

ABSTRACT

HORSE POWER: SOCIAL EVOLUTION IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

My research is on the development of the horse as a status symbol in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. Horses throughout history are often restricted to the upper classes in non-nomadic societies simply due to the expense and time required of ownership of a 1,000lb prey animal. However, between 1000 and 1300 the perceived social value of the horse far surpasses the expense involved. After this point, ownership of quality animals begins to be regulated by law, such that a well off merchant or a lower level noble would not be legally allowed to own the most prestigious mounts, despite being able to easily afford one. Depictions of horses in literature become increasingly more elaborate and more reflective of their owners' status and heroic value during this time. Changes over time in the frequency of horses being used, named, and given as gifts in literature from the same traditions, such as from the *Waltharius* to the *Nibelungenlied*, and the evolving Arthurian cycles, show a steady increase in the horse's use as social currency. Later epics, such as *La Chanson de Roland* and *La Cantar del Mio Cid*, illustrate how firmly entrenched the horse became in not only the trappings of aristocracy, but also in marking an individual's nuanced position in society.

Katrin Boniface
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HORSE POWER: SOCIAL EVOLUTION IN
MEDIEVAL EUROPE

by
Katrin Boniface

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APPROVED

For the Department of History:

We, the undersigned, certify that the thesis of the following student meets the required standards of scholarship, format, and style of the university and the student's graduate degree program for the awarding of the master's degree.

Katrin Boniface
Thesis Author

Mark Arvanigian (Chair) History

Lisa Weston English

Brad Jones History

For the University Graduate Committee:

Dean, Division of Graduate Studies

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CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW

Introduction

Horses throughout history have often been restricted to the upper classes in non-nomadic societies, simply due to the expense and time required of the ownership of a 1,000lb prey animal. However, between 1000 and 1250 CE, the social value of the horse surpasses the expense involved in their upkeep. After this point, ownership of high-class animals begins to be regulated by law, such that a well off merchant or a lower level noble would not legally be allowed to own the most prestigious mounts, despite being able to easily afford one. After roughly 1250 CE, horses also become increasingly differentiated in type, with each type signifying a different station in society. Literature is the richest source for evidence of these changes, as it allows insight not into reality, but rather into the ideals held by society. Early literary references (generally, pre-eleventh century) may be as plain as saying that the hero mounted or dismounted from the saddle.¹ Later works increasingly name horses and give them descriptions and actions of their own.² In the tenth century, there was little differentiation between types of horses. By the thirteenth century there was a wide variety of types, and each was associated with specific roles in society. As with most things, the literature of this time shows an extremely stylized version of reality. These types of horses, such as

¹ Ekkehard, *Waltharii Poesis*. http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost10/Waltharius/wal_txt1.html ln. 471.

² There is also an increase in the literary description of hounds and hawks, and to a lesser extent food and clothing, though horses have the most drastic change and the most specific social rank. All of these items become subject to sumptuary laws. By contrast, there is not a significant change in the description of fortifications, gold or silver treasure, landscapes, or ferries, and surprisingly little change in the treatment of arms and armor that is not related to the horse (i.e. swords and doublets as opposed to spurs and chamfrons). See for example the Walter or Arthur traditions.

classes of warhorses, palfreys, or packhorses, became tied to class: a lord's courser was vastly different from a farmer's plough horse.

The idea that horses were used as symbols of rank as well as wealth has been largely taken for granted. Few historians bother to mention it, and when it is mentioned it is in a broad way, appearing to encompass the entirety of the Middle Ages, as well as being focused primarily on the knight's mount. Ewart Oakeshott, author of more than a half-dozen books on various aspects of knighthood, states that "to men of the middle ages, horses were a source of great pride and affection, for the horse could signify the status, wealth, and importance of its owner. A knight who went about with several spare destriers would be highly regarded by everyone he met."³ In a book dedicated to the knight's horse, he gives no further mention or explanation of the horse's symbolic or social value. The most pointed observation of horses as symbolic of power in the middle ages comes not from any of the great number of books on Medieval horses, but from a single article on the Spanish epic *the Cantar del Mio Cid*: Francisco LaRubia-Prado says that it is "clear that horses and honor were invested with similar symbolic power" and that the "emphasis is placed not on the economic value and functions of horses...but on their symbolic and spiritual importance."⁴ However, he, too, generalizes this concept to encompass equally the entire span of the middle ages, rather than as a trend in which the horse's 'importance' increased in both quantity and complexity. The development of the valuation gap between practical use and social symbolism has glossed over.

³ Ewart Oakeshott, *A Knight and His Horse* (Pennsylvania: Dufour Editions, Inc., 1962, 1998) 16.

⁴ LaRubia-Prado, "Gift-Giving Diplomacy: The Role of the Horse in the Cantar de mio Cid," *La corónica: A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures*, Volume 37, (Issue 1, Fall 2008), 275-299.

The introduction of *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World* explains that “the editors...aim to reintroduce scholars to ‘the significance of the horse in the early modern period’ and thereby to fill a void in the current state of scholarship.”⁵ While medieval scholars are more ready to point out the social importance of the horse than those of the early modern period, that importance is often boiled down to a single phrase. Ann Hyland acknowledges this very simply with: “as [the warhorse’s] effectiveness was prove[n], his accoutrements and those of his rider affected social and economic life.”⁶ It is assumed that the aristocratic association was due simply to the cost of keeping a large prey animal in good health, a cost only worthwhile to someone using the animal in war. John France, in *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades*, suggests that “the fact that horses were expensive meant that there was a social overtone to any word applied to a cavalryman.”⁷ The impression given by medieval historians, if any thought is given to the subject, is that the conflation of horses with status was handed down from antiquity.⁸ The Romans, Greeks, and even Egyptians all had elite military equestrian classes. However, these classes developed over time in each of these civilizations. Like other social classes, they were not inherited intact. When the military and political structures that supported them collapsed, the social hierarchy was also disrupted. After the

⁵ Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker, ed., *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan: 2005), xv.

⁶ Ann Hyland, *The Medieval Warhorse From Byzantium to the Crusades* (London: Grange Books: 1994), 57.

⁷ John France, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades* (New York: Cornell University Press: 1999), 53.

⁸ This may be due to the fact that Oakeshott’s *A Knight and his Horse* and Davis’s *Medieval Warhorse* remain the sources that most scholars consult on the subject of medieval sources. Both made this assumption.

fall of Rome, Europe was left in a state of disarray. In periods of social chaos, particularly with low population density, horses often became necessary tools for life. This can remove them from any prior class associations, and later they can be the tools of upward social mobility. This is seen in the early years of the Roman *equites*, Charlemagne's ever-growing cavalry, and in the American westward expansion. As society in medieval Europe became more stable, the horse was removed from its strictly utilitarian usage. The warrior elite that had relied on them to gain and maintain their status began to elevate the horse, turning it into a symbol of social currency to hold that status in a new societal order.

Terminology & Etymology

Medieval historians are familiar with the many terms for horse types used in the middle ages, including destrier, charger, courser, palfrey, rouncey, hackney, and sumpter.⁹ These terms for differentiated types of horses seem to appear in literature before they appear in law.¹⁰ This may be misleading because of the scarcity of medieval sources, but it does suggest that the laws were passed to support the ideals illustrated by the literature. Increasingly fine distinctions, such as between rouncey, courser, and destrier, keep pace with the increasingly complicated social classes of the late middle ages. These terms also become conflated with the animals' breeding rather than pure utility, such as the use of palfrey for a finely bred (often of eastern extraction) general riding animal, as opposed to hackney for a common bred general riding animal. Most of these

⁹ See Glossary, pg. 68.

¹⁰ Both the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Le Dictionnaire Littré* list the first occurrences of these terms as being from literary sources, though both cite legal and other documents for other vocabulary. While it seems that English is very late in using these terms, it should be noted that French was still commonly spoken among the nobility of England.

names come from Latin, and have been assumed to be holdovers from Rome.¹¹ However, the Romans had far fewer, and different, terms for their horses. As the horse in general becomes more symbolic of social station, each type becomes more strictly codified, and closely related terms, such as charger and destrier, are used less interchangeably.

These terms are distinctly lacking from any source prior to the eleventh century, and do not appear to be common until much later. These terms- even those such as palfrey and destrier, which may have Latin cousins- appear to be late medieval inventions to reflect changes in breeding practices that went along with agricultural inventions and societal restructuring.¹² *The Oxford English Dictionary* dates all of these terms to the early fourteenth century, a time that also saw a huge growth in literature, and changes in how horses were depicted in these texts.¹³ *Le Dictionnaire Littré* dates the French *destrier*, *coursier*, *roussin*, *palefroi*, and *soummier* to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century.¹⁴ There is some disagreement among historians (when it comes up at all) as to what precisely each of these terms signifies. This is because their significance, both literal and literary, is not static. For example, a sumpter (*soumpter*) was first commonly a footman

¹¹ R.H.C. Davis, *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development, and Redevelopment* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1989) is explicit about this, giving etymologies for a few words. As Davis' work was for several decades the only modern work on the medieval horse, other historians have relied on it. The major problem with these etymologies is that he gives only that the word is "from the Latin." They do not take in to account when or why terms changed drastically in meaning, such as Latin "*para veredus*" (literally "spare horse for riding," a term for replacement mounts for messengers and soldiers) to the late medieval "*palfrei*", a well-bred refined gaited horse generally suitable for aristocratic women. This is, I believe, due to Davis' focus on the horse as a tool for war.

¹² For more information see Lynn White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (UK: Oxford University Press 1966) and Thomas Bisson, "Medieval Lordship" *Speculum* Vol. 70, No. 4 (Oct. 1995): 743-759

¹³ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://www.oed.com>

¹⁴ *Le Dictionnaire Littré*, <http://www.littre.org/>

who handled packs, whether or not they were on an animal; but by the end of the middle ages it was any beast of burden.¹⁵ The meanings are, however, fairly consistent within a given time period across English, French (including Occitan), and Spanish (including Catalan).¹⁶ Several terms have cognates which appear to date to the thirteenth century in Middle German, Middle Dutch, and Italian.¹⁷ The fact that there are close cognates of ‘new’ words in such disparate languages suggest that they were part of European culture as a whole during these centuries, and makes it more unlikely that they are simply remnants of Latin language and ideology. Most of these words, unsurprisingly, are rooted in French, and their usage spreads alongside chivalric culture.¹⁸ This has supported the idea that the confluence of horses and rank stemmed from military usage. However, it is important to remember that chivalric culture bloomed in a time where pikeman, bowman, crossbowman, mounted infantry, and even the new cannon were rapidly eclipsing the aristocratic knight. In addition, the symbolism surrounding medieval equines is not a linear hierarchy, nor does it apply strictly to military animals. By the end of the middle ages, a person’s precise role in the increasingly murky societal fabric was determined by a few words describing their horse. The animal’s own class, or proto-breed, it’s sex, health, age, and even color reflected a nuanced interpretation of it’s owners estate, role, rank, and wealth.

¹⁵ Most late texts will specify ‘sumpter horse’ or ‘sumpter mule,’ but not always. Regardless, the term came to be used more commonly for the animal than the man.

¹⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary; Le Dictionnaire Littré; Online Etymological Dictionary*, <http://www.etymonline.com/>

¹⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary; Online Etymological Dictionary*.

¹⁸ For more on chivalric culture, see Maurice Hugh Keen, *Chivalry*. (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1984)

The Stage

The development of a valuation gap is fairly well illustrated in the evolving literature of the late middle ages. Similar associations are apparent in Greece, with Justina Gregory suggesting that “the Homeric epithets commonly attached to horses...[such as] "swift" and "with lovely mane"...and the similes that liken Homeric heroes to horses make it clear that the animals were valued both for their practical and their esthetic qualities” and that “the discourse of horses takes its inspiration from the discourse of aristocrats.”¹⁹ However, the repeated changes in the status of the horse over the successive centuries shows that the symbolic value of the horse in the late middle ages is not a simple continuation of the animal’s rank in antiquity. The Roman Republic employed a large cavalry, and is even credited with one of the earliest saddles.²⁰ Roman cavalry, or “*equites*,” were required to enlist with their own horse. This necessitated some amount of wealth— or at least luck— but patrician status was not required.²¹ Enlisting in the cavalry was a straightforward route to upward social mobility. An *equite*’s pay was double that of a foot soldier, and they were likely to retire with a good deal of wealth, and possibly even land.²² However, as the phalanx replaced the cavalry as the heart of the Roman army, the term *equite* became tied to the aristocracy which

¹⁹ Justina Gregory. “Donkeys and the Equine Hierarchy in Archaic Greek Literature,” *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 102, No. 3 (Feb. - Mar., 2007), 193-212. In addition, there are very notable differences between “aristocratic” horses of different ages. For example, Gregory notes that archaic Greeks used male (does not specify stallion or gelding) and female horses for soldiers and male rulers. In the middle ages, these horses were exclusively male and generally intact. In Greece and early Rome, mules were firmly working class animals. By the late middle ages, especially in Spain and southern Europe, a fine mule held a status higher than any but a warhorse.

²⁰ Peter Connolly and Carol van Driel-Murray, “The Roman Cavalry Saddle,” *Britannia*, Vol. 22 (1991): 33-50.

²¹ H. Hill, “Equites' of Senatorial Rank,” *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Jan., 1929), 33-36.

