"BEHIND EVERY GREAT STALLION THERE IS A GREAT MARE"

ARABIAN HORSES: ELEGANCE, ENDURANCE AND EXCELLENCE THAT CAPTIVATE THE WORLD

◆ by Monika Savier ◆

Before the time when worldwide shipping of semen of stallions of all kinds of origin was not yet practiced, almost every European country had their own distinctive type of Arabian, formed by the selection exerted by the natural environment, climate, and food or also by selection criteria applied by their respective region or country. As a result, there are Egyptian Arabians as well as Spanish, Russian, Polish or Marbach Arabians, just to name a few. The state studs took over the breeding for the selection of stallions and specified the criteria to be used. Functionality was considered more important for the selection than Arabian type, as all horses were intended to be ridden later on. The wind of the legendary old cavalry was still blowing through the barns and training centers for riders and breeders. Private studs used the state-run stallion stations without having to stable stallions of their own. Today, however, almost a hundred years later, riding horses as a means of transportation have vanished from public spaces and lots of things have changed. Many state studs were closed or it was allowed to convert them into museums of all sorts. Small private breeding enterprises cropped up. Riding turned into a hobby. What connects the different worlds of horses and their owners today is a kind of world religion that provides the space for an enormously wide field of interest,

Albrecht Adam, Arabian mare and her foal, Oil painting (1845)

Theodor Horschelt, Arabian mare. City Museum, Munich

> *"Bedouin Horse breeders emphasized the importance of the mare over the stallion in both, warfare and breeding. The love and admiration they felt for their mares, however, is perhaps best expressed through the centuries of Arabic literature. It is here that one can best appreciate not only the physical characteristics the Bedouins prized, but also the beauty and spiritual attributes that make the Arabian mare a treasure beyond price."*
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> *(Cynthia Culbertson, Desert Heritage Magazine No. 49, 2020)*

such as sports, representation, or economy. In addition, advanced reproduction technologies evolved, and were not only applied by the state studs for their stallions, but even by private small breeders.

Today, Arabian breeding is highly specialized, asking for a completely different kind of selection. There are four flourishing sections of Arabian horses which apply different selection methods: Arabians bred for speed on the racetrack, bred for performance in endurance sports, bred for showing and beauty; and then there is the forth one which is the single branch of worldwide breeding that concentrates on horses of a historical geographic background: the Straight Egyptian Arabians. Even these Egyptian bloodlines are successfully selected for breeding for the same aims, as showing, and occasionally for endurance and track racing.

While on the racetrack and for endurance sports, selection is mainly done by means of racing performance of mares as well as stallions, the selection for show horses,and also the Straight Egyptians is, by and large, a matter of the respective markets.

The body language of stallions, often displayed spectacularly on the occasion of shows and stud presentations, is very much dominating the media coverage. It's just these online pictures of our horses, in particular of the show scene stallions, that have moved the world of horse breeding from the analogous reality in a natural environment into the artificial world of digital horse business – which is much supported by social media. For some of the members of this business world, horses tend to be fabulous creatures which turned into reality and became aspects of their own selves – a dreamed reality – as indicated by the fact that the most beautiful Arabians in this world are usually just owned and admired, but not used in any other way. Stallions represent the other Self, a hidden personality, the aesthetic part or the athletic one, or the gentle or the wild one… Such stallions are the projection of unfulfilled ideals, and at the same time, they are a subject which can be controlled. Both of them have resulted in a complete mastership over the reproduction of horses.

With that, the mares are increasingly fading from the spotlight and being pushed into the background. The possibility of globalizing frozen semen via Instagram, Facebook, or show streaming services made certain stallions famous all over the world, and made their owners rich men. With that, linebreeding that had been locally rooted started to minimize. If you look for a straight Polish Arabian horse today, you have to make a lot of effort by digging into the pedigrees of Polish studs in order to find a proper one. The markets

"In Polish breeding, the dam lines have an overwhelming importance" (H.J. Nagel)

there are just as much dominated by stallions bred according to show criteria and imported from Qatar, with their bloodlines originating from Poland, Brazil and Spain, or Russia, where one is breeding with stallions of different combinations of origin as well. On the catwalks of Arabian shows, we see beauty in perfection, but also sometimes horses bordering on the unacceptable, when the functionality of the horses has only been allotted a minor role. And these could be winners, the super guys who divide between themselves the market for breeding of good mares. Their breeding fee is too high and leaves no room for testing and experiments.

