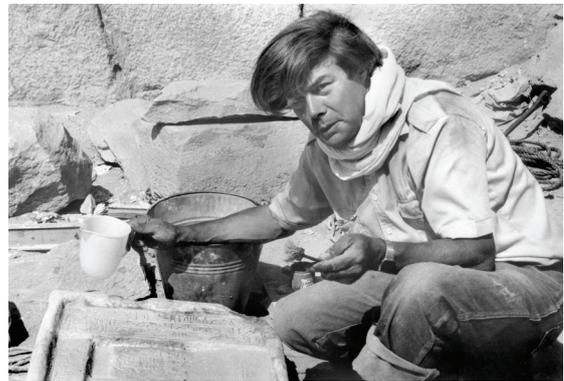


Professor Dr. Peter Munro (January 8, 1930 – January 2, 2008) 1970-1981 Director of the Kestner-Museum, Hannover

An obituary by Christian E. Loeben (translated into English: Michael Wolfson)



Peter Munro as museum director (1971) and as excavator in Saqqara (1982)

After a long illness und six days before his 79th birthday, the Egyptologist Peter Munro (born 1930 in Hamburg) died in the Siloah-Klinikum in Hannover.

After studying Egyptology, classical archaeology, and Semitic studies at the universities of Hamburg, Göttingen, and Cairo, Peter Munro, who was always proud of his Scottish heritage and wore a tie with the tartan of the Munro clan at any and all occasions, completed his doctorate in 1957 in Heidelberg with a dissertation on “Das Horusgeleit und verwandte Standartengruppen im ägyptischen Kult.” He initially found work in Cairo thanks to this excellent knowledge of Arabic: 1957-60 as a docent at the local Goethe-Institut, 1960-63 as a DFG (German Research Foundation) fellow, and 1963-65 as reader at the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service). In 1967, he habilitated with a thesis about “Die spätägyptischen Totenstelen,” a monumental conglomeration encompassing all the then known tomb stele of the first millennium B.C. which was published in 1973 in two volumes as Number 25 of the prestigious “Ägyptologische Forschungen” series. The significance of this book as a standard reference work on the subject matter can be measured by the fact that three Belgian Egyptologists –supported by numerous colleagues– underwent the effort of compiling an “Index and Addenda” supplement which was published in 1985 in Brussels as a third volume.

Prior to this work, Munro visited most of the collections of Egyptian art in the world and was very familiar with their holdings. This made him a suitable candidate for the directorship of the then Kestner Museum which had become vacant upon the death of the Egyptologist Irmgard Woldering

(1919-1969; director from 1955). After a classical archaeologist and four art historians, Peter Munro was the third Egyptologist to hold this position. He headed the museum for eleven years, from March 1, 1970 to June 30, 1981, when he went to the Free University Berlin, where he was appointed to Germany's first professorship focusing on Egyptian archaeology and art.

He was responsible for several spectacular acquisition of Egyptian art for Hannover. The most sensational was surely the head of King Akhenaten purchased in 1971. The sales price was about three times the museum's then yearly acquisitions budget and it was finally possible to implement the purchase thanks to the great generosity of Hannover's citizens. Just as expensive and no less spectacular was a bronze Romanesque candlestick that was acquired for the museum's Department of Medieval Art at the 1978 auction of the world-famous Hirsch Collection. In 1974-76, the museum's permanent exhibition of Egyptian art and artifacts was redesigned by the architect Thilo Mucke in accordance with Peter Munro's conception, expanding the Kestner Museum to include new storage facilities and an elevator.

In 1972, Peter Munro had his *venia legendi* transferred from Munich to Hannover and was thus able to teach Egypt-related subjects matters from 1974 at the Institute for Architecture and Art History at the former Technical University Hannover. In doing so, he revived the great tradition of this famous institution for teaching and research insofar as the link between Egyptian architectural studies in Hannover were particularly close since the appointment of Uvo Hölscher (1878-1963), who regularly participated as an architect in excavations in Egypt since 1907, to a professorship. One of Hölscher's many students who later also worked in Egypt was Herbert Rieke (1901-76) from Hannover-Linden who from 1938 was the long-term director of the "Schweizerisches Institut für ägyptische Bauforschung und Altertumskunde" in Cairo. Peter Munro not only retained close ties to him personally until his death, but also to this significant research institution in Egypt.

