

WHAT ARE THE NT AUTOGRAPHS? AN EXAMINATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY IN LIGHT OF GRECO-ROMAN PUBLICATION

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Abstract: *This article explores the definition of the NT “autographs” as articulated in various inerrancy doctrinal statements. It begins by sketching the history of the doctrine of the inerrancy of the “autographs,” followed by some modern criticisms of the doctrine. Greco-Roman composition and publication practices are surveyed by investigating three figures from the beginning of the Roman imperial age through to its height: Cicero, Pliny the Younger, and Galen. Four extant examples of ancient papyrus “autographs” are examined, illustrating the draft and rewriting stages of composition. After analyzing Greco-Roman publication, a definition is proposed: in reference to the NT, the “autograph,” as often discussed in biblical inerrancy doctrinal statements, should be defined as the completed authorial work which was released by the author for circulation and copying, not earlier draft versions or layers of composition.*

Key Words: *Greco-Roman publication, Cicero, Pliny the Younger, Galen, NT autographs, inerrancy, papyri, Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.*

In the last three hundred years and more, thousands of Greek manuscripts of the NT have been discovered and rediscovered in monasteries, ancient church libraries, university archives, and archaeological digs.¹ Because the printing press was not invented until the mid-fifteenth century by Johannes Gutenberg, each of these thousands of Greek NT copies were produced entirely by hand with the result being that no two manuscripts have exactly the same text. This has introduced hundreds of thousands of variations within the textual tradition of the NT.² These variations first came to the attention of modern theologians when John Mill, fellow of Queen’s College, Oxford, published his edition of the Greek NT in 1707 which included a critical apparatus that noted some 30,000 variations in the text.³ Daniel Whitby, rector of St. Edmund’s Salisbury, distressed at the number of these variations, “argued that the authority of the holy scriptures was in peril and that the assembling of critical evidence was tantamount to tampering with the text.”⁴ As

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¹ For a listing of NT manuscripts and a bibliography of their scholarly editions and publications see J. K. Elliott, *A Bibliography of Greek NT Manuscripts* (3rd ed.; NovTSup 160; Leiden: Brill, 2015).

² For an evaluation of the number of NT textual variations within the manuscript tradition see Peter J. Gurry, “The Number of Variants in the Greek NT: A Proposed Estimate,” *NTS* 62 (2016): 97–121.

³ Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the NT: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (4th ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 154–55.

⁴ *Ibid.*

more and more ancient copies of the NT were discovered, and the number of known variations increased, modern theologians had to further refine the doctrine of Scripture by placing the process of God's inspiration of the writings of the NT upon the initial documents, or "autographs," penned by the authors and not upon any one manuscript or manuscript tradition.⁵

However, declaring that inspiration applies only to the "autographs" of the NT writings has led to questions pertaining to the exact definition of "autograph." Some have argued that, in regard to the NT writings, it is impossible to speak of only one autographic text.⁶ Others have proposed that the autographic text of the NT writings (however defined) should not be given privileged authority over other forms of the text that have been in use in different Christian communities over the centuries.⁷

This essay sketches the historical development of the doctrine of Scripture and the emphasis of placing the divine act of inspiration of the NT writings on the "autographs," followed by a survey of common objections to the doctrine. Then, Greco-Roman publication practices are examined by focusing on three personalities (two Roman and one Greek) from the beginning of the Roman Imperial age through to its height. A selection of contemporary papyrus "autographs" are highlighted in order to illustrate the pre-publication draft and re-writing stage of composition. Finally, a full definition of "autograph" as it relates to the NT writings and the doctrine of inspiration is explored in light of Greco-Roman publication.

I. THE DOCTRINE OF THE INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY OF THE AUTOGRAPHS

The inerrancy debate raged in American evangelical circles for the better part of the twentieth century, culminating in the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy which held a series of meetings in Chicago in 1978 and formulated *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (CSBI).⁸ A hallmark of this doctrinal statement is found in Article X,

⁵ See the discussion in John J. Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph? Uses and Abuses of Textual Criticism in Formulating an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture," in *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics* (ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, and Dennis L. Okholm; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 93–111.

⁶ Michael W. Holmes, "Reasoned Eclecticism in NT Textual Criticism," in *The Text of the NT in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (ed. Bart Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes; SD 46; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 353–54; Holmes analyzed the definition of "autograph" in relation to "original text," the traditional goal of NT textual criticism, in "From 'Original Text' to 'Initial Text': The Traditional Goal of NT Textual Criticism in Contemporary Discussion," in *The Text of the NT in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes; 2nd ed.; NTTSD 42; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 637–81.

⁷ Eldon J. Epp, "Issues in the Interrelation of NT Textual Criticism and Canon," in *The Canon Debate: On the Origins and Formation of the Bible* (ed. Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 512–15.

⁸ Roger E. Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 212–15.

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.⁹

The exact boundaries and definitions of the terms used in the CSBI have been a point of contention for Christian theologians since its formulation, especially in regard to the terms “inerrancy,” “infallible,” and “autographic text.”¹⁰

1. *Historical development of the doctrine.* Though the Princeton doctors Charles Hodge, Archibald A. Hodge, and Benjamin B. Warfield are usually singled out as the first to fully articulate a doctrine of Scripture using language that explicitly limited inerrancy to the “autographs” of Scripture, they were certainly not the first to emphasize the inspiration of the original documents.¹¹ To quote just one example, in 1851 John B. Adger wrote,

When we say that the scriptures are divinely inspired throughout, we do not speak of translations or copies, but of the original writings. For the Almighty to direct the pens of the sacred writers is one thing, and it is quite another for him to guide, infallibly, the pens of all in every age who may copy or translate or quote the Bible.¹²

Adger’s comments are representative of the views of American Protestant Christianity on inerrancy before Hodge and Warfield.¹³ Over twenty-five years later in 1878, Archibald Hodge stated that “the Church has asserted absolute infallibility only of the original autograph copies of the scriptures as they came from the hands of their inspired writers.”¹⁴ Just three years later, Benjamin Warfield wrote in an 1881 issue of *The Presbyterian Review*,

The historical faith of the Church has always been, that all the affirmations of Scripture of all kinds, whether of spiritual doctrine or duty, or of physical or historical fact, or of psychological or philosophical principle, are without any error,

⁹ Ronald Youngblood, ed., *Evangelicals and Inerrancy: Selections from the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 233.

¹⁰ Olson, *Westminster*, 213. The literature published articulating both sides of the debate over “inerrancy” (and every position in between) is enormous; for an introduction to the fray see J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, eds., *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Counterpoints: Bible and Theology; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013). See also Robert M. Price, *Inerrant the Wind: The Evangelical Crisis of Biblical Authority* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2009).

¹¹ See the discussion in John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 132–35. For a survey of theologians before Hodge and Warfield that emphasized the original documents of Scripture, see Ronald F. Satta, *The Sacred Text: Biblical Authority in Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series 73; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2007), 2–16.

¹² “The Plenary Inspiration of the Scriptures,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* 4/4 (April 1851): 469.

¹³ Satta, *Sacred Text*, 2–16; Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 134.

