



HERZFELD, ERNST I. LIFE AND WORK

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i. LIFE AND WORK

Herzfeld ([Figure 1](#)) was born on 23 July 1879 in Celle, Germany. His father was a medical major in the Prussian army of Protestant Christian faith. Herzfeld attended the Domgymnasium at Verden and received his high school diploma at the Joachimsthaler Gymnasium at Berlin in 1897. After a year of military service he studied architecture at the Technische Hochschule (later renamed Technical University) in Berlin, but also Assyriology, art history, and philosophy at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Berlin. In 1903 he passed his examination in structural engineering. Afterwards he spent two years at Assur as assistant to Walter Andrae (1875-1956). At this excavation of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft he received the best possible training for archeological field work available in those days. On his way back from Assur to Berlin Herzfeld traveled extensively in Iraq and Iran in 1905-06. Like the other Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft excavators he was an excellent draftsman and surveyor. He visited, mapped, photographed, and drew intensively many places which successively became the focus of his interests, most notably Samarra, Baghdad, Ctesiphon, Persepolis, and Pasargadae. His first publications on these explorations demonstrate his keen eye for architecture; but even more they abound in topographical discussions which make ample



use of Latin, Greek, Arabic, Persian, Syriac, and cuneiform sources and display his mastery of these diverse languages.

Following another year of study at Berlin, Herzfeld passed his oral examination in February 1907, then excavated in Cilicia for three months with Samuel Guyer (Mietke, in press) and submitted his Ph.D. dissertation on Pasargadae at the end of July of the same year. The examining committee was chaired by Eduard Meyer (1855-1930), the most renowned ancient historian of his time and the central figure in German research on the ancient Near East between 1900 and 1930. Meyer exerted a strong lasting influence on Herzfeld, most notably in his basic conceptions of history and culture and the inner workings of its actors, i.e., *Kulturkreise* (culture circles), races, people, and individuals. Herzfeld followed Meyer's description of races and ethnic groups as constantly changing, never remaining as static or fixed entities. This approach later brought Herzfeld into conflict with research conducted in the 1920s and 1930s, which largely aimed at the identification of races and ethnic groups in the archeological record (see Hauser, in press).

After receiving his Ph.D. in August 1907, Herzfeld traveled extensively in Syria and Iraq with Friedrich Sarre, director of the Islamic Museum in Berlin. They published their results in four volumes, *Archäologische Reise im Euphrat-und Tigrisgebiet* (Berlin, 1911 and 1920; cf. Kröger, in press). In 1909 he submitted his inaugural dissertation for professorship (*Habilitationsschrift*) on Iranian rock reliefs, and the text was incorporated in the joint publication of Sarre and Herzfeld, *Iranische Felsreliefs* (Berlin, 1910), a pioneering and finely illustrated study of ancient Persian monuments of Pasargadae, Persepolis, Naqš-e Rostam, and other Achaemenid and Sasanian sites of Fārs province and western Iran; it has remained a handbook of Iranian archaeology to this day. During his travels and by his cooperation with Sarre, Herzfeld had become an expert on Islamic art. They next excavated at the vast ruins of Samarra, the short-lived Abbasid capital (see Northedge, in press). This was the first excavation of an Islamic site in the Near East. Herzfeld's work as field director between 1911 and 1913 and his articles, especially "Die Genese der Islamischen Kunst und das Mschatta-Problem" (*Der Islam* 1910, pp. 27-63), helped to define Islamic art in Western research and were important in creating the field of Islamic art history (see Leisten, in press). The work at Samarra resulted in six volumes of final reports, four of which were by Herzfeld (see



BIBLIOGRAPHY

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With the outbreak of World War I Herzfeld was drafted and stationed first in France and Poland. On his request he was sent to Iraq, where he worked largely as surveyor, in particular mapping the province of Mossul. While in Iraq, in 1917 he was appointed “extra-ordinarius,” i.e., associate professor for Historical Geography and Art History of the Ancient Orient at Berlin. As such he was expected to teach Near Eastern Archaeology. In 1920, after the war, he was promoted to become the first full professor of Near Eastern Archaeology in the world. Herzfeld never really filled this position, as he was on leave most of the time. Having lost his father in 1916 and his mother in 1922, Herzfeld, who never married, went to Persia in 1923. There he occupied various positions and became the most prominent figure in Iranian research until he was forced to leave in 1934 (see below).

Herzfeld’s first visit to Persia in 1905-06 had resulted in his Ph.D. thesis on Pasargadae (published in *Klio* 8, 1908, pp. 1-68) and also in a travel report (“Reise durch Luristān, Arabistān und Fārs,” *Petermanns Mitteilungen* 53, 1907, pp. 49-63, 73-90). In his 1909 Habilitation and his monograph *Am Tor von Asien. Felsdenkmale aus Irans Heldenzeit* (Berlin, 1920), he gave the first scientific descriptions and interpretations of Iranian rockreliefs, in particular those dating to the Sasanian period. Soon after World War I he also devoted two important articles to Islamic architecture in Iran (“Khorasan,” *Der Islam* 11, 1921, pp. 107-74; and “Die Gumbadh-í Alawiyyân und die Baukunst der Ilkhane in Iran,” in *A volume of Oriental Studies presented to E.G. Browne*, Cambridge, 1922, pp. 186-99; see Hillenbrand, in press).

