Matilda: Hello and welcome to #FinallyFriday. This chat session is run by EXARC, the society for archaeological open-air museums, experimental archaeology, ancient technology, and interpretation. My name is Matilda Siebrecht and today I am joined by two specialists from our EXARC community, focusing on historic and prehistoric equestrianism aka horses.

Dr. Rena Maguire is a visiting researcher at Queen's university Belfast, where her research focuses on equestrianism in Ireland in the late Iron Age and Early Medieval period. She specializes in the material culture associated with horse riding practices and is particularly interested in using this material as a means to investigate the level of interaction that late Iron Age Irish society had with mainland Europe.

Joakim Løvgren is one of the founders of EquiAstra, which offers a range of training services, both modern and historic, related to horse riding and is a historian specialized in Late Medieval equestrianism. His work investigates historic equestrian theory as well as artistic depictions of horse riding from the past and how these styles can be practically replicated today.

So welcome to both of you. I have a quick question to start you off. What came first for you, personally, the love of the past or the love of horses? Perhaps Rena you could go first?

Rena: It's definitely both for me. I couldn't say that there was one thing that came before the other, well, okay, well maybe horses, because my grandmother dumped me on horseback from, the old, what would you call them, the old baskets that they used to put babies in, apparently from six months. So yeah, possibly the love of horses came first but the archaeology came afterwards. There was no problems.

Matilda: Did you have a similar experience Joakim ?

Joakim: No, quite the opposite, actually, I was started by the love of history, because I started as a volunteer at the place called the Medieval Center in Denmark. That is an open-air museum trying to convey the life of a medieval city in the Late Middle Ages. And at the place they had, as part of the daily program, they had knight's tournament. And then I saw these knights' tournaments and thought that was the most terrific thing I've ever seen and thought I wanted to investigate further and wanted to try it out myself.

Matilda: So indeed, both from similar ideas, I suppose, but, I guess you mentioned, Joakim, that you came from more the re-enactor side of things, shall we say? And you were interested in more of the historic side of things, whereas Rena, were you always more interested in prehistory?

Rena: I think so, yes. You don't grow up in Ireland without being... obviously it's part and parcel of your culture. Things like The Tain, Cuchullain, the Ulster saga, [...], and Queen Medb, and god knows what, and there's lots and lots of horses in those stories. And I grant that they're all Early Medieval. They're written down in the Early Medieval period, but they have lots of references to things that were happening earlier, Iron Age, et cetera. Some people would argue maybe even earlier than that. But for me, I think that as a small kid, being on horseback, or ponyback as it was back then, that's certainly being a bit of a daydreamer on scores like that. It was like, yeah, I could be like queen Medb or whatever. I was definitely into the whole idea of the history, of the mythologies, I really should say, what I grew up with and the horse of course is inextricably linked. I mean, Cu Chullains horses cry and talk and leave and come back with ghosts to convince, you know, to convince the high king to become Christian. So yeah, horses are pretty mouthy in Ireland.

Matilda: Joakim, you look mainly, I guess, at the theory of it and from a purely, potentially technical standpoint, or do you also have that feeling of the kind of mythology of horse riding?

Joakim: Definitely.I can completely relate to that.Well, at least the daydreaming part of it, you know, imagining yourself sitting on a warhorse in armor and doing, you know, war riding and different exercises and such. I also used to daydream about that and trying to imagine the feeling of doing it and then having an urge, a very, very sincere wish, about also wanting to experience it [rather] than just a dream about it.

Rena: I would definitely agree with that because, whenever, I think, whenever you're a kid it's daydreaming, and then by the time you've reached into archaeology studying it - certainly from my side - it is a case of why did they make the snaffles like this? I mean, that's a golden wing, that's a ported snaffle this, this that or the other and you start asking questions, which do require the science. And then after the science, you have to start replicating them to understand why they were fitting in the way they did and what tasks did they want. And so automatically you start going into experimental archaeology. So a cautionary tale for anybody starting out on this. You may start off with the daydreams, but you're going to end up basically knee- deep in all sorts of things, which are very practical.

