

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

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with contributions by AnneMarie Luijendijk

Published here for the first time is a fragment of a fourth-century CE codex in Coptic containing a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples in which Jesus speaks of “my wife.” This is the only extant ancient text which explicitly portrays Jesus as referring to a wife. It does *not*, however, provide evidence that the historical Jesus was married, given the late date of the fragment and the probable date of original composition only in the second half of the second century. Nevertheless, if the second century date of composition is correct, the fragment does provide direct evidence that claims about Jesus’s marital status first arose over a century after the death of Jesus in the context of intra-Christian controversies over sexuality, marriage, and discipleship. Just as Clement of Alexandria (d. ca 215 C.E.) described some Christians who insisted Jesus was not married,<sup>1</sup> this fragment suggests that other Christians of that period were claiming that he was married. For purposes of reference, the fragment is referred to as *The Gospel of Jesus’s Wife (GosJesWife)*.<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> See *Stromateis* III, 6.49; Greek text in Otto Stählin (ed.) *Clemens Alexandrinus. Stromata Buch I-VI* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1906) 218.

<sup>2</sup> The use of the term “gospel” here regards the probable genre of the work to which this fragment belonged (see below, “Genre”) and makes absolutely no claim to canonical status nor to the historical accuracy of the content as such. This invented reference in no way means to imply that this 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—none of that can be known from such a tiny fragment. Rather the title references the fragment’s most distinctive claim (that Jesus was married), and serves therefore as a kind of short-hand reference to the fragment.

The papyrus currently belongs to a private collector.<sup>3</sup> Assuming its authenticity for the moment, its language (Sahidic Coptic) as well as the conditions for the preservation of organic material indicate that it was found in Egypt. Nothing is known about the circumstances of its discovery, but we have some clues about its modern history. The current owner possesses a typed and signed letter addressed to H. U. Laukamp dated July 15, 1982, from Prof. Dr. Peter Munro (Freie Universität, Ägyptologisches Seminar, Berlin). The letter states that a colleague, Prof. Fecht, has identified one of Mr. Laukamp's papyri as a 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. C.E. fragment of the Gospel of John in Coptic. He advises that this fragment be preserved between glass plates in order to protect it from further damage. This fragment of the Gospel of John is now in the collection of the owner of *GosJesWife*, who acquired it among the same batch of Greek and Coptic papyri. More directly relevant, the owner also has an unsigned handwritten note, stating the following:

Professor Fecht glaubt, daß der kleine ca. 8 cm große Papyrus das einzige Beispiel für einen Text ist, in dem Jesus die direkte Rede in Bezug auf eine Ehefrau benutzt. Fecht meint, daß dies ein Beweis für eine mögliche Ehe sein könnte.<sup>4</sup>

Although the note is neither dated nor signed, it is presumed to belong to the 1982 correspondence between Prof. Munro (d. 2008) and Mr. Laukamp (d. 2001). If so, this

<sup>3</sup> We wish to offer here our sincerest thanks to the owner, who wishes to remain anonymous, for permission to publish this papyrus fragment.

<sup>4</sup> "Professor Fecht believes that the small fragment, approximately 8 cm in size, is the sole example of a text in which Jesus uses direct speech with reference to having a wife. Fecht is of the opinion that this could be evidence for a possible marriage."

note is evidence that *GosJesWife* was in the possession of Mr. Laukamp in Berlin in the early 1980's. The named Professor Fecht is likely Gerhard Fecht (d. 2006), who was on the faculty of Egyptology at the Free University, Berlin, at this time. Nothing else is known to us of the modern history of the papyrus.

The current owner contacted Karen L. King via email requesting that she look at the fragment to determine its content. The owner then delivered the papyrus by hand to Harvard Divinity School in December, 2011, and generously gave permission to publish. As a first step, King, who is neither a papyrologist nor a Coptic linguist, sought expert advice regarding the authenticity and date of the fragment. In March, 2012, she transported the papyrus to the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World in New York, where it was viewed by the Institute's director and renowned papyrologist, Roger Bagnall<sup>5</sup> and by AnneMarie Luijendijk (Princeton). Our lengthy discussion about the characteristics of the papyrus (detailed below) concluded with the judgement that the papyrus was very likely an authentic ancient text that could be dated on paleographical grounds to circa 4<sup>th</sup> c. C.E. On this basis, work began in earnest on a critical edition, translation, and interpretation of the fragment.

In August, 2012, a version of the present article was submitted to the *Harvard Theological Review* for consideration for publication. In the course of the normal external review process, reviewers differed in their judgments about authenticity. One accepted the fragment, but two raised questions, without yet being entirely certain that it is a fake, and suggested review by experienced Coptic papyrologists and testing of the chemical composition of the ink. The third reviewer provided detailed comments on a

<sup>5</sup> We would like to acknowledge here our sincere gratitude to Professor Roger Bagnall, Director of the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, for meeting with us to view and discuss the papyrus.

number of difficulties with the text's grammar and paleography. Neither of the reviewers who questioned the fragment's authenticity were aware that Bagnall had already seen the actual fragment and judged it to be authentic. Their own views were based on relatively low resolution photographs of the fragment.

The present version of the edition, translation, and interpretation of the fragment here responds gratefully to the substantive matters raised especially by the third reviewer. While in the end we have come to a different judgement and tend to regard the papyrus fragment not to be a forgery, several of the suggestions about the text's grammar and syntax have been incorporated into our argument (with due credit for his/her contribution), and we feel that addressing those and other objections have usefully strengthened the presentation. High resolution digital photographs have now been taken and will be made available to scholars on a web-page linked to the Harvard Divinity School website. Ariel Shisha-Halevy, Professor of Linguistics at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, was sent those high resolution digital photographs, a transcription of the fragment, and (with the permission of the editors of *Harvard Theological Review*) a copy of the third reviewer's detailed evaluation, and was asked to offer his judgement about the fragment's authenticity with regard to his area of expertise, Coptic linguistics. He replied, "I believe—on the basis of language and grammar—the text is authentic. That is to say, all its grammatical 'noteworthy' features, separately or conjointly do not warrant condemning it as forgery."<sup>6</sup> Several of his suggestions are incorporated below (with due credit for his contribution). Roger Bagnall was sent a copy of the remarks from all three reviewers (with the journal editors' permission), and his response has also been helpful in identifying salient points for strengthening the critical edition. We are also pursuing

<sup>6</sup> Email communication, September 7, 2012.

chemical testing of the ink. The owner has agreed that the fragment itself will remain at Harvard University for the time being, where it will be accessible to accredited scholars. While any remaining infelicities are the responsibility of the authors, we would like to acknowledge with gratitude the collaborative character of the final presentation, offering our appreciation in particular to Roger Bagnall, Ariel Shisha-Halevy, and the third reviewer whose identity remains unknown to us. Although the authenticity is not absolutely settled beyond any question, we are sufficiently confident to offer our results here. We anticipate that publication of the fragment at this stage will facilitate further conversation among scholar regarding the fragment's authenticity, interpretation, and significance.

#### Papyrological and Palaeographical Description

The fragment is a small, honey colored piece of papyrus, measuring c. 4 cm in height by 8 cm in width, inscribed with Coptic letters in black ink. None of the margins are preserved. On the recto (→), the papyrus has eight incomplete lines of script (with illegible traces of a ninth), and on the verso (↓), it has six.<sup>7</sup> A kollêsis is clearly visible in the middle of the verso. On the left side of the verso, the writing in a section measuring 4 cm in height by 4.6 cm in width has abraded, and the writing in the remaining section on the right is faded. The recto is thus better preserved than the verso. Bagnall has suggested that perhaps the verso was at some time exposed, while the recto remained protected.

<sup>7</sup> We use the terms recto and verso here to indicate the direction of the fibers, not the position of the folio in the codex. See Eric G. Turner, *The Terms Recto and Verso: The Anatomy of a Papyrus Roll. Actes du XV<sup>e</sup> Congrès international de papyrologie. Bruxelles-Louvain, 29 août-3 septembre 1977* (ed. Jean Gingen and Georges Nachtergaele; Papyrologica Bruxellensia 16; Bruxelles: Fondation égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1978).

In addition to the abraded section, the faded ink on the verso makes it difficult to decipher the remaining text. Infrared photography brought out contrast and facilitated reading to a certain extent.<sup>8</sup> High resolution digital photography and additional manipulation with Photoshop also aided in decipherment of both recto and verso, as well as viewing the manuscript itself in daylight and with magnification.

Using predominantly the thick side of the pen, the scribe wrote small, upright, unadorned letters, without connecting them in ligatures.<sup>9</sup> The letters are slightly irregular in size and color, measuring 3 to 5 mm in height and 2 to 5 mm in width. Their irregularity can be appreciated by noting, for example, that epsilons measure from 3 to 4.5 mm in height, and from 2 to 4 mm in width.

The script is unimodular in appearance.<sup>10</sup> Noteworthy palaeographical features of individual letters are as follows: *alpha* is angular, *epsilon*, *theta*, *omicron* and *sigma* are wide and round, *mu* is written in four strokes, *rho* has a small head, *upsilon* is tall and narrow with the v-shaped top placed high, and *shai* has a short, straight tail. The letters do not extend below the baseline; in other words, the writing is bilinear.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Our sincere thanks to Roger Bagnall for the loan of a camera for infrared photography, to Nancy Richardson for her help with photographing the fragment in infrared, and to Rose Lincoln and B. D. Colen for producing high resolution photographs.

<sup>9</sup> For the implications of dating, see Iain Gardner and Malcolm Choat, "Towards a palaeography of fourth-century documentary Coptic," in *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium. Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies*. Mat Immerzeel and Jacques van der Vliet, eds., Leiden, August 27 – September 2, 2000, (Leuven: Peeters, 2004) 497: "Variation [in fourth-century Coptic documentary texts] is certainly visible; however, the hand, which Stegemann called the *Gitterstil*, may be generally characterised as relatively upright and square. Ligatures are rare and frequently absent."

<sup>10</sup> On this type of script, see Stephen Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* (2 vols.; Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 599–600, subsidia 111–112; Leuven: Peeters, 2004) 56–57, 107.

<sup>11</sup> In this section, we follow Bentley Layton's descriptive categories for analyzing Coptic handwriting in *A Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts in the British Library Acquired Since the Year 1906* (London: British Library, 1987), especially lxiii–lxiv.

With relatively little space between the lines, the page has a cramped look. No punctuation is present in the section preserved, but a space is left blank at ↓ 3, probably signaling the beginning of a new section. The scribe placed fairly narrow superlinear strokes above single letters.<sup>12</sup> The name Jesus is written as a *nomen sacrum* (→ 2, 4), a scribal feature common in Christian manuscripts.<sup>13</sup>

The overall character of the handwriting is functional, neither a formal literary hand nor a purely documentary script. It is legible, but not regular, let alone elegant.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, based on viewing low resolution photographs, the third reviewer described that hand as “clumsy and labored.” Bagnall, too, when he first observed the script judged it to be an unpracticed, messy hand, perhaps even by a modern forger, but on further observation and reflection concluded that the problem was the pen of the ancient scribe. In our initial conversation, he suggested that it appears to have been blunt and not holding the ink well, resulting in the wide letter and thick strokes that appear. With this kind of tool, the copyist may have aspired to imitate the so-called “thick and thin style,” the type

<sup>12</sup> For distinctions in superlinear strokes, see, for instance, Layton, *A Catalogue*, lxiv.

<sup>13</sup> The classic study on *nomina sacra* is Ludwig Traube, *Nomina Sacra. Versuch einer Geschichte der christlichen Kürzung* (Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters 2. München: Beck, 1907). For recent scholarship on the topic, see especially Larry W. Hurtado, “The Origin of the Nomina Sacra: A Proposal,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998) 655–73, idem, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); and AnneMarie Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Harvard Theological Studies 60; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 57-78. Up to now, no study has been dedicated exclusively to Coptic *nomina sacra*. An interesting document in this regard is P.Cotsen 1, a 6<sup>th</sup>- or 7<sup>th</sup>-century Coptic school book with a section of *nomina sacra* and their full spelling (fol. 53r, line 4-53v); for a description, see Scott Bucking, “A Sahidic Coptic Manuscript in the Private Collection of Lloyd E. Cotsen (P. Cotsen 1) and the Limits of Papyrological Interpretation,” *Journal of Coptic Studies* 8, (2006) 55–78 at 59-60.

<sup>14</sup> There appear to be no scribal mistakes in this small section, but note the smudged letters due to dipping too much ink (→ 5). For other instances of uneven ink flow, see, for example, P.Ryl.Copt 314 and 396 (images can be found online at <http://enriqueta.man.ac.uk/luna/servlet/ManchesterDev~93~3>).

of uncial handwriting used for biblical manuscripts, yet succeeded only in the “thick” effect, with no “thin” strokes.<sup>15</sup>

Coptic palaeography is notoriously difficult to date.<sup>16</sup> Within the limits of the current state of the field, the handwriting of our papyrus seems to belong in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It is comparable to the hand of Codex Schøyen (a copy of the Gospel of Matthew) dated to the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>17</sup> and to the hand of the Coptic Genesis in the cartonnage of Nag Hammadi Codex VII (C2), dated to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> or early 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> Other useful comparanda among literary manuscripts are

<sup>15</sup> Layton characterizes a Biblical uncial hand with thick vertical strokes and thin horizontal strokes as “thick and thin style.” This effect is due to both the writing instrument used and the skill of the writer (Layton, *Catalogue*, LXIV). See also Pasquale Orsini, “La maiuscola biblica copta,” *Segno e testo* 6 (2008), 121–50. For another, albeit more successful example of a hand with this thick effect, see Karlheinz Schüssler (ed.), *Biblia Coptica, die koptischen Bibeltexte*. Vol. 3, fasc. 2 (sa 521-540) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), sa 529 (6<sup>th</sup> cent.), plate 3.

