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Tomasz Derda

### SOME REMARKS ON THE CHRISTIAN SYMBOL ΧΜΤ\*

Nearly every year brings a new study concerning the Christian symbol ΧΜΤ, which is very common in both papyri and inscriptions from the 4th century onwards. We seem, however, still to be far from the decisive solution of the meaning of these letters and the purpose of the present paper is to draw attention to some new evidence rather than to give a final interpretation.

In 1970 J.O. Tjäder gave a summary of a certain stage of the century long discussion. His conclusion, however, which attributed to the symbol ΧΜΤ the meaning Χ(ριστὸν) Μ(αρία) γ(έννη) juxtaposing it with the Latin VDN = V(irgine) D(eus) n(atus), does not provide an answer to all the difficulties<sup>1</sup>. Tjäder, like many other scholars dealing with the symbol ΧΜΤ, was influenced by P. Grenf. II 112a (dated by J. van Haelst to the seventh century<sup>2</sup>) where the formula ΧΣ ΜΑΡΙΑ ΓΕΝΝΑ is repeated three times in the first two lines (the second time ΧΣ is put in between ΜΑΡΙΑ and ΓΕΝΝΑ). The editor of the papyrus (B.P. Grenfell) gave the text in majuscule without punctuation and wrote in his commentary Χ(ριστὸν) Μαρία γέννα without having taken into consideration the possibility of keeping the name of Christ in the nominative: Χ(ριστὸ)ς Μαρία(ς) γέννα. Tjäder rejected such an interpretation without the slightest hesitation, pointing out both that the name of St. Mary does not appear in genitive and that the noun γέννα is not commonly used with the meaning "offspring, son"<sup>3</sup>. The noun γέννα with this meaning is indeed very rare in ancient literature and limited in use to poetry only<sup>4</sup>. In patristic literature and in papyri the noun γέννα appears only with the meaning 'birth' hence *birthday*; of Nativity of Christ<sup>5</sup> and refers often to Christmas day<sup>6</sup>. But in Modern Greek the meaning "offspring, son" for the sub-

\* This paper was written during my stay at Amsterdam in March 1992. I am deeply indebted to Pieter J. Sijpesteijn with whom I discussed the whole evidence presented here. I would like to thank also Ewa Wipszycka and Adam Łajtar for their valuable suggestions, and Roger S. BAGNALL for correcting my English.

<sup>1</sup> J.O. Tjäder, *Christ our Lord, Born of the Virgin Mary*, "Eranos" 67, 1970, pp. 148-190.

<sup>2</sup> J. van Haelst, *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens*, Paris 1976, pp. 54-55, nr. 88.

<sup>3</sup> J.O. Tjäder, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 160-161.

<sup>4</sup> LSJ, s.v., II.1.

<sup>5</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v.

<sup>6</sup> DuCange, *Glossarium* ....., s.v.; cf. P. Oxy. XVI 1945 (descr.), 517 A.D. - an order from a comes and a περίβλεπτος for the issue of wine to some monks on Christmas day: εἰς πῖν [τ]ῶν ἀγί(ων) μονα(λότων) ἐν τῇ γέννᾳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ οἴνου διπλά ὀδοῦκουτα κτλ.

stantive in question still exists; moreover, the noun *γέννα* with this meaning is to be found in many proverbs<sup>7</sup>. Nor is it to be excluded that *γέννα* in P. Grenf. II 112a might have been confused with the noun *γέννημα*, "that which is begotten or born, offspring"<sup>8</sup>, which most often refers to Christ himself and is of crucial significance in the days of Arian controversy.

The arguments put forward by Tjäder are important but one should add that the name of Christ does not appear in the accusative either<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, it should be pointed out that there is a significant difference between the Latin formula *V(irgine) D(eus) n(atu)s* and what according to Tjäder is its Greek equivalent: *Χ(ριστόν) Μ(αρία) γ(εννᾶ)*. The subject of the Latin formula is *Deus*, i.e., Christ, while in the Greek one we have *Μαρία* as subject. Following Tjäder's reasoning we may assume that the formula *Χ(ριστός) Μ(αρίας) γ(έννα)* is a closer equivalent of the Latin *VDN*<sup>10</sup>.

