

NOTE

PAPYRUS BODMER II: AN EARLY CODEX OF ST. JOHN

The recovery and publication of a papyrus book still containing two-thirds of the Gospel according to St. John, in a hand that may be dated about the year 200, is an event of signal importance in early Christian studies.¹ We already possessed a fragment of a leaf of the same Gospel, Papyrus Rylands 457, which palaeographers place not later than 150.² It is a priceless remnant, containing a dozen un mutilated words, with vestiges of others, from St. John's account of Christ before Pilate. About a century later, the Beatty codex (P⁴⁶), in which the four Gospels and Acts were combined, was in existence.³ Most of its leaves are lost; many of those that remain are in shreds; yet enough is preserved to enrich our textual resources very much. The Bodmer manuscript, falling between these two in date, has its own distinction in the amount of continuous text it contains from a period so early.

The reviewer intends to give a simple account of the papyrus and its *editio princeps*, dispensing with most of the technicalities that a severe study would require. He would like to make the point that further work is waiting and that it could be inviting. Textual studies belong to the *critica humilior* of the Bible; but a sound exegesis can never dispense with them.

The book was a codex, not a roll. The time has passed when this format should cause surprise in the case of Christian literature. "In the pagan world of the second century," writes C. H. Roberts, in an admirable monograph, "the codex has barely a foothold." Yet the same author can add: "No early text of the New Testament known to us was written on the recto of a roll."⁴

Plate 1 in Martin's edition gives a vivid sense of the sheaf of leaves, worn at the edges, stripped of covers, and incomplete, which remained of the old book when it was found. The page on top, under the title, *εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ ἰωάννην*, opens with the Prologue: *ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος*.

The pages originally would have been about six inches high by five and a half wide, and would have numbered 146 when the book was whole.

¹ *Papyrus Bodmer II: Évangile de Jean, chap. 1-14*, edited by Victor Martin (Geneva, 1956).

² *An Unpublished Fragment of the Fourth Gospel in the John Rylands Library*, edited by C. H. Roberts (Manchester, 1935).

³ *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri*, fasc. 2: *Gospels and Acts, Text and Plates*, edited by Frederic G. Kenyon (London, 1933 and 1934).

⁴ C. H. Roberts, *The Codex*, in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 40 (1954) 185-86.

Perforations remain to show where the fascicles, composed of a varying number of leaves, were sewed; and an expert in Coptic bindings has contributed a persuasive description of the technique probably used in covering the Bodmer codex. Plate 2 reveals the narrow strip of parchment sewed into a fascicle at the hinge to strengthen it. The book would have been firmly made, and light to handle.

The scribe writes a professional book-hand, of the broad uncial type familiar to us from facsimiles of the great vellum codices of the fourth and fifth centuries. His, by comparison, is a modest performance; but his letters are well formed and evenly placed; the lines of the single, wide column of writing are regular, with ample space between them; the margins are roomy; and the whole page is laid out with a discerning sense of proportion. Only the first page is a little crowded. We omit the detailed analysis of the hand which would be necessary to justify an independent opinion of the date. The editor's experience, and that of his consultants, give weight to their conclusion. The year 200 appears to be a safe approximation.⁵

The only second hand clearly distinguished is one that numbered the pages, in Greek letters. Corrections of the text which permit a judgment, for example in Plate 3, are clearly by the first hand. Such cases occur often enough to allow a presumption that the same hand made other corrections, cancellations for example, in which the positive evidence is not decisive.

As we should expect, in a manuscript of the period, there are no accents, no iotas subscript, very little and quite unpredictable punctuation, and no separation of word from word. The inexperienced reader may find this feature baffling at first, like the odd breaking of words at the end of the line; but he will be surprised at the ease with which he accommodates himself to the habit of an ancient reader. A few of the sacred names are written compendiously. The scribe is consistent about this in strictly divine names, irregular in others, and quite without the device in many words that eventually came into the system.

In the transcript the word-separations are made; but in other respects it follows the codex, letter by letter and line by line. A first impression on the reader, unless he is familiar with written koine, is likely to be surprise, and possibly distrust, at the orthography, which deviates widely from the standards of our editions. Yet almost all the cases are ordinary examples of itacism—the substitution of one vowel or diphthong for another when they were pronounced alike, as they were in the Christian period. These would hardly be accounted faults by the scribe or by his readers, even when a superficial confusion results, as in the endings of forms such as *akoverai*

⁵ Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 17–18.

and *akovere*; nor do they justify a prejudice against the value of the text. By way of rapid test, I collated chapter 10 in P⁶⁶ (to adopt the official *siglum* of the Bodmer codex) with Sinaiticus (S) and Vaticanus (B), and found forty-four variants which I classified as orthographic. In each case one or two of the three manuscripts has our spelling; one or two depart from it. P⁶⁶ has twenty-four such variants; S has twenty-four; and B has eight. The favorable score of the Vaticanus is noteworthy. So are its peculiarities: *γειν-* in place of *γιν-* in present forms of *γινωσκω*, six times out of six; and a single nu in the proper name *ιωαννης*, three times out of three. These were good spellings in a grand scriptorium.

