

Foy SCALF, Judith BARR & Sara E. COLE

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Two New Kingdom Hieratic Manuscripts from the Collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Foy SCALF, Judith BARR & Sara E. COLE
Oriental Institute, J. Paul Getty Museum, J. Paul Getty Museum

ABSTRACT

This brief essay summarizes two New Kingdom hieratic papyri in the Antiquities collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, California. Previously in the possession of the 19th-century manuscript collector Sir Thomas Phillipps, the texts are an early 18th Dynasty *Book of the Dead* scroll belonging to a woman named Webennesre, and a late Ramesside private letter from the end of the 20th Dynasty. The papyri will be included in a digital catalogue publication of twenty ancient Egyptian manuscripts in the Getty collection, scheduled to appear in 2024.

1. HISTORY OF THE COLLECTION

The antiquities collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum—displayed at the Getty Villa Museum in Pacific Palisades, California—is primarily known for its Greek, Roman, and Etruscan artworks. The Getty Villa itself is modeled on the Villa dei Papiri, a Roman luxury villa excavated at the site of Herculaneum in the Bay of Naples. A lesser-known group within this collection, which has never been publicly displayed or fully published, comprises nineteen *Book of the Dead* manuscripts, ranging in date from the early New Kingdom to the late Ptolemaic Period. Seven of these manuscripts are written on papyrus, while the remaining twelve are written on strips of linen wrappings that belonged to the mummies of three male individuals. An additional text on papyrus records a private letter of the Ramesside

period. The manuscripts were originally owned by the famous English antiquary and manuscript collector Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792–1872), and donated to the Getty by rare book dealer Hans P. Kraus Sr. and his wife in 1983. Since that time, they have remained in storage, but current studies are preparing the documents for a full publication and eventual exhibition.

2. THE NEW KINGDOM HIERATIC MATERIAL

There are only two New Kingdom manuscripts inscribed with hieratic writing in the J. Paul Getty Museum antiquities collection: a unique *Book of the Dead* papyrus from the beginning of the 18th Dynasty and a late Ramesside letter from the end of the 20th Dynasty.

Inventory Number:

83.AI.46.3 (= TM 134689)¹

Materials:

Papyrus, ink

Measurements:

H: 18.4 × L: 59.5 cm

Date:

New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, Tuthmosis III–
Amenhotep II, ca. 1479–1400 B.C.

Script:

Hieratic, Retrograde Columns

Language:

Middle Egyptian

Contents:

Spells 98 → [...] → 136A → 136B → 149 → 150

Primary Editions:

Scalf (forthcoming)

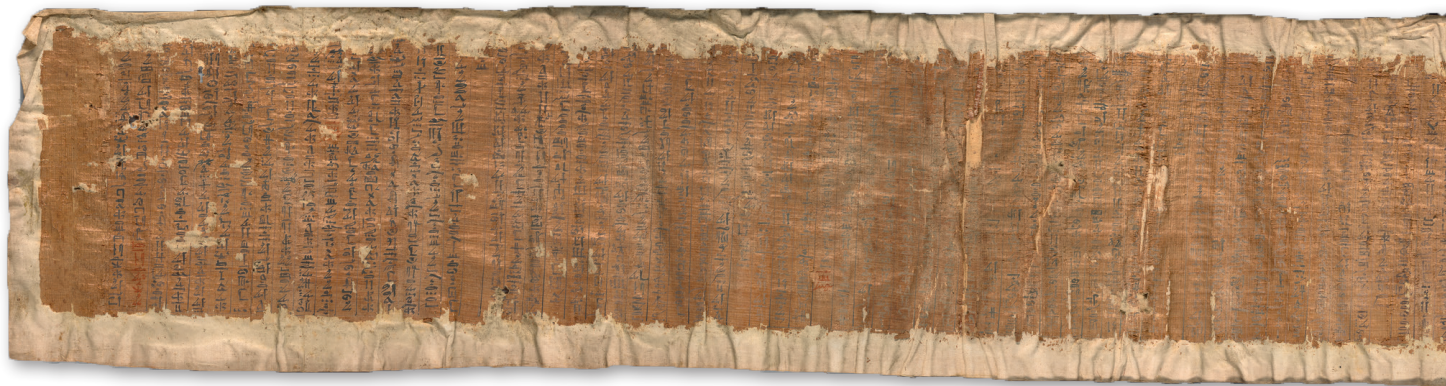
Citations:

Kockelmann (2008: 133, fn. 96)

This papyrus is medium brown in color and inscribed in black and red ink with 114 columns of hieratic text on the obverse (papyrological recto) organized in retrograde columns. Now mounted onto a fabric backing, the reverse is presumed blank. Two fragments of papyrus from a now lost earlier section of the manuscript, inscribed with

sections of *Book of the Dead* spell 98, have been incorrectly patched above the first four columns. The text then picks up in the middle of spell 136A followed by spells 136B and 149. After these columns is the vignette commonly labeled as spell 150 showing fourteen mounds, each of which has an associated cursive hieroglyphic text naming the mound and its divine guardian. What appears as a blank section of papyrus at the beginning (left edge) actually represents a modern patch of vertical papyrus fibers (papyrological verso). The initial section of papyrus has broken away or was removed. Therefore, an indeterminate length of papyrus is missing from the beginning of the manuscript. The end (right side) is complete along with a blank, protective sheet.

Both the upper and lower edges of the papyrus are damaged throughout. Given the dimensions of the preserved papyrus of 18.4 cm compared to the typical height of over 30 cm, it seems likely that space for illustrations may once have existed at the top of the manuscript. Lower grid lines show that very little to no text is missing at the bottom edge. Along the top edge, columns are missing approximately two to four sign quadrants, most evident where only the introductory rubric *dd mdw in* is missing (e.g., col. 19, 23, 32, 36, 43, 48, 53, 58, 63, 68, 85, 90, and 100). Red ink for rubrics



¹ For updated information for all J. Paul Getty Museum objects, the Collection Pages can be accessed at: <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection>.

is used sparingly: for the title of spell 136B, the column headings before the section for each mound in spell 149, for *ʿp* in col. 35, and for *lw=s pw* in col. 108. Red is also found in the outline of some of the illustration in spell 150.

The restrained use of red, the paleographic forms of the hieratic signs, the layout in columns, the retrograde orientation, and the sequence of spells place this manuscript in the early 18th Dynasty. A number of early New Kingdom *Book of the Dead* manuscripts close with the same sequence of spells,² including the papyri of Nu (= TM 134299) and Iuya (= TM 134267), while many of the textual variants share similarities with P. Louvre N. 3073 (= TM 134306). The combination of hieratic and retrograde orientation is highly unusual and suggests that the manuscript was produced as part of early New Kingdom experiments with funerary text formats (Dorman 2019). Contemporary manuscripts employing hieratic columns in standard orientation, as well as similar spell sequences, include the papyri of Muty (= TM 134264) and Ahmose (= TM 134310). Retrograde hieratic columns are attested on the shroud of Ahmose Henut-Tjemehu (= TM 133680), notably in spells 136B and 149 (Dorman 2019: 37). Given these similarities and relationships, the manuscript

is unlikely to be earlier than the reign of Ahmose or later than the reign of Amenhotep III.

The hieratic signs of the scribe are very formal and conservative, often being more reminiscent of earlier styles, while certain signs reflect more contemporary forms. Columnar format restricted the opportunity for more cursive ligatures. Therefore, some signs show a close affinity with cursive hieroglyphs, while others retain a more hieratic character. Similarity of signs throughout the manuscript strongly suggest the hand of a single scribe (apart from the illustrations in spell 150). In the central section of the preserved manuscript, the scribe dipped their brush less frequently and the ink has a washed-out appearance. The consistency of the signs throughout the manuscript clearly demonstrates that they were produced with care and diligence.

