

ANTIQUE ARABIAN HORSE *Sculptures*

Part II

by ©Judith Wich-Wenning

Antique Arabian Horse Sculptures have an ever-growing circle of admirers and collectors around the world. Horse breeders as well as people with a sense for beauty, elegance and art were and are fascinated by the strong aura of these antique works. The 19th century saw a group of sculptors, the so-called "Animaliers", who specialized in the realistic modelling of animals. As Orientalism and Arabian subjects were so much "en vogue" during this time, Arabian horses were a favourite motif. The mystical Orient bathed in a new, unknown light, attracted a large number of artists looking for new sources of inspiration. Desert landscapes, fantasias and Oriental hunting scenes impressed people. Superb Arabian horses, their nobility, beauty and strength became recurring subjects exhibited at the Salons and art fairs at that time.

The heyday of the Animalier movement was between 1830 and 1890. Especially in France gorgeous sculptures of Arabian horses were created. In this part of the series "Antique Arabian Horse Sculptures" several of the most important artists, their life and works are introduced.

Antoine-Louis Barye (Paris 1796 – 1875)

Before the year 1830 little attempt was made to produce bronzes of animals as such. Today many art historians give Antoine-Louis Barye a premier position in the field of animal bronzes. His reputation and influence was indeed enormous. However, during his lifetime, his work was often criticized and dismissed. Barye was the classic case of an artist's struggle for recognition. His talent was too advanced to be fully appreciated by the world until the

late 1830s. Even his strongest critics had to admit that no one excelled Barye regarding the accuracy of anatomical details and the realistic modelling of his sculptures. Barye did not follow in the footsteps of other artists, he created a movement in art of his own.

Antoine-Louis Barye was born in Paris in 1796, the son of a jeweller from Lyon. Barye began his career as a goldsmith, like many sculptors of the Romantic Period. At the beginning his father taught Barye the basics, but when he was around 14 years old, Barye started to work under the goldsmith of Napoleon. Later on he studied under the famous Orientalist and painter Baron Antoine-Jean Gros. In 1818 Barye was admitted to the important Ecole des Beaux Arts. A few years later he discovered his true passion and destination: Barye watched animals in the park Jardin des Plantes. He made vigorous studies of them in pencil drawings and modelled them in sculpture. The Jardin des Plantes, the great botanical gardens in Paris provided Barye with the important practical knowledge of animals. This was enormously important for his whole career as a sculptor. The Jardin was not only a garden of exotic plants and a zoo of wild animals, but also contained several museums devoted to different aspects of natural history. Moreover, the Jardin comprised a library, laboratories and different lecture rooms. Here Barye was able to study closely domestic and exotic animals moving freely. He observed their attitudes and poses and even had the chance to examine skeletons and stuffed animals in the Museum of Zoology. He also attended the lecture courses. Barye passionately measured, drew and sometimes modelled animals there. Barye was successful in sculpturing animals on a small as well as on a large scale.



A very imposing Animalier sculpture: “Cheval Turc” by Antoine-Louis Barye.
It is one of the most sought-after and expensive models.

In 1820 Barye won the famous Prix de Rome. In 1831 he had his first important success at the well-known and influential “Salon”. He exhibited a sculpture showing a tiger and a crocodile. This work is today exhibited at the Louvre in Paris. With this sculpture and the following he started a new direction in art. His style was very true to nature, passionate, energetic, expressive and full of movement. This was in great contrast to the usual academic style. In 1837 the academic jury of the Salon decided not to accept and exhibit Barye’s bronzes anymore. Barye stayed away from the Salon from then on and founded his own business. He created a lot of smaller and larger bronze works in this time. His specialty stayed of course sculptures of animals. Barye’s works excelled in quality and technique. The Louvre owns today the most complete collection of his

charming bronzes in smaller scale. Of course these objects are also very much sought after by private collectors who are fascinated by their refinement and the beauty of their patina. Interestingly Antoine-Louis Barye was also a very talented painter. He created watercolours, oil paintings and masterly drawings of animals. Several of his works were also available as lithographs.

