**combined**

**Aven:** [00:00:00] Welcome to the Endless Knot Podcast

where the more we know,

**Mark:** [00:00:03] the more we want to find out

**Aven:** [00:00:05] tracing serendipitous connections through our lives

**Mark:** [00:00:08] and across disciplines.

**Aven:** [00:00:16] Hi, I'm Aven.

**Mark:** [00:00:17] And I'm Mark.

**Aven:** [00:00:18] And today we're going to be talking about horses. But first, a couple of new patrons to say thank you to. So welcome back and thank you again to Nick Batter. Thank you to Zaraffa and to Guille Puerto. If that's even close to the right pronunciation. Thank you so much.

**Mark:** [00:00:34] Also thank you to Dariel Hopersberger. Now, you asked me if I knew anything about the etymology of your names and, as to your last name, I think your, your guess is as good as anything. I think you're right. The -berger part probably has something to do with a mountain or a Hill or something. So it's probably the name, it's a place name, probably it comes from

**Aven:** [00:00:54] I think we should just decree that it means mountain of hops. As you say. Let's go with that.

**Mark:** [00:00:59] But as for the first name, I did find something about that. So apparently It can be both a male or female name in English speaking places.

But in Spanish speaking places, it's strictly masculine.

**Aven:** [00:01:13] This is the name Dariel. For those who didn't hear it first of all.

**Mark:** [00:01:15] And so for men the assumption is that it comes just as a, a combination of you know one of the various names that start with dare like Darren or something like that, Darin Dario and the sort of standard ending in a lot of biblical names, -iel like Daniel and Gabriel,

**Aven:** [00:01:33] which means of El, right, of God.

**Mark:** [00:01:35] But for women the first use of this name might be traced back to a particular source, a novel called "Dariel, a romance of Surrey" published in 1897 written by the English author RD Blackmore. In which Dariel is the name of a Caucasian princess. Now the author of this novel might have derived it from the name Tariel, which is a masculine name in that region in Georgia. And you know, that, that region in the Caucasus, in the Caucasus mountains. So you know, it became at least popular from that.

**Aven:** [00:02:09] And that's about all we can find. Yeah. But thank you very much for your support. If anyone else wants to support us on Patreon, please head on over.

And if you want to ask us to find out some more about your names, I don't know that we were going to make it into a side business exactly. But I think, I think for new patrons, we're happy to do so if we can help out.

So today we're going to be featuring an interview all about horses in the ancient world.

Not about words for horses. Maybe we'll do another episode about that because there are actually lots of things to say about that, but this is more about the use of the horse in antiquity. And we interviewed Carolyn Willekes. She holds degrees in classical studies from the university of Calgary and the university of Guelph, and teaches at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and her main area of interest as you'll hear is horses in antiquity and she's published two books as well as multiple articles.

"*The horse in the ancient world from Bucephalus to the Hippodrome"* in 2016 and "*Greek warriors hoplites and heroes"* in 2017. so get set for some great stories and fascinating equine facts.

**Mark:** [00:03:16] Giddyup.

So Carolyn, we have a question that we used to always ask our interviewees. We don't do it all the time anymore, but it just seems to me that you're the perfect person for this question.

Tell me about the ways in which your professional life and other aspects of your life have become surprisingly connected.

**Carolyn:** [00:03:40] Yeah, that's a great question because I basically have no separation between my professional life and my personal, nonprofessional life, because everything that I do with my research and the things I teach are basically exactly the same things I do in my quote unquote downtime.

So, horses have been a huge part of my life for going on 30 plus years now, long before I even knew what classics, ancient history or grad school was, because I was a wee little person, eight or 10 years old. So yeah, I fell in love with horses as a child, as so many of us do. We get the horse curse, the obsession with horses and I didn't outgrow it, much to, I think, my parents' dismay. I didn't hit that like, teenage phase where, 'oh, I don't need horses anymore'. I just kept going with them. So yeah, I started riding as a kid. Just, you know, English riding lessons, typical package type stuff, hunters, jumpers, all of that, obsessed with all things horses, read every book I could about horses, fiction, nonfiction, you name it. I was devouring them. But when it came to school, when it came to university it never really crossed my mind that this was something I could study because I didn't go into a bio-sci related field.

I mean, I started off in anthropology and then switched into classics. And so I was like, 'yeah, I mean, the Greeks had horses and the Romans had horses and they seem to like putting horses on things', but I didn't connect the dots that I could study horses in the Greek and Roman worlds and other parts of the ancient world until I started my Masters degree.

So I moved across the country, moved from Ontario to Alberta and I'm starting my Masters at the University of Calgary, I was going to study Alexander the Great. My big plan was to study his deification and religious propaganda and that whole thing. So I'd done my undergrad thesis on that. And my grad supervisor, Dr. Waldemar Heckel was like, 'No. No, you can't. Not that one. Nope. I don't like that topic'. It's like, 'but he was on my application, I just moved across the country, what am I supposed to do now? I need to study something'. So his suggestion, he was like, 'well, you ride horses, so why don't you study cavalry?'

Because I know nothing about warfare, I don't even, I don't like violence. I've, I've never thought about warfare other than like high school history classes before in my life. And he gave me a book to read on ancient cavalry, it was a recent publication at the time and it was pretty good. But it just raised all sorts of questions, the biggest one being 'who in their right mind thought it was a good idea to actually use horses in war'? Because they're afraid of everything. So I kind of fell into this seemingly never-ending rabbit hole of ancient horses.

How do you train them? What did they look like, how were they bred? What were their specific characteristics? How did it vary from region to region, did they have specialized breeding and things like that? And so I then started training war horses to figure out how it all actually works. And I started traveling around the world to ride horses in different parts of the ancient world to see what these sort of local breeds or types-- I don't like the term breed-- types were like and how they were suited to the environment. And yeah, the two just became one. My professional life and my hobby, personal, fun life kind of collided. And I feel like they shall never separate again.

**Aven:** [00:06:49] Right. So unexpected, but now a lifelong connection.

**Carolyn:** [00:06:53] It's one of those really fortuitous-- I don't think, I mean, there's no way I could have planned it like this. Like, at all. It wouldn't have worked. I think if I'd planned it like, 'Yes,I want to go here and study horses and train horses and--', I feel like that would have imploded.

So it's been this kind of bumbling along, almost serendipitous finding of a path in which I've been very, very lucky in, doing what I love. I mean, I love studying the ancient world and the culture and the material culture and all of that. And obviously I love horses and they've somehow just mashed themselves together.

**Mark:** [00:07:22] And it gives you a really special position that another scholar who studies horses might not have is that you have so much experience on the practical side. Like you can do things like experimental archeology, you can go out into the world and look at horse traditions that are around today, that someone who was just reading about cavalries wouldn't have that kind of insight or ability to engage with the topic.

**Carolyn:** [00:07:46] Yeah, I mean, for sure. That's a huge advantage and colleagues I know who again, study horses in later time periods, the Middle Ages or Early Modern period or Modern period.

Again, they often tend to come from an equestrian background because , when studying horses there's a whole language that goes with it and there's this whole jargon. There's always been a jargon, whether you're looking at Ancient Greek or like Assyrian , --not that I know Assyrian, but I'm presuming they had their own jargon-- or Latin or Old English or anything like that.

There is a language that we use to discuss horses and describe horses and talk about the things that we train them to do and the different maneuvers and the equipment and all of that. And often there are, especially when talking about the behavior of the animal, --just so important in training them and understanding how they're used-- there are these sort of nuanced phrases that yes, you could translate them literally. But unless you understand what that phrase is referring to in terms of the animal and how it might react to something or their thought processes or something like that, it's not really gonna make sense.

So yeah, the fact that I've spent so much time with horses and have kind of dedicated my life to riding them, training them, understanding every aspect of their existence means that you can pick up on those subtleties for, for sure. Which is a huge advantage because sometimes you'll read Xenophon's Art of Horsemanship, and if you didn't understand what he was talking about on like an intrinsic level, you're like 'this sounds odd'. And he's talking about different types of bits or different training patterns you can ride to make your horse supple on both sides. And without that firsthand experience of-- because horses are naturally stiffer on one side than the other, just like we have a dominant side and the less dominant side, you're not necessarily going to find the usefulness in that statement.

**Aven:** [00:09:31] Yeah, there's a lot of implied and implicit knowledge that even a manual of horse training is not going to bother to tell you. They're going to assume you've stood next to a horse before, so they're not going to give you the really, really basic stuff. It reminds me of when I, as a Latin poetry person, work on the Eclogues.

And while I don't think that Virgil was all that big a farmer himself, nonetheless, in the ancient world, there was a lot more closeness to animals and basic understanding and the many words for types of sheep and cows and different ages and used yes, just for poetic use, but also to an audience that would know what the heck they meant.

And my complete lack of agricultural knowledge on herding means that you have to go and look in a dictionary and find out what is the difference, what does it matter if it's a two-year-old sheep or a three-year-old sheep? Why should I care about that? And I'm sure I miss a whole bunch of stuff because I don't have that knowledge and I don't even know what to look for. And that's, I think, often true when you talk about specialized stuff, you don't even know which holes you have in your knowledge and how to plug those holes.

