

# Westernizing Arabian Horses:

*Examples of Purity Breeding  
in Relation to Authenticity and  
Improvement, 1880–2020*

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**Abstract:** This article reviews Western approaches to the regulation of Arabian horse breeding as it shifted west and globalized, focusing on the period between 1880 and 2020. The move to “preserve” the Arabian horse within a Western framework is central to this history, but different approaches have been adopted over time. I consider examples from nineteenth century Poland, England, and Russia as contexts for understanding how debates about and approaches to producing “purity” unfolded in the Arabian horse industry in the twentieth-century United States and continue today in the global context of Arabian breeding framed by the World Arabian Horse Organization (WAHO).

**Keywords:** *Arabian horse; breeding; purity; pedigree; Poland; England; Russia; United States; WAHO*

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*The sound of pounding hoofs in sand could be heard easily.  
[... The] steeds moved effortlessly across the sand [...].  
Blacks, bays, chestnuts galloped swiftly with heads held  
high and hot coats shining in the sun.*

—Walter Farley, *The Black Stallion Returns*

**S**ince its first publication in 1945, American novelist Walter Farley's *The Black Stallion Returns* has captivated readers with the fantasy of desert Arabia and its horses.<sup>1</sup> Among many of Farley's admirers in North America the book has stimulated a lifelong interest in the Arabian horse and accompanying feelings about its assumed uniqueness and perceived exotic heritage. Farley's books appeal especially to young readers, and by the 1980s his earliest fans were in a position to realize the childhood dreams these stories had stirred. Some have become breeders as a result of Farley's influence, while others have tried to recapture childhood memories by investing in Arabians. Indeed, one breeder claims that Farley contributed more to the development of the Arabian over the twentieth century than any other single person.<sup>2</sup> Many readers also developed the conviction that antiquity and purity were embedded in this desert horse in a way not true of other equine breeds originating in the West.

A dichotomy exists, however, between what Farley wrote about the Black Stallion and what many Arabian horse breeders in Western society have come to believe about Arabian-specific notions of purity. Farley's imaginary breeder of the Black stallion, the Arab sheik Abu Ja' Kub ben Ishak from the El Kharj district in Saudi Arabia, actively introduces foreign blood into his breeding programmes to produce greater speed. Such improvement is achieved, his daughter explains, by abandoning ideas about strict genetic purity where necessary: "My father and his father before him have spent their

1 Farley, *The Black Stallion Returns*, 100. In what follows I refer to "Arabia" both when discussing the imagined, orientalised East and in historical discussion of eras when the territory was identified as "Arabia" by Western travellers. Where geographical specifics are available they are identified and when referring to more present history I refer to the "Middle East".

2 Forbis, "Ansata Arabian Stud", 178; Forbis, "Ansata: The Breeding Program", 213.

lives interbreeding the original Nejdī purebred strain [...] with others which they have sought for improvement purposes.”<sup>3</sup> The sheik enlarges on this point, noting that his horses’ “blood is pure and free of admixture, except in instances when we think that our line will be improved by careful interbreeding with other strains.”<sup>4</sup> He concludes by noting that because such breeding practices are commonly followed in Arab countries very few “pure” Arabians exist there, and “certainly none in any foreign country.”<sup>5</sup> Abu Ja’ Kub ben Ishak’s implication that purity and authenticity as ideologies have not been sacrificed through this breeding strategy is central to Farley’s fictional representation of the Arabian horse. By the 1980s, however, breeders of Arabians in the West saw the situation differently when assessing real animals. Though they continued to revere Farley’s fictional horse, the perceived need to adhere to ideals of purity and authenticity to historic type raised critical questions about improvement. Was improvement, for example, the antithesis of authenticity because improvement implied change from the original? Could authenticity exist without genetic purity?

In what follows, I take up questions of this nature by reviewing Western approaches to the regulation of Arabian horse breeding as it shifted west and globalized, focusing on the period between 1880 and 2020. The Arabian was popular and influential in the West well before Farley’s time. Indeed, the importation of such animals to Europe through agents from Constantinople and towns in Syria had been underway from at least the late sixteenth century, and Oriental bloodstock were central to the creation of many breeds including, most notably, the English Thoroughbred. By the nineteenth century, however, a growing focus on the Arabian as a pure breed in itself had taken hold as a result of the expanding preoccupation of Western travellers, explorers, and businessmen with the Near and Middle East. Prior to the Napoleonic campaigns of 1798–99, Western interest in Ottoman lands had centred on the desire to establish trade routes and political contacts in North Africa. By the early

3 Farley, *The Black Stallion Returns*, 112.

4 Farley, *The Black Stallion Returns*, 115.

5 Farley, *The Black Stallion Returns*, 116.

nineteenth century, however, the focus was beginning to shift. Concern with the topography of the land and its minerals, with its human history (especially that of Egypt), as well as the drive for scientific exploration (the river Nile being a prime example) began to focus increased attention on the Middle East. In the mid-nineteenth century, Britain and France developed political and commercial aspirations for greater control of this territory, particularly Egypt (and the building of the Suez Canal, for example). Mapping and exploration became critical for Western penetration of this territory, in turn encouraging further exploration and ultimately tourism. Railway building amplified the sense of European presence, and Turkey itself (the centre of the Ottoman Empire), Syria, and Iran (Persia) all attracted significant European attention. Ottoman and Arabic cultures and customs offered what western newcomers increasingly defined as a sense of exoticism: painters and writers, for example, took the exotic East as their subject in greater numbers over the late nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Europeans often felt a sense of decay pervaded countries under Ottoman control, moreover, making many Western visitors come to believe it was their duty to rescue and preserve its treasures.

The move to “preserve” the Arabian horse within a Western framework, keeping it pure rather than using it to upgrade European horses, was part of this Orientalist trend in Western thought. After the mid-nineteenth century, European travellers began to penetrate the interiors of Syria in greater numbers in search of Bedouin-bred Arabian horses. By the late nineteenth century more adventurous visitors began extensive trips into central (now Saudi) Arabia with the same thought in mind. In Europe, importers developed two different strategies to breeding these horses, both designed to maintain the Arabian in its new environment.

### **Establishing Arabians as a Breed in the West: Importing Stallions to Breed Local Mares in Poland.**

The most important examples of the earliest method of breeding Arabians outside the Middle East rested on breeding up to intensified

6 For example, see Stevens, *The Orientalists*, 15–18.

Arabian blood by mating imported Arabian stallions with local mares. The system developed primarily in Poland where, for centuries, princely stud owners had coveted and collected Arabian horses. Historically, many of these studs could be found on what was known as the “black road”, the main route taken by Tartar and Turk invasions up to 1750.<sup>7</sup> Around 1570, Polish princes began the practice of capturing cavalry stallions during invasions and mating them to local mares. The breeding of “Arabians” as such was not central and selection strategies beyond this simple formula were random and haphazard. Over time, however, the Poles came to believe that crossing Eastern males into the national herd led to an improvement in Polish horses. As Prince Roman Sanguszko wrote in 1876, describing the state of his family’s stud at the end of the previous century:

the herds of great landowners of the times were often mixed and led without any thought. The only saving grace was that from the older times, as a consequence of the Turkish and Tartar attacks, the hero families of our countries defending it [sic], [...] they had the opportunity to acquire original eastern and Arab horses through the wars, and from them, the better blood and the higher oriental race spread throughout the country.<sup>8</sup>

