Interactions between the man and horse

In our reflection on the greatest victories of man as presented in myths, religions, and also encyclopedias and works of art, an important role will always be played by the horse – an animal which, of all species, has made the greatest mark on the history and progress of humanity. The horse is connected with the development of many crafts and trades,with overcoming distances and learning about other countries and cultures, with speeding up the passing of messages between people who were far away from one another. It is certainly no fault of the horse that it has been misused for purposes of military conquest, but it is also true that in many cases successful defence against armed aggression, or life-saving escape would not have been possible without the horse. In many countries the horse is also the source of many consumer items – milk, hides, horsehair and meat; it is an indispensable helper in areas hard to reach by modern off-road vehicles, and it has inspired many ancient noble crafts producing items used in the care of horses or needed for riding and harnessing them, crafts, which have their *raison d'être* in the horse.

A lot of these things have disappeared or will disappear with the passage of years, especially in industrialised countries; what remains, however, is the use of horses for sport and leisure, as helpers in maintaining public order and in the therapy of the disabled. First and foremost, however, the horse continues to be a faithful friend and companion of its master or mistress, bringing people back to nature and the natural order of things.

The ancestor of the modern horse appeared on our planet for the first time some 60 million years ago in North America as a small forest mammal (*Eohippus*) with several digits on each foot. Unlike other larger herbivores, especially ruminants, it adapted itself slowly to the ecosystems of open spaces covered in sparse vegetation. The middle digit on each limb developed into a single toe while the remaining digits gradually disappeared, the limbs grew longer, allowing the animal to run fast and become taller.The evolution of the equidae included changes in the teeth structure, enabling them to chew the hard vegetation of the plains where they lived. During the Pleistocene this resulted in the development of the *Equus*, which had a withers height of 1.40 cm.

Some 15 thousand years ago, its successor, *Equus ferus*, spread across a wide area. Skeletal remains from the Late Pleistocene can be found in North America, Beringia and the whole of Eurasia where horses came from North America via the land bridge.

The coexistence of man and horse can be divided into several areas according to the purpose for which horses have been kept; some of them may overlap on the time scale.

Functional areas of human-horse interactions depending on the purpose horses served:

1) Horse as a source of meat – from 50 thousand years BCE to date

2) Horse as the subject of works of art, legends, myths and rituals – from 35 thousand BCE to date

3) Horse as a domesticated animal and a contributor to civilisation development – from 4 000 BCE to date

4) Horse used to help herders (stock horse) – from 3 500 BCE to date

5) Draught horse (drawing trolleys, sledges, coaches including carriages) – since 2 000 B.C. to date

6) Horse helping farmers – from 900 BCE to 1945 CE (in the majority of developed

countries)

7) The warhorse – from 700 BCE to 1945 CE

8) Horse as a partner in sport and leisure – from the 6th century BCE to date

9) Horse as a messenger – from 4th century BCE to date

1) The Horse As a Source of Meat

The first link between man and the horse as a source of food (meat) was some 50 thousand years ago. Prehistoric man was the first to see much desired prey in the horse – a killed horse meant a supply of food for a number of days. This fact is supported by the archaeological evidence of finds of bones of hunted animals including the bones of horses.

There was never any guarantee that the hunt would have the desired result and a successful outcome was encouraged or, if the purpose was accomplished, appreciated by magical rites. Some people think that cave drawings of horses (and of other hunted animals) were connected with these beliefs. Examples of such caves can be found in France and Spain. The walls of the caves are covered with hundreds of coloured drawings of horses.

2) The Horse As a Domesticated Animal and Factor in Civilisational Development

In ancient times people lived day by day. They ate what they killed or found and nobody knew what the next day would bring: it was safer to gather and store crops. The meat of hunted and killed animals spoiled rather quickly and could be kept for a longer time only in freezing weather or if the animal was kept alive. People then discovered a new option – some animals would let themselves be lured and captured, they slowly became accustomed to man, they were `domesticated' and could be kept as animals for slaughter. Man thus had meat within reach at all times. The first animal to be domesticated was the dog. This happened approximately 10 thousand years BCE. Dogs were later joined by sheep and goats, and later pigs and cows. Only then came the horse, which was among the last to start living with people. The domestication of horses is believed to have occurred in the Eurasian steppes. The exact place where the domestication took place is now diffcult to identify. One of the reasons is that the bones of wild and domesticated horses are in fact identical.

Domesticated horses descended from the wild horses of Central Asia.

