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FREER GALLERY OF ART
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

SIXTH PRESENTATION
OF THE
CHARLES LANG FREER
MEDAL



WASHINGTON, D.C.
JANUARY 16, 1974



ROMAN GHIRSHMAN

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FOREWORD

The year which commenced with May 1973 and concludes with May 1974 marks the Fiftieth Anniversary celebration of the public opening of the Freer Gallery of Art. A most important part of the ceremonies is our recognition of three different cultural areas represented by our collections. Japan was honored in May, China in September, and today we salute the Near Eastern world and, even more specifically, Iran.

On February 25, 1956, the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of the late Charles Lang Freer, a medal was established in his memory to be presented from time to time to scholars throughout the world "For distinguished contribution to the knowledge and understanding of Oriental civilizations as reflected in their arts."

On February 25, 1956, the first presentation was made to Professor Osvald Sirén of Stockholm, Sweden, the eminent scholar of Chinese art. The second presentation was made on May 3, 1960, to the Islamic scholar, Professor Ernst Kühnel of Berlin, Germany. The third, fourth, and fifth presentations, including two this Jubilee Year, were made on September 15, 1965, May 3, 1973, and September 11, 1973, respectively, to the distinguished Japanese scholars, Professor Yukio Yashiro and Professor Tanaka Ichimatsu, and to our eminent museologist American colleague, Mr. Laurence Sickman of Kansas City, Missouri. This evening the sixth presentation is being made to Professor Roman Ghirshman of Paris for his outstanding contribution and achievements in the field of Iranian art.

The design for the bronze medal was done on commission by the late Paul Manship, a leading American sculptor.

HAROLD P. STERN
Director
Freer Gallery of Art

Washington, D. C.
January 16, 1974

SIXTH PRESENTATION
of the
CHARLES LANG FREER MEDAL

January 16, 1974

OPENING REMARKS

S. DILLON RIPLEY

Secretary, Smithsonian Institution

THE CAREER OF
PROFESSOR ROMAN GHIRSHMAN

HAROLD P. STERN

Director, Freer Gallery of Art

PRESENTATION

by

THE SECRETARY OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

ADDRESS OF ACCEPTANCE

PROFESSOR ROMAN GHIRSHMAN

A Reception will follow the Address of Acceptance

OPENING REMARKS

S. DILLON RIPLEY

Secretary, Smithsonian Institution

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests:

It is indeed an honor to call to order this convocation marking the sixth presentation of the Charles Lang Freer Medal. In 1956, one hundred years after the birth of the founder of the Freer Gallery of Art, the Freer Medal was created to honor scholars of world renown: "For distinguished contribution to the knowledge and understanding of Oriental civilizations as reflected in their arts." With today's presentation, we commemorate another area of the collection as part of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of this Gallery.

