

CRABBET - THE EARLY DAYS

by Rosemary Archer

History was made on July 2nd, 1878 when the first horses brought to England by Wilfrid and Lady Anne Blunt arrived at Crabbet Park, their Sussex home. Six months earlier, when staying in Aleppo during their journey through Arabia, the Blunts made a decision which was to have a lasting effect on Arabian horse breeding. In Lady Anne's own words "We have made a plan of importing some of the best Anazeh blood to England and breeding it pure there".it would be an interesting and useful thing to do and I should like much to try it.

It was during their travels amongst the Bedouin tribes of the Euphrates in the winter of 1877/78 that the Blunts, managing to evade the Turkish authorities who wished to prevent them from meeting the Sheykhs of the Shammar and Anazeh tribes (tribal wars were fierce at that time) succeeded in reaching the camps of Faris and Ferhan and other Bedouin leaders.

Through this association with principal Sheykhs and with the knowledge they gained of the great horse-breeding tribes, the Blunts were in a unique position to seek out and acquire, in this and later visits, some of the finest horses in the deserts of Arabia.

Amongst the first group of horses was a bay filly of the Keheileh Dajanieh strain which the Blunts purchased on Christmas Day, 1877. When she arrived at Crabbet Lady Anne wrote "Dajanieh, very pretty as ever", and she was renamed Dajania and was to become one of the most important foundation mares of Crabbet.

It was whilst they were visiting the Welled Ali that they saw a dark bay mare which immediately struck them as surpassing anything they had seen so far. She was a celebrated mare in the desert and the Blunts determined to buy her. The purchase was complicated by the fact that the mare, an Abeyeh Sherrakieh, was owned in partnership by Beteyen Ibn Murshid, Sheykh of the Gomussa, and his cousin and it was only after lengthy negotiations that Queen of Sheba, as they were to name her, was finally purchased in the summer of 1878.

A year later when the Blunts were on their second journey through Arabia they heard of another celebrated mare, a chestnut Kehaileh of Ibn Rodan. In 1881 they returned once more to the deserts and saw the mare near the wells of Abu Fayal and immediately purchased her; Rodania arrived at Crabbet that summer.

Although the Blunts brought back to England over 30 mares, only a comparatively small number left descendants. This is not an unusual situation for when a large collection of Arabians are formed and the stock bred for many generations, the strongest families will always emerge, as was the case in horse-breeding in Arabia. The Blunts' policy was to cull vigorously any colt or filly which did not come up to their high standards of quality, soundness and good temperament. But perhaps the most important of all was the criterion by which they selected mares to be kept in the stud. Wilfrid Blunt wrote in his memorandum of 1904 that "It will be found at Crabbet, as is found in every Arabian tribe, that, while all are of the same original blood, certain strains only produce colts worthy of being used as sires. Thus the produce of certain imported mares, however good individually these were, will become eliminated from the stud. It is better such strains should be lost when after three generations they have failed to produce a sire of the first class".

Queen of Sheba certainly came into the category of sire producer for, although she only left a slender female line of descent, her influence has been mainly through her two sons, Ahmar by Azrek and Astraed by Mesaoud. Ahmar was the sire of Siwa, ex Sobha, and of Bukra, the dam of Berk. Siwa's principal daughter by Daoud, Somra, was the mother of Silver Fire and Berk was the sire of Rissla two of the principal families represented in the Crabbet Convention Parades. Bukra was the granddaughter of Basilisk, the grey Seglawieh Jedranieh of the famous Ibn Ed Derri strain which the Blunts imported in 1878.

Rodania's family is numerically the largest of all the Crabbet female lines and, through the exportation of members of this family to America and to Australia, her descendants became established in the very early days of Arab horse breeding in those countries.

In England the "R" line is strongest through Rose of Sharon to Risala, the dam of Rissla and Rasim, and to Riyala, who produced Razina, as well as through Rosemary to Rish. Rissla was one of the greatest of all the famous Crabbet mares and her influence spread around the world. She inherited her brilliant action from her sire Berk, whilst her dam was described by Wilfrid Blunt as the finest mare at Crabbet "without question".