The prevailing view is that what can be considered to be the first domesticated horses were those that were kept for meat and herded rather than hunted. Later they were used as pack horses and only after that to carry riders. Riders on horseback followed semi-domesticated animals rambling over the vast steppes.

In 2009 it was announced that the herders of the Kazakh steppes were probably the first to domesticate horses, to bridle and ride them.This has been proven by finds dating to the high period of the Botai culture (approx. 3 700–3 100 BCE) made on the territory of prehistoric Kazakhstan - a detailed study of the teeth and jaws of Botai horses has revealed unmistakeable traces of long-term use of a bridle. A convincing testimony to the importance of the horse in the life of the Botai people are fat residues on pottery shards. The composition of the isotopes in this fat corresponds with that of mare milk. More proof has been provided by the comparison of finds of bone remains of demonstrably more recent domesticated horses with wild horses.

Domestication, whether started with a captured foal or gravid mare that have not managed to

escape, or with a small herd driven into a prepared enclosure, brought a revolution: man owned an animal in which he valued not only its power and the fact that it could carry or pull heavy loads, but also its speed and sense of perception, which somehow made it different from domesticated bovids.

The moment when man domesticated the horse and harnessed it for the first time, and later threw his leg over its back, was the culmination of a truly historical coup: to his own skills and intelligence man added the power of the horse; its speed and stamina; the horse's visual field of 340°, which enabled it to see hidden danger; its acute sense of hearing, by which, the horse can, amongst other things, predict an earthquake, perceive ultrasound or an approaching predator; a well-developed sense of smell thanks to which it can sense water from a distance of up to 800 m, etc. By joining forces with the horse, man acquired a great advantage. New horizons opened up for him. The horse helped him become acquainted with faraway lands; conquer great empires; develop trade and crafts, some of which were directly connected to the breeding and training of horses; organise a systematic way of delivering messages;and help some of the settled tribes and peoples to plough and harvest, to drive herds across the pastures and guard them. Progress in agriculture would have been unimaginable without the horse.

Sandra L. Olsen: "*Many animals - dogs, cattle, goats, pigs, and sheep - were domesticated before the horse, but breeding that one species of livestock was a seminal event. Horses stand apart because of their versatile roles in human society, which came to include dairy production, transportation, haulage, plowing, sports, warfare, religion, and status. It is difficult to place those functions in order of importance.*"

For several millenia the alliance of man and horse contributed significantly to the development of society. It changed fundamentally during the 20th century in industrialised countries when technological progress brought about the last change in the purposes horses served in the lives of people. In most industrially advanced countries, the arrival of the steam engine, of motor vehicles and the farm tractor heralded the demise of the horse-drawn carriage and horse power during the 20th century. Horse riders changed, too: the cavalry, passengers, farmers and merchants were replaced by people riding horses for sport, or rather leisure, who often lived in towns and sought contact with nature and an opportunity to enjoy physical exercise.

At the same time, however, horse-riding, which in the past was mainly the domain of men in Europe, became more gender-balanced in the 20th century and now there are both men and women riders, horse breeders and grooms.

Horses enter the 21st century still possessing their ancient, albeit in history often overshadowed mission in sport and as guards, but with new additional tasks, such as hippotherapy. Also the role of the horse as a subject of works of art lives on.

The significance of the horse as man's work mate is confirmed symbolically every day by the widespread use of the HP unit for measuring the performance of technical devices.

3) The Horse Used to Help Herders

When the horse turned from being a source of food to becoming a riding horse, it started being used as an indispensable workmate in the herding of earlier domesticated stock, especially sheep and cattle, but also horses. The stock horse made the work of the herder more efficient. A man with a dog could guard a flock of 100 sheep, but one man with a horse and a dog could manage a flock of up to 500 sheep. The herds often grazed on vast open pastures, which meant that the drover needed a very calm, reliable, steady and deft horse capable of

working long hours not only tracing the herd and rounding it up, but also dividing it, or rather separating an animal selected, for example, to be slaughtered.

4) The Draught Horse (Drawing Carts, Sledges, Wagons and Coaches)

Nomadic tribes have generally been inclined to ride horses; settled peoples usually harnessed them to vehicles. Using a horse in harness depended on whether the civilisation concerned had any previous experience in harnessing other types of animals, such as oxen or donkeys, on whether the people knew how to use the wheel in an effective way or on whether they had any need at all of a draught animal.

Carts, sledges and wagons were used to transport goods and frail or elderly individuals.

