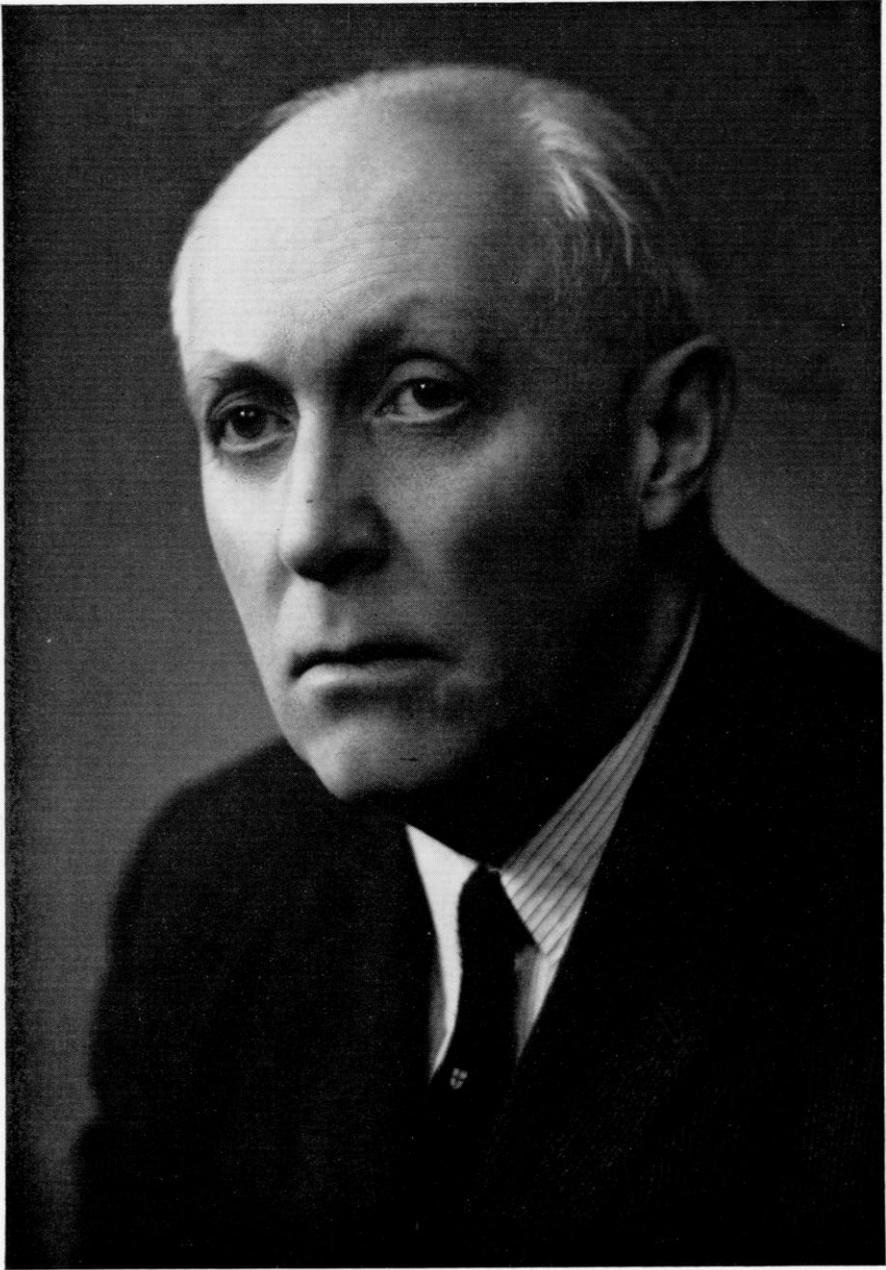


PLATE XIV



VINCENT DESBOROUGH

Guttenberg Ltd.

VINCENT ROBIN D'ARBA DESBOROUGH¹

1914-1978

To Vincent Desborough, who died on 24 July 1978 at the age of 64, belongs the rare distinction of having discovered and defined a new period of ancient Greek civilization: the Dark Age of c. 1125-900 BC which intervened between the fall of the Mycenaean world and the rise of the historical city-states. With a single mind and a strong sense of purpose, he devoted his entire career as a scholar to this hitherto uncharted field of study, refusing to become side-tracked into more easily accessible topics of the ancient world, but always happy to share his knowledge with friends and colleagues who wished to learn from him. His three major books, written as surveys of the archaeological evidence, remain the definitive works on the period, and a firm foundation for present and future research. 'The Dark Age is now there, to be discussed and interpreted, and we have gained new insights into the origins of Greek society': thus Professor Antony Andrewes, paying tribute to Desborough's achievement from the ancient historian's point of view.

