



TYCHE

Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte Papyrologie und Epigraphik

Herausgegeben von

Gerhard Dobesch, Hermann Harrauer
Peter Siewert und Ekkehard Weber

Band 1, 1986

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Tafeln 1—32

GEORGINA ROBINSON
KMG and ΘMG for XMG

New light is thrown on the question of the interpretation of the cryptographic or abbreviated use of the letters XMG by two receipts of payment documents of the early Arab period. In these the letters ΘMG, preceded by a chrismon appear immediately above the *di emu* of the notary's signature at the bottom of the documents. The first instance of this is to be found in P.Grenf. II 100, 24. The letters were not then understood by Grenfell and do not appear in the transcription nor is any reference made to them in the commentary. They are however clearly visible on the microfilm of the British Library no. DCCXXVIII. The second instance is the unpublished text P. Vindob. G 20777 + 20783 + 26663¹. Here the letters appear in exactly the same position above the notarial signature. Both texts, although not from the same hand or witnessed by the same notary, are palaeographically very similar and both are addressed to the Duke Joseph. The British Library text is dated 683 A. D. The date for the Vienna text, which only gives the month and 14th indiction year, is likely to be either 671 or 685 A. D.

Quite clearly in these two instances of ΘMG the Θ stands for Θεός and replaces the X for Χριστός in the common XMG formula². This substitution of Θεός for Χριστός is to my knowledge hitherto unknown and it throws an exciting new light on how the letters were interpreted by their users in this context. A similar example of a single letter substitution is the one instance of the letters KMG occurring on an Alexandrian stele of the 5th—6th century A. D. These were transcribed by the editor G. Botti, *Stele cristiane di epoca bizantina*, Bessarione 51—55 (1900) 243, as *Cristo. Maria. Gabriele*. This was then subsequently discussed by V. Strazulla, *Rivista di storia antica* N. S. 6 (1901) 136—138, who rightly interpreted the letter K as representing Κύριος³.

These two lots of examples of the letters ΘMG and KMG in the XMG formula limit considerably the choice of interpretations which can be made to apply to all three groups of letters XMG, ΘMG and KMG. For instance the interpretation which can be excluded *prima facie* in these cases is that the letters are numbers corresponding to the addition of the letters in a well-known Christian phrase such as ἡ ἀγία τριάς Θ(εός); ἄγιος ὁ Θεός; Νέος Ἥλιος or Θεός βοηθός⁴. This isopsephical interpretation depends on the number 643 = XMG and can clearly not

¹ The text was found and pieced together by H. Harrauer who also drew my attention to the occurrence of ΘMG in both texts and suggested the important implication of this.

² For a thorough discussion of the letters XMG and the various interpretations attributed to them see J.—O. Tjäder, *Christ, Our Lord, Born of the Virgin Mary (XMG and VDN)*, *Eranos* 68 (1970) 148—190.

³ I am very grateful to H. Taeuber (Vienna) for drawing my attention to the letters KMG and also to the relevant *Dumbarton Oaks Bibliography* (note 5).

⁴ J. Krall, *Mittheilungen aus der Sammlung der Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer* 1 (1887) 127. More recently for the interpretation Θεός βοηθός see A. Blanchard, *Sur quelques interpretations de XMG*, *Proceedings of the XIV International Congress of Papyrologists*, Oxford 1975, 19—24.

