

“... and Allah took a handful of Southerly wind... and created the horse”

The history of international equestrian sports

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The aim of this paper is to chart the relationship between men, women and horses with focus on equestrian sports. The degree of internationality of these sports, as well as the question of whether a sport can be seen as international if only men *or* women participate, are discussed. Furthermore, the diffusion of equestrian sports are presented; in short, equestrian activities spread internationally in different directions up until the late 19th century. Since then Olympic Equestrian events (dressage, show jumping and eventing) have been diffused from Europe. Even though men and women are allowed to compete against each other in the equestrian events, the number of men and women varies widely, irrespective of country, and until this imbalance is redressed, equestrian sports cannot be seen as truly international.

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*Allah took a handful of southerly wind,
blew His breath over it,
and created the horse.
Thou shall fly without wings,
and conquer without any sword, O, Horse!*¹

Introduction

The title of this article is derived from an old Bedouin legend and indicates the horse's position as one of the most important domesticated animals for mankind. Humans and horses have worked and played together, and numerous representations in traditional and modern art reveal the horse's significance. In many cultures, a beautiful horse has been a source of prestige. The purpose of this article is to chart the international history of the relationship between men, women and horses. Focus is on equestrian sports, and questions regarding gender and the international status of equestrian sports will be tentatively discussed and it is argued that both men and women have to be included in a sport on equal terms for the sport to be regarded as international.² The article is based on the results of previous research, quantitative data and information from Internet sites.

International sport and gender

The concepts *international sport* and *gender* are used in order to analyse the history of equestrian sports. A simple definition of an international sporting event is to say that it has to include participants from more than one country. Yet, to define a sport as international is much more complicated. What is sport, and in how many countries or on how many continents must a sport be practised to qualify as international? Mangan (2001) contends that England was the birthplace of several significant modern sports, and that the British exported these sports to other parts of the Empire as well as other European countries. By means of the globalisation process, European and, somewhat later, American sports spread

1 Anonymous Bedouin legend, as quoted in *Mr. Darcy Takes the Plunge* (2010) by J. Marie Croft.

2 There is, however, a growing body of literature on women and horses, as well as on gender issues and equestrianism, see Adelman, M., & Knijnik, J. D. (Eds.) (2013). *Gender and equestrian sport: Riding around the world*. London: Springer; Dashper, K. L., & University of Keele. (2010). *Exploring gender in British equestrian sport*. Keele University; Dashper, K. (2012). "Together, yet Still Not Equal? Sex Integration in Equestrian Sport". *Asia-pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*:3, vol 3, 213–225; Hedenborg, S., & Hedenborg White, M. (2012) "Changes and variations in patterns of gender relations in equestrian sports during the second half of the twentieth century", *Sport in Society*:3, vol 15, 302–319; Hedenborg, S., & Pfister, G. (2012) "Écuyères and 'doing gender'. Presenting Femininity in a Male Domain - Female Circus Riders 1800-1920" *Scandinavian Sport Studies Forum* (sportstudies.org) Vol 3, 2012, pp. 25–47; Hedenborg, S. (2009) "Unknown soldiers and very pretty ladies: Challenges to the social order of sports in Post-War Sweden", *Sport in History*:4, vol 29, 601–620.

and became the “property” of new nations.³ This article will investigate whether equestrianism can be seen as an international sport and if so, which disciplines, as well as where the sport has developed and the directions in which it has been diffused.

In addition, it will be argued that the question of a sport’s international range must be connected to gender. A sport practised by men must be performed in a greater number of countries than a sport practised by women in order to be recognised as an Olympic sport. The different requirements are related to men’s and women’s unequal opportunities to participate in sport, as well as to gender expectations. Inherent in the concept of gender as an analytical tool is the idea that so-called masculine and feminine characteristics are socially and culturally determined, rather than effects of biological sex. Gender analysis also takes into account that what is regarded as masculine or feminine is fluid, and can vary from one context to the next.⁴ However, this article will focus on whether both men and women have access to equestrian sports, and say less about gender constructions.

