

THE HORSE IN ROMAN SOCIETY

by

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I declare that "The Horse in Roman Society" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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(Dr M R Lawrie)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of ancient works and authors used in the text are listed alphabetically by author.

Aeschylus

Prom.

Prometheus Bound

Cic.

Cicero

De Off.

De Officiis

De Rep.

De Republica

CIL

Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum

Columella

De Re. Rust.

De Re Rustica

Dio

Cassius Dio

Roman History

Dio Chrysostomos

Orat.

Orationes

Dion. Hal.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus

Ant. Rom.

Roman Antiquities

ILS

Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae

Juv.

Juvenal

Satires

Livy

Livy

Ab urbe condita

Martial

Epig.

Epigrammata

Ovid

Am.

Amores

Hal.

Halieuticon

Met.

Metamorphoses

Tr.

Tristia

Pelagonius

Ars Vet.

Ars Veterinaria

Pliny the Elder

NH

Naturalis Historia

Pliny the Younger

Epist.

Epistulae

Plut.*Cato Min.**Pomp.**Vit. Rom.***Polybius****Suet.***Aug.**Calig.**Dom.**Tib.***Tac.***Ann.***Tert.***De Spect.***Val. Max.****Verg.***Aen.**Georg.***Xenophon***Eq.***Plutarch***Cato Minor**Pompeius**Vita Romuli***Polybius***Roman Histories***Suetonius***Augustus**Gaius Caligula**Domitian**Tiberius***Tacitus***Annalium ab excessu Divi Augusti Libri***Tertullian***De Spectaculis***Valerius Maximus***Facta et dicta memorabilia***Vergil***Aeneid**Georgics**On the Art of Horsemanship*

ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents an investigation of the place of the horse in Roman society, within the context of its roles as *equus publicus*, which derived ultimately from that of the cavalry mount, and race-horse. Consideration of the ceremonial role of the horse provides a clearer understanding of the value placed upon horses and horsemanship in the Roman world, thus permitting inferences to be drawn regarding the role played by the horse in the development of the *equester ordo*. Evidence is drawn from both literary and archaeological sources to shed light on the management and training of the horses of equestrian Rome. Chariot racing is also re-examined from the perspective of its equine players, and evidence is drawn from various sources to provide a more complete picture of the Roman horse-racing industry as a social structure. The importance of the race-horse in Roman society is examined and the symbolism of the victorious horse as represented in Roman art is discussed.

Key Terms:

equus publicus, *equites*, *lusus Troiae*, *transvectio*, Roman equestrian displays, imperial horse guards, chariot racing, circus, training of the Roman race-horse, horse-racing in Rome, victorious horse, racing mosaics, Roman stud farms

INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries the horse has played a variety of roles in the development of human society. Archaeological evidence dates the domestication of the horse to as early as 4000 BC, in the Dnieper valley of the eastern Ukraine.¹ At first a food source, the horse rapidly became a mount for riding, a prized commodity and a source of conflict between neighbouring tribes.² The use of horse-drawn chariots revolutionised warfare in the second millennium BC,³ and horses were key players in the military sphere until just under a hundred years ago. The role of the horse in transport and agriculture is also well documented. In addition to these utilitarian aspects, the relationship between horse and man has frequently carried a social dimension. Horsemanship has been prized over the ages in a variety of cultures, and in the western world the horse became the 'unquestioned steed of prestige, the undisputed bearer of kings'.⁴ The enormous popularity of equestrian displays and horse-related sports in different parts of the world at different periods in history provides further evidence of the social importance of the equine species. An understanding of the history and social development of man is therefore well served by studying his relationship with the horse.

In the Roman world horses fulfilled a number of functions. Columella (*De Re Rust.*, VI, 27.1) identifies three classes of horse: the first of *generosa materies*, bred specifically for the circus and the sacred games, the second for breeding mules, and the third of common stock for ordinary riding. The utility of the horse in war and transport is also mentioned, although in the agricultural sphere oxen and mules were preferred (Columella, *De Re Rust.*, II, 7.15 and 20.4). Vergil (*Georg.* III, 118) considers the breeding of racers and chargers as equal in worth, and it is very likely that the 'noble' horse also supplied the cavalry until Rome began to employ foreign auxiliaries with their

¹McMiken, "Ancient Origins of horsemanship", *Equine Veterinary Journal*, 22(2), p.74

²*ibid.*, p. 75

³Bennett, "Chariot Racing in the Ancient World", *History Today*, 1997, p. 42

⁴Piggott, *Wagon, Chariot and Carriage: Symbol and Status in the History of Transport*, p. 74

own home-grown mounts in this capacity. The *equus publicus*, originally a cavalry mount, no doubt continued to be drawn from this first class as well. The horse was therefore at the centre of Roman society, although his contribution often goes unremarked. He played a key role in establishing the might of Rome, provided a means for differentiating social class, and entertained enthusiastic crowds with his speed and skill in the circus. For the wealthy he provided a speedier and more comfortable means of transport than the ox or mule and permitted such leisure activities as hunting. An understanding of Roman society and culture would therefore be advanced by focussing on the place of the horse within this milieu.

Many books which treat of the social aspects of Roman life contain some mention of the various capacities in which horses were employed. Toynbee gives a particularly good overview of equine animals in the Roman world, as revealed in literature and art.⁵ Despite their usefulness, however, such summaries frequently tend to convey the impression that horses were used equally, for example, in war as they were for draught animals. This provides a distorted picture of the Roman horse and of his role in society. This study proposes instead to examine more closely Columella's 'noble' horse, a designation which of itself identifies those roles which the Romans themselves considered most worthy of note.

Of these roles, that of cavalry horse has received the most attention from modern scholars. Hyland in particular provides a detailed study of breeding programs, stud management, training, equipment and veterinary care.⁶ Other researchers have tended to focus on the military aspects of this field of study, and the cavalrymen and horse guards have frequently received considerably more attention than their mounts. Speidel's work on the imperial horse guard, for example, comprises a detailed study of the men who served in this elite group and their relationship with the emperor.⁷ Horses, the ultimate source of the guards' prestige, are not mentioned except in passing. Nevertheless the

⁵Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art*

⁶Hyland, *Equus: The Horse in the Roman World*

⁷Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*

cavalry horse is fairly well represented in the literature and this study will instead focus on the development of cavalry mount into the *equus publicus*.

The importance of the horse and of a certain standard of horsemanship is apparent from the early phases of Rome's history, as indicated by the development of the *equites* from an elite cavalry group to the basis of an entire class of society. The right to the title *equus equo publico* was considered a significant privilege from early in the republican period, and remained a hallmark of the equestrian class under the Empire. Although the history and development of the *ordo equester* has been examined extensively by numerous authors, the horse who gave his name and indeed lent his dignity to this class remains in obscurity. Hill provides some useful information relating to the conferral of the *equus publicus* on an individual and to ceremonial events such as the *transvectio*, but the focus is largely on the *equites* themselves.⁸ Horses and horsemanship played a central role in the development of Roman social structure, and displays of horsemanship such as the *lusus Troiae* featured prominently in Roman public life. The first part of this dissertation will therefore examine the social and ceremonial role of the horse, topics which thus far have received little attention.

The 'noble' horse was specifically bred for the circus, as mentioned earlier, and the circus is the central theme in numerous examples of Roman art, revealing an enduring interest in chariot racing and chariot horses among the Roman public. The horse-racing industry clearly held a position of central importance in Roman culture for a considerable period of its history. Chariot racing as a sport is well represented in the literature. The history, development and organisation of this institution have been thoroughly surveyed by Harris, *inter alios*.⁹ Humphrey has produced a comprehensive study of Roman circuses, giving details of construction, design, typology and archaeology.¹⁰ Details of the lives of individual charioteers are provided by numerous inscriptions and monuments, giving rise to such diverse works as Cameron's scholarly investigation of the life of Porphyrius on the

⁸ Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*

⁹Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*; Cameron, *Circus Factions*

¹⁰Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing*

one hand and the fictional *Ben Hur* on the other.

Once again, however, researchers have tended to focus on the human participants in this drama, examining the mechanics of the race, the social function of the sport, the attitudes of the spectators. Hyland goes some way towards making up this lack as she explores wide-ranging topics such as breeding, early training, performance in the arena and veterinary care. However her overview takes little account of chronology, making it difficult to gain an accurate sense of the development of the sport or the overall structure of the horse-racing industry. Given the position of importance which this pastime clearly occupied in the Roman world, there are still many questions to be answered with regard to the breeding of horses for the circus, the training of both horses and charioteers and the subsidiary industries which serviced the race-track. Clearly a detailed study of these topics is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but an exploration of chariot racing from the perspective of the horses who made it possible will contribute some pieces to the puzzle and facilitate a broader understanding of the Roman horse-racing industry as a whole.

This topic will also be considered within its social context through the medium of Roman art, which contains numerous representations of circus-related themes. Although most research in this area has naturally focussed on the art itself, some authors have considered the social aspects and symbolism of circus images. In particular, Dunbabin has presented a typology of the victorious charioteer as represented in mosaics and has demonstrated that aspects of these images were incorporated into imperial iconography.¹¹ Ennaïfer suggests that a similar study of the victorious horse might also be profitable and has made an excellent start in cataloguing representations of the chariot horses in North African mosaics.¹² This work provides an invaluable source from which a tentative typology of the victorious horse and his symbolism will be explored.

¹¹Dunbabin, "The Victorious Charioteer on Mosaics and Related Monuments",
American Journal of Archaeology, 86(1), 1982

¹²Ennaïfer, M. "Le thème des chevaux vainqueurs à travers la série des mosaïques africaines", *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome*, 95(2), 1983

PART ONE
EQUUS PUBLICUS: THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE ROMAN HORSE

Chapter One

Equites equo publico

Much of what appears in the ancient sources concerning Rome's middle class relates to the role played by its members in business, in provincial affairs and in politics. Yet the name *equester ordo* evokes the sound of hoof beats and tossing manes on proud necks, a clear reminder that this rank of society derived its origins from Rome's early cavalry. By a process of social evolution over several centuries the *equites* on active service became men of the *equester ordo*, which included Rome's wealthy businessmen as well as *novi homines* such as Cicero, who sought political careers. At first consideration, any connection to their cavalry roots seems tenuous and even contrived.¹ However, the horse, the silent partner in the relationship, played a central role in the development of this class and remained a key symbol of equestrian identity throughout the republican and imperial periods.² An understanding of this role is best achieved by reviewing the history of the Roman cavalry from a social perspective.

The importance of the cavalry in the early Roman state is evident from the accounts of ancient historians such as Livy, Plutarch, Polybius and Dionysius of Halicarnassus.³ Many scholars, both ancient and modern, equate the early cavalry with the *celerēs*, the three-hundred strong mounted bodyguard chosen by Romulus from among 'the most illustrious families' (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* II, 13.1-4). This connection, which has found ready acceptance in modern accounts, has been questioned by Hill, on the basis of the weighty authority of Livy, Plutarch and Dionysius.⁴ Livy makes no connection between the three centuries of *equites* enrolled at the institution of the *curiae* and the *celerēs*, the bodyguard which Romulus kept with him at all times, despite the obvious equality of their numbers (Livy, I, 13.8 and I, 15.8). Dionysius also treats these two groups as distinct,

¹Henderson, "The Establishment of the *Equester Ordo*", *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 53(1&2), 1963, p. 61

²Demougin, *L'ordre équestre sous les Julio-Claudiens*, p. 189

³Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, p. 2

⁴Hill, "Equites and Celerēs", *Classical Philology*, 33(3), 1938, p. 289

comparing the *celeres* to the royal Spartan bodyguard (Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.*, II.13). The disappearance of the titles *celeres* and *tribunus celerum* at the end of the monarchic period, while the *equites* remained and continued to develop as a separate social group, provides further evidence of this distinction, as Hill suggests.¹ For the purposes of the present discussion therefore, these two groups will be considered as distinct, and the topic of the *celeres* will be addressed in more detail at a later stage.

The cavalry had a strong presence in Rome from its beginnings. Dionysius informs us that the survivors of the battle between Romulus and Remus included the original three hundred horse (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* II, 2). Livy supplies the further detail that these three hundred were divided into three 'centuries', named the *Rhamnes*, *Tities* and *Luceres* (Livy, I, 13.8). Clearly these numbers would not remain adequate to the needs of a growing power, and at a fairly early stage the cavalry strength was doubled.² Livy and Dionysius attribute this increase to Tarquinius in the sixth century, and the insistence of the augur Attus Navius that such a change require a favourable omen is an indication of the importance accorded to the cavalry at this period (Livy, I, 36; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* III, 71).

This religious sanctity of the early cavalry combined with the respect accorded to its members has led most scholars to conclude that the original six 'centuries' were entirely patrician.³ The six regal contingents are generally accepted as the forerunners of the *sex suffragia*, the most aristocratic section of the cavalry in the republican period.⁴ The privileged position which continued to be held by the *sex suffragia* is a clear indication that the Romans themselves retained a belief in the superiority of the early cavalry.

¹Hill, "Equites and Celeres", pp. 288-289

²Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, p. 4

³*ibid.*, p. 5

⁴*ibid.*, p. 4

However, Momigliano questions the assumption of a purely aristocratic cavalry, pointing out that the ancient sources contain no explicit information to support this contention.¹ In addition, there are two passages in Dionysius which give clear evidence to the contrary. During the kingship of Marcius a battle is fought against the Veientes, and Tarquinius, then the commander of the horse, is honoured for his courage by the king, 'among other things making him both a patrician and a senator' (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* III, 41.4). The same distinction is later accorded to Servius Tullius by Tarquinius himself; according to Dionysius it was 'an honour ... previously conferred on Tarquinius, and, still earlier, on Numa Pompilius' (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* IV, 3.4). Hill dismisses this latter account as 'a later invention'² but two such explicit statements cannot be wholly discounted. If these two references are accurate, not only did the early cavalry include plebeians, but it was possible for a man of lower birth to rise to the highest rank by virtue of ability.

If the assumption of a purely patrician cavalry is set aside, an intriguing new question arises: how were the members of the cavalry chosen, if not solely as a privilege of birth? Dionysius relates that Romulus chose for his bodyguard 'the most robust of body...from the most illustrious families' (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* II, 13.1) and it seems reasonable to suggest that the cavalry were recruited in a similar way. The young men most able to serve in this capacity, those who demonstrated superior skills in horsemanship and mounted fighting tactics, would clearly be the most sensible choice for an effective cavalry. Selection would no doubt begin amongst the ranks of the nobility, but men of lower birth with outstanding ability would provide additional numbers.

What then of the privileged position enjoyed by the equestrian centuries? If a selection based on ability as well as birth is accepted, it follows that honour was accorded to the cavalry in recognition of their mastery of equestrian skills in addition to their social status. The emphasis placed on horsemanship as a hallmark of the *equester ordo* in the republican and imperial periods, long after this rank of society ceased to comprise an

¹Momigliano, "Procum Patricium", *Journal of Roman Studies*, 56(1&2), 1966, p. 18

²Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, p. 5

active cavalry, supports this hypothesis.

