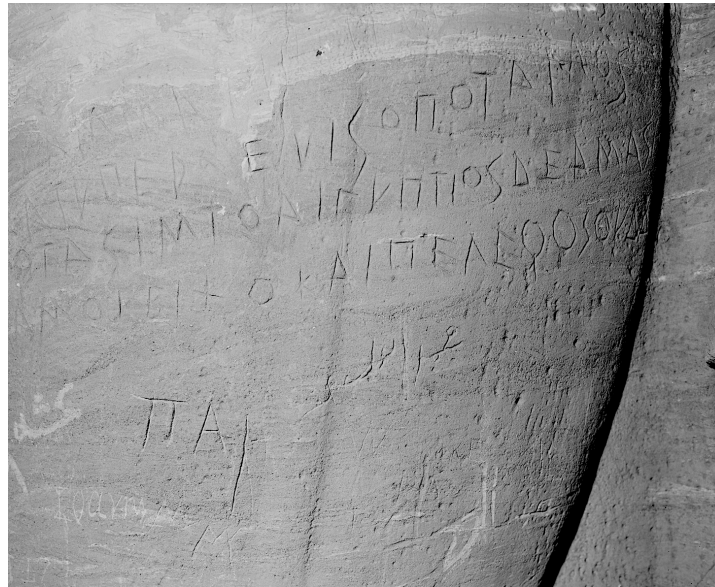


Background Information:



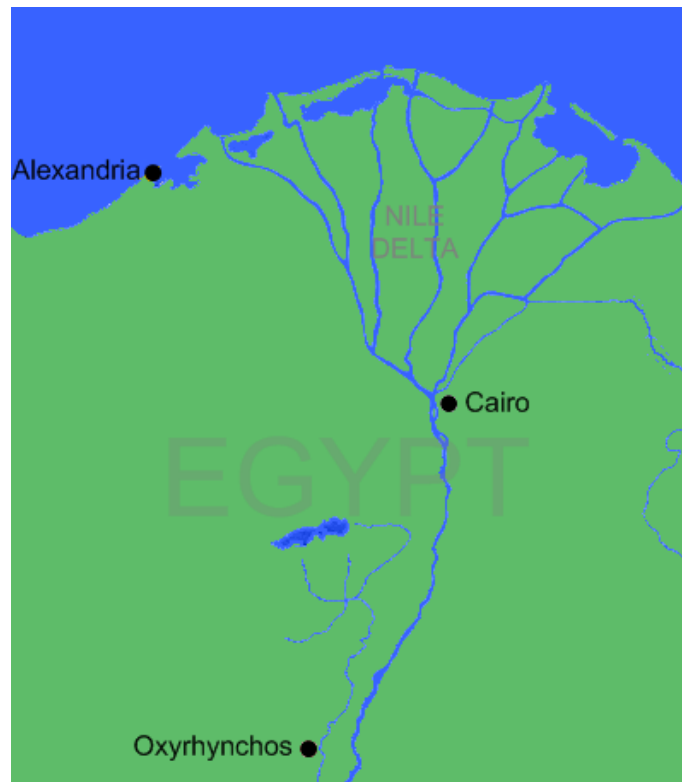
Greek Inscriptions on leg of Ramses II, Abu Simbel

Greeks and Greek language is attested in Egypt prior to the conquest of Alexander the Great, but this was primarily restricted to Greek mercenaries working for Egyptian kings and Greek merchants who were in Egypt for commercial reasons. These Greek soldiers and merchants were not only conducting business in Egypt, they were also tourists who visited prominent sites much as modern tourists do today. Greek mercenaries on their way to invade Nubia, stopped at the site of Abu Simbel and took the time to carve their name on the monumental legs of the statue of Ramses II.



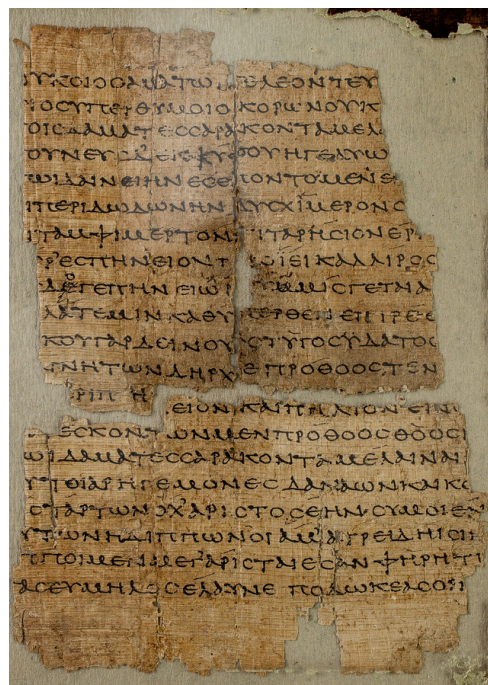
Map Ptolemaic empire, 200 BCE (Wikimedia Creative Commons, Thomas Lessman)

