

Urban *Palio* and *Scharlach* Races in Fifteenth- and Early Sixteenth-Century Italy and Germany

Christian Jaser

Philosophische Fakultät, Institut für Geschichtswissenschaften, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany

ABSTRACT

For the first time since antiquity, the Italian and German urban horse races for the prize of a precious piece of cloth called *palio* or *scharlach* could be studied as a fully-developed competitive ‘sport culture’ in all its dimensions, from planning and organization to the competitive performance itself through to the discursive perception and symbolic communication of victories and defeats. On both sides of the Alps, this communal tradition of horse racing experienced its heyday in the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Notwithstanding this contemporaneity and a bunch of organizational similarities, the Northern and Southern racing phenomema did not form a specific field of transalpine entanglement, but rather unconnected parallel worlds. In this essay, I will present some key comparative aspects of the transalpine field of urban horse racing: organizational structures, spatial arrangements, social range of the participants, the central role of equine agency for the success or failure of racing performances, and different media representations of victories.

KEYWORDS

History of sport; history of horse racing; Renaissance history; human-animal studies

In July 1502 the margrave of Mantua, Francesco II Gonzaga, received a letter from the Swabian city Böblingen, signed by his aunt Barbara, who had been married to the duke of Württemberg. In this letter duke Ulrich of Württemberg asked whether Francesco would sell one or two of his calm gaited Barb stallions to him. He claimed it was impossible to get hold of such horses north of the Alps – neither for money nor by any other means. By contrast, he knew that in the princely studs of Mantua a large number of *barbarici* were available. In his letter of reply to the Württemberger, Gonzaga recommended Turkish horses (*turci*) instead, on account of their being both fast and pleasant to ride. His Barb horses on the other hand did not have a slow gait and were only able to run – *[i]psi equi barbarici currere tantum sciunt*.¹

This misunderstanding about the degree of specialization of the horses from the North African Barbary Coast, which in Italy were indeed trained only to take part in

CONTACT Christian Jaser  christian.jaser@geschichte.hu-berlin.de  Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Philosophische Fakultät, Institut für Geschichtswissenschaften, Unter den Linden 6, Berlin, 10099 Germany

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races, appears to be symptomatic of the lack of connection between two series of horse races with the prize being a valuable piece of cloth – in Latin *bravium*, in Italian *palio*, in German *scharlach*. They both had their heyday in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, and yet they were two separate worlds. On the one hand, we have the dense network of urban *palio* races in Northern and Central Italy – from provincial races in small towns to the main Florentine race of the *Palio di San Giovanni* – whose tradition reaches back to the thirteenth century.² On the other hand, we have the Upper German *Scharlach* races in cities such as Vienna, Munich, Nördlingen, Augsburg, Ulm and Strasbourg, for which documentation starts between 1382 and 1473.³ Based on the interplay of communal and courtly records and of local and translocal spheres of communication, these urban horse races emerge as a fully-developed competitive ‘sport culture’⁴ that could be studied in all its dimensions – organization, performance, perception – for the first time since antiquity. And yet these races have so far been neglected by general historians and have neither been the object of systematic analysis nor of transalpine comparison.

In the following, the field of *palio* and *scharlach* races will be highlighted with regard to some of its key aspects.⁵ First of all, general organizational structures will be addressed, in particular with regards to frequency, finance logics and practices of regulating the competition (I). Secondly, the focus will shift to the spatial arrangements of the races, i.e. the condition and preparation of racetracks as well as the placement of spectators (II). Thirdly, it is important to discuss the social outreach of the horse races and therefore look at the backgrounds of race patrons and jockeys and their interests in participation (III). Fourthly, I will deal with the exposed role of the racehorse as performer of these high-speed-contests, that, especially in Italy, is accredited with the decisive performative agency⁶ in the *palio* races. Here, the key lies in the competitive terms *virtù* and *velocità* (IV). Lastly, I want to concentrate on the different media representations of competitive achievement as we encounter them mainly south of the Alps: political readings of race results in diplomatic correspondence, acclamations on the part of the spectators and followers directly after the race, the ostentatious display of the prize and the commemoration of victories in textual, visual and musical form (V).

