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The Royal Mares: Imagining a Race (Part One)

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Abstract

In the years since their first appearance in Cheny's Racing Calendar of 1743, a group of celebrated yet vague beings, the Royal Mares, have from time to time attracted scholarly attention. Suggested to be the foundation mares of the Thoroughbred breed, they have subsequently been variously described as imported mares, as mares bred on the island of Britain, or a mixture of both. This series explores the origins and progress of the story, around which mythology has accumulated, showing that there is a core of truth within the legend of imported mares, but that certain aspects of the historiography have been influenced by unreliable sources. The evidence for imported horses from the sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century is also examined in depth.

“The only certainty of pedigrees is that they will confound you. No animal species is better documented than the Thoroughbred, yet, after two centuries of controlled racing and breeding, the laws of reproduction decree that luck will always be a major factor.”¹

I. The Royal Mares: a match for the Founding Fathers?

Horse racing thrives on big, bold, legendary characters, both human and equine. Much mythology still swirls and accumulates around the tales of the three “founding father” stallions of the Thoroughbred breed, the Darley Arabian, the Byerley Turk, and the Godolphin Arabian, or Barb. There is clearly more to the story of the Thoroughbred than three stallions, even if the breed is generally dated from the arrival in the narrative of the first, the Byerley Turk. It is also important to point out that one scholar suggests this horse was not imported at all, but bred in Yorkshire.²

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¹ George Rae, *The Sporting Life Guide to Owning a Racehorse: a Handbook for Current and Future Owners*, (London: The Sporting Life, 1990), 40. Cited in Rebecca Cassidy, *The Sport of Kings: Kinship, Class and Thoroughbred Breeding in Newmarket* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 143.

² The Byerley Turk legend includes his capture at Buda by Captain Byerley, for which there is no documentary evidence, and his role as a charger at the Battle of the Boyne, for which there is evidence. Richard Nash suggests the horse was bred in Co. Durham. See Richard Nash, “Beware a Bastard Breed”:

Thus legend and myth are acknowledged to be part of the Thoroughbred story. Furthermore, both the primary and secondary sources, available to the historian are limited, as Peter Edwards points out, given the importance of horse breeding generally until modern times: “It is therefore surprising to note the dearth of publications on the management of a stud. Except for Prior's book on the royal studs and Reeve's account of royal Masters of the Horse, it hardly features in the literature. Books on the landed elite rarely mention horse-breeding, even in the biographies of royal Masters of the Horse. What little there is tends to focus on racehorses.”³ The Welbeck stud, the focus of research by Edwards, is one of the exceptions, but even here the available material is relatively late.

As is so frequently the case, speculative material has tended to fill in the gaps. However, if all the legendary and semi-legendary material were stripped from the history and historiography of horse racing, even more fascinating truths might be revealed by further engagement with existing sources. This is true of the curious history of the Royal Mares, creatures more elusive and contentious than the founding stallions. The first reference to them occurs in Cheny's *Calendar* of 1743, in which it was stated that “King Charles II sent abroad the Master of the Horse (which some say was a late Sir *Christopher Wypil* (others the late Sir *John Fenwick*), in order to procure a Number of Foreign Highbred Horses and Mares for Breeding, and the Mares, thus procured by the said King's interest, and brought to England (as also many of their offspring) have, for that reason, been called Royal Mares.”⁴

The idea was taken up by Weatherbys G.S.B. (General Stud Book) of 1791, in which included an entry as follows: “ROYAL MARES. King Charles the Second sent abroad the Master of the Horse to procure a number of foreign horses and mares for breeding, and the mares brought over by him (as also many of their produce) have been called Royal Mares.”⁵ The story subsequently continued to appear in a number of sources, until in 1891, Weatherbys appended to the original paragraph a passage about Charles I having a number of horses “described as racehorses,” including three Morocco mares at Tutbury in 1643.⁶ C.M. Prior, historian of the Thoroughbred, pounced on this, noting the resemblance between the two earliest references, and

Notes Towards a Revisionist History of the Thoroughbred Racehorse,” *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World*, ed. Peter Edwards, Karl A.E. Enenkel and Elspeth Graham (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 191-216.

³ Peter Edwards, “The decline of an aristocratic stud: the stud of Edward Lord Harley, 2nd Earl of Oxford and Mortimer, at Welbeck (Nottinghamshire), 1717-29” *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (August 2016), 870.

⁴ John Cheny's *Racing Calendar* was founded in 1727, and reflects the growing interest in horse racing and its history at that time: “An Historical List or Account of all the Horse-Matches Run, And of all the Plates and Prizes run for in England (of the Value of Ten Pounds or upwards) in 1727, Containing the Names of the Owners of the Horses, etc., that have Run, as above, and the Names and Colours of the Horses also, with the Winner distinguished at every Match, Plate, Prize, or Stakes; the Condition of Running, as to Weight, Age, Size, etc; and the places in which the Losing Horses have come in.” James Weatherby first published *Weatherbys Racing Calendar* (the apostrophe is not usually included) in 1773.

⁵ James Weatherby, *An Introduction to a General Stud-Book* (London: Printed by H. Reynell for J. Weatherby, 1791), 203.

⁶ C.M. Prior, *The Royal Studs of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, (London: Horse and Hound Publications, 1935), 101.

deduced that Weatherby had acquired his information about the Royal Mares of Charles II from Cheny.⁷ After that, the idea had taken on a life of its own. However, it was clear from the additional information provided in the 1891 revised volume of Weatherby's Stud Book that imported mares had been part of the racehorse stock – or at least part of the breeding stock – of Charles I, ergo imported foreign mares had arrived before the days of Charles II.

