



JOHN COOK

## John Manuel Cook 1910–1994

JOHN MANUEL COOK was born on 11 December 1910 in Sheffield, the younger son of the Reverend Charles Robert and Mary Manuel Cook. His elder brother, Robert Manuel Cook FBA, was to follow an academic career also, and in classical archaeology. Their grandfather had gone to sea aged fourteen but returned after seven years and became vicar of Out Rawcliffe, between Preston and Blackpool. Their mother's father was a village carpenter who became a wealthy manufacturer of furniture in Sheffield. Their father moved to be vicar of Fence-in-Pendle (East Lancashire) in 1913 and educated his sons at home to the age of nine, then in boarding school (Aysgarth School, Newton-le-Willows), at some sacrifice. John went on to Marlborough College (1923–9) and thence to King's College, Cambridge, with the help of scholarships. There he read Classics, taking the Group D papers in classical archaeology in the second part of the Tripos, but he shone rather in language and literature, winning the Sir William Browne's Medal for Greek Ode and the Members' Latin Essay Prize in 1933. He always took pride in his skills in Greek and Latin, and especially in his knowledge of early Greek literature.

Studentships allowed him to spend 1934–6 in Greece, at the British School at Athens. Professor (later Sir John) Beazley's work on Athenian vases had ensured that further pottery studies were likely to be a feature of British scholarship. Humfry Payne, Beazley's pupil and Director of the British School 1929–36, had put in order the pottery of Corinth and encouraged students of the School to extend the exercise

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to other wares. John saw that the seventh-century pottery of Attica, between the orderly Geometric styles and the inception of black figure, could repay study through the close analysis of both figure drawing, in the Beazley manner, and of ornament. His article 'Protoattic Pottery' appeared in the *School Annual* 35, published in 1938. It remains the fundamental study of a subject that has occupied many scholars since. His conclusions have not been seriously affected by new discoveries in Athens (the Kerameikos and Agora) and the eventual publication of the great find on Aegina, material from which (in Berlin) was not wholly available to him. He supplied a typology and chronology of the vases, with attributions and names for artists and styles which remain in use to the present day. However, this devotion to the art-historical aspects of Greek archaeology was not to be the guiding principle of his later academic career. In common with other British archaeologists at the School he was a prodigious walker, exploring areas of Pindus in 1935, and had a taste of excavation in helping with the pottery finds from Lord Rennell of Rodd's work on Ithaca.

In 1936, at the end of two busy years in Greece, he was appointed Assistant in Humanity at Edinburgh University, and Lecturer in Classical Archaeology in 1938. He had virtually to set up the subject there, with the active encouragement of Professor (later Sir William) Calder, then the Dean of Faculty. But the outbreak of war in 1939 interrupted further development of his department. His short sight delayed admission to the army (the Royal Scots). His knowledge of modern Greek brought him into the Intelligence Corps, and in 1942 for training to Matlock, where the Commandant was the archaeologist Stanley Casson. 'I ceased from then on trying to be a soldier in either behaviour or mentality.' Nor did he need to be. A British Mission had been established in Greece to coordinate and encourage guerilla activities, a Mission well staffed by ex-students of the Athens School and other classicists. In late summer 1943 he was parachuted into west Greece to serve as a British Liaison Officer with the resistance movements. He landed in the Valtos, forested mountains west of the Achelous, to become a spectator of the senseless civil war between the factions ELAS and EDES which lasted until February 1944. In May he took charge of the landing ground at Neraidha, above the Thessalian Plain, and oversaw the maintenance in villages of 7000 Italians who had joined the Allies and been abandoned by ELAS. He was successful in both these operations and most of the Italians eventually returned home. He was then summoned to a staff post in Athens with the Department of

Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives (under Sir Leonard Woolley) and travelled Greece to distribute materials for the repair of damaged monuments and to compile the HMSO publication *Works of Art in Greece, the Greek Islands and the Dodecanese: Losses and Survivals in the War* (1946). The war brought him yet closer experience of a wider range of the land of Greece and its sites than his student years in Athens. Demobbed in March 1946, he returned to Edinburgh, only to be appointed almost immediately, and almost without warning, to the Directorship of the British School at Athens, which he took up in the autumn of the same year.