The text is of chief importance.⁶ Let us begin with the elementary observation that the new manuscript confirms the general tradition, with no paradoxical surprises. Secondly, as we might well expect, it supports our critical editions rather than the "received text," which has long since fallen from its high estate. The position of P⁶⁶ is illustrated by two notable omissions. One of these is of the fourth verse (with a few words of the third) of chapter 5, the descent of the angel into the pool of Bethsaida. Of greater moment is the omission of the episode of the woman taken in adultery (7:53—8:11). In neither case is there a word in the papyrus to suggest that the missing text was known to the scribe.

Lagrange bracketed the first of these in his edition of the Greek.⁷ The second he printed in its customary place; but in the commentary he clearly argues that it is an insertion. It is unnecessary to recapitulate the discussion of a question which St. Ambrose in his time called *semper decantata*. There would be nothing to add to the old material except the important silence of our earliest witness, P⁶⁶. It should be understood that the difficulty is not raised against the ancient origin of the pericope or its canonicity. The question is whether it can be maintained as primitive in St. John's Gospel, and at this point.

Wishing to test, on a wider scale, the relation of P⁶⁶ to the *textus receptus* on the one hand, and a critical edition on the other, I found an apt instrument laid in my hand by the obliging industry, for which I am deeply grateful, of Ernest C. Colwell in his valuable book, *What is the Best New Testament?*⁸ In the interest of the audience for whom these lectures were originally prepared, Professor Colwell quotes all his texts in English. Thus it came about that he composed a list of sixty-four variations between the

⁶ For a discussion of select readings in the papyrus, see C. K. Barrett, "Papyrus Bodmer II," *Expository Times*, March, 1957, pp. 174-77.

⁷ M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon saint Jean* (5th ed.; Paris, 1936).

⁸ Ernest C. Colwell, *What is the Best New Testament?* (Chicago, 1952).

textus receptus and Westcott and Hort in the Gospel of St. John, which are of such a quality that "even the freest English translation must show which of the two Greek texts it supports."⁹

Of these sixty-four readings, P⁶⁶ lacks all after verse 26 of chapter 14, where the codex breaks off, and two others which fall within a missing pair of leaves. Forty-six readings, however, remain; and it was a simple matter to tabulate them in the Greek text of the papyrus and to note the agreements with the editions considered by Colwell.¹⁰

One of the forty-six is the proper name (5:2) of the pool where the paralytic lay, waiting the stirring of the water. The papyrus agrees with neither of the two editions; but its form, *βηδσαῖδα*, supports *βηθσαϊδά*, which stands in the margin of Westcott and Hort.

In six cases the original text of the papyrus has been corrected by cancellation of one or more words. The original and the corrected reading are intelligible in every case, and both are attested elsewhere. Five times, the original reading agrees with the *textus receptus*, once with Westcott and Hort; the corrected form agrees four times with Westcott and Hort completely; a fifth time, partially (12:22). One original agreement with the latter (12:47) varies, in its corrected form, from both editions, to join Codex Bezae (D) and other manuscripts.

In the remaining thirty-nine cases, P⁶⁶ agrees with the *textus receptus* against Westcott and Hort four times. In three of these, the papyrus reading appears in the margin of the latter. The fourth case (13:18) is one in which the papyrus text, a quotation from the Old Testament, may have been influenced by the parallel in St. Mark (14:18). In thirty-four cases, P⁶⁶ agrees with Westcott and Hort against the *textus receptus*—a proportion of eight to one. Another (6:69) might be added, in which there is partial agreement with both texts, but much more strongly with Westcott and Hort.

The main lesson to be drawn from an application of Colwell's test is clear. P⁶⁶ is notably on the side of the critical text. The further point, however, is hardly less important. It contains a fair number of readings, corrected or uncorrected, in agreement with the *textus receptus*. In these it reflects the existence, in the second century, of positive variants, and enjoins caution upon the critical editor in judging them. From the total state of our older

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 86; for the list, see pp. 100-104.

