QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TCHACOS CODEX

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Any ancient manuscript has two dimensions, one physical and one intellectual. A manuscript is an artifact, like a potsherd, a Roman coin, or excavated archeological ruins. But it is also an intellectual thing, a text, with ideas. This is a decisive trait not shared with other kinds of artifacts. Almost all of the discussion of Tchacos Codex has been on this intellectual side of the texts, since few have had experience, much less interest, in the physical side. After all, Judas is more interesting than are codices, at least to most people. Besides, the artifact was not available for study to those outside the inner circle of editors.

I have worked a great deal on papyrus codices as artifacts and have published what I learned about their codicology.1 To begin with, I led the team restoring the Nag Hammadi codices in the Coptic Museum. On the basis of what I learned there, I conjectured what the codicological situation might be in the case P. Berol. 8502, and asked Hans-Martin Schenke to confirm my hypothesis on the papyrus itself in Berlin, which he did. My conjecture proved indeed to be the case.2 I also helped in the codicological analysis of a papyrus manuscript in the Chester Beatty Library that was unusual, in that sheets were not cut from the roll and stacked in the usual fashion to make the quire, but sometimes folded back and forth in accordion style.3 And I worked in Berlin to arrange a tentative sequence of leaves in the so-called “Coptic Book,” though the obscurity of the fibers made any final solution impossible.4 On the basis of my background and interest in this rare dimension of scholarship, I thought I should address some basic questions about the Tchacos Codex and its codicology, even though it is an artifact that I have never seen.

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1 Robinson 1975a, 170–90; Robinson 1975b, 15–31; Robinson et al. 1984, 1–102, 103–33.
2 Robinson 1978, 23–70.
Where is the Tchacos Codex?
It was in Nyon, Switzerland, near Geneva. This is where the leaves of the Tchacos Codex were conserved and the fragments placed by Florence Darbre, conservator for the Bibliothèque Bodmer at Celigny (also near Geneva), who was aided by Rodolphe Kasser and Gregor Wurst. Some leaves have been on display at the Bibliothèque Bodmer and in Washington, D.C. Gregor Wurst reported at the Judas Codex Congress that the Tchacos Codex now is all in Celigny, and that the glass panes are no longer opened to place physically new placements, since the risk of damaging the fragile papyrus is too great. He also reported that the leaves are accessible to scholars at the Bibliothèque Bodmer if one makes an appointment in advance.

Have the efforts to attach fragments physically to the leaves to which they belong been discontinued?
There were reports that when the definitive edition was published, further efforts would be discontinued. There would then be no legitimate reason not to return Tchacos Codex promptly to Egypt. Hence the temptation might be strong to say one still had hopes of further placements, as an excuse for keeping it from Cairo, and thus from the rest of the academic community. In any case, this motivation was involved in Rodolphe Kasser’s successful efforts to delay the return of the Jung Codex from Zürich to the Coptic Museum in Cairo until the editio princeps he edited had finally appeared. But since Gregor Wurst reported at the Codex Judas Congress that newly placed fragments are no longer actually placed physically inside the glass containers, this need to retain the leaves in Switzerland is less applicable. But the original is needed in identifying fragment placements, even if the fragments are not then put physically inside the glass containers.

When will Tchacos Codex be returned to Egypt?
It was to be returned to Egypt after publication, an agreement reached with the understanding that Mrs. Tchacos would hence not be prosecuted in Egypt for infringement of its export laws. But when? “Eventually,” “ultimately,” “several years after its first publication in the West,” according to Roberty. Gregor Wurst told me there is a deadline of

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