

Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας

Τόμ. 43 (2022)

Δελτίον ΧΑΕ 43 (2022), Περίοδος Δ'



Cyril Alexander Mango, 14 April 1928 – 8 February 2021

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doi: [10.12681/dchae.34351](https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.34351)

Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

McCABE, A. (2023). Cyril Alexander Mango, 14 April 1928 – 8 February 2021. *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, 43, 16–20. <https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.34351>



The brothers Mango, Andrew and Cyril, 1998.
Cornucopia 19 (1999), photographer: Charles Hopkinson.

CYRIL ALEXANDER MANGO

14 April 1928 – 8 February 2021

Byzantium has lost one of its most ardent devotees in Cyril Mango, though he would no doubt ironically deny the description. Born in Constantinople and brought up there, he had a lifelong passion for that city, and became perhaps the greatest authority of our day on the monuments and urban development of the Byzantine capital. Although remarkably focused from an early age, his interest was not narrow, but encompassed the hinterland of Constantinople as well as the farthest-flung provinces of the empire, not to mention its neighbours. His formidable scholarship extracted unexpected information from an astonishingly diverse array of ancient and modern evidence, from manuscripts, bricks, poems, and stones to travellers' tales and insurance maps –an approach that his good friend Ihor Ševčenko called “byzantinologie totale”.

It might come as a surprise that someone so closely identified with the Βασιλεύουσα was not a Phanariote with ancient roots in the city, but from a Greek family of Chios with Genoese origins. A great-great grandfather was known as Capetan Andoni Mango. His son Dimitri departed at the time of the Greek Revolution for Syros and thence to the Ottoman capital, where he worked as a printer for the Catholic church. Dimitri had five children with his first wife, Carolina Calavassi; his second wife was Roxana Melidi (the Loxandra of Maria Iordanidou's book). Dimitri's eldest son Antony started coal and shipping businesses which prospered, with an office in London and fueling stations from Hamburg via Piraeus to Novorossiysk. Christened a Catholic, Antony became Orthodox upon marrying his Epirote wife Evangeline Margariti. They lived in Pera near the seat of the Ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει Ἑλληνικός Φιλολογικός Σύλλογος and had five sons.

Antony's youngest son Alexander, Cyril's father, was sent to England for boarding school, continued his studies at Cambridge University, and eventually received British citizenship. He practised maritime law at the court associated with the British consulate in Constantinople. To the dismay of his family, he married a Russian refugee, Adelaide Damonov, who had grown up in Baku but after losing her parents fled the Bolshevik Revolution to Turkey.

Their three sons grew up in the cosmopolitan, elegant, but increasingly beleaguered world of the Istanbul minorities, speaking French, Russian, Greek, and English at home and Turkish outside. Cyril, the youngest, was educated at home until the age of twelve by tutors. Studies continued at the English High School for Boys in Nişantaşı where fellow-students were also from the minority communities. The family spent long summers on the island of Prinkipo, where Cyril's explorations led to first encounters with Byzantium, the mysterious ruined Monastery of the Empress Eirene and the equally fascinating living tradition of pilgrimage to the Church of Saint George.

Explorations continued in town when Cyril was a teenager, with tram rides to the far reaches of the Old City in the company of a less enthusiastic classmate. He became acquainted also with kindred spirits, the Greek bookseller Miltiadis Nomidis and Swiss scholar Ernest Mamboury, who had made serious efforts to explore and delineate the monuments of the city. Work at the British Council brought him in contact with Steven Runciman and other British denizens of Istanbul at the end of the Second World War.

After the war's end in 1945, encouraged by a Scottish schoolmaster who had worked on the excavations of the Great Palace, Mango left Turkey for the first time to study at St Andrews, taking an MA in Classics four years later. Thanks to a scholarship from the French government, his studies continued in Paris,

nominally under the supervision of Rodolphe Guiland, with a thesis on the Chalke or Brazen House of the Great Palace submitted in 1953. A fortunate application to Harvard's recently created Byzantine research institute at Dumbarton Oaks brought him to the United States. At Dumbarton Oaks he found a congenial atmosphere for research presided over by the formidable founder Mrs Bliss, and a diverse cast of colleagues, eventually including his future wife Marlia.

At the time Dumbarton Oaks was also actively involved in fieldwork projects, primarily involving restoration of works of art. Cyril Mango's participation in them was an opportunity for intimate observation of some of the most beautiful monuments preserved in Istanbul: Saint Sophia, the Pammakaristos, the Monastery of Christ in Chora, and that of Constantine Lips. Productive time was also spent at the Istanbul Archaeological Museums, where friendship with successive directors permitted freedom of access to galleries and depots. He also made expeditions further afield to Bithynia and Eastern Thrace, to Euchaïta, Germia, Bargala in Macedonia, and Cyprus.

In 1963 Mango took up the Koraës Chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language, and Literature at King's College, University of London, where he had no obligation to teach. After five years he was invited back to Dumbarton Oaks as Professor of Byzantine Archaeology and Director of Fieldwork. In 1973 he returned to the UK definitively when appointed Bywater and Sotheby Professor of Byzantine and Modern Greek Language and Literature at the University of Oxford.

Cyril Mango maintained that he was an autodidact who had not benefited from guidance by a teacher. Things were different for his students at Oxford. Under his aegis, informal lectures organised by the Byzantine Society evolved into an official Byzantine Seminar, attended in its heyday by luminaries such as Sebastian Brock, Henry Chadwick, Dimitri Obolensky, Kallistos Ware, and Nigel Wilson (many of whom made up the Oxford Committee for Byzantine Studies), who would provide kind and expert answers to questions on any aspect of the subject. Mango's diplomatic outreach as Chairman of the Committee garnered financial support from the Greek community of London, which ensured the continuity of the Bywater and Sotheby chair and the master's degree programmes in Byzantine Studies.

