MERVYN POPHAM

Mervyn Reddaway Popham
1927–2000

MERVYN POPHAM was a questioning, quiet person, driven by an uncompromising honesty to find the truth, and always ready to doubt accepted explanations or any theory-driven archaeology for which he could find no evidential basis. He was probably the most percipient archaeologist of the Late Bronze Age of Crete and the Aegean to have worked in the second half of the twentieth century, and became almost as important in the archaeology of the Early Iron Age, which succeeded the Bronze Age. In his archaeology he took an analytical–empirical approach to what he saw as fundamentally historical problems, reaching unprecedented peaks of intelligent, and commonsensical, refinement. He pondered long before making up his mind. He was expert at reading and hearing what is unsaid. It was a sensitivity and scepticism that existed equally strongly in his views of human motivation, and an asset that his friends, perhaps especially those who were Greek, appreciated. Once he had decided on an interpretation, however, whether to explain contemporary events or for the distant past, it was hard to induce him to change his mind. And so often he was right—as he would observe ('Didn't I say so?'), looking up with a half-grin as he heard of some new discovery in Crete that confirmed an *en passant* suggestion of his, or of apparently puzzling behaviour that, all the same, fitted his patterning of a person's character. He was as brave as he was decisive, qualities that characterise his scintillating contributions to the history of Knossos and the study of Late Minoan pottery—and achieved greatness in brilliant excavations of the highest forensic standards at Knossos, Palaikastro, and Lefkandi, sharing

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direction usually with Hugh Sackett. For Popham digging was an ultimate test of mind, will, and concentration, the chance to release truths that had been dormant for millennia. His approach was an artist's. For those lucky enough to have worked with him at those sites, or to have written a dissertation with him, he still seems present, asking questions or pointing out overlooked evidence and always trying to place matters in a larger context so as to elicit the likely truth. If gone, he still seems to be shaping our lives, as he started to do when he arrived as the senior Student at the British School at Athens in 1961, in 1963 becoming the School's Assistant Director. We—a list that includes Mark Cameron, Oliver Dickinson, Doniert Evely, Eleni Hatzaki, Roger Howell, Irene Lemos, Martin Price, Cressida Ridley, Elizabeth Schofield, Ken Wardle, Peter Warren, and Elisabeth and Geoffrey Waywell—came to see digging as a philosophical paradigm. Our duty was to identify and create truth. We were lucky to be digging whatever the particular spot was. Now we had to make the most of the opportunity, and repay our debt to the ancients whom we were trying to delineate.

Born on 14 July 1927, Mervyn Popham was the son of a West Country engineer's fitter, as his birth certificate says, who had been an engineer officer in the merchant navy in the First World War. His parents died in 1942 and 1943, when he was an adolescent. As a scholar at Exeter School, he did well in classics and helped found the archaeology society. He was also School Librarian, presaging one of his later duties in the post of Assistant Director of the British School at Athens. National service was in the Royal Navy in 1946–8, when he became an expert photographer—a practical and artistic skill he exercised for the rest of his life. He then went to St Andrew's (1948–52) and read classics, graduating with a second (and a medal for being best in General Ancient History in 1950). One of those who taught him was Terence Bruce Mitford who kindled an interest in epigraphy and took him as photographer on his excavations at Kouklia (or Palaipaphos) in south-western Cyprus. When Hector Catling visited in 1952, he found that among other members of the team besides Popham were the young Franz-Georg Maier and Jörg Schäffer (Mitford believed in re-establishing links with German archaeology), G. R. H. ('Mick') Wright, Angeliki Paschalidou (later Pieridou) and Mary Burn. The year before, Popham had gone to Greece, and visited the British School at Athens, for the first time.

This first, working encounter with Cyprus must have been a factor in his being posted there when he joined the Colonial Service in 1953, stay-

ing on the island until late 1959 (before Cyprus's independence in 1960). The experience did much to shape the rest of his life. He began as Assistant District Commissioner for Nicosia, and was then moved to the Secretariat, where he was when the Eoka emergency erupted in April 1955. Among his duties was visiting Eoka members in Nicosia prison sentenced to death. He was also present, I believe as secretary, at the meeting of the Executive Council when it was decided not to hang Nikos Sampson (later the short-lived puppet president of Cyprus whom the Greek junta installed in the attempted coup of 1974 that led to the Turkish invasion) for several convictions for murder—in view of the popular unrest that would result, Popham recalled. In 1958 he was given probably the most difficult posting in Cyprus, to be District Commissioner for the Troodos area, where the Eoka fighters used to hide. Of necessity, journeys were often by helicopter. Popham had the trauma of being in one that crashed, when he nearly died. He was pulled from the wreckage.

