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From Cartonnages to Cultural Contexts

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Abstract: During his excavations in the Fayum, between 1900 and 1902, Pierre Jouguet was able to find a large number of mummy cartonnages, which along with documents of various sorts yielded some surprising, previously lost literary texts, such as Menander's *Sicyonians*, Euripides' *Erechtheus*, and Stesichorus' *Thebaid*. The exact find-spot of the papyri is unclear: we know that the mummies were found in different necropoleis between Medinet Ghoran and Medinet en Nahas (ancient Magdola), but clear topographic information is largely missing: after reaching France, the cartonnages were dismantled in different steps over a span of several decades, so their 'archival' history is often difficult to trace. Nonetheless, even if their archaeological context is lost, the texts seem to point to common cultural contexts, as suggested by a comparison of their philological, palaeographic and 'bibliological' features. This article will survey such characteristics, in order to reflect on the readership and circulation of Greek literary texts in Ptolemaic Egypt.

Keywords: Ptolemaic Egypt, Greek papyri, Fayum, ancient readership, cultural practices

1 "Out of Context"

"Out of Context" is the title of one of the many exhibitions organized at Beers, a recently opened gallery close to the City of London. It featured works by three influential German female artists – Regina Nieke, Frauke Wilken and Heike Jobst – which were not displayed in chronological order and did not have information on the 'historical' circumstances of their creation. The selected artworks – paintings

Article Note: In order to make the apparatus of footnotes less burdensome, the papyri mentioned are not provided with a comprehensive bibliography, which can easily be acquired from the online databases Mertens–Pack[3], CEDOPAL (URL: http://www.cedopalmp3.uliege.be/) and Trismegistos of KU Leuven (https://www.trismegistos.org/ – unfortunately requiring a subscription for most of its functions). Apart from the first editions and other repertories, images of the papyri in the Sorbonne collection can be viewed online through the website of the Institut de Papyrologie at Sorbonne University, while most of the papyri in Lille are reproduced in Boyaval/Meillier 1984 and Boyaval 1990.

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and sculptures – were presented to the public as a succession of glimpses of human figures or anatomical details, under cones of white, encompassing light. Yet, in this way the curators of the exhibition wished to suggest to the viewers that the fragmented images shown to them belonged to a common background, which could be perceived despite the alienating effect produced by the distorted anatomies and evanescent shades. Deprived as they were of any indication about their origin, the juxtaposed works evoked a wider unity "as part of a larger historical and contemporary context, that created further complexities for [their] understanding".[1]

Apart from the aesthetic implications of this approach, which is quite commonly found in reflections on contemporaneity,[2] it may seem ironic that the quest for a broader meaning would begin with the rejection of circumstantial information. At the same time, this approach reveals a problem which cuts across the epistemological borders of historical disciplines: 'context' is a slippery concept, whose parameters are not fixed.

The definition of 'context' is also troublesome for papyrology. In a sense, many of our extant papyri can be considered structurally 'out of context', because in many cases we cannot establish their find-spot, and even when we can, we often have no way of knowing where they have been read, stored or written. This has proven to be problematic especially when scholarship attempts to move from specific cases to the broader background of complex phenomena, from local stories to History.

A paradigmatic example is the fragmentary bookrolls extracted from mummy cartonnages. As is well known, these 'mummy texts' offer a wide array of forgotten or submerged literary works;[3] moreover, they are the best source of information on the characteristics of early Greek books. Since they come from peripheral parts of Egypt, they are the only tangible remnant of the dynamics of diffusion and reception of Greek literacy and literary culture during the first phase of its diffusion beyond Greece itself. Yet, paradoxically, the relevance of such texts has also been questioned from this point of view, mainly because of the difficulty of defining the 'context' they belong to.[4] The reasons are pretty obvious. The bulk of our

1 As described in the short description at https://beerslondon.com/exhibitions/out-of-context/.

2 To give only one among the many possible examples, a transhistorical approach to the study of literature has been theorized and applied in Bronstein 2018 (significantly titled *Out of Context*).

3 On the distinction between 'forgotten' and 'submerged' texts, see Rossi 2000, Ercolani 2014, and Colesanti/Lulli 2016.

4 The most accurate overview of the diffusion of literary papyri, van Minnen 1998, systematically excludes papyri from cartonnages because of the problems involved in establishing the exact place where they were read (as cartonnages can be made from papyri written and read in different places from the one where they were found: to recall a well-known case for papyrologists, the cartonnages found in the crocodiles necropolis at Tebtunis mostly belong to the so called 'archive of Menches', or better the 'archive of the village scribes of Kerkeosiris', *komogrammateus* in Kerkeosiris: see Vandorpe/Clarysse/Verreth 2015, 440–446 [K. Vandorpe]).

papyrus cartonnages have either been bought on the antiquities market, and thus lack clear indications as to their provenance, or were discovered at the turn of the 20th century, when excavation reports – especially for tombs and necropoleis – did not contain all the information we would expect: sometimes even the generic find-spots are uncertain.[5] Moreover, while some necropoleis were extensively and accurately excavated (even if the results were not always clearly documented), the same did not happen with the urban areas they belonged to, which in many cases still await to be explored. The result is a series of distortions that increase the risk of improper inferences: writing history from untraced sources can be dangerous.

In response to such obvious limitations, recent studies have argued that a single cartonnage can be regarded as the context of the texts it contains, and as such can provide "archaeological and contextual information" – to quote Erja Salmenkivi – that "can help us better understand the sometimes difficult texts".[6]

Does this also apply to the reconstruction of cultural morphologies? How far can a set of tendencies be considered a context? And how can we use such information for broader historical reconstructions?

Despite the challenges, it is worthwhile to reflect once more on such questions. In this paper, I will try to do it through a survey of a tantalizing group of books and documents, whose study has been steadily unfolding over the last few years: the mummy cartonnages found by Pierre Jouguet in the Fayum.

2 Pierre Jouguet and his Papyrological Findings

Pierre Jouguet worked in the Fayum for two years, leading three excavation campaigns between 1900 to 1902. His archaeological experiences, and the problems he had to face, have recently been outlined by Florent Jacques, "papyrothécaire" of the Sorbonne collection.[7] Drawing from his work, I will outline some basic elements.

Jouguet mostly worked in the south-western part of Fayum, especially around the Gharaq basin.[8] Like many papyrus seekers, he was more interested in rubbish

5 An updated, critical overview of the first steps in 'papyrological excavations', with their methodological limits, is offered by Cuvigny 2009 (with further, selected bibliography), but remarks on this topic can be found in every work on the history of papyrology.

6 Salmenkivi 2002, esp. 9–13 (words quoted from p. 13).

7 Jacques 2022. For a general discussion of the life and works of Pierre Jouguet, see also Husson 2007.

8 On this area in general see Rathbone 2001, which presents the results of a survey conducted from 1995 to 1998. On the hydrological work carried out on the basin in the early Ptolemaic period see at least Bagnall/Rathbone 2008, 142–143, and Malleson 2019, 121.

dumps and *gafsh* than urban plans and domestic architecture, and he was well aware that large cemetery areas had better chances of yielding papyrus-made cartonnages. When he explored the largest *kiman* in the plan of Medinet Madi, he found that they seemed unsuitable to the preservation of papyri or similar written artefacts. He thus decided to look for mummies instead, and directed most of his archaeological activity towards that 'noble' (in the excavators' perspective) goal. Following the locals' advice, Jouguet moved to the desert area west of Narmouthis and chose to focus on the small, desolate *kom* Ghoran, despite its unimpressive appearance ("peu de kômes en Égypte ont un aspect aussi insignifiant", he wrote in his first report).[9] The *kom* covered some poorly preserved buildings, but not far from it there was a necropolis of around 6,000 tombs. These were located inside an irregular space of around 500 meters in length and between 20 and 100 meters in breadth, and were mostly untouched. Jouguet recorded rather basic information about these tombs, along with a schematic plan and a short description of the different burial types, spanning the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.[10] An inventory of the cartonnages discovered during the first campaign – and never intended for publication – listed 363 items, distinguishing the type of cartonnage, the language of the texts pasted together, and their condition.[11]

During the following excavation season, which Jouguet directed together with Gustav Lefebvre, he spent some weeks in Ghoran and then decided to move to another site, Medinet en-Nahas, which he promptly identified as the ancient Magdola. The mission uncovered a temple dedicated to the god Haeron and two necropoleis – one for sacred animals, the other for human beings – which yielded 60 more mummies made with 'papyrus cartonnages'.[12] Jouguet was never able to carry out a more systematic exploration of the site, although he had apparently planned one: for his third expedition he moved to Middle Egypt, as far as Akoris, and then decided to curtail his involvement in fieldwork, only travelling back to Egypt from Europe for short visits.

During his campaigns this scholar discovered a considerable number of texts: according to the published reports (but further studies of extant archival material might yield more detailed information), Jouguet brought more than 423 mummy cartonnage plasters to France (the 363 found in Ghoran plus others from 60

9 Jouguet 1901, 25. A survey of the site of Ghoran is offered by Davoli 1998, 217–222 (on Jouguet's works see esp. 217–218).