be applied to the other two letter groups. It must however be stressed at this point that any one of the more commonly argued interpretations of the letters very probably represent, at some instance, the actual interpretation attributed to them by the users themselves. Any formula of such drastic abbreviation, which appeared on a wide range of medium other than documents, such as amphorae, roof tiles, gravestones, graffiti and rings⁵ throughout the Mediterranean world and Africa and over a period of almost half a millenium, would inevitably generate a number of different interpretations. The letters appear to have been used in some cases apotroically, for instance on door lintels⁶, and this usage probably represents the original intention behind the letters. The original meaning is arguably the interpretation $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\nu\ \mu\alpha\rho\iota\alpha\ \gamma\epsilon\nu\nu\tilde{\alpha}$. It is still the only interpretation for which we have evidence in the form of unabbreviated texts: P.Grenf. II 112 (a) a fragment of Psalm I 3 is prefaced with $\dagger\bar{\chi}\bar{C}\bar{M}\bar{A}\bar{P}\bar{I}\bar{A}\ \bar{G}\bar{E}\bar{N}\bar{N}\bar{A}\ \bar{K}\bar{A}\bar{I}\ \dagger\bar{M}\bar{A}\bar{P}\bar{I}\bar{A}\ \bar{X}\bar{C}\bar{G}\bar{E}\bar{N}\bar{N}\bar{A}\ \bar{K}(\bar{A}\bar{I})\ \bar{X}\bar{C}\bar{M}\bar{A}\bar{P}\bar{I}\bar{A}\ \bar{G}\bar{E}\bar{N}\bar{N}\bar{A}$. Secondly in an inscription on a Nubian gravestone of the 5th century the words appear at the end of a section of the inscription followed by *amen*⁸. This interpretation is also adaptable to all three of the letter combinations. $\Theta\epsilon\acute{o}\nu\ \mu\alpha\rho\iota\alpha\ \gamma\epsilon\nu\nu\tilde{\alpha}$, Mary as the mother of God is attested in the form of the epithet $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\sigma\tau\acute{o}\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ ⁹. $\text{K}\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\nu\ \mu\alpha\rho\iota\alpha\ \gamma\epsilon\nu\nu\tilde{\alpha}$ has a more direct parallel in the words of the Christian creed: $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\omega\ \epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \Theta\epsilon\acute{o}\nu\ \pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho\alpha\ \pi\alpha\nu\tau\omicron\kappa\rho\acute{\alpha}\tau\omicron\rho\alpha\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\nu\ \text{I}\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon\acute{\nu}\ \upsilon\iota\acute{o}\nu\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\acute{o}\nu\ \mu\omicron\nu\omicron\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\tilde{\iota},\ \tau\acute{o}\nu\ \text{K}\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\nu\ \eta\mu\acute{\omega}\nu\ \tau\acute{o}\nu\ \gamma\epsilon\nu\nu\eta\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\tau\alpha\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \pi\nu\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\mu\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \mu\alpha\rho\iota\alpha\varsigma\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\upsilon\ \kappa\tau\lambda.$ This substitution of $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ for $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ corresponds more directly with the argument suggested by Tjäder (op. cit.) that XMG is the equivalent of the Latin letters *VDN* found in graffiti from the Paedagogium on the Palatine in Rome, which he translates as *v(irgine) d(ominus) n(atus)*. $\text{K}\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ and *dominus* are the direct translation of each other as in *dominum nostrum, qui natus est* and $\text{K}\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\nu\ \eta\mu\acute{\omega}\nu\ \tau\acute{o}\nu\ \gamma\epsilon\nu\nu\eta\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\tau\alpha$. This instance of the letters KMG would therefore support his argument.

Despite the possibility of the interchange of all three groups of letters to this interpretation, I do not believe that this is the interpretation intended when this formula is used before the notary's signature. Documents where this occurs are: CPR I 30, 55 (VIth century); BGI I 364, 21 (553 A. D.); SB I 4681; 4824 and 4771 where it appears after $\sigma\tau\omicron\iota\chi\tilde{\iota}\ \mu\omicron\iota$, XMG $\acute{\omega}\varsigma\ \pi\rho\acute{o}\kappa\epsilon\iota\tau\alpha\iota$; SPP III 100, 5; SPP VIII 702, 3. The use of the formula in this position is comparable to the use of $\kappa\bar{\epsilon}\ \beta\omicron\eta\theta^{\theta} = \kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\epsilon\ \beta\omicron\eta\theta\epsilon\iota$ found in Hermopolitan documents of the second half of the 5th century through to the 7th century A. D. These letters are discussed and interpreted by J. Diethart in his article *KYPIE BOHΘEI in byzantinischen Notarsunterschriften*, ZPE 49 (1982) 79—82. The letters appear immediately after the $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\rho\acute{\alpha}\phi\eta$ of the notary. There seems to be no logical purpose for the inclusion of the formula XMG/ΘMG/ $\kappa\bar{\epsilon}\ \beta\omicron\eta\theta^{\theta}$, unless to serve a specific function as part of the witnessing procedure of the notary. The function of the notary, as discussed by V. Gardthausen in

⁵ For references to the different medium on which the letters occur, see Dumbarton Oaks Bibliography II/ i: Epigraphy. Abbreviations, Monograms and Cryptography.

