

■ *The Gospel of Jesus's Wife: A Preliminary Paleographical Assessment**

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It is the simple truth that paleographical analysis alone is sometimes not sufficient to settle questions of authenticity.¹ In the present case, while further conservation is required for a final judgment on some issues,² I have not found a “smoking gun” that indicates beyond doubt that the text was not written in antiquity, but nor can such an examination prove that it is genuine. I do, however, believe the present case is less straightforward than some proponents of forgery have assumed.³ I confine myself here to a few observations.

*The remarks below are based on autopsy of the papyrus on November 14 and 15, 2012, at the invitation both of Professor King and of Professors Madigan and Levenson in their capacity as editors of the *Harvard Theological Review*, and on high definition images subsequently provided to me.

¹ Witness most obviously the continuing controversy over the Artemidorus papyrus. I do not take any account here of analysis of the textual content or scientific testing, both of which are also required to make a judgment on authenticity.

² Specifically, correct positioning of the dislodged fibers at the beginning of lines 2–5 on the “front”; see further below.

³ As the discussion concerning this fragment has taken place almost exclusively online or via the media since it was made public, I respond here inter alia to points that have been raised by various commentators both in conversation (which I have not attributed) and in fora such as blogs: the latter include Peter Head, “More questions on Jesus’ Wife Fragment,” *Evangelical Textual Criticism* [blog], October 3, 2012, <http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/more-questions-on-jesus-wife-fragment.html>; Hugo Lundhaug and Alin Suciu, “On the So-Called Gospel of Jesus’s Wife: Some Preliminary Thoughts by Hugo Lundhaug and Alin Suciu,” *Patristics, Apocrypha, Coptic Literature and Manuscripts* [blog], September 26, 2012, <http://alinsuciu.com/2012/09/26/on-the-so-called-gospel-of-jesus-wife-some-preliminary-thoughts-by-hugo-lundhaug-and-alin-suciu/>; and the remarks of Christian Askeland on the fragment (“JesusWife,” video clip, 9:43, September 28, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LtRVtLXpkQ>). See also Michael Peppard, “‘Gospel of Jesus’ Wife’—One year later,” *dotCommonweal* [blog], December 5, 2013, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/gospel-jesus-wife-one-year-later>. I should emphasize (with apologies to others who have contributed paleographical observations) that this list is not exhaustive and that I do not respond here to every point made in these blogs.

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The hand suggests an informal context of production.⁴ The handwriting is not similar to formal literary productions of any period and should be compared rather to documentary or paraliterary texts (though it does not closely resemble typical fourth-century Coptic documentary hands).⁵ While I cannot adduce an exact parallel, I am inclined to compare paraliterary productions such as magical or educational texts.⁶

The way the same letter is formed sometimes varies.⁷ Thin trails of ink at the bottom of many letters, multiple thin lines instead of one stroke,⁸ and the forked ends of some letters could suggest the use of a brush, rather than a pen: one may compare Ptolemaic-period Greek documents written with a brush.⁹ The brush had largely ceased to be used by the Roman period¹⁰ and should not be encountered in this context. However, one can observe analogous phenomena in later texts that are neither presumed to have been made by a brush nor suspected of being forgeries.¹¹

I have been unable to confirm that there is any ink on the lower layer of fibers in the start of lines →2–5 or inside the damaged area of what has been read as the

⁴ One might also note in this connection that the fact that there are six lines of text on the “back” and eight on the “front” is not uncommon in less formal contexts.

⁵ Now well attested: see P.Lond. 6.1920–22, P.Ryl.Copt. 268–276, and the documentary papyri published in *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis: P. Kell.V (P. Kell. Copt. 10–52; O. Kell. Copt. 1–2)* (ed. Iain Gardner, Anthony Alcock, and Wolf-Peter Funk; Dakhleh Oasis Project 9; Oxford: Oxbow, 1999). For the abbreviations for papyrus volumes used here, see Roger S. Bagnall et al., *Checklist of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, June 1, 2011, <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html>.

⁶ See, e.g., the irregular and informal script found in magical texts such as P.Bad. 5.126 (VI–VIII), P.Mich. inv. 594r (VI–VII), or P.Köln inv 20806r (IV–VIII) and, among educational texts, papyri such as P.Rain.UnterrichtKopt. 15 (VIII/IX?), 268 (VII), or 279 (X–XI). I cite these papyri here only as examples of less formal hands, and I would not compare the hand of the *GJW* papyrus specifically to them, especially not for dating purposes.

⁷ Sometimes letters are made very “chunkily,” at other times not: compare, e.g., the tau of ΤΑΜΑΥ in →1 with that in ΗΛΘΗΤΗΣ in →2.

