



Oil painting by Neil Moore with red-figure amphora UA2003.25
 Purchased with funds from Professor John Young 2003
 Chau Chak Wing Museum, The University of Sydney

Emeritus Professor Alexander Cambitoglou AO (1922-2019)

We mark with sadness the death of Emeritus Professor Alexander Cambitoglou AO on 29 November 2019. With his passing, we lose one of the most influential figures to have shaped the study of Classical antiquity in Australia.

Alexander Cambitoglou was born in Thessalonike, Greece, in 1922. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Thessalonike, a Master of Arts from the University of Manchester, and a doctorate from the University of London. He was awarded a second doctorate from the University of Oxford, where he studied with renowned classical archaeologist and art historian Sir John Beazley, before being appointed Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of Mississippi (1954-56) and then Bryn Mawr College (1956-61).

As a young scholar of considerable promise, Cambitoglou started corresponding about South Italian vase painting with A. D. Trendall, Chair of Greek at the University of Sydney and Curator of the Nicholson Museum (1939-54). This correspondence flourished into a celebrated research collaboration, culminating in Cambitoglou's arrival in Australia in 1961 as Senior Lecturer in Classical

Archaeology at the University of Sydney. With the untimely death in 1962 of Trendall's curatorial successor, Prof James Stewart, Cambitoglou found himself thrust into the role of Acting Curator then Curator of the Nicholson Museum. He became Professor of Classical Archaeology in 1963.

Cambitoglou found a museum with extraordinary depth but needing significant attention. Although Trendall had arranged the collection to accord with his seminal *Handbook to the Nicholson Museum* (1945), the galleries retained an antiquarian feel. Cambitoglou swiftly enacted an ambitious new vision. Closing the museum from 1962-66, he set about preparing contemporary displays in a building that he noted 'does not lend itself to the needs of a modern museum'.¹ The long rows of Gothic windows were sealed to focus attention on the objects, and the high ceiling was lowered to reduce the 'barn-like effect'² of the open hall. Dozens of grime-covered plaster casts were distributed to high schools to de-clutter the galleries and make room for the genuine antiquities in store. New glass cases were introduced, and displays arranged to follow didactically the chronologies and geographies



*A Gallery in the Nicholson Museum at its re-opening in 1966 after four years of renovations by Cambitoglou.
Photo: Courtesy of the Nicholson Museum*

of the regions the collections represent. The result would fundamentally shape the layout, tenor and tone of the museum for the next 50 years.

The revitalised Nicholson Museum was unveiled on 23 September 1966 with speeches by Prof Cambitoglou who overviewed the transformation, and Prof Trendall who was invited to declare the museum open. Trendall described the new museum as a fairy-tale, ‘revealing, as it does, so much beauty that was previously hidden from us beneath a disguise’³.

The transcript of Cambitoglou’s 1966 speech resonates with his vision to create something beyond itself. ‘It is only because of our faith that we were contributing something important to our University, to the city of Sydney, and indeed to Australia that we had the strength to carry out our task’, he remarked, before concluding, ‘since there is no other Museum of Antiquities of this magnitude in the country, the Nicholson Museum’s importance extends beyond this University’s grounds; it is the Australian National Museum of Antiquities’⁴.

At the same time, Cambitoglou undertook a stocktake of the entire collection – the most important in the museum’s history since the accession of Nicholson’s original donation. This inventory addressed thousands of objects that had lain unregistered in the stores, many from Cyprus,

Egypt and the Middle East sent by excavations in acknowledgment of the university’s support. Many artefacts were treated in a new conservation laboratory, and most objects displayed at the reopening had undergone some sort of treatment.

Cambitoglou augmented his displays with detailed handbooks for the collections, and formal publications followed. In 1995, he co-edited with Dr Ted Robinson the volume *Classical Art in the Nicholson Museum*, the first major work on the Classical collection since Trendall’s handbook. In 2008, he authored with Michael Turner the first fascicule of the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* for the Nicholson Museum *The Red Figure Pottery of Apulia*. This was followed in 2014 with the second volume *Red Figure and Over-Painted Pottery of South Italy in the Nicholson Museum*.

In addition to his scholarship, Cambitoglou built a community of people that surround a museum to make it come alive. He revitalized the Society of the Friends of the Nicholson Museum and established the Association of Classical Archaeology, which later served as the bedrock on which the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens was founded. Both organizations sponsored the famous Nicholson Museum music concerts, held annually in the Great Hall of the University of Sydney between 1971-



Ancient Torone, located on the promontory and its hinterland on the right of the photograph, was one of the largest and wealthiest cities of the Chalkidike. It was excavated from 1975 through to 1995 under the direction of Alexander Cambitoglou. Photo: Courtesy Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens.

