

*Sport in the Global Society: Historical Perspectives*

# THE RUNNING CENTAUR

## HORSE-RACING IN GLOBAL-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Edited by  
Sinclair W. Bell, Christian Jaser  
and Christian Mann



# The Running Centaur

This book surveys the practice of horse racing from antiquity to the modern period, and in this way offers a selective global history.

Unlike previous histories of horse racing, which generally make claims about the exclusiveness of modern sport and therefore diminish the importance of premodern physical contests, the contributors to this book approach racing as a deep history of diachronically comparable practices, discourses, and perceptions centered around the competitive staging of equine speed. In order to compare horse racing cultures from completely different epochs and regions, the authors respond to a series of core issues which serve as structural comparative parameters. These key issues include the spatial and architectural framework of races; their organization; victory prizes; symbolic representations of victories and victors; and the social range and identities of the participants. The evidence of these competitions is interpreted in its distinct historical contexts and with regard to specific cultural conditions that shaped the respective relationship between owners, riders, and horses on the global racetracks of pre-modernity and modernity.

The chapters in this book were originally published as a special issue of *The International Journal of the History of Sport*.

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*Horse Racing in Imperial Rome: Athletic Competition, Equine Performance, and Urban Spectacle*

Sinclair W. Bell

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*The Emperor and His People at the Chariot Races in Byzantium*

David Alan Parnell

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*Horse Racing at the Ottoman Court, 1524–1728*

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*Capitalist Horse Sense: Sports Betting and Option Trading during the English Financial Revolution, 1690–1740*

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*'A Horse-Race is the Same All the World Over': The Cultural Context of Horse Racing in Native North America*

Peter Mitchell

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## Series Editors' Foreword

*Sport in the Global Society: Historical Perspectives* explores the role of sport in cultures both around the world and across the timeframes of human history. In the world we currently inhabit, sport spans the globe. It captivates vast audiences. It defines, alters, and reinforces identities for individuals, communities, nations, empires, and the world. Sport organizes memories and perceptions, arouses passions and tensions, and reveals harmonies and cleavages. It builds and blurs social boundaries--animating discourses about class, gender, race, and ethnicity. Sport opens new vistas on the history of human cultures, intersecting with politics and economics, ideologies and theologies. It reveals aesthetic tastes and energizes consumer markets.

Our challenge is to explain how sport has developed into a global phenomenon. The series continues the tradition established by the original incarnation of *Sport in the Global Society* (and in 2010 divided into *Historical Perspectives* and *Contemporary Perspectives*) by promoting the academic study of one of the most significant and dynamic forces in shaping the historical landscapes of human cultures.

In the twenty-first century, a critical mass of scholars recognizes the importance of sport in their analyses of human experiences. *Sport in the Global Society: Historical Perspectives* provides an international outlet for the leading investigators on these subjects. Building on previous work and excavating new terrain, our series remains a consistent and coherent response to the attention the academic community demands for the serious study of sport.

Mark Dyreson  
Thierry Terret  
Rob Hess

# Towards a Global History of Horse Racing

Sinclair W. Bell, Christian Jaser and Christian Mann

## ABSTRACT

By investigating the global history of horse racing from antiquity to the modern period, it is likewise possible to overcome the traditional pitfalls in the periodization of sport history. Instead of claiming an exclusiveness of modern sport and downgrading pre-modern physical contests as pure phenomena of alterity, this special issue discusses racing in the horse age as a deep history of diachronically comparable practices, discourses, and perceptions centered around the competitive staging of equine speed.

