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**“Jesus said to them, ‘My wife...’”:
A New Coptic Papyrus Fragment**

Karen L. King

This article offers a critical edition of a papyrus fragment in Coptic that contains a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples in which Jesus speaks of “my wife.”¹ The fragment does not provide evidence that the historical Jesus was married, but concerns an early Christian debate over whether women who are wives and mothers can be disciples of Jesus. Solely for purposes of reference, the fragment is given the title *The Gospel of Jesus’s Wife (GJW)*.²

The existence of the *GJW* papyrus was announced at the International Coptic Congress in Rome, September 18, 2012, and a draft of the critical edition with digital photographs was posted on the Harvard Divinity School website. The critical edition published here is very much a collaborative project, although any remaining defects are mine alone. Roger Bagnall, AnneMarie Luijendijk, and Ariel Shisha-Halevy offered significant contributions, and I offer them my deepest gratitude. Their continued help and the aid of many other scholars and scientists are reflected in the critical edition published here. Also helpful were many of the critical and constructive comments, questions, and analyses offered in three peer reviews, in on-line media, and through private communications. I have attempted throughout to give serious consideration to all the relevant points of which I am aware, although the overt discussion of forgery is taken up only in the section on dating.

¹ I would like to thank the owner for permission to study and publish the *GJW* and a Coptic fragment of the *Gospel of John*.

² The term “gospel” in *GJW* regards the probable genre of the work to which this fragment belongs. It does not imply canonical status or the historical accuracy of the content. Nor does it imply that *GJW* was the title in antiquity, or that “Jesus’s wife” is the “author” of this work, is a major character in it, or is even a significant topic of discussion.

In addition to those already named, let me acknowledge and thank the following for their enormous generosity of time and expertise: Rose Lincoln and B. D. Colen produced high-resolution digital photographs. Malcolm Choat examined the fragment during a visit to Harvard (November 14-15, 2012). Microscopic imaging was conducted by Douglas Fishkind and Casey Kraft with Henry Lie at the Harvard Center for Biological Imaging (December 17, 2012). Raman testing of the ink was done by James Yardley with Alexis Hagadorn at Columbia University (March 11-12, 2013). Radiocarbon analysis was performed by Greg Hodgins at the University of Arizona Accelerator Mass Spectrometry Laboratory (June-July, 2013). Funding for the carbon-14 (¹⁴C) testing was generously provided by a gift from Tricia Nichols. Multispectral imaging was performed by Michael Toth and select images were processed by William Christians-Barry (August 26, 2013). Timothy Swager, Joseph Azzarelli and John Goods performed Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FT-IR) testing at MIT (November 5, 2013). Harvard librarians, especially Douglas Gragg, were gracious and patient supporters. Harvard's communications professionals took the lead in public dissemination. Noreen Tuross gave invaluable advice and conducted a crucial range of testing, including a second radiocarbon determination. Hal Taussig offered collegial counsel. My warm thanks to David Hempton, Dean of the Harvard Divinity School, who offered consistent support and much-needed advice throughout the entire process. And finally, to the many other supporters not named here, I offer my sincere appreciation.

The critical edition begins with a transcription of the Coptic text and English translation, followed by a discussion of the material artifact (papyrology, paleography, form and uses), language, interpretation, and the history of the manuscript. Summary reports of analyses performed on the ink and papyrus completed to date follow. Full reports, imaging, and other supplementary materials may be found at <http://www.gospelofjesusswife.hds.harvard.edu/> (*GJW* webpage).

Transcription

recto (along the fibers →)

- 1]η]ει αν ταμααγ ας† ηει πφ[η2
- 2]ς πεχε ημαθητης ητ̄ χε ς[
- 3] . αρηα μαριαμ ηπφα ημος α[η
- 4] . . . [vac. .] / πεχε ητ̄ ηαγ τα2ιμε ηη[
- 5] . . . σηαω̄μαθητης ηει αγω [
- 6]! μαρερωμε εθοογ φαει ηε[
- 7] ανοκ †φοοπ ημας ετβε η[
- 8] . ογ2ικων . . [

verso (against the fibers ↓)

- 1]ταμααγ[
- 2]ημωμητ[
- 3]α . ε . . . [
- 4]εβωλ ετη[
- 5]οπ [
- 6] . [.] . . ηη[

Translation

- 1] “not [to] me. My mother gave me li[fe...”
- 2] .” The disciples said to Jesus, “[
- 3] deny. Mary is [not?]worthy of it [
- 4]...” Jesus said to them, “My wife . . [
- 5]... she is able to be my disciple . . [
- 6] . Let wicked people swell up ... [

7] . As for me, I am with her³ in order to . [
8] . an image ... [

1] my moth[er
2] thr[ee
3] ... [
4] forth ...[
5-6] (untranslatable) [

The Material Artifact⁴

Papyrological Description

The fragment has a largely regular rectangular shape measuring ca. 4 cm in height by ca. 8 cm in width. The lines of text are incomplete, suggesting it belonged to a larger piece of papyrus. It is not possible to determine its original size because none of the margins are preserved, and no known direct parallels exist upon which to reconstruct the text.⁵ The fragment may have been inscribed on a single new leaf or a reused piece of papyrus, perhaps taken from a wide margin or an unscribed portion of a leaf.⁶ (The terms “recto” (→) and “verso” (↓) are used solely to indicate the dominant fiber patterns on each side.⁷)

The extant papyrus has suffered significant damage. On the right third of the verso (↓) (measuring ca. 3.4 cm in width), some letters are visible, although there is a

³ Or: “I exist with it/her”; “I dwell with it/her.”

⁴ For imaging used in describing the material artifact, see *GJW* webpage.

⁵ See Stephen Emmel, “On Using ‘Proportional Extension of Text’ as a Criterion for Placing Fragments in a Dismembered Codex” in Paola Buzi and Alberto Camplani, eds., *Christianity in Egypt: Literary Production and Intellectual Trends in Late Antiquity. Studies in honor of Tito Orlandi* (ed. Paola Buzi and Alberto Camplani; SEAug 125; Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2011) 257–278.

⁶ Compare, e.g., NHC VI, 11-12.

⁷ See Eric G. Turner, *The Terms Recto and Verso: The Anatomy of a Papyrus Roll* (ed. Jean Bingen and Georges Nactergale; vol. 1 of *Actes du XVe Congrès international de papyrologie. Bruxelles-Louvain, 29 août-3 septembre 1977*; Papyrologica Bruxellensia 16; Bruxelles: Fondation égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1978).

notable loss of ink.⁸ On the left two-thirds (measuring ca. 4.6 cm in width), many of the vertical fibers and pith are missing. Choat concludes that “the lack of ink on the left two-thirds of the ‘back’ is clearly caused by the loss of most of the upper layer of fibers at this point.”⁹ Numerous holes are evident in this section of the fragment, for example a hole in the final μ in $\mu\alpha\rho\iota\alpha\mu$ ($\rightarrow 3$). Indeed back-lit digital photographs show light streaming through the left two-thirds but not the right third. On one section on the verso (\downarrow) measuring ca. 0.6 cm wide by 4 cm high (located ca. 2.2 cm from left margin), the vertical fibers are almost entirely absent and the horizontal fibers of the recto ($\rightarrow 3$) are clearly visible. Moreover, the division between the two sections is marked by a vertical break that appeared on initial observation of the verso to be a collesis. The recto, however, shows no corresponding indication. On viewing additional imaging, Bagnall suggested that what we are seeing is a strip of reed from the “verso” layer lifting away from the “recto” layer.¹⁰

Many fibers on the left edge of the recto (\rightarrow) are damaged or misaligned. The bottom and right (\rightarrow) edges appear somewhat jagged. In contrast, the top edge is clean and appears to have been cut.¹¹ On the recto, one can observe many places where the pith is gone or fibers are broken or misplaced; note for example, line $\rightarrow 4$, where the papyrus is folded over in a tiny flap on the upper stroke of the τ and another on the α , just above the hole in the papyrus that mars these letters. Moreover, in $\rightarrow 3$, dislocated fibers have obscured the first letter of the line due to damage after the page was inscribed. In $\rightarrow 4$, several letters have discontinuous strokes with missing ink because of damage to

⁸ Since carbon pigments are highly resistant to fading, the “faded” appearance is probably due to the absence of ink, which may result from abrasion or some other cause.

⁹ See Malcolm Choat, “*The Gospel of Jesus’s Wife: A preliminary Paleographical Assessment*,” below, 160-162, at 162.

¹⁰ For imaging illustrating these features, see *GJW* webpage.

¹¹ It is not possible to determine whether cutting was done in antiquity or modernity, e.g., perhaps by an antiquities dealer cutting or tearing a larger page into sections in order to have more pieces for sale, as Bagnall suggested in conversation (personal communication, March 12, 2012). Compare Alin Suciuc’s comments on a fragment from the Tchacos Codex (“Newly Found Fragments from Codex Tchacos,” *Patristics, Apocrypha, Coptic Literature and Manuscripts* [blog], October 10, 2012, <http://alinsuciuc.com/2012/10/10/newly-found-fragments-of-codex-tchacos/>).

the material. For instance, the diagonal stroke before the π lacks its center where there is a small hole in the papyrus. And in that same line ($\rightarrow 4$), the horizontal bar of the π of $\pi\epsilon\chi\epsilon\zeta$ is split.

Examination with microscopic imaging using top, side, and back lighting does not show ink on the lower fibers of the recto.¹²

Visible, however, is some material of a brown-orange color¹³ on the top of the ink, observable with the naked eye on the upper right of the λ in $\bar{\pi}\pi\omega\lambda$ (line $\rightarrow 3$), and on the lower stroke of the first ϵ in $\epsilon\tau\beta\epsilon$ (line $\rightarrow 7$). Tinier bits of this material “splattered” toward the right side of the recto can be observed in the microscopic imaging.

Raman analysis done by James Yardley and Alexis Hagadorn has determined that the fragment is inscribed in ink based on carbon “lamp black” pigments.¹⁴ Analysis indicates the possibility of similar but not identical inks on each side, perhaps indicating different batches of ink. The differences, however, fall within the range of experimental error so this possibility is not certain. In addition, Columbia researchers are studying details in Raman spectra that may indicate aging of carbon black pigments. Their research to date shows that details of the Raman spectra of carbon-based pigments in *GJW* match closely those of several manuscripts from the Columbia collection of papyri dated between 1 B.C.E. and 800 C.E., while they deviate significantly from modern commercial lamp black pigments. The implication is that the *GJW* fragment belongs within the ancient group.

Radiocarbon analysis conducted by Gregory Hodgins at the NSR-Arizona ANS Laboratory (June-July 2013) produced a date of 404 to 209 B.C.E. The reliability of this date is problematic, however, given that the small size of the sample led to the interruption of the cleaning protocol in order to reduce loss. In addition, the low $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (stable isotope) value of 14.3% is odd, although not impossible among plants that employ

¹² See imaging posted on the *GJW* webpage; also Choat, “Assessment,” 161-162.

¹³ Under microscopic imaging the contamination resembles a resin or wax (see *GJW* webpage), but testing to date (Raman and FT-IR) has not succeeded in identifying it.

