

INTRODUCTION.

CONTINUITIES OF EQUESTRIAN PRACTICES

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Equine and equestrian history are new and growing fields of academic study: in recent years, they have experienced something of a flourishing, with conferences and individual sessions at congresses being dedicated to horses and horsemanship.¹ In 2020, however, equine and equestrian history, like other areas of academic studies, experienced a serious challenge as conferences had to be canceled or quickly transferred to the virtual format. At the same time, this transition provided a unique opportunity to scholars from around the world to put their heads together without leaving the comfort and safety of their houses and discuss equestrianism and equestrian sports, which would have been impossible to do at short notice due to the lack of funding, visas, and other arrangements. Thus, in 2020, my colleague Timothy Dawson and I decided to organize the first virtual conference on the history of horsemanship and equestrian sports. Initially, we aimed at having a one-day event to allow our colleagues, who were scheduled to present their research in equine history at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds, now suspended, to come together virtually and share their

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¹ Annual conferences have been organized by the Equine History Collective since 2019 (<https://equinehistory.wpcomstaging.com/>). The French group of horse historians Cheval et Sciences Humaines have been active since at least 2019 (www.facebook.com/reseachevalSHS/). In the field of medieval studies, regular sessions and round tables on horse history at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds have been organized by me and Timothy Dawson since 2016. In 2020, the Equine History Collective also organized one session on horse history at the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo. A conference Equine Cultures in Transition takes place every two or three years, and includes a number of papers on horse history.

research. However, when we put out the call for papers, we were overwhelmed with the enthusiastic response from scholars working in various disciplines and on various historical periods, so we extended the time of the conference to five afternoons of sessions and included a number of fringe events to enable the participants to discuss their work and socialize in a setting that would be as close to a regular conference as possible. We were very lucky to be offered the technical and institutional support of the Latvian Academy of Sport Education, which agreed to host the conference in the last week of August 2020.

The outcome of this conference was twofold: this volume and a series of monthly virtual seminars in equestrian history extending from October 2020 to May 2021, the latter coming out with the technical support of the Latvian Academy of Sport Education. Select papers from the conference were developed into articles for publication, using the feedback provided during the conference sessions and the following discussions. Later on, Emma Herbert-Davis joined the team of authors with the study of medieval English warhorses she presented at the virtual seminar on horse history hosted by the LASE in May 2021.

The resulting volume covers a broad range of chronological periods, from prehistorical equitation to modern equestrian sports, with the appendix containing an article about a classical dressage instructor, Henriquet, reprinted by permission of the author, Kip Mistral. The words of Henriquet about the principles of classical dressage, which go back to the rise of manege riding in the sixteenth century, remain topical for riders, riding instructors, and horsepeople today. Indeed, what all authors in the volume noted is that many historical equestrian practices are still present with us, be it the involvement of veterinarian specialists in evaluating horses, as was the case in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England, or the resistance against female involvement in horse racing – an issue topical in ancient Greece, but also in modern Thoroughbred racing throughout the twentieth century and even today, when professional female jockeys are largely outnumbered by men, especially in jump racing.²

² There have been numerous studies on gender inequality in horse racing today, including the publications by Miriam Adelman, as well as a few articles by Anastasija Ropa: see Miriam Adelman and F. A. Moraes, “Breaking Their Way in: Women Jockeys at the Racetrack in Brazil,” in *Advancing Gender from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. M. T. Segal and V. Demos (Bingley: Emerald, 2008), 91-124. On the rodeo, see also

What is more, a number of studies highlighted the continuity of practices between historical and modern equestrian sports: mounted games, like polo, have a centuries-old history, while various forms of groundwork with horses were developed by different masters in the thirteenth (Jordanus Rufus) and sixteenth centuries (Pluvinel). Revisiting the history of these equestrian practices is useful both for scholars working in the fields of sports history and for equestrians, as these studies can highlight new or previously forgotten aspects of their work.

In the recent years, numerous scholarly publications have been devoted to the history of individual equestrian sports or aspects thereof. Thus, Thoroughbred racing, mentioned above, has been the subject of numerous studies.³ Many traditional and revived equestrian sports, such as jousting⁴ and mounted archery⁵ have been researched to a varying

Adelman and Gabriela Becker, "Tradition and Transgression: Women Who Ride the Rodeo in Southern Brazil," in *Gender and Equestrian Sport*, 73-90. Also see Deborah Butler, "Not a job for 'girly-girls': horseracing, gender and work identities," in *Diversity, equity and inclusion in sport and leisure*, ed. Katherine Dashper and Thomas Fletcher (New York: Routledge, 2014); Susanna Hedenborg, "Female Jockeys in Swedish Horse Racing 1890–2000: From Minority To Majority – Complex Causes," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 24: 4 (2007): 501-19; Anastasija Ropa, "Gender in Horse Racing: Queens and Mistresses in the Sport of Kings," in *Building Bodies: Gendered Sport and Transnational Movements*, ed. Marjet Derks, *Yearbook of Women's History/Jaarboek voor vrouwen geschiedenis* 38 (Hilversum: Verloren Publishers, 2019), 87-102; and Anastasija Ropa and Nadezhda Shmakova, "Gendered Spaces and Heteronormative Discourses in Horse Racing Narratives," *Contemporary Problems of Social Work* 29 (2018): 49-56. The issue of gender in ancient Greek chariot races has not been studied before.