In 1973, together with the university's architectural researchers, museum director Munro began excavation work of the oldest section of the extensive cemetery at the capital Memphis known as Saqqara. In doing so, the long Hannover tradition of architectural study in Egypt was closely linked to the Kestner Museum for the first time. This also manifested itself in the fact that the engineer Uvo Hölscher, a grandson of the same-named Hannover professor of architectural history participated in the excavation campaign of 1974 and its preliminary report. And in fact Munro's excavations in Saqqara, which were generously financed by the DFG, enabled a number of young architects from Hannover as well as many young Egyptologists from Göttingen and later also Berlin to gather initial excavation experience and thus to gain much insight into an aspect of their future working lives. Munro selected an area known in short as the "Unas Cemetery" located to the south of the enclosing wall of the gigantic pyramid complex of Pharaoh Djoser (Third Dynasty, ca. 2600 B.C.) adjacent to the pyramid complex of Unas for his excavation. A number of Old Kingdom officials tombs known as "Mastaba," including the double mastaba of two queens of Pharaoh Unas, the last ruler of the Fifth Dynasty (ca. 2330 B.C.) can be found here. The excavation concession also included the 4000 m² large subterranean gallery tomb of Pharaoh Nynetjer (Second Dynasty, ca. 2700 B.C.) comprising over 100 chambers, where the Hannover architect couple Hanne and Erwin Arend carried out the architectural survey from 1980. Due to the great importance of this pharaoh's tomb for research of Egypt's early dynastic period, its further investigation was assumed by the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) in Cairo and headed by its last director, Prof. Dr. Günter Dreyer. The Kestner Museum's participation in archaeological field work ended with Munro's assumption of a professorship in Berlin.

Munro's activities at Saqqara and their publication continued after he retired from teaching in 1995. Aside from 11 articles appearing as preliminary reports, his excavations were unfortunately only published in the book "Der Unas-Friedhof Nord-West I: Topographisch-historische Einleitung. Das Doppelgrab der Königinnen Nebet und Khenut" (Mainz 1993). His numerous other essays published in Egyptological journals revolve basically around the subject matters of his above-named doctorate

and habilitation theses as well as the “Amarna Period,” i.e. the reign of Pharaoh Akhenaten (1353-1336 B.C.), as well as the so-called “Egyptian Image Metrics,” a type of analysis of the composition of Egyptian wall reliefs and paintings developed by Munro.

Peter Munro was always interested in a direct dialog among Egyptologists. Along with the Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum in Hildesheim, he invited museum Egyptologists from 21 countries to the Kestner-Museum in 1978 in order to exchange experience about the “Corpus Antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum” (CAA) which Munro co-founded. Oriented on the international publication of ancient vases, this project encompassed the standardized publications of museum holdings of ancient Egyptian art in the form of loose-leaf catalogues. Forty-one volumes of this series have been published to date; many others are oriented on the publication standards introduced by CAA.

Peter Munro was also one of the driving forces behind the founding of the “Ständige Ägyptologe Konferenz” (SÄK), the annual conference of Egyptologists from German-speaking countries. Hardly founded, he invited this conference to its first independent meeting at the Kestner Museum. For this reason he was also very pleased to find out that this conference –which was now attended by over 400 Egyptologists– returned to Hannover and the neighboring Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim in 2006 for its 38th annual congress and again in 2008, when Hannover and Hildesheim co-hosted an international conference of museum Egyptologists in which 54 colleagues from 37 institutions from 16 nations participated. Both conferences were incidentally only possible thanks to the generous support of the society for the advancement of the Museum August Kestner, “Antike & Gegenwart e.V.” This association, which provides a wide range of support to the museum –for example it now operates the cafeteria and museum shop– was founded in 1979 largely through the initiative of museum director Munro and presently numbers over 300 members. Since his retirement in 1995, it was unfortunately not possible for Peter Munro, who was now living in Hannover again, to participate in the celebration marking the association’s 25th anniversary in 2004 or at the two above-mentioned conferences. Serious illnesses bound him to his apartment in Hannover-Nordstadt which he could only rarely leave in recent years.

Peter Munro will be particularly remembered in Hannover for his large special exhibitions: 1978 “Geheimnisvolles Nepal” with over 50,000 visitors, 1979 “El Dorado - Der Traum vom Gold,” an exhibition that featured the treasures from the Bogotá Gold Museum in Germany for the first time, and especially “Tutankhamun.” After tenacious efforts, he was able to show this exhibition in 1981 at the Kestner Museum Hannover after stations in the United States and Canada as well as Berlin, Cologne, Munich, and before Hamburg. It bestowed Hannover with a still unbroken exhibition record of over 414,000 visitors in only two months!

About the author:

Dr. Christian E. Loeben (christian.loeben@hannover-stadt.de) studied Egyptology and art history at the Free University Berlin from 1980 to 1985 during the professorship of Peter Munro and participated in the 1982 season of Munro’s excavations at Saqqara (Egypt). He has been the responsible curator of the holdings of Egyptian and Islamic art at the Museum August Kestner since 2004 and is thus Peter Munro’s second successor as Egyptologist at this museum.

Photos: left - Museum August Kestner, Hannover, archives, right - Christian E. Loeben, Hannover