

## George T. Scanlon 1925–2014

Born in Pennsylvania on April 23, 1925, George T. Scanlon was more than just a scholar of Islamic art and architecture; he was a true Renaissance man who paved the way in areas as wide-ranging as salvage archaeology and scholarly writing. One would have to refer back to his vocation as a young Naval officer to find the wellspring of his intrepid career, since it was his service in the armed forces that played an important role in shaping his academic and professional trajectory. According to one of Scanlon's oldest friends, he volunteered to join the US Navy at around the age of 18, and was first active in the Second World War from 1942. One of the advantages of his service was eligibility to enroll in the V-12 Navy College Training Program, an initiative created by the American government during the wartime period to augment declining college attendance and grant degrees to prospective officers. It was through this program that he received a Bachelors of Science in Chemistry from Villanova College in 1945. As a war veteran he was also a beneficiary of the G.I. Bill, which enabled him to attend the prestigious Swarthmore College to earn a Bachelor of Arts in Literature and History in 1950. Through ties at Swarthmore he taught English for two years at the Friends Boys School in Ramallah (1950–1951), on a fellowship from the Friends Service Committee; and it was from Ramallah, so I have been told, that Scanlon visited Egypt for the first time.

With the outbreak of the Korean War, Scanlon resumed active service with the Navy during the tumultuous years of 1951 to 1953. He returned to the world of academia immediately thereafter, receiving a Master of Arts in Oriental Studies from Princeton University in 1956. Even though awareness of the Middle East was on the ascent due to the revolutionary spirit that arose in the region at the time, few American institutions offered serious graduate work on the area and Princeton University was one of them. Attendance at this Ivy League university afforded the aspiring historian an opportunity to comprehensively study the region and its languages under the tutelage of the eminent scholar Philip Khuri Hitti and Arabist Farhat J. Ziadeh.

Following a sojourn and fieldwork in Egypt to carry out research for his dissertation on a fifteenth-century Arabic manuscript on the art of Mamluk warfare, Scanlon became affiliated with The American University in Cairo (AUC) (1957–1958) primarily to work with K.A.C. Creswell, the great authority on the Islamic monuments of Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean. An ARCE Fulbright Research Fellowship kept Scanlon in Egypt after completion of his doctoral degree in Near Eastern History (1959), also from Princeton University; he then assumed the directorship of The American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE) from 1959 to 1961, which was still in its nascence, and again from 1965 to 1966. His tenure at ARCE coincided with an important interval in the short history of American-Egyptian cultural relations, one that paralleled a politically difficult period for foreign archaeologists working in Egypt; it also marked a key turning point in ARCE's developing mission. Almost all foreign archaeological expeditions operating in Egypt were excavating with an exclusive focus on the country's ancient Pharaonic patrimony; however, it was with Scanlon's appointment(s) that forays into later historical periods were introduced to ARCE. The Center's emphasis on Islamic material culture can be attributed to his early association with ARCE as a Fulbright Fellow and subsequent integration on the executive level.

In the midst of all these promising changes at ARCE, *A Muslim Manual of War: being Tafrij al-kurub fi tadbir al-hurub* by 'Umar ibn Ibrahim al-Awsi al-Ansari, was published by The AUC Press. More significant, it was one of the first three books published upon The Press' establishment in 1960. Long since out-of-print, a facsimile of Scanlon's first monograph was recently made available to the public on the occasion of his recent retirement: <http://www.aucpress.com/p-4740-a-muslim-manual-of-war.aspx>.

Scanlon's fieldwork began in 1963, working for three seasons at Gebel Adda and the Coptic Monastery of Qasr al-Wizz in Nubia. Both of these medieval concessions were managed under the auspices of ARCE as part of UNESCO's International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia located above the Aswan High Dam. One of Scanlon's colleagues on the campaign, William Y. Adams, an anthropologist and UNESCO coordinator, mentioned in a recent correspondence that a testament to Scanlon's contribution to this international cooperation is that Qasr al-Wizz remains the only monastery in Lower Nubia that was ever published. The massive scale of this salvage undertaking proved to be a valuable networking forum for it was in Nubia where Scanlon met Polish archaeologist and Islamicist Wladislaw B. Kubiak, with whom he co-directed the ARCE sponsored Fustat Expedition for nine seasons between 1964 and 1980.

