The following lecture was delivered by Dr. Victoria Sabetai (Academy of Athens) at a colloquium, 'The Ure Museum: a Retrospective', which celebrated the launch of the Ure Museums' renewed learning environment. It is published here with the kind permission of Dr. Sabetai.

Ronald M. Burrows and Percy N. Ure in Boeotia¹

It is a well known fact that historical memory is selective, but in the cases of Percy N. Ure and his mentor, Ronald M. Burrows, it has been highly selective. Both are less acknowledged than they deserve and both received less recognition from the British academic community of their times. I discuss here their contribution to the field of Boeotian archaeology, their method of work, their relationships to Greek archaeologists in the turbulent years between the world wars and their perceptions of modern Greece.

No one who has set out to study artifacts recovered from Boeotian graves will deny the place of honour that must always be held by Ronald M. Burrows, Percy N. Ure and Annie D. Ure. Their books and articles published grave groups from the necropolis of Mykalessos, in the vicinity of Tanagra, in a very systematic manner. Yet Burrows, the first to set foot in Boeotia in the spring of 1905, did not originally intend to excavate tombs [fig. 1, left]. He came to Greece rather to work on Thucydidean topography, and was interested particularly in Thucydides’ account of

¹ Sincere thanks to former and current curators of the Ure Museum at Reading for their help, namely Drs. J. F. Gardner, P. C. N. Stewart and A. C. Smith. A somewhat different version of this paper will appear in Sabetai, forthcoming. [Note that abbreviations and footnote style follow those of *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 1997, 611 ff., which is online at http://www.dainst.org/index.php?id=141].

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Mykalessos. The site of Mykalessos was disputed and is currently identified with modern-day Rhitsona. Burrows also intended to excavate the site of Delium, south of Rhitsona, hoping to locate and unearth the temple of Apollo that was mentioned in some literary sources. Burrows was primarily a classicist, for whom the material remains of antiquity were an illustration of the ancient texts, the truths of which ought to be proved and verified. In this he was typical of his generation. The fact that the temple was not found caused a change of plans. Here is how Burrows recorded the events two years later, in September 1907:

“For eight days we were at Dilisi, on a hill over the Euripus, and with the glorious mountains of Euboea right above us on the other side. It was a beautiful site, but we had no luck, and found nothing but Roman and Byzantine remains. In England they would have made the name of a place, but archaeology is locally comparative, and here they are not even worth mentioning. I sent them all off, vases, mouldings, one inscription, and a really pretty Byzantine lamp with a cross on it, to the nearest local museum, and struck tents for Rhitsona, near which is the ancient Mycalessus. Here I have had amazingly good luck, having hit upon a whole set of very ancient Greek tombs, 7th and 6th century B.C., with beautiful little Boeotian polychrome vases, with sphinxes and griffins and lions designed on them [fig. 2, right]. It is luck, but not altogether undeserved. No other archaeologist has even come here, but I

2 Burrows 1904-1905. The search for the temple of Delium was funded by a grant from the Oxford Craven Fund. For the continuation of the digs see A. C. B. Brown, BSA 12 (1906) 93-100; this excavation and report were assessed as poor, confusing and of appalling casualness: J. M. Fossey, Topography and Population of Ancient Boeotia (1988) 63, n. 65. For the early classicists in search of epigraphic material which would allow them to determine ancient sites and sanctuaries see O. Polychronopoulou, Archéologues sur les pas d’Homère (1999) 241-247. For the earlier travellers see further D. W. Roller, Early Travellers in Eastern Boiotia (1988).
wandered here by myself two years ago, and scented out that there might be something. I also made friends with the most notorious tomb-robber of the district, Aristeides.... I heard from him at Dilisi that he was digging here secretly, and that two months ago the line of tombs had been discovered by some peasants. He naturally didn’t want me to come here, but I have made a bargain with him, and he is with me here, getting so much for every tomb he finds for me. It is a great and special art, like finding wells. Today, for instance, one foot below the surface he picked up a lump of earth. “Very deep, very old”, he said in Greek, “this will be very good”. So we set two workmen at it, and they went down and down, till at last, 12 feet below the surface, we came to a great stone slab, and below it was a splendid skull and 12 dear little 7th century B.C. vases, only one cracked. Hardly any of the tombs have slabs on them, and the vases are, therefore, mostly broken. It was a grand moment when we found it!” [fig. 3, above].