Wheeled vehicles were invaluable for civilisations that developed cities. (Grain and fodder had to be transported from the country to the towns where there was a high concentration of people and animals, and goods from town to town had to be also transported.) Harnesses existed before the invention of the wheel and were used for traction. In those times, horses pulled a load placed between two wooden beams with one end dragged along the ground. In Europe and Asia this type of transport disappeared with the switch to a wheeled cart.

In the Middle Ages people were often transported in litters carried between two horses. The structures were very simple, without cushioning or cover, but on the other hand they were robust and could withstand the terrible state of the roads. The times of medieval knighthood were indeed not very kindly disposed to the transport of persons. Servants, women and men rode on horses or mules, women and monks also on jennets. Not even in festive processions, including papal processions, was it a common to travel in carriages.

When covered wagons became somewhat more common in the 17th century, it was mostly women that travelled in them. It was considered effeminate for men to ride in carriages. The feudal lords had a great interest in their retainers being skilled horsemen accustomed to using horses, thus it was a social norm for a healthy man to transport himself on horseback.

Once the state of the roads improved a little in the modern period and the public safety of travellers, which was not much in the Middle Ages, improved too, and cushioning of vehicles was reinvented (see next paragraph), a wide assortment of vehicles appeared (travel coaches, carriages for official purposes, carts to transport goods, sometimes modified for special purposes especially with the development of trade; sport carriages, etc.).An important phenomenon in the Modern Age was the use of horses in public transport (stagecoaches, fiacres, omnibuses, horse-drawn trams and horse-drawn railways – see next paragraph).

A special kind of draught horse is the **coach horse**. In this case the carriage is a comfortable sprung four-wheel vehicle drawn by horses. Until the spread of railways and later motor vehicles, this type of carriage was the most common road vehicle.The difference between a cart and carriage is that the former has no springs and is not covered.

Ancient Romans started using carriages as travelling vehicles in the 2nd century CE at the latest. This was a vehicle with springs and a cabin for passengers. However, this technological achievement disappeared with the decline of the ancient world and approximately until the 16th century people were transported in uncushioned carts with no springs or hinges.

Springs were reinvented in the 15th century CE in the Hungarian town of Kosc. From that time the carriages, which became technically more sophisticated as time went by and fitted with a roofed cabin, spread quickly all over the European continent because they were so comforable. They were, of course, owned only by the wealthiest strata and hence were a kind of status symbol. They were decorated accordingly and equipped with all kinds of accessories. What was important was also the breed of the harnessed horses and their number in a team.

Members of the highest strata would have two or three carriages.

The carriages were perfected as time went by and in the Baroque period they were built as luxurious vehicles. No amount of gold, silver and ornaments was spared and the carriages became very expensive, not to mention the price of the draught horses. Royal courts and the nobility needed stud farms to produce beautiful teams. Special coach breeds were bred, for both transport by common coaches and festive occasions (like the Kladruber horse).

Continuous improvement gave the carriages a beautiful and elegant shape and when the English introduced iron axles, they also became very safe. The greatest improvement of carriages occurred in the 18th century, especially in France and England.

At the time when horse-drawn carriages were most popular in western Europe, especially in England, it became a fashion at the beginning of the 19th century for people to drive their own teams. In France it was fashionable at that time to have an equipage with handsome horses and, as we read in literature, it was considered good taste to present oneself in public, for example on the Champs-Elysées, in an equipage.

For a long time the horse-drawn carriage remained the most widespread means of passenger transport. It was also possible to lease one. Carriages stopped being used for commn transport of people only with the emergence of steam and automotive transport and the expansion of the public motor transport network.

Together with the development of carriages - albeit with some delay as far as the principles of providing passenger comfort were concerned - public transport started appearing, especially in the form of post-carts (see the chapter on the horse as a messenger) and stagecoaches.

Stagecoaches became increasingly common after 1818, though because of their height they were not very stable and were slower than the *malle-poste* in France or the British mail coach system. The stagecoaches may have been covered and in Europe (not so in America) equipped with glazed windows, but they were cold and not very comfortable inside. Stagecoaches disappeared from the main roads with the emergence and development of railways.

