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The Scythians

With painstaking attention to detail, Tamara Talbot Rice provides a thorough survey of Scythian history and culture in *The Scythians*. Building upon research done first by Herodotus and more recently by scholars E. H. Minns and Rostovtzeff, Rice draws on her travels throughout the Near and Middle East to enrich her account of the Scythian nomads' way of life.

In her discussion, Rice challenges the traditionally held notions of Scythians as bloodthirsty savages by offering well-researched findings on Scythian art and religion. She divides her findings into chapters on history, daily life, tombs, worldly goods, and art, and also includes a chapter on the Scythian legacy in Slavic Russia. Rice's section on Scythian art is most impressive, as she presents a detailed assessment of artistic connections to both Neolithic works and more modern styles. Her argument that Scythian art can be seen as a "missing link" between Eastern and Western art styles is vividly supported by the lengthy appendix of comparative illustrations.

Rice presents many other convincing examples of cultural blending across central Asia, linking customs such as Scythian burial practices, eating habits, and religious rites with those of the Chinese, Assyrians, and Ionian tribes, among others. Her claim that the Scythians helped introduce horsemanship into Western Europe is also well argued, as she draws on numerous sources both ancient and modern to substantiate it. Her original research into horsemanship includes such elements as a five-page discussion on the varieties of saddles used by Scythians and their neighbors. Rice also offers comparisons of the different bridles, bits, and other pieces of riding equipment favored by Scythian nomads.

This book is brimming with engaging information about the Scythian way of life. Rice's attempts to give the reader an authentic account of life as a Scythian nomad are innovative and insightful. Despite the book's many positive features, however, it is not a perfect resource due to its age and its lack of ancient sources. Because this book was published over forty years ago, some of Rice's information has been annulled by more recent archaeological and historical finds. Furthermore, although her modern sources are rich in geographic diversity, Rice makes no mention of ancient writers other than Herodotus and Xenophon. Considering these two factors, scholars should be careful not to limit their studies of Scythia to this book. However, one may indeed safely build a Scythian library around it, as it remains ever-enlightening in its detailed and well-wrought prose.

