

THE OXYRHYNCHUS NEW TESTAMENT
PAPYRI: “NOT WITHOUT HONOR
EXCEPT IN THEIR HOMETOWN”?

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The papyri offer us the most direct access we have to the experience of ordinary people in antiquity.

—E. A. Judge¹

A year and a half ago I presented to a distinguished NT scholar an offprint of an article I had just published on the Junia/Junias variation in Rom 16:7.² A few weeks later, in his presence, I handed a copy also to another NT scholar. At that point, the first colleague said to the second, “You must read this article. Can you imagine—something interesting written by a textual critic!” This was

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Note: References to Oxyrhynchus papyri will be given as P.Oxy. + papyrus no.; discussions of a papyrus will be indicated by P.Oxy. + vol. no. + pp. All such references relate to *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Greco-Roman Memoirs; London: British Academy for the Egypt Exploration Society) 1898– [67 vols. to date]. Oxyrhynchus papyri published elsewhere use the appropriate abbreviations, e.g., PSI + vol. + papyrus no. Basic data on papyri (contents, names, date, etc.) are taken from these sources without further acknowledgment.

References to the papyri in Joseph van Haelst, *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens* (Université de Paris IV, Papyrologie I; Paris: Sorbonne, 1976), will be reported as van Haelst + no.

¹ E. A. Judge, *Rank and Status in the World of the Caesars and St Paul* (Broadhead Memorial Lecture 1981; University of Canterbury Publications 29; Christchurch, NZ: University of Canterbury, 1982), 7.

² Eldon Jay Epp, “Text-Critical, Exegetical, and Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting the Junia/Junias Variation in Romans 16,7,” in *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis: Festschrift J. Delobel* (ed. A. Denaux; BETL 161; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 2002), 227–91.

meant to be a genuine compliment, yet it echoed a common and almost unconscious impression that biblical textual critics are dull creatures who spend their careers tediously adjudicating textual minutiae that only impede the exegete's work. Of course, critical editions are considered essential and therefore welcome, but must we really be bothered by that complex apparatus at the foot of the page?

I. Introduction: Traditional and New Goals of Textual Criticism

Naturally, textual critics will continue their tradition of establishing the earliest or most likely "original" text, though now we use such a term, if we use it at all, with caution and even with reluctance, recognizing that "original text" carries several dimensions of meaning.³ Indeed, ever since Westcott-Hort entitled their famous edition *The New Testament in the Original Greek*,⁴ we have learned that many a pitfall awaits those who, whether arrogantly or naively, rush headlong into that search for the Holy Grail. Yet the aim to produce better critical editions by refining the criteria for the priority of readings and by elucidating the history of the text will remain; at the same time, however, textual criticism's other goals will be pursued in accord with significant changes that recent decades have brought to the discipline. For example, emphasis has fallen on scribal activity, especially the purposeful alteration of texts that reflect the theology and culture of their times. One dramatic presentation was Bart Ehrman's *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, a work so well known that I need only summarize his main point: During the christological controversies of the first three centuries, "proto-orthodox scribes," as he calls them, "sometimes changed their scriptural texts to make them *say* what they were already known to *mean*."⁵ Hence, they "corrupted" their texts to maintain "correct" doctrine. Much earlier, textual critics had been willing to attribute such arrogance only to heretics, but Ehrman boldly and correctly turned this on its head. Though startling and unexpected, his thesis, as he recognized, issued quite naturally from text-critical developments of the preceding four decades.⁶

³ See Eldon Jay Epp, "The Multivalence of the Term 'Original Text' in New Testament Textual Criticism," *HTR* 92 (1999): 245–81.

⁴ Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (2 vols.; Cambridge/London: Macmillan, 1881–82; 2nd ed., 1896).

⁵ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), xii (his italics); see also 24–31.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 42 n. 94, but esp. his "The Text as Window: New Testament Manuscripts and the

A second phenomenon, long troubling to textual critics, concerns multiple readings in one variation-unit that defy resolution, and attention has turned to what these multiple—often competing—variants might tell us about crucial issues faced by the churches and how they dealt with them. David Parker, whose small volume is at risk of being overlooked owing to its simple yet significant title, *The Living Text of the Gospels*,⁷ confronted the problem head-on, with fascinating results.

For instance, the six main variant forms of the so-called Lord's Prayer in Matthew and Luke show the evolution of this pericope under liturgical influence. This is well known, but my description of it is much too detached. What obviously happened, of course, was that the fervent, dynamic worship environment in early churches at various times and places evoked appropriate expansions of the shorter and certainly earlier forms that we print in our Greek texts of Matthew and Luke, including additional clauses such as "Your Holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us," but especially the lofty praise of the Almighty and Eternal God offered with grandeur and dignity and beauty in the famous doxology, "For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever and ever. Amen" [additions to Matt 6:13]. Once hearing the variants of these six forms and reciting them again and again, ". . . they will be a part of the way in which we read and interpret the Lord's Prayer," says Parker, and "we shall not be able to erase them from our minds, and to read a single original text as though the others had never existed."⁸

A second, more poignant example in its relevance to anguishing life situations concerns the twenty-some variants in the four passages on divorce/remarriage in the Synoptic Gospels. Parker's analysis of this complex array shows that some variants concern Jewish, others Roman provisions for divorce; some condemn divorce but not remarriage, while others prohibit remarriage but not divorce; some variants describe adultery as remarriage, others as divorce and remarriage, and others as marrying a divorced man; and some variants portray Jesus as pointing to the cruelty of divorcing one's wife—thereby treating her as if she were an adulteress, though she was not—perhaps with the outcome of establishing her right to remain single, yet without affirming that the divorcing man commits adultery. Some variants, therefore, are concerned with the man, others with the woman, and still others with both. Sometimes the divorcing man commits adultery, sometimes not; sometimes the divorced or divorcing

Social History of Early Christianity," in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes; SD 46; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 363–65.

⁷ David C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

woman commits adultery, sometimes she is made an adulteress, sometimes she commits adultery if she remarries, and, finally, sometimes a man marrying a divorced woman commits adultery.⁹ “The main result of this survey,” says Parker, “is to show that the recovery of a single original saying of Jesus is impossible.” Nor can we say that one variant is more original than the others, he adds, for “what we have is a collection of interpretative rewritings of a tradition.”¹⁰ Indeed, in the early centuries of Christianity, the collection of writings that was to become or had become the NT was not a closed book, but—through textual variation—to quote Parker again, “it is open, and successive generations write on its pages.”¹¹

What do multiple variants without resolution about originality mean for textual criticism and for us today? On the one hand, we are permitted to glimpse something of the creative dynamism and eloquent expansiveness of early Christian liturgy as new expressions evolved within the Lord’s Prayer, and, in the divorce/remarriage morass, a window is opened for us to observe and to experience with early Christians over wide areas and lengthy periods the pathos and the agonizing, intractable ethical dilemmas that they faced. On the other hand, multiple variants, with no single original or simple resolution within grasp, can show us the way for our own times: there is no one right path or answer, no single directive, but the multiple variants reveal an array of differing situations, leaving open multiple options for us as well. In such cases, to quote Parker a final time, “the People of God have to make up their own minds. There is no authoritative text to provide a short-cut.”¹²

Suddenly textual criticism comes alive and becomes relevant in ways that no one might have imagined. Why didn’t we see this sooner and how could we have missed it? One of the earliest reviews of my 1966 book on theological tendency in the so-called Western text of Acts¹³ contained this line: “. . . if the

⁹ *Ibid.*, 77–89. For a graphic display of Parker’s analysis of these variants, see S. R. Pickering, “A Classified Survey of Some Recent Researches Relevant for New Testament Textual Studies,” *New Testament Textual Research Update* 8 (2000): 66–69.

¹⁰ Parker, *Living Text of the Gospels*, 92–93.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 174. He was speaking of Luke, but it is clear from the larger context that he views the Gospels and, by extension, the entire NT in this fashion. Cf. the recent statement of Traianos Gagos, “The University of Michigan Papyrus Collection: Current Trends and Future Perspectives,” in *Atti del XXII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia, Firenze, 23–29 agosto 1998* (ed. Isabella Andorlini et al.; 2 vols. + 1 vol. of plates; Florence: Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli,” 2001), 1:515: “An edited text is no more a static, isolated object, but a growing and changeable amalgam: the image [a reference to electronic images of papyri] allows the user to look critically at the ‘established’ text and to challenge continuously the authoritative readings and interpretations of its first or subsequent editors.”

¹² Parker, *Living Text of the Gospels*, 212.

¹³ E. J. Epp, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts* (SNTSMS 3; Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1966; unchanged repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001). By request, I presented an update of the issues in “Anti-Judaic Tendencies in the D-

tendency were as clear as Epp suggests one wonders why generations of highly competent textual critics have missed it.”¹⁴ Well, the time was right forty years ago—though not a hundred years ago¹⁵—to observe that the NT text suffered alteration for ideological and theological purposes. And the time was right during the past decade to see the positive aspects of multiple variants. At last NT textual criticism has lost its innocence and has learned to tolerate ambiguity—one of the sure signs of maturity.

And why was an earlier time not propitious? Perhaps because textual critics, often working in isolation, focusing resolutely on their traditional tasks and employing overly mechanical methods, could not see through to real-life situations. Recently David Parker, again, has called some of the newer approaches “narrative textual criticism,”¹⁶ which I understand to mean, simply and at a minimum, that textual variants have a story to tell—and that they allow new voices to be heard beyond the traditional call for “the original” text. This, for me, has energized textual criticism. Establishing the earliest text-forms provides one dimension; grasping the real-life contexts of variant readings adds richness by showing how Christians made meaning out of the *living* text as they nurtured and shaped it in worship and in life.

Our discipline, to be sure, has its technical aspects, but it remains primarily an art, and therefore it is for neither the perfunctory, nor the inflexible, nor the unimaginative, nor the tender-minded; and above all it is not the safe harbor that for so long and by so many it has been perceived to be. And “this”—as the saying goes—“is not your father’s” textual criticism, but an entrance into a brave new world, with provocative challenges and captivating promises!

Text of Acts: Forty Years of Conversation,” in *The Book of Acts as Church History: Text, Textual Traditions and Ancient Interpretations/Apostelgeschichte als Kirchengeschichte: Text, Texttraditionen und antike Auslegungen* (ed. Tobias Nicklas and Michael Tilly; BZNW 120; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2003), 111–46.

¹⁴ Leon Morris, *ABR* 15 (1967) 48. He introduces this comment by saying, “It is a learned and valuable study, and I think it could scarcely be denied that Professor Epp has demonstrated that the tendency of which he speaks exists.”

¹⁵ Except with respect to “heretics”: see, e.g., the often quoted statement of Hort (1882) in Westcott and Hort, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2:282–83: “Even among the numerous unquestionably spurious readings of the New Testament there are no signs of deliberate falsification of the text for dogmatic purposes. . . . It is true that dogmatic preferences to a great extent determined theologians, and probably scribes, in their choice between rival readings already in existence: . . . the temptation was strong to believe and assert that a reading used by theological opponents had also been invented by them. Accusations of wilful tampering with the text are accordingly not unfrequent in Christian antiquity: but, with a single exception [Marcion], wherever they can be verified they prove to be groundless, being in fact hasty and unjust inferences from mere diversities of inherited text.”

¹⁶ D. C. Parker, review of Bart Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, *JTS* 45 (1994): 704. He was referring to my *Theological Tendency* and to Ehrman’s book; I would include Parker’s *Living Text* in this category as well.

II. New Testament Papyri in Their Cultural and Intellectual Context

During the past half-dozen years my research has emphasized the provenance of manuscripts, a factor much neglected in discussing fragmentary papyri. Provenance translates into *context*—the sociocultural and intellectual character of the communities where manuscripts resided and which left its mark on those manuscripts. But the manuscripts, as shaped by that context, in turn illuminate their own community contexts—not unlike the hermeneutical circle.

Previously, manuscripts—when viewed as impersonal and perfunctory sources of data—were not seen as living and dynamic, with individual “personalities” that emerged out of the everyday life and exigencies of the churches, reflecting their faith and practice and the controversies of the time. Today, by placing NT manuscripts in their immediate contexts, we can more clearly understand their role as witnesses to the NT text. It is these issues, confined to the environment of the NT papyri at Oxyrhynchus and to the first three and a half centuries of Christianity in that locality, that I wish to explore on this occasion. After all, it is well known that the NT papyri found at Oxyrhynchus constitute the most numerous, the most geographically concentrated, and as a whole the oldest at any single location. It is natural then to ask, first, about the Christian environment of the city with this remarkable corpus of manuscripts and, second, whether their reception, use, and influence in their own time and place were proportionate to these superlatives—and whether they enjoyed a special place of honor there.

At Oxyrhynchus, the context of its NT papyri must be recovered almost entirely from other papyri, and we face two frustrating barriers: the fragmentary nature of most evidence and the randomness of its survival, for at Oxyrhynchus the vast majority of papyri were recovered from rubbish heaps. Yet there is no scarcity of data, for the literary and documentary remains to date exceed five thousand published manuscripts—enormous riches compared to other sites. And there are more to come.¹⁷

The Provenance of New Testament Manuscripts

The relevance of provenance. Those who consult the *editio princeps* of a manuscript inevitably will find a statement of its ascertained date and provenance (or often the confession that these are uncertain or unknown). Hence,

¹⁷ I recall the 1998 Oxford University centenary of the publication of Oxyrhynchus papyri, when the research team publicly thanked the British Academy for one hundred years of support—and promptly requested funding for the next hundred years!

lengthy discussions of a manuscript's place of origin and/or discovery and its travels and utilization as it made its way to its present location will be found for such grand codices as Sinaiticus (S), Vaticanus (B), and Bezae (D), though their places of origin—discussed for centuries—may have reached resolution just in the last several years.¹⁸ Only occasionally, however, is more than a minimal treatment offered for lesser manuscripts, particularly the fragmentary papyri. This was understandable over the long history of textual criticism, when manuscripts were viewed largely in isolation—as objective, detached repositories of readings useful in establishing the text, but all the while remaining impersonal and lifeless. To be sure, their dates and sometimes their geographical diversity were factors in assessing their value for establishing the text, but manuscripts and the texts they carried were not often seen as influences upon the liturgy, thought, and ethics of early Christian congregations, nor as reliquaries for past theological expressions or controversies—preserving for us the artifacts of both discarded and prevailing Christian faith and practice.

Beyond Oxyrhynchus, a number of papyri of known provenance might be investigated in this fashion. For example, P4, consisting of six fragments of a double-column codex containing Luke and dated in the late second century, was actually found *in situ* at Coptos (just north of Thebes) in a jar walled up in a house. More precisely, it was used in the binding of a (presumably Christian) codex of Philo, but the house showed no evident connection to a church.¹⁹ Yet there is likely more to this story, for books are known to have been hidden in private homes during periods of persecution, and Diocletian sacked Coptos in 292. Hence, it might be surmised that the owner of this codex concealed it then or perhaps later during a further severe persecution, with the intention of retrieving it after the danger was past.²⁰ Beyond this, though, we would move only deeper into speculation. One might also consider P92, found in 1969 at Medīnet Mādi in the Fayum in a rubble-filled structure near a racing course.²¹ Surely there is more to this story also, but no one knows what it might be.

¹⁸ On Sinaiticus and Vaticanus and their origin in Caesarea, see T. C. Skeat, "The Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Vaticanus and Constantine," *JTS* 50 (1999): 583–625, esp. 603–4; on Bezae's origin in Berytus (Beirut), see David C. Parker, *Codex Bezae: An Early Christian Manuscript and Its Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 261–78, esp. 266–78.

¹⁹ Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (Schweich Lectures 1977; London: British Academy by Oxford University Press, 1979), 8, 13. Roberts dates P4 in the later second century, as does T. C. Skeat in an extensive discussion: "The Oldest Manuscript of the Four Gospels?" *NTS* 43 (1997): 26–31. There is debate as to whether P4 was part of the same codex as P64 + P67; see Skeat, above. The definitive edition of P4 was by Jean Merell, "Nouveaux fragments du papyrus 4," *RB* 47 (1938): 5–22 + 7 pls.

²⁰ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society, and Belief*, 8.

²¹ Claudio Gallazzi, "Frammenti di un codice con le Epistole di Paoli," *ZPE* 46 (1982): 117.

The New Testament papyri at Oxyrhynchus. The most obvious candidates for study, however, are the NT papyri from Oxyrhynchus, for they number an astounding forty-seven, or 42 percent of the currently known 116 (but perhaps 112 different) papyri. More striking is their proportion among all *early* NT manuscripts (including four majuscules, one from Oxyrhynchus), for out of the sixty-one that date up to or around the turn of the third/fourth centuries,²² thirty-five or 57 percent were found at Oxyrhynchus.²³ As a whole, NT papyri date from the second century to ca. 600, but we should include also eleven additional majuscules found at Oxyrhynchus, for they all date within the same range—from the third/fourth through the fifth/sixth centuries.²⁴ All together, these papyri and majuscules, though mostly highly fragmentary, preserve portions of seventeen of the twenty-seven books that eventually formed the NT canon,²⁵ and, as I have argued elsewhere, they may be viewed as a microcosm of the various textual clusters (text-types) that present themselves across the entire NT manuscript tradition.²⁶

²² Or sixty-two if P4 is treated as a separate manuscript rather than part of P64 + 67 (see n. 19 above). K. Aland and B. Aland (*The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* [rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leiden: Brill, 1989], 96, 159) treat it separately, though others speak of P64 + 67 + 4: T. C. Skeat, "The Oldest Manuscript of the Four Gospels?" *NTS* 43 (1997): 1–34, esp. 1–9; Graham N. Stanton, "The Fourfold Gospel," *NTS* 43 (1997): 327–28.

The figure sixty-one (or sixty-two) includes majuscules 0162 (P.Oxy. 847, 3rd/4th c.), as well as 0189 (2nd/3rd c.), 0220 (3rd c.), 0171 (3rd/4th c.) from other locations; 0212 (3rd c.) is usually omitted because it is a Diatessaron manuscript, and not strictly of the NT: see Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 56, 95, 125.

²³ This includes majuscule 0162 (see preceding note).

²⁴ The twelve Oxyrhynchus majuscules, by century, are third/fourth: 0162 (P.Oxy. 847); fourth: 0169 (P.Oxy. 1080), 0206 (P.Oxy. 1353), 0308 (P.Oxy. 4500); fifth: 069 (P.Oxy. 3), 0163 (P.Oxy. 848), 0172 (PSI 1.4), 0173 (PSI 1.5), 0174 (PSI II.118), 0176 (PSI 3.251); fifth/sixth: 071 (P.Oxy. 401), 0170 (P.Oxy. 1169). On the possibility that P52 (P.Ryl. 457, 2nd c.) came from Oxyrhynchus, see C. H. Roberts, ed., *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester, III: Theological and Literary Texts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1938), 2. Roberts is more cautious in *An Unpublished Fragment of the Fourth Gospel in the John Rylands Library* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1935), 24–25.

According to its editor, Oxyrhynchus is the likely provenance of the highly important fifth-century Coptic manuscript G67, containing Acts 1:1–15:3 in the Middle Egyptian (or Oxyrhynchite) dialect: Hans-Martin Schenke, ed., *Apostelgeschichte 1,1–15,3 im mittelägyptischen Dialekt des Koptischen (Codex Glazier)* (TU 137; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1991), 88, 249.

²⁵ Oxyrhynchus papyri contain portions of fifteen books of the NT: Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1–2 Thessalonians, Hebrews, James, 1 John, Jude, Apocalypse of John. Hence, those missing are Mark, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, Pastoral Epistles, Philemon, 1–2 Peter, 2–3 John. However, Mark (069 = P.Oxy. 847, 5th c.) and 1 Peter (0206 = P.Oxy. 1353, 4th c.) are represented among the Oxyrhynchus majuscules, for a total of seventeen.

