

A photograph of an ancient, cracked clay bowl, likely a Mesopotamian artifact, filled with cuneiform script. The bowl is set against a background of reddish-brown soil. In the center of the bowl's interior, there is a circular diagram with several intersecting lines forming a star-like pattern. The bowl is cracked, with a prominent crack running across the middle. The overall scene is lit with warm, golden light, suggesting an archaeological excavation site.

# VARIANT SCHOLARSHIP

*Ancient Texts in Modern Contexts*

EDITED BY

NEIL BRODIE, MORAG M. KERSEL  
& JOSEPHINE MUNCH RASMUSSEN



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# Performing papyrology: cartonnage, discovery and provenance

Roberta Mazza

## Abstract

This chapter looks at the history of the papyrological practice of disassembling mummy and other types of cartonnage to retrieve papyrus manuscripts hidden within. Through the discussion of cases dating from the nineteenth century to the contemporary, it argues that the extraction of papyri from cartonnage has fulfilled different aims: sourcing texts dating to the Ptolemaic period, creating excitement for new discoveries and in some cases offering a convenient provenance narrative for undocumented or illegally sourced papyri. The practice remains highly problematic in various respects and more attention should be paid to the curatorial, ethical and legal issues involved.

*Keywords: cartonnage, papyri, provenance, papyrology, new Sappho papyri, Artemidorus papyrus, antiquities market*

In 2014, a video emerged on YouTube in which Josh McDowell, a famous U.S. evangelical Christian apologist, explained that it was possible to find early copies of the New Testament and other Biblical texts hidden within mummy masks (Mazza 2014, with a link to the video). To prove his point, McDowell showed some slides with pictures of an event in which a Ptolemaic mask was dissolved in warm water using Palmolive soap (in his own words) to retrieve texts on the papyrus fragments that had been used to make it. The video was bizarre and worrying. It left me with many open questions: Where did the performance take place? Who did it and why? Last but not least, how was it even possible that New Testament papyrus fragments could be retrieved in that way? It is well known that the use of discarded papyri to make masks and other mummy coverings ended in the early Augustan period, before Jesus was born (Frösén 2009; Obbink 2009).

We now know that the pictures shown by McDowell were taken on 16 January 2012 at Baylor University's Department of Classics. There, Scott Carroll – at the time director of the

collection of the Green family, owners of Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc. – gave a demonstration of how mummy masks could be dissolved in warm water to retrieve papyrus fragments (Mazza 2019a, especially 181-186 and 191-192; on the Green family and their collection, Moss and Baden 2017).<sup>1</sup> Departmental faculty and graduate students actively participated. A video of the event, retrieved later and also available on YouTube, showed that McDowell was attending the performance and taking pictures (Mazza 2015, with a link to the video). After years of polemics and fights against the methods of the Green Collection and the Museum of the Bible (MOTB), it has recently been revealed that part of the Baylor performance was staged (Sabar 2020). The mask being dissolved contained some documentary texts, but Carroll surreptitiously mixed them in with others he had brought along, including some Sappho fragments that will be discussed at length later in the chapter, and at least one papyrus stolen from the Egypt Exploration Society (EES) collection in Oxford (Nongbri 2020; Sabar 2020; the EES's papyrus was P.Oxy. inv. 29 4B.46/G(4-6)a). It should be remembered that the papyri were all dampened in water to create the illusion of their retrieval from the mask, with damage that one could imagine. Needless to say, the whole performance was highly unethical and perhaps even illegal in some respects: an Egyptian mummy mask of undocumented provenance was manipulated and dissolved in a sink full of water, papyri stolen from a collection and bought through illicit channels – as will be explained later in the chapter – were moved around and students were involved in the process. Still, this type of event has great allure in some quarters for making a spectacle out of a moment of discovery; their success among evangelical audiences convinced the Green family and their team to plan an open-view laboratory for dissolving cartonnage in the MOTB that they were intending to open in Washington D.C. In 2013, a magazine for manuscript collectors reported:

*A laboratory display in the museum that exploits advanced technology especially excites the Greens; it is designed to show how early text fragments are recovered from mummy-cartonnage. This procedure is already in use with remarkable results by affiliates of the Green Scholars Initiative (GSI), the research arm of the Museum of the Bible (Hindman 2013: 36).*

Images of a performance in which cartonnage was disassembled at a public event organised by the Green Collection were shared via Twitter on 28 October 2013;<sup>2</sup> the practice was later dropped as a reaction to sustained criticism.

While the Baylor event was exceptional in most respects, Carroll and the other Green scholars had not invented anything new, but rather had applied in a devious manner methodologies that are well known among papyrologists. In this chapter, I will discuss how the practice of disassembling cartonnage was born in the nineteenth century and developed since then as a normal though increasingly problematic method for obtaining papyrus manuscripts. In view of current practices and ethics, most papyrologists would never join a performance such as the one enacted at Baylor University, but some did

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1 In the literature, the Green family collection is sometimes termed the Green Collection, but at other times the Hobby Lobby Collection.

2 Images were still visible in March 2022. <http://ow.ly/i/2NyGF>. Accessed 31 March 2022.



and the reasons why it happened are not confined, in my opinion, to personal gain or inadequate ethical standards. As we shall see, the practice is embedded in the discipline and supported by a thought system that perceives texts as historical evidence superior to any other (Mazza 2021). The main argument of this chapter is that over the course of time, the disassembling of mummy masks and other cartonnage artefacts has become a form of ‘performative papyrology’, fulfilling several different aims. The first and most practical aim has been that of procuring papyri, especially ones dating to the Ptolemaic period, to feed private and institutional collections. Secondly, the practice has contributed to building and propagating the myth of the ‘papyrologist-discoverer’. Thirdly, especially after the 1970s, the discovery of papyri inside cartonnage objects has become a convenient but often fabricated narrative to conceal the problematic provenances of papyrus fragments that are undocumented or illegally sourced. To support these claims, this chapter will address first the history of the practice of disassembling cartonnage and its colonial roots, and will then analyse two case studies of papyri that have recently emerged from the antiquities market and that are said to have been retrieved from cartonnage: the Artemidorus papyrus (P.Artemid., Gallazzi *et al.* 2008) and the new Sappho fragments (P.Sapph.Obbink and P.GC inv. 105, Burris *et al.* 2014; Obbink 2014b).

