

MOROCCO

A Country Taking Care of Its Horse Culture

Text and Photos

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MOROCCO, this country of beautiful landscapes, impressive historic sites and welcoming people, has been experiencing a notable economic advance for several years now. The upswing also frees up some space, giving rise to interest and financial resources among the population who wants to play an active part in developing the history and culture of their country. The horses of Morocco are part and parcel of that. They reflect the different demographic groups within the country who have been living and working in peaceful co-existence for centuries. Which is why there are several horse breeds being maintained: Barbs, Arab-Barbs, and purebred Arabians. In addition, Thoroughbreds and Anglo-Arabians are bred. All of that gives the impression of being well organized and financed, with the country's breeders being encouraged and supported with the aim of advancing horse breeding in Morocco. The crucially important factor for this is the decentralized information and promotion concept of SOREC (the Société Royale d'Encouragement du Cheval), the long arm of Morocco's king Mohammed VI. Up to now, the main focus of the concept was on horses on the racetrack, on show jumping, and on breeding horses for trekking, leisure time use, and tourism. Several years ago, however, the passion for Arabian show horses reached the country.



International A Show and Breeders Cup: Salon du Cheval d'El Jadida October 21 to 26, 2014, in Morocco

Right from its first edition – this year's is the seventh one - Tutto Arabi has been attending this event. It must be said that this show's impact has been great and increasing in the course of these years. The Salon du Cheval d'El Jadida has ever more turned its attention to the quality of national and international horses and to the hospitality towards guests. Every year, the organizers include something new in the event, larger box stalls and new expo stands every time, and there is a big stonework building for the fair under construction and expected to be finished next year. It was the patronage of H.H. Mohammed VI that has made the Salon du Cheval d'El Jadida a reality. This farsseeing monarch envisions the road towards national splendor for his country, while never forgetting the ancient culture that Morocco can rightfully boast of.

This year, in addition to several other equestrian events, there were two Arabian horse shows held within the scope of the Salon du Cheval d'El Jadida. One was a **Breeders' Cup** attended by more than 70 Arabian horses, most of which were from Morocco. The event was sponsored by the Arabian Horse Organization (AHO) supporting the breeders. And there was an **A Class Show** with more than 120 international horses coming from Spain, Switzerland, Italy, France, Saudi Arabia and Morocco, among them horses from the Royal Stud, Haras Royal Bouznika. An extraordinary staff lighted up the show this year. First of all, there is Dr. Vet. Lahsen Fdali, well known for his marvelous saddles which he has been donating to the Gold Medal winners at the World Championships in Paris every year. Highly important persons were SOREC's general director Mr. Omar Skalli, and Dr. Mohamed Machmoum. Guest of honor was Dr. Hans Nagel, President of WAHO, with his wife Nawal. Judges in the ring for this edition were Mr. Marek Trela (PL), Dr. Nasr Marei (EG), Mr. Holger Ismer (DE), Dr. Hmidani Abderrazek (MA), Mrs. Joanne Lowe (GB) and Mrs. Renata Schibler (CH). Mrs. Malak Benamar (MOR) was the D.C. As Ring Master, there was Mr. Mohammed Hamad (EG). The speaker was Mrs. Nabila Al Ali (KW) and music was by Mr. Hassan Valsa (FR). So let's now pass the ball to Mrs. Monika Savier from TUTTO ARABI MAGAZINE, for her beautiful pictures of the show, and for her comments and the interview with Mr. Omar Skalli. Show results available on www.ecaho.org Enjoy!



