The Word of God

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In 1984 and 1986, the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, with generous help from the Friends of the Library and from P.J. Carroll Ltd., purchased a substantial number of leaves which had been missing from the manuscript of the *Diatessaron Commentary* acquired by Sir Chester Beatty in 1956.

This purchase, by which the Trustees added significantly to the collection, prompted the idea of holding an exhibition devoted to the Chester Beatty Biblical manuscripts, which are surely this Library's greatest treasure.

My colleague, Dr Patricia Donlon, Reference Librarian and Curator of Western Manuscripts, collaborated with me in the mounting of the exhibition, and has given constant help at all stages of the preparation of this catalogue.

Special thanks are due to Professor Sean Freyne, of Trinity College, for reading of the draft and for helpful comments and suggestions.

I am grateful to Dr Bernard Meehan, Keeper of Manuscripts, Trinity College Library, for his efficient help in securing reproductions of the Trinity Uncial Palimpsest, which is here reproduced by kind permission of the Board of Trinity College, Dublin.

Much use was made of the work of Sir Frederic Kenyon, Dom Louis Leloir, O.S.B., Professor B. Metzger and Kirsopp Lake; and also of the relevant sections of *The Cambridge history of the Bible*. Quotations from the Bible in English are taken from the *Revised Standard Version*.

I also wish to acknowledge the co-operation of Mr Bill Bolger of the Department of Visual Communication, National College of Art and Design, for assistance in preparation of this catalogue and publicity material. Calligraphy for the catalogue and for exhibition is the work of Br T. O'Neill. Photographs for the catalogue were made by David Davison of Pieterse Davison International.

W.L.
There are many manuscripts of the Bible in libraries throughout the world; the number of them, in fact, runs into several thousands. However, of these, the manuscripts which are of real significance, those on which scholars principally rely in their efforts to recover the original text of the Bible — The Word of God — are very much fewer in number. Among those crucially important manuscripts, a special place is held by the papyrus texts acquired by Sir Chester Beatty.

These precious documents alone would suffice to place his library among the great libraries of the world, alongside such institutions as the Vatican Library and the British Museum, and so to make Dublin a major centre for the study of the Bible. These are certainly the most important manuscripts in this Library and among the most precious possessions of the people of Ireland, to whom Sir Chester Beatty bequeathed them.

To explain the significance of these manuscripts and to place them in the context of the history of the Bible, as illustrated by the very various biblical materials in the Chester Beatty Library, is the purpose of the present exhibition.

The Bible, which perhaps we tend to think of as one book, is in fact a collection of books composed over a long period of time. The word "Bible" itself — from the Greek τὰ βιβλία, "the Books" — implies as much, and and when we examine the contents of a copy of the Bible, we find a collection of works of a wide variety: history, law, poetry, proverbial wisdom and so on. At the same time a comparison of different editions will reveal various differences in content. The Bible as used traditionally by Catholics and Orthodox Christians contains more constituent books than the Bible of Protestant Christians, while those books which they have in common are arranged in differing order. Again, examination of the notes in a modern Bible will show there is apparently considerable disagreement among the old copies on which the modern text is based. How was this collection of books compiled, and why did these variations arise? Will it ever be possible to recover the original and authentic text of the Bible, of the Word of God? These questions naturally suggest themselves and
answered by reference to a history which is well illustrated by the collection of Sir Chester Beatty.

The oldest part of the Bible is of course that which constitutes the whole of scripture for the Jewish people. In the course of some two thousand years, from the days of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, through the conquest and settlement of the Holy Land, the rise and fall of the two Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the mass deportation of Jews from Palestine, known as the Babylonian captivity, up to the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70, the Jews produced a literature of very considerable bulk. For much of this time, in fact up to the Captivity, the religious life of Jews was centred on the cult of sacrifice and especially the rites of the great Temple at Jerusalem. The deportation of a great part of the population in the sixth century B.C. disrupted this sacrificial cult, and even though the Temple was rebuilt in 516 B.C., Jews were thereafter in increasing numbers to be found living in communities outside the Holy Land, and so quite unable to take part regularly, if at all, in the restored cult. The religious life of the great majority of Jews would from now onwards centre on the synagogue, a local association for prayer and study of Jewish Law and customs. Thus there came about an urgent concern to identify those books in the national literature which represented an authoritative witness to authentic Judaism, a concern felt among communities anxious to define and preserve what was important in their communal and religious life in the face of defeat, loss of national independence and pressure to assimilate to non-Jewish ways of life. In the course of some five hundred years there crystallised a general agreement among Jews as to which books might or might not be recited at public worship or used as sources of law. It is in fact to these synagogues that we owe the concept of a canon (Greek κανών “rule” or “list”), a list of authentic holy books.

The Pentateuch, i.e. the five books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, traditionally ascribed to Moses, was the first part of the Bible to be accorded sacred status. These books contain some of the oldest material in the Bible, narratives and genealogies of the Israelite people, together with its codes of law, civil and religious, some of which may have been committed to writing before 1000 B.C., though probably edited and compiled later. This remains the only part of the Bible recognised by the Samaritans, a small community which adopted Judaism in the 6th century B.C. The Samaritans were not admitted to membership of the Jewish community and so were isolated from the subsequent development of Jewish literature.

The prophecies and moral exhortations of the prophets who spoke for God in the days of the Israelite kingdoms were preserved either in writing by the prophets themselves or by their followers and pupils. These works
must have been added to the books of authentic Judaism after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

The book known to us as the *Psalms*, traditionally associated with King David (c. 1012-972 B.C.), was in all probability the hymn-book of the second Temple, i.e. the Temple restored in 516 B.C., and contains much which must have been composed after the Captivity; indeed the whole book may not have reached its present form until the 3rd century B.C.

Other types of literature, poems, novels, historical works, ethical treatises were also added in later times. In fact, a final list of sacred books generally accepted by Jews was not arrived at quickly, but only in the course of a long period during which there was a degree of divergence among Jewish communities as to which books were to be recognised. The destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by the Romans in A.D. 70 reinforced for Jews the importance of the synagogue as the focus of their religious life and hence of the written documents of their faith. The final crystallisation of the text of the Bible as recognised by orthodox Jews is traditionally ascribed to a synod of learned rabbis held at Jamnia in Palestine in about the year A.D. 100.

Bitterness at the crushing defeat inflicted by the Gentiles caused Jews to turn more and more from the use of any languages other than their ancestral Hebrew and Aramaic for purposes of worship. In this way the languages of the synagogue came to be almost exclusively Hebrew and Aramaic.

**The Septuagint**

As a result, the great Greek translation of the Bible, known as the *Septuagint*, which had been made for the benefit of the largely Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria ceased to be used by the Jews themselves, as more and more they turned their backs on the culture of the Graeco-Roman world. This Greek version was also the Bible of the young Christian Church and it is possible that the use of the Septuagint by Christians for controversial purposes may have impelled the Jews to abandon it, as being too free a translation, and to seek to defend their interpretation of Jewish tradition by appeal to the Hebrew text. It is to the Septuagint translation that we owe the preservation of certain books (e.g. I & II *Maccabees*, *Ecclesiasticus*) which were at this time excluded from the Jewish canon. The Septuagint was to survive in use as the Old Testament of the Bible used by the Greek Church; and the books which it contains, in various subsequent translations, were inherited by all Christian Churches until the Reformation, when the Protestant Reformers, anxious for the verbal accuracy of their translations, went back to the Hebrew text. In the process, books included in the Septuagint, i.e., the canon of the Alexandrian Jews, but excluded from the Hebrew canon, came to be relegated to a secondary section, usually referred to as "the Apocrypha", and not normally included in Protestant Bibles. Thus, the Old Testament of a Protestant Bible will usually contain fewer books than those of an Orthodox or Catholic Bible. The order of contents common to all will also differ for this reason.
It is not known when the Bible was first translated into Latin: by the latter half of the 4th century A.D. the version then current in the Western Roman Empire was felt to be unsatisfactory by reason of the great divergences between the various copies. Pope Damasus (366-384) consequently commissioned St Jerome (c.340-420) one of the most learned men of his day, to revise the Latin translation. Jerome’s revision of the New Testament version was published in 384. For the Old Testament, Jerome was not satisfied simply with revision of a translation made from the Septuagint, but preferred to go back to the original Hebrew, where this existed. In this work he was aided by a number of Jewish Rabbis. As Jerome said, “Let him who would challenge aught in this translation ask the Jews”.