### **The practice of disassembling cartonnage**

After Egypt fell under European colonial control in the nineteenth century, ancient texts written on papyrus became the target of intensive searches conducted through excavations and purchases. A host of scholars, collectors, dealers and adventurers travelling in the country realized that the dry climate and soil of Egypt had allowed for the conservation of hundreds of thousands of papyrus fragments with remains of ancient texts. Among them, known and unknown works of classical authors and early copies of Christian writings were the most sought after. The discipline of papyrology developed as a branch of classics; at its inception, it was especially concerned with Greek and Latin texts inscribed on papyri and any other moveable material, such as parchment, potsherds or wooden tablets (Keenan 2009). Papyri could and can still be found buried where the ancients left them, for instance deposited in storage facilities inside houses and other buildings. They could also be scattered around a site, due to human or other agency. Some of the most exciting finds have been made in ancient rubbish mounds, especially those of the ancient city of Oxyrhynchus (el-Bahnasa). Texts on papyrus have also been retrieved from tombs, either purposefully deposited or in less intentional contexts (Cuvigny 2009; Davoli 2015). Finally, Egyptologists and papyrologists soon realised that papyri can also be found repurposed as an element of other objects, such as mummy masks and other dead-body coverings made of cartonnage, and book covers and bindings. The term ‘cartonnage’ is used by papyrologists to mean a sort of *papier-mâché* obtained through the layering together of various types of materials. Cartonnage was used especially to cover the heads and other parts of mummified bodies before their deposition in sarcophagi or other contexts (Cuvigny 2009: 44-47; Frösén 2009: 87-88).

The first person to document the fact that mummy coverings could hide papyrus texts was French classicist and archaeologist Jean Antoine Letronne (1787–1848) while inspecting the collection of Giuseppe (or Joseph) Passalacqua (1797–1865), an Italian merchant who escaped to Egypt for political reasons and after failing in horse-trading

turned to antiquities (Tedesco 2017). Letronne noticed that some broken pieces of mummy cartonnage revealed papyri, demonstrating that discarded manuscripts were sometimes repurposed, a fact that had previously been unknown (Letronne 1826: 11-16; I suspect that the term cartonnage has been adopted – often in a rather loose way – from this first publication).

However, it was only after Flinders Petrie's excavations at Gurob and following archaeological missions in the Fayyum at the close of the century that extracting papyri from mummy cartonnage became a systematic way to retrieve Ptolemaic papyri. In the words of papyrologists of the time, Flinders Petrie 'reopened an avenue for obtaining Ptolemaic texts which had been forgotten since the days of Letronne' (Grenfell *et al.* 1900: 19; see also Sayce 1923: 278-279). Discoveries of Ptolemaic mummies covered by papyrus cartonnage were also made by Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt at Tebtunis (Umm el-Baragat) while excavating on behalf of the University of California. At that site, they also discovered by chance, it seems, that discarded writings on papyrus had been used to wrap mummified crocodiles and sometimes to stuff their throats:

*The tombs of the large Ptolemaic necropolis adjoining the town proved in many instances to contain only crocodiles, and on Jan. 16, 1900 – a day which was otherwise memorable for producing twenty-three early Ptolemaic mummies with papyrus cartonnage – one of our workmen, disgusted at finding a row of crocodiles where he expected sarcophagi, broke one of them in pieces and disclosed the surprising fact that the creature was wrapped in sheets of papyrus. As may be imagined, after this find we dug-out all the crocodile-tombs in the cemetery; and in the next few weeks several thousands of these animals were unearthed, of which a small proportion (about 2 per cent) contained papyri (Grenfell *et al.* 1902: viii).*

As the passage demonstrates, the first generations of papyrologists did not share our attitudes regarding artefacts from excavations. Unless they were aesthetically appealing and museum worthy, objects were easily sacrificed for the retrieval of texts; several thousand crocodile mummies were manipulated or even destroyed in order to investigate their contents, and very little if anything was recorded about their morphologies or burial contexts.

Despite the hundreds of thousands of manuscripts transferred to Western collections still awaiting full cataloguing and publishing, subsequent generations of papyrologists have maintained a lust for new discoveries very similar to that of their forebears. Mummy cartonnage continued to offer an easy, convenient and somehow spectacular source of texts, as a paper published in 1980 by Herwig Maehler, professor of papyrology at University College London, explains:

*A century ago large finds of Greek papyri from Egypt led to the establishment of a new branch of scholarship, Papyrology, and began to alter our outlook on classical antiquity. For the following 60 years substantial finds continued to be made. Since the 1950's, however, the mounds of the ancient town sites have not yielded Greek papyri in any significant numbers, and although occasional discoveries may still be possible, it seems that this source of "new" texts may now be exhausted. As the sites in Middle Egypt and the*

*Fayoum which supplied the bulk of the new papyrus material began to dry up, another source has become increasingly important: mummy cases of papyrus cartonnage. Many papyrus collections in Europe own cartonnage mummy cases, or cartonnage pieces, and this material is also still coming out of Egypt. From the papyrologist's point of view, its main significance is that it will supply him with new texts – provided that the gesso can be dissolved and removed, the layers of papyrus separated and the papyrus extracted without surface loss or damage (Maehler 1980: 120).*

