

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Grace Theological Journal* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_grace-theological-journal.php

TRANSFORMED INTO HIS IMAGE: A CHRISTIAN PAPYRUS

D. BRENT SANDY

Published here for the first time is a Christian papyrus of the fourth century. The content of the document is of special interest to biblical students for its statement about transformation. The position of the text on the page and the signs in the text are significant for papyrology. This article begins with a brief summary of the concept of transformation in the milieu of early Christianity, and against that backdrop presents the papyrus and its contents.

Basic to the entirety of this article is the persuasiveness of the excellent teaching and scholarship of my esteemed pedagogue, Professor James Boyer. Through many undergraduate and graduate courses, he created in this student an insatiable interest in the likes of Classical Greece and NT backgrounds. A Greek proverb says: ἡ ἀρχὴ ἡμισὺ παντός, "The beginning is half of everything." To the one therefore who began a good work in me the following is dedicated.

* * *

In the ancient world the concept of transformation was very common.¹ Several literary pieces were entitled *Metamorphoses*, of which probably best known is Ovid's epic poem composed from about A.D. 2 onwards.² The dominant idea in much of this genre is of gods changing themselves into perceptible beings. But from Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, written in the second century, we learn of the initiation rites typical of the mystery religions, where the devotee is transformed into a god-like being in a regeneration ritual.³ Tatian, a Christian writing in the second century, mentions both aspects when

¹J. Behm, "μεταμορφώω," *TDNT* 4. 756-57.

²E. J. Kenney, "Ovid," *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 764.

³Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* (= *The Golden Ass*), 11. 23-29; J. W. Duff, *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age: From Tiberius to Hadrian* (2d ed.; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960) 153.

he ridicules the Greek and Roman gods: "There are legends of the metamorphosis of men: with you the gods also are metamorphosed. Rhea becomes a tree; Zeus a dragon . . . a god, forsooth, becomes a swan, or takes the form of an eagle. . . ." ⁴ Present also in the Jewish literature, the transformation motif occurs especially in apocalyptic descriptions of an eschatological salvation. ⁵

In the NT, deity and humanity again undergo a change in form. ⁶ Paul describes the incarnation as a taking on of the form of a servant. ⁷ Jesus was transfigured, as recorded in three Gospels, ⁸ mid-way through his public ministry. The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus evidence another change in form. ⁹ However, that special experience on the Mount of Transfiguration viewed by three disciples goes almost unnoticed in the rest of Scripture ¹⁰ and had little apparent effect on his followers. ¹¹ Paul speaks of a present and future transformation of the Christian but makes no allusion to the transfiguration of Jesus: τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα, "we are being transformed into the same image;" μετασχηματίζει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, "He will transform the body of our humility into conformity with the body of his glory." ¹²

Among the many volumes extant representing the early Christian movement, Jesus' transfiguration and incarnation are treated in numerous commentaries and homilies, ¹³ but the Christian's transformation is rarely mentioned, ¹⁴ perhaps to avoid association with the pagan mystery religions.

⁴Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 10.1. See similar statements in Aristides, *Apology* 8.2; 9.6.7.

⁵2 Bar. 51:3, 10. In the OT the only change of form recorded is Exod 34:29-35; perhaps also the angel of the Lord appearances imply a transformation of deity into human form.

⁶Terms: μεταμορφῶ, μετασχηματίζω, συμμορφίζω, σύμμορφος.

⁷Phil 2:7.

⁸Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36.

⁹Luke 24:37, 38; John 20:14-17; cf. Mark 16:12.

¹⁰The only clear remark is 2 Pet 1:17, 18.

¹¹Joseph B. Bernardin, "The Transfiguration," *JBL* 52 (1933) 188.

¹²2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:21. See also Rom 8:29; 12:2; Phil 3:10; 2 Cor 11:13-15.

¹³For complete discussion see A. M. Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (London/New York/Toronto: Longmans and Green, 1949) 130-35.

¹⁴The only examples I have found are Methodius Olympius, *The Banquet* 8.8, ". . . transformation into the image of the Word" and Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, *De Divinis Nominibus* 1.3. My search for references to transformation was conducted in: G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961-68); E. J. Goodspeed, *Index Patristicus sive Clavis Patrum Apostolicorum Operum* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1907); E. J. Goodspeed, *Index Apologeticus sive Clavis Justini Martyris Operum*, (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912); H. Kraft, *Clavis Patrum Apostolicorum* (Munich: Kösel, 1963).

