Counting on God's Name: The Numerology of *Nomina Sacra*[*]

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Abstract

This study reconstructs the numerological considerations behind a Judeo-Greek innovation in religious terminology, with a focus on its key element—Hellenization of the Hebrew name of God. It demonstrates that the Greek *nomen sacrum* κc can also be interpreted as a sacred number, a fact that directly infuses the otherwise broad term κύριος with numinosity. This observation carries multiple implications for understanding the phenomena of *nomina sacra* and "names-numbers" as well as other related topics, such as the emergence of Greek and Hebrew alphabetic numerals, early Jewish and Christian numeric symbolism, and early binitarian theology.

[*] This work is being completed during the "Swords of Iron" operation. I dedicate it to the memory of the victims of October 7 and its aftermath הי״ד, extending prayers for all the captives and the soldiers who continue to put their lives in danger even as I pen these words. May their sacrifice be the last ever—לִקְרֹא שְׁנַת־רָצוֹן לַיהוָה וְיוֹם נָקָם לֵאלֹהֵינוּ לְנַחֵם כָּל־אֲבֵלִים (Isa 61:2).

I thank my friends and colleagues Cyril Aslanov, Mark Geller, Moshe Idel, Menahem Kister, Israel Knohl, Andrei Orlov, Serge Ruzer, Dan Shapira, and Michael Stone, who either read the manuscript or took part in its discussion at the workshop in Dor-Nahsholim in June 2023, providing valuable notes. A significant part of this research was carried out during my visiting appointments at Sapienza Università di Roma and Università della Tuscia in spring 2023. I thank Barbara Ronchetti and Alessandro Cifariello for inviting me, Francesco d'Aiuto for his help and advice at Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, and Juan Carlos Ossandón Widow for hosting me at Biblioteca Pontificia Università della Santa Croce.

Keywords

Tetragrammaton, numerical symbolism, isopsephy, gematria, alphabetic numerals, Judeo-Greek, binitarian, high Christology

> וְשָׂא אֵת מִסְפַּר שְׁמֹתָם—". . . and take the count of their names." (Numbers 3:40)
>
> Who will tolerate you in your juggling with forms and numbers . . . and bringing down the Lord of all who founded the heavens to the number. . . . Nor should they seek to prosecute inquiries respecting God by means of numbers, syllables, and letters. For this is an uncertain mode of proceeding, on account of their varied and diverse systems, and because every sort of hypothesis may at the present day be, in like manner, devised by anyone. (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.15.5, 2.25.1)[1]

Introduction

A. Naming God

Naming is one of the fundamental devices of cognition. Since cognition is based, as noticed already by Aristotle, on our ability to recognize commonalities and differences,[2] it is not easy to pick a name for a referent which, being completely unique, at the same time also contains all other referents within itself. Such a referent remains essentially beyond any taxonomy—that is, unknowable and, therefore, unnamable. However, our ability and need to contemplate such an entity makes its naming necessary. Indeed, over the course of history such names have been achieved through diverse and often interdependent modes of revelation, tradition, and speculation.

The central idea of Jewish thought—the concept of the one and only God, the sole creator and ruler of the universe—developed through elaboration of a set of terms enabling the possibility of referring to this original theological construct. These Hebrew designations of God—his names, titles, and attributes, some borrowed from existing cults and others unprecedentedly original—underwent transformation as they evolved towards a monotheistic conception.[3] This transformation was as

[1] Translations of Irenaeus here and elsewhere are by Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* [hereafter *ANF*] (ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe; 10 vols.; Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885).

[2] See, e.g., Aristotle, *Met*. 10.1054b; 3.999a; cf. W. Quine, "Natural Kinds," in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (ed. J. Kim and E. Sosa; New York: Columbia University Press, 1969) 114–138, at 116.

[3] Among relatively general or recent works on Hebrew divine names, see, e.g., Oskar Grether, *Name und Wort Gottes im Alten Testament* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 64; Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1934); Lawrence H. Schiffman, "The Use of Divine Names," in his *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Courts, Testimony and the Penal Code* (BJS 33; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983) 133–54; Otto Kaiser, *Der Gott des Alten Testaments* (3 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Gmbh, 1993, 1998, 2003); Adelheid Ruck-Schröder, *Der Name Gottes und der Name Jesu. Eine neutestamentliche Studie* (WMANT; Neukirchen-Vluyn:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001781602510076X Published online by Cambridge University Press

semantic as it was structural. That is, being integrated into monotheistic usage, these pre-monotheistic terms underwent an evolution of their meanings. By developing and complementing each other, they came to form a new conceptual structure (or, more precisely, multiple structures) of the only God and his characteristics.

B. Translating God's Name

Devising names for God is a linguo-theological development that has, in fact, never ended. It continues in our days, having been transplanted to multiple cultural contexts. However, during certain phases of history it accelerated, becoming more productive and influential. The transformation of religious terminology that occurred when the Hebrew faith was exported onto Greek soil became the basis for all subsequent developments. This Hellenization of God was similar to and different from the long, painful, and inspiring process of the reduction (or, if you prefer, promotion) of earlier Semitic deities to the names and titles of the Hebrew God. Both processes were intercultural and had immense consequences for religious and secular thought. The main difference is that the latter process was shorter in duration, has much better documentation, and belongs to the period when speculative thought began to displace myth.

Among the nearly one hundred terms and metaphoric and descriptive epithets applied to God in the Hebrew Bible and early post-biblical Jewish literature,[4] the most significant and least translatable was the name of four letters (the Tetragram). The most common equivalent for the Tetragram (on the meanings of which, see below) came to be the Greek κύριος (often in its contracted form—$\overline{\text{κς}}$),which combined a diverse set of meanings ranging from the mundane "master, lord" to the royal human or divine "Lord." This polysemy has been partly inherited through the biblical usage by the English word *Lord* and its equivalents in other languages, such as *Dominus*, *Signor*, *Herr*, *Господь*, et cetera. The introduction of κύριος, as well as its equivalents in many languages, proceeded not without deliberation or resistance. The inadequacy of any term to be applied to the concept of the monotheistic God caused and continues to cause unceasing attempts to introduce alternative terminology. These philosophical and taxonomic difficulties were compounded by cultic and magical considerations, as well as by the social-religious concerns of group identity.[5]

The demand for alternatives and surrogates appeared already in Hebrew usage. In parallel with the development of the Greek tradition that was based on it, this

Neukirchen Verlag, 1999); Christiane Zimmermann, *Die Namen des Vaters. Studien zu ausgewählten neutestamentlichen Gottesbezeichnungen vor ihrem frühjüdischen und paganen Sprachhorizont* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) 12–17; David Porreca, "Divine Names: A Cross-Cultural Comparison (Papyri Graecae Magicae, Picatrix, Munich Handbook)," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 5.1 (2010) 17–29.

[4] See, e.g., the list of Greek terms in Ralph Marcus, "Divine Names and Attributes in Hellenistic Literature," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 2 (1931–1932) 45–120. See also Zimmermann, *Die Namen des Vaters*.

[5] On the process of the introduction of κύριος, see the section "The Introduction of κύριος" below.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001781602510076X Published online by Cambridge University Press

development further complicated the already perplexing undertaking of translating the Hebrew term. The situation with finding a Greek equivalent for the Tetragram was complicated by the fact that during the period under discussion, oral usage of the Ineffable Name had already become extremely limited.[6] Thus, two functional forms co-existed: the original written but now tabooed form, alongside various Hebrew and Aramaic substitutions.[7] As was formulated later, "I am not pronounced as I am written" (b. Kidd. 71a). Therefore, the Greek word could render not the Tetragram itself, but its substitutions in Hebrew and possibly Aramaic (*adonai, mara(n), ribbon*, *shema*, etc.). Since the meanings and connotations of both forms of representation—both original and substitutional—were relevant in Semitic usage, both had to be taken into account when translating to Greek.

C. Lost in Translation

It was, of course, an impossible task to translate this Hebrew name. The Greek term inevitably failed to express most of the diverse elements of content contained not only in the Tetragram itself but even in its most common Semitic substitutions.[8]

[6] For a recent and detailed survey of research on the disuse of the Tetragram, see Anthony R. Meyer, *The Divine Name in Early Judaism: Use and Non-Use in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek* (PhD diss., McMaster University, 2017) 13–41. See also Guy G. Stroumsa, "A Nameless God: Judaeo-Christian and Gnostic 'Theologies of the Name,'" in *The Image of the Judeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature: Papers Delivered at the Colloquium of the Institutum Iudaicum, Brussels, 18–19 November 2001* (ed. Peter J. Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 230–43; Kristin De Troyer, "The Names of God, their Pronunciation and their Translation: A Digital Tour of Some of the Main Witnesses," *Lectio Difficilior* 2 (2005), https://www.lectio.unibe.ch/en/archive/kristin-de-troyer-the-names-of-god-their-pronunciation-and-their-translation-a-digital-tour-of-some-of-the-main-witnesses.html; eadem, "The Pronunciation of the Names of God: With Some Notes Regarding 'Nomina sacra,'" in *Gott nennen: Gottes Namen und Gott als Name* (ed. Ingolf *U.* Dalferth and Philipp Stoellger; Religion in Philosophy and Theology 35; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 143–72; Pavlos D. Vasileiadis, "The Pronunciation of the Sacred Tetragrammaton: An Overview of a *Nomen Revelatus* that Became a *Nomen Absconditus*," *Judaica Ukrainica* 2 (2013) 5–20.

[7] Cf. similar substitutions in other practices, like the descriptive *Bel* (also meaning "lord") for the proper name *Marduk*. On κύριος for Greco-Roman and especially Oriental deities and on numeric substitutions of divine names, see below.

[8] Such as plurality and the possessive form of *adonai* "my lords." This would apply unless 1) *-ai* was an emphatic suffix without these grammatical meanings or they were eliminated in the usage of *adonai* as a title (as they are in *elohim*, also translated to Aramaic and Greek with forms in singular); 2) κύριος was not based on *adonai* but on another substitute, like Aram. *mar(e)* or *ribbon* (see, e.g., Gustaf H. Dalman, *Der Gottesname Adonaj und Seine Geschichte* [Berlin: H. Reuther's Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1889] 328; C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935] 7; Troyer, "Names"). See also Wolhel Bousset, *Kyrios Christos. Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1967) 94–125; Gustaf H. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language* (trans. D. M. Kay; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902) 179–83, 324–40; J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Semitic Background of the New Testament *Kyrios*-Title," in his *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays* (SBLMS 25; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979) 115–43; idem, "New Testament *Kyrios* and *Maranatha* and their Aramaic Background," in his *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) 218–35.

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However, the incongruity of Greek equivalents was much more striking in relation to the Tetragram itself. It is not surprising that some Greek translators simply gave up on the challenge and kept the Hebrew word intact (sometimes in paleo-Hebrew script) or even left an empty space (into which the Hebrew word was probably supposed to be written later).

Compared to the Hebrew Tetragram, Greek κύριος provides a functional description instead of a name (and thus, contributes rather to theology than mythology). However, in addition to bringing new opportunities for theologizing the term in certain respects,[9] it also brought theological constriction and the loss of a wider exegetical perspective. This is because the Greek term lacked a number of the Tetragram's semantic and functional characteristics, such as: 1) verbal meaning; 2) the quality of a proper name; 3) uniqueness; and, moreover, its 4) phonetic, 5) graphic, and 6) numeric values. Before introducing our new analysis here (which relates mainly to the last point), it is important to demonstrate what pains ancient Judeo-Greek[10] translators were prepared to take in order to overcome these deficiencies and to preserve at least some of the characteristics of the Tetragram that could easily be lost in translation. These include:

1) *Verbal meaning*. The Tetragram's verbal meaning of "be" or "cause to be," actualized in the Hebrew texts of Ex 3:14 and Hos 1:9, was lost in κύριος and other equivalents. However, it found actualization in the substantivized participle ὁ ὤν (or τὸ ὄν) "the One who is / the Being," which translated אהיה (אשר) in LXX Ex 3:14. This term was frequently used as God's name by Philo (*Abr.* 107, 119–123, esp. 121; *Det.* 160, *Mut*. 11–13, *Som*. 1.231–4). Outside Philo it is rare but exists (Wis 13:1; 4 Macc 5:24; Josephus, *Ant*. 8.350; Rev 1:4, 8; cf. 4:8; 11:17; 16:5). This Judeo-Platonic term was also appropriated and widely used by Naassenes and other groups defined as Gnostics and possibly by the second-century Neopythagorean philosopher Numenius of Apamea.[11]

2) *Proper name*. The very existence of ancient Near Eastern gods was connected to their ability to be "called by name" (Enuma Elish 1.6–10; cf. Ex 3:13).[12]

[9] See, e.g., the discussion in George Howard, "The Tetragram and the New Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977) 63–83, and the references there.

[10] Hereafter we use the term Judeo-Greek mostly in an inclusive way, referring also to the early Christians and avoiding anachronistic dichotomy between the two groups.

[11] See A. Marmorstein, "Philo and the Names of God," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 22 (1932) 295–306; N. A. Dahl and A. F. Segal, "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 9.2 (1978) 1–28; Gerard. P. Luttikhuizen, "The Revelation of the Unknowable God in Coptic Gnostic Texts," in *The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity* (ed. G. H. van Kooten, R. A. Kugler, and L. T. Stuckenbruck; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 237–46; Robert J. Wilkinson, *Tetragrammaton: Western Christians and the Hebrew Name of God from the Beginnings to the Seventeenth Century* (Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 179; Leiden: Brill, 2016) 158–59.

[12] "When no gods whatever had been brought into being, uncalled by name, their destinies undetermined. Then it was that the gods were formed within them. Lahmu and Lahamu were brought forth, by name they were called" (Enuma Elish 1.7–10 [*The Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James Bennett Pritchard; 3rd ed.; ANET 60–61; Princeton: Princeton

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This entire sphere of "Name" mythology and mysticism would be lost with the substitution of a descriptive title for a *nomen proprium*. Knowing the name is a religious value (Ps 9:11; 91:14). God's name is "on" his messenger (Ex 23:21). The name can be loved (Ps 5:11), praised (Ps 7:17; 9:2), and trusted (Ps 20:7); it can protect a person (Ps 20:1). God's name is in fact his very presence (Deut 12:5; 1 Kg 8:6 *et pass*.). Some verses, in fact, do not make sense unless the proper name is meant (Ex 6:3; Isa 42:8; Jer. 16:21; Ps 83:18). The fact of its existence and magic powers was known also to non-Jewish Greek authors.[13]

Attempts to preserve God's prosoponym are reflected in fragments of the Greek Bible that preserve the Hebrew name amidst a Greek text, either in original Hebrew writing or its graphic imitation or phonetic transcription, as discussed below. But neither of these options endured, and additional strategies were also employed. Greek equivalents of the Tetragram could be likened to proper names grammatically. Thus κύριος was often used without an article in the LXX.[14] Most curiously, the loss of God's proper name was partly compensated by the introduction of new ones. God's Hebrew titles and attributes, being permitted for pronunciation, were sometimes transliterated and thus began life anew as proper names. Thus, in Greek there are *El* (Ἔλ), *Saddai* (Σαδδαΐ), and *Sabaoth* (Σαββαώθ). The latter eventually usurped the place of the Tetragram as a proper name of God. However, the loss of the original proper name, the importance of which biblical texts often refer to, could not be ignored. The name was reinvented by medieval Latin scholars (based erroneously on Masoretic vocalization of the Tetragram as its substitute *Adonai*) and may be found in Christian usage in several verses of Tyndale's Pentateuch (1530), the Geneva Bible (1560), the Bishop's Bible (1568), the King James Version (1611), and (more consistently) the American Standard Version of 1901.[15]

University Press, 1969) 60–61]).