As relations with Turkey stabilized and the wars ended in the early nineteenth century, the acquisition of Eastern stallions became more difficult. Landowners in Poland interested in intensifying the “Arabian” qualities of their animals, started to send agents to Constantinople and centres in Syria, like Aleppo, to purchase stallions. As the century advanced, Polish breeders relied less on their own agents and more on horse dealers from Constantinople or Aleppo to supply breeding stock. The Poles usually made no effort to understand where the horses they imported originated or who their breeders were, and reliance on the judgement of agents/dealers for selection was the common practice — though an important exception

7 W.S. Blunt, *My Diaries*, 219 (13 September 1895).

8 Sanguszko, Sr. “Prince Sanguszko’s Stud Farm”. For this and all subsequent documents downloaded from [skowronek.io](http://skowronek.io). This website was constructed by Lyman Doyle and was also attached to the blog *Daughters of the Wind* until shortly before December 2022. The site is currently down but can be accessed via the Internet Archive’s WayBack Machine.

was Count Wactaw Rzewuski, who had come to know and admire Bedouins as a result of his travels through Syria and imported more than one hundred animals when he returned to Poland.<sup>9</sup> As Polish breeders began to focus on improving the horses in their studs, they adopted more structured breeding programmes utilizing newly purchased stallions. After generations of constant breeding with Arabian stallions, the resulting horses carried a greater concentration of Arabian blood.<sup>10</sup> In effect, they became “Arabians”.

The history of the Sanguszko family stud in Sławuta (established in 1791 to work in concert with another family stud founded in the sixteenth century) illustrates many of the patterns described above. Prior to 1800, the Sanguszko herd had been a nondescript group of horses which resulted from random breeding involving some Arabian blood.<sup>11</sup> When the end of several wars resulted in a shortage of raided stallions, between 1800 and 1803 the Sanguszko family began to follow the standard practice of purchasing stallions in the Ottoman Empire and despatched the nobleman Kajetan Burski to Constantinople in search of horses. Finding nothing of interest there, Burski proceeded to Aleppo and thence into the interior of Syria (a practice virtually unheard of at that time) on various buying expeditions. By the late nineteenth century, though, the Sanguszko family had come to rely on horse dealers in Ottoman lands and followed the common custom of purchasing stallions rather than mares. The historic propensity of Polish breeders to have little knowledge of where horses originated or how the Arab people bred continued as well. In 1900, Prince Roman Sanguszko Jr., nephew of the elder Prince Roman and the Sanguszko family member then in charge of the Arabian horse operation at Sławuta, admitted that he knew next to nothing about how breeding proceeded in Arab countries: “I cannot judge about strains, the species, divisions and branches of the desert Arabian horse [...] I have never travelled to Arabia,” he suggests, adding that “whether the nomadic Bedouins will disappear in the less or more distant future, under the influence of European

9 Archer et al., *Crabbet Arabian Stud*, 18.

10 Ott, “Skowronek Type”, 103; Taverna, “Comet”, 84.

11 Sanguszko, “Prince Sanguszko’s Stud Farm”.

culture, [...] it is difficult for me to judge.” Sanguszko did, however, believe in the value of the Arabian horse and saw “saving” the breed as his mission: “the Arabian horse deserves to be preserved, there is no doubt about that.” He further argued that his horses had attained a degree of excellence while maintaining authenticity and so “completely preserved the type of the desert Arabian horse.”<sup>12</sup>

The Sanguszko interaction with Arabians became more complicated when the Sławuta operation split into two sections, a division initiated by the marriage of Maria Sanguszko to a member of the Potocki family. Many of the Sławuta animals became part of Potocki holdings as a result of this split, and in 1881 they would form the foundation of a new stud, Antoniny, established by Józef Potocki (Maria’s son).<sup>13</sup> The affairs of the family studs — Sławuta and Antoniny — remained closely linked and private breeding records existed for these interconnected family operations. The basis of both studs, then, rested on bred-up animals with records linking them to the breeding practices of the late eighteenth century.

It should be noted that it was not always clear whether the stallions acquired by the Poles, either in raids against the Ottomans or via agents sent to Constantinople and Aleppo, were in fact Arabians. Sanguszko, for example, spoke of “eastern” or “oriental” horses as opposed to “Arabians” being obtained by the princely studs. Many equine types passed through the general area and had commonly been traded in towns like Aleppo. In other words, it is likely that some animals brought to Arabian studs in central Europe belonged to other breeds. This situation appears to be the case in the breeding and importing work of the Branicki family whose stud, Uzin, was founded around 1780. In 1895, Wilfrid S. Blunt, an English visitor and important commentator on Arabian affairs in the west, noted that:

The history of the stud, of which I have looked over the books, seems to begin authentically in 1813, though [it is said to have] forty years or more of antiquity. It can hardly be called a pure

12 Sanguszko, Jr., “Letter”. The letter was published in Shcherbatov and Stroganov’s *Book of the Arabian Horse* [Книга объ арабской лошади], pp. 158–64.

13 Parkinson, “Skowronek”, 119.



Arab stud, as the stallions then imported stand entered as Turk, Turkoman, Anatolian, Persian, Arab, and even in 1828 English, while the mares are equally mixed. It is clear that they have run too much after size; and at Uzin the type nearly lost. [...] The mares are far inferior in looks to the Sanguscko mares, having coarse heads, long backs, and long legs. They carry their tails, however, generally well. One cannot avoid the conviction about them that they are of mixed origin. I only saw one mare [...] one would have supposed to be an Arab. They are breeding now largely from an English thoroughbred, which gives more saleable stock.<sup>14</sup>

### **Establishing Arabians as a Breed in the West: Importing Mares and Stallions for Breeding in England**

The second approach to “preserving” Arabians *en route* to creating what would become the modern Arabian breed, involved having considerable knowledge of Arab culture and breeding methodology: knowing exactly where the best horses were bred, undergoing difficult travels to reach them, and subsequently importing mares and stallions with little reliance on town agents. The intent was to produce Arabians with no admixture of local European stock and to do so on the basis of personal research. The approach was initiated in 1877 by Wilfrid and Lady Anne Blunt when they founded the Crabbet Arabian Stud in England. The Blunts learned to write and speak Arabic, and after communicating with Arab breeders soon understood certain principles that were commonly held by desert Bedouins throughout Arab countries. Namely, that young foals should be deprived of water for their first few days of life to test foal stamina in the environment; that seasons dictated when to breed and which animals should be bred more than any outward appreciation of quality in an individual. Bedouins believed in telegony—the idea that if a mare carried a foal by an undesirable stallion (usually simply meaning one owned by a foreign tribe), all her future foals sired by different stallions would be tainted. Because only mares that had never been covered by the wrong horse were considered to be of the

14 W.S. Blunt, *My Diaries*, 223–24 (20 September 1895).

highest quality, the family of such mares would easily become associated with quality; by inference, if a mare was clean she was also pure. Conversely, foals born from the wrong crossing, as with their dams, became valueless for breeding purposes and therefore were viewed as being of low quality.<sup>15</sup> (Clearly at least some tenets of environmental breeding, which had dominated European approaches up until the late eighteenth century, also played a role in Arab strategies.) The Bedouin breeders also kept track of their mares by categorizing them within “strains”, thereby defining the family line to which any individual horse belonged via the strain relation of mares, not stallions.

