



Elizabeth (Betsy) Pemberton FAHA

1940 – 2024

The passing of Elizabeth Pemberton is a great loss to classical archaeology, not only on account of her publication, in three magisterial volumes as well as many articles, of Classical and Hellenistic pottery and finds from ancient Corinth, but also for her rigour, integrity and intelligent approach to all the topics she investigated and interpreted.

Elizabeth (known as ‘Betsy’ to close friends at Corinth) was born and brought up in New York, where she attended the Friends’ Seminary, an education which she always praised, although she was not a Quaker. From there she went on to Mount Holyoke College for her BA, and then to Columbia University, where she gained her MA in 1964, supervised by Otto Brendel. In 1964–65, she spent a year as a graduate student at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, and it was there that she was introduced to the Corinth excavations by the then Director, Professor Henry Robinson, and formed some lasting friendships with the Corinth team, including Nancy Bookidis, and Connie and Ronald Stroud. It was Ronald Stroud, director of the excavations of the Demeter Sanctuary, who realized her potential and invited her to publish the Greek pottery from the site. He didn’t realize her additional strength, her ability to climb rickety ladders in the storerooms to bring down heavy wooden cases filled with pottery.

This aided her again when she was locked into the museum by mistake one evening. While everyone happily ate dinner, not realizing that she was missing, she managed to climb up over the museum roof from an interior courtyard and get down to the ground. She was, of course, a little annoyed that no one had looked for her. In 1969, she gained her PhD, on the Vrysoula pottery deposit at Corinth, supervised by Evelyn Harrison, who had stimulated her love of sculpture, and Roger Edwards, who had reaffirmed her love of pottery. These two have been described as the ‘royalty’ in the field.

She began her teaching career at the University of Maryland in 1966 and stayed there until she moved to Australia in 1981. On sabbatical in 1979 –1980, she returned to the American School in Athens as a Visiting Professor, where she indulged her love of classical sculpture by teaching a course on 5th century sculpture. The University of Melbourne was later to benefit from this particular interest. Some of her early publications reflect this concern with sculptural iconography, such as “The East and West

Friezes of the Temple of Athena Nike" (AJA 1972) and "The Gods of the East Frieze of the Parthenon" (AJA 1976). These publications used not only the sculpture itself but were informed by a wide range of textual sources.

For anyone who knew Elizabeth, it was clear that a major turning point in her life came when she met an Australian classical archaeologist, Ian McPhee, in February of 1980. Then living in Washington, Elizabeth made a choice which she never regretted. As she summed up in her own words: 'In 1981, I (very sensibly) married Ian McPhee and emigrated to Australia' (Ancient World Seminar, speaker biography, 2 August 2021). Once settled in Melbourne, Elizabeth took up a teaching position in the University of Melbourne between 1983 and her retirement in 2002, first teaching in the Department of Fine Arts, and then in the Classics Department.

Over the years, Elizabeth taught a range of popular subjects, which reflected her interests and the wide scope of her expertise. While in Fine Arts she offered courses in, for example, Western Art that ranged from Greek and Roman art, painting, sculpture and archaeology through to Giotto (1989). In Classical and Near Eastern Studies, as the department would be known for some time, Elizabeth taught Classical Studies subjects, e.g. 'The Rise of Athens', 'Greece in the Bronze Age', 'Greek and Roman Painting', 'Introduction to Greek Archaeology', not to mention a course in 1992, 1993, that must have been close to her heart, 'Corinth: A Case Study in Greek History and Archaeology', a subject that lured students with a different vision of the ancient Greek world as conveyed in Elizabeth's course summary:

'Greek history is usually seen through the eyes of Athens, because of the spectacular material remains and the variety of written sources. But not all Greek cities were like Athens.

Corinth was wealthy, geographically vital, and a major power throughout Greek history. Written references to her history are few, but archaeological remains are extensive' (Classical and Near Eastern Studies Handbook 1993).

Her publications during this period reflect her ongoing association with Corinth as well her interest in iconography, for example 'Ten Hellenistic Graves in Ancient Corinth' (Hesperia 54, 1985), 'An Early Red-figured Calyx Krater from Ancient Corinth' (Hesperia 57, 1988) and 'The Dexiosis on Attic Gravestones' (Mediterranean Archaeology 2, 1989). Her major volume on the pottery of the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore, which she had worked on throughout the 1980s, came out in 1989 (Corinth XVIII, 1).

As well as teaching undergraduate courses, Elizabeth undertook many postgraduate supervisions. She was an excellent research supervisor, exacting but generous and helpful. Submissions were always read promptly and commented on perceptively. Both authors of this obituary were supervised for their doctorates by Elizabeth and feel fortunate to have had that experience.

