Jesus’ Wife: A New Controversy in the Study of Christian Study

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1. Introduction

The International Association for Coptic Studies (IACS) organized their regular international congress in Rome in 2012. The beginning of the conference was tranquil with the exchange of delightful greetings to each other. The announcement of the article, “Jesus said to them, ‘My wife …’: a New Coptic Gospel Papyrus”, nevertheless, brought a deep impact, when Madeleine Scopello1 chaired the Gnostic section in the evening of the second day (Tuesday, 18th September, 2012) at the Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum across the Vatican Square. Hugo Lund testified that there were about twenty colleagues in the place2, but it ultimately became about thirty-five people including journalists at around 7: 15 p.m. The measure of the unknown papyrus was 4 cm in height and 8 cm in width. Each line of the recto (8(9) lines) and verso (6 (7) lines)3 was incomplete.4 The 30 minutes of the presentation was not good enough for a scholarly debate, but left many controversial questions. Wolf-Peter Funk, who eventually withdrew from the room even before the end of the section with other colleagues, had pointed out that there are so many Coptic fragments like this in Egypt to be discovered even now.5 Thus, the discovery of the unknown Coptic

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3 The line nine of the recto side and line seven of the verso side are not clear, but it is sure there is papyrological evidence of writing on these lines.
5 My paper was delivered just before King at the same section of the conference in Rome. David W. Kim, ‘A New Branch Sprung: Judas Scholarship in Gnostic Studies’, Augustinianum, Vol 53 Issue 1 (June, 2013), 5-32.
papyrus not only surprised the congress audiences but only reminded the paper of Rodolphe Kasser of Switzerland who initially unveiled the secret existence of the Coptic Gospel of Judas (A New Coptic Apocrypha Available to Science: Peuaggelion Nioudas) at the 8th International Congress of Coptic Studies (ISCS) in Paris on July 1st, 2004.\(^6\)

The fifty-two paged article of Karen King informed many new ideas about the (non-historical) figures of Jesus, leadership principles, and family concepts.\(^7\) The Coptic papyrus was considered as ‘a fragment of a fourth-century CE codex’ in presuming the original composition was from the second half of the second century CE. The observation was not a big surprise, for most of the ancient Coptic manuscripts were written in the third and fourth centuries with the perspective of the second century origination. One of the arguments was clear that the new papyrus does not prove any evidence of the historical Jesus. Nonetheless, with the line four (\textit{πηψε ἐς τὴν ταξίμη}) of the \textit{recto} side, the scholar’s warning was unconsciously misunderstood among readers of faith, that Jesus historically had a wife. King already presumed the fact that Jesus’ marital status was one of the disputable issues in the early Christian communities of the second century CE, but did not clearly demonstrate that the Coptic text were gnostic opposing the doctrines and decrees of the mainline Christianity. The Coptic version of the Gospel of Jesus’ Wife was thought to have originated from a Greek version like the case of the Gospel of Thomas for which we have three Greek fragments and a complete Coptic version. On the other hand, it is not definite that the Coptic version of Jesus’ Wife would be derived from a Greek version. The scenario the author or complier of the Coptic text used various Greek materials of the Jesus tradition available in the ancient era, cannot be excluded. The title of the papyrus (Gospel of Jesus’ Wife: GosJesWife or GJW) was also not literally written on the manuscript, but created by the Harvard scholar. Decisively, the interpretation of \textit{ταξίμη} (‘wife’) that was previously assumed by a German scholar\(^8\), was a revolutionary exposition for every conference attendant.


\(^{7}\) King is a historian of Christianity, but also teaches the intermediate Coptic language courses. Karen King, with contributions by AnneMarie Luijendijk, “Jesus said to them, ‘My wife …’: a New Coptic Gospel Papyrus”, last modified on 19th September, 2012. http://news.hds.harvard.edu/files/King_JesusSaidToThem_draft_0917.pdf.

\(^{8}\) See the following section of this paper.
2. The Discovery of Jesus’ Wife

Then, how was the mystical fragment uncovered in modern history? There is evidence that the papyrus has been surfaced for at least thirty-five years.9 The papyrus originally belonged to the early owner, H. U. Laukamp (Berlin) before 197710, even though there is another hint that it was in the possession of a German-American collector in the communist side of the Eastern Germany in 1960s.11 The German Coptologist, Gerhard Fecht (died in 2006) and Egyptologist, Peter Munro of the Ägyptologisches Seminar of Freie Universität of Berlin (died in January 2009) have professionally examined the condition and context of the papyrus (between 1977 and 1982)12 and Fecht, based on observation, surmised the possible implication of ‘a marriage’ by the reference to having a wife.13 After the death of H. U. Laukamp in 2001 the papyrus fragment became in the possession of the current unknown owner (a German) who may be a relative of Mr Laukamp or an antiquity dealer in 1997.14

King had doubts about the value of the mystical manuscript and thought it was a forgery when the private collector approached her in 2010, because the Coptic grammar and syntax of the text were not regular and comprehensive.15 King did not make any decision by herself, but collaborated with a couple of experts (from December 2011). The modern history of its discovery and analysis continued as King requested Roger Nagnal of the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World (ISAW) in New York and Anne Marie Luijendijk of Princeton University the authenticity and date of the new fragment in March 2012. The authenticity of the text was positively judged as the palaeographical conclusion was set up in

