

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

EARLY CHRISTIAN
BIBLICAL
INTERPRETATION

Edited by
PAUL M. BLOWERS
and
PETER W. MARTENS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
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First Edition published in 2019

Impression: 1

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018963934

ISBN 978-0-19-871839-0

Printed and bound by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CRO 4YY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to express our profound appreciation to Tracy Russell of the St Louis University for her extraordinarily good work as editorial assistant for this *Handbook*. Her copy editing and stylistic conformation of the essays, as well as her organizational work, were indispensable to the production of this volume. We also wish to thank Karen Raith of the Oxford University Press for her excellent work with the editors in the whole process of preparing this book for publication, and Tom Perridge, also of the Press, for the invitation to include this work in the excellent series of *Oxford Handbooks*. Thanks as well to our copy editor, Edwin Pritchard, for his careful work on all the chapters herein and his assistance in conforming this volume to the series standards.

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PART I

SCRIPTURE

CHAPTER 1

SCRIPTURE AS ARTEFACT

LINCOLN H. BLUMELL

OUR engagement with ancient Christianity is principally a textual one. Early Christians wrote texts (sermons, letters, Gospels, apocalypses, etc.), which were circulated, read, and copied. But while early Christians were in some sense ‘a people of the book’, the extant textual remains are rather small and fragmentary for the first few centuries. Consequently, many of the documents we read today are based on copies, with the result that the earliest textual witnesses we possess for some Christian writings were produced hundreds, or even over one thousand years, after the original was composed. For example, the *Didache*, an early Christian handbook that was most likely written in the first century or early second century CE, is preserved principally from an eleventh-century manuscript (Holmes 2007:339–40). As texts were copied (and recopied) over the centuries it is clear that changes occurred in the materials, format, and textual features. The materials upon which texts were transmitted developed and evolved as new media and technologies became available. The format and layout of a text changed, reflecting contemporary trends. Likewise, a number of other features changed and emerged: script, breaks, divisions, versification, capitulation, spellings, marginalia, and sometimes even the text itself (Wilson 1983:65–8). This is not to imply that a completely different text ultimately resulted in this process, but that the *mise-en-page* of our modern editions can be quite different from the originals they purport to reproduce. This preliminary chapter seeks to cut through this long process of transmission to examine the earliest extant Christian manuscripts—specifically those that came to be a part of the OT and NT. Accordingly, it seeks to consider them primarily as ‘artefacts’ in their own right, in some ways apart from the textual content they bear. Focusing on the *medium* of early Christian writings, this chapter will address issues of format, production, reading, and circulation to shed some contextual light on early Christian interpretation of Scripture. While the texts these early artefacts transmit have been abundantly studied, by comparison, there has been relatively little attention given to what the physical artefacts that convey these texts can reveal (Gamble 1995; Hurtado 2006).¹

¹ For editions of papyri I have followed the abbreviations given in J. F. Oates et al. (eds), *Checklist of Editions of Greek and Latin Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets* (5th edn: BASP Suppl. 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2001).

EARLY CHRISTIAN BIBLICAL REMAINS

As one begins to consider the literary remains of early Christians, it is worthwhile to do so within the broader category of early Christian artefacts in general. At present, the earliest archaeological remains with an undisputed Christian origin date to the third century (White 1997:123–31; Tepper and Di Segni 2006). The earliest Christian inscriptions come from either the latter part of the second century or more probably the first part of the third century (Snyder 2003:210–66; Tabbernee 2008). Likewise, distinctly Christian art can only be identified beginning in the third century (Jensen 2000:9; Spier 2007:4–8, 51; cf. Clement, *paed.* 3.59–60). But with the extant scriptural fragments, we are able to securely penetrate the second-century world of the early Christians. While there have been sensational claims for the discovery of first-century Christian texts (O’Callaghan 1972; Kim 1988; Jaroš 2006), such claims have been largely rejected in mainstream scholarship (Nongbri 2005; Bagnall 2009; Orsini and Clarysse 2012). The earliest textual artefacts consist of fragments from early Christian writings, both canonical and non-canonical; though none of these preserves an entire text, and they usually contain no more than a handful of verses, they are important witnesses. Due to the fact that these fragments—and indeed most early Christian textual remains—are dated palaeographically, it is difficult to assign a date any more precise than a century or half-century (Cavallo 2009). It has become common to designate the NT fragments written on papyrus with a ‘Gregory number’ preceded by a Gothic \mathfrak{P} (Gregory 1908); NT fragments written on parchment along with notable uncial manuscripts by numerals with an initial o—although uncials through o45 are also written with a capital letter (Aland and Aland 1995:72–184); and copies of the Septuagint (LXX) with a ‘Rahlfs number’ (Fraenkel 2004).

The earliest extant Christian fragments, whether OT or NT, are all written in Greek (Table 1.1). Of the LXX fragments Psalms and Isaiah are especially well attested, while from the NT Matthew and John are the most common. Determining whether an early LXX fragment is of Jewish or Christian scribal origin is difficult; however, it appears that Jewish copyists had a tendency to substitute the Hebrew tetragrammaton (YHWH) for $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ (Blumell and Wayment 2015:13–14; e.g. Rahlfs o848 and o857). While the earliest remains are just fragments, as one moves into the third and fourth centuries the extant remains begin to grow, not just in terms of numbers but also in terms of size. The third-century remains include copies of almost entire books from the NT (\mathfrak{P}^{66} [John]) as well as manuscripts that included multiple scriptural texts (\mathfrak{P}^{45} [Matthew, John, Luke, Mark, Acts], \mathfrak{P}^{46} [Pauline Epistles], \mathfrak{P}^{75} [Luke and John]); the fourth-century remains culminate with the preservation of the famous parchment codices: Codex Vaticanus (B) and Codex Sinaiticus (\aleph) preserve large sections of both the OT (LXX) and NT.

The online version that is updated regularly is available at <<http://papyri.info/docs/checklist>>. For abbreviations of ancient authors I have followed *The SBL Handbook of Style (Second Edition): For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). For abbreviations of ancient authors not found in the *SBL Handbook* I have followed S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd rev. edn; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Table 1.1 Earliest extant Christian biblical fragments*

Papyrus	Date	Format	Text	Provenance
RahIfs 0970/P.Bad. IV 56 (LDAB 3086)	II CE	Papyrus Codex	LXX Exod 8.3, 5–9, 12–20, Deut 28.36–30.7	Egypt, Herakleopolite Nome
RahIfs 2082 (LDAB 3083)	II CE	Papyrus Codex	LXX Ps 48.20–49.3, 49.17–21	Egypt, Antinoopolis
RahIfs 2122/PSI Congr. XX 1 (LDAB 3085)	II CE	Papyrus Sheet (or roll)	LXX Ps 1.2–3	Egypt
RahIfs 2077/P.Ant. I 7 (LDAB 3087)	II CE	Papyrus Codex	LXX Ps 81.1–4, 82.4–9, 16, 17	Egypt, Antinoopolis
ⲡ ¹⁰⁴ /P.Oxy. LXIV 4404 (LDAB 2935)	II CE	Papyrus Codex	Matt 21.34–7, 43, 45	Egypt, Oxyrhynchus
ⲡ ⁹⁰ /P.Oxy. L 3523 (LDAB 2775)	II CE	Papyrus Codex	John 18.36–19.7	Egypt, Oxyrhynchus
ⲡ ⁵² /P.Ryl. III 457 (LDAB 2774)	II CE	Papyrus Codex	John 18.31–3, 37–8	Egypt

* In canonical order. LDAB = Leuven Database of Ancient Books: <<http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/>>. For papyrological abbreviations see <<http://papyri.info/docs/checklist>>.

While Greek fragments/manuscripts dominate the earliest remains, other languages are attested. From the middle or end of the third century a Coptic gloss of LXX Isaiah is extant (Chester Beatty Papyrus VII; Bagnall 2009:66–9), and from the fourth century there are a few NT fragments (Metzger 1977:99–152; Choat 2012). While the earliest dated reference to Latin Scriptures is from the later part of the second century in the *Acts of Scillitan Martyrs* sect. 12 (17 July 180 CE), the earliest extant Latin fragments and manuscripts of Scriptures date to the fourth century, predating Jerome's Vulgate (Houghton 2016:22–31). Syriac biblical manuscripts (both OT and NT) with dated colophons are extant from the latter half of the fifth century (Brock 2012; cf. Blumell and Wayment 2015:337–40), and from the sixth century there is one Ethiopic NT manuscript of the Gospels (McKenzie and Watson 2016). There are also a handful of extant Armenian and Georgian NT manuscripts from the seventh and eighth centuries (Metzger 1977:153–214) (Table 1.2).

