

PHILIP MAYERSON (1918-2016)

Roger S. Bagnall *New York University*

Philip Mayerson, Professor Emeritus of Classics at New York University, was born on May 20, 1918, and died on April 13, 2016, just a month short of his 98th birthday. The youngest of four children of immigrant parents in Brooklyn, Mayerson attended public schools there and then worked as a bookkeeper while studying part-time at Brooklyn College. During World War II he served in the U.S. Navy in the South Pacific; like many veterans of that war, he did not care to talk about his experiences in later years. After the war, he attended New York University on the G.I. bill. He spent his entire postwar career at NYU, where he received his A.B. in 1947 and his Ph.D. in 1956, and taught for forty years, rising through the ranks from Instructor to Professor and retiring in 1988. He also served the university as Vice Dean, Acting Dean, and then Dean of Washington Square and University College (Dean 1973-1978), altogether dedicating nearly a decade to administration during some of the most difficult years in the university's history.

His life-long interest in the agricultural life of southern Palestine was already the focus of his dissertation, "Arid zone farming in antiquity: a study of ancient agricultural and related hydrological practices in southern Palestine." Just after receiving his doctorate, Mayerson spent a year in Jerusalem as visiting scholar at the Hebrew University, with the assistance of a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. In the fall of 1957 he married Ann Barkow, with whom he had two daughters, Miriam and Clare, who survive him. (I am indebted to Miriam Mayerson for much of the information in this memorial.) A first article on the Negev appeared in *BASOR* 153 (1959), and after that a steady stream of publications on this domain established him as an expert on the region and on agriculture. Taking advantage of the material found by the Colt Expedition at Nessana, he published *The Ancient Agricultural Regime of Nessana and the Central Negeb* in 1961; this appeared also the following year in the first volume of *Excavations at Nessana*, drawing heavily on the papyri published in 1958 (*P.Ness.* 3 = *Excavations at Nessana*, vol. III) but also on the archaeological finds, including archaeobotanical remains. A leave in 1961-1962, soon after promotion to associate professor and also spent in Israel, was supported by a

fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies. In the 1960s and 1970s he taught on television for Sunrise Semester, an experience he seems to have enjoyed greatly.

Over the next three decades, Mayerson continued to publish on a wide gamut of aspects of the history, archaeology, geography, and texts of the region in late antiquity, ranging across literary, documentary, and legal sources. A relatively fallow period can be seen during his administrative years, which coincided in large part with the years after his wife's death in 1971, leaving him with two children to raise. In 1976 he was remarried, to Joy Gottesman Ungerleider, and he spent a year as visiting professor at the Hebrew University (1978-1979) just after his service as dean ended. From this point, one sees a marked upswing in publication in the following years, during which he and Joy traveled frequently to Israel. Forty of his articles in this domain were collected in *Monks, Martyrs, Soldiers and Saracens: Papers on the Near East in Late Antiquity (1962-1993)*, published by the Israel Exploration Society in association with NYU (Jerusalem 1994). Many of these articles are papyrological in character, mostly having appeared in *ZPE*. In the same year that the book appeared, Joy Ungerleider-Mayerson died.

By this point, Mayerson was 75 and had been retired for five years, but he went on to publish very actively over the next fifteen years or so, including in *BASP*, the most recent contribution here being a short article on the Pharanitai in *BASP* 47 (2010); he continued his scholarly work until his mid-90s, and only in his last decade did he reduce his frequent trips from Westchester into New York for his research. His later work is particularly devoted to measures, especially of wine, a subject long of interest to him and on which he contributed a section to the first volume of the publication of the excavations at Ashkelon (2008). The combination of papyrological and archaeological evidence visible in his early work remained a feature of his scholarship right to the end.

Through the Dorot Foundation, of which Joy Ungerleider-Mayerson was president, Mayerson was a generous supporter of the American Society of Papyrologists and its *Bulletin*.