

Tifla

AN IMPOSSIBLE LOVE AFFAIR?

by Annalisa Monticelli
■ photos by Historical archive by Annalisa Monticelli

Ours is a story of passion and love that started around the mid 1950s, in Egypt. Not in the royal palaces or the market place, but in a paddock full of sand surrounded by Eucalyptus trees. This is the Kingdom of the war mares of the Prophet. This is, also, the Kingdom of the descendants of the royal families of Bahrain.

We are in El Zahraa in the year 1955. The this year different horses were born: the grey stallion Amrulla who would become the father of the famous Akhtal, the black mare Bint El Bataa and the bay stallion Rashad Ibn Nazeer both exported to the USA. Also born that year were the stallion Fagir full brother of Dahma II, the amazing chestnut Maysa, the lovely grey Nagdia who was to become one of the modern founders of the Marbach Stud, the grey mare Rafica, the radiant Shahrzada, the full sister of Aswan, the little bay mare Sherifa, the grey mare Zebede who would to become the grandmother of El Shaklan and the mysterious dark grey mare Tifla.



Nader 1958 (Nazeer x Elwya)



Seef 1959
(Mashhour x Elwya)



Ansata Bint Elwya 1961
(Antar x Elwya)

Who was Tifla?

Tifla grew up in the paddocks of El Zahraa. Like nearly all the horses from the El Zahraa stud she was used for track galloping and at the end of her sporting career, still young and full of energy, she was sold to Dr. Sayed Marei from the newly opened Albadeia stud in Giza. On her mother's side, Tifla was sister to the stallions Seef, remembered for supreme movement and his capacity to dance, Nader, a great galloping horse and later a dancing

horse, and Ansata Bint Elwya. All the horses of this family are remembered for their athletic strength and their superb movement. Who doesn't remember Bint Maisa El Saghira?

Mrs. Hansi Heck-Melnyk, founder and owner of Serenity Arabian Stud, together with Doug and Margaret Marshall, owners of Gleannloch Farm, Tom and Rita McNair, trainers at Gleannloch Farm, and Judith and Don Forbis, were able

to see her live – more than once – in the Albadeia paddocks. Mrs. Melnyk* recalls in 1973: I saw Tifla in 1973 at Sayyed Mareeis (Albadeia) and here are the notes I made” “Tifla a very good mare, good legs, good action, head straight but classic/dry. She produced that excellent daughter “Soheir II” (1963 by Fagir), A very beautiful, substantial flying machine of a mare”.

* A few words about Mrs. Hansi Heck-Melnyk. She is a researcher, author of 24 volumes about Arabian horses, dressage instructor at Gran Prix level and jumping instructor, as well as being the famous founder of the Serenity Arabian Farm. She is one of the world authorities on Arabian horses and one of the people to have introduced the Egyptian horse to the USA together with Judith Forbis, Doug Marshall from the glorious Gleannloch Farm and of course Henry B. Babson.

In 2006, Mr. Omar Sakr – another respected and well-known breeder in Egypt – also spoke about Tifla: Tifla was a 1955 EAO bred mare by Nazeer out of Elwya that was purchased by the late Sayed Marei after her racing career was over and she never left Egypt. To this day no one has said what was wrong with her. Maybe some breeding expert can shed some light on this matter to benefit us all. Or maybe Dr. Nasr can help as well. I consider that there is nothing

wrong with Tifla’s pedigree.”

Tifla had 4 daughters, all born in Dr. Sayed Marei’s stud. Her first daughter was the grey Soheir II, out of Fagir, born in 1963. Then came Naeema in 1964, out of Ramses Fayek, Om El Arab out of Alaa El Din in 1967 and finally in 1969 Naadya out of Ramses Fayek.

Soheir II and Naadya were exported to the USA and went to Enrich the broodmares band of Gleannloch Farm. Om El Arab was transferred to Germany while three daughters and one stallion by Naeema went to the United States.

In short, the destiny of Tifla’s descendants followed the same path as nearly all the Egyptian breeding mares raised in El Zabraa.