²⁶ See E. J. Epp, "The New Testament Papyri at Oxyrhynchus: Their Significance for Understanding the Transmission of the Early New Testament Text," in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts*

So, if provenance is central, no other group of papyri begins to match Oxyrhynchus, for no more than three or four NT papyri are known with certainty to have been found at any other single location, and even if one considers a region, such as all the cities of the Fayum (the Arsinoite nome), where thousands of papyri were recovered, only a dozen of the NT survived there.²⁷ Noting that about thirty-eight NT papyri stem from unknown localities means that Oxyrhynchus has furnished 64 percent of all NT papyri of known provenance.

Naturally, because of their early dating and extensive coverage of the text, the prominent Chester Beatty and Bodmer papyri are of greater importance for the various tasks of textual criticism than those of Oxyrhynchus, but the Egyptian provenance of the Beatty group (P45, P46, P47) cannot be more narrowly identified than the supposition that they came from the Fayum. As for the Bodmer papyri (P66, P72, P75), James M. Robinson has clearly located their place of *discovery* among the Dishna Papers (at Dishnā, some 220 miles upstream from Oxyrhynchus), which were part of the nearby Pachomian monastic library until they were buried in a large earthen jar in (probably) the seventh century. Yet the Bodmer *New Testament* papyri clearly originated at another uncertain place or places, for they all antedate the founding of the monastic order.²⁸ Thus, we do not know their earlier or original provenance.

(ed. Peter Parsons et al.; London: Egypt Exploration Society, [forthcoming]); see section on "Oxyrhynchus as a microcosm for New Testament text-types"; see also idem, "The Significance of the Papyri for Determining the Nature of the New Testament Text in the Second Century: A Dynamic View of Textual Transmission," in *Gospel Traditions in the Second Century: Origins, Recensions, Text, and Transmission* (ed. William L. Petersen; Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 3; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 89–90 [reprinted in E. J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee, *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* (SD 45; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 286–87]; idem, "Textual Criticism in the Exegesis of the New Testament, with an Excursus on Canon," in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; NTTs 25; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 58.

²⁷ Papyri known or thought to come from the Fayum (ca. forty miles east to west and ca. thirty miles north to south in area) are P3, P12, P33 + 58, P34, P45 (?), P46 (?), P53, P55, P56, P57, P79, and P92 (Medīnet Mādī). Sinai provided three: P11, P14, P68, as did Auja el-Hafir (Nessana): P59, P60, P61; the Dishna Papers, found near Dishnā, include P66, P72, P75, and P92 (see next note).

²⁸ James M. Robinson, *The Pacomian Monastic Library at the Chester Beatty Library and the Bibliothèque Bodmer* (Occasional Papers 19; Claremont, CA: Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, 1990), esp. 4–6, 22–27. A shorter version: "The First Christian Monastic Library," in *Coptic Studies: Acts of the Third International Congress of Coptic Studies, Warsaw, 20-25 August, 1984* (ed. W. Godlewski; Centre d'archéologie méditerranéenne de l'Académie Polonaise des Sciences; Warsaw: Éditions scientifiques de Pologne, 1990), 371–78. See also idem, "Introduction," in *The Chester Beatty Codex AC. 1390: Mathematical School Exercises in Greek and John 10:7–13:38 in Subachmimic* (ed. W. Brashear, W.-P. Funk, J. M. Robinson, and R. Smith; CBM 13; Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 3–29, esp. 3–7, 15–23.

P99 is included in the Dishna Papers: see Alfons Wouters, *The Chester Beatty Codex AC*

By way of contrast, the forty-seven papyri and twelve majuscules discovered and presumably utilized at Oxyrhynchus—with many of them, though not necessarily all, likely to have originated there²⁹—provide a statistically significant sample for examining their specific local Christian context.³⁰

“Canonical” and “Extracanonial” New Testament Manuscripts
at Oxyrhynchus: An Environmental Scan

Our first step is to provide an environmental scan of Christian literature in Oxyrhynchus to discover the extent to which the NT manuscripts there shared space with additional Christian writings, keeping the issue of canon formation in mind. Of course, any notion of “New Testament papyri” as a formed and isolated body of literature is anachronistic: I know of nothing at Oxyrhynchus informing us of the canonical process there during the first three centuries or so of Christianity, except the very telling presence of numerous and often early manuscripts of what we—again often anachronistically—call the “apocryphal New Testament.” Hence, for a clearer picture of “New Testament papyri” at Oxyrhynchus into the late fourth century, the following writings discovered there—or at least most of them—should be included. Many are fragmentary, yet each is a remnant of a more extensive copy that was present in the ancient city. Naturally, one copy is significant, though two or more copies of a writing portray a more expansive and richer context. There are:

- Seven copies of the *Shepherd of Hermas* (P.Oxy. 404 [late 3rd/early 4th c.], 1172+3526 [Greek and Coptic, 4th c.], 1599 [4th c.], 1783 [vellum

1499: *A Graeco-Latin Lexicon on the Pauline Epistles and a Greek Grammar* (CBM 12; Leuven: Peeters, 1988), esp. xi–xii.

In the *editio princeps* of P72, Michel Testuz argued that P72 was copied in Thebes by a Coptic scribe (*Papyrus Bodmer VII–IX: VII: L’Épître de Jude, VIII: Les deux Épîtres de Pierre, IX: Les Psaumes 33 et 34* [Cologny-Geneva: Bibliothèque Bodmer, 1959], 10, 32–33); this is based on “the presence of a Coptic word in the margin of 2 Peter 2:22 . . . and the frequent confusion of its K and G, characteristic of Copts of Thebes” (p. 10). Cf. Kurt Aland, ed., *Repertorium der griechischen christlichen Papyri, I: Biblische Papyri* (PTS 18; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1975), 303.

²⁹ See E. J. Epp, “New Testament Papyrus Manuscripts and Letter Carrying in Greco-Roman Times,” in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (ed. B. A. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 35–56, esp. 52–56.

³⁰ In earlier studies, I treated the NT papyri in their literary/intellectual context in Oxyrhynchus: “The New Testament Papyri at Oxyrhynchus in Their Social and Intellectual Context,” in *Sayings of Jesus: Canonical and Non-Canonical: Essays in Honour of Tjitze Baarda* (ed. W. L. Petersen et al.; NovTSup 89; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 47–68; “The Codex and Literacy in Early Christianity and at Oxyrhynchus: Issues Raised by Harry Y. Gamble’s *Books and Readers in the Early Church*,” *CRBR* 10 (1997): 15–37; and “New Testament Papyri at Oxyrhynchus: Their Significance for Understanding the Transmission of the Early New Testament Text.”

palimpsest, early 4th c.), 1828 [vellum codex, 3rd c.],³¹ 3527 [early 3rd c.], and 3528 [late 2nd/early 3rd c.]—note the exceptionally early date of the last one)

- Three copies of the *Gospel of Thomas* (P.Oxy. 1; 654; and 655, all 3rd c.)—the only ones extant in Greek³²
- Two copies of the *Gospel of Mary* (P.Oxy. 3525, 3rd c.; P.Ryl. III.463, early 3rd c.)³³
- One copy of the *Acts of Peter* (P.Oxy. 849, parchment, early 4th c.)
- One copy of the *Acts of John* (P.Oxy. 850, 4th c.)
- One copy of the *Acts of Paul* (P.Oxy. 1602, parchment, 4th/5th c.)³⁴
- One copy of the *Didache* (P.Oxy. 1782, late 4th c.)³⁵
- One copy of the *Sophia Jesu Christi* (P.Oxy. 1081, 3rd/4th c.)³⁶
- Two copies doubtless of the *Gospel of Peter* (P.Oxy. 2949 [not a codex], late 2nd/early 3rd c.; P.Oxy. 4009, 2nd c.)—again, extraordinarily early³⁷

³¹ See van Haelst, no. 665, who noted that Silvio Giuseppe Mercati (“Passo del Pastore di Erma riconosciuto nel pap. Oxy. 1828,” *Bib* 6 [1925]: 336-38) identified the fragment as *Hermas* (*Sim.* 6.5.3 and 6.5.5); cf. Ulrich H. J. Körtner and Martin Leutzsch, *Papiasfragmente, Hirt des Hermas* (Schriften des Urchristentums 3; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998) 117 and 360 n. 9.

³² For the latest critical edition, see Harold W. Attridge, “The Greek Fragments,” in *Nag Hammadi Codex II.2-7, together with XIII.2^o, Brit. Lib. Or.4926, and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655: Volume One* (Coptic Gnostic Library; NHS 20; ed. Bentley Layton; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 95–128.

³³ These two fragments are not from the same manuscript: P.Oxy. L, p. 12.

³⁴ A portion of “From Corinth to Italy”: see Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha* (rev. ed.; Eng. trans. ed. by R. McL. Wilson; Cambridge: James Clarke; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991–92), 2:259. In P.Oxy. XIII, pp. 23–25, 1602 was unidentified, but see van Haelst, no. 606, and, for a revised text, Henry A. Sanders, “A Fragment of the Acta Pauli in the Michigan Collection,” *HTR* 31 (1938): 79 n. 2.

³⁵ For the importance of P.Oxy. 1782 for the *Didache* text, see Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 21–23.

³⁶ For a restoration of the Greek text of P.Oxy. 1081, see Harold W. Attridge, “P. Oxy. 1081 and the Sophia Jesu Christi,” *Enchoria* 5 (1975): 1–8. Aland (*Repertorium*, 1:373) dates it 3rd/4th c.; P.Oxy. VIII, p. 16, early 4th c.

³⁷ See P.Oxy. 2949 and pl. II; P.Oxy. 4009 (by D. Lührmann and P. Parsons) and plates I–II. They report that 2949 and 4009 are not from the same manuscript; for the view that both are likely copies of the *Gospel of Peter*, see D. Lührmann, “POx 2949: EvPt 3–5 in einer Handschrift des 2./3. Jahrhunderts,” *ZNW* 72 (1981): 216–26; “POx 4009: Ein neues Fragment des Petrus-evangeliums?” *NovT* 35 (1993): 390–410. Lührmann’s identification of P.Oxy. 2949 is accepted, e.g., by Schneemelcher (*New Testament Apocrypha*, 1:217–18 [though, curiously, the identification is dismissed on p. 93]); and by Helmut Koester (*Introduction to the New Testament* [2 vols.; 2nd ed.; New York/Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995, 2000], 1:167).

- Possibly a copy of the *Apocalypse of Peter* (P.Vind. G, 3rd/4th c.)³⁸
- Single copies of three unknown Gospels/sayings of Jesus:³⁹
 - A narrative in which Jesus discusses the “good,” including the parable of the good and bad fruit, and makes direct claims to be in the image/form of God (P.Oxy. 210, 3rd c.)⁴⁰
 - A “Dispute between the Savior and a Priest in Jerusalem”⁴¹ (P.Oxy. 840, parchment, 4th c.)
 - Some sayings of Jesus (P.Oxy. 1224, 3rd/4th c.)⁴²

Three more copies of well-known “apocryphal” writings were found, though in manuscripts later than our period: the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (P.Oxy. 6, 5th c.), the *Protevangelium of James* (P.Oxy. 3524, 6th c.), and the *Letter of Abgar to Jesus* (P.Oxy. 4469, 5th c., amulet), as well as a tiny, unidentified fragment of “the Acts of some apostle or saint” (P.Oxy. 851, 5th/6th c.). What is not known is whether these were late imports or copies of earlier exemplars that were used in the city during the period of our concern.

Some of these well-known writings were contenders for canonicity at various Christian localities—indeed, possibly most of them, since all except the *Letter of Abgar* certainly or plausibly stem from the second century.⁴³ Or, if we

³⁸ P.Vindob. G.[no number], from the Rainer collection, Vienna [no further identification appears to be available], a vellum leaf, 3rd/4th c. Provenance is described by van Haelst, no. 619, as “Oxyrhynchos (?)” Provenance is not discussed by any of the authors referred to by van Haelst, nor by Schneemelcher (*New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:620–21).

³⁹ See also P.Oxy. 1384 (but 5th c.). Perhaps P.Egerton 2 (P.Lond. Christ. 1), with four gospel-like pericopes, is from Oxyrhynchus (van Haelst, no. 586).

⁴⁰ I adopt the case for an apocryphal Gospel made by Stanley E. Porter, “P.Oxy. II 210 as an Apocryphal Gospel and the Development of Egyptian Christianity,” in *Atti del XXII Congresso internazionale di papirologia, Firenze, 23-29 agosto 1998*, ed. Andorlini et al., 2:1095–1108, esp. 1101–8. Cf. P.Oxy. II, pp. 9–10.

⁴¹ I use François Bovon’s description: see “Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840, Fragment of a Lost Gospel, Witness of an Early Christian Controversy over Purity,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 705–28. Bovon marshals voluminous evidence to show that it reflects an intra-Christian dispute: cf. 728. Although this writing is sometimes thought to be an amulet, Michael J. Kruger opted for a miniature codex: “P. Oxy. 840: Amulet or Miniature Codex?” *JTS* 53 (2002): 81–94.

⁴² Aland, *Repertorium*, 1:374.

⁴³ Dates generally accepted: end of first or first half of second century: *Shepherd of Hermas*; early to mid-second century: *Gospel of Thomas*, *Didache*, *Gospel of Peter*, *Sophia Jesu Christi*; second century: *Gospel of Mary*, *Acts of Paul (and Thecla)*; second half of second century: *Acts of Peter*, *Protevangelium of James*, *Acts of John* [or first half of third century]. For most, see Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, ad loc.; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1987], ad loc. (see index); Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, ad loc. (see index). On the date of the *Shepherd*, see esp. Carolyn Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis:

adopt the principle that canon contenders can be identified by their inclusion in a canon list or by discussion in a canon context—even if only as rejected books—or by being cited as authoritative by early Christian writers, nearly all would qualify under these criteria as potentially canonical.⁴⁴

The collocation with our so-called “New Testament” papyri of such recognized or possible candidates for canonicity raises serious issues, such as the propriety of designating *two* categories of writings in this early period: “New Testament” and “apocryphal,” and whether we have given sufficient weight to the provenance of these “extracanonical” books and to their juxtaposition and utilization alongside our “New Testament” manuscripts. And where better might these canonical issues be investigated than at Oxyrhynchus—in a local, real-life context?

For example, the seven surviving copies of the *Shepherd of Hermas* are spread evenly from the late second through the fourth centuries, which is striking evidence of an early and continuous textual tradition of a single writing in one locality—especially in a situation of random preservation. The extended rivalry, well documented elsewhere, among the Apocalypse of John, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, and the *Shepherd of Hermas*, for a place in the canon draws our attention also to the substantial textual tradition of the Apocalypse of John at Oxyrhynchus: six manuscripts from the turn of the third/fourth century (P18, P115) to the fourth (P24, 0308), then to the fifth century (0163), and to ca. 600 C.E. (P26). Too much must not be drawn from such comparative data, but it is clear by any measure available to us that the *Shepherd of Hermas* was very much a part of Christian literature in Oxyrhynchus at an early period.⁴⁵

Furthermore, if—as is likely—the *Gospel of Peter* is represented in two

Fortress, 1999), 19–20. The *Letter of Abgar* stems from the end of the third century (Schneemelcher, 1:496).

⁴⁴ The exceptions appear to be the *Gospel of Mary*, *Sophia Jesu Christi*, and the *Letter of Abgar*. On *Sophia*, see “Eugnostos the Blessed and the Sophia of Jesus Christ,” in *Coptic Encyclopedia* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 4:1069. For notice of the others in canon lists or discussions, see Metzger, *Canon*, esp. Appendix IV, 305–11, and ad loc.; Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, ad loc. For example, *Hermas* was included in Codex Sinaiticus (S, mid-4th c.) following the twenty-seven NT books; in the Muratorian Canon, though only to be read but not “publicly to the people in church”; and in the Latin canon inserted in Codex Claromontanus (D^p) of the sixth century, though the list is older. In the latter, *Hermas*, *Barnabas*, the *Acts of Paul*, and the *Apocalypse of Peter* are marked with a horizontal line in the left margin, doubtless to indicate less authority or the like (see Metzger, *Canon*, 230; for the D^p text and that of the Muratorian Canon, 310–11, 305–7). For patristic references to the *Gospel of Thomas*, see Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1:110–11; Marvin Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1992), 6–7.

⁴⁵ G. H. R. Horsley, *NewDocs 2* (1977): 159–61, lists seventeen manuscripts of the *Shepherd* to that date, though this includes P.Oxy. 5—a citation not a text—but not P.Oxy. 3526 (same codex as 1172), 3527, or 3528.

fragments that date from the second or early third centuries (P.Oxy. 2949 and 4009), and if the *Apocalypse of Peter* is extant from Oxyrhynchus (see above), we would have manuscripts of three unsuccessful canon contenders—the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and both the *Gospel* and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, with the first two dating in the range of our earliest ten NT papyri.⁴⁶ If one were to play comparative statistical games—not well advised in this situation—it could be said that up to around 200 C.E. Oxyrhynchus yielded seven copies of the *Shepherd* and two of the *Gospel of Peter* alongside four of Matthew, three of John, two of Paul, and one each of Luke and Revelation.⁴⁷ If we were to extend this playful approach to around 400 C.E., it could be claimed that, while Oxyrhynchus had forty “New Testament” papyri (plus four parchments) containing portions of sixteen⁴⁸ of our NT books, there were present also twenty copies of nine known “apocrypha,” plus three unidentified Gospel-like writings, in the city. Moreover, the presumption—though not provable—would be that at least some of these writings that had originated in the second century, but are now preserved only in third- and fourth-century manuscripts, had earlier exemplars in Oxyrhynchus.

When this broader definition of “New Testament papyri” is applied—bringing early so-called “apocrypha” under the same umbrella—it will be clear that any position of exclusive honor in ancient Oxyrhynchus that we might have assumed for the forty-seven papyri of our NT has been compromised, for that honor had to be shared with numerous other early Christian writings, of which some twenty-three manuscripts have survived, and there is no basis, therefore, to claim that the “New Testament” manuscripts stand out as a separate or separable group.

The Jewish Bible in Oxyrhynchus

A fragment of a third-century roll (P.Oxy. 1075) holds the final thirteen verses of Exodus, and later in the third or early in the fourth century someone else copied on the verso the *Apocalypse of John* (P18 = P.Oxy. 1079), though only 1:1–7 survive. Naturally, there is no context for a NT papyrus more intimate than having been written on the back of another document. This

⁴⁶ Dates are from Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 96–102, supplemented by Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed, 8th cor. and exp. printing [with Papyri 99–116]; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001) [card insert].

New Testament papyri dated to the second century are P52 (ca. 125), P90 (P.Oxy. 3523), P98, P104 (P.Oxy. 4404; ca. 200), P32, P46, P64 + 67 + 4[?], P66; second/third c.: P77 (P.Oxy. 2683), P103 (P.Oxy. 4403).

⁴⁷ Matthew: P64 + 67, P77, P103, P104; John: P52, P66, P90; Paul: P32 (Titus), P46; Luke: P4 [part of P64 + 67?]; Revelation: P98.

⁴⁸ Seventeen if majuscule 0206 (P.Oxy. 1353, 4th c.) of 1 Peter is added.

manuscript, then, is an opisthograph, but with the writing of the Apocalypse (on the verso) running in the opposite direction of Exodus (on the recto), so that—when the end of the roll was reached and the roll was turned over—the conclusion of Exodus led directly to the beginning of the Apocalypse. Whether this was deliberate and, if so, what the motivation might have been are not obvious, though there are ready parallels between the end of Exodus and the opening of Revelation. Exodus, for example, concludes with the anointing and consecration of the tabernacle and of Aaron and his sons as *priests* (esp. Exod 39:32–40:33), followed by:

. . . the *cloud* of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the *cloud* by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey. (Exod 40:38)

And the opening doxology of the Apocalypse of John (1:6) refers to Christ who “made us to be a kingdom, *priests* serving his God and Father,” and then, reminiscent of Dan 7:13, it says, “Look! He is coming with the *clouds*. . . .” Whether this or another form of intertextuality was operative is a matter of speculation, but not without interest, for the collocation—on a single papyrus roll—of Jewish Scripture and an authoritative Christian writing⁴⁹ opens an inquiry about the use of Jewish writings by Christians at Oxyrhynchus, and of the relation between Jews and Christians there.

