

The Stallions That Survived

How the Surviving Sires of World War II Carried the Old Polish Arabian into the Future

When war destroys a culture of horse breeding, it does not destroy all things equally. Buildings may be rebuilt. Records may be reconstructed. Institutions may be renamed and reassembled. But the living continuity of a breed survives only if certain horses survive with it. After the Second World War, the Polish Arabian did not begin again from theory, nostalgia, or paperwork alone. It began again from flesh and blood: from mares recovered after evacuation and dispersal, and from a handful of stallions whose survival made the rebuilding of Poland's Arabian heritage something more than a sentimental hope.

That is why the surviving stallions matter so profoundly. They were not simply breeding animals that happened to be available in a depleted postwar herd. They were living bridges between the old world and the new one. In them remained not only pedigree, but type, constitution, breeding potency, and the accumulated judgment of the prewar Polish program. Without them, postwar Poland might still have possessed Arabians. But it would have possessed far less continuity with the deeper inheritance that had made the Polish Arabian distinct.

The wartime record shows just how narrow that continuity became. Historical accounts of the Janów horses' wartime wanderings state that, after the evacuations and losses of the war, 39 Janów mares, 12 foals, and three stallions — Amurath Sahib, Wielki Szlem, and Witra — returned to Poland. Andrzej Krzyształowicz accompanied the horses through their 1944 evacuation and their long wartime aftermath until 1947. A national breeding inheritance that had taken generations to form had, in one vital sense, narrowed to a handful of remnants.

Yet even this remaining treasure was not simple. The stallions who came back did not contribute in identical ways, nor were they remembered with equal emphasis. Some became legends in public memory. Some proved themselves most deeply through daughters. Some branches flourished abroad more than at home. Some were promoted, while others, no less significant genetically, were absorbed more quietly into the structure of the breed. The surviving sires did not merely rebuild Poland's Arabian horse; they did so unevenly, and that unevenness helps explain much about the Polish Arabian that followed.

At the center of the public legend stood the sons of Ofir. Contemporary and later accounts alike place Witra, Wielki Szlem, and Wite II among Ofir's most celebrated sons, and one source notes that Stanisław Pohoski valued Kuhailan type especially highly and placed Witra and Wielki Szlem ahead of Wite II. Their prestige did not arise only from later romance. They were already seen as extraordinary products of the prewar Polish program.

Their wartime ordeal only deepened that stature. During the bombing of Dresden in February 1945, the Janów groom Jan Ziniewicz is remembered for saving Witra■ and Wielki Szlem, holding their lead ropes through the inferno while many other horses perished. They became, in effect, living proof that some part of the prewar Polish Arabian had survived the fire.

Of the two, Witra■ became perhaps the more visibly radiant in long-term public memory. Through descendants such as Celebes and Bask, his branch helped announce the restored Polish Arabian to the wider world. Bask in particular became one of the most internationally famous Polish-bred Arabians of the twentieth century, and through him Witra■'s influence moved far beyond Poland's borders.

Wielki Szlem, by contrast, seems to embody a somewhat different kind of lasting power. He is tied historically to Czort, who in turn became sire of El Paso, one of the most famous Polish Arabians of the modern era. If Witra■ helped project brilliance and attraction, Wielki Szlem helped secure depth, seriousness, and enduring class within the breed's later architecture.

And then there was Amurath Sahib.

If the sons of Ofir often dominate the romantic imagination of postwar Polish breeding, Amurath Sahib stands as a reminder that public legend and actual genetic consequence are not always identical. He was one of the three great stallions who returned to Poland with the Janów remnant after the war, and later evaluations of his legacy emphasize that his stamina also helped him survive the wartime evacuation westward into Germany. During the war he also served mares at private studs and sired daughters whose later influence became enormous. He was not simply a survivor. He was a genetic force during the very years when continuity was most endangered.

Yet his place in memory has always been somewhat more complex than that of Ofir's sons. One later historical article says that in purebred Arabian breeding Witra■ was preferred over Amurath Sahib, partly because Witra■ was seen as giving horses closer to the "pure desert type," while Amurath Sahib's offspring were viewed as already more shaped by human selection and stud culture. Whether one accepts that language fully or not, it captures a real historical tension: Amurath Sahib was valued, but not always idealized in exactly the same way.

Whatever individual breeders may have meant by "desert type," the older sire lines often showed a remarkable continuity of inherited phenotype. In the case of Bairactar and his descendants, one can trace not merely pedigree, but a recurring physiological and visual identity — a resemblance so persistent that it suggests more than fashion or imagination. It suggests a type carried forward with unusual fidelity.

