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*Cheiron: The International Journal of
Equine and Equestrian History*
Vol. 3, Issue 2/2023
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Available online at
<http://trivent-publishing.eu/>

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DOI: 10.22618/TP.Cheiron.20233.2.216007

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I. Introduction

There remains a strong interest in the horse in the twenty-first century. There is no shortage of literature which studies the horse in modern society, looking at the role of the horse in society and in horse-human relationships.² Argent and Vaught argue that as the place of the horse in human society has changed, so has the discourse about the horse within these societies.³ They assert that there has been a change to “EuroAmerican narratives”⁴ about horses in modern society which objectify the horse and remove a sense of the horse as an active participant in horse-human relationships.⁵

¹ School of Law, University of Buckingham, UK.

² See for instance, Kristen Guest and Monica Mattfeld, eds., *Equestrian Cultures: Horses, Human Society, and the Discourse of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); Gala Argent and Jeannette Vaught, eds., *The Relational Horse: How Frameworks of Communication, Care, Politics and Power Reveal and Conceal Equine Selves* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

³ Argent and Vaught, Introduction, in *The Relational Horse*, 2.

⁴ Argent and Vaught, Introduction, in *The Relational Horse*, 2.

⁵ Argent and Vaught, Introduction, in *The Relational Horse*, 2.

Narratives about horses are powerful because they “reflect and influence how we perceive (and study) our relationship with horses, the work we ask of them, and the ways they are treated as they carry out that work.”⁶ In understanding narratives about horses, there is a greater insight into different aspects of human community and culture. They help to reveal just what place the horse has in a modern technologically dependent society in the twenty-first century.

There are other narratives about horses outside of the Western world as well. In the telling of the tale of the horse in the twenty first century, it is important that these are given cognizance as well. For instance, Fijn offers a contrasting narrative where “Mongolian herders view their herd animals [including horses] as agents who participate in a reciprocal, co-domestic relationship.”⁷ Thus, in Western worldviews horses have often been represented as having no agency, while other worldviews consider the horse as having agency within the horse-human relationship.

These contrasting perspectives point out the great variety of social views and uses of horses in the twenty-first century. This article examines the place of the horse in and across human societies within the twenty first century—and challenging the notion that the relevance of the horse has ended in the modern world.

It does this through an analysis of horse-related elements of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) that have been approved for listing on one of two United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (“UNESCO”) lists. In so doing, it explores the listings of horse cultural heritage, and the narratives contained within the listings. It also plumbs the reasons that particular horse-heritage elements are significant to states. These listings give a glimpse into the reasons why horses retain significance in human societies in the twenty-first century. The article proceeds as follows. The first section discusses cultural heritage involving horses. This section takes a broad view, looking beyond the definitions and criteria that are required for a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage listing. The second section then looks at just that—the requirements and process for an element of intangible cultural heritage to be approved to be listed on one of the two UNESCO intangible cultural heritage lists. The third section then evaluates a range of ICH horse cultural heritage listings. It uses several horse-heritage items as case studies to consider the relevance of horses in communities in the twenty-first century. The narratives within these listings provide These listings further insight into the relevance of horses in the twenty-first century.

Concluding thoughts are offered on how it is abundantly clear that horses remain relevant in the twenty-first century, in both pragmatic and symbolic measures. These uses are partially reflected in the reasoning behind the listing of horse-heritage—in a way perhaps not anticipated or intended by UNESCO. However, this also leaves open the need for further exploration of the relevance of the horse in the twenty-first century. In the end, the article posits that there is indeed no end to the era of the horse—that it continues, an area ripe for more exploration and discussion and research.

⁶ Argent and Vaught, Introduction, in *The Relational Horse*, 2.

⁷ Natasha Fijn, *Living with the Herds: Human-Animal Co-Existence in Mongolia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, Paper Back Edition 2017), 36.

II. What is Horse -Cultural Heritage?

Horses have been an integral part in the formation and structure of human cultures over time. This is axiomatic. It has been speculated that the significance of the horse would end with the widespread use of mechanization—so much so that this has been referred to as the “end of the era of the horse.”⁸ But is this in fact so? Raulff explains that the end of using horses was something that took place over an extended time, and in fact is not completed:

The process of *deborsification*... has its own duration and its historical power. It occurs as a result of the dissolution and transformation processes that dragged on for over a century; in certain respects they are unfinished to this day... the end of the era of the horse spans not only a relatively long time period but also a wealth of realities and observations from the most diverse spheres of life.⁹

To identify the “end of the era of the horse” is then something which becomes a misnomer. The role of the horse in human communities has changed. But the horse is far from absent—it has not vanished. As Raulff significantly notes, the changing place of horse in society is something that occurs across a wide range of communities.¹⁰ This opens the question: in the twenty-first century, what place does the horse occupy in social structures, and why?

Raulff comments on the shifts on how horses are considered as their role in society has transformed with the growth of mechanization:

Just as the old, solid world of horses, carriages and cavalrymen begins to crumble under the pressure of an increasingly mechanized civilization; horses take on a more imaginary and chimeric form: they are reduced to an existence of the ghosts of modernity, and the more they forfeit their worldly presence, the more they haunt the minds of a humanity that has turned away from them.¹¹

These comments highlight that the horse takes hold of the human imagination even as it fades from essential daily life.¹² Likewise, Pickel-Chevalier notes change in how

⁸ Ulrich Raulff, *Farewell to the Horse: The Final Century of Our Relationship*, trans. Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp (Allen Lane, 2017), 7.

⁹ Raulff, *Farewell*, 7-8.

¹⁰ Raulff, *Farewell*, 7-8.

¹¹ Raulff, *Farewell*, 11.