Organizational Structures: Frequency, Financing, and Competition Management

On both sides of the Alps, *palio* and *scharlach* races consistently took place annually. For the host cities they were central events in the festival calendar and at the same time a much-noticed occasion for communal self-representation. South of the Alps *palio* races were mostly linked to the anniversaries of the cities’ patron saints – for example, the Florentine Palio di San Giovanni or the Ferrarese Palio di San Giorgio – or to *lieux de mémoire* of civic military successes against external and internal enemies.⁷ The Upper German *scharlach* races on the other hand, were usually organized on the occasion of annual trade fairs during high church feasts and on patrons’ days – such as the Pentecost fair in Nördlingen,⁸ the *Jacobidult* in Munich,⁹ the Michael fair in Augsburg¹⁰ and the fairs in Vienna on Ascension Day and on

Catharine's Day¹¹ – or at shooting festivals, which were also attended by visitors from outside the region. Here, the large spectator turnout promised an increase in tax revenue and level of consumption for the city. Consequently, the communal envoy Jakob Protzer presented the prospect of *nutz mit ungelt zern und in ander weg* ('benefit through tax, consumption and other ways') to the council of Nördlingen as an economic effect of the local *scharlach* race.¹²

It was the duty of the city authorities to plan and carry out these racing events. They referred to communal norms and rules that were drafted to help ensure a smooth event and fair competition. Numerous Italian cities had sets of rules in their statutes that were sometimes as in Florence emended and updated through regulations called *provvisioni*. For example, in the statutes of Verona it says

... we decide and order that on the first Sunday of Lent each year the *podestà* of the commune of Verona may put up two *palio* banners – *bravia* – at a suitable location. One of the banners is earmarked for a horse race, the other for a foot race. (...) The winner of the horse race is presented with a *palio* banner as prize, the loser with a piece of ham (*baffa*) that is to be hung around the horse's neck after the race and from which everyone can cut a slice.¹³

Even more clearly than the Italian tradition of statutes, the Upper German *Rennordnungen* ('race rules') provide a set of rules for the organization of the competition. For example, the Nördlingen regulations from 1463 concern a range of topics from written registration, inspection and sealing of the participating race horses, to weight checks of the riders and their behaviour during the race and possible manipulation through *zabern vnd andern sachen* ('spells and other things'), as well as safety aspects and the placement of guards around the racetrack. The latter happened not without reason: the Nördlingen *scharlach* race had been raided by knight Anselm of Yberg (Eiberg) in 1442.¹⁴

The statutes also provide us with more details on the cost of the *palio* banners made out of several meters of damask, velvet or gold brocade¹⁵ and often adorned with the host city's coat of arms. Florence, for example, planned for substantial expenses up to a maximum of 200 florins in 1415.¹⁶ Annual expenses for this purpose are fully documented for both Florence in the fifteenth century city accounts and Munich from 1451 until far into Early Modern times.¹⁷ At this time, the cost of the prizes – a *scharlach* cloth for the winner and a sow for the loser – was split between the city of Munich and the duke's court – a particularity of a residential city. An entry in the chamberlain's accounts from 1454 states: *Item X lb. IIII β. XIII d. haben wir zalt für halben scharlach halb parchant ain saw der stat tail* ('we have paid ten pounds, four shillings and thirteen denars for half of the scharlach, half of the piece of fustian, half of the sow, the part of the city').¹⁸

