

The Codex and the Early Collection of Paul's Letters

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The early Christian predilection for the codex may be a major key to understanding how Paul's letters were collected. Ancient letter-writers routinely kept personal copies of their letters. These personal copies were often kept in codex notebooks. Paul probably followed this custom. The "collection" of Paul's letters was not the result of any deliberate second-century effort to collect the letters of Paul. There was probably no early veneration of Paul or any early appreciation of Paul's letters. Rather, Paul had a personal set of copies with him in Rome. After his death, these copies with his other personal effects were passed down to his disciples. The later (second-century) publication of Paul's letters arose from these copies rather than the dispatched copies.

Key Words: Paul, codex, corpus, letters, collection, secretary

INTRODUCTION

Current Theories

Older "Collection" Theories. In times past, the formation of the Pauline corpus was viewed largely as "stymied" among several major theories. These theories may be broken down into two groups: those advocating a collection through a gradual process, "a slow ooze," and those contending for a sudden move toward collection, "a big bang." Although grouped thematically, it is also a chronological presentation, since "slow ooze" theories have given way to "big bang" theories.

Slow Ooze. Early in this century, the "collection" of Paul's letters was often argued to be a gradual process. Since churches esteemed their own letter(s) of Paul, they also began to collect copies of his letters written to other churches.¹ Thus partial collections arose in

1. P. N. Harrison is a classic example, positing Col 4:16 as the first sign. See Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles to the Philippians* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1936).

various regions (e.g., Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia), leading finally to a complete collection.² Professor Gamble calls this approach "the snowball theory."³

Big Bang. The older approach gave way to the reasoning of Edgar J. Goodspeed. His theory broached a whole new approach by arguing that a single individual took it upon himself, following the publication of Acts to collect the letters of Paul from the various churches.⁴ Although Goodspeed's theory has fallen upon rough times, his approach remains in vogue. Even now, the various collection theories all seek to find the three keys: "an occasion, an agent and a motive."⁵ The years that followed have seen the offerings of Walter Schmithals and others.⁶ Conzelmann's "Pauline School"⁷ has even been conscripted as the agent.⁸ While having unique elements all of the theories share the commonality of positing an individual (or an individual school) who took the initiative to collect the dispatched letters of Paul.⁹

Newer "Codex + Collection" Theories

Recently there has been a revival of interest in the formation of the *Corpus Paulinum*. This is largely the result of a 1994 article by T. C. Skeat and the 1995 book by Harry Gamble.¹⁰

2. E.g., see G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles: A Disquisition upon the Corpus Paulinum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963) 278-79.

3. Harry Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 36.

4. Goodspeed, *New Solutions to New Testament Problems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927) 1-64.

5. To borrow Gamble's phraseology (*New Testament Canon*, 39).

6. W. Schmithals, "On the Composition and Earliest Collection of the Major Epistles of Paul," *Paul and the Gnostics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972) 239-74. A new twist has been added by David Trobisch, who argues that it was Paul himself who started this by collecting, selecting, and editing an "authorized" collection of his letters (the *Hauptbriefe*), which was later expanded. See Trobisch, *Paul's Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) esp. 50-54.

7. Hans Conzelmann, "Paulus und die Weitsheit," *NTS* 12 (1965) 321-44.

8. E.g., H. M. Schenke, "Das Weiterwirken des Paulus und die Pflege seines Erbs durch die Paulusschule," *NTS* 21 (1975) 505-18.

9. This is well summarized by A. G. Patzia: "It is difficult to imagine this early circulation and collection of Paul's letters without the guidance of some significant individual(s)"; Patzia, "Canon," in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (ed. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993) 87.

10. Skeat, "The Origin of the Christian Codex," *Zeitschrift für die Papyrologie und Epigraphik* (ZPE) 102 (1994) 263-68; Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

The most interesting aspect of these two works—and the tie that joins them—is that they both take a new approach to the collection issue. Both Skeat and Gamble tie the early Christian predilection for the codex to the issue of collection. Skeat argues for the collection and formation of a fourfold Gospel collection, while Gamble argues for the collection of Paul's letters.

