

Elephantine: Challenges and first results on papyrus research

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The ERC Project “Localizing 4000 Years of Cultural History. Texts and Scripts from Elephantine Island” is based at the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, which houses one of the largest papyrus collections from Elephantine. Today, several thousand papyri and other manuscripts from Elephantine are spread throughout more than 60 institutions in 24 different countries. Their texts are written in various languages and scripts, including hieroglyphs, hieratic, demotic, Aramaic, Greek, Coptic and Arabic. 80% of these manuscripts are unpublished. No other settlement in Egypt has been so well documented over such a long period through texts. Its inhabitants comprise a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious community, which has left behind large amounts of written material, which provides evidence of everyday life from the Old Kingdom up to the era following the Arab conquest. First results of this project will be presented, including access to hidden text due to fading of the ink and revealing texts from folded papyri by virtual unfolding.

The texts are made accessible in an online database, allowing the identification of joins between fragments from different collections. Through international cooperation, the “papyrus puzzle” can thus be solved – with the help of cutting-edge methods from the digital humanities, natural sciences and mathematics.

In cooperation with Tobias Arlt (TU Berlin); Daniel Baum, Hans-Christian Hege, Felix Herter, Norbert Lindow (ZIB); Ingo Manke (HZB); Marc Etienne (Musée du Louvre), Eve Menei (Paris); Tzulia Siopi (ÄMP SPK).