

Travels: Israel, Sinai, Palestine

Part 2

Gail Goodman

Back on the bus to Haifa. The route from Jerusalem to Haifa goes first towards the coast, Tel-Aviv, then heads north, along the Mediterranean. All the sea side towns which, when I lived in Israel in the 1960s and 70s were small communities, now form the silicon valley of Israel, so I have been told. There certainly was tremendous development and the drive was beautiful. The greens and blues and golds were those of the impressionist's palette. As the sun was setting, the bus arrived in Haifa; at about eight o'clock, after a mere three hour ride, I knocked on Igal Sella's apartment door. I really had no idea what to expect, though we had been in contact since 1976. As the door opened, there I was, at last, face to face with Igal Sella, and he with me!



Igal Sella in the 1970s with a yearling Lobo x Ruah pup.

After greetings, arrangements for another youth hostel night, and calls to my next contact, who I had not been able to get a hold of but who, it turned out, was an old friend of Igal's, we sat down, at last, to talk about Saluqis. I was living another dream, meeting the breeder of Dar and Div, and finally learning how he got their parents and how he came to know Salim Ibn Jahzi. I could hear about the background of my own Saluqis, and the experiences of the man who had bred them for me so long ago. As fate and a case of "nerves" would have it, Igal Sella being my first "formal" interview, I couldn't figure out how to work the tape recorder! After hitting it a couple of times, fiddling with the batteries, I gave up and resorted to my notebook.

I will share with you the recollections of Igal Sella as he shared them with me. First we looked through his slide collection, all that remains from his many trips into Sinai. Then, after dinner, we sat down again and I asked him some questions and tried to record in my notes as much as possible. The next day, with his grandson, we drove to the town of Nazareth, where we met both Arab and Israeli contacts. During the drive I finally got my tape recorder to work, so, I have transcribed parts of our conversation. Many of Igal Sella's slides illustrate this series.

Also from the period of the 1940s through the 1970s are photographs that were shared with me by Dr. Zafra Sirik, director of the Sighthound Section of the Israel Kennel Club. The photographs from the 1940s are from unknown sources. The photographs of Tarabin Bedouin in Sinai in 1970 were taken by Israeli photographer, Eli Chen.

Before I start to share the material I collected from Israeli and Arab people who were either involved with the breed in the past, or who were and remain involved with Saluqis today, a moments

reflection on the history of Salukis in the West, particularly England and the United States, will be useful. Though my story is very much about the Saluki roots of my own hounds, it is also very much about the roots of the breed in general. According to John Boutflower, writing in the early 1990s (1), there were 187 Salukis imported from the Middle East that were registered with the Kennel Club of England. Of those, only 45 have living descendants in England. Catherine Kuhl and Carlene Kuhl wrote that going through the documentation available on the American Saluki, "a group of 28 'original imports' can be identified" (2).

The specific countries that these English and American Salukis were imported from, as well as extensive anecdotal, historical, and pedigree information about these hounds is authoritatively covered in *The Saluqi: Coursing Hound of the East* by the writers already mentioned, and June Appleby-Burt. The imports came from Egypt (which before the construction of the Suez Canal, was an unbroken landmass with the Sinai Peninsula), Palestine (now Israel and Palestine), Syria, Jordan, and Iraq. There are Salukis with names indicating that they came from Bahrain, others were supposedly gifts from Persian/ Iranian notables. The Turks ruled the region for several hundred years, so certainly Salukis went from Turkey everywhere and from everywhere to Turkey. Sinai Salukis in the recent past, and probably for centuries, were interbred with Salukis traveling from Saudi Arabia with the caravans, some remaining in Sinai, some being bred to the Salukis of the Sinai Bedouin then continuing on with their own tribes into Egypt.

