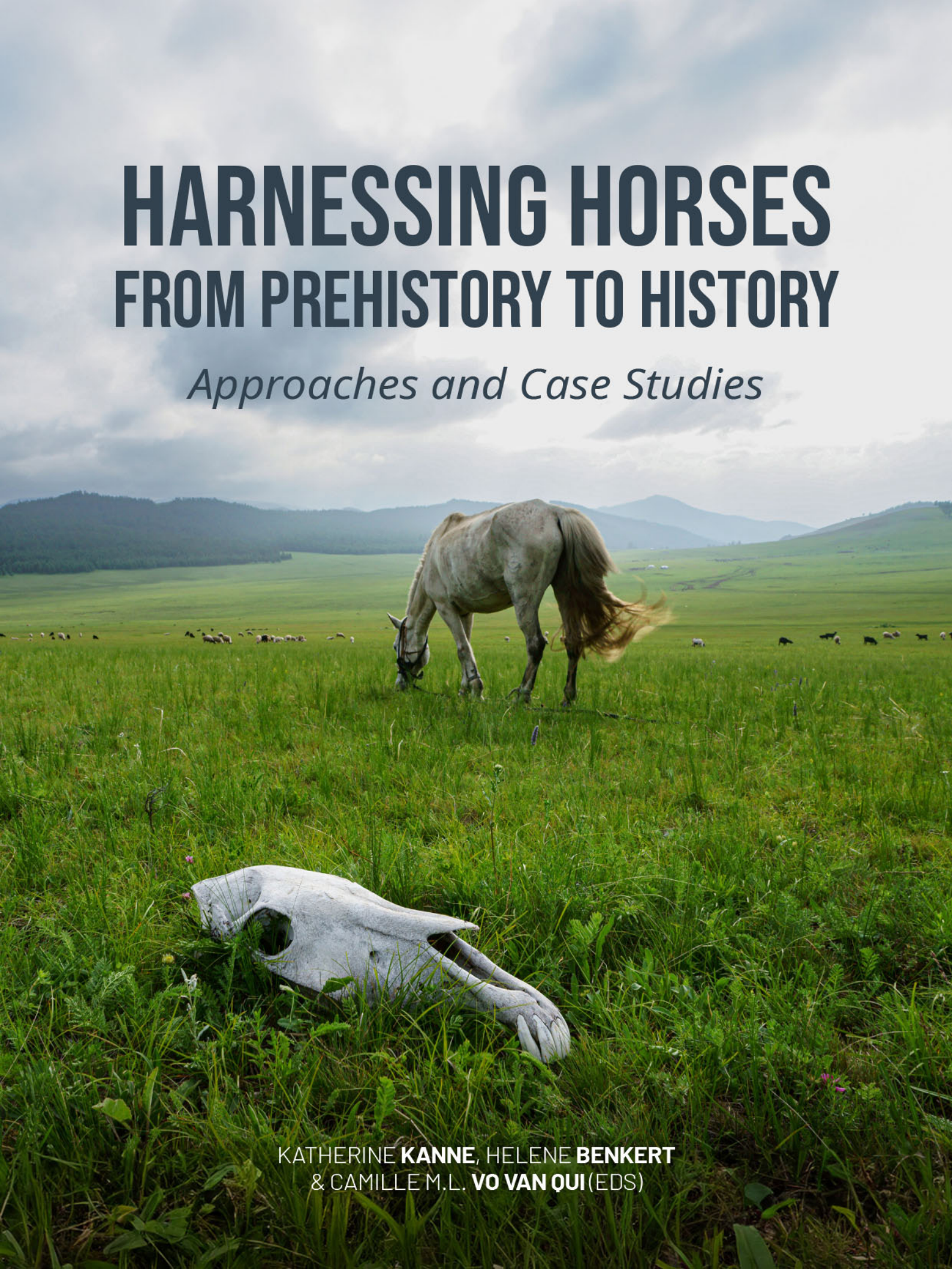
HARNESSING HORSES
FROM PREHISTORY TO HISTORY

Approaches and Case Studies



KATHERINE **KANNE**, HELENE **BENKERT**
& CAMILLE M.L. **VO VAN QUI** (EDS)

This is a free offprint – as with all our publications
the entire book is freely accessible on our website,
and is available in print or as PDF e-book.

www.sidestone.com

HARNESSING HORSES
FROM PREHISTORY TO HISTORY

Approaches and Case Studies

KATHERINE **KANNE**, HELENE **BENKERT**
& CAMILLE M.L. **VO VAN QUI** (EDS)

© 2025 Individual authors

This book is published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). This license does not apply to content that is attributed to sources other than the copyright holder mentioned above. Under this license you are free to share this work, provided the makers are attributed. Its content cannot be used for commercial purposes nor is it allowed to make adaptations without permission from the copyright holder.

For more information about our licenses, please visit https://www.sidestone.com/publishing/creative-commons.

Published by Sidestone Press, Leiden
www.sidestone.com
E-mail: info@sidestone.nl
Phone: (+31)(0)71-7370131

Lay-out & cover design: Sidestone Press
Cover: Front, horse on the Mongolian Steppe (photo: Choi Mino, stock.adobe.com);
Back, horse in polo halter (photo: arthorse, stock.adobe.com).

ISBN 978-94-6426-335-0 (softcover)
ISBN 978-94-6426-336-7 (hardcover)
ISBN 978-94-6426-337-4 (PDF e-book)

DOI: 10.59641/ww723zi

Open access publishing funding was generously provided by University of Exeter Open Research, facilitated by Imogen Ward-Smith.

Katherine Kanne was supported at the University of Exeter via a Standard Research Grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council on the Warhorse: The Archaeology of a Military Revolution? project, grant AH/S000380/1, Oliver Creighton, Principal Investigator, Robert Liddiard and Alan Outram, Co-Investigators. At University College Dublin, she is supported through an Advanced Grant from the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme (2021-2027), for the Animals and Society in Bronze Age Europe (ANSOC) project, grant 101055195, Joanna Brück, Principal Investigator.

Helene Benkert received funding from a University of Exeter PhD Studentship and is currently supported at the University of Iceland by a grant from the Icelandic Research Fund, on the project, Between man and nature: The Making of Benedictine Communities in Medieval Iceland, Principal Investigators Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir and James G. Clark.

Katherine M. French's work was funded by a European Union's Horizon Europe 2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship, Baltic paganism, Osteology, and New Evidence from Zooarchaeology (BONEZ), grant 893072.

