



Sacred Scriptures as Trash: Biblical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus*

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Abstract

Most New Testament papyri with a known provenance were found at the site of the ancient Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus, or more precisely: on that city's rubbish mounds. The fact that sacred scriptures were discarded as garbage is surprising in view of the holiness of Christian biblical manuscripts, intrinsically and physically. Yet the trash aspect of provenance has never been adequately problematized or studied. Taking a social-historical and garbological approach, this article demonstrates that at Oxyrhynchus in antiquity entire manuscripts with biblical writings were deliberately discarded by Christians themselves, unrelated to persecution and issues of canonicity.

Keywords

Oxyrhynchus/el-Bahnasa, New Testament papyri, Septuagint Papyri, New Testament Textual Criticism, sacredness of biblical manuscripts, trash/discarding, garbology

*) This topic has fascinated me for a long time and I have presented different parts of my growing research at several scholarly occasions: at the New Testament Textual Criticism session of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2006, at the Social History of Formative Christianity and Judaism section of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2008, and the Group for the Study of Late Antiquity at Princeton University in February, 2009. I thank the audiences for their stimulating questions and comments. I am greatly indebted to Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre and Laura Nasrallah for reading drafts and giving insightful comments. David Frankfurter (respondent to the 2008 SBL session), Dirk van Keulen, Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, Alicia Walker, and Roger Bagnall and other members of the papyrological seminar in New York City, also kindly provided feedback and help with bibliography at various stages of my research.

*And we'll be lucky
if anyone remembers us
as well as the earth
remembers our garbage*
Priscila Uppal¹

I have always found it striking that numerous fragments of Septuagint and New Testament writings were discovered on trash heaps at the ancient Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus, because literary sources, archaeological finds, and iconographical representations imply that ancient Christians regarded their manuscripts as sacred objects. Were these sacred scriptures really found on garbage heaps or have scholars misunderstood their find site? Who discarded them, and why? And what does this imply for the attitude of Christians towards their scriptures? I contend that studying the praxis of discarding manuscripts provides social information on Christian communities and their habits towards holy scriptures.² Having begun to analyze the disuse of manuscripts held sacred by ancient Christians, I argue in this article that at Oxyrhynchus in late antiquity, entire Christian literary manuscripts were discarded deliberately as trash by Christians themselves. I shall conclude with several explanations for this phenomenon.

Over the past decades, scholars have paid valuable attention to the circumstances surrounding the “birth of the codex,” to borrow the title of Roberts and Skeat’s influential book,³ that is, to issues relating to the production and inscription of early Christian books, scribal practices and habits.⁴ In this article I examine what I call the “death of the codex,” that

¹ Priscila Uppal, “Uncle Fernando’s Garbage Triptych,” in *Trash* (ed. John Knechtel; Cambridge, Mass./London, England: The MIT Press, 2007) 32-7 at 33.

² This paper concentrates on the Christian literary manuscripts from Oxyrhynchus, but I believe my findings are also relevant for the other discarded literary manuscripts at Oxyrhynchus and elsewhere.

³ Colin H. Roberts and T.C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (London: British Academy, Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁴ Important publications dealing with these issues are, for instance: Roger S. Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); and Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy, 1977; London: Oxford University Press, 1979).

is, the damage, disinterest, and disposal of Christian manuscripts. With this research I build on recent scholarship that considers manuscripts not solely as repositories of textual variants but rather as objects in and of themselves, and studies their social location. Harry Gamble in his seminal work *Books and Readers in the Early Church* discussed manuscripts as “social artifacts.”⁵ He wrote:

All aspects of the production, distribution, and use of texts presuppose social functions and forces—functions and forces that are given representation, or inscribed, in the design of the text as a concrete, physical object. Hence the careful physical evaluation of a manuscript. By observing precisely how the text was laid out, how it was written, and what it was written on or in one has access not only to the technical means of its production but also, since these are the signs of intended and actual uses, to the social attitudes, motives, and contexts that sustained its life and shaped its meaning.⁶

I pose similar questions as Gamble did, with the difference that I focus not on the manufacturing and employ of manuscripts, but on what happens when manuscripts get out of use and discarded. That leads first to the place where they were thrown away, in other words, the provenance of early Christian manuscripts.

New Testament textual critic Eldon Epp put the topic of the provenance of New Testament papyri on the map as he probed the social location of these papyri in a series of publications.⁷ He remarked: “Provenance

⁵ Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 43.

⁶ Ibid. For similar approaches, see also Thomas J. Kraus, “Ad fontes: Gewinn durch die Konsultation von Originalhandschriften...” *Biblica* (2001) 1-2, and Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*.

⁷ Eldon Jay 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. Birger A. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 35-56; 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 *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* (ed. Eldon Jay Epp and Gordon D. Fee; Studies and Documents 45; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993) 274-97; idem, “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; idem, “The New Testament Papyri at Oxyrhynchus in Their Social and Intellectual Context,” *Sayings of Jesus: Canonical and Non-Canonical: Essays in Honour of Tjitze Baarda* (ed. W.L. Petersen, J.S. Vos, and H.J. De Jonge; NovTSup 89; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 47-68; idem, “The Oxyrhynchus New Testament Papyri: ‘Not Without Honor Except in Their Hometown?’” *JBL* 123 (2004) 5-55; idem,

translates into *context*—the sociocultural and intellectual character of the communities where manuscripts resided and which left its mark on those manuscripts.”⁸ Epp calculated that the majority of these earliest witnesses to the New Testament text for which a provenance was known came from Oxyrhynchus⁹ and discussed the cultural climate of these Oxyrhynchite New Testament papyri.

I investigate the issue of provenance from a different—and I admit, dirtier—angle, namely by addressing the fact that these earliest witnesses of New Testament texts and of Septuagint and other important writings for early Christians were not just discovered at one location, Oxyrhynchus, but specifically at that city’s trash heaps. In the more than hundred years that have gone by since the initial find at Oxyrhynchus and the publication of hundreds of biblical fragments, no one has systematically researched the question of why these manuscripts ended up in the trash. Many papyrologists and textual critics share this lack of interest in garbage as garbage with their colleagues in archaeology, at least according to the analysis of that field put forth by Michael Shanks, David Platt, and William L. Rathje. In their words:

99 percent or more of what most archaeologists dig up, record, and analyze in obsessive detail is what past peoples threw away as worthless—broken ceramics, broken or dulled stone tools, tool-making debitage, food-making debris, food waste, broken glass, rusted metal, on and on. These are society’s material dregs that even those most clever at salvage couldn’t figure a way to use or sell. But ask archaeologists what archaeology focuses on and they will mention ‘the past’ and ‘artifacts’ and ‘behavior and ‘attitudes and beliefs,’ but you will rarely, if ever, hear the words ‘garbage’ or ‘refuse’ or ‘trash’ or ‘junk.’¹⁰

“The Jews and the Jewish Community in Oxyrhynchus: Socio-Religious Context for the New Testament Papyri,” in *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Texts and Their World* (ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas; Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 2; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 13-52; and idem, “New Testament Papyri and the Transmission of the New Testament,” in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts* (ed. A.K. Bowman et al.; Graeco-Roman Memoirs 93; London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2007) 315-331.

⁸) Epp, “Oxyrhynchus New Testament Papyri,” 10.

⁹) When Epp published the article, “out of the sixty-one [NT manuscripts] that date up to or around the turn of the third/fourth centuries, thirty-five or 57 percent were found at Oxyrhynchus” (Epp, “Oxyrhynchus New Testament Papyri,” 12).

¹⁰) Michael Shanks, David Platt, William L. Rathje, “The Perfume of Garbage: Modernity and the Archaeological,” *Modernism/Modernity* 11 (2004) 61-83 at 65.

I should emphasize that my point here is not that it is unknown that some biblical papyri are in reality ancient trash—scholars have acknowledged this all along¹¹—but that no one has problematized and examined this.¹² With this article, I intend to do just that. Since for this research the trash heaps at Oxyrhynchus are so important, I will first briefly situate that city and its Christian community and then dig into its garbage dumps.

Oxyrhynchus under a Magnifying Glass

Located on the Bar Yusuf canal (a branch of the Nile), about 300 kilometers south of Alexandria, Oxyrhynchus was not a one-camel-town, but one of the major cities in Egypt for many centuries and the metropolis of the homonymous nome.¹³ Some 20,000 or more inhabitants lived in the

¹¹ For example, Epp mentions the rubbish heaps regarding difficulties in reconstructing context from accidentally preserved fragments: “At Oxyrhynchus . . . 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” (“Oxyrhynchus New Testament Papyri,” 10).

¹² A few scholars brought up the issue of the trash-provenance in passing. Adolf Deissmann considered the fact that the papyri were dug up from trash heaps “das Merkwürdigste der äußeren Fundgeschichte” and associated it with the every day character of papyrus texts, see (Adolf Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten. Das Neue Testament und die neuentdeckten Texte der hellenistisch-römischen Welt* [4th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1923] 23-24). Recently, Don Barker in his case study on Christian and secular books from Oxyrhynchus, mused: “. . . we do not know the circumstances that led to the New Testament manuscripts being thrown onto the rubbish dumps.” In the footnote to this statement, he offered three options: “(i) The New Testament fragments found on the rubbish dumps are the remains of books that were seized by the authorities in times of persecution. (ii) They are the remains of books that had been thrown out by their owners because they were worn out. (iii) They are the remains of worn out pages that had been replaced. Unlike the library remnants, some of which consist of a considerable number of fragments for the one book, showing that they had been torn up before being thrown onto the rubbish dump, it seems that the last possibility is the most likely” (Don C. Barker, “Codex, Roll, and Libraries in Oxyrhynchus,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 57.1 [2006] 131-148, at 140, and 140n33). For Philip Comfort “manuscripts found in rubbish heaps are not ‘rubbish’ per se or defective copies. When a manuscript became old and worn, it was customary to replace it with a fresh copy and discard the old one” (Philip Wesley Comfort, *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Barker, 1992] 62).

¹³ As Eric Turner remarked: “Because the contrary is so often asserted, I begin by emphasizing that Oxyrhynchus was an important place” (Eric G. Turner, “Roman Oxyrhynchus,” *JEA* 38 [1952] 78-93 at 78).

walled city.¹⁴ While only few archaeological remains of buildings testify to the city's former grandeur,¹⁵ papyri from the site expose the lives of its inhabitants in vivid detail, which Peter Parsons, that eminent editor of many Oxyrhynchus papyri, recently so eloquently described in his *City of the Sharp-Nosed-Fish: Greek Lives in Roman Egypt*.¹⁶

Turning our attention to early Christianity, we observe that literary and papyrological sources give the impression of a lively Christian presence at Oxyrhynchus in late antiquity. Writing around the year 400, the author of the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* describes Oxyrhynchus in idealized terms as a fully orthodox Christian city.¹⁷ But the religious milieu at Oxyrhynchus was much more diverse. Besides "pagans and heretics," such as Manichaeans, papyri found at the site reveal also a Jewish community.¹⁸ These papyri also testify to issues of Christian life and allow glimpses into

¹⁴ Richard Alston calculated the Oxyrhynchite population in the first half of the third century at ca. 21,000 (Richard Alston, *The City in Roman and Byzantine Egypt* [London: Routledge, 2002] 331-2). According to Grenfell, the site of the ancient city was "1 ¼ mile long and in most parts ½ mile broad" ("Excavations at Oxyrhynchus: First Season (1896-7)," 346).

¹⁵ Digging at Oxyrhynchus in 1922, Flinders Petrie excavated the remains of colonnaded streets, a number of tombs, and the ruins of the city's theater (W. M. F. Petrie, "Oxyrhynchus Revisited," repr. in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts* [ed. Bowman et al.; London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2007] 50-69). In Donald Bailey's calculation, this theater could seat some 12,500 spectators and "is the largest recorded theatre in North Africa, larger even than that of Carthage" (Donald M. Bailey, "The Great Theatre," in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts*, 70-90 at 89).

¹⁶ Peter Parsons, *City of the Sharp-Nosed-Fish: Greek Lives in Roman Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2007).

¹⁷ "(3) . . . since the city is large, it has twelve churches where the people assemble. As for the monks, they have their own oratories in each monastery. The monks were almost in a majority over the secular inhabitants. (4) In fact there are said to be five thousand monks within the walls and as many again outside, and there is no hour of the day or night when they do not offer acts of worship to God. Moreover, not one of the city's inhabitants is a heretic or a pagan (ἀίρετικός οὐδὲ ἔθνικός). On the contrary, all the citizens as a body are believers and catechumens (πιστοὶ καὶ κατηχούμενοι), so that the bishop is able to bless the people publicly in the street." Transl. Norman Russell, in idem and Benedicta Ward, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers. The Historia monachorum in Aegypto* (Cistercian Studies Series 34; London: Cistercian Publications, 1981) 67. For the Greek text of the passage on Oxyrhynchus, see A.-J. Festugière, ed., *Historia monachorum in Aegypto. Édition critique du texte grec* (Subsidia hagiographica 34; Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1961) 41-3.

