

# Research Portal

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## Application - Insight Development Grants

### Identification

#### Applicant

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**Family Name:** Zelyck

**First Name:** Lorne

**Middle Names:** Robert

**Current Position:** Associate professor

**Primary Affiliation:** University of Alberta

**Department/Division:** St. Joseph's College

#### Application

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**Application Title** The British Papyrus Syndicate

**Language of the Application**  English  French

**Committee** 01 - Philosophy, medieval studies, classics, religious studies

**Joint or special initiative** Select

**Is this a [research-creation project](#)?**  Yes  No

**Does your proposal involve [Indigenous Research](#) as defined by SSHRC?**  Yes  No

#### Scholar Type

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**Are you an [Emerging Scholar](#) or [Established Scholar](#)?** Emerging

Have you received a previous grant (with the exception of a fellowship, knowledge mobilization grant and/or partnership engage grant) as principal investigator or project director, through any of the following organizations: SSHRC, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, or Canadian Institutes of Health Research?

Yes  No

When did or will you obtain your highest degree? For doctoral and master's degrees, this is the thesis defense date for the first highest degree obtained.

2012-08



Have you held a tenured or tenure-track postsecondary appointment for a total of 6 years or more throughout your career?

Yes  No

Confirmed Scholar Type **Emerging**

## Administering Organization

**Organization** University of Alberta

**Department/Division** Faculty of Arts

## Invitations

Role	Last Name	First Name	Organization	Department
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## Activity Details

### Certification Requirements

Does the proposed research involve humans as research participants?

Yes  No

Does the proposed research involve animals?

Yes  No

## Impact Assessment

Will any phase of the proposed research take place outdoors?

Yes  No

## Keywords

List up to 10 keywords that best describe the proposal.

Papyrus, Manuscripts, Provenance, Antiquities Market, Archives, Museum archaeology, Papyrology, Classics, British Museum, British Library

## Disciplines

Indicate and rank up to three disciplines relevant to your proposal, with #1 the most relevant and #3 the least relevant.

1. Classics, Classical & Dead Languages Classical Greek Literature
2. Archival Science Archival Science
3. History Other History

## Areas of Research

Indicate and rank up to three areas of research relevant to your proposal, with #1 the most relevant and #3 the least relevant. If you select "Not Subject to Research Classification" in #1, the system will automatically remove any other areas of research when you save this page.

1. Arts and culture
2. International relations, development and trade
- 3.

## Temporal Periods

Indicate up to two historical periods covered by your proposal.

	From		To	
	Year	Period	Year	Period
1.	<input type="text" value="400"/>	BC	<input type="text" value="400"/>	AD
2.	<input type="text" value="1900"/>	AD	<input type="text" value="1950"/>	AD

## Geographical Regions

Indicate and rank up to three geographical regions relevant to your proposal, with #1 the most relevant and #3 the least relevant.

1. Western Europe
2. North America
3. Northern Africa

## Countries

**Indicate and rank up to five countries relevant to your proposal, with #1 the most relevant and #5 the least relevant.**

1. United Kingdom
2. United States
3. Egypt
- 4.
- 5.

## **Revisions since previous application**

## **Summary of Proposal**

Papyrus manuscripts are priceless, historical artifacts, yet they have been bought and sold as a commodity on the antiquities market. Scholarly effort has traditionally been focused on reconstructing and interpreting the cryptic texts that they transmit, often without asking the preliminary question: How did this physical object come to light, and how did it end up in the collection of a foreign museum?

## **Objective**

Little is known about the acquisition history (i.e. provenance) of famous papyrus collections in North America and Europe. Although they were acquired 'legally' (since foreign powers influenced Egyptian laws), the lack of transparency from these institutions has hindered research in manuscript studies, the history of the antiquities market, and our ability to rejoin separated fragments of the same manuscript. This research project will address these problems by examining the provenance of papyrus manuscripts that were purchased by the British Museum and disseminated to North American and European collections in the early 1900s. The objective will be accomplished through examining the departmental archives of these institutions involved in the British Papyrus Syndicate, which contain detailed letters between curators, scholars, and antiquities dealers, as well as acquisition lists of the manuscripts purchased.

## **Method**

Research for this project will be conducted over two years. The first year (2021-2022) will be dedicated to data collection at the archives of the American institutions; interviewing curators; examining, transcribing, and synthesizing the data; and developing a database of the manuscripts acquired by the Syndicate. One graduate student from the department of History, Classics, and Religious Studies, or Library Sciences, will provide research assistance throughout this project and aid in the analyses of the data. Information about this project, and the initial formation of the Syndicate, will be presented at an international conference and then submitted to a peer-reviewed journal. I will also begin preparing an article about the American acquisition of papyrus manuscripts from the British Museum.