¹⁴ See James T. Yardley and Alexis Hagadorn, “Characterization of the Chemical Nature of the Black Ink in the Manuscript of *The Gospel of Jesus’s Wife* through Micro-Raman Spectroscopy,” brief summary below, 162-164, and full report on the *GJW* webpage.

the C4 biosynthetic pathway.¹⁵ Initially it was speculated that this oddity might indicate the presence of an unknown contaminant which would result in an older-than-expected dating. Subsequent FT-IR microspectroscopic analysis by the Swager team at MIT did not, however, identify a specific contaminant (beyond the “orange” spots).¹⁶ A second radiocarbon analysis of the papyrus was done by Noreen Tuross (Harvard University) in conjunction with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (January-February 2014). She reports a $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ value of -12‰ and a mean date of 741 C.E. for *GJW*.¹⁷

The FT-IR testing did, however, produce additional information.¹⁸ The team concluded the papyrus’s chemical composition and patterns of oxidation are consistent with old papyrus by comparing the *GJW* fragment with a fragment of the Gospel of John (dated by Hodgins’ and Tuross’s radiocarbon testing to the 7th-8th centuries C.E.) and with modern papyrus. Neither the recto and verso nor the inked and “bare” areas of the *GJW* papyrus displayed major spectral differences. The nature of the oxidative aging of both *GJW* and the Gospel of John fragments, however, differs notably from modern papyrus.¹⁹

Current testing thus supports the conclusion that the papyrus and ink of *GJW* are ancient.

Paleography

The recto (→) has eight incomplete lines of unimodular Coptic script, and the verso (↓) has six. With small letters and relatively little space between the lines, the recto has a cramped look, due perhaps to the need to fit the desired text onto a limited area.²⁰ The letters on the verso, however, are somewhat larger and the spacing is broader.

¹⁵ See Gregory Hodgins, “Accelerated Mass Spectrometry Radiocarbon Determination of Papyrus Samples,” below, 166-169, with supplemental report on the *GJW* webpage.

¹⁶ See the executive summary below of Joseph M. Azzarelli, John B. Goods, and Timothy M. Swager, “Study of Two Papyrus Fragments with Fourier Transform Infrared Microspectroscopy” posted on the *GJW* webpage; the executive summary of this study is published below, 165.

¹⁷ See Noreen Tuross, “Accelerated Mass Spectrometry Radiocarbon Determination of Papyrus Samples,” below, 170-71.

¹⁸ See below Azzarelli, Goods, and Swager, “Executive Summary,” below, 165.

¹⁹ See Azzarelli, Goods, and Swager, “Study,” *GJW* webpage.

²⁰ See similar examples in NHC VI at 63:33-36; 65:8-14; note, too, the cramped script on the culminating page, 78.

The letters are slightly irregular in optical density (e.g., appearing sometimes lighter or darker) and in size (measuring ca. 3 to 5 mm in height and ca. 2 to 5 mm in width). Their irregularity can be appreciated by noting, for example, that epsilons measure from ca. 3 to 4.5 mm in height, and from ca. 2 to 4 mm in width.

AnneMarie Luijendijk observed the following from visual examination of the papyrus:²¹ Letters are unadorned and without ligatures. The vertical strokes are generally upright; *mu* is formed with four strokes; *epsilon*, *theta*, *omicron* and *sigma* are wide and round; *upsilon* is tall and narrow with a high v-shaped top. The scribe may have aimed at bilinear (short) letters, but the lines are not entirely straight and the spacing varies such that this is not always successful. The scribe placed fairly narrow superlinear strokes above single letters. The name Jesus is written as a *nomen sacrum* (→ 2, 4), a scribal feature common in Christian manuscripts.²²

Notable, too, is a blank area followed by an oblique stroke in →4, possibly functioning like a *paragraphos* to mark a textual division.²³ The odd appearance of the sigma in ⲚⲓⲞϢ (→3) may be due to a phonological confusion of zeta with sigma,

²¹ Her description in this paragraph generally follows Bentley Layton's categories in *A Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts in the British Library Acquired Since the Year 1906* (London: British Library, 1987), especially lxiii-lxiv.

²² See Ludwig Traube, *Nomina Sacra. Versuch einer Geschichte der christlichen Kürzung* (Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters 2. München: Beck, 1907); Larry W. Hurtado, "The Origin of the Nomina Sacra: A Proposal," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998) 655–73; idem, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); AnneMarie Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (HTS 60; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 57-78; Scott Bucking, "A Sahidic Coptic Manuscript in the Private Collection of Lloyd E. Cotsen (P. Cotsen 1) and the Limits of Papyrological Interpretation," *Journal of Coptic Studies* 8 (2006) 55–78 at 59-60.

²³ See Kathleen McNamee, *Sigla and Select Marginalia in Greek Literary Papyri* (Papyrologica Bruxellensia 26; Bruxelles: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1992) 17-18; regarding Coptic papyri, see Leo Depuydt, *Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (2 vols. Corpus of Illuminated Manuscripts 4 and 5; Louvain: Peeters, 1993) I: 487-88; II: plate 418). Choat, however, judges a letter to be more likely than a mark of punctuation ("Assessment," 162).

corrected by overwriting a sigma. Additionally, the η in $\eta\lambda\epsilon\iota$ ($\rightarrow 5$) appears to have been corrected, but the λ in $\tau\lambda\eta\mu\epsilon$ shows no sign of correction.²⁴

The uneven optical density and occasional smudging of the letters may be due not only to abrasion, but to dipping too much ink or re-inking the pen. Bagnall suggests that the pen itself may have been blunt and not holding the ink well.²⁵ Magnification also shows a number of places where the ends of letters form tails or forks; these could indicate the use of a brush rather than a pen, or alternatively may be due to a poor pen and inadequate scribal skill.²⁶

Finally, due to the poor preservation of the verso, it is not possible to determine conclusively whether both sides of the papyrus are from the same scribal hand, although they appear similar. Differences in spacing and the possibility that different batches of ink were used on the two sides are also not unequivocal indicators.

In summary, the general impression of the recto is a crude and unpracticed, functional script, such as one might expect from a scribe who has not progressed beyond an elementary “school hand.”²⁷ As several experts have helpfully pointed out, the script shows the characteristics of neither a formal literary (“professional”) hand nor documentary script.²⁸ Magical, school, or private texts do offer cases of idiosyncrasy and crudeness.²⁹

²⁴ Raman analysis also indicates a single ink (see Yardley and Hagadorn, “Characterization,” 164).

²⁵ For other instances of uneven ink flow, see, e.g., P.Ryl.Copt 314 and 396 (images online at <http://enriqueta.man.ac.uk/luna/servlet/ManchesterDev~93~3>).

²⁶ See the comments of Choat, “Assessment,” 161.

²⁷ See Raffaella Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (ASP 36; Atlanta, GA: Scholar’s Press, 1996) 102-106.

²⁸ See also Iain Gardner and Malcolm Choat, “Towards a Paleography of Fourth-Century Documentary Coptic,” in *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium. Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies, Leiden, August 27 – September 2, 2000* (ed. Mat Immerzeel and Jacques van der Vliet; 2 vols.; OLA 133; Louvain: Peeters, 2004) 1:495-203 at 497; and Choat, “Assessment,” 161.

²⁹ Coarse and cramped writing with uneven inking and blotches can be observed, for example, on P. Kell. Copt. 19, a private letter; see *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis: P.Kell.V (P.Kell.Copt. 10-52; O.Kell.Copt. 1-2)* (ed. Iain Gardner, Anthony Alcock, and Wolf-Peter Funk; Dakleh Oasis Project 9; Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999) vol. 1:156 and plate 12.

Form and Use(s)

The cramped size and crudeness of the script almost certainly rule out the form of a formal literary codex or production for public reading, for example in a liturgical church or school setting.³⁰ Once we leave the world of the formal codex (or scroll), however, we enter into an astonishing diversity of literary productions and their functions in a wide variety of settings. The extant papyri include single leaves, scraps, and even miniature “codices,” which are often characterized by crude and idiosyncratic handwriting, as well as orthographic, grammatical, and other scribal infelicities. Often their functions are obscure, and many are without secure provenance.³¹ The fact that, as Frankfurter observes, “(t)he concept of supernatural power in Egypt was strongly tied to the notion of writing” indicates that some of these papyri may have had utility for protection (from demons).³² Moreover, multiple functions or reuse confuse tidy categorization (e.g., in distinguishing scripture from magic³³). The poor scribal and literary quality of such texts probably tells us more about the social and economic status of whomever produced and used them than it does about their relative importance to their owners.

The *GJW* fragment shares the features of many of these artifacts.³⁴ Some have suggested that it may be an amulet due to its compact size and regular shape.³⁵ Although

³⁰ My thanks to the several scholars who corrected my own initial assumption that the fragment might belong to a formal codex.

³¹ See examples in Thomas J. Kraus, “Manuscripts with the *Lord’s Prayer*—they are more than simply Witnesses to that Text itself” in *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Texts and Their World* (ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Niklas; Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 2; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 227-266.

³² David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998) 268, see also 267-272.

³³ See e.g. Tommy Wasserman, “P78 (*P.Oxy.* XXXIV 2684): The Epistle of Jude on an Amulet?” *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Texts and Their World* (ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Niklas; Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 2; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 137-160

³⁴ Compare, for example, *P.Berol.* 11710, an unprovenanced, bilingual Greek and Coptic “gospel” (amulet?), consisting of two leaves measuring 6.5 x 7.5 cm (with visible holes probably used for binding the leaves together), which contains a dialogue between Jesus and Nathaniel with strong similarities to John 1:48-49; although crude and idiosyncratic, the hand is dated solely on paleographical grounds to the 6th c. C.E. [see Thomas J. Kraus,

no folds remain, the regular edges may indicate where a larger leaf has broken along the fold lines, leaving a middle section of the page without margins.³⁶ The very mention of Jesus (and his mother Mary) may have given *GJW* an aura of sacrality, and the seemingly odd appearance of the “curse” in line →6 may indicate that the papyrus was considered to have protective value. (Re)use as an amulet would not, however, eliminate the possibility that it may be an excerpt from a longer work used for private study or devotional use or that it may have originated as an aide-mémoire or even a practice text.³⁷

Language

The language of the fragment is standard Sahidic. While the orthography of the first person singular suffix pronoun as object of the preposition $\text{N}\Delta\text{z}$ is normally ï , the spelling of $\text{N}\Delta\text{z}\epsilon\text{I}$ (→1 and →5) is comprehensible within the range of Sahidic orthography³⁸ and is not sufficient to indicate dialectal influence, e.g., from Lycopolitan in which $\text{N}\Delta\epsilon\text{I}$ also appears. Given that Sahidic can be well characterized as “an

“P.Berol. 1710” in *Gospel Fragments* (ed. Tobias Nicklas, Michael J. Kruger, and Thomas J Kraus; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 228-239].

³⁵ Amulets are often, but not always, narrow and long. For a useful discussion of criteria for amulets and problems of classification of certain texts, see Theodore De Bruyn and Jitse H. F. Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets and Formularies Containing Christian Elements: A Checklist of Papyri, Parchments, Ostraca, and Tablets,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 48 (2011) 163-216, esp. the discussion on pages 167–173 and the dimensions listed in the tables accompanying the article. See also Theodore De Bruyn, “Papyri, Parchments, Ostraca, and Tablets Written with Biblical Texts in Greek and Used as Amulets: A Preliminary List,” in *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approach* (ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas; Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 5; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 145-190.

³⁶ See examples in *Ancient Coptic Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (ed. Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith; San Francisco: Harper, 1994).

³⁷ See Sarah Clackson, “Coptic Oxyrhynchus” in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts* (ed. A. K. Bowman, R. A. Coles, N. Gonis, D. Obbink, and P. J. Parsons; Graeco-Roman Memoirs 93; London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2007) 332-341 at 336.

