

MANUSCRIPT, SOCIETY
AND BELIEF IN EARLY
CHRISTIAN EGYPT

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II

NOMINA SACRA: ORIGINS AND SIGNIFICANCE

NOMINA SACRA¹ as a term in Greek and Latin palaeography denotes a strictly limited number of words, at most fifteen, the sacral character of which, intrinsic or contextual, is emphasized by abbreviating the word in question, normally by contraction, occasionally in the earliest period by suspension. A horizontal line is placed above the abbreviation as a warning that the word cannot be pronounced as written, as it was in documents with numerals, and where, as is usual, contraction is used, the treatment of the end of the word is governed by strict rules. The subject as a tool for palaeographers was invented by Ludwig Traube, to whom the name itself is due, in a fundamental monograph published nearly seventy years ago. Some of his conclusions can now be seen to be erroneous, thanks largely to discoveries made since he wrote; he was in any case more concerned with palaeography and less with the historical questions which are our business. Though there are earlier references to the method of writing the Tetragrammaton and to the monograms for *Ἰησοῦς* and *Χριστός*, no ancient author alludes to the system—familiar to anyone who has ever looked at a Biblical manuscript or indeed at a Christian Greek or Latin inscription of any period—before Christian of Stavelot in the ninth century;² that they should thus be taken for granted is an indication of their antiquity.

The purpose of the system was demonstrably not to save either space or the scribe's time; a free space is often left round the abbreviation and the time saved by writing a four-letter

¹ The principal discussions of the subject to date are:

L. Traube, *Nomina Sacra* (Munich, 1906).

A. H. R. E. Paap, *Nomina Sacra in the Greek Papyri of the First Five Centuries* (Leyden, 1959); this gives references to and discussions of work that appeared subsequent to Traube's book, and lists all instances up to the end of the fifth century.

Schuyler Brown, *Concerning the Origin of the Nomina Sacra in Studia Papyrologica* 9 (1970), pp. 7 ff.

There are useful lists supplementary to Paap by J. O'Callaghan, *Nomina Sacra in Papyris Graecis Neotestamentariis Saeculi III, Analecta Biblica* 46 (1970), (Rome, 1970) and by the same author for the fourth to the eighth centuries in *Studia Papyrologica* 10 (1971), pp. 99–122.

² Traube, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

word in two letters would be occupied in drawing the line. Thus there is no connection with the abbreviations by suspension found in Greek documents¹ or with those found not in ordinary literary papyri but in working copies and a few technical texts.² The words in question are certain proper names and some other terms which for religious reasons only are given special treatment in writing. They divide into three classes; the first consists of the four words *Ἰησοῦς*, *Χριστός*, *κύριος*, *θεός* the abbreviation of which in their sacral meaning may be said to be invariable, the second of three words—*πνεῦμα*, *ἄνθρωπος*, *σταυρός*—of which the contracted form is found relatively early and relatively frequently, the third of the remainder. Of these eight words—*πατήρ*, *υἱός*, *σωτήρ*, *μήτηρ*, *οὐρανός*, *Ἰσραήλ*, *Δαυεῖδ*, *Ἱερουσαλήμ*—the contraction is irregular; the problem here for the scribe was to determine when a word such as *υἱός* was used sacrally, e.g. in the expression Son of Man, or in an ordinary sense, or when a proper name such as David was used in a messianic context or in a purely historical one. The same problem arose to some extent with the four key words; in some Old Testament manuscripts, for example, Joshua is treated as a *nomen sacrum* since in Hebrew and Greek the name is identical with that of Jesus.

The different treatment accorded to these three groups may be seen in the great uncials and also in the Codex Purpureus Petropolitanus³ where the four primary words together with *πατήρ*, *πνεῦμα*, and *υἱός* are in gold, the remaining five (out of the possible eight treated as *nomina sacra* in this manuscript) in silver. It is noteworthy, too, that only the first four are regularly contracted in early Latin manuscripts.⁴

Two other observations may be in place here. Firstly, the contractions⁵ occur in documents as well as in literary manuscripts and where exceptions to the rule—rare even in documents⁶—are listed they will be found on examination to occur in private letters or prayers or in e.g. magical texts, often the work of an amateur or careless scribe. Secondly, there are a

¹ For these see now A. Blanchard, *Sigles et Abréviations dans les papyrus documentaires grecs* (*Bull. Inst. Clas. Stud., Suppl.* no. 30, 1974), who maintains that contraction is not a principle known to Greek systems of abbreviation.

² See E. G. Turner, *GMAW*, p. 17.

³ Traube, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁴ See C. H. Turner in *Miscellanea Ehrle (Studi e Testi, 40, (1920))*, iv, p. 64; 'Only the primary four . . . are everywhere and always abbreviated'.

⁵ Suspensions as a rule are only found in the earliest period and soon disappear; for the very occasional suspension of *θεός* see H. C. Youtie's note on P. Mich. Inv. 337, 4 (late fourth century) in *ZPE* 22 (1976), p. 66.

⁶ For eccentric forms in some documents see P. Merton ii. 93 and P. Abinn., p. 42.

few instances of words outside the standard list being contracted; some come from the pen of an obviously unskilled or ignorant scribe, but one or two (which will be examined later) occur in one of the earliest of all Christian papyri and witness to a stage at which the system was still to some extent fluid.

The *nomina sacra* have naturally been given close attention by palaeographers, but hopes that a detailed study of their variations might provide a clue to the provenance of manuscripts or their relationships have where the earliest period at any rate is concerned been disappointed.¹ But this in itself is negatively of interest; it suggests that, as we have reason to think on other grounds, the system did not grow up piecemeal but was originally laid down from a single centre. What is clear is that, as far as concerns the four primary words, the abbreviations occur, with such rare exceptions as to be insignificant, in written material of all kinds from the earliest period of which we have evidence, the first half of the second century; their universality is as striking as their antiquity.

The questions to which we want to find answers are as follows:

- (1) Is the system Jewish or Christian in origin?
- (2) If Christian, where and why did it originate and what is the earliest evidence for it?
- (3) If these questions can be answered, what is the significance of the system for the history of the early Church in general and for that of the Church in Egypt in particular?

In one sense the answer to the first question is simple. The concept of the sacredness of the name of God and the related belief that this should in some fashion be expressed in the way the name was pronounced or written, though parallels can be found elsewhere, e.g. in magical texts of all kinds, is in this context indubitably Jewish; the ineffability of the name of God,

¹ Paap (op. cit., p. 126) has observed that *οὐρανός*, *Δαυείδ*, *Ἱερουσαλήμ*, *μήτηρ*, *σωτήρ* are never found contracted in the Chester Beatty papyri, but as the last two are in any case late additions to the list too much importance should not be attached to this. H. Hunger has pointed out (*Anzeiger Akad. Wien* 13 (1960), p. 22) that the list of compendia in the Bodmer St. John (= H. 426) is practically identical with that in the Chester Beatty *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*; this might suggest a common origin. He has also remarked that the treatment of *nomina sacra* in the Berlin Genesis (= H. 4) is very close to that in the two Chester Beatty manuscripts of Genesis (= H. 7 and 8). All three manuscripts are of much the same date; that in Berlin was purchased in Achmîm (Panopolis), the suggested provenance being the nearby White Monastery; two of the Bodmer papyri are demonstrably associated with Panopolis and if the Chester Beatty and the Bodmer papyri formed part of one and the same find, Panopolis would have been their *origo* (see E. G. Turner, *Greek Papyri*, pp. 52-3, and for an objection to this view see above, p. 7).

expressed when the Law was read in Hebrew by replacing the vowels proper to it by those of Adonai ('Lord'), is directly or indirectly the psychological origin of the *nomina sacra*; whether the Greek equivalents for the Hebrew words for God and Lord were ever written in contracted form by Jews is another question. Schuyler Brown has forcibly argued against Traube and others that there is no connection between the way in which the name is *written* in Hebrew and the writing of *nomina sacra* in Greek: there was nothing in the manner of writing it to distinguish it from other Hebrew words: the omission of vowels is neither here nor there since at this period this was common to all Hebrew writing, and in any case the *nomina sacra* do not omit all vowels and they do omit certain consonants: there was nothing ineffable about *θεός* and *κύριος* and the writing of them as *nomina sacra* would not affect the pronunciation.¹ Certainly there is no strict parallel between the method of writing the Name in Hebrew and the manner of writing the *nomina sacra* in Greek; but there are some indications, as we shall see, that not only the pronunciation but also the writing of the Name in Hebrew was regarded on occasion as requiring special attention.² And to assert that the form of writing e.g. $\overline{\kappa\epsilon}$ would not affect the way it was spoken goes beyond what we know; all reading was reading aloud and the abbreviation would constitute a warning signal to the reader and may have served as the occasion for some mark of reverence on his part.

