

FROM WHERE I SIT, A SIDEWAYS LOOK AT GLOBALISATION!

■ by *Deirdre Hyde*

photos by Deirdre Hyde and Monika Savier archive

Some years ago, a very interesting conference was organised by Monika Savier in Sicily, the title for the Conference was “Arabian Horses in the World, A Dialogue of Cultures and Breeding” Its sub-title was “The Globalisation of the Arabian Horse, dialogue between cultures or homeless show star”. Little did we know just how valid the concerns then voiced would prove to be and how we have come to breed an Arab horse unrecognisable from its origins whether it be show or racehorse. Is it not time serious breeders and those who claim to love the Arab horse take a long hard look at the future for our breed? Can a breed still exist if it loses the qualities for which it was originally valued? Should action be taken before it is too late or is it a natural progression thanks to globalisation?

The following brief stories perhaps illustrate the gulf that has grown between old world culture and the followers of the modern show and racing scene; neither can remain untouched by globalisation.

In the 1970's I gave a slide show to the Scottish Regional Group of the Arab Horse Society on that year's Arab Horse

Show, illustrating the cream of UK breeding and the show's champions. We had, as guests of honour,

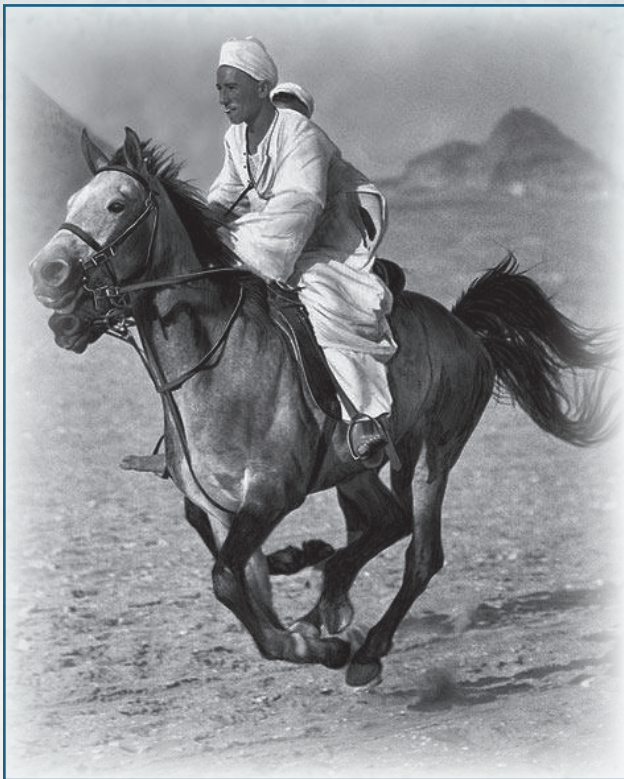
several veterinary students from Saudi Arabia. After the show they were asked what they thought of the horses they had seen. There followed what is known as a pregnant pause, before one of the students bravely

said he was very sorry, but he had not seen a true Arab horse. No one knew quite how to respond to this shocking statement. We soon discovered the students felt very strongly that a true Arabian not only had to be bred and raised under traditional concepts but should have been born in Arabia! During my years in the

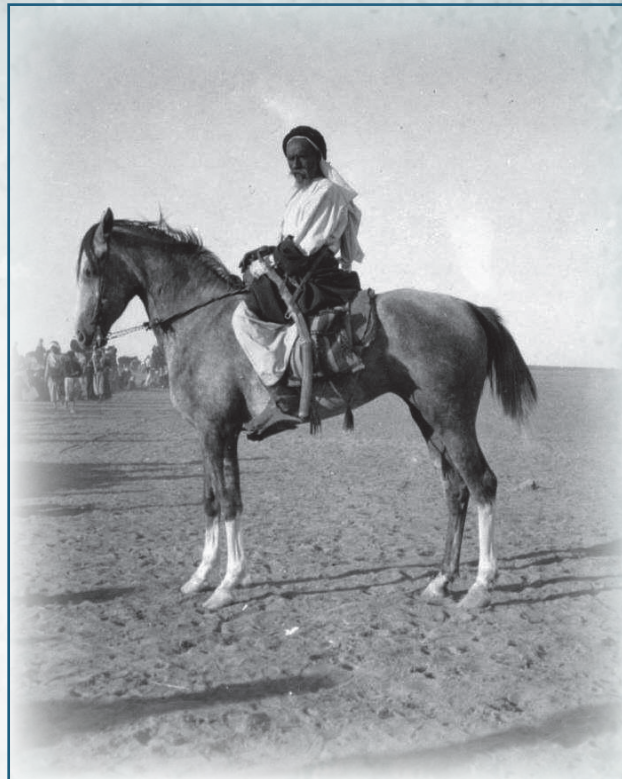
Middle East, I have since heard various versions and shades of this view expressed by people uninfluenced by the show rings of

