

THE RYLANDS COLLECTION OF GREEK AND LATIN PAPYRI

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PAPHROLOGY is commonly regarded as a technical and forbidding study, of concern only to a few specialists, and it must be admitted that its name does nothing to dispel this impression. But once we paraphrase it as "the study of whatever was written on papyrus" and remind ourselves that anything could be, indeed anything was written on papyrus from a poem of Pindar or a book of the Bible to an invitation to dinner or a cross-word puzzle, we shall appreciate that there are few if any pursuits that bring us in closer touch with every aspect of the ancient world during the millennium between Alexander the Great and the Islamic conquests; indeed, in one important sense the period of time covered by the papyri is greater, since throughout that millennium the literature of earlier ages was read and studied and to some extent preserved. It is of course the case that the reconstitution and decipherment of papyri is a skilled and often technical business as is the interpretation of many of the legal and administrative texts, but it may confidently be said that no other branch of classical studies offers so wide a variety of subjects.

Of this variety the Rylands collection, the last volume of whose catalogue was published last year¹ is fully representative; although in point of size it cannot compete with the great collections of the Berlin, British, or Cairo Museums, in point of

¹ In this article the papyri are referred to throughout by their serial number; they are divided between the different volumes of the catalogue as follows:

Vol. I.: Literary Texts (nos. 1-61), ed. A. S. Hunt (1911);

Vol. II.: Documents of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods (nos. 62-456), ed. J. de M. Johnson, Victor Martin, and A. S. Hunt (1915);

Vol. III.: Theological and Literary Texts (nos. 457-551), ed. C. H. Roberts (1938);

Vol. IV.: Documents of the Ptolemaic, Roman, and Byzantine Periods (nos. 552-717), ed. C. H. Roberts and E. G. Turner (1952).

quality it stands very high. There are two features of it which would strike anyone familiar with the published volumes. Most collections, whether acquired by purchase or excavation, contain a large amount of indifferent material, as can be observed when their publication draws to a close ; that this is not the case with the Rylands collection is because the papyri were acquired by scholars of the eminence of A. S. Hunt, B. P. Grenfell, and J. Rendel Harris, with the result that both the level of interest of the texts and that of their state of preservation is singularly high. And secondly, although, as is only to be expected, the Greek papyri far out number the Latin, yet the proportion of Latin texts is unusually large ; they include poetry and prose, legal and military, public and private texts and enable the Library's collection in this field to challenge comparison with that in any other library.

The interest and importance of the theological papyri needs no emphasis. The Library enjoys the unique distinction of owning the earliest known manuscript of the New Testament (no. 457) and of the Greek Old Testament, if indeed the latter (no. 458) is not the oldest fragment of the Bible in any language. Since their republication in the third volume of the Catalogue there is little new to add ; later discoveries and renewed palaeographical study have tended to confirm the placing of the fragment of the Fourth Gospel in the first half of the second century (Deissmann and Wilcken both remarked that closely similar hands could be found in the reign of Hadrian). The Deuteronomy papyrus has the additional interest that it illustrates what we may call their "environmental" as well as their textual value. Just as a man may be known by the books he keeps, so the heterogeneous theological papyri give us a picture of Christian, or (as in this case) Jewish, society in Egypt which we could hardly get otherwise ; different aspects of thought and life, official and private, learned and vulgar, orthodox and heretical are all reflected. Thus not only was no. 458 found gummed together with other texts Greek and demotic, literary and documentary (one of them was a scrap of Homer, *Iliad* I), to form mummy cartonage, but before it went to the scrap merchant its verso was used to take a private or official account. A

strictly orthodox Jewish community would have carefully preserved its Roll of the Law from such contamination (as was done e.g. in the Cairo Geniza); this papyrus clearly had its origin in a mixed Jewish-Gentile community in which Homer and the law were not necessarily incompatibles.¹ This text also gives us some readings which are known otherwise only from some much later manuscripts, often regarded as inferior; somewhat ironically, not the least use of this and other very early manuscripts (e.g. nos. 1 and 5) is to underline the fact that the importance of the date of manuscripts for textual criticism can be overrated.