The second year (2022-2023) will focus on data collection at archives in the United Kingdom. This data will be analyzed, and form the basis of an article about the British acquisition of papyrus manuscripts from the Egyptian antiquities market. One graduate student in Classics will be hired as an additional research assistant for the last six months of the project. They will assist in identifying instances where the archival records suggest that a particular antiquities dealer was responsible for the sale of one fragment of a manuscript to the Syndicate, and the other fragment to another institution. These findings will be presented at a colloquium in Germany in 2023, with a corresponding peer-reviewed journal article.

## **Outcome**

This is the first project to examine the provenance of manuscripts obtained by the British Papyrus Syndicate, and therefore fills a significant lacuna in scholarship. The results, which will be disseminated in two conference papers, three peer-reviewed journal articles, and a project website, will be of interest to the fields of History, Classics, Religious Studies, Museum and Archival Science. They will inform public knowledge about the creation of papyrus collections, the antiquities market, and the western appropriation of cultural artifacts. I have previously worked on interpreting manuscripts, but this project will focus on the provenance of collections of manuscripts. It will lay the foundation for a monograph about American and European papyrus collections, and open up possibilities for collaboration with colleagues at Canadian,

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American, and European institutions.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

I am the sole applicant for this project, and therefore responsible for obtaining and researching the archival material. I will undertake an analysis of the data through a close reading of the letters, documents, and reports, and will produce and present two conference papers, as well as complete and submit three peer-reviewed journal publications. Since this will be my primary research focus for the next two years (2021-2023), and I have been awarded a 6-month research sabbatical in 2022, the majority of my research time will be devoted to this project. This includes approximately 10 hours per week during the academic year; 20 hours per week during the spring and summer months; 30 hours per week during the research sabbatical; and 40 hours per week while collecting data at the archives. It will be necessary to travel to the departmental archives of each of the institutions involved in the Syndicate, since this material is not published, nor available through interlibrary loan.

One graduate student (MA) will assist me with this project for three semesters (12 months), and another graduate student (MA) will be hired for the final semester (four months) of the project. It is expected that they will each devote 10 hours per week to this project. The details of the students' roles and contribution will be explained in the Roles and Training of Students section of this application. In what follows, I will briefly explain my leadership role in obtaining, researching, presenting, and publishing the data.

### **Year One:**

In Year One (2021-2022), I will examine archives in the Eastern United States (Cornell University; Princeton University; New York University; Columbia University; Yale University) for one month, and Midwestern United States (University of Michigan; University of Wisconsin) for two weeks (I have already spent one week at the archives and papyrus collection of the University of Michigan [the largest papyrus collection in the United States] while working on a previous project, so I am confident I will be able to gather the data in the allotted time). The initial step will be to locate the 'tariff reports'—a list provided by the British Museum of all the manuscripts that were allocated to each institution in the transaction, along with a brief description of each fragment. Then, the supporting documentation for the acquisition (e.g. letters between the curators, papyrologists, and antiquities dealers) will be photographed, photocopied, or transcribed. I will also interview the current curator of each archive, as well as the director of the papyrus collection.

After the data has been collected from the archives, it will be analyzed and synthesized by myself and a Graduate Research Assistant, in order to construct a historical and material account of the acquisition of papyrus manuscripts by American institutions from the British Museum. This research will form the basis of an article that I will submit to a peer-reviewed journal (e.g. Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists).

I will also present a paper in the Papyrus and Early Christian Backgrounds section at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature – American Academy of Religion in San Antonio, Texas, November 20–23, 2021. This paper explores the initial formation of the British Papyrus Syndicate: F.W. Kelsey from the University of Michigan approached B.P. Grenfell of the University of Oxford to form the Syndicate, but due to Grenfell's debilitating (and ultimately incapacitating) mental illness, H.I. Bell of the British Museum was enlisted to lead the Syndicate. The paper proposal has already been accepted, and a 10,000 word article on the topic (which is mostly finished) will be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal (e.g. Classical Receptions Journal) shortly after the presentation.

### **Year Two:**

In Year Two (2022-2023), I will examine archives in the United Kingdom (British Library; British Museum; National Library of Wales [which contains a personal archive of letters and notebooks from H.I. Bell]) for one month. I have spent over one month at these archives for a previous project, and despite their byzantine system of cataloging archives, and a restriction against photographing or photocopying archival material, I am confident I will complete the data collection within the allotted time. The data will then be examined and synthesized by myself and the Graduate Research Assistant, in order to determine the

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history of the Syndicate, its acquisition of manuscripts through the British Museum, and their engagement with the antiquities market at this time. This will include details describing: a manuscript's date of acquisition by the British Museum; identity of the antiquities dealer; price of the manuscript; contents of the manuscript; and date of distribution to a Syndicate institution.

