CHAPTER 7

PAPYROLOGY

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In a broad sense, papyrology is a discipline concerned with the recovery and exploitation of ancient artefacts bearing writing and of the textual material preserved on such artefacts. For the most part it focuses on what can be called the spectrum of everyday writing, rather than forms of writing intended for publicity and permanence, most of which were inscribed on stone or metal and belong to epigraphy in the scholarly division of labour. The edges of these domains, however, are fuzzy. Papyrology cannot actually be defined by the material support—potsherds can belong to epigraphy or papyrology depending on their origin and nature. Technique of writing is not an adequate discriminant, for not all epigraphical texts are incised, and some papyrological texts are. A public/private dichotomy is undermined by papyri put up as public notices, and many types of content are found in both epigraphical and papyrological texts—edicts of Roman governors, to give only one obvious example. Nor does geography divide the fields; both papyrological and epigraphical texts can be found from Britain to Afghanistan. None of this, however, is a problem unless one wants to close oneself into a discipline. For the Roman world, papyrology is pragmatically just part of a larger domain involved with these surviving witnesses to the ubiquity of writing in antiquity.

For enviromental reasons, most papyrological material does come from Egypt. The Ptolemaic kingdom was the last of the main Hellenistic states to come to an end and be taken into the Roman Empire. But papyrological evidence for matters Roman goes back to the century before Actium; a Roman senator touring Egypt got the VIP treatment (*P.Tebt.* I 33; Bagnall and Derow 2004: 118 no. 69), Rabirius Postumus gets a bad press in another papyrus ('He appointed unsuitable and desperate men . . .': *SB* XXII 15203, Bagnall and Derow 2004: 109 no. 62).

These and other texts give a sense of the ways in which the Roman presence in the few decades before Octavian's triumph had already begun to change Egypt. Even in public one sees the impact: an inscription confirming the right of asylum of a sanctuary has a Latin phrase ('the queen and king ordered this') so that Roman troops would know it concerned them (Bingen 2007: 71). The Arab conquest of 641 brought to an end only Roman rule, not Romanity. The Arabs took over the Roman administrative structures of the country, and the Egyptian population continued for centuries to use the legal forms of late Roman times, in both Greek and Coptic documents (Richter 2002). In this broader sense, the 'Roman' period in the papyrological documentation is at least 900 years long.

The Roman period in a narrower sense—the Principate, really—has become a kind of 'standard' or normative period for the papyrological documentation. The reason is in part archaeological. Ptolemaic papyrus finds come from only a handful of types of discoveries. Most are either family archives saved as units, and thus focused mainly on asset-defending documents like deeds of sale or litigation papers, or else waste paper used in cartonnage, the wrappings of human or crocodile mummies. This waste paper came above all from government offices or office-holders, and it informs us well about the Ptolemaic bureaucracy and bureaucrats, but poorly about many other things. The more varied kinds of papers usually left in houses or thrown away on rubbish dumps are much less well preserved for the Ptolemaic period than for the Roman, where cartonnage vanishes as a source and the excavation of habitation sites and their dumps becomes more widespread. The archaeological horizon narrows in again with late antiquity, the 'Byzantine' period of papyrologists, particularly in that villages almost disappear as sources, leaving a handful of the cities and a very skewed geographical perspective (Bagnall 1995: 26–9). It is thus for the Roman period that we have the best overall spread of documents, even if important unevennesses and gaps remain.

The 'normality' of the Roman period is probably not just a matter of survivals, however; or, to look at it from another point of view, the survival of documents is probably not only the product of archaeological contingency. Roman rule brought with it the development of a society of 'notables', the prosperous elites of both villages and cities who governed them—the cities especially after Septimius Severus granted them city councils. These groups, the property they owned, and the public duties they carried out generated an immense amount of paperwork, much of which had not been there in the Ptolemaic period, and these papyri are a large part of what gives us our impression of the 'middle-class' (but really upper-middle or lower-upper class) society to which the modern middle-class reader connects so easily. It is the village societies of the Fayyum and the bourgeoisie of Oxyrhynchos that have generated most of the stories papyrologists tell about life in Greco-Roman Egypt.

