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Jim Coulton 1940–2020

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Jim Coulton, inspiring teacher, archaeologist and architectural historian, died in Edinburgh on 1 August 2020 (fig. 1). Jim taught at the Australian National University, Canberra, at the universities of Manchester and Edinburgh, and was Reader in Classical Archaeology at Oxford University from 1979 until his retirement in 2004. He taught a whole generation of students and colleagues a huge amount about the ancient world and its buildings. He worked on the architecture of Greek cities from the early Archaic to the late Roman period, both in Turkey and Greece, and wrote a series of highly influential studies on a wide range of subjects – Greek temple design, Hellenistic stoas, the nature of the Greek city and the strange mountain poleis of Lycia. He carried out and published groundbreaking research at a series of now-important sites in Anatolia, notably at Oinoanda and Balboura, as well as in Greece at Zagora, Lefkandi and Phylla; and at the same time he published widely on more theoretical aspects of how exactly ancient architects worked, how their buildings were put up.

Such achievements are a matter of public record. Less well-known is the strong influence Jim had in helping and shaping the research and fieldwork of others. He put a lifetime's experience at the service of archaeologists whose sites he visited all over Turkey and Greece or who visited him in Edinburgh or Oxford. He was a master of 'reading' ancient buildings and excavations, and gave his ideas on what he saw freely – not in the form of a disquisitive soliloquy, but through a series of mild but probing questions from which a larger picture emerged, quite different from that envisaged at the start.

Jim had a memorable effect on his students, both in classes and in doctoral supervision. He wrote lapidary comments on chapters submitted, mixing some encouragement with strong points for improvement, and engaged close attention through patient, in-person interrogation of the devil's-advocate kind. He made his students defend

Fig. 1. Jim Coulton at Aphrodisias in 2015.

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their premises and arguments in long exchanges, always good-humoured, but always deadly serious. Jim hated false praise of any kind and always gave clear, honest assessments. His close concentration on the subject and question, on antiquity and the material, and on the kinds of argument and evidence that would move things forward stayed with his students. He was not interested in polemics or personalities, only in what arguments about the ancient world could be made to stand up. He supervised doctorates on a wide range of topics – for example, votives in Hera sanctuaries, portraits of Hellenistic kings, Greek treasury buildings, Hellenistic gymnasia, the economy of the Greek countryside and Nabataean building techniques.

Jim was a kind and generous host who went out of his way to make visitors to Oxford working in his field feel welcome, and he and his wife Mary entertained visitors and students regularly at home. Jim was also a highly effective, plain-speaking university colleague who got good things done without fanfare. He played a major role in the creation of the new undergraduate BA degree in Classical Archaeology and Ancient History at Oxford (started in 2000), which has had a strongly beneficial effect on the subject. It trains students in an integrated archaeo-history of the Greek and Roman worlds, using texts and material evidence equally, and has expanded the social profile of those studying classical antiquity in the university (the degree encourages and enables the learning and use of Greek and Latin but does not require it).

Jim worked and published throughout his career on Greek temples, architectural design and the components of the polis as built. His doctoral research on Greek free-standing stoas was published in a major monograph that was based on long fieldwork and his own complete set of drawings, plans and site plans for each of the stoas (Coulton 1976a). His distinctive drawing style that aims for interpretative clarity is here already fully formed. Jim's drawings exclude any details and embellishment that are unnecessary for the points they are intended to convey.

The results from a series of hard-core research articles through the 1970s, on aspects of early Greek temple design and construction (stylobate plans, angle contraction; for example, Coulton 1974a; 1975), were synthesised in a short, much-read book written for a wider audience, *Ancient Greek Architects at Work* (Coulton 1977). The articles include several classics, such as 'Lifting in early Greek architecture' that examines the maximum sizes of blocks used in Archaic period temples tabulated against their dates to show when construction cranes were invented – in the late sixth century BC, at the point at which raising huge blocks on ramps changed to lifting smaller, crane-friendly blocks vertically by machine (1974b). A later article, 'Coping with curvature' (1999), discusses how the notorious mind-bending 'refinements' of the Parthenon might actually have been implemented in practice. Rather than being an index of pointless architectural extravagance and going further than any other builders in a tightly normative building type, Jim shows that, when you know how, curvature refinements would be no more expensive to carry out than cutting the elements straight. The issue brought out his intensely practical nature. Jim's position was that, in truth, he had no idea how the Parthenon builders went about implementing curved designs in the marble blocks of the temple, but if he had had to do it, this is how he would have gone about it.

