

Brief Update on the Lead Codices

See Also *Artifacts and the Media: Lead Codices and the Public Portrayal of History*

And *Jordan Lead Codices: Exposing the Fakes*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGw0orL78I4>

By Thomas S. Verenna

Independent Researcher and Student

<http://tomverenna.Wordpress.com>

September 2011

Back in May, I wrote an article explaining, in some detail, the preliminary results of the investigation by a group of scholars and Bibliobloggers into the lead codices purportedly found in a cave in Jordan.¹ At the time I wrote that article, it had appeared as though the tides were beginning to turn on the reporting done on their authenticity. Peter Thonemann and Steve Caruso had given reports against the genuine state of the codices and Philip Davies had stated clearly his caution towards their value as ancient artifacts.² In July, the BBC published a retraction of sorts, catching up, it seems, to the facts that many investigating the codices had already known:³

But the search for truth in the Holy Land has been littered with fakes and forgeries for hundreds of years and when great claims are made for a new discovery, the burden of proof lies with the finders. And the burden is a heavy one.

In early August, Jim Davila was contacted by a source from the media who asked useful questions about the lead codices,⁴ and from there, it appeared as though the story would fade into the background. However, with all initially odd reports, the academic community should have known better.

Around mid-August the group of scholars and Bibliobloggers loosely involved in the investigation into the authenticity of lead codices and the dissemination of accurate information⁵ noticed the formation of a new page on Facebook created by an anonymous individual and built around the lead codices' validity. Several new pictures of the codices were posted on the page along with scans of the metallurgical report and news articles that all appeared to be in strong support of the codices. Furthermore, a large number of comments from the page's administrator began to build that talked about an "academic team" researching the codices and that "scholars" were in agreement about their authenticity, and a number of other highly specious claims.

Around the same time, an entry with detailed information was noticed on the website of one Colin Andrews—a strong supporter of the New Age and crop circle conspiracy movements—and

another article on a website by Wayne Hershel, a self-identified “sybologist” whose theories are firmly on the fringe.⁶

Also discovered on eBay was a lead codex for sale (for the bargain price of \$13,000) and when the seller was contacted he claimed he was living in Israel and that he found the codex near the Dead Sea; however, when pressed he changed his story and said he was taken there by a nameless individual, and after some further discussion the listing was pulled altogether.

Finally, to wrap up the extent of the recent coverage, Philip Davies published an article on the codices in the *PEQ*.⁷ Davies’ caution rests a great deal upon the metallurgical reports; he writes:

A later test conducted in the Oxford Materials Characterisation Services (the report is confidential, but I have seen it) concluded that the lead was not of recent production and the pattern of corrosion suggested storage in a dry place for a long period, but further tests on another codex are being conducted at present. I should add that neither report is foolproof, but neither can they be simply dismissed either. They remain part of the wider puzzle.

Davies’ comments are quite erudite and cautious. While this is admirable, more information was revealed about the nature of the tests, themselves, which shall be elaborated upon below.

As a result of these articles and additional comments from Davies, the email group refocused their efforts on exploring the possibility of authenticity. However, as more investigative work was done, the more evident it became that the codices were modern productions of a workshop. In many obvious ways, David (or Paul) Elkington seemed to have overlaid his hand.

First, it is widely believed, though hard to prove, that the Elkingtons are behind the creation of the Facebook group.⁸ On the groups page they announced, with photos (Fig. 1), a large stock of fake codices which were made in a workshop just recently. These 500 or so fakes were produced by none other than the same Bedouin—Hassan Seada—who “found” the codices and sent them to Elkington (or so goes the story told to the media). As suspicious as this is on its own accord, the photos provided by the Elkingtons proved to be the beginning of the end.⁹



Fig. 1

It was noticed right away that one of the codices contained the same stamp on the lower right corner from one of the purported “genuine” codices, which Robert Deutsch had already pointed out had come from coin iconography dated to Herod the Great.¹⁰ The stamp wasn’t similar—it was *identical* down to every line and stroke (Fig. 2). Steve Caruso even provided a graphic where the two images were overlaid upon one another, clearly showing that the same stamp or die had been used, rather than a cast taken from an original. If anything, this meant that at least the “fake Codex” displayed on the Facebook page and a handful of the so-claimed “genuine codices” were produced by the same people, possibly even in the same workshop.¹¹



