

The *Gospel of Jesus' Wife*: “Patchwork” Forgery in Coptic . . . and English

Guest post on the NT Blog by Andrew Bernhard

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Building on the work of Francis Watson and a number of other scholars, I argued in [an article in the July 2015 issue of *New Testament Studies*](#) that the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* is essentially a “patchwork” of words and short phrases culled from the lone extant Coptic manuscript of the *Gospel of Thomas* (Nag Hammadi Codex II), prepared by a forger using [Michael W. Grondin's PDF edition of this manuscript that was posted online on November 22, 2002](#). I suggested that someone had basically “cut and pasted” Coptic text from Grondin's edition, switched third-person masculine singular pronouns (“he,” “him”) to their feminine equivalents (“she,” “her”), and placed two key Coptic words (meaning “Mary” and “my wife”) into the “patchwork” text to give it “sensational” content.

As I pointed out, in addition to the overwhelming textual similarities between the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* and the *Gospel of Thomas*, the Coptic text of the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* contains at least five tell-tale signs of its modern origin – including the apparent replication of a typographical (and grammatical) error from Grondin's 2002 PDF edition. For a concise summary of my article, please see pages 351–355 of [my article](#) (especially Figure 6 on p. 352 and Table 1 on p. 353 for information about the tell-tale signs of forgery in the Coptic text of the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife*).

In my article, I also noted that [a Smithsonian article released on the day that Karen King first publicly unveiled the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife*](#) mentioned that the owner of the papyrus fragment had also provided Professor King with an English translation of the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife*. The *Smithsonian* article quoted only a single line from the owner's translation, but it seemed to provide additional evidence of a direct link between the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* and Grondin's 2002 PDF edition of the *Gospel of Thomas*.

The Release of the Owner's “Translation”

Professor King has graciously made the translation that the owner of the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* provided her [available online](#) within the last day, and I wish to express my sincere appreciation to her for doing so. I believe this critical document that the owner gave her provides further decisive evidence that the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* is indeed a modern forgery derived from Grondin's 2002 PDF edition. I hope that the regrettably divisive debate that has taken place over the past few years about the antiquity of *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* can now conclude – hopefully, with a unanimous consensus that the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* is indeed a modern forgery.

My analysis of the English translation that the owner gave Professor King indicates that it is not an actual translation of the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife*; it seems to have been prepared by someone relying directly on the English translation provided in Grondin's 2002 PDF.

At the outset, I must note that both the owner’s “translation” and Grondin’s 2002 PDF edition of the *Gospel of Thomas* have a rather surprising similarity: both are interlinear translations (that is, they include English translations in between the lines of Coptic text). The figure below places the owner’s translation beside the pertinent excerpts from *Grondin’s Interlinear* (see [Figure 6 on p. 352 my of article for the key to which passages from Grondin’s Interlinear are presented in the figure](#)). Both the “translation” and *Grondin’s Interlinear* have been annotated to facilitate understanding of the commentary beneath.

