

Barbara Tsakirgis, 1954–2019

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On 16 January 2019, Barbara Tsakirgis died in Nashville, Tennessee, from complications of ALS. Tsakirgis was well known as an expert on Greek houses and households as well as for her service—both formal and informal—to the field of Mediterranean archaeology. She was also known for her devotion to teaching and to her friends, students, and family. Nashville, Athens, and Sicily were the three foci of her life.

Tsakirgis was born on 12 May 1954 in Arlington, Massachusetts. A proud New Englander, she studied at Yale University from 1972 to 1976, earning a B.A. cum laude in classics. She continued her education in the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University where she earned an M.A. in 1979 and Ph.D. in 1984. Her doctoral dissertation, “The Domestic Architecture of Morgantina in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods,” presented the Hellenistic and Roman houses at Morgantina, the Sicilian site where Princeton began excavations in 1955. Though responsibility for the site had passed to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign under the direction of fellow Princetonian Hugh Allen, and then to another Princeton graduate, Malcolm Bell III at the University of Virginia, Tsakirgis took up the study of the houses as part of a team of students and scholars working to publish the results of decades of excavation and to continue on-site investigation. This research would form the foundation of her lifetime engagement with the Greek house and household.

In 1975, as a classics major at Yale, Tsakirgis participated in the American School of Classical Studies at Athens Summer Session. As a graduate student, she returned to the American School as a Fulbright Scholar and Regular Member in 1980–1981. These years in Athens profoundly influenced the course of her career, and she would return to Greece nearly every subsequent summer until the end of her life. She was also a veteran of the summer program at the American Numismatic Society in 1982. Her training included excavation seasons at La Befa, Italy; Corinth; and Morgantina, where she served as Associate Director in 1987–1988. Beyond excavation, her research annually took her into the field for study seasons at Morgantina or Athens, sometimes both.

Tsakirgis started her professional teaching career at Princeton University as an Assistant Instructor in 1979. In 1984, she joined Vanderbilt University as Assistant Professor in the Department of Classical Studies and was affiliated with the Department of the History of Art; she was to spend the rest of her career in Nashville. In 1992, she was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure and in 2017 retired as Professor Emerita. Among her many services to Vanderbilt, she was first secretary and then chair of the Faculty Council of the College of Arts and Science and then secretary of the College Faculty, as well as holding various posts related to the Faculty Senate and working on

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numerous faculty search committees. She served as chair of the Department of Classical Studies from 2005 to 2011, during which time she oversaw a growth in faculty numbers and the inauguration of the Program in Classical and Mediterranean Studies (which occasioned the renaming of her home department to reflect this wider scope) as well as a move to a new building. Previously, she had also served as director of both undergraduate and graduate studies.

Tsakirgis' earliest publications considered the mosaics and tiled floors of the Morgantina houses and continue to be critical reading for the history of Greek floor treatments.¹ She published one of the earliest extant tessellated mosaics, the Ganymede mosaic in the House of Ganymede on the East Hill overlooking the city's agora, demonstrating that the technique was already in use in central Sicily (and thus in the milieu of Syracuse) in the third century B.C.E.² In 1986, she received an American Council of Learned Societies grant-in-aid for her work at Morgantina, and a National Endowment for the Humanities summer stipend

in 1993, in addition to various Vanderbilt Research Council grants to support summer research.

She returned to Morgantina often, working toward a thorough revision of her doctoral dissertation in light of the explosion of new work on domestic archaeology and new research at Morgantina itself, which contributes a far greater understanding of the city's founding, its urban plan and development, and the relationship of the city's houses and neighborhoods to its public spaces.³ As she continued to publish on Morgantinian topics, her research career took an eastward turn in 1993—back to Athens. As she described it, she innocently asked Prof. T. Leslie Shear, Jr., about the state of publication of the houses surrounding the Athenian Agora excavated by the American School. Not only did Prof. Shear invite her to study and publish the Greek and Roman houses, but Prof. Homer Thompson also added permission to study the houses excavated during his directorship of the excavations. At the time her illness was diagnosed, Tsakirgis was working on two volumes in the Athenian Agora publication series, one

¹ Tsakirgis 1989, 1990.

² See also Bell 2011.

