

CHAPTER 27

HORSE RACING AND CHARIOT RACING

SINCLAIR BELL AND CAROLYN WILLEKES

INTRODUCTION

THE horse has long played a part in human society. Equines first served as a food source for prehistoric man, but through the process of domestication they came to serve a variety of other functions. Indeed, from the time of their domestication until the early twentieth century horses filled an intrinsic role in the daily lives of cultures all over the world. Amongst the nomadic groups of the Eurasian steppes horses were necessary for survival. In other regions of the ancient world the horse fulfilled more specialized jobs.

GREECE

In the Greek world horses were a living status symbol owned by the elite, who paraded them in processions, rode them in battle, and entered them in athletic contests as ways to flaunt their wealth and prestige. Greece is—for the most part—not particularly well suited to horse husbandry (*hippotrophia*). Certainly, it was nothing like the plains of Anatolia or the Central Asian steppe. In the Greek peninsula the horse was expensive to breed, raise, and maintain, and so *hippotrophia* was the prerogative of the elite, something the debt-ridden Strepsiades discovers starkly in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (Golden, 1997: 337; Griffith, 2006: 200–2). *Hippotrophia* has never been a hobby for those with shallow pockets. Despite their elite associations, horse sports and in particular horse racing have been popular for thousands of years and in this regard the Greek world is no exception.

The earliest written description of a horse race in the Greek world comes from the *Iliad* (Homer, *Iliad* 23.566–611). The race is for the *synōris* (the two-horse chariot),

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which is part of the funeral games for Patroclus and is considered to be the most aristocratic event on the programme (Gardiner, 1910: 14). There are several features of note in this race. Only five teams are entered, and it is not surprising to find that all belong to aristocrats. The horses entered in the race include both mares and stallions. What is most interesting is the fact that the drivers are not slaves or hired professionals but the aristocrats themselves, something rarely seen in later equestrian competitions. The logistics of the race are relatively straightforward. This is a standard out-and-back race with a log as the turning post. The track is not a purpose-built hippodrome but an open space with relatively good ground for running the horses on. What differentiates this chariot race from those held at later formal athletic festivals is the nature of the human and equine competitors. These horses are not selectively bred racehorses, the chariots are not lightly-built racing models and the drivers are not professional chariot-eers. Horse, driver, and chariot are all more accustomed to the battlefield than the racecourse. We should not view this chariot race in relation to the races at the pan-Hellenic games and other festivals, then, but as an extension of military training (see further Chapter 17 Animals and Warfare). The speed, skill, and control required to navigate the racecourse successfully were related to the expertise needed to wield a chariot on the battlefield. For both combat and competition the horses had to be fit, brave, obedient, and clever enough to manoeuvre themselves out of trouble if their driver was unable to. The driver had to be secure and balanced in the chariot and able to keep hold of his horses calmly in stressful, dangerous situations.

There is physical evidence for the appearance of chariot racing in the late eighth century, but neither chariot nor horse racing were part of the early Olympic games (Olivova, 1989: 74). The first equestrian event on those programmes was the *tethrippon* (the four-horse chariot race) in 680. The *kelēs* (the ridden horse race) became an Olympic event in 648. The *synōris* was added in 408 (Hemingway, 2004: 116, 120). To these three races were added age designations, with a division for adult horses and another for youngsters (colts and fillies) in the early third century. Stephen Miller suggests that these races for *pōloi*—the *tethrippon pōlikon* (284), *synōris pōlikon* (264), and *keles pōlikon* (256)—were for two-year-olds. The *kalpē* (a race for mares) was introduced at Olympia in 496 (Miller, 2004: 80). In the *kalpē* riders were expected to jump off their mounts and run alongside them for the last lap of the race (Pausanias, 5.9.2). The *kalpē* appears to have been unique to the programme at Olympia and did not stay on the schedule very long. It was dropped after the 84th Olympiad in 444 (Hemingway, 2004: 124), perhaps because it was not a spectator favourite: the *kalpē* lacked some of the speed and danger associated with the other equestrian events. The *kalpē* is nonetheless interesting because of its connection to the use of the horse in warfare. It is not easy to leap off a moving horse and land on one's feet, but it was an important skill. It is easy to imagine a number of situations in which it might be necessary for a cavalryman to perform an 'emergency dismount' while maintaining control of his horse. Similarly, running on foot in concert with a horse is not as simple as it sounds. The horse must be trained to stay next to its rider while holding a steady pace. The military use of these skills can be seen with the *hamippoi*, light-armed infantry who ran alongside the cavalry (Spence, 1995: 58–9).

