

Only a very few of those who had the privilege to meet Sheikh Nasser al-Sabah became aware of his vast culture. Sheikh Nasser had that other rare quality: he was a truly modest man, as those who truly live their faith sometimes are. Steeped in classical Arabic literature, he made no show of it and expressed himself with elegant simplicity, occasionally allowing his vivid sense of humour to come through. Few people as cultivated as Sheikh Nasser was, wear their knowledge as lightly. A joie de vivre that never failed him made one forget how seriously he proceeded to attain his goals.

Deeply attracted to objets d'art from his world, he gradually attained the highest level of connoisseurship in the art of the Islamic civilizations and from there worked his way back through time to the Antiquity that preceded them. Partly through opportunity but largely due to deep personal inclination, he focussed in the main on the art of the Iranian world.

In the course of the sixty years or so during which I came across collectors, curators and professionals of every stripe involved in handling the art of the Islamic or Ancient Middle East, I met only one other man who responded as intensely to it. Sheikh Nasser will be remembered as the most perceptive collector in the Arab world, with a rare eye for sheer beauty. He was as ready to pounce on very fine pieces of limited commercial value, occasionally worth no more than a few dollars, as to draw on his vast means when the occasion required it. A highly gifted and marvellous man has just left this world.

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