The cemetery of Rhitsona was unearthed in subsequent short campaigns in 1907-1908 and 1921-1922, initially by R. M. Burrows and P. N. Ure [fig. 4, right], later by the latter and his wife,
Grace Holding came along on the first campaign. She was perhaps the first British woman ever to have taken part in a British archaeological field expedition in Greece. She photographed the material and made some of the drawings. The project was not an official excavation of the British School at Athens (hereafter BSA), but was under its auspices, as were Burrows’ and later Ure’s initiative. Impressed by the wealth of grave offerings that he found at Rhitsona, Burrows set out to see whether or not each vase assemblage was placed in the grave on one single occasion; he soon found out that these were mostly single interment graves, as is typical of Boeotian burial customs. Annie Ure described the beginning of the 1921-22 campaign thus: “We had to apply to the mayor of Aulis for a permit. He granted it on condition that we offered employment first to citizens of Aulis, our landlords. So we sent

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5 For the history and role of the BSA see most recently J. Whitley, *Pharos* XI (2003) 95-111.

6 Ure 1927 a, vi.
our foreman to Aulis to pay our respects to Artemis and the shade of Iphigeneia and to enrol workmen. He got three or four there and filled up the number with men from Tanagra, which was a little further away [fig. 6, previous page]. We depended a great deal on our workmen. They knew when they were only about a foot down from the surface whether there was a grave beneath or whether it was stereo (empty) and must be abandoned. One man, Costas, was a clever scoundrel. He had been in prison again and again for tomb robbing and he knew all about it. One day I found him digging with tremendous gusto. I asked him if it was a grave for he was only a little way down. He said, “It is a grave, kyria, and it’s a very good grave. It will have lots of gold and silver in it”. This was of course rhetorical exaggeration, for we never found gold and only very occasionally silver. But it proved to be a remarkably good grave with hundreds of objects buried in it.” The Ures resided in rustic houses with floors of beaten earth, furnished with boxes which were used as seats and crates for the archaeological finds; A. D. Ure described vividly the hurling cold winds and the music of birds and sheep bells in a talk to the Reading Atrebates society in 1967.\(^7\) [fig. 7, below].

\(^7\) Recorded audio-tape in the archives of Ure Museum, Reading.
The results of the Rhitsona research appeared in a series of publications, either preliminary reports, or in Percy and Annie Ure’s articles dealing with specific finds. A series of monographs by P. N. Ure, some co-authored with A. D. Ure, treated the plain pottery, the figured pottery, the Corinthian aryballoi and the archaic figurines.8

Burrows and Ure were pioneers for their scientific approach of Boeotian burial archaeology, which at the time was totally undermined from the extensive plundering of the Tanagran necropolis. Tanagran graves were being systematically looted in order to retrieve those famous clay figurines called “Tanagras” by the learned Europeans, who were buying them fervently.9 The excavators postulated that their “first business [was] to publish the total contents of as many graves as possible in catalogue form.” This was a difficult task because of the large amount of grave furniture, in one occasion up to 447 items in a single tomb.10 Burrows and Ure were influenced in their approach and in their publications by the Italian archaeologist, P. Orsi. Orsi was the excavator of several Sicilian cemeteries and propagated a new excavational rationale, according to which the full contents of each individual grave ought to be treated as a unit, in contrast to the practice, then current, of separating the showpieces from their grave context and paying attention only to what seemed to have aesthetic merit. For the first time in the history of Boeotian grave digging, therefore, every object from every grave opened has been preserved, and the full contents of each grave were kept together. In so doing, Burrows and Ure made optimum use of the archaeological context, a crucial notion for archaeology, which was substantiated in Boeotia for the first time with the Rhitsona project. It is of course common practice today, although the scholars who introduced it are rarely remembered, especially R. M. Burrows, who died young and therefore left the task of publishing the material to the Ures.

Ure put forth a meticulous taxonomic system in his publications. He divided the material by shape in order to understand the connections of vases in a grave

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8 See bibliography (Appendix 2). For a comprehensive list of the Rhitsona graves see B. A. Sparkes, *JHS* 87 (1967) 128-130. For some chronological adjustments see Sabetai 2001, 10; 98-100.