⁸ See, e.g., the nu of ΗΛΕΙ in →1; the final pi in →1; the ti in →1; and the first mu of ΠΗΛΘΗΤΗΣ in →2. See also especially the first epsilon (?) and the nu of ΕΠΕ in →6; many other examples could be cited.

⁹ E.g., P.Cair.Zen. 2.59243r and P.Mich. 1.29. On the use of the brush in Ptolemaic texts, see William J. Tait, “Rush and Reed: The Pens of Egyptian and Greek Scribes,” in *Proceedings of the XVIII International Congress of Papyrology, Athens, 25–31 May 1986* (ed. Basil G. Mandilaras; 2 vols.; Athens: Greek Papyrological Society, 1988) 2:477–81; Willy Clarysse, “Egyptian Scribes Writing Greek,” *ChrEg* 68 (1993) 185–201; Joshua D. Sosin and Joseph G. Manning, “Palaeography and Bilingualism: P.Duk. inv. 320 and 675,” *ChrEg* 78 (2003) 202–10.

¹⁰ Mark Depauw, *The Demotic Letter: A Study of Epistolographic Scribal Traditions against Their Intra- and Intercultural Background* (Demotische Studien 14; Sommerhausen: Zauzich, 2006) 76–77.

¹¹ See, e.g., P.Rain.UnterrichtKopt. 279, an educational text from the 10th or 11th cent. C.E.: the editor (Monika Hasitzka) remarks simply “Breiter Kalamos” in her introduction to the edition (compare the remarks on the *GJW* papyrus of R. S. Bagnall quoted by King: “the pen itself may have been blunt and not holding the ink well”). For an image of this text, see the Tafelband for P.Rain.UnterrichtKopt. (in which it is Taf. 100) or search for “P.Rain.UnterrichtKopt. 279” on the website of the Austrian National Library Papyrus Collection: http://aleph.onb.ac.at/F?func=file&file_name=logi&local_base=ONB08.

second mu of ΜΑΡΙΑΜ in line →3 (which would surely indicate a modern forgery). Further conservation of the papyrus is required to confirm this beyond doubt. It is, however, clear that some issues that have been brought forward as evidence of forgery are apparent only on the digital images that were originally made available: this primarily concerns cases in which holes in the papyrus appear to be ink in the image¹² and where pooling of ink is not apparent on the papyrus itself.¹³ The text in line →7 is also clearly under the “blob” of foreign matter (some type of wax?).¹⁴ The “oblique stroke” before ΠΕΧΕ in →4 is more likely the remains of a letter than a mark of punctuation.¹⁵ One can also note that the lack of ink on the left two-thirds of the “back” is clearly caused by the loss of most of the upper layer of fibers at this point and that, while the top edge of the papyrus does give the appearance of having been cut, not broken,¹⁶ such a clean straight break is not unknown in genuine papyri.¹⁷

Overall, if the general appearance of the papyrus prompts some suspicion, it is difficult to falsify by a strictly paleographical examination. This should not be taken as proof that the papyrus is genuine, simply that its handwriting and the manner in which it has been written do not provide definitive grounds for proving otherwise.

■ Characterization of the Chemical Nature of the Black Ink in the Manuscript of *The Gospel of Jesus’s Wife* through Micro-Raman Spectroscopy

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Brief Summary

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A research team at Columbia University consisting of Professor James T. Yardley of the Department of Electrical Engineering and Alexis Hagadorn, Head of Conservation, Columbia University Libraries, with the support of Dr. David

¹² See, e.g., the first alpha of ΑΡΙΛΑ in line →3, where there is a tiny hole in the papyrus at the bottom right of the alpha.

¹³ E.g., to the bottom right of the first alpha of ΑΡΙΛΑ in →3 and in the diagonal stroke before ΠΕΧΕ (→4), where I can see neither the hole that was noted in the draft edition, nor ink pooling around it.

¹⁴ See especially the first ε of ΕΤΒΕ.

¹⁵ Note that the scribe varies letter forms elsewhere (compare the *upsilon* in → 4 and 5 [ΗΛΥ, ΛΥΩ] with that in →6 [ΕΘΘΟΥ]), and something like], ΗΗΦΟΥ or], ΗΗΛΛΥ] might be considered.

¹⁶ On the “front,” there appear to be no remains of a line above line →1: a trace of ink on a partially detached fiber above the second alpha of ΗΛΛΥ probably comes from the alpha itself.

¹⁷ Such cuts are commonly made in modern times (e.g. to cut up a text to sell to different buyers), but similar breaks also occur in papyri discovered in archaeological context.