Vincent Robin d'Arba Desborough was born on 19 July 1914 at Tunbridge Wells, the son of a Latvian father and an English mother. His father, Dr Max Jules Praetorius of Riga, lost his life on active service during the First World War. Thereafter his mother, Mary Violet, née Parker, resumed her British nationality, and at the end of the war took by deed-poll the surname Desborough, an earlier family name, for herself and her descendants.

¹ For supplying us with sources for this memoir we are especially grateful to Mrs Mary Desborough. Our thanks are due also to Professor A. Andrewes, MBE; Mr W. C. Brice; Mr G. Chandler, CBE; Professor C. R. Cheney; Professor J. M. Cook; Professor P. E. Corbett; Professor P. L. C. Courbin; Sir Christopher Cox, GCMG; Mrs M. Cox; Mrs A. D. D. Dunbabin; Mr H. Forster; Dr E. B. French; Professor N. G. L. Hammond, CBE, DSO; The Hon. Mr and Mrs H. A. Hankey; Mr D. Kessler; Mrs J. Langham; The Revd D. V. Lewis; The Revd D. Rees, OSB; Professor Dr K. Schefold; and Lady Waterhouse, who has kindly allowed us to consult the manuscript of her forthcoming history of the British School at Athens to mark its centenary.

A full bibliography of Desborough's published work has been assembled by Dr H. W. Catling in his memoir in *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus*, 1979, 7-12.

After a year at the English School at Chateau d'Oex in Switzerland, Vincent Desborough was educated first with the Benedictines at St. Augustine's, Ramsgate, and then at Downside School. There he became deeply rooted in the Roman Catholic faith, which was to play a prominent part throughout his whole life. A succession of talented teachers—Dom Laurence Kynaston, N. H. Watts, and W. R. Brash—gave him a firm grounding in and love for the Classics. Although he is remembered at Downside as a late developer who quietly went his own way and did not shine among the foremost scholars, he nevertheless gained a Classical Exhibition in 1932 to New College, Oxford. He then went on to Greats in the following years, after taking Pass Moderations.

During his undergraduate years Desborough developed a deep interest in the sources for early Greek history, and after achieving Second Class Honours in Greats in 1936 went on to study for the B.Litt. degree at Oxford under the supervision of Sir John Myres. With more optimism than many ancient historians would evince today, Myres then hoped that the chronology of pre-Archaic Greece could be reconstructed through a careful mustering of the literary sources, including the generations of royal dynasties apparently remembered through an illiterate age by word of mouth. Desborough chose to work within this field for his B.Litt. thesis, with special reference to the date of the Trojan War; the careful re-excavation of Troy by the Cincinnati Expedition during those years may no doubt have diverted his interest in that direction. Since his wish to check and amplify Myres's 'generation' theories could only be achieved by a detailed review of the archaeological evidence then available, he enrolled as a student of the British School at Athens, where in the following year he was awarded the School's Macmillan Studentship.

Desborough completed his B.Litt. thesis in 1939 after three years in Greece, but by then his own interests had undergone a marked change: he had become committed to the study of archaeological finds as an end in itself, rather than as a means for checking later literary sources for a shadowy and obscure age. To most scholars in Athens at that time, his period of research would have seemed unorthodox and unglamorous. Of his fellow students at the British School, some were pursuing Archaic topics in the wake of Humfry Payne's brilliantly successful excavations at Perachora; others were scrutinizing various aspects of the Late Bronze Age in Minoan Crete and Mycenaean Greece, following up the work of Sir Arthur Evans and A. J. B. Wace. The long interregnum between those two *hautes époques*, in the opinion of