¹² Raulff, *Farewell*, 11. See also Sylvine Pickel-Chevalier, “Tourism and the Intangible Culture of the Horse,” *Mondes du Tourisme* [Online], 18 | 2020, paragraph 5, online since 01 March 2021, connection on 15 March 2021. Accessed January 12, 2003, <http://journals.openedition.org/tourisme/3016>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/tourisme.3016>.

the horse is viewed in modern society. She identifies a modern “revolution”¹³ in the abstract construction of the horse.¹⁴ This abstraction resulted in a “reinvention of the horse, as subject of love and object of transgression, favouring social engagement and accomplishment...more important for young women and their paths to self-development than to young men.”¹⁵

Here a focus on this abstract horse is seen as part of the maturation and growing up for women in Western cultures. This gives rise to the stereotype of a girl being “horse-crazy” so common that it is viewed as a phase or rite of passage to adulthood in parts of modern American society.¹⁶

III. Horses and Cultural Heritage

It is not only in the human imagination that horses can be found in the twenty-first century. While the horse may take on an increasingly symbolic role in a mechanized age, actual physical horses continue to occupy spaces and roles in human communities.

The obvious inclusion and starting point for the constitution of a horse cultural heritage is the physical presence of the horse. The use that is made of the horse, as well as the symbolic meanings and associations given to that use and to the horse itself, are all part of the of what establish varying kinds of horse cultural heritage.

Pickel-Chevalier offers a definition and explanation of what is encompassed within a horse cultural heritage:

Horses, fundamentally associated with systems of practice, knowledge and representation, can thus be understood as a heritage that is both tangible (a socially constructed animal and the equipment associated with it) and intangible (modes of existence) around which group identities emerge.¹⁷

The communal identity that is formed around the horse is critical to the formation of horse-oriented intangible cultural heritage. Pickel-Chevalier outlines that horse cultural heritage can be of a of high and elite status¹⁸ or “throughout all social strata of the population.”¹⁹

There is another level of horse cultural heritage in addition to what Pickel-Chevalier has identified. This is the use of the horse in practical, working roles and the activities and meanings which surround it. This is not something which is elite or that is found across all levels, but has a precise location as a non-elite, practically

¹³ Sylvine Pickel-Chevalier, “Popular Horse Stories and the Invention of Contemporary Horse-Human Relationships Through an ‘Alter Ego’ Paradigm,” *Journal of Sport Science* 5 (2017): 135, accessed August 6, 2023, <http://www.davidpublisher.com/index.php/Home/Article/index?id=30927.html>.

¹⁴ Pickel-Chevalier, “Popular Horse Stories,” 135.

¹⁵ Pickel-Chevalier, “Popular Horse Stories,” 135.

¹⁶ See for instance, Jean O’Malley Halley, *Horse-Crazy: Girls and the Lives of Horses* (University of Georgia Press, 2019): 22-25, 28-31.

¹⁷ Pickel-Chevalier, “Tourism,” paragraph 12.

¹⁸ Pickel-Chevalier, “Tourism,” paragraph 14.

¹⁹ Pickel-Chevalier, “Tourism,” paragraph 14.

oriented cultural heritage element. Examples of this can be found in ICH listings, as discussed in section three of this article.

The international stage provided by the UNESCO listings demonstrates the continued vitality and importance of a range of horse cultures in the twenty-first century. It also provides horse-heritage elements with a highly visible platform through which information can be gleaned about these. As discussed in the following section, it is far from straight forward as to which heritage elements a state selects to put forward for nomination onto a UNESCO list. These demonstrate that in the twenty-first century, horse culture still has a perhaps surprising relevance and strength.

IV. UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage and Heritage as Discourse and Politics

A. Defining Intangible Cultural Heritage

UNESCO is one of the specialized agencies of the United Nations. It has a broad-based mandate “to build peace through international cooperation in education, sciences, and culture.”²⁰ As part of its mandate, it has several international treaties related to safe-guarding cultural heritage. These include the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the 2001 Convention for the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH Convention) and the 2005 Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.²¹ While the Convention on World Cultural and Natural Heritage and the Convention on Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage maintain lists of approved heritage elements, the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions does not.²²

This article focuses on the Convention on Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the lists of approved heritage where elements of heritage are inscribed. There are two lists for intangible cultural heritage: the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding and the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Each list has a process for a heritage element to be nominated and a set of criteria that must be met for approval of the nomination.²³ Nominations can be made by a single state or by several states through

²⁰ “UNESCO in Brief,” UNESCO, accessed September 4, 2022, <https://www.unesco.org/en/brief>.

²¹ “Conventions,” UNESCO, accessed September 4, 2022, https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/instruments/conventions?title=&field_convention_theme_value=CLT.

²² “The 2005 Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions,” accessed January 15, 2023, <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/passeport-convention2005-web2.pdf>.

²³ Operational Directives, 1.1, for Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding and 1.2 for the Representative List, accessed September 4, 2022, https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/2003_Convention_Basic_Texts-2020_version-EN.pdf.

a multinational nomination.²⁴ A meeting is held annually to review nominations and determine what heritage elements meet the criteria to be inscribed onto a list.²⁵ Not all nominations are approved to be inscribed—there is a very rigorous process to go through. The process, however, has been criticized as being highly political.²⁶

A state must have the Convention in force to make a nomination to one of the lists.²⁷ As of July 2020, there were 180 state parties to the Convention.²⁸ Nominated elements are scrutinized against criteria by a subsidiary body, the Evaluation Body, which issues a draft decision.²⁹ The nomination and draft decision are then considered by the Intergovernmental Committee, which makes final decisions on whether to approve a particular nomination for inscription on one of the lists.³⁰ UNESCO proposes the following general explanation of what is meant by cultural heritage: “Heritage is the cultural legacy which we receive from the past, which we live in the present and which we will pass on to future generations.”³¹

The ICH Convention then contains detailed definitions of intangible cultural heritage. It begins with defining it as:

the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.³²

In addition to this definition, the Convention explains that intangible cultural heritage falls within one or more of five domains:

- (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;

²⁴ Operational Directives, 1.1, for Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding and 1.2 for the Representative List, 1.5 for multinational nominations.

