

Children of the Wind

by Monika Savier, ©2010

translated by Bettina Borst; photos of the conference by Joanna Jonientz

*Sicily in April...
Mediterranean breezes,
mountain views,
historic setting,
stimulating speakers,
Arabian horses.*

April 9, 2010: An International Conference under the patronage of WAHO and the Senate of the Italian Republic took place.

More than one hundred delegates and speakers from many countries including the Middle East, Europe, the US and Mediterranean countries were gathered in Naxos, on the east coast of Sicily, to take part in the first conference of its kind: *"The Arabian Horse in the World: The Dialogue of Cultures and Breeding."*

The setting for the conference could not have been more fitting. The 300-year-old Castel San Marco, set in a fine parkland location with Mount Etna splendid in the background and looking down onto the white beaches of Calatabiano, provided a historic environment. Here the Islamic Cavalry reached the bay of Naxos, by ship—just as Teocles the Greek before them in 735BC, using the well-protected bay of Naxos to anchor and conquer Sicily. This wonderful location in Sicily (which drew the attention of national press and media and attracted the presence of leading figures from the Sicilian local government) was a remarkable setting for the meetings. Indeed, the location, an original centre of early Mediterranean civilisation, played a key role in the past, connecting Arab and European worlds. There remain today many signs of the Arab migration to Sicily. This can be seen in archaeological sites and in the wide range of architectural patterns and forms which can be seen across the landscape.



From left: Mr. Ahmed Hamza, Director of El Zahraa State Stud, Cairo; Dr. W.G. Olms, Germany; Amedeo Cultreri, Catania; Judith Forbis; Basil Jadaan, Syria, speaking; Tarek Hamza, Cairo; Ida Arsenault, Canada/Calabria.



Judith Forbis being interviewed by Monika Savier. The conference was broadcast live online.

As to the history of Arabian horses in Sicily, it is well established that around 840AD, Arabian invaders spread throughout Sicily, expelled the Byzantines, and settled here until near the end of the 13th century—and they imported a great number of Arabian horses as replacements for their own

fast-footed and substantial cavalry units. Not surprisingly, Sicily's population subsequently used this "miracle weapon" in their breeding, improving the indigenous stock of horses that way. After all, this idea underpins the globe-spanning idea in horse breeding, which is to use hybridization in order to achieve more performance and beauty. There are "oriental Arabians" in Sicily to this day who date back to those matings in ancient times. Who knows—maybe this idea is still alive in the genetic code of Sicily's people today. There was enormous interest in and fascination with this first Arabian Conference in Sicily, especially seeing the changes and also the similarities with the Sicilian horses.

On the famous bay of Naxos on the days following the conference (April 10–11), two further events were hosted: an international C show run according to ECAHO rules and an Egyptian Event, a show for straight Egyptian horses only.

Conference Themes and Topics

Although there are many shows each year bringing breeders and others together for competitive purposes, rarely is there a chance to exchange opinions, and reflect widely on breeding strategies and also on the changes which are occurring in the world of horses.

This conference in Naxos demonstrated the value of an event allowing breeders, owners and patrons of Arabian horses to enter into constructive dialogue with each other. Indeed there were so many issues, concerns and topics to be discussed that the initial planning stage inevitably required pre-selection and narrowing down of the scope. Given that the breeding of Arabian horses now exists in a global frame, the primary aim of the conference had to be



Above: Dr. Hans Nagel, Germany, President of WAHO and Dr. Girolamo di Benedetto, Sicily, a well-known Egyptian breeder.

one of encouraging collaboration and creating new dialogues between breeders from Orient and Occident as well as to highlight the common denominators, past and present.

The rapid globalisation of breeding, with Arabians bred all over the world, has given rise to new dynamics. There is less romanticism, a greater presence of media, markets and money, and as a result there is change in the status and fortunes of the best-known studs across the world. There are also many new opportunities for fresh perspectives. Some oppose the over-industrialisation and presence of commercial factors, emphasising instead with new fervour the special quality of the “relationship with the horse.” Likewise there is a visible move to maintaining a “small is beautiful” approach. Finally in times of global crises and conflicts, the “cross-border” collaborative dialogues within the Arabian horse world show the possibilities for new forms of participation and new relationships.

With these factors in mind, the conference opened with kick-off statements from two “breeders of the century:” Judith Forbis (USA/Qatar), judge and founder of the Ansata Stud, and Hans Joachim Nagel (Germany), founder of Katharinenhof Stud and President of WAHO (World Arabian Horse Organization).

Presenting the most famous breeding stable of straight Egyptian horses was Director Ahmed Hamza (Egypt) President of the EAO (Egyptian Agricultural Organisation), Ministry of Agriculture State Stud, El Zahraa, Cairo. His key speech concerned breeding strategies historically and today at El Zahraa, and the passions around horses that developed across many continents.

