

Point of honor, point of passion: Breeding Arabians in Syria

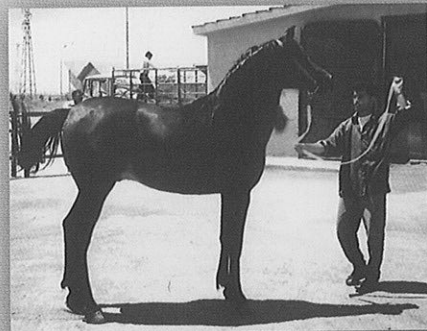
BY STEPHANIE SEARS

More than just a splendid form, a fine Syrian Arabian epitomizes its country's immense history and culture.



Bedouin spectators wave from under the temporary tenting at El Dimas racecourse

The three to four thousand year old breeding tradition of the Bedouins continues to stamp the physique and character of the Syrian Arabian today. The land was both fertile enough to sustain man and horse and arid enough to test their fortitude and bind them together in mutual reliance. In the sometimes harsh environment of nomadic life and during times of crisis the Prophet Mohammed allowed man to eat horse meat. In return man's custom was to crush the mutton bones left in his plate to supplement his foal's diet with calcium. There is ample indication of how significant man and horse still are to each other in Syria today. It is not only the beauty of the horses that is striking to a foreign eye but also what can only be

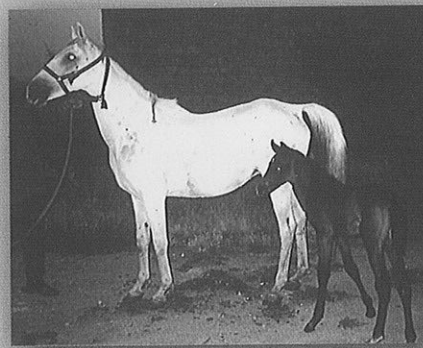


The stallion, Eliatim, a characteristic example of the horses found at the Basil Al Assad Center



Two of Al Jabri's yearlings

described as their expression of courtesy and dignity which perhaps reflects qualities also found in their human counterparts. To ride one of these horses is to meet not only with liveliness and quick understanding but also with natural friendliness and politeness. So communicative is the Arabian's personality that one almost believes that he wishes to express the Arab welcome 'Ahlan wa sahlam', meaning, 'you are among friends and I will do my best to make you feel at home.' The analogy is not far-fetched by Arab standards. Syrians continue to acknowledge the existence of a mutual emulation between man and horse, setting standards of nobility and patience for each other. According to one hadith, or saying, of Mohammed, "All Arabian horses are called for prayers each dawn..." Another hadith says, "Satan will not assail the



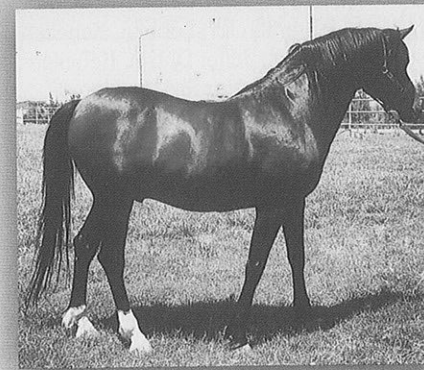
The lovely Saffa and foal, Basil Al Assad Center

owner of a pure-bred horse." Arabs faithfully follow the Qu'an's message that breeding Arabians is virtuous, but a healthier economy has also permitted an increasing number of breeders in Syria today.