12 Winfield, “Jesus Wife Papyrus Authentic”.
circa 4th century CE.\(^{16}\) The efforts of King did not stop here, but received another confirmation from one of the Coptic linguistic experts on September 7th, 2012. Ariel Shisha-Halevy of Hebrew University in Jerusalem likely denied the possibility of it being a forgery based on a study of the high resolution digital photograph\(^ {17}\): “I believe – on the basis of language and grammar – the text is authentic. This is to say, all its grammatical ‘noteworthy’ features separately or conjointly do not warrant condemning it as forgery.”\(^ {18}\) The new fragment was seen as an irregular manuscript in language and grammar, but the counteractive issues were not seen as any big deal to criticise the text as a fake, for there are many similar cases in Gnostic texts of the Jesus tradition.

Thus, the fragment has papyrologically and palaeographically been analysed by the world class experts, even though the scientific examination of the carbon 14 dating was not going to be performed due to the size (no margin) of the papyrus.\(^ {19}\) The result of the chemical testing of the ink (‘spectroscopy’) was on its way, while the style of the handwriting that does not have ligatures was considered as ‘bilinear’.\(^ {20}\) The figures of the ‘faded ink of the verso’ and ‘the thick side of the recto’ were presumed as that the Coptic text like the earliest NT papyri could have come from an ancient garbage heap or burial sites. The geographical provenance and region of circulation were presumed to be in Upper Egypt, Syria, and Rome. The Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary, and the Gospel of Egyptians were seen as the closest parallels to the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife. Such indications of the textual authenticity faintly maintained the perspective that there was an ancient religious group which kept the anti-Christian tradition of the earthly Jesus.

3. Reaction Against Jesus’ Wife

Such a careful approach was condemned soon after the official announcement. Although

\(^{16}\) even though it is not known what method was applied for this result.

\(^{17}\) The high resolution photographs were produced by the efforts of Nancy Richardson, Rose Lincoln, and B. D. Colen.

\(^{18}\) He was also at the Gnosticism and Manichaeism section of the Rome ICCS conference (2012). King, “Jesus said to them, ‘My wife …’: a New Coptic Gospel Papyrus”, 5.

\(^{19}\) According to Bagnall, the case of no margin is presumed in that an antiquities dealer cuts or tears a large papyrus into small pieces in order to earn more money. If we could scientifically check the date of the edge of the fragment, we would know more about the condition of the fragment. King, “Jesus said to them, ‘My wife …’: a New Coptic Gospel Papyrus,” 10.

\(^{20}\) For the ink test, ‘if synthetic materials are found, then the new papyrus is invalidated, but if the ink is made of the organic materials, then the test remains inconclusive, since ink of the that kind could be made during any time period’. See more at Farrior, “Divorcing Mrs. Jesus”.

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King and her colleagues took almost ten months to evaluate the papyrus, the first response emerged after just two days. The theory of a fake was that the papyrus belongs to a modern compiler who is not a native speaker of Coptic, but has a limited ability of the ancient Egyptian language.21 The first reaction provided three evidences22 that 1) the Jesus’ Wife papyrus is a collection of phrases or words from the Gospel of Thomas (Logia 12, 18, 20, 30, 45, 81, 101, and 114).23 Waston, along with Päivi Vähäkangas24, could not find any relevant phrase of the recto lines six and seven from the Thomasine Logia, but the rest of them were able to be compared. Goodacre supported the dependent view through the case of the line seven; ἀνόκ τῶν ὥν ἔδωκεν ητέβε π (I am with her on the account of …).25 As the sentence was presumed with Mt. 28: 20b26, the ἀνόκ τῶν ὥν ἔδωκεν was seen to be from the Logion 30 (ἀνόκ τῶν ὥν ἔδωκεν).27 The ητέβε π of Jesus’ Wife was depicted as quoted from the Logion 29 (ητέβε ΠΝΑ or ητέβε ΠΝΩΜΑ). 2) The phrase (ναεί) of line one is placed at the same location with the word (εί) of the Logion 101 (GTh 49: 35-36). 3) The GosJesWife is contextually disjointed, as having full of gaps (for some lines there are three letters missing on each side of each line).28 Additionally, the insignificance of the ink test also added weight to the dependent view of Watson29 even if there is a positive result of the ink test:

