HUMA 3424 History of the Bible

Jan. 15: Early Manuscript Production  
Read for Today: Wegner, chs. 6; Arnold, pp. 8–9

1. Orality

* much of the Bible bears the marks of oral tradition—e.g., the Pentateuch, the Deuteonomic History, the Psalms, the gospels
* sometimes easier to understand what is written by considering the original oral form of the tradition
* once the Bible achieved written form, orality did not cease
* oral material circulated hand-in-hand with what was written—e.g., rabbinic Judaism, Psalms, Gospel of John
* texts written not to be read in private but to be performed in public—e.g., Jesus on reading and hearing
* oral/scribal dynamic: traditions change in the telling, get scribed at important moments (eyewitnesses dying, historical situations threaten the retention of the traditions, etc.), new traditions/interpretations enter into performance of the text, text rescribed

2. Writing in Antiquity

* Papyrus
  + made from a plant plentiful along the Nile; begins ca. 3000 BCE
  + glued together to make a roll/scroll; seldom exceeded 35 feet in length; writing in series of columns; rarely on both sides
  + later cut to make codices
  + popularity: over 40,000 papyri published in modern times; bullae
  + ink can be scraped and washed off to make palimpsests; condemned at Council of Trullo (692)
* Parchment
  + skins of young cattle (=vellum), sheep, goats and antelopes
  + name comes from Pergamum in Asia Minor
  + begins to replace papyrus ca. fourth cent.
  + in codices placed flesh to flesh (recto and verso)
  + paper replaces parchment by the mid fourteenth cent.
* Tablets
  + ink on wooden boards or impressions in wax-covered wooden boards; Romans called it the caudex from the Latin word *caudeus*, meaning wooden
  + in time papyrus and parchment sheets used instead
  + usually not used for literature; more for transactions and school books
  + Christians favoured it as early as the second cent.
  + use of codex can lead to specific kinds of damage (loss at beginning and end; outer edge)
* Features of Writing
  + bookhand (conservative) vs. cursive (rapid; abbreviations common)
  + Majescules/uncials (used until tenth cent.) vs. miniscules (begins ninth cent.)
  + scriptio continua: no spaces and little punctuation
  + aids to reading: chapter divisions, titles, Eusebian canons, titles
  + colophons: contain information about origin of manuscript

3. Special Topics: Nomina Sacra

* abbreviations common on coins (for space) and documentary texts (land transfers etc.), but rarely in non-Christian literary texts
* nomina divina: Theos, Kyrios, Christos and Iesous
* other nomina sacra: saviour, son, spirit, Israel, Jerusalem, David, man, mother, father, heaven
* *Epistle of Barnabas* 9:7–8 and Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 6:278–80) refer to the suspended form of Jesus (IH=Jesus) as having significance; gematria; perhaps origin or the phenomenon
* tau-rho: abbreviation for cross (*stauros*) but perhaps a pictogram

4. Writing Then and Now (Discussion)