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EDITOR

Emily Teeter, Chicago

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

Kathryn Bandy, Chicago

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Donald Bruce Redford

September 2, 1934–October 8, 2024



Don and Sue Redford celebrating the 1990 University of Toronto, Akhenaten Temple Project at “Beit Kanada,” East Karnak. Photo: Gregory Mumford.

Donald Redford was born in Toronto, Canada. He grew up in a conservative, Baptist household, being exposed extensively to Biblical accounts plus *National Geographic Magazine* articles and illustrations on past civilizations, particularly ancient Egypt and the Bible Lands that inspired and shaped his future from the age of seven. From his childhood through adult years, he maintained a passion for sports and music. He loved hockey, baseball, and football, remaining an ardent fan of Toronto sports teams. Likewise, he had a deep love for Italian and German opera, particularly that of Wilhelm Richard Wagner.

Don (as he was known), received his B.A. (1957), M.A. (1958), and Ph.D. (1965) from the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Toronto with an emphasis on languages. He studied ancient Egyptian with Richard A. Parker, Hans J. Polotsky, and Ricardo Caminos. His PhD dissertation was published in 1967 as *History and Chronology of the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt: Seven Studies*.

Don began his career as a teaching assistant at Brown University (1959–1961). In 1961, he accepted an appointment in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Toronto, being appointed full professor in 1969. When facing a then-mandatory retirement at sixty-five, he accepted an invitation from the newly established Department of Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies at Pennsylvania State University. There,

he helped found a highly successful program, teaching a range of history, archaeology, and language courses. With his wife Susan, he ran an archaeological field school (1998–2021) until his retirement in July 2024. He was the recipient of many prestigious scholarships, awards, and grants.

Redford was trained in archaeological fieldwork by the “grand dame” of archaeology, Kathleen Kenyon, excavating portions of the old city of Jerusalem for the British School of Archaeology via its affiliation with the Royal Ontario Museum in 1964, 1965, and 1967. In 1968, Don worked as an epigrapher and site supervisor for Veronica Seton-Williams at the Egypt Exploration Society’s excavations at Buto. Don often regaled his later dig staff and students with riveting tales of Kenyon’s rigorous methodology and “Buto stories.” One I recalled involved snakes, insects, frightening night trips to the outhouse, plus Don relating that his excavation unit had stopped just one meter away from what would transpire to be a significant discovery by later archaeological teams at Buto.

Redford directed a Toronto/SSEA and SUNY Binghamton epigraphic project in the chapel of Osiris Heka-Djet in Karnak (1970–1972). In 1972, he became director of the University of Pennsylvania Akhenaten Temple Project (ATP), and in 1975, he initiated the University of Toronto/ATP investigations at East Karnak that concluded in 1991. Among the ATP’s achievements was tracing the buried Gem-pa-aten temple’s foundations and *talataat* blocks from 1975–1991 and investigating other strata at East Karnak. Redford also served as an epigrapher on John S. Holladay’s Tell el-Maskhuta project (1977 and later), and his interest in Egyptian toponyms in Syria-Palestine guided his 1981 Jordan Toponym Survey, during which he led a small team tracing routes and identifying potential toponyms from part of Thutmose III’s lists.

In 1989, Don started a new project in the east Delta at Mendes (Tell er-Ru’aba), initially with co-directors Douglas Brewer and Robert Wenke (1989–1994). He assumed the directorship of the excavation in 1994, and conducted work at site almost annually until 2021, continuing previous work by New York University and other investigators. He brought his tireless energy and enthusiasm to shorter seasons at Tel Kedwa in northwest Sinai in 1993, 1997, and 1998, finding several phases of occupation in a Dynasty 26 fortress. Don also worked as an epigrapher and co-director alongside his wife and colleague, Dr. Susan Redford, in her Theban necropolis project in the tombs of Parennefer, Re’a, and Ramosi (1988–).

Don’s bibliography is extensive with many excavation reports and monographs, including *Akhenaten: The Heretic King* (1984), *Pharaonic King-Lists, Annals, and Day-Books: A Contribution to the Study of the Egyptian Sense of History* (1986), and *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (1992). He served as editor for *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (2001), the first such English-language resource. The supplementary volumes to his “History of Ancient Egypt,” projected to be five or six volumes, remained in manuscript at the time of his death.

Don gave time to professional organizations, serving as a long-term trustee of the American Schools of Oriental Research, and he was one of the founders of the Canadian Institute in Egypt and the (initially) Toronto-based Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities (SSEA). His work was featured in many television documentaries and broadcasts.

It is hard to do justice to Don’s great breadth of character in a brief obituary. He had a deep sense of humor and sharp wit: He loved Monty Python’s Flying Circus with all its ribald humor. While he did not suffer fools and often got “lost” deep within his studies, he was kind, generous, and forgiving. Although quick to anger, he could return to laughter seconds later. He loved archaeology, “dig life,” his family, students, and friends. I recall one illustrative memory of Don from the fall 1989 season at East Karnak, when Don, as ever, was actively engaged in searching for further funds for the Akhenaten Temple Project. Heading into Luxor one evening, he encountered a Canadian couple who appeared to be well-connected to the Canadian embassy or had some sort of link to potential funds. Don invited them to an evening party at the dig house (referred to as Beit Kanada). Don and Sue carefully instructed all team members to be “on our best behavior.” We put our hearts and souls into the many and intricate preparations for snacks, food, drinks, and decorations, with the party being held on the roof top. I am not quite sure how things unfolded, but as the evening progressed it gradually became apparent that the Canadian couple, far from having any links with potential future wealthy patrons, were actually a regular, everyday Canadian couple simply touring Egypt. As this realization dawned upon us, including Don, his reaction was immediate and predictable: A deep, long, hearty bellow of laughter, yet coinciding with the equally predictable continued good manners of the consummate host. The Canadian couple left that evening feeling that Canadian

archaeologists were the most hospitable and kindly of people, while the event gave us all one more of many great memories and something else to chuckle about for years to come. Such “Don memories” are varied and endless. Our fond recollections of Don and our indebtedness to him will remain with us for the duration of our days.

Don is survived by sons, Christopher and Philip from a first marriage, and Alexander and Aksel, from his marriage to Susan (née Pirritano) who became his lifetime partner and who co-directed many of their projects.

I thank Dr. Susan Redford and Dr. Tawny Holm for biographical information.

Gregory D. Mumford

The University of Alabama at Birmingham