

As many of you know, in 2012 I had a public debate in Chapel Hill with Dan Wallace, professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary, on the question of whether we have the original New Testament or not. During the debate he dropped a bombshell, on me and all of us. He mysteriously claimed that now we have a first-century copy of the Gospel of Mark. This would be a copy well over a century older than any other that exists, and would give us a copy that is very close in date to the original. He dropped the bombshell purely as a debating strategy, not in order to provide real information – when pressed he wouldn't say anything about the copy, except that it is not anything like a complete copy, but a fragment with probably a few verses, at best, on it. But he refused to answer, and continues to refuse to answer, all the relevant questions: How extensive is the fragment? How does he know it is from the first century? What experts have examined and dated it? Are there any variant readings in it? How does it tell us anything new, anything that we don't already know, about the transmission history of Mark's Gospel? And lots of other questions.

He did say that the fragment would be published by the end of that year and, well, that hasn't happened.

But it has been becoming clear what the situation really is, as announcements are now being made and news reports are being released. The information we are receiving is very disturbing indeed.

The following article comes from

<<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/mummy-mask-found-contain-oldest-known-gospel-first-century-ad-1484086>>

This complete disregard for the sanctity of surviving antiquities is, for many, many of us not just puzzling but flat-out distressing. It appears that the people behind and the people doing this destruction of antiquities are all conservative evangelical Christians, who care nothing about the preservation of the past – they care only about getting their paws on a small fragment of a manuscript. Can there be any question that with them we are not dealing with historians but Christian apologists?

Here is the article:

EGYPT: MUMMY MASK FOUND TO CONTAIN 'OLDEST KNOWN GOSPEL' FROM FIRST CENTURY AD

By Mary-Ann Russon

A papyrus fragment taken from this ancient Egyptian mummy mask could well be the oldest copy of a gospel known to exist

Archaeologists believe they may have found the oldest copy of a gospel ever known to exist, inscribed on a fragment of papyrus used to make an Ancient Egyptian mummy mask.

The ancient papyrus fragment contains a text from the Gospel of Mark and was written in first century AD prior to the year 90. So far, the oldest surviving copies of the gospel date back to the second century, which would make the new find at least 10 years older.

Pharaohs and nobility in Ancient Egypt might have been able to afford funerary masks made

from gold but ordinary people usually could only afford mummy masks made from linen or papyrus.

Add to that, under the Roman rule of Egypt (30 BC-619 AD), Egyptian influences were being phased out by the Romans and indigenous Egyptians were considered to be on the lowest rung of society, far below Romans and Greeks, so the people were very poor.

Nevertheless, some traditions remained and at times, mummy masks would be made from recycled sheets of papyrus as the material was very expensive.

MUMMY MASKS MADE FROM VALUABLE PAPYRUS

Now a team of archaeologists at Acadia Divinity College in Wolfville, Nova Scotia are taking mummy masks apart, using a special technique to remove the glue on the masks that does not harm the ink on the sheets of papyrus.

The researchers have discovered hundreds of new texts using this method, including philosophical writing and copies of stories by Homer, an important ancient Greek poet.

A papyrus fragment from the Gospel of Thomas written in Greek, which dates back to the third century AD (British Library)

“We’re recovering ancient documents from the first, second and third centuries. Not just Christian documents, not just biblical documents, but classical Greek texts, business papers, various mundane papers, personal letters,” Craig Evans, a professor of New Testament studies at Acadia Divinity College told Live Science.

The researchers are analysing the mummy mask texts in order to discover how biblical texts were copied and whether there were any alterations to the Gospel of Mark over time.

“We have every reason to believe that the original writings and their earliest copies would have been in circulation for a hundred years in most cases — in some cases much longer, even 200 years,” Evans said.

“A scribe making a copy of a script in the third century could actually have at his disposal [the] first-century originals, or first-century copies, as well as second-century copies.”

ANGER OVER TAKING APART MUMMY MASKS

Although Evans’ discovery is not insignificant, there are many scholars in the archaeology world who disagree with dismantling ancient mummy masks to access the papyrus texts.

There are also concerns Evans’ work is not grounded in fact. Questions posed to him about where the mask came from and carbon dating have gone largely unanswered, as the Acadia Divinity College professor said he and his team are subject to a nondisclosure agreement until the papyrus is officially published.

Evans confirmed to Live Science the owners of the funerary masks do not want to be known and the only reason he can even mention the first-century gospel fragment is because a member of his team leaked some of the information in 2012.

“Here’s a guy getting so excited about finding a first-century manuscript of a first-century text that he’s totally oblivious to the destruction of archaeological material it entails,” wrote Paul Barford, an English archaeologist living in Warsaw in his blog about private artefact collecting and heritage issues.

“By the way, they generally did not accompany sarcophagi. Getting the mask off the wrapping was usually accompanied by the destruction of the whole mummy.”

FEARS OF IMPROPER RESEARCH DONE BY CHRISTIAN APOLOGISTS

Separate to archaeology is the field of Christian apologetics, whereby people seek to present a rational basis for the Christian faith against objections.

Apart from trying to prove miracles and defending authorship and dates of biblical books, Christian apologists often analyse ancient historical artefacts for connections to Christianity. Many archaeologists allege they obtain these items privately through unscrupulous means.

Roberta Mazza, a lecturer in Classics and Ancient History at the University of Manchester, has been trying to find out whom the papyri belongs to but has so far been unsuccessful.

Until the papyrus has been published, scholars and archaeologists will not be able to prove or disprove Evans’ work.

In her blog, she wrote of Evans’ talk at the 2014 Apologetics Canada conference: “These people are not doing any good service to the public and to our cultural heritage patrimony.

“The audience who attend their talks are told fantasy stories on the retrieval of papyrus fragments and their date, and on the quest for Christian original texts.

“Apologists’ speeches are not only misinformed, but can even encourage more people to buy mummy masks on the antiquities market and dissolve them in Palmolive soap.”

Brice Jones, a doctoral candidate in religion at Concordia University, is concerned apologists often have “no scholarly credentials” and this is part of the problem with private collecting, which denies the world’s people their heritage by hiding away artefacts that should be displayed publicly for study and enjoyment.

In his blog, he wrote: “The scholarly community needs to be more and more aware of these practices, how these artefacts are being used, and the religious agendas behind it all.”



[Defending the Destruction of Mummy Masks](#)
[Public Reactions to Muslim Extremists](#)