

**GEORGE MAXIM ANOSSOV HANFMANN**

**MEMORIAL MINUTE ADOPTED BY  
THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY**

**NOVEMBER 15, 1988**

## GEORGE MAXIM ANOSSOV HANFMANN

BORN November 20, 1911

DIED March 13, 1986

**T**he death of George Maxim Anossov Hanfmann in Cambridge, Mass., on March 13, 1986 deprived the international archaeological community, as well as Harvard University, of a scholar and teacher of widespread interests, multiple talents, and rare humanity.

Hanfmann was born on Nov. 20, 1911 in St. Petersburg, Russia, the third child of Maxim Ippolitovich Hanfmann, the distinguished editor of *Rech*, and Ekaterina Alexeevna Anossov, a high school teacher. The revolution of 1917 forced the family to flee to Kiev, Odessa, and finally to Lithuania.

George Hanfmann attended school in Jena and entered Jena University, but transferred after one year to Berlin, where he earned his doctorate in 1934. He devoted himself to the classics; while his primary interest remained archaeology, he pursued ancient history and classical philology with equal zeal. For admission to the Philological Seminar of the University of Berlin, he submitted a Latin dissertation on the style of the two most outstanding treatises of the Hippocratic Corpus. A member of this Committee who reported on his paper in that seminar remembers it as an unusually brilliant, strictly philological investigation. Hanfmann's main teacher in Berlin was Gerhart Rodenwaldt, under whom he wrote his dissertation *summa cum laude*, *Alte-truskische Plastik*, in 1934.

Hanfmann married Ilse Bohland of Jena, who became his beloved life partner and eventual scholarly collaborator. She survived him only briefly. The Hanfmanns fled Hitler's Germany to Baltimore, where he became a Vogeler Fellow of Johns Hopkins University and earned a second Ph.D. degree for his publication of metal objects from Olynthus in Macedonia. Upon his election to the Society of Fellows in 1935, Hanfmann came to Harvard, where he remained until his retirement in 1982.

His Junior Fellowship formed a turning point in Hanfmann's intellectual development. Having been trained at the most rigorous school of classical archaeology in Europe, George Hanfmann believed that

*From the Harvard University Gazette,  
Vol. LXXXIV, No. 18, January 13, 1989*

excavations provided much of the essential data of history. Toward the end of his life, in an address to that same European school, he told how, at the Harvard of Paul J. Sachs, he had also learned that excavated objects might also be great works of art. Research begun as Junior Fellow on the sculpture and society of Rome and Late Antiquity, resulted in his monumental study, *The Seasons Sarcophagus at Dumbarton Oaks* (1951). He also undertook responsibility for publishing [about] the Lydian pottery from Princeton's early excavations at Sardis, an obligation that was to have far-reaching consequences for his life's work.

Hanfmann became a naturalized United States citizen in 1940. After wartime service with the Office of War Information and as chief of the German section of American Broadcasting Station in Europe (ABSIE), he returned to the Department of Fine Arts at Harvard. There, he had been appointed instructor in 1938. In 1956, he became Professor of Fine Arts, and the John E. Hudson Professor of Archaeology in 1971.

Integrating the study of classical art with Greek and Latin literature and ancient history became a unifying concern of George Hanfmann's scholarship and teaching. He trained many doctoral candidates in classical art history and archaeology through his exciting seminars and his course, *Art in the Culture of Classical Greece*. His demanding standards were exceeded only by his eagerness to share his immense knowledge, his desire to learn from his students, and his generosity in inviting them to assume research responsibility through publication.

From 1949 through 1974, Hanfmann pursued a second, voluntary Harvard career as Curator of Ancient Art at the Fogg Art Museum, the first person to hold that office. With his student, Cornelius Vermeule, he organized Harvard's numismatic holdings into the Coin Room. He enriched the collections by judicious purchases, as well as attracting many donations of art objects, by such great connoisseurs as Norbert Schimmel, and bequests, including half of the David M. Robinson collection and the choice works of Greek art owned by Frederick M. Watkins. Even more important were his major exhibitions: "Ancient Art in American Private Collections" (1955); the first exhibition of the Norbert Schimmel Collection (1964); "Master Bronzes from the Classical World" (1967), and "Gods and Heroes: Baroque Images of Antiquity" (1968). He invariably invited students and younger colleagues to collaborate in writing the distinguished scholarly catalogs that accompanied these exhibitions.

Hanfmann's scholarship was prodigious. His interests ranged throughout all of Mediterranean antiquity. His numerous books and monographs include introductory surveys as well as detailed studies. The speed and intensity of his writing were awe-inspiring; usually he pursued several projects at once. The archaeology of Anatolian and Roman art, especially painting and portraiture, assumed special prominence in his research. His *Festschrift, Studies Presented to George M.A. Hanfmann* (1971), reflected these priorities in articles written by former students.

The work that he did and directed at Sardis, however, remains George Hanfmann's achievement of greatest international impact. Participation in field work at Tarsus in 1947-1948 gave him an appetite for excavation. The Hanfmanns conducted their first season at Sardis in 1958, in collaboration with A. Henry Detweiler, who involved Cornell University as cosponsor of the project. Hanfmann's vision shaped the expedition into a long-term interdisciplinary, international effort to investigate the cultural development of the Sardis region from earliest times to the present. Throughout, he included Turkish colleagues and students, making an enduring contribution to Turkish scholarship. He published the results in preliminary reports and detailed final monographs. An illustrated edition of his colorful field bulletins, *Letters from Sardis*, won the Harvard University Press Faculty Prize in 1972. Hanfmann also edited and largely wrote *Sardis from Prehistoric to Roman Times* (1983), which synthesizes 5,000 years of Sardis's cultural history.

George Hanfmann possessed great physical vigor, intense warmth of personality, and unflinching generosity and concern for others. A devoted family man, he found strength and happiness with wife, Ilse, and their daughters, Ruth and Vera, in their homes in Cambridge and Watertown. He played the violin and often invited students to join family quartets.

For some, the most impressive of his honors may have been the Gold Medal of the Archaeological Institute of America, awarded in 1978. The one that moved him most was an honorary doctoral degree from his alma mater, now the Freie Universität Berlin, awarded on May 21, 1982. His reply to the presentation of the degree, *Die "Berliner Schule": Archäologie und Archäologen in Berlin und U.S.A.*, published in 1983, provides a penetrating analysis of the intellectual climate during the decades of his scholarly activity. It stands as the enduring testament of his ideas, ideals, and goals. Forming a bridge

between American and European scholarship, George M.A. Hanfmann advanced the cause of classical archaeology as a collaborative humanistic endeavor. His example as scholar, teacher, excavator and curator will perpetuate that vision for decades to come, at Harvard and throughout the world.

Herbert Bloch  
John Coolidge  
Zeph Stewart  
Emily T. Vermeule  
David Gordon Mitten (Chair)