In favour of his interpretation Tjäder recalled another text where the formula might appear written in full; it is a Christian funerary inscription from Nubia published already in 1883 by E. Miller (= Lefebvre 663)<sup>11</sup> and dated as late as the 13th century<sup>12</sup>. The formula appears in between common biblical phrases and dating clauses, and reads (ll. 21-22): *ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ ΜΑΡΙΑ ΓΕΝΝΑ*. Tjäder argued that there is perhaps a mistake (or even a misreading of the editors), and the name of Christ should be read in the accusative<sup>13</sup>. But it seems at

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Another reference to the noun *γέννα* is to be found both in *Spoglio lessicale papirologico* and in *WB Supl.*, Abschn. 21: "Christlicher Kultus" - P. Ryl. IV 706 (descr.), early 4th cent.; cf. H. C. Youtie, *P. Ryl. IV 706*, ZPE 21, 1976, pp. 199-201; but in this document *γέννα* has its common meaning "birth" and there is no reason why P. Ryl. IV 706 is to be referred to in Abschn. 21: "Christlicher Kultus".

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Λεξικόν τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Γλώσσης, Α' Ἱστορικὸν Λεξικὸν τῆς Νέας Ἑλληνικῆς τῆς τε κοινῶς ὀμιλουμένης καὶ τῶν ἰδιωμάτων, τόμος Δ', τεύχος Β'*, Ἀθῆναι 1980, p. 330, s.v. *γέννα*: "5. τὸ γέννημα, τὸ γεννηθὲν τέκνον". Many proverbs used all over Greece are quoted *sub voce*, e.g., *Διαβόλου γέννα*.

<sup>8</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. N. Lewis, *Notationes legentis*, *BASP* 13, 1976, pp. 158-159.

<sup>10</sup> Note that even the title of Tjäder's article suggests that the name of Christ should stand in the nominative!

<sup>11</sup> E. Miller, *Inscriptions grecques d'Égypte*, RA Série III, 1-2, 1883, pp. 203-205; G. Lefebvre, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Égypte*, Cairo 1907, n. 663. The inscription is one of the most often quoted and discussed inscriptions from Nubia; a list of reeditions and reprints is given by M. Guarducci, *Epigrafia greca*, IV, Roma 1978, pp. 459-461.

<sup>12</sup> R. S. Bagall, K. A. Worp, *Dating by the moon in Nubian inscriptions*, *CE* 61, 1986, pp. 351-353. On the grounds of coincidence: Phamenoth 11th, lunar month 26th, 5th indiction, 3rd day of the week, Bagall and Worp date this inscription to March 7th, A.D. 1217, but they put a question mark after the date they calculated. A. Lajtar, *Notes on Greek Christian Inscriptions from the Nile Valley*, ZPE 93, 1992, pp. 138-139 suggests that the tenor of the inscription points rather an earlier date (8th-9th cent.).

<sup>13</sup> J. O. Tjäder, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 161-162. It would not be necessary to change the text of the inscription, if *Χριστού Μαρία γέννα* could be understood as "Mary, mother of Christ" but there is no evidence to accept such a meaning of the noun *γέννα* in Antiquity (in Modern Greek, however, the substantive *γέννα* is sometimes used with the meaning "mother" but without reference to St. Mary; cf. *Λεξικόν τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Γλώσσης*, loc. cit., meaning 4: "ἡ γεννώσα, ἡ μήτηρ").

least possible to look for another solution of this puzzling passage. We can either change Χριστοῦ into the nominative and add *sigma* at the end of the name of St. Mary (it would give Χριστὸς Μαρίας γέννα) or try to find a noun which would correspond with Μαρία in nominative and would fit Χριστοῦ in genitive as its object; γενήτειρα/γεννήτρια, "mother", comes to mind, nouns frequently used both in late non-Christian prose and in patristic literature (in *Apophthegmata Patrum* among others). Especially in connection with St. Mary, the mother of the God, γεννήτρια is often used<sup>14</sup>.