Since Charles II had, somewhat erroneously, been allocated the role of creator, or at least chief promoter, of racing as the sport of kings, the idea of the imported mares of Charles II had fitted nicely with a legend that was developing around that ruler as sportsman and horse racing enthusiast, and even, occasionally, potential architect of the Thoroughbred breed. The political background and ramifications of this need to be included in any consideration of the period.⁸ The problem was that C.M. Prior could not find any documentation that matched the importation by Charles II, nor any other evidence to support it. However, references to Royal Mares do appear in documentation in the eighteenth century, notably the studbooks of individuals as well as the G.S.B. itself, and they are widely considered to be some of the significant foundation mares of the Thoroughbred breed, through which various families can be traced.

Fortunately, Prior was able to examine an itinerary of the mares of Charles I kept at the Tutbury Stud, and the evidence provided, and its possible significance, will be discussed shortly. Further, he noted that every single one of the seventy-eight mares accepted in the G.S.B. as being the female founding stock of the Thoroughbred were in Yorkshire, thus “the thoroughbred horse can be considered mainly a product of the Northern counties, and accounts for the supremacy of horses from the North in the early days of horse racing.”⁹ In an earlier publication, Prior also referred to the fact that “(i)t is well known that time out of mind there had been a breed of running galloways in this country, more especially in the north of England, which were the racehorses of pre-Restoration days and for some time afterwards, but it is not established to what extent they themselves had been crossed...”¹⁰ The contribution of the Galloway landrace has not been examined in detail to date, and forms part of the material of a forthcoming volume.¹¹

II. Henry VIII's Mantuan mares

It is worth stressing that one group of imported “royal” mares with a genuine connection to horse racing is well-documented. They are the mares given to Henry

⁷ Prior, *Royal Studs*, 103-5.

⁸ For details of the development of the relationship between politics and racing in the latter part of the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century, see Richard Nash, “Sporting with Kings,” *The Cambridge Companion to Horseracing*, ed. Rebecca Cassidy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 13–25); and Richard Nash, “The Sport of Kingmakers: Horse Racing in Late Stuart England,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37:3-4 (2020), 304-22.

⁹ C.M. Prior, *Early Records of the Thoroughbred Horse* (London: The Sportsman, 1924), 6.

¹⁰ Prior, *Early Records*, 9.

¹¹ Miriam A. Bibby, *Invisible Ancestor: the Galloway Nag and its Legacy* (Budapest: Trivent Publishing, forthcoming).

VIII by the Gonzagas of Mantua, who were breeding racehorses using Barbs, Hobbies, and other types of horse, including possibly horses from India, in the fifteenth century.¹² It should also be noted that there is no evidence for any animal called an Arab, or Arabian, horse being involved in the programme.¹³ The Barbs were imported by the Gonzaga family directly from north Africa, since this breed of horse originates in that region, and is particularly associated with Morocco. Barbs had been favoured by royalty and the elite since the days of Richard II, if Shakespeare is to be believed, and remained so until the late seventeenth century, being endorsed by leading equestrians such as William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle.¹⁴ In return, Henry VIII supplied animals from his Hobby studs in Ireland, and some fast Scottish runners too, to the Gonzaga family.¹⁵ It is also worth considering that this exchange, and the particularly the arrival of the Mantuan mares, may have entered the belief systems of later writers almost as a folk memory, to be embellished and enlarged upon. The basic facts are these: the Gonzagas were producing their own breed(s) of horses, known as *razzu(e)* in Italian, mainly to participate in the Palio races. The high status that success in these events offered was part of the motivation for the development of the racehorses, and the level of devotion of the Gonzaga family to this task is clear through their correspondence with other rulers, including Henry VIII, with their stud managers, and with other suppliers of horses.¹⁶ What the documentation reveals is that the Barbs and Hobbies were both considered to be extremely fast, and that, interestingly, the “Scottish Runners” (*cavalli corridori di Scotia*) of Henry VIII, which Andrea Tonni identifies very plausibly as Galloways, were the apparently the best running horses to which Henry had access on the island of Britain, but were prized more for their stamina.¹⁷

The fact that Henry VIII had such a keen interest in horse racing is interesting, since it is not one of the aspects of his character that comes through in many of the biographies of the king. There is some confusion about the dates of the arrival of the mares. Henry VIII had to make several requests through his representative Gregory de Cassalis (probably a member of the family associated with southwest Scotland)

¹² Elizabeth Tobey, “The Palio Horse in Renaissance and Early Modern Italy,” *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Modern World*, ed. Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 74, 87.

¹³ The best source of information is Carlo Cavriani, *Le razze Gonzaghesche di cavalli nel Mantovano e la loro influenza sul pure sangue Inglese* (Roma: Cooperativa Tipografica Manuzio, 1909).

¹⁴ William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, *Methode nouvelle et invention extraordinaire de dresser les chevaux*. (Antwerp: Jacques van Meurs, 1658), 15; William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, *A New Method and Extraordinary Invention to Dress Horses* (London: T. Milbourn, 1667), 49.

¹⁵ See Andrea. Tonni, “The Renaissance Studs of the Gonzagas of Mantua,” *The Horse as Cultural Icon, The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World* ed. Peter Edwards, Karl A.E. Enekel and Elspeth Graham (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 261-77; Andrea Tonni, “Allevamento e diplomazia tra Mantova, Torino e Londra: lo scambio dei cavalli tra cinquecento e seicento.” DSS Papers STO 01-08, 1-28: “È vero che in Inghilterra si costuma molto tenere cavalli corridori di Scotia, et giocano di gran scommesse con essi, ma detti cavalli sono di lena et corrono cinque et sei miglia. [It’s true that in in England there is a very strong tradition of Scottish running horses, and they stake large bets on them, but these horses have great stamina and run five or six miles.]” (Ibidem, 16. Trs Miriam A. Bibby.)

¹⁶ Cavriani, *Le Razze Gonzaghesche*, passim.

