



NICOLAS COLDSTREAM

## John Nicolas Coldstream 1927–2008

NICOLAS COLDSTREAM was born in Lahore on 30 March 1927, only son of John Coldstream, whose career was spent in the judicial arm of the Indian Civil Service and whose mother (Phyllis née Hambly) was from a military family, Lancers not Coldstreams. His father was knighted in 1938 after retirement but stayed on as first minister of Kapurthala state until 1939. On returning to England the family took up residence in St John's Wood, moving in 1952 to 180 Ebury Street, SW1. Nicolas, as he was always known, though too often with an added 'h', was educated at prep school in Eastbourne, then as a King's scholar at Eton. St Cyprian's at Eastbourne had a lasting impression on him, and he concurred with the picture of the school given by Cyril Connolly in *Enemies of Promise* and George Orwell in 'Such, such were the joys'. He was one of the first Raj children to travel by air, just once, in 1938, and his first publication was based on it—*Croydon to Kapurthala. My First Flight* (Kapurthala, Jagatjit Electric Press, 1938); the Maharajah was so impressed that he had it privately printed at his own expense. His first view of the Athenian Akropolis was when the plane stopped to refuel on this journey. At Eton he had to choose between his two best subjects, Classics and Mathematics, and plumped for the former; he much respected his Tutor, Francis Cruso. His career took a not unusual step, from Eton to King's College Cambridge, but not until he had done his National Service, 1945–8. He had been allocated to the Buffs, but switched to the Highland Light Infantry because they had a battalion in Greece; however, he ended up in the Canal Zone and Palestine. An R and R break also took him to Cyprus. He graduated from King's with a double first in 1951 and spoke of his debt to Patrick Wilkinson and John Raven.

In 1950 he paid his first visit to the British School of Archaeology (as it was then styled) at Athens.

His first job covered the years 1952 to 1956, as a Classics teacher at Shrewsbury School, a period when two Salopian pupils were preparing for a different sort of future, Richard Ingrams and Willie Rushton, though little other record is left of that period in Nicolas's life. A move to the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the British Museum then gave a new impetus to his career, even if it was only a temporary post. It was there that he first came across, en masse, the area of Greek pottery production that was to be the basis of his future work, the Geometric style. It is ironic that his one major still outstanding publication is that of the Museum's Geometric pots, to be issued in the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, one hopes in the near future. His first scholarly publication was in a rather different area, that of an interesting figured Etruscan pot in the Museum, in the now defunct *British Museum Quarterly* (21, 1958, 159–71); this was a demonstration of his broad interests and background knowledge of the wider classical world, a range which some perhaps have overlooked because of the concentration of his subsequent work in a more restricted, earlier field.

The next years consolidated these particular interests, since they were spent in Athens studying the broad range of material of the Greek Geometric period; he was awarded the Macmillan studentship at the British School at Athens, with Sinclair Hood as the Director. Here was the spur to show that the site of Knossos, which was intimately linked to, and partly owned by, the School through Sir Arthur Evans, was not merely a Bronze Age showpiece and Roman colony. His excavations on a hillside south of the palace revealed a cult place, whose resident deity he deduced from the artifacts to be Demeter; the eventual publication of the work in 1973 by the British School (*Knossos: the Sanctuary of Demeter*) is another testimony to his broad knowledge, including as it does much material of the classical and hellenistic periods.

He may well have over-appreciated the solid durable qualities of the Cretan pottery of the early iron age; certainly he was not prepared for the handle of a classical Athenian cup to break off so easily when it was handed to him by a colleague working on material from the excavations in the Athenian Agora at this same period.

A great deal of work had been done on his major research project on Geometric pottery by the time he returned to take up a lectureship in Greek at Bedford College, University of London, in 1960, shortly before it became co-educational. At that time the teaching of the archaeology of