[13] G. H. van Kooten, "Moses/Musaeus/Mochos and his God Yahweh, Iao, and Sabaoth, Seen from a Graeco-Roman Perspective," in *Revelation of the Name*, 107–38. On magic powers of the Hebrew Name, see Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978) 49; Hans-Jürgen Becker, "The Magic of the Name and Palestinian Rabbinic Literature," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture* (ed. Peter Schäfer; 3 vols.; Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 71, 79, 93; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998–2002) 3:391–407; Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 117–19, 198–201, 305–7, 376–78.

[14] Apart from rare exceptions, it is used without an article in the nominative, direct accusative, and genitive cases (see Zimmermann, *Die Namen des Vaters*, 179). Cf. τὸ ὄν "the One who is," also not declined in Rev 1:4.

[15] Cf. F. B. Denio, "The Use of the Word *Jehovah* in Translating the Old Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 46 (1927) 146–49. See also the modern reinvention of the Tetragram's pronunciation and translations based on it (e.g., the Catholic Jerusalem Bible of 1966). On the other hand, the very existence of the name could be ignored: "Lord . . ., whose name has not been sent into this world" (Asc. Isa. 1:7); alternatively, the loss of the Name could be conceptualized. In Greek usage mythological and mystic aspects of the proper name were replaced by a theologization of the very fact of the name's absence. This namelessness of the Greek-Jewish God was rationalized by Philo: "God indeed needs no name" (Philo, *De Abrahamo* 51 [trans. F. H. Colson; LCL 289; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935] 31); "it is a logical consequence that no personal name even can be properly assigned to the truly Existent" (*De Mutatione Nominum* 11, [trans. F. H. Colson

3) *Uniqueness*. The Hebrew version of the Name was not only personal, but also unique. The Greek equivalent was anything but unique and could bear other religious and profane meanings: from deities and demons to worldly rulers and "masters," in the widest spectrum of senses related to ownership of property and slaves, authority over disciples, or even polite address. Thus, in addition to losing some original meanings of the Semitic surrogates of the Tetragram, the Greek title gained new meanings absent in the original forms. This profane-sacral polysemy of κύριος enabled cases of confusion or intentional play among the meanings of "master,"[16] "teacher,"[17] "king," and "divine being." Even uniquely biblical combinations of divine titles did not always help to differentiate God from his creatures in Greek. A striking example is the phrase δέσποτα κύριε ("Lord God" or "lord master")—used in the LXX to render the Tetragrammaton or אֲדֹנָי (e.g., Jonah 4:3; Dan 9:15)—which also appears in Judith 5:20 and 11:10 as a form of address to the vicious Holofernes. This situation could and did cause certain confusions for religious thought. When applied to Jesus, this enabled his assimilation with God and had consequences for the emergence of binitarian and trinitarian theology.[18]

An additional reversal of functions accompanied the Greek set of God's names. Among the Hebrew names and titles of God only the Tetragram and Shaddai are unique. All the rest are descriptive titles with profane usage as well. In Greek it is precisely the other way round: the renderings of the Tetragram and Shaddai (παντοκράτωρ, ἱκανός, πανηγεμών) are mostly descriptive and have profane meanings as well, while some Greek equivalents for other Hebrew *nomina divina* had mostly sacral usage in Greek (like θεός or ὕψιστος). Thus, as in the case of seeking to preserve the quality of a *proper* name (see above), there was a structural need for a *unique* form when rendering the Tetragram. It is likely that the introduction of an innovative contracted form was intended to solve this problem (as well as the even more pressing issue of the profane-sacral ambiguity of κύριος). Eventually, however, $\overline{\text{κς}}$ would be used with a profane meaning as well.[19] This failure

and G. H. Whitaker; LCL 275; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934] 147). It was developed further in patristic writings (cf., e.g., Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5, 81). On God's namelessness, see more in A. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God* (2 vols.; London: Oxford University Press, 1927) 1:17–18; idem, "Philo and the Names." According to Dodd, "by merely eliminating the name of God, the Septuagint contributed to the definition of monotheism" (*Bible and the Greeks*, 4). For an alternative view, see Emanuel Tov, "Theologically Motivated Exegesis Embedded in the Septuagint," in *Translation of Scripture: Proceedings of a Conference of the Annenberg Research Institute, May 15–16, 1989* (Philadelphia: The Institute, 1990) 215–34.

[16] Including in the rabbinic Hebrew loan form קירי(ס) in both profane and sacral meanings.

[17] As in Hebrew and Aramaic *rabbi*, *maran(a), rabboni.*

[18] Additional consequences, not all of them purely theological, also ensued, such as martyrdom for refusing to call emperors κύριος. See, e.g., Dalman, *Gottesname*, 326–30; A. Deissman, *Light from the Ancient East* (New York, 1927) 357–61.

[19] See Scott D. Charlesworth, "Consensus Standardization in the Systematic Approach to *Nomina Sacra* in Second- and Third-Century Gospel Manuscripts," *Aegyptus* 86 (2006) 37–68. Cf. D. Jongkind, *Scribal Habits of Codex Sinaiticus* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2007) 62–84; James R.

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of the Greek tradition was ameliorated in its Cyrillo-Methodian offshoot, where the Slavonic form господь (contracted гѣ) was eventually isolated for reference to God only.[20] In the Western tradition the first consistent attempt to indicate the uniqueness of God's name came about only with the complete capitalization of "HERR" in the Luther Bible of 1522 to 1534.[21]

4) *Phonetic value*. Despite the tendency to taboo oral usage of the Name, its phonetic form has been transcribed into Greek as ιαω and other similar forms.[22] Some scholars suggest that this form was, in fact, the earliest Greek equivalent of the Tetragram, which was transcribed just like other proper names in the LXX.[23] This Greek transcription of the Hebrew form possibly gave impetus to the development of a new theological and rhetorical device in Revelation: "I am the Alpha and the Omega"—the two letters adjacent in ιαω (1:8; 21:6; 22:13). This conception is close to that constructed on the verbal semantics of the Hebrew name in Rev 1:4 and parallels (see above).

5) *Graphic value.* Another extreme was furnished by graphic imitation of the Hebrew letters by means of visually similar Greek ones (ΠΙΠΠ), as witnessed *inter alia* by Jerome (*Ep. 25 ad Marcellum*).[24]

6) *Numeric value*. Based on the information presented heretofore, one may receive the impression that Jewish Greek literati, while going to great lengths to express diverse meanings and features of the Tetragram, totally neglected only one aspect: its numeric value. Is this likely?

There are two possible answers to this question.

One would be that the very question is superfluous: *the Tetragram did not have a numeric value* at the time when its Greek equivalents were introduced,

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Royse, *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri* (Brill: Leiden, 2008) 260–61.

[20] See Alexander Kulik, "The господь–господинъ Dichotomy and the Cyrillo-Methodian Linguo-Theological Innovation," *Slověne* 8.1 (2019) 25–54. Cf. also the introduction of two equivalents for the Greek κύριος in Peshitta, Syriac *morio*/*maria* and *moran*/*maran*, in order to distinguish God and Jesus (Shirley L. Case, "Kurios as a Title for Christ," *JBL* 26.2 [1907] 151–61; Alain-Georges Martin, "La Traduction de ΚΥΡΙΟΣ en Syriaque," *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 12 [1999] 25–54).

[21] See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann; 82 vols.; Saint Lewis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–2022) 35:248–49.

[22] See the list of possible Greek transcriptions of the Tetragram assembled by Vasileiadis ("Pronunciation," 77–82).

[23] Thus P. W. Skehan, "The Qumran Manuscripts and Textual Criticism," in *Volume du Congrès International pour l'étude de l'Ancien Testament, Strasbourg 1956* (ed. P. A. H. de Boer; VTSup 4; Leiden: Brill, 1957) 148–60, at 157–58; H. Stegemann, "Religionsgeschichtliche Erwägungen zu den Gottesbezeichnungen in den Qumrantexten," in *Qumrân. Sa piété, sa théologie et son milieu* (ed. M. Delcor; BEThL 44; Leuven: Peeters, 1978) 195–217, at 205; E. Tov, "The Greek Biblical Texts from the Judean Desert," in *The Bible as Book: The Transmission of the Greek Text* (ed. Scott McKendrick and Orlaith O'Sullivan; London: The British Library, 2003) 97–122, at 112–14. Cf. Martin Rösel's criticism of this hypothesis in his "The Reading and Translation of the Divine Name in the Masoretic Tradition and the Greek Pentateuch," *JSOT* 31 (2007) 411–28.

[24] CSEL 54.219. See *Monumenta Sacra et Profana VII Codex Syro-Hexaplaris Ambrosianus* (ed. A. M. Ceriani; London, 1874) 1.106–12; C. Taylor, *Hebrew-Greek Cairo Genizah Palimpsests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900) 6–11; Wilkinson, *Tetragrammaton*, 89–96, 72–74.

because Jews did not assign numeric values to their letters until a relatively late period. Hebrew-Greek translations started in the third century BCE, while Hebrew alphabetic numerals are not attested before the late second century BCE.

This answer cannot satisfy for three reasons: 1) The search for equivalents of the Tetragram did not cease in the later period, after Hebrew alphabetic numerals had been documented. In fact, our data primarily pertains to this later period. 2) Furthermore, indirect evidence of Hebrew alphabetic numerals exists from an earlier era. 3) And most importantly, as this article will demonstrate, the numeric value of the Tetragram does appear in Greek translations.

This study suggests that the numeric value of God's name not only was not neglected but, on the contrary, was introduced with clarity for an authentic target audience. Drawing upon the well-documented graphic identity of the Hellenistic *sigma* and *digamma* in the form of the lunate c, I will demonstrate that the *nomen sacrum* $\overline{\text{κc}}$, a commonly employed contracted form of κύριος, used as an equivalent of the Hebrew Tetragram, was isomorphic to the Greek alphabetic numeral $\overline{\text{κc}}$ (*kappa-digamma*, 20+6=26). Thus, it must have been devised as an isopsephism of the Hebrew divine name (*yod-heh-vav-heh*, 10+5+6+5=26). This suggestion aligns well with the fact that the majority of supposed cases of isopsephism found in the Hebrew Bible are also based on the number 26, a numeric representation of the name of God (see the section "Numerology of 26 in Hebrew" below).

The numeric value of $\overline{\text{κc}}$ is conspicuously absent from ancient Jewish and Christian sources and has been overlooked in the extensive research literature on *nomina sacra*. This oversight is especially striking given that the observation could have aided in resolving several issues concerning the origins of *nomina sacra*, revisiting some old questions, and shedding new light on the interpretation of important texts.

The article will begin by presenting the paleographic evidence and exploring possible alternatives for the numeric reading of $\overline{\text{κc}}$ (section A, "The Numeric Value of $\overline{\text{κc}}$"). It will then delve into a discussion of the broader phenomena that made possible the introduction of $\overline{\text{κc}}$, along with its manifold implications (section B, "The Name-Number $\overline{\text{κc}}$ in Context"). An overview of the diverse evidence presented below has been organized into a timeline, which can be found at the conclusion of the article.

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The Numeric Value of κϛ

> The intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. (Edgar A. Poe)[25]

A. κϛ as 26 and the Origins of "Nomina Sacra"

The so-called "Milesian" system of Greek alphabetic numerals included three ἐπισήματα, additional characters, among which was the archaic character *digamma*, used for the numeral 6. This *digamma* was known also as *vau* (βαυ, an equivalent of the Canaanite *waw*), or simply as ἐπίσημον "a remarkable sign" (a name it shared with *koppa* [90] and *sampi* [900]) or alternatively as γαμ(μ)έξ/γαβέξ.

In fact, the Hellenistic ἐπίσημον with a numeric value of 6 is called "*digamma*" mostly in modern usage, while in antiquity the names and especially the forms of this sign were quite different.[26] One of the graphic variants of the Semitic as well as the Archaic Greek *waw*/*digamma* was ϝ (originally inverted; this form was inherited by the Latin F). Already in the Classical period, this form had developed a square variant without a tail—⊏, which by the Hellenistic epoch had lost its angles to take on the rounded form ⊂, thus making it fully homographic with the lunate *sigma*.[27] Greek paleographic data indeed shows that the new *digamma* was often homeo- or fully homographic with the *sigma*. What is important for our discussion is that this is true not only for the late minuscule script—where *digamma*, *stigma* (a ligature of *sigma* and *tau*), and the word-final *sigma* with a tail (ς) were identical or highly similar (to the extent that the *digamma* was often called "*stigma*")—but, even more strikingly, for the Hellenistic script as well, where *digamma* and *sigma* were both often depicted as a lunate C.[28]

This frequent graphic identity of the numeric *digamma* and the *sigma* is known to paleographers and corroborated by Graeco-Egyptian papyri.[29] I will adduce

[25] Edgar A. Poe, "The Purloined Letter," in his *The Gift: A Christmas and New Year's Present for 1845* (ed. Robert Walsh; Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1844) 41–61.

[26] See A. N. Jannaris, "The *digamma, koppa*, and *sampi* as Numerals in Greek," *CQ* 1 (1907) 37–40, at 39.

[27] Thus L. H. Jeffery, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961) 23–25. The form became very common, at least outside Attica (Marcus N. Tod, "The Alphabetic Numeral System in Attica," *Annual of the British School at Athens* 45 [1950] 126–39, at 135). For the lunate *sigma*, see the paleographic tables in Victor E. Gardthausen, *Griechische Paläographie* (2 vols.; 2nd ed.; Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1911–1913) 2:Taf. 1–4.

[28] See G. Ranocchia, "Is ϝ-shaped digamma attested as a numerical sign in Greek papyri? Once more on P.Herc. 1669 and P.Oxy. 1176," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 140 (2020) 199–205, and refences there.

[29] See Ranocchia, "Is ϝ-shaped digamma," 199, 202–3 (esp. n. 8), where he adduces the following examples of manuscripts with identical *digamma* and *sigma*: P.Lond.Lit. 28, col. 11, 42; P.Grenf. II 11, col. 2, 4; P.Oxy. 4449, col. 1 (upper margin); P.Oxy. 4499, *fr*. 16, 3 recto; P.Beatty III, f. 1v, 9 and 13; f. 7r, 10; P.Beatty VI, f. 11r, 11 *passim*. Cf. "Das Vau hat in der älteren Papyrusschrift noch seine ursprünglichere Form C," etc. (Gardthausen, *Griechische Paläographie*, 2.265); "In NT manuscripts it [*digamma*] is fairly rare (most scribes tended to use the longhand ἕξ), but when it

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only one example out of many instances. In Chester Beatty P. 47 (P. Beatty III; TM 61628),[30] a manuscript of Revelation dating from the third century, in 9:13–14 (fol. 1a) the number 6 appears twice (underline added):

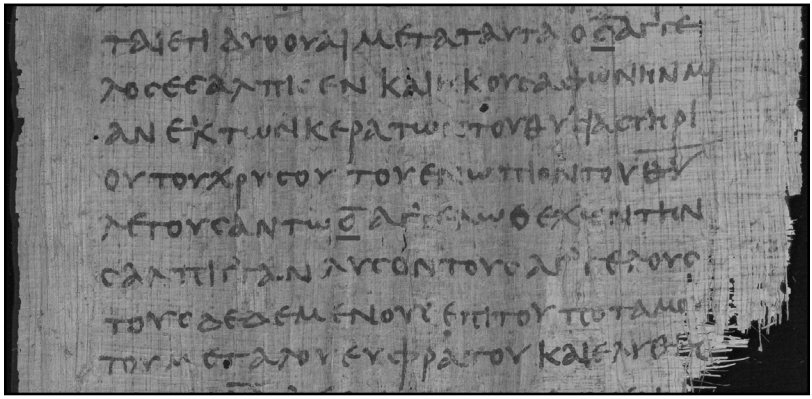

Fig. 1: P.47 (fol. 1a), Rev 9:13-14 (Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, CBL BP III).