many, hardly merited any deep study; thus there were few people with whom Desborough could discuss his subject in any great detail. But he was used to making his own way. He delighted in travel, in getting to know Greece; and in search of Dark Age pottery he made many journeys, sometimes alone, sometimes with other students of the School, to Thessaly, to the Argolid, and to the Dodecanese. He also took an active part in three of the School's excavations, each of which repaid him by shedding some new light on the Dark Age. Thus at Knossos he assisted Tom Dunbabin in his search for the elusive Archaic levels, but what they found was in fact Protogeometric. A more arduous experience in Crete was his participation in John Pendlebury's excavation of Karphi, a peak five thousand feet up in the Dictaeon range, where a whole town of Subminoan refugees came to light—a site which, even today, remains the only well-preserved settlement of the early Dark Age; its rigours were vividly recalled by Desborough in his last book: 'even in early summer the place is bitterly cold before the sun rises'. At another remote and mountainous site, Aëtos on Ithaca, he helped Sylvia Benton clear a more denuded settlement of the Dark Age, which subsequently became a sanctuary visited by early Greek travellers on their way to Italy and Sicily. All these early experiences in the field must have played a significant part in encouraging him to plan a general survey of the Dark Age in his later years.

In contrast to the strenuous character of its excavations, the British School's base in Athens was then losing some of its traditional austerity. The students' hostel, now thoroughly refurbished by the Director Gerard Mackworth Young, had become a reasonably comfortable place in which to live. For the first time in the School's history, the resident students included a considerable proportion of women. One of them, Vronwy Fisher (now the Hon. Mrs Henry Hankey), records Vincent Desborough's demon ingenuity as a player of table tennis (a sport in which he had gained a one-eighth blue at Oxford) on the polished mahogany dining table with its rounded corners, and otherwise remembers him thus:

He was very slight in build, slightly stooping, destined for early baldness, with a fresh colour and a quizzical, enquiring expression. He usually wore baggy grey flannels, a well-worn tweed jacket, and what were known as orebatic shoes, too large for everyday use, more suited to thick socks and mountain walking. His aura of frailty and premature middle age (I suppose he was about twenty-four) disguised his athletic ability and toughness.

Out in the country, site-hunting or merely walking, Vincent would outwalk most, . . . and he was irritatingly patient and cheerful about the deficiencies of public transport and popular information. He minded more about people than about things, and this made him a very caring Macmillan student. If anyone had or looked like having a cold, Vincent's remedy was brought out or renewed at a moment's notice. This was strong administration of Samian wine. I think he kept a demijohn in his room against emergency.

He never discussed politics, went to church every Sunday without making it apparent that he was a very religious man. He was free from the meannesses that seem inevitable in hostel life, kind in thought and action, and though not conspicuous in a crowd, he made himself gently felt on social and academic occasions.

Desborough returned from Greece in summer 1939, presented his B.Litt. thesis at Oxford, and received for it the Charles Oldham prize. On the outbreak of the Second World War he joined the infantry as a private soldier, later transferring to the Royal Artillery to become an anti-aircraft gunner. In that branch of the service he was subsequently commissioned and rose to the rank of Captain. There he remained until early in 1944, when he was posted out to GHQ Cairo to join the Political Warfare Executive with a view to service in Greece during the German Occupation. His preliminary training included a course in sabotage on Mount Carmel, and a few months at a camp near the Pyramids of Giza. A brother officer, David Kessler, enjoyed his company on walks round the Pyramids, heard him talking 'lucidly, learnedly, and interestingly about his subject', and remembers him as 'a reserved and modest man who never threw his intellectual weight around'.

In July 1944 he was flown in to a secret landing ground in the mountains of western Thessaly, to join officers of the Allied Military Mission behind enemy lines. Its Commanding Officer was a fellow archaeologist and ancient historian, Nicholas Hammond, and Desborough was there to help in entertaining three Russian colonels who arrived unexpectedly by air and refused to divulge their intentions. For the next three months he moved from place to place over the mountain districts of Pindus, Othrys, and Pelion, which by then were largely under the control of left-wing ELAS guerillas and their civil organization EAM. As an observer Desborough was charged with the task of informing his HQ in Cairo about the political intentions of EAM/ELAS, and about the attitudes towards them of the local inhabitants. He would also take any opportunity of countering anti-British

propaganda spread among the mountain villages. At the same time he would gather information about the self-appointed left-wing government established in the mountains, PEEA (Political Committee of National Liberation), to report on the likelihood of their organizing resistance against any Allied liberating forces that might enter Greece. His despatches to Cairo are remarkable for a shrewd evaluation of his often biased sources—a shrewdness later displayed in all his surveys of the Greek Dark Age.