⁶ W. K. Prentice, *Magical Formula of Lintels of the Christian Period in Syria*, AJA 10 (1906) 137—150.

⁷ For a detailed discussion of this interpretation see Tjäder, op. cit. Also noteworthy are the discussions in the BPhW (1906) between E. Nestle (381—384), who maintained that the letters XMG represent Christus, Michael, Gabriel; A. Dieterich (510) $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma\ \mu\alpha\rho\iota\alpha\ \gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\nu\alpha$ and J. J. Smirnof (1082—1088) who regarded the letters isopsephically.

⁸ C. M. Kaufmann, *Handbuch der altchristlichen Epigraphik*, Freiburg 1917, 75. M. Guarducci, *Epigrafia greca*, Roma 1978, IV 459—461; 549—551. I am grateful to the Ancient History Department of Vienna University, Prof. P. Siewert for drawing my attention to the epigraphical evidence and also for the reference to Mary as $\text{M}\acute{\eta}(\tau\eta\rho)\ \Theta(\epsilon\omicron)\tilde{\upsilon}$ in MAMA I 387 (note 9).

⁹ Mary as the mother of God, $\text{M}\acute{\eta}(\tau\eta\rho)\ \Theta(\epsilon\omicron)\tilde{\upsilon}$: MAMA I 387.

Di emu der ägyptischen Notare, SPP XVII 1—8, was not only to verify the authenticity of the document, but also it appears that if the document was not witnessed by a notary then its legal validity was questionable. This accounts for the use of elaborate signatures by the notaries to avoid the possibility of forgery. The use of the two formula, either ΧΜΓ or ΘΜΓ must therefore have served as an abbreviated form of oath. An oath is defined as an “appeal to God in witness that a statement is true or a promise binding” (Oxford English Dictionary). This appeal to God is in my opinion expressed in the ΧΜΓ/ΘΜΓ formula. The interpretation which in this case best suits the sense in this particular usage is that recently proposed by A. Gostoli, *Una nuova ipotesi interpretativa della sigla cristiana ΧΜΓ*, Stud. Pap. 22 (1983) 9—14, in which she argues that the letters ΧΜΓ represent Χριστός μάρτυς γένηται. This hypothesis is further strengthened by the substitution of Θεός for Χριστός because unlike the phrase Χριστός μάρτυς, Θεός μάρτυς finds its direct parallels in the Pauline Epistles, Romans I 9 and Philippians I 8 where it is used in the sense of calling upon God to witness the veracity of an action, μάρτυς γάρ μου ὁ Θεός κτλ.¹⁰ The Lord is my witness is also completely interchangeable although I can find no direct example.

The very fact that we have the three variants of the formula ΧΜΓ, ΘΜΓ and ΚΜΓ is proof that the letters ΧΜΓ had no hard and fast interpretation. Rather an interpretation should be sought which best suits the context. In the case when they appear before the notaries signature at the end of documents, then μάρτυς γένηται would seem a most appropriate solution. It served not only the function of distinguishing the christian character of the document in the Arab period but was also an intrinsic part of the notary’s signature to the witnessing of the document: — ἐγὼ δὲ μάρτυρα τὸν Θεὸν ἐπικαλοῦμαι (Corinthians I 23).

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¹⁰ Philippians I 8: μάρτυς γάρ μου ὁ Θεός, ὡς ἐπιποθῶ πάντας ὑμᾶς ἐν σπλάγχχοις Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ; Romans I 9: μάρτυς γάρ μου ὁ Θεός, - - - ὡς ἀδιαλείπτως μνεῖαν ὑμῶν ποιοῦμαι;