



WAHO Conference Syria 2007



story and photos by Gudrun Waiditschka

Arabian horse lovers come across Syria and its capital Damascus whenever they read about the early desert imports to our Western world. Situated at the crossroads of the silk and incense road, Damascus has been a trading post for thousands of years, so it is no surprise that early travelers and horse-purchasing commissions often made Aleppo or Damascus their starting point. Count Rzewuski traveled to Damascus in 1819 to buy horses for the King of Wuerttemberg and his Royal Stud of Weil, among them Goumouch Bournu who can still be found in the pedigrees of some of the mares of the German State Stud of Marbach. Baron von Herbert's horse purchasing commission bought

from Syria who became foundation stock of European or American studs is far from complete.

So there could hardly be a better place for a World Arabian Horse Organization (WAHO) Conference than “the source,” the country where so many of our foundation stock originated. With WAHO accepting the Syrian horses several years ago, they came a bit more into the limelight. Nevertheless, not much was known about them in the Western world, so the idea of going to Syria to see what is left there, thrilled me. Would we see true “desertbred horses,” under what conditions would they live today, and what would their quality be like?

Orient Meets Occident



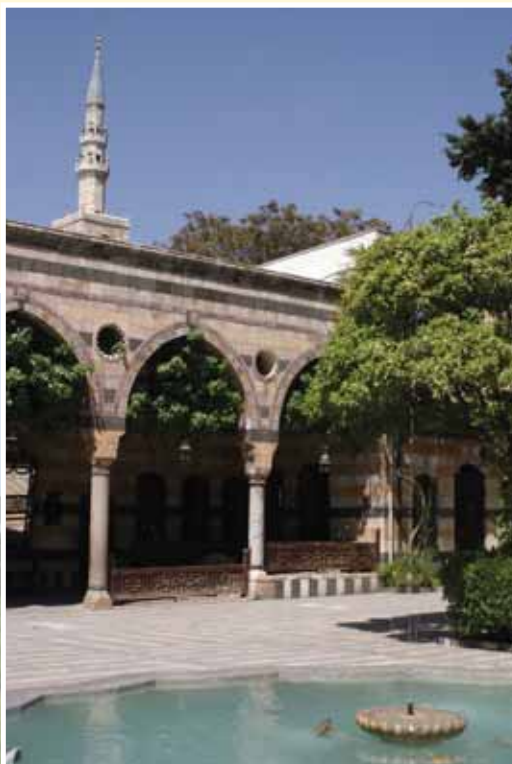
For most people, WAHO conferences are social gatherings where one may meet old and new friends from

horses in Aleppo and Damascus for the Hungarian stud of Bábolna in 1836, among them the stallion Shagya, the founder of the Shagya Arabian breed. The French “Commissions d’Orient” bought close to 600 horses between 1818 and 1925, many of them in Syria, and some of them became the foundation of today’s French race breeding program. Wilfrid and Lady Anne Blunt chose Aleppo as the starting point for their trip to Deir Ez Zoor and further into the Al Jazirah and Baghdad; right at the beginning of their journey to the “Bedouin Tribes of the Euphrates” they bought Kars, the first stallion to be used at their famous Crabbet Stud. In the early 20th century, Homer Davenport imported 27 horses to the U.S. that he had bought from the Anazeh and the Shammar Bedouin tribes in what is today Northern Syria. The last import of significance was in 1931, when Kuhailan Haifi db and Kuhaylan Zaid db were imported to Poland and Hungary, respectively. But this list of imports

around the world. This is one of the unique “characteristics” of the Arabian horse — its ability to bring people together regardless of their religious, cultural, or political background. The conferences also provide opportunities to visit countries that may not rank on the top of anybody’s wish list. It is not any different with Syria, which has had a rather negative image in recent times. But once you are there, you’ll experience great hospitality, beautiful places, and most of all wonderful people.