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

For about the first five centuries, the extant manuscript evidence is overwhelmingly biased towards Egypt. Its arid sands have yielded tens of thousands of ancient texts from the Pharaonic to the Arabic period, and have preserved Christian fragments from as early as the second century CE. To give some idea of the importance of Egypt for the

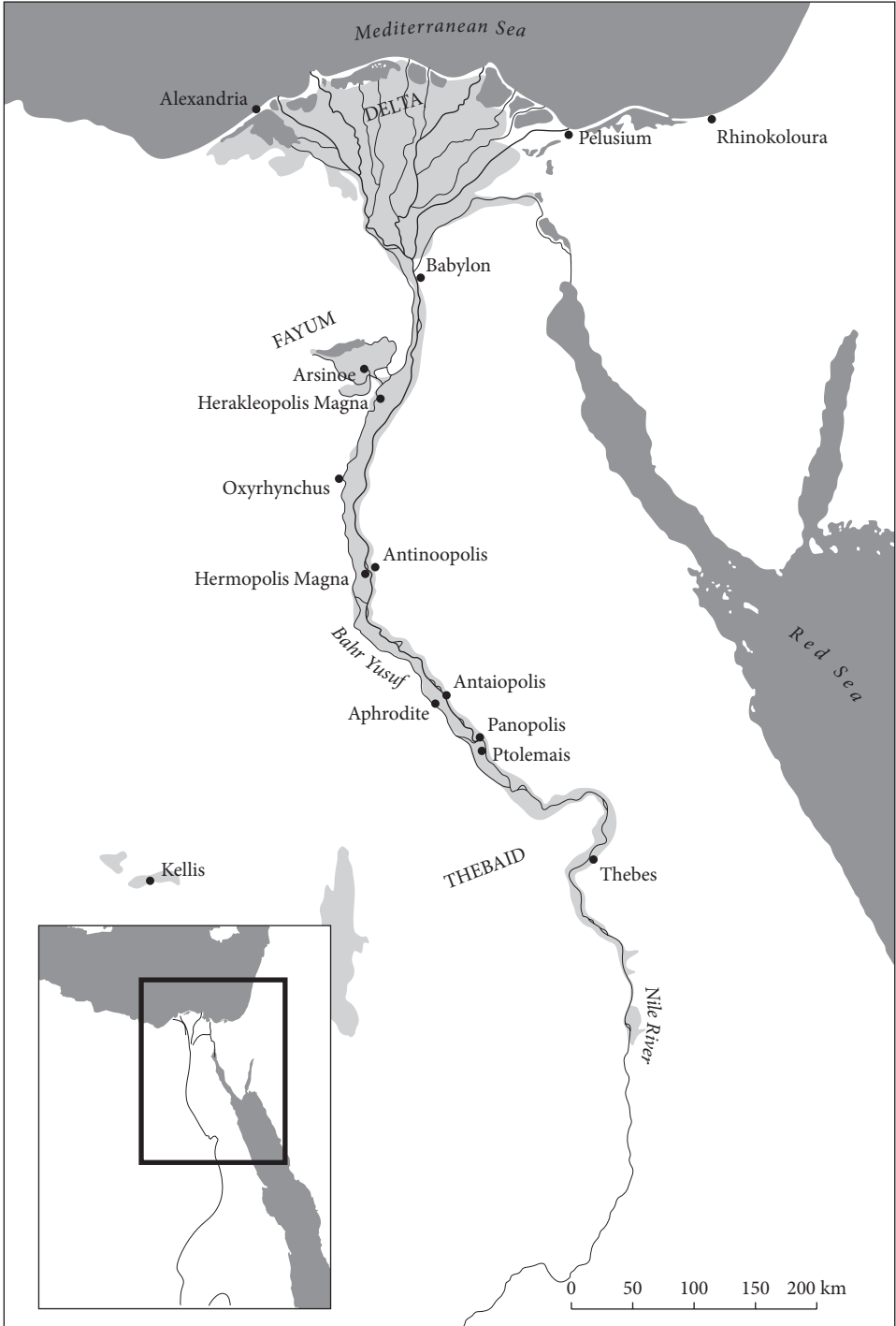
Table 1.2 Significant early Christian biblical witnesses: third to fourth century CE

Papyrus/Codex	Date	Format	Script	Text	Provenance
ⲡ ⁴⁵ (LDAB 2980)	First Half III CE	Papyrus Codex	Greek	Matt 20–6, John 4–11, Luke 6–14, Mark 4–12, Acts 4–17	Egypt, Aphroditopolis (?)
ⲡ ⁴⁶ (LDAB 3011)	First Half III CE	Papyrus Codex	Greek	Rom, Heb, 1 & 2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Phil, Col, 1 Thess	Egypt, Aphroditopolis (?)
ⲡ ⁶⁶ (LDAB 2777)	First Half III CE	Papyrus Codex	Greek	John 1.1–6, 11, 6.35–14.30, 15.3–21.9	Egypt, Panopolis (?)
ⲡ ⁴⁷ (LDAB 2778)	III CE	Papyrus Codex	Greek	Rev 9.10–17.2	Egypt, Aphroditopolis (?)
ⲡ ⁷⁵ (LDAB 2895)	III CE	Papyrus Codex	Greek	Luke 3.18–22.53, John 1.1–15.10	Egypt, Upper Egypt (?)
ⲡ ⁷² (LDAB 2565)	III/Early IV CE	Papyrus Codex	Greek	1–2 Pet, Jude	Egypt, Panopolis (?)
Codex Vaticanus (LDAB 3479)	IV CE	Parchment Codex	Greek	LXX Gen 46.28–Dan 12, Matt 1.1–Heb 9.14	Palestine (?)
Codex Sinaiticus (LDAB 3478)	IV CE	Parchment Codex	Greek	LXX Gen 21.26–Job 42.17, Matt 1.1–Rev 22.21 (and <i>Shepherd of Hermas</i>)	Palestine (?)
Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae (LDAB 7820)	IV CE	Parchment Codex	Latin	Long portions of Mark and Matt	North Africa
Codex Vercellensis (LDAB 7822)	Second Half IV CE	Parchment Codex	Latin	Long portions of Matt, John, Luke, Mark	Italy
Codex Sarravianus- Colbertinus (LDAB 3202)	IV/V CE	Parchment Codex	Greek	Gen 21.43–Judg 21.12	Europe (?)
Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae (LDAB 2985)	IV/V CE	Parchment Codex	Greek	Matt, John, Luke, Mark	Egypt
Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae (LDAB 2929)	c.400 CE	Parchment Codex	Greek/ Latin	Long portions of Matt, John, Luke, Mark, 3 John, and Acts	Syria (?)

study of early Christian manuscripts, of the current 139 NT papyri that range in date from the second to the eighth century, there are only three that do not come from Egypt (ⲡ⁵⁹, ⁶⁰, ⁶¹ [Palestine]). Furthermore, prior to the fourth century there is only one extant scriptural text of Christian origin that does not come from Egypt: a parchment fragment from Dura-Europos (Syria) dating to the first half of the third century that attests Tatian's *Diatesseron* or *Harmony of the Gospels* (P.Dura 10; LDAB 3071). While this gives a skewed view of early Christian manuscripts, and there is a danger of overgeneralizing from one locale, the textual evidence from Egypt is probably indicative—or at the very least instructive—of scribal practices and conventions from other parts of the Mediterranean world (Hurtado 2011:68).

While Alexandria became a centre of Christian scholarship by the latter part of the second century, none of the early biblical fragments come from Alexandria; every piece for which a provenance can be ascertained comes from Middle or Upper Egypt. In general, few texts (Christian or otherwise) have been found in the Nile Delta because it is considerably more moist and humid, which significantly diminishes the afterlife of a text. While it may be possible that some, or even many, of the earliest extant Christian texts originally came from Alexandria, this cannot be proven, and the evidence itself suggests that many of the extant fragments we possess were probably produced in centres outside of Alexandria (Roberts 1979). Far and away the most important Christian centre within Egypt, in terms of the number of texts it has produced, is the provincial metropolis of Oxyrhynchus (modern el-Bahnasa), located some 180 km south of Cairo. Excavated at the turn of the twentieth century by Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, two Oxford dons in search of ancient Greek manuscripts, the rubbish heaps of Oxyrhynchus have yielded tens of thousands of papyri (Parsons 2007). Among these are hundreds of fragments of early Christian texts that all date before the seventh century CE. In addition to biblical fragments, other Christian texts like those from the apostolic fathers (e.g. *Shepherd of Hermas*) or certain patristic writers (e.g. Melito, Irenaeus) as well as miscellaneous texts like homilies, commentaries, dialogues, and hymns have been found (Blumell and Wayment 2015). The importance of Oxyrhynchus for the study of NT manuscripts is illustrated by the fact that 56 (or 40 per cent) of the 139 known NT papyri come from this city (Map 1.1).