In his acceptance speech for the historian's prize of the city of Münster in 2003, the famous German historian Reinhart Koselleck proposed a new periodization of global history. Bearing in mind that the horse belonged to the most important, but rather neglected protagonists in the depths of history, he argued for three historical epochs: the pre-horse age, the horse age and the post-horse age.<sup>1</sup> During Koselleck's horse age (ranging from 4000 BC to circa 1950 AD), the equine species played an indispensable role in every aspect of social, religious and political life – from cultic rituals and war to agriculture and trade – thereby reflecting a millenia-long experience of human-animal dependence.<sup>2</sup>

This macro-historical approach was recently updated and refined by Ulrich Raulff in his bestselling book *Farewell to the Horse*, which focused on the 'separation between man and horse' in the long nineteenth century and, in consequence, explored the historical significance of the horse in the age before (i.e. in the premodern era).<sup>3</sup> In particular, Raulff stressed the performance capacities of the horse as an 'animal vector' and 'supplier of kinetic energy' without which one would have to write the history of human civilizations in a very different way.<sup>4</sup> During the horse age, horse races became a key competitive stage and representational space of equine speed that pervaded nearly every social practice of premodern societies as a whole – at least in the fields of mobility, communication, and the economy.

By investigating the global history of horse racing from antiquity to the modern period, it is likewise possible to overcome the traditional pitfalls in the periodization

of sport history. Instead of claiming an exclusiveness of modern sport and downgrading premodern physical contests as pure phenomena of alterity,<sup>5</sup> this special issue discusses racing in the horse age as a deep history of diachronically comparable practices, discourses, and perceptions centered around the competitive staging of equine speed.

The assessment of differences and similarities with regard to this worldwide *longue duree* phenomenon represents both an analytical challenge and a cooperative research opportunity. The essence of the subject seems at first to be very simple, even not sufficient compared to the degree of abstraction of other historical topics: a speed contest between two or more horses to determine a winner over a previously agreed distance, which is carried out with riders or carts and is subject to varying degrees of regulation. Nevertheless, from a global historical perspective, the phenomenology of horse racing consists of a broad spectrum of historical variants<sup>6</sup>: Is it simply a pragmatic performance test of the 'speed machine'<sup>7</sup> horse, which helps to assess individual prices and breeding preferences? Is it elsewhere a ludic phenomenon, a form of entertainment, a mere stage in the protocol of secular or religious celebrations? Is it a specific human-animal physical exercise that demanded certain historically and anthropologically comprehensible body techniques from all participants, horses and riders? Or is it – as *ipso facto* assumed for the English horse races of modern times – a 'sport': a physical, rule-bound form of competition with specific social and cultural ramifications?

Even this brief outline of historical interpretations reveals the range of organizational, performative, and representational manifestations that characterize the global history of horse racing and constitute the core topic of this special issue: from informal and less institutionalized races in the surroundings of horse markets, inns and amusement parks to serial, spatially- and exclusively-installed horse races, which imply social competition and political significance. Historically, horse races have had a comparatively large spectator appeal, which not only results in condensed face-to-face communication, but also in reporting via distance-media, be it in the form of handwritten letters, print media or live coverage on radio, TV and streaming platforms. By this interplay of praxeological variability and different ranges of perception, global horse races reveal themselves as 'total social facts' (following Marcel Mauss), which at the same time raise social, political, religious, economic, legal, moral and media dimensions.

In order to compare horse racing cultures from completely different epochs and regions, this special issue is based on a catalogue of questions which will serve as structural comparative parameters. Certainly, the evidence has to be interpreted in its historical contexts and with regard to specific cultural conditions which shaped the respective 'centaurian pact'<sup>8</sup> between owners, riders, and horses on the global racetracks of pre-modernity and modernity.

The main aspects of this catalogue of questions are the following:

(I) *The Spatial and Architectural Framework*: In this respect, one has to deal with a wide range of venues and spatial arrangements that conditioned the performance of horse racing. In some cases, such as the ancient Olympic Games, open spaces without any architectural structures were used. With the Roman circus or the

modern hippodrome in mind, elaborately designed horse racing tracks existed for the sole purpose of staging fast horses. For the palio races of Renaissance Italy and modern Siena, urban streets and squares were temporarily rededicated for equine speed contests. In each case, the spatial setting of the racetrack – a circuit with narrow or wide bends or a straight route – rebounds on the competitive practice and the structural tension between performance and contingency. Another key issue was the placing of numerous spectators along the racetrack – for example, in the form of temporary or stable structures or grandstands or a specially-secured zones. At the same time, the organizers of racing events also had to take into account the requirements of a fair competition to ensure equal opportunities for all participants – for example, by removing possible obstacles, by preparing the surface of the racetrack and by creating proper starting and finish areas.