²² George H. Allen, “The Advancement of Officers in the Roman Army,” *Supplementary Papers of the American School of Classical Studies in Rome*, Vol. 2 (1908), 1-25.

still preferred a branch of service that, in addition to already being loosely tied to the upper class, came with better pay and a more individualistic experience.²³ In addition, Rome did not have a particular need for farm horses, due to the slave-based agronomy. This meant that there was no direct association of horses with the lowest class. This appears to be not entirely unlike the trend in the middle ages. A man with a horse under Charlemagne— even one of ‘peasant’ birth— could greatly increase both his wealth and status, but a few centuries later the association between class and horse became more about birth status than utility. Rather than simply being a tool of a warrior class, the horse became the medium in which social status was expressed.

The early middle ages, due in part to the chaos of the collapse of Rome and to a multitude of invasions, effectively had a two-class system.²⁴ A minority aristocracy controlled nearly all of the land and wealth, while the vast majority of the population lived at or near a subsistence level. The peasant class certainly did not have enough excess to own a luxury animal, and at this point the horse was not economical for use in agriculture. An average modern horse in little to no work requires about ten thousand calories per day,²⁵ which must include a minimum of ten pounds of hay or as much as a hundred pounds of grass.²⁶ Even if we consider medieval horses to be hardier, which they surely were, they were also in much heavier work and would still require an immense amount of food. Unlike cattle,

²³ M. J. V. Bell, “Tactical Reform in the Roman Republican Army,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Bd. 14, H. 4 (Oct., 1965), 404-422

²⁴ Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe, 300-1000*. (New York: St. Martin's Press: 1999)

²⁵ Bodyweight divided by 100 times 1.5 equals kcal for a horse in no work. Melyni Worth, *Storey's Guide to Feeding Horses* (Massachusetts, Storey Publishing: 2003), 21.

²⁶ Horses require at minimum 1%, preferably at least 2% to remain healthy, of their body weight of hay at 25-30% fiber (10-20lbs/day for a 1,000lb horse). Grass, being mostly moisture, can have a fiber content as low as 5%. Generally, it requires 1-2 acres of quality pasture to sustain one horse.

goats, or sheep, horses are fairly picky and will not eat many species of flora. When a horse does opt to eat something unusual, out of curiosity or desperation, they often become ill. In addition, horses need to walk to remain healthy. Confined horses are prone to colic, founder, stomach ulcers, and simply to injure themselves kicking the walls.²⁷ The feed and space required makes horses expensive to keep. Considering the effort put into reclaiming agricultural land in medieval Europe, good pasture was a relative luxury.²⁸ England in particular enacted a significant number of laws regarding where horses could be pastured, and what crops could be stored for fodder.²⁹ Medieval Europeans were certainly not opposed to eating horses, which would have made them more economical. Hyland notes that under Charlemagne “excess, unsalable horses, presumably worn out and/or old animals were eaten as long as they were healthy and free of mange.”³⁰ However, horses are not as economical a meat source as pigs, sheep, or even cattle.³¹ The horses Hyland mentions were produced largely at studs owned by the Emperor, being produced for reasons other than meat.³² In the west, horses were also not commonly used for milk. If a peasant was comparatively well enough off to have a

²⁷ Colic is a general term for intestinal problems in the horse. Founder is a condition where the bone inside the hoof detaches from the hoof wall. Both can be fatal.
<http://www.thehorse.com/articles/25106/consequences-of-stall-confinement>

²⁸ Kevin Dale Hill. *Assarting and Governmental Development in Twelfth-century England: A Study of the Pipe Roll Evidence Concerning Illegal Land Clearance, 1154--1189*. 2002. n.p.: ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing.

²⁹ George Henry Hewitt Oliphant, *The Law of Horses: Including the Law of Innkeepers, Veterinary Surgeons, Etc.* (U.K. Henry Sweet: 1882)

³⁰ Hyland, *The Medieval Horse*, 63.

³¹ Earth Policy, *Feeding Seven Billion Well: Producing Protein More Efficiently*,
http://www.earth-policy.org/books/pb2/pb2ch9_ss4

³² “Stud” in this case means a breeding farm. The term, which is used by the breed association, is generally associated with high class pedigree animals. Most farms today that are known as “studs” are based on royal breeding programs, produce million dollar racehorses, or both.

ploughing animal, it was more likely to be an ox than a horse. Oxen were more economical, especially as teams were often shared between several families, and were better able to plough rough ground.³³ Some peasants would have produced enough surplus (generally grain) to require taking items to market; however, their markets generally would have been very local, belonging to their lord. With both the small amount of the surplus and the short distance needed to travel, a horse cart would not have been necessary. A hand-cart, or possibly a goat or dog-cart, might have sufficed. If more was needed, the same oxen used for the field could be used for transport. Einhard's biography of Charlemagne describes the emperor sometimes riding in a cart "drawn by a yoke of oxen driven peasant-fashion by a Ploughman."³⁴ Three centuries later, riding in a cart would be considered a dishonor. Peasants during the time of Charlemagne had no reason to travel any considerable distance. Because of this and the ox's superiority on the farm, there was generally no need for a peasant to own a horse. By the thirteenth century, innovations in the plough, harness, and in horseshoes (necessary for horses working in wet climates) would change this, making horses more economical as a work animal.³⁵

Medieval aristocracy was based largely on military might, which in turn was based on mounted warriors. Charlemagne's grandfather, Charles Martel (b. c. 688 CE), has been credited with 'inventing feudalism,' specifically to fund an

³³ The heavy plough is usually cited for changing this, and did allow for more land to be used more often. However, the creation of the horse collar (rather than simply using the ox harness for the horse) is what allowed late medieval farmers to really take advantage of the horse's speed and maneuverability. See Lynn White's *Medieval Technology and Social Change*.

³⁴ Einhard: *The Life of Charlemagne*, Chap. 1, Fordham.edu

³⁵ John Langdon, "Horse Hauling: A Revolution in Vehicle Transport in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century England?" *Past & Present*, No. 103 (May, 1984), 40.

equestrian army.³⁶ Charlemagne showed concern for the quality and quantity of horses produced in his territory, and provided specific instructions to his stewards for the management of his herds. He maintained large royal herds, which may suggest that he provided mounts for some of his highest-ranking officers. Ann Hyland notes that “income from colts and fillies suggest [Charlemagne’s] royal studs were in the business [of] supplying military and hunting needs.”³⁷ The Emperor also restricted the export of horses, along with gold and weapons. None of his capitularies differentiated between types of horse. A mounted warrior could certainly expect to gain wealth, and the best could expect land (with the associated rank and revenue) as reward for service. Like the Roman Republic, the cavalry was the surest method of upward social mobility. During the time of Charlemagne, horses were restricted to the upper class for purely practical reasons, but a man could quickly change his station by gaining a horse. This restriction of horses to the fighting aristocracy did set the foundation for the later valuation gap, as the association of horses with rank and with the methods of achieving rank was already present.

Charlemagne himself “in accordance with the national custom.. took frequent exercise on horseback and in the chase, accomplishments in which scarcely any people in the world can equal the Franks.”³⁸ For his own sons, “as soon as their years admitted, in accordance with the custom of the Franks, the boys had to learn horsemanship, and to practice war and the chase.”³⁹ These were the

³⁶ Lynn White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change*.

³⁷ Hyland, *The Medieval Horse*, 63.

³⁸ Einhard, Chap. 22

³⁹ Einhard, Chap. 19

skills most important and appropriate to a ruler. At this time, these skills were practical and necessary for the militaristic aristocracy. Yet, at the same time, they were equally unnecessary and unaffordable for the peasant class. This early association of aristocracy with mounted warfare and mounted hunts will become exaggerated and outlast the practical considerations of horse ownership.

Like those of Rome, Medieval cavalymen eventually faced the pressures of new technology. The new thirteenth century longbow, made of yew, had considerably more reach and power than the shorter elm bow, and contributed greatly to the stunning defeat of the French cavalry at Agincourt.⁴⁰ Crossbows lacked the range of longbows (especially compared with the new heavier draw-weight yew bow), however they also require far less training. Though medieval-style crossbows had existed for at least three centuries before, it was Richard Coeur de Leon (r. 1189-99) “who was credited by contemporaries and modern scholars alike with having inaugurated the widespread deployment of this weapon among his troops.”⁴¹ This ‘widespread deployment’ was possibly due to an innovation in tactics which combated the crossbow’s largest weakness: its slow speed. Richard I is credited with employing teams rather than single crossbowmen; one crossbowman would have two crossbows, and be accompanied by a peavese (shieldsmen), and an assistant who would reload the second crossbow as the first was being fired. This protected the crossbowman from enemy fire (longbows, crossbows, or horse archers), and more than doubled his firing speed. Within Europe, archers of various types were deciding battles more than

⁴⁰ Clifford J. Rogers, “The Military Revolutions of the Hundred Years’ War,” *The Journal of Military History* Vol. 57, No. 2 (Apr., 1993), 249.

⁴¹ David S. Bachrach, “Crossbows for the King: The Crossbow during the Reigns of John and Henry III of England,” *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Jan., 2004), 103-104.

cavalry; outside of Europe, the knighthood was rarely a match in the open⁴² for the hit and run tactics used by the Turks, Moors, and other eastern cavalries, nor were their horses suited to be under armor in the heat.⁴³

While the aristocracy was slowly being made obsolete on the battlefield, they also faced their social standing being encroached upon by an emerging middle class. Thomas Bisson notes that some successful merchants bought “lordships in the countryside.”⁴⁴ These new lords, or *arrivés*, along with the wealthier of the craftsmen and trade merchants in the growing cities, would have the excess capital needed to afford a horse. In addition, there was a growing need for non-military animals: trade meant travel, and travel meant horses. With horses, fine clothing, and sometimes even land, the bourgeoisie were indistinguishable from the aristocracy. Sara Lipton writes that the “aristocracy reacted to the rise of the prosperous bourgeoisie by elevating the aspects of a ‘noble’ lifestyle...in an attempt to visually and culturally distinguish themselves from their middle-class competitors.”⁴⁵ This included progressively more elaborate hunts and tourneys, both of which required specialized horses. Richard Abels remarks that “Tournaments evolved from war games into pageants.”⁴⁶ An article from the

⁴² Sieges allowed for other equipment, and rest for the ‘heavier’ European horses. The *chevauchée* popularized in the Hundred Years War relied on moving an army quickly in and out of a fairly unprotected area in order to damage non-military targets, which could still be accomplished by an aristocratic cavalry. By contrast, the horse archers and light lancers (more appropriately, mounted spearman) of non-European armies relied on speed *within* the battle. The European nobility considered the use of missiles beneath them, and so had a difficult time engaging mounted archers or spearmen who would not charge unless cornered. For more on this, see John France, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades* and Andrew Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses* Imprint Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell Press, 1994.

⁴³ Hyland, *The Medieval Warhorse*, 53.

⁴⁴ Thomas N. Bisson, “Medieval Lordship,” *Speculum*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (Oct., 1995), 755.

⁴⁵ Sara Lipton, “Tanquam effeminatum,” *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle ages to the Renaissance* (1999), 121.

⁴⁶ Dr. Richard Abels, “Medieval Chivalry,” United States Naval Academy <http://usna.edu/Users/history/abels/hh381/Chivalry.htm>

Pennsylvania Museum of Art elaborates on this, stating that “tournaments then became gay festivals, balconies were ... hung with tapestries and heraldic devices and adorned with banners” and “rich fabrics brought from the East by the Crusaders were hung from the balconies and windows of the castle.”⁴⁷

Charlemagne appears to have the earliest post-Roman laws governing the production of horses. For the next three centuries or so, we have no laws other than those dealing with production and taxation; during this time, horses were more valuable than other livestock, but were still listed with them.⁴⁸ Through the late middle ages and early modern period, there continues to be a concern for production, as illustrated by Henry VII’s 1542 ‘Bill For Great Horses’, which required lords to keep a certain quality of breeding stock.⁴⁹ Prohibitions against the export of horses, especially from France and England, were common from Charlemagne through the early modern period. Laws regarding the maintenance of horseman, a practical concern, were common, such as King Phillip IV of France’s 1304 law requiring “each prelate and noble...to equip one armed horseman for every 500 livres of income.”⁵⁰ However, there also developed a trend towards seeing horses as treasure rather than livestock, and towards codifying the social traditions associating certain animals with certain classes and roles in society. Hyland discusses one such early law, which was an attempt to legally recognize the horse as separate from other animals. In this case, the horse was listed first among items due to the Crown under William the Conqueror before a lord could

⁴⁷ “A Model of a Mediaeval Tournament,” *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, Vol. 18, No. 78 (Sep., 1923), 23.

⁴⁸ Fordham.edu, *Medieval Legal History*, <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook-law.asp>

⁴⁹ Sir James Sibbald David Scott, *The British Army: Its Origin, Progress, and Equipment* (University of Michigan Library: 1867), 259.

