



by *Monika Savier*

Babolna

State Stud

Today

Balancing Hungarian Cultural Heritage and Arabian Elite Breeding

Noon in Babolna. The august heat lies heavy on people and horses. The show classes for purebred Arabians are held as usual, as the schedule for this international B show lists several more demonstrations and classes for traditional Arabians and Shagya Arabians. A lot of horses have enrolled for the event in the Hungarian state stud of Babolna and wait for their turn in the riding arena which is surrounded by well-filled stands. The show features two different horse breeds which are judged separately:

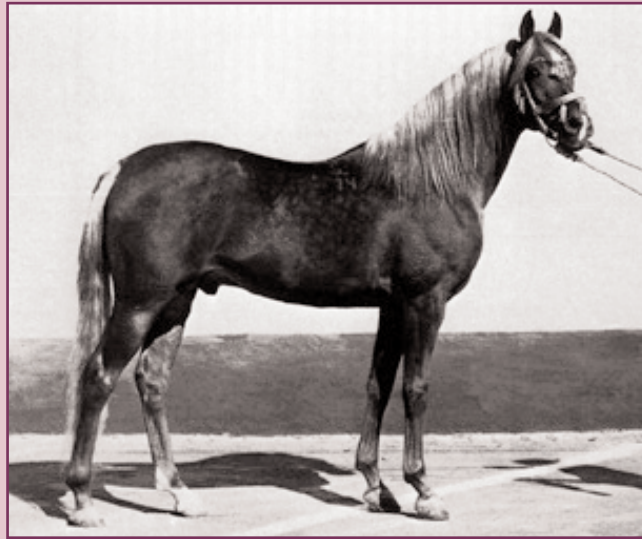
- Shagya Arabians, a breed tracing back to the stallion *Shagya d.b.* who was imported to Hungary from the Orient around 1800 and became the foundation sire of the best Arabian lines then known in the Hungarian-Austrian

monarchy. He covered Hungarian warmblood mares, transmitting his beauty and noblesse, his toughness and his stamina - an immeasurable benefit in itself at the times of cavalry horses. The Shagya offspring with their elegance and robustness were molded into a Hungarian Arabian breed of its own and got their own stud book. Up to today, Shagyas are enormously popular in Hungary - not only for military use as it was the main purpose in the past, but particularly as riding and carriage horses. The majority of the Babolna stud premises stable the most noble representatives of this warmblood breed with their oriental touch. No wonder, then, that the show should be open for the Shagya Arabians as well.

- Purebred Arabians, with the show classes not only open for horses home-bred in history-rich Babolna, but also for all horses registered in WAHO-acknowledged stud books, according to the rules of an international B show. Contrary to the situation in many Western European Countries, horses are by no means a luxury in Hungary. It's not surprising, therefore, that private breeders keep a lot more Shagyas than Purebreds. They still use their horses for farming and transport purposes, as well as showing them successfully in sports.

The particularly selected elite Purebred Arabians, partly in show quality even according to today's standards, are hardly to be found with the private breeders but mainly with the state stud in Babolna. Even here, however, the straight Egyptian stock of dam lines has only just survived recent history.





Ibn Galal I (Ibn Ghalal x Hanan), leading sire of Babolna in the 1980ies.

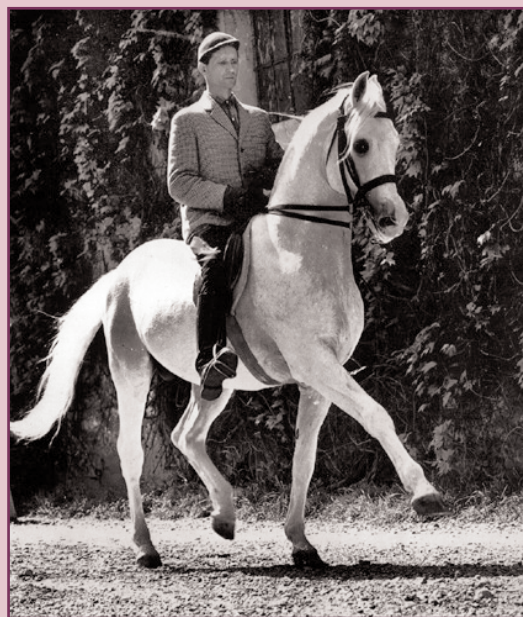
160 horses participated in the show. Almost 100 of them belong to the Shagya Arabians. The rest consists of pure-breds and 75% of them came from the Babolna Stud. The influence of these origins on the overall show proceedings were immediately apparent. Most horses had never heard of training for showing and never came into contact with “beauty farm concepts”. Why should they? Natural beauty was the word of the day. It was just the international judges who suffered from some confusion when being faced with the decision to whom to give the higher score:

the horses brought in from abroad with their perfect stand-ups and styling, or to the wild young brats with their natural charm?

Strolling through the barns spread widely on the vast stud premises, one can see the following: the stud's home-bred horses were brought in from the pastures by trailer just a day before their presentation, cleaned with water from the hose, and then brought to the edge of the show arena by stud employees. There, two professional handlers were waiting, Robert Schlereth and Volker Wettengel who had been invited from Germany just for

that purpose. In their hands they had small slips of paper indicating the numbers of their Shagyas and Purebreds, then they would tie on their starting numbers, put a show halter on their “wild horse”, and try to get him in front of the group of judges waiting in the ring - somehow. The older horses took it all in composed stride. No “nervous sense”, they would just finish their rounds in an overall confident and relaxed behaviour, some of the horses displaying brilliant trotting movements in a natural way, others more or less dragged along and somewhat amazed.

Again and again, the handlers could succeed in conjuring up some unknown qualities in their young horses. One of them was Hamad B (El Nabila B x 227 Hafiza B). He was standing in the group of two-year-olds with a show halter hanging down to his nostrils as it was much too big for him. The bit clanged against his teeth and it was more than obvious that this baby had never felt a bit in his mouth in his life. He chewed quite desperately, trying to spit the iron-mongery out and showing the white of his eyes. Robert Schlereth approached and took horse and starting number away from the Hungarian apprentice holding both, saying “I will take this one, he can win here”. Everybody laughed, but when the little stallion entered the ring for the first time in his life, he was already floating. Instead of being depressed from the humiliation of halter and bit, he decided to show off for what he was worth. His tail carried proudly, he



Stallion Master Ferenc Sauer riding leading sire Shagya XXXIX in Babolna.

trotted past the judges with a beautiful swan's neck nobody had noticed on him before, and he even produced quite an acceptable stand-up. This made him class winner. In the Championships, the judges had no other choice than to reward him with the reserve title, unable to let pass anyone of the international guest horses perfectly trained and styled for the show. It would have meant turning the criteria for shows and their whole field of profession upside down if they had gone so far as to give the title of Junior Champion to that wild young natural.