Prehistory

It is not known precisely when the horse began to play an important part in human civilisation. Over time, however, equestrian activities developed and spread around the world. This diffusion has taken different directions. Prehistoric art shows that humans hunted horses as prey at least 30,000 years ago. A small horse sculpture (the Vogelherd horse) was found in a cave in Germany, and was likely carried by its owner as a hunting mascot.⁵ Horses also feature in cave paintings, such as the ones found in the Lascaux Cave in France that have been estimated to be between 17,000 and 18,000 years old, and the ones in Ardèche that are believed to be 20,000 years old. These paintings were made using a makeshift brush – a stick that had been chewed on at the end – and simple materials such as clay, coal and various minerals mixed with fat. Similar paintings can also be found in other parts of Europe.⁶

Archaeological evidence from 4000 BC shows that humans drove and rode horses at the time. The horse was hitched to the carriage using a primitive harness consisting of a collar and girth. The 16th century BC also saw the invention of the spoked wheel, which made carriages easier to pull. Around the same time, two-wheeled war chariots and metal bits were developed, making the horses easier to manoeuvre. The “breastcollar” harness was not developed until the 4th century BC in China.⁷ The first known saddle was created

3 Mangan, J. A. (2001). *Europe, sport, world: Shaping global societies*. London: Frank Cass, 1–4. Mangan also underlines that the process is not only working in one direction – sports from other parts of the world influence European sports as well.

4 Lorber, J. (2005). *Breaking the bowls: Degendering and feminist change*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company; Connell, R. (2002). *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity; Hedenborg, S., & Pfister, G. (2012). “Introduction”, *Sport in Society*:3, vol 15, 283–286.

5 <http://www.historyofinformation.com/expanded.php?id=3917>

6 http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/lasc/hd_lasc.htm; http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chav/hd_chav.htm

7 Hemingway, S (2004). *The Horse and Jockey from Artemision: A Bronze Equestrian Monument of the Hellenistic Period*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

somewhat earlier and used by Assyrian cavalry around 700 BC. This saddle did not have stirrups (which aid the balance of the rider); the earliest finding of a stirrup-like toe-loop comes from India, dating back to 200 BC. A few hundred years later, the stirrup spread from Asia to Europe (appearing first in Hungary).

The Arab world and the Greek and Roman Empire

Equestrianism has a long history in the Arab countries, from which the Arabian horse originates and where the horse has been used mainly for transportation. The horse plays an important role in the legend of Al Khamsa, a tale about the Prophet Mohammed. According to this legend, Mohammed arrived at an oasis after a long journey through the desert, and released his herd of horses. Being thirsty, the horses went to drink from the oasis. Just before the herd reached the water, however, Mohammed called them back. Five mares responded and subsequently became the Prophet's favourites. According to the legend, the Arabian horses of today descend from these mares, and horses that can be traced back along these bloodlines are called Al Khamsa Arabians. The horse's significance is also clear from the stories of Mohammed's life, the Hadith texts. In one of them (Hadith-Caliph 634–44H, 20–21) children are described as swimming, shooting and horse riding.⁸

Horses were also used in sports in antiquity. Pot decorations, statues and written documents prove that races were held as early as the 11th century BC.⁹ Horse racing is even mentioned in the twenty-third book of Homer's *Iliad*, in descriptions of the funeral games held in honour of Patroclus' death when chariot racing featured as one of the main events. Horse racing became increasingly popular in the 8th century BC, as Greece developed extensive contacts with Eastern civilisations. Driving with a team of four horses was introduced at the Olympic Games in 680 BC, and mounted horse racing was introduced shortly thereafter, in 640 BC.¹⁰ In the Roman Empire, races were held in the large market squares, or in special arenas similar to the Greek hippodrome. One of the most famous arenas was Circus Maximus outside of Rome, constructed in the 3rd century BC. Races ran counter-clockwise, comprising varying numbers of laps. Horse racing had been held in the same area in the Etruscan civilisation, and the area continued to be used for equestrian sports until 549 AD. 350 years earlier, the arena had been reconstructed following a fire.¹¹

8 Haifaa, J et al. (2010). "Islam, women and sport", in Benn et al. *Muslim women and sport*, London: Routledge, 25–40; cf. Essa, I. (2010), "Challenges facing South African Muslim secondary school girls' participation in physical activities, physical education and sport", in Benn et al., 185–197, in which horse riding, *wrestling* and swimming are pointed out as the sports recommended by the Prophet Mohammed.