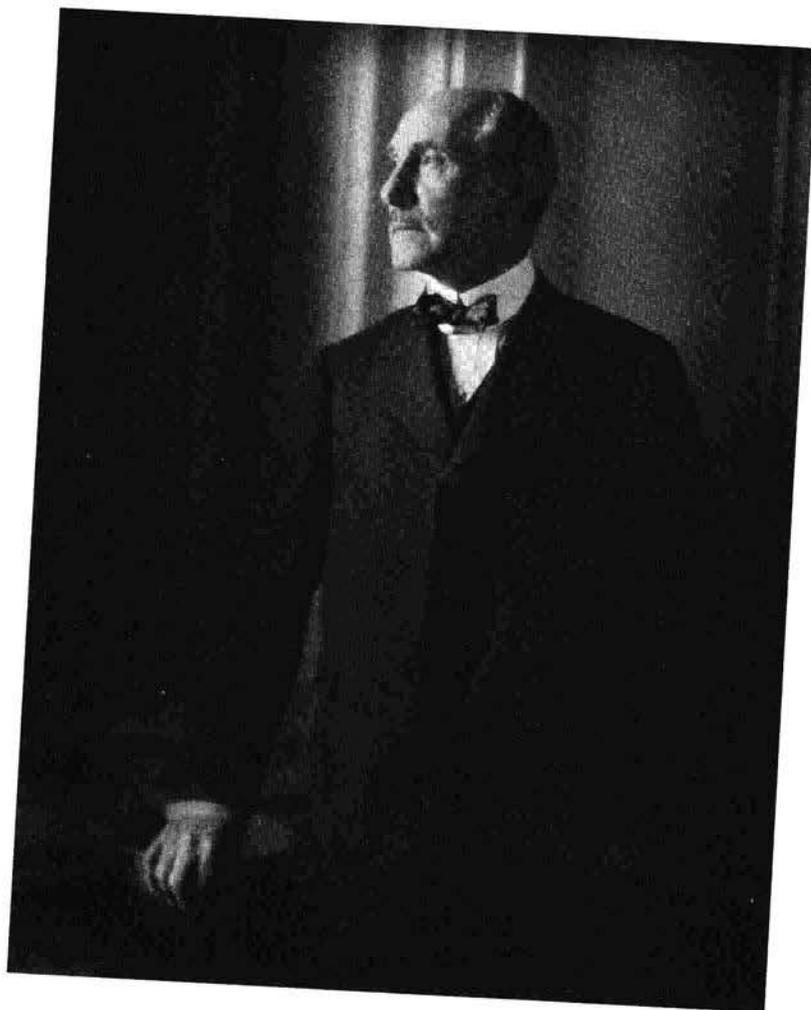
The Smithsonian Institution, a gift to the United States of an enigmatically generous Englishman and scientist, James Smithson, was directed by its basic legislation to maintain a Gallery of Art; and today no less than five museums of art are part of the Smithsonian Institution. The Freer Gallery of Art is one of these, and when Charles Lang Freer made his foresighted and generous gift to the people of the United States in 1906, he not only gave his extraordinary collections and a handsome structure he had designed to house them, but also provided a fortune to assist in endowing the gallery that was to bear his name. That gallery, founded by

Mr. Freer, is unique in that, in keeping with the founder's wish, its primary emphasis is on the art of the Orient, and its staff is devoted to research on the civilizations which produced those works of art.

In seeking to honor outstanding scholars in the field, the Gallery has already conferred the medal on five distinguished men. The first recipient in 1956 was the late Professor Osvald Sirén of Stockholm, who was a pioneer in the study of Chinese art. In 1960, reaching into an entirely different field of Asian art, that of the Near East and especially the area concerned with arts of Islam, the second award was bestowed upon the late Professor Ernst Kühnel of Berlin, at that time the dean of his field. He was an innovator in interpreting the arts of Islam to the Western World. The third Freer Medal was presented to Professor Yukio Yashiro, the doyen of Japanese art historians and also a specialist on Botticelli, in 1965.

Marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Freer Gallery, three special exhibitions have been planned, each saluting a major area of the collection. Freer Medals have already been presented to two scholars for their achievements in the areas of Japanese and Chinese art. The first exhibition, Japanese Ukiyoe Painting, began on May 2, 1973, and the Freer Medal was presented to the celebrated Japanese scholar, Professor Tanaka Ichimatsu. The second exhibition, Chinese Figure Painting, commenced on September 11, 1973, and the Freer Medal was awarded to that eminent sinologist and museologist, Mr. Laurence Sickman, the Director of the Nelson-Atkins Gallery of Kansas City, Missouri. This evening we open the third of our special exhibitions. It is devoted to Ceramics from the World of Islam, and we are assembled here to honor Professor Roman Ghirshman for his outstanding accomplishments in the study of Iranian art. He has done much to further our knowledge of the great civilization of that noble land.

It is a great honor for me to make this presentation on behalf of the Regents of the Smithsonian Institution. Before doing so, however, I want to call upon Dr. Harold P. Stern, the Director of the Freer Gallery, to say a few words about the career of our medalist, Professor Ghirshman. Dr. Stern:



CHARLES LANG FREER

Photo by Edward Steichen, 1916

THE CAREER OF PROFESSOR ROMAN GHIRSHMAN

HAROLD P. STERN

Director, Freer Gallery of Art

Mr. Ambassador, Mr. Minister, Distinguished Guests:

On May 2 of last year we commenced a program in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the public opening of the Freer Gallery of Art. In doing this, we sought to rededicate ourselves to the charge of Charles Lang Freer that study of the civilizations encompassed by his collections be encouraged. During the past eight months, we have focused on the civilizations of Japan and China, and today we salute the Near Eastern world and especially Iran, for our collection is blessed with a fine selection of objects from that land created during the Achaemenid, Sasanian and Islamic periods.