Throughout his time in the mountains Desborough had also played a part in circulating propaganda leaflets among the already demoralized forces of the German occupation, based on the towns and the low-lying areas. After the departure of the Germans and the arrival of British forces under General Scobie, he came down to Athens in late October and spent the winter there, amid the turbulent events which heralded the Greek Civil War. By then his organization had been given the more innocuous-sounding title of Anglo-Greek Information Service, and in 1945 he was sent as its representative to various parts of the country to set up information centres and to arrange for the teaching of English. His travels took him to Kalamata, to Patras, and to Chios where he was made an honorary citizen of the island. Early in 1946 he went to England to be demobilized, but soon afterwards returned to Greece as a member of the British Council, the natural successor to A.G.I.S. As Secretary-Registrar of the British Institute in Athens he was once again able to devote some time to his research on Protogeometric pottery, and to give the occasional lecture on his subject. He is also remembered at the Institute for his part in a production of T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, in which he acted the leading knight with remarkable vigour and decisiveness.

Meanwhile the British School of Archaeology was gradually coming back to life. Its Athenian premises had been used during the Occupation by Swiss and Swedish Red Cross, and then by personnel from the British Embassy; but research students were beginning to take up residence in the Hostel, and by autumn 1947 the School's normal activities were fully resumed. Desborough then left the British Council to become the School's Assistant Director, under the Directorship of John Cook who had been one of his brother officers in the Pindus mountains. He found himself among an entirely fresh generation of students, virtually cooped up in Athens while the Civil War made most of the country inaccessible to travel. His tireless efforts to keep everyone in good humour and morale are recalled by one of the new students, Peter Corbett:

Vincent was faced with the problem of trying to recreate the pre-war tradition, which he alone knew, since we were all raw. On top of that, he had to run the building. The greatest difficulty was staff who, owing to rapid inflation, were underpaid, and it speaks volumes for his combination of fluent Greek and great diplomacy that he managed not only to keep them, but to keep them happy. He had to re-start the engine, and did so superbly. He was throughout patient, kind, and understanding. Let one example stand for the rest: in those days it was the custom not to dine in the Hostel on Sundays, so that the staff could be free. Sunday after Sunday he would lead us to what he knew were good tavernas, see that we got what we wanted, and put up with the inevitable arguments. His good nature was inexhaustible. He was, first and foremost, our friend.

In 1948 Desborough was appointed to an assistant lecturership in the department of history at Manchester University, subsequently becoming lecturer, senior lecturer and finally, after his election to the Academy in 1966, reader. He had applied at the instigation of Robert Cook, who was himself a lecturer there in Greek and Latin, and who at the same time persuaded him to publish a preliminary article on Protogeometric pottery. His appointment raised from two to three the department's complement of ancient historians, who were together responsible for all the teaching of that subject in the university. This included the provision of background courses for those reading classics, but most of the work was with history students.

At that time all those reading for honours in history at Manchester still had to take courses in ancient as well as medieval and modern history in their first two years, so that they would be equipped to take a special subject in any of these areas as the main component of their final year. Early in the fifties this requirement had to be abandoned, but, rather surprisingly, a substantial proportion of students continued to take the ancient courses, at the cost of omitting courses either in economic or in modern history, and a smaller but sizeable number, most of whom had come to the university totally ignorant of ancient history, still chose to specialize wholly or partly in that area in Part II. For most of them a special subject, based on work with original sources, could only be Roman, since few came up with a knowledge of Greek or took on the task of learning it during their first two years.

For this reason the late R. E. Smith, when he came in 1953 from the chair of Latin at Sydney to the chair of ancient history (which he continued to occupy for the rest of Desborough's time in Manchester) encouraged him to equip himself to offer a special

subject on the age of Diocletian. Smith was anxious to make up for the neglect of the third century, and even of the Antonine period, in most British universities at that time, and he felt that a study of the age of Diocletian would not only follow on suitably from the second-year course in Roman history, in which Desborough was already involved, but would also provide a link with the medieval courses, in addition to fitting in with study of the archaeology of Roman Britain, with which the department had long been concerned.