After a short break, Basil Jadaan (Syria), horse judge, breeder and member of the executive board of WAHO, described the role of Arabians as desert-breds, still the case today in Syria. During the 18th and 19th centuries, many European expeditions sought out Syrian Bedouins in order to purchase their Arabian horses, which were then sold to European royal house-

holds. Sicilian nobility and Italian King Victor Emanuel II also came into possession of these breeds.

Sicilian historian Giuseppe Pucci Maiorano (of Catania) provided the conference with a full introduction to the place of horses such as these in the history of civilisation and the role they played in the multicultural developments of the last 5,000 years in the Mediterranean region.

In the afternoon two roundtables/workshops allowed the opportunity to focus in more detail:

‘The Role of the Past to Build the Future. The History and Renaissance of the Arabian Horse between the Orient and the Occident’.

The first speaker should have been Sharzad Amir Aslani (Iran), judge and breeder of Iranian Arabians, but she did not receive her Visa in time and her prepared paper about traditional horse breeding in Iran today was read by a delegate. This session also heard from Amedeo Cultreri (Italy), secretary of the national association ANICO, of the studbook of the “Arabi Orientali,” the original race of Sicily. He talked about early imports and exports of desert Arabians between Sicily and Egypt.

Next came Georg Olms (Germany), breeder and President of the Asil Club. In his presentation, he discussed the heritage of the Bedouin breeds and the role of the pure (*asil*) Arabian horses, stressing their value and not forgetting their strength as performance horses. Judith Forbis, Basil Jadaan and Ahmed Hamza discussed, with audience and delegates, the necessity of seeing the Arabian horse in a historical context, so as to better understand, and be able to plan for a successful future for the breed. Following from this discussion was a concern with the purity of the breed and the importance of this for the gene pool for the future.

The workshop was moderated by Ida Arsenault (Canada/Italy) and Tarek Hamza (Egypt).



Globalisation of the Arabian Horse: A common denominator to promote dialogue between cultures, or 'homeless show star'?

This panel was chaired by Dr. Hans Nagel. Speakers were Deirdre Hyde, stud manager and horse judge, Abu Dhabi, United Emirates of Arabia; Francesco Santoro of La Frasera Stud, horse judge and President of ANICA, Italy; Inge Friedman of Friedman-Stud, breeder and member of the board of VZAP Registry, Germany; and Nasr Marei of Al Badeia Stables, breeder and horse judge, Egypt.

The topics included debate on the role of the Arabian horse today in the high visibility show world, the function of media, beauty, money and markets, the impact of these on how people make a living in the horse world, and the possibility of bringing more of the people involved in this horse economy into dialogue and discussion. Finally, how to promote the importance of this field of agricultural activity to the wider world, how to show its value in current debates on horse environment and ecology, how to show how good practice in the horse world can have lasting impact. The workshop concluded with calls for experts and breeders from the Arab horse world to take a new lead on social issues connecting to their daily practice.

After the common discussion and following the plenary report back from the workshops, Monika Savier, originator of the conference, equestrian journalist and breeder (Italy), invited all participants to continue the dialogue between the cultures. She also made the recommendation that concrete strategies be developed with the overall aim of extending further training and education in this field at an international level, also with a view



The team of organizers: Antonella Bartolotta, Monika Savier, Pietro Giannetto and the German breeder Robert Schlereth.

to widen social participation in this area of breeding. Ahmed Hamza said “The conference was the first of its kind in which Arabian Horse Breeders had the chance to meet and discuss in an open forum the problems and obstacles they face today,” and Basil Jadaan reminded us how “the Arabian horse forms a bridge between nations and their cultures and is a unifying factor between humans with different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. The outcome of this for the future can only be positive.” [Papers from the conference will be included over several issues, beginning on the next page. Al Khamsa, Inc. extends its thanks and gratitude to the conference speakers and to Ms. Savier for allowing us the opportunity to cover such interesting material.] ■



Events in our World-2010

Children of the Wind: Introduction

by Dr. Hans Nagel, ©2010

I was asked to make the introductory speech for this conference and I am here to represent the World Arabian Horse Organisation (WAHO). But first, I'd like to greet those people who organised this conference and to congratulate them specifically on the ideas they put into this agenda. Normally the matters concerning Arabian horses tend to be a bit dry since they have been repeated over and over. We have here in front of us two special subjects which need to be discussed in more detail, and which have a lot of potential for the future development of the Arabian breed. I was thinking to present to you first all general data of the Arabian horse population as it presents itself today. This might be a good base for our discussion in the afternoon.

At this time we have Arabian horses registered in about 70 national studbooks worldwide. These 70 national studbooks are controlled by WAHO and follow the rules and regulations set up by WAHO. We can say they are practically uniform and unified.

