

Isabelle Kelly Raubitschek 1914-1988

By P. Terrence Hopmann¹

Isabelle Kelly Raubitschek was a scholar of classical Greek and Roman archaeology, whose career culminated as Associate Professor of Art at Stanford University. Her magnum opus was published posthumously in 1998. Entitled Isthmia, Vol. VII: The Metal Objects (1952-1989), it is an analysis of objects in bronze, iron, copper, gold, silver, and lead recovered from the Sanctuary of Poseidon at Isthmia. In this work, Professor Raubitschek analyzed the full range of objects, many of which were fragmentary, recovered from the debris of the Archaic Temple of Poseidon originating from the 7th and 6th centuries BC. This was an important sanctuary during the period when many of the major metalworking establishments at Corinth were founded and first used in the Pan-Hellenic games at Isthmia. This book concluded a long and distinguished career in which Professor Raubitschek gained distinction as a teacher of Latin and of classical art and archaeology, while also devoting much of her energy to her family, including her husband, Professor Anton E. Raubitschek, and four children to whose upbringing she devoted many years of her life.

Isabelle Kelly was born in 1914 in Boston, Massachusetts, and was raised in an Irish Catholic neighborhood in south Boston and subsequently in Allston. Growing up near the Bay of Boston, she developed a lifelong love of the sea. Swimming, especially in the ocean, was her favorite recreational activity throughout her life. She graduated from the Girls' Latin School in Boston and entered Barnard College, where she was recipient of a Pulitzer scholarship. She had a very successful undergraduate career and was admitted into Phi Beta Kappa after her junior year. In addition to her academic work, she continued her swimming while in college and ran the hurdles in the college "Greek games." She graduated with an A. B. in Classics in 1935.

Her mentor at Barnard was Professor Margarete Bieber, one of the most distinguished women of her generation in the field of archaeology, who inspired her students to continue in her footsteps. The two women maintained a close professional and personal relationship throughout Professor Bieber's life. Indeed, the affection that teacher and student had for one another became so deep that Isabelle's children grew up knowing their mother's mentor as "Grandma Bieber."

Shortly after Isabelle Kelly's graduation from college, tragedy struck her family when her father, a physician, was killed in an automobile accident near his home in Boston. This tragedy left her mother alone to care for her two siblings, Gerard and Miffie (Walsh), who were much younger than Isabelle.

In spite of the added family obligations entailed in her father's death, Isabelle continued her graduate studies in the Department of Art and Archaeology at Columbia University, which she had begun immediately after graduating from Barnard. She received a fellowship throughout her years in residence at Columbia. In 1936 she attended the Institut d'Art et d'Archéologie at the Sorbonne, where she studied classical

archaeology under Charles Picard and medieval architecture under Marcel Aubert. At Columbia she worked closely with William Bell Dinsmoor, who supervised her dissertation on “Ionicizing-Doric Architecture,” for which she received her Ph.D. in 1943. While a graduate student, she studied at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens in 1938-38. There she came into contact with Oscar and Verna Broneer, with whom she developed a close relationship in ensuing years. She also developed quite a reputation as an enthusiastic dancer during her stay in Athens. In early 1938, she met Toni Raubitschek, himself a classical archaeologist and epigrapher who was working at the Austrian School in Athens after completing his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Vienna.

When Isabelle Kelly returned to the United States, she taught Latin and ancient history at the Berkeley Institute in Brooklyn while writing her dissertation for Columbia University. In 1940, she was invited by E. A. Lowe to help with the preparation of the Codices Latini Antiquiores at the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. She was offered this position because of her strong scholarly reputation from her graduate work at Columbia, in spite of the fact that the philological study of some of the oldest Latin manuscripts took her beyond her major field of graduate study in the archaeology of Greece in the classical period. At Princeton she renewed her acquaintance with Toni Raubitschek, who had received an appointment at the Institute of Advanced Study and had emigrated to the United States shortly after the Anschluss had brought an end to the independence of his native Austria. They were married in 1941. Her first scholarly publication also appeared in the same year in the American Journal of Archaeology on “Ionic Treatment of Some Early Doric Capitals,” based on her dissertation research. There she reviewed the Ionic decorative elements seen on Doric columns and she suggested that this style may have been inaugurated by the Bathykles of Magnesia, whose work is preserved at Amyklai.