Interlinear Translation of the Gospel of Jesus’ Wife given to Karen King (the “translation”)	Grondin’s Interlinear Coptic/English Translation of The Gospel of Thomas (Grondin’s Interlinear)
1 ΕΙΔΑΝ ΤΑ ΜΑΛΥ ΑΣΤ ΝΑΕΙ Π () me not For my mother she gave to me the ()	·ΕΙ ΔΑΝ ΤΑ·ΜΑΛΥ ΑΣ·Τ ΝΑ·ΕΙ Π· -me not; > (for) my-mother, she-gave to-me The
2 (ε) ΠΕΔΕ ΜΗΛΘΗΤΗΣ Ν ΙC ΔΕ () () The disciples said to Jesus this ()	ΠΕΧΕ·Μ·ΜΑΘΗΤΗΣ Ν·ΙC ΧΕ Said-the-disciples to-JS11 this:
3 (c) ΑΡΝΑ ΜΑΡΙΑ(Μ) ΜΠΩΑ ΜΜΟ(Κ) Δ (Ν?) () abdicate Mary be worthy of you (not)	·ΑΡΝΑ Mary ·ΜΠΩΑ Μ·ΜΟ·Ϟ· ΔΝ· abdicate. be-worthy of-him not.
4 () ΠΕΔΕ ΙC ΝΑΥ ΤΑΡΙΜΕ Μ(Ν) () Jesus said this to them My wife (and)	ΠΕΧΕ·ΙC ΝΑ·Υ ΧΕ My Wife ΜΝ *Said-JS12 to-them this: and-
5 () ΓΝΑΨ Ρ ΜΑΘΗΤΗΣ ΝΑΕΙ ΑΥΩ () she can become a disciple to me and	Ϟ·ΝΑΨ·Ρ·Μ[ΑΘΗΤΗ]C [ΝΑ·]ΕΙ ΑΥΩ he can become-disciple to-me and
6 ΜΑΡΕ ΡΩΜΕ ΕΘΟΥ ΨΑϞ ΕΝΕ (Sc) No man who is wicked, is he	ΜΑ·ΡΕ·ΡΩΜΕ ΕΘΟΥ ΨΑϞ·ΕΙΝΕ No-man which-is-wicked does-he-bring
7 ΔΝΟΚ ΤΨΟΟΠ ΝΗΜΑC ΕΤΒΕ () I exist within her, because ()	ΔΝΟ·Κ· ΤΨΟΟΠ· ΝΗΜΑ Ϟ· ΕΤΒΕ· I, I-exist with-him. because

Preliminary Observations

Line 1. The “translation” includes the word “for,” but **there is no corresponding Coptic word for in the text of the Gospel of Jesus’ Wife.** *Grondin’s Interlinear* includes “for” in parentheses in the same spot as the “translation” because the Greek loan word γάρ (“for”) follows ταμαλυ (“my mother”) in the *Gospel of Thomas* (and Grondin presumably preferred English word order for his translation). It seems clear that “for” in the “translation” has been copied directly from the English of *Grondin’s Interlinear* rather than actually translated from the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* papyrus fragment.

Line 2. The “translation” glosses that Δε (sic Δε) means “this.” In the present context, the Coptic conjunction χε should function something like a comma and a quotation mark at the start of a direct statement in English, and **χε would never be translated as “this” in any context.** *Grondin’s*

Interlinear uses the English word “this” as “filler” translation for ⲭⲉ (i.e. to fill blank space beneath the word and indicate that it had not merely been overlooked). It seems clear that “this” in the “translation” has been copied directly from the English of *Grondin’s Interlinear* rather than actually translated from the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* papyrus fragment.

[The person responsible for the “translation” does not seem to have been familiar enough with Coptic to distinguish between the letter delta (Δ) and the letter djandja (Ⲭ), as delta has been incorrectly used in place of djandja in the words ⲛⲉⲭⲉ and ⲭⲉ.]

Line 3. The “translation” renders ⲁⲛⲏⲁ as “abdicate.” While the word might (rarely) be translated this way if warranted by context (and translator preference), **it would ordinarily be translated as “deny”** (cf. Karen King’s translation). It seems clear that “abdicate” in the “translation” has been copied directly from the English of *Grondin’s Interlinear* rather than actually translated from the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife*.

[It is curious that the Coptic text of the “translation” has the second-person singular pronominal affix ⲕ (translated correctly) instead of the third-person singular masculine pronominal affix ⲙ found in the *Gospel of Thomas*. This is especially curious because it appears that ⲕ was originally written on the papyrus and then the third-person feminine singular pronominal affix ⲥ was written over it.]

Line 4. The “translation” includes the word “this” for which **there is no corresponding Coptic word for it**; the “translation” also introduces a quotation idiosyncratically with a colon. In *Grondin’s Interlinear*, the Coptic conjugation ⲭⲉ is separated from the phrase meaning “Jesus said to them” by a line break. It seems clear that whoever copied the papyrus accidentally omitted ⲭⲉ, and it seems equally clear that “this” (an incorrect translation – following *Grondin’s Interlinear*, as in line 2) of the **missing** ⲭⲉ in the “translation” has been copied directly from the English of *Grondin’s Interlinear* (complete with the colon also found there) rather than actually translated from the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* papyrus fragment.

