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Le cheval dans la péninsule Arabique
Le cheval dans la péninsule Arabique

The Horse in Arabia and the Arabian Horse: Origins, Myths and Realities

JÉRÉMIE SCHIETTECATTE ET ABBÈS ZOUACHE

Texte intégral

1 Publishing an issue devoted to the horse in Arabia and in Arabian culture stems from the discovery of equid statues on the Neolithic site of al-Maqar (Saudi Arabia) in 2010. This discovery was prematurely presented as the earliest testimony of horse breeding and horse riding. It was dated to 7,300–6,700 BC —i.e. 3,500 years before the first evidence of horse domestication known so far. It has stirred up controversy about the ongoing issue of horse domestication, against a background of ideological debate. It has also been an indication to the critical place given to horsemanship and horse breeding in the Arabian Peninsula.

2 Gathering contributions on the topic of the horse in Arabia and the place of the Arabian horse in the medieval Islamic world allows us to draw an overview of the current knowledge about the issue of the introduction of the horse to Arabia (see Robin and Antonini), of the origin of the Arabian breed (see Olsen), of the significance and contribution of Arabian rock art (see Robin and Antonini, Olsen), of the role of the horse in Rasulid diplomacy (see Mahoney) and in Mamlūk culture (see Berriah, Carayon), of the emergence of the myth of the Arabian horse in the 19th-century Arabian Peninsula (see Pouillon), and on the specific issue of horse armour from the late pre-Islamic period to the Ottoman empire (see Nicolle).

3 This introduction is an opportunity to present the setting of these contributions from specific viewpoints:

• The al-Maqar case: an ideological historical reconstitution

- The domestication of the horse: the state of the art
- The introduction of the horse in Arabia: the state of the art
- The horse in the Islamic period
- The myth of the Arabian horse

The al-Maqar case: an ideological historical reconstitution

4 Until 2010, al-Maqar [often written al-Magar] was nothing but a dot on the map of the governorate of Tathlīth (province of ʿAsīr, Saudi Arabia). The submission to the Saudi Commission of Antiquities and National Heritage (SCTH) of hundreds of artefacts sampled on that locality by a certain Mutlaq ibn Gublan, a camel herder native of the area, threw this institution into turmoil.

5 While digging a cistern, Mutlaq ibn Gublan had fortuitously discovered an 86-cm-long sculpture fragment of an equid; afterwards, he collected some 300 artefacts including other fragmentary animal statues (among which a dog, an ostrich, a falcon), stone tools, arrowheads, scrapers and spearheads, stone grinders and stone pestle.

6 A team of the SCTH along with international scholars carried out a one-day expedition on the site. This permitted them to complete the ground sampling of artefacts and to collect organic material for radiocarbon dating. The extracted collagen of four burned bones of unpublished provenance was dated to 7,300–6,640 cal BC.

7 This discovery got media attention and was displayed in a short book in Arabic[1]. It was usefully summed up and critically reviewed in a short paper by Harrigan[2]. The Saudi experts came to the conclusion that:

"The artefacts and objects found at the site showed that the Neolithic period was the last period when human beings lived on the site 9,000 years ago. All objects and stone tools found on the surface of the site dated back to the said history"[3].

"The features of the horse statue are similar to that of the original Arabian horses [...]. On the head of the statue there are clear signs of a bridle which in turn confirms that inhabitant of al-Magar domesticated horses"[4].

"Presence of horse statues of big sizes, coupled with Neolithic artefacts and tools dating back to 9,000 years ago is considered an important archaeological discovery at the international arena particularly in view that the latest studies indicated that animal domestication was known for the first time 5,500 years ago in central Asia. This site demonstrated that horses were domesticated in Saudi Arabia before a long period of the afore-mentioned date"[5].

"Al-Magar site incarnated four significant Arabian cultural characteristics for which the Arabs are highly proud of. These aspects include horsemanship and horse breeding, hunting with falcons, hunting with hound dogs and using the Arabian dagger as part of the Arabian dress. These cultural inherited characteristics were found at al-Magar in the central region of the Arabian Peninsula before nine thousand years. This impressive discovery reflects the importance of the site as a centre and could possibly the birthplace of an advanced prehistoric civilization that witnessed domestication of animals, particularly the horse, for the first time during the Neolithic period"[6].

8 Harrigan has already emphasized how "the discovery at al-Magar and the

electrifying question it raises come as Saudi Arabia experiences a resurgent pride not only in its archaeological heritage but also, particularly, in the legacy and culture of the desert-bred Arabian horse"[7]. The assumed late introduction of the horse in Arabia by Western scholars —see below— had already been questioned in the past[8]. Making the heart of the Arabian Peninsula the cradle of the Arabian horse and of horsemanship was not only a matter of scientific debate, it also achieved ideological purposes. When the results were officially presented to King Abdallah, "he urged the SCTH to publish the results of the excavation that proved that the Arabian Peninsula had precedence in taking care of horses"[9].

9 Now, when much detail has been left vague, the conclusions about al-Maqar were hardly convincing.

10 *Concerning the context of these discoveries*, the official report downplays the way most of the artefacts were collected —namely through illegal excavation/surface collection, with no archaeological record. The reports states that the discovery of the site was done by a Saudi national who collected some archaeological objects scattered on the surface, and followed by field work of a team of international experts; the proportion of artefacts sampled by the different actors is not mentioned[10]. Enlightening is the lecture of Harrigan's detailed account of the discovery, confirming that most of them have been collected without record:

"Ibn Gublan unearthed some 300 objects there. Though none was as large as the first, his finds included a small stone menagerie: ostrich, sheep and goats; what may be fish and birds; a cow-like bovid; and an elegant canine profile (...) he found mortars and pestles, grain grinders, a soapstone pot ornamented with looping and hatched geometric motifs, weights likely used in weaving and stone tools. [...] Two years ago, he loaded it all up in his Jeep, drove it to Riyadh and donated it to the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA). [...] In March 2010, the SCTA flew Saudi and international archaeologists and pre-historians to al-Magar for a brief daytime survey. The team fanned out and, in a few hours, collected more stone objects, including tools and another horse-like statue."[11]

11 *Concerning the dating of the statues of equids*, it has been considered that all the objects and stone tools found on the surface of the site dated back to c. 9,000 BP[12]. This date is asserted after the presence of specific types of arrowheads and four fragments of bones, whose collagen was radiocarbon dated to c. 9,000 cal BP. Yet, the exact provenance of these organic samples is unknown, and as stated by others the relationship between the stone figures, the arrowheads and radiocarbon samples is not clear[13]. Moreover, the idea that all the artefacts belong to the same period of time is questioned by the presence of Middle Palaeolithic tools nearby[14].

12 *Concerning the identification of the statues of equids as domesticated horses*, Henzell summed it up clearly:

"The evidence from the 86-centimetre-long fragment spotted by Gublan is tantalisingly inconclusive. The carving features a rounded head, arched neck, muzzle, nostrils, shoulder, withers and overall proportions that are clearly horse-like. The contention about domestication comes from two distinctive features, one of which suggests some kind of strap going from the shoulder to the forefoot and the other involving delicate incising around the muzzle. The proof from the find goes no higher than that, being just carvings indicative of a kind of primitive bridle. One expert on the subject of horse domestication, David Anthony, says he will go no further than suggesting that the sculpture at al-Magar 'might be' from the horse genus."[15]

13 The relief considered by some as a bridle, and hence evidence of domestication, could portray natural aspects of the animal itself such as musculature or coat markings[16]. It would be much more conclusive to interpret this relief as the black shoulder stripe marking some donkeys and asses, an hypothesis reinforced by the high frequency of wild ass (*Equus asinus*) in faunal assemblage from Arabian Neolithic sites[17] (Table 1).

14 To sum up, al-Maqar is a location where human presence is attested at least from the Middle Palaeolithic down to the Protohistoric period. Besides, the Middle Holocene occupation is clearly a major discovery, shedding light on a culture whose features were only partly known up to now. The animal sculptures could be part of this occupation and some of them definitely depict equids. However neither the presence of horses in this part of Arabia nor their domestication 3,000 years earlier than expected can be proved on the basis of the sculptures on site.

15 The best way to address the question of the domestication of the horse and its introduction in the Arabian Peninsula is still to consider available data systematically (see in this issue: Olsen; Robin and Antonini).

Horse domestication and its diffusion in the Middle East and North Africa: the state of the art

16 Much has been written on the topic and our intention is not so much to produce a new synthesis as to underline the progressive shift of horse domestication along a north-south axis, starting in central Asia and the Eurasian steppes, and progressively reaching the Middle East, Egypt, and then Arabia.

17 The original location —providing that a single location is concerned— and the date of horse domestication remain a burning issue. Genetic studies have been addressing this problem, defending either the hypothesis of several original areas of domestication[18] or an original restricted area of horse domestication, and, as domesticated horses spread, subsequent recruitment of local mares from further wild horse populations into the domesticated herds[19]. Both theories locate horse domestication in central Asia and the Eurasian steppes. It is currently acknowledged that substantial support for early horse domestication is provided by the investigations carried out on the Botai culture settlements (Northern Kazakhstan), where a horse-centered economy developed in the first half of the 4th millennium BC[20]. That the Botai culture displays the earlier evidence for horse domestication does not mean that it was the first to develop it.