The discovery at Oxyrhynchus of some twenty-three Greek manuscripts of the Septuagint and one in the Old Latin dating up to the end of the fourth century further enlarge the body of “biblical” material with which our NT papyri had to share their space. The following copies, largely fragmentary, survive: Genesis (P.Oxy. 656, papyrus codex, early 3rd c.; 1007, vellum leaf, late 3rd c.; 1166, papyrus roll, 3rd c.; 1167, papyrus codex, 4th c.; 1073, Old Latin, vellum codex, 4th c.); Exodus (P.Oxy. 1074, papyrus codex, 3rd c.; 1075, papyrus roll, 3rd c.; 4442, papyrus codex, early 3rd c.,⁵⁰ P.Mil.R.Univ. I.22 [van Haelst, no. 39], vellum codex, 4th c.); Leviticus (P.Oxy. 1225, papyrus roll, 1st half of 4th c.; 1351, vellum codex, 4th c.); Joshua (P.Oxy. 1168, vellum codex, 4th c.); Esther (P.Oxy. 4443, papyrus roll, late 1st/early 2nd c.); Job (P.Oxy. 3522, papyrus roll,

⁴⁹ Another papyrus with Jewish Scripture/NT contents is P.Amh. 1.3b, with Gen 1:1–5 on the verso, and Heb 1:1 on the recto (= P12), suggesting that Hebrews was copied earlier! However, only Heb 1:1 is present, though the recto also contains a Christian letter written from Rome by someone important in the church, dating between 250 and 285: B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, *The Amherst Papyri* (2 vols.; London: H. Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1900–1901), 1:28–31. See Tobias Nicklas, “Zur historischen und theologischen Bedeutung der Erforschung neutestamentlicher Textgeschichte,” *NTS* 48 (2002): 154–55. Aland and Aland view the Heb 1:1 text as “occasional notes,” and not as a proper NT papyrus (*Text of the New Testament*, 85).

⁵⁰ See Daniela Colomo, “Osservazioni intorno ad un nuovo papiro dell’Esodo (P.Oxy. 4442),” in *Atti del XXII Congresso internazionale di papirologia, Firenze, 23-29 agosto 1998*, ed. Andorlini et al., 1:269–77.

1st c.; PSI X.1163, papyrus codex, 3rd/4th c.); Psalms (P.Oxy. 845, papyrus codex, late 4th/5th c.; 1226, papyrus codex, late 3rd/early 4th c.; 1352, vellum codex, early 4th c.; 1779, papyrus codex, 4th c. [van Haelst, no. 90 = 3rd c.]; P.Harr. 31, papyrus roll, 4th [Haelst no. 148, Oxyrhynchus?]; 2386, papyrus roll, 4th/5th c.); Wisdom of Solomon (P.Oxy. 4444, vellum codex, 4th c.); Tobit (P.Oxy. 1594, vellum codex, late 3rd c.); and *Apocalypse of Baruch* (P.Oxy. 403, papyrus codex, 4th/5th c.). There are in addition fragments of a papyrus codex of *1 Enoch* (P.Oxy. 2069, late 4th c.).⁵¹ Five other LXX manuscripts and one Old Latin date in the fifth and sixth centuries.⁵²

Incidentally, criteria for determining whether these texts were copied for Jewish or for Christian use have not been clearly defined, and certainly not agreed upon by all. Commonly, however, two principles are employed: (1) writings on rolls, especially if from the first or early second centuries, presumably are Jewish, with the likelihood that codices from the third century and later are Christian, though each case must be decided on its own merits; and (2) the employment of *nomina sacra* (contracted divine names and terms, but in this context “Lord” [κύριος, κ̄ω̄] and “God” [θεός, θ̄ω̄,]) has been taken as a sign of Christian origin and use⁵³ (see further below). Though this is not the occasion to explore these issues, sorting out LXX manuscripts of Jewish origin from those copied by Christians would provide useful information both about the Jewish community at Oxyrhynchus and the Christian community there.

Without belaboring the point, did our “New Testament” papyri hold a special, separable place of honor among all the related Christian and Jewish literature at Oxyrhynchus? Criteria for establishing such a position are not apparent.

The second step in assessing our NT papyri in their local context is to take several “core samples” of the sociocultural soil of Oxyrhynchus, probing Christian letters, hymns, prayers, treatises, and petitions, and our first probe reveals a private letter already famous though published only in 1996.

⁵¹ See van Haelst, nos. 576 and 577: it was identified as *1 Enoch* and republished by J. T. Milik, “Fragments grecs du livre d’Hénoch (P. Oxy. XVII 2069),” *ChrEg* 46 (1971): 321–43.

⁵² Genesis (in Old Latin): P.Oxy. 1007 (vellum leaf, 6th c.); Judges: PSI 2.127 (papyrus codex, early 3rd c.); Ecclesiastes: 2066 (papyrus codex, 5th or 6th c.); Amos: P.Oxy. 846 (papyrus codex, 6th c.); Ecclesiasticus: P.Oxy. 1595 (papyrus codex, 6th c.); Tobit: P.Oxy. 1076 (vellum codex, 6th c.). There are also two amulets with LXX Ps 90 (P.Oxy. 1928, roll, Christian, with 1–16; and P.Ryl. 3, with 5–16, both 5th/6th c.). On P.Oxy. 846, see Robert A. Kraft, “P.Oxy. VI 846 (Amos 2, Old Greek) Reconsidered,” *BASP* 16 (1979): 201–4.

⁵³ See, e.g., Roberts, *Manuscript, Society, and Belief*, 28–34, 74–78; E. A. Judge and S. R. Pickering, “Biblical Papyri prior to Constantine: Some Cultural Implications of Their Physical Form,” *Prudentia* 10 (1978): 2–3. See also n. 58 below.

*A Letter about Lending Books:
Jewish-Christian Issues and Women's Literacy and Leadership
in Christianity at Oxyrhynchus*

An early-fourth-century private letter at Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. 4365) reads simply:

To my dearest lady sister, greetings in the Lord. Lend the Ezra, since I lent you the little Genesis. Farewell in God from us.

This is the complete letter, twenty-one words written in six short lines on the back of a piece of papyrus cut from a roll that contained a petition written in the late third century—hence, the presumed early-fourth-century date for the letter. Its six lines elicit at least six significant questions:

1. Are the writer and recipient Jews or Christians, and how can we tell?
2. Why aren't they named?
3. Is the writer a man or, like the recipient, a woman?
4. What books are being loaned?
5. Why would they be read? And
6. What might a woman's voice tell us about female literacy, and does her interest in these books inform us about women's leadership in the implied community?

1. *Are the writer and recipient Christians?*⁵⁴ On the face of it, everything in our tiny letter could be Jewish, and the terms “Ezra” and “Genesis” confirm a biblical context. “Lord” and “God,” by themselves as singular terms, do not aid the decision between Jewish and Christian. It is of methodological interest, moreover, that, if “Ezra” and “Genesis” were *not* present, a context in Greco-Roman religions would be possible, for “god” in the singular occurs often in phrases such as “I pray to god” or “to the lord god” or “before the lord god”; “I thank god”; “god willing”; “god knows”; or “until god takes pity”;⁵⁴ and *nomina*

⁵⁴ Oxyrhynchus occurrences through the fourth century: “I pray to the god”: P.Oxy. 1680, line 3 (3rd/4th c.); 1773, line 4 (3rd c.); 3065, line 3 (3rd c.); 3816, line 3 (3rd/4th c.); “to the lord god”: P.Oxy. 1298, line 4 (4th c.); 1299, lines 3–4 (4th c.); 1677, line 3 (3rd c.); 1678, line 3 (3rd c.); 1683, line 5 (late 4th c.); 2728, line 5 (3rd/4th c.); 3860, line 3 (later 4th c.); “before the lord god”: P.Oxy. 3999, line 3 (4th c.); “in god”: P.Vindob.Sijp. XI.26, line 23 (3rd c.); “in the lord god”: P.Oxy. 2276, lines 29–30 (end 3rd c.); “I/we thank the god”: P.Oxy. 1299, lines 5–6 (4th c.); 3816, line 11 (3rd/4th c.); “god willing/with god's help/by god's grace”: $\sigma\upsilon\nu\ \theta\epsilon\omega\ \phi$ as in P.Oxy. 1220, line 24 (3rd c.); 1763, line 11 (3rd c.); 3814, line 25 (3rd/4th c.), or $\tau\acute{\alpha}\chi\alpha\ \sigma\upsilon\nu\ \theta\epsilon\omega\ \phi$ in P.Oxy. 4624, lines 3–4 (1st c.); “god knows”: P.Oxy. 3997, lines 8–9 (3rd/4th c.); 4628, line 3 (4th c.); “until the god takes pity”: P.Oxy. 120, line 16 (4th c.); “barring an act of god”: P.Oxy. 2721, line 24 (234 C.E.) [cf. 411, line 11].

*sacra*⁵⁵—contracted divine names, to which we turn in a moment—do not occur in several dozen examples from Oxyrhynchus. The singular is common also in the frequent formula, “I make obeisance every day before god,” or “the lord god,” often specifically “before god, the . . . lord Sarapis.”⁵⁶ *Nomina sacra* do not occur in these cases either.

Nomina sacra, however, do occur with virtual consistency through the fourth century in letters otherwise clearly Christian, and the instances are numerous.⁵⁷ As is well known, this is a complex matter, though a criterion com-

Other occurrences of “god” or “lord” in singular: “(the) god”: P.Oxy. 112, line 4 (3rd/4th c.); cf. 2474, line 6 (3rd c.) [lacuna preceding]; 1680, line 3 (3rd/4th c.); 1682, line 6 (4th c.); 3356, lines 16–17 (76 C.E.); 3859, line 10 (4th c.); 3997, lines 4, 12; “the lord god”: P.Oxy. 3819, line 10 (early 4th c.); 3998, line 2 (4th c.); 4493, lines 3–5 (1st half of 4th c.); ὁ δεσπότης θεός: 939, line 4 (4th c.) [cf. Christian use with *nomen sacrum* in P. Oxy. 2729, line 3]; “the great/est god, Sarapis”: P.Oxy. 1070, line 8 (3rd c.); 1453, line 5 (30–29 B.C.); “the great/est god, Apollo”: P.Oxy. 1449, line 4 (213–217 C.E.); 1435, lines 2–3 (147 C.E.); “Sarapis, the great god”: 2837, line 12 (50 C.E.); “the lord Sarapis”: P.Oxy. 110, lines 2–3 (2nd c.); 523, lines 2–3 (2nd c.); 1484, lines 3–4 (2nd/3rd c.); 1755, line 4 (2nd/3rd c.); 3693, lines 3–4 (2nd c.); 4339, lines 2–3 (2nd/3rd c.); “O lord Sarapis Helios”: P.Oxy. 1148, line 1 (1st c.); “the greatest god, Ammon”: P.Oxy. 3275, lines 5–6 (early 1st c.) “Goddess,” as in P.Oxy. 254, lines 2–3 (20 C.E.); 2722, lines 2, 6 (154 C.E.); 1449, line 11 (213–217 C.E.), is not relevant.

Nomina sacra do not occur in the cases above. On “God knows,” see A. M. Nobbs, “Formulas of Belief in Greek Papyrus Letters of the Third and Fourth Centuries,” in *Ancient History in a Modern University*, volume 2, *Early Christianity, Late Antiquity, and Beyond* (ed. T. W. Hillard et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 235–36; on “I pray to god” as both Christian and non-Christian, 237. On “god willing,” etc., see B. R. Rees, “Popular Religion in Graeco-Roman Egypt, II: The Transition to Christianity,” *JEA* 36 (1950): 94–95; he provides fifty fifth- to seventh-century Oxyrhynchus examples (Christian and non-Christian) of σύν θεῷ on 94 nn. 14–16; 95 nn. 1–6 (though, curiously, only P.Oxy. vols. through XVI [1924] are used).

Though disputed and often doubtful, a number of the expressions above have been taken as Christian (of course, not those with Sarapis), including P.Oxy. 120; 939; 1298; 1299; 1678; 1680; 1682; 1683; 1773; 2276; 2474; 3816; 3819; 3997; 3998; 3999. See Horsley, *NewDocs* 4 (1979): 57–63; cf. P.Oxy. XIV, p. 138.

⁵⁵ See Aland, *Repertorium*, 1:420–28, for an index of *nomina sacra* in biblical and apocryphal manuscripts, showing their numerous formations.

⁵⁶ Obeisance before “the god”: P.Oxy. 2682, lines 3–5 (3rd/4th c.); 3997, lines 9–11 (3rd/4th c.); “the lord god”: P.Oxy. 3998, lines 4–5 (4th c.); 4493, lines 3–5 (1st half of 4th c.); P.Alex. 30 (4th c.) from Oxyrhynchus; “the master god”: 1775, line 4 (4th c.); specifically “before the god, the . . . lord Sarapis”: P.Oxy. 3992, lines 13–16 (2nd c.); cf. 1670, lines 3–6 (3rd c.); 1769, lines 4–5 (3rd c.); 1677, line 3 (3rd c.); 2984, lines 4–7 (2nd/3rd c.). For an obeisance passage (non-Christian) without mention of a deity, see P.Oxy. 1482, lines 22–23 (2nd c.). “The obeisance formula is typically pagan” (P.Oxy. LIX, p. 148); cf. Horsley, *NewDocs* 4 (1987): 61–62. Some instances have been taken as Christian, e.g., P.Oxy. 1775; 3997; 3998. *Nomina sacra* do not occur in the preceding instances. See n. 59 below.

⁵⁷ Oxyrhynchus evidence through the fourth century: letters clearly, likely, possibly, or alleged to be Christian; those clearly Christian are marked with an asterisk (*); those possibly Christian have a question mark (?):

(1) *Nomina sacra* in clearly or likely Christian letters: 1161, line 7 (4th c.)*; 1162, lines 4, 12,

monly taken as virtually decisive is that “god” and “lord” in the singular (when the latter refers to deity) are non-Christian when *nomina sacra* are absent and Christian when present.⁵⁸ However, there are a fair number of ambiguous

14, and $\overline{\phi\theta}$ in 15 (4th c.)^o; 2601, line 5 (early 4th c.) [complex case, see P.Oxy. XXXI, pp.167–71; it contains a bungled *nomen sacrum* and $\overline{\phi\theta}$ (line 34)]; 2729, line 3 (4th c.) [*nomen sacrum*: one of two]; 2785, lines. 1, 13 (4th c.)^o; 3857, line 15, plus $\overline{\phi\theta}$ (4th c.)^o; 3858, lines 3, 25 (4th c.)^o; 3862, lines 4, 39, plus $\chi\mu\gamma$ bis, $\overline{\phi\theta}$ (4th/5th c.)^o; PSI 3.208, lines 1, 12 (vellum, 4th c.); PSI 9.1041, lines 1, 16 (vellum, 3rd/4th c.)^o.

P.Oxy. 1592, lines 3, 5 (3rd/4th c.) is a special case, with *nomina sacra*, $\overline{\kappa\epsilon}$ $\mu\omicron\upsilon$ $\overline{\pi\rho}$ and $\overline{\pi\eta\rho}$, though all refer, not to deity, but to a high church official, and the *nomina sacra* obviously were used to show the greatest possible respect, further enhanced by the use of “exalted” and “rejoiced” from the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–47): “. . . greetings. I received your letter, my *lord father*, and I was very much *exalted* and I *rejoiced*, that such a *father* of mine remembers me. For when I received it, I [worshipped?] your holy [face?]”—trans. and interpretation by AnneMarie Luijendijk, Harvard doctoral student, in a paper “What’s in a *nomen*?” at the SBL annual meeting, Atlanta, 2003 [italics added]. The Magnificat verbs are without context and doubtless came from liturgy. On the allusions, see B. F. Harris, “Biblical Echoes and Reminiscences in Christian Papyri,” in *Proceedings of the XIV International Congress of Papyrologists, Oxford, 24–31 July 1974* (Graeco-Roman Memoirs, 61; London: British Academy, 1975), 156.

On $\overline{\phi\theta}$ = 99, isopsephism of $\overline{\alpha\mu\eta\nu}$, see P.Oxy LVI, pp. 116 n. 13; 135–36 n. 1; P.Oxy. XXXI, p. 171; as “exclusive to Christians,” see E. A. Judge and S. R. Pickering, “Papyrus Documentation of Church and Community in Egypt to the Mid-Fourth Century,” *JAC* 20 (1977): 69; cf. 54: “the cryptogram for Amen . . . was coming into fashion at the beginning of the fourth century”; cf. S. R. Llewelyn, *NewDocs* 8 (1984–85): 171–72. On the enigmatic $\chi\mu\gamma$, see Horsley, *NewDocs* 2 (1977): 177–80; esp. Llewelyn, *NewDocs* 8 (1984–85): 156–68; P.Oxy. LVI, pp. 135–36. It occurs also in a prayer: P.Oxy. 1058 (4th or 5th c.).

(2) *Nomina sacra* in letters with virtually no other Christian identifiers: P.Oxy. 1493, lines 4–5 (3rd/4th c.): mixed: $\overline{\kappa\omega}$ $\overline{\theta\epsilon\phi}$; 1495, lines 4–5 (4th c.); 1774, line 3 (early 4th c.); 2156, (4th/5th c.): mixed: line 6, “divine providence of God (no *nomen sacrum*), line 25, $\overline{\epsilon\nu}$ $\overline{\kappa\rho\upsilon\tau\iota}$ [$\overline{\phi}$] $\overline{\theta\omega}$; 2609, line 2 (4th c.) [may also contain a chi-rho monogram]; 2731, line 2 (4th/5th c.); 3858, lines 3, 25 (4th c.); 4127, line 4 (1st half 4th c.). PSI 8.972, line 3, probably from Oxyrhynchus (4th c.): line 4 refers to “the evil eye”; on the evidence that the letter is Christian, see Horsley, *NewDocs* 1 (1976): 134–36.

(3) *Nomina sacra* lacking in letters clearly, likely, or alleged to be Christian: P.Oxy. 939, line 4 (4th c.)[?]; P.Oxy. VI, p. 307 assumes it is Christian due to its phraseology and sentiments in lines 3–10, 28–30; 1492, line 19 (3rd/4th c.)^o; 1494, line 3 (early 4th c.); 1593, line 12[?] (4th c.)[?]; 3421, line 4 (4th c.): “I pray to the all-merciful god”; 3819, line 10 (early 4th c.): “the lord god”—basis for Christian origin is a rare word ($\overline{\delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\rho\tau\epsilon\omega}$) found only in Philodemus, Epicurean philosopher of the first century B.C.E., and in the Pauline epistles; 4003, line 4 (4th/5th c.)^o: Christian letter, but shaky grammar and vulgar spelling could account for lack of *nomen sacrum*.

⁵⁸ On the basis of the discussion and evidence in Roberts (*Manuscript, Society, and Belief*, 26–34, 74–78), *nomina sacra* do not occur in clearly Jewish manuscripts; his one exception (van Haelst, no. 74, fragments of 1–2 Kings, 5th/6th c.) has four instances ($\overline{\kappa\omega}$ once and $\overline{\iota\sigma\alpha\lambda}$ [$\overline{\iota\sigma\rho\alpha\eta\lambda}$] three times), but all at the ends of lines, perhaps to save space, because no other divine terms are contracted (pp. 32–33). More recently Robert A. Kraft has noted two instances where $\overline{\kappa\omega}$ has been inserted in an apparently blank space (by a later hand in P.Oxy. 656 of Genesis, ca. 200 C.E.; likely by a later hand in P.Oxy. 1075 of Exodus 40, 3rd c.): <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/rak/lxjewpap/kyrios.jpg>; see his cautions on the identification of Christian manuscripts: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/rak/jewishpap.html>, “The Debated Features,” §4.

cases,⁵⁹ and the principle, I think, has been applied too loosely.