Fig. 2

On another front, Steve Caruso was analyzing the origins of the script of the codices. Caruso posted an excellent article on his blog showing that most of the script was the result of the same two letter-stamps (Fig. 3) repeated in an inconsistent or staggered manner to make it appear as if the larger blocks of text were unique (Fig. 4).¹²

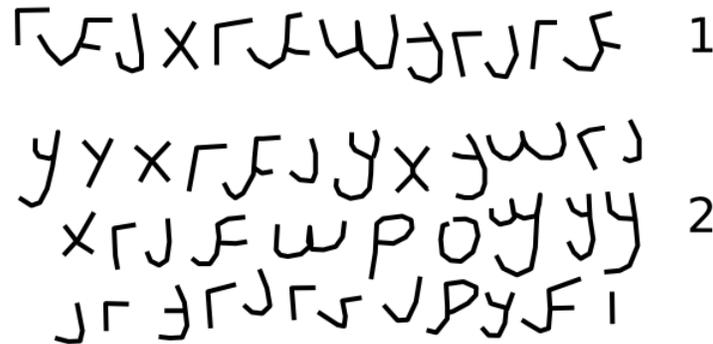
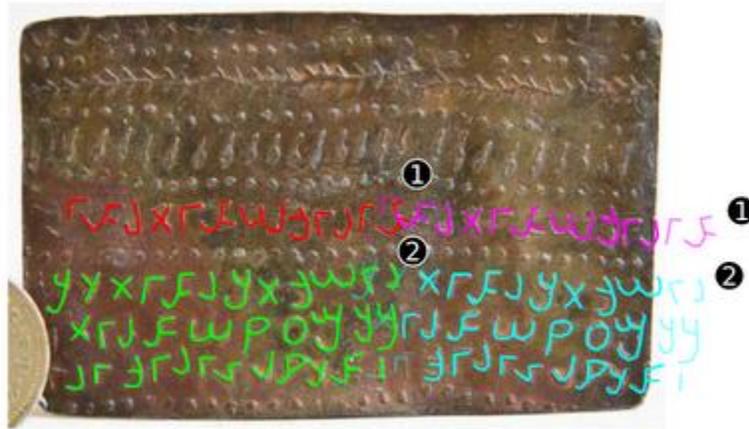


Fig. 3



Note the overlap.

Fig. 4

Caruso also made the discovery that some of the script on one of the claimed “genuine” codices was likely taken directly from a John Hyrcanus I prutah with its distinctive *he* (Fig. 5) and that this script was side by side with other scripts which all seem out of context:¹³



Often these forms of Paleo-Hebrew are rather distinct and can be traced to particular times and geographical locations in history, so when we see Hasmonean Paleo-Hebrew side-by-side with other scripts, it becomes very suspicious.

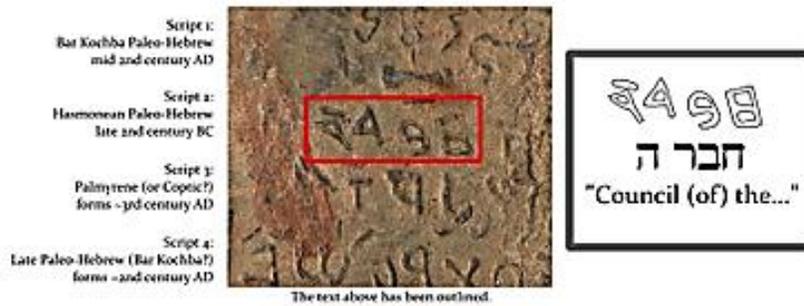


Fig. 5

On yet another front, Dan McClellan refocused on a different oddity and brought up the rather curious “translations” proposed by Elkington’s “team of experts” (which continue to remain anonymous).¹⁴ McClellan concludes in the same post:

I disagree with the reading offered by the admin of the Lead Codices Facebook page and I would venture to guess that there is no eminent professor emeritus behind it. It makes much more sense to me that someone forged the codices (which has already been established for several codices) and just indiscriminately copied down a bunch of letters. Someone else came by and with a rudimentary grasp of Hebrew and a lexicon was able to squint hard enough to make sense out of a portion of it.