The earliest Christian artefacts from Oxyrhynchus are a couple of second-century fragments: \mathfrak{P}^{104} /P.Oxy. LXIV 4404 (Matt) and \mathfrak{P}^{90} /P.Oxy. L 3523 (John). In third-century remains there is a marked jump in the number of Christian texts; at the same time, individual Christians begin to appear in the papyrological record in letters, orders, and official correspondence (Luijendijk 2008; Blumell 2012). Thus far, the most notable third-century Christian to appear in the documentary papyri is a man by the name of Sotas who issues, and receives, a number of ecclesiastical letters of recommendation (P.Alex. 29, PSI III 208, PSI IX 1041, P.Oxy. XXXVI 2785; see also P.Oxy. XII 1492). What is most significant about Sotas for the present purposes is that two of his letters are written on scraps of parchment (PSI III 208, PSI IX 1041), and not papyrus, which is highly unusual. Of the nearly 7,500 published letters from Egypt written in Greek between the third century BCE and seventh century CE, there are only two others written in Greek that are also written on parchment. Given these statistics, it is more than just coincidence that the same person would write two letters on parchment and strongly suggests something more is occurring. It seems, therefore, that the material evidence provided by these two letters suggests that the parchments on which they were written were leftover scraps from the production of texts and that Sotas was involved in the production of Christian manuscripts at Oxyrhynchus. At the same time these letters were written, the manuscript evidence from Oxyrhynchus attests parchment manuscripts of biblical texts: P.Oxy. VI 847 (John 2.11–22); PSI I 5 (Jas 1.25–7); P.Oxy. VIII 1080 (Rev 3.19–4:3); P.Oxy. LXVI 4500 (Rev 11.15–18). Thus, as one perceptive scholar has pointed out, ‘Behind a material detail—these two seemingly insignificant parchment scraps—I behold the contours of a Christian scriptorium at Oxyrhynchus’ (Luijendijk 2008:150–1; cf. Roberts 1979:24).



MAP 1.1 Roman Egypt

EARLY CHRISTIAN MANUSCRIPTS

The ‘books’ (*libri*; βιβλία) of the first centuries CE were primarily scrolls (*rotuli*/κύλινδροι). Manuscript remains from Egypt, Herculaneum, Palestine, and a few other locations and ancient artistic depictions of readers and writers reveal that Graeco-Roman culture had a strong preference for the roll as the standard format for producing texts (Johnson 2004). At the same time, the most common material used for scrolls was papyrus (*charta*/χάρτης), which was made from the papyrus plant (*papyrus*/πάπυρος) that was indigenous to Egypt. Though papyrus was effectively the ‘paper’ of the ancient world (Pliny, *HN* 13.74–82; Lewis 1974:34–69), parchment (*pergamena*; μεμβράνα, δέρμα, διφθέρα), made from animal skin (normally calves, goats, and sheep), was also used as a writing medium (Pliny, *HN* 13.21f.). To manufacture a roll, several sheets of papyrus were glued together to form a long strip (*κόλλημα*), or stitched together if it was made of parchment; though size could vary, it appears that rolls were usually anywhere from 22 to 38 cm in height and could be up to 15 m in length (Johnson 2004:143–52). Texts on rolls made from papyrus were typically written along the recto where the orientation of the plant fibre runs horizontally (instead of the verso where the orientation was vertical) because it was easier to write. Only very rarely was a text written on both sides of the roll (*opistograph*; Rev 5.1; Lucian, *vit. auct.* 9; Pliny, *ep.* 3.5.17; Martial, *Spect.* 8.62; Juvenal, *Sat.* 1.6). Text was written in columns (*paginae*/σελίδες) which ranged from 5 to 10 cm in width and was broken up by inter-columnar margins which tended to be quite thin. In deluxe editions, scrolls might have been fastened and tightly rolled around a wooden roller (*umbilicus*/ὄμφαλός; Horace, *epist.* 14.8; Martial, *Spect.* 4.89) and might contain a visible tag (*titulus*/σίλλυβος) attached to the exterior that contained the title of the work (Cicero, *Att.* 4.8.2: P.Ant. I 21: a tag that contains Πίνδαρος ὅλος ‘The complete Pindar’).

Despite the overwhelming preference in Graeco-Roman society for the roll, which was also shared among Jewish scriptural texts as evinced by the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), early Christian Scriptures were overwhelmingly written in a codex, or book, format (Hurtado 2006:44–53). In fact, it was not until the fourth century in general that the Graeco-Roman world at large began to prefer the codex to the scroll (Roberts and Skeat 1983:35–7). In contrast to the roll, the codex was made of leaves of papyrus (or parchment) fastened together like a modern book and had a precursor in Roman *tabula* where two (*diptych*), or more (*triptych*, *polytych*), wooden plates were fastened together for notebooks (Livy 6.1.2; Quintilian, *inst.* 10.3.31; Martial, *Spect.* 14.184–92; Pliny, *HN* 35.7; Bagnall 2009:70–90). The earliest codices seem to have been single-quire and could hold a maximum of around 250 pages (about 125 leaves) before the spine became strained and a bulge in the centre of the book was created (Skeat 1969:65–7). The earliest single-quire codices that preserve scriptural texts are \mathfrak{P}^{46} (Pauline Epistles), \mathfrak{P}^{47} (Revelation), and \mathfrak{P}^{75} (Luke and John); however, there are also a few early codices that were made of multiple quires like \mathfrak{P}^{66} (John) and \mathfrak{P}^{45} (Matthew, John, Luke, Mark, Acts). Before the fourth century, pandect bibles—which could have contained both the OT and NT

between two covers—were probably non-existent as the codicological technology required to facilitate such a massive tome had not yet been refined and developed.

Many utilitarian reasons have been put forth to explain the early Christian preference for the codex over the roll as the preferred format for scriptural transmission (Hurtado 2006:63–9): it had a practical advantage in terms of cost (Roberts and Skeat 1983:45–53); it was easier to carry and was ideal for evangelization (cf. Martial, *Spect.* 1.2); it more readily facilitated locating scriptural passages (Metzger and Ehrman 2005:12–13); and it was easier to use because it only required one hand and not two. While such reasons may have been contributing factors, none can readily account for the very early, and seemingly widespread, use of the codex by Christians—only a handful of NT papyri were not written in codex format (P¹², 13, 18, 22, 134). A fairly recent hypothesis has suggested that because a single codex (multi-quire) could contain far more text than one roll—which could typically contain up to about 1,500 lines—it could accommodate multiple treatises between two covers; thus, the formation of the canon may have been a factor in the choice of the codex (Trobisch 2000; Hurtado 2006:59; Kruger 2013:20–2). As a result, an inherent relationship may have existed between the form and the content and the choice by early Christians to prefer this technology (Table 1.3).

This does not imply, of course, that all early Christian scriptural codices were uniform, since there was variation in size, layout, format, make, and material. The earliest evidence shows that papyrus was the most common material for early Christian Scriptures, although as one moves into the late third, fourth, and subsequent centuries, there is a growing use of parchment (Turner 1977:37–9). While the use of parchment may have expanded because it was more durable than papyrus and was deemed more valuable, it was also considerably more expensive (Kotsifou 2007:61–3; Bagnall 2009:50–69). When Constantine ordered fifty de luxe copies of the ‘sacred Scriptures’ for the churches of Constantinople he specifically instructed that they be made of ‘parchment’ (*διφθέρα*; Eusebius, *v.C.* 4.36). As the use of parchment evolved, not only were de luxe editions of the Bible written on parchment, but in a few rare cases the parchment was even dyed purple to give it an added aesthetic appeal (Booker 1997). In fact, because parchment was so

Table 1.3 Extant early Christian literary texts by format

Text	II CE		II/III CE		III CE		III/IV CE	
	Roll	Codex	Roll	Codex	Roll	Codex	Roll	Codex
Septuagint (LXX)	1	3	1	7	4	24	3	15
New Testament	–	3	–	4	4	33	1	8
<i>Shepherd of Hermas</i>	–	–	1	1	2	4	1	1
Patristic Text	–	–	2	–	1	1	1	5
Apocrypha (OT and NT)	1	1	–	3	5	3	1	2
Unidentified Homilies, Commentaries, etc.	1	–	2	2	6	6	6	4

valuable it was periodically reused with the previous underlying text scraped or washed away to prepare for a new text (palimpsest); Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C), a fifth-century biblical manuscript (OT [LXX] and NT), was later erased and reused in the twelfth century for the sermons of St Ephrem.