For most of the academic world, Fustat is where Scanlon sealed his reputation as a doyen of Islamic archaeology. Building on his experience in Nubia, several very important contributions arose from those Fustat years: not only was the first Islamic capital of Egypt and the site from which medieval Cairo blossomed properly documented in the face of inevitable destruction and years of neglect, but Fustat was the first Islamic concession granted to a foreign archaeological institute. Consequently, the breadth and depth of the deluge of articles and reports published by Scanlon on the pits, mounds, rubbish dumps, domestic architecture, sanitation, and material finds of Fustat have filled a lacuna in the fields of Islamic archaeology and Egyptian urban history. Not to be forgotten is his 1965 discovery of a luster-painted glass goblet inscribed with the name of Abd al-Samad (722–802), governor of Egypt for a month in 773. Now in the collection of the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (Inv. No. 23284), it is one of the earliest datable and most important glass objects from the early Abbasid period. This and other significant glass finds ultimately led to the 2001 publication of *Fustat Glass of the Early Islamic period: Finds Excavated by the American Research Center in Egypt, 1964-1980* with Ralph Pinder-Wilson, a distinguished Persian scholar and Islamic archaeologist with whom Scanlon enjoyed a lasting and productive academic relationship. Drawing from his acute interests in material culture, his interpretation of the large variety of finds—especially the imported wares—widened our understanding of medieval trade relations and brought the seemingly desolate remains of Fustat vividly to life. All this wealth of data greatly impacted and accelerated other missions to invest in Islamic sites throughout Egypt, like the subsequent American, French, Japanese and Kuwaiti sponsored excavations in Fustat, Upper Egypt and the Red Sea. Without his laborious efforts in the often challenging fieldwork conditions, precipitated by limited resources and lack of time, much of the material culture of Fustat would have remained undiscovered if not undiscoverable, which is why his prescient fieldwork is greatly appreciated today considering the constant threats and continuous urban encroachment to the site.

Scanlon was closely affiliated with several other US and UK-based institutions throughout his academic career: at the University of Chicago he was awarded a Carnegie Teaching Fellowship (1958 to 1959); he taught the history of the Middle East and Islamic Art and Architecture at the University of California at Berkeley (1961-1962); was a Fellow at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University, conjoint with the status of Senior Visiting Fellow at St. Anthony's College in Oxford (1966 to 1968); an Associate Professor of History at the University of Michigan, while acting as a Research Curator at the university's Kelsey Museum of Ancient and Medieval Archaeology (1969-1971); and a Visiting Fellow at St. Anthony's College (1971 to 1974). His longest affiliation, however, was with AUC, where, as successor of K.A.C. Creswell, who died in 1974, he was first a Visiting Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture with tenure ensuing in 1975. Although Creswell's legacy at AUC has remained a strong memory, Scanlon added significantly to the university's Islamic art and architecture curriculum over the decades, so much so that many found it difficult to reconcile his decision to finally hang up his gown in 2011.

Fortunately, Scanlon's manifold contributions have been appropriately recognized by the academy for posterity. The most notable honors were bestowed upon him by the Institut d'Égypte in 1987, when he was elected a Corresponding Member; the Middle East Medievalists awarded him their first ever Lifetime Achievement Award in 1998; and in 2002 The AUC Press published a festschrift, *Historians in Cairo: Essays in Honor of George Scanlon*, containing scholarly articles written by his close friends, former students and colleagues. More recently, he was honored at the 50th anniversary of the Nubia Campaign held in Aswan in 2009; at the 7th International Congress of Archaeologists on the Ancient Near East

(ICAANE), held in 2010, a resolution was passed recognizing his life-long achievements; and during the same year, the Ministry of Antiquities (then known as the Supreme Council of Antiquities) broke with tradition by honoring him in a formal ceremony and making him the first and only non-Egyptian medieval archaeologist recognized by the SCA in this way.