By the third century BC, the programme of equestrian events at Olympia had been finalized and included the *tethrippon*, *tethrippon pōlikon*, *synōris*, *synōris pōlikon*, *keles*, and *keles pōlikon*. From this we can establish some basic facts about the equestrian events at the other pan-Hellenic games too. The races were open to horses of either sex: fillies/mares and colts/stallions, presumably geldings could also be entered, though gelding does not appear to have been a popular practice in Greek culture. Sex distinction was only made in the short-lived *kalpē*, a race open only to female horses (Hemingway, 2004: 120). Such practices are still standard today. In non-racing equestrian sports mares, geldings, and stallions all compete against each other on a regular basis. Mares do excel in competition, but they can be more unpredictable and often require a certain type of rider to be successful. It is a truism that you ‘tell a gelding, talk to a stallion, and discuss things with a mare!’ Mares were often quite successful in the mixed-sex races of the Greek festivals. There are numerous references to victorious female equines in the literary record. The Athenian Cimon had great success with a team of mares at Olympia (Herodotus, *Histories* 6.103).

Prior to the third century, races were open to horses of any age. In the early third century we see the establishment of the *pōlikon* races. The addition of these races has been compared to the established programme of ‘senior’ and ‘junior’ athletic events (Miller, 2004: 12). The appearance of age categories in equestrian competition in the third century is perhaps connected to the revival of the popularity of equestrian events in the Hellenistic period (Hemingway, 2004: 130). The Hellenistic kingdoms, particularly those of the Near East, had a long history of *hippotrophia* and equestrian traditions (Longrigg, 1972: 10–12; Hyland, 2003: 18–32; Gonzaga, 2004: 161–7). Even in Egypt the horse held a significant place in the iconographic tradition and the Ptolemies in particular had a passion for horse racing (Remijnsen, 2010: 101–105; see also Chapter 25: Animals in Egypt). The successor states of the Hellenistic period were founded by Alexander’s generals who were, of course, Greek. Thus the Hellenistic dynasts had the right to enter the pan-Hellenic games. Participation in the games was a way to emphasize their ‘Greekness’ despite their residence outside the traditional Greek world (Golden, 2008: 17). It would have been unseemly for these royals to participate in the athletic contests, a point made by Alexander himself when he refused to compete in the *stade* race unless he could compete against other kings (Plutarch, *Alexander* 4.10–11). In this way equestrian events provided an opportunity for the Hellenistic royal families to participate in a wholly Greek festival in a manner that befitted their station and to continue the long-established equestrian traditions of the territories they ruled. The addition of the *pōlikon* races in the third century is likewise connected to the establishment of the Hellenistic kingdoms and the subsequent expansion of the ‘Greek’ world. With increased access to prime equine breeding stock, the third century must have seen an increase in horse trading across the Mediterranean world. This would have resulted in the regular importation of new or foreign horse types to Greek territory. It is possible that some of these horses were fast-maturing types—animals physically developed enough to begin a racing career at a younger age (McBane and McCarthy, 1991: 185).

Equestrian competition in ancient Greece was often used as a marker of class distinction. There were those who competed in the athletic contests and those who entered the

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horse races. Alcibiades felt only equestrian events were appropriate to the upper classes; he disdained athletic competitions as suitable only for commoners (Isocrates, *On the Team of Horses* 16.33–4). The main point of contention with regard to the equestrian events and their role in Greek sports and society is related to who actually earned the accolades that came with victory. The owners of the horses rarely rode or drove them in competition. The jockeys and drivers appear to have been hired professionals or slaves.

