

## Werk

**Titel:** Lithography

**Untertitel:** I. history

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**Ort:** London

**PURL:** <https://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?665762720> | LOG\_0015

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## LITHOGRAPHY: I. HISTORY: By F. ERNEST JACKSON

**A**LOYS SENEFELDER, who invented the art of lithography, was born at Prague on the 6th of November, 1771. He was the eldest son of an actor attached to the Bavarian Court Theatre. Educated at Munich College and the University of Ingoldstadt, he was considered by his professors to be a very brilliant student and was expected to distinguish himself in the profession of the law which he intended to follow. The demise of his father abruptly terminated the student's university career and placed him, at the age of 21, in the position of responsible head of a family of nine. Penniless and with the burden of such a responsibility upon his shoulders, he set to work with a spirit characteristic of his whole life to make a living for himself and his flock by writing for the stage. His first play, a comedy, with the amusing title of the "Connoisseurs of Women," was acted with some success at the Court Theatre at Munich. This was, however, his first and last triumph in the art of playwriting, for although he subsequently wrote four or five dramas they were all doomed to failure, neither theatre manager nor publisher could be induced to bring forward his work to the public notice. The cost of printing and publishing at the end of the eighteenth century was too considerable to allow Senefelder to proceed far as his own financier in the production of his plays. His venture in this direction soon brought him to the end of his slender resources and set him to search for some means by which he could personally print and issue his own works. Etching coming first to his hand he proceeded to write his copy in reverse with a steel point on a sheet of copper previously prepared with etching ground, to print the number of impressions he required, and then, for the sake of economy to re-polish the plate with snakestone and make ready for the next page. History does not recount how long this labour of love lasted, but it must soon have proved even to the dauntless Senefelder to be a very unprofitable expenditure of energy. All etchers know what a considerable amount of effort is necessary to remove a firmly bitten line from a copper plate by such means. Abandoning copper, he next tried the fine-grain limestone that was used for paving the floors of the better class houses in Munich: the stone from the Solenhofen quarries, Kelheim stone, which is used for lithographic drawing and printing to-day. He still used the etching method with doubtful success, and was on the point of abandoning his experiments when the incident known to all lithographers gave him a clue to what he calls the "good method." Senefelder's own version of his discovery, taken from the first part of his work on lithography, is most interesting.

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" I had just succeeded in my little laboratory in polishing a stone plate, which I intended to cover with etching ground—in order to continue my exercises in writing backwards ; when my mother entered the room and desired me to write her a bill for the washerwoman, who was waiting for



*" He is not here, for he is risen." B. West.*

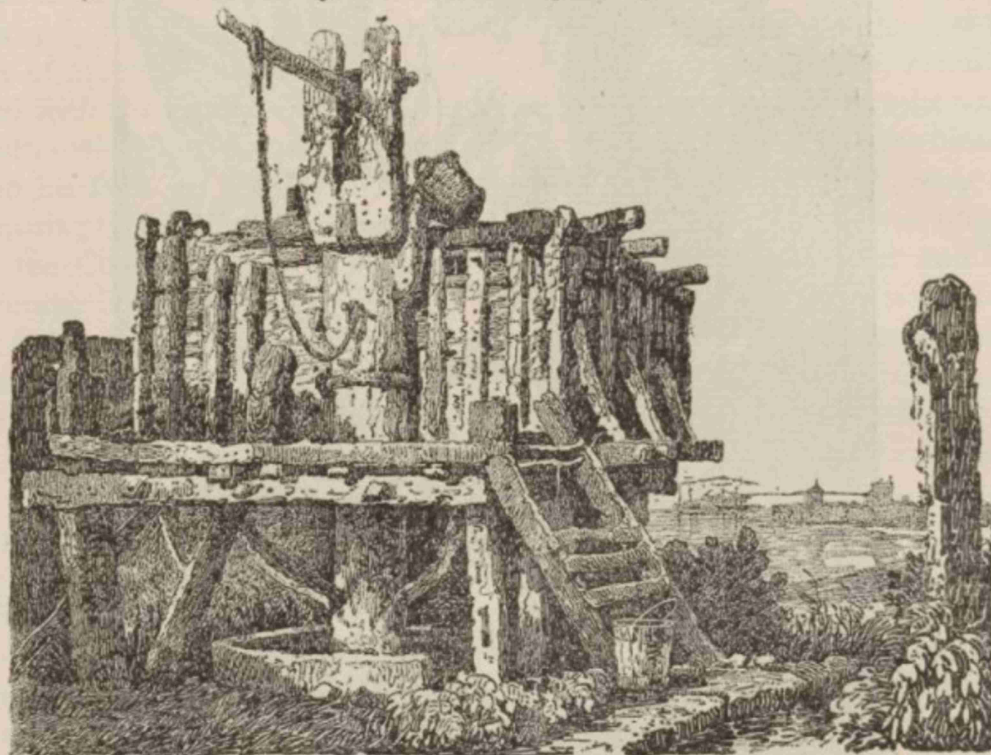
the linen. I happened not to have the smallest slip of paper at hand, as my little stock of paper had been entirely exhausted by taking proof impressions from the stones : nor was there even a drop of ink in the inkstand. As the matter would not admit of delay, and we had nobody in the house to send for a supply of the deficient materials, I resolved to write the list with my



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ink prepared with wax, soap, and lamp-black, on the stone which I had just polished, and from which I could copy it at leisure.