10 Jouguet 1901, 401–411 (the map is reproduced as fig. 17).

11 Described (and partially transcribed) in Jacques 2022, 573.

12 See the report by Jouguet 1902. A description of the site, with an account of the archaeological excavations, in Davoli 1998, 213–216; see also Bernand 1981, 29–36.

mummies from Medinet Nahas).[13] Personal and academic vicissitudes nonetheless prevented him from appreciating the full extent of his discoveries, and reduced their impact on the general public.

The cartonnages themselves had a troubled life. They were first deposited at the Université de Lille, where the scholar was based when he began his work. Then, in 1919, they were moved to Paris, where Jouguet had been appointed professor, founding a new Institut de Papyrologie at the Sorbonne. Some of the cartonnages remained in Lille, but this was only noticed several decades later. Probably also as a consequence of the World War I (Lille was occupied by the Germans as early as October 13th 1914, when Jouguet was not there),[14] he was only able to supervise the disassembling of some of the cartonnages he had brought to France. These yielded many interesting documents (notably *enteuxeis*, re-edited by Octave Guéraud in 1931)[15] and a few literary papyri, such as the *adespota comica*, later inventoried as Inv.Sorb. 72 ('groupe B') and one of the most ancient *Odyssey* rolls, Inv.Sorb. 2245. Other famous literary treasures were only discovered in the 1960s and 1970s, when work on the cartonnages resumed, first in Paris under the direction of André Bataille[16] and then in Lille through the efforts of Jean Vercoutter, who 'rediscovered' the forgotten cartonnages in 1960.[17]

So far, the study of the cartonnages in both collections has led to the recovery of more than 270 documents and of the fragments of at least 26 literary texts of varying length. These include peculiar works, such as a curious edition of Callimachus' lost *Aitia* whose verses are intermingled with prose explanations, as well as the main witnesses of other largely lost masterpieces, such as Menander's *Sicyonians*, Euripides' *Erechtheus* and a lost poem by Stesichorus, his so called *Thebaid*.[18] In the literary selections found around the Gharaq basin, the most widely repre-

13 Evidence on the number of the cartonnages is provided by Jacques 2022, esp. 571, based on the unpublished inventory by Jouguet.

14 Husson 2007, 144.

15 For a survey of the papyri from Ghoran see *P.Sorb.* III, p. 3–4 (with previous bibliography). The first notice about the texts from Magdola, with the publication of some relevant documents, can be read in Jouguet/Lefebvre 1902 and 1903; the *enteuxeis* found there were first gathered in *P.Lille* II and later republished, together with the similar material found in Ghoran, in *P.Enteuxis* (on certain peculiarities of the material from Magdola see esp. pp. XXVIII–XXIX; for a list of the *enteuxeis* found in the two sites see pp. XCIII–XCV). Other documents have been extracted from a mummy mask dismantled in Lille in the 1970s: see below, 344–352.

16 On his work see Pellé 2007 (esp. 312–313 on the decision to resume the process of dismantling the cartonnages).

17 Vercoutter 1979; see also below, 344–345.

18 For the editions of these rolls, and more general information about them, see the detailed lists below, 329–330.

sented are works which became uncommon in Egypt only a few decades later, and which were destined to be excluded from the main vehicles of textual transmission.

We cannot help but wonder about these bookrolls' origin and the different steps from the time they were read to their 'new life' as cartonnages, but the elements we may rely on are very few. Their original editors did not assign much importance to the provenance of the texts, but organized the editions on the exclusive basis of content, without drawing any distinctions between the main find-spots or documenting the disassembly of the cartonnages. Moreover, the cartonnages' inventory numbers were not always stated, and the available information seems now inconsistent. The uncertainty only increased further every time that the collection was moved, from Lille to Paris and then around different buildings in Paris, often in difficult circumstances (such as during the World War II),[19] and when the texts began to circulate, becoming stratified in our databases: if one cross-checks field reports, first editions, and archival information still in the Sorbonne (made available by Florent Jacques), the picture that emerges is far from exciting. Among the literary papyri, only eight rolls can confidently be assigned to Ghoran, and one to Magdola. All the others come from mummies whose provenance cannot be firmly established, at the moment: it is either Ghoran or Magdola. The results of this enquiry are summarized in the following lists, organized according to the place where the material is kept.[20]

Papyri in Paris, Institut de Papyrologie de la Sorbonne (Inv.Sorb.)

Inventory number	MP³/TM	Contents	Edition	Provenance
Inv.Sorb. 72 ('groupe B')	MP³ 1657/ TM 61591	*recto*: comic fragments; *verso*: two comic prologues	Jouguet 1906 (*PCG* 8.1017; 8.52–53; cf. Perrone 2009, 137–138)	Ghoran
Inv.Sorb. 72 + 2272 + 2273	MP³ 1308.1/ TM 61589	Menander, *Sicyonioi*	Blanchard/Bataille 1964 (cf. Blanchard 2009)	Ghoran
Inv.Sorb. 2245	MP³ 1081/ TM 61238	Homerus, *Od.* 9, 10	Guéraud 1925/1927 (cf. West 1967, 223–256)	Ghoran
Inv.Sorb. 2252	MP³ 393/ TM 59917	Euripides, *Hippolytus*	Cadell 1962	Ghoran

19 Private communication by Florent Jacques.

20 The papyri left in Lille formally belong to the collections of the Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille (IPEL), founded at Lille University by Jean Vercoutter in 1954, but they are now stored in the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Lille.

Inventory number	MP³/TM	Contents	Edition	Provenance
Inv.Sorb. 2265	MP³ 895.2/ TM 61239	Homerus, *Il.* 12	*P.Sorb.* I 4	Magdola
Inv.Sorb. 2302	MP³ 786.1/ TM 61240	Homerus, *Il.* 6	Boyaval 1967, 61–65	Ghoran
Inv.Sorb. 2303	MP³ 948.2/ TM 61117	Homerus, *Il.* 17	Boyaval 1967, 65–69	Ghoran
Inv.Sorb. 2328	MP³ 437.2/ TM 59930	Euripides, *Erechtheus*	Austin 1967 (cf. Sonnino 2010, 316–406, fr. 17)	Ghoran
Inv.Sorb. s. *n.*	MP³ 1984.7	Poetry	Blanchard/Bataille 1964, 106 (mentioned)	Ghoran

Papyri in Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts (P.Lille inv.)

Reference	MP³/TM	Contents	Edition	Provenance
P.Lille inv. 62 A–B *r*	MP³ 2845.5/ TM 92223	Unidentified prose	Boyaval 1979, 344–347 (transcription only)	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 66*r*	MP³ 2845.6/ TM 7901	Unidentified prose	Boyaval 1975, 270 (description only)	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 66*v*	MP³ 2704.1/ TM 65792	Writing exercise	Boyaval 1988, 108–109 (Cribiore 1996, nr. 1)	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 69 A–B	MP³ 2845.7	Unidentified text	Boyaval 1975, 270 (description only)	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 70 A–F + 85 + 86 + 114 A–D, J, L–M	MP³ 2845.8/ TM 65716	Aeschines Socrat., *Miltiades* (?)	Boyaval 1975, 270–272 (*CPF* I 1* 8, 148)	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 70 G–O	MP³ 2845.9	Unidentified text (prose)	Boyaval 1975, 270	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 71 A–Z + 126	MP³ 2448.2/ TM 100151	Prose about Herakles	Meillier 1981, 243–252	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 76A–C + 73 + 111C	MP³ 1486.1/ TM 62787	Stesichorus, *Thebaid* (?)	Meillier/Ancher/Boyaval 1976; Parsons 1977 (Davies/ Finglass 2014, fr. 97)	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 76D + 78A–C + 79 + 82 + 84	MP³ 207.3/ TM 59428	Callimachus, *Aitia* III, with commentary	Meillier 1976, 253–278; Lloyd-Jones/Parsons 1983, nrr. 254–258, 260–263	Uncertain

Reference	MP³/TM	Contents	Edition	Provenance
P.Lille inv. 83 + 134 + 93B + 93A + 114T + 114O + 87	MP³ 1211.01/TM 60828	Commentary on *Od.* 16–18	Meillier 1985	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 88	MP³ 2846.1; TM 68679	Philosophical prose text	Meillier 1979, 366–368 (cf. *CPF* I, 1**, 42 1 T, 3–5; *CPF* IV.2, 107)	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 91	MP³ 2846.2; TM 65716	Unidentified text (prose)	Meillier 1979, 358–360	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 92 A-D	MP³ 2846.3	Unidentified text	Boyaval 1975, 272	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 101abc	MP³ 2846.4; TM 68680	Unidentified text (prose)	Meillier 1979, 369–370	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 110 A-B	MP³ 2704.2; TM 65790	School exercises	Boyaval 1988, 108–109 (Cribiore 1996, nrr. 2–3)	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 119	MP³ 2846.5	Unidentified text	Boyaval 1975, 274	Uncertain
P.Lille inv. 127	MP³ 2846.6	Unidentified text	Meillier 1979, 368–369	Uncertain

3 The Cartonnages as Context

Even when we can track the place where the cartonnages were found, the broader archaeological context of the findings remains largely obscure: we have a little information about the necropoleis, but nothing about the urban areas close to them.

