

Memories of *Erika Schiele*



Erika Schiele with Ghazal.
Photo: Erika Schiele, Fotoarchiv Deutsches Pferdemuseum
e.V. Verden (Aller), Deutschland.

■ by *Judith Wenning*

This article is to commemorate one of the most outstanding personalities and best authors on Arabian horses in the 20th century. The German Erika Schiele wrote numerous publications about Arabians. The world was a different place during Erika Schiele's lifetime: She worked analogously of course as there were no smart phones, internet or let alone Facebook, etc. available at her time. Her phenomenal memory for pedigrees, names and details concerning Arabian horses was impressive.

My first contact with her was when my grandmother gave me the book "The Arab Horse in Europe" as a present when I was still at school. It was one of my first books on the subject and fascinated me deeply.

Erika Schiele had received a great talent. She was able to write in an easily understandable way, her descriptive style, which reads effortlessly and quickly, still captivates the reader today. She liked to embellish her texts with

stories and narratives. Nevertheless, she possessed great accuracy in recording facts and figures. Not to be forgotten was her photographic talent, which produced many historical photographs of Arabian horses. Her photos of Ghazal, Kaisoon, Negatiw, Bandola, etc. are today important historical documents.

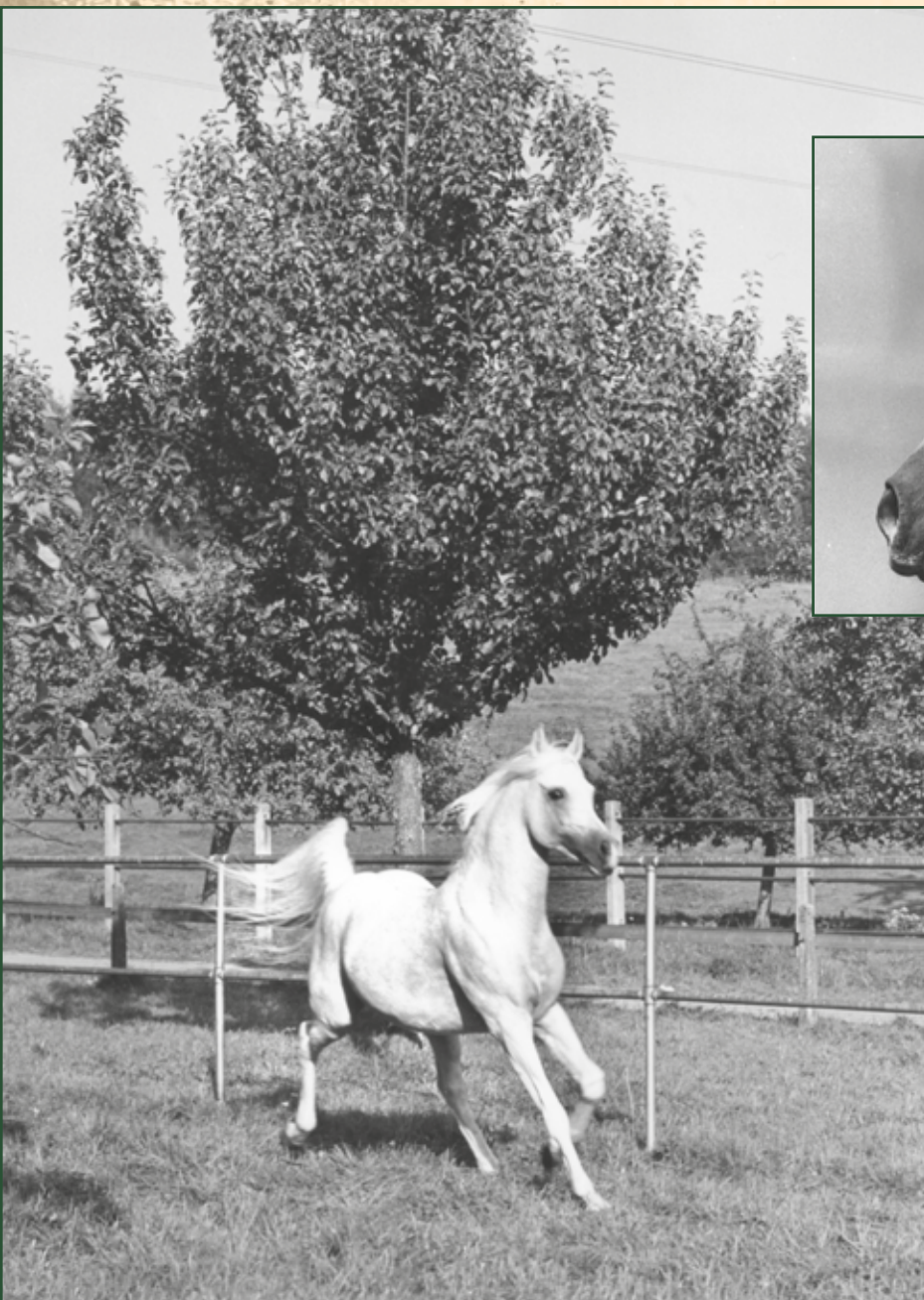
Erika Schiele was born in 1914. In one of her books, she remembered: "Before my second marriage, my