THE PAPYRUS¹⁵

P. Rob. inv. 28 was purchased in 1953 by the late Professor David M. Robinson, who bought it from a Cairo dealer by the name of of Sameda. Nothing more about the provenance is known.¹⁶

The papyrus is the bottom 4.4 cm. of a leaf of a codex that was apparently 14.7 cm. in width. Along the top edge of the fragment, on both sides, remain the lower portions of letters which were from the last line of the body of text. On *H*,¹⁷ below the traces of letters at the top of the fragment (line 1), are five lines written in what was originally the margin at the bottom of the page. The papyrus is light brown in color, *V* being somewhat lighter than *H*. The fabric of the papyrus is of coarse quality.

The appearance of the writing and the position on the papyrus is informal and almost careless. The amount written and the room on the leaf were not carefully coordinated, so that it is gradually more crowded together into the available space. The margin to the left is at least 1.3 cm. and above, 1.3 cm.; but no margin exists to the right or at the bottom. As much as 0.7 cm. separate lines 2 and 3, while between lines 5 and 6 there is at most 0.5 cm.

The bottom edge of the papyrus is fairly straight, probably representing the original bottom edge of the codex leaf. The side edges are both frayed and rounded on the corners. The left edge (looking at *H*) is likely where the leaf was folded in the binding of the codex. The top edge is not as straight as the bottom edge, nor is it as frayed as the side edges; here the papyrus was probably cut with a knife by the finders or dealers through whose hands it passed. Perhaps we can hypothesize that when the papyrus was cut it was not connected to its codex, but was a single leaf that was divided by at least two parties.

PALAEOGRAPHY

Although written along the fibers, the line of fibers is not followed for the writing, nor were any rulings made. Brown ink, although sometimes dark and sometimes light, was used for all the writing on the papyrus. Several places on *H* there appear to be some traces of lampblack, unrelated to what is written in brown ink. Little care was given in the use of the pen; it was evidently rather blunt and not carefully made. There are not neat thicks and thins in the letters;

¹⁵See the plates on pp. 234-35.

¹⁶For permission to publish *P. Rob.* inv. 28 I thank Professor William Willis of Duke University under whose guidance I did initial work on this papyrus and who has graciously assisted in this publication of the papyrus.

¹⁷*H* stands for the side of the papyrus with the fibers lying horizontally; *V* is for the side with vertical fibers.

this is true for what remains of the text above and for what is written below. Palaeographically, the remains of line 1 on both sides resemble the style of lines 2-6 on *H*. Thus the same hand with the same pen and ink may have written both.

The characteristics of the hand are best paralleled by *P. Mert.* II, 93 (a private Christian letter, dated to the fourth century and described in relation to *P. Jews* 1927 as a fair sized, sloping, literary type), and the *Dyskolos* papyrus of *P. Bodmer*, dated late third or fourth century.¹⁸ For some letters, their size in relation to others is quite irregular (note the long descenders, especially on *upsilon*, and the large *epsilon*), adding to the informal look of the writing. The absence of ligatures and the presence of diaeresis is standard in book hands of this period.

SYMBOLS

Occurrences of ∙/ in literary papyri that I have noted are as follows:

<i>P. Oxy.</i>	16	first century	Thucydides
	696	first century	Thucydides
	2442	third century	Pindar
	2697	third century	Argonautica
	2306	second century	Commentary on Alcaeus
<i>P. Flor.</i>		third century	Commentary on Aristophanes

In four of the six examples, it is placed in the margin; in the other two it is placed in mid-verse.

A partial explanation of this symbol is given by Diogenes Laertius (iii, 66). He names and describes the use of various signs in a text of Plato; in regard to ∙/ he says: ὀβελὸς περιεστιγμένος πρὸς τὰς εἰκαίους ἀθετήσεις, "the *obelos periestigmenos* is for random rejections (of passages)."

Nowhere has ∙ been found among literary papyri of Classical authors.

The use of both signs, however, is frequent in Biblical and Christian papyri. Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus demonstrate the frequent use of both signs, sometimes together and sometimes separately, but always where a correction has been made.¹⁹ When used together, ∙ stands in the margin and ∙/ marks the precise place in the line for the correction. At the top or bottom of the page, ∙ stands

¹⁸For bibliographical data on various editions of papyri cited, see John F. Oates, Roger S. Bagnall, and William H. Willis, *Checklist of Editions of Greek Papyri and Ostraca*, 2nd ed., BASP: Supplements 1 (1978), distributed by Scholars Press.

¹⁹See, in addition to the codices, H. J. M. Milne and T. C. Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors of the Codex Sinaiticus* (London: British Museum, 1938) 40.

at the beginning of what is to be inserted, and ∙/ stands at the end. Sometimes ἄνω and κάτω accompany ∙/.