T. C. Skeat is well known for his works arguing that Christians preferred the codex over the roll because of practical considerations. His arguments, while well reasoned, and his evidence, while thorough, have failed to explain adequately why *Christians* noticed this practicality and others did not—that is, why the preference for the codex was a *Christian* phenomenon. Recently, further research has also led Skeat to retract some of his earlier assertions about the overwhelming practicality of the codex over the roll; for example, a codex was more frugal but scarcely more so, due to the customary wide margins in a codex. A codex did perhaps facilitate locating a passage in the middle of a book, yet ancients were quite adept at rolling a scroll and were less familiar with the codex.¹¹ In his 1994 article, Skeat makes a shift, arguing for a Christian preference for the codex not with a "practicality" rationale but rather with a "deliberate ecclesiastical" rationale. His thesis is this:

Hitherto, all the advantages claimed for the codex as opposed to the roll have been matters of degree—the codex is *more* comprehensive, more convenient in use, *more* suited for ready reference, *more* economical (because both sides of the writing material were used), and so on. But in the case of the Gospels, representation of the codex is not a matter of degree—it is total, 100%, and the motive for adopting it must have been infinitely more powerful than anything hitherto considered. What we need to do, in fact, is to look for something which the codex could easily do, but which the roll could not, in any circumstances, do. And if the question is posed in this way, we do not have to look very far, for a codex could contain the texts of all four Gospels. No roll could do this.¹²

Harry Gamble rightly notes that Skeat is tacitly assuming that "nothing short of a Gospel-type document that evoked dominical authority could have predisposed Christians to the codex. Yet this is neither self-evident nor plausible."¹³ It remains to be seen how effective Gamble's rather thorough critique of Skeat's thesis is. What is significant for us here is this analysis by Gamble:

11. Skeat goes so far as to concede that an ancient might have preferred a single Gospel roll to a single Gospel codex for practical reasons; see Skeat, "Origin," *ZPE* 102 (1994) 264.

12. *Ibid.*, 263.

13. Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 58.

Though the theories of Roberts and Skeat are unconvincing, the basic assumption behind them is sound: there must have been a decisive, precedent-setting development in the publication and circulation of early Christian literature that rapidly established the codex in Christian use, and it is likely that this development had to do with the religious authority accorded to whatever Christian document(s) first came to be known in codex form.¹⁴

Gamble argues that there was a drive to collect the ten letters of Paul, written to *seven* churches,¹⁵ to emphasize his catholicity. Such a sevenfold theme would carry this emphasis only if all ten letters were contained in one book, whether roll or codex. He then argues rightly that only a codex could hold all ten.

While the content of these two theories is different and while they are in heated disagreement, I am struck that the framework of both theories is the same. Both Skeat and Gamble argue for a deliberate, theological, or at least ecclesiastical motivation to collect a specific body of literature into one unit. The length of the resulting unit necessitated the adoption of the codex.

Both theories give rise to the same two observations: (1) Both theories address the process of publication. Neither theory specifically explains how the material might originally have been collected (whether for private use or publication).¹⁶ Must collection and publication be tied together? (2) While there are no necessary objections to a theory that requires a deliberate, well-designed, well-orchestrated, theologically-motivated drive behind the adoption of the codex, might a simpler explanation be preferred,¹⁷ especially if collection is separated from publication?

14. Ibid.

15. That is, Philemon followed Colossians (to tie them together) and, of course, 1 and 2 Corinthians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians; see Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 61-62.

16. Skeat does not address the issue of collecting, nor apparently did Gamble in earlier works. In the mid-1980s, during the research for my book about the secretary, I discussed on several occasions an early form of this theory with Prof. Gamble, where I maintained that the Pauline collection arose from Paul's personal copies. His receptivity led me to mention briefly the idea (Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* [WUNT 2/42; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991] 6-7). Although "how" the initial collection arose is not germane to Gamble's theory regarding the publication of Paul's letters, he recently suggests my idea as the preferred reconstruction (Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 100-101). He also encouraged me to write this article as a fuller explanation. We will not, though, agree as to the role of the codex in this process.

17. Eldon Epp expressed a similar desire when he responded to the discussion of Gamble's book, saying that we need a simpler approach than "the big bang theories of Skeat and Gamble" ("New Testament Textual Criticism Seminar," Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Nov. 25, 1996). Epp suggests that we consider that ancient teachers, who were on the move, preferred the portable and more durable codices to rolls or tablets.

In my work on Paul's secretary (buried in the fine print of an extended footnote),¹⁸ I had suggested a simpler approach, positing an *unintentional* adoption of the codex. The practicality of the codex then insured its retention. This theory does not require such careful deliberation, such intentionality. Indeed, first-century Christians were often harried, pressed with immediate concerns of the church, and not particularly far-sighted.

RETAINING PERSONAL COPIES

When letters were collected for publication, an ancient publisher had two sources from which he could collect copies of the letters. He could collect copies from the various recipients, making copies of the dispatched letters, or he could make copies from the letter-copies retained by the author himself. It is routinely assumed that whoever collected Paul's letters did so from the dispatched letters. The other possibility deserves examination.

The First-Century Practice

That ancient letter-writers retained copies of their letters is generally assumed by modern scholarship.¹⁹ This would be expected since letters could be easily lost²⁰ and since secretaries often worked as both secretaries and copyists.²¹ Ancient writers retained copies of their letters for four different reasons.²²

18. Richards, *Secretary*, 165 n. 169.

19. See, e.g., R. Y. Tyrell and L. C. Purser, *The Correspondence of M. Tullius Cicero* (7 vols.; 3d ed.; London: Longmans, Green, 1901-33) 1.59: "There seems considerable evidence that the senders of letters . . . were accustomed to keep copies of letters, even, perhaps, letters which might seem to us to be of no great significance."