¹⁸ Greek and Hebrew papyri attest to the presence of Jews at Oxyrhynchus. For discussions, see Aryeh Kasher, "The Jewish Community of Oxyrhynchus in the Roman Period," *JJS* 32 (1981) 151-57, and Eldon J. Epp, "The Jews and the Jewish Community in Oxy-

a bookish milieu and a Christian scriptorium as early as the third quarter of the third century.¹⁹ Christian literary manuscripts were found, dating from roughly the second until the sixth century of the common era,²⁰ comprising Christian copies of Septuagint writings, and a wide array of early Christian texts, now classified as “New Testament” and “non-canonical.” These include fragments of writings such as the *Gospel of Thomas* (from three different copies),²¹ *Revelation* (six copies from five codices and one opistograph roll),²² *Hermas* (11 fragments from seven codices and two rolls),²³ and the *Gospel of John*. Perhaps even the earliest fragment (or so scholars claim) of a New Testament writing, *P.Ryl.* III 457 (P52), from the *Gospel of John*, came from Oxyrhynchus.²⁴ Documents from the site also mention many churches and shrines, where books would have been read during worship services.²⁵ Some of those books apparently

rhyndus,” 13-52. The Hebrew fragments are published in Arthur E. Cowley, “Notes on Hebrew Papyrus Fragments from Oxyrhynchus,” *JEA* 2 (1915) 209-13.

¹⁹ See my *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Harvard Theological Studies 60; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008) 70-8, 144-51.

²⁰ A search on the Leuven Database of Ancient Books for “Provenance = Oxyrynch” (sic, without the h) and “Religion = Christian” gives 203 results. This includes sub-literary texts such as prayers, homilies, and amulets. Restricting the search to literary texts by indicating “Culture = Literature” renders 176 hits (February 13, 2009).

²¹ P.Oxy. I 1, P.Oxy. IV 654 and P.Oxy. IV 655. For a papyrological evaluation of these fragments, see Larry Hurtado, “The Greek Fragments of the Gospel of Thomas as Artefacts: Papyrological Observations on Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654 and Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 655,” in *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung—Rezeption—Theologie* (eds. Jörg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes, Jens Schröter; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008) 19-32.

²² P. Oxy. VI 848; P. Oxy. VIII 1079 (roll); P. Oxy. VIII 1080; P. Oxy. X 1230; P. Oxy. LXVI 4499; P. Oxy. LXVI 4500.

²³ Codices: P.Oxy. III 404; P.Oxy. IX 1172 + P.Oxy. L 3526; P.Oxy. XIII 1599; P.Oxy. XV 1783 + P.Oxy. XV 1828; P.Oxy. L 3527; P.Oxy. L 3528; P.Oxy. LXIX 4707. Rolls: P.Oxy. LXIX 4705 and P.Oxy. LXIX 4706.

²⁴ Colin Roberts, the fragment’s editor, noted: “it is possible that the provenance... is Oxyrhynchus—the parcel in which 457 was included was marked ‘from the Fayum or Oxyrhynchus’” (*P.Ryl.* III 457, 2). See also idem, *An Unpublished Fragment of the Fourth Gospel in the John Rylands Library* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1935) 24. Brent Nongbri has offered a critical evaluation of the dating of this papyrus on exclusively palaeographical grounds in his “The Use and Abuse of P52: Papyrological Pitfalls in the Dating of the Fourth Gospel,” *HTR* 98 (2005) 23-48.

²⁵ Two papyri are especially important in this respect: P.Oxy. LXVII 4617, “List of Festival Payments” (fifth century) and P.Oxy. XI 1357, “Calendar of Church Services” (535-536 CE). See also Arietta Papaconstantinou, “La liturgie stationnale à Oxyrhynchus dans la

ended up as garbage, therefore I now dive into the trashy provenance of Christian manuscripts.

Dissecting the Dump

The papyri from Oxyrhynchus were for sure found on actual rubbish heaps. It was the activities of British classicists Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt that brought the waste from the ancient Oxyrhynchites to the scholarly world.²⁶ As Parsons described the situation: “The town dumps of ancient Oxyrhynchus remained intact right up to the late nineteenth century. They didn’t look exciting, just a series of mounds covered with drifting sand. But they offered ideal conditions for preservation. In this part of Egypt it never rains; perishables which are above the reach of ground water will survive.”²⁷ The arid climate of Egypt and layers of sand had preserved also organic material, including texts written on papyrus.

During their six excavation seasons at Oxyrhynchus, Grenfell and Hunt dug up thousands of papyrus fragments. The first excavations at Oxyrhynchus took place in the winter of 1896-97, and then every year from 1903 until 1907. After each season, the two Oxford scholars edited not only fairly quickly a number of the huge amount of papyri they had discovered, they also faithfully published an archaeological report, in which they

première moitié du 6[e] siècle. Réédition et commentaire du POxy XI 1357,” *Revue des études byzantines* 54 (1996) 135-59.

²⁶ For a description of the accomplishments of these two men, see, Luigi Lehnus, “Bernard Pyne Grenfell (1869-1926) and Arthur Surridge Hunt (1871-1934),” in *Hermae: Scholars and Scholarship in Papyrology* (ed. Mario Capasso, Pisa: Giardini, 2007) 115-41.

²⁷ Peter Parsons, “Waste Paper City,” online at <http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/oxyrhynchus/parsons3.html>. I find it interesting to note in this context that research conducted in the humid climate of the American North East found that garbage stays largely intact in modern landfills, containing even food items and printed materials. For instance, at the Fresh Kills landfill outside of New York City, scholars discovered that “down through the first thirty-five feet, a depth that in this well would date back to around 1984, the landfill had been relatively dry. Food waste and yard waste—hot dogs, bread, and grass clippings, for example—were fairly well preserved. Newspapers remained intact and easy to read.” William Rathje and Cullen Murphy, *Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage* (New York, N.Y.: HarperCollins, 1992; repr. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001) 8. I doubt that these newspapers will still be preserved in fifteen hundred or more years, as happened with the Oxyrhynchite materials. Nevertheless, the discovery of these organic materials and the still legible printed matters within modern landfills makes a relevant comparison for our trash endeavors in Egypt.

detailed the papyrological and archaeological highlights of the season.²⁸ They paid little attention to other finds,²⁹ for their stated objective was to find papyrus texts at Oxyrhynchus, as Grenfell reminisced in the opening lines of the archaeological report on the first season: “I had for some time felt that one of the most promising sites in Egypt for finding Greek manuscripts was the city of Oxyrhynchus.”³⁰ Nevertheless, that same report of the first season provides an impression, albeit an incomplete one, of the archaeological circumstances of the find. Grenfell noted that:

The papyri tended to run in layers rather than to be scattered through several feet of rubbish, and as a rule were associated with the particular kind of rubbish composed largely of pieces of straw and twigs which the natives call *afsh*. It was not infrequent to find large quantities of papyri together, especially in three mounds, where the mass was so great that these finds most probably represent part of the local archives thrown away at different periods. It was the custom in Egypt to store up carefully in the government record offices at each town official documents of every kind dealing with the administration and taxation of the country; and to these archives even private individuals used to send letters, contracts etc., which they wished to keep. After a time, when the records were no longer wanted, a clearance became necessary, and many of the old papyrus rolls were put in baskets or on wicker trays and thrown away as rubbish. In the first of these ‘archive’

²⁸) These archaeological reports first appeared in issues of the *Egypt Exploration Fund: Archaeological Report*, published by the Egypt Exploration Society in London. They are now conveniently reprinted and provided with footnotes as: Bernard P. Grenfell, Arthur S. Hunt, “Excavations at Oxyrhynchus (1896-1907),” in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts* (ed. A.K. Bowman, et al.; London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2007) 345-68. Later, Italian excavations found additional large amounts of papyri, published mainly but not exclusively in the PSI-series, *Papiri greci e latini* (ed. Girolamo Vitelli and Medea Norsa et al.; 15 vols; Pubblicazioni della Società Italiana per la ricerca dei papiri greci e latini in Egitto; Florence: Istituto papirologico “G. Vitelli,” 1912-2008). On these excavations, see now Rosario Pintaudi, “The Italian Excavations,” in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts*, 104-8. In recent years, first Kuwaiti and then Catalan and Egyptian scholars have led archaeological expeditions to Oxyrhynchus, see the articles in the same volume by Géza Fehérvári, “The Kuwaiti Excavations,” 109-28 and Josep Padró, “Recent Archaeological Work,” 129-38.

²⁹) Grenfell and Hunt were pioneers in this field and subsequent papyrologists have improved their methods of excavating papyri. For instance, American archaeologists digging at the site of ancient Karanis in the Fayum conducted their excavations differently in reaction to the work done at Oxyrhynchus. As a result, for this site the context of each find is recorded. See also Elaine K. Gazda, “Karanis: An Egyptian Town in Roman Times. Discoveries of the University of Michigan Expedition to Egypt (1924-1935),” Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan, 1983, online at <http://www.umich.edu/~kelseydb/Exhibits/Karanis83/KaranisExcavation/KaranisExcavation.html> (accessed January 6, 2009).

³⁰) Grenfell, “Excavations at Oxyrhynchus: First Season (1896-7),” 345.

mounds, of which the papyri belonged to the end of the first and beginning of the second century, we sometimes found not only the contents of a basket altogether, but baskets themselves full of papyri. Unfortunately, it was the practice to tear most of the rolls to pieces first, and of the rest many had naturally been broken or crushed in being thrown away.³¹

Grenfell's account thus allows a most interesting insight into the excavations at Oxyrhynchus. The question of why these early Christian manuscripts were trash would have been aided if we knew where and in what groups of texts Christian manuscripts were found, so that we could learn something about their owners or the circumstances under which they were discarded. Unfortunately, Grenfell and Hunt did not conduct a stratigraphy so that we lack the immediate archaeological context of these papyri—Christian and others.

Despite Grenfell and Hunt's at best lukewarm interest in archaeology (or the archaeology of trash), it is possible to catch further glimpses of the general context of the papyrological finds, besides their excavation reports, from inventories of gifts donated to museums in Europe and the United States by the Egypt Exploration Society, and from photographs Hunt took during the digging seasons. These sources indicate that the copies of early Christian and other texts were discovered between broken potsherds and straw, and had been discarded together with such objects as terracotta lamps, pens, pieces of glass, keys, silverware, combs, hairpins, toys, textiles, woolen socks, broken sandals and dice.³² They apparently found so many dice, that Grenfell, jokingly, came to the sociological conclusion that the Oxyrhynchites had been "inveterate gamblers."³³

A crucial point for my investigation is that the papyri and other objects from Oxyrhynchus were not discovered among the ruins of ancient buildings but on actual trash heaps, or in Grenfell's words: "the rubbish mounds

³¹ Grenfell, "Excavations at Oxyrhynchus: First Season (1896-7)," 349.

³² These and other objects are listed in Donald M. Bailey, "Objects from Oxyrhynchus in the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum," *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts* (ed. A.K. Bowman et al.; London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2007) 369-81. In each of their archaeological reports, Grenfell and Hunt also provide brief enumerations of "antiques". For pictures taken during these excavations, see especially the Oxyrhynchus website at http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/VExhibition/exhib_welcome.html (accessed January 6, 2009).

