

THE EARLIEST MANUSCRIPT OF THE SO-CALLED *INFANCY GOSPEL OF THOMAS*:
EDITIO PRINCEPS OF P.HAMB.GRAEC. 1011*

We present here the first papyrological attestation of the so-called *Infancy Gospel of Thomas (IGT)*, an apocryphal account of Jesus's childhood, generally agreed to have been written in the second century.¹ The original text was in all likelihood composed in Greek and subsequently translated into numerous languages both in antiquity and the Middle Ages.² P.Hamb.Graec. 1011 is the earliest preserved manuscript of the text in any language. It follows the so-called recension *S* of the Greek text (= *G_S*), which is considered to be the version closest to the original work (see below). The fragment is of extraordinary interest both on account of its early date and for the new insights it provides on the textual history of the *IGT*. It furthermore proves that the text was in circulation among Christians in Egypt, although there is no evidence that it was translated into Coptic. This late antique Greek copy of the work also corroborates the currently dominant view that the text was originally composed in Greek.³

P.Hamb.Graec. 1011 is kept at the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek in Hamburg.⁴ Apart from what can be deduced from the general history of the collection, there is no evidence of how or when the papyrus was discovered.⁵ The Hamburg papyrus collection was acquired firstly through the German Papyruskartell between 1906 and 1913, and later through individual purchases until 1939. Before arriving in Hamburg, some of the papyri went through conservation work by Hugo Ibscher in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.⁶ P.Hamb.Graec. 1011 must have been inventoried after 2001, since in that year the collection counted only 782 inventory numbers. The fragment might either have belonged to the original core of the collection or to a lot of unconserved papyri transferred in a wooden box from Berlin to Hamburg in 1990. Conservation work on these pieces started in 1996–97. A further possibility is that inv. 1011 was originally in one of six metal boxes containing mostly Arabic papyri, which Dieter Harlfinger started to examine in the late nineties.⁷ Whatever the case may be, it is certain that the papyrus had reached Germany before the Second World War.

P.Hamb.Graec. 1011 consists of a single papyrus fragment attached to a rectangular sheet of paper and mounted between two glass panes. Small pieces of adhesive tape or *washi* were placed on different spots of the rim of the fragment to fix the papyrus on the paper. It is unknown whether glue was applied to the back of the papyrus. We can assume that the decision to attach the papyrus to paper – a practice no longer current in papyrus conservation – was justified by the absence of writing on the back, which is now invisible.

The papyrus fragment is broken off on all sides. Its dimensions are 5 cm (width) × 11.1 cm (height). The papyrus is of light brown color and seems to be of average quality. Remnants of 14 lines are written across

* We thank Dr. Katrin Janz-Wenig of the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg for the permission to publish P.Hamb.Graec. 1011. We have studied the papyrus both in the original and on the basis of a digital image. For their comments on an early draft of this article, we warmly thank Tony Burke, Andrea Jördens, Thomas J. Kraus, and Marco Stroppa. We are grateful to W. Graham Claytor for proofing our English. All remaining errors are our own.

¹ For an overview of the history of research and a general introduction to the *IGT*, see Aasgard (2009) 1–12.

² The standard Greek text is that of Burke (2010), who also produced the first edition of the Syriac version, see Burke (2017).

³ The hypothesis of an original Syriac composition has been all but abandoned in scholarship since the 1970s, see Burke (2010) 71–72.

⁴ We would like to thank Brent Nongbri for his comment at the 9th Annual Meeting on Christian Origins (Bertinoro, 23 September 2023), which underlined the importance of a detailed discussion of the provenance and acquisition history of the fragment in order to allay any suspicion of forgery. There is no evidence either in the material and palaeographical characteristics of the piece or in its text that would suggest that P.Hamb.Graec. 1011 is not an authentic ancient artifact.

⁵ On the history of the Hamburg papyrus collection, see Schreiber (2000), Salvo (2001), and Essler (2021).

⁶ Schreiber (2000) 127.

⁷ Salvo (2001) 1161 and 1165–1166.

the fibres, seemingly on the recto *transversa charta*, as the other side is presumably unwritten. Based on supplements for lines 2–4 and 6–7, where reconstruction seems reasonably secure, we can tentatively calculate the number of letters per line to be around 30, which would make the original width at least 15 cm⁸.