It was part of the standard administrative duties to register the participating horses, riders and patrons, i.e. usually people of high rank who had signed up their horses for the race. The purpose of these procedures was to fix and precisely identify the starting field, especially by means of a detailed description of the race horses including characteristics and colours that is comparable to contemporary horse examination lists.¹⁹ In the register of the Augsburg *scharlach* race in 1476, it states: *H[erzog] Cristoffs von Baiern erst Renner: (...) Item ain raut praun reuß haut ain*

pläßlin und 4 weiß füß. (...) H[erzog] Jörgen von Baiern Renner. Item ain prauner Türck mit ain pläßlin der lingk fuoß weiß ('Duke Christoph of Bavaria's first racehorse: ... Item a bay horse with a blaze and 4 white feet. ... Duke George of Bavaria's racehorse. A brown Turk with a blaze, the left foot white').²⁰ On the occasion of the Palio di San Donato in Arezzo in 1481 'a chestnut horse with a star on the face and marked white on both hind legs, belonging to Clarice Orsini, wife of said Lorenzo' was among others registered with the rider Fantaguzo.²¹

Registering the jockeys in writing served the purpose of fulfilling the imperative of identifiability and equal competitive opportunities. In order to be able to identify them better during the dynamic race they wore differently coloured robes. In 1559 scribes from Augsburg noted: *der bueb zu Klaidung Gelb, Praun und weiß, aber zwarch auf der ainen seitten, der bueb gar weiß unnd mit ain rotten kreutz, der bueb chrau und leip farb* ('The boy in yellow, brown and white clothes, but black on one side, the completely white boy with a red cross, the grey and skin coloured boy').²² According to the Upper German race rules jockeys had to weigh a minimum of 120 or 125 pounds. According to a letter from King Maximilian to the town of Nördlingen from 1493, if a rider who was too light, a compensation weight should be attached to the horse *an ziemliche Enden und Stätten* ('on all proper ends and places').²³ In 1476 in Augsburg, the jockeys were weighed on the episcopal scales and the findings were meticulously documented²⁴: the jockey Albin Pfaffer weighed the required 125 pounds,²⁵ his colleague Bartolin Wappner hundred and 22 ½ pounds and *sol II ½ lib. zuo im nehmen* ('is supposed to take 2½ pounds with him'), Leonhard Madowa undercut the minimum weight by two pounds and was also instructed to attach a compensation weight.²⁶ Presumably, there are few other people in the 15th century of whom we have such precise weight indications.²⁷

Spatial Arrangements: Quality and Preparation of Racetracks

The Italian *palio* races were mostly urban race courses that crossed the urban space from city gate to city gate in a straight track. They manifested an anything but natural, even for premodern times, communal spatial sovereignty.²⁸ The Florentine Palio di San Giovanni, for example, is of this nature: from the Porta al Prato right across the oldest parts of the city over the Via del Corso, which has its name from the race, to the end at the nun's convent San Pier Maggiore.²⁹ The key feature of this two kilometer race course was its straightness, which demanded mainly high speed endurance from the race horses.³⁰

With respect to the spatial dimension, by contrast, the Upper German *Scharlach* races were suburban events. In Nördlingen, the annual *scharlach* race on the Monday after Corpus Christi took place on the so called *Reichswiese* or *Kaiserwiese* ('Imperial' or 'Emperor's meadow'), the *pratium imperiale* in front of the Baldinger Gate, northeast of the wall on a straight track. This was certainly motivated by pragmatic reasons, since the inner-city area was occupied by market stalls, so that racehorses could not run there.³¹ Indeed, even in 1549, Hans Deutsch's view of the city prominently associated the suburban meadow with galloping horses in his cityscape.³² In Munich, too, the horses raced on a straight track in front of the walls on the so

called *Rennweg* ('racetrack') in front of the western Neuhauser gate. This track is basically identical with today's Schleißheimer Straße and is also illustrated with a small race scene on the oldest preserved city map of Munich by Tobias Volckmer from 1613.³³

Before the racing events the *palio* and racetracks had to be prepared by the officials of the host cities in a way that ensured a smooth event and fair competition. Thus, according to the statutes from 1322–1325 and 1415 the Florentine Capitano del Popolo had to provide 'an unscathed, hard covered, unobstructed' racetrack and remove benches, porches and other obstacles that protruded more than a *braccio*, i.e. half a meter, into the street.³⁴ In Nördlingen the race commission, which comprised the two mayors and five councilmen, had to repair the entrances to the *Reichswiese*, mend railings and bridges or, if necessary, rebuild them and cover the main bridge with straw and grass. Fishermen were placed nearby this bridge to rescue jockeys who fell into the water.³⁵

