

## The Gospel of Jesus's Wife: Evidence of Modern Forgery

A reference with sources and citations. *Warning*: this document contains spoilers.

For use with Ariel Sabar's *Veritas: A Harvard Professor, a Con Man and the Gospel of Jesus's Wife*.

[last update: August 17, 2020]

### OVERVIEW

Historians and literary scholars use a wide variety of evidence to decide whether a newfound manuscript is authentic or fake. In the case of a papyrus fragment known as "The Gospel of Jesus's Wife," internationally renowned scholars in a number of disciplines have concluded on multiple grounds that the manuscript is a fake. They believe that a modern forger wrote the Coptic text on a pre-cut scrap of genuinely ancient, probably Egyptian papyrus, using a soot-based ink as easy to make today as it was in antiquity.

How was it done? The strongest evidence suggests that the text is a patchwork of phrases "cut and paste" from an easily accessible online typescript of the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas. A retired computer programmer in Michigan had typed up an "interlinear" Coptic-English translation and posted it as a PDF to his popular Gospel of Thomas website in November 2002. Scholars believe that a forger with a basic grasp of Coptic downloaded the PDF, cherry-picked phrases from it, and used it to say something new that sounded like something old. The PDF has unique typographical errors in Coptic that are reproduced in the "ancient handwriting" of the Jesus's Wife papyrus; it also has unique English translation errors that recur in the English translation that came with the Wife papyrus. The presence of one-of-a-kind errors in two languages that trace to a single online source are powerful evidence of the forger's 21st-century source material.

The forgery is thought to have been done sometime between that November 2002 date and July 2010, when the papyrus's owner—a German immigrant and former Egyptology student named Walter Fritz—first emailed photos of it to Harvard Divinity School professor Dr. Karen King.

A case for forgery is often multidisciplinary. If done well, it draws on expertise ranging from handwriting examination, linguistic analysis, and historical research to microscopic imaging, laboratory studies, and investigations of provenance, or ownership history. Rarely is a single piece of evidence enough to deem a manuscript authentic or fake. But when many kinds of evidence point in the same direction—a phenomenon experts call "consilience"—scholars gain confidence in their conclusions.

For readers who want a deeper look, here is a detailed breakdown of some of the key pieces of evidence, along with sources and citations. *Note*: If you have not yet read *Veritas*, you may want to stop here, as this list contains a number of spoilers.

### HANDWRITING

Handwriting style has no known precedent in the ancient world, either for religious, literary, or informal manuscripts.

Source: (1) Dr. Malcom Choat, Macquarie University (Australia), preeminent papyrologist and paleographer of Coptic literary manuscripts. See, e.g., his article "The Gospel of Jesus's Wife: A Preliminary Paleographical Assessment," *Harvard Theological Review* 107 No. 2 (April 2014): pp. 160-162. See also Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 332-333.

Despite exhaustive search at request of Harvard's Dr. King, no good ancient comparisons found for handwriting.

Source: Dr. AnneMarie Luijendijk, Princeton University, papyrologist and scholar of early Christian manuscripts, former student of Dr. King's. See Sabar, *Veritas*, p. 333.

"Clumsy and labored" handwriting looks not like ancient script but "rather like what any of us [modern scholars] might produce—without practicing a lot." It looked like someone "not very experienced at writing on the surface of papyrus at all...To put it baldly—a fake."

Source: Dr. Stephen Emmel, University of Münster (Germany), Yale-trained senior expert on Gnostic manuscripts, worked at Cairo's Coptic Museum in the 1970s piecing together Nag Hammadi fragments for the definitive facsimile edition of the illustrious manuscripts. Member of the National Geographic team of scholars that oversaw the study of the gnostic Gospel of Judas. Quote is from Emmel's peer review of King's article at the request of *Harvard Theological Review*. See *Veritas* p. 287.

