



**Latin Documents Written on Papyrus in the
Late Antique and Early Medieval West
(5th-11th century): an overview**

Dario Internullo

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Latin Documents Written on Papyrus in the Late Antique and Early Medieval West (5th-11th century): an overview*

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The overview studies of Leo Santifaller (1953) and Jan-Olof Tjäder (first volume, 1955) on Latin documents written on papyrus in the West between the fifth and eleventh century still remain unsurpassed in the field of medieval papyrus studies. In some cases even the work of Gaetano Marini, published in 1805, must still be taken into consideration.¹ Discoveries of papyri in the West, none of which come from excavation but are preserved *ab antiquo* in archives and libraries, surely occur less frequently than their Eastern counterparts; nevertheless, these discoveries do exist. From this point of view, the aforementioned studies are nothing but illustrations or photographs of the *corpus* made in different years: 1805, 1953 and 1955. After their initial publication some of the documents were lost, others recovered or discovered, others re-read and better understood, all of them becoming part of a renewed interest in medieval Latin papyri by historians of society, economy and culture, as well as paleographers and diplomatists, jurists, and linguists.² The lack of papyrologists among them is quite surprising, but it is less puzzling if we consider that an ancient tradition binds these papyri to historians of the Middle Ages and to diplomatists.³

In recognition of the high level of interest in these sources, new surveys of the corpus of medieval Latin papyri can contribute usefully to scholars from these different fields, especially because they can offer a new and updated overview of the materials available and their relevance to the history of the medieval West. The present contribution thus has a twofold purpose: first, it offers an updated synopsis of the currently preserved Latin documents written on papyrus in the late antique and early medieval West; then, it considers this corpus in relation to those areas in which the papyrus remained in use as writing material after the seventh and eighth century.

This overview will divide the documents into two broad categories, based on the main macro-areas of production, plus a third category of some still-unpublished or particularly problematic manuscripts: 1) Italian papyri; 2) French papyri; 3) unpublished papyri. The first two categories are further divided into subgroups, taking into account documentary typologies (public documents, private documents, inventories/lists, epistles and relic labels)

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¹ P. Marini (1805); Santifaller (1953); P.Ital. I (1955). For papyrus codices cf. Ammirati (2015) 105-111.

² Examples of historians are Brown (1984); McCormick (2002); Pasquali (2005); Caliri (2012). Paleographers / diplomatists: Atsma / Vezin (1999); Vezin (2004); Santoni (2011); Carbonetti (2011). Jurists: Migliardi Zingale (2008); Tarozzi (2017). Linguists: Francovich Onesti (2010). About the editions cf. P.Rain.Cent. 166; Salomons / Tjäder / Worp (1998); ChLA² LV; Radiciotti (2004); Ghignoli / De Robertis / Zamponi (2018).

³ On this point cf. Carbonetti (2011) 36. An exception is made for the Spanish papyrologists: Noël / Tudela (2007); Tudela (2015). The Checklist of editions and papyrological databases does not cover all these documents: I will quote some of them with the ChLA number or with the title of the works in which they are published or mentioned.

and chronology.⁴ The final part of the paper explores indirect evidence and the most recent studies about the use of papyrus in the medieval West in order to discuss, in a preliminary form, the circulation of papyrus in the Mediterranean Sea, from Egypt to the West, during the early Middle Ages.

1. Italian papyri

The papyri written in Italy total 91 items dating from 433 to 1052 CE. They have been drafted in Byzantine or formerly Byzantine areas, especially Ravenna and Rome. Of these, 45 are public documents, 33 are private documents, 5 are inventories / lists, 3 are epistles and 5 are (groups of) relic labels.

a. Public documents

15 of the 45 public documents are fragments of *gesta municipalia*, proceedings of city councils (*curiae*) in which documents were presented by citizens to the council for inspection, recitation, and registration in the city archives, with copies of the transcripts of these proceedings given out to citizens. They date from 433 to 625 CE, and refer not only to the territory of Ravenna, but also to Lazio (Rieti) and Sicily (Syracuse).⁵

