

Harald Buchinger, in coop. with Elisabeth Hernitscheck

## P. Oxy. 840 and the Rites of Christian Initiation: Dating a piece of alleged anti-sacramentalistic polemics<sup>1</sup>

### I. P. Oxy. 840: A discourse about the efficacy of Baptism?

P. Oxy. 840 shares the fate of many apocryphal writings:<sup>2</sup> interest was triggered by the publication in 1908 of a Gospel fragment<sup>3</sup> that initially was thought to complement biblical data about the historical Jesus; attention faded when this expectation was disappointed and it became clear that neither the date nor the place of origin of the text transmitted on a small 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> century parchment page could be identified with any certainty. Too many

- 
- 1 My attention was first drawn to P. Oxy. 840 by my friend and colleague Tobias Nicklas in the course of an interdisciplinary seminar on Liturgy in Early Christian Apocrypha at Regensburg University in spring 2010. In the meantime, Elisabeth Hernitscheck has been dealing with the text in her PhD dissertation at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in the context of a project on the reconstruction of Early Christian history from fragments directed by Joseph Verheyden; see J. Verheyden, “Lost (and Found). A Critical Study and Analysis of the History of Research on Lost Documents and Hypothetical Sources of Early Christianity”, *EC* 4 (2013) 419–422. My considerations about the place of P. Oxy. 840 in liturgical history respond to Elisabeth Hernitscheck’s presentation of François Bovon’s and Michael J. Kruger’s research during a New Testament graduate students’ colloquium at Regensburg University in September 2013, and it is to be expected that she will further develop the argument. A draft of this paper has been discussed in the Problems in Early Liturgical History Seminar of the North American Academy of Liturgy in Orlando, FL, in January 2014; I am grateful to the members of this uniquely stimulating group for their comments and encouragement. My thanks go to John Nicholson for the revision of the English text.
  - 2 T. Nicklas, “Das Fragment Oxyrhynchus V 840 (P.Oxy. V 840)”, in *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung. Vol. I: Evangelien und Verwandtes* (ed. by C. Marksches and J. Schröter; Tübingen 2012) 357–359, with bibliography and assessment of earlier research, including the most extensive treatment by M.J. Kruger, *The Gospel of the Savior. An Analysis of P.Oxy 840 and its Place in the Gospel Traditions of Early Christianity* (Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 1; Leiden 2005).
  - 3 B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt (eds.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri 5* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1908) 1–10 and pl. I. The editors’ designation of the text as fragment of a “Gospel” has become common and cannot be discussed further in the present context.

are the historical problems of the discourse in which the Saviour opposes his own (!) and his disciples' "bathing in waters of eternal life" to the external purification by ritual washing in the "pool of David" referred to by a "Pharisee, a chief priest called Levi" as the prerequisite for entering the temple and seeing its "holy vessels":<sup>4</sup>