<sup>16</sup> See Layton, *Catalogue*, xxiv; idem, “Towards a New Coptic Palaeography,” in *Acts of the Second International Congress of Coptic Studies. Roma, 22–26 September 1980* (ed. Tito Orlandi and Frederik Wisse; Rome: Centro Italiano Microfiches, 1985) 149–58; Rudolphe Kasser, “Paleography” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (ed. Aziz S. Atiya; New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1991) v. 8, 175-184; Stephen Emmel, “Recent Progress in Coptic Codicology and Paleography (1988-1992),” in *Acts of the Fifth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Washington, 12-15 August, 1992* (ed. Tito Orlandi and David W. Johnson; 2 vols.; Rome: C.I.M., 1993) v. 1, 22–49, and idem, “Recent Progress in Coptic Codicology and Paleography (1992-1996),” in *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit. Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses. Münster, 20.-26. Juli 1996* (ed. Stephen Emmel, Martin Krause, Siegfried G. Richter, Sofia Schaten; Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1999) v. 2, 65–78; Anne Boud’hors, “Paléographie et codicologie coptes: progrès et perspectives (1996–2004),” in *Huitième Congrès international d’Études coptes. Paris, 28 juin – 3 juillet 2004. Vol. 1 Bilans et perspectives 200–2004* (ed. Anne Boud’hors and Denyse Vaillancourt; Cahiers de la bibliothèque copte 15; Paris: De Boccard, 2006) 95-109; and the recent bibliography by Sofía Torallas Tovar, “Coptic Codicology and Palaeography (2004-2012)” at [http://www.copticcongress2012.uniroma1.it/Report\\_Torallas.pdf](http://www.copticcongress2012.uniroma1.it/Report_Torallas.pdf). For fourth-century Coptic documentary texts, see also Gardner and Choat, “Towards a palaeography,” I, 501-509.

<sup>17</sup> See Hans-Martin Schenke, ed., *Coptic Papyri*, vol. I. *Das Matthäus-Evangelium im mittelägyptischen Dialekt des Koptischen (Codex Schøyen)*. Manuscripts in The Schøyen Collection series vol. 1 (Oslo: Hermes, 2001). For an image online, see [http://www.schoyencollection.com/Coptic\\_files/ms2650.jpg](http://www.schoyencollection.com/Coptic_files/ms2650.jpg).

<sup>18</sup>, Edition: J.W.B. Barns, G.M. Browne and J.C. Shelton, eds., *Nag Hammadi codices: Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Covers*. (Nag Hammadi Studies ; 16; The Coptic gnostic library; Leiden : Brill, 1981), C2 = inv. VII 89c, 90c, 91c, 92, 93c in James M. Robinson (ed.), *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices. Cartonnage* (Leiden: E. J. Brill,



Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum Ms. Orient. 3065, a 4<sup>th</sup> c. copy of 1 Clement,<sup>19</sup> and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Copte 135 F, a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> c. manuscript of the *Apocalypse of Elijah*.<sup>20</sup> These manuscripts are, however, more elegantly written and none of them has the very thick strokes that characterize our hand. Compared to the documentary hand of SB Kopt III 1310 (P.Lond. inv. 2724), a letter dated ca. 330-340, the letters in our papyrus are more upright and separate; in the documentary letter they are connected and slope.<sup>21</sup>

The handwriting on our papyrus appears to identical on recto and verso, which may indicate that the page belonged to a codex.<sup>22</sup> Given its fragmentary preservation (especially the poor state of preservation on the verso), it remains unclear which side would have come first in the order of the pages were it to derive from a codex. Without direct parallels from which to reconstruct the text, it is not possible to estimate the original size of the folio or the codex.<sup>23</sup>

1979), plates VII, 89c-93c, pages 47-50. On the dating, see Barns et al., *Papyri from the Cartonnage*, 124.

<sup>19</sup> Carl Schmidt, *Der erste Clemensbrief in altkoptischer Übersetzung* (Texte und Untersuchungen 32) = Viktor Stegemann, *Koptische Paläographie: 25 Tafeln zur Veranschaulichung der Schreibstile koptischer Schriftdenkmäler auf Papyrus, Pergament und Papier für die Zeit der III.-XIV. Jahrhunderts: mit einem Versuch einer Stilgeschichte der koptischen Schrift* (Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums und des Mittelalters, Reihe C: Hilfsbücher; Bd. 1; Heidelberg: Im Selbstverlag von F. Bilabel, 1936) plate 2.

<sup>20</sup> Georg Steindorff, *Apokalypse des Elias. Eine unbekannte Apokalypse und Bruchstücke der Sophonias-Apokalypse: koptische Texte, Übersetzung, Glossar* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1899) = Stegemann, plate 2. Both have the high *upsilon*, angular *alpha*, 4-stroke *mu*, similar *hori*, round, open *omicron*, and small head of *rho*.

<sup>21</sup> See W. E. Crum, "Some Further Meletian Documents," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 13 (1927) 19-25 and plate X; and Stegemann, *Koptische Paläographie*, plate 6.

<sup>22</sup> This is not conclusive, however, since a two-sided amulet, for example, could display the same pattern of handwriting. Our thanks to Roger Bagnall for pointing out this uncertainty.

<sup>23</sup> Only if a text is part of a known work is it possible to calculate the size of a page which has no indication of margins and is this fragmentarily preserved. See check Stephen Emmel, "On Using 'Proportional Extension of Text' as a Criterion for Placing Fragments in a Dismembered Codex" in P. Buzi and A. Camplani, eds., *Christianity in Egypt: Literary Production and Intellectual*

Initially the compact size and regular shape of the fragment led us to consider whether it might have been an amulet, but we excluded this possibility because it shows no folds, and it begins and ends in the middle of sentences that also extend into margins of unknown length on both the right and left.<sup>24</sup> Alternatively, Bagnall suggests that the regularity may have been caused by an antiquities dealer cutting or tearing a larger page into sections in order to have more pieces for sale. A copy of this quality probably tells us more about the social and economic status of those who produced and used the text than it does about its importance to them. We can speculate, however, that it may have been intended for private study by an individual or group rather than for public reading in a liturgical church or school setting, but we cannot be certain.<sup>25</sup>

Just like most of the earliest papyri of the New Testament and other literary and documentary papyri, a fragment this damaged could have come from an ancient garbage

*Trends in Late Antiquity. Studies in honor of Tito Orlandi* (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 125; Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2011) 257–278.

<sup>24</sup> Moreover, amulets are often, but not always, narrow and long. For a useful discussion of criteria for amulets and problems of classification of certain texts, see Theodore De Bruyn and Jitse H. F. Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets and Formularies Containing Christian Elements: A Checklist of Papyri, Parchments, Ostraka, and Tablets,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 48 (2011) 163–216, esp. the discussion on pages 167–173 and the dimensions listed in the tables accompanying the article. See also De Bruyn, “Papyri, Parchments, Ostraca, and Tablets Written with Biblical Texts in Greek and Used as Amulets: A Preliminary List,” in Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas, eds., *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approach* (Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 5; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 145–190.

<sup>25</sup> For reading practices in antiquity, see especially William A. Johnson, “Toward a Sociology of Reading in Classical Antiquity,” *American Journal of Philology* 121 (2000) 593–627; and idem, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Classical Culture and Society; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Larry Hurtado, “Manuscripts and the Sociology of Early Christian Reading,” in Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger, eds., *The Early Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 49–62; and Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church. A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

heap.<sup>26</sup> The other usual place to discover papyri is in burial sites, but such finds are more frequently in better condition.

Given the content of this text, we took into serious consideration whether this was a genuine ancient text or a modern forgery. It would be very difficult to reproduce the kind the damage from insects or moisture that the fragment indicates, but it could have been penned on a blank piece of ancient papyrus, which are available for purchase on the antiquities market. Such a papyrus would pass a Carbon 14 dating test. On the other hand, there are a number of other facts that point toward authenticity. Most notably, it would be extremely difficult to forge the way the ink has been preserved on the writing material. As mentioned above, the ink on the verso has faded badly, an unfortunate characteristic shared with many ancient papyri, but an indicator of a long aging process. In addition, close examination of the papyrus under magnification and with the use of high resolution photography yields the following detailed observations that substantiate its genuineness: On the recto, tiny traces of ink from a preceding, but now lost, line can be seen on the small fray pieces of papyrus protruding from the top of the fragment. This suggests that our fragment has broken off from a larger page. Moreover, in 3 →, dislocated fibers have obscured the first letter of the line due to damage of the material after the page was inscribed and this is again a common occurrence in ancient papyri. Also in 4 →, several letters have discontinuous strokes with missing ink because of damage to the material. For instance, the diagonal stroke before the *pi* (the remains of an *upsilon*?) lacks its center where there is a small hole in the papyrus. And in that same line 4→, the horizontal bar of the *pi* of πϵχϵϵ is split. If this had been a forgery penned

<sup>26</sup> On this topic, see AnneMarie Luijendijk, “Sacred Scriptures as Trash: Biblical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 64:3 (2010) 217–54.

on an ancient, already damaged papyrus, these sections would have been filled with ink, but they are not. Thus, all these instances of ink preservation seem to indicate that the text was indeed written in antiquity. We are currently in the process of seeking to have the chemical composition of the ink tested by non-destructive methods.<sup>27</sup> While this analysis will not yield a specific date, it can indicate whether the composition of the ink corresponds to comparable inks used in antiquity. A positive result would further substantiate the document's authenticity. We are, however, at the point where it seems appropriate to release these initial findings along with high resolution photographs to our colleagues for their discussion and further deliberation.

#### Language, Date of Composition, Provenance, and Authorship

The language is standard Sahidic. While in Sahidic the orthography of the first person single suffix pronoun as object of the preposition  $\text{ⲛⲁⲗ}$  is normally  $\text{ⲓ}$ ,<sup>28</sup> the spelling of  $\text{ⲛⲁⲗⲉⲓ}$  ( $\rightarrow 1$  and  $\rightarrow 5$ ) is comprehensible within the range of Sahidic orthography,<sup>29</sup> and is not sufficient to indicate dialectal influence, e.g., from Lycopolitan in which  $\text{ⲛⲁⲉⲓ}$  also appears.<sup>30</sup> Given that Sahidic can be well characterized as “an aggregation of linguistic

<sup>27</sup> For this process, see I. Rabin, R. Schütz, A. Kohl, T. Wolff, R. Tagle, S. Pentzien, O. Hahn, and S. Emmel, “Identification and Classification of Historical Writing Inks in Spectroscopy: A Methodological Overview” in *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Newsletter* 3 (2012) 26-30.

<sup>28</sup> See Bentley Layton, *A Coptic Grammar* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. revised and expanded; Porta Linguarum Orientalium n.s. 20; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004) ¶ 85-86, pp. 69-70.

<sup>29</sup> See Layton, *A Coptic Grammar*, ¶ 16 (a), p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> While the fragment is too small to determine whether it might contain other evidence of dialectal “mixing,” the third reviewer agreed that  $\text{ⲛⲁⲉⲓ}$  is comprehensible with the range of Sahidic orthography.

habits only imperfectly and variously standardized,”<sup>31</sup> such orthographic variation is not consequential.<sup>32</sup>

Inscription in Sahidic provides only a rough indication of the papyrus’s geographical provenance and region of circulation in Upper (Southern) Egypt. It may also point toward the increasing tendency of Sahidic to be used by Christians, notably as “the first Coptic dialect into which the Scriptures were translated” in the third to fourth centuries.<sup>33</sup>

A substantial portion of early Coptic literature was translated from Greek, including the closest parallels<sup>34</sup> to *GosJesWife*, suggesting that it, too, was originally composed in Greek, although it is extant only here in Coptic translation. While plausible, this supposition cannot be definitively established on the basis of this tiny fragment.

Given 1) that the closest parallel material to our fragment is found in literature originally composed in the second century, namely, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Mary*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and 2) that *GosJesWife* fits well within speculations about Jesus’s marital status that appear in the second century (see the discussion of Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian below), it is probable that *GosJesWife* was also originally composed in the second half of the second century.

<sup>31</sup> See Ariel Shisha-Halevy, “Sahidic” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (ed. Aziz S. Atiya; New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1991), v. 8, 194-202; citation is from p. 195.

<sup>32</sup> See for example the variation of  $\text{N}\bar{\alpha}\bar{\iota}$  and  $\text{N}\bar{\alpha}\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\iota}$  in the Tchacos Codex version of *1 Apocalypse of James* 15.13; 16.4; 26.18 (Coptic text in *Codex Tchacos. Texte und Aalysen*. Ed. Johanna Brankaer and Hans-Gebhard Bethge; TU 161; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> For discussion of the history and features of Sahidic, see Shisha-Halevy, “Sahidic,” 195.