Take Damascus — I have hardly ever been in any Arab city that is more “oriental,” while at the same time totally safe and welcoming to visitors. Strolling the Souk, you can

immerse yourself in exotic smells, sounds and colors — always feeling welcome. The city has a lot to offer in terms of history; whether you visit one of the oldest





Christian churches on our planet (Ananais chapel), or one of the most famous mosques of the area (Omayyad mosque), history here goes back several thousand years, as Damascus is regarded as the oldest continuously inhabited city.

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The conference as such was

very informative with lectures and documentaries on the Arab horse. One of the lectures, by Dr. Hazzaim Alwair, was on strains. Together with Edouard Al Dahdah from Lebanon he is researching Arabian horse strains and collecting all the stories of their origins. The idea of these strains is not — as Raswan postulated — a certain phenotype to be associated with a certain strain, e.g. Keheilets to be strong, masculine, with a shorter head, etc. It is rather the breeder's ideal that is

reflected in the phenotype, and the strain is named after the origin of the foundation mare and is being maintained through the female line. For example: The Keheilet Ajuz is the “mother of all strains”: A Keheilet mare was named after her owner Murshil al Nawak, who bought her from the Dhafeer tribe; since then, her descendants belong to the “new” strain of Keheilet Nawakieh. Strains may stay within a breeder's family for several hundred years. For example, the Saglawieh Marzakanieh strain: the foundation mare of this strain was taken by the Shammar as booty in a ghazu (raid) from the Anazeh tribe. Today, the strain consists of about 40 horses, but has been maintained by the same family for about 180 years. Another example is the Obayah: The original foundation mare belonged to the Beni Khaled tribe. For 400 years, the Obayah Seheilieh strain has been in the same breeder's family. Originally, they got the foundation mare from Sherif Barakat of Mecca in Hejaz, which was before the Shammar migrated from the Nejd to Northern Syria, while the Obayah Sharakieh strain belongs to the Sebaa tribe, a

JONIENTZ PHOTO



WAHO RECOGNITION

It is to the credit of Basil Jadaan and his colleagues of the Syrian Arab Horse Association that the first studbook was established and the Syrian horses became WAHO recognized; the last group of horses in 2002, two years before the World Studbooks were closed.

It was not an easy undertaking to convince the sheikhs to register their horses, as they did not see the benefit of doing so. Basil told me the story of a 22-year-old unregistered mare. She is a Obayah Seheilieh and quite possibly the mare is as much a purebred Arabian as any of the other WAHO-recognized horses here, but her owner refused to register her, as he did not see any purpose in doing so. “She is registered in my heart,” Sheikh Meizar told me, “she does not need to be registered in any book.” Basil recalls the situation when he asked him why he doesn't want her to be registered. “It was a major problem when we started to register the horses for WAHO recognition, that the owners did not understand the purpose of it. Quite the opposite, some were suspicious that with marking (branding) them, the government would have a way to lay hands on them, expropriate the owners and take their horses,” Basil explained. “It took a lot of work to persuade the Bedouin that registration is for the benefit of the breed, as only through WAHO recognition the world will become aware of what heritage there is still left in Syria,” he added. The procedures to register a horse in the studbook were quite strict: only horses of which there was no doubt about their purity were accepted. The owners had to swear by the Koran that the horse is a purebred and that it is the one they claim it to be — and religious as these people are, it is unthinkable for them to give false testimony under the eyes of Allah. Also, “social control” works well where everybody knows everybody else and his horses. Blood tests were conducted to confirm relationships (sire and dam, if they were still alive). But apart from all these technicalities, there is something else to be considered; These horses are the family's heritage, their pride and joy. An owner would deceive himself and his family if he tried to manipulate and have a non-purebred horse registered as a purebred. Apart from that, the economic value of a horse was not all that great, as there was no racing in Syria — racing, with all the money involved, is the one big temptation to tamper with purity.