the Greek world in the broadest sense was sparse in London, the only other full-time practitioner at the time of Coldstream's appointment being the Yates Professor of Classical Archaeology at University College London (UCL), Martin Robertson. There was indeed a wave of excitement still rippling from Ventris's decipherment of Linear B, with the Mycenaean Seminar in the Institute of Classical Studies being a centre of discussion and debate. Nicolas was a regular attendee and later organiser of the Seminar. He was also allowed to introduce an undergraduate course on the Greek Bronze Age as well as one on 'his own' area of the Early Iron Age; this was appropriate in that the Department was housed in St John's Lodge, vacated a few years earlier by the Institute of Archaeology. However, he continued to teach Greek well into the 1970s, while Latin was partly in the hands of another Greek expert, John Barron, between 1959 and 1964. In the field, he collaborated with George Huxley in a highly important excavation over three seasons, 1963–5, at Kastri, the port site on the island of Kythera, where they found ample evidence to substantiate the notion that Minoan colonisation on this stepping-stone from Crete to the Peloponnese was a major feature in the cultural development of the Greek mainland around the mid-second millennium BC. The results, together with an overview of the archaeology and history of the island, were published by the pair with admirable promptness in 1972 (*Kythera—Excavations and Studies*: London)—not that delay marked the publication of any of the work for which he was responsible. Research on the island is continued by the British School at Athens and UCL under the aegis of Cyprian Broodbank, Nicolas's academic successor at the Institute of Archaeology.

In the meantime the *magnum opus* had been published, *Greek Geometric Pottery: a Survey of Ten Local Styles and their Chronology* (London, 1968; and prematurely pulped). The basic thrust of the volume was a ceramic survey of material of the period c.900–700 BC and an appreciation of the technological and stylistic elements that united or divided the regions involved, from West Greece to the Dodecanese. Particular emphasis was placed on the chronological indicators provided by the archaeological evidence, and the chapter on that chronology has been a cornerstone of all reconstructions ever since; he revisited such matters frequently since the publication, not least in the second edition of *Greek Geometric Pottery* published shortly after his death; despite substantial new finds his original framework has survived largely intact. He always insisted that the weight of one piece of evidence should be placed against that of the totality of the rest. Paul Courbin in his appreciation in the Festschrift edited by

Christine Morris (*Klados: Essays in Honour of J. N. Coldstream*: London, 1995), 'J. N. Coldstream; English Archaeologist', noted: 'I do not know whether he has ever made a single mistake, at any rate a serious one'; this, together with his formidable powers of recall, made him an ideal teacher and reliable Solomon.

Nicolas was living in the family house in Ebury Street, and in 1970 was married to Imogen Nicola Carr, who also used her second Christian name (shortened to Nicky). Her own interests were much later, in Western medieval architecture, but they both appreciated, in the fullest sense, object and building, whatever the date. The house became a renowned centre of good hospitality, not least after Annual General Meetings of the British School at Athens with which Nicolas kept up lasting connections; he edited the *Annual* between 1968 and 1973, was Chairman of the Managing Committee 1987–91, and was to be honoured by a symposium marking his eightieth birthday; it took place as a memorial meeting a week after his death.

Those who could not remember the number of the house merely had to look for the blue (actually brown) plaque on the wall commemorating Mozart's stay there in 1764. They might also be able to hear the piano inside; Nicolas was a highly accomplished pianist, taking lessons up to the end, as well as being heavily involved in the Chamber Music Society at UCL. Only one recording is known, if still extant; when Nicky was being interviewed by the BBC on the topic of Mozart in London, the background music was Nicolas playing Mozart's first symphony, probably composed in the house.

During his employment at Bedford College Nicolas progressed readily to a readership (1966) and then to a personal chair in Aegean Archaeology (1975). He attracted large numbers of undergraduate and research students many of whom went on to very higher things, and very few of whom are known to have dropped by the wayside; indeed two, albeit mature, students were allowed to submit doctoral theses well after the normally accepted term, with the help of elegant and persuasive letters from Nicolas to the UCL Administration to the effect that neither was in a rat-race (not his words of course) but pursuing valuable research. This was an echo of the old days when lack of a further degree did not prevent one from climbing the ladder; it may be the case that when he lectured much more recently in Athens it was illegally since he was without the doctorate required to instruct the young.

His publications during his time at St John's Lodge in Regent's Park included, in 1977, his probably best known work, *Geometric Greece*

(London). It was a decade of significant monographs in English on early Greece. Vincent Desborough's *Greek Dark Ages* and Anne Jeffery's *Archaic Greece* in the same series has already appeared, while Anthony Snodgrass covered a fuller range in 1971 in *The Dark Age of Greece: an Archaeological Survey of the Eleventh to the Eighth Centuries BC*. Desborough indeed marked the way for Nicolas, not only in producing such an overview but in his approach to the treatment of pottery of the Greek Iron Age, in his *Protogeometric Pottery* of 1952. *Geometric Greece* appeared, surely not coincidentally, in 1976, the year before Nicolas was elected a Fellow of the Academy (1977). While no such book can please everybody, it is hard to find any serious criticism of it, in detail or approach, in the published reviews (not so the second edition, as discussed below), and all recognise, more or less directly, the clarity with which the volume is written, an honest resumé of an enormous amount of material, accessible to the broadest of readerships—'an archaeological survey of the Geometric period, amplified where possible by information from literary sources' to quote the preface.

