

THE NEW TESTAMENT WORLD

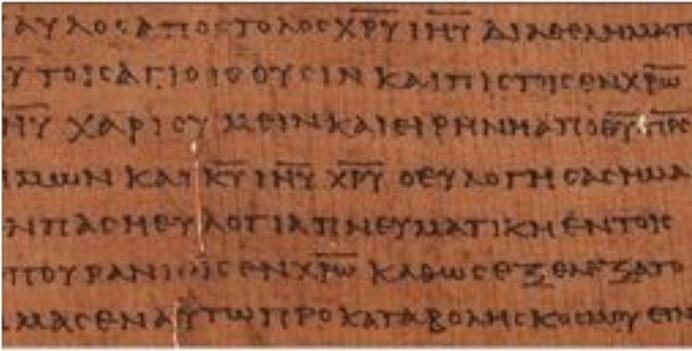
PART 4: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON



FRAGMENT OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
3RD-4TH CENTURY A.D.

"READING" THE NEW TESTAMENT

- In antiquity, reading was done aloud
- "Be *hearers* of the word..." (James 1:22-25)
- "Let the reader understand..." (Matthew 24:15) - a note to the one reading aloud that this passage is politically sensitive
- In some cases, the person who delivered the letter was expected to read it aloud to the assembly (Tychicus in Colossians 4:7)
- People read aloud, even when alone (Acts 8:30)



A NEW TESTAMENT PAPYRI

NOTE - NO SPACES OR PUNCTUATION

READING AND WRITING

- Modern definition of "literacy" - the ability to read and write
- Definition in antiquity - literacy = ability to read
- Writing a specialized skill, like modern calligraphy
- "See what large letters I make" (Galatians 6:11)
- Most writers used a secretary

LITERACY RATES

- Most people could not read (maybe 15%)
- Abundance of visual imagery for signage
- No widespread educational system
- Jews - more likely to read
- When Jesus speaks to the Pharisees - "Have you not read..."
- When Jesus speaks to the crowd - "Have you not heard..."



WRITINGS

- Rare, valued, and shared
- Christians received and handed on traditions in both oral and written forms
- Appearance of documents mattered - written in careful script on expensive paper

MAKING MANUSCRIPTS

- Pens - reeds, feathers
- Inks - red = ochre, gelatin, gum, beeswax; black - lamp black or ground charcoal with gum Arabic
- Could be erased with water



WRITING SURFACES

- Chinese invented paper around 100AD, but did not find widespread use in Middle East until later
- Ostraca - clay pot fragments
- Tablets - wood or wax
- Parchment - sheep, goat, or calf hide
- Papyrus - made from Nile reeds



SCROLL AND CODEX

- Scrolls - made of parchment or papyrus
- Sheets sewn or glued together
- "Volumen" - book roll, about 15 feet
- Codex - like a modern book



"THE BIBLE" IN THE FIRST CENTURY

- Scriptures were not gathered into a single volume or collection until after the New Testament period
- A complete Bible would require 78 papyrus scrolls
- Most synagogues in Jesus' day could only afford a few scrolls
- This may be why Jesus quotes extensively from a few books like Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Psalms, perhaps Daniel - these were the only ones available to the Nazareth synagogue
- Having a complete set of Scriptures is a modern experience

MAKING MANUSCRIPTS

- Secretary took notes on tablets as author spoke (Tertius - Romans 16:22)
- Later, secretary would return with a draft of the letter in a notebook (wax or wood) for the author to critique and edit
- Then secretary would draft final copy on papyrus or parchment
- Author was responsible for everything in the document, thus they checked the final draft

COST OF WRITING

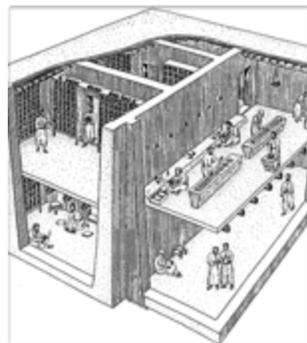
- Secretary/Scribe services, materials
- Approximate costs of Pauline epistles in today's \$:
 - Romans - \$2,275
 - 1 Corinthians - \$2,108
 - Galatians - \$722
 - Philemon - \$101