**Carolyn:** [00:10:32] For sure. I mean, when I'm reading modern research, secondary sources on cavalry, ancient cavalry, you can always tell if the author has experience with horses or not.

Because if they do, that kind of creeps in. If they don't, they basically describe the horses as almost being like tanks. Like, they assume that all horses are this homogenous thing and they all act exactly the same way. And you have your tactics and you put them in drive and off you go into battle and it's just going to magically work, which of course is not how it works.

Whereas people who have that experience with horses are like, 'yeah, maybe be aware of this?' And 'this tactic, it works'--

**Aven:** [00:11:08] This was the plan, but this is how it actually probably turned out--

**Carolyn:** [00:11:12] --'and here are some surprises that could pop up'. And, and as you were saying, Virgil, yeah, probably not farmer of the year, but obviously aware of farming jargon and vernacular.

And you see the same thing with the sources and references to horses, where-- they appear in everything. They're in every genre of literature. And again, whether you're looking at erotic poetry or epic poetry or historical accounts, Thucydides and, and things like that, and Arrian and stuff. When they mentioned horses, the authors-- and again, it's probably because they are coming from the upper classes, so they would have familiarity with horses because it's their class privilege-- their almost innate or expected understanding still comes through when they're writing.

So even when they're not trying to write a texts on horses, their understanding of what a horse is and its basic requirements still come through. I mean, Thucydides talks about the Athenian Calvary. And they're riding out every day to patrol Attica to try and keep the Spartans from ravaging the crops and all of that, but it's hot and it's dry.

And so, because they're riding out day after day, their horses start to go lame from the rocky ground and Thucydides puts that in there and it's like, well, of course they would because it's a repetitive injury, they're bruising their feet. They didn't have horse shoes yet. And it's those little things that I always find so fascinating ,these little side references that show this understanding so clearly.

**Aven:** [00:12:28] And again, it's interesting that for previous generations of classicists or people working with these texts up to, say, the end of the 19th century, given that they would have been upper-class people as well, they would have lived with horses. Again, even if they weren't experts, everyone pretty much was riding around, horses around them, whether they were riding or not, there were horses that they lived cheek by jowl with. And so everybody who is engaging with those texts, whether or not they realize they had that expertise had a similar level, at least of base knowledge. It's only within the 20th century, that that has become so specialized and so uncommon among people who are taking an intellectual path rather than other types of approaches and horses become even more rarefied in terms of elite-- really, there aren't that many people who get the chance to ride horses, you don't have to be elite to do it. I rode horses as a kid too, but-- solidly middle-class family, we had that access. Didn't own a horse, but got to ride them. And so, that has become a much less common base level of expertise.

You have much more than just basic familiarity, but up until fairly recently, it wouldn't have been a big gap, just like the agricultural knowledge wasn't a huge gap for somebody in the 17th, 18th century reading Virgil. And we've lost a lot of that familiarity, so we have to come back to it through expertise rather than daily knowledge.

**Carolyn:** [00:13:51] Yeah, that was actually-- thinking way, way back, yonks and yonks, when I was defending my Masters. And that was a question I was asked by someone on my committee, because so many of the translations, the majority of translations we have of Xenophon's Art of Horsemanship are older. The Loeb one, I think is from like, 1922.

And then there's another one by the publishing house JA Allen, they do a lot of equestrian publications, it's from like the late 1800s. And normally that puts a red flag for us. Like, 'hey, this is a really old translation, there's probably going to be cultural bias, eliteness, that whole thing'.

And sometimes they're funny about translating certain words because it was seen as inappropriate and all of that. But with these texts, it is almost an advantage because as you pointed out, who were doing these translations of Xenophon from Greek into English in the 1800s and 1900s--.

Again, educated elite upper-class individuals who most likely, even if they didn't ride all of the time, that would have been part of their social existence, would be the ability to sit on a horse, maybe go hunting, maybe go to the races, play polo, things like that. So it is kind of a, like with the agricultural texts, an interesting reversal from how we often look at translations today. It's like, 'no, we need to update our translations and modernize them or look at them through different lenses'. Whereas with these we're like, 'Oh, these are actually really good translations because the horse was still such an important part of that society'.

**Aven:** [00:15:11] So do you want to give us as much of a capsule history as you can of your research interests? So you started off by looking at the horse in the ancient world, but I imagine it was a little more specific than that. And what have been the main research areas you've looked at and some of the things you've worked on and are working on now.

**Carolyn:** [00:15:32] So the starting point was the warhorse, not so much the military strategy side of it. I mean, I talk about tactics and formations and all. I mean, you have to when you look at military history, but that's not my favorite part. I do that 'cause I have to and all of my military history friends are going to be cringing right now.

But what I've been absolutely fascinated and I guess borderline fixated or obsessed with is how we actually did it. Right? How do you train a warhorse? Because it makes , like I said, it makes zero sense. This is a highly attuned flight animal that, runs away from everything. It runs away from its own shadow, it runs away from its farts, it runs away from a plastic bag. Not that they had those in antiquity, but it would probably spook at an amphora that it didn't think was there before. Because this is how the species evolved to survive in the wild, was to run away from any potential dangers without giving it a really long think ahead of time, they just run.

And so, when we ride a horse to war, we're asking them to completely override that evolutionary instinct because-- you know, I always picture it, and this is how I often describe it when I'm teaching elementary school classes on, on sort of, you know, the history of horses and stuff like that-- you were on this horse and you're riding off and you line up for battle and you look across at your opponents who all have these sharp, pointy things pointed directly at you.

And your horse is probably like, 'Yeah, okay! We see them, so we're gonna--we've SEEN them, so we're going to turn around and go in the safe direction.' And now we're like, 'No, it's fine! I got you, trust me! We're just going to go gallop into them. Just go into the sharp pointy things. What's the worst that could happen? It's fine.'

And then when you put it that way, it does sound utterly absurd. Yet clearly it worked because the horse revolutionized warfare, the horse was a central component of warfare for thousands of years, not having cavalry often puts you at a disadvantage. So as the horse and mounted chariot warfare, especially mounted warfare, spread initially across Eurasia and North Africa-- but then, you know, through colonization, colonialism, trade and all of that stuff to other parts of the world, it becomes a necessary component. So obviously training warhorses worked, this whole phenomenon worked. So I wanted to figure out how you did it. And I was very fortunate to be given access to a herd of war horses. They're predominantly jousting horses outside of Calgary. It's the Society of Tilt and Lance Cavalry.

And so I started going out there and experimenting and at first I was like, 'I don't know, I'm just going to trial and error, figure out how it worked'. And then obviously had to add in the armor and the weaponry and see how does this adjust the way you ride? Cause then it went from, how do you train the horses to why did they sometimes do things in a manner that's different from how we would do it today in the 21st century. Right? Why did they sometimes have different riding styles? Why did they-- the way they sit the horse or the way they control the horse? Why did they have big, massive bits or big spurs --not that the Greeks did, but later cultures had big spurs, Greeks have little spurs-- what's the reason for all of this? Because so often, I think, there is this unfortunate tendency to go, 'Well they didn't understand, or they were ignorant or they were doing it wrong or they were abusive or whatever', rather than 'Okay, well, there's probably a reason why they're doing it this way', because, it's not like it was a random one-off and someone happened to make a relief of it, they kept doing this over and over again. So often when you sort of scratch below the surface a little bit, you find logical explanations.

And then from there it snowballed into, well, what did their horses look like? We have an idea of what their horses look like from the art, but the art is a bit of an idealization.

So what did ancient horse types look like? And to discover that, I was visiting my parents back in Ontario and I had this old encyclopedia of the horse with all the pretty glossy photographs of different horse breeds or types in it. And I'm skimming through. And I was like, 'Oh my God, there's a page of Greek horses! Who knew?'

And so these two Greek breeds, the Pindos Pony and the Skyros Pony. And I was looking at the Pindos pony and I looked at it and then like, I looked at a picture of the Parthenon, like a section of the Parthenon relief, and then back. And then I'm like, it looks like the same animal. I mean, of course it looks like the same animal, because it's the same environment. Same environment, same food, same conditions.

And so that triggered what has been a really special part of my research, which is traveling to different parts of the ancient world to actually ride these horses. Which is not to say that a modern Greek pony or a modern Mongolian horse is identical to one from 2000 years ago, but there's an environmental continuity that certainly exists.

So that's kind of taken the experimental side to a whole other level that just has been really cool. Challenging at times, very challenging at times, but probably the coolest part of the research that I get to do.

**Mark:** [00:20:14] So I've been recently doing a bit of research on Proto-Indo-European and the spread of Proto-Indo-European, and it becomes pretty immediately clear that it's very entwined with the spread of horse technology, of the ability to ride horses. And I was wondering, how much do we know about the genetic spread of horses?

