Mary Hamilton Swindler 1884-1967 by

As an interpretive archaeologist who remained always closely in touch with her background as a student of Classical literature, Mary Hamilton Swindler contributed to Twentieth Century archaeology through her publications and sponsorships. Her two major achievements were a comprehensive book on Ancient Painting, widely acclaimed for its scholarship, and an innovative fourteen year editorship of the American Journal of Archaeology. Among the many honors and awards given in recognition of her accomplishments were several of which she was the first woman recipient. From 1912 through 1949, she was a professor of archaeology and Classics at Bryn Mawr College, the first of the succession of distinguished women archaeologists who have created professional reputations in virtual identification with the college. The large number of significant Bryn Mawr archaeologists who attribute the beginnings of their careers to Professor Swindler’s inspirational teaching and their continuation to her practical support and guidance also comprise a major contribution to the history of archaeology in America.

Personal Background

Proud of her origins in the “open spaces of the Middle West,” Mary Hamilton Swindler regarded her early environment as a shaping factor in her life. “It taught me what kindness and tolerance I have, as well as the ability to live and work with people.” Her “open spaces signified the university town of Bloomington Indiana where she was born on New Year’s Day 1884, as the second daughter of Harrison T. Swindler, baker and restaurant proprietor, and his wife Ida M. Hamilton; and where she received her education from elementary school through the M.A. degree. Both at home and at Indiana University, Mary Swindler enjoyed an atmosphere favorable to the education and careers of women. Her maternal grandfather, James B. Hamilton, a Civil War veteran, who returned from a Confederate prison in Alabama to serve for many years as minister of the First Methodist Church in Bloomington, had provided thoughtfully for his daughters. Mary was proud of the fact that her aunt, Susanna Hamilton, had been among the seven members of the first contingent of women to receive degrees from Indiana University in 1871, while her mother, Ida M. Hamilton, was in the preparatory program in 1878, although she did not enter the university. Upon the occasion of her being nominated for an honorary degree from Indiana in 1941, Mary Swindler cited these old family connections in her letter of acceptance to President Hermann Wells: “no honor from any other source could mean more to me.” In the introductory paragraphs of her commencement address, “Education in a Changing World,” Swindler spoke more broadly about her perception of Indiana’s contribution to women’s academic progress, remarking: “I am glad to return to an institution which early recognized that women are people and called upon them to play their part in academic life and in the world at large. The university was a pioneer among state universities, not only in opening its doors to women, but also in appointing them to academic posts.”

Although the claim to primacy may be overstated, since certain public universities further West had begun life as co-educational institutions before any woman had entered Indiana University, it is understandable why Swindler saw the university as supporting
women’s professional identities. Academically there had never been a double standard, as some institutions of the late Nineteenth Century espoused in prescribing a different curriculum for women than for men. That women should be admitted with equal status to study the same subjects as their fellows was a stipulation made by the first student, Sarah Morrison, a trustee’s daughter, who was already a Mount Holyoke graduate when she challenged the all-male constituency of I.U. and subjected herself to a second college education. While the six women who had followed Morrison felt their social singularity keenly enough to develop such compensatory organizations as a literary society of their own, increasing numbers came to produce a cordial social and academic integration of the sexes. Although the campus newspaper and literary magazines fattened on co-educational romances with a certain innocent Booth Tarkington flavor, a number of women were, not only participating in regular undergraduate societies, but also competing for leadership. The first woman editor of the senior yearbook, *The Arbutus* took office in 1901, the same year that Mary Swindler herself entered the freshman class.

To this young woman entering with a strong background in standard college preparatory subjects, the university offered two major advantages: a rigorous course of study in Latin, Greek, German and Philosophy and the opportunity to develop through co-educational competition in extra-curricular activities her subsidiary talents in journalism and drama that might be seen as the foundation of the diversified activities of her later career.

In her 1905 graduating class, she was one of two majors in Greek as opposed to some twelve in Latin. The curriculum in the major comprised sixty hours of course work in a graded sequence involving all the major authors from Xenophon to Thucydides, and even selections from Theocritus. Her senior Greek Professor was Horace Hoffman, an Indiana native with a B.A. from I.U. but a scholar who had done graduate work at Harvard and traveled extensively abroad. His concept of Classical study exemplified Wilamovitz’ comprehensive formula: “Greco-Roman civilization in its essence and in every facet of its existence.” Although the university did not offer a program in archaeology, Hoffman was keenly alert to the excitement of contemporary field work and discoveries and desired to keep himself and his students informed of the newest. He did his best to procure plaster reproductions of ancient sculpture, and this was one of the goals of his two terms of study abroad.

Another personality relevant to her college career was the Dean of Women, Mary Bidwell Breed, to whom Swindler paid homage in her dedication of the 1905 *Arbutus*. Dean Breed probably exerted the greatest practical influence in shaping her future. Herself a Bryn Mawr Ph.D. in Chemistry, Dean Breed had early on marked Swindler as a candidate for a graduate fellowship at the college. In her letter of recommendation to President Thomas she described her candidate Swindler as: A natural leader who has been in the foreground alone with the men while meanwhile a thousand or more other young women students have come and gone.”

In the summer of 1909, en route to Berlin with her Mary E. Garrett Fellowship, Swindler paid a visit in Paris to Dean Breed, who had by this time left Indiana for a higher position at the University of Missouri. Later, in the course of writing her dissertation, Swindler herself was to assume the women’s deanship at Indiana for several years as a summer job. For her part, Professor Breed, who went on to an influential position at the Carnegie Institute, considered Mary Hamilton Swindler as one of her
professional achievements. Her congratulatory letters applauded every new mark of distinction.

**Bryn Mawr Years:**

The year 1905-1906 found Swindler returning to Indiana for an intensive program of graduate study in Greek and Latin leading to the M.A. Her thesis was on the topic “Women in Euripides.” During the spring of 1906 she wrote the nationally competitive Greek examination that brought her to Bryn Mawr as the Fellow in Greek in September. During her first year she read Attic Orators with Sanders and continued throughout her next two years of formal seminar work to read both Latin and Greek authors. At the same time her curriculum every semester included an “archaeological seminary.” Whether or not she had brought from Indiana an interest already whetted by her first glimpses of Greek material culture, her gravitation towards archaeology appears as a natural outcome of increased exposure to artistic material that would seem to reflect in some ways the developing strength of the discipline itself, not only at Bryn Mawr, but throughout the country.

