

Remembering Gina Coulthard

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I first knew Gina as a slightly mature student at the University of Warwick. Her application for admission was distinguished by the information that she had gone off for months on her own travelling across Transcaucasia. Her interview was greatly enhanced by her recounting her encounters with the authorities in Tbilisi who mistook her for a ‘dumb blonde’ and/or a foreign agent. Herein can be found themes which characterised Gina for the rest of her life, fierce independence, a wonderful gift for punchy storytelling and deep affection for the countries adjoining the Black Sea.

Gina was a lively undergraduate who clearly emerged as a strong character, leading and organising her fellow students as a student representative, playing a prominent role in the Students’ Union Entertainments Committee and excelling on training excavations, where she was quickly promoted to the rank of site supervisor. As an undergraduate, she developed an academic interest in early Byzantine matters and stayed on after graduation to complete a Masters degree by research on the life of St. Macrina, the sister of St. Basil and St. Gregory of Nyssa. The subject appealed to her strong instinct for gender equality as she felt that Macrina needed to be restored to the honour she deserved as an equal alongside her brothers, whose fame as Cappadocian Fathers totally eclipsed her. The subject of her thesis inspired her to want to see the sites associated with Macrina.

At the end of the consequent trip round Cappadocia and the Pontus, Gina appeared unexpectedly at Amasra where Jim Crow and I were surveying the Early Byzantine fortifications. The tribe of Hill and Crow children were supposedly being looked after by a less-than-competent student childminder, who had asked to be relieved of the duty in order to go off on an ‘adventure’. Gina offered to stay and take over child watching, and thus began her love affair with fieldwork in Turkey. With her organisational skills, Gina managed her new charges most effectively (well, better than anyone else ever did), but it also became clear that she was itching to become part of the archaeological team, something which had to wait for the following year’s permit to come through.

Back in the UK Gina kept in touch, and one day she asked to meet me for a coffee at a subterranean café in Baker Street, close to the then offices of the British Academy in Cornwall Terrace. The post of London Administrator had fallen vacant, and, with very uncharacteristic diffidence, Gina asked me, as Honorary Secretary, if I thought she could apply for the job. I could only support her in this enterprise and therefore excluded myself from the appointment procedure. After Gina was vetted by my fellow officers, the rest, as far as the Institute is concerned, is history.



Gina and Warwick student, Rupert Howell, paste calico onto the north mosaic at Çiftlik preparatory to lifting it because it was collapsing into the Black Sea. The mosaic was subsequently reassembled in the Sinop Museum.

Gina was to become a natural and core member of the team when the Directorate asked us to excavate a mosaic being washed into the sea at Çiftlik, near Sinop. As well as being Finds Assistant, Gina took over roles like sorting out flights and accommodation for us. One year she set us up in a slightly-too-small flat, where she nobly arranged for herself to sleep in the kitchen but never let us forget her self-sacrifice. Gina effortlessly kept us all under control, although I do remember that there was one lapse when one of the students was dramatically sick, and I could not but notice that all her egalitarian principles were abandoned when she and all the other female team members found reasons to go somewhere else, leaving the men to clear up the mess.

I was always aware that Gina was quietly managing me as the project developed, and I shall particularly remember the season when Anthony Bryer came to the dig. The two of them developed a great natural bond, which they sustained for the rest of Bryer’s life, through his terms as Chair and Editor, and at Sinop it was all too apparent that, in the nicest and most constructive way possible, they were thoroughly enjoying plotting around me behind my back. When news of Princess Diana’s death on 31 August 1997 arrived in Sinop, it was our day off, and Ismail, the Director of the Sinop Museum, had arranged a treat for us to visit the fiord at Hamsilos. We hadn’t heard the news and, on arrival at Hamsilos, Gina and Ismail had a chaotic conversation in which more was lost in

translation than was understood. Ismail kept saying ‘Di Die: Di Die’, and when eventually Gina grasped that the subject was Princess Diana, she tried again and again to explain that Diana’s partner was Dodi not ‘Di die’. As it does in late August on the Black Sea, Poyraz was blowing at gale force, which didn’t help communication. After emerging from a freezing swim, I tried to disentangle the baffling discussion. Ismail explained to me in Turkish that Di and Dodi had died, but Gina refused to believe me when I passed the news on. Meanwhile Bryer was happily sitting in Sinop holding court over a pipe and blackberry ice cream, receiving sonorous Ottoman condolences from an assemblage of Sinop worthies. Gina believed *him* when he passed the news on....

The story had a sequel. Thus it was that they informed me that they had arranged transport to take us to Amasya on our day off because Bryer wanted to check up on something there (I never discovered what that was). I should have smelt a rat when they also told me that it involved moving our day off to a Saturday and that Penny McParlin was coming too. Penny it was who was instrumental in introducing Gina to skydiving, but that is a story for others to tell. So we set off early to Amasya by what seemed to me to be a slightly devious route via Tokat in pursuit of tablecloths. En route we stopped at a roadside teahouse, whereupon the pair of them commandeered the television and settled down with Penny to watch Princess Diana’s funeral along with a mass of baffled but very respectful Turkish bus travellers. I had never imagined that Gina would have such royalist proclivities, and I was able to tease her about that for years afterwards.

After her move to Canberra, Gina kept in touch, especially with news about the achievements of Mick and Lilly and about her skydiving exploits. She always said that she was more proud of Lilly and her dancing successes than anything she ever did herself apart from being Lilly’s mother. It seems so poignant to me now that our last exchanges were decidedly existential, even apocalyptic, being about such subjects as bushfires, suffering koala bears and the pandemic.



Gina and Tamar Hodos prepare to witness the solar eclipse at Kerkenes, 2006.



Gina Coulthard, 18 February 1969–6 February 2022.

I should never have found myself in the situation of writing a memorial tribute to one of my students, but there is great appropriateness that this piece should appear in *Heritage Turkey*, which, as Lut recently observed, was ‘Gina’s “baby” entirely’. There is a back story which casts light on Gina’s subsequent editorial activities. When Gina took on the role of London Secretary in 1994, one of her duties was to organise the AGM. At that time members received an Annual Report consisting of a few photocopied pages of A4 containing short paragraphs from directors of current projects, bound in pale blue card. Gina and I decided that the event could be enhanced by collecting photographs from the project directors and using them to mount a small exhibition. Gina hounded the contributors for captions as well as paragraphs and set about editing the captions for public consumption. One day, at the kitchen table of our home in Warwick, surrounded by glue spray, scissors, photographs and printouts of Gina’s edited captions, we looked at each other and said, ‘Why don’t we just publish that instead of the dull, image-free, Annual Report?’ With great daring we even approached the Treasurer and gained permission to have a full-colour image on the cover. Thus was born *Anatolian Archaeology*.

Gina now had the bit between her teeth. She realised that there was a need to up our professional game here. Desktop publishing was relatively undeveloped, but she enrolled in a training course and, using her new formatting skills, greatly improved the presentation of *Anatolian Archaeology*. By the time that Gina moved to Canberra in 2007 and took over editorial management of all the Institute’s publications, she had developed all the necessary professional skills to perfectly complement her natural eye for accuracy and design. Furthermore, Gina delighted in sharing her knowledge and understanding of publishing with so many early-career academics.

Heritage Turkey stands as a visible memorial to Gina’s work for the Institute. She was a great student, a trusted and valued colleague and a much-loved friend. We will miss her hugely. ‘She should have died hereafter’.