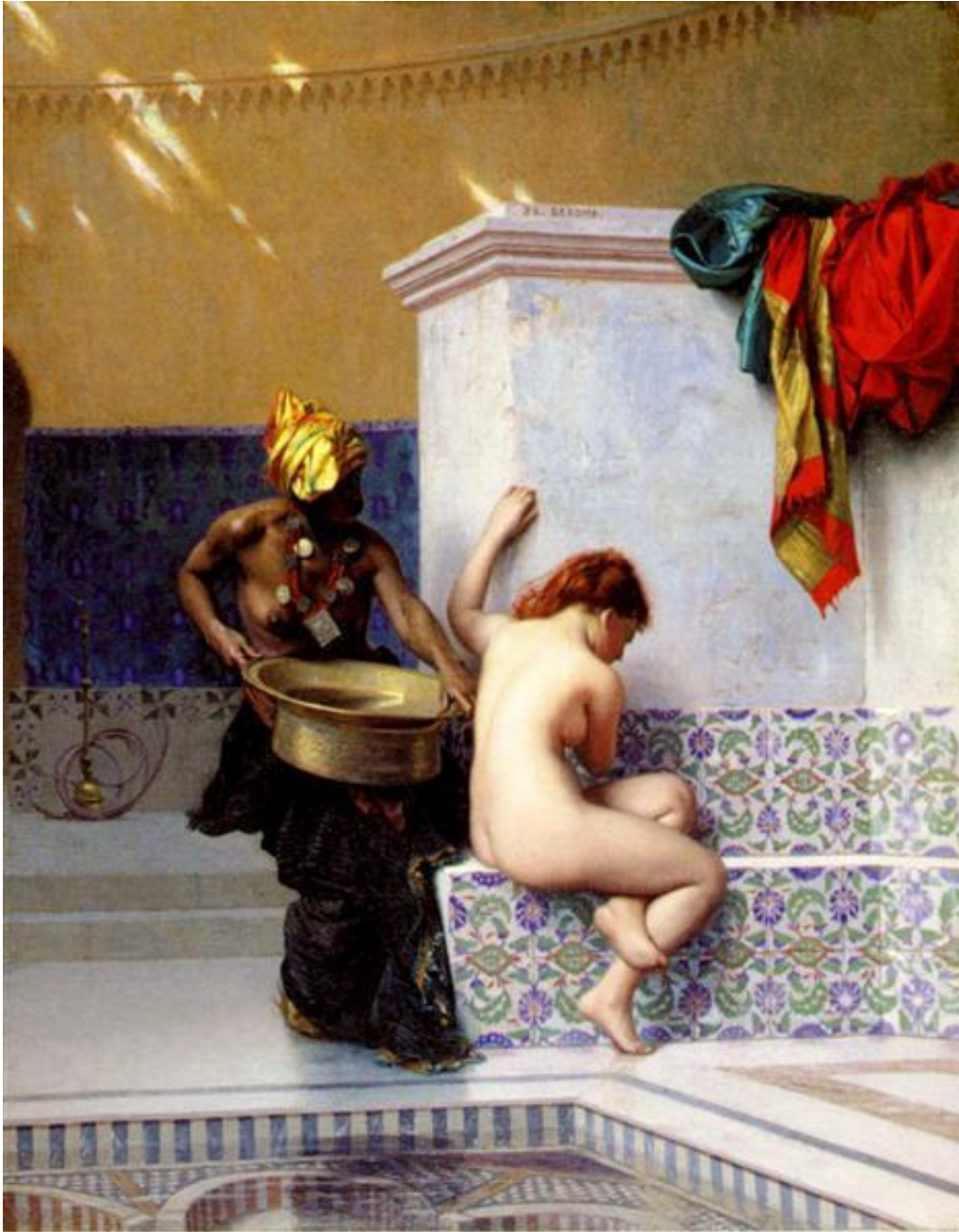


**DEI Spotlight – Orientalism in the SCA
A Class Prepared for the Barony of South Downs**



Disclaimer: This handout is meant to spark a discussion about the representation of Arab culture and peoples in Western culture and how that impacts the SCA. The content shared here has been conglomerated by me. Information is always evolving, and we are always learning. Should you find something problematic or wish to update information here for the betterment of the SCA, please feel free to reach out to me for an open dialogue.