The next stage of social and military reorganisation is generally attributed to Servius Tullius in the sixth century BC.¹ According to the ancient sources, the Servian reform introduced the innovation of division into class based on a property qualification as well as on birth. Initially this system was applied only to the organisation of the army, but later formed the basis for political grouping.² Eighteen centuries of cavalry were enrolled from among 'such as had the highest rating and were of distinguished birth' (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* IV, 18.1; Livy, I, 43.8-9). Most modern scholars consider that it was at this time that plebeians were first admitted to the ranks of the cavalry.³ In fact, the accounts given by Livy and Dionysius do not provide support for this, and the assumption is based on the concomitant inclusion of the plebeians in the citizenship rolls.⁴ The major alteration in cavalry arrangements seems to have been an increase in numbers along with the property requirement. If the argument against an all-patrician cavalry presented above is accepted, the cavalry already included plebeians amongst its ranks. One might conjecture that in this case, the Servian system would have granted the plebeian *equites* a more equal standing, since they now held citizen rights. The initial development of the *equites* towards a distinct class can perhaps be traced to this period, the unifying factor being membership in an elite group recognised for its equestrian ability.

It is at this time that Livy (I, 43.9) first records the granting of the *equus publicus*, the horse provided at public expense. Momigliano sees this state grant for the expense of a horse and its upkeep as further evidence that the cavalry was not comprised solely of great land-owners.⁵ Ancient sources, however, emphasise the property qualification for the cavalry,⁶ and it therefore seems reasonable to accept that its members could have supplied their

¹Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, p. 6

²*ibid.*

³*ibid.*, p. 8

⁴*ibid.* p.8

⁵Momigliano, p. 20

⁶Livy, I, 43. 8-9; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* IV, 18.1-3; Polybius, VI, 20.9

own horses. The grant of a horse from the state would then represent a substantial privilege rather than a subsidy, a view supported by the importance which continued to be attached to this right in the republican period. Stewardship of the *equus publicus* conferred membership in the equestrian centuries, which in turn held important voting privileges in the *Comitia Centuriata* until the third century BC.¹

The grant of the public horse took the form of two sums of money, the *aes equestre* for the initial purchase of the horse, and the *aes hordearium* intended to pay for its upkeep.² Livy (I, 43.9) provides the information that this money was raised by a tax on wealthy widows. The horse was retained by the *eques* in peace and in war, a further indication that this grant was considered a privilege, a mark of status, rather than simply a means of ensuring that horses were available for fighting. The title *equites equo publico* was one of high honour, and the horse itself had become a symbol of rank. Being stripped of the right to the public horse was considered a grave disgrace, as is illustrated in the accounts of Caecilius Metellus in 214 BC (Livy, XXIV, 43.3) and L. Cornelius Scipio Asiaticus in 184 BC (Livy, XXXIX, 44.1).

The voting rights of the equestrian centuries further illustrate their privileged status. Cavalry centuries remained fixed in number, while infantry centuries did not and in fact frequently comprised greater numbers.³ Added to this advantage was the privilege of voting first, which was regarded as an omen. Once a member of the *equites* ceased to be fit for active service, either due to age or infirmity, he was expected to surrender his public horse and enroll in one of the first class infantry centuries for voting purposes.⁴ However, membership of the equestrian centuries was controlled by the discretion of the censors rather than by a fixed law, and a senator retiring from active cavalry service might retain his public horse. This conferred both superior voting privileges as well as higher social prestige, and retention of the *equus publicus* by senators became common practice

¹Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, pp. 13-14

²*ibid.*, pp. 11

³*ibid.*, p. 14

⁴*ibid.*, p. 15

until the privilege was removed by a vote of the people in 129 BC (Cic. *De Rep.* IV, 2.2).¹

Was a distinction of rank preserved within the eighteen equestrian centuries? Hill states that the *sex suffragia* held the most distinguished position among the eighteen, and earlier scholars held that they cast their votes first, thus differentiating between patrician and plebeian.² However the generally accepted view, according to Hill, is that all eighteen voted together, which suggests that in fact no distinction was made between older and newer centuries, or between patrician and plebeian *equites*. This accordingly marks a further step in the development of a distinct class, based on selection for the cavalry, and therefore ultimately on equestrian skill in addition to birth and property.

At the end of the fifth century BC several changes were introduced which had important social consequences. At this time, according to Livy, certain men who met the property qualification for the equestrian census but who had not been granted a public horse offered to serve in the cavalry *equis suis* (Livy, V.7). The wording of this passage clearly shows that some other criterion in addition to the required property qualification needed to be fulfilled to merit inclusion among the ranks of the cavalry, providing some support for viewing the *equites* as a distinct group as has been suggested. Although Hill questions the accuracy of Livy's account, it is certainly the case that at some time before the third century the cavalry began to include supernumeraries who provided their own horses.³ It does not appear that a distinction was drawn between cavalry service *equo publico* and service *equo privato*.⁴

Livy records that the senate voted for a fixed sum to be paid to each volunteer *eques*, 'the first occasion that knights received military pay' (Livy, V.7). It is likely that at some later

¹Taylor, "Republican and Augustan Writers enrolled in the Equestrian Centuries", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 99, 1968, p. 470

²Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, p. 14

³*ibid.*, p. 17

⁴*ibid.*, p. 18

stage all *equites* received pay, which for the *equites equo publico* would have been in addition to their usual stipend.¹ Cavalry pay was three times that of the infantry (Livy, V.12), which reflected their higher status rather than greater expenses if it is true that the salary applied to all knights and not just those serving *equis suis*. In addition to the introduction of pay, another change dating to this period was a reduction in the period of cavalry service.² As a result there was a greater turnover within the equestrian centuries, with more men laying claim to social superiority on the basis of ex-cavalry rank.³ Those who served as supernumeraries also benefited from the respect accorded the cavalry, although they would not have been included among the equestrian centuries.⁴

During the third century BC the cavalry declined in importance as a fighting force, but nonetheless retained many privileges which indicate their superior status.⁵ By the time of Polybius all *equites* received a salary and the *aes hordearium* had been merged with this so that the cost of rations for both man and horse were deducted from each man's pay (Polybius, VI, 39.12). This innovation further marks the lessening of distinction between different types of cavalry service. The higher pay received by the cavalry has already been mentioned; similarly in the distribution of booty the share received by an *eques* was three times that given to an infantryman. Cavalrymen similarly were granted larger tracts of land in new colonies, were excused menial tasks, took precedence over centurions and were classed with the officers.⁶

The higher status of the cavalry was recognised by the use of such titles as *proceres iuventutis*, *principes iuventutis* and *primores iuvenum*, titles which are generally considered to reflect superior birth or wealth,⁷ but which could equally well denote outstanding skill or service. It was also the cavalry who formed an honour guard for performing special

¹Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, p. 20

²*ibid.*, p. 20

³*ibid.*, p. 21

⁴Hill, "Livy's account of the *Equites*", *Classical Philology*, 25(3), 1930, p. 248

⁵Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, p. 23

⁶*ibid.*, p. 24

⁷*ibid.*

duties, such as the escort of knights who conveyed the body of Brutus back to Rome after the battle against the Tyrrhenians (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* V, 17.1). This ceremonial function became more pronounced as Rome gradually began to make greater use of foreign auxiliaries, drawn from those nations who had superior cavalry.¹ Roman *equites* thus came to be less involved in active cavalry service and evolved instead into a separate social class.

Although Polybius, writing in the second century BC, recognised only two classes, there had long been a group of men who, as Hill comments, 'regarded themselves as belonging neither to the senatorial aristocracy nor to the mass of the people'.² As we have seen, members of the equestrian centuries enjoyed a higher social status and held many privileges which underlined this rank, privileges which extended to both patrician and plebeian *equites*, thus conferring a degree of cohesion and unity upon an otherwise diverse group. After the law of 129 BC which compelled senators to give up the public horse upon entering into office (Cic. *De Rep.* IV, 2.2),³ it would be reasonable to suggest that a sense of group identity developed even more strongly, since the remaining *equites* shared the same property qualification and were distinguished only on the basis of the *equus publicus*.

Thus the *equester ordo* gradually came into being, coalescing from diverse roots to comprise a fairly homogeneous middle class by the early first century BC. These men adopted the title *equites* along with the insignia of the ancient cavalry.⁴ There were nonetheless still distinctions of rank within this group. Henderson's examination of the sources for this period indicates that the *equites* were divided between those who qualified for membership on the basis of property only, and those included on the basis of birth as

¹Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, p. 26

²*ibid.*, p. 45

³Taylor, "Republican and Augustan Writers enrolled in the Equestrian Centuries" p. 470;

⁴ Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, p. 114; Taylor, "Republican and Augustan Writers enrolled in the Equestrian Centuries", p. 469

well, who held the title *equites equo publico*.¹ The latter formed an elite within the *equester ordo*, and it was from their ranks that the panel of jurors for public and extortion courts was drawn.²

The higher rank of this section of the *equester ordo* was based on birth and therefore on tradition, but the symbol of this higher rank was the *equus publicus*. That this was not an empty symbol is made clear by the emphasis placed on horsemanship in connection with the *equites*. This emphasis increased rather than lessened in the imperial period, when all members of the class were made *equites equo publico*.³ These elite knights appeared in their equestrian capacity in various public ceremonies, including the annual parade known as the *transvectio*, which will be discussed in greater detail in the section following.

¹Henderson, p. 65

²Taylor, "Republican and Augustan Writers enrolled in the Equestrian Centuries", p. 469; Henderson, p. 71

³Henderson, p. 71; Hill, "Livy's Account of the Equites", p. 245

Chapter Two

Pompaee equitum

As the *equus publicus* was the key symbol of membership among the *equites*, it is not surprising that there existed a special ceremony for the granting of the horse to each man. There are scattered references to this ceremony among the ancient sources, which have been reviewed in detail by Hill.¹ The ceremony, usually referred to as the *census equitum*, was carried out by the censors in the forum following the general census (Plut. *Pomp.* 22). Those who already held a public horse would present themselves before the censors, each man leading his horse by the bridle, as Plutarch describes. The censors would then review each *equus* in turn to determine whether he remained fit for service, or was eligible for discharge. This review included a physical examination of both man and horse and penalties could be levied for a badly kept horse.² When the *equites* served as an active cavalry, this examination served the pragmatic purpose of ensuring that horses were fit for service. Its continuation into the republican and imperial periods is an indication of the continued value placed upon the horse itself.

The *equus publicus* could also be stripped from anyone found guilty of a moral offence.³ On this basis Hill considers moral probity to be the third basic requirement for membership among the *equites*, in addition to the qualifications of birth and property.⁴ Certainly one of the functions of the censors was to enquire into the morals of all members of the upper classes, but it is absurd to suggest that this criterion formed a distinction between those selected to hold the public horse and those who were not. Members of the *equites* who were not also *equites equo publico* formed a large number,⁵ and it is highly unlikely that they were all found wanting in morality. Following the

¹Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, pp. 33-37

²*ibid.*, p. 34

³Taylor, "Republican and Augustan Writers enrolled in the Equestrian Centuries", p. 477; Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, pp. 34-6

⁴Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, p. 34

⁵Henderson, p. 72

argument presented earlier, it is reasonable to suggest that membership among the ranks of the *equites equo publico* was also based upon the level of horsemanship of the individual.

Those who passed all tests were readmitted to the equestrian centuries, while *equites* who had completed their term of service were discharged with honour (Plut. *Pomp.*, 22). The censors would then fill any vacant places from among those with the necessary qualifications. Just as each existing *equus* was given a physical examination, each new member had to provide proof of both physical and moral fitness (Ovid, *Tr.* II, 89-90). Although none of the sources give details as to how physical condition was judged, it is certainly conceivable that new recruits could have been required to demonstrate their horsemanship. The ceremony was concluded with the reading of the completed list (Suet. *Calig.* 16).

The *census equester* did not of itself constitute a display of equestrian skill, although it has been conjectured above that a demonstration of horsemanship might have been required as proof of fitness for service. However, the horse itself was central to the process and the sight of several thousand men leading their gleaming mounts before the censors would certainly have made an impressive display. The process must have continued for several days, providing a far greater visual reminder of pride in equestrian skill than the other symbols of the order such as the gold ring or the purple-striped *trabea*.¹ Demougin comments that the *equus publicus* retained for the Romans an imagery of power,² an association made most readily for those who viewed either the *census equester* or indeed the annual parade termed the *transvectio*.

The *transvectio*, held each year on July 15, was a spectacular parade exclusively honouring the *equites equo publico*. Dionysius records that this event formed part of the annual sacrifice to the Dioscuri in commemoration of the assistance given by these gods

¹Taylor, "Republican and Augustan Writers enrolled in the Equestrian Centuries", p. 471

²Demougin, p. 190

to the Romans at the battle of Lake Regillus in the fifth century BC (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* VI, 13). Some scholars infer from Dionysius' account a fifth-century origin for the *transvectio*,¹ but Livy (IX, 46.15) records the tradition that the ceremony was instituted by the censor Quintus Fabius Maximus, in 304 BC. A fifth-century date is perhaps supported by the arrangement of the *equites* in six *turmae*, possibly representing the sex *suffragia* enrolled by Tarquinius.²

Whichever date is accepted, the institution of such a parade specifically honouring the *equites equo publico* is an indication that these men were considered a distinct group worthy of public recognition. Their group identity derived from their equestrian service, which was showcased in the annual parade vividly described by Dionysius. The *equites*, 'sometimes even to the number of five thousand', rode in battle formation, crowned with olive branches and wearing the purple-striped *trabea* as well as military decorations (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* VI, 13.4; Val. Max. II, 29). Possibly the horses were arrayed with garlanded manes, as Ovid (*Tr.* IV, 2.22) describes for a triumphal parade. The procession wound from the temple of Mars outside Rome, through the streets to the Forum and past the temple of Castor and Pollux. It was 'a fine sight and worthy of the greatness of the Roman dominion' (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* VI, 13.4), a visual display of rank and power.

This procession continued to hold a position of importance in the imperial period. Suetonius records that Augustus revived 'the long forgotten custom of making them [knights] ride in procession' (*Aug.* 23), implying a period during which it had lapsed. Certainly the ceremony receives frequent mention in literature of the Julio-Claudian period, an indication of the importance which continued to be attached to the equestrian identity of the *ordo equester*. Monuments dating from the second century AD and later also attest to this, frequently depicting *equites* wearing the *trabea* or in procession.³ In addition to funerary reliefs, a large number of dedicatory inscriptions mentioning the

¹Momigliano, p. 22

²*ibid.*

³Devijver, *The Equestrian Officers of the Roman Imperial Army*, pp. 422-4

transvectio are also attested.¹

A funerary relief from Ostia shows the *eques*, T. Flavius Verus, seated on his horse and wearing the *trabea*.² One attendant leads the horse while another, standing behind, hands his master the traditional olive wreath. Devijver's interpretation notwithstanding,³ the relief cannot depict the *transvectio* itself, where the *equites* would have been riding arrayed 'in regular ranks...as if they came from battle', as Dionysius relates (*Ant. Rom.* VI, 13.4). Perhaps Flavius Verus is about to join his squadron, and the presence of two attendants as he makes himself ready enhances his status. The horse itself is beautifully rendered, well muscled with proud arched neck and pricked ears. He too wears ceremonial dress - a saddle cloth made from a spotted leopard skin, with front and rear paws still attached, perhaps a hunting trophy from the provinces.