The history of the Bryn Mawr program that Swindler herself wrote in later life is our best source for its formative stages. When she entered in 1906, the study of Classical Archaeology was contained within a Department of Art and Archaeology, founded in 1895/96 by Richard Norton, the son of Charles Eliot Norton who had introduced the study of Greek Art at Harvard and had become a major influence in the development of the study in America. Classical antiquity had been visibly present in the halls since 1893 when Mary Garrett presented twenty six marble copies to the trustees. So it would seem that President Thomas’ long term plan of development had marked archaeology for personal attention. Norton’s successor Joseph Clark Hoppin added more specifically archaeological offerings, including his own specialty subject, Greek vase painting, to the curriculum, but he also offered Classical Topography, Mycenean studies, and two courses in Greek mythology. Using family resources to purchase vases for their aesthetic qualities and teaching possibilities, Hoppin was the first donor to the incipient collection of antiquities that would ultimately grow into the Ella Reigel Museum. When Hoppin himself left the College in 1904, his successor was Dr. Carolyn Ransom (q.v.), a specialist in Egyptian art whose 1905 doctorate from the University of Chicago was only the second awarded to a woman. She further expanded the program with an even broader range of courses--“numberless” as Swindler called them--and worked intensively on the library collection. Under Dr. Ransom’s headship, Edith Hall, the first fellow whom the college sent to Athens, received the first Ph.D. in archaeology in 1908. Until the spring of 1909, Dr. Ransom was Mary Swindler’s sole archaeology teacher. Her “profound scholarship,” as Swindler later wrote, “left a deep impression on many budding archaeologists,” and the Preface to *Ancient Paintings* pays tribute to Caroline Ransom’s teaching as a vital source of inspiration underlying the book.

The first course with Dr. Ransom on Greek and Roman vases sent Swindler examining the collection in the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences. An unpublished kylix loaned by the American Philosophical Society caught her attention for the presence of a signature, *Nikosthenes epoisen*, on its foot. Her excitement at the sense of discovery must have spilled over into a communication to friends in Bloomington,
since a January issue of the *Indiana Daily Student* under the heading “Graduate Makes Good” carried a notice that Miss Mayme Swindler had made “what might prove to be an important discovery in the field of Classical Archaeology,” with prospects of publication should experts judge the signature to be genuine.\(^7\)

In fact the situation, as Swindler actually developed it in her *American Journal of Archaeology* article of 1901 (13:142-150) was more complicated because the *Nikosthenes* belonged only to the foot of a black-figured kylix wrongly attached to a red-figured shell. With reference to Furtwangler’s criteria in *Griechischen Vasenmalerei*, she identified the painting as work of the “master of the Penthesilea kylix, citing as her evidence several precise stylistic hallmarks: detailed similarities in the drawing of horses, the poses of youths and older men on the exterior of the kylix, the superiority of the interior design. Showing a firm confidence in her powers of observation, her discussion embodies the animating characteristics that become a feature of her spectatorship in the study of painting. “Life-like” drawing is important. The painter has a “feeling for rapid movement,” in the case of the horse “the pose of the forefeet and the erect position of the head give it a spirited air.” Identifying the general subject as the departure of an ephebe for his required military service, she gives a narrative dimension to the figures based upon their conversational interaction. Her attribution of the Philadelphia was followed in 1915 by an article that expanded the corpus of the Penthesilea painter by a catalogue of pots in American museums. In addition to describing seventeen vases and fragmentary vases, including one in Bryn Mawr’s collection, she answered certain stylistic questions about the painter. He was a great innovator, comparable to wall-painters of his day, who had his own workshop, but was all the same uneven in his productions, turning out some remarkable masterpieces but also some of poor quality. By refining stylistic distinctions, she distinguished his work from that of the Brygos painter. In *Ancient Painting* the Penthesilea painter receives notice as one influenced by the paintings of Polygnotus both in his use of a grandiose style and in color. These articles prognosticate, not only Mary Swindler’s career-long interest in Greek painting, but also the admiration for scientific precision of analysis that led her as Editor-in-Chief of the *AJA* to devote two honorary issues to the work of J.D. Beazley.\(^8\)

In 1909-10, a Mary E. Garrett Fellowship European financed a year of study abroad, divided between the Friedrich Wilhelm Universität in Berlin and the American School of Classical Studies. She traveled with Dörpfeld on the mainland itinerary, with Karo in Crete, and she also participated in the School’s excavations in Corinth, to which she apparently returned in the early summers of 1911 and 1912.\(^9\)

Back at Bryn Mawr in 1911, Mary Swindler financed her next two years’ work on her dissertation “Cretan Elements in the Cults and Rituals of Apollo” with teaching positions in Latin at the nearly girls’ preparatory schools, Shipley and Miss Wright’s, as well as in the Bryn Mawr tutoring service. The departure in 1912 of Professor Ransom for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York meant changes in the archaeology program and a new stage in Mary Swindler’s career. During 1912 her employment also included the position of reader in Latin at Bryn Mawr and the following year brought her first full time employment at the college with the title Reader in Latin and Demonstrator in Archaeology. Along with the recruitment of Rhys Carpenter, this appointment marked the formal separation of the Classical Archaeology Department from Art History. At the same time she was already
sufficiently known to have been offered a position as Professor of Archaeology at Mount Holyoke College.