The question whether the Jews, when from the third century B.C. onwards they used a Greek translation of their scriptures wrote the contractions of *θεός* and *κύριος*, as in Traube's view they did, is a different one, and with the help of pre-Christian Jewish papyri from Egypt and that of the Biblical

¹ He considers that Christian scribes in writing *nomina sacra* were following a documentary practice whereby some proper names and titles were not always written in full; but in Greek documents of this period there are no contractions, only suspensions and above them there is no suprascript line, and the practice is quite unknown to literary manuscripts. A. Blanchard (op. cit., p. 18) also sees no connection between such *griffonnages* and *nomina sacra*; in fact, there is no real evidence in Greek documents for a habit of 'omitting the middle portion of an entire word'. Blanchard, however, follows Schuyler Brown in seeing no connection between the Hebrew tradition and *nomina sacra*. Byzantine documents do employ regular and systematic abbreviations, but, as Blanchard points out, the differences of form, date, and manner are too great for there to be any relationship here with the *nomina sacra*. See also below, p. 35, n. 2.

² It is important to distinguish between the writing and the speaking of the Name; while Origen (*in Ps.* 2: 2) tells us that the Name was read as Adonai (by the Hebrews) and as *κύριος* by the Greeks (i.e. Jews who knew no Hebrew), nothing is said or implied about the way it was written. All our evidence goes to show that in writing the Jews retained the Hebrew form.

texts, both Greek and Hebrew, discovered in the Dead Sea area of Palestine can now be given a decisively negative answer. From Egypt, from Qumran, and from another site in the wilderness of Judaea we now have seven manuscripts of the Jewish scriptures ranging from the early second century B.C. to the early first A.D. and all with one exception of the Law.¹ Not all preserve an instance of the Tetragrammaton, but two which do are substantial: the Cairo papyrus consisting of 115 fragments, three of Genesis and the rest of Deuteronomy, and the roll of the Twelve Minor Prophets from near Engedi with part of at least twenty-four columns. In none of these manuscripts is the Divine Name ever represented by *κύριος*; it is written in Hebrew. In some, as in that of the Minor Prophets, it is written in the Phoenician or ancient Hebrew characters, as it was still, according to Origen,² in the version of Aquila in the Roman period. The ancient Hebrew script had been largely abandoned after the exile; its retention is a mark of reverence for the Name and reflects the belief that this was the exact way in which it had been written by Moses.³ In others, as in the Cairo Deuteronomy, it is written in the square Hebrew characters, which gave rise later to the mistaken transliteration of the four Hebrew letters as *πικι* in Greek.⁴ In one only, the roll of Leviticus from Qumran, do we find the Name itself written in Greek letters *ΙΑΩ*—hitherto known only from one later manuscript, the Codex Marchalianus of the Prophets. No line is drawn above the Name; the use of Hebrew in a Greek manuscript was warning enough. The other words that are treated as *nomina sacra* in later Greek manuscripts and are not of obviously Christian origin—*heaven, Israel, David, Jerusalem*—are without exception written in full.

With these texts may be associated a liturgical papyrus to be dated to the late first century A.D.;⁵ it appears to be a

¹ The texts in question are as follows:

H. 38: Exodus, papyrus roll, Qumran, c. 100 B.C.

H. 46: Leviticus, papyrus roll, Qumran, late first century B.C.—early first century A.D.

H. 49: Leviticus, leather roll, Qumran, c. 100 B.C.

H. 51: Numbers, leather roll, Qumran, 50 B.C.—A.D. 50.

H. 56: Genesis/Deuteronomy, papyrus roll, P. Fouad Inv. 266, first century B.C.

H. 57: Deuteronomy, papyrus roll, P. Ryl. iii. 458, second century B.C.

H. 285: Dodekapropheton, parchment roll, desert of Judah, 50 B.C.—A.D. 50.

References to the publications with some later discussions will be found in van Haelst's *Catalogue*.

² In *Ps. 2: 2*. The ancient script is also used for the Name in the fragment of the Psalter dating from the third century A.D. in the version of Symmachus: see below, p. 32 n. 5.

³ See W. H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible* (New York, 1964), p. 29.

⁴ See Traube, *op. cit.*, pp. 28 ff.

⁵ Published by P. Benoît in *Revue Biblique* 58 (1951), pp. 549 ff. (= H. 911): see Appendix I, p. 78.

prayer invoking the aid of the Angel of the Exodus against evil spirits. Both the subject-matter (to which parallels can be found in Philo) and the style of writing suggest a Jewish origin; and in it *κύριος* is written in full with no line above it, thus confirming Paap's view that the Jews had no occasion to regard *κύριος* as a *nomen sacrum*.¹ Only in the fourth century A.D. and later are there occasional examples of *κύριος* contracted in a Jewish manuscript; such cases are still exceptional and can be attributed to the influence of the usage prevailing in the world around them.

The treatment of the Tetragrammaton in the Hebrew manuscripts from Qumran is also relevant.² In the Isaiah scroll the Name is written in full; in a quotation from Isaiah in the Manual of Discipline four points are substituted for the Name,³ while in the Habakkuk commentary the ancient Phoenician characters are employed for writing the Name only as they are in the Hymns scroll with one exception when the scribe forgot and put the square characters instead. And if we can trust Josephus,⁴ in some manuscripts—no doubt reserved for ceremonial use—the name might be written in letters of gold.

From time to time the Name in Hebrew was abbreviated both in Hebrew manuscripts and when it was written in Hebrew in Greek manuscripts. A Greek papyrus from Oxyrhynchus of the third century A.D.⁵ exhibits it in the form of a double *yod* with a line through it; other forms of abbreviation occur in the Elephantine Aramaic papyri of the fifth century B.C., in two late manuscripts, and on coins (though coins are not good witnesses to manuscript practice). It could be argued that there is a link between these occasional abbreviations of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton and the *nomina sacra*, but it is improbable. Not only are the abbreviations of the Hebrew Name very far

¹ At one time P. Kahle regarded the use of *κύριος* in a manuscript as a sure sign of Christian origin (see *Theol. Lit. Zt.* 1954, II, p. 2), but subsequently changed his mind and in *The Cairo Geniza*² (London, 1959), p. 219 claimed P. Oxy. iv. 656 for Judaism. What is true is that the contracted form of *κύριος* is in the first three centuries the mark of a Christian manuscript.

² See M. Delcor, *Des diverses manières d'écrire le tétragramme sacré dans les anciens documents hébraïques* in *Rev. Hist. Relig.* 147 (1955), pp. 149-73.

³ For this see the comments of Françoise Dunand in *Papyrus grecs bibliques* (Cairo, 1966), p. 43; it is possible that the Name had to be inserted by someone other than the scribe of the manuscript.

⁴ *Ant.* xii. 2. 10: cf. *Clem. Alex. Strom.* vi. 11. 84, and L. Blau *Studien zum althebräischen Buchwesen* (Strasburg, 1902), pp. 157 ff. A passage in the letter of Aristéas, § 176—*ἡ νομοθεσία γεγραμμένη χρυσογραφία τοῖς Ἰουδαϊκοῖς γράμμασι*—has been taken to refer to the use of gold for the Tetragrammaton.

⁵ P. Oxy. vii. 1007 (= H. 5): see Appendix 1, p. 77.

from being regular as are those of *θεός* and *κύριος*, but there is no one method of abbreviation and there is no suprascript line.¹ Thus the writing as well as the pronunciation of the Name might be accorded special treatment in Hebrew, but not invariably and not in a constant form. The form which this principally took was the use, as Origen correctly states,² of the archaic Hebrew characters; there is of course no parallel to this in Greek manuscripts, and we can conclude that there is no legacy from the Hebrew scribes to the writers of *nomina sacra*.

