

Carsten Thiede's Nonsense Refuted

Attempts have been made by Christians to corrupt scholarship to push back the dating of the New Testament closer to the time of Christ. This study examines them. We will see that we are forced to conclude that their efforts are not about concern for truth but concern for dogma and power and to dodge the embarrassment of having gospels that were written too long after the alleged events to be worthy of taking seriously.

The motive behind the lies is to make the gospels seem more genuine by dating them closer to Jesus. The chances of texts being true are bigger if they are written and published soon after the alleged events.

Craig Bloomberg wrote in *Making Sense of the New Testament* "Distortions of new discoveries can also come from conservative circles. Carsten Thiede, a German evangelical, has written several recent works arguing that tiny fragments of Greek manuscripts found at Qumran, containing just a few letters each, actually represent verses from the Gospel of Mark. If true, these finds would require a date for that Gospel earlier than that which even conservative scholars have usually defended. Thiede also believes that a copy of Matthew in Greek, long preserved in the Magdalen College, Oxford, library, dates to the mid-first century. But virtually all scholars who have examined these claims find the equation of the Qumran fragments with Mark in error and the Oxford papyrus to have come from the same codex (or book) to which papyri dating to the 200s, now housed in Paris and Barcelona, belonged." Page 18. The book was published by IVP in 2003.

THE JESUS PAPYRUS

Carsten Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona wrote *The Jesus Papyrus* to state and defend the unlikely notion that three tiny scraps of papyrus which came from a book or codex of Matthew's Gospel are the most ancient sample of the New Testament in existence and date from 70 AD or before (page 58) and possibly as early as the year after Jesus died to be specific. These fragments are called *The Magdalen Papyrus*. Few scholars find the book convincing and it is agreed universally that they are third century. An able and intelligent pro-Christian book, *The Original Jesus*, rejects Thiede's thesis and his batty conspiracy theories with which he rails against those who contradict his dating of the Magdalen Papyrus to the 60's of the first century. The book shows that the dating is wholly dependent on the dating of the Qumran fragments he thinks are from Mark which is compared to a huge weight hanging by a light string.

If *The Jesus Papyrus* had been right it is not too alarming because Matthew could still have been written when the Jews were in too much trouble to bother refuting or to remember his lies and Jesus was forty years off the picture which left plenty of time for memories to corrupt and for history to be rewritten. The presence of the fragments in Egypt and not in Palestine means that Matthew could have lied. *The Jesus Papyrus* stupidly assumes that Matthew is more probably true the earlier it appeared.

Most scholars are sure that these Magdalen texts are not that old because they turned up in Egypt.

The Jesus Papyrus insists that somebody could have taken the codex they were in to Egypt or Matthew could have been copied there (page 127) because the Mark Gospel was copied in Egypt. It is thought that the text must have been made for distribution when it was found there and there must have been a lot of copies when that bit was able to survive against all the odds. The Church was not as strong in Egypt in the first century as it was where Paul established it and it dwindled to almost nothing in Israel through war, exile, emigration and persecution. So it was hardly the place to find many scriptoriums for the copying of the gospel.

Another reason why the texts are younger than *The Jesus Papyrus* says is because any Christian writings made for distribution in the first century would have been put together in shorthand. The Christians were being persecuted and so they would not copy out a long manuscript and waste time and when it might only be burnt. Tachography was a form of shorthand that was used then and even into the Middle Ages and was extremely widespread. It would have been used. Thiede ignores the fact that the Magdalen Papyrus came from a book using two columns while the first books that came about had one column and that was in the second century and conservative Christians think the first time the gospels were bound into books was about 150 AD.

Thiede used fragments that might not date from the first century in an attempt to prove that the writing on the Magdalen Papyrus must have been first century as his ridiculous third chapter shows. In it he surmises that his redating of the Magalene Papyrus is plausible for fragments of Mark were found at Qumran that date Mark as much earlier than the 70 AD that scholars accept.