the West. It has not even been a question of purity, but more a philosophy or feeling for what the Arabian is thanks to the part it played in the life of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and in Islam.

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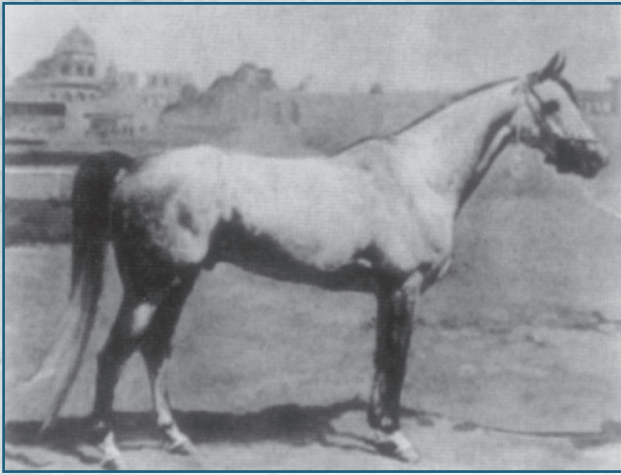
Arabians love to race - Egypt 1929 Martin Munkacsi



Bedouin mare near Arish, Gaza races c. 1934 John D Whiting



Lady Ann Blunt on Kasida (Nasr x Makbula) a Kuaylah Jellabyah mare * 1891 in the desert of Syria.



At El Zahraa in Cairo, the stallions Balance *1928 (Ibn Samhan x Farida) and El Deree *1920 have been excellent race horses and proved to be good sires for producing racing stock



Asil Arabian Horse in Khuzestan, West-Iran

A further illustration of this comes from HH Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan the late President of the UAE when he was inspecting a recently imported racing stallion. Almost immediately, HH waved the horse away saying "I do not care how fast he is, he is not an Arab horse!" He made it very clear that in his view the horse did not look or behave like an Arabian and therefore was not worthy to be considered one no matter what his pedigree might say!

Then there is the pride of one tribe in Southern Iran who claim to have kept their strain of Arabians within the tribe for over 400 years. These horses are certainly not beauties in any classic sense, although



Modern Arabian race horses





Parading before the start.
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“ Can a breed
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The start.
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they have huge eyes and a wonderful quality of skin, but for their owners they have beauty, which lies in their exceptional speed and endurance. Without doubt, their ancestors were the horses of ballads and heroic deeds, which caught the imagination of the West in the first place.

The problem for this group is that the old way of life has all but gone, the Arabian is certainly redundant as a war horse, and there is virtually no demand for the unimproved desert horse, except in a few corners of the Middle East, or amongst a dedicated handful of preservationist breeders who are often the

butt of cynical comment. To give these horses some value beyond curiosities, several Middle East shows have introduced special show classes for desert-bred or local-bred horses. Whilst this may help in a small way, there is the danger that the horse will be transformed into the favoured image of the moment with little regard to preserving its essential qualities of soundness, temperament, endurance etc. on which, as much as on beauty, the Arabian's reputation traditionally lies. Unfortunately, if nothing else these classes show man's ability to transform the appearance of a breed over a very few generations. There is of



