

## The Greek Fragments of “The Gospel of Thomas” as Artefacts: Papyrological Observations on P. Oxy. 1, P.Oxy 654, and P. Oxy 655<sup>1</sup>

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In the voluminous body of publications on the *Gospel of Thomas* (hereafter GThomas), and in surveys of this mass of scholarship as well, there has been a concentration on a host of questions of an exegetical and tradition-critical nature. It is the *text* that has drawn the overwhelming attention of scholars, whether considering the Nag Hammadi Coptic version or the very fragmentary Greek witnesses.<sup>2</sup> This is perfectly understandable; but I suggest that in all this activity we have not given sufficient attention to the *actual manuscripts themselves* as artefacts that may give us valuable information about this intriguing collection of sayings ascribed to Jesus.

A “text” is, in one obvious sense, a body of cognitive content in written form, whether the content is intended to inform, inspire, entertain, exhort, or befuddle. But texts really acquire their life when made available to readers (copied) and used (by readers and those to whom texts are read). A full historical approach to ancient texts, therefore, should include attention to how they were handled, used and understood, how they functioned in the ancient setting(s). Manuscripts are direct artefacts of the actual transmission and usage of texts, and can give us hints about the real-life ways that texts functioned, at least for those who copied and used the manuscripts that survive. This is the broad emphasis that I have elaborated in a forthcoming book, and in this presentation I offer some illustration of it with reference to the extant portions of the three Greek manuscripts of GThomas.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, a number of previous scholars have given attention to these intriguing items. In the main, however, these studies have concentrated on *textual*

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<sup>1</sup> Published version in *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung – Rezeption – Theologie*, eds. Jörg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes and Jens Schröter (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 19-32.

<sup>2</sup> Key surveys of scholarship on GThomas include the following: Francis T. Fallon and Ron Cameron, “The Gospel of Thomas: A Forschungsbericht and Analysis,” *ANRW* 2.25/6: 4195-4251; G. J. Riley, “The *Gospel of Thomas* in Recent Scholarship,” *CR:BS* 2 (1994) 227-52; Stephen J. Patterson, “The Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Tradition: A Forschungsbericht and Critique,” *Foundations and Facets Forum* 8 (1992) 1-54; and Philip Sellew, “The *Gospel of Thomas*: Prospects for Future Research,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*, ed. John B. Turner and Anne McGuire (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 328-46. Riley (227) noted that already by 1985 there were more than 600 books and articles by scholars on GThomas, and that by the date of his writing “that number is greatly increased.” David M. Scholer’s inventory of publications on all the Nag Hammadi texts, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography 1948-1969* (Nag Hammadi Studies, 1; Leiden: Brill, 1971) has been updated annually in *Novum Testamentum*.

<sup>3</sup> L. W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

concerns, such as the correct restoration of the often lacunose lines, and/or comparing the similarities and differences between the Greek fragments and the Coptic version.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, so far as I am aware, the only sustained *papyrological* analyses of the three Oxyrhynchus manuscripts of GThomas were done by the original editors and a very few others in the early decades after their original publication.<sup>5</sup> In this presentation, I draw gratefully upon these crucial studies, supplemented by my own opportunities to conduct an autopsy analysis of P. Oxyrhynchus 1, and P. Oxyrhynchus 654.<sup>6</sup> I believe that on some matters I am able to supplement in greater detail previously published descriptions of the manuscripts. But my principal aim here is to point to physical features of the three Greek manuscripts that may be more significant and heuristically useful than has been recognized. I shall consider the three Oxyrhynchus manuscripts individually, in the order of their original identification, and then draw some general conclusions.

### *P. Oxyrhynchus 1*

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<sup>4</sup> Among such studies, I note in particular J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Oxyrhynchus *Logoi* of Jesus and the Coptic Gospel according to Thomas," *TS* 20 (1959) 543-51, reprinted in Fitzmyer, *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974), 355-433 (which is cited here); Otfried Hofius, "Das Koptische Thomasevangelium und die Oxyrhynchus-Papyri Nr. 1, 654 und 655; II," *Evangelische Theologie* 20 (1960) 189-92; Robert A. Kraft, "Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 655 Reconsidered," *HTR* 54 (1961) 253-62; M. Marcovich, "Textual Criticism on the *Gospel of Thomas*," *JTS* 20 (1969) 53-74; H. A. Attridge, "Appendix: The Greek Fragments," in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7 together with XIII, 2\**, *Brit. Lib. OR. 4926(1), and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655*, ed. Bentley Layton (NHS 20; Leiden: Brill, 1989) 96-128; and now April DeConick, "Corrections to the Critical Reading of the *Gospel of Thomas*," *VC* 60 (2006) 201-8. There is now a useful Internet site offering a critical transcription and translation of the Greek fragments: <http://www.gospels.net/thomas/>.