The research will be presented to a group of European scholars at the 'Beyond Canon' Colloquium at the University of Regensburg, Germany, in June 2023 (I am not requesting funding from the SSHRC Insight Development Grant for this, since I am a Humboldt Foundation Research Fellow and Adjunct Fellow of the 'Beyond Canon' Research Project, and they will cover these expenses). I will then submit this research article to a peer-reviewed journal for publication (e.g. *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*).

This research will result in two papers presented at academic conferences, three articles in peer-reviewed journals, a project website, and provide a strong foundation for a larger research project on the acquisition of manuscripts by North American and European papyrus collections.

## **Roles and Training of Students**

I intend to hire two University of Alberta graduate students to assist me with this research project. They will be drawn from different departments, which reflects the interdisciplinary nature of this project.

It is envisaged that one Graduate Research Assistant will be enrolled in the Master of Library and Information Science program, with an interest in Archival and Museum Science, and ideally some proficiency in reading, transcribing, and translating French and/or German. They will be hired for 3 semesters (12 months). Their initial role will be to conduct a systematic review of all the publications relevant to the topic of papyrus acquisition by the member institutions of the Syndicate, and begin building an annotated bibliography that will be supplemented throughout the grant period. They will also be responsible (with my supervision) for gathering detailed information about the content of the archives at the Syndicate institutions that are available in the online catalogues.

Once I have gathered the data from the American and British institutions, the Graduate Research Assistant will participate (with myself) in the data analysis—deciphering, cataloging, indexing, transcribing, and translating the documents. They will also develop skills in record keeping and organizational management, and will be supported to take a critical reading of the documents, in order to determine the validity and coherency of their claims. I will also support the Graduate Research Assistant in writing an article for an interested audience that may be posted on a popular journalism website (e.g. *The Daily Beast*) and/or the project website, as well as present the findings of this project at a lunch-time talk hosted by the one of the museums or libraries at the University of Alberta.

The second Graduate Research Assistant will be hired for the final semester (4 months) of this project. Ideally, they will be Master's student in the department of History, Classics, and Religious Studies, with an interest in manuscripts, and proficiency in Attic or Koine Greek. They will gain experience in examining digital images of manuscripts, and will be mentored in important aspects of papyrology, particularly paleography and codicology. They will also be trained to navigate the search engines devoted to papyrus manuscripts (e.g. LDAB; Papyri.info), first to discover what other papyrus collections contain manuscripts with the same classical texts as those acquired by the Syndicate (e.g. the gospel of Matthew, or the Iliad), and then identify cases where the archival records suggest most strongly that these individual fragments were once part of the same, larger manuscript.

Each Graduate Research Assistant will be expected to contribute 10 hours per week to this project. Both will also aid in the development of a project website using the Google software that we have access to through our University of Alberta accounts. This website will publicize the most interesting, and pertinent, discoveries of the project, and provide a database of provenances with further information about the manuscripts acquired by the Syndicate. It will also serve as an easily accessible point of reference for the various public and academic audiences that hear about the project.

As an emerging scholar, I have not had the opportunity to supervise PhD students. However, I have supervised one Master's student, taught two graduate courses, and been a thesis examiner for four PhD students. This grant would offer me an excellent opportunity to gain experience in training graduate

students to develop their skills and competence as researchers. They will also be vital to the success of this project, and will ensure the timely and successful accomplishment of the research objectives.

## Knowledge Mobilization Plan

The knowledge outcomes of this research project will be mobilized in three fields: the academy; the classroom; and the public sector.

Within the academy, this research will be primarily disseminated through two presentations at international conferences in the United States and Germany, and three top-rank journals in the fields of Classics and Papyrology. They will address the formation of the Syndicate, the involvement of the American institutions, and the Syndicate's influence on the antiquities market.

Within the classroom, this research will inform my teaching in Religious and Biblical Studies. Each of the classes I teach is focused on texts, and it is valuable for students to not only be informed about the text and its interpretations, but also the material history of how this text survived and is accessible today. This applies to introductory courses on the Bible, up to graduate-level courses on early Christian apocryphal texts, where sometimes the text is only extant in one manuscript that is housed in a North American or European papyrus collection. I also suspect that this project will allow me the opportunity to deliver guest-lectures in the School of Information and Library Studies at the University of Alberta.