²⁵ “Procedure of Inscription of Elements on the Lists and of Selection of Good Safeguarding Practices,” sets out the timetabling and procedures for inscription on each list. Accessed September 4, 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/procedure-of-inscription-00809#timetable-and-procedures>.

²⁶ See for instance, Enrico Bertacchini, Claudia Liuzza, Lynn Meskell, and Donatella Saccone, “The Politicization of UNESCO World Heritage Decision Making,” *Public Choice* 167, no. 1 (2016): 95-129; and Marc Jacobs, “Brugel and Burke Were Here! Examining the Criteria Implicit in the UNESCO Paradigm of Safeguarding ICH: the first decade,” *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 9 (2014): 100-118.

²⁷ ICH Convention Articles 16(1) and 17 (1), 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

²⁸ “The State Parties’ to the Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,” <https://ich.unesco.org/en/states-parties-00024>, accessed January 8, 2023.

²⁹ “Operational Directives”, Section 1.8, para 27, and Section 1.8, paras 29-31, accessed September 4, 2022, https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/2003_Convention_Basic_Texts-2020_version-EN.pdf.

³⁰ “Operational Directives,” Section 1.10.

³¹ <https://en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/santiago/cultura/patrimonio>.

³² Article 2(1), 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

- (b) performing arts;
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events;
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- (e) traditional craftsmanship.³³

One aspect of the definition is intangible cultural heritage is passed from one generation to another, thus opening the potential for a view of the past. The definition also notes that the recreation of heritage is also done through “interaction with... their [the group’s] history.”³⁴ So while intangible cultural heritage is focused on an element’s practice and expression in the present day, its past is also part of the expression of a heritage element.

But just how the past should be recounted in nominations has not been clear. As discussed in the third section of this article, the way in which the past is related to the heritage element and to the present day can be difficult proving grounds for listing approval.

In 2016, the Evaluation Committee commented upon the inclusion of historical events in the nomination forms:

Historical accuracy. Although making abstraction of the historical context in which an element is situated is both unrealistic and unhelpful, and considering that any attempt to ‘freeze’ an element in time is discouraged (Article 2 of the Convention), the Body evaluates its current practice and meaning, rather than its past significance. Nevertheless, many elements have roots in violent historical events (such as in the colonial domination over indigenous populations) whose memory in contemporary expressions of intangible cultural heritage may now act as factors of unity. Where this may be the case, the submitting State is encouraged to present the historical context in as balanced a manner as possible.³⁵

That is, historical context, when presented, is not meant to take one side or another when events are contentious. Indeed, past conflicts are now to be presented as “factors of unity,”³⁶ but without any elaboration on how this might in fact be done. The reality will be for many communities that the past remains relevant in the present-day.

Heritage elements are now also linked with specific Sustainable Development Goals, as can be seen with the 2022 approved element “Lipizzan Horse Breeding

³³ Article 2(2), 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

³⁴ Article 2(1), 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

³⁵ Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Eleventh Session, Item 10 of the Provisional Agenda, ITH/16/11.COM/10, 31 October, Paris, 2016, paragraph 34, accessed January 8, 2023, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/11com>, .

³⁶ “Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Eleventh Session, Item 10.”

Traditions,” linked with the goals of Gender Equality, Life on the Land and Partnerships for the Goals.³⁷

Thus, there are many formal requirements that a heritage element must meet, and if approved for inscription, the element will be aligned with other information about sustainable development goals even though these do not form a part of the definition of ICH or of the approval criteria. But these are not the only factors that shape the decision on whether to approve a particular heritage nomination.

In addition to the criteria which must be met, other intense pressures shape the decision whether to approve a particular nomination. This affects the way in which the heritage element itself is presented, interpreted, and practiced. These are reflected in the narratives and discourse which underlie cultural heritage.

B. The Discourse and Narrative of Cultural Heritage

Smith contends that heritage can be understood as a form of discourse, and that an examination of this underlying narrative reveals many characteristics about heritage in general and of individual heritage elements in particular.³⁸ She explains that there is an “Authorised Heritage Discourse”³⁹(AHD) that favors some forms of heritage and marginalizes others.⁴⁰ This discursive understanding of heritage demonstrates that:

“Heritage” is thus a discourse involved in the legitimization and governance of historical and cultural narratives, and the work that these narratives do in maintaining or negotiating societal values and the hierarchies that underpin them.⁴¹

The creation of international instruments on cultural heritage and a system of recognizing heritage elements through inscription onto a list had a profound effect on cultural heritage as explained by Smith, who points to the World Heritage Convention as being of particularly significant in establishing the way in which heritage was to be interpreted.⁴² The tangible heritage which was inscribed through the World Heritage Convention was seen to have an AHD that privileged European origin heritage.⁴³

Schreiber’s research indicates that despite the aims of the ICH Convention in changing a European dominated cultural heritage field into one that was more

³⁷“Lipizzan Horse Breeding Traditions,” accessed January 8, 2023, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/lipizzan-horse-breeding-traditions-01687>.

³⁸ Smith, “Intangible Cultural Heritage,” 135. Laurajean Smith, “Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Challenge to the Authorised Heritage Discourse?” *Compilation* 40 (2015): 135.

³⁹ Smith, “Intangible Cultural Heritage,” 135.

⁴⁰ Smith, “Intangible Cultural Heritage,” 135.

⁴¹ Smith, “Intangible Cultural Heritage,” 141.

⁴² Smith, “Intangible Cultural Heritage,” 133.