Jim was interested in how ancient buildings worked and in the changing character of Greek urban settlements, from startling beginnings in the early Archaic period to fast or slow decline or transformation in late antiquity. He wanted to test ideas about Greek settlements, cities and buildings on the ground, and fieldwork brought out some of Jim's most salient characteristics: boundless energy, austere living, strong collaborative spirit, precise budgeting, good humour even in adversity, close focus on a project's main aims, excellent planning, love of maps, decisive leadership, strong language skills in modern Greek and Turkish, sharp observation and a clear-headed grasp of research economy – that is, not doing more than is needed to get results and answer the questions posed at the start.

Jim made decisive contributions at several sites and led his own pioneering projects at others. He worked with Oxford colleagues on the excavation and publication of the extraordinary *heroon* at Lefkandi – precisely what no one expected, a 50m-long wooden-columned structure of the mid-tenth century BC, Greece's first monumental building after the Bronze Age, long before it was meant to have any (Coulton 1993). Jim summed up research on the building in a brilliant graphic reconstruction that has become iconic (fig. 2). At Zagora on Andros, he worked with colleagues from Sydney on one of the earliest Archaic Greek settlements, built and inhabited for a comparatively short period (ca 900–700 BC), doing drawings that superbly evoked its character and enlivened its landmark publications (figs 3–4; Cambitoglou et al. 1971: 6–36; 1988: 147–61, 175–78). At Phylla-Vrachos on Euboea, Jim collaborated with Greek colleagues in campaigns of excavation and documentation to demonstrate that the site was indeed a military fort and dated to ca 500 BC. Jim provided the drawings and an evocative reconstruction of the barrack building (fig. 5), and pulled together and edited the final publication, writing much of it himself, including the important historical interpretation and evaluation (Sapouna-Sakellarakē et al. 2002).

In Turkey, Jim investigated the strange phenomenon of Greek-style city settlements in high-mountain locations of inner Lycia. At Oinoanda he joined British epigraphist Alan

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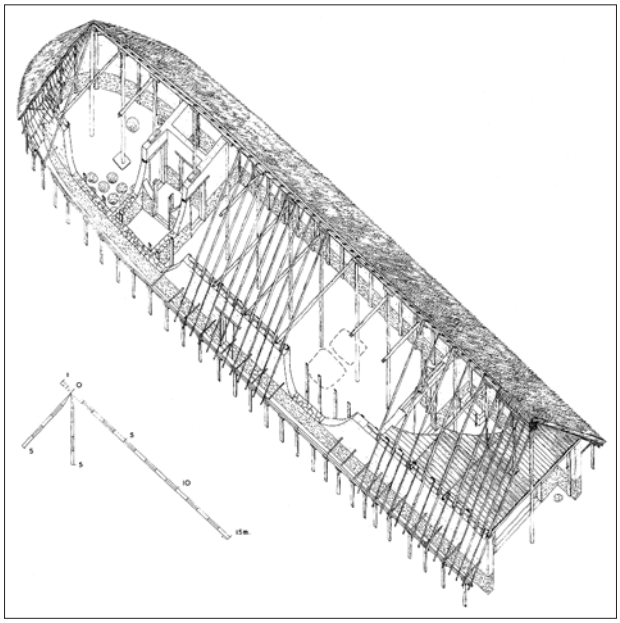

Fig. 2. Lefkandi: axonometric reconstruction of the Toumba Building.

