

Robert Dyson, Penn Museum

MARCH 3, 2020

VOL 66 ISSUE 25 ([HTTPS://ALMANAC.UPENN.EDU/VOLUME-66-NUMBER-25](https://almanac.upenn.edu/volume-66-number-25))

DEATHS

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Robert Harris Dyson, Jr., world-renowned Near Eastern archaeologist, scholar, educator, Williams Director Emeritus of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and emeritus professor of anthropology, died peacefully after a long illness on February 14 in Williamsburg, Virginia. He was 92.

Dr. Dyson was born in York, Pennsylvania, and educated in the public schools of Forrest Hills, New York and the Collegiate Institute in Ontario, Canada. At 17 he enlisted in the US Navy and served in China.

Robert Dyson

After being honorably discharged from the Navy, he enrolled at Harvard University and graduated *magna cum laude* with a BA degree in 1950. He received his PhD, also from Harvard, in anthropology in 1966, specializing in Near Eastern archaeology but with a broad interest in Asia.

Dr. Dyson first came to the University of Pennsylvania in 1954 as an assistant professor in the anthropology department in the School of Arts & Sciences and assistant curator in the Near East Section of the University Museum, where he was responsible for the installation of the Mesopotamia Gallery. He was tenured in 1962 and promoted to professor of anthropology in 1967, when he also became head curator of the Museum's Near East Section.

In 1979, Dr. Dyson was appointed dean of the faculty of Arts & Sciences. He served in this capacity until 1982, when he was named the Williams Director of the Penn Museum. He held this position until his retirement in 1994. He continued to hold the titles Williams Director Emeritus and Emeritus Professor of Anthropology.

During his years as Penn Museum director, Dr. Dyson supported expeditions around the world. He also took on structural and internal improvements to the sprawling Museum building, which had been neglected over the years. He established new ties with the Penn administration, re-organized the Registrar's and Business Offices to make the Museum inventory more accessible to scholars, and developed a solid foundation for the Museum's finances.

In 1987, Dr. Dyson founded, with Peter Paanakker and Jerome Byrne, the Louis J. Kolb Foundation and the Louis J. Kolb Society, which provide fellowships and financial aid to graduate students at Penn in disciplines related to the mission of the Penn Museum (primarily in the departments of anthropology, classical studies, history of art, Near Eastern languages and civilizations and East Asian languages and civilizations). Dr. Dyson served as president of the Kolb Society until his retirement from Penn.

Dr. Dyson's training and research extended over a broad geographical area. While a graduate student at Harvard, he participated in the Point of Pines archaeological field school in Arizona, and in 1951 he represented the Peabody Museum as an anthropologist on the first Marshall Expedition to study the Kalahari Bushmen of southern Africa. Dr. Dyson conducted his dissertation research at the important Iranian site of Susa, where he constructed the first stratigraphic assessment of the prehistoric periods under the direction of the inimitable French archaeologist Roman Ghirshman. As a talented excavator, Dr. Dyson participated in excavations in Iraq, Jordan, the Persian Gulf, Pakistan and Turkey, and in 1962 he served as director of the Penn Museum's Tikal Project in Guatemala.

His most important contribution as a field archaeologist was as director of the Penn Museum's Hasanlu (Iran) Expedition from 1956 to 1977 (jointly sponsored by the Iranian Archaeological Service and for many years by the Metropolitan Museum of Art). Dr. Dyson and his team excavated a series of large buildings that had been burnt, including a palace and what was probably a temple. Most of the buildings had not been emptied of their contents, preserving a range of artifacts in the places that they were used or stored. More than 7,000 items were formally recorded by the excavation staff and more than 200 bodies were discovered.

With his discovery of "The Golden Bowl of Hasanlu" in 1958, Dr. Dyson became famous through a multi-page spread in *LIFE* magazine (1959). The "bowl" (now in the National Museum of Iran) is a large, unique gold vessel, beautifully decorated with mythological scenes and an important document for our understanding of belief systems in Iron Age Iran. It also gave scholars a rare glimpse into a moment in the past: crushed in the collapse of a mudbrick building, the bowl was found in the skeletal hands of a warrior who appears to have been fleeing the second story of a building as it fell.

Dr. Dyson was a skilled excavator and mentor to multiple generations of archaeologists and art historians. The Hasanlu Expedition served for two decades as the premier training ground for American and foreign archaeologists interested in pre- and proto-historic Iran. The field rosters of the Hasanlu Project read like a "Who's Who" of the archaeology of Africa, Europe and Asia.

Many of Dr. Dyson's former students went on to illustrious careers and founded their own excavations at important sites throughout the Middle East and Asia, creating robust academic dynasties of their own.

Dr. Dyson was an active member of numerous scholarly organizations. He was president of the Archaeological Institute of America 1979-1981 and president of the American Institute of Iranian Studies in 1968 and 1987-1989. He was a member of the Society of Fellows at Harvard, the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He received honors from the Athenaeum of Philadelphia and the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, and was a Decorated chevalier de l'Ordre des Artes et des Lettres (France). He was awarded the Order Homayoun (4th Rank) by the Shah of Iran in 1977. He was a Guggenheim Fellow of Social Sciences in 1971. The Robert H. Dyson chair appointments in the department of anthropology and Near East Section of the Penn Museum were established in his honor.

Dr. Dyson leaves no immediate family. A memorial program is being planned for fall 2020 at the Penn Museum.