The so-called Butini papyrus is a solemn act issued by the chancery of a *comes sacri stabuli* in mid-sixth century Italy. Following Tjäder's interpretation, scholars ascribed it to a Iohannes, maybe one of the Justinian's *magistri militum*, but a new inspection of the text has linked it to the chancery of Costantianus –a key figure in the Gothic war– and to the city of Ravenna in the years 540-543 CE ca.⁶

P. Ital. 49, dated to 557 CE, is a fragment containing witness statements related to an inquiry about landed property near Nepi, carried out under the supervision of the *vicarius praefecti Urbis*, with Goths among the parties.⁷

Two further documents were issued by the archiepiscopal chancery of Ravenna: the former is dated between 642/643 CE and 665/666 CE, and contains a grant in *emphyteusis* of land to the exarch; the latter, datable to the years 851-867 CE, contains a solemn deed of donation directed to the Church of Ravenna.⁸

Like a Roman counterpart to the archiepiscopal papyri from Ravenna, the papal papyri are a series of 25 public documents issued by the chancery of the Roman bishops that range from 788 to 1052 CE. The series is composed almost exclusively of grants and confirmations in

⁴ I use the term 'document' in a (rather) general sense, meaning a non-literary or non-paraliterary text. For the division between public and private documents see Pratesi (1999). As regards the epistles discussed here, despite their similarity with some public documents, I have chosen to consider them as a separate group, since their senders (ecclesiastics, officers) are related to public institutions, but the genetic context of these texts can not be immediately linked to public documentary practices.

⁵ P.Ital. 59 (433 CE), 10-11 (489 CE), 12 (491 CE), 29 (504 CE ca), 31 (540 CE), 33 (541 CE), 26 (6th cent. CE, half), 9 (6th cent. CE, half), 27 (6th cent. CE, second half), 4-5 (552-575 CE), 7 (557 CE), 8 (564 CE), maybe 2 (565-570 CE), 14-15 (572 CE), 21 (625 CE), discussed by Santoni (2011) and Everett (2013) (from which I take the definition). P.Ital. 7 is referred to Rieti, P.Ital. 10-11 to Syracuse. The structure of the *gesta* is very close to that of Egyptian court proceedings.

⁶ P.Ital. 55; cf. Internullo (2018).

⁷ P.Ital. 49 (probably written in Rome); cf. Cosentino (2014).

⁸ P.Ital. 44; Carte Ravennati 22, both of them written in curial writing.

favour of ecclesiastical authorities, churches and monasteries of Italy, France, Germany and Spain.⁹

The group ends with two papyrus fragments from a Carolingian deed of donation directed to a Roman pope, written in Caroline minuscule and dated to the ninth century CE. The editors believe that this is not original, but a copy of an actual diploma made at the behest of the recipient (in Rome), or a fake created within a papal milieu.¹⁰ However, indirect evidence regarding the use of Carolingian script (cf. *infra*), as well as comparison with P.Marini 70-71 and P.Vat.Mai (*infra*), suggest that further research should be undertaken to determine whether (and in which sense) this document is original.

b. Private documents

The private documents consist mostly of deeds of sale and donation. The deeds of sale (11 in total) date from 539 to 767 CE, mention only Ravenna and its territory as the place of their composition, and essentially concern the land market in which the major social and economic actors of the area were involved: Latins and Goths, soldiers and clergy, bankers and tailors, mostly men but also women.¹¹ There are also 15 donations, 13 written in Ravenna and 2 in Rome, from the beginning of the sixth to the middle of the tenth century CE. They involve actors of different cultures and extractions (including Goths, Greeks, Latins, soldiers, ecclesiastics, later even artisans, *virii honesti* and *consules*) and are addressed to the Church of Ravenna.¹² A further Italian papyrus may fall under one of these two typologies, but its content has not yet been precisely determined.¹³

Among the private papyrus documents there is also the resolution of a lawsuit between a married couple and a *navicularius*, dated to about 542 CE and written in Ravenna, as well as a will, composed on February 25th, 575 CE (opened on April 1st) in the same city on behalf of a Goth, with provisions in favour of the local Church.¹⁴

