

# The Egyptian Arabian It's History And It's People

Text by Barbara S. Lewis

**T**he Arabian, never mistaken for another breed, yet is the root from which all light breeds sprang. It captures the soul as no other can, and is favored by artist, photographers, historians and poets over all others. What is the magnetism this breed holds? Why has this ancient breed remained a favorite subject for artists of all mediums? An early student of the Arabian will find a maze of puzzling terms and subtle type differences. What do they all mean?

Man's fascination with the beauty of the Arabian horse is documented, even before their value was discovered as a means of transportation and advantage in war. The oldest documentation of the Arabian horse was a fine carving uncovered in a cave in Turkey. It depicts a leaping, fine-headed horse of pure Arabian type, its mane flowing and tail carried high. Scientific data places this at 8000 BC.

The Pharaoh Thutmose III (1479-1425 B.C.) and his son Amenophis II (1427-1400 B.C.), "could not be overtaken in races," in large scale military use of the horses of Egypt. In the Karnak annals, it is recorded that Thutmosis III had among his booty from the battle of Megiddo 2,041 horses including stallions and foals. Ramses II (1279-1213 B.C.) credits his horses for saving his life in battle against the Hittites. His own words reflect his devotion and appreciation for their valor as he proclaimed, "Henceforth their food shall be given them before me each day when I am in my palace ...."

The Pharaoh Piy (also known as Piankhi (747-716 B.C.) grieved when learning that a rebellious Egyptian King had left his stable in total chaos and cried, "I swear, as Ra loves me..... It is more grievous in my heart that my horses have suffered hunger, than any evil deed that thou hast done, in prosecution of thy desire." There are documents from the Late New Kingdom that give instructions on the care and training of horses.

## ART

From the time of that oldest carving to the present, more and more artistic representations of this beautiful and noble horse emerged. The study of ancient Egyptian pharonic tombs and temples, dating 1580 BC and beyond, are covered with painted reliefs and carvings of the Arabian horse. In their depiction of their subjects, the priority of ancient Egyptian artist regarded the importance of the subject over

that of perspective, or size relevance. Royalty was depicted as proportionately larger than other images in the scene. Likewise, animals were lower on the scale, therefore smaller than they may have been. These relief paintings of horses appear to be actual portraits of horses that must have existed, as each shows varying personal and strain characteristics.

Egypt, Syria, Turkey, and all the great countries of the Arabian Desertia, have revealed ancient drawings, carvings, and reliefs of beautiful Arabian horses. More fascinating is that the horses appear exactly as they do today. Moving amongst the world's finest museums one comes to realize that no other horse throughout history, has captured the imaginations of so many of the finest artist known to man, as the Arabian horse.

Clearly, the first artists to capture the Arabian were those who immortalized their own horse in their dwellings, tombs and temples. They were enraptured by its beauty coupled with a gentle spirit. They were in awe of the incredible speed of this ethereal creature, as it crossed the desert sands. The Arabian horse was found to be a creature that contributed so much to their quality of life, as to soon earn a place of almost godly importance. For this, they graced their walls with images of its spirited beauty.

From that day to this, artist have tracked the development and history of the Arabian through paintings and carvings on tombs, monuments, embellishments on costumes, tools and weapons, up to modern day fine art paintings and drawings. Horses are found depicted in hunting scenes, more commonly with chariots rather than being ridden. Most of us have seen one of the artistic images of Thutmose, in golden carvings, and paintings, depicting him at the hunt in his chariot. Even more familiar are the many beautiful painted carvings seen in the Tutankhamen treasures. Early examples of other hunting scenes are found in the chapels of Djehuty-hetep in Nubia and User at Thebes. One of the first images of a ridden horse appears on a bronze ax head, from the 18th Dynasty, now in the British Museum. As time progressed, the positions of the horse began to follow a distinct time line, with legs in specific positions, according to that particular period. Chariots also began to appear in war scenes, giving us a view to the advantage given to those who used the horse. Still few were seen mounted, until the time of King Solomon. He was recorded as having 1200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen when attacking Jerusalem.





The Egyptians made great ceremonies, consigning beautiful golden trappings to adorn themselves and their horses. Often these were scenes of hunting or war. These trappings were beautiful works of art, comparable to the finest jewelry or relief sculpture to be found up to this time. Much of the earliest art of the Egyptians were in the form of carvings. Temples and tombs were originally brightly adorned with great painted carvings or reliefs that told the story of the ancient Egyptian lives. Time has erased the paint, but the beautiful carving remains.

A great contraction in the world's frontier began with Napoleon's campaign into Egypt in 1798, marking the first modern, western incursion into Islam. With the passing of 100 years, tourists were traveling into the Middle East from everywhere, fascinated with these mysterious and exotic lands. Egypt evoked great intrigue, with its ancient temples, tombs and monuments. A great surge of interest in Egyptology emerged, and began to influence every facet of art, from jewelry, to architecture, fashion and fine art.

Most paintings depicted the more glamorous side of life in and near Cairo, with falcon hunts, beautiful horses, women, and the handsome Mamelukes in their elaborate military costumes. Others ventured, on a lesser scale, to the more basic and unattractive form of life in the Arab world. Of these painters, their undisputed leader was Jean-Leon Gerome, who was a frequent traveler to Egypt. Gerome also taught many of the emerging orientalist artists at the Paris School of Fine Art. Many of his students went on to make their own name as an Oriental painter of significance.

The painting of horses was common in the works of the Orientalist, and some began to favor the horse as a subject. In time, they became known for their beautiful and accurate equine work. Topping that list, were Eugene Delacroix, Horace Vernet, and Adolf Schreyer, to name a few.

The Arab horse world boasts many fine and recognizable artist who devoted much of their work to the desert horse, colorful Mamelukes, Pasha's and Sultans of the day. We owe a great thanks to these dedicated artists who documented, in art, information on the lifestyle of the past.

### **HISTORY OF THE ARABIANS OF EGYPT**

To understand the essence of the Egyptian Arabian, and its great value, one must understand its beginning and evolution to where it is today.