Graeco-Jewish manuscripts of the Roman and early Byzantine periods lead to the same conclusion. In some cases, as in that of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus just mentioned,³ it is arguable whether the manuscript was Jewish or Christian in origin,⁴ and it will be convenient to look first at those which are certainly Jewish. The earliest is a fragment now in Vienna of a parchment roll dated to the third or fourth century carrying some verses of the Psalms in the version of Symmachus;⁵ here the Tetragrammaton appears in the ancient Hebrew characters and *θεός* and *Ἰσραήλ* are uncontracted. Other manuscripts which are incontestably Jewish are the fragments of Kings and Psalms in the version of Aquila from the Geniza of Cairo and assigned to the fifth or sixth century.⁶ In both the Tetragrammaton appears in the ancient Hebrew characters, but in the Kings fragment there is a single instance of *κύριος* contracted to $\overline{\kappa\nu}$ at the end of a line and three of *Ἰσραήλ* contracted

¹ See Dunand, *op. cit.*, pp. 39 ff. for an account of the different forms and letter shapes of the Name in Greek and Hebrew manuscripts from the Dead Sea area in relation to the Cairo papyrus. Delcor (*op. cit.*, p. 157) draws attention to a passage in the Damascus document where the Tetragrammaton is referred to by the first two letters; but there is no contraction.

² *In Psalm. 2: 2*. In the early part of this often cited passage Origen is referring to the pronunciation, not to the writing, of the Name among *Ἑβραῖοι* (i.e. Jews whose language was Hebrew) and *Ἕλληνες* (i.e. Jews whose language was Greek). He then goes on to discuss the writing of the Name as follows: *καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀκριβεστάτοις δὲ τῶν ἀντιγράφων ἑβραϊκοῖς χαρακτηῖται κεῖται τὸ ὄνομα, ἑβραϊκοῖς δὲ οὐ τοῖς νῦν ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἀρχαιοτάτοις*. It is clear from the context that he is talking of Greek manuscripts in use by Jews. It is usually thought that he had Aquila's version in mind, and this may well be so; but this form of the Tetragrammaton occurs in a fragment of Symmachus' version (see p. 30, n. 2 above) and Origen's statement could equally well apply to manuscripts of the LXX. In any case, he is here concerned not with versions, but with manuscripts.

Similarly when Jerome (*Ep. XXV ad Marcellam* and in his preface to Samuel (Migne, *PL* xxviii. 550) alludes to the use of the square Hebrew characters or to that of the *antiquae litterae* in both cases he is talking of Graeco-Jewish, not Christian manuscripts.

³ p. 31, n. 1 above.

⁴ See Appendix 1, pp. 74 ff.

⁵ = H. 167. Both the format and the version, apart from the treatment of the *nomina sacra*, speak for its Jewish origin.

⁶ = H. 74, 123, 203, 236.

to $\overline{\iota\sigma\lambda}$, again at the end of a line.¹ Elsewhere they are written in full, as are $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$, $\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi\omicron\varsigma$, $\nu\acute{\iota}\acute{o}\varsigma$, and Ἱεροσολήμ . In the Psalms $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$, $\omicron\upsilon\rho\alpha\nu\acute{o}\varsigma$, $\pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$, $\nu\acute{\iota}\acute{o}\varsigma$, $\Delta\alpha\upsilon\epsilon\acute{\iota}\delta$, and Ἰσραήλ are all uncontracted. The fact that the Tetragrammaton appears in Hebrew shows clearly that (as Origen implies) in writing as distinct from pronunciation $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ = Adonai was not thought of as a substitute.² The single case of the Greek contracted form, an exception which proves the rule, is due less to Christian influence (for then it would have been regularly used) than to the exigencies of space; the scribe had left himself no space to write the Hebrew and so had recourse to the form prevailing in the non-Jewish world. Similarly, in only one out of the twenty-seven instances of the Tetragrammaton is the suprascript line employed. There could be no better witness to standard Jewish practice than these texts from a Jewish synagogue.

Prevailing Christian practice and perhaps the advisability of not openly flouting it will explain the presence of $\kappa\epsilon$ and $\iota\sigma\lambda$ with no suprascript line in a public inscription of a Samaritan synagogue in Thessalonica of the fourth century, where however $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ is uncontracted.³ And if G. D. Kilpatrick is correct in thinking that a liturgical text on a roll from Oxyrhynchus is Jewish rather than Christian,⁴ then the presence in it of $\overline{\theta\nu}$ is to be explained on the same basis.

There remain for consideration two Biblical texts, both of Genesis, both from Oxyrhynchus, one part of a papyrus codex of the second century, the other part of a parchment codex of the third century;⁵ both may well be Jewish, although a case can also be made out for their being Christian.⁶ In the first,

¹ Ἱεροσολήμ appears once as Ιουσαλμ , again at the end of a line where space was short. It should be noted that Ἰσραήλ is uncontracted in one of the Qumran manuscripts: see P. W. Skehan in *Vetus Testamentum* iv (1956), pp. 155 ff.

² $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ was on occasion used as a title for the deity by Jews, e.g. by Philo and in the liturgical papyrus mentioned above, p. 30, n. 5; but what was legitimate enough in a treatise or a liturgical text would be deemed inappropriate for a roll of the Law. See also Dunand, *op. cit.*, p. 52 and, for Philo, the review of Dunand's work by J. van Haelst in *Chronique d'Égypte* 44 (1969), pp. 148 ff.; observing that it is used as a divine name in Wisdom and in 2 and 3 Maccabees he concludes that either the Tetragrammaton or $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ might be written and that in Jewish circles in Alexandria two texts may have circulated, one with the Tetragrammaton, the other with $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$. However, we have no early Jewish manuscript of these books and it may be significant that they were excluded from the Jewish canon.

³ = H. 53.

⁴ See *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 5 (1964), p. 222, n. 14. Whoever the writer of the papyrus was, it looks as though he may not have been at home with the system; he writes $\beta\epsilon$ for $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma$ while Ἰσραήλ was apparently written in full.

⁵ P. Oxy. iv. 656 (= H. 13) and vii. 1007 (= H. 5); for the date of the first, see H. I. Bell in *HTR* xxxvii (1944), p. 201.

⁶ See Appendix I, pp. 74 ff.

in one place where in a Christian manuscript $\overline{\kappa\epsilon}$ would normally stand the space was left blank, as though in expectation of a second hand inserting the Hebrew Tetragrammaton; in the event a second hand wrote $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ unabbreviated. There are no other contractions. In the second, as has been noted above, the Tetragrammaton is represented by a double $\gamma\omicron\delta$ with a line through it, a form of abbreviation already known from Jewish coins of the second century B.C.; $\theta\epsilon\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ is contracted in the usual way. While it is established that in their Greek manuscripts of the Old Testament the Jews invariably wrote the Name in Hebrew, it does not follow that all Greek manuscripts with the Hebrew Tetragrammaton are necessarily Jewish. We know from other sources that a Jewish form of Christianity persisted in Oxyrhynchus,¹ and a possible explanation of these two eccentric texts would be that they were the work of Jewish-Christian scribes.

Thus in the light of discoveries made since he wrote Traube's statement that $\overline{\theta\epsilon}$ and $\overline{\kappa\epsilon}$ were certainly of Jewish-Hellenistic origin² can be seen to be erroneous; there is no evidence in favour of it and much against. Perhaps the most conclusive evidence is that of the Greek inscriptions from Palestine covering the period from Qumran to Bar Kokhba;³ there are 184 instances of $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ in a sacral sense and 109 of $\theta\epsilon\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ and in not one is either word contracted. For the formal origin of the *nomina sacra* we must look elsewhere.

Granted, then, that the system was Christian in origin and not Jewish, we need to ask why and where it was invented and what is the earliest evidence for it. Two alternative hypotheses may be advanced. The first assumes—something that is by no means certain—that $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ was the first word to be so abbreviated. We have to envisage a newly formed Christian congregation—not necessarily in Egypt—who as Hellenized Jews had heard the Law so read in Greek that (as Origen tells us)⁴ the Name, while written in Hebrew was never pronounced but represented in reading either by Adonai or possibly by the Greek equivalent of Adonai, $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$. Expelled from the syna-

¹ See below, p. 57.

² Op. cit., p. 34. In the absence of other evidence Traube relied on the magical papyri of the late third or fourth century A.D. in which there is a strong Jewish element, and he infers that the occasional *nomina sacra* in these texts are of Jewish origin. But the magical papyri are thoroughly syncretistic and contain Christian elements as well.

