Excerpts: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on their breeding and racing thoroughbreds

"The year that my father died, he was having remarkable success with the racing operation. As a young man who knew nothing, I found this success daunting. There were a large number of people who had devoted a great deal of time to this activity, people who had been very loyal to my father and my grandfather. My father only owned the operation for three years. He actually inherited most of the key people who had worked over a long period with my grandfather. There was a context of strong human relations and loyalty, and I was genuinely uncomfortable with not respecting that should I have decided not to continue. On the other hand, I imagined that these people might look to me in five years’ time and say: 'How on earth did this happen: we ended in the hands of a twenty-three year-old who doesn't know which end of a horse kicks!'"

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2010 Interview for the book 'A Racing and Breeding Tradition: The Horses of the Aga Khan' by Philip Jodidio (Aiglemont)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9690/

"[M]y activities in the field of private business was the result of mere chance. You may be interested to know for example that I had no choice in owning the horses I own. My father died in a car accident leaving behind him three children, two of whom did not want to continue to breed horses. It was left to me to say whether or not I wished to preserve a family tradition which had been passing from one generation to the next. I did not understand anything in horse-breeding; I thought it was a risk, but I invoked the force of God and I succeeded."
ITV: But do you think there's any resentment amongst your followers, in the Ismaili community, that their leader should be concerning himself with race-horses, race-horse breeding and so on?

Aga Khan: No, I don't think so. I don't think the Ismaili community would resent that the Imam should have a hobby so long as that doesn't impede his work and he doesn't totter in blind drunk after the Darby!

Nicholas Tomalin: Have you come to enjoy it?

Aga Khan: I absolutely do.

Nicholas Tomalin: Why?

Aga Khan: I'll tell you something. I suppose by nature I like creation, and horse-racing is one of the most creative things a man can enjoy. Each year you are creating new racehorses. You're using your knowledge and experience, everything you know about the family and physique of the horses, their aptitudes and their weaknesses, to try and breed better stock. And then you're pitting this stock, the result of your own intelligence and the unknowns of nature, against other people's intelligence.
"I've come to love it [breeding and racing thoroughbreds]. It's so exciting, a constant challenge. Every time you sit down and breed you are playing a game of chess with nature."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2013 Vanity Fair interview with James Reginato (USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10388/

"It's a game of chess with a nature ... you spend a long, long time watching families develop and strengthen. You watch others disappear and weaken. You try to establish the sires that are becoming the dominant sires in the period you are living through.... And then you produce a foal from a mating you have worked out and it goes into training ... and you know it's what you wanted. You know why you did it.

"Maybe over a 20-year period, (he says), the possibilities of logic and reason being right are 50.0001 per cent ... the breeding is fascinating. The management of horses in training is fascinating. The sheer joy of having a good horse, of seeing foals and mares at stud, is something which is totally different from any other activities I have....

"(It is perhaps a measure of the Agha Khan's [sic] love of horses that he refuses to bet on them.) If a big breeder and race horse owner were to start running his stables according to the betting, (he said), you would never see the end of it. It would disrupt all values -- it would disrupt all consistency. I just don't want to run the thing that way. If I have a good horse, I want to run him in the race which is right for him."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1979 The Age Interview with Geoffry Barker (Melbourne, Australia)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10329/

"All those who, like me, are passionate about breeding and racing
thoroughbreds do it for the intrinsic value of the adventure, not the drum [sic] around a major event."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1997 Paris Match Interview (3rd) with Caroline Pigozzi (Paris, France) [Google translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5311/

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Narrator: The Aga Khan normally lives in his house in Paris, he’s got a racing stable a few miles away in Chantilly, and 10 stud farms -- 6 in France and 4 in Ireland. He owns in fact 242 horses -- in this he’s following a family tradition.

