

Harvard: 'Jesus' wife' evidence likely a hoax

North Port man, owner of evidence in question, maintains nobody is certain

By **SCOTT LAWSON**
NORTH PORT SUN EDITOR

NORTH PORT — A journalist's investigation into evidence suggesting Jesus had a wife led him to Southwest Florida, ultimately to Venice and North Port, and then to Germany and back to North Port resident Walter Fritz.

Fritz, 50, maintains he purchased a papyrus that looked to be ancient from his longtime friend and sometime business partner, Hans-Ulrich Laukamp, in 1999.

In an article in the June 15 edition of The Atlantic magazine, journalist Ariel Sabar documents his quest to attempt to authenticate ownership and the actuality of the papyrus, which has been the subject of debate between scholars and theologians for four years.

A Harvard professor, Karen L. King, revealed the papyrus to scholars in 2012 at an event held in Rome, saying on it (in part) was the phrase "Jesus said to them, My wife." It was written in Coptic language and was reportedly from the eighth century — about 700 years after Jesus lived, but before King Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman emperor.

The story in The Atlantic is more

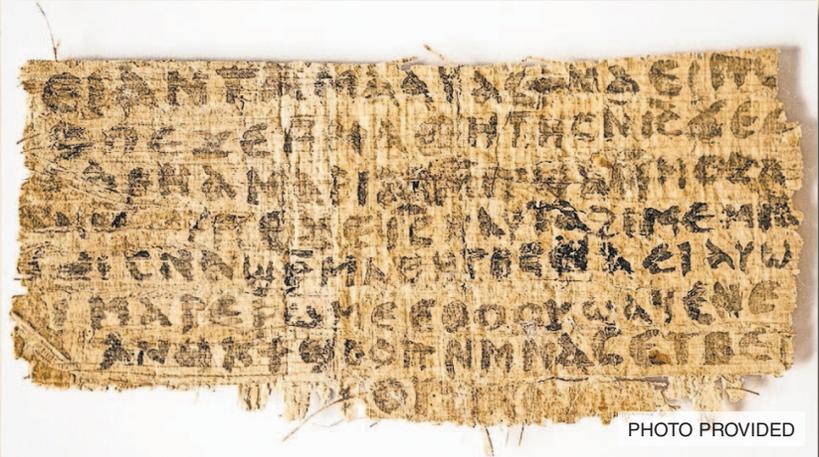


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than 11,000 words and heavily focused on Fritz and King. It took six months to write and delves into Fritz's personal life — along with heavy hints at reasons he would attempt to perpetrate a hoax suggesting Jesus had a wife.

Fritz said Tuesday that, if it is a hoax, it's not one he created. He said he cautioned against making too big a deal of the piece of papyrus.

"I contacted Professor King at Harvard to authenticate a piece of papyri I'd acquired many years ago," he said. "I did that as a question, without any bad intent."

Fritz said he bought the six pieces of ancient writing paper with the Coptic lettering for \$1,500 from Laukamp, who had kept the papyri in an envelope with a goal of putting the items in a frame.

"He gave me two beer mugs along with it," Fritz said.

Laukamp and his wife had been Venice residents and had businesses

in the area. Both died of cancer more than a decade ago.

On Tuesday, Fritz said

Laukamp had explained his family in East Germany had the papyri. Fritz said he didn't know where Laukamp's family obtained the items.

On Monday, Harvard distanced itself from the authenticity of the items and words, putting the blame on Fritz.

"Reached for comment by The Boston Globe after publication of the Atlantic article, Professor King was quoted as stating that 'It appears now that all the material (owner Walter) Fritz gave to me concerning the provenance of the papyrus ... were fabrications,'" the university stated on its website. "King stated that the Atlantic's investigation 'tips the balance towards forgery' and that the preponderance of the evidence now presses in that direction."

In the she-said, he-said, Fritz said it's on King. He never said it was authentic, saying he sought to authenticate the evidence and have it used for research, not to be a smoking gun that Jesus was married.

"In her opinion, this piece was authentic," he said.

She'd had several people do independent research, including other universities and private firms, he said. She sought to publish the work but needed to contract with him for it, he said.

"I wanted certain things made clear: You publish it at your own risk," he said he wrote to King. "I give no guarantee as to its authenticity."

And then King made a splash, revealing the item in Rome in 2012.

ONLINE

To read the full story by Ariel Sabar, visit theatlantic.com and search for "The Unbelievable Tale of Jesus's Wife."



PHOTO PROVIDED BY LISETTE POOLE, THE ATLANTIC

North Port's Walter Fritz is the focus of a story in The Atlantic this month.

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