
Did You Know?

Equus caballus is native to the Americas. That's where the oldest known remains to date of the species that ultimately led to the modern domestic horse have been found. However, they became extinct on that continent around 8,000 to 12,000 years ago. Before that happened though, and fortunately for the modern horse, some members of the species had made their way to other parts of the globe, most notably central Asia. And it was from their new home on the other side of the world that the surviving members of this species grew and flourished into the modern equine.

In the 16th century (in 1519 to be precise) horses were reintroduced to the Americas by early Spanish explorers. They landed in what is now Mexico and spread across the Great Plains into North America. Those Spanish horses became the foundation stock upon which many modern US breeds are based, including the famous American Quarter Horse. And the American mustang.

But back to Central Asia and the development of the modern horse there. Because this is where some of the most important original breeding stock for so many of the world's modern breeds evolved.

Oriental Horses From The Arabian Peninsula, Central Asia And Northern Africa

The term *oriental horse* refers to the ancient breeds of horses developed in the Middle East, such as the Arabian, Akhal-Teke, Barb, and the now-extinct Turkoman horse. The "Oriental" horse was a tall, slim, refined and agile animal arising in western Asia, adapted to hot, dry climates, and thought to be the progenitor of the modern oriental breeds. They are bred for agility and speed and are generally considered spirited and bold.

Original classification of ancient horse phenotypes was originally based on body types and conformation, prior to the availability of DNA for research, and has since been superseded by modern studies. Prior to these developments, the Four Foundations theory suggested the existence of four basic "proto" horses developed with adaptations to their environment prior to domestication by humans. However, modern genetic evidence now points at a single domestication event for a limited number of stallions, combined with repeated restocking of wild mares into domesticated herds, making the later divergence of body types a landrace or selective breeding adaptation.

The Progenitor Of The Modern Thoroughbred – Was It Really Just Arabians?

Over the centuries, European breeders imported oriental horses from the Middle East and Northern Africa for breeding when they wanted to incorporate the characteristic traits of these breeds into their best horse racing and light cavalry horses. The well publicized use of oriental horses was instrumental in developing the Thoroughbred breed. Analysis of mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) in the Andalusian horse also shows a clear link to an influx of Barb breeding. Nearly all other breeds of light and warmblood horses have some oriental ancestry, usually through the Arabian.

With respect to the mighty English racer, it's been accepted for the last couple of centuries that the Thoroughbred as we know it today owes its existence in its current form to the Arabian horse. After all, weren't those 3 famous progenitors of the breed – the Darley Arabian, Godolphin Barb and Byerley Turk, all 'Arabians'?

What is not quite as commonly appreciated however is that historically, including during the 1600's and 1700's when the typical English racer was a horse of mixed pedigree and often smallish in stature, the term 'Arabian' was generally used to denote a horse of Oriental origins. In England, as S Sidney tells us, "Every Oriental horse -- Turk, Barb or Egyptian bred -- is called an Arab in this country."

The Turkoman Horse Of Central Asia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkoman_horse



The Turkoman horse, or Turkmene, was an Oriental horse breed from the steppes of Central Asia, now represented by the modern Akhal-Teke. The Turkoman has influenced many other breeds, including modern warmbloods, and recent research confirms that Turkoman stallions made significant contributions to the development of the Thoroughbred. Some horses bred in Iran and Turkmenistan today are still referred to as Turkoman, and have similar characteristics. Modern descendants include the Akhal-Teke, the Iomud (also called Yamud or Yomud), the Goklan and Nokhorli.

Characteristics

The Turkoman horse was noted for its endurance. It had a slender body, similar to a greyhound. Although refined in appearance, the breed was actually one of the toughest in the world. They had a straight profile, long neck, and sloping shoulders. Their back was long, with sloping quarters and tucked-up abdomen. They had long and muscular legs. The horses ranged from 15–16

hands.

The coat of a Turkomen horse could have been of any color, and usually possessed a metallic sheen. This was due to a change in the structure of the individual hair. Many theories have been formulated to explain why hair of the Turkomen and its descendants shines, but none explain why the Turkoman horses in particular benefitted from this genetic difference and why other horses would not.

The Turkoman and the Arabian compared

Though both the Arabian horse and the Turkoman may have had a common ancestor in the oriental horse prototype, in their purest old forms they were very like one another in some ways and very different in others. Both had excellent speed and stamina. Both had extremely fine coats and delicate skin, unlike many horse breeds found in Europe. They both had large eyes, wide foreheads and tapering muzzles. They both came from very arid environments. Here, however, the similarities between the Turkoman of Central Asia and the Arabians of the Nejd desert lands of Central Arabia end, and the horses begin to diverge to suit their environments and the fighting styles of their breeders. Some divergence may be attributable solely to natural selection of landrace traits, other differences may be attributable to selective breeding. The Turkoman had small hooves. This was an adaptation to the steppes of the Central Asia, which largely consisted of a hard, rocky ground, covered with coarse sand, more like fine gravel and of stiff, parched vegetation. The Arabian had fairly large hooves for its size. In the Central Arabian desert there is deep sand as well as hard terrain. A larger hoof is needed here to cope with this type of terrain.