Three petitions of *emphyteusis* follow. These date to the eighth and ninth centuries CE and are directed to the same Church of Ravenna by prominent local personalities.¹⁵

The last document in this group is a renunciation completed in Ravenna around 858 CE, made by a Lombard named Aatroaldo in favour of a *dux* named Gregory.¹⁶

⁹ ChLA XVI 630 (788 CE), Carte Ravennati 9 (819 CE), Radiciotti 2004 (847 CE), Carte Ravennati 13 (850 CE), Tock (2001), 138 (855 CE), 239 (863 CE), 140 (876 CE), Frühe Papsturkunden 1 (891 CE), P.Marini 20 (892 CE), Noël / Tudela (2007), 3 (893 CE), Papsturkunden 5 (897 CE), 206 (971 CE), 207 (971 CE), 210 (971 CE), 245 (978 CE), 325 (995 CE), 357 (998 CE), 377 (999 CE), 299 (1001 CE), 405 (1002 CE), 416 (1004 CE), 437 (1007 CE), 457 (1011 CE), 507 (1017 CE), Prou (1903) (1052 CE), all written in curial writing.

¹⁰ ChLA² LV 8.

¹¹ P.Ital. 30 (539 CE), 32 (540 CE, an *epistula traditionis* concerning a land sale), 34 (551 CE), 35 (572 CE), 36 (575-591 CE), 37 (591 CE), P.Rain.Cent. 166 (6th-7th cent. CE), P.Ital. 46 (7th cent. CE), 42 (7th cent. CE), 38-41 (616-619 CE), Carte Ravennati 5 (767 CE ca.). All of them are written in new Roman cursive.

¹² P.Ital. 16 (6th cent. CE), 13 (553 CE), Solomons-Tjäder-Worp (1998) (553-564 CE), P.Ital. 18-19 (590-598 CE), 20 (590-602 CE), 28+56 (613-641 CE), 22 (639 CE), 25 (7th cent. CE), 24 (650 CE ca.), 23 (8th cent. CE), Carte Ravennati 6 (767 CE ca.), 10 (823/824 CE), 24 (853-868 CE), 20 (858/859 CE), Kehr 1896 (10th cent. CE, half). P.Ital. 18-19 (addressed to the Church of Ravenna) and Kehr 1896 seem to be written in Rome; P.Ital. 23 is addressed to a monastery of Ravenna, Kehr 1896 to a Roman monastery, P.Ital. 25 (which contains also a grant of *emphyteusis*) to privates. Except for Kehr 1896, written in Roman curial writing, all other documents are written in new Roman cursive.

¹³ P.Ital. 54 (500 CE ca for Tjäder), in new Roman cursive. I am working on a new edition of it.

¹⁴ P.Ital. 43 (542 CE ca), 6 (575 CE), both of them in new Roman cursive.

¹⁵ P.Ital. 45 (8th cent. CE, first half), Carte Ravennati 15 (9th century CE, half), 34 (850-882 CE), in new Roman cursive.

¹⁶ Carte Ravennati 18 (858 CE).

c. Inventories and lists

There are five Latin papyrus documents of this type. They are related to institutions but concern internal practices and do not exhibit the solemn forms of chancery acts. Three date to the sixth century CE: an inventory of documents stored in the archives of the treasurer of the praetorian prefect in Ravenna; another similar in form and content, dated to the sixth century CE as well; and a fragment of a description of several estates –one of which near Padua– that contains a list of dues owed by a set of tenants towards their lord, probably the Church of Ravenna.¹⁷ The fourth might be assigned to the eighth century CE and describes several items plausibly part of a church treasure.¹⁸ The fifth is the so-called *Breviarium Ecclesiae Ravennatis*, a papyrus codex drafted in Ravenna, with reused material, between 966 and 978-983 CE, in which 186 documents are recorded, all of them concerning properties of the archbishop of Ravenna in the Pentapolis.¹⁹