The practice of copying literary texts across the fibers when the other side, with horizontal fibers, was available, is rare.⁹ The existing occurrences are found mostly among school exercises, especially longer passages of literature copied by students or apprentice scribes who already had some experience in writing. Pupils in the earlier stages of learning avoided writing across the fibers and would often rotate the papyrus sheet 90 degrees.¹⁰ An example from a Christian context is PUG I 1, a 5th-century copy of the *Epistle of Jacob* written *transversa charta* on the verso of a papyrus leaf, the recto of which holds *Psalms* 114 (PUG I 2, 5th century). The practice of writing documentary texts *transversa charta* had been common in Ptolemaic times and reappears in the 5th century, becoming widespread from the 6th century onward.¹¹

If the other side of the papyrus is indeed blank, it is then most likely not a codex fragment, but rather a single sheet. In light of the dating of the manuscript to the 4th–5th century (see below), the possibility that it was originally a bookroll must in all likelihood be excluded. New Testament texts and apocrypha written on a sheet with a blank back are rare, the most notable exceptions being P.Oxy. XLI 2949, a 2nd/3rd-century fragment of an apocryphal work (*Gospel of Peter?*), which does not bear writing on the back, and might or might not have belonged to a roll;¹² and PSI Congr. XVII 4, a 5th-century copy of the *Epistle to the Romans* written *transversa charta* on a single side. Since the preserved text on our papyrus seems to come from the initial section of the *IGT*, we may even think that the upper part of the papyrus would have started with the beginning of the work.

We can only guess what the function of such a single sheet could have been. It may have been conceived as an amulet or some sort of “magical text”, perhaps a *historiola*, since biblical and apocryphal texts are known to have been used in amulets.¹³ However, the content of the preserved passage does not seem to warrant an apotropaic or other magical functions. Furthermore, no signs of folding are discernible, which could support such an assumption. A more plausible hypothesis is that the text was copied on a loose sheet as a writing exercise, perhaps in a school or monastic context.¹⁴ New Testament texts, including the Gospels, were used for such exercises. A noteworthy example is with P.Oxy. II 209, containing the beginning of St. Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans*, which was found tied together with a contract dated to 316, and later identified by A. M. Luijendijk as belonging to the Leonides archive.¹⁵ As the *IGT* text in P.Hamb.Graec. 1011, the biblical excerpt is written on a single side of the papyrus sheet (but along the fibers) in a clumsy and crudely aligned capital script qualified as “evolving” in Criore’s classification.¹⁶ Most editors and commentators identify the papyrus as stemming from an educational context, possibly but not necessarily

⁸ The reasoning of our reconstruction is as follows: the preserved beginnings of lines 3 and 4 are aligned on the left. Therefore, the calculated number of letters between the two beginnings is roughly equivalent to the average number of letters per line. With supplements from *Gs*, we count 30 letters between the first letter of l. 3 and the first letter of l. 4: [ϋης ἐπέτασεν [τὰ ὄρνεα ἐνώπιον πάντων]y. 3 and 4 are the longest preserved lines, with 11 and 14 extant letters respectively, and measuring approximately 5 cm. For a line length of about 30 letters, between 10 and 15 cm (excluding margins) would be necessary.

⁹ Examples are given in Stroppa (2013).

¹⁰ Criore (1996) 60–62.

¹¹ Fournet (2009) 31.

¹² Online image:

https://portal.sds.ox.ac.uk/articles/online_resource/P_Oxy_XLI_2949_Fragments_of_an_Apocryphal_Gospel_/21166660.

¹³ We thank Janet E. Spittler for suggesting the possibility of a *historiola* at the conference “The Infancy Gospel of Thomas: Its Contents, Contexts, and Receptions” (Prague, 21 June 2023). On the use of apocrypha in amulets, see De Bruyn (2015).

¹⁴ On the use of Christian texts as writing exercises, see Römer (2003), esp. 188, and Carlig (2013).

¹⁵ Luijendijk (2010).

¹⁶ Criore (1996) 247 (no. 302). For the palaeography of P.Oxy. II 209, see Cavallo–Maehler (1987) 9 (no. 1a). Online image: [https://iif.harvard.edu/manifester/view/drs:7456384\\$1i](https://iif.harvard.edu/manifester/view/drs:7456384$1i).

the schoolroom.¹⁷ This could also be a plausible context for the *IGT* fragment, especially since both papyri contain only the beginning of a longer work.

