



Article

Codex and Contest: What an Early Christian Manuscript Reveals about Social Identity Formation Amid Persecution and Competing Christianities [†]

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Abstract: Recent scholarship on the Bodmer Miscellaneous Codex (BMC) has analysed various features of the manuscript, mostly attempting to answer questions like “Why was this codex created?” and “What purpose did it serve?” Some have given more specific answers, while others believe the document to be largely enigmatic. To further the academy’s understanding of this ancient codex, this paper will examine the BMC, which comprises 11 different writings, for evidence of early Christian social identity formation. More specifically, it will heuristically apply Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Identity Complexity Theory (SICT) to reflect on identity and boundary construction in the BMC. It will be argued that various features of this ancient codex reveal a process of social identity formation, specifically an emerging orthodox Christian identity that is seeking positive distinctiveness and striving to reinforce the boundaries between an ingroup and various other outgroups. Furthermore, it is argued that the evidence of these features, in the context of persecution and competing Christianities, denotes a lower level of social identity complexity.

Keywords: Bodmer Miscellaneous Codex; Social Identity Theory; Social Identity Complexity Theory; social identity; early Christian; orthodox; persecution; competing



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1. Introduction

The Bodmer Miscellaneous Codex (BMC) is a 3rd–4th-century CE papyrus manuscript that contains a heterogeneous compilation of 11 early Christian texts, found alongside a curious mix of other literature somewhere in Egypt.¹ It is a small codex (15.5 cm × 14.2 cm), which indicated to its editor that the manuscript was reserved for personal and private use (Testuz 1959a, pp. 9–10).² The literature found within, in the order proposed by Testuz (1959a, p. 8), can be seen in Table 1 below.³ At first glance, the individual writings appear to be disparate and unrelated to each other, which has prompted inquiries into the reason the codex was constructed in this form and what possible purpose it might have served. Interestingly, it appears that the BMC contains literature that was removed from prior collections and combined into a new container (Testuz 1959a, p. 9; Haines-Eitzen 2000, p. 100; Wasserman 2005, p. 154; Nongbri 2016; Knust 2017, pp. 107–8), which is suggestive of a conscious effort to bring together texts with certain thematic commonalities (see Section 4).

In our view, the question of reason and purpose is not only pertinent historically but also socio-historically. In other words, the question can be pursued for both historical value and for a social value that is related to the interaction between social groups at a point in history. In pursuit of the latter, this article will make use of two related but distinct

theories from the social sciences, namely, Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Identity Complexity Theory (SICT). Consequently, this study finds itself at the intersection of social history and social theory.⁴ It will be argued that various features of this ancient codex reveal a process of social identity formation, specifically an emerging orthodox Christian identity that is seeking positive distinctiveness and striving to reinforce the boundaries between the ingroup and various other outgroups. Furthermore, the evidence of these features denotes a lower level of social identity complexity.

Table 1. The Bodmer Miscellaneous Codex: a proposed reconstruction⁵.

Text	Scribal Hand	Pagination
Section 1		
The Protoevangelium of James (Nativity of Mary)	A	1–49
Correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians	B	50–57
11th Ode of Solomon	B	57–62
Jude	B	62–68
Melito’s homily on the passion	A	1–63
Hymn fragment	A	64
Section 2		
Apology of Phileas	C	129–146? ⁶
Psalms 33–34 (LXX)	D	147–151? ⁷
Section 3		
1–2 Peter	B	1–36

Recent studies have shown that ancient Mediterranean persons were group-oriented, dyadic persons who formed collectivistic societies (Malina 2001; Crook 2020). Identity was a product of an individual’s membership in a social group rather than the individualistic identity that is more common in modern times. This was the case in the 1st century, during which many New Testament (NT) texts were being written, and has remained a feature of Mediterranean societies over the centuries (Duling and Rohrbaugh 2020, p. 96), including in places like Egypt.⁸ As such, the application of the abovementioned modern social scientific theories would be appropriate for the study of Christian literature and artefacts that originated in ancient Mediterranean collectivistic societies. They are especially appropriate due to their focus on *social* (group) identity. I will now give a cursory description of these theoretical models.

2. Social Identity Theory and Social Identity Complexity Theory

SIT owes its origins to Henri Tajfel (1919–1982).⁹ Philip Esler (1994) was the first to use SIT in NT studies and Kok (2014) the first to use SICT in the same field. Tajfel defines social identity as “that *part* of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1981, p. 255, italics and parenthesis original).¹⁰ One of the strengths of SIT is its recognition that intergroup relations are plagued by a tendency toward favouritism of the ingroup and discrimination toward the outgroup. This favouritism and discrimination denote the *collective* behaviours of *individual* group members, resulting in behaviour by a unified whole, the group. In other words, individuals behave based on attributes and identity imputed from the group rather than attributes and identity originating in the individual. Tajfel offered a sort of ontological basis for this, saying, “We need to postulate that, at least in our kinds of societies, an individual strives to achieve a satisfactory concept or image of himself” (Tajfel 1981, p. 254). To achieve

such a self-image, the individual will seek out a group or groups whose perceived identity in society is positive. Therefore, through membership in such groups, the individual assumes for themselves a favourable social identity.¹¹

A caveat about the use of the term “group” is required here. Tajfel (1981, p. 254) defines a group as a “*cognitive entity* that is meaningful to the individual at a particular point. . .” (italics mine). When discussing early Christianity, the mind is predisposed to assume a physical community when the word “group” appears. We are not primarily using the word in this sense, though it is not wholly excluded. However, for this article, we prefer to emphasise Tajfel’s point that group membership can simply be mental assent, rather than necessitating physical and geographical proximity.

However, scholars have noticed that social identity is often more complex than simple binary memberships of one group *or* another. In fact, as Roccas and Brewer (2002, p. 88) have suggested, individuals are often members of more than one social group, hence the introduction of a new theoretical framework, Social Identity Complexity Theory (SICT). Roccas and Brewer have developed four models to represent the extent to which an individual senses that their memberships in multiple ingroups overlap. These models, placed on a low-to-high complexity continuum are (see Figure 1): ‘Intersection’, ‘dominance’, ‘compartmentalization’, and ‘merger’ (Roccas and Brewer 2002, pp. 90–91). “*Low complexity* means that multiple identities are subjectively embedded in a single ingroup representation, whereas *high complexity* involves acknowledgment of differentiation and difference between ingroup categories”, write Roccas and Brewer (2002, p. 93, italics original). Importantly for this article, identity complexity can be higher or lower depending on the social situation in which a person finds themselves, with stress playing a role in the reduction in identity complexity (Roccas and Brewer 2002, pp. 92, 99). This last point will be directly addressed towards the end of the article (see Section 6).