<sup>34</sup> Greek fragments are extant for two of the closest parallel texts, *Gospel of Mary* (see C. H. Roberts, “463. The Gospel of Mary” in *Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the John Rylands Library III* [Manchester: University Press, 1938] 18-23; and P. J. Parsons, “3525. Gospel of Mary” in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri Volume 50* [Graeco-Roman Memoirs 70; London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1983] 12-14) and *Gospel of Thomas* (see Harold W. Attridge, “Appendix. The Greek Fragments” in Bentley Layton (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7* [Nag Hammadi Studies 20; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989] 95-128).

While the Coptic fragment certainly has its provenance in Egypt, the place of composition and areas of circulation in the second and third centuries are less certain, although Egypt and perhaps Syria or even Rome (given the presence there of Valentinians and Tatian) are possibilities.

Many ancient Christian gospels were pseudonymous, but without a title or other identification, the ancient attribution of this text (if it indeed explicitly had one) remains unknown. There is insufficient evidence to speculate with any confidence about who may have composed, read, or circulated *GosJesWife* except to conclude they were Christians.

### Transcription

recto (along the fibres →)

- 1 ΝΑ]ΕΙ ΔΗ ΤΑΜΔΔΥ ΔΣ† ΝΑΕΙ ΠΩ[ΗΖ
- 2 ]Ϛ ΠΕΧΕ ΠΜΑΘΗΤΗΣ ΠΙϚ ΧΕ Ϛ[
- 3 ]. ΑΡΝΑ ΝΑΡΙΑΜ ΠΠΩΔ ΠΜΟΣ Δ[Η(?)
- 4 ]. . . . / ΠΕΧΕ ΙϚ ΝΑΥ ΤΑΖΙΜΕ ΜΗ[
- 5 ]. . . ΣΝΑΩΠΜΑΘΗΤΗΣ ΝΑΕΙ ΔΥΩ [
- 6 ]Ι ΝΑΡΕΡΩΜΕ ΕΘΟΟΥ ΦΑϚΕ ΝΕ[
- 7 ]. ΔΝΟΚ †ΨΟΟΠ ΝΜΜΑΣ ΕΤΒΕ Π[
- 8 papyrus broken off ±6] . ΟΥΖΙΚΩΗ . . [
- 9 (illegible traces of ink)

verso (against the fibres ↓)

- 1 ] ΤΑΜΑΔΑΥ[
- 2 ] ΝΗΜΩΜΗΝΤ[
- 3 ] ἀ·ε· vac. [
- 4 ] ΕΒΟΛ ΕΤΗ[
- 5 ] ΟΠ . . . . [
- 6 ] .[.] . . ΜΜ[

7 (illegible traces of ink)

Translation

- 1 ] “not [to] me. My mother gave to me li[fe...”
- 2 ] The disciples said to Jesus, “[
- 3 ] deny. Mary is worthy of it<sup>35</sup> [
- 4 ] . . . . .” Jesus said to them, “My wife . . [
- 5 ] . . . she will be able to be my disciple . . [
- 6 ] Let wicked people swell up . . . [
- 7] As for me, I dwell with her in order to . [
- 8] an image [

- 1 ] my moth[er
- 2 ] three [
- 3 ] . . . [
- 4 ] forth which . . . [
- 5 ] (illegible ink traces)

<sup>35</sup> Or alternatively: Mary is n[ot] worthy of it.

6 ] (illegible ink traces)

### Notes to the Coptic text

→1: A probable restoration for the lacuna prior to first line and in →1: [ΠΕΤΗΔΜΕΣΤΕ ΠΕΔΕΙΩΤ ΔΗ ΜΗ ΤΕΔΜΔΔΥ ΔΗΔΩΡΗΔΑΘΗΤΗΣ ΝΔ]ΕΙ ΔΗ ΤΑΜΔΔΥ ΔC†ΝΔΕΙ ΠΩ[ΝΖ . . . ] ([“Whoever does not hate his father and his mother will] not [be able to become] my [disciple]. My mother gave me li[fe]”) can be suggested based on comparison with *GosThom* 101 (49:32-50:11); cp. also Luke 14:26 (Sahidic).

ΤΑΜΔΔΥ ΔC†ΝΔΕΙ ΠΩ[ΝΖ can be analyzed as follows: ΤΑΜΔΔΥ is the extraposed subject<sup>36</sup> (feminine singular possessive article ΤΑ plus noun ΜΔΔΥ). ΔC is the past tense conjugation base with feminine singular personal intermediate. †ΝΔΕΙ ΠΩ[ΝΖ consists of the double-object infinitive †ΝΔC which “takes two objects always immediately suffixed in a string, one after another, expressing personal recipient + thing given.”<sup>37</sup> The absence of the direct object marker ḡ before ΠΩ[ΝΖ is therefore well-established. The orthographic variation of this construction, however, is indicated by a variant found in *Gospel of Thomas* 50.1 which reads ΔC† ΝΔΕΙ ḡΠΩΝΖ with the direct object marker ḡ before ΠΩΝΖ.

→2 ΠΕΧΕ ḡΝΔΑΘΗΤΗΣ ḡḲ ΧΕ This sentence contains the suffixally conjugated verboid ΠΕΧΕC which “signals direct discourse in past time”; it is almost always completed by

<sup>36</sup>Layton, *A Coptic Grammar*, ¶ 330, p. 256.

<sup>37</sup>Layton, *A Coptic Grammar* ¶173, p. 135.



ⲭⲉ “to introduce reported discourse.”<sup>38</sup> The disciples are addressing their remarks to Jesus.

→3 ⲁⲣⲏⲁ ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁⲙ ⲡⲓⲡⲱⲗ ⲡⲓⲙⲐⲥ ⲁⲓ can be analyzed as follows: ⲁⲣⲏⲁ (Graeco-Coptic related to the Greek ἄρνέομαι) can be intransitive<sup>39</sup> or transitive (with the direct object marker ⲏ-/ⲙ- before the entity term). Here the previous sentence must end with the ⲁⲣⲏⲁ because if ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁⲙ were the object of ⲁⲣⲏⲁ, it would need to be marked by the direct object marker ⲡ. A durative sentence (ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁⲙ ⲡⲓⲡⲱⲗ ⲡⲓⲙⲐⲥ) follows, with a definite subject (ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁⲙ) and durative infinitive (here the transitive verb ⲡⲓⲡⲱⲗ with object marked by ⲡⲓⲙⲐⲥ meaning “to be worthy of”).<sup>40</sup> There is no clear antecedent for the feminine singular personal suffix ⲥ. The sentence could be restored to end with the negator ⲁⲓⲛ, but this is not required grammatically. The ⲁ could also begin a new sentence.

→4: ⲡⲉⲭⲉⲛ ⲓⲥ ⲛⲁⲮ ⲧⲁⲒⲓⲙⲉ ⲙⲏⲓ Although not standard, the absence of ⲭⲉ following ⲡⲉⲭⲉⲛ to introduce direct discourse is attested in the *Gospel of Thomas*, which also varies its usage of ⲡⲉⲭⲉⲛ with and without ⲭⲉ.<sup>41</sup> In line 2→ above the standard form of

<sup>38</sup> Layton, *A Coptic Grammar* ¶380 p. 302-303; see also ¶ 517, p. 426.

<sup>39</sup> See for example Acts 4:16 and John 18:27 in George William Horner (ed.), *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect otherwise called Sahidic and Thebaic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911, 1922), v. 3, p. 286 and v. 6, p. 72.

<sup>40</sup> Our thanks to reviewer three for helpfully suggesting this analysis.

<sup>41</sup> See the index to the *Gospel of Thomas* in Bentley Layton (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7* (Nag Hammadi Studies 20; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989) 270. In an email of Sept. 7, 2012, Shisha-Halevy indicated that Manichaean texts also offer occurrences of ⲡⲉⲭⲉⲛ with and without ⲭⲉ. Here we are not including consideration of “the intercalability of the parenthetic ⲡⲉⲭⲁⲓ” (see Ariel Shish-Halevy, *Coptic Grammatical Categories. Structural Studies in the Syntax of Shenoutean Sahidic* [Analecta Orientalia 53; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum 1986] 162-163) since the situation of such cases does not apply here.

πϵχϵ with χϵ appears, indicating the usage is variable here as well. I do not therefore judge this to be a case of an error requiring emendation, nor an indication of the fragment's inauthenticity.

The antecedent of the third person plural personal suffix (γ) of the preposition ηλϛ is most probably “the disciples” (see →2), establishing that the fragment contains a dialogue between Jesus and the disciples.

The meaning of ταρμϵ as “my wife” is unequivocal; the word can have only this meaning. Given that Jesus is the speaker, the possessive article indicates that he is speaking of his wife.

Given the dialogue form, Jesus seems to be addressing his disciples (which does not precluding her presence among the other disciples, especially given the following line's affirmation that “she is able to be my disciple”).

Just before πϵχϵ an oblique stroke (/) appears. Its function is unclear. It may be the upward stroke of an upsilon, but that is unlikely given its shape.

→5 ϸηλϛω̄μλϛϑητϑϸ ηλϛϵι can be analyzed as durative sentence composed of a third person feminine single personal prefix of the durative sentence (ϸ) with future (ηλ), verbal auxiliary ω (“be able to”), prenominal infinitive (̄) with zero article phrase (ηλϛϑητϑϸ) and preposition (ηλϛ) with first person single suffix pronoun object (ϵι). Layton notes that the durative sentence ̄ plus zero article phrase means “have/perform the function of, have the characteristic of.” Moreover, it can have “*ingressive* meaning, expressing entry into a state; in other words, the distinction between being and becoming

is cancelled.”<sup>42</sup> The sentence should therefore be understood to mean that “she” will be able to perform the functions of, or have the characteristics of being (or becoming) a disciple. Assuming Jesus is speaking here, the prepositional phrase  $\text{ⲛⲁⲉⲓ}$  indicates she will be able to be/become a disciple “to me,” i.e., to Jesus.

→ $\text{ⲙⲁⲣⲉⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩⲩ ⲱⲁⲓⲉ}$  is a non-durative sentence with the jussive conjugation base  $\text{ⲙⲁⲣⲉⲗ}$ . The jussive expresses a command and is used only in dialogue.<sup>43</sup> This sentence offers two interesting features. The first was noted by Shisha-Halevy who writes, “Grammatically,  $\text{ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩⲩ}$  is very interesting, for this is a case of zero-determined generic noun a antecedent of a relative (not circumstantial!).”<sup>44</sup> While unusual, it attests to an as-yet only partially understood phenomenon.

The other issue is the lexical identification of the infinitive. King initially suggested that the infinitive might be  $\text{ⲱⲁⲓ}$ , a previously unattested form of  $\text{ⲱⲱⲓ}$  (be destroyed).<sup>45</sup> Given the proverbial character of calls for the wicked to be destroyed, this seemed to offer a well-attested meaning. Both the third reviewer and Shisha-Halevy,<sup>46</sup> however, found this suggestion unpersuasive, and offered instead  $\text{ⲱⲁⲓⲉ}$  (“swell”). Luijendijk had already noted that  $\text{ⲱⲱⲓ}$  is regularly used of places not persons, and she, too, had argued for  $\text{ⲱⲁⲓⲉ}$  (“swell), which is often used to describe unpleasant bodily

<sup>42</sup> Layton, *A Coptic Grammar*, 141.

<sup>43</sup> See Layton, *A Coptic Grammar*, ¶340, p. 268.

<sup>44</sup> Email communication September 7, 2012. See also Ariel Shisha-Halevy, *Topics in Coptic Syntax: Structural Studies in the Bohairic Dialect* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 160; Leuven, Paris, and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007) 351-2, 489 n.19, 597-599; and “Bohairic-Late Egyptian Diagloses” in Dwight W. Young (ed.), *Studies Presented to Hans Jakob Polotsky* (East Gloucester, MA: Pirtle & Polson, 1981) 413-438.

<sup>45</sup> See Walter E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939) 609b. Crum also offers one case of  $\text{ⲱⲁⲓⲉ}$ , a noun meaning “desert” (idem, 610a)

<sup>46</sup> Email September 7, 2012.

tumors, illness, and swellings.<sup>47</sup> King, too, is now convinced that  $\omega\alpha\iota\epsilon$  (“swell”) is the preferable reading.

→7  $\lambda\text{NOK } \dagger\psi\text{OOPI NMM}\lambda\text{C } \epsilon\text{TB}\epsilon \text{ } \Pi\lceil$  is a durative sentence with an extraposed topic ( $\lambda\text{NOK}$ , the personal independent), first person single personal prefix of the durative sentence ( $\dagger$ ), qualitative infinitive ( $\psi\text{OOPI}$ ), preposition ( $\text{NMM}\lambda\text{C}$ ) with third person feminine suffix pronoun object ( $\text{C}$ ). The preposition  $\epsilon\text{TB}\epsilon$  + infinitive forms an infinitive phrase (“in order to, to”).  $\epsilon\text{TB}\epsilon \text{ } \chi\epsilon$  + main clause means “because” but the ink traces at the end of the line make the letter  $\chi$  impossible.