During her employment by the University of Melbourne, Elizabeth was active in the Classical Association of Victoria, serving as a member of the Council and giving several well-attended lectures to the general public. She was called on twice to deliver the H. W. Allen Memorial lecture for the Classical Association of Victoria: in 1989 she spoke on “Agalma and Xoanon: Greek cults and cult statues” (published in 1990 in IRIS 3(1–2): pp. 1–14, the journal of that association) and in 2002, her lecture carried the title, “Archaeology of Food: Cooking and Cuisine in Ancient Corinth.” A member of the audience commented “Elizabeth is the only person I know who could make the dullest, non-decorative pottery sound interesting”. Indeed, Elizabeth had a way of engaging the audience and revealing the underlying value of even ordinary domestic wares in constructing the narrative of life in the ancient world. During this time, she also served on the Council of Heritage Victoria, combining her interests in heritage and archaeology.

It would be remiss not to mention that this deep interest in the ancient classical world was shared with Ian and together they travelled to Corinth almost on a yearly basis and to other destinations to conduct research on major international museum collections. Together, they published works on red-figured pottery: ‘Aphrodite on the Swan. A Red-Figured Vase in Avellino’ in 1990 and ‘South Italian and Etruscan Red-figure Pottery from Ancient Corinth’ in 2006.

Both Elizabeth and Ian proved invaluable for their excavation experience and for their expertise in classical ceramics when they took part in archaeological fieldwork in a remote part of eastern *Türkiye* with Tony and Claudia Sagona between 1990 and 1997. These expeditions for the ‘Archaeology at the Northeast Anatolian Frontier Project’ included the first extensive survey of the Bayburt Plain, and subsequently the first systematic excavations at the sites of Büyüktepe Höyük (Bayburt Province) and, in turn, excavations at Sos Höyük (Erzurum Province). Their work helped construct the Hellenistic and early Roman components within the ceramic typology for these regions. From this involvement came important publications including a chapter in the final report of the project’s Bayburt Province survey (2004).

Elizabeth retired from teaching in 2002, but not from her research and other interests. She became an Honorary Research Fellow at the A. D. Trendall Centre for Ancient Mediterranean Studies, at La Trobe University. Her 2003 publication of the Attic and Atticising forms of pottery at Corinth (in *Corinth XX, The Centenary*) proved her long-held opinion that Corinth was independent of Athens’ influence. Indeed, any careless student who had mentioned ‘The Agora’, was pounced upon with the query ‘Which Agora? Corinthian or Athenian?’

The Trendall Library provided the perfect base for ongoing research and in 2012, she and Ian published the important volume, *Late Classical Pottery from Ancient Corinth: Drain 1971–1* (2012). In it they reviewed a controversial subject, Corinthian pottery of the 4th century B.C., established a chronology for it and for one of the most important buildings

in the Greek city, the South Stoa. Their book also set a standard for the publication of such material that will be used by all.

But her inquiring mind had meanwhile led her to enrol in the United Faculty of Theology in Trinity College, Melbourne, graduating with a Master of Divinity in 2010 and having published a short article in the Australian Biblical *Review*. She continued to visit Corinth with Ian and to publish material from there, including a paper on the Corinthian mortaria (with Alexandra Villing) published in *Hesperia* 79, 2010, and 'Small and Miniature Vases at Ancient Corinth' (*Hesperia* 89, 2020). Both are fundamental publications. She much enjoyed working on the "offering trays" which resulted in the publication in 2015 of *Corinth XVIII,7: The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore. The Greek Lamps and Offering Trays*, Princeton 2015 (with her great friend Nancy Bookidis). At the time of her death, she was still hoping to see the proofs of her major paper, to be published in *Hesperia* 2024, on the terracotta figurines from Drain 1971–11, a topic which she found fascinating, as it encompassed two of her favourite topics, Corinth and iconography.

In spite of all this scholarly activity and achievement, Elizabeth did lead a 'normal' and well-balanced life. While teaching she used to relax at lunchtime with a detective novel while she ate her sandwich. She attended Pilates classes. She adored going to the movies; she and Ian shared a passion for Bollywood. At the other end of the scale, she loved classical music and particularly opera and particularly *Così fan Tutte*. Her knowledge of opera was such that she once defeated the experts in the Metropolitan Opera quiz held during the weekly opera radio broadcasts. She had a deep faith. She must have felt a culture shock when, as a migrant, she transferred from the American system to the Australian tertiary system, from lovely fall colours to the dull green eucalypts, but she adapted, as a good Corinthian would. She would be proud to be called a 'Corinthian'.

Once a friend of Elizabeth or Betsy, one was a friend for life and she will be much missed by friends in Australia, Corinth and the U.S., but most of all by her husband Ian to whom the Academy sends heartfelt condolences.

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With thanks to Nancy Bookidis, Assistant Director Emerita of the Corinth Excavations, who contributed the stories from Corinth.