So it came about that Roman imperial history became Desborough's main sphere of teaching (he later devised also the Roman part of a course on Greek and Roman citizenship). It was sad that he had almost no opportunity to engage the interest of Manchester students in the Protogeometric world; even the department's first-year course in Mediterranean history took as its notional starting point 800 BC, whereas his concern was, in his own words, to make 'contributions to the archaeology (and history?) of Greece, *c.* 1200–*c.* 800 BC'. An honours school of ancient history and archaeology was instituted while he was still at Manchester, but the emphasis was on the archaeology of the western Roman provinces, and though there were also courses on the bronze age and the early iron age in the Near East, he was not called upon to help fill the intervening gap, no doubt because his Roman courses, felt by then to be indispensable, made up, with his personal research, a full load. However, he organized a lively series of seminars involving those few Manchester scholars whose interests interlocked with his, including William Brice, John Gray, Alan Rowe and Theodore Burton-Brown.

Meanwhile, betraying no signs of any sense of frustration, he set about mastering the evidence for Roman imperial history with the unostentatious scholarly thoroughness that was characteristic of him. His special subject was a success from the start, although he was constantly striving to improve his teaching in the light of his continuing contemplation of the evidence and in response to the questions his pupils raised. It was his hope eventually to resume research into this period, after he had completed more pressing tasks—which, however, preoccupied him into the last weeks of his life. It soon became known among history students that both the more able and the weaker would receive the sort of help that they needed; he took at least as much trouble over their work as they took themselves, and it was not least for this reason that the study of ancient history retained its strength within the school. One of them has written that 'he had one great gift which very few

teachers have: he gave each and every one of his students the feeling that they had something worthwhile to say and that he genuinely and sincerely respected them. In his classes I was for the first and only time at ease. He had a true gentle courtesy, based on a kindly Christian charity which for me shone through in everything he said and did.'

Although he bore his fair share of administrative burdens, he generally stood aside from the disputes about courses and methods that inevitably arose in a lively and rapidly expanding department, for, as a former colleague has remarked, he 'was a very private person and abhorred controversy'; but as an unmistakably genuine scholar he won the respect of all his colleagues. Another of them remembers him 'as a rather aristocratic, sweet-natured personality, capable, however, of gentle mockery of the foolish or false—and the gentle manner and voice could hide trenchancy'. Another suggests that 'at his arrival in Manchester he was perhaps a little dismayed at the crudities (as who would not have been?), and it may have taken him a little time to get over the shock'.

Those who worked with him soon became aware that 'his good manners corresponded to a genuinely kindly disposition—not mere courtliness, though courtly he certainly was'. His care for his pupils was tutorial in the full sense; after his marriage in 1950 to Mary Appach, he and his wife made them welcome in their home, and took pains (without prying) to help them through any personal troubles. This was a natural expression of his unobtrusive but deep charity. He was an active member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, the saint after whom he was named, which does practical work for the poor, and for long he regularly got up early to light the fire for an infirm old man; but of course he never told his colleagues. The non-scholarly interests which he manifested to them were mainly of a lighter kind; his skill, for instance, at tennis and table tennis, and his enjoyment of a lively game of hockey.

Throughout his twenty years at Manchester, Desborough never lost touch with the British School at Athens. From 1958 until 1962, and again from 1966, he served as a member of its Managing Committee in London. For his several visits to Greece during these years, the School in Athens was his base of operations which included many an expedition to remote sites and museums in pursuit of new evidence concerning the Dark Age; in spite of the increasing strain on his heart, he continued to flourish in the Greek climate. His longest sojourns were in 1953 and 1961, years in which he stayed for several months on leave from Manchester as the School's Visiting Fellow. Thus it was that he came to know a

younger generation of scholars, several of whom had been fired by his example to follow the relatively untrodden paths of the Early Iron Age. The resident students of those years will remember his kindly interest in, and encouragement of their work, and also the endless pains which he took to help and advise those whose fields overlapped with his. Meanwhile the scope of his own research had broadened to cover the whole obscure period between the decline of Mycenaean culture and the rebirth of Greek civilization during the Geometric period. An open lecture which he gave at the School in 1961 on 'The Aegean in the twelfth century B.C.' was heard by a distinguished international audience, and helped to establish his reputation as the leading authority on the Greek Dark Age. This lecture contained the kernel of his second major work, *The Last Mycenaeans and their Successors*, the book which in due course led to his election in 1966 as a Fellow of the British Academy.

