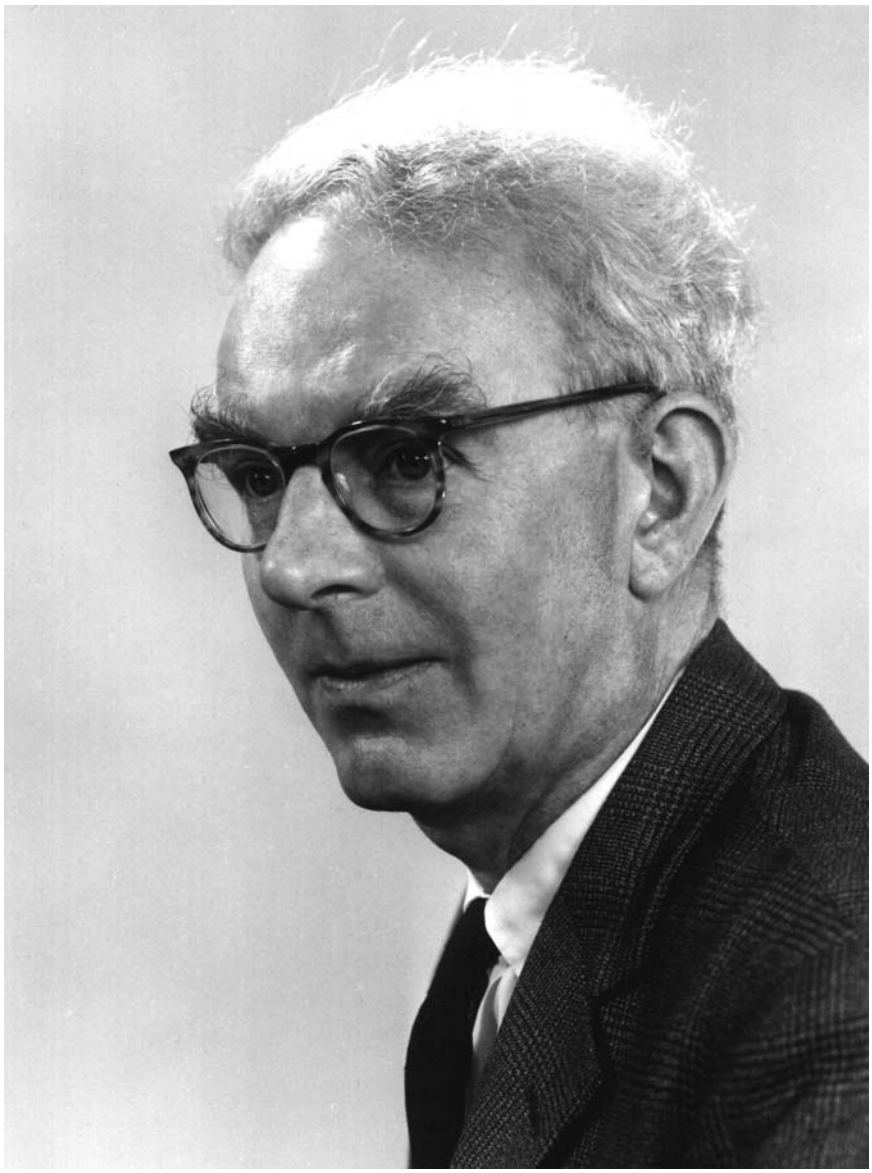

ROBERT COOK *Eaden Lilly*

Robert Manuel Cook
1909–2000

ROBERT MANUEL COOK was born on 4 July 1909 in Sheffield, the son of the Reverend Charles Robert and Mary Manuel Cook. His younger brother, John Manuel Cook FBA, was destined for a somewhat different career in classical archaeology (see these *Proceedings*, 87 (1995), 265–73, also for the family). The young Cooks were educated at home until they were nine, then in a boarding school (Aysgarth School, Newton-le-Willows). Robert went to Marlborough College (1923–9), thence to Clare College, Cambridge, where he read Classics, achieving a Double First and a Distinction in Classical Archaeology. In 1932 he was awarded a Walston Studentship and went to the British School at Athens for two years' research. The Director at the School was Humfry Payne, who had learned skills in the classification of Greek pottery from Beazley in Oxford, and was applying them to the non-Athenian wares. His magisterial *Necrocorinthia* had appeared in 1931 (Oxford) and pointed the way for further work. Robert was one of the first recruits to the new discipline, along with his brother and Arthur Lane, and the results of his and Lane's research filled the volume of the *Annual of the British School at Athens* which appeared in 1936.[1] The contrast in styles is illuminating. Lane, working with Laconian pottery (which had at first been designated as Robert Cook's subject), presented his results in a somewhat more discursive manner, with greater emphasis on iconography and painters' styles; he went on to become an expert on Islamic pottery. Cook was doggedly scientific in his analysis of every single aspect of his vases, both shape and

[1] *BSA*, 34 (1933/4), 1–98.

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decoration, and was no less thorough in treatment of issues of distribution, imitations, origins, and source; yet all presented economically and with a light touch. In those days his subject, 'Fikellura pottery', was generally agreed to be Rhodian in origin. Cook weighed the possibilities, admitted Rhodes' claim, but also speculated about a *koine*. He thought of Samos, but his scepticism has been rewarded by the results of clay analysis which seem to declare for Miletus, although for some scholars Samos remains in the picture.

In 1934 he returned to Britain to become Assistant Lecturer, then Lecturer in Manchester University, and Sub-warden of St Anselm's Hall (1936–8). In 1945 he was appointed Laurence Reader in Classical Archaeology in Cambridge, then Professor in 1962 until retirement in 1976. During the Second World War he joined the Civil Service. He continued an active scholar for many years after retirement; I revert to his tenure of the posts in Cambridge below.

