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In Memoriam Katharina Otto-Dorn: A Life Dedicated to Turkish Islamic Art and Architecture

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Katharina Otto-Dorn passed away on Easter Sunday 4 April 1999 at the grand old age of 91. Responsible for her scholarly bequest, I want to use this opportunity to present a paper in memory of her. I would like to thank the organizing committee of this conference for their willingness to replace my paper on *Miraj* representations in Ottoman Art with the one I am presenting now. One may ask whether it is appropriate to present a paper on the subject of a scholar who is longer with us at an International Conference such as this. In my opinion, the true value of presenting a paper in memory of one of our famous scholars lies in showing us the origins of our own research in the field. The *curriculum vitae* of Katharina Otto-Dorn is unusual and exciting, and she was one of the few Islamic specialists who have strongly influenced Islamic art history through her scholarly contributions.

My first contact with Katharina Otto-Dorn took place in Heidelberg ten years ago when I was preparing my doctoral thesis on Anatolian Seljuk animal reliefs. At that time I had an excellent opportunity to discuss many problems on Anatolian Seljuk art and architecture with Katharina Otto-Dorn, sitting around a "*sini*", drinking many cups of delicious Chinese tea. After a few of these meetings I became fascinated with the idea of having direct access to the scholarly founders of Islamic art history through her.

Researchers and scholars such as Friedrich Sarre (1865-1945),¹ Ernst Herzfeld (1879-1948),² Josef Strzygowski (1862-1941),³ Ernst Diez

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¹ Even after more than 70 years, the important collection of Islamic art in Berlin is still influenced by the "taste" of the collector, scholar and first (honorary) director, Friedrich Sarre. In 1921 Sarre became a paid director and at the same time he bequeathed more than 700 objects to the Museum of Islamic Art (then 'the *Islamische Abteilung*'). A detailed study on Friedrich Sarre's life and scholarly merits has still to be written, but some information can be found in E. Kühnel, "Friedrich Sarre", *Der Islam*, 29, 1950, pp.291-95;

(1878-1961)⁴ and Ernst Kühnel (1882-1964),⁵ to mention only a few, have left many landmarks that shape our understanding of Islamic art history to the present day.⁶ Unfortunately, these figures were left unacknowledged in a conference at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in October 1996, which focused on the history of the Islamic art history.⁷

Katharina Otto-Dorn is directly linked to this "founder generation" through her teachers Josef Strzygowski, Ernst Diez and Ernst Kühnel. Whereas Josef Strzygowski was her spiritual guide, it was Ernst Kühnel who provided her with practical training in the Islamic Department of the State Museum at Berlin. Supporting her as a mentor and friend over a long period, Kühnel would also not hesitate to criticize her work if necessary.

Born in Wiesbaden in 1908, she studied at Vienna University with Josef Strzygowski, a genial and outstanding personality but also a rather controversial scholar, teacher and author, to whom she submitted her thesis on Sassanian silver in 1933.⁸ Immediately after finishing her studies in 1934, she became a volunteer at the Islamic Department of the Berlin State Museum with Ernst Kühnel who had succeeded Friedrich Sarre as director

see also J. Kröger, "Friedrich Sarre (1865-1945)", *Führungsblatt ISL*, Nr. 5 (Berlin, Museumspädagogischer Dienst 1995). For his bibliography (until 1935) see J. Schmidt, *Friedrich Sarre, Schriften* (Berlin 1935).

² For Ernst Herzfeld's life and scholarly career see e.g. C.R. Morey, Ernst Herzfeld, 1879-1948, in: *Archaeologica orientalia in memoriam Ernst Herzfeld*, ed. G. C. Miles, Locust Valley 1952, pp. 1-4.

³ Obituaries have been published in *Forschungen und Fortschritte*, 17, 1941, p. 87 (F. Ginhart) and in *Byzantion*, 15, 1940-41, pp. 505-510 (Anon., probably by A. M. Schneider). See also A. Karasek-Langer, *Verzeichnis der Schriften von Josef Strzygowski* (1933). A serious attempt to describe Strzygowski's great merits as well as his "scholarly wanderings" had been undertaken by his colleague Ernst Diez. See E. Diez, "Zur Kritik Strzygowskis", published posthumously in *Kunst des Orients*, IV, 1963, pp. 98-109.

