The Book with Seven Seals.

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Upon the words of the text of Revelation 5, critics are agreed: καὶ ἔδωκαν ἔπι τὴν δεξιὰν τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου βιβλίον γεγραμμένον ἐσῳθεν καὶ ὅπουθεν κατεσφραγισμένον σφραγίσω ἐττά. Only a question of punctuation remains, Westcott and Hort, with most editors, inserting a comma after ὅπουθεν, and thus making both adverbs limit γεγραμμένον. Against this view, Zahn (Einleitung, II, p. 599), and after him Nestle (Textual Criticism of the Greek New Testament, p. 333) maintain that only ἐσῳθεν limits γεγραμμένον, “written within,” while ὅπουθεν is to be taken with κατεσφραγισμένον σφραγίσω ἐπτά, “sealed on the back with seven seals.” Nestle devotes a critical note to the verse: “... Zahn holds that ἐσῳθεν and ὅπουθεν are not correlative terms, and that the idea of a papyrus-roll written on both sides (ἅπειδογραφόν) must be abandoned; compare above, p. 43, n. 2. The book was, in fact, not a roll but a codex. Two things point to this. There is, first, the fact that it is said to be ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν. Had it been a roll, it would have been ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ. Moreover, the word used for opening the book is ἄνοιξα, and not, as in the case of rolls, ἀνελίσσει, ἀναλίσσει, ἀνεπιστάσει. That it was not written on the outside is also shown by the fact that it was sealed with seven seals, the purpose of which was to make the reading of the book impossible. Not till the seventh seal is broken is the book open and its contents displayed. This βιβλίον is quite different from the βιβλαρίδιον mentioned in 10:9.”

The dogmatic presentation of this position, not less than the questionable evidence adduced in its support, invites a reexamination of the passage, less from the textual than the exegetical point of view. From the textual point of view, it is perhaps enough to observe that Nestle’s own text, like Hort’s, reads with a comma after ὅπουθεν, and must therefore be to that extent revised to sustain his present interpretation. From the point of view of interpretation, the ground
may best be cleared by a detailed scrutiny of Nestle's words just quoted.

It is probably true that ἐσωθεν and ἐπισθεν are not correlative terms. ἐσωθεν implies ἐξωθεν (2 Cor. 7'), and ἐπισθεν, ἐμπροσθεν (Rev. 4') as correlative. But no one doubts that ἐσωθεν limits γεγραμμένον; the only question is as to ἐπισθεν. Now ἐπισθεν, as the word ἐπισθογραφον implies, has an explicit technical appropriateness with reference to the back (verso) of a roll. The very fact that ἐπισθεν is substituted for the usual correlative of ἐσωθεν, points to a roll. Of a roll we can understand ἐπισθεν, but if a codex or leaf-book is thought of, how came it to be used in place of ἐξωθεν, which Zahn and Nestle agree is the usual correlative of ἐσωθεν? We can understand the deviation from the normal correlative, if a roll is meant; but if we think of a leaf-book, straightway a difficulty arises. The evidence adduced to show that the idea of a roll written on both sides must be abandoned, is thus found to point in the very opposite direction.

But two further grounds for the codex are noted; it is said to be ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιὰν. These words may at first sight suggest a leaf-book rather than a roll. Yet it must not be forgotten that presently the Lamb comes and takes the book ἐκ τῆς δεξιᾶς, “out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne” (5'). Indeed, when it is remembered that the βιβλίον is tightly closed, ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιὰν is hardly more suggestive of a codex than of a roll, unless a very small roll is thought of in contrast with a large codex. If one were speaking, for example, of the Nabulûs roll of the Samaritan Pentateuch, ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιὰν would be a perfectly natural expression. But that a large βιβλίον is here thought of, is evident from the number of seals used to secure it, and once the element of size is recognized, the superior appropriateness of ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιὰν with a leaf-book vanishes away.

It is further urged in favor of a leaf-book, that ἀνοίξασθαι is used of leaf-books and not of rolls. The three verbs named by Nestle as proper expressions for opening a roll, however, never occur in the New Testament, with the partial exception of ἀναπτύσσωμεν. This word appears in Luke 4', ἀναπτύξας τὸ βιβλίον, — according to Tischendorf (following ΜΔ et al.) and the Textus Receptus. Westcott and Hort, however, read ἀνοίξας τὸ βιβλίον, with the very strong support of ABL Ἐ 33 et al. That a roll is meant in this passage is beyond question; rolls are still used in synagogues in the East, and that a leaf-book of Isaiah should have been used in the synagogue at Nazareth before A.D. 30 is not to be believed. The use of πτύχας of the folding up of the roll (Luke 4') after reading, further confirms the
same position. Interestingly enough Nestle's own text in this very passage (4\textsuperscript{17}) coincides with Hort's, in reading ἀνοίξας τὸ βιβλίον\textsuperscript{1}; which is perhaps a sufficient answer to his present contention.