Joakim: Yes, I can relate to that as well. What got me started was also the curiosity about this whole thing, how horses were depicted in medieval art. And then when I compared it to how it looked, for instance, when they did medieval tournaments or knights' tournaments at the Medieval Center, and how it appeared in Medieval art, then there was no..., it didn't match, it wasn't put together. That's also why I was interested in exploring it practically, simply because I wanted [to] recreate how it looked in medieval art.

Rena: Pretty much we know next to nothing about it. But we do have lots and lots of tack. It was a case of reconstructing bridles, looking at why it was being made like this, how it was being made like this and it's in the process of asking how and why that you start to actually get the holy grail in many ways, which was a chronology for the end of the Irish Iron Age, which the late great professor Barry Raftery of UCD had referred to the period as the Silent People. There was that little known, but I think as I'm going to do a shameless promote here for the book, which is published by Archaeopress, you know, I say in the introduction to it, that basically by doing the equivalent of hanging over a fence and talking to... talking horse, we managed to get some sort of an understanding of one side of the elite life, of those who were the riders of that period. And, what came obviously like your period it's the elite that are riding. It's not anybody who's down the grades but it is very much the elite.

Joakim: Yeah definitely.

Matilda: You mentioned earlier this idea of context and how ingrained it is in sort of your modern context, but also in past contexts. If you're specialized in this topic, so in equestrianism, can you study it, do you think, in any time period, or is the time period really essential? Is there specific knowledge related to these things? So for example, if Joakim decided to go and study Bronze Age equestrianism or vice versa. Is that possible or is the context of the past also more important in this case?

Rena: Well, I mean, I think it's perfectly interchangeable because, obviously, I would know what a curb bit from the medieval period looks like. He would know what a basic single-joint snaffle would look like, which would be being used on, say, for example, the end of the Bronze Age and the center of Europe. We both would know exactly all the equipment that exists, still exists to some extent today. And therefore we've got a unique situation where we actually have provable use-wear and reconstructions. If there's something maybe is a wee bit different, we can actually test it in a very, very practical way and that's an absolute gift for any kind of archaeologist, you know? I wouldn't be as au fait, obviously with the High Medieval period. But certainly the both of us, I think, would probably recognize the equipment and be able to make it a good stab at what was going on in each other's area of expertise...

Joakim: Yeah, I can definitely agree with the experience that both me and Rena have, we could draw parallels in time, if one could put it that way. I also think it's very important to look at every period very specifically. At some point I thought that throughout the Middle Ages you would just ride with curb bits. But then I found out that there was a certain type of curb that was used in, for instance, the 13th century and a completely different kind of curb bit used in the late 15th century. And then from the 15th century, developing into the Renaissance they used different bits. So, I also think it's very important to look at a specific time period and see and try to understand why did they have this kind of specific equipment, because, for instance, you have a bit from the 13th century, compared to a bit from, let's say the end of the 16th century is very, very different also in mouthpieces, compared to what kind of bits that are available today. So perhaps we don't have any experience with this kind of equipment. So yeah, I think it's very important to also be very specific in your interpretation of the period.

Matilda: So able to recognize things from different periods, but also obviously indeed, important to sort of base your research in the period that you're studying. I can understand that. So you both referred to the fact that people in the past would have been the elite who would have been riding horses. So it wasn't for everyone. Does it mean that riders were always expert horsemen? Would people have been trained in this or was it just something like kind of riding a bike or driving a car? It was just assumed that if you were elite, you could do it?