“Some time after this I was just going to wipe this writing from the stone, when the idea all at once struck me to try what would be the effect of such a writing with my prepared ink, if I were to bite in the stone with aqua-fortis : and whether perhaps it might not be possible to apply printing ink to it, in the same way as to wood-engravings, and so take impressions

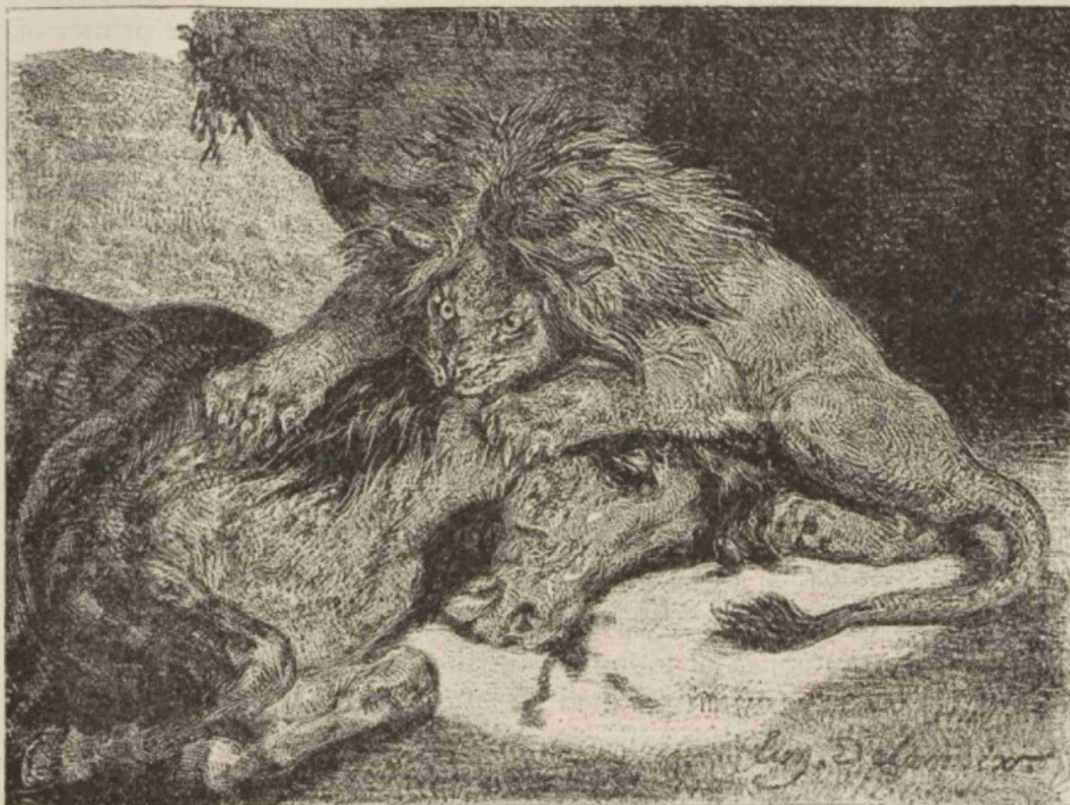


*A Transfer. Lithograph by S. Prout.*

from it. I immediately hastened to put this idea into execution. I surrounded the stone with a border of wax and covered the surface of the stone, to a height of two inches, with a mixture of one part of aqua-fortis and ten parts of water, which I left standing five minutes on it, and on examining the result of this experiment I found the letters elevated about the tenth part of a line. Some of the finer and not sufficiently distinct lines had suffered in some measure, but the greater part of the letters had not been damaged at all in their breadth, considering their elevation, so that I confidently hoped to obtain very clear impressions, chiefly from the printed characters in which there were not many fine strokes.