**Teaching:**

Six years from the date of her entry into its graduate program, Mary Hamilton Swindler joined the college faculty of Bryn Mawr as a teacher of Latin and Archaeology. Along with her colleague Rhys Carpenter she built the podium, one might say, of the monumental Bryn Mawr program. Appointing these two young scholar teachers as a team was one of Carey Thomas’ characteristically bold gestures and perhaps one of her most inspired. Edith Finch tells the traditional story concerning Rhys Carpenter’s transformation from Greek scholar to Classical Archaeologist. As a young instructor in Greek at Columbia he had never considered archaeology, until President Thomas called him for an interview in which she instructed him to go and study the subject for a year in Athens and come back to teach it at Bryn Mawr. The cooperation of Mary Swindler as an archaeologist was clearly different, representing less of a presidentially engineered metamorphosis than a recognition of interests and authority already established within the developing field. Throughout their long harmonious colleagueship Carpenter and Swindler covered the entire field of archaeology, the one offering courses in architecture and sculpture, the other in vases, painting, Etruscans, and Roman subjects. They shared the Aegean and the Bronze Age. Beyond subject coverage, however, their approaches complemented each other, each urging upon students his/her characteristic critical watchword. Carpenter: “See what you look at,” and Swindler: “What is the significance?”

As a classroom lecturer, Mary Swindler held her own in company with the charismatic Carpenter. Her course in ancient painting as given in 1920 was what determined Dorothy Burr (q.v.) to become the first Bryn Mawr undergraduate B.A. in Classical Archaeology. But lecturing was not her most important manner of teaching, but rather direct engagement. On the first day, the introduction to Classical Archaeology that Frances Follin Jones was taking, “Miss Swindler entered the classroom with her hands full of fragments: terra cotta figurines, clay lamps, etc.” Unlike Burr, who entered Bryn Mawr already predisposed to archaeology, Jones was a convert from Science and Math.

Students particularly admired her approaches to painting with an eye for precision in drawing and the command of words to explain what she saw. Tireless in bringing the latest discoveries to her students, as Sara Immerwahr recalls, she combed the Anzieger reports of the Kerameikos excavations by Kunze and Kübler and translated for her students all their accounts of the Sub-Myceanaean, P.G. Geometric and 7th Century graves.

Friendly hospitality was the other side of Mary Swindler’s demanding pedagogy. Frequently she invited students to her apartment in Low Buildings for tea, but even without invitation graduate students, at least, were always welcome to drop in. Students remembered her tea parties (she brewing a particularly good Hukwa quite ceremoniously), but also her monumental efforts to boost their careers, both individually and collectively. “She was,” Lucy Merritt recalls, “the only person to pay attention to our
financial conditions” and this was perhaps because she had to use ingenuity in financing her own progress toward her degree. For students, as for herself, the goal was to reach Athens as soon as possible. This too was an enterprise in which the training she provided helped them to help themselves. On the occasion of her appointment to the editorship of the *AJA* in 1932, she spoke proudly of the number of Bryn Mawr girls studying in Athens. The editorship itself provided a new financial opportunity for assistants who could type correspondence, read proof, and make indices. All the editorial assistants made their way to Athens.

Swindler herself was an energetic and enthusiastic traveler, although financial responsibilities for family members curtailed her resources for this purpose. All the same, she did manage in the early 1920’s to visit all the sites covered in her Ancient Painting, whose descriptions of color and effect make clear that much of the writing was based upon direct observation. Traveling was also an aspect of her teaching, since many of her journeys were made in the company of students and involved lecturing on site. In 1932 she participated as lecturer in an “Odyssey Tour” arranged by Louis Lord for students and faculty primarily of Oberlin and Bryn Mawr. As a Visiting Professor during her 1938 sabbatical in Athens her lectures attracted such a following that the audience had to be limited. An occasional traveling companion was Norelle Brown, a Head Teacher of the Phoebe Anna Thorne Model School that operated from 1913-1931. In company with Brown and Lucy Shoe, Swindler made her first visit to Istanbul, where she was dismayed to see how the mosaics of Santa Sophia had been covered. Only on second thought did she remember to admire the architecture. Later travels included a short trip in 1933 to Petra, whose rock cut facades, especially in their parallelism with the forms of Roman painting, so captured her imagination that she interwove her personal impressions with Nabatean history to create one of her most colorful lectures for the Metropolitan Museum.  

Neither retirement nor age diminished her enterprise and enthusiasm. Most adventurous of all her trips, perhaps, was an expedition to Turkey in the company of Machteld Mellink and Jess Vornys, when she was sufficiently senior for her young colleagues to request in the name of their “Mother” whenever they needed special favors or permission from the Turks. Since Miss Swindler spoke no Turkish, she never knew. At the same time she functioned as the pathfinder of the trip with an eye for landmarks and signs.

One product of Mary Swindler’s earliest travels that came to be of paramount importance for Philadelphia and Bryn Mawr was the Archaeology Club where scholars gathered monthly to share their expertise. The idea was born in 1921 when Swindler, Gisela Richter (q.v.), and Ernest Dewald were traveling together to Sicilian sites. “The experience gathered,” as Richter noted in her Memoirs, “made us feel what an advantage it would be if some of us could meet periodically to discuss problems. So we started this Club.” Discussion was the object of meetings. No formal readings took place, but rather each member was allotted ten to fifteen minutes for presenting a problem. Usually, Richter noted, the responses were useful, but even if not, the presentation would have helped the presenter to clarify his/her thinking. Dinsmoor, Carpenter, Louise and Leicester Holland, Goldman (q.v. *B.G.*1), and Newall were among the invited charter members, and membership remained always a matter of election.

Both in these gatherings and generally, Gisela Richter would seem to have been Mary Swindler’s closest friend and most frequent consultant, whose opinions she
invariably respected and with whom she discussed not only questions of pictorial style, but also the affairs and policies of the Archaeological Institute of America. After the death of family members had separated her from her home base in Indiana, Mary spent some time in Cragsmoor, New York, a summer colony in the Catskills where both she and Richter had small cottages. Students serving as her Editorial Assistants were invited to work with her there, and it was at Cragsmoor’s summer theatre that her white Scotts Terrier, Happy, distinguished himself and drew letters of congratulations from many friends when he appeared on stage in a production of the play “Peg of my Heart.”