The *census equester* and the *transvectio* both provided the Roman people with an impressive spectacle, an opportunity to see both *equites* and horses arrayed in ceremonial garb, a reminder of their rank and honour. In addition to these ceremonies, the *equites equo publico* also rode in official funeral parades and triumphal processions.⁴ Equestrian contests and displays frequently formed part of funeral games, birthday celebrations and other festivals,⁵ and although the *equites* are not specifically mentioned in these contexts it is possible that such occasions may have served as an opportunity to showcase their equestrian skills.

¹Demougin, p. 151

²Devijver, Figure 3, p. 423

³*ibid.*, p. 422

⁴Henderson, p. 67

⁵eg. Suetonius, *Tib.* 25, *Nero* 12, *Dom.* 4 ; Dio LX, 5.2-3

Chapter Three

Equestrian displays

That horsemanship was considered an important skill for the sons of senators and knights alike is most evident from frequent references to their participation in public parades and equestrian displays. Perhaps the best known of these are the *lusus Troiae*, the equestrian games performed in the Circus Maximus on special state occasions and traditionally held to be of Etruscan origin.¹

The first literary mention of the *lusus Troiae* records their performance in the time of the dictator Sulla (Plut. *Cato Min.* 3.1), but the antiquity of the games is attested by their depiction on a vase from Tragliatella which dates to the sixth century BC.² Most references to the *lusus Troiae* state that they were performed by boys of noble birth, although in one instance Dio specifies 'the sons of senators' (XLIX, 43.3). Tacitus uses the term *pueri nobiles* (*Ann.* XI, 11.15), which could be applied equally to the sons of both knights and senators. Sons of senators were included in the equestrian centuries until they embarked on the *cursus honorum*, and these two groups rode together on other occasions.³ It therefore seems reasonable to assume that boys from both classes performed in the *lusus Troiae*, which had religious associations but also served as a showcase for horsemanship.

The *lusus Troiae* were held at a variety of public events, including Julius Caesar's triumph in 46 BC (Dio, XLIII, 23.6; XLVII, 20.2), public festivals (Tac. *Ann.* XI, 11.15; Suet. *Caesar*, 39), dedications of shrines and theatres (Dio, LI, 22.4; LIV, 26.1), imperial

¹Taylor, "Seviri Equitum Romanorum and Municipal Seviri: A Study in Pre-Military Training among the Romans", *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 14, 1924, p.160; Alföldi, *Early Rome and the Latins*, p. 281; Schneider, "Lusus Troiae" in *RE* s.v. 23: 2060

²Smith, "Nero's Equestrian Interpretation of Vergil", *Ancient World*, p. 187; Schneider, *RE* 23: 2060-1

³Taylor, "Seviri Equitum Romanorum and Municipal Seviri", pp. 158-160; Henderson, p. 61

birthdays and funerals (Dio, LIX, 11.2). Performances seem to have been more frequent from the time of Augustus, which was in keeping with his program for restoring ancient traditions and enhancing the dignity of both senatorial and equestrian orders (Suet. *Aug.* 43).¹ In the republican period more emphasis was placed on the religious character of the games, while from the Augustan period they served more as a display for the *equester ordo* and the *iuventus*.²

The best description we have of the *lusus Troiae* appears in Vergil's *Aeneid*, where the poet links these games with the performance given by the young Ascanius at the funeral of his grandfather Anchises. Although many scholars deny the military nature of the *lusus Troiae*,³ Vergil's imagery is all martial. Ascanius' troop of boys are a *paratum agmen* which he draws up in battle order, and he 'presents himself in arms' (Verg. *Aen.* V, 550-551). However, it does not appear that the boys wore battle dress. They carried spears and quivers but instead of helmets they wore garlands and around their necks were twisted golden circlets (*Aen.* V, 556-559). The display itself took the form of a mock battle, with the boys in three squadrons charging each other with dipped lances, each group weaving through the opposing line (*Aen.* V, 580-585). This equestrian dance simulated the twists of the labyrinth, which held sacred associations.⁴

These manoeuvres would have been most impressive to watch, but participation was also dangerous. Suetonius (*Aug.* 43) records that young Nonius Asprenas fell from his horse and was crippled, while Aeserninus grandson of Asinius Pollio broke a leg. According to this account the *lusus Troiae* were discontinued as a result, but this could not have lasted for long as performances are mentioned frequently throughout the Julio-Claudian period. Participation in these displays presupposes a high level of equestrian skill and training, a topic which will be addressed more fully at a later stage.

¹Taylor, "Seviri Equitum Romanorum and Municipal Seviri", p. 159

²Schneider, *RE* 23: 2065-2066

³Speidel, *Riding for Caesar: The Roman Emperors' Horse Guards*, p. 101

⁴Schneider, *RE* 23: 2061; Alföldi, p. 281

In the Augustan period much emphasis was placed on the *iuventus*, the sons of senators and knights who regularly represented the *equester ordo* at its public appearances.¹ The new title *princeps iuventutis* was bestowed by the *equester ordo* on Augustus' grandson Gaius when he took the *toga virilis*, and the title later devolved to other imperial heirs. The importance attached to this event is attested by its commemoration on a series of coins.² The youth of the order were honoured with special seats at the theatre, the *cuneus iuniorum*, and as a group frequently performed in equestrian exercises at religious festivals, games and exhibitions designed to display the strength and skill of Rome's young manhood (Tac. *Ann.* II, 83.5). The *pompa circensis* which preceded the *Ludi Magni* was led by the *iuventus* on horseback (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* VII, 72.1). The *iuventus* also had their own celebration, known as the *ludi sevirales* or the *ludi Martiales*, held on the Kalends of August at the dedication of the temple of Mars Ultor (Dio, LV, 5). At this festival the *lusus Troiae* were performed by the younger boys along with other games, directed by the *seviri equitum Romanorum*.³ This title, along with its older form *sevir centuriarum equitum*, illustrates the continued importance placed upon equestrian associations and equestrian skill in the imperial period.

Equestrian displays of similar type were held at other towns in Italy and the western provinces, a further indication of the premium placed upon horsemanship and martial skills for the sons of prominent families. Inscriptions and lead *tesserae* attest that the *lusus iuvenalis* were celebrated by the free-born youth of the town, frequently in association with religious festivals.⁴ An inscription from Pompeii arranged in a spiral records the *lusus serpentis* of a specific *iuvenis* named Septimius, recalling the labyrinthine associations of the *lusus Troiae*.⁵ Other inscriptions refer to the performance of games in which boys are arranged in *turmae*, while paintings and reliefs show mounted youths in procession.⁶

¹Taylor, "Seviri Equitum Romanorum and Municipal Seviri", p. 160

²Romer, "A Numismatic Date for the Departure of G. Caesar", *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 108, 1978, p.187

³Taylor, "Seviri Equitum Romanorum and Municipal Seviri", p. 161

⁴*ibid.*, p. 165

⁵Schneider, *RE* 23: 2065

⁶Taylor, "Seviri Equitum Romanorum and Municipal Seviri", p. 166

From this evidence it is clear that centres other than Rome held events designed to showcase the strength and abilities of their youth, and that horsemanship represented an important aspect of the skills a young man was expected to acquire.

A marble relief from Fossombrone (Forum Sempronii), dating most probably to the Claudian period, further illustrates the importance of such ceremonies.¹ The relief depicts three mounted riders with full helmets and in military dress but without armour, with youthful faces.² One carries a shield, another a practice lance and shield while the third has a lance on his back. It has been variously suggested that the relief represents the *transvectio* or the *lusus Troiae*, but the youthful appearance and the absence of the *trabea* precludes the former, while the helmets in place of *coronae* rule out the latter.³ It is most likely that the relief depicts three *iuvenes*, possibly the leaders of the three *turmae* of the *lusus Troiae*, at a presentation of helms and arms at a celebration of the *ludi iuvenales*.⁴ This relief along with numerous other funerary reliefs and frescoes depicting similar scenes give further confirmation of the importance of such performances and festivals in municipal life throughout Italy.⁵

After the creation of the title *princeps iuventutis* the equestrian association of the imperial family seems to have been foregrounded. Images of emperors and their heirs as horsemen began to appear increasingly on coins. An interesting series of *sestertii* from the reign of Nero bearing the legend *DECVRSIO* depict the emperor in equestrian scenes.⁶ Nero's family were known for their skill in horsemanship and Nero himself was passionate about horses, particularly chariot-racing (Suet. *Nero*, 22). Sources record that he won the favour of the people for his performance in the *lusus Troiae* before the age

¹Gabelmann, "Ein Iuventusrelief in Fossombrone", in Cain et al. (eds.) *Festschrift für Nikolaus Himmelmann*, p. 370; Plate 59, 4.5

²*ibid.*, p. 369

³*ibid.*, pp. 371-2

⁴*ibid.*, p. 372

⁵*ibid.*, p. 373

⁶Smith, p. 813; Cunnally, "Leonardo and the horses of Nero", *The Burlington Magazine*, 130(1026), 1988, p. 689

of ten, and he also led a ceremonial procession of the Guards after his maiden speech in the Forum (Tac. *Ann.* XI, 11.15; Suet. *Nero*, 7).

As emperor Nero continued to promote equestrian displays and to participate in them himself. The newly inaugurated *Neronia* included exhibitions of horsemanship (Suet. *Nero*, 12) and the emperor's notorious personal interest in chariot-racing has received much scholarly attention. The event or events commemorated by the *decursio* coins has occasioned much debate. Several different types were designed, but all show Nero on horseback couching a spear, accompanied by other equestrian figures carrying spears or standards.¹ The images have been variously interpreted as representations of military processions, cavalry manoeuvres or equestrian displays involving the praetorian guard.² These suggestions are unlikely, as Nero took pains to emphasise the peacefulness of his reign and even refused to accompany the troops on military campaigns (Tac. *Ann.* XV, 36). The appearance of the praetorian guard in an official capacity within the city of Rome would also have occasioned comment from the sources.³

Smith proposes that the *decursio* coins depict the participation of the emperor in performances of the *lusus Troiae*, possibly together with his German bodyguard.⁴ He points out the correspondence between the scenes on the coins with the description of the *lusus Troiae* found in Vergil. However, the participants of the *lusus Troiae* were generally young boys; Nero himself took part before he reached the age of ten, as mentioned above. Smith reconciles this by citing Nero's obsession with eternal youth and the aura of adolescence which characterised his reign.⁵ This is a possibility, but it seems more likely that the coins merely depict the emperor's participation in equestrian displays which shared some characteristics with the *lusus Troiae*. As we have seen, other such events were celebrated both in Rome and elsewhere in Italy, designed to showcase the

¹Smith, p. 183

²Speidel, p. 27, Smith, pp. 183-4

³Smith, p. 185

⁴*ibid.*, pp. 188-189

⁵*ibid.*, p. 189

horsemanship of the *iuvenes*. It may be that the twenty-six-year-old Nero wished to show himself to best advantage, participating in the type of performance in which he excelled and which he clearly enjoyed. Since he had come to power young without following the usual *cursus honorum* or commanding men in the field, perhaps he wished to make the point that he nonetheless embodied the ideal of the Roman noble, and that he possessed all the traditional skills and abilities. Equestrian displays, unlike his stage appearances, would have been acceptable to Roman sensibilities. Certainly the *decursio* did not occasion any adverse comment from contemporary sources.

Chapter Four

Training of Horse and Rider

The prominence of the *lusus Troiae*, the *lusus iuvenalis* and other equestrian displays at public events is a clear indication that equestrian skill was prized in upper and middle class Roman society. Accordingly horsemanship must have formed an important aspect of the education and training of the sons of senators and knights. Not all would have been equally proficient or shown the same degree of enthusiasm, but there must have been sufficient youths with the requisite skills to participate in public displays. The horses too must have been trained to execute the complex manoeuvres described in the *lusus Troiae*.

The horse was not generally used as an agricultural animal in classical Rome, oxen and mules being preferred for regular farm work and transport (Columella, *De Re Rust.* II, 20.4). Horses were more expensive to breed and train, and the best were used mainly for the cavalry and in the circus.¹ It is reasonable to suppose that the *equus publicus* fell into this category, as did the horses on which the sons of knights and senators would train. Many wealthy landowners raised horses. According to Suetonius (*Caesar* 61), Julius Caesar rode an outstanding horse bred on his own private estate. Columella, Varro and Vergil all give advice relating to horse breeding, while wealthy *equites* such as Atticus and Lucilius also kept horses, implying that the practice was widespread.² It is therefore quite conceivable that a young man might enter the ranks of the *equites equo publico* with a horse raised on his family estates. In this case the *aes equestre* would be seen more in the light of an honorarium.

Hyland identifies approximately fifty different breeds of horses mentioned in ancient texts. Italy itself had many areas suitable for raising horses, and mounts from Campania were

¹Hyland, p. 30

²*ibid.*, p. 32

particularly prized as cavalry chargers.¹ In the later Empire horses from Spain, North Africa and Persia became popular.² No doubt opinions as to the best breed varied, as is the case today, and each man chose according to personal inclination. Similarly, a horse might be trained on the farm where it was bred or a man might purchase a trained horse from another breeder or dealer. Most information relating to the training of both horse and rider applies specifically to the military, and most research on this topic has focussed on this aspect as well. However, some inferences relating to general training for civilian riding can be drawn from various sources.

'The foal of a noble breed', says Vergil, 'steps higher in the fields and brings down his feet lightly' (*Georg.* III, 75-76). Here the poet is describing the best horse for racing, but the same characteristics would be sought in a horse intended to perform in public displays. The young horse, chosen for his courage and his intelligence, would be trained to the halter as soon as he was weaned, 'while still weak and trembling' (*Georg.* III, 75-76). At the age of four formal training would begin, using the *gyrus* or training ring, much like a modern lunging arena. The remains of such an arena have been excavated and rebuilt in Warwickshire.³ Representations on tombstones show that the long-reining technique used today was employed in Roman times as well.⁴ Vergil describes the various skills the young horse was expected to master, including moving with an even pace, cantering on either lead, galloping freely and showing obedience to the 'cruel curb' (*Georg.* III, 190-208). All these represent the standard skills expected of a well-trained dressage horse today, and all would have been required for a horse performing in the *lusus Troiae* or any other equestrian display.

In addition to basic schooling, the horse would also have been expected to perform more complex manoeuvres, such as those described in the *lusus Troiae*. Since this training parallels that of the rider the two will be discussed together. The manoeuvres of the *lusus*

¹Hyland, p. 73

²*ibid.*, p. 14

³*ibid.*, p. 104

⁴*ibid.*, p. 105

Troiae constituted an impressive display of horsemanship. Their danger is attested by the injuries sustained by both Nonius Asprenas and Aeserninus, as mentioned previously (Suet. *Aug.* 43). According to Vergil's description, horse and rider would have been required to regulate their pace in order to ride in formation, to charge, to perform a rapid turn at the gallop and to stop effectively, which is in fact one of the most difficult skills. In order to have effective control of lines of horses weaving in and out of each other, both horse and rider would have required a knowledge of the correct diagonal in the trot, and of the correct lead if performed at a canter. Speidel describes the skills required for the *lusus Troiae* as 'too ceremonial and stylised to be of much use [in combat]'.¹ However, most of the movements described above are similar to manoeuvres described in Arrian's *Ars Tactica*, used in the exercises performed in displays for the emperor and typical of those required to be mastered by the active cavalry.² A team of horse and rider accustomed to working at a high level of precision would also perform more effectively in combat although the more stylised moves would obviously be modified and abbreviated on the battlefield.