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"The new art was thus invented, and I lost no time in making myself a perfect master of it, but in order to exercise it so as to gain a livelihood by it, a little capital was indispensable to construct a press, purchase stones, paper and other utensils. But as I could not afford even this trifling expense, I saw myself again on the point of being obliged to relinquish all my fond hopes and prospects of success unless I could devise an expedient to obtain the necessary money. At length I hit upon one, which was to enlist as a



*Lion devouring a horse (proof). Lithograph by Delacroix.*

private in the Artillery, as a substitute for a friend of mine, who promised me a premium of 200 florins. This sum, I thought, would be sufficient to establish my first press, to which I intended to devote all my leisure, and the produce of which, I hoped, would soon enable me to obtain my discharge from the Army."

This discovery, important as it seemed to Senefelder, was only the first step towards his "Chemical Printing," the lithography we know to-day, which was invented by him two years later. Before going further into the



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developments of "Chemical Printing," it is necessary to mention that at least two other persons claimed to have been previous to Senefelder in the invention of the first method, that is the method of printing from stone engraved in relief. The first of these persons, Father Schmidt, a professor at the Cadet School at Munich, printed in this manner a series of plates for use in his lectures on botany. The other claimant was Charles Weber, the musician, who used engraving on stone as a medium for printing music. Both used stone similar to that used by Senefelder and both printed typographically, which is a very different process to that used by the printer of lithographs. The great difference between Schmidt and Weber on the one hand and Senefelder on the other is that the first two remained satisfied with their primitive discovery whilst the other, realising the possibilities of his first idea, worked with perseverance until a completely new and entirely different principle of printing was evolved. It has been frequently suggested that the Chinese invented lithography many centuries ago, but there seems to be very little evidence to support the theory, and a friend of the writer's who has lived in China for many years, and who frequently worked as an artist in Chinese workshops, denied the existence of any but European installations in that country; and there is little reason to suppose that before Impert, the French missionary, introduced Senefelder's invention to them the Celestials knew anything about lithography.

The pressing needs of his family impelled Senefelder towards such an immediate commercial outlet for his work that in 1796, after his first crude discovery, he entered into a partnership with a musician of the name of Gleisner with the object of founding a firm of music printers, and it was for writing music that he first used transfer paper, which greatly helped him to discover true lithographic printing. From this first establishment at Munich, lithography spread over Europe with considerable rapidity. It was introduced into England in 1800 by Andre and Senefelder himself. The first works of any importance executed in this country were those published by the Polyautographic Society. These lithographs were certainly the most interesting specimens of the art produced at that time, and are certainly much in advance of any contemporary continental works. They are in most instances very simple pen and ink drawings or imitations of wood-engravings of the period. The lithograph by Benjamin West which we reproduce was among the works published in this volume, and is probably the first lithograph done in England. For many years there was very little enthusiasm for stone drawings, possibly to be accounted for by the division of labour in pro-

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duction : the draughtsman rarely knowing how to print and therefore unable to direct the printer, and the printer seldom understanding the wishes of the artist and frequently being most anxious to keep him in complete ignorance of the mysteries of lithographic printing. It was only towards the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century, and in the hands of men like Prout, Hullmandel, Bonnington, Lane and a few others in England and under such signatures as Chas. Vernet, Isabey (father and son), Charlet and Raffet, Delacroix, Daumier and Gavarni in France that lithography really showed its possibilities to the world. The commercial mind soon grasped those possibilities, but instead of using, it set to work to pervert them, and it is no exaggeration to say that, as an art, lithography almost expired in the arms of commerce. Men of little taste controlled its destinies; its capabilities were used for the purpose of imitation only, and it was the proud boast of the master printer that one was unable to distinguish between the original work, water colour or oil-painting, and the ingenious reproduction. Designers rarely took into consideration the natural limitations and beauties of the medium by which their work was to be reproduced; and the lithographic artist was very seldom more than a copyist whose extreme ingenuity was exercised at great cost in straining the medium he used in order to make a lithograph resemble anything but itself. Good tradition was never so completely lost in France as it was in this country, there being a constant living artistic interest in the medium which illuminated their commercial use of it, and to-day there is an abundance of healthy work which will be dealt with later. Until a comparatively recent date Germany, the mother country of the art, had produced no first-rate lithographers, with the notable exception of Adolphe Menzel, but during the last few years such numbers of admirable prints for commercial and decorative purposes have been given to the world by members of the younger school of artists that special attention must be given them in a future article. Spain with her splendid Goya, Italy with her modern posters, Holland and Belgium with their artist lithographers, have all added their contributions. This very brief history must not be closed without mention of the revival of artistic lithography in England. Thomas Way provided the means with his technical knowledge and his great enthusiasm, and Whistler gave the artistic impulse. The movement has culminated in the formation of a society, under the presidency of Mr. Joseph Pennell, which has for its mission the encouragement of artistic lithography. This society was named by its sponsors the Senefelder Club, in homage to him who invented the art one hundred and sixteen years ago, and who died at Munich on the 26th of February, 1834.