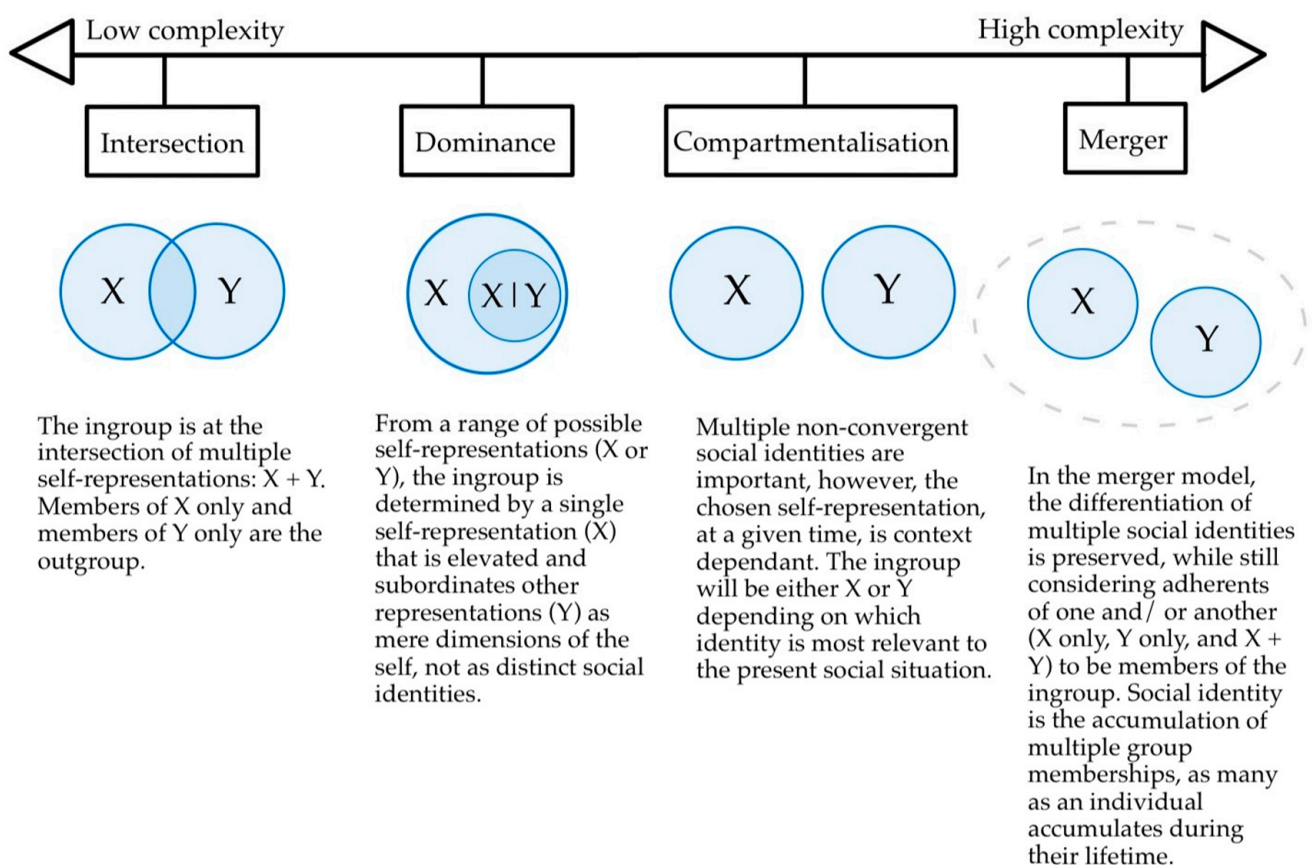


Figure 1. Continuum of social identity complexity: from low to high complexity¹².

More recently, Jacobus Kok (2014, pp. 1–9) has applied SICT to NT studies, using Galatians as a case study. He mentions that early Christianity and Judaism could be characterised by a higher level of identity complexity (Kok 2014, p. 1). However, often, Jewish (particularly Judean) identity appears to have been low in complexity, owing to a strict delineation of insiders and outsiders; anybody who was not a Jew was an outsider (Kok 2014, pp. 5–6). Despite this, as Kok (2014, pp. 7–8) shows, Paul developed a ‘merged’ social identity that allowed him to transcend strict identity boundaries and advocate for a greater inclusivity, or a higher complexity, of the Christian self-understanding (see Galatians 3:28).

Depending on the level of complexity, a self-representation will naturally display varying degrees of distinction between insiders and outsiders. In some cases, the distinction can be blurred, allowing for greater overlap of various ingroup identities, while, in other cases, the divide can be rather sharp between those who are included and those who are excluded from the group. Discussing the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in 1 Peter, a text pertinently represented in the BMC, Kok (2023, p. 119) argues: “It needs to be recognized. . . that every attempt to describe identity for the insiders in such dualistic fashion *ipso facto* implicitly entails a form of exclusion and evaluation of others. *By saying who we are, we are also at the same time saying who we are not*” (italics original). Furthermore, by declaring who we are and therefore who we are not, we are implicitly or explicitly identifying those who are *not one of us*. However, as already mentioned, such a simplistic scenario is not always the case, hence the application of SICT. With this theoretical foundation in place, we will now consider who might have owned and used the BMC, after which we will consider the socio-historical situation reflected in the codex.

3. Who Owned and Used the BMC?

When viewed in the context of the larger Bodmer collection, one becomes acutely aware of how tricky it is to answer the question of ownership.¹³ As we will show in subsequent sections, the literature of the BMC contains themes that are indicative of an emerging Christian orthodoxy and that the codex displays a lower level of social identity complexity. However, the library of which it was a part is comparatively more complex. The collection is multilingual, with Greek, Coptic, and Latin all represented. In addition, and rather mystifyingly, there is a mixture of both Christian and Greek classical literature which, in some cases, is codicologically related (Camplani 2015, p. 126).¹⁴

It is tempting to study an ancient Christian manuscript and imagine an actual community behind its production and use. Most notable in this regard was the proposal put forward by James Robinson, who argued, relying on the emergence of Pachomian letters on the antiquities market around the same time as the Bodmer Papyri were found, that the full collection was owned by a community of Pachomian monks (Robinson 2011, pp. 133–34). However, this thesis has recently found staunch opposition (Fournet 2015, pp. 15–16; Agosti 2015, pp. 96–97; Camplani 2015, p. 134; Nongbri 2018a, pp. 214–15). Robinson explained the presence of classical works (and other material of excellent quality) by suggesting that they might have predated the Pachomian order, entering through the benevolence of wealthy individuals joining the order (Robinson 2011, p. 155). As a counterpoint to this, however, it is believed that Pachomian monks were strongly opposed to Greek culture and so the ownership and/or use of classical literature was highly unlikely (Fournet 2015, pp. 16–17). Nevertheless, it seems that what we know about Pachomius and his monks, their reading preferences and theology, is a matter for debate.¹⁵

Similar to that of Robinson, and with specific regard to the BMC and P72 (the nomenclature given to Jude and 1–2 Peter in the BMC), is the proposition given by Phillip Strickland, in which he hypothesises two communities that held diametrically opposed theological views regarding Petrine authority and teaching. One community, represented by the BMC and P72, was a Coptic proto-orthodox community for whom Jude and 1–2 Peter “affirmed. . . the boundaries of orthodoxy within the NT’s Petrine tradition” (Strickland 2017, p. 791). He juxtaposes this community with a neighbouring one, also Coptic, that owned the Nag

Hammadi codices (NHC) (Strickland 2017, pp. 786–87). He avers that the presence of the Apocalypse of Peter in the NHC and its similar paleographic dating to P72 “provides evidence that the Nag Hammadi community believed their movement was started by Peter, and that they, not the proto-orthodox, were the true inheritors of his teaching” (Strickland 2017, p. 789). He goes on to cite textual references from the Apocalypse as further evidence (Strickland 2017, pp. 789–90).

