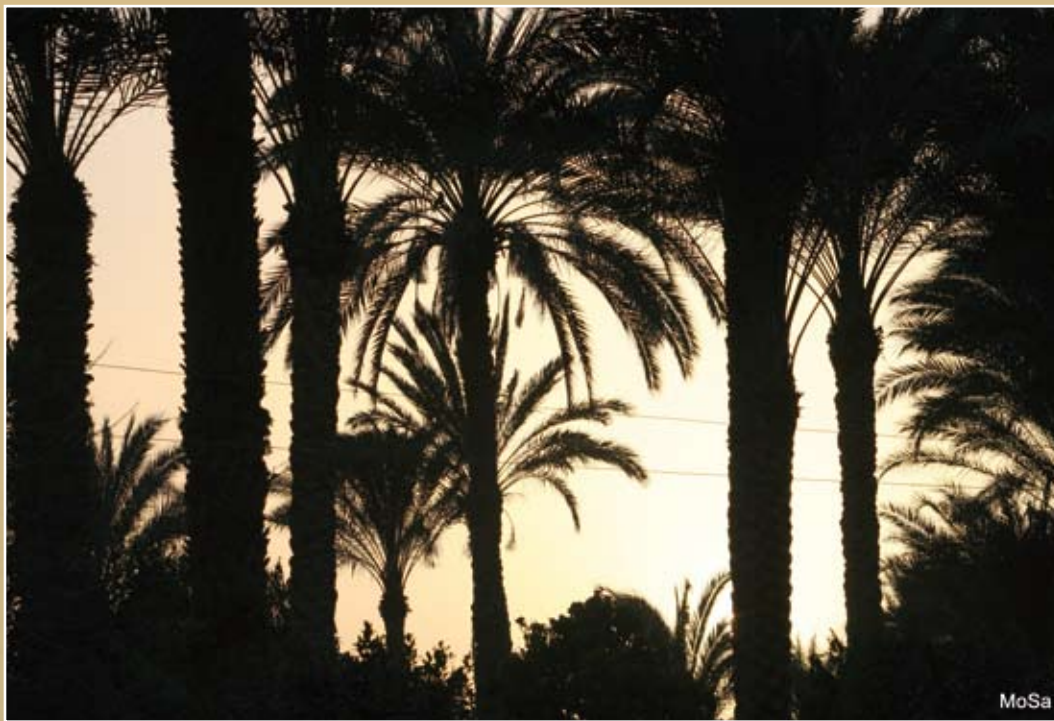


Cairo, Looking Back to the *Future*

At first, the World of Arabian Horse Breeding was invited into the green oasis of Cairo: El Zahraa Stud, steeped in tradition. Not just one but two shows engrossed the spectators from all over the world, as there were the National Championships and the International Championships of Egypt.

Next, the breeders from the „Egyptian Horse Breeders Association“ cooperative gave a presentation in Giza. Accompanied by live music and culinary highlights, they illustrated the level they have reached with their breeding work.

The week with all that was offered just carried everybody along
– anybody who could not manage to come this year had better book his slot for next year now!



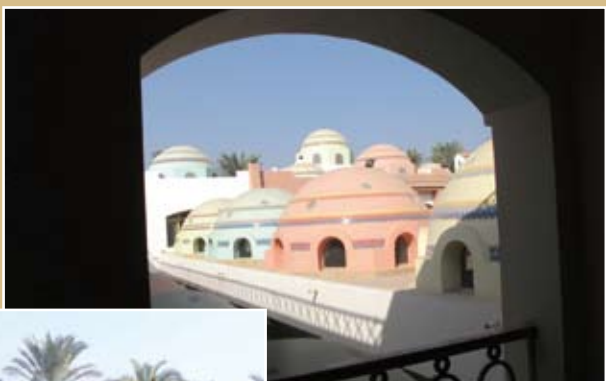
■ by **Monika Savier**

photos by Monika Savier, Erwin Escher

Some Background

Particularly for breeders involved with straight Egyptian Arabians, the impact of the name of “El Zahraa” is sort of magical. Based on this historic location, for more than 80 years the Egyptian government has taken measures to promote and preserve the breeding of Arabian horses in their own country, for the most part on the foundations laid by the famous breeding of Abbas Pasha and Ali Pasha Sherif. El

Zabraa has always been more than just a stud – it is acknowledged world-wide as a symbol for authentic Arabian Horse breeding, as a synonym for the dialogue between the people of different continents and cultures with a common passion: maintaining and improving Straight Egyptian Arabians. In El Zabraa, the most renowned international studs of the world discovered their stock horses. From there, Henry Babson imported the first horses to the US in 1932; from there,



the stable masters of Marbach State Stud in Baden-Württemberg

(Germany) imported the first Nazeer son, Hadban Enzahi, in 1955; and in the same year, Ghazal (Nazeer x Bukra) arrived in Germany. He was followed by the Nazeer son Kaisoon in 1958, who was a noble present of the state, and then there was another Nazeer son, Aswan, who became an improver in the Russian state stud of Tersk. In 1968, Babolna state stud in Hungary imported the stallions Ibn Galal and Faraq. Dr. Nagel purchased his famous stock mare Hanan and four other beauties in El Zahraa in 1968, and Judith Forbis found her stock mare Bint Bukra and other important horses, hugely famous today, just there – in El Zahraa. There were many in the next years to follow along these same lines, founding their studs on the basis of horses from El Zahraa, “the flower” of Cairo.

