



THE "SATOR-FORMULA" INSCRIBED ON ROMAN WALL-PLASTER FROM CIRENCESTER.

THE SATOR-FORMULA AND THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIANITY.

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IN the mysterious region where religion, superstition, and magic meet, where words, numbers, and letters are believed, if properly combined, to exert power over the processes of nature, the so-called Sator-formula has long occupied a distinguished place. It is not the purpose of this paper to trace its history through the later centuries of antiquity, the Middle Ages, or the modern world, nor to explain how the five words which it contains became the names of the five nails of the Crucifixion, of the four (or three) Shepherds who worshipped the new-born Christ, or of the three Magi, still less to enquire into the reasons for its efficacy in modern times against the bites of dogs or snakes, or in promoting easy child-birth.¹

But in a time when the increasing specialisation of learned research renders it difficult for discoveries in one field to become known to those best able to profit by them, it seems permissible to draw attention, in a journal circulating widely among those

¹ The Bibliography of the Sator-formula is immense. It will suffice here to refer to some recent treatments, the knowledge of which I owe to the brief discussion contained in *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters. Preliminary Report of Fifth Season of Work 1931-32*, p. 159 f, and *ibid.*, *Sixth Season 1932-33*, p. 486. (1) Cabrol-Le Clerq. "Dict. Arch. Chrétienne" I. 2. (1907), p. 1809 f. (2) Dornseiff "Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie," 2nd edition (1925), p. 79 and 179. (3) *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* XXIV (1926), p. 165 f. (Grosser, *Ein neuer Vorschlag zur Deutung der Sator-Formel*). (4) *Gnomon*, vol. VI (1930), p. 365 (review by O. Weinreich of Dornseiff with discussion of Grosser). (5) Dölger *IXΘΥΣ*, vol. V (1932), p. 57 f. (6) *Recherches de Science religieuse*, vol. XXV (1935), p. 188 f. (Jerphanion; *La Formule magique Sator Arepo ou Rotas Opera*).

interested in the early history of Christianity, to two recent accessions to our knowledge of this formula, and to suggest some of the directions in which further advances may be made as a result of them.

The formula itself appears in two forms, as Jerphanion seems to have been the first to point out, an earlier and a later. Both consist of a square formed of five words each of five letters, which are such that they form the same sentence whichever way they are read. Thus :—

(1) ROTAS	(2) SATOR
OPERA	AREPO
TENET	TENET
AREPO	OPERA
SATOR	ROTAS

Until ten years ago the only known example of the first type was that incised on a fragment of wall-plaster from a Roman house at Cirencester, Glos.² Though this was discovered in 1868 and has been frequently published, its Roman origin and its date (not later than the fourth century A.D.) has not been generally accepted, and Dornseiff³ still regarded as the oldest example of the formula a Coptic papyrus of the fourth or fifth century A.D.⁴ This latter and apparently all later examples belong to arrangement 2 above.

The first of the two new discoveries referred to above is that of Grosser, published in 1926.⁵ In attempting to explain the formula by means of an anagram Grosser discovered that "from the twenty-five letters the first words of the latin Lord's Prayer PATERNOSTER can be twice composed, but in such a way that the letter N as the only once-appearing middle letter is used as the middle point." This implies the arrangement in the form of a cross. There remain four letters, two As and two Os. Thus the arrangement imposes itself as follows :

² The fragment is now in the Cirencester museum, to the authorities of which I am much indebted for permission to publish the new photograph reproduced as frontispiece to this article.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 50, 179.

⁴ Cf. Dölger, *op. cit.*, p. 58, n. 3.

⁵ Cf. footnote 1 above, no. 3.

A
P
A
T
E
R
O
S
T
E
R
O

A P A T E R N O S T E R O

Such an explanation of the origin of the formula is not susceptible of proof. If it is to be accepted it must be on account of its inherent plausibility. This, in my opinion, it possesses in a very high degree. My mathematical friends tell me that the chances against the fortuitous occurrence of so striking a combination are exceedingly high: certainly none of the anagrams previously suggested—which must, if this is the real origin, be fortuitous—possess much claim to credence;⁶ and the explanation has been accepted by those who have written on the subject more recently, Weinreich, Dornseiff, Rostovtzeff, Jerphanion, Della Corte. Dölger is, as far as I know, alone in rejecting it.⁷

In the 1931-1932 season of excavation at Dura no less than four examples of the formula (all of arrangement (1) above) were discovered. Three were scratched on wall-plaster, one

⁶ For a considerable collection of them see Jerphanion footnote 1, above, no 6, p. 221f. The most ingenious is that published by Graf. K. von Hardenberg in 1924, PETRO ET REO PATET ROSA SARONA. (The Rose of Sharon stands open for Peter, guilty though he be.)

