

# Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery?

The *Secret Gospel of Mark* in Debate

Proceedings from the 2011 York University  
Christian Apocrypha Symposium

Edited by  
**TONY BURKE**

Foreword by  
**PAUL FOSTER**



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ANCIENT GOSPEL OR MODERN FORGERY?

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Front cover image of Mar Saba manuscript 65 used by permission of the Westar Institute.

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## Preface

THE PAPERS IN THIS volume were presented at the York Christian Apocrypha Symposium on the *Secret Gospel of Mark* on April 29, 2011, at York University in Toronto, Canada. The symposium, convened by York professors Tony Burke and Philip Harland, had one goal: to gather together experts on the text to consider recent developments in its study—including the uncovering of apparent “clues” revealing it to be a hoax and recently-commissioned handwriting analyses—with the hope of reaching some consensus on which arguments advanced for its origins remained viable. Over the course of several months, we solicited involvement from North America’s most prominent *Secret Mark* scholars. Not everyone we asked was available or interested in participating, but we ended up with an outstanding panel of experts eager to contribute new work on the text and to discuss the efficacy of the various positions advanced about its origins and its meaning.

This volume aims to capture the experience of the symposium, both for those who attended the event and for those who could not. All of the papers are included, along with a transcription of the evening Question and Answer session with several of the participating scholars. Also incorporated is an earlier paper by Stephen Carlson presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature; due to scheduling conflicts, Stephen was not able to attend the symposium, but suggested we include his paper, which is mentioned by several of the contributors, in the published proceedings. By the symposium’s end, the debate over the origins of *Secret Mark* clearly was moving away from the distractions of the weaker arguments for forgery, but, not surprisingly, the participants remained entrenched in their positions. On the effort to reach consensus, Marvin Meyer spoke, hopefully, for everyone when he said, “I’d love to think there is some consensus. I guess the consensus that I feel at this

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point is that we all came to Toronto and had a good time together and enjoyed each other's company and had a rousing debate."

The gathering was made possible with contributions from several funding bodies within the university: the Department of the Humanities, the Office of Research Services, David B. Dewitt at the office of the Associate Vice-President Research, and Barbara Crow, the Assistant Dean of Research for the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies. We are grateful also to all those who registered for the symposium, travelling from near and far to listen to the papers and to participate in the discussions that arose.

Additional thanks go to our panelists who contributed their time and expertise to the symposium, but especially Scott Brown, Allan Pantuck, and Peter Jeffery who were involved in planning the event. And to Paul Foster who brings an international voice to the project with his foreword. Special appreciation goes to Laura Cudworth for transcribing the evening Question and Answer session, and to Joe Oryshak for compiling the indices.

The *Secret Mark* symposium was the first in a planned ongoing series of symposia on the Christian Apocrypha to take place semi-annually at York University. The idea began out of a desire to bring more attention to the work of North American scholarship on this literature. For information on future symposia in the series, look for announcements on the Apocryphicity blog (<http://www.tonyburke.ca/apocryphicity/>).

February, 2012

Tony Burke

# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Tony Burke

THE STORY OF MORTON Smith's discovery of the *Letter to Theodore* with its references to the *Secret Gospel of Mark* has been recounted often and may seem superfluous to repeat here. Yet, the misinformation and obfuscation about Smith's role in the discovery has had such a profound impact on discussion of the text that it requires an objective restatement of the facts. Readers of the papers in this volume may benefit also from a short recounting of the major works on *Secret Mark* published over the past forty years so as to see the transmission of arguments made for and against the text's authenticity and understand the origins of various personal attacks made against Smith by his detractors. *Secret Mark* is not the only text from antiquity to polarize scholars, but it certainly stands out among others for the attention it has attracted, among both scholars and the wider public, as a result of this conflict. In addition, the personalities and biases of the scholars interested in this text, for better or worse, come through in their work. It is useful, therefore, to focus this introduction particularly on the contributions to the study of *Secret Mark* made by the authors of the papers in this volume and on the origins of the arguments they continue to champion.

1. My thanks to Scott Brown and Allan Pantuck for reading earlier drafts of this chapter, offering their feedback, and helping to correct factual errors.

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### MORTON SMITH AND THE DISCOVERY OF SECRET MARK

In 1958, American historian Morton Smith journeyed to the monastery of Mar Saba, located 20 kilometers (12 miles) south-east of Jerusalem in the Judean desert, to catalogue the library in the monastery's great tower.<sup>2</sup> Smith had previously visited Mar Saba when a graduate student in 1942 and remained there for two months. This began a friendly relationship with the Archimandrite allowing for Smith's return. Though much of the library's holdings had been moved to the Patriarchate library in Jerusalem in the late nineteenth century, Smith found there a number of printed books and a handful of manuscripts.<sup>3</sup> Smith noted that the pages of printed books often contained additional writing in Greek, which demonstrated how scarce paper was in recent centuries of the monastery's history. The end-papers of one of these printed books, a 1646 edition of Isaac Voss's epistles of Ignatius,<sup>4</sup> particularly attracted Smith's attention. In an apparent eighteenth-century hand there is a text that begins: "From the letters of the most holy Clement, the author of the *Stromateis*; to Theodore." Smith had chanced upon a previously unknown letter by Clement of Alexandria, a well-known early Christian writer whose other works were written between 175 and 215 CE. That alone would be a major discovery, but the writer of this *Letter to Theodore* mentions also the existence of a longer version of Mark current in his time. The complete letter reads as follows:<sup>5</sup>

From the letters of the most holy Clement, the author of the *Stromateis*. To Theodore.

You did well in silencing the unspeakable teachings of the Carpocratians. For these are the "wandering stars" referred to in the prophecy, who wander from the narrow road of the commandments into a boundless abyss of the carnal and bodily sins. For, priding themselves in knowledge, as they say, "of the deep things of Satan," they do not know that they are casting themselves away into "the nether world of the darkness" of falsity, and, boasting that they are free, they have become slaves

2. Read Smith's account of his visits in *The Secret Gospel*, 1–9.

3. For a description of the seventy-five manuscripts Smith catalogued see Smith, "Monasteries and Their Manuscripts"; and Smith "Ἑλληνικὰ χειρόγραφα ἐν τῇ Μονῇ τοῦ ἁγίου Σάββα" ("Greek Manuscripts in the Monastery of St. Saba").

4. Voss, *Epistulae genuinae S. Ignatii Martyris*.

5. The text is taken from Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, 446–47; see also Smith, *Secret Gospel*, 14–17. For a Greek and English synopsis of the text see Appendix II.

of servile desires. Such men are to be opposed in all ways and altogether. For, even if they should say something true, one who loves the truth should not, even so, agree with them. For not all true things are the truth, nor should that truth which merely seems true according to human opinions be preferred to the true truth, that according to the faith.

Now of the things they keep saying about the divinely inspired Gospel according to Mark, some are altogether falsifications, and others, even if they do contain some true elements, nevertheless are not reported truly. For the true things being mixed with inventions, are falsified, so that, as the saying goes, even the salt loses its savor.

As for Mark, then, during Peter's stay in Rome he wrote an account of the Lord's doings, not, however, declaring all of them, nor yet hinting at the secret ones, but selecting what he thought most useful for increasing the faith of those who were being instructed. But when Peter died a martyr, Mark came over to Alexandria, bringing both his own notes and those of Peter, from which he transferred to his former book the things suitable to whatever makes for progress toward knowledge. Thus he composed a more spiritual Gospel for the use of those who were being perfected. Nevertheless, he yet did not divulge the things not to be uttered, nor did he write down the hierophantic teaching of the Lord, but to the stories already written he added yet others and, moreover, brought in certain sayings of which he knew the interpretation would, as a mystagogue, lead the hearers into the innermost sanctuary of that truth hidden by seven veils. Thus, in sum, he prepared matters, neither grudgingly nor incautiously, in my opinion, and, dying, he left his composition to the church in Alexandria, where it even yet is most carefully guarded, being read only to those who are being initiated into the great mysteries.

But since the foul demons are always devising destruction for the race of men, Carpocrates, instructed by them and using deceitful arts, so enslaved a certain presbyter of the church in Alexandria that he got from him a copy of the secret Gospel, which he both interpreted according to his blasphemous and carnal doctrine and, moreover, polluted, mixing with the spotless and holy words utterly shameless lies. From this mixture is drawn off the teaching of the Carpocratians.

To them, therefore, as I said above, one must never give way; nor, when they put forward their falsifications, should one concede that the secret Gospel is by Mark, but should even deny it on oath. For, "Not all true things are to be said to all men." For

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this reason the Wisdom of God, through Solomon, advises, “Answer the fool from his folly,” teaching that the light of the truth should be hidden from those who are mentally blind. Again it says, “From him who has not shall be taken away,” and, “Let the fool walk in darkness.” But we are “children of light,” having been illuminated by “the dayspring” of the spirit of the Lord “from on high,” and “Where the Spirit of the Lord is,” it says, “there is liberty,” for “All things are pure to the pure.”