d. Epistles

Three Italian papyri are epistles. The first dates back to the years 445/446 CE and is a fragment of a personal *volumen epistolarum missarum* of Lauricius, once court officer in Ravenna: it has been written in Ravenna and contains the text of three letters concerning estates owned by Lauricius in Sicily, plus a list of money sums that the *conductores* were to give him.²⁰ The second one, recently published, can be dated between the late sixth and the early seventh century CE and contains an epistle sent by a high-ranking ecclesiastic to a lay authority, probably the Lombard queen Teodolinda, about religious issues.²¹ The third one, composed in 788 CE, is a letter sent by the abbot of Saint-Denis to Charlemagne; it was probably written in Spoleto and concerns a mission of the abbot in this Lombard duchy.²²

e. Relic labels

This category includes the small papyrus strips used to identify relics of saints or similar small objects. Divided by Jan-Olof Tjäder into five items, these labels date from the sixth to the eighth century CE and were probably written in Rome, within a papal milieu. Among them is also a papyrus sheet containing a classification of oil lamps that burned on the martyrs' tombs in Rome. It was composed by a priest named Iohannes on behalf of the queen Teodolinda and brought to the queen by him.²³

2. French papyri

The group of Latin papyrus documents written in the French (Frankish) area is rather scant if compared to Italy: in fact, only 18 items are preserved. The types represented do not seem very different from those of Italy as from this region, too, survive public documents (13), some private documents (4), and a relic label.

¹⁷ P.Ital. 47-48 (*post* 510-half of 6th cent. CE), in new Roman cursive; the second, now published in Ghignoli / De Robertis / Zamponi (2018), is written in new Roman cursive; the third, P.Ital. 3, is illustrated in Pasquali (2005) and Wickham (2005) 273-299. It is written in new Roman cursive too.

¹⁸ P.Ital. 53 (8th cent. CE), in new Roman cursive.

¹⁹ *Breviarium Ecclesiae Ravennatis*.

²⁰ P.Ital. 1 (445/446 CE), in new Roman cursive. Cf. Caliri (2012).

²¹ Lettere originali I 1, in new Roman cursive. Cf. Ammannati (2004). The place of writing cannot be determined.

²² ChLA XVI 629 (= Lettere originali II/2 1), in Merovingian script.

²³ P.Ital. 57 (6th cent. CE), 50 (6th-7th cent. CE = *pittacia* and list), 51 (8th cent. CE, beginning), 52 (8th cent. CE, beginning), 58 (8th cent. CE, beginning). They are in total 24 small strips written in new Roman cursive. Cf. Smith (2014).

a. Public documents

All of the 13 public documents are solemn acts issued by the Merovingian kings from the years of Clotaire II (584-629 CE) to the early 670s. They consist of precepts, privileges and judgements written in Merovingian script, and concern both the properties of the powerful monastery of Saint-Denis and other properties related to Saint-Denis or to local élites.²⁴ Where exactly these acts were written remains unclear. Topographical details, where specified, refer to two areas of the Île de France (Clichy and Étrépagny), and yet the strong homogeneity that such documents share, especially from the palaeographical point of view, has led Jean Vezin to think that all of them were at the behest of the recipient, thus the monastery of Saint-Denis.²⁵

b. Private documents

The four preserved private documents are more difficult to date, but are placed between the end of the sixth and the seventh century CE. Two are wills, one written in Arthies in the Île de France, and the other in an unspecified location, but likely in the same area; they represent the last will of the son of Idda and of a woman, Erminetrude, who were both rich local aristocrats. The third document coincides with a fragment of a deed of donation from the years 619/620 CE, probably made in favour of Saint-Denis, while the fourth, written about 691 CE, is an exchange of properties between the abbot of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois (Paris) and that of Tucionevalle (Oise).²⁶

c. Relic labels

In contrast with the many parchment relic labels found in areas politically and culturally related to the Merovingians, only one papyrus label has been found. It comes from a reliquary of the Swiss monastery of Saint-Maurice d'Againe and includes the name of saint Euphemia.²⁷

3. Unpublished papyri

A brief summary of unpublished papyri is here presented.