<sup>5</sup> The key descriptions, on which virtually all subsequent work depends, are these: Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *LOGIA IHSOU: Sayings of our Lord from an Early Papyrus* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1897); *id.*, *New Sayings of Jesus and Fragment of a Lost Gospel from Oxyrhynchus* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1904); *id.* (eds.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Volume I* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898); and *id.* (eds.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Volume IV* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1904), 1-28. Fitzmyer ("The Oxyrhynchus *Logoi*," 420-33) aimed to give a complete listing of bibliography on the Oxyrhynchus fragments of GThomas published by ca. 1973. In this vast body of work, there is scarcely any *focused* on papyrological questions of the sort I explore here. Fitzmyer's otherwise very helpful study is illustrative of my point. He makes only brief comments about the physical features of the Oxyrhynchus manuscripts, and focuses almost entirely on establishing the reading of the sayings that they contain. See also the concise descriptions and bibliographies in Joseph van Haelst, *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1976), #593 (P. Oxy. 654), #598 (P. Oxy. 1), and #595 (P. Oxy. 655).

<sup>6</sup> In a visit to Oxford in July 2005, I was able to examine a number of early Christian papyri in the Bodleian Library and the Sackler Library, including P. Oxy. 1 and P. Oxy. 654. (At the time of writing this I had not been able to examine directly P. Oxy. 655, housed in the Houghton Library, Harvard University, and my observations here are based on a good-quality photo. Subsequently, however, I was able to examine the manuscript in the Houghton Library. I thank the authorities at all these libraries for their cooperation in my research.)

P. Oxyrhynchus 1 is a portion of a single papyrus leaf from a codex.<sup>7</sup> The extant portion (ca. 15 x 9.5 cm) comprises 21 lines of incompletely preserved text (each line comprising 15-17 letters) that roughly corresponds to sayings 26-30 (+77b), and 31-33 of the Coptic text. On the assumption that the extent of the Greek text basically corresponded to what we have in the Coptic, Fitzmyer posited that there were originally 37-38 lines of text on each page of the manuscript.<sup>8</sup> The single column of writing on each page measures ca. 6.5 cm width on both sides of the leaf, and it seems clear that the extant text ran from the verso side (i.e., the papyrus fibres perpendicular to the lines of text) to the recto side (the fibres parallel to the writing). On both sides of the leaf, the extant top margin is about 2.8 cm. Based on the height of the extant 21 lines of text (ca. 12.2 cm), an additional 16-17 lines would require ca. another 9.7 cm, making a total column height of about 22 cm. If we also assume a bottom margin of at least 2.5 cm (bottom margins are usually somewhat greater than top margins), we can estimate a total page height of 27+ cm.

On both sides, the outside margin measures 1.5-1.7 cm and the inside margin 1.0-1.6 cm (the inner margin on the recto side slightly narrower, and the endings of the lines somewhat less regular than on the verso side).<sup>9</sup> So, allowing for some loss of material from both margins, we can assume an original page-width of perhaps 10-13+ cm. This sort of tall and narrow page has analogies in some other Christian papyrus manuscripts, and fits easily Turner's proposed "Group 8" of papyrus codices, one of the more common shapes among codices of the second and third centuries CE.<sup>10</sup>

On the left edge of the recto side, there is a repair strip about 3.8 cm wide with fibres running vertically the entire height of the page. Grenfell and Hunt noted this strip, and seem to have suggested that it reflects a greater wear that accrued to the outer margins of codex pages through frequent usage. But in this instance, it is clear that the damage requiring the repair strip happened *before* the text was copied, for the lines of writing (all in the same hand) commence on the repair strip and extend onto

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<sup>7</sup> The leaf is held in the Bodleian Library (Oxford), catalogued as Bodl. MS. Gr. th. e 7 (p).

<sup>8</sup> Fitzmyer, "The Oxyrhynchus Logoi," 355-56 n. 2.

<sup>9</sup> The inside margin is also noticeably more ragged, suggesting that the leaf may have been torn from the codex of which it was originally a part. It does not appear simply to have fallen out.

