

LUCY TALCOTT

1899-1970

1. EARLY LIFE

Lucy Talcott was born on April 10th 1899 in New Britain, Connecticut; her parents were George Sherman Talcott and May Churchill Talcott. Her father was in manufacturing, and the family was descended from Thomas Hooker who in 1636 had founded the Hartford colony.

The major influence on Lucy's education came at Miss Porter's School in Farmington, which she attended from 1913-17. The school had been founded in 1843, and Lucy was a third generation pupil, her grandmother having attended the school under Miss Porter herself. In Lucy's days the school was basically a finishing school for 'ladies' ('white gloves at the Harvard-Yale game'); it was not exactly the environment for automatic progression to higher education, as the school curriculum was not organised for college preparation. Lucy described herself as something of a misfit: she 'came from the wrong sort of town, wore the wrong clothes'. She was rather shy but was certainly a serious and determined student. The epilepsy from which she suffered and which on one occasion at the beginning of her college career caused her face to be burnt in an accident, cannot have helped in overcoming her youthful reticence.

Later in life Lucy always mentioned the special debt of gratitude she felt towards Miss Porter's, especially for the strict discipline it had given her in her classical languages and for the understanding of the need for discipline; she saw that it had provided her with the best of a finishing school education and of a highly personal college preparation. She had a passion for Latin, taught by Misses Wells and Clough, and was excited to be introduced to Greek by the art teacher, Miss Nichols. She also showed an early interest in Greek mythology and history, having been inspired by a lecture about Helen of Troy and the archaeology of the site. She knew that she would never have reached college without that background.

Few ladies of the School went forward to college from Miss Porter's in those early days, but Lucy was one of those determined few. In perhaps a juvenile manner she chose a college that she felt was least like Miss Porter's; she wanted the academic side and nothing else. The college she chose was Radcliffe, which in her eyes had only one standard: academic excellence. Whilst there, she found that the college had more to offer than scholarly pursuits and much to her later regret she found herself majoring in English, rather than in Greek and Latin which were her real joy. She gained her BA there in 1921, and the remaining years of the 1920s were taken up with work on an antiques magazine, a year in England and finally graduate studies at Columbia where she was taught by William Bell Dinsmoor and was awarded an MA in Archaeology. In 1929 this last led to a stay in Athens at the American School of

Classical Studies, and Lucy's future career had already begun to take shape.

2. CAREER

The American School of Classical Studies at Athens to which Lucy went in 1929 was already well established. It had been founded in 1882 and had been responsible for excavations in various parts of Greece, often in association with the Archaeological Institute of America or an American university: the Heraion at Argos (1892-5), Corinth (1896- : Lucy assisted there in 1930), Korakou (1915-16), Zygouries (1921-2), Nemea (1924-6), Eutresis (1924-7), Olynthus (1928-), etc. (see Louis E. Ford, A History of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens 1882-1942 (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1947) Appendix III). However, after prolonged negotiation, major excavations were about to start under the auspices of the American School in the centre of ancient Athens itself, in a search for the Classical agora. The limits of the concession from the Greek parliament were bounded west by the Temple of Hephaistos, east by the Stoa of Attalos, north by the Athens-Piraeus Electric Railway and south by the Areopagus and the Acropolis. Parts of the area had already been investigated and uncovered by the Greek Archaeological Society and the German Archaeological Institute, but this new venture was on a much larger scale. In May 1931 digging began, and, along with other staff, both male and female, who were appointed at the time under the

direction of T. Leslie Shear. Lucy was given the task of being in charge of 'Records' (in all but name the 'Secretary' of the excavations). In her own self-deprecating way she later saw herself as 'a mere typist and recorder'; others viewed her far differently. It is true to say that the rest of her life and her career was bound up with Greece, Athens and the Agora excavations, its personnel and its findings and that she came to be one of those who best epitomised the generous spirit of co-operation that was the hallmark of the whole undertaking.

A season of excavation took place every year from 1931-1940 without a break, and the magnitude of the task facing anyone organising the records can well be imagined. Acting on the Director's pronouncement that every find should be awarded the same treatment, no matter from what period, how intrinsically (un)important, nor in what condition, Lucy devised a model system which was the envy of many other excavations. The undertaking was vast, but the system had to be clear and readily accessible. Information from the excavators' field notebooks was transferred on to cards: precise identifications (grid location, contexts (e.g. well, shop, public building, grave), day of excavation, inventory number, etc.) were set down; description and measurements were given; a category number was allotted (P = pottery, I = inscription, and so forth); a date of manufacture was assigned; and one or more postage-stamp-size photographs of each object were attached. These record cards, along with the field notebooks, were to become the bedrock of the Agora