¹⁷ Tonni, “Renaissance Studs,” 275.

before receiving any horses. A number, specifically described as brood mares (*cavalle fattrici*) certainly arrived from Mantua in 1512, with another potential import in 1532.¹⁸ There were other gifts of animals apparently not destined for the stud. In return, the Gonzaga family showed keen interest in *gradarios*, or ambling horses. Both England and Scotland had a high reputation for the quality of their *gradarios* horses, usually geldings, as shown in the work of Polydoro Virgilio (Polidoro Vergil) early in the sixteenth century, and also the words of Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, later Pope Pius II, in the fifteenth century, when he gave an interesting, if brief, commentary on the horses of Scotland.¹⁹

The exchange of horses between rulers was not just about the practicalities of horse breeding. It was also highly symbolic, proof of the value of the relationship and a recognition of kingly and noble status. This had been the case at least as far back as the kings of ancient Egypt. Correspondence between the Egyptian pharaohs and other rulers inevitably includes references to horses. These references often appear at the start of the letters, an integral part of the formula in which good wishes are sent to the people and things the king holds most dear: his family, his chief men, his horses and his chariots.²⁰ Thus, the tradition of exchanging horses among the elite was an ancient one, and Mantuan rulers felt equally pleased and privileged to receive Hackneys, *equi gradarii*, and Hobbies from a king of Henry VIII's stature.

C.M. Prior gave due credit to the Mantuan imports as potentially marking the start of both interest in racing on the part of the English monarchy, and the development of dedicated racehorses (runners, or coursers) on the island of Britain, leading ultimately to the creation of the Thoroughbred.²¹ The genes of these mares may have continued in the studs of the later Tudor monarchs, including those of Elizabeth, and fortunately this is a period for which there is at least one key documentary source.

III. Prospero D'Osma's "small courser mares and large courser mares"

The documentation in question dates to 1576 and consists of a very useful report by Prospero D'Osma, who was a famed Neapolitan horseman. His report, *Dichiaratione e Relatione sopra la mia andata alla razza di Malmesbury e poi de Tutbury* was included in translation in Prior's work on the Royal Studs.²² Tutbury had been an important royal

¹⁸ Cavriani, *Le Razze Gonzaghesche*, 19.

¹⁹ A complete Latin version of the *Anglica Historia* by Polydore Vergil (Polidoro Virgilio of Urbino, 1470?–1555) with English translation by Diana F. Sutton is available at: <http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/polverg/>. However, it should be noted that Sutton incorrectly translates *Equorum bona pars non succussat sed graditur* as "a goodly portion of their horses walk but do not trot" when it should be "a good number of their horses do not trot, but amble." For Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, see *Pius II Commentaries*, ed. Margaret Meserve and Marcello Simonetta (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 20-21; Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, *Secret Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope: The Commentaries of Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini* (abridged) trs. Florence A. Gragg and ed. Leona C. Gabel (London: the Folio Society, 1988), 29.

²⁰ William L. Moran, ed. and trs., *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), *passim*.

²¹ Prior, *Royal Studs*, 2.

²² *Ibidem*, 7. According to Prior, only one copy of this work exists. The original was in the Earl of Leicester's library, for whom it was apparently created, and at Prior's time of writing in 1935 this unique

stud since Henry VIII's day, but it was not the personal property of the king, as it was part of the Duchy of Lancaster. Prospero D'Oasma's report was thorough and provides a fascinating insight into contemporary horse management and care. Not only does D'Oasma provide a list of the horses at Malmesbury and Tutbury, but also descriptions of the grounds in which they were kept. This knowledgeable horseman makes useful comments and suggestions about their care, which mares should be bred to which stallions, when and how to wean youngsters, and so on. Several of the stallions appear to be Neapolitans, stressing the importance of these horses at this time. The need for good quality grass and hay is paramount, and D'Oasma makes insightful remarks about the difference in climate between west and east locations. Altogether, it is an interesting read, and one to which modern horse-keepers can still relate.

With regard to the horses themselves, D'Oasma divides them into categories as follows: courser mares, small courser mares, Jennets; courser/small courser/Jennet mares to be covered; colts and fillies. The focus in this paper will be on the courser mares, as relevant to the discussion about Royal Mares and their association with the development of the Thoroughbred breed. The courser mares at Tutbury are five in number, a black, a fleabitten gray, two bays, and a light bay. These, says D'Oasma, will be sent to the stud this year, so apparently they had perhaps been or resting (or coursing!), rather than breeding, since D'Oasma also lists a further fifteen which have produced foals "and will rest until next year."²³ Another five courser mares, making a total of twenty "will be given to the gray courser stallion called 'Grisone'."²⁴ Possibly these mares are the five listed as "going to stud that year"? This would thus create his total of twenty courser mares for Tutbury.

The small courser mares at Tutbury are six in number, two chestnuts, a light bay, a sorrell, a dark dappled gray, and a dark bay. Again, perhaps these mares have been resting, or coursing, and not breeding. These too were to be sent to the stud and mated with "the stallion called 'Abbot'," who is amusingly so named "because of his large body," it seems.²⁵ D'Oasma states that the complete total of potential stud mares, including coursers, small coursers, and jennets, at Malmesbury and Tutbury is 44. He appears to favour the soil and fodder conditions at Tutbury over those of Malmesbury, and also perhaps Tutbury is better equipped, managed and utilised than Malmesbury, which does not appear good for the in-foal mares. D'Oasma suggests the whole stud be moved to Tutbury, which did indeed become the major stud location for subsequent monarchs.

What distinguishes the courser mares from the small courser mares? An interesting, and apparently unexplained comment may provide a clue. D'Oasma remarks that "the Jennet mares and the Irish mares can be kept in the part called Stockley [at Tutbury] which is two and half miles round."²⁶ This apparently perplexed

document was in New York. Not having seen the original Italian, I cannot comment on the quality of the translation provided in Prior's work on the Royal Studs.

²³ *Ibidem*, 19.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 18-19.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 26.