Helen Baker's *Saluki Quarterly* interview (Spring 1989, pp. 34-46) reminded me of the particular importance of the region I visited when she was discussing the origins of the Knightellington bloodline, an English kennel which now spans three "human" generations: the founder of the line, in the early 1930s, Lady Gardner, her daughter, Helen Baker, and her daughter, Rosemary Lewis. The Knightellingtons played an important role in the development of several influential American kennels. When asked about their "original stock", Helen Baker replied that the person they got their original ones from was a matron in a hospital. "She was out in Nabloos where the Palestinians were having problems. ...She had brought some back and my mother liked hers, so we started with these and have carried on ever since."

Commenting further on the early history of the breed in England, Helen Baker reflected on the dogs brought in by army people and how these were bred to Salukis brought in by others, and this is how the breed took hold, with the eventual formation of the Saluki Club in 1923. She commented that General Lance brought in a lot of dogs, "his were bigger and came from Syria, not from Palestine, and then there was the honorable Florence Amherst...she was sort of keen on the Middle East as it was then and spent an awful lot of time in Saudi Arabia and Arabia and probably Iraq as well. She brought some back and bred over here quite a bit". The original Amherstia Salukis were reported to have come from Egypt, and Sinai was part of Egypt and is again.

Though more than a century has passed since the first recorded Saluki imports into the West, the Sinai Bedouin informants I met were in their 80s and the younger people remembered well what their fathers had taught them. All of the people who shared stories with me were immersed in the region and culture where the Saluqi evolved. Some were horsemen; all spoke Arabic. I found everyone interesting, some information fascinating, some memories so beautiful that I was deeply touched. I will now try to share a bit of what I heard and saw.

Conversations with Igal Sella, August 1-2, 1999

While looking through the slide collection before dinner.....

The slides were taken in the southern Sinai, during trips made from 1968 through 1975. Igal Sella traveled in the region from the monastery of Santa Caterina, in the interior, to the coast, from Sharm El

Sheikh at the bottom of the Peninsula, to Taba, just south of Eilat. He remembered seven or eight main Tribes or family groups, the Tarabin, Muzeina, Jabaliyah being some of the major groups. These people were camel people and smugglers.



Ruah Tarabin 1970s. Photo: Igal Sella



Ruah Tarabin with her puppies. Israel, 1970s. Photo: Igal Sella

When asked about the origins of the Sinai Saluqi, he reflected and offered these comments:

The Saluqis of Sinai came from many sources---Sinai is only a spot, a needle between North Africa and the Indian deserts. In any area with a commercial connection with the Middle East, with trade, the dogs have spread, from as long ago as 6000 years before Christ. In Turkey, the dogs are related very much to the modern dogs. All dogs are from the same origins, as far as I understand, and all through history man has brought them from place to place. Ibn Jahzi told me that Ruah Tarabin, for example, was the daughter of a bitch that came with a camel caravan from Saudi Arabia.

In Sinai the dogs are not a homogeneous group due to the movement from east to west and from west to east. Even the Tarabin are just barely "local", only three or four hundred years in Sinai; four

When he was in Sinai in 1956, Bedouin life was for the most part "traditional". They still used camels as their major transportation and caravans were still common. Before WW I game was plentiful. By 1967 cars and jeeps were beginning to replace the camel and he felt that what they were seeing was the transition from the traditional way of life, which included hunting with Saluqis, to a more modern life, where the use of long distance rifles was accelerating the disappearance of game. By 1967, Sella felt that hunting was no longer an everyday activity for sustenance. He felt that he was privileged to have witnessed the tradition of hunting with Saluqis before it gave way entirely to the modern life. The Bedouin hunted hare, gazelle, and ibex with Saluqis.



Palestine, 1945. photo courtesy of Z. Sirik.

hundred years is not actually a long time in the Middle East. The Saluqis in Sinai are ten times more ancient than the current human residents.....we know it from carvings.

Most of Sinai is a tough desert and without the help of man, dogs cannot live there. Once the Sinai Bedouin had to depend on the small number of local wells and water sources, but after 1967, Israeli technology enabled them to drill for water everywhere, which caused a revolution in the amount of agriculture. Today there are more and more palms, for example, which depend on pumped water. It is believed that there is an enormous underground water source in Wadi Firan, but it's very deep.

