Al-Khamsa: The Prophet’s Mares –
Or Were They Stallions?

Hylke Hettema

Abstract

Arab(ian) horse enthusiasts perpetuate an origin legend for the breed that counts five foundational mares in relation to Islamic Prophet Muhammad. Challenging both the concept of a gender preference for mares among Bedouin and/or Arab people in the early Islamic empire as well as the popular historiography of the Arab horse as a Bedouin breed promoted by Islam and in particular its prophet, this paper contextualises Al-Khamsa (the five) as evidence of matrilineal horse breeding strategy by surveying premodern Arabic material on horses.

Keywords

Origin legends; Prophet Muhammad; Arab horse; Bedouin; al-khamsa; breeding; bloodlines; strains; Islam.

DOI: 10.22618/TP.Cheiron.20211.1.233008

CHEIRON is published by Trivent Publishing
Al-Khamsa: The Prophet’s Mares – Or Were They Stallions?
Hylke Hettema

Abstract
Arab(ian) horse enthusiasts perpetuate an origin legend for the breed that counts five foundational mares in relation to Islamic Prophet Muhammad. Challenging both the concept of a gender preference for mares among Bedouin and/or Arab people in the early Islamic empire as well as the popular historiography of the Arab horse as a Bedouin breed promoted by Islam and in particular its prophet, this paper contextualises Al-Khamsa (the five) as evidence of matrilineal horse breeding strategy by surveying premodern Arabic material on horses.

Keywords
Origin legends; Prophet Muhammad; Arab horse; Bedouin; al-khamsa; breeding; bloodlines; strains; Islam

Prophet Muhammad (570-632 CE) was overlooking a lake in the desert where dozens if not hundreds of mares were quenching their thirst after having been deprived of water the days prior to this moment. Legend has it that they were on a long journey through the sands of time. Suddenly Muhammad sounded his battle horn to signal the mares to return to him. Only five of them responded and they are said to have become his favourite mares, now known as al-khamsa or “the five.”

1. Al-Khamsa as part of the history of the Arab horse
Many variations on this tale exist in several western languages; some detail that Muhammad had been on campaign for four days without resting. When he finally halted to water the horses he sounded his horn when the horses were just meters away from the lake and only five of them would resist the urge to drink and returned to him. Other versions do not include any water or lake, instead picturing the sheikhs of famous Yemeni Bedouin tribes gifting their best mares in tribute to the Prophet. All narratives conclude that Prophet

1 Leiden Institute for Area Studies, Leiden University, the Netherlands.
4 Judith Forbis, The classic Arabian Horse (London/New York: Liveright, 1976), 74-75. For further variations see for example Austen H. Layard, Discoveries in the ruins of Niniveh and Babylon (London: John
Muhammad had five favourite mares, handpicked and named. It is said that these mares, also known as “The Prophet’s Mares,” who chose duty over sustenance, became the founders of the five most important strains representing matriarchal families in Bedouin Arab horse breeding until today. Although al-Khamsa are generally accepted to have been legendary horses, some horse enthusiasts consider them to be the actual ancestors of the modern Bedouin Arab horse. Breeders debate “[…] whether the initial Khamsa (Five) taproot strains may have in fact originally constituted by Kohailan, Saklawi, Obayan, Hadban and Hamdani – or some others. Our confidence in any such information may hinge on whether the ‘Khamsa’ were in fact five, as many would have it, or perhaps just three, […] perhaps even seven.”

Indeed, most discussion in early modern European books published for an audience with an interest in the history of the breeding tradition of horses among the Arabs, is about how many and which strains are part of al-khamsa. Italian explorer Carlo Guarmani (1828-1884) wrote his book Al Kamsa after he was commissioned to procure Arab horses of the finest blood from the Arabian deserts by Emperor Louis Napoleon II of France and King Victor Emmanuel II of Spain. A considerable amount of his report narrates details of the many dozens of strains of the horses among the Arabs and Bedouin as well as the history, hierarchy and separate qualities of the kamsat al-Mashhur (the famous five) also known as kamsat al Rasul (the five of the Messenger) of Allah. A rare account by Captain Luis Azpeitia de Moros published in 1905 lists seven mares as the private horses of Prophet Muhammad followed by the statement that he chose only five of them to be baptised as Kabael (most probably referring to the Arabic term kahyl, “a horse of high breed”) and became the source of the Arab horse breed. Not much later German traveler Carl Raswan published his own ‘strain theory’ that only three taproot strains had ever existed which were all descending from the one generic kahyl ancestor, without addressing the existence and circulation of the overwhelming amount of al-khamsa accounts. Lady Wentworth concurs with this explanation stating that “The word Thoroughbred is a direct translation of the Arabic word ‘Kehilan,’ meaning purebred all through,” and concludes that “El Khamsa (the five) is a post-Islamic invention, a pleasant but unfounded romance.”