Loyalty to the College was clear in decisions and comments. In 1925 Swindler was pleased to he the person who had negotiated the payment of $250.00 that made the College a Life Member in perpetuity of the AIA, but greater challenges lay ahead. That Bryn Mawr should sponsor its own archaeological expedition was to her a matter of paramount importance, both as an opportunity for the institution to corroborate its archaeological preeminence, and also to send students directly into the field. In speaking to the Bryn Mawr Club of New York, Professor Swindler described the dig as providing for new generations a first-hand contact with the technological side of archaeology that many of her own generation had missed. Not only was it the first campaign for the College, but also the first undertaken in the name of any women’s college. As Director, it featured the celebrated Hetty Goldman (q.v.), an alumna of 1903, who had gained experience directing excavations at Halai and Colophon, and was already the first female professor appointed at Princeton’s Institute of Advanced Study. Thus the story of the field campaign belongs elsewhere, yet these would never have come about without Mary Swindler’s behind-the-scenes activity as fund-raiser, negotiator, and publicist. Working closely with her colleague Louis Lord, then President of the AIA, Swindler attempted to guarantee a fund match from BMC and the AIA as the basis for an application to the ACLS.

With such strong personalities as Goldman and Carpenter contributing their opinions, negotiations were never simple; among the matters to be agreed were the choice of a site, whether Tarsus or the nearby Hittite mound at Ankale, the composition of the sponsoring consortium, and the final authority in choosing staff. Goldman’s professional authority was bolstered by the fact that her family had for many years made a handsome regular contribution to the College. On behalf of Bryn Mawr’s autonomy, Swindler was particularly distressed. Indeed felt herself betrayed when Goldman’s powerful uncle Sachs, the Director of the Fogg Museum, suddenly entered the picture with an offer of funds. On all the points of controversy, Swindler had decided opinions, but especially where staff members were concerned. She claimed on behalf of her students the rights of the fund raisers to determine participants. In practice, if not in theory, she and Miss Goldman found themselves agreed in appointing Ann Hoskin who had served as her editorial assistant on the AJA to the initial survey team in 1934. Miss Goldman sailed in March 1934 and was joined by Hoskin who had been spending the year in Athens as European Fellow. In the following year, the vote of the AIA Board determined Tausus as the principal site. Initial annoyances seemed forgotten once the expedition was actually in the field, and Swindler, although never a member of the excavation team, gave numerous enthusiastic lectures to alumnae and other groups on the progress of Bryn Mawr’s Tarsus project.

Another major contribution to the college and its archaeology students was the
institution of the Ella Riegel Museum of Archaeology named in honor of an alumna of 1889, who donated generously to the program, to the library, and to the Tarsus excavation. Dr. Swindler claimed that Miss Riegel’s benevolence stemmed first from a liking for her dog. Beginning with vases and fragments purchased by Professor Joseph Clark Hoppin, a number of alumnae and friends had been donating gifts of antiquities to the program. Some of these were quite substantial. In 1916, Mary Swindler herself published the Bryn Mawr collection of vases in the AJA, and she herself became a major donor to the collection. For many years, however, the gifts and bequests sat in storage wherever room could be made for them, but through Professor Swindler’s efforts the opening of the new West Wing of the Library in 1940 saw the Museum installed with its objects systematized by Mary Zella Pease in display cases that classmates of Miss Riegel donated. Rebecca Wood (Robinson) worked on the catalogue. The Attic Red Figure vases have been published by Ann Ashmead as Fasc. 13 of the CVA, and the current collection numbers over 6500 items.

**Ancient Painting:**

The honors and distinctions that came to Mary Hamilton Swindler from mid-career onwards were in consequence of her book, *Ancient Painting*, published in 1929. During the 15 years dedicated to research and writing, the book figured heavily in Miss Swindler’s own classroom in a manner that will have epitomized the Bryn Mawr conception of integrated teaching and scholarship. By the time of its publication, she was teaching separate year-long courses in vases and in painting. Originally intending the book as a study of Greek painting alone, she soon discovered the futility of isolating this work from its larger Mediterranean context, a decision quite in keeping with her generally broad cultural perspectives. Coverage ranges from cave painting to the threshold of Christianity where she concentrated her attention on vestiges of earlier art. There was nothing else like it, as the French scholar Salomon Reinach noted in his succinct but laudatory review. Given his own work in compiling images, Reinach could appreciate how the abundance of illustrations comprised no small part of the accomplishment; an assemblage of 15 plates, 6 in color and 641 “zincogravures.” For ten American dollars it was a good bargain. Others also appreciated the illustrations. Benjamin Clough called the book “a godsend” for those lacking the advantage of a museum. Within four years of publication, *Ancient Painting* had received twenty two reviews, many of them featured reviews in a variety of periodicals extending to literary magazines and newspapers as well as the usual Classical journals.

Intending her work to fulfill an informational function for historians and the general public, as well as its primary audience of art students, Swindler necessarily incorporated large amounts of description and scholarly synthesis. The bibliography is formidable and many chapters conclude with compendiary codas listing the minor branches of their subjects. Nonetheless, the informational function does not overshadow the definite unifying themes, some of which reflect current thinking, others more individual. Aside from noting what Swindler herself says, that the design is historically consecutive, reviewers say very little about the conceptualization of the book, which is the aspect most interesting today both in its adherence to and departures from the contemporary state of aesthetics and criticism.
Comprehensiveness imposed its own demands. Beginning with the animal paintings of the Altamira and Lescaux caves, the book inevitably traces a history of graphic development as the witness to cultural development. That this process had reached its destined fulfillment in the Greek achievement of mimetic naturalism was an assumption of the time. But as Gombrich points out in *Art and Illusion*, the canonization of naturalism was wide-spread. Because it was an authentically ancient viewpoint, whose lineaments showed through the details of Pliny’s narrative histories of sculpture and painting, it carried scholarly sanction as a framework for classical research. When Swindler singles out painting as focus of her developmental narrative, she positions its history within this framework as a cultural mirror reflecting all developments of artistic skills, perspective, line, color, depth, atmosphere. Attention to color, both in its technical aspects and in its functions of articulating form and perspective is among the consistent elements that give unity to *Ancient Painting*. So explicitly does she incorporate it into her descriptions that the reader can often see her black and white plates in color.