³ As of this writing, long-time director of the Morgantina excavations, Malcolm Bell III, is finishing the revisions that Tsakirgis had nearly completed at the time of her death.

each on the houses of the Greek and Roman periods. She welcomed this return to the epicenter of Greece in her research, and the complexity and scale of the Athenian project dominated the rest of her scholarly career. She was also working on a book on Greek houses and households for Cambridge University Press, a volume she envisioned as a modern version of Bertha Carr Rider's study of the early 20th century.⁴ Though this volume remains unrealized, a synthesis on Greek houses providing a glimpse of Tsakiris' long engagement with the subject is among the last of her publications.⁵ In addition to her other awards and honors, in support of her study of the Athenian Agora houses, Tsakiris held a Whitehead Visiting Professorship at the American School in Athens in 1996–1997; a Solow Art and Architecture Foundation grant in 2000; Kress Agora Publication Grants in 2001–2002 and 2017–2018; a University of Cincinnati Summer Scholar fellowship in 2004; and an American Philosophical Society Franklin Grant in 2012.

In her studies of the houses and households surrounding the Athenian Agora, Tsakiris never lost sight of the real people living in them.⁶ Her articles considered what constitutes a house, plus basic questions such as: How do you cook without a fixed hearth?⁷ Were there windows in houses?⁸ Can we tell the difference between evidence for craft production as a cottage industry or as household self-sufficiency?⁹ In this way, Tsakiris refocused our attention from the familiar, major personalities of Greek history to the much more numerous families and workers of ancient Athens. Her coedited volume with Allison Glazebrook of Brock University extended our view to encompass brothels, taverns, and other contexts of daily life.¹⁰ Tsakiris' publications and countless public lectures populated the past with individuals and their everyday lives and contributed to the contextual turn in Mediterranean archaeology.

As an archaeologist living in Nashville, Tsakiris naturally found research inspiration in the modern copy of the Parthenon in Centennial Park. She offered popular lectures on the building and its replica of the

cult statue of Athena Parthenos, and she also traced the influence of American School architect and professor of architecture William Bell Dinsmoor, Sr., on the plan of the Nashville Parthenon.¹¹ Her engagement with the Nashville Parthenon and Centennial Park are emblematic of her zeal to share antiquity with everyone as well as her skills as a public lecturer and teacher. She was well known as an engaging, innovative, and passionate professor, teaching a wide range of topics at Vanderbilt and fostering a number of undergraduate students who continued on to careers in classics and archaeology.

Tsakiris also dedicated her life to service to the field, most notably through the Archaeological Institute of America and governance at the American School. Her commitment to the AIA culminated with the Joukowsky Distinguished Service Award in 2017, which acknowledged her extensive volunteer service educating in and advocating for archaeology. She was an officer of the Nashville AIA society, sometimes filling all leadership positions at once; during more than 25 years as a national lecturer, she visited nearly every other local society, making friends everywhere she went; and she was an Academic Trustee from 2000 to 2006. She led several AIA tours and served on a variety of AIA committees.

Tsakiris devoted herself to the governance of the American School throughout her career. She was a member of the Managing Committee from 1988 and served as Vice Chair from 2012 to 2016. Once she was appointed to the Managing Committee, there was no time when she was not on an American School committee, including Excavations and Surveys (2000–2004). In addition, she was president of the Alumni Association from 1992 to 1995. Her devotion reflects her keen desire to give back to the institutions that had nurtured her passion for archaeology.

Other professional service obligations included to the Classical Association of the Midwest and South, and to the College Art Association. In Nashville, she sat on the Board of the Conservancy for the Parthenon and Centennial Park, and she lectured about the Nashville Parthenon at many local schools.

Tsakiris never met a stranger or an enemy. Regardless of one's status—from director to student—she greeted everyone with kindness and respect, and she

⁴Rider 1916.

⁵Tsakiris 2016a.

⁶Tsakiris 2005, 2009.

⁷Tsakiris 2006, 2007, 2016b.

⁸Tsakiris 2010.

⁹Tsakiris 2015a, 2015b, 2016b, 2016c.

¹⁰Glazebrook and Tsakiris 2016.

¹¹ She gave several scholarly lectures on this topic for the AIA and other organizations, but her publication remains uncompleted.

had time for everyone, eager to hear what you were working on and to offer advice, and, to the very last, interested in the latest news from the field and profession. Classical archaeology has lost a dear colleague, mentor, and champion.

Barbara is survived by her devoted husband of 36 years, Jerry Spinrad, and her daughters, Demetria and Thalia.

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