

235 years of Polish Private Arabian Horse Breeding

# TAURÓW OF DIONIZY TRZECIAK

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It is rare that I find myself traveling only to see one specific painting. But that's exactly what happened when the National Art Gallery in Sopot exhibited, among other Polish masterpieces from the Lviv Art Gallery, a painting by Juliusz Kossak\* titled "A herd of horses" (1879). It is one of the most known portrayals of Arabian horses in the history of Polish paintings. As Polish aficionados of the Arabian horse very well know, it depicts the herd of Dionizy Trzeciak of Taurów. And not only his herd, but also the breeder himself, accompanied by one of his servants. Dionizy, a robust man with a walrus mustache, as befitted a Borderland nobleman, is standing straight, with one hand in his pocket, looking at his horses with satisfaction, but also with a caring concern. The servant, dressed accordingly to the customs of those times, lowers his head, probably as a sign of respect. Is he listening to instructions or being criticized? Or perhaps he's being praised? The horses are mares, some with foals, others still in foal, as they appear to be in excellent condition. They graze peacefully. As we have meticulously counted, there are seven foals. They have long necks, nicely set tails and pleasant heads. Even today they would be considered as handsome produce. Some of the mares are looking towards their breeder, others are nibbling on the grass. Thanks to this beautiful, tasteful composition we can feel the pride that the breeder must have felt towards his herd.



A herd of horses. Painting by Juliusz Kossak (1879) photo: archive





**Who was Dionizy Trzeciak?** We hand over the story telling reins to Krzysztof Czarnota, who travelled to the Ukraine in search of memories of the Taurów Stud. Here is his account.

## Ukrainian villages: Like a discoverer

When traveling across the Ukraine of today, retracing the footsteps of legendary Polish studs, I fell a bit like a discoverer of an old, non-existent world. Sitting down on the ruins of once grand manors and palaces, pulling out bricks and stones from what remains of formerly famous barns, plowing through thickets growing over old Polish cemeteries and lighting candles on the graves of great breeders, I have a strange feeling that I am the first living soul here. When I tell the locals that I came to bow before the old masters, because the horses in my barns come from the same lines that they bred 150 years ago, I am met with disbelief. I often hear that no family member has come here since the war and certainly no horsemen have ever been seen. What drives me to travel to these sunken Ukrainian villages is a curiosity to see the historical, almost sacred places for Polish Arabian horse breeding. Moss-covered ruins and tombstones, old Orthodox and Catholic churches, finally the vast Podole steppes – they all hold a history of the old Borderland Poland\*\*, its customs, traditions and rituals. Every time I come here I am accompanied by great emotions. It was no different this time when I arrived at Taurów, the once abode of Dionizy Trzeciak.

This inconspicuous, though quite large village, lies in the Podole region near the town of Kozłów, south of the Lviv-Ternopil route. The road leading to it is made of unbelievably broken asphalt. On dry days it is better to drive along the untreated

roadside, which is much more level. Again I find myself thinking that although today's western Ukraine has some sort of asphalt roads, everyone still drives on the dirt running beside them. Right at noon we reach a plate with the name of "Tauriv" on it. The weather is beautiful, we drive to the center of the village, right up to the Orthodox church where it will be easiest to gain some information. We ask about the manor of old, about the barns, the horses, but the people just shrug their shoulders. However the eastern hospitality never leaves a needing person without help. Grandma Aniela is the oldest here, she should remember something about the old days – says one of the inquired locals. In a wink of an eye a yellow Lada car appears, probably as old as myself, and its driver guides us towards the abode of grandma Aniela.

## A tragedy falls upon the herd

Professor Witold Pruski\*\*\* positions Taurów as the second among Małopolska studs in the second half of the 19th century. The Trzeciak clan had bred horses for generations. Dionizy's father, Leopold, left the stud with 44 mares, mostly in an older Polish horse type. The beginnings of Arabian horse breeding are considered to date back to

1852, when Dionizy Trzeciak purchased three mares (**Zulema, Kokietka and Nelisonka**) from Juliusz Dzieduszycki\*\*\*\* of Jarczowce, as well as the count's favorite steed, the stallion **Step**. The stud grew very quickly, reaching over twenty pure bred broodmares. Just as quickly the Taurów herd gained recognition among its close and further neighbors, both horse users and breeders. Many stallions from this breeding were purchased and used across the entire Małopolska region. Cavalry officers were convinced that if an uhlan wanted to buy a good mount, Taurów was the only way to go. Dionizy tested his