In 1917 Herzfeld, together with Sarre, Meyer, industrialists, and members of the Persian Embassy in Berlin, was a founding member of the German-Persian Society, which advocated increased cultural and economic exchange between the two countries. These efforts were thwarted by Germany’s defeat in World War I and the resulting international isolation and economic crisis. Even before German-Persian relations were re-established after the war (see Bast, 2001), Herzfeld made plans for another expedition. Soon after, in January 1923, the first German ambassador to Persia, Count von Schulenburg, arrived in Tehran, and economic relations between Persia and Germany were revived



on a small scale (see Hirschfeld, 1980). Herzfeld entered Persia for extended research (on politics and archaeology; see Hauser, 2003), and on his way there he visited Iraq. After visits to Babylon, Ctesiphon, and Samarra, he stayed for one week at Paikuli, where he conducted a small-scale excavation and unearthed thirty new blocks of the important Parthian and Middle Persian inscriptions. It was too late to include them in his monograph on the monument (see Skjærvø, in press), published in Berlin in 1924 in two large-format volumes of text and plates: *Paikuli, Monument and Inscription of the Early History of the Sasanian Empire*.

Herzfeld's extended travels through Persia are described in his "Reisebericht" (ZDMG 80, 1926, pp. 225-84), which stands as an indicator of his importance for the future of Persian archaeology. In this article he describes exactly those sites which became the main targets of excavation activity once the French monopoly had been lifted in 1927, e.g., Bisotun, Rayy, Tepe Giyan [Giān], Karg, Nishapur, and Tepe Hissar [Hešār] (see ARCHAEOLOGY i.). He also documented rock reliefs from the second millennium B.C.E. to the Sasanian period, e.g., the newly discovered relief of Sar Mašhad. In 1923, in violation of the French monopoly on excavations, Herzfeld did some prospecting at Pasargadae and Khurha [K̄urha] with the support of local dignitaries. His amicable relations with Persian authorities and the high esteem he enjoyed in 1923 led to an official request and commission from Tehran to prepare a description of the current state of the ruins of Persepolis and to make plans for their preservation (see PERSEPOLIS). The report was written in French, and the importance attributed to it is indicated by the fact that the minister of court, Foruḡi, planned to translate it himself, contributing to a delay in publication. It appeared with a Persian translation by Mojtabā Minovi (in Herzfeld's *AMI* 1, 1929, pp. 17-64) as "Rapport sur l'état actuel des ruines de Persépolis et propositions pour leur conservation."

This report started Herzfeld's involvement with Persian national heritage and the organization of a department of antiquities. Already in a programmatic article of 1919 ("Vergangenheit und Zukunft der Erforschung Vorderasiens," *Der Neue Orient* 4, pp. 313-23) Herzfeld had advocated the establishment of strong and independent departments of antiquities in Near and Middle Eastern countries to control all field work, an idea which was not welcome in Western countries. Since then, the National Monuments Council of Iran had been founded in Tehran in 1922 "to promote interest in and to preserve Iran's cultural heritage" (see ANJOMAN-E ĀTĀR-E MELLI). On his return to Tehran in



spring 1925, Herzfeld was asked by the Council to compile a list of historic monuments and to assist in developing a plan for a department of antiquities. He became the only foreign member of this Council, and he later created a logo for it, which showed the Ctesiphon and Persepolis palaces within a palmette from Tāq-e Bostān.

Herzfeld left Persia in October 1925, but in April 1926 he was asked to come back as archeological advisor to the government. Another leave of absence from Berlin was granted for a year. In Tehran Herzfeld drafted the first list of 88 monuments and sites designated as historical monuments. He also made various drafts for a law on antiquities. Although it is not recognizable from Herzfeld's publications, he also worked on the various collections of Islamic manuscripts, a subject in which Shah Reza Pahlavi took particular interest (Kröger, in press).

On 10 May 1927 Persia announced the abolition of all capitulatory privileges, including the French monopoly on archeological matters, in a year's time. Herzfeld was the government's candidate for heading the department of antiquities (Mahrads, 1974, p. 415). During the negotiations with France, however, it became a condition that a Frenchman would head this new institution. With the arrival of André Godard (see GODARD, ANDRÉ) the agreement came into effect (Abdi, 2001; Mousavi, in press).

