

Recto or verso?

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RECTO ODER VERSO?

Die Papyrusrolle ist ursprünglich dazu bestimmt, nur auf einer Seite beschrieben zu werden. Es finden sich jedoch unter den erhaltenen genug Beispiele von beiderseits beschriebenen oder opisthographen Rollen. Ich unterscheide drei Arten unter denselben: Erstens wurde häufig, nachdem der eigentliche Text auf die eine Seite geschrieben, und der Papyrus zusammengewickelt war, auf das so entstandene Convolut eine Aufschrift gesetzt, welche, da die den Text enthaltende Seite natürlich zum Schutz nach innen gewickelt war, auf die andere Seite geschrieben wurde. So findet man daselbst bei Briefen die Adresse, bei Contracten eine den Inhalt kurz zusammenfassende Bemerkung. Bei den demotischen Contracten finden sich auf der Rückseite die Namen der Zeugen, jedoch nicht als Aufschrift der Rolle. Zahlreiche Beispiele bietet die kostbare Sammlung des Berliner Museums. — Zweitens konnte man sparsam auch einen längeren Text auf einem verhältnissmäßig kleinen Stück Papyrus unterbringen, wenn man nach Benutzung der einen Seite das Blatt wendete und den Schluss auf die Rückseite setzte. Ein Beispiel bietet der von mir copirte, aber noch unpublicirte Londoner Faijümpapyrus, der die Nummer CXIII 4 trägt, ferner der bekannte Brief eines Juden an den Imperator (Pap. Paris. 65a). Dies ist der eigentliche *liber opisthographus*, über den Birt (das antike Buchwesen S. 177. 251. 321. 349 A. 2) zu vergleichen ist. — Drittens verwendete man gleichfalls aus Sparsamkeit sehr häufig auch noch die Rückseite solcher Blätter, die schon auf einer Seite beschrieben waren, zur Aufnahme von Texten, die mit denen der anderen Seite in gar keinem Zusammenhang stehen. Belege finden sich in den meisten Papyrussammlungen.

Bei dieser dritten Gattung ist es häufig von der grössten Wichtigkeit mit Sicherheit zu wissen, welcher von beiden Texten zuerst geschrieben ist, namentlich, wenn auf einer Seite ein litterarischer Text steht. Denn die Beurtheilung des Werthes der Handschrift ist dann abhängig davon, ob der Papyrus ursprünglich zur Aufnahme dieses Textes verwendet war, oder ob der Text nachträglich auf die Rückseite des schon benutzten Stückes geschrieben ist. In letzterem Falle hat man es dann nicht mit einer zur

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Abstract

Examination of the Royal Canon establishing that the king list is written on the verso, and thus not the original document. The note about the Turin papyrus is found in the addendum.

English translation of the German original.

Source

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Recto or verso?

The papyrus roll is originally intended to be inscribed on one side only. However, among the preserved rolls there are enough examples of both sides inscribed, or opisthographic rolls. I differentiate between three types: – firstly, after the actual text had been written on a page and the papyrus wound together, a label was often placed on the resulting convolute, which, of course, wrapped the text on the inside for protection. Thus, letters are given the address, and in the case of contracts a label summarizing the content briefly. In demotic contracts, the names of the witnesses are found on the back, not on the label. Numerous examples are provided by the precious collection of the Berlin Museum. – Secondly, one could sparingly accommodate a longer text on a comparatively small piece of papyrus if, after using one side, one turned the page and placed the end on the back. An example is the London Fayum-papyrus, copied by me, but still unpublished, bearing number CXIII 4, as well as the well-known letter of a Jew to the Emperor (Pap. Paris 68a). This is a real *liber opisthographus*, to which Birt (das antike Buchwesen p. 177, 251, 321, 349, A2) can be compared. – Thirdly, it was also very common to use the reverse side of such leaves, which had already been inscribed on one side, for the inclusion of texts not related to those of the other side. Evidence can be found in most collections of papyri.

In this third type, it is often of the utmost importance to know with certainty which of the two texts was written first, especially if there is a literary text on one side. Judging the value of the manuscript is then dependent on whether the papyrus was originally used for the text, or whether it was subsequently written on the back of an already used piece. In the latter case, one does not have to do it with a handwriting intended for an official edition, but only as a copy written for private purposes, perhaps by a pupil's hand. Also in the interpretation of documents, it is of great importance to have clarity about this.

So far, the decision on this question has been rather difficult, and often enough, only the grounds of probability have been given, each derived from the peculiarities of each case. In what follows, I will now communicate an observation that I made this winter in the processing of the Berlin Papyri, which will answer the question of which side is the recto and which is the verso. In the future, this can be answered at a mere glance in all cases.

For a better understanding of the following, I briefly call to mind the composition of a papyrus roll. As is well known, the papyrus, or more precisely, the individual pages which were joined together, was made by the superimposition of two layers of strips,¹ obtained by finely cutting the marrow of the papyrus. According to Pliny's report on the production of

¹ Rarely three layers. See Birt, das antike Buchwesen p. 233.

papyrus (on the following page, xiii., 77 ff.), a layer of such schidae was first spread on the table *'in rectum'*; i.e. in the direction of the worker, whereupon the second layer was placed across it (*transversa*). In the direction of the plant fibres, which are strong, usually a little darker and almost equally spaced parallel to each other running through these schidae, the direction of the schidae itself can still be seen. Considering a sheet on these fibres, Pliny says that on the one side, the lower one in fabrication, one goes in the vertical direction and on the other side in a horizontal direction and find those cutting at right angles. In the following, for the sake of brevity, I will call the former the vertical side, the second the horizontal side. To avoid misunderstandings, I add that I use the terms horizontal and vertical, thinking of a single sheet lying in the original position in front of me, i.e. as it was inserted into the roll so that the longer side forms the height.