³³ Grenfell, "Excavations at Oxyrhynchus: First Season (1896-7)," 351. See also Bailey, "Objects from Oxyrhynchus."

were nothing but rubbish mounds.”³⁴ This implies, therefore, that Christian writings, just as all other manuscripts found there, had been discarded. Grenfell’s report makes this very clear. People in antiquity deposited these materials at a garbage heap, sometimes transporting them to these places in baskets.³⁵

Garbage mounds, built up over the course of centuries, encircled ancient cities and could reach heights of 20 or 30 meters;³⁶ so also at Oxyrhynchus. Volume fifty of the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* contains the reproduction of a plan of the site of El-Bahasa/Oxyrhynchus, made in 1908 based on drawings by Grenfell and Hunt. This map allows for some orientation, and recently a key to the map has resurfaced.³⁷ One area, centrally located near the theatre and colonnade, just off the major road, functioned as trash heap for over 600 years.³⁸ This pattern of discarding waste just outside or even

³⁴ Grenfell, “Excavations at Oxyrhynchus: First Season (1896-7),” 346. See also the appropriate title of Peter Parsons’ article “Waste Paper City,” online at <http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/oxyrhynchus/parsons3.html>. Grenfell noted the difference between excavating deserted, dilapidated houses and excavating trash heaps: “In the former there is always the chance of finding valuable things which have been left behind or concealed by the last occupants, such as a hoard of coins or a collection of papyrus rolls buried in a pot; while in rubbish mounds, since the object found must have been thrown away deliberately, they were much less likely to be valuable, and were quite certain to be in much worse condition.” (Grenfell, “Excavations at Oxyrhynchus: First Season (1896-7),” 346). Other sites in Egypt also yielded papyrological treasures as trash. Ulrich Wilcken provides another first-hand account of such papyrological excavations among trash (Ulrich Wilcken, “Die Berliner Papyrusgrabungen in Herakleopolis Magna,” *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 2 [1903] 294-337). Wilcken distinguished between two kinds of rubbish: collapsed buildings and rubbish mounds (“Häuseruinen und Schutthügel,” *ibid.*, 296-7). He discusses the Egyptian trash heaps (“Kehrichtshaufen”); their contents of kitchen debris, manure, rags, and above all innumerable potsherds (“unzählige Thonscherben”); and the purpose of these rubbish mounds: making room in the inhabited sections of the cities (*ibid.*, 300-301).

³⁵ Ulrich Wilcken, a German contemporary of Grenfell and Hunt and excavator for papyri at ancient Heracleopolis Magna, some 70 km north of Oxyrhynchus, recounts how this practice of trash removal continued into his own time: From his tent at the edge of the settlement, he observed how each morning at the crack of dawn women from the neighboring homes arrived to deposit all sorts of dirt and garbage very close to that tent, so that by the end of his eleven-week-long archaeological season, a little *kôm*, or rubbish mound, had formed (*ibid.*, 301).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, esp. 301.

³⁷ P.Oxy. L (1983), “Plan of Oxyrhynchus,” vii. Parsons comments in “Waste Paper City:” “between country and town, a circle of dumps where the rubbish piled up” (online at <http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/oxyrhynchus/parsons1.html>).

³⁸ From the Oxyrhynchus website: “Kôm Gamman. Not far to the north-east of the

within the city matches the evidence from other pre-modern cities.³⁹ Except for Naples, Italy, where citizens still regularly face piles of garbage in the streets,⁴⁰ with trash-removal we enjoy a relatively modern luxury.⁴¹

A Garbological Approach

In our days, garbage forms not only a challenge for waste management or a potential source for renewable energy. It also offers an opportunity to examine our world from a different perspective. Regarding modern and ancient trash, the discipline of *garbology* offers tools to analyze discarded materials methodologically. A rather new branch of scholarship, garbology is associated with the groundbreaking work, literary and figuratively, of William Rathje and collaborators in the Garbage Project, begun in 1973 at

classical theatre was a large rubbish mound crowned by the venerated tomb of a mediaeval Sheikh, Ali Gamman, and often referred to as Kôm Gamman (Kôm = mound). To judge from what was found in the mound, this spot was used as a rubbish dump for 600 years at least, starting in the first century AD; such use may surprise us, in a spot in the midst of monumental structures (theatre and colonnade) and almost on the line of a conjectured ancient main street. This mound was numbered K 20 on Grenfell and Hunt's plan, and identified as Kôm Gamman in the black notebook. It was a particularly rich source of rare literary MSS., but the presence of Ali Gamman's tomb on its top prevented Grenfell and Hunt from investigating it thoroughly. In the 1930s an Italian team obtained permission to dismantle the tomb and re-erect it elsewhere; a consequence is the number of literary papyri in the Oxyrhynchus collection of which further portions are now in Florence." http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/VExhibition/the_site/kom_gamman.html.

³⁹⁾ "It is difficult for anyone alive now to appreciate how appalling, as recently as a century ago, were the conditions of daily life in all of the cities of the Western world, even in the wealthier parts of town. 'For thousands of years,' Lewis Mumford wrote in *The City in History*, 'city dwellers put up with defective, often quite vile, sanitary arrangements, wallowing in rubbish and filth they certainly had the power to remove.'" (Rathje and Murphy, *Rubbish*, 40-1). A broad overview of waste removal throughout the centuries, with interesting images, can be found in Gottfried Hösel, *Unser Abfall aller Zeiten. Eine Kulturgeschichte der Städtereinigung* (München: J. Jehle, 1987).

⁴⁰⁾ For the trash problems in Naples, see, for instance, Elena Ferrante's Op-Ed article "Our Fetid City," in *The New York Times*, January 15, 2008. Accessed online January 5, 2009, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/15/opinion/15ferrante.html>.

⁴¹⁾ For instance, waste collection began in New York City in the 1890s (Shanks, Platt, Rathe, "Perfume of Garbage," 71). See especially Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: Toward a History of Trashmaking* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999), "Municipal Trash Collection," 118-25 and further.

the University of Arizona.⁴² These scholars, garbologists, apply methods from traditional archaeology onto modern waste⁴³ and in doing so expose unexpected sides of modern society and human conduct. Their findings and methodological reflections offer also useful tools for my work on interpreting ancient garbage.

By taking a garbological approach we are bound to detect information about the people and communities that left their waste on these ancient trash heaps. Garbology allows us, as Rathje and Murphy assert, to measure human conduct “and, what is more, gauging behavior unobtrusively, thereby avoiding one of the great biases inherent in much social science.”⁴⁴ When applied to antiquity, the dirty lens of garbology allows us to view practices that we cannot observe or are not explicit in the written record, as I will show next. At the end of this article, I will offer other garbological insights.

Ecclesiastical writers do not mention discarding biblical manuscripts as trash, not even disapprovingly. Yet through the Oxyrhynchite garbage heaps, we know that this must have been a fairly common practice, at least at Oxyrhynchus and presumably in other communities also. Acknowledging that important early Christian sacred texts ended as refuse on garbage heaps in Oxyrhynchus opens our eyes to hints of such practices recorded in contemporaneous Christian literature. This struck me first in the colophon appended to the Martyrdom of Polycarp. In it, Pionius—allegedly the martyr—relates that prompted by a revelation, he discovered an old, worn-out manuscript of Polycarp’s *Martyrium* that he then copied and thereby preserved for posterity. The section reads:

And I, Pionius, then sought out these things and produced a copy from the one mentioned above, in accordance with a revelation (κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν) of the blessed Polycarp, who showed it to me, as I will explain in what follows. And I gathered these papers together when they were nearly worn out by age (ἤδη σχεδὸν ἐκ τοῦ χρόνου κεκημηκότα).⁴⁵

⁴² Rathje and Murphy, *Rubbish!* 13-14. For a bibliography and outline of the work conducted, see “The Garbage Project Research and Reporting Record @ 2000” online at <http://traumwerk.stanford.edu:3455/GarbologyOnline/48>.

⁴³ The Garbage Project “aimed to apply *real* archaeology . . . to see if it would be possible to investigate human behavior ‘from the back end,’ as it were” (Rathje and Murphy, *Rubbish!* 14).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁵ Bart D. Ehrman, “Martyrdom of Polycarp,” in *The Apostolic Fathers* I (ed. and transl.

(Pseudo-)Pionius offers no word about what he did with the ancient manuscript after he copied it.

If Pionius's comment involved only a single depleted manuscript, the Christian library at Caesarea faced a more dire situation with multiple time-worn holdings, as Jerome's writings imply. In a letter to Marcella and in *De viris illustribus*, Jerome recounts that Euzoius, a Caesarean cleric (first presbyter, then bishop from 369 to 380), ordered new copies made of deteriorated manuscripts in an effort to maintain the famous library: "afterwards, as bishop of that same city, he [Euzoius] undertook with very much toil to restore on parchment Origen and Pamphilus's then damaged library."⁴⁶ As Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams explained, the phrase *in membranis instaurare* means that Euzoius "had the library's holdings copied from papyrus rolls and codices into parchment codices."⁴⁷ For my

idem, LCL 24; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003) 355-401 at 398-9. The manuscript evidence for the Martyrium of Polycarp is late; the oldest manuscripts date from the 10th century (*ibid.*, 362-3 at 363).

⁴⁶ eiusdem postea urbis episcopus plurimo labore corruptam iam bibliothecam Origenis et Pamphili in membranis instaurare conatus . . . est. (Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 113). Edition: Hieronymus, *De viris illustribus* (ed. Carl Albrecht Bernoulli; Sammlung ausgewählter kirchen- und dogmengeschichtlicher Quellenschriften 11; Freiburg i. B. and Leipzig: J.C.B. Mohr, 1895) 52. The letter to Marcella (*Epist.* 34) contains a similar phrase: (the library of Pamphilus and Origen) "which was partly damaged Acacius, then Euzoius, priests of that same church, undertook to restore on parchment" (. . . quam ex parte corruptam Acacius, dehinc Euzoius, eiusdem ecclesiae sacerdotes, in membranis instaurare conati sunt). Edition: Hieronymus, *Epistularium* Pars I. Epistulae I-LXX (ed. Isidorus Hilberg; CSEL LIV; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996) 260, lines 5-7. According to Hilberg, this sentence is a gloss depending on the statement in the *De viris illustribus* (*ibid.*, 260).

⁴⁷ Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006) 215. See also Andrew J. Carraker, *The Library of Eusebius of Caesarea* (VCSupp 67; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 23, and Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 159. Gamble adds: "it is not clear whether the retranscription was projected for the whole library or only for those parts that were in poor condition and liable to be lost altogether, or whether the deterioration was due to age, use, or other causes" (*ibid.*). Grafton and Williams point out rightly, I think, that "this was no doubt an expensive and demanding process" (*Christianity*, 215), but Marco Frenschkowski expresses skepticism about the size of the work: "Vielleicht bezog sich die Aktion ja nur auf wenige schadhaft gewordene Exemplare. . . . Dringender Bedarf wird also wohl eher für einzelne Bücher bestanden haben. Wurde das Projekt überhaupt in größerem Umfang durchgeführt?" ("Studien zur Geschichte der Bibliothek von Cäsarea," in *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Texts and Their World* [ed. Thomas Kraus and Tobias Nicklas; Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 2; Leiden: Brill, 2006] 53-104 at 85). A colo-

research, I wonder: With new parchment codices adorning the library's shelves, what happened to all those damaged manuscripts?⁴⁸

An examination of practices surrounding the disuse of Christian texts, as I will present below, moving from the Oxyrhynchite trash to other archaeological finds of manuscripts, suggests that Pionius, and Euzoios and the scribes at Caesarea, had several options for handling their deteriorated manuscripts, ranging from reverent burial to disposal as trash and everything in between.

The garbological view leads not only to new questions for old texts, another conclusion obtained from studying garbage is that discarding involves a choice. In her book *Waste and Want. A Social History of Trash*, a study of 19th century America through its practices of discarding, social-historian Susan Strasser makes the important observation that "Trash is created by sorting." According to Strasser, "If we focus on the categorizing process that defines trash, our attention will be drawn away from the rubbish heap and concentrated on human behavior."⁴⁹ Thus, going back to Oxyrhynchus, the owners of the biblical manuscripts that form the topic of my investigation chose to deposit them as waste. Yet, as I will show next, this deliberate discarding of scripture stands in contrast to the attitude that appears in other sources.

From Sacred Scriptures to Religious Rubbish

In order to appreciate the contrast between the trashing of Septuagint and New Testament books and their intrinsic holiness for ancient Christians, it is pertinent that I discuss the sacredness of scriptures as physical artifacts at

phon in a manuscript of Philo's *De opificio mundi* now at the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (Vienna theol. gr. 29, 146 verso) confirms Jerome's information. It reads: "Bishop Euzoios had new copies made in codices" (Grafton and Williams, *Christianity*, 215 and 349n96).

⁴⁸) Another example of the restoration of a library, roughly contemporary with that at Caesarea, can be found in Themistius's oration to Constantius (*Oratio* 4.59d-60c), probably of the year 357. Edition: Wilhelm Dindorf, *Themistii orationes* (Leipzig, 1832; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1961) 71-2.

⁴⁹) "Everything that comes into the end-of-the-millennium home . . . eventually requires a decision: keep it or toss it. . . . As everyday life and ordinary housework have changed over time, so has this process of defining what is rubbish, as well as the rubbish itself, the contents of the trash" (Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want*, 5).

some length.⁵⁰ That Christians considered their writings sacred—not just the content but also the physical manuscripts—becomes clear through an examination of three different areas: literary sources, iconography of books, and archaeological contexts of other manuscript finds.

