

1. POSSIBLE MARKERS OF INAUTHENTICITY IN A GREEK NEW TESTAMENT PAPYRUS: GENUINELY BAD OR A VERY GOOD FAKE?

ELIJAH HIXSON

In this chapter, I suggest that P.Yale I 3 (GA P50; LDAB 2861) *might* be a modern forgery. I discuss aspects of the manuscript itself, its possible provenance, and the potential identity of its forger, should it turn out to be a modern production. While there is no single smoking gun strong enough to prove that P50 is a modern fake, there are several red flags that mark it as suspicious. Many of these red flags could be explained in such a way that does not de-authenticate the manuscript, but the number of red flags is suspicious. I argue that it should be subjected to further testing in order to authenticate or de-authenticate it as a genuine New Testament papyrus.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE MANUSCRIPT

According to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library's website, P50 (P.CtYBR inv. 1543) was 'Purchased by Michael Ivanovich Rostovtzeff from Maurice Nahman in Paris, June 1933, with funds donated by Edward Stephen Harkness and Horatio McLeod Reynolds'.¹ In its *editio princeps*, Carl Kraeling mentioned

¹ 'Guide to the Yale Papyrus Collection':

<https://beinecke.library.yale.edu/research-teaching/doing-research-beinecke/introduction-yale-papyrus-collection/guide-yale-papyrus>

that it was purchased ‘together with a number of other texts of Egyptian provenance’.² The papyrus is a bifolio containing Acts 8:26–32 and 10:26–31 in an unusual, non-continuous format. The two folios are not a sheet from a larger gathering with text missing from lost inner sheets—the bifolio as preserved is the manuscript in its entirety. Each page contains a single column of text. The text of Acts 8:32 ends a line prematurely on col. 2 (line 15) and Acts 10:26 begins on the next line (line 16) of the same column. P50 was first edited by Kraeling in a 1937 Festschrift for Kirsopp Lake, and it was re-edited in 1967 by John F. Oates, Alan E. Samuel and C. Bradford Welles.³ Stephen Emmel conserved P50 at some point between 1983 and 1996, though his remarks on the papyrus are limited to a correction of two readings in the 1967 edition that were correct in Kraeling’s *editio princeps*.⁴ More recently, John Granger Cook has provided a survey of the different functions (for example, amulet, miniature codex, liturgical aid.) that have been proposed for the manuscript.⁵ It has been assigned varying dates within the range of third century to fourth/fifth century (see the discussion of anomalous letterforms below).

Referenced henceforth as ‘Guide to the Yale Papyrus Collection’. This lot is described as containing ‘P.CtYBR inv. 841 (?), 1527-1534, 1535 (?), 1536, 1537, 1538 (?), 1539 (?), 1540 (?), 1541 (?), 1542-1545, 1546 (?), 1631 (?), 1651 (?), 1652 (?), 1656 (?)’. All websites in this chapter were accessed in December 2019 unless otherwise stated.

² Carl H. Kraeling, ‘P50: Two Selections from Acts’, *Quantulacumque: Studies Presented to Kirsopp Lake by Pupils, Colleagues, and Friends*, eds. Robert P. Casey, Sylvia Lake, and Agnes K. Lake (London: Christophers, 1937), p. 163.

³ John F. Oates, Alan E. Samuel, and C. Bradford Welles, ‘P.Yale I’, *Yale Papyri in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library* (Durham: The American Society of Papyrologists, 1967), pp. 15–21.

⁴ Gisela Noack, ‘Conservation of Yale’s Papyrus Collection’, *The Book and Paper Group Annual*, 4 (1986): pp. 61–73; Stephen Emmel, ‘Greek Biblical Papyri in the Beinecke Library’, *ZPE* 112 (1996): pp. 289–294.

⁵ John Granger Cook, ‘P50 (P.Yale I 3) and the Question of Its Function’, *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approach*, eds. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas. Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 115–128.

KNOWN FAKES IN THE YALE COLLECTION

Malcolm Choat writes that ‘the majority of forged papyri entered collections over 100 years ago’ and that ‘[i]n nearly every case, fakes on papyrus come through the antiquities trade...often hidden among a larger lot of genuine papyri’.⁷ Yale’s papyrus collection does contain a few papyri known to be fakes. The database of known forgeries maintained by the Forging Antiquity project lists the following forgeries housed at Yale’s Beinecke Library, though none bear any real resemblance to P50.⁸

Papyrus	Acquisition information, according to Yale’s website ⁹
P.CtYBR inv. 85	Purchased by David L. Askren (no dealer mentioned) before 1927.
P.CtYBR inv. 526	Purchased by Michael Ivanovich Rostovtzeff and Charles Bradford Welles from ‘Dr. Kondilios’ in Cairo, in 1931, before 10 February.
P.CtYBR inv. 1797	Purchased from Hans P. Kraus in New York, 1 May 1964.
P.CtYBR inv. 1798	Purchased from Hans P. Kraus in New York, 1 May 1964.
P.CtYBR inv. 1802	Purchased from Hans P. Kraus in New York, 1 May 1964.
P.CtYBR inv. 5207	Purchased from Gallery Nefer, Zurich in 1997. ¹⁰
P.CtYBR inv. 5268	Purchased from Gallery Nefer, Zurich in 1997.

⁶ Unedited images of P50 throughout this chapter are courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. All edits are my own.

⁷ Malcolm Choat, ‘Forging Antiquities: The Case of Papyrus Fakes’, *The Palgrave Handbook on Art Crime*, eds. Saskia Hufnagel and Duncan Chappell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 560.

⁸ <http://www.forgingantiquity.com/forgeries>.

⁹ ‘Guide to the Yale Papyrus Collection’. I have simply copied in the relevant information from the website without using quotations.

¹⁰ The digital catalogue entries for 5207

(<http://hdl.handle.net/10079/digcoll/2768796>) and 5268

(<http://hdl.handle.net/10079/digcoll/2768976>) both list ‘1997a’ for the acquisition information. ‘Guide to the Yale Papyrus Collection’ reports Gallery Nefer as the source of the ‘1997a’ acquisition.

P.CtYBR inv. 5407	Purchased from Alan Edouard Samuel (University of Toronto) in New York, 24 February 1992, related to the earlier purchase of a lot by Alan Edouard Samuel from a dealer across from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, early 1965 (sometime between December 1964 and Spring 1965). ¹¹
-------------------	--

ANOMALIES IN THE MANUSCRIPT

The papyrus exhibits a number of anomalies concerning fibre direction, text avoiding lacunae, ink, letterforms, and a discrepancy between the copyist's apparent knowledge and skill. On these bases, I suggest that P50 be subjected to further testing before a conclusion is made regarding its authenticity or inauthenticity.

1. Fibre direction

The first anomaly is admittedly complex, but it appears that the papyrus fibres are at odds with the extant text, particularly on col. 2. The placement of the two sides of the lacuna in the middle leaves insufficient room for the text that must have appeared in that lacuna. If space is made for the expected text, the horizontal papyrus fibres meet at a slight angle at precisely the point of the lacuna in the middle of the folio.

If we presume forgery, one explanation for this phenomenon is that the papyrus fragments were too far apart when transcribed. The forger wrote through the lacunae on each line, unaware that the left fragment had warped out of its correct alignment. In conservation, Emmel would have rotated the bottom of the fragment slightly anti-clockwise, which correctly lined up the papyrus fibres, but this left the text out of alignment. In the following edited images (Figure 3A–D), I use black for a crude drawing of the expected text, white for the average line directions and grey for the papyrus fibres.

¹¹ The digital catalogue entry for 5407 (<http://hdl.handle.net/10079/digcoll/2769401>) lists '1992b' for the acquisition information. 'Guide to the Yale Papyrus Collection' gives the above information about the source of the '1992b' acquisition.

