

The uniqueness of the character of our Arabian horses is the ultimate proof of their heritage!

■ by Matthias Oster

"It was a great evening. Still on thing bothered me I had not yet made friends with my mare. She fretted and was nervous.... So I let her fret. We rode on for miles over dirt and rock and Wadduda still seemed fretful. She wanted something; that was evident, but what it was I could not quite make out. Then suddenly I was enlightened.

Just as the big red sun was setting we came to the desert. Wadduda stopped as if she were paying some tribute to the closing day. The faint roadway now seemed to disappear and before us was a vast barren plain. The sky was of a soft blue tinted to gold by the sun, which had just set. I turned in my Oregon-made saddle, as easily as I could, that I might see where the rest of the caravan was. The mare did not notice my turning. With a quick and graceful toss of the head, she began to play. I sat deep down in my saddle and let her frolic uninterrupted. She finally stopped short, and snorted twice.

Turning slightly to the left she started galloping with a delighted spring. It was the return home, the call of the wild life with its thrills of wars and races; with its beautiful open air, as compared with the musty stuffed corral she had been picketed in. She was getting away from civilization and back to the open. Once in a while she stopped short, apparently to scent the rapidly cooling atmosphere. Now and then she pranced, picking her way between camel thistles. Her ears were alert; her eyes were blazing with an expression of intense satisfaction. All this time, I found by my wet cheeks, that I had been crying without knowing it. I was wrought up to a state of much excitement. I was again a boy and felt the presence of my parents, and recalled the stories of the Arab horses, they used to tell me when I was a child. I remembered the drawings I had made of them as a boy. It was hard to realize that I was I, and that I was astride the most distinguished mare of the desert. I seemed then to realize what she was and what she meant to me. My face was dripping again and I felt glad I was alone.

Wadduda had stopped short again and was scanning the horizon. I touched the mare with my heels, but she did not move. She was thinking. Of what, who knows? Perhaps of her wars, or of combats of the desert, or of the keen edge of the Bedouin lance given when she had seen both horse and rider fall from the thrust of the spear of the Great Sheikh who had ridden her. So for a long time we waited together – the mare and I, in the gathering dusk, and as we waited I almost wished that we could always be alone. The call of the desert came strong to both of us then."

Homer Davenport 1906

Homeless Arabian-Horse?