There is no question that the jockeys who rode in the *keles* events were young boys. This is a fact clearly supported by the iconography of the *keles* race. The rationale behind the use of boy jockeys is straightforward enough. In antiquity, as today, jockeys had to be small and lightweight. The logic goes that the lighter the jockey, the faster the horse could run. The diminutive size of the Greek jockeys was further necessitated by the size of the Greek racehorses, animals decidedly smaller than the thoroughbreds we see on the racecourse today. In many ways the *keles* race was similar to the Nadaam races held in Mongolia, for in both the jockeys are children chosen because of the small stature of the racehorses. Further, the actions of the child jockeys were largely superfluous in the event, as their only job seems to be to keep the horse going in the right direction. In all truth there is very little a child could do to control a determined racehorse. The expression of anxiety on the face of the Artemision jockey (Fig. 27.1) is probably a very

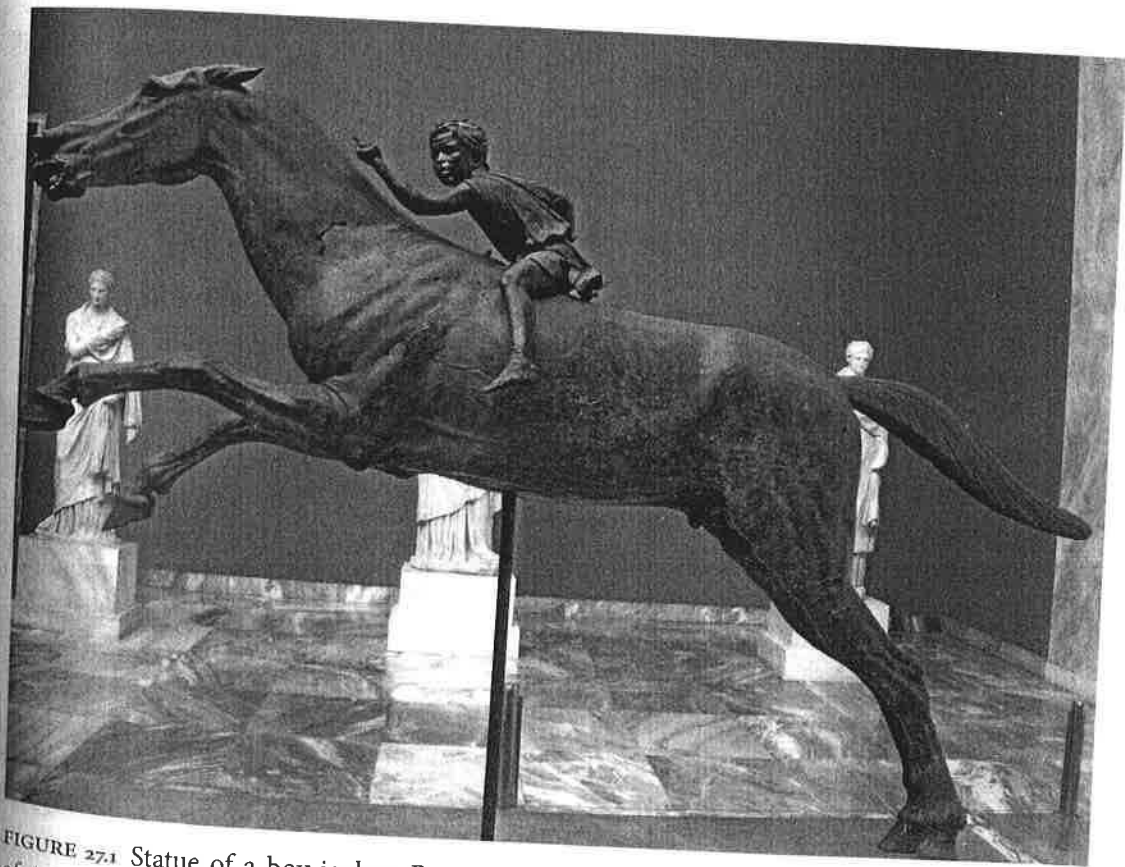


FIGURE 27.1 Statue of a boy jockey. Bronze, middle second century BC. From near the cape of Artemision.