The lines are uneven, with lines 12–13 sloping to the right. The interlinear spaces are irregular: they vary between 0.3 cm (ll. 2–3) and 0.8 cm (ll. 9–10). Most letters of this informal round semi-cursive hand do not fit the bilinear scheme. Letter-size is irregular (0.3–0.7 cm), large letters are κ, λ, and ξ. The letter ο can be small and round (l. 9), medium-sized and squarish (l. 6), and large and oval (l. 8). Ligatures are present between αι, κλ, λω, and γε.

Characteristic letter shapes are: α sometimes open on top; β going above the line; γ in a single stroke; δ round, sometimes oversized, closed by a diagonal stroke; ε large with middle stroke on the upper half and ends curved up- and downward, sometimes almost touching each other (l. 11); η with the lower tips of the vertical strokes bending outward, and middle stroke crossing over both sides; θ almost larger than tall (“squashed”); ι with empattement below; κ in three strokes occasionally with a bending upper curve, and lower diagonal going under the line; λ triangular, similar to an inverted “v”; ξ going below the line. ο has irregular shapes: round and short (l. 5), oval and angular (l. 7); the diagonal stroke of ν starts with a hook in the upper part; π is small, with curved feet and top stroke going over the left; ρ with a small loop; ς written in two strokes with the top elongated towards the right and longer than the bottom.

The irregularity of the script and the clumsiness of the layout clearly point to the work of a non-professional scribe, who also seems responsible for four corrections in the text (see the apparatus below). Especially noteworthy is the α of ταδε (l. 5), written over an erasure, whereas a sequence of three letters (perhaps εδε) was added in the interlinear space above, but subsequently erased. Ink stains suggest that the letters were washed off. The blank spaces with faint ink stains within lines 12 and 13 also appear to be the result of erasures made after the text had been written (and not *in scribendo*), since no new letters were written in the erased spots. A further noteworthy feature is that Jesus’ name (l. 2:]ιησου, l. 4: ιησοϛ) is not abbreviated. This is a rare occurrence in Christian papyri, including school texts, where *nomina sacra* are usually contracted.¹⁸ There are, however, a few examples of writing exercises and amulets where one or more of the holy names are written in full. For instance, in the prayer written (perhaps as an amulet) on one side of a papyrus sheet from Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. III 407; 3rd–4th c.) Θεός, Ἰησοῦς, and Χριστός are written in full.¹⁹

The script could be a student hand, particularly of the “evolving” type or “Hand 3” in Cribiore’s classification. Hands of this type are usually attempts by already experienced, but not expert, students at writing in a formal (bookhand) style, which is done with some degree of fluency, but still shows unevenness.²⁰ If P.Hamb.Graec. 1011 were a school exercise, it would then belong to the level of “Longer Passages” in Cribiore’s typology, i.e. longer extracts from literature copied by relatively advanced pupils.²¹

The script of the above-mentioned Oxyrhynchus papyrus II 209 (ca. 320–339 AD), even if overall more angular, presents relevant palaeographical similarities to that of the Hamburg fragment, particularly ε with the upper stroke curved down, κ with an occasionally descending lower diagonal, and η with outward bending tips. Further comparisons with documentary pieces seem to point to a date in the 4th or early 5th century. SB VIII 9907 (an offer to lease an orchard dated to 388 AD), albeit written by a more experienced cursive hand, shows similar letter shapes, notably large ε with folded up lower end, κ with prolonged lower diagonal, open α, η with curved feet, and looped υ.²² Similarly shaped characters are also seen in P.Köln III 151, a loan dated to 24 July 423.²³ In light of these comparisons, P.Hamb.Graec. 1011 can be reasonably dated to the 4th or early 5th century.

¹⁷ Luijendijk (2010) 588–594.

¹⁸ Learning to write *nomina sacra* was part of Christian education, see Luijendijk (2008) 66–69.

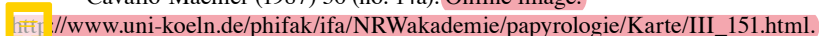
¹⁹ Four Christian school exercises with unabbreviated *nomina sacra* are listed in Carlig (2013) 71–72.

²⁰ Cribiore (1996) 112.

²¹ Cribiore (1996) 47–49.