In terms of size, early Christian scriptural codices varied greatly and ranged from 41 cm in height down to less than 10 cm, and also varied in width. To the end of the third century it appears that on average they tended to be above 20 cm in height (Hurtado 2006:162–3). \mathfrak{P}^{45} and \mathfrak{P}^{75} , which sometimes preserve entire pages (with margins), measure about 20 × 25 cm (W × H) and 13.0 × 26.0 cm (W × H) respectively. Likewise, \mathfrak{P}^{46} from the first half of the third century measures about 16 × 27 cm (W × H) (Figure 1.1). However, since many of the earliest fragments of Christian Scriptures are quite small, only occupying a portion of a page, reconstructing the contours and dimensions of the codex from which they came can be difficult. A notable feature of some early Christian codices is their tendency to be quite small and so they have been given the designation of ‘miniature’ (Turner 1977:51, defined as less than 10 cm in width). Such codices are mostly made of parchment and contain a high number of texts that came to be deemed ‘non-canonical’ (Kruger 2013:26–7). It has accordingly been suggested that a codex’s size reflected how the manuscript was used; smaller copies were primarily intended for

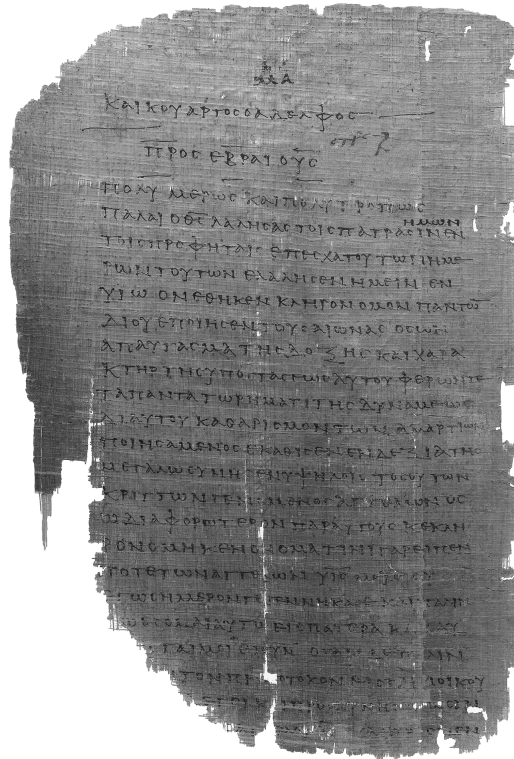


FIGURE 1.1 Page from \mathfrak{P}^{46} , end of Romans and start of Hebrews

personal use while larger copies were probably used in communal and liturgical settings (Gamble 1995:236; Hurtado 2011:75).

In terms of page layout, early Christian manuscripts tend to have been written in one column per page with straight margins, giving the text a distinct rectangular or square shape. While there are a few notable exceptions that are written with two columns per page (P⁴, ⁶⁴, ⁶⁷ [late second/early third century CE], 0171 [late second/early third century CE]; probably P¹¹³ [third century CE]), it is not generally until the fourth and subsequent centuries that two-, three-, and even four-column formats become more common in Christian manuscripts: Codex Vaticanus has three columns; Codex Sinaiticus has four columns, and Codex Alexandrinus (A) has two columns as do P³⁴ (seventh century CE) and P⁴¹ (eighth century CE). The early Coptic and Latin manuscripts likewise employ the single-column format, and in early non-Christian codices of the Roman and Byzantine periods there is also a clear preference for the single-column format (Turner 1977:101–85).

Like other ancient prose texts, a feature of early Christian Scriptures, as well as early Christian texts in general, was that they were written with no word division (*scriptio continua*), at least until the eighth century CE. While some ancient Latin texts initially contained word division, it was not universal, and eventually this habit was given up in order to conform to Greek custom. As a result, the earliest extant Latin biblical texts were written without separation, as were all of the earliest Greek and Coptic manuscripts. Even for a skilled lector, picking up and reading a text smoothly and proficiently at first sight would have been extremely difficult (Criamore 2001:189–90), and persons who could read fluently ‘at sight’ without any previous preparation were deemed exceptional (Petronius, *Sat.* 75.4: *librum ab oculo legit*). Therefore, it is probably best to imagine that lectors of early Christian manuscripts analysed and studied the text before public reading in order to interpret its proper division, prosody, and delivery (Lucian, *De mort. Peregr.* 11; Justin, *1 apol.* 67.1; Tertullian, *praescr.* 41; Hippolytus, *trad.* 11; Cyprian, *ep.* 38.2, 39.1; *Const. App.* 2.47, 8.22; Jerome, *ep.* 147.6). For example, even a familiar passage in English might suddenly become somewhat cryptic when written in this way:

*godsolovedtheworldthathegavehisonlybegottensonthatwhoeverbelievesinhi
mshouldnotperishbuthaveeternallifeindeedgoddidnotsendthesonintothew
orldtocondemntheworldbutinorderthattheworldmightbesavedthroughhim*

While *scriptio continua* would have made reading more difficult, as word division facilitates comprehension and interpretation, this generally did not pose significant interpretative difficulties, even if there are places where there is some ambiguity over how to divide words (Metzger and Ehrman 2005:22–3; Mark 10.40, ἀλλ’οἷς ἠτοίμασται or ἄλλοις ἠτοίμασται; Rom 7.14, οἶδαμεν or οἶδα μὲν; 1 Tim 3.16, καὶ ὁμολογουμένως μέγα ἐστὶν or καὶ ὁμολογοῦμεν ὡς μέγα ἐστὶν). Nonetheless, there are some claims that this led to problems: Irenaeus reports how faulty stops, mispronunciations, and the erroneous use of *hyperbaton* led certain readers of the scriptures to heretical interpretations

(*haer.* 3.7.1–2); Augustine likewise recorded how various NT phrases could be erroneously read aloud, leading to unorthodox interpretations if they were not punctuated properly (*doctr. chr.* 3.1–6). By contrast, the Hebrew texts of the DSS were generally written with slight word division as were the LXX texts from Qumran and Naḥal Ḥever (Tov 1990:9–12).

Other Inscriptional Features

In comparison to modern editions, early Christian biblical manuscripts are quite bare, although in some there are a few extra-textual features that appear to shed light on how these texts were employed and read. Among the earliest Christian manuscripts of the third century is a system of pagination that was placed in the upper margin, either in the centre or outer margin. As Greek employed a system of alphanumerics where every letter had a corresponding numeric value (i.e. $\alpha = 1, \beta = 2, \gamma = 3$, etc.), page numbers were simple letter combinations written with a supralinear stroke to indicate that they should be taken as a number (e.g. $\overline{\kappa\beta} = 23, \overline{\chi\iota\zeta} = 617$). While pagination was not very common, as less than 20 per cent of Christian scriptural manuscripts contain it (including the deluxe editions like Codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Sarravianus-Colbertinus), its mere presence may suggest that referencing or locating a passage was important in that text (Mugridge 2016:72–5). In a day before versification and chapter division as we have them today, pagination could have greatly facilitated locating passages. As one moves into the fourth and fifth centuries, an early system of chapter division or capitulation (*κεφάλια*) emerges in certain manuscripts, of which the oldest extant system can be found in Codex Vaticanus (not to be confused with modern chapter division in the Bible that was added in the thirteenth century by the Archbishop of Canterbury). Most *κεφάλια* were accompanied by a title (*τίτλος*) that described the chapter (von Soden 1902:405f.). So too, the Eusebian Canons (*κανόνες*), a system designed to identify and locate passages in the four Gospels with either the same or similar content, are attested at this time (Edwards 2010; for details of this system see Eusebius, *ep. Carp.*); it may even be possible that a precursor to the Eusebian system, perhaps based on the parallels and divisions supposedly developed by Ammonius Saccas (c.175–242 CE), can be detected in some third-century papyri (Wayment and Trotter 2016). Finally, prologues (*argumenta/ὑποθέσεις*) began to appear in a few manuscripts, Greek and Latin, beginning in the fifth century.