“Restful tranquillity and creative serenity, contrasting the sprawling, roaring city spreading all around, still lie across this modest Egyptian horse paradise from which Arabian Horse breeding world-wide was able to take so lavishly. Every foreigner is impressed with the now-rare exotic flair enveloping El Zahraa. The timelessness of oriental life as it was seems to be taking breath here, the mares slowly roam their paddocks in small bands day in, day out – all of that fills this place with an infinite silence and calm, making you believe it will be there forever. Whether there are unexpected things lurking behind the silence here after all the political and social changes that took place, whether a last remnant of a form of life closely connected to man – the horse, reminiscent of nomadism – can be faithfully preserved in a form as close to the original as possible, or whether everything here will finally drift away with the pull of the Western way of thinking in terms of performance only – it remains an enigma for the time being. People will write the next lines of history, just

Emotions and Opinions of Horses and People

Along the sidelines of the show, I was able to capture some opinions on the Cairo show and on recent developments in breeding in Egypt. It turned out that breeding strategies were varied indeed, and in many aspects, there were highly differing opinions. In one aspect, however, everybody agreed: El Zahraa stud is the source, the foundation of the breeding of Egyptian Arabians world-wide. El Zahraa has earned acknowledgement and needs to be preserved – more or less the way it is now.

Ms Maha Ibrahim, breeder and architect, Alexandria

Desert Heritage: Why do you adore Arabian horses so much here in Egypt? Is that tradition or religion?

Maha Ibrahim: It's both. As to religion: for a Muslim, it's obvious that owning and breeding Arabian horses is a lucky activity blessing the house and increasing social standing, as this is how the prophet Mohamed wanted it to be. On the other hand, tradition matters a lot in our country. Arabian horses have always been an integral part of our culture, owning an Arabian horse was the pride and joy of any Bedouin. Horses were not only a means of transport, but a status symbol earning acknowledgement and social contact.



Ms Maha Ibrahim

Desert Heritage: That's true even today, horses promote the dialogue between people from different origins and cultures. As to yourself, you enrolled two horses for this show, does this give rise to a competitive feeling towards other breeders?

Maha Ibrahim: Well, it's true, of course. During the show, everybody just thinks of his own horse and wants to win, but afterwards, we are all friends again and will join to celebrate the winners and eat out together in the evening.



as it will be people who will write the history of Arabian horses in Egypt, those Arabians who are renowned as the most typey of all Arabians. El Zahraa became their substitute home for almost a full century, living up to the cultural challenge and task brilliantly and at least as well as any other place trying to rival them.” (H.J. Nagel, Bremen 1998).

The sheer number of Egyptian horses exported from El Zahraa resulted, on the one hand, in heavy losses for the breeding strategy of the stud. On the other hand, the enormous popularity of this oasis of horse breeding increased, with the stud achieving unparalleled



Mr. Ahmed Hamza,
Chairman of EAO /El Zahraa

of the Egyptians for breeding their horses had adhered to the ideals of Abbas Pasha and Prince Mohamed Pasha, dating back to the 19th century and acknowledging first the noble pedigree of a horse, and beauty only in second place, Europeans and Americans just a century later had – with the exception of a few traditionally oriented studs – definitely reversed the order of importance of the main criteria of selection. Their breeding goal was perfect beauty which would help their owners earn glory, recognition, and money on the occasion of shows, and only then did they pay attention to strategic line breeding, with value placed on maintaining the pedigrees and the original traits of this breed of horses and their ancient mare tail lines.

So time-proven and modern breeding concepts drifted apart as they applied different criteria – and no matter whether these are just a fad or result in permanent and evolutionary modifications of the Arabian horse as a breed, nowhere are they experienced as distinctly and can be compared as easily as in El Zahraa during the annual national and international show events.

There you see the horses of El Zahraa, the historic gene pool, affectionately preserved and



fame with horse friends all over the world. When, during the 1990ies, private breeders from Egypt and the Middle East re-discovered Arabian horse breeding as a hobby, a long caravan of horses started coming in from Cairo, re-importing the offspring of the famous horses of El Zahraa who had meanwhile thrived on the green pastures of the American and European continents. However, where the breeding concept





protected from genetic influences out of new and foreign pedigrees, as they playfully canter through their spacious paddocks or just lie in the sun sleeping. And adjacent to them, in the show ring, you see the modern international Arabian horses, some displaying a kind of uniform look, be they imported or lately home-bred in one of the many private studs in Cairo which are based on modern imports from Western countries. Now they contend for their cheering owners, displaying more or less exaggerated stand-ups, floating gaits and raised tails in order to win ribbons, cups, or at least honour for their studs.

I asked the Chairman of the Egyptian Agricultural Organization, Mr. Ahmed Hamza: "What is the motivation of EA/O/El Zahraa when every year, you open your doors for the national and international shows?"

Ahmed Hamza: Our motivation when we open our doors for the national show at El Zahraa is to encourage the Egyptian breeders to compete with each other and demonstrate how much the horses born in Egypt have improved, year after year, and how the breeding programme of each farm and stud is developing. As for the international show, it has a different flair owing to the different horses bred in different parts of the world, and there is also the interesting fact that many of those horses are winners of shows abroad. So you may say that I consider both shows very educational to all breeders including myself, plus the fact that breeders local and foreign meet and exchange ideas, and every time there are new friendships created.

As for the El Zahraa breeding programme, a year ago we have started a new breeding programme which I truly believe will be very successful, and as any new breeding programme it will take several years to develop to fruition. Believe it or not, the El Zahraa horses will always have a very special place with all straight Egyptian Breeders." □

Ms Mila Khamis, breeder, Cairo, Egypt www.bebostud.com

Desert Heritage: What's your opinion with the show this year?

Mila Khamis: I am quite content, the judges were good, the horses are getting ever better, and the organisation has been improving every year.

As to the international show in Cairo: there is a long-standing demand for Egypt getting an A show, as many of the imported horses already earned champion titles for B or C shows and there are even world champions here, and all of these had better enrol for A shows only.

Desert Heritage: What is ECAHO's opinion with that?

Mila Khamis: They say that there already are two A shows in the Middle East, but they seem to have overlooked the fact that Cairo is part of Africa, not of Asia. And there is no A show in Africa. But what is more, Egypt is the cradle of Straight Egyptian Arabians and of most of the tail lines existing in Arabian horses, so we ought to have an A show here, we have been ready for that for a long time.

Desert Heritage: What do you think when Imperial Barez, who is World Reserve Champion after all, only wins second place here?

Mila Khamis: He lost deservedly – he did not actually want to win. He was not in form. That's a great pity for him and for us here in Egypt, we would have liked to see him win. But as it was, the title went to Moutaz Al Biwaibiya in Saudi Arabia...