⁷ His comment may be quoted: "Ich sehe nicht ein, was damit gewonnen wäre. Die Sator-Formel ist ein Palindrom und weiter nichts. Ich denke, das magische Quadrat kostete schon Mühe genug. Aus dem Text noch einmal ein Rätsel zu machen und damit dem findigen Kopf noch mehr Ruhm zu verleihen, ist überflüssig." This scepticism, however, does not prevent him from returning to the attempt to make sense of the words, which he translates, "Der Sämann hält den Plug, der Arbeiter die Räder," and assigning a Celtic origin to the word *Arepo*, which following many earlier scholars he connects with *arepennis* (said by Columella to mean *semitugerum*).

painted on it.⁸ All were found in rooms attached to the temple of Azzanathkona, but these rooms were early in the third century diverted to military uses. One of the graffiti was found on the outside wall of a room which contained numerous papyri relating to the Roman garrison, the other three in an adjacent room, and Professor Rostovtzeff has no hesitation in regarding all of them as the work of soldiers.

Here, then, apparently for the first time were examples of the formula belonging definitely to the classical period, and dated definitely to the first half of the third century. The find seemed clearly to increase the plausibility of Grosser's explanation, and greatly to increase the historical interest of the formula. It may be convenient to quote a passage from Professor Rostovtzeff's note,⁹ "If Grosser is right, and the *sator* square is a Christian cryptogram—and I believe it is very difficult to disprove the interpretation of Grosser—then the Dura squares acquire a great importance for the history of Christianity. It must be noted first and foremost, that our three¹⁰ dipinti and graffiti are the most ancient representatives of the square: the oldest hitherto known was a magic papyrus of the fourth century A.D."¹¹ Furthermore, we ought not to forget that the square occurs at Dura in a place which was occupied by soldiers and that consequently it was written in all probability by one of them. It appears, therefore, that there were many Christians among the soldiers of the Dura garrison at the beginning of the third century A.D. These soldiers, during the periods of persecution, carefully concealed their allegiance to the new religion and used *cryptogram* instead of regular monogram of the name of Christ. It seems that the contention of Grosser, who thinks that the formula was first invented by the Christians in time of persecution, is fully supported by our copies of the *sator* square."

⁸ Dura; Prelim. Ref. V., p. 159; Pl. xxvii, 2: VI, p. 486.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, V, p. 160.

¹⁰ The fourth graffito was deciphered too late for inclusion in the fifth and is published in the sixth Report.

¹¹ Professor Rostovtzeff adds a footnote referring to the Cirencester square as "contemporary and palæographically similar." The Cirencester square, like the Dura examples, but in contrast with the papyrus, has arrangement (1), so that, in fact, the similarity is with the Dura examples and the Cirencester square must be earlier than the papyrus.

The second of the discoveries which form the subject of this paper was made earlier than those at Dura. The excavations at Pompeii in 1925 uncovered an incomplete example of the formula in arrangement (1). This was deciphered by M. Della Corte and published by him in 1929.¹² In its imperfect state, it is not surprising that the real character of the graffito at first passed unrecognised by Dr. Della Corte. The subsequent publication, however, of the Dura examples, and the reference made to the discovery of Grosser, revealed to him the importance of his find. He discussed the immediate implications of it in an article in the *Giornale d'Italia*,¹³ in which he pointed out how this discovery confirmed the view held by De Rossi as long ago as 1862, that a Christian community existed at Pompeii before its destruction in A.D. 79. It does not appear, however, that Dr. Della Corte's discovery has become widely known among students of early Christianity,¹⁴ and so it seems permissible to bring it to the notice of readers of the *Bulletin*, and to suggest some conclusions to which it would appear to lead.

