The Berkeley Papyrus Collection, 1968-1979: Unfinished Business

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I was first introduced to the Berkeley papyrus collection in the summer of 1968 just before becoming a twenty-four-year-old assistant professor in the University of California's Department of Classics. My guide to the library's Rare Books Room was one of my senior colleagues, Tom Rosenmeyer. It was then I first met the late Leslie H. Clarke, the singularly gracious and efficient Assistant Head of Rare Books and Special Collections. Tom introduced me to her, to use his exact words, as "a trained papyrologist." This was a slight shock, for although I'd done some secondary work with papyrological evidence, I was not then a real papyrologist, that is, an editor of papyrus texts, much less a trained one. If that ever happened, it would take time and practice.

I can't recall whether it was on that first visit to the Rare Books Room, or a later one, that I saw seated at the near end of the reading table, studying a very large papyrus, a small man who seemed older than his age. He had refined hands and curly, dark hair, beginning to recede, but the most remarkable thing about his appearance—this was Berkeley after all, and this was 1968, and this was the summer—is that he was wearing, if my memory serves me well, a dark, three-piece pin-stripe suit. This was John Shelton.

Shelton explained his project to me, an edition of the unpublished tax lists of Menches, scribe of the village of Kerkeosiris in the late second century B.C. These had been given mere brief descriptions by Grenfell and Hunt at the back of The Tebtunis Papyri volume 1, published in 1902. A short time later Shelton invited me to join him by editing the other Menches materials among the P. Tebt. I descripta, which turned out to be basically a handful of petitions and official letters. When summer was over he confirmed the invitation in a personal letter dated September 9, 1968: "I am perfectly serious about doing that edition," he wrote.

Over the 1968-1969 academic year, as time permitted, I worked on the Menches material and on other Ptolemaic papyri from the back of P. Tebt. I and on some of the Roman-date papyri described at the back of The Tebtunis Papyri volume II, published in 1907. This was mostly for practice and self-training, but partly with a view toward publication. Also in my first year at Berkeley, I taught a graduate seminar in papyrology and used some Berkeley papyri as practice samples for the students.

For the following summer, 1969, Berkeley's Department of Classics had agreed to host one in the series of six-week institutes sponsored by the American Society of Papyrologists and previously held at such venues as Yale, Princeton, and Penn. These institutes in papyrology were meant to train students in the techniques of editing papyri and, depending on the inclinations of the instructors, to inform them generally of what the papyri contributed to knowledge of the ancient world. The principal arrangements for the Berkeley institute had already been made by Tom Rosenmeyer. After my arrival, I became, in a sense, Tom's assistant. One of our jobs was apparently fund-raising. In this connection, one lone event comes to mind: a luncheon arranged by Tom at the Berkeley Men's Faculty Club for a wealthy, potential donor, whose family had contributed heavily to projects involving the Dead Sea Scrolls. The lunch was fine but the conversation proved both frustrating and financially unsuccessful: we could not convince our guest of the value of training of students to read documents that, first of all, were written in Greek (not Hebrew or Aramaic) and that were, secondly, and in her repeatedly stated view, composed after religious dogma had become ossified.

More successful were two nuts-and-bolts assignments connected with the Berkeley institute. The institute was going to be conducted by the late Sir Eric Turner of University College London and by Peter Parsons, now Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford. In advance of the institute Turner had submitted two requests. One was that we assemble in one room, the room in which the institute was going to be conducted, virtually all the papyrology books in Berkeley's General Library. The second was that we purchase a variety of materials: sheets of glass variously sized, masking tape, scissors, tweezers, et cetera. This was because, following their practice in conducting the institute at Penn the preceding summer, Turner and Parsons were not going to use the papyri of the host institution as specimens for study, but instead Oxyrhynchus pieces belonging to the Egypt Exploration Society.
that they would bring to Berkeley from England. The glass and other materials were meant for the temporary mounting of the Oxyrhynchus papyri the students would be working on.