⁴³ Laurajean Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London/New York, Routledge: 2006), 113.

inclusive of heritage from other regions of the world, Europe remains a dominant influence on the workings of intangible cultural heritage.⁴⁴

While never intended to be lists that bestowed prestige, nevertheless, the lists soon came to be seen in that way and having heritage listed a prestige marker for a state. Schreiber discusses how an intangible cultural heritage listing on a UNESCO list can provide a state with an attractive opportunity for gaining the prestige of “soft power.”⁴⁵

All of this combines for a complicated stew of influence as to what elements are approved, and with what information. The next section considers several inscribed horse-heritage elements, considering them in light of these factors and influences, and indicating what this means in a larger sense for horse cultural heritage.

V. Horse-Cultural Heritage Items and UNESCO ICH Listing

This section provides case-studies of several elements of horse cultural heritage that have been nominated or inscribed on a UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage. The case studies explored in this section provide insight into the significance of horse cultural heritage in the twenty-first century. This discussion points out the many spheres in which horse heritage operates in the present day.

A. Inscription of Classical Horsemanship Elements

As Smith notes, the fashioning of a heritage narrative is done to promote aims of national identity.⁴⁶ Because of this, it is no surprise, for instance, that there are national claims to different forms of horsemanship in the form of four European schools of classical horsemanship⁴⁷ that embrace a version of national history as well as making the element relevant to the present day. Two schools of national classical horsemanship are now inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List, as discussed below.

Pickel-Chevalier notes the historical lineage of modern European classical horsemanship schools going back to the era of the European Renaissance.⁴⁸ It is

⁴⁴ Hanna Schreiber, “Intangible Cultural Heritage, Europe, and the EU: Dangerous Liaisons?” in *Cultural Heritage in the European Union*, ed. Andrzej Jakubowski, Francesca Fiorentini and Kristen Hausler (Leiden: Brill Nijhoff, 2019), 329-330.

⁴⁵ See generally Hanna Schreiber, “Intangible Cultural heritage and Soft Power – Exploring the Relationship,” *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 12 (2017): 44-57.

⁴⁶ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 48-49.

⁴⁷ These are the Spanish Riding School in Vienna, Austria; Cadre Noir of the French National Riding School in Saumur, France; the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art in Lisbon, Portugal and the Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art in Jerez de la Frontera, Spain, “How Four Classical Schools Came Together,” *Equisearch*, May 27, 2008, accessed September 3, 2022, https://equisearch.com/articles/classical_schools_052708/.

⁴⁸ Sylvine Pickel-Chevalier, “Tourism as an Agent of Reinvention for European Equestrian Intangible Cultural Heritages: The Case of Three Great Public Classical Riding Schools,” *Mondes du Tourisme* 18 (2020), paragraph 1. Online since 01 March 2021, connection on 15 March 2021. Accessed January 13, 2023. <http://journals.openedition.org/tourisme/3019>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/tourisme.3019>

from this Renaissance period that the name of “classical horsemanship” is derived. A focus on this lineage was to prove a stumbling block for the approval of Austria’s classical horsemanship element, as discussed below.

The first element of classical horsemanship to be approved for inscription was that of France for Equitation in the French tradition. The UNESCO inscription of this explains:

Equitation in the French tradition is a school of horseback riding that emphasizes harmonious relations between humans and horses. The fundamental horse-training principles and processes are guided by non-violence and lack of constraint, blending human demands with respect for the horse’s body and mood.⁴⁹

Particular mention is made in the inscription of the “Cadre Noir of Saumur”⁵⁰ as “the most widely known community”⁵¹ of French equitation.⁵² The inscription notes the pivotal role that is played by the Cadre Noir in promoting French equitation, saying that “Frequent public displays and galas hosted by the Cadre Noir of Saumur help to sustain the visibility of equitation in the French tradition.”⁵³

But this brief description belies the complex history of the development of the Cadre Noir equitation practices. Pickel-Chevalier explains that “French horse-riding has been built on foundations that go back many centuries – in particular since the Renaissance period – by absorbing various international influences.”⁵⁴ The successful inscription is noted by Pickel-Chevalier as “pav[ing] the way” for the eventual inscription of another European classical horsemanship element four years later.⁵⁵

The element “Classical Horsemanship and the High School of the Spanish Riding School Vienna” (“Spanish Riding School”) was nominated twice. The first in 2013 was not successful, while a subsequent nomination in 2015 was. The unsuccessful 2013 nomination included specific references to the lineage of classical horsemanship tracing back to Xenophon and to its establishment as an elite riding form in the Renaissance.⁵⁶

The Intergovernmental Committee gives several reasons as to why the 2013 nomination was not successful. It notes that “although classical horsemanship and the Spanish Riding School Vienna have long histories, the nomination does not

⁴⁹ “Equitation in the French Tradition,” <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/equitation-in-the-french-tradition-00440>. Accessed August 6, 2023.

⁵⁰ “Equitation in the French Tradition.”

⁵¹ “Equitation in the French Tradition.”

⁵² “Equitation in the French Tradition.”

⁵³ “Equitation in the French Tradition.”

⁵⁴ Sylvine Pickel-Chevalier, “Globalization and Equestrian Culture: The Case of Equitation in the French Tradition,” in *Equestrian Cultures in Global and Local Contexts*, ed. Miriam Adelman and Kirrily Thompson (New York: Springer, 2017), 84.

⁵⁵ Pickel-Chevalier, “Globalization and Equestrian Culture,” 83-84.

