The Alleged *Gospel of Jesus's Wife*: Assessment and Evaluation of Authenticity

Leo Depuydt
Brown University

The following analysis submits that it is out of the question that the so-called *Gospel of Jesus's Wife*, also known as the Wife of Jesus Fragment, is an authentic source. The author of this analysis has not the slightest doubt that the document is a forgery, and not a very good one at that.

Foreword (September 23, 2012; enlarged on September 24)

The following report about the so-called Gospel of Jesus's Wife *has been compiled from Thursday to Saturday, September 20–22, 2012, in response to a request by the editorial board of the* Harvard Theological Review *dated to Wednesday, September 19, 2012. The report was submitted on September 22 and with small changes again on September 23. The first few pages—which include the description of, and some principal conclusions regarding, the alleged Demotic* Gospel of Thomas*—were submitted as an interim report on September 20 and appear here with little change.*

I first gained access on Monday, September 24 to another analysis of the so-called gospel along similar lines—though not including a discussion of points of grammar—authored by Francis Watson of Durham University and posted on the internet and hence widely publicized.[1] It is recommended reading. I do not know what further plans Professor Watson has for his analysis. Because our reports are completely independent, readers should benefit from a comparison. I assume at the time of writing that the analysis of my colleague Francis Watson will remain available for some time.

I have seen no need to spend more time on my analysis of the text by going into excruciating detail. Bis dat qui cito dat. I also do not want to belabor something that seems abundantly obvious to me. But I also feel that sufficient detail is presented to support fully the points that are being made.

---

[1] The article in question—Francis Watson, "The Gospel of Jesus' Wife: How a Fake Gospel-Fragment Was Composed"—is available on Mark Goodacre's blog, *NT Blog*, under the entry "Revised Versions of Francis Watson's Articles on the Jesus Wife Fragment," http://ntweblog. blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/revised-versions-of-francis-watsons.html.

Postscript to Foreword (July 2013)

When given the opportunity to alter an analysis concluded on September 23, 2012, after a period of several months in which the near total silence about what may be called the Wife of Jesus Fragment could not have stood in starker contrast to the intense noise initially surrounding it, I decided that it seemed most advantageous just to leave the analysis mostly unchanged in its original state. A number of people have now seen it and I have not so far received comments that warrant changes.

Then again, a few typos have been corrected, some pointed out by my colleague Professor Mark Goodacre. (There have also been changes after July 2013 in terms of certain refinements of the line of argument and of style, many applied—and here gratefully acknowledged—as the result of [copy]editing by the editors and editorial staff of the Harvard Theological Review.) *A couple of observations have been added regarding probability theory, about which Pierre Simon Marquis de Laplace opined, "Il n'est point de science plus digne de nos méditations" (There is no science more worthy of our reflections).[2] With the arrival of the digital age in the second half of the nineteenth century, probability theory has become deeply relevant, in a way that Laplace could not at all have foreseen, to the analysis of rational thought and language.[3] Every moment spent reflecting on probability is an enrichment of the mind.*

In the months since September 2012, I have seen various useful insights about the Coptic text under discussion, mainly on the internet. For example, others brought to my attention that Andrew Bernhard has made a proposal on the internet about the origin of the Coptic text.[4] I have made no effort whatsoever to collect all the other insights and proposals systematically. Perhaps someone else will.

I also take the opportunity to note that an article in an unexpected venue—a piece by Mary-Evelyn Farrior entitled "Divorcing Mrs. Jesus: Reactions to the Gospel of Jesus' Wife" and appearing in The College Hill Independent, *a Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design weekly—conveniently and thoughtfully summarizes some of the events surrounding the entry of the Wife of Jesus Fragment on the world stage.[5]*

Then again, I cannot resist pointing out two additional relevant facts, both pertaining to Coptic orthography.

The first fact, which Mark Goodacre[6] traces to Dr. Alin Suciu,[7] is that epsilon is written over iota in the form ϣⲁϥⲉⲛⲉ *ša=f-ene. The correct form is* ϣⲁϥⲉⲓⲛⲉ *ša=f-eine (he brings), with both epsilon and iota. It is altogether possible that a Coptic scribe would make a mistake, even if writing* ⲉⲛⲉ *ene for* ⲉⲓⲛⲉ *eine strikes one as curious with such a common verb as* ⲉⲓⲛⲉ *(bring), all the more so because the rest of the text is fairly consistent (but then, it is after all mechanically copied from a modern text edition). However, it does not seem possible that a Coptic scribe would have corrected one mistake into another mistake. The correction indicates awareness that an error has been committed and therefore, one would*

---

[2] Le Marquis de Laplace (Pierre Simon), *Théorie analytique des probabilités* (3rd ed.; Œuvres complètes de Laplace 7; Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1886) cliii.

[3] See the references in my "The Mathematical and Physical Theory of Rational Human Intelligence: Complete Empirical-Digital Properties; Full Electrochemical-Mechanical Model (Part I: Mathematical Foundations)," *Advances in Pure Mathematics* 3 (2013) 491–561, http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/apm.2013.35071.

[4] Andrew Bernhard, "How *The Gospel of Jesus's Wife* Might Have Been Forged: A Tentative Proposal," available on the following website: http://www.gospels.net/gjw.

[5] Mary-Evelyn Farrior, "Divorcing Mrs. Jesus: Reactions to the Gospel of Jesus' Wife," *The College Hill Independent* 25 (October 5, 2012) 5–6, students.brown.edu/College_Hill_Independent/?p=7296.

[6] Mark Goodacre, pers. comm., October 2, 2012; see also idem, "Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Jesus' Wife?," *NT Blog*, December 5, 2013, http://ntweblog.blogspot.com/2013/12/whatever-happened-to-gospel-of-jesus.html.

[7] Alin Suciu, "A Peculiar Dialectical Feature in the Gospel of Jesus's Wife, Line 6," *Patristics, Apocrypha, Coptic Literature and Manuscripts* [blog], September 27, 2012, http://alinsuciu.com/2012/09/27/alin-suciu-hugo-lundhaug-an-interesting-dialectal-feature-in-the-gospel-of-jesuss-wife-line-6/.

assume, also awareness of what the correct form is. It is difficult to imagine that a native Coptic scribe with even the slightest awareness of the language would then have supplied another incorrect form.

The second fact—which I owe directly to Mark Goodacre, who noticed it independently even if others may have too—is that ⲧⲁ t=a (my) in the expression ⲧⲁϩⲓⲙⲉ t=a-hime (my wife) is written in what looks like bold letters. To be clear, using bold letters for emphasis to my knowledge never *occurs in ancient Coptic literary manuscripts; I have never seen it in any documentary texts that have come to my attention. As a student of Coptic convinced that the fragment is a modern creation, I am unable to escape the impression that there is something almost hilarious about the use of bold letters. How could this not have been designed to some extent to convey a certain comic effect? The effect is something like: "**My** wife. Get it? **MY** wife. You heard that right." The papyrus fragment seems ripe for a Monty Python sketch. I do not want to make light of the situation but rather venture to construct a truly plausible guess as to the actual nature of part of the forger's real intent. If the forger had used italics in addition, one might be in danger of losing one's composure.*

All this brings one to the surreal. I personally—and I am not sure whether I share this feeling with anyone—experience a certain incredulity pertaining to how something that is at first sight so patently fake could be so totally blown out of proportion. If this sounds too strong, please understand that I am just trying to find words to express my heartfelt opinion.