Within the public sector, this research will appear on the project's website, but I also intend to publicize it through open-lectures at the University of Alberta and local media outlets in Edmonton, as I have done with previous publications. I will also support the Graduate Research Assistants to contribute to an article about the findings of the project for a popular journalistic website, and present at lunch-time talks in the museums or libraries at the University of Alberta.

## Expected Outcomes

### Scholarly Benefits

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**Indicate up to three scholarly benefits of the proposed project. (required)**

1. Knowledge creation/intellectual outcomes
2. Enhanced research methods
3. Enhanced research collaboration

### Summary of Expected Scholarly Outcomes

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The foremost scholarly outcomes of the research project are threefold:

1. It will provide a historical examination of the British Papyrus Syndicate and the Egyptian antiquities market in the early 1900s. This includes a historical account of the individuals involved, touching on the personal, academic, economic, and political dynamics that made this arrangement so successful, until it ultimately disintegrated. This study will be the first to offer such an analysis.
2. It will emphasize the importance of knowing the provenance of a particular manuscript and an entire papyrus collection, and elucidate how museum archaeology provides an indispensable research method for attaining this knowledge.
3. It will provide valuable data for curators, archivists, and scholars attempting to rejoin sister-manuscripts dispersed amongst various papyrus collections, which will require international collaboration.

## Societal Benefits

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**Indicate up to three societal benefits of the proposed project.**

1. Critical knowledge
2. Enriched public discourse
3. Enhanced professional practice

## Summary of Expected Societal Outcomes

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Only a relatively few number of Canadians have examined an ancient papyrus manuscript under a microscope, but most Canadians have been to a museum.

This research project will raise critical questions about the legal, cultural, and ethical implications of the purchase of ancient artifacts by public institutions from the antiquities market.

It will also tangentially critique historic institutions that have previously, and currently, lacked transparency during investigations into the provenance of their artifacts. This is a form of censorship, which prevents access to information that may inform public decisions and discourse.

I would hope that the results of this research would enhance the practice of curators, scholars, politicians, and policy makers, who, perhaps for too long, have prioritized the value and authenticity of an artifact, over considerations of its provenance.

## Audiences

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**Indicate up to five potential target audiences for the proposed project.**

1. Academic sector/peers
2. Scholarly associations
3. Para-public institutions (e.g., museums, libraries)
4. Postsecondary institutions
5. General public

## Summary of Benefits to Potential Target Audiences

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Within the academic sector, this research will benefit future inquiries into the history of papyrus collections, the antiquities market, and the division of manuscripts amongst different institutions.

It will also benefit scholarly associations by showing that their policies against the presentation and publication of unprovenanced artifacts should also include a discussion about the 'legally' acquired manuscripts in famous collections that do not possess a detailed provenance history.

Institutions that possess papyrus collections will also benefit from seeing how departmental archives can solve many mysteries surrounding the history of their collections, and hopefully it would compel curators to engage in this research themselves.

The general public would benefit from an increased awareness of the legal and ethical issues surrounding museums and their displays of cultural artifacts.

## Funds Requested from SSHRC

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### Year 1

#### Personnel costs

Student salaries and benefits/Stipends	Number	Amount	Justification
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<b>Undergraduate</b>			
<b>Masters</b>	1	\$14,541.00	Cost of hiring one MA student at University of Alberta institutional rates. Costs are for two (four month) semesters at 10 hours/week plus benefits (=\$1817.63/month). This student will compose literature reviews and annotated bibliographies about the Syndicate institutions and the antiquities market, but their primary focus will be deciphering, cataloging, indexing, transcribing, and translating the archival material.
<b>Doctoral</b>			
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>\$14,541.00</b>	
<b>Non student salaries</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Postdoctoral</b>			
<b>Professional/Technical Services</b>			
<b>Other</b>			
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>\$0.00</b>	
<b>Travel and Subsistence Costs for Research</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Applicant/Team Member(s)</b>	1	\$9,600.00	Costs for travel to and accommodation in Eastern US for 30 days and Midwest US for 15 days, for the purpose of archival research, data collection, and interviewing curators. Costs include: 1. Round-trip flight from YEG-EWR (\$500) and YEG-DTW (\$600); 2. 45 nights' accommodation at modest hotels near each institution (\$4500); 3. Trains between Eastern cities (\$350); 4. Bus/taxi/car rental from hotel to institution (\$900); 5. 45 days per diem at \$50/day (\$2750).
<b>Student(s)</b>			
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>\$9,600.00</b>	
<b>Travel and Subsistence Costs for Dissemination</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Applicant/Team Member(s)</b>	1	\$1,550.00	Costs for the dissemination of research results about the origins of the Syndicate at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature – American Academy of Religion, November 20-23, 2021 in San Antonio, Texas. This includes: 1. Roundtrip airfare YEG-SAT (\$500); 2. Bus/taxi to hotel (\$50); 3. Four nights' accommodation at a modest hotel near conference center (\$400); 4. 5 days per diem at \$50/day (\$250); 5. Conference

registration (\$200); 6. Annual Society membership fee (\$150).