Harriet J. Evans Tang was supported through the Leverhulme Trust, for the COHABITing with Vikings: Social space in multi-species communities project, grant RPG-2019-258, Karen Milek, Principal Investigator.

Věra Klontza-Jaklova's archaeological field prospecting, excavation and documentation IV, was courtesy of Masaryk University, specific research grant MUNI/A/1353/2023.

Contents

European Women in the Sideways and the Side-saddle

Bettina Keil-Steentjes

During the past two and half millennia, a form of horseback riding reserved exclusively for women gradually evolved and established itself in Europe: riding aside, or with both legs on the same side of the horse. Until recently, historiography has tended to neglect women, so reliable sources on horsewomen from before the nineteenth century are indeed rare. References to the history of female horsemanship in Europe can be found from the late eighteenth century onwards (e.g., Berenger 1771:105–106; Pellier 1897; Tavard 1975), but they are mostly written for entertainment. The authors draw from legends and popular lore but only occasionally from historical sources, which are then made to fit the prevailing image of women in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These texts are still quoted to this day. The critical evaluation of primary text and image sources, archaeological finds and saddles from museum collections provides a more nuanced picture, will be discussed on the following pages.

Safely riding aside requires the use of special riding equipment, whereas riding astride can be done even without a saddle. In essence, there are two types of women's saddles for riding aside: the sideways saddle and the side-saddle. In the sideways saddle, the rider sits on the mount facing to one side or slightly forward as if sitting on a chair. The side-saddle on the other hand features at least one saddle horn (pommel) providing support for the rider by using a special riding technique. In this case, the rider sits facing forwards. With both saddle types, the rider's legs are on the same side of the horse, usually the left side.

Early History and Antiquity: the sideways saddle

The earliest depictions of horsemen riding sideways date back to the second millennium BC. Votive figures and other pictorial evidence from the eastern Mediterranean and Near East (Crouwel 1981:51–52; Voyatzis 1992; Karageorgis 2006) suggest that the sideways saddle, presumably in the semi-rigid form, was widespread in the region as early as the first half of the first millennium BC.[1] The first images of humans on sideways saddles depict Assyrian and Neo-Hittite male rulers from the 8th–7th century BC (Keil-Steentjes 2020: Figure 1). From the fifth century BC onwards, the sideways saddle is shown exclusively used by women. This riding style and its specific female riding gear most likely arrived in northwestern Europe in the late Roman Imperial period (Keil-Steentjes 2020).

Depictions of female deities sideways on horseback run through many cultures. They are found in the Mycenaean (Crouwel 1981:51–52; Voyatzis 1992; Karageorgis 2006) and the Colchis cultures (Lordkipanidze 2001:25), among others. In Western Europe, the Gallo-Roman deity Epona is well known (Euskirchen 1993: Figure 2), and with Christianity the

1 A semi-rigid saddle is a saddle construction consisting of a riding cushion combined with rigid saddle bows/arches on the shoulder and rear back area of the equine (semi-rigid saddle type: cf. Stepanova 2014).

In: Kanne, K., Benkert, H., Vo Van Qui, C.M.L., eds. 2025. *Harnessing Horses from Prehistory to History. Approaches and Case Studies.* Pp. 239-252. Leiden: Sidestone Press.

Figure 1. Karatepe-Arslantaş relief NVl 2. c. 700 BC, Karatepe-Arslantaş (Kadirli, TUR). Photo: Klaus-Peter Simon 2011.

Figure 2. Bas-relief of the Romano-Celtic goddess Epona. 2nd or 3rd century AD, Dalheim (LU). Nationalmusée um Fëschmaart. Photo: Carole Raddato, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

biblical motif of Mary, Mother of God, riding sideways during the flight to Egypt became a widespread pictorial representation from the sixth century onwards.

The latest research shows that, as early as the Bronze Age, women were among the riders in the Pannonian Basin – but they rode astride (Kanne 2022). Nevertheless, the prehistoric and early historical sources are still full of gaps. Chariot burials of women became more common in the Iron Age (Metzner-Nebelsick 2009). However, they only indicate the high social status of these women and do not allow any conclusions as to whether women rode horses or mainly used the chariot.

Early and High Middle Ages

Riding aside spread from the Frankish Empire to other parts of Europe in the course of Christianisation. Two early medieval grave finds are currently known in Germany (Wesel-Bislich and Aufhausen-Bergham [Stadt Erding]) (Figure 3), which can be interpreted as women's sideways saddles (Keil-Steentjes 2020). An itinerant court required the wives of the rulers to be mobile and able to perform official duties, even when pregnant. This may have played a role in establishing this riding style, as well as the traditional imagery of Mary, Mother of Jesus (in the Flight into Egypt) symbolising fertility, protection and motherhood may have had an influence. In the further course of the Middle Ages, riding sideways became the typical riding style of the noble, Christian, married woman (Keil-Steentjes 2018, 2020).

The Middle Latin term *sambuca,* for a saddle or a richly decorated saddle cover exclusively reserved for women, was probably used as early as the sixth century (Zeumer 1882:5). From this, the French term *sambue* evolved in the High and Late Middle Ages (Scheler 1879:45; Du Cange 1886:249–250; Meyer-Lübke 1935:568–569) as well as the Spanish term *jamuga* (Gómez Ortin 1991). In Old High German, the term *sambũh* (cf. Schützeichel 2004), traditionally meaning sedan chair or women's carriage, may also have referred to a woman's saddle in certain cases (Keil-Steentjes 2020).

Although European written and pictorial sources highlight riding sideways as the accepted riding style of women of high rank (cf. Ammianus Marcellinus 1794: 31-2, 6; Petrus de Eboli 1994: fol. 96r, 111r, 124r, 128r, 138r; Ordericus Vitalis XIII 1793:17, 238–241), there were several reasons for women to ride astride. These could be due to circumstance or their marital status. Written sources document this for the (unmarried) daughters of Emperor Charlemagne (747–814) who participated in a royal hunt (Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa 1966:75–79). The Empress Matilda of England (1102–1167) was forced to flee her enemies in 1141 and had to change from riding sideways to riding astride (Florence of Worcester 1964:134; William Marshall 2002:13). Women who took part in the Crusades rode astride at least partly (Geldsetzer 2003:122–123). Difficult travel conditions such as crossing the Alps could also have been a reason why a lady of rank rode astride (Codex Balduini Trevirensis 1965:67).

The importance of horseback riding for the representation of high social status and the resulting claims is shown by female equestrian seals, common in France and the Rhineland (Germany) from the late twelfth to the early fourteenth century (Stieldorf 1999:271–282). The motif shows a female rider sitting aside on horseback with a falcon on her arm (Figure 4). It corresponds to the common seal motif of male heirs and refers to primogeniture. And indeed, some of the women can be identified as hereditary daughters. In some cases, women sealed (and ruled) in the name of their minor sons. Only in very rare cases are these women depicted riding astride, possibly due to widowhood.