In Lefebvre's corpus we can find also another Christian inscription probably from Akhmim, which has not been taken into consideration by those who tried to explain the symbol ΧΜΓ<sup>15</sup>. The text contains a very common formula of funerary inscriptions and ends with μονογενῆς ΧΜΓ (l. 4). Undoubtedly ΧΜΓ in such a context must refer to Christ himself and his name should be taken in nominative: Χ(ριστὸς) Μ(αρίας) γ(έννα)/γ(έννημα).

There are also two Latin papyri which are of some importance for understanding the symbol ΧΜΓ. The first of them, P. Lat. Tjäder<sup>16</sup> I 6 (= P. Marini LXXV) is a will dated to 575 A.D.; in l. 23, in front of a witness's subscription written in Latin but with Greek letters, there is the symbol ΧΜΓ, printed by J.O. Tjäder as χ( )μ( )χ( ). But on the photograph (Taf. 35) I can see a *sigma* written above *chi*, and, what is more, a cross after *gamma*. In the other, P. Lat. Tjäder II 30 (= P. Marini CXIV), a sale dated to 539 A.D., the formula ΧΜΓ occurs at the end of line 75, amidst a Latin text (but in other places there are Latin phrases written with Greek characters). In this case the reading ΧΣΜΓ (instead of χ( )μ( )χ( )) proposed by the editor) seems to be even more clear. The *sigma* is written on the line, in between *chi* and *mu* (a horizontal stroke apparently visible on the photograph [Taf. 104], going through the middle of the *sigma* and continuing to the right margin, is due to damage of the papyrus). In this case also *gamma* is followed by some signs which can be interpreted as a cross or even a *chris*<sup>17</sup>.

In P. Oxy. XI 1357.30 (535/6 A.D.) we may find a parallel phrase to that of the inscription in question: εἰς τὴν ἀγίαν Μαρίαν γέννα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, which was translated by S. Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*, Wiesbaden 1984, Teil 1, p. 288, as "die Kirche(?) der Maria, der Christusgebärerin", but he gave no evidence to support his translation of the name of the church; he did not even mention the fact that he had changed the interpretation of the first editors (B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt): "Choiak 28th, at St. Mary's, Nativity of Christ"; cf. L. Antonini, *Le chiese cristiane nell'Egitto dal IV al IX secolo secondo i documenti dei papiri greci*, "Aegyptus" 18, 1940, p. 177. It is certain, however, that the church mentioned in P. Oxy. XI 1357.30 was St. Mary's (cf. P. Oxy. I 147 (556 AD): κηπῖον τῆς ἀγίας Μαρίας) and γέννα τοῦ Χριστοῦ refers simply to Christmas day (other festivals are mentioned in other lines; cf. P. Oxy. XI 1357, introd., pp. 20 and 28).

<sup>14</sup> LSJ, s.vv.; G. W. H. Lampe, *A Greek Patristic Lexicon*, s.vv.

<sup>15</sup> G. Lefebvre, op. cit. (n. 11), nr. 350. I am indebted to Ewa Wipszycka for drawing my attention to this inscription.

<sup>16</sup> I am using this *siglum* for J. O. Tjäder, *Die nichtliterarischen lateinischen Papyri Italiens aus der Zeit 445-700*, Bd. I: Papyri 1-28, Lund 1955; Bd. II: Papyri 29-59, Stockholm 1982, Bd. III: Tafeln, Lund 1964.

<sup>17</sup> The sign after *gamma* was misinterpreted as *rho* and both these Latin papyri were referred to as an evidence for the interpretation χ(ειρὸς) μ(ου) γρ(αφή) by C.

Both these papyri, therefore, have ΧΣΜΓ instead of ΧΜΓ, just as in P. Grenf. II 112a quoted above.