Of the 2000 to 2500 asil Arabians in Syria, some 1000 are bred by Bedouins; 544 straight foundation Syrian Arabians were registered in the studbook. Search for the origins of these horses started in 1985 and the first volume of the studbook was published in 1989. This systematic effort and adaptation to W.A.H.O. registry standards has reintroduced Syria to international Arabian breeding. This state of renewal has by no means, however, weakened Syria's sense of being fountainhead for Arabian lineages around the

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Stallion

world and of its unbeatable longevity in the breeding of the asil horse. Private breeders like Mr. Hisham Ghayeb in Damascus, Mr. Abd Al Mohsen Al-Anaini in Homs and Mr. Mustapha Al Jabri in Aleppo continue to obtain horses from Bedouins and have restored the large-scale breeding which existed before Socialism. Some of their horses now compete in International events, as well as in annual domestic ones such as the Republic's Halter Championship in March and the September races and endurance competition held in Lattakia and in Palmyra. Recently the El Dimas racecourse outside of Damascus was inaugurated with racing for both Arabians and Anglo-Arabs. While El-Dimas promises in the near future to possess all the amenities of a modern race-course, it is still unfinished, with spectators seated under temporary tenting and the inauguration preserved some of the spontaneity, charm and excitement of a Bedouin meet in the desert. Horses arrived two by two in open trucks, or had been simply ridden to the track.

Horse events of a 'folkloric' nature appear to have somewhat ceded their place to modernization. For example, dancing horses richly caparisoned in traditional silver ornaments perform only at weddings, and the equestrian game called Jireed in which two riders pursued each other with spears, was last played in 1996.

Yet in contradiction with this neglect or abandon of certain customs, the effort to modernize the domestic horse market through auctions has met with resistance. The probable cause of this negative reaction is the absence of a personal exchange and therefore of the opportunity to express honorability and respect between buyer and seller. Traditionally, the sale of a horse could be sealed by merely

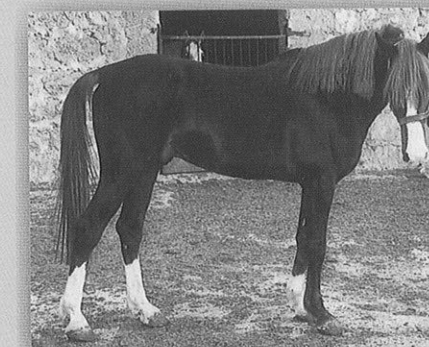
reciting a verse from the Qu'an, and Bedouin custom compensated a man for the loss of his sold mare by having the buyer return to him her first and third born.

Despite reticences, systematization continues and the most recent effort to centralize information and services for Syrian breeding is the Al-Za'eem Arabian horse Documentation Center created only months ago. Managed by Mr. Amir Mardini, it bears the name of its owner, Mr. Mohammed Sa'eed Al Za'eem, whose interest in Arabians derived felicitously



Of the 2000 to 2500 asil Arabians in Syria, some 1000 are bred by Bedouins; above, an old Bedouin mare at Imad El Shaar Farm

from his other involvement in night clubs. The center provides instruction to jockeys, to judges for international events and to breeders wishing to enter their horses in competitions; it also advertises horse sales through the internet, will have a library and will also include a museum devoted to horses.



Stallion at Al Jabri Farm

Among the breeding farms around Damascus the one that is most adamantly devoted to the preservation of Syrian blood-stock is certainly the National Basil Al Assad Center, initiated by the now deceased son of late President Hafez Al Assad. For that reason the one hundred



Waffa, one of Basil Al Assad's prize winning mares

and seventeen horses that occupy the one hundred and sixty hectares of land do not include foreign-bred Arabians unless they be straight Homer Davenport. Until recently exports were illegal, but are now permitted if not exceeding fifty per cent of the national product, and if the horses are no less than eighteen months old. Importing countries have been the United Emirates, Jordan, Kuwait, Sudan and to a lesser extent the United States and France. Stud fees are negligible, veterinarian services free, and food is supplied to breeders at a substantial discount of sixty per cent. The center's director and a young Druze employee, Louis El Shorifi, whose task is to school and exercise the horses, both demonstrate intense emotional involvement in their work - indeed almost religious devotion - not only to the horses but to the idea that successful breeding must avoid the pitfalls of commerce.