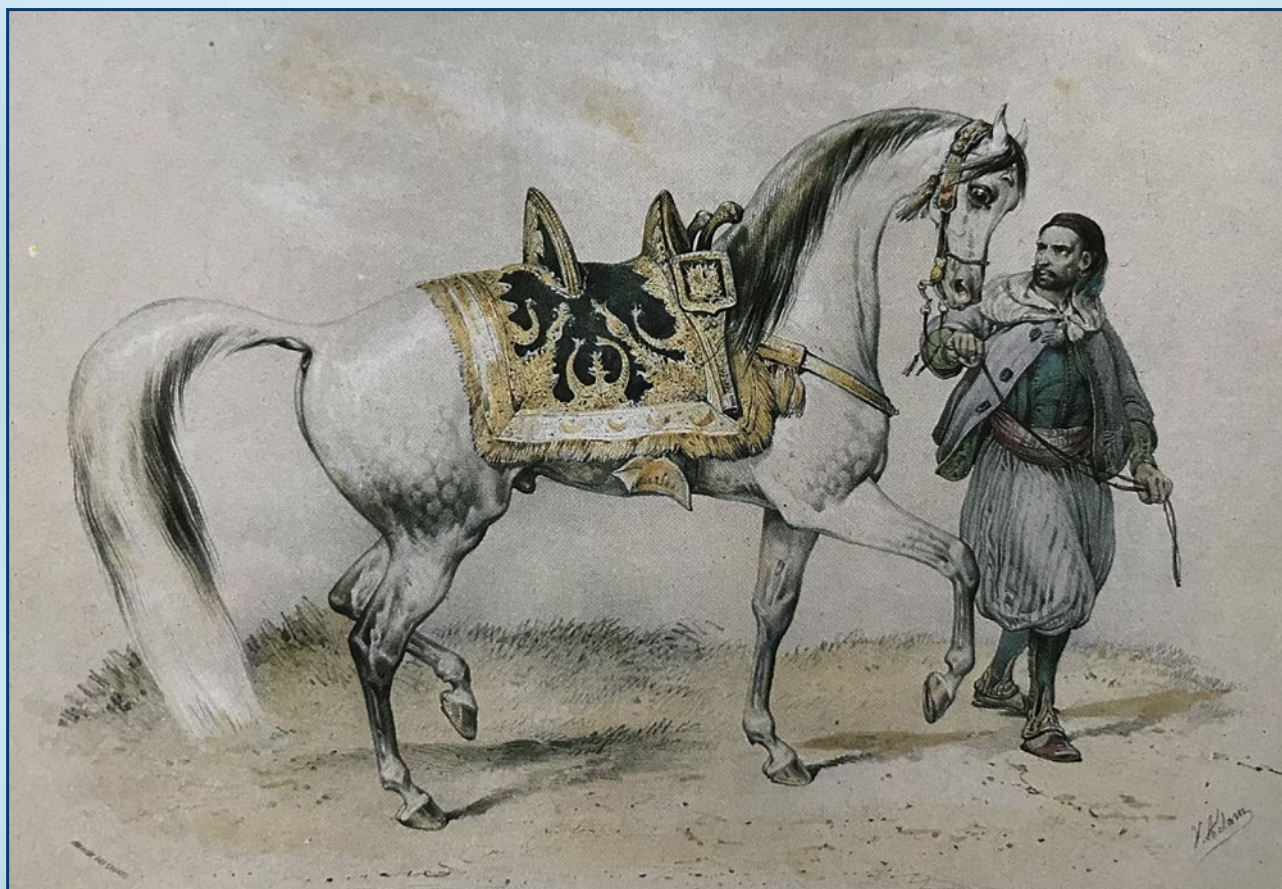
The touching description of the war mare Wadduda, returning to her home, the desert, with her new owner in his search of the dream-horses of his childhood, before her export to America, brings us to questions of great importance, that shall be discussed in the following.

In his remarkable book „The Egyptian Alternative“, Part One, Philippe Paraskevas made a true statement about the horse of the Bedouins: He calls it a refugee and the author wants to add: It is a refugee also in his home country, the Arabian peninsula, today. A strong description, nevertheless hitting the nail on its head. Because the “home” of the Arabian breed does no longer exist! More later.

The Arabian horse shares his fate as refugee with countless humans, especially of Arabian heritage, but not directly. The living conditions of the human refugees are reciprocal to those of the Arabian horse. While the first live a poor existence in refugee camps, mostly in tents, the Arabian horse came from the

desert into luxury. Paraskevas therefore calls it a “glorious refugee”. It was able to exchange the black tent of the Bedouin with a stable and the desert with green pastures. Human refugees need not stay refugees forever. Some may become integrated in the countries of their save havens. Others may return into their old home countries. But also, and regretfully there remain those, whom an end of their refugee lives is denied, in most cases out of political reasons. And at last there are those who find a new home but still remain refugees because their yearning for the old home does not diminish. But let us go back to our Arabian horses.

