

MY FRIEND, SHEIKH NASSER – by Herbert Horovitz

It was in the 80's, I was at the head of my small jewelry workshop, when my father, a renowned diamond dealer, asked me one day to go to Kuwait on his behalf to make the molds of some important Mughals engraved emeralds that had been acquired by Sheikh Nasser.

These came from the treasures collected by the Nizam of Hyderabad.

This was my first stay in this country and my first contact with this endearing man and his world of Dar al Athar al Islamiyyah.

Who could then predict this great friendship and these forty years, peopled with numerous enriching encounters, extraordinary journeys, lively conversations and passion for a particular hunt: treasure hunting...

Sheikh Nasser's name was not unfamiliar to me. My mother had told us about a dinner with Murray Mundshein (Fred Leighton) and his wife and Sheikh Nasser and his wife Sheik ha Hussah. For the occasion mother had selected a beautiful diamond brooch, her ring and ear clips, Murray's wife was transformed into a real Christmas tree with diamonds in profusion and Sheikha Hussah, who owned sumptuous jewelry, true to her discretion, wore almost no jewelry... great, very great class! That made my sister Ilona and me smile.

On several occasions, we had entrusted to our expert hands the realization of drawings and jewels of great quality and size. Behind the apprehension that the importance of this character could arouse in me, I discovered a man of extreme kindness and a magnificent family that immediately put me at ease. My father had been present at the inauguration of the Kuwait Museum, and I had the privilege of visiting it in my turn and appreciating the beauty of the building and the exhibits.

Sad events proved the foresight and interest in taking prints of the emerald collection, many of which disappeared a few years later, in 1990, during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and which have not reappeared to this day.



Having, at the request of my father, handed over my workshop in 1990 and integrated the family business, I got back in touch and reworked some of the files that were still pending. At the end of the year 1996, my father left us. I then took over some of the old contacts, in particular with the lawyers who had dealt with Sadruddin Javeri, and I negotiated the purchase of several pieces including this spinel bearing the name of Ulugh Beg, Timur. This allowed me to complete the purchase of this splendid "ruby handle" which will be the poster for the "Treasury of the World" in London. In January and July 1997, I had the opportunity to return to Kuwait with the "Timur Ruby". What a pleasure and pride to succeed in finalizing the acquisition of such important pieces! It was worth it to me, during the delivery of these treasures, to come to share for a few days, for a few hours the life of Dar al Athar al Islamiyyah in Kuwait located then in the family property in Mahbula. I had at each stay the joy of sharing my time with all the actors who played in this adventure, Sheikha Hussah, who gathered once a week the whole family, children and grandchildren to whom I think of with great emotion; what beautiful moments spent together in this magical place!



I met Sheikh Nasser in 1998 in Amsterdam to show him a huge emerald engraved in a belt buckle belonging to

Mr. Loh, formerly the property of the Maharajah of Patiala.

We then went together to Antwerp where he was interested in visiting beautiful houses in a neighborhood that had been praised to him. During our meeting with the real estate agent, he asked me to play the role of the buyer, him being in blue jeans, it's me, in a suit and tie who represented the "serious" character ...

In May 1999 I brought him a stone in Kuwait for which he had asked me to finalize the purchase, the 56.70 carat "Taviz" diamond from Spinks in London. I also had the privilege of delivering him a collection of Mughal objects acquired from the Molayem family, including an enameled shield, as well as a long sword which caused a stir in the boarding lounge of the Geneva airport when I presented myself at the checkpoint with this formidable weapon. I owed the salute to the captain of the Kuwait Airways plane who agreed to take me on board with it. I took the opportunity of taking with me the 59.60 carat emerald of Nadir Shah. In December, I came back with Mr. Mahendra Patel to show his 211.70 carat Venkatagiris emerald.

It was in March 2000 that we went to the TETAF in Maastricht, a city with a very complicated access. On our arrival we took a cab driven by a woman and throughout the journey, Sheikh Nasser inquired with curiosity about the life and activity of a woman taxi driver in Maastricht... We ended our stay in Paris in a small hotel near the Gare de Lyon.