Like, are they taking breeds from, you know, the steppes area or are they training local horses? How does that spread happen?

**Carolyn:** [00:20:45] So that is a, that is a can of worms, but I shall--

**Aven:** [00:20:49] We only ask easy questions!

**Carolyn:** [00:20:52] --So there is more and more-- obviously as the technology that we have access to advances-- there's more and more research being done on testing DNA from ancient horse remains to try and answer those questions, try and figure out, you know, where was the horse domesticated? How do these populations migrate? Most equine historians and archeologists, I think would be fairly comfortable in saying that that by the time the horse was domesticated, roughly five and a half ish thousand years ago is kind of the general date that a lot of people play with, there were not a lot of horses left. So horses, pretty much-- I mean, they had been long extinct in North, South, Central America. So our side of the world, seemed to have gone extinct here sort of around 10,000 BCE. And so they only really existed in pockets of Eurasia. Where exactly those pockets were, some people say maybe some in the British Isles, in sort of Northern Iberia. Definitely central Asia, whether there are any down in the Northern parts of the Middle East, we're not sure.

But there weren't a lot of populations, so it's not like if you were in Greece or Turkey or Russia or something you necessarily had these herds of wild horses just wandering along. They were in very sort of specific spots. And so after they're domesticated and again, a lot of the evidence suggests to domestication coming out of central Asia ,there's a really important site in Kazakhstan that provides some reasonably firm evidence for this, that the horse then began to spread with the people who had domesticated it. Because again, you know, when we--horses seemed to have been domesticated as a food source, but then you realize, 'Hey, we can also ride them'. Which was pretty sort of probably mind blowing, because prior to that, if you wanted to go anywhere, you walked, or you had your ox cart, or you had your donkey, which, while they're strong and durable, they're not the fastest sort of mode of transportation. So the horse-- I often liken the horse to like, 'Now I've got a sports car, I bought this Ferrari'. And when you prance into town on a horse, even though they're small horses, you're going to be noticed. And it adds to sort of your presence.

And so horses and the technology and the language that's developed to describe them, you know, it then gradually starts to spread, right? I mean with trade, with sort of diplomatic relations. We know that by the Bronze Age, horses are being shipped around the Mediterranean as diplomatic gifts, you know, from the Hittites to the Egyptians and so on and so forth.

So they gradually spread through trade, through warfare, through diplomacy, people moving about, and then the language and the technology comes with them.

**Aven:** [00:23:19] Right. So maybe not only one population as an original population, but probably mostly coming from one sort of domestication act over some period of time that moves outward rather than multiple sort of re-domestications in multiple places.

**Carolyn:** [00:23:36] Yeah. I mean, when horses arrived-- like when they arrived in Mesopotamia, which was probably one of the first places they did migrate down to with people after domestication-- I think it was, was it Sumerian? I can't remember the exact language, but one of the, you know, one of the linguistic groups, they had to think of how to describe this animal, because they hadn't seen it before. And so they called it 'the ass of the mountain' because it came over the mountains and down into Mesopotamia. And it was the same thing when horses then came across the Atlantic with the colonizers and settlers and conquistadors and all of that. You know, the Indigenous tribes, First Nations tribes-- again, they, there was nothing here that was rideable. I mean, transport animals, you had dogs. And then if you went south, you had llamas and alpacas for carrying your things, but you weren't riding them. And so again, they were trying to come up with a description for this new animal. And so they were called 'big dog' or 'sky dog' or 'big elk' because they were trying to build that association with an animal they were familiar with.

I mean, a horse doesn't look like a dog, but it's useful like a dog. A horse kind of looks like an elk, so let's sort of give it that name. So you can often use language to trace domestication and trace the arrival of, I suppose, foreign animals or exotic animals into a new region because they have to come up with a way of talking about them and recording what they are and naming them.

**Aven:** [00:24:55] And you could also use the North American and South American examples as also a model for the likelihood that, as you say, horses may very well have moved far ahead of the people who rode the horses. Because of trade, because you know, horses made it to the Plains and the indigenous people in the Plains long before people made it-- Western settlers made it there. By the time they-- because of trade networks and everything, by the time any intensive settlement in that area of people bringing their own horses, the horses were already there. So, yeah.

**Carolyn:** [00:25:27] Yeah.

**Aven:** [00:25:27] And I imagine it happens in the Mediterranean too.

**Carolyn:** [00:25:28] Yeah. It's one of the things that's so fascinating about this animal. Even going far beyond the ancient world and into sort of the 19th and 20th centuries and stuff, you know, is-- again, as you see people colonizing, taking control, dominating, whatever, different parts of the world and bringing their presence there, they would bring horses. And so the Indigenous communities would see this animal and almost always incorporate it within to their own traditions in some way, right?

They develop their own equestrian sports. They develop their own equipment. They work it into sort of folklore and storytelling, which I think really speaks to just the presence of horses and the usefulness of horses. I think the only other animal that we could probably, you know, in a sort of a, as a not-food animal that we could look at in a comparative sense would probably be dogs.

Right? I mean, as an animal that isn't primarily used for secondary resources, right? That we're using for companionship or to do jobs. Horses and dogs kind of had this spread across different regions and work themselves into communities and cultures and identities in a very interesting way.

**Aven:** [00:26:38] So let's get back to some of this more experimental archeology, as it were, because it's just so fascinating, what you've had a chance to do, what you've been able to do and what you've done with it. So, you said that you've done-- one of the things you've been doing is going to places and riding sort of native horses or horses that seem like they might be connected to the ancient lines. Do you want to tell us a bit about some of those experiences?

**Carolyn:** [00:27:05] Sure! So the first one was Greece which seemed like a logical starting point. I was, this was back, I don't know, I think it was a couple years into my PhD at this point in time. And I was TAing a field school over there in between the fall and winter semesters. We took some grad students, some of the grad students, and some undergrads over. And I decided to stay on for a few weeks after, because I wasn't TAing a winter course , so I didn't have to rush back and I was on Crete.

And so ahead of time, I sort of Googled riding in Greece, as you do, and found this fantastic place. And so spent, you know, several days with them sort of just exploring the areas outside of Heraklion. And it was really cool because they had some, they had some North African horses, they had some of the different Greek horses.

So those from sort of central mainland Greece, they also had a Cretan type of horse called the Georgalidikon, which means 'the fast walker'. And it's a, it's a gaited horse. It tolts like the Icelandic horses. And I got to ride one of those, which was really cool. I'd never ridden a fully gaited horse before, and it's just the most comfortable thing to sit on.

And she was like a little mountain goat. Like again, you can see how she's adapted to this because she's just picking her way up and down these super narrow rocky passes and you know, up and down all sorts of crazy terrain without batting an eyelash or stumbling or anything.

Look at her--- you're like, 'she looks really tiny and super narrow, and I feel like I'm going to tip her over when I get on', but once you're on her she's like, 'no, I'm like--' she's like an all-terrain vehicle. Like, 'I am perfectly adapted to this environment'. So that was really cool. It was also really interesting because islands are curious environments for horses, especially-- I mean, Crete is not a small island, but it's a pretty rocky island.

And so yes, they have horses on Crete. Yes, they have their Cretan type, their local horse, but a lot of people don't use them anymore. They're kind of just there in the background or sort of kept for ceremonial purposes or sporting purposes. And so people were quite terrified of the horses.

It was olive harvesting season, and we were riding through the olive groves and like, the dogs would hide under the trucks. People would like, step out of the way and jump behind the olive trees as myself and my hosts were like, just like the two of us, and we weren't on demon horses.

Like, we're just walking our way up through the olive groves, not charging like a bat out of hell. And people are like, 'Whoa', and -- even resources, right? Again, thinking back to the ancient world and, you know, the need to feed these horses and provide for these horses when you're on these really rocky islands, pretty much everything has to be brought in, right?

You have to import food, which makes them even more expensive and more difficult to keep and to see that in the 21st century, where it's like, yeah. It's 21st century, yes, you know, we can have our grain and we have all this and all that, but basically everything they had for their horses had to be imported either from mainland Greece or brought down from Northern Europe.

So that was kind of really cool to see that connection or to make that connection between kind of island horse hippotrophia in the modern world. And thinking back to how that would've worked in the ancient world as well.

I've ridden in Turkey a few times, which was also super cool. It was a new sort of hiking riding trail that they were setting up called the Evliya Celebi routes. So Evliya Celebi was an Ottoman explorer. He wrote a book about his travels around the Ottoman Empire. And so I was riding part of his route through Turkey and to this day, I still don't know what I wrote on my little bio, because, you know, okay.

They're like, tell us about yourself and your riding experience because they want to match you up with the horses. So I have no idea what I wrote. But we get there and you know, take the ferry and go to where the horses are waiting, where we're going to pick them up and everyone else is getting on their horses.

They're like, 'oh, we've got this new one for you, she's great. But don't get on her yet. Cause we're not entirely sure what she's going to do.' Like...what?