[Again, the person responsible for the “translation” does not seem to have been familiar enough with Coptic to distinguish between the letter delta (Δ) and the letter djandja (Ⲭ), as delta has been used incorrectly in place of djandja in the word ⲛⲉⲭⲉ.]

Line 5. The “translation” indicates that ⲛⲁⲟⲩ means “can,” but **ⲛⲁⲟⲩ is actually future tense and should be translated “will be able to.”** Grondin has made a mistake in his translation, and the “translation” repeats the same mistake. It seems clear that “can” in the “translation” has been copied directly from the English of *Grondin’s Interlinear* rather than actually translated from the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife*.

[The person who prepared the papyrus changed q to c, changing the third-person masculine pronominal affix to its feminine equivalent. The “translation” consequently has “she” rather than “he.”]

Line 6. The “translation” indicates that ⲙⲁⲣⲉⲣⲟⲙⲉ means “no man,” but **this is not an accurate translation of Sahidic Coptic**. In standard Sahidic, ⲙⲁⲣⲉ- is the pronominal jussive conjugation base; the noun ⲣⲟⲙⲉ means “man.” So a translation of the Sahidic text ⲙⲁⲣⲉⲣⲟⲙⲉ might be something like, “Let man...” But the *Gospel of Thomas* does not use fully standard Sahidic orthography: it includes some dialectical features of Lycopolitan. As a result, ⲙⲁⲣⲉ- can function as the pronominal negative aorist conjugation base (in place of the standard Sahidic ⲙⲉⲣⲉ-), as it does in the pertinent passage in *Grondin’s Interlinear*. Thus, Grondin has translated ⲙⲁⲣⲉⲣⲟⲙⲉ with the functional equivalent, “no man.” It hardly seems plausible that a “translator” who could not distinguish between two letters of the Coptic alphabet (delta and djandja) would have understood ⲙⲁⲣⲉ- as a Lycopolitan conjugation base in a text labelled as “Sahidic.” It seems abundantly clear that “no man” has been copied directly from the English of *Grondin’s Interlinear* rather than actually translated from the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* papyrus fragment.

[The “translation” indicates a copyist error in line 6 of the papyrus with “(Sic!)” at the end of the Coptic text. The peculiar appearance of the third-from-last character in the line 6 was [first noted by Alin Suciú and Hugo Lundhaug in 2012](#). As argued in detail on pages 341-342 of the most recent issue of *New Testament Studies*, the copyist appears to have made an uncorrectable mistake in attempting to write epsilon-iota. **It now seems undeniable that the line was intended to read ⲙⲁⲣⲉⲣⲟⲙⲉ ⲉⲑⲟⲟϥ ⲩⲁϥⲉⲓⲛⲉ.** Such a line of text is simply ungrammatical in Coptic because a single infinitive (ⲉⲓⲛⲉ) cannot be modified by two conjugation bases (ⲙⲁⲣⲉ- and ⲩⲁϥ-) . . . but, when the pertinent Coptic words are juxtaposed from *Grondin’s Interlinear*, the line makes sense in English.]

Line 7. The “translation” indicates that ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲩⲟⲟⲣⲓ means simply, “I exist.” Usually when an unnecessary personal pronoun (such as ⲁⲛⲟⲕ) appears in a Coptic text, a translator will indicate that there is some kind of special emphasis on the pronoun (cf. Karen King’s translation of the start of the line as, “As for me, I . . .”); also, the infinitive ⲩⲟⲟⲣⲓ might be translated in a variety of ways (cf. Karen King’s translation: she translates it as “am,” indicating in a footnote that “exist” or “dwell” are alternative possibilities.) It seems clear that “I exist” in the “translation” has been copied directly from the English of *Grondin’s Interlinear* rather than actually translated from the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* papyrus fragment.