20. See, e.g., Cicero *Fam.* 7.25.1: "You are sorry the letter has been torn up; well don't fret yourself; I have it safe at home; you may come and fetch it whenever you like." The LCL editor correctly notes that Cicero is referring to a copy that he has retained.

21. In Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, the same term is commonly used to designate a secretary or a copyist: Hebrew: (סֹפֵר), Greek: (γραμματεὺς), and Latin (*librarius*). Indeed Cicero once chided a young lawyer-friend for making multiple copies of a letter in his own hand. Apparently Cicero considered such a task to be secretarial work. Cicero *Fam.* 7.18.2. Of course, we are not assuming such a pompous attitude for the Pauline band. Nevertheless, whoever was literate enough to write the letter would doubtless be conscripted to prepare a copy as well.

22. In my book on Paul's use of a secretary, I discussed the connection of secretary and copyist and possible implications for Paul. This work was critiqued because of a heavy dependence upon Cicero, but the dependence is not as heavy as some reviewers implied, because: (1) although the footnote read Cicero *Fam.* etc., sometimes

First, a copy was made so that the writer would have his own copy. There are numerous references to this practice, usually being

the letter cited was a letter *to* Cicero, and (2) there is evidence of a particular practice in other writers and even in the papyri, but Cicero was the quoted example because his evidence was the clearest. Nevertheless, the criticism is somewhat valid. I did use Cicero more than any other writer. I am not alone. David Trobisch in his recent work (*Paul's Letter Collection*, 50), comments: "I investigated about two hundred letter collections from 300 BCE to around 400 CE, written by more than one hundred different authors, covering more than three thousand letters." Yet when he needs a clear example, whom does he cite? Cicero (see, e.g., p. 53). Cf. also J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995). Most ancient letter-writers never commented on secretarial issues of any kind.

When one reads Cicero's letters, however, s/he immediately notes that Cicero often commented on mundane matters, including his personal situation. I was often struck with the feeling that Cicero occasionally was "scraping the bottom of the barrel" for something about which to write. This might strike us as odd; why write at all, if there was nothing to write about? We might assume that most ancient writers certainly would not. We would maintain that the expense of the writing materials and the contracting of a secretary plus the hassles of finding a letter-carrier would mitigate against casual correspondence. Yet notable epistolographists such as William Doty, John White, and Heikki Koskeniemi have shown that ancient people often wrote, not to convey information, but rather to refresh a relationship (*philophronesis*), (*Letters in Primitive Christianity* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973]; White, *Light from Ancient Letters* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986] 216); Koskeniemi (*Studien zur Idee and Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Chr.* [Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1956] 115-27) uses *philophronesis* to denote the desire of the sender to establish, strengthen, or restore his personal relationship with his recipients.

The sudden appearance of someone who was available to carry a letter would often precipitate a letter. For example, an Oxyrhynchus papyrus reads: "As an opportunity was afforded me by someone going up to you I could not miss this chance of addressing you" (*POxy* 123 [3rd to 4th century]). The letter then goes on with the typical stereotyped formulae and no significant content or information. Clearly a carrier not content caused the letter to be written. And more importantly, when a carrier brought a letter and was returning (that is, he came for the specific purpose of delivering the letter), the recipient would often feel compelled to send a return letter. We can see that Cicero often felt pressured to write in this circumstance. When a carrier brought a letter from a friend, the carrier would wait for a letter from Cicero to carry back. Carriers would even pressure Cicero to write quickly so that they could leave (*Cicero Fam.* 15.17.1-2).

For the wealthy, such as Cicero, the expense of ink and papyrus was trivial. Cicero had a full-time secretary-slave. Cicero once commented to his friend Atticus: "When you have nothing to write, write and say so" (*Cicero Att.* 4.8a). So we see some reasons that a small group of letter-writers in Italy would comment more on secretarial practices than the painfully brief papyri in Egypt, although these practices often have some evidence in the papyri. Finally it should be noted that I do not argue that the letters of Cicero, Seneca, and others, are analogous to Paul's but, rather, that a secretary that Paul used, although certainly less skilled, would nevertheless have had some commonality with secretaries of the wealthy.