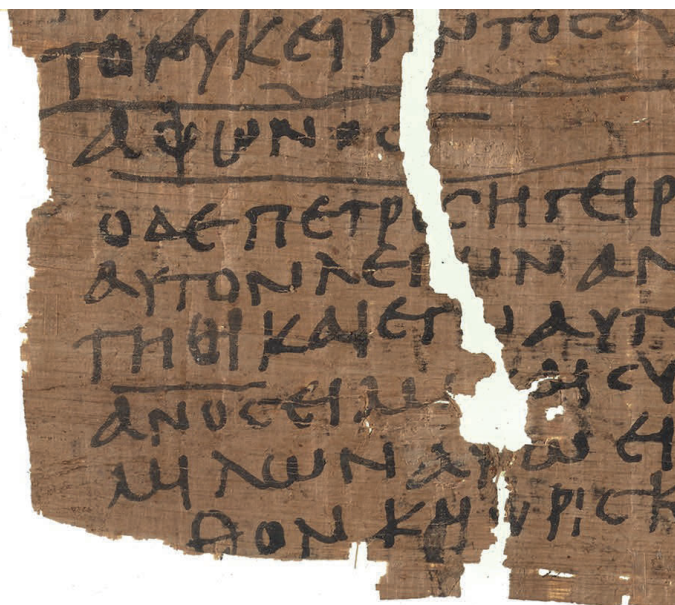


Figure 3A. P50, col. 2, uncorrected, unedited

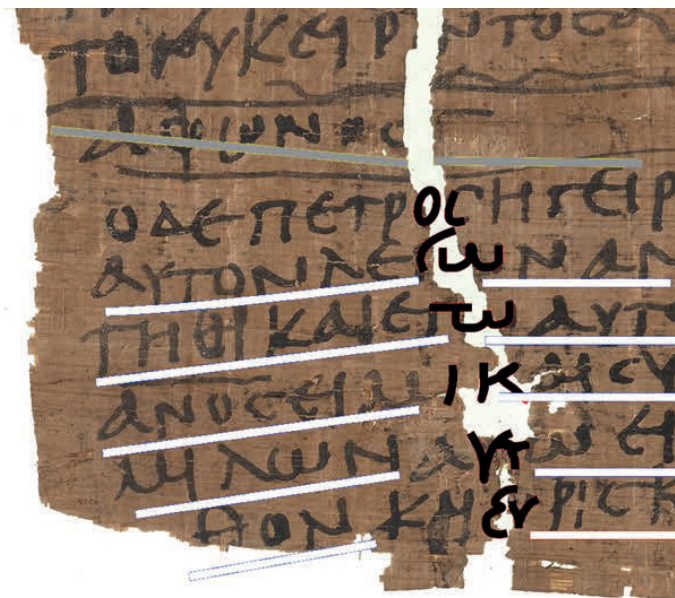


Figure 3B. P50, col. 2, uncorrected, edited

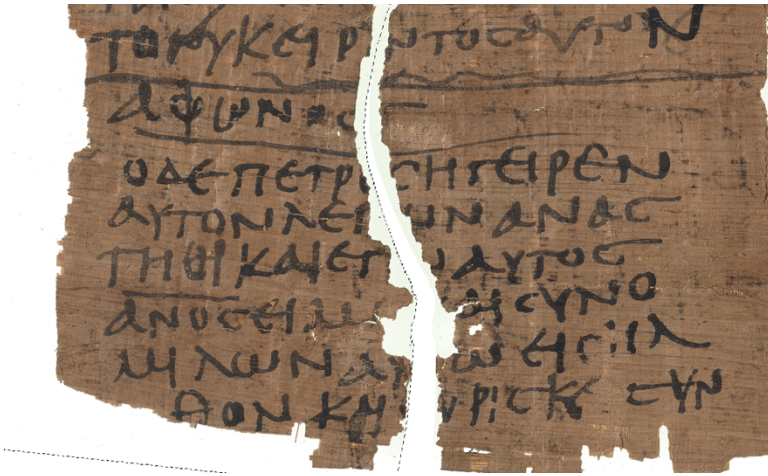


Figure 3C. P50, col. 2, 'corrected', but otherwise unedited

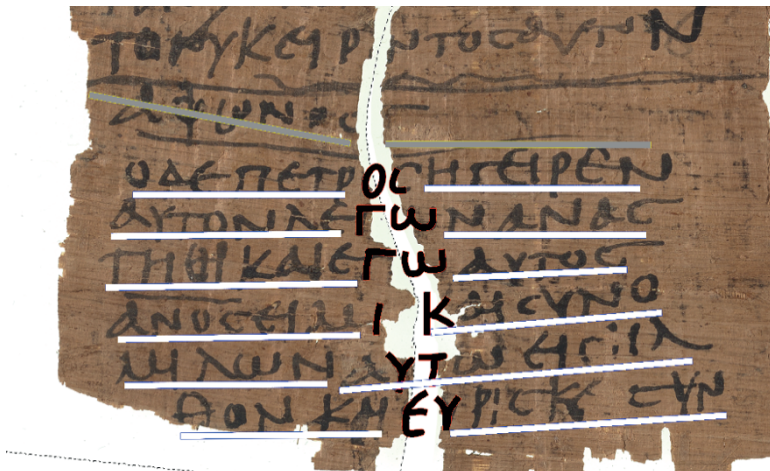


Figure 3D. P50, col. 2, 'corrected' and edited

2. Text avoiding lacunae

Revel Coles and Claudio Gallazzi write:

The following procedure may be helpful in identifying forgeries of this last type [i.e. ‘learned counterfeits’ made ‘with knowledge of language and of palaeography’]. 1) A close examination of the fibre texture. In this class the use of a single dug-up piece of genuine ancient papyrus is likely, which may then exhibit damage (word-holes, cracks, breaks) incurred prior to the forger’s setting-out of his text, and also clean cuts on one or more sides if it has been taken from the margin or other blank area of an existing text. 2) An analysis of the script which is likely to present features from different periods and which above all will reveal itself as adapted to the surface on which it is set out. It will be especially useful to examine letters placed close to any damage, since the writer will have attempted to make his text seem earlier than worm-holes and cracks already there.¹²

In general, it appears that the copyist of the manuscript writes as though the major damage to the papyrus occurred after the text was written, though it is clear in two instances that the writing material was already slightly damaged when the text was added.¹³ First, a square piece of papyrus is missing at the edge of lines 17–18 on col. 3. These lines end here with no missing text before the beginning of each of the following lines. However, the ends of lines 16 and 19 continue beyond this place, each missing pieces of the final letters due to damage at the edge of the papyrus. In line 19, the second peak of μ is noticeably shorter, and the circle of $\circ$ is not completed at the top of the letter as if the writer were avoiding the hole there.

¹² R.A. Coles and C. Gallazzi, ‘Papyri and Ostraka: Alterations and Counterfeits’, *Scritti in onore di Orsolina Montevecchi*, ed. E. Bresciani (Bologna: Cooperativa Libreria Universitaria Editrice Bologna, 1981), p. 102.

¹³ Kraeling suspects that some damage happened before the text was written and cites $\pi\rho\omicron\varsigma\epsilon\upsilon\chi\omicron\rho\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ on col. 3 as possible evidence, in ‘P50: Two Selections from Acts’, p. 163, n. 2.

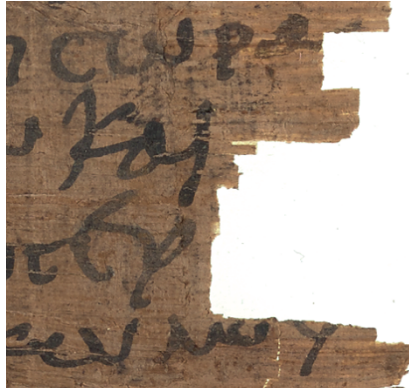


Figure 4. P50, col. 3, ends of lines 16–19

Second, at col. 3, line 18, a fold has cracked the papyrus. The first four letters $\tau\eta\nu\epsilon$ go through the fold, while the fifth letter begins through it but angles up to avoid the crack, and the following letters sit slightly higher on the line of writing, above the fold. The placement of these letters suggests that the crack was already present when the letters were inscribed.¹⁴



Figure 5. P50, col. 3, beginning of line 18

A second manifestation of this anomaly is that in the space below col. 1, line 7 is approximately twice the length of the space above it, as if line 7 was written to avoid a hole in the papyrus here.

¹⁴ Cf. the edition by Oates, et al., in *P. Yale I*, 15, which does not address the ink's avoidance of this crack but states that the cracks in the papyrus are evidence that it was folded after its text was written.



