Grace Theological Journal 2.2 (Fall 1981) 227-37.

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**TRANSFORMED INTO**

**HIS IMAGE:**

**A CHRISTIAN PAPYRUS**

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Published here for the first time is a Christian papyrus of the

fourth century, The content of the document is of special interest to

biblical students for its statement about transformation. The position

of the text on the page and the signs in the text are significant for

papyrology. This article begins with a brief summary of the concept

of transformation in the milieu of early Christianity, and against that

backdrop presents the papyrus and its contents.

Basic to the entirety of this article is the persuasiveness of the

excellent teaching and scholarship of my esteemed pedagogue, Profes-

sor James Boyer. Through many undergraduate and graduate courses,

he created in this student an insatiable interest in the likes of Classical

Greece and NT backgrounds. A Greek proverb says: ἡ ἀρχὴ ἥμισυ

παντός, "The beginning is half of everything." To the one therefore

ho began a good work in me the following is dedicated.

\* \* \*

In the ancient world the concept of transformation was very

common.1 Several literary pieces were entitled Metamorphoses, of

which probably best known is Ovid's epic poem composed from

about A.D. 2 onwards.2 The dominant idea in much of this genre is of

gods changing themselves into perceptible beings. But from Apuleius'

Metamorphoses, written in the second century, we learn of the

initiation rites typical of the mystery religions, where the devotee is

transformed into a god-like being in a regeneration ritual.3 Tatian, a

Christian writing in the second century, mentions both aspects when

1 J. Behm, "μεταμορφόω," TDNT 4. 756-57.

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

3 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* (= The Golden Ass), II. 23-29; J. W. Duff, *A Literary*

*History of Rome in the Silver Age: From Tiberius to Hadrian* (2d ed.; New York:

Barnes and Noble, 1960) 153.

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he ridicules the Greek and Roman gods: "There are legends of the

metamorphosis of men: with you the gods also are metamorphosed.

Rhea becomes a tree; Zeus a dragon. . . a god, forsooth, becomes a

swan, or takes the form of an eagle. . . . "4 Present also in the Jewish

literature, the transformation motif occurs especially in apocalyptic

descriptions of an eschatological salvation.5

In the NT, deity and humanity again undergo a change in form.6

Paul describes the incarnation as a taking on of the form of a

servant.7 Jesus was transfigured, as recorded in three Gospels,8 mid-

way through his public ministry. The post-resurrection appearances

of Jesus evidence another change in form.9 However, that special

experience on the Mount of Transfiguration viewed by three disciples

goes almost unnoticed in the rest of Scripture10 and had little

apparent effect on his followers.11 Paul speaks of a present and future

transformation of the Christian but makes no allusion to the trans-

figuration of Jesus: τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα, "we are

being transformed into the same image;" μετασχηματίσει τὸ σπωμα  
τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, "He

will transform the body of our humility into conformity with the

body of his glory."12

Among the many volumes extant representing the early Christian

movement, Jesus' transfiguration and incarnation are treated in

numerous commentaries and homilies,13 but the Christian's trans-

formation is rarely mentioned,14 perhaps to avoid association with the

pagan mystery religions.

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

8.2; 9.6,7.

5 2 *Bar*. 51:3, 10. In the OT the only change of form recorded is Exod 34:29-35;

perhaps also the angel of the Lord appearances imply a transformation of deity into ,

human form. lf

6 Terms: μεταμορφόω, μετασχηματίζω, συμμορφίζω, σύμμορφος.

7 Phil 2:7.

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

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

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

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

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

13 For complete discussion see A. M. Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the*

*Transfiguration of Christ* (London/,New York/Toronto: Longmans and Green, 1949)

130-35.

14 The only examples I have found are Methodius Olympius, The Banquet 8.8,

". . . transformation into the image of the Word" and Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita,

*De Divinis Nominibus* 1.3. My search for references to transformation was conducted

in: G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961-68);

E. J. Goodspeed, *Index Patristicus sive Clovis Patrum Apostolicorum Operum* ;

(Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1907); E. J. Goodspeed, *Index Apologeticus sive Clovis*

*Justini Martyris Operum*, (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912); H. Kraft, *Clovis Patrum*

*Apostolicorum* (Munich: Kosel, 1963).