18 Not long afterwards, domesticated horse bones increased in sites of the North Caucasus, Eastern Anatolia and Azerbaijan[21]. Horse bones appeared on Syrian sites during the Akkad period (c. 2350–2150 BC) and in the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (2100–1800)[22]. In Mesopotamia, horses were only rarely attested until after the Ur III period (c. 21st–20th cent. BC)[23], at the time when the first written word for horse (literally "ass of the mountains", referring to Zagros and Anatolia) appeared in Sumerian texts[24]. A seal dated to the reign of the Ur III king Šu-Sin[25] is the oldest preserved image of a man riding a horse[26].

19 It is generally admitted that horses appeared in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period (c. 1650–1550) or slightly earlier[27]. Whether they were brought together with chariot from Southwestern Asia into Egypt by the Hyksos[28] or not is still debated[29].

20 In the Bronze Age, horses were mainly used for chariotry and wagon pulling. Horse riding really took off in the Early-Iron-Age Luristan. In Mesopotamia,

cavalry developed after 900 BC where it progressively replaced chariotry. Mounted troops started to be mentioned in the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta II (890–884 BC) (RIMA 2: 173) and Aššurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) (RIMA 2: 205); they are displayed on the reliefs of the latter's palace[30].

21 As long as horses were mainly used as draught animals, their absence in Arabia is no surprise. The Peninsula was definitely a hostile environment to chariotry or any kind of vehicle on tow[31], and even to horse itself. It could be an explanation for its late introduction in the region, as field data collected below tend to demonstrate.

Introduction of the horse in Arabia: the state of the art

Faunal remains

22 Dating the introduction of the horse in the Arabian Peninsula cannot be solved by the isolated discovery of equid statues on the surface of al-Maqar. Faunal remains were found in different archaeological contexts in the Peninsula, and bring first-hand information. However, we come up against a lack of systematic studies and, when available, these studies are faced with the difficulty to distinguish, from bone fragments, one equid from another or domestic from wild species. The recognition is often merely that of the genus (*Equus* sp.), when the subgenus remains a question mark. Rare is the distinction between onager (*Equus hemionus*), ass/donkey (*Equus asinus*) and horse (*Equus caballus*). In this context, only a multi-proxy approach making an inventory of archaeozoological occurrences of faunal remains with iconography, epigraphy and classical sources brings us closer to the answer.

23 Although not exhaustive, Table 1 attempts to gather as many occurrences of equid bones as possible in Arabian archaeological contexts. Data are displayed in chronological order.

Table 1: List of Arabian sites with rest of equids within the faunal remains (NISP = Number of identified specimens).

Country	Site	Type of site	Date	Species	Remarks	Reference
Saudi Arabia	Jiledah (Western Rubʿ al-Khālī)	Surface lithic industry	Neolithic	Wild equid		EDENS, 1982, p. 119
Yemen	Wādī Rimaʿ et Kuwayʿ (Tihāma)	Shell middens	Neolithic	Wild ass (*Equus asinus*)		KHALIDI, 2005, p. 117
Yemen	Ash-Shumah (Tihāma)	Shell midden	7th–6th mill. BC	Wild equid (*Equus hemionus or Equus asinus*)	NISP = 92% – specialized hunt	CATTANI & BÖKÖNYI, 2002; Fedele, 1992, p. 73-74
Yemen	Jaḥabah – JHB (Tihāma)	Shell midden	6th mill. BC	Wild ass (*Equus asinus*)	Fragmentary teeth	TOSI, 1986, p. 407

Yemen	Wādī al-Thayyila – WTH3 (Khawlān)	Settlement	6th–5th mill. BC	Wild equid (*Equus asinus*?)		FEDELE, 2008, p. 164; FEDELE & ZACCARA, 2005, p. 225
Saudi Arabia	Dosariyya		5th mill. BC	Wild equid (*Equus hemionus or Equus (asinus) africanus*)	NISP = 12% (surface); 6% (excavation)	MASRY, 1974, p. 237-238; UERPMANN, 1991, p. 16
Saudi Arabia	Ayn Qannas (Eastern Arabia)		5th mill. BC	Wild equid (*Equus hemionus or Equus (asinus) africanus*)	NISP = 86%	MASRY, 1974, p. 236; UERPMANN, 1991, p. 16
UAE	Al-Buhais 18	Settlement	5th mill. BC	Wild ass (*Equus (asinus) africanus*)		UERPMANN *et al*., 2000, p. 230
Oman	Raʾs al-Hamra – RH5, RH6, RH10	Shell middens	5th–4th mill. BC	Wild ass (*Equus (asinus) africanus*)		UERPMANN, 1991, p. 14
Oman	Khor Milkh – KM1	Shell midden	5th–4th mill. BC	Wild ass (*Equus (asinus) africanus*)		UERPMANN, 1991, p. 14
Yemen	Al-Akiya – Ak-4 (Highlands)		5th–4th mill. BC	Onager (*Equus hemionus)*		KALLWEIT, 1996, p. 42
Yemen	Wādī Surdud – SRD-1 (Tihāma)		4th mill. BC	Equids		TOSI, 1986, p. 415
Yemen	Jabal Quṭrān – GQi (Khawlān)		4th–3rd mill. BC	Wild equid (*Equus* sp.)		BÖKÖNYI, 1990
Kuwait	as-Sabbiya	Grave SMQ 49	Late Neolithic	Wild equid (*Equus hemionus*?)	Almost complete skeleton	MAKOWSKI, 2013, p. 522-523
Yemen	HARii (Ramlat as-Sabʿatayn)	Surface lithic industry	4th–1st mill. BC	Wild equid (*Equus asinus*?)		DI MARIO, 1989, p. 143; FEDELE, 1992, p. 72
Yemen	Wādī Rūbayʿ – WR3 (Saada)	Campsite	3rd mill. BC	Wild ass (*Equus (asinus) africanus*)	Also attested on the sites of Jabal Ghubayr – JG4 (Saada) and Jabal Aḥram (Radaa) with no date.	HADJOUIS, 2007, p. 51, 54-57

24 With regard to equids in general, Table 1 underlines several trends.

25 Firstly, the wild ass —generally the African species (*Equus asinus africanus*)[32]— is well attested in the Gulf area and Yemen at the latest in the Middle Holocene period. Incipient attempts to domesticate the ass (*Equus asinus*) at ash-Shumah (Yemen), in the 7th/6th millennium BC, have been proposed[33]. However faunal remains from the sites of Hili, Tell Abraq and Maysar 25 coalesce to indicate that the domestication of asses most probably happened in the Early Bronze Age (c. mid-3rd mill. BC). This hypothesis is reinforced by the representation in a bas-relief on grave 1059 at Hili of a rider sitting on an equid, most probably a donkey[34]. In Bahrain and Yemen, the earlier evidence of domesticated donkeys was found in later contexts —respectively at Qalʿat al-Bahrain, in the City II levels, c. 2100–1700 BC[35], and at Yalā, in the early 1st millennium BC[36]. This is not to say that donkeys were not domesticated earlier in these regions.

26 The testimonies of domestication of asses happened several centuries later than in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt where it is known in fourth millennium contexts[37], and where the animal was trained to pull wagons and battle carts as early as the first half of the 3rd millennium BC. An iconographic example is represented on the 'Standard' of Ur, c. 2600 BC[38]. It cannot be said whether the domestication of asses in Arabia resulted from its spread from surrounding regions or developed locally.

27 Secondly, the earliest osteological evidence for the appearance of the horse in Arabia was found in much later contexts. The most ancient comes from Bahrain in a mid-1st millennium BC context[39]. At the turn of the Christian era, horses are attested in ed-Dur[40] and in Tombs 4 and 22 at Mleiha[41], where they appeared similar in size to modern Arabian horses, but maybe slightly more robust[42]. At a same period, a horse or a hybrid is mentioned at Madāʾin Sāliḥ[43]. A few horse bones were also found in the cemetery and 'Stone Building' at Ẓafār, in the early Christian era[44].

Arguments *a silentio*

28 The absence of horse bones before the mid-1st millennium BC is not necessarily a proof of its late introduction in Arabia[45]. However, both arguments *a silentio*, and other testimonies (iconography, numismatics, inscriptions, classical sources) reinforce this hypothesis. Several arguments *a silentio* have been stressed by Robin in this issue and others[46]. They briefly are:

1. The Neo-Assyrians royal annals: none of the peoples offering horses in tribute to the king come from the Peninsula; besides the tributes from the Arabs includes camels and donkeys, never horses[47].

2. Similarly, on the Achemenid reliefs of the Apadana at Persepolis, the delegations offering horses are the Armenians, the Cappadocians, the Scythians, and the Sagartians from central Iran[48]. Arabs are offering dromedaries.

