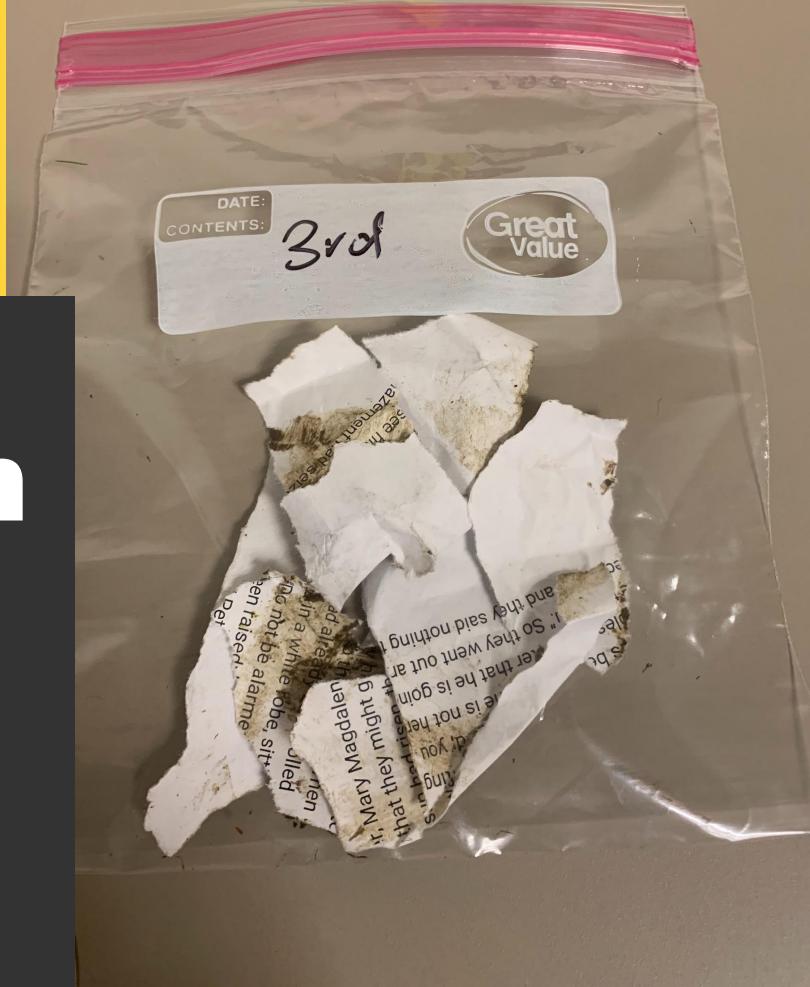


# Muddy Paper in Plastic Bags:

Practicing Textual Criticism



# Outline

- I. Purpose
  - A. Archaeology
  - B. Papyrology
  - C. Paleography
  - D. “Original” Texts
  - E. Standardized Texts
- II. Preparation
  - A. Muddy Paper
  - B. Damaged Paper
  - C. Plastic Bags
- III. Activity
  - A. Treasure Hunt = Archaeology
  - B. The Puzzle = Papyrology/Paleography
  - C. Juxtapose and Standardize = Original and Standardized Texts
  - D. *Reusable Container?*
  - E. *Post-Covid-19?*

# **Purpose**

The main purpose of this activity is to introduce students to the work that went into creating the Bible(s) they study. This can include the discovery and preservation of texts and manuscripts that are necessary for the work of textual criticism but also the theory/philosophy that guides textual critics as they construct/reconstruct a text (or *à la* Parker that guides them in tracing the development of textual traditions).

# Purpose (cont.)

## Archaeology

This activity can be used to introduce students to the work of archaeologists. For example, one could discuss the findings at Qumran or Nag Hammadi.

## Papyrology

This activity can be used to introduce students to the work of papyrologists, the study of parchment, vellum, etc. For example, one could discuss how the manuscripts and fragments from Qumran or Nag Hammadi were preserved, stored, studied, etc.