The School presented both domestic and academic problems. Part of the buildings in Athens had been used by the Swiss and Swedish Red Cross and its Hostel was in the hands of the British Embassy until 1947, while the School's property in Crete, Arthur Evans's 'Villa Ariadne', had been the HQ of the German General Commandant for Crete. The Athens buildings were not in good repair, but the Library was safe. A handful of full-time students appeared in 1947 and numbers rapidly grew. The School's finances were precarious until the British Academy, under Sir Mortimer Wheeler, secured central funding for the overseas Schools in 1950–1. It was necessary, however, to relinquish the control (and expense) of the Villa Ariadne, and John conducted the delicate negotiations of handover to the Greek Archaeological Service of the Villa, the site of Knossos and accompanying land, except for the territory of the 'Taverna' which became the School's new base. Beside the problems of local negotiations in a country which for some years after the war was still in a state of civil unrest, and of dealings with British officialdom, the burden of academic responsibility for the students must have seemed slight. Under John's direction the School's authority in Athens and especially its good relations with Greek archaeologists developed rapidly. His wife and family provided a domestic atmosphere as much appreciated by the ex-Service students as by the less mature, and he offered expert guidance and encouragement to their studies. He was especially proud of the part the School could play in facilitating the re-opening of the German Institute and the establishment of the Swedish. The renewed interest and activity in Greek archaeology in British universities after the war owed no little to his eight-year stewardship in Athens, however uneasy he may have felt in an administrative role which seemed to have been forced upon him and for which he did not consider himself entirely suited.

His own academic interests were not neglected and he published

short studies related to his student work of the 1930s, notably an account of Late Geometric Athenian vase-painters ('Athenian workshops around 700' in the *School Annual* 42), and an iconographic study ('A Geometric graveside scene' in *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 70 (1946)). He was a good friend of the collector Hélène Stathatou, taking students to her house near Kolonaki to view her treasures; he published a Geometric amphora and gold band from her collection in the *School Annual* 46. The Directorship obliged him to undertake rescue excavation in School territory near Sparta, promptly published in 1950, and in the same year he excavated under Alan Wace and later published (*Annual* 48) the Agamemnoneion sanctuary at Mycenae, giving a shrewd account of its evidence for 'Homeric' hero cult. His experience of Greece and Greek archaeologists was enlarged by the Directorial duty and burden of writing annual 'Archaeology in Greece' articles for the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*.

Excavation had always seemed a major element in the School's role but new projects were forbidden in Greece. John looked east, and in 1948 began joint excavations with Ankara University (Professor Ekrem Akurgal) on the site of Old Smyrna at Bayraklı, where British participation continued until 1951. John always had an eye for sites and Smyrna proved to be (what it still is) the most spectacular and informative of the early Ionian cities. The British element was mainly responsible for the stratigraphic control (under James Brock), and Smyrna was the first early, major city site of East Greece to be explored in a responsible and detailed manner. John was well aware of its historical, archaeological and art-historical importance, and moved quickly to publish that part of the excavation which had been allotted to the British. Turkish archaeologists have continued to work there since, and in his last years John was turning again to notes and plans of the early dig to refresh and improve interpretations of the site. It was, in its way, the first modern British 'Classical-Greek-style' dig in an eastern country, where excavation life and manners were markedly different. Seton Lloyd, Director of the British Institute at Ankara, visited and commented on the quality of the finds and added 'these Greek archaeologists are really awfully nice. . . . They drink wine rather than spirits and are slightly donnish in the least offensive way', and on a site-hunting expedition at a weekend 'like Pendlebury, these people from Athens have the same, almost fanatical energy where purposeful exploration is concerned' (in *The Interval*, 1986, 122–3).