³⁸ See Bentley Layton, *A Coptic Grammar* (3rd ed. revised and expanded; *Porta linguarum orientalium* n.s. 20; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011) ¶ 85-86, pp. 68-70; ¶ 16 (a), p. 17.

aggregation of linguistic habits only imperfectly and variously standardized,”³⁹ such orthographic variation is not consequential.⁴⁰

Inscription in Sahidic provides only a rough indication of the papyrus’s geographical provenance and region of circulation since it may also point toward the increasing tendency of Christians to use Sahidic, notably as “the first Coptic dialect into which the Scriptures were translated” in the third to fourth centuries.⁴¹

A substantial portion of early Coptic literature was translated from Greek, including the closest parallels to *GJW*,⁴² suggesting that it, too, may originally have been composed in Greek although it is extant only in Coptic. While plausible, this supposition cannot be definitively established on the basis of this tiny fragment.

The grammar and syntax of *GJW* can be described as follows:

→1: ΤΑΜΑΛΥ ΑC†ΝΑΕΙ ΠΩ[Ν2 : ΤΑΜΑΛΥ is the extraposed subject⁴³ (feminine singular possessive article ΤΑ plus noun ΜΑΛΥ). ΑC is the past tense conjugation base with feminine singular personal intermediate. †ΝΑΕΙ ΠΩ[Ν2 consists of the double-object infinitive †ΝΑΕ which “takes two objects always immediately suffixed in a string, one after another, expressing personal recipient + thing given.”⁴⁴ While rare, the absence of the mediating direct object marker ⲙ- before ΠΩΝ2 has precedents.⁴⁵

³⁹ See Ariel Shisha-Halevy, “Sahidic” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (ed. Aziz S. Atiya; 8 vols.; New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1991) 8:194-202, at 195.

⁴⁰ Cf. the variation of ⲛⲁⲓ and ⲛⲁⲓ attested in *1 Apoc. Jas.* TC 15.13; 16.4; 26.18 in *Codex Tchacos. Texte und Analysen* (ed. Johanna Brankaer and Hans-Gebhard Bethge; TU 161; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

⁴¹ Shisha-Halevy, “Sahidic,” 195.

⁴² Notably the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as well Greek fragments, are extant for two of the closest parallel texts, *Gospel of Mary* (see C. H. Roberts, “463. The Gospel of Mary” in *Theological and Literary Texts (Nos. 457-551)* [vol.3 of *Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the John Rylands Library*; Manchester, U. K.: Manchester University Press, 1938] 18-23; and P. J. Parsons, “3525. Gospel of Mary” in *Texts (nos. 3522-3600)* [Oxyrhynchus Papyri 50; Graeco-Roman Memoirs 70; London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1983] 12-14) and *Gospel of Thomas* (see Harold W. Attridge, “Appendix. The Greek Fragments” in *eNag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7 Together with XIII, 2**. *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1), and P. OXY.1,654, 655* [ed. Bentley Layton; 2 vols.; NHS 20-21; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989] I:95-128).

⁴³ Layton, *A Coptic Grammar*, ¶ 330, p. 256.

⁴⁴ Layton, *A Coptic Grammar* ¶173, p. 135; for full discussion, see Stephen Emmel,

→2 ΠΕΧΕ ΠΜΑΘΗΤΗΣ ΠΙΣ ΧΕ: This sentence contains the suffixally conjugated verboid ΠΕΧΕ- that “signals direct discourse”; it is almost always completed by ΧΕ “to introduce reported discourse”⁴⁶ but note the variant and discussion of line →4 below.

→3 ΑΡΗΑ ΜΑΡΙΑΜ ΠΠΩΑ ΠΜΟΣ Α[Ν: The verb ΑΡΗΑ (Graeco-Coptic related to the Greek ἀρνέομαι) can be intransitive⁴⁷ or transitive (with the direct object marker Ν-/Μ before the entity term). Here the previous sentence must end with ΑΡΗΑ because if ΜΑΡΙΑΜ were the object of ΑΡΗΑ, it would need to be marked by the direct object marker Ν-. A durative sentence (ΜΑΡΙΑΜ ΠΠΩΑ ΠΜΟΣ) follows, with a definite subject (ΜΑΡΙΑΜ) and durative infinitive (here the transitive verb ΠΠΩΑ with object marked by ΠΜΟΣ meaning “to be worthy of”).⁴⁸ There is no clear antecedent for the feminine singular personal suffix Ο. The sentence could be restored to end with the negator Α[Ν, but this is not required grammatically. Or the Α could, *inter alia*, begin a new sentence or be restored with the connector Α[ΥΩ.

“Proclitic Forms of the Verb † in Coptic” in *Studies Presented to Hans Jakob Polotsky* (ed. Dwight W. Young; East Gloucester, MA: Pirtle and Polson, 1981) 131-146. To be added to Emmel’s study are now, *inter alia*, four examples without the mediating direct object marker before the definite or possessive article + noun from the Coptic documentary papyri found at Kellis: P. Kell. Copt. 22.42: Αϣ† ΝΗ ΠΚΕΣΕΠΕ ΖΟΥΝ ΑΡΩΥ (“He gave me the remainder against them.”); P. Kell. Copt. 22.54: ΠΤΑΥΠΕΖ † ΝΙ ΤΑΖΗΜΕ (“They have already given me my fare.”); P. Kell. Copt. 43.16: ΠΤΑΡΕϣ† ΝΗ ΤΟΤΙΧΑΡΙΟΝ (“When he gave me the tunic ...”); P. Kell. Copt. 36.18-19: [ΕΚΑ†] ΝΕϣ ΠΜΠΤΕϣΤΕ ΠΨ[Ε] ΠΒΠΒΩΡ (“[you can give] him these 1400 talents.”) (*Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis* (ed. Gardner, Alcock and Funk]).

⁴⁵ See n. 44 above. For an orthographic variant of this construction with Π before ΠΩΝΖ, see *Gospel of Thomas* NHC II,2 50.1.

⁴⁶ Layton, *A Coptic Grammar*, ¶380 p. 302-303.

⁴⁷ See for example Acts 4:16 and John 18:25, 27 in *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect otherwise called Sahidic and Thebaic* (ed. George William Horner; 11 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911-1924) 3:286 and 6:72.

⁴⁸ My thanks to the third reviewer for helpfully suggesting this analysis and also for noting that if the sentence were understood “deny Mary is worthy of it” then one would expect ΑΡΗΑ ΧΕ ΠΜΑΡΙΑΜ ΠΠΩΑ ΠΜΟΣ. Alternatively, Shisha-Halevy suggests it could be a case of “pleonastic negation,” but examples would need to be identified (personal communication, Jan. 8, 2014).

→4: ΠΕΧΕ ΙϢ ΝΑΥ ΤΑΖΙΜΕ: Although not standard, the absence of ΧΕ following ΠΕΧΕϛ to introduce direct discourse is attested in the *Gospel of Thomas* and the Manichaean *Kephalaia*, which also vary their usage of ΠΕΧΕ- with and without ΧΕ.⁴⁹ In line 2→ above the standard form of ΠΕΧΕ- with ΧΕ appears, indicating the usage is variable here as well.

The antecedent of the third person plural personal suffix (Υ) of the preposition ΝΑϛ is most probably “the disciples” (see →2), establishing that the fragment contains a dialogue between Jesus and the disciples.

Regarding ΤΑΖΙΜΕ (my wife), ΖΙΜΕ (singular) always means “wife” not “woman.”⁵⁰ Given that Jesus is the speaker, the possessive article indicates that he is speaking of his wife.

⁴⁹ See the index to the *Gospel of Thomas in Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7* (ed. Bentley Layton; NHS 20; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989) 1: 270. My thanks to Wolf-Peter Funk for alerting me to examples in *Kephalaia*, e.g., 89.22, 24, 30-31 without ΧΕ; 89.28-29, 33 with ΧΕ, *inter alia*, in *Kephalaia. 1. Hälfte (Lieferung 1-10)* (ed. Hugo Ibscher. Manichäische Handschriften der staatlichen Museen Berlin 1; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1940) 221. Here I am not including consideration of “the intercalability of the parenthetic ΠΕΧΑϛ” (see Ariel Shisha-Halevy, *Coptic Grammatical Categories. Structural Studies in the Syntax of Shenoutean Sahidic* [AnOr 53; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1986] 162-163) since the situation of such cases does not apply here.

⁵⁰ ΖΙΜΕ and ϞΖΙΜΕ are not always flexible (i.e., interchangeable) in syntactic usage. Shish-Halevy notes that “ϞΖΙΜΕ is the Egyptian (ḥmt) with the prefixed (s.t), probably meaning ‘feminine human being’” (personal communication, Jan. 8, 2014). Dwight W. Young [“The Distribution of *shime* and *hime* in Literary Sahidic.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91.4 (1971) 507-509] notes that ΖΙΜΕ is always used “in cases with the definite article which are followed by the genitival particle *n* prefixed to either a proper name or a noun with a determinative prefix” (507a), although he goes on to state incorrectly that “*hime* cannot be used with the possessive article, contrary to the practise [sic] in both Old Coptic and Demotic” (508a). Francis Llewellyn Griffith had indeed offered examples in his edition of the *First Tale of Khamuas* 3.5, where he distinguishes ΖΙΜΕ (ḥm.t) from ϞΖΙΜΕ (s- ḥm-t) noting that the former “always means ‘wife’” [*Stories of the High Priests of Memphis: The Sethon of Herodotus and the Demotic Tales of Khamuas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), see transcription p. 86; translation and note p. 87]; see also his edition of an old Coptic horoscope, where he writes concerning v. 7: “ΖΙΜΕ. This word in the singular means “wife” not “woman” in all passages in which I

→5 $\text{C}\text{N}\text{A}\text{W}\bar{\text{P}}\text{M}\text{A}\text{-}\text{OHTHC}\ \text{N}\text{A}\text{E}\text{I}$ is a durative sentence composed of a third person feminine singular personal prefix of the durative sentence (C) with future (NΔ), verbal auxiliary $\omega\text{-}$ (be able to), prenominal infinitive ($\bar{\text{P}}$) with zero article phrase (MΔ-OHTHC) and preposition (NΔ Z) with first person singular suffix pronoun object (E I). Layton notes that $\omega\text{-}$ in combination with NΔ expresses the present tense “without distinguishing present and future” and that the durative sentence $\bar{\text{P}}$ plus zero article phrase means “have/perform the function of, have the characteristic of.” Moreover, it can have “*ingressive* meaning, expressing entry into a state; in other words, the distinction between being and becoming is cancelled.”⁵¹ The sentence should therefore be understood to mean that “she” is able to perform the functions of or have the characteristics of being a disciple. Assuming Jesus is speaking here, the prepositional phrase NΔE I indicates she is able to be a disciple “to me,” i.e., to Jesus. The reference for C (3 sg. f.) is not certain, but the immediate extant antecedent is “my wife.”

→6 $\text{M}\text{A}\text{P}\text{E}\text{P}\text{O}\text{M}\text{E}\ \text{E}\text{O}\text{O}\text{Y}\ \text{W}\text{A}\text{Q}\text{E}$ is a non-durative sentence with the jussive conjugation base $\text{M}\text{A}\text{P}\text{E}\text{-}$.⁵² The jussive expresses a command and is used only in

can trace it in Sah(idic)” [“The Old Coptic Horoscope of the Stobart Collection.” *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache* 38 (1900) 71-85, text p. 79; comment p. 80]. Examples of $\text{Z}\text{I}\text{M}\text{E}$ with possessive article ($\text{T}\text{E}\text{Q}\text{Z}\text{I}\text{M}\text{E}$) have now been identified, e.g., in NHC II,6 *Exeg. Soul* 129.9 and NHC II,4 *Hyp. Arch.* 91.5, 14. Regarding the latter Layton writes: “ $\text{Z}\text{I}\text{M}\text{E}$ (sing.) deserves a separate index entry with the gloss ‘wife’ (ḥm. t) as distinct from $\text{C}\text{Z}\text{I}\text{M}\text{E}$ ‘woman’ (or ‘wife’) (s.t- ḥm.t). Sahidic $\text{Z}\text{I}\text{M}\text{E}$ (sing.) occurs only in possessive constructions or in $\text{X}\text{I}\text{-Z}\text{I}\text{M}\text{E}$ (‘marry’) and always with that specific meaning,” and he suggests that the examples from Griffith are therefore worth resurrecting [Bentley Layton, “The Text and Orthography of the Coptic *Hypostasis of the Archons* (CG II,4)”, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 11 (1973) 173-200, at 183].