People will want to hear from those familiar with Coptic as to what they think. As far as I am concerned, this is not the time to allow an inadvertent "maybe" to be interpreted as a 50% probability, as so often happens.

In addition, it would be useful to have more details about how the papyrus fragment surfaced. In fact, all the known data about its origin and circulation need to be publicly disclosed and thus made available for scholarly discussion, as is the norm in the handling of manuscripts. Is there some reason we cannot just be told?

Sufficiency has been the guiding principle in compiling the following analysis. My take on this text has been from the beginning, and still is, to make a number of my own observations about it that I find amply sufficient to leave me personally at peace forevermore with my opinion that the Wife of Jesus Fragment is a forgery. Let others judge as they will. This is the stage in which everyone who cares to voice an opinion should just be allowed to say their piece and then, maybe, at some point, we will know what to make of it all. In that regard, I remain grateful to the editors of the Harvard Theological Review *for the opportunity to voice my own sincerely considered opinion.*

This analysis is also self-contained in that it does not critically engage anything that anyone else has said even if I have become aware of much of it. I have the impression that such engagement is not necessary to meet the principle of sufficiency adopted above. Also, sometimes, one knows where getting into an argument with someone begins but not where it is going to end.

In sum, the analysis below is designed as neither a rebuttal nor an affirmation of anything. What follows in the main text are all my own observations that do not relate to, or owe anything to, anyone else's.

It cannot be denied that the Wife of Jesus Fragment has now become a little bit of an item of history in its own right. Although I do not believe that it says anything at all about the historical Jesus or about Coptic civilization or about any ancient religion, perhaps its existence and the reactions to it do bear in some way on the subject of the history of religions.

Some may even see the Wife of Jesus Fragment as a tool in a religious or political cause. I wish everyone the best in all their causes. But the truth still counts for something.

So what is next? Again, a personal perspective: I venture to suspect that the fragment will keep leading a kind of pseudo-existence as a tale from the academic twilight zone—a little scary, but not too much—and will have many late-night reruns in syndication. I also venture to suspect that the fragment will belong to that remarkable set of phenomena that many will consider totally irrelevant, quite a few even ridiculous, yet others will take very seriously. But if one takes into consideration all that has been learned about human nature over the ages, one conclusion seems inevitable: The Wife of Jesus Fragment is here to stay.

Second Postscript to Foreword (February 2014; enlarged in March 2014)

At the beginning of February 2014, the editors of the Harvard Theological Review *allowed me to view all the other documents relevant to the Wife of Jesus Fragment that will appear in the April 2014 issue of the journal. I am grateful to them for this opportunity.*

I find nothing in these documents that could change in any way the fact that I am personally 100% certain that the Wife of Jesus Fragment is a forgery. I have otherwise never deemed ink or papyrus tests necessary or relevant in light of the evidence set forth below. I will make three brief observations, however.

First, the ink tests show chemical composition, in this case carbon-based "lamp black," not age. Carbon-based ink is exactly the type that I would have used if I had been the forger. Second, as for the papyrus, nothing is more common than for forged paintings to be painted on an old piece of wood. And third, in a letter of July 19, 2013, accompanying his report, the principal investigator of the radiocarbon dating test, Professor Greg Hodgins, states that certain stable isotope measurements "[cast] doubt upon the validity of the radiocarbon date."

After writing the above, I gained access in March 2014 to the results of a second radiocarbon dating test by Professor Noreen Tuross of the Department of Human Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University. The new results show certain similarities to the results submitted by Professor Hodgins. The identical graphic representation of both sets of results seems to suggest the use of similar, or the same, methods and systems. I make four observations.

First, it is remarkable that the final dates of the two tests differ by minimally 867 years to maximally 1272 years in a period beginning in 440 B.C.E.; in calculating these spans, it should be noted that there is no year 0. Both dates are rated at 95.4% probability. How can the two dates both be deemed so close to certain yet differ by that much?

Second, the unexpectedly low $\delta^{13}C$ percentage that made Professor Hodgins call his own results into doubt seems confirmed, though by a lower degree.

Third, Professor Hodgins doubts his own results even though his test makes the papyrus at least 800 years, on average about a millennium, older than the test by Professor Tuross!

Fourth, again, I have from the beginning always speculated—without being able to substantiate this guess in any way—that the papyrus sheet itself is more likely to be ancient or late antique rather than modern. The sheet is crudely manufactured. Heaps of papyrus have been found on ancient sites and mummy casings are full of them. The forger must have known that writing the Wife of Jesus text on a modern papyrus sheet would lead to immediate exposure of the stratagem. In principle, I believe that tests like those under discussion did have the potential of invalidating the text but never of authenticating it.

All this still leaves me personally 100% convinced that the Wife of Jesus Fragment is a forgery. I don't do 95% in this case.

Whence 100%? DNA evidence alone, even in the absence of other evidence, can suffice for conviction in a court of law, even though all agree that the minutest of minute possibilities remains that the evidence is invalid. However, convicting is an all or nothing event. By concluding that they got the right person on the basis of DNA evidence, juries in effect wipe out the last infinitesimally small margin of uncertainty. The considerations presented below involve the same low degree of probability as DNA evidence, if not lower.

*   *   *   **

ⲡⲉⲧⲉ ⲟⲩⲛ̄ ⲙⲁⲁϫⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟϥ ⲙⲁⲣⲉϥⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄
"As for him who has ears, let him hear."
Gospel of Thomas, Section (8)

There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind personally that the text (henceforth: the Text) presented to the world on September 18, 2012, as the *Gospel of Jesus's Wife* is a patchwork of words and phrases from the published and well-known Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*. The dialect of Coptic in question is Sahidic. "Coptic" is therefore henceforth an abbreviation of Sahidic Coptic. This patchwork is characterized by a

certain loss of textual coherence, by minor modifications designed to put a certain spin on delicate modern issues of theology, and by a couple of fatal grammatical blunders. A careful word-by-word juxtaposition and comparison of the text with the text of the *Gospel of Thomas* reduces the chances that the text is *not* a somewhat clumsy remix of words and phrases from the *Gospel of Thomas* statistically to zero. It is therefore clear that the Text is not an independent literary composition at all.

I believe that there can only be one explanation for the complete dependence of the Text on the *Gospel of Thomas*: forgery. What other motive could there be for taking, for example, the text of the US Declaration of Independence, picking out a few phrases here and there, and changing a new resulting composite text slightly so that it says something different from what the original text says, perhaps even that the British actually won the war?