³ See M. Schwabe-B. Lifshitz, *Beth Shearim II, The Greek Inscriptions* (Jerusalem, 1967); $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ in the sacral sense occurs in no. 184, $\theta\epsilon\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ in no. 109.

⁴ *In Psalmos*, 2:2: λέγεται μὲν (sc. the Tetragrammaton) τῇ Ἀδωναὶ προσηγορίᾳ, οὐχὶ τούτου γεγραμμένου ἐν τῷ τετραγραμμάτῳ, παρὰ δὲ Ἑλλῆσι τῇ κύριος ἐκφωνεῖται.

gogue they would lose any slight contact they might have had with Hebrew and, although they would have had no difficulty in acquiring texts of the Greek version of the scriptures, when it came to copying them they would have no one competent to write the Name in Hebrew—in the synagogue a task probably reserved for the priest. The obvious course was to write *κύριος*; in imitation of the Hebrew the vowels of the stem of *κύριος* (together with one consonant) were omitted and a line placed above the contraction to warn the reader that the letters so marked could not be pronounced as they stood. It is at this point that the argument lacks conviction; would such a scribe have been aware of the absence of vowels in the Hebrew Name and, if he was anxious to follow Hebrew practice, why omit a consonant as well?¹ Leaving this objection on one side, we can see that on this theory *κύριος* in its religious significance would be clearly distinguished from its secular use, and in reading aloud this may have been recognised by some obeisance. The suprascript line was borrowed from Greek documentary practice. The use of abbreviation would then have been extended to other religious terms and names, a stage already reached in our earliest Christian papyri, for on this hypothesis the first step, that of contracting *κύριος*, would have been taken before the end of the first century.

There is, however, a more probably hypothesis. The earliest direct evidence for a compendium of a *nomen sacrum* comes not in a manuscript but in a literary source. In the Epistle of Barnabas the number of Abraham's followers recorded in two passages of Genesis as 318 is given a symbolic interpretation;² the Greek letter *tau* (of which the numerical value is 300) represents the cross, and the *iota eta* (the combined numerical value of which is 18) stand for *Ἰησοῦς*.³ The writer does not put forward his

¹ The form $\overline{\kappa\rho\varsigma}$ occurs in only one Christian text and that not one of the earliest: see Paap, op. cit., p. 102. It is also found in P. Colon. Inv. 4780 (= H. 1072), the remarkable biography of Mani preserved in a miniature parchment codex of the fifth century. While the standard forms of *nomina sacra* for *Ἰησοῦς*, *Χριστός*, *πνεῦμα*, *πατήρ*, and *ἄνθρωπος* are regularly employed, $\overline{\kappa\epsilon}$ is used of Mani himself in 14. 4; this may explain why the form $\overline{\kappa\rho\varsigma}$ appears in 18. 11 when the reference is to the deity.

² The number symbolism is in itself sufficient to dispose of G. Rudberg's thesis (*Eranos* xiii (1913), pp. 156 ff.) that the system derives from documentary practice. Words may be slurred over in hastily written documents, but this led to no regular or systematic abbreviation; Christian manuscripts are not as a rule hastily or carelessly written and not infrequently a blank space surrounds the contracted *nomen sacrum* so that there is in effect no saving of space. Had saving either of time or space been the object, we should expect the system to be applied to the commonest words such as the definite article or the verb *to be*. To say with Rudberg that early Christian manuscripts are more akin to ostraca than to later manuscripts is very wide of the mark (Rudberg, quoted with approval by Paap, op. cit., p. 107 n. 12).

³ *Tau* as a symbol for the cross is found both in other Christian and in pagan (e.g. Lucian, *Δίκη Συμφώνων* 12) writings, but is never treated in any manuscript as a *nomen sacrum* for

explanation of the number as a novelty and this might suggest that the abbreviation was current before it was given a symbolic interpretation. The epistle, which was regarded as canonical in some circles, is ascribed by modern scholars to dates ranging from A.D. 70 to 130, while a date about A.D. 100 is generally favoured; it is reasonable to conclude that $\overline{\iota\eta}$ as a compendium for $\text{'I}\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ goes back if not to the Apostolic at least to the sub-Apostolic age. It is generally assumed that the Epistle is of Alexandrian origin, but unfortunately there is no proof of this. Could it be proved, it would be valuable testimony to the existence of orthodox Christianity near the turn of the century, that is, in the dark period of the Alexandrian Church.¹

It will be noticed that this compendium for $\text{'I}\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ is a suspension, not a contraction; that is, it is formed of the first two letters, not of the first and last, as indeed it had to be to give the required numerical value. Although the contracted form $\overline{\iota\epsilon}$ or $\overline{\iota\eta\epsilon}$ is far commoner and later became the only form used, the suspension $\overline{\iota\eta}$ is found in seven Christian papyri with forty-five instances in all.² One of them is the Egerton Gospel, the earliest Christian papyrus in which the name Jesus occurs (it does not come in the surviving fragment of the Rylands St. John) and another in the following century is the Chester Beatty Gospel and Acts.³ Early as the usage is, it does not follow that there was a development from suspension to contraction; the manuscript evidence for $\overline{\iota\epsilon}$ or $\overline{\iota\eta\epsilon}$ is nearly as early as that for $\overline{\iota\eta}$. $\overline{\iota\epsilon}$ is found in the Chester Beatty Numbers and Deuteronomy and then in P. Oxy. iii. 405⁴ and in the Bodmer St. John.⁵ The form $\overline{\iota\eta\epsilon}$ (which as the oblique cases indicate, is a

$\sigma\tau\alpha\upsilon\rho\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$; $\overline{\tau}$ = $\sigma\tau\alpha\upsilon\rho\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ would have invited confusion with $\overline{\tau}$ = $\tau\rho\iota\alpha\kappa\acute{\omicron}\sigma\iota\omicron\iota$. (The closest approximation is $\overline{\sigma\pi\iota}$ with the *tau* and *rho* in ligature, found occasionally from the third century onwards, cf. Paap, op. cit., p. 112). Thaw (Tau) as the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet has been thought to have apocalyptic significance, as does omega in Greek, e.g. in Ezekiel 9: 4 where it is the mark on the forehead of the elect. For Christians, however, it was the symbol, not of the End, but of the cross (see F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Magie und Mysticism*² (Leipzig, 1925), p. 109). In a discussion of the significance of Thaw in Ezekiel and other passages E. Dinkler in *Zt. f. Theol. u. Kirche* 48 (1951), pp. 118–77, regards its use as an *Eigentums- und Schutzzeichen* as the origin of $\sigma\pi\iota$; but given the general pattern of *nomina sacra* this is an unnecessary hypothesis. For a discussion of the different forms of abbreviating $\sigma\tau\alpha\upsilon\rho\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ and their frequency see K. Aland, *Studien zur Überlieferung des Neuen Testaments und seines Textes* (Berlin, 1967), pp. 173 ff.

¹ W. Bauer, for whose theory the Alexandrian origin of Barnabas would otherwise be an embarrassment, attempts unconvincingly to label it as Gnostic in tendency on the ground of its anti-Jewish attitude and allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament. It is hardly probable that an epistle recognised as Gnostic would have been accorded quasi-canonical status as it is e.g. in the Codex Sinaiticus where it is placed immediately after the Apocalypse; and a definition of Gnosticism as wide as Bauer's deprives the term of any definite meaning.

² See Paap, op. cit., p. 102.

³ H. 371.

⁴ H. 671.

⁵ H. 426.

contraction, not a suspension) also occurs in the Chester Beatty Numbers and Deuteronomy and in the Chester Beatty Gospels and Acts side by side with $\overline{\iota\eta}$; it may have been an intermediate form between $\overline{\iota\eta}$ and $\overline{\iota\epsilon}$. On present evidence the form $\overline{\chi\epsilon}$ for $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ is earlier than $\overline{\chi\rho}$ which is never found except in association with $\overline{\iota\eta}$ and then only in the Chester Beatty Gospels and Acts and in P. Oxy. viii. 1079.¹ There is thus no reason to think that with *nomina sacra* in general suspension is earlier than contraction. It seems then that there were two lines of development, the one owing something to number symbolism, the other, perhaps with an allusion to Alpha and Omega, taking the first and last letters. If, as looks probable enough, $\iota\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ was the first name to be treated as a *nomen sacrum*,² the abbreviation $\overline{\kappa\epsilon}$ for $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ would have been formed by analogy from it.³

More significant for our present purposes than this divergence of usage is the misuse of $\overline{\iota\epsilon}$ for $\iota\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ in the Chester Beatty Numbers and Deuteronomy where it is regularly used, together with the form $\overline{\iota\eta\epsilon}$, of Joshua. Its use for Jesus was so well established in the second half of the second century that to write it wherever the name occurred was second nature to the scribe. This again would seem to carry the system back to at least the turn of the century; it is worth noting that at any rate it antedates the full development of Christian scholarship in Alexandria.