3. South-Arabian languages: in the corpus of Minaic inscriptions (8th–1st cent. BC), the South-Arabian word for 'horse' (*frs¹*) is never used[49]; in the Qatabanic corpus (c. 2500 inscriptions written from the 7th cent. BC to the 2nd cent. AD), only one inscription uses it (*RES* 851). Nearly all of the occurrences of the word *frs¹* only appeared in the Sabaic corpus from the 1st century onwards[50].

4. South Arabian iconography: none of the representations of horses in South Arabia are securely dated previously to the turn of the Christian era. Moreover, Robin in his contribution underlines that the horse was not a symbolic animal associated with gods in South Arabia —contrary to the ibex, the bull, and the ostrich for example—; this could result from its absence in the daily life of Southern Arabians, at the time their rites were organised and codified in the early

1st millennium BC.
5. Eastern Arabian iconography: the horse does not appear as an iconographic motif previously to the mid-1st millennium BC (Table 2).
6. Classical sources: both accounts by Herodotus and Strabo are frequently quoted as an illustration of the absence of horses in the Peninsula previously to the very end of the 1st mill. BC[51]. Herodotus (7.86), while describing the cavalry forces of Xerxes, states that "the Arabians [...] rode on camels no less swift than horses"; Strabo (*Geogr*. 16.4.2), quoting Eratosthenes of Cyrene (c. 276-195 BC), says of Arabia that "with the exception of horses and mules and hogs, it has an abundance of domesticated animals".

Iconography and written sources

29 The earliest occurrences of horse bones in Arabian archaeozoological assemblages are concomitant with the first representations and epigraphic mentions of horses in the Peninsula.

30 In **Eastern Arabia**, horse bones appeared after the mid-1st millennium BC. A list of the prominent artefacts (vessels, figurines, statues) found in this region representing or displaying horses (Table 2) shows that all of them are posterior to the 4th cent. BC too. Some of these artefacts are influenced by Parthian productions, or even imported from Persia and Southern Mesopotamia[52], where the motif of the horse was already in use for centuries. Interestingly, this motif only entered the Arabian repertoire once its inhabitants familiarized with the animal.

31 This process is clearly marked in Eastern Arabian coinage. From the 4th century BC, the Alexander series (Heracles obverse; enthroned Zeus reverse) were adopted as a model for local coin productions. During the 2nd century BC, on the series of Ḥārithat king of Hagar and Abīʾēl —probably a queen of ʿUmān[53]— the seated figure of Zeus/Shamash holding an eagle on the reverse of the tetradrachms is replaced with that of a beardless seated figure holding a horse protome[54].

Table 2: Pre-Islamic terracotta figurines, copper alloy vessels, and copper alloy or lead protomes showing horses in Eastern Arabia.

Artefact	Site	Period	Remarks	Reference
Mounted equid (donkey?) terracotta figurine	al-Maqsha (Bahrain)	10th–7th cent. BC	Grave 3/4, National Museum, inv. N° 856-2-82	LOMBARD, 1999, fig. 202
Horse-and-rider terracotta figurines	Tell Khazneh (Failaka, Kuwait)	4th–2nd cent. BC	Parallels in Susa and Babylonia during the Achemenid and Parthian era	SALLES, 1986
Bowl with a décor with horse	Mleiha (UAE)	3rd–1nd cent. BC	Cemetery C Bowl ML 86 C m 17	MOUTON, 2008, fig. 24.5; ROBIN, 1994, 82, pl. 42

Horse protome	Mleiha (UAE)	2nd–1st cent. BC		MOUTON, 2008, fig. 43
Bowl with a décor with mounted horse	Mleiha (UAE)	2nd–1st cent. BC		MOUTON, 2008, fig. 24.7; MOUTON & SCHIETTECATTE, 2014, fig. 50
Bowl with a décor with horse	al-Fuwaydah (Oman)	c. 2nd–1st cent. BC (?)	Grave Fu9 Bowl DA13335	YULE, 2016, fig. 6.2
Horse protome	Khor Rori (Oman)	c. 2nd BC–3rd cent. AD	Area SUM03A, cat. 865	LOMBARDI *et al.*, 2008, fig. 31.6, 59.3
Bowl with a décor with mounted horse	al-Fuwaydah (Oman)	2nd–1st cent. BC	Grave Fu11 Bowl DA13363	YULE, 2016, fig. 6.1
Saddled horse terracotta figurine	Al-Hajjar (Bahrain)	1st cent. BC/AD	Tomb II	LOMBARD, 1999, fig. 341
Horse protome	Jabal Kanzan (Saudi Arabia)	c. 1st cent. AD (?)		POTTS, 1989, fig. 118-119
Horse protomes	Ed-Dur (UAE)	1st–2nd cent. AD	Grave AV/G.5156	HAERINCK, 1994, p. 422-423; MOUTON, 2008, fig. 91
Horse protome	Samad al-Shan (Oman)	1st–2nd cent. AD	Site 20, Grave 2020	CLEUZIOU & TOSI, 2007, p. 299; YULE & WEISGERBER, 1988, fig. 8.6
Bowl with a décor with mounted horse	Samaʾīl/al-Bārūnī (Oman)	c. 3rd–4th cent. AD	Grave Bar1 Bowl DA10617	YULE, 2009, fig. 4; 2016, fig. 6.3
Horse protome	Samaʾīl/al-Bārūnī (Oman)	c. 3rd–4th cent. AD	Grave Bar1	CLEUZIOU & TOSI, 2007, p. 299; YULE, 2009, fig. 4
Horse figurine (lead)	Al-Qatif area – GOSP 2 (Saudi Arabia)	c. 3rd–6th cent. AD (?)	Surface	POTTS, 1993b

32 In **Southern Arabia**, prior to the 2nd century AD, only donkeys were identified in archaeological contexts (Table 1). The single horse mention we have been able to retrieve comes from Ẓafār (layers from the 2nd–6th cent. AD)[55]. This is in line with some of the conclusions reached by S. Antonini and Ch. Robin in this issue:

• Epigraphic South Arabian mentions and iconographic representations of horses are dated after the turn of the Christian era;

• From the 1st century AD onwards, classical sources started to mention the delivery of horses to the kings of Ḥimyar and Ḥaḍramawt (*Periplus Maris Erythraei*, §24, 28; Philostorgius *Eccl. Hist*. III.4).

33 In **Northern Arabia**, the only archaeozoological evidence published so far were found at Dūmat al-Jandal and Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ in the early centuries of the Christian era. However, the contribution by S. Olsen in this issue clearly shows that the rock art representations of horses in the region stretching from Taymāʾ to Ḥāʾil and al-ʿUlā could have originated in the 1st millennium BC. Ch. Robin (in this issue) also argues for an earlier presence of the horse in North Arabia, taking into account that contacts with cavalry and chariotry from the north, e.g. the prominent expedition of Nabonidus in Taymāʾ, were likely to arouse the interest of local leaders. He also shows that the two different ways to depict horses in South Arabian petroglyphs differs from that described by S. Olsen in North Arabia. The absence of the northern "slender horse" in the southern repertoire could be indicative of an earlier iconographic tradition developed at a time horses were absent from South Arabia.

34 So far, evidence coalesces to indicate that horses started to be tamed in both Eastern and Northern Arabia in the mid-1st millennium BC at the latest. They became permanent in South Arabia a few centuries later (c. 1st cent. BC/AD). Therefore, it seems most likely that the horse domestication spread from Southern Mesopotamia and Southern Levant to North-Eastern Arabia, later reaching South Arabia.

35 Both the development of mounted contingents among South Arabian, Nabataean and Saracen cavalries in the early centuries of the Christian era[56] and the mention by Ammianus Marcellinus (c. 330–395) that the Saracens ranged "widely with the help of swift horses and slender camels in times of peace or of disorder" (*Res Gestae* 14.4.3), shows that horses soon became a normal mount for both the nomadic and settled peoples of the Peninsula.

36 Be that as it may, horses remained characterized by their relative **rarity** all along the late pre-Islamic period: in the faunal remains (Table 1), equid bones never exceed 1% of the number of identified fragments[57]; in Mleiha, only two graves yielded a horse skeleton against twelve dromedary skeletons[58]; and finally Robin (this issue) counts thousands of petroglyphs showing horses potentially ascribed to the Islamic period against 10 to 20 assuredly pre-Islamic.

37 All the evidence suggests that this rarity goes hand in hand with the **high value** granted to horses:

• Horses had a role in raid, fight and hunt scenes, they never appear as burden beasts[59];

• Harnesses discovered in archaeological contexts were of high quality, including golden pieces[60] or silver inlay[61];

• Much importance was given to the killing of the enemies' horses in the Sabaic inscriptions, e.g. that of the Ḥimyarite king Shammar[62];

• Horses were given a name in South Arabia[63];

• Horses were the main gift of the embassy of Constantius to the Ḥimyarite king as reported by Philostorgius (*Church History* III.4).

38 As emphasized by D. Mahoney (this issue), both the high value of horses and their use in political machinations remained one of its characteristics in the Islamic period.

The horse in the Islamic culture

The horse in the early Islamic warfare

39 What seems obvious is that just before the advent of Islam, the horse was seen as a powerful tool for combat and a marker of social status in the whole Middle East.

