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Josephine Powell and Anatolian Architecture

Walter B. Denny



Josephine Powell. Main court, İshak Paşa Sarayı, Doğubayazıt, Turkey. 1955.
Josephine Powell Collection, Special Collections, 159 D679 3I CMI.

SEVERAL EVENTS IN THE FINE ARTS LIBRARY COME QUICKLY TO MIND when I consider its impact on my career. One has little to do with books: it was the sight of a small “Lotto” carpet from Anatolia, woven in the seventeenth century, on the floor under the desk chair of then Fine Arts Librarian Wolfgang Freitag, that led in 1968 to events eventually resulting in my three-decades-long stint as Honorary Curator of Rugs and Textiles at the Fogg from 1970 to 2000. Discovering Josephine Powell’s magnificent black and white photographs of Anatolian architecture in the enormous array of cabinets of mounted photographs in Otto Hall (dedicated in 1991) was an inspiration for me to begin my work as a serious photographer of Islamic art, a choice that has proven enormously fruitful over my career. But quite frankly, above all else, it was my first discovery, as a summer school student from Oberlin in 1963, of the Fine Arts Library as a place of refuge from the daily grind of seven hours of instruction in elementary Arabic that had the greatest eventual impact on my life. Returning to Oberlin for my senior year, I decided that my graduate school applications would be in fine arts rather than history—and, as they say, the rest is (art) history

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