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THE INTRODUCTION OF THE HORSE INTO THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

To Spain is due the coming of the horse to the Western Hemisphere. The introduction of horses into two continents previously destitute of them may be considered one of Spain's main contributions to the New World. The offspring from the original stock, for few horses were shipped from Spain after the first thirty years, eventually came to serve all of Spanish America as well as that region today known as southwestern United States. In colonial America the uses of the horse were many. Whether they were carrying the conquistadores to victory over the natives, helping in the care of vast herds of Spanish cattle, serving as pack animals to link the outlying provinces to the principal cities, plowing the fields for planting, or grinding sugar cane, the importance of the Spanish horses can at no time be underestimated.

Española became the first home of the horse in the Americas. From there the Spanish conquerors soon took horses to Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Cuba. As a group, these four islands became the great source from which horses were drawn for the conquest of a large portion of the New World. The success of Spain in converting her island colonies into bases from which to overrun so vast a region was achieved only after two decades of sincere efforts at colonization, in which, from the first, the horse played an outstanding part.

In the same year that Granada, the last stronghold of the Moors on the Iberian Peninsula, fell before the forces of Isabella and Ferdinand, the Spanish sovereigns finally listened sympathetically to Christopher Columbus' dream of

reaching the rich spice countries by sailing west and, at Isabella's insistence, saw that he was outfitted. Columbus underestimated the distance to the East, but other land was sighted, and the weary and discouraged seamen were glad to put their feet on the first island reached. Hoping to find riches in the country to the south, Columbus pressed on until deterred by the disappearance of one of his vessels and the wreck of another. He finally put in at an island which he named Española. Here he reconnoitered and founded Fort La Navidad. After resupplying his remaining ship he left about forty men at the fort and sailed back to Spain to report concerning the lands which he had claimed for the Spanish Crown.

It is immaterial to the study of the horse in America whether Columbus' real ambition in sailing west was to reach the Indies or to find new land for Spain. The significant fact is that a new world was discovered; and upon his return Columbus lost no time in extolling it and impressing his financial backers with the opportunities for the permanent occupation of the region as a Spanish colony. According to Columbus the newly discovered lands offered a fruitful field for exploitation, but if the region was to be held it was necessary to send not only soldiers to subjugate the natives, but colonists, horses and other livestock for breeding, and seeds for planting. The second expedition to the New World was outfitted with these needs in mind.

The recruiting of the men for this second voyage, which was so much more full of promise than Columbus' first sailing into the unknown, was comparatively easy. Spaniards had been reared in the tradition of army life during the centuries it took to drive the Moorish infidels from the Peninsula. Now that the enemy had been removed from the national territory, the idle fighting men of Granada welcomed this new opportunity to conquer a more distant people and to advance their own fortunes while once again carrying the emblem of Christendom.

To achieve these multiple aims, not only the intrepid men of Granada would be needed, but their horses also. The Spanish cavalry had proved invaluable against the Moors.

Horses used in the armies of the reconquest were a cross between the fleet and powerful horse of the Peninsula and the fine stock introduced by the Moorish invaders. More than seven centuries of cross-breeding had produced what was considered the finest horse in Europe.¹ Since these horses had served so well in Spain, they were wanted for the new enterprise.

Convinced that a mounted company would be needed, the king and queen wrote to their secretary, Fernando de Zafra, commanding him to collect horsemen to accompany the expedition. This cedula, dated May 23, 1493, is important as the first documentary evidence indicating that horses were to be sent to the newly discovered lands; and because it has bearing on matter to be discussed later, some of its details should be noted. The order specifically instructed the official to obtain from among the inhabitants of Granada twenty horsemen, who were to be dependable and go of their own free will. Moreover, he was instructed to see that five of these took spare mounts, which might be mares. The men, who were instructed to be in Seville by June 20, were to be provided with maintenance money for themselves and their horses.²

These and other preparations for the voyage required several months, during which time much correspondence was exchanged between the parties concerned. Included among the many letters was one in which Columbus requested the king to authorize the taking of additional ships to be used in transporting the horses. In answer to this request the king wrote that finances would not permit the sending of more vessels, but he suggested that, if necessary, some other supplies might be left behind in order to make room for the horses.³

¹ Pedro Fernández de Andrada, *De la naturaleza del cavallo* (Seville, 1580), leaves 50-52.

² *Colección de documentos inéditos relativos al descubrimiento, conquista y organización de las antiguas posesiones españolas de América y Oceanía* (42 vols. Madrid, 1864-84), XIX, 499; XXI, 310. (Hereinafter referred to as *D. I. I.*) See also Martín Fernández de Navarrete, *Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos . . .* (5 vols., Madrid, 1825-37), II, 41.

³ *D. I. I.*, XXI, 377.

Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca, official in charge of outfitting, sent Columbus' second expedition to the New World across the bar of Cádiz on September 25, 1493. On board the seventeen sailing ships there were

great stores of provisions, grain seeds, mares and horses, tools to work the mines, abundance of merchandise for bartering, and for the Admiral to give to whom he saw fit. The fame of this novelty and the gold drew together fifteen hundred men, including several gentlemen, all in the king's pay, for there were not more than twenty who went without it, and they were the horsemen.⁴

Permanent colonization was to be attempted, and preparations had been made accordingly.