, the goat's meat and milk were very important, and the Saluqi was used, maybe once a week, to hunt gazelle, which provided a nice addition to the family diet. Today, due to hunting with rifles, there is little game, and hunting for the pot is too much effort. With the disappearance of game, the Saluqi has no use.

After dinner, then during the drive the following day from Haifa to the city of Nazareth, our conversation continued, with Igal Sella reflecting on his early memories of Salukis and other topics:

The first Saluqi I saw was in Hulda, a kibbutz near Rehovot, south of Tel Aviv, in 1945.....not in Sinai. The Sheikhs came to Hulda because there was an excellent horse there....the Arabs had Arabians, but they wanted to use the English thoroughbred for speed. One of the Sheikhs came with a completely black Saluqi, a smooth bitch.....from Sidoon, not from Hulda.....Sidoon was a small village near Ramleh that does not exist anymore.



Dhirri prized by the Sinai Bedouin for the ability to bring down ibex. photo: Igal Sella



Tarabin Bedouin Saluqis, Ayn Hodra, Sinai, 1975. photos: Igal Sella

This Saluqi made no particular impression on me....I was a fifteen year old boy....but I do remember thinking that she was something completely different from all of the other dogs and that she was used for hunting.

The next time I saw Saluqis was from a distance, in Sinai, in 1956 but I didn't have time to stay and watch. Only in 1968, when I started learning in Sinai as a guide did I have time to pay attention to the dogs. In Sinai, for example, I saw no completely black Saluqis and only a few that were partly black. Most, ninety-five percent, were very pale, white or reddish or gray; very few were partly black. The first quality that struck me was their unique shape and their movement.

What do you mean?

For example, most Saluqis, at medium speed, walking or trotting, most move with the head not higher than the body and many times **lower** compared with the back. I didn't pay attention to other dogs but this is the way the desert Saluqi moves. Also, there is something different about how the Saluqi raises and puts the

legs compared to the Canaani or others...the actual movement of the leg is very light.

The closest animal to the Saluqi for movement is the cheetah, but the cheetah's body cooling system does not allow for long distance running. Otherwise, I think the Saluqi is cheetah-like. I didn't actually see Saluqis hunting in Sinai; I was only told about how they worked.

The Bedouin divided Saluqis into two main groups: heavy ones for ibex, lighter ones for gazelle and hare. The slide of the gray and white one, this one could get an ibex alone. It may not look like a perfect Saluqi but it was an extremely valuable one.

The Sinai Bedouin have their own ideas about "purebred". You can identify the Saluqis apart from other dogs, but they didn't mate only Saluqi to Saluqi. Another dog may have mated with a Saluqi bitch; the pups may be good looking, good hunters, and to them, a Saluqi but to us, not a "pure" Saluqi. By "other dogs" I mean all levels of mixtures, all varieties of Saluqis and all varieties of Canaani or camp dogs.

Why didn't they all become camp dogs? Well, at some point they must have watched what they were doing. [For specific information on how matings were monitored and unwanted breedings prevented refer to C. Bailey's chapter, Bedouin Saluqi-Lore in Sinai, pp.247-255, and Ali Miguel's section, Saluqis in Morocco, pp.308-317 in *The Saluqi: Coursing Hound of the East*.] The first concern will always be for how the dog can survive, how the dog can hunt...looks did not matter.

How did you get Ruah Tarabin?

After I established personal relations with Salim Ibn Jahzi, I dared to ask him to arrange for me to have a Saluqi. He said, "You can take this one." This was Ruah; she was very old, maybe eight. By that time she had already had a few litters. The poor conditions, the lack of food, it is not every year that the bitch has a litter, like the women, not every year.