One of the means of public transport in towns that must be mentioned was the omnibus. Historically, the omnibus was always a horse-drawn vehicle providing regular public transport service. Omnibuses always followed set routes, which distinguishes them from fiacres, the predeccesors of today's taxis. The first attempts to intorduce an omnibus took place as early as in 1662. This was supposed to be a coach that would follow always the same route in Paris from one quarter to another and depart from a set stop, regardless of how many people were there, always at the same time, even if empty, and without the people using the service having to pay more than for their own seats. The time then was not ready for the omnibus system and the service did not catch on. It really developed, and that very strongly, in the first half of the 19th century (for example in Britain, France and Prussia) – in Paris there were 25 lines in 1855 and in 1860 the relevant omnibus company had 503 omnibuses and 67 thousand draught horses.

The success of the omnibuses was followed by the horse-drawn tram, which became very common at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century in various urban conglomerations (London, Manchester, Toronto, Omaha, Paris, New York, Montpellier, Prague, etc.). What contributed to its popularity was the fact that the cars could carry many more passengers, because moving on rails was less demanding of horse power. After 1896, horse-drawn trams started being replaced by engine driven ones. This resolved the issue of the demanding care of draught horses.

Horse-drawn rail transport found its place also in other forms. Rail routes for carriages pulled over a light railway superstructure by horses started being built at the beginning of the 19th century all over the world.Thus in 1825 the first public railway track on the European continent linked České Budějovice in Bohemia with Linz in Austria. The main idea behind the construction of these tracks was to reduce transport costs. The horse was able to pull a much heavier load in a carriage on rails than in a carter's wagon. Nevertheless, the era of horse-drawn railway wagons was shortlived and as early as the mid-19th century they were replaced by steam driven engines.

In industrialised countries the arrival of the steam engine and later of the internal combustion engine brought the use of teams of horses for the transport of people and goods to an end, nevertheless the use of horse teams started spreading in the world of sport and leisure activities (see The Horse As a Partner In Sport and Leisure).

5) The Horse Helping Farmers

The power, stamina and speed of the horse facilitated the utilisation of larger areas of land for crops than farmers would have been able to cultivate without horses (and also made easier the exploitation of large and more remote plots for breeding and grazing herds of animals, as described earlier).

The combination of more sophisticated agricultural tools and the use of horses resulted in higher yields – horses thus helped to increase the efficiency of farm management, which thanks to them required less time – farmers could move from simple production to the production of surplus (so called expanded production) , which they could then exchange or sell and improve their material and economic circumstances.

The more effective agricultural machines meant more time left to be used for other purposes, for example for home crafts, art, and also learning. The effect was more than the individual and his family just having more time away from farm work - the greater efficiency of agriculture brought also the liberation of the agricultural labour force from its traditional occupation and led increased migration from the agricultural countryside to the towns, reinforcing the urban population as a reservoir of labour and potential customer base, and also as the proletariat. The surpluses also contributed to the development of towns as places of concentration of market exchange. The markets of the towns were places where farmers could, on the one hand, trade their produce and, on the other hand, acquire products which they were unable to make themselves or not in the desired quality or amount.

Thus freeing labour from agricultural work thanks to horse power had consequences in the advance of education, the establishment and development of entrepreneurial activities, travel, and artistic and technical creativity, but also in the risk of social and economic conflicts. As mentioned earlier, the horse is from the historical point of view a working animal, which in agriculture facilitates the transport of loads and possibly also people, pulls farming equipment (ploughs, harrows), serves to drive certain machines (mills, water pumps) and facilitates pasturage. However, it should be pointed out for the sake of accuracy that although the horse has been replaced in a number of these fields in the 20th century by motor engines, mechnical drives etc., especially in industrialised countries, this is not absolutely true. In these countries, too, there are regions where the conditions are not favourable to the use of machines or make it difficult. This, for instance, is the case of mountainous regions or of transporting timber from the woods to the roads. Besides, even in developed countries there are communities that reject technology, either for religious reasons, like the Amish in the U.S., or for environmental reasons (the horse, for instance, does not destroy agricultural land like a tractor and other

heavy farming machinery does, it does not pollute with exhaust gases and leaking oil etc.), or for the simple finding that the traditional way is the best for a given purpose, like watching over herds in Camargue or working on cattle farms in North America, or for certain types of work in French vineyards.

6) The Warhorse

Horses were used in ancient wars by the advanced civlisations of Asia Minor, Egypt and Asia to pull chariots, but most of the army were foot soldiers.

Due to their costliness and the fact that chariots could be used only on a certain kind of relatively flat ground with a hard surface, they were replaced by the more flexible and cheaper cavalry.

