

Researcher adds to evidence that 'Jesus's wife' papyrus is a forgery

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A fragmentary papyrus dubbed by Harvard scholar Karen King as the "Gospel of Jesus's Wife"—and declared in April after lengthy tests to be an authentic writing from centuries ago—has been challenged anew by some scholars as a forgery.

An American researcher, Christian Askeland, published findings in late April that some colleagues say provides convincing evidence that the tiny fragment was forged.

The *Washington Post* said on May 5 that suspicions arose regarding another Coptic language fragment purportedly from the Gospel of John that was part of King's article in the *Harvard Theological Review*. Both fragments, said Askeland, were written in the same hand and inked in a dialect that scholars say did not exist at the time they were said to be written.

In an interview with the *New York Times* on May 4, King acknowledged that Askeland's arguments are legitimate criticisms. "This is substantive, it's worth taking seriously, and it may point in the direction of forgery. This is one option that should receive serious consideration, but I don't think it's a done deal," she said.

This saga "is moving into the realm of the absurd," said Askeland. He is an assistant professor at Germany's Protestant university Wuppertal and also works for Indiana Wesleyan University.

Askeland has good credentials for the analysis of documents written in Coptic, the language used by the early Christians in Egypt who translated biblical and apocryphal texts from Greek codices. Askeland did his Ph.D. thesis on the Coptic versions of the Gospel of John. He found, in the John fragment accompanying King's article, that for 17 lines the breaks were identical, suggesting to Askeland that a forger may have copied the document from the Internet onto genuine papyrus. He suggested that if the John fragment was forged, it was likely that the "Jesus's Wife" fragment was written by the same hand.

"It's always exciting to find something new, but I take no joy in messing things up for Karen King," he said to the *Washington Post*.