The center's horses appear unaffected even by midday scorching summer temperatures and, as so well illustrated by the long-legged bay stallion Eliatim and the lovely gray mares Saffa and the prize-winning Waffa, display a combination of spirit and poise. Large and athletic, they also tend to be short-backed, straight-nosed and barrel-bellied. At smaller establishments, such as the Imad El Shaar farm, Arabians are shown with the same devout passion. Among the forty-seven horses owned by Mr. El Shaar, most mares are of a less athletic cast than those at the National Center but show that fascinating sparseness which imparts the presence of such qualities as courage and toughness which made the Bedouin horse so valuable in wartime.

At another private and manicured establishment near Damascus, two

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handsome stallions, a Hamdani Semri named Daraan and a Keheileh Memreh named Sakar are brought onto a miraculously green lawn in the same mood of uncontrived pleasure. These horses, bred by Basil Jadaan, international judge for halter events and member of W.A.H.O.'s Executive Committee and of the Arabian Horse Care Committee, are estimated at forty to fifty thousand dollars for the international market. The domestic price is set lower for among private breeders in Syria there also exists solidarity and mutual encouragement. Stud fees are considered dishonorable and compensation is usually given in the form of presents to stable boys or food to the horses.

At dusk, at the impressively modern Asayel Al Sham stable, a vast, illuminated paddock harbors playful mares and their foals whose pleasure in the cooler evening air and total lack of shyness prompts them to resolutely seek the attention of visitors. A Syrian happily demonstrates further the Arabian's sociable temperament by calling a favorite mare out of her stall and letting her, unhaltered, follow him outside the stable building where, for fun, he crouches under her legs. But it is in the north of the country, outside of Aleppo, where stands Mustapha Al Jabri's breeding farm, that one understands to what extent the Arabian is part of its human family. For in accord with the Arab saying that asserts that the value of a horse is equal to that of its owner Mr. Al Jabri will no more advertise photographs of his horses than he would of his children.

The Al Jabri farm is a sober-looking stone building planted on a flat, grassy plain that feels more like Central Asia than Arabia. At sunset, lifting billows of golden dust, the mares trot about and play in their paddock with an incomparable air of strength and sweetness, and walking among them one feels welcomed and protected. The farm is a resurgent effort begun twenty years ago, after Mr. Jabri's family was obliged to sell its horses during the 1963 revolution. He is now one of the main proponents for the preservation

of Syrian strains, (called rasan in Arabic). Surprisingly, some of his horses have less of the Arabian look one expects and is used to seeing in Egypt and in western countries - that is, dished head, high-set tail, long arched neck. Indeed one bay stallion looks remarkably like an Irish hunter with a large head, Roman nose and angular body. Yet generally, physical criteria are the same in Syria as elsewhere, though dished heads are considered, if too exaggerated, to be a physical defect which prevents proper breathing. Why then do some horses show little of these famed characteristics? Though beauty remains an inferred goal, Mr. Al Jabri considers the preservation of blood and strains more important and not all Arabians have such marked types as one is used to seeing in more commercial breeding. One of Syria's many national treasures is the number of its Arabian strains. In the effort to preserve them lies that point of honor and passion upon which the Bedouins have based their own breeding. In these strains are to be found essential if not always glamorous qualities of the Syrian horse. But even under that pared down look of some Bedouin horses one cannot help but notice the indefinable grace of expression and movement due perhaps to the austerity of environment and to the moderation of their keep.

The Sbaa, Fedaan, Amarat clans of the Anazeh confederation, and the Shammar, Ta'i, Jbour tribes, to name a few, continue to breed these valuable horses. Out of the fifty-four strains registered in the studbook, Seglawieh Jedranieh is the most represented, followed by Seglawieh Shaifieh, Obayah Sharakieh, Obayah Seheilieh, Hamdanieh Ibn Ghorab, Hamdanieh Semrieh, Keheileh Krush Al Baida, Keheileh Nawakieh, Keheileh Ajuz, Shweimet Sabbah, Ma'anaghieh Sbeylieh.

