



# The Magnificent Mule

**University Session #104 - June 13, 2020**

**Class #619, 4:30 to 5:30 PM EST**

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# Course Agenda

- What is a mule?
- Differences between horses and mules
- Advantages of mules over horses
- Mule myths
- Uses of mules today
- Artifacts and art depicting mules and their uses, pre 1600
- Summary



# What is a mule?

Donkey Sire -  
62 chromosomes



Horse Dam -  
64 chromosomes

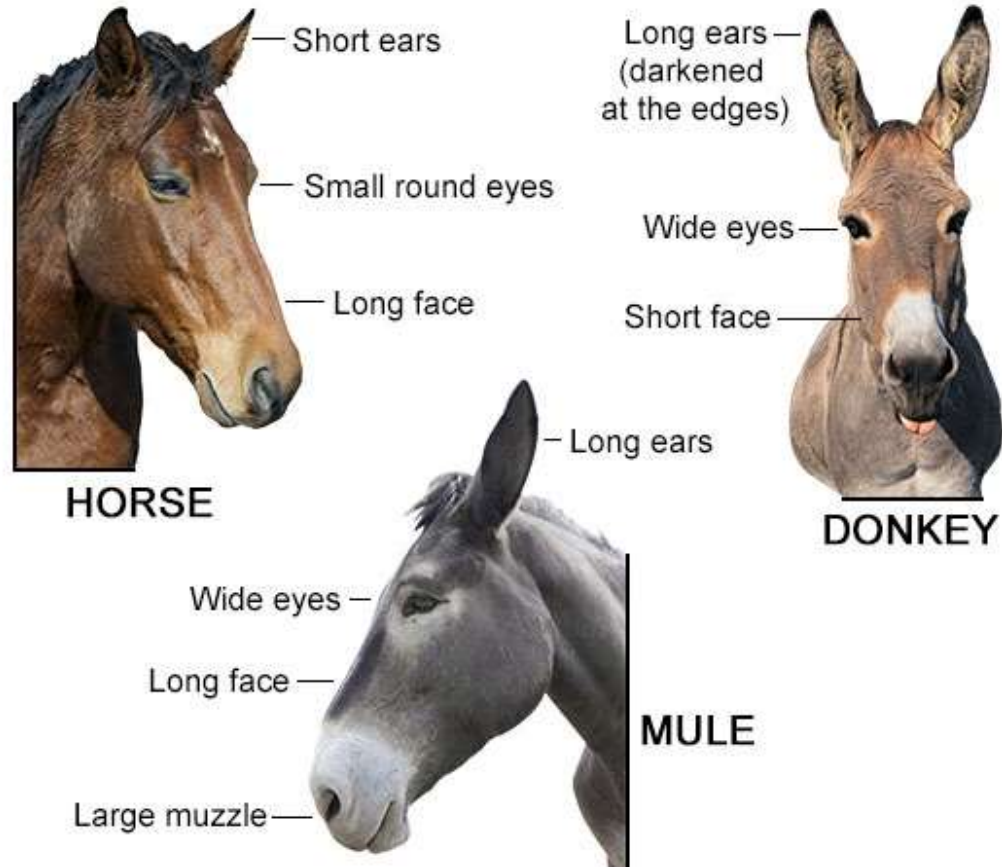


NOTE: A donkey dam and horse sire produce a hinny, which is similar to a mule, but not as popular.



