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Papyrus Sixty-Six

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THE Arabs who came across some fifty rolls of papyrus in the Fayum district of Egypt, back in 1778, burned them because they could find no purchasers and because they gave forth a sweet aromatic smell as they were consumed by fire. Only one roll escaped this tragic fate and was published as the *Charta Borgiana*, containing an account of the labors of the peasants along the Nile at Arsinoe for the year A. D. 191—192. It was not until 1889 to 1890, less than seventy-five years ago, that a beginning was made in the systematic exploration and study of the literary fragments found for the most part in the rubbish heaps of Egypt.

The first discovery of a papyrus containing something of the New Testament was made in 1896, when Dr. B. P. Grenfell and Dr. A. S. Hunt began excavating at Oxyrhynchus. On the second day of their work Dr. Hunt found a leaf from a very early collection of the Lord's sayings, including the saying on the mote and the beam as found in Matt. 7:3-5. Since this sheet contained sayings which are not included in the canonical Gospels, this papyrus is not given in lists of New Testament documents. The honor of being the first exclusively New Testament papyrus to be discovered belongs to a fragment found on the third day of the expedition, containing the greater part of the first chapter of St. Matthew.

Since that time other papyri have been found. The latest of these is known as *Bodmeriana II*. The fact that it is listed as number 66 means that we now have sixty-six papyri fragments which give us portions of the text of the New Testament. Since its publication two more have been deciphered, bringing the total to 68. This low figure stands in contrast to the more than 250 vellum uncials and the more than 2,500 minuscules presently known. In time there may be a few more papyri. They will, however, hardly ever be as numerous as other scrolls or codices, chiefly because papyrus is the kind of material that can survive only in a dry climate like that of Egypt. In fact, except for a few oxidized rolls from Herculaneum, brought to light as early as 1752, all the papyri we have are from Egypt.

We do not know how Papyrus 66 was discovered. The people who are familiar with the circumstances are keeping this a secret, possibly because some delicate negotiations with an Egyptian agent are involved. But we do know that somehow this papyrus got to Switzerland, where it is now owned by Martin Bodmer, founder of the Bodmer Library of World Literature. After purchasing this papyrus he turned it over for editing to Victor Martin, president of the International Association of Papyrologists and professor of classical philology at the University of Geneva. The job of preparing this papyrus document for print was completed late in 1956; and a printed version of this text became available in December of last year. * We understand that a photostatic volume of the 104 pages, measuring about $6\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ inches each, is in the course of preparation now. The publication of this papyrus is the most important event of this kind since the Chester Beatty Codex was published as P45 and P46 in the years 1933—36.

It should be noted, first of all, that P66 is a codex and not a scroll. In the days of our Lord and the apostles books consisted of individual scrolls. The Gospel of Luke, for example, it has been estimated, would require about thirty feet of papyrus roll for its twenty-four chapters. Some unnamed genius in the middle of the second century of the Christian era discovered that papyrus sheets could be folded and used as pages. Two such folded sheets could be put together for eight whole pages. This was an important discovery. For the works of St. Paul, just to illustrate, could in this way all be kept together in one place as a single volume. Before this development each of the longer letters would constitute an individual scroll. It is quite possible that the epistles of Paul were in fact the first significant literary documents to be put together into a codex and that these were followed by the four Gospels.

P66 is such a codex. It contains John 1:1—6:11 and 6:35 b to 14:15. One folded sheet of papyrus is missing toward the middle of the document; and that accounts for the omission of 6:12 to 6:35 a. It is written, as was customary at the time, in capital letters (uncials) without any division between the words. The use of

* *Papyrus Bodmer II: Evangile de Jean chap. 1—14*, ed. Victor Martin. Geneva: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1956. 152 pages. Paper. No price given.

longhand and the practice of separating words did not develop until approximately the ninth century.

P66 dates from about A.D. 200. This makes it almost forty years older than the Chester Beatty papyri and one and a half centuries older than the great uncials known as the Vaticanus (B) and the Sinaiticus (Aleph).

However, it is not the oldest papyrus fragment we have of the New Testament. This honor belongs to the Rylands Fragment, which is about the size of a dollar bill and contains John 18:31-33 and 37:38. This last fragment dates from the first half of the second century and is significant particularly for the dating of the Gospel of John. There was a time, for example, when it was believed that the Gospel of John was written about A.D. 180. But the Rylands Fragment, discovered as it was in the rubbish heap of a remote village in Egypt and dating from before A.D. 150, put an end to this theory. For if the Gospel of John was already in use in such a distant village by A.D. 150, an earlier date for the writing of the Gospel of John receives strong support.

With the discovery of P66 more than three fourths of the Gospel of St. John is now available on papyrus. Since other fragments have come into the hands of Martin Bodmer from his secret source, it is possible that some of the rest of the Gospel, not contained in P66, will also be found on papyrus fragments.

On the basis of the printed text it is possible to get some idea as to how the ancient scribe worked in this particular instance. It is evident that he was extremely careless at times; for there are many corrections in the manuscript. It seems also that he copied very mechanically. This becomes clear, for instance, by the fact that at times he inserts in the middle of a line a crotchet-shaped mark which other copyists employed to fill out a line, without himself apparently realizing the significance of this particular device. It would also appear that he copied from one manuscript and corrected it at the hand of another. There are at least nineteen instances where parts of the text have been canceled in the interest of getting a more correct copy.