The central Arabian Nomadic region of Nejd, now a desert, but in ancient history was covered with vegetation, rivers and streams. Therein lived a wild horse, the Arabian horse. History calls it the original horse. Lady Wentworth, in her renowned book, "The Authentic Arabian Horse," writes: "Authors of the many books on the horse with which the literary world of Islam has teemed ever since the second century of the Hejra, hold that the Arabian surpassed all other breeds of horse. Many count only two sorts of horse; the "true" or Arabian and the "false," which includes

everything else indiscriminately." It was commonly thought that the Arabian horse was miraculously created "out of a handful of wind from the south" and domesticated for religious purposes. To this purpose, writings of the horse were common amongst recordings of pre-Islamic histories and traditions. Great books and poetry had begun to emerge, verifying the great part the Arabian horse played in the life of his owner. He was one of the greatest treasures of the Nomad.

The Arabian horse is accepted, without question, through pre-Islamic tradition of being a wild horse in Arabia and of great antiquity. Native to the southern deserts of Arabia, Yemen and into Egypt from the Zagros Mountains around 1600 B.C., they came in time to be used to improve the Indo-European stock. He is recorded as being captured as far back as Ishmael, as late as 2000 B.C. or beyond. It is believed that Ishmael was the first to mount a horse. The Arabian horse is mentioned in the book of Job as the "horse of the desert which stumbleth not" and the "horse and his rider."

Even the characteristics of the Arabian horse, as is also true of all other species of the desert, support its authenticity as a wild animal and not the results of domestication. Large eyes enable the horse to see well in all directions. His nostrils expand to great size, allowing huge supplies of air to fill its huge lungs, larger in proportion to any other breed. A sleek body designed for great speed over long distance, was lean and carried no extra weight. Large veins cool the body rapidly, lying just under fine, kohl black skin designed to protect itself from the burning rays of the sun. A high tail carriage is a sign of great pride, but is also a means of temperature control. Domestic breeding does not and cannot develop such characteristics. Only the evolution of God's creatures adapting to their native environment can design something so perfect. He is now, as then, the most perfect of all domesticated breeds.

While it lends its fine qualities to other breeds, the Egyptian Arabian remains virtually unaltered since the beginning of history. From the earliest carvings seen on the ancient temples of Egypt, horses of undisputed Arabian type can quickly be spotted. One can easily compare them to the Arabian horses living today, as their basic type is unaltered. Then, as now, the beautiful, fine chiseled head, elegant arched necks, and high flowing tails, earmark the horse as an authentic Arabian. This author has seen some which so closely resemble horses personally known, that one would think they had been the model for these ancient carvings. How precious is the ability to have something so perfect as to have been preserved in its original state throughout the earliest history?

**Lady Wentworth**





## **DOMESTICATION**

Evidence of the domestication of horses emerged in Syria, dating 2000 BC. In an excavation, halters adorned the bones of horses and horses were found in artistic drawings. In 1330 AD, the first pedigrees recorded, referred to the Arabian by name. As time went on, early travelers questioned the crossing of apparently different "breeds" by the people of the Desert. These were not, in fact, different breeds but strains, or families, of the same breed. These strains gather their names from the important tribes who bred them.

Before man's interference, natural selection dictated those who lived to breed on. In spite of this, it was man who brought it to be the horse we see today. Each tribe had their own vision of perfection. Selecting a mare that fit these criteria, she was bred with a stallion of their taste, and pass on those characteristics which suited the breeder's eye. In this way, the horses of each tribe began to take on a look that was unique to the tribe, based on the foundation of an exceptional mare.

The unique qualities of each tribe became established and known as strains. Originally, they were all referred to as Kehilat, or Kehilan, specifically Kehilan Ajuz, which refers to them as the ancient pure Arabian horse. As the variations began to immerge, strain names began to expand, relating to certain characteristics, or perhaps given the name of their owner or tribe. Kehilan was first used as a prefix until it was so well known that the prefix was dropped. Examples would be Kehilan Norwagieh, Kehilan Rodania or Kehilan El-Krush, being carried from generation to generation through the dam line.

As an example of how the strains came to be named, a mare by the name of abu Shahwan of Libayda was the foundation from which all Dahman (the dark one) originated and became known as Dahman Shahwanieh. Roughly translated, they were descendants from the dark mare, "Shahwan."

Basic among many variations today are the Maneghi, Seglawi, Dahman, Obeyan and Kuheilan, all descending from the Kuheilan. Today's Arabian is a product of constant crossing of these strains, as no known individual carries the blood of a single, undiluted strain. This is not to say that an Arabian of pure, undiluted, Desert blood does not exist. Therein is one of the major differences in the Straight Egyptian Arabian and those of other bloodlines. The Straight Egyptian is the blending of strains of pure, undisputed, Desert heritage.

The true Nomad trusted only the words of his ancestors, and not that of writers of books. Generation after generation, pedigrees and characteristics of each horse was handed down orally, recorded in memory as that of their family. This oral history has been accepted as authentic and coming from men of great reputation and respect. It has continued throughout history as an ongoing record of the purity of this noblest of all horses.

As the great Nejd plains began to dry and the Nomad was forced to be in constant search of resources, his priority remained his horse. Next to himself, his highest value was placed on his horse. "Children of mine may hunger and thirst, but not my mare," is heard today just as it was said by the pre-Islamic warrior. His beloved horse was not only a means of transportation but also a partner in war.

Just prior to 2000 BC, warrior tribes descended from what is now Uzbekistan to Babylon, bringing horses from Central Asia with them. 400 years later, Babylon was taken by the Hittites, who were a strong horse breeding tribe. The Hittites left the kingdom of Babylon in shambles. Vulnerable, Babylon then fell under the hands and rule of the Aryan Kassites, also a tribe using horses. Contemporary with the rise of the Kassite Dynasty, the Hyksos invaded Egypt. As they came to power in that land, they brought horses to the southern borders of Egypt. Although the Egyptian was familiar with use of the horse due to Asiatic trade, it was the observation of the horse as an advantage of great power used by the Hyksos to easily overtake their country that brought the horse into use in that country.

