

## BOOK REVIEW

*Discarded, Discovered, Collected: The University of Michigan Papyrus Collection.* By ARTHUR VERHOOGT. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017. Pp. xv + 186. Paperback, \$39.95. ISBN 9780472053643.

The University of Michigan's papyrus collection, founded by Francis Kelsey in the 1920s, is the largest of its type in North America. To commemorate its centennial, Arthur Verhoogt, acting archivist from 2010-2013, has undertaken in this short book to write an introduction to the collection, to set forth its history and to suggest some of its contributions, especially in developing preservation and digitalization techniques. A second goal of the book is to present an overview of the discipline of papyrology as a whole in a form accessible to specialists and laymen alike. The papyrus collection itself consists of over 7000 items and 10,000 fragments with 1100 additional potsherds housed in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology. Papyri in the collection cover over two millennia from the 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the 16<sup>th</sup> century CE, with the majority being in Greek and dated from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Much of the collection comes from University excavations at Karanis in the Fayum region of Egypt during 1924-1935. Among the works in the collection are found almost every type of early written text, including literary and religious ones, personal letters, sales receipts, student exercises, tax registers, Nile recession records and even mummy tags. Included in Verhoogt's slender volume are sixty-four color illustrations of the collection's papyri texts, with translations, and five additional charts

The book consists of twelve chapters; each followed by notes for further reading with footnotes located at the end of the volume. The first three chapters are introductory; Chapter 1 describes the relatively small working space allocated to readers, Room 807 on the eighth floor of the Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library near the environmental room which houses the papyri. Chapter 2 presents a brief history of the collection, first conceived by Kelsey, who believed that the university's students should be able to study ancient artefacts first hand. The third chapter describes methods of conservation. These include the cleaning of the

manuscripts and the storage of the most fragile between sheets of glass and of the better preserved in acid free folders.

The fourth chapter deals with the history and methods of studying individual texts. The fifth discusses writing materials and the sixth the languages found in the collection. The general process of reading a text is complicated by the condition of the papyrus and also by the separate challenges posed by each language. For example, Greek texts are written without breaks between individual words. Once a work is translated, the papyrus is then assigned a special number linking it to any scholarly publications. The completed translation is also entered into an online data base of all papyrus texts, whose webpage links it to additional data bases. In the fifth chapter the various writing surfaces are discussed. In addition to papyrus and ostraca, texts are recorded on wood, wax tablets, parchment, limestone, leather and finally paper. The collection includes examples of virtually every language spoken in Egypt from pharaonic times to the beginning of Arab rule: Egyptian (Hieroglyphs, Hieratic, Demotic), Greek, Latin, Coptic, Arabic and Hebrew.

The next four chapters discuss the most prominent types of texts. The seventh deals with school texts, the eighth chapter with ancient books, the ninth with those forms of writing which derive from everyday life and the tenth with archives, a term applied to groups of texts found together. School texts in the collection demonstrate that students learned to read and write by first memorizing letters, then words and finally sentences; they also learned math skills. The eighth chapter deals with the discovery of literary texts. Although few in number, their discovery created the most excitement among scholars. Before papyrus texts, the earliest surviving works of ancient authors were those found in medieval manuscripts. The writings of even popular authors such as the Athenian comic poet Menander were sometimes not transmitted and the texts of those authors which were transmitted often contained scribal corruptions.

The ninth chapter discusses those papyri which reflect the workings of daily life. These include personal letters, birth registrations, contracts of property sales and petitions to public officials. The eleventh chapter deals with archives, groups of interrelated texts discovered in a single location. The Michigan collection typically owns only parts of such archives since the documents were often sold separately. For example, portions of the large Archive of Zenon are found in twenty collections.

Chapter 11 is devoted to describing the excavations at Karanis and the final Chapter 12 to speculations on the future of the collection. The chapter on the

Karanis excavations views the papyri as one of several groups of archaeological finds. Chapter 12 suggests new approaches to translating and interpreting the remaining texts, all small fragments. Since the larger documents, about 5% of the collection, have all been translated, Verhoogt believes that the remaining fragments would probably best be analyzed through collaborative approaches. His most promising suggestion is to provide records of each fragment online with notes to encourage input from the broadest range of scholars.

Verhoogt's short volume capably achieves his goals. His style is very readable, almost conversational, and his text is supported by numerous color illustrations. The author's concluding remarks suggest a course of action for the next century.

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