"That it was not written on the outside," continues Nestle, "is also shewn by the fact that it was sealed with seven seals, the purpose of which was to make the reading of the book impossible." But the text says nothing about the "outside" of the roll; it speaks of the "back side," and a roll might have a hundred columns of writing on its back side (Juvenal's "in tergo," 1, 6), and yet when rolled up present an outside perfectly blank, if only the last few inches of its verso were left uninscribed. Even when six of its seals had been broken, the seventh would still secure the contents of a roll from inspection quite as well as those of a leaf-book.

"This βιβλίον," says Nestle in conclusion, "is quite different from the βιβλαρίδιον mentioned in chap. 10\textsuperscript{8.9}." If this means only that they are not identical, it may readily be accepted. But if Nestle means that βιβλίον of 5\textsuperscript{1} differs from βιβλαρίδιον \textsuperscript{10,9} as a codex differs from a roll, the later passage may be examined a little more closely. The βιβλαρίδιον of \textsuperscript{10,9} and \textsuperscript{10} is called a βιβλίον in \textsuperscript{10,8}; and it is twice spoken of as ἡντεγγμένον, "opened," \textsuperscript{10,8}. The principal point previously urged against the roll-form of βιβλίον in 5\textsuperscript{1} — the use of ἀνοίξα of it — is thus seen to apply with equal force against the roll-form of βιβλαρίδιον in \textsuperscript{10,8.10}. But the latter is nevertheless pretty certainly a roll; for the language of \textsuperscript{10,8} unmistakably reflects Ezekiel 3\textsuperscript{1}, where the Hebrew has חִטֵּפָה, a perfectly unequivocal word for roll. Reference may also be made to Rev. \textsuperscript{20,12}, βιβλία ἡνοίχθησαν, a manifest reminiscence of Daniel 7\textsuperscript{10}, where both LXX and Theodotion use the same verb: βιβλίον ἡνοίχθησαν. It will hardly be urged that βιβλίον in the Greek versions of Daniel means "leaf-book," because ἀνοίξα is used with it. "Ἀλλὰ βιβλίον ἡνοίχθη in the same verse (Rev. 20\textsuperscript{12}) enforces the same conclusion.

It thus appears that the points named by Nestle in support of his position fail to sustain it, indeed in some cases seem plainly to favor the very opposite. The roll is further favored by the Old Testament passages which seem to be reflected in the words in question: Isa. 29\textsuperscript{11}, ὁμοθήμων τοῦ; LXX, τοῦ βιβλίου τοῦ ἑσφραγισμένου; and

\textsuperscript{1} The explanation of this doubtless is that Nestle took the point over, unverified, from Zahn, whose argument he is reproducing seriatim: for Zahn expressly appeals to Luke 4\textsuperscript{17}, as an example of ἀναπτύσσειν, evidently following Tischendorf.
Ezek. 29.10, LXX, εν αυτη (i.e. τη χειρι) κεφαλις βιβλιον. και ανειλησεν αυτην ενω­πιον έμου, και εν αυτη γεγραμμενα γιν τα ξυπτροσθεν και τα δπισω. In looking at the matter a little more broadly, two questions not specifically raised by Nestle seem pertinent. What, first, is the probability of the use of βιβλιον for a leaf-book in a Jewish-Christian work of the first century? Setting aside the etymological improbability as indecisive, there remain two elements in the question; first, what is the evidence for the parchment or papyrus leaf-book in the first century? and, second, supposing such book-forms to be familiar to the writer, what probability is there of his introducing them into this august scene, in place of the time-honored form dignified and even hallowed as for centuries past the sole vehicle of transmission of the Law and the Prophets? Egypt has yielded us no Ptolemaic leaf-books. Among codices of the Roman period the best known is perhaps the Oxyrhyn­chus Logia, the book-form of which its discoverers cite, among other considerations, as “putting the first century out of the question and making the first half of the second unlikely.” (Sayings of Our Lord, p. 6.) This is the situation for papyrus leaf-books. Parchment leaf-books may have preceded them, but none can be produced, and the contemporary testimony for them in Greek literature is ambiguous and unconvincing. Unmistakable cases of βιβλιον in the sense of “roll” can be cited from other parts of the New Testament (Luke 4:5), and even from Revelation itself (10, 20); but no such evidence for the “leaf-book” meaning is to be found.

But a second question presents itself. What, on Nestle’s interpretation, is the meaning of δπισθεν? How is a leaf-book “sealed on the back side with seven seals” to be understood? We may not render δπισθεν “on the outside,” for Zahn has reminded us that δπισθεν and δπισθεν are not correlative terms, and thus closed that avenue of escape. If δπισθεν means “on the back side,” as we use the phrase, sealing a book so would not secure it from inspection. But is δπισθεν a natural expression for the edges of a book? and would not the sense suggested by Nestle for the passage have been much more happily set forth by the omission of δπισθεν? What place can be found for δπισθεν on the codex theory of βιβλιον? Concerning this very obvious difficulty with his view, Nestle gives us no hint.

If on the other hand, βιβλιον is a roll, not a codex, the force of

2 Zahn understands the side away from the beholder to be meant.
The roll before the apocalyptic is a portentous thing; terrific demonstrations attend the successive openings of its seven seals; and its own contents may naturally be expected to prove extraordinarily weighty and comprehensive. Anticipation is heightened by the fact that there is no blank space left in it; the whole, recto and verso, is crowded with meaning; it is written within and on the back side.