mentioned when the original letter was lost or damaged.²³ The writer assures the recipient that he will send a replacement. When Cicero is concerned that his less-experienced brother, Quintus, may have hastily written some letters that were ill advised, Cicero cautions his brother to write the recipients and ask that the letters be destroyed. And (more importantly for us) Cicero also tells Quintus to destroy his personal copies.²⁴ According to Plutarch, when Alexander in a fit of rage sets fire to the tent of his secretary, Eumenes, he later regrets that the copies of his letters are destroyed. This loss is sufficient that Alexander writes to all his recipients requesting that they send him copies of his letters.²⁵ One of Cicero's friends asks for a copy of something that Cicero had written. Cicero had not thought well of it and hesitatingly agreed to send a copy.²⁶ Although he thought little of it, he nevertheless had a copy of it. On another occasion, Cicero remarks casually that he was scratching off (*exaravi*) a copy of a letter into his "notebook" while reclining at the meal table.²⁷

Second, a copy of a letter was often made (and sent) to be shared with another person. Often this was done by appending a copy to the original letter.²⁸ For example, Pollio writes to Cicero, "I am sending you for your perusal a letter that I have written to Balbus."²⁹ Cicero writes to his friend Atticus and appends a copy of a letter that Cicero had written to Pompey.³⁰ Sometimes the author would not append a copy but recommend that something be read and suggest that his reader acquire a copy of his own to read. For example, Cicero writes, "Be sure you send me a line as often as you can, and take care that you get from Luceius the letter that I sent him."³¹ (compare to

23. For lost letters, see, for example, Cicero *Fam.* 7.25.1. For damaged letters, see, for example, a letter of Cicero's to Caesar had become so wet as to be unreadable. Cicero comments: "So later on I sent Caesar an exact duplicate of my letter." Or Cic. *Fam.* 7.25.1: "You are sorry the letter (probably the preceding letter, in which Tigellius was severely criticized) has been torn up; well don't fret yourself; I have it [no doubt a copy of it (LCL 2:101)] safe at home; you may come and fetch it whenever you like."

24. Cicero *QFr.* 1.2.8-9. Cicero mentions that he himself had seen a copy of one of those "unbecoming" letters, probably a circulated copy.

25. Plutarch *Eum.* 2.2-3.

26. Cicero *Fam.* 9.12.2.

27. Cicero *Fam.* 9.26.1.

28. Since the previous letter would probably have long since been dispatched, the appended copy would have been made from the author's own retained copy.

29. Cicero *Fam.* 10.32.5.

30. Cicero *Att.* 3.9.

31. Cicero *Att.* 4.6.

Col 4:16). Brutus writes, "I have read the short extract from the note which you sent to Octavius: Atticus sent it to me."³²

Third, multiple copies of important letters were often made and dispatched by different carriers (with different routes) to ensure safe delivery.³³ This practice seems limited to the wealthy and to the politics and intrigues of government. It is scarcely plausible that Paul would have felt such a need, particularly if he retained personal copies.

Fourth and last, authors would make use of their personal copies in order to reuse all or part of a letter in a different letter to another recipient. This practice appears to have been quite acceptable.³⁴ Apparently it was most commonly done for two purposes. First, a copy was retained and a portion reused when a writer wanted to send a more lengthy recounting of information to more than one recipient. For example, young Quintus (Cicero's nephew) had written his uncle a long letter, including an extended recounting of some adventures. Quintus then wrote a letter to Atticus as well, repeating the section about the adventures.³⁵ Second, a copy was retained and a portion reused when the writer wanted to send a well-written piece of prose or theme or argument to another. For example, Atticus had written a letter to Cicero, and the letter included an apparently cleverly written passage about Atticus' sister. Atticus then repeated that passage in a letter to another.³⁶ Following the assassination of Caesar and the survival of Anthony, Cicero wrote: "I should like you to have invited me to your banquet on the Ides of March; there would have been no leavings [Anthony]." Cicero reused that witty piece of prose in a different letter to another man.³⁷ If we followed C. H. Dodd, who long ago argued that Romans 9-11 was a preformed sermon, we would

32. Cicero *Br.* 1.16.1. On another occasion, Cicero sent a sealed letter of recommendation for the letter-carrier to take. Then Cicero provides the letter-carrier with a copy of the recommendation letter so he would know what Cicero had said (Cicero *Fam.* 6.8). The letter-carrier, Furfanius, came from an important family, and Cicero, no doubt, wished the family to know what a kind letter he had written.

33. Int. al., Cicero *Fam.* 9.16.1; 10.5.1; 11.11.1; 12.12.1.

34. The only place I noticed where it was spoken of disparagingly was a letter in which Cicero sheepishly confesses to Atticus that he had carelessly used the same preface in two different works. The works were too similar to allow this (see Cicero *Att.* 16.6).

35. Cicero *Att.* 13.29: "I am sending you young Quintus' letter. . . . I have sent you half the letter. The other half about his adventures I think you have in duplicate."

36. We (and Cicero) became aware of this only because the other recipient happened to share the letter with Cicero and Cicero noticed the repetition. He in no way chides Atticus for reusing the material, saying only, "The letter contained the same passage about your sister that you wrote to me."