The first to use horses in a fighting cavalry were the nomadic Scythians. The animal they rode was more a pony than a horse, around 140 centimetres tall with a strong neck, head and shoulders, but a small rump and legs. Their art of war served as a model to many others, for example the Parthians.

No detailed description of their battle tactics on horseback has survived, we can only guess what it was like from the example of other similar peoples. What is certain, however, is that it must have been successful, as proven by their defence against the invasion of their territory by both Darius and Alexander the Great.

From the end of 4thcentury the Scythians started being attacked from the East by other steppe nomads, the Sarmatians, who in the end defeated them. One of the causes may have been the horses of the Sarmatian nobles, which were up to 152 centimetres tall. With these horses the Sarmatians were able to deploy a truly heavy cavalry. Since their archers on horseback were as good as the Scythians, the height of the horses was a great Scythian disadvantage.

In the Middle East and Iran the Achaemenid Persians (560–330 BCE), following the example of the Assyrians, used foot archers and lancers in combination with the cavalry armed with bows and lances – and it was this cavalry which employed Scythians.Their tactics were very effective in local circumstances in their defence against the steppe nomads, but failed in battles against the Greeks, for example in the Battle of Plataea (479 BCE).

As for the Greeks, most city states never had a cavalry. Even powerful city states like Athens and Sparta did not use horses before the 5th century BCE. There were, however, regions in Greece suitable for keeping horses, such as Thessalia, Boeotia and the island of Euboea, and suitable breeds of horses were raised for warriors on horseback. With the exception of the Thessalians, no Greek state had at its disposal more than 1000 riders. The cavalry units were usually much smaller.

Far-reaching reforms of the cavalry were carried out by Philip II, king of Macedonia, who expanded the original aristocratic light horsemen with a light brigade from Thrace and Thessaly, which he called the hetairoi. The latter gained greatest prestige under Alexander the Great and was considered to be the best cavalry in the world.

The Romans relied more on their infantry than on the cavalry. Until the 1stcentury BCE the Roman cavalry was formed of Roman citizens, who were not vey good riders, and from the 1stcentury BCE Rome relied on provincial auxiliaries called the auxilia and recruited from friendly and subjugated peoples, especially the Gauls and Iberians, who supplied almost all the cavalry.

The Romans created many types of cavalry units including light horsemen. They introduced a

new type of horse harness– head-stall, horseshoe and curved saddle, and from the 1st century BCE until the 2nd century CE they gave much attention to the effort to use (and train) the cavalry in an efficient way.

While in the west horse riders started turning into members of the Roman cavalry on horses equipped as described above, in the Eurasian steppes the Parthians and later Persians started to protect their horses with massive metal armour. The ancient world called such riders cataphracts or clibanarii. The heavily armoured cataphracts could attack cavalry archers before the enemy was able to deploy all their arrows, charging into attack against the front lines of the formed infantry.

The horses were protected on their back and sides with bronze and iron scale armour. The armour had an opening for the saddle and triangular scales protected the horse's **rump.**

The riding horses bearing such a load had to be huge and strong. The armour of a cataphract could be carried only by well-fed horse, with a 152 centimetres withers height. Towards the end of the first millenium BCE, both the Sarmatians, who usually fought as cataphracts, and the Achaemenid Persians really did breed horses that meet this description. The Romans and later the Byzantines included cataphracts in their own armies.

In the militant Middle Ages the horses were widely used. The Vikings, who mounted their invasions also westwards, to Iceland for example, transported horses on their boats to be used either as a means of transport once the disembarked, or as a source of meat. Thanks to the Vikings, the history of horses in Iceland starts in the 9th century.

Warhorses are linked to the Mongols and their leader Gengis Khan during their campaigns of conquest when they followed the Scythian tradition of using horses this way.

The cavalry was a major force in European feudal armies and was almost exclusively composed of nobles, who alone had the means to purchase and maintain warhorses.

During the `European' Middle Ages, the warhorse (Lat. equus bellator, equus ad pugnandum, dextrarius; French and English destrier) was used in battle or in jostling tournaments and was trained (and bred) to carry its master wearing armour and carrying arms into battle while being itself covered in armour and capable of galloping in, for instance, knight tournaments. For a long time it was believed that this was a large horse as strong as a draft horse, but the prevailing view today is that it was a smaller animal (withers height approx. 150 cm.), which from the point of view of strength was comparable to a strong riding horse.

