

## Not the Gospel Truth: Modern Manuscript Forgeries and the Story of the Archimedes Palimpsest

### ABSTRACT

When the Archimedes Palimpsest was sold in 1998 to a private American collector it contained five modern miniatures that had been painted over erased text pages. Three leaves of the manuscript are currently missing and were probably also forged. All the images were copied from a 1929 catalog of Greek illuminated manuscripts from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the identification of phthalocyanine green more accurately dates the forgeries to a period after 1938, when that pigment was first commercially available in Europe. A second and much larger group of forgeries copied from the same source has been identified in a Byzantine Gospel book at Duke University, which, coincidentally, had originally come from the same monastic library in Constantinople as the Archimedes Palimpsest. Although the modern provenance of the Duke manuscript is unclear, the Archimedes Palimpsest is said to have been owned by the same French family since the 1920s. Who ordered the forgeries to be painted in the manuscript, and when and why this was done, has not been discussed by any of the parties involved in the 1998 sale. However the evidence points to a pair of art dealers who acquired Byzantine manuscripts from their monastic owners in Greece and Turkey and sold them in Paris after having “improved” their appearance for greater profit. This paper described the forgeries in the Archimedes Palimpsest and the Duke Gospels and explored the connections with the other manuscripts that were altered and sold by these Parisian dealers in the early twentieth century.

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