Kom Ghoran has not yet been identified with any ancient toponym attested in the papyri, and no further archaeological excavations were carried out at the site after the French mission. Even though it was suggested some decades ago that the necropolis may originally have belonged to the nearby Narmouthis,[21] Jouguet's report mentions houses with walls of bricks or stone – one even may have had a bathroom with a stone basin: a rather uncommon feature;[22] moreover, the *propylon* of a Ptolemaic temple was identified, which at some point in late antiquity was converted into a Coptic church.[23] Ghoran itself was a town.

21 Boyaval 1988, 105–106.

22 Jouguet 1901, 393–394; see also Davoli 1998, 218. On bathrooms (βαλανεῖα) in private houses from Graeco-Roman Egypt see, in general, Husson 1983, 57–60.

23 Jouguet 1901, 398–400; Davoli 1998, 218.

We know a little more about the other *kom* from a mix of archaeological investigations and papyrological sources: Magdola had at least four temples, which together controlled a decent amount of *hierà ghe*;[24] in the first century BC this land was no longer properly cultivated and the temple of the god Haeron – apparently the most important – was in a poor condition. Later, however, the town regained some of its former prosperity, which lasted until the 3rd century AD.[25] None of this information can be connected with our cartonnages, nor does it indicate anything about a possible public of curious readers living in the town.

Nonetheless, if we consider the cartonnages themselves as a context, some recurrent elements emerge, and they seem to be common to all the 'textual mummies' from the Gharaq basin, and even beyond: 'text-bearing' cartonnages are never homogeneously distributed across the burials, but tend to be concentrated in individual tombs or in groups of tombs; moreover, texts strictly connected because of their (documentary or literary) contents could have been used for the cartonnages of individuals buried together or close to each other. And we may add, as a corollary of this, that when coherent groups of documents are mixed with literary texts in the same cartonnage, they often date from the same period and sometimes share certain palaeographic features.

Coherence in terms of content is easier to identify when we are dealing with documents found in cartonnages. In Ghoran the mummy wrappings 157–159, whose progressive numbering suggests they may have been found together, were made from the remains of a dossier of texts in Greek and Demotic related to the nomarch Diogenes – mostly *prostagmata* and letters written around 251–250 BC.[26] An even larger dossier, containing official correspondence of the toparch Tesenouphis from December 224 to May 217 BC, was scattered across seven pieces, but most of the letters come from only two plastrons (24 and 302). Furthermore, all the carton-

24 According to *P.Tebt.* I 82, a land survey from Tebtunis dated to 115 BC, in Magdola there were 170 arourae of cleruchic land controlled by three temples: the largest share, consisting of fields with an overall surface of 150 arourae, was owned by a temple of Sobek (ll. 3–4), while a temple of Orsenouphis had at its disposal a field of ten arourae (ll. 35–45) and two shrines of Thot (lit. ἰβίων τροφαί) controlled a κλῆρος of just five arourae each. A much larger amount of land was owned by a temple of the local god Haeron: even if its extent is unknown (it was indicated at the beginning of the first column of *P.Tebt.* I 81, which is unfortunately very damaged), this property must have been more extensive than the others, as *P.Tebt.* I 83 records fields of 50 arourae for that temple (ll. 75 and 83). The pre-eminence of the temple of Haeron is confirmed by *I.Fayoum* 3.151, a dedication dated to 118 BC, in which this temple is said to have a πρόπυλον and other λιθικὰ ἔργα (l. 6). See also Calderini/Daris 1980, 218, *s.* v. Μαγδῶλα.

25 Rathbone 2001, 1116.

26 Greek documents make up *P.Lille* I 39–52 and *P.Sorb.* I 22–31; for a detailed overview (with a full list of all the texts), see Vandorpe/Clarysse/Verreth 2015, 123–125 (W. Clarysse).

nages were manufactured contemporaneously, as on repeated occasions the same letter was employed for two of them (as in the case of *P.Sorb.* I 46, which is divided between mummies 302 and 356).[27] Documents found in Magdola tell much the same story: to give just one example, the plastrons used for mummy V and especially X have yielded a coherent set of documents dated to the 25th year of Ptolemy III Euergetes' reign.[28]

A degree of 'contextual' coherence also applies to literary texts, albeit in a less immediate way. At a first glance, the literary rolls found in Ghoran contain rather homogeneous texts: only theatrical poetry (mostly by two 'mainstream' authors) and Homer. Closer examination confirms this initial impression. Like the documents, the literary texts only come from a specific set of mummies. The extant evidence is limited, as the mummy number is only recorded for the most recently published texts, but further information can be gleaned from sporadic notes added to other texts. The introduction to *P.Lille* I 1, for example, the famous plan of Apollonios' *dorea*, states that the document comes from the same cartonnage as the adespota comica (Inv.Sorb. 72 'groupe B'), here identified as 'mummy 9', which can therefore be assumed as the number of the cartonnage which yielded the unidentified comic verses (not directly stated in their first edition).[29] The same mummy could also be the original 'repository' of the *Odyssey* roll, as its editor Octave Guéraud reports that it was part of the same cartonnages preserving the adespota and "les pièces qui composent le tome I des *Papyrus de Lille*".[30] The meagre results of this enquiry are grouped in the following table:

27 *P.Sorb.* I 38–55; Vandorpe/Clarysse/Verreth 2015, 406–407 (W. Clarysse).

28 This set of documents comprises *P.Enteux.* 13 (formerly *P.Lille* II 2), 55 (*P.Lille* II 1), 58 (*P.Lille* II 5), 59 (*P.Lille* II 3), 71 (*P.Lille* II 4) and 75 (*P.Lille* II 6 + 38). These papyri are said to come from three mummies, labelled as V, X and Y. The plastrons used for mummy X preserved *P.Enteux.* 55, 58 and parts of 71 and 75; mummy V yielded *P.Enteux.* 59 and the rest of 71; finally, mummy Y contained *P.Enteux.* 13 and the other fragments of *P.Enteux.* 75 (mummy provenances are not stated in *P.Enteux.* but they are all listed in the introductions to their first edition in *P.Lille II*). Unfortunately, such reflections do not help us to clarify the process of manufacture of the cartonnages by the craftsmen who were responsible for it, even because we ignore significant information about the people who were buried there: e. g., we have no way to assess if the discarted papyri had been provided by the family of the dead, or if a coherent set of documents was used for people buried in the same timespan.

29 *P.Lille* I, p. 13. Florent Jacques informs me that it is not possible to identify this 'cartonnage 9' with any of the entries listed in the inventory quoted at note 11.

30 Guéraud 1925/1927, 89.

Inventory	Content	Mummy number(s)
Inv.Sorb. 72 ('groupe B')	*Hypotheseis* + *adespota comica*	9
Inv.Sorb. 72 + 2272 Inv.Sorb. 2273	Menander, *Sicyonians*	24 (plastron 1)
		202 (mask)
Inv.Sorb. 2328	Euripides, *Erechteus*	24 (plastron 2)
Inv.Sorb. 2245	*Od*.	9? 12? 13?
Inv.Sorb. 2252	Euripides, *Hippolytus*	301
Inv.Sorb. 2302	*Il*. 6	*n.a.*
Inv.Sorb. 2303	*Il*. 17	*n.a.*
Inv.Sorb. s. n.	Poetry?	?

As the table shows, there is a two-way relationship between texts and cartonnages: a single mummy may yield different literary texts, and the same text may be divided between two (or more?) mummies. This 'material' connection is stronger for the rolls with theatrical poetry: the pectoral enclosing the last columns of the *Sicyonians* also contained the extant parts of Euripides' *Erechtheus* (Inv.Sorb. 2328). Moreover, in addition to Menander, mummy 24 also yielded part of Tesenouphis' correspondence[31] and, considering the inventory numbers, it is tempting to suppose that mummy 302, which preserved another part of that dossier,[32] was buried close to mummy 301, which is the source of the other Euripides papyrus, Inv.Sorb. 2252.

4 Palaeography as a Contextual Element

Such tantalizing connections are reinforced by palaeography. The fragments of the *Sicyonians* are written in an unpretentious script, which switches between formality and informality: an untidy majuscule, not uniform in the thickness of the strokes and ductus, with letters that have non-homogeneous shapes and are sometimes well-spaced, sometimes leaning on each other.[33] This script becomes more disorderly in the last part of the play, while the only two surviving fragments of the first act are written more carefully: the traits are neater, even if their thickness is

31 Relevant texts include *P.Sorb.* I 42, 44, 48, 49, 55 and possibly *SB* XII 10874.

32 Especially *P.Sorb.* I 45, 46, 51, 52 and 54.

33 Palaeographic description of the hand in Blanchard 2009, cxiii–cxv, and Del Corso 2017, 1–3. 'Informal' scripts are often found in Ptolemaic bookrolls: see Del Corso 2004 (focusing on the case-study of Hibah papyri) and 2006–2008, 224–228.