EL JADIDA is a city on the ocean, originally a Portuguese colony with an interesting historic core and Soukh, and one of the five decentralized facilities run by SOREC for advancing horse breeding. At present, new extensive facilities are being built here for horse fairs and for sports events. The whole project gives proof of the highly impressive concept that makes obvious just how much the government promotes initiatives from breeders and athletes – a genial contrast to the present situation in most of the (crisis-ridden) European countries, where increasingly, a running battle is fought between the breeders and their administrative bodies, and where encouraging the breeders is definitely not the word of the day. The Salon du Cheval d'El Jadida is more than just a place where a horse show is held. It is a horse fair, with hundreds of horses and riders participating, and with thousands of spectators coming in from the region and even from all over the country. For the spectators, the daily highlight of this horse week are the Tbourida (Fantasia) presentations in the afternoons. Groups of riders from all over the country, Arabs from Tangier in the North as well as Berbers and Tuareg from the South of the nation, have come to present their basically simple, but brilliantly sensational mounted game here. It has been popular in all layers of the population for centuries, and the spectators sit enthusiastically watching for hours when group after group of riders starts off at a frenzied gallop, with everybody performing a sliding stop at an invisible command firing their rifles high above everybody's heads in unison. The shot needs to sound as if it had been fired by a single rifle, I was told.

There are also interactive workshops, training presentations, instruction for children, and conferences within the Salon du Cheval. The show presentations of Arabian horses had not fully registered with the audience yet: there was a notable lack of spectators in the show arena. Now and then, however, a class of school students would drop by for twenty minutes, to watch the goings-on in the ring and to have the secrets of point scoring, and of the numbers games which the four judges in the ring perform, explained to them by an expert. To give everybody a chance at understanding, the electronic score board would display, in addition to the list of scores given by





the four judges and the five criteria of selection, a short summary: not so good horse, good horse, very good horse, excellent horse. For the first two days, the dominating feature was the Breeders Cup. Only horses bred in Morocco were eligible for presentation here. For the breeders, it was the perfect moment to make out where their

own breeding operation was standing right then, and which direction to take for the future. In every class, the three top-placed horses received prize moneys, as did the three final champions for each category. The show was organized based on ECAHO rules, but it was carried into effect by AHO (the Arabian Horse Organisation, based in Abu Dhabi),

which fact made issuing prize money possible. The international class A show that followed was well stocked on an international basis. The title of Senior Champion was the only title to stay in Morocco and was won by TS Apollo, a highly typey stallion from the Royal Bouznika stud. All the other championship titles went to Saudi Arabia,

which had sent top-class horses on their journey to Morocco. There were even 15 horses from Italy. In the end, they achieved a bronze championship and several good placings, but as all costs for the journey of the horses and their entourage had been taken over by the organizers, everybody had a good time here in Morocco.

BREEDERS CUP



Amira De Dream, Gold Champion Mare, Mr. Bachiri Youssef



Jamila Bouznika, Bronze Champion Senior Mares, Haras Royal De Bouznika



Mayssal Selman, Gold Champion Colts, Mr. Laamiri Driss



Didar Bouznika, Silver Champion Colts, Haras Royal De Bouznika



Bamanssour, Gold Champion Senior Stallions, Haras Royal De Bouznika



Fatine Ra, 3rd in class, Ranch Adarouch



Shahada Alima, Top Five, senior mares, Mr. Youcef and Mrs Lise Laghzal



Shahada Ajayeb, class winner and Gold Champion Filly, Mr. Youcef and Mrs Lise Laghzal



Issan Jizan, 2nd in class, Mr Mustafa Ben Lafkih



Mazine Gam, Bronze Champion, Mr Saïd Gamhiouine



Jawhar Selman, Silver Champion



Amira De Dream, Gold Champion Mare, Mr. Bachiri Youssef



Jamila Bouznika, Bronze Champion, Haras Royal De Bouznika



CLASS A SHOW



TS Apolo, Senio Gold Champions, Haras Royal De Bouznika



Yalta Des Aubus, Mrs Katel Lucas



Priam De Djoon, Silver Champion, Owner: Mr. Eric Cailleux



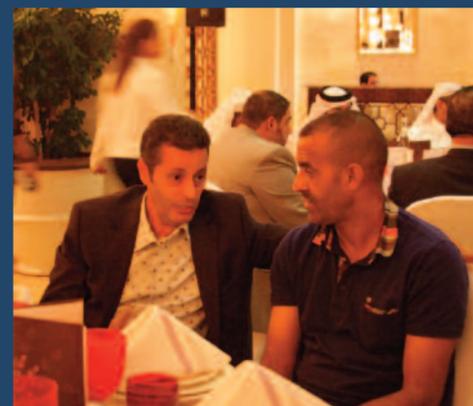
Sheikk Mutlaq bin Mesharif and friends



GALA DINNER



Essam Abdullah, AHO President



“Local Breeders are the Basis the Future Champions Come From”



The way of the Kingdom of Morocco to responsible horse breeding for maintaining their horse culture. Monika Savier discussing Strategies for Breeding Arabian Horses in Morocco with **Mr. Omar Skalli**, the Chairman of SOREC, the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Horse Breeding in Morocco.