In Cyprus Popham came to form his apparently unsentimental ideas about Greeks, the people and their politics, based on his own experiences and observations. 'He was hard on us Greek girls', says his former pupil Irene Lemos, 'but that was because he cared. He had a theory that we had to be little Mrs Thatchers, and tough girls if we want to get on in the business. I said to him, "Yes, but you have to be proud of your Greek girls"', namely Eleni Hatzaki and herself. (That was in 1999, when Hatzaki became Curator at Knossos for the British School at Athens and Lemos was already a Lecturer at Edinburgh. But there were two others who did not last the course.) 'And the last time we met, he said, "I am proud"'. Fundamentally, he was always very fond of Greeks—even if, as one Greek colleague told me, 'he seemed still part of the British Empire, like many of you'—and liked the Greek readiness to adapt to the unexpected, and celebrate or create an occasion, recognising probably an openness in the culture that was not innate in himself. But equally he was sceptical of them, and quick to detect (and voice) unsaid motives and explanations: a quality that Greeks respect and practise in their relations with each other, but which can be misinterpreted by those not in the game. Cyprus shaped his attitudes and his politics, which were right wing in a Platonic sense of his valuing enlightened detached authority. 'The time in Cyprus must have been painful', his long-time colleague Hugh Sackett concludes. Similarly, I remember Popham later as sceptical of Lawrence Durrell, author of *Bitter Lemons* and Director of Public Relations for the colonial government, not for the quality of his writings but for his aura of sentimental liberalism, as it seemed to Popham. He learnt also as a civil

servant the necessity of method and precision. Years later, when he would still answer the telephone with a clipped 'Popham here', it was easy to imagine the young member of the colonial administration in the Secretariat buildings in Nicosia.

Besides the driving energy of his intellect, another major impetus to his strong sense of self-discipline was his homosexuality, in the era when homosexual activity was still prosecutable and homosexuals had to be extremely careful. Some found, however, that they could sublimate their needs and desires, and cope with the desperate, continuous pressure of having to be untrue to themselves in public, by disciplined hard work. I think this applies to Popham. As Assistant Director at the British School at Athens in the mid-1960s, he was notable for the depth of sympathy, surely out of personal experience, that he felt for the anguish of the sexual entanglements of (some of) the students. While clearly quite aware of what might be going on in the hostel, he was not at all a prude. But, while tolerant of others, he abhorred shoddy behaviour, of any sort. He had no affection for the brazenness of gays in the late twentieth century. If he did from time to time treat men with an indulgence that he did not on the whole allow to women, he had many close women friends, especially among those with whom he worked. His male intimates included Takis Koukis, to whom he dedicated his first book.[1] Similar close alliances during the time in Cyprus would not be surprising, but things would have been difficult with the worsening security situation.

If Cyprus both revealed Popham's bravery and decisiveness and nurtured the sense of sadness and having suffered (but with no self-pity) that seemed so much part of his character, it also kept archaeology in his life, the more valuable perhaps as some sanity and detachment in the mess of the Eoka conflict. In 1955 he met again the newly arrived Hector Catling, the first Survey Officer of the island's Archaeological Survey, and his wife Elizabeth, and would often go on expeditions with them at the weekend (if the security situation permitted, on which Popham was briefed) to the island's many ancient sites, especially if they were of the Late Bronze Age. He read in the library of the Cyprus Museum, and stayed in close touch with Mitford and would photograph objects, especially inscriptions, for him in the Kouklia *apotheke* (storeroom) and check on its condition. His 'triumph', Catling recalls, was to re-identify the open air shrine at Rantidi near Kouklia, a spectacular site in the hills (above the new Aphrodite

[1] *The Last Days of the Palace of Knossos—Complete Vases of the Late Minoan IIIB Period*, Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology, 5 (Lund, 1964): 'TO MY FRIEND *T. K.*'.

Hills golf and leisure resort) with majestic views down to the sea across the foothills of south-western Cyprus. He visited the site during Mitford's last season at Kouklia.[2] Another epigraphical success was finding, in the village of Nikoklia two kilometres north of Kouklia, the inscription recording a Cypriot oath of allegiance to Tiberius on his accession in AD 14.[3] He also met the young Swedish archaeologist Paul Åström, who soon urged him to study and write up the Cypriot pottery known as Proto White Slip ware, dating to around 1600 BC. Popham's masterly essay[4] defined the pottery, and led to a further major essay on White Slip ware as a whole, including Proto White Slip, in the standard work of Cypriot archaeology, *The Swedish Cyprus Expedition*.[5] In 1998 at a conference in Nicosia on this pottery, Popham reviewed his work of 'some 25 years or so ago', admitting that he had originally hoped to write 'a synthesis of the main lines of development of White Slip', but 'not a D.Phil. thesis of the type which is inclined to go on for many years, adding detail to detail, and which sometimes never reaches an end'.[6]

