

An Artifact Speaks • Artifact Information Sheet

Artifact Name: Papyrus Sheet

Time Period of the Original: see time period of papyrus use below

Culture/Religion Group: Ancient Egypt

Material of the Original: Papyrus



Reproduction? No. Modern-made by ancient process.

Background Information:

Papyrus was an important plant in the ancient Western world. It was used to make mats, cords, cloth, and sails. Its most widespread use, and the one that has allowed modern scholars to learn so much about life thousands of years ago, was as a writing material. This material is also called papyrus. Though most often associated with the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans also wrote on sheets of papyrus. The oldest existing example has been dated to approximately 2600 BCE. Arabs in Egypt continued using papyrus for writing until the 9th century CE.

This paper-like substance is made from the central pith of the stalk of the papyrus plant. The pith is removed in thin strips that are squared off on the ends. There were a variety of grades of papyrus, based on the quality of the pith. A first layer of strips, all going in one direction, is laid on top of a wet board; a second layer is laid on top of the first, going in the opposite direction. The layers are then joined together through pressing, the water from the board and sap from the plant holding the layers together. Individual sheets could then be adhered together into a roll. A more complete description, recorded by the Roman known as Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE) in his *Natural History*, can be found at <http://legacy.earlham.edu/~seidti/iam/papyrus>.

For much of ancient Egyptian history, writing was done on paper stored in this rolled form. Later, writings were stored in the form of a codex or book.

Sources:

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- Seid, Timothy. "Papyrus (5th Cent. B.C.E.-8th Cent. C.E.)." Papyrus." Earlham School of Religion, 28 June 2004. Web. 17 May 2015. <<http://legacy.earlham.edu/~seidti/iam/papyrus.html>>.