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# The life and times of Francis W. Kelsey

Steven E. Ostrow

JOHN GRIFFITHS PEDLEY, *THE LIFE AND WORK OF FRANCIS WILLEY KELSEY: ARCHAEOLOGY, ANTIQUITY, AND THE ARTS* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 2012). Pp. xi + 468, figs. 36. ISBN 978-0-472-11802-1. \$75 [also available as e-book]

The name "Kelsey" will be recognized by many readers of this journal first of all as the translator/collaborator for the legendary Pompeian handbook *Mau/Kelsey*, many will also know the name as marking the University of Michigan's (recently renovated, much expanded) archaeological museum. But henceforth, thanks to J. G. Pedley's superb new biography, many will come to appreciate Francis W. Kelsey as a most extraordinary figure in the annals of American classical studies and classical archaeology and, indeed, in the development of a wide range of American humanistic pursuits, including music and the fine arts.

Pedley's account is ordered largely along broad chronological lines, aided by the detailed diaries (which survive for nearly all his final three decades) and voluminous correspondence that Kelsey kept, as well as university papers, family records, and the like. Clearly, Pedley has engaged in prodigious archival and other research to produce a richly textured account of his subject's life. One happy result are the many footnoted mini-biographies that flesh out the world through which Kelsey moved: these include family members, along with students, colleagues, and a long roster of American and international scholars (Kelsey was Professor and Chair of the Latin Department at the University of Michigan for nearly 40 uninterrupted years until his death in 1927), but also a host of other persons from very diverse walks of life, some of humble status, others very famous indeed, from luminaries in the arts and the world of business, finance and industry, to military and government officials, including more than one U.S. President or President-to-be. Thus Kelsey rose from a modest farming background in upstate New York to move comfortably and non-stop through the most varied social circles on four continents, from the United States (and Mexico) to Europe and the Near East, from central Turkey to Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.

It is hard to decide in which part of his professional life Kelsey's work left the most enduring stamp, so many were his achievements across such a wide range (Pedley addresses that legacy succinctly in his final pages, recapitulating the major chapters in Kelsey's life). There is the stimulus he gave to major archaeological excavations in Asia Minor (Antioch-in-Pisidia) and North Africa (Carthage, Karanis, and [sadly ill-omened] Cyrene); his bringing to a global audience an acquaintance with the latest finds in the world's earliest archaeological laboratory at Pompeii through his very considerable contribution to the two editions of *Mau/Kelsey*; his central rôle in helping to build some of the world's richest collections of papyri (along with important numbers of other manuscripts, inscriptions and coins), which have continued to provide inexhaustible fodder for generations of students and scholars; his (often enhanced and re-issued) editions of texts by Caesar, Cicero, Lucretius, Ovid and Xenophon; his tireless work as teacher and public lecturer (despite one diary entry from 1921: "How I dread and dislike lecturing!" [302 n.4]). Kelsey was an inspired pedagogical reformer, builder of close ties between secondary and university education, tireless editor (even of works far from his own academic interests), relentless administrator (including service as president of both the Archaeological Institute of America [1907-12] and the American Philological Association [1906-7]), and an inveterate fund-raiser.

Before surveying Kelsey's achievements in the realms of classics and archaeology, it may be worthwhile to touch on his gift for fund-raising, and the related topic of his early dealings in business and investment, for these offer a hint of the way in which Pedley's biography often opens onto a colorful panorama of American life at large in the late 19th and early 20th c. To advance nearly all the central interests of Kelsey's professional life, the seeking out of financial donors was crucial, and it proved to be a ceaseless activity. Such funding would support publications in Michigan's University Humanistic Series, the acquisitions of papyri, inscriptions, coins and other artifacts (including replicas, as of coins in the British Museum or frescoes

of the Villa of the Mysteries), multiple excavations, Ann Arbor's flourishing musical life, and the development of the Ann Arbor campus (above all, to provide proper accommodations for the Humanities in all their diversity, including the display of archaeological materials but also for other University art collections). And Kelsey raised major funds to support his charitable interests and various forms of community service. Horace H. Rackham and Thomas Spencer Jerome are only two of the familiar names among innumerable donors from whom Kelsey obtained (often multiple) contributions, at times of truly jaw-dropping size, such as Rackham's offer of \$100,000 in 1923 "to conduct ... archaeological work in the Near East" (308).

That Kelsey had a lifelong interest in matters of money is displayed early on in Pedley's portrayal of Kelsey "the business man" (94-113), where we witness a Hollywood-worthy saga of Wild West adventure (with violence, fraud, corruption) attached to Kelsey's interests in the American Southwest and Mexico (through his involvement with the ill-fated Hays Consolidated Mining, Milling and Lumber Company in the first decade of the new century). Here we find a Kelsey emmeshed in the often harsh realities of frontier wheeling and dealing, where he "learned firsthand something of ruthless business practices, life on the edge of civilized society, and the precariousness of investment" (112). For those of us for whom "investment experience" is just an occasional mouse-click away, Kelsey's adventure presents a whole other world.