Several fragments have been extracted from the book binding of an eighth-century manuscript containing the works of Gregory the Great (probably of French origin), 10 of which were written on papyrus. These papyri, dated paleographically to a period running from the fifth to the seventh century CE, include a document in new Roman cursive, two Merovingian documents, perhaps containing a *petitio* and a regal privilege concerning monastic environments, and fragments of a Byzantine protocol. These papyri still remain unpublished in the Capitular Archives and in the Biblioteca de Catalunya (Barcelona).²⁸

From another –or several– book binding(s), other papyrus fragments have been extracted which probably came from the archbishop's archive of Ravenna. They are in Greek and Latin

²⁴ ChLA XIII 550 (584-629 CE), 552 (625 CE), 554 (629-637 CE), 551 (632-633 CE), 556 (639-642 CE), 555 (639-650 CE), 559 (639-650 CE), 558 (654 CE), 557 (657-679 CE), 560 (657-688 CE), 561 (659/660 CE), 553 (660-673 CE), 562 (660-673 CE), all republished and better dated in *Urkunden der Merowinger*. A list in *Atsma / Vezin* (1999).

²⁵ Vezin (2004) 250, followed by Radiciotti (2008).

²⁶ Respectively ChLA XIII 569 (end of 6th or 7th cent. CE), XIV 592 (end of 6th or 7th cent. CE), XIII 549 (619/620 CE), 563 (691 CE ca.), in Merovingian script. The first two are now published in Barbier (2014), 259-348, who considers them as contemporary copies dating to the end of the sixth century CE. On paleographical grounds, Radiciotti (2008) 84-85 ascribes them to the seventh century CE.

²⁷ Schnyder (1966) 123, probably of the seventh century CE.

²⁸ Cf. Tudela (2015) and Ronzani (2013).

and currently stored in Pommersfelden castle. An excellent edition of the Greek texts has been carried out, whereas the Latin set, analyzed only in part, still awaits an overall study and a complete edition. One document fragment remains completely unpublished.²⁹

Among the papyri preserved *ab antiquo* in the Basilica of S. Giovanni Battista in Monza, from which several labels and the epistle mentioned above come, there is another papyrus fragment that cannot be linked to either. Tjäder considered it part of a private document of the seventh century CE, while Giulia Ammannati believes it to be a further letter, written in the same period.³⁰

Among the unpublished texts it is necessary to mention two endorsements, written on the verso of deeds of sale issued in Ravenna in 572 and 591 CE respectively (P.Ital. 35 and 37). Containing topographical data of the good sold in the deed, these endorsements are very similar to the ones written on the verso of coeval parchment documents and Byzantine papyrus documents. They provide precious evidence about archival practices in Ravenna.³¹

Lastly, a papyrus palimpsest stored in the Vatican collection contains a (fake?) Carolingian diploma (ninth century CE) in the *scriptio superior*, and an unpublished text in the *scriptio inferior*.³² The latter probably belongs to a private document of the seventh century CE, in which a priest of an *ecclesia sanctae Mariae* is mentioned.

4. Widening the overview: indirect evidence and the circulation of papyrus in the West

The geographical and chronological distribution of the papyri discussed above is relatively limited. As regards Italy, the papyri date to between the fifth and the sixth century CE and range from what is now Romagna (Ravenna and its territory, 443-end of sixth century CE), to Sicily (Syracuse, 489 CE), passing through Lazio (Rome, 557? CE, 590-598 CE; Rieti, 557 CE). The later papyri from between the seventh and the eleventh century CE elucidate only the city of Ravenna (until the tenth century CE) and Rome (until the mid-eleventh CE), with perhaps a reference to Spoleto (788 CE). As for the Frankish area, if we exclude the label from the Swiss monastery, which may be an imported item, all the papyri lead back to a single area, the Île de France of the late sixth and seventh centuries CE. From these data, one could conclude that from the end of the sixth century CE onward papyrus had a very limited circulation.