23 Watson, “The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife: How a Fake Gospel-Fragment was composed.’ Ibid., “The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife: How a Fake Gospel-Fragment was composed: Introduction and Sumary,’ last modified on 21th September 2012, http://markgoodacre.org/Watson2.pdf. The GosJesWife line one is from the GTh 49, 35-36 (εί ἀν ΤΑΜΑΛΛΥ) and GTh 50.1 (ΑΣΤ ΝΑΕΙ ΗΤΤΩΝ). The GosJesWife line two is seen in GTh 34.25, GTh 36.9, and GTh 36.26. The GosJesWife line three and four are from the GTh 45. 17; and 51. 5, 19-20. The GosJesWife line five is from the GTh 49. 32-36 and Lk. 14: 16. The GosJesWife line six is with Mk. 11: 14 (later he offered a reference of GTh 41. 1-2). The GosJesWife line seven is with Mt. 28: 20b (later it was compared with GTh 39. 1-5). The GosJesWife line eight (ΟΥ ΖΙΚΛΗ) is with the Logia of the GTh 37. 34, GTh 42. 1, GTh 47. 20, 22, 23, and GTh 47.27.
26 “I am with you…”
27 Goodacre did not concern about the switch of the gender issue (from f to c).
28 The recto lines five, seven and eight are about Jesus’ wife’ and discipleship, but the line six (‘let the wicked man bring forth…’) interrupts the main context of the discourse. Francic Watson, ‘Addendum: The End of the Line?’, first posted on 22th September, revised on 26th September, p. 1. http://markgoodacre.org/Watson3.pdf.
29 He himself denied being an expert on ‘ink’ technology, but has involved the ink issue of the Secret Gospel of Mark and Letter to Theodore. Watson, “Inventing Jesus’ Wife”.

‘Carbon-gum ink (while the ‘carbonless-iron-gal ink’ was used during the Middle Ages) was more common in antiquity and was probably the kind of ink used for the fragment. … it may be possible to carbon-date the soot in this kind of ink but one should be aware that obtaining ancient carbon to make the soot for the ink is not difficult. So, … testing the ink is likely conclusive, unless the forger made a mistake’.  

There is another palaeographical view that the papyrus is authentic, but the handwriting is unauthentic. About the type of the handwriting, the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife reflects a character of irrelevance with other ancient Coptic manuscripts. The scribe(s) of the papyrus have been criticized for the lack of professionalism. The Coptic letters are roughly shaped (in particular ω, ο, and έ) and inconsistent in writing. The style of τ is also seen not to be familiar with any other 4th century texts. It suggests that the papyrus was written not by a pen, but with a brush. The e of the line six (ωαψενε) was suspicious as a mistake of the copyist. The feature of the oblique stroke (/) just before the sentence (πεζε ρε ναυ ταξιμε μη) in the line four of the papyrus was seen as being unusual. The uncertainty of its provenance and unidentified ownership likely caused the papyrus to be a modern forgery. The square formation of the papyrus is another external cause for mistrust along with the view that the papyrus is written without minimum spares.

While the actual dialect of the Coptic language was not mentioned as either Bohairic or Sahidic, the scepticism was developed in the theory that the papyrus, though Goodacre once thought of a post-1945 (post-Nag Hammadi papyrus) writing, was created between 1956 (or 1975) and the present time. In particular, Watson in considering the impact of the Da Vinci Code assumed Jesus’ Wife as a post-2003 modern papyrus. The suspected period of the Durham reader does not deny the time of 2006 where there were the publications of the

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30 “For example, one can obtain some (blank) ancient papyri on the antiquities market and then cut and burn part of it to make the soot for the ink”. Watson, “Inventing Jesus’ Wife”.
31 Lundhaug, and Suciu, “On the So-Called Gospel of Jesus’s Wife. Some Preliminary Thoughts”.
34 Robinson, “Rebuttal of the presentation of a Gospel of Jesus’ wife”.
35 The Bohairic is the modern Coptic dialect for the today Coptic church and its community and the Sahidic is the ancient Egyptian Christian dialect around 3-5 (8) centuries AD.
37 Watson, ‘Addendum: The End of the Line?’.
New-Age Christian culture: the Gospel According to Judas: Myth and Parable, the Missing Gospels, and the Jesus Papers. The theory of a forgery was compared with the case of the so-called Secret Gospel of Mark which was discovered in 1958. The text of a Jerusalem monastery was interpreted as being composed by Morton Smith (died in 1991), who was also the supposed discoverer. The material was eventually published in 1973, when Smith felt confident about the authenticity of the text. The homosexual Jesus of the Secret Gospel of Mark has been satirically paralleled with the heterosexual Jesus of the new Gospel of Jesus’ Wife.

Further, the view of a patchwork supported the textual analysis of Watson that the Coptic fragment was reconstructed out of many words or phrases from the Coptic Gospel of Thomas. The professional insights of the experts (Gerhard Fecht, Peter Munro, Karen King, AnneMarie Lujendijk, Roger Bagnall, and Ariel Shisha-Halevy) were treated as being a hoax by a modern forger. Bernhard, like Leo Depuydt who was a formal student of Ariel Shisha-Halevy in the 1980s, supposed that the person(s) may be dependent on the Grondin’s Interlinear of the Coptic Gospel of Thomas.