All the above was leading to a restriction of the gene pool available for horse breeding today. Taking a look into a modern pedigree, you will often find a high degree of inbreeding - which is, sadly, mostly not based on a consistent breeding strategy, since most of the sires cropped up from the showing scene, and the dams just come from anywhere. And even though these mares are responsible for a greater percentage of a foal's quality than are the stallions, they are often not considered enough in planning of breeding for the future. It's not only that the genetic material is split between mares and stallions, but there are also epi-genetic factors on the mares' side that further shape and influence the foal during pregnancy and even after the it is born. Every breeder knows that a shy dam will produce shy foals, and that a dominant lead mare will transmit to her offspring just this kind of character, that will then be perpetuated into the next generations (the mechanism is called epi-genetics). Which is why embryo transfer, if it should ever be necessary, should only be done using good Arabian broodmares as recipient mares. Many traits typical to a breed are only transmitted in the embryonic phase, and further solidified during raising time and educating of the foal after birth.

These facts also need to be considered when a mare is expected to produce a good stallion. Mares who became known as „stallion producers" can be assumed to have had dominant status in their herd, as well as pride and composure, so as to produce a self-confident colt. A shy colt growing up with his subordinate dam will hardly grow into the role of a breeding sire; the genetically implied and epigenetically consolidated behavior of a dominant stallion affects his body language, his gaits, his pride in his way of displaying himself. He will overcome his flight instinct when difficulties arise, meeting the challenge just as nature intended for him to do.

It is also possible, however, that many potential sires simply remain undiscovered; one reason being that they are not submitted to any criteria of selection. To be able to judge colts as required, the whole animal should be checked, not just their heads and necks. Such procedure needs the experience of many years. Apart from that, there are the high cost and risk when one undertakes to present successfully a promising sire to the

Theodor Horschelt, Arabian mare.
City Museum, Munich

public. In addition they do not like to try to engage in the inevitable competition with the big studs of the Gulf area. This is a dilemma that calls for suitable initiatives to be taken into the right directions: the breeding associations of Europe might consider joint show events, or other alternatives such as hosting combined shows, featuring stallions and mares presented together with their offspring This would be highly informative. It would also replace partly the social online networks that breeders use now, and would, last not least, constitute a very necessary measure of ongoing education which is in the best interest of quality breeding..

Arabian Broodmares of the Royal Stud Weil. Oil painting Friedrichshafen Castel

Based on the example of the breeding history at Katharinenhof Stud, Dr Nagel explains about the secrets of his success with his long-time experiment. A lot of world-famous stallions such as Salaa El Dine, Adnan, Asfour, Safir, NK HafidJamil,and NK Nadeer were born there. Some others, such as Madkour I, Mohafez, and Ansata Halim Shah only came to fame after they had been used as sires with a group of carefully selected mares whose offspring, in their turn, would then lay the foundations for the success of their respective sire lines all over the world. What were Dr Nagel's criteria for selecting his stallions? Who were these dams in the background, and what influence did they have on the whole?

"TO BREED SUCCESSFUL STALLIONS, ATHE BREEDERS NEED TO TAKE THE MARES MORE SERIOUSLY"

◆ by Hans J. Nagel, photo by Joanna Jonientz ◆

How to produce a good stallion? It's a highly important question.

Most breeders of Arabian horses won't think much about that topic. They are more interested in having mostly fillies anyway – obviously assuming that some when later, when that filly has grown, they are going to find a stallion that is well suited to this mare. The question is getting increasingly more important, however, as the number of good sires is getting ever smaller. Artificial insemination and the show scene are responsible for that, as only show champions will receive enough mares to cover - mostly done by artificial insemination - while other stallions are hardly in demand. Our initial question, however, keeps being up to date, and is even crucial in the case of a bigger stud and particularly in the case of one that depends on home-bred stallions: mostly because they will want to breed horses of a type of their own, or with a certain performance capability in mind. The closer such a stud has come to its goals, the more difficult using external stallions will become, as they run the risk of introducing or re-introducing not only the traits they were looking and wishing for, but also unwanted characteristics, or even detrimental drawbacks that had been bred out already.