an issue. Today data retrieval is made easier through the existence of the computer; earlier the logging and the retrieval were more personal and time-consuming concerns. Lucy explained her system in Archaeology 1 (1948) where she commented (p. 13): 'What to do with the things that are dug up is a perennial excavation problem. It is a troublesome problem for two reasons. When an object has been excavated, the evidence of date and history which its finding-place provided is gone for good, except in so far as preserved in a careful written record. Excavation finds, moreover, seldom come in convenient sizes and shapes, or in perfect condition. Almost all need first aid, and all need adequate housing.' Every significant object had to be accessioned and stored: sculpture, coins, inscriptions, terracotta figurines, lamps, pottery and the myriad small finds (e.g. knucklebones, hairpins, etc.). After a few short years the number of catalogued items had risen to six figures, and each year brought its increase. Besides the accessioned pieces, there was also much fragmentary material that was simply stored for future study and re-investigation. And all this material stretched over centuries of time from the fourth millennium B.C. to more recent times, a spread of over 5000 years. Lucy had assistants for longer and shorter periods of time, but it was her initial conception and responsibility and her faithful devotion to her task as 'mere typist and recorder' that placed the material evidence for the history and working of the Athenian Agora on a sure footing. 'Methodology' is a popular term in archaeology these days. Lucy's methodology had a far

basic purpose, it was a necessary machine for the running of the excavation.

1940 saw the last, brief season of excavation: the material had to be packed up and stored for the duration of the War, a task with which Lucy was intimately involved. During the War she spent her time back in the United States, both in Farmington and in Washington working for the Office of Strategic Services. She helped raise funds and was closely involved in the newly formed Alumni Association of the American School which has been of such importance in the decades since the War.

After the end of the War, and despite the Greek Civil War which continued until 1949, excavations began again in 1946, and in 1947 Lucy resumed 'responsibility for the records, for the museum, and for the running of the excavation house' (Thompson, Hesperia 17 (1946) p. 149), a post which she held until 1956. The position continued to be a demanding one, with yet more material to be accessioned and stored. The old excavation house which had served as a temporary museum on the south side of the Agora site was starting to overflow with objects, and in 1949 a decision was taken by the American School and the Greek authorities to rebuild the Stoa of Attalos, initially erected on the east side of the site in the mid-second century B.C. and still furnishing enough building fragments to permit a very trustworthy reconstruction. The dedication of the new building took place on September 3rd

1957, and the King of the Hellenes, King Paul, presented a number of decorations: Lucy was one of those decorated, for her contribution to the work of the Agora. But even before this time (and for some time afterwards) the transfer of the finds from the old excavation house to the Stoa of Attalos went on continuously, a major undertaking that called for organisational ability of a high order as well as personal dynamism. Once again, Lucy showed her generous dedication, unobtrusively working so that others might benefit.

Throughout all this time, the excavations had attracted the attention of the scholarly world: professors of ancient and medieval Greece, students of art, architecture and town-planning, sociologists and political historians, etc. Often their first point of contact either at the old excavation house or on the upper floor of the Stoa was Lucy. Her attitude to her job was to allow free access to the material to all who came to learn, an approach that was shared by the other members of the Agora team. She proved a welcoming and helpful guide to the material she herself had so expertly recorded and organised. There can be few students of ancient Athens, young or old, of any nationality, who failed to be helped in some way by contact with Lucy.

During the 1960s Lucy spent more of her time in the United States than she had done in the previous decades. In 1958 she had handed over her position as 'Records' and was anxious to devote more time to pursuing her research (see next

section). With her friend and colleague, the Medieval scholar and Agora photographer Alison Frantz, she moved into a new house built in Princeton, close to the Institute for Advanced Study where she then Director of the Agora Excavations, Homer A. Thompson, held a professorial appointment. Scholars working on the publication of the final volumes of the Agora excavations were invited to continue their research at the Institute, and Lucy was close at hand to maintain her role as midwife to many such publications.

She died in Princeton on April 6th 1970 after a long and heroic struggle against cancer.

3. RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

For all the years that Lucy was involved in the demanding task of organising the Agora material she was researching and publishing in her chosen field of classical Greek pottery.