Most troubling, however (as I alluded to earlier) is the business with the metallurgical report. As was briefly discussed above, the administrator of the Facebook page (who again is likely to be Elkington himself) posted several scans of the report from Oxford Materials Characterization Service. Unfortunately, the scans were terrible in quality, such terrible quality in fact that one individual who posted to the photo page complained about the fact that they could not be read (Fig. 6). Steve Caruso took a few screen captures of the report (Fig. 6-9).

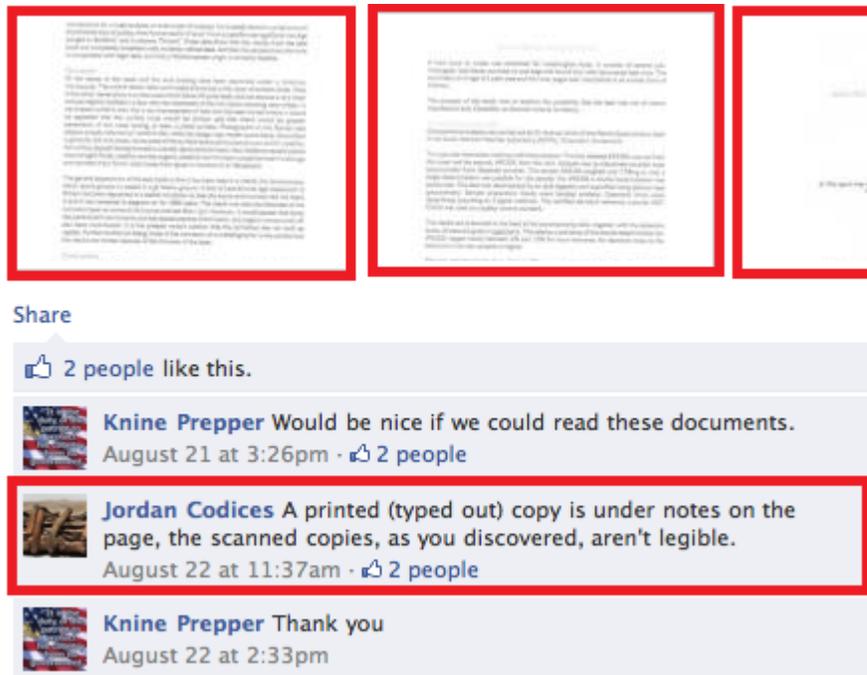


Fig. 6

If we recall Davies' words, quoted above, about the metallurgical reports on the status of the codices, one only needs to review the section on corrosion from the report. Fig. 7 is a screen capture of the blurry part of the report in question. The image has not been altered; it is precisely this blurry on the Facebook page:

Corrosion

All the leaves of the book and the wire binding have been examined under a binocular microscope. The wire is rather clean and merely shows just a thin layer of surface oxide. Most of the other leaves show a surface scale which flakes off quite easily and can expose a very clean and just slightly oxidized surface with the characters of the inscription showing very crisply. In the present writer's view this is not characteristic of lead that has been buried where it would be expected that the surface crust would be thicker and that there would be greater penetration of the metal leaving, at least, a pitted surface. Photographs of the Roman lead objects already referred to⁹ confirm this; while the design may remain quite sharp, the surface is generally dull and pitted. Some areas of the surface have a particulate structure with, possibly, the surface deposit having formed in a locally damp environment. Also visible on several pieces were straight fibres, possibly entirely organic, possibly lead formate crystals formed in a storage environment from formic acid fumes from glue in woodwork or fibreboard.

Fig. 7
(Actual Resolution)

The administrator transcribed this very vital part of the report which has been included here (Fig. 8):

Corrosion

All the leaves of the book and the wire binding have been examined under a binocular microscope. The wire is rather clean and mostly shows just a thin layer of surface oxide.