In Chester Beatty Papyrus VI (Numbers and Deuteronomy), dated to the second century, † is used identically as † in Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

Henry A. Sanders notes the use of ∙/ in some biblical manuscripts dated to the fourth or early fifth century, marking the location of the omission and then repeated in the margin giving the words to be supplied.²⁰

An exact parallel to *P. Rob. inv. 28* is described in *P. Tura*, where † and ∙/ stand together in the margin at the beginning of the part to be supplied. In the text, † marks the line and ∙/ the precise location within the line.²¹

A somewhat later function of ∙/ is described by Isidore (A.D. 602-36), bishop of Seville (1.21): *Lemniscus, id est, virgula inter geminos punctos iacens, opponitur in his locis, quae sacrae Scripturae interpretes eodem sensu, sed diversis sermonibus transtulerent*, "The lemniscus, that is a stick lying between two points, is placed in those places which the interpreters of Holy Scriptures transcribe in the same sense, but with different expressions."

The evidence therefore for the function of † and ∙/ in the fourth century suggests that lines 2-6 of *P. Rob. inv. 28* were an omission in the text above and were supplied in the bottom margin of the page.²²

CONTENT

The text of *P. Rob. inv. 28* has not been found in the corpus of Patristic literature extant, nor has the rest of the papyrus from which this piece was cut been located in the editions of published papyri. Without that larger context it remains impossible to determine the complete meaning of the text we have. Clearly, however, it is a Christian description of some form of transformation.

Transfiguration

Although the usual Christian discussions of a change in form centered on the transfiguration of Jesus, the present text does not readily fit that sense of transformation. The restoration of what is destroyed and the visitation of the dead seem out of place in the context of the transfiguration. Some recent scholarship, however, has

²⁰Henry A. Sanders, *The Washington Manuscript of the Four Gospels* (New York: MacMillan, 1912) 32.

²¹Albert Henrichs, *Didymos der Blinde: Kommentar zu Hiob, Teil I* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1968) 17.

²²E. G. Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1971) 17, 18.

seen in the transfiguration story a prediction of the resurrection, in which case inclusion of references to the passion week may be appropriate.²³ A. M. Ramsey, discussing Heb 2:9, says "... the writer, who cherishes greatly the traditions of the earthly life of Jesus and dwells especially upon the episode of Gethsemane (in v. 7-8) may have the event of the transfiguration specifically in mind."²⁴ However, this association of the transfiguration with the resurrection of Jesus is rare in the early Christian literature.

Incarnation

Perhaps the visitation of the dead should be understood in a spiritual sense, that Jesus came among the spiritually dead to raise them up to be citizens of heaven.²⁵ Problematic, though, for this explanation is the statement that it was a transformation into his own image, hardly descriptive of the incarnation; unless this statement refers to the transformation of believers into his image, that their obedience might restore what sin destroyed.

A good example of an early Christian work which speaks of the incarnation as a transformation is Ascension of Isaiah 3:13:²⁶

... καὶ ὅ[τι δι' α]ὐτοῦ ἐφανε[ρώθη ἡ] ἐξέλευσις [τοῦ ἀγα]πητοῦ ἐκ [τοῦ ἑβδ]όμου οὐρανοῦ, καὶ ἡ μεταμόρφωσις αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἡ κατάβασις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ ἰδέα ἣν δεῖ αὐτὸν μεταμορφωθῆναι ἐν εἰδει ἀνθρώπου. ...

... and that through him was revealed the departure of the beloved from the seventh heaven, and his transformation, and his descent, and the appearance which had to be transformed in the form of man. ...

Descent into hell

A third explanation for the meaning of *P. Rob. inv. 28* is a frequent topic in early Christianity, the *descensus ad infernos*.²⁷ The

²³J. Schniewind, *Das Evangelium Nach Markus* (NTD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1956) 117; H. Baltensweiler, *Die Verklärung Jesu: Historisches Ereignis und synoptische Berichte* (Zürich: Zwingli, 1959). R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1957) 278; but against this see G. H. Boobyer, *St. Mark and the Transfiguration Story* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1942) 21.

²⁴Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ*, 126-27.

²⁵For the use of "dead" in this figurative sense see *BAGD*, 534.

²⁶*P. Amh.* 1. xviii. 22- xix.5

²⁷See J. A. MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930); Malcolm L. Peel, "The 'Descensus ad Infernos' in 'The Teachings of Silvanus' (CG VII, 4)," *Numen* 26 (1979) 23-49.

visitation of the dead and raising them up to heaven and the restoration of what sin destroyed favor this interpretation.