Although intended specifically for the summer of 1969, filling Eric Turner's requests had effects that went beyond that summer. First, when the institute was over, I was able to move much of the assembled papyrology library to my office on the fifth floor of Dwinelle Hall. That together with the presence of a Greek typewriter, many photographs paid for out of my Berkeley research fund, and Shelton's various extended visits when on teaching leave from the University of Georgia turned the office over the next couple of years into a little papyrology workshop. Second, on conclusion of the seminar, the Oxyrhynchus papyri were removed from their mountings and the glass and other materials that Turner had requested were left behind. It was their ready availability that suggested the idea of remounting some of the Berkeley papyri that had been hermetically sealed in 1940 between Vinylite sheets. I dimly recall the outlines of the first such experiment, Shelton's joining and remounting of two large Menches piece. There was a sense of danger and excitement in the air; Leslie Clarke was anxiously hovering about; and, somewhat amusingly, because the pieces in question were so large, common kitchen spatulas were used to separate them from the plastic sheets to which they were so desperately and statically clinging. In the end, the operation was successful and proved that although remounting a Berkeley papyrus in glass was a painstaking, time-consuming, sometimes trying process, it was not impossible. And so, following that first experiment, together and separately, Shelton and I remounted other Berkeley pieces, never systematically but always on an "as needed" basis. Unfortunately, although Shelton wrote to James D. Hart, Director of the Bancroft Library, on August 4, 1973, describing the problems entailed generally in remounting the Berkeley papyri, we made no conservator's notes on our experiences in remounting individual pieces. All I have evidence of is a Bancroft Library order card of uncertain date implying that I had remounted a Ptolemaic petition, UC inventory number 1583, and a letter I wrote, November 8, 1971, to Ludwig Koenen indicating the very minor results of a remounting I did for P.Tebt. 537, a loan repayment of A.D. 137: the papyrus had been smoothed out; two uncertain letters were able to be verified and one missing letter recovered.

In any event, as mentioned earlier, these remountings were made possible by the materials Eric Turner had ordered for the 1969 papyrology institute. As for the institute itself, it attracted a dozen or so junior faculty and graduate students from much of North America. Guest lecturers included the late T. B. L. Webster of Stanford. Among the students were the late Dick Sullivan of Saskatchewan, later to become well known for his work on Parthian dynasties, Harvard University Byzantinist John Duffy, and Toronto medievalist Virginia Brown. But apart from Susan Stephens of Stanford, the only student in the group, to my recollection, who became professionally serious about papyrology was Berkeley's own doctoral student, Teresa Carp.

Teresa's dissertation, "Some Documentary and Literary Papyri of the Roman Era," began in 1970 and completed in 1972, edited texts from three different collections, including the one at Berkeley. Five of Carp's Berkeley pieces were subsequently published in ZPE 16 (1975) 47-62: a fragmentary lunar calendar (449), a series of certificates for work done on the dikes and canals of the Fayyum (371), a poll-tax receipt (622), a land lease (441), and a loan repayment (524). Not included in the ZPE article, but part of the dissertation were three Homeric fragments (425, 426, 430) and, more significantly, a village-by-village list of personal names, P.Tebt. 400, still unpublished, encompassing nearly 190 short lines in 15 columns. The first 13 columns, not previously transcribed, gave the names according to their villages with relevant sub-tallies; the 10 and 15a' columns, transcribed by Grenfell and Hunt on p. 269 of P.Tebt. I, recapitulated the sub-totals, adding them up to 124 individuals, representing 23 different villages of the Arsinoite nome and unnamed villages of the Herakleopolite and Oxyrhynchite nomes.