The existence of only one N among the twenty-five letters of the rebus imposes the arrangement of the original formula as given by Grosser,¹⁵ and this in turn necessarily implies that it was inscribed upon a cross. This use of a cross, therefore, so inscribed, as a Christian amulet must be assumed as current in Christian circles at a very early period. For although the persecution referred to by Professor Rostovtzeff is now seen to be far too late, his hypothesis, following Grosser, that the transformation from the patently intelligible badge to the cryptogram occurred at a time of persecution retains its plausibility, and this second stage had been reached in Italy before A.D. 79. The persecution of Nero in A.D. 64 is at once the earliest and the most

¹² "Notizie degli Scavi," 1929, p. 440, n. 112, and p. 447, Fig. 2, n. 112.

¹³ 12th February, 1937.

¹⁴ This paper was already in proof when my attention was drawn to a note in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. xxxix, p. 331 (July 1938) referring to an article in *Pastoralblätter*, 1937, p. 92ff. by H. v. Kaltenborn-Stachau, entitled "*Die Älteste bisher bekannte christliche Originalurkunden*." This discusses the Pompeii discovery and points out that if it is a concealed form of the Lord's Prayer, it is the earliest original Christian document. I have not had access to the article itself.

¹⁵ Above, p. 420.

likely occasion for the transformation of the Paternoster cross into the rebus, which would conceal from the heathen what would still be evident to the initiated, the Christian character of the square.

Jerphanion¹⁶ has pointed out that it would be easy, by marking out the square in unobtrusive ways, to give the same kind of veiled hint of its Christian significance as is found on third century tombstones in Asia Minor.¹⁷ Thus the form of the amulet might be as follows :—

R	O	T	A	S
O	P	E	R	A
T	E	N	E	T
A	R	E	P	O
S	A	T	O	R

The lines bounding the cross formed by the spaces occupied by TENET are slightly accentuated, and it will be observed that in this case each arm of the cross ends in a Tau cross, these letters as well as the symmetrically placed As and Os being also slightly emphasised.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 223.

¹⁷ E.g. the use of a cross (+) instead of *chi* (X) in the formula *μνήμης χάριν*. Cf. Calder in *J.R.S.* XIV, p. 88 f.

¹⁸ It may be suggested that the change from arrangement (1) to arrangement (2) was effected to provide a more satisfactory placing of the As and Os, avoiding the reversed order.

S	A	T	O	R
A	R	E	P	O
T	E	N	E	T
O	P	E	R	A
R	O	T	A	S

The first conclusion to be drawn is that already pointed out by Della Corte, the existence of a Christian community at Pompeii. The scepticism in regard to this, which has long been current, was never well justified, and is now seen to have been misapplied, and it may be observed that this evidence of the presence of Christians at Pompeii gives some support to the interpretation by Newbold of another, and more famous, Pompeian graffito as an Aramaic reference to the Christians,¹⁹ though the matter, in the last resort, must be decided by the experts in Aramaic.

But a consideration of the bearing of the discovery in the earliest history of Christianity permits suggestions of more general interest and importance. In its original form the amulet has reference to the Lord's Prayer, and to the Alpha and Omega. In a recent review of E. F. Scott's *The Validity of the Gospel Record*, Professor Manson remarks that the most pressing question in the study of the Gospels, namely, what happened to the tradition in the period before it became fixed in writing in our Gospels, can only be answered conjecturally. If this is so, even so small a shred of evidence as is here presented is worthy of consideration.

1. *The Place of Origin of the Amulet.*—This is a matter where certainty is at present unattainable, but the claims of Rome can be supported on grounds of probability. It would be inconsistent with all that is known of the spread of Christianity before A.D. 64 to suppose that the Lord's Prayer could be familiarly known by a Latin formula anywhere east of the Adriatic. West of that sea we have clear evidence in Rome of a community whose beginnings belong to the forties rather than the fifties of the century, and nowhere else any evidence of communities at all, except at Puteoli.²⁰ But however cosmopolitan Rome may have been, the probability of the existence of converts whose native tongue was Latin is far greater there than at the port whose chief

¹⁹ Cf. *Amer. Journ. of Archæol.* vol. XXX, p. 288 f. The graffito is that published by De Rossi *Bulletino*, 1864, p. 71. (Cf. Cabrol-Le Clerq, *Dict. Arch. Chrét.* s.v. Graffites, VI, p. 1482-84). It would now appear that the attacks on the authenticity of this (e.g. Jackson and Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. V (1933), p. 385), lose much of their force.