<sup>10</sup> To my knowledge, this is the first attempt to estimate the original page size. See Eric G. Turner, *The Typology of the Early Codex* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 20, for a list of other codices (Christian and non-Christian) in this category, which involves a breadth of 12-14 cm and a height of 25-30 cm. Other Christian examples of the same approximate date include P. Chester Beatty II (ⲓ46; 13.5-15.2 x 26.5-27 cm) and P. Oxy 208+1781 (ⲓ5; ca. 12.5 x 25 cm). In his table of codices surveyed, Turner gives no estimated page-size for P. Oxy. 1 (*Typology*, 143).

the remaining portion of the page.<sup>11</sup> It is more likely, therefore, that the particular sheet of papyrus of which the extant leaf is a portion suffered damage to this edge in the process of cutting the bi-folia for this codex. In short, the repair strip tells us nothing about how heavily the text may have been used.<sup>12</sup> There is, however, considerable abrasion to the beginnings of lines on this side, resulting in the loss of one or two letters from some. But this abrasion probably happened in the course of the fragment lying in the ground for many centuries.

As for the scribal hand, it is clear and competent, but workaday and certainly not calligraphic, and a dating to the early third century CE is commonly accepted.<sup>13</sup> For instance, it is clearly not bilinear, and there is considerable variation and obvious inconsistency in letter sizes (cf., e.g., the different sizes of the *epsilons* in verso ll. 1 and 3, the *bēta* in ll. 2 and 7, and the *sigma* in ll. 1 and 2).<sup>14</sup> Other features, such as ligatures confirm a copyist of very limited aesthetic abilities. The majuscule letters are mainly ca. 2 mm in height, initial letters of lines often slightly larger (ca 3 mm), and “descenders” noticeably larger still (the *phi* ca. 6 mm, the *psi* 4.5 mm).

In general, however, the size of the writing tends toward the smaller end of the spectrum of hands usual for a page of this size, and this also means a somewhat larger number of lines per page, ca. 37-38, than more typical of Christian literary manuscripts. To cite two roughly contemporary examples of codices of similar page shape and size, P. Oxy. 208+1781 (Ⲛ5, fragments of John) had 27 lines per page, and P. Chester Beatty II (Ⲛ46, Pauline epistles) had 25-28 lines per page. If, as is usually assumed, fewer lines per page and somewhat larger letter-sizes reflect a copy prepared for ease of reading (perhaps public reading in particular), then the smaller-size letters and somewhat greater number of lines per page may signal that P. Oxy. 1 was copied more for personal reading/usage.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Grenfell and Hunt, *LOGIA IHSOU*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> I thank Dr. Nick Gonis of the Sackler Library (Oxford) for discussing the matter with me during my visit to Oxford in July 2005 and confirming this view of the likely occasion for the repair. I assume that the person cutting and preparing the bi-folia for copying cut the horizontal fibres vertically in a straight line, which then permitted an even strip of vertical fibres to be pasted onto the damaged area.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Attridge, “Appendix,” 96-97, who describes the writing as “rather flattened capitals of medium height,” and “an informal literary hand” with analogies in other late second and third-century CE papyri. I would say that among papyri of this period and page-size, the letters are somewhat on the small side, and that the hand is unskilled at literary quality, rather than “informal”.

<sup>14</sup> “Bilinear” means that the letters in lines all are written evenly in size and placement so that they fit within two imaginary parallel lines. For an excellent *entrée* into papyrology, see Eric G. Turner, *Greek Papyri: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

There are several scribal devices worth noting. As observed already, the copyist was clearly concerned to make the right-hand ends of lines on the verso more regular than on the recto side, likely because on the verso side the lines ended on the outer edge of the page, where irregularities would be more noticeable.<sup>15</sup> In an effort to achieve this visual regularity of line endings, the scribe used a line-filler mark (ll. 3, 9, 17, 18), whereas no such mark appears on the recto side. The *nomina sacra* forms (all with the usual supralinear stroke) are ΙΣ (verso ll. 5, 11; recto ll. 23 [restored], 30, 36, and 41), ΘΥ (verso l. 8), ΑΝΩΝ (verso l. 19), ΠΡΑ (verso l. 11), and ΠΙΡΙΑΙ (recto l. 32). A diaeresis (functioning as a rough breathing mark) appears over the initial *upsilon* of ΥΙΟΙΣ (verso l. 19), and a supralinear stroke is used at the end of some lines in place of a final *nu* (verso ll. 10, 16; recto ll. 27, 35). There is, however, no punctuation, and I cannot detect any clear use of spacing to signal sense units.