The present report is about the philological and redactional analysis of the Text. I will not deal here at all with any ethical dimensions of the circumstances in which the text came into existence. It cannot be excluded that the presumed modern author of the text thought of his or her effort as some kind of a clever joke, whether that is justified or not. I also refrain from addressing the motivation of the forgery in any detail. Quite provisionally, it seems eminently possible to me that the forger wanted to put his or her own spin on modern theological issues.

Among the issues may well be: 1) the female priesthood in line →5; 2) the marital status of Jesus in line →4; 3) the virgin conception and birth of Jesus in line →1; and 4) cohabitation and again marital status in line →7.

Certain Christian denominations maintain an exclusively male priesthood to some extent in light of the tradition that all Jesus's apostles or disciples were male. The fragment states that a woman could be a disciple.

In certain Christian denominations, priests are celibate in part because Jesus was. The fragment implies that Jesus had a wife because he refers to "my wife" in line →4. Also, in line →7, it may be suggested again that Jesus was living with a woman because it is stated, "As for me, I am with her."

Devout Christians believe that Jesus was conceived in the womb of his mother Mary by the Holy Spirit and born while Mary was still a virgin. In short, there was a divine intervention. Perhaps the intention of the statement "my mother, she has given me life" in line →1 is to suggest that Jesus owes his life 100% to Mary. A certain sensitivity relating to the aforementioned belief might provoke the following question: Was there not Someone Else who also played a role in giving Jesus life? If this role were suppressed, then the divine intervention would be too.

In addition, many assume uncritically that the so-called Immaculate Conception pertains to the conception of Jesus—as the present writer originally did in this connection, until he was notified of the error of his ways. The Immaculate Conception rather pertains to the conception of Mary by her mother, and it is a dogma of the Catholic Church. It does not hold that the conception of Mary by her mother was not 100% physical but rather that it was free of original sin. Then

again, the Immaculate Conception did prepare Mary for conceiving Jesus. Could the forger have targeted the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in the common but mistaken belief that it pertains to the conception of Jesus by Mary? **The other theological buttons that seem to be pushed pertain especially to Catholic theology, namely celibacy and female priesthood. So perhaps this one does too.** In general, Mary the mother of Jesus occupies a much more prominent place in Catholicism than in other Christian denominations.

I obviously do not know what went through the forger's mind in terms of the design of his or her forgery and I do not have any evidence for the suggestions made above. Nor do I want to overanalyze the matter. The matter is in the end external to the main argument of this paper, whose conclusions I do otherwise deem certain. Then again, I do consider it very probable that the forger was trying to make points of the theological kind. The above suggestions regarding potential topics are in large part designed to set the reader thinking about this eminent probability. Evidently, any possible theological references made by the forger would not necessarily reflect highly nuanced or sophisticated positions.

The forger may have tried to pack much polemical punch in a small space, pushing many buttons, even including in Line →6 a warning—whose grammar is completely botched—to "evil" people doubting the Text.

◼ Preamble: The Coptic *Gospel of Thomas* and Modern Forgery

The phenomenon at hand is a forgery involving the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*. It will therefore be useful to begin by establishing that modern forgery involving the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas* more or less contemporaneous with the time in which the Text surfaced can already be positively documented by a much more sophisticated exemplar. Readers can skip this section if they wish to go on to the discussion of the Text.

But first it seems prudent to provide some background on the *Gospel of Thomas*. The Coptic gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* may seem like an obscure source. But it is more widely known than one might assume. As a result of the discovery of the Coptic gnostic texts near the village of Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945, it became not uncommon for students of religious and biblical studies to learn Coptic. Distinct from most Coptic treatises, the *Gospel of Thomas* exhibits a certain narrative simplicity and directness that make it ideal reading for beginners. And the fact that Jesus is speaking does not detract from its interest. In sum, the *Gospel of Thomas* is a premier Coptic gnostic text. Many students of Coptic must have read it as their first or one of their first texts. The photographic edition of the Nag Hammadi codices was acquired by many institutes of higher learning and is therefore easily accessible to many and has been for quite some time. I also remember from my student years that, in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, Nag Hammadi studies were something new and hot that captured the imagination.

Around 1990, a few years after the Text surfaced, photocopies of an article dating to 1875 printed in a publication that could not be located in libraries circulated among scholars of Coptic and Demotic. In it, a Demotic text is published without transcription or translation. The copies were accompanied by a transcription and translation by a Demotist, who established the fact that the text is a Demotic version of excerpts of the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*, including the title.[8]

Demotic is the stage of Egyptian immediately preceding Coptic. It is the language of the middle portion of the Rosetta Stone. Demotic is written in an extremely cursive variant of hieroglyphic writing that has a reputation for being difficult to read. The Demotic *Gospel of Thomas* was publicized somewhat prominently in the British press at the time. But there was never a peep about it, as far as I know, in the American press. Perhaps someone interested in modern forgeries may feel called to dig a little deeper.

I was shown the text along with a transcription and a translation, and I was asked for an opinion. I soon established that there was no doubt that the text is a forgery, and I communicated this conclusion to a couple of acquaintances, including my revered teacher, the Egyptologist, Coptologist, and linguist H. J. Polotsky (1905–1991), who contributed more than anyone except the decipherer of hieroglyphic writing himself to our understanding of Egyptian and Coptic grammar, and he accepted my argument, so it seemed to me. But soon after, the text vanished entirely from the scene and I have myself never heard of it again.

What is published of the text in question is a drawing and it seems possible—and I would personally think eminently probable—that there never was a papyrus. I have never heard of the existence of an actual papyrus containing said text.

I describe elsewhere in detail what exposes the Demotic *Gospel of Thomas* as a forgery.[9] But ever so briefly, the gist of the argument can be laid out as follows. Two verbs are used in Coptic as an equivalent of "watch over, guard": the native Coptic Egyptian verb ϩⲁⲣⲉϩ *hareh* (Demotic *ḥrḥ*) and the verb ⲧⲏⲣⲉⲓ *tērei* adopted from Greek. The former takes its direct object "him" as ⲉⲣⲟϥ *erof* (Demotic *r.r.f*) and the latter as ⲙ̄ⲙⲟϥ *mmof* (Demotic *n.jm.f*). However, the Greek verb is never used in Demotic. The native Egyptian verb *ḥrḥ* needs to be used and take its direct object "him" as *r.r.f*. But the Demotic version of the *Gospel of Thomas* has *n.jm.f*, which is impossible. There is only one way to explain the presence of *n.jm.f*: Greek ⲧⲏⲣⲉⲓ was replaced by native Egyptian *ḥrḥ*, and the wrong direct object expression, namely *n.jm.f*, was erroneously held over by someone who is not a native speaker of Demotic.

One fatal blunder suffices to expose the Demotic text as a forgery.

---

[8] Copies of this article, whether in scanned form or hard copy, can be made available upon request.