The manuscript was produced for a woman whose name is commonly cited as *R^c-wbn=s*, but this name surely uses honorific transposition and conforms to the pattern *Wbn-n=f-R^c* (Ranke 1935: 217), *Wbn-n=f-Hr* (TM Nam 14599; Ranke 1935: 77), *Wbn-n=f-T^ch* (TM Nam 19581), and the like, so that the name should be read *Wbn-n=s-R^c* (rather than an unattested **R^c-wbn=s* that would presumably mean ‘Re is her shining/rising’). However, nowhere in the manuscript is a second

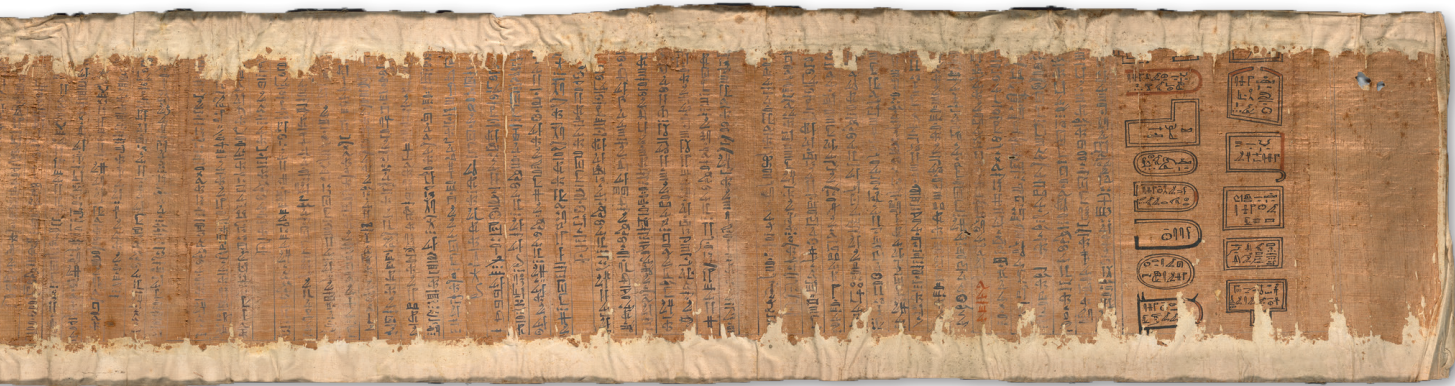


Fig. 1. JPGM 83.AI.46.3

2 See Munro (1988: 143); Lapp (1997: 42, sequence 8).

n written in the name; if this interpretation is correct, this might suggest graphic deletion of the sign, potentially the result of consonant clustering (i.e., *Wbn-(n)=s-R* ‘Webennesre’).

There are two further interesting aspects of this manuscript. First is the use of *iw=s pw* ‘This means it has come (to an end)’ rather than *iw=f pw*, a characteristic also found in the papyri of Nu and Iuya following spell 149. Second is the passage that immediately follows *iw=s pw*, which is associated with the spell by the introductory [*dd mdw.w*] in *Wbn-(n)=s-R* *hft sw³=s hr nn n i³.wt št³.wt* ‘[Recitation] by Webennesre when she passes by these secret mounds.’ At the end of this section, Webennesre asks to be endowed with ten arouras in the field of reeds: *s³h=k wi m ³h.t st³.t 10 m sh.t i ³r.w* ‘May you endow me with a field of ten arouras in the field of reeds...’ The hieratic sign used here is the *dekaroura* sign,³ representing a generic field cultivable by a single person.

Inventory Number:

83.AI.46.1 (= TM 129730)

Materials:

Papyrus, ink

Measurements:

H: 32.4 x W: 21.9 cm

Date:

New Kingdom, 20th Dynasty, Year 10 of the Renaissance Era. Wente (1990: 196).

Script:

Hieratic

Language:

Late Egyptian

Contents:

Letter to Dhutmose from Amenhotep and Butehamun

Primary Editions:

Černý (1939: 28–30, no. 15); Wente (1967: 47–49, no. 15); Wente (1990: 196–197, no. 318); Janssen (1991: pl. 90–91); TLA 18945; Ramses Online

Citations:

DeM Database; Baines (2001: 9, 16); Bouvier (2005, fig. 1); Donker van Heel (2012: 160–163).