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41 It described the earliest Christian history and the formation of the NT canon. Many subjects were concerned, such as the early Christian landscape, Gnosticism, the diversity, the nature of God and Creation, Jesus: Divine and/or human. Darrell L. Bock, the Missing Gospels: Understanding the Truth behind Alternative Christianities, (Nashville: Nelson, 2006).
42 Jesus was seen as a mortal human being married with his female disciple Mary Magdalene and had a child. David M. Haskell, Kenneth Paradis, and Stephanie Burgoyne, ‘Defending the Faith: Easter Sermon Reaction to Pop Culture Discourses,’ Review of Religious Research, Vol. 50. No. 2 (2008) 139-156.
45 Bernhard, “How the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife Might Have Been Forged: A Tentative Proposal”.
46 King has already mentioned in many places of her article that Jesus’ Wife has many common figures with Thomas. King, “Jesus said to them, ‘My wife …’: a New Coptic Gospel Papyrus”, 13, 16, 17, 22, 24, 25, 28, 32, 33, and 47.
47 See more at Farrior, “Divorcing Mrs. Jesus”.
Thus, Bernhard, though supporting the theory of a forgery, suggested that the lines three, four, five, six, and seven of the *rector* are equal with other Thomasine *Logia* rather than the ones Watson had previously mentioned. For instance, the line three of the *GosJesWife* is from the ἌΝ ἩΜΟΥ of the *GTh 51.21 (Logion 114)*. The word (AN ἩΜΟΥ) of the line four reconstructed is from the *GTh 36.17 (Logion 18)* and *GTh 36.25 (Logion 19)*. The sentence of πειθεὶς ἢ ἰοῦσεν corresponds with the *GTh 34.27 (Logion 12)*. The line five is from the *GTh 42.26-27 (Logion 55)*, while the line six is from the *GTh 41.2-3 (Logion 45)* and *GTh 41.17 (Logion 47)*. The line seven is similar with the *GTh 39.4-5 (Logion 30)* and *GTh 38.33 (Logion 29)*.

Nonetheless, it is very interesting that the two scholars (Watson and Bernhard) offer different sources of evidence in the process of comparing the *Gospel of Jesus’s Wife* and the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*. Why did the author of the new papyrus copy the words or phrases only from *Thomas*? If the forger had a particular story of Jesus in their mind, what would the picture be that he/ she/ they wished to draw? Such inquiries seem like a mystical puzzle in which he/ she/ they picked up the right Thomasine words or phrases for the particular scenario. Then, is *Thomas* the only text he/ she/ they practically used? The two scholars indirectly deny the involvement of other texts. This fact does not prove the inauthenticity of the new Coptic papyrus. Instead, it reflects that the *Gospel of Thomas* contains the common words or phrases which could be found in the *GosJesWife* as the sayings tradition of Jesus in the history of early Christianity. The palaeographical condition of the *verso* side is another issue for the modern readers who see this papyrus a forgery. There is no plausible comment on how the modern technic of the foolish forger(s) was applied. If the forger(s) used an ancient papyrus and wrote the words or phrases of the *Gospel of Thomas* before known to King in July 2010, the ink of the *recto* side would have hardly been dried and the *verso* side

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49 Tabor, “The Latest Twist on the Jesus ‘Wife’ Fragment: a Smoking Gun for the Forgery Case?”.
50 Bernhard, “How the Gospel of Jesus’s ‘Wife’ Fragment: a Smoking Gun for the Forgery Case?”.
52 Since the Sahidic Coptic language had been used from the second century to the early fourth century AD (until the time of the great persecution of Diocletian), one can infer that the skills of the Egyptian Gnostic Christian scribes would be often unprofessional. Hany N. Takla, “the History of the Coptic Language,” last modified 10th November, 2012.http://www.stshenouda.com/coptlang/copthist.htm.
would not be easy to identify as being an original as old as a fourth century fragment.53

Watson previously explored Papyrus Köln 255 and also concluded that the text is a modern forgery.54 The verso side of Papyrus Köln 255 that contains six lines was compared with the passages of John.55 Watson, in using the modern tool of Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG)56, argued that the verso lines from two to four are directly from the Johannine passage with two minor modifications. The forger, with a limited knowledge of Greek, adopted the passage of John 4: 21-22 for the lines five and six of Papyrus Köln 255. The forgery view of Watson was based on the non-sequitur theory of Aristotle: “if forgery, then patchwork. If patchwork, then possible of verbal parallels. If there are verbal parallels, then it is a patchwork, so it is forgery”.57 However, the composition of the Greek papyrus could possibly be written in late 20 AD (at the earliest).58 And the line one (ΤΟΙΣ ΥΠ ΑΥΤΟΥ) is familiar with the phrase (ΤΟΙΣ ΥΠ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΛΟΓ ΟΙΣ) of the Acts of Paul and Thecla 9. 6.59 Paananen, therefore, insisted on the authenticity of the Papyrus Köln 255 because it is in fact the lower part of the first fragment of Papyrus Egerton 2.60

Paananen of Helsinki, likewise, asserted that the GosJesWife is coincidently similar with the Gospel of Thomas, not the deliberate actions of the complier.61 The similarity of the new papyrus is not a good reason to label the text as a forgery, because the forgery issue is the norm in the field of the New Testament studies.62 The Gospel of Judas, when it was surfaced in 2006, was critically condemned as a forgery by Richard L. Arthur.63 However, no one supported his view afterwards, rather the Judas studies with the reconstruction of the lost Ohio fragments (2010-11) was progressively developed based on the Coptic text of

