Contents

Acknowledgements 8
Preface 9
Introduction 11
The role of horsepower in the evolution of ancient civilizations

PART I WILD HORSES AND ASSES 16

1 The family Equidae 17
Reproduction 19
Teeth and food 20
Behaviour 22
Equids as hunters’ prey at the end of the last ice age 24

2 Wild horses and asses in historic times 26
Wild horses 26
The tarpan, Equus ferus ferus 26
Przewalski’s horse, Equus ferus przewalskii 30
Wild asses 33
The African wild asses, Equus africanus 33
The Asiatic wild asses, Equus hemionus and Equus kiang 36
Feral horses and asses 38

PART II EQUIDS THAT ARE WITHOUT PRIDE OF ANCESTRY OR HOPE OF POSTERITY 41

3 Hybrids and the breeding of mules 42
Hybrid vigour 42
The first ‘mules’ 43
Mules and hinnies 44
Telegony 46
Zebra hybrids 47
The bell-mare 49
Poitou mules 50
The beast of burden 50

PART III HISTORY OF THE DOMESTIC HORSE, DONKEY AND MULE 52

4 The earliest domestication of the horse and the ass 53
The horse 53
The ass 62
5 The first wheeled transport, horse-riding, the stirrup, and nose-slitting 67
  The need for transport and traction 67
  The first carts and waggons 68
  Wheel-making 70
  Harness 71
  Control of the equids 72
  Horseshoes 73
  Horse-riding and the stirrup 73
  Slitting the nostrils of equids 77

6 Equids in ancient Egypt and western Asia, and the enigma of the onager 80
  The enigma of the onager, Equus hemionus. Was it ever domesticated? 87
  Textual evidence for equids in third millennium BC Mesopotamia 89
  The Assyrian palace reliefs 90
  Horses and asses in the Old Testament 92

7 The horses of Scythia and the Orient 96
  Scythian nomads in the first millennium BC 97
  Equids in the Orient 102

8 Equids in the classical world 106
  Cavalry in ancient Greece 107
  Horses in ancient Greek pageantry and sport 112
  Cavalry in ancient Rome 113
  Equids in Roman agriculture and transport 117

9 Equids in the Middle Ages 121
  The horse in feudal Europe 121
  The great raids of the Magyars 124
  The art of venery 124
  The battle of Hastings and the Bayeux tapestry 125
  The Crusades 129
  Genghis Khan (1162–1227) and the Mongol hordes 133
  The travels of Marco Polo (1254–1324) 134
  The economics of horsepower in the Middle Ages 136

Conquest of the Americas 140
  The extinct species 141
  Introduction of the domestic horse 143
  Native Americans become horsemen 144
  Nomadic horsemen in North America 145
  The horsemen of South America 148
  The ethos of the cowboy and the ranch 151
11 Equids in agriculture, transport, exploration, and warfare 154
   Animals for plough and traction AD 1100-1800 154
   The emergence of the heavy draught horse 156
   Working ponies and the horse trade 156
   The age of improvement 158
   Exploration 160
   British cavalry since 1800 162

12 A history of horse-racing 165
   The Homeric chariot race 165
   The Olympic Games 167
   The Roman chariot race 168
   Horse-racing in Britain from AD 1100 to Eclipse 170
   Influence of the Arab and the early Thoroughbreds 172

Conclusions 178

Appendix:
Nomenclature of the family Equidae as used in this book 182

References and publications for further reading 184

Index 189