1995. Featuring international musicians, these concerts were a key feature in the cultural landscape of Sydney, helping energise the museum community and encourage people to visit the galleries. Generous donations and bequests followed, allowing Cambitoglou to expand the collection through the purchase of key objects such as the marble busts of Claudius and Germanicus, an Attic grave stele, a celebrated Cycladic figurine, and a black-figure amphora by the Antimenes Painter depicting Herakles' dule with Kyknos, the brigand son of Ares.

Cambitoglou's curatorship of the Nicholson Museum was one of several achievements that mark an extraordinary career. He enthusiastically promoted Australian research in Greece, beginning excavations in 1967 at the Early Iron Age settlement at Zagora on Andros and in the 1970s at Torone in the Chalkidike. He was well-placed to do so. As a Fellow of one of Greece's oldest learned associations, the Archaeological Society of Athens, he could apply, via the Society, to the Greek Ministry of Culture for permission to undertake archaeological fieldwork in the country. In fact, the Australian campaigns at Zagora in the 1960s and 70s and the early years of the excavations at Torone were conducted solely under the aegis of the Society. Cambitoglou, though, had grander plans in mind, plans that would bring his two homelands, Greece and Australia, still closer. Australia, he felt, needed its own academic representation in

Greece and to this end in 1980 he created his greatest legacy, the Australian Archaeology Institute at Athens, a research and educational facility for Mediterranean studies with heavy emphasis on archaeological fieldwork and research. Australian academics could now apply, through their own Institute, to the Ministry of Culture for permission to conduct excavations, surveys and the like and Australian researchers had a far more direct link to the many museums and collections in Greece. There is no doubt that the AAIA has been a major contributing factor to the flourishing of Australian participation in Greek archaeology. Australian projects, based at a number of universities throughout the country, have been conducted at Zagora, Torone, Plataea, Perachora on the Corinthian Gulf, Vapheio-Palaiopyrgi in Laconia, and in the centre of Athens as well as on the island of Kythera. Literally hundreds of study and publication applications have been made by the AAIA on behalf of Australian research students and academics while the AAIA has collaborated in, or facilitated, on-site study programmes organized by various Australian universities. And we should not forget the highly important educational aspect of fieldwork; scores of Australian students benefitted from their participation in excavations and surveys organized through the AAIA. Back in Australia the Institute's annual Visiting Professor brings a distinguished archaeologist from Europe or north America to tour its member



*Professor Cambitoglou speaking at the Nicholson Museum in the presence of a statue of Hermes.
Photo: Archives of the Nicholson Museum.*

universities throughout the country, a great boon for the promotion of classical archaeology Australia-wide. These are just some of the ways in which Cambitoglou's legacy continues.

Cambitoglou was elected Fellow of the Academy of the Humanities in Australia in 1968, before becoming Arthur and Renee George Professor of Classical Archaeology in 1978. He retired from his Chair in 1989, although continued to serve as Curator of the Nicholson Museum until December 2000 and Director of the AAIA until 2016.

Several honours recognise in Cambitoglou a man who, with wit, grace, tenacity and skill, was able to create an academic environment that placed the study of Classical antiquity in Australia at the forefront of the discipline across the world. He was made Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in 1987 for his contributions to archaeology and international cultural relations. In 1991, he became the fourth person in the University of Sydney's history to receive the prestigious title Doctor of the University. When presenting the award, Vice-Chancellor McNicol noted that it was reserved only for 'those few and exceptional individuals whose work has substantially enhanced the reputation of the University'⁵. In 2001 he

was awarded a Centenary Medal for his contribution to the Arts in Australia. Generations of students are grateful to have attended his lectures, excavated on his digs, and visited his museum galleries, while falling under the spell of his enthusiasm and charm.

Beyond his recognition in Australia it must also be remembered that Cambitoglou was a preeminent presence in Greek academic circles. In 1994 he was elected a member of the Academy of Athens, the pinnacle of the country's academic establishment. This was not just an august honour, it was also a position of responsibility which brought many duties with it, all of which Cambitoglou executed with his characteristic thoroughness. In 1998 the Order of the Phoenix was bestowed upon him by the President of Greece. His international standing was reflected by his membership of the Society of Antiquaries, London, and his corresponding membership of the German Archaeological Institute and the Archaeological Institute of America.

Cambitoglou achieved a great deal. He was a rare example of a visionary who could actually implement his plans. In this he was, as he would insist that his interlocutor remember, helped by many like-minded supporters, but the vision was his.

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Endnotes

1. Transcript of speech delivered by Prof Alexander Cambitoglou at the Nicholson Museum, 23/9/1966. *Archives of the Nicholson Museum.*
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4. Transcript of speech delivered by Prof Alexander Cambitoglou at the Nicholson Museum, 23/9/1966. *Archives of the Nicholson Museum.*
5. 'Emeritus Professor Alexander Cambitoglou', *University of Sydney News*, 9 April 1991