In recent times, with regard to the study of early Christian literature, the “community” hypothesis has received strong criticism (Stowers 2011; Walsh 2021). It has been contended that this recourse, in certain corners of NT scholarship, to “the idea of community as a deep social and mental coherence, a commonality in mind and practice” (Stowers 2011, p. 238) is part of Christianity’s “myth of origins” (Walsh 2021, pp. 12–13, 31–33) and is an inheritance from German Romanticism, which has played a role in misconstruing what NT writings reveal about early Christians (Walsh 2021, pp. 50–104). In the study of the Bodmer Papyri, Fournet (2015, p. 17) has echoed the caution against ascribing these documents to a specific community:

“Le terme même de communauté n’est-il pas abusif en sous-entendant un profil homogène pour l’ensemble de ses utilisateurs? De plus, nous avons vu que cette bibliothèque s’est constituée sur trois siècles et qu’elle était donc susceptible d’être l’agrégat de plusieurs fonds d’origines diverses qui ne reflètent pas nécessairement l’état d’esprit de l’ensemble des usagers à la fin de son histoire. Enfin, elle peut avoir donné lieu à plusieurs activités, qui ne sont pas exclusives l’une de l’autre: création, lecture édifiante et instruction scolaire. Autrement dit, l’hypothèse d’une bibliothèque d’école n’est pas incompatible avec un milieu religieux”.

Who, then, owned the Bodmer Papyri, and, by extension, the BMC? Trying to ascertain the exact identity of individuals or groups by analysing these documents will lead to unnecessary conjecture; after all, the collection exhibits accretion over three centuries, which inevitably widens the possibilities. Despite this, a general profile can be sketched. In his fresh paleographical study, Orsini (2019, p. 32) writes:

“the differing qualities of execution show that, in most cases, the producers of these manuscripts were not professional scribes but individuals whose writing abilities varied and who were producing books intended for practical use, by other individuals or groups, in daily life”.

Typically, the proposals about who owned the Bodmer Papyri have variously suggested that they appear to be products of an educated and religious milieu in Egypt (Nicklas and Wasserman 2006, p. 187; Miguélez-Cavero 2008, pp. 218–26; Agosti 2015, pp. 95–97; Camplani 2015, pp. 134–35). Owing to the complexity displayed by the collection itself and the obscurity created by the antiquities trade in the mid-20th century, which distorts both our view of the circumstances of the find and its exact inventory, much more certainty than this also falls within the realm of speculation. As such, Nongbri (2018a, p. 238) laments, “Until some semblance of a consensus is reached on the contents of the Bodmer Papyri, its ancient context will continue to remain in question”.¹⁶

Does this mean we can say nothing or next to nothing about who created and used the BMC? We do not think so. In fact, as Walsh (2021, p. 109–10) asserts, “writing was a specialist’s activity” and was “ultimately a product of an author’s education, training, and range of literary and other interests—as well as the feedback received from relative peers”.¹⁷ Whoever the owners of the Bodmer library were, they were certainly educated and collectively displayed a diverse literary interest that sometimes traversed the divide between Christian and classical Greek literature. Moreover, their works were not only read but were also hermeneutically engaged (see Section 5) and collated along thematic (theological) lines that were pertinent to their enjoyment and edification (see Section 4), as well as that of their network of fellow readers and copyists (Knust 2017, p. 114). Analogously, Sabine Heubner offers a useful 3rd-century case study of some of Egypt’s early Christian Gospel readers (Heubner 2019, pp. 18–28). These readers exhibit both an acquaintance with Christian texts

and an active adoption of literary features peculiar to them (Huebner 2019, pp. 21–22). Her study reveals that those who owned and used early Christian literature were from the elite of Roman Egyptian society (Huebner 2019, p. 23), educated within a still-classical Greek milieu (Huebner 2019, p. 28), and they were responsible for the proliferation of Christianity to the remote areas of Egypt (Huebner 2019, p. 24).

Returning to the BMC, a physiognomy of an educated elite with access to valued literature and engaging (networking) with one another over these writings bears resemblance to Haines-Eitzen's (2000, pp. 96–104) hypothesis that the BMC was the product of private social networks of scribes. She writes that this codex "provides illumination of the process of transmission, the motivations and impetuses behind transmission, as well as doctrinal, theological, and social issues facing Christianity in the late third and early fourth centuries" (Haines-Eitzen 2000, p. 104). This is a critical point because Christianity in the early centuries was not a unified and coherent whole; rather, it represented a mixture of theological worldviews that competed with one another in the same social space. This competition was perpetuated by the educated religious elite whose literary objects functioned as "social mediators" in the discursive environment.¹⁸ The survival of manuscripts in Egypt, thanks to its dry climate, has enabled modern scholarship to glimpse something of this social context, one which we will now observe.

4. The Socio-Historical Situation: Persecution and Competing Christianities

Prior to Constantine I and the Edict of Milan (313 AD), early Christianity faced social censoring (persecution) that ranged from local and sporadic to (and including) official and empire-wide censorship (Horrell 2013, p. 197).¹⁹ This form of social resistance was a response to the claimed faith of early Jesus followers. Yet, given that Romans were typically tolerant, scholars have noted that it was unusual for them to resist Christians to the extent they did (Moss 2017, p. 783). Nevertheless, it appears that due to their withdrawal from typical Greco-Roman social activities, Christians were interpreted as anti-social and, therefore, deviants who threatened societal stability (De Vos 2017, p. 830; Horrell 2013, p. 193).²⁰ Christians were considered dangerous outsiders who were, at best, viewed with suspicion and, at worst, heavily censored.

The letter of 1 Peter provides early evidence of this withdrawal by Christians and the resulting objection from members of their former social groups.²¹ The text of 1 Peter 4:2–4 describes something of the social situation of the readers; on the one hand, these Christians have rejected a previous kind of life (μηκεται ανθρωπων επειθυμιας. . . αρκετος γαρ ο παρεληλυθωνς χρονος το βουλημα των εθνων κατιργασθαι. . .), while, on the other hand, their objectors are surprised by this non-participation (εν ω ξενιζονται μη συντρεχοντων υμων εις την αυτην της ασωτιας αναχυσιν. . .). The result is harm (κακοσων) and suffering (πασχοιτε) for these Anatolian Christians, despite their innocence (δικεοσσηνη) (3:13–14).²² This kind of social interaction is to be expected in a group-oriented or dyadic social world, where the rejection of societal norms would have been viewed as dangerous and a charge of deviance very likely laid. Of course, 'Peter' does not share such an interpretation of the situation; as far as he is concerned, the addressees have been rescued from their former fruitless lives (1:18). In addition, to contest this censorship, the author pointedly reverses the charge of deviance by listing off his own charge sheet of vices (4:3–4), a rhetorical strategy that early Christians were known to employ (Bazzana 2020, pp. 225–26). This reversal means that Christians are now members of the new εκλεκτοις (1:1) ingroup, who have a special status (2:9–10), and non-Christians are members of the outgroup, who will have to answer for their deeds (4:5).²³ The drawing of such boundary lines becomes particularly clear in other texts of the BMC; however, for the moment, we will stay with 1 Peter.