The age of the boys participating in this display varied, but all would have been under the age of sixteen, the age at which a young man assumed the *toga virilis*.³ Typically they were divided into their *turmae* by age, and Suetonius (*Tib.* 6) records that Tiberius led the older boys on one occasion. Nero himself won acclaim in the event at the age of nine or ten, as mentioned previously. For such young boys to achieve this level of proficiency implies training from an early age over a period of several years. Toynbee comments that horses must have received a very intensive training for participation in the *lusus Troiae*,⁴ and the same would undoubtedly be true for the riders also. Presumably the earliest training was received at home, with riding being 'simply one of the things boys were taught to do'.⁵ There is evidence that boys participating in a particular staging of the

¹Speidel, p. 101

²Hyland, p. 111

³Smith, p. 189

⁴Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art*, p. 170

⁵Hyland, p. 45

lusus Troiae would gather in advance for group training or practice. Plutarch (*Cat. Min.* 3.1) records that 'when Sulla was preparing for exhibition the sacred equestrian game for boys', the young participants refused to rehearse or train under Sextus, preferring Cato as their leader. Common sense indicates that in order to produce a polished performance extensive group practice would have been required for both boys and their mounts.

It is also possible that boys may have been sent to trainers for riding lessons, which would have ensured good riding habits and a greater uniformity of style. However, evidence for such formalised training seems to apply only to older boys. Cicero (*Pro Caelio* V.11) states that 'formerly, we had one year established by custom ... during which we practised our exercises and sports in the Campus Martius in our tunics'. This training was undertaken after assumption of the *toga virilis* and undoubtedly included equestrian exercises. Under Augustus formalised training for the sons of knights and senators was provided in the *collegia iuvenum*,¹ which by its title implies attendance by boys over the age of sixteen. By this age most of the boys would already have had extensive training in riding, particularly if they had participated in any performances of the *lusus Troiae*. All that can be assumed therefore is that boys received thorough training in equestrian skills from an early age, probably undertaken at home under a tutor, but including group practice with other boys in order to achieve the high level of proficiency required for public displays.

Boys of the upper classes thus received a solid grounding in traditional cavalry riding, although many of them would never serve in this capacity. This apparent contradiction has sparked much debate amongst scholars. The clear emphasis on militarised exercises and training for the *iuvenes* in the western parts of the Empire has been interpreted as basic preparation for army service.² Taylor even refers to the boys enrolled in the

¹Taylor, "Seviri Equitum Romanorum and Municipal Seviri", p. 158

²Mohler, "The Iuvenes and Roman Education", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 68, 1937, p. 442

collegia iuvenum as *tirones* or young recruits.¹ Certainly some of the young men trained in this way would embark on military careers, but the ranks of the *equites* generally provided officers not cavalrymen.² Until relatively late in the imperial period the cavalry was essentially made up of foreign auxiliaries. There were also many *equites* who remained within the civilian ranks, including writers such as Vergil, Horace, Tibullus and Ovid.³ Ovid in particular participated a number of times in the *transvectio*, which from the imperial period seems to have included a review by the emperor, for he reminds Augustus (*Tr.* II, 541-2) ...*cum te delicta notantem praeteriit totiens inreprehensus equus.*

A fairly simple explanation may be offered to resolve the apparent dichotomy. The *equites equo publico* held a position of honour because of their association with the ancient cavalry. The honour of the cavalry was related perhaps to nobility of birth but also to their equestrian skill. That horsemanship continued to be valued is patently clear in the emphasis placed on equestrian displays. Although ceremonial in nature, these displays continued to celebrate the skills which had come to represent the epitome of young manhood, instead of developing other forms of equestrian display with a civilian connotation. The displays of the Spanish Riding School represent a parallel example, where highly trained horse and rider execute breath-taking movements and leaps which have their origin in the fighting tactics of the battle-trained charger but which have now come to represent the pinnacle of dressage riding.

¹Taylor, "Seviri Equitum Romanorum and Municipal Seviri", p. 158

²Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, p. 27

³Taylor, "Republican and Augustan Writers enrolled in the Equestrian Centuries", p.480

Chapter Five

The Imperial Horse Guards

The tradition of an elite horse guard in Rome dates back to the *celeres*,¹ the illustrious three hundred who accompanied Romulus as a guard of honour (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* II, 13.1-4). The commander of the royal bodyguard, the *tribunus celerum*, seems to have held considerable authority. In his account of the overthrow of Tarquinius, Dionysius records that as *tribunus celerum* Brutus had the power of calling an assembly of the people (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* IV, 71.11). The royal horse-guard ceased to exist at the end of the monarchic period, but many scholars consider that the office of *tribunus celerum* survived in the form of the *magister equitum* of the republican period.² The existence of this office and title is a clear indication of the importance which continued to be attached to equestrian skill.

As we have seen, horsemanship continued to be prized in Roman society, and the Roman army readily engaged the services of auxiliary cavalry with skills superior to their own. In addition to the foreign cavalry Caesar also had a German horse-guard, an elite group of four hundred horsemen whose ability to swim and ride fast made their service invaluable in the Gallic campaigns.³ From the time of Augustus the horse-guard, recognised and honoured for their superior horsemanship, became an imperial fixture (Tac. *Ann.* II, 1626; Dio, LV, 24.7).

The primary function of the horse-guard was to protect the person of the emperor and as such it would not have been surprising if they were viewed as a symbol of oppression. Interestingly enough this does not seem to have been the case. The praetorian guard, being a detachment of the regular army and thus perceived as a military presence, caused

¹Hill *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, p. 3

²*ibid.*, p. 3

³Speidel, p. 13

offence by their presence in the city.¹ The Germans on the other hand constituted a private bodyguard and after the time of Julius Caesar seem to have been accepted readily. Their high status is attested by the honours granted to them by various emperors.² Gaius gave them rich gifts, while Nero honoured them with citizenship, a colony at Antium for horse-guard veterans and a free monthly issue of grain (Suet. Nero 9,10). Under Commodus the freedman Cleander rose from the position of horse-guard commander to praetorian prefect, an indication that command of the horse-guard was a mark of high distinction.³ Clearly the high status of the horse-guard derived from the prestige of personal association with the emperor, but recognition was certainly derived in large part from their horsemanship. Tacitus (*Ann.* II, 16.27) describes them as *delecto equite* while Juvenal (X.95) uses the term *egregii equites*.

The horse-guard were trained for war and were deadly in combat. However, their civilian role seems to have been equally important. They provided an impressive presence in the imperial ceremonies of *profectio* and *adventus*, the setting out and arrival of the emperor.⁴ Nero led a ceremonial march of the Guards after his maiden speech in the forum (Suet. Nero 7). The horse-guard participated in triumphs, games, pay-day parades, and funerals, their major task being 'to lend splendor to the capital'.⁵ Many of the equestrian displays mentioned in the sources were performed by the horse-guards, for example Nero's *decursio* which was discussed earlier, providing variety for a public who clearly enjoyed this kind of spectacle.

Although the members of the horse-guard were foreigners and not representatives of Rome's upper classes, the honour that they received is an indication of Roman attitudes towards those who demonstrated skill in horsemanship. Equestrian skill was not the only reason for the superior rank of the horse-guard, but it certainly played a role, and the

¹Smith, p. 184

²Speidel, p. 28

³*ibid.*, p. 52

⁴*ibid.*, p. 42

⁵*ibid.*, p. 131

guard's own pride in their ability and in their horses is attested by the depictions in reliefs and mosaics. Horses are rendered with great attention to detail, always shown with proudly arched necks, feet and tails lifted high. Of six hundred gravestones found at the horse-guard cemetery in Rome almost all portray horses.¹

¹Speidel, p. 109

PART TWO
EQUI CURULES: THE RACE-HORSES OF ROME

Chapter One

Chariot Racing in Rome

Throughout its recorded history, horse racing in its various forms has been the domain of the wealthy. The structure of the sport seems to have followed a general trend, still exhibited in its modern form. Those with the wherewithal to sustain this expensive industry control its organisation and derive prestige from the ownership of a champion horse. Those less affluent are not barred from participation, but make up the ranks of spectators whose enthusiasm (and wagers) ensure the continuance of the institution. This pattern is evident in the Roman sport of chariot racing, where we see the horse in yet another social role - the entertainer who delighted all levels of society with his performance in the circus.

The sport of chariot racing was already well developed at the time Rome was founded. The earliest use of light chariots with spoked wheels was in battle, revolutionising warfare in the ancient Near East from the fourteenth century BC.¹ Chariots at this time were a symbol of rank, and Eastern kings and aristocrats displayed their skill and power through hunting and target shooting from chariots.² Competition in hunting gradually developed into racing, a transformation which Olivová attributes to the Egyptian or Hittite cultures, although this remains unproven.³ Chariot racing was certainly known to the Mycenaean Greeks, as evidenced by stores of chariots and wheels listed in Linear B tablets, actual wheels found at Pylos, and pottery fragments from Tiryns showing chariots engaged in a race.⁴ Certainly competitive racing became a hallmark of classical Greek culture, with chariot racing being introduced into the Olympic Games by 680 BC.⁵

There has been much debate as to the origin of Roman racing. The Romans themselves held to an Etruscan origin for the sport (*Tert. De Spect. V, 2-5*). Livy (I, 35.8) records that

¹Olivová, "Chariot Racing in the Ancient World", *Nikephoros*, p. 66; Bennett, p. 42

²Bennett, p. 42

³Olivová, pp. 72-74

⁴Bennett, p. 43; Olivová, p. 70

⁵Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 158

the Circus was first laid out by Tarquin the Elder, with horses brought from Etruria for the inaugural games. Tacitus alone amongst ancient authors claims the importation of *equorum certamina* from Thurii, a Greek colony in southern Italy (*Ann.* XIV, 21.1). Both archaeological and literary records indicate a rich tradition of chariot racing among the Etruscans from as early as the sixth century BC, predating the founding of Thurii by at least a hundred years.¹ Murals from the 'Tomb of the Olympic Games' at Tarquinia, which are dated to the beginning of the sixth century, vividly portray the excitement of both competitors and spectators, and numerous other reliefs and friezes depict circus scenes.²

Further confirmation is found in Herodotus' record of equestrian competitions at the Etruscan city of Caere in ca. 540 BC, although as Humphrey points out there were probably not the earliest of their kind.³ In fact, ancient sources indicate a much earlier tradition. Tertullian (*De Spect.* IX, 4) attributes the introduction of the four-horse chariot to Romulus, 'at least if he and Quirinus are the same'. Livy's account of the inauguration of the Circus Maximus by the elder Tarquinius (I, 35.8) explicitly states that 'he celebrated the Games with greater splendour and on a larger scale than his predecessors', while Dionysius tells us that prior to this time spectators had stood to watch the races (*Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom.* III, 68.1-4). The implication is that events involving chariot racing were already well established by the time of Tarquinius, a tradition which pre-dated Greek influence.⁴

The archaeological record highlights important differences between the Greek and Etruscan racing styles, which are preserved in the Roman tradition and which further support the independent development of Etruscan racing. Etruscan art shows charioteers driving with their reins wrapped around their waists in the Assyrian style, a fashion

¹Humphrey, p. 64

²Auguet, *Cruelty and Civilization: the Roman Games*, p. 120; Olivová, p. 78

³Humphrey, p. 64

⁴Rawson, "Chariot Racing in the Roman Republic", *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 49, 1981, p. 1

perpetuated in Roman racing.¹ Greek charioteers are depicted in flowing robes while Etruscan and Roman drivers wore short, often coloured, tunics.² In addition, the Greek sport included ridden races as well as driven chariots, a practice which does not seem to have formed part of the Etruscan games.³ It therefore seems clear that Roman chariot racing derived from the Etruscan tradition and formed part of Roman public life from the earliest times.

In both the Etruscan and Roman traditions chariot racing had a strong religious connection, comprising an important part of public games. Funeral games also included races, a parallel with the Greek tradition.⁴ The earliest recorded games are those produced by Romulus in honour of the god Consus (Plut. *Vit. Rom.* 14.3), probably held as a celebration of the harvest.⁵ The early association of racing with the sun, moon and four seasons (Tert. *De Spect.* IX, 2-3) highlights the agricultural symbolism, although public games were by no means restricted to this context. One of the most important early celebration of games formed part of the *triumphus*, honouring Jupiter at the end of a successful military campaign, a tradition which continued into the imperial period.⁶ Regner thus accurately describes the *ludi circenses* as 'half sport, half military art under religious auspices'.⁷

At first votive games were held sporadically, gradually developing into the annual *Ludi Magni*, also known as the *Ludi Romani*, which were celebrated each September in honour of Jupiter.⁸ Livy (I, 35.8) records the marking out of the Circus Maximus by Tarquinius

¹Junkelmann, "On the Starting Line with Ben-Hur", in Köhne and Ewigleben,(eds.), *Gladiators and Caesars, The Power of Spectacle in Ancient Rome*, p. 92; Olivová, p. 79

²Rawson, p. 6; Junkelmann, p. 92; Olivová, p. 79

³Junkelmann, p. 99; Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 179

⁴Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 155; Rawson, p. 2

⁵Auguet, p. 121; Humphrey, p. 62

⁶Olivová, p. 80

⁷Regner, "Ludi Circenses" in R.E. s.v. 7: 1626; own translation

⁸Humphrey, p. 66; Olivová, p. 80

Priscus, with special seating areas designated for knights and patricians. It was probably at this time that games became sufficiently frequent to justify setting aside an arena dedicated for this purpose, as Humphrey suggests.¹ Dionysius (*Ant. Rom.* VI, 10.1) attributes the institution of annual games to the dictator Postumius in 499 BC, a date consistent with the development of racing as reflected by Livy. Certainly by the mid fourth century the *Ludi Magni* were held annually, independent of the military triumph, and by the second century had been joined by five other festivals which included chariot racing.² With the passage of time racing became more secular, but lost none of its popularity, continuing to hold a position of central importance in Roman society.

The manifest importance of chariot racing from the earliest period of Roman history serves to highlight the social role of the horse in Roman society, one aspect of which was discussed in Chapter 1. That racing was considered an appropriate offering to the gods, including Jupiter Optimus Maximus, is an indication of the value placed upon the performance of an outstanding horse and skilled driver. Pliny the Elder (*NH XXI*, 5.7) mentions the honour which derived from crowns or garlands won for a man by his slaves or horses, and the Twelve Tables also indicate that gold crowns won in races were considered a mark of high honour.³ Just as skill in horsemanship was of central importance in determining social status, as discussed in the previous chapter, so it seems that involvement in chariot racing played an equally important role, although in a manner more complex and more subject to change in different periods.

