

Dating Ancient Egyptian Papyri through Raman Spectroscopy: Concept and Application to Fragments of The Gospel of Jesus's Wife and the Gospel of John

Program Unit: Archaeology of Religion in the Roman World

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The Ancient Ink Laboratory is an interdisciplinary, interdepartmental working group based at Columbia University exploring the chemical nature of ancient inks. We have recently completed a systematic study of the Raman spectra of 17 Egyptian papyri spanning the 4th century BCE to 10th century CE. Close study of the spectra reveals specific variations that correlate closely with the date of the papyrus. This discovery thus enables us to determine the average Raman spectroscopic parameters as a function of manuscript date. The observed systematic variation in Raman spectral parameters with manuscript age establishes, in principle, a non-destructive scientific means for estimating the date of ancient Egyptian manuscripts written in carbon ink from the period defined by this study. We are now developing a sophisticated statistical method for interpreting our spectrographic data and deriving an explicit date for the manuscripts we test. We have applied this methodology to two recently-reported papyrus fragments that have been widely discussed: the "Gospel of Jesus' Wife" and a fragment with text from the Gospel of John. This report will present our data with respect to these two papyri in the context of our wider study and our current research.

Learning from Jesus' Wife: The Role of Online Scholarship in Creating and Exposing a Forgery

Program Unit: Digital Humanities in Biblical, Early Jewish, and Christian Studies

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Forgeries are by no means a new phenomenon, and have complicated the study of the Bible - and of history more generally - since long before the modern era. New technologies offer the promise of new ways to detect forgeries, but also provide new methods and resources for forgers to produce them. In recent years, we have witnessed online discussion becoming a major element in the assessment of a number of purportedly ancient artifacts (the Gospel of Jesus' Wife is but one well-known example). But we have also witnessed the use of blogs by non-academics to dispute the findings of mainstream archaeologists and historians, for instance about the existence of Nazareth in the time of Jesus, or even whether there was a historical Jesus at all. This paper will look at recent examples of scholarly interaction on blogs in investigating and discussing forgeries, in comparison with the investigation of such matters in the era prior to blogging and social media, to see whether the level of collaboration, the speed of progress, the reliability of conclusions drawn, and the impact on the consensus of scholars suggest that using blogs in this way represents a genuine improvement in our methods and approach.

From Scrolls to Scrolling: Making the Most of Shifting Modes of Scholarly Communication

Program Unit: Digital Humanities in Biblical, Early Jewish, and Christian Studies

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This paper intends to explore new and old modes and media of scholarly communication, their similarities and differences, and what opportunities today's humanists enjoy for their own scholarly expression and research. Two case studies will be explored: (1) A New Testament scholar's blog post that was substantially engaged and critiqued by a fellow scholar in a leading journal; and (2) The online scholarly (self-)publications that swayed reception of the authenticity of the "Gospel of Jesus' Wife" fragment. It will be shown that in spite of the effectiveness of some newer digital forms of scholarly publication, traditional publications still hold sway for many stakeholders. Even so, an argument can be made for scholars to increasingly take up (and value) the new and potential forms of digital publication, formal and informal.