In her article “Holy Texts, Holy Men, and Holy Scribes. Aspects of Scriptural Holiness in Late Antiquity,” Claudia Rapp argued for this physical holiness of Christian books:

The Christian religion has a deep affinity with scripture, writing, and *Schriftlichkeit*. God made his Word manifest in the world through Christ, the incarnate Logos. The Gospels and other New Testament writings contain this ‘good news’ in written form... readily available for ownership in the form of manuscripts. These physical depositories of the Word of God shared in the holiness of the message they contained.⁵¹

Christian authors referred to these writings as sacred scriptures, expounded upon them in sermons, homilies, and commentaries, and engaged in polemics with other Christians about the correct interpretation. If in the Gospel of John, Christ figures as the incarnate word (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, John 1:14), in the Gospel of Truth, Jesus cloaks himself with the book, and is nailed to a tree.⁵²

Biblical manuscripts also functioned in rituals. For instance, Christian books played a role during the ordination of lectors and bishops. The Sahidic translation of the *Apostolic Tradition*, an ancient church order, prescribes that at the ordination of a reader the bishop, quite fittingly, “shall give the book of the apostle to him and pray over him.”⁵³ Moreover, accord-

⁵⁰ I should note that manuscripts in general were considered status objects, as Raymond J. Starr noted: “books were high-prestige items that apparently were kept rather than disposed of.” (“The Used-Book Trade in the Roman World,” *Phoenix* 44:2 [1990] 148-157 at 156).

⁵¹ Claudia Rapp, “Holy Texts, Holy Men, and Holy Scribes. Aspects of Scriptural Holiness in Late Antiquity,” in *The Early Christian Book* (ed. William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran; CUA Studies in Early Christianity; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007) 194-222, at 196.

⁵² αϛβαλεϛ π̅ιπρωμε. ε̅τι̅μη̅εϛ α̅λαϛτ̅ι̅ α̅λω̅ε, GTruth 20:22-5. Edition: Harold W. Attridge and George W. MacRae, “NHC1,3: The Gospel of Truth,” in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex)* (ed. Harold W. Attridge; NHS 22; Leiden: Brill, 1985) 86.

⁵³ η̅α̅†̅ π̅ιπρωμε η̅παποστολος η̅αϛ η̅ϛωηη̅ ε̅ρ̅ρα̅ ε̅χωϛ. Edition: Walter Till and Johannes Leipoldt, *Der koptische Text der Kirchenordnung Hippolyts* (Texte und Untersuchungen 58; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1954) 6. See also Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002) 74, chapter 11. The text is not present in the Latin. A

ing to the *Apostolic Constitutions*, in the ordination ceremony for a bishop, deacons were to “hold the divine Gospels opened over the head of the ordinand.”⁵⁴ Christian books not only featured on these special occasions of ordination, but also as part of regular worship services. In several liturgies, the gospel codex was carried into the sanctuary in a candle-lit procession.⁵⁵

Also outsiders recognized that books occupied a crucial place in Christian congregations. This is apparent from the fact that during the persecution of Christians in the early fourth century, the imperial edict, as preserved by Eusebius, ordered “the destruction by fire of the Scriptures,”⁵⁶ that is, the confiscation and burning of Christian manuscripts. In this respect, Gamble remarks: “Diocletian took it for granted that every Christian community, wherever it might be, had a collection of books and knew that those books were essential to its viability.”⁵⁷ Several sources indicate that Christians in reaction to the imperial edict tried to hide their books.

comparison between the versions shows that the other versions mention the *book*, but only the Sahidic mentions the “book of the apostle” (see *ibid.*, 74-5).

⁵⁴ τῶν δὲ διακόνων τὰ θεῖα Εὐαγγέλια ἐπὶ τῆς τοῦ χειροτονουμένου κεφαλῆς ἀνεπτυγμένα κατεχόντων (*Apostolic Constitutions* VIII 4. 6). For the text, see Marcel Metzger, ed. and trans., *Les Constitutions apostoliques*, vol. 3 (SC 336; Paris: Cerf, 1987) 142. For other examples and a discussion of this practice of “imposition of the Gospel Book,” see Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* (New York: Pueblo, 1990) 39-44. I should note here, that Bradshaw concludes that this custom has Syrian origins and probably not “reflects authentic indigenous practice” in Egypt (*ibid.*, 41).

⁵⁵ It is not yet clear to me when this ritual of the procession of the gospel book into the church began. In her *Peregrinatio* (ca. 380), Egeria recounts of the bishop processing with the gospel book in the Church of the Resurrection at Jerusalem (*Itinerary* 24,10, edition Pierre Maraval, *Égerie: Journal de Voyage [Itinéraire]* [SC 296, Paris: Cerf, 1997] 245). Scholar of Christian liturgy, Josef Jungmann, described the so-called “Kleinen Einzug: Der die Liturgie feiernde Klerus formt sich im Altarraum zum Zuge, der sich durch eine seitliche Tür wieder zurück in den Altarraum bewegt. Es ist der Einzug mit dem Evangelienbuch” (Josef Andreas Jungmann, *Missarum sollemnia. Eine genetische Erklärung der römischen Messe* [Wien: Herder, 1962] 1:344). Jungmann mentioned the Coptic mass and a French rite (referring to the ninth-century monk Remigius of Auxerre) (*ibid.*, 570-1). As Jungmann pointed out elsewhere, such processions with candle bearers, or *ceroferarii*, reflected Roman imperial ceremony, where candle bearers accompanied the emperor at his entrance (idem, *Liturgie der christlichen Frühzeit bis auf Gregor den Grossen* [Freiburg/Schweiz, Universitätsverlag, 1967] 121).

⁵⁶ τὰς δὲ γραφὰς ἀφανεῖς πυρὶ γενέσθαι, Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* VIII II.4 (LCL 265) 258; transl. Oulton, 259.

⁵⁷ Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 150.

But even those Christians who had handed over their scriptures to the Roman authorities had reportedly done so only reluctantly.⁵⁸ In the aftermath of the persecution, manuscripts were at the heart of the Donatist controversy, which split churches in North Africa in the fourth century and had long-lasting effects on Christianity in that region. At stake in this controversy was the issue of *traditio*; whether one had handed over manuscripts to the Roman authorities during the time of persecution or not. Thus, to put it bluntly, at the same time that Christians in North Africa had far-reaching disputes about giving up manuscripts under the pressure of persecution (*traditio*), fellow Christians to the east of that same continent, in Egypt, were throwing out Christian texts as trash.⁵⁹

The importance of the physical codex as the embodiment of Christ even resulted in its enthronement—literally—at church councils. The earliest firm evidence for this practice comes from the Council of Ephesus, held in 431, where the participants gathered “in the holy and great church which is called Mary, with the holy gospel exposed on the throne in the very middle, and displaying Christ himself present with us.”⁶⁰ At least one person at Oxyrhynchus must have known of this practice of reverential treatment of a gospel book as substitute for Christ’s presence, for the acts of

⁵⁸ At Circa subtle forms of resistance were used. The bishop, for instance, claimed not to know where the lectors that have the manuscripts live, see Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 207-8.

⁵⁹ I wonder whether these same people at Circa also would have thrown out their manuscripts at the garbage. Or would this be one of those differences in the attitude towards scripture between North Africa and Egypt, as G.E.M. de Ste. Croix has argued in his “Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?” *Past and Present* 26 (1963) 6-38 at 17.

⁶⁰ συναχθέντες ἐν τῇ ἁγίᾳ καὶ μεγάλῃ ἐκκλησίᾳ, τῇ καλουμένῃ Μαρία, προκειμένου τοῦ ἁγίου εὐαγγελίου ἐν τῷ μεσαιτάτῳ θρόνῳ, καὶ αὐτὸν ἡμῖν παρόντα τὴν Χριστὸν δεικνύοντος in: Johannes Dominicus Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence: Antonius Zatta, 1760; repr. Paris: Herbert Welter, 1901) 4:1237C. See also Rapp, “Holy Texts,” 197. Horst Wenzel remarks: “Bereits aus dem 4. Jahrhundert ist für bedeutende Versammlungen der Brauch belegt, das Evangelium auf den Bischofsstuhl zu legen, um so den Vorsitz Christi zu symbolisieren, dessen unsichtbare Gegenwart das Buch sichtbar repräsentiert. Für die große Konzilien des ersten Jahrtausends ist diese Gewohnheit häufig belegt, z. B. für die römischen Synoden von 649, 745 und 769. . . . Noch auf dem II. Vatikanischen Konzil (1930) had das *Urbino-Evangeliar* aus der Vaticana Urb. lat. 10, das 1474 im Auftrag des Federigo da Montefeltre entstanden is, den Vorsitz genommen. Es stand auf dem Lesepult und wurde symbolisch als Repräsentant des *logos* angesehen.” (Horst Wenzel, “Die Schrift und das Heilige,” in *Die Verschriftlichung der Welt. Bild, Text und Zahl in der Kultur des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit* [ed. Horst Wenzel, Wilfried Seipel, and Gottfried Wunberg; Milan: Skira, 2000] 15-57 at 33).

that council at Ephesus contain the subscription: “I, Peter, bishop of Oxyrhynchus, have subscribed etc.”⁶¹ Presumably bishop Peter had observed the ritual enthronement of a gospel codex during the Ephesian Council.

The enthronement of the gospel book inspired artists as it became a frequent iconographical theme. The late-fourth/early fifth-century dome mosaics in the Rotunda in Thessaloniki depict “jeweled books on pillowed thrones,”⁶² and a bronze relief in the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople shows a throne with an opened codex upon which a dove descends.⁶³ In this way, the codex becomes the stand-in for the word made flesh (John 1).⁶⁴ As Wenzel noted, “the incarnation of the word manifests itself iconographically in the mutual representation of book and body: Christ appears as a book or in a book; the book represents the embodied Christ.”⁶⁵

Other depictions of Christian codices radiate the same reverence. In seventh-century Egypt, the wooden covers of a four gospel codex, now known as the Freer Gospel Codex, received encaustic paintings depicting the four evangelists, two on each cover. Their pale faces framed by dark hair and large haloes, they gaze at the beholder with big eyes. Dressed in colorful robes in shades of red, blue and yellow, each man presses a golden codex adorned with precious stones against his chest. As Michelle Brown notes, “Their hands are draped in the attitude of veneration adopted by the deacon when carrying the gospels in procession and reading from them

⁶¹ Πέτρος ἐπίκοπος Ὁξυρίγγου ὑπέγραψα, καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς, Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum* 4:1220B.

⁶² Laura Nasrallah, “Empire and Apocalypse in Thessaloniki: Interpreting the Early Christian Rotunda,” *J ECS* 13 (2005) 465-508 at 485.

⁶³ See Wenzel, “Die Schrift und das Heilige,” 33 and 34, Abb. 18. Such images of the throne are called the *hetoimasia* (preparation). As Annemarie Weyl Carr stated, “Initially, in the 5th-7th C., the image signifies not the empty throne awaiting God, but—in accord with antique use of the throne to represent the presence of a god or emperor—God’s mystic presence upon the throne” (Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Hetoimasia,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* [ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; e-reference edition 2005, accessed through Princeton University, 7 January 2009]).

⁶⁴ See Herbert L. Kessler, “The Book as Icon,” in *In the Beginning. Bibles before the Year 1000* (ed. Michelle P. Brown; Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art & Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 2006) 77-103 at 79.

⁶⁵ “Die Fleischwerdung des Wortes manifestiert sich ikonographisch in der wechselseitigen Stellvertretung von Buch und Corpus: Christus erscheint als Buch oder im Buch, das Buch steht für den leibhaftigen Christus” (Wenzel, “Die Schrift und das Heilige,” 15).

during the liturgy.”⁶⁶ Out of reverence for the sacredness of their book, not even the evangelists themselves grasp these sacred scriptures with their bare hands, but hold them *super planetam*, covered with their robes.⁶⁷ How far removed this seems from the discarding of biblical manuscripts on garbage mounds.

The disposal of Christian manuscripts as waste such as happened at Oxyrhynchus stands also in contrast to other practices surrounding the disuse of scriptures. Surveying the archaeological provenance of early Christian manuscripts, I found that a good number of them had been buried, alone, with other writings, or with deceased people.⁶⁸ Such burial practices indicate the value—religious, economic, personal—associated with these manuscripts. The burial of used-up sacred manuscripts evokes a practice reflected upon more systematically in rabbinic Jewish circles regarding the *genizah*, or storage room, a topic that I intend to address in a separate study.⁶⁹ I shall limit myself here to Christian manuscripts.

⁶⁶ Michelle Brown, “28 Painted Covers from the Freer Gospels,” *In the Beginning. Bibles before the Year 1000* (ed. eadem; Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art & Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 2006) 268-9 at 268. See also a discussion by John Lowden, “The Word Made Visible: The Exterior of the Early Christian Book as Visual Argument,” in *The Early Christian Book* (ed. William E. Klingshirm and Linda Safran; CUA Studies in Early Christianity; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007) 13-47 at 21-3.

