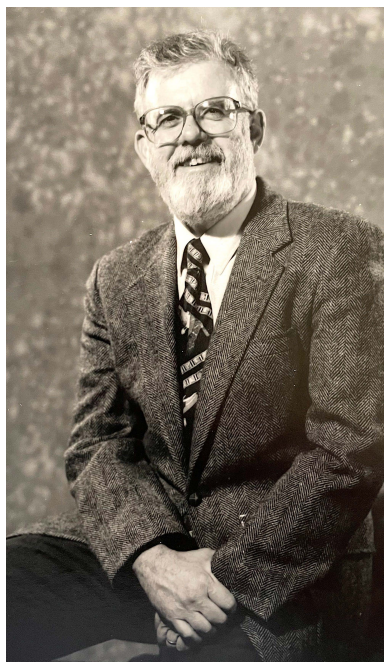


## David Bourke O'Connor

(February 5, 1938– October 1, 2022)



David Bourke O'Connor, Director Emeritus of the Pennsylvania-Yale-New York University Expedition to Abydos, Lila Acheson Wallace Professor Emeritus of Ancient Egyptian Art at the Institute of Fine Arts New York University, and Professor and Curator Emeritus of Egyptology at the University of Pennsylvania, passed away on October 1, 2022, at 84 years of age.

One of the world's leading Egyptian archaeologists of his generation, David O'Connor was born on February 5th, 1938 in Sydney, Australia. He had been interested in archaeology from a young age and enrolled in the University of Sydney where he studied Neolithic and Bronze Age Cyprus. After earning his BA in 1959, his professors encouraged him to continue his studies at University College, London, where he received his Diploma in Egyptology in 1962, under the direction of Walter Bryan Emery. While in London, he had his first experience of excavation, at St Albans in England. During the 1960s, he worked for the Nubian Salvage Campaign for three seasons on survey and at the important fortress site of Buhen. O'Connor completed his graduate work at the University of Cambridge where he was awarded his Ph.D. in 1969, writing his dissertation on "Nubian Archaeological Material of the First to the Second Intermediate Periods: An Analytical Study." During his fieldwork in Nubia, Froelich Rainey, Director of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, arranged to meet with O'Connor at the Temple of Abu Simbel and offered him the post of Curator-in-Charge of its Egyptian Collection, which

he accepted and took up in 1964. This was a joint appointment as Professor of Ancient Egyptian History and Archaeology in the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, as well as Curator-in-Charge of the Egyptian collection at the Penn Museum. O'Connor made full use of the Museum's extensive collections in familiarizing students with all aspects of pharaonic material culture.

In 1967, taking advantage of the Egyptian Government's offer to give new concessions to work in Egypt for institutions that had participated in the Nubian salvage campaign, O'Connor applied to work in the northern area of the site of Abydos. There he constructed an excavation house inspired by the one that had been built originally at Buhen by David Randall McIver, bringing Nubian craftsmen to construct the domes to roof many of the rooms. The dramatic appearance of the structure prompted Omm Seti, the expat English doyenne of Abydos, to nickname it "O'Connor's Kremlin."

When, after the October 1973 war, security concerns restricted excavations in Egypt to areas around Cairo and Luxor, O'Connor applied to work at the palace-city of Amenhotep III at Malkata on the Theban West Bank where he could pursue his strong interest in settlement archeology. This was a collaboration with Barry J. Kemp, with whom he had worked earlier in Nubia. They concentrated on the great artificial harbor at Malkata known as the Birket Habu, achieving notable results that also informed O'Connor's later work on Egyptian conceptions of royal cities as an earthly manifestation of the cosmos.

When the restrictions were lifted, O'Connor returned to work at Abydos, where he located and excavated the Terrace of the Great God, a Middle Kingdom area that was known only from texts on stelae. Its core consisted of a vast number of chapels in the North Cemetery there that had previously been covered over by the Gateway Temple of Osiris constructed under Ramesses II. He went on to re-excavate the massive funerary enclosures of the kings of the First and Second Dynasties, discovering the earliest boat graves and beginning an ambitious conservation project on the Shunet es-Zebib, the monument built by Khasekhemwy, one of the oldest standing brick structures in the world. Work on the enclosures continued after O'Connor left the University of Pennsylvania in 1995 to become the Lila Acheson Wallace Professor of Ancient Egyptian Art at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, a post he held until his retirement in 2017. A uniquely gifted teacher, in both his university appointments O'Connor mentored more than a generation of significant Egyptian archaeologists and art historians. Former students of his hold positions in universities and museums in several countries.

O'Connor curated the permanent displays in the Egyptian galleries at University of Pennsylvania Museum as well as mounting temporary exhibitions, working first with Lanny Bell and later with David P. Silverman. Notable exhibitions, together with associated publications, were *Egyptian Mummies: Secrets and Science* (1980) and *Ancient Nubia: Egypt's Rival in Africa* (1993). He also developed the management of the collection, involving both museum staff and loyal volunteers. He was exceptionally helpful to scholars wishing to work on objects in the collection. O'Connor was much involved with touring exhibitions and with assisting other institutions, such as the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, in curating and displaying their collections.

O'Connor's interests and scholarship were very broad. His archaeological focuses ranged from fieldwork techniques, through object typologies, as far as applications of statistical methods and analysis of landscape and configuration of Egypt as a whole country. Perhaps most distinctive are his integrative studies of Egyptian cities. He was never content simply to present materials, always seeking to achieve a deeper and more informed understanding of the ancient world, while often questioning established interpretations, for instance in views of relations between Egypt and Nubia.

The breadth of O'Connor's work is visible in his vast published output, perhaps especially in articles in journals and edited collections. His books include *Ancient Nubia: Egypt's Rival in Africa* (1993), *Abydos: Egypt's First Pharaohs and the Cult of Osiris* (2009), and edited volumes on *Ancient Egyptian Kingship* (with David P. Silverman, 1995); *Ancient Egypt in Africa* (with Andrew Reid, 2003); *Mysterious Lands: Encounters with Ancient Egypt* (with Stephen Quirke, 2003); and volumes co-edited with Eric Cline on Thutmose III, Amenhotep III, and Ramesses III. His long-awaited work on the Old Kingdom Town at Buhen was published in 2014.

David O'Connor's passing is mourned by Egyptologists worldwide, and particularly by his many colleagues and students, along with his wife, Gülbün O'Connor, daughters Aisha and Katie, and his three grandchildren.

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