[“Within” should presumably be just “with” (“within seems most likely to be a typographical error similar to “Gosple” or “Centruy” in the heading of the “translation.”) The person who prepared the papyrus changed q to c, changing the third-person masculine pronominal affix to its feminine equivalent. The “translation” consequently has “her” rather than “him.”]

Summary

The connection between the owner's "translation" and *Grondin's Interlinear* now seems undeniable. The evidence for the dependence of the Coptic text of the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* on *Grondin's Interlinear* was presented in [my article in *New Testament Studies*](#). Now, the newly available "translation" that the owner gave to Professor King provides astonishing additional evidence for the dependence of the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* on *Grondin's Interlinear* . . . in English! **All seven of the lines containing more than a single word in the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* in the owner's "translation" appear to show clear evidence of dependence on *Grondin's Interlinear*.**

In line 1 of the owner's "translation," the English word "for" appears when there is no corresponding word in the Coptic text on the papyrus fragment from which it could have been translated . . . and the word "for" appears (in parentheses) in *Grondin's Interlinear* in the same place as it does in the "translation."

In line 2, the Coptic conjunction ⲗⲉ is mistranslated as "this" . . . just as it is in *Grondin's Interlinear*.

In line 3, the Coptic infinitive ⲁⲣⲛⲁ is translated oddly as "abdicate" (rather than "deny") . . . just as it is *Grondin's Interlinear*.

In line 4, the Coptic conjunction ⲗⲉ is missing AND mistranslated as "this." It appears that the forger forgot to copy ⲗⲉ onto the papyrus fragment because it is separated by a line break from the phrase "Jesus said to them" in the pertinent passage in *Grondin's Interlinear* . . . but the mistranslated word still appears in the "translation." Also, a colon is used to introduce a quotation . . . just as in *Grondin's Interlinear*.

In line 5, the Coptic ⲛⲁⲓ is translated incorrectly as "can" (rather than as the future "will be able to") . . . just as in *Grondin's Interlinear*.

[The person who prepared the papyrus changed ⲓ to ⲥ, changing the third-person masculine pronominal affix to its feminine equivalent. The "translation" consequently has "she" rather than "he."]

In line 6, a non-Sahidic translation of ⲙⲁⲣⲉⲣⲟⲙⲉ is given ("no man") . . . just as in *Grondin's Interlinear*. The Coptic text on the "translation" indicates that there is a scribal error in the second half of the line . . . just as many have argued since [the error was first pointed out by Alin Suci and Hugo Lundhaug](#). It now seems clear that the intended Coptic text for this line was ⲙⲁⲣⲁⲣⲟⲙⲉ ⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ ⲩⲁⲩⲉⲛⲉ . . . grammatical nonsense in Coptic that only makes sense in the *English of Grondin's Interlinear*.

In line 7, ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲣⲟⲟⲡ is translated simply as “I exist” . . . just as it is in *Grondin’s Interlinear*.

Arguing that **every single line** of the owner’s “translation” can be connected to the English of *Grondin’s Interlinear* (via translations of phantom words, mistranslations of Coptic text, distinctive translations of Coptic text, and even usual English punctuation) by coincidence seems utterly absurd. It now appears certain that the owner’s “translation” of the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* was prepared directly from the English of *Grondin’s Interlinear* rather than actually translated from the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* (it contains translations of two words that are not even present on the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* fragment!).

With the now overwhelming evidence that the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* is dependent on *Grondin’s Interlinear* in Coptic . . . and English, I think it is now reasonable to assert simply that the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* was forged using *Grondin’s Interlinear*. Given this assumption, **the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* papyrus fragment must have been forged sometime after November 2002** (when the PDF version of *Grondin’s Interlinear* containing the typographical/grammatical error also found in line 1 of the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* was put online) **and before the Summer of 2010** (when it was first brought to the attention of Karen King).