53 James Tabor, “The Latest Twist on the Jesus ‘Wife’ Fragment: a Smoking Gun for the Forgery Case?”.  
54 Paananen, “Another ‘Fate’ or Just a Problem of Method: What Francis Watson’s Analysis Does to Papyrus Köln 255?”.  
55 Ibid.  
56 See the University of California Digital Library of Greek Literature provides the ancient texts written in Greek from Homer to the fall of Byzantium in AD 1453. http://www.tlg.uci.edu/.  
57 Paananen, “Another ‘Fate’ or Just a Problem of Method: What Francis Watson’s Analysis Does to Papyrus Köln 255?”.  
58 Ibid.  
59 Ibid.  
60 The method of Watson ‘does not tell the difference between authentic and fake passages’. Ibid. Also see the same view of Wieland Willker, http://www-user.uni-bremen.de/~wie/Egerton_home.html.  
61 Paananen, “Another ‘Fate’ or Just a Problem of Method: What Francis Watson’s Analysis Does to Papyrus Köln 255?”.  
Tchacos Codex 33-57. The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) were also declared as forgeries. So the team of academics led by several priests kept the scrolls hidden from the public for decades. It was only reopened to the public when Robert Eiseman and Hershel of the Biblical Archaeology Review ‘illegally’ published these scrolls. Therefore, contemporary readers should use Watson’s method of literary parallels for searching the origin and religious characteristics of the ancient text: with which texts is the Gospel of Jesus’ Wife familiar? If there are familiar texts, what kind of the ancient community wrote or used it? What was the reason the text was written? What would the historical situation of the people who applied the text? It would not be an easy task, but if one is interested in the identity of the mystical text, it would be better to approach the text with other familiar texts rather than prematurely judging it as a fake. The small size of the papyrus (a piece of 4cm x 8cm) does not seem to bring a big fortune to the forger as well even if the work is recognised as a perfect deceit. If money is not the main purpose of this fraud, what would the main reason?

4. Alternative Insight: Another Notorious Gnostic Fragment

The couple narrative of Prisca and Aquila is described in the Acts of Apostles in the first century CE and is well known in the early Christian communities. By the Lukan narrative one could think that a second century Christian would find it easy to perceive Jesus as having a husband-wife partnership. However, the NT texts do not externally introduce the married life of Jesus, but the spiritual unity of Jesus is generalized in term of purity, genuineness, and incorruption. The Pauline letter of Ephesians, based on the Genesis tradition (Gen. 2: 24), demonstrates the marriage culture in relation to the relationship of Jesus and His church (Eph. 5: 22-33). Jesus is seen as the Bridegroom and the church is His bride. Such a mystical teaching is reflected in the Book of Revelation where there is a vision of the bride, the wife of the Lamb (a Revelation image for Jesus). The Johannine author depicts the spiritual desire

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68 ‘A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh’.
of the bride toward the bridegroom.\textsuperscript{70}

Among the early Christians, celibacy was preferred as the highest sexual virtue, while marriage was conditionally required for the sake of reproduction. It is well depicted in the teaching of Clement of Alexandria that ‘marriage was a fornication put in place by the devil, and that people emulate Jesus by not marrying’ \textit{(Stromateis 3. 49. 1)}.\textsuperscript{71} The text shows that Jesus’ marriage ‘was invented as a reason to justify marriage’.\textsuperscript{72} Tertullian of Carthage of North Africa (200 AD) also argued of the unmarried Jesus and encouraged the Christians to stay single. It was not about the first virgin marriage, but was against divorce and remarriage after the death of a spouse as being an overindulgence.\textsuperscript{73} The marriage status of Jesus was continuously denied by Augustine as it has a spiritual meaning. Sexuality was one the major obstacles for the spiritual character of a person.\textsuperscript{74} The leader of the early church taught that the female body was as ‘substandard, subhuman, and naturally deficient’.\textsuperscript{75} ‘The sexual desire was perceived to be the penalty for sin’.\textsuperscript{76}

The view of a forgery was established within the mentality that the historical Jesus was ‘the supreme celibate’ and that the Coptic papyrus was created in the 2000s. The comprehension, however, is not quite theoretical or reliable if one accepts the pre-1982 view that the papyrus has been surfaced at least more than three decades.\textsuperscript{77} Richard Bauckham once mentioned that ‘even if Watson’s observations fall short of proving that this \textit{(GosJesWife)} is a modern forgery… that would suggest, to me, one of two conclusions: either it is a later Gnostic text composed in the fourth century, or …’.\textsuperscript{78} Bauckham included the possibility of a Gnostic papyrus showing the existence of anti-Christian groups like the Sethian groups. The marginalized group(s) paganized wanted to believe the humanized Jesus through marriage. The new fragment proves neither the celibacy nor marriage of the historical Jesus, but it is still a precious source for the readers who study the life, belief and


\textsuperscript{73} Kaleem, “The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife,’ New Early Christian Text, Indicates Jesus May Have Been Married”.

\textsuperscript{74} Tony Campolo, “Did Jesus Have a Wife?”, last modified on 11th October, 2012, http://www.redletterchristians.org/did-jesus-have-a-wife/.

\textsuperscript{75} DeConick, “Is Jesus ‘Too Holy’ For Sex?”.

\textsuperscript{76} DeConick, “Is Jesus ‘Too Holy’ For Sex?”.

\textsuperscript{77} See the previous section of the ‘Discovery of Jesus’ Wife’.

\textsuperscript{78} Brown, “the Gospel of Jesus’ Wife and the Perils and Potential of Online Scholarship”.