With the impending independence of Cyprus, Popham had to decide whether to stay in the Colonial Service (as the Governor, Sir Hugh Foot, later Lord Caradon, urged), in which case he would eventually have reached the Foreign Office: he was offered the Secretaryship to the Governor of Malta. Or he could apply for the official bounty for termination of the post, and use it to change his career. That he decided to do. In 1959 he went to Oxford to read for the Diploma in Classical Archaeology, where he was taught by John Boardman and Dorothea Gray, and also David Lewis. During this time, he lodged with the Catlings at 381 Woodstock Road, who came to realise, Catling writes, that 'he

[2] 'Rantidi 1910 and 1955', in T. B. Mitford and O. Masson, *The Syllabic Inscriptions of Rantidi-Paphos*. Ausgrabungen in Alt-Paphos auf Cypern, 2 (Konstanz, 1984), pp. 3–11. For a new overview of Rantidi, see G. B. Bazemore, 'The Display and Viewing of the Syllabic Inscriptions of the Rantidi Sanctuary', in J. S. Smith (ed.), *Script and Seal Use on Cyprus in the Bronze and Iron Ages* (Boston, 2002), pp. 155–212.

[3] T. B. Mitford, 'A Cypriot Oath of Allegiance to Tiberius', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 50 (1960), 75–9.

[4] 'The Proto White Slip Pottery of Cyprus', in P. Åström and G. R. H. Wright, 'Two Bronze Age Tombs at Dhenia in Cyprus', *Opuscula Atheniensia*, 4 (1963), 277–97.

[5] 'White Slip Ware', in P. Åström, *The Swedish Cyprus Expedition*, *4. 1C* (Lund, 1972), pp. 431–71; together with: 'A Note on the Relative Chronology of White Slip Ware', in P. Åström, *The Swedish Cyprus Expedition*, *4. 1D* (Lund, 1972), pp. 699–705.

[6] 'Problems Encountered in the Preparation of the Section on White Slip Ware for *SCE* IV', in V. Karageorghis (ed.), *The White Slip Ware of Late Bronze Age Cyprus* (Wien, 2001), pp. 45–7. In this retrospective review Popham gives useful leads for further work on White Slip, including the possibility of creating a 'White Slip III' group for the very late White Slip bowls.

suffered from periods of deep depression—Elizabeth persuaded him to see a doctor. At the time, we supposed (and I still think so) that it was what is now called "post-traumatic stress" from the Cyprus years.'

In 1960, the year he was elected FSA, he went back to Cyprus one vacation to help in the transition. That same year, after the row erupted about the date of the so-called final destruction of the Minoan Palace of Knossos and the associated Linear B tablets, following an article entitled 'The truth about Knossos' by Leonard Palmer in the *Observer*,[7] Boardman suggested to Popham that he examine the pottery that could be associated with the destruction and/or the subsequent 'Re-occupation'. The result is a masterly short report in the curious double volume by Palmer and Boardman that was published by the Clarendon Press.[8] Not read enough today, and omitted from the bibliography from 1963 to 1995 published in his Festschrift,[9] Popham's first published essay in Minoan archaeology (and in particular in Late Minoan pottery) foreshadows all of his subsequent work in this field, and is an early example of his confident decisiveness and his sensitivity both to excavation data and the modulations of style in Cretan Late Bronze Age ceramics—which are many times more complicated than the contemporary wares of Cyprus.

In the summer of 1961 Popham joined Sinclair Hood's excavation team at Knossos. It was an ironic start to fieldwork in Greece. Hood believed he had lined up some Late Minoan tombs as something pleasurable for Popham to dig, but their contents proved to be wholly Roman, and one of them was beside the sewage pit of the Venizeleion hospital. Ever thereafter, however, Popham declared how much he had learnt from Hood in the art of digging,[10] which Hood himself had learnt principally from Sir Leonard Woolley at Tel Atchana and Dame Kathleen Kenyon at Jericho. A year later, as a pluralist Macmillan Student cum School Student at the British School at Athens, Popham began his long contribution to the tradition of the British way of excavating in Greece, when he and Sackett, then Assistant Director of the School, took a team from

[7] L. R. Palmer, 'The Truth about Knossos', *Observer* (3 July 1960), 17, 19.

[8] 'Notes on the Stratigraphical Museum', in L. R. Palmer and J. Boardman, *On the Knossos Tablets* (Oxford, 1963), pp. *90–5*.

[9] D. Evely, I. S. Lemos, and S. Sherratt (eds.), *Minotaur and Centaur: Studies in the Archaeology of Crete and Euboea Presented to Mervyn Popham*, BAR International Series, 638 (Oxford, 1996), pp. 3–5, where 1962 and 1996 are given as the terminal dates.