Jerome’s translation established itself as the standard version in Western Europe. The title Vulgate (Latin, editio vulgata “common, standard, edition”) is said to have been first used by the English Franciscan Roger Bacon, in the 13th century. The Protestant Reformers largely abandoned the Vulgate, preferring to make new translations from the original languages. However, the Vulgate was declared authoritative by Pope Clement VIII in 1592 and accordingly has continued in use among Catholics both in the original Latin and in versions made from the Latin, until the present day.

Even as late as the 4th century, the canon of the Old Testament as used by Christians was not completely settled. The Septuagint translation contains a short work known as The Prayer of Manasses, which is thus part of the Bible of the Eastern Orthodox Churches; this work was relegated by St Jerome to a kind of appendix at the end of his Vulgate translation and is thus not now normally included in Catholic Bibles.

The fluidity of parts of scripture at a relatively late date can be seen in the case of the books associated with the name of Ezra, the priest and scribe who laboured to re-establish the Temple in Jerusalem, when the Jews returned to Palestine in the reign of the Persian King Artaxerxes II. The Hebrew text of the Bible contains two books now known as, respectively, Ezra and Nehemiah. In fact these books appear in manuscripts copied as late as the 15th century A.D. as one book, entitled Ezra. In the Septuagint, likewise, these works are counted as one book, under the title II Esdras (Ezra), following the book I Esdras, for which no Hebrew original is extant, and which deals with essentially the same material, i.e. the return of the Jews from exile and the re-building of the Temple.

In his Vulgate Latin translation, St Jerome preferred the Hebrew tradition to the Greek; manuscripts of his Vulgate give our Ezra and Nehemiah as I Esdras and II Esdras (or Nehemiah) while his translation of the Greek I Esdras appears as III Esdras, followed by IV Esdras, a book of visions dealing with religious and eschatological speculations, apparently derived from a Greek version of a Hebrew original, neither of which survive. To complicate matters further, this latter book appears in the Apocrypha of the English Authorised Version as II Ezra.
For the first generations of Christians, authority resided in the Scriptures which they had inherited from their Jewish origins and in the words of Christ as handed down and preserved orally.

The words of Christ were written down in various forms which crystallised into our present four Gospels, but for at least another hundred years, oral tradition continued to be regarded as authoritative and was only slowly displaced by the written Gospels. As with the formation of the Old Testament, the impulse to determine which particular works were to be regarded as the authentic expression of the Faith came from outside. Controversies with various heretical groups led to a mistrust of the oral tradition, for the heretics often claimed to have secret oral traditions of the words of Christ to justify their own deviant teachings and speculations. At the same time, heretics produced books of their own, books which, they claimed, had been kept secret since apostolic times, or which contained teachings not to be divulged to the faithful at large. These works were described as *apocryphal*, i.e. "hidden", and the word has acquired its common meaning of "literature more or less untrue" from its association with those heretical books. Apocryphal gospels and epistles, which were produced in considerable number, were, however, not always of unorthodox origin. Many were written to commend particular features of Christian life, e.g. consecrated virginity or ascetical practices, or even simply as pious fictions, filling in the gaps left in the narrative of the canonical Gospels and Acts of the Apostles. Many of these pious legends were to pass into the religious folklore and literature of the Middle Ages, so to become the inspiration of masterpieces of European sculpture and painting.

Nor were the orthodox alone in their anxiety to establish a canon of Christian books. Indeed, the first Christian known to have compiled an exclusive list of authentic Christian scriptures seems to have been the heretic Marcion, who lived in the earlier part of the second century. Marcion was anxious to purge Christianity of Jewish elements which, as he believed, had been introduced by opponents of St Paul; to this end, he rejected the entire Old Testament, and, of the New, retained only the Pauline Epistles and the *Gospel of St Luke*.

It was, then, the circulation of heretical books and ideas, which led Christians to address themselves to the question of which books were to be regarded as authentic. Wide general agreement seems to have been reached quite early. In the Ambrosian Library in Milan there is a document written perhaps as early as A.D. 190, and known as the *Muratorian Canon* (after L.A. Muratori, who published it in 1740), which lists the books recognised in Rome as authoritative, and which shows that even as early as the end of the second Christian century, the canon was established virtually as it is today. The major criteria in the selection of any book seem to have been that the book in question was in some way associated with one of the Twelve Apostles, and was admitted for use in public worship. The 2nd and 3rd *Epistles of St John*, the *Epistles of St Peter* and
St Jude, and the Apocalypse were not generally accepted until the 4th century and in fact the Apocalypse is even now excluded from the canon by certain Oriental Churches. The Epistle to the Hebrews was long subject to debate, on which, as we shall see, Chester Beatty manuscripts throw some light. It seems that the Western Church originally held that it was not the work of St Paul and for this reason excluded it, only eventually accepting it under the influence of the Eastern Churches.

In addition to the books which make up our present New Testament, there were also in circulation a considerable number of other early Christian writings, now usually referred to as the Apostolic Fathers, some of which were regularly read in certain churches perhaps as late as the 4th century, and, which though quite orthodox, were eventually excluded from the canon as not being associated with the Apostles. Of these books, the Epistles of Clement, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas, are to be found in various 4th century copies of the New Testament. However, by the 5th century the canon of the Bible as generally accepted by Christians had been established, and the text translated into the languages of the main Christian communities. The Greek Church used the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, and the original Greek of the New; the Western Church had St Jerome's Latin Vulgate; while the various Oriental churches had all acquired their own standard versions, in Coptic, Syriac and Armenian.

Throughout the period of the formation of the Bible, and for some thirteen hundred years of its transmission, all books were produced by the laborious process of copying by hand. This is by far the most significant factor in the transmission of the Biblical text, for this is extremely exacting and tiring work and consequently it is virtually impossible to produce by these means a perfect copy of a book. Whenever a text such as a book of the Bible was copied, the copyist could be expected to introduce changes, consciously or unconsciously, into the text, and as a result, all manner of variations are to be found in texts which have been copied and recopied many times over many centuries. Inadvertent omission might lose anything from a letter to whole lines of text as the copyist’s eye, moving between the page of copy and the original, returned to the wrong place on the original page, attracted perhaps by a word identical or similar to one which had just been copied. Again, a letter or passage might be copied out twice for a similar reason. Plain misreading of the original, the mistaking of one letter for another, would also produce a crop of mistakes in the copy. In addition to these difficulties, the text copied by the ancient scribe would be largely lacking in the aids to reading (spaces between words, capital letters, punctuation) which we expect to find in a book. In the course of copying, such mistakes might be further multiplied as a scribe attempted
The evangelist Mark
W.Ms. 139—vellum
12th century
to amend the text to make it agree with his memories of other copies. This would be particularly likely in the case of the Bible, where much of the text was familiar through regular reading in Church. Again, finding something which he failed to understand, a scribe might assume that a mistake existed in his original and so attempt to ‘correct’ it.

It was common practice to supply, between the lines of text, words which had been inadvertently missed in copying; explanatory notes also were often added in this way. Hence, a copyist, coming upon an explanatory note written between the lines of his original, might assume that this was part of the text missed in the copying and supplied later, and so incorporate it as an integral part of his own copy. The work of checking and revising a copy against the original was, of course, hardly less laborious and was often neglected.

Such was the case with the copying of the Christian Bible. It must be remarked, however, that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament was much more carefully transmitted and copied; and manuscripts of this text, particularly the scrolls for use in the synagogue, exhibit an impressive degree of uniformity.