<b>Student(s)</b>		
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$1,550.00</b>	
<b>Other Expenses</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Supplies</b>		
<b>Non-disposable equipment</b>		
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	
<b>Grand total year 1</b>	<b>\$25,691.00</b>	

**Year 2**

<b>Personnel costs</b>			
<b>Student salaries and benefits/Stipends</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Undergraduate</b>			
<b>Masters</b>	2	\$15,050.00	Cost of hiring two MA students at University of Alberta institutional rates. Each GRA will be hired for one (four month) semester at 10 hours/week plus benefits. The same GRA from year 1 will continue working with the archival material. The second GRA will be responsible for researching search engines devoted to papyrus manuscripts, discovering other papyrus collections with the same classical texts, identifying potential sister-manuscripts, and developing a database for the project website.
<b>Doctoral</b>			
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>\$15,050.00</b>	
<b>Non student salaries</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Postdoctoral</b>			
<b>Professional/Technical Services</b>			
<b>Other</b>			
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>\$0.00</b>	
<b>Travel and Subsistence Costs</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>

<b>for Research</b>			
<b>Applicant/Team Member(s)</b>	1	\$7,930.00	Costs for travel to and accommodation in the UK for 30 days, for the purpose of archival research and data collection. Costs include: 1. Round-trip flight from YEG-LHR (\$1200); 2. 30 nights' accommodation at modest hotels near each institution (\$4500); 3. Roundtrip train from London to Aberystwyth (\$150); Tube pass (\$250); 4. 30 days per diem at \$66/day (\$1980).
<b>Student(s)</b>			
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>\$7,930.00</b>	
<b>Travel and Subsistence Costs for Dissemination</b>			
<b>Applicant/Team Member(s)</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Student(s)</b>			
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>\$0.00</b>	
<b>Other Expenses</b>		<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Supplies</b>			
<b>Non-disposable equipment</b>			
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>\$0.00</b>	
<b>Grand total year 2</b>		<b>\$22,980.00</b>	
<b>Grand total</b>		<b>\$48,671.00</b>	

### Funds from Other Sources

You must include all contributors (e.g., individuals, not-for-profit organizations, philanthropic foundations, private sector organizations) that are providing contributions for the project. Indicate whether or not these contributions have been confirmed.

If a funding source is not listed, you must:

- (a) type the source name in Funding Source
- (b) identify the contribution type
- (c) enter an amount.

If you have received, from a single funding source, more than one contribution of the same type (e.g., cash) and confirmation status, you must combine these into one entry (e.g., two \$20,000 confirmed cash contributions from a university become one \$40,000 confirmed cash contribution).

For examples of Canadian and international sources of eligible cash and/or in-kind support, see [SSHRC's](#)

[Guidelines for Cash and In-Kind Contributions.](#)

**Note:** All contributions must be indicated in Canadian currency.

Funding Source	Contribution Type	Confirmed	Year 1	Year 2	Total
					\$0.00
Details					
					\$0.00
Details					
					\$0.00
Details					
Grand total					\$0.00

**Reviewer Exclusion**

**Excluded Reviewers**

Exclusion Type	Family Name / Collaboration	First Name	Initials	Organization	Department	Email
No records to display.						

## The British Papyrus Syndicate

The acquisition history (i.e. provenance) of most ancient manuscripts in papyrus collections is virtually unknown, since they were not discovered during formal archaeological excavations, but rather bought on the antiquities market after informal, undocumented excavations. Famous collections that acquired and published these manuscripts in the early 1900s did not, nor were they expected to, reveal their provenance. Due to legal, ethical, and scholarly advancements, the practice of publishing unprovenanced papyri is no longer acceptable. When a papyrus fragment is published for the first time, scholars must now ask: how and when did this manuscript arrive in the papyrus collection; who are the antiquities dealers involved in the sale of this manuscript; where did it originally come from; was it legally exported out of Egypt, Israel, Syria, etc. before 1970 when prohibition legislation was enacted (Mizzi and Magness 2019)? Since the initial publications from these famous collections did not reveal the provenance of their manuscripts, this desideratum is a great hindrance (and embarrassment) to scholars who continue to publish these manuscripts, studies on the history of the antiquities market, and analyses of how fragments from the same papyrus manuscript (i.e. sister-manuscripts) arrived in multiple collections on different continents. This research project will attempt to address these problems by exploring the acquisition history of papyrus manuscripts that were purchased by the British Museum and disseminated to North American and European collections in the early 1900s.