This papyrus is light brown in color and inscribed in black ink with seventeen lines on the obverse and eleven lines on the reverse. It would have been cut from a larger roll for the purposes of composing a short letter. The inscription begins on the papyrological verso where the papyrus fibers run vertically (designated V/H, i.e., vertical fibers over horizontal fibers, by J. Černý 1939: ix), and continues on the papyrological recto where the papyrus fibers run horizontally (designated H/V by J. Černý 1939: ix). After inscribing the first seventeen lines on the obverse, the scribe flipped the papyrus vertically and began writing on the upper right of the reverse. An eleventh line on the reverse contains the badly abraded remains of the address located at the bottom of the sheet, separated from the other ten lines by a large space, where it would have been visible on the outside of the folded document. The document is complete, with only slight damage from fraying on the left edge (from the perspective of the obverse). A few minor lacunae appear in the first and final lines. There is a slight separation of the papyrus along a horizontal fold at line nine (obverse) of the text.

As pointed out by previous editors, the hieratic text on this papyrus reflects three phases of writing by the scribe. The scribe began (lines 1–3) with a formal, chancery script,⁴ with large signs and relatively minimal ligatures, reflecting the formalized opening in the epistolary address of late New Kingdom letters. With line four, the scribe started to save space by progressively reducing

³ For the reading *h³-t³*, see Allen (2002: 151–154).

⁴ Fischer-Elfert (2020: 656); also called ‘uncial hieratic,’ see Donker van Heel (2012: 162).