But we can be more precise because our letter on exchanging books has more specific and evidentiary phrases, namely, “Greetings in the Lord” and “Farewell in God,” where both “Lord” (κυρίῳ) and “God” (θεῷ) are in contracted forms (κ̄ω̄ and θ̄ω̄). Moreover, these two phrases, when written as *nomina sacra*, appear to be virtually exclusive to Christian letters,⁶⁰ although—as in the present instance—there is an occasional ambiguous case.⁶¹ To be sure, at least one clearly Christian letter, probably from Oxyrhynchus,⁶² employs “in

⁵⁹ Ambiguous cases would include those listed in (2) and (3) in n. 57 above. Another criterion would be that the “obeisance” formula indicates a Greco-Roman religions context and not a Christian one. There is, however, an occurrence of this formula in a certainly Christian letter, though from Arsinoë (P.Mich.Inv. 346, 4th c.). Its identity as Christian is based on “characteristically Christian titles,” and the formula reads, “I make obeisance for you daily”; here, though, there is no deity specified, so we cannot test the *nomen sacrum* criterion: see Herbert C. Youtie, “P.Mich.Inv. 346: A Christian ΠΙΠΟΣΚΥΝΗΜΑ,” *ZPE* 28 (1978): 265–68. Youtie dismisses other alleged Christian examples—where “god” in the singular occurs—as “inference which cannot be proved” (p. 265). See the earlier discussion in G. Geraci, “Ricerche sul Proskynema,” *Aeg* 51 (1971): 197–200, 207, which includes P.Oxy. 1775 (4th c.); 2682 (3rd/4th c.); and P.Alex. 30 (4th c.), found at Oxyrhynchus; and Horsley, *NewDocs* 4 (1979): 62, who accepts Youtie’s view.

⁶⁰ For instances without *nomina sacra* and with no evidence of Christian or non-Christian religion, see (4) in the next note.

⁶¹ Ambiguous cases would be (2) and (4) below. Oxyrhynchus evidence through the fourth century for greetings/rejoice, etc. “in the Lord/God/Lord God”:

(1) With *nomina sacra* and other Christian evidence: (a) “in the Lord”: P.Oxy. 1162, ter lines 4, 12, 14 (4th c.); 1774, line 3 (early 4th c.); 2609, line 2 (4th c.) + a defaced Christian monogram; 2785, bis lines 1, 13 (4th c.); 3857, line 15 (4th c.); 3858, bis lines 3, 25 (4th c.); PSI 3.208, bis lines 1, 12 (4th c.); 9.1041, bis lines 1, 16 (3rd/4th c.). (b) “in the Lord God”: P.Oxy. 1162, bis lines 4, 14 (4th c.); 3862, bis lines 4, 39, but not ἐν Χριστῷ in line 7 (4th/5th c.). P.Oxy. 2156 (4th/5th c.) is mixed: line 6, θεός (no *nomen sacrum*); line 25, ἐν κυρί[ω] θ̄ω̄. P.Oxy. 2729 (4th c.) is complex: ἐν κυρίῳ in line 2 is not contracted (though the first two and last letters are obscure) but in the next line θ̄ω̄ is.

(2) With *nomina sacra* but no (or virtually no) other Christian evidence: “in the Lord”: P.Oxy. 4127, line 4 (1st half 4th c.); “in the Lord God”: 2731, line 2 (4th/5th c.).

(3) Without *nomina sacra* but with evidence of non-Christian religion: (a) “in the lord god”: P.Oxy. 2276, lines 29–30 (late 3rd/4th c.); cf. lines 28–29: “I greet your children, those secure from enchantment (τὰ ἀβάσκαντα),” trans. “whom the evil eye shall not harm.”

(4) Without *nomina sacra* and with no evidence of non-Christian religion: P.Vind.Sijp. 26, line 23 (3rd c.): “I pray for your good health . . . in god”; P.Oxy. 3998, lines 2–3 (4th c.): “very many greetings in the lord god,” followed (lines 4–5) by a statement of obeisance “before the lord god,” again without *nomina sacra*. Nothing else in these letters suggests they are Christian, and I would not view them as such; cf. P.Oxy. LIX, p. 148. Similar is P.Oxy. 182 (mid 4th c.), published by Dominic Montserrat, Georgina Fantoni, and Patrick Robinson, “Varia Descripta Oxyrhynchita,” *BASP* 31 (1994): 48–50: greetings “in the lord god” (lines 2–3), with reference in line 5 to “divine providence”; possibly connected with the archive of Papnuthis and Dorotheus (P.Oxy. 3384–3429).

⁶² Van Haelst, no. 1194.

God” without the contracted *nomen sacrum*: the letter, from a young man to his mother (P.Harr. 107, beginning of 3rd c.), opens as follows:

To my most precious mother Mary, from Besas, many greetings in God. Before all things I pray to the Father, the God of truth, and to the Spirit, the Comforter, that they may preserve you in both soul and body and spirit, and [give] to your body health, and to your spirit gladness, and to your soul eternal life.⁶³

Nomina sacra do not appear in this clearly Christian letter, but the letter itself undoubtedly contains the explanation: in spite of a smooth translation into English (and the lofty sentiments expressed), the editor describes it as “an illiterate letter written . . . in a boyish hand.”⁶⁴—which may explain the failure to execute the *nomina sacra*.

Hence, the preceding evidence, here almost entirely from Oxyrhynchus—though similar throughout the papyri—permits us to claim with great assurance that a letter, dating through the fourth century, may be deemed Christian if it employs the phrase “in the Lord” or “in God” with *nomina sacra* present.⁶⁵ Moreover, these two particular *nomina sacra* are frequent in Christian letters, while other forms are rare.⁶⁶ Exceptions would be *nomina sacra* due not to the “writer” but to a scribe who had picked up the practice.⁶⁷ In our letter about books, however, a scribe is unlikely to have been engaged for so brief a note—

⁶³ Trans. slightly modified from J. Enoch Powell, ed., *The Rendel Harris Papyri* [I] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 89–90. Later the letter refers to Easter (lines 20–21). Powell (p. 90, followed by Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* [LEC; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986], 74) asserted that the trichotomy (soul, body, spirit) was “based on” 1 Thess 5:23, but then added that this order is “characteristic of Egyptian liturgies” rather than in the body, soul, spirit order in 1 Thessalonians. Hence, the boy’s phraseology undoubtedly stems from liturgy rather than directly from a text of 1 Thess 5:23, especially since the verbs are different: διαφυλάξωσιν . . . σέ in the letter and ὁλόκληρον . . . τηρηθεῖ in 1 Thessalonians. Stowers allows for this: “Besas has either studied the letters of Paul or picked up a local Christian tradition” (p. 74). On the theological orientation of the letter, see B. F. Harris, “Biblical Echoes and Reminiscences in Christian Papyri,” in *Proceedings of the XIV International Congress of Papyrologists*, 157. P.Oxy. 1161 (4th c.), a fragment of a clearly Christian letter, refers to “body, soul, and spirit” (lines 6–7).

⁶⁴ Powell, *Rendel Harris Papyri* [I], 89.

⁶⁵ This argument may border on being circular, for letters otherwise clearly Christian that contain one of these phrases are used, at times, as a basis for calling “Christian” letters that contain no other Christian evidence, whereas, if letters with one or both phrases, but without other Christian evidence, were designated “non-Christian,” then the phrases would have to be said to occur in both Christian and non-Christian letters. Hence, each case must be considered on its own merits. For an expanded list of criteria, see Nobbs, “Formulas of Belief,” 235.

⁶⁶ J. R. Rea in P.Oxy LXIII, p. 45; cf. Judge and Pickering, “Papyrus Documentation of Church and Community in Egypt,” 69.

⁶⁷ See Horsley, *New Docs* 3 (1978): 143; idem, *New Docs* 2 (1977): 70, though I find no relevant examples in his discussion.

six very short lines—or to have omitted the writer's and recipient's names (see below).

So our letter about exchanging books, which might at first blush seem Jewish, must be taken as Christian because the expressions “in the Lord,” and “in God” exhibit *nomina sacra* (κυρίῳ > κ̄ω̄ and θεῷ > θ̄ω̄), thus conforming to a pattern established elsewhere.

We should pause here for a further methodological moment. Beginning about thirty years ago, identifying papyrus letters as Christian, unless unambiguous Christian references occurred, has been made with much more caution than earlier had been the practice.⁶⁸ Yet two tendencies of the past have clouded our picture of early Christian documents, especially letters. First, too many have been called Christian that in reality reflect a context of Greco-Roman religions or may be of Jewish or even secular origin. Second, and more specifically, editors—at the mere sight of a word, phrase, or idea reminiscent of our NT—too often have exclaimed “citation” or “source,” seizing myopically on the “New Testament” as the virtually exclusive resource for tenuously related expressions. Such hyper-parallelism—such a rush to judgment—about the source for a document's vocabulary, phraseology, or stream of consciousness, however, runs counter to our current views of intertextuality, for it ignores the wider range of available Christian literature or tradition—as well as Jewish and secular material. What we need is a microscope with less power of magnification so that our field of vision is broader. Hence, one or several similar words or partial parallelism in thought do not a citation make. Various editors' notes in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* and elsewhere illustrate such faults, as do occasional recent articles.⁶⁹ This is not to say that pointing out similarities to the NT is

⁶⁸ Criteria for identifying Christian letters have been much discussed over time and especially recently; see Horsley, *NewDocs* 4 (1979): 58–63, for a critical assessment and comparison of significant earlier works by G. Ghedini (1923) and Mario Naldini (1968), and the more recent critiques by G. Tibiletti (1979), and by Ewa Wipszycka, “Remarques sur les lettres privées chrétiennes des siècles (a propos d'un livre de M. Naldini),” *JJP* 18 (1974): 203–21; cf. Naldini's response, containing additional Christian letters, “In margine alle ‘lettere cristiane’ nei papiri,” *CCICr* 2 (1981): 167–76; “Nuove testimonianze cristiane nelle lettere dei papiri greco-egizi (sec. II–IV),” *Aug* 35 (1995): 831–46. See also *NewDocs* 2 (1977): 156–58; Nobbs, “Formulas of Belief,” 233–37.

Commendable caution is displayed by Judge, *Rank and Status*, 20–31, where, correctly in my judgment, he declines to identify as Christian P.Oxy. 3057 (thought by some to be the earliest Christian letter extant), or P.Oxy. 3313, or 3069, or even 3314 (the letter of Judas, who, he says, “may be safely left a Jew” [p. 31]—a view with which I concur; cf. G. H. R. Horsley, “Name Change as an Indication of Religious Conversion in Antiquity,” *Numen* 34 [1987]: 8–12: “our Judas could perhaps be . . . a Jewish convert to Christianity” [p. 12]).

⁶⁹ E.g., the very helpful article of B. F. Harris (“The Use of Scripture in Some Unidentified Theological Papyri,” in *Ancient History in a Modern University*, volume 2, *Early Christianity, Late Antiquity, and Beyond*, ed. Hillard et al., 228–32) refers, I think incautiously at times, to NT “citations,” “expressions,” “echoes,” “reflections,” etc., and states, in summary, that the OT and NT writ-

inappropriate or unhelpful, but only to plead for caution in identifying material as Christian and for a more enlightened view of intertextuality.

2. *Why do the writer and recipient lack names?*⁹ Even in brief letters lack of names is uncommon. Our letter's editor, John Rea, noting the possibility of an early-fourth-century date (that is, prior to 325, "when Constantine's acquisition of Egypt finally made it safe to profess Christianity there") speculated that this lack of names "denotes a degree of discretion" on the part of its author.⁷⁰ I think it is easier, however, to account for the absence of names by reference to a well-known and partially parallel phenomenon: papyrus invitations, for example, to a wedding or dinner, which were very brief, small in size, and written in short lines. The following example from Oxyrhynchus (where two-thirds of all extant invitations have been found⁷¹) is typical:

ings "were employed, often with some liberty of citation and adaptation, in a great variety of contexts" (p. 232). Actually, options abound for "sources": other Christian writings (including "apocryphal" and patristic), liturgy, oral tradition, etc.; cf. his discussion of P.Oxy. 2072, "echoing Acts 2 and 4" (p. 231), and our discussion below, questioning the connection with Acts; a connection with Heb 10:34 (ibid.) seems tenuous indeed.

I would grant, however, that two verbs in P.Oxy. 1592, lines 3, 5 (3rd/4th c.) may well be an "echo" of Luke 1:46–47, even though there is no further context, because (a) their collocation in the Magnificat and (b) the context of the papyrus letter makes an allusion likely (see n. 57 above).

Harris, in an earlier article ("Biblical Echoes and Reminiscences in Christian Papyri"), uses the classifications "citations, verbal echoes, and lesser verbal reminiscences" (p. 156). For him, e.g., in P.Oxy. 1161, lines 3–4 (4th c.) there is an "echo" of Mark 1:11 in "beloved son," but so common a Christian expression cannot easily be linked to a specific text without fuller parallel contexts. Similarly tenuous is his link (p. 157) of "body, soul, and spirit" in lines 6–7 with 1 Thess 5:23—where the order is spirit, soul, and body (see n. 63 above). His possible "reminiscence" of Titus 2:11 and/or Titus 3:4 in lines 3–4 of P.Oxy. 939 (4th c.) points to one option (pp. 157–58), though I am not entirely convinced that this is a Christian letter (no *nomen sacrum*, though several Christian-sounding phrases).

P.Oxy. 1494 (early 4th c.) is similar: no *nomina sacra* (lines 3, 7), some common expressions, e.g., "god willing" (line 3), some less common, e.g., "sweetest brothers" (but this occurs also, in singular, e.g., in P.Oxy. 935, lines 22–23 [3rd c.], a non-Christian letter [note "ancestral gods," line 10]); hence Harris's "reminiscence" of Matt 3:3 or Acts 13:10 in "straight path" (ὁδὸς εὐθεΐα, lines 8–9) is unlikely: it is a biblical phrase to be sure (e.g., LXX Hos 14:10), but found elsewhere, as in Diod. S. 14.116.9; 2 *Clem.* 7.3. A. L. Connolly agrees, though he provides further evidence for his claim that "the letter is almost certainly Christian" ("Miscellaneous NT Quotations," *NewDocs* 4 [1979]: 193).

Finally, Harris mentions a "general similarity" of the mirror passage that introduces P.Oxy. 2603, lines 3–19 (4th c.) to Jas 1:23, but mirror has the opposite effect in each passage: in the papyrus, it fully displays a person who can then "speak about his own likeness" (lines 8–9), while in James a person "observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like" (pp. 158–59).

⁷⁰ J. R. Rea in P.Oxy. LXIII, p. 44; cf. 43.

⁷¹ P.Oxy. 110–112, 181, 523, 524, 747, 926, 927, 1214, 1484–1487, 1579, 1580, 1755, 2147, 2592, 2678, 2791, 2792, 3202, 3501, 3693, 3694, 4339, 4539–4543; SB X.10496; P.Lond.Inv. 3078;

Eros invites you to a wedding tomorrow the 29th at the 9th hour. (P.Oxy. 927, 3rd c.)

The inviter was always mentioned, though almost never were the invited guests named, presumably because weddings, birthdays, and dinners were largely local events and the invitations were from known friends, delivered by the host's servant or slave, who in turn would report back whether the invitation had been accepted or not.⁷²

Similarly, the letter about lending "the Ezra" and "the little Genesis," though not an invitation, was obviously a quick communication between close acquaintances, doubtless delivered locally by a personally connected messenger, rendering names superfluous.

3. *The recipient of the letter was a woman, but was the writer male or female?*⁹ Normally the reused side of a piece of papyrus would not be closely related in content to the side first written upon, but here again the most immediate context of the letter should not be ignored. The petition on the recto survives in only nine lines, which disclose little of its nature, but two subscriptions remain, the first in the petitioner's own hand, stating her name, Aurelia Soteira, and certifying her submission of the request. The second, written now by the third hand, was the response to the petition—"the reply of a high Roman offi-

P. Köln VI.280 [probably Oxyrhynchus]; no. 7 in O. Giannini, *Annali della Scuola Normale di Pisa* ser. 2, 35 (1966): 18–19. Most of these consist of four or five short lines. Other invitations found to date include BGU I.333, II.596; P.Apoll. 72; P.Fay. 132; P. Fouad III.76, VIII.7; P.Oslo III.157; P. Yale 85; P.Coll.Youtie I.51, 52; SB V. 7745, VIII. 11652, 12511, 12596, 13875. On the thirty invitations known in the mid-1970s, see Chan-Hie Kim, "The Papyrus Invitation," *JBL* 94 (1975): 391–402; on Sarapis banquets, see *Yale Papyri in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, I* (ed. J. F. Oates, A. E. Samuel, and C. B. Welles; ASP 2; New Haven/Toronto: American Society of Papyrologists, 1967), 260–64; Horsley in *NewDocs* 1 (1976): 5–9; on wedding invitations, see Llewelyn and Hobbs, *NewDocs* 9 (1986–87): 62–65.

⁷² Of thirty-six Oxyrhynchus invitations to date (out of a total of about fifty-two), four have "today" with the date (P.Oxy. 1485, 1486, 4542, 4543); four say "tomorrow" (P.Oxy. 111, 1580, SB X.10496; Köln VI.280—probably Oxyrhynchus); ten have "tomorrow" plus the date (P.Oxy. 110, 524, 926, 927, 1487, 1597, 2791, 3202, 3693, 4540); thirteen give the date only (P.Oxy. 112, 523, 747, 1214, 1755, 2147, 2592, 2678, 2792, 3501, 3694, 4339, 4539); one provides no day or date (P.Oxy. 4541); and three have lacunae (P.Oxy. 181, 1484, P.Lond.Inv. 3078). The vast majority are from the second and third centuries, with a few earlier or later. The latest, 1214 (dated 5th c.), provides the name of the invited guest, as does 112 (late 3rd or early 4th c.), but the latter invitation went to someone who must travel, either by donkey or boat, and the invitation would have gone in the usual mail fashion rather than by local messenger.

T. C. Skeat speculated that the very small size of invitations "might have formed a kind of 'status symbol' in the upper classes at Oxyrhynchus" and conjectured that "some means were found for displaying them to visitors in the house of the recipient, in much the same way as the bowl of visiting-cards in the hall of a Victorian residence" ("Another Dinner-Invitation from Oxyrhynchus [P.Lond.Inv. 3078]," *JEA* 61 [1975]: 251–54, here 254).

cial.”⁷³ John Rea concluded that, although different in size and using different pens, the writing of the petitioner’s own hand and that of the Christian letter on its reverse are “rather similar” in the formation of letters and “it is quite possible that the same person wrote both.”⁷⁴ In view of Rea’s earlier explanation for the lack of names, this conclusion caused him to wonder why, if this were a pre-Constantinian environment, she would not make sure “that there was nothing on the sheet to identify her as the writer of the letter.”⁷⁵ However, rather than invoking a persecution context, for which there is no other evidence in the letter, it is easier to say that the woman named Aurelia also wrote the letter about books and to explain, then, the absence of names by its nature as a very personal, local correspondence. So writer and recipient doubtless were both women.⁷⁶

4. *What books were these Christians exchanging?* At first glance, both books might be taken not only as Jewish but as Jewish canonical writings. “Ezra” (Ἐσρα) doubtless referred, however, not to the book of Ezra of the Jewish Bible but to one of several other works written under that name, most likely *4 Ezra* (*2 Esdras* of the English Apocrypha).⁷⁷ It so happens that a fourth-century miniature codex of *6 Ezra*⁷⁸—an early Christian apocalypse added to and now constituting chs. 15–16 of *4 Ezra*—was found at Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. 1010), though only the wildest speculation would identify that with the “Ezra” of our letter. As for “the little Genesis,” this, again, was not the Genesis of the Jewish Bible but the book of *Jubilees*,⁷⁹ designated “the little Genesis,” e.g., by

⁷³ P.Oxy. LXIII, pp. 42–43.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 44; cf. 43. Cf. Rosa Otranto, *Antiche liste di libri su papiro* (Sussidi eruditi 49; Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2000), 128.