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culture of those anti-Christian practitioners (so called, ancient Egyptian Gnostics).\(^79\)

The gnostic group of the post-second century CE was familiar with the marriage tradition of Jesus. The ancient tradition of Mary (Magdalene) being Jesus’ wife was not a unique phenomenon because such Gnostic texts commonly contain a strong feminist perspective.\(^80\) In this regard, the recto phrases of the line one (\textit{tamaay act naei nqynq} (my mother gave to me life)), the line three (\textit{mariam nipwa nqoc adn} (Mary is worthy of it)), the line five (\textit{chauryaqethc naei ayu} (she will be able to be my disciple)), and the line seven (\textit{anok tqoost nmmac etbe pi} (as for me, I dwell with her in order to)), are quite feminine.\(^81\) The phrases of the new papyrus are consistent with in the Gnostic view, particularly to \textit{mariam} (Mary (Magdalene)).\(^82\) The \textit{Gospel Mary} that has Greek and Coptic versions from 1896 (Schmidt), 1955 (Till), and 1972 (Till-Schenke) represents the figure of Mary.\(^83\) The Gnostic \textit{Gospel of Mary} is divided into two parts: the first one is the conversation of Jesus with his disciples and the second one is the words of Jesus to Mary. The appearance of Mary is composed within the narrative where the risen Jesus provides the answers to his disciples. When the disciples asked Mary to share the words of Savior which she alone received, Peter became jealous: “\textit{Peter said to Mary; Sister, we know that the Savior loved you more than the rest of women} (\textit{pexe petroc mmariham je tcw ne tنووون re nepeqauf oyuqe nrov para pkeceete nozime} (BG, I: 1-3)).\(^84\) Although it is not known which Mary she was among Mary Magdalene, Mary the sister of Martha, or Mary the Mother of Jesus, the Mary of the text parallels with the Mary of the Coptic \textit{GosJesWife} in that she ‘has become an alternative channel of revelation’.\(^85\) Her role

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\(^79\) Meantime, for faith communities it is nothing but a spiritual challenge over their belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of man.


\(^81\) Such figures of the text are not from the canonical tradition, but a Gnostic Egyptian Christian approach of late Antiquity where the females were more recognised within the discourses of Jesus.


\(^85\) Gathercole, “Did Jesus Have a Wife?, by Tyndale House.
functioned like ‘a mouthpiece for an alternative treatment of salvation’ (BG, I: 9. 12-24)86:

“He (Peter) questioned them about the Savior: did he really speak with a woman without our knowledge and not openly? ... Did he prefer her to us? ... Then Mary wept and said to Peter: ... Do you think that ... I am lying about the Savior? Levi answered and said to Peter: Peter, ... if the Savior made her worthy (C ΝΑΧΙΟΣ), who are you indeed to reject her? ... Surely the Savior knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us.87

The debating narrative does not show any trace of a sexual relationship between Jesus and Mary. Rather, the influence of Mary was equal with Peter. It is one of the Gnostic figures in the non-canonical tradition. The negative attitude of the disciples also corresponds to that ascribed in the Gnostic book of Pistis Sophia (the Dialogue of Savior (NHC III, 5).88 The ancient Gnostic text that was used in the Egyptian Coptic Christian churches of the second century CE, describes the dialogues between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Many parts of the Gnostic text illustrate the role of Mary with Matthew and Judas: NHC III, 5. 13, 41, 53, 60, 62, 64, 69, 79, 88, 93, and 97.89 Such scenes of Pistis Sophia (the Dialogue of Savior) challenge readers with the question of ‘was there a secret marriage between Jesus and Mary Magdalene?’ or ‘did Jesus have female disciples?’ The GosJesWife demonstrating a special relationship between Jesus and Mary is also portrayed in the Coptic Gospel of Philip (Gos.Phil.) where Mary Magdalene among other Marys of Jesus’ mother and sister is closer to Jesus than any other disciples.90 This text of the Nag Hammadi Codices is a collection of excerpts in the arrangement of materials. Isenberg presupposes that the complier of Philip purposely disjoined paragraphs of ‘a Christian Gnostic sacramental catechesis’ or a Gnostic gospel that ‘had a continuity of thought and deposited the pieces in diverse places in the work’.91 For example, the passage of ‘there are three who always walked with the Lord. Mary, his mother, her sister and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion’ (Gos.

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86 “Then Mary stood up, greeted them all, and said to her brethren: do not weep and do not grieve nor be irresolute, for his grace will be entirely with you and will protect you. But rather let us praise his greatness, for he has prepared us and made us into men. When Mary said this, she turned their hearts to the Good and they began to discuss the words of the Savior” Ibid.
87 BG, I: 17. 7-9 and 17. 16-18.15.
90 Gathercole, “Did Jesus Have a Wife?, by Tyndale House.
Phil. 59: 6-10\textsuperscript{92}), is not connected with the following phrase which is about the heavenly characters of the ‘father’ and ‘the son’, and ‘the Holy Spirit’. The complier of the text describes that the father and the son have single names, but the Holy Spirit has a double name.\textsuperscript{93} Further, the \textit{Gospel of Philip} contains a form of Jesus sayings like the \textit{Gospel of Thomas}.\textsuperscript{94} The 127 sayings tradition (but the sayings of Jesus are only fifteen) of \textit{catchwords} parallels with the 114 sayings tradition of \textit{Thomas} where there are also \textit{catchwords}.\textsuperscript{95} The Valentinian gnostic text that was used among Egyptian Gnostics of the fourth century CE, mentions the unique scene where Jesus kisses Mary as his spouse in the context of a discussion about discipleship\textsuperscript{96}:

\begin{quote}
‘[ … loved] her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] kiss her [often] on her [ … \textsuperscript{97}]. The rest of [the disciples …]. They said to him, ‘why do you love her more than all of us?’ The savior answered and said to them, ‘why do you not love you like her? (63: 34-64:9).\textsuperscript{98}
\end{quote}