Rena: Certainly in the Iron Age you see all kinds of riders showed really bad use of the bit and some things. I think you're probably going to see an awful lot more cultured riding and the art of riding in Joakim's period because obviously that's the period of where dressage, haute ecole, airs above the ground, that's really where it's all kicking off. That's where that form of display, of human and horse interaction becomes a status symbol within its own right. We have absolutely no idea what's going on in the proto-historic period. Certainly in Britain, I don't think that they have a whit regarding most of the styles of tack that they're using. It looks as if it's using brute force and ignorance and if horses do not survive then "next"!, you know, that seems to be the kind of equipment being used. The Irish Iron Age is equally compatible with show bridles of today because they're using the only ported bridles, or the ported snaffles of the ancient world. But the point of where it becomes a status display is really Joakim's period.

Joakim: Just because I'm curious, Rena, as far as I understood, you said that it was elite horsemen in the period that you are focused on in the Irish Iron Age. Were horses used for a status display or for warfare, or how were horses used?

Rena: I think actually a lot of it is about impressing the locals. I think they have to really get to the..., as we started to untease what part of the culture was like. And that you've got what appears to be two cultures coming and clashing very strongly, with Ireland in particular, you've got Romano-British influences coming in. You've got Germanic because, part of what I did also was to study the stuff that's up in Torsberg, up in Vimus and Avalsness because it's very much an analog of what's happening in Ireland, what they call the Kehlberg, which we call the Y-piece, both of them be in a form of running martingale combined with a bosal of sorts. None of it nice, but certainly, it's for high maneuverability. Don't forget in Ireland, you've got a culture of cattle raids. There's even books, obviously the Tain is about the mega cattle raid, all supernatural bulls and stuff like that. But yeah, it didn't go unmarked for me anyway, whenever I realized that the equipment that the Irish are using, the stuff is so exquisite. I don't think that any Tom, Dick or Harry in the street would be able to afford it, but I think whenever you look at how it would have been used after reconstruction, it's very much about neck-reining. It's about twisting, turning - very like polo today, or the way you would see a gaucho ride, and that's the style of riding that you're using: neck-reining quite a lot. I find that very interesting whenever you think about..., that's exactly what you would use if you were cattle cutting. Have you ever wanted to steal somebody else's cattle to add to your own and round them up? You'd be using

very much that technique, you know? So there might be some truth in the old stories over here after all, you know.

Joakim: Yeah, I was just very curious about that, what kind of equipment the horse [was] because, as you said, in the late Middle Ages, knights would use their horses for warfare. And concerning the question about, if anyone could ride and of course, at least in the Late Middle Ages, anyone could jump on a horse and ride it, but yes, it was an elite that would use the horse for war, where the horse would be as much a weapon as anything else. So not a distance weapon where you would shoot a bow or throw javelins at your enemy, but actually jump into the fight with your horse. And that would of course demand some kind of... you know, you would need to be able to control your horse in the situation. So that would require some kind of high level dressage, horsemanship, equestrianism. But if people were, or if let's say knights, or the nobility were expert horseman, I think it is a very hard question to answer because then we need a common agreement about what is an expert horseman because, at least today, some people would consider how knights would ride their horses in battle as expert horsemen, whereas others would say that they are definitely not expert horseman, that they lack a lot of detail that modern day riders would focus on.

Matilda: That was really interesting. And actually we have a question from one of our EXARC community. We had released the topic of the episode beforehand, so that people had the chance to ask questions if they wanted. This one's from Daniel Bertrand asking about the use of horses for physical labor. So you've both talked today about riding horses in terms of the travel or dressage or status symbols or stealing cattle, but were they used also for physical labor? Would you, for example, see a horse pulling a cart or a plow, or would that be an ox? So, what was the primary roles of horses within different cultures, and why would people choose horses over other animals for these kinds of tasks, do you think?

