



Papyrus Egerton 2, fragment 2 (recto)

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[1]

Language English

Giving kings their dues (unknown Gospel fragment)

Typology: Gospel fragment

Original Location/Place:

Egypt

Actual Location (Collection/Museum):

British Museum

Physical Characteristics:

This fragment is part of a collection of four fragments of a codex known as Papyrus Egerton 2 (one of which is merely a scrap). The scribal hand seems to be experienced, and is relatively regular. Apart from the apostrophe of fragment 4 (P.Köln 255), the scribe uses no other accents or breathings. The papyrus is noted for its unique use of certain *nomina sacra*, including "???????" for "?????????" ("kings") in line 55 on the recto of fragment 2 (for a discussion see Bell and Skeat, *Fragments of an Unknown Gospel*, p. 2-4). Fragment 2 has some significant lacunae, particularly an almost triangular shaped gap rising from the bottom to about three-quarters of the way up the fragment (see image).

Date: 80 CE to 120 CE

Measurements:

11.8 x 9.7 cm

Language: Greek

Category: Christian

Publications:

Papyrus Egerton 2

Papyrus London Christ. I

Commentary:

This papyrus (known as P. Egerton 2) was originally published in 1935 by H. Idris Bell and T. C. Skeat, and consists of two leaves and the very fragmentary remains of a third. Subsequently, a further fragment (P. Köln 255) was also discovered, adding a further five lines to the text. The discovery of this latter fragment suggested a dating for the papyrus closer to 200 CE than previously thought (initial estimates dated the papyrus at around 150 CE), due to the use of the apostrophe, which became more common in the third century than the second (see Eric Turner, *Greek Manuscripts*, p. 11 n. 50). The text consists of four pericopes, the first of which seem to be Johannine in character, the second and third of which seem to be parallels to Synoptic stories, with the final (in very fragmentary state) relating an apocryphal miracle story performed by Jesus. Of concern here is the recto of fragment 2, which offers a version of what was clearly a popular dialogue. In addition to those in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 12:13-17; [Matthew 22:15-22](#) [2]; Luke 20:20-26), we also find parallels in texts such as the [Gospel](#)



[of Thomas 100](#) [3], the *Excerpts of Theodotus* 86, and the *Sentences of Sextus* 20. All seem to agree on the general thrust – that powers (earthly and divine) are entitled to what rightly belongs to them. The Jesus of Matthew, for instance, states that taxes should be “given back” to Caesar, the implication being that this is simply what the government is due for services rendered (see Matthew 22:21).

As with the other Synoptic pericope in the papyrus (the healing of the leper), the present text seems to show awareness of all three Synoptic Gospel accounts, but it seems as though perhaps the author was writing from memory, as there are digressions, and the text is worded much more generally (Joachim Jeremias and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, p. 97). In the present text, Jesus is approached by unidentified questioners, who wish to tempt him into discussing the issue of paying “kings” what they demand for their rule. They address Jesus as “teacher/Master” and state that they know he comes from God (there are evident parallels here with John 3:2, where similar claims about Jesus are made). Tobias Nicklas argues that the fact that “know” is chosen, perhaps over “believe” intends to characterise the questioners negatively, and indeed Jesus calls them out for having dishonourable intentions later on in the episode, citing Isaiah 29:13 (LXX) (“Papyrus Egerton 2,” p. 265). While Mark 12:13-27 and its parallels are clearly evoked here, the author has generalised the Synoptic pericope, which deals with the issue of ascribing appropriate honour and obligation to both God and Roman rule, eliminating the mention of Caesar and the specifics of paying tax. The issue of Roman domination of Israel is therefore clearly not at issue here. In the present text, Jesus’s questioners ask about their obligations to “kings,” suggesting worldly powers more generally. Their intention is likely to test Jesus by seeing if he will acknowledge that God is the one true king, superior to any earthly authority. While it is true that the Roman emperor can sometimes be referred to as a “king” (e.g. on occasion in the New Testament: [1 Peter 2:12-17](#) [4]), this does not seem to be the case here. What we have in this papyrus is an example of how material, in this case a tradition about Jesus’s teaching on the payment of Roman taxes, could be adapted and utilised in very different ways by early-Christian writers. Judging from the content of fragment 1 (verso) and P. Köln 255, which record a scene where Jesus seems to argue with Jewish opponents over the law, it is perhaps the case that Jewish-Christian relations/disputes were more prevalent to this author than the issue of Roman rule and of how to be a Christian in the context of the Roman empire.

Keywords in the original language:

- [??????????](#) [5]
- [?????????](#) [6]
- [?????????](#) [7]
- [?????](#) [8]
- [???????](#) [9]
- [?????????](#) [10]

Thematic keywords in English:

- [king](#) [11]
- [tax](#) [12]
- [Isaiah](#) [13]
- [prophet](#) [14]

Bibliographical references: Bell, H. Idris, Skeat, T. C. , [Fragments of an Unknown Gospel and Other Early Christian Papyri](#) [15] (London: British Museum, 1935)

Turner, Eric G. , [Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World](#) [16] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971)

Koester, Helmut, [Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development](#) [17] (London: SCM Press, 1990)

Porter, Stanley E. , [“Recent efforts to Reconstruct Early Christianity on the Basis of its Papyrological Evidence”](#) [18], in *Christian Origins and Graeco-Roman Culture* (ed. Stanley E. Porter, Andrew Pitts; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 71-84

Kazen, Thomas, [“Sectarian Gospels for Some Christians? Intention and Mirror Reading in the Light of Extra-Canonical Texts”](#) [19], *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005) : 561-578

Nicklas, Tobias, [“Papyrus Egerton 2 - the ‘Unknown Gospel’”](#) [20], *Expository Times* 118.6 (2007) : 261-266

Other sources connected with this document: Text



[Matthew 22:15-22](#) [21]

Paying taxes to Caesar

- [Read more about Matthew 22:15-22](#) [21]

Text

[1 Peter 2:12-17](#) [22]

Christians urged to honour the emperor

- [Read more about 1 Peter 2:12-17](#) [22]

Text

[Gospel of Thomas 100](#) [23]

Paying taxes to Caesar

- [Read more about Gospel of Thomas 100](#) [23]

Realized by:

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[2] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/matthew-2215-22>

[3] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/gospel-thomas-100>

[4] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/1-peter-212-17>



- [5] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%AC%CF%83%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%BF%CF%82>
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- [13] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/isaiah>
- [14] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/prophet>
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- [18] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/%E2%80%9Crecent-efforts-reconstruct-early-christianity-basis-its-papyrological-evidence%E2%80%9D>
- [19] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/%E2%80%9Csectarian-gospels-some-christians-intention-and-mirror-reading-light-extra-canonical-texts%E2%80%9D>
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- [21] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/matthew-2215-22>
- [22] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/1-peter-212-17>
- [23] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/gospel-thomas-100>
- [24] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/erc-team/kimberley-fowler>