## Paleography

This activity can be used to introduce students to the work of paleographers. For example, one could discuss how writing styles are dated, what was used to make ink, etc.

# Purpose (cont.)

## “Original” Texts

On the more theoretical side, as one moves into the work of textual criticism, this activity can be used to introduce the controversies and debates around the concept of an “original” text (autograph), e.g. D.C. Parker’s appeal to scholars to do textual criticism not with “a single original text” in mind but instead with the goal of analyzing “all the developments of the material in order to demonstrate the processes to which they owe their origin”.

## Paleography

Also on the more theoretical side, this activity serves as a way to introduce students to standardized versions such as the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) or the *Novum Testamentum Graece: Nestle-Aland* (currently NA28), so that students can become aware of the function of these versions (e.g. writing commentaries).

# Preparation

**Step 1**



Muddy Paper

**Step 2**



Damaged Paper

**Step 3**



Plastic Bags

**Step 4**



Hide the Bags!

## **Preparation (cont.)**

The preparation for this activity is simple. You will need to print copies of a passage from the Bible (probably an English translation unless you are doing this activity with students who know other ancient languages). As I will discuss below, I use versions of Mk. 16 from four or five different translations (including the King James Version or a version that has the “long version” of this chapter). Then you will need to find mud or make mud (though dirt will do). Scissors are optional if you prefer not to tear with your hands. You may benefit from gloves. Finally, you will want plastic baggies (or an alternative: see below) to hold the paper once you have printed and damaged it.

NRSV • 1989

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They said to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place where they laid him. Go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you into Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

#### King James (1611)

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spicke, that they myght come and anoint hym. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came to the sepulchre before the sun shone, and saw that the stone was rolled away from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, then saw they that the stone was rolled away for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen: he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But come, see the place where they laid him: then shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were affrighted: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were affrighted.

Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven devils; she went and told them that had been with her, as they mourned and wept. And when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them.

Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not those which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe: In their name shall they cast out devils: they shall speak with new tongues: they shall take up serpents: and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them: they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and confirmed the word with signs

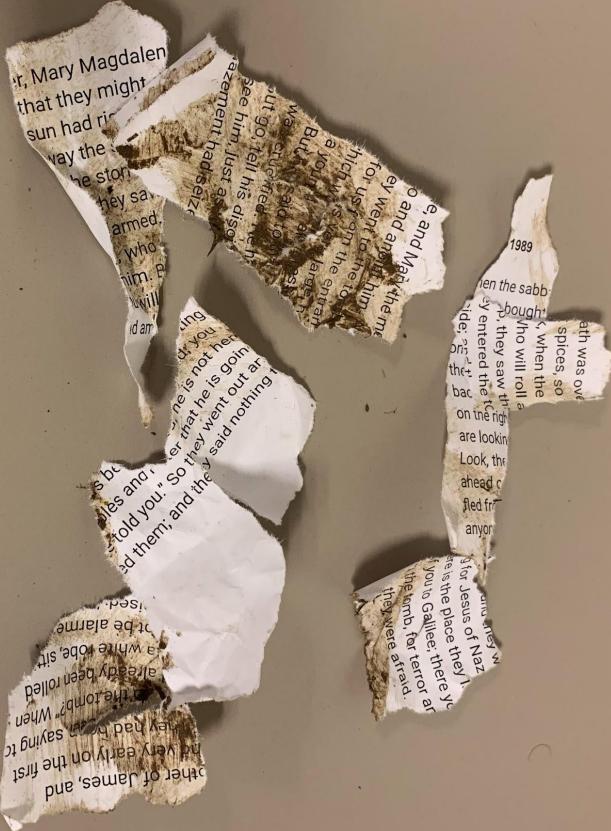
#### RSV (1971)

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun was risen. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back—it was very large. And entering into the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and who was amazed. And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him; go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.

Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told them that he was alive and had been seen by her; they would not believe it.