⁴ O. Aslanapa (ed.) *Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte Asiens. In Memoriam Ernst Diez*. Istanbul 1963 with a short obituary by O. Aslanapa. See also E. Kühnel, "In Memoriam Ernst Diez", *Kunst des Orients*, IV, 1963, p. 110 and more recently J. Kröger, "Ernst Diez", in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (ed. E. Yarshater), vol. 7, 1996, pp. 401-2, online under: www.iranica.com/~iranica/articles/v7f4/v7f433.html.

⁵ R. Ettinghausen, "In Memoriam Ernst Kühnel (26. X. 1882 – 5. VIII. 1964)", *Madrider Mitteilungen* 6, 1965, pp. 217-36 (with an Appendix of Ernst Kühnel's bibliography including further obituaries).

⁶ Substantial research reviewing the influence of the German speaking contribution to Islamic art history, a discipline that was founded in Germany and Austria at the beginning of the twentieth century has still to be written. See also footnote 7.

⁷ The conference papers have recently been published: see St. Vernoit (Ed.), *Discovering Islamic Art. The History of the Islamic Art History: Collectors, Collections & Scholars 1850-1950*, London 2000. The paper of A. Hagedorn, "The Development of Islamic Art History in Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (ibid, pp. 117-127) concentrated on the impact the Museums of Applied Arts played at that time.

⁸ The doctoral thesis has not been published but for a part of the topic, see K. Otto-Dorn, "Östlicher Einfluß auf eine Gruppe iranischer Silberschalen", *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift*, N.F. 13, 1937, pp. 82-91.

three years earlier. A year later, in the spring of 1935 at the age of 26 she travelled by train via Budapest to Istanbul. Provided only with a short-term contract by the German Archaeological Institute - the Istanbul branch had been founded in 1929 - she had been asked to work on the ceramics of Iznik. Staying at Constantinople however, her first contact with the fascinating heritage of this town had been with the ceramics that had been excavated in the courtyard of the Hagia Sophia. Her first steps working on these materials had been documented in an article in the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper dated 17 April 1935 (**Figure 1**). With interruptions in the years 1936 and 1937, Katharina Otto-Dorn stayed in Istanbul for ten years in total, from 1942 as a member (*Referentin*) of the German Archaeological Institute. After relations between Turkey and Germany were broken off on 3 August 1944, she had to leave the country with other German émigrés.⁹ During this decade, Katharina Otto-Dorn (**Figure 2**) took part in excavations and various expeditions often under very difficult conditions. She started with research on the Islamic period of Iznik,¹⁰ and later with Therese Goell excavated the site of Kahta in the southeast of Anatolia (near the famous Nemrud Dağı).¹¹ In March 1944, she traveled to Cilicia, a region widely neglected at that time, accompanied by the architect Alfons Maria Schneider. Starting from Adana, they undertook surveys to Antakya (Antiochia at the Orontes) researching many unknown Islamic monuments.¹²

The last two years of World War II as well as the first years after the war, Katharina Otto-Dorn lived at her parents' house in a remote village not far from Wetzlar. During this time she worked on her *habilitation* based on preliminary researches done during her Istanbul stay. In April 1948 she started teaching Islamic Art at Heidelberg University: the courses were a general introduction into Islamic art and architecture with a seminar on Mughal painting.

In the early fifties, Katharina Otto-Dorn took part in the excavations at Rusafa Hisham in the Northeast of Syria together with Johannes Kollwitz, who only became the head of the expedition after the tragic death of Alfons Maria Schneider. The latter had explored the site a year before, but died on a train when traveling together with Katharina Otto-Dorn to Resafa.¹³ At

⁹ The only exception was Helmut Ritter, who was allowed to stay and teach in Turkey: see Th. Lier, "Helmut Ritter in Istanbul, 1926-1949", *Die Welt des Islam* 38, 3, 1998, esp. p. 359, footnote 80.

¹⁰ K. Otto-Dorn, *Das islamische Isnik, Istanbulischer Forschungen*, 13, Berlin 1941.

¹¹ K. Otto-Dorn, "Die islamischen Bauinschriften von Kahta", in: K. F. Doerner – R. Naumann: *Forschungen in Kommagene (Istanbulischer Forschungen, 10)*, Berlin, 1939, pp. 97-101

¹² This survey has been later published; see K. Otto-Dorn, "Islamische Denkmäler Kilikiens", *Jahrbuch für kleinasiatische Forschungen*, 11/2, 1952, pp. 113-26.

¹³ A. M. Schneider, Bericht über eine Reise nach Syrien und Jordanien (2.X.-22.XI.1951), *Nachrichten der Akademie Göttingen*, 4, 1952, p.17f.