Egypt was conquered from the Achaemenid Persian empire by the Macedonian Alexander the Great in 332 BCE. While there had been Greeks living in Egypt throughout the 1st millennium BCE, this was the first time that Egypt came under Greek control. At this time, Egypt had been controlled since the 8th century BCE off and on by foreign powers, including the Kushites from the south and the Neo-Assyrians and Achaemenids from the east, with intermittent periods of local control. After the death of Alexander the Great, his large empire broken into a number of kingdoms controlled by his generals. Ptolemy came into possession of Egypt and founded the subsequent Ptolemaic dynasty. Under his rule and that of his successors, large numbers of Greeks settled in Egypt, intermarried with the local population, and established Greek as one of the main languages of the population. He also continued the capital at Alexandria in the delta, which had been founded by Alexander the Great, as well as other settlements. In particular, the Ptolemies colonized the Fayyum, which had largely been abandoned and settled Greeks there. This is why in the late 19th century people began finding large numbers of Greek papyri in this region. These papyri were considered of particular interest to scholars because they were interested in finding lost Greek texts that they knew from references in other Classical texts existed but had not survived. Greek papyri had been known from Egypt prior to this period, but they were much rarer.



Map showing location

Nearby the Fayum Oasis was the site of Oxyrhynchus (modern el-Bahnasa). The site was already occupied in the Pharaonic period when it was known as the site of Per-Medjed and the capital of the 19th nome (or province). The site was built on a canal rather than the Nile River, which meant it avoided being flooded during the yearly inundation. Large numbers of Greek speaking settlers also moved to this region, and they eventually discarded their old texts in rubbish dumps. In the late 19th century, as Egypt expanded its use of agriculture, people realized that rubbish that had been piling up for literally thousands of years, was a great source of fertilizer for their fields. When they began to exploit these rubbish dumps, they discovered objects still preserved within them and some of these had writing on them. The papyri made their way to the antiquities market and soon sites such as Oxyrhynchus were being excavated precisely to find these texts. At the end of the 19th/beginning of the 20th century British scholars Bernard Pyne Grenfell (1869-1926) and Arthur Surridge Hunt (1871-1934) worked at the site of Oxyrhynchus for the Egypt Exploration Fund (now the Egypt Exploration Society). They compared their approach to finding papyri at the site to gold mining, which explains why they found as many as 50,000 texts at the site when they worked there. In order to fund their excavations, they sold subscriptions to various museums and other institutions. Subscribers would then receive a share of finds, which is how the ISAC came to acquire their fragment of Homer's *Iliad*.



ISAC's *Iliad* fragment (ISACM E2058)

While today we might assume that owning a copy of a book means that one owns the entire book, this was not the case for texts such as the *Iliad* that were read in Egypt. These copies were

written on papyrus scrolls, but people do not seem to have owned the entire book although it is likely that they would have known the entire epic from memory. Rather, they owned different sections which are now largely only preserved as fragments. These scrolls were eventually discarded, which is why they were found in the rubbish mounds of Oxyrhynchus.

The ISAC's *Iliad* fragment is of a fairly common part of the *Iliad* found in Egypt. It is from Book II, the *Book of Ships* (Lines 745-764) and dates to the 1st/2nd century CE, when the Romans controlled Egypt as a province of the Roman Empire. Most Homeric papyri date to the Roman period (it is rarer in the earlier Ptolemaic period), meaning it is hundreds of years after when Homer supposedly wrote his epics in the 8th century BCE (which itself was looking back to Bronze Age Greece). Despite these issues, the *Book of Ships* is considered important for historians trying to reconstruct Bronze Age Greece because it lists how many ships each Greek kingdom contributed to the fleet that was going up against Troy and what towns the individuals from these kingdoms came from. The *Iliad* Book 2 and *The Book of Ships* were popular part of the *Iliad* for ancient readers. Around 1500 copies of part of the *Iliad* are known from Roman Egypt, making it far more popular the *Odyssey*. Further, the first parts of the *Iliad* were more popular than the later books *Iliad*. The speculation is that the later books presented bad sides of the heroes and people did not enjoy reading about them acting in what was considered an "unheroic" manner.