Meanwhile, as Teresa Carp's dissertation was in progress, work on what was to become The Tebtunis Papyri volume IV continued, being greatly advanced by Shelton's presence in Berkeley for the 1970-1971 academic year under an NEH fellowship. Shelton was to return to Berkeley in the summer of 1972 and spring of 1973 for some mop-up work on the manuscript and its indices, and to write the volume's introduction, but the P.Tebt. IV manuscript had been brought near enough to completion by summer's end 1971 for Shelton to send it to Eric Turner in Turner's capacity as senior general editor of the Egypt Exploration Society's series of Graeco Roman Memoirs. Shelton's cover letter of August 30, 1971, begins amusingly: Dear Professor Turner, I hope you are not too dismayed at getting such a thick and tedious manuscript from me. Only the land lists and tax accounts are my work; the letters and petitions were done by Jim Keenan. The letter proceeds to sketch how the volume will be brought to its completion, politely asks Turner's advice on a series of specific points, and raises questions about potential publishers and costs. Turner's handwritten reply,
coming as it did on September 10, 1971, was amazingly prompt and unflaggingly positive. Dear John, ... It is an enormous task that you have set yourself to join correctly, to see the relevance of each list of its relationships, to transcribe it correctly and to comment on it. But the principal value is that you will be making available to scholars material that has lain untouched since GH [sc. Grenfell and Hunt] gave up—and heaven knows, they had done enough to interest other people. No doubt they hoped for someone like you to come along, and are amazed in their graves that it has taken seventy years to finish (is the right word) the job. Turner expresses his conviction that Oxford or Cambridge will take the book, but proposes first to approach the Egypt Exploration Society for its support, then to seek other support.

By February 7, 1972, Turner's proposal to the EES for publishing P.Tebt. IV in its series of Graeco-Roman Memoirs had been formally accepted. The printing of the volume was undertaken by Cambridge University Press, but itself production did not take place until 1975, at which time Professor Turner estimated that printing costs would run in excess of 8,000 pounds sterling. His efforts to secure funding from sources outside the EES, evident in correspondence dated May 28, 1975, won an award from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation; otherwise, it seems, EES with the British Academy bore the full cost. Finally, it may be noted for the record that, although P. Tebt. IV is dated as published in 1976, the volume did not become available until early 1977. Turner, the senior general editor, did not receive his advance copies until February 21, 1977. Ours came a bit later.

Shortly before the appearance of P.Tebt. IV, articles by Shelton and me based on Berkeley papyri appeared in another publication that was, because of funding problems, long delayed in its appearance. This was the project popularly known as the "Youtie Festschrift," but formally published in 1976 in two volumes under the cumbersome title, Collectanea Papyrologica: Texts Published in Honor of H. C. Youtie. There, under the title "Land Register: Crown Tenants from Kerkeosiris," Shelton provided, with extensive discussion and commentary, an advance publication of what was to become P.Tebt. IV 1103, uniting two pieces that had been treated separately by Grenfell and Hunt, namely, the verso sides of P. Tebt. 61 and 141. It was by far the longest and possibly the most important article in the "Youtie Festschrift." My own, smaller offering was an edition of a piece that Grenfell and Hunt and others had apparently overlooked. In any case, it had been neither edited fully nor briefly described in any of the Tebtunis volumes. In the absence of a publication number, it was catalogued by Edmund Kase in 1940 as UC inventory number 1583. This was a petition from an imprisoned tax-collector drafted in 177 B.C., three years after Ptolemy Philometor's accession, referring to royal amnesty decrees on whose basis the anonymous prisoner believed himself entitled to release from jail.

By the time of these publications, both Shelton and I had moved. Leaving Georgia, Shelton had become attached to the University of Kiel's Institut fur Altertumskunde as Professor Horst Braunert's personal research assistant. I was teaching at Loyola University of Chicago.