sub-tribe of the Anazeh. Quite honestly, all these names are rather confusing for those of us not so familiar with Bedouin history and their migration. However, the key is to remember that horses of a particular strain are often held in high esteem because this particular breeder — the owner of the strain — is known to have good breeding stock and to exert great care in selection and breeding, just as there are positive associations with famous breeding programs of Europe or America. Sure, certain horses breed true to type and stamp their offspring, thus creating a certain type that is associated at least for a certain time with the strain name. But in general, no specific type can be associated with a strain as selection is an ongoing process during which new strains may be developed. There are still a great number of strains maintained in Syria (see Table 1), some of which we have never heard of in the West. However, the question remains whether these strain names still have their meaning if the horse in question has been bred for several generations by another breeder under different conditions and with a

Back in the conference room, Dr. Tarek Abdel Rahim of the Syrian Arabian Horse Association talked about the Arabian horse, past and present. He explained that even in the old days, say in the mid-19th century, the purchasers from abroad selected horses for their own very specific purposes: The French were looking for strong, big horses, with good bodies, but those with nice heads went to Egypt. He emphasized that the horse has been part of the bio-ecological life of the desert. The horses were selected by their habitat, the desert having been a big breeding laboratory. In another lecture we learned about the history of the Bedouin, their tribes and migration. Do these Bedouin still exist? Yes, but their lives have changed as migration is restricted — tribes used to migrate across borders from Syria to Iraq or Jordan. Dr. Rahim feels that WAHO is doing an important job in creating a future vision for the breed, also in Syria. Workshops were held to discuss how to preserve the original Bedouin horses. Some attempts have already been made, and scientific work is being conducted, for example, on



different breeding goal.

To give an impression of what the conference is all about, the delegates had the opportunity to witness a horse parade right in front of the Four Seasons Hotel. For this purpose one of the main streets into Damascus had to be blocked to allow several hundred riders to show their horses to us foreigners — what a unique sight! All horses were beautifully turned out with the typical Syrian halters, breast collars and saddles, their riders wearing their “Sunday best,” and despite the unusual situation everything went surprisingly well.

Jadaan Stud ✦ Left: The Saglawieh Marzakanieh mare Bariat El Sham, by Mokhtar, of the second generation of Basil Jadaan’s breeding. ✦ Middle: The black Shweimat Sabbah mare Al Kahirah is the favorite mare of Basil Jadaan, who also bred her. ✦ Right: Wud belongs to the strain Keheileh Khalawieh, which is rather unknown outside Syria.

measuring the growth of foals.

After all this theory, interspersed with some documentaries, everyone was eager to see the “real thing,” the

horses in the flesh. Mahmoud Anzarouti invited guests for dinner (including the best lamb kebab I’ve ever eaten) at his Asael Al Sham Stud, where he showed a collection of Egyptian and Egyptian-related horses. For some of us, it was a nice reunion with Ansata Haisam who found a new home here in Syria. However, personally, I was more interested in the pure Syrian bloodlines, and the group of mares from Al Khaer and Jadaan stables was hard to beat. I had seen some of the horses already during my visit to Syria in 2006, and



rare strains. He owns, for example, Ghazali, the only Dahmah Amir mare in Syria; this strain is otherwise only maintained in Bahrain. My favorite here was Bint El Maha, a lovely Saglawieh Marzakanieh, whose daughter Za'afaranah was also shown. The mares and some youngstock were shown during lunch, in the narrow aisles leading up to the tables.

Al Ghabra Stud ✨ One of the best Saglawieh Marzakanieh mares at Al Ghabra Stud is Bint El Maha, who also proved to be an excellent broodmare.