A. Al-Khamsa through Arab vs. Bedouin eyes

Lady Wentworth’s conclusion that al-khamsa does not represent Islam however contradicts her mother’s writing on the matter. Lady Anne Blunt discusses ‘the five’ several times in her

8 Carlo Guarmani, Al Kamis and Journey to Najd , trans. Andrew Steen (Seville: Tales of the Breed, 2004), 34-38; 57-63.
diaries reporting on her time spent traveling and living in the middle east in search for what she believed where the original Arab horses. In a 1916 letter to her husband, well known poet and diplomat Wilfrid Blunt, she expresses her surprise that the Bedouin mind does not necessarily reflect Islamic doctrine as “our Berayda friend [whom she describes as true Arab but not Nomad] began about the ‘Khamsa’ at which Mutlak [her trusted Bedouin stud hand] with a smile, signed to me ‘do not say anything.’ For the ‘Five’ are Islamic of origin.”

Bedouin and Arab are often used as synonyms, especially in the early modern period when many Europeans travelled to the desert in search of the “true Arab,” which they believed were the Bedouin. But it was not just westerners that went looking for specific types of horses among the nomads that camped in the desert. Abbas Hilmi I, also known as Abbas Pasha, who ruled Egypt and Sudan (1848-1854) was an avid collector of horses from the Arabian deserts. He inherited the breeding program that was started by his grandfather Muhammad Ali (1769-1849) at the age of 23 and started accumulating more horses from various tribes across the Levant and the Arabian peninsula. In addition to acquiring horses he documented all details on the bloodlines and history of the strains, which resulted in the publication of Aṣīl al-khayl al-‘arabiyya (the original Arab horses). To obtain the information he was looking for, Bedouin were carefully interviewed about the pedigrees of their horses. Of course, al-khamsa were no exception. He describes how all the men of the Ramula tribe, around thirty at that time, were gathered and asked about al-khamsa of al-Saḥāba (the companions of the Prophet) and if they knew which strains those five horses would have represented. An old man among them answered that he learned from their “white haired men” about three strains, the other two he did not know. A similar account is given for the same question when it was asked to about forty people from the Banū Sakhr tribe; a white haired man of eighty or more years old answers that he knows a few names but seems uncertain as he concludes his report “This is what we have heard from our grandfathers. And we do not know anything else.”

The editors of the Abbas Pasha manuscript note that although it is entirely about matriarchal families and strains of Bedouin horses, al-khamsa barely surface in this work. Edward al-Dahdah kindly pointed out to me that this may be explained by the fact that the tribes being questioned here were from the Levant (on the border of today’s Syria and Jordan), whereas a legend about the Prophet perhaps would be expected to have its origins among people from the Hijāz region as that is where the spread of Islam began. The Islamic character of the legend of the Prophet’s mares has also been pointed out to us by Mutlak, Lady Anne’s Bedouin stud hand, as well as the fact that efendi al-Fayiz, the official who conducted the interviews on behalf of Abbas Pasha asked about the five mares of the Prophet’s Companions. Interestingly, Mutlak evidently believed that there was a distinct difference between Bedouin and Islamic traditions. We will now explore how the Prophet’s mares often function as evidence of the matriarchal character of the Arab and Bedouin breeding tradition.