Figure 6. P50, col. 1, lines 6–8 (black lines added to mark the interlinear spacing)

Additionally, there are several instances on the papyrus in which individual letters appear to be written to avoid pre-existing holes, as shown in Table 1.

col. 1, line 2: top of ε is abnormally short at the edge of what is extant	col. 1, line 11: ν looks fully formed but almost untouched by the hole	col. 1, line 12: the hole fits snugly between ε and λ, though the top of ε normally curves over more, and ink might be bleeding around the hole at λ
col. 1, line 17: loop of α is abnormally narrow, avoiding the damage in the middle of the sheet	col. 1, line 22: the hole comes right to the edge of η	col. 2, line 2: this letter is supposed to be a ν; it is missshapen for a ν and fits perfectly within the papyrus

		
col. 2, line 12: the left edge of α ends at the crack in the papyrus, and the tail rises above the hole	col. 3, line 5: the top right corner of ρ comes right to the edge of the hole	col. 3, line 10: ν fits perfectly between two holes, with ink coming right to both edges
		
col. 3, line 10: the top of ϵ ends right at the edge, and the bottom seems to attempt to avoid the hole	col. 3, line 11: a misshapen ϵ at a point of damage and an α that avoids the damage to its left and rises above the hole beneath it	col. 3, line 11: misshapen θ at a crack in the papyrus
		
col. 3, line 18: bottom of ϵ is misshapen	col. 3, line 19: μ and $\circ$ of $\mu\omicron\nu$ avoiding a hole	

Table 1. Letters avoiding pre-existing holes in P50

A final example of ink avoiding lacunae concerns line spacing. Where there is no existing hole to write ‘through’, writing is not difficult, but the greater the damage, the more difficult it may be to write through it without giving evidence of forgery. One subtle way to reduce the amount of work involved is to adjust line spacing. The overall effect is that extra spacing reduces the number of lines that need to be written through the difficult part. We may compare P50 to P.CtYBR inv. 85, a known fake in the same collection. Though the line spacing is more exaggerated in P.CtYBR inv. 85, the same phenomenon can be observed in both papyri.

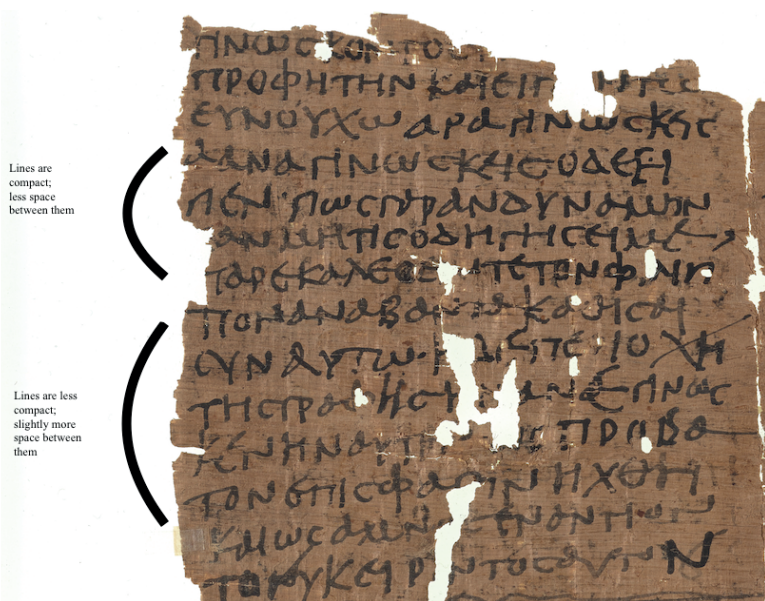


Figure 7. Line spacing in P50

It appears at many places on P50 that damage to the papyrus was already present when its text was inscribed. Some of these anomalies could be explained by poor quality papyrus, but others, such as anomalies around the ‘worm trench’ (as Oates, et al., describe it) in the middle of the folios, are more difficult to explain. If the papyrus was indeed inscribed after such damage had been done, who is more likely to have done so—an ancient scribe or a modern one?

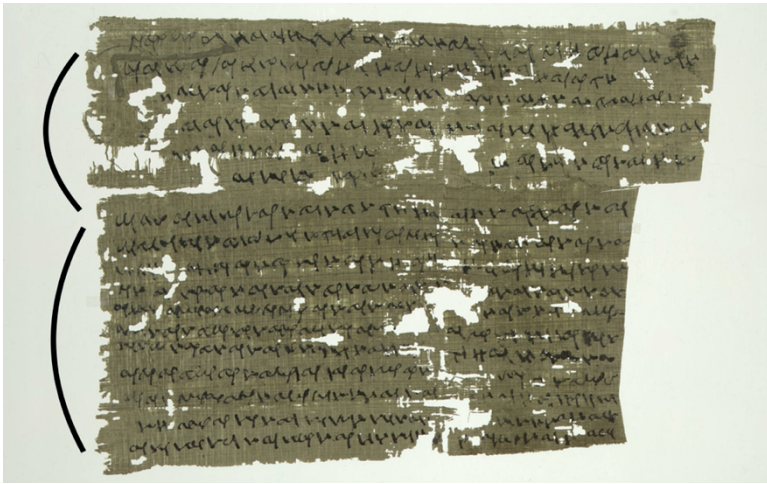


Figure 8.¹⁵ Line spacing in P.CtYBR inv. 85

3. Observations on the ink

3.1 Ink and particles on the surface of the papyrus. Kipp Davis et al. noticed that the one of the Dead Sea Scrolls they had identified as forgeries (Schøyen MS 4612/6) had salt crystals on the surface ‘consistent with dry common table salt’ but *under* the ink.¹⁶ This phenomenon was evidence that the papyrus MS 4612/6 had been inscribed with ink ‘in modern times’. Although not an identical phenomenon, the surface of P50 features occasional particles of a reddish-brown solid. The ink of P50 variously appears under these particles or, occasionally, over these particles just as in the case of Schøyen MS 4612/6 as shown in Table 2.

¹⁵ Image courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹⁶ Kipp Davis, Ira Rabin, Ines Feldman, and Myriam Kutzsch, ‘Nine Dubious “Dead Sea Scrolls” Fragments from the Twenty-First Century’, *Dead Sea Discoveries* 24.2 (September 2017): pp. 208–209.

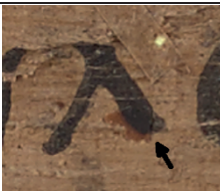
		
col. 1 line 2: particle on top of ink	col. 1 line 8: particle on top of ink	col. 1 line 12: ink partially on top of particle
		
col. 3 line 4: ink written around particle	col. 3 line 11: ink partially on top of particle	col. 4 line 3: ink written around particle

Table 2. Ink and Particles in P50

3.2 Ink Bleeding. In a few places, the images of P50 show a slight discoloration, which may be occasions on which the ink bled but the person who wrote the text tried to scrape some ink away to minimise the effects of bleeding. Perhaps these letters could be examined under a microscope for a more thorough analysis. Kipp Davis et al. also give ink bleeding as one anomalous feature of Schøyen MS. 4612/6.¹⁷

An unskilled copyist could result in some ink bleeding, both in the way the ink itself was made and in the execution of the writing. Stephen C. Carlson describes forged writing as having a slower, more hesitant quality.¹⁸ In the case of P50, ink bleeding

¹⁷ Davis et al., ‘Nine Dubious “Dead Sea Scrolls” Fragments’, p. 207. For comparison, see the image there.

¹⁸ Stephen C. Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith’s Invention of Secret Mark* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), pp. 27–29.

could suggest that the scribe occasionally wrote too slowly for the consistency of the ink, allowing some ink to bleed out into surrounding cracks. If any of this excess ink has been scraped off, that might indicate an intent to hide the ink bleeding—or at least minimise it. Admittedly, if P50 is a writing exercise, its purpose could explain this anomaly. The examples of ink bleeding are shown in Table 3.

 col. 1, line 4: ink bleeding below v; possibly scraped	 col. 1, line 5: ink bleeding above and below both instances of α along fibre direction; possibly scraped
 col. 1, line 9: vertical ink bleeding; discoloration to the left suggests possible scraping, but to the right, unscraped ink flows down a crack	 col. 2, line 16: horizontal ink bleed- ing

	
col. 1, line 17: horizontal ink bleeding	col. 3, line 9: horizontal ink bleeding
	
col. 3, line 13: unscraped ink bleeding (though it is possible that the raised fibre was scraped)	col. 3, line 18: ink bleeding around damaged papyrus

Table 3. Ink Bleeding in P50

3.3 Patching. Additionally, the papyrus has several examples of what is described as ‘patching’, ‘touching up’ or ‘overwriting’. This phenomenon occurs when a forger writes an imperfect letterform and returns to it to touch it up.¹⁹ Gregg Schwendner has appealed to patching as one indicator that the Jesus’ Wife

¹⁹ Admittedly, patching can happen in genuine writing. On the distinction between patching as an authorial tendency and patching as evidence of forgery, see Joe Nickell, *Detecting Forgery: Forensic Investigation of Documents* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), pp. 70–71. It is unclear whether Nickell’s distinctions are relevant to forged papyri, as his primary concern is to detect forgeries among documents that claim to be more recent—his example of patching is a forged signature of ‘Mrs. A. Lincoln’.