It was obviously the case in the Byzantine and the Sasanid Empires, as well as in central Asia, where the horse was for a long time an important source of economic and political power. The contribution of Robin and Antonini in this issue shows that a quite similar situation prevailed in Arabia: it became quite common to mount a horse in Southern Arabia from the fourth century onwards, whereas possessing a horse allowed to be integrated into the dominant class in the Hejaz before the emergence of Islam[64].

40 Robin and Antonini also recall that the number of cavalrymen in pre-Islamic South-Arabian warfare was never important: the highest number mentioned in the sources is three hundred cavalrymen. It is likely that the number of horsemen involved in warfare was not higher in the other parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Should we underplay, then, the role played by cavalry in warfare? In fact, the sources seem too sparse to determine with certainty their effectiveness on the battlefield. It should also be noticed that contrary to popular belief, the number of horsemen was no longer the key metric of military effectiveness in late Antique and medieval warfare[65]. In particular, horsemen were never the most numerous soldiers involved in medieval battles. On the contrary, they formed an elite of highly esteemed fighters whose primary asset was mobility, whereas their charge was seen as the key tactic and decisive moment of most battles[66].

41 In fact, the role played by the horse in Arabian early Islamic warfare is still poorly known. It is true that despite the revivification that followed its sceptical turn during the seventies, the historiography of early Islam largely remains in construction. In particular, subsequent studies dealing with the early Arab and Islamic conquests leave many questions unanswered[67]. It is also true that archaeological sources are missing, and written sources are not always reliable. Nicolle outlines, in this issue, that no medieval equine skeleton or horse armour have been excavated in Arabia. Scholars can rely on epigraphy as well as on numerous rock paintings and engravings, from which thousands are dated to the Islamic era[68]. However, these valuable sources of information still need to be comprehensively compared by military historians with post-Islamic narratives.

42 Obviously, much of the material preserved in written sources is not so easy to use. Whether they were written by Muslims or not, the earliest texts are rather elusive and subjective. Arabic pre- and early Islamic poetry, which had been often disqualified as fabricated by Abbasid authors, is now generally acknowledged as useful[69]. Certainly, it is only preserved by much later authors[70], and could not be used without caution by historians. However, when properly contextualized, it helps to reflect the variety of Arabian pre-Islamic societies[71], and provides reliable information on various topics, including warfare. The earliest Islamic narratives have been even more criticized by historians for being “replete with confusion and improbability”, especially when relating battles[72]. They generally emphasized that these narratives emerged only from the mid-eighth century. The most sceptical scholars even completely rejected them as too poorly informative, and only useful to understand the ideology that they reflect[73]. Very recently, Shoshan still recalled that they present numerous tropes aiming to highlight the superiority of early Muslim armies[74].

43 One of the tropes often carried by Islamic narratives is that these armies strongly relied on light Bedouin cavalry which provided Muslims a greater mobility than the one of their enemies[75]. However, it is now clearly acknowledged by most scholars that cavalry was not prominent in armies whose core consisted of infantrymen who, moreover, played a major role during battles[76]. As we have seen, that does not mean that cavalry played no role in battles nor was completely ineffective. The importance of light cavalry, which have been involved in Arabian warfare for a long time, can scarcely be denied. This seems, however, less clear regarding horsemen who were more heavily equipped. Before the advent of Islam, the heavy cavalry was

certainly not unknown in Arabia, or at least in some parts of Arabia. After all, there is no reason to think that the Peninsula, which has maintained military relationships with Byzantine and Sasanian armies for a long time, remained completely alienated from the secular process that led all the Middle East to adopt medium- or heavy armoured cavalry. Moreover, Nicolle, in this issue, suggests that horse armour was associated with Pre-Islamic Oman and Yemen, which were, in his words, "under Sasanian Iranian domination".

44 The armoured cavalry seems to have gradually become more important in Islamic armies during the seventh century. Narratives clearly distinguish the light or unarmoured cavalry (*mujarrada*) and the heavy one, which is referred to by the word *mujaffafa*[77]. This word is somewhat problematic, because it is also sometimes used in texts written in the Abbasid era to refer to warriors who should be precisely characterized as armoured[78]. However, it is used in most cases for a horse wearing a *tijfāf*, a term which probably originally referred to a soft and seemingly coloured or embroided caparison/armour[79], and perhaps, according to Nicolle, "to a method of construction employing felt"[80]. Then, it eventually came to refer to all kind of horse armours. For instance, the eleventh-century scholar al-Ḥumaydī (d. 488/1095) asserts that it means "all things that fully cover [the horse] in warfare"[81]. As for the lexicographer Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311), he claims that the *tijfāf* could even be made of iron: "*Al-tijfāf* and *al-tajfāf*: what was put down on the horse from iron or other [material] in warfare[82]".

45 In any event, textual evidence corroborates the pictorial material studied by Nicolle: contrary to a still widely common view, the horse armour was not unknown in the early Middle Eastern armies. It is likely that its use gradually increased from the generalization of the heavy cavalry after the Abbasid took power in Baghdad and reformed the army under the influence of Iranian and central Asiatic traditions. After this reform, the Middle Eastern Islamic armies largely relied on horsemen, whether they were born free or military slaves. The warrior dynasties that ruled the Middle East from the fragmentation of the Abbasid Empire in the tenth–eleventh century onward were also strongly associated with the horse. It is worth noting with Mahoney, in this issue, that when he deals with the arrival of the Rasūlid in Yemen in the early thirteenth century, the chronicler al-Kharazjī also emphasizes the major role played by the horse in the creation and preservation of the new dynasty.

Islamic mythology

46 The horse did not only play a significant role in the military and political fields. At the same time that the horse was erected as a decisive tool in warfare and the symbol of the dominant military class, Muslim scholars incorporated it into Islamic mythology. By doing so, they relied on Arabic pre-Islamic practices: from the earliest times, the horse was featured in Arabian myths and legends, which were at least partially incorporated into Islamic belief[83]. Pre-Islamic poetry, in which the horse was a common subject, was one of their main source of inspiration. In particular, hunting on horseback, which is also documented by epigraphic and pictographic evidence[84], was a major motif for the chivalric tribal poets, whose ethos of physical toughness, martial prowess, generosity, and selflessness, was conveyed in *qaṣīda*-s that strongly inspired Islamic poets and literati[85]. The horse symbolized the physical features as well as moral values embodied by the figure of the *Jāhilī* chivalric poet, who gradually became the archetypal model for the Muslim *fāris* (pl. *fursān* or *fawāris*)[86]. Speed, prowess, strength and aggressiveness, arrogance and haughtiness, virility, pride and nobility, characterized the animal as well as its mighty rider[87]. Thus, the *muʿārada* ("poetic

contest") in describing the horse (*waṣf al-khayl*) between the "two poetic giants" [88] Imruʾ al-Qays (d. ca. 550) and his opponent ʿAlqama (d. after mid-6th c.) allowed the winner, ʿAlqama, to be celebrated with the *laqab* ("honorific title") al-Faḥl, which means "stallion" as well as "master poet"[89].

47 It is worth noting that the trilateral root *KH/Y/R*, which formed the most common Arabic word used by Islamic authors to refer to the horse (*khayl*), conveys some of these features and values, or that the widespread use, in the Islamic era, to give proper names to horses, dated back to the earliest times[90]. In Yemen, according to the Rasūlid sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf ʿUmar b. Yūsuf (r. 694–6/1295–6), the kings of Ḥimyar gave names to their horses. However, they were unknown to him:

"As for the ancient Ḥimyarite kings of Yemen (*al-tatābiʿa min mulūk Ḥimyar bi-l-Yaman*), the name of their horses did not come to our knowledge. However, it comes in their annals and histories (*fī akhbārihim wa tawārīkhihim)* that they had a great number of horses.
[...]
Then, the first name of a horse of a Yemeni king that became renowned was "Ḥayzūm". He was the horse (*faras*) of Mahdī b. ʿAlī b. Mahdī[91], the one whose father attacked the Abyssinians (*al-Ḥabasha*) in Zabīd[92], and who is from *ashāʿir* related to Qaḥṭān. The history of his attack is renowned, and he ruled Yemen. This Mahdī is his son"[93].
[...]
'Al-Dhayyāl' was [the name of] the horse [ridden by] Ibn al-Ṣulayḥī the day when he was killed[94] in the attack during the famous battle between him and the Abyssians[95].

48 Mahdī b. ʿAlī's horse bore the name given by Islamic tradition to the one of Angel Gabriel's (Jibrīl) horse[96]. Prophet David (Dāwūd) and his son Solomon (Sulaymān) were also said to have given proper names to their horses, as ancient Bedouins poets did[97]. At the battle of Uḥud (3/625), Muḥammad was said to have ridden a horse named "Sakb", a name that especially refers to a "continuous rain"[98], and that was given to different horses by various Muslim rulers throughout the Middle Age, such as Rasūlid Sultan al-Malik al-Muʾayyad Dāwūd (r. 696–721/1296–1322)[99].