(II) *Race Organization*: In addition to the frequency of the race events (a race series or an individual event), one has to examine the organizational responsibilities as well as the rights and obligations deriving from them. Which person or institution organizes and finances the horse races to be discussed and who pays and awards the corresponding prizes? At the same time, this raises the question of regulatory authority: Who decides on and issues binding regulations, who acts as arbitrator and before which institutions or persons and in what way are disputes dealt with? How and with what degree of literacy does the contest administration take place in detail? And finally: What do we know about the people who provided the horses or teams and selected jockeys or charioteers? In historical retrospect, different models are at work here. In Classical Antiquity, for example, private individuals took part in the Greek competitions at their own expense, while in the Roman circus, professional racing stables organized like clubs provided horses and charioteers. During the Italian Renaissance, princes, nobles, and townspeople acted as racing patrons in the urban palio races, while later in the early modern era, urban neighborhood associations such as the Sienese *contrade* took over. Even later in the early modern age, the notion of ‘sport of kings’ indicates a heavy presence of royal and noble patrons in the starting fields.

(III) *Prizes*: The competitive momentum of horse racing has often been increased by the offer of prizes. Their quantity, quality, and symbolic significance vary greatly from one period to another. In addition to the type of prizes, the scope of the awarding of prizes must always be clarified: Did only the winner receive a prize or also in the case of certain placements, for example the second- and third-placed horses? Did there exist consolation prizes for the slowest horses? Did the prizes go to the jockeys or charioteers or to the owners of the race horses? In which ceremonial framework did the awards ceremony take place and what symbolic forms of communication were used (stage arrangements, acclamations, ceremonial props)? How can the relationship between the economic and symbolic value of the prizes be qualified?

(IV) *Symbolic Representations of Victories and Victors*: This aspect deals with the question how competitive successes were commemorated and which media forms were used in doing so. On the part of the organizers, publicly accessible lists and portraits of winners were produced, on the part of the winners themselves, for example, there existed funerary monuments or a textual-visual memory of victories in book format. Behind these symbolic representations lies the fundamental question to

whom the performative agency was attributed: Were horses, riders, or owners perceived as decisive players in the field? What role did the racehorses actually play as performing and symbolic animals? There is a need for explanation why in some historical cultures, such as ancient Greece, winners and losers were differentiated in a striking way, while elsewhere pictorial representations tended to depict the participants in a more homogeneous way.

(V) *Social Range and Identities*: For each of the case studies to be discussed, one has to consider the social range of participants and aspects of identity building through competitive participation. In order to take an active part in this resource-intensive ‘sport of kings’, it is usually required to belong to the social and financial elites of the respective societies. In this respect, horse races provided a stage for public demonstrations of status and reputation. Conversely, the exclusion or non-participation of certain groups reveals ethnic, political, and social boundaries. Likewise, the behavior of participants and spectators alike reveals competitive constellations (between families/cities/city districts or neighborhoods/nations etc.). Horse racing could also be culturally charged, such as through ‘national styles’ of riding or through specific group formations of participants and supporters. In this context, the betting practices along the racetracks should also be taken into account: Clifford Geertz’s classic essay on Balinese cockfights has clearly shown that betting did not exhaust itself in economic profit interests but was also practiced in order to demonstrate social affiliation.<sup>9</sup>

These questions are meant to serve as guidelines for the individual contributions of this special issue that is based on the papers given in 2017 at a conference held at the University of Mannheim and organized by Christian Mann (Mannheim) and Christian Jaser (Berlin). However, it is clear that not every question included in this catalogue can be answered by each author, due to the different types and degrees of sources from each horse-racing culture. Nevertheless, the findings present the first comparative perspectives on global horse racing across a wide temporal and geographical range – from Greek and Roman antiquity to the Native American mid-1800s.