Desert Heritage: ...who is not a Straight Egyptian, by the way. Is that a problem for breeders in Egypt, the fact that they import a whole array of foreign lines?

Mila Khamis: It's unbelievable how many horses were imported to Egypt. The horse breed that originated here is the Straight Egyptian breed, of course, but I can understand that some breeders might want to try something different and use other Arabian lines. World-wide, Straight Egyptians account for no more than 5% of the Arabians. In BeboStud, I breed Straight Egyptians exclusively, and if necessary, we

will go and organise an Egyptian Event where we can compare our own lines and nothing else. However, I don't mind competing with other lines on the occasion of an international show. The best Arabian horse should win – that should only serve to motivate us into using our own Egyptian lines to even better ends.



Ms Mila Khamis

The Egyptian National Championships



More than 150 horses started in Cairo for the Egyptian Championships which were restricted to horses born in Egypt. The grandstands were crammed with enthusiastic spectators of any age and social environment. Many of the studs had their own tight-packed group of fans including cheering teenagers and quite a few mothers who would set their babies down for a moment and rattle two-handed when the horses from next door floated by. The joy was immeasurable when the right horse had won, and usually 50 or even 100 people would rush in on the price-giving in order to celebrate their respective heroes.

In the VIP areas, tempers were somewhat more moderated. The catalogue was studied, discussions were held, and judges' decisions were commented, but victory and defeat were taken at a more statesmanlike stride. Many of the visitors here were from abroad.

Owing to the WorldWideWeb, there is a global community of horse enthusiasts organising "supply and demand" via innumerable private websites, facebook, newsletters such as www.arabianessence.com, www.tuttoarabi.com, www.arabianhorse.com – to name only a few – or discussion pla-

tforms such as www.straightegyptians.com and others. The international import and export business with horses, trading into every corner of the globe, has left marks in Egypt in particular. Anybody who ever experienced Egyptian hospitality can easily imagine that a lot of international friendships were established when so many horses were imported from Europe. Visiting the great show events in El Zahraa was, therefore, a good opportunity for many visitors from Western countries to visit their Egyptian friends, their former horses, and their grandget.

I asked Dr. Nasr Marei, one of the most renowned breeders (www.albadeia.com) and horse judges in the world – and this year, he had assumed liability for organising and managing the event here – about show procedures, and about how far the almost 400 horses present for the show today are exemplary for the level of breeding in Egypt today?

Nasr Marei: "There is a huge revival as to the interest in horse breeding in Egypt. In the seventies, there were less than ten breeders. Today we have over 350 breeders registered with El Zahraa. The number of Purebreds went up from around 500 to more than 3000. The grand leap



Dr. Nasr Marei

forward was executed by private breeders on their own initiative. While the official El Zahraa Stud keeps their numbers to less than 500.

In addition, many private breeders sought to enrich their gene pool by buying or leasing horses from abroad. This was a major step that took quality to a higher level.

Desert Heritage: Which obstacles did you overcome to make the show a reality? Any difficulties?

Nasr Marei: Organizing a show is a major undertaking, as everyone knows. In order to have a "successful" show a whole number of details need to be addressed and taken into consideration. There are the technical aspects of any show, such as the implementation of the ECAHO rules and preventing any violations. The choice of judges and DC members has to be done carefully and ensure harmony among the working teams of officials. Another technical matter is to educate the horse owners and exhibitors as to the Rules of Conduct. That can be somewhat tricky since many exhibitors are either not aware of these rules or chose to ignore or bypass them.

On the other hand, the organisational issues also require a lot of work. For example, there is boarding for the participating horses to be organised. In these two shows we had to find housing for 376 horses at El Zahraa, and they have enough to do with providing room for their own 450 head of horses. There was organizing for the show ring, the holding ring and the stands for the visitors that were built from scratch. We needed to take care of the accommodations and post show visits of the guests that were coming from abroad. The list goes on and on.

This year, as the Head of the Organizing Committee I wanted to have the best show that we ever had in Egypt. At the end of the four days of the show, I think that everyone testified that it was. Many problems were met and continuous monitoring of the problems around the clock was done and solved the problems as they came. Dealing with horses and people, you should expect problems, particularly in Egypt when emotions run high.

Desert Heritage: Did the show meet your expectations?

Nasr Marei: As said before, the target was achieved. We have put into reality the best show ever staged in Egypt. We had a record 376 entries in the 2 shows, we had over 40 breeders showing their horses, we had many visitors

Ms Inge Friedmann, breeder, Germany **www.friedmann-araber.de**

Desert Heritage: You have been successful in Straight Egyptian breeding for many years, and you certainly are up to date with show events in Egypt. This show now – is it different?

Inge Friedmann: Extremely different, the rise in quality is highly apparent. Of course, there is the fact that they bought and imported very good horses, and here during the national and the international shows, we get to see their offspring, which I find incredibly exciting.



Ms Inge Friedmann

Desert Heritage: And the original, the breed that has always been Egyptian Arabian? Do they still play a role? Are they still recognisable?

Inge Friedmann: As there were show horses purchased from the US and from Europe, the look of the horses is getting more uniform. We see a lot of horses who look quite alike and are sure to be judged as beautiful according to the current criteria for show horses...

Desert Heritage: ...and will accordingly receive winning scores from the judges. Which is why most breeders dream of breeding a horse just like them who will earn them a trophy as well...

Inge Friedmann: ...which is the problem we encounter everywhere nowadays. The versatility of the breed is on the decline.

Desert Heritage: All about us in El Zahraa stud, there are almost 500 authentic Egyptian Arabians bred from different dam tail lines. How many generations would it take you to breed, from these, a show winner as they are perceived today?

Inge Friedmann: ...at least 2-3, I think. However, the question is why we should do that. These horses should be preserved to be there when we need to reintroduce the features we lost in the course of time.

Desert Heritage: For both shows here, there are horses enrolled with their sires named Al Lahab or F Shamal. Are they among the reasons why you are here?