In 1968, partly owing to the uncertainty of his health, and partly to find greater freedom to pursue his own research, Desborough retired prematurely from his post at Manchester to return to Oxford, where he had been elected to a Senior Research Fellowship at New College. There he played a full and cheerful part in the life of the College, among friends and colleagues old and new. Antony Andrewes, then Wykeham Professor of Ancient History, vividly recalls

. . . that small, benign, hunched figure, with the brown bald head surrounded by a fringe of white hair, often surmounted by an old and improbable pork-pie hat; and when he had triumphantly squeezed his car through the half-shut gate in Holywell, one might meet him in the quad and share gossip and a joke as well as discussing high and serious matters. Vincent's sense of fun, quiet like the rest of him, was an essential part of his make-up and never long absent.

Although he was no longer committed to formal teaching, he would always be generous of the time he gave to friends, colleagues, and research students who came to discuss Dark Age matters in the Desboroughs' house just off the Woodstock Road. All their visitors, at Oxford as at Manchester, would at once appreciate the great happiness and security of Vincent's family life with his wife Mary and his daughter Caroline.

During these years at Oxford he now found himself involved in two new and major undertakings. One was the study and publication of the copious Dark Age pottery from Lefkandi in Euboea, the unexpectedly rich site then being excavated by the

British School at Athens. For the next few years, however, the time he could devote to this task was severely curtailed by his other new responsibility: very shortly after the move from Manchester to Oxford he was elected Chairman of the British School's Managing Committee.

As Chairman, Desborough worked in close cooperation with the School's successive Directors, Peter Fraser and Hector Catling. Greece then being under the sway of a military dictatorship, an unusual degree of diplomatic skill and sympathetic understanding was required in Chairman and Director alike; for although the ruling junta were not by nature xenophobic, they could not fail to create in the Greek Archaeological Service an atmosphere of insecurity. The Service was then under the direction of the distinguished veteran archaeologist Spyridon Marinatos, with whom Desborough had enjoyed a lasting friendship since his student days in the thirties; and it is a tribute to the wisdom and experience of all concerned that harmonious relations were maintained between the School and the Service in these far from easy circumstances. Over the School's internal affairs Desborough took infinite trouble, always informing himself meticulously about every problem as it arose, and always being prepared to see both sides of an argument—in short, displaying the same qualities of open-mindedness which distinguished his published research. As a consequence, the School's administration worked very smoothly during his Chairmanship. For the first time the Committee in London began to include representatives of the students. In Greece there was even some modest expansion: at Knossos, the School's most important excavation site ever since the days of Sir Arthur Evans, the workshops and study quarters were enlarged; and within the School's grounds in Athens an archaeological laboratory was set up, named after its generous sponsors Marc and Ismene Fitch. Although Desborough's obligation to the School now brought him out to Greece every year, it never claimed all his time there; he was also able to prosecute the study of the Lefkandi pottery, and to collect much new evidence from other recently excavated sites for his last general work, *The Greek Dark Ages*.

Although Desborough's official term as Chairman ended in 1972, he shouldered this burden once again in 1973/4 when his successor, Nicholas Hammond, was away in the United States. Then it was that the School embarked upon another useful innovation, the September course in Greek Archaeology for undergraduates which included a programme of lectures organized by the Assistant Director and a tour of the chief sites and

museums (this course has now become a regular institution). On his final retirement from the Chair Desborough still continued to serve on the School's Committee as the representative of the British Academy; but now he had more time to work on the Lefkandi publication, a formidable task which in spite of recurrent ill-health he completed in the last month of his life. He died suddenly in July 1978 while on holiday with Mary in the Dordogne.

For over forty years of his life, Vincent Desborough devoted himself to the study of the Greek Dark Age: an age so dark that ancient Greek sources had been virtually unaware of its existence; an age when Greece was poor, illiterate, and virtually cut off from the outside world. In spite of his early interest in the shadowy literary references to the dawn of Greek history, he soon came to realize that the darkness of the age could be penetrated only through meticulous scrutiny of its artefacts.