Fragment resembles ‘simulated writing’ rather than authentically ancient writing, and Carlson writes, ‘Even more suspicious than the forger’s tremor is retouching’.²⁰ For P50, there are some irregularities that might be patching, but they may also be due to the general irregularity of the hand and consequently not evidence of forgery. Roger S. Bagnall and Raffaella Cribiore mention ‘retracing of letters’ as one indicator of an unpractised (but genuinely ancient) hand.²¹ Microscopic analysis may be able to shed more light on whether any patching on the papyrus could point to forgery, but it is difficult to come to firm conclusions from the images.

		
col. 1 line 3: β is re-written	col. 1 line 15: top of α is re-touched	col. 2 line 1: ω is rewritten or retouched
		
col. 3 line 12: mis-shapen ν is rewritten in the same shape	col. 3 line 15: α is rewritten	

Table 4. Patching in P50

²⁰ Gregg W. Schwendner, ‘The ‘Gospel of Jesus Wife’ as a Questioned Document’, https://www.academia.edu/6860965/THE_GOSPEL_OF_JESUS_WIFE_A_S_A_QUESTIONED_DOCUMENT_What_Would_Simulated_Ancient_Writing_look_like; Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, p. 26.

²¹ Roger Bagnall and Raffaella Cribiore, *Women’s Letters from Ancient Egypt, 300 BC–AD 800* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015), p. 45.

3.4 Strength/damage. Finally, the ink is regularly dark and undamaged. There are sections of damage that look as though the surface was scraped or rubbed away, and there are several ‘lines’ of damage to the ink that overlap with strips of papyrus. Otherwise, however, the ink does not appear as damaged as one might expect. This uneven damage could be a consequence of the way the papyrus survived through the centuries, or it could be the result of a modern attempt to make the writing look older than it is.

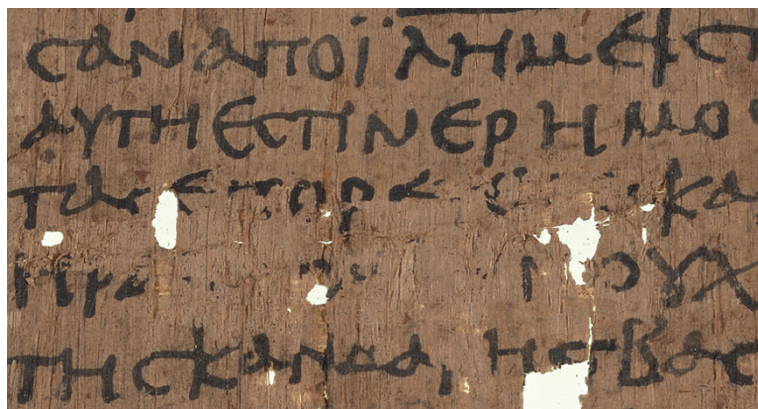


Figure 9. P50, image of ink and damage

3.5 Summary. The ink of P50 has, at times, been written over particulate contamination on the surface of the papyrus. It has occasionally bled out beyond the edges of the written letters (and may have been scraped off in places to mask this bleeding) and has been retouched. In general, its damage seems slightly uneven. The ink is dark and well-preserved in some places and almost completely gone in others. In combination with other anomalies, are these features sufficiently explained by a genuine, but genuinely bad copyist, or does a modern forger provide a better explanation?

4. Anomalous letterforms

The hand of P50 presents difficulties. It has been assigned dates ranging from ‘second half of the third century’, to the fifth century

(by Roberts and Skeat).²² Oates, et al., discuss its mix of earlier and later letterforms, and Cook gives a brief summary of some of the disagreements among palaeographers.²³ Orsini and Clarysse date it to the fourth century.²⁴ Alan Mugridge also accepts a fourth-century date, and describes the hand as: 'Very uneven semi-uncial, with numerous irregularities in letter shape, size and placement, the unsteadiness evident in the lettering and lines of writing not being straight clearly indicating the hand of an unpractised writer'.²⁵ Additionally, the form and location of punctuation might seem anachronistic with the hand. One of the arguments Oates et al. give for an earlier date is that, despite the later appearance of the hand, such punctuation is more at home either earlier or much later.²⁶

In general, the hand starts out attempting to replicate a majuscule hand, but cursive elements creep in more and more throughout the papyrus. This phenomenon itself is consistent with genuine papyri.²⁷ On the other hand, a few unusual letters

²² Philip Comfort and David Barrett, *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Volume 1: Papyri 1–72* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2019), p. 332; Karl Jaroš, *Die ältesten griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments: Bearbeitete Edition und Übersetzung* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2014), p. 699. For this dating both editions appeal to a remark in Oates, Samuel, and Welles, *P.Yale I*, p. 16: 'It is hard for me to think of this hand as belonging other than in the period of Diocletian'. For a range of dates that had been assigned to it by 1976, see Kurt Aland, ed., *Repertorium der griechischen christlichen Papyri I: Altes Testament, Neues Testament, Varia, Apokryphen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1976), p. 280.

²³ Oates, Samuel, and Welles, *P.Yale I*, pp. 15–16; Cook, 'P50 (P.Yale I 3) and the Question of Its Function', pp. 116–117.

²⁴ Pasquale Orsini and Willy Clarysse, 'Early New Testament Manuscripts and Their Dates: A Critique of Theological Paleography', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 88.4 (2012): p. 470.

²⁵ Alan Mugridge, *Copying Early Christian Texts: A Study of Scribal Practice*, WUNT 362 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), p. 366.

²⁶ For punctuation, the copyist 'uses a single dot, high in the line, but occasionally a combination of dots and curves ([col.] iii. [line] 14) or something much like an apostrophe ([col.] ii. [line] 11). These last two stand at the end of questions, and the first editor took them to be marks of interrogation, but no others are known before the ninth century, and this is highly unlikely', in Oates, Samuel, and Welles, *P.Yale I*, p. 16.

²⁷ Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt*, p. 45.

may reveal instances in which a forger momentarily lost concentration and slipped into a revealing letterform.

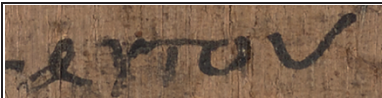
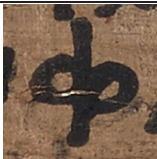
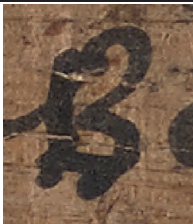
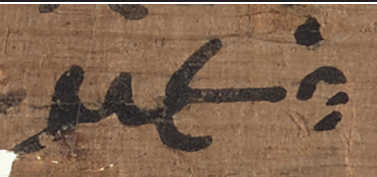
	
col. 1, line 15, αυτου; a modern <i>upsilon</i> ?	col. 2, line 3, χει (χ-ε ligature?)
	
col. 2, line 6, με· Tischendorf's 8 th edition punctuates with a semicolon here—με; (Acts 8:31).	col. 2, line 7, φ (in a single movement)
	
col. 2, line 8, αχ	col. 2, line 8, β (formed in three movements: ↓, →, and '3')
	
col. 2, line 17, half of ω without evidence of a first half?	col. 3, line 14, modern punctuation (;) after με? Tischendorf's 8 th edition punctuates with a semicolon here—με; (Acts 10:29).

Table 5. Anomalous Letterforms in P50

5. Discrepancy between the copyist's apparent knowledge and skill

Finally, there does seem to be a discrepancy between the copyist's apparent knowledge of manuscripts and his or her skill in producing one. In the *editio princeps*, Kraeling writes, 'The question is whether the writer's knowledge of literary conventions and his purpose in the composition of the text corroborate the impression made by the script. In general, it may be said that he knows the conventions of manuscript composition'.²⁸ Kraeling notes that the *nomina sacra* are correctly written in standard forms, punctuation and diacritical marks are used correctly, and the scribe's 'orthography, though not above reproach ... is at times better than that of the great fourth-century codices'.²⁹

Textually, Oates et al. write that 'between the Alexandrine text, represented primarily by $\aleph$ and B, and the Western text of D, *P. Yale* 3 goes mostly with the former' but mention a small number of places where P50 agrees with D (GA 05) against $\aleph$ and B (GA 01 and 03), echoing Kraeling's assessment of the manuscript's textual affinities.³⁰ Oates et al. write of the few 'unique readings' that 'None of them is of special importance'.³¹ These readings in general are sensible and are not inconsistent with what could be expected. They list the following:

Text	Location	P50	NA28	Additional attestation, according to the ECM
Acts 8:28	col. 1, line 13	οὗτος	ἦν τε	-
Acts 8:30a	col. 1, line 21	προελθών	προδραμών	181 1875
Acts 8:30b	col. 2, lines 2–3	εἰπ[ε]ν τῷ ευνουχῷ	εἶπεν	K:SM S:P ^{>}
Acts 8:30c	col. 2, line 3	αῖρα	ἄρά γε	61 636 642 1751 1890 2147 2718 Ath ^{ms} Eus. SevGab ^{ms}
Acts 10:30	col. 3, line 14	οὗδε	καὶ ὁ	-

Table 6. Singular Readings in P50

²⁸ Kraeling, 'P50: Two Selections from Acts', p. 169.

