

Possible further proof of forgery:

**A reading of the text of the Lycopolitan fragment of the Gospel of John,
with remarks about suspicious phenomena in the areas of the lacunae
and a note about the supposed Gospel of Jesus' Wife**

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Introduction

In these pages, I share the result of my work preparing for reading the supposed Gospel of Jesus' Wife and the related Lycopolitan fragment of the Gospel of John for the Coptic Reading Group of the DDGLC Project at the University of Leipzig, Germany, on the 29th of April 2014. Most of the work was done on Sunday the 27th, and its starting point was the (re)discovery of the Gospel of John piece and its dependence of the text of the Qau Codex by Christian Askeland that was so widely taken up in the days before. I used the photos of the manuscript and the parallel text presented on the websites of Mark Goodacre (Recto) and Alin Suci (Verso), as well as some further text of the Qau Codex mentioned to me in subsequent correspondence with Christian Askeland (for line 9 of the Verso).

My remarks are not meant to be exhaustive but made in order to demonstrate that it is possible to say more about the Lycopolitan Gospel of John fragment than that it was copied from the Qau Codex with only every other line being copied as well as exactly the same line breaks being used. In the damaged areas of the papyrus, strange things seem to be going on, and several of them are highly suggestive of forgery. These facts should be added to the debate about the fragment, not least because they are also relevant for the discussion of the Gospel of Jesus' Wife. During the reading of the texts with the group (we only had time for the Recto), my colleague Frederic Krueger came up with a brilliant remark that I and the others considered to be the ultimate 'smoking gun' of this fragment (see below). I would like to thank the participants for listening to and elaborating my arguments, which I hereby present to a wider audience.

Verso, John 6:11-14 (Right margin preserved; no punctuation except in l. 8 (?))

x + 1	(?)	[		] Traces	(?) (?)
	(?)	[		Δ]ϵ αγ† ηνετνηλ αγ	(13) (?)
	(23)	[	Ω ΔΝ ΠΕΝΤΑΥΧΙΤΓ ΔΡΑΥ	ΔΒΑΛ ΖΝ] ητβτ ηταρογσι	(12) (35)
	(20)	[	Δε παχεφ ηνεφμαθητς δε]	ζωογζ αζογη η[η]λε	(13?) (33?)
5	(23)	[	κμε ηταγσεεπε δεκασε νε λαγ]	ε ραειε εβολ <α>γσαγ	(14) (37)
	(24)	[	ρογ σε αγμαρ ηητςηαογς ηβιρ η]	ηλεκμε ηταγσε	(12) (36)
	(20)	[	επε ανετογωη	αβαλ Ζη ητθ]γ ηδαικ ηειωτ η	(12) (32)
	(22)	[	ρωμε σε ηταρογνεγ απμαειη]	ηταφεεφ · νεγζω	(12) (34)
	(5!?)	[	μμας	χ]ε πεει ηαμηε πε	(12!?) (17!?)
10	(?)	[		] No traces!?	(?) (?)

Remarks on the parts indicated in red

Recto:

L. 2: - ηεφ might be possible to read here, but I cannot see it very well.

- ητϵζ looks a bit strange, with the supralinear stroke half over what seems to be τ;
and is there enough room for η in the gap?

L. 3: - ρμα: I wonder whether the first of these traces is ρ, and I cannot read the other two.

L. 4: - ο<γ>αν: The omission of the γ makes me suspicious, also in view of the omission of the α in l. 5 of the Verso (see below). And is the last trace really η?

- The available space looks too small for ημ, unless the following letter, read by me as ε, actually is the μ (suggestion by Frederic Krueger).

L. 5: - [η]εηταγ, for us, was the final ‘smoking gun’ of this fragment: I had already noted that there is no place for ηε in the lacuna, and that the surviving trace does not present a convincing ε, when Frederic Krueger drew our attention to the fact that ηταγ clearly seems to have been written under and next to an already existing gap in the papyrus:

notice how η is only half the height of the other letters of the line, how τ is already able to get somewhat bigger, and how γ is finally able to stretch to full normal height. According to me, if the damage had occurred after the writing of the text, at the very least the η should be looked different. (See also l. 4 of the Verso.)