... και παραλαβὼν αὐτοὺς εἰσήγαγεν εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγνευτήριον και περιεπάτει ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ. και προσε[λ]θὼν φαρισαῖός τις ἀρχιερεὺς Λευ[εῖς] τὸ ὄνομα συνέντευχεν αὐτοῖς και εἰ[πε]ν τῷ σω(τῆ)ρι· τίς ἐπέτρεψέν σοι πατ[εῖν] τοῦτο τὸ ἀγνευτήριον και ἰδεῖν [ταῦ]τα τὰ ἅγια σκεύη μήτε λουσα[μ]έν[ῳ] μ[ή]τε μὴν τῶν μαθητῶν σου τοὺς π[ό]δας βα[π]τισθέντων; ἀλλὰ μεμολυ[μ]μένος ἐπάτησας τοῦτο τὸ ἱερόν, τ[ό]πον ὄν[τα] καθαρὸν, ὃν οὐδεὶς ἄ[λλος] εἰ μὴ] λουσάμενος και ἀλλά[ξ]ας τὰ ἐνδύ[μα]τα πατεῖ, οὐδὲ ὀρᾶν τολμᾷ ταῦτα] τὰ ἅγια σκεύη.  
και σ[τα]θεῖς εὐθὺς ὁ σωτήρ] σ[ὺ]ν τ[οῖς] μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ ἀπεκρίθη·] σὺ οὖν ἐνταῦθα ὢν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ καθαρεύεις; λέγει αὐτῷ ἐκεῖνος· καθαρεύω· ἐλουσάμην γὰρ ἐν τῇ λίμνῃ τοῦ Δ(αυει)δ και δι' ἑτέρας κλίμακος κατελθὼν δι' ἑτέρας ἀ[ν]ήλθον, και λευκά ἐνδύματα ἐνεδυσάμην και καθαρά, και τότε ἤλθο(ν) και προσέβλεψα τούτοις τοῖς ἁγίοις σκεύεσιν.  
ὁ σω(τῆ)ρ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀπο[κρι]θεὶς εἶπεν· οὐαί, τυφλοὶ μὴ ὀρᾶ(ν)τ[ε]ς· σὺ ἐλούσω τούτοις τοῖς χεομένοις ὕ[δ]ρασι(ν), ἐν οἷς κύνες και χοῖροι βέβλην[τα]ι νυκτὸς και ἡμέρας, και νιψάμε[ν]ος τὸ ἐκτὸς δέρμα ἐσμήξω, ὅπερ [κα]ί αἱ πόρνοι και αἱ αἰ αὐλητρίδες μυρί[ζ]ου[σαι] και λούουσι και σμήχουσι [και κ]αλλωπίζουσι πρὸς ἐπιθυμί[αν] τῶν ἀν(θρώπ)ων,

... And having taken them he brought them into the place of purification and was walking in the temple. And having approached, a certain Pharisee, a chief priest, whose name was Levi, joined them and said to the Saviour: Who gave you permission to enter this place of purification and to see these holy vessels, when you have not washed yourself, nor have your disciples surely bathed their feet? But you, in a defiled state, have entered this temple, which is a pure place that no one enters nor dares to view these holy vessels without having first washed themselves and changed their clothes. And immediately the Saviour stopped, and standing with his disciples answered: Are you then pure in your present state here in the temple? And he replied to him: I am pure, for I have washed myself in the pool of David, and having descended by one staircase I came up by another; and I have put on white and pure clothes, and only then did I come and lay eyes on these holy vessels. The Saviour answered him saying: Woe unto you, O blind ones, who do not see! You have washed yourself in these running waters where dogs and pigs have wallowed night and day, and you have cleansed and wiped the outside skin which the prostitutes and flute-girls anoint, which they wash, and wipe, and make beautiful for human desire;

4 Text and translation according to F. Bovon, "Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840, Fragment of a Lost Gospel, Witness of an Early Christian Controversy over Purity", *JBL* 119 (2000) 705–728 [repr. in: id., *New Testament and Christian Apocrypha. Collected Studies II* (WUNT 237; Tübingen 2009) 174–196] 714f; the beginning of the acephalous fragment is omitted here. The number of conjectures is to be noted.

<p>ἐνδοθεν δὲ ἐκεῖ[ναι πεπλ]ήρω&lt;v&gt;ται  σκορπίων καὶ [πάσης ἀδι]κίας. ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ  οἱ [μαθηταί μου,] οὓς λέγεις μὴ  βεβα[μμένους, βεβ]άμμεθα ἐν ὕδασι  ζω[ῆς αἰωνίου τοῖς κα]τελθοῦσιν ἀπὸ  [τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. ἀλ]λά οὐαὶ  [τ]οῖς [...]</p>	<p>but inwardly these women are full of  scorpions and every wickedness. But I and  my disciples, who you say have not  bathed, we have bathed in waters of  eternal life, which come down from the  God of Heaven. But woe unto those [...]</p>
--	--

François Bovon convincingly argued for a shift of paradigm towards interpreting the fragment not as a source for New Testament history but rather in the context of early Christian disputes about ritual purity and the efficacy of Baptism.<sup>5</sup> According to this interpretation, the text “reflects a Christian setting in the second or the third century”<sup>6</sup>; to be more precise: “either in the second-century Gnostic opposition to a Jewish Christian Baptist movement or to the mainstream church, or in the third-century Manichaean polemic against the Elkesaites.”<sup>7</sup>