There are the things which make Babolna stand out again and again, as many experts have to note. There are existing unsuspected quality reserves. Despite all the croaking of “Babolna has sold everything which was of any value”, there will be always foals coming in from those unbelievably vast pastures and they might become just stars. This gene pool of more than 200 years will, again and again, produce masterpieces of phenotype and genotype. In order to understand how this could all happen, the history of Babolna must be told, at least partly.

Back to the Roots of the Stud

For more than 150 years, the Turks reigned Hungary and parts of Austria. During their conquerings (1526), the Turkish armies would purely aim at extermination, not only killing all the people who stood up against them but also destroying Hungary's stock of horses almost completely. During the long years of Turkish occupation, on the other hand, the Oriental horses left their “genetic fingerprint” in the country of the hussars. The indigenous country mares were covered by the Arabian stallions the Turks had brought, and in the course of decades, a noble Hungarian steppe horse developed who displayed distinct traits of the Arabian breeds and was professional used by the Hungarian population.

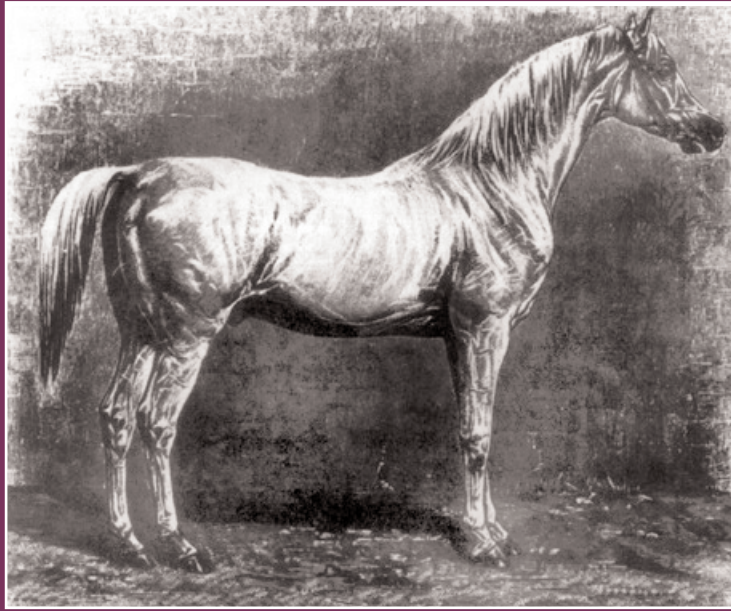
At the end of the 16th century, the Turks left the country, but they were quickly replaced by the Habsburgers from Austria, trying to patronise the Hungarian population even when horse breeding was concerned. “The Habsburgers shared the European preference of their time, introducing the heavy Spanish and Neapolitan horses all over the monarchy and in great numbers. They led to the development of Lipizzaners and Kladrubers. In Hungarian horse breeding, however, their tracks were few and far between, as Hungarian horses were rather inclined toward the Oriental model. When state and private studs in Europe were forced to try, particularly after the Napoleonic Wars, to fill the great gaps in their ranks of horses, they turned increasingly to Oriental and particularly to Arabian horses who were intended to improve their own stock.” (E. Schiele 1982).

The Hungarians were one important step ahead of their times. To keep up the percentage of Oriental blood in their horses, they could



O Bajaz	Gulan I	Gastan Schagya	Zarif III
☉	9 ₁	☉	☉
Dunglakhan	Jho Achmet	Schagya X	
nach nicht bestimmt	nach nicht bestimmt	Sh ₁₀	
Habsen-Brände:		Habsen-Brände:	
Abgrenz	Agz	Gottlo-Brand	Gidran
#	V		☉
Andan	O Bajaz		Kereishan
☉	☉		Kebelian
Dahaby	Dahoman		Kibechan
☉	☉		Machlalis
Djife	El Badavy	Wird bei Vollzug an der linken, bei Hohlheit an der rechten Kanteletelle eingewandt.	Menaghe
☉	☉		Mourour
Samban	Sigavy	Tscheloly	Abu Argub (Tife)
☉	☉	☉	☉
		Schagya	Propheten-Stute
		☉	☉

Babolna brands of 1890 for the different horse breeds of the stud.