Inge Friedmann: Well, of course, I am quite proud of them, I love my sires' offspring just as I love my own horses, and I'm dying to know whether they are going to be successful.

from Europe, the US, Australia and the Arab countries. We had a record number of visitors that we estimate at over a thousand every day, the quality of the horses was much better than in preceding years. The hotel accommodations and transportation airport-hotel-show ground was first class, the breeders in Egypt have generously sponsored all the classes, and for the first time we had three big names as sponsors, namely, Mercedes-Benz, Marriott Hotels and Resorts, and Lufthansa and SWISS.

Answering your question, yes I am quite satisfied with the outcome.

Desert Heritage: From your point of view, which role should El Zabara stud play in the future?

Nasr Marei: El Zabara is in high regard with the Egyptian breeders in Egypt and I am sure with any other Straight Egyptian Breeders in the world, as the source and the mother stud farm. El Zabara is keen to maintain this status as the "source".

Having said that, we all know and realize that in recent years, the quality of horses that are being bred may not be up to the standards that are expected from such a leading breeding programme. We also know that the quality has become inferior to that of horses bred by many private breeders in Egypt. The EAO and El Zabara are undergoing changes now under a new leadership and reforms are to be expected. However, it will take some years for significant changes to become apparent.

The major issue is to establish an intelligent breeding programme that sets up a new concept and better management of the gene pool. Once this programme is founded, it will have to be implemented and continued for a few years to assess. Further changes in breeding philosophies can be implemented."

So much about the adventure of managing a show in Egypt. Naturally, it's a great responsibility to present the Egyptian horse stock to the whole world, with Egypt regarded as one of the countries of origin of Arabian Horse breeding, and, as far as breeding the Straight Egyptian lines is concerned, with a tradition and the reputation of Abbas Pasha to defend. For the international show that weekend at El Zabara state stud, however, Egyptian horses bred all over the world were eligible. Was it possible that the predominance of the Egyptian lines could be starting to topple?

Well, the overall quality of the horses was indeed even better than when I visited here last, two years ago for the National Championships in El Zabara.

However, it was not only Straight Egyptians who were re-imported to Cairo in recent years, but there were also a few Russian or Polish lines of show quality who made Cairo their home. On the occasion of the National Championships, it was easily apparent that there were exclusively Straight Egyptian horses enrolled. I asked Nicki Knoth, an "interface" between the cultures of breeding, native Ger-

man and breeder of Arabian horses who has been running Al Sharbatly Stud for many years together with her partner Sultan Sharbatly, about her views on the development of horse breeding in Egypt during recent years.

Nicki: There were quite stringent rules for taking part in the National Championships: with imported horses, their direct descendants were not allowed to take part, only their grandget. This has been changed by now, so we see a lot of horses competing who are from the first generation after being imported. The problem proper is the fact that according to ECAHO rules – which reglement showing in Egypt as well – any Arabian horse who is WAHO-acknowledged is entitled to enrol for an ECAHO show. Now our view was that we are Egypt, we have an authentic breed or line of our own and we don't want to mix them with other lines on the occasion of the Nationals. This show is meant to present the current state of Egyptian breeding. Of course, this was impossible to enforce from a legal standpoint, but we reached a rather unanimous gentlemen's agreement stating that any breeders who are engaged in breeding Arabian from other lines would voluntarily refrain from showing them in the Nationals. As you can see, they kept to that. Anybody who wanted to show horses of a different pedigree entered them for the international show which admits all nations and tail lines, after all.

Desert Heritage: What is your opinion on the developments in horse breeding if we take this show here as our benchmark?

Nicki: There is definite improvement, even if I liked the mares better by far than the stallions. But that's mostly the case, producing a good stallion is not easy.

Desert Heritage: What did you like less?

Nicki: ...that the foals here display a perfect stand-up at six months of age. They are usually weaned too early and immediately enter training. I don't like that at all. At that



Nicki Knoth & Sultan Sharbatly



Stand-ups even for the babies

age, they need to be in a herd together with other foals. You can see baby foals here, without their dams, and they are just absolutely disturbed.

Desert Heritage: You are not the only person with that opinion. There is Dr. Santoro, a children's doctor from Italy acting as a judge here, who remarked yesterday that if he had his say, not a single horse under one year of age would be allowed to compete at a show.

Nicki: I agree, we need new ECAHO rules for protecting foals. Not breeding strategy, but keeping and rearing foals is a weak point here in Egypt.

Desert Heritage: What are the strong points of breeding here in Cairo?

Nicki: As to show business: the horse quality in Cairo has strongly improved in recent years, as new blood lines were imported by purchasing good stallions and mares, and they left their distinct tracks – just look at their offspring in the show ring here. And the show proper has taken a 100 % improvement in organisation. Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Nasr Marei and his team, this is today an international event with hardly anything left to be improved. Of course, there were big sponsors with their financial support who played a role in lifting the show level to the international standard we have today.

Desert Heritage: ...yes, the food is exceptionally good in the Marriot tent...

Nicki: Despite everything – and that's characteristic of the El Zabara show – a show here on the grounds of the state stud will always be somewhat different. The horses on the pastures surrounding us, the enthusiastic spectators, the atmosphere they create – that's something you don't find with any other show in the world."

She might be right. But then, how did that rapid development come about? After all, the Egyptian state stud rather conjures up images of quietude and slow time-bound development than of quick moments and of event management with an international flair. □

Mr. Omar Mustafa, breeder, Ikhnatoon Stud, Egypt

Desert Heritage: What was different during this show?

Omar Mustafa: It was just as if a revolution had taken place. Many breeders have imported horses from just about everywhere, and as a result, we see horses in the shows today who are completely different from those we had ten years ago. That's a completely new situation and a challenge for all of us. This is true for myself as well, I've been breeding horses for 25 years now, my Arabians are EAO lines from El Zahraa, but now I need to react and import horses if I want to keep up.

Desert Heritage: What is so different now?

Omar Mustafa: The type. We've been breeding horses for many years now, they are brilliant movers, they display a nice topline, but they are not good enough in their type.

