

Chapter 3. Textual criticism and text editing 3. Case Studies 3.6. Greek literary papyri

Laurent Capron

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Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies

An Introduction

Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies

An Introduction

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3.6. Greek literary papyri (Laurent Capron)

Literary papyri present many aspects that are not usually found in other kinds of manuscripts. First of all, a papyrus is a peculiar witness to a text: it is sometimes even the only one, or in most cases, one of the oldest. The text contained in a papyrus is therefore edited on its own, even if the edition may requires the help of one or several other witnesses (if they exist and are known). Physical data about the papyrus must be studied with special attention: a papyrus is usually a fragment, or a group of fragments, which conveys an incomplete text; the reconstruction of the original layout, as well as palaeographical peculiarities, can provide information on the context of writing and can help to determine the size of possible lacunae.

Description of the papyrus

It is recommended to start the edition with a precise description of the papyrus or of the fragments. Such a description will include: the number of fragments and their size; the orientation of fibres and whether or not the papyrus is written on both sides, on recto and/or verso (recto is the inside of the roll, verso the outside—NB: the recto is normally written first; if a text is written on the verso, it normally indicates a secondary use of the papyrus, which gives a *terminus ante quem* for the date of the text on the recto); the presence of margins and intercolumns, as well as their sizes, the presence of *kollēseis*, and, if several are visible, the distance between them.

After the physical description, the codicological part will follow. This will include: the number of lines of the column, or of the page; the approximate number of letters per line, if this is possible to determine; the size of a line (height of the letters and of the spacing, and length of the line); in the case of a page, the size of the written surface.

For the typology of ancient books, one can refer to Turner, who proposes a classification of codices according to their layout specificities (Turner 1977); otherwise, Johnson proposes a close analysis of formal and conventional features for over four hundred bookrolls from Oxyrhynchus (Johnson 2004).

Lastly, a palaeographical description is provided. This will include: the form and possibly *ductus* (in the sense of *tratteggio*, cf. Ch. 2 § 1.2–1.3) of the letters; identification of the scribe (see for example Johnson 2004, 17–32, for the scribes in Oxyrhynchus; Cavallo 1983, 28–46, for the scribes in Herculaneum); marginal annotations (*paragraphos*, *korōnis*, stichometric annotations, etc.) and *vacat*s in the text; punctuation and accentuation; presence of a second hand, of corrections, etc.

Other elements are useful to determine the structure of the text. For example, in the case of a theatre piece, the change of character can be noted with a *paragraphos* under the first letter of the line. In Herculaneum papyri, the end of a sentence is normally indicated by a one-letter-size *vacat* and a *paragraphos* under the first letter of the line; the presence of a *korōnis* indicates the beginning of a new chapter.

The letters can be compared with other published papyri in order to establish the date of the fragment. Nowadays, many editions offer excellent plates of papyri, and more than 2,800 photographs of Greek literary papyri are accessible on the Internet (their URL can be found via the *Leuven Database of Ancient Books*, <http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/>). One can first refer to the palaeographical studies in Turner 1971, in Cavallo – Maehler 1987 and Cavallo – Maehler 2008. The *Leuven Database of Ancient Books* provides a research field for the script type: even though this field is not systematically filled, and the terminology employed is not clearly indicated, it can be used as a tool to find photographs of similar scripts. If the script is easy to define (for example biblical majuscule, Alexandrian majuscule, uncial, etc.), one can easily consult specialized books about this script.

Edition of the text

In most cases, the papyrus is partly or severely broken, and fragmentary. It is thus necessary to indicate clearly what remains. Papyrologists commonly use a set of diacritical signs as editorial convention (this list can be found in Schubert 2009, 203). It is important to follow these conventions as they warn the reader about the real state of preservation of the papyrus, and the level of certainty of the reading.

Regarding well-known texts, a diplomatic edition can be sufficient; but in many other cases, it is preferable to present both a diplomatic transcript of the papyrus and a normalized edition, one facing the other. The transcript should respect the exact presentation of the papyrus, including *vacat*s, abbreviations, *nomina sacra*, corrections, accentuation, annotations, punctuation, iotacisms, and scribal errors. Since there are many uncertain readings, corrections, abbreviations, and unusual forms, it is preferable to use a font and/or software that allows for the easy typing of all required signs (underdotted letters, simple and

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double square brackets, abbreviations, etc.). The edition, on the other hand, will give a normalized text, with a standardized accentuation and punctuation, indicating where the text has been corrected. Where it is possible to complete the missing text, these supplements should appear clearly in the edition, so that it is evident for the reader that the text is supplied by the editor and does not appear in the papyrus. If the restitution of the text is uncertain, however, it is preferable to give hypotheses in a commentary rather than in the text itself.

Apparatus and commentary

An apparatus will depend on the state of the papyrus: it may be necessary to give a palaeographical apparatus when readings are really difficult and doubtful. If the text is already known, the palaeographical details may be better studied in the commentary, and the apparatus used for comparison with the mediaeval and papyrological tradition.

The commentary is the freest part of the edition: it can contain proposals for supplements, explanation of interesting passages, comparison with other known texts that can help to understand the content of the papyrus. However, it should always be as brief as possible so that the edition remains a valuable resource for a long time, whereas the commentary can always be improved via further analyses. In an unidentified text, it is quite useless to give all the parallels of a given word, or to provide all the words fitting with the remaining letters of a broken word. The *P.Oxy* series provides a good overview of the diversity of texts found on papyri and, as a result, of the possibilities of apparatus accompanied by a commentary, and of what is expected from a papyrological edition. Nevertheless, other corpora of literary papyri (for example Porter – Porter 2008, containing only New Testament Greek papyri; *P.Gen*., containing a variety of literary texts; etc.), or isolated editions may be a precious help, depending on the kind of papyrus one has to edit.

Photographs

Last, but not least, no edition is complete without access to good quality photographs of the papyrus. It is necessary for readers to be able to check the readings of the editor and, eventually, to improve them. Further, reproductions provide an image of the papyrus, which itself can always get damaged or lost. It also contributes to the greater knowledge of literary palaeography, and offers the possibility of discovering connexions between fragments dispersed in different collections. However, in order to be really useful, photographs have to be made in a high resolution (600 dpi is a good standard), and with a focus that gives a good view, not only of the text, but also of the fibres and of the texture of the papyrus. At such a high resolution, it is possible to tell that separate fragments were formerly parts of the same manuscript, while the connexions remain doubtful if the fibres are not precisely visible. Nowadays, more and more institutions propose to make the catalogues of their published papyri available online, which is a great help for scholars. In such cases it is possible simply to share the URL of the photograph.

References

Cavallo – Maehler 1987, 2008; Cavallo 1983; Johnson 2004; *P.Gen*. = Gaffino Moeri 2010 and Schubert 1996; *P.Oxy*. = *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 1898–2012; Porter – Porter 2008; Schubert 2009; Turner 1971, 1977. Web source: LDAB: *Leuven Database of Ancient Books*, <http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab>, last access November 2014.

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