



Early Christian Books in Egypt

Roger S. Bagnall

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For the past hundred years, much has been written about the early editions of Christian texts discovered in the region that was once Roman Egypt. Scholars have cited these papyrus manuscripts--containing the Bible and other Christian works--as evidence of Christianity's presence in that historic area during the first three centuries AD. In *Early Christian Books in Egypt*, distinguished papyrologist Roger Bagnall shows that a great deal of this discussion and scholarship has been misdirected, biased, and at odds with the realities of the ancient world. Providing a detailed picture of the social, economic, and intellectual climate in which these manuscripts were written and circulated, he reveals that the number of Christian books from this period is likely fewer than previously believed.

Bagnall explains why papyrus manuscripts have routinely been dated too early, how the role of Christians in the history of the codex has been misrepresented, and how the place of books in ancient society has been misunderstood. The author offers a realistic reappraisal of the number of Christians in Egypt during early Christianity, and provides a thorough picture of the economics of book production during the period in order to determine the number of Christian papyri likely to have existed. Supporting a more conservative approach to dating surviving papyri, Bagnall examines the dramatic consequences of these findings for the historical understanding of the Christian church in Egypt.

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