

Heritage Preservation: Digitization and Analysis of Zaki Aly* Papyri Collection at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

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The Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA), as a beacon of knowledge and a custodian of cultural heritage, has consistently demonstrated its commitment to preserving ancient texts and manuscripts. The BA Rare Books and Special Collections Section has undertaken numerous initiatives aimed at the conservation, study, and dissemination of rare and significant documents. Among its most prestigious acquisitions is the Papyri Collection of Prof. Zaki Aly, which represents a unique reservoir of historical knowledge and ancient documentary treasures.

In 2009, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina received an exclusive collection of papyri from the family of Prof. Zaki Aly, delivered in a black Samsonite case. The BA Rare Books and Special Collections Library cataloged the donation under special code 1676. Subsequently, a scientific committee, chaired by Prof. Mostafa El-Abady, established to examine the collection. In 2010, the committee reported that the collection comprised 23 folders, each containing original Greek papyri, photographs, negatives, handwritten descriptions, notes, remarks, and scholarly articles.

It is likely that the collection was being prepared for publication, as evidenced by the numerous notes and remarks accompanying the papyri, along with certain study papers. The committee also recommended that the 1676 collection consolidated with a previous donation from the Zaki Aly family. This earlier collection, received by the BA in 2002, comprises 23 glass panels containing original Greek papyri and fragments. Of these, 20 panels cataloged under donation code 13, while the remaining three panels assigned the codes G.1794, G.1795, and G.1796.

To honor this remarkable collection, the BA has embarked on a comprehensive project involving the digitization, study, and publication of the papyri, ensuring its accessibility to both scholars and the public. By leveraging state-of-the-art digitization technology, this project will convert delicate and aging materials into high-quality digital formats, ensuring their longevity and protection from physical degradation. The digitized content will be organized and cataloged within an accessible online platform, allowing researchers, historians, and the general public to explore and study these invaluable resources from anywhere in the world. The initiative not only safeguards our cultural heritage but also presents access to knowledge and promotes educational opportunities. The project revolves around three primary goals, first is the digitization process of the physical papyri, by transforming them into high-resolution digital formats for long-term preservation. Second is conduction through academic research, including translations and analyses, to uncover valuable historical, literary, and cultural insights. Finally, the initiative aims to make the collection accessible to both the public and scholarly communities through the creation of digital and physical platforms for publication and engagement.