

History Lives on in Spanish Arabian Horses

edited by Molly Stanley


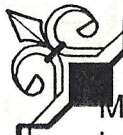
The purebred Arabian horse can directly trace its origin to the time of Mohammed in the seventh century. The Arabian has been kept recognizable and distinct through selective inbreeding within a relatively small stock. It is speculated that the Arabian was essentially the same up to 20 centuries ago. It is generally accepted by scholars that before the dawn of recorded history, there 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.



Most of the Arabians imported for the State at that time were used to upgrade existing horse breeds in Spain, as was the custom in all of Europe, and none of the horses imported from 1847 to 1903 still exist in the present Stud Book.

In 1893 the Yeguada Militar was established near Cordoba. The Arabian horse was an important war machine in those days, so selecting, purchasing, and breeding Arabian horses came under the Department of War - the same still holds true today at the Yeguada Militar of Spain.


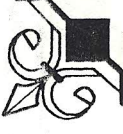
Around the beginning of the century, important importations to Spain began. In 1905, a specially selected group comprised of military officers and veterinarians was sent to the Orient to search out and buy a group of the best Arabians. The commander of the expedition was Major Luis Azpeitia de Moros, who published a book in great detail about the perilous adventure entitled "El Busca Del Caballo Arabe". This commission was able to buy 10 stallions and 13 mares; of these, 9 stallions and 11 mares actually arrived home to Spain. Again, the usual practice in Europe was to use the stallions to improve outcross breeding programs. The mares were bred for purebred Arabian offspring, and we find 5 of these 11 female families still in the Spanish Stud Book today; these being Bint, Yamila, Ymm, Zarifa and Zulima.

From 1905 to 1927, commissions were sent to Egypt, Turkey, Polish-Russia, (Poland was occupied by Russia from 1772-1918) and France, always in search of outstanding Arabian horses of desert origin, which were brought to Spain for the Yeguada Militar.

Another necessary ingredient of the present day Spanish Arabian was the important group purchased in England by Don Cristabal Colon, the Fifteenth Duque de Veragua, mostly from Lady Wentworth at Crabbet Park, but also the stallion Razada, bred by Cecil Hough. The Duque imported three stallions and 13 mares from England between 1927 and 1930. These he added to his original herd, obtained when he bought the entire stud of Arabians after the death of the Marquis de Casa Domecq, who was the first private breeder of Arabian horses in Spain. Lady Wentworth (Crabbet Park) noted that the Duque de Veragua was one of the world's authorities on the Arabian horse. Later she wrote a note in her memoirs saying that she regretted having sold her finest Skowronek daughters (5 of them) to the Duque.

The Duque was obsessed with breeding the best of purebred Arabian horses and went to great lengths to attain this goal. Previous to his trip to England, he traveled to Argentina and bought 4 mares there, who were descendants of Lady Wentworth's or her mother's (Lady Anne Blunt) stock.

The Duque was only granted a few short years before the Spanish Civil War exacted its terrible toll. In the autumn of 1936, the Duque de Veragua, his brother, and most of his servants and employees were brutally assassinated, and his palace and papers were burned, including a priceless document, the letter from Queen Isabella I to Christopher Columbus, the first Duque de Veragua, authorizing his historic sail to the "New World."



A number of mares were shot and killed during the rebellion on the Veragua lands for more than month before General Franco's troops arrived to drive them out. As soon as it was possible, Franco had the mares moved by truck to the National Stud at Cordoba. The Military State Stud then resumed its breeding program with these valuable additions and entered them in the Stud Book with new names starting with the prefix VERA.

The rebuilding of the Arabian population of Spain was a slow process. In 1957, some 23 years after the outbreak of the Civil War, Spain still had only 631 purebred Arabian horses in the country. Today, there are 40 or 50 private breeders in Spain in addition to the Yeguada Militar.