To you, therefore, I shall not hesitate to answer the questions you have asked, refuting the falsifications by the very words of the Gospel. For example, after, “And they were in the road going up to Jerusalem,” and what follows, until “After three days he shall arise,” the secret Gospel brings the following material word for word:

“And they come into Bethany. And a certain woman whose brother had died was there. And, coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me.’ But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, and straightway a great cry was heard from the tomb. And going near Jesus rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And straightway, going in where the youth was, he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand. But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days Jesus told him what to do and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God. And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan.”

After these words follows the text, “And James and John come to him,” and all that section. But “naked man with naked man,” and the other things about which you wrote, are not found.

And after the words, “And he comes into Jericho,” the secret Gospel adds only,

“And the sister of the youth whom Jesus loved and his mother and Salome were there, and Jesus did not receive them.” But the many other things about which you wrote both seem to be and are falsifications.

Now the true explanation and that which accords with the true philosophy . . .

Though surprised at his find, Smith continued with his work, photographing the manuscript, and adding a reference number on the front page (“Smith 65”). The manuscript then was left in the monastery library where Smith found it. Upon his return to America, Smith began the work of deciphering and translating the text and puzzling over its meaning. In 1960 he made a formal announcement of the discovery at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.<sup>6</sup> Thereafter he continued to consult paleographers and scholars of the New Testament, patristics, and Judaism before finally publishing his findings in 1973 in both a detailed commentary (*Clement of Alexandria*) and a short, non-scholarly account of the discovery (*The Secret Gospel*).

Smith’s find achieved instant notoriety, principally because it was intertwined with his own particular interpretation of the text.<sup>7</sup> He believed the letter to be an authentic composition by Clement and cited a dozen scholars who agreed with his assessment. The “secret gospel” cited in the letter was a revision of Mark that drew upon a lost source common to canonical Mark and John, thus explaining the parallel to John’s raising of Lazarus (11:1–44) and why *Secret Mark*’s version of the tale seemed to be more primitive than the one in John. The story itself Smith interpreted as an indication of secret, mystical practices in the Jesus movement by which Jesus, in the manner of a magician, initiated his followers into the kingdom of God; these included a ritual that united the initiate with the spirit of Jesus through a preparatory baptism and then an ascent into the heavens. In passing, Smith speculated also that the spiritual union with Jesus may have included physical union.<sup>8</sup>

6. An account of Smith’s presentation appeared the next morning on the front page of the *New York Times*: Knox, “A New Gospel Ascribed to Mark.” Pierson Parker’s reservations that the gospel was not written by Mark appeared in a second article the following day: Knox, “Expert Disputes ‘Secret Gospel.’”

7. For summaries of the early scholarship on *Secret Mark* (up to 2005), see Brown, *Mark’s Other Gospel*, 23–74 (to which this overview is greatly indebted); Eyer, “The Strange Case of the Secret Gospel according to Mark”; Foster, “Secret Mark: Its Discovery and the State of Research” (and for scholarship up to 2008, Foster, “*Secret Mark*”; Hedrick, “The Secret Gospel of Mark,” 136–38; Piovanelli, “*L’Évangile Secret de Marc*,” 52–72; Schenke, “Mystery of the Gospel of Mark,” 69–74; and Smith, “Clement of Alexandria and Secret Mark.”

8. For this last element in particular see the brief mention in Smith, *Secret Gospel*, 114.

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### THE FIRST PHASE OF SCHOLARSHIP ON SECRET MARK: 1973–2003

Initially, Smith's peers trusted in his integrity and the authenticity of the *Letter to Theodore* was not in doubt. Early reactions focused on *Secret Mark*, declaring it a typical second-century apocryphal gospel with its attendant expansion and combination of canonical traditions. The first scholar to question publicly the origins of the letter was Quentin Quesnell. In a 1975 article for *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*,<sup>9</sup> Quesnell declared that the text bore the characteristics of a hoax and therefore must be authenticated, and that this can be done only by personally examining the manuscript. Quesnell considered Smith's photographs, which are included in his commentary, inadequate for the study of the text as they were mediocre in quality and had been cropped by the publisher for publication. Quesnell placed the onus on Smith to produce the manuscript for forensic examination. Smith's failure to do so looked suspicious to many and led to speculation that there was no manuscript at all. Quesnell also remarked that the *Letter to Theodore* could have been created in recent times with the assistance of studies of Clement's style such as the Clement index published by Otto Stählin in 1936.<sup>10</sup> Though Quesnell made no explicit indictment, readers of his article saw in it an accusation that Smith himself forged the text. So, too, did Smith, who, in his reply in the following year's volume of *CBQ*, objected to the veiled accusation.<sup>11</sup> To Quesnell's dissenting voice was added that of Charles E. Murgia, who participated in an early colloquium devoted to the text at Berkeley.<sup>12</sup> Murgia characterized the letter as a carefully-constructed "seal of authenticity" for the secret gospel—that is, it is written to preemptively answer the readers' question of why they have never heard of this text before—and thought it suspicious that the manuscript lacks the serious scribal errors one would expect of a text after sixteen centuries of transmission. Smith reportedly gave some thought to Murgia's "seal of authenticity" argument but later dismissed it because it was based on a misreading of the text.<sup>13</sup>

9. Quesnell, "Mar Saba Clementine."

10. Stählin, ed., *Clemens Alexandrinus*, vol. 4, register 1.

11. Smith, "On the Authenticity." A response from Quesnell followed: "Reply to Morton Smith."

12. Murgia, "Secret Mark."

13. See the discussion in Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 29–30.

By far the loudest and most prolonged argument for forgery was put forward by Smith's former student Jacob Neusner. Though at first Neusner wrote favorably about Smith and his work on *Secret Mark* (even contributing a laudatory dust jacket testimonial to *The Secret Gospel*), his relationship with Smith suffered in the '70s and '80s, culminating in Smith's public denunciation of Neusner for academic incompetence at the 1984 Annual Meeting of the AAR/SBL. The event has been recounted several times, even by Neusner himself,<sup>14</sup> but one of the most memorable was by Hershel Shanks who wrote an overview of the meeting for *Biblical Archaeological Review*.<sup>15</sup> This report led to threat of a lawsuit from Neusner and a letter to the editor from Smith. After the 1984 meeting, Neusner increasingly criticized Smith's work in print. The invective intensified and turned more personal after Smith's death in 1991, beginning with a lengthy 1993 critique of Smith's dissertation.<sup>16</sup> Here Neusner calls the *Letter to Theodore* "the forgery of the century" and Smith "a charlatan and a fraud." Where Quesnell showed some restraint, Neusner did not hesitate to name Smith as the forger:

Smith's presentation of the evidence for his homosexual magician, a Clement fragment he supposedly turned up in a library in Sinai in 1958, ranks as one of the most slovenly presentations of an allegedly important document in recent memory; and, to understate matters, it left open the very plausible possibility of forgery. Smith himself was an expert on such matters, having devoted scholarly essays to great forgeries in antiquity.<sup>17</sup>

Donald Harman Akenson, a devotee of Neusner, later echoed his mentor's opinions on Smith and the text,<sup>18</sup> though this time with great emphasis placed on the seeming homoeroticism of the *Secret Mark* excerpts: "what we have here is a nice ironic gay joke at the expense of all the self-important scholars who not only miss the irony, but believe this alleged piece of gospel comes to us in the first-known letter of the great Clement of Alexandria."<sup>19</sup> Morton Smith is identified as "the most likely prankster."<sup>20</sup>

14. See *ibid.*, 44–45.

15. Shanks, "Annual Meetings."

16. Neusner, *Are There Really Tannaïtic Parallels to the Gospels?*

17. *Ibid.*, 28; for more details see Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 39–40.

18. First in Akenson, *Surpassing Wonder*, 595–97; and expanded in Akenson, *Saint Saul*, 84–90.

19. Akenson, *Surpassing Wonder*, 597 (and similarly Akenson, *Saint Saul*, 88).

20. Akenson, *Saint Saul*, 89.

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Around this time also Craig Evans joined the debate on the text. In a 1994 response to one of Neusner's attacks, Evans defended Smith by stating that it is "hard to believe that anyone would devote years of painstaking labor to the production of a 450-page technical book that studies a writing that the author himself faked."<sup>21</sup> As the paper in this volume shows, Evans has since changed his views on Smith's part in the origins of *Secret Mark*.