Desert Heritage: What are you going to do to improve your horses?

Omar Mustafa: I need fresh blood in my stable, I want small beautiful heads, long necks... I simply want to improve everything.

Desert Heritage: And what about the horses from El Zahraa then? Do you still have use for them?

Omar Mustafa: But of course, they are important horse tail lines, there is no way how Egyptian Arabian breeding could do without the line of Moniet El Nefous, of Dahman Shawan, of Bukra, Halima, Farida....I simply cannot imagine that.

Desert Heritage: Why are most of the breeders here so crazy for shows?

Omar Mustafa: Many are, yes, but this is not what I am going for. For me, breeding is about producing good horses. I will only display them at shows in order to submit them to national and international competition and comparison. If we win, that's even better, of course.



Mr. Omar Mustafa

12th International Championship of *Egypt*



Mahala



Sporting almost 200 horses, this was another show that was extremely well attended. Spirits in the VIP area and the visitors' stands went sky high when stars such as the Al Lahab daughter Mahala or Imperial Bareez made their appearance in the arena. However, this was not a "Straight Egyptians Only" event here. Al Khaledia Farm had come in from Saudi Arabia with a vast contingent of horses, almost all of them bred for beauty and not according to tail lines, and to the grief of many locals, these were the horses that won most of the

Championships. For the Filly Championships, Saudia Arabia collected gold, silver, and bronze. For the Mare Championships, however, the Straight Egyptian Mahala owned by Sheikh BinLaden of Rabab Stud, Cairo, took the laurels in front of Shaikhat



Mr. Raouf Abbas

**Mr. Raouf Abbas,
breeder,
Sheikh El Arab Stud,
Cairo, Egypt**

Desert Heritage: It's apparent that horse quality has improved. Is that from the imported horses, or is it that the authentic EAO lines are used better and more strategically to the aim of breeding horses in show quality?

Raouf Abbas: I am glad that you and lots of Arabians lovers have noticed that the standard of horses bred in Egypt is going up. This development has many reasons, the imports are one of them, it certainly helped a lot that we imported some very nice horses from Europe and the US. This way, we added some different blood from other families that we did not have or had lost through the big export, before this expanded the gene pool of our horses and allowed these horses to bring out the beauty they have in them. There was also a group of Egyptian breeders who started to travel and attend shows in Europe, the US and the Emirates, and participating in some of them helped a lot to improve the vision of these breeders.



Desert Heritage: What's the role of El Zahraa today for you Egyptian breeders?

Raouf Abbas: El Zahraa is the mother of all the breeders in Egypt, keeper of the heritage, and of the registry. They still are and I hope they will always be the point of reference for all of us, not only for breeders in Egypt but also for all breeders of Egyptian horses world-wide, El Zahraa still has some of the most beautiful mares you can ever hope to see.

Desert Heritage: If you could wish for a stallion to further develop your breeding programme, which horse would you like to have for your stable?

Raouf Abbas: If I could wish to have a stallion at my farm, it would be Al Lahab, as I am a big fan of him. I am also very happy that Ibn el Nil is coming to Egypt soon, as I always wished to have some of his offspring.





The Judges Of International Show



The Judges Of National Show and Organizer



Giampaolo Gubbiotti
and Paolo Capecci





Al Khalediah and Imeila. With the Colts, gold as well as silver and bronze were awarded to non-Egyptian Arabians – as is almost the rule by now for European shows. The winner was Ataa Al Khalediah, an Aja Sangali son, in front of MW Siensei, a Gazal Al Shaqab son bred in the US and today owned by El Gabry and Al Baidaa Stud in Egypt.

The Stallion Championships offered quite some suspense. Almost everybody had betted for Imperial Bareez, the stallion who won so many international shows and had last year only narrowly missed the title of World Champion in Paris, contending himself the Reserve World Champion title. He did not actually meet strong competition in his class, but he appeared somewhat tired and lacked motivation. He would neither display his usual charm nor his beautiful gaits, so the judges took his form on this day as their yardstick and preferred Moutaz Al Biwaibiya, another Aja Sangali son from Saudi Arabia and owned by Al Khalediah. For quite some Egyptian breeders, their euphoria after the successes at the national show was now brought back to the ground and to reality. Quite a few studs of the Middle East have already arrived where most of the Egyptian breeders are still going. It's a long way there, however, if they want to stay true to their Straight Egyptian lines and their traditions. They will meet their next great challenge in November this year in El Zabraa, at the latest. We advise you to make a note in your agenda for that! □



Ms Hoda H. Hidayah, breeder, Cairo, Egypt

Desert Heritage: For how long have you been breeding horses, and how did you come to take up breeding?

Hoda Hidayah: I've been breeding for 26 years now, there are 70 horses in my stable. I was an athlete originally, I was Karate World Champion, and when I became older and had to stop competing, I wanted to do something that would allow me to do some more winning. So I started to breed Arabian horses...



Ms Hoda H. Hidayah

Desert Heritage: ...and to go on winning?

Hoda Hidayah: Yes, very often, it was an exciting time. However, I have not been showing any horses for six years.

Desert Heritage: For what reason?

Hoda Hidayah: Do you want me to be honest? I don't like the international judges. They often choose horses as winners who don't actually represent the breed.

Desert Heritage: Something like that can happen in any sport where judges determine winners and losers. Sometimes, it's a matter of the personal opinion towards a horse.

Hoda Hidayah: But it's often that the judges don't know about Egyptian horses, they are from countries breeding different lines. Often they don't understand our horses.

Personally, I would not be able to judge European Arabians, I don't understand them as well, and vice versa...