Shortly thereafter the Raubitscheks moved from Princeton to Cheshire, Connecticut, while Toni was teaching at Yale. The two spent many winter evenings together translating a volume of Cicero’s collected works, which was published in 1948 by the Classics Club, and the Trojan Women by Euripides, which was published by Rinehart in an anthology of Greek drama in 1954. During the wartime years they moved back and forth between New Haven and Princeton and began to raise a family. Their elder son John was born in 1942 and their first daughter, Agathokleia (Kleia), was born in 1945, both in Princeton. After returning to New Haven, Isabelle became an instructor in Greek and Greek art at Albertus Magnus College during the academic year 1945-46. She discontinued her teaching prior to the birth of Marita in New Haven in 1947. Just weeks later, the family moved back to Princeton where Toni had received a faculty appointment in the Department of Classics, which he held for 16 years. Shortly after their return to Princeton, their last child, Andrew, was born in 1948. In those early years in Princeton Isabelle Raubitschek devoted herself to her family and instilled in her four children her love of learning and respect for hard work and scholarly inquiry. All four have themselves gone on to earn doctorates upon becoming adults, John and Kleia (Luckner) in Law, Marita (Hopmann) in Developmental Psychology, and Andrew in Medicine.

Isabelle Raubitschek was not a woman of independent means; she had to work her way through college and graduate school and devote many years of her life to her family as well as to her profession. She faced directly the challenge of trying to balance two full-time sets of obligations, albeit with varying relative emphases on her family during the 16 years she and her family resided in Princeton. At various times in her life she cared not only for her husband and four children, but also for her mother and her mother-in-law, who both spent many years living in the Raubitschek home. These obligations prevented her for many years from engaging in field work and many of the other complex tasks that are required in order to conduct original research in archaeology.

In spite of these impediments to her career, she refused to believe that she or any group of women had anything in common that set them apart from the rest of professional culture and denied that she had ever been the victim of any form of discrimination, whether intentional or inadvertent. When confronted by the many obstacles faced by women of her generation, she insisted on moving ahead in her own work with a singleness of purpose and a commitment to her own high academic and personal standards, determined to surmount by the strength of her own willpower whatever obstacles she encountered.

When her youngest child, Andrew, began school in 1952, Dr. Raubitschek became head of the Latin Department at Miss Fine's School, a private girls' college preparatory school in Princeton. There she taught Latin and Roman Art to almost an entire generation of young women, including her two daughters, Kleia and Marita. She held this position at Miss Fine's for eleven years as the children were growing up and until the family moved to California in 1963. Because of her love of the sea, she also took her children most summers to vacation at the New Jersey shore, her favorite setting for relaxation and rejuvenation.

Upon arriving in California, she joined the faculty at San Francisco State University, where she became head of the Archaeology Department and subsequently expanded it into a full Classics Department that is flourishing to this day. She joined the Stanford faculty in 1966, when she was appointed lecturer in the Department of Art. In 1974 she was promoted to Associate Professor of Art, and in 1977 she was granted an adjunct appointment as Associate Professor in the Classics Department at Stanford. She also held a position as Curator of ancient art at the Stanford Museum, where she used a fund established by Ms. Hazel Hanson to acquire several major works by Attic vase painters for the museum. She was an active supporter of the Stanford-in-Greece Program and led several groups of alumni and friends of Stanford to Greece and Egypt.

She also participated actively in the Committee for Art at Stanford as well as the Stanford Chapter of the Archaeological Institute of America. While she was chapter president from 1973 through 1975, the Stanford chapter became one of the largest and most active in the country. During these years she and Toni opened their home to dozens of archaeologists and classicists, many from abroad, who were visiting in the San Francisco Bay area, offering them a home away from home, California sherry, home-

prepared food, and engaging conversation about recent developments in their common field of study.

She was also an enthusiastic teacher to students of classical art at Stanford. One of her favorite graduate students, Kurt Luckner, married her elder daughter Kleia in 1971 and went on to a distinguished career as curator of the ancient art collection at the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio, before his death in 1995.

As she returned to university teaching in the mid-1960s, and as her children entered college and later graduate school, Isabelle Raubitschek was able to devote more time to her scholarly research and publication. A highlight of this period was the 1969 publication of her book, The Hearst Hillsborough Vases. Her research for this book also illustrated her approach to teaching. She invited her students to participate in the preparation of this book by conducting a seminar in Hillsborough California, where the vase collection was located, in collaboration with Professor Tom Webster of Stanford's Classics Department. Most of the illustrations, designed to assist the reader in understanding these works, were made on these occasions.

