

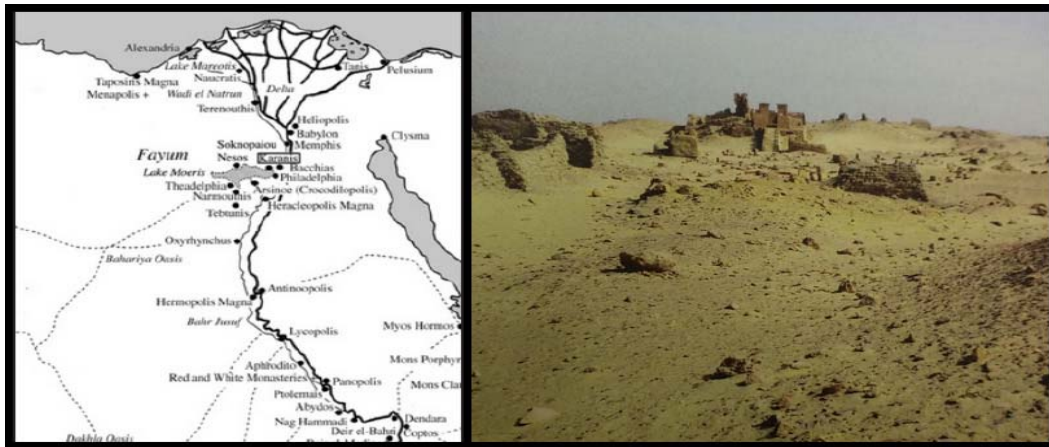
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The seminar in Papyrus Conservation, June 13-24, 2016 at University of Michigan was one of the highlights of the summer, and of my professional career to date. It was a privilege to be invited, and an invaluable opportunity to attend. Thank you Cornell University Library and Digitization and Conservation Services for making this possible.

For two weeks, 8 of us – an international group of conservators and papyrologists gathered in Ann Arbor to work directly with the University of Michigan's Papyri collections under the direction of Marieka Kaye, Book Conservator/Conservation Librarian.

Holding one of the largest papyri collections in the western world, the University of Michigan was the ideal institution to host this seminar. Not to mention the University's history of concern and awareness for the care of papyri collections. The University's contributions to conservation research began in the 1980s with Professor Ludwig Koener and continued with Julia Miller's contributions to research and conservation protocol, Leyla Lau-Lamb's development of the APIS Project, and now with the work of Marieka.

Their collections hold 18,000 items dating from 1000 BCE-1000 CE. About 2/3 of the collections were acquired through purchases made beginning in the 1920's when the antiquities market was still active and legal. At that time the greater majority of papyri were first treated overseas before being dispersed among international institutions. This resulted in the **separation of fragments, loss of archeological context, and questionable treatment methods** having repercussions later on – i.e. deterioration and damage to backing materials.



The remaining 1/3 come from archeological excavations conducted in 1925-1935 by the University of Michigan in the area of Middle Egypt called the Fayum. The site at Karanis proved to be the most fruitful. The findings from this excavation represent the 2nd-4th century Roman Egypt and are important for their insights into everyday life rather than the lives of the elite. The fragments we were working with were from this site, often literally swept into whatever boxes or containers were available on site – like the one shown here:



Though not yet fully published, the collection continues to be digitized for the [APIS project](#) (The Advanced Papyrological Information System). APIS was started by Leyla Lau-Lamb in 1993 and continued until 2013. It was initially part of a larger international project with other institutions with the goal of reuniting fragments that had become separated during the time of the Antiquities Market. The current APIS site reflects only the University of Michigan's contributions. A [separate link](#) will take you to the previous contributions from other institutions.

Among their collections are also papyri that were once here at Cornell University. They were given to the University of Michigan in 1972's to receive appropriate care and storage.

The Seminar was divided into **lectures, work-time, student presentations, guest lecturers, workshops, and field trips.**



Lectures, work-time, and student presentations: This was time focused on common conditions found among papyri collections, factors contributing to current conditions; treatment methods and materials; current research, technology and analytical practices.

In addition, each of us were asked to give a short presentation about our institution's collections – the size, needs, and expectations ranged widely from small collections like ours to those housed at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, and from treatment and condition concerns to setting up a papyrus lab.



Julia Miller, scholar/historian of bookbinding, discussed her work with the University of Michigan collections of papyri in bound structures. We spent a morning looking at historical models and numerous examples of cartonnage. Conservators will not separate the layers; there is promising technology (x-ray phase contrast imaging) that will enable the layers to be virtually separated in the future without damage to the original format.

Terry Wilfong, Curator of Greco-Roman Egypt, Kelsey Museum of Archeology and Professor of Egyptology) gave an overview of his work and Egyptian script systems, how scripts are used in dating pieces and how they are transcribed.



A field trip to the [Kelsey Museum of Archeology](#) provided archeological context for the Karanis fragments with which we were working, as well as a glimpse into daily practices. Shown here are dice, a lock and key system, and magic bones. Because the Sahara sands have preserved materials so well, archeologists have been given a portrait of everyday life in Karanis. A current goal of the museum is to look at the whole picture in archeological context rather than isolated items (pottery, basketry, etc.) as in previous studies.



At **Out of Hand Papermaking Studio** we made both papyrus and papyrus paper. You can see the two are quite distinct - papyrus being made from overlapping perpendicular layers of the inner pith of papyrus stalk and then pressing under weight; papyrus paper being made from cooking and beating the fiber obtained from the papyrus stalk, and then forming a sheet on a mold allowing the fibers to collect on a screen and form a sheet (of paper).



Making re-moistenable repair tissue: Many of the papyri fragments contained extremely fragile areas that required stabilization with VERY tiny and discrete pieces of repair tissue. We use "pre-coated"/re-moistenable repair tissue because it offered the advantage of using less moisture and offered quick drying time. Aisha Wahab, Paper Conservator, presented a workshop giving us the opportunity to make our own re-moistenable repair tissue.



What this means for our collections here at Cornell University: A year ago, Michele Hamill, Paper and Photograph Conservator, and I worked on stabilizing the [funerary text of Usir-Wer](#) in preparation for the [Gods and Scholars](#) exhibit. My interest in applying to the seminar was largely directed by this item and what treatment options, if any, were available, but also to address the concerns for the papyri fragments contained within the **Bruce Ferrini Paleography collection** that presented condition concerns -specifically **housing** in plastic sleeves (which release plasticizers and hold static which is problematic for friable media), **accessibility** (under-utilized and under-studied), **realignment** of fibers, and **stabilization**. We are currently searching for new housing materials for Cornell University Library's fragments.

In summary, I left the seminar with increased comfort working with these extremely fragile collections, greater confidence in recognizing when the potential for significant loss outweighs any treatment that can be performed, recognition that with patience and time technological advances may provide new opportunities to benefit these materials, and this: **The importance of digitizing items currently held in collections and making them available to researchers, and the importance of institutional collaboration to reunite (virtually if not physically) separated fragments.**