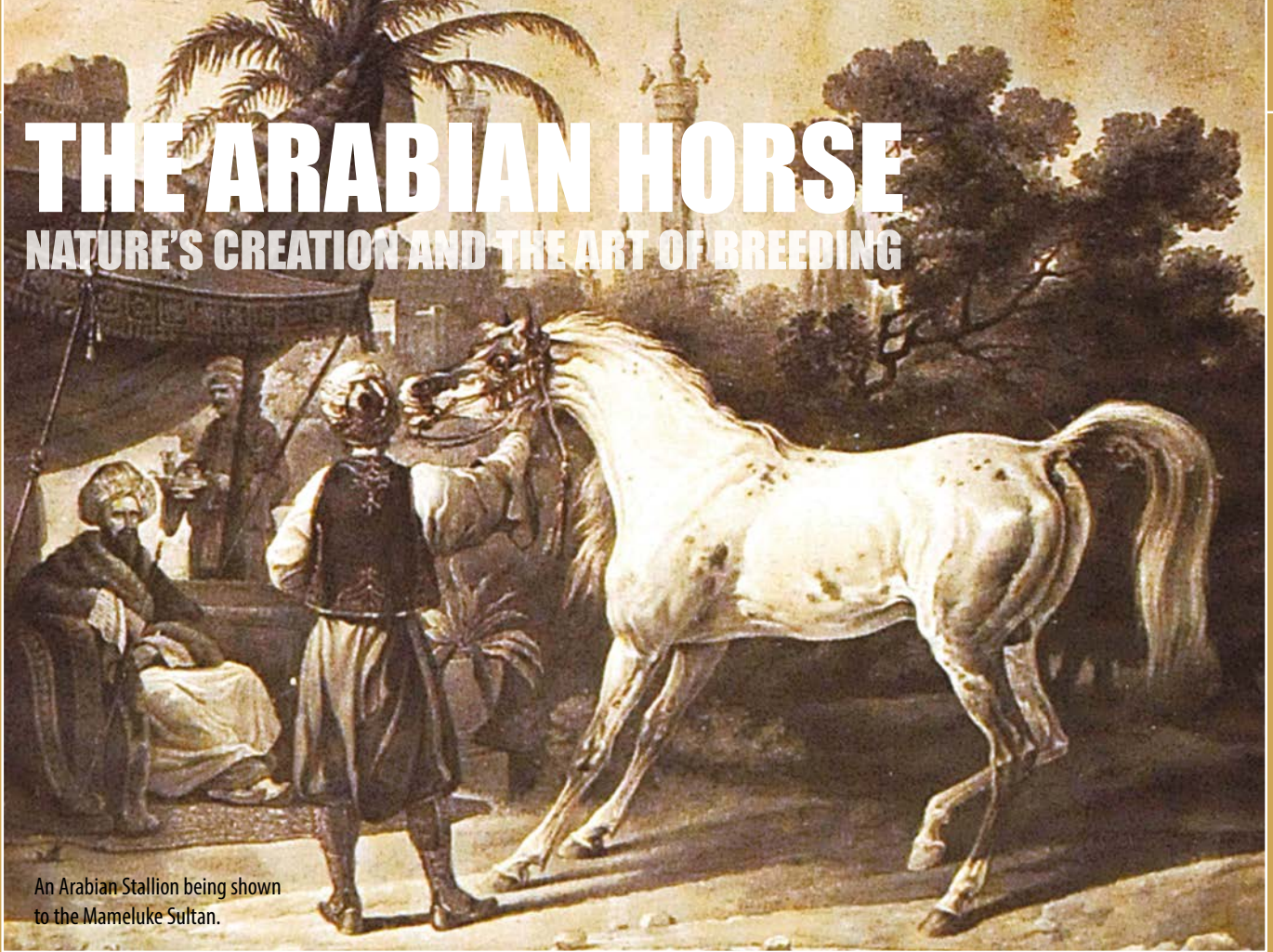


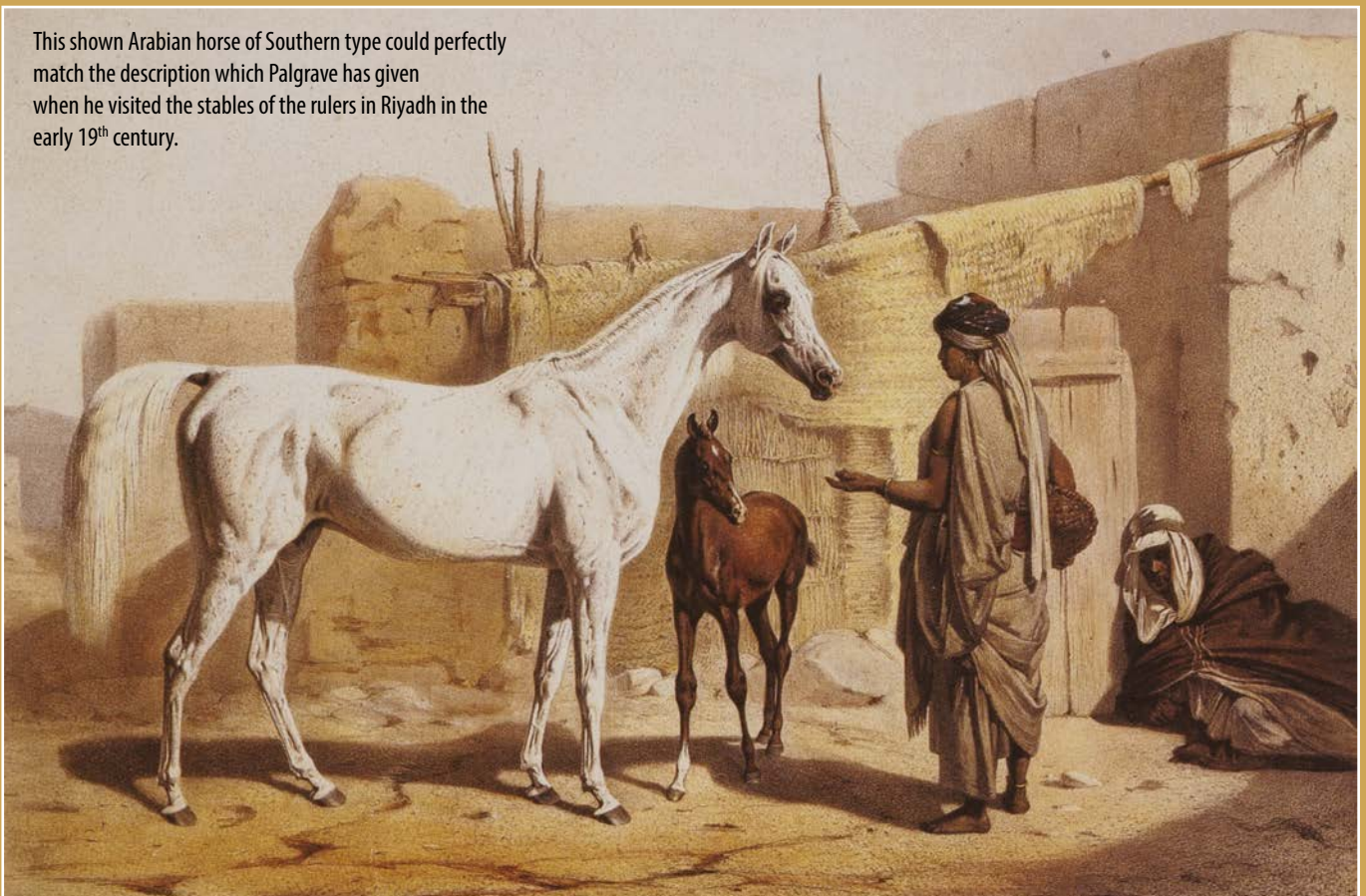
THE ARABIAN HORSE

NATURE'S CREATION AND THE ART OF BREEDING



An Arabian Stallion being shown to the Mameluke Sultan.

