

§21. *Nomina Sacra*

DURING the first centuries of the Church, Christian scribes developed a system of contractions for certain sacred words. These *nomina sacra*, as the Latin palaeographer Ludwig Traube called them,<sup>74</sup> eventually came to include fifteen such terms. Some were contracted by writing only the first and the last letters (*θεός*, *κύριος*, *Ἰησοῦς*, *Χριστός*, and *υἱός*); others, by writing only the first two and the last letters (*πνεῦμα*, *Δαυίδ*, *σταυρός*, and *μήτηρ*) or the first and last two letters (*πατήρ*, *Ἰσραήλ*, and *σωτήρ*); still others, by writing the first and last syllables (*ἄνθρωπος*, *Ἱερουσαλήμ*, and *οὐρανός*). In order to draw the reader's attention to the presence of a *nomen sacrum*, the scribe would place a horizontal line above the contraction. In the developed Byzantine usage the fifteen *nomina sacra* in their nominative and genitive forms are as follows:

<i>θεός</i>	<u>θς</u>	<u>θυ</u>
<i>κύριος</i>	<u>κς</u>	<u>κυ</u>
<i>Ἰησοῦς</i>	<u>ις</u>	<u>ιω</u>
<i>Χριστός</i>	<u>χς</u>	<u>χυ</u>
<i>υἱός</i>	<u>υς</u>	<u>υυ</u>
<i>πνεῦμα</i>	<u>πνα</u>	<u>πνς</u>
<i>Δαυίδ</i>	<u>δαδ</u>	
<i>σταυρός</i>	<u>στυς</u>	<u>στυ</u>
<i>μήτηρ</i>	<u>μηρ</u>	<u>μρς</u>
<i>πατήρ</i>	<u>πηρ</u>	<u>πρς</u>
<i>Ἰσραήλ</i>	<u>ιηλ</u>	
<i>σωτήρ</i>	<u>σηρ</u>	<u>σρς</u>
<i>ἄνθρωπος</i>	<u>ανος</u>	<u>ανου</u>
<i>Ἱερουσαλήμ</i>	<u>ιλημ</u>	
<i>οὐρανός</i>	<u>ουνος</u>	<u>ουνου</u>

Scholars differ in accounting for the origin and development of the system of *nomina sacra*. According to Traube,<sup>75</sup> their origin is to be found in the need among Hellenistic Jews for devising a Greek equivalent for the Hebrew Tetragrammaton.

Others have sought to explain the *nomina sacra* as reflecting certain usages in secular texts. Rudberg<sup>76</sup> and Nachmanson,<sup>77</sup> for example, drew attention to the

<sup>74</sup> *Nomina Sacra: Versuch einer Geschichte der christlichen Kürzung* (Munich, 1907). This standard work is now supplemented by the additional data collected by A. H. R. E. Paap, *Nomina Sacra in the Greek Papyri of the First Five Centuries A.D.: the Sources and Some Deductions* (Leiden, 1959); José O'Callaghan, 'Nomina sacra' in *Papyris Graecis saeculi III neotestamentariis* (Analecta Biblica, 46; Rome, 1970); idem, "'Nominum sacrorum" elenchus in Graecis Novi Testamenti papyris a saeculo IV usque ad VIII,' *Studia papyrologica*, x (1971), pp. 99-122; idem, 'Consideraciones sobre los "nomina sacra" del Nuevo Testamento (del siglo IV al VIII),' *Akten des XIII. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses, Marburg/Lahn, 1971* (Münchener Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung und antiken Rechtsgeschichte, 66.

Heft; Munich, 1974), pp. 315-320; Flavio Bedodi, 'I "nomina sacra" nei papiri greci veterotestamentari precristiani,' *Studia papyrologica*, xiii (1974), pp. 89-103; and C. H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (London, 1979), pp. 26-48.

<sup>75</sup> Op. cit., pp. 31 f.

<sup>76</sup> Gunnar Rudberg, 'Zur paläographischen Kontraktion,' *Eranos*, x (1910), pp. 71-100; idem, 'Verschleifung und Kontraktion,' *Eranos*, xiii (1913), pp. 156-61; cf. also idem, *Neutestamentlicher Text und Nomina sacra* (Skrifter utgifna af Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskaps-Samfundet; Uppsala, 1915); idem, 'De nominibus sacris adnotatiunculae,' *Eranos*, xxxiii (1933), pp. 147-51.

<sup>77</sup> Ernst Nachmanson, 'Die schriftliche Kontraktion