In view of the terminology and the ritual sequence<sup>8</sup> it seems absolutely plausible that early Christian initiation is indeed the historical reality behind the purificatory rites against which the text polemicizes with a de-

5 For the present purpose, it is not necessary to reiterate the exhaustive accounts of earlier research, with the exception of D. Tripp, “Meanings of the Foot-Washing: John 13 and Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 840”, *ET* 103 (1992) 237–239, who briefly and without detailed references proposed that the fragment was “coming from a group who rejected mainstream Christians as being too close to Judaism in their acceptance of material sacraments ... Such an attack on baptism and on the whole material universe, while still couched in very Jewish terms, points to an origin among those people, whose spiritual lives had been condemned to a bitter solitude during the parting of church and synagogue, now known as ‘Naassenes’ – such people who produced the *Gospel according to Thomas*” (238). Kruger, *Gospel* (see n. 2), by contrast, held “that the content and concerns of P.Oxy. 840 best fit not within the context of Christian baptismal practices as Bovon and others maintain, but within the context of early Jewish Christianity” (256) and assumed “a composition date of c. 125–150” (257).

Recent scholarship seems to ignore the important contribution of F.J. Dölger, “Der Durchzug durch das Rote Meer als Sinnbild der christlichen Taufe. Zum Oxyrhynchus-Papyrus Nr. 840”, *Antike und Christentum* 2 (1930) 63–69, and id., “Der Durchzug durch den Jordan als Sinnbild der christlichen Taufe”, *Antike und Christentum* 2 (1930) 70–79, who back in 1930 considered exactly the interpretation argued below: “Man möchte fast auf den Gedanken kommen, der Verfasser des Bruchstückes habe die Einrichtung eines christlichen Taufhauses des vierten Jahrhunderts vor Augen gehabt und habe eine Symbolik wiedergegeben, die ein christlicher Bischof der damaligen Zeit in einer Taufansprache vorgetragen hat.” (69)

6 Bovon, *Fragment* (see n. 4), 705.

7 Bovon, *Fragment* (see n. 4), 728.

8 The reference to anointing in the second speech of the Saviour is noteworthy, though it is not discussed further in the present context, because it does not become clear whether it relates to a ritual at all; and even by doing so, it would not make a decisive contribution to dating the text.

nunciation of them as “Jewish” that is nothing short of a malicious caricature;<sup>9</sup> and little can be added to the rich material adduced by François Bovon, though the liturgical and terminological details do in fact indicate a later date than he assumed.<sup>10</sup>

## II. The date of the underlying ritual

Virtually every detail of the ritual referred to by the Gospel fragment points to a date in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and thus quite close to the actual origin of the parchment, which is dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> (or, at the latest, 5<sup>th</sup>) century on palaeographical grounds.

In the chief priest’s first speech, “washing” is paralleled with “bathing the feet”;<sup>11</sup> apart from hypothetical inferences on liturgical practice from John 13,<sup>12</sup> solid evidence for a baptismal pedilavium emerges only in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup>

9 Just imagine a “pharisaic high-priest called Levi” (a “veritable operetta figure” according to T. Nicklas, “Critical Study: Michael J. Kruger, *The Gospel of the Savior: An Analysis of P.Oxy. 840 and its Place in the Gospel Traditions of Early Christianity*,” *Apocrypha* 17 [2006] 203–210, at 207), a “pool of David” that is not otherwise attested, and the reference to pigs.

10 Though E. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church. History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI 2009) 269 f, did not adopt Bovon’s interpretation but preferred to follow “the straightforward reading” of the text, he noted that “the orthodox practices in regard to baptism and sacred vessels which are cited are much later than the second-third centuries assigned to the fragment” (269 n. 9), Ferguson did not, however, follow the consequence by questioning the “late second century” date assigned to the original by the editors of the text, and therefore inserted its analysis between Justin Martyr and Pseudo-Cyprian, *Against the Jews*.

