

Ancient New Testament Manuscripts

Survey of Manuscripts

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1. Review of types of manuscripts

In our last class we looked at the type of Greek copies of the New Testament. There are four types of ancient manuscripts of the New Testament: Papyri, Uncials, Minuscules and Lectionaries. This week we will look at some of the specific manuscripts that are the most significant.

2. Review of NT manuscripts in comparison

- New Testament: 100+ copies within 300 years
- Homer: No copies within 500 years
- Josephus : No copies within 800 years
- Caesar's Gallic War: No copies within 1,000 years
- Plato: No copies within 1,200 years
- Euripides: No copies within 1,300 years
- Aristotle: No copies within 1,400 years

3. The form of the manuscripts

- Every New Testament manuscript is either a scroll or a codex. Scrolls were written on one side of the material and rolled up. Codices were written on both sides for the material and folded, like a book.
- The use of codices was fairly uncommon until after the completion of the New Testament.
- Of all the 5,800+ New Testament manuscripts that have been catalogued only four papyri -- P12, P13, P18, P22 (all from the third century) -- are in the form of a scroll. All the rest of the existing manuscripts are in codex form.
- Codices survive much longer since they are more protected by being folded and lying flat since even air contributes to decay. This explains why nearly all of the manuscripts that have survived until today are codices.
- Christians were early adopters of the codex instead of the more common scroll probably because it used less material since it would be written on both sides of leaf and would be easier to transport.
- It was hard to write on the back side of a papyrus since you would write against the grain. However, by writing on both sides of the material, the expense of the manuscript would be less.
- God used the volume of material, the poverty of the scribes and the wide distribution to protect the Scripture.

4. The dating the manuscripts

The basic means of dating manuscripts includes:

- Measuring radioactive decay of carbon-14
- Examining the materials used
- Examining the text form
- Evaluating other circumstantial considerations

5. Survey of uncial manuscripts

a. Overview of Uncials

- Uncials are New Testament manuscripts written on parchment (animal skin).
- What distinguishes uncials from papyri is strictly the writing material upon which the text was written.
- Uncials are manuscripts in all capital letters, also called majuscules.
- New Testament uncials typically have no spaces between words and extremely limited punctuation.
- There are presently about 322 NT uncials, date from between 300 and 1000 AD.
- Four uncial manuscripts stand out above the rest, and have become known as the “Great Uncials.” They each originally contained the entire Bible.
- These four uncials are professionally copied on vellum, which is a type of parchment made of high quality calfskin.
- It is estimated that 200 perfect calfskins would be needed to create the New Testament alone.

b. Codex Sinaiticus

- Codex Sinaiticus is the oldest complete New Testament manuscript by several centuries.
- Sinaiticus was discovered in 1844 by Constantin Von Tischendorf and its text was published in 1862.
- Sinaiticus dates between 330-360 A.D.
- Sinaiticus is located in mostly in London, with a small part of it in Egypt, Germany and Russia.
- It is designated by the Hebrew letter Aleph א

c. Codex Vaticanus

- Codex Vaticanus is the oldest uncial, dating between 300-325 A.D.
- Vaticanus has been at the Vatican since the 15th century.
- Vaticanus lacks Hebrews 9:15 and following, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon and Revelation. This is due to damage to the manuscript.
- It is designated by the letter B and is considered to be, along with Sinaiticus, the most important uncial for determining the original text of the New Testament.

d. Codex Alexandrinus

- Codex Alexandrinus is the oldest manuscript to use large letters to begin new sections and added some degree of decoration.
- Codex Alexandrinus is the oldest manuscript to use large letters to begin new sections and added some degree of decoration.
- It dates from 400 A.D. and is located in London.
- It was given to King James I in 1624 by the Patriarch of Constantinople
- It is designated by the letter A.

E. Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus

- Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus is a palimpsest, which means the text has been scraped or washed off the parchment allowing the material to be reused.
- Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus got its name because it was written over in the twelfth century with writings of Ephrem the Syrian, a fourth century theologian.
- The original text (or “lower text”) was determined to be the Bible around 1700 and deciphered by Tischendorf in the 1840s. Even with modern ultra violet photography, not all of the text is clearly legible.
- Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus is dated at around 450 A.D. and resides at the French National Library in Paris.
- It is not completely intact, missing 2 Thessalonians, 2 John and parts of many other New Testament books.
- It is designated by the letter C.