[9] Leo Depuydt, "Analyzing the Use of Idioms Past (with Special Focus on Sovereign Nubia)," *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 27 (1999) 33–63, at 54–55 n. 62.

◼ Two Avenues for Establishing the Spuriousness of the Wife of Jesus Fragment

In identifying the Coptic Text as a forgery, I will present two distinct lines of argument. There will be some interference between the two lines.

The first line is a close comparison of the words and more importantly the phrases of the Text with the words and the phrases of the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*. Every single one of the handful of phrases (and almost every single word) in the Text is found almost exactly in the *Gospel of Thomas*.

The second line is a discussion of grammatical inconsistencies. The special focus will be on two grammatical blunders. A mistake is something that one makes as a student or in other transparent manifestations of human fallibility. A blunder is something done inadvertently by someone who wants to avoid detection by devious dissimulation. Sahidic Coptic is by now so well known that one can confidently identify certain ways in which one writes as fully grammatical and idiomatic Coptic and other ways in which one writes as absolutely not. In that regard, the two blunders cannot be condoned. The fact that the Text is otherwise written more or less in fairly standard Sahidic Coptic (and, I would say, borrowed from the *Gospel of Thomas*) only makes any stark deviations that have every appearance of being errors stand out all the more.

First Avenue: A Comparison with the Coptic Gospel of Thomas

It is altogether justified to state that every single phrase of the Text can be found in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Full details follow below. There are slight deviations. But importantly, these deviations do not produce what might be called a different phrase.

No one can possibly doubt that, if someone wanted to create a composite text by using only snippets from the *Gospel of Thomas*, something very much like the Text would absolutely have to be the exact result.

To the extent that in certain cases not enough words are found to make a phrase because the text is fragmentary or presented as fragmentary, the words also all occur in the *Gospel of Thomas*, with one critical exception, namely ⲧⲁϩⲓⲙⲉ *t=a-hime* (my wife) in line →4.

In regard to this exception, it is interesting to note that the Text deviates from the *Gospel of Thomas* because the latter uses the form ⲥϩⲓⲙⲉ *shime* (wife). Accordingly, the expected equivalent of "my wife" in the *Gospel of Thomas* would be ⲧⲁⲥϩⲓⲙⲉ *t=a-shime*. In other words, in the sole word or expression, as opposed to phrase, for which the Text does not have an equivalent in the *Gospel of Thomas*, the Text also deviates from the *Gospel of Thomas*.

Before entering into a more detailed comparison of the Text with the *Gospel of Thomas*, it will be useful to consider issues of probability.

The great Laplace (1749–1827) already pointed out in the philosophical essay that accompanies the third edition of his epochal *Traité analytique du calcul des*

probabilités (1820) as an introduction that critical issues of probability are so often disregarded in the humanities.[10] One consideration is the devastating effect of compound probability. Compound probability stipulates that the probabilities of events need to be *multiplied* to obtain the probability of their joint occurrence.

Consider the throwing of three dice. The probability of obtaining a six is 1 in 6 for each of the three throws as events taken separately. But the probability of obtaining three sixes in the joint occurrence of all three events viewed as a single compound event is $\frac{1}{6} \times \frac{1}{6} \times \frac{1}{6}$ or $\frac{1}{216}$, or less than half a percent. Therefore, if three conditions need to be true at the same time for an event that depends on them to occur and the probability of each condition's existence is estimated generously at 79%, then the event has less than a 50% chance of happening as a result of the conditions on which it depends for its existence because $0.79 \times 0.79 \times 0.79 = 0.493039$, which corresponds to about 49.3%.

One might object and say that 49% or so is still significant. For example, if there were a 49% chance that it would rain tomorrow at an outdoor event, I would be very wise to take an umbrella. If one would win $100 if a coin landed heads, an event whose probability is 50%, who would not take the bet? The propitiousness of 49% or 50%, however, rests entirely on the fact that there is no penalty for flipping tails, nor for bringing an umbrella when it ends up not raining. If it were stipulated in addition that one would have to pay $100 if the coin landed tails, one might think twice about entering said bet, and even more than twice if the chance of the favorable event were less than 50%.

Something similar applies in the quest for truth. Stating something that has a 49% chance of being true at the same time means stating something that has a 51% chance of being false. There is nothing wrong with freely contemplating all kinds of possibilities, even outlandish ones, *before* drawing conclusions. But why would anyone want to defend a conclusion that is more likely to be false than true? Scientists are not impressed by a hypothesis that has a chance of more than 5% of being false and often demand something close to 1% even to pay attention.

As the eyes wander from one line of the Text to the next, the reader again and again encounters phrases found in the *Gospel of Thomas*. And as will be evidenced below, just about every phrase—with one telltale exception—can be found in the *Gospel of Thomas*. It is true that there are a few slight deviations mostly restricted to a single word. A phrase and its variant with only minimal deviation still share a list of several identical features and combinatory syntactic characteristics that suffice to make them essentially the same phrase. Each word and each combination between two words and each sequential relation between two words is a separate feature. Accordingly, the number of features quickly adds up so as to guarantee total

---

[10] Laplace, *Théorie analytique des probabilités*, v–cliii; the relevant passage is found at xii–xiii. The introduction appeared separately as *Essai philosophique sur les probabilités*. An English translation of the sixth edition is *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities* (trans. Frederick Wilson Truscott and Frederick Lincoln Emory; New York: Dover, 1951), where the relevant passage is found at 12–14.

distinctiveness. The deviations do not in the least affect the striking individuality of the phrases as distinct from all other possible phrases of the Coptic language.

The obvious question naturally arises: Can this be a coincidence? Could the author have composed the text and proceeded line by line, again and again producing phrases found in the *Gospel of Thomas*? Naturally, if it is not a pure coincidence, then the conclusion must be that there is a definite cause or factor that triggers the recurrence of the phrases from the *Gospel of Thomas*. And what else could this cause or factor possibly be other than that the author is adopting phrases from the *Gospel of Thomas*? The *Gospel of Thomas* is an integral literary work that is internally fully coherent. It is therefore not possible that the *Gospel of Thomas* borrowed phrases from the Text.

Is it possible to quantify exactly the degree of probability that the recurrence of phrases from the *Gospel of Thomas* either is a coincidence or is not a coincidence? The exact probability cannot be measured. There are just so many possible phrases in the Coptic language, and no one could possibly count them or, if they are at all countable, know how many there are.

However, it is altogether possible to compute the probability of absence or presence of coincidence numerically in relation to a certain exact limit above or below which a certain probability must be located. How so?

It is a fact that there are at least six phrases in the Text that are also found in the *Gospel of Thomas*. There is no need to consider more as long as any other phrases in the text are also from the *Gospel of Thomas*. And in fact they are. The six can therefore for all practical purposes represent the entire text. Considering more than six phrases would only strengthen the final result, as will become obvious below. Then again, taking no more than six is a measure designed to keep the argument safer. It is also a way of taking no more than one needs to make a point.