NK Larissa (NK Hafid Jamil x NK Lateefa) with filly NK Leilah, sired by NK Nizam

Successful experienced stud managers in the past were interesting partners for discussing this topic, such as Dr Rudolfski who headed the big Czech stud of Hostau and in

whose hands as a director, for some time, the fate of the Vienna Spanish Riding School rested. Later he was one of the foundation members of the German Association for Arabian Horse Breeding (VZAP). Another important contributor when discussing this topic was Dr Krysztalowicz, who headed the Polish State Stud for 30 years, leading this stud to its top-of-the-world position. Basically, there was general agreement on the following points:

The first guideline: "Mate same with same", or to put that more specifically: "Don't breed small mares to very big stallions" but do, if necessary, "breed small stallions to big mares".

The second guideline: There ought to be a certain degree of kinship between the horses to be mated. So they should have some common ancestors, they should "nick" with their bloodlines. For example, the sire of the stallion and the grandsire of the mare should be identical, or the grandsire of the stallion and the grandsire of the mare should be siblings, etc.

Both of these guidelines are easy to meet.

"Every stallion I use needs to have outstanding potential for improving my breeding. You can't always know that beforehand,you just have to give it a try."

Hans J. Nagel, 2003, Katharinenhof

"It's no problem if the stallions are smallerthan the mares. I prefer the stallions to deliver type, not size. Those highly influential stallions for the last eighty years: Nazeer, and then Skowronek for the Polish lines, and Amurath for the Russian lines - all three of these influential sires did not reach 148 cm. That idea that a stallion needs to be a big guy to get something going, that s macho thinking and absolutely wrong. In breeding, the smaller and more refined stallions have always been those who were far more influential. The size of the foal is determined by the dam, not the sire."

Hans J. Nagel, 2009

The next question, now, is: How to recognize the quality of the stallion?

A sire needs to have developed correctly and according to his age, and may additionally have a special, much desired trait in his outer appearance, such as a typical shape of the head, an elegant neckline, or particularly well conformed hind quarters.

To put that in technical terms: the stallion needs to have a good, correct phenotype. In Arabian breeding, there are many stallions today who won shows and embody that phenotype, with some of them even distinguishing themselves by some much desired trait. However, will stallions like these be good transmitters at the same time, animals to be recommended as sires? Yes and no. „Yes" if the stallion's genotype is known as well, and „no" if there is no data available.

It's logical and consistent to consider the genotype of the same importance as the phenotype, as the genes are what determines the prepotency of a stallion: his power of transmission or heredity. Experienced breeders are able to guess the genotype from a stallion's pedigree. However, to correctly evaluate a sire, both sets of data need to be known, the phenotype as well as the genotype.

The only way to really determine the genotype is by progeny testing. An ancient saying from the bible, "Ye shall know them by their fruits", expresses this time-proven wisdom. The genotype is expressed in the quality of the offspring.

A stallion ought to have produced at least 10 to 15 foals from different dams to make it sufficiently possible to assess his quality. In private breeding, many smaller stallion owners don't have the opportunity to do this testing, as their stallions don't receive enough mares for serving, or else it will take several years to produce a pool of offspring big enough to provide reliable information on the stallion's transmission qualities. During that time, it's all up in the air, and the mare owners who decided to use such a stallion are those who bear the risk

of whether progeny testing will prove successful.

That period of testing is different for big breeders or state studs. They are in a position to present their sire-to-be with a great number of mares within one year, or even more safely, within two breeding periods, and can get the desired information within the shortest time possible.

So the following has been substantiated:

A good sire needs to be exemplary in his outer appearance as well as in his transmitting potency. Without these data, achieving good breeding results is highly unlikely.

It's not uncommon to find that certain stallions will produce very good female offspring while their male get is of inferior quality, or that they will produce good stallions as well as good mares.

Both sexes will profit from carrying out reliable progeny testing.