It is not perhaps always appreciated that in no. 5 the Library possesses another second-century Christian text, the earliest witness to the Epistle to Titus.² Not all the biblical papyri formed part of ordinary reading manuscripts; thus no. 4 is an extract (dating from the sixth or seventh century) from the Epistle to the Romans, clearly meant to be read in church; no. 3 contains Psalm 90 which was designed to be worn as an amulet to protect the wearer against the powers of evil. The Psalms were frequently used for this purpose; another instance of this practice is no. 461 on which the thread with which it was sewn together after being rolled up still survives, so that if it could not be read it could at least be easily carried. In this category may be classed no. 462, a collection of phrases from the Psalms, reproduced in order but with many omissions and no regard for sense. It is worth noting that such texts are never earlier than the Byzantine period; all belong to a period after the Peace of the Church when Christianity was widely spread and strongly diluted.

A different and more creditable use of the Bible is to be found in no. 467, a fragment of a Book of Testimonies, of which another piece, immediately adjoining no. 467, exists in the Oslo collection. This is the only specimen in the papyri of such a book, composed of Messianic texts from the Old Testament; it is a rough production and may have been put together by the preacher

¹ Among documents referring to Jews are nos. 578 and 590 (both of the Ptolemaic period) and no. 613 (a Latin letter of the second century A.D.).

² For the date of this papyrus see H. I. Bell—T. C. Skeat, *Fragments of an Unknown Gospel*, p. 6.

who used it. Liturgical texts are well represented, among others by an important and early text of the Liturgy of St. Mark (otherwise known as the Liturgy of Alexandria, no. 465) and by a small fragment, no. 470, containing a prayer addressed to the Virgin. It presents a peculiar palaeographical problem but cannot in any case be later than the fifth century and may most probably be placed in the fourth; some of the peculiar letter shapes are explicable if it was an engraver's model. This prayer was identified by Mercennier and later and independently by Stegmüller, to whom the best restoration of the text is due, as a prayer famous in east and west and best known from its opening words as *Sub tuum praesidium confugimus*.¹ As it stands no. 470 is not only the earliest witness to the text but is the earliest example of a prayer addressed to the Virgin.

Another text which should be mentioned here is no. 6, the earliest extant copy of the Nicene Creed, dating from the sixth century; it does not quite coincide with any of the extant versions and was preceded by a statement of the authority on which the creed rested, in which there was a reference, unfortunately obscure, to Rome. Hymnology is well represented; there is an acrostic hymn celebrating Christmas (no. 7), with a refrain to each verse and two hymns of the kind known as troparia (no. 466), very early examples of this genre. The papyrus on which these were written probably served as a choir slip; it may date from after the Arab conquest and is one of the latest Greek papyri in the Library. One of the two hymns is in honour of St. Theodore Stratelates to whom a church in Arsinoe was dedicated; this may provide a clue to the provenance of the papyrus. Further evidence of the cult of the saints is to hand in no. 10, an unidentified text containing a quotation from the New Testament; the subject may be the martyrdom of Lucian.

Heresy is represented by an unusually early text, a fragment dating from the early third century (no. 463) of the "Gospel according to Mary", a characteristic fiction of Gnostic theosophy of which the complete text is known to exist in Coptic, but has

¹ See O. Stegmüller in *Ztschr. f. Katholische Theologie*, 74 (1952), pp. 76 ff.

not yet been published. Of more general interest are two texts both of which are strictly documents but may more appropriately be considered here. The first (no. 469) is the latter part of a circular letter, almost certainly sent by the Patriarch of Alexandria to all the churches in his province warning them against the new religion of Mani. Mani died in Persia in A.D. 276 and this text, which may be assigned to the late third century, is the earliest evidence we possess of the church's reaction to the new danger. (How strong the Manichaeism later became in Egypt we know both from the literary sources and from the great find of Coptic Manichaean papyri.) Other early opponents of Manichaeism are more concerned with his theology and cosmogony; the writer of this epistle, addressing the ordinary Christian, is more at pains to emphasize its moral and practical consequences; the Manichaean attitude to the material world is condemned as a form of idolatry and their attack on the institution of marriage is refuted by quotations from the Bible. Altogether it is a singularly interesting example of a rare type of literature whose origin is to be traced back to St. Paul's Epistles. The other document (no. 12) reflects an earlier stage of the Church's struggle against a different enemy, the State. This is a certificate issued in the year A.D. 250 by the local authorities of the Arsinoite nome to the effect that the person presenting the document for certification had duly sacrificed to the gods, in other words, was either a pagan, or, if a Christian, was apostate. The initial lines of this contemporary witness to the Decian persecution (no. 12) run as follows:

To the commissioners of sacrifices from Aurelia Demos, illegitimate daughter of Aurelius Irenaeus, of the Quarter of the Helleneum. It has ever been my practice to sacrifice to the gods and now also I have in accordance with the edict made sacrifice and libation and tasted the offering in your presence. I request you to certify my statement.¹

One last theological text should be mentioned if only because it is unique. A few fragments of Latin versions of the Bible have been found among the papyri; no 472 is notable in that it is a Latin Christian text earlier than any of the Latin biblical fragments, contains an unknown liturgical text and is a relic—

¹ Three other such certificates are published under no. 112.

the last page of a papyrus codex—of the earliest Latin Christian manuscript yet known. The difficulties of the text whose language is involved and obscure deserve more attention than they have yet received from liturgiologists.

Among the new poems recovered for Greek literature none of the first importance is housed in the Library but there are a number of minor pieces of interest. Tragedy is represented by no. 486, a column from a lost play, almost certainly *The Gathering of the Achaeans* by Sophocles, and Alexandrian literature by two fragments, one from the *Aitia* (no. 13), the other from the *Iambi* (no. 485), of Callimachus, the poet whose reconstitution has been one of the major tasks of classical scholarship in this century. A particularly intriguing text is no. 489, part of an elegiac poem on Hero and Leander; this famous story first occurs in Greek literature in the epyllion of Musaeus in the fifth century A.D.; is this papyrus a fragment of the Hellenistic poem known to and used by Latin poets of the classical age? In nos. 15 and 17 we find poetry of a more popular type, the first a lament by a girl whose lover has been pressed into service to fight as a *murmillio* in the arena and means with the help of a slave to try and buy him off, the second a lame epithalamium, full of reminiscences of better poems and probably composed for some local occasion. Last in this class we may notice a fragment of a late epic remarkable in that its subject is taken not from the *Iliad*, but the *Odyssey* (no. 487).

In prose the contribution of new texts made by the Library's papyri is more considerable. The student of Greek literature may be pardoned for thinking that in general oratory is sufficiently represented by our extant texts, but any addition to the slender corpus of the speeches of Lysias, in style and subject-matter the most attractive of the orators to the modern reader, is welcome. This is provided by no. 491 which, in collaboration with a London fragment of the same manuscript, provides us with part of a known speech (that on the murder of Eratosthenes) and with the beginning of another, *On behalf of Eryximachus*, whose very title was previously unknown. This Eryximachus was apparently one of the Athenian generals at the Pyrrhic victory of Arginusae in 406 B.C., and both the nature of the charge and the treatment

of it throw additional light on the state of feeling in Athens after the return of the democrats in 403 B.C.

In general, a fragment of an historical work is likely to be of more value than a fragment of the same size of an oratorical or philosophical text, and in new historical texts of small compass, but each of distinctive interest, the Library is rich. No. 18 deals with early Spartan history, a much debated text whose problems are still unsolved; no. 490 belonged to a handsome manuscript (probably an epitome of a *Philippica*) giving a factual account of the achievements of Philip of Macedon and was written less than a century after the events it describes; no. 491, written in the second century B.C., is concerned with an account of some negotiations after the decisive battle of Zama in 202 B.C., while no. 473 is that rarity, a new Latin literary text. It is written in a magnificent Rustic Capital hand and formed part of a roll, or series of rolls, containing the *Histories* of Sallust; the surviving fragment includes a description of Sardinia and also an account of a naval operation in the western Mediterranean. One other new prose text deserves a mention, a handsome manuscript of Aesop of the first century A.D. (no. 493) which throws some illumination on the debated problem of the relationship between our medieval tradition and the collection of fables known to antiquity.