⁷⁵ P.Oxy. LXIII, p. 44.

⁷⁶ Simon Franklin takes the same position (“A Note on a Pseudepigraphical Allusion in Oxyrhynchus Papyrus No. 4365,” *VT* 48 [1998]: 95).

⁷⁷ On the identification with *4 Ezra*, see the reference in P.Oxy. LXIII, p. 44, to a seventh/eighth century papyrus “Inventory of Church Property” that refers to Ezra: P.Leid.Inst. 13, line 36 = F. A. J. Hoogendijk and P. van Minnen, eds., *Papyri, Ostraca, Parchments and Waxed Tablets in the Leiden Papyrological Institute* (Pap.Lugd.Bat. XXV; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 51, 54, 70. See also Dieter Hagedorn, “Die ‘Kleine Genesis’ in P.Oxy. LXIII 4365,” *ZPE* 116 (1997): 147–48; Thomas J. Kraus, “Bücherleihe im 4. Jh. N. Chr.: P.Oxy. LXIII 4365—ein Brief auf Papyrus und die gegenseitige Leihe von apokryph gewordenener Literatur,” *Biblos* 50 (2001): 287 and n. 14.

⁷⁸ *6 Ezra* was written in the third century, probably by a Christian. The small Oxyrhynchus fragment “suggests that the sixth book of Ezra was originally current independently of the fourth” (P.Oxy. VII, p. 13); that *6 Ezra* was not an integral part of *4 Ezra* and is Christian is affirmed by Michael Stone, *ABD* 2:612.

⁷⁹ Hagedorn, “Die ‘Kleine Genesis,’” 148; supported by Franklin in 1998 (“Note on a Pseudepigraphical Allusion,” 95–96), who states that λεπτή here means not “little” but “detailed,” and there is no reference to the canonical Genesis. Then A. Hilhorst (“Erwähnt P.Oxy. LXIII 4365

Epiphanius⁸⁰ (ca. 315–403) in the very time frame of our letter (and, by the way, of the 6 *Ezra* codex). Incidentally, P.Oxy. 4365 provides the oldest witness for the existence of the Greek version of *Jubilees*.⁸¹

5. *Why these two Jewish deuterocanonical books?* Certainly the two Christians were exchanging books to read them, and not merely for leisure but for knowledge through study. Why, then, in the early fourth century, were they engaging a second-century B.C.E. Jewish account of revelations to Moses on Mt. Sinai and a late-first-century C.E. Jewish apocalypse, especially when two or three prominent Christian apocalypses—in multiple copies—presumably were available in Oxyrhynchus at this time? And why were these Christians not reading one of the fourteen writings from what we call the “New Testament” that are extant from the period preceding the date of their letter? These papyri survive in thirty-four copies (plus one majuscule) from that period and include, for example, nine of the popular Gospel of John and seven of Matthew.

Were our “New Testament” papyri without relevance, or, to offer an opposite—and more likely—spin on the situation, had the study of the “New Testament” and related Christian books advanced so far in the Oxyrhynchus churches of the third and fourth centuries that some of their inquisitive members had moved beyond—or behind—them to related interests in the Jewish Scriptures? For example, is a special interest in apocalyptic signaled by the dozen or more copies of the Revelation of John and the *Shepherd of Hermas*⁸² found there, along with an otherwise unknown Christian prophetic work that quotes the *Shepherd* (P.Oxy. 5),⁸³ as well as copies of 6 *Ezra* and the *Apocalypse*

das Jubiläenbuch?” *ZPE* 130 [2000]: 192) argued convincingly against the view of Rosa Otranto (*Aeg* 77 [1997]: 107–8; reprinted in her *Antiche liste di libri su papiro*, 128–29) that “little Genesis” referred to a miniature codex; cf. Kraus, “Bücherleihe,” 288 and n. 22.

⁸⁰ *Panarion* 39.6.1 (GCS 31, p. 76, 16–17); Hagedorn refers to additional uses of “the little Genesis” (λεπτὴ Γένεσις) for *Jubilees* (“Die ‘Kleine Genesis,’” 148); see also O. S. Wintermute, “*Jubilees*,” *OTP* 2:41. On “little books” in Coptic lists, see Otranto, *Antiche liste di libri su papiro*, 129; cf. 141.

⁸¹ Hagedorn, “Die ‘Kleine Genesis,’” 148; Franklin, “Note on a Pseudepigraphical Allusion,” 96; Kraus, “Bücherleihe,” 289.

⁸² On the *Shepherd* as an apocalypse, see Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 10–12; Helmut Koester, *Introduction*, 1:262–66. On its popularity, see Osiek: “No other noncanonical writing was as popular before the fourth century as the *Shepherd of Hermas*. It is the most frequently attested postcanonical text in the surviving Christian manuscripts of Egypt well into the fifth century” (p. 1). On its reception and canonicity, see pp. 5–8. Her list of manuscripts includes those with extensive text but also a fragment possibly of the early second century (P.Iand. 1.4), though not any Oxyrhynchus papyri (pp. 1–2).

⁸³ The quotation is *Mandate* 11.9–10. The fragment dates in the third/fourth century (P.Oxy. I, p. 8) or fourth/fifth; see Körtner and Leutzsch, *Papiasfragmente, Hirt des Hermas*, 118 and 361 n. 15, which refers to E. G. Turner, *The Typology of the Early Codex* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 131, no. 528.

of Peter?⁸⁴ And were they drawn also to Jewish apocalypses, not only *4 Ezra*, but also the *Apocalypse of Baruch* (P.Oxy. 403), and *1 Enoch* (P.Oxy. 2069)—copies of which were discovered at Oxyrhynchus?⁸⁵

To be sure, statistics of surviving papyri may prove little, yet the abundance of apocalyptic material at this site, Jewish and Christian, is striking and may well suggest that this early Christian community ascribed canonical authority to these Jewish apocalyptic writings. Again, though, nothing at Oxyrhynchus provides any confirmation except the very presence of these many books and the stated or implied use of them—apparently an extensive use.

6. *What might a woman's voice—or better, two women's voices—tell us about female literacy and about women's likely leadership in Oxyrhynchus churches?* Literacy is a vast topic that cannot be explored here, and discerning the existence and nature of leadership not only would be speculative but also is hampered by the scarcity of relevant material. It is worth noting, however, that while papyri in Roman Egypt reveal that families with literate men commonly had illiterate women, an Oxyrhynchus papyrus of the year 215 provides a striking exception: a literate Oxyrhynchite woman whose Alexandrian (!) husband and his brother were illiterate (P.Oxy. 1463).⁸⁶ In addition, in 263 a woman petitions a prefect of Egypt for the right to carry out business transactions without a guardian, and she supports her argument by her ability to write (P.Oxy. 1467, see below). A further example is an application dated 201 for remarriage to her former husband by a woman who states, “I know how to write” (P.Oxy. 1473). Such pride in writing, however, ran counter to another source of pride: upper-class women—whether literate or not—may have felt it below their dignity to write when they had slaves or secretaries to do it for them.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ See n. 38 above.

⁸⁵ This supposition, however, would require that earlier copies of the *Apocalypse of Baruch* (P.Oxy. 403, 4th/5th c.) and *1 Enoch* (P.Oxy. 2069, late 4th c.) had been present in Oxyrhynchus, for the surviving copies are later than the letter about lending books.

⁸⁶ See William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 279–80. On cautions in generalizing from papyri data, see T. J. Kraus, “(Il)literacy in Non-Literary Papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt: Further Aspects of the Educational Ideal in Ancient Literary Sources and Modern Times,” *Mnemosyne* 53 (2000): 333, 338–41.

⁸⁷ On the larger subject, see Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (TSAJ 81; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2001), 474–75, 484–85; E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (WUNT 42; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991), 18–23, esp. 22; Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 230–60, esp. 246–47, 255–56, 258–59; idem, *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History* (Approaching the Ancient World; London/New York: Routledge, 1995), 24–25; Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmission of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University

Further insight may be gained from a copy of a lease for property (P.Oxy. 1690, dated about 287) owned by a literate woman, Aurelia Ptolemais, that was found with fragments of two papyri containing the *Iliad* (P.Oxy. 1386, 1392) and portions of a much rarer *History of Sikyon* (P.Oxy. 1365), literary works that she owned and presumably read.⁸⁸ Roger Bagnall argued that her father was Aurelius Hermogenes, a councillor at Oxyrhynchus, whose will named as heirs a daughter, Aurelia Ptolemais, along with another daughter, three sons, and his wife, Isidora (P.Oxy. 907, dated 276). Curiously the will was written on the verso of a papyrus that contained the *Kestoi* of the Christian writer Sextus Julius Africanus (P.Oxy. 412, mid-3rd c.), though this particular work is not specifically Christian in nature.⁸⁹ E. A. Judge and S. R. Pickering, appealing to Julius Africanus's Christian identity and to a phrase in Hermogenes' will that conveys "an idea familiar to [NT] readers," suggested that Hermogenes—and therefore perhaps his family, including Aurelia—were also Christians.⁹⁰ If this plausible though tenuous thread of evidence is accepted, another literate woman of a prominent Oxyrhynchus family will have been identified as Christian. It remains unclear, however, whether these papyri are evidence that literate women in Oxyrhynchus were more numerous than elsewhere, or that literate women, like those in our short letter, were the exception, as has been the common view.⁹¹

Press, 2000), 7, 21. For speakers and writers in Egyptian, "illiteracy in Greek, the language of the alien and worldly bureaucracy, may have become a point of pride" (Herbert C. Youtie, "Because they do not know letters," *ZPE* 19 [1975]: 108).

⁸⁸ Roger Bagnall, "An Owner of Literary Papyri," *CP* 87 (1992): 137–40; reprinted in his *Later Roman Egypt: Society, Religion, Economy, and Administration* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate; Burlington, VT: Variorum, 2003), no. VII. Her literacy is confirmed by her "fairly rapid cursive" signature, "Not the hand of someone who could barely sign, certainly" (p. 140 and n. 18), and by her presumed ownership of the literary papyrus found with the lease.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 138–39 and n. 16.

⁹⁰ Judge and Pickering, "Papyrus Documentation," 65; cf. Bagnall, "Owner of Literary Papyrus," 139 n. 16. The phrase in question (line 17) is *πρεπόντως περὶ τὴν συμβίωσιν ἀναστραφείση* ("who has conducted herself becomingly in our married life"), which Judge and Pickering correctly characterize as "not a direct New Testament echo," but nonetheless refer to it as "an idea familiar to its readers" (p. 65); Bagnall appropriately labels this argument for designating Hermogenes as Christian "less compelling" (p. 139 n. 16). Hermogenes' wife, Isidora, was also called Prisca (lines 16, 21), though Judge and Pickering's comment, "the name of a prominent collaborator of St Paul" (p. 65) is doubtless gratuitous. Current intertextuality views would broaden the search for "sources."

⁹¹ Harris adopts the latter view—evidence that literacy was the exception even among affluent women (*Ancient Literacy*, 280). On literacy of women in Roman Egypt, see Susan G. Cole, "Could Greek Women Read and Write?" in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* (ed. H. P. Foley; New York: Gordon & Breach, 1981), 233–38 and notes. Bagnall notes that "men of the bouletic class were expected to be able to read and write," as an edict seems to suggest (PSI 6.716, from Oxyrhynchus, ca. 306), and that most women of this class "could do little but sign their names"

Equally difficult to determine is whether the letter about lending books implies that women held positions of leadership in the early churches at Oxyrhynchus, and if so, exactly what they might have been. One approach—though it might not apply directly or necessarily to churches—would be to assess the extent to which women in Oxyrhynchus acted without guardians, that is, were entitled to act independently of a male, for whom the standard term was κύριος, or to ask what proportion of women (especially around the mid-third century and later) claimed the *ius liberorum*, that is, an exemption from guardianship “by the right of children.”⁹² An instructive instance is P.Oxy. 1467, dated 263, in which Aurelia Thaisous petitions for this status by appealing to laws:

. . . which enable women who are honoured with the right of three children to be independent and act without a guardian in all business which they transact, especially those women who know how to write. Accordingly I too, fortunately possessing the honour of being blessed with children, and a writer who am able to write with the greatest ease, in the fulness of my security appeal to your highness by this my application with the object of being enabled to carry out without hindrance all business which I henceforth transact. . . .

Indeed, one of her subsequent, independent transactions survives, a sale of land (P.Oxy. 1475, dated 267).

As Sarah Pomeroy points out, however, “illiteracy was not burdensome, since unless a woman enjoyed the *ius iii liberorum* . . . she was always accompanied by a *kyrios*,”⁹³ so that “literacy had no effect upon legal capacity.”⁹⁴ Yet, for those granted the *ius liberorum*, “only literacy enables women to make legally

(*Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 246–47; see also 230–60 on literacy in urban and rural areas, and in the church, esp. from the fourth century on).

⁹² See Antti Arjava, “The Guardianship of Women in Roman Egypt,” in *Akten des 21. internationalen Papyrologenkongresses, Berlin, 13.–19.8.1995* (ed. B. Kramer et al.; 2 vols.; APF Beiheft 3; Stuttgart/Leipzig: Teubner, 1997), 1:25–30, esp. 25–27. Under the *ius liberorum*, decreed by Augustus, “all freeborn women who had borne three living children should be free from guardianship (freed-women needed four births after their manumission)” (p. 27). Many helpful details of Arjava’s discussion cannot be treated here. For a detailed treatment in the papyri, see Joëlle Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme à Byzance (4^e–7^e siècle)* (2 vols.; Travaux et mémoires 5–6; Paris: de Boccard, 1990, 1992), 193–267; on the formula, 198–202 [though P.Oxy. 1467 is not mentioned]; see also R. S. Bagnall’s affirmative review: “Women, Law, and Social Realities in Late Antiquity: A Review Article,” *BASP* 32 (1995): 75–77; reprinted in his *Later Roman Egypt*, no. II; also Herbert C. Youtie, “ΑΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΟΣ: An Aspect of Greek Society in Egypt,” *HSCP* 75 (1971): 166–68.

See also Sarah B. Pomeroy, “Women in Roman Egypt: A Preliminary Study Based on Papyri,” in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Foley, 308–9, 313, 315–17. See P.Oxy. 2777, lines 10–11 (A.D. 212).

⁹³ Pomeroy, “Women in Roman Egypt,” 313.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 315.

binding commitments without the assistance of men.”⁹⁵ Hence, independence empowered women in Roman Egypt, and the more so for *literate* independent women.

Jennifer Sheridan has brought up to date previous compilations of women functioning independently, showing that during the first six centuries (in data on papyri from at least fifteen cities) 123 women acted without guardians, and thirty-six of these (or 29 percent) were in Oxyrhynchus.⁹⁶ If one restricts the data to our period of interest—through the fourth century—thirty-five out of 110 (or 32 percent) were in Oxyrhynchus. Sheridan’s main point, however, was that one-third of the third- and fourth-century women in the list (wherever status can be determined) were of the bouletic class or otherwise wealthy and therefore more likely to act without a guardian.⁹⁷ Using her data, out of twenty-two Oxyrhynchite women whose socioeconomic status can be determined, ten (or 46 percent) were of the wealthy class.

Naturally, such statistics can be only suggestive at best owing to randomness in the survival of papyri; and of course the numbers are *extremely small*, yet the resultant broad strokes are of interest, pointing, for example, to the plausibility that Oxyrhynchus contained a fair number of literate women and women who could act independently, thereby raising the possibility that *Christian* women in these classes might have assumed leadership positions in the churches. To spin a slightly larger web of speculation, perhaps the literate Christian women identified earlier, whether with guardians or without, might have become leaders in their churches—but most likely the two who exchanged “biblical” books—though there is no direct evidence.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 316; see Herbert C. Youtie, “ΥΠΟΓΡΑΦΕΥΣ: The Social Impact of Illiteracy in Graeco-Roman Egypt,” *ZPE* 17 (1975): 221 n. 62.

⁹⁶ Jennifer A. Sheridan, “Women without Guardians: An Updated List,” *BASP* 33 (1996): 117–25. She noted (p. 118 n. 4) that only seven women listed are definitely literate, and—perhaps surprisingly—only one was from Oxyrhynchus, Aurelia Thaisous, mentioned above. Extensive lists of women with or without guardians are provided by Edgar Kutzner, *Untersuchungen zur Stellung der Frau im römischen Oxyrhynchos* (Europäische Hochschulschriften III/392; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), 79–99; for women without guardians, see 90–97. See further Tina Saavedra, “Women as Property-Owners in Roman Spain and Roman Egypt: Some Points of Comparison,” in *Le rôle et le statut de la femme en Égypte hellénistique, romaine et byzantine: Acts de colloque international, Bruxelles-Leuven 27–29 novembre 1997* (ed. H. Melaerts and L. Mooren; Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 302–3, 310–11. In the first to third centuries in papyri from Socnopaiou Nesos, women were “principals in about half of the 32 documents recording house ownership”; owners of about one-third of the village real estate attested, almost two-thirds of the slaves, and one-fifth of the camels (pp. 309–10).

⁹⁷ Sheridan, “Women without Guardians,” 126–31. The percentages are based on her data.

⁹⁸ The evidence for women in leadership positions who were not literate must also be recognized: e.g., even in 600, Maura, the (presumably Christian) female steward of an Oxyrhynchus hospital, was illiterate (P.Oxy. 4131).

We have elicited from our six-line letter much information about identifying Christian letters, the use of Jewish writings, the issue of canon, and women's literacy and leadership—all significant facets of the Oxyrhynchus environment for our NT papyri there. The likely identity of authorship between this Christian letter and the secular petition on the other side begs for discussion of how Christians interacted with their economic and political context of Roman Egypt, but this would carry us beyond the scope of the present paper.

When we pause again to ask what position our group of “New Testament” papyri held in the situations described, silence reigns. We have no information about any role they might have played or any honor they enjoyed, but their impact is likely to be more evident in documents relevant to church and piety, and perhaps also in personal letters.

*The Role of “New Testament” Papyri
in Christian Worship in Oxyrhynchus*

The extent to which our NT (and other Christian) texts were utilized by or had direct influence on worship and theology might best be discerned, at least to our way of thinking, by examining the remnants of hymns, prayers, sermons, and theological treatises in Oxyrhynchus into the late fourth century. Our core sample turns up no early examples—which appear not to exist—but several items stem from the third and fourth centuries, and naturally they increase as one moves beyond our period into the fifth and sixth centuries. That progression of church-related materials parallels the increase in known churches from two sometime after the year 295 (P.Oxy. 43),⁹⁹ to fifteen in the fifth century (P.Oxy. 4617, 5th c.),¹⁰⁰ to forty or more by 535,¹⁰¹ in a city that by Roman times had perhaps 20,000 residents, more or less.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ P.Oxy. 43 is a list of Oxyrhynchite watchmen on the verso of an account dated 295 C.E., recording streets and public buildings, including a north church (col. 1, line 10) and a south church (col. 3, line 19), with streets named after each ἐκκλησία. Bagnall reminds us that the date of the watchmen's list could be closely after 295 or much later (*Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 53, 280 n. 118).

¹⁰⁰ See G. Schmelz, P.Oxy. LXVII, pp. 241–45; P.Oxy. 4618 (6th c.) lists fifteen also, but not all are the same as in 4617; 4619 (early 6th c.), a fragment, names six: see N. Gonis, P.Oxy. LXVII, pp. 245–50. Rufinus reported twelve early in the fifth century: see P.Oxy. XI, p. 26.

¹⁰¹ P.Oxy. XI, p. 26.

¹⁰² Estimates are difficult; Itzhak F. Fichman [elsewhere Fikhman] suggests, on extensive relevant evidence, 15,000 to 25,000 (“Die Bevölkerungszahl von Oxyrhynchos in byzantinischer Zeit,” *APF* 21 [1971]: 111–20, esp. 120); cf. Julian Krüger, *Oxyrhynchos in der Kaiserzeit: Studien zur Topographie und Literaturrezeption* (Europäische Hochschulschriften III/441; Frankfurt am Main/New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 8 (about 30,000). Very recently Dirk Obbink speaks of “perhaps 20,000 inhabitants of the Greek-speaking settler class, Egyptian Greeks, and their later Roman counterparts” (“Imaging Oxyrhynchus,” *Egyptian Archaeology* 22 [Spring 2003]: 3).