---

13 https://issuu.com/arabian-horse-times/docs/ed-history-abpash907a
14 The extant manuscript that has been translated to English is now held at the King Abd al-‘Aziz library in Riadh, MS9960_708_36_5.
16 It may of course also be possible that the legend first started in the Levant, as many Bedouin were also Muslims. Given the fact that the accounts show they were not able to name all the strains with exact precision and the strains named during the interviews vary greatly among the various tribes, it is unlikely that the legend of the Prophet’s mares is of Levantine origin. Personal communication, April 14th, 2020.
B. The Prophet’s mares as matriarchs of the Arab horse breed

Although there are other extant origin myths for the Arab horse, al-khamṣā as the origin of matriarchal strains is often used as evidence for a special feature that sets the reproduction of the Arab horse apart from other breeds; “[…] from time immemorial the Arabs have been accustomed to trace the pedigrees of their horses solely through their dams […].”17 Most other breeding traditions focus on the sire line when discussing pedigrees.18 An example from the Dutch Warmblood industry: Sandreo x Wellington x L’ Espoir. This is the reference for a mare called Aliena JVR, her given name plus the stud name all horses from this particular breeding program are assigned. Yet among breeders, she is identified by the mentioning of just those three stallions. The first being her sire, the second the sire of her dam, the third being the sire of her dam’s dam, and so on.19 Although the reference is entirely male in appearance, breeders will understand the information they need about the dam line, as the majority of the stallions mentioned are sires of the subsequent mares in the dam line.20

A similar reference to an Arab mare is quite the opposite: for example, Bint Bint Sabāḥ of the family of Bint Sabah of the Dāhmān Shābān strain.21 Her name literally spells out her dam line: she is the daughter (bint) of the daughter of Sabāḥ (bint sabaḥ), who is the matriarch of the Bint Sabah family of the strain Dāhmān Shābān. Strains can be possessed by multiple matriarch families or “branches” and are only carried on through dams; a stallion by the same dam carries the strain of his dam, and is unable to pass it onto his offspring, which will assume the strain of their dams. This matriarchal system is used to identify horses as well as an indication for future breeding decisions, as some breeders prefer the strategy of breeding horses “pure in strain.” The complexity of the strain system initially caused western travellers to the desert to report on finding different breeds or “races” in the Orient.22 However, it puzzled them greatly that these different strains did not represent different phenotypes the way the European breeds often do, and that they were constantly crossbred with one another. Eventually, writers on the topic learned that they rather represent matriarchal families of one ‘breed and started to refer to the strain system as the ultimate proof of a unified dam line oriented breeding tradition of the Bedouin.23 After all, if the Prophet24 preferred mares, surely all Arabs/Bedouin did; “Hence they may be often heard to exclaim: ‘The head of riches is a mare that produces a mare.’ And this idea gathers strength in their eyes from it having been

18 Margaret Derry, Bred for Perfection: Shorthorn Cattle, Collies, and Arabian Horses Since 1800 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 104-5.
19 Example and explanation kindly provided by Christie Jolink, breeder and owner of Aliena JVR. Personal communication April 15th, 2020.
20 Mr. Ehab Farah pointed out to me that in the English Thoroughbred breeding tradition there are also matriarchal families, primarily because mares can produce far less offspring than stallions, therefore making it easier to remember the lineage of the offspring by the dam(line). Personal communication May 10th, 2020.
21 A mare bred by the Royal Agricultural Society in Cairo in 1930, later exported to the U.S.A. by Henry B. Babson.
22 See for example the work of Rzewuski, in which he classifies the characteristics of each race of Oriental horse and argues there is a hierarchy within these breeds, of which he states al-khamṣā are a part.
24 Words spoken by the Prophet are called traditions (ḥadith) and are collected and transmitted by many Islamic scholars since the death of Muḥammad in 632 CE. They are often cited in evidence of Islamic origins of a certain matter, in this case the preference of mares over stallions.
said by our Lord Mohammed, the messenger of Allah: ‘Give the preference to mares; their belly is a treasure, and their back a seat of honour.’