It was remarked earlier that the use of the compendium for the four primary words— $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$, $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$, $\iota\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$, $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ —was for all practical purposes invariable. A nice exception that proves the rule is provided by a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus; on the back of an account of corn dated to the first half of the third century, some one wrote a hymn to the Trinity, otherwise unknown, with musical notation;⁴ here necessarily each syllable must be written out in full and in consequence $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ is

¹ H. 559. The form $\overline{\chi}$ recorded in a Strasburg liturgical text (= H. 998) of the fourth or fifth century (Paap, op. cit., p. 109) is replaced in C. del Grande's edition (*Liturgiae Preces Hymni Christianorum* (Naples, 1934), p. 6) by $\overline{\chi\nu}$: see Appendix V.

² Both the precedence of $\iota\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ over other *nomina sacra* and of the suspended form over the contracted may be implicit in a passage of Clement of Alexandria. He writes (*Strom.* 6. 278 ff.): $\phi\alpha\sigma\acute{\iota}\nu\ \omicron\upsilon\delta\acute{\nu}\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\acute{\omega}\ \mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \kappa\upsilon\rho\iota\alpha\kappa\omicron\upsilon\ \sigma\eta\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\pi\omicron\nu\ \kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}\ \tau\omicron\ \sigma\chi\acute{\eta}\mu\alpha\ \tau\omicron\ \tau\rho\iota\alpha\kappa\omicron\sigma\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\nu\ \sigma\tau\omicron\iota\chi\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$, $\tau\omicron\ \delta\acute{\epsilon}\ \iota\omega\tau\alpha\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \tau\omicron\ \eta\tau\alpha\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\acute{\omega}\nu\omicron\mu\alpha\ \sigma\eta\mu\alpha\acute{\iota}\nu\epsilon\iota\nu\ \tau\omicron\ \sigma\omega\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\omicron\nu$. The $\phi\alpha\sigma\acute{\iota}\nu\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota$ suggests that $\overline{\iota\eta}$ was no longer current in Clement's day. The editors of P. Lond. Christ. (p. 3) quote G. B. de Rossi (*Bull. di Arch. Crist.*, S. iv, vi. 37) to the effect that $\overline{\iota\eta}$ was in use from the Apostolic age onwards.

³ $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ is very occasionally suspended, but never in the second century; it is found in a few occasional texts (prayers and letters) and in the Berlin Genesis (= H. 4) where in six instances it was corrected; it also occurs once by what is clearly a scribal error in the Chester Beatty Gospels and Acts (see Paap, op. cit., p. 102).

⁴ P. Oxy. xv. 1786 = H. 962.

uncontracted.¹ The general principle can be best illustrated by the treatment of *Ἰησοῦς* when the reference is to Jesus. In 1959 Paap had noted¹ that, down to the end of the fifth century, in its sacral meaning it was found abbreviated 976 times in 76 sources as against 10 places in 9 sources where it was written in full. On inspection the exceptions are more apparent than real; three are prayers (private texts), three are magical and two amulets (not necessarily of Christian origin), one is a medical miscellany written for private use, while the last exception rests on an uncertain reading.² Thus there is no certain instance of the name in its sacral sense being left uncontracted in any text of the New Testament or indeed in any book as distinct from occasional and private papers.³

One might reasonably expect that the earliest group of Christian papyri—those listed above on pp. 13–14 as assignable to the second century—would throw some light on the origin and development of the system. At first glance the results are disappointing; with two exceptions, no. 4 of which more than fifty leaves or parts of leaves survive and no. 11 with sixty lines, the earliest papyri are very fragmentary and in no less than five out of fourteen there is no occurrence of a *nomen sacrum*. *θεός*, *κύριος*, *Ἰησοῦς*, *Χριστός* are regularly contracted;⁴ *πνεῦμα* is found once and correctly contracted in no. 8 and incorrectly in no. 4. The contraction of *πατήρ* in the sacral sense goes back to the second century, witness nos. 11 and 13; it has perhaps some claim to be regarded as one of the original group. Later on usage becomes irregular and often inconsistent, especially in sub-literary or non-literary texts such as prayers and letters, but this is hardly surprising with a word so often employed in a purely secular sense. Evidence for the early contraction of *ἄνθρωπος* can be found in no. 4; on the

¹ Op. cit., p. 107.

² In P. Oxy. ix. 1170 (= H. 357), a papyrus codex of Matthew of the late fourth or fifth century A. S. Hunt read in ll. 32–3 [οτε ετελεσεν ο Ιη|σους δι]ατ[ασ]σων. But to read [οτε ετελεσεν ο | ιης δι]ατ[ασ]σων would suit the spacing better; similarly in l. 42 ιη̄ς̄ ει]πεν would fit as well as ιησουσ̄ ει]πεν, particularly when it is remembered that a small space was often left before and after a contraction. In l. 38 [ω τα ερ]γα τ̄οῡ χ̄ρι[σ]τ̄οῡ the papyrus (now Bodl. MS. Gr. bibl. d. 6 (P)), is all but illegible, but to assume a reading $\overline{\chi\rho\nu}$ would result in too short a line.

³ In his list of *nomina sacra* in third-century texts of the New Testament O'Callaghan (see p. 26 n. 1) cites one instance of *Ἰησοῦς* written out from the Bodmer codex of Luke and John (= H. 406) at John 6: 11. The *ed. pr.* here reads ο ι]η[σ]ου[σ] και ευχαριστησα]ς [δι]εδω on which the editors commented *lectio valde dubia; alibi undique compendio utitur librarius*. The photograph suggests that the correct reading here may be ο ι[ης κ]αι ευχαριστησας] δ[ι]εδω; the tip of the kappa in this hand is very like that of upsilon, and the abrasion of the surface would remove any traces of the suprascript line above.

⁴ In n. 12, the Michigan fragment of *The Shepherd*, we find *θεον* [*sic*]; this is probably a scribal error since considerations of space make it certain that *κύριος* was contracted.

other hand, the earliest instance of the contraction of *υίός* is in the Chester Beatty Pauline Epistles¹ and the Bodmer St. John,² the only second-century text in which the word occurs in a sacral sense being no. 8 where it is uncontracted. That conveniently careless penman, the scribe of no. 4, quite incorrectly contracts *Ἰσραήλ*; hence we can again infer that the correct use of this compendium is older than the papyrus, and it is likely that what goes for *Ἰσραήλ* would also go for *Δαυείδ*. Here there may be an important clue to the origin of the system.

More evidence on this point comes from no. 11, the Egerton Gospel in the British Library. Side by side with the familiar compendia are three that are unique: $\overline{M\omega} = M\omega\ddot{\upsilon}\sigma\eta\varsigma$, $\overline{H[\Sigma A \Sigma]} = \text{'}\overline{H\sigma\alpha\iota\tau\alpha\varsigma}$, $\overline{ΠΡΟΦΑΣ} = \text{προφήτας}$,³ and one not unique but very rare, $\overline{ΒΑΛΕΥ[\Sigma I]} = \text{βασιλευσι}$.⁴ In any period there are very occasional eccentric forms, most of which occur once only and then usually in a badly written manuscript, the result of the misunderstanding or vagaries of a particular scribe;⁵ but both the early date and the connectedness of this group set them apart. It seems to represent an experimental phase in the history of the system when its limits were not clearly established, though the basic words were; $\overline{M\omega}$ is clearly formed on the analogy of \overline{IH} . By the end of the second century the list had been pruned and effectively closed.

One word that appears to be a late addition to the list and whose absence from the earliest texts may be significant is *σωτήρ*.⁶ As a title of Jesus in the New Testament it is confined to

¹ = H. 497.

² = H. 426.

