

OBITUARY

Naphtali Lewis
1911-2005

Naphtali Lewis was born on 14 December 1911 in New York and died in Cambridge, Massachusetts on 11 September 2005, at the age of 93. He is survived by his children Judith Lewis Herman and John B. Lewis, and his grandchildren, Emma Berndt (Judith's daughter) and David Lewis (John's son).

Naphtali Lewis graduated in Classics and French in 1930 from City College. American papyrology being in its infancy at the time, he was lucky to get a fellowship, which allowed him to pursue postgraduate studies in France. He received his doctorate in Paris in 1934 for *L'industrie du papyrus dans l'Égypte gréco-romaine*. Translated into English and published by Oxford University Press in 1974 as *Papyrus in Classical Antiquity*, this study has never been superseded. Lewis taught at Brooklyn College and in the City University of New York's Graduate School from 1947 until his retirement in 1976.

However, he never retired from papyrology, as is borne out by the rich bibliographical lists in *BASP* 15, 1978, 2-8 and Lewis's *On Government and Law in Roman Egypt*, xi-xiii, and the constant flow of newly edited texts and corrections (*notationes legentis*) of old ones. For me, as an historian of Rome, he was the doyen of the papyrology of Roman Egypt, not Graeco-Roman Egypt¹ — a concept which he successfully debunked, thus making it legitimate and safe for us to use the abundant Egyptian material to reconstruct various aspects of Roman government and society elsewhere. In his hands the papyri became a prime tool for understanding the Roman provincial system in general — not that he was oblivious to the similar contribution of inscriptions on stone, bronze and other materials. All this is obvious in the two volumes of *Roman Civilization* (1951 and 1955) compiled with his friend Meyer Reinhold — one of the first such source books in translation.

In this country Naphtali Lewis will always be remembered and cherished for his faster than lightning publication of the Greek papyri of the Babatha Archive in 1989,² less than five years after Yigael Yadin's untimely death on 28 June 1984 and the distribution of his *Nachlaß* among different scholars. From its discovery by Yadin in 1961 in the Cave of Letters in Nahal Hever and until 1989 only preliminary publications of this archive appeared — enough to suggest its paramount importance.³ Lewis brought his enormous knowledge and acquaintance with the study of papyrology to bear on this tantalising cache. It is no exaggeration to say that the 1989 publication marked a turning point for the study of Jewish life and law under Roman rule. The overwhelming,

¹ Cf. his two programmatic essays undermining the concept of the *Sonderstellung Ägyptens*: 'Greco-Roman Egypt: Fact or Fiction?', *Proceedings of the XIIIth Int. Congr. Papyrology 1968*, 1970 and 'The Romanity of Roman Egypt: A Growing Consensus', *Atti del XVII Con. Int. di Papirologia*, 1984.

² *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters. Greek Papyri, with Aramaic and Nabatean Signatures and Subscriptions*, edited by Y. Yadin and J.C. Greenfield, *Judean Desert Studies* II, Jerusalem 1989. The Semitic part of the Babatha Archive and the Bar Kokhba leases and letters followed 13 years later: Y. Yadin, J.C. Greenfield, Ada Yardeni and Baruch Levine, *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters* II, *Judean Desert Studies* III, Jerusalem 2002.

³ H.J. Polotski's publication of *P. Yadin* 15 in *El* 8, 1967 occasioned H.J. Wolff, 'Römisches Provinzialrecht in der Provinz Arabia', *ANRW* II.13, 1980, 763–806, the starting point for any discussion of the Roman provincial legal system after the discovery of the Babatha Archive, and the publication of *P. Yadin* 18 by N. Lewis, R. Katsoff and J. Greenfield in *IEJ* 37, 1987, 229–50, called forth A. Wasserstein's 'A Marriage Contract from the Province of Arabia Nova: Notes on Papyrus Yadin 18', *JQR* 80, 1989, 93–130, with its fresh evaluation of the impact of Hellenism on Jewish society in the Roman Near East.

almost exclusive,⁴ use of the Greek language in legal documents by Jews who were neither Hellenised nor even semi-Hellenised forced us all to rethink our notion of 'a people living apart among the nations', the concise Hebrew phrase, both prescriptive and descriptive, עם לבדד ישכון. The Babatha Archive thus underlined the conclusions reached already by the editors of the *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* faced with the absence of documents reflecting the existence of Jewish courts in Egypt and of the exercise of Jewish law there.⁵

