Introduction

How We Put It All Together

In my graduate school days (1952–57), I was studying at two institutions simultaneously: the Jewish Theological Seminary and Columbia University. At the Seminary, I was captivated by the approach to the Bible of H. L. Ginsberg, and at Columbia, I was pursuing a doctorate with Salo Baron, who felt that there was nothing more to write concerning history in the biblical period. He thus suggested that I tackle the Brooklyn Museum Aramaic papyri just published by Emil G. Kraeling (1953). Ten years later, I concluded a dissertation entitled "The Elephantine Jewish Community: Studies in the Life and Society of an Ancient Military Colony." In 1968 it was published as *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony*. After so long steeped in those archives, I asked myself, "So where do I go from here?"

In 1957, there appeared the collected study of Jewish Greek papyri from Egypt by Victor Tcherikover, called *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum.* It occurred to me that the Aramaic papyri from Egypt needed a similar corpus. While writing my dissertation-cum-book, I had never seen a papyrus, but if I were to make an edition of these papyri, they would certainly require firsthand examination. On October 1, 1971, together with Reuven Yaron, my mentor at the Hebrew University, I visited the Brooklyn Museum, and when the curator of the Egyptian collection, Ken Linsner, showed me the verso of the marriage contract of Tamet (now TAD B3.3), he asked, "What's this writing at the bottom?" I answered, "What writing?" Sure enough, there indeed was writing, and it could be restored to read ספר א[נתו זי כתב ענני לת]מת, "Document of wi[fehood which Anani wrote for Ta]met." Here, then, was the document's true endorsement! Previously, the line at the top of the papyrus on the verso had been assumed by Kraeling to be the endorsement, but as it turns out, it was an addition to the contract. In answering the question, "Why hadn't Kraeling noticed that fragmentary writing at the bottom?" I became a papyrologist—because to answer why Kraeling missed it required an understanding not only of the text itself but also of the way in which papyri were handled in antiquity. And that's how I met Ada Yardeni.

Jonas Greenfield called Ada to my attention. She was a graphic artist and epigrapher, and she assisted me for several months in demonstrating that "the medium is the message" by preparing fold-ups of papyrus letters and restoring the original endorsement of Tamet's marriage contract. We were able to show that the text on the bottom of the verso, when folded, appeared as the endorsement on the outside.

Shortly after my visit to the Brooklyn Museum, I went to the Pergamon Museum in East Berlin to examine their Aramaic papyri. Among their holdings were fragments of the Bisitun inscription, and it was believed that there were two fragments of that text in their collection. Careful examination, however, suggested to me that the fragment in question was actually part of the major text itself. But I was faced with the question of how to prove this hypothesis. Surely, tracing the two pieces at the source to get better drawings would help. I again turned to Ada Yardeni. Would she also be able to trace the Bisitun fragments and show that they constituted a single document? A visit to the Pergamon Museum showed that she could, and in 1982 Greenfield and I issued *The Bisitun Inscription of Darius the Great: Aramaic Version* with a complete handcopy by Ada Yardeni.

With visits to museums from Brooklyn to Moscow, Ada and I studied, copied, and published four volumes of the *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt Newly Copied, Edited and Translated into Hebrew and English* (1986–99), abbreviated as TAD. This publication finally did for Aramaic papyri what Tcherikover's *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* did for Jewish Greek papyri. My ultimate goal was then to provide an *Elephantine compleat*. In addition to the many Hebrew names that the papyri provided, there were Egyptian and Persian names. And so, with the assistance of Shaul Shaked for the Persian names and Karl-Theodore Zauzich and Günter Vittmann for the Egyptian names, I published onomastic studies of those

names as they appeared in the Aramaic papyri (1999, 2003). Together with Günter Vittmann, Cary Martin, Leslie S. B. MacCoull, Sarah Clackson, and especially Joel Farber, I produced in 1996 *Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change*. Following that, I worked with Taka-mitsu Muraoka for *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (1998). In addition, I collaborated with Steve Kaufman and Jerome Lund to produce *Aramaic Documents from Egypt* (2002), a KWIC (Key Word in Context) con-cordance. Still pending, there is also an Aramaic *Namenbuch*, being worked on by Alexandro Botta.

With most of the work then finished for TAD, I was fortunate to learn that discoveries of Aramaic ostraca were made in my backyard. These included both provenanced and unprovenanced ostraca that came to light in many private and museum collections (see the introduction to TAO vol. 1). To continue my Aramaic studies, I started researching these texts and produced several articles with Ada Yardeni from 2003 to 2007, dealing with issues arising from these ostraca. As I continued to collect references to the Aramaic ostraca in various collections, it became clear that they too, just as with TAD, needed a volume to put the whole corpus together, to which Ada and I turned our attention.