¹⁴ *Outlines of Theology: Revised and Enlarged* (Chicago: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1878), 75.

when *ipsisima verba* of the original autographs are ascertained and interpreted in their natural and intended sense.¹⁵

The doctrine of Scripture articulated by Hodge and Warfield continued to be the standard Protestant position into the beginning of the twentieth century. The twelve-volume pamphlet series known as *The Fundamentals of the Faith*, containing some ninety articles on various aspects of Christian doctrine, were published from 1910 to 1915. These articles were then collected by R. A. Torrey and republished in a four-volume set in 1917, *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*.¹⁶ The series was extremely influential with over one million volumes distributed.¹⁷ *The Fundamentals* propagated a doctrine nearly identical to that of Archibald Hodge. In volume two, James M. Gray wrote,

Let it be stated further in this definitional connection, that *the record for whose inspiration we contend is the original record*—the autographs or parchments of Moses, David, Daniel, Matthew, Paul or Peter, as the case may be, and not any particular translation or translations of them whatever. There is no translation absolutely without error, nor could there be, considering the infirmities of human copyists, unless God were pleased to perform a perpetual miracle to secure it.¹⁸

The limitation of inspiration and inerrancy to the “autographs” of Scripture has been a central component of the doctrine of Scripture in America, at least since before the American Civil War, and was incorporated into many doctrinal statements of the twentieth century and has continued so into the present day.

In 1949 the Evangelical Theological Society was formed and has required its members to adhere to a simple doctrinal statement: “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore *inerrant in the autographs*. God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.”¹⁹ Limiting inspiration and inerrancy to the “autographs” has helped in distinguishing between the inspiration of the authorial text and textual alterations and errors that have been introduced into the manuscript tradition over the centuries during the copying process. Yet, despite this, recent criticisms of inspiration and inerrancy have focused on the term “autograph” and the related concept of “original text.”²⁰

2. *Modern criticisms*. Confusion over the term “autograph” is illustrated well by Jacobus H. Petzer who wrote that “New Testament scholarship is slowly but certainly coming to realize that ‘autograph’ is a much more complex concept than

¹⁵ “Inspiration,” *Presbyterian Review* 2/6 (April 1881): 238.

¹⁶ Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 29–30.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ “Inspiration of the Bible—Definition, Extent and Proof,” in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (ed. R. A. Torrey, A. C. Dixon, et al. [Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917]; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 2:12–13 (*italics original*).

¹⁹ <http://www.etsjets.org/about> (*emphasis added*).

²⁰ For a full-length treatment of the issue, Eldon J. Epp, “The Multivalence of the Term ‘Original Text’ in NT Textual Criticism,” *HTR* 92 (1999): 245–81. See also Holmes, “Original Text,” 637–81.

generally anticipated.”²¹ Ben Witherington, in a paper presented at the 2013 annual meeting of the ETS, stated that “confident claims about the inerrancy of the original autographa need to be chastened by the realization that we don’t know exactly what was in those original texts, and since inerrancy is about precision and exactitude, this fact matters.”²² Criticizing the traditional evangelical doctrine of Scripture, John J. Brogan wrote,

Textual critics have recently been examining the question as to what we even mean by “original text” or whether there is even such a thing as a single autograph and whether it is recoverable. . . . In some cases, it is extremely difficult and problematic to define what exactly an autograph *is*.²³

Theologian Michael F. Bird has expressed similar misgivings about the doctrine of the inerrancy of the autographs when he stated that,

To maintain that divine inspiration is confined to the initial autographs is a position that is textually problematic, as it is theologically indefensible. . . . Limiting inspiration to an initial autograph creates a host of problems when we realize that our biblical texts sometimes had secondary additions and subsequent editions, since it would imply that our inspired autographs have noninspired sections overlaid upon them.²⁴

Bird’s comments about multiple editions came in reference to the OT books, in particular, multiple editions of Jeremiah, rather than the NT, which is the focus of this paper.²⁵ However, scholars have expressed similar misgivings about the alleged NT “autographs.” In reference to the traditional goals of NT textual criticism, Michael W. Holmes poignantly questioned,

Precisely what is it that we are attempting to recover? The traditional answer is “the autographs.” But just what is meant by this term? It implies some sort of “fixed target,” but that is a concept attended by a host of difficulties. In the case of the NT, one may suggest that the ramifications of the possibility, for example, of two editions of Mark, multiple copies of Romans or Ephesians, and, to a lesser degree, the relationship between original copies of Paul’s letters and the editio princeps of the corpus have been insufficiently considered. Only in the case of Acts has the possibility of two editions received any extended attention,

²¹ “The History of the NT Text: Its Reconstruction, Significance and Use in NT Textual Criticism,” in *NT Textual Criticism, Exegesis, and Early Church History: A Discussion of Methods* (ed. Barbara Aland and Joël Delobel; CBET 7; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), 26.

²² “The Truth Will Out: An Historian’s Perspective on the Inerrancy Controversy,” *JETS* 57 (2014): 22.

²³ Brogan, “Can I Have Your Autograph?,” 103 (emphasis original).

²⁴ “Inerrancy Is Not Necessary for Evangelicalism Outside the USA,” in *Five Views on Inerrancy*, 151–52.

²⁵ The textual history of the OT is complex and has raised a number of issues in regard to inspiration and inerrancy; for a detailed discussion see Michael A. Grisanti, “Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the OT Canon: The Place of Textual Updating in an Inerrant View of Scripture,” *JETS* 44 (2001): 577–98.

and even here nothing even approaching a consensus has been reached. How do these possibilities affect what we mean by ‘autograph’?²⁶

It is precisely these issues that Holmes raised in regard to the goals of NT textual criticism that this paper addresses in relation to the doctrine of the inspiration and inerrancy of the NT “autographs.” In order to accomplish this task, these questions will now be directed at a fresh examination of Greco-Roman publication practices.

II. GRECO-ROMAN PUBLICATION PRACTICES

The modern concept of publication with its mass production of books, copyright, bookstores, and rules of plagiarism, did not exist in the Greco-Roman world in which the NT documents were composed, circulated, and gathered into collections. Consequently, an adequate formulation of a doctrine of Scripture must incorporate the techniques of book production available to the authors of the NT. Harry Gamble noted that “it is within this broad Greco-Roman context that the publication and circulation of early Christian literature must be considered.”²⁷ A study of the methods used in the larger culture to publish, that is, disseminate works of literature, will illuminate the processes by which the authors of the NT may have compiled, composed, and published the inspired documents.

There have been several studies over the past one hundred years and more that have surveyed classical, Hellenistic, and Greco-Roman primary sources, as well as ancient material remains that shed light on ancient publication.²⁸ The following discussion will now turn to three prominent figures from Roman antiquity that are predominant in illustrating the process by which books were composed and published.

1. *Marcus Tullius Cicero*. He flattered, conspired, debated, and clashed with some of the most infamous men of the Western world: Pompey, Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, Octavian, and Crassus.²⁹ Cicero’s life of just over six decades “coincide[d] almost exactly with the final six decades of the Roman Republic,” and these were some of the most tumultuous and bloodiest years in the history of Rome.³⁰

Cicero was born in 106 BC to a wealthy family in an Italian village called Arpinum located southeast of Rome. When Cicero and his brother Quintus were still young, his father moved the family to Rome in order to secure the best educa-

²⁶ Holmes, “Reasoned Eclecticism,” 353.

²⁷ Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 93.