And although I am sure this is not what they do every day, these horses were totally relaxed and easy to manage. I also



clearly, Bariat Al Sham is my favorite among the mares. She is a flea-bitten grey Saglawieh Marzakanieh, second generation of Basil Jadaan's breeding. By the same sire, Mokhtar, is Basil's favorite — the black Shweimat Sabbah mare Al Kahirah. Then there is Wud, by Hassan, a strong-moving mare, but more elegant than her sire, and Mansoorah, a grey Obayah Seheilieh. We had the pleasure of seeing this group of mares again the other day, at the Basil Al Assad Equestrian Center, and again they radiated such grace, superiority, and self-confidence, totally at ease with themselves, it was simply breathtaking.

National Stud ✨ Middle left: The Keheiliet Haifi stallion Majd at the National Stud is a look-alike of Kuhailan Haifi DB who was imported to Poland in 1931 — so this type of horse still exists in its native land. ✨ Middle right: Majd's daughter Lain Al Sahara is very much stamped by her sire, but belongs through her mother to the strain Hamdaniet Ibn Ghorab. ✨ Bottom: The same is true for Ya-teem, a seven-year-old stallion by Majd, yet he is a Keheiliet Al Rabdah, so the strain clearly is not responsible for the type that the horse represents.



Lunch was served at Zaman Alkhair restaurant outside Damascus, conveniently owned by one of the biggest Arab horse breeders in Syria, Mohammed Hamsho, who prides himself on a good collection of mares of many different and

would like to mention that — although I have traveled in most of the Arab countries — nowhere I have seen such a kind and understanding way of handling horses as that shown by the local Syrian handlers. Obviously, the traditional horsemanship has had uninterrupted continuity here.

Another highlight was the trip to the National Stud, some kilometers outside Damascus. The national studs are usually good places to start if you wish to get acquainted with a country's breeding, because in Europe, they belong to the oldest establishments with the oldest bloodlines. Not so in Syria, where the National Stud was established only in 1992 and started breeding in 1995 with 18 broodmares and two stallions bought from private breeders. The aim today is

to preserve the different bloodlines and strains for which reason a broodmare band of around 95 pure Syrian mares is kept, plus around 50-55 males and youngstock. At present there are 12 strains represented, of which six belong to the major strains.

We saw a nice group of broodmares, all of them with some strong points and most of them with good, strong legs and good hooves. My glance fell upon a bay stallion whom they showed also at liberty: a strong stallion, wide in the chest, with a well-set neck and a very nice canter although with a slightly weak back. Majd (Basil x Mayadah) is a Koheilet Haifi — and indeed he has a distinct similarity to the Kuhailan Haifi DB who was imported to Poland in 1920,



Only from the mountaintop, may the whole expanse of the ruins of Palmyra, an ancient trading center, be viewed.

so this kind of horse still exists in its country of origin. He is a breeding stallion and stamps his offspring, as could be seen in his daughter Lain Al Sahra and his son Ya-teem. Majd's full brother Moonjarid is an athletic chestnut, maybe better in the body, but with less expression. His half brother on the dam's side, Ma'roof (Mehrez x Mayadah), looks probably a bit more "Arabian" with a better tail carriage and a flying and energetic trot. In any case, all of these horses looked "usable" and not purely ornamental, as we see it all too often back home.

Having seen the horses under the favorable conditions at the Damascene stables, the agenda for the postconference tour raised expectations, as we were to see horses still living under the same harsh conditions as their ancestors.

Apparently, some of the Bedouin tribes had not immediately realized the importance of this conference in their country, and so with each day the agenda grew longer as Bedouin tribes joined in to host traditional lunches and dinners.

About 60 participants of the postconference tour set off to the Al Jazirah. The first part of this trip took us across the Al Badia, the Syrian steppe between Damascus and the Euphrates river, to Palmyra. Surprisingly, there were water puddles along the roadside — but then, it was springtime,

Top row: ✨ Left: It's common for the Bedouin mare to wait patiently, saddled and pegged to the ground on a long lead. ✨ Middle: This young stallion was prancing and rearing — agitated by the surrounding mares, and because everybody was preparing for the race. ✨ Right: At the race — most riders were bareback, using a bit-less halter.