A saddle find from a Frankish woman's grave in Wesel-Bislich from the early seventh century is an early example of a woman's sideways saddle (Keil-Steentjes 2020). It consists of two approximately identical, comparatively high and wide saddle arches, and was probably equipped with a footboard (Figure 3). Later in the Middle Ages, pictorial evidence also shows women's saddles with one or two stirrups on one side. The sideways saddles of this period do not have a backrest attached to the side. Earliest proof of this, can be found in manuscript illustrations from the fifteenth century onwards.

It is generally assumed that women riding in the sideways saddle were led at a walk (Pellier 1897:13; Mitchell and Creaton 2019:8), but a contemporary source of the early 13th century indicates that they also rode independently (Thomasîn von Zerclaere 2004:32). As such, they are often depicted facing forward, a detail referred to in the previously mentioned source (Thomasîn von Zerclaere 2004:32). This riding position was indispensable for the control of the mount. It appears that the rider's position with the rider's legs to the left was used more for independent riding, while the rider's position with the legs to the right was preferred when the mount was led by an escort (Keil-Steentjes 2020). These escorts may be seen as an expression of wealth or high status and need by no means be understood as a sign of helplessness.

Mules were used by women in Western Europe as early as the seventh to eighth centuries (Giesler 1996; Keil-Steentjes 2020). They were considered comfortable and sure-footed mounts. Pacing and ambling horses, confirmed in Europe from the ninth century onwards (Wutke et al. 2016), also seem to have been preferred by women (Herbert-Davies 2018).[2] Special gaits, such as the flying pace and tölt, are faster gaits than walk and allow higher travelling speeds while still comfortable for the rider.

The Sandulf's Cross-Slab is a tenth century gravestone on the Isle of Man. It shows the deceased on horseback

2 Pace and tölt (four-beat lateral ambling) are smooth gaits whose foot sequence and beat differ from the common gaits walk, trot and canter.

Figure 3. Reconstruction of the 7th century saddle from Wesel-Bislich (DE). LVR LandesMuseum Bonn. Photo: Jürgen Vogel.

Figure 4. Seal of Hedwig von Ravensberg. 1290/91, Germany. Photo: Keil-Steentjes 2025.

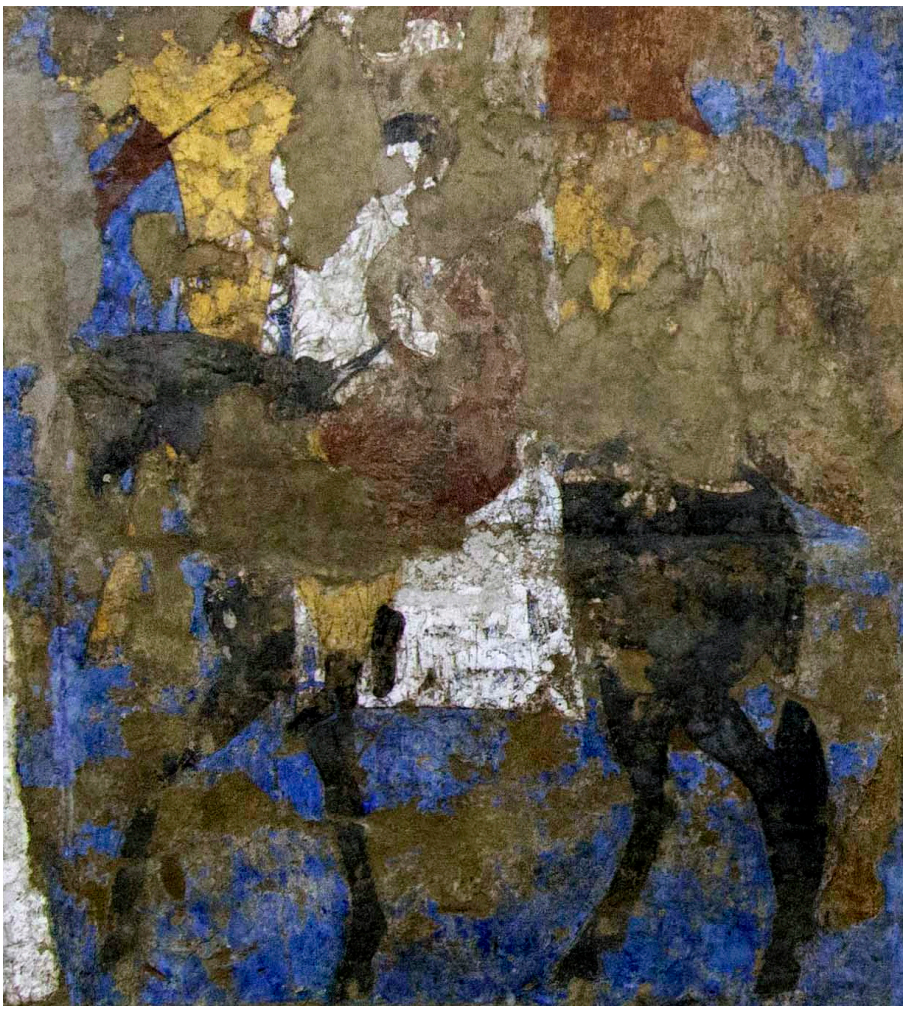


Figure 5. Afrasiab South Wall. 7th century. Photo: northeast Asian history foundation, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

in a sideways saddle and is an indication that with Christianisation the female riding style was also adopted by the Vikings (Keil-Steentjes 2020). The saddle find from the women's double burial at Oseberg ship's burial (Norway) from the ninth century, on the other hand, is an astride saddle, also called a cross-saddle. DNA studies of the skeletons have shown that one of the buried women originated from the Black Sea region, present-day Iran or Iraq (Gansum 2016). Historical written sources with references to the riding habits of Eastern European women consistently confirm the use of only the cross-saddle. There is hardly any evidence for the spread of riding aside in Asia. However, a fresco in the palace of Afrasiab (Samarkand, Uzbekistan, Figure 5) from the seventh century show three horsewomen riding aside on horseback and taking part in a procession (Silvi Antonini 1989:129).

