

In a 2006 there went on show in Turin a fragmentary papyrus book-roll, nearly thirteen inches tall and over eight feet long, datable from its script to the latter first century BC. On the front it carries a Greek text: a poem which dilates on the intellectual status of geography (two columns); then a wide space which contains the remains of a detailed map (without place-names); then the introduction to a geography of Spain (two columns), of which part coincides with a passage quoted elsewhere as from Book II of the long-lost *Geographical Descriptions* by Artemidorus of Ephesus (c100 BC). The wide left-hand margin, and a long blank at the end, are occupied by some twenty drawings – heads, feet, hands. The back (which in a normal book-roll remains blank) shows some forty small drawings of birds, fish and animals, real and fabulous, with names attached. Photographs can be seen in the sumptuous catalogue, *Le vie del papiro di Artemidoro* (noticed with the exhibition in the TLS of March 8, 2006). The map is by far the earliest Greek map to survive; the drawings, if they are artists' drawings, represent a great rarity in the history of Greek art. All in all, a sensational find.

The find began, according to the catalogue, with a mummy-case. This came into private hands in Egypt in the first part of the twentieth century (finders and origin unknown) and then passed to a European collector after the Second World War. Such cases are moulded from cartonnage, a kind of paper mache in which used papyrus, torn or cut up, were glued together layer upon layer. You can reverse the process ("dismounting") by soaking the cartonnage in an enzyme solution, which dissolves the glue and releases the constituent papyrus. The European collector duly dismounted the case to produce 200 fragments: fifty of these have been pieced together to make the Artemidorus roll, the rest yield twenty-five documents (unpublished) which date from the second half of the first century AD.

The roll goes on exhibition again in Berlin on March 12. The scholarly first edition, by C. Gallazzi (Milan), B. Kramer (Trier), S. Settis (Pisa) and others, is bound with LED Milan, has not yet appeared. But to do have, by way of a pre-emptive strike, a substantial book, *Il papiro di Artemidoro*, by the eminent classical scholar and controversialist Luciano Canfora and his colleagues. Professor Canfora went to see the papyrus in Turin, and concluded that it was a forgery. This has maintained in journals and newspapers in Italy and Germany. *Il papiro di Artemidoro* (Rome/Bari: Editori Laterza) releases the arguments in full, for more than 500 pages; a shorter work, *The True History of the So-Called Artemidorus Papyrus*, offers sections of the longer book, principally those concerned with the history and credentials of the geographical text, in English translation (Bari: Edizioni di Pagina).

The main charges may be summarized as follows (though summary does not do justice to the dense and savoury detail): "Artemidorus" cannot be the real Artemidorus: the style is clumsy; the language includes words and expressions attested only much later; the grandiose proem ill suits the beginning of a Book II; the description of Spain clashes with other ancient accounts, and so does the map (which in any case shows the wrong part of

Spain). As for the quotation, which appears in a text of the tenth century AD, it can be traced back only to an epitome of the fifth century AD, and its wording in the papyrus reflects the work of modern editors. But a papyrus that combines an ostensibly early script with a demonstrably later content must be a fake. If the text, then also the drawings: thus the sketch of a limp hand recalls Raphael's "La Fornarina"; the bestiary parallel drawings of constellations in early modern star maps.

But who would fake an unlearned geographer alongside implausible graphics? Canfora has a name, a name indeed that deserves a whole page in the golden book of chutzpah. Constantine "the Greek" Simonides, Dr. Ph. (Moscow), was a self-made mystery. He was born on the small Greek island of Hydra in 1820 (or was it 1824?); his died (in Egypt, of leprosy) was rumoured in 1867, and reported by *The Times* in 1890 ("in a little town in Albania"). He sold a mix of real manuscripts and his own concoctions. Thus on his visit to the Bodleian in 1853, he showed some fragments to the sub-librarian, H. O. Coxe, who "assented to their belonging to the twelfth century. And these, Mr. Coxe, belong to the tenth or eleventh century." "Yes, probably." And now, Mr. Coxe, let me show you a very ancient and valuable MS. I have for you a sale, and which ought to be in your Library. To what century do you consider this belongs?" "This, Mr. Simonides, I have no doubt," said Mr. Coxe, "belongs to the nineteenth century." The Greek and his MS. disappeared." Others were more gullible. The great bibliophile Sir Thomas Phillips bought, among other things, a copy of Hesiod so "ancient" that it was written as the ox turns, that is zigzag like the track of a plough; and part from the *Theogony*, marked up with "ancient musical notes"; it contained three unknown poems "in ancient stereographic characters, a knowledge of the meaning of which is confined exclusively to Simonides". The Berlin Academy welcomed a palimpsest which carried an unknown history of the kings of Egypt, by Uranus of Alexandria; an edition of this by the great Dindorf, published by the Clarendon Press, had to be destroyed when the fraud came quickly to light. As times changed, Simonides adapted, and parchments from a mysterious cellar on Mount Athos gave way to papyrus from mysterious tombs in Egypt. In 1860 he gained access to the Egyptological collection of Joseph Mayer in Liverpool. Among the papyri there he "discovered" an "early" and "more correct" copy of Hanno's *Voyage Round Africa*; and a text of St. Matthew's Gospel which declared itself to have been copied by Nicholas the Deacon – to the dictation of the Apostle himself, in the fifteenth year after the Ascension!