This must not be taken as meaning that the Hebrew text as transmitted is necessarily identical with the original text. Comparison with the Septuagint and other old translations shows that these translations must have been made from Hebrew texts differing, in places quite strikingly, from the Hebrew known to us. Our Hebrew text seems to be the result of the work of editors active in the early centuries of the Christian era, and so not necessarily more authentic and almost certainly later in date than the Hebrew text with which the translators of the Septuagint worked. The differences between the Hebrew text as transmitted and the Septuagint range in scale from words and phrases to whole passages of text.

For example, the Septuagint text of Job is approximately one-sixth shorter than that of the Hebrew; the order of the prophecies in Jeremiah differs greatly between Hebrew and Greek; great differences are to be found in numbers, e.g. the length of the lives of the patriarchs as given in the early chapters of Genesis.

However, it should be stressed that the divergences between manuscripts of the Bible are superficial by comparison with those found in the manuscripts of the pagan literature of Antiquity. In no case is any point of Christian doctrine affected by scribal corruption.

The various discrepancies between copies of the Bible did not escape the notice of scholars, and, in the course of centuries, various attempts were made to establish a true text. However, so long as copying by hand was the only way of reproducing texts, such attempts, even when relatively successful, could only slow down the process of corruption, which would resume as soon as further copies were made. In fact, considerable revision
of the copies of the New Testament took place in the thousand years between the fixing of the Biblical canon and the intervention of printing, when the whole process of book production was revolutionised. Printing rendered largely obsolete the trade of the scribe, but at the same time it set the work of editing old texts on a much more reliable basis. It was now possible to produce a virtually unlimited number of identical copies of a work, all of which, providing that proof-reading and correcting had been carefully carried out, would be perfect copies of the original. Thus, the process of progressive corruption could be halted, and, perhaps even reversed. At the same time the greatly increased diffusion of books allowed scholars to communicate at much greater speed and ease their discoveries and their corrections of the texts which they studied. They could now set to work to examine all available copies and to compare and publish the divergences, so as to lay the foundations for the recovery of the original text. However, the necessity to do so was not immediately apparent, for as a result of sporadic editing over the centuries, the manuscripts available to scholars in the 15th and 16th centuries showed a deceptively reassuring uniformity. In the case of the Greek New Testament, editing had produced a more or less standardised type of text, represented in by far the greater number of surviving manuscripts. In fact some 96% of surviving manuscripts were copied later than the 8th century, i.e., at least seven hundred years after the composition of the original. When, in the 16th century, the first printed editions of the Greek scriptures were published (by Erasmus, 1516; by Stephanus, 1546) the editors did not realise how unreliable were the manuscripts used. So reassuringly similar were these Byzantine ecclesiastical copies that it was not until the third decade of the 17th century that the confidence of scholars in this traditional text was seriously shaken.

In 1627, Cyril Lucaris, patriarch of Constantinople, presented to King Charles I of England a very old copy of the Bible, which he had brought from Alexandria. This manuscript, now in the British Museum and known as the Codex Alexandrinus, is generally agreed to have been copied in the 5th century, and the text which it contains is rather different from that of Byzantine tradition. The appearance of a manuscript so much older than any other so far known to scholars, and containing new readings in the text, caused a sensation, for it was now plain that the Greek text as hitherto known was not reliable, and that if a more satisfactory text was to be established this could only be done through the examination of all existing copies, and especially of the most ancient. Thus the 17th century saw the beginning of a period of search and discovery of copies hitherto ignored or unknown in the libraries of Europe and the Near East. By the beginning of the 19th century, an impressive array of more than a thousand manuscripts had been found and their various readings noted and published. More important than the mere number was the fact that certain copies made as early as the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries had come to light. These circumstances augured well for the project of recovering the original text of the Bible. The scholarly discipline of textual criticism was by now
securely established and scholars editing the various texts of Greek and Latin literature had arrived at solid and generally agreed results. This success had been achieved on the basis of much fewer, and much later manuscripts than those now available of the Bible. For example, the earliest surviving manuscript of most of the works of Plato was copied some thirteen hundred years after the author’s death; while, in the case of the plays of Euripides, the gap is some sixteen hundred years. In the case of the New Testament, this gap between the earliest copy known and the completion of the various texts by their authors could be said to be about 200 to 250 years.

The most notable and influential edition to be produced at this stage was the edition of the New Testament by Westcott and Hart, published in Cambridge in 1881. The attempt however was to prove premature, for the age of discovery was not past and major finds were still to come.

Up to this point the earliest known state of the text depended on certain vellum manuscripts, notably the Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Alexandrinus (both in the British Museum) and the Codex Vaticanus (in the Vatican Library), all of the 4th or early 5th century. New evidence was soon to come, not from libraries as with the manuscripts already known, but from the great dumps of papyrus — waste paper — which had been accumulating since ancient times in the dry sands of Egypt and which began to be excavated and studied in the last quarter of the 19th century. Among the many thousands of fragments of literature of every description found in these dumps were a considerable number of copies of parts of the Bible. Of these, by far the most significant in bulk and importance are now in the Chester Beatty Library.

In the edition of The Times for November 19, 1931, Sir Frederick Kenyon, then the recently retired Director of the British Museum, announced the acquisition by Mr Chester Beatty of a number of Biblical manuscripts fit to rival in interest any of the discoveries in the field made in the previous hundred years, and surpassing all in antiquity. This discovery consisted of a group of Greek Biblical papyri said to have been found at some time between 1928 to 1930 by Arabs digging in the region of the ancient Aphroditopolis, i.e. on the right bank of the Nile, some thirty miles above Cairo. The papyri were found a few feet below the surface in three jars resting on a wooden coffin. The contents of one jar were badly damaged and yielded little, but the other two contained papyri in a good state of preservation. The documents had been pushed loosely into jars, the leaves in some cases being loosely held together by a binding cord. It seems that one jar contained leaves from the Old Testament and the other, from the New. In addition, there was a portion of a manuscript containing part of the lost Greek text of the apocryphal Book of Enoch, and a homily on the Passion by Melito, Bishop of Sardis, who lived in the third quarter of the 2nd century. In all probability, the manuscripts had been buried with the
body of their owner, a practice very common among the early Christians of Egypt. Though Chester Beatty did not acquire the whole of the find, a number of leaves being purchased by other libraries, notably that of the University of Michigan, he nonetheless secured the bulk of it and for this reason all the papyri in this find are now known to scholars as "The Chester Beatty Papyri".

Since there was no external evidence for the date of the manuscripts which are themselves undated, scholars have been obliged to rely on the style of the writing to arrive at an approximate date. In fact, there is general agreement as to the dates of the various manuscripts, some of which are believed to have been copied in the late 2nd, some in the 4th, and most in the 3rd century. Thus some of these manuscripts are about a century and a half older than any of the vellum manuscripts of the Bible, and in the case of the New Testament manuscripts, there are some which may well have been copied within a hundred years of the composition of the original. This one discovery had halved the distance separating the original text from the earliest known copy.

Quite apart from the text which they contain, these manuscripts are of great significance for the light which they throw on the development of book-production. Up to the time of their discovery, it was generally believed that the normal form of book in antiquity was the papyrus roll, and that the codex, i.e. the book in the form of leaves bound together, was not widely used for anything (other than small notebooks) before the 4th century A.D. This belief led some scholars to argue that the four Gospels must have circulated separately, not combined into a single book until after 300 A.D. since it is the case that no book of greater length than one of the Gospels could have been contained on a single roll of papyrus. Now we have specimens of substantial papyrus books from the 2nd century which show that among Christians, at any rate, the modern form of book was in use for literary works and we have indeed parts of such a book containing not only all four Gospels, but also the Acts of the Apostles, which is not later than the 3rd century, and possibly as much as a hundred years older than any other copy. Yet another book in this collection, containing all the Epistles of St Paul except the Pastoral Epistles (i.e. except I & II Timothy, Titus and Philemon) had page numbers which show that it must originally have consisted of a huge quire of a hundred leaves. The inclusion of the Epistle to the Hebrews in this manuscript is particularly interesting as showing that this Epistle, whose Pauline authorship has been challenged, was accepted as Pauline at a very early date in Egypt. Indeed the relative position of Hebrews in this book, directly after the Epistle to the Romans, rather than, as in our Bible after all the Pauline Epistles, indicates that it must have enjoyed a very high regard among certain Egyptian Christians.