Rena: Certainly I don't think that you're seeing an awful lot of use of the horse for domestic agricultural use, through, until Christianity, but that's because in Ireland certainly anyway, but that's because Christianity brings it back down to being a dumb beast instead of a king maker, which, in many ways the horse was considered as being, well, the consumption of horse flesh... it was friend and food. The consumption of horse flesh was part of the rite, which made you into a king. So therefore it had a status that was raised above, above other critters, that this was the last thing that you actually had to do before taking your crown. But that's something which… certainly it's in Ireland. It might be in other places, that's another story altogether. But certainly it had… in the ancient world the horse has an elevated status. Yes, you will get carts. You will get like dog carts and sulkies, but these would be very, very lightweight, very fast maneuverable carts. And then by the time the Early Medieval comes, there are huge wheels. There's depictions of them on high crosses across Ireland. The Early Medieval texts state that you should have a horse for your cart and a horse for riding, but it doesn't state that you should have a horse for pulling the plow and that seems to come much later, probably into well Christianified period. And of course that's where I hand over to Joakim's area of knowledge, which will be dealing with a period where horses become draft.

Joakim: To be perfectly honest, it's not something that I've looked lot into, but I have seen several depictions of horses being used for labor, both working fields and pulling wagons and being what you could call a carriage animal, you know, carrying different types of stuff to be transported from A to B. What I have seen from depictions is that they not very often depict horses pulling carts and at least when they do, they do not sit that much on the cart, but they ride the horse instead and my interpretation is that roads weren't always that good, neither in the Late Middle Ages. So, traveling on a bumpy road would just be much easier just sitting on the horse and making it pull the cart [rather] than sitting on the cart.

Rena: Yeah. There are far too many prehistorians who see chariots turn about and you know, you look at what the landscape would be like at that station. So, they had suicide wishes because those

things are springy. You're going to have to take that at a reasonably sedate pace while you're… - even with a really good sense of balance... I think sometimes there's a lot of people who will, they want the big dramatic thing of horses and create some warfare and climbing along the shaft and the pole! And Julius Caesar chariots and went on with the Britains and God knows what... I don't know how much that would've been... people standing on a stationary cart and doing it for acrobatics. There's a lot of questions about this stuff. It could be done experimentally, but I wouldn't be able to do it. I'm built for comfort, not speed.

Matilda: A bit related to that, actually. Do you think that it's essential for someone who wants to study past equestrianism to be able to ride a horse and to have experience, a lot of experience in riding a horse? Or is it just a recommendation? Do they, if they sit on a horse once, is that enough?

Rena: It depends how deep they want to go. I was asked this actually, not that long ago. The advice I gave somebody was, if you want to do this thing right, you're going to have to live, breathe, eat, and sleep it because, you know, if you aren't used to this you're going to fall in the old traps of like 1930s, 1940s, you know, some very bookish wee man, sitting somewhere making stuff up. So what he thought would fit in with the world view of that time. I think that if I was to go and learn, say... a friend of mine, a good friend, Niall, deals with canoes, that's his whole specialty area. I wouldn't even begin to actually even look at that unless I knew exactly how to sail a boat, because I wouldn't be able to get a feel for what the people were doing and as to why they wanted it carved this way, that way. I think a lot of that applies, certainly from my period of equitation, if you haven't got any experience it's going to be an uphill battle, and you better leave all the whole idea of ritual and horse harness to one side, but if you're prepared to get down to the nitty gritty and really learn, there's no reason why you can't, but it's just, it's going to be up to the person, how enthusiastic and how much they want and how far in the the subject they want to go.

Joakim: I would completely agree with Rena that it's good to have some experience with horses and perhaps a bit more than just sitting on a horse but I also think that, at least in the Late Middle Ages, and let's say that you want to discover how they rode horses in war, I also experienced that one can have a certain bias when doing that kind of interpretation. For instance, that people want to use the method of how classical dressage is applied today and force it upon how they rode horses in the Middle Ages, whereas, that could be two very different things, how they rode horses in the late Middle Ages and how you would do classical dressage like they do, for instance, in the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. I think that people that have no experience with horses sometimes also see other things more clear, that they have examples in sources that goes completely against how you would train a horse in classical dressage and such. I also think that it's very easy, if you have experience with horses prior to wanting to investigate historical horsemanship, then you have a certain bias in the way you interpret horses and horseback riding and how it should be done. So I also think that it can be something positive that you do not have any experience.