Strains less well represented are Seglawieh Jedranieh Ibn Zobeini, Keheileh Jreishieh, Keheileh Jalfet Dahwi, Keheileh Shwaitieh, Keheileh Ajuz Ibn Rawdan, Keheileh Asheer, Keheileh Ayaleh, Ma'anaghieh Al Aqraa. Some strains are found pure for three generations. Others have disappeared or are on the verge of doing so despite efforts to preserve them. One twenty-year-old gray mare and her foal at the Al Jabri farm are - with a nineteen year old sister sold to a Damascus breeder - the last registered representatives of the Riche Sharaabieh strain. Outside the walls of the Al Jabri stable, at sunset, that clan of horsemanship composed of the owner, friends, stable hands likes to converse around a table sipping the inevitable steaming tea. They talk about horses with the same passionate interest that revealed to Arabs in the past the numerous nuances in coat colors, markings and whinnies, and made them apply the results of such meticulous scrutiny to their breeding. But as Arabian breeding in Syria increasingly favors bureaucratic efficiency in its efforts toward greater international recognition, some individuals, active themselves in this process, fear nonetheless that man and horse will lose some of their closeness which is the foundation of the Arabian's good character and intelligence. Also feared that will be lost is that Bedouin point of honor and passion where a man's reputation is sufficient guarantee of a horse's pure origins.

A more optimistic view is that the new energy given to breeding will not just return Syria to its proper place. In a time of political strife, it may also reveal to others the happy resemblance of character, so familiar in Arabians, that one meets among their breeders.

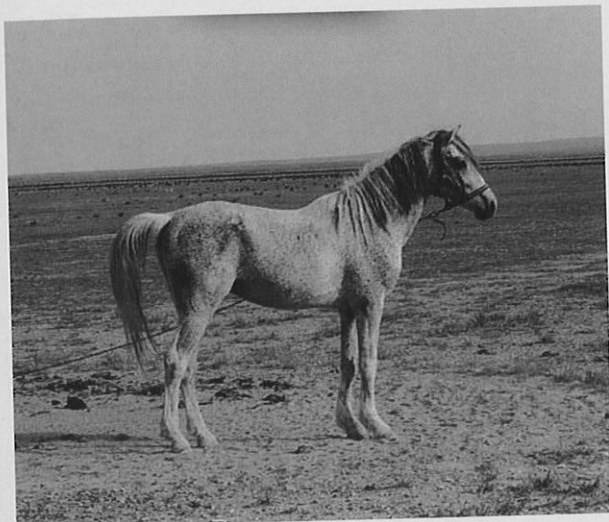
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El Dimas race-course outside Damascus was recently inaugurated with racing for both Arabians and Anglo-Arabs



Ali Mazaouat stallion

The Syrian Arabian horse: a Bedouin creation

By Stephanie Sears

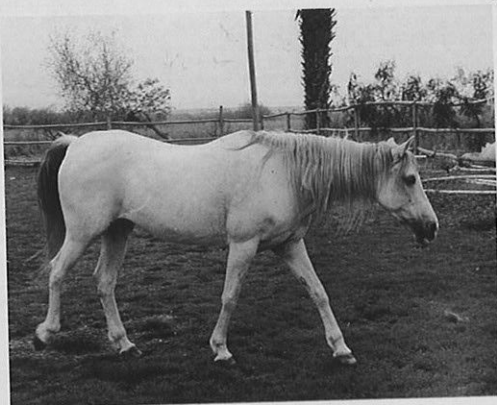
Damascus is ancient and no doubt fascinating, but fixed and confined in its oasis. To leave it for Al Jezire, Syria's northeast region is like a promise of freedom in vast open spaces. Yet the name Al Jezire or Al Jazira means 'the island' and describes the space between the great rivers of the Euphrates and Tigris. The region is watered by them and by their affluents Balikh and Kabour flowing down from Turkey's neighboring heights. The drive north soon recalls images of Bedouin life, of camel-haired tents open to the fresh northern air, of horses standing saddled and ready with colorful and pomponed tackle ready to be mounted at a moment's notice. The seduction of such romantic visions is all the more intense when the wearying materialism of industrialized commercial society has only just been left behind. To Syrians themselves, the presence of a Bedouin society in their country appears to guarantee the enduring purity and authenticity of Arab culture. If Bedouin society has also been criticized as a menace to order and for retarding progress, it has nonetheless always been acclaimed for its most glorious creation, the Arabian horse. In his case there are few negatives, only his relatively small stature,