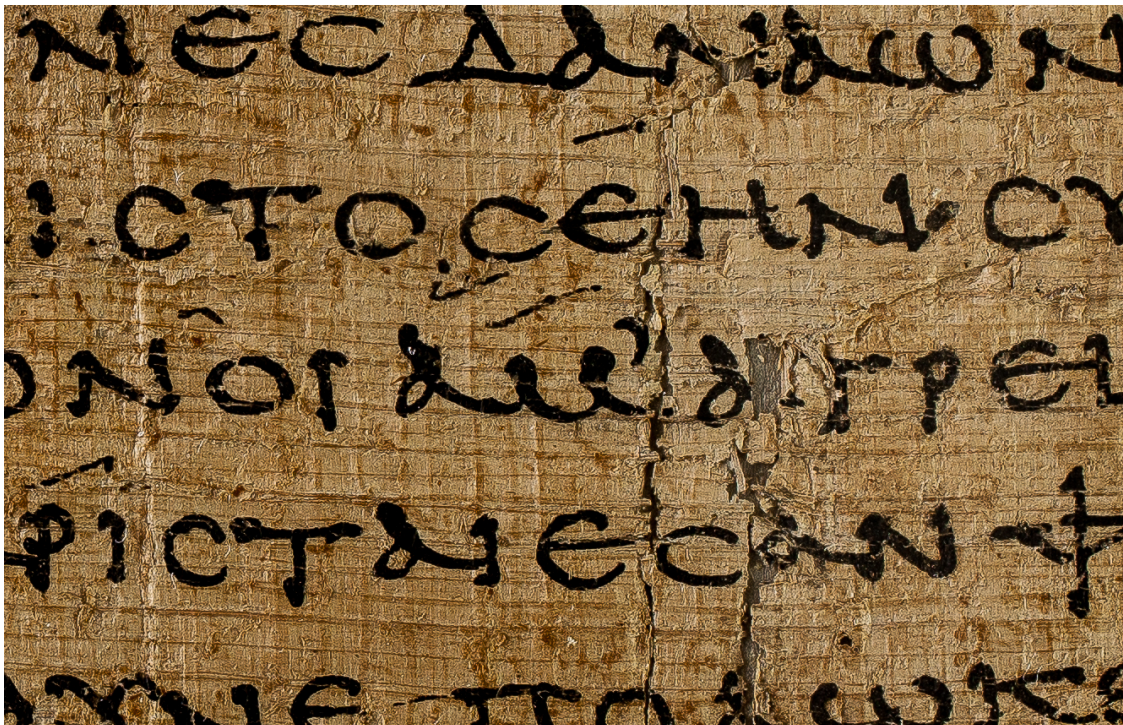
The majority of these papyri come from the town of Oxyrhynchus, although people also owned the *Iliad* in other towns in Egypt. When people started discovering Homeric papyri, scholars also found variant writings of the *Iliad* that were different to the texts with which they were familiar which they often thought to be "mistakes." This is a result of people seeing these texts as being fixed, rather than being fluid and changing through time, meaning that a variety of different variations should be considered "authentic."





Reed pens, Roman period, Oxyrhynchus (ISACM E 8522 and E3922)

While most people may think of ancient Egyptians writing in hieroglyphs, starting in the Ptolemaic period, Greek became a common language spoken by both Greek immigrants to Egypt as well as native Egyptians. Greeks who settled permanently in Egypt continued to speak Egyptian for centuries and for the Egyptians, many at least knew some Greek. They also wrote with a pen made from a reed. The end of a reed was sharpened with a knife and then the nib was slit. The slit creates a channel for the ink to flow continuously down the pen to the paper and not in blobs or drips. You would then dip your pen in an inkwell and write, re-dipping as the ink ran out. The ISAC Museum's *Iliad* fragment is written with the reed pen and in two different hands. It is written in what is known as "book hand" which is used for literary texts and more legible than handwriting used for everyday texts. One should also note that there are no divisions between words, as we are used to today. Further, there are two hands present on the text.



One can see how a second hand went through the papyrus and added in accent marks. These are marks that help with the pronunciation in Greek. They are generally absent from Greek texts, but they would have helped with reading the papyrus aloud.



We can also see that the papyrus was corrected as well.

Modern Interpretations

Lesson Plan

Essential Question:

How do archaeologists and historians use documents found at archaeological sites to interpret the past?

What Students Will Learn

We can use texts found in archaeological excavations sources to reconstruct how people were writing and reading in the past.

Through examining these texts we can better understand how ancient people, wrote, read, and stored their documents.

What Students Will Do

Look closely at texts and make observations about these texts.

Compare the sources to each other and explain what it tells us and why modern examples can be helpful to better understand the processes by which this occurred

Assessment

Students will write about why they think the *Iliad* was more popular than the *Odyssey* in Roman Egypt.