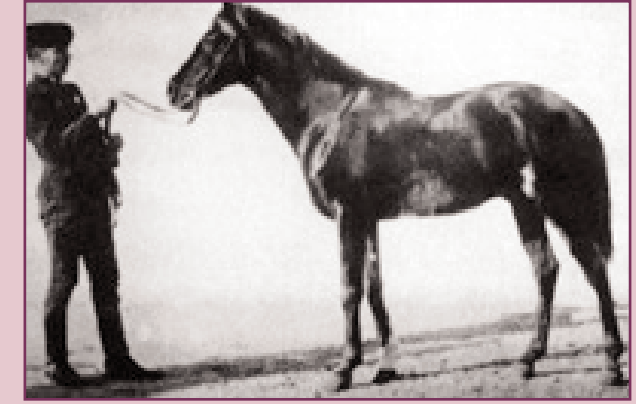
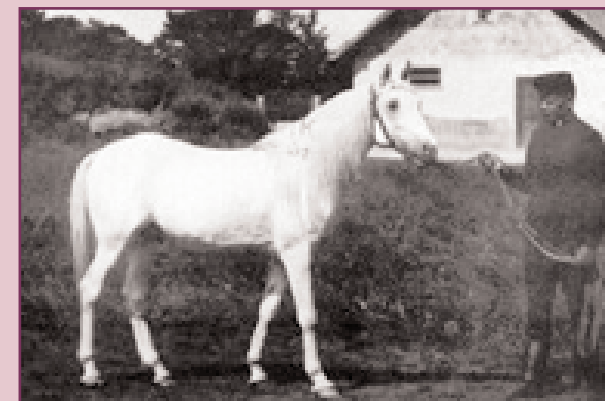
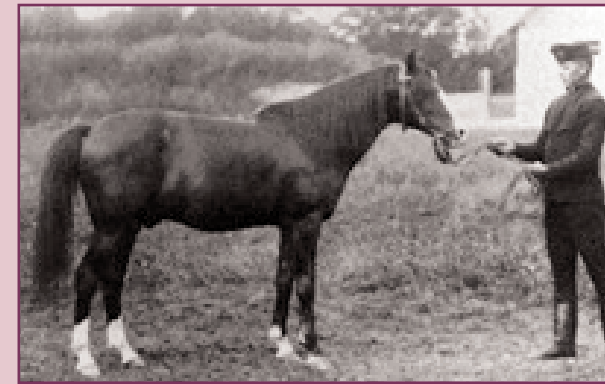
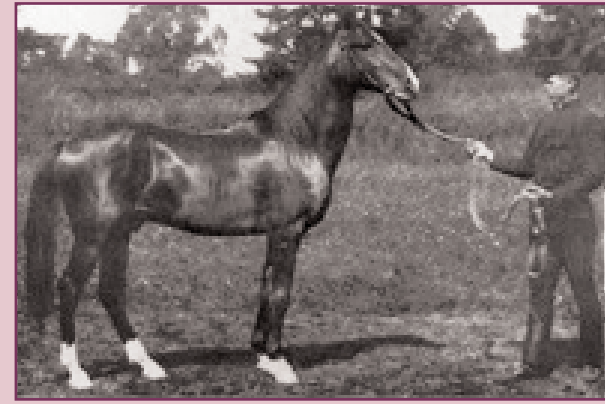
Stallion Tajar d.b., imported in 1811, the model horse for horse breeders at the beginning of the 19th century.

and they did import Arabian horses from the Orient when other countries just started to think of this for their own horse breeding. A milestone in the history of Hungarian breeding was the stallion *Tajar*, bought by *Baron Fechting* from a Mameluke Sheikh in Gizeh, Egypt, in 1811. *Tajar* must have been the fastest and most noble horse of his time. In addition, he was extremely fond of people. He came to be 35 years old and embodied the breeding ideal of his times. *Baron Fechting* undertook several journeys to Egypt and the Arabian peninsula in order to import good horses who were intended to consolidate the percentage of Arabian blood in the royal and private studs of Europe. He was the man who brought *Bairactar* and the foundation mare *Murana I* to the royal stud in Weil - later called Marbach - in Wurttemberg, Germany (see Desert Heritage No. 5). He also imported

the mare *Trifle* who founded a dam line which is in existence in Babolna up to this day, as well as the stallion *Siglavy Gidran* whose offspring can be found in Babolna today.

To be able to breed performance horses for the cavalry for generations to come, and in order to do this in a systematic way, the Habsburg Empress and Ruler of Hungary and Austria, *Maria Theresia*, decided not only to pay a premium for good young horses, but also to found a stud owned by the crown which would be able to guarantee continuity, strategic breeding according to a plan, and in addition by guaranteeing the financial means to accomplish this aim. In doing this, she stuck to the well-known saying by *Prince Eugen of Savoyen* (1663-1736) stating "A full treasury and 200,000 well equipped soldiers give the country more safety than signing excellent contracts". To put that differently, armament for deterrence was the motto even then. Wars, however, were won or lost by the cavalry and no matter whether it was the Moors, the Saracens or the Ottoman Empire, the fulcrum and pivot of the whole business of war was the Arabian horse.

Considering lots of aspects, Arabian horses had the best performance statistics. And Arabian horses had been introduced into Hungarian horse breeding no less than 200 years ago. Taking the logical consequences, the first imperial-royal military stud was founded in Mezöhegyes. For some time, it was the biggest stud in Europe with a stock of more than 4000 horses. Very soon, however, there were new wars, new losses, new defeats, with the brunt of



the losses taken by horses. The then stud director Csekonics proposed to found a new stud which was to breed mainly Arabian horses. This was the reason why the military stud of Babolna came to be founded in 1789.

Arabian Horses for Babolna - the Purchasing Expeditions in the 19th Century

The Emperor of Austria and Hungary, the Kings of Poland and of Germany, the Czars of Russia - all the royal houses of the time were looking for the "miracle weapon", the desert Arabian. Ordered to do so by their majesties, a great number of young nobles, military doctors, Orient explorers, and horse experts travelled to the Arabian peninsula in order to buy the legendary Arabian horses from the Bedouins and to export them to their respective homes, where they would serve as breeding animals to improve the local cavalry horses.

For the foreigners, however, it was far from easy to identify the desert horses as such and to develop quality criteria for selecting them. In addition, many of the buyers would prefer to take the easy and less risky way of buying the horses in the port towns of the Orient, such as Aleppo, Beirut, and Damascus, where they were offered as well fed animals. A Bedouin, however, would not sell his horse to a foreigner right away, as he would usually breed his horses just often enough to meet his own requirements. Besides, if buyers managed to advance to the deep desert, the

The desert-born stallions imported to Babolna:

- Kohaylan Raschid, born 1897**
- Saklavy Jedran, born 1876**
- Schechan Schammar, born 1895**
- Siglavy Bagdady, born 1895**
- Mersuch, born 1989.**



horses there would often appear as too thin and even unhealthy to their eyes. A great error! Rather it was the opposite: the horses from the horse markets in the North of the Arabian peninsula had been culled because of infertility or



health problems, not the asil horses from the Nejd who would be in somewhat poor feeding condition during the dry season but were otherwise healthy and robust and would be ready for the exertions of a long ride at any time.