⁵⁰ Sanderson Beck, “France and National War,” <http://www.san.beck.org/7-11-France.html>

claim his inheritance.⁵¹ Under Louis IX of France the social status of certain classes of horses was finally codified. Oakeshott describes the “French Royal Ordinance of 1265...[which] mandated that no squire, not even...of considerable wealth, could buy an ambling rounsey worth more than fifteen livres or a trotting one worth more than twenty.”⁵² This ordinance was part of a “series of reforms” by ‘Saint Louis,’ and may imply that a man buying a horse valued above his own rank was a mark of corruption.⁵³ In this instance, it would have been a vanity to present, via his horse, a higher rank than the squire actually held. A squire’s work would require a trotter, and so he could own a higher quality animal. An ambler might be for his own comfort or appearance. An “amble” is any sort of intermediate four-beat gait, what we would call “gaited” today. These gaits can achieve the speed of the trot (sometimes faster) while being much smoother and easier to ride.⁵⁴ Amblers would come to be synonymous with refined palfreys, which were “highly prized as a mount for traveling or hunting, much used by the high and the mighty on ceremonial occasions and in parades,” making them also symbolic of ‘class.’⁵⁵

⁵¹ Hyland, *The Medieval Warhorse*, 83.

⁵² Oakeshott, *A Knight and His Horse*, 12.

⁵³ Beck, “France and National War.”

⁵⁴ For more information on the mechanics of gait, see Gaited Horses <http://gaitedhorses.net/> ; For more on gaited horse in this period see “A Note On Gait,” pg. 59

⁵⁵ Oakeshott, *A Knight and His Horse*, 14.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORIOGRAPHY

The study of medieval horses has, until recently, been very sparse. Surprisingly, considering how often medieval scholars come back to the subject of the horse, prior to 1983 there was only one short monograph on the subject published. This was Ewart Oakeshott's *A Knight and His Horse* from 1962, which while full of primary source material seems to be geared more towards school children than historians. H.J. Hewitt's *The Horse in Medieval England* might have ended this drought in 1983, but it unfortunately only had a very limited print run with limited scholarly use. Hewitt's slim work looks almost exclusively at fifteenth century England, and he himself mourns the "gaps."¹ Nonetheless, it is an accessible and horse-sensible work that deserves more attention.

R.H.C. Davis's *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development, and Redevelopment*, first published in 1989, seemed to reopen the subject, if only because many scholars came forth to disprove his theories. After this we get John Clark's *The Medieval Horse and its Equipment*, Charles Gladitz's *Horse Breeding in the Medieval World*, and Ann Hyland's ever growing collection of works on the ancient and medieval (and modern!) horse. All of the works have contributed to the re-opening of this long stagnant field with their willingness to examine prior theories and apply a multi-disciplinary approach to an area where mistakes have often been made, even by thorough scholars like R.H.C. Davis, due to a dearth of rich sources, as well as due to a lack of understanding of the mechanics of horses and horsemanship.

R.H.C. Davis gives a remarkably in depth view of medieval horse breeding and management practices, alongside the more commonly found military

¹ H.J. Hewitt, *The Horse in Medieval England*. (London: J. A. Allen, 1983), viii.

applications. He uses an impressive array of sources, including breeding records, letters, law codes, and art. Unfortunately, he often fails to make clear when he transitions from paraphrasing a source to giving his own suppositions on it. Furthermore, he jumbles time periods with very little organization or warning to the reader, often writing about not just different centuries but different eras in the same paragraph. In many sections, it is difficult to follow whether he is writing about the 1200's, the 1500's, or even the 1800's, particularly if the reader is not intimately familiar with historical equestrian trends. Finally, his work contains several terminological mistakes, particularly concerning breeds and equine locomotion, that make the reader question its validity. This book remains one of the most complete and respected on medieval horses, and his mistakes are still widely propagated despite newer scholarship.

Davis uses the term "breed" too liberally, as what we define as a breed today did not exist in medieval Europe. Even discounting this problematic term, there are areas where his application of it raises significant questions. The horses of King Henry VIII of England are among the more thoroughly documented pre-modern animals. Davis describes a horse acquired by Henry as "a fine horse of the breed of Isabella".² "Isabella", in the modern sense, is a term for horses of a pale golden color. There are many color breeds, and it is reasonable to suppose that proto-breeds were bred along color lines; the 'black horse of Flanders' is certainly noteworthy.³ However, "isabella" is a color that has changed meanings rapidly over the last three decades due to the advent of genetic testing, and even before

² R.H.C. Davis, *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development, and Redevelopment* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1989), 108.

³ Breed as we define it today is a concept that did not develop until at least a century after Henry VIII. See "Type vs. Breed," pg. 58

that the meaning was not static. It has in the past been used for a number of very different colors, many of which would not “breed true,” i.e. reproduce themselves. The mistake of calling palomino (a color still sometimes called “isabella”) a breed is still made by novice horsemen.⁴ It may be that the mistake was in Davis’ source. There is also some conjecture that the Royal Hanoverian Creams, which pulled the English Royal carriages until the 1920’s, were descended from Spanish “isabella” horses. Some American Champagne breeders claim their unique color comes from the Hanoverian Creams, but the small amount of evidence available seems to contradict this.⁵ These horses may have been an unknown mutation, or most likely they were double “pearl” dilutes. This color has only recently been genetically identified, but could breed true. The “isabella” color in Spanish-bred and American frontier horses was, after the discovery of the pearl gene, found to often be a case of one pearl gene, and one cream gene.⁶ After the discovery of the pearl gene, the term “isabella” has been slowly changing from meaning any “café au lait” colored horse (including double pearl, cream pearl, pale palomino, and champagne) to meaning one that is homozygous for the cream dilution. This is a color that would breed true, but up until recently it was considered very undesirable, as it was thought that they were albinos. This meaning for the word “isabella” also was not yet being used when Davis was writing. Further, this color does not match with any prior description of “isabella” horses, including the Royal Hanoverian Creams, which very specifically did not

⁴ One copy of the co-dominant cream dilution on chestnut, which causes a yellow body with white mane and tail. In the past (and currently in some countries) one of the many “isabella” coats.

⁵ The paintings and few photos available of the RHC horse prior to its dispersal in the 1920’s show clearly dark legs and tails, a trait that does not occur in champagnes, and lack the champagne’s mottled skin. Champagne also appears to be a ‘New World’ mutation.

⁶ Animal Genetics: Pearl Dilution Test http://www.horsetesting.com/Equine/Coat_Color/Pearl.asp

produce palominos as a double cream would. Davis, who elsewhere gives detailed etymologies and explanations of unusual words in his sources, does not address any of these factors, leaving the reader to wonder what “isabella” and even “breed” mean in this case.

Unfortunately, there are other cases where the mistake is not one of possible omission. Most striking among them is the grouping of trotters with pacers as all being amblers. He writes that some “were pacing horses which...moved both left feet forward, then both right feet...various terms for these horses [include] pacing horses (*gradarii*), amblers (*ambulatorii*), or trotters (*trottarii*).”⁷ His use of the original words is exemplary and shows attention to clarity; however, a trotter by definition is not a pacer.⁸ A trot is a two beat diagonal gait, with the opposite fore and hind leg move together. A pace is a two beat lateral gait, with the fore and hind leg on the same side moving together—being the gait he actually described. An ambler might be considered a pacer, as *one* of the ambling gaits is what we now call a “stepped pace” or “slow-gait,” which is lateral like the pace, only with each leg moving separately, though this is certainly not the only ambling gait.⁹ The trot, however, as well as being the opposite of the pace is the one gait that is never called an amble.

There is also, in Davis’ work, some mis-defining of military maneuvers that are still in use today. In describing the downfall of the “17 or 18 hand” Great Horse, he illustrates the need for horses capable of performing what are now

⁷ Davis, 67.

⁸ Clarity that most scholars miss: a pacer may be an ambler, but not all amblers need be pacers! Ambler is accepted to mean any non-trotting horse. Davis himself seems to lump them all as pacers (two beat lateral way of moving) despite his attention to different words for their gait.

⁹ For more on the history of gait, see “A Note on Gait,” pg. 59

known as the “airs above ground.”¹⁰ He describes the croupade as “jumping off the ground and kicking in mid-air” which is actually a capriole.¹¹ The capriole he describes as “rising up on the back legs” which could refer to levade (a rear with a low angle) or pesade (more upright).¹² The croupade itself is much like the capriole, however requires that the horse tuck his hind legs in, for greater clearance and protection of his belly, rather than kick out to strike enemies as with the capriole. While there has been some evolution in terms for the airs above ground, the croupade and the capriole have consistent usage dating to Federico Grisone’s 1550 *Gli ordini di cavalcare*.¹³ Inaccuracies such as these force us to question other details of Davis’ work. Nonetheless, it remains a thorough work, and contains an invaluable collection of reproduced artwork and original source language, with great attention to how things can become lost in translation. Davis also provides us with an unprecedented glimpse at the domestic life of the medieval warhorse.

Ann Hyland has considerable equestrian experience (including being the founder of Endurance Horse and Pony Society of Great Britain and a carded judge for both the British Quarter Horse Association and the Western Horsemen's Association) and applies this to her research. She has written many handbooks for

¹⁰ Davis, 69.

¹¹ Davis, 112.

¹² Davis, 112.

¹³ Or rather, their Italian cognates. Italy, due to its own complex political situation, did not strongly enter European equestrian culture until the fifteenth century. By the sixteenth century, however, they dominated that culture, as the tournament became less popular and the riding academy paramount. France was later home to a number of ‘enlightened’ academies based on the Italian schools, and the French terms have survived as the universal terms for dressage. Federico Grisone. *Ordini di cavalcare*. Elizabeth M. Tobey and Federica Deigan, trans. Elizabeth M. Tobey ed., Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2014. See also entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Le Dictionnaire Littré*.

modern equestrians, as well as historical works. While her works have received some criticism because she is not an academic, and often works in translation, she has illustrated the enormity of the gap in scholarship.¹⁴ Her main contributions to the area of medieval horses are: *The Medieval Warhorse from Byzantium to the Crusades* and *The Horse in the Middle Ages*, both published in the 1990's.¹⁵ Despite their titles, they overlap considerably, and both are focused on the horse in war and tournaments. Her research is presented first through addressing available sources, and then through good horse sense. She uses a variety of sources, including Byzantine and Latinate chronicles, laws, art, and artifacts. Her most notable contribution to the field is her measurement and analysis of artifacts, including several different late medieval armor panoplies from the Museum of London. The dimensions of these horse armors, which she compares to an assortment of modern horses, has largely put to rest the debate over the size of the medieval "Great Horse."¹⁶ Similarly, she compares available medieval horse shoes to the size and shape of modern horses, which not only suggests an animal much smaller than Davis' Shire-like destrier, due to the smaller size of the shoe, but also one of considerable eastern influence, due to their shapes.¹⁷ Hyland does sometimes diverge into purely theoretical ideas. However, unlike Davis, Hyland

¹⁴ See Bachrach, BS. "The Horse in the Middle Ages," *Speculum*. 76, no. 3, 2001: 740-741; and Kaegi, WE. *The Medieval Warhorse from Byzantium to the Crusades*. HISTORIAN. 61, no. 4, 1999, 956-957.

¹⁵ Ann Hyland, *The Medieval Warhorse From Byzantium to the Crusades*; and *The Horse in the Middle Ages*, Stroud, UK: Sutton, 1999.

¹⁶ Ann Hyland, *The Medieval Warhorse From Byzantium to the Crusades*; and John Clark, *The Medieval Horse and its Equipment*. (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2004). Since their collaboration, the Great Horse has been accepted to be much closer to the size of a modern pleasure horse than the 18hh (6 ft.) draft animal discussed by prior scholars.

¹⁷ The American Farrier's Association has grouped hooves into six basic shapes, which can be loosely associated with horses of different breeding. Doug Butler, *The Principles of Horseshoeing II*, Maryville, MO: D. Butler, 1985.

generally makes very clear what is primary evidence, what is well-supported theory, and what is educated conjecture.

John Clark is a curator at the Museum of London, and as such his book *The Medieval Horse and Its Equipment* is primarily focused on objects on display at the museum, which are themselves primarily English in origin. What sets Clark's book apart from similar catalogs is his in-depth analysis of each object. Clark gives a full account of how each item was found, and also shows examples, where available, of each item in art contemporary to itself. He then relates it all to current scholarship, applying in this way the research of not only Ann Hyland and R.H.C. Davis, the major authors on medieval equines, but also of dozens of scholars in art, archeology, agricultural and military history.

Because many of the smaller items, such as bits and horse shoes, were found in archeological digs, Clark provides diagrams of the most important sites.¹⁸ With the long and complicated history of horses in England, these help illustrate which items are Roman in origin, which are Saxon, etc. In addition to the assorted bits, spurs, brushes, shoes, and other equine implements, Clark also presents equine skeletons found at these digs. These corroborate his own and Hyland's theories regarding the size of the animal that would have worn the shoes, bits, and armor we have available for measurement. Because the size of the medieval "Great Horse" has been the subject of debate for much of the past century, Clark opens his book with this skeletal evidence, and a long historiography on the topic. Clark is very meticulous in all of his reports, and these skeletons are no different. He gives the location where they were found, not only geographically but also whether it was a burial, a trash heap, or a butchers yard. He provides the

¹⁸ John Clark, *The Medieval Horse and its Equipment*, 34-42.

approximate date they were buried (or otherwise disposed of), and he notes the measurements as well as any marks, such as injuries from weapons, signs of butchery, or “pathologies indicating stress on the joints and back.”¹⁹ Those with weapons marks, of course, are used to support the idea of a much smaller “Great Horse” than that supposed by Davis and other early scholars. Clark also uses the skeletal evidence to touch on a second highly debated topic, hippophagia. By noting the complete absence of butchery marks on horses found in dump sites near London later in the period, Clark can suggest that butchers were not taking old horses for meat near London by the fourteenth century. Finds further from the city did have butcher marks, but Clark does not posit a theory for these. The third common controversy regarding medieval horses is the role of the stirrup in the rise of “feudalism,” but Clark does not touch on this in his chapter on the stirrup. This may simply be due to this argument centered on artifacts outside geographic area.