Clearly, readers are witnessing the appearance of a phrase from the *Gospel of Thomas* six times in a row. What are the chances that this is a coincidence?

At this point, it will be useful to take a look at a case in which the sixfold occurrence of an event is surely pure coincidence. Consider someone throwing a six with one die six times in a row. If the die is not compromised, the sequence must be pure coincidence. It would be difficult for anyone witnessing such an event not to be a little baffled. One would rightly wonder and be curious: What were my chances of being a witness to such an event?

Everyone agrees that the chances can be computed exactly in the case of throwing dice. One obviously has a chance of 1 in 6 of obtaining six at each throw of a die. Therefore, the chance of throwing six exactly six times in a row is no doubt $\frac{1}{6} \times \frac{1}{6} \times \frac{1}{6} \times \frac{1}{6} \times \frac{1}{6} \times \frac{1}{6}$, or $(\frac{1}{6})^6$, that is, one-sixth to the sixth power. That is, one has a chance of 1 in 46,656 of witnessing such an event. In other words, the odds are 46,655 to 1. There is no one who doubts that, on average, one can expect throwing six exactly six times in a row only once in 46,656 sets of six throws. That is a little over 0.002%.

Now back to the sequence of six phrases from the *Gospel of Thomas*. In the case of the throwing of a die, everyone knows that obtaining a certain number is pure coincidence. However, in the case of obtaining sentences from the *Gospel of Thomas* again and again, it is not really known beforehand whether that sequence is pure coincidence or not. It is therefore necessary to evaluate two scenarios: absence of pure coincidence and presence of pure coincidence.

Let us first evaluate the presence of pure coincidence. In the case of the throwing of a die, an event involving pure coincidence, the chance of obtaining six in one throw is 1 in 6. It is the ratio of the desired outcome, namely 1, to all the possible outcomes, namely 6. But what is the chance of obtaining a phrase from the *Gospel of Thomas*, assuming the presence of pure coincidence? Clearly, the answer is the ratio of all the different phrases in the *Gospel of Thomas* to all the possible phrases in Coptic. What is this ratio?

It is not possible to know this ratio exactly. But it is easy to accept that there are at least six times as many different phrases found in Sahidic Coptic as there are phrases in the *Gospel of Thomas*. It is therefore possible to use the numbers obtained from the case of throwing a die described above as a higher limit of the probability. In other words, as the mind of the author of the Text selected phrases for the composition in question, he or she did something that happens only once in at least 45,656, perhaps more, cases.

However, it appears to me that seasoned readers of Coptic will readily agree that there are many times more than six times as many possible phrases in total in the Coptic language as there are phrases in the *Gospel of Thomas*, even if the *Gospel of Thomas* is of a decent length. I personally find it easy to imagine that there are at least 100 times as many possible distinct Coptic phrases as those found in the *Gospel of Thomas*. There are so many ways in which one can combine words with one another in distinct phrases. Likewise, combinations of just the twelve notes of the chromatic scale keep yielding ever new songs. And there are many more than twelve words in Coptic.

If we assume there are exactly 100 times as many possible Coptic phrases as there are attested phrases in the *Gospel of Thomas*, what are the chances that a mind that randomly selects phrases from the Coptic language obtains six from the *Gospel of Thomas* in a row? The answer is $(1/100)^6$, or 1 over 100 to the sixth power, or 1 chance in 1,000,000,000,000, that is, one in a trillion, effectively zero.

In other words, in seeing phrases from the *Gospel of Thomas* appear six times in a row, the observer has every right to claim having witnessed an event that can take place only one in a trillion if not more times—if it is assumed that the selection is purely random.

To be clear, I emphasize again that computing the probability that the phrases of the Text are not derived from the *Gospel of Thomas* to anywhere near precision is impossible. What does appear possible is giving numerical expression to the fact that the probability is staggeringly low, even if it cannot be computed exactly how very low.

There are far too many variables to make sophisticated computations possible. However, it is possible to compute the probability of a simple artificial scenario

whose probability must be higher than any scenario that is anywhere close to reality. And it appears that assuming artificial conditions that are as favorable as possible to a high probability that there is no connection with the *Gospel of Thomas* already produces an exceedingly low probability.[11]

One artificial scenario presented above yielded a chance of one in a trillion. In fact, again, if one assumes that the Coptic corpus has only six times as many phrases as the *Gospel of Thomas* does, which is far too few, the probability of encountering phrases from the *Gospel of Thomas* six times in a row is already at least like the probability of throwing a six with one die six times in a row, namely 0.002%. I am excluding variation in the word order of the phrases and all other real complications for the sake of the argument. It is not possible to compute by how much including them would further lower the probability. But lower the probability it clearly would.

My conclusion is that it is out of the question that the sequence of six phrases from the *Gospel of Thomas* found in the Text is the result of pure coincidence or random selection. Accordingly, some definite cause or factor must account for the selection of phrases from the *Gospel of Thomas*. And what else could account for the selection of phrases from only the *Gospel of Thomas* other than that someone deliberately selected phrases from only the *Gospel of Thomas*?

---

[11] The aforementioned analogy with the case of throwing dice has only limited validity. The case of the dice has mainly been adduced to evidence the debilitating effect of the rules of compound probability on the probability that a compound event will occur. Even so, there are ways of creating artificial models that make the case of phrases found in a text identical in probability structure to the case of throwing dice. Let us assume that there is a total of exactly 10,000 extant phrases in Sahidic Coptic. Then let there be exactly 100 different phrases in the language and let each different phrase occur exactly 100 times, including six phrases occurring once in the *Gospel of Thomas*, for a total of 10,000 phrases. If the 10,000 phrases are inscribed on balls and placed in a big urn, the chance of drawing a ball inscribed with a certain phrase randomly is exactly $\frac{1}{100}$ or 1%. As in the case of the dice, each different outcome now has an equal chance of taking place. A ratio of 1% is quite large and the chance of drawing the phrase in question hence relatively high. A large ratio is favorable to the assumption that the phrases in the Wife of Jesus Fragment have no connection with the *Gospel of Thomas*. It is at the same time clear that any ratios found in actual reality are bound to be smaller if not much smaller. The chance of encountering a certain specific phrase would hence be much, if not very much, lower than 1% in the artificial model. And so would the probability that there is no connection between the Fragment and the *Gospel of Thomas*. The chance of drawing balls inscribed with six specific phrases from said urn is exactly $\frac{100}{10000} \times \frac{100}{10000} \times \frac{100}{10000} \times \frac{100}{10000} \times \frac{100}{10000} \times \frac{100}{10000}$, or $\frac{1}{100} \times \frac{1}{100} \times \frac{1}{100} \times \frac{1}{100} \times \frac{1}{100} \times \frac{1}{100}$, or also 1 in a trillion (1,000,000,000,000), practically zero. The assumption is that the balls are placed back in the urn after having been drawn because the selection of phrases is each time anew from the totality of phrases. (If they were not placed back, the probability would be ever so slightly—and negligibly—higher, namely $\frac{100}{10000} \times \frac{100}{9999} \times \frac{100}{9998} \times \frac{100}{9997} \times \frac{100}{9996} \times \frac{100}{9995}$.) One in a trillion is the probability that there is no connection between the Fragment and the *Gospel of Thomas*. And this probability results from a model that is much more favorable than actual reality to the possibility of the absence of such a connection! No matter how much one tinkers with the numbers to produce scenarios that are as favorable as possible to the absence of any connection, one keeps coming up with probabilities that are minute to the point of vanishing. The probability of drawing just three balls inscribed with specific phrases from said urn is already as small as 0.0001%.