Another reason for the expeditions to travel to the desert Bedouins and do negotiations directly with them was to find

out about the true heritage of a horse. This way, they came to know that the Arabians themselves would divide their horses into two overall groups (*Lady Blunt, Lady*

Wentworth, v. Wrangel et al.):

- The *Nejds*, the Arabians proper, with the animals themselves or their parents born directly in the area of the Nejd, which is the central and Southern part of the Arabian peninsula,

- The *Schimali*, the Arabians from the Northern part of the peninsula, from Syria, Mesopotamia, and the area that is today Iraq. (*acc. to Schiele 1985*). How should the buyers have known that the term "pure blood" would never be applied to a Northern Arabian but exclusively to a Nejd horse? "*True Arabians in the true sense of the word are only those horses bred in the former Wahabite kingdom of Nejd, and their direct descendants*". (*v. Wrangel 1908*).

Full of pride, emperor Franz Joseph I would visit his military stud ever so often. Different expeditions had imported valuable Arabian horses for him in the past, since there was always a demand for Purebreds in order to bring the traits of the Arabian horses into other breeds. In 1856, he sent the 4th mission to the Arabian peninsula. Headed by *Rudolf von Brudermann*, the men were fully aware that they would have to take great risks to find the true desert-bred Arabians.

"*In general, it can be said that horses of the first quality will only be offered to those who will make the effort to buy them first-handed and locally.*" (*L. Burkhardt 1829*).

The desert-born mares imported to Babolna:
Farha, born 1896
Em Tiur, born 1896
Aida, born 1898
Semrie, born 1896
Hadjale, born 1895
Kheila, born 1896
97 Jussuf, born 1877.



Loeffler (1860), a member of the Hungarian expedition, states: "From what we just reported, it is clear that the truly pure and noble horse, be it stallion or mare, is only to be bought in the desert, where the price will be so high that as you are accustomed to the prices asked in the North, you cannot help but shrink back, and you will hardly be

able to get the price reduced for all your astonishment and negotiations - provided the Bedouin can be talked into selling such an animal at all..."

Rudolf v. Brudermann, the leader of the expedition, noted the following in his travel report of 1856: "I faced Bedouins who would ask up to 60,000 FL for a three-year-old mare and would not even give an answer to an offer of 6,000 to 8,000 FL, but just gallop away. Such a Bedouin will typically have nothing but his mare, some camels and sheep, a shirt, a cloak and a god... I once met several Bedouins, one of them riding a beauty of a grey mare, a well-framed beast. I asked him whether he would consider to sell her. He asked what my offer was? I dismounted and inspected her teeth and thought her to be about 16 to 18 years old, but she was highly pregnant and exceptionally beautiful. I offered him 1000 FL. "This is what I gave as a tip when I bought her" he said and galloped away."

It was thanks to the horse and human expertise of this Graf Brudermann that the expedition was highly successful in spite of the risky caravaning toward the Bedouin tribes in the high country of the Nejd, an area which was virtually unknown and dangerous to Europeans. He bought exceptional horses from the Bedouins, 16 stallions and 50 mares all in all, who were transported to Hungary with lots of effort - on foot, by ship and by train. All of them would prove to have important influence on Purebred Arabian breeding in Europe.



Loeffler remarked: "... this collection of Arabian desert horses, of rare beauty and number, was generally acknowledged and honoured so widely that there was the most favourable opinion uttered everywhere and Babolna became a place of pilgrimage for any friend of horses" (Loeffler 1860, as quoted in Hecker 1994).

Years after this expedition to the desert of Arabia, the opinion among many of the European buyers was that "*Oberst v. Brudermann has bought the very best away from the desert for importing to Babolna*" (*Hecker 1994*).

Babolna, a "Place of Pilgrimage for Horse Fans"



Von Brudermann was made stud director of Babolna on the merit of the great success he had achieved for the Imperial stud with his spectacular horse imports. Finally, Babolna was boosting. The desert imports from the Orient were received with great international interest. *Von Brudermann* was able to expand his breeding concept. He decided on a similar approach as King William I of Wurttemberg had adopted for Weil (later Marbach): he would only breed the desert-borns among themselves and keep them as a pure breed, meaning that the imported mares would be covered by Arabian Purebreds only, in order to consolidate and preserve this valuable gene pool in Babolna. For improving the Shagya and warmblood breeds, there would always be Arabian stallions available this way. Increasingly, however, different interests gained ground in Babolna. There was no war at that time to destroy the horses, but the political warfare within the



World Exhibition in Paris, the victorious Babolna mares with their handlers.



Monarchy was no less dramatic in its implications for Babolna. Over time, the most valuable stallions were sold or displaced to other Imperial studs such as Lipizza or Slavuta. *Von Brudermann* was eventually ordered off to Vienna, and it took his successors only a few years to start some aimless experimenting with English Thoroughbreds in his Arabian stud.

It was only in 1869 that the Emperor committed Babolna stud to the government of Hungary. They decided to dedicate

Babolna to the breeding of Purebred Arabians once more - meaning there had to be expeditions to the Orient again in order to buy fresh horses. In 1876, nine stallions purchased by *Graf Franz Zichy* in Constantinople arrived, among them the desert-borns *Mahmoud Mirza* and *Amurath Bairactar*. The latter was later sold to Weil in Germany. In 1885, another expedition brought the stallions *O'Bajan* and *Kobeilan Adjuze*. The black *O'Bajan* was chief sire in

Babolna for 25 years until his death. His son *Kobeilan I*, a Shagya stallion, became Grand Champion on the occasion of the Paris World Exhibition in 1900 (acc. to *E. Schiele* 1982).

Successful years followed for Babolna, with the Shagya Arabian breed ever more consolidated and a Hungarian Arabian gradually developed. The Hungarians displayed the noblesse and the nerve of the Purebred Arabians, but their size and conformation came close to light warmbloods.

The two World Wars would bring suffering and horror for people and animals alike while the stud continued to adhere to its double strategy of breeding Shagyas for one part and Purebreds for the other part, keeping the purebreds in store to be able to improve the Shagyas if necessary. At this time, the stud was headed by one Tibor von Pettko-Szandtner who displayed vast knowledge and was highly successful as a breeder. He was later to become world famous in the breeding scene as the director of the Egyptian state stud of El Zahraa.

