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N. 6
2025

Fascicolo 23. Luglio 2025

Storia Militare Moderna (6)

Società Italiana di Storia Militare

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Direzione, Via Bosco degli Arvali 24, 00148 Roma

Contatti: direzione@nam-sigm.org ; virgilio.ilari@gmail.com

Grafica: Nadir Media Srl - Via Giuseppe Veronese, 22 - 00146 Roma

info@nadirmedia.it

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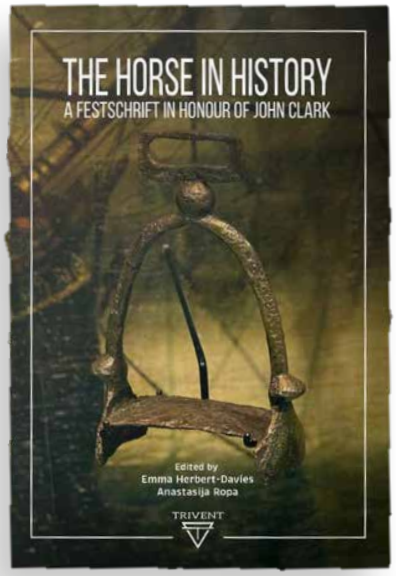
Stendardo di Lepanto (1570), Lati A e B, Museo Diocesano di Gaeta. Wikimedia Commons. Lo stendardi fu dipinto a tempera su seta da Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta (1521-1575), su incarico del Cardinale Onorato Caetani. L'11 giugno 1570 fu benedetto da Papa Pio V nella Basilica di San Pietro e consegnato a Marcantonio II Colonna ponendolo al comando della flotta pontificia. Partito da Civitavecchia e giunto a Gaeta il 22 giugno 1571, Marcantonio Colonna, fece voto di consegnare lo stendardo al patrono della città qualora fosse tornato vincitore. Il 13 agosto Pio V fece consegnare un secondo stendardo della Lega a Don Giovanni d'Austria, comandante generale della flotta cristiana che, riunitasi a Messina, salpò il 24 agosto verso Lepanto. Durante la battaglia del 7 ottobre i due vessilli sventolarono rispettivamente sull'Ammiraglia e sulla Capitana pontificia e non furono mai centrati dal tiro nemico. Nelle stesse ore il papa ebbe la visione della vittoria e in ricordo rifinì l'Ave Maria nella forma attuale, aggiunse le Litanie lauretane alla recita del Rosario e l'appellativo mariano di *Auxilium Christianorum* e consacrò il 7 ottobre a Santa Maria delle Vittorie sull'Islam, celebrato con lo scampanio al mattino, a mezzogiorno e alla sera in ricordo della vittoria. Papa Gregorio XIII trasferì poi la festa alla prima domenica del mese di ottobre intitolandola alla Madonna del Rosario. Al ritorno da Lepanto, Marcantonio Colonna sciolse il voto consegnando lo stendardo al vescovo Pietro Lunello. Il vessillo fu poi conservato presso la cattedrale dei Santi Erasmo e Marciano.

Emma Herbert-Davies and Anastasija Ropa (eds.)

The Horse in History

A Festschrift in Honour of John Clark

Budapest, Trivent Publishing, 2025, pp. 403 – eISBN 978-615-6696-57-1



The publication of "The Horse in History: A *Festschrift* in Honour of John Clark" by Trivent in March 2025 provides a timely opportunity to review not just this book, but also take stock of the recent spate of academic works and fora dealing with a feature of military and general history that has hitherto been oddly underserved: the actual horse.

By way of disclosure, I have contributed to John's *Festschrift* and I am with John on the editorial board of Trivent's "Rewriting Equestrian History" series, in which "The Horse in History" has appeared.

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John has had a long and distinguished career as a curator, beginning in 1967 at the Guildhall Museum of the City of London. The Guildhall Museum later merged with the London Museum into the Museum of London, where John was instrumental in computerising the records of the Medieval Department and organising several of the museum's notable exhibitions.

Unsurprisingly for the institution, the main focus of John's work was on the material culture found in the Thames and at London's building sites. A review of the horse-related finds resulted in "The Medieval Horse and its Equipment", initially published by HM Stationery Office in 1995 and republished by Boydell in 2004.[1] This book was among the first to relate the material culture to the historical horse. Unlike other publications from the time, it has aged well, and is the reason why John's *Festschrift* has an equine theme.

John remained active after his retirement from the Museum of London. He participated in the Leeds International Medieval Congress' 'Horse History' stream initiated by Anastasija Ropa of the Latvian Academy of Sport Education, Riga Stradnish University, and Timothy Dawson in 2016. He has and continues to be open to sharing his knowledge and assisting the next generations of researchers in their work, be they affiliated with museums or academic institutions or independent. It is this commitment that is being honoured by the contributors to his *Festschrift*, many of them active equestrians.

