

HELENE J. KANTOR
(1919-1993)

Helene Kantor was born in Chicago in July 1919. Soon after her parents moved to Bloomington, Indiana, where her father, Jacob R. Kantor, took up a teaching position at the Department of Psychology of Indiana University. Dr. Kantor was born with *amortous congenital myopathy*, a rare muscular disease that progressively robbed her of her muscles and increasingly made her great mind the prisoner of her body. Because of that disease, she was taught at home by her mother, Helen Rich, until the age of 15 when she entered college. Her vast and impressive knowledge of classical, medieval, and Renaissance art and literature was the product of her "cottage" education and her mother's devotion to her upbringing. Helene began to study the piano at an early age and developed sufficient skill to play Mozart's sonatas with her teacher. As she grew older, the disease became more active forcing her to abandon her cherished extra-curriculum.

Confined to a life at home in the countryside, Helene Kantor developed an immense interest in animals and plants. She entered college and took a B.A. in zoology/biology. She initially wanted to become a physician, but because of her physical condition, and perhaps because she was a woman, she was dissuaded to pursue her interest in medicine.

Helene Kantor received the Edward L. Reyerson Fellowship and entered the University of Chicago in 1938 and completed her Ph.D. in 1945 under the supervision of Henry Frankfurt. She was awarded the Alvin K. Brown Fellowship in 1943 and the Reyerson Fellowship in 1944 for outstanding study in archaeology. She accepted a Research Assistant appointment in 1945 and became Assistant Professor in 1951. She was promoted to Professor in 1963. She retired from the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations in 1989, after a long

and productive career in teaching and scholarship. A volume of studies was dedicated to her in 1989.

Most of those who studied with Helene Kantor or audited her classes (many of them well known scholars from many countries) not only believed she was a scholar of impeccable credentials, but also agree that she was an exceptionally gifted teacher as well. To be unprepared for a class was for her an unthinkable act. While she was active teaching, she taught classes having read or at least seen the latest work on the subject at hand. While she presented her lectures articulately and eloquently, her personal and human feelings for subject matter instilled in students the enthusiasm and admiration she possessed for the ancient Near East.

Helene Kantor was never parsimonious with time spent helping and guiding students, often at the expense of her own projects. Her role as a teacher and supervisor was invaluable to the students of the Department of the Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. She taught classes in a number of distinct fields of inquiry, including Iranian art and archaeology, Mesopotamian art and archaeology, art and architecture of Egypt, and Aegean and Anatolian art and architecture, all with admirable command of the subject and materials. She directed doctoral dissertations in many of these fields, a feat that was as remarkable as it was vital to the academic growth and reputation of the Oriental Institute.

Professor Kantor was a combination of Renaissance "man" and Victorian scholar. Her discussion of a piece of prehistoric painted pottery, for example, would very relevantly take her to Impressionism and vice versa. She possessed an unsurpassed knowledge of Near Eastern pottery, as well as other art objects. Her keen observation would reveal such subtle nuances of

art objects and pottery that one would wonder whether she could "communicate" with them. However, despite, and perhaps, because of her vast knowledge of art and archaeology of the Near East, she was never given to generalization and had certain mistrust for theoretical elaboration.

Helene Kantor's scholarly contributions to the field of ancient Near Eastern art and archaeology are precise, clear, exhaustive, well documented, and classical examples of a deep understanding of and intimacy with the subject matter. Her book, *The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millennium B.C.*, as well as numerous articles are testimony to her rigorous style of research and her arguably unsurpassed knowledge of ancient Near Eastern art and archaeology. Her article "*The Chronology of Egypt and Its Correlations with that of Other Parts of the Near East in the Periods before the Late Bronze Age*" (in E. Ehrlich Relative Chronologies in the Old World Archaeology, 3rd ed. 1992, is a major contribution to the art and archaeology of Egypt and remains a basic research tool for Egyptologists and Near Eastern archaeologists interested in Egypt's foreign connections with the Near East before the Late Bronze Age. Helene Kantor's opus magnum, unfortunately unpublished, is her doctoral dissertation *Plant Ornament: Its Origin and Development in the Ancient Near East*, demonstrating not only the depth and range of her scholarly but also her artistic abilities in the numerous beautiful illustrations that adorn and enhance this as well as her other works. Dr. Kantor received the prestigious Schimmel Prize for her profound lifetime academic achievements.

Helene Kantor began her archaeological field experience with Pinhas Delougaz. As a team, they worked closely together for more than three decades. They conducted field work at Nahal Tabur, Beth Yereh, and Nahariya in Israel and at Chogha Mish, Chogha Banut, and

Boneh Fazili in Iran. The excavations at Chogha Mish, started in 1961 and ended in 1978, revealed a hitherto unknown stage of the Neolithic period in southwestern Iran, known now as Archaic Susiana, that extended the Susiana prehistoric sequence by about a thousand years back to the beginning of the Neolithic period. Helene Kantor's numerous preliminary analyses of the Archaic Susiana period contributed greatly to the understanding of the prehistoric and protohistoric life in southwestern Iran.

While this abbreviated account of the accomplishments of Helene Kantor reveals her brilliance, it does not indicate what she meant as a person to others. Helene Kantor had a deep understanding of human nature and immensely enjoyed people's company. Her love for Iran and the bond of friendship she developed with the villagers in the vicinity of Chogha Mish had become so strong that she had planned to live in the village of Dolati, near Chogha Mish, after she retired. Unfortunately, the political upheavals in Iran deprived her from reuniting with, as she put it, her "people," for her a calamity from which she never recovered. She was an ardent supporter of a number of important issues, such as gun-control, the pro-choice issue, wildlife preservation and environmental protection. She was also a foster-mother and long-time supporter of a number of poor and orphaned children in various countries around the globe. Professor Kantor died of heart failure at Mitchell Hospital on January 13, 1993.

Abbas Alizadeh

The Oriental Institute

The University of Chicago

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