There are some itacisms, ηηστευεται (verso ll. 5-6), ευρηται (verso l. 7), σαρκει (verso l. 13), δειψω(v) (verso l. 16), and γεινωσκονταϚ (recto l. 35), and a clear correction of πτωχια(v) (recto l. 22, an *epsilon* written above the *iota*). However, οικοδομημενη is uncorrected in ll. 36-37 (recto).<sup>16</sup>

The number on the upper right-hand corner of the verso side (ΙΑ = 11) is very interesting. Grenfell and Hunt suggested that it was “usual to foliate the right-hand pages” of a codex, which would confirm further that the text on the verso preceded the material on the recto side.<sup>17</sup> But, in fact, it is not so easy to be sure what the number represents.<sup>18</sup> Numbering can function to order the sheets of papyrus, which were folded to form “bi-folia” (i.e., two leaves, or four pages of writing space), to ensure their correct order for assembly to form the codex (particularly in single-gathering codices). But sometimes leaves, not sheets, are numbered, and in other cases numbers identify gatherings (quires), especially, of course, in the case of multiple-gathering codices. With only this one leaf from the codex extant, it is wise to be cautious. That the number on this leaf appears to be from a hand other than the

<sup>15</sup> This was first observed by Grenfell and Hunt, *ΛΟΓΙΑ ΙΗΣΟΥ*, 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> Here, too, I reiterate items mentioned by Grenfell and Hunt, *ΛΟΓΙΑ ΙΗΣΟΥ*, 7. For very recent discussion of itacism in Koine Greek, see now Chrys C. Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission* (WUNT, 167; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2004), esp. 339-96; and Francis T. Gignac, “Phonological Phenomena in the Greek Papyri Significant for the Text and Language of the New Testament,” in *To Touch the Text: Biblical and Related Studies in Honor of Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J.*, eds. Maurya P. Horgan and Paul J. Kobelski (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 33-46.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> For a careful discussion of the functions of numbering in codices, see Turner, *Typology*, 73-80.

copyist further justifies caution. Turner cites other examples of numbering added by a second hand, and suggests that in these instances it might have been added by a user of the codex, perhaps to facilitate reference.<sup>19</sup>

So, the number 11 on this leaf might mean that it was preceded by ten leaves (or twenty pages), which is my own guess. But the number might instead reflect a pagination scheme added by a user, a scheme that might have involved numbering the right-hand pages. Or, just conceivably, the number might mean that this leaf was preceded by ten previous gatherings, each of an uncertain number of papyrus sheets. The beginning of text on the verso of P. Oxy. 1 corresponds to saying 26 of the Coptic text. As noted, if the number reflects a marking of the leaves or the papyrus sheets, then the extant verso was preceded by ten leaves (twenty pages). At about thirty-six lines per page, twenty pages would accommodate about 720 lines of text, or about 575 letters per page (each line about 16 letters). As Fitzmyer judged, it would not have required twenty pages to accommodate the equivalent in Greek of sayings 1-25 of the Coptic, and so some other text probably preceded GThomas in the codex.<sup>20</sup> But, unfortunately, we have no basis for proposing what other text(s) this codex might have included.<sup>21</sup>

In summary, I suggest that P. Oxy. 1 is a copy prepared by a scribe of modest literary ability and quite possibly for someone of modest financial resources (and so was not able to afford a more elegant copy), or else by/for a reader who wanted only a readable copy of the text. The codex format reflects the general preference for this book-form among early Christians, and the likely page-size is a common one among codices of the period of this one. The absence of the sort of scribal devices that we customarily associate with copies prepared for public reading suggests that this may have functioned as a personal/private copy.

#### *P. Oxyrhynchus 654*

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<sup>19</sup> Turner, *Typology*, 75.

<sup>20</sup> Fitzmyer, "The Oxyrhynchus Logoi," 355-56 n. 2.

<sup>21</sup> In her presentation at the Eisenach conference on the Gospel of Thomas (October 2006). Jutta Leonhardt-Baltzer noted that the Coptic version of GThomas in Nag Hammadi Codex 2 is preceded by a version of the *Apocryphon of John*, and suggested that this might have been intended to make the latter text a kind of interpretative context for reading GThomas. Her presentation made me realize all the more how very interesting it is that also in P. Oxy. 1 the Greek GThomas was preceded by some other text. It is intriguing to wonder if this text was some version of the *Apocryphon of John*! For an analysis of the contents and arrangements of the Nag Hammadi codices, see also Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 235-66, esp. 253-55 for discussion of Codex 2.