The Hyksos (1450 to 1550 B.C) came from Asia Minor through the Sinai into the Nile Delta, dominating the Egyptians from horseback for decades, bringing the country into despair and confusion. They were proficient in the use of many weapons, and both drove and rode the horse. Their barracks including stables housing up to 200 horses. Eventually King Ahmose drove them out from the North of Egypt, leaving behind death and destruction, but also a population of beautiful Arabian horses. While in power, they demonstrated the superiority the horse gave to man, both in war, hunting and daily use.

We can easily see from our first documentation of the horse in Egypt, how they had already established themselves as an animal of the greatest importance, a position that has been theirs from that day to this. They were loved, admired, and cherished by the noblest of men and the desert nomad. They came to be a symbol of wealth, relating in numbers according to one's ability to afford to own great stables of fine steed. As history progresses and the Prophet Mohamed established his teaching out of the desert, he taught that "every man shall love his horse." Bedouin warriors when mounted on their finest Arabian steed, proved to be invincible as Islam's power spread throughout the civilized world. Egypt was submerged in this Arab tide.

Ahmad Ibn Toulon, (1193-1250) built palatial gardens and a magnificent hippodrome to house his collection of the choicest Arabian horses. Saladin, was the great Sultan who had prevented Richard the Lion Hearted from conquering Egypt, had a stable of Arabian horses who were hailed by Sir Walter Scott for their fine quality. He writes in "The Talisman": "They spurned the sand from behind them -- they seemed to devour the desert before them --



miles flew away with minutes, yet their strength seemed unabated . . . " In 1279-1382, Sultan Nasser Mohamed Ibn Kalaoun, was obsessed with obtaining the choicest Arabian horses and built an equally impressive Hippodrome for their comfort. Price was no object. For a single mare, he paid the equivalent of \$5,599,999., plus land. These horses were indisputably the most beautiful, courageous and exquisite horses in the world.

Apart from the great Arab rulers, who treasured their desert horses, Napoleon Bonaparte quickly became a devotee, when he discovered their beauty and ability while invading Egypt in his Egyptian campaigns. The advantage Napoleon had with more advanced artillery gave his army superior strength against the Arabs and Turks, but he quickly noted the superiority of the Egyptian Arabian horses they rode. It wasn't long until he had replaced his troops European horses, with Egyptian Arabian horses.

After the discovery of the Egyptian Arabian, he reconstructed the national studs of France. He expropriated the studs from the conquered nations, established stallion stations and rebuilt France's horse breeding stock.

Napoleon himself kept a stable of about 80 personal horses, the majority of which were Egyptian Arabians. Baron Fain wrote: "The horses which the Emperor usually rode were Arabians of small size, grayish-white coat, good-tempered, gentle gallopers, and easy amblers." These horses were very carefully trained by his riding master. Knowing Napoleon's lack of skill on horseback, these horses were made accustomed to any event that they may encounter, from the firing of weapons close to their heads, sudden blast of instruments, such as drums and trumpets, flags waving and

animals driven beneath their legs. Napoleon's valet was quoted as saying, "The Emperor mounted a horse without grace... and I believe that he would not have always been very sturdy on the horse if we had not taken so much care to give him only horses perfectly trained."

From 10 to 18 horses were killed under him in battle during his career. Nearly all were entire stallions. Of that group, his most favorite, and famous mount was the 14.1 hand Arabian stallion, Marengo, named after the Battle of Marengo. Marengo was captured in Egypt, and ridden by Napoleon on all his famous campaigns from the second Italian campaign, through the retreat from Moscow to the final battle at Waterloo. He is the horse depicted in David's famous painting of 1801, titled "Napoleon Bonaparte Crossing the Alps." It was thought that he was bred at the famous El Naseri Stud.

Napoleon frequently rode this courageous little horse in the 80 mile gallops from Valladolid to Burgos, said to often be completed in 5 hours.

History tells us that Marengo was captured in 1815 at the Battle of Waterloo by William Henry Petre, 11th Baron Petre. He was brought to the United Kingdom, standing unsuccessfully at stud in New Barnes, at the age of 27. Marengo died at the age of 38, with his skeleton being preserved and passed to the Royal United Services Institute, and is now on display at the National Army Museum in Chelsea, London. His hide, with the distinctive "N" brand was lost, and one hoof was made into a snuff box. The box was given to the officers of the Brigade of Guards by General Angerstein, who had purchased him from Petre, and owned him at his death



Napoleon Bonaparte



## **MOHAMED ALI AND THE MAMELUKES**

More recent history of the Egyptian Arabian begins with the ruler, Mohamed Ali the Great, during the time Egypt was a province of the Turkish Empire. Compared in many ways to Napoleon, Mohammed Ali was blessed with a well guided destiny that led him from the humble home in which he was born, to one of the most revered and famous rulers in history. Mohamed Ali was born in Kavalla of Turkish/Albanian descent, sharing the year of his birth with Napoleon. Orphaned as a young boy, he was adopted by the village mayor who taught him military skills and riding. The mayor also gave him military appointments, and although not important in the scope of things, they brought him recognition, and which he used to his advantage as stepping stones to higher ground. One such appointment came when the Sultan's requested that the mayor gather 300 citizens to help ward off the vicious invasion of Egypt by Napoleon. The Brits had coordinated with the Turks to drive the French out of Egypt, after so many other attempts had failed. Appointing his son second in command, Mohamed Ali joined the battle which resulted in Napoleon driving thousands of Moslems into the sea. It was the British Admiral, Sir Sidney Smith, who sent boats to rescue some of the drowning Turks, of which it is believed that Mohamed Ali was one. Afterwards, and using his manipulative skills, Mohamed Ali rose to power so rapidly that in 1805 he was able to obtain the appointment of Pasha of Cairo by the Sultan of Turkey, and played the Turkish troupes against the Mamelukes, with whom he had become somewhat obsessed. We can't be sure what drove his great desire to conquer the Mamelukes. Was it their superiority as horsemen and great collection of superior horses that carried them? Was it their strikingly beautiful presence which gave an aura of power, and their reputation as great warriors? Or could it be the fact that they had conquered Albania in 1803, when Mohamed Ali was colonel of the Albanian army? Regardless, they were a force to be reckoned with, and a serious adversary. He was determined to crush them and thus lock in his position of power, for which they were a constant threat. Needless to say, any man capable of defeating them would be thought of as almost god-like. The Mamelukes, led by their founder the great Sultan Baybars, had been victorious in some of history's greatest battles, including crushing the Crusaders repeatedly as they tried to manipulate their heavy horses against those of the Mamelukes. Baybars also successfully brought Egypt and Syria under his rule. Baybars became known as one of the greatest military leaders of the Middle Ages. He was also an extremely gifted horseman, and polo player. In battle, and always, he respected the importance of the horse under him, making sure that his horses were well conditioned for any task that may be asked of them. He advanced them into war when he was confident that there was nothing threatening to their welfare, and reined them back with any likelihood of danger to them, making sure to