The back of the Turkoman, the Tekke Turkoman, and today in many cases, the Akhal-Teke, is much longer than that of the Arabian. The reason for this may likely be that when riding long distances, the Turkoman was expected to trot, and the Arabian was not; the Bedouin tended to ride camels over long distances, leading their war horses, saving them for raiding, which was primarily done at the gallop.

The Turkoman was taller than the desert-bred Arabian and had a sparse mane. The Arabian carries its tail high when galloping, and higher than most when walking or trotting. The Turkoman runs with its tail streaming behind.

The Turkoman horse is narrower in the body than the Arabian, or indeed than any other breed of horse. This helps it to dissipate heat quickly, but it is also a great aid in twisting and turning in the saddle, which would be invaluable to mounted archers who need to shoot in any direction, as opposed to lancers who need a firm footing from which to thrust a lance. Lance-throwing from horseback would be far easier on an Arabian horse shaped wider in the body would also help with making the sharp turns that close-fighting requires. In other words, the Turkoman was the ideal horse for the Turkmen, and the Arabian was the ideal horse for the Bedouin.

The North African Barb



Another ancient breed from the area was the Barb or Berber, a desert-bred horse that originated in northern Africa and today is predominantly found in Morocco, Algeria, Spain and southern France. It possesses great hardiness and stamina, a fiery temperament and an atypical sport-horse conformation, but nevertheless has influenced modern breeds.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barb_horse

Characteristics

The Barb is a light riding horse noted for its stamina. It has a powerful front end, high withers, short back, a sloping croup, and carries its tail low. It is hardy with clean legs and sound hooves. It does not have particularly good gaits, but gallops like a sprinter. It was used as breeding stock to develop racing breeds such as the Thoroughbred, American Quarter Horse, and Standardbred.

Breed history

It is not known where the Barb horse developed; some believe the breed originated in northern Africa during the 8th century, about the time that Muslim invaders reached the region. There is controversy over whether the Barb and Arabian horses share a common ancestor, or if the Arabian was a predecessor of the Barb. Native horses of the region may have been influenced by the crossing of "oriental" breeds, including the Arabian horse, Turkoman Horse or Akhal-Teke, and Caspian horse, with Iberian horses brought back from Europe by the Berber invaders after they conquered southern Spain. Today the several varieties of Barb include the Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian.

When imported to Europe, the Barbs were sometimes mistaken for Arabians, although they have distinctly different physical characteristics. The Europeans saw that their size was similar and their handlers were Berber Muslims who spoke Arabic.

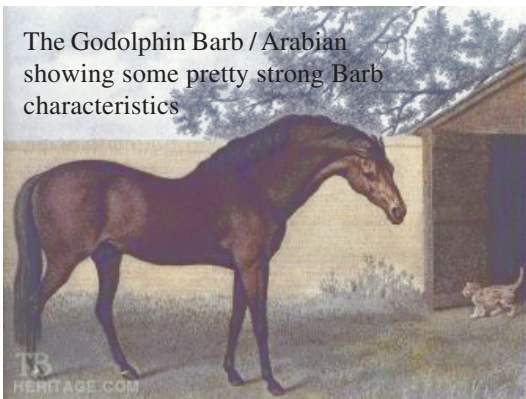
The Barb is now bred primarily in Morocco, Algeria, Spain and southern France. Due to difficult economic times in North Africa, the number of purebred Barbs is decreasing. The World Organization of the Barb Horse, founded in Algeria in 1987, was formed to promote and preserve the breed.

Conformation of the Barb

The Barb may have had more influence on the racing breeds throughout the world than any other horse except the Turk. Berber invaders from North Africa took their horses, the forerunners of today's Barbs, to Europe from the early eighth century onwards. Once established with settlers on the Iberian peninsula, the Barb horse was bred with Spanish stock under 300 years of Umayyad patronage to develop the Andalusian (and the Lusitano). The Andalusian was highly prized and it was used for major development stock in horse breeding all over the world.

Historical references to "Barbary" horses include Roan Barbary, owned by King Richard II of England in the 14th century. The Barb horses were valued by other Europeans, including the Italians, whose noble families established large racing stables. During the 16th century, Henry VIII purchased a number of Barbary horses from Federico Gonzaga of Mantua, importing seven mares and a stallion. He continued to buy other Barbs and Andalusians. After the Royal Stables were sold off under Cromwell, private owners in England continued to value the Barbs and used them to develop the Thoroughbred. The influence of the Barb is also evident in the Argentinian Criollo, the Paso Fino, and many other Western Hemisphere breeds, including the American Quarter Horse, the Mustang and the Appaloosa.

The Godolphin Barb / Arabian showing some pretty strong Barb characteristics



Despite its importance as a progenitor of other breeds, the Barb is less renowned than the Arab, possibly because it was considered a less attractive-looking breed. In other important qualities, the Barb has the same stamina and endurance, the same ability to thrive on meager rations, and the same sure-footedness and speed over short distances. The Barb also was valued for its “strong, short-coupled body, perfect for collection—the posture that makes weight-bearing easiest for the horse—its eagerness to learn and its gentle nature.” Because of these characteristics, beginning in the 16th century, the horses were also trained for dressage, in Paris and other European capitals.