In P. Oxyrhynchus 654 we have a very different item.<sup>22</sup> First, it is a portion of an “opisthograph,” a re-used roll, the extant text of GThomas having been copied on the outer side of a roll, whose inner side was used for a land survey-list. Grenfell and Hunt dated the cursive hand of this survey-list to the late second or early third century CE, and assigned the hand of this copy of GThomas to the middle or late third century CE. This dating has obtained general acceptance.<sup>23</sup> The extant portion measures 24.4 (h) x 7.8 cm (w). Portions of the top margin (1.5 cm) and the left-hand space between columns (2.6 cm) survive, and 42 incomplete lines of text that correspond to sayings 1-7 of the Coptic text of GThomas. Unfortunately, there is an uneven vertical break that cuts through all the extant lines, so that only the left-hand portion of each line survives. Reconstructions of the remainder of the lines based on retranslation from the Coptic suggest an original column of ca. 9 cm width, and ca. 26-36 letters per line.<sup>24</sup>

The text is written in majuscule letters that vary considerably in height, from 1.6 mm (*omicron* and *omega*), to 2 mm (*sigma*, *thēta*, and *ēta*), and 3 mm (descenders such as *upsilon*), and the initial letters of lines somewhat larger, ca. 3- 4 mm. Attridge repeated the description of the hand by Grenfell and Hunt, “a common informal literary type of the third century,” but I would suggest that this is a rather generous characterization.<sup>25</sup> The complete inability at bilinear writing, the irregularities of letters in size and formation, and other features seem to me to indicate a scribe of very limited skill (or little interest) with regard to the aesthetic properties usually expected in copies of literary texts. Furthermore, the errors in spelling (e.g., γνωσθε, l. 20;0 αποκαλυψησετ[αι], l. 29), and the bizarre first line (οιτοι οι οι λογοι οι . . .), which Grenfell and Hunt described as “intolerable, even in third century Greek”) combine to indicate a scribe characterized by a noticeable level of carelessness or limited skill.<sup>26</sup> Note also the two cases where the scribe accidentally omitted words and then inserted them above the line (υμεις, l. 19; οτι, l. 25).

The only *nomina sacra* form is the consistent use of IHΣ (ll. 2, 27, 36). Compare this three-letter form of the name with the two-letter spelling used in P.Oxy 1. It is also interesting that neither πατρος (l. 19) nor ουρανος (ll. 11-12) is treated

<sup>22</sup> P. Oxy. 654 is catalogued as B. L. pap. 1531 and held in the British Library (London).

<sup>23</sup> Grenfell and Hunt, *New Sayings* 9.

<sup>24</sup> The maximum number of extant letters in any line is 19 (l. 28).

<sup>25</sup> Attridge, “Appendix,” 97.

<sup>26</sup> Grenfell and Hunt, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Volume IV*, 2.

as a *nomen sacrum* in this manuscript, whereas in P.Oxy 1 πατρος is written as a *nomen sacrum*.

There is no punctuation, but there are a number of other interesting scribal devices. In particular, note the “coronis” marks (shaped somewhat like an arrow) that usually precede the phrase λεγει Ιη(σου)ς (ll. 5, 9, and 36); but note also line 27, where the mark appears mistakenly placed following this phrase. At several points, horizontal lines extending from the left margin and a few letters into the text signal the first full line of a saying (ll. 6, 10, 22, 28, 32). These lines, however, appear to have been added by someone other than the copyist. A diaeresis over an initial *upsilon* or *iota* appears in ll. 13, 14, 15, 19, and 21.

To summarize, all indications make it likely that P.Oxy 654 is a personal copy of GThomas, intended for private study. The carelessness or limited skill of the copyist may suggest either that the intended user was unable to afford a better quality copy, or was simply not sufficiently concerned to have one.

#### *P. Oxyrhynchus 655*

The remaining item to be considered, P. Oxyrhynchus 655, is comprised of several fragments of a papyrus roll.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, two of the eight fragments originally identified as part of this manuscript are now missing (fragments *f* and *h*), but these were rather small and their loss probably does not detract much from what we can say about the manuscript. Of the remaining ones, fragment *b* is the largest, 8.3 cm (wide) x 8.2 cm (high). According to Kraft’s reconstruction, fragment *a* contains parts of eleven lines from the top of one column, and fragment *b* has another 17 lines of the same column (most lines incompletely preserved) and the initial few letters of 10 lines of a second column. Fragment *c* has the initial one or two letters of ten lines from the top of this same second column. Kraft has also proposed that fragments *d* and *e* might be bits of some other column, but not one adjacent to the material in the larger fragments.<sup>28</sup> In sum, Kraft proposed that “the papyrus once contained columns of

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<sup>27</sup> P. Oxy. 655 is catalogued as SM 4367 in the Houghton Library (Semitic Museum Collection), Harvard University. For this discussion I studied a good-quality photograph kindly supplied by the Houghton Library, which I was able to scan into digital form and then enlarge for examination of details. I also draw upon the results of Robert A. Kraft’s analysis of the fragments (“Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 655 Reconsidered,” *HTR* 54[1961] 253-62), which corrects the results of earlier studies, including Grenfell and Hunt’s *editio princeps*, at several points.

