

Margaret Munn-Rankin 1913-1981 by Barbara S. Lesko

J. Margaret Munn-Rankin, Near Eastern archaeologist and historian, was the only child of William and Sophie Munn-Rankin, and was born in Bournemouth England on July 29, 1913. Her father was an educator, head of more than one technical college during his career and the author of text-books on chemistry and botany. Margaret was sent to Bournemouth High School for Girls and then attended St. Hugh's College, Oxford to read Philosophy, Politics, and Economics. Visits to France and Germany between the wars fostered an interest in international relations. She worked for the Institute of International Affairs in London until the outbreak of war (1936-39) and then joined the Ministry of Information.

It was in this post she met the women who would give focus to the rest of her life, the archaeologists Veronica Seton-Williams (q.v.) and Joan Du Plat Taylor (q.v.). They brought her to appreciate the ancient Near East to such an extent that in 1935 Margaret decided to read for the Diploma in Western Asiatic Archaeology at University College, London, studying under Sidney Smith and Margaret Drower. Her successful attainment of the Diploma in 1949 led to her appointment at Cambridge University where she also became a Fellow of Newnham College later, and remained until her death.

As J.N. Postgate recalled in the obituary he wrote for Professor Munn-Rankin, she shouldered the teaching of both the history and the archaeology of the ancient Near East and Egypt in the Faculty of Oriental Studies. However, often in 1950 with her friends, she participated in field archaeology in the Near East as well. Her field experience began

under Mallowan at Nimrud, but also with Seton-Williams and Du Plat Taylor on Cyprus at Myurtou-Pigades. In 1951 the women surveyed the Cilician plain and began to excavate there in 1953 with John Waechter and James Mellaart at a Hittite period site, Sirkel, possibly a provincial capital of Kizzawatna. In 1953 they surveyed and worked at prehistoric sites like Daghdaghli near the Gaziantab road and then left for Syria where they explored sites in the vicinity of Aleppo. On this expedition the group was shown the site of Tell Rifa'at, some eighteen kilometers north-west of Aleppo and in 1956 the team (now including David Stronach and minus Waechter and Mellaart), were granted a concession for excavating here. Worked continued here until 1964. Margaret first established the origins of the mound, which had Hellenistic material on top, by digging a trench down to the Chalcolithic levels and in the 1960 season she excavated the East Gate. In 1963 Professor Munn-Rankin took a sabbatical in Iran. She was fond of travel, especially in the Near East, and had seen much of Turkey, the Levant, Egypt and Iraq.

Meanwhile, in 1957 Margaret bought a cottage near Cambridge at Balsham with Veronica Seton-Williams and proceeded to develop the landscaping of the acre and accomplishing an attractive garden. As a conscientious teacher (and she did produce many students who became active in the fields she was concerned with), Munn-Rankin did not find much time to write and is said to have regretted this. Others have praised her for her grasp of detail combined with a breadth of view, balanced approach and lucid style. Her most important contribution to history is probably her chapter for the *Cambridge Ancient History's* revised edition on "Assyrian Military Power, 1300-1200 B.C." which was published in 1967. Not long after retirement from teaching at Cambridge, in 1981, Margaret Munn-Rankin succumbed to a brain tumor on the 28th of

July, 1981. As a lasting legacy she left an endowment for a student fellowship at Cambridge in Assyriology, which is still active to this day.

Source

“Margaret Munn-Rankin (29 July 1913- 28 July 1981),” by

J.N. Postgate, *Archiv für Orientforschung* XXIX/XXX (1983/84), 333.

Publications by J.M Munn-Rankin

“Diplomacy in Western Asia in the Early Second Millennium B.C.,” *Iraq* 18 (1956), 68-110.

“Ancient Near Eastern Seals in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge,” *Iraq* 21 (1959), 20-57 (7 plates).

“Luristan Bronzes in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge,” *Iraq* 29 (1967), 1-2.

“Two Reliefs of an Assyrian King with Bowl,” *Iraq* 36 (1974) 169-171.

“Assyrian Military Power 1300-1200 B.C.,” chapter XXV in the I.E.S. Edwards et al eds., *Cambridge Ancient History*, 3rd edition, volume 2, part 2, 274-306.