

## Biography of Professor Scanlon: “A Life Journey”

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December 14, 2012

### LEAD-IN:

This is a biography of Professor George T. Scanlon, a prominent American art historian to be honored by the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities. A-U-C’s Dina Tolba has the story.

### *MUSIC: John Williams Concerto*

Of the thousands of the 20th-century orientalists and western scholars, who gravitated to the Islamic world, few possessed an extraordinary curiosity and passion to record the historical and artistic heritage of ancient Egypt and medieval Islam.

Indeed, Professor George Scanlon is one of those few whose contributions to Egyptian Islamic medieval archaeology are valued by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) in Egypt, an entity of the Egyptian Ministry of Culture. Under the directions of Dr. Zahi Hawas, then the Secretary General of the SCA, Dr. Scanlon was honored on May 25th 2010 for his life long input and influence on the field of archeology in Egypt.

### *MUSIC: “Act II: Triumphal March” by Giuseppe Verdi*

### *MUSIC: “Violin Concerto in A Minor” by Antonio Vivaldi*

Scanlon’s obsession to explore the orient and admiration to Egypt’s art and architecture led him to settle down in Egypt nearly 4 decades ago.

He devoted his life journey to the excavation and preservation efforts focusing on Islamic art and architecture in Fustat and Nubia. This was at a time when no foreigner worked in that field. He was the first non-Egyptian to be given permission to work on Islamic excavation and archaeology; so he became very

active as a field archeologist doing his work meticulously. Ola seif, Curator of photography collection at rare books library and a former student of Scanlon, describes his passion towards archeology and how he sees things beyond the scope of archeology courses he teaches.

*OLA: “ Once we are going on a field trip to Fustat, so of course while we are going to be on site he was going to explain situation and the dig and the excavation and what was found and the meaning of this and the meaning of that. But when we were in the car together on the way going he pointed out to me the houses of where the people the other excavators the other helpers on site local people were living and who were the people involved in the excavation, that wasn't part of the course but to me I found it very interesting and relevant information because it put me in the context on what was happening in the 60's, like who were the builders of the pyramids who were the excavators of Fustat another social aspect that seemed very interesting and that he was not committed to say it, he didn't have to say it to the students it was beyond the scope of the course, but perhaps he did understand that I was interested in it so he just gave me this piece of information. It was kind of storytelling. So that is Scanlon, he has information he shares it.”*

*MUSIC: “Violin Concerto in A Minor” by Antonio Vivaldi*

It goes without saying, he was a pioneer in Islamic archeology as his work in Nubia and Fustat documented significant sites before their destruction like the flooding of the Nile caused by the High Dam in Aswan and the advance of urban cities in Fustat. He also earned recognition for his scholarly publications that influenced and urged later missions to invest in Islamic sites all over Egypt. But this is not all he also pass down life wisdoms in this field to his students Dina Bakhom, a Heritage

Conservation Manager and Adjunct Faculty at AUC, explained how he gave her an insight into her future career while being a graduate student.

*DINA: “One of the things I learned from him in one of the courses when we were discussing the Muslim city is, we were talking about Cairo the difficulties of Cairo and so on, and he said one job you wouldn’t want to have image this being the governor of Cairo you don’t want that and ok even as a graduate student you think you got it, you know, but no didn’t get it fully until I started to work in this field and you know I am working in heritage conservation specifically on Islamic architecture for almost 10 years and one time two times three times you meet the governor, this Cairo governor you see the problems challenges of the historic city but of Cairo in general and you get it. (:50)*

*MUSIC: “Violin Concerto in A Minor” by Antonio Vivaldi*

Professor George T. Scanlon is not only an American archaeologist of excellent talent and genius, who spent much of his life in Egypt. He is also an amazing scholar of Islamic art and architecture and an brilliant art historian.

In 1945, he earned his bachelors of Science degree from Villanova College, and he received his Bachelors of Arts in history and Literature from Swarthmore College in 1950. He also received a Masters of Arts in Oriental Studies and a PhD both from Princeton University in New Jersey, USA, in 1956 and 1959 respectively.

