Vronwy Hankey

Vronwy Hankey (1916-1998) was a leader of the second generation of British women archaeologists who worked, in a private capacity principally, in the Bronze Age cultures of Greece, Egypt and the Near East. She also made good use of her husband Henry's postings abroad as a British diplomat to learn the language and explore – and come to love – the archaeology, art, culture and people of wherever they happened to be. As a vivacious person with a strong sense of the absurd, she made lifelong friends everywhere; and the same holds for Henry. In her archaeology she was always ready to propound, unrepentantly, practical explanations of the evidence and to use her exposure to so many different parts of the world to enrich her understanding of the past and the present. She was never a determinist and, in so far as she considered it, had little time for deductive theory-driven archaeology. To her the answers to the fundamental questions of archaeology depended on the practical, inductive need to explain the rich bounty of evidence that confronts archaeologists. In so far as there was a theoretical component of her work, it was a sense of an abiding continuity in human responses to the Mediterranean and surrounding countries, and of the demands made upon the inhabitants by landscapes and ways of communication that had barely changed for millennia (until the widespread adoption of the internal combustion engine well into the second half of the 20th century).

Being born the daughter (Vronwy Mary Fisher) of a Church of England parson (the Reverend Thomas Fisher), who was a Welshman, was an important and lasting influence on Vronwy. Her father taught her Latin and Greek from an early age: in those days many clergymen still saw the classics as a proper part of education and often were spare-time teachers. The benefit for Vronwy was an early and disciplined introduction to the ancient world, resulting eventually in her reading classics at Cambridge, and her being well aware that there is a variety of ways to speak and think. Being Welsh, and having a Welsh first name, mattered much to her and contributed to her lifelong readiness to side with the underdog and give sceptical, rebellious opinions about any establishment. (At times these included the Hankey

family, her father-in-law Lord Hankey having been Secretary to the Cabinet from 1916 to 1938 and a member of the government during during World War II.) Helped by her peregrinations with the Foreign Office, she became a first-rate linguist who talked with gusto, and read where feasible, in Arabic, French, Greek, Italian and Spanish, as well as having some Welsh and a smattering of other languages such as Turkish. In English, she was well read. As well as a boundless appetite for knowledge, she had a phenomenal memory and learnt poems with ease. Indeed, soon before death, when she was very ill, she recited two sonnets of Shakespeare to her daughter-in-law. She also wrote poems. Her memory proved equally valuable in recognising joins between Mycenacan sherds from el Amarna that had been dispersed to museums in several countries.

There were other advantages in growing up in a rectory, as has often been noticed in clergymen's children. Life in large, cold and draughty houses was not particularly comfortable, and clerics were badly paid. Such conditions can produce a robust approach in clerical offspring, and an ability to cope with life's discomforts and blows, as well as fluency in creating one's own entertainment in company through music, dancing, games and poetry competitions. Vronwy showed these qualities energetically, until she died, and saw them as an integral part of being alive. This helped much in her understanding of the ancients since she could easily imagine these parts of life, which archaeology identifies, at best, only with difficulty, albeit that they were, and in many cultures still are, among the most important parts of existence.

Another result of being her father's daughter and of life in the rectory is harder to define. From time to time Vronwy would remark that her father eventually lost his (Christian) faith. She did not, however, adduce any specific evidence for this, at least not to me. She seemed to be suggesting that weariness, presumably a spiritual weariness, had overcome him. Whether that really led to loss of faith, I am in no position to tell. Nor do I know how much she was really talking about herself, although I suspect to quite a degree. What is certain is that Vronwy's conviction that this had happened was linked to, and may in some way have been a justification or rationalisation of, her own mixed attitudes to religion. Although she was nominally an Anglican and had been bought up as one, she seemed to become steadily more sceptical. This was also partly a result of her fierce support of the Palestinians as a

people displaced from their land, which she felt keenly after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war which, following quickly upon her time in the Middle East when Henry was posted to Beirut (1962-66), resulted in Jordan's losing the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem. She never believed that there was any justification in the Old Testament for 20th century territorial claims on Palestine and, in some loose way, blamed Christianity either for conceding that there might be or for giving undue weight to the pre-Christian texts of the Old Testament. But, as the emotions of those years faded in the face of the *faits accomplis* of the region, she came to have many very good friends in Israel, and had already by 1974 written for an Israeli publication on Aegean pottery at Akko (although the article did not come out until 1977).