Horses first tried their legs in the New World on November 28, 1493.⁵ Columbus had sailed south to the Canary Islands, where he put in for supplies, and then west, discovering several other islands, including Puerto Rico, before he reached Española and the site where he had established Fort La Navidad. Here he disembarked, but found that the fort had been destroyed and all the Spaniards killed. He was greeted instead by natives. These people had shown little fear of the bearded white strangers, even upon their first appearance, but the horses filled them with awe. Guglielmo Coma's vivid description of a visit made by one of the caciques to the Spanish camp after the landing illustrates their feeling. Reporting after his return from the second voyage, he said that

Goathanari [Guacanagari] came down to the shore to see the ships. When there he admired the lofty bulwarks, examined the tackle of the ships, observed attentively the instruments of iron, but fixed his eyes most upon the horses of which the Indians were entirely destitute. A great number of fine horses—fleet for the course and strong to bear armour—had been brought out by the Spaniards. These horses had plated bits, trappings of gay colors, and straps highly polished. The formidable appearance of these animals was not with-

⁴ Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las Islas i Tierra firme del Mar Océano* (9 vols. in 4, Madrid, 1601-15), Década I, Libro II, p. 54.

⁵ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias* (5 vols., Madrid, 1875-76), II, 12.

out terror to the Indians, for they suspected that they fed on human flesh.⁶

They might well look with wonder at these fearful yet fascinating creatures, for horses were to play an important rôle in dispossessing the Indian of his heritage.

Coma's statement that the Spaniards had a great many horses raises the question as to how many were actually taken on this second voyage. Some chroniclers have been content merely to record the taking of *caballos*, others give the added information that both *yeguas* (mares) and *caballos* (stallions) were sent in order to encourage breeding.⁷ "I think that not more than twenty *a caballo* [horsemen] went." Thus Bartolomé de Las Casas dismissed the subject.⁸ Twenty-four *caballos*, ten *yeguas*, three female mules, hogs, cattle, sheep, and goats were carried, according to Andrés Bernáldez.⁹ When compared with commonly accepted figures, Bernáldez' number seems high, but in the light of evidence it appears quite probable. In the first place we know of the twenty-five horses which the king ordered the men of Granada to take. In addition, it seems safe to assume that Columbus himself took some; for in a letter to the king he complained that at the review held in Seville the traders sold him good horses, but later delivered less valuable animals to him.¹⁰ This consignment of horses apparently had no connection with the twenty-five belonging to the lance-men of Granada, and can therefore be considered as augmenting that number. One should keep in mind, however, that the figures used by Bernáldez refer to the horses actually taken from Spain, and do not necessarily imply safe

⁶ John B. Thacher, *Christopher Columbus* . . . (3 vols., New York and London, 1903-04), II, 256.

⁷ Juan Bautista Muñoz, *Historia del Nuevo-Mundo* . . . (Madrid, 1793), I, 168; Pietro Martire d' Anghiera, *De Orbe Novo* (2 vols., New York and London, 1912), I, 67; Fernando Colón, *History of the Discovery of America* (Edinburgh, 1824), III, 96; Girolamo Benzoni, *History of the New World, Shewing His Travels in America, From A. D. 1541 to 1556* . . (London, 1857), p. 24; Francisco López de Gomara, *La historia general de las Indias* (Anvers, 1554), verso L, p. 27.

⁸ Las Casas, *op. cit.*, I, 497.

⁹ Andrés Bernáldez, *Historia de los reyes católicos don Fernando y doña Isabel* (2 vols., Seville, 1870), II, 35.

¹⁰ *D. I. I.*, XXI, 535.

arrival in Española of the entire number. The largest number of horses known to have been used in America before new importations from Europe is sixteen.¹¹ These animals were taken on a single expedition into the interior, but they were not necessarily the only ones available.

Aside from the impression made upon the Indians, perhaps the first influence of the horse in the New World was exercised in the founding of the town of Isabella. Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas and Las Casas both wrote that the site was chosen because the men and horses aboard the fleet were becoming weary. When Columbus learned that the fort at La Navidad was destroyed, he chose to found his new settlement elsewhere. Reloading his horses and other provisions he sailed along the coast of Española to Monte Cristo. Hoping to put into that harbor he lay off shore so long waiting for a strong wind to subside that both his men and horses, especially the latter, began to show the effects of the ship's rolling in the swell. Columbus, with an eye to the welfare of the expedition, therefore retraced his route for three leagues and brought his fleet to rest in a quiet bay. On the adjoining shore Isabella was founded.¹²

The town must have swarmed with activity during the months following the landing. A fort was built, mounted expeditions were sent into the interior, and some of the ships were prepared for the return to Spain. It was on this fleet that Columbus sent to the king his famous memorandum of January 30, 1494. Since Antonio de Torres was assigned the responsibility of delivering it, it has come to be known as the Torres Letter. In this report are found several statements about the first horses which had been brought to the New World. Columbus not only complained about the horses he bought at the review held in Seville, but added that they were not worth the two thousand *maravedís* he had paid for them. He went on to say that horses should be sent on every ship coming to the Indies, and that the king ought to buy the horses belonging to private individuals in Española because the owners would not permit their use unless they themselves

¹¹ *D. I. I.*, XXXVIII, 249.

¹² Herrera, *op. cit.*, Década I, Libro II, pp. 63-64; Las Casas, *op. cit.*, II, 342.

were riding them. In answer to the last request the king replied that he thought it better for the present that the men keep the titles to their horses, but that the Admiral should have authority to commandeer them for use by anyone at any time if it was in the best interests of the colony.¹³

Columbus' statement that the horses were not worth two thousand *maravedís* deserves elaboration. This might be interpreted to mean that the first horses to reach the New World were mediocre. However, in his above-mentioned letter Columbus was speaking only of the horses he bought, and there is no reason to believe that the horses belonging to the Granada lancemen were not worthy animals. Moreover, Columbus may have been hypercritical of his own purchases, since the traders at Seville should have been able to supply good horses for that price. For we know that during the same year riding horses good enough for crown officials were to be had for one thousand *maravedís*,¹⁴ and that in 1494 the Crown purchased horses at twenty-five hundred *maravedís* each to be sent to the New World.¹⁵

The request that horses be sent on every ship was favorably received in Spain. Available evidence does not warrant saying that horses were sent on every vessel, but it appears likely that they were sent with every fleet. The first additions to the horses brought by Columbus on his second expedition probably arrived in 1494. Documents for that year show that twelve mares were to be taken aboard the ships then designated to carry supplies to the Island.¹⁶ Bernáldez indeed says that an expedition left in the year 1494 for America.¹⁷ Lists of supplies for ships that were to sail in 1495 under the command of Juan Aguado¹⁸ show that mares were to go,¹⁹ and Aguado's appearance in Española prior to Columbus' third voyage is evidence that at least part of the vessels reached the island.²⁰ Columbus took horses on his

¹³ *D. I. I.*, XXI, 535.

