

The Dr. Gene Scott Bible Collection

STATION 52: ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS



Although the oldest substantial Bibles extant are the three 4th and 5th century Uncials (shown at [Station 48](#)), their Greek texts are predated by papyrus and vellum fragments of scripture. Some give variant readings or include portions missing from the Uncials. Accurate Bible scholarship must include study of **any** available texts, whether they are part of a Biblical book, a page of scripture or a citation of a passage in another ancient work. Determination of the relative age and origin of such manuscripts places them in the stream of the transmission of the Bible. For example, texts used at Alexandria in ancient times varied from those used at Damascus or Caesarea. The work of Origen in the 3rd Century (shown at [Station 49](#)) to compare and "correct" the texts of his time affected

subsequent texts.

Only by comparing and contrasting masses of ancient manuscript material of all kinds can scholars build a "frame" on which to hang any given manuscript. Determining age and place of origin with any degree of certainty depends upon several factors. First among these is **paleography**, the study of handwriting. The uncial manuscripts of the first few centuries A.D., written in capital letters without divisions between words, gave way to cursive manuscripts with words separated; letter forms changed over time. Other factors include the use of shorthand and abbreviations for common terms or for sacred names, the study of colloquialisms and regional peculiarities, plus the distinguishing features of the underlying writing materials. These factors serve to place an unknown manuscript into a relatively specific time and place of composition.

The earliest "books" were scrolls made of papyrus or leather, usually written upon one side only; sheets of papyrus, tablets of wax or clay and even knotted cords were used for sending messages (akin to modern letter writing). Scrolls gave way to **codices**, made by stitching together one or more folded sheets of papyrus or vellum, and using both sides for writing upon. With boards for protection at top and bottom, **codices** prefigure modern books. The transition from scrolls to **codices** is now known to have occurred sometime in the 2nd Century A.D. (as proven by the Chester Beatty Papyri, shown at this Station). Thus, even the **form** of the manuscript (scroll fragment, letter or **codex** page) can help determine the relative age of a scriptural manuscript. The art of making papyrus was lost in the centuries before Christ, but fortunately Egypt had a steady supply in the form of mummy wrappings, which could be stripped and reused to create both scrolls and **codices** for several centuries!

Shown at this Station are a variety of ancient manuscripts, from hieroglyphics on plaster to texts on vellum and papyrus. They date from before the Christian Era to nearly the end of the first millennium A.D., and correspond to four periods: the **Ptolemaic** (4th-1st centuries B.C.); **Roman** (1st-3rd centuries A.D.); **Byzantine** (4th-7th centuries A.D.) and **Coptic** (7th-9th centuries A.D.). Though most are non-scriptural, they are all part of the **accumulated evidence** needed to form the basis for dating and analyzing the extremely rare scriptural items. Consider that nearly all scriptural manuscripts are now housed in institutional collections world-wide, and appreciate that the scriptural manuscripts shown here are among the very few in private hands anywhere in the world.



Dating & "Periods"

The manuscripts in this display are grouped into four main "Periods," as defined by scholars, though keep in mind that as languages and writing styles evolved, some documents written during one period may have characteristics of an earlier or later period.

- **PTOLEMAIC (4th to 1st Centuries B.C.)** - Written with **thick strokes**, in either Greek (which by the time was the "common language" of the area) or in the Egyptian Demotic script which evolved from hieroglyphics. The two scripts often look similar when seen in faded or worn manuscripts.
- **ROMAN (1st to 3rd Centuries A.D.)** - Greek texts written in **clear, upright characters** which evolved into the "uncial" literary form (used for Bibles in later centuries). Later Roman-period texts began to use a more cursive hand, especially in private or informal communications.
- **BYZANTINE (4th to 7th Centuries A.D.)** - Greek or more rarely Sahidic Coptic texts, the former written in a looser style which appears ***italic*** or ***cursive*** compared to prior texts.
- **COPTIC (7th to 9th Centuries A.D.)** - The "Copts" were the native people of Egypt; their written language evolved from the common Greek; texts in the Sahidic dialect (from the area around Thebes) are shown herein, starting in the middle Byzantine period. The "Coptic Period" texts are generally written in **upright capitals**, often in cruder hands than any before.

The incursions of the Arabs towards the close of the First Millennium A.D. led to Arabic texts, a few of which are shown herein, but Coptic-language texts continued well into the 12th Century and beyond.