In 1978 London was the venue for the tenth international congress for classical archaeology, under the auspices of the British Academy. The president of the committee of honour was John Ward-Perkins, but organisation of the whole in the hands of Peter Corbett, with Anne Birchall as second-in-command. Corbett resigned the post, saying that the conference would run at a loss; Nicolas took over the position and the conference subsequently was a great success. The first verbal announcement in Britain of the finds at Vergina in the tomb of Philip II of Macedon by Manolis Andronikos and a splendid reception in the Guildhall helped, but so did Nicolas's leadership in this crisis, even if his, and others', feet were paddling away furiously below the surface. It is said that the conference actually made a profit, despite the fact that conference packs were bought and made up for all who made an initial enrolment; hundreds did not eventually arrive.

There ensued a period in 1982–3 in which the interweave of the structures of the University of London, of University College London and of the teaching of Classical disciplines in Britain and in London played a substantial role. While from the outside these matters may seem or have seemed to be of minor significance, those within were very much affected, both physically and mentally, it may be truly said. An original threat to close the Classics Department at Bedford College resulted in various countermeasures, within the frame of both Bedford as a whole and the future of teaching Classical Archaeology within central London. Reports

and working parties moved with some rapidity: Bedford to King's changed to Bedford to Royal Holloway, and the decisions of both Holloway not to take on teaching in Classical Archaeology and Peter Corbett, then Yates Professor of Classical Archaeology at UCL, successor of Martin Robertson, to retire early, initiated a move, supported by the Provost, Sir James Lighthill, for Nicolas to be translated to the chair, a move which indeed he might well have made purely on merit had the post not become involved in this upheaval. Ironically the Chairman of the Board of Studies of Classics on whose watch these rationalisations took place was John Barron, who by now had passed from Bedford via UCL to King's. There was a hiatus year for the chair, 1982–3, involving much debate on frozen posts and FTEs, before Nicolas moved to Gower Street, where he reconstituted the smallest department in UCL. However it was not long before what Sir Charles Newton had founded as a Department of Archaeology, in 1880, found itself merged into the Institute of Archaeology, which itself had recently lost its own independence as an independent School of the University and been brought under the wing of UCL.

At UCL there has been a major difference of approach to the broad field of Classics, with a variety of historical roots, from that in the rest of the University, and indeed most other British universities, in that the area was split between three departments; this presents a situation not ideally suited to the running, especially at the administrative level, of traditional Classics courses, whatever goodwill was on offer from the constituent parts. It is worth noting this point since it inevitably affected the efficacy with which Classical Archaeology could operate, or be seen to operate, in the College.

Not that such teaching was in any way stagnant during Nicolas's tenure of the chair. Especially at postgraduate level he continued to attract a good number of quality students, both at master's and research levels. His course on Cypriot archaeology was well attended, and also materially supported by the then Director of Antiquities of Cyprus, Vassos Karageorghis, a UCL alumnus himself. Some students even came from Cambridge to hear his lectures. An unusual spin-off was the publication in the *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, London* of a tomb group from Nicosia in the possession of the Institute of Archaeology, written by members of the class under Nicolas's supervision. His Festschrift is also telling, composed wholly of articles written by one-time pupils, twenty-five contributions in all; add to that the numerous overseas scholars whose theses he examined—at Amsterdam, Austin, Goteburg, Lausanne, Lund. It would be invidious to single out individual names.