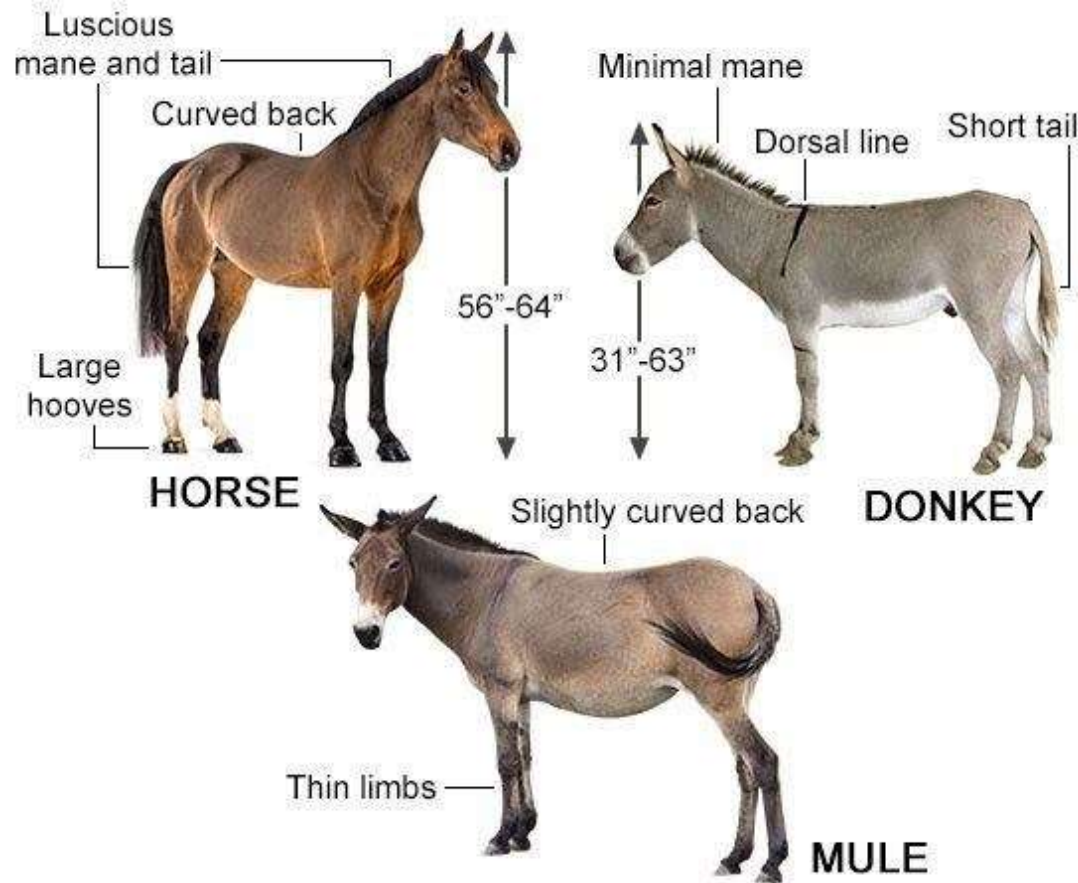
Mule - 63 chromosomes.  
Uneven number results in sterility.

# Facial differences between horse, donkey, & mule



Source: <https://animalsake.com/how-to-differentiate-between-donkey-horse-and-mule>

# Body differences between horse, donkey, & mule



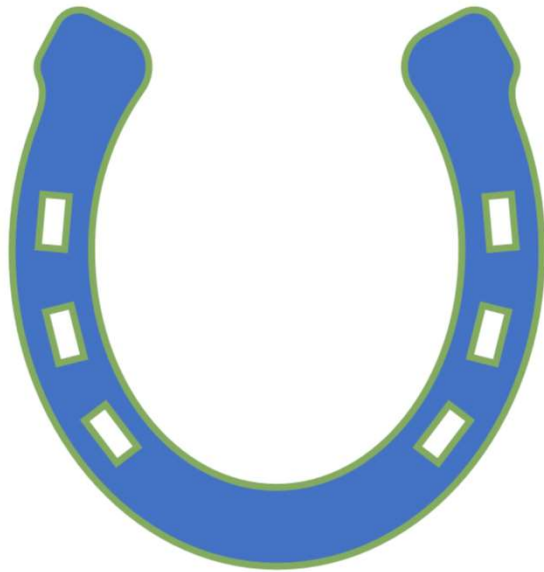
Mules' size, coloring, height, gait, and other characteristics are dependent on the breed of its parents. Just as there are many breeds of horses and donkeys, there are many types of mules, from miniature to draft, and even gaited mules.

