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ANTHONY A. M. BRYER

I did not know Anthony Bryer when I was an undergraduate at Oxford and he was a student at Balliol, although he married Elizabeth Lipscomb, an exact contemporary of mine at Somerville. Like many others I got to know him in the context of the annual symposia in Byzantine Studies that he initiated and organised at the University of Birmingham and which I often attended after their beginning in 1967, when Bryer was only in his third year as a lecturer at the University. I was working on sixth-century writers – Agathias and Corippus – and although I had read classics at Oxford (unlike Bryer himself, who had read history and been a graduate student in Oxford under Dimitri Obolensky) he welcomed me at once and drew me into the circle he was creating. It is hard to overestimate the importance of these symposia (which still continue) in the development and expansion of Byzantine studies in Britain. Students of Byzantium were few in the 1960s, even at King's College London, the home of the Koraes chair, or Oxford, the home of the Bywater and Sotheby chair, still held until 1968 by Constantine Trypanis. I joined the classics department at King's myself as an assistant lecturer in 1965 but it took nearly twenty-five years before I was officially recognised as a Byzantinist.

Bryer's annual symposia were aimed at a wide audience, academics and lay people alike, and while his expansive personality has given rise to many well-known anecdotes, they soon became central to the discipline in Britain. In 1975, he founded the well-known journal *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, and in 1976 he established the Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies at Birmingham. He was also active on the international front in the British National Byzantine Committee, affiliated to the International Byzantine Studies Association, which organises an international congress every five years, and in the

early 1980s he was its secretary and I was its chair. I had close connections with the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies and was a member of its equivalent in Hellenic Studies, and I advocated setting up a Byzantine Studies Society along similar lines. Bryer drove this forward and in 1983 the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies was formed, with Bryer as Secretary and myself as Chair. It continues today with a longstanding publications series and as the organising body of the annual Byzantine symposia, the 53rd of which is due to be held at Birmingham in 2020; its executive committee serves as the British national committee of the international association. All this derives directly from Bryer's vision and initiative.

This generosity of spirit was what was most characteristic of Bryer. In many ways, he was a larger than life character who loved spreading a knowledge of Byzantium in unexpected contexts, not least as a favourite lecturer on Swan Hellenic Cruises. When I went as a lecturer myself on one such cruise round the Black Sea my group encountered Bryer calmly walking up the main street in Trabzon (Byzantine Trebizond), and many tales were told of experiencing him as a lecturer on earlier cruises. But he was also a learned and dedicated scholar who respected and appreciated excellence in fields of Byzantine studies other than his own and had a humane and inclusive approach to Byzantine scholarship that was very different from the hierarchical character of the discipline that still often prevailed elsewhere.

The subject of Bryer's Oxford doctorate was the empire of Trebizond, and much of his later work and publication focused on the Pontos, and especially the area inland from Trabzon. It found expression in his major work with David Winfield, the two large volumes of the definitive study, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos*, published in the series *Dumbarton Oaks Studies* in 1985 and dedicated to the two authors' wives Elizabeth Bryer and June Winfield. This is itself a monumental work. Its history went back over many years, the two authors having first met when they were both in Trebizond in 1959; their respective fieldwork was conducted in 1959-1962 (Winfield) and 1959-1971 (Bryer) although as Bryer later pointed out, they actually visited only one site together. Even by the date of publication, or indeed the earlier date when the preface was composed, the physical geography of the

region had drastically changed and many of the monuments recorded in the book had disappeared or been seriously damaged; as they wrote, although “the bulldozers are indiscriminate”, modern development was not the only agent of change. The publication was a pioneering study in the physical and historical geography of an important region of Anatolia and it remains a remarkable and enduring achievement. Bryer was particularly attuned to the changes in toponyms that went along with political and demographic changes over time, some relatively benign, others the result of force and displacement. The preface points to developments in Byzantine historical geography since the international Byzantine congress of 1966 and the establishment of the project on the *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* with the aim of mapping the entire Byzantine empire, but the book itself drew on a wider range of regional studies and their different methodologies, among them works by George Bean and Bruce Mitford on Rough Cilicia and Martin Harrison on Lycia. It was also a contribution to the “total history”, or “histoire totale” of the region, to which Bryer also contributed in many articles. It was no accident that the Centre in Birmingham also included Ottoman studies, for example, and I learned so much myself from Bryer’s papers about landholding and Ottoman rule in Anatolia. Especially memorable is his article included in his 1988 collection (based on his inaugural lecture at Birmingham in 1981 and in which in note 1 he thanks Dr P. Kitromilides) about the Greek ‘crypto-Christians’ who were especially associated with the silver-mining in the hinterland of Trabzon that was at its height in the eighteenth century in the area around the Soumela monastery; they kept their heritage alive under Ottoman rule and were encouraged to reveal themselves in 1857 after the Hatt-ı Hümayan decree of 1856. Another paper by Bryer on “The Pontic revival and New Greece”, published in 1976 and included in his 1980 collection, traces their history in more detail, including the spread of schools and the advent of Greek printing from the 1860s onwards. The sight of Bryer walking up the street on that day in Trabzon reminded me forcibly of his account of the occasion when the crypto-Christians dared to show themselves openly in the main street of Trabzon. The Pontic Greek Christians were forced to leave Turkey for Greece in the exchange of populations in 1923 and the treasures of Soumela including its precious icon were transferred later.