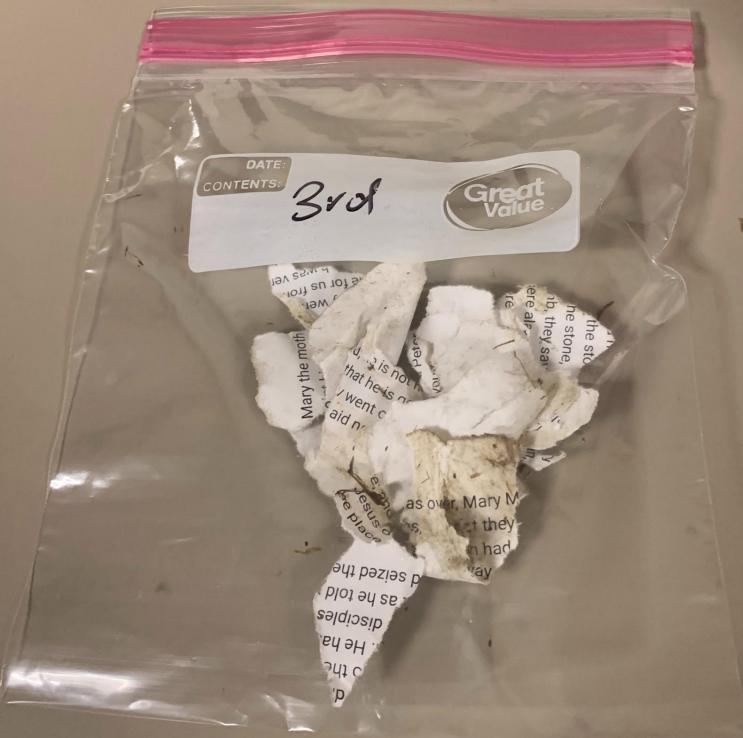
# Muddy Paper

As mentioned, this exercise can be used to discuss the findings at Qumran or Nag Hammadi. I muddy the paper so that it will dry on the paper, sometimes streaky and sometimes clumpy but in such a way that I can simulate how the natural environment (caves, jars, soil, arid climates, etc.) impact the texts.



# Damaged Paper

For the sake of the activity, I prefer to turn these pieces of paper into something quite fragmentary. I will tear off whole pieces, poke holes in key locations, and do enough damage so that my students have to reconstruct the texts to the best of their ability.



## Plastic Bags

When I heard of a version of this activity, the professor used plastic baggies to hold the paper. I used them as well when I did this activity. This allows you to keep a page “together” in a sense but also to place it somewhere outside to be found with *relative* ease.

# **Activity**

**Step 1**



Treasure Hunt

**Step 2**



Puzzle

**Step 3**



Juxtaposition

**Step 4**



Standardization

# **Activity**

The activity itself simulates some of the stages of the discovery and reconstruction of manuscripts and fragments so that students can then work on putting together their findings, juxtaposing them with those of other groups, and then debate what the “original” or “standardized” text should say.

# Treasure Hunt

My classroom has easy access to areas where I can cover the plastic baggies in rocks, grass, or dirt. On my whiteboard I create a map of the area around the building. Then I send my groups to go searching for one of the baggies. Once they find a baggie, they return to the classroom, and empty the bag of its contents.

# The Puzzle

Students understand puzzles. Presenting papyrology as a puzzle is a useful analogy. This is why I invited the students to reconstruct their deconstructed piece of paper like they were putting together a puzzle. If there is time, then you may be able to discuss the transmission of artifacts, their legality, how documents are conserved and tested, or related topics.

# Juxtapose & Standardize

Once each group has finished putting together their puzzles, and they have compared and contrasted the available wording, the goal is to have them create a standardized version. When I first tried this activity, I did not give them enough time, nor did I develop, or help them develop, criteria that would guide their reconstruction. While I think this part of the activity, if done right, will stretch the lesson about forty-five minutes to an hour, it seemed to me to be necessary if my students were to really grasp the point of the whole project.

