

Donna Landry: *Caravane Maritime: Equine & Equestrian Perspectives*

What can we learn from studying a certain Mediterranean trafficking in horseflesh?

The trade in equine bloodstock between Britain and the Ottoman Empire was to prove crucial to the development of early modern English culture. Between 1650 and 1750, more than two hundred horses of Eastern blood were imported into the British Isles from ports in the Ottoman Empire and the regencies of North Africa. Their arrival, usually on Levant Company ships, changed ideas about equine capabilities, as well as racing, riding, and painting. The glowing heart of England's green and pleasant land was thus transformed from within by an alien incursion from the East.

From the Portland Papers held at the British Library and University of Nottingham Library, we can learn a great deal about this trade and its effects on horsemanship in Britain, as well as begin to compare Eastern and Western philosophies of the proper relations between homo sapiens and equus caballus. Ideas of equine purity, beauty, and utility changed, as did notions of pedigree-keeping and theories of the efficacy of leniency versus cruelty in breaking, training, and grooming. These papers of Levantine merchants, stewards of great estates, and landowners, who hoped to breed a fine 'race' of 'through-bred' or 'thoroughbred' horses from Eastern strains, constitute a rich repository of early modern East-West cultural exchanges both metaphorical and material.

By the later nineteenth century, the Eastern blood horse had been fully incorporated into English life, but geopolitical changes, and imperial interest in the Great Game, gave English horse fanciers a renewed interest in retracing and re-appropriating the Eastern bloodlines that had contributed so much to the genetic matrix of the Thoroughbred. The voluminous diaries and papers of Lady Anne Blunt at the British Library contain extraordinary evidence of one woman's unlearning of English prejudice in favour of Bedouin understanding of the blood horse, and of related codes of purity, nobility, honour, courage, and loyalty. The Blunts' (Lady Anne's and her husband Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's) travels began with visits to France and Madeira, and a riding holiday in Spain, and progressed to more ambitious mounted expeditions in Anatolia, Algeria, Greater Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, culminating in important published books. The unpublished diaries supplement the published books in interesting ways, and, taken together, constitute a wide-ranging source of evidence and commentary on the Mediterranean as a cultural entity, on Anglo-Ottoman, Anglo-Arab, and Anglo-Muslim relations, and on East-West cultural exchanges during a politically charged and influential moment in the unfolding of the modern Mediterranean and modern Middle East.

Both moments of archival richness—the early modern Levantine horse trade of 1650-1750, and the 1870s-1890s moment of Lady Anne and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's desert explorations and search for the legendary origins of the Thoroughbred—indicate how the Eastern blood horse functioned as a largely peaceful currency of exchange within imperial rivalries, as well as a shared obsession of both East and West. Equine and equestrian perspectives on the *Caravane Maritime* suggest how Sea Studies and Desert Studies might be developed fruitfully together, given their intersections and cross-fertilisations in the historical record.