CHAPTER FIVE

PVINDOB.G 2325: THE SO-CALLED FAYÛM-GOSPEL—RE-EDITION AND SOME CRITICAL CONCLUSIONS*

In the course of the 21st International Congress of Papyrology in Berlin in 1985 Stanley E. Porter found fault with the lack of a critical edition of the Greek papyri with apocryphal Gospel texts on the one hand, and, at the same time, criticized the treatment of the once edited papyri on the other, which are rarely appropriately considered on their own or which are not adequately republished even if it might be necessary.1 His estimation can be complemented by the observation that the discovery of fragments of apocryphal Gospels causes a temporary stir,2 but as soon as it becomes obvious that they won’t offer any insights about the canonical Gospels, their history of origins, or the relationship between each other, the interest in these new discoveries dies at once, as was the case with PVindob.G 2325.3 An evaluation of papyri with apocryphal texts

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1 Cf. Porter, ‘The Greek Apocryphal Gospels Papyri’, 795–803, here 795. Porter’s claims (803) refer to the following manuscripts (795): ROxy I 1; IV 654; 655; XLI 2949; XL 4009; PEgerton 2 in connection with PKöln VI 255; PCair. 10735; PVindob. G 2325; PBerol. 11710; PMert. II 51.

2 In this respect, the recent retrieval of a newly discovered papyrus fragment of the Letter to the Hebrews in the Papyrus Collection in Vienna comes to mind. In many newspaper reports the fragment was misjudged as the oldest witness to the Letter to the Hebrews, so that the editor of the PVindob.G 42417, Amphilochios Papathomas, felt obliged to publish some clarifications even before the papyrus had officially been published (cf. his email to the PAPY-forum [papy@igl.ku.dk] of 07/01/2000 and his statements on the homepage of the Papyrus Collection in Vienna [http://www.onb.ac.at/sammlungen/papyrus/aktuell/news1.htm]). The edition of the papyrus from the sixth or seventh century is Papathomas, ‘A New Testimony’ (2000), 18–24.

3 The initial sensation about the fragment, which was regarded as a pre-stage of the synoptic Gospels, above all of Matt and Mark (Bickell, ‘Ein Papyrusfragment’, 498–504; PERF no. 541: ‘...wohl Übersetzung des aramäischen Urevangeliums...’) or as a potential parallel text to the Synoptics and, thus, called in to understand them better (see the title of Resch, Ausserekanonische Paralleltexte zu den Evangelien II, 28–34),
and a critical treatment in their own right only rarely occur. It is self-evident that this is unacceptable because every direct primary witness to a bygone time is unique. Furthermore, these fingerprints of early Christianity—as is the case with the papyrus dealt with in the present essay—are then not properly accepted on the basis of their invaluable significance for recovering the past, and, by doing so, valuable pieces of information and inferences about the variety and complexity of previous text transmission are at risk of getting lost. 

Therefore, it is the goal of this essay, by means of a new analysis of $P_{Vindob}.G$ 2325—the fragment of the so-called Fayûm-Gospel of the Papyrus Collection of the Austrian National Library in Vienna—to point out that essential conclusions can be drawn from a detailed investigation into the papyrus itself and that they can be made utilizable for further discussions of diverse problems even in related academic disciplines. After a description of the fragment, a survey of the history of research (a Forschungsbericht), a diplomatic transcription of the fragment with annotations and comments, and a reconstruction (that, of course, will remain hypothetical), the focus is put on the assessment of the papyrus and its text.

1. $P_{Vindob}.G$ 2325—Description and History of Research

The papyrus fragment is at most 3.5 cm high and 4.3 cm wide, and has seven lines of writing on one side only parallel to the horizontal papyrus fibers (recto). The last line is partly lost. The reverse side with vertical fibers (verso) is blank. If the Christian preference of the codex is taken into account or if the codex is even accepted as the original died quite soon, after there were no further conclusions gained from $P_{Vindob}.G$ 2325 for these issues.


The terms ‘recto’ and ‘verso’ are deliberately used in this context, because $P_{Vindob}.G$ 2325 is seen as a fragment from a roll here. On ‘recto’ and ‘verso’ see Turner, ‘Recto and Verso’, 102–6; idem, ‘The Terms Recto and Verso’; Rupprecht, *Kleine Einführung*, 19–21 (with literature).