The strong focus on spectators of these racing events can also be retraced in the temporary building activities of the host cities. In the run-up of Ferrara's Palio di San Giorgio, viewpoints were prepared in different buildings for the duke's family and high-ranking guests.³⁶ In Florence, too, *magnifici palchetti*, 'magnificent stands', were erected (most probably made out of wood), which afforded the letter writer Marco Parenti and his Venetian guests, who were greatly interested in *palio* races, a view of the contest.³⁷ We can gain a good impression of the spectators' perspective through a wedding chest (*cassone*)³⁸ that shows the dramatic scene of horses reaching the finishing line in the Palio di San Giovanni in front of San Pier Maggiore, painted by Giovanni Toscani between 1425 and 1430. There are spectators everywhere – on the struts of houses, at windows and especially many along the edge of the racetrack. With regards to the mass of spectators, the historian Gregorio Dati refers to this event as a *cosa mirabile*, 'wonderful thing'.³⁹ The same applies to the Upper German races in the suburban space. An anonymous poem on the *scharlach* race in Nördlingen 1442 reports on *ein grosse meng* ('many people') and *ein hubsch gedreng* ('a pretty dense crowd').⁴⁰

Social Outreach – Backgrounds and Interests in Participation of Race Patrons and Jockeys

On the basis of the lists of participants mentioned above, diplomatic correspondence and historiographic as well as diary documentation, the social outreach of the starting field can be identified relatively accurately. On both sides of the Alps the *palio* and *scharlach* races were a field of interaction between urban and courtly protagonists. Ownership of a competitive race horse undoubtedly required significant financial strength with regards to both purchase and care. Therefore, the victory of a Florentine butcher's son in the Palio di San Giovanni in Florence 1405 was a rare exception.⁴¹ Unlike tournaments, which were open exclusively to nobility, urban horse races on both sides of the Alps attracted participants of heterogenous backgrounds; we find peasants, burghers and patricians as well as lesser noblemen and members of the gentry, princes, high church dignitaries and even kings. The most important and most lucrative *palio* race of Renaissance Italy, the Florentine

Palio di San Giovanni, brought together an elite of race horse owners with studs that were famous throughout Europe – the Gonzaga from Mantua, the Margraves of Este from Ferrara, the Bentivoglio from Bologna, the Baglioni from Perugia, the lords of Mirandola. However, among the winning patrons we also find citizens from Siena, Rome and Lucca as well as the Florentine patrician family of the Benci.⁴² Compared to this dominance of princes and *signori* south of the Alps, the lesser remunerated *scharlach* races in Nördlingen attracted participants more from the patrician and lesser noble class, apart from the presence of Albert III, Duke of Bavaria-Munich as race patron in 1449.⁴³

The race patrons were able to increase their social capital and demonstrate their social status and financial wealth in front of the urban public through mere participation, but even more so through competitive success. South of the Alps, for example, the presence of princely *signori* of a middle rank who often offered their services as *condottieri* is anything but a coincidence. The urban *palio* races in front of a large number of spectators – i.e. in front of their potential employers – provided them with a welcome opportunity to display the quality of their studs in order to land lucrative future contracts.⁴⁴ The spice dealer Gostanzo Landucci's success in the *palio* races – between 1481 and 1485 he won no fewer than 20 races⁴⁵ – reflected not only his financial power but also the extent of his business activities that allowed him to import a winning horse like the stallion *Draghetto* from the Barbary coast.⁴⁶ At times the starting field turned into pure demonstration of power as it was the case with the 1486 *Scharlach* race in Vienna. Here, the new city ruler, the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus, ordered an entire phalanx of his entourage to compete in the race and excluded other participants. The king himself put forward four horses, his cousin and military leader Peter Gereb three, the wealthy Hungarian merchant Hans Pempflinger two, whilst the captain Nikolasch Cropez and two scribes registered one horse each.⁴⁷