¹⁴ *D. I. I.*, XXI, 503.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 474.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 479.

¹⁷ Bernáldez, *op. cit.*, II, 36.

¹⁸ *D. I. I.*, XXXVIII, 334.

¹⁹ *D. I. I.*, XXXVIII, 331; Navarrete, *op. cit.*, II, 162.

²⁰ Herrera, *op. cit.*, Década I, Libro II, 78-79. This author states that Aguado arrived in October, 1495.

third voyage,²¹ as did the ships that carried Nicolás Ovando when he sailed to replace Francisco de Bobadilla as governor of the Indies.²² The fact that most of these animals were mares indicates that an effort was being made to encourage breeding on the island. This contention is further sustained by the fact that mares could be imported duty free, while definite restrictions were put on the number of *caballos* that could be sent.²³ In spite of natural increase and additions from Spain, horses were not plentiful in Española in 1501. Las Casas estimated that there were between twenty and thirty horses on the island at that time.²⁴ Herrera wrote that it was a rich man who owned a horse, and that some taught them to dance and curvet.²⁵ Soon after this time, however, there was a marked increase, because in 1503 Ovando was able to mount sixty²⁶ or seventy²⁷ men for an expedition to quell an Indian uprising.

The Crown had a sincere interest in the horses on Española during this period. No detail appeared too small to merit royal attention. The sovereigns' endeavor to propagate livestock on the island made them responsive to the breeder's complaints. Two references illustrate their solicitude. Included in the orders Ovando carried was one commanding him to return to Columbus two *yeguas* with their offspring and two *caballos* which Bobadilla had taken from Columbus. The Admiral had a rightful claim to these animals because he had bought the two mares from a farmer in the Indies and had obtained one of the *caballos* from a certain Goyalán. The other was from one of the mares that Columbus took to the island.²⁸ About the same time, the king signed a cedula granting Alonso de Ojeda permission to cut thirty quintals (each quintal one hundred pounds) of brazilwood in Española, ten of which were to be recompense for a stal-

²¹ Navarrete, *op. cit.*, II, 183, 188; *D. I. I.*, XXX, 449, 465.

²² *D. I. I.*, XXX, 543; *ibid.*, XXXI, 50.

²³ *Ibid.*, XXXI, 132, 233.

²⁴ Las Casas, *op. cit.*, III, 1.

²⁵ Herrera, *op. cit.*, Década I, Libro VI, p. 191.

²⁶ *D. I. I.*, VII, 397.

²⁷ Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, *Historia general y natural de las Indias, islas, tierra firme del mar océano* (4 vols., Madrid, 1851-55), I, 90; Las Casas, *op. cit.*, III, 51-52.

²⁸ *D. I. I.*, XXXI, 72; Navarrete, *op. cit.*, II, 275.

lion that Columbus took from him for breeding the mares on the island.²⁹ The value (five hundred reales) placed on this animal suggests that he was imported for a special breeding purpose, possibly to introduce some particular strain.

The Crown's chief contribution to the use and increase of the horse in the New World was its promotion of livestock raising through the establishment of royal farms in Española, and later in the neighboring islands. Just when the first breeding farm was started is not known, but it was in existence by 1499. In that year the rebel Francisco Roldán received from the king's herds two cows, two calves, twenty sows, and two mares, to be used for breeding purposes. These were given to Roldán by Columbus for giving up his opposition and coming back into the fold.³⁰ From this time forward the Crown showed a continued interest in developing a permanent supply of livestock in the Indies. The sovereigns maintained their farms by importation, by natural increase, and by taking livestock in payment of taxes. As already noted, they purchased animals that were sent on the fleets which sailed in 1494 and 1495; and later (1502) Ovando took along horses which were purchased and transported at the expense of the royal house.³¹ Although available documents do not show that horses were sent by the Crown after this date, it does not necessarily mean that none was imported. To expect specific information regarding natural increase of the horses on the island would be asking a great deal, but we do know that they did well. The climate, the abundance of grass, and the lack of predatory animals were all conducive to their propagation.³² The fact that after 1501 the Crown began accepting colts and other livestock as tax payments³³ suggests that the rulers were looking to the future. Before

²⁹ Navarrete, *op. cit.*, III, 84; *D. I. I.*, XXXVIII, 466.

³⁰ Herrera, *op. cit.*, Década I, Libro III, p. 121.

³¹ *D. I. I.*, XXX, 543.

³² José de Acosta, *The Naturall and Morall Historie of the East and West Indies* (London, 1604), 301.

³³ *Colección de documentos inéditos relativos al descubrimiento, conquista y organización de las antiguas posesiones españolas de Ultramar* (25 vols., Madrid, 1885-1932), V, 23. (Hereinafter referred to as *D. I. U.*)

the heavy demand for horses subsided, the royal farms had grown to considerable proportions. During this period a single farm at Santo Domingo had 1,650 cattle and sixty breeding mares.³⁴ The importance of the royal farms lay not only in their ability to furnish stock, but also in the fact that they had sires which were used to improve the strains.