I went two more times to Kuwait, made an estimate of the value of the collection and in May 2001, we met in London for the opening of the first exhibition of "Treasury of the World" at the British Museum and then visited together the exhibition "Le Diamant" in Paris, at the Museum of Natural History". Afterwards, we opened the exhibition in Berlin in 2005, in Paris in 2006, al-Fann at the Palazzo Reale in Milan in 2010. Each time a renewed pleasure, a delicious assembly, and exhibits of a very high quality and an enlightened choice.



In 2002, he became interested in acquiring a property in Geneva, but, faced with the impossibility for a foreigner to buy a house in Switzerland, I found a beautiful residence in the vicinity of Cointrin airport, on French territory. This patrician house had been built by Voltaire to house his watchmakers. After many adventures and a couple architects, the house allowed some barbecues and was a "pied à Terre" in the region, the best use of which was made by Futooh during her studies. Sheikh Nasser even brought back a Mongolian yurt which I helped the assembly. A very nice relaxing break.

In September 2002 he picked me up in Geneva and we left for Munich to meet Sarah Kuehn in her parents' house and her friend Jambaz Khan who presented several breathtaking pieces from excavations in Bactria. We then left to visit the Berlin Museum and after that, as if by magic, we met again in Zürich to see other excavated objects with the same people.



In October 2004, London and then Berlin in January 2005 for the opening of the travelling exhibition. It is also in August 2005, after long transactions that I was finally able to bring back a much-awaited trophy, the 100 and especially the 1000 Mohurs gold coins. They were

hotly disputed between the bank where they had been deposited as security for a loan to Nizam, which was never repaid, and the Indian government, which claimed ownership.



In February 2012, I am invited to spend a week in Beaconsfield, a superb property in the neighborhood of London, with time spent with a snowman competition and a cooking festival... There is a deer herd in the park, a great place.



In April 2012, I am asked to make copies of the Mohurs coins.

Sheikh Nasser takes me during the weekend on a walk... We fly in and land in the south of Egypt, at Marsa Alam where his father owns a large property by the sea. We are welcomed by the whole Egyptian army (or almost...).



From then on, a military truck with about ten soldiers followed us in all our movements to ensure the security of an important statesman, and this annoys Sheikh Nasser to the highest degree. It must be said that the atmosphere is a bit electric as elections approach.

In the morning, after a solid breakfast, we go shopping at the market, a sport that Sheikh Nasser practices assiduously. We even buy a huge scarlet grouper that we will use to make a joke to Mubarak Alomair by hooking it on his line on a fishing trip on the Salwa.



In 2017, we meet again in Beaconsfield, from where we set off together for Paris at the inauguration of the exhibition of Sheikh Hamad al Thani at the Grand Palais, at the reception of which Sheikh Nasser is the guest of honor. It is a sumptuous reception with all the world's top experts of Islamic art museums.



How I enjoyed our adventures! How I loved his entourage! Starting with the luminous Sheikha Hussah, to his children Ali, Dana, Bibi, Futouh and those whom I knew thanks to him, Sue, my wonderful Sue, Katie, Philipp, Daud and Ahmad Shah, Firas, Aurora and William, Suresh, Katherine, Sophie, Loulwa, Samir, Georges, Brian Fix, Mr. Melikian, Mahrukh, Mubarak, Abaed, Lahcen, Benji, Dino and his wife, and all those whose names I forgot but who are engraved in my heart. But him...his friendship, his kindness, his compassion, his concern for the well-being of all, his mocking smile when he gently teased me, his ideas about the future of his country, the rail link between Kuwait and China, his concerns for the transmission of his collection... What a sparkling memory of an extraordinary character, what a satisfaction to know that Sheikha Hussah will know how to keep his memory alive and continue his work, what luck to have been able to cross his life and constitute a small stone in this great edifice.

His blessed memory will always be for me an object of great pride.
I miss him...