Athens, National Archaeological Museum (photo C. Willekes).

accurate reflection of the jockey's demeanour (on this statue, see Hemingway, 2004). If the rider fell in the course of the race but the horse still crossed the finish line, the equine was not eliminated, but dropped down a place because it did not finish with a full load. Pausanias (6.12.9) recounts a *keles* race at Olympia that supports the overall impression that the jockey was unimportant. The prizes thus went to the owner of the horse, as this was the individual who had invested significant sums of money into the care and conditioning of the animal. The owner's glory might be further emphasized through victory poems, in which the role of the jockey is downplayed or excluded entirely (Nicholson, 2005: 25–118).

Like the *keles* jockey, the driver of a *synōris* or *tethrippon* was rarely the owner of the team. As we saw above, a primary reason for the use of boy jockeys in the *keles* race was their height and weight. The chariot races also required a specific physique. The charioteer had to be physically strong enough to control a team of two or four horses while remaining balanced and upright in the chariot. Driving a team of horses is very different from riding. The rider can use his entire body to control his mount; a charioteer only has his hands and voice as a means to communicate with his horses. Thus, a driver had to be strong but not too large and heavy. Any excess weight would only serve to put extra strain on the horses and slow the team down. An excellent example of the ideal charioteer physique is the bronze charioteer from Delphi (see Adornato, 2008).

The charioteer's job was a dangerous one; not only did he have to keep control of his own team, he also had to worry about potentially catastrophic interference from others. Menelaus's displeasure with Antilochus during the chariot race in the *Iliad* in part reflects this tension and anxiety (Homer, *Iliad* 23.417–28). The *tethrippon* is considered to have been the most dangerous event at the ancient games (Kyle, 2007: 126). The all too real risk of serious injury or death faced by the charioteer was probably a significant factor in deterring an owner from stepping into the chariot himself. The account of Orestes' 'death' in Sophocles' *Electra* (746–56) gives a vivid description of the dangers of chariot racing. At major events such as the pan-Hellenic games the competition must have been particularly cut-throat.

However, there were instances where the owners competed with their own horses. Pindar praises Hieron of Syracuse, who drove his own team to victory at Thebes (Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 2.1–9). Damonon the Spartan records forty-seven victories in chariot races with teams he drove himself (Kyle, 2007: 188; Golden, 2008: 12). Damonon attained all of his victories at local Lacedaemonian and Messenian festivals. He never competed in, or at least was never successful at, the pan-Hellenic games (Harris, 1972: 161). To understand the difference between competing at the regional (Lacedaemonian) level and the national/international level (pan-Hellenic games) we can use the close parallel of modern equestrian competition. At modern regional shows individuals competing usually own the horses they ride. At this stage one sees riders with the financial means to purchase a well-bred, trained horse with the ability to perform to the required level. The situation becomes very different at international competitions such as the modern Olympics. The riders who compete at this level rarely own the horses they sit on, which instead belong to extremely wealthy individuals or syndicates. The rider is chosen

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because of his or her skill and natural talent, including the ability to get a horse to perform to its utmost ability. The riders who succeed at this level do so because of their riding ability. The rider receives a portion of the winner's purse, but the majority of the rewards go to the owner(s) who foot(s) the bills. In this regard, riders in modern international competitions are much like pan-Hellenic charioteers. No owner would waste time and money by pairing a talented horse or team with a mediocre charioteer or rider. The debate over the purpose of horse sports and their place in the modern Olympics is an ongoing one. It seems that Alcibiades' stereotypical distinction between those who are worthy of entering equestrian competition and those who are not still stands today.