Prior, who added a footnote: “No Irish mares are enumerated.” This is apparently the case – no stud mares are listed as “Irish.” However, there is a possible resolution, suggested here. The courser mares would plausibly be examples of, or descended from larger horses, perhaps with Barb or Neapolitan ancestry, while the small courser mares might be descended from, or examples of, Hobby and Galloway mares. These could potentially both be described as “Irish” for the following reasons. The Hobby was definitively a landrace with its origins in Ireland, though appropriated by Henry VIII and various early modern commentators as “English.”

The Galloway landrace came from southwest Scotland. Both were famed as swift, light horses, and were likely to be related. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a critical period for its emergence into wider consciousness, the main producers of the Galloway Nag were likely to have been Gaelic-speaking people living in the uplands of Galloway in the region later known as the Stewartry.²⁷ The term they used would probably have been “garrons,” that is geldings, within the region itself, since Scotland was famous for the production of geldings for the riding horse market.²⁸ The term began to be applied more generally and is still used today for Highland Ponies. A famous horse fair held at Kelton Hill was well-known beyond the region until the nineteenth century.²⁹ This could, from an Anglo-centric viewpoint, potentially make the producers of the Galloway “Irish,” since this is how English speakers, particularly those in the south of England, had historically referred to the inhabitants of the *Gàidhealtachd*, the Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland. It is in fact fascinating to view this as another potential stage in the development of the Thoroughbred, and to note the types of animals involved in its creation. Interestingly (since both the Galloway and the Hobby were mainly gaited animals), by 1598 the Tutbury Race [stud] had no stallions there, but seemed to be mainly producing ambling stock, which were reliable riding horses for both home and overseas trade, with a few coursers among them.³⁰

IV. James VI/I and the Duke of Buckingham

There does appear to have been a flurry of documented private imports of Barbs, mostly stallions, by the aristocracy and gentry in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. These were bought at Marseilles, rather than imported by the owners via Marseilles, which is an interesting difference, and evidence for their arrival is cited in Prior.³¹ While generalist texts talk vaguely about importing horses from “the east,” it is evident that these were not horses selected and bought by individuals in any of the places that later became important locations for acquiring horses, such as Constantinople or Aleppo. Rather, Marseilles was an entrepôt for horse traders.

²⁷ For evidence of Gaelic speakers in the region in this period, see James Brown, “Nic and Mac: Gaelic Lingering in Eighteenth Century Carrick,” in *Galloway, The Lost Province of Gaelic Scotland* ed. Michael Ansell, Ronald Black and Edward J. Cowan (n.p.: John Dewar Publishers, 2022) 265-280. See also in the same volume, Alistair Livingston, “Gaelic to Scots in Galloway,” 384-390.

²⁸ Bibby, *Invisible Ancestor*, forthcoming.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Prior, *Royal Studs*, 47.

³¹ Prior, *History of the Racing Calendar and Stud-Book*, 11-12.

The Sheffield Barb, so called because he was bought by Sir John Sheffield, was later acquired by the Duke of Buckingham, and it had apparently cost Sir John the immense sum of £140 to even get the horse as far as Paris.³² Indeed, James VI was given the gift of a “gallant Barbary horse, a rich saddle, and furniture suitable, which his highness gratefully accepted,” by Sir Anthony Mildmay at Apethorpe, where the king had broken his journey to London on accepting the crown of England. Apethorpe was also where he is alleged to have met George Villiers, later Duke of Buckingham.³³ Horses would play a leading role in their relationship.

Tutbury and Malmesbury remained important horse breeding centres in the reigns of James VI/I and Charles I, as did the stud at Hampton Court. George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, performed his task as Master of the Horse with enthusiasm and skill. In the remaining stud documents for royal studs of this period, once again we find references to Barb stallions (the Barbery Sheffield) and coursers. At Hampton Court in 1620 it is noted that “a bay Barbery without white, one of the mares that my Lo: Digbey sent with the lame Barbery, that my Lo: Donkester” provided was covered, presumably by the “Barbery Sheffeeld” that was at stud there.³⁴ At Malmesbury in 1620 are listed mares whose names might indicate their origins, but it is not always possible to prove. There is, for instance, Poland, a bright bay mare, Jennet, a dun mare, Bay Denmarke (more likely to indicate origin, and very plausibly given that James VI/I’s wife was Danish, and received gifts of Danish bred horses³⁵). There is also listed Arrabian, a bright bay mare covered by a “white Gennett,” suggesting that if the mare is truly an Arabian, there is clearly not an issue with producing “bastard breeds” at this time.³⁶ Poland is covered by a “gray Turke,” Bay Denmarke by the “white Gennett”; Turk, “a blew Roand mare” is covered by “Ambling Courser” and so on.³⁷ There is another “Arrabian,” a bay mare, which “folled a sorrell horse Colte, and was covered againe by bay Barbara.”³⁸

The Hampton Court Stud records for 1623 suggest that at this most royal of studs, many of the horses are bred only to horses of similar “breed.” This had theoretically been the case with the Gonzaga family, although as Tonni points out, the reality may have been more expedient.³⁹ At Hampton Court, Spanish mares are covered by Jennets, Barbs are covered by Barbs, and so on. However, there are a few whose ancestry is not clear, and thus it is not known whether this applies, such as “(t)he Bay mare that George Armstrong kept, was covered with the great bay Jennett

³² Ibidem.

³³ John Stow and Edmund Howes, *Annales, or a General Chronicle of England*, (London: Richard Meighen, 1634), 821.

³⁴ Prior, *Royal Studs*, 39.

³⁵ See Miriam A. Bibby, “Arabians in the Architecture,” *Cbeiron* 1/1 2021, 129-130.

³⁶ Prior, *Royal Studs*, 66. This was a concern of some commentators, such as Holinshed and Harrison. Raphael Holinshed, *The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande*, Volume 1 (London: George Bishop, 1587), 219; William Harrison, *Description of England* (New York: The Folger Shakespeare Library & Dover Publications, 1994), 308.