²⁸ Jon W. Iddeng, “*Publica aut perit!* The Releasing and Distribution of Roman Books,” *SO* 81 (2006): 58–84; Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 83–93; Raymond J. Starr, “The Circulation of Literary Texts in the Roman World,” *CIQ* 37 (1987): 213–23; Kenneth Quinn, “The Poet and His Audience in the Augustan Age,” in *ANRW* 30.1:75–180; Richard Sommer, “T. Pomponius Atticus und die Verbreitung von Ciceros Werken,” *Hermes* 61 (1926): 389–422; K. Dziatko, “Die Veröffentlichung der Bücher im Alterthum,” in *Untersuchungen über ausgewählte Kapitel des antiken Buchwesens* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1900), 149–78.

²⁹ James M. May, “Cicero: His Life and Career,” in *Brill’s Companion to Cicero: Oratory and Rhetoric* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

tion for them. By the time Cicero was in his twenties he had studied grammar and rhetoric under the great orators Lucius Crassus, Marcus Antonius, and the Stoic L. Aelius Stilo; studied philosophy and dialectic under Philo of Larissa and Diodotus; served a brief period in the military; composed his first work on oratory; and successfully argued his first case in the forum. Though Cicero was a glittering success in the courts of Rome, and his influence on the study of oratory and rhetoric are felt to this day, his life was plagued by the political intrigue of the age, and he was eventually executed in 43 BC.³¹

Cicero's legacy is found within the extraordinary number of his writings that have been preserved: fifty-eight speeches, seven works on rhetoric, several poems, many works on philosophy, and over thirty books of letters.³² His letters, especially those to his life-long friend Atticus, provide a wealth of information regarding the publication of his writings. The following excerpts from his letters will be examined in order to gain insight into the methods employed by Cicero to compose, edit, and publish his work.³³

During the beginning stages of composition, Cicero regularly sent a draft copy for his friend Atticus to proofread, correct, and provide critical suggestions.³⁴ Apparently these corrections were a source of anxiety for Cicero who wrote to Atticus, "After finishing this letter I have devoted myself to my treatise. I fear you will run your red pencil under many passages in it" (*Att.* 15.14). In another letter to Atticus, he wrote, "I am glad you like my book, from which you quoted the very gems; and they seem to me all the more sparkling for your judgment on them. For I was afraid of those red pencils of yours" (*Att.* 16.11). This practice of proofreading a colleague's composition was not unique to Cicero, for he wrote to Atticus that, "Brutus has sent me the speech he delivered in the meeting on the Capitol, and has asked me to correct it without regarding his feelings, before he publishes it" (*Att.* 15.1).

Once a work was given to Atticus for critical evaluation (or to anyone else who was editing a first draft), Cicero expected that the manuscript would remain under the tight control of the corrector. It was generally understood that the work would not be copied or disseminated until directed by Cicero. Despite these expectations, sometimes a portion of an unfinished text would circulate more widely than the writer had intended. In the following letter, Cicero chastised Atticus for allowing segments of his draft-composition to circulate and be copied.

³¹ For a comprehensive overview of Cicero's life and works with bibliographies see Miriam T. Griffin et al., "Tullius Cicero (1), Marcus" (*OCD*), 1558–64. For a detailed biography, see Kathryn Tempest, *Cicero: Politics and Persuasion in Ancient Rome* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011). For a study on his oratory and rhetoric, see James M. May, ed., *Brill's Companion to Cicero: Oratory and Rhetoric* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

³² Griffin et al., "Tullius Cicero (1), Marcus," 1560–64.

³³ The following English translations of Cicero's letters are taken from Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* (trans. E. O. Windstedt; 3 vols.; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912–1918) and from Cicero, *Letters to His Friends* (trans. W. Glynn Williams; 3 vols.; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927–1929).

³⁴ Cicero also regularly sent first drafts of his work to his brother Quintus; see *Quint. frat.* 3.6.

Come now, do you really think you ought to publish without my orders? ... Do you really think you were justified in sending to anyone before you sent to Brutus, to whom at your advice I dedicated the work. For Balbus has written to me that you let him have a copy of the fifth book of the *De Finibus*, in which I have made a few alterations, though not many. However, I shall be obliged if you will keep back the others, so that Balbus may not get unrevised copies and Brutus what is stale. (*Att.* 13.21a)

It seems that Atticus was under the assumption that Cicero's *De Finibus* was completed and allowed their mutual friend Balbus to acquire a copy of the text before Cicero had properly completed Book 5. Because the work had been dedicated to Brutus, it was he who should have first been presented with a final copy of the essay. Cicero was concerned that Brutus would receive a book that someone else had already read and Balbus one that was not of the highest quality. Despite his complaints Cicero admitted that his instructions had not been clearly made and reiterated that his books should not leave Atticus's control until they both agreed that they were finished (*Att.* 13.21a, 13.22).

Of course, macro-level changes in structure and style were a concern when editing and proofreading. Nevertheless, Cicero and Atticus often labored over the use of a single word. To Atticus, Cicero wrote,

To return to business, the word *inhibere* suggested by you, which at first took my fancy very much, I strongly disapprove of now.... So change the word back to what it was in the book; and tell Varro [the dedicatee of the work] to do the same, if he has altered it. (*Att.* 13.21)

Seemingly, Cicero ordered these changes after the book had already been completed and a presentation copy given to the dedicatee Varro. The correcting of a work already completed and released for copying occurred in another instance as well. To Atticus, Cicero wrote,

"What, so much leisure from your own affairs" that you have found time to read the *Orator* too. Bravo! I am pleased to hear it, and shall be still more pleased if you will get your copyists to alter Eupolis to Aristophanes not only in your own copy but in others too. (*Att.* 12.6a)

Here Cicero asked Atticus to correct a name entered mistakenly in the text of his *Orator*, from Eupolis to Aristophanes. Though the book had already been released from the author's control for copying, only the corrected text is present in all of our surviving manuscripts.³⁵

Even when pressed for time, Cicero's concern over presenting an error-free work to a reader can be seen in his comments to Atticus, "I am sending to you the funeral oration of Porcia corrected. I have hurried about it, so that, if it should be sent to young Domitius or to Brutus, this edition should be sent" (*Att.* 13.48). However, when preparing a completed work for initial release, mistakes made by the author were not the only concern. Managing copyist mistakes could also be a

³⁵ Starr, "Circulation of Literary Texts," 29.

problem. In answer to queries from Atticus as to the status of a work, Cicero responded,

There is no delay about the books dedicated to Varro. They are finished, as you have seen; there is only the correction of the copyists' mistakes. About those books you know I have had some hesitation, but you must look to it. The copyists have in hand, too, those I am dedicating to Brutus. (*Att.* 13.23)

To ensure that his work was of the highest quality, Cicero often employed the literary skills of his scholarly slave Tiro when composing and editing his writings. To Tiro, Cicero wrote, "Your services to me are past all reckoning—at home, in the forum, in the City, in my province, in private as in public affairs, in my literary pursuits and performances" (*Fam.* 16.4). In another letter, he commented on Tiro's particular use of a word. The exchange illustrates well the level at which Cicero and Tiro must have discussed and edited Cicero's various writings.³⁶ To Tiro, Cicero wrote,

But look you here, sir, you who love to be the "rule" [*κανων*] of my writings, where did you get such a solecism as "faithfully ministering to your health"? How comes *fideliter* to be used in such a connexion? [*sic*] That word's proper home is in the province of duty, though its migrations to foreign territory are frequent—for instance, learning, a house, art, or even a field, can all be called "faithful," provided, as Theophrastus holds, that its metaphorical application is not shockingly extravagant. But of this when we meet. (*Fam.* 16.17)

The Greek word used to describe Tiro's skill in editing Cicero's writings, *κανων*, implies that Tiro acted as some type of quality control during the writing process.³⁷ Of course, Tiro was not the only scribe that aided Cicero in his writing tasks; to Atticus he wrote, "If there is anyone to whom you think a letter ought to be sent in my name, please write one and see that it is sent" (*Att.* 3.15). In another letter he instructed Atticus, "Please, as before, if there are any persons to whom you think I ought to write, do it for me" (*Att.* 11.3).