Materials

For each student

Background information sheet

Images

For the teacher

Chart paper and marker for recording students' ideas

Preparing to Teach

1. Make a copy of all documents for each student
2. Prepare to discuss background information
3. Set up the chart paper and markers to share students' ideas
4. Post word bank words
5. Post the essential question: "How do we study writing and reading in the ancient world?"

Word Bank

archaeological site: a place where people were in the past and left objects that they used behind or other signs that they had been there

artifact: an object made or used by people

primary source: first-hand testimony or direct evidence concerning a particular topic or event, created by people who were present during the event. While these often happen when the event occurred, primary sources can also be composed by these individuals later. This can also include archaeological evidence since this is the remains left behind by these individuals.

secondary source: document that discusses primary sources and often provides an interpretation of what they mean.

evidence: material used to answer the questions and interpret them

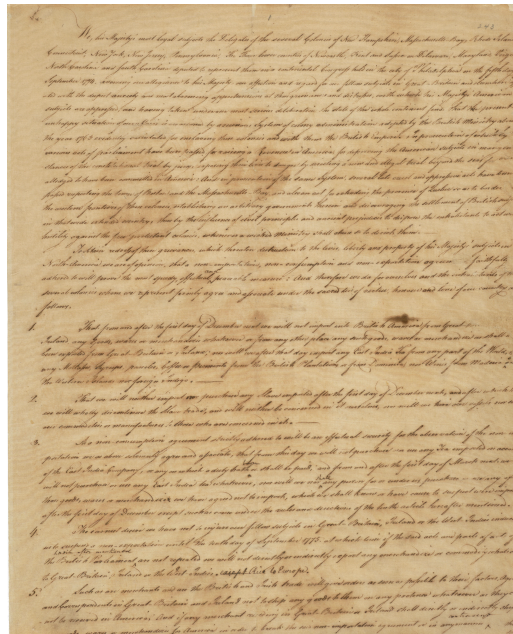
analysis: investigation to learn new information about something or solve a question

interpretation: subjective conclusion reached on the basis of analyzing the evidence

artifact: an object made or modified by people

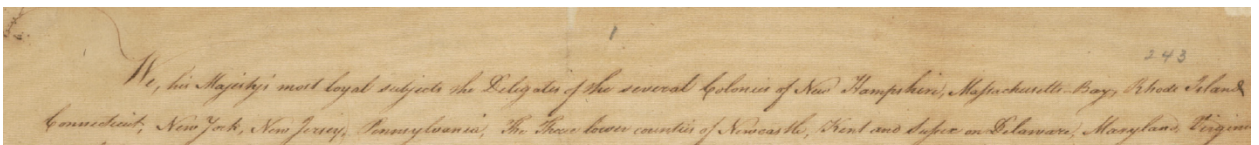
Uncover Prior Knowledge

1. Discuss with your students examples of different types of artifacts. Explain that while writing is a relatively recent invention in human history, archaeologists still find texts written on by ancient peoples.
2. Ask students to give you different examples of instruments people might use to write documents. Write these examples on the board.

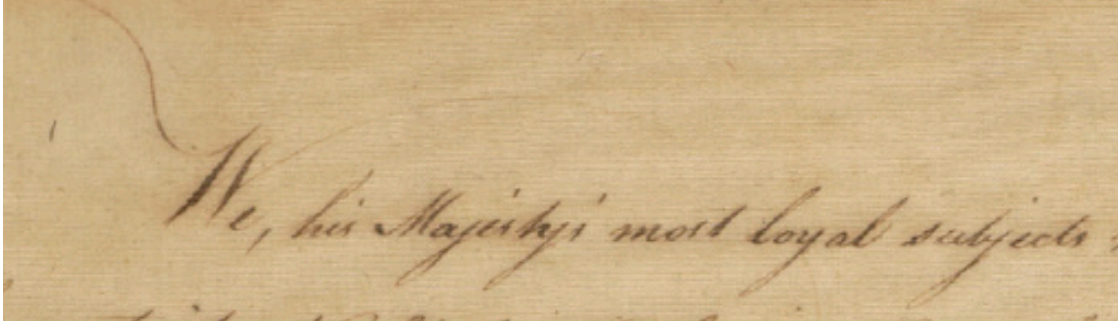


Articles of Association, page 1, 10/20/1774. (National Archives Identifier 6277397)

