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# Some Reflections on Continuity of the Desert Horse

By Joe Ferriss



Above left is the Al Khamsa stallion Mister Kheys (Khemahr x Khebaba) and above right is a 19th century lithograph of an Arabian horse head by Carle Vernet. While it is the artist's freedom to stylize, one can see that the fine dry skin, prominent veins and facial expression of Mister Kheys represent qualities similar to that which must have inspired Carle Vernet more than a century and a half ago. The horse of the past is still a part of the present in Al Khamsa bloodlines. Mister Kheys is Combined Source breeding.

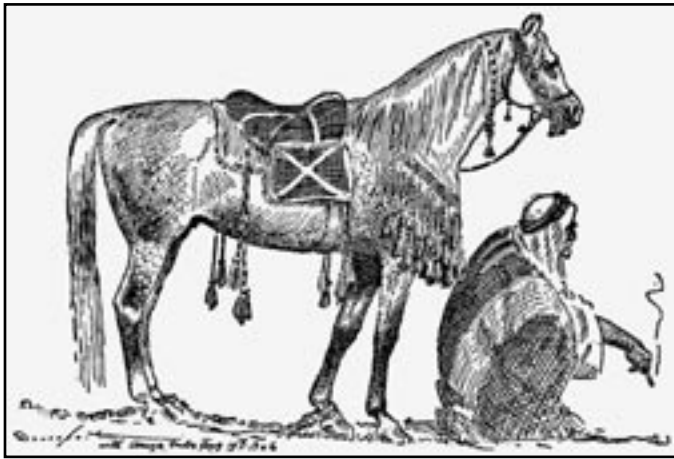
Throughout the decade of the 1970s, Sharon and I traveled to many farms that represented a wide range of Al Khamsa bloodlines, taking movies and notes. We often saw similar horses that transcended breeding groups. However, the popular thought at the time was that Egyptians must be different than Davenports which must be different than Blue Stars which must be different than Combined Source breeding and so on. Most breeders stayed within their chosen breeding groups, but a few Combined Source breeders gave themselves more choices. There is certainly nothing wrong with preserving a specific breeding group or having very specific breeding choices and it has certainly produced some very honored and memorable horses. However, if one goes back far enough to the Al Khamsa foundations, it is not based on any one nationality or any one breeder but rather derives from the various migratory Bedouin tribes.

How did our Arabian bloodlines get so divided up by program today? Perhaps the answer to that question is unimportant if instead one focuses on general continuity in preserving the horse of the desert. There is not enough space within these pages to completely define such continuity. Perhaps the better question to keep asking ourselves is, "What do our horses today have in common with their distant ancestors, and what do they have in common with each other?"

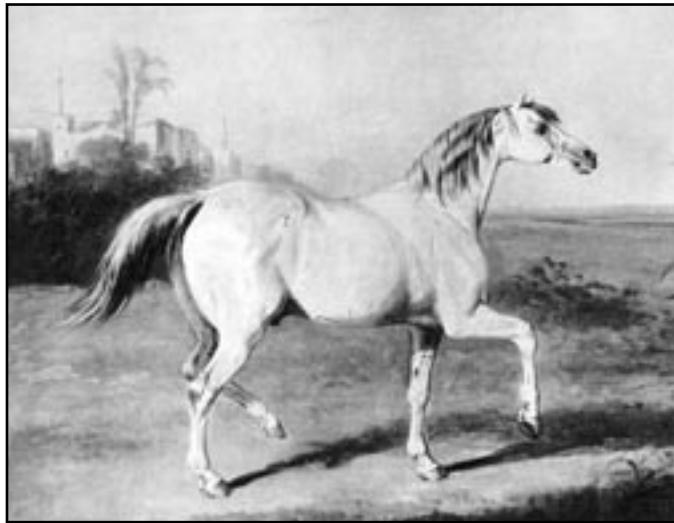
Some feel that the "horse of the desert" from the days of Bedouin life gone by is no more. But is it? The more one reads the descriptions from old books and studies old art, old engravings, and photos from the past, one will get a sense of the traditional horse of the desert. Then just look around and it will be still be found in Egyptian, Davenport, Blue Star, Combined Source and similar breeding groups. Our bloodlines are still quite fluid depending on the choices we make. Perhaps it is not how we breed but how we see. On the next few pages I offer some picture comparisons with commentary using old art, photos or pictures of Bedouin-bred horses from my 1996 travels in the Middle East.