Resafa she excavated an Umayyad palace¹⁴ outside the Byzantine walls beginning research that has continued to the present day.¹⁵

In 1954 at the age of 46, her second 'Turkish period' began, this time at Ankara, where she was appointed *ordinaria* at the University. Here, she established the newly founded chair of Islamic Art and Archaeology, the second in Turkey. This period would become her most important as scholar as well as teacher. After a few years she had more than 100 students and Kurt Erdmann (1901-64) who taught from 1951-58 at Istanbul University recorded in a letter from 1959 on the occasion of the First Congress of Turkish Art "mit Grausen an die Meute von Studenten, die bei meinem letzten Besuch Ihre Türe umlagerten".¹⁶

Step by step, Katharina Otto-Dorn was able to acquire three to four assistants who all did research in the field of Seljuk Anatolian art and architecture. Gönül Öney prepared a thesis on bird representation in Anatolian Seljuk art,¹⁷ later enlarged as a *doçentlik* thesis on figural representations in Anatolian Seljuk art, while Oluş and Rüçhan Arık worked on Anatolian Seljuk mausoleums and on the monuments of Erzurum. Fügen Tunçdag (Ilter) submitted her thesis on Artuqid architecture and later concentrated on Seljuk and Artuqid bridges. This research has been published in Turkish with translations into English or German, and still remains an important source of knowledge.

During her 'Ankara-period' (1954-67), Katharina Otto-Dorn wrote most of her significant articles, many of which dealt with groundbreaking topics. I would like to mention the article on Seljuk wooden mosques in Anatolia (1957),¹⁸ (Figure 3) the study on Turkish tombstones with figural

¹⁴ K. Otto-Dorn, "Bericht über die Grabung im islamischen Rusafa", *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 69, 1954, pp. 138-59; idem, "Bericht über die Grabung im islamischen Rusafa", *Les Annales Archéologiques de Syrie*, 4-5, 1954-55, pp. 45-58; idem, "Grabung im umayyadischen Rusafa", *Ars Orientalis*, 2, 1957, pp. 119 ff.

¹⁵ After a break of some years in the sixties and seventies the surveys and excavations started once more in 1976 (see Th. Ulbert, *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 1977, pp. 563-69). Since 1982, Dorothée Sack has been investigating the Islamic Resafa, starting with the Great Mosque (see D. Sack, "Das islamische Resafa", *Bericht über die 33. Tagung der Koldewey Gesellschaft* (1984) pp. 38-41; idem, *Die Große Moschee von Resafa - Rusafat Hişam. Resafa*, vol. 4 (Mainz 1996).

¹⁶ Mentioned in a letter of 13th of November 1959 from Kurt Erdmann to Katharina Otto-Dorn. The correspondence between Katharina Otto-Dorn and Kurt Erdmann is kept in the archives of the Museum of Islamic Art at Berlin. The author is planning a more detailed study concerning this correspondence.

¹⁷ See her last published contribution "Das Drachenrelief vom Talismantor in Baghdad", in: *Light on the Top of the Black Hill - Studies presented to Halet Çambel. Karatepe'deki Isik - Halet Cambel'e sunulan yazilar*. Editors/ Derleyenler: Güven Arsebük, Machteld J. Mellink, Wulf Schirmer. Istanbul 1997, 532-42.

¹⁸ K. Otto-Dorn, "Seldschukische Holzsäulenmoscheen in Kleinasien", in: R. Ettinghausen (Ed.), *Aus der Welt der Islamischen Kunst, Festschrift für E. Kühnel zum 75. Geburtstag*. Berlin 1957, pp. 59-88

representations in Asia Minor (1959),¹⁹ her article on the figural reliefs of the Armenian church of Achtamar in the lake of Van (Eastern Anatolia) in which she investigated the Abbasid prototypes and influences of some of the representations (1961),²⁰ and the contribution to the *Diez Festschrift* on the representations of the Turco-Chinese animal circle in *Islamic Art* (1963).²¹ All these articles and further research are summarized in her "Kunst des Islam" published in 1964, which was translated into various languages and reprinted as a revised paperback edition in 1980.²²

Unfortunately an enlarged and revised edition in English, which had been planned for several years has still not been published. While it is true that Katharina Otto-Dorn did not see the publication of her *opus magnus*, I am attempting to publish the manuscript she left behind.²³

In the "Kunst des Islam", she provided a clearly structured overview of Islamic art from the beginning and up to the later periods of Ottoman and Mughal art. Without any doubt her main interest was focused on the Seljuk period where she discovered and clearly emphasized the important civilization of the Anatolian Seljuks. While the "Kunst des Islam" is a kind of 'synthesis' of her research, her aforementioned articles, especially on "Figurenreliefs von Achtamar" as well as the "Darstellungen des turco-chinesischen Tierzyklus in der islamischen Kunst" touched upon topics that had been either peripherally treated or not researched at all. These articles inspired a controversial debate, which has still not been resolved today.