Since literary papyri were in no way selected for survival as were, generally speaking, our medieval manuscripts, we should expect to find not only popular literature side by side with classical but also works of a technical or specialist nature. Thus in the Library's collection there are a number of medical papyri including a treatise on surgery of the third century A.D. of which the extant portion deals with a compound fracture of the shoulder (no. 529), a treatise on the physiology of the nervous system (no. 21), a collection of medical aphorisms (no. 530), a collection of medical receipts of the Ptolemaic period (no. 531) and a similar text (no. 29a) which includes a recipe for tooth-powder. Of the remaining scientific texts the most important is no. 522, a manuscript of the *List of Famous Cities* of the astronomer and geographer Ptolemy, the first papyrus of his works to be found in his native Egypt; the name of each city is accompanied by its latitude and longitude and on the verso are some astronomical

calculations. These scientific texts are all Greek and show no sign of Egyptian influence; the contrast is striking when we come to the pseudo-sciences of astrology and divination. One such papyrus (no. 523) is concerned to correlate the stages of human and animal life, also the habitat of some living creatures (here there is an interesting allusion to India), with the movements of the heavenly bodies; this valuable information is regarded as a revelation given by an unnamed deity to his priests or devotees. Another text (no. 28) purports to give the rules for divining the future from the involuntary movements or twitchings of the human body—a form of divination specifically prohibited by the Christian Church just about the time this papyrus was written.

More respectable are the numerous grammatical or exegetical papyri several of which are, as we should expect, concerned with Homer. One of these may be mentioned as illustrating the value that the papyri occasionally have for the textual critic; this is no. 532, a small fragment of the work by the scholar Harpocration on the vocabulary of the Attic orators.¹ Our earliest manuscript of this work is of the fourteenth century; this small fragment of the second or third century supplies two new readings both of which are probably correct (one had already been conjectured by a modern scholar) and in one place quotes (as our mediaeval manuscripts do not) the actual words of an ancient historian. Even grammatical tables have a certain marginal interest if only as illustrating how stereotyped and unimaginative ancient teaching often was; it must have been a humourless grammarian who selected the verb *I sail* for conjugation in active, middle and passive in all moods, tenses and persons, the dual included (no. 534).

To the activities of the Greek schoolmaster in Egypt (joined in the fourth century A.D. by a Latin colleague) we are indebted for a number of our literary texts, notably for many of our Homers which we must admit we should be glad to exchange for something else. (But from this category we must exclude no. 53, the substantial and important remains of a third century codex

¹ On Harpocration's connection with Oxyrhynchus (the probable provenance of this papyrus) see E. G. Turner's discussion of a letter from the Oxyrhynchus collection in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 38 (1952), p. 92.

which once held the entire *Odyssey*.) A special category of school books is represented by Latin classical texts with a Greek translation on the opposite page, clearly as popular in Byzantine Egypt as Loeb's are today. Of these the Library owns a Cicero in *Catilinam* (no. 61), and an *Aeneid I* in which, as the translation is based on a Virgilian dictionary which gave one, and only one, equivalent for each Latin word, the results sometimes have an unconscious humour. Here also should be mentioned a Cicero, *Divinatio* with Greek glosses, which incidentally gives us an important new reading (no. 477), and a Greek translation of an unknown Latin author (no. 62).

But attractive and important as are the fragments of classical and theological literature, the major contribution of papyrology to classical studies lies in the discovery of thousands of documentary papyri, many of which, unlike the literary papyri, are complete. Nothing resembling them has been found elsewhere;¹ nothing else (not even the inscriptions which are both more limited in their range and were *intended* to survive) takes us so closely or intimately into the lives of the ordinary people of the Hellenistic or Roman ages as these chance survivals from the desert fringe of Egypt—business papers, legal deeds, files of local government offices, public records, private letters and memoranda. But their very variety and, in the case of the legal and public documents, their complex and technical nature, do not make it easy to give a general description. The Library's collection is both fully representative of all periods except the very latest and includes some specimens that are the equal, whether in state of preservation or in inherent interest, of those in any other collection. The series of taxation documents in the second volume of the catalogue (including some carbonized papyri from the Mendesian nome in the Delta, especially valuable

