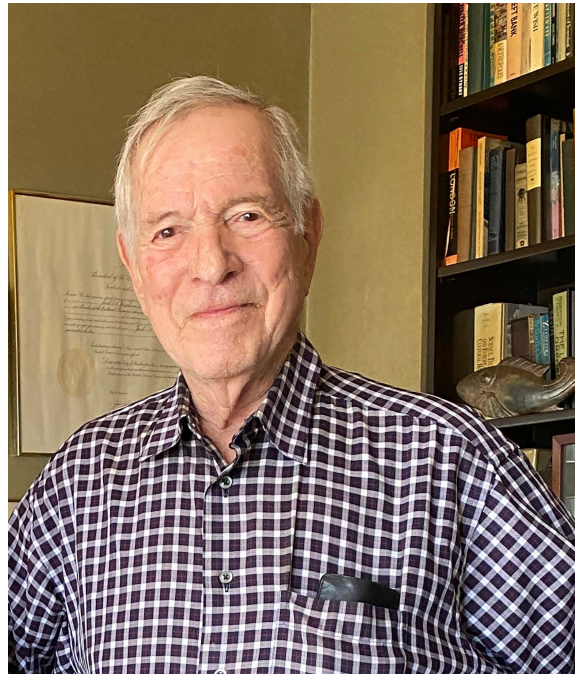


Jack A. Josephson

(January 31, 1930–October 22, 2023)



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Courtesy of Bruce Silverstein Gallery*

Home in the evening sipping red wine, my thoughts turn easily to Jack Josephson, whose stimulating conversation and “cocktail hour” hospitality many of us have been privileged to enjoy over the years. With his passing on October 22, 2022 at the age of 92, Egyptology lost a great scholar, friend, and generous supporter to many causes, including ARCE.

Jack, the son of immigrant parents, came of age in Atlantic City, New Jersey during the Great Depression. Thanks to a grant from the US Navy, he attended the University of Michigan, where he earned a degree in engineering. Following graduation, he joined the Naval Reserve and was posted to Morocco. During his free time on weekends he frequently went to Cairo, where he developed a fondness and an eye for things ancient Egyptian and Islamic, both of which he collected. (His Islamic collection now forms part of the National Museum of Kuwait.) The 1950s were at times difficult years in Egypt. Many of us have heard him tell of his harrowing escape from Shepherd’s Hotel as it burned to the ground in 1952.

Returning to the US, Jack supervised the construction of several large buildings in Manhattan before starting his own business in decorative waterproof wallcoverings. Retiring early from his business ventures gave him the opportunity to pursue the passion he developed in Egypt. At the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University’s

art history graduate program, he audited every course Bernard V. Bothmer offered and the two became good friends. The Institute is where I, and many other future Egyptologists, first met him. He enjoyed engaging in lively discussion with students, and he frequently invited us to his home to see his growing collection of Egyptian art—and for a glass of fine red wine, of which he was a connoisseur.

Scholarship for Jack went together with collecting and soon superseded it. His first love was Late Period Egyptian Art, and he published many insightful articles and books in that area, either alone or with colleagues, including Richard Fazzini and Paul O'Rourke. His *Egyptian Royal Sculpture of the Late Period 400–246 B.C.* (1997), and the Catalogue Général volume *Statues of the XXVth and XXVIth Dynasties* (1999), both co-authored with Mamdouh Eldamaty, are particularly noteworthy. (Jack proudly mentioned to a colleague that he was the first American since George Reisner in 1913 to author a volume of the Catalogue Général.)

From Late Period art, his curiosity led him to Middle Kingdom art and several other articles, and ultimately to research art of the Predynastic and Archaic periods. He found a willing colleague and friend in Günter Dreyer, with whom he enjoyed many a late-night discussion and debate, resulting in several more pioneering articles. He applied his expertise in civil engineering to an ingenious 2005 article entitled, “The Use of Sand-Box Foundations in Ancient Egypt.”

Jack continued to be a mentor to many young scholars. He particularly enjoyed the semester he spent in Cairo teaching Egyptian Art at the American University in Cairo. Having been a widower for six years, during this semester he was accompanied by his second wife, Dr. Magda Saleh (recently deceased) and particularly spoiled by her family who lived in Cairo. He would often speak reverently of how she opened up an entirely different side of Egypt for him.

Magda's first love was dance. As a student, she was sent to Moscow where she danced with the Bolshoi Ballet. Returning to Egypt, she became first Director of the new Cairo Opera House prior to emigrating to the US. She often recounted with a chuckle how shocked Jack's friends were when they thought they heard he had married a “belly” rather than “ballet” dancer.

Jack was a multi-talented, natural leader. President George H. W. Bush recognized it when he appointed him Chairman of the US Cultural Property Advisory Committee and charged him with promoting the U.S. government's effort to implement the 1970 UNESCO convention on the protection of cultural heritage. He continued to serve under President Clinton. In this post he traveled extensively and enjoyed it immensely, recalling fondly his visit to the house in Türkiye where his grandfather was born.

Many non-profit organizations benefited from Jack's support and expertise. He served on the Board of Trustees of ARCE from 1993–2005 and on its Finance and Audit Committee. On at least one occasion, he saved the institution by anticipating a devaluation of the Egyptian pound and overseeing the transfer of ARCE funds from Egyptian pounds to dollars. He was a Trustee of the Brooklyn Museum and headed the Circle of Friends at the Institute of Fine Arts of NYU. At the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, he was on the Visiting Committee. He chaired the International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR) and founded the American Friends of the German Archaeological Institute, of which he was a corresponding member. The list goes on. To all these institutions and many others, he was also a generous donor.

Egyptology was but one thing that Jack enjoyed and excelled. At home in New York City, Wednesday evenings was devoted to a decades-long game of poker with friends, including the renowned music critic, Harold Schonberg, who mentored him in classical music and chess.

On weekends he could be found playing tennis at his restful Shelter Island getaway. Many of us have fond memories of spending long weekends there deep in discussion, sailing on his Sunfish to a far island for a picnic, antiquing, watching mysteries on TV, and always sipping that glass of fine red wine. Jack is much missed.

Rita E. Freed
Boston