**Aven:** [00:30:45] That's a great way to start a long distance ride, right?

**Carolyn:** [00:30:52] And she was a little four year old off the track racing Arabian. And she had literally just come off the track and she was incredible, but like, she'd never seen like rivers, like running water, like rivers before, just like the first time we had to cross the stream it's like 'whoa what is this?'

The second day we rode through a river for most of the day, so she kind of got over that and like, she'd never been tethered before, so she kept getting caught, but she was really smart. She was incredible. If I could have financially justified buying her and bringing her back to Canada, one hundred percent would have, cause she was just the coolest little horse.

I mean, one of the memories, there's a lot of fantastic memories of that ride. But a lot of it was sort of figuring out the route as we go. And I have this very vivid memory of having to cross like a six lane highway because we'd slithered down the side of this sort of foothills thing outside of Bursa.

And there was a massive highway there and I'm like, 'okay, I guess we're going to cross, just keep kicking', hope we make it to the other side. So there was that!

Sometimes you just kick and go and try not to think about it. Mongolia was-- Yeah, pretty, I mean, it sounds cheesy to say life-changing, but it was pretty life-changing. Because you know, prior to that, yes, I'd crossed highways and terrorized people in olive groves, but it was all relatively familiar kind of in, in the sense of what we were doing.

Mongolia was wild. I mean, in the best possible way. You know, you got these tiny little horses. They come in every shape, size, color, version you could possibly imagine-- like some look like little draft horses, some look like little polo ponies, some look like they were put together by a committee. Some are gaited, some aren't, and they're kind of half trained at the best of times, because every Mongolian can just inherently ride. It's just what they do. And you get on and they just start galloping. Like there's no, let's go for a little walk and get to know each other. It's like, just get on and go.

And I remember I had a friend who came with me to Mongolia. He was the only one who really, really fit the bill. Lots of people wanted to go to Mongolia. I'm like, you'll die. You're allergic to horses or you can't ride, or you can't go that long without showering or any of these things, or the food will kill you. And so the, the first day of our like, you know, multi week trek, we get on our horses and the, the friend who had come with me, he's on this little like Palomino paint type thing-- you just see this blonde streak hurtling past you across-- and there's no fences anywhere. Like it's all--

**Aven:** [00:33:24] No way to stop them if they don't want to stop--

**Carolyn:** [00:33:26] --No way to stop them. And so he goes whizzing past and our herdsman looks over and he's like, can he ride? Like, I think so. I guess we'll see.

And we named his horse Dudley cause he looked like a rather grumpy, British explorer. That's just sort of the air that this horse had about him, who should be eating cucumber sandwiches. He did eventually stop. And like, Dudley only had two speeds. He was either walking really slowly, like half a mile behind us and then he'd just take off and rip past us all and just run, run, run into the distance. No one else ever wanted to ride Dudley. But those horses, I mean, they'll just run and gallop and gallop for tens of kilometers every single day. Like, they will not stop unless you make them, over every sort of terrain you could possibly imagine.

And all you can really do is you just stand up, cause your stirrups are always really short cause they're tiny. So you just stand up all day long. As you gallop. Endlessly, and when you get tired, you just lean forward, and brace your hands on their neck, and that's how you rest. And you get a six pack really, really quickly.

You're like, wow. I thought I was fit. Like, I am ready-- at the end of the first day of riding, I probably must've ridden like, well, over 40 or 50 kilometers that day and we get to our camp and we're staying in a ger camp, like a tourist camp that night. It had a shower, which we appreciated, most of the time we were in tents. And-- got off the horses, took care of them.

And I made the mistake of sitting down and I'm like, I am so physically exhausted that like, I can't eat. Like, I'm so tired that I can do nothing. And of course hospitality is huge. So I felt terrible because we had this meal made for us and I was too tired to be able to digest it. I'm like, ' there's nothing wrong with it, I just can't eat it. I am broken. I am shattered beyond all existence'. Like the hardest thing I ever did was getting on a horse again the next day. I'm like, 'I didn't know I could hurt like this'. I had been training hard for this. I was like, 'good Lord. How am I going to do this? I'm going to die'. But it was incredible. Would go back there in a heartbeat.

Yeah, ridden in Spain and parts of Canada. In 2019, I was in Kyrgyzstan, which was also just mind blowing because their mountains make our Rocky Mountains look like piddly little bumps in the ground. Vast, vast mountains, Tien-Shan Range. And these horses would just like, boom, over glaciers, up the scree, down the scree.

At one point, I'm like, Oh my God, I feel terrible for my little horse going straight up the side of this mountain. So I'm going to get off and lead him except you're at three and a half thousand meters. And even all the altitude medication in the world is not going to help with that. So I think I hiked, I made it for about, I don't know, 10 or 15 meters where I'm like 'Oh I gotta get back on, I'm gonna die, I'm going to fall off this mountain if I keep trying. And the horse is barely even panting and he's like, 'just get back on lady, what are you doing? I was born to do this'. So that kind of broke my brain in terms of one, how much we spoil and coddle our horses in North America and Western Europe.

And just what they are actually capable of doing. Again, going back to the ancient world, you think of like, Alexander's campaigns and the mountain ranges that he must've crossed, the passes that he must have crossed. And I don't think we often really think about the logistics of that, but they're huge.

And then you realize that yeah, these horses can do it, you know, and it's not this crazy extraordinary thing for them. This is what they do. This is the environment they live in. So again, it takes it out of the books, out of the textual traditions and all of a sudden you're like, yeah, this is actually possible.

They're not exaggerating, or they're not glossing things over. You can do it and you still can do it. So--

**Aven:** [00:37:00] -- yeah. I'm just, I'm imagining-- whenever I think, and I know you've done a bunch of this riding as well-- whenever I think about the ancient world, I have to spend a good 15 minutes reminding myself 'no stirrups' for a very long time, because, you know, I grew up in an English riding tradition and of course we did do no stirrup work and stuff, but it was really always just as essentially a punishment. 'All right. You guys are not working hard enough. This, this class is --everybody. Out of the stirrups!'

**Carolyn:** [00:37:25] No stirrups November. Yep, yep.

**Aven:** [00:37:27] Yeah. So, you know , and it was such hard work, and then that's still in a fitted, you know, in the leather saddle with a lot more support, even than the English saddle. And I know you're talking about the Mongolian, you know, stand up in your stirrups and run, and that's gotta be super, super hard too.

But thinking about doing all of this without that sort of firmness and that help of-- and I know you've done some work on that too, right? Like you've done a bunch of bareback and also not bareback, but no stirrup riding.

**Carolyn:** [00:37:54] Yeah. I mean it's certainly now-- I mean, it's, it's the depths of winter as we're recording this.

So I-- except when I'm at like the jumping stables, right? I mean, doing sort of-- I have, you know, jumping lessons and stuff like that. And when I'm out on the farm with the war horses, I mean, pretty much exclusively ride bare back in the winter. Cause it's way warmer. I mean, it is so much warmer? Especially if you put a blanket over you. It's like you have a little furnace under you. But yeah, I mean, didn't ride bareback a lot as a kid. We would sometimes jump on the ponies and do little vaulting lessons. You know, a lot of riding stables, like, riding schools people don't get to ride bareback, I think because of insurance reasons.

**Aven:** [00:38:26] And there tends to be a sort of thought that it's not good for the horses too, whether or not that's true as you say--

**Carolyn:** [00:38:32] Yeah, because we know the harm that ill-fitting saddles can cause. So yeah, I mean, getting on bareback and being tense and bouncing around probably isn't that great for your horse, but, you know, strip the equipment off and there's no risk of causing saddle sores or muscle atrophy or anything like that.

I think it's more just an unfamiliarity with it, because when you're taught how to ride with saddle and stirrups, then that is your security. And if I haven't ridden bareback for ages, you know, the first couple of times I do, you're like, 'Oh!' a little, even on a horse I know you're like, 'Oh! Little precarious here. Oh, geez. Okay.'

And it's always like some crazy windy day too. Like, 'I'm going to die. This is how I'm going to die'. But one of the things you definitely start to appreciate when you ride bareback all the time is all of those descriptions of the ideal horse that you see in like Xenophon and Virgil and Columella where they describe what they call the double back, which is sort of like this broad-backed horse with almost like a recessed spine because you don't want what would we call a roached back horse where the spine kind of sticks up a little bit. You can imagine why you wouldn't want that if you're riding bareback. Or horses that have a giant wither, like the shark fin wither, which is the bump at the base of their neck.

Yeah. That also, not at all pleasant when riding bareback. So you start to pay attention to different aspects of horse anatomy, right? Because it can get really uncomfortable. Like, some horses it's like sitting on a sofa and it's magical. Other horses. You're like, 'Oh, why did I think this was a good idea? How quickly can this be done? I am never doing this again.'

So again, those subtle nuances of-- yeah, we've got all of these descriptions of the ideal horse and the ancient descriptions, like the classical descriptions carry on into the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, right?

There's like this reception thing with them through different equine textual traditions. But when you think about riding bareback, some of those features that we may not fixate on today make a lot of sense. And yeah, no, I mean, I really like riding bareback. I almost prefer it to taking the stirrups off my saddle.