Kelsey developed an early and long-lasting friendship with the preeminent German Pompeianist August Mau, stemming probably from Kelsey's first visit to Italy in 1883, during his early teaching career at Lake Forest University near Chicago (23-24). One result was that Kelsey become the acknowledged American master of Pompeian studies in his day, an achievement made manifest in his translation of, and significant original contributions to, the first and second editions of Mau's *Pompeii: its life and art* (New York 1899).<sup>1</sup> Among innumerable other results of Kelsey's Pompeian work was the inspired idea of commissioning from the Roman artist and archaeologist Maria Barosso a replica of the famous "Mysteries" fresco from the namesake Villa, discovered in 1909. The result, Kelsey judged, was "splendid", but the life-size watercolor copies on paper were forced to remain in storage for some 80 years until the Kelsey Museum's new addition put them on "brilliant display". They represent in vivid color just the kind of material acquisition that Kelsey prized throughout his career, as likely to enhance an appreciation of the ancient world in all its dimensions (and not just in classical texts) for students, scholars and the public alike (328; 366).

Kelsey was vigorous in pursuit of archaeological fieldwork on three continents. Aside from his lifelong interest in Pompeii, he played a major rôle in launching, all in the mid-1920s, excavations at Pisidian Antioch, Carthage, and Karanis in the Fayoum. (A decade and a half earlier he had also been key to initiating excavation at Cyrene — with sadly disastrous results, as noted below.) He was one of the leading promoters of ambitious excavations in Asia Minor. As the staff member "in charge of policy", and with Rackham's financial backing in particular, he joined with the likes of William Ramsay and David Robinson to promote excavation in 1924 at Pisidian Antioch, where work was undertaken on a sanctuary for the imperial cult, a city gate, a Christian basilica, and the city's aqueduct (309-16 and 321-28). Among the many finds were hundreds of new fragments of the *Res Gestae*. Pedley's revealing narrative here opens the door on unfortunate "difficulties between Ramsay and Robinson", where Kelsey attempted mediation; and there were other sticky matters too (such as trouble with fieldwork permits) for him to confront. The episode nicely illustrates Kelsey's well-honed diplomatic skills. In 2004 a group from Michigan examined the site anew, leading to an exhibition and a recently published volume<sup>2</sup> of related essays (322 n.100).

1 The first English edition actually preceded the appearance of the German original by a year, thanks in good measure to Kelsey's own rapid work. The second English edition was published already in 1902, signed by both men, and included even more material composed by Kelsey himself, who also set to work on a never-realized third edition, intended to appear some years after Mau's death in 1909 (pp. 53-55).

2 E. K. Gazda, Ü. Demirer and D. Ng (edd.), *Building a new Rome: the imperial colony of Pisidian Antioch* (Kelsey Museum of Archaeology; Ann Arbor 2011).

Kelsey was a central player in a multi-sided collaborative effort to undertake archaeological exploration at Carthage in 1925, beginning with the Tophet, sanctuary of the Punic goddess Tanit (the "Michigan Franco-American team" included the Count Byron Khun De Prorok, of rather dubious motivation as to whether "commercial rather than scholarly" [309 n.46]): his presence lends a haunting shadow to the Carthage episode in Pedley's telling). This early instance of international cooperation at Carthage was to be followed half a century later by an altogether more elaborate program, launched in 1972 under the aegis of UNESCO, to "safeguard Carthage" (338 n.154): Kelsey foresaw that a full-scale project to explore and preserve ancient Carthage must call for some kind of "governmental intervention", and it fell finally to the Tunisian government, rather than to France as the colonial power, to invite numerous countries to participate under the UNESCO umbrella during the 1970s-80s (336-44). The Tophet has become famous (infamous) for the large number of its burial urns containing the burnt bones of young children, raising the question as to whether the Carthaginians practiced child sacrifice, as attested by literary sources, or whether the Tophet served simply as an infant cemetery. It may say something about Kelsey's inherently generous perspective on humankind that he preferred the latter interpretation, whereas a Harvard team that re-examined Kelsey's dig site in the late 1970s and pursued its excavation further has "reached the opposite conclusion: that infant sacrifice was indeed practiced" (343 nn. 171-72).