When Desborough first came to Greece in 1936, such scrutiny had not progressed very far. A motley collection of pots from various parts of Greece, simply decorated with abstract motifs, had been recognized by S. Wide as later than Mycenaean but earlier than Geometric. The whole corpus was then loosely described as Protogeometric, and correctly dated by B. Schweitzer to the eleventh and tenth centuries BC. Yet there had been little awareness of the regional variety of this pottery, still less of its historical implications. Indeed, it was not until the 1930s that any real progress could have been made along this avenue of research; for then it was that the burials of the Athenian Kerameikos site, carefully excavated by the German Institute, furnished for the first time a continuous sequence of artefacts lasting all through the darkest part of the Dark Age. The pre-Geometric graves from this all-important cemetery were exhaustively published by K. Kübler and W. Kraiker, but without much reference to contemporary finds already known from other parts of Greece. Desborough, however, was quick to see that almost all other regional manifestations of Protogeometric pottery were in some way related to the Attic style. Athens offered a lifeline throughout the Dark Age; perhaps also a series of prototypes for other local styles, for only in the Athenian grave groups was it possible to trace the evolution of the Protogeometric style from the preceding Submycenaean. Hence arose Desborough's conviction that the Protogeometric style had been invented in Athens, inaugurating a rebirth of decent craftsmanship for the first time after the

Mycenaean collapse. Meanwhile 'The rest of Greece, unaware that the life of Spring had been reborn in Athens, slept on awhile' (*Protogeometric Pottery*, 299); but eventually Attic influence was felt in the pottery of many other regions, indicating the revival of free exchanges in the Aegean world. Stability was thus returning, and the foundations of Hellenic civilization were being laid. Such were the far-reaching conclusions arising from Desborough's meticulous study of Protogeometric pottery, which earned him universal admiration. In the words of Professor Karl Schefold: 'Desboroughs Sinn für diesen Stil, in dem die Athener, auf grosses geschichtliches Geschehen antwortend, zum erstenmal ein Symbol ihres eigensten Wesens schufen, gab seinen umfassenden Untersuchungen einen Glanz, den wir nicht vergessen.'

In his brief pioneer article of 1948 entitled 'What is Proto-geometric?' Desborough first aired his views with characteristic caution. Four years later came the publication of his definitive work *Protogeometric Pottery*, the most expansive of his books, in which he gave comprehensive coverage to every part of Greece in this little known period. By now he was being required to teach Late Roman history at the University of Manchester; but the interest aroused by his book, and the steady flow of correspondence which it generated, encouraged him to continue single-mindedly with the Dark Ages as his only field of research. In general, he earned high praise from his reviewers for his open-minded and objective approach to the evidence. 'D. is no controversialist', wrote Sylvia Benton; he 'just sets out the facts remorselessly and leaves the theories to fall apart.' But controversy there was bound to be, especially over the peripheral areas of Greece where the available evidence was unusually scanty. Thus the primacy of Attic Protogeometric was challenged by N. Verdhelis, who maintained that the Thessalians had developed their own Protogeometric style from the latest Mycenaean quite independently of Athens—a view with which Desborough courteously agreed to differ. Meanwhile his own interests had in any case moved backwards in time, to the end of the Mycenaean world and its immediate aftermath. After the discovery by S. Iakovides of the surprisingly wealthy cemetery of Perati in eastern Attica which was actually contemporary with the Mycenaean decline and collapse, it was becoming evident that this process had been by no means uniform all over the Aegean. So there grew in Desborough's mind the idea of a second major archaeological survey, exploring the different experiences of each region during the onset of the Dark Ages. He wished to span the hitherto

impassable abyss separating the study of the Aegean Bronze Age and of classical civilization: 'Aegean archaeology', he wrote in correspondence, 'is now interpreted as a process that continues on from Minoan and Mycenaean down to Archaic and Classical times. . . . the more people who can bridge the gap between Prehistoric and Protohistoric, the better.'

Desborough's second major work of synthesis, adumbrated in his chapter for the third edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History* (1962), emerged in 1964 as *The Last Mycenaean and their successors*. Covering a much wider field than *Protogeometric Pottery*, it offered for the first time an integrated account of the Mycenaean collapse based firmly on the archaeological evidence. As in the earlier book, each region is treated in turn; one thus learns how it was the main centres of Mycenaean civilization that suffered the worst destructions and depopulation, while more peripheral areas enjoyed an Indian summer followed by a steady decline. Much new light was also thrown on the outward movements of refugees to Cyprus, Achaea, and Kephallenia. As the chief cause of all these commotions, Desborough firmly believed in hostile invaders from beyond the northern limit of the Mycenaean world; invaders who, when they eventually settled down, rejected altogether the Mycenaean way of life, and introduced in its place the rather drab culture associated with the Submycenaean cemeteries of individual cist graves in Attica and elsewhere.

