



THE EGYPTIAN ALTERNATIVE

BREEDING THE ARABIAN HORSE

A BOOK BY PHILIPPE PARASKEVAS

By Pat Canfield

A BOOK HAS RECENTLY BEEN PUBLISHED IN CAIRO WHICH PUTS A THOROUGH AND SOMEWHAT CONTROVERSIAL FOCUS ON ARABIAN HORSE BREEDING IN EGYPT. THE BOOK, 'THE EGYPTIAN ALTERNATIVE - BREEDING THE ARABIAN HORSE' BY PHILIPPE PARASKEVAS, TAKES A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF BREEDING IN EGYPT WITH PRIMARY FOCUS ON THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY THROUGH THE PRESENT DAY. HE COVERS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DESERT HORSE IN THE EARLY ISLAMIC YEARS AND THE BEDOUIN LIFE STYLE THAT PROMULGATES THE ROLE OF THE DESERT WITH CONFORMATIONAL ATTRIBUTES BUT MORE .IMPORTANTLY THE CHARACTER AND SPIRIT OF THE HORSE

Paraskevas has been a serious breeder of the Egyptian horse, primarily of EAO (Egyptian Agricultural Organisation) bloodlines for over 25 years. He has brought this experience as well as an in-depth study of history and bloodlines to a well thought-out presentation of what he views as the desperate current situation in breeding which focuses mainly on the show ring with strong emphasis on the situation among local Egyptian breeders. He quotes a number of well regarded writers on the Arabian horse primarily those of the previous six decades with occasional reference to authorities from the Nineteenth Century.

The book is of particular relevance because of the tremendous expansion of breeding in Egypt. In the early days of the EAO, which was established in 1956 taking over the RAS (Royal Agricultural Society), there were just over one dozen breeding farms. Today there are over 450 farms registered under the EAO. This has dramatically increased the number of Arabians in Egypt. Subsequently, this has led the author to question the influence of Western imposed standards on judging and setting the "Ideal Egyptian" as the accepted standard. He feels this has been done with the complete acquiescence of many of the people who are more market driven than preservation driven.

The book is presented in a carefully researched and thought through manner. A number of highly respected writers and breeders are quoted throughout the text. Some of Paraskevas's views are bound to create controversy among today's breeders as he challenges current practices but always in a respectful and carefully presented manner. However, no matter what their personal views may be, this book may incite readers to think and evaluate their own programs based on the writer's deeply held beliefs and those of the many authorities whom he quotes in the text.

The author shows how the role of Islam and the fate of the horse are inextricably linked and quotes some highly respected writers of the mid-nineteenth century. He refers to the role of the Bedouin in the propagation of the horse, and writes that survival of the man and the horse in wars and extreme environmental conditions led to selection of the qualities that would indeed develop and preserve the breed. The writer goes in depth about the role of the show ring and how the uniform standards set by Western judging along with artificial methods of showing have led to a deterioration of the original Desert horse. He sees the Egyptian horse in a time of crisis.

Paraskevas refers to many of the original sire lines from the EAO and discusses their individuality and the lack of uniformity in their overall look. He appeals for a return to

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Volume 1

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diversity as a way of preserving the heritage of the horse as opposed to everyone trying to adapt to the "Ideal Arabian" concept that evolved without challenge and has led to an ideology of its own in the general approach to breeding. An extremely controversial issue of importing the progeny of horses who were sold out of Egypt is put forward with logic and deep feeling. He addresses a growing tendency of mixing Polish and Russian bloodlines with the Egyptian lines.

There is an extensive discussion of the pros and cons of both inbreeding and out-crossing. He cites the major sire lines from the EAO and the mare lines that trace back to Inshass stock as he quotes many of the recognised authorities on breeding. Careful attention is paid to the advantages and disadvantages of close inbreeding fuelled by the desire to win in the show ring with both short and long term results of the two approaches.

Paraskevas presents a spirited defence of the EAO against many of the attacks that are currently being made against it in a chapter sub-headed 'The High-Wire Act of Defending the Safe-Haven Concept in a Market Environment'. He makes a strong case for the survival of the EAO as a "safe-haven" for the preservation of the Egyptian Arabian horse out of love for both the horse and the country by following its history through changes in fortune during the years since its founding. A case is also

made that the EAO is the last refuge of the true Desert Horse as their pedigrees trace back to their desert roots and many lines are now extinct or very rare.

In his Conclusion, the author asks:

"Who is responsible for the current state of the 'Egyptian Arabian' in Egypt? In a nutshell, the market is. In equal measure, perhaps, so is the Egyptian breeders' reaction to the market's predictable influence."

He submits the proposition that the Egyptian breeders, as temporary custodians of the breed should aim for noble goals and look for a purpose beyond commerce while not espousing the elimination of the free market. He appeals for a better understanding of the heritage of the Egyptian Arabian and breeding closer to the lines of the 'Desert Arabian' by presenting an 'Egyptian Alternative'. The author decries the possibility of the emergence of the 'Multi-ethnic Arabian that could displace the 'Egyptian Arabian' in its own home.

In Volume Two, which will be published shortly, the author delves extensively into the qualities of the various strains that have survived through the years of breeding at the EAO and how they can be used today in the local programs to further the information offered in Volume One in practical applications. 