"It looks exactly like those texts we were writing at university, when we learned how to write Coptic"

Source: Nicola Hensel, top Egyptology master's student and classmate of Walter Fritz at the Free University in the early 1990s. Interview with Sabar, *Veritas*, p. 187

Formation of Coptic letters on the papyrus "looked like twenty-first-century handwriting"

Source: Dr. Alin Suci, Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities (Germany), senior researcher in Coptic biblical literature and paleography. See Sabar, *Veritas* p. 100.

#### GRAMMATICAL ERRORS ANCIENT WRITERS WOULD NOT MAKE

"This short fragment seems to contain four violations of basic Coptic grammar"

Source: Dr. Stephen Emmel, University of Münster (see full credentials above). Quote is from his peer review of King's article at the request of *Harvard Theological Review*. See *Veritas*, p. 287.

A "colossal double blunder" in the papyrus's grammar suggests a present-day European grappling with ancient Coptic—"a modern author who might have benefited from one more semester of Coptic."

Source: (1) Dr. Leo Depuydt, Brown University, Egyptologist and Coptologist, cataloger of the Coptic manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Collection, in email to editors of the *Harvard Theological Review*. See *Veritas* p. 105. (2) Depuydt, "The Alleged Gospel of Jesus's Wife: Assessment and Evaluation of Authenticity," *Harvard Theological Review* 107, no. 2 (April 2014): 172–189.

The papyrus contains a "grammatical monstrosity," "horrendous syntactic mash," a "Frankenstein" patchwork of errors

Source: Various Coptologists. See *Veritas* endnotes, bottom of p. 356.

#### THOROUGHGOING EVIDENCE OF COPYING FROM ONLINE 2002 PDF OF THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

The Gospel of Jesus's Wife is a patchwork of Coptic phrases cut and paste from the only surviving Coptic manuscript of the Gospel of Thomas. The sole original words are "my wife." In the few places where the author tries to stray from Thomas, "the fully inadequate knowledge of Coptic [is] evidenced."

Source: (1) Dr. Francis Watson, Durham University (U.K.), New Testament scholar, "The Gospel of Jesus' Wife: How a fake Gospel-Fragment was composed" (online September 26, 2012. (2) Dr. Leo Depuydt, Brown University, "The Alleged Gospel of Jesus's Wife: Assessment and Evaluation of Authenticity," *Harvard Theological Review* 107, no. 2 (April 2014): 172–89.

Coptic typos of in a typewritten PDF of the Coptic Gospel of Thomas—posted to the internet in 2002 by a hobbyist named Mike Grondin—are reproduced in the “ancient handwriting” on the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife. “The text contains at least five tell-tale signs of its modern origin, including the apparent replication of a typographical (and grammatical) error from Grondin’s [PDF] edition” of the Gospel of Thomas.

Source: Andrew Bernhard, Oxford-trained independent scholar, “The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife: Textual Evidence of Modern Forgery.” *New Testament Studies* 61, no. 3 ( July 2015): 335–55.

Unique English translation errors in the same PDF are reproduced in the English translation of the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife that Fritz gave to Dr. King. This suggest that a forger used the English in Grondin’s interlinear translation of Thomas to find useful Coptic phrases, which he then cobbled together anew to compose the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife. “Every single line of the owner’s purported ‘translation’ includes some textual feature suggestive of copying” from Grondin’s online PDF.

Source: Andrew Bernhard, Oxford-trained independent scholar, “Postscript: A Final Note About the Origin of the Gospel of Jesus’ Wife.” *New Testament Studies* 63, no. 2 (April 2017): 305–17.

Walter Fritz lied to Dr. King, saying he did not read Coptic and that someone had done the translation in the 1980s. Later, when pressed by *Veritas* author Sabar, he admitted doing the translation himself but still denied consulting Grondin’s 2002 online PDF. Still later, when pressed with further evidence, Fritz acknowledged having printed out the PDF, having it on his shelf, and using it in connection with the Wife papyrus.

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 248-250.