Girton College, Cambridge, brought Vronwy into the larger world. She played (field) hockey for the university and won her Blue (for playing in the match against Oxford) and secured a First in Classics. She also discovered Aegean archaeology through the teaching of Professor Alan Wace, which led to her going out to the British School at Athens as a graduate student in autumn 1938, with a remit from him to explore prehistoric – and especially Mycenaean Euboea. As she wrote later of Wace, his "teaching and encouragement set me on the sherd-strewn path of Aegean prehistory". As the creator (with Carl Blegen) two decades earlier of the "Helladic" system of arranging the Bronze Age on the Greek mainland, his vision was of a far fuller understanding of the early occupation of all of Greece. Thus he assigned different regions to his best students to study. Helen Thomas (see HELEN WATERHOUSE) and Frank Stubbings, Vronwy's fellow students at Cambridge and the School, undertook, respectively, Laconia and Attica. Stubbings also compiled a corpus of Mycenaean pottery in the Middle East, as William Taylour was to do later in Italy and Sicily in another project emanating from Wace.

It was an exciting first year. Soon after arrival in Greece, Vronwy was in Crete to help R. W. Hutchinson in excavating the vaulted tomb at Kephala near Knossos. Then her research started in the Chalkis Museum and, come the summer (of 1939), she was taking part in Wace's excavations at Mycenae which he was suddenly allowed to renew after a long gap. (It was also the year that Blegen began at Ano Englianos in Messenia, at the building later called the "Palace of Nestor".) In 1940 she was still able to excavate, helping Hutchinson on an interesting chamber tomb at Knossos, but

soon had to return to Britain. There she met the young diplomat, Henry Hankey. In 1941 they married. Henry drew well – his diplomatic and archaeological cartoons became renowned -- and played the piano, and had a lovely sense of the absurd, which was perhaps his greatest bond with Vronwy and enabled them to triumph over the moments of gloom in diplomatic life and disappointments that, towards the end of his career, he did not have more prestigious postings. At the time, any regrets were well hidden. Later, after he had retired from the Foreign Office, there was occasional mention from Vronwy - if one listened hard.

Their first posting together was to Madrid in 1942: Spain was then a nominally neutral country, but in fact pro-Axis. An exciting time included meeting Allied soldiers, and probably others, escaping from France. After the war, they were sent to Rome, where Vronwy was able to help John Ward-Perkins, Director of the British School at Rome, and to turn the Mycenaean pottery of Chalkis into a long article (1952) that is still important. But the demands of a growing family – two sons (Ceri and Peri) were born in 1994 and 1945, a third son (Peter) in 1951 and their daughter (Veronica) in 1957 - and of diplomatic life allowed little time for Greek or Mediterranean archaeology, except for prospecting for sites when returning to Euboea for family holidays. This resulted in a long article (1966) on sites in Euboea, written by her, Hugh Sackett, Roger Howell, Tom Jacobsen and Mervyn Popham, in which she describes in her part those she saw between 1938 and April 1940, and then in 1962 when she came back to Greece and Euboea for the first time since 1940 – and 1964, when she spent nearly three months on the island, and was joined by her family.

She wrote up her part of the Euboean survey article during their posting to Beirut (1962-66), which was a turning point in her life, having brought her back to both archaeology and her beloved Greece and things and people Greek. That was her spiritual home for the rest of her life. "In Beirut I became a post-graduate student again", she wrote in her short reminiscences (1998). Beirut was, before the civil war in Lebanon, the hub of communication in the Middle East for all countries except Israel. To be there and to travel freely as a diplomat's spouse gave Vronwy a rare opportunity (which she made marvellous use of), in the spirit still of Alan Wace, to assemble and inspect the new finds of Mycenaean and Minoan pottery in the Middle East since Frank Stubbings's corpus of 1951 and meet many other archaeologists,

including HONOR FROST, with whom she had a close correspondence for many years.

The immediate results were a short but important note (1966) on the first find of 12th century BC Late Helladic IIIC pottery in the region, and the magisterial article on 'Mycenaean pottery in the Middle East' (1967), modestly subtitled: 'notes on finds since 1951', which she finished in Panama (where Henry had become Britain's ambassador). While Stubbings had included Cyprus and Egypt, she wisely - did not yet touch Cyprus, where finds of Aegean pottery were starting to increase rapidly, and there is just a note on new material from Egypt. The focus is (archaeological) Syria and Palestine with, for the first time, finds reported east of Damascus and east of the Jordan river as far as Amman. She saw herself all the new material in museums that she could, and to a lesser extent the material in the storerooms of the post world war II excavations, except in Egypt and Israel - omissions that she was to remedy later.

