The codex (literally: “wood,” “trunk of a tree”) was originally a sort of “notebook,” consisting of two or more wooden tablets, bound together with a hinge. In the ancient Near East as well as in the Roman world, such devices were used for shorter documents of everyday use, while longer literary texts were normally written on papyrus scrolls. It was only with the development of codices made of parchment or papyrus in the 1st/2nd centuries CE that this medium became gradually more attractive. By the 5th century CE, it had largely supplanted the scroll as a standard medium for book production. It has often been observed that the rise of the codex, by and large, coincided with the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire. Although Christians preferred codices for their writings right from the beginning, it cannot be asserted that Christians were vital for the implementation of the new medium.

In the Middle Ages, parchment codices were the standard medium for all longer texts, while the scroll survived only for the Torah in Judaism and for certain liturgical usages (mainly for the “Exsultet,” the praise of the paschal candle) in Christianity. In the later Middle Ages, paper replaced parchment: it was thinner and cheaper. In this form the codex continued to be used as a medium also for printed books.

Bibliography:

Cock, Crowing of the

→ Cock; → Peter

Code

→ Law

Codex

The codex was a precursor of modern synopses of the Gospels. They allowed for immediate access to various parallel passages. Perhaps also due to their beauty, and often sumptuous decoration, they became a standard feature of medieval Bibles.

The ability to consult (rather than read) texts turned out to be particularly useful in the field of law. Some important late antique law collections therefore carry the name of the medium on which they were written (Codex Theodosianus, Codex Justinianus), hence the modern use of “codex” for a corpus of written rules (religious or not).

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Bibliography:

Martin Wallraff

See also
- Aleppo; → Alexandrinus, Codex;
- → Bezae Cantabriensis, Codex; → Bible Illustration; → Book; → Leningrad Codex;
- → Materiality of Scripture; → Parchment; → Scroll, Scrolls; → Sinaiticus, Codex; → Vaticanus, Codex

Codex Alexandrinus

→ Alexandrinus, Codex

Codex Bezae Cantabriensis

→ Bezae Cantabriensis, Codex

Codex Leningradensis

→ Leningrad Codex

Codex Sinaiticus

→ Sinaiticus, Codex