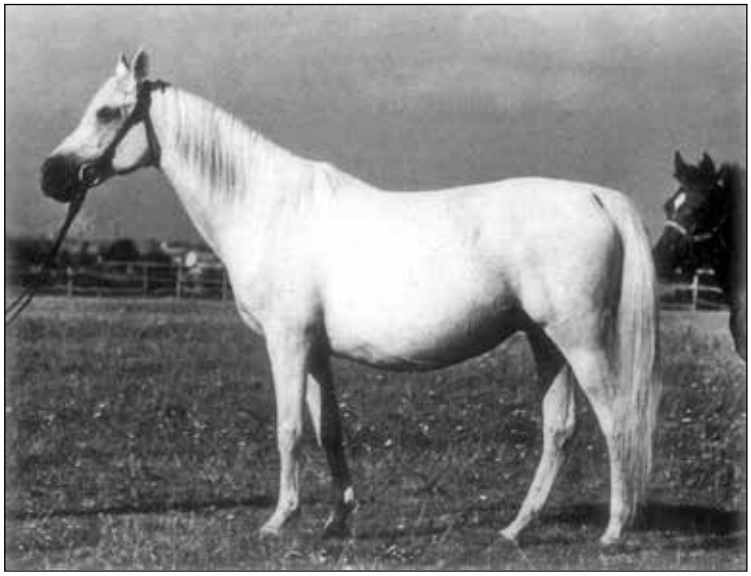
During the 1980ies and 90ies in Germany, the Association for Arabian Horse Breeding (VZAP) was obliged to conduct stallion approval events on a yearly basis – as decreed by state authorities. However, this supplied a great amount of data with interesting contents. At my suggestion, out of my position as chairman at that time, a study was carried out to estimate the transmitting abilities of the successfully approved stallions. For a period of about 20 years of mandatory stallion approval, the results were as follows. Every year, about a hundred stallions aged 3 to 4 were presented to an approval committee. About a third of them, so about 30 stallions, were officially approved/licensed, meaning they received an award that was based on their outward appearance and characteristics. The winner of the event received a gold ribbon, the second a silver ribbon as the reserve winner. What the study investigated was how many male offspring of approval event winners - produced during the lifespan of that winner or at least during the period when stallion approval was mandatory - were approved in their turn. The astonishing result: in all those years, there were just eight approved stallions who produced one or two stallions who were approved in turn. Just two more of the placed sires had some approved stallions among their progeny, four and five of them, respectively.

This disappointing result is based upon the fact that in a stallion approval, it's only the phenotype that can be assessed, while the genotype is not considered at all. By the way, another fact that's not involved in stallion assessment is the quality of their dams, which would be of high value and significance. As a consequence of this study and the results of long years of stallion approval routines, the breeding association decided to introduce today's system of „elite mares" which assessed and awarded the outwardly apparent qualities of mares.

There is a special feature which is highly uncommon, and if it is found, it's a real stroke of luck. This feature is for a mare to be able to consistently produce outstanding offspring, fillies as well as colts, from matings with different stallions. Unfortunately, mares like this are not easily recognized in everyday breeding in small studs. In the big studs in the East, such as JanoszPodlaski in Poland and Tersk in Russia, these

The famous Russian mare Tactica (Taki Pan x Krona) with her outstanding race and show records, was the dam of famous stallions such as Derby winner Topol and Pietuszok, both sired by Priboj

Bandola

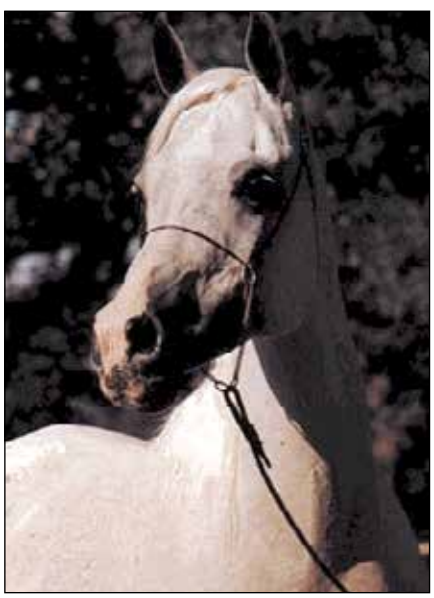


Bałałajka (Amurath Sahib x Iwonka) and her daughter Bandola by Witraz were cornerstones in Arabian breeding in Poland

mares were placed first when assessments were carried out. In these vast studs, a few such mares became the cornerstones of whole breeding populations. In Tersk Stud in particular, they had a scale for mare quality which put special emphasis on this feature, elevating dams with these qualities to „stallion producer" status.

