A NEW CHRISTIAN TEXT CONCERNING
THE LORD DRIVING OUT PASSIONS

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Abstract. — Edition of a sixth-century Greek papyrus whose provenance is
reported to be the Faiyum. The papyrus contains a previously unattested Chris-
tian text, possibly an amulet, with a reference to the Lord driving out passions.

The papyrus published here is housed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, under the
shelf mark MS. Gr. th. g. 9 (P). It is listed as no. 32481 under the accessions of 1897 in the Bodleian’s Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts (=SC). According to that catalogue, the papyrus was part of a lot purchased directly from B.P. Grenfell in 1896; the provenance is stated to be the Faiyum. It is possible that Grenfell acquired the papyrus in Medinet el-Faiyum from dealers or even workers on his excavation, although the real provenance remains unknown. While the SC lists that the papyrus came to the Bodleian in 1897, the library’s internal records show that the fragment was purchased along with other papyri on 23 October 1896. The discrepancy between 1896 and 1897 can be attributed to the weeks or months that it would take to make the item properly accessioned and shelf-marked.

1 The authors would like to thank Gregg Schwendner, the anonymous reviewers, and the editors of this journal, especially Jitse Dijkstra, for their helpful comments and feedback, which greatly improved this article.
4 On papyri excavated by Grenfell and D.G. Hogarth in the Faiyum for the Egypt Exploration Fund (now Society), see B.P. Grenfell, A.S. Hunt, D.G. Hogarth, Fayûm Towns and Their Papyri (London 1900).
5 Maden and Craster (n. 2) 159.
6 Private correspondence with the collection’s curator, Dr. Bruce Barker-Benfield, dated 7 August 2015.
The text of MS. Gr. th. g. 9 (P) is written with the fibers (→) on a complete sheet of papyrus that measures 7.9 × 7.8 cm. The back is blank. A small portion of the papyrus has torn away in the upper left-hand margin, where a cross once stood. Parts of this Christian symbol are still visible. A line filler occurs at the end of the last line of the page. There is a small lacuna running through ll. 2-3, and a tear along a possible vertical fold situated just right of center. There are horizontal abrasions that run through the bottom of the letters in ll. 2 and 6. These could possibly be normal abrasions or they could be evidence of where the papyrus was folded along these points.

The text is written in an informal hand. Letters are separated, upright, roughly bilinear, and with few decorations or flourishes. The letters ε, θ, ο, and ς are wide. The right oblique of the δ extends well beyond the apex; α has a rounded loop; υ is marked with decorative blobs. Punctuation is lacking. Nomina sacra are abbreviated by contraction, with accompanying supralinear strokes. The hand is of a hybrid type, combining elements from both biblical and Alexandrian majuscule scripts. Cavallo and Maehler note that this script was adopted for Coptic or bilingual Greek-Coptic texts. The two specimens that Cavallo and Maehler list for this hybrid class are P.Vindob. G 19802 (2 Cor., mid-sixth century) and P.Berol. inv. 13994 (Exod. LXX, middle or second half of sixth century). P.Vindob. G 39784 (1-2 Cor., sixth-seventh century) may also be cited as an additional comparandum, although this hand is admittedly more formal. The hand, therefore, may tentatively be assigned to the sixth century.

The SC describes the papyrus as a “fragment of a prayer,” and it is classified as an “invocation” in the online Bodleian catalogue of Western manuscripts. Its content, which is riddled with grammatical and orthographical errors (see commentary), may point toward an amulet. If used as an amulet, it would have, like other amulets, been placed and worn on the body. Some amulets were encased in cylinders and packets of sorts; others were merely folded and placed directly in a garment or threaded with a string and worn around the neck or arm. The absence of holes indicates