²⁰ Acts 28¹⁴.

trade was with the East. We conclude, then, that by A.D. 64, in the church in Rome, beside the majority of Greek-speaking immigrants from beyond the Adriatic—Jews, Syrians, inhabitants of Egypt, Asia Minor, and Greece, a majority which continued to exist at least throughout the second century²¹—there was a minority of Latin-speaking converts numerous enough to use commonly and publicly a Latin name for the Lord's Prayer.²²

This minority must clearly be added to, not substituted for even a part of the Greek-speaking majority, of which there was already evidence, and the Church in Rome at this early date is seen to be by so much larger than has been hitherto supposed, and the *ingens multitudo* spoken of by Tacitus²³ in connection with the events of A.D. 64 by so much less a rhetorical exaggeration.

2. *The name "Christians."*—The difficulty of supposing that a word formed by means of a "suffix" normally Latin and definitely rare in Greek could have originated in Antioch has often been felt,²⁴ and it has already been suggested that it really began in Rome.²⁵ If we accept Newbold's defence and interpretation of the Pompeii graffito containing the word "Christians" (above, p. 425), there is at least evidence of its early use in Italy, and the spread of the new faith among Latin-speakers might seem perhaps to add plausibility to the suggestion. It is in fact far from certain that the name is a contemptuous nickname invented by the heathen. There is perhaps something to be said for the view that, in consideration of the use of the word *χρηματίζου* in a formal sense, the meaning of the passage (Acts 11²⁶) is that a name occasionally applied elsewhere came to be the normal designation of believers at Antioch.

3. *The Lord's Prayer in the Early Church.*—The influence of Jewish liturgical practice in the earliest Christian worship, inevitable in view of the Jewish origin and faith of the earliest

²¹ The evidence for this is too well known to need citation here.

²² It may be recalled that the method of naming it by its first two words (a practice of Jewish origin) finds a parallel in the Gospels if Streeter's view (*Four Gospels*, p. 498) is correct, that the name Gospel itself is derived from the use of the word in the first sentence of Mark.

²³ *Ann.*, XV 44.

²⁴ See discussion in Jackson-Lake, *Beginnings of Christianity*, V, p. 383 f.

²⁵ By Gercke, quoted by Jackson-Lake I, c.

converts, has been discussed by Chase in his work on the Lord's Prayer.²⁶ He there points out that "in the period which intervened between the occasion when our Lord first taught the prayer and the time when the Evangelists gave it a place in the Gospels, it had passed through one stage, and had already entered upon the second stage, of its history. On the one hand, it is unreasonable to suppose that before the day of Pentecost the Apostles did not use it among themselves. On the other, when the number of Disciples began to increase, it passed over into the Synagogue worship of the Church. The first stage eludes our grasp." It may perhaps be remarked that the first stage did not end when the second began, that the catechetical use of the Prayer with a view to the private devotions of converts must have continued and even increased, but the details of that continues to elude our grasp. In the matter of the public or liturgical use of the prayer it is possible that new light may be thrown.

The considerable variation in the form of the Prayer as reported by *Matthew* (6^{9f.}) and *Luke* (11^{2f.}) respectively has led to much discussion. Some have been inclined to draw the inference that the tradition referring it to our Lord was relatively late.²⁷ Others, like Chase, conceive of the modification of an original form in order to fit it for liturgical purposes of various kinds both by alteration and by addition. And it is suggested that the shorter and simpler form of *Luke* is more likely to be that original form than the longer version of *Matthew*.²⁸ But if Chase is right in regarding the words Ἰησοῦς ὁ πατήρ, which occur in *Mark* 14³⁶, *Galatians* 4⁶, and *Romans* 8¹⁵, as references to the Lucan form of the Prayer, beginning simple πατήρ without the addition of Ἰησοῦς, we are presented with the probability that in

²⁶ F. H. Chase, *The Lord's Prayer in the Early Church in Texts and Studies*, vol. I (1891).

²⁷ E.g. Ed. Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*, III, 248, says that the prayer if known to Mark at all was not known as given by Jesus, and would therefore assign its attribution to Christ to the period between the composition of *Mark* and of *Luke*. On this see below, p. 429.