However, the farms were not always well managed and the stock often went to the friends of the officials. The calumnies of Columbus' enemies at length convinced the Crown that the Admiral had mishandled its interests, and finally Isabella acceded to Ferdinand's demand for an accounting. Bobadilla was sent to investigate, and carried an order demanding that the Admiral and all others turn over to him the arms, provisions, horses, cattle, and other property belonging to the sovereigns.³⁵ Bobadilla likewise was mistrusted after word was received in Spain that he distributed royal property without proper regard to the welfare of the colony. Accordingly, Ovando was dispatched with orders permitting him to reclaim the horses, cattle, and other supplies if it should be in the best interest of the island.³⁶

Many have complained of Ovando's harshness, but few have questioned his success as governor of Española. During his term the island became almost self-sufficient, order was established, and agriculture and stockraising were encouraged. By 1507 Ovando was able to write the king that there was no further need of sending mares to Española. In a few months Ovando received a cedula from the king which stated that in accordance with his wishes the Casa de Contratación had been ordered to forbid the shipment of more mares to the Indies.³⁷ The embargo was temporarily lifted to permit 106 mares to be sent. This shipment was sanctioned on the grounds that the mares had been purchased for export prior to the issuance of the above order.³⁸ When Ovando began raising livestock on his own lands, he received a grant of

³⁴ Ricardo Cappa, *Estudios críticos acerca de la dominación española en América* (20 vols., Madrid, 1889-97), V, 13.

³⁵ *D. I. I.*, XXXVIII, 416; Navarrete, *op. cit.*, II, 239; Las Casas, *op. cit.*, II, 486.

³⁶ *D. I. I.*, XXXI, 13.

³⁷ *D. I. U.*, V, 117.

³⁸ *D. I. I.*, XXXIX, 163; Navarrete, *op. cit.*, III, 533.

mares and cattle from the king. The gift, however, amounted to only half of what Ovando had requested.³⁹

Four factors contributed to the establishment and maintenance of the royal *haciendas*: namely, the inability of Spain to supply the Indies with horses indefinitely, the losses sustained in transportation, the need for a permanent supply of livestock available to the settlers, and the increased demand for horses occasioned by the spread of the Conquest to other islands and the mainland. Although Spain had been generous in sending horses to her new colony, she could not long afford to continue to drain her own resources, since she was experiencing a shortage. The scarcity of horses on the Peninsula forced the king in 1494 to issue a decree prohibiting any person or rank—clergy and women excepted—to ride mules. The stockraisers had put such emphasis on mule production that only six thousand cavalry could be put in the field that year. It was hoped that by requiring people to ride horses rather than mules, a larger cavalry could be built up. The seriousness of the situation is apparent when it is realized that the penalty for violation of the decree was death.⁴⁰ This law was in effect for some time, and accounts for the grant permitting Columbus to ride a mule when he became too feeble to handle the spirited horses.⁴¹

Difficulties of transportation complicated the problems of introducing the horse into the New World. The small ships, often in the command of navigators with minimum training, were poorly equipped and ill-suited to the transfer of livestock. This situation had been first apparent in Spain's expansion to the Canary Islands. So many horses died in transit and had to be thrown overboard that the body of water through which the ships sailed to reach those islands came to be known as the *Golfo de Yeguas*, or the Gulf of Mares.⁴² When interest shifted to the Americas the evils were intensified by distance as well as by the inadequate preparations which were encouraged by the urgent need of supplies in the new colonies. Many ships sailed toward the Indies without suitable provisions for the men or regard for

³⁹ *D. I. I.*, XXXVI, 257.

⁴¹ *D. I. I.*, XXXIX, 121.

⁴⁰ Bernáldez, *op. cit.*, II, 88.

⁴² Oviedo, *op. cit.*, I, 36.

the cargo. The hulls were filled with compact goods, and the bulkier freight, such as livestock, was placed on the upper deck, where the animals were exposed to the elements week after week. The greatest losses were sustained when an inexperienced pilot directed his course too far to the south and hit the belt of calms. Forced to wait for days or even weeks for a wind, the water supply would become so depleted that the horses were thrown overboard to conserve what was left for the crew and passengers,⁴³—thus the term “horse latitudes.”⁴⁴ Ricardo Cappa estimated that thirty-three per cent of all livestock was lost in transportation.⁴⁵ Gonzalo Dávila’s loss of fifteen out of thirty-five horses between Española and Acla on the Isthmus,⁴⁶ Pedro de Alvarado’s loss of ninety horses between Nicaragua and Puerto Viejo, Peru,⁴⁷ and Cabeza de Vaca’s arrival in Brazil with only twenty-six of his original forty horses bear out Cappa’s contention.⁴⁸ Probably an all-time high for this kind of disaster was reached when Alvarado lost seventy horses in one day off the coast of Panama.⁴⁹

Simultaneous with the inability of Spain to supply regular shipments of horses to the New World came the increased demand for them in the colonies. Although there were always those who looked upon America only as a place to plunder for quick wealth, more thoughtful minds were convinced that greater gain would come from the permanent development of agricultural resources. In order to encourage settlers to go to the Indies for this purpose the Crown promised them livestock, supplies, and implements.⁵⁰ The main source of livestock given to these settlers was from the royal farms, which had been established largely with that end in view.

But at first the rôle of the horse in the New World was definitely not confined to peaceful pursuits. Horses figured

⁴³ Cappa, *op. cit.*, V, 13, 371.

⁴⁴ Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham, *The Horses of the Conquest* (London, 1930), 12. See also “horse latitudes” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁴⁵ Cappa, *op. cit.*, V, 13.