This article was a major advance in Syro-Palestinian studies, probably more in fact than in Mycenaean studies (since on the whole it rounded out Stubbings's picture and made it more complicated); and it became the foundation for Al Leonard's indispensable *Index to the Late Bronze Age Aegean Pottery from Syria-Palestine* of 1994, which is dedicated to Vronwy. But equally indispensable is Vronwy's article.

What were the gains? First, there is her important warning, indeed an extremely important one for 1966, right at the start of the article, of the risks of Syro-Palestinian archaeologists' using Mycenaean pottery arranged according to Arne Furumark's system, with all its apparent solidarity and reliability, as the means of dating their Late Bronze sites and building a framework of interconnections, while ignoring the need for these very sites (together with those in Egypt) to be the places that produced chronology for the Aegean, rather than taking it from the Aegean. Equally dangerous was the lack of stand-alone schemes for local Syro-Palestinian pottery that then could then be matched with the Furumarkian schemes from far away in the Aegean. While there were Syro-Palestinian archaeologists who were starting to recognise, in amazement, the dangers of circularity and the inherent delusions in following such a path of convenience and expediency, Vronwy was probably the first to point this out so explicitly.

Secondly, there was an impressive increase in material over Stubbings's lists, together with the possibility to produce a more sophisticated analysis and more space to discuss the various occurrences, and discern a greater variety of shapes and more pictorial kraters than had been anticipated.

Third, at last LH IIIC pottery of Aegean manufacture had been recognised in the area, albeit in small quantities. Since Vronwy's identification of it at Beth Shan, the list of occurrences has grown steadily, as have the problems of the provenance(s) of the pottery of this type.

Next must come Vronwy's recognition that it is "almost axiomatic" that Cypriot Base Ring and White Slip products are found together with the Mycenaean pots. "Generally speaking", she wrote, "it is the constant travelling companion of Mycenaean pottery". The vital corollary of this was that all explanations of Mycenaean pottery in the Middle East have to set it in a Cypriot-linked context, whether for types, chronology, frequency or pattern of exchange. Vronwy was to return often to the theme of compare, contrast and connect with Cyprus. The finds of the Ulu Burun shipwreck emphasize how right she was.

In these ways 'Mycenaean Pottery in the Middle East' set the stage for almost all her subsequent research and unleashed a super-energetic flow of papers, correspondence and study that flourished for over a quarter of a century into the mid-1990s. The return in 1970 to field archaeology in Greece, at Myrtos-Pyrgos on top of a steep hill in southern Crete, after coming back from Panama, had also a major part in this. (But she had already had some recent digging experience in 1966, following the stay in Beirut, with Basil Hennessy at the Late Bronze Age temple at Amman airport, with finds that included Aegean pottery, which she published with various other finds [1974, 1995].)

The themes she tackled in her ceramic studies are almost all already nascent in the 1967 article, starting with chronology, which was a strong motif of, and motive for, her research, whether examining the nuances of context or her major re-analysis of the Mycenaean pottery of el Amarna. Although it was not fully published (but see her

papers of 1973, 1993 and 1995), she quickly established that the Mycenaean pottery at this short-lived settlement, revered since its recognition by Flinders Petrie as the cornerstone for Aegean Late Bronze Age chronology, was not quite so clear-cut as had been thought, since it contained elements of early Late Helladic IIIB together with the preponderant Late Helladic IIIA2. In her approach to the Amarna pottery, she followed the model of the definitive studies of ceramic groups from Mycenae by Lisa French, Wace's daughter. But she also made good use of the chance to extend her area of research into Egypt, mastering Egyptian archaeology and teaching herself hieroglyphics, through the excellent discipline of annual bouts of lecturing on Swan's Nile cruises. For Aegean archaeology it could not have been more valuable to have a scholar who was truly at home in the cultures of both areas. The principal product of this creative co-existence between the Nile and the Aegean is the masterly book on *Aegean Bronze Age Chronology* that she and Peter Warren brought out in 1989.

