

Making the study of ancient papyri self-sustainable: we are on the right track

In a mere six months, \$162,523 have been raised towards making papyri.info self-sustainable! This is more than 6.5% of the 2.5 million dollars we need to secure the future of a tool used daily by scholars, students, and members of the general public from all over the world.

Papyrology is the science of deciphering and interpreting the books and documents—hundreds of thousands of them—preserved from the ancient world. The bulk of this material was written on papyrus and was found in Egypt; the main language of the texts is Greek, but Egyptian, Arabic, Latin, and other languages are also represented. It is no exaggeration to say that our knowledge of the culture and history of the ancient Mediterranean would be staggeringly diminished without the contributions of papyrology.

Reconstructing time-worn texts, often in scripts that would make for challenging reading even if perfectly preserved and written in one's own language, is slow and difficult work. The advent of powerful computer tools has transformed this work and accelerated discovery, even permitting research that was once considered impossible. The most important of these tools is papyri.info, a resource that runs largely on the good will and spare time of its users and lacks any sort of permanent support. This is hardly a sustainable model for a project that has become so crucial for our understanding of the ancient world.

Reading new papyri brings exciting discoveries on a daily basis, and it requires the involvement of scholars with very particular skills. Without the proper tools, however, papyrologists cannot go very far. In the age of digital resources, they rely on several important databases, of which papyri.info is indisputably the central element. Although individual papyrologists can help maintain the database, papyri.info must still be monitored on a daily basis, and for this we need a stable position.

Recognizing the risk to future scholarship, the Association Internationale de Papyrologues (AIP) and the American Association of Papyrologists (ASP) launched an endowment campaign in November 2019, with the aim of raising 2.5 million to create a permanent support position for papyri.info. Individual scholars and foundations have generously responded to this call: \$162,523 (6.5% of our goal) have already been secured, and altogether \$512,500 (20.50%) have been pledged. Several partners have also provided their support.

The current Covid-19 pandemic has only served to emphasize the importance of digital tools for scholarship. Within a matter of days, most of us lost all access to libraries and became almost totally dependent on the internet. The crisis should spur us to redouble our efforts to support those resources that are essential for humanities research and help us make sense of the present world by understanding past ones. papyri.info is one such tool, and we hope that we can count on your support to ensure its longevity.



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