⁴⁶ *D. I. I.*, XXXV, 247.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, XXIV, 211.

⁴⁸ Herrera, *op. cit.*, Década VII, Libro II, pp. 45-46.

⁴⁹ *D. I. I.*, XLI, 513.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, XI, 258.

more spectacularly in subjugating the Indians. The early concern of Columbus over the quality of the horses on Española was shared by others. The Spanish conquistadores who followed him expected a great deal from their horses. Opposing a people who had to defend themselves on foot, it was anticipated that they would be a real asset. From the results it is evident that the cavalry was not a disappointment. In the first stages of the Conquest the demoralizing effect of the horses upon the natives gave the conquerors a tremendous advantage. What chance had the aborigines against an army that came as representatives of the fair-haired god and brought with them two-headed monsters⁵¹ that ate gold and silver.⁵² As if these fears were not enough, bells were attached to the breastplates to create more confusion among the Indians.⁵³ Once the fear of the horse as a supernatural monster had been dispelled, there still remained the speed, power, and maneuverability of the horse as insurmountable problems with which the natives were seldom able to cope. Las Casas wrote that one horseman could lance two thousand natives in an hour;⁵⁴ again that seventy horsemen were enough to devastate a hundred islands.⁵⁵ Although an obvious exaggeration, the underlying assumption is valid. He added, however, that this was true only if there were no high sierras. The authenticity of this statement of Las Casas is borne out by the type of warfare that soon developed on Española. Like the initial stages of most wars, mistakes were made on both sides. The Indians erred when they engaged the invaders on terrain where the horses could be used to trample them. The Spaniards' pursuit of the natives into mountainous and forested areas where the horses could not maneuver proved almost as ruinous. Profiting by their mistakes, the natives retreated into the interior for protection, while the Spaniards attempted to draw them into open country. On Española, Cacique Enrique, by resorting to the

⁵¹ Las Casas, *op. cit.*, II, 97.

⁵² El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *Historia general del Perú* (Madrid, 1722), p. 22.

⁵³ Irene A. Wright, *The Early History of Cuba, 1492-1586* (New York, 1916), p. 29.

⁵⁴ Las Casas, *op. cit.*, III, 45.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

former tactics, was able to withstand the conquerors so successfully that they finally came to terms with him.⁵⁶

In 1507 the Spaniards began to expand into the surrounding islands and onto the mainland. Those who had come for gold and quick booty were not satisfied with the prosaic profits procurable through the unexciting cultivation of farms. While agriculture had advanced on the island, the output of the mines had diminished, as had the labor supply. It was time to move on. The conquistadores again felt the urge to carry the cross of Christendom. If the natives refused to accept their indoctrination, they could be sent over to Española to work the mines and fields there; and who knew—more gold might be found. The very condition which made Española no longer attractive to the soldier made it nevertheless of great use to him. By trial and error the island had developed into an excellent base for further conquest. Agriculture had reached the stage where it could supply expeditions with cassava bread, pork, beef, and other staples. But perhaps even more important were the horses which had been raised and acclimated in Española. These, plus cannon and muskets and Spanish valor, were to make the conquest of the surrounding islands rapid and effective.

Puerto Rico was the second Caribbean island to fall under Spanish domination. As early as 1505 Vicente Yáñez Pinzón, as an indemnification for his time and money spent in exploration of the Indies, received a grant permitting him to found a colony on the island.⁵⁷ He failed in his attempt at occupation, but did carry sheep and goats to Puerto Rico, where they were left to propagate.⁵⁸ However, others were cognizant of the possibilities of the island, and in 1508 a second attempt at colonization was initiated under the leadership of Juan Ponce de León.⁵⁹ Ponce de León's request, in 1509, for permission to take his family to the new settle-

⁵⁶ Herrera, *op. cit.*, Década II, Libro V, 141.

⁵⁷ Manuel de la Puente y Olea, *Estudios españoles. Los trabajos geográficos de la Casa de Contratación* (Seville, 1900), pp. 41-43.

⁵⁸ Fray Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra, *Historia geográfica, civil, y natural de la isla de San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico* (Puerto Rico, 1866), p. 21.

⁵⁹ D. I. I., XXXIV, 480.

ment indicates that the colony was approaching the status of permanent occupation.⁶⁰

Horses were first taken to Puerto Rico in May, 1509. The records do not disclose the owners of the animals, but state that they were carried in a ship belonging to Ponce de León and Alonso San Martín.⁶¹ Additional livestock arrived in the same year when Ponce de León, in an effort to promote stock raising, imported mares, cattle, and hogs from his *hacienda* in Higüey, a province in eastern Española.⁶² About the same time other settlers in Puerto Rico began to establish stock raising and sugar plantations, but most of them preferred to work the newly discovered mines.⁶³

The interest of the Spanish sovereigns in the promotion of agriculture is perhaps nowhere better exemplified than in Puerto Rico. In February, 1510, the king ordered Diego Columbus, governor of the Indies, to allow the colonists to take to Puerto Rico as much livestock as they wished.⁶⁴ Two months later Pedro Moreno⁶⁵ and Gerónimo de Bruselas each received royal permission to take two mares to the new settlement.⁶⁶ In September, 1510, the king, in a further effort to encourage stock raising, recommended that merchant ships going from Spain carry mares and other animals to Puerto Rico.⁶⁷ This policy was reaffirmed the next year.⁶⁸ The interest of the king was also manifested in 1511 when additional orders were issued to the officials of Española commanding them to allow certain individuals to transfer livestock from Española without restriction.⁶⁹ In the same

⁶⁰ Cayetano Coll y Toste, "Primeras capitulaciones entre Juan Ponce de León y frey Nicolás de Ovando," *Boletín histórico de Puerto Rico* (San Juan, P. R., 1914-1927), I, 118.