Smith's detractors grew adept at hurling insults and making (or repeating) insinuations but few provided real evidence for forgery. The closest any scholars came to doing so were in arguments presented by Andrew Criddle, Ernest Best, and Philip Jenkins. In 1995 Criddle performed a statistical analysis of the *Letter to Theodore* purporting to show the letter "contains too high a ratio of Clementine to non-Clementine traits to be authentic and should be regarded as a deliberate imitation of Clement's style."<sup>22</sup> Presumably this feat is possible only for someone with the modern tools mentioned by Quesnell. Best provided a similar argument, but this time examining *Secret Mark's* correspondences to the style of the Gospel of Mark. He concluded that the longer excerpt in the *Letter to Theodore* is "too much like Mark" to be Mark—that is, *Secret Mark* contains a suspiciously high proportion of Markan phrases.<sup>23</sup> Jenkins's contribution, in his 2001 study *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way*,<sup>24</sup> is an insinuation of parallels between Smith's discovery of the *Letter to Theodore* and the discovery of a similarly controversial text at Mar Saba in James Hogg Hunter's 1940 novel *The Mystery of Mar Saba*. One of Hunter's characters also finds a controversial non-canonical text at Mar Saba. Though Jenkins did not explicitly state that Smith was inspired by the novel to forge the text, Robert M. Price was far less hesitant to make the charge.<sup>25</sup> He saw also something suspicious in Smith writing his name on the manuscript. "If Smith had forged the text," he wrote, this and other items "would make additional sense . . . Was he signing his own work?"<sup>26</sup>

Regardless of all of these concerns, the majority of Clement scholars at first considered the text to be genuine<sup>27</sup> and the scholars who worked

21. Evans, "The Need for the 'Historical Jesus,'" 129, cited in Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 41.

22. Criddle, "On the Mar Saba Letter," 216. See also the follow-up discussion, Criddle, "Secret Mark—Further Comments."

23. Best, "Uncanonical Mark."

24. Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels*, 102.

25. Price, "Second Thoughts on the Secret Gospel," 131.

26. *Ibid.*

27. See Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 59, with further discussion 59–71.

closely on *Secret Mark* were confident enough in its authenticity to integrate it into their reconstructions of the development of the canonical Gospel of Mark. The best known and most controversial of these reconstructions was advanced by Helmut Koester.<sup>28</sup> He argued that Matthew and Luke used an early, pre-canonical version of Mark to craft their gospels; this “Proto-Mark” was then expanded with several changes and additions including the raising of the young man from *Secret Mark* and its sequel, the naked flight of the mysterious young man at Jesus’ arrest in Mark 14:51–52. Canonical Mark is considered to be an abridgement of this longer text, while Carpocratian Mark is an expansion and interpretation. Hans-Martin Schenke wrote in support of Koester’s theory, but with some modifications, so that canonical Mark is placed last in the chain of development as a purified abridgement of Carpocratian Mark.<sup>29</sup> John Dominic Crossan also saw canonical Mark as a deliberate revision of *Secret Mark*. Concerned about Carpocratian usage of the original, longer Mark, a later editor in the same “school” dismembered the raising and instruction narrative of the text, scattering its pieces throughout the text of Mark (e.g., Mark 14:51–52) so that this troublesome incident would appear to be an inauthentic pastiche composed from the scattered phrases; canonical Mark was the resulting text.<sup>30</sup> Each of these views is summarized in Marvin Meyer’s first of several articles on the text in 1990.<sup>31</sup> Like his predecessors, Meyer assumed the authenticity of *Secret Mark* and performed a study of the use of the young man (*neaniskos*) in the text as a model of discipleship. The support lent to the text by these four scholars helped to cement its place among the material affirmed by the Jesus Seminar to be essential for the study of the Historical Jesus, thus helping to bring knowledge of *Secret Mark* to the wider reading public.<sup>32</sup>

This first phase of scholarship on *Secret Mark* concludes with Charles Hedrick’s 2003 survey article expressing frustration over the “stalemate” in the academy over the authenticity of the text. Despite the efforts of Koester and his admirers, there remained a reluctance among the majority of New Testament scholars to include *Secret Mark* in their data for examining

28. Koester, “History and Development of Mark’s Gospel”; Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 293–303.

29. Schenke, “Mystery of the Gospel of Mark,” particularly 76.

30. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 91–124.

31. Meyer, “Youth in the *Secret Gospel of Mark*.” This and three other articles are revised and updated in Meyer, *Secret Gospels*.

32. Eyer, “Strange Case,” 118. For a spirited response to this development, see Akenson, *Saint Saul*, 86.

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early Christianity. “Debate has been sidelined,” he wrote, “in favor of more spectacular issues—a missing manuscript, Smith’s passing suggestion of homosexual encounters, and the visceral defense of standard views of Christian origins.”<sup>33</sup> Hedrick provided a summary of Smith’s handling of the manuscript in an attempt to dispel some of the misconceptions about its discovery (e.g., Smith did not “add” the pages containing the *Letter to Theodore* to the copy of Voss’s book). In this summary, Hedrick draws upon developments on the status of the manuscript reported in an article written a few years earlier (with Nikolaos Olympiou) for *The Fourth R*.<sup>34</sup> The article reveals that, before 2000 a number of scholars had made efforts to see the Mar Saba manuscript. Thomas Talley tried but failed to see it in 1980, but its existence was verified by Archimandrite Meliton of the Jerusalem Greek Patriarchate, who told Talley that he had transferred the Voss book to the Patriarchate Library, and by the Patriarchate librarian, Father Kallistos Dourvas, who told him that the two pages featuring the *Letter to Theodore* had been removed from the book in 1977 and were being repaired.<sup>35</sup> However, it has been revealed recently that Quentin Quesnell saw the book in 1983 along with the pages, now encased in plastic; he even participated in having the pages photographed.<sup>36</sup> Others subsequently made efforts to see the manuscript at the monastery or at the Patriarchate Library, including Hedrick, Olympiou, James H. Charlesworth, James Edwards, Shaye Cohen, and John Dart, but they succeeded only in seeing the book and not the *Letter to Theodore* pages.<sup>37</sup> Then, in 2000, Hedrick and Olympiou contacted Kallistos, now retired, about the manuscript and were informed that the librarian no longer knew the whereabouts of the letter but had made color photographs of the pages, which Hedrick published in the *Fourth R* article.<sup>38</sup> Also, in a companion piece to Hedrick’s “Stalemate” article, Guy Stroumsa told his own story of journeying to Mar Saba in 1976 with David Flusser, Shlomo Pines, and Archimandrite

33. Hedrick, “Stalemate,” 139.

34. Hedrick and Olympiou, “Secret Mark.”

35. Talley, “Liturgical Time in the Ancient Church,” 45; noted in Hedrick and Olympiou, “New Photographs,” 7 and by Smith in “Clement of Alexandria,” 458–59.

36. Adela Yarbro Collins (*Mark*, 491) reports that in the early 1980s Quesnell was allowed to see the manuscript and obtained permission to have it photographed. Timo Panaanen interviewed Quesnell in 2009 about this event, but the interview yielded little elaboration. Read his account at “A Short Interview with Quentin Quesnell.”

37. See the summary in Brown, *Mark’s Other Gospel*, 25.

38. Hedrick and Olympiou, “Secret Mark,” 7–9 (the account of the discussion with Kallistos), 11–15 (the manuscript photographs).

Meliton.<sup>39</sup> There they found the Voss book, with the *Letter to Theodore* pages intact, in the tower library where Smith had left it. The group decided at that time to take the manuscript to the Greek Patriarchate for safekeeping. Stroumsa included in his article some of the lengthy correspondence between Smith and Gershom Scholem documenting Smith's efforts to understand and contextualize the text. Today, the location of the *Letter to Theodore* manuscript remains a mystery, but thanks to Kallistos, Hedrick, Olympiou, Talley, and Stroumsa, it can no longer be argued that the manuscript does not exist, nor that Smith was somehow restricting access to it. If anyone was guilty of doing so it was the Greek Patriarchate who, Olympiou suggested, may be withholding it because of concerns over Smith's homoerotic interpretation of the text.<sup>40</sup>

## THE SECOND PHASE OF SCHOLARSHIP ON SECRET MARK: 2005 TO THE PRESENT

The "stalemate" Hedrick observed in 2003 soon began to show movement due to the dynamic discussion prompted by three books on *Secret Mark* arguing both for and against the text's authenticity. The first of these was Scott Brown's *Mark's Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith's Controversial Discovery*, a revision of his 1999 University of Toronto dissertation, published in 2005. *Mark's Other Gospel* was the first monograph entirely devoted to *Secret Mark* to appear since Smith's two 1973 volumes. It confronted many of the criticisms and indictments of Smith's work, often with a passion that would do Smith proud. Arguments against the authenticity of the text Brown called "the folklore of forgery";<sup>41</sup> the gospel he characterized as "a ten-ton magnet for the bizarre and controversial."<sup>42</sup> Brown attacked the early critics for not presenting proof for their assertions of forgery, questioned the methodology of Criddle's statistical analysis, and claimed Price misrepresented the parallels with Hunter's novel.<sup>43</sup> Brown's own arguments about the text were aimed at divorcing the meaning of the gospel from Smith's own interpretation of it. "He was a brilliant and erudite scholar," Brown wrote, "but he did not comprehend the *Letter to Theodore*

39. Stroumsa, "Comments on Charles Hedrick's Article."

40. Hedrick and Olympiou, "Secret Mark," 8.

41. Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 12.