The destrier was a nobleman's horse. Although the knight (*nobiles, comites, rytíř...*) in armour was capable of fighting effectively also as a heavy-armoured foot soldier (during a campaign or defence of a fort etc.), his place (as period culture intended) was mainly in the saddle of a horse where, protected by high-grade apparel, equipped with superior arms and from childhood trained in riding and mastery of various weapons, he turned horse into one of the most terrible weapons on the medieval battlefield.

The destrier was employed in battle mainly until the spread of the use of gunpowder in the end of the 14thcentury; this resulted in the demise of knighthood and heavy armoured cavalryin the 16thcentury.

But the cavalry did not disappear from armies altogether. In Modern Age wars horses played an important role as the light cavalry and in unit supply. It was in the 19th century that breeding programmes transformed local breeds and gave rise to new breeds which suited the needs of the cavalry and provided strong draught horses to pull supply wagons; it was also in the 19th century that the last great cavalry battle in history took place at Waterloo, where Napoleon was defeated, putting an end to the Napoleonic wars in which thousands of horses

participated. But horses were stilI being used during the First World War.

It is important to point out that the modern era started with the European invasion of America on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean where the horse had become extinct 10 thousand years ago. Hence the indigenous civilisations and cultures of America developed without the presence of horses and therefore the native people allegedly believed that the rider and horse were one being – in any case, the horse evoked fear in the natives and in this sense horses with their psychological effect helped conquer America. During the Spanish colonisation a breed of free-roaming horses appeared in North America – the mustang, whose ancestors were the strayed horses of Spanish colonists. (The name itself comes from the Spanish *el mestengo* – a wanderer without a home.)

7) The Horse As a Partner in Sport and Leisure

A breach occurred in the 19th century. Once the steam engine was introduced the horse started being used less and less to drive engines and transport people and goods. Progress in arms development decimated the herds of warhorses; horses were no longer of any use to the military.

Horses, however, acquired new purposes or, more accurately, some of the purposes horses had been meeting since time immemorial were given a new life – the purpose of horses as welcome partners in equestrian sports and competitions, many of which have become officially recognised internationally as Olympic sports, or recognised by the International Federation for Equestrian Sports. Due to the popularity of amateur and professional equestrian sports and competitions, breeders in the last century have changed their objective – instead of the versatile utility horse they started breeding specialised sport breeds for racing, horse jumping and dressage.

There are other `entertainment' features of the horse that have been preserved from the past and are reflected in its interactions with man: the horse is capable of providing a good show – remember the circus, both circus dressage and vaulting, which of course is not considered a sport discipline in that context.

The role of horses in a hunt should be mentioned too - probably the most ancient form of using horses to catch game. Over the centuries hunting with horses has lost its genetically primary function and has changed, especially among the social elites, into a welcome pastime and social event combined with sport - for example during the hunts that were so popular with the upper strata in the 19th century.

Besides using horses for sport and entertainment, people in the 20th and in the early 21stcentury also seek in horses a counterweight to an overtechnicised and socially alienated world: the horse is a living creature, a part of nature, and through his partnership with the horse man, too, can return to nature and its rhythm; the horse, however, is also a partner with whom to spend free time, one that can help a person overcome feelings of loneliness.

8) The Horse As the Subject of Works of Art, Legends, Myths and Rituals – from 35 thousand years BCE to date

Horses are often present in legends, myths and faiths. There has already been mention of the depictionss of horses in cave paintings dating back to the stone age (see chapter The Horse As a Source of Meat); a white horse is the subject of the Uffington geoglyph dating to the Bronze Age – approx. 3000 BCE, horses were also a part of funeral rituals as proven by

archaeological finds in the kurgans of nomadic peoples.

Antiquity expanded further the presence of the horse in myths and fables: the winged stallion, the son of the sea god Poseidon and of Medusa, and the symbol of poets - Pegasus, who was the ally of the hero Bellerophon; horses harnessed to the chariot of god Helios in the Phaethon myth; Poseidon's horses know from the myth about Pelops and his courtship, and even Bucephalus, who could be tamed only by Alexander the Great, and other mythical horses. Antiquity gave birth to Centaurus – half man, half horse. India introduced the white horse as one of the embodiments of Vishnu and a horse-headed diety, Hayagriva, the Hindu deity of knowledge and wisdom. It also gave birth to Kanthaka, the horse of Prince Siddhartha, the later Buddha, and traces lead to India as the place of origin of yet another legendary animal – the unicorn, which also had some of the attributes of the horse physiognomy and was considered a symbol of purity by medieval Europe.