²² Image in Cavallo–Maehler (1987) 27 (no. 9a).

²³ Cavallo–Maehler (1987) 36 (no. 14a). Online image:

 [//www.uni-koeln.de/phifak/ifa/NRWakademie/papyrologie/Karte/III_151.html](http://www.uni-koeln.de/phifak/ifa/NRWakademie/papyrologie/Karte/III_151.html).

The current scholarly consensus holds that the *IGT* was written in Greek in the 2nd century. The text swiftly became popular and was translated into Latin and Syriac by the 5th century, and later into Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, Arabic, Irish, and Slavonic. In the Egyptian context of our fragment, it is worth noting that no Coptic translation has yet been found. The multilingual textual tradition and the existence of significantly divergent variants in different languages pose considerable challenges to the reconstruction of an original text.²⁴

The Greek text is known in four recensions: *Gs*, *Ga*, *Gb*, and *Gd*. Of these, *Gs* is thought to be the closest to the original text, since it shows similarities with early versions in Latin and Syriac. *Ga* is a longer version of the text, perhaps dating from around the 9th century and present in the largest number of manuscripts. *Gd* (11th century?) is characterised by major additions and a language and syntax that differ significantly from *Gs* and *Ga*. Finally, *Gb* (before the 15th century) is a shorter version of *Ga*, in which some episodes were rewritten.²⁵

The text of P.Hamb.Graec. 1011 follows *Gs* 2.4–3.1, i.e. the earliest Greek version of the text preserved in a single manuscript, Codex Sabaiticus 259 (= H; 11th century; fol. 66r–72r).²⁶ The other two main witnesses to the early text do not offer useful comparanda: the 5th-century Latin palimpsest, which contains parts of the *IGT*, does not preserve the passage of P.Hamb.Graec. 1011,²⁷ while the Syriac recensions *Sa* and *Sw* are too far removed from the Greek to offer any help in supplementing the text of our papyrus.²⁸ If our palaeographical dating is correct, P.Hamb.Graec. 1011 is the earliest witness to the text of the *IGT* in any language. The few preserved lines contain a number of textual variants, which are discussed in the commentary below. These confirm the high variability of the *IGT*'s text, which is well evidenced by its complex tradition. Some variant readings in our papyrus side with *Ga*, suggesting that the text of the notoriously corrupt *codex unicus* of *Gs* (the aforementioned Sabaiticus 259) simplified the vocabulary of the *IGT*. It therefore appears that *Ga* preserves a vocabulary closer to the original text of *Gs*, which is now also attested by our papyrus.²⁹

For the sake of convenience, we reproduce the relevant section of the text of *Gs* 2.3–3.1 from Burke's edition:³⁰

Ἰδὼν δέ τις Ἰουδαῖος τὸ παιδίον Ἰησοῦν μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων παιδίων ταῦτα ποιῶντα, πορευθεὶς πρὸς Ἰωσήφ τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ διέβαλεν τὸ παιδίον Ἰησοῦν λέγων ὅτι κάββατον πηλὸν ἐποίησεν ὃ οὐκ ἔξεστιν καὶ ἔπλασεν τρουθία ἰβ. Καὶ ἐλθὼν Ἰωσήφ ἐπετίμα αὐτὸν λέγων· “Διὰ τί τὸ κάββατον ταῦτα ποιεῖς;” Ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς συγκροτήσας τὰς χεῖρας μετὰ φωνῆς ἐπέτασαν τὰ ὄρνεα ἐνώπιον πάντων, καὶ εἶπεν· “Ὑπάγετε, πετάσθητε ὡς ζῶντες.” Τὰ δὲ τρουθία πετασθέντες ἀπήλθαν κεκραγότα. Ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Φαρισαῖος ἐθαύμασεν καὶ ἀπήγγειλεν πᾶσιν τοῖς φίλοις αὐτοῦ· Ὁ δὲ υἱὸς Ἄννα τοῦ ἀρχιερέως λέγει αὐτῷ· “Τί ποιεῖς οὕτως ἐν καββάτῳ;” Καὶ λαβὼν κλῶνον ἰτέας κατέστρεψεν τοὺς λάκκους καὶ ἐξέχεεν τὸ ὕδωρ ὅνπερ συνήγαγεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ τὰς συναγωγὰς αὐτῶν ἐξήρανεν.