The organisation of racing in the early period of Rome's history has been the subject of much debate. A contrast is often drawn between Greek racing, in which wealthy noblemen drove their own teams, and the professional nature of Roman racing, controlled by the *factiones*.⁴ It is in fact very likely that early Roman racing was also in

¹Humphrey, p. 64

²Köhne, "Politics of Entertainment" in Köhne and Ewigleben,(eds.), *Gladiators and Caesars, The Power of Spectacle in Ancient Rome*, p. 10; Olivová, p. 81

³Rawson, p. 4

⁴Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 185; Olivová, p. 81

private hands, with prestige accruing to the owner of the winning horses even if he did not play the part of the charioteer.¹ References to *coronae* won in racing, which were held in high esteem, are found both in Pliny and the Twelve Tables, as mentioned earlier. Harris comments that a branch of the aristocratic Claudian *gens* bore the *cognomen* *Quadrigarius*, suggesting an ancestor with skill in handling a team.² Such an ability must have been considered worthy of note for it to be commemorated by the awarding and perpetuation of the name. There are also scattered references which demonstrate a continued aristocratic involvement in the sport. Tiberius and Germanicus both won *quadriga* events at Olympia,³ implying that skill in chariot driving continued to form part of the patrician upbringing although it was considered socially undesirable for nobles to take part in professional racing.⁴ Nero's passion for the sport is of course well known, and other emperors also acted as charioteers at various times.

Despite the involvement of private owners, Roman racing bore the stamp of a professional organisation from the outset. Greek racing, like athletics, was an amateur competition with similar prizes.⁵ Roman racing by contrast was provided as public entertainment with no fee to spectators, a right rather than a luxury.⁶ Livy (X, 47.3) states that palms, borrowed from the Greek tradition, were first awarded to the victors in 292 BC, while Pliny (*NH*, XXI, 4.6) attributes the presentation of the first gold crowns to Crassus in the late second century. This is consistent with professional entertainment rather than amateur competition. In addition, the large cash prizes later awarded to charioteers⁷ have their parallel in the salaries of professional players in the modern sporting industry.

¹Rawson, p. 2; Humphrey, p. 11

²Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 185

³*ibid.*, p. 174

⁴Olivová, p. 82

⁵Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 173

⁶Auguet, p. 17; Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 185

⁷Junkelmann, P. 87; Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 213

Within this milieu it is not surprising that prestige accrued from involvement in racing shifted away from private owners. Since races formed part of the entertainment for religious festivals the responsibility for their organisation came to rest on the magistrate presiding over the games. Considerable political *gratia* was derived from generous subsidy of the games, offending Cicero's sense of traditional *gravitas* (Cic. *De Off.* II, 56-60). When exactly this development occurred is uncertain, but the custom seems to have been firmly established by the second century BC.¹ As Harris points out, a magistrate wishing to be certain of a good show would be at the mercy of the good will of private owners.² A professional organisation would serve the needs of the state far better, and evidence of state contracts for race-horses is in fact found in Livy (XXIV, 18.10). According to this account, the high cost of the Second Punic War depleted the treasury to such an extent that in 214 BC the censors found themselves unable to contract for repairs to temples or for the supply of chariot horses (*equi curules*). They were approached by the contractors with a plea for business as usual. This is a clear indication that by this time there existed syndicates or at least partnerships which were accustomed to leasing horses for racing.³ The creation of such professional stables would ensure an adequate supply of horses for public games, and private owners no longer played a significant role.

It is tempting to suggest that the change of system was connected with the emergence of the four colours which became the focus of spectator loyalty in the imperial period. There has been considerable debate amongst scholars with regard to the introduction of the colours, and evidence from ancient sources is unclear.⁴ Tertullian (*De Spect.* IX, 5) states that the red and white *factiones* were established by Romulus, with green and blue being introduced later. Many modern scholars have understood 'later' to mean the early principate, based on a dubious interpretation of a passage in Pliny (*NH* XXIV, 53.186),

¹Rawson, p. 4

²Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 193

³Rawson, p. 6

⁴Cameron, pp. 57-61

in direct contradiction of other early writers who attribute all four colours to Romulus.¹ Etruscan tomb paintings from the sixth century BC show charioteers wearing coloured tunics,² and since Roman racing originated from Etruria it seems reasonable to accept an early origin for the colours. Perhaps prior to the organisation of professional *factiones* the colours held a religious symbolism, either representing the seasons or sacred to a specific deity, as Tertullian claims (*De Spect.* IX,5).

With the institution of the *factiones* chariot racing rapidly became a multi-million sestertertius industry; as complex as, and probably impacting more heavily on the national economy, than horse racing today.³ The four racing stables or *factiones*, each identified by colour, were privately owned by wealthy *equites*, men of the *equester ordo*, a class which already had a close connection with and knowledge of horses. In 5 BC Augustus granted 'that even senators should have the right of contracting to supply the horses that were to compete in the Circensian games' (Dio LX, 10.5), implying an equestrian monopoly prior to this time. Despite senatorial involvement, it is likely that most contractors continued to be *equites*. Pliny (*NH* X, 34.71) mentions the *eques* Caecina, a *quadrigarum dominus*, who used homing pigeons to carry news of the winning team to his country estate at Volterrae. In the later Empire, from the fourth century AD, chariot racing became an imperial preserve and the *factiones* were state-controlled.⁴ From this period horses were bred on imperial estates and private involvement decreased although it probably did not cease altogether.⁵ The discussion which follows will focus on the organisation of racing prior to the period of imperial monopoly.

The *dominus factionum* controlled the *familia quadrigaria*, the 'household' of slaves employed as charioteers, along with a large staff dedicated to the smooth running of the

¹Humphrey, p. 11; Cameron, pp. 57-61

²Olivová, p. 79

³Hyland, p. 1

⁴Cameron, p. 7

⁵MacMullen, "Three Notes on Imperial Estates", *The Classical Quarterly*, 12(2), 1962, pp. 278-9; Cameron, p. 10

business.¹ The chariot racing industry required what Piggott refers to as a 'techno-complex'.² An extensive horse-breeding industry was necessary to provide a selection of animals for training. Skilled handlers as well as charioteers must also be trained. The building and repair of harness and chariots constituted a separate industry of its own, as did the supply of suitable feed, with the different types of grains and additives necessary to keep race-horses in the peak of condition.³

Information from inscriptions, chiefly from the imperial period, provides a list of employees with their different roles, including trainers, veterinarians, stable boys and groundsmen to operate the starting gates and clean the grounds.⁴ Auguet estimates that at least 100 people were employed by each *familia*, although this probably covers only the major roles.⁵ The busy racing world thus encompassed many parts of the Roman world, from the quiet stud farms in the country, to the Circus itself with its noise and excitement, to the stables and training grounds on the Campus Martius 1-2 km away.⁶ This teeming industry must have impacted hugely on Rome's economy. Money was certainly made by the *factiones* and the charioteers, many of whom became extremely wealthy (Juv. VII.241; *ILS* 5287). The financial burden on the presiding magistrates, on the other hand, caused at least one consul to resign his office (Dio, LX, 27.2).

In the welter of details relating to origins, organisation and economy, it is easy to forget that this busy industry came into being through the value placed upon its central player, the horse. It is true that in the early days individual owners were honoured for the victories of their horses, and the crowns and palms awarded to them were highly prized. After the development of the professional *factiones* prestige devolved upon the presiding magistrate, to the extent that the *mappa*, the white cloth dropped to signal the start of the

¹Auguet, p. 146; Cameron, p. 42

²Piggott, p. 45

³*ibid.*, p. 46

⁴Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 213

⁵Auguet, p. 146

⁶Junkelmann, p. 87; Hyland, p. 219

race, became a common attribute of the consul in representations.¹ The spectators, however, did not turn out in their thousands to congratulate owners or to view the magistrate - their focus was on the race itself, on the horses and their drivers.

¹Humphrey, p. 651, n.78

Chapter Two

Deliciae populorum

The popularity of chariot racing cannot be disputed. Juvenal (XI.197) comments wryly 'all Rome is in the circus today. The roar that assails my ears means, I am pretty sure, that the Greens have won'. To the spectators, he adds, such a loss would equal the tragedy at Cannae. Of all the entertainments available to the inhabitants of Rome chariot racing seems to have held the greatest appeal. Guttman points out that the Circus Maximus was designed to hold 250 000 spectators as compared with the 50 000 which the Colosseum could accommodate, reflecting the greater attendance expected at the races.¹ The development of the Circus into a complex, sophisticated structure designed to cater to every aspect of racing is also an indication of the continued importance and popularity of the pastime.² So busy was the industry that it threatened to create a shortage in the supply of horses to the cavalry, if Dio (LIII, 30.7) is to be believed.

The fans seem indeed to have been fanatical in their support. Pliny (*NH*, VII, 53.186) records an incident in the first century BC in which the nobleman Lucius Domitius flung himself on the funeral pyre of a charioteer of the Reds who had died during the race. Three centuries later, Dio Chrysostomos (*Orat.* 77) describes the fans 'constantly leaping and raving and beating one another ... and flinging their clothing at the charioteers and sometimes even departing naked from the show'.³ The behaviour of modern soccer fans at premier league matches comes to mind. The outcome of specific races was of sufficient importance to lead supporters and charioteers alike into dabbling with witchcraft, although this was illegal.⁴ Astrologers were consulted and curses purchased, and numerous curse tablets have been recovered, some even depicting charioteers

¹Guttman, "Chariot Races, Tournaments and the Civilizing Process" in Dunning and Rojek (eds.), *Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, p. 140

²Humphrey, p. 5

³quoted in Hyland, p. 201

⁴Auguet, p. 144; Hyland pp. 228-9

pierced with nails.¹ Ammianus Marcellinus records three instances of prosecutions for witchcraft against charioteers (*Res Gestae* 26.3, 28.1, 29.3). The popular appeal of the sport is also demonstrated by the numerous depictions of racing in art of diverse media, including gemstones and signet rings.²

Juvenal's biting comment (X, 81) 'only two things really concern them: bread and the Games' is often quoted and for many historians aptly describes a mindless populace, devoid of judgment and interested only in entertainment. Other ancient writers denounce the racing mania of their fellows with equal scorn. The famous letter from the younger Pliny to Calvisius (*Epist.* IX, 6.2-3) dismisses the racing enthusiasm as *pueriliter*, a fatuous enthusiasm which takes no account of the skill of the drivers or the speed of the horses but is fixated only on the colour of the driver's tunic. Pliny's diatribe is surely the standard fare of the intellectual snob, holding himself aloof from common pursuits, declaring loftily *circenses erant, quo genere spectaculi ne levissime quidem teneor* (*Epist.* IX, 6.1). He gives the lie to this image himself, as he concludes a letter to the emperor Trajan with the words *signata est anulo meo, cuius est aposphragisma quadriga* (Pliny, *Epist.* X, 74.3). It is hard to imagine a man who truly evinces such a strong distaste for this pastime choosing a personal signet ring depicting a four-horse chariot.

Fanatical adherence to a team can be reconciled with interest in individual players quite easily if we consider a parallel with the modern sporting scene. British soccer fans remain devoted to the team of their choice, but each team nonetheless has its star players, whose lives are often followed no less assiduously by the press than those of film stars. The same fans who exhibit mob behaviour at premier league matches are quite capable of discussing the finer points of strategy, or dissecting the match point by point during replay. There is no reason to assume that racing fans in Rome were any different. Ovid's description of a chariot race (*Am.* III, 2) shows that spectators took note of competitive tactics, while Sidonius Apollinaris (*Carmina* X, 360 ff.) gives a detailed account of the

¹Humphrey, p. 305; Auguet, p. 144; Hyland, p. 229

²Vogel, "Circus Race Scenes in the Early Roman Empire", *The Art Bulletin*, 51 (2), 1969, p. 156; Humphrey, p. 204

appropriate use of rein and whip and the negotiation of turns.¹ Various inscriptions dedicated to charioteers (*ILS* 5283, 5285 - 5287) also give detailed lists of statistics, wins and losses, prize money and information about individual races. As Hyland suggests, Roman racing buffs no doubt discussed tactics and statistics, pedigree and performance as do modern racing enthusiasts.² Martial (*Epig.* III, 63) defines the fashionable young man or *bellus homo*, listing among his accomplishments the ability to recount the pedigree of the famous race-horse Hirpinus.

It remains to be determined whether or not the horses themselves were perceived as central to the sport, or whether spectators focussed only on the *factiones* or indeed the charioteers, as Guttman contends.³ Charioteers certainly held favoured status and frequently became very wealthy. The charioteer Diocles, who raced for the Reds in the second century AD, earned some 36 million sestertii in the course of his career (*ILS* 5287), an amount estimated as equivalent to 3 million pounds in spending power.⁴ Juvenal (VII, 241) complains that a teacher makes as much in one year as a jockey from a single race, while Martial (*Epig.* X, 53) addresses the charioteer Scorpis as *clamosi gloria Circi*, the darling of Rome.

Horses, however, were frequently stars in their own right. Martial (*Epig.* X, 9) comments wryly that for all his fame in the known world *non sum Andraemone notior caballo*. Inscriptions dedicated to charioteers frequently list the names of winning horses as well (*ILS* 5285, 5287, 5288). Horses carried palm branches in their harness and racing prizes included gilded measures for grain and a special portion of barley, thus rewarding steed as well as charioteer.⁵ Horses frequently appear as the focus of circus-related art, on mosaics and reliefs as well as on small objects such as lamps, bowls and plaques.⁶ In

¹quoted in Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 196

²Hyland, p. 201

³Guttman, p. 140

⁴Junkelmann, p. 87

⁵*ibid.*, p. 88

⁶Vogel, p. 156

particular there are numerous examples of mosaics from various localities depicting proud race-horses, including names and sometimes stable brands,¹ showing that the central role of the horse was recognised at least by those to whom they brought honour. Some horses merited their own inscribed tombstones, such as one from Rome (*CIL* 6, 10082) commemorating the mare *Speudusa*, 'fast as the wind'. On a darker note, horses were even named on curse tablets, the better to prevent a rival team from winning.²

The names given to race-horses are a clear indication that they were viewed as individuals. Toynbee comments that the names of race-horses far outnumber names recorded for other species of animal.³ Literary references, mosaics and inscriptions reveal an astonishing variety of names, many of which have usefully been compiled and categorised by Toynbee.⁴ Many names reflect typical racing aspirations, including *Invictus*,⁵ *Dominator*,⁶ *Superstes* and *Celer*.⁷ A large number are the names of gods and heroes, demonstrating that race-horse owners in Rome had no less grandiose notions than owners today. Other names are descriptive, denoting colours or physical attributes. Less imaginative are names of towns and rivers, while names derived from professions and occupations, such as *Advocatus*, *Patronus* and *Agricola*,⁸ bring to mind modern race-horses such as 'Politician'.