predict and calculate any threats that may lay in the landscape ahead. It was no doubt this influence that played the major part in making the Mamelukes such skilled and devoted horsemen. Intending to change the course of history and indeed conquer the world, following the vision of their great founder, Genghis Kahn, the Mongols had mounted up on their sturdy war horses, and heading south toward Egypt. Their goal was to conquer Egypt, acquiring the control of an Islamic empire, gaining access to the Mediterranean, ports, naval expertise, and armies skilled in siege warfare, therefore strengthening further goals of sweeping through and conquering every other part of the world.

It was high summer of the year 1260. The horses the Mongols relied on to carry them into battle lacked stamina and weakened without regular food and water. Troops were dropping out without strong horses, but even under these rather common circumstances, they were accustomed to coming out the victors in battle. The Mongols were superb mounted archers, accustomed to fighting with lances and swords, and great warriors in their own right.

As they approached Ayn Jalut, or Goliath's Spring, sixty kilometers north of Jerusalem, there appeared a great wave of beautiful and powerful horses coming at them at full speed, unaffected by heat, lack of water or food. Mounted on their backs were colorful warriors, as strong and fit as their horses. It was the Mamelukes, paling the Mongols and their horses in their presence. The well tuned military skills of the Mongols might have had a fair chance against them, but unfortunately the Mongols had one handicap. Their horses were remarkably inferior to the great Arabian horses of Egypt, ridden by the Mamelukes. The great agility, endurance, and intelligence of the Mamelukes horses gave them an advantage far exceeding anything the Mongols could match. The Mongols died, almost to the man. The Arabian horses had been the instrument that saved Egypt from these savage warriors, but started a cold Mongol/Mameluke struggle for supremacy that continued through many bloody battles until the end of the Mongols, in 1335. Even though they were a sect of slaves, the Mamelukes were a design in perfection. Their costumes were beautifully colored and adorned with exquisite appointments, complimenting the fact that most of them were physically very handsome. They had a rock star presence, and were known to be the best of what they do. They lived in an all male world being taken from their small village homes very early in life and groomed to be the ultimate male, the ultimate warrior. Idle time was no option as they perfected themselves in horsemanship and fighting skills with a passion. It was also a largely homosexual group, with very few who married, and children were scarce amongst them. The basis of the group was purchased as children, primarily from Turkish peasants, and often through slave trades with Southern Russia. The children immediately began their training by men who had themselves been slaves. Their



training included the study of and conversion to Islam. Although trained in arms and equestrian skills and considered "freed" slaves, they were still used to serve the Bey, but as his faithful children and not as slaves, as slavery was against their code.

There were great contrasts in their lives. Slaves by birth, treacherous, unlawful butchers by choice, they were rough, ruthless and very destructive to life and property. They would be the last group from which one would expect refinement or any understanding of culture. But that was not the case.

In their private lives, they enjoyed the best of the best, surrounding themselves with opulence, stolen or purchased with the wealth they had taken from the people they had captured, oppressed or killed. Their refined taste was impeccable, exhibited by their great collections of the finest in art, architecture, furnishings and clothing. It rivaled that of the most refined and royal individuals in the entire Arab or European world from that day to this. Even their weapons were made of beautiful precious metals, often adorned with fine gems by the finest craftsmen. Their elegant Arabian horses were some of the finest in the world, and nothing was spared in their adornment and care. Matching their fine quality was the great ability of the rider, both champions in and under the saddle.

One can imagine boys from the villages, hiding to watch with amazement and envy as the great Mamelukes practiced their skills in the Egyptian desert. They charged across the plains at full speed on their gloriously beautiful horses, nostrils flared, tails flying in the wind. Their skills in training bordered on gymnastics as they twirled a series of firearms, aiming and firing with great skill, then switched to the coup de revers, a most deadly sabre, and also very difficult to handle. Although abandoned as a weapon in battle, they faithfully continued their practice with bow and arrow.

As passionate as they were in perfecting their skills with each of these weapons, always on horseback, it was the throwing of the djereed that was their favorite. Fashioning a staff like weapon from palm fronds, and weighing 5 or 6 pounds, horse and rider pursues another rider at great speed. The assailant throws the weapon at the other from a significant distance. Immediately his horse pivots to a retreat as the other rider takes his turn as the assailant. In a short time, the horse becomes as committed to the challenge as the rider. With no need for cues, the horse quickly determines the exact second of the throw, whirling instantly, and putting himself full on into the game. Most thrust the djereed with such strength as to make the game not only challenging but dangerous. Many were wounded and some mortally. The Mamelukes rarely lived a long life.

As the power of the Mamelukes grew, so did their numbers. They had grown to over 100,000, with most situating themselves in Cairo, changing the face of that city. As they always chose to surround themselves with beauty, they took it on themselves to begin reshaping the city. Their only interest

was in creating elaborate palaces in which to live, elaborate mosques adorned with beautiful tiles and carvings, and filling the city with the most beautiful monuments that can be found anywhere, all for their own pleasure. They were not interested in building utilitarian structures, such as canals, libraries or schools that might improve the quality of living for everyone. To the Mameluke, the National people of Egypt were nothing more than peasants meant to be used as slaves. They imposed high taxes on the Egyptians, and terrorized them at every opportunity.



*Arab horse and Maemluka. Carle Vernet*



*Equestrian exploits of the Circassian mamelukes  
19th century graving*



Cairo was also the home of Mohamed Ali the Great, Mohamed Ali Pasha, ruler of Egypt. Well aware of their abilities in warfare, even though he had massacred a number of Mamelukes in the past, he was able to convince them to join him in an attack on the Wahhabi's, and also preparation for an invasion of Arabia. After the agreement was made however, Ali began to realize that if he sent his troops out of Cairo to battle, he would leave Egypt, and Cairo behind, defenseless. Who would protect his country from these vicious opportunists? He knew that those most likely to turn on him, and Egypt, would be the Mamelukes, and this would be a perfect time.