⁶¹ Coll y Toste, "La propiedad territorial en Puerto Rico," *Boletín histórico de Puerto Rico*, I, 250.

⁶² *Loc. cit.*

⁶³ Abbad y Lasierra, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁶⁴ Coll y Toste, "La propiedad territorial en Puerto Rico," *Boletín histórico de Puerto Rico*, I, 250.

⁶⁵ *Loc. cit.*

⁶⁶ Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, *Biblioteca histórica de Puerto-Rico, que contiene varios documentos de los siglos XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII* (Marquez, 1854), p. 237.

⁶⁷ *D. I. I.*, XXXII, 109.

⁶⁸ *Boletín histórico de Puerto Rico*, II, 77-81.

⁶⁹ Tapia y Rivera, *op. cit.*, 235-236.

year Fernández de Alfaro, a stock raiser of Española, was granted permission to take his cattle and two mares to Puerto Rico.⁷⁰ Cristóbal de Sotomayor, who had settled on Puerto Rico, also received a permit to take his mares and other possessions from Española to his new home.⁷¹

The king may have encouraged agricultural development because he envisioned monetary gain from it. Colonies were maintained in the interest of the mother country and were valuable only in so far as they were able to yield a profit. Once farming and stock raising developed to a point of producing a surplus, they could be tapped as a source of revenue. Two years after the first horses and cattle reached Puerto Rico, the king felt that the settlers should begin paying the royal tithes. An order to this effect was promulgated by a cedula to the treasurer of the Indies, Miguel de Pasamonte, in 1511.⁷²

An Indian uprising in 1512 caused a temporary lull in attention to stock raising in Puerto Rico. Much of the island was held by the warlike Caribs, and skirmishes between them and the Spaniards were common. In 1512 the natives made a desperate effort to expel the white invaders. Their widespread attacks became so violent that the settlers had to neglect their fields and mines in order to suppress them. Once the revolt was put down, the leader, Ponce de León, and the other settlers, returned to their peaceful pursuits with renewed vigor.⁷³ In 1515, officials of the island reported that there were two settlements, Puerto Rico and San Germán; that each colony had about thirty-five families; and that stock raising and mining were their chief sources of income.⁷⁴ Two years later the king was informed that some of the settlers held large pastures, with streams flowing through them, where stock was raised both for food and to furnish beasts of burden.⁷⁵ As many as three hundred Indian slaves assisted on the larger *estancias*.⁷⁶ Among those who became rich by farming was Ponce de León, who, by his industry,

⁷⁰ *Boletín histórico de Puerto Rico*, I, 250.

⁷¹ Tapia y Rivera, *op. cit.*, 244.

⁷² *D. I. I.*, XXXII, 118.

⁷³ *Boletín histórico de Puerto Rico*, I, 250.

⁷⁴ *Loc. cit.*

⁷⁵ *D. I. I.*, XXXVI, 462.

⁷⁶ *Loc. cit.*

built up an estate having many mares and much other livestock.⁷⁷

As in Española, the Crown itself held farms on Puerto Rico. A report written in 1515 mentions that one Juan González escaped from the Indians and fled to an *estancia del Rey*.⁷⁸ More significant information is found in a letter to the king dated 1519. The writer informed the king that His Majesty then held in Puerto Rico four hundred Indians in encomienda and that they were being used to work his fields and mines.⁷⁹

By 1520 it was maintained that the settlement of Puerto Rico had three times as many beasts of burden as it needed.⁸⁰ And since the proximity of the mines to the sea made it possible for the ore to be transported to the coast comparatively easily by pack animals, some of the settlers recommended that part of the horses be moved because there was not sufficient feed in the immediate vicinity.⁸¹ Further indication of the abundance of horses is evidenced by the fact that no one bothered to develop roads on the island during the twenties.⁸²

The situation changed somewhat during the next decade. Livestock development was impeded by hurricanes and attacks by Caribs and the French in the years between 1525 and 1530.⁸³ But, in spite of these setbacks, Puerto Rico was in a position to serve as a supply base when it and the surrounding islands were called upon to furnish horses and foodstuffs for the conquest of the rich Inca Empire. Indeed, the Puerto Ricans welcomed the chance to dispose of their surplus horses and other products, but the picture changed when the officials saw that the fabulous tales of Peru were also luring away the established settlers of the island and thus endangering its own prosperity.⁸⁴

The geographical location of Jamaica made it a prize as a supply base once plans were formulated for the conquest

⁷⁷ Oviedo, *op. cit.*, III, 621.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 473.

⁷⁹ Tapia y Rivera, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-278.

⁸⁰ *Boletín histórico de Puerto Rico*, III, 82.

⁸¹ *D. I. I.*, XXXVI, 472.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 530.

⁸³ *Boletín histórico de Puerto Rico*, I, 250.

⁸⁴ Tapia y Rivera, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

of the mainland. Columbus visited Jamaica on two occasions, so by right of discovery the island belonged to his heirs. Disregarding the terms of his original contract with Columbus, the king granted Alonso de Ojeda and Diego de Nicuesa permission to occupy and develop the island as a supply station for the mainland settlements which they were about to attempt. To circumvent this plan, Diego Columbus in 1509 sent Juan de Esquivel to occupy Jamaica.⁸⁵

Mares and other livestock were taken by Esquivel to Jamaica.⁸⁶ If the island was to help supply the mainland colonies, livestock was indispensable. Excellent land and an advantageous location soon made Jamaica a rival of Española. Within five years after occupation the settlers were exporting their products to the Isthmus.⁸⁷ In the succeeding years Jamaica was able to increase her shipments of foodstuffs. Ships plying between the island and Panama carried cassava, corn, pigs, salted beef, and bacon to the needy colonists of Vasco Núñez Balboa's town.⁸⁸

