

Arthur VERHOOGT
New light on The Family Archive from Tebtunis

The village Tebtunis, situated in the south west of the Fayum depression in Egypt, could be called an Egyptian Montaignou. In the course of the twentieth century a continuous flow of texts and artifacts from this site has offered scholars a wealth of material illustrating cultural, economic, and social village life in the first three centuries of our era. These items did not only come from the official excavations carried out there by the Egypt Exploration Fund (1899/1900), Berlin (1902), University of Milan (1929-1936), and again the University of Milan (1989-present), but also from illegal activity carried out by local farmers. This latter material was offered on the antiquities market and dispersed over several collections around the world. To date, much of the material from Tebtunis remains unstudied. And much of the material that has been studied, should be reconsidered in the light of new discoveries.

One of the discoveries from Tebtunis that is in need of reevaluation is the so-called Family Archive from Tebtunis. This archive was published in 1950 by the Leiden philologist B.A. van Groningen. It comprises 55 texts related to one family that was based in the Egyptian village of Tebtunis. The documents span over some 200 years and provide detailed information about four generations and scarcer evidence about three generations more. Since the publication of the archive other texts dealing with the same family have been identified in other papyrological collections, adding more information about this family. The family owned property in many parts of the Fayum and was in the earlier generations wealthy enough to fill the liturgy of the "keeper of the public archives" (*bibliophylax*).

This paper will introduce a new reconstruction of the archive, based not upon chronology (in which the oldest text comes first), but upon archival content. The texts as we have them, spanning over such a long period, were not collected at one moment, but are the result of two centuries of archiving. In such a collection it is important to ask which texts were collected at what moment, by whom and for what reason. Such a reconstruction allows the identification of several core dossiers within the archive, which themselves allow several interesting observations, mostly concerning socio-economic matters.

Based upon this archival reconstruction, the paper will show that in many respects (e.g. demographically) the family is not what we would expect from a Fayumic family in the Roman period. One interesting observation, for example, is that brother and sister marriages do not occur within this family. Other topics to be discussed are a number of peculiar property-divisions within the family that perhaps suggest some kind of marriage strategy, and the relations of members of this with other known families from Tebtunis.