49 Many names given by pre-Islamic poets to their horses conveyed the same meaning[100]. They are preserved in their *qaṣīda*-s, as well as in the several "books on horses" (*kutub al-khayl*) written by Islamic authors throughout the Middle Ages, and dealing with Arabian horses from different points of view, such as lexicography, genealogy, literature, husbandry...[101]. These books, which as other books were part of the larger *furūsiyya* genre[102], seem to have influenced some of the 19th century's European travellers who, such as the Blunts and Rzewuski, endeavoured "to seek pure Arabian horses"[103], integrated the horse in Islamic mythology. The horse became one of the symbols of Islam. He was greatly praised not only because the Muslims considered that they "owed their victorious expansion to that animal"[104], but also, as it is explained by Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 204 or 206/819 or 821), because Muḥammad then the believers followed the footsteps of the pre-Islamic Bedouins[105].

50 As it is emphasized by Berriah in this issue, the praising of the horse, and especially the Arabian one, pervades the Koran and the hadith, and all texts that would be referred to as the roots of Islamic jurisprudence. Anecdotes, legends and traditions of various origins inextricably linked Islam to an animal depicted as combining both supernatural and earthly power. For instance, the Prophet Ismāʿīl (Ishmael), who in Islamic tradition in particular was said to have helped his father Abraham to rebuild the Kaʿba, was also supposedly the first individual to have

ridden horses[106]. It was also often mentioned that all the Arabian horses descended from one steed named Zād al-rākib, and given to the tribe of Azd by Sulaymān b. Dāwūd (Solomon), who was said to be so fond of his horses that he forgot his religious duties[107]. In addition, Muslim authors gave various versions of a tradition crediting Allah with the creation of the horse from the wind. Some of them outlined that it was a south and dry wind, which blew from the Kaʿba. Others argued that the angel Jibrīl (Gabriel) held the wind in his hands before its creation[108]. As for al-Burāq, the flying beast ridden by the Prophet Muḥammad during his ascension to heaven (*al-Mirʾāj*), a hadith transmitted by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/909) described him as a winged horse[109]. However, he was generally defined in early Islamic texts as "a white beast, smaller than a mule and larger than a donkey (*dābba abyaḍ dūn al-baghl wa fawq al-ḥimār*) [110]".

The Arabian horse: champion of the faith

51 Therefore, it made sense for Muslim jurists who codified Islamic law from the mid-eighth century to strongly connect the horse with Jihad. They especially stated that it should receive shares in the plunder: two parts of the fourth-fifths share for Ibn Mālik, al-Shāfiʿī, or Ibn Ḥanbal, and one for Abū Ḥanīfa[111]. They also emphasized the role played by the horse in protecting the Muslim frontiers[112], as did the Rasūlid historian al-Kharazjī regarding the Rasūlid Yemeni state[113].

52 It is worth noting that classical Islamic jurists often needed to clarify which horse breed they were talking about, probably because like the Arabs during the so-called Jāhiliyya, Prophet Muḥammad was said to have preferred pedigree horses[114]. Most of them distinguished the purebred Arabian horse from the mixed-bred one. One of the main questions they asked was what percentage of the spoil should be given to each breed. The Shāfiʿī jurist al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) summarizes some of their disagreement in his "Commentary" (*Sharḥ*) of the Shāfiʿī legal system:

"Salmān b. Rabīʿa and al-Awzāʿī said: the noble horse (*al-khayl al-ʿitāq*) should be given a share whereas the mixed-breed *birdhawn* should not be given one. [Henceforth], its rider (*fāris*) should [only] be given a share, [such as] the foot soldier (*rājil*).
Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal said: a mixed-breed *birdhawn* (*al-birdhawn al-hajīn*) should be given the half share of the noble Arabian [horse] (*al-ʿarabī al-ʿatīq*). Henceforth, the rider (*fāris*) of the *birdhawn* should be given two shares whereas the rider of the noble Arabian horse should be given three shares[115]".

53 Then, al-Māwardī relies on the authority of a companion of the Prophet Muḥammad, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-ʿĀṣ, who expresses a less exclusive view by transmitting a hadith praising the horse[116]. The "Commentary" sometimes echoes the Shuʿūbiyya call for extending equality to all Muslims[117], whether they were Arabs or not:

"By using the word "al-khayl", [the Prophet] embraced all breed. Indeed, the noble [Arabian] horses (*ʿitāq al-khayl*) are faster and forestaller and the *birdhawn*-s are the best in turning around and attack (*akarr*) and in firmness. Each of them has [advantages] that the other is lacking, so they complete each other. In addition, [it is true that] noble horses are Arab (purebred), and the *birdhawn*-s (mix-bred) non-Arab (*aʿājim*). There is no distinction between the Arab and the non-Arab horsemen, so the same is true regarding the horse. There should be no distinction between the strong (*shadīd*) and the weak (*ḍaʿīf*) one; the same goes, moreover, for the one who precedes (*al-sābiq*) and the one who is late (*al-mutaʾakhkhir*)" [118].

54 Such discussions did not affect the image of the idealistic Jihad fighter associated with the Arabian horse. Berriah shows, in this issue, that it was still perceived as a symbol of the Jihad in the Mamlūk sultanate, probably because he was considered as the symbol of triumphant Islam in the seventh century. From Berriah's point of view, the warriors who held the power lacked legitimacy because they were non-Arabs of slave origins. They liked to claim that they were the heirs of the first Arab warriors who had expanded and defended Islam riding beautiful Arabian horses. Those horses were strongly associated, in the Mamlūk imaginary, with their riders. According to Berriah: "it was in the framework of the legitimacy of their power as well as by their ability to fight for Jihad that the figure of the Arabian horse seems to have been included in their warrior ideology".

A passion for a luxury item

55 It should also be borne in mind that the Mamlūks, were they rulers or members of the military elite, had also developed a real passion for Arabian horses, as apparently had many of their predecessors in the Middle East. Indeed, narratives regularly describe Caliphs, Sultans, amirs and even, sometimes, civilian dignitaries, mounting on, gifting or expressing their admiration for purebred Arabian horses, which, for instance, were classified by the Baghdadi Hanafi jurist al-Simnānī (d. 493/1100) at the highest level of the equine hierarchy[119]. In Arabia, some Rasūlid Sultans or the late medieval Sharīf-s of Mekka were also said, explicitly or implicitly, to have loved or admired Arabian horses, as did the European travellers of the 19th century studied by Pouillon in this issue[120]. Al-Malik al-Ashraf ʿUmar (r. 694–6/1295–6) bred "noble horses" that were especially renowned for their beauty and their speed[121]. As for the Mamlūk Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (d. 741/1341), he was so fond of Arabian horses that he was said to have spent up to 100,000 dinars for a sole mare[122]. His "arabomania" led him to build a stud where they were carefully bred and trained[123], especially for race courses or other horse competitions that sometimes involved Bedouins, for instance, near al-Buḥayra, in the Egyptian Delta, in 1263[124]. According to al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was the first sultan to raise the office of *Amīr ākhūr* to a prominent position. This functionary was in charge of horses and other animals in the sultan's stable s, where *Kuttāb al-iṣṭabl* ("stable secretaries") especially recorded all details regarding the breeding, the purchasing, and the gifting of horses[125].

56 Indeed, it is often mentioned in medieval Arabic sources that horse gift played a significant role in political, diplomatic, and social communication. In particular, they often describe a ruler giving (or receiving from) one or several Arabian horses to a peer, to soldiers whose loyalty had to be thanked or ensured, as well as to individuals who had to be honoured. Sometimes, this applies not only to the ruler himself, but also to high-ranking Mamlūk-s, and even to civilian dignitaries. The examples dealing with the Rasūlid and Mamlūk states quoted, in this issue, by Berriah, Carayon, and Mahoney, can be paralleled by several examples referring to other Islamic dynasties, in which Arabian horses were also generally referred to as highly appreciated gifts. Here again, narratives suggest that the Arabian horse maintained his reputation in most of the medieval Islamic countries. The horse which lineage was recognized as especially noble was even considered as a most luxurious item.