The classification of Greek pottery, and thereby the revelation of its archaeological, art-historical and historical significance, remained his major, but not exclusive, interest. He published a study of Clazomenian pottery[2] where there was more definition by painter than by the broader groups which had seemed suitable for the Fikellura, and although he did not deal with Chian pottery in the same way he explored the evidence of its distribution and inscriptions (with A. G. Woodhead).[3] He remained devoted to the pottery of the east Greek world, which was certainly more difficult to control than mainland Greek wares. In a volume of the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* he published the late archaic East Greek pottery in the British Museum, mainly from sites dug by the British in Egypt (Naucratis, Tell Defenneh) or acquired from Rhodes, an ideal opportunity for closer study of major sources for these wares.[4] He had published the Clazomenian painted sarcophagi found in his brother's excavations at Old Smyrna,[5] and was persuaded to put his comprehensive knowledge of the class into a magisterial book in the *Kerameus* series.[6] His interest in the pottery of the area culminated in the publication of *East Greek Pottery* which he wrote with Pierre Dupont, who dealt with the plain wares and analyses.[7] His determination to bring order into the subject,

[2] *BSA*, 47 (1952), 123–52.
[3] *BSA*, 44 (1949), 154–6; 47 (1952), 159–70.
[4] Volume Great Britain 13, British Museum 8 (1954).
[5] *BSA*, 69 (1974), 55–60.
[6] *Clazomenian Sarcophagi* (Mainz, von Zabern, 1981).
[7] R. M. Cook and Pierre Dupont, *East Greek Pottery* (1998).

but never at the expense of the evidence, by proposing convenient answers and classifications, led to several smaller publications dealing with problems of terminology and the questions posed by imitations of the Greek wares in other parts of Anatolia, such as Caria.[8]

These studies might be regarded as mainly art-historical, though they were certainly more than that in his mind, and were treated in the manner of an archaeologist rather than an art-historian; they have contributed to our ability to deal with the evidence of the pottery of the region on a more reliable basis than that of most parts of Greece, outside Athens and Corinth. They depended on scrupulous attention to detail and his main legacy to his pupils, apart from a wary scepticism, was to insist on the importance of looking at things properly and comprehensively. The merits of this may seem self-apparent, but they have been increasingly overlooked in modern studies which have other aims beside, a fact that he deplored since they then seem to be built on unreliable foundations.