In order to assure a continuous supply of provisions for the mainland settlements, royal farms were established on Jamaica. Garay, as governor, assumed direction of the royal holdings in 1515,⁸⁹ and in the following year reported to the Crown the extent of its properties.⁹⁰ Sometime during the next three years the king and Garay formed a partnership whereby both were to share in the profits of the royal *estancias*.⁹¹ In 1519 this partnership was extended for three years to further encourage agriculture in order that the officials and troops in Castilla del Oro might be provisioned with supplies.⁹² While by and large this arrangement seems to have been satisfactory, some of the succeeding transactions were questioned by the queen who, in 1523, ordered a *residencia* to be held in order to investigate a rumor that the officials were selling their own stock when the prices were up and selling hers when the prices were down.⁹³

⁸⁵ Frank Cundall and Joseph L. Pietersz, *Jamaica under the Spaniards, Abstracted from the Archives of Seville* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1919), p. 1.

⁸⁶ Las Casas, *op. cit.*, III, p. 287.

⁸⁷ Cundall, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁸⁸ Cundall, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹⁰ *Idem.*

⁹¹ Oviedo, *op. cit.*, I, 582.

⁹² Cundall, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Regardless of who profited by the proceedings, by this time (1521) Jamaica was well able to export horses, for in that year Garay took 144 horses from the island to the Pánuco region on the mainland.⁹⁴ Just when the first horses left Jamaica is not certain. It is possible that Pánfilo de Narváez took some to Cuba in 1512, but if he did the available sources do not mention it. Likewise they do not record that horses were taken on the ships carrying supplies to the Isthmus. However, Martín Fernández de Enciso found an abundance of livestock on the island in 1519,⁹⁵ so it is evident that horses were available at that time. In 1520 Hernando Cortés, then in Mexico, was receiving small reinforcements for his cavalry from the ships that Garay was presumably sending to Pánuco. Bernal Díaz del Castillo also records that Cortés sent a ship to Jamaica expressly for horses.⁹⁶ But Jamaica was to achieve greater importance as a supplier of horses, along with the neighboring islands, when Pizarro began his conquest on the Pacific coast of South America.

Cuba, largest island of the Greater Antilles, was the last of that group to come under Spanish sway. Columbus sighted it on his first voyage, coasted the south shore on his second, and visited it again on his last trip to the Indies. Whether or not others explored Cuba during this time is not certain, but the maps of Cosa and Cantino, published before 1505, show it as an island. Nevertheless, Ovando, in 1508, commissioned Sebastián de Ocampo to determine whether the region was an island or part of the mainland. Ocampo returned with word that he had circumnavigated Cuba. The king now became keenly interested in having the island explored for precious metals. It was also wanted as a source of native labor for Española. Therefore, such interest in Cuba had been aroused by 1511 that an expedition under the leadership of Diego de Valásquez was dispatched from Española to occupy it.

⁹⁴ Navarrete, *op. cit.*, III, p. 68.

⁹⁵ Martín Fernández de Enciso, *Suma de geographia q̄ trata de todas las partidas de provincias del mundo: en especial de las Indias* (Seville, 1530), L. 52 verso, signature G III.

⁹⁶ Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (2 vols., Mexico City, 1904), I, 408.

Cuba was rapidly overrun. From the sources it does not appear that Velásquez at any time had a large number of horses, but he had enough to terrorize most of the natives into submission.⁹⁷ One of the outstanding feats of the campaign was Narváez' exploit. Aroused from his sleep by an Indian attack, Narváez saddled his mare, which was quartered in his room, threw a circle of bells over her head, and rode into the midst of the natives. Fear of the mare put the entire native army to flight.⁹⁸

After the Indians were subdued, Velásquez set about distributing the land among his followers, reserving some for the king. Cortés, the future conqueror of Mexico, and his brother-in-law, Juan Juárez, received land and Indians near Santiago de Barucoa, the first settlement established on Cuba. Here Cortés raised mares, cattle, and sheep, and was the first colonist to establish a stock farm on the island.⁹⁹ Two ships arrived from Spain in February, 1514. One of these was sent to Jamaica for cassava and the second to Española for mares and other livestock to supplement those taken by Velásquez.¹⁰⁰

Cuba supplied the horses for Cortés' expedition to Mexico, which was mustered in 1518 and finally set sail early in 1519. Fifteen¹⁰¹ or sixteen¹⁰² horses and mares were carried. The animals were not easily obtained in Cuba at this early date. They were collected at various places and good prices were paid for them. When it is realized that the expedition left Cuba less than eight years after the occupation of the island, the surprise is not that horses were expensive, but that even fifteen horses could be spared. Bernal Díaz del Castillo draws a like conclusion when he comments, in regard to Cortés' efforts to obtain horses, that they "were hardly to be procured for any money";¹⁰³ and he makes the point

⁹⁷ Las Casas, *op. cit.*, IV, 22.

⁹⁸ Wright, *op. cit.*, 29.

⁹⁹ Francisco López de Gómara, *Historia de Mexico, con el descubrimiento de la Nueva España, conquistada por el muy illustre y valeroso príncipe don Fernando Cortés, Marques del Valle* (Anvers, 1554), L. 6 verso.

¹⁰⁰ *D. I. I.*, XI, 412.

¹⁰¹ Las Casas, *op. cit.*, IV, 457.

¹⁰² *Letters of Cortés; the Five Letters of Relation from Hernando Cortés to the Emperor Charles V* (2 vols., New York and London, 1908), I, 138.