We know very little about the social background of the riders called *rennbuben* or *ragazzi* on either side of the Alps. Regarding their professional background, we can assume that they worked as grooms or stable boys in the studs of the race patrons or as *barbareschatori*, i.e. specialists on race horses, which often originally came from the Barbary coast.⁴⁸ In Upper Germany the jockeys were supposed to be *mannbar lüt*, i.e. sexually mature men, as it is stated for example in the Nördlingen race rule from 1459.⁴⁹ Jockeys and *barbareschatori* like Bartolomeo de' Barbari from the Gonzaga stud in Mantua, who was murdered in 1496, were often – despite their expertise in racing – dubious characters and their choleric temperament occasionally led to diplomatic complications.⁵⁰ At the beginning of the sixteenth century in Siena jockeys were registered with very striking nicknames that definitely have an ironic undertone and suggest a certain degree of fame: *Spera in dio* – 'he places his hope in God', *Ha paura di esser l'ultimo* – 'he is afraid to be last', *Porta el palio a casa* – 'he takes the *palio* home'.⁵¹

The Race Horse as Performer – Agency, *Virtù* and *Velocità*

For the audience the horses' competition was a rather brief event. Montaigne comments on his experience of the Florentine *palio* in 1581 rather unenthusiastically:

‘You stood on the street and did not see anything but the horses flashing by’. Likewise, Goethe only states the limits of visibility in light of the kinetic energy on the Roman course: ‘You have hardly caught sight of them and they are already gone’.⁵² In the same spirit, the Florentine poet and humanist Angelo Poliziano portrays one of the race horses of Lorenzo de’ Medici as an invisible kinetic phenomenon: ‘At best, you can see it at the beginning and at the end but by no means during the course of the race!’⁵³ Nobody captivated the agonal excitement and fascinating experience of speed at the finishing line better than Toscani in his painting *cassone*. The galloping horses’ bodies stretching towards the finishing line, leaping forward, can remind us of Théodore Géricault’s painting *Le derby de 1821 à Epsom* from 1821, whose almost flying horses represent the nineteenth century experience of speed.⁵⁴ The corpus of *palio* correspondence around 1500 – from Mantua alone we have hundreds of letters – almost overflows with comparative speed semantics. We often find statements of distances between winning and losing horses by means of horse lengths or well-known milestones⁵⁵ as well as dromological superlatives: the horse galloped ‘with such speed – *cum tanta velocità* – that it was equal to an arrow’. The author explicitly states this to be *publica fama* (‘public opinion’).⁵⁶

Assessing the speed performance, the contemporary observers had no doubt that in a *palio* race the horse, and not the rider, had the performative agency. The remark of the Mantuan Angelo de Maximis on the ‘cleverness and courage of the rider’ (*per astutia et virtù del ragazzo*) being the decisive element for the positive outcome of the Roman carnival race in 1514 is a rare exception.⁵⁷ It is much more common that reports on the races grant a performance monopoly to the horses, which were known by name. In a report on the Florentine Palio di San Pietro from 1509 it says ‘The horse of the cardinal of Mantua was the first to enter the Porta del Prato. All the other horses were really close to each other as far as the Borgo d’Ognissanti except your *Renegato Giovine*, who passed all the others on this street and extended his lead up to the *palio* such that the other horses were still at the house of the Duke of Ferrara when he finished’.⁵⁸ These ascriptions of equine agency correspond to the specific regulations for Italian *palio* races that took a horse finishing the race *scosso*, i.e. without its rider, to be a valid result.⁵⁹ Thus, what we can see on the *cassone* painting mentioned above, namely horses with riders alongside several riderless ones breaking up the competitive unit of horse and rider, was indeed consistent with the rules. If we then take into account the fact that some cities also held races entirely without jockeys, the contemporary focus on the animal’s performance becomes even more apparent. Therefore, it seems only natural if a successful race patron like Francesco II accredits his greatest results to the *virtù* of his horses.⁶⁰ *Virtù*, a key concept of the Italian Renaissance, expresses the demonstration of superiority of one person over another with its semantic content ranging from ‘virtue’ and ‘talent’ to ‘merit’ and ‘strength’.⁶¹ *Virtù* has a highly agonal connotation and with regards to the race horses has to be translated as ‘performance tested through competition’.

