

ORIENTALISM and the Arabian Horse

text by: Judith Wich-Wenning

Part I

Since primeval time, the horse has been a favorite subject for painters. Arabian horse lovers however admire especially works of art from "Orientalism". This term refers to the many 19th century artists who specialized in "Oriental" themes. They painted for example Islamic architecture, lively Arabian market scenes, imposing guards and the endless expanse of the desert. But maybe most importantly, Orientalist artists left a treasured heritage: numerous unsurpassed portraits of Arabian horses.

Fiery stallions with flashing eyes, Mamelucks on proud steeds, noble mares with their dainty foals – Orientalist art is a feast for the eyes. Today, Orientalist lithographs and originals are highly sought-after collectors' items. They are in great demand by art connoisseurs but of course especially by Arabian horse enthusiasts. We can only marvel at the impressive scenes, showing the classic, timeless beauty of the Arabian horse. But how came the Orientalist movement into

existence? For centuries Western artists have been fascinated by the exotic world of the Orient. The culmination however was certainly reached in the nineteenth century. A door opener for this was Napoleon Bonaparte's – ultimately unsuccessful – invasion of Egypt in 1798. It was not only a military expedition but also a scientific exploration. Its science and art commission made up of mathematicians, artists and architects. This project stimulated great public interest and founded Egyptology as we know it today. It discovered for example the famous "Rosetta stone", whose inscriptions later enabled to decipher hieroglyphs. Another result of Napoleon's expedition was the famous book "Description de l'Egypte". It is the final result of the collective work of all the scientists of the campaign. This extraordinary, well-illustrated publication is among the most impressive books ever printed.

The beginning of the 19th century brought about a strongly growing appreciation for the Arabian



"Arabian Horse Family", lithograph by Carle Vernet
from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning

Original pencil drawing by Carle Vernet:
"Amin Bey", dated 1823
from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning



"Arabian Stallion",
lithograph by Carle Vernet
from the collection of
Judith Wich-Wenning



One of the most classic pictures by Carle Vernet: "Cheval Arabe", collection of Judith Wich-Wenning

horse. Its beauty, nobility and endurance were highly esteemed. Artists immortalized Arabian horses in breathtaking works and provided a new source of stimulation for breeders and admirers – even up to this day.

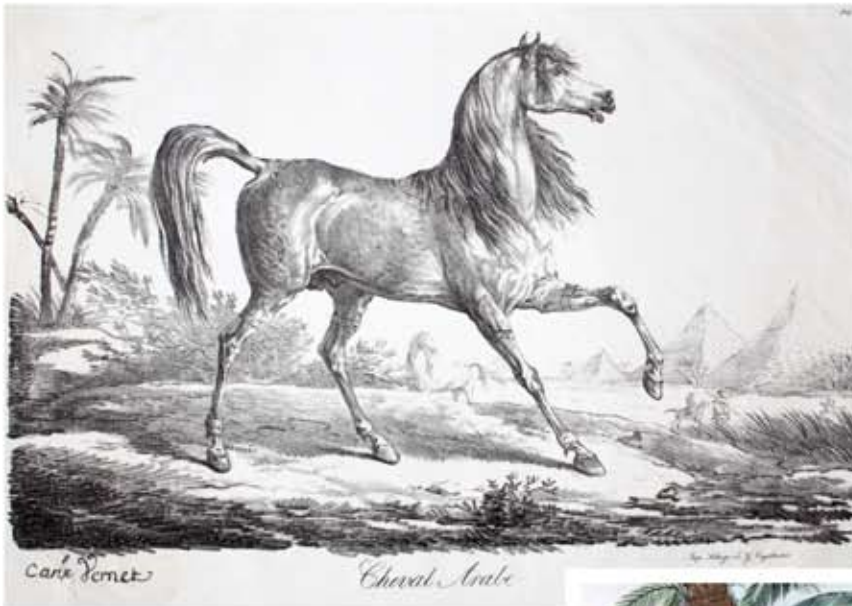
Growing interest in Oriental countries soon spread all over Europe and exerted an influence on science and the arts. The center for this development was certainly France. Although travelling to North Africa and the Middle East was difficult and dangerous at that time, more and more explorers and painters set out for this desirable journey. The discovery of the East, its cities, ruins and exotic way of life fascinated them on a large scale. They were deeply influenced – most of them for the rest of their life – by what they had seen. The quality of the light, intensity of the colours and the diversity of the people was so different from what they knew in Europe. It comes as no surprise that they wanted to immortalize these impressions in their artwork.

