The University of Michigan Papyrus Collection is a premier collection of papyri, recognized worldwide for its breadth and the excellence it supports in research, teaching, and outreach. Founded by the visionary Francis W. Kelsey, the Papyrus Collection has been the training ground for many papyrologists and home to many resident scholars: Arthur Boak, Campbell Bonner, Henry Sanders, John Winter, Orsamus Pearl, Roger Pack, William Worrel, Elinor Husselman, Herbert and Louise Youtie, Ludwig Koenen, and Traianos Gagos, who died much too young on April 24, 2010.

The vision and hard work of Traianos Gagos ensured that this papyrus collection was ready for the twenty-first century. Through his efforts, the documents received the conservation care that they needed, and almost all texts were made available in an online database. His ambition was to share the results of papyrological scholarship with a wide audience of students and the general public.

This exhibit introduces the visitor to the work that goes into making a papyrus text understandable. It also showcases the texts from the U-M Papyrus Collection that are used most in teaching and research—including some recent discoveries.

Case 1 (From Trace to Text) provides a look behind the scenes look at the work of papyrologists: how they conserve scraps of often badly damaged papyri; decipher traces of ink; read and translate the resulting text; edit and interpret its contents; and make this available to both scholars and the general public. Modern technologies, such as digitization, X-ray CT scanning, and multi-spectral imaging, are aiding papyrologists in all of these efforts.

Letter from a soldier to his mother (P.Mich. VIII 491)

Apollinarius to Taesis, his mother and lady, many greetings.

Before all else I pray for your health. I myself am well, and I make obeisance on your behalf before the gods of this place. I wish you to know, mother, that I arrived in Rome in good health on the 25th of the month Pachon and was assigned to Misenum. But I have not yet learned my unit, for I had not gone to Misenum when I wrote you this letter. I beg you then, mother, take care of yourself, and do not worry about me, for I have come into a fine place. Please write to me about your welfare and that of my brothers and all your kinsfolk. And for my part, if I find someone <to carry the letters>, I will write to you; I will not delay to write to you. I salute my brothers often, and Apollinarius and his children, and Karalas and his children. I salute Ptolemaios, and Ptolemais and her children, and Heraklous and her children. I salute all your friends, each by name. I pray for your health.

(On the back) Deliver to Karanis, to Taesis, from Apollinarius, her son, of Misenum.

Case 2 (Highlights from the U-M Papyrus Collection) showcases five texts that are used most frequently in research and teaching. They are:

- The oldest surviving manuscript of the Epistles of St. Paul
- A papyrus containing the first ten definitions of Euclid’s Elements
- A letter, written in Rome, from a newly enlisted soldier to his mother in the Egyptian village of Karanis
- A Latin birth certificate for a Roman citizen on a pair of waxed tablets
- A drawing of an elephant and two figures

In addition this case shows two new discoveries that were recently made, showing that a papyrus collection that is 90 years old still has its surprises.

One of these surprises was a sole of a small shoe, made of papyrus and linen (see image). The shoe itself proved a fake, making a good sell on the antiquities market in the 1920s, but the papyri used to fabricate it may be real ancient papyri. More research is needed.
Birth certificate of Herennia Gemella
(P.Mich. III 166)

In the consulship of Lucius Nonius Torquatus
Asprenas, for the second time, and Marcus An-
nius Libo, on the Ides of April, in the 12th year
of the Emperor Caesar Traianus Hadrianus
Augustus, on the 18th day of the month Pharo-
mouthi, in Alexandria, a copy was made and
verified from a record of declarations of births of
children, which record had been posted in the
Forum of Augustus; in which was written that
which is written below:

In the consulship of Marcus Claudius Squilla
Gallicanus and Titus Atilius Rufus Titianus, in
the twelfth year of the Emperor Caesar Traianus
Hadrianus Augustus, when Titus Flavius Ti-
tianus was prefect of Egypt, acknowledgments of
the births of children were received for record
without judicial cognizance:

There was written on tablet 8, page 2, in larger
letters, 'in the consulship of Lucius Nonius Tor-
quatus Asprenas, for the second time, and Mar-
cus Annius Libo', and after other entries on page
9, under the date of the sixth day before the
Kalends of April:

I, Gaius Herennius Geminianus, whose census
rating is 375 (thousand) sesterces, registered in
the monthly record as a Roman citizen my
daughter, Herennia Gemella, born of Diogenis
Thermoutharion, daughter of Marcus, on the fifth
day before the Ides of March last past.

Papyrology is the field of scholarship that
deciphers and studies ancient texts written
on papyrus, the primary writing material of antiquity. It is a highly specialized field,
requiring intensive and ongoing training.
Students of papyrology must first master
the relevant ancient languages, as well as
the cultural and historical background.
Then, they must develop the unique set
of skills necessary to reading the original
papyri and related documents, and the
discipline necessary to edit and interpret
the texts and make them available to a
wider audience.

This exhibit coincides with a colloquium
(October 29-30, 2010) to honor the many
contributions to the teaching of papyro-
logy by the late Traianos Gagos.

The curator of the exhibit was Arthur
Verhoogt (verhoogt@umich.edu), who
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of this exhibit.

For more information:
www.lib.umich.edu/papyrus-collection

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September 22 – December 22, 2010
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Saturday, 10:00am-6:00pm
Sunday, 1:00-7:00pm
(Closed November 25-26)