

ORIENTALISM

and the Arabian Horse

Part II

text by: Judith Wich-Wenning

Victor Adam

Paris 1801 – 1866 Viroflay

The Arabian horse was – and still is – a popular subject for artists. One of the true masters in this field was the French Victor Adam. He developed excellence in immortalizing the beauty of the Arabian horse on paper. Up to this day, he is ranking as one of the very best artists in this branch.

Victor Adam was born in Paris in the year 1801. He was the son of the esteemed engraver Jean Adam, who gave him his first drawing lessons. Already at the age of 13, Victor Adam entered the French academy “École des Beaux Arts”. Here he studied for four years. At the same time, Victor Adam learned also in the ateliers of Meynier and Régnault.

When Victor Adam was 18 years old, he debuted in public with his work. In 1819 he exhibited “Herminia succouring Tancred”. Almost immediately afterwards, he received the commission to paint various subjects for the Museum at Versailles. In the following years, he regularly showed his paintings at the Salons. His great artistic talent and especially his unusual gift for drawing met much recognition from the public. At the Paris Salons he was awarded a gold medal in 1824, a second class medal in 1836, besides several more from Lille, Douai and other cities. After exhibiting numerous important paintings, he retired from publicity in 1838. When he started to show again his work in 1846, he

restricted himself to lithography. Victor Adam proved to be an expert in this branch of art. Victor Adam left a huge opus of almost 8000 prints. Despite his impressive paintings, his works in oil and in chalk, Victor Adam is first of all known through his fantastic lithographs.

Victor Adam left us impressive hunting and battle scenes. He was very passionate about Arabian horses and loved to depict them again and again. His lithographs of Arabians are treasures. They are easily recognizable: Victor Adam drew the Arabian in a delicate and sensitive style. Some lithographs seem almost fragile in a very positive way. Victor Adam’s Arabians are very noble, with small, beautiful heads and huge, well-rounded, often fiery eyes. They are extremely typey horses and have rounded bodies with strong, but elegant legs.

Victor Adam depicted European noblemen and generals riding Arabians. His portraits show Napoleon with his favourite Arabian stallion, as well as European kings and queens with their steeds. His works comprise also unique pictures of Spahis or of Islamic leaders, as for example Mohammed Ali – the Viceroy of Egypt – or Abd el Kader on their noble Arabian horses.

Some of Victor Adam’s most beautiful lithographs show Arabian horses in their natural environment. The pale background often strongly reminds us of the bright,



"Les Bedouins" - a detail from a lithograph by Victor Adam.
Owned by Judith Wich-Wenning

Some of Victor Adam's lithographs seem almost fragile:
"Le Cheval et le Loup".
Original print owned by Judith Wich-Wenning



"Les Amis" by Victor Adam.
A detail from a lithograph owned by Judith Wich-Wenning



"La Chasse" by Victor Adam
from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning

light colours of the desert. A number of Victor Adam's pictures are enhanced by a beautifully drawn framework, consisting of Oriental accessories like "Khanjars" (i.e. Arabian daggers) or "Djerids" (i.e. spears).

After a very prolific life, Victor Adam died at Viroflay, a small village close to Versailles, in 1867. Victor Adam's bequest is a treasure, an unsurpassable tribute to the Arabian horse. His lithographs, drawings and paintings of Arabians are today the gems of private and public collections worldwide.

Théodore Géricault

Rouen 1791 – Paris 1824

The remarkable French artist Théodore Géricault suffered a tragic destiny. He passed away at only 32 years of age, weakened by riding accidents and a chronic tubercular infection. Despite his short life, Géricault left an abundance of important works.

Théodore Géricault was born in Rouen where he spent a very happy early childhood. In 1796 he and his family moved to Paris in order to live in the middle of the famous Quartier Saint Germain. After finishing school, Géricault was educated by the outstanding artist Carle Vernet (see "Orientalism and the Arabian Horse Part I" in the previous issue) who taught him excellently how to paint horses. At that time, Géricault also started a deep friendship with Carle Vernet's son Horace. Two years later, the artist Guérin, who was very much in fashion at that time, became Géricault's new teacher. In these days, Géricault copied paintings by the old masters like for example Rubens, Tizian and Rembrandt. Géricault also enjoyed spending lots of time in Versailles. The stables of the palace were always open to him – a perfect opportunity to gain more knowledge of the anatomy and action of horses. In 1816 he took part in the annual competition of the Prix de Rome. The winner of this contest received a journey to Rome as a scholarship. Géricault was very disappointed when his works were rejected. He decided to travel to Italy on his own. Seeing Michelangelo's art – especially the Sistine Chapel – was like a shock for him. He returned to Paris full of ideas and motivation. The new medium lithography fascinated Géricault. Right after his return from Italy he undertook a series of lithographs on military subjects. They are considered to be some of the earliest masterworks in that field.