Once a work was completed and sent to the dedicatee, or to others who wished to have a copy, Cicero retained a duplicate in his own collection. In several of his letters to Atticus, Cicero makes mention of "my copy" of a book or implies that he had made corrections in a copy of one of his own works in his collection (*Att.* 13.21a; 12.6a). This practice was not limited to his formal literary productions. Cicero also usually retained a copy of his letters in a notebook before he dispatched them.³⁸ To his friend D. Paeto, Cicero wrote, "I have just taken my place at table at three o'clock, and am scribbling a copy of this letter to you in my note-book" (*Fam.* 9.26).

In regard to the methods used by Cicero to publish his formal writings, presenting a polished, completed work of literature to the public for circulation and

³⁶ E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 75–76.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁸ See Cicero, *Att.* 13.6; *Fam.* 7.25; 9.12; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 156–161.

copying was not a straightforward procedure. Apparently Cicero labored over his compositions intensely, fretting even over a single word or phrase. He used the editing skills of his slave Tiro and usually sent out a draft of a writing (or a select portion) to be proofread by his friend Atticus. During these stages Cicero worked hard at retaining tight control over the text, not allowing anyone outside of his confidence to copy the work or distribute it to others. Once he felt the piece was sufficiently polished, he then sent the composition to the dedicatee or presented gift copies to friends. Essentially, Cicero had completed the writing and had relinquished control over the piece and allowed for it be circulated by copying and distributing. On a few occasions, the initial circulation of a new writing was so small that Cicero was able to direct corrections in the various copies that he knew were possessed by select individuals.

The circumstances surrounding the publication of Cicero's letters are a bit more complicated. Clues point to Tiro as the person responsible for publishing posthumously the collections of Cicero's letters.³⁹ In a letter to Atticus, Cicero mentioned in passing that Tiro possessed a copy of a letter that had been previously dispatched to Atticus (*Att.* 13.6). And in another letter to Atticus, he wrote, "There is no collection of my letters, but Tiro has about seventy, and some can be got from you. Those I ought to see and correct, and then they may be published" (*Att.* 16.5). It appears that even in the case of a completed letter already dispatched, that Cicero, or even Tiro, may have corrected and polished the collection of letters before formally publishing them.

2. *Pliny the Younger*. He was a man of great influence and importance in the last quarter of the first and the beginning of the second century. Born in AD 61 or 62, the younger Pliny lost his father in childhood and was left under the guardianship of Verginius Rufus (a very powerful man in his day). His uncle, the elder Pliny, adopted him and when his uncle died in the eruption of Vesuvius in the year 79 (which covered and preserved the now-famous city of Pompeii) left all of his wealth and property to his nephew who then took his uncle's name. Pliny the Younger studied under Quintilian, became a skilled orator, an accomplished author, was appointed to the Consulship by the Emperor Trajan, and at the end of his life became the Emperor's representative in the provinces of Bithynia and Pontus (what is now northern Turkey). It is from Bithynia that Pliny sent his last letter before dying suddenly sometime after 111 and before 115.⁴⁰

Pliny is most famous for his collection of letters (published in ten books) that vividly describe the life of an elite Roman socialite. In these letters Pliny construct-

³⁹ Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the NT: A Guide to Context and Exegesis* (trans. Daniel P. Bailey; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 157–58. In regard to Cicero's letters to Atticus, Klauck indicated that these were published from the archives of Atticus about one hundred years after the death of Cicero, during the reign of Nero (p. 158).

⁴⁰ For an introduction to the life of Pliny the Younger with bibliography, see A. N. Sherwin-White and Simon R. F. Price, "Pliny (2) the Younger" (*OCD*), 1198. For a detailed study of his life and letters, see A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966); Eckard Lefèvre, *Vom Römertum zum Ästhetizismus: Studien zu den Briefen des jüngeren Plinius* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009).

ed the ideal lifestyle for the sophisticated Roman.⁴¹ A large component of this ideal lifestyle was a prolific literary output. In a letter to his friend Celer, Pliny described the process by which he corrected and edited his own work:

In the first place, I revise my composition in private, next I read it to two or three friends, and then give it to others to annotate; if I doubt the justness of their corrections, I carefully weigh them again with a friend or two. Last of all I recite the piece to a numerous assembly, and this is the time, if you can believe me, when I exercise the most rigid criticism; for my attention rises in proportion to my solicitude. (*Ep.* 7:17)⁴²

It is a social convention amongst his inner circle to recognize that at these various stages of editing and correcting Pliny has not officially released control over the work. During this time of editing, Pliny often dictated his compositions and notes to a scribe. He wrote to his friend Fuscus that he would close the windows in his Tuscan villa and work on an initial draft, after which, he wrote; “Then I call my secretary, and, opening my shutters, I dictate to him what I have composed, after which I dismiss him for a little while, and then call him in again and again dismiss him” (*Ep.* 9.36).

It is possible that some portions of the piece would inadvertently circulate unofficially in an unfinished form. This unintentional circulation of a writing, outside of the author’s control, occurred in the case of Pliny’s friend Octavius, whose work, though not officially released, was greatly admired by his peers.

You are certainly a most enduring, or rather, hard hearted, I almost said, a most cruel man thus to withhold from the world such excellent compositions! How long do you intend to grudge your friends the pleasure of your verses, and yourself the glory of them? Suffer them, I entreat you, to come abroad, and to be admired; as admired they undoubtedly will be wherever the Roman language is understood. . . . Some few poems of yours have already, contrary to your inclinations indeed, broke their prison and escaped to the light: these if you do not collect together, some person or other will claim the agreeable wanderers as their own. . . . However, as to publishing of them, have your own way for the present. (*Ep.* 2.10)

Octavius’s poems and verses were kept tightly under his control. Yet, despite these precautions, portions of them somehow managed to be circulated and were in danger of being plagiarized. In this case, it is clear that the point at which Octavius’s works were officially completed and “published” was the point at which he freely released them from his control to be copied and circulated by his friends.

After a work was “published,” Pliny retained a copy of his compositions and at a later date would sometimes send out a gift copy. Pliny apologized to his friend

⁴¹ William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (ed. Joseph Farrell and Robin Osborne; *Classic Culture and Society*; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 35–36.

⁴² This quotation and the following English translations of Pliny’s letters are taken from Pliny, *Letters* (trans. William Melmoth and W. M. L. Hutchinson; 2 vols.; LCL; New York: Macmillan, 1915).