Dajania's filly by Hadbard (a stallion purchased by the Blunts as a 2 year old when they saw him in India, but known to them through their travels in Arabia) was named Nefisa and it is through this one daughter that the Dajania line has attained its importance for producing stallions of the highest calibre. Such horses as Naseem, Nasik, Indian Gold and Blue Domino are examples of the many influential sons of "N" line mares.

It is an extraordinary fact that for nearly 100 years, despite the exportation of numerous top-class colts from Crabbet, the stud was able to continue producing generation after generation of outstanding sires. This must be attributed very largely to the exceptional inherent qualities of its mares qualities which Lady Wentworth always maintained were of the utmost importance in the mares of a stud and which she valued so highly in her own. As visitors to Crabbet were often heard to remark, there is something about those mare, an indefinable presence or style which both Lady Wentworth and her parents regarded as essential in the high caste Arabian horse.

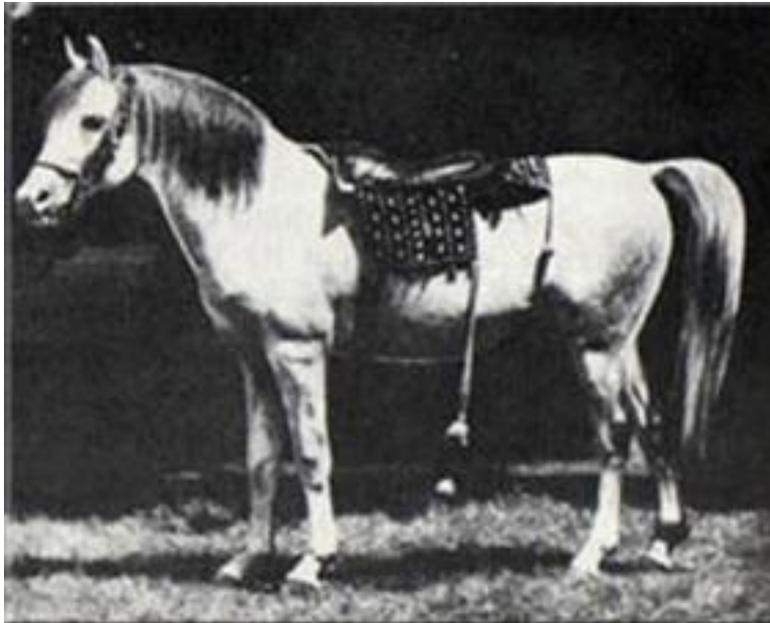
This quality the Blunts noticed in horses of Ali Pasha Sherif whose stud in Egypt was founded with horses of the world famous Abbas Pasha collection of the 19th Century. Their initial visit to his stud took place in 1880 and, 9 years later, they made their first purchase from this collection which was to be of paramount importance in the development of the Crabbet Stud. For it was the crossing of these Arabians, many of which were in fact only one or two generations removed from the acquisitions of Abbas Pasha and had come from the same tribes as the Blunts own desert purchases, with their original imports which was to prove the basis of the phenomenal success of Crabbet.



Mesaoud

In January, 1889, Lady Anne Blunt noted, after a visit to Ali Pasha Sherif's stables, that the pick is, of course, the Seglawi Sudan son of Aziz. He is four white legged and high up the knee but surprisingly handsome. They named this colt Mesaoud and today he has more descendants throughout the world than any other stallion of his era. The genius of the Blunts' breeding policy is clearly demonstrated by the use made of Mesaoud. They crossed him and his offspring with the progeny of mares such as Basilisk,

Rodania, Queen of Sheba and also with the desert stallion, Azrek, who had the true, light floating action which is one of the attributes of the Arabian they sought to perpetuate in their stud, to produce stock with all the qualities they desired.