Swindler treats painting from a viewpoint grounded in Greek art. Two chapters on Greek painting form the centerpiece of her chronological narrative. The first traces the artifactual history of vase painting from archaic to red figures; the ensuing chapter deals with pictorial history on the basis of literary evidence, coordinating the record innovations of the named painters with the perceptible characteristics of vase painting. A chapter on Etruscan painting traces the effects of Greek influence upon an indigenous artistic production, whereafter the history continues into the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. Although the point of reference here shifts primarily to Roman wall painting as witness, through copying, to the lost masterpieces of the Hellenistic era, the inquiry still points backwards as Swindler seeks evidence of the technical developments that progressed throughout the Hellenistic period.

Concerns interposed by culture provide a counterbalance to the purely evolutionary view. Seeing the need to relate phenomena to the world that produced them, Swindler weighs environmental forces against aesthetic influences, in order to coordinate the cultural counter-currents with the mainstream of progress. Swindler gives each unit its own individual narrative within which, as it were, the larger history replays. In this context it is most interesting to look at the chapters that fall outside the Greek mainstream: the primitive cave paintings, the Etruscans, whose culture assimilates Greek influence, and the Romans whose innovations must be sorted out.

The remarkable feature of the cave animals is their mimetic exactitude, which is attributed to no rule or technique, but rather to purpose and observation (p. 2): “The extraordinary truth to nature that came from the experience and the highly developed visual memory record of the hunter.” Accepting the anthropologically based concept of a magical purpose that gives the hunter a hold over the real bodies of his animals through his creation of their forms, she views the primitive painter as a paradigmatic problem solver; at a similar phase of cultural development all painters will find similar solutions. Form follows desire; when the painter wishes to express motion it arises spontaneously. Properly speaking, the work is not art because principles of artistic control, of design and imagination are absent, along with any rudiments of composition such as grouping, and yet there are traces of beauty verging upon art, as well as progressive developments and decline.

In introducing Etruscan tomb painting she is again concerned to set the cultural
frame. Her work reflects contemporary fascination with the “mysterious” Etruscans of uncertain origin, rich and joyous, dedicated to the pleasures of hunting, banquets, dancing and games. Their essential spirit expresses itself most vigorously in a certain native style that stands apart from the effects of Greek influence. Thus we see the progress towards maturity in certain images, while in others there are local aberrations, intimations of the style that might have progressed had not Greek influence taken over. This analysis sets up a tension between Greek, which is good, of course, in so far as it is conducive to beauty and grace, yet bad, in so far as it inhibits the individual. With its dependence upon foreign modes, Etruscan art remains second. Reflecting the growth and decline of Etruscan power in its one hundred years of splendor, it loses its joyous spirit in connection with the failure of politics and wealth. Here we are seeing Swindler’s classical prejudice taking over, because the Etruscan hedonism, mixed with despair before Roman hegemony, produces an indolent, self-indulgent race (p. 259). The colors are always vivid, but these children are brutal and cruel. Their luxury harbors corruption.

The challenges presented by the prevailing views of Roman Painting were quite different from those of Greek and Etruscan, since the history of painting in Italy could not, on the basis of extant evidence, be seen to constitute an evolutionary course from primitivism to sophistication. Instead the most progressive scholarly literature involve the search involves the search for Roman originality in the process of adapting Greek precedents. Roman art historians of the previous decade had complained of the neglect of Roman sculpture both on aesthetic and cultural grounds. Wickhoff had conceptualized Roman Art as a progress reaching its true culmination in the scenes of Trajan’s column. Subsequently, his translator Eugenie Sellers Strong had written a spirited defense of Roman composition and technique in sculpture. Should the transmission of paintings be seen as a parallel to the processes by which sculpture was copied? Rodenwalt’s influential Die Komposition der pompeianischen Wandgemalde (Berlin, 1901) had introduced the idea that one could separate the Greek from the Roman by the style of figure drawing and also by the positioning of figures in deep space. But even while Swindler was conducting her own research, Pfühls’s 1923 publication, Malerei und Zeichnung der Greichen had perpetuated the notion of Roman inferiority while celebrating the spirit of the original Greek.

Swindler is no apologist for the Romans. For her the recently discovered Boscoreale frescoes had to be Hellenistic copies, perhaps because of their “artistic power and the mastery of light and shadow” (p. 332). All the same, she takes a far more serious interest than Pfühl in finding the characteristically Roman, in accordance with her emphasis on progressive development she credits Roman painters with certain advances over the Greek; the development of illusionism and the development of the third dimension towards unlimited space, following in the first instance Wickoff and in the second incorporating Rodenwalt’s principles of Roman spatial composition. Also she recognizes Roman innovations in many religious scenes (p. 375), Although she never gives full credit to the Romans for the genesis of landscape painting, she admires the variety of these compositions and some of their visual effects. Like Winklemann and Goethe before her, she comments on the grace of the figures and skillful modeling of certain “floating figures” and other subsidiary decorative motifs. Nonetheless, Roman painting emerges at best as hybrid, lacking even the cultural vitality of Etruscan.

Always ambitious in the scope of her projects, Mary Swindler next let her
interests lead her backwards towards the “Beginnings of Greek art.” Excavations in prehistoric areas and in the Kerameikos had come to interest her because of their challenge to conventional understandings of early Greek civilization, in a 1936 seminar on pottery, she began to pull her observations together. Her project was to trace the evolution and growth of Hellenic civilization from the first advent of the Greeks on the mainland through the Mycenean age from 1600-1100 B.C. and the Dark Ages that followed the Northern Invasion down to the period of renewed contact with the orient from about 750-700 B.C., when Greek art received a tremendous impetus from the East. Our histories and textbooks are in many cases antiquated where the beginnings of Greek civilization are concerned. No longer was everything to be attributed to a Dorian invasion of 1100 B.C., but rather one should understand a slow and gradual growth of Greek civilization witnessing the Greek appropriation of pre-Greek elements. The work was multicultural, emphasizing the various channels through which orientalizing influences reached Greek art. Furthermore, as she said, evidence derived from other branches of knowledge such as anthropology, economics, linguistics and religion have become more available for a reconstruction of prehistoric Greek life. Although many presses inquired as to the progress of the work, Swindler was never able to complete it to her own satisfaction. Had she remained within the manageable period of 1200-700 B.C., as Sara Immerwahr comments, completion might have been possible, but her insistence upon reaching the furthest origins drove her backwards towards the Neolithic while her determination to include the most recent finds kept her constantly up-dating. The many-times revised manuscript of nine chapters left behind at her death had not been finished to her satisfaction. Unfinished as it was, however, the project had its influence upon students such as Immerwahr who attributed to the original seminar paper the inspiration for her dissertation on the Mycenean pictorial style and her greater interest in Mycenean studies and Aegean Painting.