Source: <https://www.quora.com/How-do-donkeys-look-like-the-mule>

## Other Differences between horses, donkeys, & mules

	Horse	Donkey	Mule
Fight or Flight instincts	Evolved in Plains areas, strong flight instinct. Tends to run from threats.	Evolved in mountainous areas, strong freeze or fight instinct (used to guard livestock).	Depends on individual mule and situation. Tends to have more fight than flight reaction.
Athletic Ability	Known for speed, grace, and agility.	Known for great stamina, surefootedness, and strength.	Mule inherits best qualities of both parents. Hybrid vigor.
Hooves	Rounder and greater angle. Often shod.	Narrow, oval, more upright posture. Tough hooves. Rarely require shoes.	Rounder than donkey, but still oval. Hooves are tougher than horse. Shoes optional—depends on use and conditions.
Food	Requires good quality hay and grain.	Does not need grain. Can eat larger variety of poorer quality forage (poor quality hay, shrubs, bushes, weeds, etc.)	Eats less than horse. More selective than donkey, but not as picky as horse. Does best on plain oats and very grassy hay.
Lifespan	25-30 years	30-50 years	35-40 years

# Advantages of Mules over Horses



- Pound for Pound, stronger than a horse
- More intelligent
- Longer lifespan
- Hardier/ healthier (hybrid vigor)
- Requires less feed, more cost efficient
- Better suited to hot climates and rugged terrain
- Greater endurance
- More surefooted / tougher hooves
- Will not overwork itself to the point of injury or exhaustion
- Will not overeat
- Less prone to injuries due to strong sense of self preservation



# Mule Myths

Myth	Fact
Mules are Stubborn.	Mules are very smart and have a high sense of self-preservation. If they don't think something's safe, they will refuse to do it. This is overcome by having a good working relationship with and trust in handler.
Mules Can't be Ridden and are only used for packing.	Mules can do everything a horse does, including racing, jumping, working cattle, trail riding, etc.
Mules don't have gender.	Mules can be male or female, but are sterile. Males are gelded, like horses.
Mules and horses don't get along with each other.	Mules love horses and will usually defer to them. After all, their momma was a horse. Horses may be surprised when they first hear a mule bray, but quickly get used to them and they can become great friends.
Mules are a "poor person's" equine, and are only used by those who cannot afford a horse.	Mules are preferred by a variety of people across the socio-economic spectrum.



# What are mules used for today?



Next, let's look at some historical examples found in art and artifacts...

Source: <http://www.nasma.us/Versatility/>

# Mules in the Assyrian Empire

- The Assyrian Empire was a Mesopotamian kingdom that existed between 2500 BC and 609 BC.
- The mule in Assyria was a highly prized animal.
- According to Hittite law, a mule was worth one mina or forty shekels - twice the cost of a horse.
- They were used for packing, and riding.
- The Assyrian state was the first in history to use mules for military purposes.
- They were also associated with royalty; Zimri-Lin, King of Mari is known to have ridden mules.



Example of letters that the mule riders would have been carrying - cuneiform script on clay tablets, sealed within clay envelopes



Wall panel, neo-Assyrian, 645BC-635BC, British museum

- In the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, a communication system was developed that enabled a relay team of military riders (riding only mules) to pass messages quickly and reliably across vast distances.
- See this fascinating lecture for more info: <https://www.coursera.org/lecture/organising-empire-assyrian-way/focus-on-long-distance-communications-EGDPV>
- Source: <http://mulography.co.uk/mules-in-the-assyrian-empire/>

## Ancient Greece



- *A detail from a 6th century BC Caeretan hydria - a type of vase - depicting Hephaestus on a mule. One of the myths around Hephaestus involves him taking revenge against his mother, Hera, by building her a throne which she was unable to get up from once seated. Dionysus eventually went to fetch Hephaestus, got him drunk, and brought him back to Olympus on a mule.*

