

## Types of Hobby Horses

### The Stick Horse

The stick horse is the toy we commonly think of as hobby horses. Plutarch describes King Agesilaus of Sparta (s. 886 BCE) making these horses for his children (p. 94). There are many depictions of stick horses in marginalia and woodcuts as toys. Later in period we see stick horses in portraits of children. Some horses lacked heads, consisting of simple sticks used as an imaginative prop, while others had elaborate tack and little wheels on the opposite end.



Figure 1: Ms Douce 276, f. 124v. French Book of Hours from the beginning of the 16th century.

### The Mast Horse

Figure 2: A Mari Lwyd from 2011 (Wikicommons).

These more “primitive” (Alford, p. 30) horses are seen mostly in the British Isle. They are constructed using either real or facsimile skulls affixed to a long pole. Fabric is attached to the bottom of the skull in order to hide the performer. Depending on the horse, the performer would lean to form the back of the horse, moving a bent position. These horses were used in seasonal pageants, as exemplified by the Welsh Mari Lywnd in Midwinter Pageants. These horses have a pre-Christian origin and tradition, and may be the animal disguises that early priests spoke out against.



### The Tourney Horse

Figure 3: MS Douce 118, fol. 034r. French Psalter, end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Marginalia.

The tourney horse is most often seen in descriptions of masques and processions throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and it is believed to have come into the region via Andalusia and Muslim traditions of the *kurraj*. The earliest known European hobby horse appears in a story of a 13<sup>th</sup> century youth bursting into flames after riding a hobby horse into a church. The tourney horse consists of a framework with a horse's head and tail at either end, and draped in cloth and embellished. The rider wears the horse at the waist or chest. The tourney horse can still be seen in various modern European festivals and parades. It is also called the skirted horse, or the *cheval-jupon*.



### A Brief Timeline of Hobby Horses in Period

#### Key



Stick Horse



Mast Horse



Tourney Horse



Anti-Horse

**X** 370 CE, Barcelona - Bishop Pacianus: "I think they would not have known how to act the stag play if I had not shown them by criticizing them" (Alford, p. 19).

**X** 387-430 CE, Algeria - St. Augustine: "If you ever hear of anyone carrying on that most filthy practice of dressing up like a horse or a stag, punish him most severely" (Alford, p. 19-20).



420-438 CE, Persia – al-J\_hiz(d. 869) writes that Bahram V (Sassanid King of Persia), "put a reed between his legs and galloped about with a crown of sweet basil on his head, together with 200 maids, singing, shouting, and dancing" (Harris, p. 2).



470-542 CE, France – Caesarius of Arles



?622-632 CE, Arabia – al-Suhayl\_ also mentioned "four effeminate men (*mukhannath\_n*) in the time of Muhammad, [...] did not practice homosexuality, but they spoke in a soft voice and dyed their hands and feed and toyed or danced like women. Some of these effeminate men used to play (*yal'ab*) with the *kurraj*" (Harris, p. 3).



?630 CE, Arabia– al-Bukh\_r\_ (d. 870) writes that Umar ibn al-Khatt\_b (d. 644, second Caliph) "saw a large number of emigrants" with the prophet Muhammad following a successful raid. Among them was a *la'ab*(player) who "kicked an Ans\_r\_ man on the hip" (Harris, p. 2) al-Suhayl\_ (1114-1185) later wrote that Umar also "saw a player (*la'ib*) playing (*yal'ab*) with a hobbyhorse *kurraj*), so he said, 'If I had not seen this (*kurraj*) played with in the time of the Prophet, I would have expelled him from al-Medina" (Harris, p. 3).



636 CE, Spain – St. Isidor of Seville



?653-732), Arabia – Jar\_r, a poet, mentions "The bells of a *kurraj*" three times in his works (Harris, p. 3), whose work and stories of him and his rival, al-Farazdaq (d. 738), were last transmitted by al-Yaz\_d\_ in 922 CE (Harris, p. 4).



709 CE, England – St. Aldhelm, Abbot Malmesbury



786-813 CE, Abbasid – IbnKhalidun (1332-1406) wrote, "(People at that time) constantly had games and entertainments. Dancing equipment, consisting of robes and sticks, and poems to which melodies were hummed, were used [...] Other dancing equipment, called *kurraj*, was also used. (The *kurraj*) is a wooden figure (resembling) a saddled horse and is attached to robes such as women easr. (The dancers) thus give the appearance of having mounted horses. They attack and withdraw and compete in skill (with weapons) [...] There was much of that sort in Baghdad and the cities of the 'Iraq. It spread from there to other regions" (IbnKhalidun, p. 404-405).



?809-813 CE, Abbasid Caliphate – Two different historians/writers, al-Isfah\_n\_ (1125-1201) and al-Tabari (839-923), tell the following story: singer Mukh\_riq (d. 845) was called to the Caliph's palace

after dark. He saw the Caliph “enter into a kurraj.” Accompanied by drums, oboes, and singing, al-Amin “danced animatedly inside the hobbyhorse” and Mukh\_riq was ordered to join. The entertainment continued “until daybreak” and the entire time, the Caliph “danced around in his hobbyhorse without feeling any boredom” (Harris, p. 5).



?870-892 CE, Abbasid – al-Mas’\_d\_ (d. 956) writes of “dances of a different character,” named *al-ibl* (camel) and *al-kurra* (hobby horse) (Harris, p. 7).



915 CE, Germany –Regino of Prüm



1115-1234, China – Stoneware pillow painted and glazed depicts a boy riding a stick hobby horse, apparently made of bamboo. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accession number: 60.73.2).



1160 CE, Marrakesh – in the court of Ibn Jar\_r (an advisor) “where five hundred young slaves could maneuver on wooden horses and fight with lances” (Harris, p. 7).



1269 CE, Valencia – Don Alfonso de Castilla arranges a feast for his family which includes *cavallets salvatges* (wild horses) in games (Alford, p. 104).



1283 CE, Italy - A hobby horse appeared in Adam de le Halle's *Jen de Robin et Marion* - based on scholarly assumption.



?1286 CE, Arras - A hobby horse appeared in Adam de le Halle's *Jen de Robin et Marion* - based on scholarly assumption.



1327 CE, Aragon – The coronation of Alfonso IV included “other players which are wild horses” (Alford, p. 104).



1334-5 CE, England - Edward III's Wardrobe Accounts list “14 hobby horses *pro ludo Regis* [for the game (or play) of the king]” (Harris, p. 8).



1424 CE, Barcelona - During the Corpus Christi procession, eight “Christian” hobby horses fought 24 “Turkish” infantryman (Harris, p.8)



1437 CE, Valencia – a record for a city event lists “tots los cavalls cotoners que son 8” – Spanish tourney horses were often provided by cotton weavers’ guilds, hence the term *cotoners* (Alford, p. 104).



1458 CE, Foix - a festival in honor of Charles VII featured an entertainer who appeared to be on horseback, though the costume had false legs, but the performer “was his own horse, well costumed and caparisoned” (Alford, p. 79).



1464 CE, Jaén – Enrique IV was entertained outside the city by mock “armies,” one of which was made up of “four thousand boys” in Moorish costume riding “wicker hobby horses” (Harris, p. 8).



1548 CE, Valenciennes - a Lord of Misrule (in May) was accompanied by twenty-five young men dressed in white and “mounted on basket-work horses” (Alford, p. 79).

## References

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