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Johnson, Allan Chester (11 Aug. 1881-2 Mar. 1955), university teacher, was born in Loch Broom, Nova Scotia, Canada, the son of Leander Johnson and Hannah Creelman. His parents' occupations are unknown. Johnson took his A.B. in classics at Dalhousie University in Halifax in 1904, and his Ph.D. at the Johns Hopkins University in 1909, under the supervision of Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve. After two years of study at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (1909-1911), followed by a year as lecturer at the University of Alberta (1911-1912), he was called to teach in the Department of Classics at Princeton University. He spent the remainder of his life at Princeton, rising through the academic ranks to become full professor in 1924, holding honorific chairs (Musgrave Professorship of Latin, 1933; West Professorship of Classics, 1943), and retiring in 1949. In these years he was also active abroad, on the managing committee of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, and from 1932 as a trustee of the American Academy in Rome, where he was a visiting professor in 1933 and 1948.

The externals of his academic life are quickly sketched, but of the internal life little trace remains. At Princeton and elsewhere Johnson was universally remembered by his colleagues for his warm personality, inexhaustible patience, and quiet wit, a scholar happiest in the atmosphere of intensive learning to be found in advanced seminars, and one who avoided academic feuding. He had married Laura Williamson, a fellow Nova Scotian, in the year he came to Princeton, but the couple remained childless. Scholarship seems to have been the absorbing passion of his life.

As a student of Gildersleeve, Johnson was exposed to a Germanic tradition that demanded close reading of texts set against a background of deep erudition. Accordingly his highly technical doctoral dissertation compared the syntax of two Athenian orators of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. with contemporary decrees of the popular assembly. After the First World War, he turned his attention to the tens of thousands of ancient papyri, written mostly in Greek, which turned up in the ruins and garbage dumps of Egypt. With scholars at Michigan, Cornell, and Columbia he vigorously sought to build up collections comparable to those begun in the nineteenth century at European universities and public archives. The manuscripts and fragments of long-lost or little-known works, transformed the study of classical literature. Johnson, however, unlike the classicists, did not wish to study or to acquire literary texts but rather documents, decrees, receipts, private letters, and the thousand other records of daily life that could cast light upon the social and economic history of Egypt under the Roman Empire from the first to the seventh centuries A.D. To that end he established and edited the series *Princeton University Studies in Papyrology*, which included three volumes that he coedited, *Papyri in the Princeton University Collections* (1931-1942).

Johnson's reputation rests on his contributions as a pioneer in the historical study of Roman Egypt based on a vast knowledge of documentary papyri. His major work, *Roman Egypt to the Reign of Diocletian* (1936), volume three of Tenney Frank's *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, set out the economic history of the country over the first three centuries A.D. through a collection and analysis of mainly papyrological evidence, much of it presented in translation. *Byzantine Egypt: Economic Studies*, written with Lewis C. West (1949), attempted to do the same for the next three centuries up to the Arab conquest. Several of Johnson's other works shared the same approach, recreating the realities of ancient life--inflation, land tenure, taxation--through close readings of a wide range of documents.

Johnson was not a great historian. His books lack conclusions and ignore broad themes and economic theory. Despite these shortcomings he was an important scholar, the first in the English-speaking world to put in order, set into context, and lay before readers the complex evidence for the economic structures

within which ordinary people led their lives in the Roman world. He died at Princeton.

Bibliography

Material on Johnson including some correspondence, faculty record cards, memorials, and obituaries can be found in the Princeton University Archives. His other works include *Municipal Administration in the Roman Empire*, with Frank F. Abbott (1926); *Currency in Roman and Byzantine Egypt*, with Louis C. West (1944); *Egypt and the Roman Empire* (1951); and *Ancient Roman Statutes*, with Paul R. Coleman-Norton and Frank C. Bourne (1961).

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