42. *Ibid.*, 57.

43. *Ibid.*, 54–59.

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well enough to have composed it.”<sup>44</sup> Eliminating from consideration the notion that the letter is a witness to Alexandrian baptismal rituals, Brown associated it instead with “the progressive disclosure of secret theological truths through directed scriptural exegesis.”<sup>45</sup> As for the origins of *Secret Mark*, he identified several previously-unexplored Markan literary traits in the text—intercalation, framing stories, and verbal echoes—and concluded that the author of the gospel wrote so much like Mark that he could very well be Mark himself, who revisited the text to create a longer version specifically for the Alexandrian church. *Mark’s Other Gospel* was the most comprehensive study of *Secret Mark* in the thirty years since the gospel’s first publication. It presented a forceful challenge to all previous statements and arguments made against the letter’s authenticity. However, to some extent it preached to the converted, appealing as it did to experts in the text who refused to accuse Smith of wrongdoing. In wider scholarly circles Hedrick’s stalemate remained and in popular circles the arguments for forgery remained attractive, even if only because many felt the text’s contents were so *unattractive*. The only thing those who disliked this text needed was validation for what they already held to be true.

That validation came in the same year with the publication of Stephen Carlson’s *The Gospel Hoax*.<sup>46</sup> In this brief, accessible, and inexpensive book, Carlson, a former patent attorney, sought to break the stalemate on the authenticity of the text by tackling the problem with his legal expertise. He concluded that Smith had “the means, motive, and opportunity” to create the text,<sup>47</sup> and did so as a hoax designed to test the academy’s abilities to detect forgeries or perhaps to prove himself at a delicate point in his career.<sup>48</sup> As proof of this hoax, Carlson cited two “concealed jokes” Smith left in the *Letter to Theodore* as hints to his authorship. The first is a reference to free-flowing salt, which Carlson claimed is a modern invention first made available by the Morton Salt Company in 1910.<sup>49</sup> The second is a photograph of another Mar Saba manuscript (no. 22), which Smith reproduced in his non-scholarly book to illustrate the monks’ practice of writing on blank pages in printed books. According to Carl-

44. *Ibid.*, 74.

45. *Ibid.*, 218.

46. Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*. For a lengthy response to Carlson’s arguments and a handy summary of scholarship after Carlson see Edward Reaugh Smith, *Temple Sleep of the Rich Young Ruler*.

47. Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 74.

48. *Ibid.*, 78–80.

49. *Ibid.*, 59–62.

son, the handwriting of one manuscript in the photograph is identical to that of the *Letter to Theodore*, but in Smith's published catalogue of this library's manuscripts, he assigned this handwriting to the twentieth century and attributed it to "M. Madiotes," a name which, Carlson argued, is fictional but etymologically related to both "baldy" and "swindler" (Smith was bald).<sup>50</sup> Carlson also noted the connections to Hunter's novel, cited Criddle's statistical analysis, and called attention to similarities with two other biblical hoaxes: Christoph Matthäus Pfaff's Irenaeus fragments and Paul R. Coleman-Norton's "amusing *agraphon*."<sup>51</sup> As in Coleman-Norton's case, Smith's work shows prior awareness of ideas present in his discovery, and the *Letter to Theodore* contains anachronisms—specifically, in its modern treatment of homoeroticism (such as the phrase "and he spent that night with him," Carlson's translation of *καὶ ἔμεινε σὺν αὐτῷ τὴν νύκτα ἐκέλευν*, III.8–9). Most compelling for many readers, however, was Carlson's discussion of several indications of forgery in the handwriting of the manuscript, including forger's tremor, unnatural pen lifts, inconsistency of letter forms, and retouching of letters—all indicative of "drawn imitation of an eighteenth-century hand."<sup>52</sup>

Reaction to Carlson's book was dramatic. Many scholars who equivocated over the letter's authenticity found themselves convinced that it was a modern forgery; some former supporters now changed their position, such as Craig Evans, who declared that Carlson had proven Smith had created the text.<sup>53</sup> Other prominent scholars wrote in support of the book, including Larry Hurtado, who contributed a favorable introduction to Carlson's book, and Bruce Chilton, whose lengthy op-ed piece for the *New York Sun* asserts that, due to Carlson's arguments, "Smith's contention that the text was copied during the 18th century has lost any basis."<sup>54</sup> Further, Chilton's review for the *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, though casting doubt on some aspects of Carlson's indictment, nevertheless states: "Although in my view he does not quite prove that Smith was a forger, he does demonstrate—within the limits to certainty that incomplete evidence involves—that 'Secret Mark' is someone's forgery, and that Smith is the likely culprit."<sup>55</sup> Also entering the discussion at this time is Pierluigi

50. Ibid., 43–44.

51. Ibid., 16–20.

52. Ibid., 31

53. See, for example, Evans, "The Apocryphal Jesus," 167–71.

54. Chilton, "Unmasking a False Gospel."

55. Chilton, Review of *Gospel Hoax*, 123.

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Piovanelli, who in 2007 presented the first installment of an overview of scholarship on the text covering the years 1958 to 2003.<sup>56</sup> *The Gospel Hoax* marked another turning point in *Secret Mark* scholarship in that much subsequent discussion of the text has appeared online in blogs and other forums rather than in monographs or scholarly journals.<sup>57</sup> No other study of an apocryphal Christian text has benefitted so much from this interplay of scholarship and electronic media.

Further arguments for forgery were advanced in Peter Jeffery's 2007 monograph *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*.<sup>58</sup> Like Carlson, Jeffery, a musicologist then teaching at Princeton, is an outsider to biblical studies. His book approached the *Letter to Theodore* from two angles: its ecclesiology (i.e., its presentation of baptism) and its sexology (i.e., its portrayal of a homosexual Jesus). Jeffery found that in both areas the letter reflected practices and theories of the twentieth century, not the second. On the letter's baptismal imagery, Jeffery claimed that Smith was influenced by modern Anglican theories about early Christian Paschal Vigil rituals.<sup>59</sup> And the homosexual relationship described in the text flouts the Hellenistic conventions of homosexuality—Jesus and the young man are presented as social equals, whereas Hellenistic same-sex relationships are between a teacher and student.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, Jeffery, like Akenson before him, sees *Secret Mark* as a “gay joke” created by Smith as “arguably the most grandiose and reticulated ‘Fuck You’ ever perpetrated in the long and vituperative history of scholarship.”<sup>61</sup> This gay joke is evident in a series of double entendres: the sister of the young man “coming” to Jesus, the tomb as closet, Jesus seizing the young man's “hand,” and Jesus rejecting the women.<sup>62</sup> Jeffery also heavily criticized Smith with a venom rivaling

56. Piovanelli, “*L'Évangile secret de Marc*.” The third and fourth parts of the overview were presented at a 2006 gathering of the AELAC (l'Association pour l'étude de la littérature apocryphe chrétienne).

57. Mention should be made here particularly of two sites: Timo S. Paananen's *Salainen evankelista* (<http://salainenevankelista.blogspot.com/>), which has been a hub for several discussions on the text and contains a summary of Paananen's Master's thesis: “A Conspiracy of the Secret Evangelist: Recent Debate concerning Clement of Alexandria's Letter to Theodore” and Wieland Wilker's *Secret Gospel of Mark Homepage* ([http://www-user.uni-bremen.de/~wie/Secret/secmark\\_home.html](http://www-user.uni-bremen.de/~wie/Secret/secmark_home.html)), which keeps track of new developments on the text.

58. Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*.

59. *Ibid.*, 60–70.

60. *Ibid.*, 185–212.

61. *Ibid.*, 242.