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9 See several images of such casings from antiquity in W.M.F. Petrie, Amulets: Illustrated by the Egyptian Collections in University College, London (London 1914) Pl. 19, no. 133. PGM XXXVI, ll. 37-40 contains instructions for folding an amulet and placing it in a garment.
that this papyrus was not threaded with a cord or string.\textsuperscript{10} A formulaic invocation or supporting apotropaic phrase is lacking but that does not exclude the possibility that we are dealing with an amulet. Indeed, as Theodore de Bruyn and Jitse H.F. Dijkstra note, “[t]he boundary between an apotropaic practice and a devotional practice cannot always be clearly drawn.”\textsuperscript{11}

The production of Christian amulets in Late Antiquity was rich and diverse and ritual specialists were not restricted to a certain sample of texts. We find a variety of texts inscribed on Christian amulets: prayers, creedal formulae, gospel incipits, instructions, doxologies, biblical passages, hagiographical references, and so on.\textsuperscript{12} De Bruyn notes that many amulets are indebted to “institutional rituals” (e.g. liturgies, prayers, creeds, chants) and that scribes reworked those ritualistic texts “with a degree of freedom and individuality.”\textsuperscript{13}

While the boundaries around some of these categories are admittedly often blurred, the small format together with the physical and textual features (i.e., written on one side, possible folds, cross\textsuperscript{14}) indicate that this papyrus may have functioned as an amulet, either from the beginning by design or repurposed as such. Following de Bruyn and Dijkstra’s taxonomy, we classify this papyrus as a possible amulet, leaving open the possibility that the text could have functioned in some other way (e.g. an \textit{aide-mémoire}, a writing exercise, a devotional text).\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{10} There is a small hole in l. 6, but its existence can probably be attributed to the vertical crease at that point.


\textsuperscript{13} De Bruyn (n. 12) 185.

\textsuperscript{14} 80 of the 186 (43\%) Christian amulets listed by de Bruyn and Dijkstra (n. 11) contain crosses or staurograms.

\textsuperscript{15} On the distinction between “probable” and “possible” amulets, see de Bruyn and Dijkstra (n. 11) 172-173. Items identified as probably amulets refer to texts with clearer indications about their use, such as explicit curative, apotropaic, or beneficial statements and expressions, among other features. Items identified as possible amulets refer to texts that lack protective or beneficial characteristics but have physical features such as the presence of holes, folds, and crosses.
Bodleian MS. Gr. th. g. 9 (P)  
H × W = 7.9 × 7.8 cm  
Faiyum? ca. VI CE

→ + θ(εο)ῦ δήναμις
   θ(εο)ῦ χάρις vacat
   κ(ύριο)ξ πάθη διώκει
   οὖ ξίφοι οὖ μαχέρα

5 ἀλλὰ ἐλπίς vacat
   ἔνεσις vacat
   θυσία vacat

1 ἰθ p.; read δύναμις  
2 ἰθ p.; πάθη; α corr. from δ; read πάθη διώκει
3 κϲ p.; πάθη; α corr. from δ; read πάθη διώκει
4 read ξίφοι, μαχαίρα  
6 read αἴνεσις

“The power of God (is) the grace of God. (The) Lord drives out passions not with a sword or knife, but hope, praise (and) sacrifice (drive them out?).”

1 θ(εο)ῦ δήναμις: The interchange of ι and η in Greek papyri of the Roman and Byzantine periods is well attested. The word δύναμις is no exception to this common interchange. The phrase “power of God” is a recurring theme in both early Jewish and early Christian literature. See Judith 13:19; Wis.Sol. 7:25; 2 Macc. 3:24; Matt. 22:29; Luke 22:69; Acts 8:10; 1 Cor. 1:24, 2:5; 2 Cor. 6:7, 13:4; Col. 2:12; 2 Tim. 1:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:5; many other examples may be found in PGL s.v. δύναμις.

2 χάρις: There is a blob of ink following χ, leaving α difficult to read on the papyrus. The loop of ρ is visible.