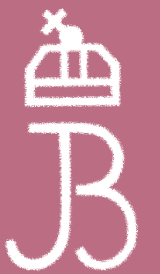
Those few Arabian horses who had somehow managed to survive World War II were auctioned away by the American occupation forces. Others ended up with the pharmaceutical industry as serum suppliers... some were shipped to the US as war booty. In the course of time, however, the world of horse breeding would come back to normal. Thanks to the sophisticated system of branding used in Babolna, even horses who had been evacuated or even thought lost could be found and identified. *"Reconstructing the breeding base in Babolna after World War II was difficult, the more so as horses were no longer needed for the army. Besides, Arabian horses are of little use in agriculture, and farm horses were being substituted by machines in ever increasing numbers anyway. Despite of all that, they started to revive Arabian breeding in 1962. The Lippizaner horses, the Thoroughbreds and Partbreds then living in Babolna were brought*



Tibor von Pettko-Szandtner when commander of Babolna stud.



Monika Savier and Marifa Al Qusar (Teymur B x El Thay Bint Maheera)





elsewhere, and Babolna was once more dedicated exclusively to the Purebred and Shagya Arabian breeds." (G. Waiditschka 1997).

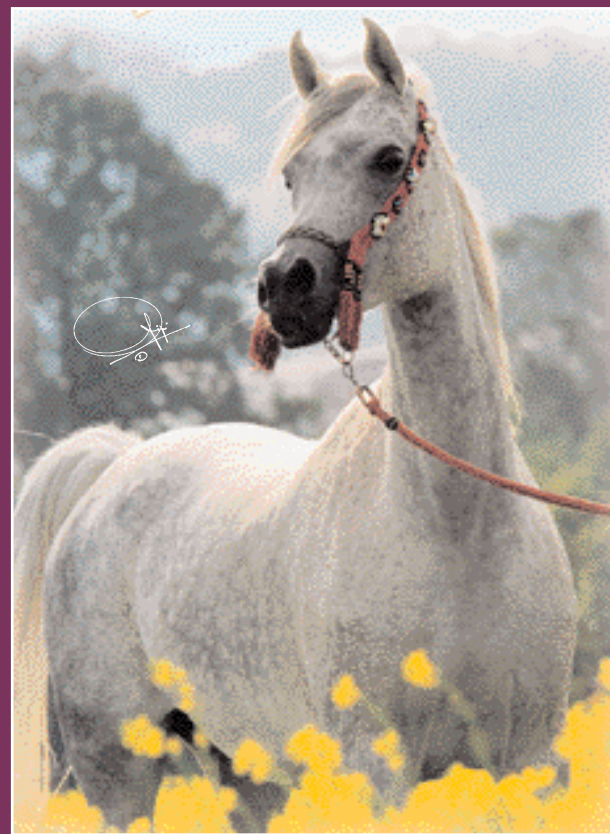
New Horse Imports by Airplane from Cairo Starting in the mid-sixties, Arabian horses were once more imported to Babolna. This time, however, they were not to make their way on foot from the high country of the Nejd, but the valuable horses were flown in as air cargo from the Egyptian state stud of El Zahraa. Their offspring were not longer intended for the cavalry, but for fans and breeders of Arabian horses all over the world. The demand for straight Egyptian broodmares and stallions started to increase, and the Babolna directors began to buy horses from Egypt as they had been advised to do by German horse and Orient expert *Dr. Hans Nagel*.

The horses who now came from Egypt were to form

an important foundation for the breeding of Egyptian purebred Arabians all over the world. There were the world-famous mares *Hanan, Tamria, Marab, Bint Inas, El Aziza and Lotfeia*. The most important stallions of this "new Egyptian era" in Babolna were *Ibn Galal, Farag* and *Ghalion*. Within a very short time, a gene pool of straight Egyptian horses had formed, well received and acknowledged internationally, but highly controversially discussed within the Babolna stud management as well as within the responsible Ministry in the government.

The new markets were enticing, but on the other hand there was a fundamental urge to consolidate and develop further the traditional Hungarian breed, the Shagya Arabian. Then stud director *Dr. Burgert*, responsible for the "new Egyptian era", met lots of criticism as according to the Ministry's opinion, the

Egyptians were too small and too noble to be of real value for improving the Shagyas. They did not recognise at this time that Babolna would face golden times as their straight Egyptian gene pool would be highly renowned and acknowledged internationally. After the stud director had been replaced, the beautiful old mares faced hard times even on the vast premises and pastures of Babolna. There was no end to the purchasing frenzy of Americans, Germans, and Italians, and later of breeders from Arabian countries looking for the Bedouin horses which had been sold away by their fathers. Quite some champion horses were busted for a few coins of foreign currency and later recognised to have left a great gap for the Hungarian breeding programme. While straight Egyptian stallions of international renown and enormous quality, such as *Ansata Halim Shah, Salaa El Dine, Ansata Abbas Pasha*, and later *Alidaar*, had been used during the 1980ies, during the 1990ies there were Russian and Polish stallions used, such as *Kubinec* and *Visbaden (Naftalin x Presnia)*. And they



Bint Amer (Salaa El Dine x 236 Amer)
owned by: **Al Kharafy Stud - Kuwait**
Her dam, **236 Amer** is a granddaughter of the ***Ibn Moniet El Nefous** son **Mohafez** as well as the **Morafic** son, **Ghalion**, and she traces in the tail female to the lovely **Inas**.

did not only cover the mares from the asile lines (*Amurath Sahib*) who were not considered to be straight Egyptian, or from the Polish-Marbach lines. They would even be mated to the offspring of those valuable Egyptian imports from the 70ies and 80ies, "in order to reinstate bone and frame to Purebred Arabian breeding". The policy that made fans of straight Egyptians weep and was considered the eradication of an important part of Babolna breeding heritage was recognised as an improvement by others. Journalist and horse expert *Gudrun Waiditschka* on the topic: "*Switching to Egyptian line breeding during the 1970ies was later considered a mistake by the Babolna administration. The stud did need the desert horses for crossbreeding with the Hungarian Shagya breed, but the offspring of Farag, to name one, was too noble and light-framed for Shagya Arabian breeding. Ibn Galal was more suited to the task, being big-framed and having good bone. What Babolna lost during that time was their solid, big-framed breed of Purebred Arabians. This Hungarian kind of Purebred and the Shagya Arabian are meant for performance sports in riding and driving. The Shagya is the cradle of the Shagya Arabian, this Hungarian cultural heritage, and this is what they are proud of there. And this is exactly what the Purebred Arabian is not, as he was no more than a means to achieve an aim. You can only understand Babolna breeding policy if you consider the Shagyas in the same picture.*"