The most important excavation of the Islamic period in Turkey, the exploration of the summer palace of Ala' ad-Din Kaiqubad I (1219-37) at the shores of the lake of Beyşehir will also be associated with Katharina Otto-Dorn forever (**Figures 4, 5, 6**). Kubadabad had been discovered by Zeki Oral in 1949²⁴ but had been excavated on two occasions in 1965 and 1966 by Katharina Otto-Dorn together with Mehmet Önder. The unique tile

¹⁹ K. Otto-Dorn, "Türkische Grabsteine mit Figurenreliefs aus Kleinasien", *Ars Orientalis* 3, 1959, pp. 63-76

²⁰ K. Otto-Dorn, "Türkisch-Islamisches Bildgut in den Figurenreliefs von Achthamar", *Anatolia* 6, 1961/62, pp. 1- 69

²¹ K. Otto-Dorn, "Darstellungen des Turco-Chinesischen Tierzyklus in der islamischen Kunst", in: O. Aslanapa - R. Naumann (Ed.), *In Memoriam E. Diez. Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte Asiens*. Istanbul 1963, pp. 131-65

²² K. Otto-Dorn, *Kunst des Islam* (Baden-Baden 1964) with translations into Italian (1964), Spanish (1965), French (1967 and 1983) Serbo-Croatian (1976); revised German paperback edition (Baden-Baden 1980).

²³ The manuscript is currently (November 2000) at the Department of Publications of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Turkey in Ankara, which in February 2000 made a general decision to publish the manuscript. I am especially grateful to Prof. Gönül Öney, former Vice-Rector of the Ege University in Izmir for introducing me to Mr. Fikret Üçcan, the Deputy Understate Secretary of the Ministry of Culture on the occasion of the 11th International Congress of Turkish Art in Utrecht in August 1999.

²⁴ Z. Oral, "Kubad-Abad bulundu", *Anit*, no.10, November 1949, p. 23.

decoration, which had partly survived *in situ*, is characterized by an increasing observation of real life in its detailed animal representations. A similar wide ranging composition of figural themes cannot be found anywhere else in the Muslim world in the thirteenth century. Katharina Otto-Dorn published two very substantial excavation reports, which appeared only a few years after the fieldwork. Much more than normal excavation reports, these articles contain much detailed information on iconography, which is unfortunately often hidden in the footnotes²⁵. Over many years, she collected extensive material for a final publication on Kubadabad, focused on figural representations and their iconography, a study, which is still a *desideratum*.

Since the early eighties, the site has been further researched and excavated under a new team of scholars, directed by Prof. Rüçhan Arık, University of Ankara.²⁶

In 1964, Katharina Otto-Dorn left Ankara and went back to Heidelberg where she tried to establish a chair for Islamic Art at the University. Because she could not find an appropriate position in Heidelberg or at another university, she again left Germany. In 1967, she was appointed Professor of Islamic Art at the University of California in Los Angeles where she taught until 1978, when she became Prof. Emeritus. In subsequent years she lectured at the University of Berkeley and at the University of Vienna.

At the end of the eighties, Katharina Otto-Dorn decided to return to Heidelberg, where she met old colleagues and made new friends (**Figure 7**). There she continued her studies up to her last year of good health. Her main interest in these years was focused on iconography, especially the meaning and the origins of the dragon figure in Anatolian Seljuk art.

Coming to the end, I would like to summarize her importance for Islamic art history:

Unlike her teacher Ernst Kühnel, whose list of publications comprised more than 400 numbers,²⁷ Katharina Otto-Dorn was not a 'generalist'. She was also not a great systematic collector of material like

²⁵ K. Otto-Dorn – M. Önder, "Bericht über die Grabung in Kobadabad 1965", *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 1966, pp. 170-83; idem, "Bericht über die Grabung in Kobadabad 1966", *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 1969 (1970), pp. 438-506; idem, "Die menschliche Figurendarstellung auf den Fliesen von Kobadabad", in: O. Aslanapa - R. Naumann (Ed.), *Forschungen zur Kunst Asiens. In Memoriam Kurt Erdmann* (Istanbul 1969) pp. 111-39.

