

# History Lives on in Spanish Arabian Horses

edited by Molly Stanley

The purebred Arabian horse can directly trace its origin to the time of Mohammed in the seventh century. The Arabian has been kept recognizable and distinct through selective inbreeding within a relatively small stock. It is speculated that the Arabian was essentially the same up to 20 centuries ago. It is generally accepted by scholars that before the dawn of recorded history, these were four different subspecies of horses gathered over the earth. One of these species was *Equus Agilia*, which was probably introduced from Northern India and settled in the high, dry plains of Arabia and Africa. *Equus Agilia* became the Arabian horse. For this reason the Arabian horse is considered a pure subspecies of horse while man-made mixes are called breeds.

Horses were first brought to the Americas by Hernando de Soto in 1539. The Spanish Conquistador made a number of exploration trips to the "New World", and when they sailed home to Spain, the horses they brought here as their mounts for the exploration were turned loose rather than putting them through the hardship of the return journey.

The exact nature of most of those horses is unknown, though there are ancient manuscripts in the "Torre de Oro" ( Tower of Gold) in Seville that give information on all details of these expeditions. However, these manuscripts are not available for study. History does show us that the Moors (Arabic people) were expelled from Spain in 1492 after 800 years of occupation, just before the "New World", voyages began. It is a certainty that numbers of desert bred horses (Arabians) were brought into Spain during the Moorish occupation and that a good many of these were left behind. Any records of these horses are lost in antiquity.

The Spanish Stud Book (SSB) of the present begins in the year 1847, making the SSB the oldest in our modern world to keep accurate breeding records. In 1847, the Queen of Spain began an active interest in keeping records on the lineage of their horses. Most of the early entries in the Spanish Stud Book state "Importado de Desierto por S.M. la Reina D. Isabel II." These old pedigrees, written in Arabic, are kept in the "Golden Book" in Madrid.

The first Arabian horses were imported for the Spanish government by the Duke of San Carlos. Later, in 1849, under General Marchesi, head of horse breeding, there were 24 stallions, 12 mares, and 12 colts imported from the desert.