# Juxtapose & Standardize

I aim to develop the activity so that they can think about how to weigh the different characteristics of a text such as its age, the majority/minority manuscript tradition, or the difficulty of a given reading (since I used Mark 16, I can elaborate more on the likelihood that the more difficult shorter ending makes more sense than the corrective longer ending).

# **Changes?**

## ***Reusable Container?***

As mentioned, I had heard of an exercise like this one, so when I went to test it in my classroom I used what was easily available: plastic baggies. In the future, I will look at more sustainable container options, something reusable.

# **Changes?**

## ***Post-Covid-19?***

This assignment was created and implemented in January of 2020. This was a few weeks before the Covid-19 outbreak was declared a pandemic. Since March of 2020, my classes, like most of yours, have been online or in socially distanced classrooms. This year it appears unlikely that I will be able to do a hands-on activity like this one again for a while—at least until the end of 2021. If you can think of a way to do this exercise in a pandemic appropriate manner, please share your ideas with me!

# Thanks!

Do you have any questions?

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# Notes/Sources

- I was told about a version of this activity that James B. De Young used to teach in his classes at Western Seminary (Portland, OR). This is where I derived the basic ideas for what I am presenting here.
- D.C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 6.
- For some brief, introductory readings on related topics (useful to my high school students; useful to undergraduates too), see Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, "Why Does the Bible Look the Way It Does?," *BibleOdyssey*, accessed from <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/tools/bible-basics/why-does-the-bible-look-the-way-it-does> on 30 November 2020; Brennan Breed, "How Was the Bible Written and Transmitted?," *BibleOdyssey*, accessed from <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/tools/bible-basics/how-was-the-bible-written-and-transmitted> on 30 November 2020; Justin Walker and Jacob L. Wright, "How Was the Bible Formed?," *BibleOdyssey*, accessed from <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/tools/bible-basics/how-was-the-bible-formed> on 30 November 2020.
- This is why the University of Michigan named one of the online exhibits of their papyrology collection "Puzzle Me This". See "Puzzle Me This: Early binding fragments from the Papyrology Collection" accessed from <https://apps.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/puzzle-me-this-early-binding-/my-vision> on 18 November 2020.

# Notes/Sources

- Topics like these have become increasingly relevant, even dramatic, as we have seen in recent cases such as the Gospel of Jesus' Wife, First-Century Mark, and other manuscripts. For a useful introduction to these topics that could be provided to students see Amy Weiss-Myer, "What Happened to the Gospel of Jesus' Wife?," *The Atlantic*, accessed from  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/08/ariel-sabar-what-happened-to-the-gospel-of-jesus-wife/615160/> on 30 November 2020; Ariel Sabar, "A Biblical Mystery at Oxford," *The Atlantic*, accessed from  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/museum-of-the-bible-obbink-gospel-of-mark/610576/> on 30 November 2020; Joel Baden and Candida Moss, "Can Hobby Lobby Buy the Bible?," *The Atlantic*, accessed from  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/01/can-hobby-lobby-buy-the-bible/419088/> on 30 November 2020. For whole book-length coverage of the Gospel of Jesus' Wife, see Ariel Sabar, *Veritas: A Harvard Professor, a Con Man and the Gospel of Jesus' Wife* (New York: DoubleDay, 2020). For controversies surrounding the Green Family, Hobby Lobby, and the Museum of the Bible, see Joel Baden and Candida Moss, *Bible Nation: The United States of Hobby Lobby* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).
- The CDC recommends that teachers "Avoid sharing books, supplies, games, or other learning aides; if sharing is necessary due to limited supply, clean and disinfect between different students" and "Face all desks/tables in the same direction. Have students sit on only one side of the table". This activity would violate both of these recommendations. See "Operational Considerations for Schools," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention accessed from  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/global-covid-19/schools.html> on 18 November 2020.