The grave of Dionizy Trzeciak photo: Krzysztof Czarnota

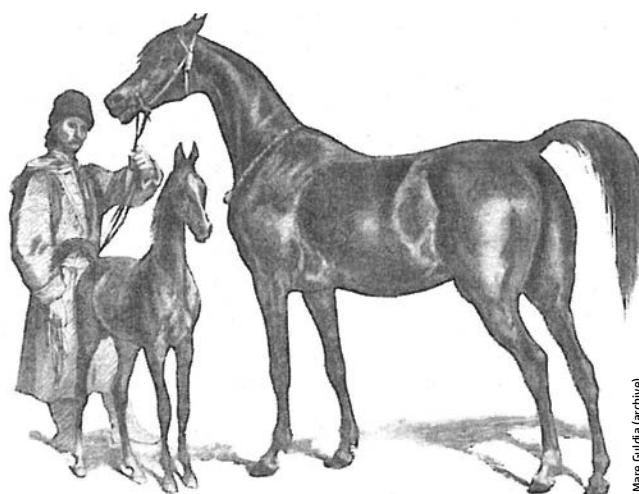
horses in demanding stamina trials. Arabians were used in carriages over long distances, pulled sleighs, roamed across the Podole steppes, hunting down wolves and hares. The breeding selection was made on this very basis. The horses exercised unrestrained movement over endless pastures, thriving on the rich in minerals Borderland soil. Nothing foreboded the tragedy that would fall upon the herd in 1864. An innkeeper fired by Trzeciak scattered oats with arsenic on the mares' pasture in an act of vengeance. At four in the morning the stable boys let out the horses onto the pasture. Several hours later twenty two mares perished in agony. The hair on Trzeciak's head turned grey in an instant. All that was left were several youngsters that remained in the barns. The despairing breeder was comforted by many neighbors, but most significantly by one from the legendary Jarczowce, count Juliusz Dzieduszycki. A man who preferred actions to words, Dzieduszycki gave his neighbor five mares from his own herd. All of them were either daughters or granddaughters of the three mares imported from the desert by the count from his expedition to Arabia – Gazella, Mlecha and Sahara. Trzeciak added his own fillies that remained and the Taurów stud again stood up on its feet. Very quickly it restored its position and significance, as already in 1877 the mare **Guldia** was awarded with a gold medal at an exhibition in Lviv.

## The lone wolf hunt

Grandma Aniela knows nothing about Trzeciak's horses, it is rather I that tell her of the old days. But we are able to locate the place where the manor and stables once stood. It also turns out that the renown breeder was buried at the local cemetery. We later find out that the grave is visited from time to time by some family member from Poland.

People that bred pure blooded horses in the 19th century were definitely not ordinary. They oozed charisma with a sprinkle of eccentricity. Dionizy Trzeciak was a Polish nobleman in every sense of the word, whose thatched roof manor was full of tradition, respect for rituals of old and patriotism, so unfashionable these days. When guests

visited, especially horsemen, the tables strained under homemade delicacies, the grey as a pigeon servant Iwaś took out a hundred year old Hungarian wine from the cellar, whereas the proud host presented his most cherished Arabians by leading them into the well-lit chambers. Stefan Bojanowski\*\*\*\*\* described this incredible persona, as well as the entire Taurów stud, in his book titled "Profiles of oriental horses and their breeders". There we find an interesting story about the stamina of Taurów's horses. On a February morning news reached the manor that there was a lone wolf on the steppe. Groom Jaśko Papuga harnessed two geldings (by the Jarczowce-bred Step) to a sleigh. Dionizy, equipped with a rifle, jumped aboard and the hunt for the wolf across the steppe began. The horses galloped after the male wolf for several hours until it was finally possible to reach him within some tens of steps. Then came the shot. It was only then that everyone remembered about the horses. They returned home well after dark and the grooms immediately took to rubbing the horses down with straw, but no one expected any positive results. Whereas the next day the geldings, as though nothing had happened, peacefully nibbled on their hay. Neighbors came to admire the wolf, but mainly the horses. Juliusz Dzieduszycki was to say to the stud's owner: If this happened in England, all newspapers would do a story about it. But here it is a normal occurrence, because no horses can match our when it comes to stamina over long distances.