At that time, usually artists were only able to do sketches and watercolours on the spot. Due to the complex preparation required, it was almost impossible to paint in oil during a journey. Therefore most oil paintings were made in the studio after the return home. Only when in the 1860s tubes for containing paint were invented, it

was finally possible to carry everything along and work on location. Interestingly, many Orientalist painters came back home with souvenirs. They brought along small pieces of furniture, weapons, jewellery and garments. After their return, these collections were integrated into their paintings executed in the studio. Today, we can discover these souvenirs in their works of art.

An aspiring technical novelty had its impact on Orientalism: in the year 1796, a new artistic medium was invented. The German Alois Senefelder from Munich developed lithography, a printing method which should become very popular among Orientalist artists. It made printing more affordable and therefore art available to more people. The French Godefroy Engelmann took this invention even one step further and developed chromolithography. This method perfected the process and made multi-colour printing feasible. Totally new possibilities to reproduce paintings were created.

The taste for Orientalist paintings and lithographs grew with the public's new preference for information on Arabian countries. This phenomenon was international, supplied by a complex group of artists. Regarding Arabian horse pictures, we have to think of John



A homage to Egypt's Arabian horses:
"Cheval Arabe avec Pyramides"
by Carle Vernet,
collection of Judith Wich-Wenning

"In Front of the Tent",
coloured lithograph by Carle Vernet,
collection of Judith Wich-Wenning



Carle Vernet
"Mameluck avec Etalon Arabe",
lithograph, from the collection of
Judith Wich-Wenning



"Mameluck dressant son Cheval", one of the most beautiful lithographs from the work of Carle Vernet. From the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning

Frederick Herring and David Roberts from Great Britain, the Germans Albrecht Adam and Adolf Schreyer, and Juliusz Kossack from Poland to name just a few. Most of the artists however came from France like for example Carle and Horace Vernet, Eugène Fromentin, Victor Adam, Hippolyte Lalaisse and Eugène Delacroix. The life, work and influence of some of these unforgettable painters will be the subject for this series of articles.

Carle Vernet **Bordeaux 1758 – Paris 1836**

Antoine Charles Horace Vernet, also known as Carle Vernet, was the youngest son of Joseph Vernet, the famous painter of marine subjects. He was born in Bordeaux while his father created his glorious views of the Ports of France on behalf of the King. Carle Vernet was a pupil of his father and of Lépicié, a very successful history painter.

Joseph Vernet fostered his son Carle and his artistic talent on a large scale. He encouraged him during his art education and supported him financially. Thanks to Joseph's own reputation, he enabled Carle to personally meet many of the most important men of his time – like for example Voltaire or Rousseau.

Carle Vernet loved horses since his childhood and immensely enjoyed painting and drawing them. Without a doubt, Carle Vernet is one of the best and most famous horse artists of the 19th century. He broke with tradition and drew horses with the forms he had learned while observing nature in stables and riding schools. In 1782 he won the highly coveted Prix de Rome – his first major prize – and left to stay at the Villa Medici in Rome. During this visit he turned towards religion and seriously thought about becoming a monk. His father travelled to Rome and persuaded him to return with him to Paris – just in time before Carle entered a monastery. Back in Paris, Carle soon took up again his old life. In 1787 he married Catherine Moreau and two years later, their famous son Horace was born. He would follow in his father's footsteps. However, Carle Vernet's life was not without sorrow. His sister was guillotined during the Revolution for hiding letters to members of the aristocracy. After this tragic event, he gave up art. When he began to draw again, his style had changed. He started to paint detailed battles and campaigns to glorify Napoleon. In 1800, he followed Bonaparte to Italy and in 1808 Napoleon awarded him the Legion of Honor for one of his battle scenes.