62. *Ibid.*, 92–99.

that of Jacob Neusner. Smith is disparaged in the book both for his public scholarship (his *Clement of Alexandria* book is described as “hundreds of slovenly pages filled with ignorance, foolishness, and angry jokes about the meaning of early Christian baptism”)<sup>63</sup> and for his private life (Jeffery’s acknowledgements page finishes with: “And I pray for the late Morton Smith—may God rest his anguished soul”).<sup>64</sup> Jeffery’s arguments have not gone unchallenged. Scott Brown contributed a lengthy “review essay” for the online *Review of Biblical Literature* stating, among many other things, that Jeffery’s discussion of *Secret Mark*’s apparent homoeroticism “consists of private associative reasoning presented as if it were exegesis” and that, “like most interpreters, Jeffery has confused Morton Smith’s misinterpretation of the letter with the letter itself.”<sup>65</sup> Jeffery countered with a response on his own web page.<sup>66</sup>

Brown has also been the principle critic of Carlson’s *The Gospel Hoax*. Before 2008 Brown contributed three journal articles challenging aspects of Carlson’s case,<sup>67</sup> including the basis for the “gay gospel” hypothesis and the hoax hypothesis as Smith’s motives for forging the text, and the often-cited Morton Salt Company clue,<sup>68</sup> which was confronted also in a 2005 paper by Kyle Smith illustrating that the letter’s references to salt are not anachronistic.<sup>69</sup> While Carlson quickly responded to Kyle Smith’s challenge,<sup>70</sup> he was shy to respond to Brown’s criticisms until the two shared a podium at a session dedicated to *Secret Mark* at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. Carlson’s presentation, “Can the Academy Protect Itself from One of Its Own? The Case of *Secret Mark*” (included as an appendix to this volume) primarily restated arguments from *The Gospel Hoax*. Brown’s contribution to the session, “Fifty Years of Befuddlement: Ten Enduring Misconceptions about the ‘Secret’ Gospel of Mark,” focused on previous scholars’ interpretations of the “great mysteries” as baptism. In the ensuing discussion, Brown asked Carlson to respond to his published articles, frustrated that there had yet to be a

63. Ibid., 251.

64. Ibid., ix.

65. Brown, Review of *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*.

66. Jeffery, “The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled.”

67. Brown, “Reply to Stephen Carlson”; Brown, “Factualizing the Folklore”; and Brown, “Question of Motive.”

68. Brown, “Factualizing the Folklore,” 306–11.

69. Kyle Smith, “Mixed with Inventions.”

70. Carlson responded to Smith’s paper in a post on his own blog; “Kyle Smith’s Critique of Gospel Hoax.”

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proper debate between proponents of the two sides in the conflict over authenticity. Carlson said such a response will come at the appropriate time. Brown asked, “When?” Carlson shrugged his shoulders. Brown asked, “After your PhD thesis?” Another shrug. Brown then added, “I won’t hold my breath.” Also participating in the session was Allan Pantuck, whose presentation “Can Morton Smith’s Archival Writings and Correspondence Shine Any Light on the Authenticity of Secret Mark?” questioned Carlson’s theory of motive, and Charles Hedrick, who spoke in support of Brown and Pantuck. Siding with Carlson were Birger Pearson and Bart Ehrman.<sup>71</sup> Audience member Helmut Koester also joined in the discussion. I too was present at the session and was struck by how poorly the principle voices in the debate were communicating with each other, particularly in regards to how Brown’s written responses to Carlson had so far been ignored (for example, Ehrman touted the Morton Salt Company clue as proof for forgery without acknowledgment of either Brown’s or Kyle Smith’s challenges to the argument). My desire to break this impasse led to the creation of the *Secret Mark* symposium a few years later.

In the meantime, several articles have appeared further chipping away at the forgery hypothesis. Refuting Charles Murgia’s “seal of authenticity” argument, Jeff Jay demonstrated that the *Letter to Theodore* coheres in form, content, and function with a newly-identified genre of literature from antiquity designed to combat the unauthorized use of writings not intended for publication.<sup>72</sup> Another article by Brown similarly responded to some aspects of Murgia’s position that were adopted by Carlson, claiming that the letter is consistent with how Clement, in his acknowledged writings, responded to concerns analogous to the situation described by Theodore.<sup>73</sup> Brown also joined Pantuck for two articles. Aided by documents from the Morton Smith Papers at the Archives of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Pantuck and Brown demonstrated, contrary to Carlson’s “bald swindler” argument, that the script of the top hand of Smith’s manuscript 22 is not the hand that Smith attributed to a twentieth-century individual but an eighteenth-century hand that is unrelated to both the *Letter to Theodore* and the individual named Madiotes; the signature of the “swindler” Madiotes is written in a different hand and may actually read Modestos, a

71. Pearson’s presentation was published as “The Secret Gospel of Mark,” article 6, 1–14. Ehrman initially became involved in the debate on *Secret Mark* with a brief response to Hedrick’s 2003 article, “Response to Charles Hedrick’s Stalemate.”

72. Jay, “New Look at the Epistolary Framework.”

73. Brown, “The *Letter to Theodore*.”

common name at Mar Saba.<sup>74</sup> The second article is an online essay that casts doubt on Carlson’s analysis of the handwriting of the *Letter to Theodore*. It demonstrates that Carlson misrepresented the support of professional document examiner Julie C. Edison in his argument that the manuscript is a forgery.<sup>75</sup> Another scholar working online, Roger Viklund, contributed a series of articles, the most compelling of which was an article demonstrating that Carlson’s list of indications of forgery in the manuscript (forger’s tremor, unnatural pen lifts, and retouching) are observable only in the low-quality black-and-white photographs published in half-tone by Smith and not in the higher-quality color photographs.<sup>76</sup> And those interested in the letters exchanged between Smith and Gershom Scholem mentioned in Guy Stroumsa’s 2003 article, can now read the correspondence in the 2008 collection edited by Stroumsa.<sup>77</sup> *Secret Mark* is discussed in some length in Stroumsa’s introduction to the volume, as Smith often consulted Scholem on the text.<sup>78</sup> The length and depth of this discussion led Stroumsa to conclude, “the correspondence should provide sufficient evidence of his intellectual honesty to anyone armed with common sense and lacking malice.”<sup>79</sup> Only one additional author has written recently in defense of the forgery hypothesis. With his lengthy 2010 article, “Beyond Suspicion: On the Authorship of the Mar Saba Letter and the Secret Gospel of Mark,”<sup>80</sup> Francis Watson aimed to prove “beyond a reasonable doubt” that Smith forged the letter, but actually Watson contributed little new to the debate aside from a more-sustained argument for Smith’s knowledge and use of Hunter’s novel,<sup>81</sup> and an expansion of the Morton Salt Company clue to include two Greek puns on Smith’s name (*παραχάρασσω* in I.14, which can be translated as “to forge” and is etymologically related to the English

74. Pantuck and Brown, “Morton Smith as M. Madiotes”; cf. Brown, “Factualizing the Folklore,” 293–306.

75. Brown and Pantuck, “Stephen Carlson’s Questionable Questioned Document Examination.” Carlson responded to the article, though on a different blog: Philip Harland’s Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean (<http://www.philipharland.com/Blog/>). The response is reproduced in the comments on the original article.

76. Viklund, “Tremors, or Just an Optical Illusion?” The site features three additional articles by Viklund on *Secret Mark*.

77. Stroumsa, ed., *Morton Smith and Gershom Scholem, Correspondence 1945–1982*.

78. *Ibid.*, xii–xxii.

79. *Ibid.*, xv.

80. Watson, “Beyond Suspicion.”

81. *Ibid.*, 161–70.

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name Smith; and *μωρανθῆναι* in I.15, which Watson sees as a hint to the name Morton and can be translated as “to be made foolish”).<sup>82</sup>

Interest in *Secret Mark* was stimulated further at this time, both in scholarly and non-scholarly circles, by a special feature on the text in *Biblical Archaeology Review*. Charles Hedrick provided an introduction for the feature,<sup>83</sup> Helmut Koester made a case for the text’s authenticity,<sup>84</sup> and Hershel Shanks<sup>85</sup> was forced to craft an argument for forgery when three pro-forgery scholars (Carlson, Pearson, and Ehrman) declined to participate. A second contribution by Shanks, “Restoring a Dead Scholar’s Reputation,”<sup>86</sup> came out in support of Smith and revealed to readers that the magazine had commissioned two handwriting experts to authenticate the text: Greek paleographer Agamemnon Tselikas and Venetia Anastasopoulou, a certified expert in handwriting analysis and forensic sciences in Athens.<sup>87</sup> The first of the experts’ reports, by Anastasopoulou, appeared on a web page hosted by *BAR* dedicated to continuing the discussion on *Secret Mark*;<sup>88</sup> the magazine provided a summary of the report shortly after.<sup>89</sup> Anastasopoulou concluded that Smith’s Greek handwriting did not match that of the *Letter to Theodore*, which was written by a native Greek-speaker, writing quickly and unconsciously.<sup>90</sup> The *BAR* site included a response to the report from Peter Jeffery<sup>91</sup> and a second came later from Scott Brown.<sup>92</sup> Both agreed that the report demonstrated that Smith could not have created the handwriting in the manuscript himself, though to Jeffery this suggests that Smith might have worked with an accomplice. While readers waited for the outcome of the second expert’s analysis, *BAR* posted

82. *Ibid.*, 152–55.