These Chester Beatty papyri are certainly the oldest substantial manuscripts of the Bible surviving and it is unlikely that any older manuscripts will ever be discovered.

The text which they preserve is important, not simply as being older
than any other, but, more particularly, because it was copied before the
great persecution of the Church under the Roman Emperor Diocletian,
(during the years from A.D. 303 to 313) when Christians were required
to surrender their sacred books for destruction by the pagan imperial
authorities. The other early manuscripts, the great vellum codices of the
4th century were all copied after the imperial decree by which Christianity
became a tolerated religion. The Chester Beatty manuscripts preserve a
type of text which disappeared during those ten years.

When in the last century scholars addressed themselves to the task
of recovering the original words of the Bible, they discovered that the
surviving manuscripts of the New Testament could be grouped into a
number of families, based on systematic resemblances and variations in
the texts they contained. One of these families, which contained two of
the oldest and most authoritative manuscripts the Codex Vaticanus (now in
the Vatican Library) and the Codex Sinaiticus (now in the British Library)
was held by many scholars to be the most reliable witness to the text and
was given the name "Neutral". Another family was distinguished and
given the name "Western" because its typical features are to be found
in the Old Latin version of the New Testament, and is generally
characterised by considerable freedom of addition and omission (especially
in Luke and Acts). A third family, called "Syrian", is by far the largest,
since its characteristic type of text is that represented by the standard
Byzantine ecclesiastical text to be found in the vast majority of mediaeval
manuscripts. To these three families was later added a fourth, the
"Caesarean", so called because its typical readings appear in quotations
from scripture works written by the early Christian scholar Origen (A.D.
184-254), probably in the later part of his life while he was resident at
Caesarea in Palestine. The text in manuscripts of this latter family stands
midway in type between the Neutral and the Western.

Such was the state of knowledge prior to the discovery of the Chester
Beatty papyri. At this stage, the scholars who set about the recovery of
the original text believed that their task was to establish which of these
families of manuscripts was the most reliable and to follow it wherever
its readings were not manifestly mistaken. This approach, which had proved
very successful in recovering the texts of Greek and Latin literature, was
to prove inadequate when applied to the text of the Bible. The Chester
Beatty papyri could not be made to fit into any of these families, but seemed
rather to show that the text, prior to the great destruction of Christian books
at the beginning of the fourth century, had been much more varied than
would appear from later manuscripts. The reason for this may lie in the
peculiar way in which Christian Biblical manuscripts, as opposed to
manuscripts of secular literature, were copied. While the copying of texts
of, let us say, Virgil or Plato was carried out mainly in the great libraries
of antiquity, under more or less authoritative control and from well-
established texts, no comparable authority existed in the case of Christian
manuscripts. When a copy of the sacred scriptures was required by a
Beginning of the Gospel of St John from a Greek Lectionary W.Ms. 143 – paper 15th/16th century
Christian community it would often be possible to obtain one only by borrowing a copy from a neighbouring church and copying from that. The copyist would often, perhaps usually, be an amateur, not a professional scribe, and his first concern would be not so much to reproduce the original exactly as to convey the substance and meaning of the sacred text, and thus he would feel himself free to vary the wording so as to make a more intelligible account, or, again he might attempt to harmonise accounts of the same event given by the different evangelists, or even insert an incident, as in the case of the account of the woman taken in adultery (John 7,53-8,11) which was introduced into some manuscripts of St John’s Gospel.

In highlighting this peculiarity of the copying of Biblical texts, the Chester Beatty papyri, while of prime importance in themselves, have tended, paradoxically, to enhance the estimation of other and later manuscripts, since they show that to establish an authentic text all divergent readings in the manuscripts must be taken into account on their individual merits, without rejecting any purely on grounds of age. Thus, the textual critic of the Bible nowadays follows a method quite different from that of his predecessors, or of the critic of classical literature.

In the case of the Old Testament, the Chester Beatty manuscripts do not provide direct evidence for the Hebrew text, but only of the Septuagint translation. However, this translation is of great importance to the editor of the Hebrew text, for as we have seen, the Hebrew text as we have it was ‘stereotyped’ quite late in its history (about A.D. 100) while the oldest surviving complete manuscript is not earlier than the 9th century. The Septuagint translation, begun in the 3rd century B.C., is thus older by several hundred years than our Hebrew text, and is known from the great vellum manuscripts of the fourth and fifth centuries. Perhaps the most important feature of the Chester Beatty papyri of the Septuagint is the fact that they preserve the greater part of the Book of Genesis, a book almost wholly lost in the two principal manuscripts, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. Also preserved here is a considerable part of the Book of Daniel. The Septuagint version of this latter book seems never to have gained popularity, perhaps being judged insufficiently literal, and was replaced in the Greek Bible by a later version (that of Theodotion) made in the 2nd century A.D. The earlier version of this book is preserved in full only in one very late manuscript. The discovery among the Chester Beatty manuscripts of a considerable portion of this book, copied in the 3rd century A.D., has carried the textual tradition of the book back some six hundred years, i.e. to within a short time after the completion of the translation.

The Chester Beatty papyri have provided abundant new information to scholars engaged in the textual study of the Bible. To illustrate how this information is used, the following examples taken from among many must suffice. In the second verse of the second chapter of St Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians there is a passage which appears in no fewer than fifteen different versions in the various manuscripts. The text as given by far the greatest number of manuscripts is that which was used by the translators
of the Authorised Version of 1611, who render the end of this verse "that they may know the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ". The variants concern the phrase following "the mystery of God" and may be rendered as follows:

(i) "of God, of Christ"
(ii) "of God"
(iii) "of Christ"
(iv) "of God, which is Christ"
(v) "of God which concerns Christ"
(vi) "of God in Christ"
(vii) "of God in Christ Jesus"
(viii) "of God and of Christ"
(ix) "of God, Father of Christ"
(x) "of God, Father of the Christ"
(xi) "of God, and Father of the Christ"
(xii) "of God, the Father and of the Christ"
(xiii) "of God the Father and of the Christ Jesus"
(xiv) "of God the Father and of Our Lord Christ Jesus."

From this mass of conflicting evidence, can we decide what it was that St Paul actually wrote? In fact there is substantial agreement among scholars that we can and that variant (i) which is the form preserved by a Chester Beatty papyrus and the fourth century Codex Vaticanus, is the original. The reasoning which arrives at this conclusion rests on the relative ease with which we can explain how the other variants arose, if we accept (i) as original; and, conversely, the difficulty of explaining how (i) arose, if any of the others is taken as original. "Of God, of Christ" in the Greek manuscripts appears of course without punctuation, and the meaning of the phrase is thus not at once apparent: it might be rendered "of the God of Christ", or "of the God Christ", or "of God’s Christ". Copyists faced with this obscurity would readily assume that the text was faulty and set about amending it in their various ways, which have resulted in the present plethora of readings. The introduction of the word "Father" was clearly a popular device to clarify the syntactic relationship between "God" and "of Christ". The commonest variant, that of the Byzantine ecclesiastical text which was used by the translators of the Authorised Version, is also the least likely, since it seems to have arisen by a combination of (xi) "of God, and Father of the Christ" with (xii) "of God the Father and of Christ". If "Father" had been part of the original text it is hard to see why it should have dropped out of so many manuscripts, for it would hardly have been deliberately omitted. Other attempts to relieve the difficulty of the reading "of God of Christ" were the elimination of one or other of the nouns. So far the great Codex Vaticanus could take us; however the authority of this reading was very much strengthened by the discovery that it was contained in a Chester Beatty papyrus, for this was perhaps a hundred years or more older than the other witnesses.