From the book Great Stud Farms of the World (Monique And Hans Dossenback, Hans Joachin Kohler, 1977, William Morrow and Co., Inc., forward by HRH Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh) about the Military State Stud of Spain, it says, "The influence of the Military Stud on Arabian horses breeding in Spain began to make itself felt soon after the turn of the century. Right from the start the work was organized systematically and scientifically, with the aim of producing purebred animals for the State Stallion depot where private breeders could send their mares to be covered.....with the pure Arab breed they achieved success right from the start. Breeding began with a foundation stock of mares and stallions, most of excellent quality. Almost all the Arabs at present standing at the Yeguada Militar are extremely beautiful. Their high quality is attributable not only to their noble origin, to expert selection and careful rearing, but also to the favorable ecological conditions in the south of Spain."

From the Arabian Horse Times, May 1995 article "Welcome to the Return of the Spanish Arabian Horse" by Kristian Fenaux, Page 355, "Pure Spanish - with their pool of original pure Arabian blood, a mixture of desert and all European strains, the Spanish Arabian grew up and acquired his own identity. After 1934 and until very recently, there were no new significant imports. These special circumstances in Spain, of breeding within a closed and limited gene pool, produced a very special Arabian horse, homozygous in almost all genetic qualities. The high quality of the foundation material and ruthless selection for generation and generations, keeping only those horses of outstanding merit and quality (both physical and mental) for breeding, has produced what we call the pure Spanish Arabian. Between 1930 and 1970, Arabian horses were bred because good horses were important, mainly for Military and agriculture needs. (Editor's note: Spain has only recently joined the European Economic Community (EEC). Through the 70's and into the 80's, on our many trips to Spain we saw in the beginning, really no tractors, but many horses (and work mules) working, pulling carts of produce even into Madrid amongst the busy motor car traffic, or being ridden beside the roads) "The Spanish Arabian is a genuine product of Spain". Here, until just recently, horses were really a significant part of everyday life. The need for strong, reliable, good minded and stable horse was a must for many activities and purebred Arabians were among the most valued assets. As an

example of this importance, we must always remember that the world famous Malvito daughter ARILLA, one of Spain's most celebrated broodmares was one of the best threshing horses at Casas Albas, the Osuna farm in Ecija, Andaluia.

At the same time, purebred Arabians were raced. First, in the 1920's and 1930's at the Tablada racetrack, near Sevilla, and also in Jerez de la Frontera, Cadiz, Sanlucar de Borromundo, and El Puerto de Santa Maria. Later, in the 1940's and 1950's, nearly all races were at the new Pineda racetrack in Sevilla. The famous CONGO raced for years and never lost a race.

From "The Arab Horse in Spain", by Maria Paz Murga Igual (re: Duque de Veragua), "There are many anecdotes about his fastidiousness as a breeder. One of my favorites is, when he invited a party of horse friends to spend the day at his farm and asked them if they could find the reason why he had chosen one colt instead of another as a future stallion.....They were at it for hours on end, looking the horses over, having them paraded slowly or letting them run loose... In the end they gave up. The colts were exactly alike. No, the Duque said, there was a difference. One had six millimeters more width between the eyes. "

From "The Spanish Significance" by S. Gordon Shreffler. "They have superb top lines and powerful hindquarters, and remarkable trainable and cooperative dispositions. They tend to produce size, and many, though not all, of the most prominent imported Spanish stallion are actually 15 hands or a little more. All Arabian horses have one region of origin. The significance of the Spanish Arabians ancestry is the selection process that gave strong importance to good dispositions. Mares that rejected or savaged foals or even were disruptive in the mare band, as well as untrainable, obstreperous stallions, were rigorously culled from the gene stream. After all, these horses would be military mounts or working horses - they had to be reliable under difficult conditions."

Presently in the USA we don't require cavalry mounts or messenger mounts to cross searing deserts while carrying essential documents. But in a world that presents us with plenty of negative stress, those who have an equine friend like one of these exciting yet peaceful Spanish Arabians or their offspring has one of the best friends of any species. "Look them up - I know you will be glad you did."