In ancient times, Europe, too, attributed a special diety to horses: the goddess Epona, of Celtic provenance, whose attribute was a horse, was worshipped as the domestic goddess of horse breeders and more commonly also as the goddess of plenty and prosperity. This goddess was adopted from the Gauls by the Romans, who often incorporated Gauls into their cavalry units. In the military regions of the Rhine and the Danube she was worshipped by the commanders of the Roman cavalry, who asked her to protect riders and their horses. The Norse pantheon also had its horse – the eight-legged Sleipner of the god Odin; the sagas, too, involve a number of horses.

The Middle Ages conceived its horses in connection with legend or religious faith, such as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse - a frequent subject of the graphic arts, the horse of St. George and St. Martin's horse, who in central European etnography is always presented riding a white horse, or Babieca, the horse of El Cid, or Al Buraq, the horse associated with the Prophet and mentioned in Islamic mythology, or the horse Haizum, who according to Islamic tradition served the Archangel Gabriel and could fly from planet to planet.

Horses are also the subject of the graphic arts. We see this in all periods: for example in the mosaic depicting the abduction of Persephone on the tomb inside the Kasta tumulus in Amphipolis, or on the quadrigas of the bronze volute krater of Vix; the destriers of medieval knights entered art and literature *inter alia* in the legends of the Arthurian cycle or in illustrations of medieval manuscripts (e.g. the *Hortus deliciarum*in the 12th century, the manuscript by Peter of Eboli, also in the 12thcentury, or the *Codex Manesse* from the begining of the 14th century) or in sculptures (such as the statue of St. George at Prague Castle dating to 1373).

The significance of the horse in the Middle Ages is reflected in its reflection in that most esteemed of places – the coats of arms of nobles and towns, and sometimes in their seals, although the principle of heraldic symbols is much older. The picture of horses can be also found on another symbol of power - coins and stamps.

Nor did the art of the modern era forget the horse: we encounter it in numerous works of fiction (Don Quijote's Rosinanta, to name just one) and in works of graphic art, such as the paintings of *Philipp Ferdinand de Hamilton*, Johann Georg de Hamilton, Eugene Delacroix, Edgar Degas orThéodor Géricault , George Stubbs, and also Salvatora Dalí, Franz Merel and others; the horse figures in portraits of rulers and military commanders (the equestrian portrait of Charles V by Tizian for example). As for sculptures, here too the horse is frequently a part of equestrian statues, starting with the mounted statue of Marcus Aurelius in Rome or of the condottiere Gattamelata by Donatello in Padua and, finally, the rider statue of St. Wenceslas on Wenceslas Square in Prague. The sculptures decorating many buildings would be hard to imagine without their horses and teams – the Parthenon frieze, for instance.

Also folklore and folk art could not do without the horse – there are horses in army, recruiting, work, love and other songs; the horse is the protagonist or one of the characters in many fairy tales and fables and the horse motif is present in the ornamentation of certain objects of folk craft, from ceramics to woodcarving and toy making.

9) The Horse As a Messenger

Ancient Chinese were probably the first to develop a network of post stations with horse couriers, a phenomenon justified by the need to pass information quickly within an empire spreading over a vast territory with a solid administrative system. During their invasion of China in the 13th century CE, the Mongols became acquainted with the system of organising long-distance mail carried by horses. The connection between the nomadic culture of the Mongols, which valued horses very highly, and the principles of the Chinese postal communication important for the administration of the empire, especially the system of stations for changing spent courier horses, enabled the Mongols to control their enormous empire, although the Mongols used the system predominantly for military purposes.

Under the sucessors of Genghis Khan the system of post stations spread to Iran, Iraq, and later Syria.

Following a decline that started with the fall of the West Roman Empire, the system of post couriers on horseback was reborn in Europe at the turn of the Middle Ages and the modern era. The post riders represented a system of distribution of horses and riders for the purpose of delivering messages. This existed in various periods and in various places (see above) and here it is referred to as the networks of regular services provided at a certain level by the state or on the basis of a permit issued by the monopolistic state. These networks were based on established routes (`mail roads') and points. Unlike other variants of the use of the horse for delivering messages, post couriers collected and delivered mail throughout their route and they met at assigned places and set times with other couriers with whom they exchanged the mail to be delivered. The correspondence could thus be delivered relatively quickly within a large territory on long routes for a relatively favourable price. A typical Modern Age feature was that the couriers delivered private mail as well. This, and also the fact that they worked according to a set time schedule distinguished them from older systems designed exclusively to serve the government or the military.