Later on I brought one of the new puppies to him and asked him for another bitch. My direction was to have more than one blood source. I asked him for a pure white-feathered Saluqi that belonged to some of his neighbors. He sent someone with me to the neighbor and I got the bitch. I had her only a short time when I decided that she was familiar enough with our home and I left her loose; until this day she was on a leash all the time. I asked my wife, Ester, to release the dog after I had been gone for an hour or so. I was riding my bicycle to Rosh HaNikra, about forty kilometers from our home. As soon as Ester released her, she disappeared. Six months later we found her dead half way between Rosh HaNikra and our home; she had been struck by a car going after me. I'm sure of it.

Ruah died from complications from her last litter; only one pup survived, a dark one. Talking about the Saluqi's ability to follow scent reminds me of something that bitch did. She was crazy....I don't know why. All of our dogs were trained to stay in the jeep. They were not allowed to leave the jeep, off lead.....they just stayed there. One time I went to visit a friend in the hospital and I left her in the jeep in the parking place. Well, after a short while she left the jeep and came looking for me into the huge hospital. I was sitting beside my friend in his room, and here she came and sat down beside me! It was amazing because it shows their ability to scent and get the right person's smell among hundreds of people and medical odors.

How did you meet Salim Ibn Jahzi?

Occasionally we met....we were traveling along Wadi Watir and Ayn Furtaga was a good place for a break.



On one occasion, he came to me, as the leader of the group, and asked me for medicine for his daughter....she was so weak, she was terribly ill with an enormous abscess on her chest. Something that made it more serious was that they had put a hot iron on the wound and brought more damage. The doctor with us said that if she would not be treated properly, she could die from this. I don't know the exact process, but the doctor cleaned her wound and gave her antibiotics.

When we came the next time, Salim ran to meet us and he told me that the child was absolutely well. That was the beginning. I met him on many occasions during my travels.

What memories do you have of your early Saluqis?

Well, Ruah was extremely smart. When I brought her to Rita to examine for her registration, I entered Rita's home and before even saying *shalom*, she said, "Where is the dog?" I said, "In the jeep." "Free with no one?" "Yes, what's the problem?" Rita said, "Saluqis are not obeying dogs, it can't be, you cannot leave the dog in the jeep with nobody!" "If so, I have news for you...." It took me only a week or so to train Ruah not to leave the jeep and all of my Saluqis, sooner or later, learned this.

It seemed very important to the Sinai Bedouin that the dogs are obedient, that you can train them because two people who really knew the dogs commented on this. One said, "Dogs are smart, they're like people, you can teach them many things and they will remember, but they can't talk." Then, the other man said that the dhirri is more obedient than the salag and this was good. Your attitude seems very like the Bedouin.

Well, in a way Saluqis are more dependent on the owner....it is dependent on what you want to get

from the dog.....the training. For me, for example, being loyal to my orders was very, very important. The first order was stay in the jeep. Only one dog, the wild one I told you about, it took me a long time to get this behavior form her. But the others, like Ruah, maybe Ruah was the leader and it was easier to get results when Ruah was the example.

Ruah had three litters, all sired by Lobo. Lobo was brought by someone from Jordan, I don't actually know who, someone who worked for the *shabak*, the Jewish intelligence. I had told a friend of mine that I was looking for Saluqis among the Bedouin, and he told me about this one, and I don't remember the exact connections, how it came, but one day I was told, the dog is yours and you can get him.



Lobo, Israel, 1970s. photo: Igal Sella



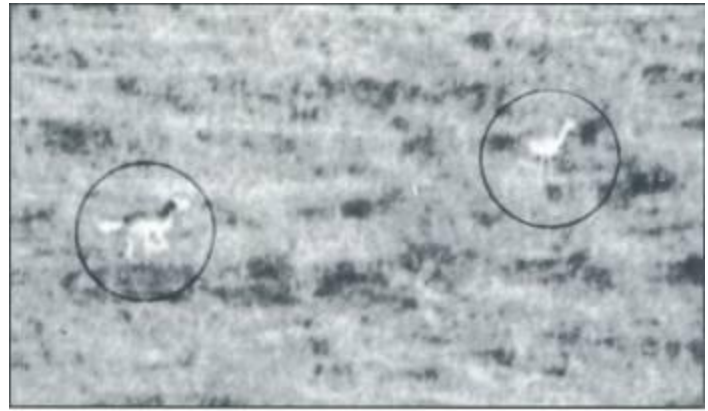
Tarabin Bedouin girls with their Saluqi. Sinai, 1970. photo: Eli Chen



Blanca Tarabin -The Galil 1970s.