The *Last Mycenaean* was at once acclaimed as an important landmark in the study of an obscure period; it was as though an extensive tract of *terra incognita* had been clearly mapped out for the first time. Once again, there were the inevitable disagreements: J. Deshayes, the French excavator of Argos, ascribed the cist graves not to newcomers, but to descendants of the lower stratum of Mycenaean society; internal discord, and a consequent reshuffling of people within the Mycenaean world, were adduced by A. M. Snodgrass as more plausible causes of disaster than an invasion from outside; others have suggested deleterious changes of climate, or crop failures, or economic distress, or earthquakes, or the collapse of top-heavy palace bureaucracies, at least as contributory causes of trouble. A lively debate on this issue still continues—a debate which is often deeply affected by the *Zeitgeist* of our generation, which seeks to belittle the likelihood of war, violence, and invasion as causes of abrupt cultural change. Nevertheless it remains a constructive debate; that it can be so is a great tribute to the clarity and open-mindedness with which

Desborough defined and set out the available evidence in this masterly book.

The Greek Dark Ages, Desborough's third and final survey, was commissioned by an enlightened publisher as one of a series of general handbooks dealing with the less well-known epochs of ancient Greek civilization. Published in 1972, it is much more than a summary of his two previous major works; all the historical problems are considered afresh, especially in the light of two important new sources of information which were becoming available during the sixties. Recent excavations in Cyprus were then building up an unexpectedly rich picture of life in the island during the eleventh century BC, illustrating the relative prosperity of the newly-arrived Greek settlers in comparison with their impoverished kinsmen who stayed behind in the troubled Aegean world. On second thoughts, it was from Cyprus that Desborough now derived the introduction of iron-working to Greece, as well as some important novelties of the Attic Protogeometric style; for Hellenists of the narrower sort it was salutary to be told that, all through the Aegean Dark Ages, Cyprus was a potential source of light and progress. And complementary evidence was now coming from the Aegean, from the Euboean site of Lefkandi then being excavated by the British School; there was a site which was yielding an unusually complete sequence of Dark Age graves and settlement deposits, at several points showing direct contact with Cyprus and the Levant, and at all times giving evidence of active maritime enterprise which foreshadowed the energy of later Euboeans who settled in the emporia of north Syria and founded colonies in Italy and Sicily. Thus the rich graves of Lefkandi pointed the way out of the Dark Age, and their significance as presented by Desborough was quickly appreciated. Karl Schefold, who directed the Swiss excavations at the neighbouring site of Eretria and who saw in Lefkandi the shadowy 'Old Eretria' remembered by Strabo, says 'Die Funde von Lefkandi, an denen Desborough arbeitete, erhellen die Ursprünge der Kultur, die in Eretria um 800 als eine der grossen griechischen Stadkulturen plötzlich ans Licht tritt wie Helena aus dem Ei der Leda.'

The full report on the pottery of Lefkandi proved to be Desborough's last major task, which he completed in the last month of his life; its forthcoming publication, embodying a lifetime's knowledge and understanding of the Greek Dark Ages, is eagerly awaited. Lefkandi also provided the theme on which he was to have addressed the Eleventh International Congress of Classical Archaeology in London on 4 September 1978, in the

course of a whole morning's session on the Early Iron Age in Greece. Vincent Desborough did not live to see that day, but he was very much in the thoughts of everyone present; how inconceivable that morning's programme would have been, without the enduring benefit of his life's work! Moving tributes to him, as a scholar and as a man, were paid by the two distinguished archaeologists who took the Chair. To Karl Schefold it seemed that 'alle andern Referate beziehen sich irgendwie auf sein Werk, alle Referenten hätten gern sein Urteil gehört . . . ' And in the words of Paul Courbin: 'Vincent Desborough, pour tous ceux qui l'ont connu, était un savant d'une distinction vraiment rare: à la fois par son affabilité, sa gentillesse, sa délicatesse de manières et d'esprit; et aussi dans sa façon d'aborder les problèmes, fondée sur une science consommée mais discrète, progressant par petites touches successives jusqu'à une conclusion toujours prudente et pourtant précise, suggérée sans être jamais imposée.'

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