

# Serenity Sonbolah

*If someone assures you that a horse flew, ask what color she was,  
and if you are told chestnut, then believe it.*

*When she flies under the sun, she is the wind....*

*Arab Proverb*

\*Serenity Sonbolah along with two of the other  
Sameh daughters in the Imperial program



■ by *Cynthia Culbertson*

photos by *Gigi Grasso, Scott Trees, Judith Forbis, Johnny Johnston, Jerry Sparagowski, Richard T. Bryant and April Visel*

In ancient Egypt, the seasons corresponded with the cycles of the mighty Nile river which brought life and prosperity to the people through its annual flood. The first season, akhet, was known as the Inundation, when the waters rose and flooded the land beginning in late June. The next season, the Emergence, known as proyet, was the time of plowing and cultivating, when the bounty of the land emerged as precious seedlings rose from the fertile soil. Shomu, the final season, was the Harvest. This was a time to reap the benefits of the annual flood, when the wheat and barley in the fields were heavy with grain, ensuring the Egyptian people would have ample bread and beer for the coming year. The living symbol of this season was the ear of grain, graceful in form and heavy with life, whose name in Arabic is *sonbolah*.

In March of 1967, a chestnut filly was born at the Egyptian Agricultural Society's El Zabraa Stud at Ein Shams, near Cairo. Ironically, she was born in the same time as the ancient Egyptian season of shomu, when the fields were golden with grain ready to be harvested. With her chestnut color, prancing with her tail held high and full of charm, it must have seemed natural to name her for the shaft of grain which represented life and prosperity to her homeland.

*Sonbolah* was the second foal of *Bint Om El Saad*, a *Nazeer* daughter bred by the Royal Agricultural Society who also produced the well-known EAO sire, *Ikhnatoun*. Her sire, *Sameh*, was a grey stallion bred by the *Inshass* Stud. He was known for the smooth bodies and balance of his offspring, and *Sonbolah* was no exception. In tail female she represented the *Kuhailah Rodaniyah* strain through the *Bint Rissala* branch tracing to *Rodania*, a family greatly prized by *Sir Wilfrid* and *Lady Anne Blunt*. They had purchased *Rodania* in the desert on April

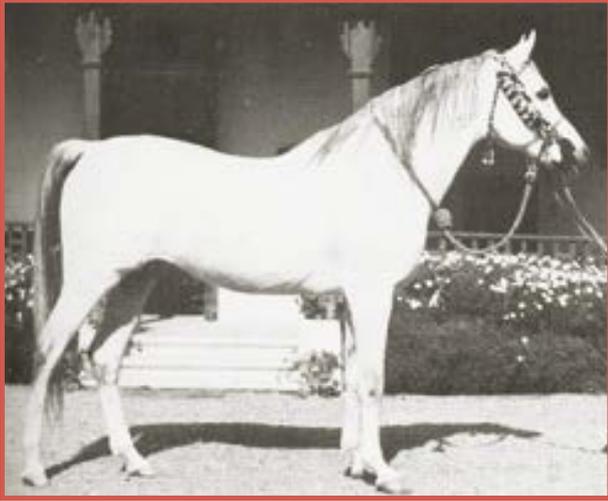


\*Serenity Sonbolah at Imperial Egyptian Stud

12, 1882 from her owner, a member of the *Anazeh* tribe who had acquired her from the *Ruwala Bedouin*. It is likely that *Rodania* herself had been used for the original purpose of the Arabian – as a war horse – since she had a scar on her belly and chest attributed to a wound from a desert raid. *Bint Rissala* (known as “*Razieh*” in Egypt) was purchased from the *Blunt's Crabbet Stud* by the Egyptians, along with *Bint Riyala*. She is the dam of *Yashmak*, *Kateefa*, and *Yaquota*, each of which had a profound influence on modern Egyptian breeding.

The late 1960's and early '70's were a time of landmark importations from Egypt by American breeders who sought to perpetuate this unique blood. Among these visionaries were *Don* and *Judi Forbis* who were living in Egypt at that time, and *Doug* and *Margaret Marshall* of *Gleannloch Farms*. Through a friendship with the Marshalls, *Hansi Heck* of *Serenity Farms*, then located in Canada, arranged to purchase and import five mares in 1968. In the sand paddocks of the EAO, the horses were not fat, sleek and conditioned as we often see them in the modern show world, and it took the eyes of a horseman to evaluate the young stock. *Judi Forbis* remembers walking through the yearling lots of the EAO, along with the Marshalls and their trainers, *Tom* and *Rita McNair*, as the youngsters were selected. “I had seen the young filly many times during my frequent visits to the EAO,” recalls *Judi*, “and she stood out as unique – refined and graceful. Although to look at her then, in minimal condition, it was not easy to envision the exceptional individual she would become when mature.”