In manuscripts of the Epistle to the Romans there is a doxology which
appears in different positions, depending on the manuscript. In some manuscripts and in most printed editions, it appears at the end of Chapter 16, i.e. at the very end of the Epistle, and reads (in the Revised Standard Version): "Now to him that is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal but now is manifested and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made unto all the nations unto obedience of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever. Amen". In other manuscripts this passage stands at the end of chapter 14, while in a few, it appears in both positions. The Chester Beatty papyrus of Romans is unique in placing the doxology at the end of chapter 15.

It is not possible to discuss here the various attempts which have been made to account for this odd state of affairs. No entirely convincing explanation has yet been offered. All that concerns us here is to point out that it is possible that the Chester Beatty papyrus preserves the original state of the text. The reasoning which would support this judgement is as follows. Chapter 16 has all the appearances of being an addition to the text: it may well have been a letter of recommendation given to the original bearer of the Epistle, preserved and eventually incorporated as part of the main text; the doxology might well have been transposed to the end of chapter 16 by a copyist anxious to retain it as the exordium of the Epistle, perhaps because it was familiar in final position and perhaps also so as to ensure that the Epistle ended on a strong note of doctrine, rather than trailing off into a series of personal messages. Such a copy would lie behind four of the great uncial manuscripts, and also the standard Latin, Syriac and Coptic versions. How, then, explain the many later Greek manuscripts which place the doxology at the end of chapter 14? It is known that in the 2nd century there was an edition of Romans which omitted chapters 15 and 16. This was the text produced by the heresiarch Marcion. Chapter 16 as we have seen stands clearly apart from the rest of the Epistle; Chapter 15 on the other hand follows naturally on Chapter 14. Would Marcion have rejected this chapter if he had found it in the copy on which he worked in producing this edition? Indeed he might have regarded this chapter with suspicion for it contains many references to the Old Testament, as well as the statement that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope", and we know that Marcion, who rejected the Old Testament itself, was anxious to purge the Christian scriptures of Jewish influence. Marcion then may well have ended his edition with chapter 14 but may have kept the final doxology of chapter 15 so as not to lose a fine and no doubt familiar conclusion. Marcion's text supplemented, by an orthodox copyist, with Chapters 15 and 16 would then be the text on which most Greek ecclesiastical manuscripts of Romans depend. Those manuscripts which place the doxology at the ends of both chapter 14 and chapter 16 would represent a text based on that of Marcion.
with the additional chapters, to which a copyist familiar with the other tradition had added the doxology again at the end, which was where he would expect to find it.

The Diatessaron of Tatian

Early translations of the Bible are an important source of information about the original state of both Old and New Testaments, because we may be reasonably certain that such versions were based on original texts as old or older than those available to us now. They thus preserve textual variants which have disappeared from the tradition of the original Greek or Hebrew, but which may in fact be correct. Various early translations into Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic used by Christians in Syria, Palestine and Iraq, are known, particularly important among them being the text known as the Diatessaron, which may be the earliest translation of the New Testament into any language.

We have now seen how the four Gospels were brought together in one volume at some time in the latter half of the second century, when the canon of scripture was largely established. Some Christians at this time seem to have felt it unfitting that there should be four separate Gospel narratives and preferred to harmonise them in one continuous narrative.

One such was an Assyrian Christian named Tatian, who in about A.D. 170 compiled a harmonised Gospel narrative which became known by the Greek name Diatessaron ("through [the] four" sc. Gospels). This work seems to have become extremely popular in the churches of Tatian's native land and continued in use both for liturgical as well as for private reading until, in the 5th century, Bishop Rabbula of Edessa ordered that it be replaced for public use by his own translation of the four separate Gospels. Thereafter, Tatian's book survived only for private reading and gradually dropped out of use and so ceased to be copied. So complete was the disappearance of this text that scholars in the 19th century debated as to whether such a work had ever existed. Certain scholars, who maintained that the Gospels were written between A.D. 130 and 170, could not accept that it was possible that a harmony should have been made so early, and consequently they argued that the references to the Diatessaron in early Christian literature were simply mistaken. This debate was settled in the last century by the discovery of translations in Armenian and Arabic, but Tatian's original was still unknown. So matters stood until, in 1956, Sir Chester Beatty bought a large collection of fragmentary manuscripts from a Cairo dealer. Among these fragments of books were sixty-five leaves of a manuscript in Syriac which proved to be part of a commentary on the Diatessaron by St Ephraem the Syrian, a Father of the Church, who lived in the 4th century. The commentary, of which these leaves contained some two-thirds, preserved extensive extracts from Tatian's text. The publication in 1963 by Dom Louis Leloir of these leaves caused a sensation among Biblical scholars, for here at last was a substantial
part of Tatian’s text, i.e. the Gospel as known to Syrian Christians in the latter half of the 2nd century. This could now be compared with the forms of text so far known and in the light of the Diatessaron version, a judgement could be made as to the true reading.

For example, in the Greek text of the 11th chapter of St Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is represented as saying, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding and didst reveal them unto babes”. Now the various texts of the old Latin version give several variations of the form of address to God, such as “O Father, Lord God of heaven and earth”, “Lord Father of heaven and earth”, “God, Father of heaven and earth”, and “Father of heaven and earth”. Clearly these are based on a Greek text different from that now surviving, but there is no clear indication of what the original was. The Diatessaron commentary comes to the rescue here, for among the passages of the original preserved with St Ephraem’s commentary is this very passage. Here it appears in yet another and simpler form, “Father in Heaven”. We may assume that this represents the original Greek, and that the various other forms have arisen through a process of elaboration and harmonisation. The simplicity of the Diatessaron text here is in its favour, for it is extremely unlikely that an elaborate original should have been simplified, and at the same time quite credible that a simple original should have been added to. Also in favour of the Diatessaron text is the fact that it is nearer to Jesus’ usual form of address to God as preserved elsewhere in the Gospels. True, no doctrinal point is affected by the true reading of this passage, but every Christian must be concerned to have as near a rendering as possible of the words of Jesus. It is noteworthy that the simpler form here is preserved only in St Ephraem’s commentary, while the translations of the Diatessaron give readings which have been assimilated to the more elaborate Greek text.

Sir Chester Beatty’s services to scholarship by the discovery and conservation of this precious manuscript was recognised by Pope John XXIII, who in a letter to Sir Chester, dated 26th of January, 1959, told of his “pleasure and satisfaction” on learning of Sir Chester’s “outstanding merits in the field of Scripture studies, to which you have generously contributed your time and resources, placing at the disposal of scholars the fruits of your research, the latest of these being the Syriac manuscript of Ephraem’s commentary on the Diatessaron”. For these and other services to humanity, Pope John imparted to Sir Chester his particular and paternal blessing.

The story of the Chester Beatty Diatessaron Commentary does not end here for within the past two years the Library has been able to acquire most of the remaining leaves of this unique manuscript. This has been achieved with the help of generous donations from the Friends of the Chester Beatty Library, also from P.J. Carroll Ltd, who have thus contributed significantly to the enhancing of the position of the Library as a major institution in the world of Biblical Studies.
### The Books of the Old Testament in Hebrew

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy
- Joshua
- Judges
- 1 Samuel
- 2 Samuel
- 1 Kings
- 2 Kings
- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Ezekiel
- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi
- Psalms
- Job
- Proverbs
- Ruth*
- Song of Songs*
- Ecclesiastes*
- Lamentations*
- Esther*
- Daniel
- Ezra**
- 1 Chronicles
- 2 Chronicles

*The ‘Five Rolls’ read on certain festivals.