9 Hemingway, *The Horse and Jockey from Artemision...*

10 Hemingway, *The Horse and Jockey from Artemision...*

11 Hemingway, *The Horse and Jockey from Artemision...*

Middle Ages through to the 19th century

During the Middle Ages after the Empire fell, the horse found new uses in battle and agriculture. War chariots lost in importance, and a heavier horse was bred to meet new demands. Previously, it was believed that this new and sturdier horse was needed to endure the weight of the riders and their armour, but it is perhaps more likely that the heavier horses gave the knights' lances greater force in battle. Horses became increasingly integral to agriculture, despite being more expensive than oxen and mules. Horses were also used in the new tournaments that became popular during this time. As in real battles, the heavier horses lent more strength to their riders. Besides tournaments, another popular form of entertainment was hunting, where horses also had a central role, as can be seen in many contemporary tapestries. Mounted races and chariot races also continued; in Ireland between the 7th and 14th century AD, for instance, large competitions similar to the antique Olympic Games were arranged, featuring mounted racing and chariot racing.¹²

The diffusion of equestrian activities outside of Asia, Europe and Northern Africa happened relatively late in the history of the horse–human relationship. The Spanish explorers brought the domesticated horse to America in the 16th century, and 200 years later British invaders brought stock horses to Australia. In Australia and North and South America rodeo was developed as a sport, and horse polo spread from Persia to India, and from India to Britain. Subsequently, horse polo was exported from Britain to the colonies and South America.¹³

Although horse polo and rodeo are still popular in many areas, they cannot really be considered international sports unlike horse racing, which is one of the sports that has followed the pattern described by Mangan.¹⁴ Jockey clubs were first established in England and Ireland during the 18th century. Over time these clubs established regulations, took charge of the registration of horses, and eventually licensed riders, trainers and owners. In France, the revolution and the Napoleonic wars delayed the development of horse racing, and even though a jockey club was established in 1834, the first official races were not held until the mid-nineteenth century. In the United States and in Sweden, jockey clubs were established somewhat later, in 1894 and 1890 respectively.¹⁵ At this time, jockey clubs had been or were being formed in Africa and Asia as well.

12 Chevenix, T. C. (1970). *A History of horsemanship*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

13 Gilbert, M., & Gillet, J. "Women in Equestrian Polo: Cultural Capital and Sport Trajectories", in Adelman, M. & Knijnik, J. (Eds.), *Gender and Equestrian Sport: Riding Around the World*, London: Springer; Adelman, M. & Becker, G. "Tradition and Transgression: Women Who Ride the Rodeo in Southern Brazil", in Adelman, M., & Knijnik, J. (Eds); Arluke, A., & Bogdan, R. (2014). "Taming the Wild. Rodeo as a Human-Animal Metaphore", in Gillet, J., & Gilbert, M. (Eds), *Sport, animals, and Society*, New York: Routledge. Nance, S., (2014). "A star is born to buck. Animal celebrity and the marketing of professional Rodeo", in Gillet, J., & Gilbert M. (Eds); Kelm, M., (2011). *A Wilder West: Rodeo in Western Canada*, Vancouver, BC: UBC Press 2011.

14 Mangan, J. A. (2001). *Europe, sport, world: Shaping global societies*. Horse polo is played professionally in 16 countries and was included in the Olympic program 5 times between 1900 and 1936. Gilbert, M. & Gillet, J. (2013), "Women in Equestrian Polo: Cultural Capital and Sport Trajectories"; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Olympic_medalists_in_polo.

15 Vamplew, W. (1988). *Pay up and play the game: Professional sport in Britain, 1875-1914*. Cambridge Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 113–115, 152; Chevenix, T. C. (1970). *A History of horsemanship*, 183–4; D'Arcy, F. A. (1991). *Horses, lords, and racing men: The Turf Club, 1790-1990*. The Curragh, County Kildare: The Turf Club, 1–12. See also Blom, K. A., & Lindroth, J. (1995). *Idrottens historia: Från antika arenor till modern massrörelse*. Farsta: SISU idrottsböcker, 116–118. For France, see Bouchet,

Horses in the 20th century

In the 20th century, the importance of the horse in everyday life declined. Engine-driven cars, buses and trucks replaced horse drawn vehicles in the transport sector, as has the tractor in agriculture and forestry. Horses were used in the army up until WW1, in which they played an important role; for example, the British army used 1 183 228 horses during the war, 484 000 of which were killed.¹⁶ After WW1, horses lost their military role in many European nations.¹⁷

While the horse lost its importance in the above-mentioned sectors, equestrian sports have thrived. Horse racing, which developed as an international sport already in the late 19th century, has continued to advance its position in global sport and today the horse racing industry is blossoming in the Arab countries. The Arabian horse is also celebrated anew. In 1970, the World Arabian Horse Organization (WAHO) was established. Initially, the organisation mainly comprised Western countries, but North African nations have joined in the last 20 years. Tunisia, Morocco, Oman and Algeria were among the first, joined later by Saudi Arabia and Iraq. A WAHO conference is held approximately biannually (1992 Egypt, 1994 Morocco, 1996 United Arab Emirates, 1998 Bahrain, 2007 Syria, 2009 Oman) – the last one in Doha in 2011.¹⁸