In favour of the interpretation Χ(ριστὸς) Μ(αρίας) γ(έννα) as presumably the most common in Antiquity we may recall an inscription from the region of Heliopolis-Baalbek (Syria) which has ΧΣΠΣΓΑ instead of ΧΜΓ<sup>18</sup>. It should be understood as Χ(ριστὸς) Π(ατρὸς) γ(έννα) and interpreted as a doctrinal reaction to ΧΜΓ understood as a Marian slogan. In the same way we should interpret some *dipinti* painted on vessels found on the Athenian Agora<sup>19</sup>.

In Greek documents from Egypt the symbol ΧΜΓ is occasionally noted as ΧΜ<sup>20</sup>. The most probable interpretation of this phenomenon is that the filiation was noted in a way which is very common in Greek inscriptions and papyri (Χριστὸς Μαρίας, "Christ, son of Mary"). In the same way W.K. Prentice interpreted an inscription from Hauran, in which ΧΜ is combined with ΑΩ:  $\frac{\bar{X}|\bar{M}}{\bar{A}|\bar{\Omega}}$ <sup>21</sup>.

Much more evidence that the symbol ΧΜΓ should be interpreted as referring to Christ (with his name in nominative) is to be found in other inscriptions coming from Syria (they have been collected and discussed already in 1914 by W.K. Prentice<sup>22</sup>). To the inscriptions gathered by Prentice I can add two others,

Wessely, *Griechische Papyri des British Museum*, "Wiener Studien" 9, 1887, pp. 252-254; cf. *infra*, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> The inscription reported by J. Robert, L. Robert in "Bulletin Epigraphique" 1953, nr. 214, has been republished as IGLS VI 2974. The editor (J. P. Rey-Coquais) wrote in his commentary on line 2: "abréviation ΧΠΓ; un petit *sigma* lunaire est gravé en haut à côté du *chi*, un autre à l'intérieure du *pi* et un *alpha* sous la potence du *gamma*". The inscription is dated by J. P. Rey-Coquais: (ε)τους θξψ' (year 769 of the Seleucid era = 457/58 A.D.).

<sup>19</sup> M. Lang, *The Athenian Agora XXI. Graffiti and dipinti*, Princeton 1976, records six *dipinti* with ΧΜΓ (J.2, 3, 5, 10-12), but one *dipinto* (J.7) has ΧΘΓ (Χριστὸς Θεοῦ γέννα) and another one (J.8) has ΧΓΘΕ (Χριστὸς γέννα Θεοῦ). The inscription from Syria as well as the *dipinti* on the vessels from the Athenian Agora are quoted by G. H. R. Horsley, *The origin of the abbreviation ΧΜΓ: a Christian cryptogram?* [in:] *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* 2, 1982, pp. 177-180.

<sup>20</sup> The earliest example of such a notation of the symbol ΧΜΓ is SB XVI 12626 dated by the editor (H. C. Youtie, *P. Mich. inv. 3707: Order to Pay*, ZPE 37, 1980, pp. 225-226 = *Scriptiunculae Posteriores* II, Bonn 1982, pp. 589-590) to the 4th/5th cent. A.D. The letters ΧΜΓ are written with a horizontal stroke after *mu* (sometimes ΧΜΓ is also written with the horizontal stroke after *gamma*; cf. H. C. Youtie, *ibidem*, com. ad v. 1; C. Bonner, H. C. Youtie, *Two Curse Tablets from Beisan*, TAPA 68, 1937, pp. 75-76 = *Scriptiunculae Posteriores* II, pp. 641-642). Other occurrences of ΧΜ instead of ΧΜΓ are: P. Form. (= SPP III) 78.1; SB I 1984a (an inscription on an amphora; cf. my publication of almost twenty inscriptions with the formula Θεοῦ χάρις κέρδος on Late Roman amphorae, ZPE 94, 1992, pp. 135-152, nr. I.5); in the latter case the symbol ΧΜ is noted with a *chrisim* in between *chi* and *mu*, and follows ΧΜΓ written the common way.

<sup>21</sup> W. K. Prentice, *Greek and Latin Inscriptions* (= Part III of the *Publications of an American Archaeological Expedition to Syria 1899-1900*, New York — London 1908, p. 307 no. 391 with the following transcription Χ(ριστὸς) Μ(αρίας), Α (καὶ) Ω.

