Appendix K: *Nomina Sacra*

••297•• The Latin term *Nomina Sacra* (Sacred Name) identifies a highly technical debate somewhat related to our study of the Tetragrammaton in the Christian Scriptures. This debate is so specialized that according to the footnotes in Bruce Metzger's *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible,* less than ten scholarly books have been devoted to the subject since the early part of this century. These few books are more frequently written in Latin and German than English.[1]

We have included this brief appendix to alleviate potential confusion. In the unlikely event that this subject were to be encountered by the reader, the first impression may be that *Nomina Sacra* support the New World Bible Translation Committee's assertion that the Tetragrammaton was used in the original Greek Christian manuscripts. However, as we will see in our conclusion, had the Committee introduced the *Nomina Sacra* into the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation's* textual apparatus, the separate identities between *Jehovah* and *Lord Jesus* would have been greatly diminished.

The *Nomina Sacra* identified

The *Nomina Sacra* are contracted Greek words representing 15 frequently occurring names (or titles) in Scripture. The contraction was written with an overline. We have previously identified these contractions as *surrogates,* with the earlier explanation that they were primarily used as short-hand notations. These contractions occur in both the *Septuagint* papyri manuscripts and the Greek Christian Scripture papyri manuscripts.

On page 36 of the book cited, Metzger lists all 15 of the *Nomina Sacra* found in the entire Greek papyri collection, which includes the *Septuagint.* He reproduces them in their nominative (subject of the sentence) and genitive (possessive) forms[2] as follows:

••298••

English meaning	Greek word	Nominative (subject)	Genitive (possessive)
God	θεός	θ̅ς̅	θ̅υ̅
Lord	κύριος	κ̅ς̅	κ̅ν̅
Jesus	Ἰησοῦς	ι̅ς̅	ι̅υ̅
Christ	χριστός	χ̅ς̅	χ̅υ̅
Son[3]	υἱός	υ̅ς̅	υ̅υ̅
Spirit	πνεῦμα	π̅ν̅α̅	π̅ν̅ς̅
David	Δαυείδ	δ̅α̅δ̅	
cross	σταυρός	σ̅τ̅ς̅	σ̅τ̅υ̅
Mary	μήτηρ [4]	μ̅η̅ρ̅	μ̅ρ̅ς̅

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[1] Only two sources were available for the author's personal study of the *Nomina Sacra*. The first consisted of selected photocopied chapters from a book published in South Africa by A.H.R.E. Paap entitled *Nomina Sacra in the Greek Papyri of the First Five Centuries A.D.,* published in 1959. The second was a brief description of the work of others on pages 36-37 in Bruce Metzger's book *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible,* published in 1981.

[2] The highest frequency of occurrence of the Greek noun is in either the nominative or genitive form. A *Nomina Sacra* may appear in other of the remaining Greek noun forms as well. Thus, κύριος (**Kyrios**) could appear as any one of κ̅ς̅, κ̅υ̅, κ̅ω̅, κ̅ν̅, or κ̅ε̅ in ancient Greek manuscripts.

[3] Common words such as *Son* or *Man* become *Nomina Sacra* when used in conjunction with the name of Jesus. The word *Heaven* is identified as a *Nomina Sacra* when used to replace the word *God.* For example, Matthew uses the expression *Kingdom of the heavens* in many parallel passages where the other Gospel writers use the expression *Kingdom of God.*

[4] The ordinary meaning of this Greek word is *mother.* It is only in its sense as a *Nomina Sacra* in which it is used of Mary, Jesus' mother. Needless to say, these *Nomina Sacra* notations were imported—we believe—into certain Greek manuscripts at a later date and do not necessarily reflect the writing (or theology) of the inspired writers themselves.