²⁴ For an overview of the textual tradition of the *IGT*, see Voicu (1991) and Burke (2010) 173–222.

²⁵ See the editions of the Greek recensions and description of manuscripts in Burke (2010) 3–43 and 127–171.

²⁶ Digitised microfilm available at <https://www.loc.gov/resource/amedmonastery.0027939432A-jo/?st=gallery>. A further Vienna codex, Philos. gr. 162 contained a version of the *IGT*, which most probably followed *Gs*, but the leaves containing the text were removed soon after 1675 and have been missing since then. Only some excerpts made by Peter Lambeck in 1675 remain, which do not overlap with the text of P.Hamb.Graec. 1011, see Burke (2010) 129–131.

²⁷ For the Latin palimpsest, see Philippart (1972).

²⁸ For an edition of the Syriac recensions, see Burke (2017).

²⁹ Our study of the text of *Gs* on the basis of the microfilm of Codex Sabaiticus 259 (see n. 26) and the testimony of P.Hamb.Graec. 1011 has led us to believe that the text of some passages of *Gs* could be further improved, as we intend to demonstrate elsewhere.

³⁰ Burke (2010) 304–305 (fol. 66v in Sabaiticus 259).

P.Hamb.Graec. 1011

11.1 cm × 5 cm

4th–5th Century

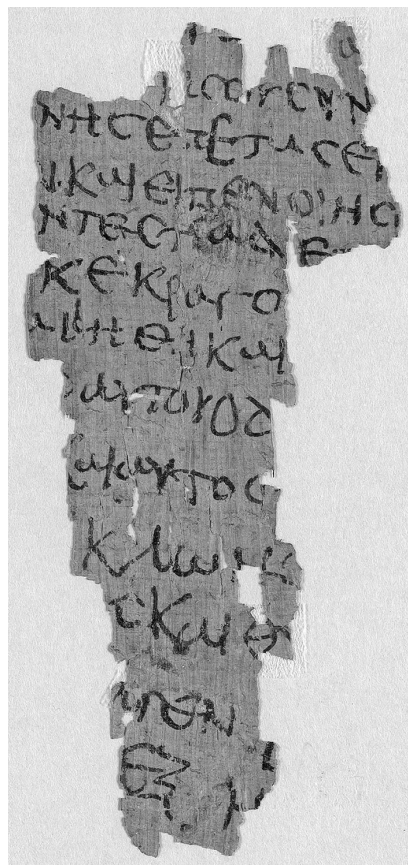
Diplomatic transcription

Reconstructed text

] . . [ca.3]α[
]ησουσυν[
]νησεπετασεν[
]νκαιειπενοιησ[
 5]ντετ[ἐδε΄]αδεπ[
]κεκραγο[
]μβηθηκαι[
]σαυτουοδ[
]καιαυτοα[
 10]κλων[
]υκαιεξ[
]αγεν[.] . [.]
]εξ[.]η[
] . [

 λέ]γω[ν δι]ὰ [.]
] Ἰησοῦς <σ>υν[
 φω]νῆς ἐπέτασεν [.]
 πάντω]ν καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς
 ζῶ]ντες τ[ἐδε΄]ὰ δὲ π[ετασθέντα
] κεκραγό]τα
 ἔθα]μβήθη καὶ [.]
 φίλοι]ς αὐτοῦ ὁ δ[ε]
] καὶ αὐτὸς α[.]
] κλών]ον
 λάκκο]υς καὶ ἐξ[έχεεν
 συνήγ]αγεν [.] . [.]
] ἐξ[.] ἡ[ράρεν
] . [

2 υ secundum corr. ex c aut ε 3 επε- corr. ex επι- 5 α supra rasuram, [ἐδε΄] add. supra lineam, deinde rasae



P.Hamb.Graec. 1011³¹ – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg, CCBY-SA 4.0³²

³¹ Digital image available at https://papyri.uni-leipzig.de/receive/HamPapyri_text_00008360.

³² License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.de>.

Commentary

1 λέ]γω[v δι]ά [: the descender of the γ is visible, cf. the shape of the same letter in line 6. The lower left-middle part of ω is visible, cf. the same letter in line 10.

2 <ς>υv[: υ seems to be written on another letter. The scribe probably started writing a ς or an ε and changed into an υ.³³ In the case of a ς, the scribe would have corrected what he perceived as a diplography. In the case of an ε, he perhaps wanted to write ἐν, but corrected it into συv without adding the missing ς.