Other areas of pottery study attracted him, notably the construction of ancient kilns, a subject into which the truly art-historical connoisseurs rarely ventured.[9] It led to consideration of purely scientific analysis, and especially the archaeomagnetic study of fired clays.[10] This depended on them being examined *in situ* at the time of firing, whether deliberately in a kiln or accidentally in a conflagration. This was worth investigation even though its useful application was bound to be limited. He also welcomed the opportunities offered by analyses of clays, though only once the study was properly established and with adequate comparanda available. These have done much to confirm or adjust his conclusions about provenance.

To avoid, he alleged, having to go on lecturing on Greek pottery in the same old way, he wrote *Greek Painted Pottery* which was published in 1960 (Methuen), with a third edition in 1992 (Routledge). This was the first comprehensive account of the subject since Ernst Pfuhl's *Malerei und Zeichnung der Griechen* of 1923, though there had been shorter studies, by Ernst Buschor and Andreas Rumpf (whom Cook admired). The book properly demoted Athenian vases to their just proportion of the whole, in terms of history if not numbers, and was generous in giving due value to many other aspects of the subject—technical and practical, but was

[8] *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 12 (1993), 109–16; 18 (1999), 79–93.
[9] *BSA*, 56 (1961), 64–7.
[10] *Antiquity*, 32 (1958), 167–78; *Archaeology*, 12 (1959), 158–62; *BSA*, 58 (1963), 8–13.

dismissive of the value of the subject for what it can tell of Greek trade, and regarded iconographic studies, beyond simple identification, as purely speculative. (Perversely, his inaugural lecture in Cambridge was iconographical.[11]) A splendid chapter on the history of the subject to the mid-twentieth century reveals many of the reasons for his sceptical approach to the possibility of knowing much more about it than it physically presents, and which can be analysed in the manner he and others had demonstrated in their work: 'Although there are rare students of genius, most are clever only in detail, normally uncritical of their methods or presumptions and blind to the further consequences of their arguments . . . We may laugh at these past follies, but they are also a warning to look for equal follies of our own.' His book will long be read with profit and pleasure by students who will judge for themselves what more the subject might offer.

Cook was not totally obsessed by pottery studies. Short essays on architecture demonstrate an unexpected interest,[12] which probably led to the appointment of a classical architectural scholar to a post in Cambridge (Hugh Plommer). He had toyed with the idea of teaching the principles of Greek construction with the help of toy blocks, like Lego. He enjoyed subjecting new theories to the closest scrutiny, even those of his pupils, dissecting them scrupulously yet with the clear presumption that there must be something either wrong or quite unprovable.[13] His reviewing was caustic and always to the point. The rather negative approach in much of his writing is belied by his obvious enjoyment in exercising his subject and in teaching it to the young.

He was ready to apply his archaeology to broader cultural and historical issues, with characteristic caution. His manner in such studies has been influential though seldom acknowledged, and he anticipated many of the more sceptical attitudes of scholarship of the last twenty years. There are few if any major issues of early Greek archaeology/history which he did not touch, taking major problems and dissecting them neatly and briefly, with cautious but acceptable conclusions, or none at all if the evidence would not bear it. These are mainly short essays, economical in wordage but packed with data and thought. In other hands they would have been major articles or books, though not the better for it, but his reticence means that they have been overlooked by all but those who read them as they appeared. In three pages he demonstrated

[11] *Niobe and her children* (1964).
[12] *BSA*, 46 (1951), 50–2; 65 (1970), 17–18.
[13] *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 107 (1987), 167–71; 109 (1989), 164–70.