⁵¹ Layton, *A Coptic Grammar*, ¶184c, 148; ¶180b, 141 [italics in original].

⁵² It is grammatically possible to understand $\text{M}\text{A}\text{P}\text{E}\text{-}$ for $\text{M}\text{E}\text{P}\text{E}\text{-}$ (negative aorist), but this reading makes little sense in context (“The wicked person shall never swell ...” or “generally never swells”), and imposes a non-Sahidic form into an otherwise Sahidic environment. Alin Suciú and Hugo Lundhaug read the negative aorist here but need to emend the verb to make sense of it (“A Peculiar Dialectical Feature in the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife, Line 6,” *Patristics, Apocrypha, Coptic Literature and Manuscripts* [blog],

dialogue.⁵³ This sentence offers two interesting features. The first, ρωμε εθουγ, apparently contradicts the well-established pattern in which the attributive clause after a definite (specific) antecedent takes the relative form, while after a non-definite (non-specific) antecedent it takes the circumstantial form⁵⁴; that is, one would expect either πρωμε εθουγ (relative) or ρωμε εϋρουγ (circumstantial). Ρωμε εθουγ may, however, be regarded as a case of the phenomenon studied by Shisha-Halevy of “zero-determined generic noun as antecedent of a relative (not circumstantial!).”⁵⁵ He regards it as a rare attestation of an as yet only partially understood phenomenon in which “non-specific, as a rule generic nuclei combine with the Relative conversion.”⁵⁶ In this case, ρωμε, albeit not definite, combines with a relative clause.

The other issue in →6 is the lexical identification of the infinitive. Luijendijk, Shisha-Halevy,⁵⁷ and the third reviewer suggested ωαϋε (“swell”). The term is often used to describe unpleasant bodily tumors, illness, and swellings,⁵⁸ and would fit the proverbial character of a call for the wicked to suffer.

→7 ΔΝΟΚ †ϰΟΟΠ ΝΜΜΔϸ ΕΤΒΕ ΠΙ is a durative sentence with an extraposed topic (ΔΝΟΚ, the personal independent), first person singular personal prefix of the durative sentence (†), qualitative infinitive (ϰΟΟΠ), preposition (ΝΜΜΔϸ) with third person feminine suffix pronoun as object (ϸ). The prep. ΕΤΒΕ + infinitive forms an

September 27, 2012, (<http://alinsuciu.com/2012/09/27/alin-suciu-hugo-lundhaug-an-interesting-dialectal-feature-in-the-gospel-of-jesus-wife-line-6>).

⁵³ See Layton, *A Coptic Grammar*, ¶340, p. 268.

⁵⁴ See Layton, *A Coptic Grammar*, ¶403-407, pp. 326-329, for a fuller discussion.

⁵⁵ Shisha-Halevy, personal communication Sept. 7, 2012. For fuller discussion and examples, see Ariel Shisha-Halevy, *Topics in Coptic Syntax: Structural Studies in the Bohairic Dialect* (OLA 160; Louvain: Peeters, 2007) 351-2, 489 n.19, 597-599; and idem, “Bohairic-Late Egyptian Diaglosses. A Contribution to the Typology of Egyptian” in *Studies Presented to Hans Jakob Polotsky* (ed. Dwight W. Young; East Gloucester, MA: Pirtle & Polson, 1981) 413-438, esp. 323.

⁵⁶ Shisha-Halevy, *Topics*, 598. N.B.: ρωμε is not a definite noun, but a generic nucleus (e.g., not “the wicked man” but “wicked people”).

⁵⁷ Luijendijk, personal communication; Shisha-Halevy, personal communication, Sept. 7, 2012.

⁵⁸ See W. E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939) 610.

infinitive phrase (“in order to, to”). $\epsilon\tau\beta\epsilon\ \chi\epsilon$ + main clause (“because”) is not possible because the ink traces at the end of the line preclude the letter χ .

→8 This damaged line contains only one visible word, $\omicron\gamma\upsilon\kappa\omega\mu\iota$, the noun with the indefinite article ($\omicron\gamma$).

Interpretation

Genre: Dialogue and Polemics

The extant text of *GJW* presents a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples. In line →2, the disciples are addressing their remarks to Jesus, and in line →4, the antecedent of the third person plural “them” most probably refers to “the disciples.” It is therefore highly probable that Jesus is directly addressing his disciples in the first person in the other extant lines. On the verso, another instance of “my mother” occurs, indicating more direct speech. It is not clear whether the dialogue was part of a more extensive work that contained narrative passages.

Dialogues are familiar constituents of early Christian gospel literature, both in canonical and extra-canonical gospels,⁵⁹ and the broader generic category for *GJW* is gospel, insofar as this category is defined capaciously to include all early Christian literature whose narrative or dialogue encompasses some aspect of Jesus’s career (including post-resurrection appearances) or that designates itself as “gospel” already in antiquity.⁶⁰ Although it is unknown whether the fragment belongs to a larger work titled

⁵⁹ See Judith Hartenstein, “Dialogische Evangelien,” in *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung* (ed. Christoph Markschies and Jens Schröter; 2 vols; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2012) I. 2, 1051-8; eadem, *Die zweite Lehre. Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen als Rahmenerzählung frühchristlicher Dialoge* (TUGAL 146; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000); Silke Petersen, ‘Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!’ *Maria Magdalena, Salome und andere Jüngerinnen Jesu in christlich-gnostischen Schriften* (NHMS 48; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 35-93. Whether the dialogue in *GJW* is set before or after the resurrection is not clear.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., the collection in Markschies and Schröter (ed.), *Antike christliche Apokryphen*.

a “gospel,” in content it most closely resembles works that are (e.g., Matt, Luke, *Gos. Thom.*, *Gos. Mary*, and *Gos. Phil.*).⁶¹

The dialogue concerns family and discipleship. Jesus speaks of “my mother” and “my wife” in lines →1 and 4, and line →5 refers to a female person who is able to be Jesus’s “disciple.” Moreover, there appears to be some controversy or polemic, although it is unclear precisely what the concerns are. The term ἀρμα in line →3 indicates that something or someone is being denied or rejected, and the line goes on to address whether Mary is worthy of something. In addition, line →7 contains what appears to be, if not a curse, at least a strong wish that the wicked should swell up, indicating some kind of antipathy.

More tentatively, the first four extant letters of line →1 (ΕΙΔΝ) may be the conclusion of a well-known Jesus saying found in Matt 10:37, Luke 14:26, (Q 14:26), and *Gos. Thom.* 55 and 101.⁶² This suggestion is based on two factors. First, the topics of family, worthiness, and discipleship are similar, and secondly, the version in *Gos. Thom.* (NHC II,2 49.34, 36) also ends with these four Coptic letters.⁶³ In addition, line

⁶¹ The suggestion that this fragment belongs to a gospel genre is not meant to imply either that it fits specific theological criteria or that it narrates a full life of Jesus. For the contours of the debate over what constitutes a gospel, see Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM Press/Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990); N. T. Wright, “When is a Gospel not a Gospel?” in *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus: Have We Missed the Truth about Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2006), 63-85; James A. Kelhoffer, “‘Gospel’ as a literary title in early Christianity and the question of what is (and is not) a ‘gospel’ in canons of scholarly literature,” in *Jesus in apokryphen Evangelienüberlieferung* (ed. Jörg Frey and Jens Schröter; WUNT 254; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) 399-422; Joost Hagen, “Ein anderer Kontext für die Berliner und Straßburger ‘Evangelienfragmente’: Das ‘Evangelium des Erlösers’ und andere ‘Apostel-evangelien’ in der koptischen Literatur,” in *ibid.*, 339-71; Christoph Heil, “Evangelium als Gattung,” in *Historiographie und Biographie im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* (ed. Thomas Schmeller; NTOA/SUNT 69; Berlin: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009) 63-94.

⁶² All citations of New Testament literature in Coptic are from George W. Horner (ed.), *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect* (11 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911-1924), with modifications of the English translation by me. Unless otherwise noted, citations and English translations of the Coptic text of the *Gospel of Thomas* are from Layton (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7*, v. 1: 52-92.

⁶³ *Gos. Thom.* 101 (NHC II, 49.32-50.1): πεταμεστε πεφει[ωτ] αν μη τεφμααυ πταζε φναωπ̄ μ[αθητ]ης ναει λ(ν) αυω πεταμ̄ρε πεφ[ειωτ αν μ]η̄ τεφμααυ

→5 offers a construction (ϸⲛⲁⲟⲡⲓⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏϸ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ) similar to *Gos. Thom.* 55 and 101 (although the sentence in *GJW* is positive and the personal prefix is feminine not masculine). Furthermore, the version of the saying in *Gos. Thom.* 101 (NHC II,2 49.36-50.2) continues with a contrast between Jesus’s (natal?) mother and his true mother who gave him life. While no such contrast is apparent in *GJW*, the similarity suggests that the restoration of “li[fe]” at the end of line →1 (ⲧⲁⲙⲁⲗⲩ ⲁϸⲧ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲡⲱⲛⲓ) is possible. Together these similarities make the restoration of some version of this saying highly likely in my opinion. However, given that none of the variants in this widespread tradition exactly match *GJW*, the precise form of the saying here cannot be definitively determined, nor is its direct literary dependence upon *Gos. Thom.* assured.

The verso of the fragment, which has only two clearly legible Coptic words, “my mother” and “forth,” offers little help to interpretation. Nor is it certain that the verso text belongs to the same literary composition as the recto, although that should be considered a possibility given the topic of “my mother” on both sides of the fragment.

Much remains tantalizingly open, given the tiny size of the fragment, the loss of text at the beginning and end of every extant line, and the serious damage, especially to line →8 and to the entire verso. What is being taught about family and discipleship? What is the issue (or issues) of the polemics? What is being stated about “my mother,” “Mary,” “my wife,” and “my disciple”? To whom do they refer? Might these figures be related? If so, how? Any answers to these questions will remain speculative to a greater or lesser degree, as is true for all historical reconstruction, but all the more so for fragmentary texts like *GJW*. Nonetheless, the themes of family and discipleship stand out, as well as the attention given to female figures. The topic of Jesus’s marital status invites consideration as well.

Who is Worthy and Able to be Jesus’s Disciple?

ⲛⲧⲁⲉ ϸⲛⲁⲟⲡⲓ ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏϸ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲁⲛ ⲧⲁⲙⲁⲗⲩ ⲓⲁⲣ ⲛⲧⲁϸ[.....] [..]ⲟⲗ ⲧⲁⲙⲁⲗⲩ ⲁⲉ ⲛⲓⲙⲉ ⲁϸⲧ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲛⲡⲱⲛⲓ (“Whoever does not hate his fat[her] and his mother in my way will not be able to become my d[iscip]le, and whoever does [not] love his [father a]nd his mother in my way will not be able to become [my] dis[ciple]. For my mother is she who []. But my true [moth]er gave me life.”)