Christian Mann and Sebastian Scharff investigate horse and chariot races in ancient Greece. More precisely, their essay deals with the Greek *agones*, i.e. a specific format of organizing competitions linked to religious festivals that flourished in the whole Greek world, from the Iberian Peninsula to Afghanistan. These *agones* contained a variety of hippic disciplines that could be studied with a view to race organization, spatial structures, prizes, and the self-representation of equestrian victors in the form of monuments, poems, and coinage.

Sinclair Bell discusses perhaps the best-known form of horse racing, one immortalized in the novel *Ben-Hur* and its later cinematic representations: chariot races in imperial Rome. The earliest, most popular, and longest-lived of all forms of mass entertainment or ‘spectacles’ in the Roman world, chariot races were held in circuses, the oldest and largest of which was the Circus Maximus in Rome. Bell’s chapter surveys this practice in imperial Rome and beyond by surveying the history, setting, and operation of the races, the athletes who competed in the arenas, the horses that were bred for racing, and the spectators and fans for whom the sport served as a socially-binding religion.



David Alan Parnell focuses the Byzantine Hippodrome as one of the most important public spaces in Constantinople and a central space for the negotiation of the relationship between the emperor and his people. As a spectator sport, Byzantine chariot races evoked direct dialogues between emperor and people in the hippodrome. More than pure shoptalk about the performances of charioteers, chariot racing provided an occasion to express complaints and requests so that the Hippodrome became a political arena and an important stage for the legitimization of imperial power.

Tülay Artan explores post-Byzantine traditions of horse racing in Constantinople during the Ottoman Era, from 1524 to 1728. In the new Ottoman capital, the Byzantine Hippodrome (renamed Atmeydanı) hosted public festivities like royal weddings and princes' circumcision ceremonies and various equestrian games, but horse races only relatively rarely. However, long-distance endurance races were held during the 1524, 1530, 1539, and 1582 imperial festivals in the Kagıdhane and Alibeyköy valleys at the upper end of the Golden Horn. After the 1720s, track-based flat racing was introduced at the Sa'adabad Palace where a permanent racetrack was erected. Insofar, Artan discusses courtly organizational practices and spatial arrangements from the sixteenth to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The contribution of Christian Jaser shifts the focus from imperial to communal horse racing cultures. In fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy and Upper Germany, flat races for the prize of a precious piece of cloth called *palio* or *scharlach* were organized and financed by city councils, mostly during annual fairs, patronal feast days, and shooting contests. Despite many organisational similarities, Italian *palio* and German *scharlach* races attracted different levels and depths. In order to trace some key comparative aspects of the transalpine field of urban horse racing, Jaser deals with the practices of race organization, spatial arrangements, the social ranges of participants, the perceptions of equine agency, and the different medial representations of victories.

On the late medieval Iberian peninsula as well as during the early modern Spanish transatlantic expansion, horse races did not play a major role, quite unlike various other equestrian displays (game of canes, running of the ring, lange games, bull runs). As Isabelle Schürch's contribution clearly shows, this variety of competitive and martial displays of speed, competition, and power gained a new cultural and social significance in colonial contexts of the West Indies and New Spain. They inspired claims of cultural specificity as well as social distinction and manifested the commemoration of the martial 'reconquista' period.

Richard Nash seeks to revise the common assumption that King Charles II of England is to be regarded as the founding father of the modern sport of thoroughbred horse racing. More than being just a 'sport of kings', the emergence of horse racing as a national sport must be seen in the context of national political change, first and foremost with regard to the conflict between Protestants and Catholics and the anxieties about succession and rebellion. Based on a particular organization of the sport that would later lead to the 'Jockey Club', horse racing became an ideological platform to mobilize popular support through sporting spectacle during a time of tension over the relationship between church and state.