Savier: This class A Show here in El Jadida in Morocco was a wonderful experience for me. A class A show is, after all, the highest level of show for Arabian horses in the world. It became a world event indeed, organized an impressive fair and an important Breeders' Cup. For me, it is particularly important to present this event to our readers, as many people don't associate Morocco with a high level of horse culture. Some know of the good development your economy has been showing, but when they think of Arabian horse culture, they think of the Middle East, which has much higher visibility. However, yours was and is a horse country. What role does the Arabian horse play in Morocco's horse world of today?

Skalli: Historically, the first horses existing in Morocco were Barbs. The Arabian horses were introduced into Morocco by the Arabs during the 8th Century. So today, the majority of our horses are Arab-Barbs. In the 1960ies, the Royal family and some other breeders were show enthusiasts with purebred Arabian horses. And during the 1980ies, Arabians began to appear as race horses, running 4 or 5 races a year – nowadays, 700 out of the 1800 races that are run here every year are races for Arabians. Our first International Racing Day in 2003 was for Arabians only, with Thoroughbreds included only as recently as 2012. So particularly for racing, the Arabian horse is very important for us. We have been able to reach a high performance level for this sport quickly, partly due to our use of Artificial Insemination, but then, we are the county offering the second highest number of races for Arabians in the world. However, we also have the Barb horses who are considered an important part of our horse heritage.

Savier: The Royal Moroccan stable Bouznika, but also private breeders in Morocco have been importing international stallions, and lately also frozen semen, doing Artificial Insemination (AI). They have been further improving the quality of your breeding basis this way. Where is your National horse breeding standing now?

Skalli: We still need good stallions, and the really good stallions are not available, the price is too high. With AI, we can buy semen of the very best stallions, that's an advantage. However, even with our breeding basis, the mares, there is right now not a very big gap in quality to the stallions we are using.

Savier: Do the Moroccan Barb breeders also breed Arabian horses?

Skalli: In Morocco, we have race breeders, and breeders who breed horses for other uses such as show or riding. The race breeders concentrate on Thoroughbreds, Arabians, and sometimes Anglo-Arabians. There are only a few who breed Arabians for show as well as for races. So usually, the breeders are specialized. However, breeders who do show Arabians, often also show Barbs. Our show breeders are very passionate. For us, shows are very important because our Arabian horses are special to us. Arabians are a genetic source for all of the other breeds, and as a horse country, we know we have to pay attention to our genetic foundations, and shows are the shop windows for that. A horse country, for me, must have good horses to present at Arabian shows.

Savier: Does that mean that as far as Arabian show horses are concerned, you are mainly competing with the Middle East countries?

Skalli: Yes. We try to have our place internationally, which is more difficult in the show sector than it is in the racing sector. Very rich people acquire the most beautiful breeding horses they can find and go to an unbelievable amount of effort in order to establish them in the show scene. We know we have top quality horses in Morocco, but we don't believe in building them up like that. It is not our top priority to be in the winning ranks of international shows. For us, it is also important to have a lot of local shows, because we do have the local breeding and the local breeders to think of. They are the basis where the future champions come from, even if they don't send their horses to international shows or races. The local level is where life takes place, so to speak, it's where the horses are, the spectators, the races, the dust. If you are able to send horses to international events, this local level is where they came from.

