

## Liturgical Psalm Papyri and Christian Literary Culture

This paper investigates the relationship between reading and writing, as well as literacy and orality, in early Christian texts. To this end I examine papyri preserving Biblical texts (in particular *P. Lond. Lit.* 207 and *P. Laur.* IV, 140) that have been previously identified as school exercises (Criore 1996), but which I argue are in all likelihood texts which have been specially prepared for reading aloud in a liturgical context. There may, as well, be traces of the kind of musical notation described by Jourdan-Hemmerdinger (1979). I argue that those who have looked at these texts previously have been too quick to interpret them as models for school exercises. Literary sources such as the *Shepherd of Hermas* and Jerome's prologue to his translation of Isaiah suggest a special interest on the part of Christian authors in the easy reading of religious texts. There is, furthermore, reason to think that this concern was tied to the use of texts in a liturgical context (Bischoff 1990: 169), a purpose which these psalm papyri could have effectively served. Finally, I will try to situate the conclusions of my investigation within the contexts of a changing literary culture brought about by the Christianisation of the Roman Empire, and a new emphasis on the oral communication of a corpus of sacred texts, the Bible. Although the codex, as a medium for writing, is often seen as a technological advance over the scroll, it does not necessarily reflect progress towards a more literate mentality: the use of texts in late antiquity was in some respects increasingly oral. If a broader investigation were to indicate a number of other such possible liturgical texts, this would be of great moment for the view held by some scholars that in a Christian context reading took priority over writing, and that the "sacred literacy" of Christian and Jewish communities was different from anything which existed in Pagan Greco-Roman religion (Lane Fox 1994).

## Bibliography

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