Charles Gladitz’s *Horse Breeding in the Medieval World* is often overlooked by scholars, possibly because of its wide scope.²⁰ While Gladitz’s monograph doesn’t truly address the whole “world,” it does focus primarily outside of Europe, addressing the numerous equine cultures in medieval Asia and the Middle East. It is an invaluable source for anyone seeking to learn about medieval horses. His small chapter on Western Europe is very dense with primary sources. Additionally, unlike all the other works on this subject, Gladitz is far more focused on the production, management, and sale of horses than on the use of the horse in war or war-related activities. Even Davis, who did look at breeding practices, was primarily concerned with the production of war animals. Gladitz

¹⁹ John Clark. *The Medieval Horse and its Equipment*, 22. The pathologies are particularly useful for estimating the type of work these horses did, as well as how heavily loaded they were.

²⁰ Charles Gladitz, *Horse Breeding in the Medieval World*. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997).

catalogs and interprets the vast records of English parks and holdings, along with corresponding laws. He is able to correlate the type of horse produced with the type of soil available for the growth of forage and grains. He is also able to extrapolate areas where imports may have been more likely, even when records are not available, due to the size, color, and form of the horses being produced. The horses of the Continent, however, are largely only referred to regarding their effects on usage and production within the British Isles. He includes an Arab treatise on horse breeding, oddly placed in the chapter on Western Europe, as it is referenced by English breeders. Many such treatises are mentioned by other scholars, but rarely analyzed, possibly due the difficulties in translating not only the Arabic, but also the equine idioms.

These works, both individually and collectively, show how necessary an understanding of the horse's role is to medieval history. The stirrup, horseshoe, horse-collar, and heavy plough are still considered the seminal innovations of medieval Europe, and none of these items would have been particularly important without the horse itself.²¹ With the central role the horse played in both day-to-day life, and in the social and technological "revolutions" of the period, it is critical to understand not only the basic mechanics of horse husbandry, but also how the horse was viewed and portrayed by all segments of medieval society.

There are two major assumptions about the horse in medieval society that I would like to challenge. The first is the assumption that the horse's elevated status was due strictly to its military usage. At a glance, this idea seems true, but it has not been closely examined. Most scholars still refer to Oakeshott's *A Knight and his Horse*, which as well as being a fairly short and simplistic work was likely

²¹ John Clark, *The Medieval Horse and its Equipment*; and Lynn White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

influenced by Victorian romanticizing of the medieval knight.²² Lynn White's *Medieval Technology and Social Change* supported the idea of the strictly militaristic basis for the horse's status with his claim that the stirrup created not only new mode of warfare, but also a new mode of government and a new social hierarchy.²³ The major problem with the strict association of the horse with the military aristocracy is that non-military animals also attained both an element of prestige and a number of gradations in type, function, and relative rank. Literature illustrates a rich variety of social functions played by the horse, which were the basis of the nuanced symbolism of late medieval horses.

The second assumption is that any social status the horse had must have been essentially static throughout the middle ages. This assumption has been based on the idea that horses in most societies have been status symbols. However, it is important to distinguish between the value of an animal that is simply expensive, and the figurative value and meaning given by each distinct society. This assumption has remained intact due the dearth of sources from the "dark ages" of early medieval Europe. Because chronicles had little space for superfluities that would have been obvious to their readership, rarity with which horses were mentioned cannot be taken as evidence.²⁴ However, the major literary traditions of Walter and of King Arthur, both of which span more than five hundred years and

²² Oakshott himself was heavily influenced by Victorian-era histories.

²³ Lynn White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change*. I largely agree with his results, although there are some flaws in the process. I do not, for example, agree that the lance was useless before the stirrup. The Roman four-horn saddle is a far more secure seat than Carolingian saddles.

²⁴ Anne Savage, ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1983); and Edward Noble Stone, Robert de Clari, and Ambroise. *Three Old French Chronicles of the Crusades : The History of the Holy War, the History of Them That Took Constantinople, the Chronicle of Reims* (Seattle, Wash.: The University of Washington, 1939)

several countries, can show the change over time in how horses were viewed compared to other valuables.

CHAPTER 3: SOCIAL EVOLUTION

The rich literary traditions of the Germanic hero Walter and of King Arthur clearly illustrate the evolving symbolism of the horse. The earliest known account of Walter does not contain a single horse, while its descendent the *Nibelungenlied* uses horses more than any other device to reflect each character's relative station.¹ Likewise, The earliest accounts of an Arthur-like hero depict an infantryman very unlike the knight in shining armor we are accustomed to. Each passing century grants the horse both more honor and a more nuanced position in society.

While later stand alone works show the nuance with which the horse could symbolize wealth, rank, and estate in medieval Europe, these two traditions are invaluable for showing how the horse was distinct from other markers of social order. The major works of the Walter tradition span half a millennia, the first of which contains no horses, while the last has a great variety, each type having a clear and differentiated symbolic value. The Arthurian tradition is even more vast, and has followed the same trend despite translation and acculturation into many languages across the centuries. By contrast, descriptions of gold, jewelry, clothing, cloth, and fortifications remain fairly similar, with only a slight increase in amount and no change in descriptors. Hunting hawks and hunting hounds gain increased mention alongside the horse, but they do not develop the complex ranking system afforded the horse, nor do they become vehicles of plot development the way the horse does.

¹ Bibliotheca Augustana, *The Waldere Fragments (Waldere A & B)*, http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/anglica/Chronology/08thC/Waldere/wal_intr.html ; and Omacl.org, *Nibelungenlied*

Walter

Waltharius, an early epic in the tradition of the *Nibelungenlied*, gives little attention to the horse.² The events of *Waltharius* are set in the mid fifth century, with Attila the Hun in a feature role. The Latin Ekkehard version appears to have been written in the early tenth century, at the beginning of the trend towards aristocratic association with horses. Most often, horses are mentioned in Ekkehard's *Waltharii Poesis* only in a general sense.³ In later works, including within the same tradition, horses are given specific and elaborate descriptions. Ekkehard's *Waltharii Poesis* contains many mounted battles, but often the horse is only mentioned briefly in passing, and left out of.⁴ The horse may thrash in death or fear, but only its actions are described, never its appearance or skills. The presence of the horse seems to be taken for granted, and unworthy of the poet's attention. Often someone will be said to "*laxis habenis*," denoting speed or travel, without ever having been said to be mounted.⁵ It is assumed that everyone rides when traveling.

Within Ekkehard's *Waltharii Poesis*, only one horse is ever named, and that is Walter's own "*Leonis*," who serves as travel vehicle, lady's mount, warhorse, and even pack animal. Even Leonis has only two brief lines in the entire work. Versions earlier than Ekkehard's, such as the Anglo-Saxon *Waldere*, have no

² Several very similar versions of this story are referred to collectively as *Waltharius*. The versions I address are the Ekkehard (*Waltharii Poesis*), considered the primary text, and the two largest fragments, being the Graz & the Vienna.

³ Ekkehard, *Waltharii Poesis*. http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost10/Waltharius/wal_txt1.html

⁴ Ekkehard, *Waltharii Poesis*. In. 64-69, In. 340-345, In. 545-580, etc.

⁵ Ekkehard, In 202. "Loose the reins."

mention of horses at all.⁶ The *Waldere* exists only in two fragments of about thirty lines each; because of this, the lack of mounts could simply be due to the brevity of the fragments. However, both fragments are entirely concerned with battle and with treasure, which are the two areas in which horses are always mentioned in later works. Ekkehard appears to have been familiar with either the *Waldere* or another Saxon-esque version of the Walter story, as he employs stylistic devices common to Saxon poetry.⁷ Captured treasure and gifts of wealth are as prevalent in *Waltharii Poesis* as in the later epics; however the only time a horse plays this role in *Waltharii Poesis* is as the bearer of treasure chests. In the later epics, horses are captured or given for their own value, which is often portrayed as greater than gold or cloth.⁸

A thirteenth century Middle High German version of the Walter tale, known as the Graz Fragment, does use horses far more. To his allies “bold Hagen gave horses and clothing, [and] silver in addition to gold.”⁹ The Vienna Fragment, also Middle High German, appears contemporary to the Graz fragment, and also makes far more use of horses than the earlier Ekkehard version.¹⁰ In the Vienna fragment, it is generally specified when characters are riding (and they often are). Walter, not wishing his “messengers [to] lack anything” gives them “horses and

⁶ *Waldere A & B*, 8th c. Anglo-Saxon. This may support a later dating for Beowulf, which contains four unique terms for horses.

⁷ Marion D. Learned, Kuno Francke, Henry Wood and Dr. Henneman, “The Saga of Walter of Aquitaine: Discussion,” PMLA Vol. 4, Proceedings, 1889 (1889), pp. xxxii-xxxiv Published by: Modern Language Association Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/456189>

⁸ This is the case in the *Nibelunelied* from this tradition (see pg 28), but it most clearly apparent in works that do not have earlier counterparts (see chap. 4).

⁹ Graz Fragment. The translation I have used was provided by Dr. Joaquin Martinez Pizarro’s coursepack. Original text available in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* Volume 7, 1892.

¹⁰ The number of vernacular versions of the tale suggests it was widely popular.

clothing.”¹¹ There is a line, part of which is missing, which ends “who there acquired good horses, very many of them came there riding.”¹² While these fragments lack the poetic detail of other epics from their time, they give more attention to horses than other treasures. Every time the plot moves forward, a horse is likely to be present. These works alone show a trend towards emphasizing the equestrian nature of the aristocracy, giving more attention to horses than to other valuables, but they do not yet show the refined distinctions of rank and role illustrated by horses in later works. The early trend shown in these works appears to coincide with the solidification of a number of kingdoms in western Europe, while the more splintered depictions of types of mounts appear in literature as the aristocratic cavalry is losing supremacy on the battlefield, and the growing bourgeoisie threatens their supremacy off the battlefield.

The *Nibelungenlied* is a much larger epic incorporating the Walter tradition. The (again) Middle High German *Niebelungenlied* is just slightly later than the Graz and Vienna Walter fragments, but far more elaborate. It revolves around Siegfried, drawn from Norse traditions, and his widow Kriemhild. But, it also draws on the characters of *Waltharius*: vain Gunter, Hagen of the mixed loyalty, the strangely benevolent but barbaric King Etzel (or Atli, or Attila), and Walter himself, who has moved a little south, being Walter of Spain instead of Aquitaine.¹³ The epic opens with young Siegfried, who is soon knighted, and in

¹¹ Vienna Fragment. The translation I have used was provided by Dr. Joaquin Martinez Pizarro’s coursepack. Original text available in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* Volume 7, 1892.

¹² Vienna Fragment.

¹³ For a comparative analysis, see Marion Dexter Learned, ed. “The saga of Walther of Aquitaine,” (Baltimore, Mod. lang. association of America: 1892)

celebration a feast with martial games is thrown. The entire event is characterized by opulence and generosity. Siegfried's royal parents distribute "steeds and raiment" to the entertainers and attendees in order "to make [Siegfried] beloved of the folk."¹⁴ In a gift-giving culture, the fastest way to engender loyalty is shown to be to give someone a horse.¹⁵ This generosity, focused on horses, saddles, and clothing, is often repeated by Kriemhild's royal brothers, and by Siegfried himself. At every royal feast there is a joust to "practice knighthood" and many gifts, including horses, are given; and there is a feast in more than half of the thirty-nine chapters.¹⁶

When Siegfried sets out to meet Kriemhild, he and his entourage "lade [loaded] their sumpters."¹⁷ Recall that in Ekkehard's *Waltharius*, Walter's own warhorse was used as a pack animal. There was no mention of this being unusual, or a waste of Leonis' abilities. But in the *Nibelungenlied*, there are different types of horses noted for packs, for the warriors, and for the ladies. Siegfried and his men "trotted [their] steeds" which suggests that they are riding war animals; amblers were otherwise preferred.¹⁸ When the ladies ride, it is on "jet-black palfreys..from [whose] bridles there gleamed forth many a precious stone," with

¹⁴ Omacl.org, *Nibelungenlied*, Adventure 2

¹⁵ For more information, see: Rob Meens, "Do Ut Des. Gift Giving, Memoria, and Conflict Management in the Medieval Low Countries," *Church History and Religious Culture* vol. 89, no. 4, 2009: 563-564 and Rosenthal, Joel Thomas. *The Purchase of Paradise: Gift Giving and the Aristocracy, 1307-1485*. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1972.