This shown Arabian horse of Southern type could perfectly match the description which Palgrave has given when he visited the stables of the rulers in Riyadh in the early 19th century.



ARABIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

by HANS JOACHIM NAGEL

from the book "The Arabian Horse. Nature's Creation and the Art of Breeding"

ARABIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Two facts are fundamental for the proper evaluation and recognition of the Arabian horse as an exclusive breed.

First: The origin of all living Arabian horses of today is the greater Arabian area, a very wide, spacious region with great variations in every respect. To be precise, this wide area should therefore be divided into at least two regions; a Southern and a Northern breeding area. Their different environments, due to geological conditions, climate and culture is so highly influential on livestock breeding that this bisectioning is imperative. Newly established genetic fingerprints are proving the fact that there are different, environment-related populations within the breed which have their own individual characteristics.

Second: a precondition to be recognised as a member of the breed is the fact that each Arabian horse has to trace back to one of the great "strains" that are accepted and appreciated by the breeders in Arabia. The many thousands of other horses kept in Arabia were classified as "impure" and "inferior". As a consequence, only a certain part of the large horse population in the Middle East can be considered to be this exclusive group which is today called "purebred Arabian horses". This horse has been bred by the Bedouins and has to be attributed to their tribes. The method of how to keep and to breed them was only in line with their customs and habits. Such strains and mare lines have existed for ages, even earlier than the Prophet's time. Five of these strains, among so many others, were named by the Prophet as the most important

strains: Siglawy, Hadban, Koheilan, Obayan and Hamdan.

The "Southern type" was a smaller and finer Arabian. In this population which was also composed of different strains, certain features prevailed which gave it, besides its historical genealogic pattern, a particularly precious rank. These features set this type apart from other breeds due to six distinctive characteristics:

- A strong, fully pigmented black skin, a feature being responsible for naming the entire breed "Koheilan"
- A special tail carriage; the tail being carried very high.
- A typical shape of head, with its elegant concaved face.
- A docile disposition and a special confidence in man.
- A dry and hardy appearance, with its concurrent ability to improve all other breeds of horses.
- Fine bone with high density.

All of these characteristics are strongly and distinctly recognisable in the Arabian horses of the "Southern type".

The "Northern Arabian type" is to be found mostly in Syria and Iraq in North Arabia. It is another population with obvious differences, being taller, stronger and a more athletic horse. At times, when expeditions from Europe searched in the Orient for horses a fully pigmented skin was no longer an exclusive feature that was required, due to the fact that, in the Northern territories, such skin protection against the sun was no longer a requirement for sur-

An Arabian mare in the Syrian countryside.



vival, due to different environmental conditions. Therefore, Arabians were often found with all kinds of white markings on legs or face. In addition, the typical Arabian shape of head was originally almost not existent.

Eventually, due to migrations and territorial wars, a lot of cross breeding took place. These cross-breeds between the Northern and Southern types, previously of a different look, added considerably to the general appearance of those Arabian horses. Only those buyers who were searching for the Southern type with patience, knowledge and caution were still able to find such particular horses, but only a few were left. The main buyers for these horses were the missionaries of the Pashas in Egypt, who were hunting for the southern type of Arabians.

In the end, Egypt was the only country in this region which decided to establish its own breeding stud for Arabians. The later established Egyptian State Stud, "El Zahraa", and respectively its predecessors, the Inshass Stud and the Pashas, based their programme on horses brought from the population living in the bordering Arabian countries. It was

mentioned before that they were the first who brought Arabians in great numbers in the early 19th century from the Arabian Peninsula to Egypt and formed their own breeding herds which lived under similar environmental conditions to those in their original homeland in the Nejd. Strong, drastic influence from outside which could decisively modify their type did not exist. However, without doubt these breeders had different aims and breeding ideas in mind than the ones which had been applied in old Arabia among the Nomadic tribes.

