

Peter Lewis Shinnie (1915-2007) – an obituary

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It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Peter Lewis Shinnie (1915-2007). Peter was a founding member of SAfA, one of the first co-presidents of the society, and founder and editor of SAfA's news bulletin *Nyame Akuma*, the first 19 numbers of which were produced with his wife Ama Shinnie from the office in their basement. Peter Shinnie's archaeological career spanned six decades of research in Africa. During his career he was Head of the Departments of Archaeology at the University of Ghana (1958-1966), the University of Khartoum (1966-1970), and the University of Calgary (1970-1975). Peter was also a talented linguist who spoke and/or read Arabic, ancient and modern Greek, French, German, Egyptian hieroglyphics, as well as ancient and modern Nubian for which he was preparing a lexicon. Many of his undergraduate and graduate students from Africa, Canada, the United States and Europe have gone on to establish professional careers in archaeology. Peter was an active Professor Emeritus in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Calgary. He will be deeply missed by his colleagues not only for his knowledge but for his great wit, generosity, and friendship.

Peter was born in London, England in 1915. He studied history and Egyptology at Oxford University graduating in 1938. He obtained practical, if informal, field training from Mortimer Wheeler at Maiden Castle and at other Roman and Iron Age sites in England. During World War II he served in the RAF first as a bomber pilot and later in intelligence interpreting aerial photographs and identifying and marking Italian archaeological sites as non-targets. After the war, Peter excavated sites in Turkey before taking up the post of Assistant Commissioner (and eventually Commissioner) of Archaeology in the Sudan. Between 1946 and 1958 Peter conducted field research in Sudan developing his lifelong interest in the archaeology of Africa's more recent past and its contemporary people. In particular Peter saw the need

to investigate the development of Sudan's unique culture apart from Ancient Egypt's role in Nubia. He began with the excavation of the medieval site of Soba with his first wife Margaret Shinnie, combining archaeological field techniques with historic information and observation of contemporary Nubian practices. He further contributed to the development of archaeology in the Sudan by founding the journal *Kush*, and by providing collections for the antiquities service which helped to establish Sudan's National Museum.

In 1956 Peter became Director of Antiquities in Uganda until he was offered the position as Head of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Ghana in 1958. While building up the department's facilities, Peter conducted field studies of the ruins of several of West Africa's medieval and historic states in Nigeria, southern Mauritania, and Ghana. In 1962 Shinnie led the only black African archaeological team that contributed to UNESCO's rescue programme of sites on the Nile at Aswan during the construction of the High Dam. In 1966 Peter was offered the Chair of Archaeology at the University of Khartoum. Peter took this opportunity to establish excavations at Meroe, the research for which he is perhaps best known.

In 1970 Peter became the head of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Calgary but maintained his project at Meroe until 1976 (with a final season in 1983-84). In 1977 he established a new field program in Ghana. Although nominally retired in 1980, Peter continued active field research in Ghana supported by, amongst other institutions, the Asantahene. While investigating the origins of the Gonja and the Asante states and their traditions, always in collaboration with his wife Ama, he continued to write on the Sudan. Peter officially retired from active field work in 1991, but continued to publish on his research until the end of his life. In March

2007 he participated in a celebration of 50 years of Ghanaian independence at the University of Calgary.

Peter was the recipient of many honours for his contribution to Africanist archaeology including honorary life member of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists, Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, honorary Doctor of Letters from the University of Calgary in 1983, and a Festschrift, *An African Commitment*, in 1992. In 2004 Peter was awarded Sudan's prestigious Order of the Two Niles for his contribution to that country's archaeology. During the conference of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists held in Calgary in June 2006, he was formally presented with the award by the Sudanese Ambassador in a session dedicated to his work. We will remember Peter for a life well lived and look forward to the publication of his memoirs. His was a life of exemplary, passionate and humane commitment to Africa and Africans, and to his relatives and friends.

Predeceased by his son Nicholas, he is survived by his wife Ama, his children Caroline and Paul, six grandchildren and one great-grandchild. A memorial service was held at the Chapel of the Bells, 2720 Centre Street North, Calgary on Monday 16th July at 10:30 am. Friends and colleagues who wish to may donate to a scholarship in Peter's memory that will assist African students of archaeology at the University of Calgary. Checks or other forms of donation should be sent to External Relations (Scholarships), University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada T2N 1N4, with the notation "Shinnie Fund" on the reverse.