Knowing he could not trust the Mamelukes when his back was turned, he decided that plans must change. How would he solve this problem? The obvious answer was to massacre the Mamelukes yet again. This time, he thought he would do it on a larger scale, annihilating them once and for all.

He had appointed Tousson, his second son and still a teenager, to command the attack on the Wahhabi's. A great ceremony was planned to present him with the Pelisse of Honor and officially begin the historical campaign. It would be held at the Citadel, which also housed his mosque, the mosque of Mohamed Ali Pasha. It was a beautiful and fitting location, perched high on the side of a hill, overlooking Cairo. All the Mameluke leaders were invited.

Skeptical, but feeling safety in numbers, the Mamelukes hierarchy dressed themselves in their very finest official attire, complete with glistening armor and elaborate appointments. They arrived astride their most beautiful Arabians, riding proudly with great cadence into the Citadel. It must have been an awesome sight. As they entered the Citadel, the gates closed behind them. Their fate had been sealed.

When the ceremony concluded, the Mamelukes remounted in preparation to leave, only to discover the gates had been locked. Confused, they began to circle the large courtyard looking for another exit. None were to be found. Only the west wall was open to the view of Cairo, but protected by its sheer height raising into the heavens over the city. A drop from there was sure to be deadly. Seeing it as the only option, the Mameluke governor, Elfy Bey (also known as Amin Bey), commanded his Arabian to fly, and fly he did. The great horse cleared the wall, sailing to the ground below, miraculously saving the life of Elfy Bey and losing his own.

Above them, and without warning, the high walls surrounding the Mamelukes had come alive with countless armed Albanian troops showering down a blanket of death from their muskets. Defenseless, the Mamelukes fell into what must have been a rising river of blood. Heaped one on another, horses screaming and falling on them, chaos abounded. They had been sitting targets with no means of defense. When the screams died, and the last musket was fired, 500 Mamelukes lay dead at the feet of Mohamed Ali Pasha. His mission accomplished. This power hungry man had slain the dragon that threatened him. As a ruthless man

himself, we can only imagine the sense of power and satisfaction he felt as he gazed down upon those once considered to be the greatest horsemen and most ferocious warriors of their time.

The wealth of the Mamelukes was not a concern to Ali. Only their valuable horses were of interest to him. Thus as payment for the soldiers who carried out the massacre, they were allowed to strip the homes of their victims of their treasures, and finish the massacre by killing all that remained of their caste. The ruthless massacre ended the dynasty of the powerful Mamelukes and elevated Mohamed Ali to even greater power. Although of the greatest quality, there was no written documentation identifying the horses. Their history had been slain with the destruction of the Mamelukes.

Power was the force that drove Mohamed Ali. He catapulted himself into greatness and reaped the rewards of all that came with it, living a life full of complexities and contradictions. His passion for his one and only wife, Amina, resulted in great honor and respect for her. Their second son, Tousson, was an exceptional young man of great moral character and generosity. Violence of any kind was not in his nature, although at the appointment of his father, failed attempts were made to lead forces in battle. Even with failure, Cairo recognized his great effort and valour, welcoming him home as a hero, in contrast to the reception he received from his father. It was this gentle and compassionate son whose own son, Abbas Pasha I, would live to meticulously carry on the breeding and integrity of his horses.

While Tousson devoted himself to his mother, their more clever and aggressive first son, Ibrahim, was always by his father's side, reaching for power and the wealth that came with it, at any cost. The two men were much alike, ruthless and determined. Like Sultan Nasser before him, Mohamed Ali bore a passion for collecting the most superior horses in all of Arabia. Initially, with Ibrahim, he was determined to reverse the desiccation of Egypt's horses caused by the disasters of war. As a horseman all his life, the beauty and qualities of the Arabian horse appealed to his eye and appreciation for quality, and directed his focus to these great horses of the desert. They soon became obsessed with them.

A hoarder by nature, he built palatial stables and used every means to collect the best of the best. He was determined to bring every treasured Arabian horse to his stables. Great fortunes were paid. If unsuccessful in the purchase of a fine steed, he would not hesitate to destroy villages, invade tribes, or wage war, all for the sake of owning a coveted horse. Mohamed Ali, and his son Ibrihim, demanded Arabia's most priceless Desert horses as terms of a peace treaty with Arabia. When Ibrihim marched against the Saudi Amir, Abdullah Ibn Saud, the Amir was captured, beheaded and his precious stud of horses was taken by Ibrihim. Although forced to withdraw from Arabia in 1841, with them were taken hundreds of treasured Bedouin horses.





**Mohamed Ali Pasha Muhammad Ali by Auguste Couder**

Ibrihim had inherited the position of ruler from his father Mohamed Ali, and upon the death of Ibrihim in 1848, Abbas Pasha became ruler of Egypt. If one could be more passionate than Mohamed Ali about the Arabian horses of Egypt, it was Abbas Pasha. He was an extremely methodical man and kept very detailed records of each horse, their pedigrees and heritage. He went to great length to prove the purity of each animal. His manuscript and records were found decades later in the possession of Gulsun Sherif, daughter of Ahmed Bey Sherif. They were translated and published in 1993 by Judith Forbis and Gulsun Sherif as "The Abbas Pasha Manuscript and Horses and Horsemen of Arabia and Egypt during the Time of Abbas Pasha 1800-1860."