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THE PAPYRUS15

P.Rob. inv. 28 was purchased in 1953 by the late Professor

David M. Robinson, who bought it from a Cairo dealer by the name of

of Sameda. Nothing more about the provenance is known.16

The papyrus is the bottom 4.4 cm. of a leaf of a codex that was

apparently 14.7 cm. in width. Along the top edge of the fragment, on

both sides, remain the lower portions of letters which were from the

last line of the body of text. On H,17 below the traces of letters at the

top of the fragment (line 1), are five lines written in what was

originally the margin .at the bottom of the page. The papyrus is light

brown m. color, V being somewhat lighter than H. The fabric of the

papyrus is of coarse quality.

The appearance of the writing and the position on the papyrus is

informal and almost careless. The amount written and the room on

the leaf were not carefully coordinated, so that it is gradually more

crowded together into the available space. The margin to the left is at

least 1.3 cm. and above, 1.3 cm.; but no margin exists to the right or

at the bottom. As much as 0.7 cm. separate lines 2 and 3, while

between lines 5 and 6 there IS at most 0.5 cm.

The bottom edge of the papyrus is fairly straight, probably

representing the original bottom edge of the codex leaf. The side

edges are both frayed and rounded on the corners. The left edge

(looking at H) is likely where the leaf was folded in the binding of the

codex. The top edge is not as straight as the bottom edge, nor is it as

frayed as the side edges; here the papyrus was probably cut with a

knife by the finders or dealers through whose hands it passed.

Perhaps we can hypothesize that when the papyrus was cut it was not

connected to its codex, but was a single leaf that was divided by at

least two parties.

PALAEOGRAPHY

Although written, along the fibers, the line of fibers is not

followed for the Writing, nor were any rulings made. Brown Ink,

although sometimes dark and sometimes light, was used for all the

Writing on the papyrus. Several places on H there appear to be some

traces of lampback, unrelated to what is written in brown ink. Little

care was gIven m the use of the pen; It was evidently rather blunt and

not carefully made. There are not neat thicks and thins in the letters;

15 See the plates on pp. 234-35.

16 For permission to publish P.Rob. inv. 28 I thank Professor William Willis of

Duke University under whose guidance I did initial work on this papyrus and who has

graciously assisted in this publication of the papyrus.

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

the side with vertical fibers.

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this is true for what remains of the text above and for what is written

below. Palaeographically, the remains of line I on both sides re-

semble the style of lines 2-6 on H. Thus the same hand with the same

pen and ink may have written both.

The characteristics of the hand are best paralleled by P.Mert.

11,93 (a private Christian letter, dated to the fourth century and

described in relation to P.Jews 1927 as a fair sized, sloping, literary

type), and the Dyskolos papyrus of P. Bodmer, dated late third or

fourth century.18 For some letters, their size in relation to others is

quite irregular (note the long descenders, especially on upsilon, and

the large epsilon), adding to the informal look of the writing. The

absence of ligatures and the presence of diaeresis is standard in book

hands of this period.

SYMBOLS

Occurrences of ·/. in literary papyri that I have noted are as

follows:

P.Oxy. 16 first century Thucydides

696 first century Thucydides

2442 third century Pindar

2697 third century Argonautica

2306 second century Commentary on Alcaeus

P.F/or. third century Commentary on Aristophanes

In four of the six examples, it is placed in the margin; in the other

two it is placed in mid-verse.

A partial explanation of this symbol is given by Diogenes

Laertius (iii, 66). He names and describes the use of various signs in a

text of Plato; in regard to ·/. he says: ὀβελὸς περιεστιγμένος πρὸς  
τὰς εἰκαιους ἀθετήσεις, "the *obelos periestigmenos* is for random

rejections (of passages)."

Nowhere has ↓ been found among literary papyri of Classical

authors.

The use of both signs, however, is frequent in Biblical and

Christian papyri. Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus demonstrate

the frequent use of both signs, sometimes together and sometimes

separately, but always where a correction has been made.19 When

used together, ↓ stands in the margin and ·/. marks the precise place in

the line for the correction. At the top or bottom of the page, ↓ stands

18 For bibliographical data on various editions of papyri cited, see John F. Oates,

Roger S. Bagnall, and William H. Willis, *Checklist of Editions of Greek Papyri and*

*Ostraca,* 2nd ed., BASP: Supplements 1 (1978), distributed by Scholars Press.

19 See, in addition to the codices, H. J. M. Milne and T. C. Skeat, *Scribes and*

*Correctors of the Codex Sinaiticus* (London: British Museum, 1938) 40.

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at the beginning of what is to be inserted, and .1. stands at the end.

Sometimes ἄνω and κάτω accompany ·/.

