THE PAPYRUS PUZZLE, or HOW TO UNLOCK A RANDOM PAPYRUS COLLECTION?

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Recently, the Allard Pierson Museum took over a neglected papyrus collection from the Special Collections section of the Amsterdam University Library. It was assembled by the late Professor of Papyrology at the University of Amsterdam, Dr. P.J. Sijpestein. During many years, he purchased papyrus lots at many auctions. Together with complete Greek papyri, of which most are already published (1), these lots often included papyrus fragments in Coptic, Hieratic and Demotic script as well, together with early Arabic texts on paper, varying in sizes from thumbnail to A4, and several hundreds in total. As an initial step, they are now being identified and catalogued, together with being photographed. The next step will be the conservation of these fragments. Some of them were loose and simply kept in paper folders; others were kept between yellowing plexiglass frames, secured with deteriorating tape. They will be stored in compartmented Secol covers, which are chemically neutral, and then collected in albums. Finally, the more coherent texts should be available for study and publication.

Additionally, the Egyptian objects of the Dortmond collection of writing material is being catalogued in the Museum. This contains i.a. fragments of the Book of the Dead of Amenhoptep, which is dispersed among collections from Boston to Brisbane.

(1) P.J. Sijpesteijn, i.a., Die Amsterdamer Papyri (P. Amst. I). Zutphen 1980