This paragraph introduces its readers to the description of a new method for disassembling cartonnage that had been developed experimentally by Hermann Harrauer, at the time director of the papyri collection of the Austrian National Library, and Alice Stohler-Zimmermann, a restorer of wall paintings, at the end of the 1970s. Papyrologists were aware of the manipulations and damage caused to archaeological objects by disassembly, so the two experts attempted to find a methodology that could ensure both the extraction of texts and the preservation of flat or even three-dimensional cartonnage items such as head and feet coverings. Maehler's paper was based on close observation of a practical demonstration given by Stohler-Zimmermann at University College London and sponsored by the British Academy; there is no information about the source of the flat cartonnage used for the event – possibly coming from the Petrie Museum, part of the hosting university – and few black and white pictures of the performance are appended. These pictures focus upon the tools used, among which is a wooden crane appositely made to help in positioning the linen used to detach the papyrus layers from the painted surface. Maehler concluded that 'the method has made it possible to extract the papyrus layers while preserving the painted surfaces not only of flat pieces such as pectorals but also of three-dimensional pieces, provided the work is carried out by skilled and experienced restorers' (Maehler 1980: 122). The reader is left guessing how many cartonnage pieces needed to be sacrificed to become 'skilled and experienced'.

This method for obtaining papyri from cartonnage and its variants were widely employed in the 1980s and beyond. A video dated to 1987 offers a good demonstration of the disassembling of a cartonnage covering that had once protected the feet of a dead child (Frösén 1987). One sees the performer papyrologist in a space recalling the science laboratory and equipped with tools like magnifying lamps, tweezers and blotting paper. When a document is finally pieced together at the end, it is revealed to be an account of payments of beer tax, a fascinating text for historians of the ancient economy, not destined, however, to cause wild excitement in the general audience. The papyrologist tried to make the papyrus more enticing by explaining that it was dated to 8 BCE and that 'the cartonnage was made somewhat later, perhaps around the year of Christ's birth', stressing its proximity to this important religious and historical figure.

As with Grenfell and Hunt, in this case too the aim was to retrieve Ptolemaic and early Augustan texts, which are rarer than Roman because the archaeological layers in which they were deposited are beneath those of later periods and often affected by humidity. One wonders, however, if the wish to find earlier papyri has been the only reason behind all the efforts put into cartonnage disassembly. This form of performative papyrology has also been congenial to the construction of the papyrologist's public persona as a papyrologist-discoverer using scientific methodologies. Since the second half of the twentieth century,

video technologies have become increasingly accessible, multiplying the opportunities to disseminate research performances. The use of scientific methods and tools in archaeological and manuscript studies helps construct narratives of discovery that are well-suited for the new media and appealing to documentary producers, and to the public and students, too. Both the new media environment and the scientific aspects of performative papyrology have become increasingly important for research, as interdisciplinarity, the development of new technologies and outreach activities are now key elements in any funding application.

Another reason why cartonnage has continued to be relevant is foreshadowed by some statements of Maehler's paragraph quoted above (1980: 120). After lamenting the exhaustion of archaeological discoveries of papyri, the author explains that cartonnage could be a good alternative source of texts, as 'many papyrus collections in Europe own cartonnage mummy cases, or cartonnage pieces, *and this material is also still coming out of Egypt*' (my emphasis). Both statements were true; deposits of cartonnage of various shapes and sizes were – and indeed still are – common in most Egyptology museum or library collections, and probably in private collections too. Moreover, even after the 1970s Western institutions continued buying cartonnage of undocumented provenance. Cartonnage was seen as an alternative source of new texts when archaeological excavations were not producing the steady flow that they had in the past and anyway due to post-1970 legislation all archaeologically-recovered objects have needed to remain in Egypt.

Egypt has had a highly restrictive legislation on antiquities since 1835, but it was only after its 1973 acceptance of the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property of 1970 and the following new Egyptian law 117 of 1983 (still valid, but partially amended in 2010) that the trade and export of antiquities, including manuscripts, were fully banned. As is widely known, UNESCO conventions are agreements that nations eventually accept and then enforce through different means, including new laws (see Gerstenblith in this volume). The fact that colonial powers like the United States and Great Britain subscribed to the 1970 Convention decades after its adoption by UNESCO demonstrates the resistance it faced in some quarters (O'Keefe 2017). The idea that Egyptian antiquities, especially those dating to the period when the region was under Ptolemaic and Roman control, had been rescued by Western scholars was widespread and still persists, especially among academics (on rescue arguments used by collectors, dealers and academics to support malpractice, see Bonnie, Gerstenblith, Korsvoll and Lied in this volume). Many papyrologists continued buying papyri and cartonnage directly or through their institutions because it was considered unproblematic. For instance, in 1982 Princeton Firestone Library bought a lot of papyri said to come from mummy cartonnage from an unnamed, Vienna-based dealer and also acquired a piece of a mask and a pectoral made of papyrus cartonnage from dealers of undisclosed identity with the aim of dissolving them to retrieve papyri (Hanson 1983: 164-165). A European specialist was invited to Princeton to perform the disassembling, since while flourishing in Vienna, Cologne and London the extraction of papyri from cartonnage was at the time uncommon in the United States (Hanson 1983: 166-169).

## The papyrus of Artemidorus

The papyrus of Artemidorus, the first of the two case studies I wish to discuss more closely, is an interesting papyrus roll said to have come from cartonnage that had been acquired

well after 1970. The unclear provenance of the papyrus, its purchase by an Italian bank in 2004 and the polemics surrounding its authenticity demonstrate that papyrus cartonnage or papyri said to be obtained from cartonnage can be problematic not only for the physical condition of the objects themselves, but also because they have raised several issues that affect the interpretation of the texts they carry.