Accordingly, breeding, grooming, veterinary care and feeding of Italian race horses were subject to a strict regime whose sole purpose was to increase the horses’ speed. Even in fifteenth century Upper Germany, where the record on princely and civil

studs is anything but satisfying, special formulas for race horses circulated under the title *Hertzog Albrechts Rennen*. The powder made of herbs, roots, mistletoe and wine was supposed to have both a strengthening and relaxing effect: ‘And if you want to race, you add one lot of powder to the horse’s fodder over four days. Afterwards you can ride cheerfully whenever you want. Nobody will be able to reach you. You will experience a miracle’. It is impossible to ignore the objective of a guaranteed performance improvement in this quote.⁶²

The Meaning of Winning – Political Readings and Media Representation

North of the Alps the scarce media representation of the *scharlach* races consists of brief entries in city chronicles. Princely correspondence was almost entirely restricted to reflections on tournaments and hardly ever mentions horse races. This contrasts strongly with the *palio* races in Italy, which were the subject not only of daily reporting but also of textual, visual and acoustic representation. In the case of winning, the *virtù* and *velocità* of race horses could be converted into *onore*, honor, of the race patrons. The basis for the transformation of equine *virtù* to patronal honor was the ‘centaurian pact’ between patron and race horse.⁶³ The role of the horse as representative and equine *alter ego* of its patron or owner was indicated through clear assignments in the lists of participants and was then made visible during the race through heraldic symbols. Referring back to ancient narratives – for example Plutarch’s and Curtius Rufus’ depiction of the relationship between Alexander the Great and his horse Bucephalos⁶⁴ – contemporary anecdotes indicate similar special relationships. Lorenzo de’ Medici’s biographer Niccolò Valori writes that his race horse Morello, which was so fast that it won all of the races it participated in, would only let Lorenzo feed it when it was ill or exhausted. Whenever Lorenzo approached it, it neighed happily and lay down on the floor.⁶⁵

Reducing social complexity to evident victory, ranking and defeat in race competition allowed the transformation of every success or failure into social value and the demonstration of political status and rank. The *honor de la nostra vittoria* (‘honor of our victory’), as Francesco Gonzaga puts it, lay in the symbolic conquest of the respective host city.⁶⁶ With tongue in cheek he attested to his Medici rivals in 1513 that due to his *palio* successes the *Excellentissima Repubblica di Fiorenza* had to be counted among his subjects almost every year.⁶⁷ Equally, rankings were politically interpreted in diplomatic correspondence, as we can see in different letters by Gian Filippo Salarolo on the performance of the Barb stallion *Fulgore* from the racing stable of the Bolognese ruler Giovanni Bentivoglio. Salarolo reports that *Fulgore* only achieved third place in the Ferrarese *palio* in May 1481, but to the satisfaction of Bentivoglio that meant he was still ranked higher than the horse of the Malvezzi, a rival family of the Bentivoglio in Bologna, which came fourth.⁶⁸ After the victory of *Fulgore* in the Bolognese *palio* of San Ruffillo the same year, the superiority of the Bentivoglio could be proclaimed triumphantly again: ‘The Malvezzi’s horse achieved second place; nevertheless, ten horse lengths behind *Fulgore*’.⁶⁹

After the *palio* victory, ‘acoustic communities’⁷⁰ formed *in situ*, consisting of followers and supporters who vociferously acclaimed the victorious patron – *Mantua*,