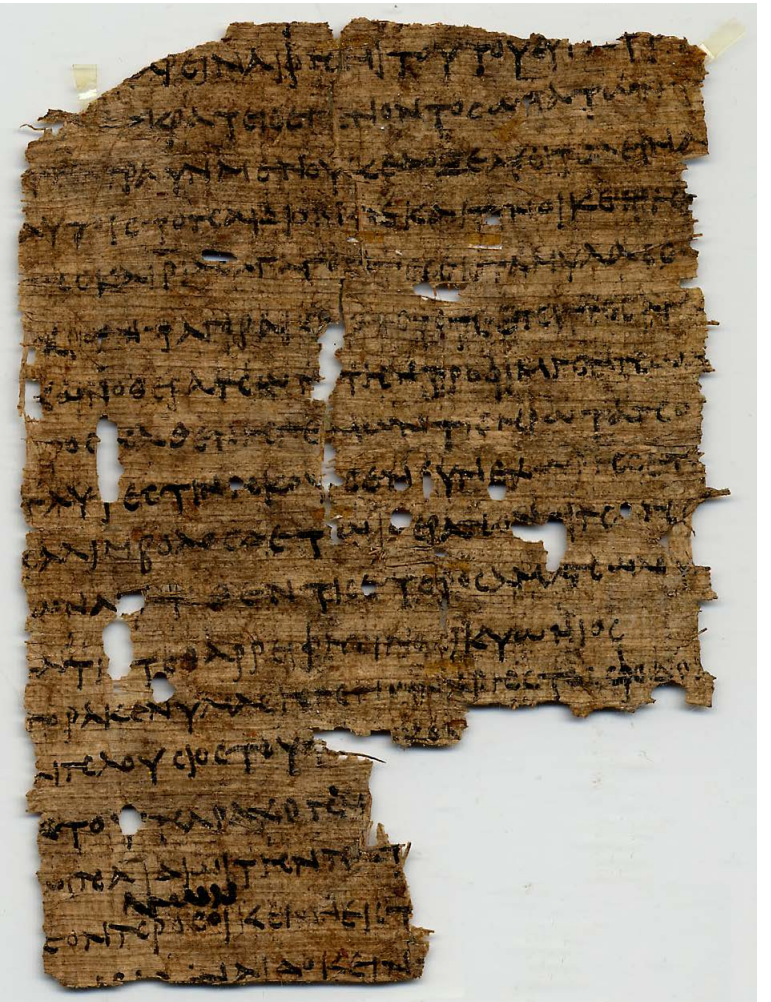

Figure 1: Inv.Sorb. 2273a (fragment the first act of the *Sicyonians*). Photo Sorbonne Université – Institut de Papyrologie

not always the same, and the letters are more rounded, and sometimes decorated with small hooks. Such discrepancies can hardly be explained as a consequence of the deterioration of the calamus tip: we need to seriously consider the possibility that the roll was transcribed by two different hands using a similar script, with one hand displaying greater skill and the other being less proficient.

The second copyist, in any case, must have been quite conscious of the poor quality of his work, as he added a rather extraordinary paratextual feature at the

end of his roll: a subscription where he addresses readers, asking them "not to laugh" at his handwriting.

Similar subscriptions are very rare in Hellenistic and Roman books; unlike those we find in medieval manuscripts, they mostly seem to derive from the need to explain some very specific features of a particular copy.[34] This could also be the case with the colophon of the *Sicyonians*, especially if the roll was written by two hands, since collaboration between different scribes is very uncommon for Hellenistic literary texts and usually occurs in rolls written outside the circuit of professional *ateliers*.[35]

The hands of the *Sicyonians* are very close to those of other papyri: a similar script is used for the roll of the *Erechtheus* (Inv.Sorb. 2328), pasted in the same cartonnage, for the *Hippolytus*, found in a nearby mummy (even if the letters are much smaller in size and the lines sloppier), and for the *Odyssey* Inv.Sorb. 2245.[36]

A good point of comparison for these informal handwritings is offered by many documents found around the Gharaq basin, particularly those addressed to public officers, such as *P.Enteux.* 59, a petition from Magdola written in 222 BC. The four rolls, then, should all be assigned to the last decades of the 3rd century BC, a date which is slightly later than the current one. If correct, this dating implies that they were written in the same time period as a large part of the other documents pasted with them: as mentioned above, the official letters of Tesenouphis span the years from 224 to 217 BC.

A similar pattern applies to the texts confidently assigned to mummy 9. The literary fragment which it contained, Inv.Sorb. 72 ('groupe B'), comes from a remarkable 'opisthograph' roll, written by three different hands.[37] On the recto, one hand has written some excerpts from an unknown comedy, which extend across four lengthy columns, each comprising 27 lines.[38] Two more columns are written on the verso, each in a different hand, and after a long *agraphon*: both contain iambic verses offering readers a convoluted description of the plot of two comedies (now

34 On the function and characteristics of extant subscriptions inserted in Greek bookrolls after the end-titles, see Del Corso 2017, 2–5 (starting from the colophon of the *Sicyonians*) and Del Corso 2022, 158–159, both with further bibliography.

35 Del Corso 2010.

36 On the hands of Inv.Sorb. 2328 and 2245 see Del Corso 2017, 4–5 (with previous bibliography).

37 An overall description of the papyrus in Perrone 2009, 137–138, with previous bibliography.

38 *PCG* VIII 1017. The verses are an excerpt from a longer roll, as is demonstrated by the presence of a P on the left margin of col. 2.2, to be interpreted as a stichometric sign for 100 or 700: see Perrone 2009, 5, footnote 8; on their (non-Menandrean) authorship see also Nesselrath 2011, 127–134.

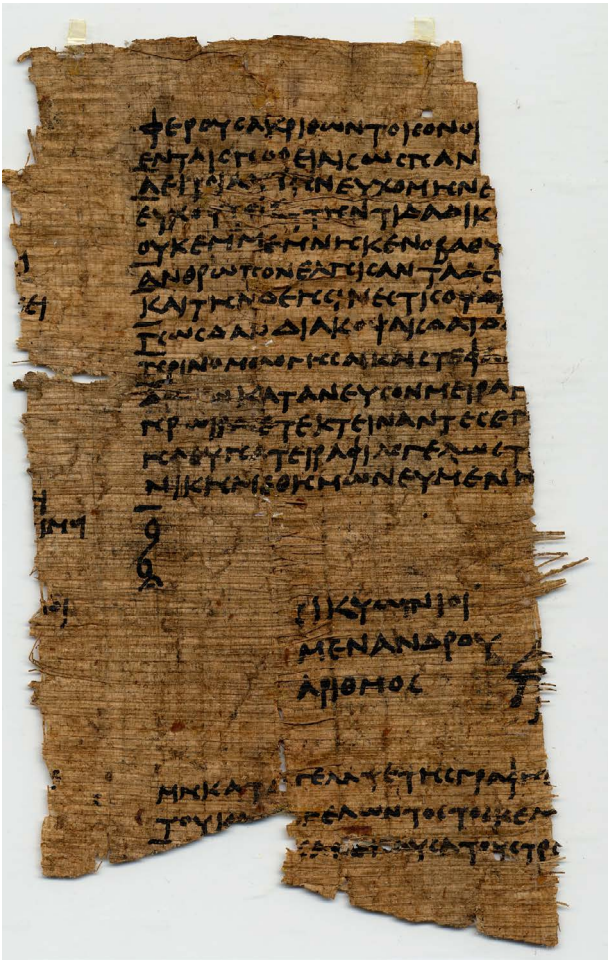

Figure 2: Inv.Sorb. 2272 e (the subscription of the *Sicyonians*). Photo Sorbonne Université – Institut de Papyrologie

lost); therefore, they have been interpreted by modern critics as either metrical *hypotheseis* or real prologues, or even peculiar poetic *divertissements*.[39]

39 The two texts have been re-edited as *PCG* VIII 52 and 53, and are now listed in the *argumenta comica* section of the *PCG*; for their interpretation as prologues, see Perrone 2009, 138. The most unusual text is the first (*PCG* VIII 52), which is written in anacyclic verses (i. e., the same verse is written twice, with the same words given in two different orders): owing to its peculiar nature, Bartol 2013 considered it a "riddle which was intended for use in a school context", and whose solution was the title of the play.

Figure 3: Inv.Sorb. 72 ('groupe B') recto. Photo Sorbonne Université – Institut de Papyrologie

The script used for the text on the recto betrays a strong influence from the Alexandrian chancery script.