37. Cic. *Fam.* 12.4.1 and *Fam.* 10.28.1.

maintain that Paul reused the sermon in his letter. Reusing material even developed to the point of keeping notebooks from which an appropriate piece could be selected. For example, Cicero kept a notebook of prefaces from which he selected.³⁸ We readily see parallels to suggestions that Paul kept collections of *testimonia*, doxologies, or other pre-formed tradition pieces.

Indications of Pauline Practice

Although it is no doubt already safe to assume that Paul retained copies of most if not all of his letters—and many scholars make this assumption³⁹—we may also look for additional evidence. Paul unfortunately did not mention retaining copies; yet he also does not refer to other aspects of the epistolary process as well.

Although there is no direct evidence, one may ask, is there any indirect evidence? Are Romans 4 and Galatians 3 sufficiently similar to argue literary dependence? Unfortunately probably not. The old theory of an Ephesian destination for Romans would, of course, be easier to argue if Paul had retained a copy of his original 15 chapter letter to Rome.⁴⁰ One would then argue that Paul took this shorter letter, cut off the generic closing to Rome and added a stereotypical commendation letter and extended greetings when he sent a copy to Ephesus. Nevertheless, I am not yet persuaded of an Ephesian destination for a longer version of Romans.⁴¹ Our attention may turn to the Ephesian-Colossian issue.⁴² By this I am not referring to any

38. E.g., see Cicero *Att.* 16.6.

39. Int. al., Hermann von Soden, *Griechische Neues Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913) vii; L. Hartman, "On Reading Others' Letters," *HTR* 79 (1986) 139; and Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 100-101.

40. The even shorter version of Romans that has some manuscript attestation could be explained by another dispatched edition.

41. The long greetings in Romans 16 have another explanation. As I argued in my book (*Secretary*, 116, 171), secretaries were often asked to research and enhance such types of details as greetings. Therefore it is easy to imagine a letter like Romans, with its named and probably professional secretary, to include names of prominent members of the Roman church whom Paul himself had not personally met, *particularly* since Paul shows a personal preference for a more generic "greet the brothers."

42. While the majority of scholars this century still reject Pauline authorship of either Colossians or Ephesians, often both, there are nevertheless reasons to consider them both Pauline. It is not to be argued here, but let me briefly note: (1) The arguments of Tim Johnson are compelling (Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986] 357ff.; see also D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1970] esp. 479ff., and D. A. Carson, D. J. Moo, and L. Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992] 305ff.). (2) The role of the secretary can account for many of the variations between the letters. Furthermore, secretaries were employed to rework a letter for another recipient (see

circular letter hypothesis related to Ephesians.⁴³ As noted above, often a copy of a letter was retained and a portion reused when a writer wanted to send a more lengthy recounting of information to more than one recipient. Any argument that maintains a literary relationship between Ephesians and Colossians, would lend support to the point that Paul retained copies of his letters. The literary relationship of Ephesians and Colossians is a time-honored topic of scholarly debate and is still unsettled; yet for our purposes here, most reconstructions, no matter which direction they argue it, posit that Paul worked from his copy of one to prepare the other.⁴⁴

The question of the relationship of 1 and 2 Thessalonians might be germane to this discussion. If 1 Thessalonians was written first and was the source of some confusion in the Thessalonian church,, then it is quite easy to see how Paul would refer back to his copy of 1 Thessalonians, when writing his second letter to them.

COPIES RETAINED IN CODEX FORM

The First-Century Practice

In Greco-Roman times, informal writing was often done on thin tablets (*codicilli*) of wood or ivory covered in wax, in which letters were cut—hence the use of *exarare* for "to write" on tablets. Abundant evidence exists for *codicilli* being carried about by a person and used for jotting down notes, writing rough drafts, and dashing off informal letters.⁴⁵ Often small notebooks of two, three, or more tablets were made, being loosely tied into a codex-like stack.

By the first century BC, small codices of parchment were beginning to usurp the place of the traditional wax tablets,⁴⁶ since, like a

Richards, *Secretary*, 5, 152). (3) The stylometric analysis of Kenny is quite persuasive, arguing that the style of Colossians or Ephesians is more "at home" in the Pauline corpus than Philemon or 1 Corinthians (A. Kenny, *A Stylometric Study of the New Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1986] 80 [also table 14.2], and 107-10). Moreover, the case from style analyses may be even stronger, since style analyses typically fail to allow for (a) the use of pre-formed tradition pieces, and (b) the influence of the secretary. Such factors permit even greater variation within one author's "style."

43. Such a hypothesis actually would neither commend nor detract from a suggestion that Paul retained letter-copies, since one could argue that the multiple copies of a circular letter were prepared from an original letter before the original letter was sent off.