***Of nearly
manuscripts
at this Station,
the full
descriptions of only
a few are given
herein. The others
include:***

***250
shown***

- **Ptolemaic Period:** Over 20 Demotic manuscripts, about 25 in Greek, and several with both languages.
- **Roman Period:** Nearly 70 manuscripts.
- **Byzantine Period:** About 50 manuscripts in Greek and five in Sahidic.
- **Coptic Period:** Some 35 manuscripts in all.

- **Arabic Period:** Several manuscripts including "protocols."
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Ptolemaic Period Hieroglyphic Cartouche

3rd Century B.C.

Painted on yellowed plaster over a backing of finely woven linen cloth, this cartouche (or "name inscription") may represent the name of a court official. Prior to the discovery of the famous "Rosetta Stone" by Napoleon's troops, and Champolion's research, hieroglyphics were thought to be "picture writing;" instead, they were determined to be a distinct alphabet, and each "ideograph" on this item is representative of that alphabet. A series of pictures (written top to bottom in cartouche form) makes up a word or a phrase. Such a cartouche may have been part of the decoration of a sarcophagus, a temple inner wall or a palace. Very few such items have ever been available outside museum collections.

Circa 3rd Century Coptic Manuscript Fragment

2 Corinthians 11:10-11

Written in uncial script on vellum (prepared animal hide), this Coptic fragment from Egypt shows the standard Sahidic text of this Epistle. Because the back of the vellum is blank, it is most probably a scroll fragment, certainly dating from the 3rd or 4th centuries A.D. - but possibly even earlier! The text mixes capitals and lower case vowels in uniform sizes:

***"(There is truth)
of Christ in me,
that this glorying
will not fail
toward me in the
regions of Achaia.
Why? Because I do
not love you."***

Fragments of any part of the Bible from the first centuries of the Christian Era are extremely rare, and (like the recently-attributed Magdalen College [Oxford] fragments of Matthew's Gospel) are held by institutions; in private hands, they just **do not exist** - with certain exceptions, such as the one shown here!

Manuscript on Vellum

Sahidic Coptic - Byzantine Period

Citation of 1 Corinthians 9

Written with bold calligraphy on both sides (one side inverted in relation to the other), this manuscript cites 1 Corinthians 9:22 (in part) on one side ("**I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.**") and reads (in loose translation):

Side A: "**In concerning the man who became old ...who is with us if...who weeps over a portion... doing it as we do it...Paul said, `I became (all) forms...I might preserve some'... Noah, undefiled... having said,"**

while

Side B has: "**...the poor and afflicted...and the unbelieving Gentiles... where I saw the things... concerning the clerics...but they are like...to them and everyone who... said up to now..."**

Such citations of the Biblical text are an important critical tool to test the extant readings which were available in an area or at a certain period of time.

Manuscripts showing passages of the Bible are rare; in private hands, there are so few that this by its very nature is a major treasure of the Dr. Gene Scott Collection.

Coptic Papyrus - 8th-9th Century

Written in Greek letters in the Sahidic dialect of Egypt, this fragment has an address on the reverse ("...to...Elder[?] of Ko[...]") as well as the text shown here, which **references Romans 8:39**:

***"Love according to
God.../ /...for
who can separate
them?/ /...against
us because.../ /...
to the small,
some.../ /...I am
in it and..."***

Such scriptural references, whether in the works of churchmen or letters of the laity, are one of the myriad streams which attest to the preservation of God's Word through the ages, and can be used to bolster or confirm the accuracy of surviving texts of the Word itself. While the vast majority of papyrus fragments found in the Middle East are of a commercial nature, the exceptions which contain Biblical texts or references are of the utmost rarity and importance. Also, the fact that this papyrus shows an integral address makes it a real treasure for students of "postal history" and would be a prize for any sophisticated collection!