[10] For example in 'Late Minoan II to the End of the Bronze Age', in D. Evely, H. Hughes-Brock, and N. Momigliano (eds.), *Knossos. A Labyrinth of History: Papers in Honour of Sinclair Hood* (London, 1994), pp. 89–102 at 89, n. 1.

the School back to the long-lived Minoan town of Palaikastro in east Crete after a break since 1906, for two seasons of excavation with the aim of reviewing the stratigraphy and history of the site, by digging in disparate but suitable areas. In aim and approach, they were following the example of Hood's series of 'stratigraphic excavations' at Knossos carried out between 1956 and 1961. Palaikastro also maintained the pattern of 'School digs', in which (almost) all long-term students were expected to participate, whether or not they saw themselves as dirt-archaeologists. In 1964, after much prospecting for the Bronze Age in Euboea,[11] they started the next School dig at Lefkandi-Xeropolis. This Bronze Age tell on the west coast of the island has proved to be of immense historical importance, especially for the end of the early Bronze Age and the whole Middle Bronze Age sequence, and also has significant Protogeometric and Geometric (Iron Age) deposits. In 1967 Sackett returned to Knossos to start a new round of School digging there with Popham, at the 'Unexplored Mansion' site (principally in 1967–8 and 1971–3), with its grand Late Minoan town house, where Popham was lead-director, and important Roman buildings on top, where Sackett was lead-director. Many took part in these three excavations. Popham was a brilliant exponent of the art and logic of digging, and of the need not to fudge but to make up one's mind in drawing sections of the trenches—since these are the primary record of, and key to understanding, the history of the site. Those who went on to direct their own excavations have in turn passed on the British School tradition of digging in Greece, usually with further refinements and adjustments of their own, in an apostolic succession of excavating that emanates from Woolley and is now well over half a century old. In Greece the leading apostles of this gospel of the logic of elucidating the past from diagnosis of layers of earth remain Hood, Popham, and Sackett.

Nine years in Greece, first as the senior student at the British School (1961–3) and then its Assistant Director (1963–70), in succession to Sackett, under A. H. S. ('Peter') Megaw as Director from 1962 until 1968—Popham knew him already when he was Director of Antiquities in Cyprus—followed by P. M. Fraser, gave Popham the opportunity and time to master Late Minoan pottery, which he expounded during the 1960s in articles, monographs, and reviews of unusual lucidity. His pottery

[11] L. H. Sackett, V. Hankey, R. J. Howell, T. W. Jacobsen, and M. R. Popham, 'Prehistoric Euboea: Contributions toward a Survey', *Annual of the British School at Athens* (hereafter *BSA*), 61 (1966), 33–112, records the work of this extensive survey from 1939 (Hankey) to 1965.

studies reveal an art historian's sharp, intuitive appreciation of style and its changes and development, which was enhanced by his ability to draw and photograph the pots and sherds himself, as well as having Petros Petrakis, the School's master-potmender, reconstitute them. If often much of the new creation was a plaster of Paris reconstruction, yet it was, and is, hard to fault Popham's decisive interpretations of how the originals would have been, so imbued was he in the creativity and style of the ancient Cretan potters and painters. He delighted in rounding off a reconstruction by painting the plastered part with the Minoan motifs that he knew had originally been there. Equally, he was driven by the historian's quest to understand the political and social changes that the pottery helped both to date and, as he saw it, to identify. He was incapable of viewing pottery, or any other of the Minoan achievements, in isolation from the circumstances that produced them. The debate on the history of Knossos in the fifteenth, fourteenth, and thirteenth centuries BC encouraged this approach, but here was a mindset that was innate in him and ruled his excavating as much as his study of what he, or others (and notably Sir Arthur Evans), had dug up. 'His view was, "If you want to be a pottery person, you have to be an excavator. And if you want to be an excavator, you have to be a pottery person"', says Hatzaki. History was the bond between all his studies. For Knossos and Late Minoan III Crete, the result was a sparkling series of precise pithy reports, often in reviews (and therefore in danger of being overlooked), of the evidence (usually with new, valuable nuggets of information) and the appropriate conclusions for discerning historians. Following the report on his first investigations into the Late Minoan III pottery of Knossos in the Stratigraphical Museum at Knossos in *On the Knossos Tablets*, his next gem of an essay was another short article with the typical title of 'The Palace at Knossos: a Matter of Definition and a Question of Fact'.[12] Many others like this continued to appear for the rest of his life.

Pottery studies were the core of his major review of the evidence for the date of the end of the Knossos Palace. *The Destruction of the Palace at Knossos. Pottery of the Late Minoan IIIA Period*[13] confirms, almost all scholars accept, the validity of the Evans–Mackenzie stratigraphical evidence for the event, while slightly adjusting the date of it from Evans's Late Minoan II to the time when the subsequent Late Minoan IIIA1 style of pottery was in general use and the first Late Minoan IIIA2 begininng

[12] *American Journal of Archaeology*, 68 (1964), 349–54.
[13] *Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology*, 12 (Göteborg, 1970).

to appear. This has the effect of placing the destruction sometime around 1375 BC, rather than Evans's 1400.