One of his most beautiful sculptures is called “Turkish Horse”. It shows an Arabian stallion with all characteristics of a fine Kobaïlan. He is full of power and strength with masculine expression, rounded forms and muscular hindquarters. This stallion has a very strong aura with his wind-swept mane, upright movement and opened mouth. This bronze was casted in four versions and different sizes



The impressive sculpture “Cavalier Arabe” was modeled by Alfred Barye and Emile Guillemin. Original 19th century bronze.

due to its success. It is one of the icons of both Romantic and Animalier sculpture of the 19th century. Here Barye was certainly inspired by one of Theodore Gericault's paintings of powerful, unrestrained horses.

Barye was a true perfectionist. His early training with a goldsmith certainly fitted him well for his task of modelling and casting bronze sculptures. He spent a great deal of time and energy to secure the correct patina on his bronzes. Barye experimented with different colours ranging from a brilliant green to deep brown tones and an almost black hue. He did not patinate his bronzes uniformly but was only content when he created an effect of various tones. Barye was one of the rather few artists during that time who numbered the casts of his bronzes. For him it was important that customers knew exactly what they were purchasing. Bronzes by Barye are seldom found with numbers higher than 100. As today we can be sure that



The beautiful bronze “Cheval attaqué par un lion” by Antoine-Louis Barye, ca. 1890.

many bronzes were destroyed, lost or damaged severely by time, a well-conserved bronze by Barye is a valuable and rare collector's item. When strolling around Paris, you can find many of his famous works: at the Iena Bridge over the Seine for example we can still admire the large eagles created by Barye in 1847 for the decoration of this bridge. His contemporaries describe Barye as a quiet, dignified man without any snobbery. While he was certainly a genius regarding art, he had unfortunately no talent concerning financial aspects. Despite getting commissions for huge statues as well as marketing small bronzes to bourgeois art collectors, Barye had to witness many monetary ups and downs. At one point, his large inventory of casts was even foreclosed and it took Barye ten years before he was able to recover them. Antoine-Louise Barye passed away in 1875 at the age of 79 years after a very prolific life. Today the

public "Square Barye" in the centre of Paris is named after the famous sculptor. This place is one of the hidden spots of the city, only a few steps from the famous "Institut du Monde Arabe".

His son Alfred Barye (1839 – 1882) had inherited lots of his talent. He grew up in the shadow of his esteemed father but developed into a great sculptor as well. He learned and worked in his father's studio and foundry. His most famous sculpture is certainly "Cavalier Arabe", a huge work (87 cm in height and 61 cm in width) which he created together with his colleague and friend Emile Guillemin. It is an impressive work, portraying a charismatic Arabian hunter mounted on his noble stallion. A dead gazelle is slung behind his saddle. An imposing sculpture, full of power and pride.



The magnificent bronze group "Kabyle Returning from the Hunt" by Arthur Waagen is a true masterpiece. 19th century bronze. Photograph Courtesy of Sotheby's, Inc. © 2013.

Arthur Waagen
(Memel 1869 – 1898)

Arthur Waagen belonged to a community of German artists of Baltic origin and was born in 1869 in the small Baltic port town of Memel. Rather little is known about this exceptional artist. Waagen was immensely fascinated with the Orient and therefore chose to live in France because he found many sources of inspiration there. Waagen settled permanently in Paris. He was a sculptor specializing in oriental figures and animals. Arthur Waagen was a regular exhibitor of Animaliers and North African subjects at the Salon in Paris from 1861 to 1887. Moreover he had a successful international career and participated at the 1876 and 1893 World Fairs held in the United States.

His masterpiece is unquestionably “A Kabyle Returning from the Hunt”. This bronze group is certainly one of the finest Orientalist sculptures ever. On oval base it unites an Arabian horseman and his stallion surrounded by three dogs. The rider’s outstretched hand holds up the head of a lion he has just captured. In his saddle he carries a life lamb which he just rescued from the claws of the lion. The dogs seem to admire and praise the hunter’s success. This sculpture shows not only an expression of victory, the liberation of the lamb from its predator is also a gesture of the hunter’s kindness. This sculpture is of greatest technical mastery and secured Arthur Waagen a place in Animalier history. All details, as for example the reins of the horse, are executed in the most stunning refinement and precision. The finished sculpture weighs around 100 kg with a height of ca. 95 cm. A cast of this exceptional work was exhibited at the 1876 World’s Fair in Philadelphia. The famous Rockefeller family, New York owned a cast of this sculpture. Another one is exhibited in the Dabesh Museum in New York. Waagen also created several beautiful smaller groups of greyhound dogs or whippets, one playing with a Persian cat. Arthur Waagen passed away in 1898.