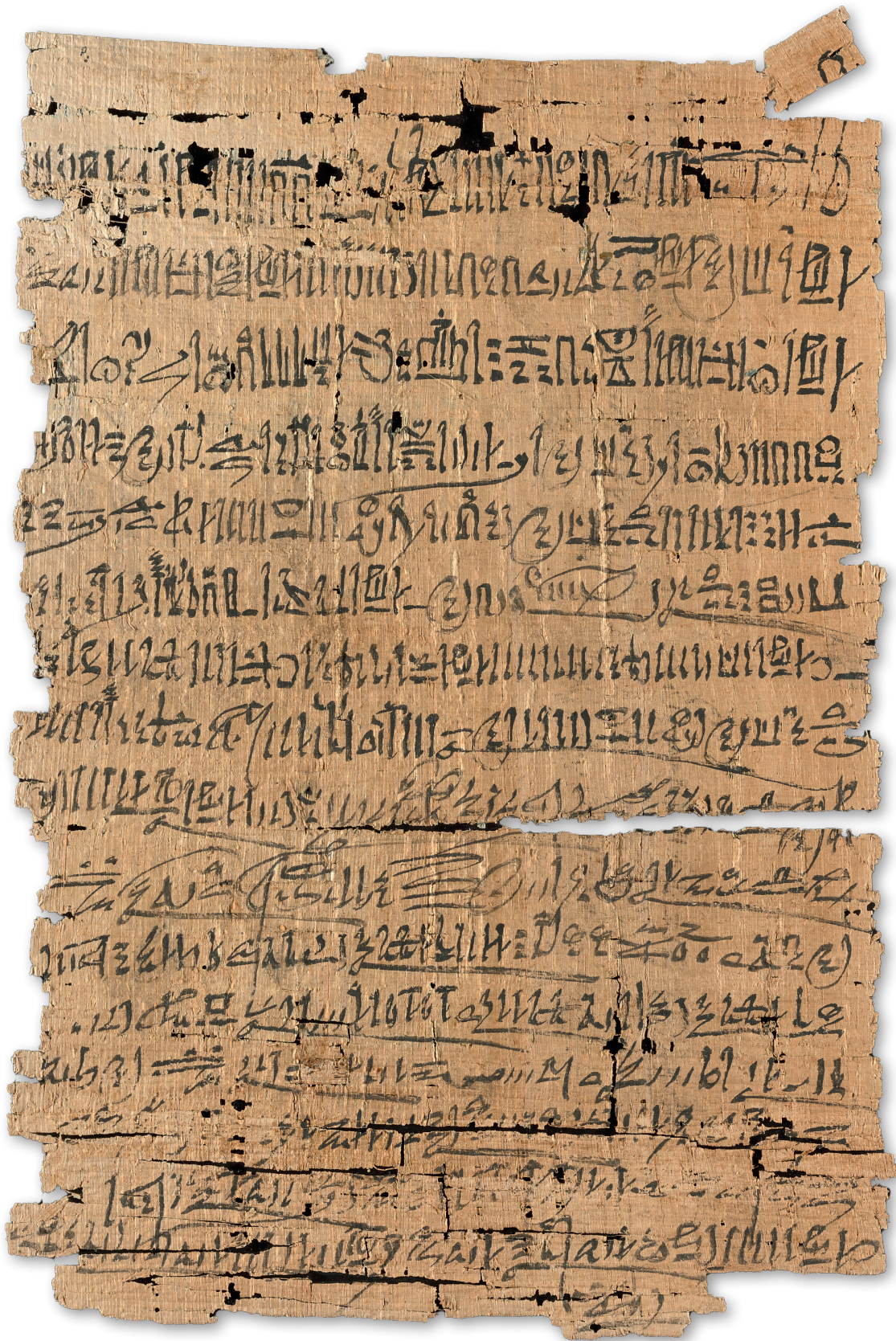


Fig. 2. JPGM 83.A1.46.1

the size of the hieratic signs. As the letter transitions from the formal introduction to the contents proper (lines 9 and following), the scribe's style changes from the formal, chancery script to the cursive hieratic characteristic of administrative documents, clearly written at a much quicker pace, with more ligatures and a flowing style. Although the letter is addressed to the scribe Dhutmose (also called Tjaroy) from Amenhotep, the *ductus* has been identified as the hand of Butehamun, who was the son of Dhutmose. Distinctive features of Butehamun's hand include a small dot above the *dd* group (Bouvier 2005: 104–105), the unligatured *p3* group,⁵ and the phrase *iw=i h3b r rdi.t m=k* 'I write to have you know' (Bouvier 2005: 105). Thus, it has been concluded that Amenhotep dictated this letter to Butehamun,⁶ which further explains the inclusion of a message from Butehamun at the end.

The content of the letter itself is rather brief. In it, Amenhotep assures Dhutmose of the safety of his relatives and associates, while urging Dhutmose to stay out of harm's way for at this time Dhutmose was on a campaign in Nubia. Following Amenhotep's message, Butehamun adds one of his own. He also tells his father Dhutmose that he is praying for him and asks him to send him a letter in his own handwriting so that Butehamun can rest assured that his father is still alive. The letter closes with repeated assurances that Dhutmose's associates back in Thebes are doing well.

3. PROVENANCE

Despite its namesake Villa dei Papiri, the holdings of the Getty Villa Museum contain relatively few papyri, and even fewer examples from pharaonic Egypt. J. Paul Getty acquired only a few Egyptian objects for his own collection and for the nascent J. Paul Getty Museum, all of which are currently dated to the 6th century B.C. or later—and no papyri. Two papyrus fragments joined the collection in 1976, a 1st century B.C. fragment with text from Homer's *Odyssey* and a 2nd century A.D. letter on Epicurean philosophy books,⁷ followed by a large group of fragments in 1980.⁸ The last papyri, several late fragments, were accessioned in 1998.⁹

Against this background, the donation of seven funerary papyri and the New Kingdom letter in 1983 is notable.¹⁰ Together with a group of twelve Ptolemaic mummy wrappings in the same donation, these form one of the largest corpora of ancient Egyptian material in the Getty's collection, apart from its holdings of mummy portraits from Roman Egypt.¹¹ Donated by Hans P. Kraus Sr. and his wife, these papyri and mummy wrappings represent part of the 'residue' of the remarkable 19th century collection of Sir Thomas Phillipps, bart. (1792–1872).¹²

Although far better known for his collections of later manuscripts and printed material, Phillipps, a self-described 'vello-maniac,' added a small but compelling amount of archeological material to his libraries at Middle Hill, Broadway,

⁵ Janssen (1987); Egberts (1997: 24).

⁶ Černý (1973: 366); Bouvier (2005: 105).

⁷ 'Papyrus Fragment with Text from Homer's *Odyssey*': JPGM 76.AI.56; 'Fragment of a Letter': JPGM 76.AI.57.

⁸ 'Papyrus Fragment': JPGM 80.AI.26.1.

⁹ 'Group of Papyrus Fragments with Text (4)': JPGM 98.AI.95.

¹⁰ 'Group of Papyri, including a letter and *Book of the Dead* fragments (8)': JPGM 83.AI.46.