### The Sayyed Khashaba Pasha Collection

To fully understand the history of the Artemidorus papyrus and its transfer from Egypt to Europe, we need to consider the wider historical context in which the dealers involved in its sale operated. The Egyptian revolution of 1950–1952 and the increasingly restrictive legislations concerning antiquities pushed some Egyptian dealers to move their business abroad. Among those who relocated there was an Egyptian family of Armenian origins, the Simonian family (Hagen and Ryholt 2016: 263). Hagop Ohan Simonian and Serop Ohan Simonian, two brothers belonging to this family, were involved with the export and sale of the Artemidorus papyrus.

While still in Egypt, Hagop Ohan Simonian seems to have played a key-role in the liquidation of the collection of Sayyed Khashaba Pasha, a wealthy merchant from Asyut and famous antiquities collector and dealer. Between 1910 and 1914, Sayyed Khashaba Pasha obtained from the Antiquities Service concessions to excavate at Asyut, Meir, Deir el-Gabrawi, Tihna and at Soknopaiou Nesos (Dimeh es-Seba) in the Fayyum. It must be borne in mind that following the decree of 17 November 1891 on excavations and partage, those who obtained excavation concessions were obliged to divide any found artefacts equally by value with the Cairo Museum. A curator of the Cairo Museum, Ahemed Bey Kamal, was contracted to excavate for Sayyed Khashaba, perhaps for their mutual convenience as the Antiquities Service endeavoured to find money to support research and conservation by exploiting the high foreign demand for objects and their trade (on the 1891 decree see Khater 1960: 73-74 and 168-171, text in French translation 282-283; on Sayyed Khabasha see Hagen and Ryholt 2016: 260-261, with further bibliography). The Egyptian government had expected that Sayyed Khashaba Pasha would build a museum in Asyut to keep and exhibit his growing collection in a sort of semi-public context. However, this did not happen, and after 1914 the Antiquities Service stopped granting him concessions. His collection was later dispersed through different sales, roughly between the 1950s and the 1970s (Hagen and Ryholt 2016: 261). The original contents of the Sayyed Khashaba Pasha collection are largely undocumented. A slim typewritten catalogue of 1931 includes some Ptolemaic cartonnage mummy coverings of high quality. One could argue that there could have been other cartonnage of worse quality or even in pieces not registered in the catalogue, but this remains speculation – the catalogue makes no mention of papyri (Hayes 1931).<sup>3</sup>

The role of Hagop Ohan Simonian in the dispersal of the Sayyed Khashaba Pasha collection is not fully clear but objects said to have come from that source have been at

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3 I am aware that new information on the history and contents of the Sayyed Khashaba museum will be provided in an article by Professor HEND MOHAMED, which is still in preparation and will appear in a forthcoming issue of the academic journal *EDAL: Egyptian & Egyptological Documents, Archives, Libraries*. The author has confirmed to me via email that there were no papyri present in the collection.

the centre of at least one court case. In 2005–2006, the Egyptian government filed a case in Germany to stop the sale of a Late Period burial assemblage, the sarcophagus of Meret-it-es and its contents, said to come from the Sayyed Khashaba Pasha collection and handled by Hagop Ohan Simonian (Wantuch-Thole 2015: 339-340). According to documents produced by the vendor, Millennium Art Holdings, the assemblage originated with Sayyed Khashaba's collection and was purchased and imported to Europe in 1972 by Münzen und Medaillen A.G. (in Basel at that time, since 1997 the business has been split between Germany and the United States). According to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art of Kansas City (which at the end of the court case was allowed to acquire and transfer the objects to the United States), the assemblage passed by descent through the Sayyed Khashaba family into the ownership of Oman Sayyed Khashaba who 'gave Ahmad Fahmi Ali Fahmi power of attorney to sell the assemblage on his behalf on November 13, 1969. Ali Fahmi in turn granted a delegated power of attorney to Hagop Ohan Simonian on November 15, 1969 and contracted him to sell the objects' (note 3 on the Nelson-Atkins provenance entry of the Meret-it-es apron; Nelson-Atkins n.d.). It must be noted that according to specialists and acknowledged in the Nelson-Atkins Museum website entry, the Meret-it-es ensemble comes from Herakleopolis (Ihnasya el-Medina), which is not among the sites that Sayyed Khashaba Pasha excavated with an official permission.

### The Artemidorus conglomerate

Serop Ohan Simonian currently runs Dionysos Coins and Antiquities in Hamburg together with Robert Dib, who has recently been arrested in France under the suspicion of being part of a network of dealers that sold looted antiquities from Egypt to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Louvre in Abu Dhabi (Noce 2022). During his long career, Serop Ohan Simonian has sold a large quantity of Egyptian antiquities, including papyri said to come from mummy and other cartonnage. At least three of the most remarkable classical papyri to have recently emerged from the market are from this dealer: the Posidippus papyrus purchased in 1991 by the Italian bank Cariplo for the collection of the University of Milan (Bastianini *et al.* 2001); a still unpublished roll with a previously unknown historical book of the Ptolemaic period also deposited at the University of Milan (Austin 2005: 68); and the Artemidorus papyrus acquired by another Italian bank in 2004 (Gallazzi *et al.* 2008). The Posidippus and Artemidorus papyri, which have been published, are said to come from cartonnage but the process through which the papyrus fragments were extracted and then recomposed remains largely undocumented. Between 2001 and 2006 Serop Ohan Simonian also sold 57 papyri – mainly dated to the Ptolemaic period and some certainly from cartonnage – to the University of Salento (Pellé 2014; see also the website of the university museum collection: Centro di Studi Papirologici n.d.).