### Relevance

Three examples of recent papyrus acquisitions and publications reveal the importance of knowing the provenance of an entire papyrus collection or even a single manuscript. It also suggests that scholars need to investigate the provenance of every manuscript – including those from famous collections that have been the object of research for over a century – with much more effort and transparency.

The Green Collection began acquiring thousands of papyri in in the early 2000s, which were subsequently published in major journals and monograph series, and eventually housed in the Museum of the Bible (Washington, D.C.). Scholars showed that the Green Collection was unable to adequately prove the provenance of these manuscripts, and as a result, 5000 papyrus fragments from the collection are now being repatriated to Egypt (Mazza 2015; Crow 2020).

The so-called ‘Gospel of Jesus’ Wife’ fragment was given to the Harvard Divinity School by an anonymous donor in 2012, and published in the *Harvard Theological Review* in 2014 (King 2014). Multiple scholars, and eventually a journalist, proved that the manuscript and the documentation of its history of acquisition were forgeries (Bernhard 2015; Sabar 2020). The fragment is now in the custody of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

In 2014, an Oxford professor published two new Sappho fragments, and the story of their provenance changed, from ownership by an anonymous private collector in London, to their discovery in an ancient mummy mask, to their purchase at a Christie’s auction. The professor is suspected of having stolen these fragments from the papyrus collection of the Egyptian Exploration Society in Oxford, and he has since been suspended from his duties at Oxford, and charged with theft and fraud (Obbink 2016; Dodd 2020).

## Context

While much of the current scholarly attention is directed towards the legality and authenticity of ‘new’ or ‘recently discovered’ fragments, little attention has been focused on the provenance of famous manuscript collections that were established in the early 1900s. The institutional accession records for these collections are often incomplete or errant. Bedouin diggers were hesitant to reveal the precise location of their papyrus hoard to urban antiquities dealers; urban antiquities dealers would concoct tales about their archaeological extraction for museums; museums would not disclose the identity of the private dealers in order to prevent competition for these valuable treasures. Each of these maneuvers served the financial interests, and bolstered the reputations, of the parties involved, but it also set a precedent that prioritized the value and authenticity of an artifact, and disregarded its historical and cultural provenance.

Even if these manuscript collections were obtained ‘legally’ according to colonial-influenced antiquities laws of the early 1900s, a thorough investigation of their acquisition history would provide a historical record of the individuals involved, elucidate the antiquities market at this time, and allow scholars to try to rejoin manuscript hoards that were separated by antiquities dealers or the original discoverers (Reid 2015). Recent publications have attempted to retrace of the acquisition history of individual papyrus collections in North America and Europe (Nongbri 2018; Verhoogt 2017; Hagen & Ryholt 2016; Talalay & Cool Root, 2015; Keenan 2009; Bowman 2007), with varying success.

## Objective

This research project will address the issue of unprovenanced manuscripts by examining a collective of North American and European institutions involved in the papyrus trade of the early 1900s – the British Papyrus Syndicate.

Starting in the 1920s, the British Museum operated a syndicate that procured ancient papyrus manuscripts from Egypt for nascent European (University of Oslo; University of Geneva) and American collections (University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, Cornell University, Princeton, University of New York, Columbia University, and Yale). The institutions pooled their resources, and each winter, the British Museum would send an employee to Egypt to purchase manuscripts. The manuscripts were then exported back to the British Museum, where each fragment was assessed for its value. The division amongst the institutions was dependent on their financial contribution and the academic interests of their employees, whether they desired Greek, Coptic, Latin, literary or documentary papyri. In return for the services rendered, the British Museum was permitted to select the papyri they desired first (Zelyck 2019).

The formation of the Syndicate had two main purposes. Firstly, it attempted to keep the prices asked by the Egyptian dealers to a reasonable level by buying in bulk, and it discouraged the contributing institutions from competing against one another. Secondly, it attempted to prevent large, valuable collections of papyri from being divided up by the dealers and sold piecemeal (for greater financial gain) to various institutions, or worse yet, private collectors and tourists. The Syndicate was relatively successful in obtaining a large amount of manuscripts at reasonable prices, but it was unable to prevent dealers from dividing papyrus hoards or individual manuscripts, and selling them to other institutions. For example, there are numerous fragments of the same manuscript (sister-manuscripts) in Syndicate papyrus collections, and non-Syndicate collections in Belgium, Italy, and Germany (Zelyck 2019).

