Lecture 3
The papyrus roll in ancient Greece and Rome
From last time: study the impact of writing in specific cultural context

I. The papyrus roll
• Originates in Egypt ca 3000 BCE: solid, flexible, very white smooth surface, but not very durable, does not fold well; palimpsest
• Egyptian archives used many rolls per day; other uses too
• Other media: potsherds, leather; clay tablets (down to 75CE in one case!)
• Late survival of scroll form—15-16th ct examples

II. Greek and Roman contexts
• Volumen (from volvere) = roll. =20 sheets of papyrus pasted together; standard size: 15-24cm X 10 m long. One roll per “book” (e.g. Aristotle’s 8 books of physics)
• Scriptio continua (sometimes dots to break words)
• Reading aloud: slaves to read and to write, no desks; children learn to write before reading
• But evidence of silent reading (“speaking objects”, plays)
• Many different genres: literacy without books (inscriptions, signs, medals); utilitarian (cookbooks) and not (novels); trots and encyclopedias. But problem of transmission/survival
• Publication: in Rome at public ceremonies called recitationes

II. Temporary writing surface: wax tablets
• Wooden tablets (“album” for official decrees, waxed for temporary writing); long survival too

III. Libraries
• Library of Alexandria, 3rd BCE; Callimachus’ Pinakes
• Grand buildings, e.g. at Ephesos (2nd CE)

IV. Plato (429-347 BCE) and his academy