⁵⁶ “Classical Horsemanship and the High School of the Spanish Riding School Vienna,” Evaluation of the Nominations for Inscription in 2013 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, Nomination information, 1(1) accessed September 4, 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/8-representative-list-00665>.

adequately explain the nature or scope of the element nor does it describe its social functions or cultural meanings;⁵⁷ and that “its inscription on the Representative List would not contribute to enhancing the visibility of intangible cultural heritage; moreover, the nomination does not clearly explain how it would contribute to encouraging dialogue among communities and promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.”⁵⁸

A transformation of information was done through a 2015 nomination.⁵⁹ Its subsequent approval demonstrated that a repackaging of the Spanish Riding School was effective. The Spanish Riding School was now explained as having a long history that was important to building and maintaining community identities.⁶⁰ Its history becomes accepted within the criteria of cultural heritage, but is stripped of a sense of elitism, and now serves as a bridge between rural and urban locations.⁶¹ A nod of approval is also given to the steps that were taken to change participation from that of men only, to now include both men and women.⁶²

B. Inscription of Lipizzan Horse Breeding Traditions

An interesting development akin to the classical horsemanship inscriptions is approval of a multinational nomination to list “Lipizzan Horse Breeding Traditions.”⁶³ The Lipizzan horse is an iconic symbol of the Spanish Riding School in Vienna.⁶⁴ Its breeding, and the traditions of that breeding, are encapsulated in this multinational nomination. Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia joined together in producing the multinational nomination.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ “Decision of the Intergovernmental Committee: 8.COM. 8.3”, R.1, accessed January 13, 2023, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/8.COM/8.3>

⁵⁸ “Decision 8.COM.8.3,” R.2

⁵⁹ “Classical Horsemanship and High School of the Spanish Riding School Vienna,” accessed August 6, 2023, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/classical-horsemanship-and-the-high-school-of-the-spanish-riding-school-vienna-01106>.

⁶⁰ Decision 10.Com.10.b.6, “Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage,” “Decisions,” 10th session, December 4, 2015, ITH/15/10.COM, paragraph 2, accessed September 4, 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/10.COM/10.B.6>.

⁶¹ Decision 10.Com.10.b.6, “Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage,” “Decisions,” 10th session, December 4, 2015, ITH/15/10.COM, paragraph 2, accessed September 4, 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/10.COM/10.B.6>.

⁶² Decision 10.Com.10.b. 6, paragraph 2.

⁶³ “Lipizzan Horse Breeding Traditions.”

⁶⁴ “Press Information December 2022, UNESCO Intangible Culture of Humanity, Knowledge Concerning the Breeding of the Lipizzan Horse,” The Spanish Riding School, accessed January 8, 2023 <https://www.srs.at/en/about-us/unesco-intangible-cultural-heritage-of-humanity-knowledge-concerning-the-breeding-of-lipizzan-horses/>.

⁶⁵ “Decision of the Intergovernmental Committee: 17.COM.7.B.40, paragraph 1, accessed January 13, 2023, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/17.COM/7.B.40>.

The elite origins of the horse breeding are noted in both the nomination⁶⁶ and the approved listing.⁶⁷ The inclusion, however, of information of this elite origin does not prove to be problematic in the same way as it was for the initial Spanish Riding School nomination. The commentary from the Intergovernmental Committee approval notes that the use of the horses has transformed from an imperial one to one of “everyday cultural and social life of communities in rural areas.”⁶⁸

Once associated with elitism, the horse now occupies another position within social strata. It has become ordinary. The multinational nature of this element is noted as well, with a history of “unit[ing] communities for 450 years”⁶⁹ and “generating a strong sense of shared identity.”⁷⁰ This suggests that the multinational nomination combined with the widespread and non-elite aspects of this horse breeding are more than enough to overcome any intolerance and recognition of its elite origins. The approved inscribed elements have a historical rendition that is acceptable to the UNESCO sensibilities, minimizing any focus on elite European origins and emphasizing a widespread reach into all strata of communities in the present-day.

The final decision to inscribe by the Intergovernmental Committee applauds the multinational nature of this element. It states that it

[c]ommends the States Parties for an exemplary multinational nomination file that demonstrates close collaboration among the submitting States, in line with the principles of international cooperation and the promotion of mutual understanding of the Convention.⁷¹

It is important to keep in mind, however, that a state must have the Convention in force to make a nomination—whether as a single state or as part of a multinational one. Where horse-heritage crosses state boundaries, but one state is not a member of the Convention, it can be difficult to express the geographic range of the heritage element. This was a challenge faced by Mexico, with the horse-heritage element of Charrería.

C. Charrería, equestrian tradition in Mexico

“Charrería, equestrian tradition in Mexico,” is an example of working traditions with horse. It was approved to be inscribed on the Representative List in 2016.⁷² Its antecedents are described in its approved listing:

⁶⁶ “Nomination file no. 01687 for inscription in 2022 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity”, page 6, accessed January 13, 2023, accessible from this link, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/7b-representative-list-01281#7.b.40>.

⁶⁷ “Decision 17.COM.7.B.40,” paragraph 1.

⁶⁸ “Decision 17.COM.7.B.40,” paragraph 1.

⁶⁹ “Decision 17.COM.7.B.40,” paragraph 1.

⁷⁰ “Decision 17.COM.7.B.40,” paragraph 1.

⁷¹ “Decision 17.COM.7.B.40,” paragraph 4.

⁷² “Charrería, Equestrian Tradition in Mexico,” accessed January 8, 2023, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/charrer-a-equestrian-tradition-in-mexico-01108>.