ITALY

In Roman Italy, as in the Greek world, equestrianism of all forms, due to the expense involved, had aristocratic overtones. But in contrast to the Greeks' equal passion for horse racing (mounted jockeys on single horses) and chariot racing, Romans strongly favoured the latter (probably due to the early influence of Etruscan practice: Humphrey, 1986: 16–17; Thuillier, 1996: 25–9, 95ff.). Indeed, chariot races were the oldest, most popular, and longest-lived of all forms of mass entertainment or 'spectacles' (*spectacula*) in the Roman world. The earliest chariot races are said to have taken place at Rome's founding in the context of religious ritual. The scale and appeal of the races expanded over the course of the Republic (509–31 BC) and Empire (31 BC–476 AD), so that they and their venues also evolved into vehicles of political ideology and popular entertainment.

Chariot races were usually held in a circus, a monumental arena that took the form of an elongated horseshoe (a canonical circus measured c.400–450 metres long and c.80 metres wide). Nearly sixty circuses are now known, the majority being found in the provinces of North Africa and Spain, where horse-breeding was well-established. The Circus Maximus in Rome was the oldest, largest, and most famous of all the circus arenas (see Fig. 27.2). At its most fully developed stage under Trajan, the Circus Maximus measured 600 metres long and 150 metres wide (with an *arena* or track 550 metres long and 80 metres wide) and could accommodate around 150,000 spectators.

At the start of a typical race, the teams of two-horse (*bigae*) or, more often, four-horse (*quadrigae*) chariots sat ready inside the twelve starting gates (*carceres*) at the short end of the track. Teams were assigned their places by lot. After a signal, the gates unlocked (probably simultaneously by a springing mechanism) and the teams exploded forwards. The first stage of the race, which extended from the *carceres* to the white break line between the three conical turning posts (*metae*) and the right-hand wall of the stadium seating (*cavea*), allowed chariots to accelerate into position. In the second stage, the course narrowed, and the chariots raced in parallel lanes from the break line to the line before the judges' tribunal. From this point onwards, the teams were free to cross lanes.

Using lightweight chariots built for speed, the teams raced anticlockwise and circled the central barrier (*euripus*) seven times (about 5 kilometres in total) in a total time of



FIGURE 27.2 Funerary relief with a circus scene. Marble, Trajanic. Find-spot unknown.

Musei Vaticani, Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. nr. 9556 (photo Forschungsarchiv für Antike Plastik, Cologne; reproduced courtesy of the Vatican Museums).

about 8–9 minutes. Teams would have slowed to around 25–30 kph around the dangerous turns of the *metae* and accelerated to as much as 75 kph in the straights (Junkelmann, 2000: 100). The teams veered as close as possible to the barrier to shorten their paths. They also strategized how to gain or guarantee a lead by edging out close competitors, sometimes by using devious tactics such as whipping another driver's team. The frequent appearance in visual representations of scenes of 'shipwrecks' (*naufragia*), which occurred especially near the turning posts, suggest that they were not only common but highly anticipated by many race-goers.

The audience monitored the progress of the race by checking the lap-counting devices (one of seven eggs, the other seven dolphins) installed at either end of the *euripus* (see Fig. 2). The race concluded with the sound of a trumpet as the victorious charioteer crossed the finish line, which was located two-thirds of the way down the right side of the track and parallel to the imperial box (*pulvinar*) (on the left) and the judges' tribunal (on the right). The victor ascended to the judges' box to claim his prizes (palm branch, wreath, and money) and performed a victory lap with his team of horses in celebration, their headdresses festooned with garlands.

Because there were regularly twenty-four such races on a game day (among other events) and some sixty-six days of games in a calendar year (as recorded for fourth-century Rome), mounting the races required the support of a complex infrastructure. The enormous burden of their cost and organization fell upon the four racing teams (*factiones*) that served as contractors. *Factiones* were business entities that were known by their colours: Blues, Greens, Reds, Whites. Each faction had a large support staff that was

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overseen by the faction manager (*dominus factionis*) and that included several hundred coaches, grooms, veterinarians, and other technicians.