Other equestrian disciplines spread from Europe and developed into international sports during the 20th century. Although dressage was part of Socrates' student Xenophone's work, the foundation of the European equestrian schools where dressage was important is dated to the late 1500s. It was not until the 1800s that further international dispersion of the sport occurred.¹⁹ Although jumping over obstacles had been practised earlier, jumping competitions in arenas did not appear until the late 19th century in France, Ireland and the UK. National organisations promoting show jumping were established and the sport began to spread globally at the beginning of the 20th century.²⁰

In 1921, Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) was formed. The founding members were France, the United States, Sweden, Japan, Belgium, Denmark, Norway and Italy.²¹ Today, FEI has 132 affiliated national federations around the world.²² FEI is the governing body for all international events in dressage and para-equestrian dressage, jumping, eventing, driving and para-equestrian driving, endurance, vaulting, and reining. It establishes regulations and approves equestrian programmes at Championships, Continental and Regional Games as well as the Olympic & Paralympic Games.²³ Up until recently, male rep-

G. (1993). *Le cheval à Paris de 1850 à 1914*. Genève: Droz, 268; For America, Case, C. (1991). *Down the backstretch: Racing and the American dream*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 18.

16 <http://www.militarhistoria.se/nyhetsfronten/forsta-varldskrigets-hastar-pa-natet/>

17 Hedenborg, S. (2011). "The horse in Sweden: workmate and leisure pursuit", in Antonsson, H., & Jansson, U. (Eds), *Agriculture and forestry in Sweden since 1900: Geographical and historical studies*. Stockholm: The Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry.

18 <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/198602/the.arabian.horse-the.arab.east.htm>

19 Smith, J. S. (2014). "Human-Horse Partnerships. The discipline of dressage", in Gillet, J., & Michelle, G. (Eds).

20 Thompson, K., & Birke, L. (2014). "'The horse has got to want to help': human-animal habituses and networks of relationality in amateur show jumping", in Gillet, J., & Michelle, G. (Eds).

21 <http://www.fei.org/fei/about-fei/history/history-of-the-fei>

22 <http://www.fei.org/fei/about-fei/structure/national-federations->

23 <http://www.fei.org/fei/about-fei/structure>

representatives from Western Europe (and briefly from the United States) have controlled the organisation (Table 1).

Table 1 *Presidents of the FEI: gender, nationality and term of office.*

President	Gender	Nation	Year
Baron du Teil	M	France	1921–1927
General Gerrit Johannes Maris	M	Netherlands	1927–1929
Major Jhkr Karl F. Quarles van Ufford	M	Netherlands	1929–1931
General Guy V. Henry	M	USA	1931–1935
Baron Max Von Holzling-Bertstett	M	Germany	1935–1936
Major Jhkr Karl F. Quarles van Ufford	M	Netherlands	1936–1939
Magnus Rydman	M	Finland	1939–1946
Baron Gaston de Trannoy	M	Belgium	1946–1954
Prince Bernhard of Lippe-Biesterfeld	M	Netherlands	1954–1964
Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh	M	UK	1964–1986
Anne, Princess Royal	F	UK	1986–1994
Infanta Pilar, Duchess of Badajoz	F	Spain	1994–2006
Princess Haya bint Al Hussein	F	Jordan	2006–

<http://www.fei.org/fei/about-fei/history/fei-presidents-since-1921>

The first female president of FEI, Princess Anne, was elected in 1986. In the last decades, the Arab countries have played a more important role in equestrian sports (as they have in horse racing). The Arab members of FEI are Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.²⁴ HRH Princess Haya, married to Shejk Muhammed of Dubai, became the president of FEI in 2006. She has also served on the IOC.²⁵ Not only nationality and gender are interesting to study in relation to the governing body of equestrian sports. From the titles of the presidents of FEI it is clear that they come from the upper strata of society.

The international diffusion of some of the equestrian events can also be seen in the history of the Olympic Games. In the Stockholm Olympic Games in 1912, the current equestrian disciplines (dressage, show-jumping and eventing) were included for the first time. At that time, ten countries (Belgium, Chile, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States) participated in the Equestrian events.

Since then, the general trend is that an increasing number of countries have participated in the Olympic Equestrian events (see Diagram 1, p. 8).