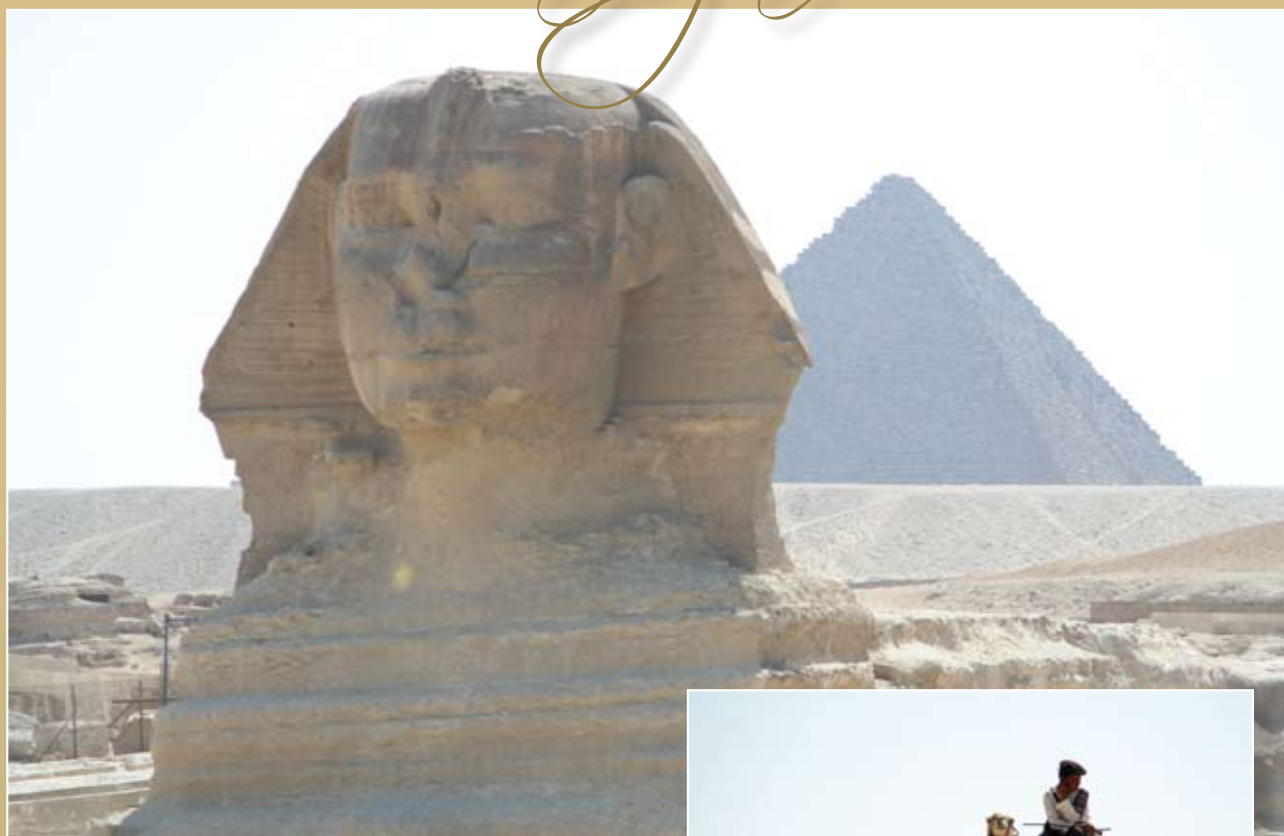
Deserte Heritage: What characteristics do your Egyptian Arabians here have which other Arabians don't have?

Hoda Hidayah: Egyptian horses have these big beautiful eyes, and their walk is different from that of other Arabians. Their movements are different, that's immediately apparent, they are lively and they carry their tails high even at a walk – you can see they are thoroughbreds. In Europe, many of the Arabians are slow movers and lack noblesse. Our horses are born lively, they elevate their tails because they are proud. That's not something you can manipulate or train them to do for good.



The Horses at Liberty Show of the Egyptian Arabian Horse Breeders Association in

Giza



The next day, the caravan of visitors and horse fans moved from Heliopolis in the North of Cairo to the Southwest, in the direction of the pyramids, to Giza. Their destination was the vast riding premises of Rabab Stud owned by Sheikh Khaled Bin Laden (www.rababstud.com). The members of the Egyptian Arabian Horse Breeders Association, a cooperation of breeders from the greater Cairo area, had invited for a presentation of their horses. Twenty-one studs had used the occasion for an at liberty-presentation in front of an international audience in the outdoor arena of Rabab Stud on Saqqara Road. The well-kept premises with their flowering Bougainville's, exotic cacti, bushes, and flowers are hidden in a palm grove. They were an ideal setting for presenting 200 horses fittingly framed by Egyptian live

music and a delicious buffet that was free for everybody. I asked Sheikh Khaled Bin Laden for his motives for organising this Liberty Show.

Khaled Bin Laden: „I am delighted to have all these international visitors and horse fans here, all of them come to take a look at the level of our breeding and to experience horses who have not yet made a show appearance. Here in



Sheikh Khaled Bin Laden

Giza today, they are in for a few surprises. We have a lot of beautiful horses here in Cairo; two shows are not enough to display them all."

Desert Heritage: *"The premises here are gorgeous. Is there something else you plan to do here?"*

Khaled Bin Laden:

"Today, we just feast together, without winners or losers. Our future plans, however, are to organise a show here." It is probably rooted in the human genetic code, this passionate striving for competition – however, had we asked the horses, they would certainly prefer the Liberty Show on Saqqara Road to any other kind of show. The relaxed atmosphere among horses and handlers was easily apparent. There was not only the fact that with neither winners nor losers, everybody was in for a laugh – there were other positive aspects. For example, there was hardly a horse in sight who had suffered the extreme beauty treatment of the face, which has become increasingly common in the show ring. There were almost no clipped ears or clipped whiskers, while on the occasion of the two El Zahraa shows; almost 20 horses had been disqualified by courageous Disciplinary Committee for breach of clipping rules. There were no exaggerated stand-ups, instead, groups were shown: horse families, or stallions and mares at liberty, floating by the totally engrossed spectators along Rabab Stud's vast outdoor arena with fantastic gaits. So, this stud presentation of Cairo breeders was a complete success and well in line with the tradition of public and



Ms Yassmin Atieh

Ms Yassmin Atieh, breeder and student, Egypt

www.petra-arabians.com

Desert Heritage: *Yassmin, how old are you? What are you doing in Cairo as a part of the breeding scene?*

Yassmin Atieh: *I'm 26 years old, Jordanian Egyptian born and I live in Egypt, and right now I'm studying dentistry in Cairo. I crossed over into the paradise of Arabian horses in 2005.*

Desert Heritage: *How was this "edition" of the national show in El Zahraa for you? Do you see a development in national breeding? Any highlights?*

Yassmin Atieh: *Well, I really can't stop being amazed every year, the show was spectacular, you can see the wonderful progress of the breeding programmes of the competing horses, new lines and better choices, I'm so proud.*

The true highlight for me was seeing so many friends from all around the world sharing the love of the magnificent Arabian horse with this intensity.

