

# IN MEMORIAM

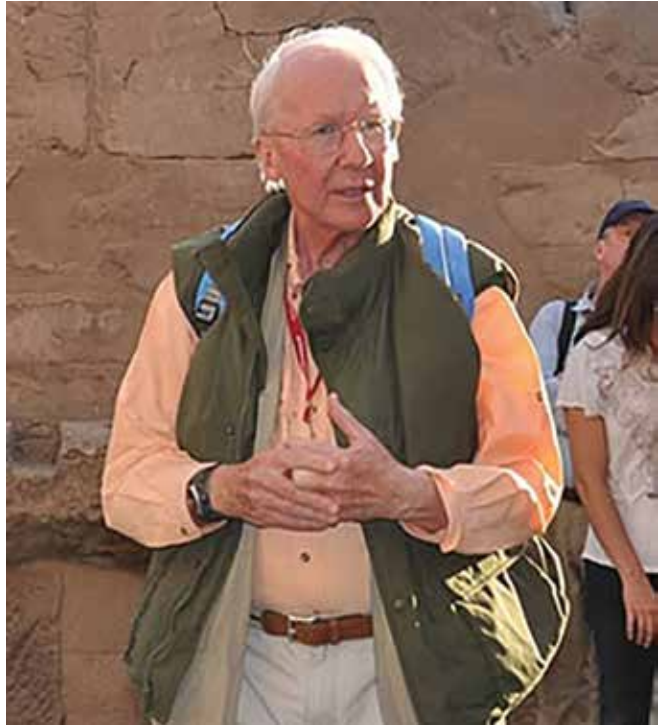
## LANNY DAVID BELL 1941–2019

by Peter Lacovara

Lanny David Bell was born on April 30, 1941 in Fort Dodge, Iowa. As a student in public high school he became captivated by a class in Latin and that sparked a life-long interest in ancient languages. Egyptian hieroglyphs particularly fascinated him and after graduating high school in 1959 he enrolled in the University of Chicago to study under John A. Wilson. He continued his graduate education at the University of Pennsylvania studying under visiting professor Jaroslav Černý and David O'Connor. While working in the University Museum he met fellow student Martha Rhoads Bell whom he married in 1968. While at Penn he taught and worked on the University Expedition to Abydos, and also instituted a field project to return to the site of Dra abu el Naga, that had been first excavated by Clarence Fisher in 1921–23. He excavated and conserved a number of tombs of Ramesside officials including those of Nebwenenef (TT157) and Bekenkhons (TT35).

His dissertation for the University of Pennsylvania was entitled “Interpreters and Egyptianized Nubians in Ancient Egyptian Foreign Policy: Aspects of the History of Egypt and Nubia” and was supervised by David O'Connor, James Muhly, and George Hughes. Hughes recommended Lanny for the position of director of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago’s Epigraphic Survey in Luxor headquartered at “Chicago House.” During his tenure in Luxor from 1977 to 1984, Lanny and Martha raised the profile of the facility welcoming and supporting scholars visiting and working in Luxor. Martha supervised the running of the house and the library along with the assistance of May Trad of the American Research Center in Egypt’s Cairo Office. He also hosted the imminent Egyptian Egyptologist Labib Habachi as resident scholar. Lanny actively fundraised to establish endowments for the Epigraphic Survey and supervised the beginning stages of two major publications on the reliefs and inscriptions of Luxor Temple. He also authored a number of important books and articles including studies on Theban temples, the cult of the deified Tutankhamun, Divine Kingship, the royal *ka*, and epigraphy.

In 1984 Lanny returned to Chicago as associate professor of Egyptology, teaching courses in ancient Egyptian literature, the literature and politics of the Middle Kingdom, wisdom literature,



Old Egyptian, Late Egyptian, and Coptic. He also supervised a number of PhD dissertations and was a popular member of the faculty. Martha was killed in a car accident in 1991 soon after finishing her dissertation on Bronze Age Aegean Pottery found in Egypt. Lanny married Jill Louise Baker in 1994 and took early retirement for Chicago in 1996.

As an independent scholar Lanny moved to Old Saybrook, Connecticut, was appointed a lecturer in Egyptology at Brown University, and also taught at the Rhode Island School of Design and Columbia University. He was sought after as a speaker, particularly by the Archaeological Institute of America, and as a tour leader bringing numerous groups to Egypt. His vast knowledge as well as his kindness and sense of humor charmed his colleagues and students as well as the general public. A *festschrift* in Lanny's honor, the knowledge of which gave him great pleasure in his final months, is being prepared now as a memorial volume.