In Europe, this system started being used as early as in the 15thcentury in Italy, which was closest to the legacy of the Ancient Roman cursus publicus system.

In France, this service was used from the time of Louis XI, who decided to introduce it, including horse changing stations, to receive information from (and give his instructions to) the whole kingdom as fast as possible while ensuring the necessary confidentiality. He thus adopted the principles of the Roman *cursus publicus*; the French service bore the name *Service des chevaucheurs du roi*. Post riders were able to cover 40 km or more per day if they used reharnessing stations, which were 28 km apart. (At the time of the greatest boom of the French horse post in the second half of the 19th century, there were aproximately 40 thousand horses available to deliver mail daily all over France.)

In territories ruled by the Habsburgs the system developed from the middle of the 16th century thanks to the efforts of the Thurn Taxis family, although it did have a predecessor in the Holy Roman Empire – from 1274 the Hansa (Hanseatic League) disposed of a regular post service between the Hansa towns and Hansa controlled castles. In Thurn Taxis times, the individual horse changing stations were approximately one day apart by horse.

In Elisabethan England the system of postriders serviced a wide range of settlements and in spite of restrictive government policy was used also for private purposes (in France this had been possible since the rule of Henri IV); one stage was approximately 10 miles after which the horses were changed.

Around 1660,the chaise de poste appeared – a light, two-wheeled cart drawn by not more than two horses, originally developed from the calash designed for the transport of one person; the calash itself was based on a litter. It was its lightness which predestined it for carrying the post with post horses changed at theharnessing stations. It could also carry one to two passengers. Later, joint transport of post and pasengers (4 to 8 people) was provided in France by the *malle-poste* (mail coach in Britain) using four-wheeled carriages.

The mail coach appeared in Britain in 1784. This was a closed carriage for the transport of 4 passengers and others could sit on the coach box next to the coachman. In the rear part of the coach there was a large trunk for the mail and a seat for the postilion, who unlike his continental counterpart was not allowed to drive the coach, which moved at a speed of 8 to 13 km/hour. Speed was more important for the mail coaches than pasenger comfort.

The French *malle-poste*, which replaced the two-wheeled carts used during the rules of Louis XV and XVI, could transport passengers too, besides the mail. These were heavy, closed, sprung, four-wheeled carriages drawn by a team of four horses. The front part, the cabriolet, was where the coachman and one passenger sat, the central cabin was for three passengers and at the back there was a chest for the mail. The *malle poste* had the privilege of being allowed to move at a gallop because of its primarily mail carrying function. It was used unti the middle of the 19th century.

The preceding pages have indicated a lot about the importance of the horse for man. The role of the horse culminated in the 19th century. Its use then was widespread: horses provided all the transport, both of freight and of persons, they did all kinds of hard work in the army, agriculture and the emerging industry and no factory could do without a stable. Horses were hauled deep downunder the ground into mines to pull bogies full of excavated coal and ore through the adits. In towns, horses turned the wheels of trade, every town had its `movers' and `dustmen' and horses were used by the police and customs officers.

Horses thus played a key role in the development of the modern world. The use of horses brought about a revolution in agriculture, it supported the development of towns, improved and sped up transport and communication, but also opened the road to imperialism and warfare. Horses contributed to medical breakthroughs and until this day remain an icon of the development of human civilisation.

The arrival of the steam engine and later of the internal combustion engine and electrical motor, the development of automotive transoprt and the use of the farm tractor heralded the decline of horse-driven vehicles and machines in most industrialised countries at the end of the 19th century and during the 20th century. The devlopment of military technology resulted in the gradual elimination of horses with their vulnerability in battle.

These changes went hand in hand with a transformation of the users of horses: army cavalrymen, passengers on horses or in stage coaches disappeared, also postriders disappeared and the farmers who use horses to pull a cart or plough are now few. They have all been replaced by horse riders, male and female, often hailing from towns, who seek, and find, in horse riding contact with nature and an opportunity for physical exercise.

As has been repeatedly noted – the bond between man and horse has changed substantially in

developed countries in the 20th century when technological progress has led to the most recent transformation of the functions fulfilled so far by the horse in people's lives. Nevertheless, the horse continues to be a very important symbol, which is confirmed by that basic characterisic of the human race – speech. In speech we still find widely adopted and common idioms referring to the horse and its features: `to work like a horse', `strong as a horse', `on his horse'…

Horses are entering the 21st century with a strengthened sport, therapeutical, guarding , security and social mission.