So the wider world was very much in evidence during his tenure of the Yates chair, 1983–92. He had sporadic contact with Cousin Bill, Sir William Coldstream, who had already retired in 1975 as Director of the Slade School of Art, but was still seen in the Housman Room (UCL's apology for a Staff Common Room), located opposite the Classical Archaeology Museum, and a regular after-lunch venue for guest speakers at the Myceanaean Seminar. Among such guests were many whose central research interests lay in the Near East. The area was of course from birth on his radar, and a good deal of his subsequent research concerned the connections of the Levant and Egypt with the Mediterranean world, mainly, but not only, the Aegean area. He was a major supporter of the London Centre for the Ancient Near East and engaged fully in the debate on Greeks, Phoenicians and others, especially with respect to the vexed question of chronology, or chronologies, of the two areas. A unique find (to date) from Huelva in southwest Spain he recognised as from an Attic Middle Geometric vase, but not a krater, as most would have thought, but a large pyxis; whatever the shape he plausibly argued that it could only have reached its destination on a Phoenician boat, have been sent originally from Athens to Tyre, as a gift. His dislike of seeing a Hellenic hand everywhere is also shown in his refusal to accept that the trading post at the mouth of the Orontes river, Al Mina, was a Greek foundation. Participation in Ben Isserlin's excavations at Motya in Sicily in 1961–3, soon we hope to be published, was a formative part of this outlook; having run out of Greek pottery to study he dug a small Phoenician temple by the north gate. In 1971, as Courbin notes, he made one of his very few changes of mind, which was to prove prescient: the large standed krater of the Late Geometric period from Kourion, in the Metropolitan Museum, dubbed the Cesnola krater, was not made on the island of Naxos, but on Euboea, a view now almost totally accepted. It was only later that a combination of new excavations and scientific analyses underpinned his sketched idea of a leading role of the Euboeans in interchanges within the whole Mediterranean in the eighth century. His study of Greek material excavated at the troubled site of Tyre confirmed even earlier connections, and more recently a single imported Euboean pot, probably of the early tenth century from Tel Rehov, has become a focus of heated debate on the topic of biblical dating(s), a debate to which Nicolas has made sober contributions.

Such studies emanated from his work on the early Iron Age on Cyprus, to which he devoted several articles and public lectures, the last at the opening of the A. G. Leventis Gallery of Cypriot and Eastern Mediterranean



Archaeology in the Institute of Archaeology on 8 November 2007. In particular he thoroughly investigated aspects of material imported to sites such as Amathus and Kition, from Greece and elsewhere, tying down relative chronologies and examining the character of exchanges of both artefact and idea.

Not unnaturally, his services were in demand, and he lectured abroad in Scandinavia, the USA, Germany and elsewhere; he took up the Geddes Harrower Visiting Professorship at Aberdeen in 1983 and was Visiting Fellow for the Australian Institute of Archaeology in Australia in 1989. He became a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1964, Ordinary Member of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in 1984, Corresponding Member of the Academy of Athens in 1996, Corresponding Member of the Archaeological Institute of America in 1994, and Honorary Counsellor of the Archaeological Society of Athens in 2000. In 2003 the British Academy awarded him the Kenyon Medal for Classical Studies. Many of these honours were granted after his retirement from UCL in 1992, but it will be clear to the reader that he continued working, and on a grand scale, afterwards.

A musical interlude. As noted above, Nicolas was a fine pianist with a very strong interest in chamber music. Outside UCL he was part of a trio including Bill's daughter, Catherine Coldstream. Shortly after joining UCL in 1983 he became a member of its Chamber Music Club, a society equally open to staff and students for the performance and enjoyment of chamber music, and soon became active on its organising committee. He was a regular performer right up until his death on 21 March 2008, playing solo piano works, piano duets, chamber works for piano and strings, and since 1991 much of the major violin and piano repertoire with David Bogle, Professor of Chemical Engineering, including the major sonatas of Mozart, Brahms, Beethoven, Schubert and Richard Strauss. After some years the idea of performing Beethoven's massive Kreutzer sonata for violin and piano was suggested and, after a deep breath and a change of colour, he agreed and duly produced a towering performance. The day before he died he was to rehearse the Brahms C minor piano quartet with Professor Bogle and friends but rang to say he was unwell but really looking forward to recovering and getting stuck into rehearsals. Another pianist was found and the work performed at the concert the following month in his memory, as he would surely have wished.

For many years he took lessons from Ruth Nye of the Royal College of Music. She helped him maintain a strong technique and dexterity while always sensitive to the nuances of his chamber music partners. Ruth Nye

is also head of Piano at the Yehudi Menuhin School and it was through this connection that he arranged the annual visit by students of the school to perform at UCL which continues today.