Rena: I would just qualify that by saying that, if somebody doesn't know anything, they're coming in from the peripherals, but if you're going to get down into things, for example, like tack and animal management and things like that, I mean, that's the only thing I would qualify. That being said, people can come from the outside and see something behavioral different or whatever, but they may not be at their strongest regarding the practicalities.

Joakim: I completely agree with that.

Matilda: That's interesting actually. We had a similar thing about boat building that, you know, if people are professional boat builders, but they've been taught the modern way to build boats, of course. So then that would kind of affect how they would plan things from a historic perspective. But do you think as well, you talked about animal management. I mean, I can imagine that maybe for

example, the ethics around animal handling might be a little more developed now than they were in the past. Or do you think that it's vice versa?

Joakim: I definitely think that they are very much more developed in a positive way today than it was back then. There are very, very horrific examples of how you would treat animals in some of the Britain sources, like for instance, I read recently, that is a mid 16th century author of a riding manual who states that if a horse has a tendency to buck, instead of going forward, then you can always tie a hedgehog to its tail and then it will move forward. Today you put a lot more effort into understanding the psychology and the behavior of a horse than just, you know, oh, it's not moving. I tie something dangerous to its tail and now it's moving, look! That kind of method wouldn't be something you would use today.

Rena: This is the odd thing. During my PhD, I got the dream ticket of travelling around Europe and looking at everybody of the Iron Age, different cultures of their tack and, it was interesting to see the differences, you know the Germanic stuff, the bits are very, very chunky, closer to what I'd call a mullen mouth today. So they're obviously using much more modern aids of... and in many ways like the Irish who are, again, riding without saddles. There's a huge amount of parallels between the two. You're looking at the Netherlands, your Frisiae and Bataviae, et cetera. And again, their riding is very simple and very straightforward and recognizable today. You look at things, for example, like the British Waterford bits, as I think of them as being proto-Waterfords, those things that are very, very highly decorative with this really long, inner central link, that's incredibly long and these two very short cannons. They were not nice, I mean, they are definitely not nice bits. You'll see that similar level of brutality to horses' mouth and palate, whenever you look even at the ancient Greek stuff, which is really ugly.

Joakim: Now that you mentioned that, I just came to think of, not that long ago that they found the horses from Byzantium had been using bits with a very, a spade-like mouthpiece, a very high port that had been pressed through the palate of the horse, that would have caused a lot of pain. And we cannot do anything like that today. And I think it's a very interesting thing that at least when you are investigating Medieval bits and tacks and such, that they put a lot of effort into creating the perfect mouthpiece for the horse. They have so much focus on what kind of metal they put into the horse's mouth, creating all kinds of different bits and pieces to adjust it perfectly for that one horse. And I cannot help to think that, at least the way many people want to ride today, if they have a kind of humane approach to how they want to ride them, they are not that focused on what kind of metal they put into the horse's mouth, but much more focused on what other aids they use with their seat, their legs and how they can use their weight to distribute and move the horse. I cannot help to get the idea that since they were so focused on what kind of tool they used in the horse's mouth, then they must also have been very much keen to, or interested in using it. So at least that's where I see a difference in how they rode horses in the Middle Ages. They would be very much focused on what kind of bits they used, whereas today it is moving to the other direction and you give a horseman or a dressage rider credit when the person is able to use his or her seat and legs instead of the bit.

Rena: It's an interesting thing because in Ireland, it seems to have been a lot closer to the most basic - although they did get very fancy as time went by. But again, it's very like the Stuebben Golden Wing or Verbindend style bit was being used in Ireland. That was the ultimate prestige Iron Age bit, which isn't actually used anywhere else in Europe. I have no idea why. It is actually double-jointed and the central links, or you can actually spot the Dr Bristol, you can spot the French link, you can spot the dog bone. They all look so similar to what you would be riding in with a double link Verbindend today.