"AUTOGRAPHS"

- We have no original autographs of the New Testament (document written by original author or scribe)
- Usually, the author retained a copy of the letter or document and sent the original - which one is the "autograph?"
- Documents later copied for wider distribution

SCRIPTORIUM

- Book-copying workshop
- Qumran example - Dead Sea Scrolls



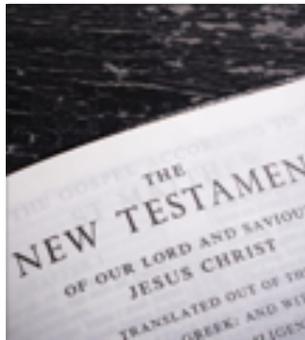
ASSEMBLING NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

- See we don't have the original autographs, what we do have is copies of copies of fragments and pieces copied and discovered over time
- Manuscript notations in modern Bibles reflect the "textual variants"
- These are not major discrepancies in most cases but rather slight corrections or mistakes
- There is also evidence of editing in later manuscripts (John 8, Mark 16)



THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

- 2 Peter 3:16 - indicates that Paul's letters were already being collected in the first century
- 2nd century - four Gospels circulating together at times
- Oldest complete NT manuscripts date from 4th century



THE FORMATION OF THE CANON

- Not finally set until 367AD (Athanasius' encyclical Easter letter)
- Ratified at Council of Hippo (393AD) and Council of Carthage (397AD)
- Canon formation sparked by mid-second century heretical offshoots of Christianity, most notably Gnosticism and Marcionism
- Provoked orthodox Christians to begin itemizing documents they believed were uniquely inspired and authoritative
- Persecution in the third century at times meant that Christians had to decide, quite literally, which books they were willing to die for

QUESTIONS AND DISPUTES

- No controversy about four Gospels, Acts, 13 letters of Paul with his name in the opening lines, 1 Peter, or 1 John
- Seven books with questions
 - Hebrews - did Paul write it or someone else?
 - 2 Peter - differs in style and content from 1 Peter
 - 2 & 3 John and Jude - significant enough to include?
 - Revelation - how to interpret?

OTHER PROPOSED BOOKS

- Shepherd of Hermes
- Epistle of Barnabas - rejected because of anti-Semitic content
- These were more a reflection of the 2nd century Apostolic Fathers that had lesser authority than original documents of the New Testament

CANONICAL OR NON-CANONICAL?: THREE CRITERIA

- **Apostolicity** - authorship by an apostle or close associate of an apostle (limited to first hundred years or so of Christianity)
- **Orthodoxy** - non-contradiction with previously revealed Scripture, beginning with the Old Testament
- **Catholicity** - universal or widespread usage and relevance through the church

SUPPRESSION OR CENSORSHIP?

- Used in modern times to assert that there was once a time when a group of so-called Christians had agreed on a larger canon only to have the majority of believers whittle that down
- This is a false assertion. The opposite is actually true. The canon actually grew up from smaller collections
- Gnostic literature was thus never put forward for formal inclusion in the finalized canon of the NT

LITERARY FORMS IN THE CANON

- Biographies (The Gospels)
- History (Acts)
- Letters (Paul's letters, James, 1-2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude)
- Homilies (Hebrews, 1 John)
- Apocalypse (Revelation)

ARRANGEMENT OF THE CANON

- Gospels - though Mark probably written first, Matthew has most connections to the OT
- Acts - treats generation of Jesus' followers immediately after his resurrection
- Letters of Paul - in descending order of length (though Galatians disrupts the pattern - slightly shorter than Ephesians). Hebrews inserted within that collection without regard to length
- General Epistles in order of prominence of their authors
- Revelation - Maybe, "We don't know where else to put this!"

YOUR BIBLE...

- The product of a lot of hard work, expense, risk, and testing over several millennia
- Consist across time and within its internal witness
- All pointing to the good news about Jesus Christ

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