

<http://dx.doi.org/10.16926/sit.2023.02.10>

Tomasz JUREK*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5055-9684>

[rev.] Renata Urban, *Tradycje sportów konnych w Polsce do 1939 roku*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2022, pp. 393

How to cite [jak cytować]: Jurek T., [rev] Renata Urban, *Tradycje sportów konnych w Polsce do 1939 roku*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2022, pp. 393, "Sport i Turystyka. Środkowoeuropejskie Czasopismo Naukowe" 2023, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 161–165.

In 2022, the Publishing House of University of Szczecin, within the framework of the series Dissertations and Studies, published a long-awaited book by prof Renata Urban entitled *The Tradition of Equestrian Sports in Poland up to 1939*. The monograph counts 393 pages, including 312 pages of the descriptive part, and is divided into 8 main chapters followed by the ending, appendix, bibliography, list of abbreviations, name index, list of photographs, drawings, tables and annexes, as well as abstracts in Polish and English. The author, Renata Urban, doctor habilitatus, professor of University of Szczecin, is a well-known and highly-valued historian of physical culture in Poland, and as the Head of the Historical Department of the Polish Society for Physical Education she actively promotes the knowledge of the history of physical education, sport, tourism and recreation. Specialising in the matter of the development of horse riding in Poland, she is the author of several dozen studies, many of them of a pioneering nature. In that way, she has saved many important events and facts from the latest history of physical culture in Poland from oblivion. No one has ever scien-

* Prof., Poznań University of Physical Education, Branch of the University of Gorzów Wlkp.; e-mail: t.jurek@awf-gorzow.edu.pl (corresponding author)

tifically explored on such a scale the area of equestrian sports that are so deeply rooted in centuries-old Polish national tradition and preserved in national culture and art. Renata Urban commenced these studies and coordinated their progress till mid-90s of the previous century.

The publication in question crowns many years of the Author's research on the history of horse riding on the Polish territory up to 1939. It recapitulates numerous cases of archival research, library and institution studies initiated at the turn of the 20th and the 21st centuries. It is reflected in an exceptionally vast source database and literature, logically ordered and carefully combined in the bibliography. Archival materials coming from 17 archive centres, museums and libraries are especially impressive. Among all, they were gathered from the following institutions: the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw, the National Digital Archives in Warsaw, the National Archives in Bydgoszcz, Cracow, Poznań, Toruń, Warsaw, the Central Military Archives, the Polish Army Museum, the Museum of Sport and Tourism, the Museum of Hunting and Horsemanship, the Municipal Museum in Grudziądz. The use of numerous printed sources, source publications, 47 newspaper and magazine titles, not to mention evoked sources (narratives) and memories shall certainly gain our recognition. The Author also used 130 works of literature and over 40 articles of occasional publications. Therefore, the evaluation of source materials and literature used by R. Urban is highly positive. She has not omitted existing historical artefacts and information on equestrian sports in Poland retained in written sources within defined chronological frames.

As a consequence, a few years of working on the text resulted in a monograph, long awaited in scientific circles, based on a factual arrangement frequently occurring in works discussing the history of physical culture, and aptly used by the Author. The book begins with the *Introduction* of a methodological nature, which offers the reader a necessary introduction into the subject matter, assesses written sources, gives a detailed report of the research conducted, justifies the structure of the whole publication and announces its particular sections. It presents a clearly defined goal, which, "[...] was to synthetically present the development and achievements of equestrian sports in Poland in the years 1918 – 1939. Particular attention was drawn to the role played by the Polish army, especially its cavalry and horse artillery, and the Polish Equestrian Federation [...]. Reconstructing the history of horsemanship in Poland was not the only challenge of the research. It was equally difficult to show the mechanisms behind its development in the period of the Second Polish Republic, to explain the influence of European horsemanship systems on the development of the Polish school, its importance for success achieved by Polish horseriders [...]."

In the first chapter, R. Urban reconstructs the rich history of horsemanship in Poland. She writes on a grand scale about knight tournaments, horsemanship

in education, activity of equestrian associations and clubs, achievements of the "Sokół" Gymnastic Association in the area of equestrian sports, not to mention an entirely unknown fate of Polish horseriders and horse breeding during the First World War, making the picture of this tradition complete in this way.

The second chapter presents the conditions for equestrian sports development in the Second Polish Republic. It takes into account the development of the Polish army up to 1921, the policy of the Ministry of Military Affairs towards horsemanship, reconstruction and development of horse breeding in Poland, training base and sports facilities, and all the trainers and instructors whose importance should not be underestimated. All those issues were presented in an attractive way, displaying the Author's vast knowledge of the subject matter.

The content of the third chapter concerns educating horseriders in horse riding units of the Polish Army up to 1939. It includes the origins and development of horsemanship training in the Cavalry Training Centre in Grudziądz, the Cavalry Training Centre in Toruń, and horse riding units of Border Defense Corps and State Police. It is very interesting to read about numerous pioneering arrangements and facts presented for the first time.