<sup>22</sup> W. K. Prentice, *ΧΜΓ, a Symbol of Christ*, "Classical Philology" 9, 1914, pp. 410-416; the article was written as a reaction to the Dölger's interpretation of the symbol Χ(ριστὸς) Μ(ιγαήλ) Γ(αβριήλ) - F. J. Dölger, *IXΘΥΣ. Das Fischsymbol in frühchristlicher Zeit*, Bd. I: *Religionsgeschichtliche und epigraphische Unter-*

both coming from Hauran. In both these inscriptions XMT appears as the addressee of the common invocation  $\beta\omicron\eta\theta\epsilon\iota$  τῷ δεῖνι. The first of them is dated to the year 851 of an unknown era<sup>23</sup>. Its text reads: XMT·<sup>24</sup>  $\beta\omicron\eta\theta\epsilon\iota$  (read  $\beta\omicron\eta\theta\epsilon\iota$ ) τοῦ δ[ι]ούλου (read τῷ δούλω) σου Θωδῖαν(?) κτλ. The text of the other inscription<sup>25</sup> reads: XMT A†Ω IHΣ BOHΘI what should be interpreted XMT A†Ω Ἰησ(οῦς) βοῆθι (l.  $\beta\omicron\eta\theta\epsilon\iota$ ). There is no doubt that in both these inscriptions XMT together with κ(ύρι)ε, A†Ω and Ἰησ(οῦς) should be interpreted as the addressee of the invocation and should refer to Christ himself.

There is another inscription from Hauran which could be of some importance for the understanding the symbol XMT. Its text reads<sup>26</sup> [A]†Ω XMT IXΘΥΣ. Two of three elements of this inscription do clearly refer to Christ, and it is very probable, if not even certain, that the third element represents Christ as well.

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Apart from Tjäder's interpretation of the symbol XMT, many other attempts to solve the riddle of XMT have been undertaken. Among them the interpretation based on isopsephy should be mentioned first as the most common. The numeral  $\chi\mu\gamma = 643$  can be interpreted in several different ways, but the simplest and possibly the best interpretation is the formula Θεὸς βοηθός. It was D. Hagedorn who pointed out that  $\theta\beta$  is sometimes found at the beginning of papyri and inscriptions, the place where in other documents the letters XMT stand very often. D. Hagedorn following Seymour de Ricci's reasoning suggests that Jews avoided using XMT because *chi* of this presumed number reminded them of the name of Christ ( $\theta\beta$  appears in fact in some documents coming from a Jewish milieu)<sup>27</sup>. If so, we should assume that XMT had been originally a Jewish symbol before it became a Christian one. It would be natural that Christians, after having incorporated the symbol, began to recognize the name of Christ in its first letter<sup>28</sup>. This

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*suchungen*, Rom 1910, pp. 298–317. It should be pointed out here that basically I am following P r e n t i c e's reasoning.

<sup>23</sup> *Ed. princeps*: J. H. M o r d t m a n n, *Griechische Inschriften aus dem Hauran*, "Archäologisch-epigraphische Mitteilungen aus Oesterreich-Ungarn" 8, 1884, p. 192 nr. 33; cf. DACL, vol. I.2, Paris 1910, col. 1695, s.v. *Amphores*. The date is noted  $\bar{\nu}\alpha\omega$  which is surprising enough. If it indeed refers to the year 851 of an era, it could give A.D. 539/40 according to the Seleucid era. Such a calculation would agree with the 3rd indiction mentioned in the text, but — as far as I know — the Seleucid era was never used in Hauran.

<sup>24</sup> There are some signs in between XMT and  $\beta\omicron\eta\theta\epsilon\iota$ ; J. H. M o r d t m a n n in his diplomatic transcription gave XMT I† BOHΘI, and interpreted this passage XMT [Κ(ύρι)ε] βοῆθι κτλ.

<sup>25</sup> W. K. P r e n t i c e, op. cit. (n. 21), p. 199 no. 224; cf. DACL, vol. VI.2, Paris 1924, col. 2100, s.v. *Hauran*.