to prehistorians what they might learn from classical archaeology—that changes in burial custom need mean no change in population, that in religious matters archaeology and literature often conflict, that material remains may be no guide to true prosperity, that trade in pottery is not an index for trade in other things: 'It is a valuable corrective to consider the material remains of historical peoples and to test archaeological methods of deduction in problems where the answer is already known.'[14]

While still in Manchester he brought archaeological expertise to the problem of the date of the *Aspis* poem of Hesiod.[15] A long essay on Ionia and Greece in the early archaic period reduced the residual 'ionicism' of earlier scholarship to proper proportions,[16] though he did not suspect that Ionia's poor showing in early pottery was answered by precocity in decorated metalwork which was very influential in the homeland. The origins of coinage he ascribed to the need for large payments, probably for mercenaries.[17] There is a salutary essay on the origins of Greek sculpture, giving proper value to Syria and demoting Egypt.[18] The importance of painted pottery for studies in trade he judged slight;[19] and other studies in trade involve the Corinth *diolkos*, the Vix crater, and the non-relevance of the distribution of Laconian pottery to Laconian trade.[20] The diffusion of the Greek alphabet and its variety is explained by different and personal choices.[21] Having looked at the evidence for the Dorian invasion he decided that it is 'not a subject that is worth much study'.[22] Ischia and Cumae were founded for subsistence not trade, and Spartan 'austerity' is much exaggerated.[23] He coldly demolished the easy assumption that early artists were inspired or even influenced by epic poetry.[24] The pitfalls of absolute chronology were a recurrent interest.[25] Sculpture is not neglected.[26] Here and there in his work there is a residual antiquarian

[14] *Antiquity*, 34 (1960), 177–9.
[15] *Classical Quarterly*, 31 (1937), 204–14.
[16] *JHS*, 66 (1946), 67–98.
[17] *Historia*, 7 (1958), 257–62.
[18] *JHS*, 87 (1967), 24–32.
[19] *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, 74 (1959), 114–23.
[20] *JHS*, 99 (1979), 152–5.
[21] *American Journal of Archaeology*, 63 (1959), 175–8.
[22] *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 8 (1962), 16–22.
[23] *Historia*, 11 (1962), 113–14; *Classical Quarterly*, 12 (1962), 156–8.
[24] *Bulletin antieke Beschaving*, 58 (1983), 1–10.
[25] *BSA*, 64 (1969), 13–15; *JHS*, 109 (1989), 164–70.
[26] *JHS*, 96 (1976), 153–4 (*meniskoi*); in *Festschrift F. Brommer* (Mainz, 1977), 77 (Praxitelean heads); *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 37 (1978), 85–7 (the Peplos kore not a copy of a *xoanon*); *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1989), 525–8 (composition of the Apollo Sosianus pediment).

chauvinism, reluctant to attribute too much to the foreigner. And he introduced a distinguished elderly lecturer at a Classical Triennial Conference in Oxford as 'Professor Luisa Banti, although a woman, . . .'.

Some of his writing for a wider public is as sceptical as anything he wrote for the professional, yet manages to be inspiring. This appeared especially in *The Greeks till Alexander* and his paperback *Greek Art* which is still in print.[27] The former carries comment on history and society as well as archaeology and art. 'The greatest service of the Greeks of the Classical period was that they created the first modern civilisation.' The Greeks were for Cook well worth studying, and in detail, but honestly: to mention the Parthenon only once, in passing, yet devote two pages to pottery in his Classical Period chapter, should satisfy even the most iconoclastic.

In *Greek Art* he concentrated on what could be known and was most plenteously preserved. Pottery was for the first chapter, therefore; the best chapter, and the longest, was on architecture. In some respects the work seems diminished by an unwillingness to explore beyond the immediate purpose and appearance of what he described, dismissing some possibilities rather unjustly; at the same time it makes the main narrative almost faultless since all possibly unjustified speculation is avoided.