less even than non-Bedouin bred Arabians, perhaps fed on a richer diet. In this end of March, the Badiya or semi-desertic steppe on the way to Palmyra and then to Deir ez Zor, is by Syrian standards, particularly lush this year and is carpeted with bright green grass which gives a hopeful air to the treeless landscape. It will nonetheless be burnt by the sun in two months' time or less. Flocks of sheep, and less frequently, herds of camels, hurry to eat this manna before it disappears. Big tents punctuate the countryside. Some, patchworked, belong to gypsies, others, colored uniformly, are Bedouin. The Bedouin's freedom has for centuries been at the price of great austerity and much traveling. To understand the qualities of the Arabian horse one should consider his breeder's own qualities of endurance and generosity. The Bedouin's needs are few. The list of necessities given by Dr. Gustave Le Bon in 'La civilization des Arabes' is short: weapons, a metal plate on which to bake bread, a cooking pot and a coffee pot, a mortar to grind coffee, a leather bag to draw water from a well, a few clothes and other small items. This tension between necessity and freedom that has so long defined Bedouin life, has slackened somewhat in the last fifty years or so. Just north of Palmyra, Ali Mezawat al Jaseem of the Bashakim tribe, receives guests under a large canvas tent set on tribal common land, (though individual property has appeared among Bedouins). Outside the tent a large satellite dish is set on the ground and a pick-up truck waits at the tent's entrance instead of a horse. Some disappointment is undeniable and yet promptly relieved by the sight of a group of horses a hundred meters away, tethered in a circle near a second tent. Inside the main tent, things assume a more traditional appearance with cushions set around the walls and an old-fashioned stove used for cooking and heating at night. As an introduction to conversation, the Maazeb,



Wadi Al Khouri stallion

the serving of clove-perfumed coffee, takes place. To conclude it before visiting the horses, Ali Mezawat, a jovial man of exquisite politeness, as is the rule among Bedouins, plays the Rababa, a single horsehair string lute. The sweetly monotonous sound expresses eloquently the delight but also the unforgivingness of desert life. Of his twelve horses those seen are spare-looking, yet animated stallions that are being trained for racing. The training track is habitually prepared by driving the offensive pick-up truck around the encampment and thus turning the hard ground into sand. Colts and fillies usually begin racing at one and a half and two years in thousand meter races. Adult horses are run in endurance races, such as the 120 km May event in Palmyra, which replaces warfare in testing a horse's stamina and courage. As in the past, mares are even sometimes raced in foal. Ali Mezawat admits with a grin to having the traditional prejudice in favor of chestnut-colored horses as long as the right fore-foot has no white. In Bedouin lore these markings are thought to belong to the fastest horses. Though Ali Mezawat will rarely sell a horse, it will most



Mr. Ghananama mare at Dier Zour



Sheikh Tai stallion with Ahmad Sheikh Mohammed, Al Jazeera

often be the off-spring of a mare which he recuperates after birth of the foal. He finances the keep of his horses with his flock of one hundred and fifty sheep - a common system among Bedouin breeders. Despite a visible easing in the Bedouin regimen of life, Arabians like those belonging to Ali Mezawat are left tied under the midday sun and still clearly receive little of the pampering that other blood horses do. As a result, they are considered hardier than their non-Bedouin relatives; they are thought to be stronger, braver, fleet of foot, lighter in their action - the reward of centuries of careful selection for the sake of survival. The Bedouins acknowledge the fact that they did not always live in Syria. And the question arises whether the Arabian horse has always been part of Bedouin life. Two basic theories answer the question of the Arabian's origins: one states that Bedouins were originally camel breeders and associates them with the horse only after their departure from 'Happy Arabia' in Yemen. Their migration around 150 AD resulted from the rupture of the Ma'reb dam which, flooding the land, made it useless. Arabs of the Azdite tribe, advised by their Prince Mozaykiya, traveled north. They may have gone northwestward and first encountered horse-owning Arabs known as Nabatheans, or they may have found their first horses farther north, in Mesopotamia, where horses were already present in great numbers. The Azdite Prince Malik formed the