From 1957 to 1958, Scanlon joined the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the American University in Cairo. However, the following year he returned to the United States after being awarded a Carnegie Teaching Fellowship at the University of Chicago for one year.

*MUSIC:* “Violin Concerto in A Minor” by Antonio Vivaldi

*MUSIC:* “Mariage D'amour” by Richard

Few orientalist like Scanlon preserved such a trove of talents, so unusual a curiosity or so passionate a commitment to record the historical and artistic heritage of medieval Islamic Egypt.

He returned to Egypt and worked at the American Research Center in Cairo as a director for the center from 1959 to 1961. Also, his teaching career at AUC began in 1974 as a Visiting Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture and was tenured at AUC in 1975 where he continued to teach until 2010.

*SOUNDBITE HEBA:* “All you have to do is watch and listen something very amazing is going to be said in a very articulate language that you’ve probably have not experienced with other professors.” (:17)

*MUSIC:* “Mariage D'amour” by Richard

Scanlon is not only dedicated to art history and his scholastic work; but also he is devoted to his beloved students. He is a role model and a godfather to many students. Ola Seif, an AUC rare books staff and Heba Al Tody an independent researcher in Islamic Art describe their feelings towards their adored professor.

*OLA:* “ Dr. Scanlon is quite a special person to me because I have known him in to capacities; one as an undergraduate student and one as a graduate student. In both cases he certainly appear to me as a very knowledge person, but in the graduate phase I enjoyed him a lot, I enjoyed his classes a lot more because I had realized his sense of hummer I realized his aaah the depth and the width of his knowledge and his ability to analyze things. I had known more about him aah his background in Egypt that he was here since the 60’s I could see his ability to merge all his knowledge and to get a wonderful product to his students or to his friends or to his entourage.” (: 55)

*HEBA: “ He was not a typical teacher, he was a researcher who exchanged his knowledge and passion with his students and this is very encouraging.” (:16)*

*MUSIC: “Mariage D'amour” by Richard*

Scanlon’s impact was not only in the field of Islamic Art, his influence is enormous on several students, who changed their life course, majors and careers to study and work in Islamic Art and Architecture. Some of his students are now prominent professors working in different universities such as the GUC, FUC or in the United States and France. Scanlon’s love and infectious passion for Cairo and its architecture has been passed down to his students. Ahmed Wahby, Professor of Islamic Art at GUC, and Heba al Today recall how such passion was passed down to them.

*AHMED: “ I was trained as an architect, I have a degree in architecture initially, I’ve been living in Egypt for sometime, I’ve been seeing and practicing the type of architecture that we see around; but when Dr. Scanlon spoke about Egyptian architecture and showed us those slides of Ayubbid, Mamluk and Ottaman architecture later on, and he started speaking about Egyptian architecture and characteristics of Egyptian architecture his passion in doing so his perspective in explaining this as a non-Egyptian, I guess it was fascinating. For me why didn’t I see it like this before? How come I’ve never notice this before? and so on... I kept telling myself it was really illuminating. The way he explain the way he showed us did open my eyes to a lot of different aspects of our own Egyptian Architecture. ” (:55)*

*HEBA: "Attending Dr. Scanlon classes was like going to a huge theatrical production or reading a mid dazzling novel. There was the intriguing introduction the enjoyable rich presentation and the conclusion that leaves one eager for more ." (:16)*

*MUSIC: "Mariage D'amour" by Richard*

*MUSIC: " Malaguena" by Ernesto Lecuona*

Being one of his students myself, it is hard to talk about his intellectual contribution and ignore a very compelling feature of his character, the human side.

I recall having my asthma once during his classes; he was at the peak of explaining a decorative feature in a monument mesmerizing all of us with his charisma and gorgeous presentation. I tried to hid my shortage of breath so no one can notice; I didn't want to interrupt him, especially while being overwhelm by the magical beauty of the building.