In his own time, Vernet was first of all known as



The Mamelucks were some of the finest horsemen known to history. Hand-coloured aquatinta by Carle Vernet, around 1840, collection of Judith Wich-Wenning



The timeless beauty of Carle Vernet's masterpieces: "Mameluck en Eclaircur", lithograph from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning



Mohamed Ali the Great had a lasting impact on the Arabian horse, felt until today. An extraordinarily detailed lithograph by Carle Vernet, dated 1818, from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning



Mameluck attacked by a French soldier. An imposing lithograph by Carle Vernet, collection of Judith Wich-Wenning

an extraordinary painter of horses in full movement. Carle Vernet's horses are truly special: they are lively creatures, always in action, full of temperament and high spirit. They look slender and elegant, with sparkling eyes and pricked ears. Carle Vernet often depicted his horses having their mouths open – a characteristic giving them a wild, untamed and dramatic touch. The security of Carle Vernet's pencil stroke was remarkable.

Carle Vernet belonged to the first French artists who experimented with lithography. Carle Vernet loved this new medium which offered him a wide range of new possibilities. His handling of the black and white scale is outstanding. Apart from his battle scenes and horse pictures, Carle Vernet became famous for his caricatures and the illustrations of La Fontaine's fables. Carle Vernet was also the first teacher for Théodore Géricault. He was another great artist passionate about horses. The second part of this series of articles will talk – among others – about Théodore Géricault and his work in detail. Up to this day, Carle Vernet's Arabian horse pictures are smashing. They provide a fantastic source of comparison and are an impulse for breeders.

Carle Vernet was an avid, excellent horseman throughout his life. Even in old age, he loved to

ride his thoroughbred regularly through the Bois de Boulogne. Just days before his death at the age of 78, he was seen racing with his horse as if he were a young man. Carle Vernet was an exceptional personality and a marvellous artist. No wonder that his pictures are among the most sought-after works concerning Arabian horses.

Horace Vernet **Paris 1789 – Paris 1863**

Horace Vernet, the son of the renowned Arabian horse artist Carle Vernet, was the last of the influential "Vernet dynasty". He was born in the Palais du Louvre in 1789 – the year of the French revolution. Horace Vernet learned how to paint horses from his father Carle, yet developed his own, unique style. He gained fame and fortune at an early age. Horace already won a first class medal at 22, and became a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour at 25. A few years later, he was named director of the Académie de France in Rome. In 1833, he decided to resign from this position in order to make the first of his many journeys to Algeria. This travel with all its first-hand impressions inspired Vernet on a large scale. It even brought about a change in his style. Before this journey, his paintings were influenced by the romantic movement, showing vibrant colours and lots of passion and exuberance.



Watercoloured lithograph "Arabian Stallion with Mameluck" by Horace Vernet, around 1850, from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning



Detail from the lithograph "Combat de la Habrah" by Horace Vernet, around 1850, from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning



One of Horace Vernet's most famous paintings is "La Chasse au Lion" ("The Lion Hunt") after which this wood-engraving was made. Collection of Judith Wich-Wenning

Afterwards, his work excelled through sharp precision and love to great ethnographical detail. Travelling to the East was dangerous and often uncomfortable at Horace Vernet's time. High expenses, unreliable itineraries and the risk of disease overshadowed such endeavours. However, Horace Vernet was certainly both, a gifted artist as well as an adventurer. His numerous, extensive journeys led him to Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Turkey and the Crimea. During these travels, he was not afraid of strains and efforts. He took any means of transport available, be it horse, camel or mule and often camped in the open air if necessary.

While the Vernets were traditionally royalist, Horace had an exceptional ability to adapt to the changing regimes of his time. His career developed steadily, no matter who reigned over France. Horace Vernet became famous for his battle scenes for which he received many important commissions. His fighting sceneries are imposing, first of all through their subjects, but often also because of their large dimensions, being painted on vast panoramic canvases. In many of his artworks, he depicted Napoleon and his impressive Arabian riding stallions. Spectators always marvelled at the incredible speed in which he painted.