Family and discipleship were issues that deeply concerned early Christians. In a world where family membership assumed strong ties of duty, loyalty, and a social identity that carried religious or cultic obligations, those who followed Jesus would often have found themselves at odds with natal family members. Sayings in the early gospel tradition emphasize that mission and loyalty to Jesus should override familial relations and could put followers at risk of losing their lives.⁶⁴

Yet at the same time, Jesus’s followers were constituting themselves using the language of family, with God as Father, Jesus as his Son, and members of the churches as brothers and sisters—or alternatively Christ as bridegroom and the Church as his virginal bride. For example, in Mark 3:31-35 when Jesus’s mother and brothers come asking for him, Jesus tells the crowd, “Whosoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.”⁶⁵ The *Gospel of Thomas* differentiates natal and spiritual families in the sharpest terms. For example, in *Gos. Thom.* 101, Jesus distinguishes between parents one should hate and those one should love, differentiating his (birth?) mother from his “true” mother who gave him life.⁶⁶ And in saying 105 Jesus says, “Whoever knows father and mother⁶⁷ will be called the child of a harlot” (*Gos. Thom.* 50:16-18), equating birth through human lust with sexual illegitimacy and implying that one’s true identity is as a child of the divine Father (and Mother?).⁶⁸ By using this strong language of hating family, slurring natal relations as illegitimacy and harlotry, and by contrasting natal family with the family of God in Christ, gospel writers were attempting to dis-embed believers from their natal families, at least in terms of primary loyalty, and to re-embed

⁶⁴ See Luke 14:26; Matt 10:1-42, esp. 10:35-39; *Gos. Thom.* 55.

⁶⁵ Versions of this saying are also found in Matt 12:46-50, Luke 8:19-21, *Gos. Thom.* 99 (NHC II,2 49:21-26), and *Gos. Eb.* 5 (Epiphanius, *Haer.* 30.14.5), indicating it was relatively widespread.

⁶⁶ Suggestions for restoration of the lacuna at 49:36-50:1 include $\bar{\eta}\tau\alpha\zeta[\chi\pi\omicron\iota \alpha\sigma\upsilon\omicron\lambda\tau \epsilon\upsilon]\omicron\lambda$ (“she who [gave me birth, she destr]oyed [me].”) and $\bar{\eta}\tau\alpha\zeta[\tau \eta\alpha\epsilon\iota \bar{\eta}\pi\theta]\omicron\lambda$ (“she [dec]eived [me].”); see *Synopsis quattuor Evangeliorum* (ed. Kurt Aland; 15th ed., 3rd corrected and expanded printing; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001) 543, n. 143, 145. These restorations suggest either a connection between physical birth and destruction (death), thereby contrasting physical birth with spiritual life, or a contrast between falsehood and truth. While both are possible, in my opinion, the former reading conveys a better sense in the context of *Gos. Thom.*

⁶⁷ $\pi\epsilon\iota\omega\tau \eta\bar{\eta} \tau\eta\lambda\lambda\upsilon$ refer here to classes of persons, not individuals.

⁶⁸ Cp. John 1:12-13; *Gos. Phil.* 55:23-26.

them as concrete members in a new (fictive) family, the church. In later centuries, these sayings took on new significance as Christians faced ruptures with natal families and broader communities during times of persecution⁶⁹ or as believers were urged to give up marriage and reproduction in favor of lives of sexual renunciation.⁷⁰

Might the similarities of these dominical sayings to the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples in *GJW* indicate similar concerns with the cost of discipleship or the identification of one's true (spiritual) family? Jesus speaks in *GJW* about worthiness and who is able to be his disciple, and, as we have seen, the mention of family members (mother and wife) in such a context is not surprising. Indeed the clear focus on female figures—"Mary," "my mother," "my wife," "my (female) disciple"—suggests a special interest in the worthiness of women to be disciples. That someone or something is being denied or rejected (→3), that someone speaks about the (un)worthiness of Mary (→3), and that Jesus defends some particular woman's ability to be his disciple (→5) all seem to indicate that the topic under discussion concerns questions or challenges about women and discipleship, in particular sexually active and reproductive women (wives and mothers). We know these were topics under debate in the early period of Christian formation. For example, in *Gos. Thom.* 114 Peter declares, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life" (a position Jesus corrects), and 1 Timothy condemns those who forbid marriage, insisting that women will be saved through childbearing (4:1-5; 2:15). Might *GJW*, too, be weighing in on such controversies? Let's take a closer look.

Women and Discipleship: Mary, My Mother, My Wife, My Disciple

While certainly Jesus's reference to "my wife" is the most startling aspect of the fragment for modern readers, it is also notable that he refers as well to "my mother,"

⁶⁹ For examples of family tensions in the context of second and third c. martyrdom, see *Mart. Perpetua* 3, 5-6; Origen, *Mart.* 37.

⁷⁰ See the discussion of Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 196-203, esp. examples on p. 198. Writers appealed especially to Luke 14:26-27, given its rejection of wives (see e.g., Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.15.97; he appears to have in mind Julius Casinos's book *Concerning Continence and Celibacy* mentioned at *Strom.* 3.13.91; for a modern edition, see *Stromata Buch I-V* [ed. Otto Stählin; vol. 2 of *Clemens Alexandrinus*; GCS 15; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1906]).

“Mary,” and “my (female) disciple.” All these figures, except a wife, are characters in narratives of Jesus’s life found in early Christian writings both within and outside of the New Testament canon. It is not entirely clear, however, how many women are being referred to in *GJW*,⁷¹ who they are, precisely what is being said about them, or what larger issues are under discussion.

To whom, for example, does “Mary” refer—Jesus’s mother, his wife, a female disciple, yet another figure—or even all of these? Early Christianity’s well-known profusion and confusion of Marys should make us cautious in identifying Mary here. “Mary” was a popular name among Jewish women, and six of the sixteen named women in the New Testament are called “Mary.”⁷² Two Marys, however, are particularly prominent: Jesus’s mother and Mary Magdalene. It seems likely that “Mary” refers to one of these, but which? Orthography is not decisive since early Christian literature uses the spelling of “Mary” (ΜΑΡΙΑΜ) found in *GJW* →3 variably for both Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene.⁷³ Further difficulty arises in that later tradition not infrequently assigns to the mother Mary roles otherwise belonging to Mary Magdalene,⁷⁴

⁷¹ See a similar problem in John 19:25; Mark 15:40.

⁷² I.e., the mother of Jesus, Mary of Magdala, Mary of Bethany, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, Mary of Clopas, the “other” Mary. A survey by Tal Ilan documents the popularity of the name, concluding that almost a quarter of all recorded names of Jewish women in Palestine between 330 B.C.E. and 200 C.E. are Mary (“Notes on the Distribution of Jewish Women’s Names in Palestine in the Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 40.2 [1989] 186-200). For discussion of the spelling of names for Mary (e.g., Maria, Mariam, Mariamme), see Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved. Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents* (NHMS 40. Leiden: Brill, 1996) 64 ns.34, 35; Petersen, ‘Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!’, 251-252.

⁷³ See Stephen J. Shoemaker, “A Case of Mistaken Identity? Naming the Gnostic Mary,” in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (ed. F. Stanley Jones; SBL Symposium Series 20. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002) 5-30, at 9-17; François Bovon, “Mary Magdalene in the *Acts of Philip*,” in Jones (ed.), *Which Mary?* (ed. Jones), 75-80.

⁷⁴ For example, Mary Magdalene’s role as apostle to the apostles (John 20:11-17) is ascribed to the mother. For this and other examples of how to identify Marys, see Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (HTR 51; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) 123-142; Stephen J. Shoemaker, “Rethinking the ‘Gnostic Mary’: Mary of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala in Early Christian Tradition,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001) 555-595; idem, “A Case of Mistaken Identity? Naming the Gnostic Mary” in *Which Mary?* (ed. Jones), 5-30;

and the reverse occurs as well, albeit more rarely.⁷⁵ Both are traditionally regarded as disciples of Jesus. In one case multiple Mary figures are directly identified. *Gos. Phil.* 59.6-11, first refers to three Marys, but then conflates them into a single figure⁷⁶:

NE ΟΥΝ ΨΟΜΤΕ ΜΟΩΦΕ ΜΗ ΠΧΟΕΙC ΟΥΘΕΙΩ ΝΙΜ ΜΑΡΙΑ ΤΕΦΜΑΔΥ ΑΥΩ
 ΤΕCСCΩΝΕ ΑΥΩ ΜΑΓΔΑΛΗΝΗ ΤΑΕΙ ΕΤΟΥΜΟΥΤΕ ΕΡΟC ΧΕ ΤΕΦΚΟΙΝΩΝΟC ΜΑΡΙΑ
 ΓΑΡ ΤΕ ΤΕΦCΩΝΕ ΑΥΩ ΤΕΦΜΑΔΥ ΤΕ ΑΥΩ ΤΕΦΖΩΤΡΕ ΤΕ (“There are three who
 always walked with the Lord: Mary his mother and her sister and Magdalene, who
 is called his partner (*koinōnos*). For Mary is his sister and his mother and his
 spouse (*hōtre*).”⁷⁷)

Moreover, it is possible that the references to mother, Mary, and wife do not refer to characters in the career of the historical Jesus, but are being deployed metaphorically as figures of the Church (fem.) or heavenly Wisdom (Sophia; fem.), or symbolically/typologically as brides of Christ or even mothers. Examples abound. In the later church, Jesus’s mother is presented as the model for virgins who are understood as brides of Christ. Athanasius, for example, writes: “But Mary, the bearer of God, remains a virgin [so that she might be a pattern for] everyone coming after her. If a woman

Antti Marjanen, “The Mother of Jesus or the Magdalene? The Identity of Mary in the So-Called Gnostic Christian Texts” in *Which Mary?* (ed. Jones), 31-41; Anne Graham Brock, “Setting the Record Straight—The Politics of Identification. Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother in the *Pistis Sophia*,” in *Which Mary?* (ed. Jones), 43-52.

⁷⁵ See Bovon, “Mary Magdalene,” 88.

⁷⁶ See Hans-Josef Klauck, “Die dreifache Maria. Zur Rezeption von John 19,25 in EvPhil 32” in *The Four Gospels. Festschrift für Frans Neirynck* (ed. F. van Segbroeck; 3 vols.; BETL 100; Louvain: Louvain University Press, 1992) 3:2343-58; Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 160-62; Hans-Martin Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium (Nag-Hammadi-Codex II,3). Neu herausgegeben, übersetzt und erklärt* (TUGAL 143; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997) 269-272; Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and Exegesis on the Soul* (NHMS 37; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 396-397. Schenke also notes Epiphanius’s report that Jesus had a sister named Mary (*Pan.* 78.8.1; Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 269-70).

⁷⁷ See Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*. Unless otherwise noted, the English translations are mine based on Schenke’s text, with reference also to Bentley Layton (text) and Wesley W. Isenberg (trans.), “The Gospel of Philip”, *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2-7* (ed. Layton; NHS 20; Leiden: Brill, 1989) 1:145-215.

desires to remain a virgin and bride of Christ, she can look to her (Mary's) life and imitate it."⁷⁸ Thus Mary the mother is, in that sense, "the image" for both his mother and his bride. As for Mary Magdalene, she too was allegorically interpreted as the bride of Christ, for example in a fourth-century intertextual interpretation of the Song of Songs 3 with John 20.⁷⁹ Moreover, in *Gos. Phil.*, it may be that Mary Magdalene is identified as "the mother of angels" and the type of the heavenly Wisdom (Sophia).⁸⁰ However, *Gos. Phil.* also teaches that Mary the mother conceived not by the Holy Spirit but from the Father of the All, and from their union Jesus's body came into being (*Gos. Phil.* 71:4-9; cf. 55:23-36). Thus *Gos. Phil.* ascribes roles in the heavenly drama of salvation to the "historical" figures of both Mary Magdalene and Jesus's mother.