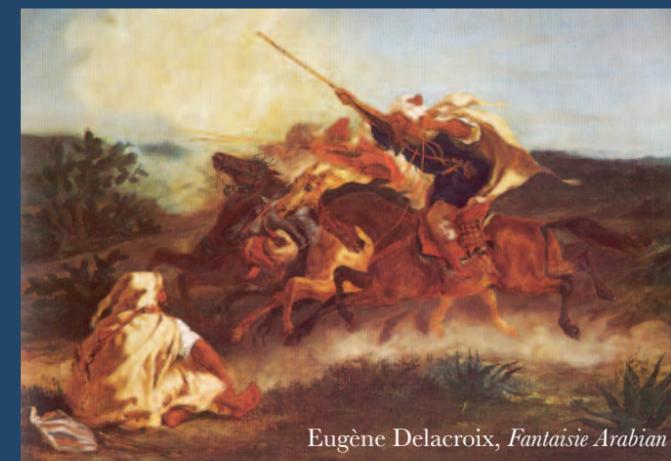
Savier: So you are saying that establishing a good basis for breeding takes time, patience, knowledge, and passion, and all of that on a “people level”.

Skalli: Exactly. All of that is a very slow process. But nowadays, everything is very fast, especially when people want to win.

Savier: Some people even try to speed up breeding, using prostaglandins on mares to have a quick high-level oestrus that can yield 2 to 3 embryos per mare in a year. Does that work? To carry a foal used to be a cool, slow thing for the mare that slowly took the breeder on the road to success.

Skalli: It's a natural process, after all, and nature has her own, slow pace. Accept this slow pace is what our breeders do. So we do use frozen semen, but not embryo transfer, for the moment. It is good to take enough time for breeding - but you don't want to miss the train. In breeding for racing, embryo transfer is slowly being accepted here, with a lot of rules and specifications for guidance. But if we don't do it at all, we will be sitting in the last car of the train before long. However, there are things that nobody should think of, such as cloning.

Savier: After all, we have enough good foals even without artificial means of breeding. Many good foals never make it to the deserved top because their owners



Eugène Delacroix, *Fantaisie Arabian*

don't have enough money to make a hype about them. **Skalli:** Which is particularly true for that local, “people” level we spoke of.

Savier: Even frozen semen results in the problem that everybody wants the semen of the “original champion” - why get yourself a “super stallion's” son to keep in your own stud if you can have the super stallion's frozen semen whenever you want to use it? Which makes thousands of top-quality colts, the sons of the super stallions, into useless by-products that don't have a market. And genetics into a monoculture, as when variety is not appreciated, the gene pool gets ever smaller.

Skalli: We don't want an inbreeding problem here. And we want lots of dedicated small breeders to get some income from their breeding. There is an even bigger problem we may be getting in the future, if people stop keeping horses for the love of them and keep them just to win, as status symbols. But it's not us who breed. It's the breeders who breed. We try to convince them of that long-range vision and strategy for breeding, but we cannot oblige them to use it. What we can do is give premiums, and provide frozen semen at a low price so breeders will choose to go this way or that way. But if a breeder wants to use a different stallion than we recommend, the choice is his.

Savier: What is the exact approach of SOREC for supporting the breeders?

Skalli: We buy semen and sell it to the breeders at lower prices, and we buy stallions. We already have this strategy for race horse breeding, and we will use it for sports and show breeding in the future. When



Mr Mustafa Benlafkih, Mr Omar Skalli, Mrs Nawal and Mr Hans Nagel

we buy stallions, we do that locally, buying directly from our breeders, or internationally, attending auctions or other events. The stallions are stabled in our national studs and are available to our breeders at very low cost, so they can improve their genetic basis. For example, we bought Mugadir, a son of the race inheritor Amer, and the covering fee for him is around 400 Euros. We do the same with Thoroughbreds, where the good stallions are very high-priced, so we can only afford to buy them at the end of their career, or when they leave training. With the Arabians, we can buy the sons of top stallions. When we buy semen, our breeders pay half of the original cost.

Savier: What position do you have for the Straight Egyptians among the Arabian horses?

Skalli: Well, some see them as a breed within a breed. We have breeders who are strongly convinced that there should be open shows for all Arabians and special shows for the Egyptians. We at SOREC think it important to give each of the groups their own space, as they have a different genetic heritage, but we are convinced we can have only one administrative body or association in which they need to co-operate.