Both of our interests had moved in other directions, his to other editing projects, mine to the social and economic history of Byzantine Egypt. Nevertheless, between 1969 and 1972, we had both singly and together published in BASP and ZPE over thirty Roman-period documents from the described pieces at the back of P. Tebt. II. Most of these were short texts—certificates for work on the embankments and assorted tax receipts—but some, including several loans and returns of loans, were more substantial. From time to time we considered using these in revised form to become the basis of a fifth volume of Tebtunis Papyri, and to this day I have kept among my files one that is labeled "OFFPRINTS PERTAINING TO P. TEB. VOL. V." In early 1975 John invited Teresa Carp to join us as a third editor. But by that time Shelton seems to have changed his mind about the form of P. Tebt. V: its core was no longer to be the P. Tebt. II descripta previously edited in periodicals, but the long Ptolemaic private lists from the back of P. Tebt. I. As Teresa wrote, February 21, 1975: [John] is still beating the drum for the lists over the other documents, but he did not indicate how much work he had done on them. He said that the photos of all the texts were in your hands—it makes you sound like the National Security Council.

At this time Teresa was teaching at the University of Oregon and the distance of all three of us in geographical terms from the living papyri and from one another are probably what made this collaborative project impracticable. Three years later, in a letter of Feb. 18, 1978, John wrote, in response to an inquiry from Teresa, saying that he hadn't done anything on P.Tebt. V and had no transcripts or photos of any Berkeley papyri. He welcomed Teresa and me "to go it alone if you like. There should still be enough material for a reasonable volume if you put in plenty of long accounts." By "long accounts," he is again referring to the many "non-
Menches' accounts described at the end of P. Tebt. I, and in a later letter (March 3, 1978), he singles out P.Tebt. 189, a long list of tax payments, for special mention. He had also settled conclusively against the idea of republishing the Roman-date documents that had previously been published in journals and were therefore destined for inclusion in the Sammelbuch, the series of volumes that reprints under its own numbers papyri that have been published in journals. “There is no real point,” he wrote, “in reprinting items that have already appeared twice (sc. in print).” This was at variance with what I had written Teresa Carp on February 22, 1978, sketching a plan for what P.Tebt. V would include and the order in which those pieces might be presented, together with some instructions on matters of editorial detail. In any event, whatever John Shelton’s intentions and whatever plans the three of us had, the P. Tebt. V project was subsequently abandoned. My last preserved mention of it is in a letter to the Demotic scholar, John Tait, dated December 18, 1978. There, I wrote in a combination of cliche and understatement, “It seems to me that the projected P.Teb. V is going to be very slow in getting off the ground and, at the present rate, may never reach completion.” Teresa last mentions the project in a letter dated February 19, 1979, which is one reason for my sub-title, “Unfinished Business,” and for choosing 1979 as the terminal date for my talk.