At the same time Popham was writing important articles on other aspects of Late Minoan pottery in the *Annual of the British School at Athens*, which remain—together with his subsequent articles on this pottery—basic reading for experts as much as for students. Particularly important is the judicious and authoritative conspectus he presents in 'Late Minoan Pottery, a Summary'.[14] In all of these accounts Popham shows himself well aware of the analytical approach of the Swedish scholar Arne Furumark towards the contemporary, and often closely similar, Late Helladic (or Mycenaean) pottery of the rest of Greece, and of the value of Furumark's approach in creating order—but he never follows such a *dirigiste* line as Furumark does. Two reasons suggest themselves. One may be that Popham's artistic sensibility and his empathy with the Minoan potter/painter forbade ultra-rigid demarcations. Styles did not change overnight. The other, connected reason may be his constant awareness of the often difficult to discern, but always present chronological value of pottery for dating archaeological levels and thus creating history. Both factors demand a sensitivity to the fluidity inherent in ceramic evidence—and make tight decisions all the harder. Equally, he encouraged others in the 1960s to study and publish pottery groups so that the subject would be better known—and more people would learn how to distinguish Late Minoan pottery from Late Helladic. Among these was Yannis Tzedakis, later Director of the Greek Archaeological Service, whose rescue excavations at Late Minoan sites in the town of Khania in west Crete opened a new chapter in the Bronze Age history of the island. Popham, of course, was quick to recognise their significance.[15] At Knossos he also set about the reorganisation of the many boxes of sherds that Evans had kept from his excavations in the early 1900s, in recognition of their value as primary evidence. Although this collection was known as the Stratigraphical Museum, it was in fact housed in dark unvisited corridors and cubby holes inside the ruins of the Minoan Palace. However, construction began in 1962 of a new building, on the site of the tennis court of Evans's Villa Ariadne, to house the sherds and other finds from Knossos. Here the material from Evans's excavations was arranged by students of the School, under Popham's general direction. He knew

[14] *BSA*, 62 (1967), 337–51.

[15] One early result was I. Tzedakis, 'L'atelier de céramique postpalatiale à Kydônia', *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*, 93 (1969), 396–418.

the Late Bronze Age pottery through and through, and enjoyed ferreting about in the boxes to retrieve new fragments that could add much, with proper explication, to the long history of Knossos, the longest-inhabited settlement in the Aegean. Today the Stratigraphical Museum remains the centre of research at Knossos. At the time of his death, Popham was working on an expansion of his many articles into a full history of Late Minoan pottery, together with a review of early Late Minoan pottery from deposits at the palatial site of Zakro at the east end of Crete.

When the Assistant Directorship at the British School came to an end in 1970, Popham moved to an Associate Professorship in the Classics Department of the University of Cincinnati, under John L. Caskey. Since well before the war, this department had been the jewel in the university's crown, thanks to generous funding from Louise Taft Semple, which enabled Carl Blegen to lead Cincinnati expeditions to excavate at both Troy and Pylos. The surprising result was that this midwestern (and then municipal) university led the United States in study of the Aegean Bronze Age by some forty years; and even in the 1970s there were only three other institutions to compete with it: Bryn Mawr College, Indiana University at Bloomington, and the University of Pennsylvania. Caskey and Popham made a powerful combination, and Popham helped Caskey by pressing him to compose two long and still valuable preliminary reports on his excavations on Kea, in anticipation of the final reports which, like the final reports of Caskey's other major excavation at Lerna in the Argolid, have almost all appeared after his death (in 1981). Jack Davis, now Carl W. Blegen Professor of Greek Archaeology at Cincinnati, applied to Cincinnati for admission to graduate school expressly so as to study with Popham, only to find when he arrived that he had already left for Oxford. Overall, despite the opportunities for plentiful funding and being able to take a term a year off for research in Greece, it was not an especially happy time for Popham, to whom America must have seemed a world too much apart, even though he made a few good friends, and established a link, that still has life, between the Department and the British School at Athens which Caskey, as an anglophile, welcomed and which Cadogan, who in 1974 succeeded Popham in the position, was to continue.

In 1972 Popham left Cincinnati to become the first University Lecturer in Aegean Prehistory at Oxford, combined with a Fellowship at Linacre College. The new post met a need, partly because Dorothea Gray had retired from teaching and Hector Catling, who had combined teaching the subject at graduate level with his position in the Ashmolean Museum, had by now left Oxford to become Director of the School at