Although the number of participating nations has increased, Olympic riders are not equally distributed across the globe. In 1928, 20 countries competed. In addition to the ones that competed in Stockholm in 1912, seven other European countries (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland) participated. There was also a new South American country – Argentina, and, for the first time, an Asian country – Japan. Although the number of participating countries largely increased over time, there have been Olympic Games in which not many countries competed. In 1932 the Olympic Games were held in Los Angeles, America. Because of the travel distance from Europe and the economic depression, only six countries competed (France, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands,

²⁴ <http://www.fei.org/fei-members/national-federations>

²⁵ <http://www.princesshaya.net/sports/federation-equestre-internationale>

Sweden, the United States). In 1936, the Berlin Olympics, the number of countries had again increased to 21. Twenty years later, in 1956, IOC decided to divide the Olympic Games between Stockholm and Melbourne. Melbourne hosted the entire event with the exception of the Equestrian competitions, which were held in Stockholm due to the protracted quarantine in Australia.²⁶ 29 countries competed in these games, including Egypt. This was the second time an Arab country participated (the first time was in 1952). Yet, it was not until 2000 that one of the Arab countries was represented among the medallists, as Saudi Arabian Khaled Al-Eid won the bronze medal in the mixed jumping individual event. In 2012 the Saudi Arabian team, consisting of four men, Ramzy Al Duhami, Abdullah Al Saud, Kamal Bahamdan, and Abdullah Sharbatly, won the bronze medal in the mixed jumping event.²⁷

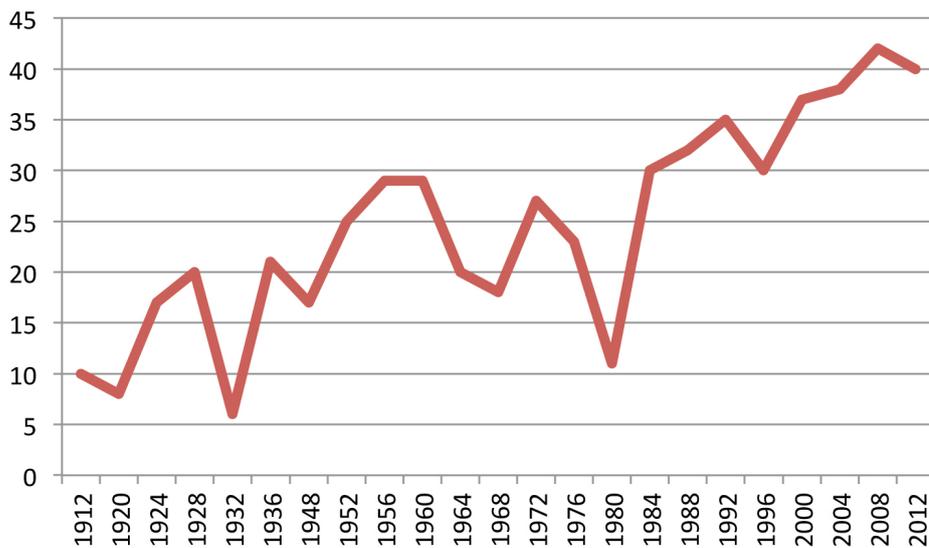


Diagram 1 *Number of countries participating in the Olympic Equestrian events 1912-2012. Source: <http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/>*

In 1980, only 11 national teams took part in the Equestrian events. The Olympics were held in the capitol of the Soviet Union, Moscow, and several countries boycotted these games because of the international political situation. As of yet, the highest number of countries competing in the Olympic Games is 42, in Beijing 2008. Aside from the European countries, countries from North and South America, Australia and New Zealand, Asia and North Africa and some of the new countries, previously belonging to the Soviet Union, competed. Yet, based on Olympic medallist statistics, equestrian sports seem to have its strongest position in Europe, the United States, Canada, Brazil, New Zealand and Australia.

²⁶ Hedenborg, S. (2009). "Unknown Soldiers and Very Pretty Ladies: Challenges to the Social Order of Sports in Post-War Sweden."

²⁷ <http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/>

Women and horses

Internationalisation of a sport has to be discussed in relation to men's and women's opportunities to participate. One might argue that in order to be truly international a sport has to be widely spread and include both men and women. Equestrian sports are interesting in this regard as men and women compete against each other. This has not always been the case. Horses have had a more or less prominent position in the lives of men in many geographical areas and time periods. Men have traditionally used horses in agriculture, forestry, the transport sector and in the army. Among other things, this strong connection is indicated by the saying "a real man is a horseman".²⁸ Widespread practices and, in particular, the symbolic correlation between masculinity and horsemanship conveys the impression that women had nothing to do with horses. While this is true in some cases as the use of horses has often been a male privilege, women's relationship with horses has varied considerably across different social and cultural contexts.

