

The Spanish Andalusian Demystified

By Sarah Gately-Wilson

The history of the Spanish horse, often referred to as the Andalusian, is shrouded with legends and myths that today cause controversy and in the extreme cases, death threats! Some of the stories about these Spanish horses involve his creation and development as a breed, his name, and those who owned and bred him. Here are the stories of the horses, their roots in history, and those who have dared to demystify them!

The Naming of the Horse

In medieval times there existed the Spanish custom of naming horses from where they originated, or were bred. Horses bred in the region of Spain known as Extremadura were called Extremeno, horses from Galicia were called Gallego, and amongst others, the horses from Andalucia, were called Andalusian. As time past and the custom and reasoning of the names became confused, all horses from Spain were called Andalusian, by both other countries and the other regions in Spain. Today, the name Andalusian elicits images of beautiful dappled grey and white horses with long flowing manes and tails, dancing elevated movements.

In 1911 Spain organized its first stud book for these horses. It was published in 1913. At this time the official name for the horse of Pure Spanish descent became Pura Raza Espanola, which translates to Pure Spanish Race. They chose this name to give equality to all of the breeders in Spain and around the world, not just those of Andalucia. However, easier to say, more romantic, and widely known, the name Andalusian is often used to refer to these horses.



Painting by Jose Manuel Gomez depicting an Iberian horse with the monks.

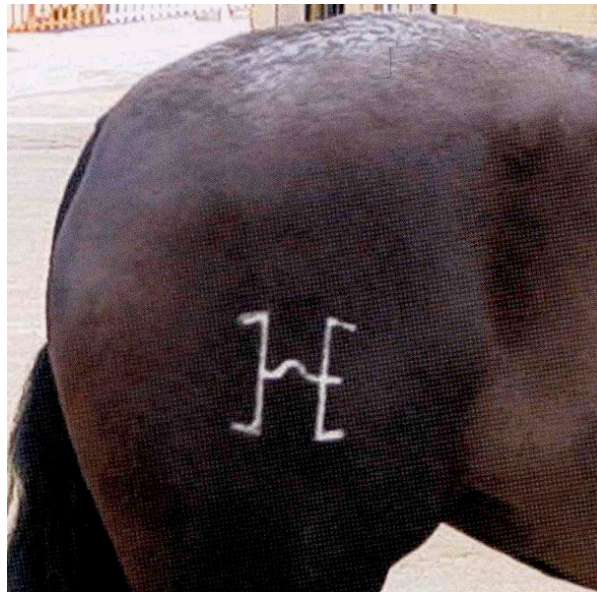
The Horses of Cartujano

In recent years the historian Juan Carlos Altamirano has written several books on the history of the Spanish horses. He has looked deeply into some of the old stories and legends in regards to the origin of the Spanish horse, and according to records of breeders and governments, has demystified the breed. Altamirano has researched the creation of the Pure Spanish Horse as we see him today, and the origin of the Bocado line of Spanish horses, a bloodline of which it is said that 60% of all of today's Spanish horses can be traced back to! Both of these involve the legend of the Carthusian horses as bred by the monks in the 1400s and 1500s.

One version of the Carthusian story begins in the 1400s, when the Spanish military instructed all breeders to breed their Andalusian mares to heavier drafts to produce a horse able to carry the rider in his heavy armour into battle. The story continues with a small group of breeders who secretly refused these orders and instead hid their prized horses away in the monastery at Cartujano under the care of the Carthusian monks. For centuries, the spectacular Spanish horse has been credited to the selective and careful breeding of the Carthusian monks. The story of the Bocado horses follows the legend of the Carthusian monks. Around 1835, the government dissolved the land holdings of the monastery and the horses were placed with select families of breeders. It is said that Pedro Jose Zapata started his herd with many of these Carthusian horses and that they are the foundation of the Bocado line.

The Origin of the Spanish Horse and the Bocado Brand

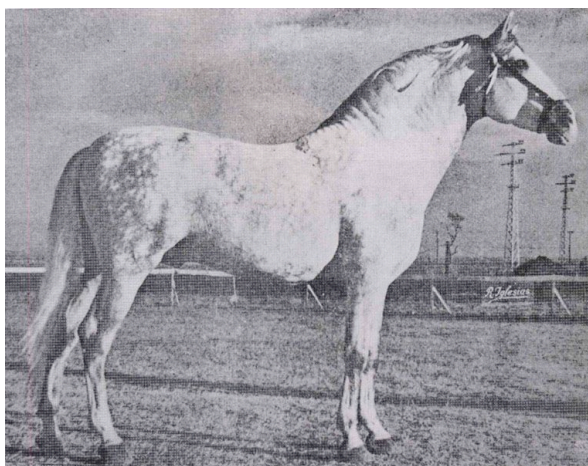
The research of Altamirano is based on the establishment of the Royal Stables of Cordoba in 1567 under the decree of King Philip of Spain. Altamirano's research shows that King Philip initiated the development of the Pure Spanish horse as he is today, not the Carthusian monks. Approximately 80% of the breed is dappled grey because that was the color prized by the court. King Philip also sought to produce a horse with elevated, dancing movement, an abundant mane and tail, capable of the airs above the ground and other high school movements. These are the central characteristics attributed to the Spanish Horse today. Altamirano further says that it was from the fine horses of Cordoba that the Bocado line originated.



The original Bocado brand in the shape of a curb bit.

The Zapata family is renowned for their Bocado horses, called Bocado because of their brand, a curb bit. The empire was created around 1750 when the Zapata and Coronado families were joined in marriage and continued until the 1850s when the brand and the stock was sold to Vincente Romero Garcia, who added a “C” brand to his stock next to the plain curb bit. Garcia became an important breeder in the Bocado line as he carefully selected, culled, and outcrossed the horses seeking to improve his herd. In his time he was very successful in horse shows and was well respected among the other breeders.

In the 20th century, the most distinct names among the Bocado breeders include Roberto Osborne Vasquez, Fernando and Isabel Terry, and most recently the Yeguada del Hierro del Bocado. In 1937 Osborne purchased the Bocado brand with the “C”, it was then sold to the Terry family in 1949. Two of the most famous stallions associated with the Terry family are Poseido IV and Bilbaino III. Bilbaino III can be found in countless pedigrees of the Spanish horse, including many owned by the Guardiola and Cardenas breeders. In 1983 the Spanish state took control of the Terry Family vineyards and livestock and in 1985 the livestock was separated. Today the Bocado brand is still under the control of the state. The Yeguada del Hierro del Bocado is located in Andalucia, southwest of Jerez de la Fronera and uses the original Bocado brand: the plain curb bit.



Left: Bilbaino III Right: Poseido IV

The history of the Bocado brand is traced through the careful records of the breeders from the time of the Zapata brothers. The written history shows that Zapata did not found his herd with horses from the Carthusian Monastery, though he did have a few, about 12 mares, though they were not considered significant in his herd. To some, the legend of the Carthusian horses is of great importance, enough to cause death threats to be sent to Altamirano. The research he produced on these horses has been well received. Altamirano’s work on the origin of the Pure Spanish horse being created by King Philip has infinitely more opponents, not because they believe the horse was created by the monks, but because they feel the horse’s roots go much deeper, into the land that is Iberia. In the words of renowned breeder Jaime Guardiola “The Andalusian horse is a product of the land...and more from here in Andalucia and the salt marshes.”