**Later divided Ezra, Nehemiah

### The Books of the Old Testament in Septuagint Greek

(For the sake of comparison, some titles are given in Hebrew form)

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy
- Joshua
- Judges
- Ruth
- 1 Kings (1 Sam.)
- 2 Kings (2 Sam.)
- 3 Kings (1 Kings)
- 4 Kings (2 Kings)
- 1 Paralipomena (=1 Chronicles)
- 2 Paralipomena (=2 Chronicles)
- 1 Esdras (Ezra + Nehemiah)
- Esther (with additions not in Hebrew)
- Tobit
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees
- 3 Maccabees
- 4 Maccabees
- Psalms
- Odes of Solomon
- Proverbs of Solomon
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Songs
- Job
- Wisdom of Solomon
- Ecclesiasticus
- Psalms of Solomon
- Hosea
- Amos
- Micah
- Joel
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi
- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Baruch (Ch. 1-5)
- Lamentations
- Letter of Jeremiah (=Baruch ch. 6)
- Ezekiel
- Daniel (Susanna + Hebr.
- Daniel + Bel and the Dragon)
- Prayer of Manasses

### The Books of the Old Testament in Vulgate Latin

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy
- Joshua
- Judges
- 1 Kings (1 Sam.)
- 2 Kings (2 Sam.)
- 3 Kings (1 Kings)
- 4 Kings (2 Kings)
- 1 Paralipomena (=1 Chronicles)
- 2 Paralipomena (=2 Chronicles)
- 1 Esdras (Hebr. Ezra)
- 2 Esdras (Hebr. Nehemiah)
- 3 Esdras (Greek 1 Esdras)
- 4 Esdras
- Tobit
- Judith
- Esther
- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Songs
- Wisdom
- Ecclesiasticus
- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Lamentations
- Baruch
- Ezekiel
- Daniel
- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees
- Prayer of Manasses

### The Books of the New Testament

- St Matthew
- St Mark
- St Luke
- St John
- Acts of the Apostles
- Epistle to the Romans
- 1st Epistle to the Corinthians
- 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians
- Epistle to the Galatians
- Epistle to the Ephesians
- Epistle to the Philippians
- Epistle to the Colossians
- 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians
- 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians
- 1st Epistle to Timothy
- 2nd Epistle to Timothy
- Epistle to Titus
- Epistle to Philemon
- Epistle to the Hebrews
- Epistle of St James
- 1st Epistle of St Peter
- 2nd Epistle of St Peter
- 1st Epistle of St John
- 2nd Epistle of St John
- 3rd Epistle of St John
- Epistle of St Jude
- Book of the Apocalypse (Revelations)
The Pentateuch, i.e. the first five books of the Bible, *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*, comprise the most sacred part of the scripture for orthodox Jews. They are called in Hebrew *Torah* i.e. teaching, because they teach the basic doctrines, practices, and morality of Judaism, the Law by which Jewish life, individual and communal, is still governed. In the synagogue services the whole of these five books is chanted in the course of a year. Copies of *Torah* for use in the synagogue take the form of continuous scrolls, prepared under the very strict rules, which lay down that "A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals, prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a Jew. These must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals. Every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire book. The length of each column must not extend over less than forty-eight, or more than sixty lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters. The whole copy must be first lined; and if three words be written in it without a line, it is worthless. The ink should be black, neither red, green or any other colour and be prepared according to a definite receipt. An authentic copy must be the examplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least to deviate. No word or letter, not even a yod, must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the book before him... Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene; between every word the breadth of a narrow consonant; between every new section, the breadth of nine consonants; between every book, three lines. The fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line; but the rest need not do so. Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress, wash his whole body, not begin to write the name of God with pen newly dipped in ink, and should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him..."

And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor the likeness of any form that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands, of them that love me and keep my commandments.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is a sabbath unto the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. Thou shalt do no murder. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.

Torah Scroll
*Exodus 20* 1-17
Hebrew Ms. 773—leather
17th century
Samaritan Pentateuch  The Samaritans are a small community living in and around the town of Nablus in Palestine. They follow the Laws of Moses and are probably the descendants of those Israelites who were not deported by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Because of their early breach with the Jewish community, their scriptures consist only of the Pentateuch, i.e. the Five Books of Moses; they do not recognise the Prophets or the other scriptures of the Old Testament. Another archaic feature of their Bible is the script which is a form of the ancient Hebrew script. (The “square” form of script used now for Hebrew was adopted by the Jews after the rise of the Samaritan community.) The rules observed by the Samaritans in the preparation of their Bibles are even more strict than those of the Jews: no skins except those of animals sacrificed as peace offerings may be used.

The Samaritan text differs from the Hebrew text in some six thousand places, most of which are of little importance to the text though of interest as possibly preserving features of ancient pronunciation or grammar. In a number of places, the Samaritan text has been held by some scholars to be superior to the Hebrew. At Genesis iv:8, where the Hebrew has “And Cain said unto Abel his brother. And it came to pass when they were in the field...”, the Samaritan text, together with the Septuagint, has “Cain said to Abel his brother, Let us go into the field. And it came to pass...” Again, at Genesis xlvi:21 where the Hebrew has “And as for the people he [Joseph] removed them to the cities”, the Samaritan, once again with the Septuagint, has “As for the people, he made slaves of them.”

And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house: and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years. And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation: the children also of Manasseh the son of Joseph's knees. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die, but God will surely visit you, and bring you up out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old and they embalmed him, and he was put in coffin in Egypt.
Scrolls of the Book of Esther  On the 14th and 15th of the month of Adar (i.e. about the beginning of March) falls the Jewish festival of Purim, when Jews celebrate the deliverance of the Jews of Persia from a massacre planned by their enemies. Purim is the occasion of great rejoicing and is in fact held as a sort of carnival in traditional Jewish communities. A prominent feature of the synagogue ritual for the festival is the chanting of the whole of the Book of Esther which tells of the plot and how it was foiled by Esther and her cousin Mordecai. Scrolls such as these are made for this purpose.

Scroll of Esther
Beginning of Esther
Hebrew Ms. 770—leather
Two small scrolls of Esther
Hebrew Mss. 765 and 768—vellum
All 18th century
The Chester Beatty Biblical papyri  In 1930, Mr Chester Beatty (as he was then) acquired a group of twelve Biblical manuscripts from Egypt. The manuscripts which are on papyrus and all in a fragmentary condition, were acquired from dealers and it is not known for certain where they had been found. Some of the papyri appear to have been discovered by villagers in earthenware pots found resting on the top of a coffin buried in the neighbourhood of a monastery south of Cairo.

The manuscripts contain large parts of the Greek text of the Old and New Testaments as well as a portion of the Book of Enoch and an early sermon. Scholars have been able to assign approximate dates to the various books with some confidence. The earliest book is a copy of the Books of Numbers and Deuteronomy, which probably dates from the first half of the 2nd century A.D.; the latest is the fragment of the Book of Enoch which may be dated as late as the 5th century A.D. The New Testament manuscripts are mostly dateable to the 3rd century. These are the oldest substantial manuscripts of the Greek Bible known to scholars.

Apart from their textual interest, the Chester Beatty papyri are of significance in that they are in codex form, i.e. the various books are made of leaves, in just the way that a modern book is made. Papyri of pagan literature dating from the same period are usually in scroll form, the codex being used otherwise only for notebooks. It may be that Christians found the codex a convenient form in that passages required for reference or for liturgical reading could be found very much more conveniently in a codex than a scroll.

But having the same spirit of faith, according to that which is written, I believed, and therefore did I speak; we also believe, and therefore also we speak; knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise us also with Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the grace, being multiplied through the many, may cause the thanksgiving abound unto the glory of God.

Wherefore we faint not; though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

For we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens. For verily in this we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For indeed we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but that we would be clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life.

Pauline Epistles
Corinthians II
Chapter 4:13-5:4
C.B.P. II—papyrus
3rd century
And he said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, desiring to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? Jesus made answer and said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, which both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance a certain priest was going down that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And in like manner a Levite also, when he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion, and came to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on them oil and wine; and he set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back again, will repay thee. Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbour unto him that fell among the robbers? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. And Jesus said unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.
village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at the Lord's feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving; and she came up to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister did leave me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. But the Lord answered and said unto her, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: for Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

And it came to pass, as he was praying in a certain place, that when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples.
The Septuagint  Legend has it that this great translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek was the work of seventy (Latin septuaginta) or, more precisely, seventy-two Jewish scholars (six from each of the twelve tribes of Israel) working for King Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-247 B.C.) so as to provide a Greek translation of the Jewish law for the great Library of Alexandria. In the course of time, other books were added, including not only the Prophets and historical books but also some works whose Hebrew original has not survived (e.g. Tobit, 1 Maccabees) and others originally written in Greek (e.g. Wisdom of Solomon, 2 Maccabees).