Athens. Another factor was Oxford's position as a centre of early Aegean studies, especially of Knossos, since the Ashmolean holds the archive of Sir Arthur Evans, still very much in use for explicating Knossos, and has the most important collection of Minoan antiquities outside Crete. Popham was the right choice which, in view of his experience, cannot have been difficult for the appointing committee. (The three other candidates on the shortlist were Cadogan, Dickinson, and Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood.) He stayed in the post until he retired in 1994 and continued to be based in Oxford until his death. Part of his duties, as had been the case for Gray, was to give the bread and butter lectures on 'Homeric Archaeology' for undergraduates taking Classical Moderations—a curiously Oxonian field of study and examination that attempts to match text and monuments, whether these are of the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age. Popham did not find it particularly congenial: it was neither straight Homer nor straight archaeology. Far more to his liking were his graduate pupils, of whom he did not have many—he could at times be austere and/or depressed to the point of being quite forbidding, and at the same time utterly exacting, if more from his female pupils than his male pupils. It needed guts and grit to be a pupil of his but, for those who survived, the experience has altered their lives and shaped their subsequent research, as the publications of Doniert Evely, Eleni Hatzaki, Irene Lemos, Colin Macdonald and Judith Weingarten, his prize(d) pupils, demonstrate. The attentive reader should be able to detect in them always the sense of 'What would Mervyn say?' The same holds, in a different degree, for those who collaborated with him as contemporaries or near-contemporaries in digging and studying pottery, notably in the cases of Hugh Sackett and Elizabeth Schofield. Pupils and colleagues joined forces in his Festschrift *Minotaur and Centaur*, a title that unites the mythical monster of the Knossian labyrinth with what may well be one of the earliest representations, if not the earliest, dating to the later tenth century BC, in Greek art of a specific classical myth—a terracaotta centaur, thirty-six centimetres high, wounded in the left knee—that was found broken in two different tombs at Lefkandi in 1969.[16]

Without a family, Popham could give much time during his years as a don to his research and had no difficulties in being in Greece frequently for extended stays. His work had two principal foci: Lefkandi

[16] V. R. Desborough, R. V. Nicholls, and M. Popham, 'A Euboean Centaur', *BSA*, 65 (1970), 21–30.

of the twelfth to eighth centuries BC (Late Helladic IIIC to Geometric), and Late Minoan (together with the so-called Sub-Minoan phase) Knossos from around 1600 to around 1000 BC, or a little later. In 1969, when the centaur was found in Tombs 1 and 3 in one of the cemeteries of Lefkandi, it became clear that investigating the site was not simply a matter of defining the long history of settlement on the hill/tell of Xeropolis. There were also extensive cemeteries to be investigated, principally of the Sub-Mycenaean and Early Iron Age era after the demise of the latest Bronze Age settlement on Xeropolis, although the hill also provides post-Bronze Age occupation that can be related to the tombs. Lefkandi offered, and still offers, an extraordinary opportunity to create the fullest possible history through combining the evidence of all its former inhabitants, whether living or dead. These cemetery excavations at Lefkandi began as a 'rescue dig' in 1968, and generally stayed so, being carried out by Popham and Sackett mostly in collaboration with the Greek Archaeological Service, where their principal colleagues were Evi Touloupa, Petros Themelis and Petros Calligas. The tombs and their pyres were exceptionally difficult to excavate. Success would not have been possible without the skills of the Cretan pickmen who came over for the task—latterly Nikos Daskalakis, Andreas Klinis, and Nikolakis Tsikalakis—and of Evely, Lemos, and Hatzaki and other pupils and colleagues, all forming a small, ultra-professional team. Two permanent mainstays in Crete and Euboea were Sackett, whose calm and kind approach to life, and skill as an excavator, made him an ideal co-director for Popham for nearly forty years, and David Smyth, a brilliant and at times erratic but always workaholic surveyor. If the work was often difficult to organise, the importance of the discoveries in creating a new picture of Greece in the early first millennium BC could always justify returning to the low slopes of Lefkandi to excavate in advance of the construction of yet another holiday home by the sea. Through its long sequence of inhabitation and burial from the end of the Bronze Age running into the Early Iron Age, its surprising range of trade connections with Cyprus and the Levant, its unique monumental hero's shrine-tomb with human and horse burials, its evidence of sophisticated metalworking at around 900 BC and the ever-present possibility of tying it closely to the early history of Greek colonisation and the 'Lelantine war' between Chalcis and Eretria (Lefkandi lies between the two), Lefkandi has probably done more than any other site in Greece to take the dark out of the so-called 'dark age'—

and promises to yield yet more evidence, as the study of the Popham–Sackett phase of research draws to a close and a new round of field research begins.[17]

Knossos, and its pottery, history and connections with the rest of Minoan Crete, with the counterpoint, in personal terms, of the company of old friends in the village or among the itinerant archaeologists, never ceased to be at the heart of Popham's scholarly impetus. His report on the Unexplored Mansion[18] produced vital, judiciously discussed, and unexpected evidence—including masses of pottery—for the Late Minoan II phase at the end of the fifteenth century BC. This covered a generation or two of the time between the Late Minoan IB destructions and disasters that struck throughout the island (including the town of Knossos but, apparently, not the Palace itself) and the great destruction of the Palace that Popham had already identified as happening around the time of the transition from Late Minoan IIIA1 to Late Minoan IIIA2. Mycenaeans from mainland Greece were probably in command at Knossos and may well have been the agents, or among the agents, of those Late Minoan IB catastrophes that inaugurated this phase of Cretan history (Popham had little faith in the explanatory value of universalising theories of natural disaster). Their presence is inferred from various cultural changes, which Popham discussed from time to time in dense but lucid short articles, the chief change being the introduction of the Linear B script as the first known way of writing Greek. The big surprise at the Unexplored Mansion was to discover that its Mycenaean or Mycenaean-connected occupants did not use the house in the elegant lifestyle that its Minoan builders may have envisaged but, instead, turned its resplendent central hall into a bronzesmithy with scrappy little partition walls. However, this