Father	πατήρ	π̅η̅ρ̅	π̅ρ̅ς̅
Israel	Ἰσραήλ	ι̅η̅λ̅	
Savior	σωτήρ	σ̅η̅ρ̅	σ̅ρ̅ς̅
Man[3]	ἄνθρωπος	α̅ν̅ο̅ς̅	α̅ν̅ο̅υ̅
Jerusalem	Ἰερουσαλήμ	ι̅λ̅η̅μ̅	
Heaven[3]	οὐρανός	ο̅υ̅ν̅ο̅ς̅	ο̅υ̅ν̅ο̅υ̅

Table 12. A complete list of all *Nomina Sacra* found in early Greek manuscripts of both the *Septuagint* and the Christian Scriptures.

To those defending this specialized Greek contractual form, the technical designation *Nomina Sacra* connotes a *sacral* (as against a *profane*) meaning. However, though the *Nomina Sacra* may be used to identify deity, the term itself does not mean *divine name.* *The use of the designation* ***Nomina Sacra*** *does not imply the elevation of the addressee to the status of deity,* though in certain instances, the *Nomina Sacra* may directly identify God.

A study of the *Nomina Sacra* is germane to the entire collection of first- through fifth-century Greek language Scripture texts. This includes the *Septuagint* as well as the Christian Scriptures. For this ••299•• appendix, however, we are concerned only with the *Nomina Sacra* found in the Christian Greek Scriptures. (The Hebrew Scriptures present no unsolved dilemma; we can readily verify over 6.000 instances in which κ̅ς̅ in any *Septuagint* text using *Nomina Sacra* was translated from יהוה in the original Hebrew text.)

The *Nomina Sacra* debate

The *Nomina Sacra* debate concerns the use and meaning of the contractions we have previously identified as *surrogates.* Many scholars consider the overlined contractions which are readily observable in ancient papyri to be mere abbreviations of frequently used words. This is the recognized meaning of the term *surrogate.* The use of contractions can be expected considering the labor involved in hand-copying scripture texts.

On the other hand, some scholars have identified these words as constituting a class of unique, sacred names which the copyist has identified by an overlined and abbreviated form. The scholars defending this position say that the intent of the copyist was far from merely a savings in papyrus sheet material and the manual effort of writing by shortening the word. In defense of their thesis, many examples have been identified in ancient manuscripts in which the word ***Kyrios*** is written in full as κύριος when referring to a human *master,* and yet is written as κ̅ς̅ when referring to Jesus (or Jehovah) as *Lord.* Similar examples of other surrogate words also exist.

The debate also concerns the *source* of *Nomina Sacra.* It was originally argued by the Latin palaeographer Ludwig Traube that the practice was of early, *Septuagint* era, Jewish origin. The latter work by Paap argues that the form was introduced at a later date by Jewish Christians.

The *Nomina Sacra* and inspired Scripture

The reader must understand that this debate does not concern the content of inspired Scripture. Many—including the author of this book—hold that the inspired Christian writers did not use contractions in their original writings; they did not use *surrogates.* The alteration was one which was introduced by scribes in later centuries. The best efforts of textual critics to reproduce the original work of the inspired Christian writers results in a text without surrogates as reproduced in the Westcott and Hort or United Bible Societies Greek texts.

Therefore, the debate concerning *Nomina Sacra* versus *surrogates* is not dealing with the content of inspired Scripture. Rather, it is merely evaluating the practice of scribes in succeeding centuries. If, in ••300•• fact, the debate could be settled by identifying the surrogates as a simple short-hand device, then the overlined words would have no implied, deeper meaning. If, on the other hand, the debate were to be settled in favor of intentional *Nomina Sacra,* then some explanation would need to be given for the *meaning* added to the text by the scribes. Yet, that meaning (in *symbol* form) is not one which was placed in the text by the original, inspired Christian writers.

The meaning of the *Nomina Sacra* in our study

A study of the *Nomina Sacra* is a worthwhile, though very technical, undertaking. There is merit in determining whether the early church regarded these Greek names as *sacred names,* or whether these overlined words merely represented a scribal short-hand to reduce the labor of hand-copying texts. However, the answer to the above examination of ancient Greek manuscripts is extraneous to the primary question of our study. Our study is limited to the inspired writers' use of the *Tetragrammaton* in their original written documents.