Desert Arabians of the Royal Cavalry in Oman



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course racing which has always been a sport for Arabians, Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) is recorded as training and racing his horses and racing has a long tradition throughout Turkey and the Middle East especially in Iraq and Egypt, and has been used by the State studs of Europe to test and assess their horses. However, man with his will to win has made such



Original Desert Arabians of HH King Hamad Bin Isa al Khalifa in Al Roudha in Nahrain

rapid strides through selective breeding that there is little chance for any, but those horses specifically bred and raised to win. Many consider this concentration on speed has been made at the expense of beauty, type and quality. However much more worryingly modern genetic science has thrown new light on the extent of questionable breeding and the purity of the racing Arabian. The intentional use of other blood to breed a faster horse has surely been a form of cheating, but proof was a grey area until DNA and parentage verification came along. So, what should be done and anyway is the modern Arabian horse really so pure? Questions that deserve serious discussion and answers. Even in endurance where it might be expected that the desert bred horse could hold its own, few if any have come close to beating the modern specialist horse or the bigger, faster cross-breeds which are becoming very popular. Of greatest concern is that for many, endurance principles have changed to reflect a new and dubious sport more akin to long distance flat racing for which the horses have paid a very high price turning people away from the sport.

On the other side of the dialogue, a more recent story concerns an article I read in a magazine describing what one looks for in the modern Arabian show horse. After many words on type, the head, the top line and tail carriage etc., the author rather astonishingly concluded by saying the show Arabian could be considered the 'ultimate fashion accessory!' After the initial shock and a moment's reflection I had to acknowledge maybe there was some truth in this idea. Consider the following, show horses like fashion items frequently have little or no practical purpose, beyond parading in the show ring and producing more of the same. In fashion, function often comes a poor second to the brand (bloodline) of the moment, or the necessity of having eye catching or particularly decorative qualities. Of little importance are soundness, fertility and temperament, which are difficult if not impossible to evaluate in the show ring. The majority of Champion show horses are not bred by their owners, but purchased through a middle-man who literally scours the World for something that will become a Champion, knowing someone with very deep pockets will pay the price, thus bringing high



Desert Arabians in a local race of the Anaze Bedouin Tribe in Syria



Al Shamoos winner Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan Jewel Crown. Winner Al Shamoos

finance into the equation. Finally, and of enormous importance with a sought-after champion, that owner becomes a member of a select club or group. This will surround him with like-minded people who will confirm his good taste and judgement especially if he bought into their particular bloodline. In our status-conscious world, this is a very comfortable and

desirable place in which to be.

Of course, the Arabian has been a collector's item for the wealthy down the centuries, one does not have to go far back in history to think of the lengths that Abbas Pasha and his like would go to in to obtain outstanding specimen of the breed; nevertheless, there are considerable differences between those days





Arabian race horses in Muskat, Oman

and the present. Such people collected Arabians with a desire to preserve certain lines and types, they were seldom driven by commerce; keeping one hundred or one thousand horses did not seem to matter to them as they followed the invocation of their Islamic faith to breed and care for horses.

A hundred and fifty years ago horses still went to war and played an important role in society, which ensured a balance and understanding between users and collectors. Until World War I hundreds of Arab horses bred by the Tribes were sold annually to India for the cavalry or racing, however with the coming of the automobile, the Arabian was feared to be disappearing from its homeland and by the middle of the last century, it was almost in danger of becoming a rare breed. Around a war-torn world the horse in general had become an unnecessary luxury. Then within the last thirty or forty years with vastly growing wealth and free time, riding and horse ownership has become highly popular, and for those with a love of the exotic, Arabians have a particular appeal. Until the recent economic crisis, this resulted in a breeding explosion and a new kind of collector who is susceptible to marketing and fashion, which is re-shaping the modern Arab horse in a desire to win. Most recently we have seen the influence of wealthy owners of the Middle East who are buying back into



the Arabian, but rather than return to the ways of their ancestors as the traditionalists would like, they have fully adopted the standards of the West and encouraged the division of the breed into 'beauty horses' and racehorses. Even the issue of purity for some has a double standard, which is difficult to reconcile with our traditional understanding of the Arab belief in absolute purity. Horses with pedigrees which are openly questioned are accepted and purchased if they are likely to be a racing Champion! Originally, horse shows were about assessing and improving breeding stock - it is interesting to note that Sir Wilfred and Lady Anne Blunt both disliked horse shows. Blunt considered them "a mistake except perhaps for advertisement" whilst they both felt that show results were misleading and that it was much more important that a horse should breed good stock than wins prizes in the show ring. They would probably be horrified that today's show ring has