## INK APPLICATION

The chunky letters—a few with forks and hairline streaks—look as though they had been applied by a brush. The trouble, historically, is that Egyptian scribes stopped using brushes more than two centuries before Christ, after which they were replaced by a calamus, or reed pen. By the eighth century A.D., brushes would have been anachronistic. The advantages of a brush for a modern forger is that it’s much more forgiving on the rough surface of a papyrus than a reed pen would be.

Sources: (1) Dr. Myriam Krutzsch, chief papyrus conservator at Berlin’s Egyptian Museum, and Dr. Ira Rabin, archaeological scientist with Germany’s Federal Institute for Materials Research and Testing, “Material Criteria and their Clues for Dating”, *New Testament Studies* 61 No. 03 (July 2015): pp 356 – 367. (2) Dr. Gregg W. Schwendner, Wichita State University, THE “GOSPEL OF JESUS WIFE” AS A QUESTIONED DOCUMENT: What Would Simulated Ancient Writing look like” (April 2014, posted on academia.edu)

Intensive firsthand examinations of the fragment reveal ink on papyrus fibers where ink shouldn’t be if a scribe had actually applied the ink in antiquity. It also reveals the absence of ink on fibers where there should have been ink, had a scribe applied the ink in antiquity.

Sources: (1) Dr. Malcolm Choat, Macquarie University, Coptic paleographer and papyrologist(see full credentials above), in interviews with Lisa Wangsness, “Is ‘The Gospel of Jesus’s Wife’ a Revelation or a Hoax?”, *Boston Globe*, November 29, 2015. (2) Choat interviews with Sabar, *Veritas*, p. 149. Choat estimated he spent 10 to 12 hours with the papyrus at Harvard. (3) Dr. Geoffrey Smith, University of Texas at Austin, Princeton-trained papyrologist and scholar of early Christianity, interviews with Sabar. See *Veritas*, endnotes, bottom of p. 359.

## CARBON-14 DATE

The papyrus’s eighth-century A.D. radiocarbon date—after the Islamic conquest—is centuries too late for its Gnostic-sounding content. When Dr. King went public with the papyrus in 2012, she believed the

text must have first been composed in Greek the second century A.D. and that the papyrus itself was a Coptic copy from the fourth century A.D. Carbon-14 dating overturned King's conclusions and raised unanswered historical questions about why a text referring to Jesus' Wife would be circulating in Egypt in the Islamic period, when Gnosticism had long been stamped out and Coptic Christianity was fully orthodox.

Source: Dr. Karen King, " 'Jesus Said to Them, 'My Wife... ' ': A New Coptic Papyrus Fragment, *Harvard Theological Review* 107, no. 2. (April 2014): p. 159. Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 128-9.

### PAPYRUS'S CHOICE OF WORDS FOR "MY WIFE" IS UNPRECEDENTED IN DOCUMENTED HISTORY

The Coptic conjunction "ta-hime" for "my wife" appears in no other surviving manuscript from antiquity, whether religious, legal, financial or otherwise.

Source: (1) *Veritas*, p. 93. (2) Dr. Tonio Sebastian Richter, Free University (Germany), Egyptologist and world's foremost expert on Coptic legal and documentary papyri.

### GOSPEL OF JESUS' WIFE HAS SAME HANDWRITING AS FRITZ'S FAKE GOSPEL OF JOHN FRAGMENT

The Gospel of Jesus's Wife is composed in effectively same handwriting as the same owner's Gospel of John, which scholars and scientists across the board regard as an unequivocal, third-rate forgery. "Simply put: If one is a forgery, they're both forgeries," the biblical scholars Dr. Candida Moss (University of Notre Dame) and Dr. Joel Baden (Yale) write.

