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THE BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN HORSES ¹

THERE WERE no horses in America before the arrival of the Spaniards, and their horses, derived from the Moors, were the finest of Europe. Their short backs revealed their Arabian blood, while their legs, not too long, and firmly jointed, made them sure on their feet. Once in America they lost weight and beauty, but were compensated by increased stamina. Unbelievable feats of their endurance are recorded.

Brought to the West Indies at the close of the fifteenth century, the horse was acclimated rapidly, and within thirty years formed the chief supply for the mainland expeditions. The conquest over, they were raised extensively in pueblos, haciendas, and missions. Bayamo in Cuba and Tlaltizapán in Oaxaca became great horse marts, while Gracias á Dios in Nueva Valladolid and Nextipaca in Nicaragua monopolized the mule market for the trans-Isthmian trade. By the middle of the sixteenth century there were outstanding horse breeders in Cuba, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Chiapas, and Oaxaca, who sold their products in two continents. The horse advanced with the Spaniard, step by step, until the close of the seventeenth century. The traditional theory that the wild mustangs sprang from the early expeditions of Coronado and De Soto is incorrect.

While Jamestown was being settled by the English on the Atlantic coast, Oñate was establishing Spanish ranches in New Mexico. By 1630 horses were plentiful around Santa Fe but the plains Indians still had none, and no records are found of mounted Indians for three more decades. By 1660 the Indians had learned the value of horses, which now began to disappear from the ranches around Santa Fe. During the next forty years the horse spread throughout the West with great rapidity. In 1719 Dutisne found the Pawnees

1. The following article represents a summary of various papers read at the now famous "Round Table" seminar of Dr. Herbert E. Bolton of the University of California.

with 300 horses, some bearing Spanish brands. The Snakes had horses in 1730, and in less than a hundred years the Blackfeet in present-day Canada were riding horses.

Almost simultaneously Kino and his companions were pushing a second Spanish wedge into Arizona, establishing stock ranches in twenty places by 1700. Here also the horse multiplied and natives soon began to steal them. Portolá brought horses from Lower California, and Anza from Arizona, into Alta California, where they increased prodigiously. Exportation thence to Hawaii began in 1803 and reached extensive proportions by 1830. So numerous did they become that thousands of them were slaughtered, or driven off cliffs and into the ocean to drown.

Just as the Western horse came from Mexico so the foundation stock of the East was bred in Spanish Florida. By 1650 this district had seventy-nine missions, eight large towns and two royal haciendas whence horses spread to the Indians—not from remnants of De Soto's horses as has been commonly supposed. Indian revolts and English depredations at the close of the 1600's tended to spread the horse.

The English, Dutch, and French brought in few horses from Europe before the nineteenth century. When Captain Smith left Jamestown the colonists ate their mounts. Virginia received a few horses in 1613 from Argall's French venture, although most of these were returned to England. The Canadian Indians got their first glimpse of the "Moose of France," as they called the horse, when a shipload came in from Le Havre in 1665, and, except for the horse sent to Montmagny in 1647, these were the first horses in Canada. Their number increased, for the Jesuit relation of 1667 says there were many horses. The French thereafter did not import many more horses and used the canoe for inland transportation. Wood, Sandys, and Gookin, the first importers to Virginia, brought Irish horses about 1620, but they were still scarce in 1640. Horses and cattle were imported into Massachusetts in 1629, and 1638 the Swedes and Finns brought horses to Delaware. In the southern border

warfare at the close of the century the English obtained Spanish stock. Soon so many horses were running wild in the backwoods of the Southern Colonies that they were a menace to the crops. The Dutch obtained most of their original horses from Curacao, although two Dutch schooners brought in twenty-seven mares from Flanders on one trip in 1660. The Dutch herding policy, like the southern English colonies, allowed the stock complete freedom. They did not employ town herders for the village commons as did the New Englanders. The sugar mills of the West Indies soon exhausted the island horses and horses were exported from the English colonies as early as 1656 by Coddington, but not until the eighteenth century did this West Indian trade reach its peak. Some of the New Englanders seeing the possibilities of this "jockey-ship" trade began raising horses, Hull stocking Boston Neck for the trade in 1685. New England with its communal grazing and constant herding had enough stock for its use almost from the start, the price of horses dropping from an average of £34 in 1635 to around £2 in 1800. The drop in price was proportionate throughout the colonies. It was not only due to the increase in supply, but also to the inferior quality of most of the stock, which had degenerated because horses of small stature and bad points were allowed to run with the herds while the better horses were kept for saddle and coach. This explains why the rich men continually imported small numbers of good animals for personal use. Patrick Henry sent to the Pawnee country for the "best and most pure Spanish breed," as he calls the horses, many of which did indeed bear Spanish brands. Spanish blood continually filtered into the colonies from the West as well as from the South. Many came at an early date from Jamaica or down a pirate gangplank. Available data at present seems to indicate that the American horses came almost entirely from the Spanish stock of Mexico and Florida and at an earlier date from the islands of the West Indies. Until the nineteenth century only small numbers were imported.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Because of the very nature of the subject, the materials covering the arrival and growth of the horse in North America are scattered throughout all our records of the white man's conquest of the New World. Any such commonplace essential as the horse usually only evoked a passing reference from the historian, although the success of the European in his various enterprises against the geographical and aboriginal obstacles that arose in the Western Hemisphere can be largely attributed to his horse. As an agent of colonial expansion and European dominance it was probably without peer.

