

A LEGACY OF LEARNING IN NEAR EASTERN ARCHAEOLOGY





Drawing of Helene Kantor by Susan Osgood

A LEGACY OF LEARNING
IN NEAR EASTERN
ARCHAEOLOGY
CENTENNIAL STUDIES
IN MEMORY OF HELENE J. KANTOR

edited by
Peter Lacovara

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Peter Lacovara
Albany 2023

Introduction

This volume in part represents some of the presentations made at a Symposium on the Occasion of the Helene J. Kantor Centennial on October 4-5, 2019 At the University Museum, Philadelphia, sponsored by the American Research Center in Egypt's Pennsylvania Chapter.

The key note lecture was delivered by Tom Tartaron, Associate Professor of Classical Studies, Chair of the Art and Archaeology of the Mediterranean World, University of Pennsylvania on Friday, October 4th.

The talks and presenters for the symposium held on Saturday, October 5 were:

“Helene Kantor and the African Origin of Egyptian Civilization”

Peter Lacovara, Director of the Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund

“Helene J. Kantor (1919-1993) and her Contributions to Iranian Art and Archaeology”
Abbas Alizadeh, Director of the Iranian Prehistoric Project, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago

“Achaemenid Ornament in Classical Greece”

Jasper Gaunt, Independent Scholar

“An ivory of the flame and frond style from Arslantepe”

Holly Pittman, The University of Pennsylvania

“Helene J. Kantor and Aegean-Egyptian interconnections: Theoretical and methodological background of her work and its legacy”

Uros Matic, The Austrian Archaeological Institute

“Lionizing Helene Kantor”

Diana Krumholz McDonald, Independent Scholar

“Leaping Trends in Stone: Imagery from Egypt and the Near East”

Daniel Warne, Onondaga Community College

“The ‘International Style’ in Egypt”

Beth Ann Judas

Helene J. Kantor

July 15, 1919 – January 12, 1993

The last of the great polymaths of Near Eastern Archaeology, Helene J. Kantor possessed an intimate knowledge of and interest in the art and archaeology of the ancient world stretching from Greece to Iran. Her keen insight and extraordinary eye made her both a scholar without peers and an inspiring teacher. She was born in Chicago in 1919 with congenital myopathy, a genetic muscle disorder; despite this, she never let the condition hamper her goals and bore the crippling disease without complaint. Her father was a famous psychologist Jacob Robert Kantor serving on the faculty of the University of Indiana in Bloomington. Her mother Helen Rich encouraged her interest in art history and music. She attended Indiana University and received a B.A. in Zoology and Biology at the age of nineteen. Kantor won the Edward L. Ryerson Fellowship to study at the University of Chicago in 1938 studying under Henri Frankfort. She distinguished herself as a student and was awarded the Alvin K. Brown Fellowship in 1943 and the Reyeron Fellowship in 1944 for outstanding study in archaeology. Her Ph.D. dissertation, “Plant Ornament: Its Origin and Development in the Ancient Near East” showcased her prodigious knowledge of the art and archaeology of the Aegean, Egypt, and Western Asia as did her early publications which were seminal works on the civilizations of the Mediterranean, the Nile, and Fertile Crescent.

After graduation, she was appointed Research Assistant at the Oriental Institute in 1945 publishing a series of “Oriental Institute Museum Notes” on important pieces in the collection. She became an instructor in the Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures in 1948 and full professor in 1963, incorporating the Museum collections in her teaching courses on the archaeology of the Aegean, Egypt, and the Ancient Near East. An inspiring instructor she transmitted her love for this material to her students along with her meticulous attention to detail. In 1958 when the Egyptian Department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art was forced to deaccession vast quantities of its excavated Egyptian pottery, Kantor, recognizing its importance, arranged to acquire it for the Oriental Institute Museum.

Despite her publication and museum work and her physical limitations, Kantor also made time for travel and archaeological fieldwork, making her first research trip to Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, and Greece in 1953-1954. She excavated in Israel with Pierre Delougaz at Beit Yerah and Nakhal Tabur in 1963-4, and in Iran at Chogha Mish and the neighboring sites of Chogha Banut and Chogha Fazili from 1961 to 1978. In 1984, Kantor received the Percia Schimmel Archeological Prize for her lifetime achievements. After her mother’s death in 1956, her father, she fondly called *Rasha*, moved to Chicago and lived with her from 1964 until his death in 1984. She

retired from teaching in 1989, and she was presented with a Festschrift, *Essays in Ancient Civilization Presented to Helene J. Kantor* that same year. Her health began to fail in her later years and she succumbed to heart failure at Mitchell Hospital in Chicago on January 13, 1993. In 2004, the Archaeological Institute of America established the Helene J Kantor Memorial Lecture in her memory.

Peter Lacovara
Albany, NY. May 15, 2023



Oil painting of Suzanna and the Elders by Helene Kantor, photograph courtesy of Abbas Alizadeh

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