(9:13) ὁ $\underline{\text{ξ}}$ ἕκτος] ἄγγε-
λος ἐσάλπισεν· καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν μί-
αν ἐκ τῶν [τεσσάρων] κεράτων τοῦ θυσιαστηρί-
ου τοῦ χρυσοῦ τοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θ[εο]ῦ,

(9:14) λέγοντα τῷ $\underline{\text{ξ}}$ [ἕκτῳ] ἀγγέλῳ, ὁ ἔχων τὴν
σάλπιγγα, λῦσον τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους
τοὺς δεδεμένους ἐπὶ τῷ ποταμῷ
τῷ μεγάλῳ εὐφράτῃ.

(9:13) The **6th** angel
sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice
coming from the four horns of the
golden altar that is before God.

(9:14) It said to the **6th** angel who had the
trumpet, "Release the four angels
who are bound at the great river
Euphrates."[31]

appears it sometimes takes the form C, which is visually undifferentiated from the lunate *sigma*" (Zachary J. Cole, *Numerals in Early Greek New Testament Manuscripts: Text-Critical, Scribal, and Theological Studies* [Leiden: Brill, 2017] 3). Cole also mentions several NT papyri which do not distinguish *sigma* and *digamma* (ibid., 3, 50, 64, 193). At the same time, this information has not been as easily accessible as it might have been: most popular paleographic tables, including the ones by Gardhausen, Thompson, and Harrauer, for some reason do not include the additional numeric letters (ἐπισήματα). See Edward M. Thompson, *An Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912) 144–47 ("Greek literary alphabets"), 191–94 ("Greek cursive alphabets"); Gardthausen, *Griechische Paläographie*, 2:Taf. 1–5; Hermann Harrauer, *Handbuch der griechischen Paläographie* (Bibliothek des Buchwesens 20; Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2010) 1:143–71 (§XII: "Bilderdatei zu den Buchstabenformen").

[30] Images reproduced by kind permission of the holding library: Chester Beatty, Dublin, CC–BY–4.0. See https://viewer.cbl.ie/viewer/image/BP_III_f_1/1/ and https://manuscripts.csntm.org/manuscript/Group/GA_P47.

[31] Hereafter, trans. NIV, sometimes modified.

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In Rev 13:18 (fol. 7a) the number 6 appears as part of 666:

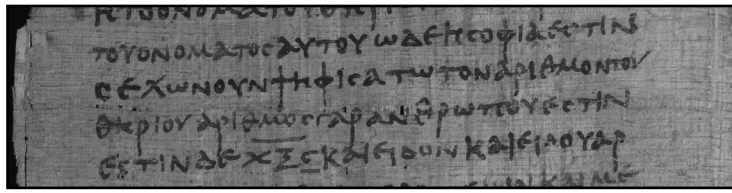

Fig. 2: P.47 (fol. 7a), Rev 13:18 (Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, CBL BP III).

ωδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν:	This calls for wisdom.
ὁ ἔχων νοῦν ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ	Let the person who has insight calculate the
θηρίου, ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν:	number of the beast, for it is the number
{ἐστίν} καὶ [ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτοῦ] χξς.	of a man.
	That number is **666**.

And finally, in the same manuscript κύριος as κc is found in Rev 11:8 (fol. 3a):

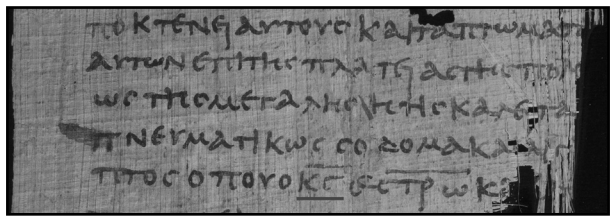

Fig. 3: P.47 (fol. 3a), Rev. 11:8 (Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, CBL BP III).

καὶ τὸ πτῶμα	And their bodies
αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τῆς πλατείας τῆς πόλε-	will lie in the public square of the
ως τῆς μεγάλης, ἥτις καλεῖται	great city, which is called
πνευματικῶς Σόδομα καὶ Αἴγυ-	figuratively Sodom and Egypt,
πτος, ὅπου καὶ ὁ κς ἐστρώ [κ[ύριο]ς [αὐτῶν]	where also their **Lord** was crucified.
ἐστ[αυ]ρώ[θη]].	

In all these cases, the number C (6) is undistinguishable from the letter C (σ).

Thus, κc, the main Greek equivalent of the Tetragram, the most common contracted form of κύριος, was completely indistinguishable from the Greek numeral κc (26), the numeric value of the Tetragram in Hebrew. These two forms were perfect homographs.

Two additional factors further enhanced their identity: 1) The contracted form of abbreviation, in which only the initial and final letters of a word are denoted—in contrast to suspension, in which the end of the word is omitted (as in κυ for κύ[ριος])—was not known in this period outside Jewish/Christian-Greek texts. It must have been a Hellenistic Jewish innovation imitating consonantal writing

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and based on early attested West Semitic practices.[32] Thus, when this abbreviating convention was introduced, it required a special effort to recognize it as such, whereas the numeric signification of such abbreviations would have been much more readily recognizable.

2) The identity of $\overline{\text{κc}}$ as a number was enhanced by the use of a macron (supralinear horizontal stroke), while outside the Judeo/Christian-Greek tradition and its successors, the macron was utilized mainly for numerals and never for abbreviations.[33] In fact, our hypothesis positing a numeric significance of $\overline{\text{κc}}$ may suggest a solution to the question of why all *nomina sacra* were presented—unusually for a general Greek reader—in this semi-numeric form. The very choice to present the name of God as a number might also lie behind the choice to use supralinear strokes for all other contracted *nomina sacra*.[34]

The perception of $\overline{\text{κc}}$ primarily as a number could be intensified by its mundane usage, for example, on coins:[35]

[32] See Ludwig Traube, *Nomina Sacra: Versuch einer Geschichte der christlichen Kürzung* (Munich: Beck, 1907); Thompson, *Introduction*, 75–78; A. Millard, "Ancient Abbreviations and the *Nomina Sacra*," in *The Unbroken Reed: Studies in the Culture and Heritage of Ancient Egypt in Honour of A. F. Shore* (ed. C. J. Eyre, M. A. Leahy, and L. M. Leahy; Egypt Exploration Society, Occasional publications 11; London: Egyptian Exploration Society, 1994) 221–26; A. Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) 70–71; Charlesworth, "Consensus Standardization," 39. On the Semitic origins of contraction, see also below in the section "Introduction of *Nomina sacra*."

[33] See Larry W. Hurtado, "The Origin of the *Nomina Sacra*: A Proposal," *JBL* 117 (1998) 655–73, at 658–59, and references there (n. 11). The supralinear stroke could be used also for "words or other combinations of letters which were to be regarded as foreign or emphatic matter. . . . Mystic words, including the sacred names, in Egyptian Greek magical papyri are also thus marked" (Thompson, *Introduction*, 77). See also Cole: "the mechanics of abbreviating numbers were so similar to names that, apart from context, the *nomina sacra* can be at times visually indistinguishable from abbreviated numbers" (*Numerals*, 173).

[34] See below for possible numeric values of some other *nomina sacra*.

[35] Coin 1. Lycia, Phaselis, c. 218/7–186/5 BCE. AR Tetradrachm (30 mm, 15.79 g, 12 h). In the name and types of Alexander III of Macedon, KC = year 26 (193/2 BCE). Head of Herakles/Alexander right, wearing lionskin headdress. Rev. ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ to right of Zeus Aëtophoros seated left, right leg drawn back, holding eagle and sceptre; in left field, Φ (Phaselis mint) above KC (26, date); c/m: Seleukid anchor countermark anchor within rectangular incuse. Private collection; image reproduced by kind permission of London Ancient Coins Ltd. See https://www.vcoins.com/en/stores/london_ancient_coins/89/product/lycia_phaselis_c_21871865_bc_ar_tetradrachm__year_26/1680965/Default.aspx.

Coin 2. Nabataea. Malichus I, 60–30 BCE. AR Quarter Shekel or Drachm (17.5 mm, 3.48 g, 12 h), Petra. L KC = regnal year 26 (35–34 BCE). Diademed head of Malichus I to right. Rev. MLKW MLK'. Eagle with closed wings standing to left; in field to left, palm branch; to right, date with the Nabataean letters S above and Ḥ below. Barkay, *Silver* 1 var. = Hoover & Barkay 15 var. (differing reverse legend). DCA 957 var. (differing reverse legend). Meshorer, *Nabataea*. Schmitt-Korte II 11. Struck from the same obverse die as CNG MBS 81, 2009, 624. Private collection; image reproduced by kind permission of Nomos AG. See https://nomosag.com/nomos-22/257.

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Fig. 4. Top: Coin 1. Lycia, Phaselis, c. 218/7–186/5 BCE. AR Tetradrachm (30 mm). Bottom: Coin 2. Nabataea. AR Quarter Shekel or Drachm (17.5 mm).

Thus, outside the Jewish/Christian usus, the sign $\overline{\text{κc}}$ could signify only a number and nothing else. At the same time, when found in a Jewish/Christian text it becomes (for a competent reader) both *nomen sacrum* and *numerus sacer*.[36] "The name which cannot be expressed in words" (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.14.9)[37] was thus conveyed by means of a number.[38]

In addition to representing an original numerical value, $\overline{\text{κc}}$ served additional purposes. As we have already noted, it aided in distinguishing between the sacred and profane meanings of κύριος. In early manuscripts, there is a noticeable effort to employ the contracted form for the former and the full form for the latter.[39] It becomes clear now why the abbreviated form was chosen for the divine name and the full form for the mundane usage, rather than vice versa. The association of $\overline{\text{κc}}$ with the divine name went beyond mere convention: $\overline{\text{κc}}$ was a form more closely related to the Tetragram than was κύριος. Furthermore, this usage also sheds new light on the possibility of early binitarian Christology, when $\overline{\text{κc}}$ with its enhanced divine associations was applied to Jesus.[40]

[36] As will be seen below, this is not a unique case of such a phenomenon; moreover, wordplay based on the homography of C may be suggested not only for $\overline{\text{κc}}$ but for other cases as well (see the section "Names-Numbers: *Nomina sacra* as *Numeri sacri*").

[37] *ANF* 1:340.

[38] For more cases of isopsephy based on *digamma-sigma* homography, see at the end of the section "Names-numbers: *Nomina sacra* as *Numeri sacri.*"

[39] See the section "Lost in Translation," point 3 (above).

[40] On the high Christological hypothesis, see Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006) 105–6; idem, "The Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship," in *The Jewish*

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B. κc *as 220 and Amicable Numbers*

The association of κc with its "authentic" numeric value, 220, is less visual. Whereas κc is fully identical graphically to a shorthand for the number 26, the number 220 would not normally be written in this form (but rather as cκ).[41]

However, this "correct" isopsephy of κc was also meaningful enough to play a role in the choice of this contracted form. κc is the isopsephon of neutr. ὅλον "everything," "whole, perfect"—a term often applied to God in early Christian texts[42]—as well as of acc. sg. οἶκον "house, temple." The combination of both these words together—ὅλον τὸν οἶκον—appears in LXX 1 Kg 6:22 [Hebrew כל הבית] and Acts 2:2. All three isopsepha occur together in sequence in LXX 2 Sam 6:11: ευλογηcεν κc ολον τον οικον (lit. "blessed Lord the whole house").

If this might be mere coincidence, it would seem less accidental that 220 is also a member of the pair of Pythagorean "amicable numbers" 220 and 284 (φίλοι ἀριθμοί, two numbers equal to the sums of each other's proper divisors)—the only pair of such numbers known before the seventeenth century. The second member of this pair, 284, is an isopsephon of θεός, as well as of ἀγαθός and ἅγιος.[43] These combinations of isopsepha of amicable numbers frequently appear in biblical texts (some are also widely used liturgically):

> κc ὁ θεός (ה׳ אלהים and אדני ה׳; Gen. 2:15 et pass. in the Bible) and θεὸς κc (אל ה׳; Josh 22:22; Ps 118[117]:27; appears in "Theos Kyrios" of Matins);[44]

Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus (ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis; JSJSup 6; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 187–213; idem, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000) 63–97; idem, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004) 108–18, 134–53. On Jesus as the hypostasized Name of the Father, see Gospel of Truth 38; Clement, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 22–27; Jean Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine: The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964, 1973) 147–63; Raoul Mortley, "The Name of the Father is the Son (Gospel of Truth 38)," in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (ed. R. T. Wallis and J. Bregman; Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992) 239–52.

[41] Compound numbers written in words may occur in either ascending ("six and twenty") or descending ("twenty-six") order, but when abbreviated the latter order prevails. On the tendency to record compound numbers in descending order in connection with a distinction made by Greeks between number-words and number-symbols (numerals), see Paul T. Keyser, "Compound Numbers and Numerals in Greek," *Syllecta Classica* 26 (2015) 113–75.

[42] See G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961) 950 (s.v. ὅλος, #3).

[43] The isopsephism of ἀγαθός and ἅγιος was known also to the Phrygian lawyer Gaius, who wrote in his autoepitaph: ἰσόψηφος δυσὶ τούτ[ο] Γάϊος ὡς ἅγιος, ὡς ἀγ[α]θός—"Gaius is equal to two [words], holy and good" (dated before 212 CE; *ICG* 1031; see also *SGO* 16/06/01; Peek, GVI no. 1905; A. R. R. Sheppard, "R.E.C.A.M. Notes and Studies No. 6: Jews, Christians and Heretics in Acmonia and Eumeneia," *Anatolian Studies* 29 [1979] 169–80, at 176–80).

[44] A corroboration of the awareness of this numeric symbolism may come from certain scribal practices. Thus, according to Wilkinson, *Tetragrammaton*, 83, the earliest Greek version of Ezekiel (P. 967) contains fifteen instances with κς ὁ θεός (KC O ΘEOC) overlined together, which might mean that they both were treated as numbers. Skehan, however, has ΚΣ Ο ΘΣ (P. Skehan, "The Divine Name at Qumran, in the Masada Scroll and in the Septuagint," *Bulletin of the International*

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> ἅγιος κς̄ (קדוש with ה׳; Lev 20:26 et pass.; Isa 6:3 et pass.; 1 Sam 2:2; Ps 99[98]:9; etc.; appears in the Doxology) and κς̄ ἅγιος (Isa 43:15; 45:11; Ez 39:7; etc.); ἀγαθὸς κς̄ (טוב ה׳; Ps 135[134]:3; Lam 3:25; etc.).

It is difficult to ascertain whether these numerological considerations underlay the choice or at least the reception of κς̄ and, if so, how early. We do not know at what date this Pythagorean concept became known to translators, editors, and readers of the Greek Bible. Iamblichus of Chalcis (ca. 250–330 CE) in his commentary to Nicomachus's *Introduction to Arithmetic* ascribes it to Pythagoras himself and says that "220 and 284, the parts [proper divisors] of each are able to produce the other, according to the word about friendship that Pythagoras revealed. When he was asked what is a friend, he replied: 'another I,' which is shown in these numbers."[45]

The question still remains: why is the numerical symbolism of κς̄ not explicitly mentioned in extant literature from that period, despite its apparent and consequential nature? Was it too obvious, or did it perhaps become forgotten? Yet in a similar case, without the sole witness of the Epistle of Barnabas 9:7–8 we would not know about ancient awareness of the numeric value of ιη̄, the suspended form of Ἰησοῦς. Its Hebrew isopsephism has also been noticed only recently.[46] With regard to κς̄, the use of triliteral forms (κοϲ, κρϲ, κυϲ) and oblique cases (gen. κυ, dat. κω, acc. κν, voc. κε), in which numerical significance with respect to the Tetragram is lost, might provide evidence of a lack of awareness of the special

Organisation for Septuagint and Cognate Studies 13 [1980] 14–44, at 35–37, 44 n. 41); the same with the portions of P. 967 published by Frederic G. Kenyon in *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri VII: Ezekiel, Daniel, Esther* (2 vols.; London: E. Walker, 1937–1938).