*Blanca Tarabin (Lobo x Ruah) 1970s, Israel
photos: Igal Sella*



Saluqi chasing a gazelle, Israel, 1970s. photo: Igal Sella

Lobo was not pretty and not good, he was medium nice, medium good, but he was quite a good hunter. He was an obedient dog and very sensitive to other animals [had excellent instincts for hunting]. He was quite tall, about ten centimeters taller than Ruah and longer bodied; Ruah was small and quite square. He was taller and longer than her but he was light in body. Ruah was more muscular compared to him, of course, as a female to a male, but she was definitely more muscular than Lobo, even though he was a male. He wasn't as deep chested as Ruah. Ruah was a better Saluqi than Lobo.

Ruah reacted like lightning, not in starting to run, but she was alert to everything happening in her vicinity....in sight and hearing, she was immediate. Lobo was more laid back, somewhat slower in his reactions but he could run very long distances and he was faster than Ruah.

I don't know if Ruah's age affected her speed. She ran not fast but far....Blanka [Lobo x Ruah] was much faster than Ruah. I'm not sure that Ruah was less fast because of the age...I'm not sure. I don't know if I agree with you that bitches lose their speed before dogs...Blanka, if to take this as an example, kept up her speed to a very late age at a very high speed, very good reactions, and not less long distances at high speed.

When you say long distances at high speed, what did you try to hunt in Israel?

I tried to cooperate with the Nature Reserve Authority and keep gazelle out of particular areas in the heights of the Tabor and the heights of the Golan using Saluqis. Not kill the gazelle, just chase them out of the area. I had one bitch, she was so impressive, she hunted for six hours in thirty-three degrees centigrade.....all day she ran.....sometimes 50 kilometers per hour, sometimes 60, 20, 30....all day she worked. And, when we decided to leave the area, I told her to get in the jeep, and I poured water. She drank only a quarter of a liter....she would have run more.

It wasn't an actual hunting....the intention was to keep the gazelle out of the area. I didn't bring the





plateaus of the Negev which are covered with flint...

dogs to a situation of having a chance to kill...it was not allowed according to the Nature Reserve and there was no sense to do something against them.

Once, in the Negev, we hunted for six hours with a Sinai Saluqi....she was one of the heaviest [substantial], a very deep chest, very, very deep, the abdomen, tuck-up was very small, very narrow, the back was wide....the whole structure of this animal was a very heavy Saluqi, even the skull, the backskull was quite broad.

She was a very small one, not tall, as small as Ruah but much stronger. The capacity of the muscles was much stronger than Ruah. *Where was she from? You had her?*

Well, over the years I became very famous among the Bedouin because I didn't only take dogs from them, I from time to time came to bring dogs from my litters to Salim or to another and I became famous among them as the one who is truly keeping Saluqis. And later on, when I came to somebody who has a good dog, and I ask him, generally the Bedouin will let me take it and I keep my promise to bring them back one.

This one I saw somewhere in Ayn Hodra [Sinai], I don't remember exactly. She was a dark one, brown-gray. The most impressive characteristic of this dog was keeping on for high speed for long distances. I told you, the most impressive experience was the height of the Sahar, this bitch kept running all day.....not going, *running*, all during the day. When we decided to leave the area.....she didn't have water all the day, she drank....she didn't finish the bowl. *She may have been too exhausted.*

No, not at all, she was not exhausted. No, I am quite sure if I would let her run more, she would do it. *Is that the time her legs were all bloody?*

No, that was another story, of the plateaus of the Negev which are covered with flint.....