AJA Editorship:

Without exaggeration, the years of Mary Swindler’s editorship were the period that brought the American Journal of Archaeology to maturity. In a brief tribute, her successor, J. Franklin Daniel, of the University of Pennsylvania, observes that “she took a good but somewhat diffident journal” and left a “periodical which can bear comparison with anything of its kind...one of our foremost scholarly publications and a dynamic and progressive force in scholarship.” As particular assets of her policy Daniel mentions her readiness to hear new ideas. “The journal was the first to publicize new concepts which seemed revolutionary at the time and to break down boundaries.” Practically speaking she produced also a larger journal with fuller field coverage. Such physical and intellectual growth may seem the more notable when we recall that these years in which it occurred were the same pinched years of the Great Depression that saw a falling off in association membership to be followed by the serious disruption of scholarly communications caused by World War II. Such crises scarcely foreseeable in 1932 when the new editor assumed her office with an appearance of cheerful confidence in the opportunities for enhanced coverage provided by the change to a new octavo format with increased pagination.

What prompted the male establishment to place the future of its journal under the
editorial authority of this Bryn Mawr woman? Probably the capacity of women for work. As Walton B. McDaniel wrote to Louis Lord, the appointment pleased him “…because she is a good archaeologist and will work hard,” but adding…”because it brings a recognition to the other sex of a kind that is long overdue.” Writing a congratulatory letter in a similar vein to Swindler herself, McDaniel not only compared her sound scholarship and hard work to her predecessor Elderkin’s devoted service, but added that her “woman’s tact would be an acceptable change from his somewhat temperamental conduct of the business.” Representing himself as a “rather active feminist” he projected with what satisfaction “our women Philologists and Archaeologists” might recognize the deserved honor and fairness of the selection.

Certainly she was already well known both as a lecturer and society officer. Unsurprisingly, she was not the first choice. Louis Lord had first offered the job to Dinsmoor, and upon his refusal attempted to persuade Rhys Carpenter to assume it. Whether it was the latter who proposed his colleague as a substitute is not known. However, within two weeks of the letter to Carpenter, she was in place and receiving supplies. About the “gorgeous green paper” she said, “I don’t know to whom I should write on it except President Hoover.” Getting a workable typewriter, and a stipend for Ann Hoskin her assistant was a more complex negotiation, prolonged throughout several rounds of correspondence from February to April. Nor did she seem in any manner uncertain of her authority. In an interview with The New York Sun, Swindler confidently observed: “Men welcome and recognize the authority of women in archaeology, especially in the field of Classical Greek Art.” And the tone of her correspondence with such colleagues as Lord, Dinsmoor, and Stephen Luce is certainly that of a woman confident in male recognition of her authority.

The immediate background of her appointment, and its first challenges, were founded in an ongoing debate concerning what kind of organization the AIA ought to be, what kind of material its journal should publish, and what manner of audience it ought to reach. Two issues had somewhat factionalized the eastern part of the society where the serious power decisions were made: the policies of Ralph van Deman Magoffin, president from 11923-32, who came close to deposition just before his term ended, and not unrelated, the fate of a popular journal Art and Archaeology.

In 1931 a petition drawn up by William Bell Dinsmoor and Swindler’s predecessor, George Elderkin set out a catalogue of the president’s sins including some against the AJA. Generally speaking, his attitude and his entire financial policy were directed towards propaganda and popularization which were creating a wholly wrong impression of archaeology. Respecting the Journal, Magoffin was said to have failed to establish a needed separate endowment while allowing the accumulation of an unpaid debt of $9000.00 to the publishers, Rumford Press. Thus, Magoffin’s critics charged that he considered the Journal as the least priority of the organization and had termed its scientific character “wholly unsalable.”

Leaving aside the justice of these charges which Magoffin countered with sufficient dexterity to retain his office for an honorable resignation in 1932. The critical issue for Swindler was a growing financial rivalry between the Journal and the more popular Art and Archaeology, which the Washington Society controlled. While these supporters defended their publication with the argument that its discontinuation would
result in a serious membership loss for the Institute, the scholarly anti-Magoffin wing saw this periodical, whose editing they called sloppy and irresponsible, as eating funds that the more serious Journal needed. Thus they urged the demise of A & A with a transfer of its dollar support to the AJA, but not without compensation for the membership. Their solution was to broaden both the size and the coverage of the AJA, making it no less scientific but more up to date especially with publication of recent news from the field. Thus shortly after Mary Swindler’s appointment, Lord put the question whether publishing twelve to sixteen pages of photographs of new discoveries on the model of the London Illustrated News would lower the scholarly standard of the Journal. At that moment T. Leslie Shear of Princeton, directing the newly opened excavations of the Agora under the auspices of the American School was publishing reports of his discoveries in Hesperia. Nettled by Capps, who charged that the AJA deliberately neglected the Agora, Lord urged Swindler especially to capture at least some part of these reports for the AJA. An enhanced issue was planned for December 1932 to be placed in the hands of all subscribers to convince them that the loss of A & A would be negligible. When Swindler had secured from Shear the promise of an eleven page article with photographs from the Agora and commissioned Hettie Goldman to gather material she remarked cockily to Lord: “I think we can make A & A useless within a short time.” The predicted decline followed soon after, and the periodical ceased publishing in 1934 at the same time that Swindler was drawing unsolicited compliments from the scholarly cadre on the ravishing quality of her new Journal. In fact the period of Mary Swindler’s editorship was the one period in which the AJA did not sponsor a popular magazine. In the years that followed upon the War, surveys of local society membership brought forward once again the interests of the “non-professional” audience in a manner that led to the founding of Archaeology Magazine.