In addition to the horses left to him by Mohamed Ali, and thereafter Ibrihim Pasha, Abbas Pasha had also built an impressive herd of his own, primarily from the horses of the Bedouins. He also used his great wealth and any other means to acquire the equine treasures of Arabia, and came to be known, after King Solomon, the greatest collector and connoisseur of Arabian horses who ever lived. Abbas Pasha, like his grandfather before him, used political maneuvers

and favors to add to his outstanding herd. The freeing of Feysul Ibn Saud from the Citadel was repaid with 290 mares and a fine collection of stallions. These horses were the absolute pick of the Desert and considered to be the most authentic collection of pure blood ever made outside the Peninsula. They were legendary and felt to "rival those of King Solomon." Throughout time, the greatest and most noble horses of Arabia Deserta found their way to Egypt. Abbas Pasha was so enamored with the Saklawi Jedran Ibn Sudan strain of the Anazeh that he eventually brought all that existed to his stables, leaving none in the desert. Sadly, upon the death of Abbas Pasha, the palace and stables was abandoned and left to ruin. The horses were dispersed at auction. In a frenzy to save these cherished treasures, Abbas chief Bedouin groom, Hashe, approached Ali Pasha Cherif, a young man of great wealth, and as passionate as Abbas about the horses. Upon the advice of Hashe, Ali Pasha Cherif bought the cream of the herd, which remained with him in Cairo. Although this love was instilled in his sons who carried on after him, eventually Ali Pasha's herd was dispersed.



## **LADY ANNE BLUNT**

A major purchaser at this sale was Lady Anne Blunt, who divided them between her Sheykh Obeyd Stud in Egypt and her Crabbet Stud in England. Happily, most of the balance of the herd remained in Egypt with wealthy, royal and titled Egyptian families. It was at this point that the government of Egypt realized the significance of their equine treasures, and the degree of devotion among their breeders. One of the greatest ladies in the history of the Arabian horse was born Anne Isabella Noel, 15th Baroness Wentworth in 1837. She was the daughter of William King, 1st Earl of Lovelace and Ada King, Countess of Lovelace. Her mother's parents were the poet George Gordon Byron, 6th Baron Byron and Annabella Byron, 11th Baroness Wentworth. With all this aristocracy behind her, she was and is best known as Lady Anne Blunt. In 1869 she began what was to be a most unhappy marriage with the poet Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. Possibly the only thing they had in common, or enjoyed together, was their love for the Arabian horse. Within a year of their marriage, they began extensive travels to Arabia, Egypt and the Middle East, seeking out what they considered to be the world's finest horse. Lady Anne was so devoted to the horse of the Bedouin, she became a serious student of their breeding practices, dedicating herself to the same code of purity of the Bedouin. It was the plan of Lady Anne and Wilfrid to bring the Bedouin horse to their newly established Crabbet Stud in England, and was successful in doing so. Establishing a stud in Egypt also, it was their plan to exchange horses between the two locations, and began by shipping two stallions to Egypt. This attempt met with disaster, when the stallions were lost at sea, putting an end to this idea. Lady Anne was a horse lover from childhood, an accomplished equestrienne, a talented and well trained artist, a skilled musician, and spoke 5 languages fluently, including Arabic. Her skills as a horsewoman, her natural eye as an artist for beauty and balance, combined with her language skills was very helpful in her selections and negotiations with the Bedouins. She had a sincere love for their horses and their principals as breeders. They recognized this and liberally shared their knowledge and horses with this English lady. Wilfrid was not only a poet, but had a great interest in Middle Eastern politics, and with Lady Anne was equally interested in saving the Arabian breed. They both made tireless journeys to this purpose. He was also a rather controlling man. Two important books she had written to document her travels, "Bedouin Tribes of the Euphrates" and "A Pilgrimage to Nejd," both based on her journals, were heavily edited by Wilfrid. She later published her journals which exclusively gives her own voice to the adventures. After many miscarriages, and babies who died shortly after birth, which grieved her terribly, Lady Anne had one surviving child, a girl named Judith, officially named Judith Blunt-Lytton, 16th Baroness Wentworth. Wilfrid made no secret of the fact that he would have much preferred a

boy. Lady Anne's loving, gentle and forgiving nature helped her to cope with the indefensible situations she was forced to suffer. Wilfrid also insisted on control of management of Crabbet Stud, although he was the lesser horseman of the two, and made many inept decisions. He insisted on managing horses in frigid England exactly as the Bedouins managed theirs in the desert, and management decisions in Egypt was greatly lacking in efficiency. Those decisions ultimately caused the death of many horses, both in Egypt and England. Using the Bedouin lifestyle as an excuse, he had many mistresses, sometimes more than one at a time. However, in 1906, he moved Dorothy Carleton into their home. She was his mistress who he later adopted as his niece. It was the final straw for Lady Anne. A formal separation was the result, and the Stud was divided. Lady Anne kept Crabbet Park, Wilfrid took Newbuildings, and the stock was divided evenly between them. From that time, she began to spend several months a year at her Sheykh Obeyd estate near Cairo, which was being used as a breeding farm for their horses in Egypt. Judith and her family lived at the Crabbet estate. In 1915, Lady Anne relinquished the management of Crabbet to Judith, choosing to live permanently at Sheykh Obeyd with her beloved horses, acquired from Abbas Pasha and Ali Pasha Sherif, where the horses flourished under her care. There she stayed until her death in 1917. Lady Anne had inherited the Wentworth title shortly before her death. Wilfrid had tirelessly tried to convince Lady Anne to give him her share of Crabbet, even creating a situation which alienates Judith and Lady Anne from each other. During this time, Lady Anne disinherited Judith, but still did not give in to Wilfrid.



