

## Horses - A History

Shire of Cote du Ciel; Lady Isabel Cordera

- \* History comes from researching bloodlines,
- \* not necessarily from historical accounts.

### Origins:

The horse is one of the oldest domesticated animals of ancient times. We begin our look at the horse not from the beginning of time, but from the time right before domestication took place. If you are curious about the origins of the horse, you can do a literary search of these early horse species from the scientific group *Condylarth*:

*Eohippus, Mesohippus, Miohippus, Pliohippus, and Equus Caballus.*

**Special Mention:** It is worth knowing that *Equus Caballas* did exist on the American continent in the Ice Age, but migrated to Europe and Asia from existing land bridges from glaciers. These glaciers melted, trapping the predecessor of the horse in the European and Asian continents, and the *Equus Caballas* remaining on the American Continent, went extinct.

From *Equus Caballas*, we come across two types of breeding:

**Natural Selection:** 'Survival of the fittest' - environment dictated survival. Viability of animal genes depended on environment. These animals are built to survive.

**Artificial Selection:** Survival based on human intervention - humans decided which traits to breed for, and did not allow breeding between 'less superior' animals. These animals are bred to work.

Our modern horses come almost exclusively from artificially selected means.



From *Equus Caballas*, 3 ancient horse breeds developed, which became the foundation of breeding stock for ages to come:

#### 1) **The Asiatic Wild Horse**

These horses were discovered in 1881 by Poliakov as a wild Mongolian horse herd. These horses survived millions of years of natural selection and are 'pure' representations of history. In zoos, the selection has become slightly more artificial.

#### 2) **The Tarpan Horse**

This horse comes from Eastern Europe in what is known as the Ukrainian Steppes; These horses are extinct, but similar horses survive in Poland and are known as Konik horses. These modern 'wild' horses have survived by means of artificial selection, for the purpose of recreating history.

#### 3) ***Equus Silvaticus***

This is the predecessor of "Draft" type horses of today. It was a large and heavy horse found in the northern European Marshlands; these horses were 'contaminated' with other horse blood to improve the breed for ancient human use (ie: no surviving specimens to this day).

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From these horses, 4 sub-species developed:

Pony type 1: This pony is able to resist harsh cold and wet conditions, as it comes from North Western Europe. This pony is the second smallest sub-species, with the modern Exmoor Pony being today's closest ancestor.

Pony type 2: Similar to (PT1) as it is able to resist cold conditions and inhabited northern Eurasia. This pony is heavier, coarser, slightly taller at 14.1-14.2 hh, and has a heavier head than it's cousin. It's closest ancestor is the modern Highland Pony.

Horse type 3: This horse is able to withstand the heat; it is long and narrow bodied, goose-rumped, long necked and has long ears. This horse inhabited central Asia, and it's closest ancestor is the modern Akhal-Teke. This is the tallest sub-specie, but it only grew as high as 14.3hh (or 'hands high', the measurement used for horse height).

Horse type 4: The smallest of all the prototypes, from Asia. The Caspian Pony is thought to be the ancestor to this type of horse, and some argue that it is also the ancestor of the Arabian horse lines.

From these sub-types, we have come to classify modern horses with three different terms:

Coldblooded - Horses adapted to extreme cold weather. These horses are big boned and heavily muscled with thick hair. Can be ridden, but are more suited to pulling and carrying heavy loads for short distances.

Warmblooded - Horses that can withstand cold and heat. These horses are of medium size, their hair often sheds, and they can perform a wide range of jobs.

Hotblooded - Horses adapted to extreme hot weather. These horses are skinny and usually smaller, with thin hair. They are better for riding in light cavalry over long distances.

## Types of Horses in the Middle Ages:

Horses in the Middle Ages were not recognized by breed, so much as what the horse was used for; below is a list of horse types commonly seen in Europe in the Medieval Era:

### **Charger/Courser:**

A hotblooded horse used for fast travel - especially good for delivering messages or making quick escapes.

### **Ambler/Palfreys:**

A finely-bred gaited horse, these animals were especially good for long distance travel and to use as a showy mount in parades. These were expensive horses, mainly used by nobility.

### **Desteriers:**

The traditional 'War Horse' - these were hotblooded animals of a taller nature (no taller than 15.2 hands - the size of an average horse today), used in jousting and war. They are known for strength, speed, and fearlessness. These were usually the most expensive horse.

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### **Drafts/Drays:**

Coldblooded work horses - the largest horse breed of the Middle Ages, they were docile for hard labor in the field or the mill.

### **Jennets:**

A cheaper horse for long-distance travel, with easier care than a Palfrey - popular for women and pilgrims as these horses required less maintenance and feed.

### **Rounceys:**

The all-purpose horse - some Rounceys could be rented, and in this instance were called "Hackneys". These horses were for the Squire, or common folk.

### **Pack/Cart Animals:**

Equines in this category included old Rounceys, ponies, donkeys and mules. These were the average work animals for general labor and transportation.

There are a handful of today's horses that trace directly back to their original design - for most horses, wealthy nobles, kings, and even Christian monasteries began to selectively breed horses for performance and looks. The following section outlines the history of some of today's horses.