In the other Arabian countries, still a good number of Arabians were kept by various breeders in towns and rural areas and these continued to live a relatively quiet life. The breeding of this stock has mostly been neglected since the early 20th century. For more than 50 years, these horses virtually were not an issue any more. Owing to the activities of the World Arabian Horse Organisation (WAHO), some of these horses were rediscovered and came into the public eye again in the last 20 years of the 20th century. This stock, whether in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Iran or Turkey, remained practically unse-

lected, and if selection did take place, then it was with regard to their ability to perform successfully on the local race courses.

Nearly all of these Arabians represent the Northern type and were and remained, for centuries, popular among the horsemen of Arabia. It became their preferred and appreciated type since the Southern type nearly disappeared from the region during the 19th century and became more or less unknown. The majority of all horses in the Arab countries were finally of the Northern type which was developed and cultivated in the Northern territories. When such horsemen, particularly the older ones, eventually became confronted with a "Southern Arabian", as represented by the horses bred later on in Egypt, the majority of these Northern breeders seemed to be surprised that such a type exists. Partly they were astonished and often they were deprecatory or even rejected such southern horses as being inferior to their stronger and more athletic ones. This attitude proves that the Arab breeders of the North had definitely developed their own taste and preferences.

It can easily be understood that they will continue, also in the future, to make effort to preserve their heritage of these Northern type horses.

All the living Arabians in the Middle East have now to be considered as cross-breeds between different populations of earlier times. A lot of them returned through re-emigration from the North to the South, or due to trade and traffic. They were again filling the vacancy which had been caused by the unfortunate events which had struck down great parts of the Peninsula.

Any additional or special criteria of selection, except speed in the racing populations, which could have changed or improved the horse considerably, were unknown and were obviously not considered to be essential. Neither beauty, nor type, nor correctness and conformation of the body according to strict European criteria were reasons for selection. The quality of body and legs was accepted as it was, and did not matter, as long as this did not adversely affect their requirements for performance. Moreover, there was no precise memory of the habits of former



The Egyptian Pashas were keen on collecting Arabians of the Southern type, wherever they could find them among the migrating Bedouin tribes. The Egyptian state stud El Zahraa has been breeding such finer horses right from its beginnings.



Savier

times, i.e., the dismissal of too many markings on legs and body. It seems they were fixed on strain breeding and the “value of blood”, guided more by traditional terms than involved in a breeding with realities. Only seldom did old breeders argue about good pigmentation and the need to only keep horses with black hooves. The horse populations in these above mentioned countries looked, as a whole, surprisingly very much alike. Neither the so-called “Saudi-Arabians” which were kept in relatively large numbers in the stables of some Princes as a heritage during all this time, nor the stallions and mares in Syria or Iraq were recognisable as a distinct type. Maybe, there were slight differences in size and constitution that could be noticed. Many of the Arabian horses in Syria, as they are still kept in local studs, are stockier, broader horses with slightly shorter legs and a wider chest. Within these countries the tallest horses are to be found in Iraq, Iran and Turkey, obviously also due to the fact that horse racing was enthusiastically cultivated, where bigger horses seemed to have a better chance.

So far, this type of Arabian horse has, until now, not appealed very much to prospective and poten-

tial customers from Western countries, as their type and head does not represent what is considered as unmistakable features of an Arabian horse: “A good Arabian horse is recognised by its head”. Regrettably this well considered view is today and by the majority of breeders, often taken too literally and has developed into a kind of a fetish which threatens to divert the vision from the overall harmony of an Arabian horse into one detail. In comparing today’s Arabian types living in the different Arabian countries with old pictures and photos, showing the former imports of the latter part of the 19th century, such as the ones of the Blunts or the Hungarians or French, one is surprised at their striking similarity.

Astonishingly, just the contrary applies to the Arabian horses kept in Egypt. For many years, the Egyptian breed has been known for its noble, appealing type, and this to such an extent that almost all important studs in Europe and in the US have used Egyptian stallions to improve and develop improved “type” in their Arabian horses, as described in detail in the following chapters.