Because you can just sit down onto the horse, but the way you sit becomes quite different. From when you had a saddle with stirrups, whether an English saddle or a Western saddle or an Aussie saddle or whatever. Cause I mean, when you look at-- I often like to use the Parthenon reliefs because they are exquisite.

I mean, they're beautiful examples of sort of the ideal horse, the ideal rider, all of that. And when you look at those guys on their snorting, prancing, presumably mostly stallions clattering through Athens in this procession, they're not in this really rigid pose.

Right? They kind of-- they're very relaxed. Like, their legs just kind of hang down. They almost have a bit of a, not a slouch, but a bit of a curve to their back. Because you actually have to relax down onto the horse, as opposed to when you're riding, you know, in a saddle where you're like, 'okay, I need to put my heels down. I need to do this. I need to do that, so that I don't bounce out of the equipment, so I don't get stuck in the equipment'. So it's learning the subtle differences in how you sit the horse. If I get on bare back and try and sit in this very formal, almost not stiff, but upright position than I would in my jumping saddle or my dressage saddle, it's going to get really exhausting and really uncomfortable very quickly. And I'm probably just going to bounce off my horse or my horse is going to get upset because I'm bouncing around. But as soon as you just relax your body and just like sink down onto them, it becomes much easier.

Yeah, I don't know, I've grown to be very fond of bareback riding.

**Aven:** [00:41:41] Nice to know that can be possible because I've never been bareback. I've never been on it, I don't think our stables ever would have countenanced us, even with just a rug or something. They would never have let us, so. Also, I've done---

**Carolyn:** [00:41:53] So much warmer in the winter, like so much. So much warmer.

**Aven:** [00:41:58] Oh, I will never, ever forget riding in Ottawa winters inside you know, unheated arena in the evenings on a January night--

**Carolyn:** [00:42:06] --with the damp, the cold humidity.

**Aven:** [00:42:09] And in actual riding boots. You know, later on, I started to get that sort of winterized kind of short boots and stuff. But I remember when I was younger, it was like in actual leather riding boots and just thinking, 'I've never been this cold. I can't feel my toes again. I will never feel it--.

**Carolyn:** [00:42:24] Toes are gone. And where you have to like, shake your feet for a good five minutes before you dared getting off the horse because you couldn't feel your feet and you knew how much it was going to hurt! Yeah. The agony of hitting the ground.

**Aven:** [00:42:39] And then the fear of like, when you start to warm up and how that's going to hurt too. Ah, good times, good times!

**Carolyn:** [00:42:46] The things we do! Horse people are certifiably mad.

**Aven:** [00:42:51] I'm like, 'I paid good money and worked long hours to be able to do this to myself'.

**Carolyn:** [00:42:58] What was really-- it was hilarious in Mongolia because at the time-- so my horse back in Calgary, my partner rides him now-- was this big-- he's gotta be like three quarters Clydesdale.

He's massive. He's just this huge truck of, you know, beast --delightful, but he is huge. And, and it takes some oomph to get up on him and get down and Mongolian horses are a good... I don't know, if we say Percy's probably about 17.2 17.3 hands and Mongolian horses are probably like 12 to maybe 13 hands..

So he's a good 12 or 16 inches taller than them. Which may not seem like a lot until you get on the tiny horse. So the first horse I rode in Mongolia, because we did a little sort of orientation ride to go look for some wild animals. I almost vaulted over the other side when I got on. And then when I got off, I had to grab my stirrup to stop my ass from hitting the ground because it's closer.

And you could just see these, all the herdsmen they're like, 'I thought you said she could ride' like, 'Who is this going--what is wrong--?' Then I showed them a picture. I'm like, 'No, this is the horse I usually ride'. They're like, 'Oh, he looks like good eatings', cause they do. They're like, 'he would feed a big family'.

So I just threaten him with that now. I'm like, 'if you don't go in that trailer, you would feed--', I'm going to get so many complaints about this now-- 'you would feed quite a family for quite a while'. Like, he's huge. Your brain just can't fathom a horse that big, he would last like five minutes on the steppe.

**Aven:** [00:44:23] And they couldn't possibly feed him. Yeah.

**Carolyn:** [00:44:26] No, no. He would go hungry very quickly. Yes. So yeah, I mean, there's been plenty of humbling moments, which-- I mean, horses always humble you. There's definitely been some serious humbling moments going through all of this. And showing up-- I've been, I say this touching wood because I have to go ride a horse later on today.

So this could be tempting fate, but I've been pretty lucky in not having a lot of armor, mounted combat related hospital type injuries, just, you know... so there's one time, it was out at the farm and they were doing some photos and stuff. And so they got me in all of the plate armor, the full jousting armor.

Which I don't wear-- I've only worn a few times. I like training the jousting horses, but jousting itself I think is utterly mad and will do it if I have to help a friend out, but certainly not my go-to favorite activity. The training is actually really cool-- but anyway, so I was in all of the armor and got on the horse.

And we forgot that she was still getting used to the clattery sound of the armor, it like, triggered her. And so she bolts loose, takes off. And of course, all of a sudden you weigh like, an extra 80 or 90 pounds. You're trying to-- and the saddles, you know, we use the, sort of the Iberian type saddles.

They've got a really high pommel and cantle to hold you in. And inevitably I came off but my armor got stuck to my leg. Part of my leg armor got stuck on the back of the saddle. And so there was a lovely, crunchy knee grinding thing that happened. And I had previously broken that knee, so I was like 'damnit!'. So off to the ER, we go.

And try and explain to them-- like, 'okay, so you fell off a horse' and I'm like 'yes, I fell off a horse, but I weighed about 90 pounds more than I usually do. And there was a trauma thing where part of me was still stuck to the horse as the horse was galloping away.

And they're just like, what? Why? I don't get it?

And you know, I had to go see like the knee specialist, same thing--

**Aven:** [00:46:11] Unlike a nice Crusader hospital or something, they don't see a lot of armor slash horseback injuries. They don't have that one in there--

**Carolyn:** [00:46:19] No, I mean it was fine, it was just sprained and whatever. And they sent me, you know, to the knee specialist at U of C and like, same thing.

Like, the orthopedic doctor walks in with his resident, and he just stops in the door and he stares at me on the bed. And he looks at his chart and he stares at me again, he's like, 'I've been doing this for 20 years. You are the first mounted combat injury I've had. And you're not what I expected. I did not expect to see YOU'.

I don't know what you expected. And I remember I had a horse show a couple of weeks after this at Spruce Meadows, one of their winter shows. And so of course, any horse person listening to this can relate to this because whenever you're injured, the first question you always ask is 'when can I ride again'?

When can I get back on the horse? And doctors have never figured out to tell us to wait longer than we actually need to. Because, you know--

**Aven:** [00:47:14] You will do it sooner than they tell you.

**Carolyn:** [00:47:16] --My doctor is like, 'Oh, well, as soon as you can bend your knee again, you can get back on the horse'. So, you know I'm sitting there being like, 'okay, I can jam it back on!'

So I'm still on crutches, and I crutch into the arena with my horse, my coach is like, 'what are you doing?' I'm like, 'Oh, you've done this before' and I get on. Like, I can bend my knee. I'm allowed to get back on.

**Aven:** [00:47:36] Yeah. And I mean, it's not like-- I don't have to walk. I mean, the horse-- I don't even have to bend my knee once I'm in the saddle. Like, what's the problem?

**Carolyn:** [00:47:42] For some reason we drifted to the right a lot that day, but still!

**Aven:** [00:47:46] Details, details. Gets the horse used to different kinds of--.

**Carolyn:** [00:47:50] It's fine, it's fine! And like every so often I showed up, you know, to teach like for a class or something, I've had a black eye and people are like, 'Oh my God!'. I'm like, 'it's fine. It's the horse. It's fine'.

Don't worry. 'Do you want me to call the police'? Or like, 'Oh, I was sword fighting. I stopped the sword with my face. Fine. No one needs to call the police. It's okay. I'm glad you're concerned. That's good. But really, it's fine.'

**Aven:** [00:48:16] Yeah, well, you know, it's just another kind of experimental archeology, right? Because we forget a lot of the time, how much, you know, how many ongoing injuries, how much sort of low level, basic trauma bodies were going through on a general day to day experience. When you live in a culture where you have to ride horses and fight and do all that and train to do those things, you know, nobody is walking down the street without a couple of bruises most days.

**Carolyn:** [00:48:43] Probably not. Yeah. I mean, there are definitely times where I have questioned my sanity. Like, 'what am I doing here? I could be in Rome right now, but no, I am lost on the side of a mountain in an unending rainstorm somewhere in Mongolia. I will never be warm again. Never be dry again. Why am I not in Rome?' So you have those moments where you're like, 'Oh wait, I could have-- why did I do this? Why am I doing this to myself?'

But at the end of the day, it's incredible. And I wouldn't actually give it up for the world, even if at times my body and brain question any sort of logic I might actually have.