Destined to become a star in her new land, the young filly was registered in North America as \*Serenity Sonbolah. Under the ownership of *Serenity Farms* she competed against the best Arabians in the United States and Canada, earning twenty halter championships and the title of U.S. Top Ten Mare in 1970. It was in 1971, however, that \*Serenity



Sameh (El Moez x Samira) represented the Saqlawi strain through the family of El Samraa. He was a sire of excellent broodmares, including \*Serenity Sonbolah



Bint Om El Saad, foaled in 1958, was the dam of \*Serenity Sonbolah and full sister to Rafica. She also produced the well-known EAO stallion Ikhnatoun by \*Farzadac



\*Serenity Sonbolah was captured in bronze by artist Karen Kasper who chose to sculpt her with head held high looking off into the distance, a pose characteristic of this great mare



Artist Karen Kasper posed with \*Serenity Sonbolah at the unveiling of her sculpture in 1988. This is one of the last photos taken of \*Serenity Sonbolah



The young \*Serenity Sonbolah (Sameh x Bint Om El Saad)

*Sonbolah made history as she was named unanimous U.S. National Champion Mare, the first straight Egyptian to do so. "In a strange twist of fate Hansi Heck sent her to Ansata to be cared for and looked after prior to the U.S. Nationals in Oklahoma," recalls Judi Forbis. "That she and Ansata Ibn Sudan became stablemates, and both became National Champions that year, was a superb victory for the Egyptian horse - especially since the competition then was tough, and the classes huge."*

*\*Serenity Sonbolah was one of those Arabian mares whose image remains forever etched in the memories of those who knew her. Photos did not do justice to her supreme elegance, and she was an example of Arabian type that transcends just a pretty head. While Sonbolah boasted the large nostrils*



**\*Serenity Sonbolah exhibits her special style and grace**

and eyes that are hallmarks of the Arabian breed, she did not have an extreme dish, but rather a longer and more refined face with fine skin and great quality. Her chestnut coat captured and reflected the rays of the sun, and was often adorned with dappling that emphasized her fine skin. But it was her presence that captivated all who beheld her, including Doug and Barbara Griffith of Imperial Egyptian Stud. They purchased \*Serenity Sonbolah in 1976 and she reigned as the “Queen of Imperial” until the end of her life. Barbara, who has owned and bred many superb horses, still recalls the electrifying presence and remarkable courage of \*Serenity Sonbolah, and her name remains the first which comes to mind when asked about her favorite horses.

After retiring from the show arena, \*Serenity Sonbolah continued to influence Egyptian breeding around the world through her offspring. She produced a total of seven foals – three bred by Serenity Farms, and the remainder by Imperial Egyptian Stud. Her first daughter, SF Bint Sonbolah, was sired by the \*Morafic son \*Khofo and was purchased by Imperial along with her dam. Inheriting her dam’s chestnut color, SF Bint Sonbolah was a champion mare who went on to produce eleven foals. She was the dam of Imperial Naseeb who won multiple Junior Championships and was a Scottsdale Top Ten colt. SF Bint Sonbolah’s daughter by Hossny, IES Sondusah, has been influential internationally, producing several daughters for Count Zichy-Thyssen of

Argentina, including ZT Jamdusah by Jamil, who is the dam of the influential young sire ZT Faa’iq.

\*Serenity Sonbolah’s second foal was another filly. A grey bred and owned by Serenity Farms, she was sired by their Nazeer son \*SF Ibn Nazeer. Originally registered as SF Bint Ibn Nazeer in Canada, her name was changed to SF Sonbolah Tu in the United States. Another prolific broodmare, she is the dam of ten foals, several of which have bred on, including her daughters Serenity Sonbolah and Serenity BT Khofo, both of which produced several horses for the Serenity breeding program.

