

Latin documents on papyrus from
late antique and early medieval West: a framework

Synthetic studies about documentary Latin papyri from late antique and early medieval West (V-XI centuries) date back, today, more than fifty years. Papyrology, as it is known, is a discipline that finds every day new enrichment, new materials: even these particular papyri cannot escape this rule. After the studies of Leo Santifaller (1953) and Jan-Olof Tjäder (I, 1955), in fact, further materials were (re)discovered and other restored; others already known documents have been the focus of renewed social, political, economic, cultural, linguistic and juridical interest; others, eventually, were object of new editions.

How many Latin papyri from late antique and early medieval West are currently known? To which geographical contexts and chronological periods do they refer? Which are their physical features and what do they contain? Moving from a systematic census, my paper aims to answer to these questions, providing a framework for these papyri on the basis of three major groups (Italian, French and papal papyri) and several subgroups taking into account documentary typologies (public and private documents, letters, inventories, authentics from relics). Moreover, through recent bibliography, an attempt to enlarge the perspective will aim to shift the focus on indirect evidence, towards a better understanding of a “culture of the papyrus” (Bagnall 1995) in V-XI century West.

The purpose is twofold: on the one hand, this research is providing a basis for further ecdotic operations and, on the other hand, it is furnishing new materials towards a multidisciplinary approach to such a precious historical evidence, like late antique and early medieval papyri.

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PLATINUM - ERC - Starting Grant 2014 636983
Papyri and LAtin Texts: INsights and Updated Metodhologies
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