The horse and horsemanship of the Spaniard upon his arrival in the New World were principally of Moorish origination, and to understand the method and manner of training, riding, and fighting employed by the conquistadores it is necessary to examine some European sources. Several Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese writers have devoted themselves to the noble equestrian art and so we have such priceless works as Don Bernardo de Vargas Machuca's *Libro de ejercicios de la gineta* (Madrid, Pedro Madriral 1500) and Gonçalo Argote de Molina's *El libro de la montería* (Sevilla, 1582). Other works, such as Josep Delgado Hillo's *Tauromaquia ó arte de torear á caballo y á pie* (Madrid, Imp. de Vega, 1804) and Antonio Galvani d'Andrade's *Arte cavallaria de gineta e estradiota* (Lisbon, Joam da Costa, 1678) are unexcelled for the continental manner of horsemanship. Another item of bibliographical interest is Alonso Suárez' *Recopilación de los mas famosos autores griegos y latinos que trataron de la excelencia y generación de los cavallos* (Toledo, Miguel Ferrer, 1564).

As for references to actual transport to America, few are found. It is only by carefully scrutinizing such documentary sources as Martín Fernandez de Navarrette's *Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos. . .* (Madrid, 1825-37, 5 vols.) and Pacheco y Cárdenas' *Collección de docu-*

mentos inéditos relativos al descubrimiento. . . (Madrid, 1864-84, 42 vols.) that any references may be found.

The original historians of the conquest as a rule made few direct references to the horses, although they must be read to obtain the story. Francisco López de Gómara's *La historia general de las Indias*. . . (Antwerp, 1554) and Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas' *Historia general*. . . (Madrid 1601-15, 8 vols. in 4) and the same author's *Descripción ed las Indias occidentales* . . . (Madrid, 1726) and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés' *Crónica de las Indias* (Salamanca, Juan de Junta, 1570) and the same author's *Historia general y natural de las Indias* . . . (Madrid, 1851-55, 4 vols.) are all basic. Certain chronicles, however, prove the exception and do include many details concerning the horses. In such works as the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's *La Florida del Inca* (Madrid, 1723) and the same author's *Primera parte de los commentarios reales* (Madrid, 1723), and Agustín de Zárate's *Historia del descubrimiento y conquista de la provincia del Perú* (in *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles*, Madrid, 1826) and Felix de Azara's *Apuntamientos para la historia natural de las cuadrupedos del Paraguay y Río de la Plata* (Madrid, 1802-5, 3 vols.) numerous references to horses abound.

By far the most outstanding work on the conquest, especially in the eyes of a horseman, is Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (México, García, 1904, 2 vols.) ; Díaz, an unusual horseman in an age of horsemen, never missed an opportunity to tell of horses and with the possible exception of the letters of Cortés (best English version probably F. A. McNutt's *Letters of Cortés*, New York, 1908, 2 vols.) showed his love of horses and horsemanship more than any other writer of the period. Modern writers, with two notable exceptions, have not been very interested in the horses of the conquest. In Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham's *Horses of the Conquest* (London, 1930) is the best single account, though Graham occasionally allows his narrative powers to stretch

the story a little beyond the known factors. Gustavo Barroso (pseud., Joaó de Norte) occupies a similar position in regard to Brazil, his books being a mine of customs, legends, horse and folk lore. The best is his *Terra de Sol* (Rio de Janeiro, 1912). An unpublished master's thesis at the University of California entitled *Spanish Horses in the New World, the first fifty years* (Berkeley, 1937) collects much of the available data, although some of the work is obviously but a rehash of Graham.

For the advance in the trans-Mississippi West such works as Charles Wilson Hackett's *Historical documents relating to New Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya and approaches thereto*. . . (Washington, 1923-27, 3 vols.), and Alonzo de Benavides' *Memorial*. . . (Madrid, 1630 [reimpreso, México, 1899]) and Pierre Margry's *Mémoires et documents pour servir à l'histoire*. . . (Paris, 1879-88) are invaluable. Hubert Howe Bancroft's *Arizona and New Mexico* (San Francisco, 1888) furnishes a good secondary source and Herbert Eugene Bolton's *Rim of Christendom* (New York, 1936) and *Outpost of Empire* (New York, 1931) are excellent.

For the Atlantic coast Genaro García's *Dos antiguos relaciones de la Florida* (México, 1902), Herbert Eugene Bolton's *Spain's title to Georgia* (Berkeley, 1925), Justin Winsor's *Narrative and critical history of America* (New York, 1889, 8 vols.) and Reuben Gold Thwaites's *Jesuit relations and allied documents* (Cleveland, 1900, 72 vols.) are outstanding. To really discover material on the horse before the eighteenth century it is necessary in almost every case to get original narratives and correspondence and piece the story together from the many and varied locations where they are found. When this is done completely, an interesting and important link in the history of the colonization of America will be complete.

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