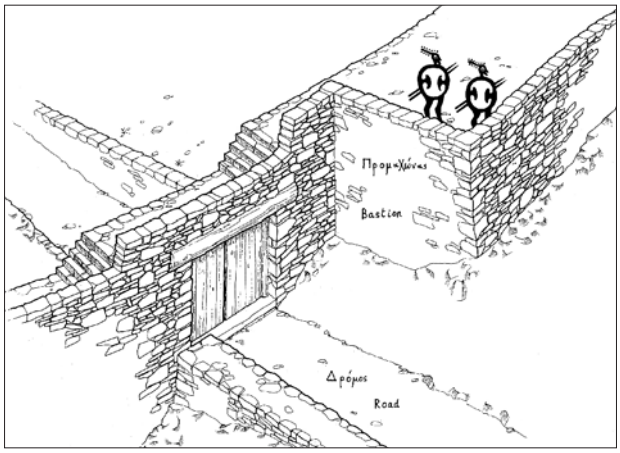

Fig. 3. Zagora: reconstruction of wall and main gate.

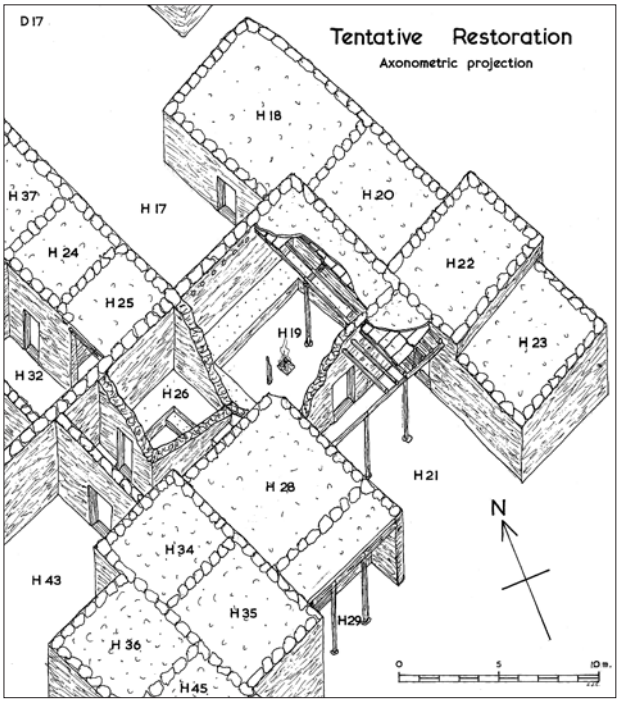

Fig. 4. Zagora: tentative reconstruction of houses.

Hall to survey and record the remarkable standing remains of the city, which he published in a series of model articles, mainly in this journal (1982a; 1982b; 1983; 1986; Stenton, Coulton 1986; Hall et al. 1996). At even more remote Balboura, Jim designed his own project from the start – first with a pace-and-compass survey, conducted alone with one student, then with an even-handed six-year programme of three years of survey and research of the urban centre (city development, buildings, epigraphy) and three years of survey and research of the city's territory (geography, resources, agriculture, landholding). The site was chosen for its small scale, relative insignificance and utter typicality – small enough that one team could research both its urban centre and its supporting territory. The project was published in two handsome British Institute at Ankara volumes and remains a model for intelligently designed survey archaeology (Coulton 2012). The underlying argument is that the archaeology of monuments, statues and inscriptions and the archaeology of the chora and the productive countryside need each other if the nature and workings of the Greek polis are to be understood.

Jim was a brilliant combination of architectural historian, classical field archaeologist and ancient historian. He was as happy to publish on technical matters, such as altar forms or the meaning of *anagrapheus* or *diplē stoa* (2005; 1976b; 1971, respectively), as on the implications of the changing proportions of Doric capitals (1979). When the first season at Balboura brought to light a long, complicated inscribed text on local forms of land tenure, Jim quickly mastered its technicalities and published it with Alan Hall in the epigraphic journal *Chiron* (1990).

Most recently Jim had been working at Aphrodisias (fig. 1), on the study and publication of the Temple of Aphrodite and its extraordinary conversion in the fifth century AD into a huge Christian church – the city's Cathedral of St Michael – in which all parts of the temple were redeployed as parts of a new, much bigger structure. Jim had completed a text describing the building's life in several chapter-phases, from the first century BC to the seventh century AD, which will become a monograph in the site series. Jim drew a colour-coded 'wiring' diagram of the temple-church plan, based on several seasons of close study of the building, that shows where every block from the temple that was moved ended up in the new church (fig. 6). A huge amount of new information is packed into a typically ingenious graphic representation.