¹⁶ Actually, a bohort, which is a large mounted melee with blunted weapons. The goal of the bohort is to show off, and "winners" are those who manage to capture the most opponents and/or horses. Omacl.org, *Nibelungenlied*, Adventure 4

¹⁷ Omacl.org, *Nibelungenlied*, Adventure 3

¹⁸ Omacl.org, *Nibelungenlied*, Adventure 3

the animals' type (palfrey) being appropriate to a lady's station, while the ornamentation signified their wealth.¹⁹

Siegfried and his companion's "steeds were fair and their trappings red with gold."²⁰ Gold is of course a timeless sign of wealth. They are 'fair,' an equine descriptor common to many epics of this and following centuries which may denote noble status—certainly, the pack horses are never fair! When Siegfried and his men are spotted in King Gunther's land, Hagen is asked who they may be. He replies that they "may well be princes or envoys of kings, for their steeds are fair."²¹ The rank of foreign visitors is estimated by the quality of their mounts. Their wealth and station, however, are illustrated by their clothing and equipment, respectively. The poet claims that "never had such princely attire been seen on heroes; their sword-points hung down to their spurs." Princely attire is directly linked with spurs, tool of the mounted warrior. Although wealth, rank, and social role are each shown in this description, no one of them can replace another. Wealth alone does not create a prince, nor does military equipment. The intersection of the animals, trappings, and equipment creates an image that must belong to a wealthy aristocratic warrior, therefore a prince.

With this work, it is regularly specified that warriors are mounted when in battle. The descriptions are not as rich as the French *Roland*, but neither are the horses forgotten as in the earlier *Waltharii Poesis*. When a messenger is relating the events of an early battle to Kriemhild, who is to become Siegfried's wife, he says that "none rode so well to the strife and fray" as Siegfried.²² The emphasis is

¹⁹ Omacl.org, *Nibelungenlied*, Adventure 9

²⁰ Omacl.org, *Nibelungenlied*, Adventure 3

²¹ Omacl.org, *Nibelungenlied*, Adventure 3

²² Omacl.org, *Nibelungenlied*, Adventure 4

put on his riding, rather than his swordsmanship. His nobility and heroicism are illustrated by his horsemanship.

Riding in the *Nibelungenlied* is connected strongly with rank, as relative station is shown not only by the horse and trapping, but also by whether or not someone is on foot. Kings always ride “forth to meet [their] guests” on horses ‘fair’ or ‘fine’, and decked in gold- to do otherwise would be an insult.²³ Nobles of lower rank might ride, but without their horse being mentioned in particular. Subservience is illustrated by being on foot while another is mounted, most especially by holding the horse; it is in this way that Siegfried convincingly pretends that he is Gunther’s servant on Gunther’s bridal quest.²⁴ It also often marks Hagen, on foot, as beneath Gunther and his brothers, being mounted. Attention to the quality and adornments of the horse is used to illustrate the rank and wealth of the rider. King Gunther’s horse is described as “stately, good and fair” and of “snow-white hue.”²⁵ The word ‘stately’ is otherwise in the work only used for royals. The King and his entourage’s “saddles [were] set with precious stones,” a fact that is mentioned more often than fine clothing, showing that their saddles may be a more important indication of their status and wealth. And, once again their swords “hung down to the spurs,” marking them as warriors.²⁶

Like in *Waltharius*, Hagen in the *Nibelungenlied* is placed in a position of split loyalties, and again he chooses King Gunther. Hagen conspires to kill Siegfried, and the bait he uses to get Siegfried away from the women is a hunt. He

²³ Omacl.org, *Nibelungenlied*, Adventure 4

²⁴ For more information on bridal quests, see *Engaging Moments: The Origins of Medieval Bridal-quest Narrative* By Claudia Bornholdt

²⁵ Omacl.org, *Nibelungenlied*, Adventure 7

²⁶ Omacl.org, *Nibelungenlied*, Adventure 7

does not even need to invite Siegfried directly, but knows that Siegfried cannot resist the lordly pastime. This would have been no surprise to the audience, as no good nobleman could easily refuse the hunt. As Susan Crane so beautifully put it, “the *hunt à force* [was] a mimetic ritual designed to celebrate and perpetuate noble authority.”²⁷ The first English book on hunting, written within a century of the *Nibelungenlied*, called hunting the most “royal disportful and noble game.”²⁸ On the hunt, Siegfried’s “horse did run so hard that none escaped him.”²⁹ This idea was apparently so important that it is repeated just a few lines later. The speed of Siegfried’s horse is equated to his value as a hero, as the Siegfried’s mastery of the hunt showed that he could not be defeated except by dishonest and dishonorable means. All of this is in an epic that is not directly related to warfare, and would not otherwise need horses to move the plot.

Arthur

The Arthurian tradition shows a similar evolution to that of the Walter tales. St. Gildas’ *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (6th c) describes the battles of the Roman Ambrosius, which are later embellished by the Venerable Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (7th c) to include an Arthur, beginning a long trend of further embroidery.³⁰ This proto-Arthur, Ambrosius, does not have

²⁷ Crane, Susan. *Middle Ages Series: Animal Encounters : Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain*. Philadelphia, PA, USA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 26 February 2015. Pg 107

²⁸ Edward Duke of Norwich, *The Master of Game*, Theodore Roosevelt, F Baillie-Grohman, and William Baillie-Grohman. Eds., Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.

²⁹ Omac1.org, *Nibelungenlied*, Adventure 16

³⁰ Kemp Malone, “The Historicity of Arthur,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Oct., 1924): 475 and Bonnie Wheeler, “The masculinity of King Arthur: From Gildas to the Nuclear Age,” *Quondam et Futurus*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Winter 1992): 2-3; Gildas, *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*, London: Londini, 1525.; and Bede (the Venerable), *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, George Herbert Moberly, ed. Oxford: e typographeo Clarendoniano, 1869

a horse at all, even in Bede's colorful account. Chretien's late twelfth century Arthurian romances, however, would be unrecognizable without the horse. Other works from the time of Chretien on feature horses prominently and use them to illustrate the relative rank, wealth, and role of each new character.

Chretien's *Lancelot: le Chevalier de la Charrete* covers the story of Queen Guinevere's abduction and Lancelot's heroic journey to rescue her. Throughout the romance, Lancelot's relative station is illustrated by his use of an assortment of horses. He begins on an average charger, then travels on foot, then by cart, then on successively better warhorses. At each stage, his relative honor is commented on in relation to his mode of travel. Gawain, beginning the adventure with Lancelot, very bluntly states that it would be "trop vilain change feroit se charrete a cheval chanjoit" which of course is very different from Einhard's account of Charlemagne riding in an ox-cart.³¹ It would be beneath Gawain's station to ride in a cart. Lancelot "la honte le laisse indifférent," rides the cart, as he sees it as his only way to find the missing Queen Guinevere.³² This becomes the theme of the tale, that anyone who rides in a cart rather than on a horse is disgraced. A lady remarks that he should be held "au mépris" and "souhaiter de mourir" because he, a knight, has ridden in a cart.³³ The cart is portrayed as worse than walking on foot, and walking on foot is portrayed as a sad oddity for a knight.³⁴ It is fitting only to ride. The Queen also rides, but on palfrey. The animal is always specified

³¹ Chretien De Troyes, "*Le Chevalier de la Charrete*." Paris: Librairie Honore Champion, 1970: 13. "it would be base or dishonorable to change a horse for a cart."

³² Chretien, "*Le Chevalier de la Charrete*." p.13

³³ Chretien, "*Le Chevalier de la Charrete*." p.19 "in contempt" and "desire death."

³⁴ Chretien de Troyes, "*Le Conte du Graal*." Paris: Librairie Honore Champion, 1975. Perceval arrives on foot and even once rides a mare, which Chretien portrays as a comic indecency caused by Perceval's sheltered upbringing.

to be a palfrey. Other ladies, when they ride, are also mounted on palfreys, often described as fitting for a lady; Chretien differentiates the Queen's mount from other palfreys by its exemplary training.³⁵ A noble man should ride a type of warhorse appropriate to his station, a noble woman should ride a palfrey or fine mule, and only commoners need be without shame riding in a cart. The general term *cheval* is only used for characters that are neither base nor elite. Every station in society has its own corresponding horse.

The horse, by the time Chretien is writing (late twelfth century), is an easily recognizable symbol of its owner's rank and role within society. In order to show the value of one of Lancelot's opponents, Chretien describes his horse as faster than a stag.³⁶ This is the only marker we have of the unknown knight's prowess when he is first introduced. After the horse is described, the mystery knight's rank is given as that of a prince. Non-princely opponents have less spectacular horses. For the shame Lancelot has been willing to endure for a greater cause, and for all his heroics in jousting and in the rescue of Queen Guinevere, his reward is a horse and he is mounted "cil saut sus."³⁷ The implication is not so much that he mounts quickly, as that his status is suddenly altered by being able to ride again. The horse he is given is "le meillor c'onques veist," and considered a fair prize for his hardship.³⁸ The warhorse he is rewarded with signifies his regained station in society, erasing the stigma of his earlier travel by cart. Throughout Chretien's *Lancelot*, the horse is crucial to illustrating the hero's decent and subsequent climb of the social order.

³⁵ Chretien, "*Le Chevalier de la Charrete.*" p.6

³⁶ Chretien, "*Le Chevalier de la Charrete.*" p.171

³⁷ Chretien, "*Le Chevalier de la Charrete.*" p.204 "in the blink of an eye."

³⁸ Chretien, "*Le Chevalier de la Charrete.*" p.204 "the best ever seen."

Chretien also works in details about the care of the horses, not just removing saddles or grazing, but also currying (brushing). These actions appear to the modern reader as menial labor, but in light of the horse's social status they act as markers of noble virtue. Human-centric routine actions, such as setting camp or eating, are not mentioned. For Chretien's knights, care of the horse's health and appearance is as important, if not more so, than care for their own bodies.

While Chretien was writing at what can be considered the height of chivalric culture, Sir Thomas Malory wrote *Le Morte D'Arthur* almost two centuries later when society was struggling between the old and new ways of government, warfare, and religion.³⁹ Malory still employs the recognizable associations of warhorse, palfrey, hunt horse, and work horse with both social rank and social role. Sumptuary and tax laws enacted between the time of Chretien and the time of Malory in France, England, and Spain showed a concern not only for producing high quality horses, a military necessity, but also for regulating high class horses and equestrian activities to the upper echelons.⁴⁰ Palfreys, trained warhorses, untrained warhorses, hunt horses, hackneys, rounceys, and work horses were all taxed at different rates.⁴¹ These taxes did not follow the cost of the production of each type of horse, but rather its perceived value. The valuation gap between the cost of production and upkeep of an animal with its taxable or

³⁹ The Winchester manuscript of the *Morte D'Arthur* is dated to ca. 1470 CE.

⁴⁰ George Henry Hewitt Oliphant. *The Law of Horses: Including the Law of Innkeepers, Veterinary Surgeons, Etc.*; and Sir James Sibbald David Scott, *The British Army: Its Origin, Progress, and Equipment*. Michigan: University of Michigan Library, 1867.

⁴¹ Charles Gladitz, *Horse Breeding in the Medieval World*. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997). A hackney was at this time a mid-quality general riding horse. A rouncey was a low quality horse for general riding and combat used by sergeants and mounted infantry. The lowest horses, sumpters (pack horses), cart horses, and plough horses, were often lumped together, though pack mules, riding mules, and donkeys were listed separately.

saleable price was significantly larger for high class animals than low class animals.⁴² Military animals existed in every bracket, showing that rank had become more important than function. Within a few decades of Malory's work, laws were passed governing not just the type of horse a person could (or must!) own, but also what colors and fabrics those horses could wear.⁴³ One of the goals of monastic reform in England in the late middle ages was curtailing ecclesiastics who sought out fine horses and horse trappings. Their desire for fine horses, especially palfreys and coursers, suggested they were "focused more on aristocratic pursuits than on spiritual ones."⁴⁴ These horses, while within the economic reach of many clergymen, were not suitable to their place in society.

In Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, Merlin rides a "great black horse" when he arrives to give instruction to Arthur in his first battles as king.⁴⁵ 'Great' in this instance may or may not refer to the animal's size, but certainly denotes its status as a warhorse.⁴⁶ When Sir Balin happens upon Garnish of the Mount, he

⁴² Charles Gladitz, *Horse Breeding in the Medieval World*.

⁴³ Noel Cox. "Tudor sumptuary laws and academical dress: An Act against wearing of costly Apparel 1509 and An Act for Reformation of Excess in Apparel 1533." Not only were better horses restricted to the upper classes, knights and nobles were beginning to be required to keep horses of a certain type, size, and quality.

⁴⁴ Allison D. Fizzard. "Shoes, Boots, Leggings, and Cloaks: The Augustinian Canons and Dress in Later Medieval England," *Journal of British Studies*, vol 46, no. 2, April 2007, pg. 245-262.

⁴⁵ Sir Thomas Mallory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, ed. Helen Cooper. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pg 18

⁴⁶ See Ann Hyland's *Medieval Warhorse from Byzantium to the Crusades* (London: Grange Books: 1994), and John Clark's *Medieval Horse and its Equipment* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2004). Absent in *Le Morte D'Arthur* work is any use of "destrier," the common term for a medieval warhorse, though this may be expected in a vernacular English text. 'Great horse' is the English term used in its place. In English tax and inventory lists (~1100-1400, see Gladitz) "dextarius" and "equi magni" were differentiated, with "equi magni" generally being native-bred warhorses and "dextarius" being imported or sire by imported stallions. By the time of Mallory, records were more commonly kept in the vernacular, and while the French "destrier" had previously been used in English texts, it seems to fall out of favor. This could be a move towards using more "native" language, or a result of improved breeding programs on the island.

recognizes Garnish as a knight by his “great horse of war,” showing that Mallory was using the contemporary martial connotation to ‘great horse.’⁴⁷ The type of horse each knight is riding is not always explicit, but often in absence of the terms “war horse” or “great horse,” Malory specified that the horse is “harnessed” and “bridled.” While this may seem like just another bit of literary color, a “bridled” horse was a trained horse, and a “harnessed” or “saddled” horse came with its equipment.⁴⁸ The Black Knight also rides a “great black horse.” While in the case of the Black Knight, the horse’s color is meant to match his knight’s trappings, Merlin’s appearance upon a black horse may suggest an animal of a particular breeding, as the color was still rare in Malory’s day. Merlin is the only other character to ride a black horse, and he only does so once, in the beginning of the tale to counsel Arthur in his first war. It is Merlin’s grand entrance, his first appearance in a military capacity, and as such his mount is important to visually support his status to Arthur and to the reader.

