

Sheikh Nasser

At the ceremony of the opening of the exhibition “Masterpieces of Islamic Art in the Hermitage Museum” in Kuwait in 1990 Sheikh Nasser approached me and exclaimed: “Do you know what you have done for us?” He was very excited and looked very happy. When we met again later, he explained that to see the famous bronzes and other Islamic objects from the Hermitage Museum on exhibition in Kuwait was his dream and it had now been realized.

I was later invited to Kuwait by Sheikha Hussah al-Sabah to give a lecture on the Islamic objects in the Hermitage. This was a wonderful opportunity to see the al-Sabah collection in the storage. That day, I again met Sheikh Nasser, and it was such an honour that he showed me the most precious objects of his collection, those he was especially proud of. He started with a very small double page with zodiac images which he had kept in its stained and damaged condition, and handed it to me with great admiration. I still remember the expression on his face. Probably the words, which I pronounced, looking at these fragile pages with wonderful tiny drawings, coincided with his own feelings because soon I was invited to work (with Manijeh Bayani) on the collection of Iranian manuscripts, miniatures and drawings acquired by him and Sheikha Hussah.

For me this meeting with Sheikh Nasser was very important, cardinally changing my attitude to those who collect. Now I could distinguish true collectors from the dealers, and from those who spoiled so many precious works of art, disjoining the manuscripts and the albums, splitting the pages etc.

I also have enormous pleasure when I recall a further meeting with Sheikh Nasser in St Petersburg. I spent the whole day acting as his guide around the Hermitage Museum, showing him what he wanted to see, as well as what I wanted to show him. It was a wonderful experience to discuss our collections with such an erudite and sensitive connoisseur.

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