Late Middle Ages

Illuminated manuscripts, which were increasingly produced in the thirteenth century, are among the most important pictorial sources of evidence for women on horseback. Early versions mainly show female riders in the cross-saddle but few in a sideways saddle. The analysis of the texts accompanying the illustrations shows that unmarried girls are often depicted riding astride, while the highest-ranking lady rides aside (Lancelot 1344: Folio 65v). In the manuscripts of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, women and girls are shown riding aside regardless of their marital status, with rare exceptions, indicating the increasing practice of this riding style.

The women's sideways saddle was a piece of exclusive female riding equipment and thus a prestigious status symbol. Sources from the late Middle Ages attest to the high material value of some women's saddles, which is shown by the use of precious metals, gems and valuable fabrics (cf. Du Cange 1886:249; Inventaire Clemence de Hongrie 1874:85–86). The connection between the sideways saddle and the status as a wife can be confirmed by dowry inventories of women of the high nobility. They often contain references to women owning saddles and horses for personal use (e.g., Maria von Burgund 1967:59–60). Women of high rank, such as Margaret of Flanders (1350–1405),

Figure 6. Evolution of the side- and the sideways saddle (from left to right): 6a. sideways saddle with footboard (Spain, 19th century); 6b. side-saddle showing central pommel (Garsault-saddle, France, 18th century); 6c. side-saddle with an English crutch (France, 1820–30). Photo: Keil-Steentjes 2023.

Figure 7. Pillion saddle. Snowshill Manor and Garden, Gloucestershire (GB), NT 1338474.1. Photo: CMS_SNO00505 Collections – Public © National Trust / Claire Reeves and team 2010.

even maintained their own stables and studs, independent of those of their husbands (e.g., Philippe le Hardi 1906:32).

Until the late Middle Ages, the ceremonial entrance was an important part of a ruler and his wife's, demonstration of their status. For the lady, it was a statement not just about herself, but also about her husband and family. Making a grand entrance into a town which was part of the ruler's territory was as important to project her standing as a coronation or a wedding, which usually served a diplomatic and dynastic purpose. Riding aside was obligatory for these occasions. It emphasised the female role model and underlined the qualities expected of a woman, such as gentleness, Christianity, benevolence and motherliness.

A regional phenomenon of the Renaissance was the *triumphal procession* of the bride on horseback, which was part of the wedding ritual of wealthy bourgeois families in northern Italian cities such as Florence and Siena (Witthoft 1982:47). Remarkably, during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, similar customs can be identified among the peasant population of certain European regions in Scandinavia, Spain, France and Switzerland. The *bride's saddle* or the *bride's horse* were established terms (Salomon von Orelli 1794:495; Person 1956). Apart from travelling and

the representation of status, the aristocratic privilege of the hunt was another reason why women rode on horseback. For this sport, the sideways saddle was less suitable, which is why the ladies of the Middle Ages are usually associated with the more gentle falconry, or they participated astride (Almond 2012).

Modern Times: the side-saddle

In the late fifteenth century, a new saddle type emerged: the front arch of the sideways saddle was now replaced by a central saddle horn or pommel (Figure 6b). This enabled the rider to wrap one leg around the pommel and to use a new riding technique with which she could actively gain a firm hold in the saddle. This feature distinguished the side-saddle from the sideways saddle and improved women's performance on horseback.

In 1531, Andrea Alciato (1531:112) equated the skills of a good horseman with the expected skills of a ruler in his work *Emblematum liber*. In 1566, Pasquale Caracciolo (1566:133–134), in *La Gloria del Cavallo*, went a step further by devoting several pages to the history of women on horseback, and he unequivocally equates the good riding skills of the women described with the (male) greatness of character that enables them to rule. This universally understandable equation of riding and ruling, explains the traditional design of the imperial seals of the English kings. These were always shown on horseback on the reverse side of the seal. The English queens beginning with Mary Tudor (1516–1558) followed this tradition albeit in a sideways and later a side-saddle

This new type of saddle allowed women to keep up with men in the various forms of hunting on horseback. Since hunting was not just a pleasure but a courtly ritual of great social importance, this also increased women's participation in social and political life. The new style of riding spread from princely court to princely court through marriage politics and can first be traced to the countries of the Habsburg monarchy as well as France and England. Some women, however, continued to prefer the use of the sideways saddle. The mule or ambling horse as a ladies' mount for travel was gradually replaced by the carriage from the sixteenth century onwards (Ginzrot 1981:117–119; Furger 2009:47–51).

The improved performance on horseback now also required specific riding instruction. But whether girls were taught to ride depended strongly on the family tradition. While Elisabeth Charlotte of the Palatinate (1652–1722), for example, according to her own account, only learned to ride after her marriage in France in 1671, Maria Anna of Bavaria (1660–1690), who married the heir to the French throne nine years later, was prepared for her role as queen from an early age and familiarised with riding. Queen Christina of Sweden (1626–1689), when heiress to the Swedish throne, was raised like a crown prince on her father's instructions. Her great equestrian skills, notably in the side-saddle, are mentioned several times by diplomats in letters and reports (Hallström 2010; Keil-Steentjes 2018).

Figure 8. Franz Leopold Schmittner (engraver), Maria Theresia (with the Crown of Saint Stephen) on horseback. c. 1741. Wien Museum (AT), Inv.-Nr. 169850/2. Photo: CC0 (https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/394946/).

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries show a general increase in interest in the systematic training of riders and horses. Aristocratic women on the continent now also began to hone their riding skills in the cross-saddle. At the same time, the first written riding instructions for women riding astride were published (Breuil Pompée 1669; Prizelius 1777). Riding exercises usually took place in private, which was facilitated by the growing number of enclosed riding houses at the courts of the nobility (Skalecki 1992). In public, ladies usually rode side-saddle, with a few exceptions. As the cross-saddle was suspected of causing infertility (e.g., Winter von Adlersflügel 1678), young wives of childbearing age such as the later Tsarina Catherine II of Russia (1729–1796) and Marie-Antoinette of France (1755–1793) were severely criticised when they used it (Keil-Steentjes 2018). This did not apply to young girls and unmarried women (e.g., Winter von Adlersflügel 1678).

Figure 9. Evolution of the side-saddle (from left to right): 9a. side-saddle with English crutch and leaping head showing slipper stirrup (France, c. 1840–50); 9b. side-saddle with leaping head and the remains of the third crutch (J. M. Mayer, Munich, Germany, 1894); 9c. side-saddle showing trapezoidal heads (Mayhew, London, England, 1910). Photo: Keil-Steentjes 2023.