An extant copy of 1 Peter (approximately 3rd century CE) bound in the BMC (4th century CE) reveals that the social censoring persisted from the time of the writing of 1 Peter to the time the BMC was created. This revelation is especially lucid in light of a martyrology (the Apology of Phileas) and the comforting Psalms 33 and 34 (LXX) appearing in the

BMC. Together, they give a sense of how acutely the social resistance could be felt. In the Apology of Phileas, we are introduced to the protagonist, Bishop Phileas, who was from the Egyptian city Thmuis and born into a noble and wealthy family. Around 307 CE, following a legal trial, Phileas was executed by Roman authorities (St. Jerome 1999, p. 110). In the Apology, the prefect Calcianus orders Phileas, on multiple occasions, to make sacrifices to Roman divinity. Each time, he refuses. Phileas argues that the only sacrifices *his* God requires are a pure heart and a sincere soul (plate 5); he also affirms that Jesus was God (plates 7–8), and that God was crucified for the salvation of believers (plates 8–9).²⁴

This is important because martyrologies functioned to form memories and shape identity for early Christians, whose supreme example was Jesus Christ (Moss 2017, pp. 783, 787). Stories of martyrdom would continue to be meaningful even after religious toleration was legislated under Constantine, bringing an end to official persecution. Once martyrdom was no longer an ideal that could be reached, martyrologies would have found new significance in ascetic circles with their focus on bodily austerity (Haines-Eitzen 2000, p. 104). Jesus was the perfect embodiment of the ingroup prototype, which is an almost nebulous, cognitively aggregated representation of the ingroup's norms (Esler 2014, p. 51). This is evident in 1 Peter, where the writer explicitly appeals to Jesus as a model of suffering (4:1, 13). As an exemplar, the suffering and death of Jesus offered purpose and meaning for early Christians who were suffering social displacement from former group memberships while also navigating membership in a new ingroup (εκλεκτοις παρεπειδημοις διασπορας; 1:1). Jesus' 'martyrdom' was the preeminent model for subsequent martyrologies, like the Apology, valourising the ingroup prototype and reinforcing social identity boundaries.

Turning now to the Psalms, which are codicologically connected to the Apology: In early Christianity, the psalter was an important source of theological reflection on Jesus Christ (Nicklas and Wasserman 2006, p. 169). In addition, at least in this codex, they appear to have offered much needed comfort for beleaguered believers, who sometimes faced more than mere negative sentiment. As we see with the Apology, there were occasions when Romans instituted legal proceedings to proscribe Christian behaviour; the letter of Pliny the Younger to Emperor Trajan (Pliny the Younger 2006, *Letters*. X.96), inquiring about the appropriate trial process when dealing with Christians, is another famous example. On the latter, Horrell (2013, pp. 183–97, esp. 196–97) notes that there are similarities between the details of that description and the picture sketched by the author of 1 Peter. If so, it is not difficult to see how, in such a crisis, Psalms 33 and 34 (LXX) would have been a source of catharsis, particularly considering that the Psalms shared a codex with 1 Peter. For example, notice that both Psalms vividly mention God's deliverance for his suffering people (33:5, 7, 18; 34:10) and both offer a warring picture of God, who will eliminate the psalmist's enemies (33:8, 17; 34:1–6).²⁵ Moreover, the psalmist in 34 invites the reader's imagination into the courtroom; God is called upon to adjudicate (δικασον; 34:1) between the innocent and those who have entered the trial with no substantial charge (οτι δωρεαν εκρουψαν μοι διαφθοραν πακιδος αυτο[ν] ματην ωνειδισαν την ψυχην μου; 34:7).

Bringing our attention to the 11th Ode of Solomon, found in the first section of the BMC, we see that imagination continues to be important. 'A Redeemed One Witnesses in Metaphorical Speech' is the description that Lattke (2009, p. 149) gives to this Ode. In our view, Ode 11 functions to complement the apologetic design of the codex by using powerful metaphorical imagery to describe and valourise, in poetic/hymnal form, the desirable redemption journey of believers. The journey to paradise (11:16) is set up in an almost enchanting fashion (τροφυης εωνιας; 11:24b) that might have further bolstered ingroup favouritism, encouraging suffering believers.²⁶

Based on the above brief analysis, and looking through the lens of SIT, it is clear to us that the presence of 1 Peter alongside other texts of the BMC like the Apology of Phileas, the Psalms, and Ode 11 emphasises a distinction between the ingroup—God's people—and the outgroup—those who seek to harm ingroup members—valourising the former and villainising the latter. There are yet other texts that do the same, albeit in a different way.

Early Christians also sought to distinguish themselves from ‘deviant’ social groups of another kind. Among other contentions, early Christians were in conflict with one another (intra-group conflict) over Christology. This conflict implies that Christianity expressed itself in a variety of forms, such that talking of ‘Christianity’, even in the 1st century, is problematic if one is referring to a monolithic belief system (Kok and Roth 2014, pp. 2–4). This continued in later centuries; as Siker (2017, p. 197) writes, “Christianity in the second and third centuries was a time of both significant fluidity and consolidation of Christian identities at the same time”.²⁷ Our knowledge of this fluidity comes from the extant literature that depicts ‘false’ and ‘true’ believers partaking in a contentious identity discourse struggle over ‘correct’ beliefs about Jesus Christ.

The BMC contains texts that either overtly or tacitly engage in this struggle. A few examples from various writings will suffice to show the contention over Christology. Most importantly is the question of Jesus’ humanity and divinity. The Protoevangelium of James is at pains to prove the virginity of Mary (20:1), indirectly emphasising the divine conception of Jesus, which is poignantly expressed in 11:2–3 and 20:3.²⁸ The humanity (fleshly reality) of Jesus is highlighted when he suckles Mary’s breast (19:2).²⁹ Similarly, the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians (3 Corinthians) is explicit in combatting errant views about the divine conception (1:14–15; 2:12–13, 16) and the resurrection of the dead (1:12; 2:6, 24–33). ‘Paul’ counters these views through the use of various deviance labels, which are ascribed to purveyors of such aberrant teachings, “του πανηρου” (2:2), “παραχαρρασοντων τα λογια αυτου” (2:3), “τεκνα οργης” (2:19), and “τεκνημα τα εχειδωνων” (2:38).³⁰ Deviance is polemically employed also by Melito in his homily on the suffering of Jesus. Melito accuses the Jews of deicide; in murdering Jesus, they killed their own God (*Pascha* 96, see also 72–105). In doing so, Melito simultaneously delegitimises the actions of those who killed Jesus while legitimising Jesus’ divinity. He girds this logic by linking Jesus to the Passover meal (Exodus 12); Jesus was prefigured in the death of the Passover lamb (*Pascha* 1–10).³¹ Finally, like 3 Corinthians, the epistles of 2 Peter and Jude are concerned to contend for the one true faith (“επαγωνιζεσθε τη απαξ παραδοθειση τοις αγιοις πειστει”; Jude 3), refuting “ψευδοπροφηται” and “ψευδοδιδασκαλοι” (2 Peter 2:1).³²

Therefore, not only were early Christians censored, but they also had a pluriform expression, and it is fascinating to see how these two socio-political and socio-religious issues come together in one codex that appears to have served as an apologetic anthology, if you will. This anthology seems to have had a dual function: (1) it could have encouraged suffering believers whose faith in Christ dislodged them from former social identities, and (2) it could have functioned as a source book for contesting and contending for the ‘true’ faith, and, in so doing, strengthened the social identity demarcations between a Christian ingroup and ‘deviant’ Christian and non-Christian groups. This prompts the question: in which specific early Christian group would the BMC find a home? Scholars have argued that the nature of the collection points to an emerging Christian orthodoxy (Wasserman 2005, pp. 147–48, 154; Nicklas and Wasserman 2006, pp. 185–88; Horrell 2013, pp. 59, 66), an argument with which we concur. Further evidence for this argument can be found in the hermeneutical and textual practices of the scribe of P72.

