CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CODICOLOGY OF P. CHESTER BEATTY XVI

How, where and when Papyrus Chester Beatty XVI was discovered is unfortunately unknown and can no longer be traced with any degree of certainty. No accession number was assigned by the Chester Beatty Library either at its time of acquisition or of conservation; consequently, no description of the eight frames of fragments can be found in the Library's registry of accessions. The current label on one of the frames “Book of Jannes and Jambres” was appended after my identification sometime in 1972. Even the place of conservation is not completely certain, as is the case with many other papyrus fragments in the Library’s possession including, for example, P. Chester Beatty XV (see my The Acts of Phileas Bishop of Thmuis p. 11). It is known that conservation work on papyri owned by Chester Beatty was carried out both in Dublin and at the British Museum. Since, however, Frame 1 was certainly among materials received in 1985 by the Chester Beatty from the British Museum (as well as the stray fragment added to Frame 8), it is likely that all the fragments of our papyrus were conserved in London rather than in Dublin, particularly since the conservation work on them all looks identical, including the tape used for binding the glass. It is somewhat surprising, in that case, that the literary work in question was not identified, especially since the names of the two magicians are quite legible in our text. Unlike the Phileas papyrus, Papyrus Chester Beatty XVI has been conserved competently.

Obviously, from an editor’s point of view, far more important than the precise place of conservation is the state and condition of the manuscript at the time of conservation. One would dearly like to know, for example, whether the Jannes and Jambres materials were among the contents of a “box of loose fragments” which, according to the Chester Beatty records, was sent to the British Museum in 1956 or whether the unknown conservator in London encountered the manuscript in some semblance of its original unity. (Mr. Stanley Baker of the British Museum [letter dated May 24, 1977] surmises that Hugo Ibscher may have mounted the fragments in the early 1930s, but his information is uncertain.) Similar looking
fragments were clearly associated, but it is not clear whether this is attributable to the trained eye of the conservator or the physical state of the manuscript at the time of conservation. Though in some instances all fragments grouped together into one frame or glass can well have belonged to a single leaf (folio) of papyrus, in other cases such a relationship is precluded purely on the basis of the document’s format. Naturally, in our reconstruction of the manuscript we have worked on the assumption that fragments framed together belong together, unless there are contrary indications based on space, content and the like.

The total number of fragments is 100, varying in size from a mere sliver of circa .3 cmB × 2.5 cmH (Frame 8p) to circa 10.1 cmB × 16.5 cmH (3a). The text was written in a single column to a page, though the breadth and height of the written column was expectedly not kept entirely uniform from page to page. Unlike the Vienna and Michigan papyri of our book, both of which belong to scrolls, P. Chester Beatty XVI is part of a codex.

Since no complete page has survived, the original format of the document must be based on estimate, with due allowance for variation in page size in the original document (cf. Turner, Typology p. 8). With the help of the Vienna papyrus, fragments 4a and 4b can be reconstructed to yield a full page in height and can thus give us the original height of the document, namely, circa 22.5 cm. Approximately the same measurement can be reached by other means. For example, fragment 3a→ has an upper margin of circa 2.5 cm and, judging from the Vienna papyrus, must have had circa 23 lines of text. Since 17 lines (measured from top of line to top of line) occupy 13.8 cm, 23 lines would need circa 18.5 cm. When we add 2.5 cm for the upper margin and 2 cm for the lower margin (see 3b→), we arrive at circa 23 cm—well within striking distance of the 22.5 cm based on 4ab. Another confirmation for the height may come from the binding technique used, and will be discussed below.

That the ratio of upper and lower margins was originally 2:3, in accordance with Turner’s rule of thumb (Typology p. 25), seems rather unlikely, since no lower margin wider than 2.6 cm (3h + 4c†, but contrast ←) has survived. Other apparently fully preserved upper and lower margins measure: 1. upper: c. 2.5 cm (1b→ 3a→), c. 2 cm (1b↓ 3a↓); 2. lower: c. 1.4 cm (3h + 4c← 2a→ 3b→ 8r†), c. 2.5 cm (2a↓ 8r←) c. 2 cm (3b←), c. 1.2 cm (5f←), c. .5 cm (5f†).