**Figure 1.** Participants in the international conference 'Pferderennen in globalhistorischer Perspektive / Global History of Horse Races' held at the University of Mannheim from June 15–17, 2017.

Nash's findings from archival sources indicate that horse racing was less the sport of kings than of protestant kingmakers, thereby turning it into a form of popular political theater.

Christiane Eisenberg brings together two historical processes that were regularly discussed separately in previous research: the emergence of horse racing as a modern sport in England and the concomitant betting practices on the one hand, and the English Financial Revolution (1690–1740) on the other hand. In particular, option trading was perceived as a form of time trade and shared structural affinities with the betting on horses. Hence, there developed a telling reciprocity between these two speculative practices: Firstly, there were sporting impulses on the financial markets because by betting on horses, actors on the financial markets became more willing to take risks. Secondly, and vice versa, there were also impulses for sport from the financial markets, as the experience in option business resulted in a preparedness to take greater risks on betting on horse races.

Peter Mitchell addresses the hitherto rather neglected field of Native American horse racing, particularly on the Great Plains and in the Southwest of North America. As a competitive arena for male status and prestige, Native American horse

races belonged to a wider field of agonistic activities, including warfare. Each race and its result had a significant impact on the standing of individuals, men's societies, and tribal groups. By invoking supernatural powers, horse racing was both secular and sacred. As in other temporal and spatial settings, betting was a fundamental part of Native American horse races. Despite the strong opposition from Euro-American authorities during the reservation era, Native American horse racing traditions persisted in the form of rodeo and Indian Relay racing.

The volume is based on a conference titled 'Global History of Horse Races', which was held at Mannheim, Germany, in June 2017 (Figure 1). The editors would like to express thanks to Judith Schönholz, Max-Quentin Bischoff, Jennifer Goetz, and Melanie Meaker for their efficient help in running the conference. We are extremely grateful to Peter Hofmann, whose generous support made the conference possible. Isabelle von Neumann-Cosel, Reiter-Verein Mannheim e.V., gave us an unforgettable introduction into the behavior of horses, and she offered us the opportunity to sit on a horse – for some of us for the first time in life! Stephan Buchner, Natascha Buchner, and Marco Klein, Badischer Rennverein Mannheim-Seckenheim e.V., were generous to welcome us at the racecourse in Mannheim-Seckenheim and to offer insights into the training of modern racehorses. Last but not least, we are grateful to Wray Vamplew and the board of editors (especially Mark Dyreson) of the *IJHS* for accepting the essays for publication as a single volume and for shepherding them through production.

## Notes

1. Reinhart Koselleck, 'Der Aufbruch in die Moderne oder das Ende des Pferdezeitalters', in *Historikerpreis der Stadt Münster 2003: Prof. Reinhart Koselleck. Dokumentation zur Feierstunde zur Verleihung am 18. Juli 2003 im Festsaal des Rathauses zu Münster* (Münster: Presse- und Informationsamt, 2003), 23–39, here 25. See also, Simone Derix, 'Das Rennpferd. Historische Perspektiven auf Zucht und Führung seit dem 18. Jahrhundert', *Body Politics* 2, no. 4 (2014): 397–429, here 398.
2. Koselleck, 'Aufbruch', 25, 28.
3. Ulrich Raulff, *Farewell to the Horse: The Final Century of Our Relationship* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), chapter 'A Long Farewell'.
4. Ibid., chapter 'Connoisseurs and Conmen'.
5. See Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record. The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); John Carter and Arnd Krüger, eds., *Ritual and Record: Sports Records and Quantification in Pre-Modern Societies* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); Arnd Krüger and John McClelland, eds., *Die Anfänge des modernen Sports in der Renaissance* (London: Arena Publishers, 1984).
6. See for a first assessment of global horse racing cultures in the early modern era Christian Jaser, 'Pferderennen', in *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit Online*, ed. Friedrich Jäger (Leiden 2018), [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2352-0248\\_edn\\_COM\\_058059](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2352-0248_edn_COM_058059) (accessed March 1, 2020).
7. Raulff, *Farewell to the Horse*, chapter 'A Long Farewell'.
8. Ibid.
9. Clifford Geertz, 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight', *Daedalus* 101, no. 1 (1972): 1–37.

