

# Featured Articles from Around the World

## WAHO Conference, Damascus, 2007

Submitted by : Marie-Louise van Wyke  
Johrhemar Arabains

It was my great honour to represent South Africa at this prestigious conference along with my co-delegate, Philip Boyazoglu. Three more South Africans: Irene Boyazoglu, and Christopher and Karen Sparks, also attended this fascinating meeting in Damascus, the oldest city on earth! More than 250 delegates from over 60 countries travelled to Damascus to participate in this WAHO Conference, and to enjoy the remarkable program laid on by the Syrian Arab Horse Society under the blessing and with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture.

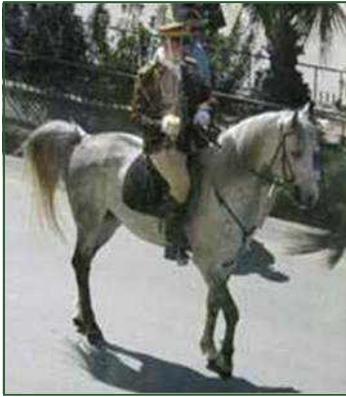
The conference was held in the luxurious Damascus Four Seasons Hotel which was quite a dramatic contrast to some of the poverty seen travelling to the city from the airport. The seemingly inexhaustable hospitality of the Syrian people was astounding - from the friendly young girls at the WAHO reception desk at the airport upon arrival and departure, the entire conference staff to the tour guides who were immaculate and efficient at all times. We were waited on hand and foot without end!

I had for years hoped and wished that I would be able to visit Syria one day. This country where it is said that the Arab horse originated, where the Bedouin tribes such as the Anazeh, the Ruala, the Shammar and many others from the Euphrates to the Nejd desert in the Arabian peninsula have for centuries bred desert horses that became the ancestors of our aristocratic Arabian horses of today. As the days passed and we learnt more about the Syrians and their horses, I found myself observing, realising and telling myself, that hardiness and endurance qualities, and the pedigree of the horse still remains paramount to these people who have depended on their steeds for so many centuries, whereas to Western people the beauty and then the pedigree are often more important.

After the official opening by the Minister of Agriculture we were asked to leave the conference room and move out to the main terrace of the hotel which overlooks the bustling main street of Damascus. Almost five hundred Bedouins of the Al Bashakem tribe, young men, elders and children, had come to Damascus with their horses to ride down the main street, through the very heavy city traffic, in honour of the participants of the conference while the military brass band played in the background. It brought tears to my eyes! Where in the world could one ever experience such enthusiasm for the ARAB horse.



*The main street through Damascus was filled with this fantastic display of Syrian Arabian horses and riders of the Al Bashakem tribe!*



*(l) Part of the main street parade*

*(r) Horsemen of the Al Bashakemtribe*



During the conference sessions many issues were raised and discussed, such as:

- The acceptance of the Studbooks of Chile, Croatia, Ecuador and Estonia.
- “Cloning” was a contentious issue, and was discussed at length, and finally it was decided that cloned Arabian horses cannot be registered with any member association of WAHO - this came about after it became known that an Arabian gelding had been cloned and was of course now a stallion producing foals!
- An appeal was made by the Australian delegate that prefixes and stud names should be registered with WAHO so as to avoid repetitions and to protect copyright and identity. A case was reported where a well known Australian stud prefix had been used in another country causing confusion as to where the horse actually had originated from. After much debate the decision was made that each country should keep a record of its prefixes and stud names and be careful not to allow such a situation to happen in the first place. It was decided that such a mammoth task could not be undertaken by WAHO and besides it would not be practical for WAHO to keep or police such records.

It also became apparent that this was not only a conference for Arabian horse enthusiasts, but also an opportunity for us all to learn more about the culture of the Arabian people as well as the culture of their horse breeding. We were given fascinating lectures and shown informational and historical films on the origins of Bedouin horse breeding in Syria, on the maintenance of pedigrees and the criteria for selective breeding. It opened up a new world between traditional breeding and breeding in our modern times. It also gave us an insight into the everyday lives of the Syrian people - very different from the information we receive in the media about this peaceful multicultural country. Historically, some 100 to 200 hundred years ago, many expeditions came to the Syrian horse markets of Aleppo and Damascus to purchase the Syrian bred horses to strengthen the breeding of the horses of Europe, but one only has to study the early photographs in the archives of old European state studs such as Babolna, for instance, to find that those horses were identical to some of the horses we saw in Syria today. The Syrian studbook was accepted by WAHO some ten years ago, and to them this meeting was a most important occasion for international visitors and breeders to experience what has occurred in the past decade in Syria as far as their Arabian horses are concerned.

At first the Bedouin tribes found it difficult to have their horses registered in writing in a studbook and even went as far as to reject the whole idea of a control they did not understand. But, after careful and diplomatic negotiations by several WAHO delegations, they slowly came to realise and acknowledge the advantages of registration and world recognition. Since then the Arab horse in Syria entered a new era, a new kind of enthusiasm - new stables were built and new private studs were established. We were treated to several stud visits during the week and to some it may be that the Syrian horses do not comply with today's show ideal as seen in European and world show events, but for anybody who looks more closely, many of the Syrian horses display a whole number of characteristics that make a good Arab horse.

One such stud visit was to Asaeel El Sham, the stud of the prominent Syrian businessman, Mahmoud al Anzarouti. Upon entering the gardens of his magnificent villa on the outskirts of Damascus, to strains of traditional Syrian background music, we stepped into what looked more like a wedding reception! There were at least 450 guests, among which the Syrian aristocracy, prominent city and government ministers and officials, the WAHO participants and Syrian horse breeders. The tables were decked with white damask linen, while the chairs had white covers with maroon

bows, all in close proximity to an enormous show ring and grandstand! After all the guests were seated and settled at the tables they were called to the grandstand for a show of the horses of Asael al Sham Stud, as well as of the Al Khaer Stud and the Basil Jadaan Stud. We watched one after another Arabian horse shown to haunting eastern music under a starlit sky - it was an emotionally charged experience! Finally dinner was served - buffet style - with an array of traditional Syrian dishes. It had turned quite chilly later on in the evening, but that was no problem, as we were each given a cloak to keep us warm so that we could enjoy the pulsating traditional dancers before we returned to our hotels well after midnight. What a fabulous evening!

***The Insallah AHC thanks Marie-Louise van Wyk  
of South Africa for contributing this article to our Newsletter!***

*From Ancient Bedouin Legend*

***AND GOD TOOK A HANDFUL OF SOUTH WIND AND FROM IT FORMED A HORSE, SAYING:  
"I CREATE THEE, OH ARABIAN.  
TO THY FORELOCK, I BIND VICTORY IN BATTLE.  
ON THY BACK, I SET A RICH SPOIL AND A TREASURE IN THY LOINS.  
I ESTABLISH THEE AS ONE OF THE GLORIES OF THE EARTH.  
I GIVE THEE FLIGHT WITHOUT WINGS."***