Charrería is a traditional practice of livestock herding communities in Mexico. It was initially used to help herders managing livestock from different estates better coexist.⁷³

The modern-day rendition is performance and sport, as noted in its listing information:

Various categories of charrería performed in front of an audience are called charreadas. Charreadas give spectators an opportunity to see livestock herding skills, for example roping and reining using wild mares and bulls⁷⁴

The draft decision by the Evaluation Body did not recommend the approval of the element to be inscribed. The nomination information failed to satisfy the Evaluation Body that its inscription would be of benefit to ICH, or that the inscription would help with creating a high profile for the element itself.⁷⁵ Further Mexico was cautioned against language that suggested “nationalistic overtones.”⁷⁶

The draft decision does not indicate which part of the nomination used language that was considered to have “nationalistic overtones.”⁷⁷ A perusal of the nomination does not have anything that stands out. Charrería is noted as being a symbolic image of Mexico and it is perhaps this that has drawn the comment from the Evaluation Body. Although presented as a single state nomination by Mexico, the nomination does contain specific mention to cross-border charro communities, communities that participate in Charrería in the United States, and how they would be instrumental in developing a higher profile for Charrería.⁷⁸ There is an open acknowledgement that the element is practiced across borders. A multinational nomination with the United States is not possible, as the US has not ratified the ICH Convention. Yet, the Intergovernmental Committee did approve the nomination for inscription, despite the opposition of the Evaluation Committee in its draft decision.⁷⁹

Here, favorable commentary is given about the cross-border nature of the element, reaching “charro communities beyond Mexico,”⁸⁰ but without specific mention of the United States.⁸¹

In this element the evolution of a horse heritage element can be seen. Once the provenance of working day tasks of ranching, Charrería is relevant in the twenty-first

⁷³ “Charrería.”

⁷⁴ “Charrería.”

⁷⁵ “Draft Decision 11.COM 10.b.22,” paragraph 3, accessed January 8, 2023, <http://hozir.org/11-com-ith1611-com10-b-paris-31-october-2016-original-english.html?page=5>.

⁷⁶ “Draft Decision 11.COM 10.b.22,” paragraph 6.

⁷⁷ “Draft Decision 11.COM 10.b.22,” paragraph 6.

⁷⁸ “Nomination Form, Nomination file no. 01108 for inscription in 2016 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity,” page 6, accessed January 13, 2023, accessible through this link, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/charrera-equestrian-tradition-in-mexico-01108>.

⁷⁹ “Decision of the Intergovernmental Committee: 11.COM.10.B.22,” paragraph 2, R.2, accessed January 13, 2023, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/11.COM/10.B.22>.

⁸⁰ “Decision of the Intergovernmental Committee: 11.COM.10.B.22,” paragraph 2, R.2.

⁸¹ “Decision of the Intergovernmental Committee: 11.COM.10.B.22,” paragraph 2, R.2.

century in a changed form—it is now sport and performance, and highly emblematic as a symbol of Mexican national pride and identity. This demonstrates that horse cultural heritage can change to retain an important place in communities, even as mechanization has changed the roles in which the horse used to be used. In this evolution, Charrería demonstrates how horse heritage can become a centerpoint for the expression of national identity, embracing within it a wide sweep of history and different cultural inputs.

D. Sinjska Alka

Just as Charrería expresses a combination of cultural crossings, within its present-day format, so does the horse heritage element of Sinjska Alka. And as with Charrería, it was also not recommended for listing by the Evaluation Committee in its draft decision. Sinjska Alka has demonstrated, as does Charrería, the place that horse heritage can have in the expression of national identity and aspiration. It also demonstrates how the expression of what a heritage element is can change to meet present day demands of identity and image. As with classical horsemanship and Charrería, the modern-day rendition has a performative aspect.

This horse-heritage element was nominated by Croatia and approved for listing on the Representative List in 2010.⁸² Although this element was approved for listing, to look no further than the approved listing for information about this does not tell the full story.

This element is described within its UNESCO listing:

The Sinjska Alka is a chivalric tournament that takes place annually, as it has since the 18th century, in the town of Sinj, in the Cetinska krajina region. During the contest, knights ride horses at full gallop along a main street, aiming lances at an iron ring hanging on a rope. The name of the tournament derives from this *alka* or ring, a word whose Turkish origin reflects the historical co-existence and cultural exchange between two different civilizations.⁸³

This description contains rich information about the element. It originates from knights' tournament and represents a modern rendition of what was once a more widespread practice in medieval Europe of chivalric tournaments.⁸⁴ The description also indicates a multi-cultural nature of the element. But is this an accurate representation of this?

Even superficial knowledge of history in the area would suggest that this is not in fact a fully accurate explanation of this element or of the meeting of the Turkish and

⁸² “Decision of the Intergovernmental Committee: 5.COM 6.47,” accessed August 6, 2023, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/5.COM/6.47> (Sinjska Alka).

⁸³ “Sinjska Alka.”

⁸⁴ Željko Bjeljac, Aleksandra Terzic, Jovana Brankov and Slavoljub Vujovic, “Image of Hajduks and Uskoks and its Role in Formation of Traditional Sports and Games as Intangible Heritage of Ex-Yugoslav Area,” *Forum Geografic* 20, no. 2 (2021): 229.

European Croatian cultures. It was a history of armed conflict, not of two cultures mingling in a peaceful setting. As Bjeljac *et al*, set out, this performance commemorates the 1715 defeat of the Ottoman Army.⁸⁵ Victory is attributed to a divinely sent illness which incapacitated the Ottoman Army.⁸⁶

The draft decision from the subsidiary body did not recommend approval.⁸⁷ It cast doubt over the multi-cultural and cooperative nature of Sinjska Alka.⁸⁸

Schäuble indicates that the narrative underlying Sinjska Alka was undergoing a transformation in response to recent events in Croatia. At the time of the nomination, Croatia was re-establishing its own national identity and overcoming recent events of conflict.⁸⁹ A modification was underway for the Sinjska Alka narrative. As Schäuble comments, there was “a carefully crafted campaign to reframe the local meaning and prevailing militant and rightist political connotation of the tournament.”⁹⁰

In its inscribed iteration, it has become a festival of multiculturalism, not a triumphal celebration of the defeat of a martial foe in the past or symbolic for contentious identities in the present. This points out the importance of getting a historical recounting set out in the manner acceptable to the prevailing sensibilities of UNESCO, perhaps foregoing detailed historical factual accuracy.