[45] *Jamblichi in Nicomachi Arithmeticam Introductionem liber* (ed. H. Pistelli; 1894; repr. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1977) 35, ll. 3–71. Cf. also a later Jewish exegesis based on the same Pythagorean concept. R. Nahshon ben Zadok Gaon (head of the yeshivah of Sura from 874 to 882; as quoted by R. Abraham Azulai [1570–1643] in his *Ba'ale Brit Avram*. Vayishlah, ch. 1 explains Jacob's gift of 220 sheep and goats to Esau in Gen 32:14 by the concept of מנין נאהב or "amical numbers": מצאתי כתוב בשם רב נחשון גאון זה הלשון: יעקב אבינו הכין בדרך חכמה מנחה לעשו אחיו "עזים מאתים ותישים עשרים"—המנין הזה לסוד נסתר, וערב עמהם מנינים אחרים להסתיר הסוד. אמנם לכך אמר "עדר עדר לבדו. . . ורוח תשימו בין עדר ובין עדר". והסוד, דע כי חכמי החשבון אומרים כי יש מנין נקרא 'מנין נאהב', וזה כי הם שני מנינים, וחלקי כל מנין מהם כמנין החשבון השני, והם מאתים ועשרים, וחלקי מאתים ועשרים הם רפ"ד, וחלקי רפ"ד הם מאתים ועשרים—"I found it written in the name of Rav Nahshon Gaon like this: Jacob our father wisely prepared an offering for his brother Esau 'two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats' [Gen 32:15]—this number is a hidden secret and mixed with other numbers in order to hide the secret. Admittedly, this is why he said, 'each herd by itself . . . and keep some space between the herds' [Gen 32:17]. And about the secret, know that mathematicians say that there is a number called 'amicable number,' and that is because there are two numbers, and the parts of each number are the same as the other number, and they are two hundred and twenty, and the parts of two hundred and twenty are 284, and the parts of 284 are two hundred and twenty." See also Shimon Bollag, "Mathematics," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum; 22 vols.; Jerusalem: Keter, 2007) 13:671–78, at 672; L. E. Dickson, *History of the Theory of Numbers* (3 vols.; Providence, RI: AMS Chelsea, 1999) 1:39.

[46] By Larry Hurtado in 1998 ("Origin," 665–69); see in the section "Hebrew-Greek Isopsephy" below.

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numeric value of κϛ̄.[47] These forms, however, might also be later developments produced by analogy to κϛ̄. In general, there is much irregularity in scribal practices regarding *nomina sacra*, and in most papyri they appear together with the full forms of the same words.[48] In any case, the nominative form of κύριος was much better represented in the LXX (3,369 occurrences of the nominative against 3,963 occurrences of the four other cases combined). An additional fact that may speak in favor of awareness of the numerical value of κϛ̄ is that, while there are two ways to abbreviate κύριος—by suspension (κῡ) and by contraction (κϛ̄)—the contracted form was normally preferred.[49]

The Name-Number κϛ̄ in Context

Although translations from Hebrew to Greek are believed to have started in the third century BCE, it is unclear when or by whom (pre-Christian Jews or Christians) the *nomen sacrum / numerus sacer* κϛ̄ was introduced. It is not even known when κϛ̄'s full form or other *nomina sacra* were adopted. In order to clarify questions regarding the provenance, relative chronology, and meaning of κϛ̄, it is necessary to consider several other, henceforth related topics. From now on the introduction of 1) κύριος and 2) *nomina sacra* should be discussed in conjunction and correlation with other issues connected to κϛ̄, such as 3) the chronology of Hebrew alphabetic numerals, 4) the earliest Hebrew and especially 5) Hebrew-Greek isopsephy/gematria, and specifically 6) the numerology of 26 (the numeric value of the Tetragram) in Hebrew and 7) Greek, as well as 8) the phenomenon of names-numbers.

A. The Introduction of κύριος

The Greek κύριος (in its full and contracted forms) overcame all possible competitors as a regular equivalent for God's Name, but not without resistance. It by no means represented the immediate default choice of translators, but was

[47] See the overview of its forms in papyri in Alan M. Mugridge, *Copying Early Christian Texts: A Study of Scribal Practice* (WUNT 362; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016) 124.

[48] Mugridge, *Copying*, 122 n. 129.

[49] "κύριος is very occasionally suspended, but never in the 2nd cent.; 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)" (Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* [Schweich Lectures 1977; London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1979] 37 n. 3). Much later and indirect evidence of awareness of the numerical value of κϛ̄ may be derived from the fact that even when the final-word *sigma* appears, it takes a form identical to another well-known variant of *digamma/stigma* (with a tail—ϛ), thus preserving their homography. This was the only word-final letter of the Greek alphabet and is attested in this form not earlier than the 13th cent.; see Gardthausen, *Griechische Paläographie*, 2: Taf. 9. The use of 26 letters in the Latin alphabet, established in its final form only in the 15th cent. (thus restoring the original number of letters of the Etruscan alphabet), is unlikely to be directly related to ancient numerology associated with the number 26 (on which see sections 6 and 7 below), although numerologies based on the number of letters in the Hebrew and Greek alphabets, which have 24 and 22 letters respectively, were well-known and could have served as a model.

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apparently either preceded by or else challenged by diverse attempts at alternative renderings of the Tetragram.[50] Some of these alternatives continued in use after κύριος had already become the dominant equivalent of the Tetragram. Even then κύριος was often used without full consistency, even within a single text.[51]

[50] We do not know if κύριος was already present in early manuscripts of the LXX, a question for which contradictory evidence exists. In unambiguously Jewish documents the only occurrence of κύριος is found in 4Qunid gr (4Q126; 1st cent. BCE)—and not in a contracted but possibly suspended or abrupted form κύριο, and without certainty that it refers to God (*DJD* 9.219)—and in the later (1st cent. CE) P. Fouad 203 (see P. Benoit, "Fragment d'une prière contre les esprits impurs?" *RB* 58 [1951] 549–65; Pieter van der Horst and Judith Newman, *Early Jewish Prayers in Greek* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008] 125–33). Contracted *nomina sacra* are not attested at all in this Jewish corpus. All other occurrences of κύριος in pre-Christian Jewish texts belong to literary evidence preserved in Christian traditions. The case of T-S 20.50 (Aquila, 2 Kgs 23:11–27), where the Tetragram in paleo-Hebrew has the gloss κυ, a suspended abbreviation of κύριος (see http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-TS-00020-00050/1), indeed indicates the Tetragram's pronunciation as κύριος in Jewish practice but belongs to the 6th cent. CE (see Nicholas de Lange, *Japheth in the Tents of Shem: Greek Bible Translations in Byzantine Judaism* [Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism 30; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015] 76). It is, however, very probable that at least the LXX manuscripts used by Philo and NT authors had κύριος. It may have belonged to Jewish usage and might even have been the original translation of the Tetragram (thus Albert Pietersma, "Kyrios or Tetragram: A Renewed Quest for the Original LXX," in *De Septuaginta: Studies in Honour of John William Wevers on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* [ed. Albert Pietersma and Claude Cox; Mississauga, ON: Benben, 1984] 85–101; Rösel, "Reading and Translation;" cf. Skehan, "Divine Name at Qumran"; Wilkinson, *Tetragrammaton*, 53–54, 86–88, 482. Alternatively, it could have been preceded by θεός (De Troyer, "Names") or Ἰαω (Tov, "Greek Biblical Texts," 112–14). On other renderings of the Tetragram, including attempts to preserve the original phonetic or graphic form of the Hebrew name, see in the section "Translating God's Name" above.

[51] It is not only that LXX did not use κύριος with perfect consistency (cf., e.g., παντοκράτωρ in the Minor Prophets instead), but even more important is that the usage of κύριος for God is remarkably absent from two other important corpora: 1) the works of Flavius Josephus, who (among some other Hellenistic Jewish authors) preferred alternative *nomina divina* (see, e.g., J. B. Fischer, "The Term *despotes* in Josephus," *JQR* 49 [1958] 132–38); and 2) sayings ascribed to Jesus (except biblical citations and prologues/epilogues). We can add to this group some pseudepigrapha, among them the Apocalypse of Abraham (whose Greek version of the presumably Hebrew original is known only through a Slavonic translation, although reliable in its literacy and consistency), which also mentions the "ineffable name" (*неизрекомаго* and *неизъглаголемаго имени*) in 10:3 and 8. All these texts must have been Palestinian and Semitic and most probably avoided the Tetragram already in their originals as it is avoided already in some Hebrew books of the Bible: Job (which uses *Shadday* instead), Ecclesiastes (only *Elohim*), Daniel (except the interpolated prayer in ch. 9), possibly some Psalms (which have instead *Elohim Tsevaot*). It is also possible that avoidance of κύριος closely associated with the Tetragram was a secondary taboo, possibly following the well-attested model of developing new substitutes for previous substitutes of a tabooed term (thus Fisher, "Term") or "criticism of the LXX by immigrants from Palestine" (Pietersma, "Kyrios or Tetragram," 101). Cf. the modern phenomenon of attempted avoidance of the equivalents of κύριος in modern languages (associated with Christian usage) in many modern Jewish translations. This explanation would fit well with the assumption of an early introduction of κύριος. The hypothesis of Semitic-speaking Jewish avoidance of κύριος for God seemingly contradicts the existence of a rabbinic loan form in Greek: קירי(ס) (in both profane and sacral meanings; see J. Heinemann, *Studies in Jewish Liturgy* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981] 156–57 [Hebrew]). However, this may reflect a later practice. For more general works on the use of κύριος for the Tetragram, see also W. W. Grafen Baudissin, *Kyrios als Gottesname im Judenttum und seine Stelle in der Religionsgeschichte* [ed. O. Eissfeldt;

B. The Introduction of "Nomina Sacra"

Like many other phenomena of Hellenistic Judaism, *nomina sacra* are not found in any early Jewish text that can be securely identified as non-Christian. Consequently, most contemporary scholarship tends to attribute *nomina sacra* to Christian circles, and they even became a primary criterion for distinguishing Christian texts from Jewish ones.[52] Even when *nomina sacra* do appear in overtly Jewish texts, such as the inscriptions of the Beth-Shean synagogue and the Samaritan synagogue in Thessaloniki (both containing $\overline{\text{κc}}$, with the latter featuring it four times), these instances are explained by Christian influence, due to their later attestation in Jewish usage.[53] Other criteria used to identify Christian manuscripts are equally problematic.[54] If some of them could equally well be classified as Jewish, then this would cut the ground out from under the very discussion of Jewish versus Christian precedence regarding *nomina sacra*. Furthermore, even the discussion of such precedence presupposes a Jewish-Christian dichotomy, which can often be anachronistic,[55] especially when considering early Jewish Christians or the fluid boundaries between proto-rabbinic and proto-Christian groups.[56] Late ancient Christians, non-Christians, and Greek-speaking Jews shared not only books and vocabularies but also the *nomina sacra*, and there may even be some indirect

Giessen: Töpelmann, 1929]; Wilkinson, *Tetragrammaton*, 45–214.

[52] See the discussion in A. H. R. E. Paap, *Nomina Sacra in the Greek Papyri of the First Five Centuries A.D.: The Sources and Some Deductions* (Leiden: Brill, 1959) 174; Schuyler Brown, "Concerning the Origin of the *Nomina Sacra*," *Studia Papyrologica* 9 (1970) 7–19, at 18; Roberts, *Manuscript*, 26–48, 74–78, and 83–84; Hurtado, "Origin," 655–73; Comfort, *Encountering the Manuscripts*, 199–212; Mugridge, *Copying*, 121–123, 135 n. 162. Among the most important general works on the *nomina sacra* are the following: Traube, *Nomina Sacra*; Paap, *Nomina Sacra*; Brown, "Concerning the Origin"; Roberts, *Manuscript*, 26–48; Hurtado, "Origin," 655–73; Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 95–134; P. Comfort, *Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Palaeography and Textual Criticism* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2005); Wilkinson, *Tetragrammaton*, 89–96.

[53] G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (5 vols.; Sydney: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1981–1989) 1:107–12; Malcolm Choat, *Belief and Cult in Fourth-Century Papyri* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006) 123–24. Cf., e.g., papyri rolls with *nomina sacra* that could be Jewish: P.Oxy. IX 1166 (Genesis 16.8–128; 3rd cent. CE); P.PisaLit. 14 (Isaiah 8.6–8, 11–14, 17–18; 3rd–4th cents. CE).

[54] See, e.g., Kurt Treu's challenge of these criteria ("Die Bedeutung des Griechischen für die Juden im römischen Reich, *Kairos. Zeitschrift für Judaistik und Religionswissenschaft* 15 [1973] 123–44) and Roberts's reply to him in *Manuscript*, 74–78.

[55] See, e.g., *Partings: How Judaism and Christianity Became Two* (ed. Hershel Shanks; Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2013); Paula Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

[56] See, e.g., Stroumsa on Robert, *Manuscripts*, 26–28: "Roberts reached the conclusion that the 'Divine names,' or *nomina sacra,* found in various papyri from Roman Egypt were a creation of the primitive Christian community in Jerusalem. In other words, they had been invented by the earliest Jewish-Christians, i.e., those Jews in 1st-cent. Palestine who believed Jesus to be the expected Messiah, and whose understanding of Jesus Christ and his nature was totally established upon Jewish religious categories" ("Nameless God," 230).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001781602510076X Published online by Cambridge University Press

evidence for their pre-Christian provenance.[57] The Hebrew association of κ̄ς̄ adds additional weight to this possibility.

A similar problem of provenance arises with the usage of abbreviations and especially of numerical shorthand relevant to our case. Zachary Cole observes that although extant evidence shows that Jewish scribes avoided numerical shorthand while Christian manuscripts regularly contain it, this does not necessarily mean that Jews did not use shorthand.[58] The distinctions between surviving Jewish and Christian materials (when the two can be discriminated), including differences in the use of abbreviations, may be attributable to the technical characteristics of extant material. These differences may be a result of the less professionally produced Christian papyri in this period, which stand in contrast to the more professionally executed and better institutionalized publication practices of extant early Jewish and later Christian manuscripts.[59]

In favor of a Jewish origin of *nomina sacra* speaks also the fact that the very practice of abbreviation through contraction was unknown to the Greeks outside the Hellenistic Jewish/Christian corpus. Alan Millard has connected contracted abbreviations to a similar West Semitic practice known from Phoenician and Palestinian coins of the Hellenistic period and also found on coins and graffiti in the Punic sites of North Africa.[60]

[57] Ludwig Traube, who coined the technical term *nomina sacra*, came out in favor of their Jewish origin. He argued that these names, in imitation of Semitic consonant writing, were abbreviated because they were sacred. According to Robert Kraft, κύριος represents the original Jewish equivalent of the Tetragram, while its alternative equivalents are secondary and reflect "archaizing tendencies in Jewish circles from at least the 2nd century BCE." As for contracted forms, he states that "some Jewish treatments of the tetragrammaton are certainly moving in the direction further traveled in the *nomina sacra* phenomenon, and there is even some reason to think that the Greek substitution term, κύριος ('Lord'), may have also received parallel treatment (abbreviation by suspension and/or contraction) at Jewish hands. To put it more directly, I would suggest that pre-Christian Greek Jews used the κύριος substitution in writing as well as in speaking, that the impetus to 'abbreviate' in writing was applied to that term as well—and probably to the closely related word θεός ('God')—and it is this trajectory that took hold and was expanded further in Christian circles" (Robert A. Kraft, "Format Features in the Earliest Jewish Greek Literary Papyri and Related Materials," brief presentation for the 2001 Papyrological Congress in Vienna, published at http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rak//earlylxx/jewishpap.html#tetragram; cf. idem, "The 'Textual Mechanics' of Early Jewish LXX/OG Papyri and Fragments," in *Bible as Book*, 68–69.