*Mantua, Gonzaga, Gonzaga*⁷¹ – and who thereby multiplied the symbolic capital in the echo chamber of the urban face-to-face society. According to a poem of praise by Filippo Lapacini on one of the Gonzaga horses, patrons earned the reputation of *virtú* through *palio* successes, so that ‘the whole of Italy shouted *Turcho Turcho*’, the battle cry of the Mantuan margraves.⁷² On top of momentary acclamation, the serial nature of the *palio* races taking place annually in many cities facilitated forms of diachronic memory of performance. The Este and Gonzaga, for instance, established special *guardarobe*⁷³ for storing the *palio* banners they had won and the offensive self-promotion of the Sienese painter and race patron Sodoma points in the same direction: ‘Over many years, he himself had won a great number of *palio* trophies with his horses in this way, and in his vanity, he showed them to anyone who entered his house and often even presented them in the window’, as Sodoma’s biographer Giorgio Vasari smugly remarks.⁷⁴

Commemoration of *palio* victories was taken to extremes by the Mantuan margraves who created a new media format with the *Libro dei palii vinti*,⁷⁵ commissioned in 1512, which was supposed to immortalize the success story of the Gonzaga race horses in text and image.⁷⁶ This elaborately designed codex contains 34 race horses, each portrayed as racing sports celebrity. In it we find the name of each horse in golden letters above a picture of it *dal naturale* in front of a fantasy landscape. At the bottom of the page there is a list of the *palio* victories of each race horse, again in coloured letters. In total, the codex accounts for 197 *palio* victories between 1499 and 1518.⁷⁷

This textual and visual commemoration of Italian *palio* races mirrors an intensive political competition between princes, signori and local elites that was accompanied by increasing communicative networking and an ‘intensifying use of propaganda and “media”’.⁷⁸ It imprinted itself in manifold ways into the sports culture of the Italian Renaissance. Through the competitive leitmotiv of race patronage, opportunities of representation opened up to horse owners that had an effect far beyond the actual racing event. Contrary to that, in Upper Germany the winner’s representation was limited to the short-termed surplus of attention in the urban face-to-face society. Immediately after the race, the participants of *scharlach* races were scheduled to enter the city in a procession according to their ranking. The victorious horse and its patron were supposed to get special attention as we can see in the Munich race rules from 1448: *Item wie die phärdt herein lauffen, ains nach dem anndern. Also sollen sie nacheinander herein geen, bis für die Herberg, da das phärt stet, das das tuech gewonnen hat* (‘Item, as the horses ride in, one after the other: They shall thus go in one after the other up to the lodging where the horse stands that has won the cloth’).⁷⁹

In sum, Italian *palio* and German *scharlach* races of the fifteenth and early century share, on the one hand, many similarities: the role of city governments in planning, managing and financing urban horse races; their communal staging as spectator events and annual frequency; the textile quality and hierarchy of prizes; and finally, the fundamental significance of racing patronage by local and foreign racehorse owners. On the other hand, the comparative perspective also shows a strikingly different approach of host cities and race patrons alike on both sides of the Alps.

Whereas Italian palio races were mostly held on religious feast days as inner-city contests, their German counterparts took place during annual trade fairs on suburban racetracks. Strictly speaking, these sport cultures south and north of the Alps operated on different levels, in particular with regard to their scale and scope: in Florence and other Italian cities, there were much richer prizes on offer than in any German race venue. As a consequence, many palio races were run by horses of princes, *signori* and *condottieri*, while the scharlach races had a rather less illustrious starting field from the patriciate and lower nobility down to the citizenry and peasantry.

By the identification of the racehorses as symbolic proxies of their patrons, urban palio races were an occasion for signorile competition, the transformation of equine speed in patronal honor and different media representations of victories. North of the Alps, the decisive agency of individual racehorses and their representative value were neither perceived nor exploited, not even by the sporadic race patronage of German princes. This particular idea of the racehorse as key performer and medium for political and social messages never reached the German racing tradition, at least on the basis of the existing source material. As the letter exchange cited at the beginning of the essay shows, the otherwise manifoldly-permeable Alps were a natural barrier for racehorses, regarding their concrete transport as well as the transfer of their performative and symbolic perceptions. In this respect, Italian and German urban racing cultures during the Renaissance did not form a specific field of transalpine entanglement, but rather unconnected parallel worlds.