## Influential Breeders and their contributions to Today's Horse:

### **Asians:**

#### a) Mongolians

The Asiatic Wild horse comes from the Steppes of Mongolia. The nomads here effectively followed/herded wild horses, taming a select few for riding. The people liked the horse as a primary herds animal, because of it's ability to graze any plant, produce milk (which was turned into the fermented mare's milk people drink to this day). They also depended on the horse's stamina and durability for travel and war.

Not much has changed from these horses - they are living animals of history.

#### b) Chinese/Japanese

Here is what was found on the subject of the origins of Chinese horses:

"[In the Qin Dynasty], horses were tamed and raised like livestock... The existence of these farm animals were recorded on the oracle shells of tortoise in the Shang Dynasty (1766-1122 BC), and horse riding probably occurred in the earlier periods. Ancient history books mentioned that a king (King Huang) sat on horses and cattle and hauled heavy loads in about 2205 BC. Then in about 1122 BC, King Chou led 300 war chariots, 3000 elite guards and 45000 armoured soldiers to overthrow the Shang Dynasty," (Ancient Asian Horses).

Not much is known about these horses, except for terra cotta figures of horses found in ancient Chinese tombs from the Qin Dynasty. During the Western Han Dynasty, outside influences came in and altered the horse from this time period on:

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“Some researchers think that the Heavenly Horses were the descendents of horses brought by Alexander the Great into central Asia while Alexander's horses were cross-bred from imported stocks. The King Philip of Macedonia had imported 20,000 Scythian mares [3] to cross breed the local stock of Thessaly. Then his son, Alexander the Great (356-323 BC), imported another herd of 50,000 Arabian horse from Persia. One of these cross-bred horses was the legendary Bucephalus, the mount of Alexander... [from ancient works of art from this time period, there was] a stocky breed for riding and a slender breed for chariots. The horses of the Amazon Archer and the Greek chariot both have a long shallow body, a long thin neck, and a small head. The [artwork] also show the straight mane on one of the four chariot horses and the Scythian horse,” (Ancient Asian Horses).

Not much seems to have changed from this point on in the Chinese horses.

### \*Coat Colors:

It is in ancient China and Japan where we see the first images of Palomino horses. They have the earliest records of this coat color.

Palomino horses have been highly regarded for centuries, and are so popular, you can register any horse with this coloration into the Palomino Horse Breeders Association. Just remember: this is not a breed, this is primarily a coat color.

### **Middle Eastern/Northern Africa:**

The Arabic people are responsible for developing the two foundation breeds of today's horses: the Arabian and the Barb.

The true Arabian has survived thousands of years of breeding (and inbreeding) and is an animal of living history. There are books with thousands of pages of historical breeding records to show which stallion was bred to which mare. All you need to know is that these horses were bred to have a limitless pool of stamina, travel long distances extremely quickly, and have the ability to withstand extreme heat.

There are several altered versions of this breed of horse which took place post-Medieval times. They look similar to the original, but have newer genetics, and therefore might vary in performance and health.

The Barb is less well-known: It originated in Africa, and is thought to have crossed with early Arabians and local stock to produce a fast, more stocky and hardy horse than the Arabian. The Moorish people used this, and the Arabian to conquer the Iberian peninsula, and were a huge influence on the horses there.

Some records record the use of 'Oriental' breeding - this is most likely Arabian influence, since this horse was considered superior to most other native horses. These animals were used a lot in 'improving' other breeds.

### **Spanish:**

Spanish horses are the next most prominent influencers of the breeds of the Middle Ages and the modern world. Native stock (ancestors of Sorraia Ponies and Garranos of Portugal) came from a possible mix of Tarpan and Wild Asiatic Horse ancestry. These ponies seem to have been crossed with Barbs from the infiltrating Moorish armies to produce a few different types of horses in Spain:

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a) Carthusian/Villano: The Andalusian; used for war, mounted games, and racing. This horse became the backbone of many modern horses. It is large and powerful as well as fast. The Carthusian monks of Jerez, Cordoba and Seville were responsible for overseeing their development. A strain of this horse was then crossed with Arabians to produce the Lusitano, a Portuguese version of the Andalusian.

b) Jinete/Jennet: Elegant riding horse; smaller type with smooth gaits; frequently gaited (specific hoofbeat pattern unique to gaited horses).

c) Gallego/Barb: Agile working horse; used for bullfighting and working cattle.

As Spain produced colonies in the Americas, they brought an assortment of livestock not native to America with them: Cattle, sheep, goats and yes, horses. The Mustang, the Spanish Jennet, and the Peruvian Paso Fino can trace ancestry back to these Spanish horses. The Quarter Horse and the American gaited horses have Spanish blood, but also have Thoroughbred blood, so they are slightly different compared to original Spanish horses (We'll discuss Thoroughbreds more later).

### \*Coat Colors:

Europe (mostly Spain) is where the spotted horses of today come from:

"Spotting is an ancient pattern recorded in the form of cave wall drawings of spotted horses in Southern France, from around 20,000 BC. There is no evidence to indicate that spotting patterns arose independently anywhere else and it has been assumed that spotting originated in Europe.