The witty cynicism which is characteristic of much that he wrote, especially for a wider audience, is a welcome antidote to the romantic or hyper-imaginative which is still found in much literature on classical antiquity. It is sincere and provokes thought but at times may seem to have become almost wilful. The hard-headed approach excluded much that even the more conservative scholars of today would regard as essential elements in the study—notably iconography and the willingness to look beyond the image and object to the intentions of its creator and response of the ancient viewer: 'the metopes [of the Parthenon] had no particular relevance and . . . were chosen from the stock artistic repertory'; 'Not much [of the sculpture in Athens museum] of the Hellenistic and Roman periods is or deserves to be on view.' His final attack was timely and biting, on the antiques trade, on excavators who do not publish, and on museums that hoard: '"Cultural heritage" is a fine-sounding slogan, of which an ad-man would be proud; but if it means that every object above a certain age must remain for ever in the country in which it was found, it is hardly more reasonable than necrophilia.'[28]

[27] *The Greeks Till Alexander* (1961); *Greek Art* (1972), Penguin/Pelican reprint (1976). There is also a lengthy essay in *Masterpieces of Western and Near Eastern Ceramics* (Tokyo, 1979).
[28] In *Periplous* (eds. G. R. Tsetskhladze *et al.*, 2000), 68–9.

His remarks and attitude make the reader stop and think, and smile, and yet may leave a regretful if not even sometimes a sour flavour; but the sceptical heritage is a necessary ingredient in all honest scholarship, no less important today than it has ever been. It was as though he had decided at an early stage what scholarship was about and the attitudes to adopt, and found no reason to adapt or alter his views in the light of experience. He can never be accused of having been narrow but he was perhaps less critical of some of his own views than of those of others. But there will never be a time when Robert Cook will not be read by students and scholars with profit and pleasure.

In Cambridge after the Second World War the Professor was A. W. Lawrence, with whom the Cooks for a while shared a house, and the other classical archaeological luminaries were Jocelyn Toynbee, Frank Stubbings, and Charles Seltman. Classical archaeology figured optionally in the Tripos and was reasonably well attended, the teaching being done for undergraduates wholly by lecture, in the Museum of Classical Archaeology in Little St Mary's Lane, which housed the library and a substantial Cast Collection. Robert would arrive briskly and noisily in the lecture room and start speaking immediately. He was slim, with a shock of wiry red hair which flew off at a tangent to his left, and continued to throughout his life. He had a wary but ready and often mischievous smile, and his delivery was only occasionally impeded by a pipe-smoker's dry cough and mumble. He was not an impressive lecturer yet more than one of his audience can still trace their attitudes to archaeology back to what they heard in 'the Ark'. He was a major influence on the attitudes and work of more British classical archaeologists of the generation after the Second World War than is generally realised.

Towards the end of his tenure he had to fight attempts to replace the chair with two junior posts and to change the syllabus, largely promoted by Moses Finley, who never quite understood what Greek archaeology and art were about but was supported by others. The Museum of Classical Archaeology fell uneasily between the Fitzwilliam Museum and the Faculty of Classics, and Cook championed its independence. In Oxford the museums were more closely linked and Faculty role rather ill-defined; this seems a common problem with the subject, and 'Oxford' supported Cook's stand. Oxford's then Reader commented through him and with his approval to the Faculty that 'it is not easy to explain to those who profess literature and history that it is pointless to expect archaeologists to provide predigested information for their use without teaching the basic principles and background, which is what most of the art, as taught here

and in Cambridge, is about'. Cook was successful. He drew comparisons with the teaching in other universities and judged that Cambridge had got the emphases about right, he also defended the broader syllabus of the Diploma in Classical Archaeology, noting that Oxford's more specialised course provided an alternative for those who wished it. He effectively saved the status of the subject in Cambridge for his successor, Anthony Snodgrass, to build on.