In its present form, the Artemidorus papyrus is a roll reconstructed from c. 50 fragments. There are different views on the placement of the fragments and above all on their authenticity (the bibliography is immense, for a brief and balanced discussion in English see Rathbone 2012). Although in the context of this discussion we do not need to consider them in any depth, it must be stressed that the problems related to the authenticity and interpretation of the papyrus are a direct consequence of its muddled provenance and the striking lack of due diligence on the part of the buyers at the time of its purchase

in 2004. The story of the surfacing of the Artemidorus papyrus starts in the 1990s, when information on the existence of a spectacular papyrus roll of the late Ptolemaic or early Roman period with columns of writing, a map and remarkable drawings of human body parts and real and fantastic animals started circulating among specialists. As it was later reported, rumours reached various people and institutions, but it was only at the end of the decade that two professors of papyrology, Bärbel Kramer (University of Trier) and Claudio Gallazzi (University of Milan), lifted the veil of secrecy surrounding the mysterious papyrus by publishing a paper in the academic journal *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* (Gallazzi and Kramer 1998 [year of the journal issue, but printed in 1999]; for rumours, e.g. Van Minnen 2009: 165).

The two authors described the Artemidorus roll as coming from a conglomerate or bundle (the two German terms *Konglomerat* and *Konvolut* are used in this and following publications) of papyrus fragments glued together and including also documentary papyri dating from the reigns of Nero through to that of Domitian (54–96 CE). Some of these documents mentioned the city of Antaioupolis (Qaw el-Kebir), the capital of a district located in the Thebaid (Southern Egypt). The date of the latest documents said to come from the conglomerate or bundle (i.e., the reign of Domitian 81–96 CE) was considered the *terminus ante quem* for the conglomerate's manufacture and discard. On the basis of the palaeography and the overall structure of the Artemidorus roll, the two papyrologists argued that it had a complex life spanning the first century BCE and the first century CE. In their opinion, it brought to light a section of a very famous and up to that moment lost ancient work in Greek, *The Geography* of Artemidorus of Ephesus, a map of Spain connected with this text, and exercises and models for artistic drawings. The way to a full edition was still long and difficult – the papyrologists explained in the article – as the papyrus roll had been recovered in many fragments and the restoration and study of the manuscript was complex. But two important elements of the story were missing from that first paper: the identity of the owner, who wished to remain anonymous, and the nature and circumstances of the disassembling of the mysterious conglomerate. No picture of the conglomerate or of the manipulations and restorations it had undergone were appended to the paper.

### Questions of authenticity

In 2004, the Artemidorus papyrus was acquired by the Italian bank Banco di San Paolo through their Fondazione per l'Arte (Art Foundation), with a view to placing it on permanent display in the Egyptian Museum of Turin. After the purchase, the Art Foundation entrusted Gallazzi, Kramer and the classicist and art historian Salvatore Settis with the restoration, study and critical edition of the papyrus. The new owners and their academic team promoted public initiatives to attract and maintain national and international media attention in the truly extraordinary object. In 2006, Turin hosted the Winter Olympics and an exhibition called *The Three Lives of the Artemidorus Papyrus* was organized as part of the celebrations. A lavish catalogue accompanied the exhibition, which gave some more details about the papyrus' provenance that are worth summarizing (Gallazzi 2006). As I have already mentioned, at the end of the 1990s the anonymous previous owner of the papyrus – always identified as *collezionista* ('collector') or *intenditore* ('connoisseur') – asked Gallazzi and Kramer to examine the artefact and write an academic paper about it.

The Artemidorus fragments – it was explained – were originally part of a conglomerate or bundle (*ammasso*, in Italian) of papyrus cartonnage found by local diggers and sold to an unnamed private Egyptian collection in the first half of the twentieth century; as it was often the case with local diggers, the find spot remained unknown. After the Second World War, the conglomerate was sold to an unnamed European collector and left Egypt with a regular export license. Once in Europe, it passed through different hands and finally ended up with the anonymous collector-connoisseur. Having kept the conglomerate for some time, he finally decided to proceed with its disassembling in order to retrieve the papyri it contained; about two hundred fragments were recovered and laid down in the form of a chaotic jigsaw for over a decade (Gallazzi 2006: 16). Besides the Artemidorus, the Milan-based team was able to identify 25 documents of different size and typology, as already described: administrative letters, documents concerning the gymnasium, court proceedings, contracts of different types, accounts and receipts, dating, as already announced in the first German paper, to the second half of the first century CE and mentioning the city of Antaioupoulis. In the catalogue, Gallazzi added that some citizens of Alexandria were also cited; this, together with the luxurious character of the Artemidorus roll, seemed to indicate an origin from or link with Alexandria and a later deposition elsewhere.

Until the opening of The Three Lives of the Artemidorus Papyrus exhibition, everything seemed to be going smoothly: a flurry of publications and media reports made the papyrus a celebrity not only among specialists but also the general public; the more substantial *editio princeps* was expected for the end of that year. However, something unexpected happened. After visiting the exhibition, Luciano Canfora, a classicist and professor at the University of Bari, publicly questioned the authenticity of the papyrus in an article published by the *Corriere della Sera*, a major Italian newspaper (Canfora 2006). After that first attack, Canfora started studying the papyrus with the help of a team of researchers hoping to prove the hypothesis of a modern forgery. Canfora and his group produced innumerable books and papers that posed important questions about the artefact as reconstructed by the editors. They rightly disputed some of the interpretations put forward, for instance the idea that the roll was a failed luxury book. Very important too was their criticism that the documentary papyri fragments retrieved from the conglomerate, which indeed were the only archaeological context available for the Artemidorus, were not included in the exhibition (Otranto 2005: 164-165). Canfora's main argument evolved later into a far less convincing hypothesis, that the roll was the product of Constantinos Simonides, famous dealer and forger active in the first half of the nineteenth century (Choat and Wassermann 2020; see also Yuen-Collingridge in this volume). The heated debate delayed the appearance of the *editio princeps* but had the positive effect that more details about the provenance of the conglomerate and its mysterious previous owner were released. It was finally revealed that the roll had been purchased for the stellar sum of €2,750,000 and the seller was not a collector and connoisseur but rather a renowned antiquities dealer, our Serop Ohan Simonian (Gallazzi *et al.* 2008: 53-54). In the meantime, Eleni Vassilika, the then director of the Egyptian Museum of Turin, opposed the accession of the papyrus by the museum for reasons of questionable authenticity, the unclear circumstances of the transfer of the conglomerate from Egypt to Europe, and because of some negative experiences with objects sold by Simonian she had suffered in the past while working for a German museum. In fact, the papyrus will never enter the Egyptian Museum, it was deposited instead in the national antiquities collection of the Turin Palazzo Reale (Somers Cocks 2019).