¹Ennaifer, pp. 817-858; Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: studies in iconography and patronage*

²Toynbee, "Beasts and their Names in the Roman Empire", *Papers of the British School at Rome*, XVI, 1948, p. 25; Humphrey, p. 320

³Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art*, p. 178

⁴Toynbee, "Beasts and their Names in the Roman Empire", pp.24-37; Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art*, pp. 177-183

⁵Ennaifer, p. 829

⁶*ibid.*, p. 832

⁷Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art*, pp. 178-9

⁸Toynbee, "Beasts and their Names in the Roman Empire", p. 29

Many names reflect individual characteristics, revealing the horses as distinct personalities. One can easily picture a horse named *Muccosus* (Snuffler)¹ or *Frunitus* (the merry one).² Would a charioteer rather drive *Benenatus*,³ whose name denotes his excellent breeding, or harness his chariot to *Volens* or *Animator*?⁴ It is hard to resist the sentiment behind the inscription from a stud farm at Constantine in North Africa, which has survived only in a drawing, stating *vincas, non vincas, te amamus, Polidoxe* (win or lose, we love you, Polidoxus).⁵

Names of horses also appear on small objects, such as terra-cotta lamps, metal bells, bone knife-handles, draught-counters, contortionates and gems.⁶ These everyday objects could have belonged to owners, trainers or charioteers, all of whom would be expected to hold their horses in affection. The large number of these items, however, makes it likely that many belonged to ordinary people who were not directly involved with horses - that is, to fans. Perhaps it is not too fanciful to suggest that these items represent the Roman equivalent of the merchandising which drives the film and publishing industries today. Horses were more than merely the engines for the chariots - they were frequently stars in their own right, beloved by the spectators and recognised for their achievements.

¹Ennaïfer, p. 851, Fig. 16; Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 102

²Ennaïfer, p. 824

³*ibid.*, p. 824

⁴Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art*, p. 178

⁵*ibid.*, p. 181

⁶Toynbee, "Beasts and their Names in the Roman Empire", p. 26; Humphrey, pp. 188 & 204

Chapter Three

Producing the Race-horse

As Piggott indicates, a flourishing racing industry would not be possible without an adequate supply of horses for selection, training and breeding.¹ Pliny (*NH* XVIII, 67.263) comments that the most lucrative form of stock-farming is to breed race-horses, while Vergil (*Geor.* III, 72 ff) makes it clear that horses destined for the Circus must be of noble breed and high spirit. The number of horses dedicated to this pursuit has been estimated by Junkelmann. Games, which included racing, usually formed part of a particular festival, which ranged from a single day to several weeks in length. In the Augustan period 77 days of the year were dedicated to racing, a number which rose to 177 by the fourth century AD.² In the imperial period special games to honour the emperor's military success might add 100 more days.³ A day's racing included ten or twelve events in earlier times (Dio, LX, 23.5), although this number increased dramatically in the imperial period (Suet. *Nero* 22; *Dom.* 4).

At an average of twenty four races a day (Dio, LX 27.2), Junkelmann estimates that a single day's events would require 700-800 horses for racing alone, and at least another 200 should be included for staff and acrobatic riders, who entertained the crowds between races.⁴ Even if horses raced on more than one day, as they must have done in order to chalk up the number of wins reported for some horses,⁵ the number of horses involved in a single festival is staggering. To meet this demand the breeding industry must have been extensive and very well established, and it is therefore not so surprising that Dio (LII, 30.8) complains of a shortage of cavalry horses due to the popularity of racing.

¹Piggott, p. 46

²Cameron, p. 175

³Olivová, p. 81

⁴Junkelmann, p. 98

⁵Hyland, p. 220

The Romans inherited horse-breeding practices from both the Etruscans and the Greeks. Etruscan paintings provide many images of beautiful race-horses with fine limbs and proud crested necks, exhibiting a wide variety of colourings.¹ Vergil describes the requirements for a top class race-horse: 'his neck is high, his head clean-cut, his belly short, his back plump, and his gallant chest is rich in muscles' (*Geor.* III, 79-81). Many such horses were produced on country estates both large and small. Vergil (*Geor.* III, 49 ff) and Juvenal (VIII, 108-110) with his description of 'a small herd of brood-mares with their stallion' provide evidence for small stud farms. The *factiones* possibly had their own studs or perhaps contracted with large stud farms, which may have carried out initial training of the young horses. Connection between stud farms and specific racing stables is suggested by a mosaic at Cherchel, Algeria, which depicts a horse (*Muccosus*) exhibiting both the Sabinus breeder's brand along with the letters PRA(SINUS) for the Green *factio*.² The famous *Maison des Chevaux* at Carthage is connected to a neighbouring house, which contains a pavement stating FELIX POPULUS VENETI, also suggesting a link to the Greens, although other *factiones* are well represented in the images.³

The keeping of stud records is consistent with a complex and sophisticated horse-breeding industry. Juvenal (VIII, 57-58) declares 'the horse we most admire is the one that romps home a winner', regardless of his origin or the performance of his forebears. The truth is, however, that in race-horses breeding does count. The offspring of the famous horse Hirpinus may have been sold off in ignominy if they did not perform (Juvenal, VIII, 62-3), but his pedigree was well known to Martial's *bellus homo* (*Epig.* III, 63) and stud records must have been kept. Names and origins of horses are frequently listed in inscriptions (eg. *ILS* 5287, 5288) and numerous race-horses depicted in mosaics sport a brand on

¹Hyland, p. 203

²Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 102; Hyland, p.217; Humphrey, p. 310

³Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 96

one flank.¹ These brand-marks probably denoted the breeder and assisted with both identification and record-keeping, particularly if horses were sold to other areas. A wide variety of such marks has been identified from different sources. More comprehensive written records were presumably kept also. The *Codex Theodosianus* (XV, 10.1) regulates that Greek race-horses sent to the circus in Rome should not have their names changed, suggesting that a fairly extensive documentation system existed at this time, which allowed officials to keep track of horses from various sources.²

Race-horses seem to have been raised throughout the Roman Empire, with different breeds enjoying popularity at different periods. In the early days of Roman racing, horses for the Circus were no doubt bred mainly in Italy. Etruscan horses were brought in for the first games held by Tarquinius Priscus (Livy, I, 34.8) and horses from Campania, Sardinia and Sicily were of good quality.³ The development of professional racing stables along with the expansion of Rome's territories brought fresh opportunities. Evidence for the origins of race-horses is most richly provided by charioteer inscriptions, in particular two lists from which the charioteers' details have been lost. One list names 74 horses giving also their breed or country of origin; 46 of these are African, with a few each from Gaul, Mauretania, Spain, Sparta, Cyrenaica and Thessaly (*CIL* VI, 10053). The other list records that the charioteer won 584 victories with African horses and 1378 with Spanish horses (*CIL* VI, 10056).

Spain and Africa therefore seem to have been huge producers of successful race-horses; it is no coincidence that these areas are also the richest source of mosaics depicting named horses and charioteers. A number of sites in Spain and Roman North Africa have been identified as large private stud farms.⁴ In particular the Sorothus villa at Sousse (Hadrumentum) has mosaics which depict the landscape of the stud farm and which stress

¹Salomonson, *Mosaïque aux chevaux de l'antiquarium de Carthage*, pp. 94-107; Ennaïfer, p. 826; Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 93

²Hyland, p. 213

³*ibid.*, p. 210

⁴Cameron, p. 10

the owner's horse-breeding interests.¹ The horses in the mosaics bear the Sorothus brand. The Sorothus estate has been located in the hills near Soul Ahras by an inscription mentioning the *saltus Sorothensis*.² Hadrumetum had its own monumental circus and presumably the Sorothus horses were local stars. The *Polidoxus* inscription from Oued-Athmenia, mentioned previously, accompanied a mosaic of six horses decked for the circus standing in front of a large villa with stables and outbuildings.³ Excavations of this site have revealed an extensive farm establishment with large stables.⁴ There is also evidence to indicate that African studs exported horses to other racing centres. A Barcelona mosaic depicting four *quadrigae* racing has the brands *C. Sabinus* and *Sorothus* visible on two of the horses' flanks.⁵ Both of these brands have been identified from African mosaics. Yet another mosaic from Medeina in Tunisia shows three named horses in a transport-ship, clearly labelled *hippago*, providing evidence that race-horses were exported or at least travelled to races in other centres.⁶

The wealth of information that has been discussed builds up an image of a vastly complex and highly sophisticated industry which existed chiefly to serve the needs of entertainment. As Hyland points out, not all horses bred for racing would ultimately be suitable, and the overflow would supply the cavalry or provide mounts for private owners.⁷ Nonetheless the resources committed to the industry seem staggering, even from a modern perspective, particularly when one considers that little mention has been made of supporting industries such as the producers of harness and chariots. These topics are beyond the scope of this discussion, but the point is well made that they suggest fruitful ground for further studies.

¹Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art*, pp. 180-181; Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 94, note 18

²Humphrey, p. 320

³Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 94

⁴Berthier, "Établissements agricoles antiques a Oued-Athménia", *Bulletin d'archéologie algérienne*, 1962-5, pp. 7-20

⁵Hyland, p. 211

⁶Toynbee, "Beasts and their Names in the Roman Empire", p. 32

⁷Hyland, p. 209

Chapter Four

Training the race-horse

The chariot horse did not begin his racing career until the age of five,¹ much later than modern race-horses which are run as two-year-olds. Training a horse for chariot racing was undoubtedly more complex than training for modern flat racing or even steeplechasing, and a later start is consequently not surprising. Most chariot horses were stallions, which were not withdrawn to stud as with modern racing but were instead used for breeding during their careers.² Mares would not be quite as strong or as fast, with the added disadvantage of coming into season periodically, although a few racing mares are recorded in inscriptions.³ Vergil (*Geor.* III, 179 - 208) describes the early training for a race-horse, and accounts from other authors such as Pelagonius provide evidence of a gradual program designed to build up strength and stamina and to ensure that a horse was fit for the rigours of the circus.⁴ The best horses raced until the age of twenty, which speaks well of their training and subsequent treatment.

According to Vergil (*Geor.* III, 185-188) early training began before the foal was weaned, by accustoming the youngster to the feel of a halter and to being handled by the trainer. At this point too the trainer would introduce the young horse to the sounds of the circus. He was taught 'to bear the trumpet call, to endure the groaning of the dragged wheel, and to hear the jingle of bits in his stall' (*Verg. Geor.* III, 183-184). Vergil's comments reflect a common sense approach designed to produce a horse unafraid of his task and therefore more likely to perform well. At this stage training would not differ from that required for a horse destined for the cavalry or for private use. In the young horse's fourth summer more formal training would begin (*Verg. Geor.* 190). Basic schooling would include work on a lunge-line to produce suppleness and obedience, and long-

¹Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 210; Hyland, p. 215

²Hyland, p. 214

³*ibid.*

⁴*ibid.*, p. 215

reining as a precursor to working on the yoke. Numerous representations on tombstones show that the latter technique was in common use, as mentioned previously.¹

Ancient sources contain scant information relating to the specific training of chariot horses, but much can be inferred from descriptions of the races themselves as well as from the design of harness and chariots. In the first instance a chariot horse would require both speed and stamina. Each race involved seven laps of the arena, covering a total distance of three to five kilometres and lasting approximately eight minutes.² The horses would not have raced flat-out for this entire distance. Junkelmann estimates a speed of 75 km/h up the long side of the *spina* or barrier, slowing down considerably to ca. 25-30 km/h for taking the turn.³ Nonetheless a horse would need to be at the peak of fitness to perform successfully in more than one such race over the course of a festival, and in addition would need to have the control to slow down and speed up according to the demands of the race. Obedience to and trust in the driver would have to be absolute for a successful team.

Training would therefore have required multiple components. Extensive schooling would be necessary to provide suppleness for negotiating tight turns and responsiveness to commands, as discussed in the section on training the *equus publicus* in the previous chapter. Chariot horses were generally driven using snaffle bits, requiring a high level of schooling to ensure obedience.⁴ Roman charioteers also drove with reins tied around the waist, steering by shifting their body weight.⁵ This technique avoided the potential for sweaty reins to slip through the fingers and also left the hands free for use of the whip.⁶ A horse would require special training for this style of driving once accustomed to harness

¹Hyland, p. 105

²Harris, "Lubrication in Antiquity", *Greece and Rome*, 21(1), 1974, p. 34;
Junkelmann, p. 96; Hyland, p. 204

³Junkelmann, p. 100

⁴Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 172; Hyland, p. 225

⁵Junkelmann, p. 29; Dunbabin, "The Victorious Charioteer on Mosaics and Related Monuments"; p. 86

⁶Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 205

and chariot, and a solid groundwork of schooling in the early phases of work would be invaluable. In addition, miles of ground-work at different paces would build up muscle and stamina, allowing the horse to run freely for long distances. Vergil (*Geor.* III, 192-194) adjures the trainer to 'let him challenge the winds to a race, and skimming over the open plains, as though free from reins'.

Feeding would be equally important for building strength and muscle. Vergil (*Geor.* III, 205-206) advises 'when the colts are now broken, let their bodies wax plump with coarse mash', but to avoid overfeeding as this might produce too mettlesome a spirit. Pelagonius (*Ars Vet.* II.24) describes the feed ration used by Cappadocian breeders, which contained barley, horse beans, wheat, chick-peas, kidney beans, vetch, fenugreek and sparrow eggs.¹ This exotic recipe provided a very high protein mix suitable for a horse in hard work, and it is likely that different trainers and breeders had their own trusted formulae based on the same mix of common sense and traditional lore that has continued to be characteristic of the horse world.

Roman racing involved chariots in various combinations and the chariot horse would have to be accustomed to being harnessed singly or in a team. Long reining, as mentioned previously, would familiarise the horse with the feel of reins touching his sides, after which the yoke, pole and traces could be introduced.² The chariot itself constituted a lighter load than has often been assumed. Racing chariots were nothing like the heavy lumbering vehicles portrayed in the *Ben Hur* films, which took as their model the elaborate triumphal chariots used in processions.³ Both the triumphal and the racing chariots derived ultimately from the two-wheeled war chariot, but the racing variety had the lightest possible construction while still being very strong.⁴

¹quoted in Hyland, p. 42

²Hyland, p. 216

³Junkelmann, p. 92; Piggott, p. 47

⁴Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 171

Depictions of racing chariots in reliefs and mosaics show that they had a long straight axle with small light wheels, suitable for negotiating sharp curves.¹ The body was small and low, constructed from a wooden framework with interwoven straps for the floor. Such a chariot (based on reconstructions) would have had a mass of 25-30 kg, and a singly yoked horse therefore pulled a load of around 100 kg including the mass of the charioteer.² The total mass would be divided between the horses of a team, representing a load far less than the weight carried in a horseback race, although a direct comparison cannot be made since a chariot horse would bear the load on chest and shoulders instead of directly upon his back. In order to get the most out of a chariot horse, this stage of training as well as racing proper would most sensibly be delayed until the animal had matured and developed sufficient muscle to manage the work easily.

The design and efficiency of the Roman harness has frequently been debated. Chariot horses were harnessed by means of a yoke attached to the draught-pole by a breast-strap, the same system used for harnessing oxen and other draught animals.³ Casson, *inter alios*, comments that a breast-strap could slide up and constrict the throat, which would be both inefficient and cruel, and unlikely to permit the horse to achieve any degree of speed.⁴ Junkelmann argues that the chest-strap was usually stabilised by attachment to the belly girth at the withers, which would prevent it from riding up, an arrangement clearly depicted in numerous mosaics and reliefs.⁵ Recent experiments by Spruyette demonstrated that horses harnessed Roman style were quite capable of pulling a load of up to a metric ton.⁶ Hyland provides the information that modern harness racing employs a similar arrangement, most suitable to a lightweight vehicle.⁷ Roman race-horses appear to have been appropriately outfitted for their task.