[58] "There is evidence that it does not correspond to actual practice in antiquity" (Cole, *Numerals*, 5). He refers to Driver's conjectures of abbreviations in the Bible: G. R. Driver, *Semitic Writing: From Pictograph to Alphabet* (Schweich Lectures for the British Academy, 1944; rev. ed. by S. A. Hopkins; London: Oxford University Press, 1976) 270; idem, "Abbreviations in the Masoretic Text," *Textus* 1 (1960) 112–31; idem, "Once Again Abbreviations," *Textus* 4 (1964) 76–94. On Jewish avoidance of numerical shorthand, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (3rd ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012) 238.

[59] Cole, *Numerals*, 5–6. Cf. Mugridge, *Copying*, 32–33, 78.

[60] Millard, "Ancient Abbreviations," 221–26; idem, *Reading and Writing*, 70–71. For other cases of early Christian adaptation of Jewish scribal practices, see P. J. Parsons, "The Scripts and Their Date," in Emanuel Tov and R. A. Kraft, *The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Naḥal Ḥever* (*8ḤevXIIgr)* (DJD VIII.1; Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) 19–26; J. Finegan, *Archeology of the New Testament: The*

C. Hebrew Alphabetic Numerals

Thus, κ̅ς̅ could theoretically be an early Hellenistic Jewish invention. Can it be attributed to early manuscripts of the LXX? Could κ̅ς̅ have been initially and intentionally devised by early Jewish translators for rendering the numeric value of the Tetragram?

This could be possible only if Hebrew alphabetic numerals (documented no earlier than the late second century BCE) had already been in use in at least the third century BCE. Otherwise, if κ̅ς̅ preceded Hebrew letters-numbers, its numerical implications should be recognized as accidental. Hence, in order to estimate how early the Greek number-name κ̅ς̅ could be introduced, we need to determine the historical point at which the Hebrew numeric value could have become relevant.

The alphabetic numeric system which the Greeks widely used in the Hellenistic period is known as "Milesian" (alternatively, "Ionic" or "Alexandrian"). It replaced the older acrophonic system (the "Attic" or "Herodianic"[61]) and was decimal additive, having three groups of enneads (sets of nine letters): for 1–9, for tens (from 10 to 90), and for hundreds (from 100 to 900). It corresponded to the Egyptian system that was based on the same principle but with four enneads.[62] In order to have three complete groups of nine letters the Greeks had to complement their alphabet of 24 letters with three additional ones in order to reach the total number of 27 characters (corresponding to the number of letters in the Proto-Canaanite alphabet).[63] For this purpose they chose to use three Semitic letters, which were known from archaic Greek abecedaria[64] but had fallen out of use as superfluous for the phonological systems of most Greek dialects. As already mentioned above, these obsolete characters—*digamma* (6), *koppa* (90), and *sampi* (900)—became known as the ἐπισήματα "remarkable signs" and were introduced during this period exclusively as numeric signs.[65]

Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church (rev. ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 381–82. See also Hurtado's criticism ("Origin," 660 n. 15, 663 n. 25). Traube also noticed that for some forms contraction would be analogous to Semitic consonant writing, which goes well with the early attestation of θ[εό]ς (Paap, *Nomina Sacra*, 1). See also Don Barker's suggestion that κύριος could be "abbreviated in this Semitic fashion to notify the reader that the word is being used to translate the personal name" ("P. Lond. Lit. 207 and the Origin of the *Nomina Sacra*: A Tentative Proposal," *Studia Humaniora Tartuensia* 8 [2007] 1–14).

[61] So named after the 2nd-cent. CE grammarian Herodian, who described this system. The system was in use from the 7th cent. BCE to at least the 2nd cent. CE; see M. N. Tod, "The Greek Numeral Notation," *BSA* 18 (1911–1912) 98–132, at 128–30; cf. idem, "The Greek Acrophonic Numerals," *BSA* 37 (1936–1937, pub. 1940) 236–57.

[62] For the theory of demotic Egyptian provenance, see S. Chrisomalis, "The Egyptian Origin of the Greek Alphabetic Numerals," *Antiquity* 77/297 (2003) 485–96.

[63] J. Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1987) 42; idem, "Semitic Epigraphy and the Antiquity of the Greek Alphabet," *Kadmos* 30 (1991) 143–52.

[64] The archaic Greek abecedaria could also initially have 27 signs, as the Abecedarium of Samos dated to 660 BCE and some more ancient abecedaria (see Dimitris K. Psychoyos, "The Forgotten Art of Isopsephy and the Magic Number KZ," *Semiotica* 154.1/4 (2005) 157–224.

[65] See Jannaris, "Digamma"; Thompson, *Handbook*, 104; idem, *Introduction*, 91; Tod, "Alphabetic

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An earlier widely accepted conjecture was that the Greeks had borrowed the numeric values of letters together with the letters themselves from the Phoenician alphabet.[66] The contemporary scholarly consensus, however, which is based on expanding archeological evidence, is that the Greeks could not have borrowed the West Semitic alphabet-based numeral system for a very simple reason: the Semites started using it later than the Greeks. In fact, alphabetic numbers in antiquity are well documented only for two languages, Greek and Hebrew,[67] and Greek precedency is supposed due to its earlier attestation. Regular usage of Greek letters-numbers is attested only for the late fourth and the third centuries BCE, but there are also a few earlier examples from the fifth through fourth centuries BCE.[68] Meanwhile, Hebrew numerical letters of the first decad are known not earlier than 141 to 136 BCE, when Hebrew letters-numbers appear on the shekels of Simon Maccabaeus.[69] Hebrew letters-numbers of a decimal system (as in the Greek "Milesian" one), as far as is presently known, are found only beginning in 78 BCE (a coin from the twenty-fifth [כה] year of Alexander Janneus),[70] with one less obvious case arguably belonging to 103 BCE (possibly dated to the fortieth [מ] year of Simon Maccabeus).[71] The likelihood of Greek precedence is exemplified well by a bilingual Palestinian Jewish Aramaic-Greek ostracon dated to the sixth year of the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (277 BCE), where the Greek text uses alphabetic numerals while the Aramaic one still resorts to non-alphabetical abstract Aramaic signs.[72]

However, despite the several early attestations, some arguments have been advanced against the antiquity of the Greek Milesian system. No literary alphabet is attested with its specific compound (containing both *vau*/*digamma* and *koppa* alongside *psi* and *omega*). If the Milesian system were ancient, we would expect to see variations (as demonstrated by the extreme variability of early Greek

Numeral System," 137.

[66] Or, rather, the Proto-Canaanite alphabet if this happened earlier, as has been convincingly claimed by Joseph Naveh (see Naveh, *Early History*, 178–86).

[67] With some scarce Phoenician evidence, as will be discussed below.

[68] Including apparently even Periclean Athens (*IG* 1^2, 760 [p. 222]), which shows that "some Athenians at least knew of its existence and understood its use" (Tod, "Alphabetic Numeral System," 137). On different theories of origin and dating, see T. L. Heath, *A History of Greek Mathematics* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921) 1:31–35; S. Dow, "Greek Numerals," *American Journal of Archaeology* 56.1 (1952) 21–23, at 22–23. For claims of even earlier origins of the Milesian system, see Chrisomalis, "Egyptian Origin," 48–54; Psychoyos, "Forgotten Art," esp. 180–82, together with the discussion of these views there.

[69] Frederic William Madden, *Coins of the Jews* (London: Trübner, 1881) 67–69; J. Gow, "The Greek Numerical Alphabet," *Journal of Philology* 12 (1883) 278–84, at 280.

[70] J. Naveh, "Dated Coins of Alexander Janneus," *IEJ* (1968) 20–26; A. Kindler, "Addendum to the Dated Coins of Alexander Janneus," *IEJ* 18 (1968) 188–91; Y. Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage* (2 vols.; Dix Hills, NY: Amphora, 1982) 1:80.

[71] G. Ifrah, *The Universal History of Numbers* (trans. D. Bellos et al.; London: Wiley, 2000) 234.

[72] L. T. Geraty, "The Khirbet el-Kôm Bilingual Ostracon," *BASOR* 220 (1975) 55–61. Cf. below on the combination of different systems in one document.

abecedaria). The absence of variants suggests that the system was regularly implemented only relatively late and under the influence of a later Hellenistic rather than early classical type of political authority. This has led some scholars to propose that the Milesian system was developed in the first half of the third century BCE, most probably under Ptolemy II Philadelphus in Alexandria, from where it spread to other Greek centers and became universal.[73]

In this light, the conjecture of a possible Canaanite origin of alphabetic numbers seems less improbable. Notably, in the supposedly original Greek system, the old-new Canaanite characters were not only restored (or borrowed anew) but also placed according to the order of the original Canaanite alphabet.[74] Even more important is that we do have evidence of Canaanite letters used by Phoenicians as numerals for their dated coinage as early as the fourth century BCE.[75] However, since the coins show Canaanite letters-numbers of only the first ten numerals (unless one dubious case includes *kaf* as 11), it is unclear whether their system was decimal (like the Milesian one) or whether their letters-numbers were used within the framework of a more primitive system of ordinalia or "letter labels" (whereby each letter of the alphabet is assigned a consecutive number without assigning values of tens and hundreds). This method of numeration was used by the Greeks alongside the Milesian numbers but was normally reserved for specific genres or usages: numbering books and paragraphs, boundary stones, panels of jury-members, et cetera.[76] Its usage here is probable, since Greek numbers on coins from the same Phoenician mints obviously belonged to ordinalia (with *kappa* for 10, *omega* for 24, etc.). Below we propose that the same system might underlie the earliest Hebrew

[73] Thus, e.g., Gow, "Greek Numerical Alphabet," 282–84 ("the cumulative evidence is surely very strong that alphabetic numerals were first used in Alexandria early in the 3rd century B.C."; ibid., 284). See also K. Meisterhans and E. Schwyzer, *Grammatik der attischen Inschriften* (3rd ed.; Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1900) 9–11.

[74] Psychoyos took this as an indication of the antiquity of the Milesian alphabet: "Since *digamma* and *koppa* were not used in writing after 700 BCE, and so they did not appear in the alphabetic sequence, it is highly improbable that they returned to their original places to be used as digits: in such a case, they would have been placed at the end, like tsade-sampi (M) which was useless to the Greeks and had already fallen out of use in the alphabetic sequence" ("Forgotten Art," 180). However, this might also reflect awareness of the order of letters in West Semitic alphabets.

[75] E. T. Newell, *The Dated Alexander Coinage of Sidon and Ake* (Yale Oriental Series, Researches 2; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916; repr. New York: AMS, 1980) 9, 12–13. See also Stephen J. Lieberman, "A Mesopotamian Background for the So-Called Aggadic 'Measures' of Biblical Hermeneutics," *HUCA* 58 (1987) 157–225, at 195. On a Phoenician ostracon from Cyprus using numeric letters, see J. H. Tigay, "An Early Technique of Aggadic Exegesis," in *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literature* (ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983) 169–89, at 179 n. 30.

[76] On ordinal numbers, see Gow, "Greek Numerical Alphabet," 281; Heath, "History of Greek Mathematics," 35–36 n. 3; S. Gandz, "Hebrew Numerals," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 4 (1932) 53–112, at 80, and references there; M. N. Tod, "Letter Labels in Greek Inscriptions," *Annual of the British School at Athens* 49 (1954) 1–8; Lieberman, "Mesopotamian Background," 195; R. Ast and J. Lougovaya, "The Art of Isopsephism in the Greco-Roman World," in *Ägyptische Magie und ihre Umwelt* (ed. A. Jördens; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015) 82–98, at 95–96.

gematria and some cases of Jewish-Greek isopsephy (see the sections "Numerology of 26 in Hebrew" and "Numerology of 26 in Greek" below).

D. Early Hebrew Isopsephy/Gematria

Two additional phenomena may support the antiquity of Semitic letters-numbers: numerical abbreviations presumed for the proto-text of the Masoretic text,[77] and letter-based numerology conjectured for the early books of the Bible and attested in other Semitic sources.

No direct uncontested evidence exists for numeric symbolism based on letters-numbers in the Bible. Due to the presumed Greek origin of numeric letters, most scholars consider attempts to detect usage of alphabetic numerals or isopsephism in biblical texts as anachronistic. The question of whether biblical numerology is obviously present or simply read into the text by a given researcher has thus become a matter of subjective interpretation.[78]

However, some voices do favor at least the possibility of the opposite presumption.[79] Since the late 1980s a series of works have appeared that lend more weight to numerical criticism of the Bible and cannot help but explain various phenomena in the biblical content and structure through means other than isopsephy. Parallel phenomena have also been found in other Semitic sources, which are likewise unequivocally independent from the Greek tradition. As a result,

[77] Some scribal errors in the MT may be best explained as misreadings of abbreviations, and, in particular, numerical abbreviations (see Driver, *Semitic Writing*, 270; idem, "Abbreviations in the Masoretic Text"; idem, "Once Again Abbreviations," esp. 82–88). For early usage of Hebrew letters as numbers, see also a conjecture by Michael Segal ("Numerical Discrepancies in the List of Vessels in Ezra 1:9–11," *VT* 52 [2002] 122–29).

[78] See, e.g., Gandz, "Hebrew Numerals," 94–95; H. L. Ginsberg, *Studies in Koheleth* (Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America 17; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950) 31–33; S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (2nd ed.; Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America 18; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962) 73. See the summary of gematria/isopsephy by F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie* (2nd ed.; Stoixeia 7; Leipzig: Teubner, 1925; repr. Zentralantiquariat, 1985), esp. 91–141.

[79] Thus, Solomon Schechter and Caspar Levias claimed that "considering that examples of permutative gemaṭria are found in Biblical literature (ששך = בבל, Jer. Xxv. 26; לב קמי = כשדים, *ib.* li. 1), there is great probability that at least some of the claims made by later writers to having found also numerical gemaṭriot are justified" (S. Schechter and C. Levias, "Gematria," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 5:589). Cf. Solomon Gandz: "The fact that the permutative gematria was already in use in the sixth century B. C. supports the assumption of an early age of the numerical gematria, too" ("Hebrew Numerals," 94). For more possible examples of gematria and other numeric patterns found in the OT, see G. R. Driver, "The Number of the Beast," in *Bible und Qumran* (ed. S. Wagner; Berlin: Evangelische Haupt-Bibelgesellschaft, 1968) 75–81, at 75–77; Patrick W. Skehan, "A Single Editor for the Whole Book of Proverbs," *CBQ* 10.2 (1948) 115–30; Addison G. Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx Revisited: Numerical Patterns in the Book of Qoheleth," *CBQ* 42.1 (1980) 38–51; idem, "Additional Numerical Patterns in Qoheleth," *CBQ* 45.1 (1983) 32–43.