In addition to hunting, the sources also report more frequently on promenade riding as a befitting occupation for women at the time. The old-fashioned sideways saddle was still used for this (Figure 6a). Most women of more modest background rode only to get from one place to another. In England in particular, sitting sideways on the horse's croup behind the male rider was common, a riding style that had been considered rather romantic among the nobility in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and which had given rise to its own type of saddle, the pillion cushion (Gilmour 2004: 75–76, Figure 7).

The Tsarinas Elizabeth (1709–1762) and Catherine II of Russia are known to have occasionally ridden astride. It is significant that they had themselves purposefully portrayed astride and in uniform. In this way, they expressed their command over the army, which was of great symbolic significance for both women, since they had attained rule on their own initiative. This was not the case with the heiress Maria Theresia of Austria (1717–1780), who completed the traditional coronation ride to become the *Rex Femina* of Hungary with a drawn sword in her hand, but in a side-saddle, and had herself portrayed in this way (cf. Serfözö 2017: Figure 8).

Society's expectations and pressures to respect the *natural* or *God-given* gender norm were a decisive factor when choosing the riding style. Ever since Aristotle, these views had been based on the assumption of the physical and intellectual inferiority of women as well as the polarity of the sexes (Daston 1987/88; Connell 2021) and was also expressed, among other things, in the riding style (e.g., Oebschelwitz 1766:166). Textual sources condemning *unfeminine behaviour* have been a tradition since antiquity. In every period, they form the basis for the widespread criticism of female riders in the cross-saddle (e.g., Niketas Choniates 1984:35).

Empress Maria Theresia had prepared intensively for the aforementioned coronation by taking riding lessons and had become enthusiastic about equestrianism (Iby et al. 2017:320). In January 1743, she organised a *carousel*, exclusively for ladies. The carousel was a courtly equestrian game that had evolved from the medieval jousting tournament. Women traditionally took part only in carriages or sleighs (Watanabe-O'Kelly 1990). Empress Maria Theresia went further by planning a ladies' carousel at the Winter Riding School, where ladies were to compete on horseback riding astride. However, the first signs of pregnancy and

Figure 10. Louis Alphonse de Brebisson: Madame de La Broise. c. 1860, hôtel de Brébisson, Falaise. Musée: Charenton-le-Pont (FR), Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Numéro d'inventaire: BRB00059. Photo: Ministère de la Culture – Médiathèque du Patrimoine, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Louis Alphonse de Brébisson

fears of criticism and comments that riding in a cross-saddle would endanger her unborn child, prompted her to change her plans and compete in a side-saddle. After that, she made no further attempts to promote female equestrianism in the cross-saddle (cf. Keil-Steentjes 2018).

At the end of the seventeenth century, a new form of side-saddle emerged in England, probably in connection with the growing popularity of the English thoroughbred. This breed had a different conformation and faster movements compared to the type of horses used until then. In the so-called *side-saddle with the English crutch* (Figure 6c), the central horn was replaced by a crescent-shaped fork into which the rider placed her right leg (when sitting with the legs to the left). The right side of the crutch could also be used as a handhold. The English side-saddle became a fashion trend and spread throughout Europe, though initially not in France. There, various alternative forms of side-saddles emerged in the eighteenth century (Figure 6b) but gave way to the English side-saddle after the French Revolution (Keil-Steentjes 2018). Another technical innovation, the invention of the so-called leaping or hunting head in the early 1830s, facilitated jumping over obstacles by providing additional support for the left leg (in the case

Figure 11. Souvenir photo with tourists at Drachenfels Castle. c. 1929, Drachenfels (Siebengebirge, DE). Photo: Virtuelles Brückenhofmuseum Königswinter DS 4475.

of riding with both legs to the left) and greater safety for the rider (Greenwood 1839:60–61) (Figure 9).

Both the sideways saddle and the side-saddle were exported over time to other parts of the world as part of the European way of life. They were imported by settler colonists to North and South America, and to Iceland and Georgia. There, local variants of the women's saddle developed that differed technically and visibly from the European models (e.g., Knopp 2018:217–222). In the course of the eighteenth century, continental women's riding evolved further with the increasing use of the cross-saddle. This was not the case in England. By the early nineteenth century, the situation on the continent reversed again with the social reorganisation gripping the whole of Europe and changing women's rights (Sorge 2015). While riding aside had previously been a status symbol of the married aristocratic woman in Europe, it now became a fashion among the wealthy bourgeoisie (Keil-Steentjes 2018).

Women, who had to live in the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century without male protection, did not have many opportunities for employment. Circus rider was a profession that was considered *demi-monde*, but offered chances for social advancement. Among these women were several who made a reputation for themselves as outstanding riders and who set new standards of equitation (Vaux 1891). However, the greatest ambassador of women's equestrian sport was Empress Elisabeth of Austria (1837–1898). Through her prominence, she became a role model for a generation of women who now discovered equestrian sport for themselves and gained affirmation, self-determination and a certain degree of freedom (Munkwitz 2021, 2022). This is reflected in riding fashion. Since its emergence in the seventeenth century, women's equestrian fashion tended to follow male styles albeit with clear feminine accents, such as the overlong, bouffant skirt worn in the mid-nineteenth century, which almost reached the ground when mounted (Figure 10). In the 1870s, the

Figure 12. Modern side-saddle rider in traditional habit. Photo: Keil-Steentjes 2010.

skirts were shortened and ended at the horse's belly. This was much more practical and safer, eliminating the danger of getting caught on an obstacle. Sporting women could now also wear a spur, which improved the rider's control. Previously, the long skirts had prevented this. Spurs had also been a traditionally male attribute with high symbolic value (Ellis 1995:124). Representing social status now became a matter of riding skills rather than simply showing expensive clothing and equipment (Schoenbeck 1904:16).

Parallel to the side-saddle, the sideways saddle experienced a renaissance in the nineteenth century. The growth of tourism in particular gave rise to a form of saddle known today as the *selle fermier*, which allowed inexperienced women to ride in the mountains or on the beach. It was used in tourist places well into the twentieth century (Figure 11).

In all eras, Western European men rode side-saddle only in exceptional cases: as horse trainers, to train ladies' horses or for health reasons. Throughout time, there have always been women who rode aside at least some of the time, either for practical, personal, or cultural reasons. At times, it was unacceptable for women to ride astride in public, such as in the nineteenth century. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, however, astride riders began to appear in the metropolises of Western Europe, thereby triggering public debate. The most common arguments in favour of the side-saddle and against the cross-saddle were primarily concerned with safety and health (The Times 1914). In the nineteenth century, the side-saddle was regarded as the saddle that offered better support and thus protected against falls. An argument that has absolute justification, since the cross-saddles of the era gave the rider little support. In addition, the view that the female body was less suitable for the riding saddle persisted into the twentieth century. Women's *shorter legs and rounder thighs* were cited, as well as the faster tiring of the (weaker) female muscles (e.g., Mazzuchelli 1805:294; Fillis 1902:24). However, many textual sources dealing with the controversy over the choice of riding style show more or less directly that a conservative mindset regarding the gender norm played a significant role in the initial strong rejection of women in the cross-saddle (e.g., Schoenbeck 1904:18–39). So did a general sense of aesthetics that rejected women riders wearing breeches, even though breeches concealed under the riding skirt had been the norm for over a hundred years and probably much longer (e.g., Nicholas l'Estrange 1974).