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Endurance training session with Arabian horses at the Gulf coast

moved dramatically towards an emphasis on “Show and presentation on the day”, and away from breeding. Nowadays Horse Shows are unashamedly called Beauty Contests. No expense is spared in the marketing, training and presenting a would-be top horse; horses can be drastically transformed by a skilled or unscrupulous hand. The question arises how far should this be allowed to go, and at what point does enhancement become misrepresentation or fraud? Judges and untutored owners can be fooled some of the time but in the end the horse remains what it is, and the beauty treatment can be just a quick, self-deluding fix! Globalisation has made the world a

smaller place, horses can be shipped with relative ease to take part in events in all corners of the globe, which has the benefit of bringing together Champions of different countries and comparing them against a standard. However, it is questionable if the Arab horse should be standardised. When the European Union introduced standards for apples, tomatoes, etc. there was a huge outcry about loss of choice and the value of the ‘old’ varieties. If this was not acceptable for fruit and vegetables, why should it be good for the Arab horse, which historically had many shapes, sizes and types? This is a big problem for future shows, handlers and judges as horses become more similar





Figaro
Gold Medal Yearling Males
Paris 2017



LR Era De Excalibur
Gold Medal Yearling Females
Paris 2017

and difficult to separate in highly competitive classes, especially if a lot of money is at stake. The ECAHO points system is a very insensitive tool, and its wider international use could be one of the hidden dangers of globalisation.

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with the possibilities of hereditary problems and diseases becoming more prevalent. These have obvious commercial implications nevertheless with careful use of global communications they can be discussed and kept in perspective. On the other hand, does it really matter that the produce of two or three stallions dominate in the show ring? The answer is probably not, except for show ring statistics, fashion and the perception of those who might want to join the fun. Just consider, for example

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in a country like the UK, which registers less than 400 foals per year: how many stallions cover more than 20 mares on a regular basis? Probably none, most foals are by stallions covering far less than 10 mares per year whilst frozen semen and improved techniques mean many fashionable stallions are readily available worldwide and used more than most domestic stallions, and so fewer stallions are used overall in the end a loss to the breed. Then there is embryo transfer, a very useful procedure, but it is very expensive and still

remains fraught with lack of success. In France where breeders particularly in racing, have had great concern about the effects of multiple embryos in a season from one mare, steps are being taken to limit the number of embryos which can be registered per mare per year. It is not clear how this will be enforced with a global

breed, but it is significant in the way breeders are thinking.

In the end Globalisation is something we cannot avoid, and it brings as many benefits as drawbacks. If our breed is to be properly preserved

for the future, we need to ensure equal value is given to all bloodlines which bear the intrinsic qualities of the Arabian. It is essential that we instil respect for our horses as part of God's creation and we must make sure that we do not accept any abuse or cruelty associated with whatever use we have for them. Together the Arab horse and man have a long and glorious history, great care must be taken that the once-proud warhorse does not become a disposable commodity of the equine fashion trade. □



Deirdre Hyde has a lifelong involvement with Arab horses. In the beginning she had her own horses and became closely involved with the Arab Horse Society until 1992, when she was offered work as Stud Manager at the Royal Stables of Abu Dhabi. In 2000, she joined HH Sheikh Sultan Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, building up his Wrsan Stables in Abu Dhabi UAE. This gave her the opportunity to study Arabians in many countries and situations. She has been a Consultant to Emirates Arabian Horse Society and is currently a pedigree consultant to Shadwell Arabian racing in United Kingdom. Deirdre Hyde is an ECAHO 'A' list judge and on their Instructors Panel.