**Aven:** [00:49:19] So have you-- not to be all academic about it-- but have you been, I know you've been publishing stuff and articles and things. Do you have a-- am I remembering rightly that you're working on a book?

**Carolyn:** [00:49:28] So I have I, so my PhD, my dissertation was published by I.B. Tauris, now Bloomsbury from a few years ago, 'The Horse in the Ancient World: From Bucephalus to the Hippodrome'.

And then I did a book for Casemate on sort of Ancient Greek warfare, 'Hoplites to Heroes'. And then I have some projects I'm working on right now. Some of them-- I am making my venture into things related to gender, which was not anything I'd ever really worked on before. So I'm looking at the presence of females, both human and equine, in ancient athletics, in ancient equestrian competition.

So I have a chapter I'm revising for an edited volume on horses on that. And there's certainly similar things I'd like to explore with that. Sports are something I've become really fascinated with, sort of the idea of horse sports and how they connect to cultural traditions and how they get incorporated into cultural traditions.

So that is actually something that, a book I would like to work on, whenever I get a chance to do that, because I have to finish some other stuff first. But kind of looking at the role of not just the major sports, like the Circus and you know, the Panhellenic Games, but even kind of local regional sort of ethnic type sports, equestrian sports because there are some really interesting ones, like--

They seem to have the precursor to steer wrestling, where they jump off their horses and wrestle steers to the ground. It's on their coins. There's a whole thing. And it was part of a, probably a festival to Poseidon. So in other parts of again, the ancient world, you get these really interesting, almost like niche, local horse sports that I'd like to do some investigating with.

I published a little bit on it. There's a Turkish game where you throw javelins. I mean, they're blunted javelins, but you throw javelins at each other on horseback. And we know it dates back to at least the Ottoman period, but it is kind of reminiscent to things that are described in like the ancient Roman hippika gymnasia, and the Troy games and stuff like that. And then in central Asia they played this game that I'm mildly obsessed with called buzkashi, which is goat polo. So it's kind of like this absolutely insane version of polo slash rugby slash hockey-- I don't even know. But anyways, played on horseback , you play it with a goat carcass or a calf carcass. So again, I'm probably gonna get all sorts of complaints from the animal welfare people about this, but they do sometimes use a synthetic one now because they have international tournaments.

And so they are starting to use a synthetic carcass for the international tournaments. Because it's a little more palatable. But it's just this mad game.

We know that it's, it's at least hundreds of years old again, where it actually originates from because so much of Central Asia is oral tradition some tie it back to the Mongols, some take it back further, but it's utterly mad. They charge, I mean, now it's a team game. It didn't used to be, it used to be an individual game. It was every, every rider, every Chapandaz for himself, trying to get this goat. Cause the game means--the name means 'steal the goat'.

So trying to get this goat carcass away from like a hundred other tribesmen who were all charging after you, beating you with a whip, trying to yank this carcass back. And then you're just, you know, we have these accounts from, you know, Europeans who were traveling down into Afghanistan and areas like that.

And they're watching these matches and they're like-- cause there was, there were no arenas at the time. So they were like, jumping hedges, going through irrigation ditches, swimming across ponds, trying to get away from everyone with the goat carcass. Cause to win, you have to drop it free and clear of anyone else.

So no one could be near you when you were doing it, which obviously is really hard to judge. And spectators risked getting trampled on a regular basis. I mean, I've watched, watched buzkashi in Kyrgyzstan, kind of the informal, you know, out in the hills version. And we did have to bolt out of the way many, many times as the clutch of horses and the goat charged towards you at a high rate of speed.

So that again, yes, just fascinated by these games and kind of the importance they hold within communities and cultures. And then, and then I'm working on some of the usual stuff, looking at Macedonian cavalry and Macedonian horse cultures and stuff, like sort of the idea of the Macedonian horse culture as well.

So, yeah, horses! Everywhere.

**Mark:** [00:53:19] Your mention of gender reminded me of a story that I've heard. And I don't know, I don't know if it's apocryphal, but that during the Crusades, the Europeans, you know, came with their stallions, but their Islamic foes would always ride mares and chaos would ensue. Is that-- what would that have been like?

**Carolyn:** [00:53:40] So, I mean, I think-- I am learning that this is probably more of an apocryphal tale. I have a friend who's doing her PhD at Leiden in Arabic history, Arabic studies, and she bred Arab horses in Egypt for 10 years. And so she is actually doing an amazing job of myth-busting a lot of the Western sort of orientalized traditions we have, especially about the Arabian horse, like sort of the romanticization of the Arabian horse.

And so yes, there are these stories about the preference for mares and people say that it goes back to a story about the prophet Muhammad and the Al Khamsa, his five mares who, you know, he'd finished a campaign and ride across the desert and they get to this oasis and he lets his horses go and they all run into the water and he blows the battle trumpet to see who's loyal. And these five mares come back and the rest don't.

So, but the origins of this story are possibly more recent than maybe-- but anyways. So whether they were actually all on mares or not, that is probably a bit apocryphal. But the description of sort of what happens where these stallions do basically lose their minds.

I mean, that is entirely possible. Stallions can work very well together. You can, you know, they can socialize with one another. But then obviously when you bring mares into the picture, especially if any of those mares are in season, so receptive to breeding. They're going to smell those pheromones and that's potentially going to cause some issues on the Crusader side of things, because the stallions are going to be all of a sudden, more focused on a different job, not the 'go to war' job, but the, 'I need to, to breed and reproduce and there's potential rivals all around me'.

But yeah, I know. I love that story. I really wanted it to be a real story for a long time. I thought it was a real story, but now I'm being forced to question that.

**Aven:** [00:55:22] It does, it does a little too neatly fit into masculinization and feminization of different cultures. And you know, it does fit a little bit too well into that. And anytime, anytime a story fits those narratives too well--

**Carolyn:** [00:55:35] So nicely, or, yeah, you've got like the, you know, the Europeans on their mighty stallions and then, and then the other side on their mares and-- there's no geldings anywhere. I mean, we know-- I think it's Strabo says the Scythians gelded their horses. So, castrated the male horses, and that actually does seem to be true. Because when you look at again, you know, places like-- I know I refer to Mongolia a lot, but it really is kind of the closest we can get to--

**Aven:** [00:55:59] --A society that still has working horses.

**Carolyn:** [00:56:00] Yeah, it still has a working horse nomadic culture where horses are just turned loose on the steppe.

Even, you know, even now really the only form of controlled breeding they do is castrating most of the male horses. So they keep some as stallions and just turn them loose and the rest are geldings. So again, just from the horse management perspective and the husbandry perspective that Strabo's comment does make sense that they probably would have gelded most of their horses because it was just an easier way of --

**Aven:** [00:56:23] --well and you don't really want to have herd dominance battles going on all the time, because you're going to get your horses hurt and stuff like that. It just, it's not useful.

**Carolyn:** [00:56:30] Yeah.

**Aven:** [00:56:31] If you're not controlling them and separating them and things.

**Carolyn:** [00:56:34] Yeah. So yeah. Yes. Gender and horses.

It is, it is a thing for sure. There's a lot of loaded gender references and allusions and-- definitely that exists in the ancient literature as well. Right? References to mares and fillies and the sort of sexual innuendos and ideas that go along with that.

**Aven:** [00:56:53] Yeah. It's very hard not to think of the Horace poem about-- and other, you know, depictions of girls as unbroken fillies.

**Carolyn:** [00:57:00] Yeah. Or, you know, with their golden spurs and sort of like Aphrodite's jockey sort of idea. I mean, there's tons of sexual references going on there that come back to that, to the horse and gender and the idea of taming something, breaking something, controlling it, dominance. I mean, that is certainly all in there.

And it's not something that I've worked on a lot. I could see working on it because again, it's just another rabbit hole to fall into because horses are everywhere.

**Aven:** [00:57:25] It might be-- I don't know if this is the way you'd think about it, but it's also might be interesting to look at the sort of gender stereotypes of horses in the ancient world and the modern world, because there's a lot of that now, right?

Like, what mares are good for? What stallions are good for? What geldings are good for? And what particular-- so much like, 'mares are tricky' and 'mares are--', you know, there's like, weird stereotyping, that matches sort of up with human stereotyping of gender, but doesn't completely in these odd ways.

And I don't know anything about how those match up with, you know, are those continuities from the ancient world or are they different? Do they have to do-- do they change as the human stereotypes of gender change?

**Carolyn:** [00:58:06] Yeah. I mean, I always wonder about the stallion thing. I mean, we have really sort of skewed perceptions of stallions, I think particularly, you know, in places like Canada and the U.S. And Western Europe because we had to create this idea that stallions are dangerous and can be violent. They need to be--

**Aven:** [00:58:25] And they're exceptional.

**Carolyn:** [00:58:25] They should be-- yeah. If you're not going to breed them, you should probably castrate them. You shouldn't breed every stallion or every mare for good reason. You want to pass on-- you know, overpopulation is an issue, you want to pass on good traits, be breeding them for a purpose.