44. The parallel commendations of the letter-carrier is compelling since such items were often recopied.

45. See my work, *Secretary*, 160-63.

46. Sherwin-White, in his classic work on Pliny, defined *pugillares* as meaning "either the usual waxed tablets or the recently introduced 'pugillares membranes'"

tablet, a specially prepared parchment would be easily washed off and reused; yet unlike a tablet notebook, a parchment notebook⁴⁷ was lighter, less easily smeared and more easily handled. Roberts and Skeat offer ample evidence for the use in the first Christian century of *membranae* that were parchment notebooks used in much the same form and for much the same purpose as the wooden tablets.⁴⁸ When Pliny the Younger distinguished between his books and his *tablets*, Sherwin-White notes that he was referring to rolls and parchment notebooks.⁴⁹

Significant for our purpose here, apparently these parchment codices were also used to retain copies of letters. Cicero in describing the events of an evening remarks casually that he was writing a copy of a letter into his "notebook" while at the meal table.⁵⁰ This was not unusual since these notebooks were also used for preparing the rough drafts of letters, later to be written on papyrus or parchment for dispatch,⁵¹ and also for recording notes, excerpts, and so on, for later use by the author.

Indications of Pauline Practice

Obviously, since there are no direct references to Paul's retaining copies of his letters, there would also be no direct references to Paul's retaining copies in a codex form. Yet, is there any evidence that Paul used codex notebooks? Ironically, according to Roberts and Skeat, Paul is the only Greek writer of the first century to refer to *μυμβράνια*, a Roman invention.⁵² The reference is the familiar passage in 2 Tim

(*Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 100.

47. "Parchment notebook" is an accurate description of the early codex. As Gamble notes: "a codex or leaf book was not recognized in antiquity as a proper book. It was regarded as a mere notebook, and its associations were strictly private and utilitarian" (*Books and Readers*, 49-50).

48. C. H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983) 30. For example, the younger Pliny describes his uncle at work with a slave by his side, holding both a book from which to read and *pugillares* on which to take down anything that the Elder wished to be extracted or noted. Sherwin-White understands the *pugillares* to be a "codex notebook" (*Letters of Pliny*, 225). See also Pliny *Epp.* 1.6.1 and 9.6.1.

49. Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 225. See also Pliny *Epp.* 1.6.1 and 9.6.1.

50. Cicero *Fam.* 9.26.1: "exemplum in codicillis exaravi" (LCL: "I am jotting down a copy of this letter into my note-book").

51. It is quite conceivable that an author might use the final copy of his rough draft as his copy. Thus the copy becomes the exemplar for the dispatched version.

52. Roberts and Skeat, *Codex*, 30.

4:13, where Paul is requesting that the "notebooks" be brought. This passage, of course, is often used as yet another example of anachronism in the pseudo-Pauline Pastorals. Pauline authorship for the Pastorals is clearly a minority position.⁵³ Now, if the Pastorals are pseudo-Pauline, is this thesis as shipwrecked as Paul on Melita? No. One may still contend for Paul's retaining his copies in a codex notebook solely because of customary practice.

CONCLUSION

The Collection of the Letters of Paul

Let me summarize the Pauline situation: (1) Paul probably retained copies of his letters. It was customary to do so. There is also some indication in his letters to this effect, yet we cannot speak with absolute certainty. (2) Paul probably retained his copies in a small codex notebook. It was customary to do so. There is also some indication in his letters to this effect, yet we cannot speak with absolute certainty. Obviously I am mentioning probabilities and not certainties. However, collection theories for the *Corpus Paulinum* because of the nature of the evidence, have always dealt in terms of possibilities and probabilities. My approach unfortunately is no different.

53. This is not the place to reargue this. Nevertheless, we must seriously consider: (1) the role of the secretary, (2) the heavy use of pre-formed traditional material in the Pastorals, and (3) that pseudonymous letters were less common than is often asserted. Just as a note, let me add these observations: (1) About the secretary, scholars seem reluctant to acknowledge secretarial influences, a complaint made nearly 70 years ago by H. St.-J. Thackeray (*Josephus the Man and the Historian* [New York: Ktav, 1929] 100, 105, 144). See the arguments of E. E. Ellis, *Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 104-7. The issue certainly deserves more than the cursory dismissal of Stanley Porter ("Pauline Authorship and the Pastoral Epistles," *BBR* 5 [1995] 105-24), who makes a "special plea" that any reference to the established effects of secretarial mediation on a letter is "special pleading." (2) About traditional material, any material inserted by the author would have the same general characteristics that a later insertion would have. Manuscript evidence should have a definitive voice in this decision. (3) Finally, concerning pseudonymous writing, in all my searches, every single instance of a secretary's being used to compose a letter in the author's name was for the purpose of deceit, except one, and that was explicitly noted (Richards, *Secretary*, 108 n. 158). This seems to argue against the usual assertions that pseudonymous letters (a) were common, (b) were written to compliment the author, and (c) were usually composed by his friends/followers. Evidence leads one to see "a myth of innocent apostolic pseudepigrapha"; cf. E. E. Ellis, "Traditions in the Pastoral Epistles," in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (W. H. Brownlee Festschrift; ed. C. A. Evans and W. F. Stinespring; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 237-53. A letter may best be termed "Pauline" or "Pseudo-Pauline." The euphemistic or conciliatory "Deutero-Pauline" label seems unsubstantiated.