Sources: (1) Dr. Christian Askeland, "A Lycopolitan Forgery of John's Gospel." *New Testament Studies* 61, no. 3 (July 2015): 314– 34. (2) Dr. Stephen Emmel, "The Codicology of the New Coptic (Lycopolitan) Gospel of John Fragment (and Its Relevance for Assessing the Genuineness of the Recently Published Coptic 'Gospel of Jesus' Wife' Fragment)." *Alin Suciu: Patristics, Apocrypha, Coptic Literature, and Manuscripts* (blog), initial publication, June 22, 2014. Revised, March 26, 2015. (3) Dr. Candida Moss and Dr. Joel Baden, "New clues cast doubt on 'Gospel of Jesus' Wife,'" *CNN Belief Blog*, April 29, 2014.

### BLANK SPACES AT ENDS OF LINES 3 AND 6 SHOULDN'T BE THERE

Ancient scribes wrote in *scriptio continua*—with no spaces or punctuation between lines. As a result, a genuinely ancient papyrus scrap that was broken off or cut from the middle of a larger page would have letters that ran blindly all the way to the edges of its right and left margins. That's because the text, when previously part of a large page, would have extended beyond the fragment's margins. Yet in the Wife papyrus, there are blank spaces on original surface fibers at the ends of lines 3 and 6, evidence of an author who was aware of a right margin but who shouldn't have been.

Source: Dr. Malcolm Choat, Macquarie University, Coptic papyrologist and paleographer, interview with Sabar, *Veritas*, p. 149.

### THOUGH THE PAPYRUS'S SHORT LINES ARE SUPPOSED TO LOOK LIKE RANDOM SENTENCE FRAGMENTS FROM THE MIDDLE OF SOME UNKNOWN PAGE, EACH LINE EXPRESSES A SURPRISINGLY FULL THOUGHT

"The degree to which each line of the fragment gives us a clear sense unit, and nearly all of them carry an important message, both individually and collectively, is remarkable...[W]e welcome anyone to try to cut out a piece of this size from any literary codex from late antiquity and get a result that is as easy as this one to make sense of and interpret."

Sources: (1) Dr. Alin Suci, Biblical Coptologist at Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities (Germany), and Dr. Hugo Lundhaug, scholar of early Christian literature and Coptic manuscripts, University of Oslo (Norway), "On the So-Called Gospel of Jesus's Wife. Some Preliminary Thoughts," *Alin Suci: Patristics, Apocrypha, Coptic Literature, and Manuscripts* (blog), September 26, 2012. (2) See also Dr. Gesine Schenke Robinson, professor emeritus of Coptic Gnostic literature, Claremont School of Theology, "How a Papyrus Fragment Became a Sensation," *New Testament Studies* 61 No. 3 (July 2015): pp 379-394.

## ALL FORGERIES IN THE ORBIT OF WALTER FRITZ EMPLOY THE SAME "CUT AND PASTE" M.O., WHETHER "ANCIENT" POPYRI OR MODERN LETTERS AND DIPLOMAS

Academic studies and Sabar's investigative reporting for *Veritas* reveal the same modus operandi in all the fakes in Walter Fritz's orbit: they are all variations on cut-and-pastes.

The "1982" letter about the Wife papyrus purporting to be from Dr. Peter Munro is printed on stationery that the Free University's Egyptology Institute didn't use until the early 1990s—the period when Walter Fritz was a student there. The forger appears to have created new text and the false date 1982, placed it in the middle of early 1990s stationery, then made a photocopy. There's likely a good reason no original exists.

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 216-217.

All 17 line breaks in Fritz's forged Gospel of John fragment mimic the beginnings or endings of lines in an easily accessible online typescript of the earliest Coptic copy of the Gospel of John. The number of matching line breaks is wholly unprecedented in ancient copies of the gospels. The "ancient handwriting" in the Gospel of John forgery also replicates modern typographical features in the online typescript.