Much more could be said here, but this brief discussion already illustrates that early Christian literature offers numerous examples where a Mary appears as Jesus's mother, bride, sister, heavenly Wisdom, Church, or archetype for virginal brides of Christ. Moreover, the practices of "confusing" or identifying various Marys with each other or assigning them metaphorical or typological roles in Christian dramas of salvation demonstrate the "flexibility" of early tradition in appealing to these important female figures for various ends.

Where might the references to "mother," "Mary," "my wife," and "my disciple" in *GJW* be situated in this field? The polemics of the fragment may help in answering this question. What are the issues under debate?

While non-Christian outsiders did ridicule the notion of Mary's virginal motherhood,⁸¹ among Christians Jesus's mother becomes increasingly valorized, even

⁷⁸ See Athanasius, *First Letter to Virgins* 11 (see also 9-18); trans. David Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 277; Coptic text in L.-Th. Lefort, *S. Athanase. Lettres festales et pastorales en Copte* (2 vols.; CSCO 150-151; Scriptorum Coptici 19-20; Louvain: D. Durbecq, 1955) 1:77, lines 29-34. Mary and other virgins are also referred to as an image (ἡ εἰκὼν) for others (*ibid.*, p. 78, line 6), the same term found in *GJW* →8.

⁷⁹ See Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 14.12.

⁸⁰ See the discussion of *Gos. Phil.* 63:30-64:5 in Karen L. King, "The Place of the Gospel of Philip in the Context of Early Christian Claims about Jesus' Marital Status," *NTS* 59 (2013) 565-587, at 578-579.

⁸¹E.g., the anti-Christian philosopher Celsus (see Origen, *Cels.* I.32-39).

venerated, for her exemplary piety and virginity.⁸² Her motherhood, however, was also a crucial, if contentious, site to explore and debate theological questions about the nature of the incarnation. Certainly some Christians were questioning the fleshly status of Jesus's birth, suggesting for example that his birth mother was only a pipe through which he flowed, contributing nothing.⁸³ Other Christians emphasized the very physical character of the birth.⁸⁴ For *GJW*, the insistence that his mother gave him life might well be an affirmation that his birth mother did indeed give him life—perhaps in opposition to views such as that of *Gos. Thom.* 101, which distinguishes Jesus's birth mother from his true mother. While such debates may have their focus on the incarnation or the spiritual nature of believers, representations of Jesus's mother also impacted Christian attitudes toward women generally, especially in regard to controversies over female virginity and reproduction. If *GJW* →3 concerns Jesus's mother, it would seem to support mothers against those who deny their worthiness.

What about Jesus's reference to "my wife" (*GJW* →4)? Might it belong to intra-Christian polemics over the value of marriage? Let us consider this question in the broader context of what early Christians said about Jesus's marital status.⁸⁵

The New Testament gospels never explicitly claim that Jesus was *not* married, but other literature does portray Christ as married metaphorically to the Church or to Jerusalem.⁸⁶ The first Christians to claim Jesus was not married used the claim to denounce all marriage, according to Clement of Alexandria. In his *Stromateis*, he reports on some second-century Christians "who say outright that marriage is fornication and teach that it was introduced by the devil. They proudly say that they are imitating the

⁸² Early interest was shown in Mary as the virgin mother of Jesus and as a kind of anti-type to Eve (see, for example, *Prot. Jas.*; Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* I,12, 33; *Dial.* 100; Melito of Sardis, *On Easter* 123; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.22; *Epid.* 33; Tertullian, *Carn. Chr.*, esp. 17.1-5; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.15 and 7.16; *Paed.* 1.6; Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 32.16; *Comm. Rom.* 3.10; Hippolytus, *Noet.* 17). For discussion of the cult of Mary, see *Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (ed. Chris Maunder; London and New York: Burns and Oates, 2008).

⁸³ See Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.7.2.

⁸⁴ See e.g., Tertullian, *Carn. Chr.*

⁸⁵ For a somewhat fuller discussion of this question, see King, "The Place of the *Gospel of Philip*," 566-69, 576-87.

⁸⁶ See e.g., 2 Cor 11:4-5; Eph 5:18-33; Rev 21:2, 9.

Lord who neither married nor had any possession in this world, boasting that they understand the gospel better than anyone else.”⁸⁷ Tertullian, too, stated that Christ was “totally unwed” (*innuptus in totum*) and he urged believers to a higher perfection by imitating Christ’s status as *spado in carne* (“an impotent person” or “eunuch in flesh”—perhaps referring to Matt 19:8-9, 12), although Tertullian invoked Jesus’s celibacy not to forbid marriage altogether but to charge believers against a second marriage.⁸⁸ As a high valuation of celibacy and virginity flourished, the position that Jesus was a virgin who never married came to be dominant, even though the extreme denunciation of marriage was rejected.⁸⁹ On the other hand, the ascetic movement tended to produce many “brides of Christ,” virgins who pledged themselves to him in “spiritual marriage.”⁹⁰ Without referring to a married Jesus, however, other Christians already in the second century pushed back against the devaluation or rejection of marriage and childbearing. 1 Timothy, for example, requires bishops to be married (3:2), argues that women are saved by bearing children (2:15), and rebukes those who reject marriage as liars possessed by demons (4:15).

Arguably, however, the *Gospel of Philip* does portray Mary Magdalene as the spousal partner of the fleshly (incarnate) Jesus as part of its complex theological articulation of Jesus’s incarnation and Christian salvation.⁹¹ It interprets Eph 5:22-33 in

⁸⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.6.49; the translation is that of Henry Chadwick, *Alexandrian Christianity* [The Library of Christian Classics 2; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954] 62-63). Although Clement himself opposed this stark rejection of marriage, he does not directly contradict the claim that Jesus did not marry. Clement may very well be referring here to the second century figure Tatian (see *Strom.* 3.6.81-82), whom Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1.27.1) and Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.29) regarded as the founder of the Encratites, a designation for certain (heretical) persons or groups who rejected marriage. For examples of Christian rejection of sex, marriage, and reproduction, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 83-102.

⁸⁸ See Tertullian, *Mon.* 5.5-7 (ed. and trans. Paul Mattei, *Tertullien. Le Mariage unique (De monogamia)*. [SC 343. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1988] 150-153).

⁸⁹ See e.g., John Chrysostom, *Virginit.* 11.1; 13.4.

⁹⁰ See Elizabeth Clark, “The Celibate Bridegroom and his Virginal Brides: Metaphor and the Marriage of Jesus in Early Christian Ascetic Literature.” *CH* 7 (2008) 1-25.

⁹¹ See esp. *Gos. Phil.* 59.6-11; 63.30-64.5. For the full argument, see King, “The Place of the *Gospel of Philip*,” 570-83. My argument there builds, *inter alia*, particularly on the work of Schenke, *Das Philippus-evangelium*, and Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*:

conjunction with a developing incarnational theology in which everything about Jesus was considered to have spiritual meaning, not only his teaching and deeds, but his birth, death, and resurrection—and his marriage. The *Gospel of Philip* interprets that marriage as a symbolic paradigm enacted by Christians in an initiation ritual (involving the normal water baptism, anointing with oil, the communal greeting of a kiss, and the eucharist meal) that effectively made initiates into members of the body of Christ (the Church) and thus restored human unity with the divine. Just as Jesus’s incarnation was the result of the union of the Father of the All with the virgin, so, too, the spiritual truth that Jesus taught in his marriage with Mary Magdalene was the union and restoration to unity with God. Baptism also purified Christians from demon possession and its pollutions, so that marriage between Christians was pure, free from demonic presence, and a matter of will not the lust of sexual desire. In short, the *Gospel of Philip* offers an incarnational theology that embraces the pure marriage of Christians as a paradigm established by Christ in his own incarnate life.⁹²

While it is impossible to read such a fully developed incarnational theology into the *GJW* fragment, if “Mary” (*GJW*→3) is the antecedent for “my wife” (*GJW*→4), it may be that this Mary is understood to be Mary Magdalene. Moreover, if the antecedent for “disciple” (*GJW*→5) is “my wife” (*GJW*→4), what might the polemics in *GJW* imply?

While later tradition in the West erroneously identified Mary Magdalene as a repentant prostitute,⁹³ earlier Christian literature portrays her as an exemplary woman

The Church of the ‘Valentinians’ (NHMS 60; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006) esp. 90-102, 272, 341-350.

⁹² *Gos. Phil.* is widely regarded as belonging to Valentinian Christianity, which allowed marriage (see King, “The Place of the *Gospel of Philip*,” 581). Although speculative, minor semantic connections between *Gos. Phil.* and *GJW* also point toward a possible Valentinian theological context: *Gos. Phil.* ωοοπ μῆ (*GJW* →7) might carry a sexual connotation (see Schenke, *Das Philippus-evangelium*, 481), and the term ζικων (*GJW* →8) is important for *Gos. Phil.*’s notion of Jesus’s marriage as a symbolic paradigm (see King, “The Place of the *Gospel of Philip*,” 571-76).

⁹³ The identification of Mary of Magdala with three other figures—Mary of Bethany (John 11:1-2; 12:1-3), the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11), and the sinner woman (Luke 7:37-38)—resulted in the erroneous portrait of Mary Magdalene as a repentant prostitute. See Jane Schaberg, “How Mary Magdalene Became A Whore,” *BRev* 8 (1992) 30-37, 51-52; eadem, “Thinking Back through the Magdalene,” *Cont* 1.2 (1991) 71-90;

disciple and even a leader in the Jesus movement.⁹⁴ Some early Christian writings, however, challenge her status,⁹⁵ notably through the figure of Peter.⁹⁶ In *Gos. Mary*, for example, Peter states that Jesus loved her more than other women (10:1-3), but later he and Andrew challenge her role as a leading disciple (17:10-22). Levi, however, defends her, stating: ΕΩΧΕ ΑΠΙΩΤΗΡ ΛΕ ΔΑC ΠΑΖΙΟC ΠΤΚ ΝΙΜ ΔΕ ΖΩΩΚ ΕΝΟΧC ΕΒΟΛ ΠΑΝΤΩC ΕΡΕΠΙΩΤΗΡ CΟΟΥΗ ΠΜΟC ΔCΦΑΛΩC ΕΤΒΕ ΠΑΪ ΔΙΟΥΟΥC ΠΖΟΥΟ ΕΡΟΗ ΜΑΛΛΟΗ (“For if the Savior made her worthy, who are you then for your part to reject her? Assuredly the Savior’s knowledge of her is completely reliable. That is why he loved her more than us”; 18:10-15).⁹⁷ Jesus’s love of Mary affirms her status as favored disciple and does not explicitly refer to her as a wife.⁹⁸ There are, however, some intriguing semantic similarities to the *GJW*. Although the precise terms used in the *Gos. Mary* are different from *GJW* →3, the Greek ἄξιος can render the Coptic ΠΠΩΔ,⁹⁹ and the semantic ranges of ΠΟΥΧ ΕΒΟΛ (“cast out, discard”) and ΔΡΗΔ (“deny, reject”) are perhaps not so far apart. Moreover, grammatically, the antecedent of ΠΜΟC in *GJW* →3 could be ΤΠΠΤΗΔ-ΘΗΤΗC (“discipleship”), a point which would fit Jesus’s statement in *GJW* →5 that “she is able to

Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003) 151-152

⁹⁴ The Magdalene’s role as a prominent disciple is emphasized in second and third c. literature (see Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*). For a fuller discussion of portraits of Mary of Magdala in the New Testament, see Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene. Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New York and London: Continuum, 2002).

⁹⁵ See King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 83-90; Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*.

⁹⁶ See Brock, *Mary Magdalene*, especially pp. 73-104.

