

An Obituary: Geneviève Dollfus from Iran to Jordan and *Paléorient*

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Emeritus Director of Research at the French CNRS, CNRS silver medal and former director of the international journal *Paléorient*, Geneviève Dollfus passed away on 29 August 2020 in her eighty-second year after a very long illness. Our good friend Geneviève was a specialist in late prehistory of the Near East, and she has always shown a great intellectual openness, being interested in all forms of art and culture, from all periods.

All those who knew her, prehistorians and orientalists, will remember her generosity and her commitment to collective responsibilities, archaeology, heritage, and the training of young people, especially in Iran and in Jordan. In addition to her exceptional human qualities, she was also always a very faithful friend and colleague.

At the beginning of her career as an archaeologist, she took part in the excavations of Henri de Contenson in the Damascus Area (1967-1968) in Syria before joining Jean Perrot's team in Israel (1967 to 1974) where, with Monique Lechevallier, she worked in particular at Abou Gosh, but most of her career as an archaeologist was linked to Iran and Jordan.

Geneviève and Iran

In 1968 Jean Perrot took over the responsibility of the Susa excavations project from Roman Ghirshman, thus he selected a few of his crew of the Israel fieldworks team, and Geneviève was one of them, to take part in the digging operations. Very quickly, in Susa, she became the second of the team of around thirty members. During the following seasons of excavations, and due to the increase of the number of the members of the team, which exceeded 40 individuals, her role and responsibilities became more evident and important.

The austerity of the raw brick walls of the castle of Susa and the more than intensive rhythm of the work were in harmony with Geneviève's seriousness, her sense of responsibility, her somewhat gruff character, but also her constant availability and her great generosity. Far from isolating herself from others, she liked to organize and facilitate the life of visitors to Susa, colleagues working in the region, especially Americans and a few Iranians, but also more "important" figures, French ambassadors or of other countries, curious to live in the "French castle". With everyone, she was genuinely welcoming, warm and curious about what everyone could bring, for she was in isolation in the castle for more than five months a year (Fig. 1).

From 1973 onwards, Geneviève headed the URA 19 team of the CNRS Archaeological Research Centre, called *Iran-Sud*, to intensively publish, especially



Fig. 1 Geneviève in Susa. (Photo: Archives J. Perrot, Nanterre)

after the interruption of excavations in Iran in 1979, interim reports on the results of the excavations of Susa Plain in the *Cahiers de la Délégation archéologique française en Iran (DAFI)*, a collection she edited. She herself published three of the fifteen volumes on her excavations in the collection.

Geneviève led an extremely coherent programme of ten excavation campaigns within the general framework of the ambitious scientific programme launched by Jean Perrot "Setting of the Susa Stratigraphic Sequence" over 5500 years of Susa's existence. This objective that had been of little concern for the first excavators of the 20th century and hardly more so for Perrot's predecessor, Roman Ghirshman (1946-1968). On three small *tepes* (tells) located less than 10km north of Susa, which had only been tested in the 1930s for their painted ceramics, Geneviève explored the periods between the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 4th millennium. In Djaffarabad (1969-1974), she brought to light the beginnings of the occupation around Susa in the very first centuries of the 5th millennium, and after a period that was very poorly represented, another period at the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 4th millennium, contemporary with the foundation of Susa. To better document the intermediate phase, she conducted a campaign on the Tepe Djowi near Djaffarabad in 1975 where she obtained the hoped-for documentation on this period. Finally, in order to achieve a better chronological link between the periods of each of the two sites, she conducted two campaigns at Tepe Bendebal, close to the other two, which corresponded to the end of Djaffarabad and the birth of Susa.

This work was carried out in a very stimulating research environment for Geneviève, since several American missions were working in the region over previous, contemporary and subsequent periods. It suffices to mention sites like Ali Kosh or Choga Mish and names familiar to archaeologists from the Near East, including Frank Hole, Helen Kantor, Henry Wright and Gregory Johnson. In this scientific ferment, Geneviève made an important contribution on the history of the settlement and the reconstruction of the way of life of the first sedentary inhabitants of Susiana.



