

# UC Berkeley

## The 150 Women Project - Holding Series

### Title

Women in the Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1jj31190>

### Author

Rochberg, Francesca

### Publication Date

2023-11-09

## Women in the Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures



### Introductory Note

One hundred fifty years ago, on October 3, 1870, the Board of Regents unanimously approved the resolution: “That young ladies be admitted into the University on equal terms in all respects with young men.” The Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures (formerly Near Eastern Studies) joins units across the campus in marking the anniversary by honoring its Founding Mothers, Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, Assyriology, Guitty Azarpay, ancient Iranian Studies, and Cathleen Ann Keller, Egyptology. Find extensive information about the project at [150 Years of Women at Berkeley](#).

150 Years of Women at Berkeley



Over the course of the year, we will add tributes to this page to honor the women of the Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures. We invite members of our departmental and extended community to contribute further sections on our alumnae, current students, staff, and friends and family. We have wonderful and talented female graduate students who should be honored on these pages as well! Advisors and fellow students are encouraged to send in profiles. All are welcome to suggest other ideas to develop this page!



**Ann Draffkorn Kilmer**

In 1963, in a period where few women were welcomed into the rarified atmosphere of Assyriology and Sumerology, Anne Draffkorn Kilmer came to the Department of Near Eastern Studies as a visiting lecturer. She had received the Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, where she studied with E.A. Speiser, the preeminent Assyriologist and discoverer of Tepe Gawra. Kilmer received her doctoral degree in 1959 with a dissertation on Hurrians and Hurrian at Alalakh. From Penn she went on to four years as research assistant at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (1957-61) where Benno Landsberger, another great patriarch of the field of Assyriology, selected her for his lexical texts project, the *Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon (MSL)*. In addition, she won a one-year research fellowship through the AAUW (American Association of University Women).

In the course of her work on MSL, Kilmer studied the names of the strings found on stringed instruments.



In the Festschrift for her mentor, Kilmer published an article titled "The Strings of Musical Instruments: Their Names, Numbers, and Significance," based on her work on MSL (see pp. 261-272 in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on his 75th Birthday*, April 21, 1965, *Assyriological Studies* 16 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965). This led to further research on ancient music and Kilmer published in the paper "Discovery of an Ancient Mesopotamian Theory of Music," in the 1971 *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* (*Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 115, 1971, pp. 131-149).

As she explained in this paper, "As far as the Assyriological world was concerned, therefore, we knew nothing about Sumero-Babylonian music, aside from what observations could be made from the pictures of musical instruments, archaeological finds, the many names of instruments not always identifiable, and a veritable sea of Sumerian and Akkadian terms relating to choral and instrumental music. In short, we have been completely in the dark about the theory and practice of that esteemed art whose divine patron was the god of the watery abyss, the god Enki/Ea, always closely associated with magic, with wisdom, and with the arts and crafts." Kilmer's pathbreaking work on the lexical lists of strings and their relationships, and further, with the collaboration of Belgian musicologist, Dr. Marcelle Duchesne-Guillemin, led to the earliest reconstructions of musical intervals, scales, and the tuning of stringed instruments in the ancient Middle East.

Anne Kilmer's dedication to the University of California at Berkeley is demonstrated in her major service commitments. She was curator of the Babylonian collection in the Phoebe Hearst Museum, had several terms as Chair of the Department of Near Eastern Studies, as Dean of Humanities in the School of Arts and Letters, and as Chair of the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate.

*Source: Text adapted from Heimpel and Szabo's preface to *Strings and Threads: A Celebration of the Work of Anne Draffkorn Kilmer*, edited by Wolfgang Heimpel and Gabriella Szabo (Winona Lake: IN, 2011)*

[Click here to watch interview with Ann Kilmer](#)



**Guitty Azarpay**

Guitty Azarpay, born in Tehran, Iran, first came to US with her family in 1953 when she settled in Colorado as a high school student only to leave the US a year later when her family decided to move back. They packed their belongings, boarded the Queen Mary and sailed to South Hampton, England, with the intent to travel on to Iran. During their sojourn in England, however, it was decided that young Ms. Azarpay would remain there to further her education in boarding school.