In Europe, horse riding became a popular and prestigious leisure activity for members of the aristocracy during the late 19th century. Men and women alike flaunted their wealth by showing off their horses, but also through their audacity in hunting on horseback and their skills in carrousels. In an article on female circus riders, so-called *écuyères*, around the *fin-de-siècle*, Hedenborg and Pfister demonstrate that the circus constituted an arena in which female horse riders were accepted.²⁹ Despite performing imaginative and dangerous acts, which were not considered to be feminine activities at the time, the *écuyères* were nonetheless acknowledged and admired for their skills. One of the most famous riders, Elvira Guerra, even competed in the 1900 Paris Olympic Games. She participated in the discipline "hack and hunter combined", an event in which the rider showed the horse in walk, trot and gallop on the flat and jumping over obstacles. On her horse Libertin, Guerra finished 9th out of 51 participants, the rest of whom consisted mostly of cavalry officers.³⁰

As previously stated, it was not until the 1912 Stockholm Olympics that equestrian sports were part of the programme in the form of dressage, show jumping and eventing. At the time, women were prohibited from competing, and female riders were not allowed to take part in the Olympic dressage until 1952, show-jumping until 1956 and eventing until 1964.³¹ Furthermore, male horse riders have made up the majority of the Olympic competitors in the period 1952–2012 (see Diagram 2, p. 10).

A comparison between the three equestrian disciplines reveals interesting disparities. Dressage, the first discipline in which women were allowed to compete, is also the one in which the most female competitors are found today. This is perhaps unsurprising, as there were women in haute école (high dressage) as early as the late 19th century. The circus riders were among them. It is possible that dressage did not conflict with the social construction of femininity. It is more difficult to understand why there are more women in eventing than in show-jumping. The former discipline was the last to allow female competitors, as it was long considered too dangerous. Nonetheless, the number of female competitors in-

28 Hedenborg, S. (2011). "The horse in Sweden: workmate and leisure pursuit".

29 Hedenborg, S & Pfister, G. (2012). "Écuyères and 'doing gender'. Presenting Femininity in a Male Domain - Female Circus Riders 1800-1920".

30 Hedenborg, S & Pfister, G. (2012). "Écuyères and 'doing gender'".

31 Hedenborg, S. (2009). "Unknown Soldiers and Very Pretty Ladies: Challenges to the Social Order of Sports in Post-War Sweden".

creased rapidly after the regulations were altered to allow their participation. This development cannot be explained by the discipline's congruence with a perceived femininity. It is more likely that higher prize sums and more generous sponsorship attracted men to show jumping.³²

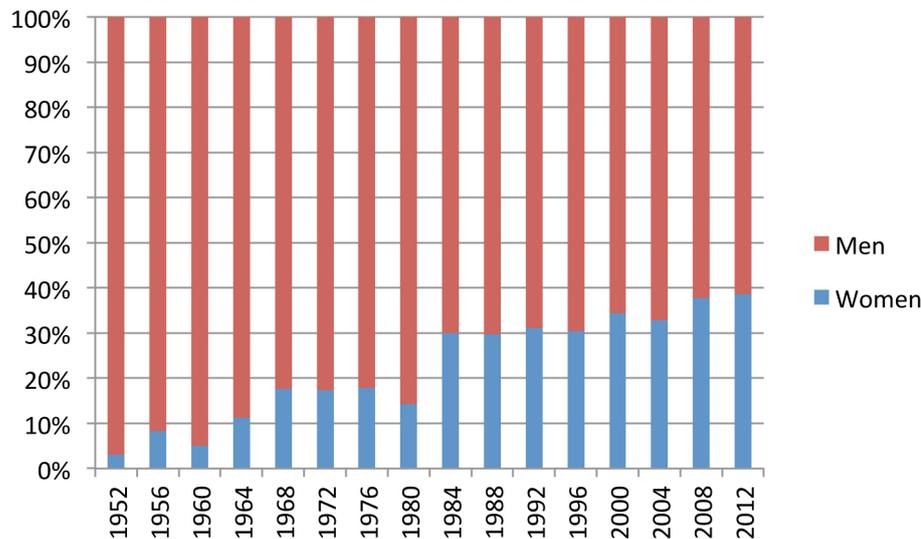


Diagram 2 *Men and women in the Equestrian Olympic events 1952-2012* Källa: <http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/>