The excavation had quickened John's interest in the archaeology,

topography and history of the east Aegean coastlands, and in 1949 he embarked on a series of archaeological reconnaissances, mainly in the company of George E. Bean. They concentrated on Caria and, later, the Troad. This was a style of survey very unlike those undertaken today, where the aims are generally different, the areas covered far smaller, the expense and personnel vast. To elucidate problems of site identification, occupation and history over wider tracts of territory required exceptional intellectual as well as physical stamina. This was more than simple site-hunting, and John brought to bear on the geographical-historical problems of the areas surveyed a considerable expertise, some of which he had largely to acquire as he went along, in epigraphy (where Bean's skills were invaluable) and numismatics, in relevant mediaeval and later literature and maps ('the maps are often missing from old books'), as well as in the realia of many different periods which they observed or collected. The work was in many respects before its time in terms of the study of settlement patterns, urbanisation and the 'inter-disciplinary' exploitation of the widest variety of sources. He could be scathing about a later generation of archaeologists who stop the jeep just long enough to ask if there are any inscriptions, but he was also led into disagreement with some scholars whose approach was more wholly epigraphy-centred, such as Louis Robert. He found in his surveys, and in the demanding archaeological and historical research that they required for any effective publication, a broader satisfaction than could be gained from the forms of specialisation indulged by more and more classical archaeologists, and which he had tasted in pottery studies in the 1930s. The results of the surveys were published in a series of massive articles in the Athens School *Annual* and elsewhere, and represent an unusual and impressive archaeological contribution to broader historical issues.

He left Athens in 1954. The School was in good running order and about to embark on a busy period of expansion for which he had prepared the ground. He was appointed Lecturer in the Classics Department of the University of Bristol, promoted to Reader in 1955 and appointed Professor of Ancient History and Classical Archaeology in 1958. The university had never been innocent of archaeology, especially as it related to historical problems, but with John the department increased enormously in personnel and students, encouraged also by the Greek archaeological interests of N. G. L. Hammond, who was Professor of Greek 1962–73 (and had been John's CO for a period in Greece). John was a first-rate teacher, able to inspire both interest and

confidence, and is well remembered for this quality by students from his days in Edinburgh, Athens and Bristol. He took some interest in local British archaeology, which he was on the whole glad to relinquish once a Lecturer in Roman Britain was appointed. This was Barry Cunliffe, and with this appointment, and that of Keith Branigan, John showed his skills as a talent-spotter. The teaching demands of a growing department occupied much of his time, and from 1966 University administration proved no less demanding: he was successively Dean of Faculty, head of the Classics Department and Pro-Vice-Chancellor, and in these positions he acquired the image of a much respected elder statesman.

His academic research in Bristol was to some degree restricted by library resources. He decided that a continuance of his survey work was probably the most feasible academic activity open to him, and that he should develop his authority in east Aegean studies. In 1959 and 1960 he returned to Turkey travelling mainly in the Troad with Bean but also conducting a small excavation, with the Beans and his son Michael, 'on a shoe-string', at Kastabos in the Rhodian Peraea, where he uncovered an unusual Ionic temple to the goddess Hemithea of the early Hellenistic period. W. H. Plommer assisted him as architect, with 'no more than the foundation plan, some plain blocks and three bags full of mouldings', and together they published the results, neatly and quickly, in 1966. He commented that, 'Few sites, large or small, have been so lucky in the scholars who have turned their hands to them'. He further deployed his expertise in east Greek matters in a semi-popular book in Thames and Hudson's Peoples and Places series, *Greeks in Ionia and the East* (1962). The way he was able to use his archaeological research to explore historical problems is well demonstrated by his excellent chapters for the new edition of *The Cambridge Ancient History* (vol. II part 2, 1975; and in vol. III parts 1 and 3, which did not appear until 1982), and in his paper for *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Association* 7 (1961), in which he considered the problems of classical Ionia on the fringes of an Athenian Empire but still pressed by a Persian Empire. He also wrote regular surveys of Archaeology in Western Asia Minor for *Archaeological Reports*, in which the accounts of new work could be given a broader setting.

From 1963 he was occupied with his most ambitious survey project, in the Troad, with successive visits in 1966–9 supplementing the results of trips in 1959 and 1960. The result was the major study, *The Troad*, published by the Clarendon Press in 1973. This had required not only the tireless work on the ground and in villages, but search for evidence

of possible relevance to ancient demography in Turkish census reports. It crowned his archaeological career in historical and topographical survey and confirmed the breadth of his archaeological skills.