kingdom of Hira south of the Euphrates which then served as a point of distribution of horses to the Peninsula. There, and particularly in the arid areas of the Djebel Shammar and Nejd where nomadic life was the only way to survive, the Arabs bred these horses during three centuries into the Kehilan Ajuz or Arabian purebred. The horse was most useful in hunting antelope, gazelle, ostrich and lion present in those areas, and was fed little more than mashed dates, Mereesy or camel's milk mixed with water, dried meat, and rarely, grass and oats. Horses most likely to resist this strenuous life, were the ones

which, according to the Bedouin, had the swiftness of the gazelle, the strong tendons of the ostrich, the courage of the lion. The second theory reverses somewhat the procedure and claims the Arabian as indigenous to the Peninsula, and that he came precisely from Yemen. It is said that the Sumerian king Sargon traveled there to obtain horses to take back to Mesopotamia. While they acknowledge the departure of their people from Yemen because of the breaking of the Ma'reb dam, Sheiks of the Tai, Shammar and Bani Azeem tribes favor this second conception over the other because it gives the Arabian horse an indisputable Arab origin. Either way, the at-taghalub or 'will to overcome', made Bedouin breeders careful selectors, as punctilious in controlling the purity of their horses' blood as they were of their own lineage. The tribes in Syria still considered today most important in horse breeding are the Tai, Shammar, Naim, Jbour, Fedaan, Amarat, these last three of the confederation of Anazeh, renowned in the past for traveling great distances. Though Bedouins are considered today to be a single population estimated in 1980 at between 200 000 and 300 000 in Syria, they were never a homogenous group and warfare was constant between tribes, caused notably by the mutual theft of coveted horses. The advantage of these raids was that it enabled precious bloodlines to be crossed. All at once means and cause of war, individual horses acquired legendary status that is still remembered today as part of Bedouin history. A well-known example of this is the story of the Dhobyian and Abas tribes that fought over two horses belonging to the Abas: Dahis, son of Dhul'Okab, himself son of El Awaj, stallion of immortal fame and Gabraah, possibly Dahis' daughter. A race

was organized between the two tribes which the mare Gabraah won after Dahis had been ambushed by men of the Dhobyian tribe. Even so, the mare's victory was contested by the head of the Dhobyian and a war ensued between the two tribes which lasted forty years. Syrian Bedouins have been sedentary or semi-sedentary for the last sixty years. It was during French Occupation that they finally integrated sedentary life, though they were still allowed a great deal of freedom to manage their own affairs. Traditional tribal hostilities as between the Anazeh and the Shammar, were neutralized. But today, Sheiks, or princes, like Sheik Tai, Sheiks Muali, Zoubeyd, Obayda, Bani Hilal, still govern the internal affairs of their people, as well as advise and participate