In Chester Beatty Papyrus VI (Numbers and Deuteronomy),

dated to the second century, ↓ is used identically as ↓ in Codices

Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

Henry A. Sanders notes the use of ·/. in some biblical manu-

scripts dated to the fourth or early fifth century, marking the location

of the omission and then repeated in the margin giving the words to

be supplied.20

An exact parallel to *P.Rob*. inv. 28 is described in P. Tura, where ↓

and :/. stand together in the margin at the beginning of the part to be

supplied. In the text, ↓ marks the line and ·/.the precise location

within the line.21

A somewhat later function of ·/.is described by Isidore (A.D. 602-

36), bishop of Seville (1.21): *Lemniscus, id est, virgula inter geminos*

*punctos jacens, opponitur in his locis, quae sacrae Scripturae inter-*

*pretes eadem sensu, sed diversis sermonibus transtulerent*, "The

lemniscus, that is a stick lying between two points, is placed in those

places which the interpreters of Holy Scriptures transcribe in the

same sense, but with different expressions."

The evidence therefore for the function of ↓ and ·/.in the fourth

century suggests that lines 2-6 of P. Rob. inv. 28 were an omission in

the text above and were supplied in the bottom margin of the page:2

CONTENT

The text of P. Rob. inv. 28 has not been found in the corpus

of Patristic literature extant, nor has the rest of the papyrus from

which this piece was cut been located in the editions of published

papyri. Without that larger context it remains impossible to deter-

mine the complete meaning of the text we have. Clearly, however, it

is a Christian description of some form of transformation.

Transfiguration

Although the usual Christian discussions of a change in form

centered on the transfiguration of Jesus, the present text does not

readily fit that sense of transformation. The restoration of what sin

destroyed and the visitation of the dead seem out of place in the

context of the transfiguration. Some recent scholarship, however, has

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

MacMillan, 1912) 32.

21 Albert Henrichs, *Didymos der Blinde: Kommentar zu Hiob*, Teil I (Bonn:

Rudolf Habelt, 1968) 17.

22 E. G. Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

University, 1971) 17, 18.

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seen in the transfiguration story a prediction of the resurrection, in

which case inclusion of references to the passion week may be

appropriate.23 A. M. Ramsey, discussing Heb 2:9, says ". . . the

writer, who cherishes greatly the traditions of the earthly life of Jesus

and dwells especially upon the episode of Gethsemane (in v. 7-8) may

have the event of the transfiguration specifically in mind."24 How-

ever, this association of the transfiguration with the resurrection of

Jesus is rare in the early Christian literature.

*Incarnation*

Perhaps the visitation of the dead should be understood in a

spiritual sense, that Jesus came among the spiritually dead to raise

them up to be citizens of heaven.25 Problematic, though, for this

explanation is the statement that it was a transformation into his own

image, hardly descriptive of the incarnation; unless this statement

refers to the transformation of believers into his image, that their

obedience might restore what sin destroyed.

A good example of an early Christian work which speaks of the

incarnation as a transformation is Ascension of Isaiah 3:13:26

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

. . . and that through him was revealed the departure of the beloved

from the seventh heaven, and his transformation, and his descent, and

the appearance which had to be transformed in the form of man. ...

*Descent into hell*

A third explanation for the meaning of P.Rob. inv. 28 is a fre-

quent topic in early Christianity, the descensus ad infernos.27 The

23 J. Schniewind, *Das Evangelium Nach Markus* (NTD; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck

and Ruprecht, 1956) 117; H. Baltensweiler, *Die Verkliirung Jesu: Historisches Ereignis*

*und synoptische Berichte* (Zurich: Zwingli, 1959). R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der*

*synoptischen Tradition* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1957) 278; but against

this see G. H. Boobyer, *St. Mark and the Transfiguration Story* (Edinburgh:

T. & T. Clark, 1942) 21.

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

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

26 P. Amh. I. xviii. 22- xix.5

27 See J. A. MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an*

*Early Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: T. & T, Clark, 1930); Malcolm L. Peel, "The

'Descensus ad Infernos' in 'The Teachings of Silvanus' (CG VII, 4)," *Numen* 26

(1979) 23-49.

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visitation of the dead and raising them up to heaven and the

restoration of what sin destroyed favor this interpretation.

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

. . .καὶ τῆ κατάβασιν καὶ ἐξέλευσιν τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ ἐκ τοῦ ἑβδόμου  
 οὐρανοῦ εἰς τὸν ᾅδην, καὶ τὴν μετμόρφωσιν ἣν μεταμορφώθη  
 ἕμπροσθεν τῶν αὐτοῦ . . . .