Work in western Asia Minor had made him increasingly aware of the importance of Achaemenid Persian presence there in the classical period, and in 1969, in the first sabbatical term he had been able to take, he drove with his wife to Iran to take a closer look at the Persian homeland. An invitation to contribute a chapter to the *Cambridge History of Iran* vol. II helped him to decide to turn to Achaemenid history which he judged to have been treated in the standard works with inadequate attention to Persian and oriental sources and topography. A longer driving tour in the east in 1972 took them over 17,000 miles through Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Armenia and eastern Asia Minor. His wife's death in January 1976 and his retirement from the Bristol chair that summer, brought him back north to Edinburgh and temporarily away from his books. Re-marriage and restoration of an interest in work and writing brought him back to Persian matters and in 1983 Dent published *The Persian Empire*. It was well received, and he rightly took amiss the criticism of some Perso-centric scholars that he was too Greco-centric in his approach. He had taken a massive subject and treated it with the same scrupulous regard for all sources, literary and archaeological, that he had devoted to the townships of Caria and the Troad, and with an exceptional understanding of historical geography. In later years he was troubled by ill health and failing sight but continued to write and review, taking especial pleasure in a chapter on Classical Art for Robert Browning's *The Greek World* (1985), since it was a subject on which he had never written though he had taught it for many years. He reviewed regularly, mainly for the *Classical Review*, and his reviews are conspicuous and unusual for placing the interests of the reader and the intentions of the author before displays of erudition.

Throughout his academic career his family was of central importance to all he did. In June 1939 he had married Enid May, daughter of Dr W. A. Robertson, Chief HMI for Scotland. She had been educated at James Gillespie's Girls' School (crème-de-la-crème at the school that inspired Muriel Spark's Jean Brodie), then at Dundee High School. At Edinburgh University she was outstanding and won a First Class in Classics within three years of the four-year course. She was awarded a studentship to the British School at Athens where she met John in 1935 and joined the School party walking in Pindus. In 1936–7 she took a

Teaching Diploma at Cambridge. Her Scottish background and the years they spent in Edinburgh made John more of a Scot than a North Briton, in both speech and manner, probably contributing no little to his relaxed and warm-hearted approach to people and work. Enid was brilliant but modest, efficient, level-headed and devoted to John's well-being, universally admired and loved. Her counsel during the difficult days of the war, and afterwards at the Athens School, made possible for him what, by temperament, he might well have found impossible decisions. She accompanied him on many of his gruelling topographical expeditions, providing the physical and logistic support necessary for the completion of his sometimes ambitious programmes. Of his book *The Troad* he wrote 'it would be difficult to say just how much of it is hers', and she played an important role in combing travellers' literature for information relevant to an understanding of Achaemenid Persia. They had two sons, Michael and Nicholas, both of whom turned to academic careers, in oriental studies and music, both of whom also collaborated in the *Troad*, as Islamist and photographer. Enid was an ideal partner for John, and when she died in 1976 John's will to live seemed shattered. But in the following year he married a close friend of his and Enid's, recently widowed, Nancy Easton Law ('the survivors must close ranks'), and she successfully restored his interest in life and work.

John was a tall, handsome man, blue-eyed, with a shock of fair, later white hair. He was not athletic, but a dogged walker, in the tradition of the British School of the 1930s. He was not exactly decisive either, except in academic matters, but was determined and observed the highest standards in his life and work. He had learned in the army 'to decide what you want to do and quietly get on with it', but there was a strong sense of duty too. An inveterate smoker, of cigarette or pipe, and natural raconteur, he was probably the best repository of tales, true and improved, of the Athens School in its Golden Age, the 1930s; this shows through in his obituary of Sylvia Benton in *British School Annual* 81 (1986), ix–x. A characteristic was the placing of unvoiced inverted commas around significant words and phrases. He wrote lucidly, with flair and wit, qualities readily apparent in his published work and in memoirs privately circulated after his death: *Greece in the 1930s*, *In the mountains of Greece 1943–1944*, and *A Fifteen-day Visit to Athos, September 1945*.

He was elected Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1948 and Fellow of the British Academy in 1974. In his later years he suffered

from emphysema which contributed to, but did not cause, his death in Edinburgh on 2 January 1994, aged eighty-three.

JOHN BOARDMAN

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*Note.* Major sources have been a short memoir written by John Cook for this purpose, as well as those circulated after his death (see above). For his Directorship at the Athens School see Helen Waterhouse, *The British School at Athens. The First Hundred Years* (London, 1986), helped by my own recollections, as Student and Assistant Director in 1948–50, 1952–5. I am deeply grateful for contributions and comment also from his brother Robert, Nancy Cook, N. G. L. Hammond and Simon Hornblower.