Ἰησοῦς <ς>υv[: is a haplographic error. Cod. Sabaiticus 259 has the participle συγκρωτήσας (*sic*), which creates a sentence without a main verb.³⁴ The papyrus could be supplemented with συνεκρότησεν, producing better syntax. The line would then run as follows: Ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς συνεκρότησεν τὰς χεῖρας μετὰ φωνῆς (καὶ) ἐπέτασεν τὰ ὄρνεα. However συvκ- instead of συγκ- is a common spelling in papyri,³⁵ thus we cannot exclude the participle form.

3 ἐπέτασεν: the second ε, considerably taller than elsewhere, seems to have been corrected from ι. The scribe might have had the prefix ἐπι- in mind. *Gs* has the plural form ἐπέτασαν, but the papyrus reading is more consistent with classical norms of agreement of neutral plurals with verbal forms in the singular. The reading of the manuscript could be a *lectio facillior*.

4 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς: in the *Gs* text, the quote is simply introduced by καὶ εἶπεν without adding Jesus as subject. The use of the singular form ἐπέτασεν makes the repetition of Jesus' name necessary, otherwise ὄρνεα could be considered as the subject of εἶπεν.

5 [εδε]: For the correction, see above p. 44.

τὰ δὲ π[ετασθέντα: τὰ δὲ τρουθία πετασθέντες *Gs*; καὶ πετασθέντα τὰ τρουθία ὑπήγον κράζοντα *Ga*. We do not supplement the incorrect masculine participle found in the corrupt manuscript of *Gs*, but the correct neuter of *Ga*. The papyrus omits τρουθία, which would unlikely have come after the participle. In the papyrus, τὰ δὲ πετασθέντα refers back to τὰ ὄρνεα, creating a smoother syntax, closer to Classical style. τρουθία might have originated in *Gs* and *Ga* as an explanatory note that slipped into the text during transmission.

7 ἐθα]μβήθη: ἐθαύμασεν *Gs*; ἐθαμβήθησαν *Ga*. The papyrus has the same verb as *Ga*, but the subject must have been ὁ Φαρισαῖος, as in *Gs*, whereas *Ga* has a plural agreeing with οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι. θαμβέω is probably a *lectio difficilior*, which might have been simplified to the more frequent θαυμάζω.

9] καὶ αὐτός α[: the last character is probably the lower part of an α (cf. the form in καί on the same line). Here the papyrus clearly deviates from both recensions. Following *Gs*, αὐτός could be an anaphoric pronoun referring to υἱὸς Ἄννα, which in *Gs* is the subject of λέγει. Otherwise, it could also refer to Jesus, but this would require a considerably different text. We do not see any plausible supplement for the end of the line.

11 λάκκο]υς καὶ ἐξ]έχεεν: the malformed ε may look like a θ at first sight. The latter however has a rounded shape (l. 7), while ε is ovalish. Here, the upper and lower ends of ε are curved towards each other forming a closed shape. The first ε of ἐπέτασεν in line 3 is similar, but only the upper part bends down to the crossbar. In l. 11, ε is followed by what seems to be the upper stroke of ξ, as in line 13. We also considered reading θ- or θυ-, perhaps a form of θυμώ (θυμωθεῖς referring to the son of Annas), but ε seems palaeographically and textually more plausible.


12 συνήγ]αγεν [.] [: ink traces are visible after the final ν, but it remains unclear whether it is an erased letter or just an ink stain/smear. In the first case, it could have been an ο, which would be compatible with *Gs*: συνήγαγεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς. The visible stroke at the end of the line could be (1) the lower part of the initial ι of Ἰησοῦς with a small hook on the base (cf. l. 9, ι in καί), in which case the text would correspond to *Gs*, or,

³³ The upper hook of ν could be mistaken for the tip of ε's crossbar.

³⁴ As read on the microfilm of Sabaiticus 259, see n. 26.

³⁵ See Gignac (1976) 168.

less convincingly, (2) the lower part of the η, as in Ἰησοῦ(ς) in l. 2, but there would hardly be enough space for the initial ι between the putative ο and the η, or (3) the lower part of an initial φ.

12–13: For the erasures, see above p. .

14] .[: only a speck of ink is visible.

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