³ Hilary Bracegirdle, *A concise history of British horseracing* (Newmarket: The National Horseracing Museum, 1999); Rebecca L. Cassidy, *Horse People: Thoroughbred Culture in Lexington and Newmarket* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press: 2007); Mike Huggins, *Horse-racing and the British 1919-39* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

⁴ Noel Fallows in *Jousting in Medieval and Renaissance Iberia* (Oxford: Boydell & Brewer, 2013) discusses jousting as a sport, that is, an activity undertaken in accordance with certain rules that made it different from mounted combat. Both jousting and mounted fighting (HEMA) have been revived and have various national and international federations.

⁵ The traditions of mounted archery differ across geographic and cultural regions. For a concise introduction to the practicalities and historical aspects of mounted archery, see *Horseback Archery: ancient art to modern sport*, ed. Claire and Dan Sawyer, published by the British Horseback Archery Association as a practical guide, or, rather, *aide-memoire*. The book includes sections by Dan Sawyer: "Overview of the history of horseback archery," "Notable horseback archery battles," and "A history of horseback archery in the British Isles."

extent. Likewise, there have been numerous publications devoted to the early history of dressage, and especially to its cultural impact.⁶ The gendered nature of equestrian sports has been discussed, most notably, in relation to horse racing (see the selected publications above), and Erica Munkwitz, in her recent studies, highlighted the relation between women's riding and emancipation.⁷ At the same time, there has not been a single publication that would consider different periods in the history of equestrianism and their relation to modern equestrian practices. This is a huge task, and, justly, a single publication cannot give a comprehensive overview of all cultural and historical traditions. Any attempt at taking a view at the panoply of horsemanship practices would have to be either reductionist or highly selective, and the editors of this volume preferred the latter option.

The chapters in this volume chart the history of horsemanship and equestrian sports, starting from the first evidence of humans riding horses in prehistorical communities to such modern-day practices as equestrian sport games, fox hunting, and classical dressage performance, looking at the practicalities of selecting, evaluating, and training horses for war and for manege riding, for racing and for playing. In selecting the layout of the volume, we decided to adopt a chronological approach, albeit mindful of the fact that several chapters cover wider chronological periods.

In the first chapter of the volume, "Envisioning Early Equestrianism: Clues from Archaeology and Ancient DNA," zooarchaeologist Katherine K. Kanne considers the evidence for early equestrianism in prehistoric communities. Looking at the bones of humans and equines, Kanne draws a vivid picture of communities in which the two met for the first time and became companions. Her careful analysis of human and equine bones, as well as of man-made artefacts that may have been used for riding horses, allows us to glimpse the earliest possible interaction between the two – the dawn of horsemanship.

⁶ Peter Edwards, Karl. A. E. Enekel and Elseth Graham, eds., *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012). See in particular the contribution by Elizabeth M. Tobey, "The Legacy of Federico Grisone," in *The Horse as Cultural Icon*, 143-174.

⁷ Erica Munkwitz, *Women, Horse Sports and Liberation: Equestrianism and Britain from the 18th to the 20th Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2021); see also Munkwitz, "The Sidesaddle: The Unlikely Emblem of Equestrian Empowerment," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* (2021).

In turn, Carolyn Willekes looks at the ancient Greek society, where horsemanship was already well established. The elite practices of ancient Greece were to a large extent gendered, and this gendering applied to the equine world as much as it did to the world of humans. In her contribution entitled “Feminizing the Hippodrome: Finding the Female in a Male World,” Willekes presents the earliest horse racing sport, the Greek chariot racing, to show how gender was significant for both human and animal agents in the hippodrome and how, despite the prominence of both human and equine males, females of both species were still allowed to participate actively in the sport, making the ancient Greek horse racing an inclusive practice.

Going forward in time and northwards in space, the Swedish archaeologist Anneli Sundkvist looks at the continuities between ancient and medieval horsemanship in her discussion of the visual evidence presented on the Bayeux tapestry. “The Horses of the Bayeux Tapestry. Where the Art of Roman Riding Meets the Middle Ages” is an innovative analysis of the tapestry, which highlights the realism and equestrian savviness of the makers as much as it does the mastery of the Anglo-Saxon riders.

The Middle Ages constitute the core part of this volume, with several authors besides Sundkvist discussing medieval equestrian practices and the continuities between the medieval period and the adjacent ones. In addressing the horsemanship from the perspective of assessing horseflesh for military use, Emma Herbert-Davies stresses the expertise and the practical mindedness of medieval horse appraisers, who had to make a quick judgment on a horse, assign it a value and ensure it would be easily recognizable for future administrative purposes. “Appraising the Warhorse: *Restaurum Equorum* in the Reigns of Edward I and II” makes an important contribution to the study of the medieval English warhorse, building on the work done by Andrew Ayton⁸ but referring to new and previously unpublished archival materials.