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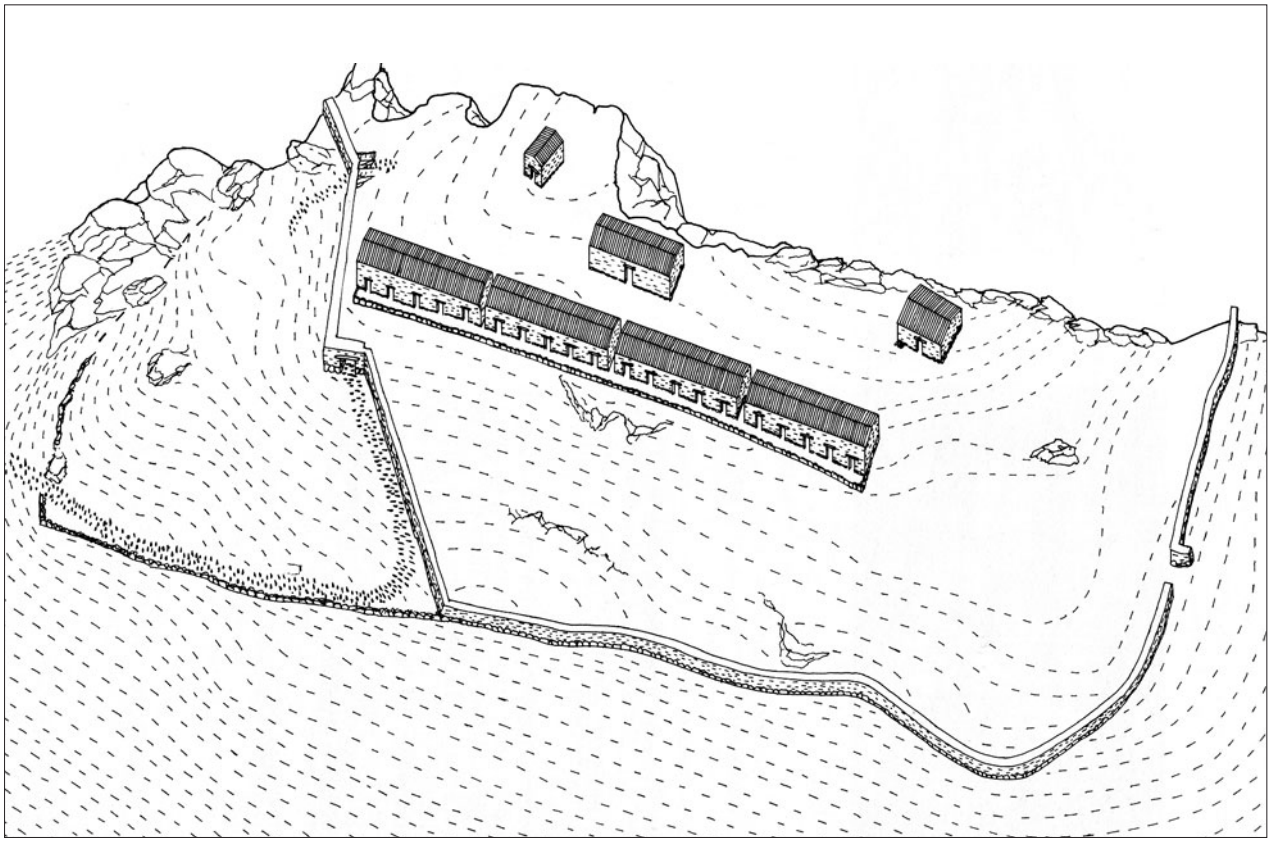

Fig. 5. Phylla: fort and barracks at Phylla-Vrachos on Euboea.