83. Hedrick, “An Amazing Discovery.”

84. Koester, “Was Morton Smith a Great Thespian and I a Complete Fool?”

85. Shanks, “Morton Smith—Forger.”

86. Shanks, “Restoring a Dead Scholar’s Reputation.”

87. *Ibid.*, 61.

88. Online: <http://www.bib-arch.org/scholars-study/secret-mark.asp>.

89. Anastasopoulou, “Experts Report Handwriting Examination,” and published in summary in the magazine as Shanks, “Handwriting Experts Weigh in on ‘Secret Mark.’”

90. Anastasopoulou, “Experts Report Handwriting Examination,” 9.

91. Jeffery, “Response to Handwriting Analysis.” Anastasopoulou later contributed a second piece responding to Jeffery’s questions about signs of forgery (forger’s tremor, etc.): “Can a Document in Itself Reveal a Forgery?” Jeffery countered with “Additional Response to Handwriting Analysis.”

92. Brown, “My Thoughts on the Reports by Venetia Anastasopoulou.”

several follow-up articles to its initial special feature, including Pantuck's response to Francis Watson, in which Pantuck counters Watson's discussion of Hunter's book with several innocent examples of life imitating art, including Morgan Robertson's 1898 novel *Futility, or the Wreck of the Titan* and its eerie similarities to the destruction of the Titanic in 1912.<sup>93</sup> Watson countered soon after with his own response, again hosted on the *BAR* site.<sup>94</sup> Tselikas's report finally appeared in May 2011, just days after the *Secret Mark* symposium.<sup>95</sup> In it he proposed that Smith could have forged his discovery using four eighteenth-century manuscripts that Smith had previously catalogued from Cephalonia as models of handwriting. Pantuck responded to this hypothesis, pointing out evidence that Smith did not photograph the Cephalonia manuscripts and could not therefore have used them as models; he challenged also the degree of correspondence between these manuscripts and the *Letter to Theodore*, and questioned Tselikas's reasoning for selecting these manuscripts for comparison.<sup>96</sup> Unfortunately, Tselikas refused to engage Pantuck's arguments.<sup>97</sup> A summary of Tselikas's lengthy report was made available by Hershel Shanks at the *Secret Mark* symposium allowing participants a look at his findings and providing the first opportunity for public discussion of this recent development in the study of the text.

## THE YORK CHRISTIAN APOCRYPHA SYMPOSIUM

As mentioned earlier, the origins of the York Christian Apocrypha Symposium on *Secret Mark* grew out of the *Secret Mark* session at the 2008 SBL Annual Meeting. The participants on the panel and audience members seemed unable to communicate well enough with one another to advance discussion on the text. Though progress had already been made on dispelling some of the weaker arguments for forgery, these arguments continued to be advanced as proof positive of fraud. A better forum for discussion

93. Pantuck, "Solving the *Mysterion* of Morton Smith." A point-by-point response to Watson was published also by Michael T. Zeddies on the Synoptic Solutions blog, which starts with "A Critique of Watson".

94. Watson, "Beyond Reasonable Doubt."

95. Tselikas, "Agamemnon Tselikas' Handwriting Analysis Report."

96. Pantuck, "Response to Agamemnon Tselikas."

97. *Biblical Archaeology Review* published a letter from Tselikas in which he stated his refusal to respond to what he called "personal criticism": Tselikas, "Response to Allan J. Pantuck."

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was needed. My impressions of the session posted on my blog *Apocryphicity*<sup>98</sup> led to early conversations with Pantuck, Brown, and Jeffery on planning a new gathering at which the principle scholars of the text could debate the elements of the forgery hypothesis and perhaps arrive at some consensus on which aspects of this hypothesis, if any, remained viable. The symposium, the first in a planned series, was intentionally focused on North American Christian Apocrypha scholarship; so, all those who were invited to present papers were residents of Canada or the United States. As it happens, the bulk of the debate over *Secret Mark* has taken place among North American scholars. It was important to all of us that the symposium featured a balance of perspectives, with an equal number of scholars arguing for and against authenticity. Though several prominent supporters of the forgery hypothesis declined our invitations, we succeeded at securing the participation of many of the major writers on the text.

The symposium was divided into two sessions. The first focused specifically on the arguments that have been advanced for and against authenticity and the second continued the conversation with new avenues of investigation. Charles Hedrick began the day with a defense of authenticity. His paper spotlights the scholarship and developments on the text since his “Stalemate” paper of 2003, including the recent handwriting analyses, which are augmented with notes from an interview with Agamemnon Tselikas from September 2010. Several of the statements made by Tselikas about the text are addressed in the paper, most notably the likelihood of finding an ancient text in a single, late manuscript, and Tselikas’s claim that Smith, lacking the ability to write in an eighteenth-century Greek hand, must have had an accomplice in his crime of forgery. But the bulk of the paper focuses on *Secret Mark*’s relationship to canonical Mark, with a rebuttal to Best’s argument that the longer *Secret Mark* excerpt in the *Letter to Theodore* is “too much like Mark” to be by Mark, and a proposal to situate expansions of Mark (including both *Secret Mark* and the longer endings of canonical Mark) in the exercise of imitation practiced in Greco-Roman schools. The *Secret Mark* expansions, however, are far better imitations of Mark’s style than the longer endings, so much that Hedrick suggests that the writer behind *Secret Mark* was none other than the author of Mark, just as Clement says.

Bruce Chilton’s response to Hedrick does not engage with any of Hedrick’s detailed arguments; instead, it focuses on the problem of working with unprovenanced documents and artifacts. Chilton details several

98. Burke, “Secret Mark at the 2008 SBL Meeting.”

examples of such material with which he has been personally involved, cautioning for each that a text of uncertain origins is best to be avoided. As for *Secret Mark*, Chilton considers Smith's account of its discovery "an unverified claim" (p. 74) unless or until the manuscript's ink has been tested and questions about the Voss volume are satisfactorily answered.

The arguments against authenticity were presented by Craig Evans, who once believed the manuscript to be genuine, but now is quite outspoken about the text being a creation of Morton Smith. His paper details the case of Paul Coleman-Norton's "amusing *agraphon*," which was declared a hoax on the basis of Coleman-Norton's knowledge of the saying of Jesus before he "discovered" it in a North African mosque. Evans applies the same principle to the *Letter to Theodore*, attempting to show that elements of the text appear in Smith's work prior to his public announcement of the letter's discovery in 1960. He also mentions several "curious features" about the find noted by previous supporters of the forgery hypothesis, including contradictions in thought between the letter and Clement's authenticated writings, and the familiar problems with the Voss volume (it is distinct among other books in the monastery, it is not listed in the monastery's 1910 catalogue, Smith never returned to examine the book, and the letter is found on the page opposite to a discussion of interpolated texts); particular emphasis is placed on the parallels between Smith's account of his find and Hunter's novel *The Mystery of Mar Saba*. As for the handwriting analyses, Evans says we now have conflicting expert opinion, with Carlson and Tselikas arguing Smith created the manuscript and Anastasopoulou arguing he could not. Evans recalls the example of the Hitler diaries, which handwriting experts had authenticated but were later established to be forgeries. Handwriting analysis, therefore, is not sufficient for establishing a text's authorship.

The original response to Evans was presented at the symposium by Allan Pantuck. In the more-detailed paper included here, Pantuck is joined by his frequent collaborator Scott Brown. The two work systematically through the arguments advanced by Evans, endeavoring to demonstrate that Evans has overstated his case that Smith's early work reveals knowledge of the text (or themes uniquely combined in the text) prior to its discovery. Along the way they deal with several components of the "folklore of forgery"—e.g., that Smith did not appeal to *Secret Mark* in his book *Jesus the Magician* (he did) and that, because the Voss volume was not published in Venice nor written in Greek, it is unique among the books found at Mar Saba (it is not)—and declare that some of the parallels

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that Evans adduces with Hunter's novel are "not real" (p. 104). Finally, they conclude from the handwriting analyses that "only one properly qualified expert in questioned document examination has thus far studied suitable images of Mar Saba 65" and "this expert's observations indicate that the manuscript most likely contains someone's natural handwriting, which in turn implies that it is from the eighteenth century" (p. 125).