Most of the other leaves show a surface which flakes off quite easily and can expose a very clean and just slightly oxidized surface with the characteristic of lead that has been buried where it would be expected that the surface crust would be thicker and that there would be greater penetration of the metal leaving, at least, a pitted surface. Photographs of the Roman lead objects already referred to 4 confirm this: while the design may remain quite sharp, the surface is generally dull and pitted. Some areas of the surface have a particulate structure with, possibly, the surface deposit having formed in a locally damp environment. Also visible on several pieces were straight fibres, possibly entirely organic, possibly lead formate crystals formed in a storage environment formic acid from glues in woodwork or fibreboard.

Fig. 8

The area highlighted in red is of key value. Notice how the findings appear quite positive. It does seem, based upon the transcript, that the metallurgist felt the lead was corroded in a way that was characteristic of something buried; however, if one also finds that the sentence structure is strange (perhaps even poor), they are not alone. McClellan noticed as well, and offered this explanation:¹⁵

The second half of the sentence seems to be describing a situation that is expected but not observed, rather than a situation that has been observed. According to the sentence above the “where” is to be understood locatively, but it seems to be operating as a subordinating conjunction. A closer look at the scan, which has been intentionally made virtually illegible by [*the administrator*], solves the problem.

It seems as if the administrator of the site has directly *altered* the findings of the report. If one returns to the blurred images and lines them up with the given transcript, they will notice that quite a bit is missing from the latter. Below is what the transcript should read (Fig. 9):

Corrosion

All the leaves of the book and the wire binding have been examined under a binocular microscope. The wire is rather clean and mostly shows just a thin layer of surface oxide. Most of the other leaves show a surface scale which flakes off quite easily and can expose a very clean and just slightly oxidized surface with the characters of the inscription showing very crisply. **In the present writer's view this is not characteristic of lead that has been buried where it would be expected that the surface crust would be thicker and that there would be greater penetration of the metal leaving, at least, a pitted surface. Photographs of the Roman lead objects already referred to[4] confirm this: while the design may remain quite sharp, the surface is generally dull and pitted.** Some areas of the surface have a particulate structure with, possibly, the surface deposit having formed in a locally damp environment. Also visible on several pieces were straight fibres, possibly entirely organic, possibly lead formate crystals formed in a storage environment from formic acid fumes from glues in woodwork or fibreboard.

Fig. 9

The additional content makes a difference! “In the present writer’s view this is *not* characteristic of lead that has been buried...” (emphasis added). Dan McClellan offers this apt perspective:

Basically, the word “characteristic” in the highlighted sentence is moved back and replaces the word “characters” in the previous sentence, removing the portion of the report that conflicts with an ancient provenance for the codices. Will Elkington argue for haplography as a result of homoioarcton? Possibly, but it can be no coincidence that the edited text supports a fundamental claim that Elkington highlights and emphasizes elsewhere. Elkington has demonstrably altered the report to support his assertions. This is flagrant and egregious deception, and it shows quite conclusively that Elkington is willing to lie and to openly and transparently manipulate scientific data to make his codices appear ancient. They simply are not.

Bob Cargill, a respected archaeologist, made a very astute (if not blunt) observation about the picture this form of document manipulation paints:¹⁶

This formula to misuse archaeology to make religious claims for ideological and/or money making purposes works regardless of the faith of the huckster making the claim: Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim – peddlers representing all faiths and even some “alien enthusiasts” (usually amateurs with no formal training in scholarship or archaeology) have used the formula to sell books, sell tickets, pitch documentaries, and attempt to proselytize the public and/or take its money. And, by the time actual scholars respond and debunk the story, the media has usually moved on (and if the media do publish a follow-up story, it is usually no longer a headline). Let’s face it: archaeological hucksters keep using the formula because it works (or at least always has), and it will continue to work in the future as long as scholars fail to respond to the false claims immediately and publicly.

This is more than a clarification; it is a *challenge*. While Davies’ caution is, again, quite an important academic quality—one that should never be lost, and Davies deserves recognition for reminding us all of its immeasurable value—when there is doubt over authenticity and when one finds these sorts of alarming signs, the responsibility rests mostly on the shoulders of scholars, the academics closest to the subject matter, to find the answers. None of the codices that have been released thus far for the public have proven to be authentic (including those which Elkington has supported as authentic) and none have shown to be more than the products of workshops, skilled in peddling fakes to tourists at a hefty price. It is also true that the iconography and even some of the script has roots in actual artifacts but these qualities were repurposed, out of context, from items found in museums in Jordan.