³ *επροφσεν* (l. 55) clearly derives from the compendium for *προφήτης* just as $\overline{\sigma\rho\theta\eta}$ in the Bodmer St. John does from $\overline{\sigma\rho\varsigma}$.

⁴ For two other instances, one in a Greek, the other in a Coptic manuscript, the one of the fourth century, the other of the seventh or eighth, see Paap, *op. cit.*, p. 114. The former has been claimed as a Jewish text (see above, p. 33 n. 4), but the Christian associations of the contraction tell against the hypothesis. This occasional treatment of *βασιλεύς* as a *nomen sacrum* may have been inspired by Rev. 19: 16 where the Word of God has written on his robe and on his thigh the title *βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων*.

⁵ Subsequently to those noted by Paap, *op. cit.*, pp. 114–15 the publication of P. Bodmer vii and viii has yielded $\overline{Μιχαήλ}$, $\overline{νωε}$, $\overline{\sigma\alpha\rho\rho\alpha}$ and $\overline{\alpha\beta\rho\alpha\alpha\mu}$ while P. Bodmer xiii has added $\overline{\alpha\delta\alpha\mu}$, $\overline{\delta\upsilon\omega}$, $\overline{\delta\upsilon\omega\omega}$, $\overline{\delta\upsilon\omega\iota}$ and $\overline{\alpha\beta\rho\mu}$. The last group apart, these are not abbreviations and the supra-script line may indicate not so much a *nomen sacrum* as the presence of a non-Greek word. The scribe of P. Bodmer vii and viii was both amateurish (as his hand makes evident) and ignorant, and not much importance should be attached to his practice. This group of Bodmer manuscripts—v, vii, viii, xi, and xiii—in which at least two scribes were involved have an exceptional number of unusual forms of the regular *nomina sacra*. $\overline{\alpha\gamma\omega\omega}$ $\overline{\pi\omega\iota}$ in P. Bodmer xii (which, unlike the editor, I should not attribute to the scribe of vii, viii, and xi) may well be accidental (but see Paap, *op. cit.*, p. 124). Of more interest (see below, p. 40 n. 3) is the form $\overline{\iota\chi\theta\upsilon\varsigma}$ in the Coptic codex iii. 2 from Nag Hammadi (ed. A. Böhlig and F. Wisse (Leiden, 1975), p. 166) to which I know of no parallel; here the line must denote a *nomen sacrum*.

⁶ O'Callaghan (*op. cit.*, p. 79) in his analysis of the compendia found in third-century texts of the New Testament observes that no compendium of this word occurs; but it is relevant that all the instances bar one are secular.

the Pauline and Lukan writings apart from one passage in the Fourth Gospel and several in the late second epistle of Peter; its strong pagan associations would have made it distasteful to Jewish Christians and later the use of it by Gnostic sects to designate the divine liberator from the evil powers of this world may have restricted its employment in other circles.

The question of why some theological terms, the inevitable four apart, were selected for this treatment and others ignored has attracted little attention.¹ The list is limited to proper names and nouns, in two cases with their associated adjectives and in one with a verb;² but even so there are some surprising omissions. Why should *λόγος* or even *σοφία* be excluded? More striking still is the omission of the eucharistic words *αἷμα*, *ἄρτος*, *οἶνος*, *σάρξ*, *σῶμα*, an omission that was sometimes felt as can be seen from the Chester Beatty Pauline Epistles of the early third century in which at Hebrews 9: 13 a line is placed above *αἷμα*, though the word itself is not contracted.³

The omission of these words and of *λόγος* points to a very early date for the list and to an area where Pauline and Johannine influence had not penetrated. Yet another pointer in the same direction may be the presence of *ἄνθρωπος* in the list at an early date. It is found in the Chester Beatty Numbers and Deuteronomy, once again in a secular sense which implies that its use as a sacral term is earlier. Gnostic usage apart, it must owe its position to the title of Jesus as Son of Man, employed by the evangelists only in reporting sayings of Jesus. It has been suggested that in the original Aramaic it may have carried no particular significance;⁴ it seems likely that the *nomen sacrum*, whether or no based on a misunderstanding, goes back to the translations into Greek of Aramaic Gospels or sayings. For our present purpose what is significant is that the title is of Jewish origin, is never found in St. Paul, and disappears as a title relatively soon.

¹ The question is raised but no answer advanced by O'Callaghan (op. cit., p. 27, n. 28), who asks why only fifteen were selected and why these fifteen; he draws attention to the illogicality of not treating *βασιλεύς* as a *nomen sacrum* in an expression such as *ὁ βασιλεύς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ* where *Ἰσραήλ* is a *nomen sacrum* only by virtue of *βασιλεύς* (see above, p. 33, n. 4). In this context it is worth noting that both *βασιλεύς* and *Μωϋσῆς* (whose omission from the list is singled out by O'Callaghan) are found contracted in the Egerton Gospel.

² *χριστός* → *χριστιανός*, *πνεῦμα* → *πνευματικός*, *σταυρός* → *σταυρώω* (and compounds), *προφήτης* → *προφητεύω* (both in the Egerton Gospel only).

³ For a few other instances including *ἰχθύς* (fourth century) and *σάρξ* (seventh century) see Paap, op. cit., p. 114.

⁴ Cf. G. Vermes' appendix to M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*³ (Oxford, 1967), pp. 310-30, cited and discussed by C. H. Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity* (London, 1971), pp. 110-13.

Behind the list, at any rate as composed of the four primary words with *πνεῦμο*, *πατήρ*, *ἄνθρωπος*, *Ἰσραήλ* and probably *Δαυείδ*, *σταυρός*, *υἱός* lies a quite unmistakable, if implicit, theology. The character of this theology, its source, and the authority on which it rests call for a brief scrutiny. The problem of authority has been succinctly stated by T. C. Skeat:¹ 'The significant fact', he writes, 'is that the introduction of the *nomina sacra* seems to parallel very closely the adoption of the papyrus codex; and it is remarkable that this development should have taken place at about the same time as the great outburst of critical activity among Jewish scholars which led to the standardization of the text of the Hebrew Bible. It is no less remarkable that this seems to indicate a degree of organization, of conscious planning, and uniformity of practice among the Christian communities which we have hitherto had little reason to suspect and which throws a new light on the early history of the Church.' It is worth bearing in mind Ulrich Wilcken's comment, made more than sixty years ago, that the *nomina sacra* were the spontaneous invention of an individual who was looking for an outward form to separate the holy words in Biblical manuscripts from the rest of the text and for this reason made a deliberate and conscious attempt to avoid ordinary methods of writing.² Wilcken's view has sometimes been dismissed as an explanation that explains nothing, but it is rash to dismiss the considered judgment of a scholar whose wide historical perspective was matched with such detailed knowledge of the documents of the Hellenistic world.

The profound religious significance of the Name as denoting equally the person and the power of him who bears it is evident enough in the New Testament.³ We may think, for example, not only of the famous passage in Philippians 2: 9—'that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow'—but more particularly of the stress laid on the Name in Luke's account of the primitive community in Jerusalem.⁴ In the present context some passages in the Apocalypse are directly relevant, e.g. 7: 1-4 where the servants of God are sealed with the Name on their foreheads, and 14: 1 where the names are those of the Lamb and his Father;

¹ In 'Early Christian Book Production' in the *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ii, pp. 72-3.

² L. Mitteis-U. Wilcken, *Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyrusurkunden* (Leipzig, 1912), i, pp. xliv-v. T. C. Skeat (op. cit., p. 72) is inclined to attribute the invention of the papyrus codex as a vehicle for Christian manuscripts as well as that of the *nomina sacra* to some 'dominating genius at work in the field of the earliest Christian literature'.

³ In addition to the passages cited below cf., e.g., John 17: 12 and for the identity of name and person I Clement 59, 3.

⁴ Acts, 1-7.

again in 19: 1–6 the Word of God has written on him ‘a name known to none but himself’ and on his robe and thigh were written King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Such sealings or *χαρακτῆρες* were composed, as were often names on coins, of the initial two or three letters,¹ and these passages about ‘sealing with the Name’ may well presuppose the existence of $\overline{\iota\eta}$ or $\overline{\iota\eta\varsigma}$. Indeed the Apocalypse may have been written after the system was established.

