

Introduction

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The original inspiration for *Materiality of the Horse* was provided by the equine history themed papers that have been presented at Leeds International Medieval Congress (IMC) since 2015. The initiative of equine history scholars Anastasija Ropa and Timothy Dawson, the creation of horse-focussed sessions at Leeds was greeted with enthusiasm by medievalist equine historians. The concept has gone from strength to strength, with the first set of proceedings, those from papers presented in the years 2015 to 2017 as well as invited contributions, being published in 2020.¹ Indeed, it is a sign of the success of the initiative that the editors of this volume, based initially on papers presented at Leeds IMC in 2019, have been able to extend a welcome to a chapter that expands the remit in a new and stimulating way. The editors are therefore pleased to include the paper by Felipe Vander Velden on the Tapuya horse nation of Brazil in this work.

Equine and equestrian history is a growing and fruitful field of academic research. Through their work, scholars, many of whom share their lives with horses or other equids, continue to extend our knowledge of how much human society owes to the horse. From the first widespread domestication of the horse on the Eurasian Steppes, sometime in the fifth millennium BCE, to the mass mechanisation of the later twentieth century CE, horses have been prominent in every walk of life in nearly every society. Even though today we no longer use them for heavy work, their significance lives on in the idea of Imperial units of “horse power,” one HP being the energy required to lift five hundred and fifty pounds by one foot in one second. James Watt developed this concept in CE 1782 and motor output continued to be measured in these units until the turn of the twenty-first century.

¹ *The Horse in Premodern European Culture*, ed. Anastasija Ropa and Timothy Dawson (Berlin and Boston: Medieval Institute Publications, 2020).

There is not an area of human existence that has not been influenced by the horse, including religion and philosophy. The belief system of the Celts revered the horse goddess Epona and her avatars, while the Greek God Apollo was charged with harnessing four horses to his golden chariot to pull the sun across the sky each day. The use of chariotry and the composite bow in the ancient world changed the face of societies such as Egypt forever. Adoption of horse riding allowed herders to range further and faster, and the development of horse-drawn chariotry, and later, cavalry transformed warfare. A (somewhat controversial and still much-disputed) thesis suggested that the introduction of the stirrup further altered the course of mounted combat, becoming a factor in the rise of the feudal systems that dominated mediaeval Europe.

Horses drew the plough, pulled the carts and canal barges that moved goods from one place to another, hauled coal from the coal face and carried ore from the mine. They drew the carriages and coaches that transported people and mail, and entertained – and still do – in equestrian sports from jousting to racing. Use of the horse brought with it great changes in technology. Horse-drawn wagons and chariots required the development of new woodworking techniques, including those to produce the exquisitely-formed spoked wheels of Hallstatt Europe and ancient Egypt and Assyria. The sophisticated bits of the high- and post-mediaeval periods required metalworkers with advanced skills. These represent just a few of the societal changes we owe to the horse. In short, it is difficult to imagine a world without the horse, even more so one in which its profound shaping – and ongoing – influences were never felt.

The term “materiality” may be viewed by some as a rather ugly neologism, intrusive to an already overloaded archaeological and historical jargon. However, in the title of this volume, *The Materiality of the Horse*, it does render useful service by compacting neatly a quite disparate selection of studies into a coherent narrative, covering the past roles of the horse,² its breeding, veterinary care and genealogy, training, accoutrements, archaeology and place in early spirituality and belief systems. As such, it also sets the scene for future volumes in the Trivent *Renwriting Equestrian History* series, taking a different approach

² While the primary subject of the volume is the horse, donkeys make an occasional appearance, hence the regular use in this volume of “equid.”

from the first book in the series, Anastasija Ropa's monograph *Practical Horsemanship in Medieval Arthurian Romance*, which examines a set of literary sources in their contemporary contexts.³

The texts are arranged in three sections, to reflect the disciplinary and thematic focus of the contributions. The first section examines the practices of breeding, training and keeping horses in different geographic and historical contexts. The second section discusses the representation of horses in various textual contexts, encompassing Byzantine hagiography, medieval French poetry, Scottish chronicle and Arabic *furūsīyya* literature. The third section takes an archaeological approach, studying horse equipment and horse burials in Europe.

Management practices in horse-human interactions

Gail Brownrigg discusses the history of the New Forest and its herds of semi-feral ponies. A Royal Forest and former hunting domain in south-west Hampshire and south-east Wiltshire in the south-east of England, the region has one of the few remaining extensive systems of common rights operating in lowland Europe. This system probably dates to the end of the eleventh century. She examines the history behind the legislation enacted by English kings that protected the “beasts of the chase,” and the husbandry and exploitation of the ponies that still roam the area today.

Jennifer Jobst provides an English translation of the first three books of the *De medicina equorum* by Jordanus Rufus (c. 1250). While ostensibly a book on veterinary medicine for horses, it provides also an insight into horse care and training practices in the mid-thirteenth century. The text demonstrates how little horse care has changed over the past nearly 800 years and highlights the strong oral tradition of passing down horse care and training techniques.