²⁸ Cf. H. Lietzmann *Geschichte der Alten Kirche* I (1933), p. 57. "Vielmehr können wir beobachten, dass um einen alten Kern einfachster Bitten, der dem Lukastext zugrunde liegt, sich eschatologische Bitten um das Kommen des Gottesreichs im mannigfachen, durch die jüdische Gebetsitte beeinflussten Wendungen gelagert haben.

an Epistle addressed to Rome, and in a Gospel probably written in Rome, we find a form of the prayer different from that which was current in Rome, as the amulet implies, as early as the Epistle and earlier than the Gospel. For, as Chase points out, in a Semitic language the possessive pronoun *our*, if inserted, becomes a part of the noun, thus modifying its form and making $\alpha\beta\beta\acute{\alpha}$ an impossible transliteration of it.²⁹ The two quotations from St. Paul present no great difficulty, since the Apostle had not *visited* Rome when either passage was written, and may have moved only in the sphere dominated by the tradition later followed by *Luke*, but it must, I think, be admitted that the contradiction presented by *Mark*'s use of the expression throws some doubt on the correctness of Chase's original supposition. If, however, it is correct, we still have evidence in the amulet carrying back the tradition followed by *Matthew* at least as far as we can take that of *Luke*.

4. *The New Evidence and St. Mark's Gospel*.—We may further enquire whether the discovery, implying, as it does, the existence of a widely-known Latin version of the Prayer at this early date, has any bearing on the composition and sources of St. Mark's Gospel. The enquiry is only relevant on the hypothesis of a Roman origin for the Gospel—a hypothesis to which there appears to be a considerable body of assent.³⁰ It is clear also, that if the amulet was well known in Rome, and if St. Mark's Gospel was written there, we have to explain the omission from the Gospel of so important an element of the Faith as the Lord's Prayer, which must have been known to the writer.

That in addition to oral tradition Mark made use of written sources in his compilation has been widely accepted.³¹ Both general probabilities and the internal evidence of the Gospel

²⁹ If it were objected, that in fact the Lucan text has the correct vocative form $\pi\acute{\alpha}\tau\epsilon\rho$, it would be fair to answer that in general *Luke* is careful to abstain from the use of foreign words in cases where, as in borrowings from Mark, we know that they occurred in his source.

³⁰ E.g. Bacon, *Is Mark a Roman Gospel?*; *Harvard Theological Studies*, VII (1919); Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, p. 489 f.; Branscomb, *The Gospel of Mark*, in "The Moffat New Testament Commentary" (1937), p. xv f., *contra Meyer op. cit.*, III, p. 603.

³¹ E.g. Lietzmann, *op. cit.* I, p. 35; summary in Branscomb, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii f.

suggest that at the early date to which it must be assigned,³² these sources would be short separate documents of three kinds, (a) collections of "Sayings of the Lord," such as would naturally be current in Jewish-Christian circles, of the type represented by Q, and inevitably including the Prayer; (b) apocalyptic writings, like those which form part of the material included in *Revelation*; and (c) scattered pieces of narrative concerning Christ's ministry, such as would be in demand especially among the non-Jewish element in the Roman Church. Eventually, such materials were conflated into a coherent artistic whole in St. Luke's Gospel, and less effectively in St. Matthew's, but St. Mark's occupies an intermediate position between this final achievement, and the primitive collection of separate documents. For taken as a whole, St. Mark's Gospel seems to consist of such an account of Christ's ministry as his scattered material, written and oral, would permit, intended to stand beside and supplement, but not to supersede, the probably more copious and better known collection of sayings of which but little use is made. And this impression is confirmed by more detailed study of St. Mark's text. Class (a) is represented by chapter iv, perhaps rather an expansion of a written source; Class (b) by chapter xiii; Class (c) by the Passion Narrative, and perhaps by 2¹-3⁶ + 12¹³⁻¹⁷.

It is very generally agreed that the text of Mark contains a number of Latinisms larger than that found in other books of the New Testament, but there has been a common tendency to regard them as due to the unliterary character of the writing, and to explain them as uses current in colloquial speech in the eastern provinces of the Empire.³³ It is clear, however, that the writers here quoted (see footnote), and the many others who

³² c. 65 A.D. Streeter, *op. cit.*, p. 499; before A.D. 70, Meyer, *op. cit.* III, p. 603; Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (1898), p. xxxv; soon after A.D. 70 Lietzmann, *op. cit.* I, p. 35; c. A.D. 75, Branscomb, *op. cit.*, p. xxxi.