¹¹ 'Mummy Wrappings with Texts and Vignettes (12)': JPGM 83.AI.47.

¹² Burrows (2019: S40). Having passed by descent to Alan George Fenwick, the bandages and papyri were part of the Phillipps library, which sold to Lionel Keir Robinson and Philip Ramsay Robinson in 1946, who then sold the remainder to Kraus in 1977. This earlier sequence of sales is covered in Munby (1960), and the sale to Kraus in Kraus (1978).

and Thirlestaine House, Cheltenham.¹³ The papyri and mummy bandages now at the Getty appear to have been a significant, although not majority, portion of the ancient Egyptian material collected by Philipps through both auction purchases and personal connections.¹⁴ Philipps acquired many of his Egyptian papyri at a time when the study of hieroglyphs was still inchoate. Despite this, Philipps collected a wide range of papyri representing thousands of years and multiple traditions, from pharaonic *Book of the Dead* scrolls to 7th century A.D. Coptic leaves from the archive of St. Pesynthios (Burrows 2014). Some, like the late Ramesside letter JPGM 83.AI.46.1 (= TM 129730), were acquired by Philipps at auction, already mounted between glass plates.¹⁵ Other New Kingdom material, like the 18th Dynasty scroll of ‘Spells for the Scribe Pa-aa,’ now at the British Museum, remained unrolled during their tenure in Philipps’ collection.¹⁶ The earlier collecting history of JPGM 83.AI.46.3 (= TM 134689), is unfortunately still unknown. Two invoices from May 1858 from booksellers T&W Boone to Philipps with entries for ‘Hieratic Rolls on Linen,’ ‘4 Papyri-mounted,’ and a ‘Papyrus with Drawings mounted on Linen,’ underscore both the breadth of Philipps’ collecting in this area, as well as the challenges of tracing ancient objects often incompletely described or misunderstood in contemporaneous documentation.¹⁷ Despite Philipps’ obsessive cataloging in other areas of his collection, the earlier Egyptian material appears to have been at the periphery of his focus.

4. ON-GOING PUBLICATIONS AND PROJECTS

A small exhibition featuring highlights from the Getty’s collection of *Book of the Dead* manuscripts is being planned at the Getty Villa Museum for late 2023–early 2024. A small digital exhibit of this material, titled ‘The Getty Book of the Dead,’ is presented online on Google Arts & Culture.¹⁸ A longer-term project will involve close examination of the manuscripts by Getty antiquities curators and conservators to determine the best options for safe, long-term storage and whether any manuscripts require conservation interventions to prevent damage or degradation. Currently, the manuscripts are in moderately stable condition and are not well served by their historic lining or framing, which in some instances may not be safely reversible. Further conservation analysis is needed.

The full group of twenty manuscripts is currently undergoing a comprehensive study by Egyptologist Foy Scalf at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. The study will result in a digitally published, open access catalogue from Getty Publications containing a full transcription, transliteration, translation, and commentary for each manuscript (Scalf, forthcoming). Essays from contributing authors will also help contextualize the Getty manuscripts within the broader *Book of the Dead* tradition, and discuss the provenance of this particular body of material in greater detail (Barr, forthcoming). The projected publication

¹³ Philipps & Munby (1968: preface). On Philipps as a collector, see further Burrows (2019).

¹⁴ For an expanded look at Philipps’ ancient materials, see Barr (forthcoming).

¹⁵ Mr. Evans, London, July 23, 1831, lot 582.

¹⁶ Described as ‘opened for the first time and framed by the British Museum in 1958’ in the lot notes for the Sotheby’s London sale of Bibliotheca Philippica material on November 25, 1969 [lot 441, ‘Spells for the scribe Pa-aa’ ‘Papyrus’: British Museum EA10819,2.

¹⁷ May 15, 1858, MS. Philipps-Robinson c. 546, fol. 132; May 28, 1858, MS. Philipps-Robinson c. 546, fol. 136. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

¹⁸ <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/ogUheUm1d2fPAg>.

date for this catalogue is 2024. The digital publication format will allow for interactive features, including the ability to zoom in on photos of the

manuscripts in enormous detail, and will hopefully provide a useful template for future digital publications of other groups of Egyptian papyri.

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