⁹⁷ Compare the Greek of P. Ryl. 463, 22-25: εἰ ο σωτη[ρ] αξιαν αυτην ηγησατο συ τις ει εξουθενων αυτην παντως γαρ εκεινος ειδωz αυτην ασφ[αλ]ω[ς] ηγαπησεν. Coptic and Greek texts of the *Gospel of Mary* are cited from R. McL. Wilson and George MacRae, “The Gospel of Mary” in *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2-5 and V with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4*. (ed. Douglas Parrott; NHS 11; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979) 456-471 at 468.

⁹⁸ Tradition speaks of Jesus’s loving male disciples as well, for example John 15:12, employing the same verb (ἀγαπάω) that is used in the Greek fragment of *Gospel of Mary* (P. Ryl. 463, 25), without any suggestion of a sexual relationship. For further discussion, see King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 145-146; eadem, “Why All the Controversy? Mary in the *Gospel of Mary*” in *Which Mary?* (ed. Jones) 53-74; Birger A. Pearson, “Did Jesus Marry?” *Bible Review* (Spring 2005) 32-39, 47, esp. 37-39.

⁹⁹ See Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary*, 179.

be my disciple.” Such similarities are not sufficient to establish a direct literary relationship between the two works. The relatively widespread polemic against Mary Magdalene as beloved of Jesus and as a follower whose discipleship is challenged, however, provides a compelling context in which to read the *GJW* fragment.

Finally, let’s consider the remarkable opinion of Simon Peter in *Gos. Thom.* 114: ΜΑΡΕ ΜΑΡΙΔΑΜ ΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΖΗΤΝ ΧΕ ΝΙΣΙΟΜΕ ΠΠΩΔ ΑΝ ΠΠΩΝΖ (“Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.”)¹⁰⁰ Given the “confusion” of Marys, it is again not entirely clear who is being referred to here. But whether Mary is Jesus’s mother, the prominent disciple Mary Magdalene, or even some third Mary, the statement that all women are not worthy of life is remarkable. And even though Jesus steps in to defend Mary (and women), stating that he will make her a “living spirit resembling you males,”¹⁰¹ this response is not a particularly robust defense of femaleness. In contrast, Jesus’s statement in *GJW* that his mother brought him life and is worthy (*GJW*→1, 3), and his claim that his wife is able to be his disciple (*GJW*→4-5) offer a more robust affirmation that women who are wives and mothers are worthy and able to be disciples of Jesus.

In the end, many possibilities remain open. The Mary in line →3 could refer the Jesus’s mother, his wife, or even a different figure. Jesus’s marriage in *GJW* might be carnal, celibate,¹⁰² metaphorical, and/or symbolic-paradigmatic. I consider it highly

¹⁰⁰ *Gos. Thom.* 51:18-20.

¹⁰¹ Several commentators have noted the similarity here to *GJW* →3. It is not clear what she is (or is not) worthy of. It cannot be “life” because the object of unworthy is grammatically feminine singular (ΜΗΟC), while “life” in Coptic is masculine singular. Nor does it parallel Matt 10:37 where Jesus speaks of being “worthy of me,” because “me” again would require a masculine singular personal suffix.

¹⁰² Apart from whom “Mary” refers to, the reference to Jesus’s wife as a disciple might, however, indicate that the “wife” is regarded as a “sister-wife.” Christians frequently referred to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, such that some Christian men referred to their wives in this sense as also sisters (1 Cor 9:5). On the other hand, the female partner in “celibate marriage,” in which a male and a female Christian lived together but without sexual intercourse, could be called a “wife-sister” (see 1 Cor 9:5; Clement Alex., *Strom.* 6.12 (100) in Otto Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus Bd. 2 Stromata Buch IV-VII*. GCS 15; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1906) p. 482). These cases make it possible to speculate tentatively on restoring the end of line →4 with ΜΝ [ΤΑCΩΜΕ] (“and [my sister]), but other possibilities remain.

likely, however, that the polemical issue of the dialogue concerns the discipleship of women. There is no direct evidence that the issue of women's discipleship under discussion here centered around leadership roles within Christian communities. Rather it may be that *GJW* is interested in countering views that valued virginal celibacy over marriage and childbirth or positions that made rejecting sexual life a requirement for discipleship. The dialogue may be representing Jesus's mother and his wife as paradigms for married, child-bearing Christian women and affirming that they are worthy and able to be his disciples. Other interpretations are of course possible, but this one makes good sense within the history of early Christianity, when questions of marriage and reproduction, the status of Mary the mother and Mary Magdalene, and the meaning of Jesus's incarnation were all widespread topics of theological and ethical concern.

The History of the Manuscript

Ancient Provenance

Papyrus texts written in the Coptic (Sahidic) language were produced almost exclusively in Egypt between ca. the 3rd c. (when Coptic came into circulation) and the 10th c. (when papyrus largely was no longer used). Most ancient finds come from tombs and burials, within caches of private documents in ancient towns, or in rubbish dumps. Some papyri have been reused in mummification or book cartonnage. The provenance of most Coptic papyri, however, remains uncertain.¹⁰³ Where the *GJW* fragment was found is unknown, but its poor condition suggests that it may have come from a rubbish dump or a burial site, although other contexts cannot be ruled out.¹⁰⁴ Its content and the use of *nomina sacra* indicate production and use by Christians.

¹⁰³ See Bridget Leach and John Tait, "Papyrus" in *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (ed. Paul T. Nicholson and Ian Shaw; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 227-53 at 241. Clackson writes that in contrast to the Oxyrhynchus papyri, "most surviving Coptic texts are unprovenanced and undated" ("Coptic Oxyrhynchus," 340b).

¹⁰⁴ See AnneMarie Luijendijk, "Sacred Scriptures as Trash: Biblical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus," *VC* 64:3 (2010) 217-54.

Modern Period

The current owner of the papyrus states that he acquired the papyrus in 1999. Upon request for information about provenance, the owner provided me with a photocopy of a contract for the sale of “6 Coptic papyrus fragments, one believed to be a Gospel” from Hans-Ulrich Laukamp, dated November 12, 1999, and signed by both parties.¹⁰⁵ A handwritten comment on the contract states: “Seller surrenders photocopies of correspondence in German. Papyri were acquired in 1963 by the seller in Potsdam (East Germany).” The current owner said that he received the six papyri in an envelope, and himself conserved them between plates of plexiglass/lucite.

The owner also sent me scanned copies of two photocopies. One is of an unsigned and undated handwritten note in German, stating the following:

Professor Fecht believes that the small fragment, approximately 8 cm in size, is the sole example of a text in which Jesus uses direct speech with reference to having a wife. Fecht is of the opinion that this could be evidence for a possible marriage.¹⁰⁶

If these two documents pertain to the *GJW* fragment currently on loan to Harvard University, they would indicate that it was in Germany in the early 1960’s.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ The amount of the price paid was whited out on the copy I was sent.

¹⁰⁶ “Professor Fecht glaubt, daß der kleine ca. 8 cm große Papyrus das einzige Beispiel für einen Text ist, in dem Jesus die direkte Rede in Bezug auf eine Ehefrau benutzt. Fecht meint, daß dies ein Beweis für eine mögliche Ehe sein könnte.” The named Professor Fecht might be Gerhard Fecht (1922-2006), professor of Egyptology at the Free University, Berlin.

¹⁰⁷ The second document is a photocopy of a typed and signed letter addressed to H. U. Laukamp dated July 15, 1982, from Prof. Dr. Peter Munro (Freie Universität, Ägyptologisches Seminar, Berlin), stating that a colleague, Professor Fecht, has identified one of Mr. Laukamp’s papyri as having nine lines of writing and measuring approximately 110 x 80 mm, and containing text from the Gospel of John. Fecht is said to have suggested a probable date from 2nd-5th c. C.E. Munro declines to give Laukamp an appraisal of its value, but advises that this fragment be preserved between glass plates in order to protect it from further damage. The letter makes no mention of the *GJW* fragment. The collection of the *GJW*’s owner does contain a fragment of the Gospel of John fitting this description, which was subsequently received on loan by Harvard University for examination and publication (November 13, 2012).

In July, 2010, the owner contacted me requesting I look at a Coptic papyrus in his collection, and subsequently sent photographs. In December, 2011, he delivered the *GJW* by hand to Harvard Divinity School for study and publication. In March, 2012, the *GJW* fragment was examined at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World in New York, by the Institute's director, Roger Bagnall and by AnneMarie Luijendijk (Princeton University). Announcement of the discovery was made at the International Association for Coptic Studies meeting in Rome, September 18, 2012, and a draft edition with photographs was posted on-line. The open and lively discussion which followed gave helpful direction and focus to subsequent research, including further study of the papyrus and ink, detailed above.

Dating the Manuscript and the Question of Forgery

From the moment the fragment's existence was announced, discussion of dating focused on the question of whether it was produced in antiquity or was fabricated in modernity with the intent to deceive ("forgery"¹⁰⁸). This question deserves serious consideration and requires taking account of all the pertinent factors as a whole. These include: characteristics of the materials (papyrus and ink); application of the ink on the page; handwriting; language; compositional practice; the provenance of discovery; and historical contextualization.¹⁰⁹ Let us consider each in turn.

The scientific testing completed thus far consistently provides positive evidence of the antiquity of the papyrus and ink, including radiocarbon, spectroscopic, and oxidation characteristics, with no evidence of modern fabrication. Hypothetically, a clever forger could acquire a piece of ancient papyrus and fabricate ink from ancient papyrus fragments or other vegetable matter—both of which would pass these kinds of inspection. Yardley comments, however, that while correct, "in practice this may not be so simple. The soot created in this way would not be at all the same as the soot normally

¹⁰⁸ Technically "forgery" implies a false claim to authorship and is not relevant here given the lack of any ascription (ancient or modern) to *GJW*.

¹⁰⁹ A more concise view: "Authentication should then really be viewed as 1) failure to uncover evidence of forgery, and 2) placement of results within a known historical context" [Joseph G. Barabe, Kathleen A. Martin, Elaine F. Shumacher, Joseph R. Swidler, and Anna S. Teetsov, "Examination of the Gospel of Judas using an Integrated Approach to Ink Characterization." *Microscopy Today* 14.4 (2006)6-15, at 6].

used for inks unless the person who burned the papyrus was exceedingly careful to follow a procedure similar to or related to the processes used by the ancients.”¹¹⁰ Moreover, the very early (unreliable?) ¹⁴C dating is problematic since it requires hypothesizing either that a scribe already in antiquity acquired a centuries-old papyrus to inscribe or that a forger acquired and inscribed it in modernity; both of these hypotheses have difficulties. Further testing that indicates a date for the *GJW* papyrus within the seventh to eighth centuries resolves these difficulties.

Shadows on the relatively low-resolution photographs that were initially published seemed to indicate ink on the lower layers of the recto fibers and led to speculation that a forger inscribed the ancient papyrus after it was damaged. Microscopic examination disconfirms this suggestion.

Papyrologists agree that the clumsiness of the script indicates an unprofessional, inexperienced hand but differ in their evaluation of whether it is due to the elementary educational level of an ancient writer or a forger’s inexperience writing on papyrus. They also noted the small “tails” on some letters that may indicate an anachronistic use of a brush rather than a pen, but Choat finds this point inconclusive. Bagnall suggests a poor pen may be a factor.

The initial estimation of a fourth-century C.E. date for the extant manuscript of *GJW* was based on paleography, but this method has significant limitations given the current state of the field.¹¹¹ A later date is indicated by the age of the papyrus.

¹¹⁰ Personal communication, Dec. 14, 2013.