Like the \textit{GosJesWife}, marriage ‘is referred in the \textit{Gospel of Philip} rather than singlehood or maleness’.\textsuperscript{99} Such view proves that the new Coptic papyrus of King is not unique in the Gnostic way of partnership, but for the mainline Christians it was the major issue of heresiology.\textsuperscript{100} Therefore, DeConick evinces that this papyrus, if authentic, would be the text of early Valentinian Gnostic Christians.\textsuperscript{101} The Valentinian Gnostics whose author was aware of the alternative sayings tradition, ‘envisioned marriage and sex as the greatest of sacred mysteries’. The human marriage was seen to represent the style of the divine marriages. The Jesus of Valentinians was remembered as a married man with a sexual life.

The word (\textit{ou hikwn}: an image) of the \textit{recto} line eight, if the reference is connected with the

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{NE OYIN SWOME MOOSHE MNI PHOEIE OYOIEI NIM MARIA TEFMAALY AHU TECCUNE AHU MAZALEHM TAGEI ETUWMOITE EROC XE TEPOKININOC MARIA GAR TE TEKCUNE AHU TEFMAALY TE AHU TEKWIUTRE TE.} Layton, and Isenberg, (2000) 131-132.

\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Gos. Phil. 59: 11-19.} Ibid., 158-159.


\textsuperscript{97} This lost part could possibly be interpreted as on her (mouth), on her (feet), on her (cheek), or on her (forehead). Ibid., 169.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 166-169.


\textsuperscript{100} Further, the literary development about Jesus’ sexuality has been overemphasised in the text called, the \textit{Greater Questions of Mary} that includes the sex scene of Jesus with a woman in front of Mary Magdalene, and that Jesus eventually produced his side.

\textsuperscript{101} DeConick, “Is Jesus ‘Too Holy’ For Sex?,”
phrase of \(\text{ἐτέλει πί}\) (‘in order to’ or ‘because of’), is ‘evidence for a Valentinian Gnostic worldview where Jesus and Mary’s early marriage is an image of their future aëonic marriage’.\(^{102}\)

While Mary is depicted as the most dominant female figure in ancient Gnosticism, there are other references of Jesus in similar relationships. Salome is a very minor character in the canonical tradition. The \textit{Gospel of Mark} mentions the character only twice at the very end of Jesus’ time on earth. The Markan author describes the presence of Salome at the crucifixion and tomb of Jesus. She followed her master from Galilee with other women including Mary Magdalene (\textit{Mk. 15: 41}).\(^{103}\) But, her close relationship with Jesus is mystically enlarged in the Coptic \textit{Gospel of Thomas}.\(^{104}\)

\[\begin{align*}
G.\text{Th}.61\text{-a.} & \text{ Jesus said, “Two will rest on a couch: the one will die, and the other will live.”} \\
G.\text{Th}.61\text{-b.} & \text{ Salome said, “Who are you, man, that you have come up on my couch and eaten from my table?”} \\
G.\text{Th}.61\text{-c.} & \text{ Jesus said to her, “I am he who exists from the undivided. I was given some of the things of my father.”} \\
G.\text{Th}.61\text{-d.} & \text{ <Salome said> “I am your \textit{μαθητής}.”} \\
G.\text{Th}.61\text{-e.} & \text{ <Jesus said (to her)> “Therefore I say, if he is destroyed he will be filled with light, but if he is divided, he will be filled with darkness.”}
\end{align*}\]

\textbf{GTh 1: The Logion 61 of Thomas}

The \textit{Logion 61} of \textit{Thomas} can be divided into the five sayings of Jesus and Salome. In the saying tradition, the passage (‘who are you, man, that you have come up on my couch’) of \textit{G.Th. 61-b} reflects an erotical discourse that is a general genre of Gnostic texts. If the Gnostics were familiar with the sexuality of Jesus, the line four of the \textit{GosJesWife} (\textit{πέξει \τῇ \\n\textit{nay ταξιμέ μή}: Jesus said to them (disciples), ‘My wife …’) would not be a new trauma to the readers of the ancient era. The term, \textit{ταμαλί} (my mother) of the \textit{recto} line one and \textit{verso} line one are not also unusual if one regards the \textit{G.Th. 61-c} (‘I was given some of the things of my father’) as a humanised saying of Jesus. Salome’s saying, ‘I am your \textit{μαθητής} (G.Th. 61-d) in terms of ‘female discipleship’ accords the sayings of the \textit{GosJesWife}:

\(^{102}\) Ibid.,

\(^{103}\) “In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there”.

\(^{104}\) It is unknown what the Greek version of Thomas says about this part, for the Oxyrhynchus papyri do not contains this narrative.