In conclusion, there is another very valuable piece of advice from Philip Davies that cannot be ignored: he has made it clear that there is a story here that needs to be told. He couldn’t be more correct. This story cannot be told without a strong academic desire to discover the truth. That more facts have emerged in the dissection of the codices than in their distribution is only evidence, in this author’s opinion, that the truth is no more than the old tale of a charismatic individual peddling a product, with magnificent marketing, distracting their audience from its questionable quality.

¹ See Th. S. Verenna, "[Artifacts and the Media: Lead Codices and the Public Portrayal of History](#)." Bible and Interpretation. Published online, May 2011. Accessed online: 3 September 2011. Special thanks to Steve Caruso and Bob Cargill for their generous and helpful advice on this paper.

² For Thonemann's response, see Roddy Ashworth, "[Unholy Row as New Expert Calls Ancient Scrolls Fakes](#)." *The Daily Express*. Published online, 10 April 2011. Accessed online: 3 September 2011. Steve Caruso's interview can be found here Natalie Wolchover, "[Exclusive: Early Christian Lead Codices Now Called Fakes](#)." *LiveScience*. Published online, 11 April 2011. Accessed online: 3 September 2011. For Philip Davies' comments, see "[Prof's mystery texts](#)." *Sheffield Telegraph*. Published online, 20 April 2011. Accessed online: 3 September 2011.

³ Doubts Over Authenticity Of 'Ancient Christian' Books . For the Bibliobloggers responses, see Th.S. Verenna, "[Reactions to the BBC Report on the Lead Codices](#)." Published online, 27 July 2011. Accessed online: 3 September 2011.

⁴ Jim Davila, "[Fake Metal Codices Watch](#)." Published online, 2 August 2011. Accessed online: 3 September 2011.

⁵ At this moment, the loose email list includes Dorothy Lobel King, Steve Caruso, Mark Goodacre, Jim West, Joel Watts, James McGrath, Bob Cargill, Jim Davila, David Meadows, Dan McClellan, and myself.

⁶ Colin Andrews' "Exclusive" can be found here: "[Exclusive: The Lead Codices](#)." Hershel's fantasies about the codices can be found here: "[The Metal Codices Decoded](#)." Accessed online: 3 September 2011. All are welcome to review them, but it is suspected that only the most masochistic among us will do so.

⁷ Philip Davies, "Mysterious Books from Jordan." *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, Volume 143, Number 2, July 2011, pp. 79-84(6).

⁸ Evidences behind this include the writing mannerisms of the administrator, and the fact that several of the images posted bear copyright claims in David Elkington's name.

⁹ See Th. S. Verenna, "[Jordan Lead Codices: Case Closed as "Genuine" Forgeries?](#)" Published online, 23 August 2011. Accessed online: 3 September 2011.

¹⁰ Robert Deutsch (via Jim West), "[A Few More Photos of the Jordanian 'Lead Codices'](#)." Published online, 15 June 2011. Accessed online: 3 September 2011.

¹¹ Steve Caruso, "[Lead Codices: "Genuine" Forgeries?](#)" Published online, 23 August 2011. Accessed online: 3 September 2011.

¹² Steve Caruso, "[Jordan Lead Codices: Units of Forgery](#)." Published online, 30 August 2011. Accessed online: 3 September 2011. See also Dan McClellan, "[Steve Caruso Beats Me to the Punch and More](#)." Published online, 30 August 2011. Accessed online: 3 September 2011.

¹³ Steve Caruso, "[Lead Codices: Sequence Lifted From John Hyrcanus I Prutah](#)." Published online, 27 August 2011. Accessed online: 3 September 2011.

¹⁴ Dan McClellan, "[More Dishonesty from Jordan Codices](#)." Published online, 27 August 2011. Accessed online: 3 September 2011.

¹⁵ Dan McClellan, "[Short Video on Jordan Codices](#)." Published online, 3 September 2011. Accessed online: 4 September 2011.

¹⁶ Bob Cargill, "[Evidence Continues To Pile Up That The Jordan Lead Codices Are Fakes](#)." Published online, 4 September 2011. Accessed online: 5 September 2011.