Pride of place should perhaps be given to Kelsey's rôle in initiating and conducting excavations at the Fayoum village of Karanis, one of a number of villages in the area where Ptolemaic Macedonian veterans were settled amidst native Egyptians during the earlier 3rd c. B.C. Karanis would go on to enjoy a long and generally prosperous existence (despite periods of distress) and the site has yielded countless archaeological riches that document the intimate realities of daily life "in a dusty Egyptian village". Pedley devotes a special "Excursive Chronicle" (384-91) to the story of Kelsey's involvement. Here too personnel "difficulties ..... clouded the management" of the excavation starting with the 1925-26 season, and it fell to Kelsey to resolve them through diplomacy (if, at times, of a peremptory sort [382]). Kelsey determined that the Karanis excavations should prove a model of the "modern" archaeological approach, in which the aim would be not only to recover new documentary and literary papyri (the single-minded focus of earlier explorers like Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt), but also to extract and record every trace of other kinds of archaeological material by which a reconstruction of the inhabitants' lives might be achieved. If Kelsey served as the "guiding intellect" behind this innovative approach, Pedley pays credit to Enoch Peterson (director from 1927 through 1935) for devising a whole new system of stratigraphic fieldwork (including the initial defining and subsequent refinement of the site's phasing) and new methods for recording all finds and their location. It is materials from Karanis, of course, that comprise one of the chief glories of the museum in Ann Arbor (which would assume Kelsey's name only in 1953, to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death [406]). We are treated to a tempting glimpse, with photographs (figs. 33-35), of the bounty of evidence recovered, much of it organic materials, which brought the number of finds into the many thousands: household furnishings, kitchen equipment, living-room utensils; farming implements, textiles, mats and baskets; shoes, combs, jewelry, children's toys and wooden dolls — "the variety is boundless". All these, joined by thousands of coins, ostraca and papyri, continue to enrich our understanding of the lives lived by humble folk in Rome's far-off hinterlands. Pedley highlights two letters on papyrus written in c.200 by a Roman soldier in Italy, one Apollinarius, to his mother Taesis in Karanis, touching testimony "to age-old concerns (filial devotion, material worries)" (391 and 234, figs. 16-17). A report on the early seasons' work was one of Kelsey's final publications, in 1927 (409).

More than a decade earlier, as President of the AIA, Kelsey had held initial high hopes for excavation elsewhere in N Africa, at Cyrene. He was instrumental in promoting plans for a joint expedition between the AIA and Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, but it proved to be an abortive undertaking and the only distinctly unsuccessful field effort among his many projects. In Pedley's view (148), "in retrospect, those who organized the expedition might have been more alert to the international situation". Cyrene ended as a fiasco in 1911 — a murderous fiasco, in fact (the epigrapher H. F. De Cou was shot by assassins), all described in Pedley's best detective-tale fashion (145-52). Dark suspicions fell upon the Libya-colonizing Italian govern-

ment, but not without the American director (Richard Norton) perhaps deserving some of the blame for what proved to be a diplomatic disaster, on top of a personal tragedy.

Pedley pays decent respect to other sides of Kelsey's professional life beyond his labors in administration, fund-raising, and field archaeology — especially his work as collector of antiquities and as editor and translator, the latter not unrelated to the man's humanitarian instincts. Kelsey's adventuresome and congenial nature, coupled with his sharp bargaining skills, led to a close and enduring collaboration with Grenfell and Hunt, amongst others, and helped build the remarkable papyrus collections at Michigan, the British Museum, and elsewhere (271-72). What began as occasional, then annual, shopping expeditions in Cairo were, from 1924, combined with a "more legitimate source" of papyri for Michigan with the start of the long excavations at Karanis (273). Devoted especially to his editions of Latin authors, Kelsey produced texts of Caesar (adding observations from his own surveying of World War I battlefields), Cicero, Lucretius and Ovid (*Fasti*). Nor did Kelsey neglect to keep careful track of the rather profitable royalties that were forthcoming from the frequent re-issue of some of these works, especially Cicero's *De Senectute* and *De Amicitia*, Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, and Caesar's *Gallic War* (of which 21 editions by 1927).<sup>3</sup>

It was Kelsey's close involvement in Presbyterian church life that led to his generous work on behalf of child victims of the First World War: in particular, his recruitment efforts during and after the war's final stages to seek members of a Committee for the Relief of Belgian Children (251). In a similar vein, his lifelong commitment to "community work" of varying kinds and even at the international level was responsible for his agreeing to undertake the demanding task (on-going throughout his final years) of translating Hugo Grotius' treatise *De jure belli ac pacis* (1646 edition). More with a view to Kelsey's expertise in Latin than to any particular competence in legal matters, the invitation came in the summer of 1918 from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, hoping to offer the world a very practical service immediately after the war. Pedley quotes the letter in which Kelsey explained the rationale both for the Carnegie request and for his own agreeing (with three Michigan colleagues) to accept an enormous burden that was not tied closely to his own academic interests. One could not ask for a clearer statement of the man's sense of global humanitarian commitment (241-42):

The thought was that if a fresh reading of this masterpiece could be distributed slightly in advance of the peace negotiations, its insistence upon absolute justice ... would serve to reinforce ... deliberation against the selfish and commercial trend of such negotiations for the last century.