In previous studies, Hedenborg and Hedenborg White have compared equestrian sports in Sweden and Great Britain from a gender perspective.³³ According to their study, there were more acknowledged female riders in Britain than in Sweden in the 1950s. A plausible explanation for this difference is that the Swedish army enabled men of lesser means to horse riding and competing. This opportunity did not exist in Britain, and thus women who could afford to ride at a high level were welcomed. This clearly demonstrates that gender relations must be studied in connection with social class in order to explain the different norms regarding men and women in competitive horse riding.³⁴ Although there were several prominent female riders in both show-jumping and eventing, it was not until 1972 that Sweden sent its first all-female team to the Olympic Games to compete in the dressage event. The decreasing significance of the horse in agriculture, forestry, transport and the army has been accompanied by a feminisation of horse-related activities in Sweden. Girls and women are now in majority in the riding schools, and many of the professional horse riders at high-level events are women.³⁵

- 32 Hedenborg, S., & White, M. H. (2012). "Changes and variations in patterns of gender relations in equestrian sports during the second half of the twentieth century", Thompson, K., & Adelman, M. (2013). "Epilogue: A research agenda for putting gender through its paces", in Adelman, M., & Knijnik, J. (Eds.).
- 33 Hedenborg, S., & Hedenborg White, M. (2013). "From glamour to drudgery – changing gender patterns in the equine sector. A comparative study of Sweden and Great Britain in the 20th century", in Adelman, M., & Knijnik, J. (Eds.); Hedenborg, S., & White, M. H. (2012). "Changes and variations in patterns of gender relations in equestrian sports during the second half of the twentieth century".
- 34 cf Hedenborg, S. (2007). "Female jockeys in Swedish horse racing 1890-2000: From minority to majority – complex causes." *The International Journal of the History of Sport*:4, vol 24,501–519; Hedenborg, S. (2009). "Unknown Soldiers and Very Pretty Ladies: Challenges to the Social Order of Sports in Post-War Sweden".
- 35 Hedenborg, S., & White, M. H. (2012). "Changes and variations in patterns of gender relations in equestrian sports during the second half of the twentieth century".

There is a need for additional research on the formal and informal gender regulations in equestrian sport. In addition, the internationalisation of sport has to take the gender perspective into account. Before the conclusion of this article, something will be said about the matter in relation to the situation in the Arab countries, as representatives from these countries have entered the sport relatively late and as FEI now has a Jordanian president.

In *Heroines of sport*, Jennifer Hargreaves discusses how Muslim women's participation in sport is strongly connected to cultural and religious notions of the female body. At the same time, she stresses that it is problematic to talk about Muslim women as one group, as there are great disparities between different areas in terms of women's sporting activities. For many, however, gender segregation seems to be a vital concern, as well as the right to choose what to wear when physically active (a right that is sometimes denied by the international sporting organisations, which do not all allow the hijab). She concludes that more Muslim women participate in sporting activities today than ever before.³⁶ However, participation is also a class issue, and women from privileged backgrounds practise sports to a greater extent than poorer women.³⁷ In *Muslim women and sport*, Benn et al. indicate the importance of gaining an understanding of physical activities in relation to religious beliefs.³⁸ The book provides valuable insights into Muslim women's sporting activities and their experiences of these activities. As noted by Hargreaves, the right to decide how training opportunities and competitions are organised as well as the rights to choose one's attire when physically active are important issues, which are discussed by Benn et al. The authors also emphasise the differences between women from different class backgrounds in terms of sports participation.

Equestrian sport is possibly paradoxical as a sporting activity for Muslim women, as men and women compete against each other. Mixed gender events may discourage some Muslim women. At the same time, other regulations may be more in keeping with the wishes of other Muslim women, as riders generally wear clothing that covers most of their bodies when competing. It is important to underline again that there is a paucity of research in the area of Muslim women and equestrian sport. Even so, some examples will be discussed as they shed light on the situation.³⁹ For example, it is worth observing that HRH Princess Haya has been important for female riders. In 1987, at the age of 13, she was the first female rider to represent Jordan internationally in show-jumping. In 1992 she won the individual bronze medal in the Pan Arab Equestrian Games, and she is to date the only female horse rider to have won a medal in this event. In 1994 she began to compete for "Team Harmony" – a successful show-jumping team. In 2000, the Princess competed in the Olympic Games in Sydney, and she was also the flag bearer for Jordan. Her riding career has steadily improved, and a year later she qualified for the World Championships in Jerez, Spain. In 2002, she was the first Arab woman to qualify and compete in an Equestrian World Championship. Since then she has also entered endurance riding.⁴⁰

Although HRH Princess Haya is an exceptional horse rider by any standards, it is essential to note that she is not the only successful female rider from the Muslim countries. When Western sports spread to Iran from the late 19th and early 20th century and onward,