²⁹ Kraeling, 'P50: Two Selections from Acts', p. 169.

³⁰ Oates, Samuel, and Welles, *P. Yale I*, 18; Kraeling, 'P50: Two Selections from Acts', pp. 171–172.

The high number of corrections is striking, which implies that it was important to the copyist to reproduce the text accurately. Oates et al. count fourteen corrections in these few verses and suggest that one of these corrections might indicate that the copyist had knowledge of multiple forms of the text. They write, 'In iii, 17 [i.e. col. 3, line 17; Acts 10:30], the writer planned to write ἡμην τὴν ἐννάτην with most of the manuscripts, but checked himself and wrote νηστεύων with D and E. It is possible to suspect that he was familiar with the other text and failed for a moment to note the divergence of his archetype'.³² In 1926, these two readings were available on facing pages in Ropes' edition.³³

The copyist clearly knew what a literary manuscript should look like, including *nomina sacra* and punctuation. He or she also clearly cared for the text, making numerous corrections so that the text would be accurately copied. Unusually, then, the first pericope ends abruptly in the middle of a sentence and does not complete the citation of Isaiah 53:7: 'As a sheep, he was led to slaughter, and as a lamb before the one shearing it was silent...'. Even this ending is a correction; ἀφωνος was added after the copyist had originally ended the pericope after χειραντος αὐτον.

Despite the copyist's accurate knowledge of the proper text and features of a Christian literary manuscript, the copyist was apparently not accustomed to producing one. The hand itself has been described as 'ugly' by Oates et al.³⁴ Mugridge placed the hand of P50 in his 'unskilled' category. Kraeling attributed 'the inelegancies of his product' to 'carelessness and haste', supposing that the copyist was simply 'accustomed to cursive writing'.³⁵ Still, Oates et al. address the discrepancy between knowledge and ability head on: 'The most obvious suggestion especially in view of the many corrections, is that this was a school exercise, but the hand

³¹ Oates, Samuel, and Welles, *P. Yale I*, p. 18.

³² Oates, Samuel, and Welles, *P. Yale I*, p. 17.

³³ James Hardy Ropes and Henry Joel Cadbury, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Text of Acts* (London: Macmillan, 1920), pp. 96–97.

³⁴ Oates, Samuel, and Welles, *P. Yale I*, p. 17, n. 4.

³⁵ Kraeling, 'P50: Two Selections from Acts', p. 170.

is not that of a schoolboy and the corrections were made by the original writer'.³⁶ They conclude their discussion: 'It is mysterious'.

In light of the observation that the hand is not the hand of a trained copyist, but it is the hand of someone who is well-acquainted with manuscript conventions, could a better explanation be that the manuscript is a fake produced by someone who knew manuscripts well? This scenario could explain why the *nomina sacra* and punctuation are completely regular, why the text does not contain any particularly interesting readings, and why the copyist was a zealous corrector who aimed to get the text correct. But it could also explain why the handwriting is not that of a skilled copyist and why so many corrections were needed. A skilled textual scholar, well-acquainted with manuscripts might be able to replicate the right kind of handwriting, but not without difficulty. The text of P50, however—particularly in light of its textual affinities—is precisely what we might expect from such an individual.

AN AUTHENTIC PAPYRUS WITH MANY OF THE SAME ANOMALIES

It may be that P50 is genuine. The hand does generally resemble an ancient documentary hand, and we might expect a forger to stay more closely to a model. Some of the anomalies might be explained by the poor quality of the papyrus and the poor skill of the copyist, and some of the textual discrepancies could be attributed to the exemplar, not a forger. As a check on these anomalous forms, I propose P. Col. VIII 225 as a counterexample. P. Col. VIII 225 is a private letter from Alexandria dated to the late second century. Though we have every reason to believe that P. Col. VIII 225 is genuine, it has some of the same anomalous features as P50. There are similar letterforms of β and ϕ , some ink smudges, a few letters that avoid holes in the papyrus and a few instances of ink bleeding.

³⁶ Oates, Samuel, and Welles, *P. Yale I*, p. 19.

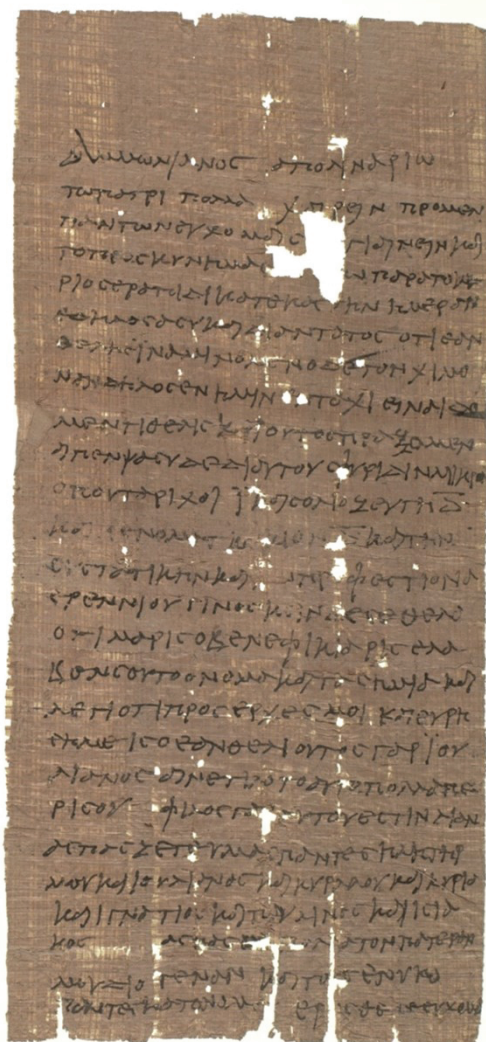


Figure 10. P. Col. VIII 225 (Private letter, late II cent.,
Inv. 320, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia
University Libraries)

Both papyri have a similar way of writing β in two ($\downarrow$, then either '3' or 'S') or three ($\downarrow$, $\rightarrow$, then either '3' or 'S') strokes. With regard to ϕ , P. Col. VIII 225 is more consistent. P50 most commonly uses

a less cursive ϕ and only occasionally has a cursive ϕ that looks like ∞ with a vertical pipe that can be made in a single movement. This behaviour might be expected if the copyist's natural hand was cursive, and he or she had momentary slips while attempting an unnatural literary hand.

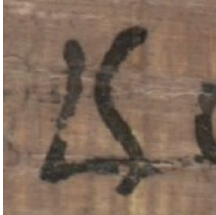
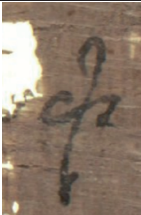
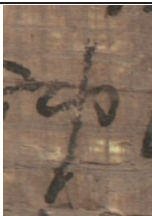
P50	P. Col. VIII 225
	
col. 2, line 11	line 16
	
col. 2, line 7	line 13
	
col. 2, line 12	line 15

Table 7. Similar letter forms in P50 and P. Col. VIII 225

Both manuscripts also exhibit ink smudges. The difference, however, is that ink smudges are worse and more frequent in P50. In P.Col. VIII 225, they are relatively mild and infrequent. The worst smudges in P.Col. VIII 225 are on lines 7, 8 and 10, but smudges are more pervasive in P50.