10 R. M. Burrows-P. N. Ure (1907-08) 227-228 citing a total of 1.500 painted vases to that date; Ure 1913 a, 1-2; Ure 1934 a, xi-xii; Ure 1943, 86. A. D. Ure calculated a total of 6.000 painted vases of various kinds and 500 terracottas (in her talk to the Atrebates Society, 1967).
assemblage, as well as the development and variations of series of shapes such as skyphoi, kantharoi and lekythoi, which were the commonest shapes found in the graves. Some of his divisions, like the skyphoi of type A1, are maintained to the present day. Ure’s task was not an easy one, as the material he was studying was not of the sort one admires in illustrated manuals of Greek art. These second and third rate pieces represent mass production rather than high art. Although Ure’s approach later became common practice, his Sixth and Fifth Century Pottery was criticised during his time by H. G. G. Payne, who caustically remarked that the authors overloaded the text by establishing complex subdivisions of the material that created confusion at the expense of clarification to the point that, in Payne’s words, “care killed the cat”. Payne further remarked: “Rhitsona, like retsina, is a somewhat specialised taste. One doubts if it can ever be acquired…. The authors do not make any distinction between the material which is intrinsically valuable and that which is merely evidence for chronological conclusions; the presentation of the whole is complicated by the establishment of innumerable minor categories and subdivisions, many of which are not of the smallest interest or importance, and merely serve to confuse the picture. The authors find their way skilfully enough through the labyrinth of their creation, but it can be safely said that no one reader in a hundred will attempt to follow them for long…” Another critic noted in 1937: “...We are but human, and the whole truth about Rhitsona is more than most mortals can digest”. Ure defended himself by asserting that his approach was from the “archaeological [rather] than from the artistic point of view”. He insisted that the low quality of the material presented in his publications, though uninteresting to students of “great masters”, serves to illuminate aspects of Greek industry and commerce, since these humble specimens form the majority and are most representative of ceramic mass production. Payne’s critique underestimated Burrows’ and Ure’s need to convey a full picture of their findings exactly as they had unearthed them and does not take into account that overly detailed classifications were unavoidable in those pre-Beazley days. In a scholarly spirit,

13 M. R. [sic], JHS 57 (1937) 92.
14 CVA Reading, v.
Burrows and Ure were fighting against selectivity in the publication and display of grave groups; against aestheticism as the driving force in the search for “masterpieces”, the ultimate result of which was the plundering of the ancient necropoleis. Further, Payne and Ure were in disagreement about the periodization and dating of Corinthian pottery.\textsuperscript{15}

Such critiques were not unanimous, but rather outnumbered by the positive reviews.\textsuperscript{16} Yet we do not know how Burrows and Ure felt about this criticism. It is certain, however, that they did not relent. Burrows wrote about this to his professor of Greek at Glasgow University, Gilbert Murray: “Great pressure was put upon us to publish only show vases, and not to adopt the catalogue form. The amateur spirit is still almost universal in England in regard to vases, and people who ought to know better like to think that they can rely upon vase articles as jam in a powdery volume. We stuck to our guns, and I have no doubt whatever that we did the right thing; but it has meant a certain amount of friction, and I should like you to put yourself in a position to give an opinion should the question be raised in your presence. Our faults, of which we are painfully conscious, lie not in recording too much, but in observing too little”.\textsuperscript{17}

Although the structure and cumbersome style does not make these monographs particularly attractive for the reader, the authors’ many groupings and classifications reveal their attempt to rationalize the material and organize it synchronically and diachronically, rather than to treat them as “objets d’art”. Thus, they managed to shed new light on what were mainly low quality pieces imported to Boeotia, they plotted the chart of their relative chronology and tightened its framework by comparing Corinthian, Boeotian, Euboean and Attic vases. They also showed that masterpieces were not as copiously filling every man’s grave; on the

\textsuperscript{15} Ure 1934 a, 2-3.
\textsuperscript{17} Glasgow 1924, 173.
contrary, most graves contained cheap, mass-produced clay offerings, a reality that would have caused some friction with those late Victorians who idealised ancient Greece as a highly artistic culture, mainly because they were using it as a looking glass into which they admired themselves while shaping their social and national identity. Burrows’ and Ure’s work, disillusioning as it may have been to some for its style of writing, was actually in keeping with the emerging epistemological goals of its time, when scientific positivism and factual objectivity were asking for their share against sheer aesthetics. Their work later formed the foundation for the study of regional fabrics, for issues of industry and commerce and of Boeotian burial archaeology in general.

I should mention that the excavators preserved also the skeletal remains found in the burials and an anthropologist reported on them.