The Empire is also the period in which the geographical range of papyrological finds outside Egypt is at its greatest. From the first to early second centuries CE there are important finds from the pre-Hadrianic forts at Vindolanda in northern

Britain (*T.Vindol.* I–III), with their snapshot of frontier military life, and the fort of Masada by the Dead Sea, where, near the other end of the empire, the Roman army was engaged in putting down a rebellion (*Doc.Masada*). Second- and third-century documents from the Dead Sea (*P.Yadin*) and the Euphrates valley (*P.Euphr.*, *P.Dura*) have also helped prevent too Egyptocentric a view of the papyrological world, as the interplay of Roman, Greek, and local languages and legal norms has given more specificity, bite, and controversy to questions all too easily buried in generalizations. The ongoing debate over the legal character—how much Jewish, how much Hellenistic, how much Roman—of the archives of Babatha and Salome alias Komaise from Nahal Hever has been particularly fascinating both for provincial Roman society in the early years after the arrival of Roman rule and for fault-lines in contemporary Israeli academe. The army is documented again in third-century Libya with a large find of ostraca (*O.Bu Njem*). Later still, Petra and Nessana give us city and village documents, linked to church and military but highly revealing about private-property transactions, in the sixth and seventh centuries (*P.Petra*, *P.Ness.*). Once again, the Roman Empire dominates the papyri, because there is nothing really comparable for the Hellenistic period.

Papyri and Roman History

One straightforward approach to thinking about the papyri as a source for Roman Studies is the kind of hierarchical method characteristic of most survey articles. The *JRS* has periodically run such articles about inscriptions, but not in thirty years now about papyri; the last was Bowman 1976, explicitly limited to 'imperial history' to the exclusion of law and religion. It begins with the imperial court, surveying new information about the emperors and their immediate circles, like Augustus' funeral oration for Agrippa, data about the imperial *consilium*, and a reference to Seneca's estates in Egypt. Many points of the chronology of the emperors' reigns and magistracies normally crop up in newly published documents in any given decade, and the emperors' visits to Egypt are documented in some texts. Sometimes the points at stake are minor, sometimes important; Aurelian and Diocletian were the emperors about whom the most significant new information had recently appeared when that survey article was done. Topics relevant to imperial history in this sense tend to be highly technical, but their relevance to the larger Roman world is obvious and needs no particular emphasis.

A second level of subjects concerns Egypt as a Roman province: its status; its administrative organization; the administrators who governed it, in particular the higher ones like the prefect and procuratorial positions, but also the mid-level

officials and even local liturgists; its land regime, including taxation; its economy and society. In this category also comes the Roman army, although much of what is written about the military is also of immediate and uncontested application wider than the province itself.

Another such survey article, covering the quarter-century 1956–80, was organized very differently but touched on many of the same key points (Keenan 1982). That survey, however, focused more on visible changes within the directions of papyrology itself, looking at the field's own changes rather than new data within fixed categories. One of these was the already-mentioned geographical widening of the range of find-places of papyrological documents, a trend that has only accelerated in the quarter-century since Keenan's survey (Cotton, Cockle, and Millar 1995). We shall return to the others later, but one fundamental point is still to some degree true today: the unbroken flow of papyri from the Roman period, the very fact that has helped make the Roman period the 'standard' in papyrology, has also kept papyrologists busy editing and has hindered the production of syntheses.

The papyri, in this respect very much like inscriptions, are ideally suited to a whole range of subjects in the domains that lend themselves to construction as lists of one sort or another—a category that includes much of what falls into the 'imperial history' approach. The information from the documents is in most cases highly analytic; that is, it provides discrete data about very specific questions: Who commanded a cohort of Ituraeans under Nero? Which prefects served under Hadrian? What taxes did a villager pay in the mid-second century? Gradually, as new documents appear, holes are filled in, and our lists of prefects, heads of the *idios logos*, strategoi, amphodarchs, and even centurions gradually fill out. The science of prosopography, which played such a central role in Roman history in the twentieth century, is nowhere more at home or better served than with administrative documents of the sort provided by the papyri. Now that such lists can be published electronically, even the drawback of instant obsolescence that plagued such lists in print (Keenan 1982: 23–4) is avoidable. By the same token, thematic collections of documents on particular subjects are a natural project, even if not as commonly undertaken as they might be (see Daris 1964 and Fink 1971, both on the army, for examples).

There is no reason to suppose that the papyri will not continue to make new contributions to the study of Roman political and institutional history for the foreseeable future. This is particularly true as the definition of 'Roman' encompasses later centuries to a greater degree, with late antiquity now much more firmly assimilated into the field than used to be the case. Papyrology too has engaged with the centuries from Diocletian to the Arab conquest (and even beyond) to a far greater degree than it did a generation ago. Keenan (1982: 31) called attention to the growing tendency twenty-five years ago to make the fourth century an integral part of 'Roman' Egypt, and in the following quarter-century the later centuries have come increasingly to the fore. Even Arab Egypt is starting to be not only a lively area of scholarly work but one more closely tied to its Roman past (Sijpesteijn and Sundelin eds. 2004).