Mesopotamian origins of isopsephy and associated numerological techniques have been proposed.[80]

If we accept these interpretations, we would have to reevaluate not only the history of Hebrew gematria preceding the influence of Hellenistic isopsephy but also the much broader question of Semitic versus Greek precedence in the introduction of alphabetic numbers (as discussed in the previous section). Such interpretation-based textual evidence stands in contrast not only to the lack of direct archeological evidence but also to the positive textual and archeological evidence of Jewish usage of alternative systems. These systems are always foreign, whether Egyptian hieratic, Aramaic, or Greek.[81] However, the fact that Jews used foreign numeric systems does not prove that they were limited to them, just as evidence of their usage of foreign languages does not imply that they did not use Hebrew. Similarly, the Greeks themselves also used two or even three systems simultaneously (the ordinal, acrophonic Attic/Herodianic, and alphabetic Milesian/Alexandrian)—sometimes even in the same document.[82] It has already been suggested that the absence of early archeological evidence for Hebrew numeric letters may be due to their usage being limited to sacred or esoteric purposes, while Jewish profane usage resorted to internationally used systems instead.[83]

E. Hebrew-Greek Isopsephy

Greek isopsephy is known from at least the third century BCE and becomes better attested from no later than the first century CE, especially among Jews and Christians.[84] Examples of isopsephy based on Greek letters' values employed by

[80] See Lieberman, "Mesopotamian Background," 186–92; Jacob Bazak, "The Geometric-Figurative Structure of Psalm CXXXVI," *VT* 35 (1985) 129–38; idem, "Numerical Devices in Biblical Poetry," *VT* 38 (1988) 333–37; Casper Labuschagne, "Significant Compositional Techniques in the Psalms: Evidence for the Use of Number as an Organizing Principle," *VT* 59 (2009) 583–605; Israel Knohl, "Sacred Architecture: The Numerical Dimensions of Biblical Poems," *VT* 62.2 (2012) 189–97; idem, "Solving the Mystery of Genesis 49:10b? The Numerical Key," *VT* 70.3 (2020) 499–501; Tzahi Weiss, *Letters by which Heaven and Earth Were Created: The Origins and the Meanings of the Perceptions of Alphabetic Letters as Independent Units in Jewish Sources of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2014) 25–30, 33–35 (in Hebrew).

[81] For the Egyptian system in Jewish use, see Y. Aharoni, "The Use of Hieratic Numerals in Hebrew Ostraca and the Shekel Weights," *BASOR* 184 (1966) 13–19; I. T. Kaufman, "New Evidence for Hieratic Numerals on Hebrew Weights," *BASOR* 188 (1977) 39–41; for Aramaic and Greek, see L. T. Geraty, "The Khirbet el-Kôm Bilingual Ostracon," *BASOR* 220 (1975) 55–61, as well as m. Sheq. 3.2 and Menah. 8.1–3.

[82] See Lieberman, "Mesopotamian Background," 197–98. Cf. a similar use of Greek and Semitic systems on the same object on an Attic vase inscribed both with Greek ordinal letters and abstract Levantine-Cypriote numerals (A. W. Johnston, *Trademarks on Greek Vases* [Warminster, UK: Aris and Phillips, 1979] 31; Chrisomalis, "Egyptian Origin," 50); cf. Geraty, "Ostracon." See more examples at the end of the section "Numerology of 26 in Greek" below.

[83] Ifrah, *Universal History of Numbers*, 239; cf. Knohl, "Sacred Architecture," 196.

[84] See, e.g., Alan Cameron, "Ancient Anagrams," *The American Journal of Philology* 116.3 (1995) 477–84; Joel Kalvesmaki, "Isopsephic Inscriptions from Iasos (Inschriften von Iasos 419) and Shnān ('IGLS' 1403)," *ZPE* 161 (2007) 261–68; J. L. Hilton, "On Isopsephic Lines in Homer and

Jews and Christians can be found in, e.g., Syb. Or. 1:232–331, 5:12–51,[85] Rev 21:17, Barn. 9:7–9, Gen. R. 68.12, as well as in copious discussions of letter-based numerical symbolism in Gnostic and early Christian literature. Isopsephy was, in fact, part of numerological beliefs and practices widely involved in cultic, magic/scientific, mystic, theological, and philosophical discourses starting from Pythagorean numerical mysticism and continuing through Platonic and Aristotelean number theories (which considered *inter alia* numbers as "primary causes of existing things"; Aristotle, *Met*. 13.1080a) and on to early Christian debates over the theological significance of numbers.[86]

In the case of $\overline{\text{κc}}$, however, we are dealing with interlinguistic isopsephy—when the numeric values of letters in one language are signified by the letters-numbers of another language and thus the numeric identity is found between the forms of different languages. Such Hebrew-Greek isopsephies are attested not earlier than the first century CE. Among the most famous are the "number of the beast" of Rev 13:18 and the numeric value of Hebrew דוד (14) lying behind the symbolism of the three sets of fourteen generations in Mt 1:17.[87] Irenaeus discussed the

Apollonius of Rhodes," *The Classical Journal* 106.4 (2011) 385–94; Julia Lougovaya, "Isopsephisms in P.Jena II 15a-b," *ZPE 176* (2011) 200–4; Ast and Lougovaya, "Art of Isopsephism." For a parody on isopsephy see Lucian, *Alex.* 11.

[85] Even more instances may be found in the later books of the Sibylline Oracles 11:29–30, 91–92, 114, 189–90, 208, 256, 266; 12:39, 49–50, 68, 78, 96, 101, 121, 125, 144, 148, 189, 207, 246, 250, 258; 13:83–84; 14.21, 28, 44, 59–60, 79, 95, l06, 126, 137, 150, 163, 227, 248.

[86] See, e.g., Robert Eisler, *Orpheus the Fisher: Comparative Studies in Orphic and Early Christian Cult Symbolism* (London: Watkins, 1921) 115–20; Dornseiff, *Alphabet in Mystik*; Oskar Rühle, "ἀριθμέω, ἀριθμός," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (ed. G. Kittel; 10 vols; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933–1973) 1:461–64; Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression* (Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature 132; New York: Columbia University Press, 1938); O. H. Lehmann, "Number-Symbolism as a Vehicle of Religious Experience in the Gospels, Contemporary Rabbinic Literature and the dead Sea Scrolls," *Studia Patristica* 4.2 (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 79; Berlin: Akademie, 1961) 125–35; M. H. Pope, "Number, Numbering, Numbers," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. G. A. Buttrick et al.; 5 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) 3:561–67; Reinhart Staats, "Ogdoas l sein Symbol für die Auferstehung," *Vigiliae Christianae* 26.1 (1972) 29–52; Dominic O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Lawrence P. Schrenk, "God as Monad: The Philosophical Basis of Medieval Theological Numerology," in *Medieval Numerology* (ed. Robert L. Surles; Garland Reference Library of the Humanities 1640; Garland Medieval Casebooks 7; New York: Garland, 1996) 3–10; O. Neugebauer and G. Saliba, "On Greek Numerology," *Centaurus* 31.3 (1988); J. Friberg, "Numbers and Counting," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David N. Freedman; 6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992) 4:1139–46; Adela Yarbro Collins, "Numerical Symbolism in Jewish and Early Christian Apocalyptic Literature," in her *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 50; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 55–138; Francois Bovon, "Names and Numbers in Early Christianity," *NTS* 47 (2001) 267–88; Mikeal C. Parsons, "'Exegesis by the Numbers': Numerology and the New Testament," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 35 (2008) 25–43; Joel Kalvesmaki, *Theology of Arithmetic: Number Symbolism in Platonism and Early Christianity* (Hellenic Studies 59; Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013); Cole, *Numerals*.

[87] The former will be discussed in more detail in the section "Names-Numbers: 'Nomina

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importance of using Hebrew ("propriam Hebraeorum linguam") and not Greek for isopsephic speculations (*Haer*. 2.24.1–2). Hebrew-Greek gematrias have been proposed for Asc. Mos. 9:1,[88] 3 Baruch,[89] and one more *nomen sacrum*: the suspended abbreviation ῑ̅η̅ for Jesus (Ἰη[σοῦς]), which is homographic to 18 (as noticed already in the Barn. 9:7–9 and Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.278-80). With regard to the latter, Larry Hurtado has proposed the Hebrew isopsephon יח ("alive" and 18).[90] Thus, κ̅ς̅ may be not the only *nomen sacrum* homographic to a numeral with a Hebrew isopsephon. (For even more examples, see the section "Names-Numbers: *Nomina sacra* as *Numeri sacri*" below.)

F. Numerology of 26 in Hebrew

It is noteworthy that the majority of supposed cases of biblical isopsephism are based on the number 26, a numeric representation of the name of God:[91]

- beatitudes (אשרי formulae) are found 26 times in Psalms;[92]
- the refrain "for his grace is forever" is repeated 26 times in Ps 136;[93]
- the expression "for you are with me" divides Ps 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd") into two groups of 26 words each;[94]
- verse 26 divides Ps 22 into two groups of 60 and 26 words;[95]
- verse 5 divides Ps 82 into two groups of 26 words each;[96]

Sacra' as 'Numeri Sacri.'" On the latter, see, e.g., Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 114; Cole, *Numerals*, 190.

[88] Edna Israeli, "'Taxo' and the Origin of the 'Assumption of Moses,'" *JBL* 128.4 (2009) 735–57.

[89] Gideon Bohak, "Greek-Hebrew Gematrias in 3 Baruch and in Revelation," *JSP* 7 (1990) 119–21; Alexander Kulik, *3 Baruch: Greek-Slavonic Apocalypse of Baruch* (Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010) 59, 226.

[90] Hurtado, "Origin," 665–69; idem, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 115–17; cf. Cole, *Numerals*, 180–84. These Hebrew and Greek forms are also similar graphically (cf. the discussion of IIIIII above and the graphical identity of the names of gods and numbers in Mesopotamian cuneiform documents below). See also a connected case of Christian numeric symbolism in another *numerus sacer*—τ̅ι̅η̅ (318 = *tau* as a depiction of a cross with ῑ̅η̅ "Jesus") applied to the number 318 as found in Gen 14:14 (Barn. 9:8; Lieberman, "Mesopotamian Background," 168–69; Hurtado, "Origin," 666–67; idem, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 114–15, and the references in n. 59 there; Cole, *Numerals*, 178–84). On ῑ̅η̅ as presumably the earliest *nomen sacrum*, see *Fragments of an Unknown Gospel and Other Early Christian Papyri* (ed. H. I. Bell and T. C. Skeat; London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1935) 3–4; Roberts, *Manuscript*, 37; Hurtado, "Origin," 665–66.

[91] Labuschagne, "Significant Compositional Techniques," 586. See also there on the use of 17 as an alternative isopsephon for the Tetragram. On 52 as the number of weeks in a solar year, see Knohl, "Sacred Architecture," 192–93.

[92] See Frank Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3*: *A Commentary on Psalms 101–150* (Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011) 398. The authors do not connect this fact to the numeric value of the Tetragram.

[93] Bazak, "Geometric-Figurative Structure," 129.

[94] Bazak, "Numerical Devices," 334.

[95] Labuschagne, "Significant Compositional Techniques," 597.

[96] Ibid., 598–99.

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- verse 9 ("But you are exalted forever, O LORD") divides Ps 92 ("A Psalm of the Seventh Day") into two groups of 52 (=26x2) words each;[97]
- Ps 80 contains 130 (=26x5) words, of which vss. 9–16 ("Lament over the vine," a metaphor for Joseph) contain 52 (=26x2) words; cf. Deut 33:13–17 (Moses's blessing of Joseph) below;[98]
- Ps 79 contains 130 (=26x5) words;[99]
- Deut 5:14 (the commandment to observe the seventh day) contains 26 words;[100]
- Deut 32:1–3 ("Exordium," the introductory passage of the Song of Moses) contains 26 words;[101]
- Deut 33:2–3 (on the appearance of God) contains 26 words;[102]
- Deut 33:8–11 (Moses's blessing of Levi) contains 52 (=26x2) words;[103]
- Deut 33:13–17 (Moses's blessing of Joseph) contains 52 (=26x2) words;[104]
- Deut 33:26–29 (the conclusion of Moses's blessings) contains 52 (=26x2) words;[105]
- Hab 3:3–7 (on the appearance of God) contains 52 (=26x2) words;[106]
- Genesis 49:2–27 (Jacob's blessings) contains 26 verses.[107]

If we accept these calculations as meaningful and not accidental, then the symbolism of 26 would become the earliest attested case of Hebrew gematria. This might have been based solely on the numeric value of the Tetragram—which would not be surprising, given the centrality of the term for Jewish thought and religious practice. This is all the more relevant considering its esoteric usages vis-à-vis the esoteric character of presumed early Hebrew isopsephism.

Here we arrive at an important point. If we bring together the data outlined thus far on Semitic numerals, biblical isopsephy, and numerical symbolism of the Tetragram we may justifiably conclude that the Hebrew isopsephism behind $\overline{\text{KC}}$ did not require an elaborate Hebrew decimal system. In fact, we can and should separate the discussions of Semitic versus Greek precedence for decimalia from the question of precedence regarding ordinalia (on which, see above in the section "Hebrew Alphabetic Numerals"). Ordinal numbers are attested much better and earlier for Semitic sources and may well have preceded the Greek ordinal system, because 1) the order of Semitic letters had been established before it was adopted by the

[97] Ibid., 600; Bazak, "Numerical Devices," 335.

[98] Labuschagne, "Significant Compositional Techniques," 597–98.

[99] Ibid., 599.

[100] Claus Schedi, *Baupläne des Wortes. Einführung in die biblische Logotechnik* (Wien: Herder, 1974) 172; Labuschagne, "Significant Compositional Techniques," 592.

[101] Knohl, "Sacred Architecture," 194. Knohl notes that the Exordium is the only paragraph in the Song of Moses that refers explicitly to the name of God ("For the name LORD I will proclaim," 32:3).

[102] Without ויאמר (Knohl, "Sacred Architecture," 190).

[103] Without וללוי אמר (ibid.).

[104] Without וליוסף אמר (Labuschagne, "Significant Compositional Techniques," 597–98).

[105] Knohl, "Sacred Architecture," 190.

[106] Ibid., 191 (cf. Deut 33:2–3 above).

[107] See more in Knohl, "Solving the Mystery."

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Greeks; 2) Semitic ordinalia might have been used already in an Aramaic inscription of the early eighth century BCE;[108] 3) the antiquity of this system in Hebrew may be corroborated by the use of alphabetic acrostics in Psalms (24, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119), Proverbs (31:10–31), Lamentations (1–4) and possibly Nahum (1:2–10).[109] Most cases of presumed early Hebrew isopsephy are based on the numeric value of the Tetragram and thus could apply the system of ordinal numbers, since the Tetragram consists only of numbers from the first decad (10–5–6–5). This means that undergirding early Hebrew isopsephy could be ordinal rather than decimal numbers. Therefore, even if the Hebrew decimal system is a late development, the Hebrew numerology behind $\overline{\text{κϛ}}$ would not be anachronistic, even if we date $\overline{\text{κϛ}}$ itself to the very beginning of Hebrew-Greek translation practice.

G. Numerology of 26 in Greek

The numerological significance of 26 can be observed in the usage of the Johannine "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι) sayings, which identify Jesus with the "Father." This phrase is unique to Jewish Greek texts and is thought to render the Hebrew אני הוא found in passages such as Deut 32:39 and Isa 48:1. In a manner similar to the patterns observed in the Hebrew Bible discussed in the previous section, it occurs precisely twenty-six times in the Gospel of John.