One of Horace Vernet's most well-known pictures is certainly "The Lion Hunt", an oil painting dated 1836. This work is full of action and dynamic. While the original is owned by the Wallace Collection in London, lithographs of this motif are popular collector's items.

Horace Vernet left a large production with some 500 paintings and around 200 lithographs. He died in his hometown of Paris at the age of 74. Horace Vernet's grave can still be visited today at the cemetery of Montmartre, not far from where his father Carle was buried.

Adolf Schreyer

Frankfurt am Main 1828 – Kronberg 1899

Adolf Schreyer was born in Frankfurt am Main, Germany in 1828 as a child of wealthy parents. At the age of 15 years he was accepted as a student by the famous art school Städelches Kunstinstitut. Already as a child, he had great interest in horses and loved to visit stud farms and riding schools in and around Frankfurt. Studying art as well as spending as much time as possible with horses stamped his youth. Adolf Schreyer loved to travel. His journeys lead him to Hungary, Wallachia and Southern Russia as well as to Syria, Egypt and Algiers. Motifs from these two regions – Eastern Europe and Oriental



"Bedouin at a Creek"
- original photogravure by
Goupil after Adolf Schreyer, around 1880,
from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning



Adolf Schreyer's artwork fascinates until
today: "Kabyle", original photogravure,
dated 1881, from the collection of
Judith Wich-Wenning



A very typical motive for Adolf Schreyer: "Departure of the Sheikhs", wood-engraving, owned by Judith Wich-Wenning

countries – stayed the main subjects for his paintings for the rest of his life.

In 1859 Adolf Schreyer married Johanna Maria Andreae, called Mary (1837 – 1921). Mary Schreyer shared her husband's passion for art and painted under his guidance striking artworks in a similar style. Adolf Schreyer regularly visited Paris, the centre of Orientalism at this time. In 1862 the young couple decided to completely move to Paris. At the beginning, life in Paris was not easy for them. But Adolf Schreyer's reputation as a painter grew steadily and with it his financial success. Especially American art dealers were very much interested in his oil paintings and offered high sums for them. Up to this day, many of Schreyer's artwork can be found in American collections or museums. Millionaire Americans like Vanderbilt, Rockefeller and Morgan collected his paintings. With this financial breakthrough, Adolf Schreyer and his wife moved into a spacious apartment at Place Vendôme in Paris. They became famous for their generosity and kind-heartedness towards their friends and guests but also to their employees. With the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the Schreyers had to leave their beloved Paris and moved to Kronberg-Taunus near Frankfurt in Germany.

Adolf Schreyer's artwork is easily recognizable. He was a specialist in riders and horses in rural settings – a subject to which he restricted himself

more or less. Schreyer was very much interested in Bedouin life and mastered several Arab dialects. The colour schemes of his oil paintings are characteristic: monochrome, often brown ground, a pale blue sky filled with few clouds and riders in striking, white and red clothing. His horses wear bridals and saddles in bright colours. Many of his works seem to be painted with quick strokes of the brush. When looking at his paintings, the impression of sandy air and whirring heat is impressive. Horsemen riding alone or in small groups were his favourite subject throughout his life. Typically, he did no exact portraits of horse and rider and put no special emphasis on details. His paintings usually have a certain universality, they show neither a specific place nor a particular historic event. The horses and riders have an air of freedom and pride around them – a distinct dignity and honour.

Adolf Schreyer was a very productive artist. His paintings were already in high demand during his lifetime. Many of his pictures were directly sold from his easel. Adolf Schreyer died as a highly respected painter in Kronberg in 1899. Up to this day, his paintings reach enormous sums at auctions and sales.

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



"Vedette Arabe" - an imposing lithograph typical for Adolf Schreyer, from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning



"Arabian Rider" - one of the extraordinary original oil paintings by Mary Schreyer, owned by Judith Wich-Wenning