
The Horse as a Medium between this World and the Next during the Kofun Period in Japan

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Abstract (in French and English)

The arrival of the horse in Japan during the late 4th and early 5th century A.D. entailed profound changes for the society of Kofun period Japan. With the horse arrived a new set of prestige objects and religious beliefs from the Eurasian mainland. Influenced by nomadic traditions, the horse began to play an important role not only in mounted combat and as a prestige object but also in religious contexts. Burial goods like horse trappings and lamellar armour, vertical-slat helmets or horse armour for mounted combat underline the great importance of the horse for the ruling elite. At the same time horse burials, the sacrifice of horses and the burial of horse gear at ritual sites as well as murals depicting horses or riders in the stone chambers of mounted tombs or tunnel tombs show the importance of the horse in a religious context. This paper will analyse the religious and economic importance of the horse during the Kofun period. It will show furthermore how the horse connected Kofun period Japan with traditions and influences from the Eurasian mainland and how it acted as a medium between this world and the next.

Keywords: Kofun period, horse culture, Japanese archaeology

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