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## **Housing and handling oversized papyrus manuscripts**

The treatment and proper housing of oversized items is a problem faced by most working in the library and archives environment. For any manuscript, a conservator has to carefully consider the support material and media, and how it can best be transported, stored, and studied. Handling and using large artefacts requires much more consideration and planning.

The University of Michigan holds the largest collection of papyrus manuscripts in North America, and this collection includes a group of oversized items that have historically been difficult to access due to the risks and inconvenience of handling. The mounting of papyrus is quite different from other manuscript supports, as it is most often placed between two sheets of a rigid material to keep it from flexing and to provide views of both recto and verso. Many different materials have been used to glaze papyrus over the centuries, including window glass, acrylic, and flexible plastics. The use of new glass technology, such as the lightweight and scratch-resistant Corning Gorilla Glass, has also been explored for use with papyrus. While glass, both traditional and new, has proven to be the best material to use, trouble arises as size increases.

This paper will address the best strategies for housing and handling such large, unusual manuscripts in a working collection, taking into account the pros and cons of the materials available. A re-housing project designed for the oversized Michigan papyri will be highlighted, assessing the problems that arose from previous solutions and addressing currently available solutions, while keeping ease of access and researchers' needs in mind.