He devoted much thought and care to the Cast Collection. Experiment with cleaning and painting of the cast surfaces which lent them an appearance more of stone than plaster ('a slight crystalline sheen') led to the treatment of the whole collection, though it can be faulted by some as disguising the nature of the casts themselves. This is a case where Cook valued appearance, for teaching and display, over strict honesty, possibly because many casts were copies of copies anyway. He carefully prepared his successor for the fight which was to develop over the Ark when Peterhouse College thought to reclaim the territory, but he approved its new installation in Sidgwick Avenue, and wrote a brief Guide to the collection which was published in 1986. His views about casts have proved pessimistic, given the revived interest in them in recent years: 'Casts are now [1977] out of favour with most people who consider themselves civilised and even with some archaeologists. This is partly because they have been brought up on photographs and are not used to viewing objects in three dimensions, and partly because the surface of untreated plaster is dead and easily becomes dirty.' Besides the casts he built up the department's collection of sherds and pottery as aids for teaching; the resources of the Fitzwilliam Museum were rather neglected for this purpose.

He was a highly effective academic chairman, both of the Cambridge Faculty of Classics and, for 1983 to 1987, of the Managing Committee of the British School at Athens. He had no truck with members who had not read their papers or who seemed unable to come to a decision or even say anything at all, and was fierce with time-wasters, whatever their seniority. He was never a 'college man' and rather despised the pretensions of Oxbridge society.

He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1974, but never attended its meetings, and had been made a Fellow of the German Archaeological Institute in 1953. In 1991 he was presented with a Festschrift volume of essays by pupils and friends, though its purpose was unnecessarily disguised by the Cambridge University Press. He naturally disapproved of Festschrifts as such, but he made an exception for *Looking at Greek Vases* which was a tribute he much appreciated.

To his family Robert was 'Freddie', probably for his red hair and early political views. His brother John, who was a year younger but began his career in parallel with Robert's and with similar interests, turned more to the field and excavation, in Greece and Turkey, so their academic paths seldom crossed thereafter, except where Robert helped publish John's finds, but they remained close. In 1938 Robert married Kathleen, daughter of James Frank and Eileen Hardman Porter. She supported Robert in many ways, with wit and excellent cooking, and as a critical companion on travels in south Greece which resulted in their joint *Southern Greece: An Archaeological Guide* (Faber, 1968). This typifies much of Robert's attitudes to his chosen subject, from the opening 'Most visitors to Greece stay too long in Athens', to concluding hints about *retsina*—'the average foreigner learns to tolerate the taste after about a gallon', and conversion tables for sizes of men's socks and women's dresses. He could not even resist a quiet gibe at his own subject, while defending its importance, in Athens museum: 'Through perhaps excessive research the great output of Greek pottery with painted decoration has been classified by styles and schools and even painters and so vase painting has become the best understood branch of Greek art.' And a sympathetic reflection on the changes in modern Greece: 'Greece is changing fast and the old-fashioned peasant is at last disappearing, lamented of course by irresponsible enthusiasts who do not have to endure his miserable existence and still less his wife's.'

Kathleen's death in 1979, soon after his retirement, threw him back on his own considerable resources, not least the domestic. His home in Wilberforce Road was well attended by Cambridge classicists, seniors and students, who could rely on at least adequate sustenance and Robert's special brand of comment on the world of scholarship, often deliberately provocative. However much he disapproved of the new trends in classical archaeology which were apparent not least in his own university, their proponents were always welcomed, and glad to be welcomed; even the ranks of Tuscany could not but acknowledge his quality as critic and friend. He died in Cambridge on 10 August 2000, shortly after his ninety-first birthday.

JOHN BOARDMAN
Fellow of the Academy

Note. Principal sources have been personal knowledge, A. M. Snodgrass, J. Reynolds, conversations and correspondence with family and mutual acquaintances.