→8 This damaged line contains only one visible word, the noun  $\text{ZIK}\omega\text{H}$  with the indefinite article ( $\text{OY}$ ).

### Genre

With a fragment this small, it is impossible to claim too firm a conclusion regarding the question of genre. The evidence, however, points toward classification as a gospel, possibly a post-resurrection dialogue gospel.<sup>48</sup> The suggestion that this fragment

<sup>47</sup> See Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary*, 610.

<sup>48</sup> Current discussion on the question what constitutes a gospel is quite lively. The primary issues concern 1) distinguishing the use of the term “gospel” as the early Christian message from the literary form of gospel (as a life of Jesus, defined primarily by reference to the canonical gospels); 2) determining more narrowly the characteristics of this gospel genre; and 3) determining inclusion or exclusion from a list of early Christian gospels on the basis of theological criteria. For the contours of this debate, see Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM Press/Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990); N. T. Wright, “When is a Gospel not a Gospel?”; James A. Kelhoffer, ““Gospel” as a literary title in early Christianity and the question of what is (and is not) a “gospel” in canons of scholarly literature,” in *Jesus in apokryphen Evangelienüberlieferung* (ed. Jörg Frey and Jens Schröter; Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 254; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010)

belongs to a gospel genre is not meant to imply either that it fits specific theological criteria or that it narrates a life of Jesus. Rather, the genre of gospel is defined here capaciously to include all early Christian literature whose narrative or dialogue encompasses some aspect of Jesus's career (including post-resurrection appearances) *or* which designates itself as "gospel" already in antiquity.<sup>49</sup> It is not possible to speculate whether the term "gospel" would have been a part of the ancient title of the work to which this fragment belongs; the title, *The Gospel of Jesus's Wife*, was invented solely to facilitate modern reference.

The categorization of the fragment as gospel literature is based on two grounds. First, the extant text of *GosJesWife* presents a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples. In the first line of the fragment, someone (probably Jesus) speaks in the first person singular ("my mother"), then in →2-4a the disciples address Jesus directly. His response takes up the rest of the preserved text. On the verso, another instance of "my mother" occurs, indicating more direct speech. It is not clear whether our text also contained

399-422; Christoph Heil, "Evangelium als Gattung," in Thomas Schmeller (ed.), *Historiographie und Biographie im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* (Berlin: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009) 63-94. For discussion of the genre of the gospel dialogue, see Judith Hartenstein, "Dialogische Evangelien," in *Antike christliche Apokryphen*, I 2, 1051-8; *Die zweite Lehre. Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen als Rahmenerzählung frühchristlicher Dialoge* (Texte und Untersuchungen; Akademie Verlag, 1998); Silke Petersen, 'Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!' *Maria Magdalena, Salome & andere Jüngerinnen Jesu in christlich-gnostischen Schriften* (Nag Hammadi Studies 48; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 35-93. It is sometimes debated in scholarly literature whether small fragments are indeed parts of entire new gospels or rather sermon material containing dialogues. An example is the discussion of P.Cair.Cat. 10735, which Grenfell and Hunt in the ed. princ. described as a gospel, but whose classification Adolf Deißmann disputed (see Thomas Kraus, "Der Papyrus Cairensis 10735 (P.Cair.Cat. 10735)" in Christoph Marksches and Jens Schröter, *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung* (2 vols; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2012) vol. I, 373-4. Another example is the disputed classification of the *Gospel of the Savior* ( see Joost Hagen, "Ein anderer Kontext für die Berliner und Straßburger 'Evangelienfragmente': Das 'Evangelium des Erlösers' und andere 'Apostel-evangelien' in der koptischen Literatur," in Frey and Schröter, *Jesus in apokryphen Evangelienüberlieferungen*, 339-71).

<sup>49</sup> Our list would therefore essentially parallel the material included in the recent collection in Marksches and Schröter, *Antike christliche Apokryphen*.

narrative passages. Dialogues are familiar constituents of early Christian gospel literature, both in canonical and extra-canonical gospels.<sup>50</sup> The latter category includes examples of texts that consist largely of dialogues between Jesus and disciples or among the disciples, for instance, the *Gospel of Mary*, a text with which our papyrus shares some features. Such dialogues are often narratively situated after the resurrection, but they can also occur prior to the crucifixion, as in the *Gospel of Judas* or the *Gospel of the Savior*.

Second, the *Gospel of Jesus's Wife* discusses discipleship in terms similar to select passages in other early Christian gospels, including the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Mary*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. There is nothing in the fragment to indicate a post-resurrection setting. The topics of family and discipleship are found in accounts in the New Testament gospels set during Jesus' ministry. Again, however, the size of the fragment makes a conclusion either way uncertain.

### Interpretation

The aim of this analysis is not to reconstruct the historical Jesus, that is, to argue whether the historical Jesus had a wife or was celibate. The material discussed below provides no reliable historical information for that discussion. Nor do I argue that historically there is any evidence that if Jesus was married, it was to Mary Magdalene. She appears in the most reliable historical information as a prominent disciple of Jesus. Rather, the importance of the *Gospel of Jesus's Wife* lies in supplying a new voice within the diverse chorus of early Christian traditions about Jesus that documents that some Christians depicted Jesus as married. The attempt below to place this fragment among

<sup>50</sup> See esp. Petersen 'Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!', and Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*.

those traditions is not intended to suggest that similar materials (“parallels”) constitute direct literary sources. Rather other literature is employed comparatively to aid in interpretation and in placing the fragment intelligibly within the range of early Christian attitudes, ideas, and practices. Determination of the closest comparands also aids in determining the date and provenance of the composition (in Greek?) of the previously unknown literary work which is fragmentarily preserved in this papyrus. The interpretation below proceeds as though the authenticity of the fragment were firmly established.

The first four extant letters of →1, εΙΔΝ, may be the conclusion of a well-known Jesus saying found in *GosThom* 101,<sup>51</sup> Luke 14:26 (Q 14:26),<sup>52</sup> and Matt 10:37:

*GosThom* 101 (49.32-50.1): ΠΕΤΑΜΕΣΤΕ ΠΕΡΕΙ[ΩΤ] ΔΝ ΗΝ ΤΕΦΜΑΑΥ ΝΤΑΖΕ  
 ΦΝΑΩΡ Μ[ΑΘΗΤ]ΗC ΝΔΕΙ Δ(Ν) ΔΥΩ ΠΕΤΑΜΡΡΕ ΠΕΡ[ΕΙ]ΩΤ ΔΝ Η]Ν ΤΕΦΜΑΑΥ  
 ΝΤΑΖΕ ΦΝΑΩΡ Μ[ΑΘΗΤΗC ΝΔ]ΕΙ ΔΝ ΤΑΜΑΑΥ ΓΑΡ ΝΤΑC[. . . . . ] [. .]ΟΛ  
 ΤΔ[ΜΑΑ]Υ ΔΕ ΝΜΕ ΔC† ΝΔΕΙ ΝΠΩΝΖ (“Whoever does not hate his fat[her] and his  
 mother in my way will not be able to become my d[iscip]le, and whoever does  
 [not] love his [father a]nd his mother in my way will not be able to become [my]  
 dis[ciple]. For my mother is she who [ ]. But my true [moth]er gave me life.”)

<sup>51</sup> Unless otherwise noted, citations and English translations of the Coptic text of the *Gospel of Thomas* are from Bentley Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7, 52-92*.

<sup>52</sup> All citations of New Testament literature in Coptic are from Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament*, with occasional modifications by King.

Luke 14:26 χε πετνηγ φαροι ν̄μοστε αν̄ μ̄περειωτ μ̄ν τεφμααγ μ̄ν  
τεφρσιμε μ̄ν νεφωηρε μ̄ν νεφρσνηγ μ̄ν νεφρσωνε ετι δε τεφρετ̄γχη μ̄ν  
σομ ν̄ερμαθητης ναι

“For whoever follows me and does not hate his father and his mother and his wife  
and his children and his brothers and his sisters and even his own soul (life) is not  
able to become my disciple.”

Matt 10:37, 39

πετμε μ̄ειωτ η μααγ ερογεροι ν̄μ̄πωα μ̄μοι αν̄ αγω πετμε μ̄ωηρε ρι  
ωεερε ερογεροι ν̄μ̄πωα μ̄μοι αν̄ ... πενταρζε ετεφτ̄γχη φηασορμεσ  
αγω πενταρσωρ̄μ̄ νεφτ̄γχη ετβηητ φηα ρε ερος

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me and whoever  
love sons and daughters more than me is not worthy of me. ... Whoever found his  
soul (life) will lose it, and whoever lost his soul (life) on my account will find it.”

Restoration of some version of this saying is highly likely given the parallel  
construction in line →5 (“she will be able to be my disciple”), as well as similarity to the  
order found in *GosThom* 101, where the saying about the attitude toward father and  
mother is followed by a similar saying about Jesus’s mother. Although it is not possible  
to determine which version of the saying, or even a new version, might be found in  
*GosJesWife*, the closest parallels are with the version in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Not only  
does it end with same four letters extant in our papyrus (εϊαν), as does the Lukan version,  
but it also continues with a comparable saying about Jesus’s mother giving him life. The  
restoration of [πετναμεστε πεφειωτ αν̄ μ̄ν τεφμααγ φηαω̄ρ̄μαθητης να]ει αν̄



ΤΑΜΑΔΥ ΔΟΤΗΔΕΙ ΠΩ[ΝΩ . . .] ([“Whoever does not hate his father and his mother will not [be able to become] my [disciple]. My mother gave me li[fe]”) is therefore highly likely.

The point of the sayings in *GosJesWife* →1 also appears to be closer to that of the *Gospel of Thomas* than to the Gospels of Matthew or Luke. The sayings cluster in Matt 10:1-42 occurs in Jesus’s instructions as he commands his disciples to go out to preach and heal. Just before Jesus teaches them to love him more than their families or even their own lives (Matt 10:37, 39), he has declared his purpose is “not to bring peace, but a sword” and to divide household members from each other (Matt 10:34-36). The point seems to be that the mission and loyalty to Jesus override familial relations, and that suffering and death for his sake will bring (eternal) life. The point of Luke 14:26 also concerns the cost of discipleship: leaving home, family, and possessions to follow Jesus, and even to be willing to lose one’s life.

In contrast, the version in *GosThom* 101 makes a distinction between mothers and fathers whom one should hate and those one should love. Jesus then offers a clarifying example of his own mothers—his (birth?) mother and his “true” mother.<sup>53</sup> It is, however, not clear precisely what this distinction implies. Although not immediately contiguous with *GosThom* 101, sayings 99 and 105 may help clarify its point.<sup>54</sup> In

<sup>53</sup> Suggestions for restoration of the lacuna at 49:36-50:1 include  $\bar{\nu}\tau\alpha\zeta[\chi\pi\omicron\iota\ \alpha\sigma\upsilon\omicron\lambda\tau\ \epsilon\beta]\omicron\lambda$  (“she who [gave me birth, she destr]oyed [me].”) and  $\bar{\nu}\tau\alpha\zeta[\tau\ \eta\delta\epsilon\iota\ \bar{\eta}\pi\iota\delta]\omicron\lambda$  (“she [dec]eived [me].”); see *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* (ed. Kurt Aland; 3<sup>rd</sup> corrected and expanded printing; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001) 543, n. 143, 145. These restorations suggest either a connection between physical birth and destruction (death), thereby contrasting physical birth with spiritual life, or a contrast between falsehood and truth. While both are possible, in my opinion, the former reading conveys a better sense.

<sup>54</sup> Indeed the relation of sayings 99 and 101 are rendered more difficult by placing between them saying 100 about paying taxes to Caesar. So, too, sayings 102-104 seem to concern unrelated issues.

saying 99, when the disciples tell Jesus that his brothers and mother are “standing outside,” he replies, “Those here who do the will of my father are my brothers and my mother” (*GosThom* 49.21-26). (Versions of this saying are also found in Mark 3:31-35, Matt 12:46-50, Luke 8:19-21, and *The Gospel of The Ebionites* 5, indicating it was relatively widespread.<sup>55</sup>) The point would seem to be that one’s true familial relations are determined by obedience to God the Father, not natal relations. In *GosThom* 105, Jesus says, “Whoever knows father and mother<sup>56</sup> will be called the child of a harlot” (*GosThom* 50:16-18), suggesting that birth through lust is being sharply differentiated from identity as the child of a divine Father (and Mother?).<sup>57</sup>

It appears that similar points about discipleship, family relations, or identity are being made in *GosJesWife*, but it does not contrast family members one should hate from those one should love, nor does it appear to be offering a contrast between mothers, as is found in *GosThom* 101. Instead a clue to the crux of the matter lies in the disciples’ response that immediately follows in →3, in which the worthiness of Mary is being discussed, and later in →5 when Jesus argues that “she is able to be my [i.e., Jesus’s] disciple.” Both seem to indicate that the topic under discussion concerns questions or challenges about family and discipleship.

<sup>55</sup> For *Gospel of the Ebionites* 5, see Epiphanius *Haer.* 30.14.5.

<sup>56</sup> ΠΕΙΩΤ ΜΝ ΤΗΔΔΥ refer here to the names of classes of persons, not individuals.