Another has to do with the papyrology seminars I had been teaching at Loyola University of Chicago. From the beginning, in 1974, I had used in these seminars photographs of Tebtunis papyri from Berkeley for training the students in editorial techniques. The fall semester 1979 marks the last and the most successful use of these materials in the Loyola seminars. I was so encouraged by the students’ work in that class that I wrote to Leslie Clarke, December 19, 1979, asking her to arrange reserving publication rights for five of the Berkeley pieces the students had studied, only to learn that Leslie had died six months earlier from a swift, aggressive cancer. In 1981, one of the students, Michael Tournazou, a Cypriote archeologist and now a professor at Davidson, published one of the five pieces with me, the oddly sub-literate food expense account that had been described as P. Tebt.113 1. But the most interesting discovery of the 1979 Loyola seminar was Laurie Haight’s study of P. Tebt. 241 and 250, private accounts in the same hand from two separate crocodile mummies, 1 and 19, from tomb (a). Haight established that the pieces came in fact from the same papyrus roll. Using cut-up Xeroxes of the photographs like jigsaw puzzle pieces, she was able to prove that although the main fragments did not physically join, their texts could be so aligned as to match up with one another across a shared column. Unfortunately, the condition of P. Tebt. 241 as represented in my photograph showed assorted detached fragments wildly floating about in their Vynilite sandwich. And so, failing the presence in Berkeley of anyone capable of remounting and conserving P.Tebt. 241 and 250, authoritative publication of Haight’s finding proved impossible. As I wrote to Leslie Clarke: For purposes of the collection you might like to note that one of the students, Laurie Haight, has conclusively proven that 241 and 250 constitute a single piece. She has been able, from photographs, visually to line up the main fragments. Unfortunately, it is impossible to incorporate the smaller fragments without studying the originals, and of course 241 and 250 should now need to be removed from their present mountings, lined up, remounted, and photographed ensemble. I would hope in the forseeable (sic) fixture ... to be able to get to Berkeley to perform the operation. The mentioned trip to Berkeley never materialized, but the connection to the Berkeley connection remained unbroken. As late as 1981 I received from Louise Younle a series of questions about readings in the Berkeley papyri. In September 1983 Naphali Lewis wrote to inquire about identifying Menches’ own handwriting among his papers. In 1985 and 1986, questions about the state of the collection were received from Gerald Browne in behalf of his University of Illinois doctoral student Richard Warga and from Henri Meleerts in connection with his Brussels dissertation on Roman Tebtunis. Earlier, from 1975 to 1979, my files preserve the remains of a long-running correspondence with John Tait concerning P. Tebt. II 598, a Roman-period register of priests of the temple of Soknebtunis. In a sense these were carryovers of the kinds of requests for photographs and questions about readings, large and small, direct or forwarded, received in Berkeley down to 1974 from a number of scholars. They included (according to my records and memory): Roger Bagnall, Whitney Bagnall, Jean Bingen, R. Bogaert, Dieter Hagedorn, Deborah Hobson, Paul Mertens, George Pasassoglou, P. W. Pestman, David Thomas, Dorothy Thompson (then Crawford), and A. Tomsin.

Of these probably most important in terms of immediate results was the correspondence, from 1970 to 1973, with Roger Bagnall in advance of his 1975 republication (in JEA 61) of one of the more intriguing Berkeley papyri as “Ptolemaic Foreign Correspondence in P. Tebt. 8.” For the collection itself, however, hinting at its future possibilities, the most suggestive exchange in those years was the one with Demotist P. W. Pestman of Leiden. It begins with a request from Pestman to Shelton for a photograph of the Demotic side of a Greek mummy tag Shelton had published in ZPE in 1970. On November 26, 1972, Shelton forwarded Pestman’s request to me, adding the following: It seems to me that this might be an opportunity to have a top-flight Demotist look at some of the pieces we found over the summer.... I have not mentioned anything about them to him, for fear that some other arrangements have...
already been made, but he might well be willing to look at photos of a few of the better pieces and at least tell us what they are about, and above all whether they are connected to the Greek pieces. If he found anything he wanted to publish, we could hardly ask for a better man to do it. I would suggest Box One, 2/10, 2/12, 3/9, 3/10, 4/1, 4/6, 4/8, 4/9, 4/10 and Box 12, 43 as especially worth photographing. I sent the mummy tag photograph to Pestman on December 6 (please note the speed and efficiency of the library's photographic services). Pestman replied with thanks on February 20, 1973, expressing also his interest in the Demotic papyri: I certainly am interested in the Demotic papyri you are talking about.... Of course I knew there ought to be some unpublished material in your collection but I did not know any particulars about it. I am very interested in these documents, and if there are specimens among them that look promising to you ... I should be very grateful to get the photographs which you so kindly offer to send me. In response, I sent Professor Pestman six photographs, and the following year, Pestman returned thirteen meticulous pages of description, transcriptions, and translation. He identified the six photographs as belonging to five, or possibly as few as four, documents. One was an account he judged to be "rather banal." Three were leases of land dating to the 170s B.C., two from the same year and possibly from the same document, all judged to be publishable. The third lease was especially interesting because it was dated by previously unattested eponymous priests. But most interesting appears to have been the papyrus 4/15 recto which Pestman called a "Survey of reports." It included, in Pestman's translation, such cryptic notations as: "The boats which are in the country Meroe," "The taxes which they-the Libyans-gave," "The soldiers and the servants from Memphis that have come," "The birthday of the mayor of the village," and "The account of the burnt-offering of the temple-domain."

