

# Why Everybody Talks of Nothing but Beauty?

*Why is it that everybody discusses nothing but beauty and how beauty might be further optimized, but not the character of the Arabian horse anymore?  
Until a hundred years ago, the emphasis was entirely different.*

■ by *Monika Savier*

Arabian horses were the fastest natural „means of locomotion“ humans ever had at their disposal. Historically, they were mostly ridden by young men. With a good and healthy horse, his rider would have a realistic chance of emerging victorious from an attack, of saving his life when fleeing, or of avoiding having to make his way home on foot after a campaign far away

from home, an undertaking which sometimes had to be paid for with one's life.

What, then, was a „good horse“ in these times? No doubt, he had to be an intelligent creature with trust in his rider, and the other way round. So it was the character of a horse that was much in the foreground, and the positive and trusting relationship between horse







Theodor Horschelt. Arabian Mare.

and rider would often save lives, as well as shaping the art of riding, the way of handling a horse, and the way he was kept and housed. A rider who entrusted his horse with his life or even owed his life to him, would often take him to his grave with him in pre-Christian times, so he would be able to ride on with this horse in heaven. A genuine ruler would, in gratitude to his horse, have his statue carved in stone together with his horse's, to unite and display the two of them for eternity. Factually as well as emotionally, the rider depended on his horse –

a fact that has been told about in innumerable romantic stories, poems, and historical traditions. The Arabian horse in particular, the fastest of all the horse breeds, was often given wings in poetry as well as in folk traditions, with the gist of the story always being that the horse saved his rider's life, brought his injured rider home, or made his rider's successful escape possible. The Bedouins, the original breeders of Arabian horses on the Arabian peninsula, rode mares. They loved the character, and the loyalty and attachment, of their mares,

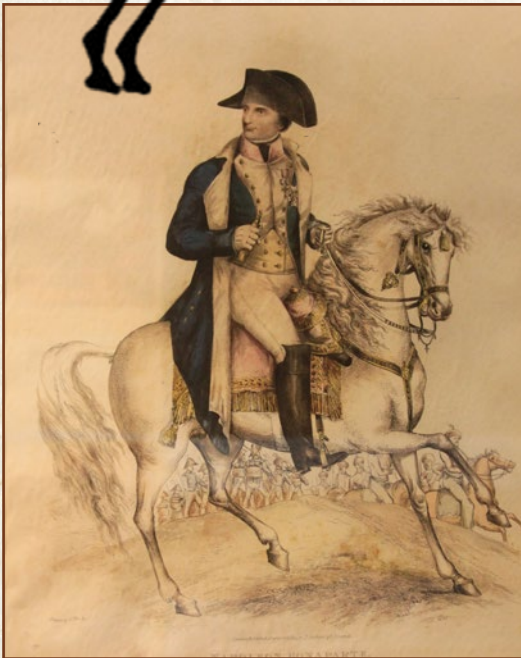


Adolph Schreyer. Arabian Scout. (1870)



Adolph Schreyer. Arabian Riders





*"If you look only to a horse's beauty, you will never perceive his real value!"*

Al Mutanabbi (ca. 950 aC)

who would often be sheltered in the family's tent in very rough weather. Today, we note with dismay that in most cases a rider's honor – such as his victory in an endurance race, on the racetrack, or in an Arabian horse show – is no longer the result of a mutually trusting relationship with his horse, but of a one-sided instrumentalization. This was not always the case: it is easy to visualize how riders, until a hundred years ago, loved their horses, honoring them and treating them as well as possible: They had to be sure they had done everything for their horse, in order to enable him to act loyally and reliably on the site of a battle, or in a Jihad, a Gazzu, or some other risky undertaking. They were very much aware that an Arabian horse was a „one-man horse“, which made the personal contact an elementarily important feature.

Badly treated, an Arabian horse was easily hurt mentally, becoming hard to handle and resentful as a result. Using

force or violence with him was, therefore, something to be avoided absolutely. These are facts written down even by Greek horse master Xenophon (426 BC) in his famous works „Hipparchicus“ and „The Art of Horsemanship“, both of which are often regarded as foundation works of hippology. Sophisticated techniques for getting a horse used to being ridden, such as long reining (to be found depicted on antique coins and amphoras from the Mediterranean more than 2000 years old) were perfected in his time, and „horse whispering“ was probably as commonly used by Greek, Persian, and Egyptian riders as it must have been second nature to the 75,000 riders of Napoleon's cavalry units who made their way from Paris to Cairo at the end of the 18th century, with their lives hanging by a thread from the lives of their horses. It was just their voice and the balance of their bodies that good riders would use to move their horses during a fight, as they needed both hands for holding their bow



and arrow, their shield and sword, or later, their rifle. A rider who was not in rapport with his horse, a rider who had to fight his horse as an opponent – that rider was doomed.