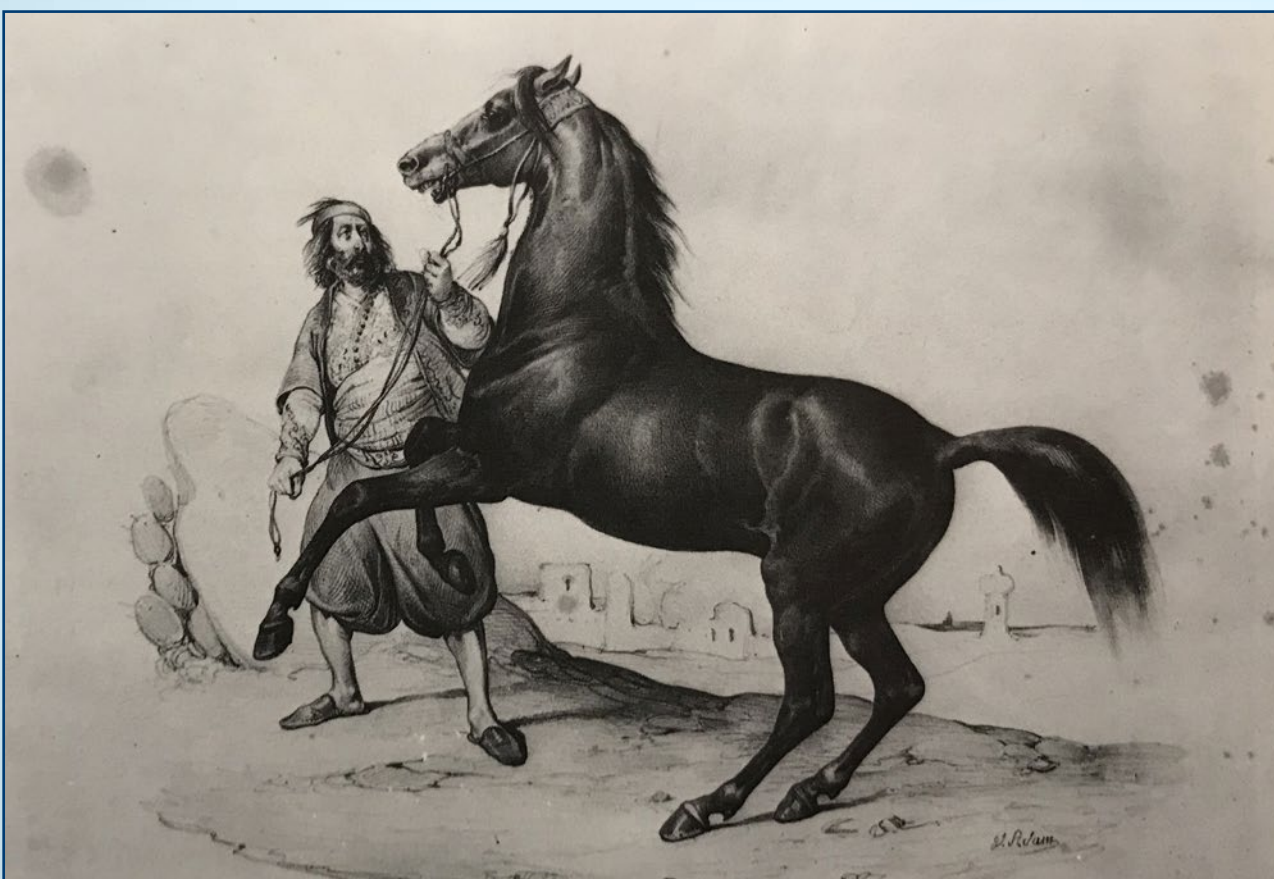
The “home” or native place of the Bedouin horses does no more exist. First we have to define the meaning of home. The author wants to lean to the definition of home for humans. Home is more than a geographic notation. It also means the social context. For us humans the family is probably the most important part of our home. If the family remains intact the horrors of expulsion can be borne in a more easy way. On the



Victor Adam, Mogador



L.C. Jument Arab avec son Poulain. Lithography of the Journal de Haras (1845)



Victor Adam. Tedmouri Race, Kirour. (1831)

other hand the destruction of the family even with an intact geographic home results in the loss of the home. Applying this to the Arabian breed we only look briefly on his geographic home. It naturally still exists, but the conditions of living there have changed dramatically. The desert is irrigated artificially. For example, Saudi Arabia is able to gain most of its needed hay by itself. Life there is no longer limited to the one question of survival, both for men and animals. In fact, the contrary applies to the social context of the horse in Arabia. It does no longer exist in the form that has shaped the asil horse. The nomadic Bedouin has become sedentary and his way of life has vanished except for rudiments. To say it again with Paraskevas: "This change of life style (from nomadic patterns to sedentary life) started a process of unavoidable separation between man and his horse, a fatal separation, first mentally then physically."