Likewise, the two hands on the verso use a swift and irregular majuscule script, with well-spaced letters. The scribe who wrote the first column was familiar with contemporary 'bureaucratic' scripts, as is clear from the characteristic form of the *ny*, with the middle stroke shifted to the upper part of the line and the second oblique projected above it. Such 'cursive' lapses are absent in the other hand, which displays a notable degree of inconsistency as regards both the shape of the letters – sometimes square, sometimes tall and ogival (as in the *epsilon*) – and the thickness of the strokes. The similarity with the Alexandrian chancery script allows us to assign the recto to the middle or the second half of the 3rd cent. BC, and the hands on the verso can be compared with documents from the Zenon archive, dated to the

same years.[40] To the same period we can also assign the other documents from this cartonnage, which all concern land management.

Such chronological parallels between literary and documentary texts from the same cartonnage are not uncommon, even elsewhere, despite the systematic tendency to consider the literary rolls as predating the documents yielded by the same cartonnages by several decades. In Hibah, the cartonnages from three mummies (68, 69 and 70) were manufactured from a mixture of letters and other documents addressed to the 'police officer' Antigonos as well as parts of bookrolls, mostly philosophical in content, written around the same period.[41] In Gurob another mummy plastron was made using "fragments of accounts and registers" dating from 245–235 BC[42] and a roll with verses from the last part of Euripides' *Antiope* (*P.Petr.* I 1–2), whose palaeographic characteristics point to roughly the same period.[43]

40 A point of comparison for the second column is provided for instance by *P.Cair.Zen.* III 59495 (reproduced in Del Corso 2004, pl. 8), even if this latter shows a more regular handwriting.

41 The documents related to Antigonos have been published as *P.Hib.* I 34, I 73 and I 111; the bookrolls comprise philosophical texts (*P.Hib.* I 13, II 188, II 189, II 230), a collection of maxims (I 17) and a calendar for the Saite nome, with an astronomical introduction (I 27): on this group of documents and bookrolls see now Maltomini 2019. As far as their date is concerned, *P.Hib.* I 34 and 73 are both related to the same events (the complaints of Antigonus against his 'boss', the *archiphylakites* Patron), "which occurred in 243/242 BCE" (Maltomini 2019, 154), and the accounts in *P.Hib.* I 111 have been assigned to the years around 250 BCE. Dating the literary rolls is more difficult: the hands of *P.Hib.* I 17, II 188 and II 189 show clear influences from the 'Alexandrian chancery script', and therefore can be assigned to the middle of the 3rd century; *P.Hib.* I 13 and *P.Hib.* I 27 might be a little earlier: the former was possibly written in the first decades of Ptolemy II's reign (Del Corso 2004, 46–47), while the second "may even be as ancient as B.C. 301–298, the period to which the calendar apparently refers" (*P.Hib. I*, p. 139); however, it was used as late as 240/239 BCE, since on the *verso* an (unpublished) list of names can be read that was written in year 8 of the reign of an unspecified Ptolemy, to be identified with Ptolemy III.

42 The notice about the composition of the cartonnage can be read in *P.Petr. I*, p. 29. Unfortunately, Mahaffy, the *editor princeps*, did not list the documents coming from the cartonnage, nor has such information been made available in any of the following editions of the Gurob papyri; one might guess that the cartonnage comprised documents such as *P.Petr.* III 63 *v* – accounts written in June 245 – and *P.Petrie* III 64b, originally labelled as accounts, but more properly part of a letter (addressed to one Zopyros), now republished (with the addition of a further fragment stored in Dublin) as *P.Petr.Kleon* 84, and dated to July 238 BC. The latter document is part of a larger dossier preserved by the cartonnages from Gurob and recording the correspondence between the *architektones* Kleon and Theodoros (an overview of its contents in van Beek 2009 and Vandorpe/Clarysse/Verreth 2015, 206–209; see also *P.Petr. Kleon*, p. 1–3). If it was used for the same cartonnage as the *Antiope* papyrus, this would make the suggested parallel with the Ghoran mummies even more attractive.

43 The hand of *P.Petr.* I 1–2 uses a square majuscule script (only the *omicron* is much smaller than the other letters, and sometimes placed on the upper part of the line, sometimes in the middle). The script has a rounded appearance, overall, but the thickness of the strokes is not uniform; such fea-

5 Physical Features, Layout and Textual Affinities: Looking for Readers

The Ghoran literary papyri share affinities that go beyond palaeography. Three rolls written in similar hands – the *Erechtheus*, the *Sicyonians* and the *Odyssey* – show very similar physical features: they have the same height and columns of similar width, as their letters are of the same size, despite variations in the right margin; only the interlinear spaces are a little different, resulting in occasional variations in the number of lines within the columns (20–24 for the *Odyssey*, 18–21 for the *Erechtheus* and 21–25 for the *Sicyonians*).[44] Another common peculiarity concerns the quality of the papyrus employed for them: they all seem to be palimpsests.[45] The presence of a *scriptio inferior* is especially clear in the *Odyssey* roll: it apparently belonged to a document mentioning *ekphoria* (rents) paid in kind.[46] Moreover, traces of a previous text can clearly be spotted in the *Erechtheus* roll, though it is impossible to guess its nature.[47] The case of the Menander roll is more complex: after dismantling the cartonnage and first publishing the text, Alain Blanchard and André Bataille had no doubt that the roll was a palimpsest;[48] some decades later, however, after inspecting the roll again, Blanchard became more sceptical on this point and more inclined to the idea that the ink traces might be "offset du texte qui

tures, together with the peculiar shape of the *beta* – with a right angle between the vertical stroke and the base, and unequal bellies – is hardly found before the mid-3rd century BC, though there are no elements to suggest a much later date: a similar *beta* occurs, e. g., in the afore-mentioned *P.Hib.* I 13. A more general parallel is *P.Hib.* I 1, which nonetheless presents more rigid strokes and therefore is probably earlier (on this latter papyrus see the palaeographic discussion in Del Corso 2004, 48).

44 Detailed comparisons between the physical features of the rolls in Austin 1967, 13–14; on the 'bibliological' characteristics of the Menander roll see also Blanchard 2009, cxv–cxvi.

45 On 'papyrus' palimpsests see Crisci 2003 (esp. 65, on the Sorbonne papyri here under discussion) and Schmidt 2009.

46 Guéraud 1925/1927, 89; a reference to rent(s) to be paid can be read, e. g., in the white space underneath v. 354 (ἐλάβομεν ἐκφόρι[ο]ν παρὰ. . .: Guéraud 1925/1927, 92).

47 This was first pointed out by Austin 1967, 14, who detected traces of letters which cannot be offsets, as they are written in parts of the roll which were folded together with 'blank' fragments. The scholar focuses on a section of the lower margin of column V (fr. B+C+D), where a χ can easily be recognized; the letter is still visible, followed by other traces, which one is tempted to read as Χο̣ι̣α̣ι̣ (although, apart from the χ, only a κ seems discernible). In this case, as for the *Odyssey*, the underlying text is presumably documentary.

48 Blanchard/Bataille 1964, 107, followed by most scholars who have discussed the roll (see e. g. Crisci 2003, 65).

faisait face dans le cartonnage".[49] Indeed, one may even wonder whether this is the case with all of our rolls. The answer is probably no. Offsets are by their nature specular images, but when one examines the margins of extant columns, one can easily detect faint traces of letters aligned and arranged in a standard way:[50] in such cases, the possibility that they might come from an underlying text should seriously be taken into account. As is well known, the practice of re-employing papyrus sheets was not usual in the professional *ateliers* where books were made, but it was much less uncommon in the production of documents.[51] It is therefore unsurprising to observe reuse in Ghoran: a good example is represented by *P.Sorb.* III 70 (a contract for the sale of some slaves written in August 270 BC). Although the first layer of writing was carefully washed out, it remains discernible in several areas of the papyrus surface.[52]

The structure and layout of the other papyri we are considering also have informal elements. The *Hippolytus* roll features an aberrant column of almost 100 tiny lines (with each letter measuring less than 2 millimetres in height).[53] The 'comic' material collected in Inv.Sorb. 72 ('groupe B') forms a coherent book project, but the three hands which transcribed it did not care much about the 'aesthetics' of the columns, and did not provide any paratextual aids to explain the contents to the reader.

Finally, in addition to these palaeographic and 'bibliological' features, the copyists seem to share a similar 'philological' attitude. All the extant fragments show the same attitude toward textual accuracy: they share minor orthographic errors and exhibit unsystematic corrections. Both hands of the *Sicyonians* – assuming there really are two – frequently confuse vowels and omit letters.[54] Most errors are corrected *in scribendo*, but in a few cases, especially when the mistake is more serious, a second hand steps in: thus, in Inv.Sorb. 2273 a, l. 17 (= v. 18 Blanchard; see above, fig. 1), at the very beginning of the play, the first scribe wrote ν]εονπροσοικειονειστ[, omitting the noun governed by the preposition; this word, ἀγῶν, is restored *supra*

49 Blanchard 2009, CXVI–CXVII (quote on this last page); his conclusions are emphasized in Schmidt 2007, 979, and 2009, 93 (but the author refers to a preliminary version of Blanchard's work, which at that time had not been published yet).

