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Project Description

Preliminary working title: Studies concerning the role of Equidae within roman military context

Domesticated Equidae, such as asses, mules and particularly horses fulfilled manifold tasks at various levels within the roman military. They served as mounts and beasts of burden, transporting people and goods, they could be deployed for tactical purposes in combat, and they took part in “parades” and rituals such as triumphs, demonstrations, and tournaments. Furthermore, iconographically they could be used as signs for the profession or personal status of individuals.

While structure and development of cavalry, as well as weaponry and armory of mounted soldiers and their forms of representations have all been researched intensely (though mostly concentrating on certain aspects and/or material groups), the conceptual significance and, connected to it, the presentation of the animals deployed by the military was mostly dismissed or, if at all, discussed only marginally. This significance of Equidae as working livestock within as “sign” for the roman military shall be investigated closely in this project. What was their role in logistic and strategical regard for the roman army in times of war, but also times of peace? How did they contribute to the creation or maybe even definition of group identities or definition of status of certain individuals? This work shall tackle the functions, characteristics, and significance, that was applied to Equidae in depictional narratives. Furthermore, their role concerning the iconographical conceptual meaning shall be investigated. Particular attention shall be given here to comparing the written sources and information given through material, such as infrastructure and function-related (protective; representative) equipment components, to be able to define the weightings within the depictions (e. g. depictions of functionalities, choice of pictured situations, variations in the composition of Equidae), respectively the conceptualization of the animals more precisely.

Cults and rituals, which were connected to Equidae and their users, shall be investigated under the aspects of specificity: in what regard could they (also) have been used to emphasize group identity/group identities? Critical iconography and frame-theories shall be used mainly for the iconographical analysis.

The Danuban provinces (Raetia, Noricum, Pannonia, Dalmatia, Dacia and Moesia) are suitable as a study region for this project various reasons. For once because of the high amount of material due to the significance of mounted military for the protection of the long border along the Danube. Many fortresses of the alae, tombstones of mounted soldiers and horse equipment can be found in the region. Furthermore, the actions of the roman military within the region are depicted are in multiple pictorial narratives, such as state reliefs, both from Rome and the study area. The military activities were partly affected by conflicts with autochthone equestrian groups, such as the Sarmatians and the Dacians. Another aim of the project is the investigation of possible influences. The chronological frame

is set from the second to fourth century A. D. of Imperial Rome, but a prospect on the diachronic development of different concepts shall be given. Hereby and through the meta-analytic approach of studying both actual handling and the pictorial conceptualization of Equidae within roman military context a broad, cross-material overview shall come into being.