5. Marginalia and Textual Emendations

Wasserman (2005, p. 148) has suggested that the final collector of the BMC and the scribe of P72 (1–2 Peter and Jude) might have been the same person. The reason for this is that the scribe of P72 has shown a theological tendency in their transcriptional activity that is analogous to the theological–apologetic tendency of the codex.³³ For the remainder of this paper, we will take Wasserman’s point as granted.³⁴ That being the case, this early Christian codex offers us a window into the theological thought world of at least one early Christian who would have assimilated into an emerging Christian orthodox social identity that appears to be shared by members of his scribal network.

In addition to the collection of literature in the BMC, our scribal collector made notes in the margins of 1–2 Peter and created several key textual variants across each writing of P72, ones that reflect beliefs typical of an emerging orthodox Christian ingroup. We will consider the marginalia first. There are nine notes in 1 Peter and four in 2 Peter, and they appear to highlight themes of individual verses (Merkel 2015, p. 32). Horrell (2013, p. 59) comments on the marginalia, “Whatever their combined doctrinal force, the summary notes certainly reflect an interpretive reading of the text which, by identifying and summarizing topics, influences subsequent readings”. For this paper, the significance of these notes is in what they reveal about the process of meaning-making, a process that is inextricably tied to the formation of identity (Schnelle 2009, pp. 30–31).

Of the nine marginalia in 1 Peter, four explicitly refer to holiness/purity (1:15; 1:22; 2:5; 2:9), a key identity marker for Christians. The flesh is highlighted in three of the nine (3:18; 4:1; 4:6), the idea of suffering in the flesh being prototypically embodied by Jesus Christ and sought after by early Christians, as shown above. God as creator is mentioned in one (4:19), and love is noted in another (4:8). Each of these themes is related to Christian (ingroup) identity formation and not unimportant to Christian orthodoxy. In 2 Peter, there are four marginalia, three of which refer to false teachers (2:1), accursed children (2:15), and scoffers (3:3). Each of these is a clear outgroup designation that emphasises deviance. The final note is about peace (3:14) in the context of living holy and peaceful lives, waiting for the promise of God to be fulfilled.

By way of example, it will suffice to expand on just one of these intriguing marginal notes, showing how we draw insight from them regarding the formation of early Christian identity. At 1 Peter 2:9, the scribe has noted, “περι γενοϋ εγλεκτον βασιλιον ιερατευμα εθνοϋ αγιον λαον περιποησιν”,³⁵ highlighting various terms that refer to ethnicity.³⁶ Invoking ethnicity (as a rhetorical strategy) is a powerful and efficient instrument for the redefinition of social identity, especially in the context of being socially displaced and negatively evaluated by outsiders (Horrell 2013, pp. 161–62; Ok 2021, pp. 9–10).³⁷ This particular marginal note highlights “the declaration of the identity of the new people of God. . .” (Horrell 2013, p. 59), and, by penning a summary note that clarifies and makes meaning, at the place where we find a key description of the believer’s new identity in God, the scribe reveals that this description resonated with them; the scribe considered himself to be part of the “γενοϋ εγλεκτον βασιλιον ιερατευμα εθνοϋ αγιον λαον περιποησιν”. This point is strengthened when considered alongside the other marginalia; the scribe highlighted themes that were important to the scribe and their perceived ingroup identity. As we will now show, this ingroup held specific beliefs about Jesus Christ that our scribe sought to clarify.

P72 is famous for, among other things, three Christological changes, one in each of 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude. Firstly, at Jude 5b, the scribe has written that it was “Θεοϋ Χριστοϋ” (written as *nomina sacra*) who saved Israel from Egypt, whereas the Accordance Electronic (n.d.) simply reads “Ιησοϋϋϋ”. This reading is an explicit attempt to equate God and Christ; the Father and the Son are both God (Nicklas and Wasserman 2006, p. 178). Secondly, at 1 Peter 5:1a, the scribe has opted for “Θεοϋ” instead of “Χριστοϋ”, the latter being found in the Accordance Electronic (n.d.). P⁷² reads, “πρεσβυτεροϋ ρον εν υμιν παρακαλω ο συνπρεσβυτεροϋ και μαρτυϋ των του Θ̅υ παθηματων. . .” The Accordance Electronic (n.d.) reads, “των του Χριστοϋ παθηματων. . .” In contrast to the critical text, the scribe of P72 highlights his belief that it was *God* who suffered on the cross. Thirdly, in 2 Peter 1:2, the scribe omits the conjunction, “και”, between “Θεοϋ” and “Ιησοϋ” (*nomina sacra*), changing the meaning of the sentence. Now, grace and peace are obtained through knowing “God, our Lord Jesus”, as opposed to “God *and* Jesus, our Lord” (italics mine). God and Jesus are thus equated once again (reminiscent of other texts in the codex). This variant may seem to be a simple scribal error, but, taken together with the similar variants at Jude 5b and 1 Peter 5:1a, that seems unlikely (Royse 2008, p. 612).

Francis Beare (1961, p. 255) questioned whether the variant at 5:1a was “an unconscious inclination to Patripassianism?” King (1964, p. 57) saw in all three variants “evidence of fullest acceptance of the deity of Christ by the scribe (or one of his predecessors) and the church in his area”. Bart Ehrman (1996, p. 88) believes this to be an anti-adoptionistic emendation that stressed that *God*, in Christ, suffered. Haines-Eitzen (2000, p. 115) wrote (citing B. Ehrman), “Like the reading in Jude 5, this change serves a dual function: it affirms ‘that the one who suffered was God (against adoptionists)’ and it stresses ‘that this God, Christ, really did suffer (against, e.g., various groups of Gnostics)’”. Addressing a fourth apparent theological change at Jude 25, Royse (2008, pp. 585–86) adds further weight to the notion that the scribe wanted to “give glory to God and Jesus Christ in a completely parallel manner”.

The definition and defence of theological beliefs are important for identity formation and preservation. Esler (2014, p. 53) writes that for social groups, “beliefs underlie their ‘we-ness’ and uniqueness and define the social identity they derive from belonging to that group”. They are also significant for effective understanding of and navigation through the world (Esler 2014, p. 54). Conceptualising the role of beliefs in this way allows us to understand the motivation behind theological emendations. Defending ingroup beliefs, through the text, is a way of preserving the psychological integrity of the group identity. Bringing the Christology of a text into conformity with the scribe’s pre-existing beliefs not only functions to reinforce social identity but also serves to delegitimise competing Christologies in the discursive environment (Haines-Eitzen 2000, p. 112).

Conforming a text to preconceptions is part of the process of meaning-making and the formation of identity. The scribe’s changes to the text are thus indicative of his salient and superordinate identity, namely, “Christian”. More specifically, considering the nature of the changes along with the construction of the codex and the marginal notes, the scribe appears to be part of the still-forming (emerging) orthodox Christian identity.