A Hymn to the Trinity. A hymn with musical notation (P.Oxy. 1786) was found on the verso of a corn account dated in the first half of the third century, placing the hymn later in that century. Undoubtedly it remains “the most ancient piece of Church music extant.”¹⁰³ Portions of the last five lines survive, written on a narrow strip of papyrus about two by twelve inches, with corresponding vocal notes above each line.¹⁰⁴ What remains of the text calls upon the light-giving stars to be silent and the rushing rivers to sing praises with all power to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen, Amen, and for dominion and praise to the giver of all good things, Amen, Amen.¹⁰⁵

To be sure, the whole hymn is not extant, though nothing here could come from our NT papyri, except the reference to the Trinity. This, however, is not likely to be a direct citation of Matt 28:19, for there is no similarity of context in the two passages. Rather, the hymn’s Trinity undoubtedly was drawn from church liturgy.

Prayers. Our core sample next contains P.Oxy. 4010, a single sheet from the fourth century containing the *Pater Noster* with a preliminary prayer. The ends of all lines are missing, but a few readable phrases remain from the prefatory prayer: “Have mercy . . . Master of all [something] . . . and God of all consolation, . . . and have mercy and lead Make us worthy [of something]. . . .”¹⁰⁶ “Consolation” and “to console” occur a remarkable ten times in 2 Cor 1:3–7, including the uncommon phrase, “God of *all* consolation,” so—with all our caveats in mind—perhaps we have our first match with the NT,¹⁰⁷ especially in view of God’s “mercy” in both immediate contexts and the fact that, as

¹⁰³ P.Oxy. XV, p. 21.

¹⁰⁴ P.Oxy. XV, pp. 21–25 + pl. I; see Charles Wessely, ed., *Les plus anciens monuments du Christianisme écrits sur papyrus* (PO IV.2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907), 506–7. For a critique of earlier reconstructions of the musical structure and other technical issues, see E. J. Wellesz, “The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody,” *CQ* 39 (1945): 34–45, esp. 41–43; and A. W. J. Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786 and the Relationship between Ancient Greek and Early Christian Music,” *VC* 26 (1972): 1–17. The music, with choral rendition, is available on a CD: *Musique de la grèce antique* (Atrium musicae de Madrid, Gregorio Paniagua; Germany: Harmonia mundi [HMA 1951015, HM 31], 1979, 2000); it contains also P.Oxy 2436 (1st/2nd c.) and other music from papyri.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. P.Oxy. XV, p. 22. Apparently the only other hymn from Oxyrhynchus is 4011 (6th c.), mostly derived from Ps 75; see pl. IV in P.Oxy. LX. On other papyri with musical notation, see William A. Johnson, “Musical Evenings in the Early Empire: New Evidence from a Greek Papyrus with Musical Notation,” *JHS* 120 (2000): 57–85, esp. 57–59.

¹⁰⁶ Alan H. Cadwallader restores line 11, just before the Lord’s Prayer, to read: *καταξίωσον ἡμᾶς εἰ[ὕχεσθαι]*, “Make us worthy to pray” (“An Embolism in the Lord’s Prayer?” *New Testament Textual Research Update* 4 [1996]: 86).

¹⁰⁷ P.Oxy. LX, p. 6; so also Stuart R. Pickering, “A New Papyrus Text of the Lord’s Prayer,” *New Testament Textual Research Update* 2 (1994): 111.

the editors of the papyrus propose, “father of mercies” would fit in the lacuna before “and God of all consolation”—as in 2 Cor 1:3, though our prayer has no further citation of that passage.

The Lord’s Prayer follows immediately in the Matthean form (6:9–13) rather than the Lucan (11:2–4), and there is no added doxology present.¹⁰⁸ However, after “. . . but rescue us from the evil one,” a second “rescue us” occurs just as the text breaks off. K. Treu, the editor, attributed this to the carelessness of the scribe, but Alan H. Cadwallader proposed that the repetition was deliberate—in the pattern of “numerous liturgies” that follow “rescue us” with various expansions or embolisms, such as that in St. Mark’s Liturgy: “Rescue us from all his works.”¹⁰⁹ Embolism is most frequently used for such additional requests for deliverance, and they are inserted just at this point—before the doxology. The further implications for Cadwallader, therefore, are, first, that a doxology followed on a next page of P.Oxy. 4010, which for him is a roll rather than a single sheet—though this cannot be demonstrated from the surviving portion—and, second, that 4010 is a liturgical text, for which he makes a substantial case.¹¹⁰

Whether or not we concede that a doxology was present in 4010, it is well known that the doxology is a later accretion in the text of Matt 6:13, owing to liturgical influence.¹¹¹ Oxyrhynchus has yielded fifteen manuscripts containing Matthew, but only one has the Lord’s Prayer, and it stems from around 500 C.E. (P.Oxy. 1169, 5th/6th c.),¹¹² yet, even at that late date, no doxology is present. Initially this might favor a claim that our independent *Pater Noster* (4010)—which shows little if any direct evidence of a doxology—was derived from a Matthean manuscript, but the availability of the passage in only one out of fifteen manuscripts is insufficient evidence that the doxology was absent generally from Matthean manuscripts at Oxyrhynchus.

More instructive, our text is one of some thirteen instances of the Lord’s Prayer circulating independent of any Matthean or Lucan context, either as an

¹⁰⁸ Unless its text carried over into another column, something not ruled out by the editor, K. Treu (see P.Oxy. LX, pp. 5, 7, and pl. III). Hence, Cadwallader proposed that this papyrus was part of a roll, noting the possibility that remains of a letter of a prior column are visible, and also that extant Christian liturgical texts were often on rolls (“An Embolism in the Lord’s Prayer?” 83–84).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹¹⁰ See his further evidence, *ibid.*, 83–86. “Designed for public recitation” (Pickering, “New Papyrus Text of the Lord’s Prayer,” 112).

¹¹¹ On the text and liturgical influence, see Bruce M. Metzger [for the Editorial Committee], *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1994), 13–14; Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 414–15.

¹¹² New Testament majuscule 0170; the others are P1, P19, P21, P35, P70, P71, P77, P101, P102, P103, P104, P105, P110 + 24, 071. Papyri of Luke from Oxyrhynchus (P69, P111) do not have 11:2–4.

independent unit or as one member of a compilation of separate biblical citations, using, for example, the first verse of one or more Gospels, or a verse or more of a Psalm, and so on. Of the five earliest survivors of these out-of-context Lord's Prayers (up to around 400),¹¹³ only the three from Oxyrhynchus have sufficient text to decide whether or not they contained doxologies. Two of them do, while our subject, 4010, appears not to have contained one, though four of the seven later examples have the doxology.¹¹⁴ Normally, the presence of doxologies would indicate, I think, that these Lord's Prayers were drawn from church liturgy rather than from Gospel texts, and more so in view of their independent circulation. In addition, virtually all of the manuscripts of this type were written on one side only and were either amulets or were used for magical purposes, indicating that these independent Lord's Prayers had developed into a separate tradition of their own as charms or for magical use. This is confirmed by the repeated use of several accompanying texts, especially Matt 1:1; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:1; John 1:1 (along with Ps 91:1 [LXX Ps. 90:1]). Of course, these NT texts ultimately derive from NT manuscripts, but soon they, like the Lord's Prayer, became standard elements in a fixed genre.¹¹⁵

Yet P.Oxy. 4010 is likely too large to have been an amulet and evidences no folding; nonetheless, the verso is blank, and the double prayer appears either to have occupied all of a single sheet with wide margins¹¹⁶ or possibly to have been part of a scroll. In either event, it most likely is a liturgical text, and, especially in view of its fourth-century date, was likely drawn from liturgical tradition, with the numerous papyri of Matthew at Oxyrhynchus playing no direct role.

Incidentally, Christian amulets and other manuscripts that contain short passages of our NT present a peculiar problem: those, for example, that quote

¹¹³ They are P.Ant. II.54 (miniature codex, 3rd c.); P.Princ. 2.107 (4th/5th c.); P.Oslo inv. 1644 (late 4th c., Oxyrhynchus); PSI 6.719 (4th/5th c., probably Oxyrhynchus); and P.Oxy. 4010. A clay tablet, inscribed with the Lord's Prayer and then fired (O.Athens inv. 12227 = van Haelst 348, 4th c.), has no doxology, nor is it a true ostrakon: see A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Harper, 1927), 56 n. 3. See the helpful survey of these texts by G. H. R. Horsley, *NewDocs 3* (1978): 103–5 (where he also discusses an inscription containing a line from the Prayer). His inclusion of P.Oxy. 407, which has only a doxology and no (other) remnant of the Lord's Prayer, is probably unwarranted.

¹¹⁴ See G. H. R. Horsley, *NewDocs 3* (1978): 104–5.

¹¹⁵ On the use of the Lord's Prayer in magic, with additional examples, see Leiv Amundsen, "Christian Papyri from the Oslo Collection," *SO 24* (1945): 143–44. I was pleased to discover that he had already espoused the view I formulated on the use of the Prayer "for magical purposes, alone or with other texts" (p. 142), followed by a reference to "a strong tradition that manifests itself also in the fixed group of texts with which the Lord's Prayer is coupled" (p. 143). Cf. his comments on the similar but even more popular use of Ps 91 (90 LXX), with thirty examples (pp. 144–47).

¹¹⁶ P.Oxy. LX, p. 5 and pl. III.

the first verse of each Gospel, such as PSI 6.719 (4th/5th c.), or the many that circulated the Lord's Prayer separately are said to pick up their citations from church liturgy (and rightly so), although P.Oxy. 209 (early 4th c.), with Rom 1:1–7 in a similar continuous text form, is placed among the NT papyri as P10.¹¹⁷ This papyrus was at first taken to be a school exercise, though Adolf Deissmann later argued that it was an amulet, because of its obvious folds.¹¹⁸ Placing it among the official NT papyri seemed justified, of course, for, as a school exercise it undoubtedly would have been copied from a manuscript containing Romans. Yet, if it had not been placed among our forty-seven Oxyrhynchus NT papyri, it would have been treated as an amulet made for religious or magical purposes or as a product of education at Oxyrhynchus that—in either case—showed the utilization of our [other] NT texts present in the city. So, we get caught in a circular argument when attempting to find cases where our NT text was employed in Christian practice.

Other prayers within our period are not common. A short, intriguing one reads simply, “O God (Θς) of the crosses that are laid upon us, help your servant Apphouas. Amen” (P.Oxy. 1058, 4th or 5th c.): God, who is responsible for the burdens, is asked to relieve them. Another, an amulet (P.Oxy. 407, 3rd/4th c.), quotes a phrase from LXX Ps 145:6, followed by a prayer for mercy and salvation “through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” with a concluding doxology,¹¹⁹ and one of the few pre-fifth-century Christian charms that survive (P.Oxy. 924, 4th c.) aims to ward off fever for a woman named Apia. There is no close reflection of NT texts in these or in later extant Oxyrhynchus prayers.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ See P.Oxy. II, p. 8 and pl. II. Aland and Aland doubt the validity of placing these among the NT papyri (*Text of the New Testament*, 85).

¹¹⁸ Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 239–40 and n. 1 + fig. 46. The folds are more visible here than in P.Oxy. II, pl. II.

¹¹⁹ There are no *nomina sacra*. The doxology contains only “the glory and the power,” a form appropriate to Egypt (Giuseppe Ghedini, “Frammenti liturgici in un papiro milanese,” *Aeg* 13 [1933]: 672–73).

¹²⁰ Later prayers, oracular prayers, charms, often amulets, from Oxyrhynchus, with no citations of NT texts, but with *nomina sacra* include P.Oxy. 1059 (5th c.); 925 (5th or 6th c.); or without *nomina sacra*, 1060 (6th c.); 1150 (6th c.; van Haelst, no. 957, says 4th c.) to ward off reptiles; 1152 (5th or 6th c.); 1926 (6th c.); P.Amst. Inv. 173 (probably Oxyrhynchus, 4th/5th c.) (see P. J. Sijpesteijn, “Ein christliches Amulett aus der Amsterdamer Papyrussammlung,” *ZPE* 5 [1970]: 57–59 + pl.); with mixed *nomina sacra*, P.Harr. I.54 (Oxyrhynchus, 6th c.); or without divine names, P.Oxy. 2063 (6th c., van Haelst, no. 965).

Amulets or charms that contain a freestanding, continuous-text, out-of-context portion of the NT are a separate issue: some are treated as NT papyri: P.Oxy. 209 (early 4th c.) = P10, with Rom 1:1–7; 2684 (3rd/4th c.) = P78, preserving portions of Jude; and P50 (3rd, 4th, 5th c., provenance unknown) containing portions of Acts 8–10.

Others with portions of NT text are P.Oxy. 1151 (5th c.), with John 1:1–3 (*nomina sacra*); P.Osl. Inv. 1644 (perhaps Oxyrhynchus, end 4th c.) (van Haelst, no. 345), with the Lord's Prayer (*nomina sacra*) (edition by Amundsen, “Christian Papyri from the Oslo Collection, 141–47); PSI

Local homilies and theological treatises. Oxyrhynchus has yielded copies of well-known theological writings made in the second, third, and fourth centuries, including the *Apology* of Aristides (P.Oxy. 1778, 4th c.), the *Didache* (P.Oxy. 1782, late 4th c.), *Against Heresies*, by Irenaeus (P.Oxy. 405, 2nd/3rd c.),¹²¹ the *Passion of Dioscurus* (P.Oxy. 3529, 4th c.), a homily perhaps by Origen (P.Oxy. 1601, late 4th or 5th c.),¹²² and possibly *On Prophecy* by Melito of Sardis (P.Oxy. 5, 3rd/4th c.).¹²³ These, however, are not relevant, for we wish to assess *local* treatises that might inform us of the use of our NT texts or their influence on worship and faith in Oxyrhynchus. Relevant materials are scarce indeed, though our probe brings forth one highly certain candidate, and possibly two others through the fourth century.¹²⁴

First, P.Oxy 2070 from the late third century meets and exceeds our primary criterion—it is virtually without doubt a local document, and, in addition, is the autograph itself:

This is suggested by the frequent alterations which have been made in the text, apparently by the original hand, and are difficult to explain except on the hypothesis that we here have a fragment of the author's own manuscript.¹²⁵

6.719 (perhaps Oxyrhynchus, 4th/5th c.) [van Haelst, no. 423], with the first verse of John, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and LXX Ps 90, plus John 1:23 and Matt 6:9 with doxology. P.Oxy. 1928 (5th/6th c.), a Christian amulet, contains LXX Ps 90 replete with *nomina sacra* and concluding with mention of John, Luke, Mark, and Matthew.

¹²¹ Initially unidentified in P.Oxy. III, p. 10, but soon shown to be from Irenaeus by J. Armitage Robinson (see P.Oxy. IV, pp. 264–65, with revised text). See Andreas Schmidt, “Der mögliche Text von P. Oxy. III 405, Z. 39–45,” *NTS* 37 (1991): 160.

¹²² Unidentified in P.Oxy. XIII, pp. 21–23; see van Haelst, no. 692, p. 249, who stated that R. Reitzenstein attributed it to Origen. P.Oxy. 406 has also been attributed to Origen according to Roberts (*Manuscript, Society, and Belief*, 24 and n. 8), crediting Giovanni Ausenda, “Contributo allo studio dell’omiletica cristiana nei papiri greci dell’Egitto,” *Aeg* 20 (1940): 46, for the identification, though Ausenda’s evidence is not apparent to me.

¹²³ Unidentified in P.Oxy. I, pp. 8–9; see van Haelst, no. 682, who reported that A. Harnack suggested that the fragment was from Melito. Two later fragments are possibly from works by Melito: P.Oxy. 1600 (end of 4th or 5th c.), unidentified there, but see van Haelst, no. 679, who reports that C. Bonner identified it as *Homily on the Passion*; and P.Oxy. 2074 (5th c.), again unidentified; see van Haelst, no. 680: possibly Melito’s *On Truth*.

¹²⁴ As to other possible “local” treatises, P.Oxy. 4 (early 4th c., *nomen sacrum*) may be “from the school of Valentinus” (van Haelst, no. 1070, pp. 332–33); P.Oxy. 406 (3rd c.) is a Christian text (as indicated by *nomina sacra*, including $\overline{\text{X}}\zeta$ and a contraction for the preceding “crucified”) that quotes LXX Isa 6:10, though in a form found in Matt 13:15 and Acts 28:27 that differs from the LXX. Beyond this, there is insufficient text to speculate on its nature. P.Oxy. 210 is a narrative and very likely from an apocryphal Gospel: see n. 40 above.

¹²⁵ P.Oxy. XVII, p. 9. Roberts ventures that the presence of this dialogue in autograph form suggests that “Oxyrhynchus in the third century may have been something of a Christian intellectual centre” (*Manuscript, Society, and Belief*, 24 n. 5).

That it is a Christian document is clear from the name “Jesus” (line 10), written in the usual abbreviated fashion (Ἰη̅). Portions of eighty-eight lines survive of this seriously deteriorated papyrus roll, though only some fifty lines contain one or more complete words, permitting almost nothing beyond its general character to be discerned. Even that is possible only because citations from two Psalms and Isaiah can be restored.¹²⁶ Their identification, in turn, clinches the nature of this treatise, for these very passages from the Jewish Scripture occur, for instance, in Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, in either anti-Jewish contexts or as proof-texts for the messiahship of Jesus.¹²⁷

In col. 1 of our document, for example, Ps 18:43–44 (LXX Ps 17:44–45) is cited: “People whom I had not known served me; as soon as they heard of me they obeyed me” (lines 5–7). We may reasonably surmise that this is used somewhat as it was in Justin, *Dial.* 28, where explicitly Gentiles were shown to be receptive to Christ when (in Justin’s view) Israel should have been. Following this citation, our document speaks “concerning Jesus” and that “many more . . . believed his word” (lines 10–12). Shortly thereafter—continuing the argument—Isa 29:13 is cited, stating that the people of Israel “honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me” (lines 24–27), again undoubtedly utilized as it was in *Dial.* 27 and 78, that is, specifically to stress that Gentiles are the recipients of God’s grace instead of a hardhearted Israel. Later, col. 2 of our document quotes Ps 22:15–22 (LXX Ps 21:16–23), though no context has been preserved, but once again we may presume that it was employed as in *Dial.* 98, in which Justin quoted the entire Psalm not only as predictive of Jesus’ sufferings but (as Justin explicitly affirmed) as a disclosure of “who they are that rise up against him.” This makes for some nasty assertions when we get to the Psalm portion that survived in the Oxyrhynchus fragment: “You lay me in the dust of death. For dogs are all around me: a company of evildoers encircles me. . . . They divide my clothes among themselves. . . . Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog!” (lines 46–59).

Minor details in our document confirm that it is both a dialogue and anti-Jewish: twice it reports, “then he said” (line 4) and “he said to him” (line 18), undoubtedly the Christian interlocutor, and once, using an abbreviation for a

¹²⁶ Lines 5–7, 19–22 = Ps 18:43–45 (LXX Ps 17:44–46) = 2 Sam 22:44–46; lines 46–59 = Ps 22:15–22 (LXX Ps 21:16–23); lines 24–27 = Isa 29:13.