Joakim: I think it's very interesting to think about, were they used very harshly these bits, or, what kind of pressure did they ride with? Because, I don't know if you have heard about this, Rena, but there is an investigation also about Iron Age horses in Denmark, from the university of Aarhus, where they are investigating Iron Age warhorses, a veterinary who has been part of that project, she has

found out that the way that they used the bit in the horse's mouth must have created some kind of tearage on the horse's bone, in the mouth. So according to that research, then it shows that the bit has been used quite harshly.

Rena: That's Xenia Pauli Jensen and Jacob Kveiborg, yes, Xenia is a friend. There's a wee book out at the moment , which is called The Liminal Horse. It's published by Trivent. Xenia and Jakob have got their paper actually on that, within it. It's 12 chapters of horsey lushness from all periods. There's lots of medieval stuff as Trivent of course do - and there's bits of pre-history Roman, Irish, you name it. If you need the paper I'd be quite happy to send it to you.

Joakim: That would be very, very interesting.

Matilda: So it sounds indeed like, actually when doing re-enactment or when working with horses nowadays, you don't want to be too accurate in the Medieval or the Iron Age riding styles, just ethically for the horse.

Rena: We're lucky because we can use things like pressure gauges to simulate rein pressure and stuff like that and tension. There's lots of ways we can use computer model and lots and lots of options that if we think something would not be right or not be good for our beasties, you know? So we're lucky to live in that period of time.

Joakim: Yes. I also think that we are lucky that we are never in need of using our horses in the same situations as they were back then, at least, using a horse for warfare. I can easily imagine that in a heated situation, you could pull your bit on your horse in a way that would harm him. Whereas in day-to-day riding you wouldn't and I am sure that they did use a lot of other fine aids that would promote more pleasant communication with the horse than just a harsh bit. But I also think that this whole thing that we never end up in the same situations as they did also creates a difference in what kind of riding you would use in re-enactment and what kind of riding you would use for real in warfare.

Rena: I think that's one of the big important things you've just hit on, that a lot of archaeology has disregarded that a horse in pain and a frightened horse in a war situation becomes a very, very unpredictable creature indeed. I think that we're in a very lucky position to be able to actually assess things in a non-combative manner. We aren't endangered either ourselves or the animals.

Joakim: Yes, that's true.

Matilda: Well, I can imagine. I mean, even though obviously you're not going into battle, working with animals in any situation I can imagine might be difficult. So how does working with live animals limit or affect your research or your experiences?

Joakim: Well, I'm very happy that it does because it affects me and limits me in the sense that I cannot do the unethical part of mistreating a horse with sharp spurs and tying a hedgehog to its tail. But also, it gives me an opportunity to think in other terms. I have the idea that the perception that war horses in the Middle Ages were very aggressive horses, at least that's how they are described in sources, that they were aggressive and they would bite and kick and today we do not have this kind of horses anymore. Horses are normally bred to be very kind and cooperative and nice towards humans. So, working with animals I have to think in the same way as training a police dog, you have to make the whole thing a fun game for the horse. Instead of encouraging the aggressive side, just encourage the playful side of the training. And then you can do all sorts of things where the horse will do the exact same thing as a warhorse would do, but his attitude towards it is just playful and fun. And I'm doing this with my human being and it makes him happy. That is a very, very nice way of doing the same research.

Matilda: Like the horse is also re-enacting in a way!

Joakim: Yes, the horse is just playing, basically.