Middle row: ✨ Left: A scene reminiscent of the old days, when the Bedouins migrated with their camel herds. ✨ Right: Making friends — a little Bedouin boy says hello to a new friend.



Some of the Shammar Bedouin rode 40 kilometers to this collecting point alongside the road to show their horses to the WAHO delegation.

The Bedouin tents are increasingly accompanied by motorbikes, rather than by horses.

the season with the most rainfall. The yellow-brownish colors of the rocky steppe accompanied us all day, together with the mountains of similar shades. The scenery was interrupted

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only by some Bedouin tents and flocks of sheep in

the distance. What a contrast when we came to the desert oasis of Tadmor, with the ruins of Palmyra, situated about halfway between Damascus and the Euphrates. The palm trees gave a green contrast to the yellow and brown shades of the sand, the rocks and ruins. Imagine to have come here after several days of riding a camel across the desert! This historic site is a not-to-be-missed place on any trip to Syria, and the sunset and the rising full moon gave the place a very special atmosphere. In the 2nd century A.D. it was a trading base through which Rome was supplied with spices, but some 500 years later, the oasis sank into oblivion. What remains of that period today are the impressive Amphitheatre, the Great Colonnade, and the Temple of Baal — all definitely worth a visit.

In the evening, we were invited for a “Bedouin-style dinner” at one of the tourist places, which nonetheless gave a first impression of some Bedouin traditions, and the dancing felt genuine, and was great fun to watch. After more sightseeing the next morning, we headed off for Deir Ez Zor. Halfway there, we turned off the main road —



Euphrates Stud ✨ Above: Mares and foals at Euphrates Stud. ✨ Far left: Tall, with long lines and expressive face, that's Al Haidara, a Keheileh Nawakieh at Euphrates stud; she is an excellent broodmare and two of her sons are doing very well in racing and endurance. ✨ Left: Amir Maridini, the general secretary of the Syrian Arab Horse Association with one of the mares at Euphrates stud.

SPELLING AND TRANSCRIPTION

The spelling of Arabic words and names in other languages such as English, French, or German is difficult. There is no standard protocol for transcribing letters or words from Arabic into other languages, so it is basically up to the author, how he writes down what he hears, and that depends very much on what language his mother tongue is: Let's take the word (Al) Jazirah, describing the “island” between Euphrates and Tigris (and also known as a TV station based in Qatar). By hearing “dza'zi:ra,” an Englishman would write down “Jazeerah,” a German “Dschasirah” and a French probably “Djazirah.” Thus, Arabic words, once they are transcribed into a “Western” language, differ greatly. This was already the case in the old days, and that's why horse names or strain names differ from one source to the other. In former times not even the Western languages had a defined spelling, and so it was up to each author how to spell certain words.

To minimize confusion, the strain names in this article are given as they are printed in the Syrian Studbook. However, for the horse names, this was not always possible and so a free transcription by hearing had to be used. So, in case you cannot find the horse name in the studbook, this is the reason.

and suddenly were taken back some 100 or 150 years! A huge herd of camels was the first thing I saw, and then, one by one, all the photographs from the Raswan books became reality: mares, pegged to the ground, were waiting patiently with their foals next to them in the camp, some stallions were getting agitated because of the unusual commotion around them. A young grey stallion, who was rearing and prancing around, caught my eye. Yes, he may have been too narrow in the breast, and yes, his head may have been too long, but he had expression, he had spirit, he was so full of life and yet, gentle and easy to handle by his owner. It was a great pleasure to

see. And the reason for the unusual commotion was soon to become evident: The riders were preparing their horses for a desert race!