¹⁰³ Díaz del Castillo, *op. cit.*, I, 66.

even more emphatic when speaking of the Narváez expedition which Velásquez sent out against Cortés over a year later by saying that the whole (which included eighty cavalry) composed a formidable and respectable force, considering that it was entirely collected in the island of Cuba.¹⁰⁴ Within the next ten years the excellent pasture lands of the island made it possible for Cuba to take her place beside Española, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico in furnishing the horses used to conquer a good part of the two Americas.

During the time that the surrounding islands were being occupied, major changes were taking place in Española. In addition to supplying horses for its neighbors, the continuing decline in the native labor supply, the efforts to protect those Indians who were left, the increase in agricultural production, and the concentration of mining in the interior, all put heavier demands on the livestock industry.

As early as 1508 the king was petitioned by the *procuradores* of Española in an effort to obtain more horses to work the mines.¹⁰⁵ In view of the fact that during the previous year Ovando wrote the king that there was no need to send additional mares to Española, the request of the *procuradores* is hard to explain. Since the first horses left Española in 1509, decrease in number because of export could not have been a reason. However, three possibilities do present themselves. Ovando may have miscalculated the need for animals on the island, or there may have been a decided swing toward agriculture, requiring more horses than were anticipated. The third possibility, that of limiting the number available in order to maintain a good price, presents some interesting considerations.

Monopolies were common at that date. Columbus had the right to restrict trade in some articles while the Crown monopolized certain rare commodities. It does not seem unlikely that the livestock raisers, anticipating the coming demand, hoped to control the horse trade. By limiting the import they held a powerful weapon over anyone who might wish to begin horse breeding. Evidence has already been presented which shows that restrictions were put on the

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 354-356.

¹⁰⁵ *D. I. I.*, XXXII, 21.

transfer of horses from one region to another; *i. e.*, grants by the king were necessary for permission to take horses to Puerto Rico. Perhaps a monopoly on horses did not enter the mind of Ovando, but once the conquest of the mainland began, some at least entertained the idea, because a religious writing from Mexico in the early twenties reported to the king that the officials would not permit the exportation of certain mares from Española.¹⁰⁶

In spite of these indications of a shortage of horses on Española, there is the following evidence that the island was more than holding its own in the maintenance of its supply—the Indians were being given horses, large *estancias* were being developed, and the Crown was still offering livestock as an inducement to settlers to take up farming. Through the efforts of the church the Indians received horses and other livestock in 1518. In 1517 a Dominican father recommended to the king that the native villages be divided into groups of seven families, and that each group be given seven cattle and seven sows for breeding, and one mare. Each group was to have its own brand in order to distinguish its animals from those of others.¹⁰⁷ Acting upon this suggestion the king decreed that the Indians should be placed in settlements of about three hundred members and that if possible each village of them should have ten or twelve mares, fifty cows, fifty hogs for food, and one hundred sows for breeding purposes. The head of the village might use the flocks for the good of his people but could not sell, gamble, or give them away.¹⁰⁸

Meanwhile various white settlers were developing large *estancias*. The documents refer to several farms which had hundreds of thousands of hills of yucayas, thousands of hills of peppers, and which were equipped with dozens of farm implements.¹⁰⁹ Livestock raising kept pace with grain and root culture; by 1515 cattle sold for two pesos and sheep for half a peso.¹¹⁰ Horses must have played an important part during round-ups and branding periods.

¹⁰⁶ *D. I. I.*, XIII, 51.

¹⁰⁷ *D. I. I.*, XII, 106.

¹⁰⁹ *D. I. I.*, XXXII, 169.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, XXIII, 319.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, XXXVI, 410.

Stock raisers and farmers in Española had their troubles over grazing problems. These disputes were markedly similar to those experienced later on the frontiers of the United States. Conditions became so troublesome that an order was issued compelling the stockmen to keep their mares, stallions, and cattle in corrals so that they would not destroy the crops. The horse corrals were to be one thousand *varas* (approximately one-half mile) square, but might be larger if the region was not too thickly settled. The provision for corrals that would care for up to ten thousand head of cattle gives some idea of the size of the herds that were developing on Española. The law tended to favor the stock raisers, because if a planter killed a horse or a cow he was subject to a fine double the value of the animal.¹¹¹

State officials and the religious of Española were not satisfied with the small number of settlers who came to the New World. Various efforts were made to induce men to bring their families and follow agricultural pursuits on the island. Letters were written to Spain telling of the excellent land, and the fact was stressed that Indians would be furnished them to work the fields.¹¹² As an added inducement the Crown promised that each farmer going to the island would be given livestock from the royal farms.¹¹³ In 1518 Fray Bernaldino de Manzanedo wrote the king recommending that he enlarge the Crown farms in order to supply the new settlers with work animals for breaking land and tilling the fields.¹¹⁴ It is not clear whether this request indicated that additional settlers were already arriving, or was in anticipation of an influx.

While Española, the first in the field, was expanding her capacities as a base of supplies by orderly development as an agricultural colony, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Cuba had not only been ransacked for gold, but pacified and settled. Contemporaneous with the successful occupation of these Caribbean islands was a widening interest in the conquest of the mainland. The initial step had been taken by Alonzo de Ojeda and Diego de Nicuesa just prior to the close of the

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, XIV, 230.

¹¹² *D. I. I.*, XII, 106.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, XXIII, 332.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XI, 298.

first decade of the sixteenth century. Their lack of success in no way deterred the gold-seeking, cross-bearing islanders who were eager to expand the frontiers of the Spanish empire while attempting to satisfy their own lust for adventure and riches. The multiple thrusts at the mainland during the next twenty years were possible largely because the islands could furnish horses to overrun the natives once a bridgehead had been established. As Española was the mother of the Americas, so also was she the mother of the horse, which contributed so spectacularly to the rapid spread of Spanish domination over two-thirds of our hemisphere.

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