Yet Lewis rightly resisted the temptation to go into all this. He had both the temerity and the modesty to publish without delay, and provide an expectant audience with complicated legal texts accurately and elegantly read and edited, but unencumbered with lengthy commentaries, which would have denied to others access to this magnificent archive for many years to come. This generosity was in character, and is as unusual as his turning over to a young colleague 'his transcriptions of the fourth-century Karanis papyri in the Columbia collection' and offering a joint publication.⁶

Today, eighteen years later, the bibliography on the Babatha Archive is enormous, with scholars from all over the world and from different disciplines contributing to it, and with Lewis repeatedly rousing himself to respond, comment, praise and denounce post-Lewis publications. Many of his reactions were published in this journal, of which Lewis became a most loyal contributor,⁷ once the papyri forged a bond between him and this country.

However, his help with the papyrology of the Judaean Desert was not confined to the papyri discovered by Yadin (*P. Yadin*). In the summer of 1992 Ada Yardeni and I were entrusted with the publication of the papyri brought to the Rockefeller Museum in the 1950s, and said to come from Wadi Seiyāl (Nahal Se'elim), but which, as we soon realised, had been found by Beduin who preceded Yadin to the Cave of Letters in Nahal Hever.⁸ A cursory glance at the Greek papyri from the so-called *Seiyāl* collection sent me running to Lewis' masterful edition of the Babatha Archive, without which I would have been able to make neither head nor tail of the material in my hands, nor discover the 'jewel in the crown', the archive of Salomê Komaisê daughter of Levi, who like Babatha lived in Mahoz 'Eglatain in the Roman province of Arabia and like her escaped with her documents to the Cave of Letters in Nahal Hever. During a visit to Jerusalem in 1993, Lewis assisted me with the difficult script, and later on, whenever I published anything, I expected, and received, a reaction from him. We often disagreed on interpretation, but I craved his criticism no less than his approval.

It seems appropriate therefore to conclude this notice with my last communication with him which followed my re-edition of *P. Yadin* 52 (first edited by B. Lifshitz in 1962, and subsequently

⁴ Of the 36 documents of the archive, 10 are in Semitic languages, but only three of those are dated to the Roman period.

⁵ *CPI I (Prolegomena)*, 33; see also II, 4-5. But see now *P. Polit. Iud.* 4 in *Urkunden des Politeuma der Juden von Heracleopolis (144/3-133/2 v. Chr.) (P. Polit. Iud.)*, eds. J.M.S. Cowey and K. Maresch, Papyrologica Coloniensia XXIX, 2001.

⁶ See R. Bagnall's Preface to *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 1993, ix. On the occasion of Naphtali Lewis' memorial gathering, on 16 September 2006, Roger Bagnall enlarged on this: 'I can hardly think of a parallel act of generosity in the history of papyrological scholarship. It is true that he might well never have got around to publishing them himself, but that consideration has not deterred any number of other scholars from sitting complacently for decades, even a whole professional life, on material kept unavailable to everyone else' [from a collection of remarks contributed for this occasion, and made available to me by Judith Lewis Herman].

⁷ 'A Jewish Landowner in Provincia Arabia', *SCI* 8-9, 1985/88, 132; 'Drytoniana', 12, 1993, 108; 'On Roman Imperial Promulgations in Greek', 15, 1996, 208; 'In the World of *P. Yadin*' 18, 1999, 125; 'The Demise of the Aramaic Document in the Dead Sea Region' 20, 2001, 179; 'The Complete Babatha: More Questions than Answers', 22, 2003, 189.

⁸ See H.M. Cotton and A. Yardeni, *Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek Texts from Nahal Hever: The Seiyāl Collection II, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert XXVII*, 1997.

by many others) for the second volume of *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters* II.⁹ This is probably the most well-known papyrus of them all because of the writer's apology for 'writing [the letter] in Greek because of our inability [to write] in Hebrew' (ἐγράφη δ[ὲ] Ἑλληνεστὶ διὰ τοῦ ἡ]μᾶς μὴ εὐρηκ[έ]ναι Ἑβραεστί, ll. 11-14) — a statement which gave an enormous impetus to the discussion of the language spoken by Jews in Palestine at the time. I gave up on ll. 15-16, reading ἐ[γγρ]άψασθαι. αὐτόν / ἀπ[ό]λυσαι τάχιον, and deservingly bringing upon myself Dieter Hagedorn's gentle reproof: 'Ich glaube, hier ist die Lösung immer noch nicht gefunden'. Lewis sent me an e-mail soon after the volume reached his hands (22 February 2002):