6. The BMC and Social Identity Complexity

Two reminders are requisite at this point: (1) the authors of this paper use “group” primarily as a reference to a “cognitive entity” (see Section 2), and (2) where an ingroup representation fails to acknowledge multiple group identities as differentiated and legitimate but rather subsumes these identities into one superordinate and dominant category, that identity displays a low complexity (Roccas and Brewer 2002, p. 93; see Figure 1). This low level of complexity can result from a variety of contextual factors, stress being one factor (Roccas and Brewer 2002, pp. 92, 99). Many early Christians who experienced social displacement and censoring were certainly acutely stressed as a result. Members of collectivistic societies, like the ancient Mediterranean world, were conditioned to prize the acceptance of the group (Duling and Rohrbaugh 2020, p. 95). Those who behaved contrary to accepted social standards (deviants) were likely to lose that acceptance, acquiring shame (the loss of honour), which was disastrous for one’s social standing and, therefore, a tremendously painful (stressful) experience (Rohrbaugh 2020, p. 74).

We have already mentioned that early Christians were marked as deviants within the wider Greco-Roman society. The text of 1 Peter offers insight concerning the impact of this, especially regarding the strained household relationships, due to a newfound faith, a new identity.³⁸ In the ancient Mediterranean world, kinship and the household were intimately connected, and they (and “family”) often extended beyond biological descent to include slaves and other dependents, etc. (Vearncombe 2020, p. 50). Because early Christians withdrew from typical societal activities and group memberships, they ultimately subverted the prevailing social structures, which unsurprisingly invoked the ire of tradition-bound Mediterranean people. To address this, ‘Peter’ offers his readers a new fictive kinship that provides a “surrogate family” (Vearncombe 2020, p. 50) which reorients them in the social landscape, towards one another and towards the ingroup prototype, inspiring solidarity between insiders. In addition, this new family subordinates all previous social allegiances to the extent that his readers are no longer residents of this world; rather, they are “πακούς και παρεπεδημους” (1 Peter 2:11) who look forward to the “ημερα επισκοτης” (1 Peter 2:12).

Recently, Kok (2023, pp. 120–23) noted the significance of the family metaphor for ‘Peter’'s rhetorical strategy. The readers of this missive are encouraged to view one another through the lens of family—they are born again (ἀναγεννησας) into a new family, one that is “qualitatively superior to earthly birth and inheritance since it is incorruptible and originated from heaven” (Kok 2023, p. 121). What they were before was inferior and, therefore, subordinated to their new superordinate identity, namely, members of God’s family. As members of this new fictive family, ‘Peter’ helps these Anatolian Christians to cognitively reorient themselves within the social space they inhabit (Kok 2023, p. 124). This reorientation helps them navigate their relationships to both insiders and outsiders, and ultimately enables them to withstand their suffering and stress. Figure 2 illustrates the family metaphor and its related imageries in 1 Peter.

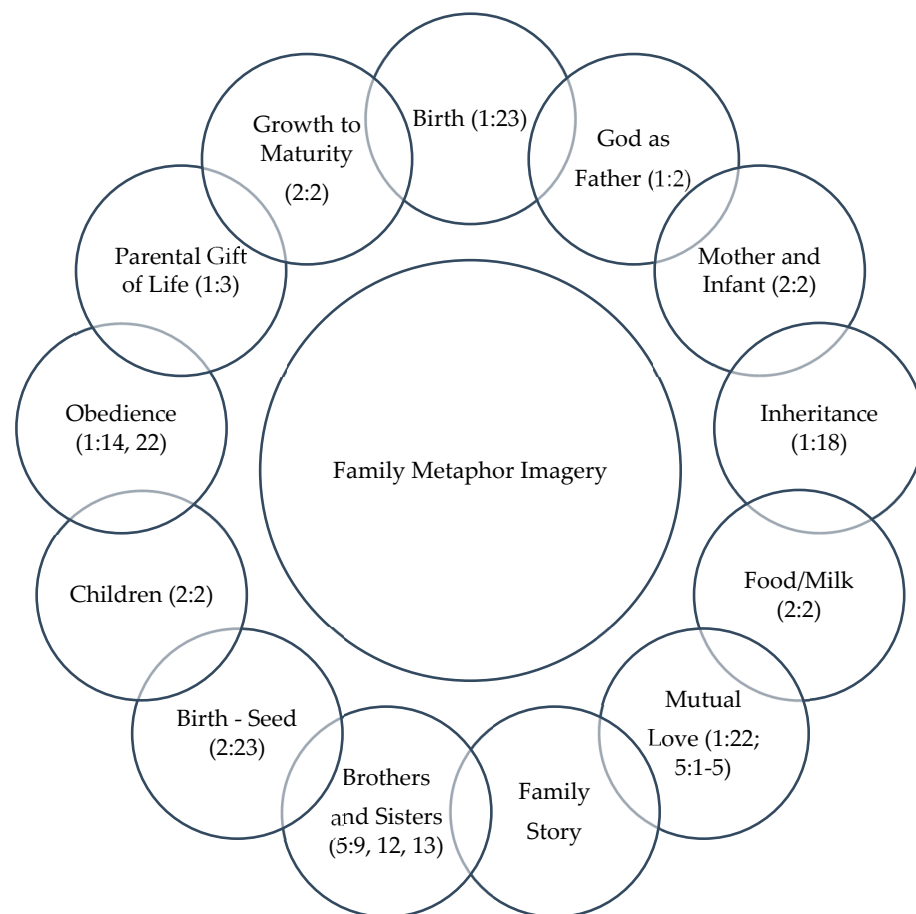


Figure 2. Family metaphor imagery: a graphic representation of the family metaphor in 1 Peter³⁹.

With its emphasis on persecution and Christology, the BMC seems to have provided its reader(s) with a clearly demarcated social identity, one that valorised martyrdom and villainised their persecutors, as well as one that legitimised ingroup beliefs about Jesus and delegitimised any supposedly deviant conceptions regarding him. Within the framework of SICT, the stress of social resistance could have instigated a cognitive reorientation from a higher level of social identity complexity (recall that the Bodmer Papyri constitute a complex set of literary interests) to a lower level of social identity complexity.

From the discussion in Section 3, it is not unreasonable to posit that the scribal collector of the BMC could have had, like his network of fellow readers and copyists, an intellectual curiosity that was not limited by his religious commitment entirely. As a member of the educated elite, he would have had training in a classical Greek milieu and would have been affiliated with others who were like-minded and similarly skilled. However, under the circumstances described above (see Section 4), an apologetic anthology, like the BMC,

would become highly relevant (at least until persecution ceased). The anthology seems perfectly suited to provide comfort and meaning amid social discomfort while also giving the sense that previous identities (or “other” identities) are inferior and, in certain cases, antithetical to Christianity. To be sure, this seemingly portrays these Christians in a state of oscillation, which may appear odd to the modern reader. However, as we noted at the outset (see Section 2), social identity in the ancient Mediterranean world apparently manifested a degree of complexity, which, as per the SICT continuum (see Figure 1), implies a degree of movement and oscillation.