3 κ(ύριο)ξ πάθη διώκει: The idea of God driving out passions is well attested in patristic and monastic literature. According to Gregory Thaumaturgus, for example, God “drives passions out of human beings and brings death to the passions.” Maximus the Confessor spends a great deal of time discussing specific passions, how to rid oneself of them, their source, and so on in his Capita de caritate. One saying from the Apophthegmata Patrum reads, “When the monk takes refuge in God, detaches

17 Greg. Thaum., To Theopompus 13; translation is our own. See also Ps.-Justin, Oratio ad Graecos 5.
18 Max. Conf. Carit. 2.31: “From the passions embedded in our souls the demons seize opportunities of stirring up in us impassioned thoughts. Then, warring upon the mind through them, they force it on to consent to sin.” Translation from P. Allen and B. Neil (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor (Oxford 2015) 296.
himself from distractions and believes that God is able to heal him, then
the spiritual salt is sent to him, the good and man-loving Spirit; and, when
he comes, the passions take flight.”¹⁹ The Thesaurus Linguae Graecae
(TLG) has several instances of διώκω (and cognate terms like ἀπελαύνω)
along with the term πάθη. In a sermon by John Chrysostom, he says: “Let
us drive out (ἀπελαύνωμεν) all such passions (πάθη) from their soul.”²⁰
Perhaps most relevant for our text is a hymn by Romanus Melodus in
which πάθη is used in the sense of physical passions, as a disease or
illness that requires spiritual healing: “They [the twelve disciples] became
unseen helpers to the faithful and visible physicians of diseases (τῶν
παθῶν). They did not care for them with medicine and herbs, nor were
they cured with a surgeon’s knife or any other such things. Rather, they
drove out diseases (τὰ πάθη μὲν διώκοντες) with much authority by a
word and faith in Christ, which they held like a flame against uncured
diseases (παθῶν ἀθεραπεύτων).”²¹

²⁰ John Chrys. Anna 2.
In a “magical” context, understanding “passions” in terms of an actual disease needing to be healed (see *PGL* s.v. πάθος) makes good sense, although it would also fit within a monastic literary context, where the passions of the mind were a frequent topic of discussion.\(^{22}\) In any case, our papyrus places the Lord in control of driving out the passions, regardless of how “passions” may be understood here. The present tense of the verb διώκει would be important in a “magical” setting: it expresses the idea that the Lord is at this time driving out the passions of the object’s owner, thereby offering assurance of the divine remedy. The verb occurs frequently in the present tense in many magical texts vis-à-vis the chasing away of demons (e.g. *P.Oxy.* 8.1151; *BGU* 3.954).


\(^{23}\) Gignac (n. 16) 235-242, esp. 236-237.

\(^{24}\) Ath. *h. Ar.* 33; translation is our own.

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\(-\quad \pi\acute{a}\theta\omicron:\) Originally written πδθι, the scribe corrected δ to α in scribendo by adding a curving stroke inside the triangle of δ. The interchange of ι > η in Roman and Byzantine papyri is not uncommon, especially for η in final position.\(^{23}\)

4  οὐ ξίφι οὐ μαχέρᾳ: read οὐ ξίφει οὐ μαχαίρᾳ. The sentiment here is that the Lord will not drive out passions with physical force but through other means, which are outlined in the following lines. In his response to the Arians’ use of violence, Athanasius in the fourth century proclaimed that Christ’s truth “is not preached with swords (ξίφεσι) or with darts (βέλεσιν), nor by means of soldiers, but by persuasion and counsel.”\(^{24}\) The similar antithesis between physical weapons and other forms of action or expression is noteworthy.

5-7  ἐλπὶς ἔνεσις θύσια: The nominatives in ll. 5-7 are odd. The verb in l. 3 should govern all three words in ll. 5-7 and so we would expect here the dative case and not nominatives. The strong disjunctive ἀλλά connects the words in ll. 5-7 to the preceding clause, ruling out the possibility that the terms are unrelated nominatives. It is possible that the scribe simply erroneously used nominatives instead of datives. Alternatively, the use of the nominatives might be understood as *anacoluthon*, namely, a change in
grammatical construction mid-sentence.\textsuperscript{25} Despite this oddity, the sense seems clear: hope, sacrifice, and praise are the means by which the Lord will drive out the passions.