To an even greater degree, papyrology has become increasingly intertwined with the study of major issues in Roman social, economic, and legal history, where the question of the relevance of the papyri to the empire outside Egypt has been more contested. From papyrology's earliest days, it was evident to those who read the documents that they could inform us about areas of life very poorly represented in the ancient authors and not easily studied even from inscriptions or the normative legal sources. Juristic papyrology was the first of these areas to blossom, with Ludwig Mitteis's contribution to the great four-volume *Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde* that he and Ulrich Wilcken published in 1912. It was perhaps also the first to fade, as the progressive withdrawal of European law schools from ancient legal history in recent decades has destroyed its institutional base; but there are substantial signs of new life in recent years, with a more strongly historical character (e.g. Beaucamp 1990; Yiftach-Firanko 2003).

Social and economic history also has a long pedigree in papyrology, and Rostovtzeff (1926, 1941) used the papyri extensively in his great syntheses. Papyrology has also played a large part in more revisionist approaches in recent years, as major issues in Roman Studies like the economic activities of the elite, the possibilities of true economic growth, the status of Roman women, and social mobility have been tackled by scholars with a primarily historical rather than papyrological formation (e.g. Arjava 1996; Beaucamp 1992; Kehoe 1992; Rathbone 1991; Rowlandson ed. 1998; Tacoma 2006).

Underlying this work has been a growing conviction of the utility of the material of the papyri, even when mainly or exclusively Egyptian, for larger currents in Roman history, a point argued most fully by Rathbone (1989) for the economy and to one degree or another by others. It might be too much to say that this is a settled issue, but the results of this work have been sufficiently compelling that the need for self-justification in applying the papyri to the Roman Empire at large no longer seems so pressing. Undoubtedly the papyri from the Judaean desert and the Vindolanda tablets (with the accessible synthesis in Bowman 1994) have also helped to awaken a sense of the broader importance of everyday documents.

Asking Different Questions

'Roman Studies', however, is a different matter from Roman history, even in the extended sense described above. Because most of the papyri come from the Greek-speaking part of the empire, they may not at first glance seem like the most obvious source for a major renewal of the questions we can ask about the Roman world. Bu Njem and Vindolanda are one obvious rejoinder, but at a deeper level the question

is one of our conception of the Roman world. In a number of respects the papyri give us the opportunity to look at aspects of the culture of the Roman world and think about the interconnectedness of the Greek and Latin spheres. These offer opportunities to engage a wider circle of scholars in the study of the papyri, something that can only bring yet other questions to bear and open up papyrology to further approaches. Here we will look at a few areas in which important work has been done in recent years.

Language

Papyri are full of words and sentences, and study of the language of the papyri began early in the history of papyrology. The most immediate impact of the papyri was on the question of the existence of a specifically Jewish dialect of Greek, which was already controversial more than a century ago and has remained a live issue despite attempts to lay it to rest. As one scholar has remarked: 'Possibly a certain theological predisposition has encouraged the continuing acceptance of Jewish Greek in some quarters' (Horsley 1989: 40). Apart from that debate, the papyri have been heavily mined for the study of the language of the Septuagint and the New Testament, a continuing process visible a century ago in Deissmann's famous *Licht vom Osten* and continuing still in the volumes of *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*. From a linguistic and cultural point of view, it is most realistic to see the Greek of early Roman Palestine as simply the pervasive *koinē* of the Hellenistic and Roman East, with some phenomena coming from bilingual interference. Such phenomena can be seen also in the Egyptian papyri of the period and no doubt would be equally visible if we had papyri from other eastern provinces.

It has taken longer for any real consciousness of the papyri to affect mainstream classical linguistics, to the point that a recent conference on the language of the papyri was called 'Buried linguistic treasure' (Evans and Obbink, forthcoming). Not entirely buried, of course. Every reader of J. N. Adams's recent book on *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (2003) will see that it draws deeply not only on the Latin papyri, as one would expect, but on those in Greek, and not only in the 115 pages of the chapter on 'Latin in Egypt' but at many other points, as in the discussion of code-switching. The non-Egyptian papyrological texts, including of course the Vindolanda tablets, are drawn on at still other points.

More unexpectedly and still more subtly, Eleanor Dickey has pointed out in recent articles that Latin idioms start to appear in the Greek of the Egyptian papyri already in the first century BCE, in the reign of Ptolemy XII (Dickey 2003, 2004): 'As the Romans conquered the Greek world, contact with Latin led to a perceived need for a Greek address system that would allow the expression of contemporary types of politeness, and this need was met (perhaps after some experimentation with other methods, at least in Egypt), by calques of the most common Latin vocatives'

(Dickey 2004: 527). Similarly, Hélène Cuvigny (2002) has shown that the Greek epistolary use of *idios* is a calque of the Latin *suus*. It is likely that the 'Romanization of the Greek East', although hardly a new discovery, will be a lively area of research for some time to come, even at fundamental levels hardly suspected until recently.