Within the scriptural text itself, there are also some extra-textual features that served as early reading and/or interpretative aids. In general, there is very little punctuation of any kind in early Christian manuscripts, or Graeco-Roman literature as a whole, before the seventh century CE. Among the earliest forms of punctuation in Christian manuscripts is the use of diaeresis (or *trema*) where two dots were frequently placed above vowels, typically iota and upsilon (e.g. \ddot{i} and \ddot{v}), to make a distinction (*διαίρεσις*) between a single vowel and a diphthong. An apostrophe (') was used to mark elision (typically

gutturals) or the end of a noun that could not be declined (i.e. certain Hebrew names), and rough breathings (´) sometimes appear to differentiate pronouns from homonyms. In general, accents (acute [´], grave [˘], and circumflex [˘]) are absent in early manuscripts until the introduction of ninth-century minuscule (Aland and Aland 1995:128–58). High, medial, and low points (e.g. ˙, ˘, ˘) were used to mark sense breaks, although what exactly the rationale is for the different heights is unclear. Other early ways to signal sense divisions include *ekthesis* (ἐκθεσις) (letters in the line extend into the left margin) or *eisthesis* (εἰσθεσις) (letters in the line are indented), and letters were sometimes written in markedly different sizes (allographs) to indicate breaks in the text (e.g. Α and α, Β and β, etc.). Likewise, there is also the use of *paragraphoi* (παράγραφος) (—) or a forked *paragraphoi* (·) to mark division in the text. When such features are present in a manuscript it is best to understand them as lectional aids and that the manuscript in question was used primarily for public reading (Charlesworth 2011; Kloppenborg 2016). Thus, despite the fact that ancient manuscripts generally did not make many concessions to the reader, such markers in select Christian manuscripts, beyond benefiting the liturgical lectors who were reading them, may have also enfranchised a wider group of people into Christian public reading beyond just literary elites (Hurtado 2012).

The most notable, and indeed distinct, of these extra-textual features in Christian manuscripts is the use of the so-called *nomina sacra* in Greek, Latin, and Coptic manuscripts (Traube 1907). Certain ‘sacred names’ like *θεος*, *κυριος*, *ιησους*, *χριστος*, and *πνευμα* were abbreviated in Christian manuscripts either through suspension or more typically by contraction along with the use of a supralinear stroke (e.g., *θεος* > *θς*, *ιησους* > *ις* or *ιης*, *πνευμα* > *πνα*). Over time other words were added to this compendium: *ανθρωπος*, *πατηρ*, *υιος*, *ισραηλ*, *ουρανος*, *σωτηρ*, and *δαυιδ* (Aland 1976:420–8). In Ψ^{10} , which preserves Romans 1.1–7, there is a very high concentration of *nomina sacra*; in eleven lines of text eighteen *nomina sacra* are employed attesting seven different words: *χριστος*, *ιησους*, *θεος*, *υιος*, *πνευμα*, *κυριος*, and *πατηρ* (Figure 1.2). The origin of this practice, which is already attested in second-century fragments, is unclear, but may have had its roots in Jewish scribal practice where there was reverence in the textual handling of the tetragrammaton (Tuckett 2003; Hurtado 2006:95–134). The widespread use of *nomina sacra* across Christian manuscripts most likely attests to some degree of organization or even standardization in manuscript production (Charlesworth 2016; Roberts 1979:26–48). A related, though not identical, feature of some early Christian manuscripts ($\Psi^{45, 66, 75}$) is the use of the ‘stauogram’ (Ⲟ) in the words ‘cross’ (*σταυρός*) and the verb ‘to crucify’ (*σταυρώω*). Here it is used in place of the letter combination *-ταυρ-* and appears as *σⲞος* or *σⲞω* (Mugridge 2016:131). While it is not a genuine abbreviation like the *nomina sacra*, since it is not accompanied by a supralinear stroke, it is certainly signalling some kind of attention to the ‘cross/crucifixion’. It may even function as a pictorial representation of the crucifixion, and if so, it is the earliest known depiction (Hurtado 2006:139–52). Christian manuscripts are otherwise devoid of illumination of any kind before the sixth century (i.e. Codex Sinopensis and Codex Rossanensis).

Other features of early Christian manuscripts that deserve brief mention are the presence of titles, colophons, and *hermeneiai*. While it appears that titles of certain

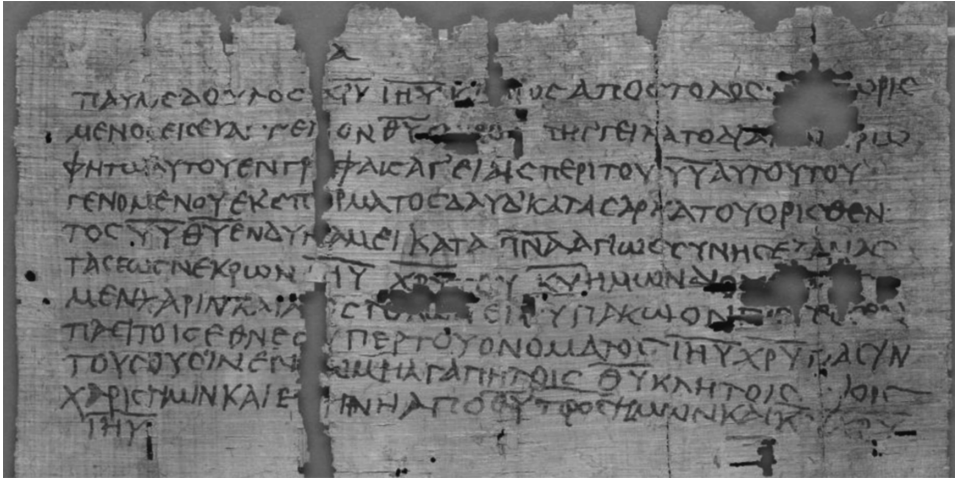


FIGURE 1.2 P.Oxy. III 209 (Ms GR SM 2218), beginning of Rom. 1, high concentration of *nomina sacra*

NT books as we have them today, namely the Gospels, were not originally included (Justin, *1 apol.* 67.1), and books were principally known by their incipits (i.e. first line of text: *αρχη του ευαγγελιου ιησου χριστου* [Mark 1.1]), by the later part of the second century titles are attested (Muratorian Canon; Irenaeus, *haer.* 3.11.8). While many of the early fragments do not contain the beginning or end of a book so that it is not possible to determine whether there is a superscription or a subscription, in some early third-century texts they are present: Ψ^{46} (*προς εβραιους; προς κορινθους; ᾱ προς φιλιππησιους;* etc.); Ψ^{66} and Ψ^{75} (*ευαγγελιον κατα ιωαννην*); Ψ^{72} (*ιουδα επιστολη*). Over time they become greatly expanded and more elaborate as various epithets or other details are attached to the names of biblical authors appearing in the title (Metzger and Ehrman 2005:270–1). Associated with the employment of titles is the adoption of colophons written by the copyist who prepared the manuscript. Before the fourth century there is only one extant colophon that appears in Ψ^{72} at the end of 1 and 2 Peter, where the copyist wrote: *ειρηνη τω γραψαντι και τω αναγνωσκοντι* (‘peace to the one who has written and to him who is reading’). From the fourth century onward colophons began to be more common, lengthy, and descriptive as copyists would include their names, date, divine warnings, descriptions about the production of the text, or in some instances self-deprecating epithets (Wendel 1950; Metzger 1981:20–1; Irenaeus *apud* Eusebius, *h.e.* 5.20.2). Finally, a few of the earliest manuscripts contain *hermeneiai* (*ἐρμηνεῖαι*) or ‘interpretations’, the earliest of which may occur in Ψ^{80} , a small fragment once dated to the later part of the third century CE but now believed to be later (Orsini and Clarysse 2012:459–60) and which contains John 3.34. After the scriptural passage there is a pithy statement that reads: *ερμηνια αληθη εστιν τα λελαλημενα παρ αυτου εαν σ[υ εν αυτοις] ωφεληθηση* † (‘Interpretation: the things that have been spoken by him are true if you will be benefited in them † ’). Thus, one can detect in such *hermeneiai* a rudimentary reflection on the passage in question (Jones 2014).

