

Thomas Warren Jacobsen, 1935–2017

TRACEY CULLEN

Open Access on AJA Online

The world of classical archaeology lost one of its pioneers with the death of Thomas Jacobsen on 15 January 2017, in St. Louis, Missouri.

Jacobsen was born on 18 March 1935, in Mankato, Minnesota, “the other end of the Mississippi,” as he would refer to it from his home in New Orleans. He was raised and educated in Minnesota, earning a B.A. in political science and classical languages at St. Olaf College (1957). He then paused, legend has it, to choose between a career in professional baseball, jazz clarinet, or classical archaeology. To our good fortune, he settled on the last, going on for an M.A. in classics at the University of Minnesota (1960), where he met William McDonald, mentor and future director of the Minnesota Messenia Expedition. From McDonald, Jacobsen gained an appreciation for interdisciplinary and regional research in archaeology, features that would come to define his own fieldwork. He then moved to Philadelphia, where he received his doctorate in classical archaeology from the University of Pennsylvania (1964). It was there that he renewed his enthusiasm for baseball, becoming a lifelong Phillies fan.

Jacobsen devoted his scholarly efforts to the study of prehistoric archaeology in Greece and the eastern Mediterranean. He spent much of his career in higher education, first teaching in the Department of Classical Languages and Literature at Vanderbilt University (1964–1966) and then moving to Indiana University (Bloomington), where he taught for the next 26 years. While in Bloomington, he chaired the Department of Classical Studies (1975–1978), and founded and directed an innovative graduate program in classical archaeology (1970–1985). Visionary for his time, Jacobsen viewed archaeology not as subservient to classics, art history, or anthropology but as an independent discipline, which, while it could profitably draw on other fields, had its own set of requirements, method, and theory. To that end, he urged students to take courses in a range of departments—not only classics and art history, but also anthropology, soil sciences, geology, statistics, and so on—to craft a well-rounded course of study. Although he worried that this approach might make it more difficult for his students to find academic employment, most graduates from the program have gone on to rewarding positions in academia, publishing, or the museum world.

Throughout his career in archaeology, Jacobsen played a vital role in many organizations, chief among them the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA). In 1968–1969, he held the Olivia James Traveling Fellowship, and he later served on the Governing Board and Executive Committee of the AIA (1983–1985) and worked tirelessly on several other AIA committees. He was similarly concerned with the curriculum and direction of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, teaching for a year as the Jessie Ball

American Journal of Archaeology
Volume 121, Number 3
July 2017
Pages 505–8
DOI: 10.3764/aja.121.3.0505

www.ajaonline.org



Thomas Warren Jacobsen, 1935–2017.

DuPont Special Research Fellow (1980–1981) and serving on the Managing (1974–1992) and Executive (1980–1984) Committees.

Jacobsen's earliest excavation experience was at Halieis in the Argolid (1962); he would later return to excavate the prehistoric acropolis (1965–1966). For his dissertation, he moved north to Euboea to conduct a one-man survey focused on the prehistory of the island, an interest he would eventually pass on to his students, most notably Donald Keller.¹ He also participated in the University of Cincinnati excavations at Neolithic Kephala on Kea, where he formed a lasting friendship with Colin Renfrew. In 1966, Jacobsen was invited by the distinguished ancient historian Michael Jameson to codirect the Argolid Exploration Project, a position he held for a decade. During informal sur-

vey in the vicinity of Halieis, local antiquarian Adonis Kyrou introduced him to a large cave on the headland of Franchthi, the excavation and publication of which was to become the center of his life for more than two decades. From 1967 to 1993, Jacobsen directed excavations at the site and oversaw the interdisciplinary research and publication program that resulted in the series *Excavations at Franchthi Cave, Greece*, published by Indiana University Press.²

Franchthi became a profoundly important site for our understanding of European prehistory. Jacobsen's background in classical languages and archaeology scarcely prepared him for the excavation of the deep stratigraphic sequence in the cave, representing some 40,000 years of intermittent occupation, from the Middle Paleolithic through the Neolithic period.

¹ Jacobsen 1964. Encouraged by Jacobsen, Keller founded the Southern Euboea Exploration Project (SEEP), a multidisciplinary research project that has supported survey and excavation in Euboea for the past three decades.

² To date, 13 fascicles of the series have appeared, with a 14th currently in press. Jacobsen served as Editor-in-Chief for the first nine volumes, succeeded by Karen D. Vitelli after he retired.

The sequence remains one of the earliest and longest known in Greece, offering an unparalleled opportunity to study the evolution of early human activity. Moreover, Franchthi's location on the route between the Near East and Europe ensured that the site would long play a leading role in discussions of early seafaring and population movements, the origins of agriculture, and the advent of sedentary life.