The most highly-visible figures in the factions under the Empire, however, were the charioteers and the horses (by contrast, honours are primarily shared between the trainer and the horse in modern horse racing). Honorific and funerary inscriptions provide us with detailed information about charioteers' changing faction allegiances; the number and categories of races (for example, a *pompa*, the prestigious race directly after the opening procession) and of victories (for example, 'last-minute'); the value of their prizes; and the names, origins, and numbers of the horses with which they won. Charioteers were ranked according to experience: a chariot-driver who raced a two-horse team was known as an *auriga* (or *bigarius*), while one who achieved a win with a team of four horses was known as an *agitor* (or *quadrigarius*) and was in the 'premier league'. They wore padded helmets, thick tunics with horizontal leather bands, and leggings for protection. In contrast to Greek practice, they tied the heavy reins around their waists (see Fig. 2), which increased their manoeuvrability as well as their risk of dragging, injury, and death in the event of a crash (each had a knife to cut himself free).

Although chariot racing was considered less shameful than stage performances or gladiatorial fights, professional charioteers—like other categories of Roman entertainer—were almost exclusively of low social status. They were mostly slaves (whose participation in the games might eventually win them their freedom), hired freedmen, or foreigners (Greeks especially). By contrast, amateur riders of social standing competed in public only under special circumstances, such as Greek contests, closed games sponsored by the emperor, or private riding (Cameron, 1976: 204–5; Hyland, 1990: 240–7). A racing career could bring a charioteer fame and wealth on a scale unthinkable to most Romans: the Spanish charioteer Gaius Appuleius Diocles, for instance, competed variously for the Red, Green, and White factions over the course of his 24-year career, running 4,257 races (an average of 170 per year) and winning 1,462 (*CIL* 6.10048=*ILS* 5287). When he retired at the age of 42, he had won more than 35 million sesterces (by comparison, a standard legionary earned around 1,400 sesterces a year).

Racehorses also became popular idols and their breeding, training, medical treatment, names, and personalities are well-documented by diverse sources. A single day of games required in the order of 700–800 horses (Junkelmann, 2000: 98) and this demand, combined with need to supply horses to the Roman cavalry, contributed to the rise of a Mediterranean-wide animal trade (Chapter 8: Value Economics: Animals, Wealth, and the Market). Both wealthy private and imperial stud farms raised and trained stock for the track in Spain, Sicily, Thessaly, Cappadocia, and North Africa (Rossiter, 1992). Not all horses bred on an estate necessarily originated from that region's stock, however. Roman authors appear to document a general preference for African (Libyan) bloodlines in the early Empire and Spanish and Cappadocian in the late Empire (Hyland, 1990: 210–14; see also Chapter 6: Domestication and Breeding of Livestock). The preference in the early Empire for African horses, which are widely singled out for their speed and endurance, is further suggested by charioteer inscriptions: in the mid-second century Diocles explicitly states that he was the best driver of African horses.



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Racehorses were also selected according to age, sex and physique, disposition, and stamina and dexterity. The majority of racehorses were stallions, though the names of a few mares do exist. Skeletal evidence suggests that the average horse was of stocky build and stood about 135–155 centimetres high (Junkelmann, 2000: 89; Johnstone, 2004). While this makes them comparable to something like a large pony in modern terms (147 centimetres being the dividing line between pony and horse today), they would have been considered large animals during this period. Pliny notes that ‘a different build is required for the Circus, and consequently though horses may be broken as two-year-olds to other service, racing in the Circus does not claim them before five’ (*Natural History* 8.162). These horses underwent thorough programmes of exercise and training, since—as Virgil notes—‘racers and chargers are both a job to breed: for either it is youth, mettle and pace that trainers first demand’ (*Georgics* 3.118–20; see further Hyland, 1990: 214–17). This training took place first on the stud farms and later at facilities near the tracks themselves (for example, the *Trigarium* in the Campus Martius in Rome). The best horses might race until 20 years old (Pelagonius, *Ars Veterinaria* 1).