57 Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Arabian horses are regularly depicted in narratives as a source of great profit for their breeders and their sellers, especially the Bedouin tribes. Vallet's works, as well as Mahoney's paper, in this issue, outline that in Arabia, Rasūlid Sultans were careful in controlling the horse economy,

especially by taxation and limiting of their purchase to specific places[126]. Even if further studies are needed to provide greater insight into the breed and the horse trade in the medieval Islamic world, some evidence gathered by medievalists suggest that the horse economy was always an important issue for rulers and merchants. Regional or international trade can sometimes be identified, especially regarding the Arabian horse, which, for instance, could be sold at a higher price by the Bedouins to the Mamlūk sultans[127]. Moreover, the trade of purebred Arabian horses in South Arabia, which is rather well documented, has been sufficiently studied. Sources allow to state that from the twelfth century, large numbers of horses were exported from Yemen to India. A real "equine trade revolution" can be identified in the Indian Ocean at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, which involved, in Vallet's word, "innovative and significant monetary and technological resources". Indeed, according to him:

"Significativement, c'est aussi entre le XIIe et le XIIIe siècle que se met en place un système d'exportation à grande échelle des purs sangs arabes en direction de l'Inde. Les conquêtes de Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ghūrī (1173–1206) à la fin du XIIe siècle, marquant l'établissement d'un puissant sultanat turc autour de Delhi, et les luttes continuelles entre les grandes principautés hindoues qui se partageaient le reste du subcontinent semblent avoir nourri une forte demande en chevaux venus d'Arabie, en particulier dans le sud de l'Inde qui accédait difficilement aux marchés de l'Asie intérieure. Selon l'historien persan Vaṣṣāf (m. 1323), 10 000 chevaux étaient ainsi exportés depuis le Golfe chaque année vers le Coromandel (actuel Tamil Nadu), vers la région de Cambay et d'autres ports de l'Inde occidentale à l'époque de l'atabeg salghūride Abū Bakr du Fārs dans les années 1220, un chiffre sans doute exagéré. L'île de Qays, au sommet de sa puissance sous la férule marchande des Ṭībī à la fin du XIIIe siècle, exportait chaque année 1 400 chevaux de ses haras particuliers et faisait élever d'autres chevaux sur la côte arabe du Golfe, à al-Qaṭīf, al-Aḥsāʾ, Baḥrayn et Qalhāt, à destination du royaume du Coromandel. Plusieurs centaines de chevaux étaient aussi transportés depuis Aden vers les ports du Malabar, à la suite d'une foire qui se tenait chaque année au mois d'août, sous la protection du sultan rasūlide du Yémen. De tels chiffres furent sans doute rarement dépassés au cours des XIVe et XVe siècles, alors que l'autorité du sultanat de Delhi s'était étendue à la quasi-totalité du subcontinent, mais le contrôle du commerce maritime des chevaux restait encore, à l'arrivée des Portugais, un enjeu majeur dans l'océan indien"[128].

Furūsiyya

58 Of course, the military, political, and social impact of the horse in the Islamic era should not be exaggerated. However, there is no doubt that to some extent, it shaped Islamic societies as no other animal did in the Middle Age. Moreover, the horse was central to *furūsiyya*, a word that seems to have only appeared in Arabic in the 8th century[129] and deriving from the Arabic root *F/R/S*, which formed both terms *faras* ("horse") and *fāris* ("cavalrymen" or, in certain circumstances and contexts, "knight")[130]. Probably born in Iraq at the turn of the 8th–9th century under the influence of central-Asiatic, Sasanid, Greek, and Arab traditions, while horsemen began to play a major role in Islamic armies before gradually taking power, *furūsiyya* consisted in secular and religious beliefs, chivalric values, as well as military, playful and prestigious practices[131]. This culture was especially transmitted in books dealing in full or partially with all topics related to horses (hippology, farriery, veterinary medicine, genealogy, riding...), as well as with the theory and practice of warfare[132]. Many *furūsiyya* treatises, among which Ibn Akhī

Ḥizām's (3th/9th c.) *Kitāb al-furūsiyya wa-l-bayṭara* was soon seen as the ultimate model, were written in Iraq in the 9th–10th centuries, then in the whole Middle East, especially in Syria and in Egypt in the Mamlūk era (13th–16th c.)[133].

59 However, all medieval Middle Eastern societies were concerned with *furūsiyya*, including the Arabian Peninsula's ones. Indeed, even if Arabian *furūsiyya* has been rather neglected by scholars, it appears that what Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) called *al-furūsiyya al-khayliyya* ("the *furūsiyya* of the horse"[134]) was especially vibrant in different periods[135]. Books centered on horses and veterinarianism were especially copied and written in Rasūlid Yemen (626–858/1228–1454), as well as in the Hejaz. Thus, Ibn Akhī Ḥizām's *Kitāb al-furūsiyya wa-l-bayṭara* was rewritten in a book preserved in a manuscript (Ayasofya Library MS. No 3705) copied by a certain Ibn Abī Quṭayra for the second Rasūlid sultan al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf al-Saʿīd (r. 647–94/1249–95)[136]. A few years later, his son and immediate successor, Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf ʿUmar b. Yūsuf (r. 694–6/1295–6), himself wrote a book on horses and veterinary medicine entitled *al-Mughnī fī al-bayṭara*, which he presented as "a compendium (*mukhtaṣar*)" relying on his own knowledge and that of the best Yemeni "learned men" on horses[137]. As for the fifth Rasūlid sultan al-Malik al-Mujāhid ʿAlī b. Dāwūd (r. 721–64/1322–63), he also wrote a *furūsiyya* treatise entitled *al-Aqwāl al-kāfiyya wa fuṣūl al-shāfiyya fī al-khayl*. Largely based on previous works, it also deals, among various topics, with the names of the Yemeni sovereigns' horses, or their breeding at their court[138]. More than two centuries later, Meccan Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Fākihī (d. 982/1574) dedicated to the Ḥasanid Sharif of Mecca the *Kitāb Manāhij al-surūr wa-l-rashād fī al-ramī wa-l-sibāq wa-l-ṣayd wa-l-Jihād*, which contains chapters on Jihad, the early Islamic military expeditions against the infidels, horses, camels and other animals, archery, bow and other weapons, and hunting[139]. Such treatises rarely provide specific examples of persons who were renowned for mastering *furūsiyya* arts. However, narratives are sometimes more accurate, showing, for instance, that as early as the 4th/10th century, a prominent South Arabian figure such as the first Zaydī Imam was described as mastering *furūsiyya* arts, as well as were, long after, sultans or high-ranked militaries of the Rasūlid state[140].

60 Similarly, no specific studies have been devoted to the practice, in medieval Arabia, of horse games and military exercises, as well as to the official manifestations during which festive activities such as horse races or parades were organized. Muslim scholars generally outline that horseracing was appreciated in Arabia well before Islam, and that the Prophet Muḥammad permitted race for stake with horses, as well as, according to some of them, with camels and arrows[141]. After the advent of Islam, horse racing was perhaps always and everywhere, as sustained by Rosenthal, "the most important and best organized activity of this kind"[142]. Even if other horse games, and especially polo, seem to have been the preferred practice of the Abbasid Caliphs then Kurdish and Turkish sultans and amirs who ruled the Middle East, the interest for horse racing never disappeared. It was practiced in race courses such as those, which would become famous in all the Islamic Middle East, of Raqqa (Syria) and Samarra (Iraq) [143]. In Arabia, the interest of the elite in horse racing most probably continued throughout the Middle Ages, as it is shown, for example, by the chapters on *sibāq al-khayl* of al-Fākihī's the *Kitāb Manāhij al-surūr*[144].

61 As for celebrations, it should be noticed that narratives sometimes relate those which were held in the Rasūlid Yemen, especially the ceremonial horse parades organized for special occasions such as the circumcision of Sultan al-Ashraf Ismāʿīl's son in Ṣafar 795/December 1392[145]. Ceremonial events held in extensive open spaces are also reported in Yemen under the Ṭāhirid dynasty (858–923/1454–1517)[146]. It is worth noting that they echo the numerous public

events held in the *maydān*-s[147] of Syria or Cairo at the same time, which are well-documented in Syrian and Egyptian chronicles whose authors describe the splendour of horses mounted by warriors admired by civilians. Then, various horse games were performed, as it was probably regularly done in Yemen, and more generally in Arabia, but a systematic study of narratives is needed to justify this assumption[148].

Arabian horse in Arabia

62 The physical characteristics of the Arabian breed —dished nose, large eyes, high arched bearing of the tail— adapted to the arid environment, and its temperament meeting the requirements of warfare, races and ceremonials —speed, hardiness, stamina—, have been much emphasized[149]. The breed arouses pride. Beyond the question of horse domestication, the issue of the origins of the Arabian breed remains a sensitive one in the Peninsula, where the will to keep the purity of the race is a reality[150] and gives way to groundless historical reconstructions claiming its paternity[151].

63 The claim of an Arabian origin finds some justification in the medieval tradition. Mamlūk *furūsiyya* treatises dealing with hippiatry distinguished lineages of Arabian horses named after their geographical provenance (Hejaz, Najd, Yemen, Bilād al-Shām, Jezirah, Iraq), the noblest according to Ibn al-Mundhir being the Ḥijāzī[152]. In the late 19th century, these traditions might have deluded the travellers in central Arabia, whose prime mover has often been the search for pure Arabian horses. F. Pouillon, in this issue, goes over this topic and shows the close relation between the European recognition of an Arabian race —at a time the concept applied to both horses and men— and its political implications. He also underlines that eventually, these explorers recognized how limited the presence of Arabian horses in Arabia was[153], for the simple reason that its harsh environment does not make the presence of large numbers sustainable.

64 The rarity of the Arabian horse in Arabia does not prevent a regional origin of the breed. Undeniably, it acquired its peculiar features through human and natural selection within a desert environment[154]. However, archaeological evidence does not make Arabia the best candidate.

65 Olsen, in this issue, shows that the horse petroglyphs in North Arabia depict most of the characteristics of the Arabian breed. Their association with Thamudic inscriptions provides a *terminus post quem* for their carving to the first half of the 1st millennium BC. As already mentioned, there is no evidence of horses in Arabia before this date and one hardly believes that the long selection process leading to the breed happened locally.

