V. Christianity

1. General Remarks and Terminology. The Greek word βιβλίον is a diminutive of βίβλος, which designates the material on which texts are written (papyrus) and hence the written text as well, in the sense of an autonomous literary unit. Accordingly, each biblical book was a physically separate unit:

Jesus receives the book of Isaiah in the synagogue (Luke 4 : 17, a scroll he "unrolls," see also v. 20), the Evangelist John calls his own work a βιβλίον (John 20 : 30). With the development of the codex in the first centuries CE of the Christian era, however, books could be produced with greater capacity (especially when parchment was used), and the term "book" then served mostly to designate a subdivision of a larger literary unit. (There is no reason to surmise that the single books of, e.g., Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* ever existed as physically separate units.) The collective plural τα βιβλία referred to the ensemble of biblical books, hence the Latin *biblia* (first pl., later fem. sg.), similarly in most modern languages, where the original plural does not emerge any longer. However, a semantic difference remains between the Greek/Latin word "Bible" (the "book of books") and the vernacular "book" in general. This article concentrates on books in the literal sense (and does not include metaphorical usage, like the "Book of Life" or the "book of the covenant").

2. Origins of Christianity and Antiquity. In Christian language, the literary units of the OT are called "books" ("book of Genesis," "book of Isaiah"), while the term does not normally designate parts of the NT (not "book of Matthew," despite Matt 1 : 1, with the exception of the "book of Revelation"). This usage may reflect the fact that the Gospels/Letters circulated only for a very short phase as separate items. Quite soon they were combined into bigger corpora, although in the first three centuries no evidence emerges for books with a complete collection of what became the canon of the NT – let alone the entire Bible. Even if these books were relatively modest in terms of size and prize (by later standards as well as those of literary production for other texts of the time), their owners esteemed them highly nonetheless. In the case of persecution, Christians handed them over only under extreme pressure, their burning was perceived as a particularly severe form of punishment (Lactantius, *mort. pers.* 12.2; Cirta protocol [CSEL 26 : 188 Ziwsa]; *Passio Sancti Philippi Heracleae* 442 [Ruinart]).

A new stage arose with the emergence of large parchment codices containing the entire Bible at the beginning of the 4th century CE. Some of these books were literally of imperial sumptuousness. For instance, Constantine ordered fifty codices at the scriptorium of Caesarea for the churches of the new capital he founded (Constantinople, *Vit. Const.* 4.36–37). The imperial letter was directed to Eusebius of Caesarea, an "impresario of the codex" (Williams/Grafton), and he may have used the opportunity to diffuse his ingenious system of the canon tables, which enabled the location of parallel passages in the four Gospels. These sober tables were not only a useful device for scholars, but with their refined layout scheme they also contributed to the beauty of the book as a work of art (Nordenfalk), becoming a standard feature of the Gospel books in most antique languages and cultures. Although the choice of the codex originally had no religious or spiritual connotations, these and other features testify to an ongoing process of "sacralization" of the Christian book.

This development also appears in the beginnings of Christian book illumination, where Gospel books especially were lavishly decorated (e.g., the *Rossano codex* and the *Rabbula codex*, both 6th cent. CE). At times precious bindings underlined the importance and the value of the book for the viewer from the outside, and some book covers with figurative scenes or with crosses made of silver or ivory have survived (Lowden). Moreover, books were carried around in a procession and liturgically venerated. Even among ascetics and monks, the production and possession of "holy books" was common. Although their primary purpose was, of course, the edificative reading of Scripture, many legends made clear that a book could have a value of it own, apart from its textual content. Small codices could be used as amulets, seen as miraculous and combined with relics to enhance their holiness (Rapp). However, these observations should not detract from the fact that late antiquity saw a flourishing of literacy favored by the Christian culture of the book. While the choice of the codex made books readily available, the general esteem for Scripture and holy texts made reading and writing important. Indeed, the holiness of the book led to an extraordinary display of art. Not by coincidence could Christians and Jews at the end of antiquity appear from an outside perspective as "people of scripture/book [*ahl al kitāb*]" – the expression used by Muḥammad in the Qurʾān to distinguish these groups from the unfaithful (e.g., S 3 : 64).