One of the most interesting studies is how the



Savier

To race and to speed with their Arabian horses was one of the oldest traditions among Arabian tribes for selecting and giving preferences to those animals which performed best.

typical characteristics of the Arabian horse have emerged, and who or what has probably had the greatest influence in its development. Why was it that in one of the harshest environments on earth and under the control of the simple nomadic Bedouins tribes there evolved this beautiful and unique creature? Systematic selection can surely be ruled out, as knowledge of any kind of such methods did not exist. What exists must predominantly be attributed to the influence of nature which honed the creation of these special body shapes and characteristics. This was supported by a certain amount of selection, done by the Bedouins in keeping with what appealed most to them and what attributes suited their purpose. Such a simple kind of selection, how intelligent and how systematic it must have been, was definitely a valuable contribution and is one of the earliest and oldest tools in animal breeding.

Which features and characteristics were appreciated more than others is disputable, but it can be taken for granted that speed, agility and endurance of these horses had a priority preference more than anything else. After swiftness, the next preference was their quiet and calm disposition. A speedy horse

with matching stamina was lifesaving for them, but an unruly horse could also be a danger. All the rest was probably due to the mighty forces of nature with all its brilliant creativity. So many other creatures of beautiful and extraordinary shapes, figuration and colours make this desert world a unique place. No human being has ever contributed to such animals and yet they fascinate peoples' minds and soul. No doubt, this noble and unique Arabian breed enjoyed the same blessing and such good fortune as well.

The Arabian horses which were brought to Europe and the US in the 19th century and later, were received into an entirely different climate, other conditions of life and a different environment. From then on, they had to live in totally surroundings. The so-called "Original Desert Arabian", which had grown up in the Middle East countries, had no other choice, but to adapt to this new situation. It had to become a "European Culture Arabian". Each traveller and buyer who went to Arabia to purchase such a horse had already decided in advance which type to buy, and he chose the most suitable one which would serve as a good breeding prospect for the future; the first step in the direction of another "cultural thinking".



A horse needs water frequently, it could not survive in the desert without human care. A horse breed could only live in combination with men.

Over a century has passed since these Arabians travelled in large numbers to the Western cultures. The West became totally independent from all Arabian imports for their studs; their own breeding flourished. At the same time, the Middle East became very wealthy, and this wealth opened up to the Arab countries the modern world, westwards and eastwards. Bedouin life has gone, and these formerly nomadic tribes have been settled and are under strong official control. Tribal wars and battles belong to the past, and instead of moving caravans through desert land one now sees solidly built wide motorways crossing the country, and instead of the old, nearly ruined and abandoned caravanserais, modern tourist hotels and petrol stations have taken their place. In between all these dramatic changes there has again grown an amazing passion for Arabian horses.

At present, the Arabian countries, from Syria, Iran, Turkey, down south to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries, are the strongest engine for the growth of the world's Arabian horse population. However, ironically, nearly all of this expansion is "imported" from the Western countries. The traditional Bedouin breeds in Saudi Arabia or Syria are losing ground. Only a few local breeders made an admirable effort to select this old stock according to



The best Arabian horses were considered to be valuable treasures. Only very rich people, either great Sheikhs in the countryside or rich noblemen in the cities, could afford to own high class Arabian horses.

Western principles; they select for better typical Arabians and have, after 10-15 years of effort, achieved astonishingly positive results. At least the Saudi Arabian State Studs and a few breeders in Syria are working intelligently to improve and maintain their valuable heritage. A good majority of new breeders, however, regard the Egyptian Arabian as their historical Arabian horse. Many of them had visited nearby Egypt where they saw this kind of horses. They became, due to publications, aware of their origin and the history surrounding them, which were available in the West in books and periodicals. Some of the world's most beautiful studs have now been founded in Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and in Saudi Arabia, and their owners have collected the finest Egyptian Arabians which are available worldwide. These studs discuss and listen with great attention as to how they can organise prosperous breeding programmes. All this offers a very promising new beginning for the Arabian breed in its country of origin. Western horse show habits moved in this context with the horses into these countries, and the great champion horses winning in European or American shows were often purchased by wealthy Arab buyers and transported to modern, sometimes too technically built air-conditioned stables, which are the pride of their owners,



