

Simcha's scholarly friends defend him, and the saga of "Jesus' Wife" continues. Why did Rachel Hachlili ignore the only first-century synagogue? And is BAR publishing pornography?

KAREN KING ON "JESUS' WIFE"

Another Explanation—Not a Forgery

Hershel Shanks's article, "The Saga of the 'Gospel of Jesus' Wife'" (*BAR*, May/June 2015) sparked a conversation in my family concerning the proof that the fragment is a forgery—that the forger had copied every other line of a known manuscript (Codex Qau) of the Coptic Gospel of John (CGJ).

Could it be that the scribe was not a forger but an ancient copyist, copying not from Codex Qau, but from another copy of the CGJ that had line lengths double that of Codex Qau? If so, that it was the same copyist would suggest that the fragment about Jesus' wife was likewise an ancient copy of an archetype we have not previously seen.

If so, it would not be a forgery.

[RABBI] AVRAM ISRAEL REISNER
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Karen King, Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard University, responds:

Your suggestion is a good one. It seems clear that the Coptic Gospel of John fragment (seventh–eighth century C.E.), which is now at Harvard on a ten-year deposit, has been copied from some version of the Codex Qau (c. fifth century C.E.). It could have been copied (1) from that manuscript (since the time of its burial has not been established); (2) from a manuscript copy of it as you suggest; or (3) from the 20th-century critical edition by Herbert Thompson (either the printed edition of 1924¹ or the more recent online PDF), as forgery proponents argue.

Whether the Gospel of Jesus'

Wife and the Coptic Gospel of John fragment were written by the same person (i.e., the same ink, pen and handwriting) is, however, a separate and much more debatable issue. It involves a number of technical fields, and I expect the debate to continue for some time.

Meanwhile, I would be interested in what you and your family have to say about another issue. For me, a crucial remaining question concerns the dating of both pieces of papyri to about the seventh–ninth centuries C.E. by radiocarbon (C-14) analysis: What would be the contexts for each being copied or even composed in Egypt at that time? I am not a specialist in the history of Christianity in Egypt during this period, but only have some questions.

One might imagine that a (poor and error-filled) copy of the Coptic Gospel of John (written in an ancient and no longer used dialect of Coptic) might have been made simply because of the esteem and holy power that Christians ascribed to Scripture. But why include only select excerpts (John 5:26–30; 6:11–14) rather than a continuous text? Might it be because these passages emphasize two points of agreement with Muslim teachings about Jesus: that he was a prophet and raised people from the dead for judgment? Or might the fragment be the product of copying on to some old papyrus by an inept modern writer (whose context and intentions are also matters of speculation)?

Similarly with the Gospel of Jesus' Wife, I would be interested in whether it may have been composed at that time rather than being a copy of an earlier manuscript. For example, Pierluigi Piovanelli at the University of Ottawa has identified such a recent apocryphon in Ethiopic

attributed to Salome, Elizabeth and Mary of Magdala.² Or, again, the fragment may be a modern composition by an inept forger.

If I may, let me add, not only to you but to *BAR*'s readers more generally, that in several respects my own position has not changed. I still consider that the Gospel of Jesus' Wife fragment is not evidence of whether Jesus was married or not, so whether the fragment is ancient or modern makes no difference to that question. I am also still open to and still learning from the substantive aspects of the discussion. In that regard I have never considered those pressing a substantive case for forgery to be "opponents" (as some style themselves), but as colleagues who are also trying to get to the bottom of things. In my view, scholarship is not about making final, definitive statements, but about putting out one's analysis and ideas for conversation, listening to alternative and critical responses, and engaging again when one has something constructive to offer. So far the academic response to the Gospel of Jesus' Wife fragment has been almost solely concerned with questions of forgery, but little with interpretation of its meaning—either in antiquity or today. (Analysis of reactions to the Gospel of Jesus' Wife fragment—both public and academic—is another conversation.)

At this point, when discussions and research are ongoing, I think it is important, however difficult, to stay open regarding the possible dates of the inscription and other matters of interpretation, to consider the implications that scholars are operating with different methodological assumptions, and to take into account the enormity of the gaps in our knowledge of both ancient and modern

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contexts. Your family discussion, Rabbi Reischer, is a great example.

¹ Herbert Thompson, ed. and trans., *The Gospel of St. John according to the Earliest Coptic Manuscript* (London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1924).

² "The Story of the Passion of Christ: A New Ethiopic Apocryphon Attributed to Salome, Elizabeth, and Mary of Magdala," in Alessandro Bausi, Alessandro Gori and Gianfrancesco Lusini, eds., *Linguistic, Oriental and Ethiopian Studies in Memory of Paolo Marrassini* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), pp. 607–628.

Shame on You, Mr. Shanks

Re: Hershel Shanks's article on Karen King and the "Gospel of Jesus' Wife." What I don't understand is the attack on Simcha Jacobovici, who had nothing to do with the "Jesus' Wife" papyrus. All I can say is shame on you. Since when are *ad hominem* arguments a form of intellectual debate?

Mr. Shanks: Having been an outsider yourself, is this what you learned from your experience?