As spotted horses spread to other parts of the world they interbred with local horses and eventually influenced various breeds, such as the Danish Knabstrup and the American Appaloosa, which came from Spain via the Conquistadors," (Horse Genetics, Color).

Also note, that at one point, Spain had a love for Palominos. There are records of a Queen Isabella loving these horses:

"The word Palomino is itself a Spanish surname, derived from a Latin word meaning pale dove. Queen Isabella kept a hundred golden horses (but forbid her commoners to own one!). She did, however send a Palomino stallion and five mares to her Viceroy in Mexico (then called New Spain!) to perpetuate the horse in the "New World". North America palominos originally came from the Spanish settlements, presumably descendants of Queen Isabella's horses," (Horse Genetic, Color).

People appear to claim that it was La Catolica Reina Isabel de Castile who did this (and the article claims it was the monarch who sold her jewels to help Columbus on his journey), but based on the above story, this appears to be false. It is more likely this happened during the reign of Queen Isabella de-Bourbon, a french queen who married a Spanish King, almost 200 years after Isabel of Castile.

### **Vikings:**

The Vikings are known for using their native horses: smaller, sturdy horses, able to withstand the harsh weather and able to forage off scarce pasture. These horse also needed to be able fit in tight quarters of viking barges. Their history is observed in this lineage:

Tarpan < Konik < Icelandic Horse

+---> (Norwegian Fjords)

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### Romans:

Horses are not native to Italy, but were imported from the Iberian Peninsula, Persia and Noricum, a vassal state of Rome. These horses were Arabian, Barb and Spanish/Andalusian.

When the Roman Empire went to conquer the European Continent, they used these three breeds to 'improve' horses they considered useful, but ugly.

### European:

*Equus Silvaticus* was the base breed of the European continent. From this heavy draft, the Romans 'improved' the breed to evolve into powerful coldblooded horses.

#### a) Flemish/Danish

Flemish horses were 'improved' by the Roman and Spanish horses, but the distinct look and build of the Forest Horse is still evident, especially in the Friesian horse.

Danish horse breeding started as early as the 14th century with the Cistercian monasteries of Holstein. The basis behind Danish breeding was using North German mares and 'the best Spanish stallions obtainable'. Many medieval and renaissance era Danish breeds were formed from the ancestors of the Danish Warmblood, the Frederiksborg,

Forest Horse (Also called the Diluvial Horse; modern "visual" equivalent is the Friesian) X (?) < Friesian ancestor X Andalusian < Modern Friesian

Forest Horse < Jutland ancestor

#### b) East Prussia/Austro-Hungarian Empire

The horses under these empires were established during the Renaissance period - Truthfully, the Austro-Hungarian breeding programs didn't get much attention until the late 1700s, but we mention them here to see what they did with the primitive Tarpan horse.

What is interesting to note is that the Order of the Teutonic Knights were the group responsible for the beginnings of the modern Trakehner horse, a warmblooded horse used for riding and jumping.

Tarpan < Konik Pony < Schweiken Pony < Trakehner ancestor

Spanish horses < Lipizzaner

#### c) France

It appears that the French people favored developing the coldblooded draft types for agriculture and warfare:

Forest Horse X Arabian/Barb < Percheron ancestor

Black Mountain Pony (Modern equivalent is the Ariegeois) < Breton ancestor

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Black Mountain Pony < Ardennais ancestor < Flanders Horse (ancestor of today's Brabant, or Belgian Draft Horse)

Manades (indigenous white horses of Southern France) X Barb < Camargue

It is possible that southern France had access to Spanish influence and horses - no documentation of this has been found for this report, at this time.

### d) England, Wales and Ireland

There are some pretty interesting finds in the English side of horse breeding. They bred horses for every single kind of job imaginable: large war horses, cart ponies, riding horses, and "running horses". Knights and kings were the directors of fine breeding, with peasants using 'lesser', native horses for use.

The Native horses of the British Isles were ponies. These ponies have continuously gone through 'improvements' to become useful to the human race; the Romans used Oriental horses. Any large horse types that were developed here were most likely imported by the Romans, who used Spanish, Oriental and indigenous horses of the European continent as a base.

Alpine Heavy Horse and the Flander's Horse < English Great Horse  
Modern Equivalent: the Shire horse.

Chapman Horse (ancestor of the Cleveland Bay)

Native Irish Stock X Alpine Heavy Horse/Flander's Horse < Irish Draft Ancestor X Andalusian/Spanish Horses < Irish Draft ancestor

### Running Horses:

These are the early ancestors of the Thoroughbred horse. King Henry VIII started the development of this breed, with successive monarchs continuing to refine it. They took the Irish Hobby and the Scottish Galloway breeds, and mixed Spanish, Italian, and Oriental blood to produce a horse that was ideal for racing. Unfortunately, this breed did not receive any true refinement until the end of the 1600s, so today's Thoroughbred is not anything like its ancestor.

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