A historical document: Hadban Enzahi (Nazeer x Kamla). He was bred by El Zahraa, Egypt and imported to Germany together with his half-brother Ghazal. Photo: Erika Schiele, Fotoarchiv Deutsches Pferdmuseum e.V. Verden (Aller), Deutschland.



Erika Schiele's stallion El Beshir. Photo: Erika Schiele, Fotoarchiv Deutsches Pferdmuseum e.V. Verden (Aller), Deutschland.



Legendary Ghazal (Nazeer x Bukra), born 1953. Bred by El Zahraa, Cairo, Egypt. Photo: Erika Schiele, Fotoarchiv Deutsches Pferdmuseum e.V. Verden (Aller), Deutschland.

Always a sight to behold: Ghazal running free. Photo: Erika Schiele, Fotoarchiv Deutsches Pferdmuseum e.V. Verden (Aller), Deutschland.

husband-to-be said, 'I shall only marry a woman who can ride a horse!'. So, at 40 years old, I learned to ride." In her standard work "The Arab Horse in Europe", first published in Munich in 1967, she wrote: "Horses and especially Carl Raswan's book "Drinkers of the Wind" changed my life and also my professional career. They inspired her to publish articles and photographs in magazines, books and calendars. When Erika Schiele was 50 years old, she travelled through Europe in search of

the Arab horse. This resulted in her writing "The Arab Horse in Europe", "Horse Buying", "Arabians Pferde, Allahs liebste Kinder" ("Arabia's Horses, Allah's favourite children"), etc. Especially "The Arab Horse in Europe" brought numerous new people to the Arabian horse. No wonder it appeared in several editions and languages. Photos and texts of different breeding programs – many of them now historical – as well as pictures of eye-catching Arabian horse artwork fascinate the readers.

In her book "The Arab Horse in Europe" Erika Schiele remembered: "One day, a good friend of mine rang me up. 'You are fond of horses,' he began, harmlessly enough. 'How would you like to see something particularly lovely?' I asked 'Where?' curiously. And how was I to guess that curiosity was about to change my whole life? 'Come to the Arab Society's show with me,' he tempted. 'I promise you will not regret it.'"

Arabs in Germany! I had heard of such things, of course, but had no proper image of what this meant. So I asked my vet, who passed for a horse specialist in our district. "Arabs?" said he with the contemptuous gesture. "What do you want with those little runts? They can neither walk out nor trot, all they can do is canter. You leave them alone!" This was not exactly encouraging, but it did whet my curiosity.

On a golden September day, I drove down with my friend to East Friesland. In front of a moated castle whose delicate red bricks of local clay glowed against the blue sky our journey came to an end. On the smooth-rolled gravel walks of the castle grounds a large crowd had collected, to watch horses being let out and critically examined. There I saw Ghazal, the silver-grey stallion from the Egyptian desert. He looked charming as he danced gracefully along, his white coat gleaming in the sunshine like metal. His mane and tail seemed to be made of soft, wavy silk. When he came to a halt the fiery glance of his great, jet-black eyes hit me like a thunderbolt, leaving me silent and awed. I had met a creature such as I have never seen before in such beauty and perfection: a pure-bred Arabian horse!

Since then I have never been free of the Arab spell, and I have sought them out wherever they were to be found – from Scotland (or nearly) to the Bosphorus, from Gibraltar to the Bug. Like thousands before me I fell a prey to "arabitis" – that strange disease which is incurable but not lethal, its only effect being to make the patient happier the sicker he becomes."