Samuel Wildman suggests that black horses were historically associated with King Arthur, due to an arrangement of inns called “The Black Horse” along the Saxon border.⁴⁹ While his research is problematic at best, it has gained some traction among Arthurian scholars. Wildman suggests that these inns owe their placement to a historical Arthur, or Arthur-like person, mounting a cavalry on Fell ponies. Leaving aside the idea of a historical Arthur, this seems unlikely. The Fell

⁴⁷ Sir Thomas Mallory, *Le Morte D’Arthur*, ed. Helen Cooper. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. pg 120

⁴⁸ See Gladitz, *Horse Breeding in the Medieval World* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997).

Equipment was generally saddle, bridle, breeching, and breastplate, each of which need to be fitted to the individual horse. For tax purposes, weaponry and armor was separate, however for required military service a “saddled” or “harnessed” horse included at least a sword.

⁴⁹ S.G. Wildman, *The Black Horsemen*. London: John Baker Publishers, Ltd. 1971

Pony Society points out that the iconic black color did not become common until after the 1950's.⁵⁰ In addition, the Fell pony's "native" area is considerably north of the area traditionally associated with Arthur. Wildman also suggests the Friesian as a possible alternative to the Fell for Arthur's black horses.⁵¹ The Friesian, like the Fell, only became predominately black in the twentieth century, yet both are decedents of the 'Black Horse of Flanders.'⁵² Because of the huge influence of the 'Black Horse of Flanders' on English horse breeding, Wildman's theory has not been completely dismissed.⁵³

Whether or not there was an association of Arthur with black horses, the color is unusual for a horse in England. Because a black coat is unusual, it can be symbolic of the animal's individual value. As there is no literary reason for Merlin's horse to be black, as there is with the Black Knight, it is therefore likely the case. There is no reason to suspect Malory is using a tradition associating Arthur with armies mounted on black horses, as neither Arthur nor his core allies ever ride a black horse in Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*. Most black horses at this time were imports, so it may denote Merlin's mount as an expensive import. Charles Gladitz has combed through breeding records from manorial holdings in medieval England and Wales and notes a predominance of bay and dun colorations, with other colorations generally coming from known imports.⁵⁴ In 1326 the royal stud

⁵⁰ Fell Pony Society <http://www.fellponysociety.org.uk/>

⁵¹ The Fell Pony is often called a miniature Friesian, they are so close in type.

⁵² There was a steady influx of horses from Flanders from at least 1066 through modern era which is thought to be the source of the modern Fell color and type, which is distinct from neighboring 'native' ponies.

⁵³ S.G. Wildman, *The Black Horsemen*; and "Black Against White: What Color Was King Arthur's Horse?" *Arthuriana*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer 2004), pp. 69-72

⁵⁴ Charles Gladitz, *Horse Breeding in the Medieval World*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997. In modern Britain, "dun" is used interchangeably for dun and buckskin, however the cream gene which causes

at Pickering added two black stallions, Morel de Mertone and Morel de Tuttebirs. ‘Morel’ may refer only to their color, or may be from ‘maurus’ for Moor.⁵⁵ The use of hot-blooded imports from Spain, North Africa, and the Levant was already common among the wealthiest horse owners.⁵⁶ While appearing on a warhorse is necessary if Merlin is to advise Arthur on the battlefield, implying that Merlin’s horse is of particular quality and expense places him on par with Arthur and his noble allies.

In contrast to early epics, *Le Morte D’Arthur* often makes mention of details regarding horses. Like Chretien, Mallory makes mention of the general care of the animal; he also includes many more specifications of riding. Rather than simply being assumed to be on a horse when moving, and on foot when not, Arthur will specifically mount, ride off, stop his horse and dismount, and even tie his horse. In earlier literature, horses are not tied, hobbled, or pastured but somehow remain (or sometimes disappear or appear suddenly in the text without explanation). This is not because of any particular training or exceptional trait on the horses’ part, but because the authors tended to ignore the four-legged characters. Similar treatment is given dogs, hawks, and even lesser human

buckskin was likely imported from Spain, either directly or via the lowlands, so it is likely that the “dun” listed for the “native” horses is actually the dominant dilution D. Another possibility is that “dun” refers to a dark bay or brown horse with pangere, which causes the muzzle and underbelly to be a “mousey” fawn color, although these tend to be called “brown” in these records. Dun literally means mouse-colored, and was until recently a catch-all term for any brownish color with shading.

⁵⁵ Robert Bell Turton, ed., *The Honor and Forest of Pickering, Volume*, pg 224 & xxxii. While almost all modern British breeds carry black, the only breeds in which it is common are the Fell and the Shire, both of which were strongly influenced by the ‘Black Horse of Flanders.’ Other breeds which carry black all have considerable Spanish, Arabian, or Barb influence.

⁵⁶ Gladitz notes the first large scale importation of Spanish horses into England as being by Robert de Belleme, Earl of Shrewsbury to the Powys Stud Park in 1100. The horses from Powys after this time were often reserved for the crown (pg 162). The Powys Stud is also one of the largest contributors to the modern Welsh Pony, which looks more like a small Pura Raza Espanola horse than it does like any of its neighbors.

characters, which tend to appear and disappear in the text without comment. Notably in *Le Morte D'Arthur*, other characters also engage in these actions, but less often than Arthur or his core cadre. By contrast, Arthur is never specified to enter or exit a building. Kings and heroes perform these routine equestrian actions more often than their social inferiors, regardless of whether they are named character or not.

When riding to war, Arthur and his knights are “well horsed and well armed.” In earlier works, either historical or literary, Arthur and other heroes are described as well armed, but they are either on foot or only assumed to be mounted. In battle, almost every action is accompanied by a description of a horse’s actions, whether in victory or defeat. Large portions of battles in Malory’s *Le Morte D'Arthur* are concerned with who has lost their horse, and how they find another. Those of best rank may have their horses slain from under them, while those of lesser importance (usually unnamed, and often enemies of Arthur) may be unhorsed, or slain before their horse is. One of Arthur’s first actions in his first battle as King is to re-horse King Ban, a new ally. Arthur picks an enemy knight who is “[sur]passingly well horsed,” slays him, and delivers his horse to King Ban, saying: “fair brother, have ye this horse, for ye have great mister [need] thereof, and me repents sore of your great damage.” This action solidifies the loyalty of King Ban and his ally King Bors to Arthur. In this one action, Arthur acknowledges Ban’s rank, by calling him brother, and claims a liege’s responsibility by replacing the horse King Ban lost fighting for Arthur’s cause. This exchange illustrates the power of a horse to strengthen social bonds and uphold rank.

The kings arrayed against Arthur’s forces decide to leave behind their infantry in order to have a better chance against Arthur. Because this is

realistically a poor tactical decision, this serves to elevate the role of cavalry within the text. The enemy infantry will be safe from Arthur because he is too “noble” to bother footmen alone. Infantry, without the cavalry, are as protected as women or children within the text, suggesting their lower status. This was, of course, reflective of ideology rather than reality, as the shock cavalry represented by King Arthur and his cohort were largely obsolete by the time Mallory was writing.

Le Morte D'Arthur contains coursers and palfreys in addition to the great horses. Coursers are used by ranked characters only outside of fighting, such as for hunts or transport, but lesser warriors may be mounted on coursers for combat.⁵⁷ Aristocratic characters, such as Arthur, his kingly allies and enemies, and his named knights, ride ‘great’ horses. Palfreys, by this period smooth gaited fine riding horses, are reserved for ladies. Ladies are always specified to ride a (usually ‘fair’) palfrey, not just any horse. There is only one man who rides a palfrey, and as punishment for dishonorable conduct. Arthur declares that Sir Damas will be given a palfrey to ride day-to-day because “that will become [him] better to ride on than upon a courser.”⁵⁸ The horse he rides, even for simple transport, denotes his fallen status, and is assigned to him based upon his deeds and not his wealth. The palfrey, while a quality and sought after animal, is strictly non-military. Sir Damas is required to ride not a low class war animal, such as a rouncey, but instead a mount that precludes him from entering battle.

Arthur meets an unknown man “riding upon a lean mare,” who is unsurprisingly later shown to be a poor cowherd.⁵⁹ His lack of wealth is denoted

⁵⁷ Courser is from *cours*, literally to run or gallop.

⁵⁸ Mallory, 68

⁵⁹ Mallory, 52

by his horse's lean condition, but his status is shown by his horse's gender. A knight would not ride a mare, even for transportation.⁶⁰ All great horses were stallions. The need for separate equine symbols for wealth and for status shows that the highest-class animals could not be purchased for simple money. All these different types of horses are of course in contrast to the tenth century *Waltharii Poesis*, in which one horse is warhorse, transport, packhorse, and lady's mount at different times in the text. In the earliest Arthurian 'histories,' horses are not even present (or at least, not mentioned). Chretien uses only three classes of horse (warhorses, palfreys, and workhorses), but Malory uses many, reflecting the more complex social structure of his day. While rank in society has become more complex between the time of Chretien and that of Malory, the horse's ability to signify nuances of rank became solidified.⁶¹ Each of these types of horse becomes the accepted appropriate mount for different social positions. Breeding records from the twelfth century on show this diversifying of type, showing that these new types were not merely a matter of training.⁶²

⁶⁰ A poor member of the secular clergy would also be possible, but even higher-ranking clergy would be unlikely to appear in literature on a mare. Instead, they would ride a lesser stallion or a gelding. The *actuality* of what they rode may be different, as illustrated by the reforms targeting their mounts.

⁶¹ The idea that the horse was symbolic of status due simply to rarity in England, which had far less grazing land than any of the continental kingdoms, is unlikely. Shortly after Malory, Henry VIII ordered the destruction of large numbers of "inferior" horses. *The Journal of Comparative Medicine and Veterinary Archives: Volumes 14-15*, New York: W.L. Hyde & Company, 1893, 298.

⁶² For more information, see: Charles Gladitz, *Horse Breeding in the Medieval World*; Robert Bell Turton, ed., *The Honor and Forest of Pickering*; Thomas Firminger Thiselton Dyer, *Royalty in All Ages: The Amusements, Eccentricities, Accomplishments, Superstitions, and Frolics of the Kings and Queens of Europe*. London: Nimmo, 1903; and *A Collection of Ordinances and Regulations for the Government of the Royal Household, Made in Divers Reigns: From King Edward III. to King William and Queen Mary. Also Receipts in Ancient Cookery*. London: Society of Antiquaries, 1790.

CHAPTER 4: SYMBOLIC HORSE POWER

The *Cantar del Mio Cid* and *La Chanson de Roland*, both written around the end of the twelfth century, show how recognizable the symbolism of the horse was to a later medieval audience.¹ Both works use horses extensively to illustrate characters' wealth, role, and rank, as well as to show or strengthen social bonds and matters of honor. Each poet communicates a great deal of contextual information via their description of these animals, which in turn adds depth to the respective works. In both works, most notably, the horse often plays a central role in plot development, showing that the symbolic value of the horse was being used as a symbolic currency.

El Cid

Although El Cid is a hero of the *reconquista*, the most famous work surrounding him is not a story of conquest but of redemption. The *Cantar del mio Cid* opens with El Cid's banishment, and concludes with his return acceptance into his King's family.² El Cid's method for achieving the redaction of his banishment does include many battles, but is ultimately achieved by the giving of gifts. LaRubia Prado gives an in depth reading of the importance of horses to the gift-giving that serves a central role in the epic, allowing El Cid to show his success as well as exchange gifts symbolic of loyalty. He concludes that the poem "reflects the great importance of horses in medieval life, not only through its abundance of horses and equine vocabulary, but also through the horse's significance in the

¹ *La Chanson de Roland*, Bibliotheca Augustana, https://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/gallica/Chronologie/11siecle/Roland/rol_ch00.html and *Cantar del mio Cid Paleographic*, Duke University, <http://mgarci.aas.duke.edu/cibertextos/ANONIMO/MIO-CID/MODERNO/DEST-MOD-PALE.HTM>

² *Cantar del mio Cid*.

poem's narrative development."³ The horse's association with honor and rank "explains why the Cid chooses horses (and their tack) over money and other objects as gifts for King Alfonso."⁴ After El Cid's early successes, he sends thirty horses to King Alfonso "todos de sillas y frenos bien dotados, y con sendas espadas de los arzones colgando."⁵ His first gift is his smallest, but it is important to note that this first gift is also specifically warhorses, noted by the sword on each pommel. The warhorse is shown to be the most important, or highest ranking, horse. El Cid's gifts to King Alfonso become increasingly larger, up to two hundred horses, and with each gift he adds more types of mounts, such as palfreys and mules, to the warhorses. King Alfonso smiles when the first horses arrive, clearly pleased. He says that it is too soon to redact his banishment, but while he would not undo his judgment on El Cid, he did grant the messenger who delivered the horses his lands and titles back.⁶ Each subsequent gift results in further concessions, eventually leading to El Cid's daughters becoming queens of Navarre and Aragon.⁷ The gifts to King Alfonso which make this possible start with horses and their trappings, and horses always figure prominently.