SCRIBES AND SCRIPTORIA

While it is common to talk about the copyists and transmitters of early Christian Scriptures and other literature as ‘scribes’, this designation is quite generic, as there was a wide range of terms (both Greek and Latin) used in antiquity for persons involved in scribal activities (Haines-Eitzen 2000:21–40). Though the most common word used for ‘scribes’ (*scribae*; γραμματεῖς) can imply literary activity, one of the principal meanings of those so identified in Graeco-Roman society had to do with administration and clerking (see Acts 19.35, where the title is principally used for a city administrator). Thus, many different persons such as local administrators, clerks, secretaries, accountants, and in some circumstances even slaves (Cicero, *Att.* 13.3), performed scribal activities. On the other hand, there were terms used for what may be regarded as ‘professional scribes’ (*librarii*; βιβλιογράφοι; καλλιγράφοι), whose primary task was to copy and prepare manuscripts for a wealthy patron, a library, or a book dealer (*bibliopola*; βιβλιοκάπηλος). The difference between ‘scribes’ and the scribal products of others is illustrated in the price edict of Diocletian from 301 CE, where the Emperor stipulates how much ‘scribes’ can charge: ‘To a scribe (*scriptor*): 25 denarii for 100 lines of first-rate bookhand; 20 denarii for 110 lines in second rate bookhand; to a notary writing petitions or deeds, 10 denarii for 100 lines’ (*Edictum de pretiis rerum venalium* 7.39–41). Bearing this in mind, and coupled with a general reticence in Christian sources for the first couple of centuries regarding who was actually copying and producing texts, it begs the question of what kind of ‘scribes’ were copying and producing early Christian manuscripts.

In the NT itself there are indirect references to the employment of ‘scribes’ in the production of various books (Rom 16.22; Gal 6.11; Richards 2004:81–93), but the references provide little information regarding who they actually were and in what capacity they functioned with respect to the production of the book in question. At the start of the second century Lucian of Samosata makes a passing remark about Christian ‘scribes’ (γραμματεῖς), but it is not directly associated with the production of manuscripts (*De mort. Peregr.* 11). The only Christian reference to the copying of a text in the second century is found in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, where Hermas reports that he copied a book ‘letter by letter, for I could not distinguish the syllables’ (*Vis.* 2.1.4). Hermas, who is nowhere in the text described as a trained scribe, acted as his own copyist; when he was finished, he began circulating copies among the Church in Rome (*vis.* 2.4.3). The picture that emerges from the *Shepherd of Hermas* is one of private copying (and circulation). Likewise, as one moves into the early third century, a similar scenario is presented; during the episcopate of Zephyrinus (bishop of Rome c.198–217 CE) a story is alleged of two laymen (one of whom was a banker) who made various copies of the Scriptures, albeit corrupt, and circulated them (Eusebius, *h.e.* 5.28).

Turning to the earliest extant manuscript evidence from the second and early third century, all signs point to the fact that these were not ‘professional’ productions akin to some of the noteworthy specimens of classical literature. The scripts of the earliest

manuscript are not written with a professional ‘bookhand’ but rather in what has been described as a ‘reformed documentary’ hand (Roberts 1979:12–17), implying that the producers of such manuscripts were not trained calligraphers or well accustomed to producing books. This does not imply that such manuscripts were necessarily of low quality, or that those who produced them were unskilled, but it does indicate something about the status of the first Christian copyists and the context in which these manuscripts were most likely produced. For the first few centuries it is probably best to imagine that Christian scribes who copied Scriptures were not professional copyists involved in the commercial book trade but rather ‘multifunctional scribes’ who worked in a number of different literary spheres (clerks, secretaries, registrars, low-level administration, etc.) and could copy scriptural texts (Haines-Eitzen 2000:68). Thus, it seems likely that many early Christians self-produced their texts individually, in small private ‘scribal’ networks, or in local communities and congregations. Based on the available evidence, this model appears to have been in operation at Oxyrhynchus even into the latter part of the third century (Luijendijk 2008:144–51). Though it has been argued that early Christian manuscripts must have been created in a somewhat controlled context because they share certain conventions (Charlesworth 2011), it needs to be remembered that all the early evidence comes from Egypt so that we are not privy to any widespread geographical diversity.

Where the earliest Christians copied their texts is also a matter of some speculation and debate. While it was once supposed that early copies of the Scriptures were produced in ‘scriptoria’ akin to the early medieval model, where a reader (*lector*, ἀναγνώστης) would read (or cantillate) the Scriptures and monks would simultaneously copy manuscripts under close supervision of a monastic superior (*praepositus*; ἡγούμενος), such a view is anachronistic for the first four or five centuries. By the sixth century there is evidence for Christian scriptoria closer to this model (Cassiodorus, *inst.* 1.15, 30; Mugridge 2004), but the early evidence is piecemeal and even the term ‘scriptoria’ poses a problem of definition (Gamble 1995:191). Derived from the Latin term *scriptorius*, this term is not used in the context of a ‘scriptoria’ or ‘writing room’ until the tenth or eleventh century (Niermeyer and Van de Kieft 2002:1236). Likewise, there is no corresponding Greek term that is used in early Christian sources; the closest term could perhaps be γραφεῖον, which served as a registry or record office, but there is no early evidence that it was ever used by Christians for a scriptorium. Furthermore, while it is often taken for granted that Alexandria, Caesarea, Jerusalem, or Rome had Christian scriptoria from at least the second century (Zuntz 1953), the actual evidence is elusive. All the same, as some early manuscripts show signs of correction, it should be assumed that there were some early controls over the production process (Charlesworth 2016), but this need not be anything more than a fellow copyist or proof reader (*anagnosta*; διορθωτής) checking the text and need not imply that a large editorial apparatus was in place.

By the later part of the fourth century things would change significantly, and the manuscript evidence provided by Codex Vaticanus and especially Codex Sinaiticus reveals a formal process of revision and correction that was carried out during and after the manuscript was completed (Jongkind 2007). In fact, over time a whole system of

scribal sigla and notations were developed and added to manuscripts marking errors, omissions, additions, or general questions about the manuscript (Mugridge 2016:101–6). So too, a notation system was even developed marking passages of contested authenticity beginning in the third century. Origen, for example, noted that an obelus (ὀβελός; e.g. –, ▯, ∷) or an asterisk (ἀστέρισκος; e.g. ✕) marked passages in the LXX (and Hebrew) whose origin was in dispute (Origen, *comm. in Matt.* 15.14); some of these notations can be found in early Christian manuscripts of the LXX (Schironi 2015). On the other hand, in Codex Sinaiticus one of the correctors of the manuscript placed a series of dots around Luke 22.43–44 (fol. 244b col. 3), which was originally included in the manuscript, to mark the passage as spurious or perhaps even remove it altogether. This is interesting since about this time there was much debate over whether or not Luke 22.43–4 was authentic (Epiphanius, *anc.* 31.4–5; Hilary, *trin.* 10.41.1; Jerome, *Pelag.* 2.16; Blumell 2014). All of this suggests some textual controls were in force during and after manuscripts were produced; but this did not stop persons from making their own copies of Scriptures much to the chagrin of certain ecclesiastical leaders (Augustine, *doctr. chr.* 2.11.16). Likewise, ancient Christian literature is replete with warnings, complaints, and allegations of faulty transmission and scriptural corruption (Rev 22.18; Irenaeus, *haer.* 1.8.1; Eusebius, *h.e.* 4.23.12, 5.28.13–17; Tertullian, *praescr.* 38, *Marc.* 4.2; Origen, *comm. in Matt.* 15.14, *Cels.* 2.27; Lactantius, *div. inst.* 4.30; Julian, *Galil.* 327A; Cyril, *catech.* 1.7; Ambrose, *fid.* 5.16; Chrysostom, *hom. in Phil.* 11; Jerome, *praef. in libro Iob* 41–8; Augustine, *Conf.* 5.11, 21; Socrates, *h.e.* 7.32). Of course, the manuscripts themselves also attest to a wide range of variants. But this does not imply that they were recklessly produced; while corruptions do occur, both intentional and unintentional, and scribes could have a bad reputation (LXX Jer 8.8), the extant manuscript remains do usually show great care in their production. It has been noted that if there is any tendency by early Christian scribes copying scriptural texts it is that they tended to shorten the text rather than add to it (Royse 2007:705–36).