One of her best friends in Arabian horses was Carl-Heinz Dömken. She had first met him in 1967 and appreciated him a lot. They often visited each other, talking endless hours about their common passion Arabian horses. Carl-Heinz Dömken managed to purchase the legendary stallion Ghazal. Erika Schiele was also very fond of Ghazal and enjoyed the times with him, especially when Ghazal pulled a carriage with her and Carl-Heinz as happy passengers.

In 1974, Dr. W. Georg Olms met with a group of dedicated breeders and idealists in Hildesheim to found the Asil Club. Among them were Erika Schiele, Carl-Heinz Dömken, Georg Thierer, Heiner Buschfort, Elke Behrens, Gustl Eutermoser, Eberhard Franck-Zügel, Jean Kayser, Karl-Heinz Kirsch, Foppe Bonno Klynstra, Barb Müller, and Heinrich Parzeller. The aim of the Asil Club was and still is to preserve those horses that could reasonably be assumed to represent 100% desert origins. The Club's definition was the following: "An Asil Arabian horse is a horse whose pedigree is exclusively based on horses bred by the Bedouins, without any evidence whatever of non-Arabian blood being admixed at any time. The word 'asil' is derived from the Arabian language meaning pure, noble and genuine." (Asil Arabians, Vol. I)

Erika Schiele thought a lot about the purity of Arabian horses. However, she began to have doubts about the various purity theories. Initially, she was also a great advocate of Carl Raswan's theories, but the more she studied his work, the more contradictions she discovered. She came to the conclusion that she only considered the things she also found in other sources – not exclusively in Raswan's works – to be probable. She would have liked to bring more biological and scientific approaches into the consciousness of breeders – more objectivity, less discrimination. Over the years, Erika Schiele was not only a treasure trove of knowledge about the Arabian horse, she had also gained great caution and wisdom.

Erika Schiele also tried her hand as a breeder. She acquired three mares with great pedigrees and imported the stallion El Beshir from the United States. The asil El Beshir was born in 1969, sired by Faaris out of Sirulla. The heavily flea-bitten stallion exuberated the classic, old type and was not only eye-catching, but also powerful. He attracted a lot of attention when he beat the Polish racing cracks on the European race tracks. One of El Beshir's daughters, lovely JK Blue Hadbah was acquired by Marbach State Stud and graced the "silver herd" for a number of years.

Unfortunately, Erika Schiele's many trips got in the way of her horse keeping and, above all, her breeding projects. Therefore, after some time, her mares moved on to Luxembourg. El Beshir went on to several stud farms. With some melancholy and perhaps even a little envy, she looked at the lives of other breeders who lived their daily lives with their horses and followed their breeding programs. However, her love of traveling,



Ibn Sharzada (Anter x Sharzada) in El Zahraa. Photo: Erika Schiele, Fotoarchiv Deutsches Pferdemuseum e.V. Verden (Aller), Deutschland.



Akhtal (Amrulla x Hagir), a straight Egyptian stallion bred by the EAO and born in 1968. He was especially well-known for his children Morhaf EAO, Taymour EAO, and Ibn Adaweya. Photo: Erika Schiele, Fotoarchiv Deutsches Pferdemuseum e.V. Verden (Aller), Deutschland.

visiting stud farms and meeting other like-minded people was her top priority. Shortly before her death, Mr. Ohliger - a fellow breeder - kindly drove her to East Germany so that she could attend the founding of the first private Arabian breeding association there. There, as usually, she offered her much appreciated advice.

At the time, she was struggling with the after-effects of a fractured neck of femur. Despite diligent physiotherapy, underwater exercise, massage and lymphatic drainage, she had great difficulty healing. Walking without a cane or crutches had become impossible.

Erika Schiele spent the last years of her life in an idyllic retirement home in Dießen at lake Ammersee in Bavaria. Three days after her 76th birthday, she lay down to rest in the evening and never woke up. The Arabian horse breed had lost a great personality, a clever, far-sighted and hard-working woman. According to Erika Schiele's will, her estate went to the German Horse Museum in Verden / Aller. It can be viewed there at any time by appointment. It was very important to Erika Schiele that her photos, records, etc. should be preserved for posterity and be accessible to everyone. A visit to this museum dedicated to horses is an event not to be missed! □