



ETTINGHAUSEN, RICHARD

ETTINGHAUSEN, RICHARD (1906-79), a German-born and educated scholar specializing in the study of Islamic art ([Figure 1](#)). His career was largely in the United States, where he held both curatorial and professorial appointments. Although his interests and publications ranged from Spain to India, he made especially important contributions to the study of Iran's artistic heritage, with a strong emphasis on the portable arts and on artistic and cultural links between the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods.

Born in Frankfurt on 4 February 1906, Ettinghausen's initial training was at the University of Frankfurt with supplementary studies at the Universities of Munich and Cambridge. By 1931, when he defended his dissertation before Carl H. Becker, he had acquired a thorough grounding in "Oriental Languages," that is Persian, Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac, "Oriental History," and the "History of Art." Shortly thereafter he moved to Berlin where he continued his studies at Berlin University, acquiring expertise in Arabic epigraphy and numismatics while working at the Berlin Museum's Islamic department as a *Voluntär* under the tutelage of Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Kühnel. Although Ettinghausen's official role at the Berlin Museum ended in early 1933 because of decrees issued by the National Socialist Party, he retained an admiration for the work of his former colleagues, especially that of F. Sarre, whose combination of intuitive connoisseurship with exacting and methodical scholarship resembled that of Ettinghausen himself.

Between his departure from Germany in June, 1933 and the summer of 1944 when he joined the staff of the Freer Gallery in Washington, Ettinghausen held



appointments at several institutions and published important studies on Persian art. During 1933-34 he resided in London where he both continued his studies of Persian language, history, and geography under E. Denison Ross and Vladimir Minorsky and was employed by Oxford University Press as “assistant editor” for the *Survey of Persian Art*. During 1934-37 Ettinghausen worked in New York for the *Survey* under Arthur Upham Pope. Although initially Ettinghausen was employed primarily for his linguistic expertise, he also wrote chapters in the *Survey* dealing with pre-Islamic and Islamic ceramics as well as manuscript illumination.

During his years as Curator at the Freer Gallery in Washington (1944-67), Ettinghausen made important acquisitions for the collection, and helped to organize major traveling exhibitions including “7,000 Years of Iranian Art” (1964-65). He also encouraged others to publish studies on Islamic art, first through his work as editor of *Ars Islamica* (1938-51) and then of *Ars Orientalis* (1951-61). In 1961, concurrently with his work in Washington, he began to teach at New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts, becoming a full-time faculty member in 1967. Subsequently, he joined the staff of the Metropolitan Museum as Consultative Chairman of the Islamic Department (1969-79).

Ettinghausen’s publications touch on many facets and periods of Iranian art from pre-Islamic and Islamic ceramics to manuscript painting and illumination, epigraphy, metalwork, and carpets. However, his greatest contribution came not from the range and volume of his studies, but rather from his innovative approach. Before Ettinghausen’s time most publications on Iranian art had focused on the visual analysis of decorative themes in particular media, whereas he stressed the need to synthesize visual, textual, and historical knowledge. His basic approach is best articulated in a 1951 essay entitled “Islamic Art and Archaeology”: “We have to study the monument’s function, or the object’s use, the conditions of life, work and trade under which it was made, and all the associations that helped to create the work, whether they were derived from religious, magical, astrological, literary or folkloristic concepts” (p. 15).

Because of his use of both exacting connoisseurship and broader cultural analysis, many of his studies remain of fundamental importance to the field. Several of these focus on Iran during the 12th and 13th century, notably “Evidence for the Identification of Kashan Pottery” (1936), “The Bobrinsky ‘Kettle’: Patron and Style of an Islamic Bronze” (1943), “The ‘Wade Cup’ in The Cleveland Museum of Art” (1957), and “The Flowering of Seljuq Art” (1970).



The art of Iran also figures prominently in his books *Studies in Muslim Iconography I: The Unicorn* (1950) and *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World* (1972). A synthesis of his ideas on Iranian art is found in *The Art and Architecture of Islam: 650-1250* which he co-authored with Oleg Grabar. A volume collecting many of his articles and other short pieces was published in 1984 (*Islamic Art and Archaeology: Collected Papers*) and a partial bibliography is included in his 1974 Festschrift (*Studies in Art and Literature*).

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Figure 1. Richard Ettinghausen. Photograph courtesy of Mrs. Ettinghausen.