Nevertheless, indirect evidence shows that this impression is not fully correct. Historians of the early medieval economy and diplomatists have realized that by enlarging the perspective to later copies of lost papyrus documents, and mentions of papyri in different typologies of sources, the amount of items becomes much greater. Thus, we learn that, for documentary purposes, papyrus was used in Italy not only in Rome and Ravenna, but also in Milan until the end of the eighth century CE at least, in Venice until the tenth, in Pavia perhaps until the later eighth, in Siena and S. Miniato until the eighth, and in Naples, Gaeta and Amalfi until the eleventh, while near Palermo at the end of the tenth century CE the papyrus plant was cultivated *in loco*, although the paper obtained from it was reserved to the sultan's

²⁹ P.Pommersf. G 1-11 and L 1-14. The Greek texts are published in Sirks / Sijpesteijn / Worp (1996). For the Latin set cf. Seider (1981) nos. 36, 48 and 52; Ammirati (2015), *ad indicem*. About the two documentary papyri, one is published by Tjäder as P.Ital. 59; the latter contains on the recto a not yet identified text.

³⁰ P.Ital. I, 64-65; Lettere originali I 1, 4; Ammannati (2004) 1052.

³¹ I am working on the *editio princeps* of these texts.

³² Inv. P.Vat.Lat. 2. The text of the *scriptio superior* is in P.Vat.Mai V, 362-363. Cf. Tjäder in P.Ital I, 65, and Brown (1979) 24. I am working on the edition of the *inferior*.

entourage.³³ In other words, public and private documents were written on papyrus not only in areas of Byzantine tradition and in Islamic Sicily, but until the later eighth century CE also in territories occupied by the Lombards.³⁴

In France the last extant papyrus dates to 691 CE, but a document of 716 CE, although not fully clarified, still witnesses batches of papyrus paper arriving in the monastery of Corbie. Such indirect evidence could be used to reconsider the fact that, while no fragments of the *gesta municipalia* from this area survive in the original, their presence is attested in many cities.³⁵

In Spain the first parchment document series dates to the late seventh century, but a document issued by the bishop of Girona and written on papyrus, now preserved in a later copy,³⁶ dates to 977 CE.

An expanded overview also allows consideration of further areas. In 862 CE, when some German bishops added an attachment to a document issued by Lothar II and Louis the German and addressed to the Roman pope, they apologized for having chosen parchment as writing material, and not papyrus *iuxta morem antiquum*.³⁷ A Latin document published by Marini which is lost today can be linked to the city of Solin in the Balkans. It was identified as a will and dated to between the sixth and seventh century CE.³⁸ Finally, a Greek literary work produced in late seventh-century Palestine, referring to the city of Carthage in 643 CE, informs us about writing practices not only on (wooden) tablets, but also on papyrus.³⁹

Another reason to reconsider the circulation of the papyrus in the West concerns Islamic Egypt. Its conquest by the Arabs in 642 did not, in fact, create a crisis in the production and export of papyrus paper: medieval Arab papyrus is not far in manufacture/form from its late antique predecessor, presenting an argument for continuity rather than rupture. As for export, a papal privilege of 876 CE still bears an Islamic Arab protocol very close to those produced

³³ Milan: P.Marini 54 (789 CE, archiepiscopal document), but cf. also Santifaller (1953), 55, about a private document of 489 CE. Venice: Carbonetti (2011) 46 (828/829 CE, private document; 819 CE, ducal privilege). Pavia: P.Marini 69 (745-752 CE, 5 Lombard diplomes, issued perhaps in Pavia). Siena and S. Miniato: Carbonetti (2011) 34n (650 CE, episcopal *conventio*; 714 CE, judgement of the *maior domus* of Liutprando; 715 CE, judgement of some bishops issued in S. Genesio in Vallauri, near S. Miniato). Napoli, Gaeta and Amalfi: Martin (2000), 9th-11th century CE, private documents. Palermo: Lewis (1974) 18-20 and D'Ottone (2008): the source is an account of the traveler Ibn Hawqal. It is not certain that the *munimina voluminum* mentioned in Santifaller (1953) 54 (and published in CDL IV/1, nos. 8, 10, 13), are referred to papyrus documents. An overview on Byzantine Italy in Carbonetti (2011). For further documents, now lost, see Tjäder (1989) and (1998).

³⁴ On the Lombards cf. the remarks of Ghignoli / Bougard (2011).

³⁵ Urkunden der Merowinger 171, where *carta tomi L* are mentioned. As the document is a confirmation of previous privileges, it is not clear whether the mention of papyri is a simple transcription of the previous privileges, or rather is related to a still existing import. Similar problems for the ninth-century document published in Polyptyque de l'Abbé Irminon, 336. For the *gesta* in Frankish areas cf. Barbier (2014).

³⁶ P.Marini 104, on which Santifaller (1953) 69. The document is preserved in a transcription made in 1252 on behalf of Innocent IV, referred to a *privilegium antiquissimum in papiro conscriptum*. In papal registers *papyrus* means '(Chinese) paper' only from 1289. The bishop of Girona, Miró Bonfill, issued acts characterized by an antique linguistic patina, and had close relationships with papal Curia, where documents were written on papyrus. Cf. Zimmermann (2003) *ad indicem*, s.v. 'Miró Bonfill'.

³⁷ Epistolae Karolini Aevi IV, 212-214; cf. Bresslau (1998) 1102. Compare it with Urkunden der Merowinger 108.

³⁸ P.Marini 78 (6th-7th cent. CE), about which cf. Santifaller (1953) 64; but this papyrus is linked to P.Ital. 26, in Tjäder's opinion written in Ravenna. For a more complete edition see Tjäder (1985). About papyrus in England cf. the hypothesis of Kelly (1990). For Ireland cf. now Read (2011).

³⁹ Doctrina Iacobi I 43; cf. Claude (1985) 90.

in Egypt. It is very likely that the writing material of the other documents shares the same origin.⁴⁰

It is, therefore, difficult to identify a clear break in the circulation and use of papyrus. Rather, it is necessary to illuminate the reasons that led some Western political and professional environments to abandon its use as a writing material, thus interrupting its import into the West. From the evidence considered above, two breaks in usage seem identifiable: 1) the last years of the seventh century into the beginning of the eighth; 2) the tenth and eleventh centuries. Both of these moments can be identified as breaks when considering the dating of the first Western documentary series preserved on parchment.

As to the first break (end of seventh/beginning of eighth century CE), we know that in these years the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik (†705), after a dispute with Justinian II over restrictive measures on the Egyptian economy, prohibited for a certain period the export of papyrus from the region.⁴¹ The embargo cannot be considered as the real cause of the change—the first parchment documents of Europe precede this event for more than fifteen years—but it provides an important clue of some constrictions in the circulation. These constrictions would run well upstream of the decision, made by monarchs and professional élites in several Western cities, to stop once and for all the use of papyrus in favour of parchment, which was much more readily available. The same period saw a constriction of larger economic systems/processes, reducing to a local level some trading systems which ranged much wider earlier, and leading urban societies to live in a deeper relationship with the surrounding natural environment.⁴² Parchment came to represent, for documentary uses, what wood constituted for architectural ones.

The second break (tenth to eleventh century CE) seems related to the widespread adoption and dissemination of Chinese paper, which decreased papyrus production in Egypt for writing purposes and hence its export.⁴³ This shift was certainly at the root of the second phase of the dismissal of papyrus as a writing surface, although complementary internal reasons remain to be explored in each area. To this point, further and more specific research would be welcome.

Across these two breaks, several areas chose to maintain the use of papyrus. Economic and trade relations with the East can certainly explain this persistence, but the main reason for this phenomenon stemmed from a choice.⁴⁴ Rulers and writing experts across Western cities decided to follow an old tradition that would affirm their identity and increase their prestige, particularly at the political level for rulers, and at the juridical and cultural level for writing experts.

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⁴⁰ D’Ottone (2008) for the Arabic papyri. About the privilege cf. *P.Ital.* I, 84 (I am working on a new edition of it together with Arianna D’Ottone).

⁴¹ Lopez (1943) 23-28 and *passim*, Lombard (1948); Heck (2006) 169.

⁴² Wickham (2005).

⁴³ Lopez (1943) 26-27; Santifaller (1953) 118-119; Zerdoun Bat-Yehouda (1999); Grob (2010) 4.

⁴⁴ One should also consider that recent studies are putting into discussion an absolute monopoly of the papyrus on behalf of the Egyptian Muslim rulers, bringing out a rather free market: cf. Malczycki (2011).

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