[17] The principal reports to date are: M. R. Popham, L. H. Sackett, and P. G. Themelis (eds.), *Lefkandi 1. The Iron Age: the Settlement, the Cemeteries*, British School at Athens Supplementary Vol., 11 (London, 1979 (plates), 1980 (text)); R. W. V. Catling and I. S. Lemos, *Lefkandi 2. The Protogeometric Building at Toumba. Part 1. The Pottery*, British School at Athens Supplementary Vol., 22 (London, 1990); M. R. Popham, P. G. Calligas, and L. H. Sackett (eds.), *Lefkandi 2. The Protogeometric Building at Toumba. Part 2. The Excavation, Architecture and Finds*, British School at Athens Supplementary Vol., 23 (London, 1993); M. R. Popham with I. S. Lemos, *Lefkandi 3. The Toumba Cemetery: the Excavations of 1981, 1984, 1986 and 1992–4*, British School at Athens Supplementary Vol., 29 (London, 1996 (plates)).

Lefkandi 4, covering the Late Helladic IIIC levels of Xeropolis, is in press. Work for the text volume of *Lefkandi 3* is under way, as is, or soon will be, work for the remaining prehistoric periods (Early Helladic, Middle Helladic, and Late Helladic I-IIIB) of Xeropolis.

[18] *The Minoan Unexplored Mansion at Knossos*, British School at Athens Supplementary Vol., 17 (London, 1984).

may well have been the place of manufacture for the magnificent weapons found buried in contemporary graves at Knossos as the kit of people who are often viewed as the Mycenaean equivalents of medieval squires.

Besides the Unexplored Mansion, two smaller excavations should be mentioned, both dating to his years as Assistant Director of the British School. One was a rescue excavation in a field above the upper village at Knossos which, though small, produced a deposit of pottery that has become a benchmark for Middle Minoan IIB at the end of the Old Palace period, as well as interesting waterworks.[19] The other was also a rescue operation which yielded two tombs (Tombs 3 and 4) belonging to an already known cemetery at Sellopoulo at some distance from the Palace, and dating to around or just before the final destruction of the Palace.[20] Tomb 4 gives a vivid view of this (Late Minoan IIIA1) phase of Mycenaean domination of Knossos, a generation or so after the Late Minoan II evidence from the Unexplored Mansion. The tomb, like Tomb 3, is cut in the soft marl rock in a shape that is derived from the Greek Mainland, with a long straight entrance-passage (dromos) and square/rectangular tomb chamber. The contents are exceptionally rich, including gold necklaces, a bead of (Baltic) amber, a silver bowl or cup, sealstones, an engraved gold ring of the epiphany of a deity swooping as a bird from the sky while a male embraces an aniconic rock, three other rings, three sealstones, an Egyptian faience scarab with the cartouche of Amenophis III, an imported Mycenaean jug, plain clay drinking vessels coated with tin (to make them look like silver), and a magnificent collection of 39 bronze weapons, tools, mirror discs, and vessels (described by the Catlings in an exemplary account) buried for three people, two of whom 'were clearly warriors', Popham writes. He then asks if they were Mycenaeans, but quickly remarks that, while it is tempting to see them as 'militant Mycenaeans' in charge at Knossos, 'the distinction between Mainland and Cretan culture so marked in the Middle Bronze Age became increasingly blurred in the following epoch', and speculates that 'Knossian nobles may have learnt or developed a love of militant display from their Mycenaean counterparts'. It is not impossible that these are burials of Cretans. But, speculation apart, these Sellopoulo tombs provide solid information of lasting value. There was a close correspondence in weapons, jewellery, bronzeware and burial habits between Crete and

[19] 'Trial KV (1969), a Middle Minoan Building at Knossos', *BSA*, 69 (1974), 181–94.

[20] M. R. Popham, E. A. Catling, and H. W. Catling, 'Sellopoulo Tombs 3 and 4, Two Late Minoan Graves near Knossos', *BSA*, 69 (1974), 195–257.

the Mycenaean Mainland, while Knossos was still an innovative centre of craft production, despite many Mycenaean-type features of the products. The burials also strengthen the case for a warrior class at Knossos at the time, as originally suggested by Evans, and, thanks to a large body of contemporary artefacts, confirm the general correctness of existing typological and chronological schemes. (The extra dating evidence from the Egyptian scarab is a bonus.)