In these studbooks are registered, summed up from the very beginning of registration in the past, about 700,000 Arabians world-wide. Regrettably breeders do not report on mortality. So we have to find an estimated figure of how many Arabians are alive today. This total breeding stock is estimated as about 350,000 worldwide. About 50% of these horses are living in the Americas, North and South America together, 35% in Europe and the remaining 15% in the Middle East, South Africa and Australia. Out of this Arabian livestock about 20–25,000 foals are born every year.

The second point: A very important matter of arguments in the past was the question: What is an Arabian? What qualifies a horse to be an Arabian as such? Before WAHO was created (WAHO was founded in 1972), several studbooks existed already. One of the oldest ones is the English studbook, another old one is the American one. Then, in the first part of the 20th century, many such studbooks were established, mostly in Europe. Each one of them had its own definition, his own idea of what qualifies a horse to be an Arabian. Most of them had a description of the horse as such, with certain differences in the importance of its characteristics. Some were short, others extremely long.

However, permeating everything that was written is one principle which was never in doubt and is a unifying factor in all pre-WAHO studbooks, and this is the fact that an Arabian has to have a history. To be a part of a studbook he must have a history which goes back to the deserts, to the Arabian bedouin breeders. An Arab horse is qualified only if he belongs to a so-called strain as used by the Arabs.



*Dr. Hans Nagel, President of WAHO.
Photo: Joanna Jonientz.*

A lot of arguments were brought forward before, since writing and reporting was not common in desert culture, oral tradition and transmission were the only means of communication. Nowadays we have properly registered statements about the Arabian horse going back to the middle of the 19th century at the earliest.

Some people may still like to argue, it looks to be an interesting subject to talk about these matters, but sometimes the impression is prevailing that some people argue for the sake of argument. One has to live with the fact that any horse pedigree will get lost in the darkness of history sooner or later.

WAHO was founded by seven major countries, among them America, England, Sweden, Poland and some others. All kinds of practical definitions were considered and after a lengthy discussion they came to a very simple solution. An Arabian horse is a pure-bred Arabian if it is registered in a WAHO-accepted studbook. In this respect, the origin of the horse is the only and decisive characteristic, all other framework has been dropped.

A registered horse in WAHO under that definition can therefore be small or big, pretty or less attractive, it may look like it wants, it does not matter, this horse is an Arabian. Its history, its origin is the basic principle which is valid now and will be valid over time.

These seven studbooks accepted each other and became the Nucleus of WAHO. Then registrations within the WAHO rules started in other Western countries which already had a studbook or wanted to establish one, and in 1980 a stage was reached when nearly all Western countries operated their own WAHO-accepted studbooks.

The Middle East region followed. Countries such as Egypt, Bahrain, and Jordan were already registering Arabians in their studbooks; these books were properly inspected by WAHO and then accepted. In Syria, Iran and Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, so many people interested in Arabians were sure that there existed a huge number of Arabian horses, but they were never properly recorded or collected. For more than 20 years, WAHO made a great effort to inspect all those horses which could be considered to be pure, collected them and encouraged those countries to create their national studbook. All of them did it with great care and admirable enthusiasm. This step was basically the beginning of the rebirth, of a renaissance of the Arabian horse in the Middle East. When all this work was done, WAHO decided in 2002 with the full support of its members to close all their studbooks. Closing means all horses which are registered until a certain date in WAHO studbooks are the basic population of Arabians. No other horses will ever enter into this population any more.

Maybe this decision was not properly understood by all people at this moment. But I think it is a very basic decision for the future, as firstly, only a few Arabians were left unregistered—they were those who could only marginally meet the requirements for “pure” and would have given rise to new question marks, and secondly, from now on and with all these new techniques such as like DNA, blood-typing and whatsoever at our disposal, we can be sure that pedigrees are correct and reliable. People who buy an Arabian horse now and in the future can be sure that they are really buying the horse which is fixed in the papers. This was not guaranteed in the past and some cases of doubt might still exist. But they will vanish in the course of time, from generation to generation. And any argument will lose its validity.

A third point that I would like to mention: Why was it possible for these Arabian horses which came from a very small population in the desert, to develop into such an enormous population size in our days.

There must be something specific about these horses which gave them a very special scope to have such an acceptance. If one looks back historically, the big boom came after the Second World War. By that time, in the Arab countries the esteem for their Arabian horses had dropped to near zero. This was in fact the same case in Europe for all kinds of horse breeds. With the introduction of engines, horses lost their important position in human culture and society. It's remarkable: the horse became the only domesticated animal which, after the introduction of the motor, had no use any more. Cows were domesticated for milk and meat, chickens for eggs and meat, sheep for wool. Horses were generally used to transport men and goods. For this they were not needed any longer.