After reviewing reports made by Western travellers, the Blunts decided that the major Bedouin breeding area was bordered by Nejd in the south and the Syrian Desert in the north.<sup>16</sup> Nejd itself, they felt, was the most significant centre of quality horse breeding. Taken in their entirety, the 1879 diaries of Lady Anne suggest that while the Blunts recognized that Bedouins produced good stock in parts of Syria, Iran and Iraq, the couple believed that the greatest historical horse-breeding tribes of Nejd were in present-day Saudi Arabia. It was here, then, that they concentrated the search for mares and stallions, although they did travel through Syria and other countries in search of potential stock. The Blunts also established an operation in Egypt, Sheykh Obeyd, to breed stock and to house horses that later would be sent to their Crabbet stud in England.<sup>17</sup>

Authentic documentation from breeders’ private records remained as important to the Blunts as good quality. They went to great lengths to ensure that documentation was as correct as possible and quickly learned to avoid horse-trading agents. From the beginning, moreover, the Blunts were interested in maintaining the authenticity of the original Arabian horse rather than breeding for improvement. The couple bred to perpetuate horses defined as “pure”, or *asil*, meaning they traced authentically on all sides to Bedouin breeding. If aims of improvement did not guide Crabbet breeding

15 Edwards, “To Progress... or Regress”, 13–14.

16 Archer et al., *Crabbet Arabian Stud*, 16; Blunt-Lytton, *Authentic Arabian Horse*, 160.

17 See Upton, *Desert Heritage*, 20, 36, 68, 80, 88.

plans, however, the Blunts diligently watched for any degeneration in quality. Culling was important to ensure the continuation of authentic quality, as Wilfrid noted in 1904: “To maintain the stud its highest perfection, all individuals should be weeded out of it every year which fail to come up to a certain standard of physical form.”<sup>18</sup>

Knowledgeable as they were about the traditional culture surrounding the Arabian, the Blunts chose not to strain breed their Arabians. Instead, they devised a way to keep track of the lines from which they were breeding based on tail female descent. Thus, for example, any horse, mare or stallion, with a name starting with R descended on its dam’s side from the desert-bred mare Rodania,<sup>19</sup> while any horse that descended from the desert-bred mare Dajania on the dam’s side had a name that started with N, for Nefisa, Dajania’s daughter. Despite this method of record-keeping, Western attitudes to the relative importance of mares to stallions continued to underpin their breeding program. The production of good stallions was the object of the stud, and mares were evaluated according to their ability to produce them. “It is better [that good mare lines] should be lost when after three generations they have failed to produce a sire of the first class”, Wilfrid opined, since only certain mare lines produce “colts worthy of being used as sires.”<sup>20</sup>

Lady Anne planned to write a book about the background and history of Arabian breeding based on her extensive first-hand knowledge. She died in 1917 before completing the project, however, leaving an incomplete manuscript, which was published in 1944 by her daughter, Lady Wentworth, in her book *The Authentic Arabian*. Lady Anne was particularly interested in how the myths and stories surrounding the antiquity of the breed developed. She outlined the way the culture concerning the beginnings of the Arabian had evolved over the years, particularly in Nejd. The original outlook about origin derived from word-of-mouth attitudes that developed in what she called the “inner circle”, the area in central Saudi Arabia known

<sup>18</sup> W.S. Blunt, quoted in Archer et al., *Crabbet Arabian Stud*, 225.

<sup>19</sup> Edwards, “Remember the Mare”, 27.

<sup>20</sup> W.S. Blunt, quoted in Archer et al., *Crabbet Arabian Stud*, 225–6.

as the plateau of Nejd. According to Nejd tradition, wild horses had been caught and tamed “in the primitive days of old”. The wild ones subsequently died out, but the tamed horses received no special treatment to ensure that animals “kept [their] pure wild type unchanged”. Lady Anne believed that Islamic religion introduced new ideas about where the Arabian came from — ideas based, as far as she was concerned, on fable. These ideas were particularly strong in the towns or oases, places traditionally looked down on by the desert Bedouins who thought their compatriots had been corrupted. “Thus,” Lady Anne suggested, “a new body of tradition was got together of a mixed if not altogether spurious kind,” but one which more accurately should be called “Mohammedan” rather than Arabic. The Moslem version, she argued, “has been repeated by every subsequent writer on Arabian matters until it has become almost impossible to distinguish what is of value in it and what worthless.”<sup>21</sup> As far as Lady Anne was concerned, the Moslem version not only coloured, but also formed the basis of, Western travellers’ views (or what she described as a third vision of the Arabian’s past) because these people rarely ventured into remote parts of the desert.<sup>22</sup> Lady Anne believed, then, there were three separate cultures regarding the Arabian; the original Nejd one (the most authentic), the broader town interpretation highly coloured by Moslem culture and common in Arab countries, and the Western view which was largely based on and similar to the generalized Arabic town attitude.

The Blunts were aware of and interested in the princely studs existing in Poland, and over the years between the 1880s and roughly 1910 often visited them. The couple appreciated the work of the Polish princes and the relative antiquity of the establishments (compared to their own) devoted to breeding Arabians. Lady Anne admired the animals that conformed to authentic type at Antoniny, for example, but concerns about their lack of purity held the Blunts back from purchasing any stock. For Lady Anne, quality and even authenticity to type could not overcome their lack of purity. After visiting the stud in 1884, she wrote:

21 A. Blunt, quoted in Blunt-Lytton, *Authentic Arabian Horse*, 86, 87, 89–92.

22 A. Blunt, quoted in Blunt-Lytton, *Authentic Arabian Horse*, 134, 135, 140–3, 148.

I should very much like to have something from this stud if we could find a pure one for sale. [...] I wished I could have made a picture of the herd of mares grazing on the edge of the oak forest. It was a lovely sight—for looking at them in that way one could not see the flaws of descent [...] In looking over the Stud Book, I found that hardly any one of the mares but has a cross in her pedigree—it would therefore be absurd to us to buy anything now; perhaps later on if one of the finest were for sale one might buy her as a specimen, but a colt from any of these would not be valid for breeding.<sup>23</sup>

### **Westernizing the Desert Arabian: The Establishment of Pedigree Registry**

The establishment of a stud in England quickly triggered the desire to standardize the Arabian along the English system of purebred breeding—a move that, in the end, would “westernize” the Arabian as an established breed. Evaluation and monetary worth, first in Britain and subsequently in international circles, rested on an animal being defined as “purebred” (having a pedigree generated by a public registry rather than an owner-breeder pedigree). For their model, the Blunts turned to the only public registry for horses at the time, the General Stud Book (GSB), which was run and operated by the Weatherby family since the late eighteenth century. The GSB generated pedigrees for the English Thoroughbred and held the power both to qualify animals for entry in the racing industry and to include or exclude new entries. The GSB provided the model for the registry of papered racehorses in other countries as well and had become the standard used by Jockey Clubs in France, the United States, and Australia.

The Weatherby family sympathized with the Blunts’ cause because of the historically close relationship of the Arabian to the Thoroughbred and James Weatherby agreed to open a special section of the GSB for Arabians in 1877, thereby identifying the Arabian as a breed.<sup>24</sup> Pedigrees involving standard genealogy would carry no strain

23A. Blunt, “Personal Journals”.