Junior, “I have over-burdened you by sending you so many volumes at once” (*Ep.* 8.15). In this way Pliny was contributing to the circulation of his own literature and did not solely depend on the popular distribution of his works.

Pliny certainly understood that, once released for copying, an author’s writings would be a lasting epitaph of glory that might long outlive the author. He reminded Octavius in the same letter that “there is nothing so likely to preserve your name, as a monument of this kind” (*Ep.* 2.10). In another letter, he encouraged his friend Caninius Rufus to drop all other frivolous pursuits and diligently work at composing a literary masterpiece.

But leave, my friend (for it is high time), the low and sordid pursuits of life to others, and in this safe and snug retreat, emancipate yourself for your studies. Let these employ your idle as well as busy hours; let them be really and forever your own. All your other possessions will pass on from one master to another: this alone, once it is yours, will forever be so. (*Ep.* 1.3)

The letters of Pliny testify to a publishing practice that occurred within various stages. First, the author kept the composition under tight control, privately correcting and editing. Next, the piece might be read out in front of a small group of close associates who then gave critical feedback and corrections.⁴³ Then, the work would be circulated amongst close friends for comment and further refinement. And finally, once the author felt the piece was worthy of the public, the writing would be released from the author’s control to be copied and circulated without stipulation. The finished product would hopefully preserve the author’s fame for posterity.

Pliny most likely published the first nine books of his letters himself and the final book of correspondence between Pliny and Emperor Trajan was published posthumously.⁴⁴ At the beginning of the first book of his letters Pliny wrote to Septicus,

You have frequently pressed me to make a select collection of my Letters (if there be any which show some literary finish) and give them to the public. I have accordingly done so; not indeed in their proper order of time, for I was not compiling a history; but just as they presented themselves to my hands. And now what remains but to wish that neither you may have occasion to repent of your advice, nor I of my compliance? If so, I may probably inquire after the rest, which at present lie neglected, and not withhold those I shall hereafter write. Farewell. (*Ep.* 1.1)

Pliny indicated that he gathered the collection of letters without reference to their chronological sequence. He did not overtly state that he edited or polished the letters, only that he selected those dispatches that “show some literary finish” (*Ep.* 1.1). Therefore, as in the case of most of Cicero’s letters above, the published col-

⁴³ Quinn, “Poet,” 83 n. 23; Starr, “Circulation,” 214.

⁴⁴ Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, 146.

lection of Pliny's letters originated from his own copies and not by gathering letters from those who received them.

3. *Galen of Pergamum*. Described as “the most influential medical author of antiquity,” Galen was born around AD 129 in Pergamum, Asia Minor, to what must have been a wealthy family, for Galen studied rhetoric, philosophy, and medicine in the cities of Pergamum, Smyrna, Corinth, and Alexandria.⁴⁵ At the age of twenty-eight, Galen was nominated by the chief priest of Pergamum to care for the gladiators that were wounded in the games sponsored by the priest. After moving to Rome in about 162, Galen practiced medicine for the city's highest social strata, which included the family of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Galen more or less remained in Rome until his death sometime around 215 or 216.⁴⁶

His literary output was nothing less than astonishing, authoring hundreds of treatises, of which around 170 separate works survive.⁴⁷ The peculiar manner in which his writings circulated prompted Galen to compose an essay, *De libris propriis* (*My Own Books*), describing the circumstances surrounding their production.⁴⁸ *De libris propriis* provides a detailed look at the unusual ways in which Galen's compositions were disseminated and sheds light on the peculiarities of publication practices at the height of the Roman Empire. His writings can be loosely classified into two groups; those writings that were composed for a specific individual and not intended for distribution, and those writings that were composed for a wider audience.⁴⁹

In regard to those writings that were intended for a specific individual, and not for distribution, Galen explained how these works came to be “published.” He complained that “my books have been subject to all sorts of mutilations, whereby people in different countries publish different texts under their own names, with all sorts of cuts, additions, and alterations” (*De libr. propr.*, 9). Galen wrote that this was because

they were given without inscription to friends or pupils, having been written with no thought for publication, but simply at the request of those individuals, who had desired a written record of lectures they had attended. When in the course of time some of these individuals died, their successors came into possession of the writings, liked them, and began to pass them off as their own. [...] Taking them from their owners, they returned to their own countries, and after a short space of time began to perform the demonstrations in them, each in

⁴⁵ Galen, *Selected Works* (trans. P. N. Singer; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), i. For a brief introduction to Galen with bibliography, see Ludwig Edelstein and Vivian Nutton, “Galen” (*OCD*), 621–22. For a detailed study of his life works, see Susan P. Mattern, *Galen and the Rhetoric of Healing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

⁴⁶ For a discussion on the issues surrounding the date of Galen's death, see Vivian Nutton, “Galen *ad multos annos*,” in *Dynamis: Acta Hispanica ad Medicinae Scientiarumque Historiam Illustrandam* 15 (1995): 25–39.

⁴⁷ Mattern, *Galen and the Rhetoric of Healing*, 11. For a full list of Galen's works, see Gerhard Fichtner, *Corpus Galenicum: Bibliographie der galenischen und pseudogalenischen Werke* (Berlin: Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012).

⁴⁸ The following English translations of *De libris propriis* are taken from Galen, *Selected Works* (trans. P. N. Singer; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁴⁹ Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture*, 88. See also Mattern, *Galen and the Rhetoric of Healing*, 12.

some different way. All these were eventually caught, and many of those who then recovered the works affixed my name to them. They then discovered discrepancies between these and copies in the possession of other individuals, and so sent them to me with the request that I correct them. (*De libr. propr.*, 10)

Galen did not possess copies of all of these writings and only received copies from those students and followers who wished that he correct and edit them in order to complete them for circulation (*De libr. propr.*, 13).

There were other works written for individuals in which Galen kept personal copies because he thought they were “properly completed” (*De libr. propr.*, 13). Two of these writings in particular were presented as gifts to a man of learning, Boethus. Galen claimed that these two treatises “survive to this day in the possession of many people” (*De libr. propr.*, 13). Apparently, it did not concern Galen that these compositions had circulated widely, even though they were written for the benefit of an individual, because they had been properly edited and polished.

There was a close connection between Galen’s lectures and quite a few of his published works.⁵⁰ In one account, he told of a public demonstration in which he was speaking about several ancient medical writers. The demonstration quickly turned into a debate between Galen and a follower of Martialius (a contemporary physician). Galen’s critical response to the follower of Martialius resulted in admiration from the crowd. As a consequence, Galen wrote that a friend

begged me to dictate what I had said to a person he would send to me who was trained in a form of shorthand writing, so that, if he suddenly had to leave Rome for his home city, he would be able to use it against Martialius during examinations of patients. When I subsequently returned to Rome on my second visit (at the summons of the emperors), the friend who had taken this document had died; but to my amazement the book, written in the context of the rivalry of a particular moment, and while I was quite young (still in my thirty-fourth year), was now in the possession of a large number of people. (*De libr. propr.*, 14–15)

Galen was apparently displeased at the wide dissemination of the written form of his lecture as he vowed never to give a public demonstration, lecture, or debate again and only to practice the “art” of medicine (*De libr. propr.*, 15).

One final example from *De libris propriis* will aid in illustrating the unique circumstances surrounding the publication of Galen’s works.

