

THE GOSPEL OF THE WIFE OF JESUS

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“Jesus said to them, ‘My wife...’ ”: A New Coptic Papyrus Fragment

Karen L. King

This article offers a critical edition of a papyrus fragment in Coptic that contains a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples in which Jesus speaks of “my wife.”¹ The fragment does not provide evidence that the historical Jesus was married, but concerns an early Christian debate over whether women who are wives and mothers can be disciples of Jesus. Solely for purposes of reference, the fragment is given the title *The Gospel of Jesus’s Wife (GJW)*.²

The existence of the *GJW* papyrus was announced at the International Coptic Congress in Rome, September 18, 2012, and a draft of the critical edition with digital photographs was posted on the Harvard Divinity School website. The critical edition published here is very much a collaborative project, although any remaining defects are mine alone. Roger Bagnall, AnneMarie Luijendijk, and Ariel Shisha-Halevy offered significant contributions, and I offer them my deepest gratitude. Their continued help and the aid of many other scholars and scientists are reflected in the critical edition published here. Also helpful were many of the critical and constructive comments, questions, and analyses offered in three peer reviews, in on-line media, and through private communications. I have attempted throughout to give serious consideration to all the relevant points of which I am aware, although the overt discussion of forgery is taken up only in the section on dating.

¹ I would like to thank the owner for permission to study and publish the *GJW* and a Coptic fragment of the *Gospel of John*.

² The term “gospel” in *GJW* regards the probable genre of the work to which this

² The term “gospel” in *GJW* regards the probable genre of the work to which this fragment belongs. It does not imply canonical status or the historical accuracy of the content. Nor does it imply that *GJW* was the title in antiquity, or that “Jesus’s wife” is the “author” of this work, is a major character in it, or is even a significant topic of discussion.

In addition to those already named, let me acknowledge and thank the following for their enormous generosity of time and expertise: Rose Lincoln and B. D. Colen produced high-resolution digital photographs. Malcolm Choat examined the fragment during a visit to Harvard (November 14-15, 2012). Microscopic imaging was conducted by Douglas Fishkind and Casey Kraft with Henry Lie at the Harvard Center for Biological Imaging (December 17, 2012). Raman testing of the ink was done by James Yardley with Alexis Hagadorn at Columbia University (March 11-12, 2013). Radiocarbon analysis was performed by Greg Hodgins at the University of Arizona Accelerator Mass Spectrometry Laboratory (June-July, 2013). Funding for the carbon-14 (^{14}C) testing was generously provided by a gift from Tricia Nichols. Multispectral imaging was performed by Michael Toth and select images were processed by William Christians-Barry (August 26, 2013). Timothy Swager, Joseph Azzarelli and John Goods performed Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FT-IR) testing at MIT (November 5, 2013). Harvard librarians, especially Douglas Gragg, were gracious and patient supporters. Harvard's communications professionals took the lead in public dissemination. Noreen Tuross gave invaluable advice and conducted a crucial range of testing, including a second radiocarbon determination. Hal Taussig offered collegial counsel. My warm thanks to David Hempton, Dean of the Harvard Divinity School, who offered consistent support and much-needed advice throughout the entire process. And finally, to the many other supporters not named here, I offer my sincere appreciation.

The critical edition begins with a transcription of the Coptic text and English translation, followed by a discussion of the material artifact (papyrology, paleography, form and uses), language, interpretation, and the history of the manuscript. Summary reports of analyses performed on the ink and papyrus completed to date follow. Full reports, imaging, and other supplementary materials may be found at

<http://www.gospelofjesuswife.hds.harvard.edu/> (GJW webpage).

7] . As for me, I am with her³ in order to . [

8] . an image ... [

1] my moth[er

2] thr[ee

3] ... [

4] forth ...[

5-6] (untranslatable) [

Read more: <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:12423666>

¹¹⁸ Walter C. Till and Hans-Martin Schenke, *Die gnostische Schriften des koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502* (2nd ed.; TU 60. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1972) 2, my translation.