In the next two generations the significance of the Name was yet further emphasized. Speculations on Christ as the Name, i.e. the Tetragrammaton, were current in Christian Jewish circles in Egypt if, as seems likely, the apocryphal letter of James is of Egyptian provenance.² In Rome Hermas (whose book, *The Shepherd*, was much read in Egypt) wrote: ‘the Tower (i.e. the Church) has been founded by the utterance of the almighty and glorious Name’.³ This particular emphasis is characteristic of, though not confined to, Jewish-Christian theology; thus Cardinal Daniélou, observing that ‘the Name . . . was for the primitive Christian community a designation of Christ as Word of God incarnate’ goes on to point out that the Gospel of Truth (a second-century homily that may be an early work of the Egyptian Gnostic Valentinus) is yet more explicit, ‘now the Name of the Father is the Son’.⁴

Where are theological conceptions such as these first likely to have been given symbolic form in manuscripts? Alexandria has been suggested as a focal point of Jewish mysticism and as a centre, if not *the* centre of the Graeco-Roman book trade, perhaps too because our earliest surviving Christian manuscripts come from Egypt, though this is but the accident of survival. None the less, I think the case for Alexandria can be dismissed. Early Christian writers had little to do with the international book trade; more to the point, it is hard to credit that a church as relatively obscure as that of Alexandria seems to have been in the first century or so of its existence, with no great name recorded in the annals of the sub-Apostolic age, could have exercised so powerful and lasting an influence throughout the

¹ For the abbreviation of the Tetragrammaton on Jewish coins see M. Delcor, loc. cit.

² See G. Quispel, *Gnostic Studies* (Istanbul, 1974/5), II, p. 229, referring to L. Cerfaux in *Recueil L. Cerfaux* (Paris, 1954), vol. ii, pp. 125–58.

³ *Sim.* ix. 14. 3: *Vis.* iii. 3. 1. These passages are cited by R. M. Grant in *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York, 1959), p. 67. He further points out that in Hermas’ theology the Son of God is identified with the Holy Spirit, the Name of God, and the Law of God; he sees in these passages the influence of early Jewish mysticism leading through Valentinian speculations in due course to Gnostic heresies (cf. also Quispel, op. cit., i, p. 208).

⁴ *Primitive Christian Symbols* (English translation (London, 1964)), p. 142.

Greek Christian world.¹ A further argument against an Alexandrian origin is that in Coptic manuscripts only the four basic words, together occasionally with *πατήρ* and *πνεῦμα* are abbreviated, more or less as in Latin. Had the system been of Alexandrian origin we would have expected the Coptic church to have followed the Greek practice, but it did not. Again, while I believe it a mistake to hold, as many scholars do, that down to the middle of the second century or beyond the Egyptian Church was essentially Gnostic (and hence the silence in our authorities), yet Gnosticism was undoubtedly very influential; why then are there no specifically Gnostic *nomina sacra* (we might think of Buthos, Pleroma, or Phaos) and why are the Old Testament terms such as Israel and David included? When we first meet with actual Gnostic texts, their writers accept the established *nomina sacra* and do not add to them; this is intelligible if they originated outside Egypt and go back to the first century.

Rome as the source of the *nomina sacra* is even less plausible than Alexandria. It is not just that the compendium for *Christus* appears in Latin manuscripts in its Greek, not a Latin dress—this might be put down, if unconvincingly, to the influence of Greek on the liturgy of the Roman church; it is much more that our earliest Latin Christian manuscripts either do not employ *nomina sacra* or do so in an uncertain or irregular fashion. Later the contraction of the four primary words became well established; but in the oldest of these manuscripts, a leaf from a liturgical codex,² *pater* and *dominus* are twice written in full. In others, for example in a Latin version of Exodus from Egypt,³ contracted and uncontracted forms of *deus* and *dominus* are found side by side, while in the Psalmus Responsorius in Barcelona⁴ we find the forms *iesum* and *dei* together with five other *nomina sacra* written out with no suprascript line; and whereas *πατήρ* and *σταυρός* are among the early Greek *nomina sacra* the contraction of *pater* and *crux* is unknown to Latin manuscripts. Equally, as C. H. Turner has noted,⁵ in all the older Gospel manuscripts even Israel, David, and Jerusalem

¹ A possible exception would be Barnabas (see above, p. 36); the evidence for St. Mark's association with Alexandria is too late to be relevant here (above, p. 59).

² P. Ryl. iii. 472 = H. 1211.

³ P.S.I. xii. 1272 = H. 1203.

⁴ = H. 1210; cf. also P.S.I. xiii, 1300 (= H. 1208), a Graeco-Latin text of Ephesians (= H. 523) and P. Oxy. xviii. 2193 and 2194; for the practice of the Codex Bezae see E. A. Lowe, *Palaeographical Papers* (Oxford, 1972) i, pp. 226–7.

⁵ 'The *Nomina Sacra* in Early Latin MSS' in *Miscellanea Ehrle* iv (= *Studi e Testi*, 40 (Rome, 1924), p. 64. Writing before the discovery of the Latin fragments from Egypt mentioned above, Turner remarks that the only *nomina sacra* 'which in Latin are everywhere and always abbreviated are the four primary words (*deus, dominus, Iesus, Christus*). And nowhere and never

are invariably written in full, whether in the Old Latin or the Vulgate version. There can be no doubt that the system was originally alien to western Christendom and was not fully accepted, and then only with limitations, until the fifth century. Rome does not provide the answer for which we are looking.

The long historical contacts between Palestine and Egypt and the close religious associations between Alexandria and Jerusalem need no emphasis; but in themselves they are not sufficient to make it plausible that the system of *nomina sacra* originated in Jerusalem and thence spread to Egypt and everywhere where Greek was written.¹ There are more compelling reasons which point in this direction. Recent studies of the primitive Christian Church in Jerusalem, for which our principal source is Acts 2: 41–5: 42, and which grew out of the Jewish Hellenistic community, have drawn attention to the emphasis it laid on the Name of Jesus. L. Cerfaux has detected² what he describes as a rudimentary theology of the Name which has left its traces in early Christian literature; the position of the Apostles was that of dispensers of the power of the Name, the name of God and that of Jesus being realities equivalent and convertible.³ This, in his view, determined the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament, every verse in the messianic passages where the Name occurred being carefully noted. Similarly J. Daniélou has emphasized the importance of the Name in Jewish-Christian theology; the Name was identified with the Messiah and so with Jesus.⁴ It is a reasonable assumption that once the Gospel was put into writing in any form

in the early documents with which we are dealing are abbreviations found for *pater* or *mater*, to say nothing of *caelum* or *homo*, *crux* or *salvator*. Even *Israel*, *David*, and *Hierusalem* are always written in full in all our older Gospel MSS, whether of the Old Latin or the Vulgate'. Latin practice incidentally provides clear support for the division of the *nomina sacra* into two classes, primary and secondary.

¹ Antioch, where the name Christian was first used (Acts, 11: 26) might call for consideration were there any grounds for associating it with Alexandria and Egyptian Jewry.

² 'La première Communauté chrétienne' in *Recueil L. Cerfaux*, ser. 4, vol. ii, pp. 125 ff.; he suggests (p. 155) that Luke's account in these chapters derives from a separate written source. The theology of the Name is not, of course, peculiar to the primitive Jerusalem church, as Phil. 2: 9 and other Pauline passages demonstrate, but its beginnings may have been there.

³ See above pp. 41–2.

⁴ In his *History of Early Christian Doctrine I: Theology of Jewish Christianity* (English translation, J. A. Baker, London, 1964), esp. pp. 147 ff. In Daniélou's view the designation of Christ as the Name was 'one of the essential aspects of Jewish Christianity'; he sees this Jewish Christianity as Essene in character and as such opposed to Jewish orthodoxy with which James, an observant of the Law, was in sympathy; and to Essene Christians, in part at least, should be attributed the foundation of the Church of Alexandria some time after A.D. 70.

Not all the strands of evidence for these views are equally strong: e.g., unless we accept the wildly improbable view that the Qumran scrolls are Christian in origin there is nothing to support the statement that χ was used as a symbol of $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ in early times. For our present

some written emphasis on the Name followed naturally; and the treatment of the *nomina sacra* in the early papyri of the Old Testament corresponds to the attitude taken to it, according to these scholars, in the early communities.