Today we are assembled to present the Freer Medal to Professor Roman Ghirshman, who has devoted most of his life to the archaeological study of Iran. One often pauses and speculates as to what leads a scholar along the path he follows, and I know that Professor Ghirshman will enlighten us on that matter with his address. He was born in Kharkov, Russia, in 1895 and came to France in 1923. But seven years after his arrival, he had completed his studies at the Sorbonne, the École des Hautes Études and the École du Louvre. He then traveled to Tello, south of Baghdad, where excavations were

in progress. His ability was rapidly recognized, for in 1931 when the Louvre established a new archaeological mission in Iran, this able and energetic scholar was appointed to head it. He, thus, was privileged to be one of the first to explore Iran using Western scientific methodology. For a year he worked at Tepe Giyan and Sialk, and the results of his research established an unbroken sequence at these sites extending from the fifth to the end of the second millennium B.C. In particular, at Sialk, seventeen superimposed villages were unearthed, and a civilization with a refined taste for painted pottery and an inquiring mind that sought to master the newly discovered art of metallurgy was found. Professor Ghirshman also clearly established at this site that the community there was not isolated, for items originating from a distance of six hundred miles away were also unearthed. His work at excavations continued and a chronicle of them is most imposing. A brief summary would be as follows:

Between 1933 and 1934 he explored in the valley of Assadabad and Luristan. Excavations continued at Sialk in 1933 through 1935, and again in 1937. He worked at Bishapur in 1935 and 1936 and from 1938 through 1941.

In 1936 he was invited by the noted scholar, Jacques Hackin, to join in excavations at Nad-i Ali in the Seistan desert of Afghanistan, and in the spring of 1941, when Hackin disappeared, Professor Ghirshman was appointed director of the French Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan. He worked at Begram, north of Kabul, from 1941 to 1943, and in 1943 also studied the Hephthalite necropolis at Setq-Abad located on the left bank of the Panjshir. It was at this time that Professor Ghirshman took a brief respite. At the end of 1943 he was appointed to the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology in Cairo, and, over the years 1944 into

1946, he prepared the research he had conducted in Afghanistan for publication. Work in the field, however, continued to lure Professor Ghirshman and, thus, in 1945 he was reappointed director of the French Archaeological Mission in Iran. From 1946 into 1967, he conducted excavations at Susa, as well as working at Masjid-i Solaiman during 1948 and at a prehistoric cave at Tang-i Pabda in the Bakhtiari mountains in 1949. In 1950, he dug at Eiwan-e Kerkha, a Sasanid town but twenty-five miles north of Susa, and from 1951 through 1962, he oversaw excavations at Choga-Zanbil, a royal Elamite town dating from the thirteenth century, B.C. During 1959 and 1960, he dug at Kharg Island, which has added significance today as being the world's largest crude oil exporting terminal. In earlier days it played a major role in the "Maritime Silk Route." Age did not slow Professor Ghirshman down, for from 1964 into 1966 he worked in the Bakhtiari mountains excavating at Bard-e Neshandeh, and from 1967 until 1972 he worked once again at Masjid-i Solaiman. His career has been a very full one, and the results of his research have been carefully documented in over two hundred publications.