24 Archer et al., *Crabbet Arabian Stud*, 170.

information other than a reference to foundation animals as “desert bred”. Any registered horse could, if bred to a registered horse, have future progeny entered in the book. Root documentation gave evidence of purity in foundation animals, making correct information important for acceptance by the registry. However, the correctness of what had been used to identify “purity” became both unimportant and superfluous once entry into the stud book had been achieved. Authenticity to purity was thus guaranteed by the prestige associated with GSB pedigrees. As had been the case with the Thoroughbred, Weatherby planned to generate a pool of animals from which all future stock would be bred so that at some point the book would be closed to outside entries.

The GSB model almost immediately created difficulties for breeders dispersed across diverse geographies and traditions. Arabians in continental Europe held only pedigrees generated by the breeder and no central public way of collecting pedigrees existed. Many of the significant horses bred as Arabians in Europe originated in Poland, and these animals carried pedigrees emanating from the stud books of various princely breeders which clearly indicated the bred-up status of the animals. The situation, it seemed to some, should be addressed: in 1900, several Russian breeders began to consider how to address the difference between the importing systems of the Polish princes and that of the Blunts. Documenting “purity” via public records (not just through breeder records), they argued, could distinguish animals that might look like Arabians but were not pure, from those that were in fact pure from a desert background. Increasingly aware of the Crabbet stud but relying heavily on Polish Arabians (which tended to be produced in what was Russian Poland), the Russians similarly began to believe that a public registry system ought to be developed in Russia.

Arabian horse breeding was not new to Russia in 1900. The Russian Imperial family and aristocracy had been using both Arabians and Turkomans for horse breeding for centuries. In 1778, Count Alexei Orlov founded a stud based on gifts from the sultan of Turkey; from these stallions, he would develop the Orlov Trotter by crossing them

on local mares.<sup>25</sup> Stud records for all Russian operations were privately kept at this time, as was the case in Poland. More studs developed over the nineteenth century. Prompted by interest in the Near and Middle East and its culture, Prince Alexander Grigorievich Shcherbatov and his brother-in-law Count Sergei Alexandrovich Stroganov established an Arabian stud and in 1889 travelled to Syria in search of pure mares and stallions. In 1900, they published *The Book of the Arabian Horse* (Книга объ арабской лошади, translated into English as *The Arabian Horse: A Survey* in 1989) in which they discussed purity and Bedouin strains. Shcherbatov used his imports for crossbreeding or upgrading local animals, but from the beginning Stroganov wanted to preserve the Arabian in its pure state and by 1899 there were sixty-six horses of one hundred per cent Arabian background in his operation. The following year, he bought an imported Arabian mare from Wilfrid Blunt at a horse show in France for 10,000 francs.<sup>26</sup>

Shcherbatov and Stroganov devised a strategy for organizing a Russian public stud book based on two separate sections, one for pure Arabians and one for bred-up Arabians. They then presented their proposal to the Imperial government. Before authorizing it, the Main Managing Department of State Horse Breeding of Russia decided to investigate the matter and sent a questionnaire to Prince Roman Sanguszko Jr., then the primary breeder in Poland. Sanguszko responded that he thought it undesirable to separate “non-pure” animals from a list comprised of horses that were one hundred per cent Arabian in a stud book. While his animals did not descend on all lines from desert-bred imports, he noted that they were as good or better in quality than those that did. Improvement as much as authenticity had always been important to Polish breeders, and Sanguszko indicated his belief that purity was not an issue of authenticity or improvement:

The [newly proposed Russian] Stud book, in my opinion, should comprise only one section of Arabian horses, without differentiating between pureblood [one hundred per cent Arabian]

<sup>25</sup> Greely, *Arabian Exodus*, 170.

<sup>26</sup> W.S. Blunt, *My Diaries*, 458 (7 September 1900).

and purebred [with less than one hundred but more than fifty per cent]. Horses that originated exclusively from pure Arabian ancestors, i.e. not having even one drop of any other blood, besides the Arabian, and horses of the famous Arabian horse breeding farms in Russia [most Polish studs were in Polish Russia] which have at least  $\frac{2}{3}$  or 66% of pure Arabian blood, should be included in this book, and their pedigree must be proven.<sup>27</sup>

In its final deliberations, the Imperial government also addressed the Blunt method, characterizing it as follows:

In general, it should be admitted that before Mr. W. Blunt, who founded his farm at Crabbet Park (England) in 1878, pureblood Arabian horse breeding in Europe did not exist. This is because the Arab Bedouins' horse breeding was not studied enough at the time, and under the name of Arabian horses the European farms were accepting all kinds of horses purchased in the East, as soon as they had a distinctive type.<sup>28</sup>

Commenting on the Arabian situation in Europe, the Russian government set out how the purity/authenticity ethos appeared to be opposed to the improvement ethos under Western standards, using the Crabbet stud as an example. The Blunts' intention, the report noted, was to "exclude all horses that don't fit into Arabian type, whatever the other individual qualities are, since the goal of the Stud is not to improve the composition, according to European concepts, but to preserve the Arabian horse in a state it existed in since ancient times in its homeland."<sup>29</sup>

Despite Sanguszko's reservations, the Russian stud book was established in 1903 with separate pure and bred-up sections. With the Russian revolution, however, the stud book collapsed as did the breeding operations of the two Russians who had proposed it. Shcherbatov died in 1915, and Stroganov (who died in 1923) fled to Paris. None of the horses belonging to either of these breeders

27 Sanguszko, Jr., "Letter".

28 "Stud Book of Arabian Horses". For the original Russian, see <https://vivaldi.nlr.ru/bv000070233/view/?#page=22>.

29 "Stud Book of Arabian Horses".



survived and when the Russian government re-established a horse breeding centre, Tersk, at Stroganov's estate in 1921 it was with entirely new breeding stock. Initially, Tersk focused on local crossbred types but shifted in 1926 to being a purebred Arabian breeding operation. None of Stroganov's lines were part of the new stud. Instead, horses acquired by Tersk often came from Polish animals of Sanguszko background or English animals based on the same lines. A newly established Russian registry book that pedigreed these animals had only a purebred section.

Before the collapse of the 1903 Russian stud book, the prototype of a public registry which would endure across Europe (Russia included) and ultimately globally, was founded in 1908 in the United States. The new American stud book separated the Arabian horse from the parallel Thoroughbred registry associated with the GSB by establishing a national registry devoted specifically to the Arabian. This stud book entrenched the pattern of maintaining only a purebred section: there was no section for bred-up animals and no pathway for admission to purebred status based on breeding up to an accepted percentage. The American registry evolved from events that began in 1906, the year in which Homer Davenport brought back a group of Arabians from Syria along with a Bedouin groom. Davenport did not have what was deemed to be accurate documentation of their "desert" breeding and had failed to take the horses through England to acquire pedigrees from the GSB. These omissions meant that in the United States no registry would accept them because the Jockey Club did not register foreign animals without GSB papers. The situation was made worse by new American legislation. In 1906, the Bureau of Animal Industry, the arbiter of what qualified as a purebred animal because of the United States Department of Agriculture's role in tariff regulations set out by the Treasury Department, demanded registration in American books was necessary to obtain purebred status. To provide his horses with pedigrees, Davenport decided to establish a new registry for Arabian horses in 1908.<sup>30</sup>

30 "Breeders of the Northeast", 143–4; Craver, "Davenport Arabian Horses", 1–5.