Next was Imperial Dakbeem, sired by the \*Khofo son Serenity Osiris and bred by Serenity Farms. A grey gelding, he had an excellent career for Imperial Egyptian Stud as a performance horse, winning championships in both English Pleasure and Pleasure Driving, including regional and Buckeye honors. Imperial Biarritz, the first of \*Serenity Sonbolah’s foals bred by Imperial Egyptian Stud, was sired by the \*Ansata Ibn Halima son Hossny. Named for the world-famous holiday resort on the Basque coast of southwest France, Imperial Biarritz was a Reserve Champion Stallion as well as both a Dressage Champion and Regional Show Hack Champion. He is the sire of twenty foals, about half of which have bred on.



ZT Faa'iq, a former European Junior Champion and an outstanding young sire, traces in tail female to \*Serenity Sonbolah. He is owned by Al Rashediah Stud (Kingdom of Bahrain)

*The next foal out of \*Serenity Sonbolah was a grey filly named Imperial Sonbesjul. Also sired by Hossny, she is the dam of the Egyptian Event winner and Reserve Junior Champion filly Imperial Im Silana, as well as the beautiful stallion Imperial Al Kamar. Sired by El Hilal, Imperial Al Kamar was a Sweepstakes Champion as a yearling, and continues to be an influential sire at Imperial, producing multiple champions for the farm and its clients.*

*The last two foals of \*Serenity Sonbolah were fillies sired by Moniet El Nafis, a stallion linebred to the great Moniet el Nefous. The first, Imperial Sonboleen, made history as the high selling horse at the Pyramid Society Sale, bringing*

*\$345,000 as a two-year old. Like the other Sonbolah daughters, Sonboleen was a prolific broodmare, producing twelve foals, including the Junior Champion colt PVA Sonbali. In 1994 Imperial Sonboleen was sold to the Woodward's of England, and she produced three foals for them before her death. Imperial Sonbolara, the last foal of \*Serenity Sonbolah, produced three foals for Imperial before her death in 1991.*

*Today, \*Serenity Sonbolah continues to influence the Imperial breeding program, primarily through her grandson, Imperial Al Kamar, who has proven to be an exceptional sire. Imperial also gives credit to Sonbolah,*

as well as their other Sameh daughters, for the strong hindquarters and drive from the hocks that are an important part of their breeding program. Through the many offspring of her daughters, the blood of \*Serenity Sonbolah is now found in almost every country which has significant breeders devoted to the straight Egyptian.

A mare of rare quality and beauty, \*Serenity Sonbolah also exemplified a definitive attribute of the Arabian breed – courage. Her wars were not the skirmishes of a distant desert, but rather internal battles against horrific injury and pain, which she consistently overcame with dignity and grace. When she could fight no more, she was laid to rest at Imperial Egyptian Stud near the gate to the stallion paddock where generations of colts and stallions carrying her precious heritage pass each day. If those who were privileged to know \*Serenity Sonbolah close their eyes to remember, they can see her still. Proud and regal, she looks into the distance, seemingly filled with a secret knowledge of a place she had not yet been. The poem of Yazid, written centuries ago, is a perfect testament to such a mare, revealing the desire of her distant gaze:

*“She is one of those steeds of race that stretch themselves fully in their gallop, springing and light of foot, pressing on in her eagerness: her longing is the far-extended desert, plain giving unto plain”. □*



Imperial Al Kamar (El Hilal x Imperial Sonbesjul) represents the damline of \*Serenity Sonbolah.

ZT Mirqaash, a mare by Imperial Madheen out of ZT Jamdusah, demonstrates the elegance and power of the \*Serenity Sonbolah family



# Memories of Serenity Sonbolah

*She was such a personality – so proud! After she was injured (her leg was fractured in an accident) you might have expected her to take it easy when we presented her. But as soon as she saw people around the arena’s edge, her tail went up and she’d start trotting, snorting, blowing, and showing off. Afterward she might limp to her stall, but she certainly wasn’t going to let that interfere with the show!*

**Barbara Griffith**

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*I first saw \*Serenity Sonbolah when she was named U.S. Top Ten mare in 1970. I thought she was gorgeous and people all around the arena were talking about that “chestnut mare”. It didn’t seem possible that she could be more breathtaking, but when she came back to compete the following year, her presence was even more extraordinary, and she owned the ring the moment she trotted in the gate. You knew she was the winner – she had an energy and magnetism that drew your eye to her. It is also interesting that Bob Hart, who showed her, was not a flamboyant halter trainer. He simply let her be the star and she showed herself. \*Serenity Sonbolah was a very balanced mare, and while horses then were not shown with the exaggerated poses of today, when she stood, she had a natural tightness and smoothness of body. She didn’t simply walk, but carried herself with the regality of a queen, and when she stopped and stood still, she raised her head and looked off in the distance, as if she were gazing at something one thousand miles away.*