The Chester Beatty Papyri

2nd - 4th Centuries

Those familiar with the great Uncial manuscripts (shown at Station 48) should know that the transition of "books" from rolled scrolls of papyrus or vellum (animal hides) to modern-style **codices**, composed of "quires" of folded sheets, began in the 2nd Century A.D. (in fact, the undoubted antiquity of the Chester Beatty Papyri "forced" this date; previously, it had been thought to start in the 4th Century). Among the oldest substantial manuscripts of the Bible, and the largest Biblical texts on papyrus, the Chester Beatty Papyri are in **codex** form. They were acquired in 1930-31 by Sir Alfred Chester Beatty (1875-1958), an American collector who eventually settled in Ireland and bequeathed his collections to Ireland (as the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin). Consisting of eleven **codices**, tentatively dated using

paleography (the study of handwriting) to the 2nd through early 4th centuries (with most coming from the 3rd), taken together they cover a major portion of the Bible. Scholars know that they are **Egyptian** in origin, but the exact place of their composition is debated (most preferring Aphroditopolis, a few the Coptic center of Fayum). In addition to the main body of the "find," which was acquired by Beatty, additional segments of these same papyri are now in public institutions in Michigan, Barcelona, Madrid, Princeton, Vienna and Cologne. Some of the Michigan portions are included in the volumes shown here for the sake of presenting as complete a picture as possible.

The papyri are remarkable for many reasons. First, they provide Greek texts for portions of the Old Testament not available in other manuscripts. Second, they confirm a remarkable consistency in the transmission of the Bible in Egypt before and after the turning in of manuscripts ordered by the Roman emperor Diocletian during his persecutions. Third, they present the text of the Septuagint as it was before the systematic revisions of Lucian and of Origen. Finally, they contain in some cases the only examples of the Greek text for such apocryphal books as the Book of Noah and parts of the Book of Enoch.

For the New Testament, these papyri place "Hebrews" among the Pauline Epistles (and amazingly, just after "Romans"), and place "Ephesians" before "Galatians." In fact, the Pauline Epistles are among the oldest texts included, dating no later than the end of the 2nd Century A.D. just a little more than a century after Paul's death!

Overall, the Chester Beatty Papyri supplement the **Codex**

Vaticanus (which lacks most of Genesis and Revelation)

and the **Sinaiticus** (which contains very little of

Genesis). Beginning in 1933, a series of 16 volumes was published at Oxford, Dublin or London, prepared for the most part by Frederic Kenyon (long-time Principal Librarian for the British Museum). The series began the task of reproducing these papyri for the benefit of scholars. Though the project was never fully completed (ending in 1958), the set as published is a milestone of Bible scholarship, and a bibliographic rarity.

Ethiopic Manuscripts: "Life of Christ"

Late 15th-Early 16th Century

Written in the Malik dialect of Ethiopia, these two magnificent manuscript "Bibles" feature full-page paintings (marked by threads knotted on the corners of the pages) and numerous decorative elements. All the pages are of the finest vellum,

inscribed in two colors (red and black). One manuscript has eight paintings and an average of 23 lines per page; the other, thicker, has 10 illustrations but only 16 lines per page, with a section at the end in double columns. The illustrations, which are of identical workmanship, include the Crucifixion, the Annunciation, the Holy Mother and Child, and St. George and the Dragon. From the costumes in the paintings, and other "clues," it is evident that these were prepared sometime after the Crusades brought European dress and ornament to the environs of the Holy Land, but before the conquest of much of Northern Africa by the Arabs. Ethiopia, an ancient dynastic kingdom, was part of the Coptic Christian world, aligned with Eastern Orthodoxy. Ethiopia's language was Semitic, and the Malik texts evolved into today's Amharic dialects.

Just as one wave of Christianity had spread from the Holy Land via Rome throughout Europe, another had swept down into Egypt and the lands bordering the west side of the Red Sea. The Coptic Christian texts of Egypt which survived from antiquity are an important resource for study into the history of God's Word; likewise, the Malik texts - besides establishing the prevalence of "God's Word through the Centuries" - serve to demonstrate the survival of early Christian practices away from the dominion of the Church of Rome. Like the 8th century Coptic leaf shown nearby as Station 39, and the 12th century Armenian manuscript page shown at Station 41 (the "Hall of the Book"), Bible versions in other languages are an inherent part of the stream of texts that undergird the history of the Bible in English. The illustration nearby shows the on-going contemporary use of such ancient manuscripts in the teaching of Christianity to a largely illiterate populace.

STATION LOCATION MAP

Below is a floor plan map of the Cathedral in 3 sections, one for each level. The first section is the Lower Level, the second is the Foyer Level, and the third is the Mezzanine Level. This station is an Octagon located in the "Room of the Book" on the Lower Level at the red #52.



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