Historical Reconstruction

It is argued here that Paul's letters were not collected by someone circulating among the churches and gathering up copies of the dispatched letters. Rather, the so-called *Corpus Paulinum* originated with Paul himself but unintentionally (that is, the so-called "collection" came from Paul's personal set of copies). We have been influenced from the beginning to see an intentional process. The very term we use, *collection*, biases us.

Is it possible? Did published collections come from personal sets of copies rather than from re-collecting dispatched letters? How would we even know? Once again, Cicero's proclivity for verbosity helps us. Two letters from Cicero to his friend Atticus need to be compared. In the first letter (*Att.* 2.12), Cicero notes that he plans to entrust the letter to the first available person rather than waiting for one of the carriers. The following letter to Atticus (*Att.* 2.13) begins with a lament over the news that the first letter had not arrived. (Untrustworthy letter-carriers were a common problem.) Yet for our purposes here, it is quite noteworthy that the earlier letter (*Att.* 2.12) is *in* the collection, even though the dispatched copy was lost. This illustrates that at least part of the Cicero collection was compiled from Cicero's *copies* and not by gathering them from all of the recipients.⁵⁴

It is quite conceivable that Paul retained copies of his letters in a parchment codex notebook. Upon his death, this notebook along with other notebooks as well as his personal effects fell into the hands of his disciples. If the Pastoral Letters are authentic, they strengthen the argument by placing "notebooks" with Paul at the end of his life. One might also assume that Luke was the one who inherited the notebooks.

Ramifications

I see four immediate ramifications of this theory.

A Simpler Explanation for the Christian Adoption of the Codex. As stated at the outset, most scholars concede that the practicality of

54. Actually Cicero's corpus is massive—774 letters—with some evidence that at least 17 more ancient collections of his letters have been lost. Because Cicero's publisher, Atticus, wished to make as complete a collection as possible, he solicited copies of dispatched letters that were not in Cicero's personal copy-collection. We see this from the response of Cicero to Atticus's request: "So far there is no collection of my letters. But Tiro has about seventy now. And some more will have to be taken from you. But I still will have to go over them and correct them. Then they might be published" (Cicero *Att.* 16.5.5). We see that the desire to publish an exhaustive collection led Atticus to seek letters beyond the ones retained by Cicero's secretary, Tiro.

a codex could explain why Christians retained the use of a codex. What is missing is the link or "trigger" that caused Christians rather than others to adopt the codex. Both Skeat and Gamble offer intentional theories to explain what triggered the use of a codex. I offer a less glamorous one: it was unintentional. The first collection, quite unintentionally, was in codex form. It was Paul's private notebook. Even if the codex was not seen as immensely more practical (a recent contention by Skeat) it was just practical enough to keep someone from taking the initiative to alter the format of the exemplar. It takes far less to explain why something is retained than to explain why something new is adopted.⁵⁵

The "Unintentional" Nature of the Collection. T. C. Skeat and Harry Gamble both offer reconstructions that require theological controversies, which the church answers by planning, collecting, and publishing select Gospels or letters in a codex form. My theory only explains how Paul's letters became collected into one group. Collection and publication issues are thereby separated.

One major obstacle to most theories about an early collection of Paul's letters is that, in the opinion of many scholars, history does not give sufficient indication of an early veneration of Paul. Thus many are discouraged from seeing an early follower of Paul who was sufficiently motivated to expend the time and money to circulate among the churches and gather up their letters, assuming the churches would have cared enough to preserve the letters at all.⁵⁶

My theory does not require a highly organized Pauline mission. The letters of Paul were collected quite apart from any organized activity or early veneration. Separating *collection* from *veneration* strengthens this theory. Since a disciple would be unlikely to discard the notebooks of his teacher, whether he thought the contents were all that useful or not, we are not required to posit any early recog-

55. Gamble's thesis, for instance, would explain why a published edition of Paul's letters retained their original codex form.