Since more than a hundred years ago, motors were invented for moving people around, and young men on the Arabian peninsula will rather steer a high-strung 4WD all terrain vehicle through the sea of dunes and steppes in order to prove their bravery, the importance and significance of Arabian horses have changed: from faithful and loyal fellow soldier to a hobby animal to adorn his human's surroundings. The breeding aim has changed accordingly. It's no longer strength and stamina

accompanied by a good character and attachment to humans that are in the fore when selecting breeding animals, but rather the representative aspects such as esthetics, beauty, speed. There are many reasons today for owning a horse. No longer connected to his archaic role, a horse offers every kind of projection surface that is imaginable and needed by his human.

So horses now, just as they were in ancient times, tend to become real-mythical creatures again, the „me“ that is pictured in their owners' minds – as indicated by the fact that most of the most beautiful Arabians are usually just owned and admired, but not ridden. After all, Arabian horses often are a projection of unfulfilled ideals. Man





*“As to virtues and beauty of conformation the Kohaylan (desert arab) exceeds all other breeds of the horse in the world. He is of extraordinary docility and absolute loyalty to his master, possesses innate courage and an infallible memory with regard to places where he has been and to treatment he has undergone. He allows only his master to touch and lead him. Even in the most frightening din of battle he retains his coolness and presence of mind and always remembers where he has come from so that even if he is mortally wounded he will make a final effort to bring his master back to his defeated tribe. His intelligence is really outstanding”*

Count Rzewusky's memories (1818)



Alberto Pasini. O.T. Falconry. (1866)

offers the horse his passion in return, even his ecstasy, and resulting from that, his jealousy and his need for control, too. This has resulted in today's almost complete domination over and control of horses' reproduction.

If horses are ridden at all nowadays, riding is enjoyed in itself, with the topic of the function of riding no longer valid. A world religion defined as a sports activity, involving an enormous interest in representation, economy, and egocentrism, is what connects the world of horses with the markets of their owners today.

Without this new world and its changed motivation for horse breeding, however, there would now hardly

be any Arabian horses left. Partner relationships are history today, though. Ownership and dominance have taken their place, in the saddle as well as on the ground. The fact that riders no longer need to entrust their horses with their lives has resulted in globe-spanning carelessness when handling horses. This development is most dramatically seen in the world of endurance riding, which by now mercilessly pressures horses to perform, with some horses paying for that performance with their lives. At horse shows, you can also observe quite often how the relationship and contact between horse and handler has long since become nonexistent.





A. Schreyer. Cheik Arabe en Voyage.

To this day, Arabian horses bring people from the Eastern and Western cultures, languages, and social classes together; the horses are the international basis for our social and communicative connection and exchange with other breeders.

Our ancestors in the Orient as well as in the Mediterranean and in Europe maintained and even nurtured and further developed Arabian horses in their extraordinary character, features, and qualities, spending lots of efforts and activities on them. At the same time, however, they subdued the horses and continued

modifying them, to an ever growing extent, right up to our times. Our friendship with and our passion for Arabian horses also mean that we are responsible for maintaining and preserving their authentic features. In particular, these features are the Big Points we owe so much to, in former times as well as today: Courage, High Spirits, Vitality, Gentleness, and Beauty. □

*Thanks to the Olmsverlag for providing the quotations from the Asil Book IV and the printing of the historical pictures. Thanks to Prof. Karin Thieme for the pictures from her archive.*

*"In disposition the Arabians are gentle and affectionate, familiar indeed almost to the extent of being troublesome. They have no fear of man whatsoever, and will allow anyone to come up to them when grazing, and to take them by the head. If they happen to be laying down, they will not move though you come close to them. They are not to be intimidated by any lifting up of hands or sticks, for they do not understand that you can hurt them. It often amused us in the desert to see the mares come up to their masters and use them, as they would one of themselves, for a rubbing-post. This extreme gentleness and courage, though partly the effect of education, is also inherited, for a colt born and brought up in the stable is just as tame."*

Lady Ann Blunt (1879)