Education and Ownership of Books

We can study language use in antiquity only when speech took written form. The last decade-and-a-half have seen a remarkable development of studies of literacy, education, and ownership of the written word, in the wake of the pessimistic views of literacy and education set out in William Harris's important book on *Ancient Literacy* (1989), which cites papyri extensively. Two stimulating collective volumes (Humphrey ed. 1991 and Bowman and Woolf eds. 1994) followed up quickly and deepened the picture of many aspects of the subject; a host of further articles has followed, in which the papyri continue to play a central role.

People acquired the capability to write and read through one sort of educational process or another, and it is here that the contribution of the papyri has been most decisive, as Raffaella Cribiore's studies (1996, 2001) of the papyri, ostraca, and wooden tablets that survive from ancient schooling have given much greater precision and depth to our understanding of this process and its role in the formation of elite culture in the Roman period. Bernard Legras's study of the formation of youth (1999) has also traced cultural formation using the papyri.

Legras has also (2002) written about what one might see as the logical extension of studies of education, the reading and book-ownership that could extend throughout adult life the participation in the literary culture inculcated in the grammarian's classes. Greater depth in our understanding of just who owned books and how they used them has also come out of study of the papyri in recent years, especially where some sense of archaeological context is possible. Peter van Minnen (1994) used the records of the excavations at Karanis to identify the owner of a particular house as a tax-collector named Socrates, who owned copies of Menander, the 'Acta Alexandrinorum', and a grammatical treatise. He is also the individual brought vividly to life years ago by Herbert Youtie (1970), who wrote nicknames for taxpayers in the margin of his tax-roll, using in one case an obscure word known only from Callimachus, an author of whom, van Minnen points out, a fragment was found in the house across the street. Van Minnen (1998) has also looked more broadly at the finds of literary texts from Fayyum villages, although the same degree of precision is hardly ever available. We may anticipate more such studies, including particularly of the ownership of both Greek and Egyptian literature by priests in Roman Tebtunis. From a later period, Jean-Luc Fournet's study of Dioskoros of Aphrodite (1999) has put on an entirely new footing our knowledge of this late-antique village notable, poet, and notary.

These and many other studies are beginning to give us a far more nuanced sense both of who could write and read and who owned books. There have been surprises, and there will be more. It is increasingly clear that it was not only the intellectual and scholarly elite of the cities who took an interest in literature. The villages of Roman Egypt housed at least some people we are not accustomed to thinking of as society's cream—tax-collectors do not make many A-lists—who had scholarly interests. How far this continued to be true after the fourth century is hard to say, as the evidence becomes much scarcer. Dioskoros is probably not a typical figure. But he was probably not unique, and in any case we may expect that an interest in reading will have taken different forms in a Christianized Egypt.

The Ubiquity of Writing

Papyrological texts thus continue to reshape our most basic notions of the cultural texture of Roman society. Although they will never tell us what percentage of people could write, they warn us not to underestimate the centrality of writing in everyday life and the complexity of individuals' relationship to the written word. Relatively few women learned to write, and yet women wrote or had written for them large numbers of personal letters in the Roman period, more than in the Hellenistic period (Bagnall and Cribiore 2006). When it became possible to write letters easily in Egyptian, with the advent of Coptic, women started to use that language more extensively in correspondence. More generally, vernacular languages gave birth to new scripts for both literary and documentary use. Greek and Latin are only part of a spectrum of languages and scripts; we find similar texts from the Mediterranean to Central Asia in languages ranging from Syriac to Bactrian.

As the example of the tax-collector Socrates showed, it is a mistake to think that the use of writing can be neatly categorized. We would expect that a career collector like Socrates could write; he needed to keep accounts. But we might have anticipated that his was a practical, business-oriented literacy. Instead, he had broader interests. So perhaps did another tax-collector whom we know well, Nemesion of Philadelphia, who copied out Claudius' letter to the Alexandrians onto the back of a tax-roll (Hanson 1991: 172, n. 46).