50 See e. g. fr. 2272C: along the lower margin, after col. 1, a γ can clearly be read besides other traces, and after col. 3 the sequence τω seems pretty clear.

51 Schmidt 2009, 88 (with previous bibliography).

52 *P.Sorb. III*, p. 24.

53 This is a *unicum* among the extant material, as first noted by the fragment's editor, Cadell 1962, 26–27.

54 For a list of mistakes and corrections, and a general study of the orthography of the roll, see Blanchard 2009, CXVIII–CXX.

lineam by a different, coarser hand, which allows us to make sense of the sequence and read ν]εὸν πρὸς ἀγῶν' οἰκεῖον εἰς τ[.[55] Orthographic mistakes due to misreading of the model or phonetic confusion also pepper the *Erechtheus* papyrus, but the scribe rarely noticed (and corrected) them.[56] On the worn surface of the roll, moreover, at least one paratextual sign can be spotted, but it is unclear whether it is an asteriskos employed as a lectional sign (possibly an equivalent of a paragraphos) or a chreston added by a reader to indicate a peculiarity in the text.[57]

The philological efforts of scribes and readers are especially evident in the roll of the *Odyssey*, as has been clearly explained by Francesca Maltomini and Carlo Pernigotti.[58] Here we sometimes come across a rather peculiar situation in which two hands are involved.

Besides correcting some minor mistakes,[59] the main scribe (M1) erases certain words and replaces them with other expressions with a similar meaning, which are added *supra lineam*. The 'corrected' text sometimes agrees with the main Homeric tradition, but at other times it is peculiar and either never or very rarely attested by later manuscript evidence. So, at col. VIII (D West), l. 18 = ι 391, the beginning of one of the most famous similitudes from this book, M1 returned to the *vulgata*, changing ὡς δ' ὅτε τις χαλκεύς (perhaps less elegant) into the 'standard' ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἀνὴρ χαλκεύς, by erasing the letters ετις and replacing them with the new noun. A few verses later, however, in col. IX (E West), l. 11 = ι 404, the expression νύκτα δι' ἀμβροσίην, attested by all the main Byzantine manuscripts, is altered – using the same procedure – into νύκτα δι' ὀρφανίην,[60] a pericope which is found only in some later codices: we may see it in a family of 15th-century manuscripts, including

55 This correction was first attributed to a different writer by Blanchard/Bataille 1964, 121 (but this is not stated in the apparatus *ad loc.* by Blanchard 2009). This correcting hand also seems different from the one that transcribed the fragments of the second part of the play, considering the thickness of the strokes, the ink colour and especially the morphology of the letters (see esp. *alpha* and *gamma*): it may belong to an occasional reader, rather than a systematic corrector, as there are no traces of it in the other extant fragments; however, the specimen is so short that it is difficult to draw any reliable conclusion.

56 A list of errors in Austin 1967, 14–15, updated by Sonnino 2010, 318. A correction *in scribendo* is clearly visible in fr. A, col. I, l. 5 Austin 1967: ποτεναπολιν is corrected to ποταναπολιν (ποτ' ἀνὰ πόλιν), by writing α *super lineam* over the erased ε.

57 The sign is in fr. B+C, col. V, on the left of v. 55 Austin. On its functions, see Austin 1967, 32 followed by Sonnino 2010, 318.

58 Full discussion in Maltomini/Pernigotti 1999; see also West 1967, 223–224.

59 Examples of orthographic corrections by the first hand appear, e. g., at ι 223 (col. I Guéraud, l. 12: correct ἐνά]μελγεν in place of the erroneous ἐνά]μελγον), 450 (col. XII Guéraud, l. 12: ποταμῶν in place of ποταμοῦ) and 480 (col. XII Guéraud, l. 21: ἐφάμην for ἐφάμηγ).

60 Maltomini/Pernigotti 1999, 303.

Laur. 32.4 and Paris. gr. 2680 (f in Allen's edition), and in a ms. more relevant for the textual history of the poems now in London, British Library Harl. 5684 (H), where it is added, anyway, as a *varia lectio* by a later hand.[61] Perhaps the scribe believed "dark" to be a more appropriate qualification than "divine" for a night shaken by Polyphemus' mournful cries. But on other occasions M1 prefers not to make a choice between alternative readings, and places the new and the old readings side by side as *variae lectiones*.[62]

Such exegetic efforts are backed by another hand (M2), who is sometimes even more drastic and adds whole alternative verses, though mostly of a formulaic nature:[63] thus, at col. XIV (I West), ll. 17–18 M1 copied two formulaic hexameters to indicate the dramatic end of Polyphemus' speech ([ὣς ἔφατ', ἀλ]λ' οὐ πεῖθεν [ἐμὸ]ν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν,/[ἀλλά μιν ἄψο]ρρον πρ[οσέφη]ν κεκοτηότι θυμῶι), but over the first of them M2 wrote a different expression, in a single verse (ὣς ἔφατ', αὐτὰρ ἐγώ μιν ἀμειβόμενος προσέειπον), as commonly in later manuscripts (ι 522 in contemporary editions).

Such activities can only be explained by assuming that two individuals who were both learned and full of enthusiasm for Greek literature, yet not as proficient as 'professional' scholars, read the text together and collated it to the model used for the transcription, along with (at least) another copy which recorded different readings, especially in formulaic sections.[64] Both the model and the copy used for the collation must have borne an 'idiosyncratic' text, compared to the later patterns within the Homeric textual tradition, with 'plus verses'[65] and peculiar readings as well as omissions.[66] Considering the philological heterogeneity of Ptolemaic

61 The variant is recorded in Pontani 2022, *ad loc.*, who tentatively connects it to Didymus, but its presence in the Ghoran papyrus indicates an earlier origin.

62 See e. g. col. XIX (N West), l. 7 = κ 68 (Maltomini/Pernigotti 1999, 303): M1 writes ἔβλαψάν με ἕταροί τε κακοὶ πρὸς τοῖσι τε οἶνος, adding above οἶνος the alternative ὕπνος, a reading that was almost universally found, but which apparently did not persuade our original scribe; it is worth noting that modern editors prefer to read ἄασαν at the beginning of the verse, with the *consensus* of the main Byzantine codices: it is the *lectio difficilior*, albeit one not attested by M1 or its exemplar.

63 Maltomini/Pernigotti 1999, 302–303.

64 A further hint as to their 'intensive' reading of the text is the sporadic presence of diacritical signs on the left side of each column (probably combined with further notes in the margins, which are unfortunately lost): see esp. the omission mark at col. XV (J West), l. 12 = ι 542.

65 Apart from the above-discussed cases, a remarkable example is ι 537a (col. XV = J West, l. 9), unfortunately only partially preserved, which is also found in another Ptolemaic papyrus, P.Bodm. inv. 49a, edited by Hurst 1986.

66 Verses which were presumably omitted in the model used by M1 include ι531 (considered a late interpolation, and as such omitted by most of the editors, even if it is accepted by Allen: West 1967, 244) and ι540 (possibly restored in one of the margins: see West 1967, 245).

Figure 4: Inv.Sorb. 2245 (coll. XIV and XV). Photo Sorbonne Université – Institut de Papyrologie

Homeric papyri, such variation is unsurprising.[67] Of greater significance is the impressive number of texts available to such writers/readers, even in peripheral areas such as the Gharaq basin. In the cartonnages from Ghoran, 'minor' works by 'major' authors, such as Menander and Euripides, destined to disappear from the Egyptian context within a few centuries, occur alongside 'bestsellers' such as *Odyssey* 9 (the book of the Cyclops) and 10. This impression is even stronger if we extend our view to another group of texts that Pierre Jouguet discovered, yet did not have the opportunity to appreciate: the fragments now stored in the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Lille.

6 The Last Cartonnages in Lille: an Overview

The story of these papyri has yet to be told in full, and unfortunately many important details are missing, even if new investigations of the archival material in the Institut de Papyrologie et Égyptologie in Lille (IPEL) might offer further insights.[68] After Jean Vercoutter's rediscovery of these cartonnages, the first notice about their textual relevance was published by Bernard Boyaval in 1974.[69] According to his report, the previous year, in June, the famous papyrus restorer and dealer Anton Fackleman had dismantled two of Jouguet's forgotten cartonnages: a mask inventoried as 2271 and another plastron, inv. 2276. Both yielded texts: the former contained around 200 Greek fragments, the latter "une vingtaine de fragments démotiques en mauvais état malheureusement".[70] The exact provenance of the two items is lost for the moment; the only available indication is that they were found in the winter of 1901/1902, which is to say during the second excavation season. As we know from published reports, that year Jouguet spent only three weeks in Ghoran, without – it seems – making any important findings; after that, he moved to Magdola, which proved more 'generous' a source of papyrus cartonnages. Such elements seem to suggest that the Lille artefacts too could originate from Magdola. But both sites

67 This philological problem has been widely discussed, yet not fully investigated: apart from surveys such as West 1967, 11–28 and later Haslam 1997 (esp. 63–69), where all the main points are discussed (though the number of relevant papyri is now much greater), recent discussions include Bird 2010 (focused on *Iliad* papyri) and Ready 2019, both with further bibliography.