There is a possibility of lowering the probability under the assumption of pure random selection even further. But I refrain from exploring it fully. Suffice it to note the following. It is a fact that a random selection of phrases cannot be 100% random. Once a certain phrase is selected, not any phrase can come next. There has to be continuity in purport. It is impossible to quantify the matter. But it is possible that there are, relatively speaking, fewer phrases that provide continuity in purport in a limited text such as the *Gospel of Thomas* than there are in all of the Coptic language. The ratio between the two may well be smaller than $\frac{1}{100}$. And so would the corresponding probability, perhaps as little as one in a quadrillion or less.

The reader of this report is still owed the positive verification that just about everything in the Text is found in the *Gospel of Thomas* and, I am personally convinced, was taken from it. References in what follows are to the sections of the *Gospel of Thomas*. The following comparison is meant to be sufficient, not necessarily exhaustive, although most of what is relevant is probably included.

Line →1: [ ]ει ⲁⲛ [ ]*y an* (not[?]). This is the end of a sentence. Suffice it to note that there is more than one sentence ending in ει ⲁⲛ, including ⲛⲁ ει ⲁⲛ *na=y an*, in the *Gospel of Thomas*. See Sections (55) and (101).

Line →1: ⲦⲀⲘⲀⲀⲨ ⲀⳞ† ⲚⲀⲈⲒ ⲠⲰ[ⲚⲒ] *t=a-ma'w a=s-ti na=y p-ō[nh]* (As for my [*t=a*] mother [*ma'w*], she [*=s*] has [*a=*] given [*ti*] me [*na=y*] life [*p-ōnh*]). Compare Section (101): ⲦⲀⲘⲀⲀⲨ ⲆⲈ ⲘⲘⲈ ⲀⳞ† ⲚⲀⲈⲒ ⲘⲠⲰⲚⲒ *t=a-ma'w de m-me a=s-ti na=y m-p-ōnh* (As for my true mother, then, she has given me life).

Comment: The absence of ⲆⲈ ⲘⲘⲈ *de m-me* ([my] true [*m-me*] [mother], then [*de*]) in the Text does not make this statement a different phrase as the term is understood here. On the absence of Ⲙ before ⲠⲰⲚⲒ in the Text, which is grammatically unacceptable, see further below.

Line →2: ⲠⲈ⳨Ⲉ ⲘⲘⲀⲐⲎⲦⲎⳞ ⲚⲒⳞ ⳨Ⲉ Ⳟ[. . . *peje m-mathētēs n-I(ēsou)s je s*[. . . (The disciples said to Jesus: ". . ."). Compare Sections (18) and (20): ⲠⲈ⳨Ⲉ ⲘⲘⲀⲐⲎⲦⲎⳞ ⲚⲒⳞ ⳨Ⲉ *peje m-mathētēs n-I(ēsou)s je*. Similar examples could be adduced.

Line →3: ⲀⲢⲚⲀ *arna*. This is the last word of a sentence. The word ⲀⲢⲚⲀ (renounce) occurs in Sections (81) and (110), in (81) at the end of a sentence.

Line →3: ⲘⲀⲢⲒⲀⲘ ⲘⲠϢⲀ ⲘⲘⲞⳞ Ⲁ[Ⲛ?] *Mariam mpša mmo=s a[n?]* (Mary [*Mariam*] is not [*an*] worthy [*mpša*] of it/her[?] [*mmo=s*]). Compare Sections (56) and (111): ⲠⲔⲞⳞⲘⲞⳞ ⲘⲠϢⲀ ⲘⲘⲞⳞ ⲀⲚ *p-kosmos mpša mmo=f an* (The world [*p-kosmos*] is not [*an*] worthy [*mpša*] of him [*mmo=f*]).

Comment: The change from masculine ⲘⲘⲞⳞ *mmo=f* to feminine ⲘⲘⲞⳞ *mmo=s* does not make this a different phrase.

The referent of feminine Ⳟ *s* in ⲘⲘⲞⳞ is not clear. Did the forger misunderstand the syntax of the expression or was he or she somehow bent on changing masculines into feminines as elsewhere in the Text? I am willing to venture a provisional hypothesis

regarding what I think happened. Evidently, ⲡⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ *p-kosmos* (the world) has been replaced by ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁⲙ *Mariam* (Mary). The meaning of the original sentence is "The world is not worthy of him." Perhaps the forger intended to make the statement "(One) is not worthy of Mary," replacing ⲙⲙⲟϥ *mmo=f* (of him) by ⲙⲙⲟⲥ *mmo=s* (of her). But by also replacing "the world" by "Mary," the forger ended up stating, "Mary is not worthy of her(self)." That would be a third grammatical blunder (for grammar, see below).

Line →4: ⲡⲉϫⲉ ⲓ̅ⲥ̅ ⲛⲁⲩ *peje I(ēsou)s na=w* (Jesus said to them). See Section (14): ⲡⲉϫⲉ ⲓ̅ⲥ̅ ⲛⲁⲩ.

Line →4: ⲧⲁϩⲓⲙⲉ *t=a-hime* (my wife). This expression is exceptionally not in the *Gospel of Thomas*, even if the word for "wife" is present, but in the form ⲥϩⲓⲙⲉ *shime* and not ϩⲓⲙⲉ *hime* (see remark above). Two more letters following ⲧⲁϩⲓⲙⲉ *t=a-hime* at the end of line →4 are of uncertain interpretation.

Comment: There is no doubt that ⲥϩⲓⲙⲉ *shime* is by far statistically the normal form in literary Sahidic Coptic. Also, ⲥϩⲓⲙⲉ *shime* is otherwise used in the *Gospel of Thomas*. The conclusion is obvious. If 1) just about every word and phrase in the Text was taken from the *Gospel of Thomas* as I am convinced it was, and 2) at the same time the phrase ⲧⲁϩⲓⲙⲉ *t=a-hime* (my wife) was not taken from the *Gospel of Thomas*, then the expression ⲧⲁϩⲓⲙⲉ *t=a-hime* (my wife) must have been added to what is otherwise entirely a patchwork of phrases from the *Gospel of Thomas*. If one considers the forger's presumed motives, it is easy to see why this phrase specifically is the only one that is definitely an addition.