In the cross-saddle, women were much less dependent on assisting personnel, thus making the equestrian sport more affordable. Horses trained especially in the side-saddle, additional staff and costly equipment and clothing were no longer required. The First World War changed the social structures in the western world and with the revival of horse shows in the 1920s, women began competing in both saddles. Side-saddle riding then reached its sporting peak (Musy 2009). At the same time, the possible effect on the horse's well-being caused by the asymmetrical and heavy side-saddle came under discussion (Nelson Evening

Mail 1905:2; Maddison 1923:4; Seunig 2011:275). In terms of athletic performance, a riding style which eliminated the function of a rider's right leg could, in the long run, only lose. Irmgard von Opel's (1917–1986) victory in the Hamburg Jumping Derby (1934), one of the world's most demanding jumping competitions, clearly proved that, in the cross-saddle, women could compete with men at all levels. After the Second World War, equestrian sport was slow to pick up again. In 1952, the Olympic Committee allowed women to compete in dressage with the first medals going to women (Olympic Equestrians 2024; Newsum 1988:97–98). Ever since, the equestrian sport has been one of the few Olympic disciplines in which women compete directly against men. Now only a small group of women in Europe uses the side-saddle, most of them in the UK.

In the 1970s, interest in side-saddle riding as a sport and leisure activity increased again. The first associations were founded in Great Britain and the USA (Skelton 1988:53–57), followed by others throughout Europe, Australia and in Japan, setting themselves the task of reviving and preserving the riding style. In parallel, written riding instructions emerged that attempted to bring the riding style into a more modern context (Cabaud 1986; Skelton 1988; Faltejsek 1998, Figure 12). Other authors dealt with the history of women in the side-saddle (Pellier 1897; Fleitmann-Bloodgood 1959; Toboesch 1970; Hermsdorf 1998; Lagier 2009) or devoted a chapter to the subject (Chenevix-Trench 1970:272–290; Tavard 1975:243–272; Newsum 1988). In doing so, they often largely adopted the information that had already been circulated in the nineteenth century. Since the 2010s, texts have increasingly begun to appear which give the impression that in past centuries riding astride was considered shameless and that the side-saddle's purpose was to preserve virginity (Knopp 2018:217). These statements cannot be confirmed by historical textual sources, but they do have a literary antecedent: by omission and the use of pejorative wording in translations and quotations, certain authors of the late eighteenth century voiced their rejection of women riding (and behaving) like men. Frequent quotation and use of such statements by other authors lent them unwarranted credibility. Further interpretations by current authors led to further distortion. Only recent years have seen an increase in the number of works approaching the history of the European woman in the saddle critically and with scientific methodology, thus helping to revise false assumptions and fill in knowledge gaps.

Concluding remarks

The formal way of riding sideways, with its enthroned appearance, has its origins in the depictions of gods and the status representation of early male rulers. The increasingly military use of the riding horse in the first millennium BC, for which riding sideways was generally unsuitable, created a general understanding that riding in a man's way symbolised martiality and a claim to power. Furthermore, in the course of Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, societies changed across Europe where the distribution of tasks between men and women became clearly defined, a separation, resulting in the assumption this was the foundation for any functioning community. Riding astride, embodying typically male attributes such as vigour, strength and vitality now stood in contrast with the sideways rider's position which represented typically idealised female characteristics such as passiveness, gentleness, obedience, and motherly care.

Since the Early Middle Ages, legal texts have shown that women of childbearing age were more highly valued than others. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the side-saddle, with its feminine image, became the privilege of high-class married women while for girls, single women and widows it was acceptable to ride astride. This attitude prevailed for centuries. It was only during the nineteenth century, when riding became accessible and fashionable for a wider section of the population, that the symbolism of the side-saddle changed. Previously, the privilege of married women, it now paradoxically became a tool for young or unmarried women to showcase their qualities as future wives. As the female emancipation movement progressed, riding aside not only lost its meaning but also its positive associations, to the point of even being seen as a symbol of female oppression. Today, side-saddle riding is increasingly gaining in popularity again, and this for a number of reasons: interest in tradition and history, joy of expressing one's femininity and of course sporting challenges to name but a few – but nowadays gender norms no longer play a role.

References

Primary Sources

Alciato, A. 1534. *Emblematum liber*. Paris: Chrestien Wechel.

Ammianus Marcellinus. 1794. *Res Gestae*. J.A. Wagner, ed. and trans. Frankfurt: Hermannische Buchhandlung.

Breuil Pompée. 1669. *Traité de l'instruction du Cavalier, pour le rendre capable de dresser toutes sortes de Chevaux*. G. de Hollande, trans. Arnheim: Haagen.

Caracciolo, P. 1566. *La gloria del cavallo*. Venezia: Gabriele Giolito de' Ferrari.

Codex Balduini Trevirensis. 1965. *Kaiser Heinrichs Romfahrt. Die Bilderchronik von Kaiser Heinrich VII und Kurfürst Balduin von Luxemburg (1308–1313)*. F.-J. Heyen, ed. Boppard: Boldt.