At Al Badeia the branch of descendants goes down through Naeema and from her some very famous names have been produced.

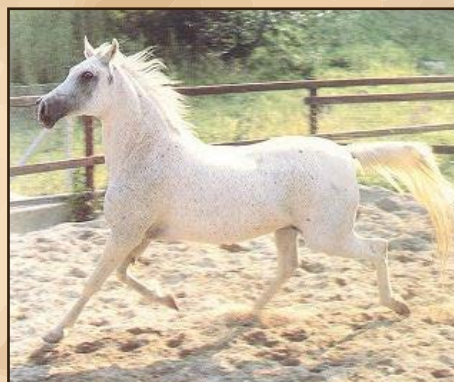
Tifla’s Daughters



Soheir 1963
(Fagir x Tifla)



Naeema 1964
(Fayek x Tifla)



Om El Arab 1967
(Alaa el din x Tifla)

The story of Bint El Bahrein

Old official documents about the distant past of this family date back to 1898 when a bay filly was born. We are in the Archipelago of Bahrain and the filly was bred by Aissa Ibn Khalifeh, the reigning Sheikh at the time, a descendant of the historical royal family of this Archipelago. I forgot to mention an important detail: the filly was a Dahmah Shahwaniyah.

Five years went by and the Emir of Bahrain chose her – a young five year old breeding mare – as a gift for Khedive Abbas II.

Khedive was the older brother of the famous Prince Mohamed Ali Tewfik who was also an important and very well known breeder.

So, Bint El Bahrein arrived in Egypt. But destiny had decided differently and after a few years of brilliant results, the Khedive stud was dispersed.

Lady Anne Blunt who was always looking for top quality horses, and who also had an eye for spotting Asayel horses, bought Bint El Bahrein and, at this point, the inheritance of this breeding mare started unravelling.

In this article, we do not want to speak about or recall the successes or the qualities of Tifla's descendants in the Eastern or the Western world, but we want to mention an episode in the life of this mare which even today remains a mystery.

AN IMPOSSIBLE
LOVE AFFAIR?

The prince, the donkey and telegony

What are the rumours about Tifla?

*It all started in the Middle East. The story goes that Tifla, on return from her racing career, was never a willing partner for the stallions that were presented to her. So, in Albadeia they decided to leave her in a paddock in the company of a male donkey.**