¹ This statement needs some qualification; apart from papyri written in, e.g. Asia or Italy and found in Egypt, mention should be made of the Avroman parchments published by E. H. Minns (*Journal of Hellenic Studies*, xxxv (1915), pp. 22 ff.), the parchments and papyri found at Dura-Europos on the Euphrates (for a general description of these see C. Bradford Welles in Otto-Wenger, *Papyri und Altertumswissenschaft* (Munich, 1934)), and lastly the find made last year in Transjordan of Greek, Aramaic, and Latin documents on papyrus and parchment of which, as yet, only the scantiest information is available.

as we know relatively so little of Lower Egypt), the contracts relating to land tenure and cultivation, legal deeds such as wills or marriage contracts, are of the first importance for the historian concerned to study the centralized bureaucratic state of the Ptolemies, the exploitation of Egypt by the Romans, or the quasi-feudal society of the Byzantine epoch; but their value lies in the contribution they make to a mosaic pieced together from a great variety of sources and cannot be adequately represented here. All that can be done here is to give some small indication of their variety and interest.

The Library is fortunate in possessing seventeen papyri from the great archive of Zenon, the estate manager and personal representative of the Chancellor of Egypt in the middle of the third century B.C., a time when Greek soldiers, business men, and adventurers were changing the shape of Egypt; it was equally fortunate in securing C. C. Edgar to edit them.¹ They are a very small part of the total archive, but palaeographically and linguistically they fill a gap in the Library's collections. Among other Ptolemaic documents may be mentioned no. 577, a petition from an embalmer of the Labyrinth (the great temple of Amemhet III near Hawara) protesting against the activities of "case-hunting busybodies", no. 583, a very detailed lease of a vineyard (which incidentally contains some crucial evidence for the date of the Seleucid invasion of Egypt), no. 589, the accounts of a friendly society probably based on a gymnasium, and no. 580, a text to which no parallel exists. In it a serving soldier who is also a member of a soldiers' club assigns in the event of his death the burial benefit to which he is entitled. No assignee is named and the assignment (to which no time limit is affixed) was apparently negotiable.

As is usual, the Roman documents in the Library's collection are more numerous than the Ptolemaic. Petitions, of which there are many, addressed to various authorities from the Prefect down to local magistrates or police officers, are revealing of many sides of life. In no. 114 a widow, Aurelia Artemis, appeals to the Prefect for protection against her late husband's employer.

¹ They were first published in *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, xviii (1934); they are now republished as nos. 554-70.

She writes : “ When my husband went the way of all flesh, Syrion broke in, intending with the help of his local influence to snatch the property of my infant children from the very bed where my husband’s body lay.” She adds that her husband had never failed in his obligations to the Treasury and that Syrion in his capacity as tax-collector had removed the corn she had set aside for the payment of her taxes and had left no receipt. The subscription appended by the Prefect to her petition must have been cold comfort : “ With a view to what is expedient for the revenues. . . . His Excellency the Epistrategus shall sift the matter with the utmost equity.” In another (no. 116) a man complains that in the course of a quarrel about his father’s will his mother had assaulted him with the assistance of his uncle. Robberies are naturally a frequent source of complaint as it was so easy to dig through the mud-brick walls of Egyptian houses; in the year A.D. 29 a man complains (no. 127) that as he was sleeping before the door of his house on a hot summer’s night certain persons made a “ thievish incursion ” and undermining the north wall of his house by way of a beer-shop removed a number of valuables. No less vivid are some of the verbatim reports of the legal proceedings in which such complaints issued. In one such report (no 653) the community of Theadelphia in A.D. 321 accuses a neighbouring village of interfering with the canal on which the life of their village depended ; their state is so desperate that only three taxpayers are left and they conclude by offering through their advocate to resign their land provided that their neighbours take over together with the land and the water their financial responsibilities as well. This is of particular interest as it is precisely to the breakdown of the irrigation system in this and the succeeding centuries which left the outlying villages high and dry that we owe so many of our papyri ; much of the land that the Greeks irrigated in the third century B.C. in the Fayûm is still desert. The proceedings recorded in no 654 have by contrast a somewhat topical air ; the issue is that of the “ direction ” of labour. A weaver claims that the builders, such is the shortage of building labour, do not recognize the importance to the state of any other work and are bent on making a builder of him ; to escape their violence he has to be guarded