Savier: There is definitely a difference in the genetic makeup, even if actually, the origin of the genetic sub-group of the Egyptians is not Egypt, but the Nejd area of Saudi Arabia, but the Pashas in Egypt selected the most beautiful horses from that gene pool. Nowadays, the Egyptians have a big fan club all over the world, and they are also big business in the show world.. And they perceive themselves as a counter movement to the globalization and concentration on just a few stallions in the show world.

Skalli: So let me ask you a question: why do Arabian breeders breed horses for shows?

Savier: Shows were breeding shows originally, intended to judge the quality of breeding horses, to make sure they were optimum representatives of their breed's standards. Today, ECAHO and AHO define a much reduced range of criteria for show horses, mainly beauty criteria. So it's often that people with money just go for the beauty of the horse they own and for the prestige that a show victory gets them. In contrast, many of the Egyptian breeders never attend a show, they want to have a human-oriented horse and, okay, maintain the gene pool. Which is why sometimes, they do attend shows, to demonstrate that there are some more Arabian genes around. In the Straight Egyptian scene, the ideal is a cool, sweet, well-mannered Arabian horse who loves people. In the show scene, showy, quite high-strung spectacular trotters are promoted, and character and conformation are usually forgotten about. In Europe, there are ideas for a different kind of horse presentation, with the owners presenting their horses and with communication and socializing afterwards, making the show a fun meeting where the victory is of almost no importance. In some countries such as Morocco, people still have a passion and a very practical use for their horses, and they keep them in natural conditions. As a result, their horses are obviously not show horses. In my opinion, it is so important to maintain the wide variety of the Arabian breed, the rich pool of genetics. This is what Morocco could do, with her time-honored history of a true horse culture.

Skalli: After all, every racehorse professional is doing a good job, he gives his best, he gets experience. Trainer and breeder get a wider horizon and meet other professionals. Everything is information and experience.

Savier: However, when locally bred horses are sent to an A show, they don't correspond to the ECAHO or AHO ideas, so they lose and their breeders come home dispirited, wanting to change everything, going after the champions they saw.

Skalli: But that's not the way. We don't need horses who are models of beauty, we need horses who transmit their good traits.

Savier: And we need media coverage not only for the World Championship winners, but for the national champions who are so very important for their countries. Their breeders can be proud of them! Besides, these horses are also products of their environments.

Skalli: Exactly - Morocco offers Arabian horses their typical environment.

Savier: Exactly. So you have every reason to be proud of your horses. They should be typey and correctly built, of course, they need to correspond to the standards typical for the breed, not some show standard. Some distinctly dish-faced horses have been known to have problems with breathing. It's better to go for more sensible overall conformation, so there is no point in being impressed by people who take a dish face as the most important sign of an Arabian horse. Type is the whole horse: proud, well-mannered, cool, with a good tail carriage, a functional body conformation, well-proportioned head and neck, and so on.

Skalli: Proud is definitely a word I associate with an Arabian horse. Back to our national shows: as I said, the local level is where the breeders and the spectators are. At the regional shows, the people can be happy, they are the champions there.

Savier: Which is what showing is about: make people happy, and proud of the horses they bred. You might consider giving prizes for horses bred in Morocco and for breeders from the country, for "best family" or "highest number of generations bred in the family tradition". Whatever sub-group they breed, the breeders who engage locally or nationally need some visibility

of their own. Then, if a "super stallion" wins the international A show, it's important, of course, but experienced breeders know that in the long run, you recognize a champion stallion from his excellent offspring – the traits inherited from the stallion. By the way: why were there so few spectators for the El Jadida class A show, what do you think?

Skalli: Not enough people knew there was an A show taking place. And people in Morocco have their own cultural heritage about horses, so they like to see and touch them and they know from experience about endurance or racing, but they don't know much about show jumping, for example. They are not used to it. They do know about the Tbourida (the Moroccan Fantasia), it is familiar to them. A friend of mine organizes an all-day Tbourida show, no competition, no judges, just presentations and games and socializing. This is something Moroccan people understand and love, using horses for sports and racing, and so this is widely popular here.

