

Anthony Bryer Obituary

A famous English scholar of Byzantine and Georgian studies Anthony Bryer died in 2016, October 22. The obituary released by the journal *The Guardian* is being printed in the current edition of *The Kartvelologist*. The material was provided by Anthony Bryer's English colleagues.

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If Britain today provides a flourishing base from which to study Byzantium, the eastern Roman Christian empire that flowered between 330 and 1453, Anthony Bryer, who has died aged 78, is the individual responsible. He was an inspiring teacher and the pioneer in promoting the growth in interest in medieval Greek and Turkish culture in the 1960s, when "Byzantine" was more often used as a term of abuse.

Through his creation in 1976 of a centre for Byzantine studies at the University of Birmingham, he built a beacon of excellence and revolutionised the subject's appeal. Accompanied by generations of students, he led expeditions exploring the Byzantine and Ottoman buildings and culture of north-eastern Turkey, the Pontos and the Pontic Alps behind Trebizond. In 1975 he founded the journal *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*. His energetic enthusiasm generated worldwide devotion among scholars and the very large number of Byzantine PhDs he trained. The annual spring symposium he established was noted for its hospitality to visitors.

Born in Southsea, Hampshire, the elder son of Group Captain Gerald Bryer and his wife, Joan (nee Grigsby), Anthony spent part of his childhood in Jerusalem, and visited the historian Sir Steven Runciman, a family friend then in the city. They later worked together to promote the study of Byzantium under the auspices of the British Academy.

Bryer attended Canford school, Dorset, did his national service and studied history at Balliol College, Oxford (1958-61). When he chose the empire of Trebizond (1204-1461) on the south-east shore of the Black Sea for his DPhil research, it might have identified him with the periphery of Byzantium. Instead, his great work, written with David Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos*,

published in two volumes in 1985, brought that eastern frontier region into the centre to enrich its entire history.

These volumes document many spectacular churches and monasteries, notably the one dedicated to the Virgin of Sumela, one of the oldest Greek Orthodox foundations in the world, hewn out of a mountain rock face like those of Mount Athos and Meteora in Greece. Bryer was the first modern historian to identify many of the Byzantine villages, castles and churches with important frescoes known from medieval records of the Vazelon monastery, in what remained a predominantly Greek area until it was abandoned after the exchange of populations in 1922-23. Yet he remained deeply committed to Constantinople as well as distant Trebizond.

While he was completing his doctorate (1967) under Professor Dimitri Obolensky, Bryer moved with his first wife, Liz (nee Lipscomb), to the University of Birmingham in 1964. There, aided by local Hellenists such as Ellis Waterhouse, George Thomson, Sebastian Brock and Meg Alexiou, and nationally by David and Tamara Talbot Rice and Runciman, Bryer created a programme of Byzantine studies that immediately attracted students.

Philip Whitting, an expert on coins and seals, later donated his collection as well as his library, and in 1976 the centre was established. Bryer served as the university's professor of Byzantine studies between 1980 and 1999.

He demonstrated his capacity for generating support for his chosen field in 1966, when he expanded a one-day adult education spring symposium. This became the venue for internationally famous Byzantinists and graduates to present their research in an egalitarian setting. The champagne double-decker bus that ferried speakers from the university to the Bryers' home in Harborne for lunch with Liz and their daughters, Theo, Anna and Katie, brought publicity to the event.

It produced a series of impressive volumes: the 16th symposium was published as *Continuity and Change in Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Society* (1985), and other titles included *Diplomacy, Orthodoxies, Trade, Travel, Desire and Denial, Eastern Approaches, and History as Literature*.

Bryer acted as chairman of the British committee of the International Association of Byzantine Studies (1989-95) and served on the managing committees of the British School at Athens and Institute at Ankara, while continuing to write and review for 40 years. In 2007, he was honoured with a festschrift, food and wine in Byzantium and in 2009 was appointed OBE.

Liz died in 1995, and three years later he married Jenny Banks.

She survives him, along with Theo, Anna and Katie and four grandchildren; two stepchildren and four step-grandchildren; and his brother, Robin.

Anthony Applemore Mornington Bryer, Byzantinist,
born 31 October 1937; died 22 October 2016.

Source:

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