When transferred into Greek the number 26, the numeric value of the Tetragram, would have taken different forms depending on the Greek numerical system used. While in the alphabetic Milesian/Alexandrian system the number 26 should be written as $\overline{\text{κϛ}}$, in the acrophonic Athic/Herodanic notation the same number 26 would be represented as ΔΔΠΙ (also a tetragram that, like the Hebrew Tetragram, contains three signs).[110]

However, the most interesting numerical sign would be provided by the Greek system of ordinal numbers.[111] With an alphabet of 24 letters, the number 26 could be written as either AB or BB,[112] but in the Milesian alphabet of 27 letters the 26th place was occupied by *omega* (the last, 27th, letter is *sampi*). This arrangement corresponds to the sequence of Proto-Canaanite alphabets[113] and is known from different periods in Greece, including in the period before the introduction of the

[108] G. A. Cooke, *A Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903) 192; *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum, Part II: Aramaic, Palmyra, Nabatean Inscriptions* (ed. Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé; Paris: E Reipublicae Typographeo, 1889), vols.1–14; Gandz, "Hebrew Numerals," 82.

[109] Thus Gandz, "Hebrew Numerals," 77–82. Some of these texts may originate in the pre-exilic period, while others in the early Hellenistic era. In any case, all of them predate any directly attested Hebrew use of letters as numerals.

[110] In the alphabetic Milesian/Alexandrian system one of the possible isopsypha of 26 is also a tetragram of three signs: AIEI. On this form, see the section "IC as *Numer sacer*" below.

[111] On ordinalia, see the section "Hebrew Alphabetic Numerals" above.

[112] See W. Larfeld, *Handbuch der griechischen Epigraphik* (2 vols.; Leipzig: Reisland, 1898–1907) 1:424; Heath, "History of Greek Mathematics," 35–36 n. 3.

[113] Naveh, *Early History*, 25, 30, 32, 42, 48.

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Milesian system. Twenty-seven letters with *omega* in twenty-sixth place are found, for example, in the Abecedarium of Samos (660 BCE):[114]

Fig. 5: Abecedarium of Samos. Included by kind permission of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Ephorate of Antiquities of Samos and Ikaria.

With ordinalia derived from the set of 27 characters, the *omega* could have been used for 26 (instead of a regular ordinal 24 or decimal 800). Although most cases of ordinalia that we know are based on the standard set of 24 letters, there is also evidence of ordinal numbers based on other types of alphabets. A fifth-century BCE bronze inscription from Locris has *vau/digamma* for the number 6 among its nine ordinalia (from *alpha* to *theta*, which number the nine paragraphs of the text).[115]

It has already been suggested that ordinal numbers could be used specifically for isopsephic calculations in esoteric cryptography by Orphic and Pythagorean mystics as well as by early Christians.[116] Some cases of numerological symbolism in

[114] Image reproduced from H. Walter, "Die Ausgrabungen im Heraion von Samos (1952–1962)," *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον* 18 (1963) Chronika, 286–96, at 290, Abb. 3, by kind permission of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Ephorate of Antiquities of Samos and Ikaria. The inscription is found on an ancient cup (Archaeological Site of the Heraion of Samos, K 5309). This and subsequent abecedaria are discussed in Psychoyos, "Forgotten Art," 182–89. Cf. other abecedaria of 27 letters: the Abecedarium of Poseideion (Poseidi of Cassandra in Chalkidiki, 480 BCE; Ιουλία Βοκοτοπούλου, "Ποσείδι," *Το Αρχαιολογικό Έργο στη Μακεδονία και Θράκη* [*ΑΕΜΘ = Archaeological Research in Macedonia and Thrace*] 5 [1991] 303–18, at 310); and the Abecedarium of Athens (post 400 BCE; J. Franz, *Elementa epigraphices graecae* [Berlin; F. Nicolai, 1840] 349). See also C. Brixhe, "Palatalisations en Grec et en Phrygien," *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* 77 (1982) 216–38, at 234–35.

[115] *IGA* 321 (*Inscriptiones Graecae Antiquissimae* [ed. H. Roehl; Berlin: Reimer, 1882] 69–73); Heath, "History of Greek Mathematics," 35. This does not necessarily indicate that in its full form this alphabet had more than 24 letters or the omega in the 26th place. There are alphabets with *digamma* but without omega (B. A. van Groningen, *Short Manual of Greek Paleography* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1967) 18.

[116] See Wolfgang Schultz, *Altjonische Mystik* (Vienna: Akademischer Verlag, 1907) 96; Robert Eisler, *Weltenmantel und Himmelszelt. Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Urgeschichte des antiken Weltbildes* (München: C. H. Beck, 1910); idem, *Orpheus the Fisher*, 116–20. Eisler there refers to the 2nd-cent. Artemidorus, *Oneirocriticon* 2.70 as a proof that ordinalia were used for isopsephic calculations (116). Artemidorus used them for dream interpretations: "It is necessary to interpret these [greater numbers] not on the basis of the ascending value of the letters but the position of the letters in the alphabet. For example, forty is *mu*, and *mu* also indicates twelve. For *mu*, which signifies forty, is the twelfth letter. And the following explanation will indicate when it indicates twelve and when it

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the New Testament can be interpreted only through isopsephism based exclusively on ordinalia.[117] Jewish usage of 27 Greek ordinalia would have had significant implications for interpreting "I am Alpha and Omega, said the Lord" (Rev 1:8; cf. 21:6; 22:13; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.14.6–8; 1.15.1–2; etc.). In this case, the entire phrase, written in shorthand, becomes a numerical riddle: ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ $\overline{\alpha}$ καὶ τὸ $\overline{\omega}$ λέγει $\overline{\kappa\varsigma}$—"I am [both] 1 and 26, said 26." The riddle is based on the reference to κύριος εἷς ἐστιν "the Lord is one" of LXX Deut 6:4 (which could be spelled as $\overline{\kappa\varsigma}$ $\overline{\alpha}$ εστιν "26 is 1"; cf. also εἷς ὁ θεὸς of Mt 19:17).[118] The use of two different systems of numeration in the same document or even phrase has well attested precedents and typology.[119]

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does not. <And> thus *nu* indicates either fifty or thirteen and *xi* either sixty or fourteen and the rest should be calculated in the same way" (Daniel E. Harris-McCoy, *Artemidorus' Oneirocritica: Text, Translation, and Commentary* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012] 255). Cf. a rabbinic dream interpretation based on a Greek numeric shorthand (Cappadocia signifying κ [κάππα] δοκοί "twenty beans"; Gen. R. 68.12; Lieberman, *Hellenism*, 73 n. 211), and more rabbinic parallels to Artemidorus in ibid., 71–75. It is remarkable that according to one of Artemidorus's methods, 26 ($\overline{\kappa\varsigma}$) would also have had a value of 85: "If one should hear someone saying, 'You will live for twenty-six years'—it is necessary to divide them up and to render the twenty as twenty but render the six, in accordance with the preceding logic [see "And six is sixty-five. For it is written with an *epsilon* and *xi*" above], as sixty-five. And thus the total comes out to eighty-five" (Harris-McCoy, *Artemidorus*, 255, 253, 500). The number 85 is an isopsephon of ζόη (an Ionic variant of ζωή). On God and Jesus as ζωή, see John 11:25; 14:6; 1 John 1:2; 5:20; Gnostic and Hermetic traditions (Hippolytus, *Ref.* 4.43–44; Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.21.3; Corp. Herm. 1.12; etc.); Mandaean *hayyi rabbi*, etc. See also Hurtado discussing an isopsephy of $\overline{\iota\eta}$ and Hebrew חי: "In early Christian views of Jesus, he can be thought of as the embodiment of resurrection life, indeed, himself the life-giving Lord (e.g., Rom. 8:1–2,10–11; 1 Cor. 15:20–23, 45; Phil. 3:20–21; John 1:3–4; 11:25; 14:6; 20:31!), and so an allusion to 'life' in a suspended form of Jesus's name would certainly have resonated profoundly with Christian piety" (*Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 115).

[117] See the following suggested isopsepha (based on 24 ordinal numbers), some of which may possibly be not coincidental: 153 (153 fishes caught by Simon Peter in John 21:10 and Σιμων ιχθυς); 90 (Πετρος and δυκτιον "net" in the same verse); 81 (Παυλυς and μεσσιας); 87 (χιτων and Ιησους) (Eisler, *Orpheus the Fisher*, 116–20). Cf. also 77 (ιχθυς and αβερικιος), 99 (Πυθαγορας et al.), 115 (Ιερουσαλεμ and Ιεροπολις), 96 (Εμμανουηλ and Ορφευς), etc. (ibid., 266–70, and plate XXVIII). It has also been suggested that Jews used Greek ordinalia for marking money-baskets in the Temple: בשלוש קופות של שלוש שלוש סאין תורמין את הלשכה, וכתוב בהן אל"ף בי"ת גימ"ל. רבי ישמעאל אומר, יוונית כתוב בהן, אלפ"א בית"א גמל"א—"The funds are collected from the Temple treasury chamber with three baskets of three *se'a* each. On the baskets is written: *alef*, *beit*, *gimmel*. Rabbi Ishmael says: 'This was written in Greek, *alfa*, *beta*, *gamma*'" (m. Sheq. 3.2). Cf. *alpha* in m. Menah. 8.1–3 and possibly ordinal numbers in m. Ma'aser Sheni 4.11 and t. Ma'aser Sheni 5.1. On Hebrew letter-labels, see m. Shabb. 12.3 and t. Shabb. 12.6. For more details on Hebrew and Greek ordinalia used by Jews, see Gandz, "Hebrew Numerals," 79–86.

[118] On *alpha* widely used for "one" in Graeco-Roman documentary papyri vis-à-vis Christian scribes' avoidance of abbreviating "one," see Cole, *Numerals*, 203.

[119] See the examples given above in a note to the section "Early Hebrew Isopsephy/Gematria." Cf. also the frequent use of alphabetic ordinalia for the number of books together with acrophonic Attic notation for the number of lines in papyri of Herculaneum (Gow, "Greek Numerical Alphabet," 279; Heath, *History of Greek Mathematics*, 1:35). Greek and Roman numerals could both be in use on the same coins (R. A. G. Carson and C. H. V. Sutherland, *Essays in Roman Coinage Presented to Harold Mattingly* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955] 236) and even mixed together in

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H. Names-Numbers: "Nomina Sacra" as "Numeri Sacri"

Early or late, intentional or accidental, the homography of the name $\overline{\text{κc}}$ and the number $\overline{\text{κc}}$ could hardly have passed unnoticed by the authentic original audience (in contrast to the modern scholarly community). It could, thus, have played a role in the numerological interpretations that were so popular in at least the early centuries CE.

However dated, $\overline{\text{κc}}$ represents a widely attested phenomenon, that of the *name-number*, which is observed most often with the names of deities. The focus on the numeric value of God's name in Hebrew—and, more especially, the complete identity of God's name and number in the *numerus sacer/nomen sacrum* $\overline{\text{κc}}$—should be regarded in the context of the graphic identity of the names of gods with other numbers attested in Mesopotamian cuneiform documents (from the eighth-century BCE Akkadian to the second-century BCE Parthian). For instance: the sign of the moon god Sin was identical to the number 30; the name of the sun god Shamash, to the number 20; Enlil, the head of the Sumerian pantheon of gods, to 50; Igigi, the word for great gods of heaven and earth, to 600; et cetera.[120] This is not yet isopsephy, since numeric value is assigned to whole words instead of letters or their combinations, but the result is the same: meaningful *homography of gods' names and signs for numbers*.

the same numbers (see the section below on $\overline{\chi\text{c}}$ as 16 and $\overline{\text{ιc}}$ $\overline{\chi\text{c}}$ as 32). Cf. also Gow's note: "We might, in the same way, use Roman numerals for the one division, Arabic for the other" ("Greek Numerical Alphabet," 279). In this typological connection, we can mention numerous puns based on the juxtaposition of verbal, Arabic, and Roman numerals with homographic words, such as, e.g., the classic "I've forgotten how to write 1, 1000, 51, 6, 500 in Roman numerals. IM LIVID," or Shakespeare's obscene "extemporal epitaph on the death of the deer [= sorel]": "If sore be sore, then l [= 50 and "ell"; the latter appears in the First Folio] to sore makes fifty sore—O sorel [= "sore l" and "sore ell"]! / Of one sore I am hundred make by adding but one more l [= "moral"]" (*Love's Labour's Lost*, 5.2). Cf. also multiple Renaissance chronograms (like CVM DVXI IVVI LVXI = 1699: *cum duxi iuvi luxi* "When I led, I helped and shone"; the tombstone of Jean Ferdinand de Beuchem, bishop of Antwerp, d. 1699, in James Hilton, *Chronograms, 5000 and More in Number* [London: Stock, 1882] 51). See also on the intercultural usage of different numerical systems in the section "Early Hebrew Isopsephy/Gematria" above.

[120] Discussed by Steven Lieberman as corroboration of the early existence of Hebrew isopsephy ("A Mesopotamian Background," 174–76, 187–88, 199; see there also on Mandaean number-based names; E. S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1937] 81–82). Names in the form of longhand ordinal numbers are well known in Latin (like Quintus, Octavia, and many others) as well as in Coptic, Armenian, and Syriac.

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We have had occasion to note that Greek isopsephy is applied most often to proper names.[121] The Pythagorean tradition associated numbers with gods,[122] so it is no wonder that these isopsephic names often belong to gods, like Isis (420), Sarapis (662),[123] and deified Roman emperors.[124] The deity Abrasax (Abraxas) is addressed by its isopsephonic number τξε (365).[125] The name of Mithras as well was known to Jerome as an isopsephon of the same solaric number.[126]

Christians applied similar numerological practices to their deified figures. Numbers could substitute for the name of Jesus, who was called ἐπίσημον (a letter for 6)—because "Jesus is a name arithmetically symbolical, consisting of six letters" (*Haer.* 1.14.4–7; cf. 2.24.1;[127] Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.40, 44)[128]—or titled by its isopsephon 888 (ibid. 2.24.1; cf. 1.15.5; Syb. Oracles 1.324–31). The Holy Spirit's symbolic representation, a dove, Greek περιστερά, was known as an isopsephon of ωα (801; *Haer.* 1.14.6). The contracted form of Ἰη[σοῦς]), the *nomen sacrum* ιη, could also be understood as the number 18 (Barn. 9:7–9; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.11).[129] The *nomin sacrum* ιχθ (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεός) can be interpreted as a gematriacal atbash of 153 and a contracted form of ιχθύς "fish" (cf. "153 great fishes" in John 21:11).[130] The number χμγ (643), an isopsephon of θεὸς βοηθός "God the helper," was used to substitute for Χριστός, Μιχαήλ, Γαβριήλ "Christ, Michael, Gabriel" (or Χριστὸν Μαρία γεννᾷ, "Christ born of Mary").[131] Knowledge of the

[121] David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16* (Word Biblical Commentary 52b; Nashville: Nelson, 1998) 772. See more examples in Ast and Lougovaya, "Art of Isopsephism." Cf. Francois Bovon: "The early Christians used the categories of 'name' and 'number' as theological tools. Often they consciously interpreted names and numbers in a symbolic way. Even their non-reflexive usage relied on implicit conceptualizations very different from our nominalist-based thinking. They presupposed that names and numbers are inextricably related. Is the Jewish and Christian confession εἷς ὁ θεὸς not a cogent expression combining a name and a number?" ("Names and Numbers in Early Christianity," *NTS* 47 (2001) 267–88, at 267; see there also about the "kinship between signs for words and signs for numbers" on 276).

[122] P. Gorman, *Pythagoras* (London: Routledge, 1979) 151.