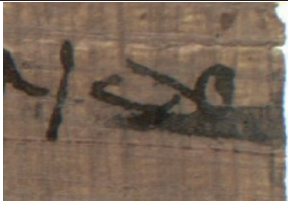
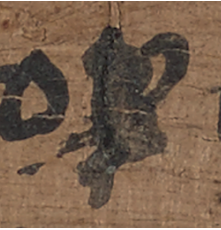
P50	P.Col. VIII 225
	
col. 3, line 12	line 8
	
col. 3, line 14	line 7

Table 8. Smudges in P50 and P. Col. VIII 225

One possible marker of inauthenticity is the phenomenon of ink being written around holes in the papyrus, as if it were added after the hole was already there. One can regularly find text that is written around holes in papyrus or blemishes in parchment, but P50 has an unusual concentration of instances in which the ink of a letter comes right to the edge of a hole in the parchment. Still, it is possible that these instances are simply coincidences. Although P50 has more instances of ink coming suspiciously close to a hole in the parchment, P.Col. VIII 225 is not without them. The holes on P.Col. VIII 225 may be due to the quality and manufacture of the papyrus medium and not to subsequent damage, which is at least partly the case also for P50. Moreover, some of the letters in P50 seem to be misshapen in order to avoid holes, but the letterforms in P.Col. VIII 225 are more natural.

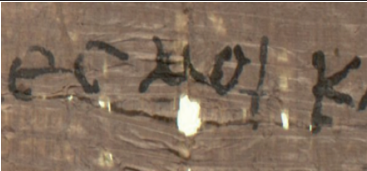
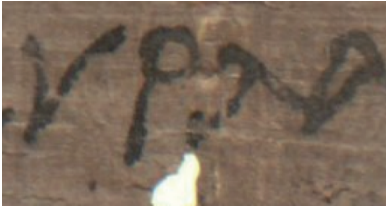
P.Col. VIII 225	
	
line 16	line 6, συ και
	
lines 2-5	line 22
	
Lines 24-25	Lines 19-20

Table 9. Writing around holes in P. Col. VIII 225

Ink bleeding is another red flag present in both P50 and P.Col. VIII 225. Although ink bleeding is more extensive on P50, it is not unique to it.

In summary, P. Col. VIII 225 does exhibit a few of the same anomalies as P50. However, the extent to which P50 exhibits these red flags, particularly the ink smudges, ink bleeding and ink avoiding holes, is greater than that of P. Col. VIII 225. The additional problems of P50, particularly the type and extent of

ink avoiding holes and the problem posed by the papyrus fibres, suggest that even if a genuine papyrus can exhibit some of the same red flags, P50 is still in need of further testing regarding its authenticity.

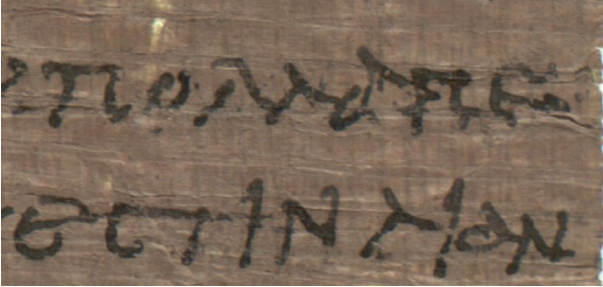
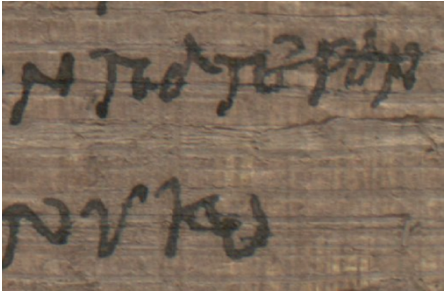
P.Col. VIII 225	
	
Lines 19–20	
	
lines 24–25	

Table 10. Ink bleeding in P. Col. VIII 225

A simple way to provide some objective evidence on the status of P50 is to examine the manuscript under a microscope and compare it to other manuscripts that are known to be fake and/or genuine.³⁷ New papyrus lacks the normal cracks that come with age, and if P50 is a modern production that used ancient papyrus

³⁷ Yale’s Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library has been closed to non-Yale researchers for the duration of the productions of this chapter. I have therefore been unable to examine the manuscript with a microscope.

(such as the recent ‘Jesus’ Wife Fragment’), ink will have seeped into microscopic cracks that would not have existed in ancient times and would be difficult, if not impossible, to see with the naked eye. If this phenomenon were observed, it would provide objective evidence that P50 is a modern production.

This phenomenon features prominently in the 2019 report of the Museum of the Bible on the scientific assessment of the Dead Sea Scrolls owned by the Museum of the Bible, all now considered to be modern forgeries.³⁸ During a presentation of the results of this report, Abigail Quandt referred to the phenomenon of ‘finding the ink going into cracks that wouldn’t have existed if the writing substrate was new at the time of the text being inscribed and also going over edges that would not have been torn and would have been intact’ as ‘kind of the most damning of all’ of her findings.³⁹

INTERLUDE

Thus far, I have suggested that P50 might be a modern fake because of anomalies in the papyrus itself. In what follows, I engage in some reasoned speculation to suggest a possible creator. I admit that I will not convince everyone. Consequently, I work from the tentative assumption that P50 is indeed fake, and I give my thoughts on who might have created it. My hope is that even if my conclusion is incorrect, the information I provide may assist someone to disprove my theory and to offer a more likely culprit or demonstrate that the papyrus is authentic.

GENRE

If P50 is a fake, we must ask what kind of fake it is. Dictionaries, encyclopaedias and maps sometimes contain fake entries or ‘trap streets’ inserted to track plagiarism. If a word, person or street listed in one of these works does not exist in reality but appears in another work of the same kind, it is evidence that the

³⁸ Available at <https://museumofthebible.org/dead-sea-scroll-fragments> (accessed 2 November 2020).

³⁹ Beginning at approximately 33:45 in the video featured at the top of the page in the previous note.

information has been inappropriately copied from its source. Examples include ‘Lillian Virginia Mountweazel’ in the 1975 *New Columbia Encyclopedia* and ‘esquivalience’ (‘the willful avoidance of one’s official responsibilities’) in the 2001 *New Oxford American Dictionary*.⁴⁰ Mischa Meier’s *Neue Pauly* entry for ‘Apopudobalia’ describes an ‘ancient’ sport surprisingly reminiscent of modern-day football.⁴¹

However, some fakes do seem to be innocent. Revel Coles and Claudio Gallazzi mention P. Harr. inv. 336, a papyrus whose text is in French that they describe as ‘school practice by an Egyptian child, without intention to deceive’,⁴² Other fakes may well have been intended to deceive, possibly even having had a definite ‘mark’. It has been suggested that evangelical Christians who are eager to purchase ‘relics’ of the Christian Scriptures were the perfect market for fake Dead Sea Scrolls.⁴³ Others, still, ‘may be attempts to perpetuate a grand joke on the academy or a rival’, as Malcolm Choat describes.⁴⁴ In his 1971 Society of Biblical Literature presidential address, Bruce M. Metzger exposed Paul R. Coleman-Norton’s ‘amusing agraphon’, published in *Catholic*

⁴⁰ Henry Alford, ‘Not a Word’ *The New Yorker* (August 29, 2005). See also ‘cj16163’ in the *Amsterdam Database of New Testament Conjectural Emendation* (<https://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/nt-conjectures?conjID=cj16163>). Thanks to Jeff Cate, Peter Gurry, Peter Head, Dirk Jongkind and Tommy Wasserman for drawing my attention to various fake references mentioned here.

⁴¹ Mischa Meier, ‘Apopudobalia’, *Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*. Edited by H. Cancik and H. Schneider. Band 1 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996), p. 895.

⁴² Coles and Gallazzi, ‘Papyri and Ostraka: Alterations and Counterfeits’, p. 103. Perhaps similar in intention is the often-repeated anecdote that C.H. Spurgeon said that in his preaching, he takes his text and ‘makes a beeline to the cross’, However, it appears that Spurgeon never actually said those words. See Thomas Breimaier, *Tethered to the Cross: The Life and Preaching of Charles H. Spurgeon* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), p. 3.

⁴³ Ludvik A. Kjeldsberg, ‘Christian Dead Sea Scrolls? The Post-2022 Fragments as Modern Protestant Relics’, *Museum of the Bible: A Critical Introduction*, eds. Jill Hicks-Keeton and Cavan Concannon (Lanham, MD: Lexington Press, 2019), pp. 207–218.

⁴⁴ Choat, ‘Forging Antiquities: The Case of Papyrus Fakes’, p. 559.