Bedouins required a horse which was fast and could run over long distances. They needed such horses for local wars and in battles with outside enemies.

but a far cry from the traditions which forged these remarkable animals. The new lifestyle in these countries has fostered the traditional love and enthusiasm for horses tremendously, and the once popular habit to collect the finest and latest models of cars has now often been shaded by the desire to acquire the best examples of the Arabian breed. Arabians for breeding and show purposes were imported from all Western breeding countries, and a lot of them from Egypt. France, however, was also again a great source of where the best Arabian race horses could be found, and they are, in fact, the most frequent winners on the newly established race tracks. They did not only conquer the Turf, but also the endurance riding discipline. Particularly in the Gulf region, the horses that can be seen galloping around are some of the best long distance horses in the world; they race on especially built tracks, sometimes located in the middle of desert land. A lot of efforts in breeding are made, but the easier method is still to buy the winners from major race events in the West, or in Australia, since this is obviously a quicker procedure to be successful.

What has recently occurred in the Middle East would not have been possible without the great breeding efforts that have occurred in the West: Europe, the US and partly Egypt have been the source

for this amazing renaissance of the breed in the Middle East. A closer look into the Western hemisphere reveals that seven breeding studs were of an extremely strong and influential importance for the survival and future development of the Arabian horse. These were the Polish and Russian state studs, the Egyptian State Stud of El Zahraa and the English Crabbet Park Stud which all were of primary importance, and to a lesser degree, the Hungarian State Stud of Babolna, the French State Stud of Pompadour and the Royal Stud of Weil, today the German State Stud of Marbach. Each of these breeders, State studs or private ones, selected their horses according to their own purposes and ideas, and, in the course of time, a type of horse emerged, which became typical and easily recognisable as their own creation. However in all this time one standard type did not exist, it has only now shown up; it is a "new invention" and fixed as a standard for judging which is applied in all major shows wherever they take place; a "construct" of an ideal type according to Western taste and horsemanship and with an enormous impact on most of the breeding concepts worldwide. In the following chapters, first the subject of early evolution and secondly the effort of these studs with the purpose of detecting their aims and selection methods will be examined.

The purpose of the above chapter from the book "The Arabian Horse" is obviously to explain why so many types of Arabians have existed. Types had time to develop during long historical periods which were very static, when traditions were valid over hundreds of years and no major inventions were made which changed the lifestyle of people. Such a situation was even more common in the Middle East than in the West (take Europe, for example). In the recent hundred years that followed this long stable period, big changes replaced the old stability; a dynamic economy, dramatic unexpected new scientific inventions, the opportunity to travel all around the world - all of this led to a totally different approach, also in animal breeding. This discipline became an international affair from now on, and our Arabian horse was thrown into this immense wave of modernization, too. This raises the question if anything or how much is left from all that has developed in early historical times. Has the genetic make-up of these horses resisted these changes, or was it lost to a great extent?

Most of the Arabians on which the present population is based, trace back to the middle of the 19th century. 15 to 20 generations have passed in a new dynamic world until our day, compared to those many hundreds of years and their corresponding generations under stable and steady conditions. The most typical answer which can be thought of is also applied here: everything depends on the breeder's will and his decisions. With the present knowledge in animal selection, and applying all the knowledge in nutrition and veterinary science, changes can be done very quickly in a few generations and not only small ones, but also very fundamental ones up to the point where traits and characteristics which were appreciated by the historical breeders got lost and were selected away.

When such a new type emerges, who are the people who are influencing the decisions about such new features and about a general trend towards a new modern Arabian? There is no doubt that the Arabian horse industry is today governed by Arabian horse shows. The way the judges are taught to evaluate Arabians, that is the guideline for the breeders on how to select and to manage their horses.