3. Middle Ages and Beyond. According to a captivating thesis of Armando Petrucci, the late antique representation of open books stemmed from their purposes for reading and writing, whereas a prevailing performative role in the Middle Ages led books to their depiction as closed. Though somewhat of an oversimplification (and certainly not always true for Byzantium and the East), it does draw attention to an important point: the significance of the book is not defined only by its contents, for it could have a function even if it remained unopened. As mentioned previously, books could be venerated (sanctioned by the second Council of Nicaea in 787 CE) or employed for magical purposes, and they could even be used as weapons. According to legend, St. Boniface used a book to defend himself from the strokes of his heathen adversaries, and although he was ultimately killed, the strokes could not damage the actual text of the book (allegedly the *Codex Ragyndrudis*, preserved in Fulda). The legend therefore emblematically stresses the superiority of the book over mundane weapons.

Over many centuries, production and reading of books came largely under the control of clergy and monasteries. A first flourishing arose in the Carolingian period, when many scriptoria provided the material basis for the learned culture of the time. However, large parts of antique literature do not emerge in codices earlier than the 9th century CE: along with the late antique scriptoria, this phase constitutes the decisive "filter" through which texts had to pass in order to survive. These books were written in the so-called Carolingian minuscule, a form of writing that later formed the basis of humanist typefaces and, ultimately, most modern printed types. Moreover, a somewhat similar phenomenon took place in Byzantium under Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (905–959 CE), when cultural knowledge was reorganized in new books (partly coinciding with the process of transcribing from majuscule to minuscule forms of writing).

Medieval book illumination had not been restricted to, but did concentrate on, religious books like Bibles and missals. While pictures had a representative function, they also showed the high religious regard with which the book was held. A particularly profound emotional link to the book developed in Armenia. Many colophons indicate the material book was charged with theological meaning (e.g., the Lemberg gospel; see Schmidt): the physical Scripture could be seen as the incarnation of the metaphysical word. God was made human, and since the Son of God is no longer physically present, the corporality of his word is now manifest in the holy book. In the Western later Middle Ages, illustrated scenes of the OT and NT circulated as a so-called *Biblia pauperum* for didactic purposes for the illiterate (the term sometimes used improperly in a broader sense). Such works could be produced as woodcut prints, thereby serving as precursors of books printed with movable type.

The impact of this invention on Christianity proved considerable. Edited by Erasmus of Rotterdam, the NT was printed for the first time in Greek (Basel 1516), and many Christian texts, especially by church fathers, were printed in the early stage as well, thereby becoming easily available. The Reformation made use of the new media right from the beginning. In this way, the writings of Martin Luther and his followers could be distributed all over Europe in high numbers and short time, which contributed to the success of the movement. On the other hand, the religious message had also been shaped by the media: the Protestant emphasis on the Bible as fundament of faith would have had little effect without the actual availability of the text at a relatively low cost. Luther's German translation was distributed in 100,000 copies in only 15 years. Indeed, the intransigent way in which old Protestant orthodoxy insisted on the immediate inspiration of every comma of Scripture presupposes a level of textual constancy that could only be granted by printed books. Besides the Bible, a further important innovation for religious life was the ability to disseminate edificative treatises in large numbers. The most successful books in this category were *De imitatione Christi* of Thomas à Kempis and the *Paradiesgärtlein* of Johann Arndt. As one of the goals of the pietist movement in the 18th century stood the mass production and diffusion of Bibles in as many languages as possible (Cansteinsche Bibelanstalt in Halle). This combination of mission and book production led to the foundation of Bible societies all over the world, favored by industrial means of printing in the 19th century (the most important being the "British and Foreign Bible Society," founded in 1804).

The high esteem for books, especially the Bible, led Gotthold Ephraim Lessing to the polemical characterization of Protestantism as "bibliolatry," as opposed to the true and pure religion of reason. However, in his theory of religions, Max Müller distinguished the lower-level "religion of the cult" from a higher level "religion of the book," the latter including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Without Müller's theoretical framework and with very different connotations, this usage persists in various contemporary contexts.

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