Rena: I'm lucky in the fact that, for me, getting out to any stables and getting on horseback, if I use a double-jointed snaffle, I'm basically doing my job, that becomes lovely and simple. For EXARC, I did make a replication of the Moynagh crannog using the antler cheek pieces. That was certainly an interesting experience. All I can think of is that the horses must've been... or the ponies or whatever they were using, must have been used to very, very gentle aids at the Late Bronze Age, in Ireland anyway. And it must be also like up in Bækkedal in I think it's Denmark, isn't it, where you've got the organic mouth pieces that are, you've got basically what we used to call wickies, but I think, it's like a rope and leather, mullen mouth that's woven together. I've certainly no problems in experimenting with those with a horse, because it's not going to do them any harm.

Joakim: No, exactly and I also think that because for instance, in the Late Middle Ages, they had a huge variety of different bits and I'm very, very sure that one can easily recreate some of them and make tests with them to see how they work and function because that specific type of bit wouldn't harm a horse too much.

Matilda: Okay, I'm going to pull it back a little bit. We've been quite specific so far, but just curious that the general question, I imagine you've both been asked lots of times. Why is it important to look at the role of horses and horse riding in the past?

Rena: It combines the idea of how people got from A to B and what they wanted to tell people that saw them traveling for A to B, what they wanted them to think about them. So therefore you have automatically covered your idea of status. You've covered your idea of to some extent, intimidation. Obviously from Joakim's time you've got somebody in full armor, you know, trotting along the road or whatever. You're not going to mess with the person. From my period of time, you've got a pack of warlords armed to the teeth with spears and god knows what strapped to their backs. Again, you're not going to mess with them. It is a form of transport and the glorious thing about it is, it also makes you look at the landscape, at roads or what might pass as roads. Why were people wanting to get from this point to that point that this trackway developed? So it starts not just from the horse, but it starts to tell about the infrastructure of travel, because if you're wanting to have a cart, you're going to have to have a better quality road than traveling on an esker as you might do on horseback, for all the obvious reasons. It's about how people are looking at solving their traveling's infrastructure problems, as well as that it looks at our relationship with the animals. People love horses and they think they're beautiful. Our ancestors from way, way back in every culture, be it Saudi Arabia, be it Africa, be it..., wherever the horse was, people have always thought, God, it is beautiful. And they want to buy into that aesthetic of beauty as well, I think. And that generates part of the relationship of horse and human and that's equally fascinating. So yeah, that's just some of why I think it's important.

Joakim: I completely agree and the thing you said, Rena, about what kind of signal you're sending. I have a deep interest of knightly culture and exploring knightly culture. And I think that in a, what you could call a popular perception of knightly and noble culture, when you talk to people and they talk about how they perceive the noble culture, then nobility is always portrayed also in popular movies and so on and so forth, as if they're degenerated, incompetent, only able to tease and harass peasants, take their money, their taxes. I think when you tell the story, or you show the story about a knight being able to control a warhorse, it gives them status and it shows also that they weren't incompetent, that they actually were very skilled in doing their craft and also gave them, what you could call a position in society because, throughout the Middle Ages whenever you hear knights talking about why didn't they pay taxes, why did they have their privileged status is because, as they say so themselves, they are the first one to defend the country, the citizens in the country. And then the horse and the horse riding becomes a tool of their trade, you know, a necessary tool to make sure

that everyone knew why they had this status. And then you can start building a new narrative, a new story about nobility. That these people actually, they had the defending societal role and they were not incompetent, they were very, very skilled riders and they knew how to handle a horse in a war, which gave them their privileged position in society. This is a very, very important part for me to try to change what you could call a popular narrative about medieval nobility.