To this period too belongs the composition, at the behest of Boethus, of six books of *The opinions of Hippocrates and Plato* and the first one of *The usefulness of the parts of the body*. Boethus left Rome before me, with these works in his possession. His destination was Syria Palaestina, where he was to be governor; and where, too, he died. Therefore I completed both these works after considerable passage of time (*De libr. propr.*, 16).

It seems that Boethus left for Syria with these books in his possession before they had been properly completed. Galen, not owning any copies, could not final-

⁵⁰ Mattern, *Galen and the Rhetoric of Healing*, 12.

ize these writings until they were subsequently returned to him after the death of Boethus.⁵¹

Galen composed his books within a community context, having a precise readership in view, and strongly discouraged specific works from circulating outside of this narrow audience. Galen wished to control the dissemination of his writings and those who read them as an extension of his teaching methods. This was because many of his compositions were envisioned only as a substitute for Galen's presence and were not meant to be disseminated as properly polished literary works.⁵² Galen was completely at the mercy of this community to obey his instructions not to circulate a particular writing (*De libr. propr.*, 42–43).⁵³

Even with this ambiguity over which texts were meant to be circulated and which were meant only for a specific individual, Galen still had a clear sense of a finished work that was worthy of copying and dissemination. His students and admirers recognized that some of his mutilated and plagiarized texts were not properly edited and therefore collected and returned these writings to Galen in the hopes of having an officially sanctioned edition, polished and complete, meant for proper circulation. Galen himself recognized many of his writings as completed works that formed a crucial part of a body of literature that he had produced.⁵⁴

4. *Extant examples of papyrus autographs.* Since the unearthing of vast hordes of papyrus documents in ancient Egyptian garbage dumps began over a hundred years ago, several examples of autographic texts have been recovered. Because the fragments discovered in the ancient trash mounds have largely consisted of documentary papyri, there are many draft versions of “petitions, letters, and accounts” and only a few examples of draft versions of literary papyri.⁵⁵ Since the production of literary documents is the topic at hand, the discussion will first turn to two extant examples of what may have been authorial copies of two literary compositions.

P.Köln VI 245 is the remains of a poem in Greek that retells the Homeric epic describing “the events leading up to the sack of Ilion.”⁵⁶ The papyrus fragment

⁵¹ Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture*, 87.

⁵² Ibid., 86. See also the discussion of Galen's preference for personal instruction and its relation to written texts in Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, 30–32; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 21–30.

⁵³ In regard to several of his commentaries on the writings of various philosophers and physicians, Galen wrote, “None of these commentaries was intended for publication; nor were the six volumes on Theophrastus' work on *Affirmation and denial*; while the work on Eudemus on *Speech* was composed earlier at the request of friends. On Aristotle's work on *The ten categories* I had not previously written any commentary either for myself or for others; when, subsequently, a friend asked me for something on the solution of the questions posed in that work, [I wrote a commentary] with the firm instruction that he should only show it to students who had already read the *Categories* with a teacher, or at least made a start with some other commentaries, such as those of Adrastus and Aspasius” (Singer, *Galen: Selected Works*, 19).

⁵⁴ Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture*, 81; Mattern, *Galen and the Rhetoric of Healing*, 12.

⁵⁵ Sean Alexander Gurd, *Work in Progress: Literary Revision as Social Performance in Ancient Rome* (American Philological Association; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 132–33 n. 44.

⁵⁶ Maryline G. Parca, *Ptocheia, or, Odysseus in Disguise at Troy (P. Köln VI 245)* (American Studies in Papyrology 31; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), ix. To examine an image of P. Köln VI 245, see <http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/ifa/NRWakademie/papyrologie/PKoeIn/PK5932r.jpg>.

has been paleographically dated to the third century AD and is all that remains of a larger book roll.⁵⁷ The many amendments, rewritings, deletions, and “interlinear corrections or second thoughts” have led scholars to the conclusion that “the papyrus is the first draft of a text which the author modified during composition.”⁵⁸ On lines 1, 8, and 35, words are deleted and their replacements are written above or below the line. In other places the words and phrases are not deleted by scribal markings, yet replacement words are written above the line (see lines 7, 10, 12, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 29, 34, and 36). The entire first line appears to have been rewritten along with line 35. Some of the alterations even appear to be amending the meter of the poem (lines 17, 21, 22, 24, and 29). Also, several spelling oddities indicate that the author must have been representing “the spoken language of his day” (lines 4, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 25, 35, 37, and 38).⁵⁹

P.Oxy. VII 1015, paleographically dated to the third century AD, is a well-preserved fragment of a poetic *encomium* praising Theon, “a young gymnasiarch ‘learned in the lore of the Muses,’ who made donations to the local gymnasium.”⁶⁰ The papyrus fragment bears the marks of significant alteration with interlinear corrections for lines 6, 7, 10, 11, and 19 and the original title of the work, *Ερμου* (Hermes), has been sponged out (erased) in the left hand margin and at the bottom of the page.⁶¹ The editor of the *editio princeps* noted that these revisions “may even have come from the author’s own pen.”⁶² However, E. G. Turner more confidently described the fragment as “very probably [the] author’s autograph (note alterations) of what may be a prize poem described in [the] top left margin as *εις τον αρχοντα*.”⁶³

Though the topic at hand concerns literary compositions, two documentary examples of a petition to the Egyptian Prefect Publius Ostorius Scapula (c. AD 3–10/11) provide a rare glimpse of multiple draft copies of the same work; P.Mich.inv. 1436 and P.Mich.inv. 1440.⁶⁴ Although both papyri were written by the same person, inv. 1436 contains several additions and corrections which favors its

⁵⁷ For the dating of the fragment, see Parca, *Ptocheia*, 6–8. For a description of its physical properties and its identification as a fragment of a roll, see *ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4–5. The following discussion of the authorial alterations found in P. Köln VI 245 are taken from *ibid.*, 4–6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁰ Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 242. To examine an image of P.Oxy. VII 1015, see E. G. Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World* (ed. P. J. Parson; 2nd ed.; Institute of Classical Studies, Bulletin Supplement 46; London: University of London Press, 1987), 91.

⁶¹ Arthur S. Hunt, ed., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Part VII* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1910), 111–14.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 112.

⁶³ Turner, *GMAW*², 90.

⁶⁴ Ann Ellis Hanson, “Two Copies of a Petition to the Prefect,” *ZPE* 47 (1982): 233–43; Hanson, “The Archive of Isidoros of Psophthis and P. Ostorius Scapula, Praefectus Aegypti,” *BASP* 21.1–4 (1984): 81–83. To examine an image of P.Mich.inv. 1436, see below, and also http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-1432/1436r____.tif. To examine an image of P.Mich.inv. 1440, see http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-1434/1440r____.tif.

identification as the first draft of inv. 1440.⁶⁵ The text of both papyri are fragmented and incomplete; lines 2–10 of inv. 1436 were repeated in lines 11–17 of inv. 1440.⁶⁶ The scribe revised the text of inv. 1436 above lines 6 and 8, and marked line 9 for deletion; nevertheless, these alterations were not integrated into the text of inv. 1440.⁶⁷ Therefore, it must mean that there were “additional rewritings, now lost” of the petition.⁶⁸ Though inv. 1440 is a polished copy with no extant editorial alterations, it “was apparently not dispatched, but was unearthed together with the much-corrected copy, inv. 1436” (see below for an image of P.Mich.inv. 1436).⁶⁹

5. *Conclusion.* The process by which a literary composition saw the light of day was a long, drawn-out procedure of correction, editing, polishing, and rewriting. At times it was a community effort that involved some of the author’s closest associates who gave constructive criticism and suggested changes. In the case of Cicero, the skills of his slave Tiro were employed to great advantage. Pliny the Younger also used the services of a secretary to copy down his thoughts as he dictated. Even the eccentric Galen allowed students and scribes to copy down his lectures for circulation amongst his community of students and upper-class followers. Though these authors used their associates, literate slaves, and scribes to aid in the editing process, the writing was still considered to be the author’s own work, a product of his or her creative mind.