Anyone who has seen the Davenport stallion Javera Thadrian (Thane x HB Diandra) in person would agree that he also demonstrates that "special look" that would have inspired Vernet and others in the nineteenth century. His extremely fine skin, prominent veins and noble expression and demeanor are unforgettable. Photo at age 23 by Charles Craver.



*In 1906 Homer Davenport drew a horse in the desert with a traditional Bedouin saddle. Ninety years later while visiting the Tai Bedouin, a Shuwaymah mare was presented to us with her traditional Bedouin saddle, still constructed in the same fashion. She looked like the kind of mare found in Davenport or Blue Star herds. It was a wonderful continuity experience.*



*About 30 years ago my grandmother gave me an old print of a painting of the Wellesley Arabian, another 19th century work of art that shows the powerful, curvy form found in many Arabians centuries ago. The continuity of this look carries forward in numerous Al Khamsa bloodlines. San Luis Marc Antony (Mista-Bin x San Luis Bint Dorzah) is a good example.*



*When the Shammar tribe presented their mares for us in 1996 I saw similarities with horses I already knew. The Hamdaniyah Ibn Ghorab mare (at left) intrigued me with her similarities to the mare at right, Belle Echo (Bel Gordas x Faarecho). It is enlightening to discover that features of tribal horses of the Shammar can also be found in the horses of Al Khamsa breeding.*



While visiting breeders in Syria in 1996 we were presented a stallion named Hassan (at left) who was very handsome and striking and drew favorable comments. He was a heavily used stallion. In many ways his proportions and style reminded me of the Blue Star stallion El Hamdan (Ibn Fadl x Bint Sirecho). Hassan was reminiscent of several Ibn Fadl get that I had seen.



Closer inspection of Hassan showed me that he was also much like the mare Sirbana (Sirecho x Habana) in skull proportions, ear set and expression. Sirbana is sired by Sirecho and out of an Ibn Fadl daughter, so is somewhat related to El Hamdan.



In terms of style and overall impression, I could not help but notice the resemblance between Shuwaimaan Mashhoor that I saw in Bahrain pictured at left, and the Babson stallion Fa-Rab (\*Fadl x Aana) pictured at right.



Seeing this Tai Bedouin mare in 1996, (left) I was struck by things that reminded me of numerous photos of the EAO mare Zaafarana [Balance (RAS) x Samira (RAS)] in general form and expression. The Zaafarana image at right is a Forbis photo.



When this stallion (left) owned by the head Shaikh of the Tai tribe was presented to us, I could not help but reminisce of similar overall proportions and character to the EAO stallion Akhtal [Amrulla (EAO) x Hagir (EAO)], pictured at right. Forbis photo of Akhtal.



Above left is a picture from Prince Mohammed Ali's book in 1936, and above right is a picture I took 60 years later when the Shammar tribe presented their horses.

These are but a few comparisons of the past to the present. It is reassuring to know that there are Bedouin today that have struggled to maintain what has been in their family for a very long time. For a visual person like me, it was a magnificent gift to be able to see this. But it is also inspiring to know that these traditional kinds of horses are not lost, but remain a part of the fabric of the kinds of horses we are trying to preserve and wish to enjoy. So long as we continue to be aware of the culture and foundation that created the ancestors of Al Khamsa horses of today, we will succeed in preserving this kind of horse for the future. The best benchmark for our perceptions and decisions about how we breed is to "think like the Bedouin" and be understanding and aware of all the bloodlines available to us. To truly value and identify more objectively the common elements among breeding groups is our greatest assurance for continuity of this "noble horse of the desert" entrusted to us.

All photos not otherwise attributed are from the Ferriss Collection.