⁶⁷ For this practice, see Jungmann, *Missarum sollemnia*, 1:575: “Wenn das Evangelium zu Ende war, erhielt das Buch im römischen Stationsgottesdienst ein Subdiakon, der es aber nicht mit bloßer Hand, sondern *super planetam* entgegennahm und der es dann dem anwesenden Klerus der Reihe nach zum Kusse reichte, bevor es wieder in die Kasette gelegt, versiegelt und an seinen Verwahrungsort zurückgebracht wurde.”

⁶⁸ In 1963, Colin Roberts published a 16-page book on the topic, entitled *Buried Books in Antiquity: Habent sua fata libelli* (Arundell Esdaile Memorial Lecture; London: Library Association, 1963), in which he lays bare evidence for burial of books. See also idem, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*, 6-7, on manuscripts burials in jars.

⁶⁹ On the Jewish practice of placing manuscripts in a genizah, see Abraham Meir Habermann, “Genizah,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2nd ed.) 7:460. For the possibility that Cave 4 at Qumran was a genizah, see Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, “Old Caves and Young Caves: A Statistical Reevaluation of a Qumran Consensus,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 14 (2007) 313-33 and references there. The most famous *genizah* is the one found in Cairo’s Ben Ezra synagogue that has yielded immensely important insights into many aspects of the life of the Jewish community and their neighbors in Egypt. See Yehoshua Horowitz, Menahem Ben-Sasson, “Genizah, Cairo,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2nd ed.) 7:460-82 and studies by S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (6 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967-1993) and Mark R. Cohen, *Poverty and Charity in the Jewish community of Medieval Egypt* (Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World; Princeton,

Arguably the most famous example of buried Christian manuscripts is the so-called Nag Hammadi Library: thirteen papyrus codices containing Gnostic texts apparently found buried in a clay jar near the modern Egyptian village of Nag Hammadi.⁷⁰ The Nag Hammadi codices were most likely interred for their less than orthodox content; but even so, they were not dumped on the garbage heap.⁷¹ In his *Buried Books in Antiquity*, Colin Roberts suggests that such interment was done in imitation of Jewish practices: “the Christians seem to have taken over from the Jews the habit of depositing unwanted or damaged or worn MSS in a special storage place from which, in time of safety, they could be taken out to be buried, this with the idea of profanation by the heathen, avoiding too perhaps total destruction.”⁷²

In another case, Flinders Petrie and his team dug up a “broken crock” that contained “a little package of papyrus wrapped in rag, and tied with thread” during excavations of a cemetery near the Upper Egyptian village

NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). See also Mark R. Cohen, “Geniza for Islamicists, Islamic Geniza, and the ‘New Cairo Geniza,’” in *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 7 (2006) 129–45 at 145n52: “After much inquiring of Christians over a period of years . . . the present writer learned from the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Mount Lebanon, Theophilus George Saliba, that his community practices a custom similar to that of Jews and Muslims, of burying or . . . burning loose pages of holy writing, and that they call this in Syriac ‘gnizo.’ The phenomenon of Christian geniza merits further investigation.” I thank the author for referring me to this article. See Peter van Minnen, “Boorish or Bookish: Literature in Egyptian Villages in the Fayum in the Graeco-Roman Period,” *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 28 (1998), 99–184 at 166n236, 168 and 168n243 for references to practices at Egyptian temples.

⁷⁰) On the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library, see James M. Robinson, “Coptic Gnostic Library Today,” *New Testament Studies* 14 (1968) 356–401, and idem, “The Discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 42.4 (1979) 206–24.

⁷¹) Similar to the discovery story of the Nag Hammadi Library is that of another important manuscript collection, this one containing mainly biblical writings. According to James Robinson’s detective work on-site, manuscripts now in the possessions of the libraries of Chester Beatty and Martin Bodmer originally came from a collection of some thirty manuscripts, including archived letters, discovered in a large clay jar buried in a cemetery located near the ancient city of Pabau and the site of the main Pachomian monastery. Robinson suggests that first, the monastery’s important papers were kept in a jar, that then was “buried for safe keeping in the period of decline that followed the imposition of Chalcedonian orthodoxy” (James M. Robinson, “The Pachomian Monastic Library at the Chester Beatty Library and the Bibliothèque Bodmer,” *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 4 [1989] 26–40 at 28).

⁷²) Roberts, *Buried Books*, 13.

of Hamamieh in 1923.⁷³ It turned out to be a fourth- or fifth-century codex containing most of the Gospel of John in Coptic (John 2:12-20:20). For its interment the codex had been enveloped in cloth, just as a human body would be prepared for burial. As Petrie noted, the state of preservation of this manuscript showed that it had been damaged through intensive use.⁷⁴ He concluded that the manuscript “when too defective for regular reading... had been set aside, and buried reverently in the cemetery.”⁷⁵ Again, in doing so, the owners of this Christian manuscript may have been inspired by the practices of their Jewish neighbors. Thus at the end of its useful life, this badly-worn Johannine codex had received a proper burial, wrapped in cloth.

Whereas this Gospel of John manuscript was interred by itself, at Akhmim (ancient Panopolis) in Egypt a codex with sections of the *Gospel* and *Apocalypse of Peter*, *1 Enoch* and the *Martyrdom of Julian Anazarbus* (P.Cair. 10759) accompanied a person in the grave.⁷⁶ We find such burials

⁷³) Flinders Petrie, “The Discovery of the Papyrus,” in *The Gospel of St. John according to the Earliest Coptic Manuscript* (ed. and trans. Herbert Thompson; London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1924) ix.

⁷⁴) Ibid., x: “The condition of the papyrus showed that it had been greatly worn. The first three leaves were missing when it was folded up, and probably as many were lost from the end. The back leave was half broken away; a leaf near the end had come loose, and was laid in at about two-thirds through the volume. The rubbed surface of these latter leaves showed how much worn they had become by sliding on the reading desk. The height of the MS. indicates that it was for Church use, rather than a private copy.”

⁷⁵) Ibid.

⁷⁶) French archaeologists discovered the manuscript in 1886-7 in the cemetery of Akhmim, which had been used for Christian burials from the fifth to the fifteenth century. See U. Bouriant, “Fragments grecs du livre d’Énoch,” in: *Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission archéologique française au Caire*, IX 1 (Paris: Leroux, 1892) 93-147, at 93-4. Bouriant claimed that the codex came from a monk’s grave (ibid., 94), however, as Peter van Minnen correctly noted, “this seems no more than an inference from the content, not from indications in the tomb itself... Monks are not the only candidates for the ownership of early Christian texts in the Panopolis area” (Peter van Minnen, “The Akhmim *Gospel of Peter*,” in *Das Evangelium nach Petrus. Text, Kontexte, Intertexte* (ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas; Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 158; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007) 53-60 at 54, and idem, “The Greek *Apocalypse of Peter*,” in *The Apocalypse of Peter* (ed. J.N. Brenner and I. Czachesz; Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha 7; Leuven: Peeters, 2003) 15-39 at 17-9. Facsimile edition: O. von Gebhardt, *Das Evangelium und die Apocalypse des Petrus. Die neuentdeckten Bruchstücke nach einer Photographie der Handschriften zu Gizeh in Lichtdruck herausgegeben* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1893), and new edition by Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas, *Das Petrus-evangelium und die Petrusapokalypse: die griechischen Fragmente mit deutscher und englischer*

of books with persons among other groups as well. Jewish sages were often buried with books,⁷⁷ and Greeks likewise gave manuscripts as grave goods.⁷⁸ In traditional Egyptian religion, the deceased needed a copy of the Book of the Dead for reference and perhaps we should interpret later finds of books in graves as a continuation of that practice.⁷⁹

Some Christians also placed manuscripts in the walls of buildings. At the site of ancient Coptos in Upper Egypt, a Christian codex containing works of Philo of Alexandria turned up from a niche in a wall. As Jean Merell remarked, this codex was probably considered as a very precious object and therefore preserved in this way.⁸⁰ In these cases, the burial practices surrounding early Christian writings, canonical and non-canonical,

Übersetzung (Berlin/ New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004). Van Minnen dates different parts of the codex to the late 6th and first half of the 7th century ("The Akhmim *Gospel of Peter*," 54, and idem, "The Greek *Apocalypse of Peter*," 20-1, 23-4). It remains unclear when the codex was buried. The Tchacos codex, which contains the recently discovered Gospel of Judas and other writings, was reportedly discovered in a limestone casket placed in a catacomb in the hills of Jebel Qarara, see Herbert Krosney, *The Lost Gospel. The Quest for the Gospel of Judas Iscariot* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2006) chapter 1: "A Desert Grave," 9-27, esp. 10 and 24.

⁷⁷ See Habermann, "Genizah," 460: "There was an ancient custom of honoring a dead man by putting holy books next to his coffin."

⁷⁸ Burial of books was a wider practice that Christians continued: other instances (not Christian) of books buried with persons are a calligraphic roll with Homer's *Iliad* II, interred with a female mummy at Hawara, and a roll with Timotheus's *Persai* found in a coffin in the cemetery at Abusir (ancient Memphis), see, respectively A.H. Sayce in W.M Flinders Petrie, *Hawara, Biahmu and Arsinoe* (London: Field and Tuer, 1889) 24-8, and Peter van Minnen, "The Performance and Readership of the *Persai* of Timotheus," *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 43 (1997) 246-60 at 247-8.

⁷⁹ See also Roberts, *Buried Books*, 5.

⁸⁰ "Considééré sans doute aux temps anciens comme chose très précieuse, il avait été clos et muré dans une niche. Le son creux de la muraille à cet endroit éveilla l'attention. En l'ouvrant, on tira de leur secret deux traits de Philon d'Alexandrie." (Jean Merell, "Nouveaux Fragments du Papyrus 4," *Revue Biblique* XLVII [1938] 5). Also relevant for my survey into practices of disuse of Christian manuscripts is that sections of the gospels of Matthew and Luke appeared in the manuscript's binding. In the latter case, the writings had not been discarded on the trash heap, but were re-used in a practical fashion: "Le tout, du format connu, presque carré, in-8° des livres arabes, était relié dans une couverture de cuir, avec une languette et un cordon de cuir se ramenant sur la couverture. Dans sa cachette, le livre dut être comprimé, le mortier est comme incrusté à l'extérieur... A la suite du quarante-quatrième feuillet, en guise de bourre, je pense, et pour remplir la capacité de la couverture, se trouvaient plusieurs fragments de feuillets collés ensemble, l'un d'eux portant $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha$ $\text{Μ}\alpha\theta\theta\alpha\iota\omicron\nu$ et les autres, des fragments de saint Luc." (idem, 6).

clearly indicate the reverent treatment these manuscripts as physical objects received at the end of their lives.⁸¹

These examples from the literary and material world suffice here to illustrate the reverence for Christian books as sacred objects, which sharply contrast the disposal witnessed at Oxyrhynchus to which I now return. First, I will discuss several inadequate explanations for this striking fact and then I will offer my assessment of the situation.

Not Persecution, Lack of Canonicity, or Fragments Only

If, as we have seen, Christians hold their manuscripts in such high regard, how then should we explain the fact that their manuscripts ended up on city garbage heaps? I must first address several explanations for this phenomenon that upon closer scrutiny do not hold. One explanation could be that not Christians but others threw out the scriptures as trash. Grenfell mentioned this interpretation in passing in his first archaeological report. He suggested that the Christian manuscripts that Hunt and he had unearthed among the rubbish had belonged to a Christian, who had perished during the Diocletian persecution and whose books had subsequently been discarded.⁸² In this scenario, the manuscripts on the trash heaps are the sad reminders of the Christian persecutions.⁸³ However, this explanation

⁸¹ Whereas instances of burial, concealment, and disposal mark the end of a book's active life through deliberate deeds, a more inadvertent approach was to leave books languishing until they or the building collapsed, or until the site became deserted. Alternatively, one could store them away in a separate room. The White Monastery of Apa Shenoute, for instance, had a room full of out-of-use manuscripts, see Stephen Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* (CSCO 599; Subsidia 111; Leuven: Peeters, 2004) 1:22-23; also idem and Cornelia Römer, "The Library of the White Monastery in Upper Egypt," in *Spätantike Bibliotheken. Leben und Lesen in den frühen Klöstern Ägyptens* (ed. Harald Froschauer and Cornelia Eva Römer; Nilus 14; Vienna: Phoibos, 2008) 5-14, especially at 8.