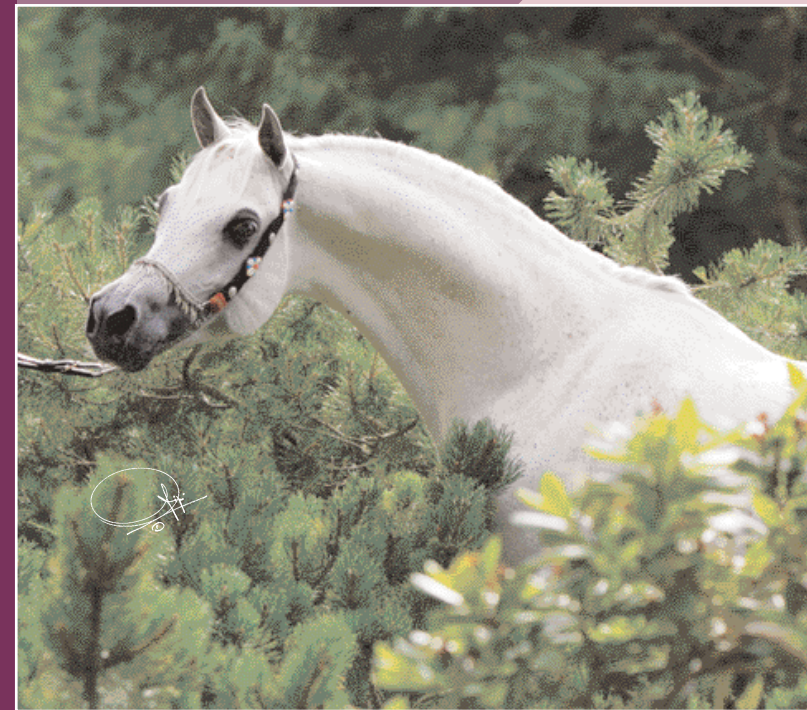
We All Know More Today ...

The history of Babolna has always been strongly influenced by the ups and downs of political oscillations - contrary to a private stud. There was a benefit, of course, which was financial means "from above" for more than 200 years, ensuring continuity for the stud as a whole and keeping the employees in pay. After the Berlin wall fell, however, this most far-reaching event in recent history, the stud has been reorganised to be self-sufficient, in part as an Ltd. business. Now it's in the hands of state administrators to consider whether to let some equine jewel go in order to meet the government-decreed level of income, or whether to go without that urgently needed amount of income in the hopes of a long-term concept earning more. Anybody who keeps horses knows how risky and costly breeding is - a small wonder, then, that exceptional mares and stallions were sold at quite low prices. Many of them are international show champions today, with their value up to ten times of



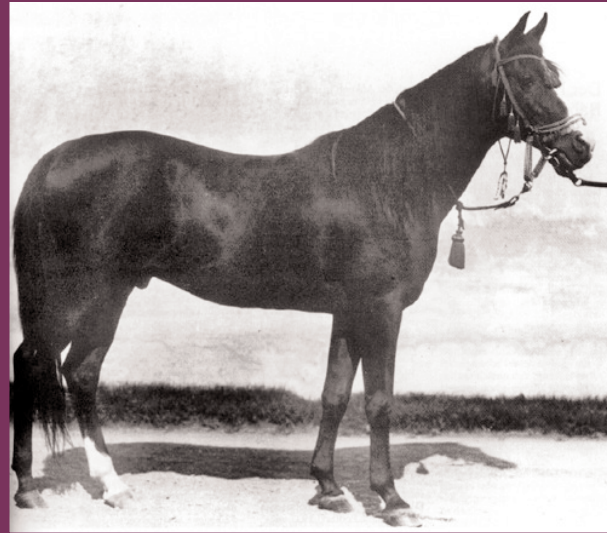
Alfibia Mameluka (ZT Faa' IQ x Taghira B)
owned by: **Al Kharafy Stud - Kuwait**
She traces in the tail female to the beautiful **Tamria**

Teymur B (Assad x 214 Ibn Galal I)
owned by: **Al Qusar Arabians**
Teymur B is bred by Babolna, is mother, the lovely chestnut mare was, a daughter of the beautiful **Tamria**



what they were sold for in Hungary. Dr Nagel's comment to that: "We all know more today and there are quite a few horses we would never sell today." The new breeding expert of the stud, Ferenc Rozman, adds: "We are trying to increase the numbers of our Egyptian stock and are looking for the lost lines."

And indeed, Tamas Rombauer, today's stud director, has leased Babolna-bred stallion *Teymour B (Assad x 214 Ibn Galal)* for the 2005 breeding season. This important *Tamria* grandson is owned by Robert Schlereth and Volker Wettengl in Germany. Rombauer also purchased the mare *Safiniya Bint Halim Shab (El Thay Thaman x Halim Shab I-1)* who tails back to Babolna offspring of *Ansata Halim Shab* and the famous daughters of *Ibn Galal I*. Other re-imports are scheduled. There are hardly any financial means from the government today, but there is clearly the willpower to constitute a Babolna-based straight Egyptian stock once more. The stud is big enough for several breeding strategies to be worked at at the same



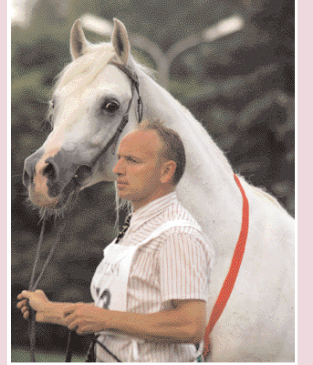
The influential stallion Kuheilan Zaid, born 1923.

time. Babolna continues to be highly impressive to everybody who knows the stud, fascinating and multicultural - a kind of cathedral for horse believers. There are those vast pastures and the stables rich in history, the horsey atmosphere, there is the Babolna history in itself - all of that is fascinating and fascinatingly present in Babolna, and we will be proud to take part in its continuing in the future.

The Babolna yard a hundred years ago, lithography.



Interview with Robert Schlereth, trainer and breeder of straight Egyptian Arabians



■ Monika Savier interviewed Robert Schlereth for Desert Heritage.