Desert Heritage: *You are keeping your horses in the stables of El Zahraa, what does El Zahraa mean for the breeders in Cairo?*

Yassmin Atieh: *Yes I do, all of my 5 horses are there, they are Haifa, Zebeeb, Joman AlWard, Malak AlWard and Jueyriah AlWard. As I did not have my own farm, I had to search for a place where my horses*

would be comfortable and safe, so this place was El Zahraa - add to this that I have a history with this place since I was 4 years old taking lessons at their riding school, it is so historical as a place and with their breeding programmes, and up to now people love to own EAO horses. These horses have their own characters that start with purity from all aspects, they have their own way of moving, and their own type, you can tell at a single look that this horse is a Zahraa horse, and almost 90 % of Egypt's horses have a very close relation to an EAO horse somehow, and without these great horses we would never have the champions we have today.

Desert Heritage: *What is your personal breeding goal for the future?*

Yassmin Atieh: *Well as you know I'm too young to have a full vision about breeding as other breeders have, but I know that I don't want just to have a Straight Egyptian breeding programme, as I respect the idea of getting the best from every line available. My first mare Haifa is 83% straight Egyptian (by*



Ahmed Hamza and Monika Savier (Photo: Simona Orvieto)



private in-stud presentations, common standard in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the Emirates, and intended to present the mainstays of any stud – the active broodmares with their offspring as well as the stallions – to a bigger audience, even if the horses are not presently in “show condition”.

I met with Mr. Ahmed Hamza again, the Chairman of the State Stud of EAO / El Zabaraa, who was a most interested spectator at the Liberty Show.

Desert Heritage: „Mr. Hamza, how do you like this kind of presentation?”

Ahmed Hamza: „I am impressed and delighted, I watch here with my eyes and with my heart. And what I see is very beautiful horses in a hospitable atmosphere.”

Desert Heritage: “What will El Zabaraa have to offer to Cairo breeders in the future, apart from the classic gene pool represented by their noble horse stock?”

Ahmed Hamza: „Right now, we are working at improving two aspects: firstly, we are going to use “external” stallions for the breeders who want to have their mares covered on our premises. That’s new and is closely linked to the new veterinary hospital in El Zabaraa offering many kinds of modern reproductive technology. Which leads, secondly, to an increase in our engagement for professional qualification and advanced training of our breeders, meaning we will, on the El Zabaraa premises, offer seminars, workshops and information events on different interesting and important issues.

There is even a cooperation with the veterinary hospital and the Institute of Agriculture of the University of Perugia in Italy. The first bilateral agreements and meetings have already been made and held.”

Desert Heritage: „Now that’s exciting, we are going to keep track of that. Profiting from these international activities of El Zabaraa promises to be useful as well for breeders in Italy.”

The day waned, it was already dark when we departed



and fought our way past the pyramids, across the Nile river, along the opera, through the everyday traffic jam on the highway and finally to a small restaurant in the Zamalek quarter of Cairo, the trendy district of the city. It is an exciting city of unbelievable variety and diversity, this Cairo – and that is true for the horses as well as for the people there. □



Shamekh Al Shaqab X Hamedah by Adl EAO, bred by the Royal Jordanian stud) and her strain is one of the rarest all over the world, the "Umm Argub" strain which is a Jordanian strain. There are few things that I would definitely go for in my goal: first of all, a horse with a good temperament and disposition, which I believe it is hereditary somehow, and a horse preserving all the criteria of a true desert noble Arabian horse, having the intelligence, type, and movement - and not only the looks, but also an enjoyable horse for riding, and that is the true reflection of how an Arabian horse should be.

Desert Heritage: If your dream comes true and you could choose, which stallion would you want to use with your mares?

Yassmin Atieh: Well of course there are so many good producers out there, but the one who impressed me most was WH Justice as I love the El Shaklan line as well as Magnum Psyche.

Desert Heritage: Which mare do you need in your stud to make your breeding goals come true?

Yassmin Atieh: Pianissima - and of course I'm kidding as she is a real dream for everyone, but I can say that as I'm not a wealthy person, I don't have a lot of choices as 4 of my 5 horses were gifts, I never choose them, they choose me so whatever lines or mares I own, I have to work and do my best, and hope for the best from God.

Desert Heritage: Is horse breeding becoming an "equal opportunity area" for men and women in Egypt?

Yassmin Atieh: Well yes, I am the only young female Arabian horse breeder in Egypt, as far as I know, but the female presence in Egypt has always been there since Lady Anne Blunt, like for example: Mrs. Gulsun Sherif, Mrs. Wegdan El Barbary, Mrs. Fatma Hamza, Mrs. Mila Khamis, and Mrs. Hanan Serag El Dine. But I can say that I had difficulties being a YOUNG female, even if after a while the Arabian horse community got used to the idea. But the fact of being relatively young compared to the others is still facing me every now and then.



Mr. Tarek Hamza, breeder and lawyer, Cairo, Egypt

Desert Heritage: Is there a new generation of young breeders who are going their own way in breeding or does breeding in Egypt still mean having El Zahraa as "alpha leader" for your concepts?