<sup>26</sup> W. K. P r e n t i c e, op. cit. (n. 21), p. 189 no. 215A.

<sup>27</sup> D. H a g e d o r n, P. Heid. IV 333.1 com. A new document (P. Lond. III 1019, ined.) containing the letters  $\theta\beta$  will be published by P. J. S i j j e s t e i j n in "Tyche" 7.

<sup>28</sup> One may recall a Catholic symbol C + M + B written on doors on the Day of Three Kings (Twelfth-day, 6th Jan.) interpreted commonly as the first letters of the Kings' names Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar, while the original meaning of these letters

interpretation cannot be totally excluded in view of the fact that all documents containing the symbol under discussion and dated as early as the 4th century A.D. always have ΧΜΓ. But this isopsephical solution is of course impossible in all documents where the symbol is written differently from the usual ΧΜΓ (ΧΣΜΓ, ΧΘΓ, ΚΜΓ, ΘΜΓ, and even ΧΜ — it produces another number, 640, which of course would imply another formula)<sup>29</sup>.

In 1983 A. Gostoli proposed an entirely new interpretation, especially important (according to her suggestion) in the case of documents where the symbol accompanies a notarial subscription<sup>30</sup>. Gostoli's understanding of the symbol ΧΜΓ: Χ(ριστός) μ(άρτυς) γ(ένηται) or γ(ένοιτο), "Let Christ be my witness", was accepted by G. Robinson<sup>31</sup> who added to the evidence documents in which, instead of the *chi* in the formula ΧΜΓ, a *theta* or *kappa* appeared (Χριστός = Θεός = Κύριος). The combination ΚΜΓ and ΘΜΓ naturally do not allow an isopsephical explanation. Another occurrence of the formula ΘΜΓ can be found in a notarial document, CPR XIV 32 (presumably 655 A.D.) recently published by the same G. Robinson-Fantoni; in her commentary she points out that while ΧΜΓ in the sense Χ(ριστός) μ(άρτυς) γ(ένηται)<sup>32</sup> is proper in a notarial subscription, it is difficult to accept it with the same meaning in private letters or, let us add, inscriptions on amphorae<sup>33</sup>. Among the latter category there is one text in which the formula ΧΜΓ was written as ΓΜΧ<sup>34</sup>.

is quite different: *C(hristus) m(ansionem) b(enedicat)*. It might be added that many other interpretations of the symbol C + M + B were current in the past; cf. *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, Bd. II, Berlin — New York 1987, s.v. C. M. B.

<sup>29</sup> There exists other evidence for rejecting the interpretation based on isopsephy (ΧΜΓ = 643), at least in documents dated to the 5th–7th centuries. First, the symbol is never noted in reverse order in inscriptions coming from Syria, where the numbers usually were written the other way round (at least in dating formulae). Moreover, in two papyri, P. Lond. V 1714 and P. Naqlun inv. 47/88 (ined.), the symbol ΧΜΓ is followed by θρ which is an isopsephic recording of the word ἀμήν (= 99 = 9θ) written in reversed order. If ΧΜΓ had been understood by the scribe as an isopsephy, he probably would have noted it in reverse order too. For the sake of clarity, I should add that both these documents contain numerals written down in the way that was common in Egypt.

<sup>30</sup> A. Gostoli, *Una nuova ipotesi interpretativa della sigla cristiana ΧΜΓ*, "Studia Papyrologica" 22, 1983, pp. 9-14.

<sup>31</sup> G. Robinson, *ΚΜΓ and ΘΜΓ for ΧΜΓ*, "Tyche" 1, 1986, pp. 175-177.

<sup>32</sup> Or rather Χ(ριστός) μ(άρτυς) γ(ένοιτο), as observed by J. Triantaphyllopoulos, *Zu Corpus Papyrorum Raineri XIV (Griechische Texte X)*, "Tyche" 5, 1990, p. 177.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. my publication of almost twenty inscriptions on Late Roman amphorae (*Inscriptions with the Formula θεού χάρις κέρδος on Late Roman Amphorae*, ZPE, 94, 1992, pp. 135-152); all the inscriptions (with one exception) begin with the symbol ΧΜΓ.