Pedley notes also the humane counterpoint to Kelsey's Belgian relief efforts whereby he worked hard to seek funds in the post-war years (when Germany's economy was in collapse) to support German scholars in their *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* project (305 n.22, 311, 359, 400), and in their successful effort to re-open the German Archaeological Institute in Rome (328).

Without in any way presuming to analyze the innermost workings of Kelsey's psychology, Pedley shows throughout a remarkable sensitivity to his subject, along with a healthy caution as to the nature of his sources. What emerges is the portrait of a decidedly optimistic soul, utterly self-confident but ever marked by a decent sensibility in his relations with others, and thus a consummate diplomat (whether in academic or excavation politics, in his dealings with high-ranking government and military officials or captains of industry and finance). Relying time and again on Kelsey's own diaries for much of the narrative, Pedley alerts his reader from the outset to "the bias of the diarist, the constructed slant on situations and personalities", even as he welcomes the picture of Kelsey's own spontaneity, revealed "with an immediacy that is transparent". Kelsey was blessed with a family life that provided periodic relief from the intensity of his professional engagement: "seriously minded in public life, he exuded plenty of twinkle at home" (4-5). The pages on the "Journey's end" (394-98) offer an affecting account of Kelsey's final weeks, which found him "shuttling back and forth between hospital and campus" as he suffered from an ever-worsening apparent heart condition (397 n.75), but still con-

<sup>3</sup> See Pedley's list of Kelsey's "Selected Works" (407-9), as well as his notation of the publication royalties for 1925: some \$3,569.86 (333 n.141).

tinued to immerse himself conscientiously in an endless array of professional and family matters right up through the morning of the day on which he died (May 14, 1927).

Pedley's narrative brims with the zest of Kelsey's life and, for those lucky enough to have witnessed it, with the energy with which the biographer presented his own lectures during a distinguished teaching career at the same university. His steady attention to colorful detail links Kelsey's career to an expansive vision of an American (and, in decent measure, a European, North African, and Middle Eastern) world undergoing dramatic change in the latter 19th and early 20th c. Readers tempted to dismiss as utterly mundane the fortunes of American mining companies, or the sexual inclinations of the denizens of early 20th-c. Capri, or the desirability of Presbyterian ministers being trained in public college and university settings, may be surprised to find themselves lured into occasional intrigues that keep them from easily setting the book aside. Pedley's eye for detail focuses first, of course, on the particulars of Kelsey's life: his sometimes parsimonious ways, his recording of the cost of a lunch, his love of opera and of gardening (derived from the early farming days in upstate New York), his enthusiastic reaction to "the only first class screen" film he had seen up to 1926, *Ben-Hur*. But we confront all manner of other detail as well that brings an era to life — for example, modes of travel and transport, as we move by train and by car (including a ride in the "Dodge car" that so gratified Kelsey's wife Isabelle *en route* to a society wedding in 1923), by mule (to visit Messenia in 1901), by yacht and by ship (oh, so many trans-Atlantic crossings here, so many steamships), by the street cars and inter-urban trolleys of 1906 Detroit; and, of course, by foot, regularly traversing the whole of central Rome, from the Quirinal (at the Pensione Boos) to the Janiculum (at the American Academy): "these walks across Rome ... are a delight", wrote Kelsey in his diary for 1921 (290).<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, Pedley's excellent biography is a profound gesture of respect on the part of one Michigan professor to an illustrious predecessor, but it is so much more than that. The book will find a broad and appreciative audience, from veterans of his university's programs in classical studies, classical archaeology, and history of art, to all those interested in Kelsey's and the university's prominent rôle in the development of American higher education and cultural life at large (including music and Presbyterian Church history); and it will hold much appeal too for an international public with interests in 20th-c. cultural history across a broad European and Mediterranean swath of regions that were touched by the vision and talents of Francis W. Kelsey.<sup>5</sup>

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4 These and all manner of other detail may be easily referenced in the book's 52-page (!) index. It includes as well a useful bibliography and some 36 photographs that capture the man and the age.

5 Another recent biography has brought to life another giant on the scene of American archaeology, even as it sheds its own light on American and wider cultural concerns of the early decades of the 20th c.: J. Abt, *American Egyptologist: the life of James Henry Breasted and the creation of his Oriental Institute* (Chicago 2011). The professional paths of Kelsey and Breasted intersected not infrequently (Pedley 217, 270, 395).