36 Hargreaves, J. (2000). *Heroines of sport: The politics of difference and identity*. London: Routledge.

37 Hargreaves, J. (2000). *Heroines of sport...*

38 Benn, T. et al. (2010). *Muslim women and sport*. London: Routledge.

39 Hargreaves, J. (2000). *Heroines of sport...*

40 http://www.teamharmony.net/faces/index.php?face_id=1

physical activities – including horse riding – were male dominated.⁴¹ Since then, sports have followed the development of society in general in terms of inclusion and exclusion of women in different activities. In 1996, however, Iranian Elmira Mostajaboldaveh was allowed to train with the national equestrian squad and compete against men in open events. In 1996, she finished second out of 85 riders in France.⁴² Maryam Koushkie Jahromi has observed that Iranian women can only compete in sports where the governing bodies allow clothing that meets Islamic requirements. In equestrian sports there are examples with female competitors from Muslim countries from Asian Games 2002 and 2006.⁴³

Another female rider from the Muslim world is Latifa Al Maktoum who competed in show-jumping in the 2008 Olympic Games. Together with Maitha Al Maktoum (competing in taekwondo) she was the first woman to represent the United Arab Emirates.⁴⁴

It is hardly possible to discuss the issue of female riders in the Muslim countries without mentioning endurance riding, a type of long distance riding. Organised endurance rides are usually 160 km long and take approximately 10-12 hours. Veterinarians check on the horses before and during the ride, and the horses must be fit and in good condition in order for horse and rider to be allowed to continue. The winning horse is the one that first crosses the finish line. Although any breed of horse is allowed in the competitions, the Arabian horse generally dominates the top levels because of its stamina and natural endurance abilities. Endurance riding became a competitive sport in the 1950s and was brought to Europe as late as the 1960s. In 1982, endurance was recognised as a discipline by FEI. At that time there were only four international events. The number of events increased over time, and in 1998 there were 18 international events and the first World Championships were held in United Arab Emirates. In 2005 the number of international events was 353.⁴⁵

As noted above, HRH Princess Haya has been competing in these events for some years. Another important woman supporting female riders is Hanan al Muhairi from Dubai. Her documentary *Arabyana* (2009) follows the six-member Emirati female riding team. The film demonstrates the struggles and hardships facing these women who practise what is still perceived as a man's sport. The documentary emphasises women's right to ride, thus challenging the social constructions of femininity and masculinity. Some female horse riders are interviewed in the film, among them Sheikha Madeya Bint Hasher Al Maktoum, a young United Arab Emirates rider who specialises in endurance races, and champion rider Sheikha Latifa Al Maktoum. In addition to these women, the film features Sheikh Nahyan Al Mubarak and Sheikh Talib Al Qassimi. HRH Princess Haya supported the film. In the documentary Hanan al Muhairi wears a black scarf and loose clothing in order to demonstrate that "you can be a good Muslim girl and a great horse rider".⁴⁶

41 Benn, T. et al. (2010). *Muslim women and sport*.

42 Hargreaves, J. (2000). *Heroines of sport...* 58)

43 Jahromi, M. K. (2010). "Physical activities and sport for women in Iran" in Benn, T. et al., 109–124.

44 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Arab_Emirates_at_the_2008_Summer_Olympics, http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/search/athlete_search.cgi?search=Latifa

45 <http://www.endurancegb.co.uk/>

46 <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/a-horsewoman-in-pursuit-of-a-vision#ixzz2NXNVi0vy>

Concluding remarks

The aim of this paper has been to chart the history of the relationship between men, women and horses with a special focus on equestrian sports. Mangan has shown that England was the birthplace of several significant modern sports and that these sports were exported. From this perspective, internationalisation is a process by which the British Empire exported certain sports. This article questions whether this is true of equestrian sports as well. It also argues that the process of internationalisation cannot be discussed without taking the gender perspective into consideration. In short, the historical chart has demonstrated that equestrian activities have spread internationally in different directions up until the late 19th century. From that time onward, equestrian sports like horse racing and dressage, show-jumping and eventing have been diffused from Europe. An increasing number of countries compete in the Olympic equestrian events. Yet, from a gender perspective it is still debatable whether equestrian sports can truly be seen as internationalised. In the last decades, there have been female presidents of the FEI, which indicates that women have entered as leaders in equestrian sports. In addition, women and men compete against each other in the equestrian competitions on the Olympic level. Yet, so far men have been in majority among the riders, which suggests that men and women do not compete on equal terms.⁴⁷ Before this imbalance is redressed, equestrian sports cannot be seen as truly international.

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