Tarek Hamza: You can clearly observe different types of young generation breeders in Egypt. On the one hand, you have certain young breeders who prefer to mate mares out of El Zahraa bloodstock to straight Egyptian



Mr. Tarek Hamza

stallions imported from well-known distinguished farms and they have a strong belief that the outcross often works well. On the other hand, you have some other young breeders who opt to mate imported horses with each other as they consider the outcome to be more promising for competing in the show ring. Lastly, you have a few young breeders who adopt a very conservative breeding philosophy by renouncing mating their Egypt-born mares to stallions imported from abroad or produced by a mare or a stallion that has been imported.

However, there are some of the young generation breeders who consider El Zahraa stud to have the most beautiful mares in Egypt.

Desert Heritage: Is breeding also increasingly becoming a female issue in the young generation? Or was it always of interest for women as well, but nowadays they are more openly claiming acknowledgement of the role they played for breeding success?

Tarek Hamza: Breeding Arabian show horses has been of women's interest for many decades in Egypt. We can mention as role models breeders such as Mrs. Wegdan Al Barbary, Mrs. Fatma Hamza, Mrs. Hoda Hidayah, and Mrs. Mila Khamis. However, the breeding industry is more dominated by men though there are no barriers to keep women from engaging in this field.

Desert Heritage: Which role should El Zahraa play in the future?

Tarek Hamza: It should continue to provide breeders who have the passion to enter the breeding industry with good progeny meeting today's show quality and other standards. In addition, it should revive its glory by improving the quality of stallions as well as of broodmares.

Finally, it should play an active role in enhancing breeding standards by organizing different multicultural conferences and workshops on breeding and veterinary matters in order to raise the level of expertise of breeders. □



Gold Champion Fillies
LOALOH AL KAHERAH

(Mirajh RCA x El Sayyeda)
Owner & Breeder: Al Kaherah Stud - Egypt



Gold Champion Mares
HEBAT ALLAH AL BAWADY

(Ibn Arabia Saqr x Hoboub)
Owner & Breeder: Al Bawady Stud - Egypt



Gold Champion Colts SIMAH EL SHERUK

(Mirajh RCA x Wardah)
Owner & Breeder: El Sheruk Stud - Egypt



Gold Champion Stallions GAMIL SAQR

(Tallahsman x Ansata Helwa)
Owner: El Gabry Stud - Egypt / Breeder: Saqr Stud - Egypt



Silver Champion Fillies
HAMEES TAHANI

(Ezz Ezzain x Serene Bana Al Daira)
Owner & Breeder: Khattab & Tahani Stud - Egypt



Silver Champion Mares
YASMINA AAL HANAFI

(Khaled Saqr x Safeiat Albadeia)
Owner: Al Najdiah - Rabab Stud - Egypt / Breeder: Aal Hanafi Stud - Egypt



Silver Champion Colts

ADHAM SAQR

(Imperial Madori x Ameera Saqr)

Owner: Al Farida Stud - Egypt / Breeder: Saqr Stud - Egypt



Silver Champion Stallions

SHAHRAYAR AL SHARAFEYA

(Sqr Shaqeel x Nooran Adam)

Owner & Breeder: Al Sharafeya Stud - Egypt



Bronze Champion Fillies
ZOMORRODA AL HAMD

(Ibn El Basha A x Shahd Al Hamd)
Owner & Breeder: Ahmadeyat Al Hamd Stud - Egypt



Bronze Champion Mares
ANBAR NOOR

(Ibn Arabia Saqr x Hams El Koloub Noor)
Owner: Leila - Rabab Stud - Egypt / Breeder: Noor Stud - Egypt



Bronze Champion Colts
MAZYOUN EL SHERUK

(Thee Desperado x Emain El Sheruk)
Owner & Breeder: El Sheruk Stud - Egypt



Bronze Champion Stallions
KHALED SAQR

(Imperial Madori x SES Marah)
Owner: Shomookh Al Masaeed Stud - Egypt / Breeder: Saqr Stud - Egypt



Gold Champion Fillies MESHAEL AL KHALEDIAH AL THANIYA

(Marwan Al Shaqab x Bluegrass Easy Lovin)
Owner & Breeder: Al Khalediah Farm - K.S.A.



Gold Champion Mares MAHALA

(Al Lahab x Mahasin II)
Owner: Rabab Stud - Egypt / Breeder: Dr. Axel Reiter & Susanne Reiter - Germany



Gold Champion Colts ATAA AL KHALEDIAH

(Aja Sangali x Mashael Al Khamisa)
Owner & Breeder: Al Khalediah Farm - K.S.A.



Gold Champion Stallions MOUTAZ AL BIWAIBIYA

(Aja Sangali x FS Premirra)
Owner & Breeder: Al Khalediah Farm - K.S.A.



Silver Champion Fillies GHAYAT AL KHALEDIAH

(Aja Sangali x Faaina TA)
Owner & Breeder: Al Khalediah Farm - K.S.A.



Silver Champion Mares SHAIKHAT AL KHALEDIAH

(Om El Abadan x KI Psparkle)
Owner & Breeder: Al Khalediah Farm - K.S.A.



Silver Champion Colts

MW SIENSEI

(Gazal Al Shaqab x MW Siena Psyche)

Owner: El Gabry & Al Baidaa Stud - Egypt / Breeder: U.S.A.



Silver Champion Stallions

IMPERIAL BAAAREZ

(PVA Kariim x BB Ora Kalilah)

Owner: Al Farida Stud - Egypt / Breeder: Imperial Stud - U.S.A.



Bronze Champion Fillies YAMAMAT AL KHALEDIAH

(Padrons Immage x Febyolla)

Owner: Sheikh Khaled Bagedo - K.S.A. - Breeder: Al Khalediah Farm - K.S.A.



Bronze Champion Mares IMEILA

(Imtaarif x Nimeelah)

Owner: Al Farida Stud - Egypt / Breeder: Kenneth or Mary Seribner - U.S.A.



Bronze Champion Colts

JAREER AL KHALEDIAH

(Padrons Immage x Barah Al Khalediah)

Owner & Breeder: Al Khalediah Farm - K.S.A.



Bronze Champion Stallions

GR LAHARI

(Al Lahab x GR Marianah)

Owner: Al Najdiah - Rabab Stud - Egypt / Breeder: Gestut Rothenburg - Germany