Unfortunately, this made things worse and my respiratory problem erupted all of a sudden with an sever asthma attack. The only thing I can remember is that Professor Scanlon was shouting over the phone to the people in the clinic because no one show up as he called them several times. His face's fair skin turned reddish his temper was bad and he was walking in the classroom going back and forth probably wondering where is the doctor! He only calmed down when the doctor showed up with two nurses and my breathing was back to its normal pace. He asked me do you feel better, I said yes. That day, I realized not only the human side of his character but also the paternity and kindness in his personality concealed underneath a tuff and serious look sometimes.

*MUSIC: “ Malaguena” by Ernesto Lecuona*

*SONDBITE OLA: “Although he seemed very strike he also has his human sides that very often he didn’t want to show it but his students realized it”(:13)*

I was not the only one who notice this about him. I am sure every former student have felt his protective nature and enjoyed his fatherhood. Ahemd Wahby recalls his own experience with him.

*AHMED: “ I rememver a situation in which I burst into tears, what happened was when I finished my PHD in Germany, the university’s admission office gave me all my original papers and I was looking through my papers my submitted papers and I found a recommendation letter of a secret recommendation letter or confidential recommendation letter that was sent by Dr. Scanlon that was sent to the university in which he evaluated my performance and he was recommending me as a student over there. I was extremely overwhelmed by the warmth of his words and what he had wrote. If I can read it write know I would but I don’t know what to say. It was a very very very touchy moment in my life.” (:50)*

*MUSIC: “ Malaguena” by Ernesto Lecuona*

On the other hand, Heba al tody and dina bakhom had a different type of experience with him a rather funnier one.

*HEBA:” once I was giving a presentation, I was very keen on impressing Dr. Scanlon, so I did all the research that I could and wanted to present everything in detail so I kept showing all the arguments that I have read on every single decorative element on the building’s wall, and after I finished the only comment he had was what can you tell me about this very little*

*insignificant corner of the building. So I found out in the end that I didn't impress him much. I think this shows that it was not about how much you have read it is about how you use it and what you understand from it. It is not the quantity of the mass of it, it is the quality of it and how you research it.” (1:00)*

*DINA: “ I also pump a lot into him in Zamalek so, Marriott gardens in the morning, you know something that often happens and now he knows the whole family. My nephew for example he met him one time and he is three years old and Dr. Scanlon did a game of a mimic or something and my nephew every time he goes to the Marriott he says where is Dr. Scanlon, you know and he goes to him and if Dr. Scanlon is not there he does the same mimic, so it is special. He has this character that he makes you smile when you see him, the way he walks, you just , it makes you really smile.”(:45)*

*MUSIC: “ Malaguena” by Ernesto Lecuona*

Though everyone of his student had their own individual experience with him; all of us share the same vision. If we had the chance to take his classes again; we wouldn't have hesitated for a second.

*MUSIC: “ Malaguena” by Ernesto Lecuona*

Professor Sacnlon has received many honors in addition to the Supreme Council of Antiquates acknowledgment of his work in Egypt. He was elected as a Corresponding Member of the Institute d'Egypte in 1987, and he was the first recipient of the Middle East Medievalists lifetime Achievement award in 1998. This recognition is crowned with his former students' words of appreciation and

gratitude for him. AHMED, OLA and HEBA Scanlon's former students describe their feeling for him.

*JINGLE:* Created by Dina Tolba

Professor Scanlon's meticulous research in archeology and Islamic Art remains to enlighten scholastic studies; while his sense of humor and human side still draw a smile on his student's faces and inspire others to continue his life journey, a fitting salute to Islamic art and the glorious era it inspired.

*MUSIC:* "Act II: Triumphal March" by Giuseppe Verdi

Thank you for listening to "A life Journey" brought to you by Dina Tolba

This documentary was produced by Dina Tolba

Special thanks to Dr. Ahmed Wahby, Ola Seif, Heba al Tody and Dina Bakhom.

Sources from: AUC TODAY, American Research Center Bulletin and being one of his students.

Music by:

"Concerto" by John Williams

"Act II: Triumphal March" by Giuseppe Verdi

"Violin Concerto in A Minor" by Antonio Vivaldi

"Mariage D'amour" by Richard

"Malaguena" by Ernesto Lecuona

NOTES:

I didn't use any NATSOUND because I think it was not essential for this audio.