¹Junkelmann, p. 91

²*ibid.*, p. 92

³Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, p. 181; Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 171; Hyland, p. 216

⁴Casson, p. 181; Hyland, p. 216

⁵Junkelmann, p. 90

⁶*ibid.*

⁷Hyland, p. 216

A horse schooled to obedience for a rider and accustomed to harness and yoke must still be trained to draw a chariot. No doubt the trainers who instituted the sensible program outlined in the preceding discussion first accustomed the new recruits to the sight and sound of the chariot before attempting to harness them up. A common and successful method of training a new horse for harness work is pair him with an experienced teammate, and *bigae* were probably used before moving on to teams of three or four.¹ At this point the trainer could assess the capabilities of an individual horse more accurately in order to determine his best position within the team. Races were run in an anti-clockwise direction around the arena, so that even in a *bigae* each horse would have different tasks. The situation became more complex with races involving *trigae* or *quadrigae*, which were the most common.²

In a *quadriga* the centre pair of horses, termed the *iugales*, was under the yoke, with the outer pair or *funales* linked to the yoke but drawing the chariot by traces.³ Scholarly opinion is divided on which horse, or pair of horses, was considered the most important. The Diocles inscription (*CIL VI, 10048*), *inter alia*, suggests that one horse was considered the leader of the team and was usually placed as the inside yoke-horse. Most of the named horses in this inscription are identified by the term *introiugis*. Harris identifies the right yoke-horse as the decisive one of the centre pair,⁴ but *introiugis* surely implies the inside position. It is also possible that the term *introiugis* should simply be translated as 'within the yoke', with no distinction then being made between the two centre horses. The yoke horses bore the majority of the load and kept the pace even, and would consequently need to be the steadiest, with the inside horse guiding the chariot smoothly around the turns without skidding. This would be consistent with the role of a lead horse. Many of the horses named in the Diocles inscription (*CIL VI, 10048*) are specifically

¹Hyland, p. 217

²Junkelmann, p. 89; Hyland, p. 220

³Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 171

⁴*ibid.*, p. 210; on an anti-clockwise circuit the right-hand horse would be on the outside, from the charioteer's perspective

identified as *introiugis*, contradicting Hyland's speculation of their identity as *funales*.¹

Added confirmation of the importance accorded to the yoke horses is provided from mosaics. There are numerous representations of 'the victorious charioteer' together with his team, in which both the driver and some of the horses are identified by name.² In the mosaic of the charioteer Eros from Dougga the two yoke horses, Amandus and Frunitus, are named.³ Only the left-hand (inside) yoke horse, Inluminator, is named in the depiction of Marcianus from Merida.⁴ The mosaic of the charioteer Polydus from Trier has the name Compressor at the bottom, but it is uncertain to which of the two centre horses this refers.⁵

The trace-horses also played an important role, however. Since they were not directly controlled by the yoke, they needed to be extremely responsive and obedient to the driver.⁶ Hyland suggests that the inside trace-horse would have had to be the most versatile member of the team as well as the strongest, since he would have been closest to the turning post and would have needed not only to adjust his own pace carefully but also to impose his will on his team-mates in order to avoid disaster.⁷ The inside *funalis* was therefore critical for negotiating tight turns successfully, although the outside trace-horse was equally important to provide stability and coherence to the team. It is the latter position which the Greeks considered to be decisive.⁸

It was therefore no mean feat to train a chariot horse to perform effectively in a team. The successful race-horse would be responsive and obedient to his driver while at the same time responding intelligently, and as a member of a team, to situations encountered

¹Hyland, p. 207

²Dunbabin, "The Victorious Charioteer", p. 82

³Bennett, p. 41

⁴Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, p. 316

⁵Dunbabin, "The Victorious Charioteer", Plate 6, Fig.8

⁶Auguet, p. 130

⁷Hyland, p. 206

⁸Harris, p. 171; Hyland, p. 206

in the course of a race. A horse in training for chariot racing would need to be tried out in different positions to ascertain his best placing and to give him sufficient practice to understand his role within the team. Horses would also be tried out in different team combinations to ensure parity of stride and compatibility of temperament, as Hyland astutely points out.¹ Once a horse was accustomed to working in a team special training for the race itself could begin. As mentioned previously, many mosaics show Roman charioteers driving with their reins tied around the waist, a technique which could not be used until the horse was actually working with a chariot.

A horse also needed to be prepared for the mechanics of the race. From early in the history of Roman racing starting gates or *carceres* were used to ensure a fair start. Livy (VIII, 20.2) dates the introduction of *carceres* in the Circus Maximus to 329 BC, and starting gates are clearly evident in a number of circuses which have been excavated.² Humphrey provides a comprehensive and detailed discussion of the design and mechanism of the *carceres*.³ The Circus Maximus had room for twelve chariots, each stall being wide enough to accommodate a team of eight horses, while other circuses could accommodate only the *quadriga*.⁴ A team of horses would need to be accustomed to entering the starting stalls without fuss and standing ready until the start of the race. This is less easy than it sounds, as trainers of modern race-horses will readily attest. Ovid (*Tr.* V, 9.29-30) describes the horses impatient to be off, pawing at the *carceres* and butting against them with their heads. The races probably also provided the inspiration for his representation of the horses of the Sun, breathing fire into the air and beating at the restraints with their feet (Ovid, *Met.* II.154-5). The best horses would have shown the eagerness and spirit attested by Ovid, but an over-excitabile horse might panic in the enclosed space and cause injury to himself and his team-mates.

¹Hyland, p. 217

²Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 168; Humphrey, p. 25 and elsewhere

³Humphrey, Chapter 4

⁴Junkelmann, p. 99

At the signal, the dropping of the *mappa*, the gates were released.¹ A clean start as the stalls opened would give the team an advantage and would depend on reaction of both horses and charioteer. A trainer could not realistically expect a novice team to perform successfully if their first experience of the start was at their first official race. Hyland's suggestion of training tracks at the major studs is reasonable,² but at the very least trainers would have provided some form of practice gate. Training would also be necessary to accustom the horses to remaining within their lanes until the break-point, a regulation designed to prevent collisions in the early part of the race.³ The Elder Pliny (*NH XXXV*, 58.199) informs us that the finish line was marked on the track using chalk, and the lanes were probably marked in the same way.⁴

A charioteer expertly directing a team of horses around the circuit, negotiating tight turns around the *metae* without mishap and completing the course in the shortest time possible, would already constitute an impressive display of horsemanship and teamwork. In an actual race the driver and his team would have to employ skilful tactics to reach the finish ahead of his competitors. In team races where more than one *auriga* raced for the same *factio* various forms of teamwork would have been employed to block a driver from a competing team.⁵ Sidonius describes the typical manoeuvres employed in a race.⁶ Crossing the break-line at just the right point, weaving between other chariots or slipping into a gap to attain a more advantageous position, holding the horses' strength in reserve and choosing the right point to give them their heads would all have required experience and judgment on the part of the *auriga*. The horses would also have needed experience to understand what was required of them and to respond appropriately. This experience can only be obtained in the race itself, and a good trainer would no doubt run a series of practice races before introducing a team to the circus for the first time.

¹Humphrey, p. 156

²Hyland, p. 217

³Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 188; Humphrey, p. 85

⁴Humphrey, p. 85

⁵Junkelmann, p. 92

⁶Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, pp. 196-197

Other tactics were more ruthless and aggressive. There were rules against foul play, and officials were on site to ensure that these were obeyed, but it would be difficult to prevent all infringements, such as charioteers striking their opponents' horses. Pelagonius (*Ars Vet.* XXX, 410-413) records many remedies for injuries to eyes and head.¹ In addition to being well schooled, responsive, strong and fit a successful chariot horse would therefore also need a certain measure of aggression so that he would respond to such a situation by pushing forward rather than shying away from the threat and thus losing ground. Aggression and courage would also be necessary to successfully cut across the path of another chariot, a tactic which could well cause a collision or *naufragium*. Accidents of this type are depicted clearly in circus mosaics from Gerona, Barcelona and the Piazza Armerina.² In modern equestrian sports such as racing and polo a horse may exhibit impeccable skill and impressive speed, but nonetheless fail to distinguish himself due to a fear of being bumped or pushed. Doubtless the same occurred in the chariot racing world.

The race was further complicated by the presence of various non-competing attendants in the ring. Inscriptions identify the role of *hortatores* within each *factio*, officials who seem to have been responsible for pacing and spurring on each team.³ Many mosaics and reliefs depict riders on horseback preceding a specific *quadriga*.⁴ Other referees responsible for preventing infringements of the rules and for judging the finish would also have been in the arena, and many circus representations show the presence of individuals on foot. Some of these would have been the *sparsores*, young boys whose task was to splash water, either onto the horses' heads⁵ or, as Harris suggests, onto the chariot

¹quoted in Hyland, p. 224

²Balil, "Mosaicos Circenses De Barcelona Y Gerona", *Boletin de La Real Academia de la Historia*, CIL, 1962, p.24 & p. 38; Polzer, "The Villa at Piazza Armerina and the Numismatic Evidence", *American Journal of Archaeology*, 77(2), 1973, Plate 25

³Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, p. 213; Humphrey, p. 195

⁴Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 89; Polzer, Plate 25; Humphrey, p.181

⁵Humphrey, p. 198

wheels to reduce friction.¹ This must have been a particularly dangerous task and reliefs frequently show these boys under the wheels of chariots.² The presence of such attendants would be an added distraction for both the *auriga* and his team.

A young, novice race-horse might also find the race-day atmosphere of the circus unsettling. In Rome the chariot horses were stabled on the Campus Martius, a distance of 1-2 km from the Circus Maximus itself.³ The Circus could not possibly have accommodated all the horses involved in the day's racing, so that it is easy to picture a steady stream of horses with handlers moving between stables and Circus, as suggested by Hyland.⁴ Stalls were probably provided at the Circus itself for the teams entered in a series of consecutive races, to save time and ensure that the horses were fresh. The number of horses and handlers behind the scenes, the roar of the crowds and the between-race entertainment would have created a highly charged atmosphere which was bound to make the horses edgy. 'Match temperament' could only be acquired by experience. Inscriptions provide evidence of different types of races including the *annagonum* which was specifically reserved for first-time runners,⁵ further evidence of a measured approach to training.

Critics tend to make much of the danger and cruelty of Roman chariot racing, pointing to the spectacular collisions which often resulted in the deaths of charioteers, and no doubt caused injury and death to horses. Certainly the potential for injury would be very great in a sport requiring such great skill and which made frequent use of tactics such as cutting directly across the path of a rival team. A large number of inscriptions to charioteers show that early deaths were not uncommon.⁶ On the other hand, charioteers such as Diocles (*ILS* 5287) and Calpurnianus (*ILS* 5288) lived long enough to retire, with

¹Harris, "Lubrication in Antiquity", p. 35

²Junkelmann, p. 98

³*ibid.*

⁴Hyland, p. 220

⁵*ibid.*, p. 227

⁶Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, pp. 205-209

Calpurnianus even arranging a monument for himself within his own lifetime. As Junkelmann comments, the profession of charioteer was considerably safer than that of a gladiator, and not much more dangerous than that of a modern racing driver.¹ Certainly horses suffered injury and death in the course of their racing careers, an occupational hazard. The best horses, however, were still racing at twenty years of age (Pelagonius, *Ars Vet.* I).²

One could make a case for the inherent cruelty of the sport, as indeed many detractors argue against horse racing and steeplechasing today. The Romans should, however, be acquitted on the charge of unthinking cruelty and callous lack of concern for the well-being of their race-horses. A race-horse represented a considerable investment of money, time and effort and it is hardly likely that horses would have been wasted wholesale. The training program which has been outlined above shows a careful, reasoned approach to producing animals strong and fit for the rigours of racing. Roman trainers seem to have been in agreement with the admonition of Xenophon (*Eq.* XI.6) that 'what a horse does under constraint...he does without understanding and with no more grace than a dancer would show if he was whipped and goaded.'

Other evidence shows that race-horses were given excellent care, within the limitations of contemporary veterinary practice. As mentioned previously, an *eques* who failed to care for his horse according to an approved standard would forfeit part of his stipend.³ Race-horses seem to have been given similar attention. At least for the *Ludi Romani* and *Plebei*, and most likely for other festivals as well, a *probatio equorum* was held on the day before the races began.⁴ This ceremony of approval probably involved a selection process to determine which horses would race, and could very likely have included an inspection of soundness, as Hyland suggests.⁵ Since the festivals were religious occasions

¹Junkelmann, p. 97

²quoted in Hyland, p. 215

³Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period*, p. 34

⁴Rawson, p. 11

⁵Hyland, p. 219

and the races were considered an offering to the god it is highly unlikely that an unsound horse would have been permitted to race.

The *factiones* had their own qualified veterinarians, of whom Pelagonius was one, to ensure the continued health and fitness of their horses. A complete discussion of Pelagonius' treatise, and of veterinary medicine in general, is beyond the scope of the current work. It is sufficient to remark that a vast array of treatments was available to the Roman veterinarian, and the *Ars Veterinaria* shows a remarkable awareness of different types of injuries and conditions. In addition to treatment of specific ills there is also evidence for preventative measures. Vergil's description of the ideal race-horse includes concern for the quality of the hoof: 'his hoof scoops out the ground, and the solid horn gives it a deep ring' (Verg. *Geor.* III, 87-88). Pelagonius includes many remedies for improving the quality of the hoof, recognising the importance of strong, healthy feet for any horse in hard work.¹ Mosaics depict race-horses with tails bound up and sometimes with bandaged legs.² Flying tails could pose a danger to both the *auriga* and his team, since tail hairs wrapping themselves around the reins could easily cause a fatal accident.³ Bandages on the legs provided some support and protection against injury, and are used in equestrian sports today.

What of horses which did not succeed, despite the thorough and rigorous training program? Juvenal (VIII, 65-57) provides a grim image of the failed race-horse sold at auction: 'these slow and plodding descendants of noble bloodstock will end up turning a mill-wheel, neck-galled from the collar, fit for no other work'. It is tempting to dismiss this dispiriting description as Juvenal's personal bile, his own idea of a fitting end for his aristocratic contemporaries who relied on their noble birth to bring them honours. Threshing grain was in fact the only regular agricultural function for horses in Roman society (Columella, *De Re Rust.*, II, 20.4), and being sold for farm work was certainly a possibility. This need not have had the gloomy outcome described by Juvenal, since

¹Hyland, p. 226

²Ennaïfer, pp. 845-858; Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 95

³Hyland, p. 225

horses were more likely to have been well-treated by the farmer as the expensive and useful commodity they were, although the possibility of mistreatment cannot of course be dismissed out of hand. The working horses depicted in the mosaic from Oudna, dated to the late second or early third century AD, certainly look well fed and content.¹ Alternatively, the investment of time and money which a race-horse represented makes it very likely that unsuccessful race-horses were sold for general riding, as is frequently the case today.

Successful race-horses seem to have retired with high honours. Nero provided them with fine cloaks (presumably rugs) and gave money for their upkeep (Dio, LXI, 6.1). Many were retired to pasture, as Ovid (*Tr.* IV, 8.19) describes 'lest the steed that has won many palms should fall, dishonouring his victories, lazily now he crops the meadow grasses'. Under the late Empire it was legislated that retired race-horses from imperial studs in Cappadocia and Spain be maintained on fodder from the State granaries.² Some race-horses even received their own memorials. A number of tombstones for race-horses have been identified, honouring their victories in life, such as the stone commemorating the mare Speudusa which was mentioned previously.