However, it is possible that the *Nomina Sacra* could give an important answer to our search for the Tetragrammaton in the original writings of the inspired Christian authors. One of two conditions would draw our immediate attention to the *Nomina Sacra* as probable descendants of the Tetragrammaton:

1. If we found *Nomina Sacra* forms of ***Kyrios*** ($\overline{\text{κς}}$, $\overline{\text{κυ}}$, $\overline{\text{κω}}$, $\overline{\text{κν}}$, or $\overline{\text{κε}}$) (or similar forms for the word ***Theos***) within ancient Christian Scripture Greek manuscripts *which were restricted to the 237 occurrences of the **Jehovah** references within the **New World Translation,*** we would be immediately alerted to the probability that a manuscript change had occurred in the early centuries of the church. This presence of the *Nomina Sacra* would give strong evidence that יהוה was used in the original writings.

2. If, at the very least, we found a consistent use of *Nomina Sacra* forms of ***Kyrios*** (or ***Theos***) restricted to each of the 42[5] quotations of Hebrew Scripture passages in these same ancient Christian Scripture Greek manuscripts, we could be alerted to the possibility that the Tetragrammaton was used by the inspired writers when they quoted Hebrew Scriptures which contained the divine name.

••301•• We must be careful not to overstate the material which was available to us from Paap's extensive summaries. Nonetheless, these papyri studies clearly show use of surrogates (contractions) in a considerably greater frequency than would be the cases were they restricted to Hebrew Scripture citations of the divine name.[6] The forms ($\overline{\text{κς}}$, $\overline{\text{κυ}}$, $\overline{\text{κω}}$, $\overline{\text{κν}}$, or $\overline{\text{κε}}$) are apparently used throughout the papyri texts in those cases where ***Kyrios*** is used of either the *Lord* Jesus or references to *Jehovah* of the Hebrew Scriptures. Consequently, some contracted form will be found in the majority of the 714 ***Kyrios*** (or ***Theos***) references in the Christian Greek Scriptures. In general, the word is written in full as κύριος only in those instances which refer to others besides Jesus or *Jehovah* in the Christian Scripture accounts.

Conclusion

It is outside the purpose of this Appendix to determine the *meaning* of the *Nomina Sacra* (Sacred Names) as used in ancient Greek Scripture manuscripts. However, the recurrent appearance of the *Nomina Sacra* throughout extant biblical manuscripts far surpass the frequency and location of the 237 *Jehovah* references in the Christian Scriptures of the *New World Translation.*

We can only assume that the New World Bible Translation Committee was aware of the *Nomina Sacra,* yet chose not to bring this material into their textual apparatus to establish the presence of the Tetragrammaton in a limited 237 instances within the Christian Scriptures. The great number of occurrences of *Nomina Sacra* (surrogates) within the text of the Christian Scripture Greek manuscripts would preclude such an attempt. *Any appeal to the **Nomina Sacra** with the intent of establishing the presence of the divine name in the Christian Greek Scriptures would, of consequence,*

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[5] The number 42 represents the verified uses of the Tetragrammaton in Hebrew Scripture quotations as identified by J[20] which is shown in Appendix G. This number could be expanded to the possible 112 Hebrew Scripture citations as noted in the summary at the end of Appendix B.

[6] This information is taken from Paap, *Nomina Sacra in the Greek Papyri of the First Five Centuries A.D.,* pages 8-118 in which he catalogs and summarizes the *Nomina Sacra* from a large number of ancient manuscripts. Paap gives one of many examples from a Chester Beatty manuscript identified as "Facsimile III, New Testament," in which he says (p. 101):

…in [this manuscript] (±A.D.200); in the sacral meaning there are 170 contractions, whereas in the 4 cases where κύριος (plural) has the profane meaning the word has been written in full.

*identify the person of Christ with **Jehovah**.* If it were to be argued that the *Nomina Sacra* in the form of $\overline{\kappa\varsigma}$ (for κύριος) is a derivative of יהוה, then it could be forcefully argued—with a large number of examples of $\overline{\kappa\varsigma}$ referring to Jesus—that the inspired Christian writers used יהוה of Jesus himself.