Professor Ghirshman's archaeological research has brought to light a proto-Median necropolis which indicated a major change in manner of life from the people of Iran of that period. In the southern mountains he uncovered places of worship dating to a period of two or three centuries prior to the time when Cyrus the Great and Darius established the first world empire. His excavations in the mountains of Bakhtiari brought to light Greco-Macedonian influence resulting from the occupation of Iran by the Macedonians. The digs also revealed the arrival of a new dynasty, the Parthians, and, for the first time, temples dedicated to Iranian deities appeared. The excavations at Bishapur, near Shiraz, revealed grand

palaces and a majestic Zoroastrian sanctuary, a Temple of Fire, as well as the palace wherein the Sasanian king, Shapur I, in A.D. 260, imprisoned the Byzantine Emperor Valerian. The extensive dig at Susa brought to light fifteen towns superimposed upon each other and ranging in date from the second millenium B.C. to the thirteenth century A.D. It also opened the door to our further understanding of the Elamite civilization. A towering ziggurat was uncovered, as well as subsidiary temples, three palaces and five monumental royal tombs thirty miles from Susa. At Kharg, he found a Temple of Poseidon, over which a Zoroastrian Temple of Fire was built which, with the advent of Islam, was converted into a mosque. On the same island Professor Ghirshman unearthed a Nestorian church. In addition to all of this, Professor Ghirshman's archaeological research in Afghanistan has done much to bring to light and preserve the cultural past of that great nation.

I feel as though I have but touched on a few of the accomplishments and highlights in the career of this distinguished scholar we honor today. In truth, ours is but an honor bestowed late in life as part of a crown of recognition. Professor Ghirshman is a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy, Doctor *honoris causa* of the University of Teheran, and an Honorary Life Member of the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York. He has been decorated by the government of France as a Commander of the Legion of Honor and Officer of Arts and Letters. The government of Iran has bestowed upon him the decorations of Grand Officer of the Order of Taj and Grand Officer of the Order of Humayun.

Today we are delighted to have this tireless archaeologist and great contributor to our knowledge of the civilization of the Near East with us. If I may now ask Dr. Ripley to make the presentation . . .



PRESENTATION OF THE CHARLES LANG FREER MEDAL

By S. DILLON RIPLEY

Professor Ghirshman:

On behalf of the Chancellor and the Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, I hereby present to you this sixth Freer Medal. The citation reads as follows:

“For Distinguished Contribution to the Knowledge and Understanding of Oriental Civilization as Reflected in their Arts.”

Sir, we would all be most grateful if you will address us at this time. Professor Ghirshman:



THE CHARLES LANG FREER MEDAL

ADDRESS OF ACCEPTANCE

PROFESSOR ROMAN GHIRSHMAN

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

A modern French philosopher has said that a man's life can be divided into two periods: the first is the age of love affairs and the second is the age of honors, and there must be paths linking the two. What I should like to do is to retrace these paths of my life for you; this is the first time I am doing so in public. But first I wish to pause to consider the honors being bestowed on me here, which represent a crowning moment in my life. I take this opportunity to express my heart-felt gratitude to the Freer Gallery of Art and to the Smithsonian Institution. Those in charge of these two institutions have not been deterred by a distance of seven and a half thousand miles in seeking out a man they consider worthy of their choice.

When a man reaches the evening of his life, he asks himself what were the influences that determined his destiny, what events, what people played a decisive role in the shaping of his personality. It is startling to discover how frequently chance has taken a hand in the high and low points of our existence.

I shall now disclose my life to you.

I was born almost eighty years ago, into a well-to-do family in a university town in southern Russia, but as a young man I was never to know the carefree

existence of a student. Those years passed like an unrealized dream.

I entered the army just after finishing secondary school. Before the end of 1914, I was at the front with the Russian army fighting against Germany. I served throughout the war, and not until the Revolution was I able to return under my father's roof. I was to leave home again shortly afterwards, when the hideous aspect of what they called "the struggle for freedom" made me realize that I could not remain neutral and that I had to choose for the left or for the right. I chose for the right, and I fought throughout the civil war. When our cause was lost I fled across the Black Sea and reached Istanbul which at that time was called Constantinople. My entire baggage consisted of a toothbrush and a towel.

I had to live. I posted bills in the streets of old Byzantium. I played the violin for silent movies and at weddings, until the happy day came when, thanks to some friends I had met, the organization ORT sent me to Palestine. How overjoyed I was to be lying comfortably on a bed of straw in the hold of a small tramp steamer. The Jewish settlement at Hedera welcomed me as a farm worker in the orange groves. How low the earth seemed to me, how pitiless the sun and how long those days were. But the reverses of fortune never shattered my faith in the future.