This process is known. The new result of which I spoke above was now as good as won, as the question arose whether perhaps one of the two sides of the papyrus had been the special page of writing, that is to say which was first inscribed. I then examined the entire papyrus collection of the Berlin Museum, numbering several thousand, not only the Greek-Fayum ones, but also the differently inscribed, and above all, the numerous well-received demotic rolls, and found that I was the right track. It turned out, firstly, that all papyri, which are described on one page only, carry the writing regularly on the horizontal side, that, secondly, opisthographic rolls of the first and second types (see above) the main text always also appears on the horizontal side. The result reveal the following conclusion: *the horizontal side is the side of the papyrus originally intended for writing, while the vertical side, if at all, and used only retrospectively.*

In addition to the testimony of the Berlin collection, I am in the fortunate position of being able to demonstrate that of the Londoners here. Mr E. M. Thompson, the gracious Keeper of the Manuscript Department of the British Museum, was kind enough to look over the entire collection at my request, and assured me that it confirm the above theory. To cite some well-known examples, the Bankes-Homer, the Harris-Homer, the big Hyperides (Lycophron) are all written on the horizontal side. Further evidence can be found in the excellent facsimiles of the *'Catalogue of Ancient Manuscripts in the British Museum. Part I. Greek. London 1881'*, as well as those of the publications of the *'Palaeographical Society'*. For the Berlin texts, compare also the facsimiles of the *'Arsinotischen Steuerprofessionen'* published by me (Sitzungsber. d. kgl. Preuss. Acad. d. Wiss. 1883), which are also written on the horizontal side.

In view of the consistent testimony of the Berlin and London collections, which offer no exceptions, one will not believe in coincidence, but will be faced with firm evidence, a practice without exception. Of course, full evidence will only be provided after the other collections have been examined, to which, hopefully, this communication has given an impetus.²

² For any upcoming investigations, I notice that it is completely unimportant which direction the writing takes, whether it runs parallel to the fibers or cuts them. One could describe the papyrus once finished in any direction; especially in the Byzantine period, but also in the time of the Pharaohs, it has been known, for

But even now I doubt even less the regularity of the observed phenomenon, as it is also possible to deduce inner reasons from the Plinian report for the preference of the horizontal side. If one considers that the many manipulations that were made in the factory with the superimposed layers, such as the flattening by the hammer, which had to act more directly on the upper layer than on the one below. However, by reversing the layers, it could theoretically be deduced from this that the sides of the finished papyrus had to have a different appearance in such a way that the upper layer appeared to be smoother and finer than the lower one. *The upper one is, however, during fabrication by Pliny, noted as the horizontal (transversa)*. Indeed, the influence of the various treatments can still be seen on any piece of papyrus today. The horizontal sides are much smoother, tighter and glossier than the vertical sides, which generally appear rougher, showing more fractures and cracks, and often in a darker colour. The virtues that Pliny requires from a good papyrus (see n. XIII 78), *tenuitas densitas candor levor*, are more peculiar to the horizontal sides than the vertical sides. This is the reason why those were preferred as writing material.

Since the externally presenting phenomenon is also internally grounded, we also draw the consequence for the opisthographic roles of the drill genus, i.e. for those who do not show coherent texts on the two sides. If, as we have seen, it was difficult to decide which side was written first, we can assert that the text of the horizontal page is the older one, for which the papyrus was originally used. The most interesting example of this is the well-known London Papyrus, which bears on one side the Epitaph of Hypereides, on the other a Greek-Coptic horoscope. Blass has proved,³ with pertinent reasons, which he derived from the peculiar composition of this papyrus glued together from two different pieces, that the horoscope was written earlier than the Hypereides text.

This result is confirmed by our theory. As Mr. Thompson kindly informed me,⁴ the horoscope stands on the horizontal side! The Hypereides text is therefore quite certainly, as established by Blass,⁵ only a so-called student copy. However, this papyrus still offers a beautiful illustration of the correctness of our theory. When, on the back of the chart, there was no room left for the last three columns of the Epitaph, the scribe found himself obliged to adhere another piece of papyrus to it. He took a piece that was still blank on both sides. Choosing one of the two sides, the most natural thing would have been to write on the vertical side, since the Hypereides text already occupy the vertical side. The fact that he actually stuck the horizontal page next to the already written vertical page and continued the text, we can affirm that the horizontal page is the intended for writing side of the papyrus.

larger contracts and the like, the roll was usually turned around and written parallel to the Selisk, i.e. the height of the papyrus. Rather, the characteristic feature of the horizontal side is that the fibers run at right angles to the Selisk. For very small fragments, which are not accidentally glued, the inspection is more difficult. But a trained eye can usually notice the difference between the two sides of the papyrus.

3 Hyperidis orationes IV. ed. alt, Leipz. 1881 p. XIII ff.

4 See also the facsimile in the Catalogue of Ancient Manuscripts etc.

5 loc. cit. XXIII.

The simplicity of the result may make my argument a little long. Nevertheless, I thought I should go into it more precisely, because from the beginning the sentence found above will be of decisive importance in the publication of papyri. It has already given me many a beautiful result. As soon the many well-known papyri in the other collections are inspected, it will bring light and clarity.

ADDENDUM.

In the meantime, I had the opportunity to look through the papyrus collections of Rome, Turin, Paris, and Leipzig to the above question, and found the theories confirmed everywhere. It is of interest to historians that the famous pharaoh lists of the Turin royal papyrus stand on the vertical side that is the verso, while the tax-records are written on the recto that is older. The Εὐδόξου τέχνη (in Paris) is on the recto, the documents of the same papyrus on the verso. I have further reservations for my publication of the Ptolemaic papyri.