⁸² "It is not improbable that they [i.e. *P.Oxy.* I 1 and 2] were the remains of a library belonging to some Christian who perished in the persecution during Diocletian's reign, and whose books were then thrown away" (Grenfell, "Excavations at Oxyrhynchus: First Season (1896-7)," 348).

⁸³ A modern example is the trash heap in the German town of Klandorf, where waste from Berlin was deposited. It was discovered recently by Israeli researcher Yaron Svoray that this waste included remains of looted possessions of Jews and synagogues, destroyed in the so-called "Kristallnacht" of November 9, 1938. See Rachel Nolan, "Klandorf Journal: Refuse Heap is Archive for Night of Hatred," *New York Times*, October 28, 2008, accessed

cannot be maintained for two reasons: first, the imperial edict required that Christian manuscripts be burned, not thrown away. Although it is easy to imagine government officials taking the rules less than stringent, my second reason completely disproves that manuscripts were discarded by others during the times of the persecution: chronology. The disposal of manuscripts as trash happened not only in the earliest centuries of our era, in the period of persecutions, but the presence of manuscripts that date to the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries found also at the Oxyrhynchite rubbish mounds means that they were copied and discarded after the persecution. What we have here is thus a continuous practice. This observation also means that I can eliminate another possible explanation: these Christian texts were not discarded by Muslims during the Islamic period.⁸⁴ If therefore the manuscripts were not thrown out by other people, only one interpretation remains as to who threw away the biblical books and I conclude that these manuscripts were discarded by their Christian owners themselves.

One might argue that these texts were thrown out because they were not considered as Sacred Scripture. In this respect a story in the *Paralipomena* to the Life of Pachomius is worth recounting. According to the narrative, Pachomius, alerted by a terrible smell to readers of unorthodox works, ordered “all the books of the heretics” to be cast into the Nile river.⁸⁵ If and

online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/28/world/europe/28germany.html?_r=1&ei=5070&emc=eta1.

⁸⁴ Grenfell and Hunt had no interest in excavating the rubbish mounds from the Arabic period. Nevertheless, during their first season, when they apparently dug all over the site, they reported finding 100 papyrus rolls written in Arabic, and ca. 300 pieces of “mediaeval Arabic paper” (Grenfell, “Excavations at Oxyrhynchus: First Season [1896-7],” 352). In their archaeological report for what turned out to be their final season at the site, they mention that “the excavations at Oxyrhynchus have now covered all the area which, in our opinion, is worth exploration. . . . The extensive excavations of the *sebakhin* show that the mounds near the village itself, which we have not tried, were formed in the Arabic period between about the seventh and the fourteenth centuries, when Behnesa was still an important town” (“Excavations at Oxyrhynchus: Sixth Season [1906-7],” 366). Arabic rule in Egypt began in 641. Sometime thereafter the site was abandoned, to be reoccupied again in the late ninth century, see Revel A. Coles, “Oxyrhynchus: A City and its Texts,” in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and its Texts* (ed. A.K. Bowman et al., London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2007) 3-16 at 14-5.

⁸⁵ *Paralipomena* β 7: ὄλα τὰ βιβλία τῶν αἰρετικῶν λαβόντες εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν ῥίψατε: “take all the books of the heretics and throw them into the river.” Edition: François Halkin, *Le corpus athénien de Saint Pachome* (avec une traduction française par André-Jean Festugière; Cahiers d’orientalisme 2; Genève: Patrick Cramer, 1982) 78. A different version of

how many books ended up floating in the Nile or in the Bar Yusuf Canal we will never know. But while the *Paralipomena* give the impression that heretical books should be done away with in a drastic manner, I have found no indication that at Oxyrhynchus manuscripts were disposed of mainly due to their canonical or non-canonical status. As a matter of fact, all sorts of Christian writings were found on these garbage heaps, from the *Gospel of Mary* to the *Gospel of Matthew*. And even a large amount of texts that now comprise the New Testament canon—or eighteen out of the twenty-seven New Testament writings—has turned up from these garbage mounds.⁸⁶ The same can be said for Septuagint manuscripts; holy scriptures for the early Christians.⁸⁷ Thus, contrary to what one might expect, the presence of biblical writings allow us to conclude that not only “heretical” writings were brought to the Oxyrhynchite city dumps.

At Oxyrhynchus, in certain instances a more practical approach was taken when it came to out-of-favor books. We observe this in a family that owned a copy of the *Kestoi* by Julius Africanus (P.Oxy. III 412).⁸⁸ Instead

the work, preserved in a manuscript in Florence, identifies these books as writings of Origen; see Armand Veilleux, *Pachomian Chronicles and Rules* (vol. 2 of *Pachomian Koinonia: The Lives, Rules, and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and his Disciples*; Cistercian Studies Series 46; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1981) 1 and 28-9. I owe the reference of Pachomius to Nicolas Marinides.

⁸⁶ At the time Epp published his SBL presidential address, this number was still seventeen (“portions of seventeen of the twenty-seven books that eventually formed the NT canon,” Epp, “Oxyrhynchus NT Papyri,” 12, reprinted in idem, *Perspectives*, 751). The publication of P.Oxy. LXXII 4845 has added 2 Cor to the list. The picture changes somewhat if we take into account a Coptic codex written in the Middle Egyptian dialect (P.Mil.Copti. 5), therefore presumably from the Oxyrhynchite area (according to its editor, Tito Orlandi in *Lettere di San Paolo in Copto-Ossirinchita* [ed. Tito Orlandi and Hans Quecke; P.Mil.Copti. 5; Milan: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino-La Goliardica, 1974] 1). This manuscript preserves sections of most Pauline letters, including Colossians and Ephesians (Rom. 14-16; 1 Cor. 1-16; 2 Cor. 6-12; Heb. 6-12; Gal. 2-3; Phil. 3-4; Eph. 1-5; 1 Thess. 1-5; 2 Thess. 1-3; Col. 1-3).

⁸⁷ Sections of the following books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Joshua, Judges, Esther, Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Amos, as well as Baruch, 6 Ezra, and the Wisdom of Solomon. This enumeration excludes quotations in amulets, homilies etc. In several instances, a Jewish scribe had copied the manuscript, e.g., two Genesis fragments, each with the Tetragrammaton: P.Oxy. IV 656 and P.Oxy. VII 1007. Presumably these were read in the Jewish community at Oxyrhynchus, see above.

⁸⁸ This is “a remarkably recherché work,” as Roger Bagnall typifies it (“An Owner of Literary Papyri,” *CP* 87 [1992] 137-40 at 139). A piece of that manuscript was re-used to hold the will of Hermogenes alias Eudaimon (P.Oxy. VI 907). Bagnall makes the case that this

of being thrown out, the roll was cut up and reused to contain a will. Later, when obsolete, that testament ended up on the trash. Thus even though in some cases owners of manuscripts may not have appreciated certain texts anymore, there is no evidence that this was especially so with what later became non-canonical scriptures. For that, they shared their final destination as trash with too many canonical texts.

Most textual remains from Oxyrhynchus consist of mere fragments, and so also the Christian papyri. Epp has indicated that “as a group . . . the Oxyrhynchus papyri are highly fragmentary and often preserve relatively few verses of New Testament text.”⁸⁹ Similarly, in his discussion of recently published New Testament papyri from Oxyrhynchus, Peter Head noted with disappointment that “the downside is that all material from Oxyrhynchus is very fragmentary.”⁹⁰ Indeed, few manuscripts contain larger portions of books.⁹¹ Does this then mean that only small pieces of New Testament manuscripts were discarded? Barker thought that the New Testament fragments found at the Oxyrhynchus garbage could best be explained as the damaged portions of manuscripts that had been repaired.⁹² This may indeed have been the case in some instances.⁹³ Alternatively, a manuscript page may have served as an amulet, such as P.Oxy. LXIV 4406 (5th/6th century) containing Matt 27:62-64 and 28:2-5; the original string is still affixed to the papyrus. Some pieces with biblical text were specifically manufactured as amulets and never formed part of a longer

literary manuscript was in the possession of Hermogenes’s family, together with two Homer manuscripts (P.Oxy. XI 1386 and 1392) and another “recherché” work, the *History of Sikyon* (P.Oxy. XI 1365) (*ibid.*, 137-40).

⁸⁹ Epp, “New Testament Papyri and the Transmission of the New Testament,” 319. See also *idem*, “The New Testament Papyri at Oxyrhynchus in Their Social and Intellectual Context,” 52 (republished in *idem*, *Perspectives*, 502).

⁹⁰ Peter M. Head, “Some recently published NT papyri from Oxyrhynchus: An Overview and Preliminary Assessment,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 51 (2000) 1-16, at 6.

⁹¹ Exceptions in New Testament manuscripts are, for instance, P.Oxy. II 208 + P.Oxy. XV 1781 (=P5); P.Oxy. IV 657 + PSI 1292 (= P13); P.Oxy. 4499 (= P115). Epp calculated that “only five [New Testament Papyri] preserve more than two dozen verses” (“New Testament Papyri and the Transmission of the New Testament,” 319). See also my discussion and appendix below.

⁹² Barker, “Codex, Roll, and Libraries,” 140n33.

⁹³ This could have been the case with P.Oxy. IV 654, the beginning of the Gospel of Thomas preserved on a reused roll. Assuming that the first sheet of a roll would be the most prone to damage, a repair of that very sheet makes sense. But I doubt that such a relatively inexpensive document would be carefully maintained, as a repair would suggest.

manuscript; they had always been small. Tommy Wasserman, for instance, has argued that P.Oxy. XXXIV 2684 (= P78), a broken bifolium of miniature format containing part of the Epistle of Jude, was such a charm, “produced, not reused, for the purpose of an amulet.”⁹⁴

An examination of the find from Oxyrhynchus, however, implies that in multiple cases large portions of manuscripts or even entire manuscripts had been discarded. These manuscripts either deteriorated (further) on the trash heap, which may explain their present fragmentary state, or they had been torn up before they were discarded. Indeed, in their archaeological reports, Grenfell and Hunt indicated repeatedly that manuscripts had been torn to pieces.⁹⁵ This seems to have happened not just to manuscripts with classical literature but also to those with Christian scriptures. Multiple yet fragmentary pages of a codex with the book of Revelation have been preserved (P.Oxy. LXVI 4499). In other instances, fragments of manuscripts that had become scattered in the rubbish mounds have been reunited in publication.⁹⁶ I have presented the evidence as a list in the appendix. Those examples of larger parts of manuscripts or reunited sections of individual manuscripts found scattered in the rubbish suggest that entire codices and

⁹⁴ Tommy Wasserman, “P78 (P.Oxy. XXXIV 2684): The Epistle of Jude on an Amulet?” in *New Testament Manuscripts. Their Texts and Their World* (ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas; Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 2; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 137-60, quote from 158. For a list of “items [that] may have come originally from codices before being redeployed as amulets,” see G.H.R. Horsley, “Reconstructing a Biblical Codex: The Prehistory of MPER *n.s.* XVII. 10 (P.Vindob. G 29 831),” in *Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses, Berlin 1995* (ed. Bärbel Kramer, et al.; APF Beiheft 3; Stuttgart–Leipzig: Teubner, 1997) 473-81, Appendix on 480-1. For an amulet cut up from a codex and thus “sekundär als Amulett verwendet” (however not from Oxyrhynchus, provenance unknown), see Peter Arzt-Grabner and Michael Ernst’s analysis of P.Bingen 16: “PS., 43, 21-24.27 und PS., 44, 1-2 LXX,” in *Papyri in honorem Johannis Bingen octogenarii* (ed. Henri Melaerts; Studia varia Bruxellensia 5; Leuven: Peeters, 2000) 79-84, quote from 84.

⁹⁵ “Before being condemned to the rubbish-heap, the papyrus had, as usual, been torn up.” (Grenfell and Hunt, “Excavations at Oxyrhynchus: Fifth Season [1905-6],” 361).

⁹⁶ Grenfell and Hunt write about this in their archaeological reports, noting “stray pieces belonging to the same texts . . . discovered some distance away.” (Grenfell and Hunt, “Excavations at Oxyrhynchus: Fifth Season [1905-6],” 362). They also attempted to keep together papyri found at the same place: “Each lot found by a pair, man and boy, had to be kept separate; for the knowledge that papyri are found together is frequently of the greatest importance for determining their date, and since it is inevitable that so fragile a material should sometimes be broken in the process of extricating it from the closely packed soil, it is imperative to keep together, as far as possible, fragments of the same document.” (Grenfell, “Excavations at Oxyrhynchus: First Season [1896-7],” 349).

rolls with Christian writings had been thrown away. I conjecture that also in many instances where we have now only a small fragment remaining, the entire book had been discarded. Probably, or at least in some cases, these manuscripts were discarded after having been torn apart.