F. Codex Bezae

- In addition, to the four “Great Uncials” there is one other noteworthy uncial, Codex Bezae, named after Theodore Beza, a disciple of John Calvin who gave it to Cambridge University in 1581 where it now resides.
- Codex Bezae is a diatome, containing the Greek text on the left hand page and the Latin text on the right side.
- Codex Bezae dates from c. 400 A.D. and is written on vellum.
- It contains most of the Gospels and Acts.
- It contains a remarkably large number of obvious errors, some of which are found nowhere else.
- It is designated by the letter D.

G. Other Uncial Manuscripts

- Codex Washingtonianus dates from c. 400, contains the Gospels and resides in Washington D.C. at the Freer Gallery of Art.
- Other fifth century uncials are fairly fragmentary.
- In general, the manuscripts that have more complete books of the Bible are designated by a letter, including several designated by Greek letters
- Fragmentary uncials are designated by a number with a zero in front of it.

6. Survey of papyri manuscripts

- The oldest manuscripts are papyri, all of which have only a part of the New Testament, and usually just a small part. They date from 125-700 AD. Papyri are designated by the letter P and a number. Presently, the last official NT papyrus is P134.
- Prior 1862, no New Testament papyri were widely known, cataloged or studied.
- Papyri have been found typically through archeological excavations. The largest number of New Testament papyri occurred around 1900 at an ancient rubbish dump near Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. A total of 52 New Testament fragments were found from as early as the mid to late 2nd century (P90, P104).

A. John Rylands Papyri

- The Rylands Papyrus (P52) was purchased in an Egyptian market in 1920 and dated c. 125 AD in 1934 by Colin Roberts.
- It is presently the oldest known New Testament fragment ever discovered.
- P52 was a codex and it includes John 18:31-33 on one side and John 18:37-38 on the other side.

B. Beatty Papyri

- Chester Beatty acquired three New Testament papyri (along with OT) in 1931 on the black market. These are among the earliest manuscripts with a significant amount of Scripture. They are located in Dublin, Ireland.
- Originally, P45 contained the four Gospels and Acts but now only contains Matthew 20-21, 25-26; Mark 4-9, 11-12; Luke 6-7, 9-14; John 4-5, 10-11; and Acts 4-17. It dates from the early 200s.
- P46 (c. 200) contains Romans 5-6, 8-15, Hebrews, Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, nearly all of 1-2 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians 1-2, 5. Most of it is in Dublin, Ireland with the rest of it at the University of Michigan.

C. Bodmer Papyri

- The Bodmer Papyri were found in 1952 near Dishna, Egypt. They were smuggled to Switzerland where they were purchased by Martin Bodmer.
- Among these papyri were the earliest text from 1 Peter, 2 Peter and Jude (P72, 3rd/4th century), a 7th century portion of Matthew (P73) and a 7th century copy of Acts, with portions of the General Epistles (P74).
- P66 is the oldest of the Bodmer papyri and is a nearly complete copy of the Gospel of John. P66 is dated by most at c. 200 some more recently there have been some who have dated it as early as 150 A.D.
- P66 resides at the Bodmer Library in Geneva, Switzerland.
- P75 contains most of Luke's Gospel (3:18-24:53) and most of John's Gospel (1-15) and dates around 200 A.D.
- P75 was sold to Frank Hanna of Atlanta, Georgia for an undisclosed amount and presented to the Vatican, where it now resides.

D. Green Collection

- The Green family, founders of Hobby Lobby, own a number of New Testament Papyri. Those announced include:
 - P129 (c. 250 AD), part of 1 Cor. 7-10.
 - P 130 (c. 300 AD), part of Hebrews 9.
 - P 131 (c. 250 AD), part of Romans 9:18-10:3.
- There are more papyri in the Green Collection that has yet to be officially announced. These have been found as the material used to create masks for mummies.
- Additional papyri **rumored** to exist in the Green Collection include:
 - The oldest fragment of the Sermon on the Mount
 - The oldest fragment of the book of Romans
 - Fragments from Galatians 4 and 1 John 2.
 - The oldest New Testament manuscript, from Mark 1, dated c. 90 AD. The news of this first leaked in 2012. The scholars involved soon signed a nondisclosure agreement so information has practically ceased.
 - One reason for the delay is the verification of the scholarship regarding the study of these texts.
 - Another likely reason for the delay in announcing these papyri is in the opening of the Museum of the Bible in November 2017 in Washington DC.

Currently, as of 2016, the published record of New Testament papyri ends at P134.

- In 1862 the record did not exist
- In 1979 the record ended at P88
- In 1993 the record ended at P98
- In 2012 the record ended at P127
- In 2017 the record will end at P?

7. Application

“Anticipate the discovery of more evidence.”