**Lady Ann Blunt**



The death of Lady Anne passed the Wentworth title to Judith, who then owned horses and land of her own. Lady Anne left her portion of Crabbet to her grandchildren, Judith's children. She also appointed a trustee to oversee her estate. Furious that they had been bypassed, Wilfrid and Judith entered into a bitter legal battle over Lady Anne's part of the estate and her horses. The courts ruled in favor of Judith's children in 1920, invalidated the deed which separated the stud, and reunified most of the stud. By this time, Wilfrid had reconciled with Judith but never bothered to alter his will to grant her any inheritance of his property or horses. Eventually, after Wilfrid's death in 1922, Judith bought her daughters shares of Crabbet and Newbuildings and many of the horses Wilfrid had sold. Sadly, Judith did not possess her mother's strict devotion to purity. When she inherited the well known Crabbet Stud in England, she changed the complexion of these horses completely. Judith discarded Wilfrid's "desert practices" which never worked to the horses' advantage in England, and with it also deserted the principals of purity of the Bedouin in favor of a different type of Arabian. She sold some of the horses obtained in Egypt, back into Egypt. The horses thrived, and Judith prospered in her breeding practices for almost 50 years, when the property was bisected by a motorway in 1971. To this day, a great number of Egyptian Arabians share a common ancestor with the Blunt horses. The student of the Egyptian Arabian will recognize some great and highly influential horses from the best of the breed's pedigrees, to some of those horses, such as Azrek, Dajania, Queen of Sheba, Rodania and the famous Ali Pasha Sherif stallion, Mesaoud. Mesaoud was brought into England from Egypt in 1889, to become one of the most influential Arabian stallions in the world and found in literally thousands of pedigrees today. Perhaps the most famous of his offspring was the 1900 stallion Astraed, foaled in 1900. One of his sons was Gulastra, a great grandsire of Abu Farwa, who established his own line in the USA. However, another of Mesaoud's grandsons, Berk, was a stallion that established a line of Arabians known for their brilliant action. Mesaoud seemed to epitomize the Blunts vision of an Arabian horse and sire. He was a beautiful chestnut with good-bone, excellent conformation, strength and movement which became a keystone of the Crabbet Arabian. Sixteen mares and forty one stallions are listed as root stock in the Egyptian Agricultural Organization (E.A.O.) Stud Book. Nearly half of these horses were bred at Shekyh Obeyd or at Crabbet Park. One was Kazmeen, who sold to the Egyptian Agricultural Organization in 1920 with several other Crabbet horses. There Kazmeen sired Bint Samih who went on to possibly be the most famous E.A.O. horse, Nazeer. If this was the only contribution Crabbet blood had in the E.A.O. it would have been significant, but in fact many Crabbet horses bred in the stud can still be found in Egyptian Arabian pedigrees. This author once owned a chestnut mare, closely related to Kazmeen. When the other horses were moving at a full

gallop, she kept up or led the pack in a powerful, smooth, ground covering trot. I rarely recall seeing her need to advance into a gallop. The majority of purebred Arabians of any program, in any country, trace to at least one Crabbet ancestor, all due to the great dedication of Lady Anne Blunt. Volumes of accounts of her life, devotion, and work with and for her horses make interesting reading for the breeder enthusiast. Crabbet-bred Arabian horses, to this day, are known for their athleticism, classic type, temperament and soundness. In 1908, the government formed the Royal Agricultural Society whose leaders gathered the best descendants of the Abbas Pasha and Ali Pasha Cherif herds for the overall good of the country. Today, the R.A.S. is known as the Egyptian Agricultural Organization, or E.A.O. This is only a name change, however, as it continues with the same devotion and with the blood of these precious, earlier horses.

#### **DR. SAYED MAREI**

It has always been fascinating how simple events can change the course of history. In our own lives, we are aware of how a quick decision can redirect our path. Rarely do we give thought to how the decisions made by our ancestors profoundly affect the present and future.

In 1935, Ahmed Marei visited the Royal Agricultural Society, and brought home two young fillies. These fillies were meant to be the beginning of a small breeding program for the Marei family. Their existence in the Marei family however would begin a passion that would grow generation after generation. More important, that passion would be an important stepping stone in the salvation of the Arabian horses of Egypt.

In time, Ahmed's son, Dr. Sayed Marei, grew up to be a very important man in Egyptian politics, but his love for the family horses was strong in his heart. Following in his father's footsteps, he took a great interest in continuing the breeding program.

In 1951, the Marei family moved from Banha to Giza, at the base of the Great Pyramids and adopted the name, Albadeia, meaning wild, open desert. It was then that they also shifted their breeding philosophy to the ultimate goal of breeding the purest and most classical Egyptian Arabians possible.

In 1961, under the rule of Gamal Abdel-Nasser, the Arabian horse in Egypt was threatened with extinction. To further Nasser's goals of creating a socialist nation for Egypt, Nasser made it practically illegal to own assets of any significance, including horses. Many of the affluent families that owned and bred horses had no more financial means to support their horses. The horses, along with their wealth, were nationalized. Horses were dispersed, given away or simply were not cared for due to a lack of funds. The lucky ones were collected in the Egyptian Agricultural Organization. At one point the regime decided that keeping breeding horses was still a symbol of the past and thus the



horses of the EAO should also be dispersed.

Dr. Sayed Marei, then Minister of Agriculture, acting alone with no political backing, and risking his career, approached Nasser with a long passionate plea in defense of the horses. His words were; "... it will be as if erasing the great pyramids of Egypt." It was Dr. Sayed Marei who was able to convince Nasser to leave the horses alone. As a sole result of this act, we have the Egyptian Arabian horse today.

Even though Nasser agreed to leave the horses alone, it was still extremely difficult to build a breeding program during the 60's. With so many horses scattered and lost, it was important to attempt to rescue as many of possible and return them to the breeding programs of Egypt. Ever dedicated to the Arabian horses of Egypt, Dr. Sayed Marei, with Dr. Amin Zaher and Dr. Mohamed Al Marsafi of the EAO, diligently searched out, found, and identified many of the missing horses, returning them to the EAO or private studs that were able to care for them and continue to breed.

Dr. Marei continued to work for the Arabian horses of Egypt throughout his lifetime. In 1985, along with his sons Nasr and Hassan, who had become equally passionate about the horses, joined with others to organize the private breeders in what was to become The Egyptian Arabian Breeders Association. That organization is active today.

In 1992 the sole responsibility of the Albadeia breeding program passed on to his son Dr. Nasr Marei. Dr. Marei is well known as a respected judge of Arabian horses, a major breeder of the Egyptian Arabian horse, and accomplished photographer in the Egyptian Arabian community too

## **WORLDWIDE INFLUENCE**

It has been realized that the importance of preserving the blood of these exceptional horses is imperative. Thus, the classification of "Straight Egyptian Arabian" was born. The term, straight Egyptian is reserved specifically for horses who trace in all lines to horses born in Arabia Deserta and were owned or bred by Abbas Pasha I or Ali Pasha Sherif or was used to create and maintain the Royal Agricultural Society or Egyptian Agricultural Organization breeding programs.