Because there are so many horses that end up, you know, in the slaughter chain, because no one's using them--

**Aven:** [00:58:42] And they're not useful enough.

**Carolyn:** [00:58:44] --or they're not useful. Yeah. Again, overpopulation and things like that. So this idea that, you know, stallions are so difficult to keep. And, and again, because you look back to the European, especially the European tradition, whether we're looking at the classical world or the medieval world, and this whole idea of the stallion.

Right? And the warrior or the aristocrat or the elite, the prince, the dauphin, you know, on a stallion and this notion of the control and the power and the-- I mean, because stallions do, they do build up more, they develop more muscle because of their hormones and stuff like that.

So they do tend to look more physically imposing than a mare or a horse that was gelded quite young. So I think the stallion somehow gets tied into these notions of masculinity. And this idea that it can be so dangerous and, you know, people even say things like, 'Oh, you know, women shouldn't handle stallions because you know, the stallion will smell if she's having her time of the month and it'll be--'

I mean, it's ridiculous, there's this absolutely insane, but this notion that yeah--

**Aven:** [00:59:40] They couldn't care LESS!

**Carolyn:** [00:59:42] --that women shouldn't be handlers of stallions because they're not strong. You know, stallions are too big and strong and this and that. And so we've actually like painted the stallion and we've started to make them antisocial and dangerous because we're denying them, their horse-ness.

We come up with these ideas that they need to be, you know, they can't be pastured near another horse. They can't go out with another horse, they need to be in the stall away from everyone else with super high walls. We basically put them in solitary confinement. It's a social animal, of course it's going to lose their mind.

But then you look at other situations where like the Spanish school in Vienna, they only use stallions for their staff, with the Lipizzaners. They're all stallions. They're all stabled next to each other. They all travel together. They all work together. They all look perfectly fine.

Like they're not trying to kill each other, they're not trying to-- , they're all very, well-mannered, they're well socialized. You know, in Kyrgyzstan we all rode stallions and, you know, you would just hobble them at night and turn them out in the field. And every so often there'd be a squeal or whatever, but they weren't trying to murder each other all at the time.

So again, we create these gendered expectations. You know, stallions are super massive and strong and powerful and dangerous. And we turn the animal into that because of how we treat it. So that's kind of a, it's not necessarily that-- I mean, yes, stallions, when there are breeding mares around are going to maybe be a little more aware of things and, you know, don't be lax or casual around them, but they're not all trying to-- they're not like Bucephalus the horse eating beast from the Alexander romance or the human eating beast from the Alexander romance. They're just horses. Right? So we turn them into something else.

And the same thing with the idea of the mare, right? Like, you know, the big thing now for a while has been the chestnut mare, right? The red-headed mare. And this has to go back a while, because even going back to like the novel Black Beauty in the 1800s, right? I mean, Ginger the mare, who is the antithesis of the ideal female in every way.

I mean, she is very intentionally a red headed female horse. And even now it's really hard to sell them. Right? People do not want to buy ginger mares because there's this prejudice against them, because somewhere, some story arose about them being more sensitive than others. And it's perpetuated, and again probably affects how we treat those animals because we assume, it's a chestnut mare, it's going to be, you know, obnoxious or super sensitive or try and kill me. So I'm going to treat it differently--

**Aven:** [01:02:04] --yeah. Controlling. Yeah. Yeah.

**Carolyn:** [01:02:05] Which then, because they're so sensitive--

**Aven:** [01:02:07] --well I mean, that brings up-- sorry, go on--

**Carolyn:** [01:02:09] --oh I was just going to say, because they're so sensitive to our body language as prey animals. We may not even realize that we're basically reinforcing the stereotypes.

Right? We are reinforcing the stereotypes about stallions, about geldings, about mares all the time, about ponies, right? You know, ponies being little devils. I mean, some of them are, some of them are really nice. It just depends how they were trained like with any animal. And so we reinforce this, but it kind of has further reaching consequences.

**Aven:** [01:02:34] And beyond gender too. Of course that like, if horses had races, horse people would be such racists. Because the number of times I've heard people say, 'Oh, well, you know, it's an Appaloosa, so it's this or she's-- oh, well, yeah'. Or as you say, like a chestnut, 'well, you know what chestnuts are like', like every coat color seems to have a temperament that goes with it and a flaw that goes with it.

And, you know, I mean, I realize that some of them are tied to breeds or types. So there are going to be certain characteristics that are more likely in certain colorations, but as if like, every chestnut horse of every breed has some tie that's always the same. And you know, you can say it about horses because they're just horses, but no, it is the kind of thinking that really reveals a lot about the way people want to categorize the world.

**Carolyn:** [01:03:23] Well, and even going back to the, I mean, going back to the ancient world, cause that's theoretically what we're talking about, you do get in some of the texts, you know, you do get these references, to different types of horses. Breeds, if you want to call them that-- I don't call them that, but these types, and having different characteristics and traits and skillsets associated with them.

Right? So again, the idea of, 'Oh, the, you know, Thessalian horse is incredible and it's this preeminent, wonderful, you know, highly sought after animal' or the Nisean horse, or, you know, I think it's Arrian in his text on hunting. He's talking about different types of horses you could use for hunting.

And he says, you know, the Scythian horse, it's not pretty, like, it's not a beautiful looking animal. It's, you know, not this aesthetically gorgeous thing. You're not going to ride in a procession, but it'll run forever. Right? So when you're chasing that stag, when you're hunting that animal, you know, the other horses, the fancier horses will start to lag far sooner, but this sort of, not the most attractive kind of, you know, run of the mill sort of horse will just keep going. The one that's not really fancy, that isn't highly bred, that isn't spoiled and kept in stables. It'll just keep going. So again, this idea of certain ideas or attitudes towards, towards different types of horses.

I mean, it is there, it's not, I suppose I don't want to say it's quite as prevalent as in the modern world. But it's there, right? This idea of preference and, and even going into the middle ages again, you know, you get to get to good old Henry VIII and you know, he wanted to breed bigger horses. Which makes sense. It's Henry VIII, he was not a tiny person. And so the idea of like, native British breeds, like the Welsh ponies, you know-- basically trying to almost like eradicate those or not promote those breeds because he wanted to breed bigger horses.

And you get this in other parts as well. They want to improve the local horses. So, bringing other stuff in to try and make them bigger or flashier or something. And that all comes back to us and the status and the hierarchies that we attached to this. And, you know, who's on the purebred, thoroughbred horse or warmblood versus maybe the cob or the pony or things like that.

So there are these inherent prejudices that definitely persist in the horse world that aren't just a product of the 20th of 21st century. They have been around for a very long time. And if you look, you can find in the ancient literary traditions as well.

**Aven:** [01:05:34] That makes me think of the origins of the word race. Right? We were discussing that--

**Mark:** [01:05:38] -- Which, its earliest uses seem to all be connected with horse breeding --

**Aven:** [01:05:42] -- in English--

**Mark:** [01:05:43] In English and in the Romance languages..

**Aven:** [01:05:45] Right.

**Carolyn:** [01:05:45] Right. Yeah. And that wouldn't surprise me because it's such a status animal. I mean, it's always been such a status animal and the idea--

**Aven:** [01:05:56] --and also because it is used for a number of different functions, you get that functional breeding you know, where you want your draft horses and you want your riding horses and you want-- so that, which we do in all of our domesticated species, plant, animal, everything. Obviously we do it. We've been doing it for forever, but it's not at all surprising that it would, it would have that-- that there's a sort of a science to it that then becomes this--

**Carolyn:** [01:06:17] --yes. Science in very big quotation marks. Yeah. There's a lot of uncomfortable connections I think, between breeding animals and things like eugenics. I mean, we can't really deny that, like it's there in trying to breed the perfect horse and trying to breed, you know, the perfect representation, the fastest horse, the best jumper, the strongest horse. Often, you know, again, it gets to the point where you then start doing what they called line breeding, which is basically inbreeding because you're trying to create perfection. And as we've also seen with so many dog breeds, it comes at the expense of the actual animal itself, because you're trying to exaggerate certain features or promote certain features or fit a stereotype that the public has created, or the audience has created about this type of horse or this type of dog. And you end up breeding for appearance or for a particular thing, like speed or jumping ability and--

**Aven:** [01:07:05] --to the detriment of overall health and things.

**Carolyn:** [01:07:08] Yeah, yeah. Which is one thing I think-- going back to the ancient world, that is one thing that we don't see as much of, is this idea of specialized breeding. I mean, as you move into the sort of Roman empire and, and we know that there are kind of studs, stud farms and stuff around the empire breeding, like circus horses and horses for the racetrack and stuff like that.

But even then it's not this sort of specialized breeding that's appeared kind of in the last 200-300 years where you start breeding those big draft horses and you start breeding horses specifically for running and you start breeding horses specifically for hunting and things like that. With this diversity--

**Aven:** [01:07:40] Quarter-miler versus a two-miler. Yeah.

**Carolyn:** [01:07:42] Yeah, and when we look back to the ancient world, there were some regions that were more renowned for their horses than others. And those horses were more highly sought after, but you don't seem to get suggestions of trying to improve breeds or create new breeds.