As the composition went through the stages of editing and rewriting, a completed work of literature was consistently the goal in view. Cicero understood that when the early-draft version of *De Finibus* was prematurely released by his friend Atticus, this early version was not the finished product and Cicero was disappointed that the dedicatee Brutus would get an incomplete work of literature (*Att.* 13.21a). Pliny the Younger realized that once a composition was fully polished and completed, and released into the world for circulation and copying, it would be a lasting monument to the author, standing forever as a testament to the author’s creativity (*Ep.* 1.3). The circumstances surrounding the publication of several of Galen’s works were convoluted. This was due to the fact that he attempted to limit his circle of readership, which was an impossible feat as there was no way to prevent the copying and circulation of a work once it left the author’s circle of control. Nevertheless, even in the most extreme cases of the unsolicited copying of Galen’s unpolished lecture notes (which unscrupulous doctors were passing off as their own work), his students and followers could recognize that these copies in circulation were actually Galen’s lectures and that they were incomplete, and they were returned to Galen so that he could revise them as proper works worthy of publishing (*De libr. propr.*, 10).

The extant papyrus fragments of authorial copies of draft documents discussed above give modern readers a firsthand view of what the draft copies of the

⁶⁵ Hanson, “Two Copies,” 233.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

works of Cicero, Pliny, and Galen may have looked like. The fact that they bear the earmarks of extensive alterations made in the same hand as the main body of text is precisely the clue that indicates their autographic nature, that is, that these papyrus fragments are not themselves the intended finished product but are early stages of the writing and rewriting process. Because a completed work of literature is the assumed outcome of composition activity, any marks of extensive editing and re-writing in a papyrus document would be an indication that the writing was incomplete. This phenomenon reflects the attitudes of Cicero, Pliny, and Galen in that they aimed for a polished, completed work, free from error, with exactly the right terminology and phraseology that best reflected their ideas and writing style.

III. THE PUBLISHED TEXT AS THE AUTOGRAPH

Doctrinal statements, such as the one articulated by James M. Gray in *The Fundamentals*, or in the CSBI, Article X, are careful to distinguish between the authorial copies of the NT books and the various textual forms and alterations introduced throughout their transmission history. On the other hand, these same doctrinal statements are not as clear in distinguishing between the sources used by the NT authors, the various stages of composition, and the final form these writings took before being released for dispatching to their intended recipients (the epistles), or for circulation and copying (Gospels, Acts, Revelation). The word “autograph” means simply “something written or made with one’s own hand.”⁷⁰ Therefore, strictly speaking, included in this definition are early versions and rewritings of a composition, for example, in the case of the papyrus documents discussed above. These have been identified as “autographs” because they bear the hallmarks of being early draft versions from the hand of the author.

In the case of the NT books, though, theologians should consider that divine inspiration and inerrancy apply only to the final completed form of these writings. Inspiration was an act of God upon the authors of the biblical books as they composed original scriptural writings (2 Tim 3:16). In the same way that Cicero, Pliny, and Galen gave their stamp of approval on the final form of their writings only after they labored over every word and were satisfied that it expressed their thoughts and ideas, theologians should only consider the completed form of the NT writings as bearing divine inspiration.

Galen complained that others were using the material from his writings and passing them off as their own work (*De libr. propr.*, 10). In the same way, divine inspiration should not be retroactively attributed to the sources used by the NT writers. The sources were written by others and may have contained errors. It was not until God moved the NT authors in the arrangement and weaving of source material into new compositions that he crafted inspired Scripture. If Luke’s notebooks that contained records from his eyewitness sources (Luke 1:1–4) and excerpts from Roman census archives were discovered, these notebooks should not be considered inspired. Even though they may contain some of the raw material

⁷⁰ “Autograph,” [www.Merriam-Webster.com \(http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autograph\)](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autograph).

later incorporated into the Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles (and God surely guided the hand of Luke as he gathered his sources), these notebooks are not the final completed form of these books that God intended to bear his act of inspiration in *plene*. In the same manner, if a Q sayings source did exist and was used by the Synoptic Gospel writers, theologians should not consider the Q document as necessarily inspired in the same manner as the Gospels that used the source.⁷¹

It was through the act of releasing a composition for circulation and copying that the author signaled to the reading public that the writing was completed. Subsequent rewritings of the same work would not be needed or expected, except when a composition (or a portion of it) was copied and circulated without the author's consent. In this instance, an officially sanctioned edition that was polished and complete would be released by the author in the hopes of supplanting the other inferior texts.⁷² Even though a full discussion of the topic is beyond the scope of this paper, it is only reasonable to assume that the NT books, once completed, were released in only one edition.⁷³ Scholars often hypothetically postulate that the NT authors gradually published and republished through various editions and rewritings, or that the NT books were formed through a process of gradual additions, deletions, and rewritings by different Christian communities over generations.⁷⁴ The textual history of the NT writings does not warrant such reconstructions. Holmes noted that the manuscript tradition reveals a remarkable level of stability "in terms of overall structure, arrangement, and content" of the Gospels and Acts.⁷⁵

Cicero, Pliny, and Galen attempted to control the point at which their writings were released to the wider public to be copied because each of these authors understood that early-draft versions did not fully express the thoughts and ideas that they had envisioned the work to encompass. Cicero objected when Atticus released segments of Cicero's work prematurely (*Att.* 13.21a), Pliny warned Octavi-

⁷¹ This writer does not hold to the four-document hypothesis of the Synoptic problem and the existence of Q. For an extensive multi-author refutation of the Q hypothesis, see Mark Goodacre and Nicholas Perrin, eds., *Questioning Q: A Multidimensional Critique* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

⁷² This occurred in the case of Galen (*De libr. propr.*, 10). See also Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 118.

⁷³ Though Holmes originally suggested the possibility of multiple editions of Mark or Galatians ("Reasoned Eclecticism," 93), in a more recent paper he stated that in the case of "the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, what stands out is that the kinds of evidence that raise the question whether certain documents ever had a single originating text—structural alterations, the rearrangement of the order of pericopes, and/or the addition and/or omission of significant amounts of material—are strikingly absent in the case of these four writings" ("From 'Original Text' to 'Initial Text,'" 672).

⁷⁴ See, e.g., D. C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 7; Petersen, "Genesis of the Gospels," in *NT Textual Criticism and Exegesis: Festschrift J. Delobel* (ed. A. Denaux; BETL 161; Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 57–62.