. . . and the descent and departure of the beloved from the seventh

heaven into Hades, and the transformation which was transformed

before his disciples. . . .

Against this understanding of P.Rob. inv. 28 is the transformation

phrase, which hardly describes the dead, but could be taken to refer to

his resurrection.

TRANSCRIPTION

P.Rob. inv. 28 14.7 x 4.4 cm. Fourth Century

H ]τὸ [ν] νο [

↓ ·/. ἔργον ἦν εἰς ἴδίαν α'τοῦ ἀναμόρφωσις

εἰκόνα ἵν' ὃ συνέτριθεν ἡ παράβασις ἀνανεώ-

σῃ ἡ χάρις τῆς ϋπακοῆς. διὰ ταύτην τὴν αἰτίαν γέ-

γονεν ἐν νεκροῖς ἵνα καὶ νεκροὺς ἑαυτῶι

ἀναστήσῃ οὐρανοῦ πολίτας κς.

V ] α δὲ γέγραφ [ ]υ[ ]υ [

TRANSLATION

The deed was a transformation into his own image in order that

what sin shattered the grace of obedience might restore. For this

reason the Lord came among the dead in order that he might raise up

to himself even the dead as citizens of heaven.

NOTES

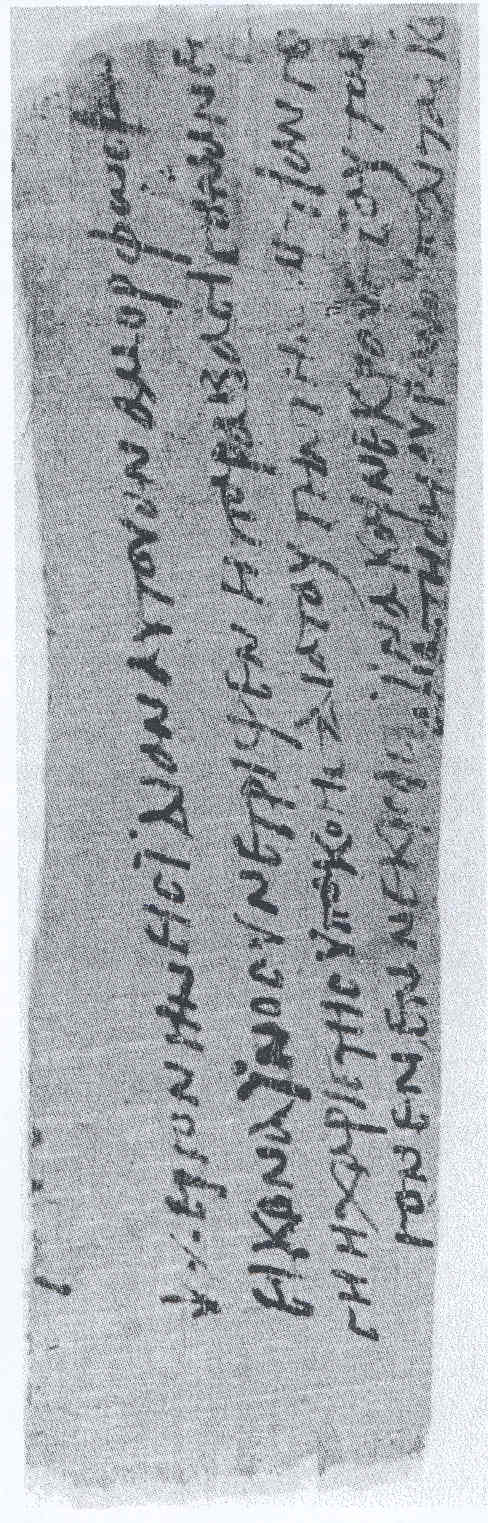
H I. Fragments of four letters remain, with space between the