Florence of Worcester. 1964. *Chronicon* 2. B. Thorpe, ed. Vaduz: Kraus.
Formulae Andecavenses. 1882. *MGH Formulae Merowingici et Karolini aevi* 1. K. Zeumer, ed. Hannover: Hahn.
Inventaire Clemence de Hongrie. 1874. *Nouveau recueil de comptes de l'argenterie des rois de France*. L.C. Douët-d'Arcq, ed. Paris: Renouard.
Lancelot du Lac. 1344. *BNF Fr. 122*.
Maria von Burgund. 1967. *Maria von Burgund. Herzogin von Kleve*. H. Will, ed. Kleve: Boss.
Nicholas l'Estrange. 1974. Merry Passages and Jeasts: A Manuscript Jestbook of Sir Nicholas Le Strange. *In* H.F. Lippincott, ed. *Salzburg Studies in English Literature* 29. Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur.
Niketas Choniates. 1984. *O city of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*. H.J. Magoulias, ed. and transl. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
von Oebschelwitz, L.W.F. 1766. *Der holländische Stallmeister, oder kurze, jedoch gründliche Unterweisung, was zum Kennen, Zäumen, Satteln. Beschlagen und Unterhalten der Pferde gehöret; wie auch zu der Reitkunst.* Leipzig/Groningen: Heinsius/Bolt.
Ordericus Vitalis. 1973. *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis IV*, lib. XVIII. M. Chibnall, ed. and transl. Oxford: University Press.
von Orelli, S. 1794. *Aloysius von Orelli: Ein biographischer Versuch. Nebst Fragmenten aus der Italienischen und Schweizergeschichte, und ein Gemälde der häuslichen Sitten der Stadt Zürich um die Mitte des sechszehnten Jahrhunderts*. Zürich: Ziegler.
Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa. 1966. Paderborner Epos. H. Beumann, F. Brunhölzl and W. Winkelmann. eds. *In* J. Brockmann, ed. *Stud. u. Quellen Westfäl. Gesch.* 8. Paderborn: Verein für Geschichte und Altertumskunde Westfalens, Abteilung Paderborn.
Petrus de Eboli. 1994. *Liber ad honorem Augusti sive de rebus Siculis, Eine Bilderchronik der Stauferzeit aus der Burgerbibliothek Bern*. T. Hölzer and M. Stähli, eds. Sigmaringen: Thorbecke.
Philippe Le Hardi. 1906. *L´Écurie de Philippe le Hardi: Duc de Bourgogne: d'après des documents inédits*. E. Picard, ed. Paris: Honoré Champion.
Prizelius, J.G. 1777. *Etwas für Liebhaberinnen der Reiterey*. Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich.
Thomasîn von Zerclaere. 2004. *Der wälsche Gast–Text (Auswahl), Übersetzung, Stellenkommentar*. E. Wilms, ed. and transl. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter.
William Marshall. 2002. *History of William Marshall I text and translations*. A.J. Holden and S. Gregory, eds. and transl. London: Anglo-Norman Text Society.
Winter von Adlersflügel, G.S. 1678. *Wolberittener Cavalier: oder Gründliche Anweisung zu der Reit- und Zaum-Kunst in zwey Theile abgefasst*, 1, 46. Nürnberg.

Secondary Sources

Almond, R. 2012. The Way the Ladies Ride. *History Today* 62(2): 36–39.
Berenger, R. 1771. *The History and Art of Horsemanship*. London: Davies.
Cabaud, J. 1988. *Monter en Amazone*. Paris: Bélin.
Chenevix-Trench, C.P. 1970. *A History of Horsemanship*. London: Longman; New York: Doubleday & Co.
Connell, S.M. 2021. Aristoteles über Frauen. *In* K. Corcilius and C. Rapp, eds. *Aristoteles-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*. Pp. 243–249. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler.
Crouwel, J.H. 1981. *Chariots and other means of land transportation in bronze age Greece*. Allard Pierson Series 3. Amsterdam: Allard Pierson Museum.
Daston, L.J. 1987/88. Weibliche Intelligenz: Geschichte einer Idee. *Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Jahrbuch* 1987/88: 213–229.
Du Cange, C.d.F. 1886. *Glossarium media et infirmae latinitatis* 7. Niort: L. Favre.
Ellis, B. 1995. Spurs and spur fittings. *In* J. Clark, ed. *The medieval horse and its equipment*. Pp.124–156. London: HMSO.
Euskirchen, M. 1993. Epona. *Ber. RGK* 74.1874.
Faltejsek, D. 1998. *Im Damensattel. Eine Reitlehre für die Frau*. Hildesheim/Zürich/New York: Olms.
Fillis, J. 1902. *Breaking and riding*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons.
Fleitmann-Bloodgood, L. 1959. *Saddle of Queens*. London: J. A. Allen.
Furger, A. 2009. *Fahrkunst – Driving*. Hildesheim/Zürich/New York: Olms.
Gansum, T. 2016. The reopening of the Oseberg Mound and the Gokstad Mount. *In* G. Andersson, ed. *We call them Vikings*. Pp. 120–127. Stockholm: Swedish History Museum.
Geldsetzer, S. 2003. *Frauen auf Kreuzzügen 1096–1291*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
Giesler, J. 1996. Rekonstruktion eines Sattels aus dem fränkischen Gräberfeld von Wesel-Bislich. *In* A. Wieczorek, P. Périn, K. von Welck, and W. Menghin, eds. *Die Franken. Wegbereiter Europas* 2. Pp. 808–811. Mannheim/Mainz: Philipp von Zabern.
Gilmour, L. 2004. Saddles of the Stuart Period. *In* L. Gilmour, ed. *In the Saddle: An Exploration of the Saddle Though History*. Pp. 67–82. London: Archetype.
Ginzrot, J.C. 1981. *Die Wagen und Fuhrwerke von der Antike bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*. Gütersloh: Prisma.
Gómez Ortin, F. 1991. *Vocabulario del noroeste murciano: contribución lexicográfica al español de Murcia*. Murcia: Editora Regional de Murcia.
Greenwood, G. 1839. *Hints on horsemanship, to a nephew and niece: or, Common sense and common errors in common riding*. London: E. Moxon.