2. Islamic origins: Muḥammad’s horses

Such a proposition requires us to take a closer look at both Muḥammad’s role in the Islamic narratives on horses as well as historical accounts of his own connection to the equine. Although this saying can be found as having been said by the Prophet, it is listed as having been said by ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb in premodern books about Islamic ethics and etiquette written by Muslim jurists. These sources tell us this saying is marjūf meaning it may have been said by Muḥammad and was only narrated by Umar, but other works leave Umar out of the picture and cite it as a ḥadīth by the Prophet without any chain of narrators, causing some confusion as to who has said it. There are two possible factors that may have caused this confusion; first, Umar was a companion of the Prophet and therefore played an essential role in the transmission of knowledge about the Prophets habits and lifestyle as well as his sayings. Second, Umar became the second caliph of the Islamic Empire and thus became an important Muslim example himself. He is remembered as an expert jurist and many of his own sayings are recorded in early Islamic books concerning legal ethics and etiquette, including his advice about giving preference to mares. Numerous things are ascribed to the Prophet, often because people project ideas and beliefs of their own time onto the past. Al-Khamsa may be part of such projections as there is discussion in premodern Arabic works about the number of horses that Muḥammad is said to have owned in his life. Seventeenth-century author al-Bakhshī al-Halabī (meaning from Aleppo) dedicates a chapter to the names of the horses of the Prophet and starts by telling us that he had only seven horses instead of the often claimed fifteen as found in the work of fourteenth-century writer al-Dumyātī (meaning from Damietta). Al-Halabī advises us to read the book on animals by ḥadīth scholar al-Damīrī in which he lists the seven horses that are recorded in Islamic records to have been owned by Muḥammad by the fourteenth century. In his Kitāb Ḥayāt al-Hayawān al-Kubra (The big book of the lives of animals) al-Damīrī indeed lists the names of seven stallions. So, where are the al-khamsa‘ Five horses attributed to the Prophet can be found in the Kitāb al-khayl (Book of horses) by the ninth-century scholar Ḥishām Ibn al-Kalbī; “And the horses of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, were five horses: Līẓāq and Līḥāf and al-Murtajīẓ and al-Sakb and al-Ya’sūb.”

A. Gender and breeding horses in premodern Arabic literature

Contrary to the story of the al-khamsa, these five horses are all males. Ibn al-Kalbi does not provide us with any other information about these horses of the Prophet, even though his work is an anthology of famous Muslims from the two centuries prior. It contains the names of 175 horses that were owned or ridden by celebrated knights and sometimes very detailed information about their colour, markings, relatives and character. The majority (120) of the horses listed are males and the mares are a total of 55. Looking at this early ninth-century account we might conclude that the idea that they preferred mares was not yet in place at the time of the Prophet. However, these numbers cannot provide us with information about whether or not the breeding tradition at this point in time was matriarchal as the book by Ibn al-Kalbi does not elaborate on practical horsemanship. At the beginning of this work (which does not have any chapters) Ibn al-Kalbi shares information about the creation of the horse by Allah; the first to breed horses was Sulayman (Solomon), son of David. The offspring of David’s winged horses spread among the Arabs and the founding father of all the horses among the Arabs was Zād al-Rākib, a stallion belonging to the Aṣz tribe. Ibn al-Kalbi’s book has been called the oldest pedigree to have ever been written, because he lists the relationship between certain horses. Most of these accounts focus on the male character of breeding: “When the Banu Taghlib heard [of Zād al-Rākib], they went to them [the Aṣz tribe] and they asked the Aṣz for [Zād al-Rākib] to be given to them for breeding [their mares], and for them [Banu Taghlib] was born from Zād al-Rākib; al-Hujays, and he was better than Zād al-Rākib.” The building of the pedigree continues with Ibn al-Kalbi describing how al-Hujays sired another stallion called al-Dinārī for the Bakar Ibn Wā’il tribe who was bred to their mare Sahl. Indeed mares are not absent but they do not seem to enjoy a preference to stallions in this early Islamic work on horse genealogy: “And those horses multiplied among the Arabs and they spread [among the Arabs], and [some] of these horses gained fame [as it was] attributed to their sires and dams.”

One might be a bit confused by certain terminology such as the one referring to certain horses as banāt x (daughters of x). However, this generally refers to horses of a particular sire, for example in the description of the horses of the Prophet’s tribe (Quraysh); “Among them is al-Ward, the horse of Ḥaneza Ibn ‘Abd al-Mattalib, and he is of the daughters/offspring [banāt] of Dhi al-Uqqal from the family of A’waq.” Both Dhi al-Uqqal and A’waq are males and banāt here could be translated as daughters because naturally, one needs mares to procreate. However, the family that is mentioned is not indicative of a matriarchal system; instead, it features a male ancestor thus rendering the usage of banāt to indicate the “offspring” of that stallion. This way of providing information for a horse is similar to the example from the Dutch Warmblood industry that we have examined earlier; names of mares are absent as the system provides information about the pedigree by listing the male progenitors. Subsequently, Ibn al-Kalbi cites a poem that creates the impression that groups of horses are referred to in a female form, such as A’waqiyāt and Khubāsiyāt, but these forms are adjectives to the