¹⁰ I have used F. H. A. Scrivener, *Novum Testamentum: Textus Stephanici A.D. 1550* (editio maior; Cambridge and London, 1891); Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Text* (Cambridge, London, and New York, 1890).

materials, we have long known that many such cases exist in which the history of alternative readings must go back beyond the earliest extant manuscripts. We lay our finger on this state of things in P⁶⁶.

Before our further inquiries, a word must be said of the editor's presentation of the textual question. The distinguished classical scholar and papyrologist who has now given us, with exemplary promptness, this first edition of our earliest extensive codex of St. John, is fully entitled to our most cordial praise and gratitude. By some misfortune, Alexander Souter's edition of the New Testament¹¹ won his acceptance as a standard of measurement for judging the text. The result, fastened into the introduction, apparatus, and appendix of his work, is regrettable. A word of explanation will make clear why this is so.

Souter's edition, in thin paper and graceful type, is an honor to the Clarendon Press and a singular boon to those who love to read the 1881 revision of the King James Version in Greek. For that English edition is the determining norm of Souter's text, as he has duly explained.¹² The critical value of his book is to be sought in his apparatus. "Without this contribution," writes a connoisseur, "New Testament textual studies would be much poorer."¹³ It is, however, a highly select apparatus, in which many variant readings are not noticed at all. The book would be a pitfall to the reader unaware of its limitations.

Martin consistently relies upon Souter's edition, text and apparatus combined, as if it sufficiently represented the ancient tradition within which P⁶⁶ is now to be placed.¹⁴ It seemed desirable to test this method in its consequence, not only as a warning to others, but for the profit one can draw from any close scrutiny of the textual materials involved. Martin finds, for example, that P⁶⁶ is differentiated from the rest of the tradition in its use of the article with the name of Jesus. "In fact the papyrus omits it thirty-two times against the whole tradition."¹⁵ This of course means that Souter has the article in his text in all these cases in which the papyrus omits it, and has no variant in his apparatus. Where did Souter get the article, since it is not used with the names of persons in the English version? From the *textus receptus*, the original of the King James Version, which has it in all these instances.

¹¹ *Novum Testamentum Graece* (2nd ed.; Oxford, 1947).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. v.

¹³ G. D. Kilpatrick, "Three Recent Editions of the Greek New Testament," *Journal of Theological Studies* 50 (1949) 23.

¹⁴ Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 7, 141, and *passim*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

I found $\iota(\eta\sigma\upsilon)\varsigma$ without the article thirty-five times in P⁶⁶, with the *textus receptus* always adding it. In twenty-four of these cases, however, Westcott and Hort in their text agree with the omission of the papyrus; and in six more they note the omission as an alternative reading. In only five cases they agree with the *textus receptus* by adopting the article absolutely.

This would be proof enough that Martin had been somehow misled. It is rewarding, however, to carry the investigation a step farther, comparing the evidence of the papyrus with that of other manuscripts. This was done, with the result that in one case only (11:25), instead of in thirty-two, P⁶⁶ was found to be alone against the field. Usually it has a number of the old uncials with it; and several times it has all of them, including the Beatty codex, where it is available. In verse 20 of chapter 11, P⁶⁶ omits the article with the name of Jesus in agreement with P⁴⁶SABCDW, while the *textus receptus* has it and bequeaths it to Souter. In Martin's apparatus the omission is noted as a singular reading of the papyrus.

We should not leave this category of variants without remarking that B omits the article with P⁶⁶ more frequently than any other of the ancient uncials—twenty-eight times out of thirty-five. Eight times it is alone in supporting the papyrus. The Freer Gospel (W) agrees with the omission seventeen times; S, in the first hand, sixteen times. The tendency of B to omission of the article with the name of Jesus is one of its known characteristics. It is of interest to find this trait anticipated in P⁶⁶.

We forego discussion of other groups of Bodmer readings deemed singular by the editor, highly instructive as their close examination would be. My summary count may be stated of unsupported variants in the papyrus, as compared with Martin's, who remarks that the codex swarms with them: "One counts almost three hundred of them, without including those which concern orthography or grammar."¹⁶ Absolute accuracy is difficult to have in these matters. I have found 287 cases in Martin's lists of singular readings, besides the omission of the article already considered. Of these 287 readings, support is found in Tischendorf,¹⁷ text or apparatus, for 224; there remains a total of sixty-three unsupported variants in P⁶⁶.

We may sum up this ungrateful task of criticism with the simple reflection that one must make his own investigation of the evidence before risking conclusions. Less than one in four of Martin's readings noted as singular is so in fact. His lists of variants within a divided tradition, attested by

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁷ *Novum Testamentum Graece* 1 (editio octava critica maior; Leipzig, 1869).