56. This scepticism is by no means universal. E. E. Ellis argues that Paul's letters were esteemed from the beginning and quickly elevated to an equal status with OT texts; compare 2 Thess 2:15 with 1 Thess 2:13; also 1 Cor 14:37; Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27 (Ellis, "New Directions in the History of Early Christianity," in *Ancient History in a Modern University* [2 vols.; ed. A. Nobbs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997] 21-22). Paul expected, even commanded, that his letters be read in church (Col 4:16; see, e.g., Christian Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980] 23). According to Ellis: "In the light of this Jewish background in which only canonical Scripture could be read in the synagogue, the reading of New Testament gospels and letters in Christian synagogues implies that they had an inspired and normative, i.e., canonical, status for the congregations using them" ("New Directions," 19).

nition of Paul's letters as being more than occasional documents. A later recognition of the noncontingent value of Paul's letters, or perhaps theological controversies such as posited by Gamble, would account for the wide publication of Paul's letters but not for the initial collection of them.

The "Lost Letters." A third ramification of this theory is a simpler—and nontheological—explanation for the so-called "lost letters" of Paul. As critical historians, we are challenged to explain the loss of the "previous letter"⁵⁷ and the "severe letter"⁵⁸ to the Corinthians. Traditionally this problem is brushed aside, or it is observed that perhaps these two letters were not esteemed enough to be included when the follower of Paul came to Corinth to collect letters. Perhaps the Corinthians themselves objected to the contents and disposed of the letters. These explanations are of course possible. It is also possible that these letters are lost because copies were not made of them before they were dispatched. Thus Paul's collection did not have them. The temporary absence of a secretary or the sudden appearance of an available carrier could cause a letter to be dispatched before a copy could be made. Paul might wish a letter that he had written in urgency and anger, such as is often posited for the "severe letter," to be sent immediately, not caring to delay. The problem was thus on the sending end, not the receiving end. We do not need to posit a reason for the Corinthians to have venerated 1 Corinthians but not the "previous letter."

The Corpus Paulinum in Rome

2 Peter 3:16. This troubling passage has long been the mainstay for pseudonymous theories regarding 2 Peter. Stylistic variations, vocabulary, and so on, might all be explained by secretarial mediation (or the lack thereof). Nevertheless, to posit a published collection of Paul's letters in the early 60s is often too much for even the most conservative reconstructions. Yet if Paul retained copies, then in the early 60s there was possibly only one collection in existence—namely, Paul's personal set of copies. The possibility of Peter's being aware of these or even having read them would be remote unless one postulates, as early traditions do, that Peter and Paul were both in Rome in the early 60s. In such a case, Peter was in the only place where he could have seen copies of Paul's letters. It is not unreasonable then to suggest that Peter would have reviewed what had been written to

57. Assuming that it is not preserved in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

58. Assuming that it is not preserved in 2 Corinthians 10-13.

churches in Asia Minor by Paul before he himself wrote to them, particularly if he was aware that some were confused by Paul's letters.

1 Clement. That *1 Clement* alludes to sections of Paul's letter to the Romans is hardly surprising, but that he was knowledgeable of at least one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians is more difficult.⁵⁹ Customarily it is suggested that Clement, in his travels, had opportunity to view the Corinthian letters (in Corinth?). Yet the numerous allusions to Paul's Corinthian letters suggest more than a casual acquaintance. Certainly Clement could have secured copies for himself while traveling; yet it is interesting to note that Clement refers to 1 Corinthians as Paul's first letter to Corinth. If Clement became familiar with the letter in Corinth, then we must maintain that the church in Corinth had not only already lost the "previous letter" but also had already forgotten it. If, however, Clement was using Paul's personal set of copies, which presumably did not contain Corinthians A and C, then Clement would mistakenly assume that 1 Corinthians was Paul's first letter to them. This reconstruction is conjecture, certainly, but no more so than assuming Clement acquired a copy while in Corinth. Furthermore, are we to assume that it is merely coincidence that the two earliest indications of a *Corpus Paulinum* originate in Rome? I suggest that Rome was perhaps the only place that had a republication collection of Paul's letters.

Perhaps, possibly, probably—these words have been sprinkled rather liberally throughout this article. No single part of this reconstruction is sufficiently persuasive; there are other possible explanations for each point. Does it become persuasive when pulled together? Is there any value to a theory built upon possibilities and probabilities? Many would say no, arguing that how the *Corpus Paulinum* came into being will remain a mystery.⁶⁰ If, however, we do want to try to address this issue, then we must be willing to tolerate probabilities. The reconstruction suggested here seems reasonable, built upon common practices, and requiring a less-organized and less-far-sighted early church. Thus the collection of Paul's letters slipped quietly in the back door of the church rather than thundering in the front door.

59. E.g., *1 Clement* 47. This is widely acknowledged. See, e.g., F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 465: Clement "plainly had access to a copy of the letter which we know as 1 Corinthians, for he quotes it freely. . . ."

60. See, e.g., Bruce (*ibid.*, 465), who makes no attempt to explain how Clement would have gained access to a copy.