<sup>57</sup> A similar point seems to be made distinguishing Jesus’s true father from his putative parent in *GosPhil* 55:23-36, which identifies Mary as the “virgin whom no power defiled” and says of Jesus’s father: “And the Lord [would] not have said, ‘My f[ather who is i]n heaven’ unless [he] had had another father, but he would have simply have said, “[My father].” Unless otherwise noted, the Coptic text and English translations (with occasional modification by King) of the *Gospel of Philip* are cited from Wesley H. Isenberg, “The Gospel According to Philip” in Bentley Layton (ed.) *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2-7 together with XIII,2\**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1), and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655.* (Nag Hammadi Studies 20. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989).

In asking what might more specifically be inferred by the disciples' statement in →3: ἀρῆναι μαριὰμ ἢ πῶς ἄξιός ἐστιν; (“... deny. Mary is (n[ot]?) worthy of it”), the first issue concerns what is being said about Mary here. Because the word “deny” ends the previous sentence, which is otherwise lost in the lacuna, it is not clear what is being denied, or indeed if the disciples are saying that something cannot be denied.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, depending upon whether or not one restores the end of the extant line with the negator ἀ[ν] the disciples may be saying that Mary is worthy or that she is not worthy.

The second issue is to identify Mary: Is she Jesus's mother (→1) or his wife (→3)? Scholars have long noted “the confusion of Marys” in early Christianity, due not least to the ubiquity of this name (Maria, Mariam, Mariamme<sup>59</sup>) for Jewish women in the period.<sup>60</sup> One of the most influential confusions has been the identification of Mary of Magdala with three other figures: Mary of Bethany (John 11:1-2; 12:1-3), the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11), and the sinner woman (Luke 7:37-38), resulting in the erroneous portrait of Mary Magdalene as a repentant prostitute.<sup>61</sup> Another is the confusion of Jesus's mother with Mary of Magdala, and even the substitution of the

<sup>58</sup> As, for example, in the scene in Acts where the rulers and elders are examining the bold speech of Peter and John. Consulting with each other about the sign that has been manifested, they conclude in Acts 4:16: “it is not possible for us to deny (it)” (ἴμῶν δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀρῆναι).

<sup>59</sup> For discussion of the form of these names for Mary, see Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 64 ns.34, 35; Silke Petersen, ‘Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!’, 251-252; François Bovon, “Mary Magdalene in the Acts of Philip” in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (ed. F. Stanley Jones. SBL Symposium Series 20. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002) 75-89, see pp. 75-80.

<sup>60</sup> A survey by Tal Ilan concludes that almost a quarter of all recorded names of Jewish women in Palestine between 330 B.C.E. and 200 C.E. are Mary (“Notes on the Distribution of Jewish Women's Names in Palestine in the Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 40.2 (1989) 186-200. Six of the sixteen named women in the New Testament are called “Mary”: the mother of Jesus, Mary of Magdala, Mary of Bethany, Mary the mother of Jakob and Joses, Mary of Clopas, the “other” Mary.

<sup>61</sup> See Jane Schaberg, “How Mary Magdalene Became A Whore,” *Bible Review* 8 (1992) 30-37, 51-52; idem, “Thinking Back through the Magdalene,” *Continuum* 1.2 (1991) 71-90.

mother for her, for example as the first witness to the resurrected Jesus in John 20:11-17.<sup>62</sup> These confusions make one cautious in identifying to whom “Mary” refers here.

Might it be Jesus’s mother? Overwhelmingly, portraits of Mary as the blessed, virginal mother of Jesus in early Christian literature are entirely positive, so much so that she eventually becomes a significant figure of veneration.<sup>63</sup> Yet, there is a tradition that on one occasion Jesus ignored his mother and brothers who were standing outside, and declared instead that whoever does the will of God is his brother, his sister, and his mother. This tradition was also widespread, as we have seen, appearing in Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, *Thomas* and *Gospel of the Ebionites*, and it could conceivably be tied to the statement here about the worthiness of Mary. In *GosJesWife* →1, Jesus states only that his mother gave him life, a positive depiction. On the other hand, *if* he had also just stated (in the preceding lacuna) that one must hate one’s father and mother in order to be his disciple, might not this juxtaposition have confused the disciples and led them to

<sup>62</sup> See Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Harvard Theological Studies 51; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) 123-142. Stephen J. Shoemaker questions whether the Mary found in a number of “Gnostic” works should be identified as Jesus’s mother rather than Mary of Magdala, given this confusion; cf. “Rethinking the ‘Gnostic Mary’: Mary of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala in Early Christian Tradition,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001), 555-595; “A Case of Mistaken Identity? Naming the Gnostic Mary” in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (ed. F. Stanley Jones. SBL Symposium Series 20. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002) 5-30. Shoemaker’s view, however, is refuted convincingly in my judgement by Antti Marjanen, “The Mother of Jesus or the Magdalene? The Identity of Mary in the So-Called Gnostic Christian Texts” in Jones, *Which Mary*, 31-41; and Anne Graham Brock, “Setting the Record Straight—The Politics of Identification. Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother in the *Pistis Sophia*,” in Jones, *Which Mary*, 43-52.

<sup>63</sup> Early interest was shown especially in Mary as the virgin mother of Jesus and as a kind of anti-type to Eve (see, for example, *Protoevangelium of James*; Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* I,12, 33; *Dialogue with Trypho* 100; Melito of Sardis, *On Easter* 123; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III, 22; *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 33; Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, esp. 17,1-5; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* VI, 15 and VII, 16; *The Pedagogue* I,6; Origen, *Commentary on John* 32, 16; *Commentary on Romans* 3,10; Hippolytus, *Against Noetus* 17). For discussion of the cult of Mary, see Chris Maunder (ed.), *Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London and New York: Burns and Oates a Continuum imprint, 2008).

ask whether they should reject Jesus's mother Mary as worthy? If this restoration of the saying (about hating one's parents) is correct, it is plausible that the disciples' statement about the worthiness of Mary relates to some confusion on the part of the disciples about his mother, a confusion similar to that addressed in the widespread tradition that the disciples mistake Jesus's true family (or mother) for his birth family (or mother). But why, then, does Jesus respond in the next line (4→) by talking about his wife, rather than by clarifying the identity and worthiness of his mother? If we read the statement above as an affirmation by the disciples that Jesus's mother Mary is worthy, there may be no need to defend his mother's worthiness and he may be turning in →4 to the topic of his wife for the first time. In this case, Mary in →3 may refer to his mother, not his wife.

On the other hand, we can ask whether it might instead be Jesus's wife whose worthiness is being denied, questioned, or defended by the disciples in →3 (depending upon whether the restoration of  $\lambda_{[N]}$  is correct or not), especially because Jesus's response in →4-5 defends her ability to be his disciple. If so, this means that *GosJesWife* is identifying Jesus's wife as "Mary" in →3. It is highly likely that this Mary would have been understood to be Mary of Magdala, given the existence of early Christian traditions which identified a close relationship between Jesus and Mary, and some which questioned Mary's worthiness. Let's examine these traditions more closely.

The tradition of Mary of Magdala as an honored disciple of Jesus is well attested from the first century gospels, and is emphasized even more strongly in a variety of literature from the second and third centuries, notably *The Gospel of Mary*, *The Dialogue*

of the Savior, *The Gospel of Philip*, and *Pistis Sophia*.<sup>64</sup> It was not until relatively late that Mary of Magdala was misidentified as a (repentant) prostitute, most clearly by Pope Gregory in the late sixth century.<sup>65</sup> Prior to the fourth century, she appears as a follower of Jesus during his ministry, was present at his crucifixion and burial, and, in the Gospel of John, is the first witness to the resurrection.<sup>66</sup> Yet in a number of these texts Mary's status as a leader or disciple is directly challenged, notably by Peter.<sup>67</sup> *GosThom* 114, for example, states: ΠΕΧΕ ΣΙΜΩΝ ΠΕΤΡΟΣ ΝΑΥ ΧΕ ΜΑΡΕ ΜΑΡΙΖΑΜ ΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΖΗΤῆ ΧΕ ΝΣΖΙΟΜΕ ΜΠΥΑ ΑΝ ΜΠΩΝΖ ("Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary leave us for women are not worthy of life'.")<sup>68</sup> Here Peter's rejection of Mary provides the opportunity for Jesus to refute the radical exclusion of all women from salvation (a position otherwise completely unattested in Christian literature). Our fragment seems to concern only Mary not all women, but it, too, contains some comment about her worthiness (→3). What is not clear is *what* she is worthy or unworthy of. It cannot be "life" because the object of

<sup>64</sup> For an excellent study of Mary Magdalene in this literature, see Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved. Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies XL. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996).

<sup>65</sup> See Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003) 151-152.

<sup>66</sup> See e.g., Mark 15:40-41, 47; Matthew 27:55-56, 61; Luke 8:1-3. For a fuller discussion of portraits of Mary of Magdala in the New Testament and early Christianity, see Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene. Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New York and London: Continuum, 2002).

<sup>67</sup> For a full discussion, see Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Harvard Theological Studies 51; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) especially pp. 73-104. She analyzes the representation of Mary of Magdala and Peter in early Christian literature, documenting the competition between the two in the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Mary*, and *Pistis Sophia*, among others. Brock suggests that this literature points toward historical controversies among early Christians over women's authority. She concludes that the passages in these texts which portray Peter and Mary in conflict "show no direct literary dependence upon each other. These texts ... derived from independent traditions and survived in widespread locations. This breadth in chronology and geography indicates that controversy between the figures of Mary and Peter does not represent a local conflict of short duration nor one that is dependent upon a single literary trajectory, but rather reflects an issue faced in many literarily unrelated texts from widely dispersed locations" (104).

<sup>68</sup> *GosThom* 51:18-20.

unworthy is grammatically f. sg. (ἄμωο), while “life” in Coptic is m. sg. Nor does it parallel Matt 10:37 where Jesus speaks of being “worthy of me,” because “me” again would require a masculine singular personal suffix. Grammatically, the antecedent could be τῆν μαθησίν (“discipleship”), which would make sense, but lacks any documentary basis. In any case, our fragmentary papyrus provides no clues as to *why* Mary’s worthiness is under discussion. Certainly there is no suggestion that the author knows anything of the later, erroneous tradition about Mary Magdalene being a prostitute. The extant portion of our fragment clearly indicates only that Jesus defended his wife, declaring her to be able to become his disciple (*GosJesWife*→5). So, too, Jesus declares in *GosThom* 114 that he is able to lead Mary so that she may become a living spirit and enter the kingdom of heaven.

In the *Gospel of Mary*, we have a case where questions about Mary’s worthiness are directly tied to the close relationship of Jesus and Mary.<sup>69</sup> Andrew and Peter both challenge the reliability of Mary’s teaching, and Peter goes so far as to imply that she is lying about having received this teaching from the Savior (*GosMary* 17:10-22). He seems disturbed (by jealousy?) at the implication that the Savior loved Mary more than the other (male) disciples (*GosMary* 17:22). But Levi defends her, stating that the Savior made her worthy: εἰς αὐτὴν ἔθηκεν ἄξιον ὁ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν ἵνα ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐκβάλωμεν αὐτήν (‘‘If the Savior made her (Mary) worthy, who are you (Peter) to cast her out’’ [*GosMary* 18:10-12]<sup>70</sup>). Although the precise terms used in the *Gospel of Mary* are different from

<sup>69</sup> For further discussion of this dialogue, see King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 83-90.

<sup>70</sup> Coptic text of the *Gospel of Mary* is cited from R. McL. Wilson and George MacRae, ‘‘The Gospel of Mary’’ in *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2-5 and V with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4*. (ed. Douglas Parrott; Nag Hammadi Studies 11. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979) 456-471.

*GosJesWife* →3, according to Crum the Greek ἄξιός can render the Coptic ⲙⲡⲱⲗ.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover the semantic meaning of ⲛⲞϮⲬ ⲈⲐⲞⲗ (“cast out, discard”) and ⲗⲣⲛⲗ (“deny, reject”) are not far apart.

These two cases from the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Mary* identify Mary as the disciple whose status was being challenged, and in both cases her worthiness is defended by appeal to Jesus, the Savior. So, too, in *GosJesWife* →5, Jesus declares that “she is able to be/come my disciple”. This statement immediately follows Jesus’s reference to “my wife” in →4, indicating his affirmation that the ability to become his disciple concerns his wife, not his mother. This line of interpretation, then, suggests that it is the worthiness of Jesus’s wife, not his mother, which is being discussed. If so, then Jesus’s wife is named “Mary” here and can presumably be identified with Mary Magdalene. It is she who he declares is able to be his disciple.

It still remains unclear, however, *who* is raising the issue of Mary’s worthiness. The lacuna extending from the end of →2 to the beginning of →3 obscures whether the disciples themselves are raising the question of Mary’s worthiness, or whether they are only asking Jesus about why some other persons are doing so. That it might not be the disciples could be indicated by Jesus’s fragmentary maxim in →6 regarding the destruction of “wicked people.” Might Jesus there be condemning those who have questioned Mary’s worthiness? Certainly Peter is not singled out, as in the *Gospels of Thomas* and *Mary*, but might the saying be directed against other Christians whose views the author of *GosJesWife* is opposing? Or might the “evil people” instead be outsiders? This latter possibility seems unlikely given that there is no tradition of non-Christians

<sup>71</sup> See *A Coptic Dictionary*, 179.



challenging Mary Magdalene's worthiness.<sup>72</sup> It therefore seems plausible that the question of Mary's worthiness belongs to an intra-Christian controversy, such as we see in the *Gospels of Thomas* and *Mary*.<sup>73</sup>

Another reason for identifying the Mary of *GosJesWife* 3→ with Jesus's wife in 4→ are early traditions that Jesus and Mary had a particularly intimate relationship. Although no extant early Christian writing other than *GosJesWife* unequivocally represents Jesus as married, two writings in particular have previously led scholars to ask whether Jesus and Mary may have been married.<sup>74</sup> My question, however, is not whether they actually were married, but rather whether these texts represent them as being married.