Whether or not prepared for the Library of Alexandria, there is no doubt that the Septuagint was generally accepted for use in the synagogue and for private reading, not only in Egypt but also in Palestine, Asia and, in fact, wherever the everyday language used by Jews was Greek. In vocabulary and accidence, the language of the Septuagint is the Hellenistic Greek established as a common language throughout the Empire of Alexander the Great; but in syntax and general usage it is very heavily influenced by the Hebrew original.

The Septuagint has a double importance.

(i) It is a witness to the state of the Hebrew text as known in Egypt some thousand years before the date of the earliest surviving Hebrew manuscript. This is particularly important in the case of the Books of Samuel, where the Septuagint presupposes a Hebrew original superior to the text of our Hebrew manuscripts.

(ii) The Septuagint was the Bible of the early Christian Church, so that, when Christians claimed that the prophecies of the old dispensation were fulfilled in Jesus and in the Church, it was usually the Septuagint version of the prophecies which they used. The Septuagint established the idiom of Biblical Greek, in which, in time, the Christian New Testament would be composed. Thus for a proper understanding of key-words and phrases in the New Testament, we must go back to the Septuagint.

The Septuagint version of the Book of Daniel seems not to have been popular and was early superseded for general use by another, more literal version. There is, in fact, only one Greek manuscript containing the complete Septuagint version of Daniel. This is in the Vatican Library and dates probably from the 11th century.

The Chester Beatty Library possesses thirteen leaves of a papyrus codex of the book in the Septuagint version. These may be dated, from the style of writing, to the late 2nd or early 3rd century A.D. and thus are much the earliest testimony to this version of Daniel.

Daniel Chapter 8: 24-27
C.B.P. IX—papyrus
2nd century

And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper and do his pleasure: and he shall destroy the mighty ones and the holy people. And through his policy he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and in their security shall he destroy many; he shall also stand up against the prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand. And the vision of the evenings and mornings which hath been told is true: but shut thou up the vision; for it belongeth to many days to come. And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; then I rose up, and did the king's business: and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it.
The Book of Enoch: This book of visions and revelations relating to Jewish history and the Messianic age, originally written in Aramaic, was well known to early Christian and to Jewish writers. It is quoted in the Epistle of St. Jude, and its influence has been detected in parts of the Gospels of St. Matthew, and St. John. Early Fathers of the Church and the Apologists treat Enoch with great respect, but by the 4th century it had come to be regarded with suspicion and so ceased to be used and copied. The book remained popular in Ethiopia where it achieved a quasi-canonical status, and it is in Ethiopic that the only complete text survives. Considerable fragments of the Greek version, from which the Ethiopic version was made, have been found, notable among them, leaves from a 4th or possibly 5th century copy, now forming part of the Chester Beatty papyri.

[Did he not make the heaven and the] earth and all that is in them? And who gave understanding to all things that move in the sea? The sailors fear the sea. And when he hurls out against you the surge of the fire of your burning, where shall ye flee and be safe? And when he gives forth his voice against you, will ye not be shaken and affrighted by the mighty sound? And the whole earth shall be shaken and trembling and thrown into confusion, and the angels fulfilling that which is commanded them, and the heaven and its lights shaken and trembling and all the sons of the earth. And ye, sinners cursed for ever, there is no joy for you. Be of good courage, souls of the just that are dead, the just and the pious, and be not grieved that your souls have gone down to Hades with grief, and the body of your flesh fared not in your life according to your holiness, for the days that ye lived were days of sinners and of men accursed upon the earth. When ye die, then will the sinners say that the pious have died according to Aeir fate, "and what have they gained because of their deeds? They too have died even as we. See now how they die in grief and darkness, and what had they more than we? From now on let them rise and be saved, and they shall for ever see us eating and drinking". Therefore it is well for you to eat and drink and plunder and sin and rob and gain property and see good days. Behold, now, they who try to justify themselves how great has been their downfall, because no righteousness was found in them until they died and were destroyed and became as though they were not, and their souls went down in pain to Hades...]

I swear to you...

Enoch Chapter
101:8-102:11
C.B.P. XII—papyrus
4th/5th century
The Uncial Codices  Before the discovery of papyrus manuscripts, the earliest copies of the Bible available were a number of manuscripts copied in the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries. These are written in a fine, large and clear, formal hand used by professional scribes for literary works and called “uncials”. The name, derived from the Latin uncia, “a twelfth part”, was apparently applied to characters each of which would occupy one twelfth of a line of writing of standard length.

The Library of Trinity College, Dublin, possesses an important uncial fragment dating from the 6th or possibly the 5th century. The fragment is a palimpsest, i.e. the original text has been cleaned off and the vellum used again, in the 14th century, for a patristic text. However, as can be seen in the accompanying photograph, it is possible to read the traces of the original, from St Matthew’s Gospel, underneath the later text. Note that the leaf was turned upside-down for re-use.

Now when they were departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I tell thee: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. And he arose and took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt; and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt did I call my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth and sent forth, and slew all the male children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had carefully learned of the wise men.

Uncial Manuscript
Matthew 2:13-16
Ms. 32, leaf 3—vellum
5th/6th century
Reproduced by kind permission of the Board of Trinity College, Dublin.
The Versions  The early versions of the Bible, produced for use in Churches whose language was not Greek, are, on the whole, very close and literal translations of the underlying Greek, so that it is often possible to reconstruct with some certainty the underlying Greek. For this reason, if the Greek text on which the translator worked was a good one, it is evident that the version will provide important help in the work of recovering the original words of the Greek.
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not. There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light. There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world.

Prominent among the great versions are those made in Egypt, in the 4th century and later, in various dialects of the Coptic language, a form of the Ancient Egyptian language written in a modification of the Greek script.

Beginning of the Gospel of St John
Coptic Ms. 813—vellum
6th/7th century
The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St Paul in Coptic. In the winter of 1924-5, Chester Beatty acquired these three vellum manuscripts, together with the coins from a Cairo dealer. The books and the coins were said to have been found in a pot buried near the pyramids at Gizeh. The books are in near perfect condition and must hardly ever have been used before burial. The coins are Alexandrian 12-*nummia* pieces, of Justinian I (527-565), and of his successors, Justin (568-578), Maurice Tiberius (582-602). The burial of books and coins cannot therefore be earlier than the 580's; in view of their good condition it is unlikely that the coins were long in circulation, so that they may have been buried in the first quarter of the 7th century. It is tempting to speculate that the books were buried for safekeeping during the Persian occupation of Egypt (c. 616-626) when it is known that many of the Coptic clergy fled from the invaders.

The original bindings, which were fragile, have been carefully reconstructed. Two of the manuscripts were bound in heavy wooden boards with leather spines. The bindings were remarkable in that they were tightly closed by long wrapping-bands of leather ending in a bone slip. It is almost certainly due to these wrapping-bands that the manuscripts were found in such good condition.

Reconstructed bindings
Mss 811, 812, 813 and the coins (nummia) of the Emperors Justinian (527-565), Justin (568-578) and Maurice Tiberius (582-602).
The Diatessaron of Tatian  The four canonical Gospels were generally established as authoritative as early as the second half of the 2nd century. Chester Beatty Papyrus 45, which has been dated to the early 3rd century, is the earliest surviving manuscript containing all four Gospels (together with the Acts of the Apostles). Some Christians, however, preferred a single connected narrative; one such was an Assyrian Christian named Tatian, who, in about A.D. 170, compiled a composite Gospel out of extracts from the four canonical Gospels. This Gospel harmony known as the Diatessaron (from the Greek: διὰ τέσσαρον “through [the] four [sc. Gospels]”)
enjoyed wide popularity in Tatian’s native land until replaced in the 5th century by a translation of the four separate Gospels. The full Syriac text of the *Diatessaron*, probably the earliest version in Syriac, and, possibly the earliest in any language, disappeared. Our knowledge of the Syriac original depends very largely on the commentary on this work written by St Ephraem the Syrian in the 4th century, which quotes sections of the *Diatessaron*. The only known manuscript of the Syriac text of this commentary was discovered by Sir Chester Beatty in 1956.
The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Even as it is written in Isaiah the prophet,
Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,
Who shall prepare thy way;
The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
Make ye ready the way of the Lord,
Make his paths straight;
John came, who baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins.