I jumped on a pickup and off we went to the starting line of the race, while the riders cantered behind us to show off their riding skills. Totally covered in dust, I watched the preparation for the race. Some of the mares had left their foals in the camp, which may have been an additional motivation for them to race back as fast as possible. Hardly any of the young riders used a saddle and some were even barefoot or had lost their shoes in the heat of the moment. The mares were ridden with a bit-less halter, with a chain as

a noseband (which is common, as are the scars on the nose bridge). Only a few stallions participated, but some of them were quite stunning! It was a flea-bitten grey stallion who won the race; he led over some 2 or 3 kilometers, but only because the young boy of the 18-month-old filly fell off just before the finish line — he had to explain something to his family...

It was time for lunch, for which they had slaughtered — so I was told — about 50 lambs, as it is custom here to slaughter one lamb per guest. The lamb — head and all — was traditionally served on huge



Ganama Stud * Left: The Keheileh Nawakieh mare Zeyn is the pride of Mazen Ganama who owns a stud near Deir Ez Zoor. A mare like her would have caught the eye of any purchasing commission in the 19th century. * Right: Her stablemate Alaa, also a Keheileh Nawakieh, has a beautifully shaped and naturally carried neck, completely in balance with her body.

T A B L E 1 — S T R A I N S M A I N T A I N E D I N S Y R I A

<p>Al Hamdaniat Hamdaniat Ibn Ghorab Hamdanieh Semrieh Hamdanieh Al Efri</p>	<p>Obayet Um Jreis Obayah Seheilieh Obayah Sharakieh</p>	<p>Keheilet Ajuz Keheilet Ajuz Ibn Jleidan Keheileh Armousheh Keheilet Al Kubeyscha Keheilet Krush Keheilet Krush Al Baida Keheilet Al Musineh Keheileh Memrahieh Keheileh Nawakieh Keheilet Al Wati</p>
<p>Al Dahmat Dahmah Shahwan</p>	<p>Al Keheilat Keheilet Ibn Mizher Keheilet Um Urqoub Keheilet Jreibeh Keheilet Jaethmieh Keheilet Jalfet Sattam Al Boulat Keheilet Jalfet Dahwi Keheileh Hablamieh Keheileh Haifieh Keheileh Khidlieh Keheileh Khalawieh Keheileh Da'ajanieh Keheileh Da'ajanieh Kasher Keheilet Al Rabdah Keheilet Reeshah Sharabieh Keheilet Sa'adat Touqan Keheilet Al Tewishah</p>	<p>Al Ma'anagiat Ma'anagieh Sbeylieh Ma'anagieh Sbeiliet Abou Saifain</p>
<p>Al Saglawiat Saglawiet Ibn Bisra Saglawieh Jedranieh Saglawieh Jedranieh Ibn Zobeini Saglawieh Jedranieh Ibn Amout Saglawieh Shaifieh Saglawieh Marzakanieh</p>		<p>Al Hedeab Hadbah Enzahi Hadbah Enzahi Al Fawaarah</p>
<p>Al Obayat Obayet Ibn Schayan</p>		

plates and on a big pile of rice. But in the eyes of our hosts, we were not eating enough, and so one of them took the head, ripped out the tongue and put it on my plate — it was a gesture of hospitality, to offer the guest the best part. Good for me that I like tongue and that I wasn't offered the eyes...

Back in the cars and buses, we drove off toward Deir Ez Zoor, where we were awaited at the banks of the Euphrates at the aptly named Al Furat (Euphrates) Stables. It is the most wonderful setting for a stud, the pasture right at the riverbank where the horses can have a dip in the water, which is surprisingly clean. The stallions were kept in the traditional way, pegged to the ground, each one out of reach of the

age, to see that such horses still exist. Another beauty in Mazen Ganama's stables is Alaa, also a Koheilieh Nawagieh. He also showed some youngstock, such as a filly by Majd, the pure Syrian Kuhaillet Haifi stallion at the National Stud, and Zeyn's yearling filly by the Egyptian stallion Seif El Din, which immediately led us to the point of discussion of whether or not the pure Syrians should be crossed with "outside" bloodlines.