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# Horse Races and Chariot Races in Ancient Greece: Struggling for Eternal Glory

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## ABSTRACT

The essay is about ancient Greek horse and chariot races. The architecture of Greek hippodromes was very rudimentary, but—at least at Olympia—the organizers put much effort in constructing a starting mechanism which was meant to guarantee all starters equal chances for winning. Concerning the prizes, symbolic prizes were common as well as valuable prizes. In ancient Greece, it was the owner of the horses who counted as the participant. The jockeys' and charioteers' strength and skill obviously had a strong impact on the outcome of the race, but they are very rarely mentioned in the ancient texts. Equestrian victors had two means of representation at their disposal: the erection of agonistic victor monuments or the commission of *epinikia*. It is equally true for both forms of representation that the way the victor was showcased was not up to the artistic license of the poets, but was controlled by the victors. Victory poetry was poetry on commission for which the victors reached deeply into their pockets. The poems dealt with important political implications. This is why *epinikia* and victory monuments constitute amazing pieces of evidence for the ancient historian, since they allow him to reconstruct the protagonist's view.

The title of this chapter needs some explanation: the subject of our analysis is neither limited to the territory of the modern Greek state nor restricted to the period of the 'free' Greeks, i.e. before the Romans came to dominate the eastern Mediterranean in the second century BC. Rather, it is the specific Greek format of organizing competitions, the *agon*, that determines the scope of this investigation. The most frequent (and most important) *agones* were connected to recurrent religious festivals (e.g. the Olympics), but there were also funeral contests and *agones* on military campaigns.<sup>1</sup> From about 700 BC to the fourth century AD, *agones* flourished in the Greek world, which extended from Spain in the west to Afghanistan in the east and from the Black Sea in the north to Egypt in the south. For many centuries, Greek *agones* and Roman circus races existed side-by-side.<sup>2</sup>

Due to the importance of the ancient Olympic Games for the history of modern sport, many scholars have published on the hippic competitions in Olympia and

other Greek hippodromes. A comprehensive study of the topic, however, is still missing.<sup>3</sup>

## Organization

*Agones* could be part of a burial ceremony, as in the famous funeral games for Patroclus in Homer's *Iliad*,<sup>4</sup> and sometimes generals organized *agones* during military campaigns.<sup>5</sup> But the most important *agones* were connected to religious festivals and organized in a cycle of one, two, or four years. *Agones* of this kind were named after the patrons of the respective sanctuaries, for example *Olympia* (i.e. Olympic Games) after Zeus Olympios or *Pythia* after Apollo Pythios, and they had a fixed set of disciplines, prizes and rules. The disciplines of the *agones* were divided into three classes: musical competitions (like singing, lyre-playing and flute-playing), gymnastic contests (combat sports, track and field), and hippic disciplines, which means equestrian sport (*hippos* = horse). In the fifth century BC, the 'guestimated' number of *agones* was 155,<sup>6</sup> while in the second and third centuries AD, when the Greek agonistic system reached its peak, no less than 500 are attested in the numismatic and epigraphic evidence,<sup>7</sup> and there might have been even more that have not left any traces in the sources.