³⁷ Prior, *Royal Studs*, 67.

³⁸ Ibidem, 68.

³⁹ Tonni, “Renaissance Studs,” 265.

the last daie of April, 1623.⁴⁰ In contrast, at Tutbury Race in 1624 there is a similar mix of names and types to Malmesbury, with several mares covered by “the Ambling Courser Digby”⁴¹ and six mares, Black bullion, Bay Brilladore, Bay Polonia with a streak, Gray Trugg, Black Ginnet, and bright bay Trugg, all covered “in hand” by an unnamed “Arabian Colt.”⁴² Sires also include a dark grey Barbery, a “white frensh horse,” a grey courser, and a “Spanish Ginnet.”⁴³ It is not clear in what relation, if any, the “Arabian colt” stands to Markham’s Arabian. During the early part of James VI/I’s reign over his new kingdoms, he not surprisingly received various gifts of horses. He was sent Neapolitan horses as gifts from Archduke Albert as early as 1605.⁴⁴ He had received horses from Elizabeth while he was still James VI of Scotland, and his officials wrote to say how much he appreciated the gift.⁴⁵

There is some documentation relating to potential imports during this period, viz. a bill from Sir George Digby, Ambassador at Madrid, who in 1617 was authorised to draw a sum of £750 from the Treasury (a fairly unusual action for an ambassador) to purchase horses in Italy. He subsequently put in a bill for the purchase of four horses, described only by colour and cost, of £1420.16. What happened to these horses, and whether they even arrived safely, we do not know. They are all described simply as “horses,” which does not suggest breeding stock.⁴⁶ Prior also notes the arrival of “half a dozen Barbary horses” the previous year imported by Sir Thomas Edmonds.⁴⁷ Whether this was another Marseilles selection is unclear.

Better evidence for imported horses survives from the journey of Charles (then Crown Prince) and George Villiers across Europe in 1623 to court, unsuccessfully, the Spanish Infanta. However, King James VI/I, waiting in London for news of their adventure, was far more interested in some promised exotics, including camels, elephants, and colourful birds, for his menagerie at the Tower. Buckingham replied preemptorily to his “dear dad” that he had sent some elephants and camels, along with some asses, and was on the lookout for the birds, “but if you do not send your

⁴⁰ Prior, *Royal Studs*, 41. It is perhaps worth noting that Armstrong is an Anglo-Scottish border name, and that the Armstrongs were a powerful reiving family with a high reputation for horsemanship. In the days of the infamous Johnnie Armstrong, they were said to be able to put 3,000 men into the saddle. Border families had power, status, and wealth, and they not only needed horses for raiding, but also keenly participated in and enjoyed horse racing. A well-known comment attributed to Elizabeth about “The Bauld Buccleuch,” the Warden of the West March and Keeper of Liddesdale, suggests that “with ten thousand such men, James VI could shake any throne in Europe.” This reveals the potential strength and threat of the border families, both English and Scottish. See George MacDonald Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets* (London: Harper Collins, 1971), 343.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 48. Bauld in this instance is bold, not white-faced, as indicated in descriptions of horses! So Buccleuch is “the bold Buccleuch,” famed for his warlike nature and activities.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 48. “Trugg” was an alternative term for whore, which gives additional insight into how at least some of the mares were viewed at this time.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 49.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 73.

⁴⁵ See Bibby, *Invisible Ancestor*, for details of horse exchange between England and Scotland at this time.

⁴⁶ Prior, *Royal Studs*, 73. It is also interesting that he was requested to purchase horses in Italy, rather than Spain, where he was located, as this might suggest additional value was put on the Italian horses.

⁴⁷ Prior, *Royal Studs*, 73.

babie jewels enough, I'll stop all other presents. Therefore louke to it."⁴⁸ Horses of the famed Cordovan breed were sent to England by the King of Spain, and some mules, and a letter from Buckingham to one shipmaster suggests the number of horses in one shipment from San Sebastian was to be in the region of thirty to thirty-five horses.⁴⁹ It should also be noted that it was not just a one way trade. James sent "twelve pacing nags" to the King of Spain, which, given that these were a speciality of both England and Scotland, were a popular choice as gifts to rulers overseas.⁵⁰ Work in recent years by Juan Carlos Altamirano suggests a good trade in "hackneys," which may well have included gaited horses, from London's Smithfield Market to Spain in the sixteenth century.⁵¹ A further gift of Barb horses from Morocco to James was discovered by Prior in the Gawdy papers.⁵²

However, in summary of all the imports, "(i)t is not known to which of the Royal studs these horses were distributed, but it is certain some of their descendants would have been amongst the magnificent stud that Cromwell's officers dispersed at Tutbury in 1650, and were the ancestors of the earliest recorded mares of the *General Stud-book*."⁵³ This may have been an assumption on Prior's part, as we shall see. Other than the preceding exchanges, and a few other reports, as Prior puts it: "(b)eyond a visit from James I to Tutbury in 1619, and that Charles I also was there in 1636, nothing can be learnt as to the progress of the Royal Stud since the death of the Duke of Buckingham in 1628, till its final dispersal by order of the Commonwealth."⁵⁴

V. The studs of Charles I: enter J.P. Hore

It is thus clear that imported mares existed as broodmares in the studs of English rulers well before the days of Charles II, though how many is unclear. Now, we return to the evidence for the reign of his father Charles I. It should be noted that a substantial part of what we know about the mares and other horses in his studs is provided by unreliable commentator J.P. Hore, whose creation of one enduring legend, that of the non-existent racing Arab horses of Septimius Severus, is analysed elsewhere.⁵⁵ Indeed, Hore's volumes on Newmarket are cited as the source of C.M. Prior's original awareness of the inventories of King Charles I's horses, which were produced by assessors along with other lists of "the late king's goods" after the

⁴⁸ Caroline Grigson, *Menagerie: The History of Exotic Animals in England 1100 – 1837* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 22.

