



ERDMANN, KURT

ERDMANN, KURT, leading historian of Sasanian and Islamic art (b. 9 September 1901 in Hamburg, d. 30 September 1964 in Berlin). Erdmann's career and numerous publications were closely connected to the Islamic Department of the Berlin State Museums, of which he was director from 1958 until his death. He also taught Islamic art at the universities of Berlin, Bonn, Cairo, and Hamburg. From 1951 to 1958, he was professor of Islamic art at the University of Istanbul.

Erdmann initially began his studies with the German language in 1919 but soon developed an interest in European art history. He eventually received a doctoral degree in 1927 under the guidance of Erwin Panofsky in Hamburg with a thesis on European architecture. In the same year he began his career as volunteer in the State Museums. Working as a curator of European paintings, he was invited by Friedrich Sarre to participate in a major publication on carpets (F. Sarre and H. Trenkwald, *Altorientalische Teppiche II*, Leipzig and Vienna, 1928), which immediately showed his mastery of the subject.

This opportunity initiated his lifelong interest in the art of carpet making, which resulted in numerous outstanding contributions not only to Persian, but also to Islamic art as a whole. Systematic research into sources, including travel accounts and European paintings, and analysis of carpet patterns, structures, and technical features, led Erdmann to insights on the general history of Oriental carpets, as well as on special groups of carpets. His major works on carpets reached an international public through English



translations. Two of his articles are still considered important contributions to our knowledge of Safavid carpets (“Persische Teppiche der Safawidenzeit,” *Pantheon* 5, 1932, pp. 227-31 and “The Art of Carpet Making,’ in *A Survey of Persian Art*,” *Ars Islamica* 8, 1941, pp. 121-91).

Excavations of 1928-29 and 1931-32 at the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon (q.v.), which had been undertaken by Erdmann’s colleague at the Berlin museum Ernst Kühnel, acquisitions in the field of Parthian and Sasanian art at the museum, and probably general scholarship of the time, led Erdmann to a second field of interest. The art of pre-Islamic Persia, especially the Sasanian period, was of great importance for his research during the 1930s and 1940s. In his study of Sasanian hunting plates, the first systematic work on this group of objects, he developed a chronological sequence according to the compositional features of the king’s crown (“Die sasanidischen Jagdschalen. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung der iranischen Edelmetallkunst unter den Sasaniden,” *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 57, 1936, pp. 193-232). Other studies on hunting plates followed (“Eine unbekannt sasanidische Jagdschale,” *ibid.*, 59, 1938, pp. 209-17; “Zur Chronologie der sasanidischen Jagdschalen,” *ZDMG* 97, 1943, pp. 239-83). His identification of the king in the rock-relief at Tāq-e Bostān as Pērōz (r. 457/59-484; “Das Datum des Tāk-i Bustān,” *Ars Islamica* 4, 1937, pp. 79-97) resulted in a controversy with Ernst Herzfeld, who identified the king as Kōsrow II (r. 591-628). Although Herzfeld’s arguments won wide acceptance, this issue is still a matter of scholarly debate. Numerous studies on different aspects of rock-reliefs (“Zur Deutung der iranischen Felsreliefs,” *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 18, 1942, pp. 209-11; “Sasanidische Felsreliefs—römische Historienreliefs,” *Antike und Abendland* 3, 1948, pp. 75-87) and the identification of crowns (“Die Entwicklung der sasanidischen Krone,” *Ars Islamica* 15/16, 1951, pp. 87-123) were written by Erdmann to determine a chronology for Sasanian art. He was also concerned with the influence of Sasanian themes on other cultures (“Die universalgeschichtliche Stellung der sasanidischen Kunst,” *Saeculum* 1, 1950, pp. 508-34). His views on the Iranian fire sanctuaries (*Das iranische Feuerheiligtum*, Leipzig, 1941), however, have been disproven by new scholarship (see CAHĀRTĀQ i, p. 637). Most of his views on Sasanian art can be found in the first publication devoted solely to this subject (*Die Kunst Irans zur Zeit der Sasaniden*, Berlin, 1943; 2nd ed., Mainz, 1969).

While carpets and Sasanian art were his two main fields of interest, Erdmann wrote extensively on a variety of other subjects, ranging from Achaemenid



themes (“Persepolis: Daten und Deutungen,” *MDOG zu Berlin* 92, 1960, pp. 31-47) to Turkish architecture (*Das anatolische Karavansaray des 13. Jh.*, Berlin, 1961-76). His work at the museum resulted in numerous publications on groups and single works, indicating his productive scholarship in all media of pre-Islamic and Islamic art (“Die Keramik von Afrasiyab,” *Berliner Museen* 63, 1942, pp. 18-28; “Islamische Bergkristallarbeiten,” *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 61, 1940, pp. 125-46; “Neue islamische Bergkristalle,” *Ars Orientalis* 3, 1959, pp. 201-205). Many acquisitions made under his tenure at the museum in Berlin resulted in expanded scope, knowledge, and understanding of Persian art in the Islamic period (“Keramische Erwerbungen der Islamischen Abteilung 1958-1960,” *Berliner Museen*, N.S. 10, 1961, pp. 6-15; “Neuerworbene Gläser der Islamischen Abteilung, 1958-1961,” *ibid.*, 11, 1961, pp. 31-41).

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