11 It has to be noted that the reference to “feet” is for its greater part conjectured to fill a lacuna.

12 M.F. Connell, “Nisi Pedes, Except for the Feet. Footwashing in the Community of John’s Gospel”, *Worship* 70 (1996) 517–531.

13 B. Kleinheyer, *Sakramentliche Feiern I. Die Feiern der Eingliederung in die Kirche* (GDK 7,1; Regensburg 1989) 74–76. P. Franco Beatrice, *La lavanda dei piedi. Contributo alla storia delle antiche liturgie cristiane* (BEL.S 28; Roma 1983), tends to ascribe the origin of the practice to the quartodeciman milieu of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century on the basis of the implicitly baptismal interpretation of John 13 in *Iren.*, *Haer.* 4.22.1 (SC 100bis, 684–686 Rousseau), but can. 48 of the Council of Elvira in Spain (ed. Vives p. 10), held in the early years of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, seems to be the first unequivocal evidence of ritual footwashing as part of baptismal liturgy; it is well known that it is widely attested as an integral element of the sacramental celebration in Northern Italy later in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (and subsequently also in Africa and Gaul), whereas the Syriac sources of that period do not necessarily suppose liturgical practice behind their baptismal interpretation of John 13. It would be particularly interesting if P. Oxy. 840 were to constitute an eastern testimony for actual footwashing, because clear hints at a ritual behind theological reason-

It has been noted that the two stairways of the pool depicted by the story's "Jewish" protagonist correspond to the design of Jewish ritual baths; in Christian baptismal architecture, however, monumental structures with double stairways occur only from the 4<sup>th</sup> century on.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, symbolic meaning is given to the distinction of the stairs for descending and ascending,<sup>15</sup> a feature which is also stressed in the fragment.<sup>16</sup>

Although dressing after the bath is a matter of course, and clothing metaphors are as old as Christian baptismal theology (Gal 3:27), the actual use of white garments for neophytes is first attested in the era of the imperial church.<sup>17</sup>

---

ing about baptismal implications of the Johannine narrative are lacking so far in the early Christian East.

- 14 After the comprehensive catalogue of S. Ristow, *Frühchristliche Baptisterien* (JAC.E 27; Münster 1998), see R.M. Jensen, *Living Water. Images, Symbols, and Settings of Early Christian Baptism* (SVigChr 105; Leiden 2011), and O. Brandt, "Understanding the Structures of Early Christian Baptisteries", in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism. Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (ed. by D. Hellhom et al.; BZNW 176; Berlin 2011) 2.1587–1609. Noteworthy, however, is the mention of "running" (or "living") water, which is an issue in Jewish halakha, Did. 7 (SC 248, 170 Rordorf/Tulier), Ps. Clement, Contest. 1.2 (GCS 1<sup>3</sup>.3.7 Rehm/Strecker), and "Trad. Ap." 21 with its derivatives (P.F. Bradshaw, M.E. Johnson, and L.E. Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition. A Commentary* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis 2002] 112), but not a prominent matter of discussion in later Christian discourses on Baptism. The suitability of baptisteries for running water remains disputed; cf. Kleinheyer, *Feiern* (see n. 13), 60, on T. Klauser, "Taufet in lebendigem Wasser! Zum religions- und kulturgeschichtlichen Verständnis von Didache 7,1/3", in *Pisciculi. Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums. Franz Joseph Dölger zum sechzigsten Geburtstag* (ed. by T. Klauser and A. Rucker; Antike und Christentum. Ergänzungsband 1; Münster 1939) 157–164 [repr. in: id., *Gesammelte Arbeiten zur Liturgiegeschichte, Kirchengeschichte und christlichen Archäologie* (JAC.E 3; Münster 1974) 177–183].
- 15 Dölger, "Durchzug" (see n. 5), traces the literary motif in early Christian literature; connection with the furniture of baptismal architecture is made, among others, by Ambr., Sacr. 1.4.12 (CSEL 73, 21 Faller).
- 16 Cf. Dölger, "Durchzug" (see n. 5), 69, as quoted in n. 5, who considered a 4<sup>th</sup>-century date on precisely these grounds. The similarity to early Christian baptisteries is also noted by Bovon, "Fragment" (see n. 4), 717. "The descent from one side of the pool and the ascent on the other is reminiscent of the baptismal ceremonies described in the catechetical homilies of Ambrose of Milan or Theodore of Mopsuestia." (719) The latter, however, though dwelling at length on the symbolism of ascending from the font in Hom. Cat. 14 = Bapt. 3.5–25 (StT 145, 412–454 Tonneau/Devreesse), does not give any hint at its shape.
- 17 After the sober assessment of the evidence by Kleinheyer, *Feiern* (see n. 13), 73f, the admirably comprehensive study of A. Crnčević, *Induere Christum. Rito e linguaggio simbolico-teologico della vestizione battesimale* (BELS 108; Roma 2000) esp. 145–181, posits an ante-Nicene dating of the rite on the basis of metaphorical statements, among which Hermas 68 = Sim. 8.2.3f (SUC 3, 282 Körtner/Leutzsch), about the "white gar-

