

Rylands Fragment

“This small fragment of St John's Gospel, measuring less than nine centimetres high, is one of the collection of Greek papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester. On one side it contains parts of verses 31-33, on the other side parts of verses 37-38 of the eighteenth chapter of John's Gospel.” *

The Paleography (study of ancient writing styles) dated the fragment to the time of Hadrian (117 – 138 CE) within 20 years of the composition of the Greek autograph of the Gospel by its author. The Gospel was written in Ephesus by the apostles John, recorded by the early church historians to be the last living eyewitness of Jesus.

It is significant in that this copy was discovered in Egypt, so far from the site of its original composition (Ephesus or Antioch), which may also be evidence that the Gospel had been around for quite a while, certainly enough time to have been disseminated among Christians in other parts of the Roman World. Such an early copy reduces the chance for errors to creep in due to copy errors. This version may have even been made directly from the original.

The John Rylands Fragment supports the evidence that:

1. The gospels were written within the lifetime of the disciples.
2. The gospels were spread across the known world within a single generation, since the common material of the day (papyrus) allowed for quick, mass distribution across the Roman road system.
3. Such a quick and widespread distribution would prevent myth and legend from developing being inserted into the text. With so many copies floating around, any one copy could be easily compared to another for accuracy.
4. Such an early copy would reduce the chance for copy errors to be inserted in the next over time. With a copy made within one generation of the original autograph, the whole idea of errors being introduced from person to person as it is copied becomes an idea with no basis.

[*http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/searchresources/guidetospecialcollections/stjohnfragment/](http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/searchresources/guidetospecialcollections/stjohnfragment/)

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Approximate Time Span between original & copy	Number of Copies	Accuracy of Copies
Lucretius	died 55 or 53 B.C.		1100 yrs	2	----
Pliny	61-113 A.D.	850 A.D.	750 yrs	7	----
Plato	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 yrs	7	----
Demosthenes	4th Cent. B.C.	1100 A.D.	800 yrs	8	----
Herodotus	480-425 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 yrs	8	----
Suetonius	75-160 A.D.	950 A.D.	800 yrs	8	----
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 yrs	8	----
Euripides	480-406 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1300 yrs	9	----
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200	10	----
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1000	10	----
Livy	59 BC-AD 17	----	???	20	----
Tacitus	circa 100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1000 yrs	20	----
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1400	49	----
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	1000 A.D.	1400 yrs	193	----
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 yrs	643	95%
New Testament	1st Cent. A.D. (50-100 A.D.)	2nd Cent. A.D. (c. 130 A.D. f.)	less than 100 years		