⁴⁹ Prior, *Royal Studs*, 75

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 74.

⁵¹ Juan Carlos Altamirano, *Historia y Origen del Caballo Español/History and Origins of the Spanish Horse*. (Málaga: np., 2005), 23.

⁵² Prior, *Royal Studs*, 74.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 76.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 52.

⁵⁵ Miriam A. Bibby, "Mist on the Border: The Emperor Severus and the Netherby Arabians that never were," *The Liminal Horse: Equitation and Boundaries* ed. Rena Maguire and Anastasija Ropa (Budapest: Trivent Publishing, 2021), 277-308.

regicide.⁵⁶ The aim was to produce a valuation of everything the king had possessed with the intention of selling or otherwise redistributing his former belongings. Prior acknowledges his debt to Hore, pointing out however that Hore had erroneously given the year of the inventory as 1643, when the king was still alive, rather than its correct date of 1649 after his death. The G.S.B. of 1891, suggested Prior, had simply copied this error.⁵⁷ As far as the list goes, copies of which by his own account Hore had access to in the Public Record Office and House of Lords, Hore's work is apparently largely reliable, although the same cannot be said of his commentary, as will shortly be revealed.

Both Hore and Prior provide the full itinerary of the Tutbury (Tutbury) Race (ie, stud) of Charles I in their works. The itinerary includes horses, mares, colts, and fillies, some of the mares with foals at foot. Other than the colts of three and under, which would likely not have yet been gelded, there is nothing to indicate that any animal is a stallion. Each entry is numbered. There are a few differences between Hore's list and that of Prior: Hore's entry after one "Morocco" description is followed by 9) One brown bay Mare with a starre two white heels behind, 12 years old, with a horse foal, and 9a) One black Mare without white 7 yeares with a horse Colt.⁵⁸ The same entry in Prior is numbered 9) and 10).⁵⁹ There does not appear to be any connection between the 9) and 9a) mares – they are different animals and the "Morocco" description/name only applies to the first. Due to this, the numbering is different between Hore's and Prior's accounts. Number 14, Fantus-Whitenose, in Prior, is referenced as 13, Fant-Whitenose in Hore.⁶⁰ This may reflect differences between two original sources, which the author of this paper has not yet had the opportunity to view. Hore also states that apart from the Public Record Office and House of Lords copies, the information is "supplied in another manuscript among the Marquis of Salisbury's manuscripts at Hatfield, which we have not seen."⁶¹ Prior, like Hore, appears to have seen both the Public Record Office and House of Lords versions. The minor discrepancies between the Hore and Prior renderings remain currently unresolved. The total value of the mares is the same in both documents, according to Prior.

Some of the horses are described in the itinerary under various names/descriptions including Spaniard, Newcastle, New Castle, sometimes with colour prefix, such as Black Morocco, Browne Newcastle, as well as Lenox, Frisell,

⁵⁶ Neither of two volumes on the itineraries of the king's goods refers to the Tutbury itinerary, despite putting equestrian portraits of King Charles I on the cover of both books. Arthur MacGregor ed. *The Late King's Goods* (London and Oxford: Alistair McAlpine in association with Oxford University Press, 1989); Jerry Brotton, *The Sale of the Late King's Goods: Charles I and his Art Collection* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Macmillan, 2006). MacGregor provides a list of the king's property but Tutbury is not included, as it was not, as noted earlier, the personal property of the king.

⁵⁷ Prior, *Royal Studs*, 102.

⁵⁸ J. P. Hore, *The History of Newmarket and the Annals of the Turf: With Memoirs and Biographical Notices of the Habitues of Newmarket, and the Notable Turfites from the Earliest Times to the End of the Seventeenth Century*, Volume II: *From the Accession of Charles I to 32 Charles II, AD 1624-1680* (London, A.H. Baily and Co, 1886), 163.

⁵⁹ Prior, *Royal Studs*, 57

⁶⁰ Hore, *Newmarket* Volume II, 163.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 161.

Sorrell Fennick, Carleton (or Carelton), Rupert, Bowland, and so on. These are capitalised in Prior but not in Hore. Only 46 of the 100 or so horses listed are described in this way, however. The rest are simply numbered and then described by colour, age, markings, whether colt, filly, mare, or horse, and value. A few things are worthy of note: the relatively high proportion of Newcastle/New Castle mares, the references to Fennick (Fenwick) mares, and, of course, the Morocco mare listings. There are four; they are Young Morocco mare, a bay, 4 years old; two described as Black Morocco mare, one five years old and the other a 10-year-old; and Morocco, a brown bay 12 years old. All these mares have foals at foot apart from the older Black Morocco. There is also Morocco, a browne bay horse, “5 yeares old.”⁶²

VI. The alterations of J.P Hore

The Newcastle and Fennick mares, reasonably enough, can be viewed as either acquired from, or descending from horses produced at the stables of well-known equestrians, William Cavendish, the Duke of Newcastle, and the Fenwicks of Wallington Hall in Northumberland, an Anglo-Scottish border family with a great reputation for both horses and hospitality, and sometime Masters of the King’s Horse. While Cavendish credited the Fenwick success to the use of Barbs, as border administrators and Wardens of the March it is plausible that the Fenwicks had relatively easy access to the racing Galloways and Hobbies that had also been famed for their speed since the days of Henry VIII, as noted earlier. Horse racing was a hugely popular sport along both sides of the border in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and had clearly been so since the days of Henry VIII, as the reference to “Scottish running horses” shows.⁶³