## The 2018 court case

The Artemidorus story had an unexpected twist in 2018. It came to light that back in 2013 Canfora had filed a legal complaint to the Procura della Repubblica of Turin asking to open a formal investigation into the sale of the Artemidorus roll because in his opinion Simonian had sold a forgery and cheated the buyer. In December 2018, the law court of Turin closed the case and a redacted copy of the public prosecutor's conclusions followed by the court's sentence was circulated online by the Italian newspaper *Il Foglio Quotidiano* (Tribunale di Torino 2018; Settis 2018). This document sheds light on many aspects of the story; but due to the focus and length constraints of this chapter, I shall limit the discussion to the mysterious conglomerate and its disassembling.

Italian law requires that when a bank foundation decides to buy assets of public cultural relevance, destined to be on permanent display in museums or other institutions, experts of the regional branches of the Ministry of Culture (i.e. the Sovrintendenza Regionale) need to certify the state and value of the object to be acquired. This document is necessary not only to allow the purchase but also for the foundation to file for tax deductions later. The public prosecutor in charge of the case decided to question the officer who wrote this document, Filippo Gambari. According to Gambari, the experts of the Ministry had expressed doubts about the origin of the papyrus from cartonnage, since the fragments did not present any features typical of those obtained in such a way, such as translucent patinas or gesso stains. Nevertheless, the Ministry released the document and the acquisition went ahead. Even more interesting is the information the proceedings provide on the largely undocumented collection history of the conglomerate. According to the purchase agreement and documents appended to it – the contents of which are summarized at pages 7-8 of the prosecutor's conclusion (Tribunale di Torino 2018: 7-8) – Serop Ohan Simonian had acquired the conglomerate in April 1971 from his brother, Hagop, who sent it from Egypt to a Dr Georges Stephan in Germany with a regular export license. (This information seems to be at odds with the passage through different European hands mentioned in the 2006 catalogue that has been summarized above). In his statement, Professor Gallazzi explains that he first saw pictures of fragments of the Artemidorus in 1991 in Basel, while he was discussing the purchase of the already mentioned Posidippus roll on behalf of his university. The following year, Gallazzi and his colleague Guido Bastianini were shown some of the Artemidorus roll fragments again in Basel. After the acquisition of the Posidippus, however, the two papyrologists realized that a second similar operation in Milan would have been impossible for the sums involved. Then Gallazzi reports that some time later he met Guglielmo Cavallo, eminent palaeographer and professor at the University of Cassino, to whom he reported the existence and contents of the papyrus. Cavallo understood the importance of the drawings for the history of ancient art and put Gallazzi in touch with Settis, at that time director of the Getty Research Institute of Los Angeles. In 1996, Settis and Gallazzi went together to inspect the papyrus in Basel. In November 1997 there was another meeting among Settis, Gallazzi, Kramer – who joined the group at that point – and Serop Ohan Simonian; the dealer offered the papyrus to the Getty for the sum of three million dollars, but the negotiation fell off and did not seem to move in any direction. At that point, Simonian proposed that Gallazzi and Kramer should write a paper on the manuscript, which they did and published in 1999 as already described. Gallazzi also presented on the artefact

and his preliminary interpretations at two conferences in Paris and Bruxelles. 'At the end of 1999', he adds in his statement to the prosecutor 'the international press started being interested in the papyrus too' (Tribunale di Torino 2018: 14, my translation from Italian).

Gallazzi's statement provides some insights into the close relationship between dealers and academics (Brodie 2011). Commenting on the fact that Simonian left the 25 documents extracted from the same conglomerate at the University of Milan for study, he explained to the prosecutor: 'I have known Simonian since 1984 and he demonstrated on that occasion to be so gracious as to let objects from his collection be accessed by those with whom he has a trustful relationship' (Tribunale di Torino 2018: 16, my translation from Italian; the ownership of the 25 documents is indeed contested). In a similar way to the consistent use of the terms collector and connoisseur rather than dealer in the 2006 catalogue, the vocabulary used in Gallazzi's statement is sanitized as it tries to conceal that Serop Ohan Simonian is not a disinterested lover of manuscripts, but is in fact a dealer. He is indeed a clever dealer, as he understood that the academics he was negotiating with were very interested in publishing the roll, and that their papers and conference presentations and consequent involvement of the media were essential for him to justify or even raise the asking price. Academic publications would have also smoothed the many problems of the Artemidorus provenance: the absence of pictures and other solid documents attesting the collecting chain, the lack of documents and reliable images of the conglomerate before and during disassembling, and the names of the conservators apparently in Stuttgart who extracted the papyri from the conglomerate (Tribunale di Torino 2018: 16; Gallazzi *et al.* 2008: 54, where it is said that after disassembly the fragments were moved to the University of Trier and inspected by two professors, Günther Grimm and John Shelton).