Desert Heritage: Robert Schlereth, you are something like the "trainer to the Court of Babolna". How did this come to be?

R. Schlereth: In 1990, I worked at the biggest Shagya Arabian stud then in existence, Ruth Pack's Reichshof stud. The state stud of Babolna, represented by their stud director Mr. Rombauer, was looking for a Shagya stallion out of pure lines with sufficient quality for Pure breeding. I was handling the horses at that time. Mr. Rombauer found the stallion he was looking for with us, and when Babolna hosted an international Shagya and Purebred Arabian show that same year, he invited me, asking me to handle and the stud's horses. This meeting has grown into a close rapport of 15 years, with a very friendly cooperation, and has by now spread to the area of breeding strategies as well.

Desert Heritage: Let us profit some from your experience with the straight Egyptian Babolna lines and tell us which are the most successful damlines in Babolna in your opinion?

R. Schlereth: According to my opinion, the most valuable damlines are those of

- 9 Tamria	- 12 Bint Inas
- 6 El Aziza	- 5 Marah

as from these lines, I continually see the most perfect offspring over the years. However, don't forget about Shagya breeding in Babolna. They made enormous progress during the last ten years. Today, you can find the horse of your dreams in Babolna - but only with the Shagyas, unfortunately.

Desert Heritage: Lots of people are saying that Babolna sold off their very best - is it true?

R. Schlereth: We have very good mares from the Babolna foundation stock of straight Egyptians ourselves, and I am sorry to say that I have seen Babolna ruin their own breeding by permanently selling the best horses. It's my opinion that the best horses should never leave the stud.

Desert Heritage: However, it's well known that the stud was under enormous pressure economically and they had to sell horses just in order to buy feed...

R. Schlereth: This is certainly true, but on the other hand, there have been breeding decisions made which were highly detrimental to the stud, like mating the Egyptian mares to non-Egyptian stallions such as Magdan, Kubinec, Visbaden etc. - they should not have done that. There was no real breeding goal at that time - what could be the reason for covering the typey, elegant and noble mares from the Dahman Shawan and other lines with those enormously big-framed, almost coarse stallions? Do we really have to put every horse in front of a carriage? There should have been a distinction made. I'll have to admit there were beautiful offspring from such matings now and then, but strategically speaking it was a road to nowhere.

Desert Heritage: What was the reason for this decision? Has the main emphasis always been on the Shagya breed?

R. Schlereth: Exactly - if they had continued to breed their Egyptian Arabians with the same kind of enthusiasm they applied to the Shagyas, Babolna could be among the leading studs in Europe today. The genetic basis, the valuable mares, they were there at the time. They were so very much beautiful, those classical Babolna mares.

Desert Heritage: Is there still a chance for the stud or do they lack the bloodstock to start anew?

R. Schlereth: Of course there is a chance for Babolna, it's just that Egyptian breeding starts almost at the zero point today. It's going to be a long way until big bands of classical Egyptians will crop the pastures of Babolna again and form a real interesting gene pool for interested people from all over the world.

Desert Heritage: In your own breeding, which Babolna lines do you mainly use?

R. Schlereth: The best offspring we get from the Tamria line, with our stallion Teymur B, who was bred in Babolna, taking first place. He is a very good match with all of the Babolna lines, but we also do inbreeding to Tamria and it has been an enormous success so far. In our Al Qusar stud, our home-bred horses have Tamria blood in their pedigrees at least once. This is partly due to the influence of our stock mares: Turefi B (a full sister to Teymur B), Teymura B (a half sister to Teymur by Alidaar), Tagia B (out of 230 Ibn Galal), Tisrina B (Salaa el Dine out of 211 Zohair) and noble 223 Ibn Galal I, the dam of international champions Elf Layla Walayla and Emiratus B. We bought her in Babolna when she was 20 years old.

Desert Heritage: What is the special thing about Babolna, why does it make for emotional reactions with so many people?

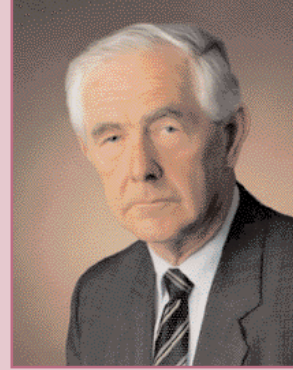
R. Schlereth: Babolna has got that certain something. We very much like to go there. It's worth the journey every time. I like that evening atmosphere in the mares' barn when the mares and their foals nose about in the fresh hay. It's just a very special atmosphere. However, it's not only the horses I feel close to, it's also the great number of friendships which have developed in the course of time.

Desert Heritage: How do you see the future of Babolna?

R. Schlereth: If I had a direct influence on Purebred Arabian breeding, I would certainly act different from them. Babolna had better stop just increasing numbers and instead start using top-class mares and cover them strategically. Of course, this implies a lot of effort and time, and there will be a lot of political skirmishing involved, but there definitely is a market for good mares and it's the only way for Babolna to reconnect with their famous historical times.

"My mind is still many times occupied with Babolna"

■ **Monika Savier interviewed Dr. Nagel, president of WAHO, for Desert Heritage.**



Desert Heritage: How did that new era of Egyptian horse imports to Babolna come to be? It is said that the initiative for that came from you?

Dr. Nagel: In the early sixties, Babolna stud was displaying all the negative consequences of World War II and the following political turmoil. Its once famous Arabian breeding programme had greatly suffered in these very difficult periods. Only two good pure-bred mares were left, all the other horses were part-bred Arabians of the Shagya type, also heavily reduced compared to pre-war numbers. It happened that at that time I started to be a consultant for Agricultural livestock, mainly for poultry, at Babolna and also at the Ministry of Agriculture in Egypt. I met with Dr. Amin Zaher, the chief of all livestock breeding programmes in Egypt, including the El Zahraa Stud. Due to his influence, I decided to import some Egyptian Arabians to Germany. However, Germany was closed for imports from Egypt due to sanitary reasons; but Babolna was helpful enough to arrange a quarantine for these horses in Hungary. When these Arabians from El Zahraa arrived at Babolna, five fillies and one colt, some of the Hungarian horsemen were very impressed by their type and features, others did not like them at all.