The resulting organization, the Arabian Horse Club of America, Inc. (renamed several times, before finally settling on the Arabian Horse Registry of America, Inc., or AHRA, in 1969) set up rules to define the eligibility status for entry into the registry. Centrally, it established both that no breeding-up would be recognized in horses accorded purebred status, and that all horses entered had to have documentation establishing descent entirely from horses bred in the desert. Davenport's Arabians were grandfathered in, but future imports would be accepted as purebred only if their purity could be authenticated with proper documentation. Entry requirements to the AHRA fell into two separate sections, both guided by the mission statement to preserve desert purity. The first was the "non-discretionary" group, which required no documentation and automatically accepted applicants as pure. In 1908 this group included Arabian horses from the Jockey Club stud books of Britain, France, Australia, and the United States. In the future, horses emanating from other sources would be admitted on a "discretionary" basis and would require supporting documentation to establish their purity. AHRA directors were given the power to accept or reject such documentation, effectively making them gatekeepers of purebred status. The problem of bred-up Arabians (those never defined as entirely descended from the desert) becoming part of the American system and later the world system was not solved by this new strategy for assessing "purity" and therefore authenticity. Furthermore, the new way of assessing purity brought with it the capacity for individuals to serve their own interests because of their power to regulate, especially when it came to importing.

### **The Heyday of the Western Trade in Arabians under the GSB and AHRA, 1920–1960.**

The centre of the Arabian horse world in the West between 1920 and 1960 was the Crabbet stud in England, whose trade with breeders in the United States shaped ideologies of purebred breeding to a considerable extent. In the early part of the twentieth century, the Crabbet operation passed into the hands of Wilfrid and Anne Blunt's daughter, Judith Blunt Lytton (later Lady Wentworth). Following her

parents' practice, Wentworth did not breed by strain; however, she did work to improve the original type. When some accused her of diverging from authentic style, she responded that "if being 'off-type' means having higher withers, longer rein and curve of neck, stronger and broader quarters and better hocks, together with freer hock action, then I am proud to say that I have deliberately bred for these points and shall continue to do so."<sup>31</sup> Wentworth's breeding philosophy of improving from foundation stock dovetailed both with the dominant approaches to Arabian horse breeding in Europe and North America at the time, and with views about the role authenticity should play in breeding decisions. Until mid-century it was generally accepted that animals could be both true to authentic style and improved, an outlook not unlike that articulated by Farley in *The Black Stallion Returns* (1945). Registry systems played a significant, but perhaps more importantly, hidden role in the establishment of this position, which in the end equated authenticity with purity. (Farley paid little attention to the impact of registries, perhaps because their influence was not publicly apparent at the time he wrote his books.) The fact that Wentworth worked within the accepted registry systems — the GSB and the AHRA — meant that neither the purity nor authenticity of her stock would be questioned.

Wentworth utilized the desert Blunt lines at Crabbet and to some degree relied on the research carried out by her mother, Lady Anne Blunt, but her most important innovation would be the introduction and widespread use of the Polish stallion Skowronek, who had been imported to England in 1913 by an American.<sup>32</sup> Skowronek was bred by Count Potocki at the Antoniny Stud in Poland and foaled in 1908. To pedigree the horse in the General Stud Book, Wentworth obtained papers verifying the horse's background from the breeder's son, Józef Potocki, Jr. This horse would be the last foundation animal to be pedigreed by the GSB as the book was subsequently closed to new unregistered stock. Potocki reported from his family records that Skowronek's sire, Ibrahim, had been brought to Poland in 1907 by Count

31 Reese, *The Kellogg Arabians*, 43.

32 *The Authentic Arabian Horse* provides a detailed description of Wentworth's views on breeding, strains, and authenticity in the true Arabian.

Józef Potocki Sr., having been purchased in Odessa through an agent who had acquired the horse in the “Orient”. The animal was documented as sired by Heifer, out of Lafitte.<sup>33</sup> Skowronek’s dam, Jaskolka, had been bred in Poland from Polish stock. While virtually nothing more could be discovered about Skowronek’s sire’s background, his dam was another matter. In this, Potocki had been less than complete in providing information about Jaskolka to the GSB in 1919.

To begin with, it is clear from the 1903 Russian stud book that the mare came from a bred-up background. Part One of the book covered all horses that had descended entirely from animals imported from the best breeding tribes in Arab countries, and Part Two set out all horses of largely Arabian blood whose pedigrees contained some non-Arabian ancestors. No horse owned by the Potocki family gained entry to Part One and Jaskolka was listed in Part Two.<sup>34</sup> Real evidence also exists to show that she did not qualify for Part One: a history of the Sanguszko family stud written in 1876 and published in the United States in the 1960s notes that all Potocki imports of Arabians before 1818–19 had been stallions. Purebred mares did not come into the Arabian breeding herd until later and thus horses that traced to the pre-1819 Sanguszko stud records (like Jaskolka) could not be described as purebred.<sup>35</sup> Despite this issue, the registration of Skowronek in the GSB ensured that any lack of purity in his background would not impact the marketing of his progeny internationally. Wentworth’s “authentic” Arabians bred after 1920 resulted predominantly from the cross of Skowronek on the old Blunt imported lines, and by 1960 Skowronek had created by far the greatest sire line of Arabians in the United States.<sup>36</sup>

Changes in Poland after 1920 raised another issue that would be ongoing: the relationship of a foreign government-regulated public stud other than the GSB with the AHRA. The situation that evolved in Poland challenged the non-discretionary views of the AHRA and

33 Edwards, “Great Strain Robbery, pt. 2”, 22.

34 See evidence in the “Stud Book of Arabian Horses”.

35 WAHO, “Is Purity the Issue?” See also “Prince Sanguszko’s Stud Farm”.

36 Edwards, “Skowronek... Three to One”, 26–28.

in doing so exposed the difficulty of maintaining “purity” on the evidence of foreign registries. Built on the remnants of the princely studs shattered by the First World War, a new public registry under the Polish government’s minister of agriculture was established in 1926 on the model of and complying with the procedures of the pure-bred system.<sup>37</sup> Breeding centres subsequently emerged with surviving horses from the old private studs serving as foundation stock for these new operations.<sup>38</sup> It would be argued that the Poles deliberately concentrated on the continued use of old Polish lines which had emanated from quality breeders.<sup>39</sup> Since the Poles had always bred for what they deemed improvement as much as for authenticity to type, no re-start based on one hundred per cent purity was planned. Impressed by the athletic ability of Polish-bred horses (as well as noting that Skowronek had been bred in Poland), American directors of the AHRA became interested in importing Polish horses. To avoid the difficulties of these horses being on the discretionary list, in 1937 they placed the Polish book in the non-discretionary section, thereby allowing the registration of Polish horses in the us without questions about their background. Admittance through the non-discretionary section meant that historically bred-up animals would be defined as one hundred per cent pure, thus serving the personal interest of the directors responsible for the decision.

### **Purity/Authenticity Concerns under Registry Definitions, 1950–1970.**

Despite the ubiquity of Skowronek genetics in American Arabians and a rising interest in imported Polish horses, many breeders in the us after 1960 began to question whether Western registry systems had actually preserved the purity of the desert horse. Underpinning

37 Wilfrid Blunt described the situation for the Sanguzsko family in his diary: “Slavuta and its stud have acquired a tragic notoriety [...], having been the scene of one of those hideous outrages which distinguished the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Prince Sanguscko, the owner of the stud, was in his country house at Slavuta, when a number of disbanded soldiers recently returned from the Russian army broke into his house and took him out of it and brutally ill-treated him, killing him at last with their bayonets and then pillaging the château and destroying the whole of his Arabian stud.” *My Diaries*, 221 (14 September 1895).