Rena: Somebody once said that the reason why the aristocracy are naturally confident about what they're doing is because they're been raised on horseback and if as a child, you feel that you can work with a horse. It's so much bigger and so much stronger than you, you can take on anything. And I think there's a certain amount of that actually with elite on horseback, it does occasionally spill over into aggression and arrogance, I'd say, because that's human nature, that if not just confidence, that the horse does become very much a weapon in its own right. Certainly from Joakim's period, I know that you've got - we mentioned the Spanish Riding School of Vienna earlier and the teaching of all the moves, which even if they weren't actually used in combat, certainly held the threats that they could be and you wouldn't get too close behind the horse carrying out a full-blown capriole, kick out in the back. You wouldn't want to be too close behind that, you know? It's about confidence, it's about rulership, it's about status. I think, no matter what area you go to, I think even the Bækkedal, the lovely cart with the organic mouthpiece and all the jingly-janglies. In Denmark, I think it's still about status. You could have a - like Hallstatt as well - you could afford to have a lovely cart like that with lots of lovely decoration.

Joakim: And there was a reason why you had that status. When you read about it in most literature, it's also, yeah they had the money to have a warhorse, but they also knew how to use the war horse. They were skilled. They were craftsmen of their own trade. They knew how to basically handle their war machine and that gave them the status. What you also said about using the weight of the horses and the maneuverability and what horses can be used I can only imagine...even smaller horses, they have an advantage in their use of weight, you know. I have a Shetland pony on our farm and he weighs almost a hundred kilos. So if you just double that weight then you have 200 kilos and there's no foot soldier in the Iron Age who, even though they're armed to the teeth with a weapon would come anywhere close to that amount of battle weight. So, you know, the horse is just in itself and its weight is a huge threat. If you can push your horse in the right direction, then you have the possibility of pushing another person with 200 kilos of force. And that is a lot, especially compared to the Middle Ages or the Iron Age where you weren't used to pushing around with 200 kilos. Then it created a huge advantage for the use of the horse.

Matilda: I'm convinced…, it sounds like they're indeed they're vehicles, they're weapons, they're tools, they're everything, really, it sounds like, horses. I think it's time to start wrapping up. So before we finish one final question, for both of you. What are your plans for the future and how can the EXARC community help to make a difference, do you think, in regards to the points that you discussed today about sort of re-enactment, horses, experimental archaeology, et cetera?

Joakim: I have this idea that I want to do a project where I develop a theory and method on how you can apply your experience when you do experimental archaeology, you know, in this case, it would be of course concerned with riding that you kind of use and apply a theory and a method where you take yourself out as a bias, as much as possible. And I want to do this by exploring late 16th century Italian riding manuals, just so you can discover that type of riding. So if I could be helped in any way, I would definitely be interested in anyone knowing where to find support with an investigation. I would think it would be really interesting if, for instance, EXARC could help with finding some kind of measurement gear where you could start exploring the force of a lance strike, given from mounted, heavy cavalry in the Late Middle Ages. And you could have measurements on the force of the lance strike because as far as I know, there has been made no such investigations before. So yeah, exploring the force of a lance strike, that would be very, very interesting to investigate.

Matilda: Good to know, if anyone is listening and would like to investigate this, please do get in contact with us!

Rena: Well, at the moment, as I say, I'm wrapping up the examination of equipment for the Early Medieval period. And I'm sort of reaching the end regarding Scottish horses of…, right up into the Early Medieval as well. So there will be wee bits of recreation, trying to actually make the equipment and see what's going on and what's here. I'm hoping that there will be a little bit of development regarding reconstruction of Late Iron Age bridles with the ubiquitous UCD folks, at a future stage. And of course that would be heading very much for EXARC to write that one up and see what we find out as we got down to the nitty gritty of actually casting and making, but that's ahead. Meantime the riding continues and just trying to make sense of it all.

Matilda: As are we all, in some ways... Great, well, thank you very, very much, Joakim and Rena for joining us today and sharing your experience and your expertise. I definitely learned a lot. I didn't know a lot of things about horses. I'm sure that our listeners did as well. So thank you very much. And thanks to everyone else for listening to this episode of #FinallyFriday by EXARC. If you would like to become more involved with EXARC, why not become a member? Alternatively, you can make a small PayPal donation through the website to help support EXARC in its endeavors. See you next month for another episode of #FinallyFriday!