68 See the survey by Gomes 2022. After 2006 the papyri were moved to the Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille, where they are still stored as a permanent loan: ibid., esp. 2–3.

69 Boyaval 1974.

70 Boyaval 1974 (words quoted from p. 9). A partial inventory of the Greek findings is offered by Boyaval 1975.

remain possible candidates, and the entries on extant databases should be modified to reflect this fundamental uncertainty.

If we trust the published reports, the Greek texts all come from the same cartonnage, which – like the other cartonnages from Ghoran – included both documents and literary texts: a *dossier* of papyri linked by their addressee, Pankrates, the *archisomatophylax* and head of the *syntaxis* of katoikic cavalrymen;[71] a few dozen incomplete documents of various sorts;[72] and, finally, the fragments of 16 literary texts, whose edition is still in progress.

As is usually the case with recently discovered texts, editorial efforts have primarily focused on the best-preserved items, namely the remains of the Stesichorus and Callimachus rolls. Their decipherment has overshadowed efforts to study the minor fragments, despite the fact that these also present many interesting features. For the same reason, there has been no investigation of the cartonnage as a whole – or as a context.[73]

When considered as a whole, however, the last Lille papyri appear to form a coherent group, much like the Sorbonne papyri from Ghoran. Judging by current editions, the cartonnage consisted of texts written over the course of almost one century. The documents from the 'Pankrates archive' must have been drafted in the mid-2nd cent. BC, since we know from other sources that the officer in question was active between 145 and 139 BC.[74] The other texts have variously been dated to an earlier period: by analogy with the previously published Ghoran cartonnages, Boyaval assigned to Ptolemy II's reign a group of papyri (P.Lille inv. 61/A-B and 68/B = *SB* XVI 12269–12276) mentioning the years of an unnamed king's rule; as a consequence, the other, undated documents, as well as the literary texts, have all been assigned to the mid-3rd cent. BC.

After the publication of these rolls, Peter Parsons suggested assigning the Stesichorus fragment to a slightly later period, the early 2nd cent. BC.[75]

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71 Documents republished as *SB* XIV 12159–12166 (and eventually XX 14420–14421); see Vandorpe/Clarysse/Verreth 2015, 269 (W. Clarysse/L. Criscuolo).

72 An overview in Boyaval 1990.

73 A new plan to publish these texts has been developed in the frame of the 2017 PRIN project "Greek and Latin Literary Papyri from Graeco-Roman and Late Antique Fayum: Texts, Contexts, Readers", through the efforts of Antonio Ricciardetto, in collaboration with Didier Devauchelle, director of the IPEL, and Frédéric Mougenot, keeper of antiquities at the Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille.

74 Pankrates is recorded in *Pros.Ptol.* 2.2499; further documents mentioning him are found in another archive linked with the village of Oxyryncha, in the *meris* of Polemon ("Lawsuit texts from Oxyrhyncha": Vandorpe/Clarysse/Verreth 2015, 234–235 [W. Clarysse/L. Criscuolo]).

75 Parsons 1977, 7 (without detailed palaeographic descriptions).

Figure 5: PL inv. 76 A–C + 73 + 111C (the Lille Stesichorus). (c) HALMA – UMR 8164

Guglielmo Cavallo and Herwig Maehler subsequently accepted Parsons' proposal.[76] Their palaeographic remarks are strengthened by a further element: the documents assigned to Ptolemy II by Boyaval are probably later than their first editors supposed. Their cursive handwritings are similar to script types which are well attested in the mid-2nd cent. BC, such as *SB* XX 14759, from May-June 147–146 BC. Because of this, we may infer that the 35th year mentioned in P.Lille inv. 61A–B corresponds to either 147–146 BC (Ptolemy VI) or 136–135 BC (Ptolemy VIII); similarly, P.Lille inv. 68B, where a 28th year is mentioned, would correspond to either 154–153 (Ptolemy VI) or 143–142 BC (Ptolemy VIII).[77]

The close proximity to a group of 2nd-century documents does not imply that the literary texts should be assigned to the same period. But we have a further element that points in that direction: the back of the Stesichorus roll bears traces of a documentary list that has been assigned to the end of the 2nd cent. BC.[78] That date suggests to assign the literary *recto* to the first half of the same century; and a comparison with dated documents, such as *P.Tebt.* 3.1.811, written in 165 BC, provides further confirmation of this assumption.

Other rolls in Lille are written in scripts not far removed from those just mentioned. The Callimachus roll has sometimes been considered far more elegant than the Stesichorus: Eric Turner, possibly inspired by its poetic contents, praised its script as "the most beautiful example of a Ptolemaic bookhand that I know",[79] whereas he described the Stesichorus roll as the product "of an untrained scribe uneasy in his craft".[80] Judging from the recent restoration of the two rolls, however, their 'graphic' characteristics do not seem so radically different. Both rolls are written in a neat, square script, almost lacking any decorative elements at the extremities, and sometimes with small differences in the thickness of the strokes.[81] The letters are

76 Cavallo 1983, 53, assigns it to the first half of the 2nd c. BC "se non più tardi"; the first half of that century is also suggested in Cavallo/Maehler 2008, 84, nr. 50.

77 A 'low' date for the documents was first suggested by Clarysse 1990, 353–354 (also with some remarks on the possible consequences for the date of the literary rolls). The content of the dossier is consistent with this proposal: the apparently high sums of money involved in accounts such as *SB* XVI 12404 (*P.Lille* 61 A–C) can be explained as the consequence of the 2nd-century inflation of copper money (a phenomenon that has been studied in detail, ever since the 'classic' Préaux 1939, 280; for a brief overview, see Manning 2007, 446).

78 The *verso* has now been republished as *SB* XIV 11894 (reproduction in Meillier 1976, pll. VII and VIII).

79 Turner 1980, 35.

80 Turner 1987, 124.

81 Besides the *edd. prr.*, the main features of the rolls are described in Cavallo/Maehler 2008, 84, no. 50, and Davies/Finglass 2014, 367–370, with previous bibliography. For the Callimachus roll, see Archer 1978 (arrangement of the fragments and text layout) and Cavallo/Maehler 2008, 84, nr. 50.

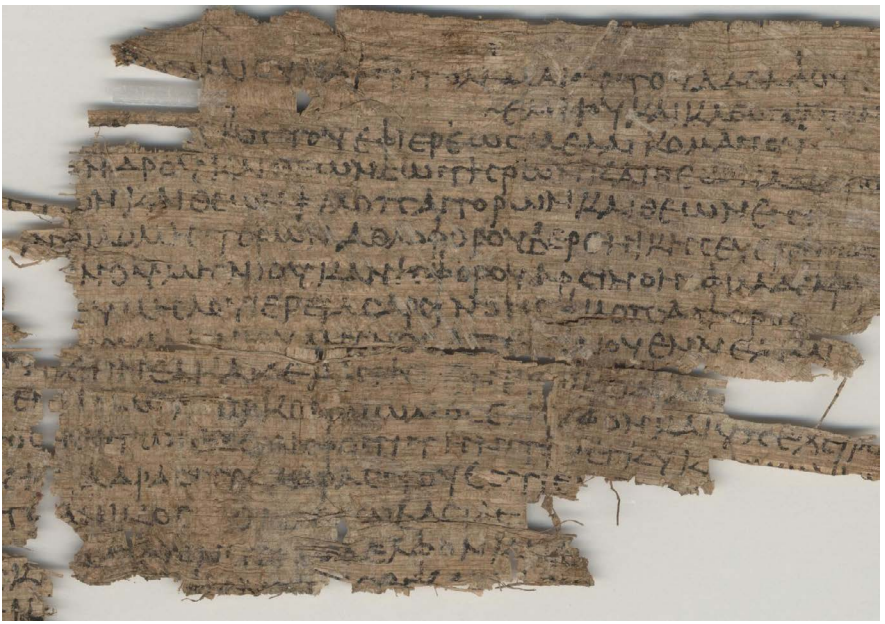

Figure 6: *P.Tebt.*III(1) 811 (part.). Courtesy of the Center for the Tebtunis Papyri, University of California, Berkeley

quite small: in the Callimachus roll, the columns, which are around 23.5 cm high, each contain 38–39 lines. Such characteristics do not indicate a 'calligraphic', luxury book, but rather an average roll, written for average readers.[82] That conclusion is consistent with the rare feature of combining verses and an indented commentary within the same column, in such a way as to give the reader a better understanding of the poet's sophisticated mythological narratives. The Lille Callimachus was a bookroll designed to allow even 'common readers', lacking proper 'grammatical' proficiency, to understand a complex work: "un esemplare di consumo", as Antonio Carlini wrote, "a buon livello di esecuzione e correttezza, destinato a un lettore colto che però non chiede a se stesso un approfondimento critico".[83]

The palaeographic features of the other rolls are no different, even though the rolls contain an array of texts belonging to a variety of literary genres. A substantial number of these texts come from prose works with moralizing content, featur-

82 On the standards of Greek bookrolls, and the characteristics that allow us to distinguish between elegant and less elegant (or inelegant) rolls, see in general Johnson 2004, 130–141, and Del Corso 2022, 127–144.

