



BRUCE CRAIG
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Winslow W. Clifford, 1954–2009

The teachers, colleagues, and friends of Wyn Clifford at the University of Chicago regarded him as a young scholar of uncommon promise. Had his career not been interrupted some twenty years ago by the first in a series of recurring cancers, there is no doubt he would have produced a much larger body of important scholarship in the field of Mamluk studies. Instead, from his early thirties onward, his daily existence was dominated by his determined, stoic will to survive. That he managed to do so for so long is remarkable and is a tribute to his grit and valor. He died on February 6 in Whittier, California. With his passing, our field has lost someone special.

Winslow Williams Clifford was born on September 13, 1954, in the Army hospital at the Presidio in San Francisco, California. At the age of 5, he moved with his family to Japan, where his father, Carleton, a colonel in the Army Corps of Engineers, was sent to work in the reconstruction after World War II. When the family returned to the U.S. after a lengthy stay in Japan, they settled in Whittier, where Wyn graduated from La Serna High School. He then entered Pomona College, in Claremont, California, from which he graduated, with honors, in 1975, with a degree in Early Modern European (Economic) History.

Wyn arrived at the University of Chicago at the age of 22 in 1976. Even though he would eventually spend more than half his life in Chicago, he pointedly clung to his Californian persona. He had come to Chicago to study Byzantine history, and in 1978 he was awarded a Master's degree in History, after defending his thesis "The Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon: Socio-Economic Aspects of the Byzantine East on the Eve of the Muslim Conquest," which he wrote under the direction of Walter E. Kaegi.

At some point in his studies, he developed an interest in Arab history. He then embarked on the study of Syro-Egypt, focusing on the history of the Mamluk Sultanate. During the next few years he occupied himself with an intensive reading program, formal seminars on Middle Eastern history, and learning Arabic, a task at which he was entirely self-taught, owing to his impatience with the conventional way in which it was taught. During these years he also worked as a research assistant, instructor, and librarian.

In 1994, while still a graduate student, he published two important articles in the influential German journal *Der Islam* on the relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Safavid rulers of Iran. These articles were based on a research paper he wrote for a seminar conducted by his mentor, John E. Woods. They

displayed a striking level of intellectual maturity, and announced his arrival on the scholarly scene. The very next year he submitted his Ph.D. dissertation “State Formation and the Structure of Politics in Mamluk Syro-Egypt, 1250–1340.” In his dissertation, he introduced a new level of analysis in Mamluk history based on social theory. His skillful interpretation of Mamluk politics using models of social theory, much of which had been developed by a group of sociologists of the so-called “Chicago School,” was immediately recognized as ground-breaking and revolutionary, and established for him a unique niche in the field. It is a great pity that it was never published so that it could have reached a wider audience. His intention to expand and amplify it for publication was never realized.

In 1977, he was among a handful of scholars at the University of Chicago who founded this journal. He served as book review editor of *MSR* for a number of years, and contributed several influential articles, most importantly “Ubi Sumus? Mamluk History and Social Theory,” in which he called for a wider application of social theory to the analysis of Mamluk history.

Wyn was widely esteemed for his intellectual prowess and ability to articulate scholarly issues. His passing has deprived the field of one of its most promising voices. He was a man of refined taste; he loved vintage cars (especially BMWs), and appreciated the cut of a finely-tailored Italian wool suit. He was legendarily at home in the kitchen and knew his way around a wine cellar. Curiously, he never visited the Middle East. He is survived by his former wife, Mary Montgomery, of Chicago, and his fiancée, Elena Medellin, of Whittier.