The Papyrus Carlsberg Collection & Project

Ryholt, Kim

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The Papyrus Carlsberg Collection houses an invaluable collection of ancient papyrus manuscripts. At its center are the remains of the Tebtunis temple library, a unique archaeological discovery that represents the only large-scale institutional library preserved from ancient Egypt. The papyri, which date to the first two centuries of the common era, were found in cellars below a building within the temple enclosure where they had been left when the temple was abandoned in the early third century AD. Estimated at several hundred manuscripts, this is the richest assemblage of Egyptian literary papyri known to date. It preserves a broad range of texts, including detailed manuals on the performance of various rituals, religious compendia and treatises, scientific texts concerned with divination and medicine, and narrative literature. The texts shed detailed light on the operation of a temple and its priesthood, and many of the literary works are otherwise unknown.

The Papyrus Carlsberg Collection was founded in the 1930s by H.O. Lange with funds provided by the Carlsberg Foundation and presented to the University of Copenhagen in 1939. The Augustinus and Carlsberg Foundations have generously funded several recent acquisitions. The largest is the important private archive of the mercenary Horos son of Nechoutes, who was stationed in the military camp of Pathyris in Upper Egypt and saw battle as far away as Syria. His archive provides detailed information on the socio-economic life of an Egyptian soldier who invested in real estate in collaboration with his brothers. The camp and his home was destroyed during a rebellion in 88 BC.

An international research collaboration was established in 1989, under the direction of P.J. Frandsen, in order to identify, catalogue, and publish texts from the collection. Since 1999, when the 10-year project came to a successful conclusion, the Papyrus Carlsberg Collection & Project has been directed by Kim Ryholt. The project continues to attract leading international experts and as of January 2016 more than twenty volumes of text editions have been published, in addition to numerous articles. Several further volumes in The Carlsberg Papyri series are currently in active preparation.

Director: Prof. Kim Ryholt (ryholt@hum.ku.dk).
Conservation: PhD fellow Thomas Christiansen.