Sources: (1) Dr. Christian Askeland, "A Lycopolitan Forgery of John's Gospel." *New Testament Studies* 61, no. 3 (July 2015): 314–34. (2) Dr. Stephen Emmel, University of Münster (Germany), "The Codicology of the New Coptic (Lycopolitan) Gospel of John Fragment (and Its Relevance for Assessing the Genuineness of the Recently Published Coptic 'Gospel of Jesus' Wife' Fragment)." *Alin Suci: Patristics, Apocrypha, Coptic Literature, and Manuscripts* (blog), initial publication, June 22, 2014. Revised, March 26, 2015

In late 2012 or early 2013, Fritz submitted a forged Free University diploma to the Sarasota County Schools while applying for jobs there. *Veritas* author Sabar obtained Fritz's job applications through a public records request. The diploma purports to be Fritz's master's degree in Egyptology—a degree that Fritz and all his professors acknowledge he never earned. Bogus information about the Egyptology degree was digitally or physically pasted on top of a completely different diploma, one issued by the Free University's Institute for the Study of Eastern Europe. (Fritz doesn't have a degree in that subject either.) Submitting or producing fake educational credentials is a crime in Florida, but Fritz went undetected.

Source: Public records request filed with the Sarasota County (FL) Schools by *Veritas* author Sabar. See *Veritas*, pp. 246-248.

## KEY WORDS "MY WIFE" ARE SPOTLIGHTED

The Coptic words for "My Wife"—particularly the "My"—are conspicuously darker than most of the other words on the papyrus. "Using bold letters for emphasis to my knowledge never occurs in ancient Coptic literary manuscripts," the Brown University Egyptologist Dr. Leo Depuydt wrote in analysis for *the Harvard Theological Review*. "I am unable to escape the impression that there is something almost hilarious about [it]. How could this not have been designed to some extent to convey a certain comic

effect? . . . something like: ‘**My** wife. Get it? **MY** wife. You heard that\_right.’ The papyrus fragment seems ripe for a Monty Python sketch.”

Source: Dr. Leo Depuydt, Brown University, “The Alleged Gospel of Jesus’s Wife: Assessment and Evaluation of Authenticity,” *Harvard Theological Review* 107, no. 2 (April 2014): 172–89. Depuydt credits Dr. Mark Goodacre of Duke University with first noticing it.

Almost perfect rectangles are a highly unusual geometry for papyrus scraps, whose shapes are generally wildly asymmetric. This one is cut in such a way that the key phrase “Jesus said to them, ‘My wife’” is billboarded in precisely the center of the papyrus.

Source: Dr. Nicola Denzey Lewis, Claremont Graduate University, scholar of Gnostic texts and Margo L. Goldsmith Chair in Women’s Studies in Religion, interviews with author Sabar. See *Veritas* p. 99.

### STATEMENTS & ALLEGED ACTIONS BY WALTER FRITZ

Fritz has denied forging the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife papyrus. But when asked if he *could have* produced a near-perfect forgery if he’d wanted to, Fritz said, “to a certain degree, probably.”

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, p. 199.

After twice lying about it, Fritz acknowledged downloading, owning and using the 2002 PDF of the Gospel of Thomas that scholars believe the forger cannibalized to create the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife.

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 248-250.

An authentic papyrus in which Jesus refers to a wife could be worth more than \$1 million, according to experts. Yet despite Harvard’s urging, Fritz declined to purchase any insurance for his papyrus when he placed it on loan at the university. “Of course!” Harvard Divinity School librarian Douglas Gragg told *Veritas* author Sabar. “‘What would I want to insure junk for?’ he was probably thinking...He wasn’t interested in spending any money on it, which I suppose in retrospect could have been a sign.”

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, p. 261.

The granddaughter of Fritz’s Florida landlady in the early 2000s recalled large bins of charcoal in an art workshop in Fritz’s rented house, which Fritz allegedly used to make various kinds of sketches. The room’s knee wall was thickly covered in wax from extensive candle burning. (Fritz denies the granddaughter’s account.) According to scientists, the ink a forger allegedly used to write the text on the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife shows evidence of both chars and soots.