¹²⁷ P.Oxy. XVII, p. 9: the Oxyrhynchus treatise is not from Justin, since it does not match and is an autograph. Isaiah 29:13–14 occurs in Justin, *Dial.* 27 and 78, in the context of prophecies being fulfilled in Christ and of the unfaithfulness of Israel; Ps 18:43–44 (LXX Ps 17:44–45) = 2 Sam 22:44–45 occurs in *Dial.* 28 in contexts of the rejection of Israel and their replacement by Gentiles; and Ps 22:15–22 (LXX Ps 21:16–23) is found in *Dial.* 98 not only as a prophecy of Christ’s suffering, but showing his opponents.

personal name or descriptive term, καὶ ὁ φ̄ εἶπε occurs, with a horizontal superscript line over φ (line 30), plausibly standing for “and the Pharisee said,” an interpretation the more likely because this character speaks just after the anti-Jewish use of Isa 29:13,¹²⁸ though we cannot tell what he said. So, we have the unpleasant presence in Oxyrhynchus of an anti-Jewish dialogue, clearly in the polemical tradition of Justin.¹²⁹

On the basis of this papyrus, it would be rash, of course, to assert that Christian polemic in Oxyrhynchus relied only on Jewish Scripture and not on NT texts, for only a small portion of the dialogue has survived. Yet, as we shall see, Jewish Scripture (i.e., the LXX) appears to take the lead time and again.

Two other possibly local treatises are still less forthcoming about their exact nature. The first, P.Oxy. 2073 (late fourth century), however, may yield its secret in the same manner as P.Oxy. 2070 above, that is, by the reconstruction of two clear citations from the Wisdom of Solomon and the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach.¹³⁰ Though only a sentence of each was taken over, Wis 11:19, whose immediate context spoke of wild beasts, including specifically “bold lions,” is quoted: “Not only could the harm they did destroy people, but the mere sight of them could kill by fright” (lines 11–12). Then our document immediately cites Sir 25:16, “I would rather live with a lion and a dragon than live with an evil woman” (lines 14–15). This contextual sequence, the first citation introducing the second, is strong confirmation that our papyrus—surely in part and perhaps in whole—was a diatribe or homily against women. Little else left can be pieced together meaningfully, though the sentence following the two citations includes “. . . the righteous and mighty God. . .” — with θεός written as θ̄ς, the usual *nomen sacrum* and a strong signal for a Christian document.

Is it more than coincidence that this “evil woman” quotation (Sir 25:16) occurs also at the outset of a brief Ps.-Chrysostom treatise (*PG* 59:486–87)¹³¹ and that a portion of it—beginning just two dozen lines farther down—turned up at Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. 1603, roll, 5th or 6th c.), namely, a twenty-one line catalogue of evil deeds by women in Hebrew Scripture and in the John the Baptist episode, concluding with “A wicked woman is the worst of all [ills] . . . and if she also has wealth as her ally in wickedness, the evil is double” (lines 17–20)¹³²

¹²⁸ P.Oxy. XVII, p. 9.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ P.Oxy. XVII, pp. 16–17.

¹³¹ *In decollationem præcursoris et Baptistæ Joannis*. In *PG* 59:487, Sir 25:16 is quoted in lines 38–40; the P.Oxy. 1603 portion on p. 487, lines 56–70. P.Oxy. 1603 was unidentified by the editors, but soon was shown to be from Ps.-Chrysostom (cf. van Haelst, no. 634). It is reminiscent in form of the litany of faith heroes in Heb 11, though the papyrus refers to evil women.

¹³² P.Oxy. XIII, pp. 25–26.

Once again, our fourth-century diatribe (P.Oxy. 2073) made its case on the basis of Septuagint writings and not using the NT—although, of course, this must remain partly (and perhaps largely) an argument from silence, since the entire document has not survived.

Though beyond our period, it is striking that four other theological treatises or homilies from Oxyrhynchus employ, in their fairly extensive surviving portions, themes from the Jewish Bible and—even in the fifth and sixth centuries—with only an occasional reminiscence of NT events or language.¹³³

So, our early local treatises have revealed an anti-Jewish dialogue and a diatribe against women. Was there anything positive in Christian exhortation at Oxyrhynchus? P.Oxy. 2072 (late third century) in its sparse remains (thirty-two lines, all broken off on both sides, with indeterminate line lengths) appears to have dealt with two issues, a community matter and one more theological, though what the preceding fifty or more pages held is unknown.¹³⁴

The recto uses words such as “opinion,” “truth,” and “brother,” but no reconstruction seems possible; then follows a statement about having “both good things and bad things in common” (lines 11–13). The editor’s notes refer to Acts 2:44 and 4:32, and he avers that “the recto apparently commends the communistic society of [Christ’s] followers,”¹³⁵ but the only significant word the papyrus shares with the Acts passages is *κοινά* (line 13), precluding, I think, any clear decision about a communal life, and perhaps speaking only of “sharing both the good and bad,” in some fashion. The verso in lines 21–26 refers to something that happened “absolutely,” though it was “not he himself but . . . Jesus Christ, who was appointed” to do something “to/for Israel and to/for all . . . those who believe,” accomplishing something through/of “him to/with God.” This was reconstructed by the editor, accommodating the likely length of lines, as “[God saved us] absolutely . . . not he himself, but [his son] Jesus Christ, who was set apart [in glory and who became a savior] to Israel and to all [the Gentiles] who believe [and who have been reconciled] through? him to God,”¹³⁶ though the reconstructed portion exceeds the surviving text and the result must be considered tentative, since there is no obvious intertext. Finally,

¹³³ P.Oxy. 1600 (5th c., 58 lines) refers to Abel, Joseph, Moses, and cites Ps 2:1, etc. 1601 (late 4th/5th c., 34 lines) cites and interprets Joel 1:6, speaks of “our battle/wrestling is spiritual” (a possible but not necessary allusion to Eph 6:12), and quite clearly alludes to 1 Pet 5:8: the devil as a lion seeking to devour. In 1602 (late 4th/5th c., 40 lines) events of Israelite history lead to Christ Jesus; 1603 (5th or 6th c., 21 lines), as noted above, lists evil deeds by women in the Bible, including the beheading of John the Baptist.

¹³⁴ P.Oxy. XVII, p. 15. Pagination indicates the presence of lost preceding pages. Van Haelst’s characterization of P.Oxy. 2072 (no. 1156, p. 351) as “a question of the parousia” is puzzling.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ P.Oxy. XVII, p. 16, where the proposed Greek text is provided.

there is a second reference to “Christ” (line 28).¹³⁷ Two points stand out: the nature of this treatise is likely beyond reach, and nothing here reflects direct influence from NT texts.¹³⁸

*The Role of “New Testament” Papyri
in Everyday Christian Life in Oxyrhynchus*

Our penultimate core sample runs through the rich stratum of private letters to explore everyday Christian life in Oxyrhynchus, yielding some two dozen clearly or likely Christian letters from the late third century and the fourth that are relevant to our assessment. First, a NT papyrus, P10 (P.Oxy. 209, mentioned above), containing Rom 1:1–7 and written in the early fourth century, was “found tied up with a contract dated 316 A.D. and other documents of the same period.”¹³⁹ Written “in a large rude uncial,” the Romans papyrus was likely a school pupil’s exercise,¹⁴⁰ or, recognizing its folds, an amulet.¹⁴¹ Either way, this manuscript’s juxtaposition with a business document and others of an ordinary nature opens the issue of how our “New Testament” papyri were related to the everyday life of Christians in Oxyrhynchus. The most obvious path of exploration is to examine private letters and official records.

Private letters. Private letters are numerous from Oxyrhynchus, and those that may be Christian include family correspondence, business matters, letters of recommendation and condolence, and others, such as the one about lending books. Letters from the early third century are rare, so we must be content with those dating in the later third and in the fourth centuries.

A number of Christian letters, such as P.Oxy. 4127 (1st half of 4th c.), after a quick Christian greeting and the customary wish for good health (though here “in soul and body”), move directly to business: “Ptolemaeus to Thonius, his beloved brother, greetings in the Lord (κ̄ϱ̄). Before all things I pray that you be in good health in soul and body” (lines 1–10), but then speaks immediately of linen yarn, “a pair of girl’s full-sized shoes made of hair,” and (perhaps) a garment. That is the full burden of the letter.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ “Christ” (lines 23, 28), “God” (line 26), and “Israel” (line 24) occur as *nomina sacra*.

¹³⁸ Even less can be said about the nature of P.Oxy. 2068 (4th c.), which has common *nomina sacra* (lines 18, 33, 43), but also β̄ς (lines 7, 14), possibly for βασιλευς. Whether a liturgical piece or homily, it has “several allusions to, or reminiscences of, the Greek of the Old Testament” (P.Oxy. XVII, pp. 5–6).

¹³⁹ P.Oxy. II, p. 8.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. See pl. II.

¹⁴¹ See n. 118, above.

¹⁴² Similar, e.g., are P.Oxy. 1774 (early 4th c.); 2729 (4th c.); 2731 (4th/5th c.); cf. 2156 (late 4th/5th c.).

Letters of introduction or recommendation might be expected to show more extensive use of our NT papyri, though quickly we discover that they follow regular patterns¹⁴³ that largely exclude the use of alternate or creative phraseology. Among several surviving Christian examples, P.Oxy 3857 (4th c.) is typical: the opening, which is lacking, would have given the sender's name and doubtless, "Greetings in the Lord,"¹⁴⁴ as in the majority of such Christian letters:

. . . to my beloved brothers and fellow ministers in every locality. Receive in peace our daughter Germania, who is coming to you, because she needs your help. Through her I and those with me greet you and those with you. Emmanuel. Amen. I pray for your health in the Lord, beloved brothers.¹⁴⁵

Other Christian letters from Oxyrhynchus request that the one introduced be received "according to custom" (PSI 3.208, 4th c.), or "as is proper" (PSI 9.1041, 3rd/4th c.),¹⁴⁶ and two refer to catechumens, one being instructed "in the beginning of the gospel" (PSI 9.1401, line 11) and another "in Genesis" (P.Oxy. 2785, line 8, 4th c.). New Testament language may be reflected in P.Oxy. 2603 (4th c.), where the writer, Paul, when referring to the "acquaintances" he introduces, says, "if you do anything for them, you have done it for me" (lines 28–29), reminiscent of Matt 25:40: ". . . just as you did it to one of the least of these. . . , you did it to me," though the allusion, while possible, lies "more in the realms of conjecture,"¹⁴⁷ because some earlier non-Christian

¹⁴³ M. G. Sirivianou, P.Oxy. LVI, p.111; cf. Chan-Hie Kim, *Form and Structure of the Familiar Greek Letter of Recommendation* (SBLDS 4; Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), *passim*, though Kim argues that the Christian letters available to him followed the general pattern only in the opening and closing, and not in the body (p. 117).

¹⁴⁴ It is said that *χαίρειν* is omitted in contrast to all other letters of recommendation (P.Oxy. LVI, p. 114; cf. 112–15; see S. R. Llewelyn, *NewDocs* 8 [1984–85]: 170–71), but the first line has only remote traces.

¹⁴⁵ *Nomina sacra* in line 15: $\overline{\kappa\omega}$, and line 13: $\overline{\epsilon\mu\lambda}$ (Ἐμμανουήλ), followed by $\overline{\phi\theta}$ [see n. 57 above].

¹⁴⁶ "Receive in peace": P.Oxy. 1162 (4th c.), 2785 (4th c.), P.Alex. 29 (3rd c.); P.Berol. 8508 (*APF* 28, p. 54; 3rd/4th c.); "Receive in accordance with custom": SB III.7269 (4th/5th c.); SB X.10255 (3rd/4th c.), phrases, along with "Receive as is proper," that are found only in Christian letters of recommendation (Kim, *Form and Structure*, 108–13). P.NagHamm. 78 (4th c.), a Christian letter, has "Receive our brother Herakleios . . .," but the text following cannot be reconstructed. For the distinction between letters of peace and of recommendation, see the enlightening discussion by Timothy M. Teeter, "Letters of Recommendation or Letters of Peace?" in *Akten des 21. Internationale Papyrologenkongresses, Berlin, 13.–19. 8 1995*, 2:954–60, esp. 956–58. Stowers calls them letters of mediation (*Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 153–65). For general analysis, see Sirivianou, P.Oxy. LVI, pp. 111–16; cf. Llewelyn, *NewDocs* 8 (1984–85): 171–72, and the older study by Clinton W. Keyes, "The Greek Letter of Introduction," *AJP* 56 (1935): 28–44.

¹⁴⁷ Harris, "Biblical Echoes and Reminiscences in Christian Papyri," 157; the link to Matt 25:40 is suggested, e.g., by J. H. Harrop ("A Christian Letter of Recommendation," *JEA* 48 [1962]:

Oxyrhynchus letters of commendation read, “Look upon him as if he were myself,” followed at the conclusion by “When you read this letter, imagine that I am speaking to you” (P.Oxy 32 [Latin], lines 6–9, 31–33, 2nd c.)¹⁴⁸ and “. . . receive him as if he were I” (P.Osl. 55, lines 8–9, 2nd/3rd c.),¹⁴⁹ but especially P.Oxy 3646 (3rd/4th c.), “And whatever you do for the *prophētēs*, you do for me” (lines 21–22), where *προφήτης* refers to a priest at an Egyptian oracle or the like.¹⁵⁰

A second sample turns up *letters of condolence* to the bereaved, which—we might suppose—would be an even more natural locale for NT quotations and allusions or at least for Christian sentiments, and the latter do occur in the sixth/seventh-century P.Oxy. 1874, though even then explicit NT passages are not evident (see below). Actually, among some two thousand private papyrus letters, only about a dozen qualify as letters of sympathy and comfort following a death.¹⁵¹ They range from the first/second to the sixth/seventh centuries, with ten written during the first four centuries. Five indicate no religious context; three give clear or implied reference to Roman religions; two are clearly Christian (P.Princ. II,102, 4th c.; P.Oxy. 1874, 6th/7th c.);¹⁵² two others are probably or possibly Christian (P.Oxy. 4004, 5th c., and 3819, early 4th c.)—and these four are the latest among the twelve. Altogether five are from Oxyrhynchus (those just noted plus P.Oxy. 115, 2nd c.; PSI 12.1248, ca. 235 C.E.). Finally, eight are complete, while four are lacunose at the beginning and/or the end.¹⁵³

136), but then he proceeds to point out several examples of “a favour to the bearer is a favour to the sender.”

¹⁴⁸ For lines 22–34, see P.Oxy. II, pp. 318–19; see also Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 157.

¹⁴⁹ From Oxyrhynchus: see S. Eitrem and Leiv Amundsen, *Papyri Osloenses, Fasc. II* (Oslo: Norske Videnskaps-Akademi I Oslo, 1931), xi, 132–35.

¹⁵⁰ See John Rea, P.Oxy. LI, p. 129, who suggests further that there may be a “connection with the worship of Hermes Trismegistus.”

¹⁵¹ See the superb analysis by Juan Chapa, *Letters of Condolence in Greek Papyri* (Pap. Flor. 29; Florence: Gonnelli, 1998). He mentions four others, but excludes them because “condolence is included in the body of the letter, as one among other topics, treated with what seems to us heartless speed” (p. 16).

¹⁵² On P.Princ. II. 102, see n. 166 below.

¹⁵³ Chapa, *Letters of Condolence*, 15–18, 23–24. No religious content: P.Oxy. I.115 (2nd c., complete); BGU III.801 (2nd c., complete); P.Wisc. II.84 (2nd/3rd c., complete); P.Rainer Cent. 70 (2nd/3rd c., incomplete); SB XVIII.13946 (3rd/4th c., complete); Roman religions: SB XIV.11646 (1st/2nd c., complete); PSI 12.1248 (from Oxyrhynchus; 235 or later; complete); P.Ross.Georg. III.2 (3rd c., complete); clearly Christian: P.Princ. II.102 (4th c., incomplete; lacking end); P.Oxy. XVI.1874 (6th/7th c., incomplete; lacking beginning and end); and probably/possibly Christian: P.Oxy. LV.3819 (1st half 4th c., incomplete; lacking end); P.Oxy. LIX.4004 (5th c., complete).

In all these letters, Christian or not, condolence is expressed with close consistency through one or more common elements, including (1) nothing can be done about mortality, it is the human condition, (2) death is common to all, and (3) bear it bravely and/or comfort yourselves.¹⁵⁴ The second-century example from Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. 115) is brusque:

Eirene to Taonnophris and Philo, take heart. I grieved and wept over the departed as much as I wept over Didymas. I and all mine, Epaphroditus, Thermuthion, Philion, Apollonius and Plantas, did all that was due. However, one can do nothing against such things. So comfort yourselves. Farewell.¹⁵⁵

Another Oxyrhynchus letter (P.Oxy. 3819, early 4th c.) has been thought by some to be Christian,¹⁵⁶ based first of all on the following portion:

For when I heard about my mother Sarapias, I was greatly grieved. Well, the lord god has the power for the future to give us good health. So do not be grieved. For these things are (part of being) human. Indeed, for all of us this is laid down.

The phrase, “lord god,” as noted earlier, is hardly a Christian indicator by itself (especially uncontracted, as here), and the Christian origin of this letter comes to rest, then, on the rare word, *δυνατέω*, found only in the first-century B.C.E. Epicurean philosopher Philodemus and in Paul.¹⁵⁷ The editor focuses on this “Pauline” word, indicating that “the reminiscence suggests that [the author of the letter] is Christian.”¹⁵⁸ To be sure, Oxyrhynchus preserves five Pauline letters dating prior to the condolence letter, but Philodemus also had a presence in the city, for a first-century list of epigrams found there is totally dominated

¹⁵⁴ SB XVIII. 13946 (3rd/4th c.) claims that those who die escape the sufferings of this life: see Chapa, *Letters of Condolence*, 115–18.

¹⁵⁵ The same day, whether earlier or later, Eirene, a business woman of some kind, wrote a matter-of-fact business letter to the same addressees (P.Oxy. 116), with no mention of the bereavement: on the dates, see Chapa, *Letters of Condolence*, 64. On self-consolation, see *ibid.*, 62, 64, 144; cf. Deissmann (*Light from the Ancient East*, 176–78) and John L. White (*Light from Ancient Letters* [FF; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986] 184–85), who translate “comfort one another”; Chapa (p. 64) to the contrary and against a Pauline parallel in 1 Thess 4:18.

PSI 12.1248 (ca. 235), from Oxyrhynchus, says, in part, “But bear it bravely! For this is something which lies in store even for the gods.” See Chapa, *Letters of Condolence*, 96–97.

¹⁵⁶ John Rea, its editor in P.Oxy. LV, pp. 219–20; cf. Chapa, *Letters of Condolence*, 128–29.

¹⁵⁷ See the references in BDAG ad loc., and P.Oxy. LV, p. 220. See the latter for other speculative evidence of Christian origin; cf. Chapa, *Letters of Condolence*, 128–29.

¹⁵⁸ See P.Oxy. LV, p. 219. The five Pauline papyri dating to the turn of the third/fourth centuries are P.Oxy. 1355 = P27 and 4497 = P113 of Romans; 1008 = P 15 of 1 Corinthians; 1009 = P16 of Philippians; and 1598 = P30 of 1–2 Thessalonians. *δυνατέω* occurs in Rom 14:4; 2 Cor 13:3; 9:8, but none of these passages is preserved in the Oxyrhynchus papyri, nor in the later P.Oxy. 209 = P10 of Romans; or 2157 = P51 of Galatians.

by those of Philodemus (Oxy. 3724),¹⁵⁹ and there is no compelling reason to link the verb usage in our letter to Paul rather than Philodemus—or to either one for that matter.

More probably Christian is a fifth-century Oxyrhynchus letter (P.Oxy. LIX. 4004), though the thoughts expressed reveal no such origin, for the customary pattern of condolence appears:

We were very much grieved when we heard about your blessed wife [*or* about your wife, Macaria]. . . . But what can we do against mortality? So please console yourself and brave the journey and come to me. . . .¹⁶⁰

Though this letter is beyond our period,¹⁶¹ it is instructive if it is Christian, for its identity is based on names later in the text, especially Neson, a location in the Heracleopolite nome, probably on the west bank of the Nile across from Oxyrhynchite territory, where an archive attests to a monastery, and two personal names: a biblical name, Nathanael (also a Coptic saint), and an unusual name, Syncletice, the name of an Egyptian nun who became a saint.¹⁶²

Yet if this letter is Christian, there is nothing of Christian sentiment, let alone any reflection of NT texts; rather, traditional formulaic statements of condolence reign. An Oxyrhynchus letter from around 600 C.E. (P.Oxy. 1874) shows us, however, language that we might have expected much earlier:

But let us glorify God, because he gave and he took away; and pray that the Lord may give them rest and may He allow you to see them in paradise, when the souls of people are judged; for they have gone to the bosom of Abraham, and of Isaac and of Jacob,¹⁶³

and

. . . pray that the Lord may send upon you his blessing, for the Lord has many good things and gives courage to those in sorrow who seek a blessing from him, and we hope to God that through this sorrow the Lord sends you joy. . . .¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ See P.Oxy. LIV, pp. 65–67.