Aga Khan: My grandfather’s father had some horses in Persia and my grandfather had some horses in India. But it was only, I think, when he came over to Europe for the first time and then ... in fact it wasn't even the first time, it was later on that he got interested in horse racing and decided to build up a stable. And he build up a stable, which I think was really an extraordinary achievement.

The decision for me to take over the racing establishment was difficult. I have got a lot to do. To take over an establishment which had had immense success and which was as public as horse racing was in itself a worry. I would have preferred not to take over the establishment at all than to take it over and see it dwindle and lose its vigour. So I hesitated. Added to that I had very, very little interest in horse racing. I was educated in Switzerland and in America and hardly ever went to the races at all.

Narrator: However, having decided to take up racing, which seems characteristic of him, but he’s taken it up seriously.

Aga Khan: I really am very interested in horse racing now. I watch it with [the] greatest interest and if I'm not in Paris or in England, or where ever the races are taking place, I'm very upset if I'm not informed with what's going on. But the problem I had, and still have, is that my time for horse racing is limited and I have to fit it into a tight programme of work.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1967 interview for the documentary, ‘Pacemakers: A
"Nor am I ashamed of being the owner of a big racing stable, about which I propose to say something in a later chapter. My family, as I have indicated, have had a long, honourable and affectionate association with horsemanship in all its forms. Had I to contemplate either giving up a considerable number of horses in training or turning the stable into a paying concern, I have no doubt that by selling a considerable proportion of my stock, I could turn it into a paying business any day of the week. Neither my grandfather, my father nor I have ever looked on our racing as simply a money-making matter, but as a sport which, by careful attention and thoughtful administration, could become self-supporting and a permanent source of pleasure not only for ourselves, as owners, but for thousands -- indeed for millions -- who follow our colours on the turf; and we have considered our studs and our training stables as sources of wealth for the countries in which they are maintained and of practical usefulness from the point of view of preserving and raising the standard of bloodstock."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1225/

"My interest in horses, their breeding, training and racing, has been with me all my life and is of course also part of the tradition which I have inherited, the environment in which I was bred. Persian art, in the various exhibitions which have been held in London and elsewhere, has perhaps helped to make the Western public realise the large and important part which sport played in the lives of that old Iranian ruling class whence I am descended. The chase in its many forms was for them not just a distraction; it was a major occupation all their lives; their hounds, their hawks, their horses were the most beautiful, the swiftest and the finest
that they could breed or procure.

"My grandfather in his young manhood, at the court of Fateh Ali Shah, as the favoured son-in-law of that powerful monarch, was as fully absorbed in all the accustomed open-air and athletic sports and pursuits of a sophisticated yet virile society as were any of his contemporaries. After his tribulations and his wanderings ceased and he settled in Bombay, he naturally and happily resumed a way of life not very dissimilar from that which he had known in his youth. And as I have tried to show earlier in this book, such was the atmosphere in which, from the dawning of conscious experience, I spent my childhood and boyhood.

"When my father died he left a large and imposing sporting establishment in being -- hawks, hounds, and between eighty and ninety race horses. A good deal of this establishment my mother naturally pared down, but she kept twenty or thirty of the horses; and throughout my minority these were raced at meetings all over Western India in my name and under my colours. I have earlier given a brief account of some of the successes which I -- and with my cousin and racing partner, Aga Shamsuddin -- enjoyed during those years."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9928/

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Haroon Siddiqui: ... How can he, a heavy hitter himself in the world of horse racing, be a religious leader?

Aga Khan: Horses in no way compromise what I do, (he says with a chuckle. Noting that orthodox Muslims raise the issue of betting, not so much horse-breeding, he adds he does not gamble; others do on his horses). I mean, other people drink, I don't drink. I can hardly be held responsible for other people's habits.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1992 Toronto Star Interview (1st) with Haroon Siddiqui (Toronto, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4527/
See also: His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2010 interview with Philip Jodidio published in the book ‘A Racing and Breeding Tradition: The Horses of the Aga Khan’

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9690/

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