The work of Bryer and Winfield is a fine demonstration of the possibilities of cooperation between two authors, and the principles they followed are meticulously set out in the preface. They could not, in the 1960s and 1970s, employ the methodologies now well-established in survey archaeology, since as yet fundamental investigations of that type had rarely if ever been done in their region. They did not go to the Pontus as scientific archaeologists (Byzantine archaeology was in any case still in its infancy) but rather as travellers recording what they saw, conscious that the historical landscape was changing even as they surveyed it, and attuned to the *longue durée* as well as to the specifics of particular periods. Bryer was often accompanied in these travels by students, younger colleagues and others interested in Byzantium. The list of acknowledgements in the book recognises the authors' debt to the work of David Talbot Rice and is long and wide-ranging. While the book covers much more than the Byzantine period alone the list of names at the end of the preface gives an insight into Byzantine studies at the time, especially in Britain, as well as to the important role played by Dumbarton Oaks, not only in originally commissioning and subsequently publishing the work (Cyril Mango, then still at Dumbarton Oaks, is thanked for his initial oversight of the authors' collaboration) but in hosting Bryer himself for stays in Washington DC and making its incomparable human and other resources available. As well as its importance for the contribution made by Bryer and Winfield, the book tells us much about the discipline itself as it was at the very stage when Bryer was at his most innovative and active in increasing the scope of Byzantine studies at Birmingham and more widely.

Bryer's many articles on related and other subjects in Byzantine history have been collected into several volumes, for instance *The Empire of Trebizond and the Pontos* (1980) and *Peoples and Settlement in Anatolia and the Caucasus, 800-1900* (1988), both in the *Variorum* series, and *The post-Byzantine Monuments of the Pontos: A Source Book* (2002), published by Ashgate for the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies, with titles that indicate their focus and the author's long fascination with the changing demographics and cultural interplay in the late Byzantine and Ottoman periods. They draw in part on the work he had done much earlier in the years after his thesis and during his collabora-

tion with David Winfield. *The post-Byzantine Monuments of the Pontos* reprints work originally published in *Archeion Pontou* from 1966 to 1972, in which Bryer collaborated with Selina Ballance, David Winfield and Jane Isaac, but also contains a valuable piece by Bryer himself on “the Pontic Greeks before the Diaspora” and an introduction serving as a retrospective on the subject matter. As he notes there, Bryer’s twelfth Birmingham symposium had the title “The Byzantine Black Sea”, and its proceedings were also published in *Archeion Pontou* for 1978.

Together with the Ottomanist Heath Lowry Bryer also edited *Continuity and Change in Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Society* (1986), the papers from a Dumbarton Oaks symposium held in 1982, but his approach was eclectic and the subjects of the Birmingham symposia ranged widely over the whole of Byzantine studies. One of the most enduring among their subsequent publications has been *Iconoclasm* (1977), which he edited with Judith Herrin; there was little to read at the time outside some highly specialised publications and the volume and the related symposium held in 1975 played a major role in opening up an immensely important and rich set of issues. Bryer was a born inspirer and collaborator, who remained modest about his own role, deferential and respectful to senior Byzantinists and invariably ready to give credit to others, especially younger scholars, and whose view of Byzantine studies was far more expansive than his own interests might suggest. Having spent part of his childhood in Jerusalem, in a family that knew Steven Runciman, he was highly attuned to the more colourful and romantic sides of Byzantium, Byzantine monasticism was among the subjects that attracted him, as in his 1979 article on late Byzantine monasteries in town and countryside (including their fate after the Turkish conquest) and his co-edited symposium volume, *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism* (1984). He travelled to Mount Athos himself and I vividly remember going with him to an inter-congress meeting of the international Byzantine association held at Ouranopolis. Another very helpful article on later Byzantium is his chapter in the *New Cambridge Medieval History* VII of 1998 on “Byzantium: The Roman Orthodox world, 1393-1482”, dealing with Salonica, Mistra, Constantinople and Trebizond in the last century of the empire’s existence.

Bryer was always conscious of the need to spread awareness of Byz-

antium and wrote a series of attractive articles in *History Today* on subjects from Skanderbeg to the Great Idea. He also contributed often to *Cornucopia*, the cultural publication about Turkey, starting with a piece about Hagia Sophia in Istanbul in its first issue in 1992, which began: “A medieval writer trying to describe an elephant to people who had never seen one began: ‘It has a small tail.’ Anyone who has tried to describe the domed basilica of Santa Sophia in Istanbul will sympathise”.

Bryer loved Byzantium and communicated this enthusiasm to a huge range of people who were quite new to it. A typically Bryer-ish spirit is shown in his article titled “Byzantine porridge”. But he also built up a group of scholars and students around him (sometimes deliberately choosing people with very different interests from his own) and made Birmingham the centre of Byzantine studies that it still remains. His publications opened up an important aspect of Byzantine studies and demonstrate his abiding interest not only in the characteristics of Byzantine society throughout its long history but also in how people can live together and maintain their identities even when political systems change. Those who knew him and those who read his work are very much in his debt.