Ecclesiastical leaders frowned upon cutting biblical books in pieces—itsself sure evidence that manuscripts were shredded. A canon of the Quinisext Council, held in the Palace of Trullo in 692, threatens to punish any destruction of Christian manuscripts with a year-long excommunication. The same canon, however, also provides an important exception for books that had been damaged. It reads:

About it not being allowed for anyone whatsoever to destroy, or cut in pieces, or to hand over to the book dealers, or to the so-called perfumers, or to anyone else whatsoever for destruction books of the Old and New Testament and of our holy and eminent preachers and teachers; unless it has been rendered useless completely either by moths, or by water, or in another manner.⁹⁷

Presumably reacting to a current situation, the council members thus disapproved of the destruction of books, to be understood especially in the context of magical practices with biblical texts. At the same time, however, they also apparently approved of the cutting up and destroying of badly damaged manuscripts; at least they acknowledged this as a matter of fact. An explicit reference to discarding such damaged book, for sure the next step in this process, still lacks.

The Death of Codices

Throughout the centuries, manuscripts not only fell prey to the proverbial bookworms, perished in natural hazards inflicted by fires and earthquakes, or expired as the result of such human doings as war or censorship.⁹⁸ Based

⁹⁷) Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ἐξεῖναι τινὶ τῶν ἀπάντων βιβλία τῆς Παλαιᾶς καὶ Καινῆς Διαθήκης, τῶν τε ἀγίων καὶ ἐγκρίτων ἡμῶν κηρύκων καὶ διδασκάλων, διαφθεῖρειν, ἢ κατατέμνειν, ἢ τοῖς βιβλιοκαπήλοις, ἢ τοῖς λεγομένοις μυρρησῶις, ἢ ἄλλω τινὶ τῶν ἀπάντων πρὸς ἀφανισμόν ἐκδιδόναι: εἰ μὴ τι ἄρα τέλεον, εἴτε ὑπὸ σητῶν, ἢ ὕδατος, ἢ ἐτέρω τρόπῳ ἀχρηιωθῆι. Edition: Périclès-Pierre Joannou, “VI Concile in Trullo (691),” in *Les canons des conciles œcuméniques (II-IX^e s.)* (Vol. 1.1 of idem, *Discipline générale antique*; Fonti 9; Grottaferrata: Tipografia Italo-Orientale “S. Nilo,” 1962) 98-241 at 206-7.

⁹⁸) Bemoaning “lost texts” in the Introduction to the edition of the recently found Gospel of Judas, Rodolphe Kasser attributes the loss of ancient manuscripts to “such hazards as

on the evidence I collected, it seems that manuscripts in antiquity itself already faced another, equally if not more threatening fate: discarding.

As garbological studies point out, each piece of trash, and thus each disposed papyrus, has its own history of discarding, resulting from human choices. Besides wear and tear, factors such as changes in education, reading preferences, and language, may have played a role in the decision to part with a book.⁹⁹ Only in rare instances, we can detect the final use of a papyrus fragment. This happened with a Homer manuscript from Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. LXVII 4633). In order to understand its last use, I should mention that when dug up from trash heaps, papyri consist of crumpled-up, dry lumps. Before they can be deciphered, they have to be straightened out. This is done by applying moisture to make the papyrus supple again and then pulling and rubbing it in shape.¹⁰⁰ Hunt even advised that this was best done with one's fingers.¹⁰¹ Whether it was the vapors let loose when this Homer piece was dampened or more substantial organic remains stuck to it, the conservation of that papyrus must have been a surprisingly unpleasant task, for its editor, J. Spooner, notes that this text was last used as toilet paper—or what I would call 'toilet papyrus.'¹⁰² In most instances—fortunately, perhaps, for conservators—the circumstances surrounding the disuse of manuscripts are less apparent.

In some cases, I find it less surprising that a papyrus with a New Testament passage ended up among the rubbish. P.Oxy. II 209 (=P10), for example, contains a school exercise with the first seven verses of the apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans and some scribbles underneath in a documentary hand. In the edition of the text, Grenfell and Hunt noted that "the

war, natural catastrophes, and fires" as well as "the meticulous ferocity of political or ecclesiastical censors" (Rodolphe Kasser, "Introduction. Lost and Found: The History of Codex Tchacos," in *The Gospel of Judas together with the Letter of Peter to Philip, James, and a Book of Allogenes from Codex Tchacos* [ed. and trans. Rodolphe Kasser and Gregor Wurst et al.; Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2007] 1-25 at 1).

⁹⁹ Roberts, *Buried Books*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ See Jörg Graf and Myriam Krutzsch, eds., *Ägypten lesbar machen: die klassische Konservierung/Restaurierung von Papyri und neuere Verfahren: Beiträge des 1. Internationalen Workshops der Papyrusrestauratoren*, Leipzig, 7.-9. September 2006 (APFBeiheft 24; Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008) and Leyla Lau-Lamb, "Advanced Papyrological Information System Guidelines for Conservation of Papyrus," <http://www.lib.umich.edu/pap/conservation/guidelines.html>. See also Hunt's memorandum, "The Dampening out and Flattening of Papyri," in P.Oxy. L (1983) vi.

¹⁰¹ Hunt, "The Dampening out and Flattening of Papyri," in P.Oxy. L (1983) vi.

¹⁰² P.Oxy. LXVII 4633: "Scholia Minora to II 277-318."

papyrus was found tied up with a contract dated in 316 A.D., and other documents of the same period.”¹⁰³ This writing exercise had belonged to a private archive with contracts and other documents, and was discarded as such.¹⁰⁴

Other scriptural papyri from the Oxyrhynchite garbage, however, give a different impression and appear to have come from ecclesiastical milieus; an indication that the discarding of biblical scriptures happened not only to manuscripts intended for private use. One such manuscript, P.Oxy. XV 1780¹⁰⁵ (= P39), is a page of a large and beautifully executed papyrus codex containing John 8:14-22, probably dating to the third century.¹⁰⁶ Its execution and production make this piece a good test case. Unlike the clumsily written school exercise, the exquisite professional handwriting and large format of this fragment suggest that this manuscript had more standing.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the size of the letters and spaces in between words make this

¹⁰³ In my article, “A New Testament Papyrus and Its Owner: P.Oxy. II 209/P10, an Early Christian School Exercise from the Archive of Leonides,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* (forthcoming, 2010), I present a full discussion of this papyrus and the identification of the archive. Grenfell and Hunt dated the cursive hand “with certainty to the first half of the fourth century A.D., and the fact that the papyrus was found tied up with a contract dated in 316 A.D., and other documents of the same period, tends to fix the date more precisely. There is no reason to think that the uncial writing is appreciably earlier than the cursive.” (P.Oxy. II 209, 8).

¹⁰⁴ Other examples of less appealing manuscripts, e.g. P.Oxy. III 402 (1903) (= P9), containing 1 John 4:11-12, 15-17. Grenfell and Hunt, P.Oxy. III 402, 2: “written in a clear semi-uncial hand towards the end of the fourth or in the fifth century. . . . The text is curiously corrupt, considering its early date, and bears evidence of extremely careless copying.”

¹⁰⁵ This papyrus has been in the news recently. Sotheby’s in London had hoped to auction the fragment for an estimated £ 200,000-300,000 on December 3, 2008, but it failed to sell. This same papyrus sold on 20 June 2003 for \$400,000, which was “still by far the highest price ever paid at public sale for any early Christian manuscript,” so the Sotheby’s website, http://www.sothebys.com/app/live/lot/LotDetail.jsp?lot_id=159503126 (accessed January 6, 2009).

¹⁰⁶ Based on palaeography, Hunt dated the manuscript to the fourth century or earlier: “The handwriting, a handsome specimen of the ‘biblical’ type, large and upright, is unlikely to be later than the fourth century” (P.Oxy. XV, 7). So also Joseph van Haelst, *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens* (Papyrologie 1; Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1976) nr. 448. Subsequent scholars have pushed the date back into the third century: Kurt Aland, *Studien zur Überlieferung des Neuen Testaments und seines Textes* (Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung 2; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967) 120. Aland reports that Roberts and Skeat, whom he consulted, suggested a date in the first half of the third century (“Roberts/Skeat: 3. Jhdt., 1. Hälfte.” *ibid.*, 105n4).

¹⁰⁷ The fragment measures 25.6 x 8 cm, upper and lower margin are preserved. This allows

manuscript well-suited and intended for public reading.¹⁰⁸ We should therefore imagine it not as a privately owned book but rather as a codex that was read from in a liturgical setting. This is not the only such manuscript from Oxyrhynchus. There are fragments of other, similarly (though perhaps less elaborately) produced biblical books from Oxyrhynchus.¹⁰⁹ The question remains: how do manuscripts like this become discarded as garbage?

Let me offer a cluster of contextualizations and explanations for this phenomenon. First, an important observation is that Christians at Oxyrhynchus are using the same methods of disposing of manuscripts as the other inhabitants of the city for their texts.¹¹⁰ Indeed, Christians share these discarding practices when it comes to their sacred manuscripts with their neighbors of different religions, Jews, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. In view of Christian rhetoric about distinctiveness so abundant and strong in literary texts,¹¹¹ these shared practices are significant and nuance our

for a reconstruction of the original format as measuring 26 x 16 cm, with 11-15 letters per line (Aland, *Repertorium*, 1:262).

¹⁰⁸ So also Comfort and Barrett: "The large and beautiful calligraphy shows that this manuscript was probably produced by a professional scribe for church use" (*The Complete Text of the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts*, ed. Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1999] 137). In comparing the remains of the classical library and contemporary New Testament manuscripts from Oxyrhynchus, Barker mentions P.Oxy. XV 1780 as "an exception, both in letter height (c. 5 mm) and the calligraphic nature of the lettering. The Library owner would have considered this book as an expensive deluxe copy. Both the size and the calligraphic nature of the hand suggest that this codex may have been used in a public reading context" (Barker, "Codex, Roll," 139).

¹⁰⁹ See, for instance, a third-century calligraphic roll of Genesis (P.Oxy. IX 1166), Job in calligraphic handwriting (PSI X 1163, fourth cent.), the Gospel of Matthew (P.Oxy. I 1 = P1, third cent.); manuscripts of the Gospel of John in biblical uncial script (P.Oxy. LXXI 4804 = P120, fourth cent., and P.Oxy. LXXI 4806 = P122, fourth/fifth cent.), or a manuscript of the Acts of the Apostles (P.Oxy. LXVI 4496 = P112, fifth cent.).

¹¹⁰ Julian Krüger provides an overview and discussion of the literary manuscripts with classical authors from Oxyrhynchus in his *Oxyrhynchus in der Kaiserzeit: Studien zur Topographie und Literaturrezeption* (Europäische Hochschulschriften III, 441; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1990). See also William Johnson, *Bookrolls and Scribes in Oxyrhynchus* (Studies in Book and Print Culture; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), who demonstrates how carefully such rolls were manufactured.

¹¹¹ Karen King's work on Christian polemics is especially helpful here. As King (*What is Gnosticism?* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003, esp. 22-3) has analyzed insightfully, Christian polemicists rhetorically created differences whereas in the practice of everyday life the differences were smaller than the agreements.

understanding of early Christian attitudes towards their most sacred artifacts.

As mentioned above, the Oxyrhynchites often tore up rolls or codices before disposing of them, a practice that the people discarding biblical manuscripts also seem to have shared with their neighbors of different religions and that seventh-century church fathers apparently took for granted. In the case of these biblical manuscripts, I suggest that this deliberate destruction may also have had a symbolic function, namely of desecralizing the sacred scripture. The treatment of damaged icons, although occurring slightly later than our trashed Oxyrhynchus manuscripts, may serve as an analogy for this destruction of sacred objects. Antony Eastmond brings up this topic in a discussion on icons, writing:

Views differed as to how damaged icons should be treated. . . . One interpretation, promoted by John of Damascus among others, argued that damaged icons should be destroyed. In this view, the presence of damage meant that the image was no longer a true representation of the prototype, and so it could no longer function as an icon: the link between image and prototype was severed.¹¹²

I consider it quite likely that people, in this case early Christians from Oxyrhynchus, purposely shredded sacred scriptures when they discarded them in order to definitely break the link between sacred text and sacred manuscript.

Moreover, it seems to me that (Pseudo-)Pionius's declaring that he had transcribed a badly damaged manuscript and Jerome's comments on the maintenance of the Caesarean library allow us to discern among the Oxyrhynchite garbage not just evidence of discarding literary texts for lack of interest and whatever other reasons, but also a lively milieu of scribes that copied these manuscripts, canonical and non-canonical, and threw out the old exemplars.