Source: <http://mulography.co.uk/10-images-of-mules-in-history/>

Source: <http://mulography.co.uk/mules-in-ancient-rome/>

## Ancient Rome

- *Mules were often depicted pulling vehicles.*
- *The mosaics shown here are from the remains of a 1st century bath-house known as the Baths of the Cisiarii in Ostia Antica, Italy.*
- *The mosaic includes the mules' names: Pudes (Modest), Podagrosus (Lame), Barosus (Dainty) and Potiscus (Topsy).*



## Ancient Rome, Continued...



- *1st century mule head, carved in marble. The Romans had a special chariot race for mules. Pliny states that, "They are produced by a union between the mare and the domestic ass; they are swift, and have extremely hard feet".*
- *A 1st century coin, possibly associated with Emperor Vespasian's daughter Domitilla. Emperor Vespasian was nicknamed "Mulio" (Muleteer) after financial difficulties forced him to start trading mules in an attempt to revive his fortune.*



# Islamic World

- A 13th century illustration from *al-Maqāmāt al-ḥarīriyah*, featuring a drum mule in the center of the line-up. Donkeys and mules had a prominent role to play in the medieval Islamic world, and there were three veterinary treatises dedicated entirely to their care.

Source: <http://mulography.co.uk/10-images-of-mules-in-history/>





## Islamic World, Cont...

- A 14th century illustration from the *Siyer-i Nebi*, showing the Prophet Muhammad riding his favorite molly mule, *Duldul*, and being greeted by the Archangel Gabriel.

Source: <http://mulography.co.uk/10-images-of-mules-in-history/>



## 14<sup>th</sup> Century Austria

- A mule is shown in the middle. Note the elaborate bridle fittings.
- Image source: Lilienfeld, Austria, Abbey Library: Codex 151, fol. 157v, around 1350
- Source: <https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/HMMLClrMicr/id/6931/>



# 15<sup>th</sup> Century Germany

- *Detail from a crucifixion painting by Austrian artist, Conrad Laib (1457). The rider is unknown. Perhaps he is a member of the clergy, or a rich benefactor who funded the painting.*



Source: <http://mulography.co.uk/10-images-of-mules-in-history/>



## 15<sup>th</sup> Century Italy

- *Details from two 15th century paintings by Benozzo Gozzoli in the Magi Chapel, Italy.*
- *The top image is from the West Wall fresco and shows either Joseph, Patriarch of Constantinople, or Sigismund, Holy Roman Emperor.*
- *The bottom image is from the East Wall and shows Cosimo de Medici riding his brown mule - a favorite animal of his.*
- *Clergy were often depicted riding mules to show humility.*

Source: <http://mulography.co.uk/10-images-of-mules-in-history/>



## 15<sup>th</sup> Century France

- *Les Tres Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, 1416*
- *The Meeting of the Magi-Represents the legend of the Magi meeting near Jerusalem.*
- *The region of Poitou (west central France) is known for breeding large mules since the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Poitevin mules are known for their size and strength.*



# 16<sup>th</sup> Century England

- *16th century painting of William Cecil, Lord Burghley. William Cecil was an adviser to Elizabeth I.*
- *Contemporary accounts state that he attended her coronation in a carriage pulled by two white mules.*
- *Mules were popular with both the aristocracy and the clergy.*



Source: <http://mulography.co.uk/10-images-of-mules-in-history/>

# 16<sup>th</sup> Century Spain/Portugal

German painter, Christoph Weiditz created a collection of drawings he made of the folk costumes worn by inhabitants of the Iberian peninsula in the early part of the 16th century. (the "Trachtenbuch", 1529). Several of these drawings feature mules.



Source:  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Trachtenbuch\\_des\\_Christoph\\_Weiditz](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Trachtenbuch_des_Christoph_Weiditz)



# Course Summary

- Mules come in many shapes and sizes.
- Mules are extremely versatile, and combine the best traits of both parents.
- Mules have been used since ancient times for farming, transportation of people and goods, and military applications.
- Mules have many advantages over horses, especially in hot and rugged climates, such as those found in Italy, Spain, Portugal, and France (and Atlantia!).
- Mules were used by a variety of people, from farmers, to tradespeople, to clergy, and even nobility.





Thank you for attending!

Questions?

