

In her lecture entitled “Bedouin Tradition and its Relevance Today”, Cynthia Culbertson viewed traditions in horse breeding through the earliest literary references of the Arabs. As part of her talk, she explored the strong beliefs of care and welfare for the horse as illustrated by pre-Islamic poetry, giving multiple examples, many of which were nearly 500 years old. In that poetry the importance of properly caring for Arabian horses, even if it meant less for the horse’s human owners, was stressed. Several examples were also given where those who did not take proper care of their horses were chastised by others. Cynthia further discussed the Bedouin tradition of never hitting horses, but only using words or gestures to train them, while reminding the audience that the Bedouin had one of the most successful horse cultures in human history using this philosophy.

She then referred to the modern show world where the popularity of the “hard stand up” has promoted a culture of abuse. She asked the audience what how she thought the Bedouin of centuries past would react if they observed a show horse today being presented.

To emphasize this, she recited a poem she had written in the style of the pre-Islamic Bedouin poetry, but from the current perspective of a modern show trainer to his horse:

O Noble Stallion!
How beautiful you are,
with your eyes and muzzle darkened by makeup,
Your hair shorn by clippers.
How brave you are, what courage!
To stand before me, frozen in place,
with fear in your heart of my chain and my whip.
You tremble in obedience to my commands.
Yet, still, you reach for me, stretching your neck,
your ears alert to the possibility of punishment.
And when we are done,
you accept my token pat upon your neck.
I rejoice!
Your suffering has brought your owner another prize.