¹¹¹ See Layton, *Catalogue*, xxiv; idem, “Towards a New Coptic Palaeography,” in *Acts of the Second International Congress of Coptic Studies. Roma, 22–26 September 1980* (ed. Tito Orlandi and Frederik Wisse; Rome: Centro Italiano Microfiches, 1985) 149–58; Rudolphe Kasser, “Paleography” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (ed. Aziz S. Atiya; 8 vols.; New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1991) 8:175-184; Stephen Emmel, “Recent Progress in Coptic Codicology and Paleography (1988-1992)” in *Acts of the Fifth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Washington, 12-15 August, 1992* (ed. Tito Orlandi and David W. Johnson; 2 vols.; Rome: C.I.M., 1993) 1:22–49; and idem, “Recent Progress in Coptic Codicology and Paleography (1992-1996),” in *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit. Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses. Münster, 20.-26. Juli 1996* (ed. Stephen Emmel, Martin Krause, Siegfried G. Richter, Sofia Schaten; 2 vols.; Sprachen und Kulturen des christlichen Orients 6; Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1999) 2:65–78; Anne Boud’hors, “Paléographie et codicologie coptes: progrès et perspectives (1996–2004)” in *Huitième Congrès international d’Études coptes. Paris, 28*

The tiny fragment contains two rare grammatical features, which can be accounted for as 1) unusual but not unknown syntactic features, 2) scribal errors, 3) indications of a forger with a poor knowledge of Coptic, or 4) copying from the November, 2002 online, interlinear version of the *Gos. Thom.* 50:1 by Grondin, which erroneously omits the ⲙⲓ before ⲛⲱⲛⲁ.¹¹² The fact that, even if these rarities are regarded as grammatical mistakes, they are attested in ancient Coptic manuscripts (i.e., they are the kind of errors that native speakers make) tends to persuade me against option three.¹¹³ This point also makes option four less likely, and indeed this option has an additional difficulty in requiring proof that the statements and documentation provided by the owner are also false or forged.

Moreover, in my opinion, option four lacks any plausibility unless the hypothesis is proved correct that the content of *GJW* was composed by “cobbling together” extracts from modern editions of the *Gospel of Thomas*.¹¹⁴ This hypothesis is, however, highly problematic.¹¹⁵ The method used by forgery proponents to establish this compositional practice assumes forgery and then produces similarities between the two works (as they

juin – 3 juillet 2004. Vol. 1 Bilans et perspectives 2000–2004 (ed. Anne Boud’hors and Denyse Vaillancourt; Cahiers de la bibliothèque copte 15; Paris: De Boccard, 2006) 95–109; and the recent bibliography by Sofia Torallas Tovar, “Coptic Codicology and Palaeography (2004–2012): Provisional Bibliography,” accessed September 20, 2013, (http://www.copticcongress2012.uniroma1.it/Report_Torallas.pdf). For fourth-century Coptic documentary texts, see also Gardner and Choat, “Towards a Palaeography,” 1: 501–509; Clackson notes an “irregular and inexperienced hand that is hard to date from palaeographical criteria” (“Coptic Oxyrhynchus,” 335 and n. 10).

¹¹² See Michael W. Grondin, “Did a Forger Use My Interlinear?” November 14, 2012, (http://www.gospel-thomas.net/x_gjw_ps2.htm). The suggestion came from Andrew Bernhard [see Anthony Le Donne, *The Wife of Jesus: Ancient Texts and Modern Scandals* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2013) 64].

¹¹³ So, too, Ariel Shisha-Halevy: “I believe—on the basis of language and grammar—the text is authentic. That is to say, all its grammatical ‘noteworthy’ features, separately or conjointly do not warrant condemning it as forgery” (personal communication, Sept. 17, 2012).

¹¹⁴ See esp. Francis Watson, “*The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife: How a Fake Gospel-Fragment was Composed: Introduction and Summary*,” “*The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife: How a Fake Gospel-Fragment was Composed*,” and “Addendum: The End of the Line?” All three pieces are dated September, 2012, and are available at (<http://ntweblog.blogspot.com/2012/09/revised-versions-of-francis-watsons.html>). My sincere thanks to Prof. Watson for collegially sending me copies of these essays.

¹¹⁵ See also below my response to Leo Depuydt, 190–193.

suggest a forger would) by locating parallels dispersed throughout *Gos. Thom.* Sometimes the parallel is only a single detached word or a grammatical form. The method also requires positing hypothetical editorial changes or grammatical errors by the forger or by emending the text of *GJW* to account for differences from *Gos. Thom.*¹¹⁶ It should be noted that while the proposed parallels are largely made up of very common vocabulary, the fragment's two most distinctive or unusual terms (ΤΑΞΙΜΕ and ΨΑΦΕ) have no parallels in *Gos. Thom.* As Peppard and Paananen have pointed out, such a method cannot distinguish between “authentic and fake” passages nor even show direct literary dependence.¹¹⁷ The results, therefore, are not evidence for forgery, but at best might be one way of accounting for the text if forgery were to be established by other methods. More to the point, the *GJW* fragment can easily be accounted for by the ancient compositional practices used by all early Christian literature (including ancient forgeries). These ancient practices are characterized by a lack of fixity as well as continuity; they include memory and oral composition, performance, and transmission, as well as excerpting and “editing.”¹¹⁸ The relation among the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) is a well-known example combining literary dependence with redactional change to produce theologically distinctive dialogues and narratives, such as forgery proponents suggest for *GJW*'s relation to *Gos. Thom.* One does not, however, have to posit modern forgery to account for *GJW*'s literary dependence upon *Gos. Thom.* (or other comparands), since that would have been possible in antiquity as well. Moreover, *GJW* fits well generically among gospel literature composed and circulated in the early centuries of Christianity.

The interpretive contextualizations offered by forgery proponents have variously pointed toward contemporary debates over whether Jesus was married or over

¹¹⁶ See Watson, “Fake Gospel-Fragment: Introduction and Summary,” “Fake Gospel-Fragment,” and “Addendum”; Suci and Lundhaug, “A Peculiar Dialectical Feature.”

¹¹⁷ Michael Peppard, “Is the ‘Jesus’ wife’ papyrus a forgery? And other queries” September 25, 2012, at <http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/jesus-wife-papyrus-forgery-and-other-queries>; Timo S. Paananen, “Another ‘Fake’ or Just a Problem of Method: What Francis Watson’s Analysis Does to Papyrus Köln 255?” (<http://blue.butler.edu/~jfmegrat/GJW/AnotherFakeOrJustaProblemofMethodbyTimoS.Paananen.pdf>).

¹¹⁸ See e.g., Jocelyn Penny Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

ecclesiastical leadership, as well as the portrait of Mary Magdalene in popular media and fiction, and (alleged) modern hoaxes.¹¹⁹ If the fragment concerns the discipleship of wives and mothers, however, these are mostly irrelevant as well as unsubstantiated. Rather, scholarship on ancient Christianity has established significant and widespread attention by Christians in the first to sixth centuries C.E. to issues of marriage and reproduction, virginity and celibacy, sexual desire and sin, family and discipleship, and Jesus's marital status. These form a demonstrable ancient historical context for the *GJW* fragment, even though the claim that Jesus had a human wife is rare, if not unique.

The lack of information regarding the provenance of the discovery is unfortunate since, when known, such information is extremely pertinent. Given that the provenance of the discovery of small Coptic papyrus fragments is frequently unknown, however, the lack is neither unusual nor decisive for the question of dating. While we can wish for strong evidence, such as an inscribed date or provenance established by professional archaeological excavation, arguments from silence based on these deficiencies are not determinative of the question one way or the other.

On the basis of the criteria considered above and the research done to date, where does the weight of evidence fall in considering the date of the *GJW* fragment? On the side of a date in antiquity, all the evidence can be marshaled: the placement of the ink, its chemical composition, the age of the papyrus, and patterns of aging and damage support ancient fabrication and inscription. The inexperienced handwriting and linguistic features fit a poorly trained scribe (with a poor pen?) who is a native speaker. The genre and literary comparands (including the *Gospel of Thomas*) are a fit for ancient Christianity, as are the topics of discussion. On the side of a date in modernity, the gravest difficulty for me lies in explaining how a forger incompetent in Coptic language with poor scribal skills (perhaps even anachronistically using a brush) was yet so highly skilled as to secure ancient papyrus, make ink with an ancient technique, leave no ink traces out of place at the microscopic level, achieve patterns of differential aging, fabricate a paper trail of modern supporting documents, and provide a good fit for an ancient historical context—one that no serious scholar considers to be evidence of the historical Jesus's marital status. In my judgment such a combination of bumbling and

¹¹⁹ See, e.g. Le Donne, *The Wife of Jesus*.

sophistication seems extremely unlikely. Further research or the development of new methods may offer determinative evidence, but for now, I would judge the weight of evidence to fall on the side of dating the *GJW* as a material artifact to antiquity, probably the seventh to eighth centuries C.E.

History in Antiquity

There is insufficient evidence to speculate with any confidence about who may have composed, copied, read, or circulated *GJW* in antiquity except to conclude they were Christians. Many ancient Christian gospels were pseudonymous, but without a title or other identification, the ancient attribution of this text (if it explicitly had one) remains unknown. Sahidic Coptic language and material composition place the fragment's provenance in Egypt in antiquity. Given that the generic form and content fit within the historical context of the second to fifth centuries of Christianity, the fragment's content might have been composed in this period. More speculatively, given that the closest materials parallel to our fragment in content and genre are found in literature originally composed in Greek in the second century, subsequently translated into Coptic, and circulated in the fourth and fifth centuries (namely, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Mary*, and probably the *Gospel of Philip*), it is possible that the dialogue of the *GJW* fragment may also have been composed as early as the second half of the second century in Greek, later translated into Coptic, and circulated in later centuries.

Concluding Reflections

The most historically reliable early Christian literature is silent about Jesus's marital status and the *GJW* fragment does not change that situation. It is not evidence that Jesus was married, but it does appear to support the favorable position on marriage and reproduction taken by the canonical 1 Timothy, and it stands on the side of Jesus as he refutes the statement of Peter in *Gos. Thom.* 114 that "women are not worthy of life." Although we cannot know whether this damaged fragment supported the ancient patriarchal household order or argued that females should become male as these writings do, it does seem to enter debates over whether Jesus's incarnate life pointed toward marriage or celibacy as the ideal mode of Christian life. Ultimately such questions raise

theological issues of whether sexuality belongs to being fully human or necessarily compromises holiness. In my reading, however, the main point of the *GJW*'s fragment is simply to affirm that women who are wives and mothers can be Jesus's disciples.

Fifty-nine years passed from the rediscovery of the fifth century Berlin Codex in 1896 until its first publication in 1955. Its final editor, Walter Till, expressed a sentiment with which I have come to have a deep sympathy after only two years. "At some point," he wrote, "a man must find the courage to let the manuscript leave one's hand even if one is convinced that there is much that is still imperfect. That is unavoidable with all human endeavors."¹²⁰ So, too, this article is not the last word on the subject of the *GJW* fragment, but I hope it will be a useful contribution to ongoing discussion and research.

Afterword

In January, 2014, I concluded this article by stating it would not be the last word on the subject. And now in early March, I received news of the results of the second radiocarbon testing of the material artifact of *GJW* that gives it a mean date of 741 C.E. This date suggests a new line of inquiry into the context of the fragment's circulation in Egypt of the Islamic period, given the Qur'an's designation of Jesus as "Son of Mary" and its view that prophets (among whom Jesus is numbered) were usually married, although the Qur'an does not state specifically that Jesus was married.

¹²⁰ Walter C. Till and Hans-Martin Schenke, *Die gnostische Schriften des koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502* (2nd ed.; TU 60. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1972) 2, my translation.