The pure Syrian bloodlines are as unique as the Bahrainis, Iranis, and Tunisians — they all derived from and exist as a small population, they have been bred in isolation for a long time, and they should be preserved for that reason



other, but all could see the others and what's going on around them. Those who think it is a cruel way to keep horses should consider that there are no fences — for a migrating Bedouin, fences would not be feasible. In any case, these stallions participate more actively in what's going on than any horse in a dark box stable. The mares, however, had a wonderful life on green pasture, with abundant water. There was one remarkable mare, Al Haidaria, a Keheilieh Nawakieh. She was a tall flea-bitten grey mare with long lines, an excellent broodmare, as she proved with her son Addai who had been unbeaten in any race he started. Also his younger half brother was placed in a 90 km endurance ride. With the image of horses mirrored in the waters of the Euphrates in our minds, we boarded the boats to cross the river where we were expected at the Ganama Stables of Mazen Ganama, a young and dedicated breeder. Mazen does not have many horses, but at least one exquisite mare, called Zeyn, again a Koheilieh Nawagieh. A chestnut mare that could have graced Crabbet Park if she had lived about 150 years ago — her color would have fit perfectly and her quality may even surpass most of the imports of Lady Anne Blunt, who came through Deir Ez Zoor in 1877/78 on her quest to buy horses. It must have been a special moment for breeders like Rosemary Archer, who was with us despite her

Tai Tribe * Left: Stallions are often presented in a more "lean" condition, but all horses are well-muscled and all are ridden. * Middle: This eye doesn't need any makeup — a bay stallion of the Tai Bedouins with one of these beautiful handmade Syrian halters. * Right: Everybody was eager to show us his horse; it made them very proud that these foreigners came from all over the world to see their horses.

as a pure gene pool by maintaining their living conditions and the old means of selection. To export Syrian horses in order to cross them outside their homeland with other populations makes sense, to bring back characteristics that might have been lost in the "modern" breed, but to import horses of other populations, such as Egyptians, French racehorses, etc. (as is being done by some Damascene breeders) to crossbreed them with the Syrians, will only dilute the source. Yet, one has to be aware that a certain size of the gene pool is as necessary to maintain a breed (or sub-breed) as is strict selection. The latter still occurs in the Al Jazirah to a certain extent due to the environmental conditions. But then, one also has to understand the wish of the breeders of these horses to be competitive with others on an international level. With the increasing globalization that reaches, today, even the farthest countries and populations on earth, this is becoming more and more a threat to these



brought from the surrounding areas, the governor of the region, the mayor of Al Qamishli, at least 30 or 40 sheikhs of the sub-tribes, clans and families were greeting us. They showed us a cross section of different strains, among them a Saglawieh Jedranieh Ibn Amoud with beautiful big eyes. A one-eyed stallion stuck in my mind, a horse in a perfect square frame, very functional conformation with perfect limbs. There were many good horses, and although not all features were to be found in one horse, the typical Arabian characteristics were nevertheless all there.

Again another 50 lambs had lost their lives to feed us all, and what was left by the guests, was taken by the locals, so at least they had a feast as well. We rushed off to meet with the Shammar tribe. Somewhere along the road, yet another group with horses awaited us. Some of the horses were ridden here some 40 kilometers just to be shown to us, and back the same distance. Again, the horses were lovely, and shown in their original way. A bay stallion with a beautiful, elegant neck; a chestnut mare with the most feminine and soft expression; a grey mare had the most exquisite muzzle and nostrils — again, the Arabian characteristics were all there.



populations. And the balance between competitiveness and preservation is difficult as long as competitiveness is measured in beauty alone.