Savier: I read that you have a decentralized system of five national studs. Where did you get this idea, and how does it work?

Skalli: Historically, there were military studs where now there are national studs. The first of these studs was founded in 1912. They placed stallions there and the country people could bring their mares for covering, so there would be more foals of better quality for the cavalry. In the 1950ies, these studs became government-controlled national studs. In addition, we have about 45 stallion depots which are basically the same as the national studs, except that in the studs, there are



20 to 40 stallions, while in the depots, there are only 1 to 6, and they are located in villages, often in newly government-built facilities. On average, 10 depots are managed by one of the national studs. The studs are the national representations of SOREC, so any breeder can go there to ask for his registration papers, the stud-book, or whatever. If any events are organized locally, a breeding show, a contest, a Tbourida – they can go there for the entries. Many of our breeders get an average of three pure Arabian, WAHO-conforming foals per year, so of course, they can't afford an Arabian stallion of their own. In general, we have the "special horses" such as Thoroughbreds, Purebred Arabians or Anglo-Arabs, in the national studs, while in the depots, mostly Barbs are kept.

Savier: Do you give prize money to local breeders?

Skalli: In 2014, we started to give some premium money for every foal born, that's 1350 Euros per Arabian or Thoroughbred foal, and some less for the other breeds.

Savier: What do you think of the horses from Europe that are imported into Morocco?

Skalli: The imports are important, to avoid inbreeding and to enable pure breeding. We try to influence the breeders so they will import quality mares or very good stallions. They also get some money if they import a broodmare or filly with a good pedigree and intend to breed her. Presently, we only check for racing heritage, but we are going to do it for show and

sports, too. In general, our policy is to allow breeders to import any horse, but if they want us to help with the transactions, we insist they must be breeding stock.

Savier: What do you do with Arabian horses who are not good enough for show or racing?

Skalli: To be honest, we don't work in that field yet. We don't ask breeders what they do. For tourism, mostly Barbs are used. And most mares who are not fast enough on the race track go into breeding. Breeding is not just about mating a champion to a champion, after all, doing that is just hoping to be lucky. Breeding is about strategic matings, knowing your genetics, just as the Bedouins did when they bred in family lines to be sure of the genetics they could then use. And even if you have no more than two mares, if you know what you are doing, you can breed a champion.

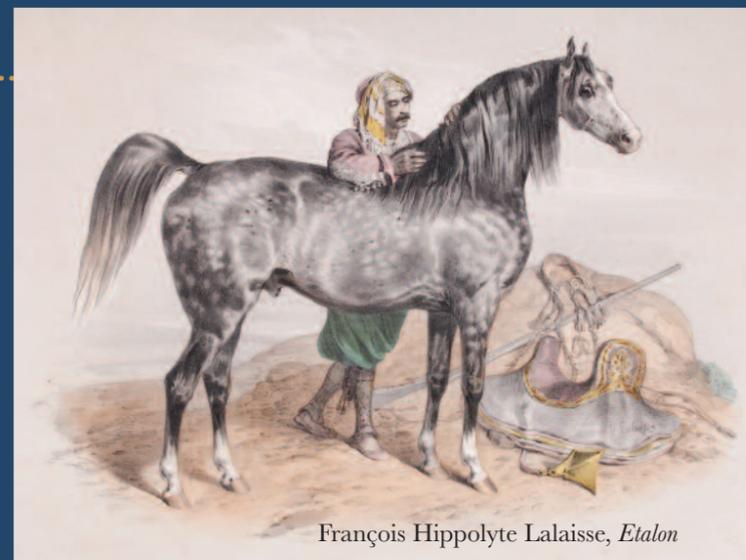
Savier: Are you planning to invest in information and education of the breeders, and publish more reports on horse breeding in Morocco?

Skalli: We are aware that horse media such as TUTTO ARABI are important for getting know-how and information on breeding strategies. And for spreading the word of Morocco, of course, giving reports of our breeding and thus giving our breeders the visibility they deserve.

