



Much research continues in the apocryphal writings and other early Christian literature. This issue identifies key questions and proposals made for situating discovered texts, but also arrays progress made in critical editions for further study.

What of the Strasburg Coptic Fragment?

An ongoing controversy over this questionable text, its nature, and literary relationships

'A new Gospel fragment' was first published in 1900 by Adolf Jacoby and Wilhelm Spiegelberg since then known as the 'Strasburg Coptic Papyrus' (Schneemelcher) or 'Strasburg Coptic Fragment' (Berger/Nord). It consists of two pages, designated Copt. 5 and 6, as well as a handful of minor fragments. The manuscript is dated to the 5th or 6th century, but most recent opinions date the original text no earlier than the beginning of the third century.

The recto of Copt. 5 contains at least a prayer of Jesus, and the verso an exchange between Jesus and the apostles, following the prayer. The recto of Copt. 6 possibly has Jesus exhorting or promising a revelation to the apostles. The verso appears to be their response to this exhortation. There are no internal or material clues to the sequence of the two pages.

Study of the fragments so far has revolved around two main questions: the quality of the initial edition and its translation and the enduring quest to re-place the fragments within early Christian Gospel literary traditions.

Controversy over the inadequacy of the initial edition and translation raged for years between the authors on one side and Carl Schmidt and no less than Adolf von Harnack on the other. Through the heated charges and counter charges it became clear that Spiegelberg had not adequately supervised his student, and that Schmidt, though technically correct on most points, showed no charity or diplomacy. Upon official publication of the discovery, other reviews were generally critical but less polemical than Schmidt had been. In the end, despite the criticisms, the text was never responsibly re-edited. Schneemelcher's translation in *NT Apocrypha* is based on Schmidt's criticisms. Stephen Emmel is currently preparing a new edition and translation.

The second question of literary relationships still admits of no consensus. Initially Jacoby claimed that it belonged to the *Gospel according to the Egyptians*, but this cannot be verified given the fragmentary nature of both texts. Other proposed 'homes' for the fragments have included Origen's *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, Epiphanius' *Gospel of the Ebionites*, and the *Gospel of Peter*.

Perhaps the most interesting current proposal for literary connection links the fragments to the *Unknown Berlin Gospel* (acquired in 1961 by the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, and published by Charles Hedrick and Paul Mirecki with the name *Gospel of the Savior* [*The Gospel of the Savior: a new ancient Gospel*, Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 1999]), mainly because the term *soter* occurs in it. While Hedrick and Mirecki had noted eight significant parallels between the two Coptic texts (also recognized by other commentators),

Emmel goes further and claims that the two belong to the same text. In addition, he proposes a 'correction' of the reconstruction of Hedrick and Mirecki which fits his theory. In defence Hedrick has raised cautions about the plausibility of Emmel's methodology and results. Is this a renewal of controversy *déjà vu*?

Association with Christian literature both inside and outside the canon and no distinctively Gnostic motifs suggest that the fragment belongs—to borrow the expression of Hedrick and Mirecki—to an open period of 'Christian pluralism'. Echoes of NT concepts have been noted in the text along with a formal parallel found in a hymnic portion of the *Acts of John*. The prayer of Jesus contains a number of answering 'Amen's', like the text in the other apocrypha (94-95). It also recalls language of 1 Corinthians 15: 25, 55. The following exhortation has numerous Matthean contacts (Schneemelcher cites Mt 26:45; 9:15; 26:38, 41; 10:28) as well as Johannine echoes (Jn 15:20; 16:33; 1:14). Copt. 6 depicts an investiture of the apostles with three of the eight parallels between that and the *UBG*. Whatever the date of the source text, at this point these two witnesses show continuing interest for the legitimacy of the original apostles and probably their succession in relation to Jesus differently to the farewell scenes of the canonical Gospels and Acts.

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Reviews & Annotations

4 Editions of the *Odes of Solomon*: A Christian Hymnbook (~100 CE)

Anyone doing serious work on an ancient document has to ask and answer the question of the primary text. Happily for almost all Christian documents from the first three centuries CE scholarly editions have been prepared. Such editions collect and evaluate the available textual witnesses to the document they present. The ancient Christian hymnbook going under the name *the Odes of Solomon* is no exception.