Sixteenth-century and later portraits of royalty on horses frequently portrayed the latter in dressage positions.

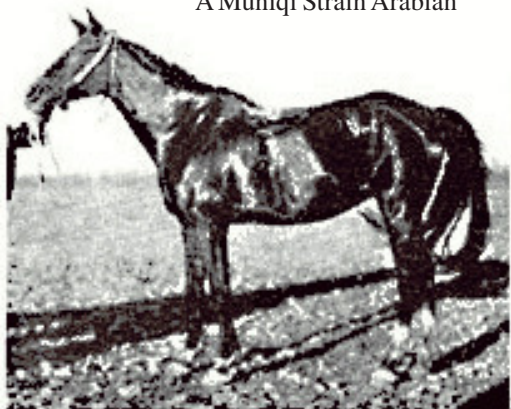
A lovely head portrait of the Godolphin Barb and his cat friend Grimalkin .



The Horse From The Arabian Peninsula

The other influential breed that comes from this area is of course the horse that originated in the Arabian Peninsula and bears its name. A smallish but tough, hardy, desert bred animal that has become renowned around the world for its stamina and endurance abilities. The oldest strains of Arabians, the Kuhlayan and the Saqlawi, are typical of the strains we’re accustomed to seeing today. They have a rounded outline, arched neck and compact ‘box like’ shape.

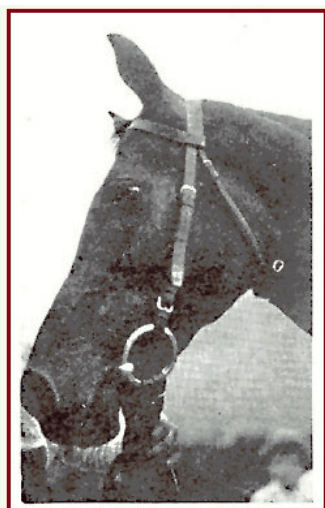
A Muniqi Strain Arabian



However, around about the time the Prophet Mohamed began spreading Islam (forcibly in many cases) to the surrounding world, a new strain of Arabian evolved. This strain, called the Muniqi or Munique, was a completely different type of Arabian. It was leggy, it was angular, it had a longer back, a long straight high set neck, an often plain head, a low set tail and dropped hindquarters. In other words, it looked nothing like the ancient Arabians. But this strain was fast, very fast, and it was also taller than the other strains. Historians believe it was produced by crossing Arabian mares with stallions from that other ancient central Asian breed, the Turkoman, in order to get more height and speed. Certainly they share many physical features.

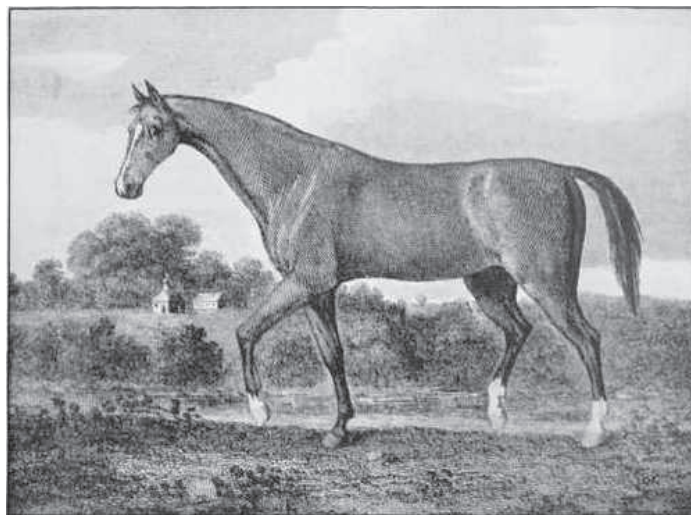
Notably, these Munique horses also looked remarkably like many of the ‘Arabian’ horses depicted in the paintings of famous early Thoroughbred stallions in England. Long legged, long bodied, long necked with a high head carriage and often-plain head, these horses towered over their handlers in a way that the smaller Arabians would not have done.

Certainly, it’s generally accepted now that the Darley Arabian, whose original name was Manak, was of the Munique strain. His most famous portraits clearly show a largish horse relative to his handler, with more similarities to a modern Akhal Teke than an Arabian. Something of his history prior to import to England is also known and confirms his Munique heritage as well as his selection as a sire specifically to add height and speed to the smaller English racing mares.



Typical Muniqi head of horses bred pure-in-the-strain.

You can see the similarity in the head between this typical Muniqi head and that of the Darley Arabian left.



A life-size painting by an anonymous Yorkshire artist dated 1709c said to have hung in the hall at Aldby along with one of Aleppo and another of Mother Neasham. The painting itself measures 9 feet 4 inches by 7 feet; from this it can be deduced that the Darley Arabian stood 15 hands high.