Line →5: ⲥⲛⲁϣⲣ̄ ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲁⲩⲱ *s-na-š-r mathētēs na=y awō* (she [*s*] will [*na*] be able [*š*] to be [*r*] a disciple [*mathētēs*] for [*na=*] me [*=y*] and [*awō*]). Compare Sections (55) and (101): ϥⲛⲁϣⲣ̄ ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲁⲛ ⲁⲩⲱ *f-na-š-r mathētēs na=y an awō* (he [*f*] will [*na*] not [*an*] be able [*š*] to be [*r*] a disciple [*mathētēs*] for [*na=*] me [*=y*]), though one finds ⲁⲛ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ *an nay* instead of ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲁⲛ *nay an* in Section (55).

Comment: The Text has feminine "she" (*s*) instead of the *Gospel of Thomas*'s "he" (*f*), and the Text exhibits a negated statement whereas the *Gospel of Thomas* has an affirmative statement. The conclusion is obvious. If just about every word and phrase in the Text was taken from the *Gospel of Thomas* as I am convinced it was, then the masculine "he (will be able)" must have been changed into the feminine and the negation must have been removed.

Line →6: ⲙⲁⲣⲉ ⲣⲱⲙⲉ *mare rōme* (people [*rōme*] generally do not [*mare*] do [this or that]). Compare Section (47): ⲙⲁⲣⲉ ⲣⲱⲙⲉ *mare rōme*. One letter preceding ⲙⲁⲣⲉ ⲣⲱⲙⲉ *mare rōme* at the beginning of line →6 is of uncertain interpretation.

Comment: The element ⲙⲁⲣⲉ *mare* is here the auxiliary verb, generally called the conjugation base (Polotsky), of the negated aorist. The typical form in standard literary Christian Sahidic is ⲙⲉⲣⲉ *mere*. But the reason for the appearance of ⲙⲁⲣⲉ

in the Text is more than obvious. It is simply copied from the *Gospel of Thomas*, in which the form ⲙⲁⲣⲉ *mare* is used.

Line →6: ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ *et-how* (evil [people]; literally, which [*et-*] is evil [*how*]). This expression involves both 1) an unacceptable grammatical blunder and 2) Coptic that is hardly idiomatic (more on this below). The expression does occur only once in the *Gospel of Thomas*, namely in Section (45), as part of the phrase ⲡⲉϥⲉϩⲟ ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ *pe=f-eho et-how* (his [*pe=f*] evil [*et-how*] treasure [*eho*]).

Comment: If the author of the Text took ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ *et-how* from the *Gospel of Thomas*, then he or she must have taken it from Section (45). As a matter of fact, I am convinced that the author did exactly that. In the Text, ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ is followed in line →6 by ϣⲁϥⲉⲛⲉ *šafene*, which at first sight is of uncertain interpretation. However, in the *Gospel of Thomas*, the affirmative aorist verb form ϣⲁϥⲉⲓⲛⲉ *ša=f-eine* (he [*=f*] generally [*ša=*] brings [*eine*]) occurs no fewer than three times in the very same Section (45). There can be no doubt, I believe, that the form ϣⲁϥⲉⲓⲛⲉ *ša=f-eine* is the origin of the form ϣⲁϥⲉⲛⲉ *šafene*. But the omission of the letter ⲓ *i* makes the form unrecognizable. What clinches the whole matter is the following. The expression ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ *et-how* is preceded by ⲣⲱⲙⲉ *rōme* in line →6 of the Text and their combination signifies "evil people." Now, in Section (45), one also finds ⲣⲱⲙⲉ as part of an expression signifying "evil people," namely ⲟⲩⲕⲁⲕ[ⲟⲥ] ⲣ̄ⲣⲱⲙⲉ *ou-kak[os] r-rōme*. Clearly, in the grammatical debris that is line →6, we see any semblance of adequate competence in Coptic disintegrating. The expression ⲙⲁⲣⲉ ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ ϣⲁϥⲉⲛⲉ in line →6 is somehow a single verb form that begins as a negated aorist and ends as an affirmative aorist and literally means "an evil man does not he brings." That is a grammatical monstrosity. One is almost tempted to think: the rascal!

This incompetent blundering makes it very improbable that the forger is ancient. A modern forger could presumably easily produce the Text with only a very poor knowledge of Coptic because all sorts of tools are available such as transcriptions and translations, including interlinear translations. Accordingly, the blundering described above can easily be explained in the case of a modern forger. Whenever the modern forger leaves the confines of his or her poor grasp of Coptic, it would be natural to commit blunders. And that is what I am convinced the forger did.

The matter differs for an ancient forger. An ancient forger would have had none of the aforementioned tools. Accordingly, the ability to cull phrases knowledgeably, without any help, from the *Gospel of Thomas* must imply an adequate knowledge of Coptic. In fact, I know of no cases in antiquity in which Coptic scribes were not native speakers of Coptic. In other words, I know of no cases in which adequate knowledge of Coptic on the part of a scribe of literary texts is not native knowledge. Someone with an adequate knowledge of Coptic—let alone a native speaker—could not have engaged in the grammatical blundering described above. Since the author of the Text did, he or she cannot be ancient.

The fact that the Text is a patchwork of phrases taken from the *Gospel of Thomas* by itself already exposes it as a forgery. But grammatical errors add something more. In conjunction with what has been inferred above in terms of competence in Coptic by the patchwork character, they show that the Text cannot be ancient. And being modern by itself in its own right additionally confirms that the author is a forger.

Line →6: ϣⲁϥⲉⲛⲉ *šafene*.
Comment: For the explanation of this expression, see the preceding section.

Line →7: ⲁⲛⲟⲕ †ϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲛⲙⲙⲁⲥ *anok ti-šoop nmma=s* (as for me [*anok*], I [*ti*] am [*šoop*] with [*nmma=*] her [*=s*]). Compare Section (30): ⲁⲛⲟⲕ †ϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲛⲙⲙⲁϥ *anok ti-šoop nmma=f* (as for me [*anok*], I [*ti*] am [*šoop*] with [*nmma=*] him [*=f*]).
Comment: The Text has feminine "her" (*s*) instead of the *Gospel of Thomas*'s "him" (*f*). The conclusion is obvious. If just about every word and phrase in the Text was taken from the *Gospel of Thomas* as I am convinced it was, then the masculine must have been changed into the feminine.

Line →8: ⲟⲩϩⲓⲕⲱⲛ *ouhikōn* (an image). This expression is found in Section (22); the word ϩⲓⲕⲱⲛ *hikōn* also occurs in Section (50).

Second Avenue: Two Grammatical Blunders

There are two grammatical blunders in the Text. One of the two has already been discussed in part in the discussion of the expression ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ in line →6 above; it is more like a combination of blunders. The question arises: Why not more? Indeed, one would think that more grammatical problems might provide additional support for discrediting the Text or one might even think that the paucity of grammatical problems supports the authenticity of the Text. The answer to the above question is simple. There are no more blunders because it cannot possibly be doubted that the Text is almost entirely a patchwork or remix of words and phrases taken from a genuine ancient Coptic text, the *Gospel of Thomas*. I now proceed to the two cases individually.