The first is the *Gospel of Mary*, which we have already considered briefly. In it, Peter states that the Savior loved Mary "more than other women" (10:1-3), and asks her to recount teaching from the Savior that the other disciples may not have received. Her words, however, demonstrate her superior understanding of the Savior's teaching and testify to her particular qualifications to be an apostle and teacher of the male disciples.

<sup>72</sup>In contrast, we do know that non-Christians made accusations against claims about the virginity of Jesus's mother, for example, by the anti-Christian philosopher Celsus (see Origen, *Contra Celsus* I,32-39).

<sup>73</sup> Although again the fragmentary nature of our text makes it difficult to speculate on the nature of this controversy, comparative data offer (at least) three possibilities: women's leadership roles, the interpretation of Jesus's teachings, and Christian teaching on sexuality and marriage. These are not mutually exclusive.

<sup>74</sup> This question has been raised with new intensity in the face of claims that Jesus was married, notoriously by Dan Brown's novel *The DaVinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), but also by historians, notably William E. Phipps, *Was Jesus Married? The Distortion of Sexuality in the Christian Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970). In contrast, John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Vol. 1. The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 332-345, has argued on historical grounds that it was unlikely that Jesus was married. While many others have engaged the topic, Phipps and Meier provide a strong overview of the shape of the arguments based on evidence from the New Testament and early Judaism, and Phipps in particular considers later church history. The most general consensus among historians of ancient Christianity is that the issue cannot be settled definitively given the silence of the earliest and most historically reliable sources for the historical Jesus.

It is this favored status that Andrew, but especially Peter, react to with jealousy. Levi defends Mary by emphasizing, “If the Savior made her worthy, who are you to reject her? Assuredly the Savior’s knowledge of her is completely reliable. That is why he loved her more than us” (18:10-15).<sup>75</sup> The language of Jesus’s knowing Mary and loving her is highly suggestive of an intimate, even sexual relationship, but generally scholars, King among them,<sup>76</sup> have tended to dismiss this language, not only as evidence about the historical Jesus’s marital status, but even as an indication that the ancient Christians who wrote and read the *Gospel of Mary* understood Jesus and Mary to be married. There are several excellent reasons to take this position. The earliest and most historically reliable evidence is entirely silent about Jesus’s marital status. Tradition speaks of Jesus’s loving male disciples as well, for example John 15:12, employing the same verb (*ἀγαπάω*) used in the Greek fragment of *Gospel of Mary* (P<sup>Ryl.</sup> 463 22.25), without any suggestion of a sexual relationship. Moreover, the *Gospel of Mary* clearly represents Mary’s status to be that of a pre-eminent disciple whom Jesus loved not just more than other women, but more than the men as well.<sup>77</sup> But most persuasive is the argument that Mary’s status as beloved disciple is based upon her superior understanding of Jesus’s teaching, not upon

<sup>75</sup>The Berlin Codex reads: ΕΩΧΕ ΔΙΠΩΤΗΡ ΔΕ ΔΑΔ ΝΑΖΙΟΥ ΝΤΚ ΝΙΜ ΔΕ ΖΩΩΚ ΕΝΟΧΣ ΕΒΟΛ ΠΑΝΤΩΣ ΕΡΕΠΩΤΗΡ ΣΟΟΥΗ ΝΗΟΔ ΔΑΦΑΛΩΣ ΕΤΒΕ ΠΑΪ ΔΑΦΟΥΩΤ ΝΖΟΥΟ ΕΡΟΝ ΜΑΛΛΟΝ. Compare the Greek of P. Ryl. 463: εἰ ο σωτη[ρ] αξιαν αυτην ηγησατο συ τις ει εξουθενων αυτην παντως γαρ εκεινος ειδωσ αυτην ασφ[αλ]ω[ς] ηγαπησεν (Greek text from Wilson and MacRae, “The Gospel of Mary,” 468).

<sup>76</sup> See Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003) 145-146.

<sup>77</sup> King has argued that what is at stake in the portrayal of Mary in the *Gospel of Mary* concerns the question of who is able to preach the gospel and on what basis. Mary is given a central role in *GosMary*, not only because she may historically have been a leader in the early Jesus movement, but in order to demonstrate that sex/gender identity is not the basis for preaching the gospel; rather what is at stake is the proper understanding of Jesus’s teaching (see Karen L. King, “Why All the Controversy? Mary in the *Gospel of Mary*” in *Which Mary* (ed. Jones), 53-74.



you love her more than us?’ The Savior replied to them, saying, ‘Why do I not love you in the way (I love) her?’”).

The statements that Jesus loved Mary Magdalene more than the other disciples and kissed her often can be interpreted in sexual terms, but, as with the *Gospel of Mary*, they could also be read to refer metaphorically to spiritual, not carnal relations. This perspective is strengthened by considering *GosPhil* 58:26-59:6, which interprets the Christian practice of greeting each other with a kiss to be a mode in which spiritual truth is conveyed.<sup>80</sup>

Indeed the exchange of a kiss is explicitly presented as effecting *spiritual* reproduction:  $\bar{\eta}\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota\omicron\varsigma\ \gamma\alpha\rho\ \rho\eta\tau\bar{\eta}\ \omicron\upsilon\pi\iota\epsilon\iota\ \epsilon\gamma\omega\ \alpha\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\gamma\chi\pi\omicron\ \lambda\iota\alpha\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron\ \lambda\omicron\nu\omicron\eta\ \rho\omega\omega\eta\ \tau\bar{\eta}\dagger\ \mu\iota\ \epsilon\rho\bar{\eta}\ \bar{\eta}\bar{\eta}\nu\epsilon\rho\eta\gamma$  (“For it is by a kiss that the perfect conceive and give birth. For this reason we also kiss one another”; *GosPhil* 59:2-4). The jealousy of the other disciples would seem to be an indication that they did not understand that this kissing has a spiritual meaning.

The fact that both reproduction and kissing are described spiritually (*GosPhil* 58:26-59:6) does not, however, require that the *Gospel of Philip* rejected actual marriage and reproduction. In fact, a variety of sources indicate that the Christian group associated with *GosPhil*, the Valentinians,<sup>81</sup> married. In *Stromateis* III,1.1, Clement of Alexandria

<sup>80</sup> In “Performing Family: Ritual Kissing and the Construction of Early Christian Kinship” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10.2 (2002) 151-174, Michael Penn shows that kissing was a common practice in the Greco-Roman world as a greeting among family members; indeed who one did or did not kiss to a great extent defined the boundaries of family relations. By making the exchange of kisses central to Christian practice, he argues, Christians were engaged in redefining family: “These ritual performances (of kissing) helped early Christianity produce a new kind of family, a community formed not by biological relationship but by a kinship of faith” (167). He also notes that both Christian ritual kisses and familial kisses were on the lips (156, 159). Thus the restoration of  $\tau\alpha\lambda\pi\rho$  (“mouth”) at *GosPhil* 64:36 is highly likely. Moreover, the verb  $\alpha\sigma\pi\alpha\zeta\epsilon$  (Greek  $\acute{\alpha}\sigma\pi\acute{\alpha}\zeta\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$ ), often translated neutrally as “greet,” probably implies a kiss of greeting (e.g., *GosMary* 8:12-13).

<sup>81</sup> For more on Valentinian Christianity, see Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed. The Church of the ‘Valentinians’* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006).

writes, “The Valentinians, who derive marital unions (*syzygies*) from the divine emanations from above, find marriage acceptable (εὐαρεστοῦνται “well pleasing”).”<sup>82</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I,6.4,<sup>83</sup> also indicates that the Valentinians believed that “the ineffable and unnamable *syzygia* came down from above” and that it is necessary to marry in this life to attain to the truth.<sup>84</sup> And the *Testimony of Truth* (NHC IX,3.56-58) condemns heretics who allow sexual intercourse, among them apparently Valentinus and his disciples.<sup>85</sup> It would therefore be entirely plausible that the *Gospel of Philip* might approve of marriage.<sup>86</sup>

If so, it may be that a second passage points toward marriage with Mary Magdalene. *GosPhil* 59:6-11 reads:

NE OΥΝ ΨΟΜΤΕ ΜΟΩΨΕ Μῆ ΠΧΟΕΙC ΟΥΟΕΙΩ ΝΗΜ ΜΑΡΙΑ ΤΕΦΜΑΑΥ ΑΥΩ  
 ΤΕCΩΝΕ ΑΥΩ ΜΑΓΔΑΛΗΝΗ ΤΑΕΙ ΕΤΟΥΜΟΥΤΕ ΕΡΟC ΧΕ ΤΕΦΚΟΙΝΩΝΟC ΜΑΡΙΑ  
 ΓΑΡ ΤΕ ΤΕΦCΩΝΕ ΑΥΩ ΤΕΦΜΑΑΥ ΤΕ ΑΥΩ ΤΕΦQΩΤΡΕ ΤΕ (“There are three who  
 always walk with the Lord: Mary his mother and her sister and Magdalene, who  
 is called his *koinōnos*. For Mary is his sister and his mother and the one he is  
 joined with.”).

<sup>82</sup> Greek text in Otto Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus. Stromata Buch I-VI* (GCS 15; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1906), 195; English translation by King.

<sup>83</sup> See Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau (ed. and trans.), *Irénée de Lyon. Contre Les Hérésies Livre I*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1979, 68-101.

<sup>84</sup> This approval of marriage is not, however, a blanket recommendation for sexual license, since, as Irenaeus indicates, the Valentinians distinguished marriage of the truth from worldly marriages which are driven by the passion of desire (ἐπιθυμία), a distinction also made by *GosPhil* 82.2-8.

<sup>85</sup> These testimonies from detractors have occasionally been dismissed as attempts to slander heretics, but the growing consensus is that Valentinians did indeed marry.

<sup>86</sup> This position was taken already by Phipps, *Was Jesus Married?* 135-138. He suggested, moreover, that this tradition in the *Gospel of Philip* goes back to first-century Palestine and “provides documentary validation of the hypothesis that Jesus married, and marriage to Mary Magdalene is one possible option that could fit into the New Testament portrayal of Jesus” (137). Neither of these views is historically plausible in my opinion.

These references to Mary Magdalene as Jesus's *κοινωνος* and *ζωτρε* are particularly suggestive. Both terms have been translated neutrally as “companion,”<sup>87</sup> and indeed neither necessarily implies marriage or sexual intercourse. On the other hand, they could. At *GosPhil* 82.1 and 78:18, the related Greco-Coptic verb *r-koinônei* clearly refers to heterosexual intercourse.<sup>88</sup> The use of the word group *ζωτρε* (“join, unite”) for sexual intercourse and marriage<sup>89</sup> as well as ritual unification in the *Gospel of Philip* only underscores that it, too, could imply sexual union in marriage.<sup>90</sup> It is therefore plausible to read this passage as a reference by Jesus to Mary Magdalene as “his lover”<sup>91</sup> and as “the one he is joined with,” i.e., in marriage, a marriage that was not merely spiritual (typological or *ikonikos*; *GosPhil* 65:12; 72:15) but that was understood to include sexual intercourse.

It may be, then, that the *Gospel of Philip* (as well as the *Gospel of Mary*?) assumes the same position taken by *GosJesWife*: that Jesus was married to Mary (of

<sup>87</sup> For example by Wesley W. Isenberg in Layton (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2-7*, 159.

<sup>88</sup> *GosPhil* also uses this verb to refer to relations between evil spirits and souls (65:1-4), *logos* with *logos*, light with light, and humans with light (78:30, 31; 79:2).

<sup>89</sup> The ancients referred to marriage as a yoking together, “the yoke of marriage,” *ρζωτρε* *μπακμνος* (*lege gamos*), see E. A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Homilies in the Dialect of Upper Egypt edited from the Papyrus Codex Oriental 5001 in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1910), 47, referenced by Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary*, 726b. *ζωτρε* can also translate the Greek *σζυγία*, a word signifying a “yoke of animals,” but also with the sexual connotation of “coupling, copulation.” Moreover, in Greek, married partners are commonly referred to as *σζυγος* (“yoked together, paired, united,” esp. by marriage), with the feminine substantive meaning “wife” (see Henry George Lidell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart James, *A Greek-English Lexicon* [9<sup>th</sup> rev. ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996]).

<sup>90</sup> See the discussion of Herbert Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus. Anfänge einer Theorie des Sakraments im koptischen Philippusevangelium (NHS 11 3)* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 88; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 97-100; also Jorunn J. Buckley and Deirdre J. Good, “Sacramental Language and Verbs of Generating, Creating, and Begetting in the *Gospel of Philip*,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5.1 (1997) 1-19, see 2-3, 12, 15.