¹Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 112, Fig.101

²Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art*, p. 168

Chapter Five

The Victorious Horse

'The horse we most admire', says Juvenal (VIII, 58-59), 'is the one that romps home a winner, cheered on by the seething roar of the crowd'. Chariot racing was about winning and the role of the horses in victory was readily acknowledged. Prizes were given both to the charioteer and his horses, as already mentioned earlier. The winners would celebrate their glory with a victory lap, while the crowd would often pelt them with flowers, garlands and small coins.¹ Several representations clearly show an official presenting a prize to the winning team in the centre of the track.² The Piazza Armerina mosaic depicts the winning horses with proudly arched necks and lifted forefeet, and smug expressions below the festive palm branches in their bridles.³ Vergil (*Geor.* III, 102) describes the horses' own response; 'the grief each shows at defeat or the pride in victory'. Ovid (*Hal.* 69-70) too provides a vivid image of the horse's recognition of his star status; *nonne vides, victor quanto sublimius altum attollat caput et vulgi se venditet aurae*. Horses are by nature competitive, and their proud enjoyment of their own success is one of the aspects which makes equestrian events popular for spectators.

The theme of victory is very much to the fore in artistic representations of the Roman circus and racing in general. Dunbabin has made a detailed analysis of depictions of the victorious charioteer in Roman mosaics, identifying distinctive schemata which recur in art from different parts of the Empire.⁴ In such images, which may or may not represent real individuals, the figure of the victorious charioteer serves as a metaphor for victory in a wider sphere.⁵ In the same way the image of the victorious horse can be seen as an emblem of *felicitas*, intended to evoke success and good luck.

¹Humphrey, p. 88; Dunbabin, "The Victorious Charioteer", p. 68, n.23

²Humphrey, p. 154

³Polzer, Plate 25; Humphrey, p. 227, Fig.114

⁴Dunbabin, "The Victorious Charioteer", p. 66

⁵*ibid.*, pp. 83-85

It is beyond the scope of the present work to make a comprehensive study of the art of the Roman circus, which is after all a vast topic. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the role of the victorious horse in the evocation of Fortuna. For the purposes of this discussion, representations of chariot horses will be divided into three types, viz., a team driven by their charioteer, individual horses with a single attendant, and unaccompanied horses in various poses. Dunbabin has examined the first type from the perspective of the charioteer. Revisiting these images from the horses' viewpoint reveals that they have been rendered with an equal attention to detail.

The expressions of the horses in the Piazza Armerina mosaic have already been mentioned. The mosaic of the charioteer Eros from Dougga also portrays the horses as individuals.¹ Although the charioteer is proportionally much larger, the horses have individualised facial expressions and care has been taken to depict their different coloured coats. All the horses wear plumes, and the two named yoke horses, Amandus and Frunitus, are shown arching their necks proudly. Two mosaics from Merida also show the horses with proudly uplifted forelegs, arched necks, pricked ears and plumed headdresses,² while the facial expressions of the horses in a circus mosaic from the Via Appia are particularly fine.³ The attention to detail, even on the horses' faces, indicates that the horses no less than the charioteer were considered an important part of the victory motif.

There are a few mosaics which depict individual horses with an attendant. One such is the early third century mosaic from Sousse which depicts four named horses, each accompanied by an unnamed attendant.⁴ The horses are clearly the focus of the image, which is probably intended as an overall celebration of horse-racing since all four *factiones* are represented by the coloured tunics of the attendants. The horses have bandaged legs, tails bound up with ribbons and wear crests of palm branches. They are

¹Bennett, p. 41 gives an excellent colour representation

²Dunbabin, "The Victorious Charioteer", Plate 8, Figs. 15 & 16

³*ibid.*, Plate 7, Figs. 11 & 12

⁴Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 95, Fig. 83

depicted standing on hind legs, necks proudly arched and ears pricked; a beautifully rendered symbol of the spirit of the circus and pride in victory.

Numerous representations of unaccompanied horses are found, either singly or in facing pairs. The 'Mosaic of the Horses' at the *Maison des Chevaux* in Carthage is probably the best example of depictions of single horses. This large mosaic is divided into sixty-one illustrated panels, only five of which contain images of charioteers.¹ The remaining fifty-six are devoted to individual horses, depicted with sumptuous harness, palms on their heads, collars of *phaleres* and ribboned tails. Many of the horses bear stable-marks on their flanks, testifying to a wide range of owners/breeders represented in the mosaic.² Names are not included, but each horse is accompanied by characters or a mythological scene which suggest a name by association, perhaps providing a puzzle for the entertainment of guests.³ Such a guessing game would be most effective if the horses indeed represented real contemporary circus champions. The names suggested by the images agree with those familiar for circus-horses from elsewhere.⁴ This unusual pavement is therefore dominated by the topic of the victorious horse, celebrating as it does the stars of its day.

Facing pairs of horses, of which there are a great many examples, hold particular interest as symbols of good luck. A mosaic from the House of Sorothus in Sousse depicts a pastoral scene with mares and foals in the centre panel flanked by four medallions at the corners each containing a pair of horses.⁵ The named horses are matched by colour and in the centre of each pair is a victory palm. A second pavement from the same site, now destroyed, depicted four named horses facing each other in pairs, also separated by a victory palm. Hovering Cupids bestowed garlands of bay leaves on the horses, which

¹Ennaïfer, p. 825

²*ibid.*, p. 826

³Dunbabin, *Mosaics from Roman North Africa*, p. 95

⁴*ibid.*

⁵Ennaïfer, p. 853, Fig.19; Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 93, Figs. 81 and 82

were shown with plumed heads and proudly lifted forefeet.¹ These images clearly celebrate the triumphs of specific horses, but the presence of victory palms and wreaths serve as a reminder of the good fortune associated with victory.

Depictions of victorious horses contain recurring elements which clearly express their association with fortune or luck. Many of the names which appear in mosaics have fortunate connotations, for example *Benenatus*, *Superstes*, *Adamatus*, *Fortunatus*.² Although these may indeed be the names of actual race-horses it is also possible that they have simply been selected by the artist for their symbolism.³ In a number of the mosaics the horses wear collars with *phalerae*, decorative medallions which frequently bear symbolic images. The crescent-shaped *phalerae* worn by the victorious team from the Piazza Armerina mosaic⁴ suggest an allusion to the goddess Luna and could be considered an evocation of good fortune.

Other good-luck symbols such as palm branches and laurel wreaths, mentioned previously, appear frequently. The right-hand yoke-horse in the Merida mosaic sports an image of a two-handled cup, possibly a *kantharos*, on his left flank.⁵ This could be a stable-mark but is more probably an emblem of good luck, particularly since the stable-mark GETULI is already evident on the right flank and shoulder of the other yoke horse. Good luck emblems such as stalks of millet, ivy plants and olive branches are also frequent motifs.⁶

Dunbabin recognises a steady progression from the theme of four victorious race-horses representing all four *factiones*, to pairs of horses and then individual horses as separate

¹Ennaïfer, pp. 832-833 and p. 854, Fig.21

²*ibid.*, p. 824

³Dunbabin, "The Victorious Charioteer", p. 82

⁴Humphrey, p. 227, Fig. 114

⁵Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, p. 316

⁶Ennaïfer, p. 835; Dunbabin, "The Victorious Charioteer", p. 83

and isolated motifs.¹ Gradually allusions to the circus decrease and disappear, and horses are identified less frequently with the *factiones*, but they are consistently named and retain their trappings of victory. By the fourth century AD the image of the victorious race-horse had become a straightforward symbol of victory, an emblem of good luck.

¹Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, p. 103

CONCLUSION

This study has aimed at a reassessment of Columella's 'noble horse'. An investigation of the ceremonial and public roles of the horse demonstrates that he was more than merely a military accoutrement or means of transport. The importance of the cavalry in the early history of Rome is not in dispute, although many questions still remain concerning the exact structure and organisation of this division at various periods. Evidence from ancient sources indicates that cavalymen were not chosen solely on the basis of class, as has been suggested by some authors,¹ but were drawn from all ranks of society.² This dissertation has argued that selection was made on the basis of superior skills in horsemanship and mounted fighting tactics, logical criteria for the development of an effective cavalry. Members of the equestrian centuries enjoyed a position of privilege within early Roman society, honour being accorded to them in recognition of their mastery of equestrian skills in addition to their social status. As the *equites* ceased to serve as an active cavalry and developed into a distinct social class, horsemanship continued to be viewed as a hallmark of the *equester ordo* and the right to the title *equus equo publico* remained a mark of distinction within the class. Possession of and mastery over the 'noble' horse was therefore a central element in the determination of Roman social structure.

Horsemanship continued to be foregrounded and celebrated in various public displays, providing excellent proof of Xenophon's assertion (*Eq.* XI.9) that 'a horse is a thing of such beauty...none will tire of looking at him as long as he displays himself in his splendour'. The dignity of the *equester ordo* was celebrated in the annual *census equester* and the *transvectio*, in which thousands of *equites* wearing striking ceremonial dress and riding gleaming mounts would parade through the streets of Rome, to the enthusiastic delight of the public. Equestrian skill was prized among the patrician classes as well. The sons of knights and senators rode together on many occasions in public

¹Alföldi, p. 44

²Momigliani, p. 23

displays, of which the *lusus Troiae* were probably the best known and most common. There is numerous evidence of such events being held at various festivals throughout the western Empire, and the enthusiastic participation of members of the imperial family also attests to their importance.

Horsemanship was clearly a skill prized by the senatorial classes and due attention was therefore given to the training of both horse and rider. Most literary sources on this topic deal with the training of the Roman cavalry, but evidence gleaned from Vergil's description of the *lusus Troiae* makes it possible to draw inferences concerning the specific skills which would have had to be mastered. The type of riding and the high level of proficiency required for public performance implies an intensive training program over a considerable number of years, thus identifying advanced riding as an important component in the educational program for sons of both knights and senators. Evidence from inscriptions, paintings and reliefs demonstrates that similar displays were held in other parts of Italy as well, suggesting that this type of educational program was valued throughout the western part of the Roman world from an early period.

The importance accorded to superior horsemanship is also evident in the position of privilege held by the imperial horse guards, an elite body which perhaps had its origins in the royal bodyguard of Romulus, a tradition revived by Julius Caesar with his four-hundred strong German guard.¹ Although the men who formed the imperial horse-guard were foreigners they were nonetheless held in high honour. Their high status ultimately derived from the prestige of personal association with the emperor, but recognition was also given to their superior horsemanship. The horse-guard corps also participated in public displays and parades. All these aspects of the ceremonial and public role of the 'noble' horse are clear indications of his central importance to the Roman perception of rank and class.

¹Speidel, p. 13

Chariot racing constituted an equestrian display of a different kind. In its early history, horse racing formed an important part of religious festivals, which also played a central role in public life. A celebration of the skill and speed of the horse therefore held sacred connotations and it is not surprising that the circus and the horse are represented by an enormous body of art in diverse media. Just as ownership and mastery of the horse enhanced and even defined the status of the *equus*, involvement in chariot racing also provided a means of acquiring prestige. At first honour was accorded to the owner of the winning horse, but with the development of racing as a professional organisation, prestige devolved upon the magistrate presiding over the games. In the later Empire the role of the emperor as president of the games became an important feature of imperial power. This dissertation has focussed on the Republican and Early Imperial periods, drawing on a variety of sources to shed light on the structure of the horse-racing industry and on its social importance. This exploration has provided evidence of a large and important industry, involving large stud farms devoted to the breeding of race-horses, particularly in the provinces of Roman North Africa and Spain. There is still ground for fruitful research to be carried out in this area; for example, questions need to be answered as to the overall organisation and regulation of the industry, the subsidiary industries which serviced racing and the role played by the industry on the development of the Roman economy.

In the consideration of the history, organisation and mechanics of chariot racing the horse itself has tended to be forgotten. The evidence examined in this study illustrates clearly that although charioteers received their share of adulation, the horses of the arena were stars in their own right. They feature by name in poems by Juvenal and Martial; they are represented in inscriptions and in works of art, many of which celebrate the successes of individual horses. This study has sought to focus the attention on the centre player, the horse, and to that end has presented a detailed analysis of the training of the Roman race-horse. Recent research into the design and operation of harness and chariots coupled with information from ancient sources reveals an intensive training program which represented a considerable investment of both time and money, yet again emphasising the importance of the horse in Roman society. This point is further made by

the wealth of circus and horse motifs which appear in Roman art. An analysis of depictions of the victorious horse, particularly those found in mosaic art, reveals a steady progression from the depiction of specific horses to horses as a racing motif and culminating in the victorious horse as a stand-alone symbol of victory and good luck.

Many aspects of the relationship between man and horse in Roman society remain to be investigated. No attention has been given to the horses on country estates, used for pleasure riding and also for hunting, an activity well represented in Roman art. Equally there has been no discussion of the *equus vulgaris*, to use Columella's designation (*De Re Rust.* VI, 27.1), although Rome undoubtedly possessed many such horses, whose lesser breeding, unsuitability of temperament or failure to achieve in the arena relegated them to humbler occupations and less fortunate lives. A complete understanding of the place of the horse in the Roman world is not possible without a more detailed consideration of the role played by these less celebrated equine cousins. This field of study is therefore potentially rich ground for further research, providing a somewhat different slant on the structure of Roman society and its values. It would be interesting, for example, to examine the extent to which the honour given to the 'noble' horse affected the way in which horses of lesser breeding were considered, and to draw comparisons between different parts of the Empire as Roman society developed. Roman mythology provides yet another source for examining the horse as a symbol and its role in the development of imperial iconography, thus adding to the work begun by Dunbabin.¹

This dissertation has not attempted to provide a comprehensive overview of the field, but represents merely a starting point through its examination of the Roman horse in a social context. The evidence examined clearly illustrates that Columella's 'noble horse' held a position of much greater importance in Roman society than has previously been recognised. Aeschylus' Prometheus (*Prom.* 465-469) boasts of his achievement in being the first to have 'tamed to the rein and drove in wheeled cars the horse, of sumptuous pride the ornament', a sentiment which was echoed in the Roman spirit and did much to

¹Dunbabin, "The Victorious Charioteer on Mosaics and Related Monuments"

shape and influence the structure of Roman society and its economy. It is remarkable that there is no period in over a thousand years of Roman history, from the time of Romulus to the fall of the Empire, when the horse was not in some way recognised as a symbol of rank and honour. Roman imagination was captured also by the noble bearing, speed and beauty of the horse. Vergil (*Georg.* III, 72-88) celebrates these qualities in his description of the noble horse with his high neck, clean-cut head, his 'gallant chest rich in muscles', the fire in his nostrils and the ring of his hoof as it paws the ground. Roman horses take their place among the steeds of legend and the gods, declares the poet (*Georg.* III, 89-94):

*talis Amyclaei domitus Pollucis habenis
Cyllarus et, quorum Grai meminere poetae,
Martis equi biiuges et magni currus Achilli,
talis et ipse iubam cervice effundit equina
coniugis adventu pernix Saturnus, et altum
Pelion hinnitu fugiens implevit acuto.*

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