Source: (1) Sabar, *Veritas*, 168-169. (2) David Ratzan, “Dating Ancient Egyptian Papyri Through Raman Spectroscopy: Concept and Application to Fragments of the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife and the Gospel of John” (paper presented with co-authors Sarah Goler and James T. Yardley at the annual conference of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Antonio, November 21, 2016).

### ALIGNMENT WITH SKILLS, LIFESTYLE, AGENDAS OF WALTER FRITZ AND HIS WIFE

Fritz quit college after washing out of an Egyptology program at the Free University in Berlin, where he struggled with Coptic and had a conflict with the program’s new chairman, who accused Fritz of plagiarizing his ideas.

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 174-182.

Fritz claims to have been sexually abused by a priest as a boy his deeply Catholic hometown in Germany. He reported the abuse to the Vatican less than three months before approaching Dr. King with his

papyrus in July 2010. He had yet to receive a response when he first sent images of the Wife papyrus to Dr. King. Fritz continues to bear a grudge against the Catholic Church, whose tradition of priestly celibacy he sees as partly responsible for the scourge of clerical sex abuse. The text of the papyrus would have challenged the theological basis of that tradition.

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, p. 222-242.

Fritz and his wife ran a series of successful internet porn sites in the “hotwife” fetish genre, in which women are simultaneously deified and desecrated. The websites launched soon after publication of *The Da Vinci Code*, the best-selling thriller about a Harvard professor who uncovers the secret of Jesus’s marriage to Magdalene thanks to a cryptic message on a piece of papyrus. One of the Fritzes’ websites contained erudite musings on sexual promiscuity, antiquity, Christian faith, and the slipperiness of reality. The book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*—which helped inspired the *Da Vinci Code*—appears as a kind of prop in a porn shoot featuring Fritz and his wife.

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 188-197; 218-222; 254-256.

During Sabar’s reporting on the papyrus for *The Atlantic*, Fritz made Sabar a strange proposition: Fritz offered himself up as an anonymous researcher for a *Da Vinci Code*-like novel that would feature “the Mary Magdalene story,” the “suppression of the female element” in the Church, the primacy of the Gnostic gospels “maybe accumulating to a thriller story in the present.” Fritz added, “I’ll do all the legwork for you, and I wouldn’t want anything in return.” (Sabar declined.) Fritz continued, “The facts alone, they don’t really matter. What matters is entertainment.”

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 253-4.

In addition to having been a star in the “hotwife” porn genre, Fritz’s wife claims to channel the voices of angels and self-published a book of “universal truths” that seem inspired by Gnostic theology, including Dr. King’s translation of the Gospel of Mary.

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 196-197.

Fritz was financially struggling—out of work, unable to sell his house, complaining about the recession in his local paper—at the time he approached King.

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 185-187; 256-257.

#### PROVENANCE STORY TOLD BY FRITZ DOESN’T WITHSTAND SCRUTINY

When Fritz first showed the papyrus to Karen King, he told her a story about its provenance, or ownership history. That story’s three central figures—Hans-Ulrich Laukamp, Dr. Peter Munro and Dr. Gerhard Fecht—were all recently dead by the time Fritz approached King. Colleagues, friends, and family of all three men told *Veritas* author Sabar that the men had never seen or owned any such papyrus. Further investigation by Sabar showed that the paperwork Fritz gave King as evidence of provenance—notably a “1982” letter from Dr. Munro—was a forgery composed on stationery Fritz would have had access to as a Free University in the early 1990s. Fritz’s claims to have inherited papyri from his father also don’t bear out; his older step siblings said their father never owned papyri.

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 160-162; 172-174; 214-218; 223-224.

## DR. KAREN KING BELIEVED POPYRUS WAS A FAKE FROM THE START, BEFORE CHANGING HER MIND. NOW SHE AGAIN BELIEVES IT'S A PROBABLE FAKE.