Depending on its suitability, a horse bred for racing would assume one of two positions within a chariot team: either harnessed on the inside (*iugales*) or attached to the central pair by rein, not yoked (*funales*). The lead horse on the left side of the chariot (*equus funalis*) is traditionally regarded as the most important, since it guided the team around the sharp, treacherous turns of the *metae* (we can assume that it is this inside trace horse that is the one mentioned in charioteer inscriptions to the exclusion of any other). In addition, horses’ stamina was tested by the length of the course (which at around 5 kilometres was considerably greater than even the longest modern American thoroughbred race, the Belmont Stakes, at 2.4 kilometres) and by repeated races on the same day. In addition, certain types of race had a higher degree of innate difficulty. In the *diversium*, for example, only two teams participated: the winner switched teams with his beaten rival, tasking each driver with gaining command over unfamiliar horses and getting them to perform at their peak just after having raced.

Racehorses endured remarkable stress over their careers and literary sources give insight into their ailments and care. The most important of these is Pelagonius’s *Ars Veterinaria*, commentaries written in the fourth century that were probably intended for wealthy Roman horse-owners or-breeders. Some of the topics that he discusses include leg injuries such as concussions sustained from the constant pounding on the hard-packed track; joint and tendon stress in the legs and back and shoulder injuries resulting from sudden, high-speed turns; and eye injuries such as blows or scarring from whips or inflammation, probably from the sandy racecourse (see further Hyland, 1990: 204–5, 224–7). Beyond the wealth of technical information that these commentaries provide about medical practice, they exhibit a genuine appreciation and sympathy for their equine subjects that is consistent with the tone and approach of other veterinary treatises (see further Chapter 33: Veterinary Medicine).

The Romans’ devotion to horses can also be seen in their appellatives, which evoke them as living personalities. Nearly 600 horses’ names survive from disparate sources and these can be organized into six categories, ranked in decreasing

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order of frequency: (1) skill, with sub-categories of speed (*Celer*, swift), strength (*Adamus*, cast-iron), agility (*Passerinus*, sparrow), etc.; (2) appearance, with emphasis on colour (*Aureus*, golden) or markings (*Maculosus*, speckled), beauty (*Elegans*), size (*Adauctus*, bulky), movement, or other physical traits (such as their manes); (3) origin, including divine descent (*Pegasus*), owners' names, sire, ethnic extraction (*Aegyptus*), etc.; (4) expectations, such as victory (*Victor*) or good fortune (*Felix*); (5) behaviour, ranging from docility (*Volens*, willing) to impetuosity (*Temerarius*, hothead); and (6) expressions of affection (*Adamatus*, much-beloved). As many of these names suggest and as the literary sources confirm, Romans commonly attributed to horses extraordinary gifts, from oracular powers (Hyland, 1990: 238–40) to human-like comprehension: 'horses harnessed to chariots in the circus unquestionably show that they understand the shouts of encouragement and applause' (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.159).

Unlike the harsh treatment that some animals endured in other spectacles (see further Chapter 26: Spectacles of Animal Abuse), many horses became beloved celebrities in their own right and were allowed a quiet retirement to pasture after their careers ended. During their lives they might be celebrated in the visual arts, from everyday clay lamps to sprawling domestic mosaics, while in death some received their own funerary monuments (Herrlinger, 1930: 106f.; Dunbabin, 1978). The legendary Apulian stallion Hirpinus was celebrated—some twenty years apart—by the poets Martial (*Epigrams* 3.63.11) and Juvenal (below; see further Bianco, 1977). Such *hippomania* infected all levels of Roman society. The emperors Caligula and Lucius Verus spoiled their favourite racehorses, Incitatus and Volucer, with lavish stables, blankets, and foodstuffs (Suetonius, *Caligula* 55; SHA, *Verus* 6). While some Romans claimed disinterest in the races (for example, Ovid, *Amores* 3.2.1 who was more interested in the opportunities for picking up girls), Lucian noted that many had succumbed: 'the craze for horses is really great, you know, and men with a name for earnestness have caught it in great numbers' (*Nigrinus* 29). For observers of the vulgar urban masses (*plebs urbanum*), horse racing was seen as an all-consuming passion: 'the favourite among all amusements, from sunrise until evening, in sunshine and in rain, they stand open-mouthed, examining minutely the good points or the defects of charioteers and their horses' (Ammianus Marcellinus 14.6.25). Fans were knowledgeable of horses' bloodlines, ethnic provenance, and much else, but they were most interested in their wins (see, for example, Juvenal, *Satires* 8.57–63).