38 Lindsay, “Arabian Breeding”, 26.

39 Marston, “Blue Influence”, 131.

this shift were Carl Raswan's ideas concerning the loss of Bedouin breeding techniques articulated in his books and horse index. Raswan, whose original name was Carl Reinhardt Schmidt, travelled extensively in Syria during the years around the First World War. Born in Germany in 1893, he became an American citizen in 1927 and changed his name to that of his favourite Arabian stallion (ironically not a product of pure Bedouin stock but rather a son of Skowronek, bred by Lady Wentworth). Passionate about Arabian horses, Raswan believed that Arabian horse breeding in the West had moved away from Arabic roots and culture, thereby resulting in a breed that was not authentic. Purity to what he believed were Arab ways became Raswan's obsession. Acting as an agent, he returned to Syria a number of times in the 1920s and early thirties and became acquainted with both town and Bedouin Arabs. Long after his travels, he wrote about breeding techniques of the Arab people while living in the United States (and later Mexico). Raswan died in 1966 but his ideas about breeding, more than any animal he either bred or imported, endured.

In attempting to reintroduce authenticity to Western breeding, Raswan focused on the strain system. For him, strains and culture were at the heart of Bedouin breeding and therefore required for authenticity. Breeding by strain had never taken hold in the West and the dominance of breeding that openly avoided purity—such as that found in Skowronek's background, for example—represented the ultimate in degradation of the Arabian horse to Raswan. Indeed, “Western” concerns with quality, improvement, and even beauty played no part in Raswan's theories. Despite this, and intriguingly, Raswan's correspondence with W.K. Kellogg in 1926 expressed overpowering appreciation for Skowronek:

Skowronek is [a] pure white Arab stallion. He has never had a rival, won all championship and is undefeatable and not in all history is known to have another Arab existed of his type outside Arabia. He is the most beautiful which I ever saw and has a spiritual to his physical which is beyond description [...]. He seems to be of an unearthly creation.<sup>40</sup>

40 Raswan to W.K. Kellogg, 4 February, 1926, quoted in Parkinson, *Romance*, 52.

The horse also seemed to evoke nostalgia for Raswan's days of freedom in the desert away from the problems of the West, and this way of life as much as the Arabian animal itself seemed to inform his passionate belief in the need for breeding reform.

According to Raswan, the Arabian horse had been created within three overarching strains (all with numerous sub-strains) associated with three distinct physical types: the Saklawi (refined, elegant, and feminine), the Kuhaylan (powerful, bold, and masculine), and the Muniqi (with a racier build and usually with the forequarters more developed than the hindquarters).<sup>41</sup> Raswan believed both that the Arabs had practised strain breeding and also inbreeding and that Western breeders should do their best to return the modern Arabian to the authentic trueness of type found in the three strains. For Raswan, this could be accomplished by undertaking a number of steps. First, by breeding away from the Muniqi strain, which he claimed was impure because of one Bedouin cross with a Turkoman stallion in the seventeenth century (a pure or *asil* Arabian had no Muniqi blood). Raswan stated that Europeans had in the past favoured Muniqis because of their racing ability, and that this preference had stimulated their production for the European market. Among Bedouins, however, Muniqi strains were avoided.<sup>42</sup> Second, by placing primary emphasis on female lines, as had been the case in Arab countries. Raswan thus advised dropping the Western obsession with stallions. Third, by expecting intensification of the basic family strain characteristics when horses are bred to produce concentration within a strain, especially where both parents follow the same strain pattern in tail female. And finally, by inbreeding whenever possible.<sup>43</sup> One follower of the Raswan system stated that "the challenge of [...] breeding has not been in the production of good horses because this has resulted from the automatic biological processes."<sup>44</sup>

41 Forbis, *The Classic Arabian Horse*, 254, 275. These names can all be spelled in a variety of ways: e.g. Seglawi, Saqlawi; Keheilan, Kehilan; Mannakey, Maneghi.

42 "Raswan", *Arabiana*, 148; Ott, "Arabian Types and Strains", 142, 145, 152; Craver, "Davenport Arabians at Craver Farms", 10–11; Edwards, "Letter", 15.

43 Craver, "Davenport Arabians at Craver Farms", 10.

44 Craver, "Davenport Arabians at Craver Farms", 11.

Throughout the 1960s, Americans Kathleen Ott and her daughter Jane actively took up Raswan's fight to return to "authentic" breeding practices. Kathleen Ott wrote extensively about the need to return to strain breeding and Jane Ott organized a plan for preserving true Arabians on a percentage basis. Known as the Blue Star system, Jane Ott's "Blue Star" designation applied to horses that descended on all sides to roots with no Muniqi blood. "Blue list" animals traced to these roots as well, but with one to fifty per cent breeding of Muniqi. All other Arabians were assigned to a "general list".<sup>45</sup> Studs operating under the Blue Star system began to practice inbreeding within strains to preserve true (non Muniqi) type. Breeders claimed that perpetuating type defined the highest quality and that any attempts at improvement—including for beauty—meant degradation. Jane Ott also addressed the issue of Muniqi and/or Turkoman influence. To begin with, she believed Turkoman blood was common in horses bought by agents in Syria despite claims that these animals were pure Arabians.<sup>46</sup> She explained the advent of Muniqi in Arabians as follows:

The Muniqiyat strains represent the only known case in which a Bedouin tribe permitted an alien stallion to serve an Arabian mare. The 17th century Salqa Bedouins allowed a cross of Turkoman (already a grade-Arabian stock) into their Muniqi strain. This produced an increase in size and sprint-speed, with a loss of compactness and refinement. The new Muniqi eventually spread through most if not all the old Muniqi, and, in the course of three centuries, has infiltrated seven of the other nineteen strains. [...] The Bedouins valued the Muniqiyat strains, [...] but never accepted them as "asil" [...]. Foreigners, on the other hand, usually fell head over heels for the Muniqi at first sight and preferred it to every other strain, possibly because of its resemblance to the English Thoroughbred, a breed which the Muniqiyat Arabians played a principal part in founding.<sup>47</sup>

There was a strong reaction by establishment breeders against the Raswan and Ott theories. These breeders not only relied heavily

45 Ott, "Arabian Types and Strains", 142, 145, 152; "Blue Star Arabians", 133–35.

46 Ott, "The Sub-List Basilisks", 95.

47 Ott, "Grant and Huntington Importations", 139, 141.



on Skowronek genetics, but also believed in striving for superior type — particularly better structured legs — while maintaining the head and neck characteristics so desirable in Arabians. Gladys Brown Edwards, a renowned expert on the history and breeding of Arabians who worked for the W.K. Kellogg Arabian breeding centre in California during the 1930s and early forties, became a major spokesperson for the status quo, which included recognition for the breeding quality of Skowronek. Edwards rejected theories that disfavoured improvement breeding, abandoned ideals of beauty, and excluded Skowronek lines. She labelled the new style of authenticity-driven breeders the “Anties” because they were opposed to any Arabian not derived from or duplicating (as they defined it) methods of pure Bedouin breeding. An “Anti” bomb had been “dropped on Poland”, Edwards suggested, “resulting in a blackout of all Polish bloodlines as far as the Anties’ conception of ‘purity’ was concerned. The target, of course, was Skowronek.”<sup>48</sup> She also noted the implication that in the American registry pedigreed half-breeds were regarded as pure. In her response to “Anti-ism” Edwards agreed with the Polish stud book’s founder Edward Skorkowski that “One would be crazy to deny the purity of Skowronek’s blood, the horse of the CENTURY.”<sup>49</sup>