36 Ibidem, 32.
37 This poem is incomplete in the edition by al- Dāman but is complete in Ibn al-Kalbi (d.809) Kitāb al-khayl, ed. Aḥmad Zāki Pāsha (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al- Mašriyya, 1924), 115.
collective *khayl* (horses). As a rule, collectives that do not have a *nomen unitatis* or refer to persons are feminine,\(^{38}\) and adjectives agree in gender with the substantive they modify.\(^{39}\) So where the Arabic language exhibits a lot of explicit grammatical gender, we cannot deduct from the text itself whether or not *A’wājjīyat* and *Khubāsiyāt* are in fact a group of female, male or mixed offspring of *A’wāj* and *Khubār*. Moreover, it does seem to point toward a patriarchal system as both *A’wāj* and *Khubās* are foundational stallions for these groups of horses.

A few centuries later, the author and court veterinarian al-Mundhir al-Bayṭār includes a chapter on the breeding of *al-‘arabiyyāt* (Arab horses, again as a female adjective) in his book on horses commissioned by Sultan al-Nāṣir (Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn 1285-1341). He explains how certain things are inheritable and others are not, such as when a horse is not sound. He advises his reader to pick a good stallion to use for breeding because “the animals take after their fathers more than they look like their mothers.”\(^{40}\) He continues to explain that it is an ancient tradition that one would keep one stallion with a number of mares and that it is crucial to keep him happy in order for him to keep covering the mares. Other than additional details as to when is the best time to mate horses and medical information on the keeping and breeding of horses, *al-Bayṭār* does not include any information on the importance of the mares and his advice on selection seems to point towards a male-oriented breeding strategy.

**B. Gender and preference in premodern Arabic literature**

It is often stated that: “The Arabs greatly prefer to ride mares rather than horses […]”\(^{41}\) “on account of their more patient endurance of fatigue, hunger, and thirst, than horses, and because they are gentler and less vicious, and never neigh when they are lying in ambush to surprise passengers.”\(^{42}\) In the Kitāb *al-Ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān al- Kubrā*, al-Damiri lists a few accounts of early Islamic times that could help us understand if there were specific preferences when it comes to the gender of a horse. As we have seen before, much of the material is centred on the Prophet and his companions as they function as role models for Muslim readers; “It has been transmitted about Khālid Ibn al-Walīd [d.642CE] that he rode nothing other than mares into attacks [fights] for their lack of neighing.”\(^{43}\) But also, “the companions [of the Prophet] loved [to ride] male horses for the battle frontlines and female horses for nightly attacks and raids.”\(^{44}\) We might deduce that some early Muslims had a personal preference of one sex over the other, and perhaps this might also explain the Hadith attributed to the Prophet about his preference of mares. Most equestrians will relate to the arguments of using a certain sex for a particular job such as the above mentioned use of mare for nightly raids because they would be silent, whereas most stallions will announce their coming when they smell other horses nearby. In al-Halabi’s book, we find another account of Muḥammad’s *Khālid Ibn al-Walīd* preferring mares but this time it is not because they do not neigh; “Khālid

---

44 Ibidem, 88.
Ibn al-Walid insisted on fighting on backs of mares because a mare would urinate while running; whereas Ibn al-Walid thinks, a stallion would not do that, rather a male horse retains urine until it causes a sort of rupture.”45 The scenario of your horse stopping to relieve itself mid-practise is well known today and is much discussed by equestrians who debate ways to train a horse to not stop to defecate while under saddle.46 While all horses may pause to relieve themselves, hormones disrupting training or even battle is a different matter. Geldings appear in al-Halabi’s for specific use, “Emasculated horses were being chosen for setting traps and exploratory groups, because they are more steadfast and patient in such contexts.”47 An anecdote showcasing gender based issues with hormones can be found in al-Damiri’s citation of the thirteenth-century Qur’anic exegete and chief judge of Damascus Taqi al-Din al-Subki (d.1355 CE). The scholar was asked if the horse was created before or after man, and whether the male or the female of the horse was created first. al-Subki replies that the horse was created only two days before man, as man was created last as the perfect creation. But the horse was “better” than inanimate creations and the best of all animals so only precedes man by a couple of days. Furthermore, he explains that it was customary to the almighty divine power (Allah) to create the most powerful the first, so naturally the male of the horse was created before the female: “The male was declared superior to the female.”48 The judge concludes that horses are no different from men, and presents the comparison with Adam’s creation preceding that of Eve, as males are stronger than females. Al-Subki then stresses that the main purpose for the horse is jihād (struggle for the cause of Allah) and that a male is preferred over a female when it comes to jihād because he is faster and more courageous. He then provides us with an anecdote that takes us to a familiar religious narrative to demonstrate that while a mare’s hormones can cause her rider serious trouble, one can also use that to your own advantage; “He [a stallion] fights alongside his rider in battle but the mare is the opposite. When she sees a stallion when she is in heat, she will abandon her rider regardless of his need for her. The fact that Gabriel rode a mare when the sea split for Moses does not invalidate the previous statement because he did so seeing that the Pharaoh was riding a stallion and he [Gabriel] intended to lure him with his mare and the Pharaoh became unable [powerless] to control the head of his stallion.”49