There are some three hundred variant readings in this manuscript. In editing P66, Martin chose Souter's *Novum Testamentum Graece* as his standard. In case of variant readings he gives the

wording of P66 first and underlines it. When such a reading differs from that of the Sinaiticus, the word or phrase is marked by an asterisk.

P66 is of paramount significance for our understanding of the New Testament, in the first place, because it gives us the traditional text of the Gospel. That is to say, the incidents of the Gospel are given in the order to which we are accustomed. This should help us to put an end to the vagaries of those scholars that have tried to transpose certain parts of the Gospel in the interest of what they call a more logical development. Now we have a copy of the text dating from a century after the author wrote the Gospel and giving us the materials in their traditional order.

At the same time we must note that this fragment, in agreement with other important manuscripts, at 5:4 omits the incident of the angel moving the water. Nor does it contain the so-called pericope of the adulteress, 7:53 to 8:11. So far as this last item is concerned, we might add that the first significant ancient document to contain this story after 7:52 is D, the Beza Codex. In a way, this is not surprising, because this particular codex contains a great many additions and omissions which differ from other major sources of the text. As a matter of fact, when Theodor Beza turned over this ancient manuscript to the Cambridge University Library, he put a note on it suggesting that the document better be hid lest someone become disturbed by its many variants. Many ancient texts do not contain this pericope at all. This does not mean, of course, that the incident did not occur. It would only suggest that it was not part of the Gospel as John wrote it. In fact, in some manuscripts this pericope is given after 21:24. Others have it after Luke 21:38. Some ancient commentaries carry it at Mark 12:16.

Possibly, the most significant reading of P66 is that of John 1:18, where it says, "the only *God*, who is in the bosom of the Father," rather than "the only *Son*," as the RSV still has it. There is a great amount of evidence to show that the word *God* should be read at this place. And surely one of the results of the discovery of P66 will be that future editions of the RSV will change the reading of this passage. This the faculty of Concordia Seminary strongly recommended previously in view of the textual evidence that was available even before P66 was discovered.

At John 13:5 P66 has the unusual word *footbasin* for the simple *basin* that is found in other texts. In John 6:51 the phrase "which I shall give" occurs only once and not twice as we have it in the King James Version. Other variants have to do with such things as verb tenses. Some of these are of significance; others are not. A rather interesting one is found at John 10:18, where P66 has the present αἶρεῖ in contrast to the aorist ἤρεν found in the Sinaiticus, the Vaticanus, and even in the Chester Beatty fragment of John. The use of the present tense simplifies the problem of interpreting this saying.

One of the difficult passages, from a linguistic point of view, is 10:29, where seemingly the strongest textual evidence supports the neuter of the relative pronoun and of the adjective. If that is the reading, it must be translated, "That which My Father has given Me is greater than all." The reference in this case would be to the sheep or possibly to the flock; and the meaning of the passage would be that the flock is greater than all things. This could mean that the sheep are more precious than anything else and that for this reason no one is able to pluck them out of the Father's hand. In the light of the context such a statement seems to be very much out of place. Here P66 gives a reading that occurs in the Received Text tradition, where both the relative pronoun and the adjective are given as masculine, meaning, "My Father, who has given to Me, is greater than all." This certainly makes better sense. It presents the problem, however, of not containing any direct object to the verb "give," though we might expect such a direct object. For our present purposes it is enough to say that it is interesting to find this easier reading in an ancient papyrus, especially since it differs from other important witnesses of that early period.

Most of the other significant variants can be described either as elocutionary expansions, to borrow an expression from the editor of the papyrus, or as textual condensations. An example of the former is found at 6:64, where the standard texts have the reading: τίς ἐστὶν ὁ παραδώσων αὐτόν. P66 expands this statement by saying: τίς ἦν ὁ μέλλων αὐτὸν παραδιδόναι. Again at 14:5 the normal text reads: πῶς οἶδαμεν τὴν ὁδόν; but P66 elaborates the question by saying: πῶς δυνάμεθα τῆ[ν] ὁδὸν εἰδέναί. As examples of condensation we might cite 13:24, where the usual reading is: καὶ

λέγει αὐτῷ, εἰπέ τις ἔστιν περὶ οὗ λέγει; P66, however, condenses this to: πύθεσθαι τις ἂν εἴη περὶ οὗ εἶπεν.

In summary, we might once again pose the question of the significance of P66. First of all, the age of this document is certainly very important. The closer we can get to the original autographs, the more certain we can be of the details in the text. For a church body that accepts verbal inspiration there must always be a special interest in this aspect of textual criticism. Secondly, the amount of materials contained in P66 is of great consequence. No other papyrus contains so much of the Gospel of John. Even the Chester Beatty papyri gives us only portions from chapters 10 and 11. Thirdly, P66 is a precious find for the reason that it supports the traditional order of the text against those modern scholars and editors that have attempted to manipulate these materials to suit their own ideas as to how the evangelist ought to have arranged his subject matter. Fourthly, P66 gives us further evidence for the importance of the Alexandrine textual tradition; for its readings conform most closely to the text of the Sinaiticus. The discovery of P66 may, therefore, help in tipping the scales for Alexandria wherever its text differs from that of the Old Syriac versions. This result may, in turn, have a direct bearing on a few debatable readings in the Revised Standard Version.

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