So how did Matt and I meet? In 2007, unlike in previous years, I put out an advertisement for two assis-tants—one regular and one research. Matt applied for the job as a research assistant. After an interview, he called to decline the offer. He was too busy with his MA in Religious Studies at Hebrew University. Never taking no for an answer, I said, "So why not take the job as a regular assistant?" Not one to make commit-ments quickly, he eventually agreed. Unbeknownst to him, my first task for him was a research piece! The most perplexing ostraca from Idumea were land descriptions, and we wanted to know more about the ancient cultivation of olives in Idumea to decide whether certain texts recorded olive yields or land parcels by size, according to seed capacity (see dossier H in this volume).

He wrote a paper on olives in the Idumean ostraca, and that was his first plunge. He must have found something he liked, because from then onwards, he became my research assistant after all, and we have worked together all these years. Incidentally, we saved that olive article until 2019, when the Israel Explora-tion Society was planning its 34th volume of the *Eretz-Israel Series*, this one in memory of Ada Yardeni. I suggested that Matt update it and then offered it to Shmuel Aḥituv, one of the editors. He accepted it, and so in 2021 there appeared in her volume "A Land Flowing with Olives and Oil," revised and updated from his student paper from a dozen years earlier!

In 2009, Matt received his MA at the Hebrew University and pursued his studies for another year as a researcher in the Department of Jewish History. All the while, he was working with me on the Idumean ostraca. When he left for London in 2012, we continued our joint work through email, Skype, and hotel visits during my annual visit to London in February. Together we prepared numerous presentations, and he actively assisted in the preparation of the *Textbook of Idumean Ostraca from Idumea* (TAO), arranging its format, drawing up numerous charts and tables, and revising its commentaries. He had a major role in the division of the corpus into chapters and their various subdivisions. The dossiers of TAO broke down into ten major sections, based on the types of texts:

A. Commodity Chits (1,152 ostraca)
B. Payment Orders (54 ostraca)
C. Accounts (77 ostraca)
D. Workers Texts (74 ostraca)
E. Names (62 ostraca)
F. Jar Inscriptions (85 ostraca)
G. Letters (23 ostraca)
H. Land descriptions (99 ostraca)
J. Uncertain (168 ostraca)
K. No text (218 ostraca)

The commodity chits (A), the largest group, covered three volumes (vols. 1–3), while only one volume (vol. 4) was required to cover the next six dossiers (B–G). We produced these four volumes from 2014 to 2020, and with that, at the age of nearly 90, I thought our study was complete—but not Matt.

We left the land description texts out of volume 4 because they represented a whole corpus of challenging topographical terms and unanswered questions. As Matt convinced me, these may very well be the most important texts in TAO. "How can you leave them unpublished?" he asked.

The dossier (H) was larger than any of chapters B–G, and twice as large as F–G combined. But together with the uncertain texts (H and J), it is not as large as the three largest dossiers of volume 4 (C, D, and F). I thought to retire and leave it to the next generation. Still, asserted Matt, H and J deserve their own volume, and who else could do it justice? For one, the land descriptions display an aspect of the community that could not even be guessed from any of the other texts. The same names appear in them as in the other texts, indicating the same population. Yet many of the terms for particular land parcels remain uncertain. If you think about it, where did the commodities described in the commodity chits (A) originate, if not in the parcels described in the land descriptions (H)?

True, I had already written commentaries for about a third of the texts—and Ada had written an in-house commentary for all of the texts before her passing—but I had written no commentary for J. Besides, was it even worth publishing these texts, all of which were very fragmentary? Seeing me on the cusp, Matt said to me, "I'll make you a deal. I'll come to Jerusalem for three months, and together we'll put out volume 5." Clearly, it was an offer I couldn't refuse.

We had some work to do to prepare the volume. While there was a folder for the uncertain texts' (J) photos, there was no folder for its drawings or texts. The drawings for A–H had all been scanned by Eugen Han, but he was no longer available to scan the drawings of this dossier. We had hard copies of all of Ada's drawings, but she had sadly passed away even before volume 4 was printed. Examination showed that preliminary scans from the hard copies were not of sufficient dpi and had to be properly rescanned with better equipment. Who would do this? I turned to my computer maven, Avner Roman, and he offered a package deal: he would produce high quality scans, and his wife Yardena would extract them individually and arrange them in a folder. And so it was. Finally, I called upon the services of Yosef Avivi to put together a folder of the Aramaic texts for J, as well.

