# 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 Suciu (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.

## Reading and reconstruction of the text

For the following presentation of the text of the Lycopolitan Gospel of John piece, both on the papyrus and not on the papyrus, I took the fragment itself as my point of departure, and not its supposed Vorlage, the Qau Codex, as was done by Alin Suciu, Mark Goodacre and Christian Askeland. From the edition of the Qau Codex, however, I took the words and letters missing on the fragment as it is now, in order to get a better feeling for what a complete original would have looked like.

For the same reason I added notes about the number of letters per line, both on the preserved part and for the reconstructed missing part, giving the presumed total number on the right. I have no further remarks to make about these numbers, except for one important observation that was made independently by Christian Askeland (see below), but thought it only logical to look into the matter in the course of my work. With the one exception, at first glance all of these numbers look quite possible to me, but in light of the additional evidence for forgery to be mentioned below, maybe more could be made of this when someone has a closer look.

I do not pretend my text to be a proper edition of the fragment, nor claim that it is perfect, but within the time and circumstances available to me I hope to have given a faithful rendering of both the text visible on the photos and of the edited text of the Qau Codex, both as presented in the online sources mentioned above. The problems I have with the text are indicated in red, and these parts are then quoted and commented upon in the next paragraph.

Recto, John 5:26-31 (Left margin preserved; no punctuation)

x + 1	(?)	Traces	[	ુ કુમા ngh]	(?) (?)
	(15)	τ₫ «አመ «ط∔ <mark>ਅંદ</mark> ਰੋਂ <u>ਅ</u> ંદ	💢[оүсіх атреціре ифе	еп хе парн]	(22) (37)
	(ca.16	(20) (ca. 36)			
	(17)	єо<Л>Уй иїй ётби и	тафос [иасшти атеч	смн аүш исе]	(19) (36)
5	(19?)	еі евоу [и]ёйдулеіре	(23) (42?)		
	(15)	иентаусіре йпсөа[ү	аүанастасіс нкрісіс	ин бан анак]	(28) (43)
	(14)	ймаєї йр хаує й <mark>гф[</mark>	в рараеі оүаеет ката	өе е†сшти]	(25) (39)
	(20?) есіркріме ауш такрісіс [оумне те же сіаціме иса па]				(21) (41?)
	(15)	оүта ен йын йыге	ы [ахха иса поүфф и	пентачтеуа]	(23) (38)
10	(5)	еі ефф[пе унук		]	(?) (?)
		Traces?			(?)

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

x + 1	(?)	] Traces		(?) (?)
	(?)	[	⊅] <mark>е</mark> ах↓ йиетинх ах	(13) (?)
	(23)	[ω αν πενταγχιτη αραγ αβαλ $[ω]$ ήτβτ $[ω]$ ήταρογει		(12) (35)
	(20)	[ДЄ ПАХЕЧ ИНЕЧИАӨНТНС Х	(13?) (33?)	
5	(23)	[кие итаүсеепе жекасе не уау]е баеге ево <mark>ў &lt;9&gt;</mark> асяд		(14) (37)
	(24)	[бол ее улнуб нитсиуолс ивіь и]йўекне итулсе		(12) (36)
	(20)	[ene anetoyum abal 2n n $\uparrow$ o]y ñaeik ñeiwt ñ		(12) (32)
	(22)	[bane we netabolnel sumpein] $\dot{\mathbf{p}}$ lasta melya		(12) (34)
	(5!?)	[имас	х]е цееі йяйне це	(12!?) (17!?)
10	(?)	[	] No traces!?	(?) (?)

Remarks on the parts indicated in red

#### Recto:

- L. 2: neq might be possible to read here, but I cannot see it very well.
  - $\bar{N}$  Tex looks a bit strange, with the supralinear stroke half over what seems to be T; and is there enough room for N in the gap?
- L. 3: pua: I wonder whether the first of these traces is p, and I cannot read the other two.
- L. 4:  $-o < \gamma > \alpha$ N: The omission of the  $\gamma$  makes me suspicious, also in view of the omission of the  $\alpha$  in 1. 5 of the Verso (see below). And is the last trace really  $\alpha$ ?
  - The available space looks too small for μ, unless the following letter, read by me as e, actually is the μ (suggestion by Frederic Krueger).
- L. 5: [Ν] ἐνταγ, for us, was the final ,smoking gun' of this fragment: I had already noted that there is no place for νε in the lacuna, and that the surviving trace does not present a convincing ε, when Frederic Krueger drew our attention to the fact that νταγ clearly seems to have been written under and next to an already existing gap in the papyrus:

notice how n is only half the height of the other letters of the line, how  $\tau$  is already able to get somewhat bigger, and how  $\gamma$  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 n should be looked different. (See also 1. 4 of the Verso.)

- nm might be possible, and nm might be lost in the lacuna.
- L. 7: ξω[β looks strange, but ξ could be; but why is there no trace of β?
- L. 8: ρκρικέ, as read by the Qau parallel, cannot be read here and would not fit. p 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: εειρκ<ριν>ε? Something went wrong here, but why?

## Verso:

- L. 2: According to the Qau Codex, the trace at the beginning should be e, 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, εβολ for λβλλ (see also l. 7).
- L. 4:  $o\gamma \bar{n} \bar{n}[\bar{n}]$ : The o 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 1. 5 of the Recto. There does not really seem enough space to accomodate three  $\bar{n}$ 's. Are there two supralinear strokes?
- L. 5: The omission of the  $\alpha$  (a shape maybe thought similar to the preceding  $\dot{\gamma}$ ) makes me suspicious, also in view of the omission of the  $\gamma$  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, εβολ for λβλλ (see also 1. 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 Suciu 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 Lycopolitan Gospel of John, which in its better preserved parts seems to follow the Qau Codex to the letter (except for εΒολ for λΒλλ), 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 1. 3 of that text, the way in which the final  $\mu$  of Mariam and the  $\mu$  of  $\bar{\mu}$  of 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...