The question of pictures attesting the morphology of the conglomerate or bundle before it was disassembled is also complicated. According to Settis, Simonian provided only three images related to the dissolving of the bundle: one of the object during the first phase of disassembling, and two of some fragments with a male profile portrait and a column of writing during the phases of disassembling and recomposition, to use Settis' words (Settis 2008: 7-10 respectively image 1, and image 4 (a) and (b) appended there; on image 1 see Morello 2009). A recent volume publishing the main finds of the study, analysis and restoration performed on the Artemidorus by the national Istituto Centrale per la Patologia degli Archivi e del Libro does not contribute to a solution regarding the conglomerate, apart from documenting traces of sulphates on the papyrus surface that can derive from gypsum of mummy cartonnage but can also be explained in other ways (Bicchieri *et al.* 2020: 104). To conclude, it is clear that when papyri are said to come from cartonnage but there is no solid proof, like pictures and documents, that this is the case, we are left guessing. It might indeed be the case that the extraction of the Artemidorus and other fragments was the work of careless conservators of some sort, especially in the 1980s and by a dealer with a profile like that of Simonian. However, one can also speculate that a dealer can easily and conveniently pretend to have extracted papyri of problematic origin from generic cartonnage obtained through legal or semi-legal channels: it will be hard to prove otherwise if no trace of the cartonnage remains. Furthermore, the situation regarding both the provenance and extraction of the Artemidorus papyrus is so compromised that it complicates the issue of authenticity still further. Ultimately, it makes it impossible to settle the question, with a consequent negative impact on scholarship. It

must also be flagged that after the polemics of 2018, the Italian bank that owns the papyrus decided to store it in its vault, away from public and scholarly inspection. I was recently denied access to it.

## The new Sappho papyrus fragments

I wish now to discuss the second case study, that of the new Sappho papyrus fragments that allegedly emerged from the disassembling of cartonnage acquisitions by the Green Collection and the MOTB. The story of the new Sappho fragments raises many of the issues already brought to light by the Artemidorus case study and provides a fully documented case of a forged cartonnage provenance, which confirms that cartonnage disassembly narratives can be conveniently used to hide a problematic source. As is now known, among the fragments Carroll mixed in with those extracted during the famous January 2012 performance at Baylor University described at the beginning of this chapter, there were pieces of new Sappho papyri (Hyland 2021; Sabar 2020; Sampson 2020). The highly controversial new Sappho papyri comprise a series of fragments coming from a roll palaeographically dated to the second or early third century CE, which originally contained an edition of Sapphic poems. When their discovery was first announced by University of Oxford academic Dirk Obbink in February 2014, the papyri were said to come from mummy cartonnage (Obbink 2014a). This cartonnage had been disassembled and the recovered fragments had ended up in two private collections: an anonymous London collector was in possession of a larger piece (P.Sapph.Obbink, probably two or more joining fragments), while the Green family owned a series of c. 25 or 26 smaller fragments (P.GC. inv. 105). A few years later, a fragment belonging to the Greens was found to join with the anonymous London owner's fragment, proving without any possible doubt that they all belonged together (Burris 2017). An origin from mummy cartonnage, however, was highly questionable because of the late date and also the absence of any details about its provenance and disassembling. In April 2014, the Green and the London fragments were published in two separate articles in the academic journal *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* (Burris *et al.* 2014; Obbink 2014b). The two publications did not provide any information about the date of export of the cartonnage from Egypt, its chain of ownership or its disassembling; any questions on the matter addressed to the Green Collection and the papyrologists who published the papyri were consistently ignored. The acceptance and publication of the papyri edition in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, one of the most prestigious papyrology journals, has had an immense impact on the developments that followed, as the owners and the editors of the fragments felt entitled to move on, avoiding answering the multiple questions that were being asked. Classicists' publications and studies of the new Sappho fragments multiplied and have not stopped since then.

A year after the announcement and first publication of the fragments, Obbink outlined and stabilized an official version of their provenance and discovery in a conference paper and two following articles based on it, though on different occasions giving inconsistent accounts (for inconsistencies see *e.g.* Nongbri 2019; the conference paper Obbink 2015a is now flagged as problematic on the website of the *Society of Classical Studies*, which organized the conference; Obbink 2016, published in a volume by Brill, was officially retracted in March 2021, Brill 2021; at the time of writing, Obbink 2015b, published in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, is still available in its original form). In brief,

according to the official account of provenance, the new Sappho papyri did not come from mummy cartonnage but from domestic or industrial cartonnage, sold as part of the Robinson papyri included in lot 1 of London Christie's auction of fine printed books and manuscripts of 28 November 2011 (Christie's 2011: 2). Domestic or industrial cartonnage is a very vague label, which might indicate a conglomerate of papyrus and other material used to make book bindings and coverings or other objects. After purchase, the cartonnage containing the new Sappho fragments was allegedly dissolved in warm water by the anonymous London collector, who not realizing that they all belonged together kept the largest fragment but resold the other pieces, which ended up with Hobby Lobby. Obbink offered a chain of ownership for the cartonnage going back to the Cairo Art Gallery of Maguid Samed, which he claimed had sold the piece and other items to a former professor at the University of Mississippi David M. Robinson (who was by then conveniently dead). Robinson certainly had acquired papyri from the Egyptian gallery in question in the 1950s (Nongbri 2017; Willis 1961), but no documented trace of the dispersal of any of his purchases or later donations through the antiquities market has emerged so far. In fact, the provenance of lot 1 as given in the Christie's catalogue has multiple problems in itself. The Robinson papyri and their connections with papyri in various collections and associated provenance issues are currently at the center of research being coordinated by the Manuscript Migration Lab of Duke University. As will be shown, however, the 2011 Christie's sale is certainly not the source of the new Sappho fragments but has been used as a purported provenance; this obviously opens questions about the role that the buyer of Christie's lot 1 and Christie's London eventually have in the new Sappho trade.

