

As most of us have suspected for years now, there is in fact no first-century copy of the Gospel of Mark. If fortune smiles upon us, maybe one will eventually be discovered. But it hasn't been yet. Dan Wallace, our lone public source for the existence of such a thing (announced with some flair at a public debate I had with him in 2012) has finally provided the necessary information: his claim that such a copy existed was based on bad information. He lays it all out here.

<https://danielbwallace.com/2018/05/23/first-century-mark-fragment-update/> . I've copied the post here, below.

He is gracious to apologize to me, and I understand about non-disclosure agreements. But at the same time, I have lots of questions about the entire affair. You may have some too. If so, let me know. I'll answer the ones I can and ask the ones I can't.

Here is Dan's Post:

First-Century Mark Fragment Update

ON 23 MAY 2018 BY DANIEL B. WALLACE IN CONTEMPORARY ISSUES, NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES, TEXTUAL CRITICISM

There has been a flurry of announcements and comments on the internet about the "First-Century Mark Fragment" (FCM) ever since [Elijah Hixson posted a blog on Evangelical Textual Criticism](#) this morning. As many know, I signed a non-disclosure agreement about this manuscript in 2012 sometime after I made an announcement about it in my third debate with Bart Ehrman at North Carolina, Chapel Hill (February 1, 2012). I was told in the non-disclosure agreement not to speak about when it would be published or whether it even exists. The termination of this agreement would come when it was published. Consequently, I am now free to speak about it.

Confirmation

The first thing to mention is that yes, Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 5345, published in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 83 (2018), is the same manuscript that I spoke about in the debate and blogged about afterward. In that volume the editors date it to the second or third century. And this now is what has created quite a stir.

Apology

In my debate with Bart, I mentioned that I had it on good authority that this was definitely a *first*-century fragment of Mark. A representative for who I understood was the owner of FCM urged me to make the announcement at the debate, which they realized would make this go viral. However, the information I received and was assured to have been vetted was incorrect. It was my fault for being naïve enough to trust that the data I got was unquestionable, as it was presented to me. So, I must first apologize to Bart Ehrman, and to everyone else, for giving misleading information about this discovery. While I am sorry for publicly announcing inaccurate facts, at no time in the public statements (either in the debate or on my blogsite) did I knowingly do this. But I should have been more careful about

trusting *any* sources without my personal verification, a lesson I have since learned.

Personal History

Prior to the Debate

Just prior to the debate, this representative discussed with me the discovery of FCM. It was my understanding that their group had purchased the papyrus; had I known otherwise, I never would have made the public announcement. I was urged—and authorized—to make the announcement at the debate. I was also told that a high-ranking papyrologist had confirmed that FCM was definitely a first-century manuscript. On that basis, I made the announcement.

Post-Debate

After the debate I posted a blog entitled, [First-Century Fragment of Mark's Gospel Found!?](#), which came online March 22, 2012. Hundreds of comments were made on that blog, all the way up to the end of 2017. Many of them were negative, asking me why I didn't say more. I have been accused of dissemblage or incompetence or both. But I could not say more. The reason was simple: I was asked *not* to say more.

Some thought that I was the one who discovered the fragment or that I was the one editing it for publication. Whenever this was suggested, I denied both. I had not even seen the fragment!

Post-Non-disclosure Agreement

Later in 2012 I did get the opportunity to see the manuscript. I was allowed to see it only after I signed a non-disclosure agreement. From that point on, I have essentially kept my mouth shut (though I was also asked not to take the blog down, since that would only raise more questions). What struck me about the fragment especially was that in Mark 1.17 instead of αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς the papyrus did not have ὁ Ἰησοῦς. I thought at the time that, if this really was a first-century fragment (which I was not prepared, with my limited knowledge of papyrology and paleography, to claim), it most likely was due to ὁ Ἰησοῦς existing as a *nomen sacrum* already in the first century. I surmised that the exemplar that the scribe was copying from most likely read αὐτοιχοις (no spacing, and Ἰησοῦς written with just the first and last letters with a supralinear bar over them). The scribe of FCM then could have easily and accidentally skipped over the duplicated οῖς. Alternatively, it was possible that the scribe's exemplar did not have ὁ Ἰησοῦς, but this seemed far less likely.

Nomina sacra are a well-known phenomenon in New Testament manuscripts from the earliest papyri, although the reasons for their creation are not altogether clear. (For a recent discussion, see Larry Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], 95-134.) To find a first-century fragment whose exemplar most likely had this *nomen sacrum* was truly exciting! But was it really from the first century? With only a few minutes looking at the papyrus, and no permission to take pictures, I too had to wait, like everyone else, to see the publication.

In virtually every speaking engagement I have had since then, the question inevitably comes up: "What can you tell us about the first-century Mark fragment?" The answer is always the same: I've signed a non-disclosure agreement.

Somewhere along the line, I learned that the world-class papyrologist who dated the fragment to the first century had *already*, prior to my debate with Ehrman, adjusted his views. He was not so certain about the date (perhaps it was early second century). I learned

that the rep *knew*, two weeks prior to the debate, that the papyrologist had changed his views. But I was told none of this. Regrettably, even when I made the announcement in Chapel Hill, I was giving misinformation. Even more regrettable, I have not been able to reveal the papyrologist's uncertainty until now.

Further, I did not know that FCM was dated to the *second/third century* until I saw Elijah Hixson's blog. The reasons for my silence had to do exclusively with the fact that I signed a non-disclosure agreement. Journalists, authors, newspaper editors, and many, many others have asked for information about it. But I was not allowed to say anything. Some have accused me of being silent to protect my reputation; just the opposite is the case. I was silent because I gave my word to be, even if it would hurt my reputation.

Final Reflections

One of the lessons my wife and I drilled into our four sons was that their integrity would be in question unless there were times when being honest hurt them. When they repeatedly told us they were telling the truth, but the consequences were always to their advantage, we couldn't trust them. In short, integrity sometimes hurts. I am glad that this fragment has finally been published, so that I can get past the accusations and condemnations. To be sure, there is much to criticize me for, in particular that I did not personally verify the information I received about this manuscript before announcing it to the world. But the speculations about my character otherwise I would hope have been resolved.



[What the New Fragment of Mark's Gospel Looks like \(the so-called First-Century Mark\) Back in Business!](#)