In entering uncharted territory—little was known of the Old Stone Age in Greece when excavation began at Franchthi—Jacobsen looked to archaeologists whose work he admired: V. Gordon Childe, Robert Braidwood, Graham Clark, Eric Higgs, and his own professor at the University of Minnesota, William McDonald. He would later also acknowledge the influence of processual archaeology, in particular Colin Renfrew's *Emergence of Civilisation* (1972), writing that “the appearance and impact of that book represent a watershed in the practice of Aegean archaeology.”³

Jacobsen's pioneering approach to Franchthi in the 1960s established a new baseline for multidisciplinary work, as he brought in specialists of many stripes, emphasized the paleoecology of the site as well as the artifactual record, water-sieved sediments, saved all finds, and established a comprehensive sequence of radiocarbon dates. With the longtime support of the National Endowment for the Humanities (1967–1990), he oversaw not only two decades of field seasons at Franchthi but also two symposia held in Bloomington. Those gatherings provided key opportunities for team members to build on one another's research to foster true interdisciplinary collaboration. The excavation and detailed publication of Franchthi set a standard for Aegean prehistory that is still cited as a model today.

Jacobsen retired from Indiana University in 1992, at the age of 57, and moved to New Orleans, where he lived for a quarter of a century and, remarkably, developed a second career as a jazz writer. He had loved jazz since his teenage years, when he played the clarinet and tenor saxophone and listened to the broadcasts of the New Orleans Jazz Club over the powerful Crescent City radio station WWL. While living in the arts district of New Orleans, in his own words “like a kid in a candy store,”⁴ Jacobsen made a name for himself as one of the local music scene's most astute observers.⁵

Devoted to both the music and the musicians, he published extensively on traditional New Orleans jazz. He especially revered the early forms of Dixieland and ragtime that took root in the early 20th century and made New Orleans famous as the birthplace of jazz. A regular columnist and contributor to periodicals such as *The Mississippi Rag* and *The Clarinet*, he also wrote three widely respected books (the latest appearing in 2016).⁶ In a blurb introducing the first book, jazz drummer and writer Charles Suhor notes that “Jacobsen, a fine jazz scholar, could have given us yet another book on early New Orleans pioneers. Happily, he chose to profile working artists, each with their own links to the city's rich jazz past.”⁷

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans. Tom Jacobsen and his wife, Sharyn, returned to their home after the storm, repaired the damage, and settled back in, planning never to leave. While Jacobsen recognized New Orleans as far from perfect, he considered it a cosmopolitan and multicultural city, with many of the qualities of a small town. “Quite simply,” he wrote, “I know of no other place like it in this country. It has become my home.”⁸ In 2014, however, as his health declined, he and Sharyn (and cats BuddyB and PK) moved to St. Louis to be near family.

Kirsten Jacobsen aptly observed that a look back at her father's years reveals “a picture of a life lived fully, adventurously, and intentionally.”⁹ Tom Jacobsen loved archaeology, jazz, and baseball. He turned the first two of those loves into vocations to which he made profound contributions. The third, baseball, remained, in Kirsten's words, “a lifelong tortured passion about which he just knew too much.”¹⁰ His students remember him with enormous fondness: his larger-than-life presence in the Archy House in Bloomington, the brown-bag lunches and seminars he presided over, full of earnest questioning, arguing, and laughter. A taskmaster in his insistence on concise, clear writing, he was also much loved for his wry wit, wisdom, openness, and warmth, qualities to which he held fast to the end. Jacobsen's vitality suggested that he would

³Jacobsen 2000, 7.

⁴Jacobsen 2014, xiv.

⁵B.B. Raeburn, Curator of the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, pers. comm. 2017.

⁶Jacobsen 2011, 2014, 2016.

⁷Jacobsen 2011 (unnumbered page).

⁸Jacobsen 2014, xv.

⁹Cullen and Jacobsen 2017, 6 February. The obituary for Tom Jacobsen posted on the website of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens also includes a link to anecdotes and personal remembrances.

¹⁰Cullen and Jacobsen 2017, 6 February.

live forever, and perhaps he will, through his work on Franchthi Cave and New Orleans jazz, and through the unbreakable bonds he forged with family and friends and students.

Tracey Cullen
American School of Classical Studies at Athens
6–8 Charlton Street
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
tcullen@ascsa.org

Works Cited

Cullen, T., and K. Jacobsen. 2017, 6 February. "Thomas W. Jacobsen, 1935–2017." *The American School of Classical*

Studies at Athens. www.ascsa.edu.gr/index.php/news/newsDetails/thomas-jacobsen.

Jacobsen, T.W. 1964. "Prehistoric Euboia." Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania.

———. 2000. "Background of the Franchthi Project." In *Depositional History of Franchthi Cave: Stratigraphy, Sedimentology, and Chronology*, by W.R. Farrand, 1–10. *Franchthi 12*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

———. 2011. *Traditional New Orleans Jazz: Conversations with the Men Who Make the Music*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

———. 2014. *The New Orleans Jazz Scene, 1970–2000: A Personal Retrospective*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

———. 2016. *The New Orleans Jazz Scene Today: A Guide to the Musicians, Live Jazz Venues, and More*. St. Louis: Bluebird Publishing.