That difference helps explain why his male line did not acquire the same immediate mythic aura within Poland, even though his actual influence was immense. A tribute to Ignacy Jaworowski states bluntly that the influence of Amurath Sahib in Polish breeding cannot be

overemphasized and calls him the greatest broodmare sire of all time in terms of genotypic influence on phenotype. That is an extraordinary judgment, and it points to the heart of his significance. Amurath Sahib's deepest empire was built not only through headline sons, but through daughters and the broodmare foundation of the postwar breed.

This is where the contrast with the Ofir branch becomes especially revealing. The Ofir sons offered Poland a powerful public narrative: wartime ordeal, dramatic survival, clear male-line prestige, and later internationally famous descendants. Amurath Sahib, by contrast, often worked more quietly, but in some ways more deeply. His daughters and daughter families became part of the internal architecture of the Polish Arabian. Among the mares associated with his legacy were the kinds of producers through whom whole breeding populations are shaped from within rather than merely advertised from above. One of his biological sons was even attributed and registered as being the offspring of another stallion, taking Amurath Sahib completely out of the equation and the pedigree of one of the most successful stallions in the U.S.

His sons tell a complicated story as well. Gwarny and Arax were the two most important names usually mentioned. But the later history of Arax shows how unevenly the branch developed between countries. One source notes that Arax was sparsely used in Poland and sold to Russia in 1958, where he was valued more highly and founded an important dynasty through descendants such as Nabeg, Tallin, Wojslaw and Menes. In that sense, part of Amurath Sahib's unrealized or under-promoted power in Poland was not a matter of lack, but of choice and circumstance.

There was also Bad Afas, a name less mythologized in popular retellings but too important to omit from a serious account. The postwar record states that at Nowy Dwór a shelter was found for the stud farm saved by the family of Józef Tyszkowski, including 25 broodmares and the stallion Bad Afas 1940. From that postwar nucleus came Abu Afas in 1947, later sire of Comet, whose progeny achieved major success in the United States and Sweden. So while Bad Afas is not usually placed in the same legendary frame as Witra■, Wielki Szlem, and Amurath Sahib, he belongs firmly among the stallions through whom the breed's postwar reconstruction was carried forward.

Even Wite■ II, who did not return to Poland, belongs in the emotional landscape of this story because his fate reveals the bifurcation of the postwar Polish inheritance. He survived the war but went west and ultimately to the United States, where he became one of the most important Polish stallions in American breeding. His story shows that the survival of the Polish Arabian after World War II was not only a matter of return. It was also a matter of dispersal. Some of Poland's living inheritance came home; some of it seeded the future abroad.

All of this helps explain why the surviving stallions should not be remembered merely as famous names in pedigrees. They were the last concentrated carriers of a damaged world. Through Witra■, the restored Polish program retained brilliance, attraction, and international

magnetism. Through Wielki Szlem, it retained depth and durable class. Through Amurath Sahib, it retained one of the profound inner forces of the breed — a broodmare influence so far-reaching that later breeders could hardly speak of phenotype without encountering his legacy. Through Bad Afas, the immediate postwar rebuilding at Nowy Dwór gained another living pillar. Through Arax, even if incompletely used in Poland, the older Bairactar inheritance found new flowering beyond Poland's borders. And through Witeń II, the wartime diaspora itself became part of the breed's story.

What makes this history so moving is that none of it was guaranteed. These stallions were not preserved in calm continuity by an unbroken and protected national program. They survived bombing, evacuation, political collapse, and postwar reorganization. Some returned to a homeland radically changed from the one that had bred them. Some did not return at all. Some were exalted. Some were underestimated. Yet together they carried enough of the old Polish Arabian forward to make later rebuilding more than an exercise in reconstruction. They made it an act of living inheritance.

Yet here, too, honesty is required. The survival of these stallions did not guarantee the full preservation of everything they represented. Blood can survive while type is softened. Names can remain while architecture changes. A pedigree can continue to read as Polish long after the old-world coherence of the heritage Polish horse has begun to thin. To say this is not to deny the worth, beauty, or appeal of many later "Pure Polish" Arabians. It is simply to acknowledge that the stallions who survived the war carried more than registry identity. They carried a particular inheritance of form, balance, constitution, and breeding logic — and that inheritance was not always preserved intact in every later branch.

That is why their legacy matters so deeply to preservation efforts today. Breeds are not saved only by names in stud books. They are saved by the survival — and the continued recognition — of actual qualities capable of transmission. The stallions that came back from war carried more than blood. They carried memory, type, possibility, and the last concentrated authority of a prewar breeding world that might otherwise have disappeared entirely.

And that is where their story becomes more than heroic. It becomes instructive. To honor these stallions fully is not only to repeat their names with reverence, but to understand what, exactly, they preserved — and what was later amplified, softened, redirected, or lost. Their survival was miraculous. But preservation, in its fullest sense, asks more than gratitude for survival alone. It asks discernment. It asks that we distinguish between continuity of pedigree and continuity of essence. Only then can the old Polish Arabian remain something more than a memory of what once came back from the fire.

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