The morning session finished with a paper from Hershel Shanks, editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*. Shanks was asked to comment specifically on BAR's involvement with authenticating the text, which he did mention, but his presentation was more a spirited defense of Smith's character. His paper, which captures the passion with which Shanks made his case, emphasizes that it is not possible to prove 100 percent that a text is authentic; there will always be one more test that "may theoretically prove the document a forgery" (p. 139). A better method of proving the text genuine, Shanks says, is to consider human nature. "Is there any hint that Morton Smith was of a character that would allow him to do this horrendous thing?" he asks. "I think not" (p. 140). For support he cites the opinions of Helmut Koester, Gershom Scholem, and Jeffrey Tigay. The discussion of Smith's character continued after Shanks's presentation. Shanks called the increasingly complicated forgery theory—that Smith bought a copy of the Voss book and had a native Greek writer copy a text Smith had invented into its endpapers—"outlandish" and asked if any scholar with the credentials of someone like Smith had ever been discovered as having done such a thing. Evans responded, once again citing Coleman-Norton, that forgeries have been made and to rule them out with "I can't think anyone would do that" is naïve. The panel had difficulty recalling the kind of example Shanks requested, but Chilton mentioned the case of the Greek manuscripts created by a sixteenth-century scholar to provide Greek evidence for the Johannine Comma, the only explicit declaration in the New Testament of the doctrine of the Trinity. Regarding the likelihood of Smith creating the *Letter to Theodore*, both Evans and Chilton stated that there are scholars still living who knew Smith and think he was capable of doing such a thing.

The afternoon session began with Marvin Meyer's short paper, "The Young Streaker in Secret and Canonical Mark." The paper builds on Meyer's previous efforts to understand the role of the *neaniskos* in the longer version of Mark, a text which he is convinced is authentic and even predates canonical Mark. He begins the paper echoing Shanks's concerns about accusations of forgery—charges which, to him, "seem almost libelous" (p.

147). Then he turns to examining other fleeing, sometimes naked, youths in ancient literature, who are found often in scenes of initiation and discipleship. These parallels help us to understand the presentation of the *neaniskos* in longer Mark: he functions as a model disciple, one who has died and been raised, has feared and fled, but at the end of the gospel he remains the only disciple proclaiming Christ risen.

Meyer's literary study of *Secret Mark* was followed by two presentations studying the man behind the text, Morton Smith. Piovanelli drew heavily on the recently published Smith-Scholem correspondence to demonstrate that Smith had a prior interest in the "main fields of research, topics, and methods" reflected in the *Letter to Theodore* (p. 164). In his paper, Piovanelli shows that Smith wrote to Scholem about the intersection between Smith's views on Jesus and Scholem's characterization of the seventeenth-century antinomian messiah Sabbatai Tzevi, and about an interest in the British occultist Aleister Crowley. Smith combined these interests to construct the magical and libertine Jesus observable in *Jesus the Magician*, but, Piovanelli argues, for Smith to make a "stronger proposal about the historical Jesus as a miracle worker/magician, he was in need of more consistent proof" (p. 181), proof he manufactured in the form of the *Letter to Theodore* in 1958. Piovanelli thus characterizes the letter as a "learned forgery," which, though "inexcusable," helped pave the way for a new wave of scholarship emphasizing the Jewishness of Jesus (pp. 181–83). Pantuck also uses Smith's correspondence in his efforts to dispel the myth that Smith had the abilities needed to create the *Letter to Theodore*. The correspondence, with Scholem and other scholars, indicates that Smith struggled with Greek; indeed, as Pantuck notes, on two occasions he "declined the opportunity to have composed in Greek when it would have been expected and appropriate" (p. 195). Smith also lacked the necessary skills in paleography and ancient epistolography, and was not sufficiently knowledgeable about the works of Clement of Alexandria. Pantuck then appeals to archive material from the Jewish Theological Seminary and Union Theological Seminary to demonstrate that Smith had no knowledge of the Voss edition before 1958 and that, from 1958 to 1963, Smith worked gradually to translate, understand, and interpret the letter, work that would be unnecessary if he had created it himself.

The final two presentations focused on the *Letter to Theodore*'s relationship to undisputed works of Clement of Alexandria. Peter Jeffery's paper constructs from Clement's writings a multi-stage scheme of Christian initiation. This he compares with the letter to determine what kind of

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initiation or ritual it is describing and if it is consistent with the mystery cult vocabulary used by Clement. Among the disagreements he finds between the letter and Clement's undisputed writings are the appeal to written rather than oral hidden truths and a special initiation ceremony for those being perfected separating them from the merely baptized. Thus, Jeffery characterizes the letter as a collection of ritual terms from Clement "indiscriminately mashed together" (p. 230). The same method, he says, is observable in Smith's academic works. During his presentation, Jeffery encouraged the graduate students in the room to observe for themselves Smith's "scattered indications' technique of reassembling words and phrases from ancient writings" (p. 246) by taking what he called the Jeffery Challenge: "Go to the library, check out [Smith's *Clement of Alexandria*], take any random page, and check his sources. Frequently the source does not support what Smith is saying, it is distorted, taken out of context. If you can do that for ten hours and not figure out that you are being conned, then I will write you a glowing letter of recommendation on Princeton stationery to the business school of your choice." Because Smith's writing is "extremely deceptive, distorted, untrustworthy," Jeffery said, "[Smith] is not a man whose announcement of a discovery is entitled to the benefit of the doubt." And to those scholars, such as Hedrick, Meyer, and Brown, who question how Smith could have forged a document he did not understand, Jeffery declared, "Morton Smith misinterpreted everything and he did it on purpose! All you're saying is that he didn't interpret this text the way you do."

Scott Brown, the author of the final paper from the symposium, has long held that "most scholars who have studied [*Secret Mark*] have fundamentally misconstrued what the letter is talking about" (p. 248). Arguing specifically against Jeffery's view that the *Letter to Theodore* is revealed as a forgery because it misrepresents baptism in the Alexandrian church, Brown places the life setting of *Secret Mark*, with its traditions that would "lead the hearers into the innermost sanctuary of the seven-fold veiled truth" (I.25–26), not among the merely baptized neophytes but among "those who were being perfected" (I.22)—that is, would-be gnostics. Brown comes to this conclusion after extensive investigation into Clement's writings, which he confesses are not easy to work with: "It can take years to make sense of the most esoteric aspects of the *Stromateis*," he writes, "and you are never sure you have properly figured something out" (p. 255). Nevertheless, he believes he has understood the purpose of *Secret Mark* correctly, as an expanded version of Mark to be read and expounded

allegorically to aid in transmitting unwritten gnostic tradition to advanced students.

The symposium concluded with a question-and-answer session with Brown, Evans, Jeffery, and Meyer chaired by Philip Harland. A partial transcript of the event is included in this volume. Then follows one final paper: Stephen Carlson's presentation from the 2008 Annual Meeting of the SBL. Carlson was unable to attend the symposium but he did want to contribute, and since his is one of the major voices on this text in the last decade, I agreed to publish the paper, particularly since it is mentioned by several of the other authors. The paper is Carlson's only published response to critics of *The Gospel Hoax*, but it has been criticized in turn as being little more than a restatement of his earlier arguments. New, however, is the appeal to the Smith-Scholem correspondence (published subsequent to Carlson's book) to bolster his argument that Smith had worked on Clement prior to his "discovery" of the text in 1958. Only one of the responses to Carlson's book is addressed in the paper (Carlson says it is due to lack of space, but there were no restrictions placed on the size of the paper, which is relatively brief; the space limitation is due to the time allowed for the original presentation): Brown's refutation of Carlson's claim that the first *Secret Mark* excerpt "easily conjures up to the twentieth-century reader the image that Jesus was arrested for soliciting a homoerotic encounter in a public garden."<sup>99</sup> Brown had commented, "Among the hundreds of twentieth-century discussions of 'secret' Mark that exist in print and on the internet, I have yet to come across the observation that LGM 1 implies that 'Jesus was arrested for soliciting a homoerotic encounter in a public garden.'"<sup>100</sup> Carlson counters with two examples, one of which was from Smith himself (pp. 305–6). The paper concludes with an exoneration of early scholars who did not recognize the text as a forgery (or "hoax," as Carlson prefers), for such recognition is made easier the greater the distance from a text's composition, when the concerns of its time come more sharply into focus.

## REACHING CONSENSUS AND MOVING FORWARD

The goal of the symposium on *Secret Mark*, as mentioned earlier, was to gather the principal North American scholars of the text and, through discussion, determine what arguments regarding the authenticity of the

99. Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 70.

100. Brown, "Factualizing the Folklore," 320.

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text remain viable. Several bloggers in attendance at the symposium commented after that none of the scholars present changed their positions on the text.<sup>101</sup> But a “conversion experience” is not what was expected, and though there was no formal discussion separating strong from weak arguments, it was clear by the end of the event, and from reading the papers collected here, that even those arguing for forgery have abandoned, or at least carefully avoided, certain claims that once seemed persuasive. Where, then, does the debate on the authenticity of *Secret Mark* now stand? And where does it go from here?