Through the early 1960s, Edwards led the crusade against what she saw as the Raswan anti-improvement movement. In “To Progress...Or Regress That Is the Question”, Edwards asked readers of *The Arab Horse Journal* to consider whether “your horse descended from certain celebrated individuals or has it ascended from them?” Edwards further argued that “to scrap such benefit and regress into yesteryear does not seem in accord with American initiative and progress.”<sup>50</sup> Improvement breeding and the systems designed to bring about improvement had, as far as she was concerned, clearly replaced the antiquated thinking and methods that dominated in Europe until the late eighteenth century. The refinement found in Skowronek’s offspring was central to her objection to Raswan’s theory concerning the Muniqi strain:

48 Edwards, “Great Strain Robbery, pt. 1”, 23.

49 Edwards, “Great Strain Robbery, pt. 1”, 29.

50 Edwards, “To Progress... Or Regress”, 12–16.

The [Muniqi] is no more “angular” than is any other strain. [...] At any rate, the [Muniqi] was no more “impure” than any other, and Rawsan’s vague story about one obscure tribe crossing with “Turcoman stallions” (he first said one, then kept adding to them—himself—not the tribe—though on paper of course [])—and pow! —automatically all [Muniqi] horses in Arabia became contaminated!<sup>51</sup>

## **The Continued Entrenchment of the Western Registry System.**

Breeding under the Western pedigree system with its unclear attitude to “purity” remained in place despite the undercurrents of a desire to re-instate an emphasis on the horse as a product of Arabic culture. The Arabian horse industry in the West exploded after 1970 following the American acceptance of many new European national registries.<sup>52</sup> The influence of Raswan and strain theory, however, continued to influence the breed via the rise of what might be called artificial Western “strains” over the late 1970s and early 1980s, including so-called straight Russian Arabians (basically horses of Egyptian, Polish and Crabbet breeding). Polish horses continued to command attention and their breeding mushroomed after the stallion Bask was imported to America in 1963. American demand for Polish horses expanded to include animals bred in Holland, Britain, and Germany and the hot market was stoked by the structure of the American tax system, which offered tax advantages to investors in the horse industry. The Tax Reform Act of 1986 changed the situation by introducing the idea of passive and active investment. Subsequently, tax advantages would be significantly reduced for those who owned horses as a passive investor or through passive activity (an investment partnership).<sup>53</sup> As tax shelters for people investing in Arabians in the United States disappeared, the Arabian

<sup>51</sup> Edwards, “Letter”, 15.

<sup>52</sup> For more detail on the Western Arabian horse industry, see Derry, *Bred for Perfection; Horses in Society; and Made to Order*.

<sup>53</sup> Email to the author from PricewaterhouseCoopers, about American taxes, 18 January, 2000. For a detailed review of how the tax act affected horse owners, see Geske, “Tax Tips”, 132, 129.

horse industry was dramatically reshaped. With this reduction in American demand, a collapse of the hot global market for Arabian horses followed.

When the dust from this downturn settled in the 1990s, the Arabian horse industry revived but its character was changed significantly. It now reflected a more fully globalized market involving many countries in the Middle East as well as traditional centres like Europe and North America. In part, this resulted from the unifying power of the World Arabian Horse Organization (WAHO), founded in 1967. WAHO would come to act as an umbrella organization for world trade, but it did so under Western registry conditions. As Christoph Lange explains:

With WAHO came a new definition of the Arabian horse, which did for the Arabian breed in the twentieth century what the British General Stud Book did for the Thoroughbred in the eighteenth century: it consolidated the Arabian's status as a global breed, established a blueprint for closed stud books, and placed control of its registry in the hands of a small but powerful group of Euro-American private breeders. Perhaps most influentially, WAHO introduced a new breeding definition embedded in a transnational bureaucratic infrastructure. The political consequences of this shift produced a regulative regime of inclusion and exclusion focusing on pedigree and questions of breed purity.<sup>54</sup>

From the beginning, WAHO defined purity through the mechanics of the Western purebred system by imposing regulations for public recording. Most crucially, registries of countries joining WAHO were required to conform to WAHO's rules for pedigree standards. As early as 1972, however, it became apparent that streamlining the world's registries would not be a straightforward process. This was immediately evident in Spain, where the Spanish Civil War had disrupted famous studs — most importantly that of the Duke of Veragua — resulting not in the loss of the horses, but rather in the loss of pedigrees. Everyone knew the surviving horses were purebred Arabians (many were descendants of Crabbet horses with Skowronek bloodlines),

<sup>54</sup>Lange, "Making and Remaking", 239.

but no one could be sure of the correct sires and dams.<sup>55</sup> The problem of validating Spanish pedigrees was solved when WAHO members agreed to recognize the Spanish horses descending from the Duke of Veragua's stud simply as "Veragua".

The Veragua issue demonstrated that if concerns over purity were not resolved the international market would not function smoothly. It was therefore important to reach a transnational agreement about how to define a pure Arabian. WAHO set up a committee that spent considerable time working on the problem of defining purity. At the 1974 WAHO meeting in Malmö, Sweden, members ratified the proposed definition put forward by the committee, which stated that "a purebred Arabian horse is one which appeared in any purebred Arabian Stud Book or Registry listed by WAHO as acceptable."<sup>56</sup> Despite the Malmö agreement, however, disputes about the purity of contentious horses, and therefore the pedigrees of animals emanating from them, continued to fracture the international market. In the 1990s, for example, a dispute over the stallion Kurdo III brought the purity (and hence the marketability) of many South American horses into question. WAHO itself became divided over the issue, a situation that threatened the stability of various national registries. Despite these setbacks, the power of WAHO continued to grow and it effectively became the titular head and governing body of the global Arabian horse world. Today, the only recognized "pure Arabians" in the world are those accepted by WAHO since horses with pedigrees from national stud books rejected by WAHO are excluded from the global Arabian community. The national registries consolidated under WAHO thus form a closed circle that has been defined by anthropologists as "kula": an idea used to describe not only the exclusive closed nature of a breeding circle, but also the complex dynamics of ritualization and commodification common to the group.<sup>57</sup> In effect, WAHO exists as a marketing cartel with cultural overtones. Membership comprises an elite and closed body of breeders who function in a sealed-off world that isolates non-members from the

55 "Spanish Arabian Stud Book", 237, 240, 241.

56 "1974 WAHO Conference", 18.

57 Lange, "Global Arabian Horse Kula". See also Ziegler, "Kula Ring", 39–60.

economics, culture, and breeding operations within its specialized society. Within the WAHO, the Western system of defining purity has prevailed.<sup>58</sup> However, the desire for closer allegiance to Bedouin traditions involving strain breeding and assessment of purity on that basis has not necessarily been incompatible with the overarching Western system, and therefore has not vanished among Arabian breeders in various parts of the world.