It was not simply the addition of regular illustrated reports on the Agora, however, that made the difference in the new enlarged periodical, but also the variety of contributions and contributors. Emanating from Princeton under Elderkin’s leadership, the old AJA had been primarily the publication instrument for a group making up the inner circle of the archaeological establishment who were for the most part closely associated with the American School. These included Carpenter, Dinsmoor, Elderkin, Holland, Lord, Merritt, several Robinsons and the scholarly women that some of these men had married. Among women contributors, Bieber and Richter were the most frequent, the latter periodically supplying information on the newest significant classical acquisitions at the Metropolitan Museum. Now and again Lily Ross Taylor took up a topographical problem or inscription. Certainly Old World Archaeology was prospering, and the abundance of contributions had quite pushed aside a one-time broader representational goal articulated by the Institute in its formative stages of covering archaeology in its fullest range. Re-instituting this goal was one of Mary Swindler’s programs. Her first reports to the officers of the institute declared a wish to receive articles on Pre-historic, Egyptian, Oriental and American Archaeology. The initial year boasted five oriental and four pre-historic articles. But the multi-cultural experiment never really took hold.

Instead Mary Swindler’s Journal became known for two aspects: open minded attention to the experimental ideas of young scholars, and an international outreach. In
1940, Swindler accepted Michael Ventris’ first paper on Linear B. Sara Immerwahr, editorial assistant at that time, remembers being shown the piece and how “we were both impressed but had no idea how young he was at that time. Of course the distinguished regulars continued to contribute, some of them very amply, but the years of the early and mid thirties saw the roster of distinguished contributors enriched by such famous European scholars as Henri Frankfort, Axel Boethius, Charles Picard, with articles in French and German. But the War, by halting excavation, dried up a chief source of copy. In 1939 and 1940 the Journal was regularly publishing reports from Agora, Corinth, Troy, Dura-Europa, and Tarsus. News columns from Athens were full and Van Buren’s Rome reports were growing more and more copious with every year of archaeological enterprise under Mussolini’s regime. In 1941 and 42 he continued to send these, although the 1942 version seemed carefully purged of any kind of laudatory reference to the reigning government. By 1943 and ‘44, the coverage had disappeared. The suspension of excavations during this period, which normally provided at least a third of her copy, must have placed a great strain on the editor’s ingenuity, but what is remarkable is how richly the Journal continued to be filled.

The issues of 1945 marked a glorious comeback. Swindler must have planned ahead for this year with the Beasley issue, for which she had raised the extra funds by subscription. Beazley, of course, was one long-standing major contributor who had not been lost to the war and it was his 60th birthday. The open call for papers for the post war publication had drawn such a response that this ample issue had to be divided into two parts. Less foreseeable was the ending of the war itself upon which the Journal seemed quick to capitalize. There was “News from Conquered Countries.” Oscar Broneer surveyed the state of Greek archaeology. A particular triumph must have been the densely printed seventy seven page bibliography of French, German and Italian books published during the war, obtained by two American archaeologists in uniform. There was also a notice of the newly formed International Association of Classical Archaeology, proposing to assess the damage of the war and to reunite European and American scholars. Swindler announced, with modest pride, that her publication was one of the few that had continued to function without interruption or curtailment. With apologies for a backlog caused by the abundance of submissions, she left the Journal with a balanced budget.

It was time now to retire. When Mary Swindler resigned her editorship, it was in the expressed hope of doing some work for herself. Her activities in the ensuing years might be interpreted from two opposed standpoints. On the one hand she exercised considerable power in professional circles; on the other hand they took advantage of her ready acceptance of work. Her first assignment for the Archaeological Institute was one that at least carried honor; For 1944-45 she was appointed the Norton Lecturer, only the third woman to fulfill that role, the two predecessors being Esther van Deman and Eugenie Sellers Strong. Among the lecture topics offered in her tour was the timely subject “Archaeological Discoveries since the War,” given with great acclaim both in Cleveland and in Cincinnati. Additional AIA offices and responsibilities included a first Vice Presidency in 1950, and the role of delegate to the ACLS in 1945-48. ACLS also availed itself of her experiences in several committee and advisory capacities, during 1947-48 she served as Archaeology editor for The Encyclopedia Britannica and also contributed reports on new archaeological discoveries to the Encyclopedia Americana.
Annual during the years 1944, ‘45,’ and ‘48.

Retirement did not bring an end to teaching. In 1947 Dr. Swindler had been appointed Research Fellow at the University Museum, upon the untimely death of J.F. Daniel. She came to the rescue as Visiting Professor of Classical Archaeology and Visiting Curator. Subsequently she held a post at Wisconsin and even in 1962, at the age of seventy-eight, she received but declined an offer from Sophie Newcomb College. She was elected to membership in a number of societies, including the American Philosophical Society and the Royal Arts Society of London as well as the German Archaeological Institute. On the occasion of her retirement from Bryn Mawr, a symposium entitled “Athens in the Age of Pericles” featuring talks by Richter, Carpenter, Dinsmoor and Finley was attended by a company of archaeological illustri and former students. In the same year a special honorary issue of the AJA was dedicated to Mary Hamilton Swindler. In 1959, she and her Bryn Mawr colleague Richmond Lattimore, were among ten distinguished scholars in the Humanities singled out by the American Council of Learned Societies for special, gratuitous $10,000.00 awards.

In reviewing the highlights of Mary Swindler’s diverse activities, there comes the inevitable question whether her personal or educational experiences left her self-conscious about being a female scholar. This question is difficult because her background gives no evidence that she was ever challenged on grounds of being a woman, but rather suggests that she took for granted a merit system open equally to the ambitious and talented of either sex. If this was mid-western democracy, it was perhaps not the rule of the times. The fact of Dean Breed’s singling her out as exceptional might suggest that her own self-perceptions somewhat differed from those of observers accustomed to the stereotyping of young women’s roles. Yet in one later instance we see her accepting some gendering of professional roles. When interviewed in 1932 by the New York Sun on the occasion of her editorial appointment, she spoke about the role of women in archaeology in a manner that must have reflected her own experience, but included some surprising distinctions. Archaeology, she said, and especially the study of classical Greek art was a profession in which women could flourish, where men recognize their authority. Noting the large number of Bryn Mawr women (she called them girls) then studying in Athens and other parts of Europe, she encouraged women to pursue the field with its many diverse branches. Here entered an eloquently worked commercial for American and South American archaeology, but there was also this qualifier:

“I think the reason is that women are particularly fitted for this kind of work. They do not seem particularly fitted for the actual superintendence of excavation work, but when it comes to drawing, writing, interpreting findings, they are excellent. They are more meticulous than men and more willing to take pains with small things.”

