IN MEMORIAM

BENJAMIN DEAN MERITT

Benjamin Dean Meritt, one of the most distinguished American classi-
cists of this century, died at his Austin home on July 7, 1989, at the
age of 90. Upon moving to Austin in 1972, he taught at The University of
Texas at Austin as a Visiting Professor of Classics and since then held
the title of Visiting Scholar while continuing his association with the
Department of Classics and offering several informal courses for graduate
students.

His lifelong work was Athenian epigraphy, the reconstruction and
interpretation of the legislative, financial, and other documents that
the ancient Athenians recorded in inscriptions on marble and that survive
today in thousands of broken fragments. So notable was Meritt's early
work in this field that in 1935 he was the first humanist-historian to be
appointed to the faculty of the newly established Institute for Advanced
Study in Princeton, New Jersey. This remained his academic home till
retirement and became, in large measure through his influence, a major
international center for the study of classical antiquity. Another
opportunity in the 1930s arose from the start of the American Excavations
in the Athenian Agora: Athenian inscriptions were turning up in these
excavations in unprecedented numbers, and Meritt assumed charge of their
study, publishing new texts in a long string of usually annual and often
book-length articles that stretched down into the late 1960s. Since
these reports cover the full spectrum of Athenian history and epigraphy
from the 6th century B.C. to the 3rd century of our era, there is prob-
ably no better proof of the range of his erudition.

His name, however, will always be most closely linked with those few
special areas of investigation to which he returned time and time again
and which are the subjects of most of his fourteen books: the organization of the Athenian calendar, the reconstruction of the list of Athenian archons in the Hellenistic period, and, above all, the inscribed financial accounts and lists of tribute assessments from the time of the Athenian empire in the 5th century B.C. The four volumes of The Athenian Tribute Lists published with the collaboration of H. T. Wade-Gery and M. F. McGregor between 1939 and 1953 stand as his greatest achievement, his monument. All students of the Athenian empire depend on them.

On his 75th birthday in Austin, close colleagues and former students presented him with a festschrift entitled PHOROS ("Tribute"). It is prefaced by a short, affectionate account of the man and his work and by his huge bibliography, which, in annual clusters of publications from 1923 to 1974, runs to seven pages and includes 200 articles, reviews, and monographs. To these must be added the articles that he continued to produce after 1974. Other lists give some indication of the recognition that this work has received. In addition to his undergraduate and graduate degrees (Hamilton College, Princeton University), he was awarded honorary degrees by four American universities and by the Universities of Oxford, Glasgow, and Athens. He lectured as Eastman Professor at Oxford and held the three major lectureships in Classical Studies in America, as Martin Lecturer at Oberlin, Sather Professor at Berkeley, and Semple Lecturer at Cincinnati. Before his affiliation with The University of Texas at Austin, he had held regular teaching appointments at five other American universities.

Upon retirement to emeritus status at the Institute of Advanced Study, Ben moved to Austin with his second wife, the archaeologist and architectural historian, Lucy Shoe Meritt, to take up residence in the
old Ionic-revival Herblin-Shoe house off West Avenue. There he wrote, met with graduate students, entertained, and enjoyed the freedom of formal retirement. Deeply touched by the hospitality extended to him by The University of Texas at Austin, he eagerly welcomed every invitation to address a class or teach a seminar or conference course. Those fortunate enough to have him teach their graduate classes have vivid memories of the unassuming yet authoritative manner with which he would demonstrate the tools of the epigraphist's trade -- squeezes, brushes, and the rest -- and the way in which he would introduce students, as equal participants, to current research, new inscriptions, and very often, scholarly controversy: Ben was nothing if not an academic in-fighter for what he believed in, so that not a few scholars-in-the-making were encouraged by the sense that academic truth, and their specialty, were things well worth fighting for -- to their great benefit.

Drawing on a lifetime of experiences and his prodigious memory, he rarely addressed a historical topic that did not have strong personal associations. He himself had written on so many of these problems, and he liked to reminisce about his encounters with legendary figures of scholarship who had also been involved and about the pioneering conditions of archaeology in Greece back in the 1920s and '30s. Through him many colleagues and friends in Austin were put in touch with an earlier, grander era of scholarship, which was represented too in his modest, gentlemanly manner. For despite all his accomplishments and learning, what is easily most memorable about him was what Thucydides termed the most noble of human characteristics, his simplicity. Faculty, students and friends of the U. T. Austin Department of Classics are fortunate to have had the opportunity to know this fine man, and to have learned from him.
This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professors John H. Kroll (Chairman), Peter M. Green, and Cynthia W. Shelmerdine.