Fig. 2 Field photo at Abu Hamid: In the afternoon, after the excavation, in the field, Geneviève (in the centre) fills in the daily graphic diary while some of the diggers finish some meticulous clearing. (Photo: Archives G. Dollfus, Nanterre)

Geneviève and Jordan

As a result of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the Susa excavation project stopped, and Geneviève found herself obliged to return back to the Levant where she began her first steps as an archaeologist and excavator. Her main target became the investigation and study of the transitional period between the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods in the south of the Levant in general, and in the Jordan Valley in particular; this would follow up her studies in the same period she previously studied in Iran. To do this, she launched a major Franco-Jordanian cooperative operation to excavate, with Professor Zeidan Kafafi of the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology of Yarmouk University (Irbid), the site of Abu Hamid. This operation was an opportunity to forge

very strong links with Jordanian colleagues, Abu Hamid becoming a pilot school project for both Jordanian and French students. Fieldwork was carried out from 1986 to 1992 and continued from 1992 to 2007 by numerous study missions at the Institute of Archaeology at Yarmouk University (Figs. 2 and 3). The Abu Hamid archaeological sequence provided a better understanding of the “Chalcolithic” phase (a term that Geneviève rejected), going from the end of the 6th millennium to the beginning of the 4th millennium, falling between the sequences of Munhatta on the Palestinian bank of the Jordan River and Teleilat Ghassoul near the Dead Sea.

At Abu Hamid, Geneviève was given a nickname by the workers from the start of the first excavation campaign. Everything went very smoothly except the weather: due to heavy rainfall, work had to be stopped for several days. With no chance to excavate regularly and continuously. Geneviève became very unhappy, but the farmers from the Jordan Valley (some of whom worked for the dig) were very happy however. Due to this Geneviève received the affectionate nickname of *Umm Shitta* (Mother of rain).

The quality of the relations established reinforced her conviction, acquired in Iran, of the importance of working for the knowledge and promotion of heritage, with an almost meticulous respect for local culture and mentalities, insisting that the members of the mission neither make mistakes, nor offend sensitivities through ignorance of local morals, customs and beliefs. The first point was very clearly expressed through the various exhibitions that she piloted or in which she actively participated, whether in Jordan at Amman and Irbid (Fig. 4 and 5 left), or in Paris at the *Musée du Luxembourg* in 1986 (*La Voie Royale: 9000 ans d'art au Royaume de Jordanie*) and at the *Institut du Monde Arabe* in 1997 (*Jordanie dans les pas des archéologues*). Refusing to



Fig. 3 The excavation team at Abu Hamid in 1992. In the 2nd row, Geneviève is 4th from the left, Zeidan Kafafi is 6th, and Eric Coqueugnot is 12th. (Photo: Archives G. Dollfus, Nanterre)

address only the small circle of specialist colleagues, she always made sure to make herself clear and understandable to her audience. She thus gave numerous lectures on the progress of the work and regularly welcomed classes from the French school in Amman or from Jordanian schools, showing limitless patience in bringing to life the reconstruction of life in Abu Hamid. In 1990, in collaboration with Louise Desrochers, the mission's Canadian draughtswoman, she published a very didactic and bilingual cartoon book for children (Fig. 5 right) explaining the work of archaeologists in the field and in the laboratory. She also regularly organised visits to the site for both French (successive ambassadors) and Jordanian



Fig. 4 Inauguration of the exhibition "Abu Hamid, a 4th millennium village in the Jordan Valley" at the Department of Antiquities of Jordan in Amman (October 1988). Geneviève explains the photographic panels to Queen Noor of Jordan. (Photo: Archives G. Dollfus, Nanterre)

officials, who were always present to view the excavation and the material brought to light.