The scholarly quality of this work was noted in a review in 1971 by Gisela Richter, and Jean-Marc Moret described the work in a 1973 article in the Revue Archéologique as “un exemple à suivre pour la clarté des notices et l'élégance de la présentation.” Since the collection of vases has since been dispersed, the catalogue has taken on a particularly important role. It contains detailed information about the objects in this collection, allowing the reader to form his or her own judgment about their artistic and historic value. Moret noted that it is a model work that needs to be imitated.

Dr. Raubitschek also presented an interpretation of an important vase painting on a volute krater by the Kleophon Painter which she acquired for the Stanford Museum. She and Toni dedicated their co-authored study of “The Mission of Triptolemos,” Hesperia, Supplement XX, 1982, to Homer A. Thompson, a life-long personal and professional friend from the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. They were able to show the significance of the Athenian claim to have spread agriculture through the civilized world. In their analysis, they combined the study of art, mythology, and cultural politics in fifth century Athens to support their thesis.

For more than ten years Isabelle Raubitschek battled cancer. During this time she neither fought against what she could not change, nor did she submit to it; rather she adjusted to it and continued to pursue a scholarly career in her chosen field even as the disease took an increasing toll on her. During this time she gained strength from the love and support of her family and from her strong religious convictions. Her Catholic faith, strongly rooted in the Irish heritage in which she was raised, gave her courage to face the most difficult challenge of her life. Throughout this time, she was a role model not only within her family but among the many people she had taught, with whom she remained engaged through her illness. The disease with which she struggled for those many years did not keep her from continuing her professional work as a scholar and teacher and from

caring for the needs of her family, which had grown to include seven grandchildren by the last years of her life.

Between 1971 and 1975, before she had become ill, Professor Raubitschek made frequent trips to archaeological sites and museums in Europe, especially in Greece, and in Asia Minor. She began concentrating more and more on the excavations at Isthmia near Corinth, which would provide the source for her final and ultimate professional accomplishment as an archaeologist. There, at the invitation of Oscar Broneer and his successor, Elizabeth Gebhard, she began research on the metal objects, other than arms, armor and coins, found at this excavation. Although this work was interrupted for a time due to the onset of her illness, she traveled to Corinth for a lengthy stay in 1984 to continue her on-site research.

The significance of her research lies not only in the magnitude and quality of the material, but especially in her presentation of it through which she emphasizes the culture of this Panhellenic sanctuary, second in importance only to Olympia. The meticulous care of the excavations enabled her to put the material in its historical and topographical context. Although her health made frequent travel and work at an archaeological excavation difficult, she and her husband, Toni, made what was to be her last visit at Isthmia in 1987, collecting new materials and verifying previous findings. She died in 1988 shortly after completing the manuscript for her book on Isthmian metal objects. Her husband, Toni Raubitschek, paid one more visit to Isthmia in 1989 to verify specifications, and he saw her final work through to eventual publication in early 1998.

This work focuses on metal sculptures, vases, tools, jewelry, and horse-trappings. It examines the role that metal objects played in the architecture of the time as well as the foundry processes at the sanctuary through which the objects were produced. Professor Raubitschek's research addresses the question of the origin of the strigil, the chronological development of horse bits, and the issue of importation versus local production of metal objects. The objects found at the excavation at Isthmia are compared with similar pieces from other sanctuaries in the region. The text includes extensive photographs and drawings, as well as a comprehensive bibliography. Professor Raubitschek believed that it was important in a work such as this to restrict the author's imagination and to avoid fanciful interpretations, while emphasizing description and comparison. This publication of the Isthmia bronzes near the end of the 20th century may well assume a place comparable in importance to Furtwängler's study of the Olympic bronzes near the end of the 19th century.

Isabelle Raubitschek's professional career spanned four decades. As a loving wife, mother of four, grandmother of seven, mentor of countless students in Latin, classical art and civilization, and as a scholar of classical archaeology, she served as a role model for young women and men in the field of archaeology to follow. Especially as future generations of women endeavor to maintain a difficult balance between their responsibilities to their family, to their sense of professional integrity and responsibility, and to the demands of teaching and scholarship, she serves as a notable example of what intelligence, hard work, faith, and determination can accomplish.

¹ P. Terrence Hopmann is the son-in-law of Isabelle Raubitschek. He has prepared this statement on the basis of extensive notes prepared by A. E. Raubitschek, her husband, and of conversations with three of her children: John Raubitschek, Kleia Raubitschek Luckner, and Marita Raubitschek Hopmann, whose contributions were invaluable in writing this brief biography.

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