I soon realized that time would not suffice for me to finish the commentary for H and write a commentary for J. We need to find an Aramaic expert to collaborate with, and where better to look then the Hebrew University itself? There was only one candidate worth considering: Tania Notarius. She had been my assistant for a couple of years and Matt's Aramaic teacher in his student years, and she had prepared a glossary of all the land description texts already. She taught, published, was adept at interpreting ancient Near Eastern texts, and was ready to undertake the task. So I put Ada's draft commentaries at her disposal, as well as mine, and instructed her to use them only as source material. The commentary was to be hers. And so she produced an outstanding piece of work in this volume (H), together with an extended introduction, that rivals what I could have done with it myself.

Dossier H has been divided into ten sections. The first section was *sui generis*, consisting of texts that dealt with sacred places, only three in number (H1.1–3). The second section was the largest, consisting of twenty texts (H2.1–20) captioned or concluded by the word חלק (plot). The remaining eight were divided into two parts, four sections each. The first three all had measurements, while the fourth (H6.1–6) did not. The first two dealt with texts where the main term was either כרם (grove [H3]) or זית (olive trees/grove [H4]) or some other toponym (H5). The second section dealt with fragments, those containing the word אשל (LOT [H7]), חלת (VALE [H8]), רפיד (TERRACE [H9]), and various other terms (H10).

The dossier of uncertain texts (J) originally contained 181 ostraca, divided into eighteen sections. Each of the first eight sections was arranged by presumed resemblance to one of the eight other chapters (A–H). Section 9 was arranged with presumed debt fragments, and section 10 contained no parallel texts. The next six sections consisted of unclassified texts, with remains of clan affiliation, names, date, products, numerals, or words. The final two sections consisted of unintelligible letters or script—eighteen sections in all.

Careful examination revealed that many of the attributions were purely hypothetical, and a different arrangement was required. In the aggregate, four features were evident—names, dates, products, and measures/numbers, so we rearranged the texts according to what they said rather than what we hypothesized. The only terms that could be classified were topographical, as found in the land descriptions (H). Because of the fragmentary nature of these ostraca, many were barely legible, were enigmatic, or contained unintelligible

letters and were classified as miscellaneous. A few texts contained non-Aramaic scripts. Thus reclassifying them, we reduced the number of ostraca from 181 to 168 and the number of sections from eighteen to only twelve. Similarly, the commentary is bare bones. We resisted the urge to hypothesize what each particular ostracon represented. Many texts are virtually unintelligible and are included with the hope that better photographic imaging may one day reveal more writing.

So, what about the texts that were truly illegible? And texts that were not literary at all but contained drawings or etchings of various sorts? There were also numerous texts that could only be defined as scribal exercises, to be distinguished from forgeries. We thus added another chapter (K), which we divided into two parts, the first without photos (K1–5) and the second with photos (K6–12). The whole dossier is arranged as one long table, with four columns for the first part and six for the second. Each piece was part of the Idumean corpus and had found its way into one of the many collections, libraries, or museums that had acquired them and bore their respective number. Thus, the columns of the first part were TAO, ISAP, Other (identifying numbers), and a Caption. For the second part, in addition to the photo, we gave the ceramic description. By including scribal exercises and forgeries, we have come full circle to volume 1, in whose introduction we discussed at length how to distinguish between the authentic ostraca and forgeries (pages xvii–xix, Figures 11–29). By also including ostraca with pictorial representations, we were indicating that ostraca were a medium not only for written communication but also for artistic design.

Finally, it was suggested that the volume should include a complete index. For this, we engaged Fern Seckbach and divided the index into four parts—words, numbers, sealing signs, and dates (kings and months). In addition, we added three tables: one of products (Table 1) one of personal names (Table 2), and one of shekels (Table 3).

There is no other written historical witness from this time and place besides the Idumean Ostraca, finally collected in their totality. In volumes 1–3, the commodity chits showed goods in motion; in volume 4, the jar inscriptions showed vessels in motion, the accounts showed how goods were inventoried, the workers texts showed distribution and supply of workers, the names lists showed people as individuals, and the payment orders showed officially authorized transfer of goods. In the present volume, the land descriptions show where goods came from, who owned the land, and how big their plantations were; the uncertain texts present additional ostraca with remains that contain barely legible text; and the final dossier shows the difference between scribal exercises and forgeries, as well as a glimpse at how the ostraca could be used not just as a source for written communication but also as a palette for artistic work. In all, some 2,000 ostraca all share a similar milieu, giving us different perspectives about the agriculture, economics, politics, onomastics, and scribal and other practices from 4th–3rd-century Idumea—and by extension, neighboring Judah (Yehud).