In terms of how early Christians copied their manuscripts there is little direct evidence. To be sure, a copyist would have required the essential tools of the scribal trade like a reed pen (κάλαμος or δόναξ), a sharpening knife (σμίλη), a sponge (σπογγιά) for erasures and wiping the pen, ink (*atramentum/μέλαν*), which was typically dark brown or black, and an ink well (*atramentarium/μελανοδοχείον*) for storage. But the exact method by which the early copyists carried out their work is a matter of some conjecture since there is virtually no evidence for the use of tables, desks, or chairs aside from much later anachronistic depictions of how early Christians supposedly produced their texts. Based on much earlier pre-Christian evidence it appears that copyists would sit on the ground or on a stool and rest the section of the codex or roll upon their knee (Skeat 2004:1–10). The extant evidence suggests that production was done primarily by copying from an exemplar instead of having a text read aloud and writing down what one heard; in fact, some of the variants that appear in early manuscripts can be easily attributed to transcriptional errors (i.e. haplography, dittography, homoioteleuton, etc.; cf. Origen, *comm. in Matt.* 15.14). Hermas reports copying his text ‘letter by letter’ (*vis.* 2.1.4), showing he was working from an exemplar. In a colophon of one of the works of Irenaeus preserved

by Eusebius (*h.e.* 5.20.2), the copyist is warned carefully and faithfully to reproduce the text and ‘collate’ (*ἀντιβάλλειν*) it against the exemplar: the colophon presupposes the transcription will be the work of a single scribe copying from an exemplar. Likewise, the recording of *stichoi* (*versus*; *στίχοι*)—a line that usually measured between fifteen or sixteen syllables and was roughly the same length as a hexameter verse—at the end of certain early copies of NT manuscripts suggests they were copied visually from an exemplar (Ψ⁴⁶; Houghton 2016:21). But this does not imply that dictation was never used in the copying process. In the detached portion of Codex Sinaiticus (i.e. Codex Frederico-Augustanus) there are two scribal notes, one at the end of 2 Esdras and the other at the end of Esther. These claim that certain portions were collated against a much earlier autograph manuscript made by Pamphilus of Caesarea (d. 16 Feb. 309 CE), and at the end of that manuscript the notes record the following colophon purportedly given by Pamphilus himself: ‘This volume has been transcribed from, and corrected by the Hexapla of Origen, as corrected by his own hand. Antoninus, the confessor, collated (*ἀντέβαλεν*), and I, Pamphilus, corrected (*διόρθωσα*) the volume in prison, by the favour and enlargement of God’ (Skeat 2004:18; Grafton and Williams 2006:186) (Figure 1.3).

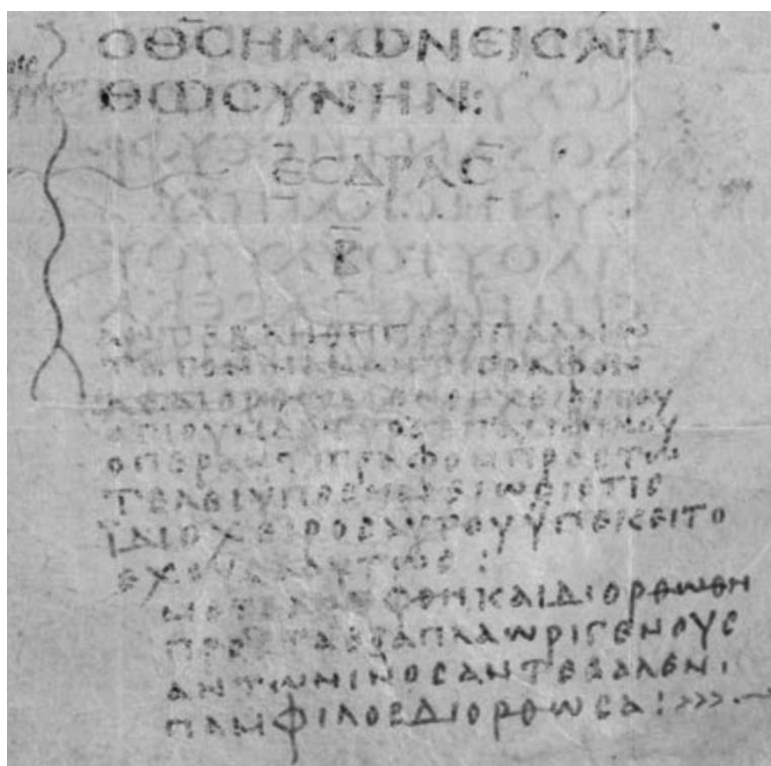


FIGURE 1.3 Colophon by Pamphilus as preserved by Codex Sinaiticus (2 Esdras: Quire 36 fol. 5r col. 3)

Taking the colophon at face value, Antoninus appears to have read the text while Pamphilus made corrections and copied. Thus, while the early use of dictation does not seem to have been especially prevalent, when multiple scribes were involved in the production of a text some dictation may have been involved in various stages. Furthermore, as dictation of certain kinds of texts (namely letters) was common in the ancient world (Cicero, *Att.* 2.23; 3.15.8; 7.13; 8.15; 12.32.1; 13.32; Pliny, *HN* 7.91; Plutarch, *Caes.* 17.7; Fronto, *Ep. Ad Marcum Caesarem.* 4.7), and it is evident from various sources that Christian sermons, lectures, homilies, dialogues, and commentaries could be transcribed *viva voce* (Rufinus, *hist.* 11.7; Jerome, *Ephes.* 2; Socrates, *h.e.* 6.4; Augustine, *ep.* 174 and *retract.* 2.41), dictation may well have been used at times in the production of some early biblical manuscripts (Skeat 2004:15–24).

With the onset of the third century the evidence begins to suggest a more ‘professional’ publication process of Christian Scripture in Christian centres. The rise of ecclesiastical libraries in the third century would have naturally facilitated the production of manuscripts (Jerusalem: *h.e.* 6.20.1; Caesarea: *h.e.* 7.32.25; Grafton and Williams 2006:56–69; Williams 2006:136–66). The most often cited passage attesting this comes from Eusebius, when describing the literary resources available to Origen at the library of Caesarea c.232 CE: ‘For as he dictated there were ready at hand more than seven shorthand-writers (*ταχυγράφοι*), who relieved each other at fixed times, and as many copyists (*βιβλιογράφοι*), as well as girls trained for beautiful writing (*καλλιγράφοι*)...’ (*h.e.* 6.23; cf. Epiphanius, *haer.* 64.3.5). While this scenario is unique, and Origen is not dictating verbatim the Scriptures for copying purposes, but rather lecturing, it certainly highlights that by the third century Christian texts could be produced in a more ‘professional’ manner. As Christian libraries developed and grew in the third and especially fourth centuries there would naturally be an association with the production of Christian Scripture and books in general (Jerome, *ep.* 49.3). It is clear that some notable libraries possessed a staff who not only maintained the collection but also copied and recopied the texts; in c.350 CE the library at Caesarea was recopied *en masse* by Euzoius and his staff because the books were becoming worn out (Jerome, *vir. ill.* 113.1). On this final point, while little is known with certainty about the average shelf life of a manuscript in the ancient world, there is some indication that in exceptional cases they could remain in use for upwards of two centuries (Houston 2009:248–51; Evans 2015).

As with ecclesiastical libraries, churches were often places where Scriptures were read and may even have been produced (Markschies 2015:266–80). Churches possessed collections of books, and in fact, the first edict of the ‘Great Persecution’ issued by Diocletian in February of 303 CE presumed that churches were places where books could be found (Eusebius, *h.e.* 8.2.4; *Gesta apud Zenophilum* 186.20–4; cf. P.Oxy. XXXIII 2673 and Choat and Yuen-Collingridge 2009). A unique papyrus from the seventh or eighth century provides a fragmentary inventory of a church’s collection of books from somewhere in Egypt (P.Lugd.Bat. XXV 13); while the inventory is dominated by NT books, it also lists a number of patristic texts by authors such as Serapion (of Thmuis), Basil, Chrysostom, and Gregory (of Nazianzus), and the books are divided

between parchment and papyrus manuscripts. By the later fourth century, monks, and by extension monasteries, were the principal vehicles for the production of Christian Scriptures (Kotsifou 2007; Maravela-Solbakk 2008; Robinson 2011:130–43); there are various references to monks copying scriptural texts from the fourth century onward (Rufinus, *apol.* 2.11; Palladius, *h. Laus.* 32, 38; Athanasius, *apol. Const.* 4). Some monasteries even had ‘professional scribes’ (καλλιγράφοι) in connection to their libraries (V. Pach. 40; Palladius, *h. Laus.* 32.12). Monks copied texts for themselves, friends, their monastic library, and might even carry out this work on a commercial basis (Palladius, *h. Laus.* 7.4; Rapp 1991:134–6). At present the best manuscript evidence for the actual production of biblical texts at a monastery comes from Naqlun just south of the Fayum (Egypt) that has yielded a number of texts from the sixth century (Derda 1995). Finally, bookshops became a place where scriptural manuscripts could be purchased and made to order (Trobisch 2000; Casson 2001:78; Augustine, *serm.* 114B.15, 198.20; *Psal.* 36.1).