Azrek

Azrek was another celebrated horse they heard of through their close connections with the horse-breeding tribes. They determined to buy him and sent a trusted Arab, Zeyd Saad el Muteyri on a mission into the desert to buy him. Lady Anne wrote afterwards that the story of his purchase read just like a tale from the Arabian Romances.

Ali Pasha Sherif's Stud was to come to a sad ending when the Pasha's health declined and he ran into financial and political difficulties. Towards the end of the 19th Century, the once magnificent collection had dwindled to a few old stallions, some mares and youngstock, the sad remnants as Lady Anne Blunt described them in the winter of 1896/97, when she went to inspect the horses prior to their sale by auction in Cairo. The Blunts were once again at an advantage through their contacts and were able to procure a few of the best mares before the sale as well as buying others in the two auctions and later obtaining a few more from Ali Pasha's sons. So it was that the finest of the horses from this renowned collection came to England and were incorporated into the Crabbet Stud. It is interesting to find that some of today's horses of Crabbet breeding carry a higher proportion of Abbas Pasha blood than many of the present day Egyptian Arabians.

Of the mares of Abbas Pasha descent imported to England by the Blunts, particular mention should be made of Sobha, a grey daughter of the great stallion Wazir and the Hamdanieh Simrieh, Selma, of Abbas Pasha's Stud. Sobha's son Seyal, the sire of Berk, was sold as a young stallion but through her two daughters Selma and Siwa, both by Ahmar, a flourishing family developed and lines from them have spread all over the world. Notable in this line of beautiful horses was the exquisite Silver Fire, a great favourite of Lady Wentworth. Her sire was, of course, Naseem, who also had the most beautiful head and was the greatest son of the Polish bred Skowronek. So much has been written about Skowronek that little need be added here except perhaps to say that he proved to be a perfect cross for the Crabbet mares and demonstrated clearly the genius of Lady Wentworth as a breeder and the gift she undoubtedly had for selecting stock.



Lady Wentworth's Naseem by Skowronek

Having selected the finest horses obtainable in Arabia and of Abbas Pasha descent as their foundation stock, The Blunts stud at Crabbet very soon became famous as the greatest collection outside the Middle East. During the latter part of the 19th Century, the main demand was for stallions to upgrade the local stock of many countries and horses from Crabbet were exported all over the world. This was followed by an interest in breeding pure Arabians and Australia and America, in particular, soon became important buyers of Crabbet stock as foundation horses for studs in those countries; in addition Arabian studs in Poland and Russia acquired horses from the Blunts.

When Lady Wentworth took over the stud, the exportation of horses continued with a large number going to Egypt and soon after several mares to Spain. There were further significant exports to the U.S. and Russia whilst studs were founded in South Africa with horses of Crabbet breeding. Thus the Crabbet bloodlines became an integral part of Arabian horse breeding all over the world. In fact, one may conjecture on the fate of the pure-bred Arabian horse today had it not been for the Blunts founding their stud in England.

Not the least important factor concerning horses of Crabbet breeding is the availability of information and a photographic record of these horses for a period of over 100 years. Much has been written of the attributes of certain lines of horses and there is not space here to elaborate on this aspect and evaluate the different families. It is hoped that a study of pedigrees of the four principal mares together with the bloodlines of the horses paraded at this Convention will help to demonstrate how the families have evolved and show the particular characteristics of the individual groups.

This article was written for the Catalogue of the first Crabbet Convention held in 1985. Now, years later, the importance of Crabbet in Arab horse breeding is undiminished. Horses of Crabbet bloodlines predominate in many ridden disciplines and the Second Crabbet Convention to be held in the UK will emphasise this fact.

I would like to finish with words written years ago which are still fitting today. Lady Anne Blunt wrote in 1915, when the future of the stud in war-time England looked insecure, expressing her feelings in her usual modest manner "I hope that what I have done while alive will turn out to have furthered my country's horse breeding, that is all". We can only add that not only did her work leave an indelible mark on her country's horse breeding but on Arabian horse breeding throughout the world. It is to be hoped that the heritage left to us by the Blunts and Lady Wentworth will continue to be preserved and developed with the same degree of dedication.