I will spend these last few lines offering my own reflections of Scanlon. Although it is through the perceptiveness of a young graduate student that I first became acquainted with him, I was fortunate to have remained in touch and privileged to have enjoyed his company over the years. I probably speak for his cohorts of former students in recounting the engaging narrative style of his lectures, which always implanted drama, intrigue and inquiry. One never left his class without having acquired new appreciation for the dullest of objects (“What does laminated glass tell you?”), perspectives on the topography of Cairo (“When you exit Bab Zuwayla and walk south until the end of the Qasaba, where will you end up?”), and an expectation to make impromptu visual associations (“Because a good art historian has a remembering eye!”). I will forever feel grateful for his uncanny ability and enthusiasm in sharing his rich experience and knowledge, and for opening up new ways of thinking and looking at the world. Surely this is the priceless gift of a true education. As we recognize Scanlon’s prowess as an archaeologist, educator and scholar, we should also recall his unforgettable presence and dynamic personality, one that was fueled by the fact that he lived a very long, rich and full life. And we should also remember him as he was: opinionated; complicated; some would say a peculiar man; genuinely interested in the prospects of his students; the life and center of any gathering; and a man who left an indelible impression on all who have met him. Even his detractors recognized his agency, succumbed to his charm, and acknowledged that he was a consummate intellectual, erudite and, yes, brilliant.

In preparing for this dedication I have also been reminded of Scanlon’s many other passions. As a student it was not uncommon to hear him hum arias to the musical accompaniment of his jingling keys, or recite lines penned by his favorite authors, both of which, in many cases, set the tone for his lectures. Then there was Scanlon the lover of horses, and Scanlon the tennis aficionado who regularly played the sport on the courts of AUC’s Old Campus. Like those tennis courts of yesteryear, he both preceded and survived one of his favorite meeting places: the Nile Hilton Hotel, which opened in Tahrir Square in 1958 and closed in 2009. And talk to anyone who knew Scanlon during the Fustat years and they will tell you about his beloved floating headquarters, the famous Nile houseboat fittingly named *Fustat*, of which he was the uncontested captain. More than anything, I think Scanlon will be most remembered for his exuberant conversation style, unabashed honesty, colorfully coordinated sartorial elegance and adventurous spirit. What should not be buried with him or fall out of historical record is his incredible generosity. Perhaps little-known outside of certain circles is that Scanlon anonymously endowed the annual George Antonius Memorial lecture at the Middle East Centre of St Antony’s College, which was held in his memory this year; he also gave generously over the years to key institutions that supported the study of the Middle East, such as The American University in Beirut and Middle East Medievalists. However, the Rare Books & Special Collections Library (RBSCL) at AUC, his official home for the past forty years, is where his spirit resides: in 2008, Scanlon donated his personal papers, correspondences and the diaries that he has kept over the years, no doubt didactic and composed with typical Scanlon-esque eloquence.

To conclude, I leave you with one of Scanlon’s notoriously candid expressions—one that is most poignant as we continue to remember and memorialize our good professor, and the first thought that came to mind when I learned of his unfortunate demise on July 13, 2014: “Say good things about me, say bad things about me but, goddammit, talk about me!!!!”

Alumnae of AUC’s Arab and Islamic Civilizations (ARIC), the department where Scanlon taught, are in the process of establishing a graduate student award in his memory. The purpose of this award is to keep his name alive by honoring and perpetuating his scholarship in an annual ceremony. If you would like to support the establishment of this award, please contact AUC’s Office of Institutional Advancement: [givingthanks@aucegypt.edu](mailto:givingthanks@aucegypt.edu).

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*Fig. 1. Sifting through pottery sherds in Fustat, 1964.*



*Fig. 2. With former students, Rare Books Library and Special Collections, AUC, New Campus, April 2010. Photo by Kathrin Sambold.*