Horses were always the most favourite subject for Théodore Géricault. His Mamelucks with imposing steeds or his fiery Arabian horses are remarkable. At

the beginning of his career, Géricault painted first of all noble horses, while in the last years of his life he turned towards depicting normal working horses.

Théodore Géricault's sharp eye was amazing. His employee Mustapha who had come from the Orient, posed for some of Géricault's pictures. It is remarkable how expressive these works turned out and how accurate Géricault painted Mustapha's oriental clothing.

An interesting marginal note is how the orientalist artists were often intertwined. As mentioned before, Géricault was a close friend of Horace Vernet and painted for example a charming picture of Horace's little daughter Louise. Géricault did also a lovely oil painting of Alfred De Dreux as a little boy. Alfred De Dreux later became another fantastic orientalist artist. His work and life will be discussed – among others – in part III of this series of articles.

We can only regret that Théodore Géricault died at such a young age. The long period of suffering must have been dreadful for the originally vivacious and impulsive artist. Géricault's legacy is remarkable: he left some of the most vivid and impressive Arabian horse pictures ever painted.

Eugène Fromentin

La Rochelle 1820 – Saint-Maurice 1876

Eugène Fromentin came from a provincial, bourgeois family. Despite the fact that Eugène was a brilliant scholar, his childhood was not easy. His father, a well-known doctor disapproved and restrained him constantly. He wanted the young Eugène to study law, although his son was much more interested in art. In 1839, Eugène went to Paris and took a law degree. Shortly afterwards, he finally persuaded his father to let him concentrate on painting. His teacher was the landscape painter Nicolas-Louis Cabat. Fromentin's idols at that time were Delacroix and Decamps. They started his interest in the Oriental world.

Fromentin first visited Algeria in 1846. Although this was only a short trip, he was totally fascinated by what he had seen. His impressions inspired him to very delicate and sensitive drawings. He realized that he would paint Algeria in a matter that had never been attempted before. In 1847 Fromentin was to return to Algeria. He set sail from Marseille, accompanied by two other painters. This time, he spent six months there. Fromentin's goals were to study nature at first hand and to experience life in the desert. To him, the



Victor Adam was a master in orientalist subjects. Original lithograph from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning

Victor Adam loved to portrait noble horses: "Cheval Trottant", owned by Judith Wich-Wenning



Powerful and expressive: "Cheval et Serpent" by Victor Adam. Owned by Judith Wich-Wenning

Victor Adam was famous for his secure drawing abilities: "Cheval Arabe" - original print owned by Judith Wich-Wenning



desert was the most spectacular sight of all. Just after his wedding in 1852, Fromentin travelled once again to Algeria – this time together with his new wife. This sojourn took almost one year and was certainly his most important one. When the Fromentins returned to France, he brought back a mass of painted and drawn studies.

Fromentin was not only a gifted painter, but also an excellent author. His literary career often complemented his painting. His travel notes “Un été dans le Sahara”, “Une année dans le Sahel” and his romantic novel “Dominique”, as well as a book about art criticism established his reputation as a writer.

Fromentin possessed a very self-critical, doubting temperament. His audience and critics however were enthusiastic about his work. He was awarded a first class medal for his art as well as the Cross of the Légion d'Honneur. Fromentin was blessed with an extraordinary visually memory. It was easy for him to transpose his impressions of Algeria and Egypt into paintings for exhibitions and sales. Usually Fromentin painted his groups of horsemen neither in the direct foreground nor in the absolute background of the picture. He typically put them in a medium level of the painting. This distincts him clearly from Adolf Schreyer who depicted his riders and horses large-sized. Since witnessing his first Arab Fantasia near Algiers, equine motifs had a special place in Fromentin's work. The realistic accuracy of his paintings are striking. Characteristic for Fromentin is also the dignity of horses and riders moving amidst the wide expanses of land and sky.

Although Fromentin himself was never quite satisfied with his work, he enjoyed great popularity with both American and European buyers and collectors already during his lifetime. Due to the high demand for his paintings, he often did replicas of his works. His most famous picture “The Falcon Hunt” was for example repeated in crayon, water colour and oil. Lithographs of this work were also in high demand.

