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In Memoriam Leslie S. B. MacCoull

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Leslie S.B. MacCoull (1945-2015)

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Dr. Leslie S.B. MacCoull, papyrologist, Byzantinist, and historian, died at her home in Tempe, Arizona, on August 26 at age 70. MacCoull was born in New London, Connecticut, on August 7, 1945, attended St. Mary's School in Peekskill, New York, and received her A.B. in Classics from Vassar College in 1965, *summa cum laude*, as class salutatorian; she had been elected to Phi Beta Kappa in her junior year. She received an M.A. in Classics in 1966 from Yale University and a Ph.D. from the Catholic University of America in Semitics in 1973 with a dissertation on Coptic papyri in the Freer Gallery of Art. She was a gifted linguist, with a command of both ancient and modern languages.

After her doctorate, MacCoull served for three years at the Institute for Christian Oriental Research at the Catholic University before moving to Cairo, where she was first a fellow at the American Research Center in Egypt and then, from 1978 until 1984, director of studies and librarian at the Society for Coptic Archaeology and editor of its journal. In 1984 she returned to the United States, living in Washington, D.C., and carrying out various editorial work for *Dumbarton Oaks*, as well as continuing her research with fellowships from *Dumbarton Oaks* and the National Endowment for the Humanities. For the past twenty years she was an academic associate and editor for the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, using her command of languages on a wide variety of topics.

Her scholarly output was prodigious, amounting to more than 300 books, articles, and reviews. She is no doubt most famous for her work in bringing back to prominence the archive of Dioscorus, the landowning notary of the Egyptian village of Aphrodito, especially its forgotten Coptic components. Her book, *Dioscorus of Aphrodito* (1988) was revolutionary for its day, an influential paradigm-shifter, treating Dioscorus not as a failed poet but as a shining representative of his "coruscating" age. Nevertheless, her work extended well beyond Dioscorus to the entire culture of the Late Antique world – its religion, philosophy, and law. She contributed, for example, a cluster of noteworthy studies on the Alexandrian philosopher and theologian John Philoponus. Nearly fifty of her best-known articles, appearing first in a stunningly wide array of journals, are collected in *Coptic Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (1993) and *Documenting*

Christianity in Egypt, Sixth to Fourteenth Centuries (2011). She recently added to her publications a volume of Coptic legal documents in translation and with commentary (2009), and co-edited a long Greek tax account in the British Library from the sixth century (2011). Her many editions of Coptic documentary texts and her enthusiastic articles about the wider significance of this material provided inspiration to new generations of scholars and contributed to the growth of Coptic papyrology in the past few decades. Much of her work was devoted, in some way, to the broadening of the scholarly understanding of the Late Antique period to include Coptic textual sources. It was her abiding conviction that Egypt was an integral component of the Late Antique *Classical* world and its Coptic culture an organic offshoot of Egyptian Hellenism. Her reviews are noteworthy for their perspicacity, generosity, and collegial good cheer. She was a true embodiment of the *amicitia papyrologorum*.

MacCoull had a wide variety of cultural interests, ranging from early and classical music (she was an accomplished soprano; her idol was Maria Callas) to pop culture (Batman, Star Trek, Jim Morrison, and the Doors); allusions to these interests are sprinkled through her elegant prose. Her many friends treasured the witty communications they received from her. She was a generous and inspirational mentor to many younger scholars, as on-line testimonials after her death quickly showed. She was many people's most unforgettable character.

MacCoull was twice married in her youth, but the love of her life was Mirit Boutros Ghali, to whom, even long after his death, she dedicated each and every one of her scholarly achievements. She is survived by her half-siblings Robert, Kit, Pat, and Nick Bailey and BJ Glanville and Darcy Kulesha.

(With contributions from Kent J. Rigsby and T.G. Wilfong)