Sinjska Alka has undergone a not insignificant change in its underlying narrative. The focus and message change from the historical event which it commemorates to something more palatable to twenty-first century sensibilities are indicative of the way in which cultural heritage can be reshaped due to the pressures of achieving an approval to be inscribed. It demonstrates the way in which the history of an element needs to be presented—but also that this can result in a misleading revision of history.

E. Tbourida

Tbourida is an element of horse-heritage that has elite and martial origins. It was approved in 2021 to be inscribed on the Representative List.⁹¹ Its UNESCO description is as a “Moroccan equestrian performance dating back to the sixteenth century. It simulates a succession of military parades, reconstructed according to ancestral Arab-Amazigh conventions and rituals.”⁹² Moreover, its nomination form

⁸⁵ Bjeljac *et al*, “Image of Hajduks,” 228.

⁸⁶ Bjeljac *et al*, “Image of Hajduks,” 229.

⁸⁷ “Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,” ITH/10/5.COM/CONF.202/6, October 6, 2010, Draft Decision 5.COM 6.47, accessed September 4, 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ITH-10-5.COM-CONF.202-6-EN.pdf>, 58.

⁸⁸ “Draft Decision 5.COM 6.47,” 58.

⁸⁹ Michaela Schäuble, “Living history? Reenacting the past and promoting ‘tradition’ in the Dalmatian hinterland,” *Nationalities Papers* 47, no. 2 (2019):14, 16.

⁹⁰ Schäuble, “Living history?” 16.

⁹¹ “Tbourida, Inscribed in 2021 (16.COM) on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity,” <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/tbourida-01483>, accessed August 6, 2023.

⁹² “Tbourida.”

comments that “[t]bourida is a traditional equestrian art that celebrates happy collective events.”⁹³

But this may be something of an inaccurate description of its origins, with Talley explaining that it has its roots in “traditions of Amazigh (or Berber) and Arab Bedouin warfare.”⁹⁴ That is, it is not just performance – it was also a martial practice. Just as the martial nature of Sinjska Alka has been diminished in its official UNESCO information, so too has that of Tbourida.

While it was approved to be inscribed, there were some concerns raised in the draft decision. The draft decision cautions that there need to be a particular focus on measures to safeguard Tbourida, and to avoid it becoming commercialized at the expense of “the viability of the element.”⁹⁵ This caution is also included in the final decision to approve inscription by the Intergovernmental Committee.⁹⁶

On the other hand, the male dominated nature of element is not addressed and does not seem to have become an issue in its approval to be inscribed. Talley comments that “[a]s of 2019, the tbourida spectacle remains a male-dominated pastime and sport, but a few women participate in their own all-female troupes and some ride with male-teams.”⁹⁷

In contrast, the gender composition of participants was commented upon in the approval of the Spanish Riding School, and a change from a previously male only to include females noted with approval.⁹⁸ The issue of the gender of participants is simply not addressed in Tbourida.

F. Shrimp Fishing on Horseback in Oostduinkerke

This heritage element, of “Shrimp Fishing on Horseback,” provides an informative contrast to the other elements considered thus far. It has no elite origin or modern-day performative aspect. It is simply the use of horses in a working function. It was approved in 2013 to be inscribed on the list of Representative List of the Intangible Culture of Humanity.⁹⁹ This is not on the list for urgent safeguarding, despite the information in its listing indicating that it is practiced by only twelve families.¹⁰⁰ Chaineux and Charlier comment

⁹³ “Nomination file No. 01483 for inscription in 2021 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity,” 4.c., 13, LHE/21/16.COM/8, accessible through this link, accessed September 21, 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/8a-urgent-safeguarding-list-01192>.

⁹⁴ Gwyneth Talley, “Human-Horse Relationships in Morocco: What Equids Can Tell Us About Society,” *Hespéris-Tamuda* 55, no. 4 (2020): 329.

⁹⁵ “Item 8.b. of the Provisional Agenda,” LHE/21/16.COM/8.b, Paris, December 14, 2021, accessed September 11, 2022, https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-21-16.COM-8.b_Rev.2_Add.3-EN.docx, 43.

⁹⁶ “Decision of the Intergovernmental Committee: 16 COM 8.B.26,” accessed September 11, 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/16.COM/8.B.26>.

⁹⁷ Talley, “Human-Horse Relationships,” 329.

⁹⁸ “Decision 10.Com.10.b. 6,” paragraph 2.

⁹⁹ “Shrimp Fishing on Horseback in Oostduinkerke,” accessed January 8, 2023, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/shrimp-fishing-on-horseback-in-oostduinkerke-00673>.

¹⁰⁰ “Shrimp Fishing.”

... traditions have been kept alive in Oostduinkerke. True the shrimp fishing on horseback has principally a folkloric cachet left, but it is nevertheless a colourful event well appreciated by the tourist and seasonal residents and a bonanza for the establishments serving breakfast!¹⁰¹

This comment points out the touristic nature of the element. But there is no caution raised in the approval of the element of the dangers of commodification, in contrast with Tbourida. Shrimp-fishing is an example of horses being used in a working fashion – but in an environment where this also features as a touristic draw to the area.

This raises a question: at what point and with what kinds of heritage does the Evaluation Body or the Intergovernmental Committee become concerned about the effects of commodification on heritage elements? With only twelve families now engaged in shrimp fishing, this element would seem to be fragile and susceptible to being affected by outside influences. This is an area which merits further research not only with horse heritage elements, but across intangible cultural heritage elements more broadly.