Compared to the New Testament which has innumerable manuscripts, a good number of ancient translations, and ample quotations, the situation of the *Odes of Solomon* is rather simple. Only five sources exist:

1. **Codex Harris** (H) from ca. 1500 CE, discovered in 1909, the most complete witness, Syriac text from 3:1b to the end (42:20). Cf. the facsimile in Rendel Harris & Alphonse Mingana, *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, Vol. 1: *The Text, with Facsimile Reproductions*. Manchester: University Press / London: Longmans, Green & Company, and Bernard Quaritch / New York, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras: Longmans, Green & Company, 1916.

2. **Codex Nitriensis** (N) from ca. 1000 CE, discovered in 1911, the oldest Syriac witness, more careful than H, but unfortunately poorly preserved and less complete: Syriac text from 17:7b to the end (42:20). Cf. the facsimile in Michael Lattke, *Die Oden Salomos in ihrer Bedeutung für Neues Testament und Gnosis*. Band II. *Vollständige Wortkonkordanz zur handschriftlichen, griechischen, koptischen, lateinischen und syrischen Überlieferung der Oden Salomos. Mit einem Faksimile des Kodex N (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, 25/2)* Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979.

3. Quotations from *Odes* in **Codex Askewianus** (C, from Coptic) of the Coptic document *Pistis Sophia*. Codex Askewianus is a fourth-century manuscript of a third-century Gnostic tract. In chapters 58, 59, 65,

69, and 71, large sections of the *Odes* are quoted and commented, namely *Odes* 1:1-5; 5:1-11; 6:8-18; 22:1-12 and 25:1-12. A carefully edited text is presented in Harris & Mingana, *Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, Vol. 1 (1916).

4. Ode 11 (all 24 verses) in the **Greek Bodmer Papyrus XI** from the 3rd century. Cf. the facsimile in Michael Lattke, *Die Oden Salomos in ihrer Bedeutung für Neues Testament und Gnosis*. Band Ia: *Der syrische Text der Edition in Estrangela; Faksimile des griechischen Papyrus Bodmer XI. (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, 25/1a)* Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980.

5. A quote from Ode 19 (verses 6-7) in **Lactantius' *Divine Institutes* IV.12.3**: "Infirmatus est uterus Virginus et accepit foetum et gravata est, et facta est in multa miseratione mater virgo" (Quoted from *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Odes of Solomon." See the following website: www.newadvent.org/cathen/14137a.htm, d.d. 6/5/2008).

All five of these witnesses have to be taken into account for a reconstruction of the original text of the *Odes*. Even the tiny fragment in Lactantius (n° 5) inspired W. E. Barnes to emend the Syriac text of Ode 19:6. "Infirmatus est" translated the Syriac *‘āpāt* rather than the extant *gāpāt*. The Coptic fragments in Codex Askewianus (n° 3) seem to be translated from an original that was quite similar to H and N, and are seldom to be preferred when their text differs from both. However, for Ode 1 the Coptic is all we have. When it is impossible to make a choice between rival readings on internal grounds, N is to be preferred over H, and both Syriac witnesses are to be preferred over the Greek and Coptic fragments. Students of the *Odes* are fortunate to have a good number of scholarly editions of the Syriac text at their disposal, each of them based on the witnesses as listed above. I will mention four of them, and comment briefly on their strengths and weaknesses.

1. Rendel Harris & Alphonse Mingana, *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, Vol. 1: *The Text, with Facsimile Reproductions*. Manchester: University Press / London: Longmans, Green & Company, and Bernard Quaritch / New York, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras: Longmans, Green & Company, 1916. In many ways this edition remains unsurpassed. It is a full critical edition of the text.

2. James H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon: The Syriac Texts, edited with Translation and Notes*. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977. Charlesworth stands on the shoulders of Harris and Mingana. His critical edition is based on a careful consideration of their pioneering work, improving their text and carefully arguing his choices.

3. Michael Lattke, *Die Oden Salomos in ihrer Bedeutung für Neues Testament und Gnosis*. Band Ia: *Der syrische Text der Edition in Estrangela; Faksimile des griechischen Papyrus Bodmer XI*. Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980. This handy booklet has an eclectic text. Unfortunately the variants are not printed. Therefore, the reader is almost forced to use this booklet together with the concordance in volume II. The Syriac is unvocalized and renders the use more difficult.

4. Ephrem Azar. *Les Odes de Salomon: présentation et traduction*. Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1996. This is a handy and affordable edition. The Syriac text is eclectic, and variants are not indicated. This edition cannot compete with that of Harris-Mingana or Charlesworth, but it is excellent as an introduction to the Syriac of the *Odes*.

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