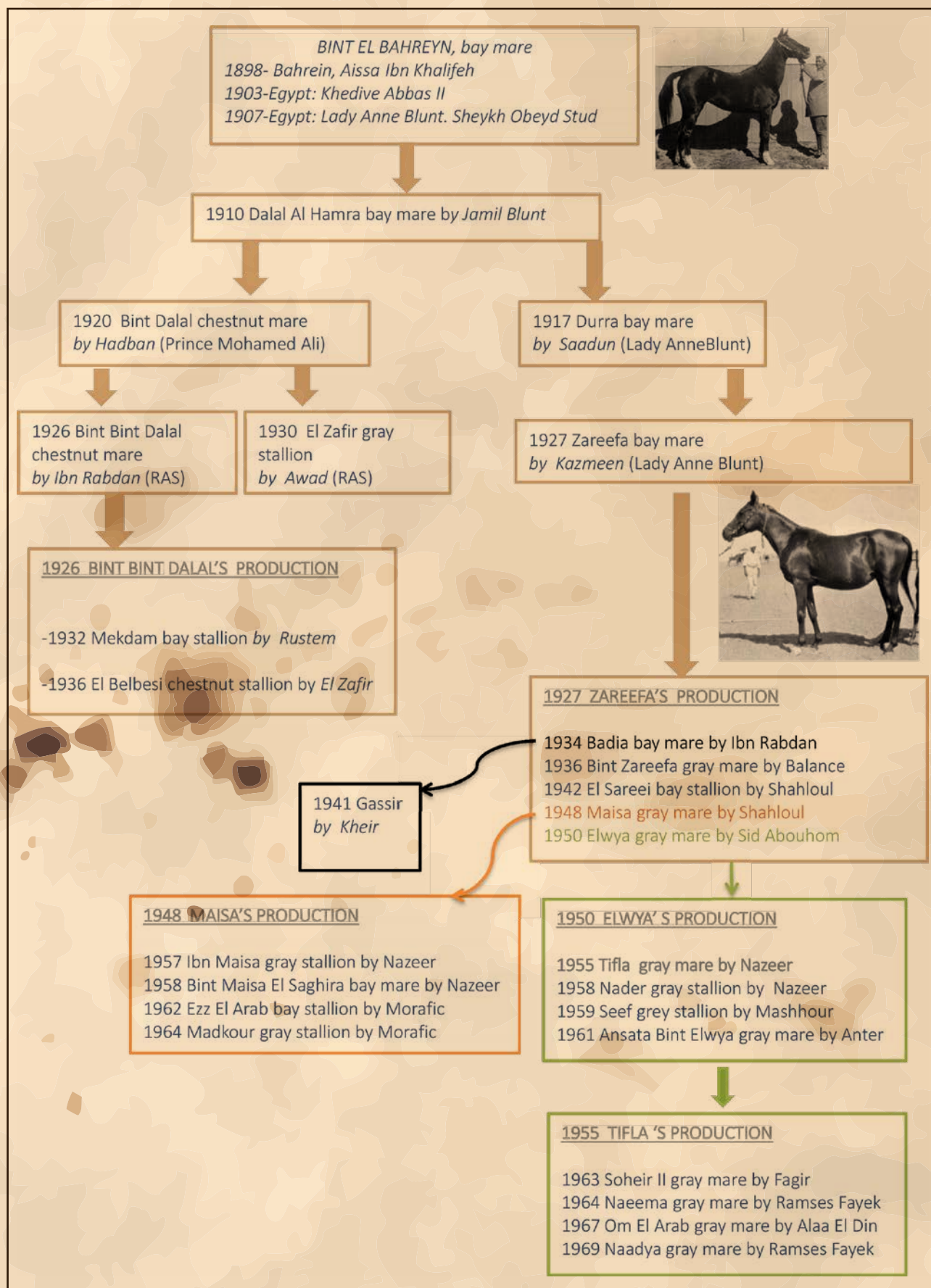
*N.B. The process of leaving a mare who had problems accepting stallions in the company of a male donkey goes back in history and was used in all cultures, especially in Southern Europe.

Tifla, the star of the moment, evidently needed a lot of attention and courting no just as a quick mount. In fact, the courting techniques of the donkey produced its fruits and 11

months after the romantic adventure, a beautiful mule was born.

However, nobody ever heard anything more about this mule; nobody actually ever saw it. These are rumors, legends, all without historical reference or certainty.

After the mysterious birth of this mule, his career as a broodmare set off peaceful and fertile. Tifla was born in 1955; her first daughter was born in 1963.



What was the problem?

There is an old belief known as telephony, first recognized in the 19th Century but probably already believed in by the Sumerians, Babylonians and Jews.

The word "Telephony" was coined by the German biologist A. Weismann, using two words of Greek origin: tele, that means "far" and gonos that means "origin", but also "offspring."

Telephony is an old theory of heredity according to which offspring can inherit the characteristics of a previous mate of the female parent. For example: If a woman has two children from two different men, the second son, should inherit some characteristics of the father of the first child. It is as if the woman retained, at its core, the memory of the genes of the sperm of the first partner.

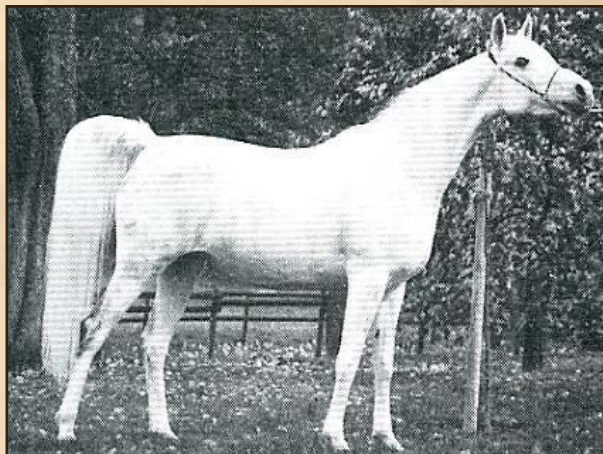
Sometimes legends and myths have their own influence and with time they tend to become part of a certain reality influencing, in our case, breeders, handlers and horselovers alike.