In order to better understand the history, function, and results of the Syndicate, the objective of this project is threefold:

- Firstly, it will provide a historical record of the curators and antiquities dealers that were involved in the purchase and sale of papyrus manuscripts by the British Papyrus Syndicate. It will also provide a historical account of the creation of the Syndicate, which touches on the personal, academic, economic, and political dynamics of the institutions involved.
- Secondly, it will elucidate the antiquities market of the early 1900s, and explore the practices of particular antiquities dealers: who they obtained their manuscripts from; how they marketed and sold these manuscripts, in spite of legal restrictions; to whom they sold these manuscripts, besides the Syndicate.
- Thirdly, it will provide valuable data for curators, archivists, and scholars attempting to rejoin sister-manuscripts dispersed amongst various papyrus collections.

## **Archival Sources**

The initial publication of manuscripts obtained by the Syndicate indicated virtually nothing about their provenance. The British Museum simply claimed that they were legally exported from Egypt by an antiquities dealer; the other Syndicate members indicated that they obtained their manuscripts from the British Museum. There was good cause for this policy of silence. Immediately prior to the formation of the Syndicate, E.A. Wallis Budge (Keeper of the Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities at the British Museum [1892–1924]) had published his autobiography, where he proudly boasted of obtaining Egyptian manuscripts and antiquities for the British Museum by means of deception, bribery, and blatant theft (Budge 1920). Despite the British Museum’s initial reticence, essential details about the Syndicate can be found buried in departmental archives. Each of the institutions involved in the Syndicate possess archives of letters between curators, papyrologists, and antiquities dealers, as well as acquisition lists of papyri from Egypt, along with other records and documentation that provide valuable information about the provenance of their papyrus manuscripts. These archives are not published, but they are accessible to researchers, and will be the primary sources used in this investigation.

## **Method**

The theoretical framework this research will use coincides with the methods of inquiry used in history and archival science – a close reading of primary sources in archives. This particular method aligns with the specific aims of ‘museum archaeology’ – a thorough examination of the acquisition history of a manuscript (or manuscripts), elucidating details of how, when, and through whom it entered a manuscript collection, in order to reconstruct the contents of an ancient papyrus archive in its archaeological context or the content of a dealer’s collection (Clackson 2004). Since none of the archival material at these institutions is digitized, it will have to be physically examined, in order to transcribe, analyze, and synthesize their contents.

The support of two Graduate Research Assistants from the University of Alberta will ensure the objectives of this project are achieved, and contribute to their development as researchers in their particular fields of study. Graduate students from different departments, such

as History, Classics, and Religious Studies, Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, and Library Sciences, would be well suited for this project, and would develop valuable research skills related to literary analysis, methodology, archival science, and museum studies – a program not offered at the University of Alberta.

## Expertise

This method has already proved fruitful in my research. I previously used the principles of museum archaeology to examine the archives of papyrus collections in North America and Europe, and discovered the provenance of one particular manuscript (as well as other manuscripts that were acquired in the same sale), which was unknown to the curators of the papyrus collections involved (Zelyck 2019).

In 1935, H.I. Bell and T.C. Skeat of the British Museum published Egerton Papyrus 2, a fragment of an apocryphal gospel from the second or third century CE. Regarding its provenance, they only revealed that the manuscript had come from “a collection of papyri purchased last summer from a dealer” (Bell & Skeat 1935, v). In 1986, M. Gronewald published Papyrus Köln VI 255, a fragment (sister-manuscript) of Egerton Papyrus 2 that was in the University of Cologne’s papyrus collection, but he did not provide any details about its provenance (Gronewald 1986). Through an examination of the departmental archives, I discovered that the British Museum purchased the Egerton fragment for itself and other manuscripts for the University of Michigan from M. Nahman, an Egyptian antiquities dealer who had travelled to London. The Cologne fragment was purchased in 1956 by R. Merkelbach at Nahman’s antiquities emporium in Cairo.

In my recent commentary on the Egerton Gospel, I was able to trace the provenance of three collections of papyri at three different institutions back to one antiquities dealer. For the first time, I was able to publish a record of the curators and antiquities dealer that were involved in the purchase and sale of these papyrus manuscripts, as well as describe one instance that illuminates the history of the Egyptian antiquities market in the early 1900s, and elucidate the practices of the British Papyrus Syndicate and M. Nahman. I am encouraged to see that one recent reviewer was appreciative of this archival research, and the answers it provided.<sup>1</sup>

Although this project will employ the same method of museum archaeology, and examine a few of the same manuscripts acquired by the British Museum, it is much more expansive and will incorporate an investigation into the distribution of manuscripts to the Syndicate members.