<sup>28</sup> See Kraft’s discussion of the possible contents of the smaller fragments in “Oxyrhynchus 655,” 260-62

about 30 lines each [ca. 5 cm width], with approximately 12-16 letters per line (usually 14-15).”<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting that these are narrow columns in comparison with more typical layout on literary rolls (and cf. the estimated 9 cm width of columns in P. Oxy. 654). These narrow columns may have been designed to compensate for the very small size of the lettering. It can be confirmed easily that the eye finds long lines of small print harder to read, and this would have been all the more true in the absence of punctuation and word division.

The extant fragments preserve portions of text that correspond *roughly* to sayings 36-39, and possibly a bit of saying 24 as well, of the Coptic GThomas. There is, however, at least one major difference. Nearly all of lines 4-17 of Kraft’s reconstruction of the first extant column (also accepted in Attridge’s edition) have no parallel in the Coptic text of saying 36.<sup>30</sup> This and a number of other instances of variation in content and order of material between the Oxyrhynchus manuscripts and the Coptic GThomas should make us a bit cautious (perhaps more cautious than some scholars have been) about using the Coptic to make conjectural restorations of the Greek manuscripts.<sup>31</sup>

The small, majuscule characters are confidently and skilfully formed, with serifs or small hooks on some letters (e.g., some horizontal strokes of *tau*, vertical strokes of some letters such as *lambda* and *phi*). Unfortunately, no published description of the manuscript to date gives an exact measurement of the size of the letters.<sup>32</sup> But it is clear that the scribe aimed to produce a very compact manuscript. Attridge estimated that the height of the roll was approximately 16 cm, which had to accommodate top and bottom margins and some 30 lines of text. For modern comparison purposes, the volumes in the Loeb Classical Library have pages of just over 16 cm height, and a maximum of about 32 lines per page. A comparison with

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<sup>29</sup> Kraft, “Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 655,” 262.

<sup>30</sup> See Kraft’s note on this, “Oxyrhynchus 655,” 254, in which he weighs whether P. Oxy. 655 or the Nag Hammadi Coptic text better represents “the original form” of GThomas. But it may also be that the text was always subject to additions or deletions. Cf. also Attridge’s restoration of these lines (“Appendix,” 121-22), which have some relationship to the sayings in Matt. 6:27-29 and Luke 12:25-27.

<sup>31</sup> Another famous instance of significant difference between the Oxyrhynchus fragments and Coptic GThomas is, of course, the position of the saying about lifting the stone and splitting “the wood,” which is part of a saying corresponding to Coptic saying 30 in P. Oxyrhynchus 1, but is attached to saying 77 in the Coptic text. Attridge listed a number of “substantial differences” between the Greek fragments and the Coptic text, “Appendix,” 99-101.

<sup>32</sup> I hope that the more recent practice of giving measurements of letters (in millimetres) will be more widely followed in descriptions of ancient manuscripts. Characterizations such as “small” or “medium sized” are far too imprecise for scientific analysis and comparison.

roll-heights of the same approximate period as P. Oxy. 655 confirms that it was very much on the small/compact end of the spectrum. In his invaluable study of Greek literary rolls, William Johnson judged that in the Roman period roll heights were characteristically 25-33 cm, with exceptions on either end of the range.<sup>33</sup> So, P. Oxy. 655 was very likely a personal copy.

The letters are evenly spaced, and the scribe appears to have aimed basically for bilinear layout; but some letters prevented fully consistent success (e.g., especially the *alpha*, in addition to descenders such as *upsilon*, *phi*, and *psi*). As is often the case in manuscripts of the period other than the highest-quality literary hands, the omicron is significantly smaller than the other letters. Also, although in general the individual letters are formed fairly consistently, there is some small variation in a few (e.g., the various instances of *sigma*, *epsilon*, and *thēta*). There is no observable punctuation, no breathing marks or accents or use of spaces to mark sense-units, and no *ekthesis* or any other device to mark paragraphs. On line 3 of fragment *d*, however, there is a small >-shaped mark apparently serving as a line filler. There is also one correction in line 2 of this same fragment, a small *epsilon* written above the *iota* in what remains of the word φῶτιω. For a somewhat analogous hand (perhaps just slightly less elegant), note, e.g., P. Oxyrhynchus 1016, a third-century CE roll of Plato, *Phaedrus*.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, none of the words characteristically treated as *nomina sacra* survives in these fragments. Those who have attempted reconstructions of the text (e.g., Attridge, Kraft) have tended to assume, however, that Jesus' name was written as ΙΣ, although a three-letter form (ΙΗΣ) is also entirely possible.