**Steve Diamond**

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*Seeing the still photos of \*Serenity Sonbolah it is hard to realize the impression she made in real life. This mare had an electrifying presence and charisma like no other horse I have ever known. As soon as she had an audience the tail went up over her back, her head raised to its highest level, and she would prance and snort (we referred to it as the “Sameh” snort) and put on her show. She would then walk over to the audience for her expected treats that were always forthcoming. Sonbolah had a very strong sense of self and a character to match. Even in her last days, always in pain and badly crippled, she held an awareness of her*

*place on our farm. We had just built a new mare barn, light and airy with an adjoining sand paddock that we felt would be perfect for Sonbolah. We couldn’t wait to move her into her new quarters, but Sonbolah had other ideas. She had been in her new stall only a couple of days when she saw her chance as her stall door had been left half-opened. While I turned to pick up a halter she escaped, and moving amazingly quickly for her condition, headed straight for her familiar stall in our old barn. She had her way and we acceded to her preference.*

**Beverly Sziraky**

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*\*Serenity Sonbolah was a mare that captured your heart. More than her outward physical beauty, there was an inward loveliness of spirit that set her apart.*

**Judith Forbis**

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*She had an incredible courage. When I first walked in her stall she had been foundered for many years, but she never let you know it. Her presence made me literally stand back against the wall. She exuded strength and courage, almost lion-like, yet feminine and I believe her nobility and her heart helped her deal with her physical pain.*

*I was commissioned to sculpt Sonbolah in 1988 by a group of Barbara Griffith’s friends and went in February of that year to do my study. The sculpture was a secret, so as I was doing my study everyone was on the lookout for Barbara in case they had to hide me and my sculpting tools. I did want to see Sonbolah outside, however, so I could watch her move freely. Due to her condition it was explained that we could not get her excited because her feet were so bad and she was in considerable pain. I promised to be very quiet and not get her excited in any way. She was walking slowly and carefully when I took the first photo for my study. With the initial flash and click of the shutter she froze and her head went up high. At the second and third flash her head went higher and higher. Suddenly she began to trot proudly with her tail over her back. Everybody went running after her, but she refused to be caught until she had shown off for her audience!*

## Elegance



EL MOEZ  
IQHB'8 Grey 1931

IBN FAYDA  
IC-B'3 Bay 1927

BINT ZAHHEFA  
IC-B'2 Grey 1926

SAMEH  
IQHB'139 Grey 1945

EL DERE  
HAS'20 Grey

SAMEERA  
IQHB'103 Grey 1934

EL SAMRAA  
IQHR'87 Grey 1924

\*SERENITY  
SONBOLAH AMR'50737 Chestnut 1967

MANSOUR  
RAS'11 Grey 1921

HAZEER  
RAS'247 Grey 1934

BINT SAMIHA  
RAS'133 Bay '925

BINT CMEL SAAD  
CAD'361 Grey 1958

SHAMLOUL  
RAS'193 Grey 1931

OM EL SAAD  
RAS'433 Grey 1946

YASHMAK  
RAS'370 Bay 1941

## Smoothness



## Power





A mare of exceptional balance, \*Serenity Sonbolah was the unanimous U.S. National Champion Mare in 1971, and the first Straight Egyptian to earn that title

*We unveiled the sculpture of \*Serenity Sonbolah in October of that year at Imperial. Afterwards, I asked Scott Trees to take a photo of me with Sonbolah, as I realized she was one of the greatest mares I would ever know. When I was handed her lead rope, something very strange happened. I felt like someone had hit me in the chest with a brick – almost as if my heart had stopped. I immediately started to cry, as I knew this was the last time I would ever see this mare. I told Scott through my tears how important the photo was to me. He simply crunched his toe in the gravel and Sonbolah gave him her full attention. He took two photographs and left. When I begged him to take more he answered simply, “I got the picture.” Indeed, Sonbolah was put to rest early the next year and I never saw her again. And yes, Scott got the picture, which I will always treasure.*

Karen Kasper

*I will never forget when I saw \*Serenity Sonbolah for the first time at the U.S. Nationals in Oklahoma City. It was one of those “freeze-frame” moments that has remained forever in my mind.*

Darryl Larson