66 Archaeological evidence indicates the presence of a “proto-Arabian” breed along the Nile. Although there is no definite proof for a Northeastern African origin, this hypothesis remains the most convincing[155]. Some significant pieces of evidence are the horse buried in a wooden coffin at Deir el-Bahari (Thebes-West), c. 1500–1465 BC, which had only five lumbar vertebrae as is frequent with the modern Arabian breed[156], and the Buhen horse (Sudan), which bore a close resemblance to the modern Arabian breed in a slightly earlier context[157]. Besides, horses showing features of the later Arabian horse are depicted in wall paintings of Egyptian tombs from the XVIII. Dynasty (c. 1550–1298 BC) e.g. that of Nebamun at Thebes[158].

67 The hypothesis of the Egyptian origin is reinforced by the analysis of the realistic representations of breeds on the neo-Assyrian reliefs, where four different races were recognized[159]: the first resembles the central Asian Akhal-Teke; the second is a Caspian type breed, offered as a tribute by the Medes and the Elamites; the third

breed, a wild hunted one in Elam, is identified as an onager (*Equus hemionus*) or Asiatic wild horse (*Equus ferus przewalskii*) and the last breed is described as the Kushite horse. The latter, with a compact body, long thin legs, a full mane falling to the side of the neck, shows many features of the modern Arabian breed[160]. The Egyptian origin and natural absence from Assyria of this kind of horse is explicitly mentioned in the account of the campaigns of Sargon II (722–705 BC) to the Egyptian border[161]. The most ancient representations were carved on the reliefs of the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh[162].

68 Therefore, it is very likely that Arabian-like horses carved on the rock in Northern Arabia in the 1st millennium BC were introduced from either Egypt through Southern Levant or from Mesopotamia. This breed could be the one buried in Mleiha (UAE) by the end of the 1st millennium BC[163], and the one that led through selection to the Arabian horse praised in the *furūsiyya* treaties.

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69 As the reader might have noted, with regard to the horse in Arabia and the Arabian horse, many issues are still to be addressed. These gaps in our current knowledge stimulate the discussion. They bear the risk of shifting from a scientific discourse to an ideological one, particularly in such a region as the Arabian Peninsula, where the subject is closely linked to local pride and identity. This makes it necessary to stand back and consider the data as they are. In this respect, we hope that this issue will come up to the readers' expectations.

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Notes

1 AL-GHABBAN *et al.*, 2011. A translation of the text in English has been made available on the website of the SCTH: https://scth.gov.sa/en/Antiquities-Museums/ArcheologicalDiscovery/Pages/GI-AlmagarSite.aspx. The quotations in this paper come from this translation.

2 HARRIGAN, 2012.

3 AL-GHABBAN *et al.*, 2011.

4 *Idem.*

5 *Idem.*

6 *Idem.*

7 HARRIGAN, 2012.

8 AL-ANSARY, 1996, p. 54.

9 ABDUL GHAFOUR, 2011.

10 AL-GHABBAN *et al.*, 2011.

11 HARRIGAN, 2012.

12 AL-GHABBAN *et al.*, 2011.

13 CURTIS *et al.*, 2012, p. 46.

14 AL-GHABBAN *et al.*, 2011; HARRIGAN, 2012.

15 HENZELL, 2013.

16 HARRIGAN, 2012.

17 UERPMANN, 1991.

18 VILÀ *et al.*, 2001.

19 FORSTER *et al.*, 2012; WARMUTH *et al.*, 2012.

20 OLSEN, 2006; OUTRAM *et al.*, 2009.

21 ANTHONY, 2007, p. 298; 2013.

22 ANTHONY, 2013.

23 POSTGATE, 1986, p. 195.

24 OATES, 2003.

25 OWEN, 1991.

26 ANTHONY, 2013.

27 CLUTTON-BROCK, 1974; CLUTTON-BROCK & RAULWING, 2009.

28 KELEKNA, 2009, p. 218.

29 CLUTTON-BROCK & RAULWING, 2009, p. 59-78.

30 CURTIS *et al.*, 2012, p. 21.

31 MACDONALD, 2009; 2012, p. 360.

32 UERPMANN, 1991.

33 CATTANI & BÖKÖNYI, 2002

34 UERPMANN, 1991; UERPMANN & UERPMANN, 2012, p. 80-81.

35 UERPMANN & UERPMANN, 1997, p. 245-247.

36 FEDELE, 2009, p. 143.

37 ANTHONY, 2013.

38 CURTIS *et al.*, 2012, p. 16-17.

39 UERPMANN & UERPMANN, 1997, p. 248.

40 VAN NEER *et al.*, 2017, p. 14.

41 MASHKOUR, 1997; JASIM, 1999, p. 77-80; UERPMANN, 1999.

42 UERPMANN & UERPMANN, 2012, p. 84

43 STUDER, 2011, p. 316.

44 UERPMANN & UERPMANN, 2013, p. 199-200; YULE *et al.*, 2007, p. 505.

45 YULE & ROBIN, 2006, p. 262: "Were one to lament the lack of physical evidence for horses (skeletons, etc.) in old South Arabia, one might fittingly respond that analogously in the 3rd century fortified Roman/Sasanian Dura Europos no skeletons came to light. But the contemporary records from there indicate that hundreds of horses were in use."

46 RYCKMANS, 1963; MACDONALD, 1996, p. 79.

47 MACDONALD, 1996, p. 79; ALBENDA, 2004; DONAGHY, 2014, p. 198.

48 CURTIS *et al.*, 2012, p. 23.

49 RYCKMANS, 1963, p. 219.

50 ROBIN in this issue; see also SIMA, 2000, p. 63-71.

51 ROBIN in this issue; see also CURTIS *et al.*, 2012, p. 44; DONAGHY, 2014, p. 198.

52 POTTS, 1989, p. 74-75; 1993b; YULE, 2016, p. 44; YULE & WEISGERBER, 1988, p. 33.

53 MACDONALD, 2010; ROBIN, 2016, p. 242.

54 CALLOT, 2004, p. 90-95; HUTH, 2010, p. 111; ROBIN, 2016, p. 235.

55 UERPMANN & UERPMANN, 2013, p. 199-200; YULE *et al.*, 2007, p. 505.

56 ROBIN & ANTONINI in this issue; NICOLLE, 1996, p. 92; RYCKMANS, 1963; ROBIN, 1996.

57 FEDELE, 2009; STUDER, 2014.

58 UERPMANN, 1999.

59 AL-ANSARY, 1996, p. 54; MACDONALD, 1996, p. 75.

60 JASIM, 1999.

61 YULE *et al.*, 2004.

62 AVANZINI, 2016, p. 230.

63 FRANTSOUZOFF, 2015, p. 90; ROBIN, 1996, p. 63, 71 n. 40.

64 ROBIN & THEYAB, 2002.

65 On warfare in Late Antiquity, see SARANTIS & CHRISTIE, 2013 (with an extensive bibliography).

66 ZOUACHE, 2015.

67 See esp. BEESTON, 1976; HILL 1977; LANDAU-TASSERON 1977; DONNER 1981, 1996; JANDORA, 1990, 2010; KENNEDY 2001, 2007.

68 For instance: KHAN *et al.*, 2012, and, in this issue: OLSEN; ROBIN & ANTONINI.

69 MAHMOUDI, 1998, p. 199-200 (on Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's scepticism concerning the authenticity of pre-Islamic poetry); KILITO, 2001, esp. p. 45-50; BROWN, 2003.

70 TOELLE & ZAKHARIA , 2005.

71 See the efforts made in this regard by MILLER, 2016.

72 KENNEDY, 2007, p. 5. See also PICKARD, 2013, p. 373.

73 BAYHOM-DAOU & BERNHEIMER, 2013; BIANQUIS, GUICHARD & TILLIER, 2012. For the use of these sources by historians from a military perspective, see also DONNER 1996; JANDORA, 1990 and 2010.

74 SHOSHAN, 2016.

75 See GAT, 2008, p. 371-2.

76 DONNER, 1981, 221-2; DIGARD, 2002; JANDORA, 2010.

77 See KENNEDY 2007, p. 170, and NICOLLE in this issue.

78 See, for instance: AL-ṬABARĪ, 1387 AH; IBN AL-ATHĪR, 1979, I, p. 279; IBN MANẒŪR,1414 AH, IX, p. 30.

79 In earlier texts, the word *tijfāf (pl. tajāfif)* is often preceded by an adjective or a substantive ("yellow", "embroided"...). See, for instance: AL-BALĀDHURĪ, 1996, XII p. 29; AL-ṬABARĪ, , 1387 AH, III, p. 426; VII, p. 245, 598, 612; MISKAWAYH, 2000, II, p. 287.

80 NICOLLE, in this issue.

81 AL-HUMAYDĪ AL-AZDĪ (d. 488/1095), 1995, p. 144, who provides a clear definition of the words *faras mujaffaf*. He explains that it means "[the horse] wearing *tajāfif*, [this last term] meaning all things that fully cover him in warfare". He also outlines that: "[the word] *al-mujaffaf* [is used] for the horse as [the word] *al-mudajjaj* for men, meaning that he is fully armoured (*wa huwa al-lābis al-silāḥ al-tāmm*)". See also ʿIyāḍ Ibn Mūsā, [n.d.], 1, p. 159.