³³ E.g. Blass *Philology of the Gospels*, p. 211 f. on *κεντυρίων* "I say this is a vulgarism not a Latinism"; Swete *op. cit.*, p. xliii f. "Some of these Latinisms occur in other Gospels as well as in St. Mark, and it may be doubted whether they prove more than a familiarity with the vulgar Greek of the Empire, which freely adopted Latin words and some Latin phraseology"; Bacon, *op. cit.*, p. 54, "All these (Latin) expressions had passed over into the current speech of Jews throughout the Empire, so that their mere occurrence in Mark cannot prove anything as to its origin in a Latin-speaking region."

agree with them, are affected by the view, correct according to the evidence at their disposal, that even in the West, the earliest converts were without exception Greek-speaking,³⁴ and that the use of Latin at all among the Christians can hardly be proved before the later second century. Accordingly, the only argument drawn from the Latinism is in connexion with the Roman origin of St. Mark's Gospel, and at most they are attributed to a writer relatively ill-educated, imperfectly acquainted with Greek, and accordingly influenced by a cosmopolitan patois containing some Latin elements.

But the situation would be changed if such a writer were in fact translating and adapting documents which were themselves translated into Latin from writings or oral traditions in Aramaic or Greek. And the existence of a Latin Lord's Prayer must make such a hypothesis less wildly improbable than it would have seemed before.

The examples of Latinisms which have been most generally recognised as such, are as follows :—³⁵

- (1) Ἡρωδιανοί 3⁶ ; 12¹³ = Math. 22¹⁶.
- (2) σπεκουλάτωρ 6²⁷.
- (3) ξέστης 7⁴ ; [7⁸ om. R.V. and most modern texts].
- (4) κῆσος 12¹⁴ = Math. 22¹⁵f. (ἐπικεφάλαιον D).
- (5) κοδράντης 12⁴².
- (6) φαίνεται 14⁶⁴ (δοκεῖ D).
- (7) ῥάπισμασιν αὐτὸν ἔλαβον (?) 14⁶⁵.
- (8) συμβούλιον ποιησάντες 15¹ (σ. εἰδιδουν (ποιουντες D) 3⁶).
- (9) τὸ ἱκανὸν ποιῆσαι 15¹⁵ (om. D).
- (10) φραγελλώσας 15¹⁵.
- (11) πραιτωριον 15¹⁶.
- (12) κεντυρίων 15^{39, 44, 45}.

³⁴ Cf. for such a view Turner, *Studies in Early Church History*, p. 243 f., " Few lines of enquiry will better repay investigation than the attempt to trace the process by which the Western Church, and especially the Roman Church passed from a Greek to a Roman environment . . . Thus between the years 150-280 A.D., the Western churches were slowly making the passage from the one language to the other ; and the indispensable companions of their journey were the sacred books of their religion."

³⁵ It might perhaps seem too rash to suggest that 15⁸ καὶ ἀναρὰς ὁ ὄχλος ἤρξατο αἰτεῖσθαι καθὼς ἐποίει αὐτοῖς is a gross mistranslation of ut sibi (satis)faceret or (id) faceret, though the MSS. show that the passage caused much difficulty.

An examination of these words and phrases in the new Liddell and Scott and in Preisigke's *Wörterbuch* suggest that *πραιώριον* and *ξέστης* were quite commonly used in the East; that *σπεκουλάτωρ* and *κεντυρίων* only occur technically, and that none of the others occur elsewhere in the use made of them in Mark. *κῆνσος* in fact, could not correctly be so used. *Κοδράντης*, however, though not found in L. and S. or Preisigke occurs in a second century Talmudic text,³⁶ so that its currency in Palestine seems to be attested. The rest seem, on the whole, likely to originate with the writer of the Gospel. It will be observed that, with the exception of nos. 2, 3 and 5,³⁷ all occur in the passages grouped under Class *c* above (p. 429) in which on other grounds Mark is held to be using a written source. Admittedly, not all are certainly so to be explained, and the total is not impressive, but when we consider that they have had to survive a long and complex process of standardisation,³⁸ what remains is perhaps sufficient to raise the question whether an intensive study of the text from this point of view might produce further evidence of the use of a Latin source.