Superstition hung heavily over the races, and charioteers and spectators alike employed strategies to ensure victory. Some enthusiasts smelled the dung of their favourite horses to evaluate their health and forecast the outcome of their races (Galen, *De methodo medendi libri XIV* [Kühn, 10.478]). Horses were decked out by their drivers with ornaments thought to aid their performance, such as wolves' teeth (Pliny, *Natural History* 28.257). Crescent-shaped amulets (*lunulae*) and bronze bells (inscribed with the names of the driver and the lead horse), together with the names of the horses themselves (for example, *Abascantus*, 'Evil Eye free'), were used to counteract the supernatural forces of Envy and the Evil Eye (cf. Langner, 2001: nos.

1390–1404). Horses and charioteers were also subject to attack by witchcraft, since some spectators attempted to influence the outcome of the races by casting spells on horses and their drivers with curse tablets (*defixiones*). These lead tablets were commonly buried at the starting gates or the turning posts of the race track, which were seen as liminal spaces because of the technical challenges they presented to the teams. *Defixiones* were inscribed by magicians with malefic curses, sometimes accompanied by visceral images, that summoned demons to disempower, maim and/or kill competitors and their horses (see further Chapter 18: Animal Magic). While some curses may have been motivated by financial gain through betting (see, for example, Epictetus, 1.9.27), generally they attest to fans' deep psychological investment in their human and equine heroes.

Because of their passionate following, horse races became targets of the Christian Church, which vilified circus arenas as houses of devil worship (Lim, 2012). We should not underestimate the threat of the races as the Church perceived it: for even in the fourth century, racehorses continued to be named after pagan gods while one Early Church Father lamented that the people of Rome were more knowledgeable about the star racehorses than the apostles (John Chrysostom, *Homilies* 48). For many Romans, even those living under the increasing influence of Christianity, chariot races were tantamount to a religion, the Circus Maximus their 'temple,' and racehorses—together with charioteers—their gods.

SUGGESTED READING

On horses in a historical perspective, see Chomel (1900), Dupuy (1960), Vigneron (1968), Clabby (1976), Goodall (1977), Hyland (2003), Digard (2004), Wagner (2006), and Kelekna (2009). On horse training in general, see Dietz (2004) and Henderson (2006). On horse behaviour, see Budiansky (1997) and Kiley-Worthington (2004).

For the Greek world, on horse training, see Anderson (1961). On hippic contests generally, see De Rossi (2011). On the aristocracy and hippic competition, see Nicholson (2005). For Athens, see Camp (1998).

For the Roman world, on spectacles, see Futrell (2006). On circus arenas, see Humphrey (1986) and Nelis-Clément (2008). On chariot racing, see Junkelmann (2000), Thuillier (1996), and Meijer (2010). On charioteers, see Horsmann (1998). On the factions, see Cameron (1976). On racehorses, see Toynbee (1973), Hyland (1990), Junkelmann (1990), and (on names) Darder Lissón (1996). On curse tablets, see Heintz (1998).

ABBREVIATIONS

CIL *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

ILS *Inscriptionum Latinarum Selectae*

REFER

Adornat
Statue
Anderson
Bianco, C
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Budiansk
Cameron
 Clare
Camp, J.
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Chomel
 Leca
Clabby,
Darder
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De Rossi
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Dietz, A
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