Cyprus also came to play an ever stronger part in her analyses, so much so that she could even recognise in Late Helladic IIIA "the first positive Aegean export drive to the Levant" (as she wrote in one of her review-papers in the Wace-Blegen conference of 1989, published in 1993). From the point of view of Aegean traders (whoever they were), Cyprus was the principal target. Aegean crockery was shipped there, or shipped on or trans-shipped further east, in hulls of uncertain registration – an old phenomenon in East Mediterranean shipping – together with lashings of Cypriot products. While Vronwy reminds us of the similar range of Aegean pottery in Cyprus and on the Syro-Palestinian mainland, and the shared habit of putting Aegean pottery into tombs, there were also some potentially significant differences in the end-use of the Aegean goods. Unlike Cyprus, pictorial kraters are found in Syria and Palestine in palaces and domestic contexts as well as tombs, Vronwy points out. "The living were perhaps reluctant to forfeit enjoyment of these outsize vessels", she remarks. Hidden in the comment lie her passionate commitment to being alive and her scepticism about religion and, I should assume, the afterlife. Earlier in the paper she had showed that Aegean pottery is also found in palaces and temples and well-to-do houses, in such contexts as "official warehouses and domestic storerooms", and shrines attached to palaces as well as isolated shrines such as the Amman Airport Temple. How much of a real contrast there is here with Cyprus is uncertain, since much of the argument depends on the uncertain role – sacred or secular? Or is that a false antithesis? – of the

dominant public buildings at such Cypriot sites as Kalavasos-Ayios Dimitrios, Kition, Maroni-Vournes and Myrtou-Pigades. We should note that Vronwy does not in fact claim that Syria and Palestine were different here from Cyprus, but it looks all the same as if that was what she was thinking.

Her discussions reflect how, after 'Mycenaean pottery in the Middle East', she never looked back but always sought new horizons of explanation. Guided by a massive supply of commonsense, and helped by a rich and, one could say, Braudelian knowledge of the East Mediterranean as a whole (which for a long time now had included Israel where she found many close friends, as well as plenty of Aegean and Aegean-related pottery to study), she was constantly trying to extend understanding of how the various exchanges happened in the Late Bronze Age, while recognising the many vagaries of wind and weather, kings and folk movements or shortages at the supply end or the receiving end, to name but a few. She attributes, for instance, the decline in imported Aegean pottery in Cyprus and the Levant in later LH IIIB (in Aegean terms) "to failing supplies in the Aegean, rather than turbulence in the Levant".

In the years after the 1967 article, the Minoans of Crete also claimed their rightful place alongside the Mycenaeans of mainland Greece in her steadily more open-minded view of the early Levant. Finally, she had a deep and totally practical interest (which became a personal, family matter once her daughter Veronica became a potter) in how the Minoans and Mycenaeans and other ancient peoples, together with traditional potters throughout the world today, have made their pottery. Here again the stay in Beirut was an important stepping stone: her fascinating article (1968) on potting at Beit Shebab in Lebanon is another fruit of the Beirut days.

Capping this productive period was her return to fieldwork in Crete 32 years after she had begun there. In 1970 she joined my team excavating a long-lived Minoan village, with remarkable public buildings, at Myrtos-Pyrgos on the south coast of Crete, under the aegis of the British School at Athens. There were several seasons of excavating, and many of study of the finds, which were housed at Knossos. There was also much good company, with singing and dancing and expeditions into the hills to accompany the hard work of the week. Vronwy loved it, and was an example to us all

of the best of mixing hard work and hard play, and never complaining – although conditions were often difficult. She soon took on the study of the many stone vases that Pyrgos produced (see her preliminary account of 1980) and the stone tools and implements, as well as the large amounts of Late Minoan I pottery. The first result of this was a study of the use and chronology of the settlement's collective tomb (1986). Her last study-visit to Crete was in 1992: family commitments and, later, ill health made it impossible for her thereafter. She has left many notes, with drawings of the pottery by Henry, which others will now have to make into a final report.

Beirut, in that golden era before the civil war, was where Vronwy Hankey saw how she could expand again her archaeology, now enriched by unusually wide experience of life around the world (with postings in Madrid, Rome, San Francisco, Santiago [Chile], Beirut and Panama, as well as London), to produce an impressive body of creative, imaginative scholarship. Never pompous, always questioning and rather restless, always making intriguing suggestions (even when one disagrees with them, which is not often), always commonsensical, always enthusiastic, always encouraging others (her daughter-in-law Julie Hankey, for instance, feels that, if it had not been for Vronwy's enthusiasm, she would probably never have written her biography of her grandfather, the Egyptologist Arthur Weigall), never a jargon-person, her works, I find, reveal ever more insights and more of value, whether of universal or particular application, every time I read them. Others will finish the main tasks she left unfinished for el Amarna and Pyrgos, but they will work in her spirit and with her deep sense of the past as being something such fun to elucidate – and quite as alive as the present.

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1966

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1989

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Further reading:

G. Cadogan
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