The Magdalen Papyrus shows a writing habit not used in the third century (page 133, *The Jesus Papyrus*). But a third century copy of something old would have some archaic traits. The book admits that the fragments have some of the style

of the second century but attributes this to the style surviving into the second first saying this survival is probable (page 136). It is trying to make you believe that the Papyrus copies a very old version of the gospel so that they can push the time of origin of the original gospel further back. When it admits that styles can be carried into the following centuries it has to admit that its early dating is uncertain.

The texts have abbreviations for Lord and Jesus and other words. This suggests that they were written with speed and for a demanding audience and when few could do the copying. This never happened until late in the second century. There is no evidence for the shortcuts being devised before 70 AD no matter what this silly book claims (page 136-137).

We are told that the design of the letters is not enough to work out the date (page 138). And because of affinities with a first century leather Leviticus scroll from Qumran, The Jesus Papyrus ends up claiming that the fragments match a form of writing that was high fashion in the middle of the first century. But are the affinities enough or are they there at all? Maybe they are just coincidence. The Magdalen fragments come from a codex and the book says it is probable that the codex was not used among Christians until the Jewish insistence upon scrolls started to diminish until 70 AD. The book then says that as the Jews began to throw the Christians out of Judaism in about 62 AD the Christians would have made codices and would have shelved the Jewish tradition for scrolls then (page 95). This is more speculative nonsense seeking to make the fragments and the gospel itself far older. The Christians did not want the hostile Jews to find their scriptures so they would have been done in scroll form which was the Jewish tradition making the Jews assume that they were just Jewish scriptures.

The internal evidence for a late date for Matthew is too strong for The Jesus Papyrus to be right. What the gospel itself says comes before any style of writing in regard to dating and more so when the writing is concerned with a copy of the gospel.

The Magdalene Fragments are three. 1 has Matthew 26:7-8 on one side and Matthew 26:31 on the other. 2 has Matthew 26:10 on one side and 26:32-33 on the other. 3 has Matthew 26:14-15 on one side and 26:22,23 on the other.

An error was found on one of them (page 110). This refutes an early date of about 70 AD or before. Following Judaism, Christian copyists of religious books had to have them perfect or destroyed. And the smallest and squarest of the three pieces has smaller writing and the letters are almost squashed together. It is from a different work that makes an early date more unlikely. It is unlikely for bits of two rare first century books which would only get less rare as time went on to have formed the trio of Magdalen fragments. Such a combination would be more likely as the Church got more powerful like it did in the third century as it would have loads of manuscripts and copies then.

The alleged mates of the Magdalen fragments, the two Barcelona Fragments which Thiede claims may have come from the same codex (page 115, 145), do not prove that Jesus existed or put the gospels closer to the time of Jesus for they might have come from a separate book that just had his teaching in them. The scraps simply give teaching from Jesus in the four gospels. Jesus means saviour so the Jesus could be anybody. Matthew 3:9 is on the front of Fragment 1. Matthew 3:15 on the back. Matthew 5:20-22 is on the front of Fragment 2 and Matthew 5:25-28 is on the back. When you compare and contrast how many verses every batch is apart you see that the idea that both batches came from the same codex (page 103, 115) is incorrect.

The website of Professor JK Elliot of the University of Leeds, The Jesus Papyrus – Five Years On, shows how after Thiede made his claims, that it was found that other lots of the manuscript the Magdalene Papyrus was a part of existed in Barcelona and Paris. Thiede focuses on the Magdalene ones and pays little attention to the other fragments which is a dishonest and biased approach. All he did was make a fool of himself.

The website discloses that the book, The Jesus Papyrus, is full of errors and sloppy research. No expert palaeographers agree with Thiede's dating. And it is childish the way they are accused by Thiede of being jealous for Thiede has proven them wrong for he has not and does not have the knowledge and training they have had. Worse, the Magdalene fragments are no different textually from any other ancient copies of the scriptures. The claim that pieces of the gospels turned up in Qumran has also been rejected.