Pestman's cover letter to this material is dated May 15, 1974, a time when I was preparing to move from California to Chicago. I retained Pestman's original typescript, but do not remember whether I copied his descriptions of these Demotic papyri for the Bancroft Library. It was in fact surprising to rediscover this among the papers I had kept from my days in Berkeley, just as, in preparing this talk, it was stunning to find how much correspondence I had preserved from that time. I just kept finding more and more in all different places. And not only correspondence, but photographs, perhaps of a hundred separate items, and transcriptions of Berkeley papyri, Ptolemaic and Roman-several hundred pages in all, divided about equally between handwritten ones and those committed to type mostly by my Berkeley work-study student Dana Smith. Admittedly, some of the transcriptions are so rough as to be useless, but others seem to have been serious attempts at producing publishable texts. Among these are transcriptions of P. Tebt. 177 and 180. The former is a private account in many columns, "chiefly dealing with wine," the latter, an account of cash contributions to defray the visiting expenses of a delegate of the strategos. Also among these transcriptions is Shelton's unpublished edition of P.Tebt. 261, a tax list not included in P.Tebt. IV because he had judged it unlikely to have come from village of Kerkeosiris, much less to have been among the papers of the village scribe Menches, and transcriptions of several pieces from the tin boxes that were not catalogued by Edmund Kase in 1940. Retention of the Berkeley photographs and these transcriptions made it possible for me as recently as 1995 to publish some emendations to texts that Elbert Wall had edited in his 1983 Duke dissertation, New Texts on the Economy of Tebywis. I mention these materials here today not to stake any claims, but to offer them to qualified parties interested in pursuing work on the Berkeley papyri.

By fortunate coincidence I was just beginning to purge my files of some of this stuff when I received Professor Mastronarde's invitation to speak at this celebration. I had pitched a few minor and seemingly hopeless transcriptions, but never contemplated disposing of any of John Shelton's letters. His last ones reminded me that he, like me, had not entirely forgotten about the possibilities of the Berkeley collection. They reminded me that, as professor of papyrology, John was due for a sabbatical from Trier in the early 1990s. He anticipated spending some of that time in the States. He first wrote about this on August 3, 1989, a month before the International Congress of Papyrology in Cairo. He then indicated his specific interest in the ostraca belonging to the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago: Listen, if the Institute is actually looking for someone to do its ostraca and you don't want them, perhaps you could mention me. I'm always open to new stuff, am immune to boredom and am even due for a sabbatical in a couple of years. But next year, on May 15, 1990, he wrote: Another [sc. project] that occurs to me would be Berkeley again; if I recall there is still a fair bit by way of semi-legible Ptolemaic name lists. But I thought that before writing there I should first ask whether I would be stepping on anybody's toes (yours, for instance) by so doing; and, if not, whether Mr. Hart is still the director there or there is someone else whom I should approach in the matter. Gad, we started Teb. IV twenty-two years ago. My son David's mouth fell open with disbelief when I told him how old I was on my last birthday.

As some here today will know, John's proposed leave never materialized. Terminal cancer set in late in 1991 and his death fell at age 48 on March 16, 1992. His loss to his colleagues at Trier and to the larger community of papyrologists was profound. His
absence on this occasion, celebrating the past history of the Berkeley collection and its future promise, is most deeply felt. I can't help but believe that he would be delighted, he might even offer a hand-rubbing chuckle or two, to see at last such great attention turned toward the Berkeley collection, a collection to whose publication and preservation he had dedicated so much wisdom and care, so much energy and skill.