in his wife's house. Here the chief legal officer rules that provided he is properly trained and is actively engaged in his craft he is not to be disturbed. Other public documents that merit a summary mention here are a lively and verbatim account of municipal elections (no. 77) near the end of the second century which ended in violence, such was the unwillingness to serve of one of the nominees; a Latin call-up notice of the year A.D. 505 served on an inhabitant of Hermopolis by order of the Count of the Thebaid Frontier in which the conditions for exemption are carefully stated (no. 609); an application for an industrial concession (no. 98) and another (no. 98a) for the grant of hunting rights; and an elaborate will (no. 153), which includes provision for the maintenance of a religious rite at his grave, of a man who was a member of the international society of athletes. The private letters are rather disappointing, but this extract from a letter written in the second century by two women to the steward of their estate may be quoted (no. 243): "Demarion and Irene to their dearest Syrus, very many greetings. We know that you are distressed about the deficiency of water; this has happened not to us only but to many, and we know that nothing has occurred through any fault of yours. We now know your zeal and attentiveness to the work of the holding, and we hope that with God's help the field will be sown. . . ."

Isolated documents, if their value is to be appreciated, must always be treated in close consideration with those in other collections; the value of a self-contained archive is more readily intelligible. Such an archive, on a small scale, the Library possesses in the papers, public and private, of Theophanes (nos. 616-51),¹ a high civil servant, otherwise unknown to history, on the staff of the Prefect of Egypt in the second and third decades of the fourth century A.D.; these were found at Hermopolis in the Thebaid where he owned a country estate with which some of the papers are concerned. But the majority of them have a wider interest; it would seem that he was sent on an official mission, probably as representing the finance department of the Egyptian Government to Antioch in Syria, the headquarters of the

¹ Cf. also nos. 607 and 713.

Praetorian Prefect of the East. He prepared (or perhaps his wife did it for him) lists of clothes and other equipment he would need for the journey ; in addition he kept a scrupulous record of his route across the desert through Palestine and Syria, listing both the daily stages in Roman miles and also his daily expenditure—what he spent on his bath, on a visit to the theatre, on food, drink, and entertainment, even (if some lines are rightly interpreted) on presents to take back to the family. To his desk in Alexandria had come petitions formally addressed to the Emperors on financial matters ; these he seems to have taken with him to Antioch, perhaps to get the decision of some higher official on some matter of principle involved, and then to have used them for his private accounts on the return journey. He carried letters of introduction in Latin (Latin was then the official medium of communication between high officials although Theophanes normally spoke and wrote Greek), but either did not bother or found it unnecessary to present them.

Of his family life we do not know as much as we should wish ; but his two young sons were privileged to accompany him to Alexandria and to see for the first time the sights of the great city. When they got home they wrote their father a letter (perhaps dictated by their tutor) in formal Greek embodying a little essay on filial piety. (Another letter which possibly belongs to this archive is no. 607 ; in this Dionysius (the father of Theophanes if the identification is correct) instructs his bailiff to convert all his available cash into goods as he had got wind of an imperial edict lowering the value of the coinage.) Theophanes returned safely from his journey and does not seem to have been personally involved in the great civil war between Constantine and Licinius with the preliminaries to which his journey was most probably concerned ; a number of accounts and lists give us a picture of his life at home, building, entertaining local notables with mimes and acrobatic performances, and generally running the estate.

Anyone at all familiar with the material will realize how inadequate this description of the Library's papyri is, particularly of the documents ; nothing, for example, has been said about the contribution they make to our knowledge of the Greek and Latin

languages or to Greek and Latin palaeography. But one point may be emphasized in conclusion. When a text is published its value for the serious student has only begun to be exploited; as these texts are more thoroughly studied and as new publications of related documents continue to be made, we may be confident that our knowledge and understanding of the ancient world, its literature, its history, and its social life will continue to be enriched by the Library's collections of Greek and Latin papyri.