The recent release of the *BAR* reports has changed the direction of the discussion of the *Letter to Theodore* manuscript. Previously the only person to submit the manuscript photos to handwriting analysis was Stephen Carlson. And many readers and reviewers of *The Gospel Hoax* found his discussion of forger’s tremor, unnatural pen lifts, etc. in the manuscript compelling evidence for forgery. It seemed that the case for forgery finally had the support of empirical data and expert analysis. Alas, Carlson’s evidence is problematic on several grounds: it was based on examination of inadequate half-tone photographs, its endorsement by a professional document examiner was misrepresented, and the “clue” to the text’s authorship in the signature of “M. Madiotes” in manuscript 22 appears to be baseless. If there is any agreement among the scholars of the symposium it is that these arguments are no longer useful, for aside from a brief mention in Evans’s paper, Carlson’s analysis was all but ignored even by supporters of forgery. Whatever Carlson’s expertise as a lawyer and budding biblical scholar, he is no expert in handwriting analysis. Those who are and have applied their skills to the manuscript images agree that the manuscript was written by a native Greek writer in a difficult-to-duplicate eighteenth-century hand. And the scribe was not Morton Smith. This means that either Smith had nothing to do with the manuscript’s creation, and therefore it is authentic, or that he had someone create it for him. If the latter, the forgery hypothesis becomes a conspiracy theory with its own metaphorical second shooter on the grassy knoll. Allan Pantuck’s paper even places in doubt that Smith had the necessary capability in Greek to compose a draft of the letter that his accomplice could transfer to Voss’s book. This may come as a shock to proponents of the forgery hypothesis who have

101. The various early responses to the symposium are collected at Timo S. Paananen, “Toronto Conference in Review—A Summary.” Paananen also comments here on the “Jeffery Challenge,” and takes issue with Jeffery’s off-hand comments about Smith’s scholarly abilities. Jeffery responded to Paananen’s concerns in the comments to the post.

perhaps overestimated Smith's brilliance. Hopefully we have heard the last also of the false assertions that used to plague commentary on *Secret Mark*: that there is no manuscript, that Smith destroyed it, and that there is something suspicious about his handling of it. Smith appears to have done what is expected of anyone in his position: he found an interesting manuscript, photographed it, cataloged it (adding his own reference number to the front page), left it where he found it, and returned home to publish his findings.

Could Smith and his accomplice have written the text into the Voss volume and planted it in the Mar Saba library? This seems increasingly unlikely. The support for this contention is that the Voss book is unique in the library—in Carlson's words, it "sticks out like a sore thumb."<sup>102</sup> But, as Brown and Pantuck show in their paper, Voss's *Epistulae genuinae S. Ignatii Martyris* is not the monastery's only book in Latin, and not the only book that was published in a place other than Venice. Nevertheless, several details about the book remain puzzling. Why was it not included in the 1910 list of the library's holdings? Why was the letter copied into this particular book? And what happened to the manuscript from which it was presumably copied? Likely the answers to these questions are more mundane than supporters of forgery would hope and are due simply to accidents of history. Still, some commentators have seen something suspicious about finding an authentic ancient text in a single, late manuscript. As it happens, many apocryphal texts were first encountered in and published from a single late manuscript. The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, for example, first appeared in scholarship in a 1675 catalogue of Viennese manuscripts by Peter Lambeck.<sup>103</sup> Lambeck excerpted several lines of the text from a fifteenth-century Greek manuscript, which, funny enough, is now missing. A second manuscript was published twenty years later, but no one, it seems, in the intervening years doubted the existence of the text or accused Lambeck of forgery. A similar situation occurs for the *Infancy Gospel of James*, the early publishing history of which is shrouded in mystery. It first appeared in Guillaume Postel's 1552 Latin translation of an unnamed but late Greek manuscript, and then in a Greek edition from another unnamed manuscript by Michael Neander in 1564.<sup>104</sup> Of course, knowledge of manuscripts of *Infancy James* grew rapidly thereafter. Maybe

102. Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 38.

103. Lambeck, *Commentariorum de augusta bibliotheca caesarea vindobensis*, 7:270–73. The manuscript is Vienna, *Phil. gr.* 162 (144). For more details see Burke, *De infantia Iesu euangelium Thomae graece*, 129–31.

104. See the summary in Hock, *Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas*, 28.

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that is the only way to settle the debate over *Secret Mark* once and for all: finding more copies, either of the *Letter to Theodore* or the longer version of Mark that it describes.

But the forgery hypothesis relies also on motive, and perhaps there would be no question of the antiquity of the *Letter of Theodore* were it not for the folklore surrounding the man who discovered it and the controversial contents of some of his scholarship. Was Smith testing the academy's ability to spot a forgery? Was he trying to advance his career by associating himself with a major discovery? Or was he enacting vengeance against his adversaries, or bolstering theories he had in development, or telling a "gay joke" at the expense of his self-important colleagues. Any of these motives are possible, but many of them lack adequate support. Smith's papers and correspondence suggest he was not particularly angry or vengeful during the low points in his career; and his books on the *Letter to Theodore* were published when his career was on the upswing. Smith's prior interest in themes present in the letter—whether of a libertine Jewish Jesus (Piovaneli) or a "troubling" combination of Clement of Alexandria, the Gospel of Mark, secrecy, etc. (Evans)—can be traced in his published work and his correspondence, but are these enough to warrant an accusation of forgery? After all, it is not uncommon for biblical scholars to discuss these topics in their works—more so for a scholar as prolific as Smith and having such a wide array of interests. That Smith's story of the discovery of the letter is based on Hunter's Mar Saba novel makes for a sensational claim that, at first thought, is quite damning; but Pantuck has effectively countered this argument with his examples of life imitating fiction and Brown and Pantuck together demonstrate in their response to Evans that the parallels between Smith and Hunter have been overstated. The playful-hoax hypothesis seems also to be losing steam, as no reference was made at the symposium either to Carlson's Morton Salt Company clue or to Francis Watson's similar examples of puns written into the text. As far as the *Letter to Theodore* as a gay joke, this theory relies primarily on the persuasiveness of Peter Jeffery's list of double entendres. Carlson and Evans also see the relationship between Jesus and the rich young man as a sexual one. The letter's Carpocratians would agree, and even Smith was open to the possibility that the letter hinted at a ritual of physical union that may have been practiced in the Jesus movement; but many scholars, including Brown, Hedrick, and Meyer, continue to argue that the homoeroticism of *Secret Mark* is in the eye of the beholder.

Overshadowing all of these arguments for motive is the evidence from Smith's papers and correspondence, as well as anecdotes from the scholars who knew him, that Smith spent a considerable span of time working on the *Letter to Theodore*, continually revising his theory of the letter's origins, his interpretation of its contents, and even its transcription (i.e., conjectural emendations) and translation. If Smith forged the letter, then he also falsified documents (his research notes) to support his discovery; yet, some of these documents, according to Smith's instructions, were supposed to be destroyed after his death. Why would Smith create this material if no one was meant to see it? To use the legal terminology that has become endemic to the debate on *Secret Mark*, it is becoming increasingly questionable that Smith had either the means or the opportunity to commit the crime of forgery, and no one would prosecute a crime based purely on motive; indeed, in this case, there is no evidence that a crime has been committed at all.

As for the future of *Secret Mark*, Piovanelli says he instructs his students not to use the text and wishes in future that specialists will meet less frequently to discuss it. Chilton, too, warns against appealing to unprovenanced texts and artifacts, and Evans would prefer to spend his time working on material with established antiquity. But no matter what one thinks about *Secret Mark's* origins, ignoring the text means missing opportunities to consider what it might tell us about a number of important topics and figures in the study of early Christianity, including the development of Mark's gospel, the relationship between Mark and John, solutions to the Synoptic Problem, Christian use of mystery religion terminology, the Carpocratians, Gnosticism, Clement of Alexandria, and others. Even as a possible medieval or modern forgery, the text contributes to the study of post-antique Christian Apocrypha, a body of literature that has received very little attention. At the very least, it is hoped in future that scholars will leap less readily upon any new evidence for or against authenticity and vigorously declare their position has been "proven" right, despite knowing full well that, in the study of history, ambiguity is the norm and certainty always elusive.

According to these interpretations, the ancient Hebrew language used in the inscription was something between the language used in two other ancient texts, the Siloam inscription and the Qumran Paleo-Hebrew Leviticus scroll. Related Coverage. 3 Distinguished Linguists Examine Mysterious Origin of Native Americans. Another theory suggests that the writing could be a Welsh Coelbren language. According to authors Alan Wilson and Baram A. Blackett, the tablet was inscribed with the ancient Welsh Coelbren alphabet. The researchers read it as "Madoc the ruler he is." Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? Tony Burke. Cascade / JAN 2013. Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate: Proceedings from the 2011 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium. Tony Burke. Retail Price: \$44.00 Web Price: \$35.20.