

Museum of Classical Archaeology

Press Release

24 September 2021

Mycenae: From Myth to History

An exhibition of photographs by Robert McCabe

Tuesday 28 September 2021 – Friday 10 December 2021

Website:

<https://www.classics.cam.ac.uk/museum/exhibitions/exhibitions/mycenae-myth-history>

In the summer of 1955, Robert McCabe, a young American, was given a simple assignment by Professor Alan John Banyard Wace: to create a visual record of Mycenae with his Rolleiflex camera and Plus-X film.

This exhibition marks last year's centenary of the British excavations at Mycenae and puts on show nearly fifty of those black and white photographs – a beautiful and evocative time capsule of the site, its landscape and its people. The words accompanying the images are the memories of the late Elizabeth French, daughter of Wace.





First picture: *The postern or North Gate at Mycenae from the inside.*

Second picture: *Alan Wace looking out across the Citadel Wall.*

Copyright: Robert McCabe, 1955

Alan Wace was Director of the British School at Athens when in 1920 he was given personal permission to investigate at the archaeological site of Mycenae, a place loaded with both mythological and historical significance. By 1955, the digs – along with those of his Greek colleagues – had revealed the remains of a palace complex, with temples, storerooms, craft workshops and housing surrounded by imposing fortified walls, testament to a flourishing city which dominated its surrounding territories. But more than that, Mycenae plays a starring role in the Greek imagination, both ancient and modern, in stories riven by treachery and discord: Agamemnon, the king who led the Greek forces to Troy, ruled Mycenae, and it was where he would meet a bloody end at the hands of his adulterous wife, Clytemnestra...

The year that Wace met McCabe, 1955, was the final year he would direct the excavations at Mycenae. Two years later, he died. Wace's daughter, Elizabeth (Lisa) French, would go on to take up his mantle as an internationally renowned expert on Mycenae – and to become the first female director of the British School at Athens from 1989 until 1994. In McCabe's photographs, French appears a young woman, her future still ahead of her. In 2013, she donated the archives of the excavations at Mycenae to the Faculty of Classics in Cambridge. Sadly, she died earlier this year.

'It was the honor of a lifetime to have photographed Mycenae for Prof. Wace,' says Robert McCabe. 'He was a towering figure both in scholarship and philhellenism. Lisa's rich and eloquent captions add a unique dimension to the images.'

This exhibition remembers that hot summer at Mycenae through the lens of Robert McCabe's camera and through Elizabeth French's words. The captions accompanying the prints are her own, and they weave her memories around the beautifully captured images –

telling a story not only of exciting discoveries but also of the very people who made those discoveries: the archaeologists on site, but also the local people. Everyone is named, everyone is remembered.



First picture: *Agamemnon Dassis with his daughter Panagoula (Loula) at the door of the Belle Helene inn.*

Second picture: *Charles Williams (excavation architect 1955) sketching, sitting in the shade of the Lion Gate.*

Copyright: Robert McCabe, 1955

We are grateful to Aegean Airlines for kindly funding the transportation of the works to the UK.

About the Robert McCabe

Robert McCabe was born in Chicago in 1934 and grew up in Rye, New York. His father worked for a picture newspaper in New York City, and as result of his father's gift of a Kodak Baby Brownie in 1939, McCabe started taking photographs when he was five.

His first photographs of Europe were the result of a trip in 1954 to France, Italy, and Greece. He returned to Greece in 1955 and 1957, and photographed the Cyclades for National Geographic. Today, his work has been exhibited in London, Paris, Brussels, in many locations in Greece including several exhibitions in Athens, as well as in Patmos, Santorini, Thessaloniki, Monodendri, Corfu and Poros, and in the United States in New York City, Boston, and Jackson Hole, WY. His published books cover subjects and locations in Greece, France, Italy, New York City, New England, Havana, China, and Antarctica.

Visiting Museum of Classical Archaeology

The Museum is currently open to the public 11am-2pm Tuesday-Friday and 2-5pm on Saturdays (university term-time only) and tickets need to be booked in advance.

However, from **Tuesday 5 October**, MOCA is extending opening hours to 10am-5pm Tuesday-Friday and 2-5pm on Saturdays (university term-time only) and removing the need to book tickets. More information: <https://www.classics.cam.ac.uk/museum/visit-us>

Our priority remains to keep staff, visitors and volunteers safe, and we are retaining some measures, including additional cleaning and screens on the front desk.



Further information on the Covid-secure measures we have in place can be found on our website. We have been awarded the Visit Britain *We're Good to Go* Industry Standard mark. This means we have followed government and industry COVID-19 guidelines, have a Risk Assessment in place and have a process to maintain cleanliness and aid social distancing.

<http://www.classics.cam.ac.uk/museum/visit-us>

About the Museum of Classical Archaeology

The Museum of Classical Archaeology is home to one of the finest surviving collections of plaster casts of Greek and Roman sculpture in the world, housed in its atmospheric Cast Gallery. Exhibitions are displayed amongst the casts, creating new dialogues between ancient and modern, antiquity and its reception.

About the University of Cambridge Museums

The University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) is a consortium of the eight University Museums and the Cambridge University Botanic Garden. Together, the UCM represents the UK's highest concentration of internationally important collections outside London. With more than five million works of art, artefacts, and specimens, the collections span four and a half billion years. The University of Cambridge Museums are funded by Arts Council England as a National Portfolio Organisation.

For further information and images, please contact the Curator, Dr Susanne Turner
smt41@cam.ac.uk | 01223 335153
www.classics.cam.ac.uk/museum



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