- $\eta\eta$ might be possible, and π might be lost in the lacuna.

L. 7: - $\zeta\omega[\beta$ looks strange, but ζ could be; but why is there no trace of β ?

L. 8: - $\rho\kappa\rho\eta\epsilon$, as read by the Qau parallel, cannot be read here and would not fit. ρ might be possible, and after that maybe κ , if this is not traces of two letters, but after that, there already is the final ϵ : $\epsilon\epsilon\rho\kappa<\rho\eta\eta>\epsilon$? Something went wrong here, but why?

Verso:

L. 2: - According to the Qau Codex, the trace at the beginning should be ϵ , but is it?

L. 3: - As this part of the text does not survive, or exist, we cannot know whether the papyrus also here read, or was supposed to read, $\epsilon\beta\omega\lambda$ for $\alpha\beta\alpha\lambda$ (see also l. 7).

L. 4: - $\omicron\eta\eta$ $\bar{\eta}[\bar{\eta}]$: The \omicron seems to be slightly elevated above the line compared to the letters before it, and might have been written next to an already existing lacuna, as discussed above for l. 5 of the Recto. There does not really seem enough space to accommodate three η 's. Are there two supralinear strokes?

L. 5: The omission of the λ (a shape maybe thought similar to the preceding λ) makes me suspicious, also in view of the omission of the γ in l. 4 of the Recto (see above).

L. 7: - As this part of the text does not survive, or exist, we cannot know whether the papyrus also here read, or was supposed to read, $\epsilon\beta\omega\lambda$ for $\alpha\beta\alpha\lambda$ (see also l. 3).

L. 8: Is this dot really the only bit of interpunction on the papyrus, of just a blot of ink?

L. 9: The reconstruction by Alin Suciú gave no Qau Codex parallel for this line; my own tentative reading from the photo was partly confirmed by Christian Askeland, who also provided the filling in of the gap. This is very curious indeed: did the forger, when almost finished, forget they had to skip one line of their ,Vorlage'!? Instead of at

least twenty letters lost before the parallel continues, this lacuna can only have had five! (This was remarked upon independently by Christian Askeland.)

Summary and conclusion

In several instances in the areas of the lacunae and of otherwise damaged text, the manuscript fragment of the Lycopollitan Gospel of John, which in its better preserved parts seems to follow the Qau Codex to the letter (except for εβολ for αβαλλ), seems to deviate from its ‚Vorlage‘.

In several instances, traces of letters do not seem to have the right shape; in four cases (Recto, l. 2, 4 and 5 and Verso, l. 4), there does not seem to be enough space for the number of letters expected; in two cases (Recto, l. 4 and Verso, l. 5) a letter seems to have been accidentally omitted; in one case (Recto, l. 8) several letters of one word seem to have been omitted; in one case (Verso, l. 9) a lacuna is much too long for the text it can be supposed to have contained; finally, in two cases (Recto, l. 5 and Verso, l. 4) it seems apparent that the text was actually written around an already existing gap in the papyrus, rather than the papyrus having been damaged sometime after having been written upon.

Whether all these things are due to the clumsiness of a forger (who apparently could not estimate how many letters fit into a lacuna, and did not pay close enough attention to each and every letter of the ‚Vorlage‘) or were at least partly done on purpose, in order to provide some variation from the text of the Qau Codex, something clearly is wrong with this Gospel of John fragment.

I have nothing to add to the discussion about the related Gospel of Jesus' Wife, except for the fact that in l. 3 of that text, the way in which the final μ of Mariam and the μ of μηρια are too close together, reminds me of the things that made me suspicious about the Gospel of John piece in the first place.

Whether or not all of the above remarks can survive further scrutiny by others, things seem to add up to (even more) evidence of forgery...