The BMC is a “social mediator” necessarily relevant to and useful in its social context. Consequently, within a context of social censoring, we submit that the codex does not portray a social identity that was happy to acknowledge distinct identities as legitimate superordinate self-representations; rather, it portrays a social identity that is elevated above all other categories to the extent that they are either to be rejected or are simply features of a superordinate identity, Christian. This would be consonant with [Roccas and Brewer’s \(2002, p. 90\)](#) dominance model and, therefore, a social identity of lower complexity.

7. Conclusions

The BMC is a 3rd–4th-century CE papyrus MS that contains a seemingly disconnected variety of early Christian literature. However, considering the thematic similarities across the texts, the marginalia of 1–2 Peter, and selected textual variants in P72 that emphasise a certain high Christology, it seems plain that whoever compiled this codex in the 4th century did so with a particular theological–apologetic intent in mind. From the perspective of SIT, this compilation served to reinforce the social identity boundaries between the ingroup (emerging Christian orthodoxy) and various other outgroups (Greco-Roman persecutors and deviant Christians). The ingroup is valorised (favoured), while the outgroups are villainised (discriminated against). Moreover, from the perspective of SICT, due to the stress of social censoring and the presence of competing Christianities, the ingroup identity represents a dominance model, which has a lower level of identity complexity.

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Notes

- ¹ The circumstances of its discovery, along with the other Bodmer Papyri in the same cache, are shrouded in a fair bit of mystery, which some have attempted to decipher ([Robinson 2011](#); [Nongbri 2018a](#), pp. 189–238). For the purposes of this paper, we accept that the exact site of the find is inconclusive but still locate it somewhere between Panopolis (present-day Akhmim) and Thebes (present-day Luxor), including the specific area of Dishna.
- ² The scribal idiosyncrasies of P72 (Jude and 1–2 Peter in the BMC), most notably the scribe’s difficulty in spelling (affirming that a Coptic individual attempted to transcribe in Greek), have further substantiated private use ([Haines-Eitzen 2000](#), p. 73; [Wasserman 2005](#), p. 154; [Royse 2008](#), p. 582).

- ³ For basic details of the codex and a list of major publications, see [Trismegistos \(n.d.\)](#). For access to high-resolution images of each of these texts, see [Digivatlib \(n.d.\)](#) for 1–2 Peter and [Bodmer Lab \(n.d.\)](#) for the rest. See the reference list below for further publications related to the study of the BMC and the Bodmer Papyri.
- ⁴ See [Clarke and Tucker \(2014, pp. 67–91\)](#). They write, “What is the use of social theory to historians, and what is the use of history to social theorists? For historians, social theory provides a framework for interpreting the evidence, and for theoreticians, social history provides the evidence needed to substantiate their purported theoretical claims” ([Clarke and Tucker 2014, p. 82](#)). This outcome is, however, impacted by limited access to historical data ([Clarke and Tucker 2014, p. 67](#)). [Horrell \(2009, p. 17\)](#) disagrees with the sharply drawn distinction between social history and social science (theory). His disagreement is a resistance to the “insistence on the use of models as the only proper and recognisably social-scientific method” ([Horrell 2009, p. 11](#)). He advocates for the use of eclectic theoretical “approaches” as legitimate ways to study the NT writings and their depicted social worlds ([Horrell 2009, pp. 12–20](#)).
- ⁵ The table I have supplied was adapted from [Haines-Eitzen \(2000, p. 97\)](#) and [Wasserman \(2005, p. 140\)](#), who both adapted it from [Testuz \(1959a, p. 8\)](#). We note that [Orsini \(2019, pp. 38–39\)](#) identifies a different scribal hand for Melito’s homily and the hymn fragment (both datable to the 4th century) to the one that penned the Protoevangelium of James. This brings the number of scribes to five as opposed to the four in Testuz’ assessment. Since the BMC was disassembled and the individual texts published separately from each other, some level of conjectural reconstruction is required. Consequently, what Testuz proposed was hypothetical, and not all scholars agree with his reconstruction. For example, based on the results of his study, [Wasserman \(2005, p. 145\)](#) is inclined to believe that, in its final state, Section 3 followed immediately after Section 1, meaning that Section 2 either began or ended the codex. Such a structure of the BMC would allow for Jude and 1–2 Peter, works considered to be copied by the same scribe ([Orsini 2019, p. 43](#)), to be placed in the same codicological section. However, [Nongbri \(2016, p. 410\)](#) believes that the codicological connection between Jude and 1–2 Peter is incidental; prior to their inclusion in the BMC, they were originally part of distinct collections. There is also disagreement about whether certain writings belong in the codex or not. [Nongbri \(2018b\)](#) argues, on the basis of various material features (page shape, lack of evidence for binding holes, unique pagination sequence, and different scribal hands), that Phileas’ Apology and the Psalms were probably never part of the BMC. In our estimation, Nongbri’s observations are compelling; however, considering that the Apology and the Psalms share key theological motifs with other texts of the codex, we are inclined to believe that both were, *in some way*, part of the codex (not physically stitched but inserted, perhaps in haste, to be bound at a later stage?). How exactly will probably always remain a matter of conjecture.
- ⁶ The Apology is highly fragmentary, with the result that the page numbers are not clear, requiring the pagination to be reconstructed.
- ⁷ The top margins of the Psalms are mostly missing, requiring pagination to be reconstructed. [Wasserman \(2005, p. 140\)](#) tentatively has the Psalms ending on p. 151, while [Nongbri \(2018b\)](#) ends the sequence on p. 150.
- ⁸ For specific examples, see contributions by [Vearncombe \(2020, pp. 53–54\)](#), [Williams \(2020, p. 164\)](#), [Choi \(2020, pp. 186–87\)](#), [Crook and Stansell \(2020, p. 206\)](#), [Neufeld and Crook \(2020, p. 236\)](#), and [Elliot \(2020, p. 246\)](#).
- ⁹ For more on the origins of SIT, see [Hogg \(2006, pp. 111–36\)](#), [Esler \(2014, pp. 29–65\)](#), and [Russell \(2020, pp. 1–24\)](#).
- ¹⁰ Much of Tajfel’s work with social identity was grounded in the ‘minimal group experiments’. See [Tajfel \(1970, pp. 96–103\)](#), [Tajfel et al. \(1971, pp. 149–78\)](#), and [Billig and Tajfel \(1973, pp. 27–51\)](#).
- ¹¹ [Hogg \(2006, p. 120\)](#), however, offers a significant caveat: “Self-enhancement is undeniably involved in social identity processes. However, the link between individual self-esteem and positive group distinctiveness is not always that tight. Although having a devalued or stigmatized social identity can depress self-esteem, people are exceedingly adept at buffering themselves from the self-evaluative consequences of stigma”. [Hogg \(2006, p. 121\)](#) goes on to say that people may be motivated toward “optimal distinctiveness”, seeking to be distinct but not too distinct.
- ¹² © [Author]. Adapted from [Roccas and Brewer \(2002, pp. 90–91\)](#).
- ¹³ From our perspective, “ownership” includes production; those who produced the BMC also owned it.
- ¹⁴ For proposed inventories of the collection, see [Miguélez-Cavero \(2008, pp. 218–21\)](#), [Robinson \(2011, pp. 169–72\)](#), [Fournet \(2015, pp. 21–23\)](#), and [Nongbri \(2018a, p. 217\)](#).
- ¹⁵ [Rousseau \(1985, p. 19\)](#) writes, “Pachomius and his associates were markedly attached to orthodoxy”; however, he also acknowledges that some gnostic influence may have been retained ([Rousseau 1985, p. 22](#)). [Brakke \(1998, pp. 111–12, 116\)](#) argues that Pachomius was simultaneously in step with emerging orthodoxy while retaining autonomy within the order. Orthodox Pachomian monasticism came into full fruition only under Theodore, one of Pachomius’ successors, and beyond ([Brakke 1998, p. 112](#)). For more on Pachomius, see [Goehring \(2017, pp. 1021–35\)](#). For a daring proposition that suggests that the Bodmer Papyri (also known as the Dishna Papers) and the Nag Hammadi codices could have been owned and used by Pachomian monks, see [Lundhaug \(2020, pp. 329–86\)](#). For criticisms to such a thesis, see [Lewis and Blount \(2014, pp. 399–419\)](#) and [Piwowarczyk and Wipszycka \(2017, pp. 432–58\)](#).
- ¹⁶ See note 14.
- ¹⁷ While these comments are in the context of a discussion about the authorship of the Gospels (see esp. [Walsh 2021, pp. 131–33](#)), they are applicable to the Bodmer Papyri and the BMC. The central argument in Walsh’s book is that Synoptic Gospels are not extraordinary religious texts that were products of theologically coherent communities; rather, they are typical and bear resemblance to other Greco-Roman literature of the imperial period ([Walsh 2021, pp. 4–15](#)).