Desert Heritage: What happened to these horses after that?

Dr. Nagel: These horses were stabled in Hungary for two years before they should be sent to Germany. During this time, the interest of the Babolna horsemen in these horses increased, with the result that I was finally asked to sell the colt and two fillies to Babolna. After lots

After a while, Babolna recognised that these 3 horses were a great gain for its whole breeding programme, and they decided, with the approval of their Ministry of Agriculture, to buy additional breeding stock from Egypt. The above-mentioned first consignment arrived at Babolna in 1968, the next group of horses was imported in 1970. Within this second group there were the stallions Farag and Ghalion, as well as the following mares:

Hanadi	by Alaa el Din
Bint Inas	by Gassir
Bint Nazeera	by Anter
Aziza	by Tuhotmos
Momtaza	by Sameh

A short time later, the three mares El Aziza, El Thaiba, Hosna and the Alaa el Din son Zohair came to Babolna as well.

Babolna now owned an excellent group of broodmares, all originating from good dam lines, sired by different stallions in order to enter into a programme on a long-term basis considering the inbreeding factor, and giving enough room for selection. Twice a year, all breeding stock was properly inspected by a group of talented horsemen; the whole programme became well designed and remained under strict control - with the result that officials and customers were well satisfied.

Desert Heritage: What did the Babolna breeding programme look like before the Berlin wall fell? Who were the most important

breeding horses?

Dr. Nagel: In the following 20 years until 1989, when the regime of the Socialists collapsed all over Eastern Europe, Babolna was able to build up an admirable group of brood mares of about 25 head, based on these two previous imports.

They had also participated in the programme of Ansata Halim Shah

and Ansata Abbas Pasha, two well-known stallions which I leased from the US in the early 1980ies.

During this time, it became highly obvious that certain mares were of excellent quality and were considerably contributing to the success in Babolna's breeding. Such top-class mares were:

Lotfeia, Tamria, Bint Inas, and El Aziza. The mares Gala and Pharah, exported to the US, came out of this group as well as the interesting stallion Abbas Pasha I, who lives in Germany now.

The next important group consists of the mares Hamadi, Aziza, and Hosna. These seven mares could be considered Babolna foundation mares for the future in their Purebred Arabian programme.

On the stallion side, major exchanges took place after a short while. The stallion Farag was sold because his offspring were not very obedient and since Babolna was very fond of carriage driving, these horses were not really suited for this purpose. The stallion Ghalion produced mostly small offspring, even from bigger mares. In Shagya breeding he surprised with the same result and was therefore not appreciated.

Desert Heritage: What happened to Ibn Ghalal?

Dr. Nagel: Ibn Ghalal, the colt which arrived with my first import, produced a very impressive son with the mare Hanan. They called him Ibn Galal I, and Babolna decided to replace the father with this son. It was finally this Ibn Ghalal I who gave the Babolna breeding stock a certain look. The majority of the foals born in the future was produced by this stallion and they enjoyed a remarkable general acceptance in Hungary and for export.

The young Abbas Pasha I was on the list to follow as a chief sire and the stallion Halim Shah I was also chosen as a promising future horse.

Desert Heritage: After the political turnaround in Hungary and with privatisation, what kind of changes did you observe in Babolna?

Dr. Nagel: Regrettably, with the change of the political regime, the whole concept was severely interrupted. The previous director Dr. Burgert was replaced and with this man Babolna's breeding programme had lost its strongest supporter.

A new era began at Babolna and the breeding principles for their Arabians were completely redesigned:

a) It was decided to return to the traditional ties which Babolna had had before the Second World War. In the past, the Eastern State Studs had always had close relations with each other, like the Polish, the Czechs and the Russians, and in earlier times even Marbach. Egyptian horses were not on the list then. Following this principle, Polish and Russian stallions were introduced for breeding and bred to the Egyptian mares available at Babolna.

b) The new management was very keen on breeding a horse of a bigger size, and therefore all mares or stallions which were below a certain height were culled and sold, regardless of their pedigree or importance in their Egyptian group.

c) The Shagya programme was to be more intensively considered and positively revived.

Desert Heritage: What happened to the Straight Egyptians?

Dr. Nagel: These three major decisions changed the Arabian Stud of Babolna in a dramatic way until today. The Egyptian programme, in principle, was reduced to a minimum and the majority of the most important mares including their offspring was sold mostly to Italian and German breeders.

This new policy did not find a positive acceptance with previous customers outside of Hungary - with the consequence that the management now decided to revise previous decisions and started to formulate a new concept.

Desert Heritage: Dr. Nagel, thanks a lot for the interesting interview.

References

- ◆ Blunt, Lady A "A Pilgrimage to Nejd", New York 1897
- ◆ Burckhardt, J.L. "Travels in Arabia", London 1829
- ◆ Hecker, W. "Babolna und seine Araber" 1998
- ◆ Loeffler, E. "Die oesterreichische Pferdeankaufsmission unter dem K.K. obersten Ritter Rudolf Brudermann in Syrien, Palaestina und der Wueste in den Jahren 1856 und 1857. Troppau, 1860 (Reprint Olms Verlag 1978)
- ◆ Nagel, H.J. "Hanan, the story of an Arabian Mare and the Arabian race" Isenhagen, 1998
- ◆ Savier, M. "Straight Egyptians in Germany - a long tradition of breeding" in Desert Heritage V, Milano, 2004
- ◆ Schiele, E. "Araber in Europa", München, 1982
- ◆ Schiele, E. "Arabia's Horses - Alah's Dearest Children", BLV Verlag München, 1972
- ◆ Waiditschka, G. "Babolna, a Phoenix raising from the ashes" in: Arabian Stallions in Europe, by Gigi Grasso, Turin, 1997
- ◆ Wrangel, A.v. "The Arabian Horse in Arabia", Heidenheim 1908



Fillies on the Babolna pastures during the 1980ies.

of discussing and considering, it was decided that the colt, Ibn Ghalal, the Tuhotmos daughter Tamria and the Alaa el Din daughter Lotfeia would remain in Babolna. The three other fillies, Hanan (Alaa El Din x Mona), Marah (Galal x Maisa) and went to my stud in Germany. It was also agreed that there should be a kind of exchange at a later date.