The Disputed Early Fragments of the So-Called
Gospel of Peter—Once Again

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Abstract
This article reiterates the argument that contrary to previous proposals five pieces of textual or artefactual evidence (P.Oxy. 2949, P.Oxy. 4009, P.Vindob. G 2325, Ostracon [van Haelst Nr. 741], and P.Egerton 2) cannot be identified with any certainty as early fragments of the Gospel of Peter or, as in the case of the ostracon, as offering testimony to the existence of that text. Furthermore, this discussion also responds to the personal attack made in this journal by Prof. Lührmann who took exception with my arguments that the basis for identifying the fragments as witnesses to the Gospel of Peter was extremely slender and flimsy. Finally, the discussion states categorically, in opposition to Prof. Lührmann’s assertion, that I have worked directly with the Oxyrhynchus fragments.

Keywords
Gospel of Peter, P.Oxy. 2949, P.Oxy. 4009, P.Vindob. G 2325, Ostracon (van Haelst Nr. 741), P.Egerton 2

In the final part of the 2006 volume of *Novum Testamentum* (48/4) an article was published which responded to an article I had published earlier in the same year in *New Testament Studies.* Here I seek to do two things. First to briefly re-state the case that I made in the original article, and secondly, to respond briefly to the personal attack that was made against me in the article.


2) I would like to thank the editors of *Novum Testamentum* for allowing me this opportunity to publish a brief response. In particular the support expressed by Dr Harm Hollander has been greatly appreciated.

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In my original article the identification of five pieces of textual or artefactual evidence that have been suggested as demonstrating the much earlier existence of the text from Akhmîm (10759) identified as the Gospel of Peter was questioned. These five pieces of evidence are: (i) P.Oxy. 2949; (ii) P.Oxy. 4009; (iii) P.Vindob. G 2325; (iv) Ostracon (van Haelst Nr. 741); and (v) P. Egerton 2. Without doubt the two most significant pieces of data covered in the discussion are fragmentary texts from Oxyrhynchus, known as P.Oxy. 2949 and P.Oxy. 4009 respectively. The first has a partial overlap with G.Pet. 2:3-5 in the initial part of its text, but then goes its own way. The second has no overlap with the extant portion of text discovered as the initial text in a codex unearthed during the Winter season dig of 1886-87 at Akhmîm. The identification of this text as part of the Gospel of Peter is made on the basis of a multiple stage argument. First P.Oxy. 4009 contains a first-person reference (probably in a narrative context), λέγει μοι. Secondly, it was argued that this fragment parallels a dialogue between Jesus and Peter that occurs in 2 Clem. 5.2-4. Thirdly, it was suggested that a first-person version of this incident with Peter as the character speaking in that voice must be a fragment from the now no-longer extant portion of the Gospel of Peter. Apart from the highly convoluted and speculative stages in this argument, it is also based upon a large-scale putative reconstruction of P.Oxy. 4009 which in effect aligns it closely with 2 Clem. 5.2-4, when actually the only significant item of vocabulary that the two texts definitely share is the term λύκων//λύκους—although in different cases. While reconstruction of fragmentary texts is an important activity, it must be conducted with some controls. Scholars will obviously differ in relation to the level at which they set such controls. However, in the present case the limits of plausibility are perhaps becoming too strained. This is due to a number of factors. The lack of shared terminology, the high level of creative reconstruction, the necessity to posit an intermediate stage based on the text of 2 Clem. 5.2-4, and also the need to account for the inversion in the order of the “serpents and doves” saying which is not in 2 Clem., but is part of the reconstruction of P.Oxy. 4009.

For these reasons, although based on a more detailed discussion, my original article strongly refuted the notion that P.Oxy. 4009 could be seen as a fragment of the Gospel of Peter. The other fragment, P.Oxy. 2949, was seen as having some kind of relationship to the text of G.Pet. 2:3-5, but the failure to take account of divergence between the two texts has too readily led to the suggestion that P.Oxy. 2949 is a second-century exemplar of the Gospel of Peter. Rather the possibility should be considered that