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19 For lists of classified objects as the very paradigm of factual objectivity which informs much of British post-war archaeology in Greece at the expense of earlier interests in cultural anthropology see Whitley, op. cit. above n. 5, 101 ff.
Ure collaborated with the Greek archaeologist, A. Keramopoulos (1870-1960), in the exhibition of the Rhitsona finds in the old Thebes Museum in 1908 [figs. 8, previous page, 9-10, this page, and 11, next page]. Keramopoulos, who apparently had similar ideas, organised a display in which the total contents of each grave were placed together on the shelves. Acting much ahead of his time and likewise following Orsi’s example, Keramopoulos created a “scientific” display which must have been instructive and didactic for the scholar. We do not know how it was received by the general public, but we may surmise that the display was aimed more at the archaeologist and the few educated antiquities amateurs than at the lay visitor.21

P. N. Ure recorded the event with the following words: “It is due to him [A. D. Keramopoulos] that

20 The identification of possibly a woman as the dead of grave 26 to whom was offered a lekythos depicting a fountain scene (Burrows-Ure 1909, 309, n. 1) strengthens the interpretation of such imagery as a *topos* of maidenal imagery: CVA Thebes 1, pl. 62; S. Pfisterer-Haas, *JdI* 117 (2002) 1-79.

the complete finds from each of our graves are exhibited as a unity in the cases of the Museum at Thebes. The temptation to follow the easy and unscientific course of exhibiting only the show pieces and keeping the mass of material out of sight is even now not always resisted in some quarters, and was the normal procedure twenty-five years ago”.22 Only a restricted number of graves was selected, however, for display of their furnishings, notably of the archaic and classical eras, but not the hellenistic.

The biographies of the protagonists of the first systematic Boeotian excavations deserve further mention.23 R. M. Burrows (1867-1920) was the son of a school-master and clergyman of the Church of England. He graduated from Oxford, where he was trained as a philologist and he later became assistant to Gilbert Murray, the famous professor of Greek at Glasgow University and a political liberal of influence. In 1895 he undertook topographical research on Pylos to test a rival theory of G. B. Grundy about the accuracy of the Thucydidean account of the battle at Sphacteria, and the configuration of the whole district. In 1897, Burrows became Professor of Greek at the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire at Cardiff and in 1905 and 1907, along with Percy Ure, he excavated the cemetery of Rhitsona, in a project that Richard Dawkins directed separately from the main work of the British School at Athens. In addition to his archaeological interests, Burrows was deeply involved in other aspects of the cultural and political life of his times. In 1913 he became the first lay Principal of the Anglican foundation

22 Ure 1934, xi.
23 Glasgow 1924; Sabetai 2004; eadem, forthcoming.
of King's College, London. During his appointment there, he championed the Greek cause in the Balkan wars and wrote extensively in the press on modern Greek political issues. His support of Eleutherios Venizelos against King Constantine I brought an invitation in 1916 to act as "semi-official" representative of this politician's provisional government in Salonika. Together with R. W. Seton-Watson, Burrows formulated the unsuccessful plan of luring Greece into the war of 1914-18 on the side of the entente through the offer of Cyprus. In the post-war years he established King's College as a centre for Slavonic and Southern European studies and helped to establish the Koraes chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine history, language, and literature, of which the inaugural holder was Arnold Toynbee in 1919. Although he is considered as “one of the progenitors of 'area studies' in Britain”, it should be added here that he has been criticized for a political unawareness of the difficulties that may arise from dependance on alien sources of funding in politically charged fields of study. This is because the financing of the Koraes chair drew from private sources, namely the Greek community of London, which disagreed with Toynbee’s views of Greek history and held an idealised view of the young Greek state which was at the time engaged in the ethnic cause of the Balkan wars.24

Driven by the ideals of Christian Socialism (he had once tutored the pioneer Labour politician Ramsay MacDonald in Classics) and a restless energy, Burrows was engaged in numerous non-academic activities: dramatic productions, dealings on the stock-exchange, women's suffrage, political and social work and public speaking. He also served on numerous academic, economic and social committees, societies (founder and first president of the Glasgow University branch of the Fabian Society), unions, leagues (co-founder with Pember Reeves of the Anglo-Hellenic League in 1913) and councils. All this, in addition to gifted teaching and effective administration and scholarship. He died from cancer at the age of 53 and even in his last days he had with him the Rhitsona field notebooks, hoping to get some work done, but he never really found the physical strength to carry it on.25


25 Besides his untimely death, Burrows’ personal life was marked by the tragedy of losing his only child shortly after she was born: Glasgow 1924, 35-36.
Burrows introduced P. N. Ure to field archaeology in modern Greece. The two met when the latter (1879–1950), a Cambridge graduate, was appointed lecturer in Greek (in 1904), at University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire at Cardiff.

