



Alumna Eleanor Coghill



Artwork by
Patrick Tresset

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Professor of Semitic Languages,
Department of Linguistics and Philology,
Uppsala University

Eleanor Coghill

Curriculum Vitae

Education

- 2004** PhD, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge, UK
"The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Alqosh"
- 1999 – 2003** PhD student under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Geoffrey Khan, University of Cambridge, UK
- 1999** Master's thesis, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge, UK
"The Verbal System of North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic"
- 1997** Studies abroad with the Erasmus programme, studying Akkadian, Sumerian, Ugaritic and Turoyo Neo Aramaic, Heidelberg University
- 1994 – 1999** BA in Oriental Studies (Assyriology, Arabic and Hebrew), University of Cambridge, UK

Scientific Career

- since 2016** Professor (Chair) of Semitic Languages, Department of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University, Sweden
- 2015 – 2016** Postdoctoral Researcher, Research Focus Group "Language and Space", University of Zurich, Switzerland
- 2015** Substitute Full Professor in Linguistics, Department of Linguistics, University of Konstanz
- 2010 – 2015** Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Linguistics, University of Konstanz
- 2004 – 2009** Research Associate, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge, UK
- 2002 – 2005** Junior Research Fellow of the Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge, UK

"Even when I was very young, I was fascinated by languages", says Eleanor Coghill, now a professor of Linguistics at the University of Uppsala, fondly remembering how her career started. She taught herself Egyptian hieroglyphs, started to learn Latin by herself and loved everything about ancient history and old languages.

"Back then, I didn't know that such a thing as linguistics as a field existed", she laughs. When deciding what to study, she first thought about ancient civilisations, but felt that "Rome and Greece have been done so much..." So she was intrigued when she found a course in Assyriology and decided to do that, even though "it was quite obscure!"

For her bachelor's she needed to add a language and chose Arabic, because she had previously done some volunteer work in the Middle East, teaching English to Arab students. Fascinated by it, she added Hebrew and Aramaic as well and by the time she began her master's, she realized that it was the languages and how they were related to each other, rather than the ancient history of Middle Eastern cultures that most interested her: "The languages really grabbed me." She studied at Cambridge under Professor Geoffrey Khan, who was researching modern Aramaic dialects, so-called Neo-Aramaic dialects. Eleanor Coghill was thrilled by the opportunity to work with a rare spoken language and with real people: "With a living language, when you have a question, you have someone to ask, unlike with a language only known from clay tablets." He encouraged her to work on Neo-Aramaic in her master's studies and for her PhD she documented a dialect that had never been described before. Before her Fellowship at the Zukunftskolleg in Konstanz, Eleanor Coghill had done most of her research in Cambridge. She spent a semester in Heidelberg to improve her Ger-

Distinctions, Awards and Honorary Posts

- since 2016** Member of the Advisory Board for the Forschungsstelle für Aramäische Studien [Research Centre of Aramaean Studies]
- 2012 – 2016** **DFG** [?] grant for the project "Neo-Aramaic Morphosyntax in its Areal-linguistic Context"
- 2010 – 2015** Fellow of the Zukunftskolleg, University of Konstanz
- 2005 – 2006** Bye Fellow at the Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge University, UK

man, because the main resources for Assyriology are written in German. After her PhD, she wanted to go back to Germany, but Cambridge offered brilliant opportunities, so she stayed. But eventually "as you get higher up the academic ladder, the jobs get thinner," and Eleanor Coghill needed a new one. The problem she faced was that a lot of positions were designed for researchers who had just finished their PhD. So after several years as a junior research Fellow and research associate in Cambridge, often she was not eligible for such positions. She found an advertisement for the Zukunftskolleg on Linguistlist, an international online linguistic community and was relieved to see that the Zukunftskolleg was not only open to any subject, but also there were no time restrictions: "I don't know if I could have continued in academia without this opportunity at the Zukunftskolleg."

She became a Research Fellow in 2010 and stayed for five years. She remembers the initial phase as quite stressful, as she was applying for a grant, but Eleanor Coghill is grateful for all the support that was offered, especially in the peer support application seminars, where Fellows received assistance with the whole process of applying for grants. "That made all the difference." In 2012 she invited Yaron Matras from the School of Languages, Linguistics and Cultures at the University of Manchester as a **Senior Fellow** [?]. She had wanted to work with him previously but the funding had not materialised. She was therefore very happy to be able to invite him to Konstanz and to maintain contact with him. Although she never collaborated with other Fellows, she loved to observe how they approached their fields: "As a researcher, you need to communicate with others, see how they solve problems and how they try to make their research as rigorous as possible. You have to challenge each other!"

Today Eleanor Coghill is still focused on the North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic dialects, a family of

diverse languages. Some of them are in danger of extinction, so documentation is a priority in her research. Due to war, eviction and relocation, some Neo-Aramaic dialects that were widespread in Christian communities in Northern Iraq and neighbouring countries may disappear within two to three generations. Dialects also blend: "It's natural for languages to influence each other." Just like the Anglicisms used now in German, these dialects have been very much influenced by neighbouring languages, especially Kurdish and Arabic.

In August 2016 Eleanor Coghill became a professor in the Linguistics and Philology Department at the University of Uppsala. Currently she is happy to be finishing some long overdue papers, because she was busy writing a book about the changes in argument alignment in Aramaic during the last 3000 years. She also wants to go more into the historical development of Aramaic.

When asked about future research and young academics, she thinks it is quite a terrible situation: "At the moment, universities are pumping out PhDs and there simply are not many jobs later on..." Therefore it is no surprise when she stresses that in her opinion, "you should only go into an academic career if you really, really want it. If you absolutely enjoy research."

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