A valuable addition to our knowledge of the Book of Enoch came with the discovery of eleven manuscripts in Qumran Cave 4. Although the Bedouin recovered the majority of material from this cave, archaeologists unearthed the final fragments in excavations lasting from September 22–29, 1952. J. T. Milik, a member of the excavation team, showed a glimpse of his future genius for scrolls work by identifying some of the fragments as belonging to Enoch before they had even been cleaned! When Milik was appointed part of the team of scholars to edit the scrolls in 1953, the Enochic fragments were entrusted to him. 23 years later in 1976 his work on the manuscripts was published as The Books of Enoch.¹

The Qumran copies were written in Aramaic and settled a long-standing debate about the original language of the work. To this day, 1 Enoch is only fully preserved in Ethiopic. In between the Aramaic and the Ethiopic was a Greek translation. The Aramaic was translated into Greek and the Greek into Ethiopic. While the Greek translation was partially known through quotation by Christian writers, good portions of it had been recovered among the great manuscript finds made in Egypt.

The first of these was discovered at Akhmim in Upper Egypt. The ancient name of the site was Panopolis and it was the capital of the 9th nome, particularly known for worship of the god Min (identified with Greek Pan). The city was excavated by Urbain Bouriant in the late 1800s. In a monk’s grave, located in the substantial cemetery

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adjacent to the site, Bouriant found a parchment manuscript containing parts of the Gospel of Peter, the Apocalypse of Peter, and the first 32 chapters of Enoch, which comprise most of that section of 1 Enoch usually termed the Book of Watchers.

The second important Greek manuscript find was part of a collection of 12 papyrus codices acquired by the American mining magnate Alfred Chester Beatty. Chester Beatty accumulated a large number of manuscripts for which he built a library and museum in Dublin, Ireland where he had been made an honorary citizen in 1957.

The provenance of Chester Beatty’s Greek papyrus texts is not known for sure. At one point it had been suggested that they also came from Panopolis. But more likely is F. G. Kenyon’s suggestion of Aphroditopolis in the Fayum. The Enoch manuscript dates to the 4th cent. C.E. as does the Panopolis manuscript. Also like the Panopolis manuscript, the Chester Beatty papyrus contains two other writings besides Enoch. The first is a long lost homily of Melito of Sardis entitled On the Passion, and the second an otherwise unknown composition that has since been given the name Apocryphon of Ezekiel. The Enoch material preserved in this codex covers 1 En 97:6–107:3, or a substantial portion of The Epistle of Enoch. Thus, the two Greek manuscripts cover the beginning and end of Greek Enoch.

2. An Oxyrhynchus Manuscript of Enoch?

Now we return to Milik. His work on the Aramaic fragments of Enoch led him to search for more textual sources, especially additional material in Greek. He happened to come across some material that had been found at the site of Oxyrhynchus, about 95 miles south of Cairo. Excavations there have produced more papyrus finds than in any other city of ancient Egypt.

The town was excavated beginning in the 1890s by Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt. In 1927 Hunt published five fragments to which he gave the number 2069. The fragments date to the 4th century C.E. Although he could not identify the text, Hunt suggested it was an “apocalyptic” work and noted similarities with the Apocalypse of Paul, the Ascension of Isaiah, and the Shepherd of Hermas.

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