CIRCULATION OF MANUSCRIPTS

Paul’s letters give the impression that texts were primarily circulated by co-workers and associates and were then publicly read in groups or congregations (Rom 16.1, 2 Cor 2.9; Eph 6.21, Col 4.7, 16, 1 Thess 5.27, 2 Pet 3.15–16). Ignatius’ letters from the start of the second century seem to have circulated following a similar pattern (*Philad.* 13.1–2), and Hermas gives his revelation to two associates who in turn circulate it to other congregations by having it read aloud (*vis.* 2.4.3). In certain respects, the picture that emerges of the early circulation of Christian texts, where they were initially exchanged in smaller networks among immediate associates, appears to mirror the early scribal networks in which manuscripts were produced. Nonetheless, there is some evidence that texts could still circulate far and wide in a relatively short period of time after production. For example, a second- or early third-century fragment of Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies* from Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. III 405) might suggest the rapid dissemination and circulation of this text from Gaul to Egypt shortly after it was written (Roberts 1979:53; Blumell and Wayment 2015:287–90). Likewise, the account of the ‘Martyrs of Lugdunum’ (Lyons) preserved in Book Five of Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* from the latter part of the second century reveals that communities as far apart as Gaul and Asia Minor were exchanging texts (Eusebius, *h.e.* 5.1.1–3).

Moving into the third and fourth centuries one can detect greater circulation and dissemination of Christian manuscripts corresponding with the emergence of large-scale ecclesiastical networks. The evidence provided by the third-century episcopal correspondence of Dionysius of Alexandria, Fabian of Antioch, Sixtus of Rome, and Cyprian of Carthage reveals that letters and texts were moving all over the empire (Eusebius, *h.e.* 6.40.1; 6.46.1–5; 7.3.1; Cyprian, *ep.* 44–5, 47–50, 57, 59, 60). Major centres (i.e. Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, etc.) served as hubs of communication and correspondence from which

texts of all kinds were disseminated and relayed to surrounding regions. Here it may be noted that for the first few centuries, Christian expansion, and by extension the circulation of texts, appears to have moved along pre-existing lines of communication and commerce in the larger Roman Empire where major cities were vital nodes in that process (Stark 2006:8–13, 63–83).

In the first part of the fourth century the epistolary and pamphleteering war carried out between Arius and Alexander demonstrates not only the extent of Christian networks but also how quickly and widely texts could circulate. Furthermore, Constantine's request (c.335 CE) for fifty complete bibles (OT and NT) to be prepared in Caesarea and sent to Constantinople not only attests to how, under special circumstances, copies of the Scriptures could circulate, but it also highlights an innovation that had potential implications for how Christian texts in the future could be rapidly transported via the *cursus publicus* ('imperial post') (Eusebius, *v.C.* 4.36; cf. Eusebius, *v.C.* 3.6; cf. Ammianus Marcellinus 21.16.18). Similarly, just a few years later (c.341) Athanasius was given orders by Constans to prepare copies of the Scriptures and to send them (*apol. Const.* 4.2). Notwithstanding these examples of long-distance textual dissemination and circulation, many manuscripts probably circulated primarily on a more regional level among local congregations or networks of friends and associates. For example, P.Oxy. LXIII 4365 (Figure 1.4), an early fourth-century letter, preserves a note exchanged between two women (?) from Oxyrhynchus or its environs that details the circulation of scriptural texts locally: 'To my dearest lady sister, greetings in the Lord. Lend the Ezra, since I lent you the little Genesis (i.e. book of Jubilees). Farewell in God from us.' Likewise, there is evidence that monasteries in close geographical proximity exchanged and lent copies of the Scriptures (Kotsifou 2007; Maravela-Solbakk 2008).

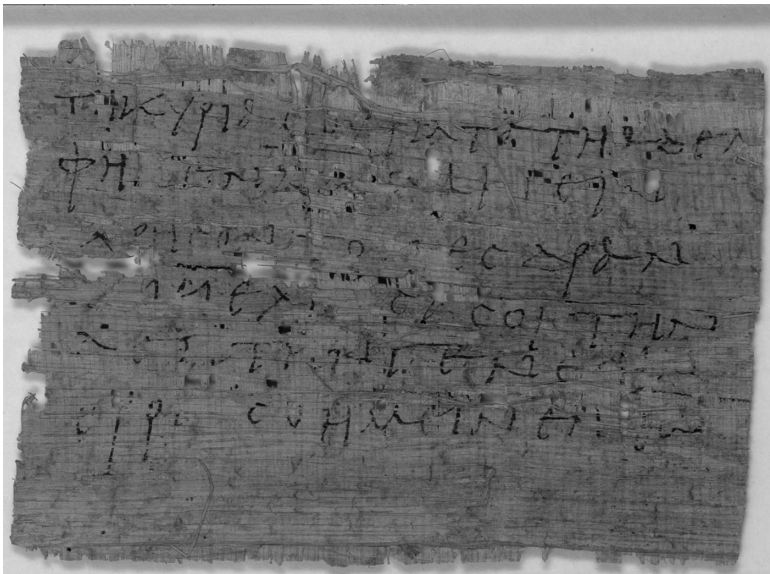


FIGURE 1.4 P.Oxy. LXIII 4365

CONCLUSION

Even apart from the texts they transmit, early Christian scriptural remains can reveal something about those who produced, read, and interpreted them. In overwhelming numbers early Christians opted to transmit their sacred texts in codex form at a time when scrolls were still the dominant medium for literary works of all kinds; whatever the exact reason(s) for preferring this choice of technology, the extant evidence suggests that Christians adapted and perhaps even contributed to the advancement of this technology. The culmination of this process was the great multi-quire pandect Bibles of the fourth century that could fit the entire Christian scriptural canon between two covers. Related to this codicological innovation was the development of various tools and an emerging apparatus and textual presentation that enhanced scriptural searching, cross-referencing, comparison, analysis, and paved the way for more advanced interpretative approaches. At the same time, the presence of lectional and interpretative aids and markers of various kinds not only shed light on how Christians were actually reading the text, but suggests that such texts were intended to be read publicly before an audience or congregation. The presence of *nomina sacra* probably reflects early Christian veneration, or at least reverence, for the realities they abbreviated; and the use of the stauogram, apart from being perhaps the earliest pictorial depiction of the crucifixion, might also reveal an early devotion to the cross in Christian texts. These features readily demonstrate that even apart from the text that these early fragments and manuscripts preserve and transmit, which is of no little significance, the medium is indeed an artefact, worthy of study in its own right and capable of shedding additional light on the larger interpretative and hermeneutical context of early Christianity. Through these early fragments and manuscripts not only do we get an idea of the *mise-en-page* of the scriptural texts that the likes of Justin, Origen, Eusebius, Athanasius, Jerome, and others may have read, but they may also provide some indications and insights into how early Christians interpreted them.

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Suggested Reading

Metzger (1981) provides a concise study of biblical manuscripts along with noteworthy scribal features. Comfort and Barrett (2001) present editions of many NT papyri but their palaeographic assessments and conclusions cannot always be taken at face value; Orsini and Clarysse (2012) are more reliable. Skeat (1969) is still very useful regarding the production of early Christian manuscripts. On the economics behind ancient Christian book production Bagnall (2009) makes a number of important contributions. The classic study for early Christian textual remains in Egypt is still Roberts (1979); more recently see Hurtado (2006). For an overview and analysis with text and translation of the Oxyrhynchus Christian remains to the fourth century see Blumell and Wayment (2015); for the larger Christian contexts of the Oxyrhynchus finds see Luijendijk (2008) and Blumell (2012). Charlesworth (2016) and Murgidge (2016) provide thorough treatments of early Christian scribal habits and manuscript features. On the scribal context(s) in which early Christians produced their manuscripts Haines-Eitzen (2000) is useful; for textual habits of early Christian scribes Royse (2007) is essential. Though dated in certain areas, Van Haelst (1976) is still helpful regarding the range and types of early Christian textual artefacts. Gamble's (1995) study of the early literary culture of Christianity is both wide ranging and insightful; more recently see Grafton and Williams (2006). The textual remains of early Christian apocrypha are succinctly treated by Wayment (2013); Jones (2016) concisely presents amulets from late antiquity containing NT passages.

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Websites

- 'The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts', D. B. Wallace, Plano, TX: <<http://www.csntm.org>>.
- 'Codex Sinaiticus', British Library and Partners: <<http://www.codex-sinaiticus.net/en/>>.
- 'The Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library', Israel Antiquities Authority, Israel: <<http://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/home>>.
- 'Leuven Database of Ancient Books', W. Clarysse, Belgium: <<http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/>>.
- 'New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room', Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung: <<http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/home>>.
- 'Papyri.info', The Duke Collaboratory for Classics Computing & the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World: <<http://papyri.info>>.
- 'POxy: Oxyrhynchus Online', Oxford University, the Oxyrhynchus Papyri: <<http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/>>.