After Herzfeld had been sidetracked in the directorship of the antiquities department, the government offered him a three-year appointment as guest professor in Tehran, starting 1 January 1928. This appointment fit his plans for the creation of a German Archeological Institute in Persia. Before he accepted, he urged decision-makers in the German government and the archeological field to support research in Persia and advocated the foundation of an institute at Tehran. Furthermore he developed plans for several series of publications and for excavations at Tepe Giyan, Pasargadae, Persepolis, Kuh-i Khwaja [Kuh-e K̄vāja], Kangāvar, and other places. Again he was granted leave of absence from his professorship in Berlin until the end of 1930; and he finally moved to Tehran with his library, considered one of the best of its kind in the world. Nevertheless, the support of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not materialize as promised. Herzfeld became a semi-official attaché at the Embassy. Due to the economic crisis of 1929, however, he was forced to give up hope for an official German Archeological Institute. Meanwhile, after much debate, in which Herzfeld played an important role as advisor, the Persian government put into effect the laws governing antiquities



in 1931.

Herzfeld was more successful in archeological excavations and publications. In 1928 he excavated at Pasargadae (“Bericht über die Ausgrabungen von Pasargadae 1928,” *AMI* 1, 1929, pp. 4-16, and Stronach, in press), which was supported by a grant from the Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft; and shortly afterwards he directed a short campaign at Tall-e Bakūn (“Steinzeitlicher Hügel bei Persepolis,” in *Iranische Denkmäler* 1/A-B, 1932). In 1929 the Notgemeinschaft supported his research at the site of Kuh-e Kāvāja in Sistān (“Sakestan, Geschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den Ausgrabungen am Kūh-e Khwādja,” *AMI* 4, 1931-32, pp. 1-116; see Kawami, in press). In accord with his plans of 1927, he founded the series *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran (AMI)* in 1929 and *Iranische Denkmäler* in 1932. Both series served almost exclusively as forum for Herzfeld’s own research and were financially supported by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut and the Notgemeinschaft. When, however, Herzfeld, after years of lobbying, finally received permission to work at Persepolis, none of the German institutions was able to support him due to the economic crisis. Herzfeld contacted the Oriental Institute Chicago, specifically its director H. Breasted, with whom he had talked about excavations several times back in 1928, regarding sponsorship of his research at Persepolis. Thus, Herzfeld became director of the Oriental Institute excavations starting 1 March 1931. For this enterprise Herzfeld’s leave of absence from his chair at the university was prolonged another five years until the end of 1935; this was a general suspension which had to be renewed by the Prussian Ministry of Culture every semester. Early in 1934 the Persian government insisted on an American director, according to Herzfeld’s architect Krefter (1979, p. 25). The timing fits with German-Persian political relations, which reached a low point at this time (Bast, 2001). Furthermore Herzfeld was accused of illicit use of his diplomatic passport in connection with the unlawful export of art. Whether these allegations were sound is uncertain. Since his former friends in the government had been removed in the preceding years, no one was there to defend him. He was dismissed from his directorship at Persepolis and had to leave Persia (Mousavi, in press).

In Germany Nazi legislation of May 1933 expelled state employees of Jewish descent from their jobs. Since Herzfeld’s grandparents had been Jewish, he fell under this legislation. His war record from World War I allowed him to remain as a state-employed professor until 1935, when he was forced into retirement. Returning in 1934 from his leave of absence in Tehran, Herzfeld



wisely chose to move to London instead of Berlin; in London he held lectures published as *Archaeological History of Iran* (London, 1935). In 1936 he moved to Boston, where he held a series of lectures in 1936 on the history of Iran (*Iran in the Ancient East*, New York and London, 1941). Still considered the leading authority on Persian archaeology and history, he was appointed a member of the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study in 1936. While there he also taught at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York. He decided to take up his interest in Zoroaster, to whom he had devoted a number of articles since 1929, and wrote two volumes on his history and religion (*Zoroaster and his World*, Princeton, 1947; see below, part v.). He retired from Princeton in 1944 at the age of 65 and sold most of his library to the Metropolitan Museum, New York. His latest work concerned Islamic architecture, in particular building inscriptions from Damascus and Aleppo. While working on these manuscripts in Cairo in 1947, he fell ill. Removed to Basel, Switzerland, for medical care, he died on 20 January 1948. His papers he had promised to the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., where they are maintained in an exemplary manner and have been used intensively by many scholars.

In retrospect Herzfeld was one of the last examples of the all-encompassing, erudite learning of the 19th century humanistic cultural tradition. Herzfeld combined a wide array of talents and interests. Although trained as an architect and appointed professor for historical geography and art history, he also translated and published new texts and inscriptions in Assyrian, Old Persian, Middle Persian, and Arabic. His approach was cultural history in the broadest sense. His interests were limited by neither chronological nor geographical borders. He was instrumental in establishing the field of Islamic art history, but he likewise made vital contributions to study of the history and culture of the Neolithic, Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sasanian periods. Even in Persepolis he continued to publish on Iraqi and Hittite archaeology as well. Most notably he wrote a general handbook on Near Eastern archaeology, which remained unpublished for several reasons (Hauser, in press). His most lasting achievement, nevertheless, was the opening of Iran for archeological research. It was unfortunate that Herzfeld himself had but few years, in which he was mostly forced to work with minor budgets and unreliable support. In Germany research on Iran became a prerogative in connection with Aryan history featured for ideological reasons by the Nazi government. At this time Herzfeld had already been forced to leave both his first and his second home, Germany and Iran.



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