The next day we drove through the Al Jazirah, the land between the Euphrates and the Tigris, to Al Qamishli. To my surprise, the landscape was all green with lush fields — now it became apparent why this area is called the Fertile



Shammar Tribe ✦ Middle left: The members of the Shammar tribe rode up to 40 km to present their horses to us; mares are traditionally ridden with a bit-less halter, but with a chain as noseband. ✦ Middle center: One of the best stallions in the Al Jazirah is Al Naif, a Keheilet Al Rabbah; a beautiful and athletic horse, and although he has a straight profile he has all the Arabian characteristics. ✦ Middle right: His full brother Dara'Hadi looks more refined and very elegant; both stallions are owned by Sheikh Daham Ahmed Hadi Al Jarba of the Shammar tribe.

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Crescent.
When I had
visited the Al

Jazirah last year, it was one month later in the year and the fields were all harvested, yellow, and dusty. Outside the town, the Tai and allied tribes had put up their tents and hosted us for lunch. What a festival they made of our visit: Several thousand (!) people gathered, several hundred horses were



At the festival place of the Shammar Bedouins, we were welcomed in such a stylish and decent manner, that it was hard to believe we were out there in “nowhereland,” close to the Iraqi and Turkish border. Unfortunately, it was already quite dark when they showed us the horses, some of which were owned by Sheikh Daham Ahmed Hadi Al Jarba. Here, I had a reunion with his stallion — and my favorite from last year — Al Naif Al Hadi of the Koheilet Rabdan strain. Al Naif is an expressive, masculine stallion, typey, despite his straight profile, with a beautiful bay coat. It was easy to see that he is an Arabian through and through. Additionally, he was standing on four correct legs, had a beautiful athletic

Damascus ✦ Top: The Omayyad Mosque in Damascus. ✦ Bottom left: The Khan Asad Pasha was built in the mid-18th century; all khans originally were “hotels” for the accommodation of travelers and their animals (caravans), hence the word “caravanserai.” ✦ Bottom right: The Anbar House is a beautiful example of Damascene architecture of the late 19th century. The ornaments consist of a mixture of European and oriental elements.

body, and a lively temperament. His full brother, 13-year-old Dara’ Hadi, is also a nice-looking stallion with good expression and well-set neck, elegant and refined. They were both sired by a chestnut stallion called Mash-hoor Shammar, born in 1982, who was among a group of horses recognized by WAHO in 2002.

Back to Al Qamishli, where we stayed for the night. And even though the flight back to Damascus never lifted off and we had to take minibuses and cars, the trip to the Al Jazirah was the trip of a lifetime. We experienced genuine Bedouin hospitality, the Bedouin's pride for their horses, and it is good to know that such horses still exist. But will they have a future? The Bedouin lifestyle is disappearing — they are no longer nomads but have settled, at least for most of the year. The life of the horses will change, too, sooner or later.

The main impression I took home from this trip is that there is a valuable heritage left in Syria that is only rarely to be found elsewhere in the world. We should be grateful to the Syrian breeders that they still preserve this blood in our time. It was also somewhat comforting to realize that the

genetic potential, which has come to its full expression under the favorable conditions in Damascus, does still exist out there in the Al Jazirah, in the native land of the Arabian horse.



Part of the Great Colonnade, the "main road" through the ruins of Palmyra.



Top: HRH Princess Alia al Hussein of Jordan and Basil Jadaan of Syria, a member of the WAHO Executive Committee. * Bottom: WAHO president Hans Nagel.

My thanks go to Basil Jadaan, for his generosity and kindness, which enabled me to come to Syria again and be part of this once-in-a-lifetime experience; to Kina Murray of WAHO, for all her help before, during, and after the trip; and to Dr. Hans Nagel, WAHO President, who strongly believed in holding the conference in Syria, even after it had to be postponed due to the unstable situation in the area.

WAHO CONFERENCE ON DVD

Dragonfly Production has been chosen as the exclusive videographer for the World Arabian Horse Organization's 2007 Conference. The DVD will be available soon and will include the WAHO 2007 Conference, A1 Tour, and the Arabian horses of Syria. Cost for the full DVD is \$45.00 U.S. and \$5.00 U.S. handling and shipping. See www.dragonflyproduction.net/waho.htm.