In the following chapter (the fourth), the Author looks back on European traditions of horsemanship training, which had an impact on the Polish system naturally drawing from training theory and practice of other countries. She presents the manege school (Vienna, Saumur, Hanover, Saint Petersburg), and the natural school (Pinerolo, Tor di Quinto). Against this background, she writes about Polish horsemanship school developed in the Cavalry Training Centre in Grudziądz.

The fifth chapter introduces the reader to the origins and activity of the Polish Equestrian Federation, which, as the Author proves, played the key role in propagating this discipline in Poland and abroad. All the aspects of this very important programme activity of the Federation were brought to light. What is more, it was shown how important the Polish Equestrian Badge, established by the PEF in 1935, was for the development of horsemanship.

Chapter six contains a detailed characteristics of equestrian sports competition. R. Urban makes the reader familiar with disciplines (competition groups) included in that vast area. Both at length and in an interesting manner, she presents dressage contests, jumping competitions, eventing, horse racing and riding, skjöring and ski-skjöring, carriage driving and polo.

The seventh chapter wins the reader's admiration as it documents Poles' participation in local and international equestrian sports contests. In four, properly created sub-chapters, the Author introduces her readers to the Riding Championships of the Polish Army – Militari, Horse Riding Polish Championships, international horse riding contests, and horse riding competitions during summer olympic games.

The last, eighth chapter presents a dramatic fate of Polish horseriders – olympics participants and sports horses during WWII and afterwards, till the end of the 20th century. Fragmentarily, the story goes beyond the accepted time framework, yet, at the same time, it creates a historical post scriptum of the title subject matter. It primarily concerns complex, post-war life stories of distinguished horseriders.

The decriptive part finishes with an ample *Ending* written in a form of an accurate recapitulation and historical evaluation of the events placed in the monograph. The Author made a concise and competent assessment of the historical development of equestrian sports on the Polish territory under the partitions and during the Second Polish Republic. She compared and contrasted two most important facts in the historical process of horsemanship development in Poland up to 1939. She distinguished the main stages of equestrian sports development. She demonstrated the contribution of this discipline into the achievements of Polish sport. Finally, she brought back highly distinguished figures of horse riding. As she aptly wrote, "The rich and centuries-old tradition of horse riding in the Polish nation and Poles' love for horses constituted a very good foundation for the development of equestrian sports in the Second Polish Republic. [...] Horse riding belonged to the most dynamically developing sports disciplines in the Second Polish Republic." Having read the monograph, it is hard to disagree with such an evaluation. In every aspect, this part of the work stands out and serves its purpose.

The 28-page *Appendix* took a classic form, comprising 17 entries, including unique photographs of the first publications dealing with horse riding and valuable documents illustrating the activity of the Polish Equestrian Federation, the most important sports results (local and international rank), lists of Polish horseriders – country representatives, and even lists of the best sports horses. The appendices were worth including in the monograph due to their important historical value.

The bibliography developed by R. Urban according to the traditional pattern, with the division into sources and monographs deserves a positive evaluation. The bibliography gathers and properly orders all used source materials and professional literature. Moreover, numerous notes show the Author's implementation of scientific tools in a positive light. Altogether, the text includes 611 references, mostly of a documentary (bibliographic) nature, but also factual ones that superbly complement the main text of the reviewed book.

The photographs accompanying the text, certainly the result of laborious preliminary archival research, deserve a special mention, too. The Author prepared 98 positions that vary thematically. They present various faces of the discipline in question, recorded in the lens of an old camera. There are horseriders (often on horseback), figures of PEF activists, barracks, sports facilities and

equipment, and others. Some photographs have never been published before, which increases their historical value. A similar thing can be said about interesting drawings and painting reproductions that accompany the text. Without doubt, they increase the value of the reviewed publication.

The book includes a useful name index prepared by R. Urban and the list of used abbreviations. We can also find an abstract in Polish and English.

In conclusion, I would like to state that it is rare to find a publication of such maturity, whose almost each aspect is taken care of in great detail. The reviewed monograph, belonging to the best ones recently published in our country, enjoys such a factual and formal value. One of the oldest, traditional sports disciplines in Poland finally receives an extensive historical monograph, meticulous and exhaustive as far as each aspect of horse riding development in Poland is concerned. An earlier publication by prof Maciej Łuczak, *Fencing in Poland in the years 1918–1945*, presented the development of the discipline whose traditions go back to the period of the Commonwealth. It is also worth locating the monograph by Renata Urban among those publications dealing with the history of traditional sports disciplines in Poland. It deserves our praise for a few reasons. Firstly, it shows an important subject matter from a historical point of view, referring to Polish cultural traditions, which has not been discussed in any monograph before. Secondly, the Author prepared the published text with exceptional meticulousness so that it reaches a high editorial level. Thirdly, the reviewed book has an educational value and can serve not only as a scientific work but also as a valuable didactic aid. Finally, the publication of the monograph naturally puts an end to the research concerning the history of horsemanship in Poland up to 1939, which constitutes a good foundation for researching the next period in the development of this discipline. Additionally, the monograph has an international dimension as it contributes to European knowledge of Polish centuries-old tradition of horsemanship.