In so far as she was describing her own preferences, which would certainly appear to have been art historical, or her sense of her own abilities, the comment is understandable. To a certain extent, especially where meticulous pains enter in, Swindler may also have been thinking of certain masculine perceptions of herself. All the same, one wonders why did she say this, being a woman in the field that had produced Harriet Boyd Hawes and Hetty Goldman?
Clearly, Mary Swindler’s philosophy of archaeology had much to do with her career direction and her personal choices, but also it played a large part in the inspiration that emanated from her scholarship. She found the growth of the discipline and its popular reception exciting and gratifying. While her authority was often enlisted as public spokeswoman for her field, she characteristically expressed some of her most intimate convictions in sources close to her affections, as seen in the publications of Bryn Mawr College and her Indiana Commencement address. Writing in 1960 for the Bryn Mawr Bulletin on “Archaeology at Mid-Twentieth Century: Its Gains and Future Prosperity,” she observed the latest areas of discovery in caves and underwater. She praised such new developments in field technology as aerial photography and periscope exploration and the diversity of finds from Siberia and the East as well as certain Greek discoveries of particular aesthetic distinction. Her conclusion triumphantly envisaged the growing reputation of archaeology as demonstrated by its currency in the popular press and the crowds in museums. To her elite Bryn Mawr audience, she delivered a characteristically democratic message: “The future of archaeology belongs to the common man.”

Perhaps it was the Indiana address that gives the fullest glimpse of her everyday, evangelical Swindler her students knew. Here, as always, she realistically proclaimed the “unromantic” nature of “digging” and paid tribute to archaeology’s new scientific methods, but still her philosophy admitted the romanticism of belief in the instructive value of an idealistic and elevated past. She could not think of Greek archaeology in separation from Classics; to speak of sculpture, architecture and painting was to speak of its contribution to a multi-disciplinary understanding of an entire national culture in whose humanistic values she deeply believed. The Greeks to her were teachers who had exerted a civilizing influence of the Greeks over the Mediterranean world and who incorporated into their own culture the paradigmatic soul-searching and understanding of human dignity along with the motto, “nothing in excess,” a “very necessary curb to the passionate Greek temperament.” If the Greeks were not perfect, “they combined with a struggle for perfection a wholesome self-criticism and tolerance.” Whether consciously or unconsciously, the speaker was certainly epitomizing herself.

Notes to the text:

1. The most substantial biography of MHS is that by Emily Vermeule and Sara Anderson Immerwahr, “Mary Hamilton Swindler” in Notable American Women, 668-669. A biographical sketch by Dorothy Burr Thompson: “Mary Hamilton Swindler,” American Journal of Archaeology (1950), 292-293 is published in the issue of the Journal dedicated to Dr. Swindler on the occasion of her retirement from teaching at Bryn Mawr. A memorial minute by her colleague Rhys Carpenter was included in the Yearbook of the American Philosophical society for 1967, pages 148-150, and another by Machteld Mellink is to be found in the Bryn Mawr Alumnae Bulletin, 1967, 19.

2. Letter from Mary Hamilton Swindler to President Hermann Wells, 4 February 1941, Indiana University Archive.

4. Letter from Dean Breed to M. Carey Thomas, April 1906, in the Bryn Mawr College archive.


8. *American Journal of Archaeology* (1946), 17 mentions, with pride, that the Institute has funded the two Beazley numbers at a cost more than $7000.00.

9. Correspondence concerning summer employment at Indiana University mentions her commitments to excavation in the early parts of the summers of 1911 and 1912.


11. In a personal letter from Dr. Lucy Shoe Merritt, 19 June 1995. I am grateful to Mrs. Merritt for many details of these pedagogical profiles as supplied in a conversation by telephone.


16. From a conversation with Machteld Mellink at Bryn Mawr College in October, 1995.


22. Information is from the Preface of a typescript in the Department of Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology at Bryn Mawr College, supplemented by a personal communication from Sara Immerwahr and the biographical sketch “Mary Hamilton Swindler,” by E. Vermeule and S. A. Immerwahr in Notable American Women, 667-669.

23. Letter from WBM to LEL, 10 February 1932, Archives of the Archaeological Institute of America at Boston University.

24. Letter from WBM to MHS, 12 February 1932, Archives of the AIA at Boston University.

25. Letter from LEL to GPE, 12 December 1932, Archives of the AIA at Boston University.


27. LEL to the Committee on the Relationship with A & A, 1 December 1932. On 29 September, MHS wrote to LEL that she had a chance to talk with Miss Richter who thought the idea of getting rid of A & A excellent. “Gisela thought as I do and Elderkin that we should use any money released to improve the Journal and should introduce illustrations of New Discoveries and more and better plates.” A.I.A. Archives, B.U.

28. LEL to MHS 8 March 1932; MHS to LEL, 20 March 1932, A.I.A. Archives.

29. Letter from ETAC to LEL, 21 October 1932. A.I.A Archives.

30. LEL to MHS, 21 November 1932; MHS to LEL 25 November 1932, A.I.A. Archives. Boston University.

31. For instance, G.G. King on Reliefs at Budapest, however King had previously published art historical material in the Journal.

32. Communication by E-mail, 2 February 1996.


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*Ancient Paintings*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1929.

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“Another Vase by the Master of the Penthesilea Cylix,” *AJA* 13 (1909), 142-152.


“Greek Vases in the Gallatin Collection,” *AJA* 28 (1924), 278-289.

“A Terracotta Aotar in Corinth,” *AJA* 36 (1932), 512-520.


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