In the U.S.A., the mare Bint Magidaa had a brilliant career as a stallion producer. She was born in the Egyptian stud El Zahraa and was a member of the Obayan strain. Later exported to the US, she achieved fame world-wide via her three sons. All three of these stallions were sired by the powerful Morafic son Sheikh El Badi. The most well-known among them was to be Ruminaja Ali, whose name is found in the pedigrees of many famous show horses even today. Second in fame was RuminajaBajat, who produced numerous offspring in the US and later in Argentina, in Zichy Thyssen stud. The third of her sons, Alidaar, was initially active in breeding in Europe and later made his home in Al Rayyan Stud in Qatar, were he was used extensively. His most successful offspring were the females.

A lot more of these important foundation mares might be listed, not only among the straight Egyptian lines, but also in show lines as well as in performance breeding lines.



Bint Magidaa had a brilliant career as a stallion producer. Her world-famous three sons Ruminaja Ali, Ruminaja Bahjat and Alidaar, were all sired by Sheikh Al Badi

Messaouda-M is the dam of well-known stallions such as Maydan-Madheen, Madheen El Shah and Mishaal HP. Photo by Paufler

"Stallion Producer" Dams and Their Sons on Katharinenhof Stud

"Already within the herd of foals 1968 in El-Zahraa the little bay Hanan appealed as the most brave and elegant one and she remained like this for all her life of 28 years. Her majestic look and her great role as a mother of 11 wonderful foals made her the queen of the stud"

Hans J. Nagel

Outstanding stallion-producing dams are not unknown and have been found in German Arabian horse breeding, too. An example with world-wide influence on breeding happened to take place in my Katharinenhof stud. In 1968, I bought a bay filly named „Hanan" from the Egyptian state stud El Zahraa. She was a daughter of Alaa el Din, with her dam being Mona of the Obayan strain. This mare's lifetime achievement was eleven foals, five of them colts, and every single one of these colts went in for a career. Three of them stayed in Germany, two were sold abroad.

The first one, Jamil by Madkour I, proved to be an outstanding mare producer with more than 50 female offspring born during his time in Ansata Stud in the US. As a sire in his own turn, it was only his son Ansata Nile Pasha who became known and was every audience's favorite in shows. The next son of Hanan, Asfour by Malik, was exported to Australia to stamp Simeon Stud there. He was followed by Ibn Galal I by Ibn Galal, who would ultimately be a main influence for the whole broodmare band of Babolna stud in Hungary. Salaa el Dine by Ansata Halim Shah was the fourth colt. He stayed in Katharinenhof stud where he was the number 1 among the sires for years. Salaa el Dine proved to be an outstanding sire for the next generation of male offspring, such as Safir in Al Rayyan stud in Qatar who went on to produce the stallion Ashhal al Rayyan for their next generation. In Iran, it was his son Mubarak who took Iranian Arabian horse breeding to a new level in all disciplines: shows, the racetrack, and endurance racing. And finally, there was Crusader who came to live in Maxwell Stud in Great Britain and who two times achieved the award of Reserve World Champion in Paris while at the same time being highly successful on the racetrack. The last son of Hanan to be mentioned was Abdallah by Galion, who made a name for himself as a good transmittor for high performance Arabians among endurance breeders. When the previously mentioned Dr Rudofski examined young Hanan during a Katharinenhof visit, his comment was enthusiastic: "With this Hanan, you bought a producer of stallions." He was so right!

Up to today, five to six generations of Egyptian Arabian horses have been born on Katharinenhof stud. For most of them, the bay mare Hanan is listed very early in their pedigrees. This mare

ph: Van Lent

together with her stable mateLotfeia, another Alaa El Din daughter but a member of the Hadban strain in El Zahraa, are the true foundation mares of Katharinenhof stud. Hanan is the mare who had the greatest influence via the stallion side. Lotfeia has, via her exceptionally beautiful daughter NK Nashua – a Salaa El Dine daughter – founded the Hadban family on Katharinenhof stud and brought it to full flower. This most well-known group of the Hadban strain that is so much famed in Egypt, has made the history books world-wide owing to her.

Research Results Confirm the Practical Experience From Breeding for Several Generations

As the final outcome of the above considerations, including the VZAP study on the results of long years of stallion approval events, VZAP officials are not the first ones to come to the following conclusion: In order to increase the probability of breeding good stallions – horses that are able to influence a breeding population on a long-term basis – the sire and dam of the stallion need to be as similar as possible. Sire and dam of a potential stallion need to nick to a certain degree, to have a certain part of their bloodlines in common. The potential stallion's sire needs to have produced a sufficient number of foals for his transmitting potency to be assessed.