An exemplary student, she soon completed high school and received a full scholarship to Oxford University. While on summer break in Iran, however, she changed her mind and decided to forfeit the scholarship to Oxford and come to UC Berkeley instead where she graduated with a Ph.D. in Art History in 1964. Following her doctorate she began to teach at UC Berkeley and remained there for 40 years until she retired. During her tenure at UC she was very active in the field of Iranian and Central Asian art nationally and internationally, but also at local Bay Area institutions including the San Francisco Asian Art Museum.



She authored multiple publications including *Urartian Art & Artifacts* and *Sogdian Painting: The Pictorial Epic in Oriental Art*, the latter the first work in English published on the arts of the Sogdians in Central Asia. In 1994, she was appointed to the editorial board of the *Encyclopedia Iranica*.

Prof. Azarpay has been a recipient of numerous grants from the American Philosophical Society, the UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Outside of her professional career, Dr. Azarpay has been affiliated with various organizations, including the American Institute of Archaeology, the American Oriental Society, and the *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*.

She has also been the recipient of the Book of the Year Award from the University of California Press, for the aforementioned *Sogdian Painting: The Pictorial Epic in Oriental Art*, and has been the recipient of the Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement award. In addition to her outstanding scholarly work, Prof. Azarpay was a wonderful instructor and mentor whose guidance helped produce some of the top scholars in the field of Iranian and Central Asian studies. Those of us who were lucky enough to be her graduate students have benefited not only from her erudition but also from her kindness and her unwavering personal and professional support. Although her field of expertise included the art of India and China as well, Professor Azarpay together with Professors Martin Schwartz and David Stronach, fostered an unique and vibrant environment that promoted the learning and understanding of the Iranian and Central Asian worlds.

In 2015 Prof. Azarpay established the Guitty Azarpay Distinguished Visitors Endowment in the History of the Arts of Iran and Central Asia. The first visitor came in Fall 2017 and we have shared this visitorship with the Art History Department on alternate years ever since. On a personal note, in 1998, she accompanied me on a trip to Iran to examine and conduct a field survey of Kuh-e Khwaja in Iranian Sistan, a site I had been working on, as well as to visit other remains from the Parthian & Sasanian periods in the western part of the Iranian Kavir-e Lut desert. Prof. Azarpay later told me this trip was her most memorable ever taken. It certainly was the most significant trip that I had taken, both academically and personally, and one that I will never forget and cherish for the rest of my life.

*Source: Soroor Ghanimati, Distinguished Guitty Azarpay Visitor in the Arts of Iran and Central Asia*



**Cathleen Ann Keller**

Cathleen (Candy) Ann Keller joined the Near Eastern Studies Department faculty as a specialist in Egyptian art and language in 1983. She chaired the department twice. While on leave from Berkeley in 1990-91, Candy taught in the Department of Fine Arts at Harvard University as the Wellcome Lecturer in Egyptian Civilization. Candy's national and international recognition was for her work in Egyptian art of the New Kingdom. She was a long-time member of the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE), the Egypt Exploration Society, the Egyptological Seminar of New York and the International Association of Egyptologists. She served as a member of the ARCE's Board of Governors and Executive Committee in the 1980s and early 1990s. Tragically, Professor Keller passed away of pancreatic cancer on April 18, 2008 at the age of 62.



Candy received her BA, MA and PhD from UC Berkeley. Her 1971 MA was the first degree ever awarded by the then-fledgling Graduate Group in Ancient History and Mediterranean Archaeology (AHMA). Her Egyptology PhD, completed in the Near Eastern Studies Department in 1978 under the supervision of Leonard Lesko, included an innovative dissertation on the craftsmen and painters at Deir el-Medinah; this topic was to become one of the focal points of her academic career. While still a graduate student, Candy spent a formative year at University College London (UCL) working with some of the most eminent British Egyptologists of the time. While completing her Berkeley dissertation, she became an assistant professor of classical archaeology at San Francisco State University (1976-1977), as well as curator of their Sutoro Egyptian Collection (1975-77). In 1977, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City hired Candy to organize their Ramesside material; she worked at the Met until 1983, first as an assistant and then as an associate curator.