Notes

1. Barbara Gonzaga to Francesco II Gonzaga, [Böblingen], June 25, 1502, in Christina Antenhofer, Axel Behne, Daniela Ferrari, Jürgen Herold, and Peter Rückert, eds., *Barbara Gonzaga: Die Briefe / Le Lettere (1455-1508)* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2013), 311, 449–50; Francesco II Gonzaga to Barbara Gonzaga, Mantua, July 10, 1502, in: *ibid.*, 312, 450–1.
2. Michael Mallett, ‘Horse-Racing and Politics in Lorenzo’s Florence’, in *Lorenzo the Magnificent: Culture and Politics*, ed. Michael Mallett and Michael Mann (London: Warburg Institute, 1996), 253–62, here 254; Elizabeth Tobey, ‘The Palio-Horse in Renaissance and Early Modern Italy’, in *Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline and Identity in the Early Modern World*, ed. Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 63–90, here 64; Elizabeth MacKenzie Tobey, ‘The Palio in Italian Renaissance Art, Thought, and Culture’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland-College Park, 2005), 45–49.
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- 24, 1459); *ibid.*, 201 (1478.61–62) (July 5, 1478); *ibid.* 220 (1482.3) (June 24, 1482). See also Nosari, Canova, *Il Palio nel Rinascimento*, 314–27.
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72. Filippo Lapacini, In laudem Sauri, in *Libro dei palii vinti*, 1512–1518, Milan, Collezione Giustiniani-Falck, 6v. See also Malacarne, *Il mito dei cavalli gonzagheschi*, 229; Cesare Campana, *Arbori delle famiglie le quali hanno signoreggiato con diversi titoli in Mantua ...* (Mantua: Osanna, 1590), 25; Dolfo, *Lettere ai Gonzaga*, 243; Alessandro Luzio, ‘Isabella d’Este e i Borgia’, *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, ser. 5, 42 (1915): 115–67, 412–64, here 126; Hans Joachim Kissling, *Sultan Bâjezîds II. Beziehungen zu Markgraf Francesco II. von Gonzaga* (Munich: Hueber, 1965), 57.
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 74. Giorgio Vasari, *Sodoma und Beccafumi*, trans. Victoria Lorini (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2006), 24.
 75. For a codicological description, see Malacarne, *Il mito dei cavalli gonzagheschi*, 88–95. See also Nosari, Canova, *Il Palio nel Rinascimento*, 209–16; David Sanderson Chambers and Jane T. Martineau, eds., *Splendours of the Gonzaga: Catalogue* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1981), 147.
 76. Malacarne, *Il mito dei cavalli gonzagheschi*, 87–8.
 77. *Ibid.*, 93.
 78. Volker Reinhardt, *Die Renaissance in Italien. Geschichte und Kultur*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Beck, 2007), 14. See also Mallett, ‘Horse-Racing’, 257.
 79. Munich race rule from 1448, Munich, Stadtarchiv, Zimelien, no. 11, 44v, printed in Ernst von Destouches, ‘Die Münchener Jakobi- oder Scharlachrennen, die Vorläufer des Münchener Oktoberfestes’, in *id.*, *Säkular-Chronik des Münchener Oktoberfestes (Zentral-Landwirtschafts-Festes) 1810–1910. Festschrift zur Hundertjahrfeier* (Munich: Lindauer, 1910), 3–11, here 4.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on Contributor

Christian Jaser, PhD, is a Research Fellow at the Chair of Late Medieval Studies at Humboldt University Berlin. His current research focuses on sport cultures in late medieval cities. His publications include *Palio und Scharlach. Städtische Sportkulturen des 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhunderts am Beispiel italienischer und oberdeutscher Pferderennen*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2020).