Class Outline:

[What is Orientalism?](#)

"Orientalism" is a way of seeing that imagines, emphasizes, exaggerates and distorts differences of Arab peoples and cultures as compared to that of Europe and the U.S. It often involves seeing Arab culture as exotic, backward, uncivilized, and at times dangerous

[What is the Orient vs the Occident?](#)

"East" vs "West" where the West refers to Western Europe and the East encompasses the entirety of the Middle East, North Africa and Asia as seen through the lens of colonialism. (My definition)

[Wait, I thought the orient was a derogatory stereotype of Asian countries?](#)

Yes, that started in the 1970's - John Kuo Wei Tchen, director of the Asian/Pacific/American Studies Program and Institute at New York University, said the basic criticism of the term developed in the U.S. in the 1970s. He has said: "With the U.S.A. anti-war movement in the '60s and early '70s, many Asian Americans identified the term 'Oriental' with a Western process of racializing Asians as forever opposite 'others'."

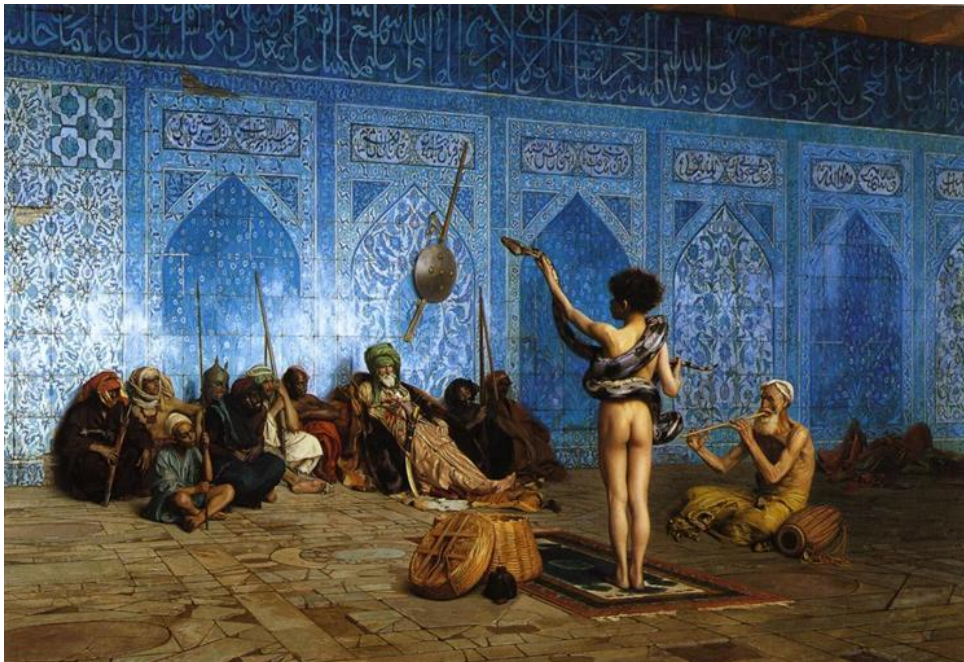
[Edward Said's Orientalism](#)

Consequently, in 1978, Edward Said, a Palestinian- American professor published his work, "Orientalism" that criticizes the view of Arabs in the west. While this work was very influential in disrupting orientalist thought and fantasies of Arabs, the book has been criticized for it's binary view of Arabs vs Westerners.



Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *The Grand Odalisque* (1814), oil on canvas, 91 x 162 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Image by Dennis G. Jarvis, via Wikimedia Commons.