In 1869 Fromentin was one of the official guests at the opening of the Suez Canal and travelled to the Land of the Nile. He was fascinated by Egypt and especially admired the Egyptian sky as well as the Nile whose colour and texture he compared to chocolate. This journey to Egypt resulted in some of his best pictures.

Fromentin did not only concentrate on Algerian and Egyptian scenes, but they played for sure the dominating role in his oeuvre. Today his pictures can be found in many important public collections. These

include for example the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the National Gallery, London as well as the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

Eugène Fromentin died suddenly in Saint-Maurice, a village close to Paris, in 1876. He became only 56 years of age. Other painters like for example Adolf Schreyer continued his tradition of horsemen riding in wide, open spaces. However, Eugène Fromentin's style of painting combined with his literary talent were unique.

Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps

Paris 1803 – Fontainebleau 1860

Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps looked back to a rather difficult infancy. He spent parts of his childhood in a foster-family in Picardie (France). Decamps fell in love with the Orient during the education by his first art teacher Pujol. Later on, Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps was a student of the outstanding painter Eugène Delacroix who influenced him a lot. At the age of 24 years, Decamps was officially sent to Greece in order to immortalize the “Battle of Navarino”. He spent over one year travelling through Asia Minor and the Near East, a journey which had enormous impact on his further art work. Following his return to France, he published an album with lithographs. His next travel shortly afterwards led him to Italy, Greece, Egypt and Turkey.

Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps' style first puzzled critics as it was very true to nature. His abilities however were soon recognized and he was ranked as one of the leaders of the French school. Decamps really played with shadow and light in his paintings. His works are often dramatic, painted with bold, rough brush strokes and great contrasts of colour. Decamps spent most of his life in and around Paris. He loved animals, especially dogs and horses. His subjects came from an unusually wide range. Some of Decamps' best works are certainly his paintings showing orientalist motifs. At the Paris Exhibition in 1855 he received the grand medal for his work.

One of the most impressive paintings by Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps is the famous “Turkish Standard-Bearer”. This oil painting – although not large in size – has an enormous aura and enchants the spectator. Decamps created this work for the Salon in Paris in 1839. Lithographs made after this painting were also very well received and are still sought-after collector's items. The original oil painting is today owned by the Musée Condé in Chantilly, France, while the museum



One of the most classic pictures by Victor Adam:
"Chef Arabe",
owned by Judith Wich-Wenning

Victor Adam's Arabian horses show great type
and rounded forms:

"Bay Stallion and Mare", hand-colored 19th century lithograph
from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning



"Guard with Stallion" by Théodore Géricault -
a detailed example of his sought-after artwork.
Hand-colored original lithograph
from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning

"Cheval Arabe" - one of the most beautiful
and well-known pictures of Géricault.
19th century lithograph on tinted paper
from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning





"Arabes Attaqués par une Lionne".
Original wooden engraving after Eugène Fromentin,
owned by Judith Wich-Wenning



"Arabian Rider"
by the orientalist Eugène Fromentin,
owned by Judith Wich-Wenning

Neue Pinakothek in Munich, Germany, has a second version, painted by Decamps a few years later.

A number of Decamps' art works show his great humour. Decamps enjoyed painting monkeys – a parody at people. His painting "The Monkey Connoisseurs" for example satirises the jury of the French Academy of Painting. They had before rejected several of his works as they were different to the then known standard. Decamps took a little "revenge" here!

In the last years of his life, Decamps loved to spend time in the spacious park of Fontainebleau. He also went there regularly to paint. At the forest of Fontainebleau a tragic event took its course. Decamps participated at a royal hunting. His horse shied and

despite Decamps being an expert horseman, he was thrown off. At the age of 57 years, Decamps passed away due to his severe head injuries. The world lost a great artist and an extraordinary personality.

Part III of "Orientalism and the Arabian Horse" by Judith Wich-Wenning will follow in the next issue of "Desert Heritage".

For inquiries regarding the Arabian horse in art please contact:

**Judith Wich-Wenning, Germany,
Tel.: ++49 1707721739
or email: JudithWich@t-online.de**



"Falcon Chase in Algiers", one of the most famous motifs by Eugène Fromentin. Original 19th century lithograph from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning



"Rencontre de Cavaliers Arabes" shows the dynamic power of Fromentin's work. Owned by Judith Wich-Wenning



A 19th century portrait of the orientalist Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (1803 - 1860), owned by Judith Wich-Wenning



Decamps: The famous work "Turkish Standard-Bearer" by Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps. Hand-colored original lithograph from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning