The Evolving Shape of the Papyrus Collection in Geneva
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Scope of this paper
The purpose of this paper is to outline the most important links between the Geneva papyrus collection and other collections in the world, in order to help reconstruct, as much as possible, a large puzzle made of scattered or torn documents. We will also focus on a specific document from the Geneva collection, dating from the Late Roman Empire.

The holdings of the papyrus collection at the Geneva library
Until recently, the papyrus collection kept at the Geneva Library (formerly University & City Library) was mostly uncharted territory. We had three volumes of texts in our P.Gen. series, which had been started by Jules Nicole in 1896, and numerous other pieces were published in scattered periodicals since 1888. The setting up of an electronic catalogue, however, has dramatically changed our view of the collection.

Let us start with a brief overview of what the Geneva collection looked like before we had our comprehensive electronic catalogue. Jules Nicole's private collection consisted of approximately seventy papyri, which came for the most part from the village of Philadelphia and dated from the Early Roman Empire. Another group from Philadelphia was purchased in the 1920s, through the so-called "cartel," from the dealer Maurice Nahman in Cairo. While working on such material, we knew we had to keep an open eye for parallels from some specific collections, notably London, Cornell, the Graux papyri in Paris etc.

The Geneva Library had also purchased a large number of papyri from the famous find of 1887 in Dime (Soknopaiou Nesos). When considering those papyri, we are always on the lookout for parallels or missing parts from European collections that bought comparable material: in the first place Berlin, but also the Louvre, London and Vienna.

Geneva keeps also a substantial number of papyri from the Abinnaeus archive, which was for the most part shared between London and Geneva in the nineteenth century. Finally, I should add that Geneva purchased some cartonnage papyri in the 1980s: those texts, originating from the Herakleopolite

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4 Ibid., 32–36.
5 On the Soknopaioi Nesos find, see E.G. Turner, Greek Papyri (Oxford 1980) 22.
6 See Schubert, op.cit. (above, n. 3) 29.
nome in the second century BC, find notable parallels in the collections of Cologne, Heidelberg, Munich and Vienna. More recent work, however, has shown that the Geneva collection hid some documents belonging to other well-known archives, without anyone being aware of it. It was thus discovered that a Geneva papyrus published long ago by Jules Nicole was actually part of the so-called "Sarapion archive," also known as the archive of Eutychides son of Sarapion. P.Gen. II 99 was also identified as another text from the same archive. Yet another document published by Jules Nicole turned out to belong to a large set of papyri relating to legal business conducted by a woman named Drusilla, which are kept mostly in the Berlin collection.

The Geneva collection does not consist of isolated papyri, but is part of an intricate puzzle with pieces scattered among several countries. The late Claude Wehrli had started working on the material from the Late Roman Empire, which had been largely neglected by his predecessors. Death prevented him from achieving his goal, but a new team is now making good progress. One interesting feature is already emerging from this project: while until recently one could have thought that most of the Geneva papyri came from the Arsinoite nome, the later documents seem to show a greater variety of provenance. We find more frequently texts from the Herakleopolite and the Hermopolite nomes, or from Oxyrhynchus, for instance.

Before we turn to a specific example from our Greek texts in order to illustrate just how closely the Geneva papyri are connected to other collections, I should mention the recently established fact that the library holds also Coptic and Arabic papyri. And last – but not least – it was discovered that the Geneva Library has a box of documents from the Genizah, i.e. the old Ben Ezra synagogue in Cairo, dating from a period between the thirteenth and the nineteenth century. These documents were purchased by Jules Nicole in 1896/1897.

Fitting the pieces together: P.Gen. inv. 399

While working presently on the publication of texts from the Late Roman Empire, I have been trying to bear in mind that some collections contain a lot of material sharing a background similar to that of our

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7 See P.Gen. III 118 and 126–136. Some notable parallels in German and Austrian collections are to be found in P.Polit.Iud. and P.Phur.Diosk.
10 This project is funded by the Swiss National Fund for Scientific Research (project n° 109254 & 117654). The team includes Noemi Poget, Sarah Gaffino Meeri and Sophie Gällnö.
11 See e.g. P.Nic. inv. 14 (Herakleopolis, AD 532); P.Gen. inv. 106 (= SB XVI 13037; Hermopolite nome, AD 522 or 523); P.Gen. inv. 110 (Oxyrhynchite nome, AD 336).
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Geneva papyri. This is best exemplified by P.Gen. inv. 399, which contains the lower half of a contract followed by the signature of a notary. An expression such as τὴν δὲ τ[οῦ]τω[ν] ἀπόδωσ[ι]ν σοι ποιῆσαιμα ("I shall pay them back to you") at once suggests a loan contract. The style of the writing indicates a date somewhere in the sixth century, which is confirmed by the fact that we already know the notary’s signature from two other documents registered in Diethart and Worp’s Notarunterschriften:

- **SB I 4753.16** (Arsinoiton Polis, AD 523) = Byz.Not. Ars. 21.5.2 [Paris, Louvre]
- **BGU II 36.21** (= M.Chr. 279; Arsinoiton Polis, AD 553) = Byz.Not. Ars. 21.5.1 [Berlin]

What is perhaps more striking is the fact that the debtor, Aurelius Menas son of Piseph, is known through only another document, **SB VI 9283**, a contract of loan from Arsinoe dating from the year 556. This papyrus is kept in Vienna. It turns out that the unpublished Geneva papyrus is the lower half of the previously published Vienna piece. A full publication of this contract will be produced under the heading **P.Gen. IV 194**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P.Gen. inv. 399 + SB VI 9283</th>
<th>11 x 20 cm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 11, AD 556</td>
<td><strong>Arsinoïton Polis (Ptolemaïs Euergetis)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The portion of the text belonging to **SB VI 9283** is underlined.

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4 χρυσίου νισμιμάτια πέντε τῇ εὐν-
[αλ]γή, χρ[υσίου] ψ[ομιμάτια] ε, τῇ ἐνυλλ(αγή) καὶ στηπί(ου)
φορτίων δέκα τρεῖων καὶ δεσμιδίων(ν)
ἐπτα ἡ[μι]ν, στῇ(πτίου) φορ(τίου) ἵγ (καὶ) δις(ιδίου) ζ (ἡμιν).
12 κεφάλαιου ζ[ου]γω Ἀρκινοειτου.  
περί εἰς ἐκ-  
20 τως ἐς ὑπ[αρ]χοντων μου πάν-
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13 A first transcript of the text of this papyrus was produced by Mr. Alexandre Solcà (student at the University of Geneva). His contribution to helping understand the link between P.Gen. inv. 399 and SB VI 9283 is gratefully acknowledged.
After the consulate of Flavius Basilius, *vir clarissimus*, on Pachon 16 of the 4th indiction, in Arsinoe. Aurelius Menas son of Piseph, together with the guarantor and receiver of the payment of the loan which I am taking, Aurelius Paulus son of Elias, from the village of Dikaiou (Nesos) in the Arsinoite nome, to the venerable Aurelius Menas, son of Thomas of blessed memory, who is presently trading here in the Arsinoite, greetings. I acknowledge that I have received right now from you, from hand to hand and for my personal use, five gold *solidi* at the (official) rate, i.e. 5 *solidi* at the (official) rate, as well as thirteen loads and seven and a half bundles of tow, i.e. 13 loads and 7½ bundles of tow, the capital (being checked) with the scale of the Arsinoite nome. I will repay (the loan) in the month of Thoth of the coming fifth indiction, without delay, drawing from all my property. And when I was asked (to confirm the deal), I gave my consent. (m. 2) I, the aforementioned Aurelius Menas son of Piseph, have received and <owe the> *solidi*, and I will repay them in time and the interest in full. I, Aurelius Neilos son of Pelos, have written on his behalf because he does not know how to write.

(m. 3) Done by me, Phoibammon.

Verso:

Presently Menas son of Piseph, together with his guarantor Aurelius Paulos, from Dikaiou (Nesos), 5 gold *solidi* at the (usual) rate, as well as 13 loads and 7½ bundles of tow, for the venerable Aurelius Menas.