It is logical that each breeder has his/her own preference when it comes to choosing this or that blood line. Without diverse genetics, there would be no sense in breeding.

However, certain unfounded opinions, without scientific proof, cause disorder and in short threaten the existence of the concept of the breeding of pure Egyptian horses.

AN IMPOSSIBLE
LOVE AFFAIR?

Tifla and her grand daughter "Ora" both charmed by donkeys?



Ora (Ibn Shaker I° x Omera)

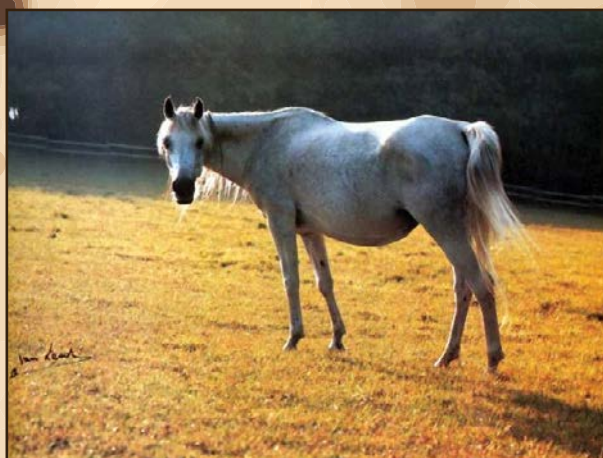
Over the years, the tale of the passion between Tifla and her paddock friend was replaced by another story from Europe that told of an illegitimate love between the breeding mare Ora (Ibn Shaker I° x Omera, daughter of Shawki x Om El Arab), bred in Germany, and her paddock companion, another donkey.

It is told that she was very young when this happened, but

even though this tale originated in Europe, no-one knows anything about the mule. And no-one ever saw him.

So Tifla and her family made their great entry into the Valley of the Desperados.

Horses looked upon with suspicion. Incredible horses which few people have the courage to buy.



Omera (Shawky x Om El Arab)

The idea of purity

Prior to the use of DNA tests or blood tests, everything was based on the spoken word and trust. The entire world of the Asayel and of Egyptian horses were built on trust and sincerity. It is a tradition passed down from father to son and so, returning to telegony, it is told – although these tales are not reliable – that in the Royal Studs of Egypt, Arabian mares were bred with English stallions and nobody complained.

Pure Egyptian mares and half breeds were accepted and kept separate. Then, the following year, the pure Egyptian mares previously given to half breed stallions, were then given to thoroughbred stallions. This was done without causing bad words or bad feelings.

I should like to tell of an episode mentioned by Lady Anne Blunt in her Journals at page 323 of 4th December 1907: "Prince Mohamed Ali always spoke with great enthusiasm about Arabian Horses and vowed to keep no others." In effect, he had eliminated all others. He complained that

his brother Khedive Abbas II continued keeping other types of horses, saying: "My brother has two Dubaymat by Ali Pasha Sherif. I asked him to sell them to me as he wasn't interested in breeding Arabian horses, but he refused. Now I have found out that he has bred them with the stallion Cedar (a P.S.I.)."

If we accept the 'illegal' love story between Tifla and her donkey friend, there is one thing to consider that however goes against legend by being scientific in nature: horses (equus caballus) and donkeys (equus asinus) have a different number of chromosomes (a donkey has 62 and a horse 64), this is the reason why the mule or hinny resulting from the mate of a horse and a donkey is sterile. Hybrids have 63 chromosomes.

At this point, using science as a means of measure and not popular belief, it is clear that it is impossible to contaminate the two different species genetically. □

Tifla
AN IMPOSSIBLE
LOVE AFFAIR?