⁸ Andrew Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses: Military Service and the English Aristocracy Under Edward III* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999). Horse inventories as a source of information about values of equines are also briefly considered in Anastasija Ropa, “The Price and Value of the Warhorse in Late Medieval England,” in *The Horse in Premodern European Culture*, ed. Anastasija Ropa and Timothy Dawson (Berlin: Medieval Institute Press, 2020).

In continuing to emphasize the importance of artistic sources, Jennifer Jobst, in her chapter “Horse head position in premodern times: A textual, iconographic, and archeological analysis of ‘behind the vertical’ and ‘hyperflexion,’” refers to a controversial issue that haunts horsemanship even today. The debate of the head position and, more generally, the dilemma of privileging control over the horse or retaining freedom of movement is as topical today as it was eight hundred years ago, in the world of the twelfth-century horse marshal Jordanus Rufus. Hyperflexion or “rollkur” is a way to describe the position of a horse’s head when it is bent dramatically towards the chest rather than carried at a right angle to the ground: this technique provides the rider with additional control of the horse, at the price of compromising the horse’s physical and, often, mental health. Whereas today we would mostly see hyperflexion in dressage training or competition – albeit numerous national equestrian federations have banned this practice – in the medieval world it would have played the practical purpose of ensuring the horse stays obedient. Analyzing illuminations and hippiatric treatises, Jobst, herself a dressage rider, carefully looks into the origins and spread of hyperflexion, as well as making some careful suggestions as to when and where it could have been used by medieval equestrians.

Bridging the medieval and the early modern period, the scholar of language literature and horse trainer Anastasija Ropa looks at the evolution of training practices and their application in today’s training of young horses and exercising adult horses in “Groundwork with Horses: Learning from Medieval and Early Modern Treatises.” Taking her own work with sports horses at a show-jumping yard and her later practice in starting a young horse under saddle as a point of departure, Ropa indicates how the practice of lunging is frequently overused and misunderstood at riding yards and how other historical alternatives for in-hand work can provide variety to the training routine, thus increasing the physical and psychological well-being of the equine and human athletes.

Continuing to examine the transition into the early modern period, Marcin Ruda, who is best known as a maker of historical saddles and tack, discusses the impact of Italian horsemanship on national European schools in his chapter entitled “The Italian Influence on Equestrian Art in Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.” Looking not only at the verbal acknowledgements of Italian masters in English, French,

German, and Polish treatises, but also at the borrowing of Italian equestrian vocabulary into European languages, Ruda convincingly argues for the formative role of Italian equestrian art on the national traditions in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In the following case study, “An Experimental Case Study of Pluvinel’s Horse Training around the Single Pillar,” Lisa Marieke Kyre scrutinizes Pluvinel’s method of working a horse around the single pillar. In difference from the practice of lunging as we know it today, Pluvinel’s method involves an immobile pillar around which a horse goes on a small circle, directed by a trainer. Kyre’s experiment involved working a green horse following Pluvinel’s guidelines to show that this method is not only viable but can bring good results.

The next chapter, by Jane Badger and Timothy George Dawson, critically examines the popular modern game of equestrian polo and investigates its possible ancient origins. Arguing for the very practical benefits polo training can bring to a mounted warrior, “Playing chicken: the early history and modern revival of an ancient game” demonstrates the use of re-examining our assumptions about modern horsemanship and of returning to the origins of modern equestrian sports and practices to enhance our understanding of horsemanship in the technology-driven twenty-first century.

The alternate clashing and blending of historical and modern horsemanship, their respective ethical status and cultural value are considered in the final chapter of the volume: Sarah Sargent’s “Foxhunting and Classical Horsemanship as Social Performance of Elitism and Power: A Journey Across Time.” Sargent considers the legal framework of cultural heritage that determines the status of two historical elite equestrian practices, fox-hunting and classical horsemanship. Whereas the former came to be considered immoral and cruel to the hunted animal (the fox), the other came to enjoy fame and public admiration, evolving in antithesis to competitive dressage.

In a sort of afterword to the volume, we decided to include the interview with the French classical riding instructor Henriquet, the husband and trainer of the Olympic dressage rider Katherine Durand, reproduced by permission of the writer Kip Mistral. In the conversation, Henriquet alluded to the historical tradition of horsemanship, which he described as vanishing, but which, we hope, may endure through awareness of historical horsemanship practices and their discriminating

application to equestrian training process and performance today. It is with this hope that we offer this volume to the audience: knowledge of equestrian history can help to enhance our practices, understand the processes that we see in equestrian sports today, but also warn us about the less desirable and even dangerous aspects of horsemanship of which we should beware in order to preserve and further the well-being of the two companion athletes – the human and the equine.

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