### *Summarizing Observations and Inferences*

Let us now try to gather up the data from our analysis of the three Oxyrhynchus manuscripts of GThomas and attempt some observations and inferences. We may begin by noting that the multiple copies of GThomas clearly indicate a certain level of interest in this text among Christians in the early third century. If, however, we compare the number of copies of all literary texts in identifiable Christian manuscripts dated prior to 300 CE, we can put the three copies of GThomas into some

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<sup>33</sup> William A. Johnson, *Bookrolls and Scribes in Oxyrhynchus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 141-43.

<sup>34</sup> See plate 84 in Eric G. Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World* (2nd ed.; Institute of Classical Studies Bulletin Supplement, no. 46. London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1987).

perspective.<sup>35</sup> Of course, any such comparison rests on the assumption (by no means incontrovertible) that the extant number of copies of a text from a given period is some general reflection of its comparative popularity at that time.

I list here the literary texts in question in the decreasing order of the numbers of extant copies among Christian manuscripts dated to the second and third centuries CE: Psalms (16), John (15), Matthew (12), Shepherd of Hermas (11), Genesis and Exodus (8 each), Luke and Acts (7 each), Isaiah (6), Revelation (5), Romans and Hebrews (4 each), James, Ephesians, Leviticus, Acts of Paul, GThomas (3 each), 1 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Jude, Irenaeus, Gospel of Mary, Gospel of Peter (?),<sup>36</sup> Deuteronomy, 2 Chronicles, Esther, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets, and Tobit (2 each), and a large number of other writings for which we have only one copy from this period (Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Job, Wisdom, Susannah, 2 Maccabees, Mark, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, Philemon, Titus, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, Protevangelium of James, “Egerton” Gospel, “Fayum” Gospel, Correspondence of Paul and Corinth, Apocalypse of Peter, Apocryphon of James and Jambres, Apocryphon of Moses, Melito’s Paschal Homily, Melito’s On Prophecy?, Melito’s Paschal Hymn?, Odes of Solomon, Julius Africanus’ Cesti, Origen’s Gospel Commentaries, a Homily by Origen, Origen’s De Principii, Sibylline Oracles, Diatessaron?, Theonas’ Against Manichaeans?, and a small number of unidentifiable texts.

So, the three copies of GThomas suggest a readership interest greater than for many other texts, but it hardly stands out. In fact, GThomas ties for thirteenth place along with James, Ephesians, Leviticus, and Acts of Paul, the three copies of GThomas suggesting an interest perhaps approximate to that given to these other writings. On the other hand, obviously the three copies place it ahead of many texts, including a number of canonical ones (e.g., Mark)!

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<sup>35</sup> For a fuller survey of all literary texts in earliest Christian manuscripts, see Hurtado, *Artifacts*, 15-41, and Appendix 1 for a complete list. The question marks in the list above reflect uncertainties about the identification of the texts in question.

<sup>36</sup> It is now less certain that P. Oxy. 2949 and P. Oxy. 4009 are fragments of the *Gospel of Peter*, in light of the discussion by Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas (eds.), *Das Petrus-evangelium und die Petrusapokalypse: Die Griechischen Fragmente mit deutscher und englischer Übersetzung* GCS 11 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004); and Paul Foster, “Are there any Early Fragments of the So-called *Gospel of Peter*?” *NTS* 52 (2006) 1-28.

It is also interesting that in the three copies of GThomas we have an example of each of the three book-forms of the ancient period. It is almost certain that opisthographs represent economical copies of texts made for private reading and study, and this is no doubt what we have in P. Oxy. 654.<sup>37</sup> As for P. Oxy 655, the roll format, compact size, the smallness of the writing and the large number of lines per column, suggest likewise a private copy (as already noted), and perhaps a copy intended for portability.<sup>38</sup> But the greater skill of the copyist and the use of a fresh roll also suggest that it was copied for someone able to pay the likely greater cost involved, or perhaps someone able to draw upon the services of a skilled slave to do the copying (which would also indicate a person of some financial means and able to own such a skilled slave). Also, given the strong general preference for the codex among ancient Christians, especially for texts used as scripture, the choice to copy a text in a fresh roll surely further indicates that this text (or at least this copy of the text) was not used as scripture, i.e., not read publicly in worship settings.<sup>39</sup>

It is, however, more difficult to be certain about the intended usage of P. Oxy. 1. The probable size of this codex is rather typical of papyrus codices of its time, including many Christian copies of biblical texts. But, as noted already, in comparison with some other Christian manuscripts, the somewhat larger number of lines per page and the small size of the letters, plus the good likelihood that the codex included some other text(s) as well as GThomas combine to make one wonder if this manuscript was some sort of compendium, perhaps for personal usage. The lack of sense-unit markers or spacing and punctuation is consistent with this, as Christian codices copied for public/liturgical usage tend to have such readers' aids supplied by the original copyist.