The months passed, and the little Jewish community in the settlement was in turmoil, fearing attack. This was the start of the tragedy that is still with us. As the only officer in the settlement, I organized armed resistance; we held out for several days until the Bengal Lancers of the mandatory power relieved us.

I was no longer a worker: every evening I saddled my horse, took up my rifle and with a comrade patrolled the sleeping settlement and the silent fields. At dawn, I sometimes spurred my steed along the edge of the

waves breaking on the Mediterranean shore—a splendid sight early in the morning—to the ruins of Caesarea, the nearby town of Herod the Great, where a friend of mine was keeper. My childhood passion for the arts and for history reawoke. Six months later, thanks to friends, I embarked on another voyage as comfortable as the previous one, this time on my way to Marseilles. In my pocket I had ten pounds sterling and my baggage was light. But I had one aim: to study.

Was I not being really very naive? I had to live, which meant I had to work; so I found a job as a clerk in a factory office in the Paris suburbs. But I did not forget the goal that had brought me to Paris: my desire to enter the Sorbonne did not leave me, even after I was no longer alone, having with me the woman who, with so much self-sacrifice, was to share my life.

A new path opened up before me. I readily accepted a job as a cashier in a nightclub in Montparnasse. This seemed to offer my sole hope of salvation: thanks to this night job I would be able to attend lectures during the day and to visit libraries and museums.

For three years, I spent every evening behind the cash register, from 8 o'clock in the evening until 3 o'clock in the morning. When business was slack, I worked over my lecture notes and learnt cuneiform. At the same time I was able to study the human fauna of Montparnasse in the twenties: Kiesling, Zadkine, Lipchitz and the others. My wife and I were living under the same roof, but our work schedules were such that we more often wrote notes to one another than anything else. She stoically bore this time of trial because I refused to let her support me.

I took courses in Oriental Archaeology under René Dussaud, Dr. Georges Contenau and Mr. Delaporte; and Classical Archaeology under Charles Picard. Hebrew, in which I earned my degree at the Sorbonne, was taught

by A. Lods; Sumerian was taught by Father Scheil, while Babylonian and Assyrian were taught by Virolleaud. One would be hard put to find such an assemblage of talent in Paris today.

Then came the day when, enraptured at having gained my diplomas, I went to my "mentor" to ask him to send me to the East with an archaeological mission. His answer hit me like a thunderbolt: "Are you wealthy?" he asked. "No," I replied. "Then give up the idea, look for something else." At that time, almost fifty years ago, positions in museums and on archaeological missions were available only to men of wealth: my mentor's father had left him the waterfront of Izmir as a legacy.

All my efforts appeared to have been in vain, all my hopes were crushed. I was approaching 35. But one thought never left me: "life never gives up on you unless you give up on it." And I won through.

Another of my teachers who had followed me during my years of studies recommended me to the Abbé de Genouillac, one of our most brilliant Sumerologists of the period, who was directing our dig at Tello in Iraq, south of Baghdad. The spark to which this first contact gave rise determined the course of the rest of my life. A few weeks after this meeting, I left for the East, accompanying this generous man, who was so sorely tried at the end of his days. The following year, when I returned from the desert, I learned that the Louvre Museum was establishing a new mission in Iran, and I was appointed to head it. Promotion was rapid: for 42 years I did not change my post, even including three years at the head of the archaeological mission in Afghanistan.

It is not without interest to mention here how little curiosity there was anywhere at that time regarding Iran's past. The only other scientific institution which

established its first archaeological mission in Iran at the same time as the Louvre was your Oriental Institute in Chicago, under the inspiration of that great Orientalist, Professor James Henry Breasted, who headed it.

Practically nothing was known of the civilizations which, for thousands of years, had flourished on its soil. After 1939, when the Chicago Institute suspended its excavation work, my mission remained for 20 years the only one active in Iran. Proper studies into Iran's past started only after the second world war. This may perhaps explain why, when one of the great British publishing houses, Penguin Books, decided in 1946 to launch a new archaeological and historical series, it called upon the sole non-English language writer, the man whom you are honoring today, to edit a volume on Iran.

