

I was truly saddened to learn of Sheikh Nasser's passing. It was my great pleasure to have met him several times while studying his collection and I always found his humble and affable demeanour very endearing. And what a collection! The sumptuous publications that have appeared these last few years only confirm that in addition to the Islamic art collection, for which he is duly well known, his ancient art holdings are also truly world class.

The earliest works of art from the ancient Near East are particularly compelling, including the extraordinary Mesopotamian copper and silver stands, one in the form of a goat and one of a bearded deity, both from the Early Dynastic period. Further to the East, and a complete revelation to me, is the composite figure of a lioness, likely from the Oxus region because of the method of its construction. This is a significantly larger version of her more famous sister, which forces one to reassess the date and origins to which it had been traditionally assigned by generations of scholars.

The collection of works from the Iron Age, especially the silver vessels from the Neo-Elamite world, are second to none. A personal favourite is the rhyton in the form of two heraldic lions. Another major group are the parcel gilt silver vessels from the Hellenized East, the most important of which is perhaps the large dish with a bust of Dionysos protruding from the tondo. Outstanding works from the 1st millennium A.D. include the large Sasanian bronze figure of a lady, bedecked in elaborate headdress and robes, or the South Arabian bronze figure of a young man wearing the armour more typically associated with Rome. Jewellery from all periods, including seals, is another noteworthy component of the collection. Here it would be hard to choose a favourite, but the Sasanian carnelian intaglio portrait of King Peroz is a stand out.

This amazing assembly of ancient objects will endure as a worthy testament to a truly great collector. While I will always have the memory of having had the privilege to handle each and every one of these works of art, most important of all is the cherished memory of sitting opposite Sheikh Nasser at his desk, while he handed me recent acquisitions, a memory for me even more precious than the objects themselves.

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