In acknowledging the contribution of the Newcastle and Fenwick bred, or produced, horses, J.P. Hore pulls off another sleight of hand worthy of his tall tale about Septimius Severus. Averring that “(i)t is evident some of Sir John Fenwick’s famous Arabian ‘race’ were introduced into the royal racing stud, as we find lot 25 is entered thus: ‘Sorrel Fennick, one Sorrel mare with a blaze, 9 years old, with a mare foal, £18’,” Hore creates an imaginary Arabian stud for the Fenwicks in much the same way he created the imaginary racing Arabians of Septimius Severus.⁶⁴ That is, simply by saying they were Arabians. Since the only documented Arabian in the country in the reign of either James VI/I or Charles I was the Markham Arabian, bought by James VI/I from John, or possibly Gervase, Markham in 1616, the likelihood of the Northumbrian Fenwicks having a purely Arabian breeding “race” is inordinately low. The Frisell horses listed in the Tutbury itinerary are potentially more plausibly offspring of the Markham Arabian, since it is alleged by Hore that the Markham Arabian sired a son called Frisell.⁶⁵ (Possibly the “Arabian colt” listed in the 1624 stud documents, cited earlier, although no other sources for this have been seen.)

⁶² Prior, *Royal Studs*, 58; Hore, *Newmarket* Volume II, 166.

⁶³ Further information can be found in Bibby, *Invisible Ancestor*, forthcoming.

⁶⁴ Hore, *Newmarket* Volume II, 160.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 161.

The issue remains that there are no documentary sources indicating that either stallion had any lasting influence on breeding. Also, since the Moroccan and Spanish horses are identified as such in the itinerary, would it not make sense for any Arab horses, particularly given their rarity and exoticism, to be described in a similar way? “Fenwick’s Sorrel Arabian” would not be an unreasonable description. The fact is, there were no exclusively “Arabian” races (studs) in the country at that time, since there were very few Arabians, possibly only one or two stallions, and a similar number of mares, if indeed the mares named “Arrabian” are Arabians at Hampton Court in 1620. How likely is it that in a country where there are only three to four potential Arabians in the most prestigious stud of the king, any non-Royal horse breeder would have an entire Arabian stud?

However, as if that were not sufficient of an eye-stretcher, Hore then comments: “(s)o also with the celebrated Arab stud maintained about this time, and subsequently after the Restoration, at Welbeck Abbey by the Duke of Newcastle, as indicated by lots 2, 3, 6, 18, 22, 26, 59, 61, 96, 98, and 99, by which we may infer (taken with other corroboratory evidence) that the royal mares in King Charles’s stud were occasionally served by stallions belonging to those notable breeders in the seventeenth century.”⁶⁶

A Civil War/Commonwealth-period Arab stud, maintained by the same William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle (1592-1676) who spent much of the period abroad in relative penury? The same William Cavendish who once commented that he had only ever seen one Arabian, that it had failed spectacularly as a racer, that ridiculous prices were asked for unprovenanced animals called Arabians, and that he could buy a nag with as good qualities for £10?⁶⁷ Cavendish also consistently maintained that Barbs and Spanish horses were the horse of choice for a gentleman, and his books contain next to no references to Arabian horses, and that only hearsay, and do not even include them in the indices. The same William Cavendish who, a little later in the text, Hore refers to as follows: “As for Arabian horses, his grace seems to have had very little practical knowledge or experience. He merely refers to the reputation of the breed; that some of those horses were bought at £1000, £2000 and £3000, which he apostrophises an ’Intollerable, and an Incredible Price;’ that they were exceedingly careful in breeding and recording the pedigrees of their famous studs; and that the only Arab horse he ever saw was that bought from John Markham by King James I., which he terms a poor specimen, and when trained was unsuccessful on the Turf?”⁶⁸ Cavendish commented that the reports of the Arab breeding records were “as they say,” and his words about the phenomenal prices of Arabians date no earlier than 1658, when his *New Method* was published. Since this was still Commonwealth era,

⁶⁶ Ibidem, 160.

⁶⁷ Cavendish, *New Method*, 66. It should also be said that in June 1666 William Cavendish published a set of racing rules for Worksop races, which he organised to be run from May to September. These reveal the depth of his interest in the sport. One comment is extremely revealing: “And because the best Horses being at this time of Year Usually set down, it was first intended onely for Buck Hunting Nagg; But his Grace now excepts against none.” Prior, *Early Records*, 110. In other words, the connection between horses for coursing and racing is once again evident, and the “buck hunting nags” are fit during that season, but any comer is welcome to enter any horse to race. There is no indication that there are horses being bred only with racing in mind.

⁶⁸ Hore, *Newmarket* Volume II, 190..

and Cromwell had attempted to import Arabians, as will be shown in part 2 of this series, this may simply be a dig at the Lord Protector's gullibility and profligacy.

Indeed, the impossibility of an Arabian stud is emphasised by the writing of Cavendish's wife Margaret. In her biography of the Duke she writes of the loss of all his lands and belongings during the wars, itemising the types of horses he owned: "all this stock was lost, besides his race of horses in his grounds, grange horses, hackney-horses, manage horses, coach-horses and others he kept for his own use."⁶⁹ Cavendish was engaged in extensive law-suits and other activities to regain his property, but since all his home-bred horses were lost, there was no alternative but restocking when it came to "the setting up a race or breed of horses, as he had before the wars; for which purpose he hath bought the best mares he could get for money."⁷⁰ Margaret Cavendish confirmed that his interest was chiefly in Barbs and Spanish horses for the manège: "of all sorts of horses, my Lord loved Spanish horses and barbs best; saying, that Spanish horses were like princes, and barbs like gentlemen, of their kind. And this was the chief recreation and pastime my Lord had in Antwerp."⁷¹