So, these three third-century copies of GThomas likely reflect a use of this text in personal or non-liturgical settings, perhaps for religious edification, reflection, and/or study. With allowance for the limits of our artefactual evidence and the need

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<sup>37</sup> Other early examples of Christian opisthographs include P.IFAO 2.32 (ⲉ98; Revelation), P.Oxy. 1228 (ⲉ22; John), PSI 8.921v (Psalms), P.Mich. 130 (*Hermas*), and a couple of unidentified theological treatises or homilies (P.Gen. 3.125 and P.Mich. 18.763).

<sup>38</sup> There are likewise examples of compact-size codices, Christian and non-Christian, and these are thought to have been prepared for portable usage. See my discussion of codex sizes in *Artifacts*, 155-65.

<sup>39</sup> For further discussion of the Christian preference for the codex, see *Artifacts*, chapter 2. It remains interesting that (at least so far) we have no instance of a writing that became part of the New Testament copied on an unused roll (in contrast to the few examples of opisthographs), and only a very few copies of Old Testament writings on rolls likely from Christian hands.

to take account of any other evidence in forming conclusions, we can say that we have no indication *from these manuscripts* that GThomas functioned as “scripture” for their intended readers. Or, perhaps a bit more circumspectly, we could say that it is at least unlikely that any of these three copies so functioned.

It is worth noting that the likely personal usage of these Greek copies of GThomas fits well with the emphasis in this text on the individual and on personal spiritual fulfilment. From the opening words onward, the exhortations are largely to individuals, as reflected, for example, in the singular forms of the Greek verbs in the exhortations in the prologue and sayings 1, 3, 5, 24, 26, and particularly in the very difficult saying 30, with its emphatic statement that οπου εις εστιν μονος, λεγω εγω ειμι μετ’ αυτου~.<sup>40</sup> The incidence of such singular exhortation-forms could be multiplied if we take account of the fuller text given in the Coptic version. By contrast, nothing in GThomas (in the extant Greek or the Coptic) seems to me to promote corporate/congregational religious life. So, GThomas may simply have been intended for the private/personal attention of individuals seeking some sort of deeper/higher truth, some sort of further spiritual attainment, some sort of further revelation of purportedly esoteric truths. Perhaps like-minded souls formed some sort of loose network, sharing texts such as GThomas with one another. But I see little reason to think that demarcated “communities” lie behind this text.

It is also worthwhile to note that the variation in the quality of the hands, book-forms, and handling of *nomina sacra* (esp. the variation in the way Jesus’ name is written) all combine to indicate that these three manuscripts were copied under separate circumstances. It is, I think, unlikely that they derive directly from a common archetype. If so, then these several copies of GThomas probably derive from a preceding equivalent number of prior copies. Again, this reflects a certain readerly interest in the text that probably pre-dates the time of the extant manuscripts of GThomas.

The use of *nomina sacra* forms for Ihsouj shows both a well-known Christian scribal convention, and also a certain variation in the specific implementation of that practice among the three copyists of these manuscripts. Unfortunately, I am not aware that we know the precise find-spot(s) for these three copies of GThomas in relation to the other Christian manuscripts from Oxyrhynchus,

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<sup>40</sup> I reproduce here the reconstruction of lines 25-30 of the recto of P. Oxy. 1 by Attridge, “Appendix,” 119.

but there is no particular reason to link these manuscripts with some distinctive circle of Christians. So far as we know, these artefacts were copied and used among the same Christian circles in which the other texts found in Oxyrhynchus and other ancient Egyptian sites functioned.

There are no doubt further inferences that might be drawn. But I trust that these will suffice to make the basic point that it is worthwhile to take account of the physical and visual properties of the actual manuscripts of texts in forming judgements about their place, role, function and significance in earliest Christianity. My key concern is that in all our efforts to understand such texts as GThomas, and to imagine what kind(s) of readers and significance the text might have enjoyed, we take full account of the actual artifacts of these phenomena, the earliest Christian manuscripts.