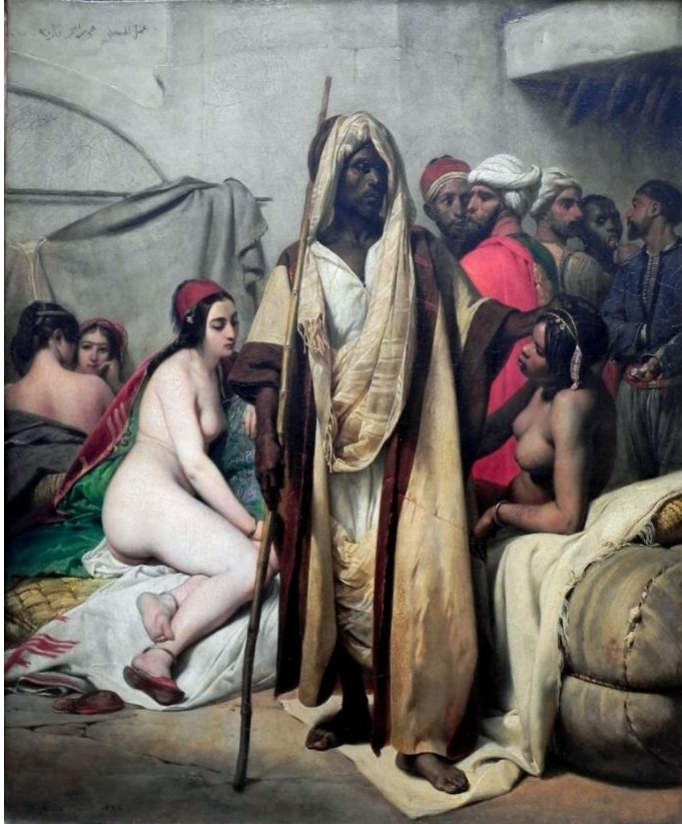
In France, however, it would be Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904) who would become most associated with the Orientalist 'movement' later in the 19th Century. **His work is often unapologetically sensual and erotic, and sought to capture what he saw as the high drama and passion of Oriental life.**



Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904), *The Snake Charmer* (1870), oil on canvas, 84 x 122 cm, Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA, US. WikiArt Public Domain.



Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904), *The Hookah Lighter* (1898), oil on canvas, private collection. WikiArt Public Domain.



Horace Vernet (1789–1863), *Slave Market* (1836), oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm, Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany. Wikimedia Commons.

Modern Misconceptions About Arab Americans:

- All Arabs are Muslims, and all Muslims are Arab.
 - Arabs are religiously diverse group – significant numbers of Arab Christians in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq. Arabs make up between 15-18% of the Muslim world.
- The Arab world is backwards and uncivilized.
 - The Arab world actually represents a highly developed culture and civilization where modern cities mingle with ancient ones.
- The Arab world is one big desert.
 - Truly geographically complex and diverse.
- Stereotypes of Arab males
 - All are “oil-rich Sheiks”. As in the West, there are economically diverse segments of the population.
 - Mad dictators. Various types of political systems in Arab world.
 - Terrorists. Overwhelming majority are law abiding citizens with families and a wide variety of occupations.

- Stereotypes of Arab women
 - All are oppressed by men. Not true.
 - All are veiled. According to Islam women are supposed to wear veils. In some countries, like Lebanon, Syria and Egypt, it is not imposed upon them and women are free to choose whether to wear veils. However, in other places, all women, even non-Muslims, wear veils out of fear of mistreatment by fanatics or those who pretend to be guardians of Islam.
 - Belly dancers are exotic, sexually available women that only exist for male pleasure. Not true. Belly dance started as a dance done in the home. There are publicly performing belly dancers, some of whom are world famous celebrities. Others are sex workers, usually not by choice.

How does this impact the SCA? – DISCUSSION!

Discussion questions:

- *What are some concepts you heard today that were new to you?*
- *What are some common stereotypes you have seen in the SCA towards Arabs or Arab culture?*
- *What are some ways we can address these stereotypes?*
- *How can you find credible, period research pertaining to the Middle East and North Africa and/or the dynasties and empires of the Islamic world?*

Other Resources for DEI:

- <https://news.jrn.msu.edu/culturalcompetence/race/arab-americans/>
- <https://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Introduction-to-the-Middle-East-The-Ethnic-Mosaic.html>
- Reel Bad Arabs – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reel_Bad_Arabs

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