second and third for another letter. The reading supplied in the

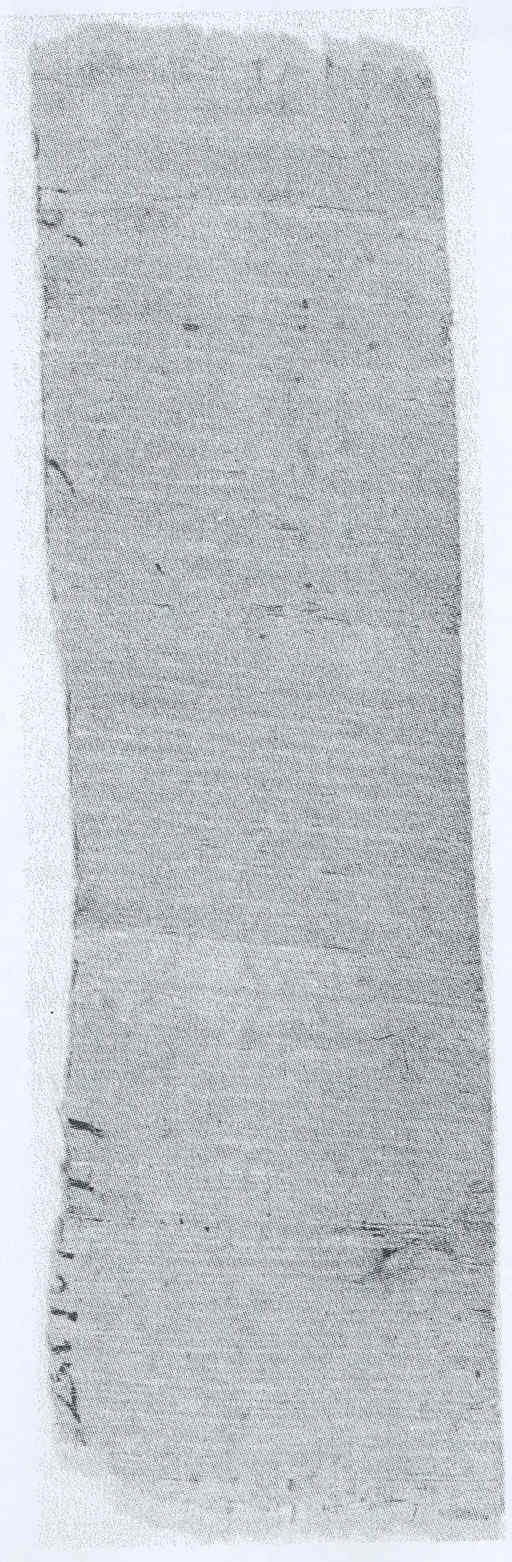
28 A. M. Denis, *Fragmenta Pseudepigraphorum Quae Supersunt Graeca* (Leiden:

E. J. Brill. 1970) 105.

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transcription is one possibility of many. The letters listed below are

considered feasible on the basis of the ink that remains of the four

letters.

1 \_ 2 \_ ? \_ 3 \_ 4

ι ε ν α

ρ o υ ε

τ ς θ

φ ω ο

ψ ς

ω

If the *omega* is selected for letter 2, there would probably not be

room for another letter following it before letter 3. It is assumed that

the line continued following letter 4; however, letter I was probably

the first in the line, considering the left margin of lines 2-6.

2. ἀναμόρφωσις: ". . . The scribe apparently wrote ανα-

μορφωσεω[ς] initially, which he (or someone) corrected to ανα-

μορφωσις; in other words, E was corrected to a heavy exaggerated i,

and ω was corrected to ς."29

5. νεκροῖς: ". . . The scribe apparently wrote the third word

νεκροοισι, then cancelled the second omicron and erased the final

iota, then proceeded to write ϊνα. . . ."

6. πολίτας: ". . . I believe the scribe wrote πολίτας, but the top

stroke of the sigma has flaked away leaving a form that could be

misread as *iota*, except for the fact that his *iotas* never turn to the

right at the bottom. . . ."

V 1. Fragments of ten letters remain, with possible space following

letters 6 and 7 for one other letter. The reading supplied in the

transcription is one possibility of many. The letters listed below are

considered feasible on the basis of the ink that remains.

1 \_ 2 \_ 3 \_ 4 \_ 5 \_ 6 \_ ? \_ 7 \_ 8 \_ \_ \_ 9 \_ \_ \_ 10

α δ ε γ α γ ρ φ υ υ

δ ς ι ε η φ ψ

κ ρ o ι ψ ρ

μ τ ς κ

ν γ

CONCLUSION

The papyrus here published, though enigmatic because of its

brevity and its separation from a wider context, is illustrative of the

29 My thanks again to Professor Willis for his reexamination of the papyrus and

comments on lines 2, 5, 6.

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primary evidence preserved on papyrus and of the theological litera-

ture of the early Christians. In addition to the essential discussions of

the papyrus itself, the signs, and the palaeography, three possible

explanations for its content were explored. However until the rest of

the piece of papyrus is located from which P.Rob. inv. 28 was cut or

until the specific content of the papyrus is found in other extant

Patristic literature, a decision regarding the significance of the state-

ments of the papyrus will remain premature.

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