The academic study of Greek pottery had always focused on painted pottery, particularly the figured vases of Athens and South Italy with their mythological compositions. Since the close of the 19th century German scholarship had led the way in sorting and, where possible, tracing different fabrics to their centres of origin and in some cases attributing individual vases to painters on the basis of stylistic idiosyncrasies. The major figure in this field since the early years of the 20th century had been an English scholar,

J.L. Beazley of Oxford University. His numerous publications, mainly on Athenian red-figure painters, from 1910-1930,

culminating in Attische Vasenmaler des Rotfigurigen Stils of 1925, had revolutionised understanding of the craft of vase-painting. There were few students of the subject who failed to be attracted by his approach and by his depth of scholarship. Lucy was no exception, and her first publication (Hesperia 2 (1933)) was a close study of two cups that had been excavated in the first year of work in the Agora. It was an accomplished and sensitive treatment that showed how well she had mastered the lessons that Beazley was teaching, a debt she scrupulously acknowledged. Further publications continued this interest and revealed her understanding of the need for delicacy and care in the matter of attribution. Her studies of a stand painted by Euthymides (Hesperia 5 (1936)) and a fragmentary oinochoe with an early theatrical scene (Hesperia 8 (1939)) both show the close understanding she had of connoisseurship and imagery. This interest and understanding continued all through her academic work, and many have been grateful for the diligence which she, together with Barbara Philippaki, devoted to the desperately small figured fragments found on the Pnyx and mainly dating from the 4th century, a then little known period of Athenian pottery production (Hesperia Supplement 10 (1956)). The conclusions on the red-figure reached in that volume have recently stood up well to intensive re-examination.

These are in a sense the visible peaks of her work:

beneath the published surface there lay much more, as a glance at the annual reports on the Agora excavations in Hesperia demonstrate. Lucy provided the description and comment on each of the classical pottery that was highlighted in those reports. A good example of this concerns 'the Gorgos cup', a small red-figured cup of ca. 490 B.C. signed by Gorgos as potter, for which Lucy wrote a brief description in the mid 50s (Hesperia 24 (1955) pp. 64-6). She commented (p. 66) that 'It seems at least possible that the Gorgos cup is a youthful piece by the Berlin Painter himself, in that case both the earliest work and the only cup thus far known from his hand'. Her proposal that this small cup was the earliest extant work of the Berlin Painter was a bold one, and was later developed in detail by Martin Robertson (JMA 62 (1958) pp. 55-66) and eventually accepted, after hesitation, by Beazley (ARV² 213-4, no. 242). That strong counterarguments have now been advanced against such an attribution by Donna Kurtz (JHS 103 (1963) pp. 68-86) does not diminish the acute insight of Lucy's initial suggestion.

Always one willing to assist others, Lucy was a most valuable help to Sir John Beazley in the preparation of the second edition of his Attic Red-figure Vase-painters which appeared in 1963. The first edition had been published in 1942, building on the original German version of 1925, but by the 1950s there was a vast wealth of new attributions as well as the updating of the earlier material that needed to be done. Using her organisational skills, Lucy devised a scheme

for typing the individual attributions that Beazley continued to make. The entries were typed on individual sheets in triplicate: one copy for Oxford, one for Dietrich von Bothmer at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and one for the Agora; this project went by the provisional name of Paralipomena. In this way Beazley's monumental updating and expansion of his earlier work was helped to its completion by a scholar who well understood the literature, the method of attribution and the need for meticulous care - another instance of Lucy's unassuming altruism.

However, Lucy knew as well as anyone that the Athenian Agora was not the place in which much quality work in painted pottery was likely to be excavated. First class work is usually found in sanctuaries and amongst grave goods, and particularly those located outside Greece itself, as the 19th century finds from the Etruscan tombs in north Italy had shown. Her familiarity with the day-by-day unearthing of the Agora material made it clear to her that 'the character of the Agora deposits makes them unlikely as evidence for art history: their interest is social and economic.....'

(unpublished comment 27.12.1963). Her two early publications of Agora deposits (Hesperia 4 (1935) and 5 (1936)) show that she was conscious of where the importance of the Agora pottery lay. In these two articles she dealt first with the figured pieces and then turned her attention to the more numerous black, plain and coarse wares. Little work had been carried out on any of these latter categories of ceramic where the

shapes, the incised and stamped decoration, and the clay composition were most important elements. For other scholars the grip and attraction of figured wares continued to be strong. As exceptions to prove the rule, Percy and Annie Ure had published the results of their excavations at Rhitsona in Boeotia and had included in them a close study of local black pottery, but most of the published black pottery from elsewhere was assumed to be South Italian, and little attention paid to it. As for the plain and coarse wares of the classical period, no major investigation had been carried out at all. Lucy saw the significance that the Agora material held for any future study of 'domestic' pottery of these classes, and despite her day-to-day commitment to classification she never lost sight of the fact that pots had functions, often of a very mundane character: neither 'Grecian' nor 'urn' were part of her vocabulary.