Alfred Dubucand
(Paris 1828 – 1894)

Alfred Dubucand was born in Paris in 1828. Dubucand was a student of the great Antoine-Louis Barye. Dubucand made his debut at the Salon of 1867. He continued to exhibit at the annual Salons with great success until 1883. Dubucand was fascinated by the people and animals of the Orient and successfully captured many scenes from that area. He was a proficient Animalier sculpture and produced extremely well modelled groups of animals and equestrian topics. His works were done in a very realistic way and many of his subjects appear to be almost alive. He was famous for his great attention to detail and his ability to capture movement rather than execute just a frozen



This sculpture “Arabian Stallion with two Salukis” by Alfred Dubucand illustrates well the artist’s ability to portray well-modeled groups of animals. From the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning.



The signature of Alfred Dubucand on one of his works in bronze.



Christophe Fratin had an excellent eye for the form and structure of his subjects. This small bronze “Cheval Arabe” shows his ability to capture the spirit of an Arabian even in small scale.

portrait of his subjects. A few of his bronzes are patinated in the multicoloured style of his famous teacher Barye. Alfred Dubucand's sculptures of Arabian horses reflect his love for detail and are valuable collector's items. Also Alfred Dubucand's son worked as a sculptor and exhibited at the Salon. He was a pupil of his father and concentrated on animals.

Christophe Fratin
(Metz 1801 – 1864 Le Raincy)

Along with Antoine Louis Barye, the French Christophe Fratin was one of the first sculptors to successfully portrait animals in bronze. He was born in Metz, France in 1801. His great knowledge and understanding of animal anatomy as well as their natural poses give his works excellent realism. Fratin first studied sculpture in Metz and later on moved to Paris where he studied under the famous Orientalist painter and sculptor Théodore Géricault. Fratin created many wild and domestic animal groups and always captured his subjects in their normal activities as for example eating or in motion. His horses look very impressive with fluent movements and flowing manes and tails. His ability to capture an animal in full flight was unmatched by any artist before his time. Fratin



Christophe Fratin's signature.



The lovely harmony between an Arabian mare and her foal as seen by the artist Christophe Fratin.
19th century bronze.

received several monumental commissions in France as well as in other countries. One of the most famous is the huge monument showing two eagles guarding their prey which is located in New York's Central Park. But Christophe Fratin created also many small, table size bronzes. Fratin worked very closely with the foundries in Paris which produced his bronzes. Many of his casts bear his personal stamp which has the "N" in his name reversed.

Numerous important museums as for example the Louvre in Paris, the Wallace Collection in London or the Peabody Institute in Baltimore have his bronze sculptures on permanent display.

Christophe Fratin passed away in 1864 and was buried at the famous Montmartre Cemetery in Paris. Today a street in Metz, France holds his name. Furthermore, a huge monument of a proud horse created by Fratin around 1850 graces since then the streets of Metz.



"Horse at the rail", 19th century bronze
of an Arabian stallion by Christophe Fratin.



The sculptures by Jules Moigniez are invariably refined and show the artist's love for details.
 "Etalon au Persia" ("Stallion from Persia"), 19th century bronze.

Jules Moigniez
 (Senlis 1835 – 1894)

The French artist Jules Moigniez is famous for his excellent bird sculptures.

His bronzes of Arabian horses however are superb as well and rival any of his best feathered subjects. Moigniez' first public appearance took place at the Paris World Exhibition in 1855. He also showed his work regularly at the annual Salons from 1859 until 1892, exhibiting a total of 30 works. Moigniez found a very receptive audience in France as well as in England and America.

Most of Jules Moigniez' sculptures were cast by his father who was a metal gilder. His foundry was established in 1857 only for the purpose of producing his son's sculptures. Father and son worked together very well and created exceptionally detailed bronzes. Many of Moigniez' sculptures were gilded, silver-plated or had unusual, extraordinary patinas as the

Moigniez family always experimented with new finishes.

In 1869 Jules Moigniez became very ill and never recovered. He produced no new models from then on and found a tragic end in 1894. His great spirit and artistic talent however live on in his fantastic works of art.

In the next issue of "Desert Heritage", several more important Arabian horse sculptors of the 19th century will be introduced.

For inquiries regarding the Arabian horse in art please contact:

Judith Wich-Wenning, Germany

Tel.: ++49 170 7721739

or email: JudithWich@t-online.de