Blunder One

In line →1 of the Text, the direct object marker ⲛ̄– *m–* is missing in front of ⲡⲱⲛϩ *p-ōnh* in the statement ⲧⲁⲙⲁⲁⲩ ⲁⲥ† ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲡⲱ[ⲛϩ] *t=a-ma'w as-ti na=y p-ōnh* (as for my [*t=a*] mother [*ma'w*], she [*=s*] has [*a=*] given [*ti*] me [*na=y*] life [*p-ōnh*]). There are two ways of identifying this absence as an error. And to this error applies the reasoning laid out in detail above in regard to another error, namely that an ancient scribe could not possibly have committed it. Therefore, the author of the text is modern. And a modern author cannot be but a forger. Modern authors do not write genuine ancient texts.

First, the direct object marker is present in the expression at hand in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Since it is clear that the Text is a patchwork of phrases taken from the *Gospel of Thomas*, its omission must be an error.

Second, the construction is not Coptic. There are no other examples of this construction. It is not advisable to postulate a completely new grammatical phenomenon on the basis of a single example in a dubious source. It is true that there are examples in which a direct object following the verb † *ti* (give) followed itself by a "dative" introduced by ⲛ̄– *n–* / ⲛⲁ= *na=* (to) is not preceded by the direct object marker. Stephen Emmel has gathered many if not most examples and discussed them in a somewhat definitive statement on the matter.[12] I have discussed certain facets of the phenomenon in its historical context in some detail on two occasions.[13]

In Emmel's comprehensive list, there are no examples outside the imperative ⲙⲁ *ma* (give!) (which is a special case altogether), in which the direct object marker is absent in front of a definite article, as it is in line →1 in the Text. Even examples involving indefinite articles, singular ⲟⲩ– *ou–* or plural ϩⲉⲛ– *hen–*, are extremely rare. Emmel cites three, as far as I can see. However, in two of the examples, one singular, the other plural, the verb appears in the reduced form ⲧⲉ– *te–* and in another Coptic dialect, namely Akhmimic. As regards the third example, which is Sahidic and involves the indefinite article ⲟⲩ– *ou–*, Emmel has demonstrated in the same article that ⲛ̄– *n–* is often absent in front of ⲟⲩ– *ou–* when ⲟⲩ– *ou–* precedes a vowel and is therefore presumably pronounced as *w* in "water" and not as *oo* in "oops".[14] However, the example at hand does not meet the conditions of the Emmel rule: the indefinite article precedes a consonant.

One does also need to consider that the Text is more or less standard literary Sahidic. The tolerance for features that deviate significantly from that norm is therefore low.

Finally, this whole second, grammatical point is to a degree a little moot if one considers the first point, which in its own right perfectly explains the absence of the direct object marker. But it is good to confirm that what is found in line →1 of the Text is not genuine Coptic.

Blunder Two

In the expression ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ *rōme et-how* (evil people), the relative clause ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ (which [*et*] is evil [*how*]) follows indefinite ⲣⲱⲙⲉ *rōme* (people). However, it is an iron-clad rule of Coptic, as it is of Classical Arabic, that indefinite antecedents are followed by circumstantial clauses and not relative clauses. In other words, one says "the man who" but "a man while," as it were. Accordingly, one definitely expects ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉϥϩⲟⲟⲩ *rōme e=f-how* as the equivalent of "evil people." Examples

---

[12] Stephen Emmel, "Proclitic Forms of the Verb † in Coptic," in *Studies Presented to Hans Jakob Polotsky* (ed. Dwight W. Young; East Gloucester, Mass.: Beacon Hill, 1981) 131–46.

[13] Leo Depuydt, "Four Thousand Years of Evolution: On a Law of Historical Change in Ancient Egyptian," *JNES* 56 (1997) 21–35, at 32–33; idem, "Eight Exotic Phenomena of Later Egyptian Explained," in *Acts of the Seventh International Conference of Demotic Studies, Copenhagen, 23–27 August 1999* (ed. Kim Ryholt; CNI Publications 27; Copenhagen: The Carsten Niebuhr Institute, 2002) 101–29, passim.

[14] For details on the Emmel Rule, see Emmel, "Proclitic Forms," 142–43 n. 5.

are easy to find. The appearance of ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ cannot be condoned, especially if one considers that the Text as a whole is more or less standard literary Sahidic.

But can the appearance of ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ be explained? It has already been noted above that it is just one component of the jumbled grammatical debris derived from Section (45) of the *Gospel of Thomas* that ended up in line →6 of the Text. This debris evidences all absence of adequate competence in Coptic on the part of the author.

It should also be noted that ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ as a signification of what is evil is generally used for inanimate things and not people, as it is in Section (45) in the *Gospel of Thomas*, from which the Text borrows the expression, namely in ⲡⲉϥⲉϩⲟ ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ *pe=f-eho et-how* (his evil treasure). I know of a couple of examples in the New Testament in which ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ accompanies "servant" and "worker." I am not sure whether this says anything about the perceived status of servants and workers in the New Testament. When referring to people, "evil" is typically expressed by, for example, the Greek adjectives ⲡⲟⲛⲏⲣⲟⲥ *ponēros* and ⲕⲁⲕⲟⲥ *kakos*, as in fact in the expression ⲟⲩⲕⲁⲕⲟⲥ ⲣ̅ⲣⲱⲙⲉ *ou-kakos r-rōme* (an evil person) in the very same Section (45) of the *Gospel of Thomas*. This is not the place for a detailed investigation into this matter.

The Ink

At present, the analysis of the ink of the Text is being awaited. From what I have read in the press, I have the provisional impression that the analysis cannot lead to the positive conclusion that the ink must be ancient and cannot possibly be modern. In that regard, the analysis would be inconclusive. But what about the converse, namely that the ink must be modern and cannot possibly be ancient? One might think that the presence of modern synthetic chemical components in the ink would indicate with certainty that the ink is modern and cannot be ancient. However, the relevance of modern synthetic components could easily be dismissed by proposing the following conceivable scenario: a dealer touched up ancient faded ink with modern ink to make the artifact more attractive to potential buyers. In sum, not only do I believe that arguments presented above make any and all analyses of ink or papyrus completely superfluous, I also believe that they could not possibly be relevant under any circumstances.

◼ Conclusion (September 22, 2012)

The paramount truth, so far unrecognized, it seems, about the Text is that it is just about entirely a patchwork of words and phrases from the *Gospel of Thomas*. Any additional interpretation of the nature of the text needs to take place in light of this key fact. This fact by itself already suffices for me to expose the text as a forgery. The fully inadequate knowledge of Coptic evidenced when the author tries to strike out on his or her own only confirms the spurious nature of the text, as well as the fact that the scribe cannot have been ancient. An ancient native speaker of Coptic who could select and combine words and phrases from the *Gospel of Thomas* with understanding would not possibly have produced said grammatical blunders.