The condemnation of experts, and a formal trial for fraud, did not deter him. Critics were answered in *A Biographical Memoir of*

Has Simonides struck again?

PETER PARSONS

Constantine Simonides, Dr. Ph., of Stageria, with a Brief Defence of the Authenticity of his Manuscripts (1859). The author gives his name as Charles Stewart; significant initials. Then in 1861 the script turned the tables. The oldest and grandest manuscript of the Bible, the Codex Sinaiticus, had recently been removed from its monastery and presented to the Tsar of Russia. Simonides now stated in print that he had written it himself, during his residence on Mount Athos. If he could no longer claim the forged as genuine, he could at least claim the genuine as forged.



The Codex Sinaiticus

To this Simonides, an audacious and experienced forger with a lifelong interest in geographical texts, Canfora ascribes "Artemidorus". As with paintings, so with manuscripts – a putative fake faces four lines of questioning: provenance, material, technique and content. With "Artemidorus", provenance does not help. The history of the cartonnage, a matter so far of report rather than documentation, leaves space for skulduggery; by the same token, we need to ask why and where a Simonidean artefact would have lain dormant for a century before emerging as "Artemidorus". Of the materials, the papyrus can easily be tested; Simonides normally used ancient blanks (not that it is so easy to find an eight-foot length), or ancient texts with the original writing washed off, but we could at least assure ourselves that the papyrus is older than the script it carries. The ink then in use would normally be carbon-based, rather than iron gall; it should be relatively simple to analyse its composition, though more complicated to date its components.

The script must carry conviction. Canfora rightly notes that Simonides could model

himself on real papyri, like the two rolls of Hydrades in the British Museum (published with facsimiles in 1853 and 1858). However, the book's detailed comments on the palaeography show more confidence than expertise. To my eye the script of "Artemidorus" looks unexceptionable, both in quality of line and in delicacy of execution, and much more accomplished than any sample of Simonides that I have yet seen. Of course, this would not exclude a more proficient forger, if one could be identified.

As to the content, we depend for the moment on Canfora's "interim text" included in *The True History*, a home-made construct based chiefly on images (rather than on microscopic examination of the original), the detail not to be relied on. When it comes to the language and the quotation, papyrologists may make less austere judgements than philologists, since they are used to trawling not just the big fish of Greek literature but the pond-life as well – excerpts and exercises, drafts and margins, alongside the textbooks and day-to-day documents which together illustrate the vagaries of transmission among the varieties of Greek as it develops outside classical and classicizing literature. Technical prose certainly had its own canons of style or non-style which we know imperfectly because most of it is lost. Even so, the short-winded flummery of the "Artemidorus" proem ("If Geography has no voice, she speaks with her own doctrines") requires some special pleading; but does it show the ineptitude of a modern forger, or of an ancient author, or indeed of an ancient student put on to compose an Encomium of Geography?

The catalogue suggested that the text and the sets of drawings represent three distinct "lives" of the papyrus: an aborted *edition de luxe* which was then twice reused in an artist's workshop. That may imply too much of a professional enterprise. Some features of the roll suggest the amateur: the main scribe, though he yields a nifty pen, cannot quite spell "geography". In the real muddled world, we could compare the papyrus from Oxyrhynchus on which one hand wrote out a Greek epigram, another scribbled a long list of similar poems, and a third interpolated a recipe for cough mixture; or the "Eudoxus" papyrus in the Louvre (added by Canfora himself), in which the same hand copied both an extensive astronomical text, misspelt and disordered, with crude and apparently irrelevant astronomical diagrams, and then on the back a set of official administrative letters (with more added by a second hand) – the exercise book, it seems, of a trained civil servant with an eye on the stars.

Canfora's book presents a brilliant speech for the prosecution, based on circumstantial evidence. However, the trial has not yet begun, and the forensic evidence has yet to be presented. Canfora cheerfully dismisses "chemistry"; who needs science, when scholarship has spoken? Science may indeed produce ambiguous results (consider the chequered history of the Vinland Map); much depends on what questions she is asked. And yet she provides the closest thing we have to objective testimony. Professor Settis has written that two sets of spectrographic tests prove the ink of "Artemidorus" identical with ancient inks; these tests will be the first witnesses for the defence.