Manipulating the evidence to claim he had Arabians, Hore had merged the seventeenth century non-Arabian horse owning, and even Arabian-sceptic Duke, William Cavendish, with an entirely different Duke of Newcastle, who did keep Arabians at Welbeck Abbey, but not until the period 1700-1711. Nor does Hore provide any other "corroboratory evidence." The owner of the eighteenth-century stud, John Holles, the 1st Duke of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the second creation of the title, was not a tail male descendant of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, whose male line became extinct on the death of his son in 1691. The details of the stud maintained by Holles, with its references to Great and Little Arab stallions, is provided in Prior, *Early Records of the Thoroughbred Horse*.⁷² Unfortunately, in this volume, which was published in 1924, eleven years before his publication on the Royal Studs, and clearly inspired by J.P. Hore since he cites him, Prior enthusiastically asserts that the Newcastle horses in the inventory of Charles I "were derived from the famous Arabian Stud maintained at Welbeck Abbey by William Cavendish, who attained world-wide celebrity as an author and stud owner, and as an exponent of the *haute école*..."⁷³ Had Prior stopped to think, and recall what he had actually read in

⁶⁹ Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, *The Life of William Cavendish Duke of Newcastle to which is added the true relation of my birth, breeding, and life*, (London: John C. Nimmo, 1886), 152. Grange horses are farm horses, and "manage" an alternative spelling for manège.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, 153.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 102.

⁷² Prior, *Early Records*, 116-125. There are no Arabians listed in 1700, only mares bred to Spanish horses. The descriptions of the horses are otherwise made by colour, or whether they are geldings, mares, colts, or fillies. One entry relates that the Duke had paid 80 guineas for three "breed" mares from Darcy. Prior brackets the "breed" thus, as [thoroughbred] but "breed" in this instance is surely simply an alternative for "brood"? The first reference to Arabians occurs in 1705, in relation to foals from mares bred to the Pagett Arabian, therefore possibly not even a horse owned by the Duke. The Little Arab only appears in 1708.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, 99.

William Cavendish's books, and knew of his life, he would have seen the impossibility of the Arabian stud.

And this is why Hore's dating of the itinerary to 1643 is unlikely to be an error, but a quite deliberate piece of misinformation. It was necessary to fix an earlier date, during the king's lifetime, in order to make a plausible case for the mares having been covered by the imaginary "Arab" stallions of the Duke and the Fenwicks. Since conflict in the War of the Three Kingdoms had effectively begun in 1642, that was the latest year that it would have been possible for any normal breeding to take place. The ages of the aforementioned lots are 7, 6, 6, 5, 7, 8, 6, 5, 5, and 5, meaning the youngest were born in 1644 and the oldest in 1641.

Hore makes the date clear in his publication, stating that the commissioners arrived at Tutbury in 1643, but then includes a key piece of information that gives the game away – the king is already dead: "We are unable to say precisely when the royal stud at Tutbury, in Staffordshire, fell into the hands of the Parliamentarians, but it must have been some time prior to July, 1643, as on the 23rd of that month four Government commissioners, viz., Mildemay, Lemprière, Carteret, and Grafton arrived at Tutbury, for the purposes of making a true inventory of the racehorses kept there, 'being part of the late king's personal estate'."⁷⁴

In confirmation that the choice of date was deliberate and not simply an error, he continues: "Upon the whole, this itinerary, though imperfectly and carelessly drawn up, proves that the principal, and probably the subordinate lots at the royal stud, immediately prior to the year 1643, were derived from and represented in the Arab blood which was deemed indispensable by the best breeders of those days."⁷⁵ Then, a page later, he reverts to the truth: "Such was the state of Charles I.'s stud at Tutbury when the subjoined inventory was finished, July 27, 1649."⁷⁶ Thus the 1643 date was essential to "prove" that the Duke and the Fenwicks had Arab horses that could cover the king's mares. There were two acts that enabled the commissioners to assess and subsequently sell the king's goods; the first was passed in 1649, therefore there was no legislation prior to this date to allow the seizure of items. The horses were among property "not to be sold."⁷⁷ Plus, there is nothing to indicate that the horses kept at Tutbury were specifically kept for horse racing, which is therefore another "suggestion" by Hore. Like his impossible Bede and Septimius Severus stories, discussed elsewhere, possibly we are invited to spot the cards at play in this pack of incompatible facts.⁷⁸

Why did Prior not challenge this? Prior simply stated the date was "a slip of the pen" on Hore's part, when everything points to it having been deliberate, especially as he uses it not once, but twice. Perhaps when Prior made the following comment, describing Hore's *Annals of the Turf* as "a marvel of research, which cannot fail to excite the admiration of everyone interested in the past history of our National Sport"

⁷⁴ Hore, *Newmarket* Volume II, 160.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 161.

⁷⁷ Oliver Millar, "The Inventories and Valuations of the King's goods 1649-1651," *The Volume of the Walpole Society* 43, 1970-1972, xvi.

⁷⁸ Bibby, "Mist on the Border," 277-308.

his tongue was straying inexorably into his cheek.⁷⁹ The only conclusions that can be drawn from the itinerary are that four mares from Morocco, or at least descendants of presumably Barb horses, existed in the stables of Charles I at the time of the regicide, and that the horses of (presumably) the Duke of Newcastle and the Fenwicks were popular with royalty. Since the Commonwealth commissioners were thorough in their assessment of the “late king’s goods,” covering every single area of the king’s interests, from artwork to horses to the pots and pans in his kitchen, if there had been other horses of value belonging to the king, the commissioners would surely have found them out and listed them. And so these four mares, assumed to be Barbs on the basis of their name/description, along with the horses of Spanish origin, provide the only proof of possible imports, or descendants of imports at this time in the royal stud.

As with his Septimius Severus story, of which this is almost a direct repeat, Hore’s confection about Arabian studs and racing had lasting consequences. These consequences are the focus of the next part of this study of the Royal Mares.

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⁷⁹ Prior, *Early Records*, 102. It should also be noted that Hore included a list of Additions and Corrections for all three volumes in the third volume of his *Newmarket* series but did not correct this date. J.P. Hore, *History of Newmarket and the Annals of the Turf* Volume III (London: A.H. Baily and Co, 1886), 381.

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