This conversation ended as we Nazareth and began to look for a we could call Nasser Darawashe meet his brother, Rashid, who Arabian horses and who lives in Iksaal.

Neither Igal Sella's I had ever visited Nazareth, so, it for both of us. Though the stench at the bottom of the hill we were pay phone, just outside the oldest overwhelming, the city seems to be expanding like all the other cities in Israel; new construction bursts from all the surrounding hilltops and down the sides of the hills. The narrow, winding streets of the old city seem entirely too small for the modern human and vehicle traffic, which forms unbroken lines encircling the city center. Parking is permitted in any spot, at any angle one can insert a car....so, the first available space we found, Igal inserted his car and we made our way towards the building housing the law practice of Nasser's father. The



Div & Dar Tarabin

entered the city of public phone so that who would take us to breeds Saluqis and the nearby village of

grandson, Itamar, nor was a new experience from the piles of trash standing on to use the part of the city, was growing and

office overlooks the main square, the main church, and Nasser was watching for us at the window. Even I noted that tourists were like apples in an orange basket, and sure enough, I heard “Gail?” called from above (fitting for the holy place) and there was Nasser, waving to us.

I had heard so much about Nasser and his family that it was exciting to meet him in person. I had been told that he is articulate and fluent in Hebrew, English, and Arabic, and that he is “old” for his years. During one of our phone conversations, trying to arrange my visit before he left for the States for a year or so to work with Arabian horses, he told me that he had finished his law studies and passed the Israeli Bar Exam (or whatever the equivalent is called in Israel). But I couldn’t possibly have anticipated his warmth and charm.....they were very real, very Arab, and very gracious. It felt more like a reunion than meeting a stranger.

We climbed an ancient stone stairway into an equally ancient building, a relic from earlier colonial regimes. All the rooms were empty, with paint and wallpaper peeling, except for the single office of Nasser’s father, who had occupied this room for his whole career, spanning almost fifty years. It was fascinating to listen to and observe this young man move not only between languages, but between cultures, as he ordered tea and soda pop, and talked about Saluqis and the Arabic language. The first interchange came up over the sense of smell with Saluqis, how well they use their noses hunting and the meaning of the word “div”.

Igal: The sense of smell in a few Saluqis is excellent, but not so far like you see with golden retrievers or pointers....not so good, but it works.

Nasser: I see them, they move around the area a lot, they look, they use their sense of smell a lot, but, essentially, the moment they make eye contact, our Saluqis, that is.....

Gail: It’s excellent on the Tarabins. Some of them in a litter use their noses more than others....Div was excellent, Dar Tarabin didn’t use his nose.

Nasser: What’s called Div? What does it mean?

Gail: I don’t know....you’ll have to ask Igal. Div or Dib?

Igal: *Dib*

Nasser: *Deeb* is a wolf.

Igal: *Dib* is a bear.

Nasser: *Dib* is a bear, *Deeb* is a wolf.

Gail: She was *Dib* or *Deeb*? So, what was she?

Igal: *Dib*, a bear.

Gail: She wasn’t molasses? *Dib* in Arabic is also molasses, brown sugar....

Nasser: No, *dibbs*.....*dibbs* is brown sugar.

Igal: *Dib*, a bear....I had to give a name, what does it matter?

Nasser: OK....we must go to see the horses, Itamar can’t wait.

So, we went down the ancient stairway, past the ancient church to the car, parked precariously, but apparently quite safely, right on the main street of the old city. We all squeezed in and were off to Kfar Iksaal.

Notes

- 1) John Boutflower, The Effect of Imported Dogs from the Middle East on Saluki Coursing in Great Britain, in *The Saluqi: Coursing Hound of the East*, edited by Gail Goodman, Midbar Inc., Apache Junction, AZ, 1995, pp. 383-388.
- 2) Catherine Kuhl and Carlene Kuhl, Eastern Influences on the American Saluki, in *The Saluqi: Coursing Hound of the East*, op.cit., pp. 425-554.