The book unites papers on material culture and John's other interests. In the first part, Frederik-Sebastian Kirch of the Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Baden-Württemberg and Victoria Haack write about a puzzling find, an unusual horse bit from the Gleichberg in Thuringia dated to the Central Middle Ages. This is followed by an article presenting new insights into copper-alloy harness decorations. The authors are Robert Webley and Laura Burnett of the University of Exeter; Robert Burnett also contributed on the same subject to "Medieval Warhorse," referenced below. Next is Arkadiusz Michalak of the Archaeological Museum of the Mid-Odra River Area in Zielona Góra, Poland, and a specialist on arms and armour. His article discusses a Late Gothic spur from Szprotawa Castle. Emma Herbert-Davies, who completed her doctoral dissertation on warhorses during the time of Kings Edward I and II last year (mentioned below), then writes about the evidence on horse training as it emerges from thirteenth and fourteenth

1 John Clark, *The Medieval Horse and its Equipment* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004).

century royal accounts. Anastasija Ropa's article analyses medieval equestrian equipment for evidence of gender-specificity.

Bettina Keil-Steentjes looks at the transition from the sideways saddle to the side-saddle at the turn of the sixteenth century. Based on her own experience with the equipment, she considers the significance of this more stable platform for female equitation. Pamela Cross reconstructs the osteobiographies of two horses from Roman Britain, one from London and the other from Vindolanda. From pathologies and activity-related bone changes Cross concludes that the London specimen may have been a chariot horse.

The artefact-based contributions opening the volume already closely relate the material culture to the actuality of the horses associated with the artefacts. The next contribution is specifically about training, in this case the horse training instructions in Jordanus Rufus' c.1250 *De medicina equorum* as they are presented in some French translations of the work. The article is by Camille Vo Van Qui from the University of Exeter, who was also involved in the Warhorse Project.

The next two articles transition into another of John's research subjects, historical lore about real and fantasy beings. The first of these is by Miriam Bibby, about the literary life of the Galloway Nag. This historical Scottish landrace is now extinct, but it shaped the real and literary equine landscape of Scotland and England in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern times. Simon Young completes the substantive part with an essay on the colt-pixy. This supernatural, shape-shifting being emerged during Elizabethan times in south-central England and often took in the form of a horse (without coach or rider).

My own contribution concludes the volume. It is not an academic paper, but traces the importance of John's book and his other contributions for my education.

While it is true that historiography regarding equine matters tended to be artefact- and rider-centred, this is changing. Trivent is home to a journal dedicated to equine history and historical practice, *Cheiron*.[2] Both *Cheiron* and the California-based Equine History Collective[3] host occasional conferences and on-line lectures.

2 https://trivent-publishing.eu/69-cheiron-the-international-journal-of-equine-and-equestrian-history.

3 https://equinehistory.org.

The presentations at the IMC's 2016 and 2017 'Horse History' streams by 2019 resulted in a first collection of articles, "The Horse in Premodern European Culture."[4] In the section "Working Horses and Their Equipment," Fabienne Meiers writes about horse husbandry in a late medieval urban setting, in this case Luxembourg. Floriana Bardoneschi's article examines the advantage of horses over oxen on northern European farms between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Timothy Dawson discusses baggage animals – an often neglected equine, and encompassing sumpters as well as mules and donkeys. Gail Brownrigg analyses medieval horse harness images, an area still coloured by the propositions advanced by Lefebvre de Noëttes in the early twentieth century. The second part is on warhorses, with an article by me on the change in mounted tactics resulting from the introduction of the couched-lance charge in the mid-eleventh century, and an article by Jack Gassmann on the use of the crossbow by medieval cavalry.

The third part is on performing horses – riding as a performative event. Karen Campbell reflects on the personality of horses and their relationship to humans emerging from chivalric literature. Jennifer Jobst shows the development of riding skills as performance in front of princes. Part four is on caring for horses, with contributions by Elina Cotterill on middle English hippiatric treatises and Katrin Boniface on horse bread, a high-quality and high-energy food for horses developed to deal with the shortened time working horses have available for feeding. The next part, on the material culture associated with riding, includes a paper by John Clark (the honouree of the *Festschrift* initially discussed here) on the archaeology of curb bits, and by Marina Viallon on the restoration of a c.1535 German war saddle now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Rennes.

The collection concludes with part on horses in law, administration and literature. Edgar Rops discusses horse-related legal provisions in Welsh and Anglo-Saxon law. Anastasija Ropa presents evidence on the price and value of warhorses in late medieval England. And Miriam Bibby concludes with an article on the twelfth-century *Roman des aventures de Fregus* and the Galloway horse.