Hallström, A. 2010. Damer i sadeln. In *Trofast. Hov och tass I kunglig tjänst*, 73–87. Stockholm: Livrustkammaren.
Herbert-Davies, E. 2018. *The Cultural Representation of the Horse in Late Medieval England: Status and Gender*. Bachelor's dissertation. Leeds: University of Leeds.
Hermsdorf, G. 1998. *Frauen zu Pferde, Geschichte und Geschichten der Reiterinnen*. Hamburg: Philippe.
Iby, E., M. Mutschlechner, W. Telesko, and K. Vocelka eds. 2017. *Maria Theresia 1717–1780: Strategin – Mutter – Reformerin*. Wien: Amalthea.
Kanne, K. 2022. Riding, Ruling, and Resistance: Equestrianism and Political Authority in the Hungarian Bronze Age. *Current Anthropology* 63(3): 289–329. DOI:10.1086/720271.
Karageorgis, V. 2006. Aphrodite Astarte on Horseback. *In* S. Gitin, J. Edward Wright, and J.P. Dessel, eds. *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*. Pp. 73–79. Winona Lake: Penn State University Press.
Keil-Steentjes, B. 2018. Die Frau in der höfischen Reiterei. *Hippomanie am Hofe, Jahrbuch der Stiftung Thüringer Schlösser und Gärten* 22: 154–168.
Keil-Steentjes, B. 2020. Der Sattel von Bislich. *Bonner Jahrbücher* 220: 197–229.
Knopp, K. 2018. *American Riding and Work Saddles and horse Culture 1790–1920*. Hattiesburg, MS: Knopp.
Lagier, R. 2009. *La Femme et le Cheval*. Janzé: Charles Hérissey.
Lordkipanidze, O. 2001. The Golden Fleece: Myth, Euhemeristic Explanation and Archaeology. *Oxford Journal of archaeology* 20: 1–38.
Maddison, I. 1923. *Riding Astride for girls*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
Mazzuchelli, F. 1805. *Scuola Equestre* 2. Milano: Pietro Giegler.
Metzner-Nebelsick, C. 2009. Wagen- und Prunkbestattungen von Frauen der Hallstatt- und frühen Latènezeit in Europa. Ein Beitrag zur Diskussion der sozialen Stellung der Frau in der älteren Eisenzeit. *In* J.M. Bagley, C. Eggl, D. Neumann, and M. Schefzik, eds. *Alpen, Kult und Eisenzeit*. Pp. 238–270. Rahden: Leidorf.
Meyer-Lübke, W. 1935. *Romanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3. vollst. neubearb. Aufl. Heidelberg: Carl Winters.
Mitchell, S. and N. Creaton. 2019. *A Brief History of the Side Saddle*. Tuxford: Palette Press.
Munkwitz, E. 2021. *Women, Horse Sports and Liberation: Equestrianism and Britain from the 18th to the 20th Centuries*. London/New York: Routledge.
Munkwitz, E. 2022. The Sidesaddle: The Unlikely Emblem of Equestrian Empowerment. *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 39(1): 57–71.
Musy, J.-M. 2009. *Grands Concours Hippiques en Amazone*. Blurb.
Nelson Evening Mail. 1905. Weekly Whispers. *Nelson Evening Mail* XL (6. May): 2.
Newsum, G. 1988. *Women and Horses*. London: The Sportsman's Press.
Olympic Equestrians. 2024. https://olympics.com/en/sports/equestrian/ (Accessed 1. February 2024).
Pellier, J.-T. 1897. *La Selle et le Costume de l`Amazone*. Paris: J. Rothschild.
Person, B.-A. 1957. Brudsadel 1900. *Kulturens årsbok* 1956, 42–43. Lund.
Scheler, A. 1879. *Olla patella, vocabulaire latin versifié avec gloses françaises*. Gent: Vanderhaeghen.
Schoenbeck, R. 1904. *Der Damen-Reitsport*. Leipzig: Grethlein & Co.
Schützeichel, R., ed. 2004. *Althochdeutscher und Altsächsischer Glossenwortschatz* 8. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
Serfözö, S. 2017. Männlich und mächtig. Die Inszenierung Maria Theresias als Königin von Ungarn auf Staatsportraits. *In* E. Iby, M. Mutschlechner, W. Telesko, and K. Vocelka, eds. *Maria Theresia 1717–1780: Strategin – Mutter – Reformerin*. Pp. 107–110. Wien: Amalthea.
Seunig, W. 2011. *Marginalien zu Pferd und Reiter*. Schondorf: Wuwei.
Skalecki, L. 1992. *Das Reithaus. Untersuchungen zu einer Bauaufgabe des 17. bis 19. Jahrhundert*. Hildesheim/Zürich/New York: Olms.
Silvi Antonini, C. 1989. The Painting in the Palace of Afrasiab (Samarkand). *Rivista degli studi orientali* 63(1/3): 109–144.
Skelton, B. 1988. *Side Saddle Riding. Notes for teachers and pupils*. London: Sportsman Press.
Sorge, C. 2015. Die Hörigkeit der Ehefrau. Entstehungsgeschichte und Entwicklungslinien von Art. 213 Code civil 1804 sowie Kritik der französischen Frauenbewegung. In *Reformforderungen zum Familienrecht international* 1. Pp. 126–188. Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau.
Stepanova, E. 2014. Kitaiskie sedla III v. do n.e.–III v. n.e. *Trudy* 4(20*), Vserossiiskogo arkheologicheskogo s'ezda v Kazani* 2: 235–240.
Stieldorf, A. 1999. *Rheinische Frauensiegel. Zur rechtlichen und sozialen Stellung weltlicher Frauen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert*. Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau.
Tavard, C.-H. 1975. *Sattel und Zaumzeug*. Köln: Dumont.
The Times. 1914. Riding Astride. Medical views on the risks of injury. *The Times* (19. March): 16.
Toboesch, E. 1970. *Amazones, Cavalieres et Femmes à cheval*. Bruxelles: Pauwels Fils.
de Vaux, C.M. 1893. Écuyers et Écuyères: Histoire de Cirques d'Europe. Paris: J. Rothschild.
Voyatzis, M. 1992. Votive Riders Seated Side-Saddle at Early Greek Sanctuaries. *The Annual of the British School in Athens* 87: 259–279.

Watanabe-O'Kelly, H. 1990. Das Damenringrennen – eine sächsische Erfindung? In R. Groß, ed. *Sachsen und die Wettiner. Chancen und Realitäten. Internationale wissenschaftliche Konferenz, Dresden 27. bis 29 Juni 1989* (Dresdner Hefte, Sonderausgabe). Pp. 307–312. Dresden: Kulturakademie des Bezirks Dresden.

Witthoft, B. 1982. Marriage Rituals and Marriage Chests in Quattrocento Florence. *Artibus et Historiae* 3(5): 43–59.

Wutke, S., Andersson, L., Benecke, N., Sandoval-Castellanos, E., Gonzalez, J., et al. 2016. The origin of ambling horses. *Current Biology* 26 (15): 697–699.

Additional Reading

Smith, L. 2004. The History and Development of the Side-Saddle. *In* L. Gilmour, ed. *In the Saddle: An Exploration of the Saddle Through History*. Pp. 83–96. London: Archetype.

Watts Hettinger, R.C. 2009. *The illustrated Enyclopedia of the Sidesaddle*. Wilton, NH: Side Saddle Source.

Weiss, U.E. 2018. Backwards in High heels: A Brief History of the Sidesaddle. *In* U.E. Weiss and C.P. Pfeiffer, eds. *Sidesaddle 1690–1935.* Pp. 1–18. Middleburg, VA: National Sporting Library & Museum.

Zanetti, V. 2019. Holding the reins. Female horseback riding and aristocratic authority in 17th–century France. In *Ludic. Annali di storia e civiltà del gioco* 25: 125–143.