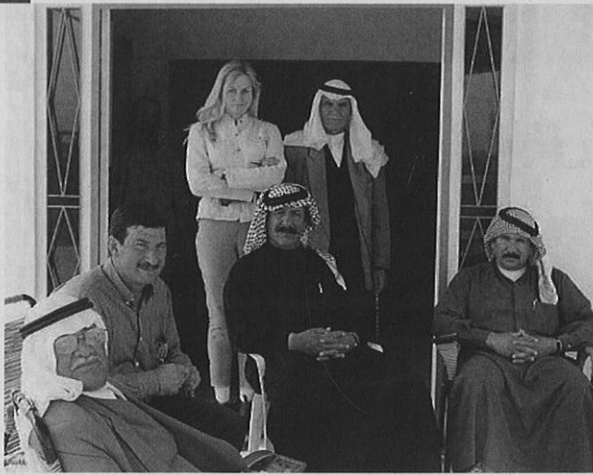
Filly Bedaouiya, Al Jazeera

in the affairs of the state, (three Tai tribesmen are members of Parliament). Despite changes that came about with Syrian independence when the government confiscated great tracts of land that had been property of Sheiks, horse breeding continued. The region of Al Jezire that has a strong concentration of Bedouins and horse-breeding, is not what is usually imagined to be the natural Bedouin environment, at least not in March. The flat land at the foot of the Turkish mountains is very grassy at this season, streams are relatively frequent, and instead of tents there are wood-beamed mud houses. Sheik Mohammed abed Razak Tai, a most charming and poised gentleman dressed in khaki Bedouin clothes and white hatthatta head cloth, has been Sheik for twenty-five years. With his brothers he bought back, near the town of Hassakeh, four hundred hectares of land that had been his tribe's summer grounds for a thousand years. While cultivating principally cotton, wheat and barley, he also owns twenty-five purebred Arabians, two of which are stallions, the rest being mares and foals. One mare and her foal belong to the rare strain Kieheliieh Mlehiieh. It is from such reserves of purity as these strains, that Bedouin breeders always hope to produce a perfect or safinat horse. Animals of this quality are remembered for generations and so Sheik Tai is able to name several Tai-bred safinat individuals: Farhan, a bay Saglaoui Jedrani dari, Massoud, a gray flea-bitten Krush, the bay Al Hermezagany (no strain indicated), Karmal, a Saglaoui Jedrani. Sheik Tai's own favorite stallion, a short-backed, high-tailed gray is tethered near



(Above & right) Shammar Stallions, Al Jazeera





Author with Sheikh Tai (Left forefront) & tribe members at Tai farm

the house in much the same way that he might have been tied near a tent. The Sheikh's attachment to the horse is obvious. The mares too, are dispersed around the house, within sight of his much frequented reception hall, the *almadaffa*, where he regularly receives his fellow tribesmen and other guests. One is struck all at once by the refinement of these horses' lineages, yet by the simplicity and lack of ceremony with which they are fed and watered outside. But is it not this very informality which demonstrates the family-like intimacy existing between Bedouin and horse? Ahmad Daham al Hadi, son of Sheikh Shammar, has that gentle and discreetly observant manner that seems to be characteristic of Bedouins. The Shammar house in the town of Qameshlye, is large, decidedly urban and sedentary in aspect. Yet the Shammar have been sedentary in Syria for only fifty years, brought to the region by Ahmad Daham's grand father. Sheikh Shammar owned 50 000 hectares before 1958 when it was confiscated. In 1980, the sheik bought back 600 hectares for his family and 250 000 hectares divided equally among the fifty Shammar villages. Shammar horses figure prominently in Syria's studbook. Among the tribe's breeding rules, incestuous crossing is firmly rejected and in-breeding is generally disfavored. Nonetheless, great importance is given to pure blood and less to conformation. Like Sheikh Tai, Ahmad Daham al Hadi applies specific traits to certain strains: the Saglaoui is generally taller and finer, (pretty girls are often compared to Saglaoui among Bedouins), the Hamdani is powerful, the Managhie is long-bodied. Strains favored by the Shammar are Hadban in Zahi for the purity of its blood believed to have originated in the Nejd, Kehileh al Wati for its beauty, the Saglaoui Jedrani for both its beauty and speed. The appearance of the Shammar breeding establishment, similar to Sheikh Tai's farm, shows none of the prettying up that can be seen at breeding farms around Damascus or abroad. Horses are not presented advantageously. Stallions stand, ungroomed, in a courtyard next to what look like truncated oil drums used as troughs; mares look equally dusty in a field nearby. Though the horses are

no longer kept on the austere diet of the old days, the conditions, sedentary though they are, remain rustic and it is rather wonderful to see how the animals' good breeding stands out.