In time, the reputation of the beautiful horses of Egypt found its way to America. The Blunts had sold a handful of Egyptian horses to an occasional American and a few others also found their way. Having heard of their superior qualities, Mr. Henry Babson traveled to Egypt and was thrilled with what he saw. In 1932, seven horses arrived at the Babson farm in Illinois, from Egypt. In the same year, W.R. Brown imported horses from the Egyptian stables of Prince Mohamed Ali. Their arrival changed the complexion of the Arabian breed in America for the next thirty years. Twenty years later, Donald and Judith Forbis imported a trio of superior horses from the Egyptian Agricultural Organization, as did Douglas and Margret Marshall and Jim and Eloise Kline. More were to follow shortly behind. The

imports of the Babson era are sometimes referred to as, "old" Egyptian and the latter, as "new."

With the arrival of the EAO horses in America, and its appearance in the show rings, an explosion of interest and enthusiasm took place throughout the Arabian horse world. Breeders, desiring to add this precious blood to their programs, as well as masses of new breeders who were moving from other breeds or starting their first program, could not get enough of Egyptian blood. The overwhelming interest started a great demand for Arabians directly from Egypt, and there seemed to be no ceiling to the price people were willing to pay.

Longtime breeders of Arabians in Egypt, such as Dr. Sayed Marei of Albadeia Stud; Fatma and Ahmed Hamza, Hamza Stud; and Dani Barberi of Shams Al Asil Stud, were quickly recognized as excellent, private sources of Arabian horses from Egypt, in addition to the EAO. The breeding and exportation of their horses, and those from the E.A.O., became a familiar ritual.

With bloodstock pouring out of Egypt, concern began to develop over the reduced choices of breeding stock in its native land. America had used this blood to breed some of the world's most outstanding horses, and on a lesser scale, Europe had joined in. It was now time for Egypt to benefit from the fruits of their efforts, and bring them back to their homeland. At the beginning of the 1990's Egyptian breeders began importing the descendants of their breeding back into Egypt.

In time, the quest for the Egyptian Arabian horse became a vessel by which people from all cultures across the world, came together as brothers. Today, there are very few countries that do not have at least one program of Egyptian Arabian horses. Arabs and American's alike, mutually exchange breeding stock with Israel, as well as countries such as Saudi Arabia, the Emirate Gulf states, Germany, Australia, South Africa, England, and more. In the presence of, and in the interest of the Egyptian Arabian horse, race, religion, language, color and class all fade away and go unnoticed by those who love this horse.

Dedicated breeders of the Egyptian Arabian are committed to the preservation of this purest of all equine blood. To lose the purity of a single mare through careless breeding is a sin among them. Aggressive research clarifies any question concerning the purity of a Straight Egyptian pedigree. Within this group are several passionate researchers who have devoted their lives to the continued documentation of these horses.

In 1952, Miss Jane Ott began a list of the horses proven in every line to trace directly to the Desert. This was called the "Blue Catalog." She continued this catalog until the early 70's, when she closed her research. The organization known as "Al Khamsa" was then born to continue her work. There are some variations, as Al Khamsa accepts some horses not listed in the "Blue Catalog" but it is evident that they would have been so, given time. All these horses trace directly in



every line to horses from Bedouin Tribes, or to exceptional individuals such as Abbas Pasha and Lady Ann Blunt, who only purchased horses from these sources. The terms "Blue List" and "Al Khamsa" indicate that this horse is believed beyond a reasonable doubt to be pure as a result of the research of these meticulous organizations. The term, Asil, meaning purebred, is a German based organization with the same goals. The term, Egyptian-Bred or Egyptian Related, is a term for a purebred Arabian horse whose sire, or both grandsires, are Straight Egyptian Arabians, but the dam or a granddame is not straight Egyptian.

Reference to "Polish," "Russian" and "Spanish" Arabians refer to horses from breeding programs of those countries. Interestingly, the horses of Egypt have played an important part in their foundation. In 1936, Lady Wentworth sold 19 Crabbet mares of Egyptian blood to the Russian Government. In 1899, de Sdanovitch purchased five horses with heavy Egyptian blood. He later purchased from the Blunts the Ali Pasha Sherif Egyptian mare Sobha. Count Stroganoff purchased Makhula in 1900. The world famous Mesaoud, from the Blunts herd, traveled to the Kleniwewski Stud in 1903, all from Egypt. The most influential modern day horse of Russia was Aswan. The Tersk Stud of Russia used him extensively throughout his life. Aswan was a straight Egyptian stallion, a son of the legendary Nazeer out of the fine mare, Yosreia. Many of his daughters remained at the stud as cherished broodmares. The blood of Egyptian horses is strong in both countries even though there, "straight Egyptian" breeding programs do not exist. In Spain, Egyptian blood is thick through the blood of Crabbet horses purchased by that country. Today, straight Egyptian breeding programs are dominate in virtually all European and Arab countries, in those of the British Isles, and on the American continent.

Modern breeders have recently rediscovered the value of crossing the blood from these other bloodlines with pure Egyptian blood. Many of the most successful and sought after horses in the Arabian horse show ring today are the results of the infusion of pure Egyptian blood, commonly though an Egyptian stallion. Likewise, other breeds often choose to infuse Arabian blood to strengthen or add their proponent characteristics. This may be for overall beauty, refinement, or endurance. Since ancient times, throughout the world, man has looked to Egypt as the source for the best blood. At this writing, the Straight Egyptian Arabian represents less than 3% of the Arabian breed, yet holds over 30% of the show titles worldwide and even more so in Europe and the Middle East. In the mid 1980's, when the horse market of all breeds crashed, the Egyptian Arabian maintained the highest position in value and the least decline in numbers, over all other Arabian bloodlines.

The purity of the Egyptian Arabian horse has endured from the beginning of history due to the passionate devotion of its caretakers. The fittest have survived centuries of battles, and harsh use across torrid Desert sand. It has earned respect

with its great beauty, intelligence, strength, courage, and stamina. Gold has adorned its head and he has walked on carpets of silk. It has slept in the tents of its owners and taken food before kings and pharaohs. Is there any wonder why its blood, fine qualities, and purity are so precious?

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Photo by Nasr Marei



"Nazeer at the EAO" by Barbara S. Lewis - Lithograph Prints  
available from the artist