

Sheikh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmad al Sabah: Encounters

Summer 2002. Encounters often unfold their significance a considerable amount of time after they have taken place. I learned of a surprise visit of Sheikh Nasser's to the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin a few hours after his actual arrival from London. We first encountered each other in the galleries on the Museumsinsel, or Museum Island. I never imagined him to be like this, a little white semi circular cap on a round head, casual, a tracksuit top over matching trousers with white trainers.

During our first tour through the exhibits it was not the descriptions whose content aroused his curiosity. His questions were directed to the provenance of the objects: who was the previous owner? Who was behind the "Collection Figdor, Vienna"? Which objects had Friedrich Sarre brought to Berlin from 1894 onwards? Which were Wilhelm von Bode's carpets, which stood out to him from the assessment of many paintings in Italian churches and European princely houses? He wanted to be inspired and learn through this wide-ranging contemplation. His acquisitions were brought into the conversation, barely disguised. Whether he was really interested in the assessment of the person questioned, was not certain. It could however have been of general interest to him. He considered research in the natural sciences with great respect.

During ten years in which I could experience the enormous expansion from strictly the Islamic world up to antiquity, I admired his decisiveness, supported by the knowledge of his closest collaborators Sue Kaoukji, and until his departure, Manuel Keene. In our Volume II- "Pre-Islamic Carpets and Textiles from Eastern Lands" he reached the zenith of his collection of carpets. Beyond classical examples he had expanded the history of carpets with about twenty-five knotted carpet fragments: these Persian-Sasanid carpets are now a new group with a home in Kuwait.

During my visits to Kuwait Sheikh Nasser enquired each time with a personal question about the progress of my work. On these occasions I was always informed about his latest treasures which currently occupied him. I have always found these exchanges to be very stimulating and valued them.

Sheikh Nasser's great passion was for gemstones, and particularly Mughal Indian jewellery. The catalogue produced for his magnificent collection, "Schatzhaus der Welt", or "Treasures of the World" is a masterpiece, and accompanied numerous special exhibitions in many museums around the world.

Beyond this he was enthusiastic as a collector in the areas of Pre-Islamic and "antique" art and archaeology. Here also he had the conviction that, as opposed to a European or American collection, he ought to offer his collection to the home where it belonged. A better home could actually not be found, because in Kuwait, his home, it is treasured and considered, and looked after with great love. We can be proud of his achievements, his provisions guarantee the collection's secure survival in the Orient.

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