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Elizabeth Sgalitzer Ettinghausen

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Photo: Stefan Heidemann, Los Angeles, June 11, 2011.

For the younger generation, Elizabeth Ettinghausen represented the nexus to the first century of Islamic Art History. Born in 1918 into a Viennese academic medical family,¹ Elizabeth Sgalitzer studied in Vienna and took courses in art history and history, starting in 1936. After the *Anschluss* of Austria, in September 1938, the family fled via Prague to Istanbul, where they stayed for most of World War II. Here she was exposed to the finest of Byzantine and Islamic Art, which became her academic profession. Soon fluent in English, French, Turkish, and Persian, she also

¹ For the biographical data I am especially indebted to the obituary of [Ettinghausen, Stephen], “Elizabeth S. Ettinghausen” *Town Topics, Princeton’s Weekly Community Newspaper Since 1946*, June 29, 2016 [url: <http://www.towntopics.com/wordpress/2016/06/29/obituaries-62916/> accessed Jan. 18, 2017].

acquired a working knowledge of several other languages. In 1943 she earned a PhD in art history from the University in Istanbul, graduating with a thesis titled “Portrait and Multiple Perspectives Within Sculpture Beyond the Mediterranean.” That same year she was awarded a junior fellowship at Harvard’s Center for Byzantine Studies at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, where she spent two years researching Byzantine glazed tiles (a study that was finally published in 1954). At the same time, she was also working as an analyst for the State Department.

It was at Dumbarton Oaks that she met the love of her life, Richard Ettinghausen (1906–1979), who had fled from the Nazis to the US, and they married in 1945. It is difficult to measure the professional impact of two people in an academic family where they are working closely with each other. It was the husband who made the career, authored the books and articles, and got the credit. Richard Ettinghausen became probably the most influential scholar in Islamic and Persian Art of his time.² After earning his PhD in Islamic Studies in Frankfurt in 1931, he became research assistant in the Islamische Kunstabteilung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin. Ettinghausen left Germany in 1933, pursuing a career that led him via Oxford, Princeton, and Dumbarton Oaks, to a professorship in Ann Arbor, and then to the position of chief curator at the Freer Gallery in D.C. In 1966 he was appointed director of the still fledgling Department of Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and almost at the same time, 1967, he became Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Islamic Art at New York University’s School of Fine Arts. The Ettinghausens moved to Princeton in 1967. After her husband’s death in 1979, Elizabeth helped to keep his legacy alive in various ways, among them by supporting his publication projects³ and donating important artworks to the Metropolitan Museum and other institutions.

Elizabeth Ettinghausen, as an active researcher, had a broad academic interest. In the 1950s she authored a study on the influence of Islamic art on contemporary design, for the Middle East Institute,⁴ which resulted in an exhibition by the US Information Agency (USIA) that was viewed in many Near Eastern and North African countries. In 1970, she curated another exhibition at the Princeton University Museum, “The Near Eastern City Since 1800.” She was awarded

² GRABAR, Oleg, „Richard Ettinghausen,“ *Artibus Asiae* 41 (1979), 281–284. Brisch, Klaus, “Richard Ettinghausen (1906–1979),” *Der Islam* 57 (1980), 185–186.

³ In the two forewords of the first comprehensive textbook of Islamic art that was posthumously published in 1987, Oleg Grabar highlighted Elizabeth Ettinghausen’s role as being constantly supportive, commenting on numerous drafts. RICHARD ETTINGHAUSEN, OLEG GRABAR, MARILYN JENKINS-MADINA, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650–1250*, New haven, 2nd revised London 2001, ix, x.

⁴ ETTINGHAUSEN, MEJ 1960, 95 (editor’s note).

a research fellowship by the German Archaeological Institute, and took part in New York University's excavation at Aphrodisias in Western Turkey. Most of her publications commenced after 1989, when she was already in her seventies. Her small oeuvre centers on decorative art, tiles, ornaments, book painting, and metalwork. Her last publication is the foreword for an exhibition on luxury textiles in Cleveland, Ohio, in 2015.

Until the last few years of her life she enjoyed travelling, and participated in many conferences and symposia across the US and in Europe, Turkey, and Iran. She was at almost every academic event on Islamic Art between Princeton, New York and Philadelphia until a year and a half ago. Her experience and erudition earned her many honors during her life. She served on the Visiting Committee of the Department of Islamic art at the Metropolitan Museum, and was a member of the Collections Committee of the Harvard University Art Museum; she was elected corresponding member of the German Archaeological Institute, Berlin, and Honorary Trustee of the Textile Museum (Washington, DC), as well as serving on the board of a number of other academic institutions and societies within the field.

Many people remember Elizabeth from her lectures and her active participation in discussions at conferences and symposia on Islamic Art in the US and beyond, where she always took a vivid interest in the research of young scholars and the progress of the field.

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