¹⁶⁰ Chapa, *Letters of Condolence*, 141, cf. 139–47.

¹⁶¹ Though its hand most resembles those of two papyri from about the first third of the fifth century (*ibid.*, 140).

¹⁶² For details, see P.Oxy. LIX, pp. 171–75; Chapa, *Letters of Condolence*, 139–47, who remarks that Neson and these names, in relation to Theodorus, the writer, “might tempt one to identify them as monks or as otherwise connected with the monastery of Hathor . . . , perhaps a Meletian monastery during the schism” (pp. 139–40, cf. 145).

¹⁶³ See Horsley, “The Bosom of Abraham,” *NewDocs* 3 (1978): 106.

¹⁶⁴ Chapa, *Letters of Condolence*, 152, cf. 149–59. P.Oxy 1874, like other fifth- to seventh-century Christian letters, prayers, and other documents, has no *nomina sacra* (e.g., P.Oxy. 1830; 1832; 1926; 3864–3865; 3870; 3872–3873; 3932; 3936–3943; 3945; 3946–3959; 3961; 4535–4536; P.Wisc. I.11. To the contrary, e.g., P.Oxy. 1927–1928; 2067 [Nicene Creed]; 2071; 2074; 3863; 4394, line 11; 4397, lines 226, 239.

But this is two centuries (!) beyond the period we are exploring, though even then nothing reminds us specifically of NT texts.¹⁶⁵ If we move beyond Oxyrhynchus, one fourth-century letter (P.Princ. II.102) reads “nobody among humans is immortal, but only God, and remember the promise of the blessed Paul, as . . . ,” where, regrettably, the text breaks off.¹⁶⁶ Undoubtedly an appropriate Pauline text followed, though we cannot know what it was. But Oxyrhynchus, where the majority of condolence letters were found, has no such explicit reference to our NT, regardless of date.

Although conclusions on the basis of a dozen or fewer letters are risky, within the first four centuries of Christianity there was very little difference between letters of condolence written by Christians and those written by non-Christians, for they all consist mainly in an array of the shared formulaic phrases, with the exception of the one non-Oxyrhynchus letter just noted. The surprises are not only that so few letters of condolence are extant, but that they are so terse and blunt, almost lacking in feeling (except for the latest Christian example, P.Oxy. 1874). Two, in fact, after a brief expression of grief, a statement that death is common to all, and advice to console oneself, proceed immediately to matter-of-fact discussions of business or other events. For example, P.Oxy 1248, partly quoted above, has seven lines of condolence and thirty-nine additional lines describing someone acting inhumanly and causing trouble, and so on.¹⁶⁷

Official records. Our exploration necessarily encompasses but a small portion of what might be explored of the Christian environment at Oxyrhynchus through the fourth century, but we must be content with a final core sample from official documents relevant to the city’s Christian terrain. As we place the samples on our laboratory table, we find, first, an order from February 256 to arrest a certain “Petosorapis, son of Horus, Christian” (P.Oxy. 3035). Parentage is a common identifier in official records, as is a professional designation, such as “weavers” (P.Oxy. 2575) or “wine-merchant” (P.Oxy. 2576), but “Christian” is unusual, leading to the notion that religion was the critical factor in his summons, but this order was issued “more than a year before legal mea-

¹⁶⁵ See Horsley, “Bosom of Abraham,” 106, for evidence that the formula “derives from liturgy rather than directly from the NT.”

¹⁶⁶ The provenance of P.Princ. II.102 is unknown; I accept Chapa’s argument that, in line 17, “blessed Paul” is to be restored, assuring its Christian origin (*Letters of Condolence*, 136–37, cf. 132–33).

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 96–98. P.Oxy. 3819 has eighteen lines of consolation (quoted above), but then begins to discuss a dalmatic—a wide-sleeved overgarment, though the text breaks off at this point (*ibid.*, 127, 130).

asures were taken against the Christians” in the Valerian persecution.¹⁶⁸ Hence, “Christian” is likely just an identifier,¹⁶⁹ and we have no clue to the occasion for the summons.

Further items, however, do take us into the context of persecution. P.Oxy. 3119 (259/260 in reign of Valerian¹⁷⁰), in what can be deciphered, reads “concerning an investigation,” followed in the next line by Χρηστιανοί (line 14), “Christians,” allowing for the possibility of an inquiry in time of persecution, though this cannot be confirmed.

About forty years later, in February 303, an edict from Diocletian required all litigants to sacrifice,¹⁷¹ and Copres, a Christian,¹⁷² who was preparing a lawsuit in another town, confirms such a requirement when he writes back to Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. 2601, early 4th c.): “It became known to us that those who present themselves in court are being made to sacrifice.” And how does he handle this? “I made a power-of-attorney in favor of my brother” (lines 8–13). Such casual treatment may suggest either that this requirement was routinely circumvented by assigning it to someone else (perhaps—by Christians—to a non-Christian?) or that the procedure was new enough that Copres and others had not yet realized that “a serious crisis of conscience was posed.”¹⁷³

Then in 304, Ammonius, an illiterate lector,¹⁷⁴ declares to the authorities

¹⁶⁸ P. J. Parsons in P.Oxy. XLII, p. 100: the text reads *χρησιανόν* (see pl. X), but no alternative to “Christian” is apparent. A similar spelling occurs in PSI 14.1412, also from Oxyrhynchus (2nd/3rd c.): see P.Oxy. XXXVI, p. 84 n. 2; cf. Horsley, *New Docs* 2 (1977): 173.

“Arrest orders” are more properly summonses, though often a guard was involved: see Traianos Gagos in P.Oxy. LXI, pp. 90–91; T. Gagos and P. J. Sijpesteijn, “Towards an Explanation of the Typology of the So-Called ‘Orders to Arrest,’” *BASP* 33 (1996): 77–97, esp. 78–79. For a list up to 1986, including some twenty-seven involving Oxyrhynchus, see Adam Bülow-Jacobsen, “Orders to Arrest,” *ZPE* 66 (1986): 95–98.

¹⁶⁹ Parsons in P.Oxy. XLII, p. 100. At the time (1974), Parsons considered this “by far the earliest use of the word ‘Christian’ in the papyrus documents.”

¹⁷⁰ Dating is complex; the reference is to a “seventh year,” including (among seven possibilities in the third century) “7 Valerian and Gallienus,” i.e. 259/260, viewed by John Rae as a standout, but still doubtful (P.Oxy. XLIII, pp. 77–78 + pl. VI); J. E. G. Whitehorn confirms the 259/260 date by careful argumentation (“P.OXY. XLIII 3119: A Document of Valerian’s Persecution,” *ZPE* 24 [1977]: 187–96, esp. 196).

¹⁷¹ Judge and Pickering, “Papyrus Documentation,” 53.

¹⁷² This is clear enough from the attempted *nomina sacra* in line 5 and from $\overline{\phi\bar{\eta}}$, the isopsephism of $\acute{\alpha}\mu\eta\eta$ in the address (line 34): see P.Oxy. XXXI, pp. 170–71; cf. n. 57 above.

¹⁷³ Judge and Pickering, “Papyrus Documentation,” 53, based on P.Oxy. XXXI, pp. 167–68. The person given the power of attorney “was certainly pagan” (Ewa Wipszycka, “Un lecteur qui ne sait pas écrire ou un chrétien qui ne veut pas se souiller?” [P.Oxy. XXXIII 2673], *ZPE* 50 [1983]: 121).

¹⁷⁴ See P.Oxy. XXXIII, pp. 105, 108, where it is suggested that the lector read in Coptic services but was illiterate in Greek; Wipszycka (“Un lecteur,” esp. 121) sees his illiteracy as a “subterfuge”: reluctant to be a hero and defy the authorities, yet unwilling to sign a document handing

“concerning the surrender of all the goods” in his “former church”—apparently in accord with Diocletian’s edict—that nothing remains except “the bronze objects”¹⁷⁵ which had been handed over for shipment to Alexandria (P.Oxy. 2673, 5 February 304, lines 14–24).

The very next year, 305, an official report affirms that a certain “Paul from the Oxyrhynchite nome” had been sentenced and that no property was currently registered in his name (P.Oxy. 2665, lines 16–20)—presumably because it was confiscated. Though there is no direct evidence, the presumption is that he was a Christian who suffered under persecution—the more likely because the document states that the sentencing agent (lines 14–15) was “Satrius Arrianus, the governor of the Thebaid, who appears so frequently in the martyrologies.”¹⁷⁶

Though details are lacking, these papyri disclose Oxyrhynchus Christians who were objects of persecution under Valerian and Diocletian.

A further probe reveals trouble in two Christian homes. In P.Oxy. 903 (4th c.), a woman files a thirty-seven line accusation, narrating the abusive behavior of her husband toward her, her foster daughters, and her slaves, as well as toward his foster son and his own slaves over an extended period. We know the couple were Christians because on one occasion he took an oath before the bishops, affirming, “I will stop and not insult her” (lines 15–17)—though he abused her again—and because of references to “the church” (lines

over the church’s goods to persecutors of the faithful, thereby defiling himself, he took an ambiguous action “consistent with declaring himself illiterate” and did not sign the declaration himself. In response, G. W. Clarke presents cases, including five-year-old (!) lectors and others who allegedly did not “know letters,” to suggest that the possibility of illiterate lectors “cannot be rejected outright” (“An Illiterate Lector?” *ZPE* 57 [1984]: 103–4, esp. 104). See also Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 256 n. 142; Kraus, “(Il)literate in Non-Literary Papyri,” 330–31 and n. 27. Haines-Eitzen (*Guardians of Letters*, 27–29) and Kraus (“[Il]literate in Non-Literary Papyri,” 329, 334–38), at greater length, discuss the striking case of two village scribes in the Fayum near Karanis who could neither read nor write, except for writing their own signatures (P.Petaus, an archive of 127 items); see also Robert A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 11; Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988; repr. 1997), 42–43, esp. nn. 41, 44; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 278–79; 320 and n. 169.

¹⁷⁵ John Rea, the editor, corrected πύλη in line 22 to read ὕλη; hence “bronze material” rather than “bronze gate” (“P.Oxy. XXXIII 2673: πύλην to ὕλην!” *ZPE* 35 [1979]: 128); cf. P.Oxy. XLVIII, p. xvii; Horsley, *NewDocs* 2 (1977): 169; Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 289–90.

¹⁷⁶ P.Oxy. XXXIII, p. 89; see E. A. Judge, “Fourth-Century Monasticism in the Papyri,” in *Proceedings of the Sixteenth International Congress of Papyrology, New York, 24–31 July 1980* (ed. Roger S. Bagnall et al.; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 614–15; Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 280 n. 117. I see no reason to think, as some have, that P.Oxy. 1464 (250 C.E.), a *libellus* or certificate of sacrifice in the Decian persecution, is that of a Christian. On the subject, see P.Oxy. LVIII, p. 39. Other *libelli* at Oxyrhynchus are P.Oxy. 658, 2990, and 3929.

19–21), including her statement, “I departed and went into the church on the Sabbath” [*sic!*] (line 19).¹⁷⁷

In P.Oxy. 3581 (the dating is complex: late fourth or fifth century), another woman submits a detailed petition seeking charges against Paul, her husband, who left her and her infant daughter to live with another woman, but then, she says, “Again he beguiled [me] through presbyters” (line 8) to return, presumably ecclesiastical elders; this time she was wiser and secured an agreement for two ounces of gold, with written surety from his father, if he were to “indulge in the same vile behavior” (lines 10–11). Well, matters were worse than before and, she says, “I endured insults and punishments to within an inch of my life” (lines 14–15). So she asks the tribune to exact the gold and to punish Paul “for his outrages against me” (lines 21–23). The results, of course, are unknown.

Two additional samples reveal troubling situations in the churches. In P.Oxy. 2344 (ca. 336) Dionysius, bishop of the [local] “catholic church” in Oxyrhynchus, petitions the strategus apparently to be relieved of the administration of an estate and the guardianship of some children, though the matter is not further clarified.¹⁷⁸ In another (P.Wash. Univ. I.20, 4th c., found at Oxyrhynchus), two brothers, upon returning to Oxyrhynchus, file a complaint against “the presbyter of the catholic church” of a nearby village because he had taken possession of their houses and lands and refuses to turn them back. Again, we do not know the other sides of these stories or their outcomes.¹⁷⁹

Finally, Christians were doing some good—or at least interesting—things in Oxyrhynchus. An athlete, presumably a professional, sent money to his

¹⁷⁷ The *editio princeps* read Σαββάθω (as if a location), but was revised to σαββάτω: see M. David, B. A. Van Groningen, and E. Kiessling, *Berichtigungsliste der Griechischen Papyrusurkunden aus Ägypten*, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 133. There is also an apparent attempt at a *nomen sacrum* at the very end (line 37): θ(εός) in “God knows these things.” On both P.Oxy. 903 and 3581 (treated below), see Roger S. Bagnall, “Church, State, and Divorce in Late Roman Egypt,” in *Florilegium Columbianum: Essays in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller* (ed. Karl-Ludwig Selig; New York: Italica, 1987) 41–42, 58–59 [reprinted in Bagnall, *Later Roman Egypt*, no. IV]; and idem, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 194–95.

¹⁷⁸ This may be in the context of seeking relief or exemption from a mandatory liturgical appointment—public service: see Royce L. B. Morris, “Reflections of Citizen Attitudes in Petitions from Late Roman and Byzantine Oxyrhynchus,” in *Akten des 21. Internationale Papyrologenkongresses, Berlin, 13.–19. 8 1995*, ed. Kramer et al., 2:746–47.

¹⁷⁹ See also the reprimand of a Christian for some unknown action in P. Laur. 42 recto (4th/5th, Oxyrhynchite nome): “I was very pained and we are exceedingly pained that you dared to do such a thing to Atheas, since you are a Christian, because she also is a laywoman, and she has never been discovered (doing) worldly business” (text and tr. in Horsley, *New Docs 2* [1977]: 172–73; cf. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 282 and n. 126). P.Oxy. 3311 (373–374 C.E.) is a petition from two sisters to recover property that had been used/controlled (?) by a monk, Ammonius; upon his death, Ammon—perhaps a fellow monk—refuses to turn back the property (see Judge, “Fourth-Century Monasticism,” 618–19).

mother “via Sotas the Christian” (PSI XIV.1412, line 10, 2nd/3rd c.).¹⁸⁰ A certain Barus requests a fellow Christian, Diogenes, to grant Horus a four-month leave or an extension of time—it is hard to tell which—“because he is of moderate means” and will be obligated for public service (P.Oxy. 3858, 4th c.).¹⁸¹ We assume that he granted the favor. And two anchorite nuns agree to rent rooms to “Aurelius Jose son of Judas, Jew” (P.Oxy. 3203, 400 C.E., line 7).¹⁸² Besides these random acts of kindness, there is little else, and our NT texts—though perhaps not to be expected in these contexts—make no appearance.

III. Conclusion

As we look back, much was happening in Christian circles in Oxyrhynchus, giving us a glimpse of the good, the bad, and even the ugly. Of course, these events did not take place in the course of a decade or even a lifetime, but over several lifetimes. Yet what we witness is instructive.

First,

- We find individual Christians, including women specifically, reading and studying biblical books and exploring Jewish and doubtless Christian apocalyptic, and likely teaching or exercising leadership in other ways.
- We discover catechumens at various stages of instruction, and individuals who pray for help or carry amulets for protection.

And • We hear of Christians writing letters of comfort—such as they are—in times of grief.

Second,

- We observe churches, with their majestic hymns, lofty prayers, and liturgical texts.
- We witness ministers asking other Christians to help a woman in need, and bishops trying to assist a battered woman, who later sought refuge in the church.

And • We hear of churches dismantled and of Christians whose property had been confiscated under persecution, though with no details, but also of

¹⁸⁰ The text preserves only *χρησι*[. . .] (line 10), restored to *χρηστιανοῦ* in P.Oxy. XXXVI, p. 84 n. 2, by analogy with the restoration in P.Oxy. 3035 (see n. 168 above).

¹⁸¹ See P.Oxy. LVI, pp. 117–20; *nomina sacra* occur in lines 3 and 25.

¹⁸² P.Oxy. XLIV, pp. 182–84; cf. Horsley, *New Docs* 1 (1976): 126–30.

one Christian who casually assigns someone else to fulfill his obligation to sacrifice.

Third,

- At the same time, we uncover an anti-Jewish dialogue and a diatribe against women, both theologically motivated, indicating—to put them in the best possible light—that the churches were wrestling with ideas that we find uncongenial.
- And • We hear of a bishop recusing himself from a legal responsibility for children, and of church presbyters who, allegedly, convince a woman to take back her husband only to be further abused, and of another presbyter who, allegedly, took houses and land illicitly and declined to make amends.

Our goal from the outset has been to disclose the local context of our fifty-nine NT manuscripts from Oxyrhynchus, and, indeed, the Christian community there has come alive for us, if only in a partial and random fashion—but alive nonetheless. Yet the anomaly is that any overt influence from our NT texts remains largely undocumented.¹⁸³ Would a different picture have emerged if Christian letters and documents from the second and early third centuries were as abundant as those from the late third and early fourth? Probably not, because forty-one of the fifty-nine Oxyrhynchus NT manuscripts issued from the third and fourth centuries, and apparently they were imported or copied and available¹⁸⁴ in the very same time frame as most of our letters and documents, supporting the reliability of our findings.

The churches at Oxyrhynchus by this later period, therefore, appear to have moved well beyond the direct use of NT texts to a reliance on the liturgical forms that had developed and on the abiding Septuagint texts for much of their worship and polemic. Liturgy, of course, was drawn mainly from Jewish Scripture and from texts that were becoming the New Testament, but by our period the liturgical formulations have overshadowed their Christian sources. Yet the Greek Jewish Bible—as understood and used by Christians—shows considerable direct influence on the Christian hymns, prayers, and theological treatises. All of this could be the uneven result of randomness in the survival of papyrus documents, yet sometimes silence is itself a loud voice that demands our attention.

Moreover, as we assess this abundance of early Christian writings at

¹⁸³ See Horsley, *NewDocs* 2 (1977): 157–58, who refers to “less than two dozen Biblical citations and verbal echoes” among some one hundred (alleged) Christian letters through the fourth century, though only half that many would remain if “reminiscences of Biblical wording which are less than certain” were excluded.

¹⁸⁴ On speed of transfer of letters—and books—in the Mediterranean area, see Epp, “New Testament Papyrus Manuscripts and Letter Carrying,” 35–56, esp. 52–56.

Oxyrhynchus through the fourth century, including those we call “New Testament” and those we designate “apocrypha,” there is no basis for assigning preference to one group over the other, or even for claiming that they were separable groups, nor—with available evidence—can we discern varying degrees of canonical authority among the writings. Because these books as a whole show precious little direct impact on worship or teaching in the Oxyrhynchus churches or on the daily lives of Christians in Oxyrhynchus, one is tempted to remark, “Why should the third and fourth centuries be any different from the twentieth and the twenty-first? After all, in any modern liturgical service, are not the hymnals and prayer books used more heavily than the Bibles in the pews?” Beyond the lessons latent in these remarks, however, what is significant for us is that we have been able to expose something of the socio-cultural and intellectual context of one locality—one real-life situation in which more than 40 percent of our NT papyri lived and were shaped in the company of numerous other Jewish and early Christian writings. To disclose and to illuminate that context, after all, was the main point—though now it remains for textual critics and others to fill out the picture and to find ways to exploit the results.