The whole narrative of discovery and provenance as built by Obbink and others collapsed under the pressure of law enforcement investigations into the acquisition methods of Hobby Lobby and the MOTB and the related thefts of papyri from the EES collection in Oxford (Higgins 2020; Mazza 2019b; Sabar 2020; Sampson and Uhlig 2019; and see also the introductory chapter to this volume). In January 2020, Michael Holmes, Senior Advisor of the Scholars Initiative at the MOTB, issued an official statement declaring that Hobby Lobby had acquired their new Sappho fragments in the shape of cartonnage chunks from Mr Yakup Ekşioğlu on 7 January 2012 (Holmes 2020). Ekşioğlu is an Istanbul based dealer with an apartment in central London and multiple e-Bay accounts (MixAntik and e-buyerrrr are the main ones), who has sold unprovenanced Egyptian papyri, mummy masks and other antiquities, and forgeries too, to various collectors since at least 2008 (Mazza 2018; 2019b: 187-190; see also Bonnie in this volume).

It is worth noting that there are similarities between the new Sappho and the Artemidorus cases: both provenance narratives were unstable and formal and informal investigations forced clarifications. These are indications of problematic acquisition chains. Differently from the Artemidorus case, however, there are reliable images of the artificially assembled papyrus chunks containing the Green Sappho fragments and the one fragment that merges with the large London Sappho fragment, which perhaps is also there, but hidden on the back or beneath various layers of the same chunk (Hyland 2021: 7-8). The image of the papyrus chunks was appended to the invoice for the sale of multiple objects, including papyri, mummy masks and cartonnage, sent by Ekşioğlu to Hobby Lobby in January 2012 (Holmes 2020; Hyland 2021). As a curator of the MOTB has confirmed to me in a recent conversation, among

the items sold over the course of the years by Ekşioğlu there were other chunks and pastiches of smallish fragments, besides those with the Sappho fragments. Artificially combining papyri fragments into larger chunks or pastiches is a well-known practice through which dealers try to make small broken pieces of papyri more saleable (Choat 2019: 562; Lougovaya 2015 with discussion of an example from the Columbia University collection). In his conversations with journalist Ariel Sabar, Ekşioğlu stated that the provenance deriving the new Sappho fragments from the 2011 Christie's auction lot 1 was fake and that he was behind the sale of both the Green and the London anonymous owner fragments, which he claimed had belonged 'to his "family collection" for at least a century'. When the journalist asked about the shaping of the fragments to resemble cartonnage, Ekşioğlu answered: 'This is a very simple method, you can do it by wetting' (Sabar 2020). In conclusion, a dealer possibly helped by one or more papyrologists who knew that the pieces belonged together transformed the Sappho fragments into a modern assemblage recalling 'cartonnage'.

Astonishing as it might seem, in the new Sappho papyri's story there are further cartonnage deceptions. In November 2019, a pdf file of a Christie's brochure advertising the private sale of the London, larger Sappho papyrus fragment was leaked to papyrologist Mike Sampson, who later published an extensive analysis of its contents and the metadata of its various components (Sampson 2020; Christie's 2015, a copy of the brochure was widely shared). The brochure contains forged provenance information and images – purporting to document the extraction of the London Sappho papyrus – that turned out to have been staged. Metadata analysis indicates that Christie's curators prepared the brochure between mid-January and the end of February 2015, so right after Obbink's January 2015 conference paper with the official provenance narrative was delivered and while his first paper including details of the official provenance, duly cited, was in draft (Obbink 2015b). The brochure repeats the story summarized above, but also offers four pictures of the purported extraction never before released to the public (Christie's 2015: 13; Sampson 2020: figures 1, 2 and 3). Sampson demonstrated that the digital images were taken in sequence on 14 February 2012. This date does not fit with the fact that the new Green Sappho fragments were among the papyri that Carroll brought along and mixed with those extracted from the mummy dissolved at Baylor University on 16 January 2012; two weeks later, the same papyri appeared in a glass frame exhibited by Carroll at a public event of the Green Collection at Atlanta (Hyland 2021; Sampson 2020). How could the extraction have taken place on 14 February 2012 if the Sappho papyri, which Obbink explained were retrieved through the same process, were already circulating one month before? In conclusion, the new Sappho did not come from any cartonnage purportedly belonging to the Robinson collection and staged in the photos of the Christie's brochure, but rather from papyrus chunks fabricated by Ekşioğlu and his partners as disclosed by Michael Holmes in 2020 and analysed in a following article by Brian Hyland, curator at the MOTB (Holmes 2020; Hyland 2021). It must be stressed that I started asking for provenance documents in February 2014 but it took Hobby Lobby six years to bring the digital images and invoice to light. The original source of the fragments remains a mystery. Also a mystery is the current location of the largest fragment, P.Sapph.Obbink, because its owner (or owners) and Christie's remain silent. The Green Sappho fragments were part of the c. 5,000 Egyptian antiquities (including forgeries, I suspect) that Hobby Lobby and the MOTB repatriated to Egypt in 2021 (Egypt Independent 2021).

## Conclusion

To sum up, the cases discussed in this chapter demonstrate that papyrus discoveries in cartonnage have been helpful to scholars, collections and dealers in multiple ways. Real disassembling performances have been sources for new papyrus texts, replacing to some extent the archaeological excavations of the glorious old days. They have also fed the myth of the papyrologist-discoverer utilising and benefiting from science and technology, which appealed to the new research and media environments of the twentieth century and beyond. Because of their nature, cartonnage objects have also been used for fabricating the provenances of objects obtained through illegal channels or other problematic and undocumented ways.

The malpractices surrounding cartonnage and its disassembling considered in this chapter call for action to be undertaken by different actors. Papyrologists and other specialists need to study in more depth the different artefacts that have been loosely labelled as cartonnage; more precise descriptions in collection catalogues are needed, together with multidisciplinary research projects aimed at better understanding the ancient and modern making of such objects. Finally, the legislation regulating the selling and purchase of antiquities, especially that concerning auction houses, is inadequate and will not prevent other Artemidorus or new Sappho episodes happening in the future.

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