

Intro:

We have seen that the materials on which the scriptures were copied give an indication of (among other things) the date when the copies were made.

The earliest manuscripts were usually written on Papyrus, a cheap writing material that is subject to decay when it is exposed to moisture. It was the most popular material for writing from the first century to the fourth century.

Vellum (or parchment), material made from animal skins, was more popular from the 4th century on up to the 15th century. It lasted longer than Papyrus.

Paper was only introduced (by the Arabs from China) about the 14th century.

Hand-copied manuscripts ceased with the introduction of printing.

Today, we want to look at what kinds of manuscripts we have and the characteristics of some of the most important ones.

I. The Papyri**A. History of discoveries of “the papyri” (ancient Greek manuscripts written on papyrus rolls or papyrus codices)**

1. 1778: Arabs discovered 40-50 rolls, one was brought to Europe, but little attention given
2. 1877: First large scale discovery, but mostly fragments, so little interest till later.
3. 1890: Famous work of Aristotle on the Constitution of Athens was discovered.
4. 1897: Grenfell and Hunt discovered “literally tons of Greek papyri at Oxyrhyncus” (in Egypt)
 - a. These manuscripts contained portions of the NT
 - b. These portions dated back 100 - 150 years older than the oldest Uncial codexes that we will discuss in a little bit.

5. Importance:

- a. Linguistic significance: help establish word meanings in first century
- b. Manuscript significance: help establish earlier dates of original authorship

B. Most important papyri manuscripts

1. The Chester Beatty papyri

a. History

- 1) 1930: Mr. Beatty purchased a group of papyrus leaves (pages) from a dealer in Egypt
- 2) These turned out to be from copies of the Old and New Testaments
- 3) They are all dated from the third century or earlier

b. The details

- 1) Chester Beatty Papyrus I (P⁴⁵)
 - a) Gospels and Acts
 - b) “Two leaves of Matthew, 6 of Mark, 7 of Luke, 2 of John, 13 of Acts” Thiessen, p. 37
- 2) Chester Beatty Papyrus II (P⁴⁶)
 - a) Pauline Epistles & Hebrews, but not Philemon
 - b) 86 leaves (out of 104)
 - c) dated beginning of third century
- 3) Chester Beatty Papyrus III (P⁴⁷)
 - a) Revelation 9.10 - 17.2
 - b) Lost one or two lines at top of each page
 - c) Probably third century

2. The Rylands Papyrus

a. Fragment

b. Contains five verses of John 18 (31-33, 37-38)

c. Dated between AD 100 - 150

d. Earliest known copy of a portion of the New Testament

e. Brought by Grenfell to Manchester in 1920, date and significance discovered later.

f. Confirms the traditional date of John against liberal attacks.

II. The Uncials

A. General Characteristics

1. Older Vellum manuscripts
2. Written in printed capital letters
3. As of 1943, 212 were known to be in existence
4. Many of these manuscripts are just fragments
5. Some are intact or nearly intact copies of the New Testament

B. Most important uncial manuscripts (the Primary Uncials)

1. Codex Vaticanus (“B” or “03”)

- a. Contains all of the NT up to Hebrews 9.13
- b. Came from the fourth century, about AD 350.
- c. Considered most valuable
- d. Generally thought to have originated in Egypt
- e. Has been in Vatican Library since 1481
- f. Vatican authorities allowed no one access to it
- g. Man named Bartolucci made a “collation” of it in 1669 which was unknown until 1819
- h. Brought to Paris by Napoleon for a time, but returned to Vatican and seclusion in 1815
- i. Tischendorf allowed to study it for six hours over two days in 1843, for another 42 hours in 1866.
- j. Erasmus was given a few readings from it, but too late for his edition of the Greek New Testament (the *Textus Receptus*)
- k. 1868-81, Vatican issued an edition of its text
- l. 1889-90, complete text photographed for scholars to use.

2. Codex Sinaiticus (“Aleph” or “01”)

- a. Discovered by Tischendorf in 1844 in the monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai.
- b. “On his visit there on that occasion he was able to rescue 43 leaves of the Old Testament from the waste basket of the monastery.”
Thiessen, p. 42

- c. Brought to Leipzig and published
 - d. Returned in 1853 unsuccessfully
 - e. Returned in 1859 when he found the rest of the codex, including most of the OT and all of the NT.
 - f. Presented the manuscript to the Czar of Russia
 - g. Sold in 1933 by the USSR to British Museum for half a million dollars (the Czar only paid the monks \$6750.00 for it)
 - h. Probably originated in Egypt
 - i. Also from the fourth century, but the last half.
3. Codex Alexandrinus (“A” or “O2”)
- a. Presented by the Patriarch (Bishop) of Constantinople to the British crown in 1627
 - b. Patriarch brought it with him to Constantinople when he was transferred from Alexandria in Egypt
 - c. Dated first half of the fifth century
 - d. Contains most of the NT
4. Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (“C” or “04”)
- a. Now in National Library of Paris
 - b. 16th century brought from the East to Italy
 - c. Transferred by Catherine de Medici from Italy to Paris
 - d. It is a *palimpsest* (Latin, means “rubbed off again”)
 - e. “The original was partly rubbed off, probably in the 12th century, and the sermons of Ephraem, a Syrian Father of the early 4th century, written over it. Near the end of the 17th century a student in the Royal Library discovered traces of a text underneath the sermons; but it was not until 1834 that any good progress was made in reading the underlying text. The original was brought to light by means of a specially prepared acid. Tischendorf was the first to be able to read it successfully. This was in 1840-41.” Thiessen, p. 45
 - f. Now contains most of the NT
 - g. Dated fifth century

5. Codex Bezae (“D” or “05”)
 - a. No general agreement where this manuscript originated
 - b. Beza, Calvin’s disciple and successor in Geneva got it from a monastery in Lyons in 1562
 - c. Presented it to U. of Cambridge in 1581 where it still is.
 - d. Bilingual, Greek on left page, Latin on right.
 - e. Not the most trustworthy manuscript, because “The Greek and Latin texts may have arise from independent authorities, but it seems clear that in this codex they have been in some measure assimilated to one another.” Thiessen, p. 46
 - f. Generally thought to be from the fifth century.
6. Codex Washingtonianus I (“W” or “032”)
 - a. Purchased by C. L. Freer of Detroit, in Cairo in 1906
 - b. Contains only the Gospels
 - c. Late fourth or early fifth century
7. Et Al

Conclusion:

These manuscripts are very important in establishing the text of the New Testament. They are among the oldest known copies of the Word of God. Although they vary with one another to some extent, diligent study of them and all the other manuscripts and fragments have been able to provide us with an accurate, reliable, and trustworthy Bible today.