5. *Alpha and Omega*.—It may be regarded as the strongest confirmation of Grosser's explanation that the letters additional to the double Paternoster are A and O twice repeated. The wide diffusion of the Greek letters of which these are the Latin equivalent as a Christian symbol from the fourth century onwards made them seem a natural appendage to the amulet when Grosser's explanation was published, nor did the discoveries at Dura alter the situation, for Dölger had already produced examples of the *AΩ* sign of second century date.³⁹ But here we have them in use as early as the reign of Nero. The only canonical evidence of their use to symbolise the all-embracing nature of the Father or of the Son is in the three passages in the Apocalypse.⁴⁰ Of these, the first (1⁸) is regarded by

³⁶ *Jer. Kidd. ed.* Ven f. 58 d l. 25 ff. cited by Bacon, *op. cit.*, p. 56. I am indebted to my colleague Dr. Rosenthal for kindly confirming for me the fact that the text contains an actual transliteration of the Grecized Latin word.

³⁷ And of these, 3 and 5 have been shown to have little evidential value.

³⁸ Thus in "Codex Bezae" (D) three of the twelve instances (nos. 4, 6 and 9) have been corrected away.

³⁹ *Op. cit.* I (1910), p. 341.

⁴⁰ Rev. 1⁸; 21⁶; 22¹³.

Charles⁴¹ as an editorial interpolation, and so may be disregarded, the second (21⁶) referring to the Father, and the third (22¹³) referring to Christ, are by the same authority included in the writing of the author, neither derived from earlier apocalyptic material, nor inserted later by the editor.⁴²

If this is so, a strong body of opinion could be collected in support of Charles' assignment of these two passages to the latter years of Domitian.

The attempts to find earlier examples of the use do not seem to have been successful,⁴³ and I suppose that most New Testament scholars would accept the view that, however much the idea owes to such passages as Exodus 3¹⁴ or Isaiah 41⁴ and 44⁶, the form of the expression makes its earliest extant appearance in the Apocalypse. As long as our evidence for it was confined to *Revelation* the symbolism might as well have been derived from Hellenistic as from Jewish sources, and quotations from Martial or from Greek texts would be instructive if they were really parallel⁴⁴ and not merely the equivalent of the English "from A to Z." But its presence in the amulet in association with the Lord's Prayer can, I think, only be explained on the assumption that it represents a saying of Christ Himself. But whether it refers to the Father or to the Son is a matter to be discussed rather by the theologian than by the historian, reaching as it does to the very central problem of the Faith. In any case in the circumstances⁴⁵ a possible parallel is only to be sought in Jewish thought, and the examples adduced are not impressive. The Talmudic use of Aleph and Tau to symbolise the whole of a body of material, as when Abraham is said to have kept the Law from Aleph to Tau, or Cain to have broken it,⁴⁶ have little bearing

⁴¹ *The International Critical Commentary : Revelation*, R. H. Charles (1920), I, p. lii ; II, p. 387, n. 4 (correcting I, p. 20).

⁴² *Op. cit.* II, p. 211 f.

⁴³ It is not clear why Dornseiff, *op. cit.*, p. 123 regards the passage quoted from Berthelot *Coll. Alch. Gr.* 79 l. 25 f. as "sicher nicht christlich beeinflusst."

⁴⁴ E.g. by Charles and Dornseiff, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁵ E.g. Few would accept in reference to a saying of Christ the statement of Kittel. *Theol. Wörterbuch zum N.T.s.v.* ΑΩ "Die (apokalyptische) Übertragung der Buchstaben auf Gott und Christus wäre Übertragung der Prädikate des Aiongottes."

⁴⁶ Cf. Cabrol-Le Clerq, *op. cit.*, s.v. ΑΩ.

on the question ;⁴⁷ and the use of it to symbolise the Shekinah⁴⁸ is in any case too late to be necessarily significant.

It would appear therefore that the author of the Apocalypse is quoting in its Greek form a well-known "saying of the Lord." And this, as far as our evidence reaches, in the Aramaic form in which Christ must have uttered it, was original with him, though perhaps suggested by the passages in Isaiah. The interest of such an addition to the corpus of "logia," if its authenticity is accepted, need hardly be stressed.