²⁶ For a summarized report regarding the recent excavations see R. Arık, "Kubad-Abad Excavations (1980-1991)", *Anatolica*, 18, 1992, pp. 101-18, and idem, "Kubadabad çinileri tarihi aydınlatıyor", *Sanatsal Mozaik*, Yıl 1, sayı 2, Ekim 1995, pp. 18-27.

²⁷ See I. Kühnel-Kunze, in: R. Ettinghausen (ed.), *Aus der Welt der Islamischen Kunst. Festschrift für Ernst Kühnel zum 75. Geburtstag am 26.10.1957*. Berlin 1957, pp. 388-404.

Kurt Erdmann (1901-64)²⁸ with whom she had quite an ambiguous relationship. From 1938 onwards, she addressed him in her letters with the nickname "Dr. Zettelci".²⁹ Katharina Otto-Dorn was not a "Vielschreiberin" (quick writer) and she mentioned sometimes that writing was a hard task for her. She always tried to find very precise expressions and moreover, she produced highly dense articles where more often than not, useful information was hidden.

Thus, it is not the number of publications, books or articles that she published but the topics and problems she dealt with that one will remember her. She liked to surprise and to provoke, bringing up a fruitful, and if necessary controversial discussion. Many of her hypotheses have led to disputes and discussions and have enlarged our knowledge, even if some of them have not been generally accepted. It is with this kind of writing that she is missed in so many scholarly contributions today.

Without any doubt, the central topic and main achievement of Katharina Otto-Dorn's research has been to emphasize the importance of the art and architecture of the Anatolian Seljuks, as well as tracing back the prototypes and their interrelationships with other cultures.

Apart from her research she was a successful teacher, especially during the ten years she spent at Ankara University. Here, she founded a school, which has produced some of the main Turkish scholars in the field of Turkish Islamic art history. As they are now professors at the universities at Ankara and Izmir, they are responsible for more than one generation of younger Turkish scholars.

Last but not least, one has to mention her excavation at Kubadabad, which is unique in many ways. The extensive report of the second expedition also shows her typical generosity in the fact that she let her assistants get a word in with their own contributions.

Researching, teaching, and excavating: in all three areas, Katharina Otto-Dorn produced outstanding results.

²⁸ R. Ettinghausen, "Kurt Erdmann (1901-1964)", *Der Islam*, 41, 1965, 253-60 and a shorter one by J. Zick-Nissen, "Kurt Erdmann (geb. 9.9.1901 gest. 30.9.1964)", *Jahrbuch der Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz*, 3, 1964/65, pp. 38-40; for his complete bibliography see H. Erdmann, "Verzeichnis der Schriften Kurt Erdmanns", in: O. Aslanapa - R. Naumann (ed.), *Forschungen zur Kunst Asiens. In Memoriam Kurt Erdmann* (Istanbul 1969) pp. 305-21.

²⁹ "Dr. Zettelci" is a wonderful combination created from the German word 'Zettel' and the Turkish suffix '-ci', which describes someone who is running a perfectly organized "Zettelkasten".



Figure 1: Katharina Otto-Dorn researching ceramics in the excavation at the court of the Hagia Sophia, Istanbul (*Cumhuriyet* newspaper April 1937)*

* I am grateful to Mr. Hannes Schneider, Hadamar, who has made available some personal photographs of Katharina Otto-Dorn used here.

IN MEMORIAM KATHARINA OTTO-DORN



Figure 2: Portrait of Katharina Otto-Dorn during her time at Istanbul (c. 1940)



Figure 3: Katharina Otto-Dorn on the floor of one of the typical wooden mosques in Anatolia in which she did research in the fifties



Figure 4: Katharina Otto-Dorn in the Ala ad-Din Kaiqubad Palace at Kubadabad (1965/ 1966)



Figure 5: Katharina Otto-Dorn studying the ceramic findings of the Kubadabad excavation



Figure 6: Katharina Otto-Dorn together with the "Kubadabad team", next to Katharina Otto-Dorn Gönül Öney (Prof. Emeritus at Ege University)



Figure 7: Katharina Otto-Dorn together with Dietrich Seckel (Prof. Emeritus of East Asian Art at Heidelberg University) on occasion of Katharina Otto-Dorn's 90th birthday in 1998