We have already noted that Egyptian Christianity had a strong Jewish strain in it, a strain that persisted as the popularity of Hermas and of the Gospel of Thomas indicates.¹ In any case Jerusalem would have been the natural *fons et origo* of Egyptian Christianity, and it is not surprising that the *nomina sacra* found in our earliest papyri have a strongly Jewish flavour.² Israel and David established themselves early in what became the second category; more significant, perhaps, is the occurrence in the Egerton Gospel of Moses and Isaiah as *nomina sacra*. In the Qumran texts the Messiah is regarded as being a second Moses; what has been called the Moses typology is characteristic of Jewish Christianity which looks to Moses as the exemplar just as the universalist theology of St. Paul looks to Abraham. It may not be an accident that Pauline texts are not found in the earliest group with the single exception—if it is an exception—of the epistle to Titus.

W. D. Davies has suggested³ that the faith was carried to Alexandria by Jewish Christians from Palestine, that is by the Christian community under the leadership of James (which he distinguishes both from the Ebionite ascetics and from Jewish Christians in general), and argues that to them the synagogue tradition was of great importance. As we have already remarked, the system of *nomina sacra* presupposes a degree of control and organization; the Jewish tradition of the synagogue *lector*, purposes it makes little difference whether it was Essene Christians or followers of James who brought Christianity to Egypt: but I find it hard to credit that no move was made until after A.D. 70 and that the kind of authority required to lay down the guidelines for Christian scribes could have issued from anywhere except the circle of the apostles or their immediate successors.

Daniélou's view (op. cit., p. 52) that the Church in Alexandria was submerged in the Jewish colony and consequently shared in its sufferings has much in its favour (see below, pp. 45 ff.).

See also R. N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (London, 1970), p. 17 for the identification of the Name with Jesus.

¹ As late as the fourth century we hear of a Christian of Oxyrhynchus going to church on the Sabbath (P. Oxy. vi. 903), a practice later visited with punishment (see H. Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila* (Oxford, 1976), p. 75, n. 4).

² The use of the suprascript line above certain Old Testament names in P. Bodmer vii and viii (see above, p. 39, n. 5) might be thought to point to Jewish influence were it not that the scribe is so palpably amateurish; thus, while he normally contracts *κύριος* on one occasion he writes *κυριω θεω* (*sic*).

³ In *Paul and Jewish Christianity in Judéo-christianisme . . . Hommages . . . J. Daniélou* (Paris, 1972), pp. 69 ff. If the reading of Codex Bezae at Acts 18: 25 which adds *ἐν τῇ πατρίδι τοῦ κατηχημένου* is accepted, Apollos was instructed in Alexandria before his meeting with Paul (cf. B. M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament* (Oxford, 1977), p. 99).

the great care taken in writing and preserving the rolls of the Law, the institution of the Geniza, if carried over in a modified form to Jewish Christianity, would explain much about our earliest Christian manuscripts from Egypt.

Seen in this perspective the *nomina sacra* may be plausibly viewed as the creation of the primitive Christian community, representing what might be regarded as the embryonic creed of the first Church; the four primary terms (as they later became) together with *πατήρ*, *σταυρός*, and *πνεῦμα* represent the beliefs common to all Christians, some of the others the particular Jewish strain in the Jerusalem church.

That the *nomina sacra* are found in our earliest papyri suggests that the form of belief they enshrine, contrasting in some respects with Pauline Christianity, persisted in Alexandria well after A.D. 70. They would thus belong to the oldest stratum of the Christian faith and may well be contemporary with the first authorized or authoritative Christian writing. The establishment of the practice would not have been left to the whims of a single community, still less to that of an individual scribe. Everything would fall into place were we to assume that the guidelines for the treatment of the sacred names had been laid down by the Church at Jerusalem, probably before A.D. 70; they would carry the authority of the leaders of the Church as the first Gospels must have done. The system was too complex for the ordinary scribe to operate without either rules or an authoritative exemplar; otherwise the difficulty of determining which was a secular, which a sacred usage would have been considerable even in a small community.

Two other questions remain to which only the most tentative answers can be given. Was *Ἰησοῦς* as a *nomen sacrum* prior to *κύριος* or *θεός* and, if so, what was the form of the compendium? That the form $\overline{\iota\eta}$ is so early suggests that it did not derive from $\overline{\kappa\epsilon}$ as $\overline{\iota\epsilon}$ might have done; they could have developed independently, but the authority behind them must have been the same and the argument from theology would support the priority of *Ἰησοῦς*. I suspect that the original form was $\overline{\iota\eta\kappa}$ or $\overline{\iota\epsilon}$ and that $\overline{\iota\eta}$ was devised to suit the number symbolism by which the particular passage in Genesis and possibly others too were interpreted.¹

¹ For the application of number symbolism to *Ἰησοῦς* see F. Dornseiff, *op. cit.* (cf. p. 36), pp. 130–31; the numerical value of the Name was 888, the separate letters standing for 8, 10, 200, 70, 400, 200. From a different standpoint it was regarded as a perfect name, 888 being composed of eight units, eight tens, and eight hundreds.

F. Doelger has pointed out (*IXΘΥΣΙ** (Munich, 1928), p. 356) that the passage in Barnabas

The second question is the more important and the more difficult. Are we to regard the all but universal adoption of the papyrus codex as the vehicle for the sacred books of Christianity and the invention and imposition of the system of *nomina sacra* as two quite separate developments, one hailing from Rome,¹ the other from Jerusalem? A good case can be made out for associating the use of the codex with Rome (and of Roman influence on the Church of Alexandria at a later date there can be no doubt); but a single source for the two would certainly be an economic hypothesis, and the alternative is that the papyrus codex originated in the tablets on which the oral law in Judaism, as distinct from the Torah, was recorded.² It is, however, a long step from the writing tablet to the papyrus codex as we know it at the beginning of the second century. *Non liquet.*

In form the *nomina sacra* cannot be explained as imitative of or even adapted from either Greek or Jewish scribal practice; they no more resemble the abbreviations or symbols in Greek documents or literary texts than they do the Jewish treatment of the Tetragrammaton. Like so much in early Christianity, they are *sui generis*. In intention they are strictly religious; the reverence for the Name derives from the Jewish background, as does much else in primitive Christianity. The combination of old and new is characteristic; we might instance the adoption of the Old Testament as basic Christian texts together with their translation into the form, that of the codex, already established for the new writings of the new religion. The attitude of mind that they express, somewhere on the borderline between religion and magic, while essentially Jewish, also looks forward to later developments in Catholic Christianity. They are a unique device that in the minimum of space provides a summary outline of theology. It has been suggested that they constitute a cryptographic system,³ but for this they are too simple and too open and where cryptography was the object, Christians could do better than this, as the *sator—opera—rotas—tenet* formula is echoed both by Clement of Alexandria and by Hippolytus. He would attribute the abbreviation of the names *Ἰησοῦς* and *Χριστός* to the fact that they are both very common words (hardly an adequate explanation) and would derive the usage from Gnostic speculations on the names; in the middle of the second century the Marcosians (followers of Marcus, a disciple of Valentinus) equated *Ἰησοῦς* with iota, this being a perfect letter composed of 1+2+3+4, though no suprascript line was attached. (For the Marcosians see Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* (ed. Harvey) 18, 12, p. 192.)

¹ See T. C. Skeat in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ii, pp. 73 ff., and the present writer in id. i, pp. 58-9.

² See the present writer in *The Codex* (*Proc. Brit. Acad.* 40 (1956), pp. 178, 188.

³ So A. Blanchard, op. cit., p. 18. But would $\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ for $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ or $\iota\eta\varsigma$ for *Ἰησοῦς* deceive anyone?

witnesses. At the same time their full meaning was only apparent to the faithful to whose attention it was brought whenever the sacred books, whether of the Old Testament or of those that later became the New, were read.

If this argument is sound, their significance for the history of the early Church is greater than has hitherto been appreciated. Cardinal Daniélou has observed¹ that the study of Jewish-Christian symbols supported by archaeological discoveries has made possible the writing of a new page in the history of Christianity in that obscure period that lies between the beginnings recorded in the Pauline Epistles and the Acts of the Apostles and the Church as we find it in the second century. To that page the *nomina sacra* contribute a footnote of some theological importance and at the same time shed some illumination, however sparse, on the dark period of the Church in Egypt.

¹ *Les Symboles chrétiens primitifs* (Eng. trans., D. Attwath (London, 1964), p. viii).