¹¹² Antony Eastmond, "Between Icon and Idol: The Uncertainty of Imperial Images," in *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium. Studies Presented to Robin Cormack* (ed. Antony Eastmond and Liz James; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) 75-83 at 75. See John Damascene, Oratio 2:19 in Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* (Patristische Texte und Studien 17; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1975) 3:118. In translation: "That I do not venerate matter is plain. For once the pattern of the cross is destroyed, and (say) it is made of wood, then I will consign the wood to the fire, and so with images," Andrew Louth, transl., *Three Treatises on the Divine Images. St. John of Damascus* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003) 75.

Finally, I suggest that we observe here a behavior that garbologists have detected in their studies of modern trash and human conduct as well. Garbologists did research in which they examined garbage bins while at the same time they also held interviews with the people who had discarded the trash. They found that what these people said was not what they actually did. For instance, the subjects claimed that they ate more healthy food than they did in reality based on their garbage,¹¹³ and that they underreported their alcohol consumption by 40-60%.¹¹⁴ Rathje described this function of trash as “a kind of tattle-tale, setting the record straight.”¹¹⁵ Analogously, although we cannot interview the Oxyrhynchites anymore, if we could, I doubt that the owners of the beautiful Johannine codex would have mentioned or admitted that they had discarded it at the garbage heap. Thus despite all the evidence for the physical holiness of Christian manuscripts, at Oxyrhynchus in late antiquity Christians deliberately discarded entire manuscripts with sacred scriptures as trash.

Appendix: Entire Manuscripts Discarded

- P.Oxy. LXVI 4499 (= P115) comprises 26 fragments from nine different folia of a late-third or early-fourth century papyrus codex of the book of Revelation.¹¹⁶ It cannot be determined whether it contained just Revelation

¹¹³ “Individuals in their self-reports are minimizing the volume of certain kinds of food intake—a phenomenon that might be called the Lean Cuisine Syndrome. People consistently underreport the amount of regular soda, pastries, chocolate, and fats that they consume; they consistently overreport the amount of fruit and diet soda” (Rathje and Murphy, *Rubbish!* 70).

¹¹⁴ “With respect to alcohol intake, for example, most people underreport their drinking by 40 to 60 percent...” (Rathje and Murphy, *Rubbish!* 71).

¹¹⁵ “A third point about garbage is that it is not an assertion but a physical fact—and thus may sometimes serve as a useful corrective. Human beings have over the centuries left many accounts describing their lives and civilizations. Many of these are little more than self-aggrandizing advertisements.... Historians are understandably drawn to written evidence...but garbage has often served as a kind of tattle-tale, setting the record straight.” (Rathje and Murphy, *Rubbish!* 11-12).

¹¹⁶ Edited by J. Chapa, P.Oxy. LXVI 4499 (1999) 11-35. The fragments preserve the text of Rev 2:1-3, 13-15, 27-29; 3:10-12; 5:8-9; 6:5-6; 8, 3-8, 11; 9:5, 7-16, 18; 10:4, 8; 11:5, 8-15, 18; 12:5, 8-10, 12-17; 13, 1-3, 6-16, 18; 14:3, 5-7, 10-11, 14-15, 18; 15:1, 4-7. For a

or also additional writings.¹¹⁷ Given that large parts of this codex have been preserved and most of the pieces, “fragments (e) to (z) come from consecutive pages,”¹¹⁸ it is unlikely that these fragments constituted repairs and therefore I conclude that the entire manuscript had been discarded.

- P.Oxy. II 208 (1899) and P.Oxy. XV 1781 (1922) (= P5) together belong to a third-century, single-quire codex of the Gospel of John. P.Oxy. II 208, a bifolium with sections from chapters 1 and 20, formed one of the outer pages of the codex and allows for a reconstruction of the quire as consisting of 25 bifolia.¹¹⁹ The second fragment, P.Oxy. XV 1781, contains sections from chapter 16, and should be ordered as pages 41-2.¹²⁰ If we just had the outer pages of this codex, an argument could have been made that only these had been replaced because of wear and tear, as those sections of a book are more prone to damage. However, from the fact that also sections from the inner part of the quire have surfaced, I infer that the whole manuscript was thrown out.
- P.Oxy. IV 657 (1904) and PSI XII 1292 (1951) (= P13) are fragments containing 11 columns of Hebrews (Hebr 2:14-5:5; 10:8-22; 10:29-11:13; 11:28-12:17). The biblical text is written on the verso of a roll and dates to the third or fourth century.¹²¹ The recto features sections from an epitome of Livy in Latin (published as P.Oxy. IV 668). It is clear from the preserved column numbers on top of the pages that the text was preceded by another writing.¹²² In a study of ink-dipping and other scribal features, Peter Head

detailed text critical examination of this papyrus, see David C. Parker, “A New Oxyrhynchus Papyrus of Revelation: P115 (P. Oxy 4499),” *New Testament Studies* 46 (2000) 159-74.

¹¹⁷ Chapa, P.Oxy. LXVI 4499, 11.

¹¹⁸ Chapa, P.Oxy. LXVI 4499, 12-3.

¹¹⁹ P.Oxy. II 208 contains sections from chapters 1 and 20 of the Gospel of John, and thus “our sheet was very nearly the outermost of a large quire” (Grenfell and Hunt, P.Oxy. II 209, 1). Comfort, *Encountering*, 60, commented: “probably on the first and last quires of a manuscript containing only the Gospel of John.” This is incorrect, as this was a single quire codex and thus the sheet contains the beginning and end of the quire.

¹²⁰ Kurt Aland, *Biblische Papyri. Altes Testament, Neues Testament, Varia, Apokryphen* (vol. 1 of *Repertorium der griechischen christlichen Papyri*; Patristische Texte und Studien 18; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1976) 221.

¹²¹ Another interesting opistograph roll preserves on the recto the end of Exodus (Ex 40: 26-32, with subscription; P.Oxy. VIII 1075) and on the verso the beginning of Revelation (Rev 1:4-7; P.Oxy. VIII 1079). This remains, however, only a fragment of 15.1 x 9.8 cm, with a few verses of each book.

¹²² So Grenfell and Hunt, P.Oxy. IV 657, 36. Preserved are columns 47-50, 63-65 and 67-69.

and M. Warren concluded that this roll was not a professionally made copy.¹²³ Together with the unusual format (at least, from a Christian book perspective) and the fact that the roll was an opistograph, this suggests that the manuscript was intended for private use and thus not likely for public reading. The large sections of the text preserved in the garbage indicate, again, that this was not a damaged section that had been repaired but rather that the entire roll had been discarded.

- P.Oxy. XXIV 2384 (1957) and PSI 419 and 420¹²⁴ (= P70) constitute parts of a third or early-fourth century papyrus codex of the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 2:13-16; 2:22-3:1; 11:26-27; 12:4-5; 24:3-6, 12-15). In this case, the extant portions cover the beginning (chapter 2 and 3), middle (chapter 11 and 12) and end (chapter 24) of the manuscript. I assume therefore that the entire codex was discarded. Probably it had been shredded, which caused the pieces to disperse—to be discovered centuries later by British and Italian excavators on separate expeditions.
- P.Oxy. XXXIV 2683 (1968)¹²⁵ and P.Oxy. LXIV 4405 (1997)¹²⁶ (= P77) complement each other and preserve the text of Matt 23:30-39. They come from a copy of the Gospel of Matthew in codex format, dated to the late second century.¹²⁷

¹²³ Peter M. Head and M. Warren, "Re-inking the Pen: Evidence from P Oxy 657 (P13) Concerning Unintentional Scribal Errors," *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997) 466-73.

¹²⁴ Mario Naldini, "Nuovi frammenti del Vangelo di Matteo," *Prometheus* I (1975): 195-200; the edition of CNR 419 and 420, containing 15 fragmentary verses of Matthew's Gospel, Matt 2: 13-16, 22-3:1 (fragment A) and 24: 3-6, 12-15 (fragment B). On the basis of codicology and handwriting, Naldini argued that these two fragments belonged to the same codex as P.Oxy. XXIV 2384, edited by E.G. Turner (*ibid.*, 195-6).

¹²⁵ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*, 23: "part of a leaf of a codex of Matthew in an elegant hand assigned by the editors to the late second century; it also has what was or became a standard system of chapter division as well as punctuation and breathings."

¹²⁶ Ed. J. David Thomas, P.Oxy. LXIV 4405 (1997) 9-11.

¹²⁷ A third, very similar papyrus, P.Oxy. LXIV 4403, has Matt 13:55-56; 14:3-5. David Thomas, its editor, based on the similarity in codex size and handwriting, cautiously suggested that "the possibility must be envisaged that both are from the same codex" (P.Oxy. LXIV 4403, 6). If these papyri did belong to one codex, then the fact that fragments from different sections in the codex have been preserved, makes a good case that the entire manuscript had been discarded. The identification, however, is not fully certain: Thomas noted that the letters in P.Oxy. LXIV 4403 are slightly smaller and that the section does not contain iotacisms, present in the other papyrus. Leaving the matter basically undecided, he concluded: "it seems to me safest to treat the papyri as from two different codices, without

- Perhaps two late-third-century Pauline fragments from Oxyrhynchus also once belonged to the same codex, as Hunt already suggested with caution, for these were found together:¹²⁸ P.Oxy. VII 1008 (= P15), containing 1 Cor 7:18-8:4, and P.Oxy. VII 1009 (1910) (= P16), with Phil 3:10-17; 4:2-8.

These fragments come from writings now adopted in the New Testament canon. The same pattern can also be observed for other writings. For instance, individual fragments have also been reconstructed as parts of codices of Hermas:

- P.Oxy. L 3526 (Herms 34.3-35.2) and P.Oxy. IX 1172 (Herms 51.4-10) once both formed parts of the same fourth-century papyrus codex. P.Oxy. IX 1172, an almost complete page of 19.2 by 12.9 cm, contains the beginning of the Parables. The pagination, still intact, identifies this sheet as pages 70 and 71, and if it contained the rest of the parables, then the original codex was a fairly substantial book.

excluding the possibility that they may be from the same codex" (Thomas, P.Oxy. LXIV 4403, 6). On the other hand, for Philip Comfort, "it is far more likely, than not, that all three belong to the same codex" ("New Reconstructions and Identifications of New Testament Papyri," *NT* 41 [1999] 214-30 at 217). It happens not infrequently in manuscripts that the writing becomes smaller towards the end of the codex, see Turner, *Typology*, 74.

¹²⁸ "Probably this fragment... belonged to the same codex as 1008, with which it was found" (P.Oxy. VII 1009, 8). Hunt points to differences in the size of the letters and ink color, and concludes that letter forms, page layout, and punctuation are very similar (*ibid.*). Van Haelst (Van Haelst 524, page 528) observed: "Peut-être le même codex que celui du P.Oxy. 1008" and Aland (*Studien*, 112, re P16) summarized: "in Duktus, Format, Zeilenzahl und Zeilenlänge ähnlich P15, Schrift allerdings etwas schmaler und dicker im Strich." See also Comfort, "New Reconstructions and Identifications," 215: "Since these manuscripts most likely are from the same codex, it only stands to reason that they were originally part of a Pauline corpus." Hunt's brief comments interspersed in the descriptions of P.Oxy. VII 1008, 1009 and 1011 give an impression about the unearthing of the Pauline papyri. He makes the tantalizingly interesting remark that the two Pauline fragments "were discovered at the same time" as parts of a Callimachus papyrus codex, published as P.Oxy. VII 1011 (Hunt, P.Oxy. VII 1008, 4). Should we infer from it that Callimachus's *Aetia* and *Iambi* and Pauline papyri had belonged to the same library or collection? At another place, in the introduction to the Callimachus fragments, he informs that this happened "in the winter of 1905-6" (Hunt, P.Oxy. 1011, 15). From the excavation reports we know that that was one of the most prolific excavation seasons.

- P.Oxy. XV 1783 (Hermas 39.2-3) and P.Oxy. XV 1828 (Hermas 65.3, 5) are two fragments that both are written on parchment and come from a codex. The handwriting situates the pieces in the third or early fourth century. Silvio Mercati first suggested that they may have belonged to the same codex.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Silvio G. Mercati, "Passo del Pastore di Erma riconosciuto nel Pa. Oxy. 1828," *Biblica* 6 (1925) 336-8 at 338. Mercati identified the section as Hermas, which Grenfell and Hunt had not realized, probably due to the piece's small size and fragmentary text. Since Grenfell and Hunt printed their editions of these two Hermas fragments in the same volume (P.Oxy. XV), it is possible that both these vellum pieces came from the same tin box and thus the same general location in the garbage.