6. *The Use as an Amulet.*—The use of the Lord's Prayer as an amulet in Early Christian circles may be illustrated by the Papyrus example published by Wilcken⁴⁹ and the clay tablet from Megara,⁵⁰ but its use in the earliest period has not so far been attested by any definite examples, and indeed the evidence in this period for the use of the sort of symbols so prevalent later is extremely scanty. The well-known passage in the Epistle of Barnabas⁵¹ clearly supports the emphasis laid by Jerphanion on the significance of the position of the Ts in the Sator formula, without necessarily implying its use as an amulet.

More significant, if it were accepted, would be an interpretation of the enigmatic Maranatha⁵² of I Corinthians 16²². An

⁴⁷ The pantheistic nature of the application of such a conception to God or Christ cannot here be discussed.

⁴⁸ Schœttgen *Horae Hebraicae* I, p. 1086, cited by Cabrol, Dornseiff, etc. *loc. cit.*

⁴⁹ *Archiv. für Papyrusforschung*, I, p. 431 f. ⁵⁰ *Athen. Mitth.* 1900, p. 313 f.

⁵¹ "Learn therefore, children of love, concerning all things abundantly, that Abraham, who first appointed circumcision, looked forward in the spirit unto Jesus, when he circumcised, having received the ordinances of three letters. For the scripture saith: "And Abraham circumcised of his household eighteen males and three hundred." What then was the knowledge given unto him? Understand ye that he saith the 'eighteen' first, and then after an interval 'three hundred.' In the 'eighteen' I stands for ten, H for eight. Here thou hast Jesus (IHΣΟΥΣ). And because the cross in the T (= 300) was to have grace, he saith also 'three hundred.' So he revealeth Jesus in the two letters, and in the remaining one the cross (Barn. ix, 7-9). Quoted from Streeter, *The Primitive Church*, p. 237.

⁵² Clearly the decision between the form Maran atha (ita codd. recentes et editiones omnes. Zorell *N.T. Lexicon Graecum s.v.*: Strack-Billerbeck, III, p. 493: Moffat *First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 284, etc.), and Marana tha must depend on its Aramaic interpretation. Dodd, *Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p. 167 n., writes "(Marana tha) not, as Moffat following earlier

alternative interpretation—not necessarily an exclusive one, to that usually given,⁵³ has been proposed and accepted by several scholars,⁵⁴ viz.: “The Lord is the Sign.”⁵⁵ Thus Moffat writes:⁵⁶ “Atha has here its meaning of standard or ‘the sign,’ as though love for the Lord was the distinctive sign-manual of the Fellowship and that this password or greeting accompanied the holy Kiss. It is also philologically possible to take atha as an Aramaic equivalent for Tau the last Hebrew letter. Thus Atha might correspond to the grecized alpha and omega. As against those who were lax in their devotion to the Lord maranatha then would protest ‘Our Lord is everything, divine and supreme in authority, the beginning and the end’”. Similarly Hommel comes to the conclusion that Maranatha signifies “Unser Herr is das Aleph und das Tau.” He notes as an analogy that “at the end of *2nd Thessalonians* Paul speaks of a sign; there, his signature. In the present instance it is a symbol of the Lord in Aramaic and so intentionally not comprehensible to every one. This raises the question whether this Aleph-Tau or ΑΩ was not already among the so-called *γράμματα τετυπωμένα* (*litteræ formatae*) employed as recognition-signs and placed in an inconspicuous part of the letter, and whether this practice in the Christian community of signing letters by a symbol or “Kennzeichen” was not used for the first time by Paul in *I Corinthians*.” It may be asked whether such speculations do not mutually lend support to and gain it from the hypothesis which is the basis of this paper.

authorities prints it, Maran atha, supposed to mean ‘Our Lord comes,’ an impossible translation of the words.” But other Aramaists would still accept the translation “Our Lord has come.”

⁵³ Our Lord has come, Our Lord comes, Come, Lord, according to the reading; see previous note.

⁵⁴ E.g. Hommel *Zeitsch. für N.T. Wiss.* 15 (1914), p. 317 f.: Klostermann *Probleme im Apostel text*, p. 220 (quoted in Strack-Billerbeck, III, p. 494, “eine spendeformel beim Bruderkuss”).

⁵⁵ This translation is only correct if the words are divided, Maran atha. I am indebted to my colleague Prof. Manson for help on this linguistic point.

⁵⁶ Moffatt *loc. cit.*