⁷⁵ Holmes, "From 'Original Text' to 'Initial Text,'" 672–75. Holmes wrote that "a very high percentage of the variation evident in the text of the Four Gospels and Acts affects a verse or less of the text. On this level, the fluidity of wording within a verse, sentence, or paragraph is sometimes remarkable. At the same time, however, in terms of overall structure, arrangement, and content, these five documents are remarkably stable. They display simultaneously, in other words, what one may term microlevel fluidity and macrolevel stability" (p. 674).

us when portions of his writings were circulating without Octavius's consent (*Ep.* 2.10), and Galen complained when unedited transcriptions of his lectures were disseminated without his approval (*De libr. propr.*, 10, 14–15). Also, Galen only approved of the circulation of his works when they were faithfully copied in an uncorrupted or unmutated manner (*De libr. propr.*, 9). In the same fashion, it is the completed form of the NT writings, not earlier layers of composition, which should be considered as fully conveying the message God moved the authors to write.⁷⁶

Therefore, in reference to the NT, the “autograph,” as often discussed in biblical inerrancy doctrinal statements, should be defined as the completed authorial work which was released by the author for circulation and copying, not earlier draft versions or layers of composition.⁷⁷

IV. CONCLUSION

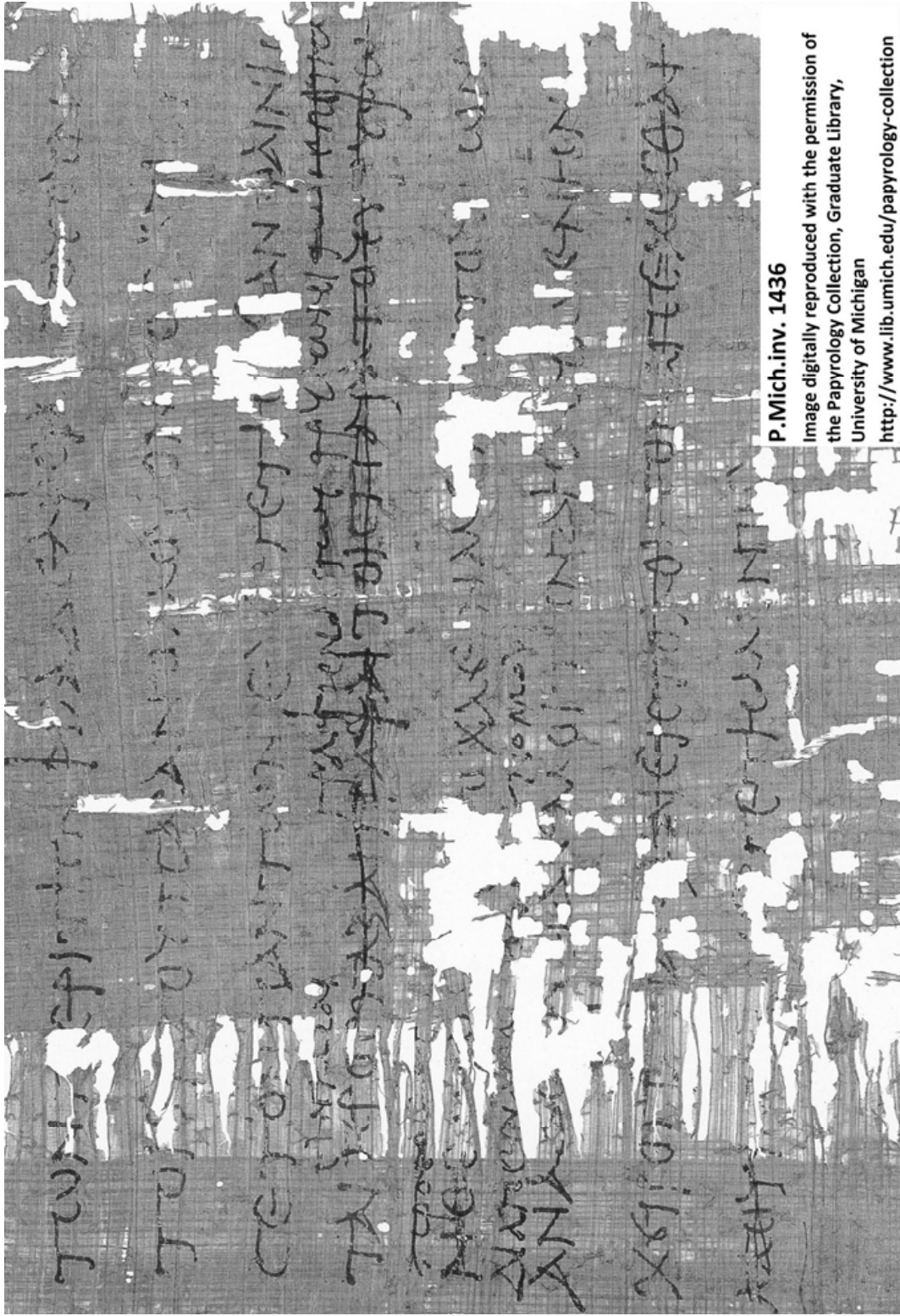
Though the proposed definition of “autograph” given in this paper brings some clarity to inerrancy doctrinal statements, other questions remain. The composition and publication practices of Cicero, Pliny, and Galen surveyed in this paper indicate that authors often possessed multiple copies of their own works. In the same manner, the evangelists most likely kept copies of the Gospels they authored. Cicero and Pliny each had their letters edited and published from notebook archives. Likewise, there is a possibility that Paul's epistles were published in this manner as well.⁷⁸ Given what we know about scribal practices, it is possible for there to have been slight differences between these various authorial copies. In light of this, should theologians consider the copies prepared under the immediate direction and control of the various NT authors (for example, personal copies of the Gospels, or archived copies of epistles) were also divinely directed and thus free from copyists' errors? Would later copies made from these archived writings (e.g. a published collection of Paul's letters) differ textually from the initially released versions?

⁷⁶ Eldon J. Epp gave a “proposed dimension of meaning” to the term “original text” as “a predecessor text-form, that is, a form of text (or more than one) discoverable behind a NT writing that played a role in the composition of that writing. Such a predecessor might have affected either larger or smaller portions of a writing. In less careful language, this predecessor is a ‘pre-canonical original’ of the text of certain books, representing an earlier stage in the composition of what became a NT book” (“Multivalence,” 276). Of course, the “original text,” or rather, in the terms used in this paper, an “autograph,” strictly speaking, would include in its definition earlier draft versions of NT writings. Nevertheless, these early draft versions were not the completed work released to the public for distribution and did not contain the full message that God wished to convey to the Christian community, otherwise these earlier draft versions would have been released for publication.

⁷⁷ The “releasing,” or “publication,” of the document occurred when, in the case of the Epistles, the letter was dispatched to the recipients, or, in the case of the Gospels, Acts, and Revelation, the book was released to the Christian community for reading, copying, and distribution (Holmes, “From ‘Original Text,’” 657–58).

⁷⁸ Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 218–23.

Despite these questions, this paper's proposed definition of "autograph," as found in various inerrancy doctrinal statements, stands. In the same way that Pliny considered a literary work a monument to the author's greatness (*Ep.* 1.3), the NT books continue to be a lasting monument to the greatness of God who inspired these writings, as long as modern copies faithfully reproduce the "autographs," that is, the completed authorial works which were released by the author for circulation and copying, not earlier draft versions or layers of composition.



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