82 IBN MANẒŪR, *ibid*. Note that Ibn Manẓūr also emphasizes the protecting role of the *tijfāf* against injuries. See also Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Tāǧ al-ʿarūs*, 23, p. 93.

83 NETTLES, 2001, p. 100-1 (incorporation into Islamic belief of the so-called « al-Khamsa genealogy explanation »).

84 See, for instance: ALEXANDER, 1996; MACDONALD, 1996; ROBIN, 1996; MARAQTEN, 2015.

85 STETKEVYCH, 1999; 2015, esp. p. 13-34; PINCKNEY STETKEVYCH, 1996; SUMI, 2004; GORDON, 2005, p. 5; AL-ṢĀLIḤĪ, 1981. On the complex relation of Islam with poetry, see the recent reflection of O'DONNELL, 2011; Miller, 2016.

86 SHAHĪD, 2009, esp. p. 303-5. This issue is discussed in Zouache, [forthcoming].

87 SUMI, 2004, p. 19-20.

88 MONTGOMERY, 1997, p. 145.

89 SUMI, 2004, p. 21.

90 STETKEVYCH, 1986, esp. p. 103-104 (names given to the horse – as well as to other animals- in pre-Islamic poetry); SUMI, 2004, p. 142. See also ROBIN, 1996, p. 63, 71 n. 40; FRANTSOUZOFF, 2015, p. 90

91 ʿAlī b. Mahdī (d. 554/1159) was the first leader of the Mahdid dynasty of Zabīd (554-69/1159-73), which was said descending from the pre-Islamic Tubba's of Ḥimyar. His son Mahdī died in 559/1163. See SMITH, 1978; 1986.

92 It is here referred to the Najāḥid dynasty of Abyssinian slaves (412-553/1022-1158) that reigned from its capital Zabīd. See STROTHMANN & SMITH, 1993.

93 AL-MALIK AL-ASHRAF, 1983, p. 96-7.

94 Or "murdered": *qutila*.

95 *Id est*: the Najāḥids. It is referred to the murder of ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣulayhī, founder of the Ismāʿīlī Ṣulayḥid dynasty of Yemen (439-532/1047-1138), dead in 459/1066 or 473/1080.

96 See, for instance, IBN SĪDAH, 1996, p. 114 (*Ḥayzūm wa-l-Burāq farasā Jibrīl ʿalahi al-salām*).

97 IBN AL-KALBĪ, 2003, p. 28. See also VIRÉ, 1978.

98 STETKEVYCH, 1986, p. 104.

99 AL-MALIK AL-ASHRAF, 1983, p. 103.

100 STETKEVYCH, 1986, p. 104. See also KUTASI 2010; BAALBAKI 2014.

101 After SHEHADA, 2013; KUTASI 2010; BAALBAKI 2014.

102 On this topic, see below.

103 POUILLON, in this issue. See also RZEWUSKI, 2002.

104 VIRÉ, 1960, p. 803.

105 IBN AL-KALBĪ, 2003, p. 23-4.

106 FIRESTONE, 1990; WHEELER, 2006.

107 IBN AL-KALBĪ, 2003, p. 28; *Koran* 38:31-3; VIRÉ, 1978.

108 SHEHADA, 2013, p. 232.

109 PARET, 1960.

110 For instance: AL-BUKHĀRĪ, 1422 AH, V, p. 25, no. 3887; AL-NAYSĀBŪRĪ, [n.d.], 1, p. 149, no. 164; IBN KHUZAYMA, 1992, 1, p. 153, no. 301. See also GRUBER 2012.

111 KHADDURI, 1995, p. 123.

112 AL-QURṬUBĪ, quoted by AMIN, 2016.

113 MAHONEY, in this issue.

114 SHEHADA, 2013, p. 261. See also DIGARD, 2002.

115 AL-MĀWARDĪ, 1999, p. 162.

116 The hadith is given as follow, whereas other versions has been transmitted by various scholars:

ارْبُطوا الخيل فإنّ ظهورَها عزٌّ وبطونها لكم كنزٌ.

117 On the Shuʻūbiyya call, see ENDERWITZ, 1996.

118 Note that *al-Sābiq* was the name given to the winner of the early Islamic racecourses, which was said involving ten horses. Then, *al-mutaʾakhkhir* was the loser.

119 AL-SIMNĀNĪ, 1970, 1, § 181, quoted in VAN RENTERGHEM, 2015, p. 319.

120 For the Rasūlids, see MAHONEY, in this issue. For the Sharīf-s of Mekka, see the *Kitāb Manāhij al-surūr* of al-Fākihī, written by ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Fākihī for the Sharīf Abū Numayy II, and that includes developments on the horse (AL-FĀKIHĪ, 2016).

121 AL-MALIK AL-ASHRAF, 1983; SHEHADA, 2013, p. 142.

122 See CARAYON, and BERRIAH, in this issue.

123 CARAYON, in this issue; AL-MAQRĪZĪ, 1418 AH, III, p. 391.

124 BERRIAH, in this issue; ZOUACHE, [forthcoming].

125 AL-MAQRĪZĪ, 1418 AH, III, p. 391, commented in SHEHADA, 2013, p. 176.

126 On the horse economy in medieval South Arabia, see esp. VALLET, 2011, with an updated bibliography.

127 See BERRIAH, in this issue. On horse trade and horse market in the Mamlūk sultanate, see also SHEHADA, 2013, p. 208-10; LOISEAU, 2014, index, *s.v.* « marché aux chevaux ».

128 VALLET, 2012, p. 374-5. See also *idem*, 2006 and 2011.

129 AL-ṢARRĀF, 2000-2001, 2002, 2004. A detailed lexicographic study will be published in ZOUACHE, [forthcoming].

130 VIRÉ, 1960; BETTLES, 2011; CARAYON, 2012.

131 AL-ṢARRĀF, 2000-2001, 2003, 2004; AL-DASŪQĪ, 1951; ḤANAFĪ, 1960; BŪMZĀR, 1986; ALEXANDER, 1996; NETTLES, 2001; DIGARD, 2002; CARAYON, 2012; ZOUACHE, 2013; ZOUACHE, [forthcoming] (with a comprehensive bibliography).

132 BERRIAH, in this issue, outlines that *furūsiyya* treatises are still too poorly studied by scholars. See also AL-ṢARRĀF, 2004; ZOUACHE, 2013.

133 After AL-ṢARRĀF, 2000-2001, 2002, 2004; ZOUACHE, [forthcoming].

134 IBN QAYYIM AL-JAWZIYYA, 1993, p. 440. According to him, *the furūsiyya al-khayliyya*

was embodied by the Compagnons of the Prophet Muḥammad.

135 ZOUACHE, [forthcoming].

136 AL-ṢARRAF, 2004, p. 157.

137 AL-MALIK AL-ASHRAF, 2004. See also *idem*, 1983.

138 See MAHONEY, in this issue, and SHEHADA 2013.

139 ZOUACHE 2013; AL-FĀKIHĪ, 2016.

140 MAHONEY, in this issue.

141 GIERLICHS, 2012; ROSENTHAL, 2015, p. 382.

142 ROSENTHAL, 2015, p. 382.

143 NORTHEDGE, 1990, 1996; SIEGEL, 2010; GIERLICHS, 2012.

144 AL-FĀKIHĪ, 2016.

145 MAHONEY, in this issue.

146 PORTER, 1992.

147 Hippodrome for horseracing and other playful and military exercises. See, for instance, CARAYON, 2012.

148 On *furūsiyya* games and exercises, and the official celebrations organized in the Mamlūk sultanate, see esp. AYALON, 1961; ʿABD AL-RĀZIQ, 1974; RABIE, 1975; NETTLES, 2001; DIGARD, 2002; CARAYON, 2012; GUO, 2013; ZOUACHE, [forthcoming].

149 OLSEN in this issue; see also CURTIS *et al.*, 2012, p. 49; KELEKNA, 2009, p. 220.

150 CURTIS *et al.*, 2012, p. 50-53.

151 KHAN *et al.*, 2012, p. 445: "The Arab Bedouins strictly maintained purity of their race and blood and likewise they did the same with their horses. Thus, like their own blood they maintained the purity of their horses for thousands of years, from remote antiquity until the present day".

152 See A. CARAYON in this issue.

153 BLUNT 1881, p. 13-14; BURCKHARDT 1831, p. 50-54.

154 UERPMANN & UERPMANN 2012, p. 84; see also OLSEN in this issue.

155 KELEKNA, 2009, p. 217-218; BEDNARIK, 2012, p. 404.

156 CHARD, 1937.

157 CLUTTON-BROCK, 1974, p. 97-99; CLUTTON-BROCK & RAULWING, 2009.

158 CURTIS *et al.*, 2012, fig. 4.

159 ALBENDA, 2004.

160 HEIDORN, 1997, n. 7.

161 TADMOR, 1958, p. 78.

162 BARNETT *et al.*, 1998 pl. 444; ALBENDA, 2004, p. 326.

163 UERPMANN, 1999, p. 115; UERPMANN & UERPMANN, 2012, 84.

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