It is in the people's mind only, and I wish to repeat this once more, what the Arabian horse of the future will look like, and how he will behave and move. All environmental influences, so important in the past, can be dominated and therefore wiped out by modern management, traditional selection criteria can be replaced or altered by new ones, and generation intervals can be shortened by new breeding techniques.

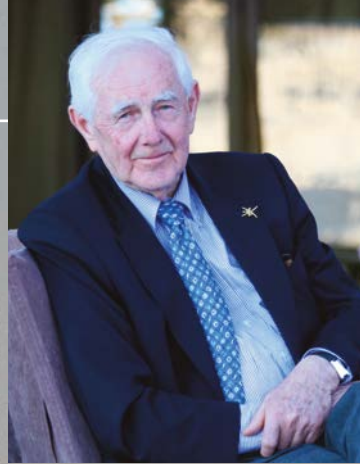
Preserving the ancient and irretrievable heritage presented by the Arabian horse is a Sisyphean task, and for many, it's an indisputable obligation.

HANS J. NAGEL



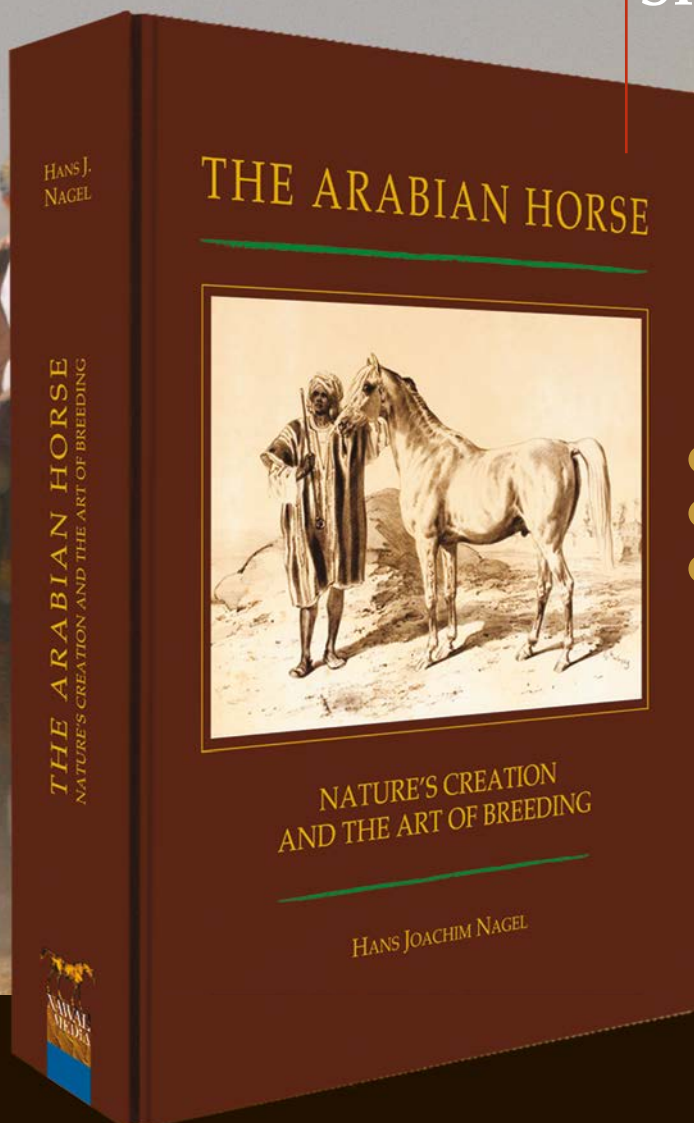
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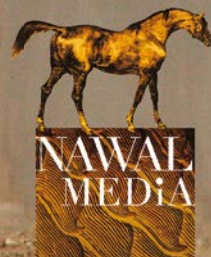
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