RABBI DAVID OSTRIKER
TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA

Simcha Responds

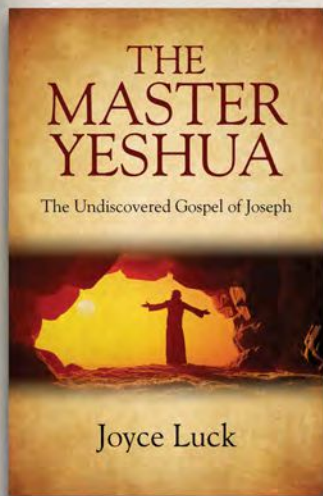
I was surprised to see you dedicate a page to me in your recent article, "The Saga of 'The Gospel of Jesus' Wife,'" because, as you say, "**BAR** does not publish Simcha's farfetched claims." But here you are publishing my claims after all, except you don't do it in the context of a balanced, serious article. You do it so as to create a straw man to mock as a prelude to an article on Professor Karen King's publication of the controversial "Jesus' Wife" papyrus.

It's interesting what you took away from the attacks on Professor King. In the past, you might have said that the attacks on me are due to the fact that I'm not a scholar. But now you've seen that a scholar of Karen King's stature is also mocked and attacked the minute she brings up an ancient manuscript that tells a story not in keeping with Pauline theology. Instead of being shocked at "scholarship by mockery," you conclude that it's okay to mock me, but it's really unfair to mock her.

You make it sound as if I'm a lone wolf claiming to make all sorts of outlandish "discoveries." But I'm not. I don't even claim to make many of the discoveries that you attribute to me. I'll give just two examples:

So as to make me sound crazy, you write, "Simcha has also discovered the true tomb of Jesus and much of his family." The only problem is that I don't claim to have "discovered" it. It was discovered by a bulldozer in Talpiot in 1980 and reported to the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). "Jesus, son of Joseph," "Maria" and other Gospel-related names that were inscribed on the ossuaries in the tomb were published by L.Y. Rahmani in the official Israel Antiquities Authority catalogue, not by me. The responsible archaeologist at the time, Professor Amos Kloner, sat on the information for 16 years, not even publishing it in *Atiqot*, the magazine of the IAA, until 1996. Except for one article in the United Kingdom, no one talked about the tomb until

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2007 when my film (*The Lost Tomb of Jesus*) and book (*The Jesus Family Tomb*) put the discovery on front pages around the world. So why the mockery? As a journalist, you seem to applaud Kloner's lack of publication, and you seem upset by the fact that I brought to public attention this remarkable find. As for its relation to Jesus' family, I'm not the only one who says this. Professor James Tabor, Professor James Charlesworth, the late Professor Jane Schaberg and many other academics have said as much. So why isolate me?

Sixty meters from the alleged "Jesus Family Tomb" is an unexcavated burial cave. For the first time in Jerusalem archaeology, we built a robotic arm to investigate that burial cave and got the cooperation of both the ultra-orthodox haredim and the IAA. As a Biblical archaeology magazine, how is it that you don't celebrate this achievement? Using this technology, we discovered an image on an ossuary that looks like the

"Sign of Jonah"—the earliest Christian symbol—with an inscription "Yonah" below. I didn't decipher the inscription; Professor Charlesworth did. In the same issue that you mock me, you have an article by the eminent Professor Rachel Hachlili. She says that there is no question that the word "Yonah" is inscribed on the controversial ossuary. Professor/Father Émile Puech agrees with Hachlili and Charlesworth, and so does noted epigrapher Dr. Robert Deutsch. But you give none of these people any credit. You don't even mention them. In fact, you don't try to report the facts accurately. Instead, you give all the "credit" to me—an old lawyer's trick, Hershel—only to set me up for an *ad hominem* attack. This is Hershel the former attorney writing, not Hershel the journalist.

Still your friend,

SIMCHA JACOBOVICI
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Why Simcha's View Is Not Accepted

I was surprised to see the opening of your story on "The Saga of the 'Gospel of Jesus' Wife.'" It seemed to me that it was a kind of mocking of our friend Simcha Jacobovici that I found sadly misguided and out of place.

I have been involved extensively in the Talpiot tomb research, and your assertion that Simcha "discovered the true tomb of Jesus and much of his family" is surely not the case. Rami Arav and I hold the IAA licenses to excavate both tombs, and I think I have written the most on the subject from an academic point of view.

As for why people would not accept that the tomb of Jesus has been found, I think there is a host of reasons ranging from faith that Jesus was taken to heaven—bones and all—to the same kind of skepticism on the part of academics you have encountered with the James ossuary inscription, which I hold to be authentic; namely, it is sensational, "too good to be true," and those promoting it only are interested in making money.

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Simcha Stands Outside the Academy

Why ridicule Simcha Jacobovici? How does ridicule in any way relate to a journal that is supposed to be evidence-based, archaeologically and historically, and not simply a bully pulpit for various faith perspectives?

Simcha has the advantage of standing outside the academy. That means he isn't bound by allegiance to college statements of faith as many religious "scholars" are, especially in the United States. Nor is he bound by the prejudices of the tribe as many of us in secular institutions are, having to take into account what are "safe" research topics and what are not. He is, as he points out, an independent investigator, an investigative journalist. And that's an important role, questioning many of the pretentious claims made by so-called experts. The silence of the academy on Simcha is very much like the silence of the lambs. Academics tend to follow the herd and, being intimidated

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to those of us who are being saved it is the Power of God" Corinthians 1:18

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