Throughout her career, Candy maintained a life-long association with museum Egyptology. She served as curator of Egyptian art and epigraphy at UC Berkeley's Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology from 1987 until her death. In 1990, she curated "From Palace and Province," an exhibit at the Berkeley Art Museum that highlighted objects from the Hearst Museum's Egyptian collection. At the Hearst, she co-curated the 1999-2001 exhibit "Sites Along the Nile: Rescuing Ancient Egypt" and supervised the graduate and undergraduate students who participated in the creation of the exhibit. She developed a program to have students digitize the Egyptian collection for the museum's web site. At the time of her death Candy was helping plan an exhibit entitled "The Conservator's Art: Preserving Egypt's Past," which, sadly, turned into a memorial for her. "Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh" co-curated by Candy, who also co-edited the accompanying scholarly museum catalogue, debuted at the reopening of the de Young Museum in San Francisco in 2005 and went on to venues at the Kimball Art Museum in Fort Worth Texas and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

Candy was a gifted, insightful and rigorous scholar, a warm and supportive colleague, and an inspiring teacher and mentor. She always encouraged students (and colleagues) to follow their own ideas and develop individually as scholars, rather than channeling them into her own projects or interests. She was a polymath: the breadth and depth of her knowledge and her formidable intellect awed those who knew her. At the same time, her self-deprecating modesty



humbled peers and students alike. She skewered pomposity with a nicely judged lift of the eyebrow or roll of the eyes.

Although greatly missed by all those who knew her, Candy will live on in her many legacies: her intellectual achievements, her endowments to Egyptology at Cal, her students, and all future students who will study Egyptology at Berkeley. Prior to her death, Candy established two university funds and contributed to another to benefit Egyptology and Egyptology students at Berkeley. In addition, she donated her professional library to the Klaus Baer Library of Egyptology, now renamed the Baer-Keller Library of Egyptology, which is housed in the Near Eastern Studies Department.



**Kristina Nelson**

We also recognize **Kristina Nelson**, author of [The Art of Reciting the Qur'an](#), a trained arabist and ethnomusicologist, who received her PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. She left academia in 1983 to move to the Arab World. Her interests range from Islam, Qur'anic recitation practice, ethnomusicology (theory and practice, music in the Arab World), culture and development, issues of cultural identity and nationalism, artists and artistic expression in the Arab World. She currently works out of Cairo as a free-lance consultant, mentoring artists and arts organizations in the region while continuing to write and lecture on Qur'anic recitation. She is passionate about promoting support for the arts as the first step to imagining and accepting alternatives that pose challenges to societies that reward obedience over initiative, certainty

over risk, influence over merit and established programmes over experimentation. Her writings and consultancies (most recently, consultant to the HBO film, Koran by Heart directed by Greg Barker) reflect her commitment to the idea that artistic expression can foster pluralism - a willingness to learn from multiple perspectives, and a recognition that there are many places where knowledge resides. As such, it can mediate the mutual exclusivity of cultural and national identities when they are appropriated for political and religious agendas as it can mediate the tension between specific cultural identities and global development.



Funded by SSRC and the Fulbright Foundation, Nelson's research focused on exploring the social and religious meaning of Qur'anic recitation in the daily life of Cairene reciters and listeners.

She learned to recite the Qur'an, and recorded and interviewed professional Qur'an reciters (including the last of some of the legendary reciters), their followers, and the institutions that promoted and regulated recitation in Cairo in the early 70s.

Her doctoral dissertation was published as *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*. She was a student of Professors Bonnie Wade of the Music Department and Mounah Khouri in Near Eastern Studies (NES). She did her B.A. in Music, M.A. in Arabic studies and brought them together for a PhD in Arabic Studies in NES.