Burrows’ death left Ure in sole charge of the Rhitsona excavations, which he pursued with Annie Dunman Hunt (1893–1976), one of the first Classics graduates at Reading (1914) and his wife since 1918. Two seasons of excavations (1921 and 1922) led to final publication of the finds by 1934. Ure was appointed professor of classics at University College, Reading in 1911 (it became the University of Reading in 1926), where he remained until retirement in 1946. Ure’s teaching collection of Greek pottery at Reading became in 1922 a departmental Museum, now perhaps the fourth largest collection of Greek vases in Britain. Many of its vases were published in the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, this work being completed after Ure’s death by his widow. Burrows also helped Ure develop a strong interest in modern Greece, and its democratic Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos (1864-1936). In 1917 Ure addressed the Anglo-Hellenic Union with a paper entitled “Venizelos and his fellow countrymen” in which the liberal-socialist Venizelos is described as the greatest and most inspiring figure in European politics and as the idealist without illusions from Crete; he is presented as a great reformer against the corrupt system of party politics run on purely personal lines and as an ally of Britain and France against Germany. Ure informed the public of the

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26 A. D. Ure was curator of the Ure Museum from 1922 to 1976. She wrote several articles on Boeotian and Euboean pottery.

27 Burrows had written a poem (1913) entitled “Song of the Hellenes to Venizelos the Cretan” in which he called this politician “our second Perikles”: (Glasgow 1924, 161-162).
reality of prisons crowded with king Konstantine’s political opponents; one of the detainees was an eminent archaeologist and friend of Ure’s, George Soteriades, excavator of the important multiple burial of the soldiers who fell at Chaironeia under the attack of Philip of Macedon in 338. Both Ures spoke modern Greek28; among their friends were such leading figures of Greek archaeology as Chr. and S. Karouzou29 and N. Papadakis with whom they held frequent correspondence [fig 12, previous page, 13, above, and 14, next page].

Ure, who devoted his life to the University of Reading, was fondly remembered for his sympathetic interest in others, his love of the scholar’s life, and an absence of professional pomposity. He was, in E. R. Dodds’ words, ‘a non-careerist.’ 30 This influential author of “The Greeks and the Irrational” described Ure as follows:

“A less bossy boss than Percy Ure it is impossible to imagine. He was free from any slightest touch of professional pomposity in word or action; he conducted his small department on strictly democratic lines, anxiously trying to ensure that no one was overworked and that each of us had the sort of work best suited to his or her tastes and talents. His own interests were mainly in Greek history and archaeology, but the only class which he invariably reserved for himself was the class for beginners in Greek to which he rightly attached the greatest importance, seeing in it the best

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28 Two of Percy’s articles were written in this language: Ure 1912 and 1915. As their son Bill kindly informs me, his parents used Greek at home, when they did not want their children to understand what was being said between them.


chance of preserving Greek as a university subject outside the narrowing circle of elite public-school boys—a circle on which Reading did not draw.... Ure was the gentlest and least self-assertive of men, totally devoid of the petty rancours which appear endemic in the teaching profession. But he was also a sturdy custodian of the English liberal conscience. On the rare occasions when I have seen him moved to anger by some act of injustice he would assert his principles unflinchingly, driving himself to speak what he felt. I think of him as one of the saints of scholarship. Greek, he said once, should be an experience, not an accomplishment. He loved the scholar’s life and incited others to it by its example. Above all he loved the Greeks, modern as well as ancient. Among my happiest memories is that of a later holiday in Greece with Percy and his wife Nan when we tramped about mostly on foot (there were no buses and few cars) and among other things he and I ascended Mount Cithaeron together. I am proud to think that he had a special warmth of feeling for me; it began, according to Nan, on the day I first arrived in Reading and lasted to the end of his life.”

figured vase (see eadem, *AJA* 57 [1953] pls. 66, 2 a; 67, 5 a) depicting a woman at a louterion could be interpreted along the lines of ancient irrationality as a scene of hydromancy.
APPENDIX 1
Bibliography of R. M. Burrows’ scholarly works


(For his co-authored publications with P. N. Ure see Appendix 2).

APPENDIX 2
Bibliography of P. N. Ure’s works

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Illustrations

1. Ronald M. Burrows. Source: Glasgow 1924, II.
2. Ronald M. Burrows with finds from Rhitsona, 1907. Source: Glasgow 1924.
   (Unnumbered leaf inbetween pp. 124-125).
5. Annie Ure. Source: Ure Museum, Reading University.
6. Local inhabitants of Boeotia. 1922. Source: Ure Museum, Reading University
8. Conservation work in the old Thebes Museum. Standing (left) P.N. Ure (or R.M. Burrows?). Surrounded by Y. Bakoulis, Mr. Kontogheorghis and his son. 1922. Source: Ure Museum, Reading University.