83 Carlini 1980 (words quoted p. 234).

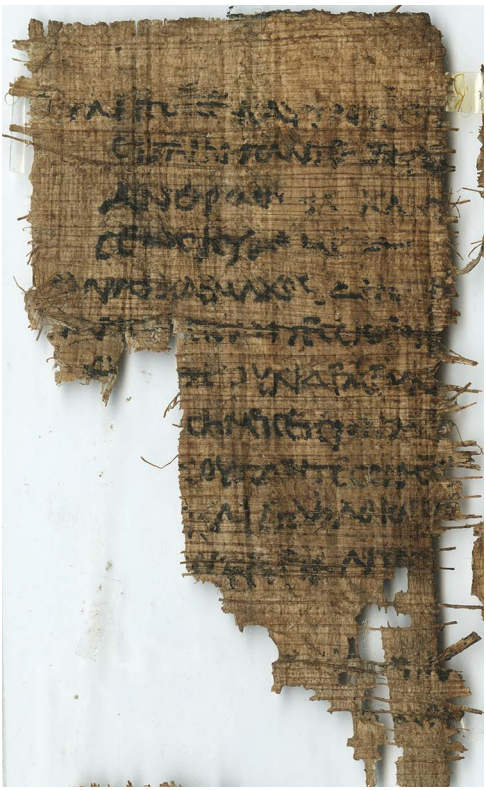

Figure 7: P.Lille inv. 83. (c) HALMA – UMR 8164

ing stories about strong characters such as Demetrius of Phalerum (P.Lille inv. 88). In other rolls, however, there is also room for mythographic prose (P.Lille inv. 71 A–Z) or even exegesis, as in the case of P.Lille inv. 83 (with other fragments), where we find an unsystematic commentary on books 16 and 17 (at least) of the *Odyssey*, mostly confined to glosses and paraphrases:[84] one of the most ancient pieces of evidence for *Homerica* on papyri.[85]

84 Lundon 2011, 168–170.

85 Apart from the fragments of bookrolls stored in Lille, among the literary texts found in Jouguet's cartonnages there is only another papyrus which can be assigned to the 2nd c. BC, *P.Sorb.* I 4. Even if its editor assigned it to the 3rd cent. BC, a date currently accepted by most studies, its script – a tiny, round and strictly bilinear majuscule – has few elements in common with 3rd-century bookhands: it better resembles later papyri, such as the Hyperides fragment P.Louvre inv. E 9331 + 10438 (Cavallo/Mahler 2008, 86, no. 52). As *P.Sorb.* I 4 comes from Magdola, this might even be taken as a faint clue hinting that the cartonnages of the papyri in Lille were found there.

Such tentative assumpsions do not imply that we are dealing with 'libraries' that possibly belonged to one of the characters mentioned in the documents preserved by the cartonnages. It is possible that sets of texts such as the Tesenouphis letters and the theatrical rolls, or the Pankrates *dossier* and the Lille literary papyri, were at some point collectively discarded and stored in the same place in order to be reused together; and this also suggests that the origin of the papyri should be traced back to the same social milieu, namely the Greek elite established in Fayum in the wake of the triumphant colonization process initiated by Ptolemy II: clerks, officials, former soldiers and small landowners. These were all individuals belonging to the same social class as the individuals who wrote our documents. They were used to reading and writing in their daily and professional activities, and were sometimes eager (or forced) to apply their familiarity with the production of documents to the transcription of the literary texts they needed, if only on strips, sheets or inelegant bookrolls.

If this interpretation is correct, we can perhaps dispel a spectre which periodically haunts the study of book circulation in Ptolemaic Egypt: the notion of schools. There is nothing of compellingly 'scholastic' in the rolls we are discussing, nor do the extant sources refer to 'libraries' or collections of literary texts gathered for didactic purposes.[86] Hellenistic schools, especially in peripheral areas, were weak institutions, lacking even dedicated teaching spaces for the most part.[87] They do not represent the right milieu for the 'informal' transcription of works that only partly overlap with the texts generally used by ancient grammarians or rhetors,[88] or indeed for the creation of books designed to help common readers to understand poetic novelties, as in the case of the Callimachus roll.[89] 'Commented editions' were not intended for students, contrary to what our current habits might suggest.[90]

86 On the origin and structure of Hellenistic private libraries see, in general, Johnstone 2014 (although he does not focus on Egypt, it is significant that the evidence he discusses does not include any references to 'schools' or educational practices). Libraries are often linked to gymnasia (not 'schools') in some epigraphic sources, but the nature of this relationship is debated: see Nicolai 1987, and, more recently, Paganini 2022, 22, 30 and especially 201–204 (focused on Egypt, but with comparative evidence from other regions of the Hellenistic world). A connection between educational practices and the transcription of books is certainly implied by the βιβλίου ἀνάθηcιc, the offering of bookrolls by ephebes, attested by inscriptions as IG II/III^2 1009, 1029, 1030, 1041–1043: see Haake 2007, 49–55. However, no extant text states that the boys transcribed the books they offered, or indeed mentions the place where they would be stored and the people who might read them.

87 See the overview by Cribiore 1996, 14–23, and Cribiore 2001, 21–34.

88 Del Corso 2022, 209–211.

89 On the category of 'common readers' in Graeco-Roman society see Cavallo 2007.

90 More complex is the case of annotated papyri, where it is more common to find notes originating from school practices (see esp. McNamee 2007, 55–62, though the relationship might be not as straightforward as some of her remarks seem to imply).

Besides the variety of reading choices, the bookrolls found in the Gharaq basin allow us to reflect on another feature of the cultural practices of the local Ptolemaic elites: their collective dimension. The striking palaeographic and 'bibliological' similarities that unite the rolls found in the same cartonnage or in nearby ones, the plurality of hands which jointly copied or corrected the same roll, and sometimes the very nature of the corrections, as in the case of the *variae lectiones* of the Ghoran *Odyssey*, all set the making and reading of the rolls in a 'collective' framework, where texts were intended to be discussed and even performed by groups of individuals. The 'collective dimension' of literary pastimes is a characteristic of Greek literary culture at least from the Classical age onwards. For later periods too the literary sources mention 'reading groups' or 'circles' as a landmark and resource for anyone involved in the production of texts or simply wishing to achieve a full understanding of them.[91] Literary sources – from Isocrates to Theophrastus and other later writers – mention the importance of reading together, and many literary works, such as Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* and Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistai*, are nothing more than fictional transpositions of discussions imagined to be set during the meeting of a circle of friends and intellectuals.[92]

Extant books show that this collective way of enjoying literature cut across – and brought together – social and intellectual milieus, 'active producers' of texts and mere amateurs. The idea that such cultural practices were characteristic of the Fayum elite, and similar to those of mainstream intellectuals, is also confirmed by many documents from the so-called 'Zenon archive'. In them we find mentions of literary and musical activities, and even of the copy of books for personal needs: Zenon and his friends supported local artists, hired poets and musicians, went to public lectures and – most significantly – read, commented and exchanged books.[93]

The rolls found in Jouguet's mummies are an example of the books used by the members of such 'peripheral circles'. Unsurprisingly, the need to have access to certain texts, which were considered a crucial part of their cultural legacy and status, often led them to rely on individuals lacking adequate skills, such as the clerks working for Zenon. In other cases, it led them to copy long literary works themselves, within their group, approximating the rigorous standards of bookrolls, but without the required experience.

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91 On the collective dimension of Greek reading practices in antiquity see Cavallo/Chartier 1998, x-xxi, Cavallo 1998, 45–52, and, for the Hellenistic period, Del Corso 2005, 114–125.

92 A crucial comparison between literary and papyrological evidence is offered by Johnson 2010, even though he focuses on the Roman period; for the Hellenistic period, see Del Corso 2005, 83–94.

93 Relevant documents have often been discussed. Good overviews are offered by Orrieux 1983, 130–136, and Orrieux 1985, 71–74; see also Clarysse 1983, 52–53, and Del Corso, forthcoming.

The context which is here described does not mean that 'reading circles' were also 'writing circles', as in the Byzantine age, when writing itself was intended as a scholarly practice, necessary for correctly understanding the text which had to be studied, and as such had an influence on the dynamics of textual transmission. In Ptolemaic Egypt writing was just a boring, necessary effort, as emblematically expressed in the *Sicyonians*' subscription.

The scattered fragments gathered from the misshapen casings of long-forgotten men and women hardly present a coherent picture of the literary attitudes and tastes of the Greek diaspora. But despite the uncertainties regarding the discovery of these fragments, the contextual coherence they exhibit seems to reflect the underlying unity of the cultural landscape in which they were produced and read, and of the social status of the people they were intended for. Looking for a context can turn into a game of mirrors in which it is easy to get lost, but the alternatives are worse, when we wish to reflect upon the ancient past.

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