\( \text{Maria} \) (Mary) (not) worthy of it) and \( \text{snagynxthc nai} \) (she will be able to be my disciple).

The Thomasine \textit{Logion} 114 also shows a feminine scene where \( \text{marisam} \) (Mary) who originally “came from Magdala, a village between Tiberius and Capernaum on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee”\(^{105}\), was recognized by her master: “Simon Peter said to them, ‘Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.’ Jesus said, ‘I myself shall lead her in order to make her male …’ Peter complained about the gender of leadership within the dissatisfaction of Mary Magdalene’s influence.\(^{106}\) The Thomasine Mary, like the Mary of the \textit{GosJesWife} is not actually involved in the conversation, but the \textit{Logiographer} discloses a certain right of the Thomasine Mary in the leadership role. The \( \text{marisam} \) of Thomas definitely challenged the leadership of Peter, who was generally recognised as one of the three senior disciples (with James and John).\(^{107}\) This scene of both texts of \textit{Thomas} and \textit{GosJesWife} implies the anti-feminist concept of Judaism. However, Jesus corrected the issue by showing a personal compassion for the futuristic destiny of \( \text{marisam} \) (Mary): “I Myself shall lead her ..., so that she too may become a living spirit ...” The status of \( \text{marisam} \) is demonstrated in the beginning of \textit{Logion} 21 where the Thomasine Mary inquired about the true nature of discipleship: “\( \text{enekma]hhtoc eic ein} \) (whom are your disciples like?)”.

Mary’s question to her master was not for herself, but it was on behalf of all followers. It is a well-known fact that the three Greek fragments of the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 654, 1, 655 is not Gnostic, but the Nag Hammadi Thomas (NHC 2, II, 43: 23–34) contains such ingredients gnostilized. The Thomasine scene of \( \text{marisam} \) is nothing unique in comparing with the line five of the \textit{GosJesWife} (‘\( \text{snagynxthc nai} \): she will be able to be my disciple’), but both of them are commonly a polemical narrative against the apostolic Christianity in the history of Late Antiquity.

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\(^{107}\) It has already been mentioned in Kim (2010). 200-202.
5. Conclusion

Ultimately, the historical Jesus or Jesus of the canonical tradition often gets challenged by modern media or readers. The last half century experienced the socio-religious disputes by the discovery of Nag Hammadi Codex. Those non-canonical materials effectively increased the popularity of the New-Age Christian culture in 2000s. The novels of *The Da Vinct Code* and *Jesus Papers* depicted Jesus as a mortal human being married with his female follower Mary Magdalene and having a child. The *Gospel of Judas* from Tchacos Codex also motivated readers in the context of Sethian Gnosticism, even though the relationship of Jesus with Mary or Salome was not practically included in the anti-Christian Coptic text of the second or third century CE. The critical debate on the sexuality of the historical Jesus continued with the emergence of the *GosJesWife* in September, 2012. The new Coptic manuscript does not include any clue about the author or complier. No title has been written in the ancient papyrus. Further, the innovative interpretation of the possessive word (*tahime*) became the major concern even though it could be less emphasized as ‘my woman’ or ‘my female follower’. Meanwhile, the theory of a forgery is quite premature because the opponents never offered any principle or a standard by which a forger or forgers tried to copy the similar words or phrase of the *Gospel of Thomas*. There is no response about the reason why he/she or they imitated the Coptic *Thomas* only. The simple theory that a forger or forgers copied various parts of the Thomas tradition is not good enough to prove the hypothesis that the *GosJesWife* is an imperfect forgery. The fact that the *Harvard Theological Review* has pulled the work of King and her collaborators for scientific evidence, should not underestimate the value of the new papyrus, since the chemical test of the ink is

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108 His resurrection experience was denied in the narratives. Haskell, Paradis, and Burgoyne, (2008) 139-156.


110 The critics also never explored or commented on the verso lines one to five of the new Coptic papyrus.
not the alternative solution for the authenticity of the Coptic fragment.\textsuperscript{111}

Relatively, the popularization of the feminine perspective supports the view that the context of the Coptic *Gos.Jes.Wife* is not unique or a distinctive character, but the concept of Jesus’s relationship was a generalised understanding among the Egyptian Gnostic Christians of the second or third century CE.\textsuperscript{112} From a historian’s view, Jesus is seen as a family man who was interested in the role of women.\textsuperscript{113} Jesus honoured his human mother as the life giver. He respected his woman and made her as a disciple and provided her a special role to dwell near him. Yet, it is true, as King apparently gave a caution, that the new Coptic papyrus does not say anything about the marital status of the *historical* Jesus. It rarely demonstrates a marginalised community of the ancient era where the anti-Christian tradition was exercised in a *religio-polemical* way against the apostolic Christianity. The *Gos.Jes.Wife* does not externally introduce a Sethian vestige, but the peculiar terminology of *tahi*\textsuperscript{me} at least manifests that the new Coptic papyrus is *another notorious Gnostic fragment* within the Valentinian Gnosticism of Egyptian Christianity.


\textsuperscript{112} Lundhaung and Suciu, “On the So-Called Gospel of Jesus’s Wife. Some Preliminary Thoughts by Hugo”.

\textsuperscript{113} Cooper, “the Gospel of Jesus’ Wife”.