The Harklean Syriac  In 508, a Syriac version of the New Testament was completed which for the first time in Syriac included the four minor Catholic epistles and the Apocalypse. This version was revised in 616 by Thomas of Harkel (Heraclea). This revision, known as the Harklean version, is an extremely literal translation of the Greek and thus very useful for the reconstruction of the Greek text which lies behind it.
The Gospels in the Harklean version; beginning of St Mark’s Gospel
Syriac Ms. 703—vellum
12th century
These are the words which Moses spake unto all Israel beyond Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah over against Suph, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Di-zahab. It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of mount Seir unto Kadesh-barnea. And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the Lord had given him in commandment unto them; after he had smitten Sihon the king of the Amorites, which dwelt in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, which dwelt in Ashtaroth, at Edrei: beyond Jordan in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law, saying, The Lord our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain: turn you, and take your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the Arabah, in the hill country, and in the lowland, and in the South, and by the sea shore, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.
A manuscript of the Pentateuch, together with the Books of Joshua, Judges and Ruth, copied at Walsingham Priory in Norfolk. The opening shows the end of Numbers and the beginning of Deuteronomy.

W. Ms. 22—vellum 12th century
Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, 
Nor standeth in the way of sinners, 
Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 
But his delight is in the law of the Lord; 
And in his law doth he meditate day and night. 
And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, 
That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, 
Whose leaf also doth not wither; 
And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 
The wicked are not so; 
But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 
Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgement, 
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 
For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: 
But the way of the wicked shall perish.

Book of Psalms, and satchels
Psalm 1
Ethiopic Ms. 906—vellum
19th century
The Eusebian canons  The existence of four separate accounts of Christ’s ministry give rise to a natural desire to compare the various accounts of the same event. In a Gospel text not yet divided into chapters and verses as in a modern Bible, location of and reference to such passages was laborious work. To overcome the difficulty, the scholar Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260-c. 340) devised a very practical system of reference from one Gospel to another.

Each Gospel he divided into sections of varying length and the sections numbered consecutively through each Gospel. Ten tables or canons were then drawn up, using these numbers. The first table shows the numbers of passages found in all four Gospels; the second table shows the numbers of passages common to Matthew, Mark and Luke; the third table shows the numbers of passages common to Matthew, Luke and John; and so on through all combinations of Gospels, the last four tables containing the numbers of passages in each Gospel which are not paralleled in another Gospel.

In the margin of the Gospel text itself is to be found both the number of section and also the number of the table in which it is listed. A reader who wishes to consult parallel passages in other Gospels will then be able to turn to the table in question, where he will find, on the same line as the number of his section, the numbers of any parallels in the other Gospels. For example, take Matthew 25:29 “For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away”. Against this verse will appear, in the margin, the number of section 271, and the number of the table 2. This means that this verse has parallels in Mark, and Luke, but not in John. Looking up 271 on table 2 in the column for Matthew we find beside it in the column for Mark, 42; and in the column for Luke, 230, and can now easily find both passages in the respective Gospels.

Eusebius’ system proved so useful to readers of the Gospels that it appears in many manuscripts not only in Greek but also in the main versions, Latin, Syriac, Coptic and Armenian and is often found printed in modern editions of the Greek Testament.

The canon tables are often richly decorated, particularly in Armenian manuscripts of the Gospels.
Eusebius to Carpianus, his dear brother in the Lord, greetings. Ammonius of Alexandria, no doubt applying much diligence and zeal, left us his harmonised Gospel, in which he placed alongside the Gospel of St Matthew the parallel passages from the other Evangelists. This has the inevitable result that, in the course of reading, the continuity of the other three Gospels is destroyed.

In order that you may be able to know the relevant passages of each Evangelist in which, zealous for truth, they speak about the same matters, while at the same time saving the integrity and continuity of the other Gospels, I have taken the work of the above-mentioned as my starting point, but have followed a different method. I have drawn up the ten lists given below, of which the first list contains the numbers of passages in which the same matters are dealt with by the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; the second list, by three Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke; the third, by three, Matthew, Luke and John; the fourth, by three, Matthew, Mark and John; the fifth, by two, Matthew and Luke; the sixth by two, Matthew and Mark; the seventh by two, Matthew and John; the eighth, by two, Luke and Mark; the ninth, by two, Luke and John; the tenth lists passages peculiar to each evangelist. That is the principle of the lists; a simple explanation of their use is as follows. In each of the four Gospels a number appears against each section of text, beginning with the first, then the second, then the third and so on to the end of the books. Underneath each number is an indication in red ink showing in which of the ten lists this number is to be found. Thus, if it is 1, the section-number in question is to be found in the first list; if 2, in the second; and so on to 10. Now, let us suppose that,

Eusebius explained his system of canons, for cross-reference between the Gospels in a letter to one Carpianus, “his beloved brother in the Lord.” In this Armenian manuscript the translation of his letter is adorned with portraits of Eusebius (left) and Carpianus (right).
opening one of the four Gospels you wish to find a particular passage, to know which of the other Evangelists speak of the same topic, and to find the relevant passages in each which deal with the same matter. You should take the number in the margin of your section, and turn to the list indicated by the number in red, where you will see from the heading of the list how many and which of the Evangelists have spoken of that which interests you; and by taking the numbers of the other Evangelists, which are parallel with your number, you will be able to look them up in the sections of each Gospel and so find where they speak of the same things.
Locus librorum nominum

Incipit liber

Genesia capta. uiij.
Exodus. xiiii.
Lectur. xiiii.
Numeri. xiiii.
Exodoorum. xiiii.
Joh. xiiii.
Suec. lxxiiii.
Sueb. xiiii.
Joh. xiiii.
Regnum primus. cciij.
Regnum secundum. ccxiiii.
Regnum tertium. ccxiiii.
Paralipomenon primus. cccxxiiii.
Paralipomenon secundum. ccxiiii.
Sueb. ccciiij.
Sueb. lectio (q.e. Naemie de Sem.) ccciiij.
Sueb. tertium. ccciiij.
Sueb. quartum. ccviiij.
Theb. ccviiij.
Abib. ccviiij.
Rester.
Job. ccviiij.
Sahliquimum.
Proverbia. ccxiiii.
Ecceastes.
Cantica cantorum.
Seapenter.
Praeclaret.
Sancta ecclesia. cccxxiiii.
Sueb. lectio. cccxxiiii.
Sueb. lectio (V. de Sem.). cccxxiiii.
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Biblia Latina

Nuremberg

A. Coburger, 1479—paper.

The Bible was first printed with movable type by Johann Gutenberg of Mainz in 1459. In the next twenty years the craft of printing spread rapidly to other German towns and other countries, including Italy, France, the Netherlands, Spain and England.

Coburger was one of the most important and active of the early printers, producing a dozen editions of the Bible in twenty-six years.
BIBLIA

Sacrosancta VETERIS & NOVII TESTAMENTI, IUXTA DII HIERONYMI VULGATAM EDITIONEM.

Hic accesserunt Tabernaculi Mosæi, ac verum punctum sepeliant, summa industria & fide expressa.

Singulis quoque capitibus breuia argumenta adieta sunt, ne quid deeserit quod sacrarum literarum candidatos, ab earundem lectione remorari posset.

Summa fruenda bene nuper major.

CAROLII

LVGDVNII

APVIDIOANNEM

FRELLONIVM

M. D. L.

Præfatis: tri.slib. tri. tri. fnres moue Lindaeo.