Subsequent IMCs resulted in a further collection, "Echoing Hooves," this time published by Brill and not limited to Latin Europe.[5] The articles are again

4 *The Horse in Premodern European Culture*, Anastasija Ropa and Timothy Dawson (eds. – Berlin/Boston MA: de Gruyter, 2019).

5 *Echoing Hooves: Studies on Horses and Their Effects on Medieval Society*, Anastasija Ro-

grouped in thematic parts. Part 1, titled "Socially Formative Horses," features an article by Anna-Lena Lange on horses as status indicators in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. Roman Lefebvre writes on the horse in Tangut society. Rebecca Henderson's contribution is on the horses in the medieval North of Europe. Agnès Carayon discusses the impressive Mamluk cavalry architecture in Cairo.

Part 2, "Literary Horses," begins with an article by John Ford on the changing significations of horses and horsemanship in the Middle English 'Matter of England' romances. Alexia-Foteini Stamouli reviews Middle Byzantine hagiographical texts for information on horses. Luise Borek's subject is the dead horse in Arthurian and other contemporary romances. Gloria Allaire presents horse descriptions contained in an unedited early sixteenth century manuscript in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana.

Part 3 is on martial horses, with a contribution by myself, discussing the absence of consistent information on medieval battlefield formations for the cavalry. Ana Maria Rodrigues then introduces us to advice on horseback hunting, fighting and jousting according to Kings João I and Duarte of Portugal. And Loïs Forster relates the typology of horses contained in fifteenth century Burgundian chronicles.

A part on horse hardware completes the collection. Gail Brownrigg traces the origins of the horse collar. Rena Maguire examines changes in lorinery and equitation in early medieval Ireland. Gavina Cherchi analyses the significance of unbridled horses in connections with the characterisation of knights errant. Anastasija Ropa concludes with an article on the gendering of riders, comparing modern racing with medieval romances.

Trivent in Budapest subsequently offered a new permanent and dedicated home, with the "Rewriting Equestrian History" series in its Trivent Medieval imprint. The series so far encompasses nine monographs and edited volumes, with more to come.[6]

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pa and Timothy Dawson (eds. – Leiden/Boston MA: Brill, 2022).

6 The eight prior releases so far (https://trivent-publishing.eu/39-rewriting-equestrian-history): Anastasija Ropa, *Practical Horsemanship in Medieval Arthurian Romance* (2019); *The Materiality of the Horse*, Miriam A. Bibby and Brian G. Scott (eds. – 2020); *The Liminal Horse*, Rena Maguire and Anastasija Ropa (eds. – 2021); *Historical Practices in Horsemanship and Equestrian Sports*, Anastasija Ropa and Timothy Dawson (eds. – 2022); Miriam A. Bibby, *Invisible Ancestor: The Galloway Nag and Its Legacy*, (2024);

The 2025 IMC will feature two horse-focused streams: 'Horse History' is this year organised by Hylke Hettema of the University of Leiden and Frederik-Sebastian Kirch, continuing the stream initiated by Anastasija Ropa and Timothy Dawson; the second is 'Warhorses,' organised by João Nisa of the University of Coimbra and Afonso Soares de Sousa of the University of Lisbon.

Without wanting to digress into animal turn territory, the tone of recent publications on the subject of horses seems to have shifted. The question in studies of material culture no longer emphasises "what does this object tell me about its owner," but its functionality: "how was this object used – why was it useful – what does it tell us about the relationship between horse and rider – what does it tell us about the horse?" A crucial part of the monetary and functional value of a horse lay in its level of (and amenability to) training, prompting a different series of questions: How were horses trained, in the stages from adolescence to fully trained war-horse? Who trained them, where, how, for how long, and for whom? The training requires skilled professionals, a large investment in time, and fit-for-purpose facilities; who paid for this? The service life of a warhorse is comparatively short, seven to eight years on average. So a mounted unit of 100 required approximately fourteen trained replacements every year; how was that accomplished?

The sources do not answer these questions directly. Properly interrogated, they do allow us to develop approaches to answers, by concentrating on the infrastructure of the breeding facilities, the training facilities, and their respective staffs. Different establishments catered to different stages of training and needs, revealed in trading and movement networks. Fiscal records and diplomatic correspondence add to the picture. It is in this light that the value of the new approaches to the historical horse economy needs to be understood.