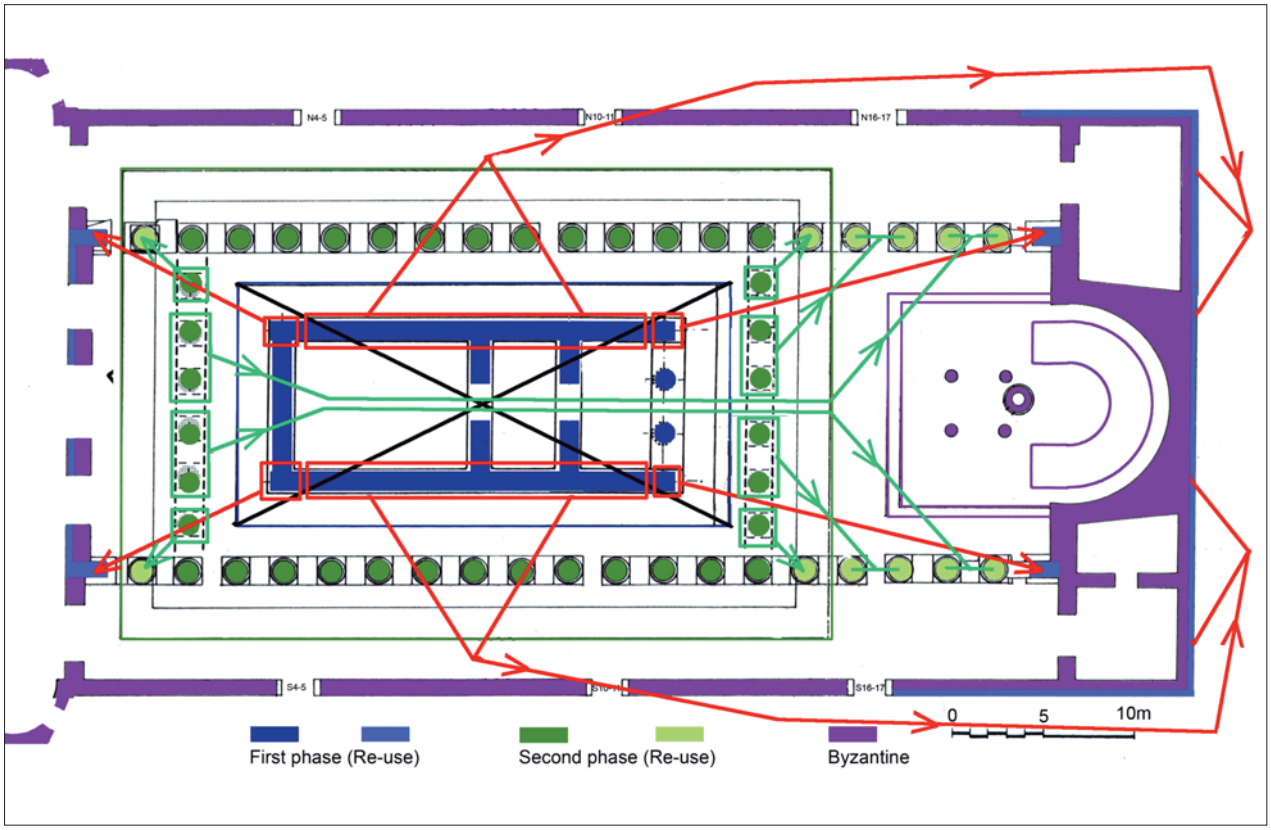

Fig. 6. Aphrodisias: diagram showing the movement of components of the Temple of Aphrodite (blue and green, late first century BC to first century AD) to later positions in the Cathedral of St Michael (fifth century AD).

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Jim had a great impact on his colleagues, collaborators and students, both for his wide expertise and for his character as a teacher and as a person. He was someone of outstanding honesty and humanity. His firm judgment and sense of what was right was always tempered by humour and a clear-eyed assessment of what was possible. He hated fuss, pretension, ceremony and rhetoric. He most prized new discoveries, new ideas from the younger generation and combative discussion about those ideas, preferably in the manner of gentle Socratic cross-examination. Jim was a person of unusual modesty and unfailing generosity. He is much missed.

Acknowledgements

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