G. Traditional Equestrian Games in Georgia

In 2022, a nomination from Georgia, on Traditional equestrian games in Georgia (Tskhenburti, Isindi, Kabakhi, Marula) received a negative decision from the Intergovernmental Committee.¹⁰² The decision said that the nomination criteria failed to explain how the inscription would provide sufficient attention to “intangible cultural heritage in general”¹⁰³ rather than the element itself.¹⁰⁴ Other concerns relate to insufficient information on “past and current efforts to safeguard the element,”¹⁰⁵ lack of information on the involvement of communities,¹⁰⁶ and lack of “information on how the State Party and the communities concerned will monitor any unintended consequences of inscription and mitigate the impact of over-commercialization.”¹⁰⁷

This is a vivid illustration of how the technical elements of the requirements for inscription must be met. Despite these being traditional games, with perhaps a folkloric appeal, they were not approved.

H. Chovqan

A final horse-heritage elements to consider is Chovqan. Chovqan was nominated by Azerbaijan as a single state nomination, and approved for inscription on the List of

¹⁰¹ Marie-Claire Chaineux and Roger H. Charlier, “Fishermen Cavalry,” *Journal of Coastal Research* 32, no. 2 (2016): 438.

¹⁰² “Decision of the Intergovernmental Committee: 17 COM 7.b.9,” accessed May 23, 2023, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/17.COM/7.b.9>

¹⁰³ “Decision 17 COM 7.b.9,” paragraph 3, R.2

¹⁰⁴ “Decision 17 COM 7.b.9,” paragraph 3, R.2.

¹⁰⁵ “Decision 17 COM 7.b.9,” paragraph 3, R.3.

¹⁰⁶ “Decision 17 COM 7.b.9,” paragraph 3, R.3.

¹⁰⁷ “Decision 17 COM 7.b.9,” paragraph 3, R.3.

listing on Heritage in need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2013.¹⁰⁸ Azerbaijan must submit a report every four years on the steps it is taking to safeguard the element.¹⁰⁹ The most recent report available from Azerbaijan is from 2017, four years after the inscription of Chovqan was approved.¹¹⁰ Another report is due in December 2025.¹¹¹ The 2017 report on the urgent safeguarding continues to link the horse heritage with contested territory, the Karabakh.¹¹² The Karabakh territory remains at the heart of efforts to resolve the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.¹¹³ The report also highlights the difficulty of breeding the Karabakh horse¹¹⁴ - where the use of other horse breeds has resulted in alterations of the game equipment:

The shortage of Karabakh horses available for Chovqan continues to force players to use horses of mixed breeds, which make them play with longer mallets, thus endangering game safety and deviating from traditional practice.¹¹⁵

VI. Conclusion

It is not possible within the space of this article to wholly examine each of the horse-heritage elements on the UNESCO lists. So, what can be gleaned from this consideration?

Horse cultural heritage retains a high level of significance and meaning in the twenty-first century. While the daily role of the horse in society may have decreased due to mechanization, horses nevertheless keep an importance in the twenty-first century. The nominations and inscriptions stand as a testament of the continued importance and relevance of horse cultural heritage in the twenty-first century across a wide range of activities and social strata: from the glamour of the present-day classical horsemanship centers in France and Austria, the multi-state activity of the breeding of the iconic Lipizzan horse, to the work of horses in herding and fishery,

¹⁰⁸ “Chovqan, a traditional Karabakh horse-riding game in the Republic of Azerbaijan,” <https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/chovqan-a-traditional-karabakh-horse-riding-game-in-the-republic-of-azerbaijan-00905>, accessed August 6, 2023.

¹⁰⁹ “Chovqan.”

¹¹⁰ “Chovqan.”

¹¹¹ “Chovqan.”

¹¹² “Report on the Status of an Element Inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding ,Deadline 15 December 2017 for examination in 2018,” section A.6 Executive Summary of the Report, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/azerbaijan-AZ?info=periodic-reporting#usl-0940-2018>, accessed August 6, 2023.

¹¹³ Joshua Kucera, “As Azerbaijan-Armenia Diplomacy Advances, a Solution to the Karabakh Remains Elusive,” May 17, 2023, Eurasianet, <https://eurasianet.org/as-armenia-azerbaijan-diplomacy-advances-a-solution-to-karabakh-remains-elusive>, accessed August 6, 2023.

¹¹⁴ “Report on the Status of an Element Inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding ,Deadline 15 December 2017 for examination in 2018,” section B.2, Cultural and Social functions, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/azerbaijan-AZ?info=periodic-reporting#usl-0940-2018>, accessed August 6, 2023.

¹¹⁵ “Report on the Status of an Element Inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, Deadline 15 December 2017 for examination in 2018,” section B.2.

and in games and ceremonies. Horse-heritage can feature as a centerpoint of national identity.

The information provided within each nomination or listing provides a narrative of the present-day significance of horses and horse-heritage in a wide variety of settings and activities. The tantalizing glimpses into horse cultural heritage in the present day provided by the case studies of UNESCO listings provide an entrée into a world of vital horse heritage in the present day.

Just to what extent the era of the horse has finished, or whether it has at all, is an area that is ripe for further research. Guest and Mattfeld make the assertion that in the twenty-first century, the idea of the horse becomes an avatar for expressing anxieties about the complexities of life. In this way the horse becomes an ideological anchor in society, as demonstrated through the array of horse-heritage that is inscribed. They comment:

If horses allow us to imaginatively ease both the paradigm shifts and the negative effects of modernity, however, they also draw attention to and magnify contradictions implicit in the human ends they are called on to serve.¹¹⁶

As Guest and Mattfeld explain, the horse is a canvas for the expression of anxiety and efforts to resolve it, but the tensions of twenty-first century life remain—and the horse is also a vehicle for identifying these. The horse as a powerful symbol holds the fascination of society across a range of places and communities in the present day – demonstrating that there is much insight to be gained from understanding the place of the horse in elements of intangible cultural heritage and for which the UNESCO listings provide a wealth of current information. Future UNESCO listings of horse-heritage will continue to provide insight into the place, role and meaning of the horse in the twenty-first century.

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¹¹⁶ Guest and Mattfeld, “Introduction,” in *Equestrian Cultures*, 4.

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