Although the horses are important to El Cid's many victories, without their value as gifts the *Cantar del mio Cid* would be all war and no drama. He would be

³ LaRubia-Prado, "Gift-Giving Diplomacy: The Role of the Horse in the *Cantar de mio Cid*," *La corónica: A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures*, Volume 37, (Issue 1, Fall 2008), 275-299.

⁴ LaRubia-Prado, "Gift-Giving Diplomacy"

⁵ *Cantar del mio Cid*, ln 817-818. "All with saddles and very well bridled, with swords hanging from the pommel[front of the saddle]." A *freno* (usually translated bridle but literally a bit) is specifically a shank-bitted bridle suitable only for well trained horses. Warhorses were expected to come with their own gear if they were trained, however 'well bridled' refers to the level of training rather than actual equipment.

⁶ *Cantar del mio Cid*, ln 881-890.

⁷ *Cantar del mio Cid*, ln 3400-3410.

fighting his way back to his rank, rather than working within the established hierarchy. If the horse did not have a social value beyond its practical worth, using them as a means to advance the plot in this way would not be possible.

One of the largest plunders of horses is said to be directly from God. El Cid exclaims “grandes son las ganancias que le dio el Creador” upon seeing the wealth of conquered horses.⁸ And again, each one is saddled, bridled, and with swords.⁹ The gift from God was horses, not gold or cloth; gold is merely material. El Cid gains gold, silver, weapons, armor, silks, brocades, and every other sort of treasure; but only the horses are given by God. On another occasion, King Alfonso gives thanks to God for the gift of horses El Cid has sent him, again claiming the horses, and nothing else, as a gift from God.¹⁰ The repetition of the idea of the horses being from God gives them added value. In light of the religious nature of El Cid’s battles, being against the ‘saracean infidels,’ the horses become symbolic of God’s wish for Christian rulership over the lands El Cid conquers. Before an early battle, El Cid exclaims “¡Con la merced del Creador nuestra es la ganancia!”¹¹ The spoils gained are then primarily horses. This ties the horses to political mastery, via God’s ultimate authority. This is upheld by King Alfonso’s claim, at the very end of the poem, that God granted El Cid victory via his heroic horse.¹²

⁸ *Cantar del mio Cid*, ln 1334 “great are the gifts from the Creator.”

⁹ More literally, a place for a sword, but the phrase is used regularly when it is clear there is a sword present.

¹⁰ *Cantar del mio Cid*, ln 1926.

¹¹ *Cantar del mio Cid*, ln 598. “With the mercy of the Creator, our are the spoils.”

¹² *Cantar del mio Cid*, ln 3517-3521.

El Cid wins ever larger amounts of booty, and is always generous in handing it out. After one battle, El Cid's share of the spoils includes a hundred horses, of which he then sends a third to King Alfonso.¹³ El Cid had his own fabulous horse whose 'noble' status upholds his own.¹⁴ The horse is named, which is unusual, called Babieca.¹⁵ El Cid claims that "entre moros ni entre cristianos hoy no hay otro de tal valor," and many of his victories are credited to his horse.¹⁶ As a final act of loyalty, El Cid offers Babieca as the last, ultimate gift to King Alfonso. This one quality horse is offered as the last, and therefore largest, gift, worth more than two hundred other horses. However, the King declines, saying that no other man would be worthy of Babieca.¹⁷ He then goes on to suggest that God would smite any man who took Babieca from El Cid, and that King and Kingdom gain honor by having El Cid and *his horse*.¹⁸ Although El Cid spends the entire epic proving his vassalage to King Alfonso by conquering his enemies and sending tribute, he is portrayed as being of kingly nobility of character (partly *because* he sends tribute and acknowledges his 'proper' place). The poet ends, just after King Alfonso's refusal of Babieca, with telling us that through these deeds El Cid became part of the royal family. Through the use of a fine warhorse, and the gift of hundreds of horses, El Cid rises from exiled lord to royalty. Gold alone

¹³ *Cantar del Mio Cid*, ln. 805-819.

¹⁴ *Cantar del Mio Cid*, ln. 1573-1575, 1589-1590, 1730-1735, etc.

¹⁵ It is suggested that the historical "El Cid," Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, actually had a horse named Babieca. Multiple legends about this horse exist, though none have been validated. See Gloria W. Lannom. "Spanish Heroes." 2007, *Faces* 23, no. 5: 30. *MAS Ultra - School Edition*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 19, 2015) for one version of the Babieca legend.

¹⁶ *Cantar del Mio Cid*, ln 3514. "among moors or among Christians, there is no other of his quality"

¹⁷ *Cantar del Mio Cid*, ln 3517-3510.

¹⁸ *Cantar del Mio Cid*, ln 3511-3512.

could not have bought this status, as is shown by the downfall of the wealthy enemies of El Cid at King Alfonso's court.

Having this fine warhorse, El Cid does not need to stockpile hundreds of horses, but he continues to choose horses over gold when it comes time to pick his 'share.' He has no practical use for so many horses, but always takes a large number for himself in addition to the hundreds he sends back to King Alfonso, suggesting that, as Oakeshott would say, amassing "spare destriers" may make him "highly regarded," as El Cid's goal is to regain his social status.¹⁹ Litanies of wealth gained occur after each of the many battles, such as "palafrenes y mulas y corredores caballos...mantos y pellizas y otros vestidos largos"²⁰ The horses usually come first, and there are more types of mounts mentioned than other types of treasure, suggesting they are the most valued. El Cid is generous in passing out the spoils, including awarding a 100 silver marks to every horseman after a single battle, while the footmen received just half that amount.²¹ It is implied that the 'half' share for the footmen was as generous as any of El Cid's other payments, which indicates a hierarchy of value. Infantry are not usually mentioned in similar works; it may be that they are mentioned here because the *Cantar del mio Cid* portrayed more contemporary events than most epics. The *Cantar del mio Cid* was written about a hundred years after the events it describes, compared to roughly three hundred for *La Chanson de Roland*. Alternatively, it may be that the payment of his infantry (this is their biggest role in the poem) may serve to further underscore El Cid's great wealth and generosity. That generosity had limits. It did

¹⁹ Oakeshott, *A Knight and His Horse*, (Pennsylvania: Dufour Editions, Inc., 1962, 1998), 16.

²⁰ *Cantar del Mio Cid*, ln. 2254-2256. "palfreys & mules & running horses...cloaks & furs & other long clothes."

²¹ *Cantar del Mio Cid*, ln. 2466-2471.

not allow for footman to spend their share of silver on a horse, even though the cavalry is portrayed as the most important force, and even though there are hundreds of spare horses to be had. Captured horses could only be taken by those who already had a mount, or by those who had lost them through battle. This suggests that footmen staying on foot was a product of rank, not wealth. The footmen are not even given names, much less titles, whereas the horsemen are always introduced by their title. Footmen lack noble status, and no amount of coin could make them horsemen.

The depiction of footmen in the *Cantar del mio Cid* appears to be a slight exaggeration of reality. The historical King Alfonso XI *did* give horses to infantrymen. However, there was clearly anxiety about this practice. He also passed laws that clarified the temporary, emergency nature of non-nobles being mounted for war. A *miles per naturam*, knight by birth, was allowed to pass on his horse and equipment along with his titles to his chosen heirs. A *caballero villano* could serve as cavalry (as opposed to mounted infantry), but the pay and privilege that came with this service was temporary. A *caballero villano*'s horse was forfeited to the crown (or, more practically, whatever noble he was serving under) if he died. He had no noble rank to pass on to his heir, and so his heir could not inherit his horse. A *caballero villano* could immediately lose his increased pay and privilege if his horse died or was stolen. *Caballeros villanos* were also more likely to be found guarding pastures or towns, rather than going on campaign.²² The *Cantar del mio Cid*'s slight deviation from reality only serves to underscore the ideological association of certain animals with social rank rather than military usage.

²² For more information, see Elena Laurie, "A Society Organized for War: Medieval Spain," *Past and Present*. 35, no. 1: 54-76.

Roland

La Chanson de Roland (1170 CE) is also an extremely rich source for horse descriptions. It describes the deeds of a lord, Roland, serving under Charlemagne during his invasion of Spain (778 CE). Some accounts have it being performed to rouse the French morale before the Battle of Hastings (1066 CE), however the version we have is from a century later.²³ Like in the *Cantar del mio Cid*, the giving of gifts plays an important role. Equines are given equal billing with gold and silk in litanies of wealth, often with several types of horses listed.²⁴ The variation in what is in each litany makes this unlikely to be a metrical device, while the variation in order gives no weight to any particular item, suggesting similar value amongst them. While these gift horses do not stand out among Charlemagne's treasures, they do stand out in the interpersonal politics of the piece.

Much of the poem concerns building up the merits of its heroes, and those of their infidel counterparts. Without enemies who are strong, wealthy, and aristocratic, heroes seem weak for lack of a challenge. The Archbishop Turpin is one of the greatest heroes of the poem, and one of the last to fall before the death of Roland. As such, he is the subject of a great deal of poetic lauding. In the process, the poet gives a detailed description of his horse:

“Siet el cheval qu'il tolit a Grossaille,
 Ço ert uns reis qu'l ocist en Denemarche.
 Li destres est e curanz e aates,
 Piez ad copiez e les gambes ad plates,

²³ Andrew Taylor, “Was There a Song of Roland?” *Speculum*, Vol. 76, No. 1 (Jan., 2001): 28-65.

²⁴ *La Chanson De Roland*, ls. LXXIX, etc.

Curte la quisse e la crupe bien large,
 Lungs les costez e l'eschine ad ben halte,
 Blanche la cue e la crignete jalne
 Petites les oreilles, la teste tute falve;
 Beste nen est nule ki encontre lui alge.”²⁵

This horse symbolizes the Archbishop’s defeat of a king. While only an Archbishop among Charlemagne’s people, Turpin is shown, via his mount, as being the equal of a foreign king. His horse’s qualities are depicted in much the same way as any lord’s: he is an effective tool of war, with all the needed conformation and speed, just as a warrior would be described as tall or strong; the horse is described to have a gold coat, just as a lord’s gold-decked mail may be portrayed to underscore his wealth and nobility. In describing a foreign King, Malquiant, the poet chooses only two items to describe the wealth of this foe. He wears a vest of “or batud” and he rides a horse that is faster than any beast.²⁶ Turpin’s stallion’s appearance echoes that of all nobles, hero or villain within the work. The charger’s “petites...oreilles” stands in for a noble man’s fine face, being a refined trait associated with horses of good breeding. The semi-native horses of Europe have bulky, round ears, which lack definition. A smaller, pointed and slightly curved ear is typical of horses with an infusion of Arabian or Arabian type blood.²⁷ The same can be said of his small hooves, which calls to mind a

²⁵ *Chanson de Roland*, ls. CXIV “sat on the horse which he took from Grosaille/the king that he slew in Denmark/that destrier was strong and noble/his hooves were fine and limbs smooth/short gaskins and large rump/long ribs and high wither/white his hair and yellow his neck/small his ears and tawny his face/there is no beast who can win against him in a race.” The color described could be palomino, dark cream, pearl, or blonde. Later art depicts Turpin on a palomino.

²⁶ *La Chanson de Roland*, ls. CXX “beaten gold.”

²⁷ Leon B. Blair, “The Origin and Development of the Arabian Horse,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (Jan., 1965): 303-316 That is not to say that these horses were

description of a hero's well-turned calf, and at the same time infers Arabian-type ancestry. His snow-white tail is described with the same phrase as Charlemagne's own beard, which in this work is consistently mentioned as a Greek epic-style epitaph to Charlemagne.

It may also be pertinent that Archbishop Turpin's horse is from Denmark, an area that later would dominate the production of warhorses. Denmark claims that their "Frederiksborg Horse is the world's oldest pedigree domestic animal breed...The operation of the royal stud farm at Frederiksborg dates back to King Frederik II [1534-1588]...the horses from this stud farm became acknowledged and famous all over Europe for their noble blood."²⁸ The emphasis is given to their "noble blood" rather than speed, size, or strength. The Frederiksborg stud began as a collection of already extant (if not recorded in pedigree) royal breeding programs, with a specific claim to Iberian horses, which had known Arabian-type heritage.²⁹ The Frederiksborg also comes in palomino, the color most likely described for Archbishop Turpin's horse. If Denmark was already known for fine horses in this period, this would further serve to further elevate Archbishop Turpin's status via his mount.

"Arabians." European sources refer to horses by their owners, rather than their breed (i.e., these were horses owned by 'Arabs'). However, the horses of North Africa and the Levant at this time were all of a similar type, much lankier and more agile than their European counterparts, and this was very clearly noted during the poet's time.

²⁸ The Frederiksborg in 17th century art appears startling like the modern Frederiksborgs, which still retain a shape that is ideally suited for war maneuvers. Most other European breeds went through a change in type in the 18th and 19th centuries, as carriage horses became more important than riding horses. This suggests that perhaps the Frederiksborg has not vastly changed since its early breeding. Frederiksborg Verband. "History of the Frederiksborg Horse" <http://www.frederiksborg.com/>

²⁹ "History of the Frederiksborg Horse." I suspect the Moorish horses brought to Spain are more closely related to the modern Akhal-Teke than the modern Arabian, but Arabian is still unfortunately used as a catch-all term for desert-bred horses. In any case, all horses of this type are significantly different from the ponies of Europe.