As a result the Arabian horse has lost its "family". Therefore it became a homeless individual in a double sense. It had to cope with the loss of its "geographic" home and of its "original family" at a time. Its geographic home had formed it into a master of survival under the harsh circumstances of desert life. But it was a life that it could only master together with its original family, the Bedouins. Now the question arises how the Arabian horse mastered this double loss of home. Or in other words: How far did the Arabian horse of today drift away from the original Arabian, the Bedouin horse? A question every sincere breeder of Arabian horses has to ask himself. A theme discussed passionately by Paraskevas. A very controversial topic of great importance, without regard how you may look upon the developments of the last one hundred years. Only some catch-words to illustrate this: preservation breeding, beauty ideals, show dolls, breeding for performance.



Carle Vernet. Playing Stallions. (1820)



But let us return to the question how the horse had coped with the expulsion from its home. We can see how it has managed the displacement the same way as we judge this in humans: by viewing behavior and mental sanity. It would lead too far to discuss this in length. Some observations on the behavior of Arabian horses shall give sufficient proof for the following theses:

- The Arabian horse of today, even after 100 years of exile, is still close to its ancestor, the Bedouin horse.
- It is possible to organize the “refugee camps” as “save-havens”. The Arabian horse needs both his like as well as the closeness to us humans.
- The Arabian breed does not only thrive “when it breathes the desert air”, as it has been expressed by an Arabian poet, but also under the love and care of modern men.
- The character of the Arabian horse is the ultimate and decisive feature of the breed.

The following examples, some from own witness and some from narration, shall illustrate the above given theses:

Nagha (Gharib X Nazeefa), one of the foundation mares of the Seidlitz breeding program, was a very special mare.

She was very shy against strangers, but when she won confidence to a person, this had nearly no limits. When not enough trained riding horses were at hand for all the children, she was taken for a ride outside without any problem, never having had a rider before. After a severe parturition assisted by the late Günter W. Seidlitz, she waited to foal in all consecutive births until her master came into the stable in the morning.

Nagha's last daughter, Nahzle (Masr El Dahman X Nagha), is very similar to her by character. Unfortunately she did not show any heat for years and all veterinary efforts did not succeed. Only when a new stallion came into the farm (Safeen), she came into heat spontaneously and now has very good foals. Safeen (Ibn Safinaz X Abitibi Madeena) prefers to cover a mare naturally to giving his semen into an artificial vagina on a dummy. Nevertheless he does it, but with sings of dislike. But careful, do not inseminate his mare in his presence, I tell you! I did not know that a horse can show such an annoyance. His son Safiy El Bediya (Safeen X Mabrouka Bint Maaresa) was not yet of six months of age, but cared for his harem. After rain a big pool of water had formed exactly on the entrance to the meadow. One of “his” mares, a filly of his age, did not follow the rest of

the herd through the water. Safiy and his dam and all other horses were already on the other side except for this foal. Realizing this, he called for her and when she did not follow, he made a big jump over the water, circled her and neighed, and finally he showed her the way by jumping back. This we could watch several times.

These examples are only a small selection of occurrences with the Arabian horses of the author and the Seidlitz breeding program, but they show: Even after generations in exile the essential inner values of the Bedouin horse have stayed intact. It is our common task to take care that they will be preserved into the future – by giving our horses the “family” they need and deserve and by breeding with the focus on character. Annotation: The stallion is part of this family. Artificial insemination and embryo-transfer have their right and pros, but should be used with care. For maiden mares natural cover should be preferred as this is good for their mental development.

The uniqueness of the character of our Arabian horses is the ultimate proof of their heritage! □

You read an excerpt of the book:

Bedouin Heritage
The World of the Arabian Horse.
Seven Pillars of Breeding Arabian Horses.

*By Dr. Matthias Oster, Equine Veterinary
and breeder of Arabian horses in Germany.*

The book can be ordered at www.Nawalmedia.org

Thanks to the Olmsverlag for the printing of the historical pictures. Thanks to Prof. Karin Thieme for the pictures from her archive.



Victor Adam. Mameluke and his Horse (1850)