Mare Guldia (archive)

## Touching history

I plow through the thickets growing over the old part of the cemetery, every now and then finding Polish tombstones. Finally, behind three meter high nettles, stands a large massive family vault. From afar I can see the stirrup – the Trzeciak coat of arms. It was this symbol that was branded on the most valuable mares in Taurów. The words on the grave can be easily read: Dionizy Trzeciak of Semetycze, owner and tenant of estates, lived 68 years, died on the 5th of December, 1894. And again comes the feeling that I am directly touching history, here and now.

After Trzeciak's death the stud was taken over by his nephew Longin Łoboś, who operated it in accordance with his uncle's instructions. Horses from Taurów still found their way to many breedings in the Borderlands, but also further. For example Witold Czartoryski purchased mares for his stud in Pełkinie. The stallion **Dziaf Amira** 1897 (Mohort x ładna Hafizka) found his way to Zdzisław Czartoryski from Pawłosiowo in the Poznańskie region and three years later became a chief sire at the Neustadt stud, where he was active for the next two decades. Even today, after more than a hundred years, when we dig deeper in the pedigrees of our Arabian horses, we will easily find ancestors bred in Taurów. They will usually be representatives of Gazella, Mlecha and Sahara, which Dionizy Trzeciak was especially fond of. One of Janów Podlaski's iconic mares, the bay **Cerekiew**, foundress of a valuable line, descends from the mare Mlecha born in Taurów in 1879. The representatives of this line are famous for their racing and endurance talents. The stallion **Cesihus** was second in the Derby and later won the Polish Junior Championships in endurance over 120 km. **Cert** is a Polish National Endurance Champion over 160 km. **Cekur** won the Bandola and Kabaret Stakes at the Służewiec track in Warsaw, while **Czertomelik** triumphed in two endurance races over 80 km. This line also produced one of the best sons of Comet, the stallion **Carycyn**, exported to the US.

PS. When I began completing this article several days ago, an unbelievable thing happened and suddenly the story of Taurów took on a new turn. According to studies of several respectable horsemen who wrote about the Taurów stud (Professor Pruski included), after Trzeciak's death his stud was taken over by his nephew Longin Łoboś, as Dionizy was said to be a childless bachelor. Meanwhile I was able to determine something completely different. It turns out that Dionizy had two sons, but as is often the case, none of them had a fondness for equines, so the stud went into the hands of Łoboś, who loved horses since early childhood and spent a lot of time in the stables. One of Dionizy's sons was named Konstancy, who in turn had a son named Stefan. I was told all this by the granddaughter of the latter, who sometimes visits Taurów and her great-great-grandfather's grave.

\* Juliusz Kossak (1824-1899), a Polish painter specializing in battle and historical paintings. He most liked painting horses. His most important works include "Sobieski at Vienna", "Stud of Mohort", "Arrival of Emperor Franz Joseph to Cracow", "A stud in the Podolia region", "A portrait of Count Rzewuski".

\*\* The Eastern Borderlands – former Eastern lands of Poland, under occupation from 1939 first by the USSR, later the Third Reich. After World War II the Eastern Borderlands were separated from Poland and annexed to the Ukrainian SSR, Byelorussian SSR and Lithuanian SSR. The annexation of Poland's territory was accepted during the Tehran and Yalta Conference. Forced by the superpower countries Poland had to give the USSR 48% of its territory, losing about 180 thousand square km in the East.

\*\*\* Professor Witold Pruski, the author of the epoch work "Two Centuries of Polish Arabian Horse Breeding (1778–1978) and its successes worldwide", among others.

\*\*\*\* Count Juliusz Dzieduszycki (1817-1885), land owner, horseman. In 1840 he set off on a famous, full of adventures expedition to Lvov to acquire the stallion Bagdad and in 1845 to Arabia, from where he brought the mares Gazella, Mlecha and Sahara. Their significance for Polish Arabian horse breeding does not need to be emphasized. This stud, similar to the others, did not survive. The only ones to survive the extermination of the World War I and the Bolshevik invasion in the years 1917-1918 were the mare Pomponia 1902 and three fillies, which sent to Janów formed the foundations of the stud (Gazella II 1914, Mlecha 1914 and Zulejma 1914). Descending from Pomponia and Zulejma was the epochal Ofir.

\*\*\*\*\* Stefan Bojanowski (1850–1910), author of many studies on horses, especially of the Galicia and borderland estates.



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