Lucy's studies of the varieties of pottery that were found in the deposits certainly quickened her interest in the social aspect of pottery and its place in the everyday life of the people of classical Athens. Also, the everyday contact that members of the Agora staff had with visitors and tourists, as well as with the scholars who came for different reasons, made them all aware of the great curiosity that the Agora, with its architectural development and its political and social history, had for the general public. In 1958 an opportunity to go some way to quenching that thirst came about with the proposal that the American School should initiate a

series of popular picture books (32 pages; 50 cents) on different aspects of the site. Lucy was quick to engage the interest of Brian Sparkes in the venture, and their joint booklet Pots and Pans of Classical Athens (1959) was the first in a series which was 'not only the sole money-making activity of the [American] School [of Classical Studies] but also one which carried the word of the School's excavations far and wide throughout the world to school children and university students, to tourists in Athens and interested laymen everywhere' (Lucy Shoe Meritt, History of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens 1939-1980 (Princeton, 1984) p. 262).

Lucy's association with Brian Sparkes, which saw such immediate results in the picture book, had already begun on a project that was much more weighty and inevitably more prolonged in its production. The series of volumes on the results of the Agora excavations had been launched with Eve Harrison's Portrait Sculpture (Agora I) of 1953, and others had rapidly followed (Margaret Thompson on Roman coinage (Agora II); R.F. Wycherley on the testimonia (Agora III); Richard Howland on the Greek lamps (Agora IV)). Further volumes were in different stages of production, and other topics had been assigned to specific scholars who had yet to start work on their material. It had always been hoped that Lucy would publish the earlier red-figure, but she handed this over to Peter Corbett who had been given the later red-figure and the black-glaze to study. In the late 1950s the black-

glaze was transferred to Brian Sparkes, and he and Lucy started to work together on a joint publication of the black and plain wares of the archaic and classical periods (600-300 B.C.). Apart from Lucy's work on the Agora black, others, particularly Peter Corbett, had shown an interest, and in Italy Nino Lamboglia had begun his important studies of the western black; the plain and coarse wares were still elsewhere neglected ground. Nor was this surprising, as it had been the policy of the Agora excavators, but of few others, to save a great proportion of the finds, no matter how initially unprepossessing. Besides the accessioned material, there was also much preserved in the uncatalogued boxes. Indeed, there was much more plain pottery to study in the Agora than at any other excavation site. But the obstacles to any clear study were formidable. The very absence of comparative material from other sites was a major drawback, and the shapes, being more functional and less elegant than those of fine wares, did not lend themselves to the same sort of diagnostic study. Also, functions were not always apparent, and there was the difficulty of distinguishing home-made from imported wares. Lucy investigated all these problems and spent a great deal of time studying the contexts which were the major source of evidence for dating the pots, drawing on her experience of the history of the excavations and producing an extremely useful list of deposits. But given the originality of her study she herself was cautious about proposing dates for the plain and coarse wares that might give a false notion of precision. She produced a magisterial and ground-breaking study which,

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besides providing a reference point for other classical archaeologists, had much to tell of the domestic and social lives of the Athenians in the classical centuries. The dedication of Agora XII to Gisela Richter gave a signal of appreciation to a female scholar of an earlier generation.

It is the fate of most scholars that their work becomes their monument. Agora XII has come to be considered Lucy's definitive work. But it has been well said that 'The Agora store-rooms were her realm; and not only this one [volume] but many volumes will be her monument' (J.M. Cook, Classical Review 23 (1973) p. 72). Yet even this would be only a very small understanding of her academic and personal importance. Generous of her time for others, unfliningly modest about her own abilities, Lucy was a leader in the methods of excavation recording and in the study of domestic pottery.

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2. 'Attic black-glazed stamped ware and other pottery from a fifth century well' in Hesperia 4 (1935) 477-523.
3. 'A stand signed by Euthymides' in Hesperia 5 (1936) 59-69.
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5. 'Kourimos parthenos' in Hesperia 8 (1939) 267-73.
6. (with Alison Frantz) This is Greece (published privately in U.S.A., 1941).
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9. (with Barbara Philippaki) 'Figured pottery' in Hesperia Supplement X: Small Objects from the Pnyx II (1956) by Lucy Talcott, Barbara Philippaki, G. Roger Edwards and Virginia B. Grace, 1-77.

10. (with Brian A. Sparkes and Alison Frantz) Pots and Pans of Classical Athens, Agora Picture Book no. 1 (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1958).
11. 'A different stigma' in The Farmington Bulletin 20 (1968) 12-14.
12. (with Brian A. Sparkes) Black and Plain Pottery of the 6th, 5th and 4th centuries B.C., The Athenian Agora XII, Results of Excavations conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1970).

Illustrations

1. Lucy Talcott at Loutsa (Attica) in the winter of 1939-40.
2. A room in the old excavation house of the Athenian Agora.
3. An Athenian red-figure cup ('the Gorgos cup'), from the Athenian Agora, ca. 500 B.C.
4. An Athenian black cup-skyphos with incising and stamping, from the Athenian Agora, ca. 440-430 B.C.
5. Kettles (chytrai), from the Athenian Agora, 6th to 4th c. B.C.

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