Very sensitive to the need to contribute to the training of young Jordanian and European researchers, she set up internships for French teachers and researchers at Yarmouk University (Jordan) and for Jordanian

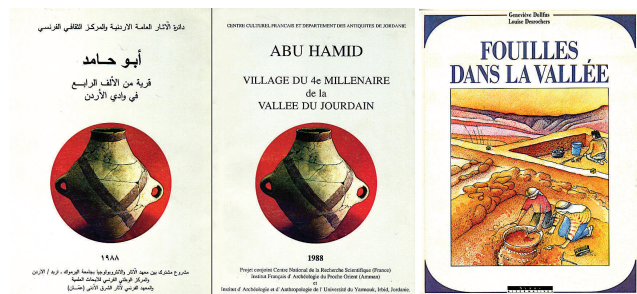


Fig. 5 Left, cover photo of the bilingual French-Arabic catalog of the exhibition organized in 1998 in Amman. Right cover photo of "Fouilles dans la vallée" (1990): Geneviève's personal interest in both popularisation with children and in drawing is at the origin of this children's book, illustrated with drawings by L. Desrochers, the Canadian draftsperson from the Abu Hamid mission. The book was quickly translated into Arabic and distributed to all schools in Jordan for educational purposes.

researchers in France, obtaining from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs doctoral scholarships for Jordanian students. In Jordan, as in France, Geneviève showed unfailing patience to help students, always remaining available to open her personal library or her Paris office. Demanding of others as well as of herself, Geneviève instilled in many young people habits of scientific rigor and she enabled them to give back the best of themselves (Fig. 6).

Geneviève and Scientific Publishing

A tireless worker, alongside her own research, Geneviève devoted a significant part of her activity to scientific publishing. She was in charge of the publication of the *Cahiers de la DAFI* (15 volumes published), the *Mémoires et travaux du centre de recherche français de Jérusalem* (volumes 1 to 5) and the *Cahiers du centre de recherche français de Jérusalem* (two volumes).

Geneviève was above all the soul of the journal *Paléorient*, founded in 1972 at the initiative of Jean Perrot and Bernard Vandermeersch within the framework of the *Association Paléorient*, but which became from its third issue a CNRS journal in its own right. Together with Monique Lechevallier, Geneviève was from the outset its editorial secretary, and then took over its management from 1994 to 2004, bringing *Paléorient* to the status of an international reference journal on the prehistory and environment of the Near East, a "multidisciplinary journal on the prehistory and protohistory of South-West Asia and Central Asia", as its subtitle emphasizes. For a long time, *Paléorient* was the only periodical in this field of research to bring together, despite the geopolitical problems of the region, Westerners, Arab, Israeli, Russian and Central Asian colleagues, allowing the exchange of ideas not only between archaeologists and prehistorians, but above



Fig. 6 Geneviève, Zeidan Kafafi and Susanne Kerner organised a workshop on the Chalcolithic in Jordan at the Institute of Archaeology (Yarmouk University). Among others, first row, Geneviève, Zeidan Kafafi, Jean Perrot, Susanne Kerner and Fuad Hourani; second row, Eric Coqueugniot behind Geneviève. (Photo: Hussein Dibajeh, Yarmouk University)



Fig. 7 Geneviève in her garden in Normandy (c. 1996).
(Photo: Geneviève Dollfus' family).

all between them and biological anthropologists, biologists, geologists, geophysicists, chemists. Open to spe-

cialists from all over the world, but also to young researchers, under the impetus of Geneviève, the journal *Paléorient* has always aimed at scientific excellence. It is an understatement to say that Geneviève devoted a very large part of her energy and passion to *Paléorient*, which became, if we can say, her emanation, her child.

Besides her own research, Geneviève was also fascinated by the itineraries of our predecessors; Geneviève was very interested in Jacques de Morgan, one of the pioneers of the exploration of Susa, whose versatility was astonishing. Before devoting himself to Susa, Jacques de Morgan had worked in Malaysia and in the Caucasus before heading the Antiquities Department of Egypt, where he contributed to laying the foundations of Egyptian prehistory. In this context, Geneviève made a major contribution to the publication by Éditions du CNRS in 2003 of Jacques de Morgan's travel journal in Malaysia, a journal illustrated with unpublished original watercolours and drawings by the author (*Exploration dans la presqu'île malaise par Jacques de Morgan – 1884*).

Finally, we cannot forget Geneviève's more personal interests for the arts in general and her hobbies of drawing and of her garden in Normandy, be it the vegetable garden or the flowers she loved so much (Fig. 7).

All those who have worked with Geneviève or who have simply rubbed elbows with her should remember her scientific rigour, her great human qualities and the strength of her friendship.

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