When the archbishop's horse is slain from under him, Turpin says to Roland that he is not vanquished, and will continue fighting so long as he is alive.³⁰ This gives the impression that a warrior unhorsed might, in fact, be overthrown, and here Turpin is portrayed as particularly valorous for fighting on without his horse. This is a practical concern, as a man on foot is at a great disadvantage against a mounted warrior; this is especially true when the man on foot is armed for mounted combat, and so lacks the tools generally used by foot soldiers against cavalry. Similarly, Roland is later unhorsed and, though he has routed the enemy, he cannot pursue because his horse has been killed.³¹ This practical concept, however, will develop into a social ideology: that a knight without a horse is not truly a knight.

While Archbishop Turpin's mount shows how horses could be used to illustrate a character's relative station and honor, other sections of this *Chanson* show how horses could also be used as a sign of degradation. Not every horse was worthy of lauding, and by the time the *Chanson de Roland* was written distinct types with associated social connotations were clearly recognizable by the intended audience. When Ganelon is treating with the enemy, in order to convince them of Roland's supposed foul intentions, he claims that King Marsil will be captured despite treaties and that: "palefreid ne destrer, / ne mul ne mule que puissez chevalcher; / getet serez sur un malvais sumer."³² This is one of the earliest, and clearest, correlations of types of horse with rank or prestige. A

³⁰ *La Chanson de Roland*, ls. CLV.

³¹ *La Chanson de Roland*, ls. CLXI. Notably, his horse is also named. Hero's horses are named as hero's swords are.

³² *La Chanson de Roland*, ls. XXXVI "he will not ride a palfrey or a destrier, a mule or [even] a female mule, [but] he will be thrown on a poor sumpter."

warhorse or a fine riding horse would be most fitting for a ruler. A mule or a jenny would be reasonable, if clearly marking the rider as inferior.³³ However, as a measure of shame, Ganelon claims King Marsil will be transported on a pack horse. He emphasizes this degradation by calling the animal “malvais.” A similar litany of animals by rank is used when Roland boasts that Charlemagne will not lose “palefreid ne destrer, ne mul ne mule que deiet chevalcher, . . . ne runcin ne sumer.”³⁴ The order is basically the same. Again, because of the slight variation in animals that are named, it is unlikely that this is a metrical device. The connotation of Roland’s boast is that Charlemagne will not lose *even* one insignificant sumpter. The poet chose the horses, rather than the men, to illustrate this boast. It is not that Charlemagne will not lose even one groom at the rear of the train, but that he will not lose any horses. Although the horse is important throughout the work as a tool of the mounted heroes, they play an equally important role in illustrating the complex politics of Charlemagne’s party and their interaction with their Arab foes.

³³ A jenny is a female donkey. Unlike horses, riding donkeys were usually female. Jacks (intact male donkeys) are notoriously difficult to handle for someone accustomed to horses, and although gelding does appear to have been a practice by the twelfth century it does not appear to have been as commonplace as it is today.

³⁴ *La Chanson de Roland*, ls. LIX “palfrey nor destrier nor mule nor female mule who is ridden fast, nor rouncey nor sumpter.” Note that there are both male and female mules. Mules, being sterile, would have been worth the hassle of gelding.

CHAPTER 5: EPILOGUE

Although the prestige of the horse can be tied to chivalric culture, it was not predicated on the practice of knighthood. The mounted warrior aristocracy of the early middle ages caused the initial elevation of the horse's social status, but that status increased after the mounted warrior lost supremacy on the battlefield. Certain animals also become tied to non-military positions in society, while retaining an elevated status of their own. Of course, because the original impetus for the nobility of the horse was the association with the mounted warrior, horse culture still retained a militaristic flavor. The epics and romances, as demonstrated above, used horses to add martial detail to characters even outside of battle. Non-military animals placed their riders in relation to their martial counterparts within a shared, if not strictly linear, hierarchy. Much of the pageantry popularized in medieval romance was retained in tournaments, where the mounted warrior still reigned supreme.

Military animals of course had the most differentiation, but each type of horse carried associations beyond rank. The *destrier*, for example, was often imported and was always assumed to be armored. The Great Horse was always trained for battle. Indeed, if the horse was not yet trained for battle, it was not yet Great, regardless of size or quality.¹ The charger and courser remained somewhat interchangeable, but each word emphasized a different trait: the same horse might be called a charger when describing the hero's armor, and a courser when describing a hunt or charge.² The rouncey (*roucin*) not only denoted a relatively

¹ The Domesday Book in particular places *equi magni* in opposition of *equi feralis*.

² See Glossary, pg. 68. Mallory uses courser exclusively, which might indicate that England was already enamored with the lanky racehorse. Within about a hundred years of Mallory the first "thoroughly bred" horses are seen in England.

poor or low ranking fighter, it carried with it the assumption that this was the rider's only horse. Rounceys were often provided by a lord to his men-at-arms.³ The rouncey, accordingly, was also seen as a general riding horse for the non-elites of the military estate. Because of its lack of prestige or particular military skill, the rouncey was also a suitable mount for clergymen.⁴ Rounceys may commonly have been gelded, unlike any of the other classes of warhorse. Hackneys, likewise, may commonly have been gelded, although unlike the rouncey there is the occasional mention of a hackney stallion being kept at a barn.⁵ Hackneys were specifically non-military animals, and as hackney stallions were purposefully kept alongside Great Horse stallions, this was a matter of type rather than training. Palfreys, like *destrier*, were often imports or sired by imports, and were often referred to as more refined than hackneys; this is an interesting distinction since they otherwise served similar purposes. However, by the end of the middle ages the 'refined' palfrey was considered the only suitable mount for an aristocratic woman, while the hackney remained the spare mount for men. An understanding of the assumption attached to each type within the period, alongside the symbolism associated with the horse's color, gender, and condition gives us access to an additional layer of meaning within medieval texts. Despite its military roots, the equestrian culture of Europe pervaded all aspects of life and all segments of society. Although the elite *destrier* and palfrey are the most recognized today, it is the laden sumpter (pack animal) and lowly plough horse that illuminate just how

³ *A Collection of Ordinances and Regulations for the Government of the Royal Household, Made in Divers Reigns: From King Edward III. to King William and Queen Mary. Also Receipts in Ancient Cookery.* London: Society of Antiquaries, 1790.

⁴ See, as an example, the Sussex section of the Domesday Book.

⁵ Gladitz, *Horse Breeding in the Medieval World*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997).

much the role of the horse changed during the last half of the middle ages. Quite unlike their later counterparts, early medieval literature and law show no dishonor in riding a pack horse or traveling by wagon. While certain horses become elevated, these horses become symbolic of dishonor and impropriety.

Type vs. Breed

During the early middle ages horse breeding in Europe was a fairly stagnant practice, with the majority of animals not leaving the region of their birth. Inter-regional trade was slow, and horses were no exception. Breeding programs were then, necessarily, somewhat closed gene pools. This should not, however, be considered anything like the modern conception of a “closed” studbook, in which “purity” is established and no outside bloodlines are allowed. A horse that was considered “good” would be allowed to breed, regardless of its origin. And, while there is some evidence of breeding records from at least the time of Charlemagne, these records were concerned primarily with the ownership of animals rather than the pedigree. Horses at early medieval studs might be barred from breeding due to age, quality, or degree of inbreeding, but they were not selected based on purity. All horses considered suitable for breeding would be used in the same breeding program.

With the development of new “types” of horses, corresponding to new human social roles, came new breeding practices. While before any two quality animals might be matched (with occasional exceptions due to relatedness), now the match was expected to be a similar type of horse. This is perhaps the root of modern breed classifications, though again these animals cannot yet be considered of a “breed.” There was still a fluidity regarding each animal’s origins, and “purity” was not yet a consideration. Increased trade included trade in horses,

including more animals from outside Europe. More emphasis was put on stallions than on mares, with each subsequent generation sired by the same type of stallion, but borne by a variety of mares. This practice led each type having a distinct different appearance, while still allowing for a wide genetic variety.

A Note on Gait

Many of the laws and literary depictions of social propriety are concerned with the gait of the horse. Horses generally have three “gaits,” being walk, trot, and canter. Any gait between walk and canter is considered an “intermediate” gait. A horse that performs an intermediate gait *other* than the trot is today called “gaited,” or in medieval terms an “ambler.” Part of the reason for this broad categorization is that many horses that can perform a gait other than trot may be able to perform several different gaits. The trot is a two beat diagonal gait, meaning each hind leg moves in tandem with the opposite foreleg, which creates a great deal of upward movement (i.e., a bouncy ride) but is also very balanced and powerful (and thus preferred in war animals). Today there are many terms for the different non-trotting gaits (there are four basic ones with several variations), but in period the distinction was generally only between trotting horses and non-trotting, or ambling, horses. Occasional distinctions will be made between ambling horses and pacing horses. The “pace” is a two beat *lateral* gait, meaning both legs on the same side move together, and while exceedingly fast can be very uncomfortable, leading to the distinction. The other intermediate gaits are all four beat, with each foot moving independently, and are much smoother than either the trot or pace, which is why they were, and still are, so popular. The spread and improvement of roads during the early modern period is usually credited with the downfall of non-trotting gaits in horses; however the selection against this trait for

war animals in late medieval Europe likely began this trend. Thomas Blundeville in 1565 cautioned breeders of military animals to select strongly trotting mares, and mentions that these may be difficult to find inside England.⁶ His advice suggests that non-trotting gaits were a fairly widespread trait, but undesirable for martial activity. And, unsurprisingly, his advice also shows that breeders still paid far less attention to their mares than their stallions. Before suggesting where to look for good stock, he first spends some time convincing the reader that mares are actually important to a breeding program! As battlefield technology continues to evolve, and the sport of jousting became increasingly discouraged, the *ménage* became the new aristocratic outlet.⁷ Because of this, gaitedness in the general population was further discouraged. While having a strong trot was useful on the battlefield, it was critical for the *ménage*. A warhorse might remain successful with a good canter despite an inconsistent or lacking trot. The movements of the *ménage* were based primarily in the trot, rather than the canter generally used for a cavalry charge or on the jousting lists.

⁶ Thomas Blundeville, *The fower chiefyst offices belonging to Horsemanshippe*, Imprinted at London: By Humfrey Lownes, for the Company of Stationers, 1609. bk 1.

⁷ The *ménage* is considered the root of the modern sport of dressage, and consisted of performing complex equestrian movements. Federico Grisone, *Ordini di cavalcare*. Elizabeth M. Tobey and Federica Deigan, trans. Elizabeth M. Tobey ed., Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2014

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APPENDIX: GLOSSARY

Glossary

Charger: A warhorse. Initially used interchangeably with courser and sometimes destrier, later became common only for mid-level animals. It is likely that this term stems from *chargeoir*, to load or to be loaded (i.e., with armor), rather than from “to charge,” although the later connotation becomes common in the early modern period.

Courser: Initially used interchangeably with charger and sometimes destrier, but later comes to specify a lighter, faster horse. These horses are seen most often on hunts. This differentiation is very suggestive of new breeding practices where multiple types of horses are produced for the same rider, to be used in different activities. It is also one of the terms that, by existing as a contrast, illustrates ‘larger’ warhorses later in the period.

Destrier: Initially any warhorse. Came to have first a connotation of quality and advanced training, and latter used most often for French and Spanish animals.

Gelding: castrated male horse

Great Horse: Any warhorse. “Great” may actually have been a reference to the war saddle, and a “Great Horse” was a horse trained to ride with that form of saddle. This term was used most often for English-bred animals, and very late in the period also Lombard animals. Both these types are actually somewhat shorter than the French and Spanish animals of the time, but significantly heavier. They do not, however, have the height or breadth of a modern draft horse.

Hackney: A general riding horse, typically of better quality than a rouncey but not often seen in battle. Although Hackney horses and ponies are today known for their trot, for most of the medieval period they tended to be amblers. Often described as little or small.

Mare: female horse

Palfrey: From a Latin phrase for a spare riding horse, this term was used for increasingly 'refined' animals over time. They were expected to be very quiet, very pretty (usually defined by their head and their hair, and often an unusual coat color), and later in the period they were expected to be gaited.

Stallion: intact male horse

Rouncey: A low ranking general riding horse also used for war. Usually small, often described as ugly, but still expected to be very hardy. Used for the lowest ranking mounted warriors, and later for mounted infantry. The rouncey is the one horse that seems to lose honor as the centuries pass, becoming almost an insulting term.

Sumpter: Initially a term for the man who managed baggage, it latter came to be used for pack-animals. This is also one of the less universal terms, suggesting that it was not as important for this animal to be symbolically recognizable. This is not surprising as a pack-horse could be used by a peasant or a King. There does, however, seem to be a clear consensus that whether they are called sumpters, beasts of burden, or simply packhorses, that they are related but inferior to other horses.

There were a number of other horse 'types' that were identifiable in different regions, such as England's 'stot' a particularly small common riding animal that might occasionally be found doing farm work. However, I have included here only those terms that were common to several languages. It is notable that *all* of the more prestigious animals had fairly universal terms, while the closer to peasant labor the less universal the term.

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