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EARLY CHRISTIAN PUBLICATION

It is exactly fifty years ago that the first piece of New Testament papyrus was brought to the notice of the public. An increasing number has made possible the production of a whole New Testament composed of Greek and Sahidic fragments. The importance of these discoveries as disclosing the history of the text in a century for which materials were lacking and as showing the materials on which the imperishable message of the Master was written is manifest in the attraction that the papyri have for many inexpert people besides the palaeographer and the textual critic.

The papyrus fragments bring us a century nearer the original autographs. None of them may support Salmond's suggestion that such documents when discovered would be regarded as "superior to any now accessible to us"; but some of them, like P46, can be ranked in consequence with the principal uncial manuscripts of the fourth century. P45 and P46 can also be put forth as modifying and correcting the expressed opinion of scholars, as when F. H. A. Scrivener wrote that the fashion of rolled books prevailed in the papyrus fragments, as when F. C. Burkitt wrote: "Till the roll dropped out of use and the large vellum codex took its place the Acts must always have circulated separately from the Gospels," and as when F. G. Kenyon wrote that "no complete New Testament was possible until vellum came into use".

It is with such bibliographical details, remaining as a memento of the early Christian achievement of giving the Scriptures to the people, that this article is concerned.

Previous to vellum and paper, potsherd and papyrus were the important mediums for writing. There are texts from the New Testament written on ostraca, twenty of these baked clay tablets being described by Lefebvre as a cheap gospel lectionary; but the papyrus book or codex was the form chosen for early Christian propaganda.

The use of papyrus for circulating the New Testament scriptures extended to the seventh century. From the fourth century, parchment was employed for this purpose. There was

no doubt as to the superiority of this material and many noble manuscripts composed of vellum are extant. It was thought that the papyrus roll was succeeded by the vellum codex; but the purchase of the Chester Beatty Papyri, first described in *The Times* of November 19, 1931, gave to the world three New Testament papyrus codices or books containing fifteen writings. W. H. P. Hatch has edited thirteen papyrus fragments also of the third century and all but one are codices. So there is confidence in the affirmation that the papyrus codex occupied a middle position between the papyrus roll and the vellum codex.

Just when the papyrus codex was put into circulation is not clear. The third century date of the Chester Beatty find, with evidence of book manufacture in simple and more intricate types cannot be the beginning of the modern book. There is a small fragment of the Gospel according to John (P.Ryl. 457) from a papyrus codex, which C. H. Roberts assigns to the second century.

The argument advanced by H. A. Sanders claims that codices were probably used for the autographs of the New Testament. The origin of the usage would then be decided by the dating of the New Testament writings. Opposing this view is the statement of W. H. P. Hatch: "The original manuscripts of the New Testament were papyrus rolls." This is supported by the fact that books of the Greeks and Romans in the century of Christ's birth were on papyrus rolls, and illustrations of these given by G. Milligan and F. G. Kenyon have long been regarded as examples of New Testament roll-books. For E. J. Goodspeed the matter is decided by a reference to Luke and Acts as being written on rolls (Acts i. 1) and to Revelation calling itself a papyrus roll (xxii 18f.).

The matter is not settled by an appeal to the N.T. terms in these passages nor in 2 Tim. iv. 13, as can be concluded by consulting the lexicons. Nor does Clement of Alexandria or any contemporary writer help us to a conclusion. But before dismissing Sanders we should look at his elaborate survey of the subject which can be appreciated in part by contrasting the preference of pagan writers for the roll whereas the Christians are addicted to the codex. In the third century the proportion of classical writings shows two hundred and ninety-one rolls to twenty codices; for Christian writings the codex predominates over the roll in the proportion of thirty-eight to nine.

The Christians' preference for the codex does not involve the creation of this format by them. B. L. Ullman applies the name codex to a book, not in the roll form, composed of two or more tablets fastened together. He assigns its origin to Rome and notes that its importance can hardly be overestimated.

The employment of the leaf-book is not a matter of bibliographical interest only; it is a significant anticipation of the S.P.C.K. and the publication activity of the Bible Societies. The early Christians quickly adopted this novel and handy means of communicating their ideas. The format may have been affected by considerations of economy, as C. H. Roberts affirms. But this was not the sole reason, as the size and wide margins of P46 make manifest. The practical problem of establishing the fourth gospel as an authority along with the three synoptics may have produced a book containing the fourfold gospel. Irenaeus, with such a copy in his hand, could give effective illustration of his affirmations. The growing reverence for the words of the apostles required accuracy in quotation. Reference to a codex was easier than unrolling a thirty-foot scroll. The codex gave facility in reference to an authoritative standard. With Justin Martyr it was the fact of the New Covenant and the word of the Old that were significant. The reading of the apostolic writings as scripture at this time contributed to the reverence which required exact reference to the word as well as the fact. Marcion in the vanguard of the New Testament Canon might seize the new instrument to make a place for his ten Paulines and his truncated edition of Luke. To him the Gospel was something entirely new, requiring not only the jettisoning of the Old Testament but also of its format. The new wine required new bottles.

To the more orthodox the numerous Old Testament writings were part of the Christian inheritance. The capacity of the codex—each side of the leaf could be utilized—must have been a solution to the massive problem of circulating the thirty-nine books of the Hebrew list. Alexandria added others, then came the apostolic writings, and the letters of Clement and Ignatius, all to be copied and circulated. The leaf-book alone answered the need. Its capacity was an attraction and confirmed the Christian in the use of the codex. Perhaps the most important consideration was the large proportions to which the literature had attained. The codex was compact; it also was ideal for travel-

ling copies. Its triumph in the contest with the roll could not long remain in question, though the conservatism that prolonged the use of the roll still prevails in England.

Every piece of New Testament papyrus is important in itself as belonging to a poor man's Bible, or as shedding light on the process of book manufacture, or as giving manuscript attestation in a century for which evidence was deficient.

One of the most solid of the yields from Egypt is P46 (the Chester Beatty third-century papyrus codex of the Epistles of Paul). This codex is made of one quire, being formed by laying fifty-two sheets with the recto side uppermost and then folding them in the middle. Eighty-six pages are preserved from an original reckoned to have contained one hundred and four. Romans stands first in the codex and it is affected by the loss of the first seven leaves. Hebrews follows Romans, this unusual position testifying to the esteem this epistle gained in Egypt. Eight Pauline Epistles complete or in part are represented. Most of the leaves are frayed, especially at the bottom, where generally lines of text are lost. The pages are numbered except two which have been overlooked. In the photographic facsimile, pages measure about nine inches by six and the column of writing when complete is seven and one-half inches high by four to four and a quarter in breadth. F. G. Kenyon calculates the original size of the page to have been eleven inches by six and one-half. The leaves are now separated but originally were attached to one another. The manuscript is brown in colour, giving evidence of age. The writing is clear and good. It is a book hand, not a private scrawl. There are spaces and occasional punctuation marks, but at first sight the impression given may be represented in this fashion:

NOTOFWORKSBUTOFHIMTHATCALLETH.

There are interesting punctuation marks and a spectacular reading at the end of chapter xv of Romans, which seem to favour the hypothesis that chapter xvi is a separate letter.

Everyone interested in the early textual history of the New Testament might profitably base his research on a full acquaintance with this papyrus codex.

EDWIN BRADY.

*Douglas,
Isle of Man.*