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<sup>1</sup> “A particular important contribution of this volume is the account of the initial acquisition and publication of the Egerton Gospel fragments (chapter ii). Through careful archival research, Zelyck has provided the fullest and most accurate available account of the means by which these fragments entered the public domain. The transcriptions of a number of letters pertinent to the purchase of the manuscript fragments are now available for the first time. These reveal the laborious negotiations, the concern over the export of antiquities from Egypt and details of purchase price. Zelyck also provides important insights into how and when the acquisition of P.Köln VI 255 might have taken place (pp. 28-29)” (P. Foster, “Review of L.R. Zelyck, *The Egerton Gospel*,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 71 [2020]: 604).



## **Data Management**

The data management plan for this research project is as follows.

- Archival material housed at the papyrus collections of the Syndicate members will be photographed (or photocopied when possible), transcribed and translated, in order to determine what hoards of manuscripts were obtained through the Syndicate.
- Communication between the members of the Syndicate, and communications with the dealers, will be transcribed. This will provide source material for the history of the Syndicate, and work towards explaining how they operated.
- A database will be developed which includes information about the provenance of each manuscript that details: the date of acquisition by the British Museum; identity of the antiquities dealer; price of the manuscript; contents of the manuscript; date of distribution to the contributing institution; and a list of publications about this manuscript.
- This database will be shared on an open-access website devoted to the British Papyrus Syndicate, along with other significant findings.

## **Outcomes**

This is the first project to examine the provenance of manuscripts obtained by the British Papyrus Syndicate, and therefore fills a significant lacuna in scholarship. Besides the project website, this research will be disseminated at two academic conference and in three peer-reviewed journal articles. In 2021, I will present a paper about the initial formation of Syndicate at a conference in the United States, and in 2023 I will present a paper at a colloquium in Germany that will summarize the project, but focus on the history of the Syndicate and its influence on the antiquities trade. The three journal articles that will result from this project will address historical issues related to: 1) the formation of the Syndicate; 2) the involvement of American institutions in the Syndicate; and 3) the Syndicate's influence on the antiquities market. My expectation is that these articles will lay the foundation for a monograph about the history of American and European papyrus collections.

## **Constituents**

The results of this project would be of interest to academics working in the fields of History, Classics, Religious Studies, Papyrology, Museum and Archival Science. More broadly, this research would inform public knowledge about the antiquities market by providing a historical antecedent to the political, economic, legal, and ethical issues that have recently come to light. It would provide a national awareness of how public institutions funded their collections, a cultural awareness of European imperialism in Egypt and the appropriation of their cultural treasures, and an institutional reflection by the leaders of these collections that raises concerns about their previous methods for acquiring artifacts.

The British Papyrus Syndicate

<b>Date</b>	<b>Stage of Research</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Principal</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>YEAR ONE</b>				
June–July 2021	Data Collection	Explore online archive catalogues; bibliography development; website	Applicant	Edmonton, AB
July–August 2021	Data Collection	Archival research, consultation, and interviews at Cornell; Princeton; NYU; Columbia; Yale	Applicant	New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, USA
September–December 2021	Data Analysis; Data Collection	Examination and transcription of archival material; literature review	Applicant; Research Assistant	Edmonton, AB
November 2021	Research Dissemination	Presentation on the formation of the Syndicate at Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature – American Academy of Religion	Applicant	Texas, USA
January–February 2022	Data Collection	Archival research, consultation, and interviews at University of Michigan; University of Wisconsin	Applicant	Michigan, Wisconsin, USA
January–April 2022	Data Analysis	Examination and transcription of archival material	Applicant; Research Assistant	Edmonton, AB
May–June 2022	Research Dissemination	Preparation of article on the manuscripts acquired by the Syndicate	Applicant	Edmonton, AB
<b>YEAR TWO</b>				
July–August 2022	Data Collection	Archival research, consultation, and interviews at British Library; British Museum; National Library of Wales	Applicant	England, Wales, UK
September–December 2022	Data Analysis	Examination and transcription of archival material	Applicant; Research Assistant	Edmonton, AB
January–June 2023	Research Dissemination	Preparation of article on the history of the Syndicate and antiquities market	Applicant	Edmonton, AB
January–April 2023	Data Analysis; Research Dissemination	Comparison of Syndicate manuscripts with other collections; website and database development; online collaboration	Applicant; Research Assistant	Edmonton, AB
June 2023	Research Dissemination	Presentation on the history of the Syndicate and antiquities market at ‘Beyond Canon’ Colloquium, University of Regensburg	Applicant	Regensburg, Germany

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