[123] P. Oxy. XLV 3239 (late 2nd cent. CE), l. 21 and 31: Ἴσις [420] ὁ Σαρᾶπις [662] ἡ μεγάλη [ἐ]λπίς ["the great hope"; 420], Ἀλεξάνδρειαν κοσμεῖ ["adorns Alexandria"; 662] (Ast and Lougovaya, "Art of Isopsephy," 94). Sarapis appears also in the 4th-cent. *Historia Alexandri Magni* of Pseudo-Callisthenes, where the god presents himself to the king as a list of numeric values of his name's letters: "Listen, Alexander, to who I am: two times one hundred and a one put together, then another hundred and one, four times twenty and ten, then take the first letter and put it also last, and then you will know which god I am" (I.33.11.37–41; Ast and Lougovaya, "Art of Isopsephy," 84–85).

[124] See multiple examples from the Sibylline Oracles cited above in a note to the section "Hebrew-Greek Isopsephy," as well as Nero in Revelation (13:18) and Suetonius (*Vitae*, Nero 39.2).

[125] Ἀβρασάξ or Ἀβράξας (*PGM* [*Papyri Graecae Magicae*] 8.61; Ast and Lougovaya, "Art of Isopsephy," 89).

[126] Jerome, *Comm. In Am.* 1.3.9–10 (*CCL* [*Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina] 76.250).

[127] *ANF* 1:53–55.

[128] On the numerology of the name of Jesus, see also below.

[129] See further details in the section "Hebrew-Greek Isopsephy" above.

[130] Neil J. McEleney, "153 Great Fishes (John 21,11)—Gematriacal Atbash," *Biblica* 58.3 (1977) 411–17.

[131] P. Hamb. IV; see S. R. Llewelyn, "The Christian Symbol ΧΜΓ, an Acrostic or an Isopsephism?,"

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numeric isopsephon of the divine name could be considered important, "a gift of the knowledge of your great name, of which the number is 9999" (θϡϟθ; again, a tetragram compiled of three signs; cf. ΔΔΠΙ in the section "Numerology of 26 in Greek" above and AIEI in the next section).[132]

Such homographies may or may not be intentional. Dan Näsellqvist cites five *nomina sacra* which might be confused with numerals: ιη (18 or Ἰησοῦς), ιϛ (16 or Ἰησοῦς), κε (25 or κύριε), υν (450 or υἱόν), χν (650 or Χριστόν).[133] In fact, Greek, due to its morphological structure, has many words (and, thus, contracted forms) ending with C, some of which would be isomorphic to numerical signs with 6. Among them are the *nomina sacra* χϛ (606 or χριστός) and υϛ (406 or υἱός). The contraction θϛ (θεός or 9 and 6) is not homographic to the Greek 15 (ιε) but reflects the structure of the later attested Hebrew טו (9 and 6) for 15, which is used instead of the combination of *yod* and *heh* (because of the latter's homography to the first two letters and short form of the name of God).[134]

Two conjectures of isopsephy have already been based on *digamma-sigma* homography, both related to the number of the beast in Rev 13:18: 1) the interpretation of 666 (χξϛ) as an isopsephonic value for the Greek form of Trajan's family name Ulpius (Οὐλπιος, with the word-final *sigma* counted as 6 instead of 200)[135] and 2) the interpretation of the variant of the same number, 616 (χιϛ),[136] as a mimicry of the contracted forms of Christ (χϛ) and Jesus (ιϛ), whose similarity is possible only in the case of *digamma-sigma* homography.[137]

In fact, these two *nomina sacra* could be names-numbers as well. Although the numeric value of ιϛ is 210, graphically this sign is fully identical to the shorthand of the number 16, differing from κϛ (26) "in one iota" (10).[138] An alternative

New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity 8 (1997) 156–68; Ast and Lougovaya, "Art of Isopsephy," 90.

[132] The sum of the numeric values of the letters in the magic Chabrax formula (PGM 2.128; C. Bonner, "A Miscellany of Engraved Stones," *Hesperia* 23.2 [1954] 138–57, at 145).

[133] Dan Näsellqvist, *Public Reading in Early Christianity: Lectors, Manuscripts, and Sound in the Oral Delivery of John 1–4* (NovTSup 163; Leiden: Brill, 2016) 38; cf. Cole, *Numerals*, 202–3.

[134] Cf. a similar model suggested for the usage of Roman IIII instead of IV, because the latter is the suspended abbreviation of the name of Jupiter (Carl B. Boyer, "Numerals and Systems of Numeration," *Collier's Encyclopedia*, 15:54–56D).

[135] See Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* (9 vols.; Groningen: Zuidema, 1630) 8:368–69; W. Hadorn, "Die Zahl 666, ein Hinweis auf Trajan," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 19 (1920) 11–29.

[136] Swete, *Apocalypse*, 175. Cf. Irenaeus (*Haer*. 5.30.1).

[137] Peter J. Williams, "P115 and the Number of the Beast," *TynBul* 58 (2007) 151–53. Cf. Cole, *Numerals*, 193; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999) 707.

[138] With C read as *digamma*-6, both letters-numbers of ιϛ become symbolically connected to Jesus. On 10/*iota* see Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.16 (cf. ibid., 6.11) and Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.3.2 and on 6/*episemon* see Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.14.4–7; 2.24.1. See also about the number 16 associated with Hermes in Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv*. 9.3; and on the association of Jesus with Hermes, see, e.g., Rebecca Diggs, "The Hermetic Christ," *Mythological Studies Journal* 3 (2012), https://www.pacifica.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/diggs_r.pdf. On Paul taken for Hermes, see Act 14:12. As for the

shorthand for 16 was a combination of the Latin 10 (X) and Greek 6 (C) signs: XC. Such mixtures of Roman and Greek numerical letters in one number are well known from early Byzantine coins but might have earlier origins.[139] Under this convention, the two main Christian *nomina sacra*, ι̅c̅ (Ἰ[ησοῦ]ς] and χ̅c̅ (χ[ριστό]ς), are numerically identical. Often appearing together, a combination of ι̅c̅ χ̅c̅ (which becomes the most widely used Christogram in Eastern Christianity: ICXC) is isopsephic to Hebrew כבוד "glory" (32), whose Greek equivalent δόξα is commonly related to or even identified with Jesus (Heb 1:3 et al., esp. Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης in James 2:1).[140]

Conclusions

It can hardly have been a coincidence that the *nomen sacrum* κ̅c̅, a perfect isomorph of the Greek number κ̅c̅ (26), became the main equivalent of the Hebrew Tetragram which has the very same numeric value. This model of naming belongs to the well-attested phenomenon of names-numbers, that is, names homographic to numeric signs. Moreover, this manner of representing deities is found in diverse traditions, from ancient Mesopotamian to Hellenistic polytheistic, Mithraic, Gnostic, and Christian practices.

Larry Hurtado proposed a similar pattern for another *nomen sacrum*, ι̅η̅, isopsephic to the Hebrew חי (18), but claimed that "in none of the other *nomina sacra* forms (other than ι̅η̅), however, does the numerical value of the letter combinations appear to have been significant."[141] Based on this observation, he suggested that the meaningful numerical value of ι̅η̅ supports the precedence of abbreviations of Ἰησοῦς (Jesus) over other *nomina sacra*, indicating their Christian origins.[142] Nevertheless, the numeric significance of κ̅c̅ demonstrates that it was not merely created by analogy with abbreviations of Ἰησοῦς[143] and that the verbal-numerical ambivalence of *nomina sacra* was a broader and potentially earlier phenomenon.

Zachary Cole adduced several examples of "theological orthography" of numeric abbreviations[144] and noted that

"difference in one iota," see the language of the Arian controversy at the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), possibly referring—in the light of these data—not only to the difference between ὁμοούσιος and ὁμοιούσιος. The same holds true also for the regular numeric values of κ̅c̅ as 220 and ι̅c̅ as 210. In both cases "my Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). However, in the latter case the numeric relations between the two names are less demonstrative.

[139] For example, in the designation of the 16th regnal year of Justinian (542/3 CE). Cf. also XXC for 26 (interchanging with XXVI; see, e.g., "year 26 is normally written XXϛ but the form XXUI occurs occasionally" in Kyriacos N. Economides, "Byzantine Folles Countermarked with Heraclian Monograms found in Cyprus," *The Numismatic Chronicle* 163 [2003] 193–204, at 195–96).

[140] On Jesus and δόξα, see, e.g., Carey C. Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

[141] Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 116.

[142] Hurtado, "Origin," 665–67, following Roberts, *Manuscript*, 37.

[143] As suggested in Roberts, *Manuscript*, 37.

[144] Cole, *Numerals*, 171–98.

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> the mechanics of abbreviating numbers were so similar to names that, apart from context, the *nomina sacra* can be at times visually indistinguishable from abbreviated numbers. Both modes of abbreviation involve ordinary Greek characters and a horizontal stroke placed directly above the letters in question. Thus, the potential for signaling a sacred number lay close at hand in a system of numerical abbreviations, the question here is if scribes ever exploited this possibility.[145]

It seems that now we can answer this question positively. What remains is the question of how to date this phenomenon.

Most of our knowledge on Hellenistic Judaism comes through Christian hands, and it is often difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish pre-Christian Jewish heritage preserved in Christian sources from original creativity confined to Christian groups. Therefore, the observations presented in this article may be interpreted in at least two ways:

1) $\overline{\text{κc}}$ could be a Hellenistic Jewish innovation that devised an inventive way to connect the widely used κύριος to a numeric value of the Tetragram. An even bolder theory would assert the precedence of $\overline{\text{κc}}$ to the term's full form, thus explaining the very choice of κύριος by numerological considerations. In other words, $\overline{\text{κc}}$ could have been initially and intentionally devised by early Jewish translators in order to preserve the numeric value of the Tetragram in Greek. In this case, we would be justified in regarding $\overline{\text{κc}}$ as a relic of an original Jewish tradition that a) introduced the Semitic mode of contraction (instead of Greek suspension), b) used with such contraction the Greek mode of presenting numbers (with a macron), and c) chose κύριος for the name of God—all in order to preserve the numeric value of the Hebrew Tetragram. An additional factor in devising $\overline{\text{κc}}$ could have been its authentic numerical value of 220, a member of the only pair known in that period of amicable numbers (with 284, isopsephic to θεός, ἅγιος, and ἀγαθός; all these words are found in combination with $\overline{\text{κc}}$ in biblical and liturgical collocations). Preserved by Christians, $\overline{\text{κc}}$ was imitated in their new names-numbers, such as $\overline{\text{ιc}}$. These could have been modeled after it or devised independently, based on the same graphic phenomenon. This interpretation has the advantage of explaining why *nomina sacra* were presented in a numeric form.

2) Alternatively, as it is unknown to early manuscripts or inscriptions that are undoubtedly Jewish, $\overline{\text{κc}}$ might have been just one of the Christian names-numbers that are attested in Christian sources of the second and third centuries CE. $\overline{\text{κc}}$ could possibly even be secondary to $\overline{\text{ιη}}$ and $\overline{\text{ιc}}$ and imitate their numeric isomorphism. However, even if a Christian invention, $\overline{\text{κc}}$, being based on Hebrew isopsephism, must have belonged to the early Jewish-Christian community.

Whether κύριος and/or *nomina sacra* including $\overline{\text{κc}}$ were originally Jewish pre-Christian or were introduced by Christians, it is now evident that the distinction between the profane and sacred meanings of κύριος through the use of its full and

[145] Ibid., 173.

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contracted forms was not merely a convention but a consequence of the contracted form's closer association with the Tetragram. Furthermore, due to the same association, the application of κc to Jesus and the consistent effort to differentiate it from κύριος in the mundane sense, as attested in early manuscripts, may have played even a more significant role in early Christian binitarianism than is usually attributed to κύριος, thus potentially tilting the balance in favor of the early high Christological hypothesis.

The introduction of the name-number κc became possible by a synergy of several overlapping innovations, some of which may be connected to third-century Alexandria. These include: a) the graphic development of Greek writing, which produced the homography of C; b) the regular introduction of alphabetic numbers (most probably following standardization of Greek scripts on the basis of the Ionian alphabet in the fourth century); c) the subsequent introduction of Greek isopsephy; d) the invention of contracted abbreviations and their marking with a sign reserved for numbers (macron); and e) Hebrew-Greek translations, in which the former novelties could be implemented.

This could have been possible only if Hebrew alphabetic numerals (documented no earlier than the late second century BCE) were already in use at least during the third century BCE. Such a circumstance is not improbable in the light of a) the scarce but obvious evidence for West Semitic letters used by Phoenicians as numerals for their dated coinage already in the fourth century, and b) even earlier but conjectured evidence of biblical isopsephy-based numerical symbolism, and specifically the abundance of the number 26 which accounts for the absolute majority of these cases. Moreover, there is no need to conjecture an earlier existence of a Hebrew decimal additive system, since the isopsephy of the Tetragram could have been based on a more archaic system of ordinal numbers.

All these factors produced an opportunity to create forms that answered to certain intellectual needs. The graphic isomorphism of names and numbers was only a specific case of the wider phenomenon of paronomasia that played an important role in constructing ancient Israelite and early Jewish theological discourse.[146] At the same time, various forms of numeric symbolism were deeply integrated into Hellenistic religious and philosophical thought. Multiple precedents of names-numbers, isopsephy (including interlingual Hebrew-Greek examples), and other graphic-verbal-numeric plays reflect the widely attested fascination of ancient Jews and Greeks alike with similar intellectual inventions. This makes our reconstruction of the numerological considerations underlying the introduction of κc and some other *nomina sacra* at least probable.

The reconstruction of the numeric value of κc should affect our perspective on several fields of knowledge and shed light on some unresolved questions, including the chronology of the introduction of Hebrew alphabetic numerals, the problem of

[146] See Alexander Kulik, "*Gilayon* and 'Apocalypse': Reconsidering an Early Jewish Concept and Genre," *Harvard Theological Review* 116 (2023) 190–227, at 218–21 and references there.

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biblical isopsephism, the introduction of Greek equivalents of the name of God, the history of *nomina sacra* (including the question of their Jewish versus Christian origins), and the problem of early high Christology as reflected in the terminology applied to Jesus.

Timeline

	Semitic	Hebrew	Greek	Jewish Greek
8th cent. BCE	Aramaic non-decimal letters-numbers; Aramaic abbreviations cuneiform names-numbers			
7th–5th cents. BCE		Hebrew abbreviations; Hebrew letters-numbers (non-decimal); isopsephy-based numerology of 26 (non-decimal)		
5th cent. BCE			first Greek decimal letters-numbers	
4th cent. BCE	Phoenician letters-numbers (non-decimal)			
3rd cent. BCE			regular usage of Greek decimal letters-numbers; lunate *digamma*; Greek isopsephy	
2nd cent. BCE	Phoenician contracted abbreviations		*digamma-sigma* homography	
193/2 BCE			$\overline{\text{κϛ}}$ as 26 on a coin of Alexander III of Macedon	
141–136 BCE		Hebrew letters-numbers (non-decimal?) on the shekels of Simon Maccabaeus		
78 BCE		decimal Hebrew letters-numbers on a coin of Alexander Jannaeus		

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1st cent. CE			Greek names-numbers	κύριος for the Tetragram; Jewish Greek isopsephy and names-numbers
2nd cent. CE				contracted number-like abbreviations (nomina sacra) κc (26) as an isopsephon for the Tetragram distinction of sacral κc and prophane κύριος co-occurrence of "amicable numbers": κc (220) with θεός, ἀγαθός, or ἅγιος (284)
3rd cent. CE			"amicable numbers" (220 and 284) ascribed by Iamblichus to Pythagoras (6th–5th cent. BCE)	

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