But horses are kept for pleasure in the widest sense of the word, and enjoy great appreciation even today. This applies as well to the Arabian and we can bring forward three characteristics for which the Arabian horse is unique. Maybe not every Arabian is gifted with them, but many are. The first is its attractive beauty, the other its exceptional athletic ability, and the third its pleasant human-related behaviour.

These are three very important traits which one can find in Arabians. If one follows these thoughts further, then one comes to the conclusion that because of its beauty and special elegance in appearance, Arabian horse shows came into existence. A show presents beauty and presents elegance. Athletic ability was finally manifested by the great success of Arabian horses in endurance racing events. No other horse breed has performed as well, and on top of such races you are very likely to find an Arabian horse.

And thirdly, I feel the most important characteristic is its human-related behaviour. People like these horses because they receive a response from them. If we look for the activities for which Arabians are used today, figures are showing that only 5–8% of the total Arabian horse population are presented in shows or participate in endurance events. More than 90% are in the hands of people who like them for pleasure. Maybe for riding, maybe just as an animal which they like to have close to them. This figure is an enormous indication of how much Arabian horses are appreciated by animal-friendly people.

We have to accept that all these about 350,000 Arabians display a great variety. They are all related concerning their historical origin, but not concerning their geographical origin and not in relation to the preferences of their breeders. Each major breeder might have had his own idea and bred Arabians according to his own choice. And the Arabians living and developed in the north of Arabia had for sure a better chance to survive and to grow than those ones in the dry region of the Arabian Peninsula. Not long ago, many do it until today, we used to talk about Egyptian Arabians,

about Polish Arabians or Russian and Spanish Arabians. We will also talk later about Syrian Arabians, about the ones from Iran, Turkey, or South Arabia. All of these are specific populations with their own characteristics and their own type and many of them are recognisable as that.

But still Egyptians are not all the same; neither are all Russians and Polish. Within each of these populations we still have evident variations. Normally, in horse breeding organisations of other breeds, there exists an authority which gives directions for breeding. We as WAHO will not and cannot do that. The only solution and method for breeding is to have your own choice out of a great variety considering the differences between various types. The liberty for choices is great and wide. Everybody may decide for himself and should be able to choose out of this enormous population his type and horse, whatever he wants.

This is his chance and maybe his success. However, before starting to breed, before starting to buy, one should think about which aim and purpose is in one's mind. If one does not take the time to do that, one may never reach a stage of happiness and satisfaction which is necessary for any hobby to be a good one. This is a great choice and a great question, and maybe in our seminar in the afternoon it might play a certain role.

I want to make a last point:

Horse breeding in the past was carried out within natural biological limits. Normally a mare brought one foal per year, one of the best stallions worldwide maybe produced tens or a few hundreds of offspring per year. Their breeding was locally restricted. Polish stallions were breeding in Poland, Egyptians in Egypt. This has totally changed, and it is a fantastic challenge and may have a positive or a negative influence on the whole breed. It is all up to us to think about and channel this trend into the right direction. Today Arabian mares have by embryo transfer 6–7 foals in one year. A stallion can breed 1,000 and even more offspring per year, if one wants to do that. Semen can be shipped everywhere worldwide. This means that the distribution and spread of the genetic material of horses can happen very, very fast. If the horse concerned is a good horse, a proper healthy horse, this spread is a positive procedure. But if it is not? This is a challenge for all of us. This could also develop into a problem because it could reduce a great range of variation within the breed. If there is no variation, there is no progress.

In this fast-moving world, those people who want to breed endurance horses or a good show horse will choose only top stallions world-wide. If there are only a few to concentrate on, then it will be, in the long run, a disaster for the breed. These effects should or might be considered when one looks forward over a longer period and one can see it as a big question for the future.

A relief and a very positive situation is the fact we mentioned before. This kind of modern scientific techniques in breeding and proliferation seems to concern and affect only 5%, maybe 10% of the whole breed. 90% of Arabian horses belong to other breeders, to other owners, to other enthusiasts who may not care about it or would not like it. These breeders require more attention. They do not play a big obvious role in the worldwide Arabian society, they are somewhat too anonymous. It is our duty in WAHO, and maybe of other organisations that already exist or are upcoming, to look more closely after this huge fraction of 90% of breeders and to try and get them properly incorporated into the total development of the Arabian horse worldwide. Let me express the fact that many things are now possible in breeding. But they should not release us from our responsibility for a living entity and its well-being.

[Editor: More of the fascinating talks from the Children of the Wind Conference will be published in the Fall issue of the *Khamsat*.]

Giardini Naxos
April 9th - 11th
2010

CHILDREN OF THE WIND أبناء الرياح
Between Orient and Occident
FIGLI DEL VENTO tra Oriente e Occidente