It is particularly noteworthy that Raswan's passionate and even romantic vision has continued to inspire breeders even if few now implement his theories. In a conversation on an internet forum in 2010, for example, Lebanese breeder Edouard Al-Dahdah noted that he admires Raswan's passionate vision, despite his belief that "Raswan's monumental body of work (his Index) is cryptic, garbled, ambiguous, incoherent, confusing and downright contradictory. It generally complicates rather than clarifies."<sup>59</sup> Replies to this comment suggested general agreement but most posters also expressed deep admiration for the man and his ideals. One noted that "Raswan raised awareness for preservation of the Authentic Arabian Horse, at a time when people just bred one Arabian to another [...]. Whether you agree or disagree with Rawsan's theories, whether you think he was a charlatan or a hero is not as important as his overall general message calling for the preservation of the Asil." It could thus be argued that the main significance of Rawsan's influence rests on his reintroduction of the importance of Arab thinking and culture to debate about the authenticity of the Arabian. Five different groups devoted to preserving both purity and Bedouin theory in the breeding of Arabians still exist today: the Blue Catalog, the Pyramid Society, Al Khamsa, and the Asil Club. A group of international breeders who support the dream of preserving Bedouin standards within the Western registry system issued a Manifesto in 2022 outlining what made an Arabian pure to its past.<sup>60</sup>

58 For more on the WAHO and its effects on Middle Eastern countries, see Lange, "Decolonizing the Arabian Horse".

59 On Carl Raswan as a reliable source of scholarly information on Arabian horses see Edouard Al-Dahdah's blog *Daughters of the Wind*: <https://daughterofthewind.org/>.

60 See: <https://arabianhorsemanifesto.org/>.

## Modern Genetics and the Purity/Authenticity Myth.

By now it should be apparent that the “Turkoman”, an Oriental horse found in many Ottoman lands often in conjunction with Arabians, lurks behind much of this story—and particularly the period covering the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The exact location where the two breeds might have simultaneously existed in the Middle East remains unclear, but both types could be found in Europe as early as the sixteenth century. Whether an imported horse was an Arabian or a Turkoman has historically been difficult to determine. The founding stallions of the Thoroughbred breed, for example, were often referred to as “Turks” but at the same time were said to be Arabians. It even appears that sometimes “Turk” was a synonym for Arabian. The records of Polish princes who presided over early Arabian studs show evidence of imported “Turkomans”, and in the 1890s, Wilfrid Blunt wondered if these “Turkomans” were in reality Arabians. Raswan spoke of Turkoman crosses on particular Arabians, and Jane Ott believed many of the horses sold by agents in Syrian towns were in fact Turkomans. This breed of Oriental horse was developed in the desert north of Arabia in the steppes of Central Asia. Long bodied, slender, tough, and fast, the type was favoured both in the Ottoman Empire and Europe.<sup>61</sup> In 1813, for example, John M. Kinneir reported that in Persia it was common to cross Turkomans on Arabians.<sup>62</sup> European wars with the Ottomans often resulted in the importation of Turkoman horses for the cavalry.

The Turkoman is believed to be extinct today but with a close living relative, the Akhal-Teke. Recent genomic work confirms the validity of arguments that Turkoman genetics are central to breeds such as the Thoroughbred. As Donna Landry points out, “the resemblance, even today, between the English horse [Thoroughbred] and the Turkoman—in the form of the modern Akhal-Teke—is so striking, and so in contrast to the relative lack of resemblance between the English horse and the purebred Arabian [...] that it appears the Turkic contribution has been hidden in plain sight.”<sup>63</sup> Among the more

61 See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkoman\\_horse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkoman_horse).

62 Landry, “Disappearance of the Turk”, 41.

63 Landry, “Disappearance of the Turk”, 38.

important findings related to DNA studies of Turkoman genetics is that our understanding of the lineage of the three founding stallions of the Thoroughbred breed — the Darley Arabian (the most significant), the Godolphin Barb, and the Byerly Turk — were all Turkomans by male descent.<sup>64</sup> Turkoman stallions were thus clearly being used extensively to improve horses in Europe, making it attractive for breeders in the Middle East to cross Turkomans on Arabians to produce stock for export to Europe. Jane Ott suggests as much, and Lady Anne Blunt infers the same. How frequently the Turkoman was interbred with the Arabian is not known, but the potentiality raises interesting questions related to the antiquity of Arabian purity.

Modern genomics has also done much to illuminate the Arabian's past revealing, for example, information about genetic diversity and the modern pursuit of purity in Arabians. It seems evident that the broad diversity evident in the DNA of Polish Arabians, especially in relation to low diversity levels in other North American and European Arabians, resulted from the long history of upgrading local stock with stallions among early Polish breeders. The greatest genetic diversity in Arabians, however, can be found in Middle Eastern countries, indicating that the movement of horses to the West initiated a trend towards diversity loss. Generations of inbreeding in the animals originally imported to the West and strict emphasis on the centrality of imported genetics to ideologies of purity have therefore come at a cost for breeders outside the Middle East. If further DNA studies link the Turkoman more closely to the past of the Arabian, such information could undermine the focus on purity that has led to decreased genetic diversity in the modern Arabian breed. Given the tenacity of myths surrounding purity and strain differentiation, it will be interesting to see how new DNA studies will impact engrained cultural ideas.

<sup>64</sup> The overview of DNA and genomics in relation to the Arabian presented here is based on the following: Khanshour et al., "Microsatellite Analysis"; Almarzook et al., "Diversity of Mitochondrial DNA"; Almarzook et al., "Genetic Diversity"; Wallner et al., "Y Chromosome Uncovers"; Hudson, "Whole-Loop Mitochondrial DNA-D loop"; Sadeghi et al., "Genetic Diversity"; Cosgrove et al., "Genome Diversity"; Machmoun et al., "Genetic Diversity"; Sargious et al., "Genetic Diversity"; Sargious et al., "Genetic Diversity"; Remer et al., "Y-Chromosome Insights"; Felkel et al., "The Horse Y Chromosome"; Michaelis, "Analysis of Arabian Stallion".

## A Few Concluding Remarks

The confusion arising from trying to fuse notions of Western “purity” with reconstructed historical views of Arabic “purity” has made the history of the Arabian tumultuous, and in the end has given rise to an East–West hybrid in the regulation of the Arabian horse industry on a global stage—though nationally there continues to be a deviation towards one form or the other. The difference between global and national trends, and between WAHO-identified breeders and those whose stock is excluded from WAHO’s closed books, might in the end reduce the power of WAHO to control definitions of purity or authenticity in the name of marketability. Genomic information could also play a role in undermining the foundations of organizations like WAHO. There are currently deep feelings of bitterness about pedigree issues, believed lack of purity, and the excessive power of certain breeders within the framework of WAHO-enforced culture.<sup>65</sup> The economic basis of contemporary breeding culture rooted in Western privileging of certain forms of pedigree keeping stands to erode if its perceived value undergoes a transformation. Under these conditions, Walter Farley’s fictional rendering of attitudes to purity, authenticity, and improvement in the Middle East seems surprisingly prophetic. The actual history of what has happened to the Arabian horse over the past three hundred years, however, tells us much about human interactions with animals, the culture that results from that interaction from a global point of view, and the difficulties that arise when trying to define quality in a living thing.

<sup>65</sup> This issue has been extensively discussed on the blog “Daughters of the Wind” over the years. See especially <https://daughterofthewind.org/note-on-amer-saudi-race-stallion/>.



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