Souter's apparatus, retain their value within the limits of the latter instrument.¹⁸

By way of positive experiment in the textual field, I made the above-mentioned collation of P⁶⁶ with the Vaticanus and with the Sinaiticus in the tenth chapter of St. John.¹⁹ A word has been said of the orthographic variations, to which may be added a few differences in the use of nu-movable, and a few cases of haplography (one in P⁶⁶, two in B). The *nomen sacrum* *πατηρ* is used thirteen times in this chapter, in various cases; and it is always written compendiously in the papyrus, never in B or in S.

There are four corrections in P⁶⁶, consisting of a single letter, omitted within a word, and supplied above the line. These are most probably by the first hand and in any case do not change the text. A correction of consequence, in verse 26, is noticed below.

Nine variations occur in word order, in one of which P⁶⁶ is corrected to agree with B and S alike; in another, with B alone. In readings which remain unaltered in the papyrus, it agrees once with B against S; twice with S against B. In two other cases it disagrees with both. Little is to be drawn from all this, except that the scribe of P⁶⁶, since he sometimes corrects his word order, was not entirely indifferent to it.

Four verbal variants may be called lexical or grammatical. Thus P⁶⁶ has *θυρουρος* (10:3) where B and S have *θυρωρος*; *εκυκλωσαν* (24) with S, against *εκυκλευσαν* in B. It has the standard ending of the imperfect, third person, plural, *ελεγον* (20), with B, where S, with koine sanction, has the ending proper to a first aorist, *ελεγαυ*. P⁶⁶ and B have the imperative *ειπε* (24); while S, not without classical precedent, has *ειπον*.

The principal verbal variants consist of omissions, additions, and substitutions. In one case (26), P⁶⁶ has a reading found neither in B nor in S: *καθως ειπον υμιν οτι* (after *εμων*); and this is expunged. It survives, with omission of *οτι*, in many manuscripts, including A and D, and in the *textus receptus*.

In all, I count thirty-eight of these principal variants. Out of this number, P⁶⁶ agrees eighteen times with B, and eight times with S,²⁰ while B and S agree twelve times. S has numerous later corrections; and these tend to join the common readings of P⁶⁶ and B. They have their own significance but they are not the text of S.

¹⁸ Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-46, 148, 150.

¹⁹ *Codex Vaticanus 1209 . . . pars altera, Testamentum Novum* (Milan, 1904); *Codex Sinaiticus: New Testament*, edited by Helen and Kirsopp Lake (Oxford, 1911).

²⁰ The agreements with S include one case (10:34) in which the first writing has been corrected by the first hand; see H. J. M. Milne and T. C. Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors of the Codex Sinaiticus* (London, 1938), especially pp. 29 and 41.

How notable are the papyrus variants in themselves? Four may be selected for special mention. The first reading in every case is that of P⁶⁶; the second is common to B and S.

10:3 *προβατια* (after *idia*): *προβατα*.

10:16 *συναγαγειν*: *αγαγειν*.

10:29 *ος εδωκεν . . . μειζων*: *ο δεδωκεν . . . μειζον*.

10:34 *απεκριθη ις και ειπεν αυτοις: απεκριθη αυτοις ις*.

The first two of these appear to be singular in the papyrus, and they are expressive. The others are found in later manuscripts. Like the canceled words in verse 26, they illustrate the antiquity of readings which we would never know from B and S.

The general conclusion to be drawn from our collation is of greater moment. In the tenth chapter of St. John, P⁶⁶ lies textually between B and S and is actually much nearer to the former than is S itself. This point is reinforced by the high ratio noticed above of agreements between P⁶⁶ and B in omission of the article with the name of Jesus. Since B and S are by common consent the chief representatives of the type of text to which they belong, with the primacy usually given to B, our newly recovered codex of a much earlier date seems to rise at once to a position of importance in the history of a great tradition.

One must by no means overlook the independence of P⁶⁶ in a considerable number of its readings. These variants, which almost always reappear in later codices, remind us again of the critical importance of the second century in the genesis of our textual problems. We are not yet able to get back of them.

Nothing has been said, to my knowledge, of the provenance of the codex. It is safe to assume that it comes from Egypt, and probably it was written there. It would have been preserved in the sands above the Delta; but it may well have had its origin in Alexandria, the traditional center of classical learning, and of Christian studies from an early date. Pantaenus, the founder of the catechetical school, whom Clement praised as the greatest of his teachers, flourished there in the last twenty years of the second century. Our papyrus of St. John merges easily into such a nursery of Christian culture. It might have issued from it.