These prerequisites are easier to achieve, for sure, when there is a stud with a breeding population composed of a few families only, whose quality and traits are sufficiently well known from long years of breeding with them. In this case, the prerequisite of a bloodline nick - be it more close or more wide - is easiest and most conveniently met.

It is also known that a top sire is able to influence breeding positively for three generations. After that, his influence is more or less completed; younger stallions have out-competed him and taken over his role. If this is not the case, there was no progress in breeding! In all horse breeding operations, no matter whether for sports horses, racing horses, or Arabian horse breeding, this is a well-known fact.

The great influence of the dams on the quality of the stallions can also be read from the following results achieved on Katharinenhof Stud.

Among the sires who successfully served on Katharinenhof Stud, there was a bay purchased in the USA, the young stallion Mohafez by Ibn Moniet El Nefous out of Ahroufa. The mares to be served by him were selected according to the breeding criteria mentioned before. As a result, Mohafez was the one who had four approved male offspring under his belt in the VZAP study – so he was found to be one of the best transmittors, a prepotent sire.

And then there was USA-born Ansata Halim Shah, a stallion who just blew the statistics. His performance was totally out of the ordinary. Licensed with a very pleasing phenotype, he was leased to Katharinenhof Stud for two years by Ansata Stud of Arkansas, USA. At that time, he was just three years old and had a famous sire and a dam of equal value. He did not yet have any offspring – nevertheless, Katharinenhof Stud choose this

NK Abla (NK Jamal El Dine x NK Aziza), dam of NK Anwar

NK Nadirah (Adnan x Nashua). She is the dam of NK Nadeer and NK Nizam, two cornerstones in the NK breeding concept

hitherto unknown stallion who, in the course of these two years, served 30 mares, with 19 fillies and 11 colts born. One of these sons became a sire for Babolna State Stud. Two others were successfully approved as sires in Marbach State Stud, seven others received stallion awards during the VZAP stallion approvals in Kranichstein. Among these, there were Salaa el Dine, Maysoun, and El Thay Ibn Halim Shah. Just a single one of the eleven colts was not presented for approval. Never before and never afterwards did a stallion achieve this outstanding result. How was this kind of success even possible?

The answer: both of these successful stallions had only been presented selected mares, females chosen with the greatest care, with a quality similar to that of Ansata Halim Shah, and with more or less of the bloodline nick that is so desirable. His daughters were gorgeously beautiful and correctly built Arabian horses who were sought after world-wide later on. So 95% of the offspring produced during his stay in Germany were of top quality.

On his return into the USA, this success in Germany meant high demand for the stallion. Lots of

Ansata Ken Ranya (Salaa El Dine x Ansata Prima Rose).
She was the dam of NK Jamal El Dine and NK Kamar El Dine

Helala (Salaa El Dine x Ansata Gloriana). She was the dam of NK Hafid Jamil and other important NK horses

NK Nachita (NK Nadeer x NK Bint Bint Nashua)

NK Lina (NK Kamar El Dine x Muneera Al Ariba), dam of NK Lotfy and NK Lam El Dine

mares were served by him, mares of all levels of quality. Later analysis showed that just 25% of the foals born succeeded in reaching the quality that had been achieved in Germany.

Later on, Ansata Halim Shah was sold to Qatar and served the mares of Al Shaqab Stud. Unfortunately, he died in an accident only a short time later, only leaving 15 to 20 offspring on the Gulf – and among all of them, just one achieved world-wide fame: Al Adeed Al Shaqab out of Sundar Alisayyah. This one was a wonderful stallion and sire, a true son of Ansata Halim Shah. Of all the other offspring produced there, nothing special has been heard. Obviously, nobody paid attention to finding the right mares that would have been the most suitable ones for Ansata Halim Shah.

Everything said above clearly outlines how important and influential mares are when it comes to breeding horses. It's an amazing fact that historically, the Bedouins cast their lot with the mares, basing their breeding strategy and recording on the dam lines. In Bedouin genealogy, the stallions were not even mentioned. Today we know that the influence of the dam on the progeny is 60% and more. A number to be kept in mind. ◆