Not every *agon*, however, comprised all three classes of disciplines; musical competitions, for example, were missing in the program of the *Olympia*, the most important *agon* of the ancient world. Hippic disciplines, on the contrary, were included in the ancient Olympics, which featured a variety of races with driven chariots and ridden horses:

- Four-horse chariot race (*tethrippon*), introduced in 680 BC (?)<sup>8</sup>
- Horseback race (*keles*), introduced in 648 BC (?)
- Mule-cart race (*apepe*), introduced in 500 BC, abolished in 444 BC
- Horseback race for mares (*kalpe*), introduced in 496 BC, abolished in 444 BC
- Two-horse chariot race (*synoris*), introduced in 408 BC
- Four-colt chariot race (*tethrippon polikon*), introduced in 384 BC
- Two-colt chariot race (*synoris polike*), introduced in 268 BC
- Horseback race for colts (*keles polikos*), introduced in 256 BC

These races were embedded in a set of competitions and rituals: on the first day of the great festival that took place at Olympia every fourth year, the authorities divided the participating horses and athletes into age-classes.<sup>9</sup> Due to the absence of officially recognized criteria, the referees evaluated their physical development. Their visual appearance was the basis for the decision on who was allowed to start in the races for colts and who had to compete with the full-grown horses. The classification of athletes as boys or men was made in a similar fashion. On the second day, the boys' contests took place, and on the third day the crowd moved to the hippodrome to watch the horse and chariot races. These competitions were considered the most magnificent and most spectacular part of the festival. After several processions and sacrifices and the men's gymnastic competitions, the festival ended with the victory

ceremony on the sixth day: all winners were announced by the heralds and received their prize, a crown made of a branch of the sacred olive tree.

The distances of the hippic races differed significantly: The horses in the *tethrippon* had to run more than ten times longer than the colts in the *keles polikos*. Yet the exact distances remain unclear as there are no traces left of the Olympic hippodrome (see below).<sup>10</sup> Most of what we know about the hippic disciplines in Olympia comes from Pausanias, a Greek writer of the second century AD. His work offers not only a detailed description of the architecture and statues in the sanctuary, but also details of the rituals of his time and stories from the past.<sup>11</sup> He gives the following information on the *apene* and *kalpe*:

The trotting-race (*kalpe*) was for mares, and in the last part of the course the riders jumped off and ran beside the mares, holding on to the bridle, just as at the present day those do who are called "mounters." The mounters, however, differ from the riders in the trotting-race by having different badges, and by riding horses instead of mares. The cart-race (*apene*) was neither of venerable antiquity nor yet a graceful performance. Moreover, each cart was drawn by a pair of mules, not horses, and there is an ancient curse on the Eleans if this animal is even born in Elis.<sup>12</sup>

Riders jumping off their horses and running a part of the distance would make a strange impression on modern spectators, but races like this were quite common in ancient Greece.<sup>13</sup> The *agon* called *apobates*, which was popular in Athens and Boiotia, started as a chariot race, but at some point the drivers had to dismount and run a portion of the course.<sup>14</sup> This action can be explained as a remembrance of the Homeric heroes, who drove to the battlefields with their chariots, jumped off and fought as foot soldiers. Parallels like this have led some scholars to consider warfare as the root of ancient Greek equestrian sport,<sup>15</sup> but one should be very careful with this hypothesis: in the seventh and sixth centuries BC, when the system of hippic disciplines at Olympia and other *agones* evolved, there were no war chariots at all in the Greek armies, and the cavalry had only a minor role on the battlefield.<sup>16</sup> It is more likely that hippic competitions evolved out of the social elites' desire to represent their superior status, using the horse as a symbol of wealth and luxury.<sup>17</sup>