3. Conclusion

Although most of the Islamic narratives on the creation of the horse make use of the sexless terms ƙhayyil and faras (horse), we might conclude that the majority of the information on horses in pre modern Arabic primary sources point towards a male oriented equine tradition. While the popular story of al-Khamsa as the five mares of Prophet Muhammad is part of the assumption that Bedouin and/or Arabs maintained a preference for mares as well as a matriarchal breeding system since the rise of Islam, early Islamic Arabic literature of various

---

46 Contrary to the account given by al-Halabi, mares must also stop to urinate as seen here https://youtu.be/JnBVFGn8Xls. For discussion between equestrians on allowing a horse to stop to defecate or to train it to keep moving see https://forums.horseandhound.co.uk/threads/do-you-let-your-horse-stop-to-poop.133299/.
49 Ibidem, 39. The anecdote refers to the Crossing of the Red Sea, the escape of the Israelites led by Moses from the pursuing Egyptians in the Book of Exodus. The narrative can also be found in the Qur’ān (7:36).
genres does not support such suppositions. As we have examined, Arabic terminology on the
topic of horse breeding does not provide evidence for a matriarchal breeding system, quite
the opposite as the references to parents or ancestors of a horse invariably point towards the
male progenitor. Moreover, the discussion of five specific foundational mares or dam line
families on which the breeding of Arab horses is said to be based is absent from primary
premodern Arabic literature on horses. Claims that Muḥammad and other prominent
Muslims are said to have preferred mares appear to be suggestive of personal preferences
when contextualised by other contemporary accounts about the qualities early Muslims
attached to the specific genders, painting the stallion rather superior.

The lion’s share of the material also indicates a rather male oriented breeding tradition as
it sketches a patriarchal arrangement of the horses’ genealogy. Unsurprising, as the study of
genealogy (‘Ibn al-Nasab) was a significant part of the formation of the Arab identity following
the rise of Islam. Genealogist Hishām ibn al-Kalbī recorded both the genealogy for the Arabs
and the auxiliary horse, naturally including Ismail, the foundational father of the Arabs, who
was the first to ride horses. The Islamic genealogical system is chiefly patriarchal and it has
been suggested that prior to the rise of Islam, tribal organisation was matrilineal based on the
fact that some clans carry feminine names. This raises questions about gender in both pre-
Islamic and Islamic tribal societies as well as in Bedouin or nomadic life within the Arabic-
speaking territories throughout history. Could al-Khamsa be evidence of pre-Islamic custom
of female oriented identification and perhaps even breeding of horses? Recent research
however has established that at least one of the strains that is said to be included in al-Khamsa,
Daḥmān Shāhwan, traces back to no earlier than the 13th century. Although it is attested that
the strain refers to an individual mare and her female offspring that carries on the strain, it is
named after Shāhwan, a Bedouin tribal and military leader from the region of al-Juwf which is
a governorate in the north of current-day Yemen. When, where and why exactly the use of
matrilineal strains became popular among breeders of horses in the Arabic speaking world is
yet to be studied, but as we have seen the strain system has been widespread since at least the
end of the 18th century. The legend of al-Khamsa provides a vital historical narrative to many
preservation breeders who make use of the strain system for breeding Arab horses today and
what would be better than to have the Prophet’s Mares as foundation to a current herd – or
were they stallions?

References

Primary Sources

France, Arabe 2813.

Secondary Sources

of the Breed, 2002.


Anthropology 8:4 (1952), 480.
52 Edouard al-Dahdah, “The Three Voices of Shahwan” in Ansata Hjaži: Born to Rule, ed. Judith Forbis,
Al-Khamsa: The Prophet’s Mares – Or Were They Stallions?