Our chances of understanding just how pervasive and varied writing was in Roman society are best where papyrological texts come from an archaeological context and are not isolated from 'epigraphical' types of texts or other objects found in the same context. The Dakhleh Oasis offers a particularly rich opportunity to see papyrology, archaeology, and epigraphy working together to create a picture of writing in daily life. The excavations at Kellis have brought some striking juxtapositions: a wooden codex with a schoolteacher's copy of three orations of Isocrates discovered with another such codex full of three years' accounts of rents

and expenditures on a unit of a large estate, with one scribe's hand probably found in both codices (*P.Kell.* III and IV); and a trove of private letters in Greek and Coptic in one house found along with Manichaean literature on papyrus and wood, and with enough clear references to Manichaeism in the letters to show that the juxtaposition is no coincidence (*P.Kell.* I, II, and V).

Across the oasis as a whole, another phenomenon stands out: the ubiquity of Greek poetry in public and private. A recently published miniature wooden codex found at Kellis contains a Homeric parody displaying both wit and knowledge (Hope and Worp 2006). At the temple of Ain Birbiyeh, toward the eastern end of the oasis, a temple gateway excavated in 2006 has the remains of Greek poetry incised on a now-shattered and effaced block, evidently a visitor's graffito. And at Amheida, ancient Trimithis, at the opposite end of the oasis, a thick chunk of plaster found on the surface by a boy from the neighbouring village in 2005 has several fragmentary lines of Greek, in poetic vocabulary, probably from the same source as fragments published by Guy Wagner (1976). The new fragment seems to have a reference to Bousiris; across the top, in larger letters, is ΣΑΡΠ[, probably part of the name of the hero Sarpedon, who in some ancient mythographic sources is indeed connected with Egypt. But that is not all. In 2006 the excavation of a fourth-century house at Amheida found a room with multiple columns of a red painted inscription on one whitewashed wall, the remains of an ancient 'white-board' on which more washed-out text can be seen (Cribiore, Davoli and Ratzan 2008). The lines are elegiac couplets in Greek, addressed to pupils, and invoking the Muses for poetic inspiration, Hermes for rhetoric, and Herakles for hard work. The presence of all possible critical marks—accents, breathings, long marks, and caesura indicated by a high dot, as well as paragraphos between poems—shows that the pupils were learning to write rhetorical compositions in verse and had to master the rules of Greek prosody. With all of these discoveries, both papyrological and epigraphical in the same setting, we are beginning to get a sense of just how the poetry-heavy literary and rhetorical education of the Greek world in the Imperial era led to a physical environment saturated with what are probably in at least some of these cases local poetic products. At the same time, some ostraca from the same house as the rhetorical composition show that the rudiments of writing the alphabet were being practised there at the same time.

Most of what was written in the ancient world does not survive, and a host of circumstances have left us a sample that is anything but random. The papyri are part of a spectrum of surviving writing that embraces, as we have seen, many other media. It is when they are integrated with those other types of writing and placed in an archaeological context that we can recover the place of writing in Roman society most effectively. At the same time, the bringing of new questions to the papyrological documentation can enable it to play a greater role, in conjunction with other types of evidence, in broadening our vision of the everyday realities of the Roman world.

Further reading

Introductions to papyrology are Turner 1968, 1980², the succinct but recent and handy Rupprecht 1994, and the massive Montevecchi 1973, 1988² with poorly organized but extensive bibliographies. Bagnall ed. (2007) offers an introduction by twenty-seven scholars to a variety of topics. A selection of Greek texts for reading appears in Pestman 1990. For method and approaches in writing history using papyri, see Bagnall 1995. Bibliographies can be found in all of these works.

Editions of papyri are cited according to the abbreviations in Oates *et al.* 2001. Among the main digital tools for papyrology are the following:

Advanced Papyrological Information System (APIS), a union catalogue of metadata and images from many papyrus collections, at http://www.papyri.info.

Duke Data Bank of Documentary Papyri, a full text database only for Greek and Latin documents, at http://www.papyri.info.

Heidelberger Gesamtverzeichnis der griechischen Papyrusurkunden aus Ägypten; www.rzuser.uni-heidelberg.de/~gvo/gvz.html, a database (without texts) of Greek and Latin documentary papyri and ostraca.

Leuven Database of Ancient Books (LDAB), a guide to Greek, Latin, and Coptic literary texts, including school exercises, at http://www.trismegistos.org.

Leuven Homepage of Papyrus Archives and Collections, at http://www.trismegistos.org, databases with description of archives and dossiers and of modern institutional collections.

The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, at http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/, metadata and images of the more recent volumes.

'Pack-Mertens, 3rd edition', a digital update of R. A. Pack, *Index of Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt* (2nd edn. Ann Arbor, Mich., 1965). A listing of literary papyri with full references, at http://promethee.philo.ulg.ac.be/cedopal/index.htm.

The Vindolanda Tablets, metadata, translations, and images, at http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk/.

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