Another passage of the Ascension of Isaiah is instructive here:²⁸

. . . καὶ τὴν κατάβασιν καὶ ἐξέλευσιν τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ ἐκ τοῦ ἑβδόμου οὐρανοῦ εἰς τὸν ᾅδην, καὶ τὴν μεταμόρφωσιν ἣν μεταμορφώθη ἔμπροσθεν τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ. . . .

. . . and the descent and departure of the beloved from the seventh heaven into Hades, and the transformation which was transformed before his disciples. . . .

Against this understanding of *P. Rob. inv. 28* is the transformation phrase, which hardly describes the dead, but could be taken to refer to his resurrection.

TRANSCRIPTION

P. Rob. inv. 28

14.7 × 4.4 cm.

Fourth Century

H]τὸ[ν] νο[

ἰ/. ἔργον ἦν εἰς ἰδίαν αὐτοῦ ἀναμόρφωσις
εἰκόνα ἱν' ὃ συνέτριψεν ἢ παράβασις ἀνανεώ-
ση ἢ χάρις τῆς ὑπακοῆς. διὰ ταύτην τὴν αἰτίαν γέ-
γονεν ἐν νεκροῖς ἵνα καὶ νεκροὺς ἑαυτῶι
ἀναστήσῃ οὐρανοῦ πολίτας κς.

V]α δὲ γέγραφ [

]υ[

]υ[

TRANSLATION

The deed was a transformation into his own image in order that what sin shattered the grace of obedience might restore. For this reason the Lord came among the dead in order that he might raise up to himself even the dead as citizens of heaven.

NOTES

H 1. Fragments of four letters remain, with space between the second and third for another letter. The reading supplied in the

²⁸A. M. Denis, *Fragmenta Pseudepigraphorum Quae Supersunt Graeca* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970) 105.

ἡ ἐπισημειωθεὶς ἀναγνώρισις ἀποφασιστικῶς
 ἐκκαθάρσιος ἐπιπέφυκται ἡ παράδοξις ἡ ἀποφασιστικὴ
 ἐπισημειωθεὶς ἀναγνώρισις ἀποφασιστικῶς
 ἡ ἐπισημειωθεὶς ἀναγνώρισις ἀποφασιστικῶς

transcription is one possibility of many. The letters listed below are considered feasible on the basis of the ink that remains of the four letters.

1	-	2	-	?	-	3	-	4
ι		ε				ν		α
ρ		ο				υ		ε
τ		ς						θ
φ		ω						ο
ψ								ς
								ω

If the *omega* is selected for letter 2, there would probably not be room for another letter following it before letter 3. It is assumed that the line continued following letter 4; however, letter 1 was probably the first in the line, considering the left margin of lines 2-6.

2. ἀναμόρφωσις: "... The scribe apparently wrote ἀναμορφωσεω[ς] initially, which he (or someone) corrected to ἀναμόρφωσις; in other words, ε was corrected to a heavy exaggerated ι, and ω was corrected to ς."²⁹

5. νεκροῖς: "... The scribe apparently wrote the third word νεκροισι, then cancelled the second *omicron* and erased the final *iota*, then proceeded to write ἵνα. . . ."

6. πολίτας: "... I believe the scribe wrote πολίτας, but the top stroke of the *sigma* has flaked away leaving a form that could be misread as *iota*, except for the fact that his *iotas* never turn to the right at the bottom. . . ."

V 1. Fragments of ten letters remain, with possible space following letters 6 and 7 for one other letter. The reading supplied in the transcription is one possibility of many. The letters listed below are considered feasible on the basis of the ink that remains.

1	2	3	4	5	6	?	7	?	8	9	10
α	δ	ε	γ	α	γ		ρ		φ	υ	υ
δ		ς	ι	ε	η		φ		ψ		
κ			ρ	ο	ι		ψ		ρ		
μ			τ	ς	κ						
ν					γ						

CONCLUSION

The papyrus here published, though enigmatic because of its brevity and its separation from a wider context, is illustrative of the

²⁹My thanks again to Professor Willis for his reexamination of the papyrus and comments on lines 2, 5, 6.

primary evidence preserved on papyrus and of the theological literature of the early Christians. In addition to the essential discussions of the papyrus itself, the signs, and the palaeography, three possible explanations for its content were explored. However until the rest of the piece of papyrus is located from which *P. Rob. inv. 28* was cut or until the specific content of the papyrus is found in other extant Patristic literature, a decision regarding the significance of the statements of the papyrus will remain premature.