As mentioned in the opening paragraphs, the last year has seen a number of important publications regarding the historical horse. Three books newly released in the past few months alone are referenced here:

Fabrizio Ansani's "Il cavallo da Guerra e lo Stato del Rinascimento" was re-

Saints and Sinners on Horseback, Vol. 1, Miriam A. Bibby (ed. – 2023); *Saints and Sinners on Horseback*, Vol. 2, Miriam A. Bibby (ed. – 2024); Emma Herbert-Davies, *The Warhorse in England: 1272-1327* (2025).

viewed here by Marco Merlo.[7] Ansani has scoured the Italian archives for sources on the breeding of and trade in horses, especially warhorses, in the Italy of the late Middle Ages and Early Modern Times. What emerges is, as the title promises, a story and a history with political, economic, and cultural aspects. The trade was international, reaching to the British Isles, Iberia, North Africa, Turkey, and across the Alps. It engaged the diplomatic attention of the princely players, especially Milan and Mantua. So important were these activities that it is no exaggeration to say that they contributed to shaping the identities and interests of these polities. Supporting the effort was an infrastructure of breeders, veterinaries, pharmacists, trainers, and blacksmiths. Princes invested time and money into the construction of studs, both for representation and as working facilities, enabling them to focus on developing prized breeds. The princely attention to assuring a steady supply of trained warhorses facilitated the transition of the cavalry into a standing force of professional soldiers. Prince- and authority-sponsored events such as palios, jousts and tourneys encouraged training and provided popular entertainment.

In parallel, Emma Herbert-Davies' 2024 doctoral dissertation on the warhorse in England under Kings Edward I and Edward II was published by Trivent in January of this year.[8] Her approach is similar to Ansani's, concentrating on the crucial importance of a reliable supply of warfare-capable horses to the state, as it were. Warhorses were superior and advanced military technology; trade in them was not just a private matter, but of intimate concern to rulers – for the English crown as much as in Italy. Contemporaneously and as an aside, this can also be observed in connection with the Crusades and the Teutonic Order's wars in the Baltic, and as late as the Boer War. Only a high-capacity indigenous supply assured independence from neighbouring princes' embargoes, and Herbert-Davies shows the enormous administrative effort, investment in studs and training facilities as well as veterinary care, and close royal attention paid to developing such a capability.

Last but by no means least, March also witnessed the publication of "Medieval Warhorse," the result of the University of Exeter's project "Warhorse: The

7 Fabrizio Ansani, *Il cavallo da Guerra e lo Stato del Rinascimento: Una storia politica, economica e culturale* (Bologna: Mulino, 2024); review in *Nuova Antologia Militare* 6.21, pp. 365-71. Ansani was also at University of Exeter, but did not participate in the Warhorse Project.

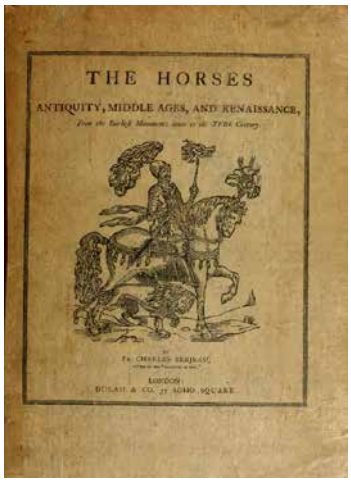
8 Emma Herbert-Davies, *The Warhorse in England: 1272-1327* (Budapest: Trivent, 2025).

Archaeology of a Military Revolution?" already mentioned.[9] The corresponding book unites the findings of this five-year project, which collected, reviewed, and analysed the evidence on the medieval warhorse. The project centred on the UK, but – as the authors elaborate – the situation in what is today the UK did not differ fundamentally from the environment on the Continent, and trade was active.

The evidence is wide-ranging, from bones to breeding and training infrastructure to barding, with much in between. In addition to the book itself, the project has resulted in numerous academic papers and theses. Importantly, the raw data collected by the project is available on-line for researchers to analyse.

One of the vexing questions the Warhorse Project incidentally sought to settle was the height of historical warhorse, a matter on which the sources give us frustratingly little information. Historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries tended to put this figure at 16 hands (163 cm) and higher. Based on an extensive review of the archaeology, the Warhorse Project concluded that the standard height was around 14½ hand (147 cm), give or take. They thus confirmed the finding put forward in 1995 by John Clark (whose contribution to the investigation of the historical horse is expressly honoured) in his "The Medieval Horse and Its Equipment."

Jürg Gassmann



9 *Medieval Warhorse: Equestrian Landscapes, Material Culture and Zooarchaeology in Britain AD 800-1550*, Oliver Creighton, Robert Liddiard, Alan Outram, Katherine Kanne and Carly Ameen (eds. – Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2025).

Carle Vanloo (1737 / 1747), *Le Voeu de Louis XIII au siège de la Rochelle en 1628*, esquisse du tableau du Maître-autel de l'église de Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris, P1912, CC0 Paris Musées / Musée Carnavalet - Histoire de Paris,

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