5 ἑλπίζ: The theme of “hope” is prevalent in the New Testament (48 times in total) and throughout early Christian literature. New Testament examples include, but are not limited to: Rom. 15:13; 1 Cor. 9:10, 13:13; 2 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 1:12; 1 Thess. 1:3; Titus 3:7; Heb. 6:18; 1 Peter 1:13, 21; 1 John 3:3. Often in the New Testament, “hope” is eschatological in nature, as in Rom. 5:4-5 where Paul refers to the “hope of sharing the glory of God.” Hope refers to the coming fulfillment of salvation, which has already begun in and through Christ. Related to this notion, Christ himself is often described as being the hope of all Christians (1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Clem. 1.7; Ign. Trall. proem, Magn. 7.1). Ignatius refers to Jesus Christ as the “perfect hope” (ἡ τελεία Ἰησοῦς Χριστός; Smyrn. 10.2). Elsewhere, he claims he is in chains “for the sake of our shared name and hope” (ὑπὲρ τοῦ κοινοῦ ὄνοματος καὶ ἑλπίδος; Eph. 1.2). Similarly, in 1 Clem. 51.1, dissenters are told to “look to the common ground of hope” (τὸ κοινὸν τῆς ἑλπίδος σκοπεῖν).

6 ἐνεσις: read αἰνεσις. The interchange ι/ε is the most frequent interchange in the papyri, next to the ει/ι interchange.\textsuperscript{26} This word for “praise” is a hapax legomenon in the New Testament at Heb. 13:15 (αἰνεσιος θυσια). “Praise” more commonly appears as the Greek word δόξα in the New Testament (149 times in total). However, αἰνεσις is not uncommon in the Septuagint (62 times in total) and early Christian literature; for instance, see 1 Clem. 18.15, 35.12, and 52.3; Iren. Haer. 1.14.8.

7 θυσια: As demonstrated in the PGL, θυσια has a broad range of meanings in early Christian literature: Christ as sacrifice; sacrifice of the cross; of martyrdom; of the Eucharist; of preaching; as a remedy for idolatry, and so on. Lactantius explains that a sacrifice worthy of God is “praise and a hymn,” probably an allusion to the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{27} Sacrifice frequently functions as a metaphor for thanksgiving and praise, particularly in the Psalms (e.g. Ps. 49:14 LXX). Commenting on the phrase αἰνεσιος θυσια in Heb. 13:15, which itself likely alludes to Ps. 49:14 LXX, Harry Attridge notes: “The metaphorical application of the language of

\textsuperscript{25} On anacoluthon, see H.W. Smyth, Greek Grammar (Cambridge, Mass. 1956) 671-673 (§§3004-3008).
\textsuperscript{26} See Gignac (n. 16) 192-193.
\textsuperscript{27} Lactantius, Div. inst. 6.25.
sacrifice either to prayer or to ethical categories was widespread in the Hellenistic period, among Greco-Roman moralists, Jews who continued and expanded the prophetic critique of cultic formalism, and early Christians.” 28 Heb. 13:15 defines αἰνέσεως θυσία as “the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” 29 According to Philo, the noble offer sacrifices, namely, honoring God with “hymns and thanksgiving … sometimes with the organs of speech.” 30 While it is unclear precisely how θυσία should be understood in our papyrus given a lack of meaningful context, it is possible to understand the term broadly and metaphorically in terms of thanksgiving and praise to God.

In summary, we have here a previously unattested Christian text with an expression concerning the divine remedy of the passions. In a “magical” application, the written text would have had this specific beneficial value (e.g. remedy of the passions) for the one who presumably wore it on his or her body. The cross-fertilizing influences of religion and culture in Late Antique Egyptian Christianity are visible in our papyrus, within which various and widespread theological terms and concepts are embedded.

29 Translation is our own.