## MIGUEL CIVIL 1926–2019

by Christopher Woods

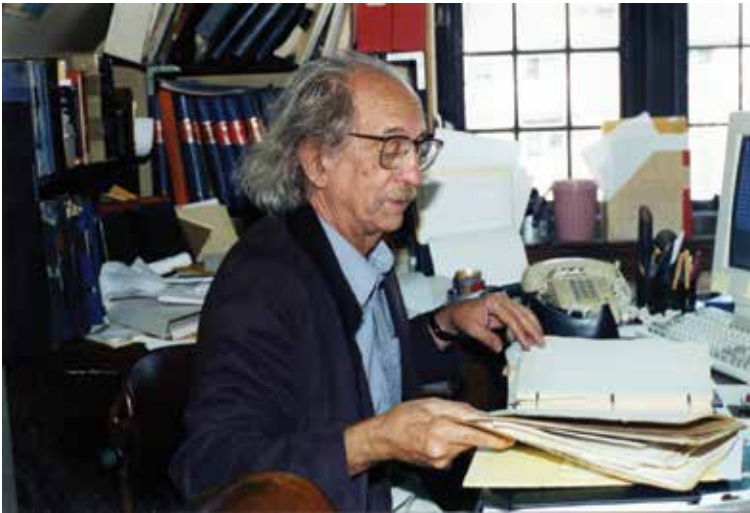
Miguel Civil's scholarly contributions are simply monumental—more than any other scholar, he shaped the modern, post-WWII study of Sumerology. Our understanding of Sumerian writing, lexicography, grammar, literature, agriculture, and socio-economic institutions all bear his deep imprint. He was a mentor, teacher, and friend to two generations of Sumerologists, Assyriologists, and archaeologists. It remains the greatest honor of my career to have come to Chicago to replace Miguel after he retired in 2001.

Born outside of Barcelona in 1926 and trained in Paris, Miguel came to the US in 1958 to take the position of associate researcher under Samuel Noah Kramer at the University of Pennsylvania. He joined the faculty of the University of Chicago in 1964. Even after retiring in 2001, Miguel remained the field's leading light, publishing two books (*The Early Dynastic Practical Vocabulary A* [Archaic HAR-ra A] [Rome: Missione archeologica italiana in Siria, 2008], and *The Lexical Texts in the Schøyen Collection* [Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, 2010]), as well as a raft of seminal articles during these years.

Up until relatively recently, it was not uncommon to see Miguel in the halls of the OI. He would invariably appear late in the day to check references before the archives closed, and catch up with Professor Matt Stolper and me in our neighboring third-floor offices, eager to hear the latest OI news and, always, to talk about his research and his most recent breakthrough.

The article he published in 2013 on the so-called Tribute List in the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* represents a highlight not only of his post-retirement period but of his entire career, a culmination of his thinking on two of his great intellectual passions: Sumerian lexicography and writing. It is a work of stunning insight and erudition—a *tour de force* that at once exemplified his brilliance and showed Miguel to still be at the very pinnacle of his intellectual powers as he approached ninety.

I remember clearly the genesis of that article. A couple of years before its appearance in print, he stopped me in the halls and had one cryptic sentence for me—uttered without preamble or context, as was often his custom—and intoned in his distinctive, thickly-accented gravel voice, “I’ve found Semitic in the Uruk texts,” and then he walked away. For those of us who do this work, it was a truly profound statement, full of linguistic, social, and cultural implications for our understanding of early Mesopotamia at the time of the world's first cities. He did not mention this again to me, and it was only when the article appeared two years later that I fully understood what he meant. Encounters like this were not uncommon with Miguel and, in fact, were a defining characteristic of our interactions together, and I’m sure the same is true for others as well.



It is important to point out that Miguel's greatness was not simply in the mastery of the material, but in what he was able to do with the same material and data we all have access to. He just had this unfathomable ability to know more than the data at hand allowed—he somehow knew more than he had any right to know. Time and again I would ask myself, "How can he possibly know that?" This ability was something of perpetual amazement to me—it seemed like an almost

magical or supernatural power. But in the end, I think it was simply that quality we call genius.

Certainly, every Sumerologist should read his entire oeuvre, paying close attention to even the smallest statements and details. Miguel was never one to belabor a point. And so often his most profound insights—a conclusion perhaps worthy of a monograph in itself—could be stated in the most laconic terms and buried in a footnote, leaving you thirsting for more. And his conversation about the work could be much the same—with a single sentence, he could change the course of an idea you had been working on for months.

As I remarked to his obituary writers, for the *Washington Post* and elsewhere, Miguel quite literally knew Sumerian better than anyone since the early centuries of the second millennium BC. And it was always hazardous to your mental health to disagree with him. Doing so could leave you spiraling into self-doubt no matter how deeply entrenched your position was. There was always the fear that somewhere quivering on the horizon was the realization that he was right after all.

Miguel was supremely confident and self-assured in his knowledge, but at the same time he was utterly uninterested in self-promotion and had little use for accolades. Consequently—and quite unfortunately—he was vastly underappreciated in the field and even here at the University of Chicago. His work was highly technical, detailed, complex, and written for the Sumerologically initiated. Even to many Assyriologists in our field who focus on the later periods, it can be difficult to explain and convey the massive significance of his contributions.

But it is easy to focus exclusively on his brilliance, to be dazzled by it and lose sight of the entirety of the man. Miguel was unstintingly generous and kind; he was a great raconteur; he was funny and had a searing wit, which could often be irreverent. He enjoyed the simple things—casual conversation with friends over a few beers or even discussing power tools, a topic of which he curiously had an advanced knowledge—but which I always figured must somehow be connected to his interest in Sumerian material culture.