It's more like this idea of, 'well, this is the type of horse that's really well suited to this environment that I live in'. So I mean, get the best version of that because why would I import something from somewhere else and alter what nature created to then create a horse that maybe it's bigger or prance-ier or a different color, but is more likely to break down.

Because again, horses, even for elites are expensive. So you, you want something that's going to be able to do the job that you have bred or purchased it for.

**Aven:** [01:08:25] I think that'd be really interesting if-- I mean, I know you have a million threads that you're going to be following and that you do not need more research subjects, but it would be very interesting.

And since it's such a topical thing in the world of classics right now to think about, and you may well have done so-- the, you know, the theories of race in the ancient world. And how that is relative, because what you're talking about is the environmental determinism of-- which was such a fundamental theory of racial characteristics and, you know, human difference when you look at ethnography. And that what you're suggesting essentially is that-- makes total sense, of course-- that it also was true of the way they thought about horses. That if you wanted a different horse, you needed a horse from a different place because that place would have created a horse of a certain kind.

Not that what you do is you breed them for traits. I mean, you don't need to know genetics to be able to do that, but it's a different-- that idea of inheritability of characteristics irrespective of environment is not really the kind of thinking that we see in the way race or type is characterized in the ancient world.

Like, wouldn't make sense. The idea that we see elsewhere, which is if you take people out of an environment and you leave them in another place for a while, they'll start to take on the characteristics of the new environment. That's not that idea that they'll breed true. You think of it-- sorry, there's no good terminology in any of this, especially if you apply it to humans, there's no good way of thinking, but that idea doesn't you know, it's a very different fundamental idea about how characteristics are created. So that makes sense that that would be how they would think of the animals.

**Carolyn:** [01:09:58] Well, and it's really-- I joined a workshop a month or so ago that was looking at sort of, it was an equine history workshop and it was again, looking at ideas of breeding and shaping the horse's body and stuff over different periods of time. But you know, someone had mentioned and I'd never thought of it before, but really when, when we talk about breeding animals in English, by and large, the language that we use to describe the breeding of animals is-- we're using human language.

We're using words that use to discuss human acts of reproduction. We don't have necessarily specific terminology that's for different species of animals. So we kind of anthropomorphize the whole process, which again, plays into this notion of race and the issues that come along with that, because again, we're looking at it very much from a human lens and a human perspective rather than the perspective of nature and that particular species and the factors that might sort of influence their reproductive process and mating process and things like that.

So, I never really thought about how language can inform the way we view breeding and the way we view the creation or alteration of other species, which is often done at our behest, because that whole species, is this anthropocentric thing of 'we control what we want to create', which always-- and that's where, you know, looking back to Central Asia, yes, the form of control they have is, is gelding. And I'm sure they do, you know, breed specific stallions specific mares for their race horses. But other than that, they really do just leave it to let nature do its thing. And you do get all of these unexpected colors. You get pintos and spotted horses and palominos and like color combinations I'd never really seen before. And it just happens naturally. They're not necessarily breeding for a color. It's just genetics doing its thing in a somewhat uncontrolled environment.

**Aven:** [01:11:46] And where they're not even doing very much to --I mean, if they aren't doing things like culling herds-- though I suppose if they were eating them, they are occasionally making choices, you know? So there's a little bit of artificial selection going on where they're like, 'well, that's the one that we'll eat. Cause that's the one that like, threw five people yesterday. That one's going in the pot'. But otherwise, yeah, there's not a lot of the kind of artificial selection that goes on, even with cattle or sheep or things like that on a farm usually.

**Carolyn:** [01:12:10] Yeah. So when I was there, which was in 2008, talking to some of the-- the Naadam festival is their big festival where they have the horse races and their horse races are like 15 to 30- ish kilometers long. We're not talking like a mile on a Kentucky Derby track--, and they're just across the steppe.

It's utterly mad, jockeys are all children, saddles are optional, shoes are optional. You just, you just go. And sometimes the kids are still hanging on at the end. Sometimes they aren't. You know, and the Russian Jeep goes back to find them. But that's what you do. But there was this concern that they, you know, some people were starting to import larger horses from Russia and cross them with the Mongolian horses to try and make them bigger.

And that's almost this, this Western sizeist notion because we are a very sizeist about our horses. We tend to look down upon small-- I mean, aside from some disciplines-- tend to look down upon small horses. We think bigger is better, much like with our houses and our cars and all of that. Right? And again, that can be to the detriment of the horse, especially for certain jobs.

And so there was this very real concern about what was going to happen to the Mongolian horse and, you know, the hardiness and durability and endurance and stuff that it was so famous for when you started bringing in these, these outside types and cross-breeding to basically try and create something new.

And is that going to change how these races functioned and how long they are and the type, the temperament of the horse and the way that they're able to keep these horses. Now, are they going to have to alter essentially their husbandry traditions to fit this new, bigger horse that some people with the wealth and the resources and means to import them are starting to do.

And what's that going to do to the playing field? So it is a very real concern.

**Aven:** [01:13:49] Yeah. I could see that and yeah, because if you can't afford to feed them, then you can't afford to have them. And then do you have to change--

**Carolyn:** [01:13:56] And if they're not hardy enough to survive out on the steppe then okay, do you need stables? And what does that mean for nomadism? Because are you just going to build stables wherever you go? Are you going to keep this horse in one particular spot and then have the other horses somewhere else? And it just becomes more complicated and more stratified.

**Aven:** [01:14:11] Interesting. Well, I think probably we should stop there though that's not all the topics we can talk about

**Carolyn:** [01:14:18] We've rambled on all over the place for awhile.

**Aven:** [01:14:20] Oh no. That's-- we are big fans of all over the place.

**Carolyn:** [01:14:24] The thing about this topic is that-- you know, like, I love it. Like, I certainly don't want people to not do this, it's one of my favorite things is I will literally get questions on anything about anything to do with horses from the earliest ancestor of the horse 55 million years ago, to like the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, people are like, 'horses! You must know everything about horses!'

So all of a sudden you're reading things on genetics and this and that, and metaphors and breeding and like, 'okay, I could have just---

**Aven:** [01:14:51] Oh yeah, we didn't touch-- we didn't even touch on, hardly touched on art. We didn't touch on religion and horses. We didn't talk about horses as draft animals. And the lack thereof. We didn't talk, --tons of stuff we didn't talk about!

**Carolyn:** [01:15:05] --well, like when I was still on the job market. And you know, you'd see all, the paucity of jobs that would come out, but, you know, looking through some of the--you could talk about Near Eastern stuff for this, for that, I'm like, 'well, I can'. Because I had to learn--

**Aven:** [01:15:17] --as long as there's a horse involved, I can talk about anything!

**Carolyn:** [01:15:19] If it's in the ancient world and they had horses, I had to learn about it because I had to talk to the horses and I had to understand the culture, but you can just see that like there's no, no, no, you can't possibly--

--like no, had horses, they had horses. I can tell you something about them and horses were everywhere. So they have both literally and metaphorically taken me some very interesting places.

**Aven:** [01:15:40] What more can you ask from a research subject?

**Carolyn:** [01:15:42] That's true! Someone said to me, you are like living every six year old girl's dream and I'm like, 'it is true'. Kind of remind myself about when I'm like, 'Oh, I'm drowning in marking and I'm stressed about a chapter that's overdue'. It's like, 'right, but I can just like, okay, well I'm gonna go jump on a horse and fire a bow'.

And I'm still technically working, but also having a ridiculous amount of fun while doing it.

**Aven:** [01:16:04] Yeah. Yeah, see, we didn't even talk about archery! But another time --

**Carolyn:** [01:16:08] We shall open that barn door another time.

**Aven:** [01:16:14] Quick, somebody go get the horse and bring it back.

Well, thank you so much. It's been absolutely fascinating and fun and I knew it would be, and it was.

**Carolyn:** [01:16:27] I like the kind of 'well, we'll just see where it goes'.

**Aven:** [01:16:31] 'I don't think we'll have any troubles filling the time'. So I will make sure that I put your books in our show notes. But say the titles again, just one more time.

**Carolyn:** [01:16:41] So, The Horse in the Ancient World: From Bucephalus to the Hippodrome, which was I.B. Tauris, is now Bloomsbury. And then Greek Warriors: Hoplites to Heroes, which is Casemate's. And then I have various and sundry chapters or whatever.

**Aven:** [01:16:54] But if people are interested in finding out more, The Horse in the Ancient World would probably be a good start.

**Carolyn:** [01:16:58] Definitely would be a good start, yeah.

**Aven:** [01:17:01] So thanks very much.

**Mark:** [01:17:02] Thank you, this has been a blast.

**Carolyn:** [01:17:05] Well, thanks! Yeah, so much fun to do.

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Thanks for listening.

**Mark:** [01:17:52] Bye.