Dr. Karen King believed the papyrus was a fake from the start. “I didn’t believe it was authentic and told him I wasn’t interested,” King said after seeing images of the papyrus Fritz had emailed her in 2010. But shortly after the Harvard Divinity School was plunged into an identity crisis, *Veritas* author Sabar discovered, King abruptly changed her mind and decided to aggressively pursue its publication.

Sources: (1) B.D. Colen, “HDS Scholar Announces Existence of a New Early Christian Gospel from Egypt.” Harvard News Office press release, September 18, 2012. (2) Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 301-322.

In 2016, responding in part to new scientific reports questioning Fritz’s papyri and in part to Sabar’s reporting in *The Atlantic*, Dr. King conceded that the papyrus was a probable fake.

Sources: (1) Lisa Wangsness, “‘Jesus’s Wife’ Scholar Now Says Papyrus Is Likely Fake.” *Boston Globe*, June 18, 2016. (2) Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 260-261 and 298-299.

## THE FEW SCHOLARS WHO ONCE CONSIDERED THE POPYRUS AUTHENTIC NO LONGER DO

The only papyrologists who spoke in favor of authenticity in 2012—Dr. Roger Bagnall and Dr. AnneMarie Luijendijk—now believe on the basis of much wider evidence that the papyrus is a modern fake.

Sources: Bagnall and Luijendijk interviews with Sabar. See *Veritas*, pp. 288-290.

Dr. Ariel Shisha-Halevy, an eminent Hebrew University linguist who tried to explain away the grammatical errors in 2012, says his remarks were cherry-picked by Dr. King and misconstrued by the media as a kind of authentication. He told *Veritas* author Sabar that it was indeed “remarkable” to find so many different irregularities on so small a fragment.

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, p. 288.

## THE HARVARD THEOLOGICAL REVIEW’S PEER REVIEW PROCESS WAS MARRED BY UNDISCLOSED CONFLICTS OF INTEREST THAT APPEAR TO HAVE VIOLATED THE ETHICS POLICY OF ITS PUBLISHER

Two out of the three anonymous reviewers whom the journal had asked to review Dr. King’s article believed the papyrus was a fake. In the course of his reporting for *Veritas*, Sabar discovered the identities of the reviewers and interviewed them on the record: The two unfavorable reviewers were Dr. Bentley Layton of Yale and Stephen Emmel of the University of Münster, two of the world’s most respected all-in-one experts on Gnostic manuscripts and Coptic language.

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, p. 286-288.

The third peer reviewer—the only one to believe at the time that the papyrus was likely authentic—was Dr. Roger Bagnall of New York University. He had examined the papyrus firsthand for only an hour. As Sabar discovered in his reporting, Dr. Bagnall had warned *Harvard Theological Review* against using him as an anonymous reviewer. He had limited expertise: his specialty was Greek documentary papyri, not Coptic Christian papyri. It was also a conflict of interest: He had openly helped Dr. King with her paper, had allowed his positive view of the papyrus to be quoted in it, and had already been interviewed for a Smithsonian Channel documentary promoting the fragment. Yet the journal hid his identity and appears to have presented his review to Dr. King as an impartial outsider’s vote of confidence.

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 285-286.

Harvard’s Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies referred King to two highly regarded art and antiquities scientists for lab testing of the papyrus. For reasons that remain unclear, King did not use



them. Instead, she commissioned scientists at MIT and Columbia University who had no prior experience in archaeological science. As Sabar discovered in his reporting for *Veritas*, the scientists also had conflicts of interest that neither Dr. King nor the scientists themselves disclosed, either publicly or to the *Review*: The MIT scientist is a close friend of King's family from her Montana days, and the Columbia scientist, a brother-in-law of Dr. Bagnall, who had publicly lent his support for the papyrus's authenticity. Science alone can never authenticate a forgery, but proper, well-designed lab studies by trained archaeological scientists form part of the broader evidence scholars evaluate when assessing a disputed object.

Source: Sabar, *Veritas*, pp. 290-296.