<sup>91</sup> Bart D. Ehrman translates the term *koinônos* as “lover” in *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 41.

Magdala). This point is perhaps furthered by attention to the verso of the papyrus. Although this side of the papyrus is badly damaged and the ink is quite faint, the two words which are decipherable at ↓1 and ↓2 (“my mother” and “three”) point in an elusive but tantalizing direction at *GosPhil* 59:6-11 (cited above). Moreover, the wording of →7 and →8 (“I dwell (or exist) with her” and “an image”) might be elucidated by reference to the *Gospel of Philip*. Addressing this connection will require further analysis of how the *Gospel of Philip* understood the relationship of Jesus and Mary, and what that might imply about its attitude toward marriage and reproduction, before turning back to reflection on how these may relate to *GosJesWife* →7-8.

I am convinced by Hans-Martin Schenke’s extraordinarily fine and detailed exegesis of the *Gospel of Philip* that this work is best understood as a set of excerpts from a single treatise, probably written in the second half of the second century.<sup>92</sup> It has long been recognized that one of the main topics of these excerpts is ritual, including “the bridal chamber.”<sup>93</sup> Since the initial publication of the *Gospel of Philip*, scholars have engaged in considerable discussion and debate about the nature of the ritual practices *GosPhil* names: ἀπλοεἰ[ς ᾤ]ζωβ νῆμ ζῆνοῦμῦστηριον οὐβα[π]τισμα μῆ οὐχρισμα μῆνοῦεὐχαρ[ιστ]ῆ μῆοῦσῶτε μῆνοῦνῆμφων (“The Lord did everything in a mysterious mode: a baptism and a chrism and a eucharist and a redemption and a bridal chamber” 67:27-30). In particular discussion has focused on whether these were separate rituals or parts of a single ritual, how these rites were performed, and how to interpret the many statements that the *Gospel of Philip* makes about them. Most persuasive in my

<sup>92</sup> See *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 6-8; on the date, 4-5. Schenke suggests that the excerpts are from the mission speeches in a now lost *Acts of Philip*, but a more precise determination of the source work is not necessary for the point being established here.

<sup>93</sup> For a thorough discussion of the evidence for Valentinian ritual, see Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 333-414, esp. concerning *GosPhil*, see 341-350 and 90-102.

opinion are the arguments of those who see these as a single, initiation ritual,<sup>94</sup> which involved water baptism, anointing with oil, and a eucharist meal. Schmid has argued, to me persuasively, that this entire complex of ritual actions may have been collectively referred to as “the bridal chamber.”<sup>95</sup> This initiation ritual almost certainly involved the practice of exchanging a kiss<sup>96</sup> (perhaps in conjunction with the eucharist), but did not include sexual intercourse,<sup>97</sup> as has sometimes been suggested.<sup>98</sup>

But why refer to this ritual as “the bridal chamber”?<sup>99</sup> Apparently the language of marriage, sexual union, and reproduction were crucial to articulating the *Gospel of Philip*’s conceptuality of salvation, especially the importance of unification. To understand the centrality of the bridal chamber, it is necessary to set out briefly the relevant points, even though no brief review can do justice to the rich complexity of the topic.

<sup>94</sup> See esp. Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 372-377; Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 90-102, 341; Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus*, esp. 83-109

<sup>95</sup> Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus*, 103-105.

<sup>96</sup> *GosPhil* 59:2-6; see esp. Schenke’s discussion in *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 264-269; Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus*, 87, n. 331.

<sup>97</sup> See e.g., Hans-Martin Schenke, “‘Das Evangelium nach Philippus’. Ein Evangelium der Valentinianer aus dem Funde von Nag Hammadi,” *Theologische Literatur Zeitung* 84 (1959) 1-26, esp. 5; idem, *Das Philippusevangelium*; Michael A. Williams, “Realized Eschatology in the Gospel of Philip,” *Restoration Quarterly* 3[1971] 1-17; Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 405; Schmid, 108 n. 413, 120-127, 486.

<sup>98</sup> See e.g., Jorunn J. Buckley, “A Cult Mystery in the Gospel of Philip,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980) 569-581; April D. DeConick, “The True Mysteries. Sacramentalism in *The Gospel of Philip*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 55 (2001) 225-261, esp. 257-258.

It should also be noted that the different readings of the *Gospel of Philip* are tied not just to different interpretations of the ancient texts, but to different conceptualities of ritual theory (see here esp. Buckley, “A Cult Mystery”; Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus*, 26-44); it is this latter difference that is at stake in the various disagreements about whether to regard the bridal chamber as “mystery,” “sacrament,” or “ritual.” My assumptions in calling the bridal chamber a “ritual” follow Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>99</sup> See Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus*, 102 n. 388, for discussion of the specific terminology used.



Thomassen argues persuasively that the *Gospel of Philip* represents the initiation ritual in a complex of overlapping and mutually intersecting layers of protological references, salvation history, and effective ritual transformation.<sup>100</sup> According to the *Gospel of Philip*, death came into existence because Eve separated from Adam (*GosPhil* 68:22-26; 70:9-17<sup>101</sup>). The ritual of the bridal chamber effects the spiritual transformation of the initiand by uniting male and female (*GosPhil* 70:17-20), represented as the (present attainment of the) eschatological union of the redeemed person's true light-self with his or her heavenly twin (σύζυγος) or angel (*GosPhil* 58:10-14; 67:26-27). The ritual of the bridal chamber is thus necessary for salvation (*GosPhil* 86:4-8).<sup>102</sup> Simultaneously, certain acts in the life of Jesus are represented in terms of

<sup>100</sup> See Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 90-102. He argues that the *Gospel of Philip* collapses the sequential narrative of protology (93-94) and salvation history (101, 102) in the service of "synchronic typology and symbolism." For example, he concludes that *GosPhil* "collapses the incarnation, baptism, and crucifixion of Jesus into one single act. This also means that these events are less significant as acts, properly speaking, in the sense of episodes that can be placed one after the other in a sequential narrative, than in their common and mutually illuminating symbolism. Moreover, this symbolism is governed, it would seem, by the initiation ritual, which serves as its *Sitz im Leben*" (95). So, too, I would argue, allusions to the intimate relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene are less significant as historical actualities than for their usefulness to *GosPhil*'s symbolism of the bridal chamber ritual.

<sup>101</sup> *GosPhil* 70:4-17: ΝΕ ΜΠΕΤΣΩΜΕ ΠΩΡΧ ΕΦΟΟΥΤ ΝΕΣΝΑΜΟΥ ΑΝ ΠΕ ΜΗ ΦΟΟΥΤ ΠΕΦΠΩΡΧ ΝΤΑΖΩΠΠΕ ΝΑΡΧΗ ΝΠΜΟΥ ΛΙΑ ΤΟΥΤΟ ΑΠΕΧΡ̄Σ ΕΙ ΧΕΚΑΔΣ ΠΠΩΡΧ ΝΤΑΖΩΠΠΕ ΧΙΝ ΦΟΡΠ ΕΦΝΑΣΕΖΩΦ ΕΡΑΤΦ ΠΑΛΙΝ ΝΦΖΟΤΡΟΥ ΝΠΝΑΥ ΑΥΩ ΝΕΝΤΑΖΜΟΥ ΖΗ ΠΠΩΡΧ ΕΦΝΑ† ΝΑΥ ΝΠΟΥΩΝΖ ΝΦΖΟΤΡΟΥ ΨΑΡΕ ΤΣΩΜΕ ΛΕ ΖΩΤΡ̄ ΑΠΕΣΖΑΕΙ ΖΡΑΙ ΖΗ ΠΠΑΣΤΟΣ ΝΕΝΤΑΖΩΤΡ̄ ΛΕ ΖΗ ΠΠΑΣΤΟΣ ΟΥΚΕΤΙ ΣΕΝΑΠΩΡΧ ΛΙΑ ΤΟΥΤΟ ΔΕΥΖΑ ΠΩΡΧ ΑΛΛΑΜ ΧΕ ΝΤΑΣΖΩΤΡ̄ ΕΡΟΦ ΑΝ ΖΗ ΠΠΑΣ[ΤΟ]Σ ("If the woman had not separated from the man, she would not die with the man. His separation became the beginning of death. Because of this the Christ came in order to repair the separation which happened from the beginning (and) again unite the two, and to give their life to those who died in the separation, and unite them. For the woman is united to her husband in the bridal chamber. For those who are united in the bridal chamber will never be separated. Because of this Eve separated from Adam because she did not unite with him in the bridal chamber.") See also *GosPhil* 71:16-21: "Adam came into being from two virgins, from the spirit and from the virgin earth. Christ, therefore, was born from a virgin to rectify the fall which occurred in the beginning."

<sup>102</sup> *GosPhil* 86:4-8: ΕΡΩΑ ΟΥΑ ΩΩΠΠΕ ΝΨΗΡΕ ΝΠΝΥΜΦΩΝ ΦΝΑΧΙ ΝΠΟΥΟΕΙΝ ΕΤΗ ΟΥΑ ΧΙΤΦ ΕΦΠΝΕΕΙΜΑ ΦΝΑΧΙΤΦ ΑΝ ΝΠΕΚΕΜΑ ("If anyone becomes a child of the bridal chamber, he will receive the light. If anyone does not receive it while he is in this place, he will not receive it in the other place.")



kissing and marriage.<sup>106</sup> These, too, I argue, would have been considered by the *Gospel of Philip* to be paradigmatic events for ritual-symbolic enactments to effect redemption.

What attitude toward marriage and reproduction is then implied by the *Gospel of Philip*'s imagery and theological speculation about intercourse and reproduction, as well as by the ritual practices of the bridal chamber? That sexual intercourse was not part of the ritual of the bridal chamber, does not mean that Christians who went through this initiation ritual did not marry and have children. Rather, I would argue that the effective performance of the ritual of the bridal chamber was considered to have a real impact on actual marriage,<sup>107</sup> insofar as Christians thought that unification in the bridal chamber exorcised polluting demons from the soul<sup>108</sup> and enabled them to have intercourse not from lustful desire, but by the exercise of the will:

*GosPhil* 82: 2-8: ΟΥΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΓΑΡ ΠΕ ΠΓΑΜΟΣ ΠΙΚΟCΜΟC ΠΗΝΕΝΤΑΧΙΖΙΜΕ  
ΕΩΧΕ ΠΓΑΜΟC ΠΠΧΩΖΗ ΕΖΗΠ ΠΟCΩ ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΠΓΑΜΟC ΠΑΤΧΩΖΗ ΟΥ  
ΜΥCΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΠΕ ΠΑΛΗΘΕΙΝΟΝ ΟΥCΑΡΚΙΚΟΝ ΔΗ ΠΕ ΑΛΛΑ ΕCΤΕΒΒΗΥ ΕCΗΠ ΔΗ  
ΑΤΕΠΙΘΥΜΙΑ ΑΛΛΑ ΕΠΟΥΩΩ (“For the marriage of the world is a mystery for  
those who have taken a wife. If the marriage of defilement is hidden, how much  
more is the undefiled marriage a true mystery. It is not fleshly, but pure. It  
belongs not to desire but to the will.”)

<sup>106</sup> While Thomassen's illuminating study considers carefully the role of these other cats beyond baptism, I did not find any discussion of the question of Jesus being married.

<sup>107</sup> April D. DeConick argues that “human marriage is reflective of the perfect marriage that takes place in the heavenly realm” (“The True Mysteries,” 246-247, see also 246-250, 252-253 on the relation of ritual and human marriage). While I am not persuaded by her thesis that Jewish mystical traditions provide keys to interpreting the *Gospel of Philip*, she helpfully shows that comparable kinds of thought and practice can be seen among some Jews and Hermeticists as well (245, 250-256).

<sup>108</sup> See *GosPhil* 65:1-12, especially in light of the discussion of Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 350-352.

This distinction between the defiled intercourse of non-Christians and the undefiled marriage of those who have entered the bridal chamber emphasizes that only Christian marriage can be pure. For the *Gospel of Philip*, then, the statement that one receives the truth in the bridal chamber carries more impact than mere intellectual apprehension; it makes the moral life possible.<sup>109</sup> We see here, then, an exemplification of how *GosPhil* intricately overlays protology (the separation of Adam and Eve), spiritual transformation (unification in bridal chamber), historical events of salvation (Jesus’s life as a symbolic-paradigmatic model, including his relation to Mary Magdalene as his spousal partner), and a moral-social ethos (proper marriage, including sexual relations, that are pure because they occur according to a will directed to spiritual matters, and are not polluted by improper desire and demonic influence).