Savier: Thank you very much for this highly interesting discussion!

Breeding Straight Egyptians in Morocco

"Of all the bloodlines of Arabian Horses in the world, straight Egyptians seem to evoke a special sense of history and the flowing river of time. While they may appeal to people from many walks of life, most who share a passion for Egyptian Arabians are also aficionados of art and culture, and possess a discriminating eye for harmony and classic beauty". (Cynthia Culbertson, breeder and historian, USA) It's only been a few years that there have been breeders in Morocco who engage in linebreeding Straight Egyptian Arabians. If somebody wishes to win big international shows, breeding Egyptians is hardly an option. It is rare for straight Egyptian horses to make it to the winning placings in Paris or Aachen nowadays – with



François Hippolyte Lalaisse, *Etalon*



Mr Mustafa Benlafkih, Issan Stud and Mr Fabio Brianzoni, Tutto Arabi

massive selection, Arabian show horses have developed far away from their origins by now. The important factor for the shows is mainly beauty, but not as a relative factor, which would mean regionally speaking, but as an absolute criterion. Arabian noblesse, a functional body conformation, and the character are no longer direct criteria for the scores awarded in the show ring, which is why these aspects are not even considered. However, there is a different approach to breeding: In breeding Straight Egyptian horses, the aim is mainly to maintain original bloodlines, horses with all their Arabian noblesse, their charm and their people-oriented character intact. Overall, it might be justified to talk of two different directions in breeding or two different breeding types, which are today's "culture Arabian" who is bred according to the beauty standards for shows, and the "original Arabian" who has fans of his own and usually makes an appearance on "Egyptian Event" shows only. They are the only shows where these Arabians stand a chance of making it to the top, and the Pyramid Society of the US, the organization that initiated these shows, comments "the Straight Egyptian is a breed within the breed". There are various groups and organizations, associations and institutions all over the world which are dedicated to exactly this original Arabian, be they the *Pyramid Society* in the US, the *Asil Club* in Germany, the *Blue List* horses or *Al Khamsa* in the US, and others. Where, however, do the Straight Egyptians come from, and why are they the horses who come closest to representing the desert-bred Arabian horse from the Nejd, the country of origin of the Arabian horse that is today located in Saudi Arabia?

"The heartland of the Arabian horse was a desert, populated by indigenous nomads, who were the historical breeders of this famous Arabian horse; in the few cities which existed in this desert region, the dominant culture

was deeply rooted in the Islamic world. Only a thin upper class enjoyed the best of the prestigious Arabian horses, which were brought to them from the desert or were handpicked by their emissaries as possessions of precious beauty and heritage... Egypt was situated nearest to the homeland of the Arabians, and to the Nejd region on the Peninsula, a region nearly inaccessible to Europeans at that time, and it was Egypt which took the first step in bringing a special type of Arabian into the focus of the West. Egypt acquired an Arabian type which had been out of reach for the vast majority of buyers... As spoils of war and through purchases, the Egyptian conquerors, mainly during the Wahabite Wars, transported thousands of the best Arabians from the Nejd region to Cairo. Contemporary reports state "that the Pashas of Egypt brought the flowers of Arabia, the legendary horses of the Bedouins, to Egypt" (H. Nagel, p 346, 2013). In the past, there were not only private breeders who passionately searched for Arabian horses and made them a part of their breeding, such as Lady Ann Blunt, Graf Knyphausen, Henry Babson, and later Judith Forbis, Hans J. Nagel, and many others. There were also, 200 years ago, Royal Studs and later State Studs, such as Weil – Marbach in Germany, Babolna in Hungary, and first of all, of course, El Zahraa in Cairo. All of these studs bred the original Arabian horse and were dedicated to maintaining, unconditionally, the characteristics of this extraordinary horse breed. This is the tradition in which the recent breeders of Straight Egyptian horses in Morocco can be seen. They joined forces, organizing an exhibition booth for the El Jadida fair. This stand did not only offer cakes and drinks, but mainly lots of information as well as amicable conversation and discussion, all centered on horse breeding – which is, after all, the common denominator connecting all of us. ■