His powers of persuasion, as noted above, were legendary. He organised many concerts and often had a clear idea of the shape of the programme he wanted. Once clear, he would work on appropriate members to perform the pieces that he had in mind with his winning style and twinkle in the eye. More famously, he and colleagues persuaded Sir James Lighthill, the then Provost, to contribute most of the money for the Bosendorfer piano on which the Chamber Music Club concerts are still performed. His wife Nicky donated much of his extensive music library to the UCL Chamber Music Club.

Knossos continued to be central to his academic work, and along with Humfry Payne and James Brock he promoted the study of post-Minoan Knossos, and Crete, in all its aspects. Because of the constructive brilliance of Sir Arthur Evans and the destructive powers of the Roman colonists, few visitors recognise the site as a major player in Crete throughout the first millennium BC. The remains in-between fall into three categories: Evans's unpublished material, tombs, and minor bits of stratigraphic evidence from ongoing excavations in the area. Nicolas has contributed more than anybody in all three areas, and also argued that the acropolis of the Iron Age town lay on the hill west of the palace, an area still privately owned; subsequent survey by a team under the leadership of Todd Whitelaw has made such a concentration of Iron Age habitation clear. Nicolas's work resulted in a string of publications; hardly a string, however, are the four volumes (J. N. Coldstream and H. W. Catling (eds.), *Knossos North Cemetery*: London, 1996) devoted to publication of the Early Iron Age section of the North Cemetery, excavated under extremely difficult rescue circumstances in 1978 ('my lunch was eaten by a bulldozer'), when construction of the University of Crete's Medical Faculty site was begun. Nicolas was joint editor and major contributor to the volumes, and Nicola's drawings, as so often, were a central feature, needed not least because of the poor surface condition of much of the pottery. The latter, as ever in Crete, never failed to surprise, and Nicolas did not fail to point out the many strands of iconography and myth-history that went into the production of such things as the 'Protohippalektryon' and the 'Goddess on the Skateboard', unearthed in the semi-controlled chaos of the excavation. The latter was perhaps the most remarkable of the objects he ever published, displaying on either side a female holding birds between trees, and standing on a wheeled trolley; one side is clearly summer, the

other winter, and the whole echoes near-eastern representation of deities on chariots. The full series of Cretan pictorial pots of the ninth century is a delightful set, more varied and earlier than the better known Athenian examples of early Greek pictorial art; Nicolas's contribution to the study and interpretation of both has been considerable.

He also treated the social aspects of Knossos in an article devoted to Aristotle and his ideas on the rise of the polis, a theme which he developed and updated in a contribution to the *Festschrift* for George Huxley in 2006. Otherwise, archaeological theory was not an area that was of interest to him, and that most probably led to his not being chosen as successor to Robert Cook as Lawrence Professor of Classical Archaeology at Cambridge in 1976. It also provoked the exclamation from one reviewer of the second edition of *Geometric Greece*, 'Why on earth not?', in response to the statement in the new preface 'we cannot deal here with theoretical reconstructions of early Greek society, often based on anthropological analogies far removed in space and time'. It was a statement probably born of dislike of such approaches, though it was probably also true that there was little room or need for even a survey of that field in what was avowedly a handbook of archaeological evidence. It should be added perhaps that a good many theoretical approaches have been more closely based on archaeological material of immediate relevance than his statement would perhaps indicate; Courbin in his *Festschrift* essay (page 7) took this point regarding the archaeological base of socio-anthropological theories further: 'No, it is not the case of "refining the relative chronology or of constructing a new one", one accepts broadly the stylistic chronology established by—among others—Coldstream! In short, it is out of the question to impugn archaeological work for the sake of these interesting, if not new, theories, which are often uncertain and ephemeral.'

Nicolas was a tall but not lofty person. His manner indeed was that of a quiet and thoughtful member of the old-school type, and this certainly was occasionally misinterpreted. He tended to couch his disagreements in terms well known from the *Yes Minister* repertoire—'I am not quite sure that I can follow you completely on that'. His deliberate and seemingly at times slow responses were however always to the point, and couched in readily understandable terms; his students always valued the meticulous detail that he could bring to their work, as he did in his publications. And there was indeed a twinkle in the eye; his doggerel verses do not compare to the output of his predecessor Martin Robertson, but they do at least remind us of the lighter touch that was never far from the surface. Academically he concentrated on the essentials of gathering physical evi-

dence and interpreting them in historical terms, be they art–historical or broadly political. He regarding both his basic books, *GGP* and *GG* as historical contributions; certainly nobody working in the field can afford to ignore either.

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