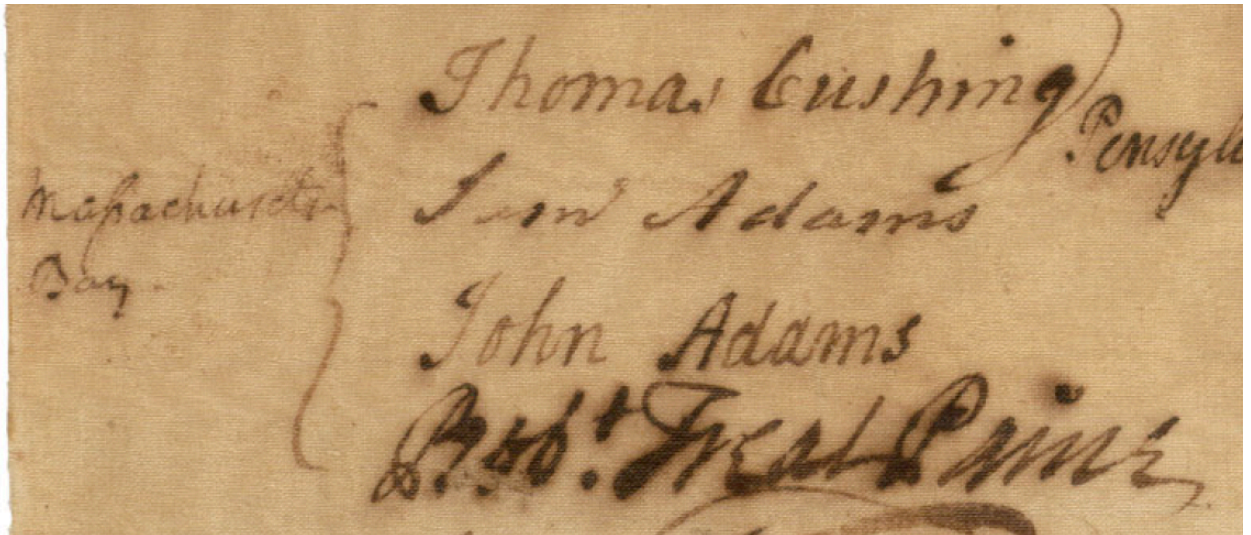
3. Show students an example of a document from early American history, the *Articles of Association* which dates to October 20, 1774 and was written with a quill pen.



4. Ask the students, what do you notice about this document? Have them tell you about what it looks like and the handwriting.



5. Ask students to try to read the first sentence of this document and have them tell you what they think it says.
6. Explain to the students that the reason that this document looks the way that it does, is because it was written with a quill pen not with the type of pen we use today. Reliable fountain pens were invented in 1884 and reliable ball point pens became popular only after WWII. Pencils also became popular at the end of the 19th century.



Articles of Association, page 3, 10/20/1774. (National Archives Identifier 6277397)

7. Show the students an example from Page 3 showing the signatories of the *Articles of Association* from Massachusetts Bay. Here one can see the difference between the handwriting of the actual document, which is written far more carefully, and that of the signatories, which is cursive, varies greatly, and also suffers from the fact that people were not loading the quill pen carefully with ink and there is blotting.
8. Tell the students that there are different materials you can use to write: brushes, pens (reed pen, quill pen, fountain pen, modern ballpoint pen), pencils, etc.
9. Ask students to think about what they think the benefits and disadvantages are of these different writing forms.

Discover New Knowledge: How do archaeologists use textual sources they find to interpret the past?

These questions will guide the students as they learn. The word bank words (archaeology, evidence, analysis, and interpretation) should be discussed and explain to students that they will use these words in the lesson and also define them.

1. Look at the copy of the *Iliad* that is in the ISAC Museum. Divide the students into groups and ask them to spend time looking at a photograph the papyrus.
2. Distribute a copy of “Gather the Evidence: Data Collection Sheet” to each group.
3. Instruct groups to examine the census record and then complete the “Gather the Evidence: Data Collection Sheet.”
4. Ask the students to think about the following questions: why does the papyrus look the way that it does? Based on what they have just discussed with the *Articles of Association*, what can they say about the type of instrument the text was written on? What else do they observe about the handwriting of the papyrus?
5. Ask the students to present their observations to the class.
6. Explain to the students about reading the *Iliad* in Roman Egypt and ask the students to then write a short essay on why they think the *Iliad* was more popular than the *Odyssey*.

Gather the Evidence: Data Collection Sheet: *The Iliad*

Name: _____

1. What do you think about date of the document?

2. What can you observe about the material the document was written on?

3. What can you say about other features of the document such as handwriting, and word spacing?

4. What kind of instrument do you think was used to write the document?

5. What else can you say about the document?

ΠΟΙΟΝΤΩΝ ΤΕΛΕΟΝΤΕΣ
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ΡΙΠΗ

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