Biblical Quarterly, as a forgery.⁴⁵ Metzger affirmed that the content of the agraphon was suspiciously similar to a joke Coleman-Norton (Metzger's *Doktorvater*) once told to his students.⁴⁶

Perhaps 'joke' or 'spoof' is the best description of what P50 was intended to be (see below). By 'spoof,' I mean a fake that was created without any obvious malicious intent. Some examples do not even reflect an intent to deceive. There is no shortage of spoofs in the academy—fake articles and references that are written as if they were serious works of scholarship but contain enough information to reveal their true identities. One example is Peter Arzt-Grabner's tale of finding in a flea market a folder containing '...um erste Beschreibungen und Transkriptionen antiker Papyri handelte—womöglich aus Ulrich Wilckens eigener Hand!'⁴⁷ One of these 'records' described a papyrus that recorded a traffic accident in ancient Egypt—obviously the value of such a find is that it answers the important question of whether ancient Egyptians drove on the right side or on the left side of the road: damage to the left side of the cart (or car) involved ('die linke Seite seines Wagens') suggests that in ancient Herakleopolis, they drove on the right.⁴⁸ Another example of a joke within a serious work is Martin E. Marty's brief 'review' of *The Relieved Paradox* by one Franz Bibfeldt, in a publication of Concordia Theological

⁴⁵ P.R. Coleman-Norton, 'An Amusing Agraphon', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 12.4 (October 1950): pp. 439–449.

⁴⁶ Bruce M. Metzger, 'Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91.1 (March 1972): pp. 3–24.

⁴⁷ Peter Arzt-Grabner, 'Eine Eingabe aus Herakleopolis Magna (Ägypten)—einen Verkehrsunfall betreffend?', *Calamus: Festschrift für Herbert Grassl zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Georg Nightingale, Monika Frass, and Rupert Breitwieser (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), p. 35. It should be noted that Arzt-Grabner describes this article as 'fiction' on his own English-language CV at <https://www.uni-salzburg.at/index.php?id=21286>.

⁴⁸ Arzt-Grabner, 'Eine Eingabe aus Herakleopolis Magna (Ägypten)', pp. 39–40. For another article similar in genre, though not (to my knowledge) described as fiction, see Daniel T. Baldassarre, 'What's the Deal with Birds?', *Scientific Journal of Research and Reviews*, (April 1, 2020).

Seminary.⁴⁹ Despite the fact that no such book—and no such theologian—ever existed, the joke persisted long enough to spawn a collection of essays on the theology of ‘Bibfeldt’.⁵⁰

Academic spoofs or jokes can also appear in the form of fake references contained in otherwise serious works. In a review of Carsten Peter Thiede’s work arguing that the Qumran fragment 7Q5 is a ‘first-century Mark’ papyrus, Daniel B. Wallace mentions alternative identifications of its text.⁵¹ In a footnote sandwiched between serious works by Gordon Fee and Kurt Aland, Wallace notes a monograph on the subject, ‘Conan D. Parson, 7Q5: *An Ancient ‘Honey Do’ List?* (Snowflake, Saskatchewan: Technasma, 1975)’, an invention that is clearly a joke and not intended to offer additional support to his otherwise-serious critique of Thiede’s hypothesis. Wallace mentions Parson’s ‘monograph’ only in his review published in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, the institutional journal of Wallace’s own seminary; the reference does not appear in the other review article Wallace published that year (in *Westminster Theological Journal*).⁵²

A PROPOSAL FOR THE CULPRIT’S IDENTITY

If P50 is not an authentic Greek New Testament manuscript, it would not be the only one to be included in the *Kurzgefasste Liste* and given a Gregory-Aland number. Gregory-Aland 2427 (University of Chicago ms. 972), also known as ‘Archaic Mark’, is

⁴⁹ Martin E. Marty, ‘Review of *The Relieved Paradox*’, *Concordia Seminarian* (1951): p. 19.

⁵⁰ Martin E. Marty and Jerald C. Brauer, eds., *The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).

⁵¹ Carsten Peter Thiede, *The Earliest Gospel Manuscript? The Qumran Fragment 7Q5 and its Significance for New Testament Studies* (London: Paternoster Press, 1992); Daniel B. Wallace, ‘A Review of *The Earliest Gospel Manuscript?* by Carsten Peter Thiede’, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July 1994): pp. 350–354.

⁵² Daniel B. Wallace, ‘7Q5: The Earliest NT Papyrus?’, *Westminster Theological Journal* 56.1 (Spring 1994): pp. 173–180. For another excellent, though dated, example of this practice, see the classic study by the noted English sociologist Richard Geroltt, ‘Some Observations on Persistence’. Though the article itself can be difficult to access, a summary by the author can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQw4w9WgXcQ>.

an infamous example of a modern production that was once thought to be ancient. However, before Mary Virginia Orna discovered Prussian Blue (first made around 1704) in it or Stephen C. Carlson identified its exemplar as Philipp Buttmann's 1860 edition of the Greek New Testament, there were doubts about its authenticity.⁵³ Kirsopp and Silva Lake never completely committed to a position on its authenticity though. Mitchell et al. report that according to a letter from Chuck Bennisson to E.C. Colwell, Silva Lake was asked about Archaic Mark again in June 1970. She still would not commit to a position regarding its authenticity, but she remarked, 'It's either 14th century or a 19th century forgery, and if a forgery, either a serious attempt or a spoof by someone like my husband!'⁵⁴

Perhaps Silva Lake's comment reveals more than she intended at the time. Kirsopp Lake (1872–1946) was a New Testament textual critic and Harvard professor who certainly had the means and opportunity to produce P50, and according to his wife, he may have had the motive as well. By 1970, she did not seem to think it had been beneath her late husband to make a fake manuscript as a spoof. Silva Lake and Kirsopp's daughter Agnes were two of the three editors of Lake's *Festschrift* (along with Robert Casey) in which the *editio princeps* of P50 was published.⁵⁵ If it was a fake, they—especially Silva—would have almost certainly known the truth. From this working hypothesis that Kirsopp Lake is the scribe of P50 and created it as a spoof or joke, there *does* seem to be an intent to deceive but not in a malicious manner. If Lake is its creator, I suggest that he intended the papyrus to be published, accepted, and forgotten before its authenticity was questioned.

⁵³ For a summary, see Margaret M. Mitchell, Joseph Barabe, and Abigail Quandt, 'Chicago's "Archaic Mark" (ms 2427) II: Microscopic, Chemical, and Codicological Analyses Confirm Modern Production', *Novum Testamentum* 52 (2010): pp. 101–133.

⁵⁴ Cited from Mitchell, Barabe, and Quandt, 'Chicago's "Archaic Mark"', 132. Many thanks to Margaret M. Mitchell, who helped me verify the contents of these letters.

⁵⁵ Casey, Lake, and Lake, eds., *Quantulacumque*.

ASPECTS THAT POINT TO KIRSOPP LAKE

A few aspects of the papyrus may point to Kirsopp Lake as its author. First, as already mentioned, its *editio princeps* was published in a *Festschrift* to Lake. Publication of a fake manuscript as if it were real in a *Festschrift* may not be the best way to honour someone unless that person was the manuscript's creator. However, if the papyrus was a joke to Lake, one way to honour him would be to publish his creation as if it were genuine in a way that resulted in its acceptance as authentic.

Second, P50 is a manuscript of Acts that came onto the scene as the final volumes of Lake's five-volume work on Acts (with F. J. Foakes Jackson) were being published.⁵⁶ By this time in his life, Lake had invested heavily in the Acts of the Apostles. The text is one fitting for Lake. As I have mentioned above, Lake wrote in the preface to the translation and commentary volume of this five-volume work that he thought the original text of Acts was more like Codex Vaticanus than Codex Bezae, but that occasionally, Codex Bezae preserved original readings against Codex Vaticanus.⁵⁷ Lake's general position on the original text of Acts describes precisely the textual affiliation of P50.

Finally, there is one textual anomaly that might point to Lake. Although the hand is uneven, it seems that too much text is required to fit on the first line, which comes textually at Acts 8:26. There, the ECM prints Ἄγγελος δὲ κυρίου ἐλάλησεν πρὸς Φίλιππον for the *Ausgangstext* and reports only minor variation. The text at the end of col. 1, line 1 survives, but the beginning of the line is lost to a lacuna. Cook writes, 'Although Kraeling considered the possibility of 25 letters in 1.1 [i.e. col. 1, line 1], the word ἄγγελος (angel) must have been abbreviated given constraints of space'. Rather than an unusual *nomen sacrum* in a manuscript in which *nomina sacra* otherwise appear in standard forms, there may be another explanation.⁵⁸ Volume IV of the five-volume *Beginnings*

⁵⁶ Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity Part I* (London: Macmillan, 1920).