<sup>34</sup> In the original publication of six inscriptions on amphorae coming from Oxyrhynchus, B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, *Excavations at Oxyrhynchus*; Egypt Exploration Fund, Archaeological Report 1906-07, pp. 10-11 (=SB 1 1984 a-f = 1.5-7 in my article quoted in the preceding note) the first line of the inscription is always χμγ, but in the commentary (p. 11) it was stated that "in one instance (unfortunately the authors did not specify which) the letters were reversed, γμχ". However, the inversed notation γμχ, which could be of importance to explain the problem under discussion (cf. my footnote 24) does not appear in the published text of any of the inscriptions! The statement of B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt made in their com-

In one of the inscriptions on late Roman amphorae the symbol was written ΧΜΓΡ<sup>35</sup>. The reading ΧΜΓΡ is certain (instead of the expected ΧΜΓ). Such a form of the formula, if it was not an error by the scribe (e.g. *rho* instead of a *chris*m), does not fit any of the existing interpretations of the formula ΧΜΓ, with the exception of the generally rejected interpretation *χειρός μου γραφή*. This interpretation was suggested by C. Wessely<sup>36</sup> who referred to two documents; both are the Latin papyri discussed above (in both cases ΧΣΜΓ with a cross or even a *chris*m after *gamma* should be read<sup>37</sup>). Other occurrences of the formula ΧΜΓ written as ΧΜΓΡ have been questioned by A. Blanchard<sup>38</sup>. As far as I know, there is to date no other document with the formula written as in this inscription.

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Many scholars started from the assumption that the symbol ΧΜΓ has to have had only one meaning. This assumption is very reasonable, but the evidence seems to correct it<sup>39</sup> (there are some inscriptions and papyri where the symbol cannot be interpreted in the same way as in the others, e.g., the inscription with the symbol written as ΧΜΓΡ). On the other hand, we should remember that while interpreting the symbol we are interested only in the exceptional cases and we are passing by hundreds (or even thousands) of occurrences of the symbol in its usual form. We have to take the possibility into consideration that the meaning of ΧΜΓ varied at times (the above quoted hypothesis explaining ΧΜΓ on the basis of isopsephy should especially be kept in mind). Perhaps people forgot its original meaning and/or interpreted it according to, say, local traditions or in view of ideological controversies (ΧΠΓ could be a good example of the latter). But such phenomena seem to be beyond the range of our observation and it is quite possible that we never will be sure what the symbol did mean. And almost every year will give us a new study on the symbol ΧΜΓ...

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mentary escaped almost all who have discussed the problem of the interpretation of ΧΜΓ so far. Only B. P. G r e n f e l l and A. S. H u n t, P. Oxy. VI 940.1 com., quoted their own observation as a possible evidence for understanding ΧΜΓ as a visual equivalent to Hebrew מחר (=εἶς) *per analogiam* with ΠΠΠ for יהוה. But ΓΜΧ can be quoted also in favour of both T j ä d e r ' s interpretation (γεννᾶ Μαρία Χριστόν) and the interpretation suggested in this paper (γέννα/γέννημα Μαρίας Χριστός).

<sup>35</sup> T. D e r d a, op. cit. (n. 33), nr. III.2.

<sup>36</sup> C. W e s s e l y, op. cit. (n. 17), pp. 252-254.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. supra, pp. 21-22.

<sup>38</sup> A. B l a n c h a r d, *Sur quelques interprétations de ΧΜΓ*, [in:] *Proceedings of the XIV International Congress of Papyrologists*, London 1975, pp. 19-24.

<sup>39</sup> J. O. T j ä d e r in the introduction to his paper (op. cit. [n. 1], pp. 148-150) pointed out that this assumption is incorrect and agreed with P. P e r d r i z e t, *Isopsephie*, REG 17, 1904, pp. 350-360, who had asserted that several interpretations of the meaning of the symbol in question might have been current.