- 18 For more on how early Christian manuscripts, like the BMC, functioned as “social mediators”, see [Knust \(2017\)](#), pp. 99–118).
- 19 Horrell connects official and non-official public persecution in the following way: “To depict these as two alternatives does not rightly appreciate the legal status of Christianity in the first three centuries, nor the connections between public hostility and the accusatorial process, which remained the route through which Christians generally came to judicial attention. . . The occasional and local nature of Christian persecution does not mean that there was no official stance towards Christianity, but is in fact reflective precisely of that stance” ([Horrell 2013](#), p. 197).
- 20 For philosophical opposition to early Christianity, see [Simmons \(2017\)](#), pp. 796–816).
- 21 The use of the term “withdrawal” does not denote a *physical* withdrawal that would be typical of sectarian seclusion. As [Miroslav Volf \(1994\)](#) has shown, the writer of 1 Peter was concerned with exhorting his readers to display a “soft difference”, socially distancing themselves from practices that were considered anathema to Christianity while, simultaneously, working to maintain societal stability (cf. 1 Peter 4:3–4; 2:11–3:9). These Anatolian Christians were to be different to those around them (“αγείοι εσεσθε διότι εγω αγειος εμει”; 1:16) but not removed from them.
- 22 Unless otherwise stated, we have quoted from the BMC retaining the individual scribe’s spelling, which is oftentimes errant. We have done this because the codex is the primary focus of study.
- 23 There is another intriguing reversal that takes place in 1 Peter that has to do with the label Χριστιανός. At 4:16, the author encourages his readers to not be ashamed (μη αίσχυνέσθω in the [Accordance Electronic \(n.d.\)](#); μη εσχυνεσθω in P72) if they suffer for being Christians. Χριστιανός was not a name that Christians chose for themselves; rather, it was bestowed on them, seemingly by the Roman administration ([Horrell 2013](#), p. 169), and intended as a stigma, a label that marked its wearers as worthy of shame ([Horrell 2013](#), p. 198). However, the author of 1 Peter reinterprets this label as one of honour and one that glorifies God, most especially if the name itself is the cause for their suffering ([Horrell 2013](#), p. 209). In the SIT framework, such reinterpretation would be called ‘social creativity’, which, in the case of 1 Peter, functions as an important authorial strategy that reinterprets an intended negative label and introduces a new superordinate identity. On this, [Hunt \(2020\)](#), p. 541 writes, “Although in their discursive environment, they are denigrated as ‘Christians’, 1 Peter reclaims the term as an ingroup label, and generally engages in the social creativity necessary to raise the status of the believing community”.
- 24 Because P. Bodmer XX has many lacunae, some measure of conjecture about its contents is required. I have given the plate numbers for easier reference. For more, see [Pietersma \(1984\)](#), pp. 18–19). See [Martin \(1964\)](#), pp. 24–52) for Greek and Latin versions of the Apology.
- 25 [Testuz’s \(1959a\)](#), pp. 77–81) transcription has been used for the Psalm references.
- 26 [Lattke’s \(2009\)](#), pp. 149–50) translation has been used for the Ode references. See also [Testuz \(1959b\)](#), pp. 61–69) for a Greek transcription and French translation.
- 27 For early diversity, see [Klutz \(2017\)](#), pp. 142–68). For Jewish Christianity, see [Luomanen \(2012\)](#), [Bird \(2017\)](#), pp. 84–94), and [Broadhead \(2017\)](#), pp. 121–41). For Gnostics, see [Brakke \(2010\)](#) and [Logan \(2017\)](#), pp. 850–66).
- 28 See [Zervos \(2019\)](#) for a recent study on the compositional journey of the Protoevangelium of James. [Zervos \(2019\)](#), p. 20) believes that, at the third stage of its composition, this proto-gospel was redacted to give it a more orthodox flavour.
- 29 [Testuz’s \(1958\)](#), pp. 31–126) transcription has been used for the references. This work also contains a French translation, side by side with the Greek.
- 30 [Hovhannessian \(1998\)](#), pp. 110–12) translates these as “the wicked”, “falsifiers of his words”, “children of wrath”, and “children of vipers”, respectively. [Hovhannessian’s \(1998\)](#), pp. 109–13) translation has been used for the references.
- 31 [Testuz’s \(1960\)](#), pp. 26–153) transcription has been used for the references. This work also contains a French translation, side by side with the Greek.
- 32 For a minuscule transcription of P72, see [Comfort and Barrett \(1999\)](#), pp. 470–90).
- 33 For a detailed study of the scribal habits of P72, see [Royse \(2008\)](#), pp. 545–614).
- 34 Doing so might, however, require a later dating for the texts of P72.
- 35 “About a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession”.
- 36 [Horrell \(2013\)](#), pp. 133–63) offers an extensive analysis of the function of these words in 1 Peter 2:9. Importantly, ethnicity is considered by many to be socially constructed rather than biologically inherent ([Horrell 2013](#), pp. 157–58; [Ok 2021](#), p. 5; [Marcar 2022](#), pp. 1–2). For more on ethnicity in 1 Peter, see [Ok \(2021\)](#) and [Marcar \(2022\)](#). See [Skarsaune \(2018\)](#), pp. 250–64) and [Gruen \(2018\)](#), pp. 235–49) for related discussions about ethnicity and early Christianity. See [Horrell \(2020\)](#), pp. 67–92) for a recent treatment of the language of ethnicity and race.
- 37 For the relation of ethnicity and social identity, see [Kuecker \(2014\)](#), pp. 92–116). [Horrell \(2013\)](#), pp. 159–60) draws on Anthony D. Smith’s definition of ethnic groups to show how ‘Peter’ demarcates the new identity of his readers.
- 38 ‘Peter’ exhorts his audience to submission in a variety of areas: citizens to political authority (2:13–17), slaves to masters (2:18–25), wives to husbands (3:1–6), and husbands to wives (3:7).
- 39 © Reproduced from [Kok \(2023\)](#), p. 121).

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