Felipe Vander Velden introduces a New World perspective, bringing to light the effects of the sixteenth-century introduction of the horse to the Amerindian peoples of Brazil. He proposes that an equestrian

³ Anastasija Ropa, *Practical Horsemanship in Medieval Arthurian Romance* (Budapest: Trivent, 2020).

culture or “horse nation” emerged (albeit briefly) among certain indigenous groups known as Tapuya in the *sertão* badlands of north-eastern Brazil. Incorporating the horse, along with the technologies associated with raising and riding horses, allowed their use in pursuing indigenous social, economic and political goals. However, the processes that brought the horse also ended up destroying most of Tapuya, although traces of the culture may be glimpsed within the intense material and symbolic relationships that the present inhabitants of the region, called *sertanejos*, have with their horses, and the great esteem and value accorded to the cowboy as a professional.

Secular, sacred, and historical

Anastasija Ropa takes the poem *Le Debat du Cheval et du Levrier* (“The debate between the horse and the greyhound”) by the fourteenth-century chronicler Jean Froissart, and first sets it in the context of contemporary European literature involving animal and human relationships. She emphasises the fact it presents a novel discussion from the point of view of the animals. The two companions debate the advantages and disadvantages of each other’s position, considering duties and their respective capacities to perform them, rewards and punishments, feeding, as well as the general and medical care accorded to each. The information provided by each animal is examined in light of other evidence from literature, hippiatric treatises and hunting books, as well as the illuminations used to elucidate Froissart’s representation of the lives of the horse and the greyhound, and their relations to their human owner.

Alexia-Foteini Stamouli demonstrates the important roles of equids – horses and donkeys – in the hagiographic literature of the Middle (AD 843–1204) and Late (AD 1204–1453) Byzantine periods. Comparing the two reveals a complexity of relationships. Both horses and donkeys appear in each period as companions to saints, or as vehicles of punishment for the wicked. In the later period, however, more emphasis is placed on the horse in war. The references to equids used for water transport are of particular interest, and there are similarities in the use of similes, metaphors, and proverbs involving horses, across both periods.

Miriam A. Bibby untangles the tale of a horse, described in the foundation accounts of the Priory of St Andrews, Fife, Scotland as the gift of an *equum Arabicum*, reported to have been a donation by King Alexander I of Scotland in CE 1121. She sets this interrogation of the Foundation Accounts of the priory in the broader context of the interpretation of the term *equum Arabicum*, invoking evidence for wider themes relating to Scottish identity, sovereignty and nationhood. Consideration of the interpretation as “Arab (or Arabian) horse,” leads to the conclusion that it may represent another beast entirely.

Hylke Hettema analyses the Arabic text *Nasāb al kabayl fi al jābīlīyyah wa al islām w akhbārīha* (“Origins of horses in the time of ignorance and of Islam and their stories”) by the ninth century historian Ibn al Kalbi. She explores the content of Ibn al Kalbi's work on horses as one of the earliest examples of *furūsiyya* literature, as well as the historical, cultural and political context in which it was written. Did Ibn al Kalbi really establish a 'pedigree' based on a single ancestor of religious, cultural and historical value, upon which the discourse surrounding a superior Arab race was built over time, introducing the "father of all horses," the stallion Zād al Rakib? Analysing and contextualising this early medieval genealogy of the horse explores how the horse was viewed by early Islamic society, and gives insight into its role in the making of the Arab identity.

Equestrian material culture: archaeological perspectives

Mattia Caprioli examines the literary and archaeological evidence for the production and use of horse equipment among Roman armies in the sixth and seventh centuries CE. In particular, he discusses the forms of saddle in use, and the key question of the extent to which the stirrup had been adopted. Archaeological evidence is compared with the detailed descriptions in the *Strategikon* of the Emperor Maurice Tiberius, and differences and similarities between Roman armour and that of contemporary Avar and Sassanian suits are debated.

Annamaria Fedele shows that amongst Germanic and Nomadic cultures in the Early Middle Ages, the horse was the sacrificial victim

par excellence. Lombard cemeteries in Italy include numerous burial pits containing horses, and the majority of horse burials found in Italy shows similar deposition methods to some discovered in the cemeteries of Central and Eastern Europe, where Lombards and other Germanic peoples overlap. The Italian cemetery of Campochiaro in southern Italy includes horse burials where the ritual is similar to that observed among the nomadic Avars who settled in the Carpathian Basin in the sixth century CE. These observations permit differentiation between the two traditions.

Brian G. Scott defines a class of zoomorphic cheek-piece of predominantly Irish provenance, in which the motif is a male deer, either red or fallow. Unfortunately, none has a firm archaeological context, and so dating depends on stylistic comparison between the pieces and metalwork, stone carving and ceramics of the tenth to fifteenth centuries CE. Metal analysis would tend to indicate later production rather earlier mediaeval, a view that might be supported by ceramic motif parallels and, by the dating of the introduction of fallow deer to Ireland at the start of the thirteenth century CE.