I am very pleased with your treatment of PYadin 52. I find it thorough and careful, clearly distinguishing the certain from the probable and the uncertain. With respect to the crux at lines 15-16, my thinking parallels Dieter's. At 15 I think of an expression beginning with εὖ followed by a verb ending in -ασθαι (= ασθε) imperative, giving the sense 'take good care', 'be sure to'. The question, which I pass along to you, is: What verb(s) will give that sense and conform with the visible traces of ink? Good luck! Best wishes, Naphtali

I passed the question back to him by sending him a digitalised image of the papyrus. He did not take long to reply, and this was the last time I heard from Naphtali Lewis (18 March 2002):

Εὐρηκα! (maybe). The reason for my caution is that the digitized enlargement shows that in line 15 everything before]αι αὐτόν must be regarded as uncertain. With this caveat, we observe as follows: 1) there is no dot or stroke of ink that can be reconciled with reading *phi* or *psi*, thus ruling out any form of γράφω; 2) the reading -θαι before αὐτόν is impossible, because *theta* is never ligatured in this hand and αι is clearly ligatured here to the letter preceding it; 3) at the beginning of the line there is the big lacuna and a little to the right of it there is clearly visible a horizontal stroke that can only be read, as far as I can see, as the bottom of a *beta* or a *xi*. Putting together all of the above, I read: ἐ[ύλ]αβεῖσθαι (= ἐ[ύλ]αβεῖσθε) καὶ αὐτόν, all letters preceding καὶ to be dotted. The verb is an imperative plural, addressed to the two addressees of the letter: 'Be sure to', 'take care to.' The καὶ here has the sense of 'also', i.e. send back the man as well as the *thyrsos* and *kitria* (line 7). N

Εὐρηκα! (maybe): the joy of discovery. One can almost see the twinkle in the eyes. I for one 'have never got over those blue eyes'.

Hannah M. Cotton

Hebrew University of Jerusalem

⁹ See n. 2 above, 351-66.

Revised reading of *P.Yadin 52* (In memoriam Naphtali [Toli] Lewis)

¹ Κογ[μαι]ος Ἰωναθη
² Βειανου καὶ Μα-
³ [ς]αβαλα[ι] χαίρειν.
⁴ ἔπειδὴ ἔπεμψα πρὸς
⁵ ὑμᾶς Ἀ[γ]ρίππαν σπου-
⁶ δ[άς]α τε πέμψε μοι
⁷ θ[ύ]ρξου[ς] καὶ κίτριά,
⁸ ὅ[ς]ον δυνασθῆσεται,
⁹ ἵς [π]αρεμβολὴν Ἰου-
¹⁰ δ[αί]ων καὶ μὴ ἄλλως
¹¹ π[οι]ήσεται. ἐγράφη
¹² δ[ὲ] Ἑλληνεστί διὰ
¹³ τ[ὸ] ἡμᾶς μὴ εὐρη-
¹⁴ κ[έ]ναι Ἑβραεστί.
¹⁵ εὐλαβεῖσθαι¹⁰ καὶ αὐτὸν
¹⁶ ἀπ[ο]λύσαι τάχιον
¹⁷ διὰ τ[ὴν] ἑορτὴν
¹⁸ καὶ μ[ὴ] ἄλλως ποιή-
¹⁹ σαι[ται].

m. 2

²⁰ σουμαιος
²¹ ἔρρωσο

⁴ ἔπειδὴ ἔπεμψα ⁶ πέμψαι ⁷ κίτριά ⁸ δυνασθῆσεται ⁹ εἰς ¹⁰ ἄλλως ^{11; 18-19} ποιήσῃτε
¹² Ἑλληνιστί ¹⁴ Ἑβραϊστί ¹⁵ εὐλαβεῖσθε

Soumaios to Yonathes son of Beianos and to Masabala greetings. Since I have sent you Agrippa, hurry to send me palm branches (*lulavim*) and citrons (*ethrogim*), as much as you will be able to, for the camp of the Jews, and do not do otherwise. It (the letter) was written in Greek because of our inability (to write) in Hebrew (letters). Be sure to release also him (Agrippa) quickly on account of the festival, and do not do otherwise.

Soumaios
Farewell.

¹⁰ Hagedorn prefers ἐ[πίμ]λησθαι = ἐπιμέλестhe.