These two Knossos reports are excellent examples of Popham's scholarship. He starts with a meticulous account of the circumstances of discovery, and proceeds to an equally meticulous account of the finds, without indulging in unnecessary detail, such as giving the colour of the clay according to Munsell Soil Color Charts—which he would see as beyond the mindset of the Minoan potter, while at the same time it confers a false objectivity on the observations of the modern observer. Popham's approach was very much that of the best sort of connoisseur—thoroughly subjective, but drawing on a long, hands-on experience of the material and, in the end, almost always right. The climax, and driving purpose behind all the forensic examination of the evidence, is to make historical sense of the observations. Constantly, Popham puts his evidence into a bigger picture, writing succinctly and densely. One must read attentively, not least so as not to miss what he does not say. The usually short conclusions of his articles, together with a few longer summary accounts,[21] are masterly distillations of Cretan Late Bronze Age history, and always the result of much pondering, and manage to say in a few pages what others would need books for. I should like to think that, if asked now for more general history, Popham would feel that he had little more to say beyond what he had already said, briefly and cogently.

Continuing, however, to present primary evidence remained an immediate call on his resources, as was writing up the development of Late Minoan pottery, which was something that he had wished to do since the 1960s, and was at last at work on in a consecutive way when his health deteriorated in the late 1990s. By then, he had written up his excavations or felt that he had done all that he could do himself, having assigned outstanding study and publication to others (who were not, or did not have the freedom to be, usually so punctilious as he was). His last monograph was a corpus, prepared with Margaret Gill, of the sealings in use at the

[21] Culminating in 'From Late Minoan II to the End of the Bronze Age' (see above, n. 10).

time of the final destruction of the Palace of Knossos.[22] It is an important body of material that needed a full presentation. And it took Popham straight back to the issues of dating Knossos's end as a functioning palace, which is where his archaeological career in the Aegean had begun when he embarked in the early 1960s on studying the sherds that form the principal dating evidence for the event, supported by the evidence of the sealings and Linear B tablets.

A quiet, determined man, at times terrifying in his austerity, unusually perspicacious, set on getting things right but sceptical of pseudo-objective discourse of those who did not have the boldness to make intellectual decisions and stay with them, Popham taught, formally and informally, many the practice of this historical discipline that lacks the comfort of written history and literature. We all learnt, and gained in our own bravery in making the hard decisions in reading and recording a wall of earth whose layers document centuries of history. In his scholarship Popham was always an artist. His love of classical music ('it kept him sane', says Weingarten) and passion for the quality of the reproduction of sound, memorable in his taking his gramophone with two very large speakers to place in the bottom of the stairwell of the grubby hotel we stayed in for the Lefkandi excavations in the 1960s, may well have had its counterpoint in the way he approached pottery, recognising the rhythms and patterning of an anonymous potter/painter of the fourteenth century BC as easily as those of Beethoven.

He loved Greece and Greeks, and managed especially with them to be simultaneously tolerant and sceptical, and was proud of his Greek students. They, like his other students, friends, and colleagues, were in turn proud to collaborate with him as members of his team. Touloupa gives a lively, direct account, from a Greek view, of working with him, whom she did not really know at first, on the Heroon at Lefkandi in 1981—and the intensity of his concentration on the digging.[23] For Popham certainly, excavation was the paradigm of archaeological research in the cause of writing history, with its hands-on approach which Popham embraced wholeheartedly, delighting in practical solutions. He was not an arrogant excavator. He chose his sites carefully but he could never have expected

[22] M. R. Popham and M. A. V. Gill, *The Latest Sealings from the Palace and Houses at Knossos*, British School at Athens Studies, 1 (London, 1995).

[23] E. Touloupa, 'Αναμνησείς από μια ανασκαφή με τον Mervyn', in *Minotaur and Centaur* (see above, n. 9), pp. 166–7.

what the soil, and the skill of his teams, would reveal. For us, his work in Crete and Euboea is paradigmatic. Hatzaki and I were expecting him at Knossos at the time he died on 24 October 2000.

Mervyn Popham was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1988.

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Popham's bibliography from 1963 to 1995 may be found in *Minotaur and Centaur* (see above, n. 9), to which one may add some articles/sections that have already been cited (see above, n. 2, n. 6, n. 8, n. 11); also 'The Sub-Minoan Pottery', in L. H. Sackett, *Knossos: from Greek City to Roman Colony. Excavations at the Unexplored Mansion 2*, British School at Athens Supplementary Volume, 21 (London, 1992), pp. 59–66; 'The Final Destruction of the Palace at Knossos: Seals, Sealings and Pottery', in J. Driessen and A. Farnoux (eds.), *La Crète mycénienne*. Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique Supplément, 30 (Athènes, 1997), pp. 375–85 ; and 'An East Cretan LM IA Vase at Knossos', in G. Cadogan, E. Hatzaki, and A. Vasilakis (eds.), *Knossos: Palace, City, State*. British School at Athens Studies (London, forthcoming), which is his last article.