⁵⁷ Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, *The Beginnings of Christianity Part 4: Translation and Commentary*, p. ix.

⁵⁸ Cook, 'P50 (P.Yale I 3) and the Question of Its Function', p. 116.

of *Christianity* is a commentary on Acts by Lake and Henry Cadbury, of which Lake ‘acted as final editor of the whole’.⁵⁹ At Acts 8:26, Lake and Cadbury note the mentions of ‘the Spirit’ and ‘a Spirit of the Lord’ at vv. 29 and 39, adding ‘It is doubtful how far the writer [of Acts] distinguished between “angel” and “spirit”’.⁶⁰ Lake had already made a similar statement as early as 1915. In his article, ‘The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles’, Lake referred to ‘the apparent exchange of usage between ‘Spirit’ and ‘angel of the Lord’ in the story of Philip (Acts 8:26, 29, 39)’.⁶¹ Perhaps in the lacuna at the beginning of fol. 1 ↓, line 1, an abbreviation was indeed intended, but the *nomen sacrum* in the lacuna was $\pi\nu\alpha$. This solution would resolve the problem of too many letters on the line in a way that is consistent with Lake’s position regarding angel/Spirit in Acts. Again, this solution is admittedly speculative—the text is lost, but the extant letters do suggest that something was anomalous at the beginning of the line.

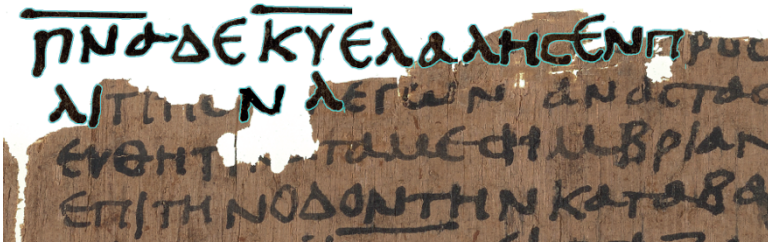


Figure 11. P50 col. 1, reconstruction with $\pi\nu\alpha$ using handwriting samples from elsewhere in P50

MEANS, MOTIVE AND OPPORTUNITY

As I mentioned earlier, there seems to be a discrepancy between the knowledge of the copyist of P50 and his or her skill. The

⁵⁹ Lake and Cadbury, *Beginnings*, Vol. 4: *Translation and Commentary*, p. VII.

⁶⁰ Lake and Cadbury, *Beginnings*, Vol. 4: *Translation and Commentary*, p. 95.

⁶¹ Kirsopp Lake, ‘The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles’, *American Journal of Theology* 19.4 (October 1915): p. 499.

papyrus was clearly written by someone who knew normal manuscript conventions well but was not a well-practised copyist. Kirsopp Lake as its copyist again would explain this discrepancy. He was certainly familiar not only with manuscripts but also with various readings and what to expect regarding scribal error.

If P50 is a fake, it is a brilliant fake. One useful thought experiment is to step back and think about what kind of manuscript one would make if one wanted to create a 'spoof' in the 1920s or 1930s that had potential to go undetected. The manuscript would ideally be small—the more of it there is, the more chances there are for the scribe to make a telling mistake and the papyrus to be exposed as inauthentic. The format should be unusual enough that it cannot easily be compared to anything else but at the same time, not so unusual that it would draw much attention to itself. The format of P50—two excerpts from Acts on a single bifolio—does that. The text cannot be too unusual, but it should also not be too 'clean'—it should contain enough variants and copyist errors to make it look like a real manuscript, but at the same time its text should not be too interesting so as to draw unwanted attention. The date of the manuscript likewise should not be so early that it attracts additional research. In short, if one wanted to create a fake manuscript that had good chances of not being exposed, P50 is exactly the sort of manuscript one would make. It is the sort of papyrus that might be cited for only a few variants but is not in itself enough to change anyone's opinion on the text at those places. It is the sort of manuscript that could sneak into a critical apparatus and be forgotten. It would take an exceptional mind to conceive of the perfect fake, but Kirsopp Lake may have been just that exceptional person. He lived at the right time and fits the bill perfectly for the kind of person required for the task, and his wife did not seem to think such an endeavour was beneath him. If P50 is a modern production, Kirsopp Lake had the means to make it.

With regard to motive, I can only refer again to Silva Lake's comments in 1970. I suspect that if Kirsopp Lake did create P50, it was simply a joke to him—a spoof. If P50 is indeed such a spoof, it would not be the only such manuscript created for this purpose. Bruce Metzger recounts the story of the 'Partridge Manuscript', a

creation by students Barrett Tyler and Reamer Kline at the Episcopal Theological School, who managed to fool W.H.P. Hatch before coming clean.⁶²

Kirsopp Lake had the means and the motive to create a fake Greek New Testament papyrus as a spoof, and he also had the opportunity. A *terminus ante quem* can be set at June 1933, when the papyrus was purchased (as part of a papyrus lot) in Paris from Maurice Nahman. Lake's time spent in and around Egypt is well-documented. In addition to his work at St. Catherine's Monastery, Lake places himself in Cairo both in 1927 and again in early February 1930.⁶³ Though I have not yet been able to place Lake with Maurice Nahman, I have been able to place Lake with one of Nahman's associates, David Askren. Lake appears to have met Askren in 1927. Based on entries in Francis W. Kelsey's diary, dated 28 February and 3 March 1927, John Griffiths Pedley writes, 'At the end of the month (i.e., February 1927), Kirsopp Lake arrived from Port Said to be introduced to Askren and to visit the office in Cairo of the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai, from which he subsequently learned that he had been authorized to visit the monastery itself'.⁶⁴

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

One problem is that, although there are a number of small anomalies in P50, there is no single smoking gun. Most, if not all, of the anomalies could be explained by phenomena that are seen in genuine ancient papyri. The unusual format of the manuscript indicates that it could not have been intended as a normal literary manuscript, and its precise purpose has been debated. Cook suggests that it might be intended as 'a preacher's notes for use in a worship service or as a Christian traveller's notes for use in

⁶² Bruce M. Metzger, *Reminiscences of an Octogenarian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 1995), pp. 132–136. Thanks to Stephen C. Carlson for reminding me of this forgery.

⁶³ Kirsopp Lake, 'The Serabit Expedition of 1930', *Harvard Theological Review* 25.2 (April 1932): pp. 95–100.

⁶⁴ John G. Pedley, *The Life and Work of Francis Willey Kelsey: Archaeology, Antiquity, and the Arts* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. 383.

teaching'.⁶⁵ Some of the avoidance of damage could be explained as the act of an ancient copyist doing the best he or she could with an already-damaged scrap of papyrus. Even Kraeling suggested in the *editio princeps* that the papyrus medium was likely already damaged when the text was written.⁶⁶

Still, the papyrus has anomalies. Perhaps it has enough anomalies to justify a closer, multi-disciplinary look. Microscopic analysis, especially of the areas around the holes in the papyrus, might be able to shed additional light on the question of whether the damage where text is missing occurred before or after the papyrus medium was inscribed. If radiocarbon dating is an option, perhaps a discrepancy could be identified between the palaeographic date ranges and the date range based on radiocarbon analysis, as was the case for the *Jesus' Wife Papyrus*. Kraeling described two papyrus patches that seem to be no longer visible, but his images of the papyrus in the *editio princeps* show at least one horizontal patch of the papyrus at the bottom of the empty space in the final column that is no longer attached in the newer images.⁶⁷ Perhaps this area can be examined more closely to detect any signs of modern materials. Additionally, samples of Lake's handwriting could be examined in order to see if there is anything consistent with the hand of the papyrus.⁶⁸ P50 may indeed be a genuine, but genuinely bad papyrus manuscript of the Greek New Testament, but in light of its anomalies, might it be a *Kirsopp Fake*?

⁶⁵ Cook, 'P50 (P.Yale I 3) and the Question of Its Function', p. 125.

⁶⁶ Kraeling, 'P50: Two Selections from Acts', p. 63.

⁶⁷ Kraeling, 'P50: Two Selections from Acts', p. 164.

⁶⁸ In September 2021, I examined in Oxford a handwritten 'Catalogue of Laudian Greek Manuscripts' in the Bodleian allegedly written by Lake around 1902–1911 (Weston Library, R.6.96/1-2). The Greek text bears little resemblance to the hand of P50 in my opinion.