A list of prizes of the Great Panathenaia at Athens reveals the hierarchy of the disciplines. While the winner of the four-horse chariot race received 140 amphoras filled with olive oil (the runner-up 40), the winner of the chariot race with four colts got only 40 (the runner up 8) and the winner of the horseback race 30 (the runner-up 6).<sup>18</sup> For comparison, the winner of the wrestling competition received 60 amphoras. These numbers confirm the impression given by ancient authors that the four-horse chariot race was the highlight of an *agon*. The 'Olympic' hippic disciplines flourished in festivals throughout the Greek world, but there were also many local and regional specialties. In Thessaly the *aphippolampas*, a kind of mounted torch race, was popular together with mounted bull-hunting.<sup>19</sup> A victory list from Egypt includes a winner with a "shining horse" (ἱππῶι λαμπρῶι), which is interpreted as a kind of dressage.<sup>20</sup>

The organization of the *agones* was in the hands of the Greek *poleis* (city-states). In the case of Olympia, the *polis* of Elis, situated about 25 miles from the famous sanctuary of Zeus, was responsible for the games: Elis made the decisions about the



building program of Olympia, the officials and umpires of the Olympic Games were magistrates of Elis, and reputable men from Elis formed the Olympic council, which had to settle cases of dispute. For the Panathenaia, it was the city of Athens that was responsible for the organization, in case of the Isthmia, it was the city of Corinth, and so on. The financial burden also was the city's, but since the Hellenistic period, kings or rich private citizens could step in with their own money.<sup>21</sup> An inscription from Delphi reveals the considerable costs for the construction works (like digging and levelling the athletic facilities) that had to be done before the competitions started,<sup>22</sup> and the organizing *polis* had to pay for the prizes as well. But these expenses were more than compensated for by the fame *agones* brought to the sanctuary and to the organizing *polis*.

This is especially the case for Elis, a city far away from the powerful centers of the Greek world. Elis' reputation was tightly connected to the Olympic Games,<sup>23</sup> and although Eleians were often successful in Olympia, they had a reputation of being impartial umpires.<sup>24</sup> When Troilus of Elis won two of the hippic disciplines in 372 BC while being umpire at the same time, the Eleians passed a law that in the future no umpire would be allowed to participate.<sup>25</sup> The Eleians were less scrupulous when using their control of the Olympic Games as a political weapon: in 420 BC, in a time of increased tensions on the Peloponnese, they banned the Spartans from the Olympic Games. The historian Thucydides relates an incident that followed this ban:

Great fears were felt in the assembly of the Lacedaemonians coming in arms, especially after Lichas, son of Arcesilaus, a Lacedaemonian, had been scourged on the course by the umpires; because, upon his horses being the winners, and the Boeotian people being proclaimed the victor on account of his having no right to enter, he came forward on the course and crowned the charioteer, in order to show that the chariot was his. After this incident all were more afraid than ever, and firmly looked for a disturbance: the Lacedaemonians, however, kept quiet, and let the feast pass by, as we have seen.<sup>26</sup>

Texts like this reveal the differences between the Greek and the Roman systems of provisioning horses and chariots. In Olympia and other Greek hippodromes, unlike in the Roman circuses, there were no factions, no "blues", "greens", "reds" or "whites".<sup>27</sup> Instead, wealthy aristocrats had racehorses bred and trained, and they paid for the transport and the maintenance of the horses.<sup>28</sup> The amount of money needed to have a realistic chance of winning an Olympic victory were enormous, but aristocrats from all parts of the Greek world were willing to make this effort as they could expect prestige and immortal fame in return for their investment. In the eyes of a Greek, winning the four-horse chariot race in Olympia was among the greatest accomplishments a man could achieve in his life. It is no wonder, then, that we find the *creme de la creme* of Greek society in the victor lists: the mighty tyrant Hieron of Syracuse at the beginning of the fifth century BC, the Macedonian king Philip II in 356 BC, Ptolemaic kings in the third century BC, and members of the family of the Roman emperor Augustus in the early first century AD.

Victories in horse or chariot races were considered a sign of wealth and power and fostered the legitimation of monarchs, and they could also be used by politicians in democracies. When the famous Alcibiades claimed the command of an Athenian fleet to Sicily, he referred to his success in the hippodrome in Olympia (416 BC):