So there I was at the head of a mission in a country whose past was a mystery to me. What I had learned during my years of studies had not dealt with this matter at all. Everything still had to be done, on scientifically virgin soil, in a country which was just starting to awake from several centuries of deep slumber. Once again I bent my head to the soil, but this time with a different goal: no longer was I coaxing it to yield crops, but rather to question it, to hear what it had to say, to find out about the past of the men whose feet had trodden this ground. During my long career in the Iranian wilderness, I never found any buried treasures—no gold or silver vases. In short, I made no startling discoveries. For me, archaeology was the quest for man; it was man whom I regarded with interest, even with passion. Each potsherd, the smallest fragment of bronze or iron, a section of wall, a tablet covered with writing, these were all messages from man. Viewed together, they were to enable me to reconstruct a phase of human civilization several thousand years old. Can I compare myself with a man like Cuvier, who reconstructed an entire animal

from a single bone, or a writer like Balzac who from an object or a house reconstructed people, towns, entire nations? To do so would reveal an unbecoming lack of modesty.

I cannot conceal my astonishment when I read that nine out of every ten archaeological missions working in the Middle East today are engaged in prehistoric research, and I shall never forget the ecstatic letter I received from one of my colleagues informing me that he had found human coproliths eight or nine thousand years old up in the mountains. I do not know what to think when I read the excavation reports of certain young colleagues whose interest lies in counting how many thousands of potsherds they have found, or who try to establish at what temperature a pot was fired, or who produce reports full of columns of statistics which conceal the man in whom alone I am interested.

This does not signify a conflict. It is a sign of the times. It makes me think of the great Pablo Casals, who died just recently, who saw in music the expression of feeling, of passion, of reverie, and who felt that modern music, from Stravinsky on, lacked humanity. Let us not even start to talk about painting. I shall limit myself to quoting my friend, Professor B. Bianchi Bandinelli: "I come back with fresh enjoyment each time to look at the paintings in the Mauritshuis at The Hague, but I leave the Biennale of Venice saddened and depressed at the hundreds of informal paintings on display there."

Technological civilization should not obliterate culture which is the fabric of the mind. Scientific culture will produce excellent technicians, but men can be formed only by a humanistic culture.

I have on occasion regretted that I was born fifty years too late and did not belong to that earlier generation of archaeologists and explorers who traveled only by caravan, which enabled them to know fully the

country they were passing through. I had a slight taste of this at the very start of my career. Nonetheless, I established bonds of friendship with most of the great figures of that "heroic age" of Oriental archaeology. I have passed on to the British Academy my correspondence with Sir Aurel Stein, who explored Sinkiang three times; I was saddened to witness his death in Kabul in 1943. I was one of the few close friends of Ernst Herzfeld, the excavator of Persepolis. I enjoyed the vast learning of Walter Andrae and appreciated the company of that remarkable explorer of Mesopotamia, early in this century. Paul Pelliot was my "leader" when I was in charge of research in Afghanistan, and Alfred Foucher, our great Indologist, was my confidant. From the Freer Gallery I had the privilege only of knowing John Pope, your director emeritus, whom I knew in Teheran, where our friendship was born.

The fine medal which I am receiving today, and for which I once again express my gratitude, is decorated only on the obverse side. This side bears the effigy of the founder of this beautiful museum; like the portrait of the donor on an Italian primitive, it enhances it. The other surface bears the name of the person selected to receive the award and the citation. May I be permitted to add, mentally, the name of my wife who, for almost half a century now, has shared my life, my successes and my periods of travail, whose self-sacrifice is worthy of adulation. All the illustrations in my publications came from her pen; her skillful fingers restored thousands of broken objects of art. For ten years she worked to restore a griffin as large as a pony which used to guard one of the gates of the Tower of Babel which I found near Susa, and which now guards the museum I established at the foot of Susa Castle.

A Parisienne who gave up life in one of the most beautiful capital cities in the world to share a tent in the

desert of Seistan, in Afghanistan, six hundred miles from the nearest physicians, deserves respect and admiration.

I hope that, after half a century in which its influence has shone out over the world, the Freer Gallery may continue to be a great center of scholarly studies and a place of joy for those who love beautiful things. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

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