We can now return to the question of how to read *GosJesWife* →7 and →8, where Jesus says, “As for me, I dwell/exist with her because of ... an image.” It is tantalizing to read these lines in terms of the *Gospel of Philip*’s ritual theology. Jesus may be explaining to his disciples the meaning of his relationship with Mary, and doing so in terms of the technical terminology of “image.” As the *Gospel of Philip* 67:9-18 says,

ΤΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ ΜΠΕΣΕΙ ΕΠΚΟΣΜΟΣ ΕΣΚΑΚΑΖΗΥ ΑΛΛΑ ΝΤΑΣΕΙ ΖΗ ΝΤΥΠΟΣ ΜΗ  
 ΝΖΙΚΩΝ ΚΗΑΧΙΤΕ ΑΝ ΝΚΕΡΗΤΕ ΟΥΝ ΟΥΧΠΩ ΝΚΕΣΟΠ ΦΟΟΠ ΜΗΝΟΥΖΙΚΩΝ  
 ΝΧΠΟ ΝΚΕΣΟΠ ΦΩΕ ΑΛΗΘΩΣ ΑΤΡΟΥΧΠΟΟΥ ΝΚΕΣΟΠ ΖΙΤΗ ΖΙΚΩΝ ΑΦ ΤΕ  
 ΤΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΣ ΑΥΩ ΘΙΚΩΝ ΖΙΤΗ ΘΙΚΩΝ ΦΩΕ ΕΤΡΕΣΤΩΟΥΝ ΠΗΝΥΜΦΩΝ ΜΗ ΘΙΚΩΝ  
 ΖΙΤΗ ΘΙΚΩΝ ΦΩΕ ΕΤΡΟΥΕΙ ΕΖΟΥΗ ΕΤΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ ΕΤΕ ΤΑΕΙ ΤΕ ΤΑΠΟΚΑΤΑΣΤΑΣΙΣ

<sup>109</sup> See DeConick, “The True Mysteries,” 247-251.

("The truth did not come into the cosmos naked, but it came in types and images. It will not receive it in any other way. There is a rebirth and an image of rebirth. It is necessary for truth to be born again through the image. What kind is the resurrection and the image? It is necessary to arise through the image. The bridal chamber and the image? It is necessary to enter into the truth, which is the restoration, through the image.")<sup>110</sup>

Might *GosJesWife* also understand Jesus's actual marriage to Mary as an image that leads to the truth? The Coptic of →7 †ϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲛⲙⲙⲁϥ can be understood as "I dwell with her," implying cohabitation, or more existentially as "I exist with her," implying unification. While this ambiguity might be clarified by material lost in the lacuna, it may also be that the ambiguity has a purpose to relate actual marriage (cohabitation) with spiritual existence (unification). In any case, Jesus's relation to his wife could be a "symbolic paradigm" (an image) by which Jesus is instructing his disciples not only about the nature of salvation, but also about correct sexual relations, as in the *Gospel of Philip*.

### Summary and Conclusions

What can be said securely is that our fragment contains the first known statement that explicitly claims Jesus had wife. It consists of a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples. It is also highly likely that some version of the widespread Jesus sayings about family and discipleship appeared in the lines just before the extant material on the recto. Certain is that Jesus speaks of his mother and his wife, one of whom is referred to as

<sup>110</sup> The English translation here follows the exegesis of Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 45, 374-377.

Mary. The worthiness of this Mary is a topic of discussion. Jesus argues that some woman (most probably his wife) is able to become his disciple. He issues a statement against “evil people.” He says that he dwells or exists “with her,” and goes on to mention “an image.” On the verso, apart from the adverbial particle εβολα (“forth”) the only clear words are “my mother ” and “three.” The reference to “my mother” makes it highly likely that this is a statement from Jesus.

In addition, I have suggested above a number of additional possibilities for reading *GosJesWife*:

- The main topics under discussion concern questions or challenges about family, discipleship, and marriage.
- The “Mary” whose worthiness is being discussed in →3 is more likely to be Jesus’s wife rather than his mother, and consequently Jesus’s wife is probably meant to be identified as Mary Magdalene.
- Reference to “my mother” and “three” in ↓1 and ↓2 may possibly indicate a statement similar to that of *GosPhil* 59:6-11 (that Jesus’s mother, her sister, and Mary Magdalene are three who always walk with the Lord).
- The *Gospel of Philip*’s position on the salvific importance of marriage does offer one documented context which makes coherent sense of a scene in which Jesus is teaching his disciples that his wife, Mary, is his disciple and the one with whom he dwells/exists, and that his marriage to her is an “image,” that is, a symbolic paradigm for conveying teaching about pure marriage and sexuality. In this light, while acknowledging uncertainty, it is possible to suggest that *GosJesWife* might offer a similar perspective.

While these suggestions are plausible within the context of early Christian thought and practice, our papyrus is much too fragmentary to sustain these readings with certainty. Even the impressively close parallels with other gospels of the period does not ensure that similar language carries the same or similar meanings. Early Christian literature attests only too well how various theologians interpreted a shared set of Jesus traditions quite differently. In this context, it is important to note that no direct literary relationship among the *Gospels of Thomas, Mary, or Philip* exists. Nor does the dialogue of our fragmentary gospel appear to stem directly from any one of these second century works. Rather *GosJesWife* provides yet another attestation to the liveliness and complexity of the early Christian Jesus tradition.

Minimal as these conclusions are, they still leave open the issue raised already by Fecht in the early 1980's: Does this fragment constitute evidence that Jesus was married? In our opinion, the late date of the Coptic papyrus (c. fourth century), and even of the possible date of composition in the second half of the second century, argues against its value as evidence for the life of the historical Jesus. The earliest and most historically reliable Christian literature is utterly silent on the issue, making the question impossible to answer one way or the other.

Whether the Christians responsible for the composition, distribution, and translation of this work thought Jesus was married is, however, a different question. The *Gospel of Jesus's Wife* makes it possible to speak with certainty of the existence of a tradition affirming that Jesus was married (probably to Mary Magdalene), and it is highly probable that this tradition dates to the second half of the second century. This

conclusion has significant implications for the history of ancient Christian attitudes toward marriage, sexuality, and reproduction.

Over the last decades, scholars have produced a rich literature that illustrates the enormous diversity of early Christian perspectives regarding matters of sex, gender, reproduction, and marriage. But despite this diversity, Christians seem to have agreed on one point: that overcoming the passions, including sexual desire (ἐπιθυμία), was a necessary part of moral purification and spiritual perfection.<sup>111</sup> There were, however, a broad range of views about how to overcome the passions, and especially about whether overcoming desire was compatible with sexual intercourse in marriage. Controversies arose early and were often heated. Already in the oldest extant literature, the letters of Paul, we hear of questions about whether to marry or engage even in marital relations (1 Cor 6-7).<sup>112</sup> First century gospels also indicate that Jesus weighed in against divorce and indicated that the resurrected state of believers would be like the angels in heaven who “neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Mark 12:25; cp. Luke 20:35).<sup>113</sup> Some “Christianized” marriage by admonishing familial households to retain a patriarchal

<sup>111</sup> In this regard, Christians reflect and reproduce moral attitudes that were widespread in the ancient Greco-Roman Mediterranean world. The passions are not to be confused with modern notions of the emotions, but rather were seen as affective states (fear, grief, desire, and pleasure) that arise from *false* beliefs (see, e.g., Martha Nussbaum, “The Stoics on Extirpation of the Passions,” *Apeiron* 20 (1987) 129-77).

<sup>112</sup> Paul’s written statements on the topic left considerable confusion and gave rise to quite contradictory opinions (see Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior. Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006); Benjamin H. Dunning, *Specters of Paul: Sexual Difference in Early Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

<sup>113</sup> All Christians known to us imagined that the final immortal state of believers excluded not only desire but sexual intercourse and reproduction. This position was shared even by those who represented that state quite differently (e.g. as a fleshly, psychic, astral, or spiritual body, or as an immaterial entity) and who took different positions on the role of sexuality and intercourse in this life; see Taylor G. Petrie, *Carnal Resurrection. Sexuality and Sexual Difference in Early Christianity* (Th.D. Dissertation. Harvard University, 2010).



household order based on analogy to the model of divine rule.<sup>114</sup> 1 Timothy argued in Paul's name that women are saved by bearing children (2:15) and that those who "forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from goods which God created" are demon-possessed and liars (4:13). But the positions that 1 Timothy decried were indeed held by many Christians in the early centuries. These believers rejected sex and marriage, arguing that the life of celibacy, embodied most pristinely by virgins, was the true and highest path to God and a preview of the future of resurrection, even if Paul allowed marriage as a concession to those who "burn" (1 Cor 7). Some went so far as to argue that the purpose of the Savior's mission in the world was to end carnal procreation.<sup>115</sup>

With Clement of Alexandria, however, we can see one articulation of the position that would come to dominate Christian sexual ethics for centuries to come. In an extensive treatment of the topic of sexuality and marriage (*Stromateis* III), he argues that while certainly virginity and celibacy are good for those to whom God grants these gifts, Christians alone are able to have sexual intercourse in marriage without desire because of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. "We are children of will, not desire," he states.<sup>116</sup> Sexual intercourse, Clement argues, should be for the purpose of reproduction alone and be completely without passion—a husband should not have desire even for his wife.<sup>117</sup> Other Christians agreed that the ideal was sexual intercourse in marriage without

<sup>114</sup> See, for example, the so-called household codes in Eph 5.21-6.9; Col 3.18-4.1; 1 Pet 2.18-3.7.

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* III,9.63; *Testimony of Truth* 30:28-30; cp. *Dialogue of the Savior* 144:15-22.

<sup>116</sup> Clement Alex., *Stromateis* III,58. He is probably referring to John 1:12-13 which states that those who receive the Word of God (Jesus) and believe in his name are able to become "children of God, children born not from blood nor from the desire of the flesh, nor from human will but from the will of God" (ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, οἳ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν).

<sup>117</sup> Clement Alex., *Stromateis* III,58.

desire, notably Sethian Christians in *The Secret Revelation of John*<sup>118</sup> and Valentinian Christians in *The Gospel of Philip*.

Rarely, however, did these early Christians raise the issue of Jesus's marital status. To my knowledge, Clement of Alexandria is the first to report of some second century Christians "who say outright that marriage is fornication and teach that it was introduced by the devil. They proudly say that they are imitating the Lord who neither married or had any possession in this world, boasting that they understand the gospel better than anyone else."<sup>119</sup> Tertullian (ca. 160-230), too, stated that Christ did not wed, although he invoked Jesus's celibacy not to forbid marriage, but to charge believers against a *second* marriage.<sup>120</sup> As a high valuation of celibacy and virginity flourished, the position that Jesus was a virgin who never married comes to be dominant, even though the extreme denunciation of marriage is rejected. By the late 3<sup>rd</sup> to early 4<sup>th</sup> c., John Chrysostom argued that while sexual intercourse within marriage was allowed, celibacy was superior—far, far superior. After all, he points out, Jesus did not marry.<sup>121</sup>

*The Gospel of Jesus's Wife* now lets us see that, probably already in the second century, other Christians held that Jesus was married. Its existence also makes it more plausible that other second century texts, like *The Gospel of Mary* and *The Gospel of the*

<sup>118</sup> *The Secret Revelation of John* represents the reproduction of Seth by Adam and Eve as a mimetic representation of ideal of the divine patriarchal household above and divine generativity that contributes to human salvation (see Karen L. King, "Reading Sex and Gender in the *Secret Revelation of John*." *The Journal of Early Christian Studies* 19.4 [2011] 519-538).

<sup>119</sup> *Stromateis* III,6.49 (trans. Henry Chadwick, *Alexandrian Christianity* [The Library of Christian Classics 2; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954] 62-63). Clement may very well be referring here to the second century figure Tatian (see *Stromateis* 3.6.81-82), whom Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 1.27.1) and Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 4.29) regarded as the founder of the Encratites, a designation for certain persons or groups who rejected marriage.

<sup>120</sup> See *On Monogamy* 5.5, where he describe the last Adam, that is Christ, as "innuptus in totem" (Paul Mattei, *Tertullien. Le Mariage unique (De monogamia)*. [Sources Chrétiennes 343. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1988] 150-153).

<sup>121</sup> *On Virginity* 11.1; 13.4. Such examples could easily be multiplied.

*Egyptians*, also held that Jesus was married. In short, we are now able to document a second century controversy over Jesus's marital status, tied directly to questions about whether Christians should marry and have sexual intercourse,<sup>122</sup> and if so, why. Indeed it appears that the issue of Jesus's marital status first arose only a century or more after his death. Positions about Jesus's marital status (both for and against his being married) were intimately caught up in the wider sets of assumptions and broad controversies among Christians over sexual ethics and practices in the early centuries of the formation of Christianity.

The date of our Coptic fragment to the fourth century, along with the citation from Chrysostom, indicate that such controversies extended well into the third and fourth centuries—and of course they are alive into the modern period as well. Although the earliest witnesses are silent about whether Jesus married or not, that silence has proven pregnant with possibility for other voices to enter in and fill up its empty void with imagination—and controversy. The translation of *GosJesWife* into Coptic sometime before or during the fourth century (the approximate date of our manuscript) witnesses to continued interest in the tradition that Jesus married during the time in which monasticism in Egypt is beginning to take on institutionalized forms. Might *GosJesWife*'s explicit reference to the marital status of Jesus have been thrown onto a garbage heap, not (only?) because the papyrus itself was worn or damaged, but because the ideas it contained flowed so strongly against the ascetic currents of the tides in which Christian practices and understandings of marriage and sexual intercourse were surging? Perhaps. We will probably never know for sure. But what we have learned most

<sup>122</sup> I add this last clause “and have sexual intercourse” in the face of the practice of so-called celibate marriage.

definitely is that even tiny fragments of papyrus can offer surprises with the potential to significantly enrich our historical reconstruction of the range of ancient Christian theological imagination and practice.