Farhan al Bilou is a slim, distinguished-looking man and an expert on Arabians. In his agreeable but modest mud-walled courtyard, a colt and filly are presented like promising members of the family, soon to be raced. The gray filly Al Bedaouiya seems particularly well-bred for racing and her owner shows her with such proud affection that one recalls how in Bedouin tradition an entire tribe used to go into mourning when a fine mare died.

As a matter of fact, some of the customs that demonstrate the emotional value put upon horses continue today. When just born, a foal is blessed: a few drops of gasoline in its nostrils keep evil spirits away. Both filly and colt are kept isolated with their mother for a month as a protection against a person's evil eye, recognizable by that person's yellow eyes and widely spaced front teeth. Turquoise beads placed around a horse's neck are another mode of

protection. Though quite a few Bedouins have become businessmen like Mazeen Ghanama of the Maamra Jbour tribe, an oil man in Deir es Zor, breeding horses and racing continue to be favorite occupations. It is not rare to find jockeys or other equine professionals present in an office to discuss some horse-related matter. On this particular day, the Syrian champion jockey Rehela Bkhrif was present with Mr. Ghanama and another horse-breeding businessman, Mr. Wadia al Khouri. Around the beginning of the nineteenth century the Anazeh were thought to own about 10 000 horses; the Shammar, 8000; smaller tribes, some 5000 each. Things have changed and with the end of nomadism as a way of life and the increase in costs, the Tai tribe has now only between 500 and 700 hundred horses, the Shammar, a thousand. Near the town of Hama north of Damascus, Sheikh Fouad al Azeem of the Bani Azeem tribe, who owns twenty-five horses, estimates the monthly cost for one horse to be around 6000 Syrian pounds. Yet horses can also generate considerable revenue when



Bani Azeem mare near Homs

they have the quality of Srou, Sheikh al Azeem's prize stallion, a magnificent gray Keheilet Jreishieh, estimated at 700 000 Syrian pounds (1 US dollar equals about 47 Syrian pounds). Samely, Sheikh Tai's rare Kehelieh Mlelieh mare, is worth between 1 and 2 million Syrian pounds and a mare's price may rise to 3 million. Sheikh Hassan Nassif Naim owns a 30 hectare breeding estate close to Homs which appears to be more of a business onto itself than previously visited Bedouin breeding establishments. The lay-out of the stud farm, with large reception tent and a considerable staff suggests that showing horses is not just pride and pleasure but also part of the trade. Sheikh Naim owns one hundred and fifty horses, fifty of which he keeps at his home village. Three of his forty stallions have been selected to each produce one of three different types of Arabian: for speed, for conformation and for a pure Syrian type. He has nineteen horses racing in flat races that are trained on the farm's own manicured training track. Products descended from a son of the French-bred Dormane are destined for racing and seem, generally, quite large in their good-looks. One burnt-chestnut Managhieh stallion, Tzikar, is particularly fine, also estimated at 700 000 Syrian pounds. But while these half-French Arabian horses are



Ali Mazaouat stallions

taller and perhaps more spectacular than Sheikh Naim's purely Bedouin-bred Arabians, they seemed also somewhat aloof and less gentle in character. The Syrian Association of Arab horses monitors the country's rich horse legacy by having satellite offices throughout Syria to keep track of births and deaths among potential purebred registries and already registered horses. Through extremely congenial and active employees such as Ahmad Sheikh Mohammed who crisscrosses the country to identify new candidates for registration, the Syrian Arabian and more particularly the Syrian Bedouin Arabian is becoming more widely known than in the past. A fellowship is knit between specialists and breeders of varying backgrounds and financial means which is likely to produce better breeding opportunities. Through a systematization of the breeding process the Syrian Arabian has acquired the status of national patrimony. Regrettably, such a change no longer leaves the Bedouin and his horse alone in his halo of desert dust and exotic freedom. But efforts to constitute a more coordinated Syrian Arabian breeding has and continues to emphasize the great merit of Bedouin breeding throughout the centuries and the eminent quality of his creation: the Arabian horse.