It is correct that the title, The Jesus Papyrus and the American title, Witness to Jesus, are just pure hype and tacky advertising. The dishonesty is obvious for the impression is deliberately created that we have the actual original writings of people who saw Jesus. The website shows that Thiede simply ignores the criticisms of his work especially when they refute him.

It is only because Thiede has been good at getting publicity that he has any kind of hearing at all.

HIGHER CRITICAL REVIEW

Please read the site Higher Critical Review in which Daryl D. Schmidt reviews Rekindling the Word: In Search of the Gospel by Thiede. The essential points of the review are:

a) that Thiede maintains that the Magdalen Papyrus is a direct copy of the original scroll that

Matthew composed which is a fantastical assumption and shows how biased he is.

b) that Thiede argued that the fact that the text has an abbreviated word for Lord which was applied to Jesus showing that Jesus was considered to be God for his full Lord title was too sacred to be written out in full. That is a lie for the Christians in the early days habitually abbreviated words, even words like Jerusalem and Israel, in their texts. Moreover the context of Matthew that he is only about shows that Jesus was only called Lord in the sense of master or sir just like many other men of prestige were. Thiede twists things.

c) Thiede says that a fragment from the Dead Sea Scrolls is Mark 6:52-53 which has only one word in it kai and everything else is just less than a dozen letters. This alone tells you he is worth watching out for because it is so small it could be from any number of works. He forced this fragment to fit Mark by filling in missing letters, pretending there was a difference in spelling from the original Greek version of the Mark that we have and he even had to invent an explanation for a phrase missing. Why go to all that trouble when the simplest answer is that the fragment is not from Mark?

d) Thiede once wrote that the long speeches Jesus makes in Matthew indicate that Matthew was writing down what Jesus said in shorthand and then putting it in the gospel years later. It could indicate any number of things. That is the kind of garbage Thiede uses to make Christianity look intelligent.

e) Thiede said that since John mentioned a pool that was lost after 70AD that it means that John was written before that time. That is not logic. Thiede does not know how to think though he can think clearly enough to try and hoodwink.

Another good page is Seven Greek Fragments of the Epistle of Enoch. As it has been proven that the New Testament writers were inspired by many of the writings of Qumran to make their scriptures, it would be no surprise if there seemed to be fragments of the New Testament at Qumran. When say the author of Luke copies somebody else's work and only fragments survive of the other man's work it is easy to mistake the other man's writing for Luke's.

It was found that the fragments identified as part of the first Epistle to Timothy were from the First Book of Enoch which is not in the Bible.

The research in this page was undertaken by Fr. Emile Puech who found that one fragment shows clear signs of the scribe squeezing text in where it should not be with the result that it seems to match Timothy. This match is incorrect when part of the text is out of place. In all cases, those who wanted to identify any of the seven fragments with the New Testament were resorting to distortion to do it. Puech finds none of them to be New Testament fragments at all.

Conclusion

No fragments of the New Testament that urge us to give any of its books an earlier dating than it has exist.

BOOKS CONSULTED

ANSWERS TO TOUGH QUESTIONS, Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, Scripture Press, Bucks, 1988

CHRISTIANITY FOR THE TOUGH-MINDED, Editor John Warwick Montgomery, Bethany Fellowship Inc, Minneapolis, 1973

CONTROVERSY, Hector Hawton, Pemberton Books, London, 1971

DICTIONARY OF SECTS, HERESIES, ECCLESIASTICAL PARTIES AND SCHOOLS OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT, by Blunt, Gale Research Company, Book Tower, Detroit, undated

DEAD SEA SCROLLS, Kenneth Hanson, Ph.D, Council Oak Books, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1997

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS, Editor Maxwell Staniforth, Penguin, London, 1988

EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT, VOLUME 1, Josh McDowell, Alpha, Scripture Press Foundation, Bucks, 1995

JESUS AND THE FOUR GOSPELS, John Drane, Lion, Herts, 1984

JESUS HYPOTHESES, V Messori, St Paul Publications, Slough, 1977

JESUS LIFE OR LEGEND Carsten Thiede, Lion, Oxford, 1990

JESUS ONE HUNDRED YEARS BEFORE CHRIST, Professor Alvar Ellegard, Century, London, 1999

JESUS THE EVIDENCE, Ian Wilson, Pan, London, 1985

JESUS, A N Wilson, Flamingo, London, 1993

PUTTING AWAY CHILDISH THINGS, Uta Ranke-Heinemann, HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1994

REASONS FOR HOPE, Editor Jeffrey A Mirus, Christendom College Press, Virginia, 1982

REKINDLING THE WORD: IN SEARCH OF THE GOSPEL, Carsten Peter Thiede, Valley Forge, Trinity Press, 1995

THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE, FF Bruce, Chapter House, Glasgow, 1988

THE CONCISE DICTIONARY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, Editor Elizabeth Livingstone, Omega Books, London, 1988

THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH, Eusebius, Penguin, London, 1989
THE HOLY BLOOD AND THE HOLY GRAIL, Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh & Henry Lincoln, Corgi, London, 1982
THE JESUS EVENT AND OUR RESPONSE, Martin R Tripole SJ, Alba House, New York 1980
THE JESUS MYSTERIES, Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, Thorsons, London, 1999
THE JESUS PAPYRUS, Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona, Phoenix, London, 1997
THE MESSIANIC LEGACY, Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh & Henry Lincoln, Corgi, London, 1987
THE ORIGINAL JESUS, Tom Wright, Lion, Oxford, 1996
THE PASSOVER PLOT, Hugh Schonfield, Element Books, Dorset, 1996
THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY, WH Turton, Wells Gardner, Darton & Co Ltd, London, 1905
THE UNAUTHORISED VERSION, Robin Lane Fox, Middlesex, 1992
WHY BELIEVE? A Rendle Short, The Intersivity Fellowship, London, 1938
WILLIAM NEIL'S ONE VOLUME BIBLE COMMENTARY, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1962

THE WEB

THE JESUS PAPYRUS – FIVE YEARS ON Professor JK Elliott

www.bowness.demon.co.uk/thiede.htm

This informs us that Thiede ignored the main objections Elliott made to his silly theories in a response added to The Jesus Papyrus. Thiede uses the work of scholars that does not support his conclusions at all and twists them and misquotes them to make it look like it does.

THE CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY EXAMINED (THE PROVENANCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

www.askwhy.co.uk/truth/040ChristianCase.html

MARK: FIRST GOSPEL OR PIOUS FORGERY? Dr M Magee

www.askwhy.co.uk/Christianity/080TheGospels4.html

SEVEN GREEK FRAGMENTS OF THE EPISTLE OF ENOCH FROM QUMRAN CAVE SEVEN

www.breadofangels.com/7quenoch/article2.html

HIGHER CRITICAL REVIEW, By Daryl D Schmidt

www.depts.drew.edu/jhc/thiede.html

THE JESUS PAPYRUS: EYEWITNESS TO JESUS?

www.askwhy.co.uk/awstruth/Thiede.html#TheJesusPapyrus:EyewitnesstoJesus?

THE GOSPEL OF MARCION AND THE GOSPEL OF LUKE COMPARED, CHARLES B WAITE

www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/3827/wait2.htm

CHALLENGING THE VERDICT by Earl Doherty

A Cross-Examination of Lee Strobel's The Case for Christ

<http://humanists.net/jesuspuzzle/CTVExcerptsThree.htm>

7Q5: THE EARLIEST NT PAPYRUS? Daniel Wallace Ph.D

www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/7q5.htm