Together with Marlia he fostered several generations of students at Oxford – a majority of them Greek, many also from Cyprus as well as from Turkey, the Balkans and Levant – guiding them in their studies and their subsequent careers. Although never at ease chit-chatting with students, he was revered by them. In later years, they and admiring colleagues offered tributes: the volume entitled “Bosphorus” (an irresistible pun linking Mango's place of birth with Oxford) marking his retirement, another Festschrift called “AETOS” for his 70th birthday (not to mention a cake in the shape of Constantinople), and for his 80th birthday a symposium on Byzantine Athens held at the Gennadius Library.

Both of the august professorships he held in England comprised Byzantine and Modern Greek together, a tall order by any standard. As a native speaker with an old-fashioned classics training based on Greek and Latin composition, Mango was eminently qualified, and savoured all levels of the Greek language from *katharevousa* to colloquial, unfailingly drawing attention to the most entertaining words or phrases in any text. Nonetheless in Greece he was regarded as a foreigner, as were other Istanbul natives who emigrated in the mid-20th century. Perhaps it was the Italian surname, the Englishman's costume of tweed jacket and pipe, or his old-fashioned Greek diction. Some even called him *αυθέλλη*, no doubt mistaking his irreverent, dry sense of humour and playful relation to his subject for genuine distaste. In contrast to the pious or nationalistic attitude of other heirs of the empire toward their ancestors, Mango delighted in pointing out the paradoxes and absurdities that contributed to the richness and complexity of the Byzantine tradition. At times this provoked emotional reaction rather than the intended critical thinking. But friends and students knew that his teasing was applied universally, and without mercy, not least to himself.



Marlia and Cyril Mango, Bosra 2000.



Oxford 1998.

In his bibliography certain recurring themes may be discerned: the discontinuity between antiquity and the mediaeval world -clear in the archaeological record but masked by archaising style in texts- and the period of “recovery” afterward. The Roman-ness of early Byzantium, especially in the practicalities of administration and infrastructure. Magic, superstition, and popular belief, from haunted statues and healing cults to the messianic legend of Leo the Wise. Academic articles which run the gamut from polished essays to archaeological notes are complemented by general works on Byzantine architecture and civilisation which, translated into many languages, have become classics and curriculum staples worldwide. Collaboration with the photographer Ahmet Ertuğ produced magnificent albums devoted to Saint Sophia, the Kariye Camii, and Istanbul. In this illustrious journal he published valuable research on St Michael and Attis, on the Chalkoprateia Annunciation, on the date of the conversion of the Parthenon. All his writing and lectures were characterised by clarity and elegance, and an avoidance of jargon and theory.

It was Cyril Mango’s counsel which led to archaeological work at Saraçhane, Amorium, and Euchaïta, although he was not involved hands-on with the execution of the projects. Well into his 70s, he participated in excavations led by his wife Marlia at Al-Andarin in the Syrian desert. Despite the grueling physical conditions, he took pleasure in investigating the secular, utilitarian architecture of a bath-house and attendant practicalities of water management, as well as observing the last vestiges of a diverse Ottoman society in those peaceful days before the Syrian civil war. Declining health did not prevent him from travelling to Istanbul to see the latest archaeological discoveries made during construction works for the Istanbul Metro and Four Seasons Hotel, the latter of which seem to confirm his youthful hypotheses about the Chalke.

A stroke and a fall cruelly ended travels, though work on the Constantinople book continued. In the last year of his life, in the midst of the worldwide quarantine, Cyril Mango asked that his books be sent from Oxford to Greece to be donated to the Gennadius Library and the Monastery of Saint John on Patmos. Also delivered to the Monastery was an icon of its founder, St Christodoulos. An icon of the Virgin Mary inherited from Mango’s Epirote grandmother was donated to the chapel of Saint John’s College in Oxford. Although few members of the clergy can have been so familiar with the history of the Church and the Lives of saints, Mango was not a regular church-goer, and treated religious matters with his customary irreverence. His final request was for a Greek Orthodox funeral service to be held in Oxford. Mourners half expected a heavenly choir to descend upon Exeter College Chapel pronouncing the imperial funerary formula, Ἐξελεθε βασιλεῦ.

At his death Cyril Mango left unpublished two projects to which he was particularly attached: the “Corpus of Dated and Datable Byzantine Inscriptions from Constantinople, Bithynia, and Eastern Thrace” begun in the 1960s in collaboration with Ihor Ševčenko, which was passed on to me to complete, and a book on the urban development of late Roman and mediaeval Constantinople which Jonathan Bardill is guiding to press. Let us hope that the appearance of this latter long-awaited life’s work in particular will inspire further systematic archaeological excavations in Istanbul. Even if the finds should overturn some of Professor Mango’s conclusions, they would be a fitting tribute to his memory.

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Για τον C. Mango, βλ. επίσης τον Πρόλογο του Ihor Ševčenko στον τιμητικό τόμο για τα εβδομηντάχρονά του: Ihor Ševčenko – Irmgard Hutter (επιμ.), *AETOS. Studies in honour of Cyril Mango presented to him on April 14, 1998*, B. G. Teubner, Stuttgart – Leipzig 1998, IX-XII.