The fragment's repeated emphasis on the prerequisite of purity for "viewing the holy vessels" is a more difficult matter. Apart from seeking an explanation in Second Temple Judaism,<sup>18</sup> one may speculate about the importance of contemplating sacred vessels in the initiation to mystery cults.<sup>19</sup> Another context may be sought in the practice of 4<sup>th</sup>-century mystagogy, which used things that lay before the eyes of the newly initiated as starting-point for their sacramental theology.<sup>20</sup> In turn, it was not until the later 4<sup>th</sup> century that the Christian liturgical mysteries were protected from common sight by curtains and other fittings;<sup>21</sup> and it was in the same pe-

---

ment" (ἱματισμὸς λευκός), which is identified with the "seal", and the Pseudo-Clementine references to the "pure wedding gown, which is Baptism", appear of particular interest in view of verbal contiguity with P. Oxy. 840: Ps. Clement, Hom. 8.22.4 (GCS 1<sup>3</sup>.130.25f Rehm/Strecker: καθαρὸν ἔνδυμα γάμου ... ὅπερ ἐστὶν βάπτισμα); Recogn. 4.35.5f (GCS 2<sup>2</sup>.164.16f Rehm/Strecker: *indumenta nuptialia, quod est gratia baptismi ... tamquam vestimentum mundum*). The recurrent affinity of ideas expressed in P. Oxy. 840 and the pseudo-Clementine literature (see above, n. 14) may warrant further investigation.

The earliest unequivocal reference to actually using "brilliant imperial garments (λαμπρὰ καὶ βασιλικά ἀμφιάσματα)" (as opposed to purple) after Baptism, however, comes only from Eusebius' account of Constantine's deathbed initiation in Vit. Const. 4.62.5 (GCS 7<sup>2</sup>.146 Winkelmann; after 337 CE). Evidence from East and West abounds towards the end of the century; in the East, cf., among others, Asterius (probably not the Sophist of the first half, but a homilist of the later 4<sup>th</sup> century), Hom. 11 = In Ps. 5 Hom. 6.10 (SO.S 16.80.18 Richard), Theodore of Mopsuestia, Hom. Cat. 14 = Bapt. 3.26f (SfT 145.454–456 Tonneau/Devreesse), and John Chrysostom (various references; cf. R. Kaczynski, Introduction to FC 6/1, 88, and P. de Roten, *Baptême et mystagogie. Enquête sur l'initiation chrétienne selon s. Jean Chrysostome* [LQF 91; Münster 2005] 303–305), who occasionally refers to the white baptismal gown as "pure (!) vestment" (ἱμάτιον καθαρὸν): Catech. 2/3.2 (FC 6/1, 232, 2f Kaczynski).

- 18 Bovon, "Fragment" (see n. 4), 717 with n. 47; D.R. Schwartz, "Viewing the Holy Utensils (= P. Oxy. V, 840)", *NTS* 32 (1986) 153–159, and others.
- 19 Kind indication by Clemens Leonhard, with reference to C. Auffarth, "Mysterien (Mysterienkulte)", *RAC* 25 (2013) 422–471, esp. 429, 457; G. Baudy, "Cista mystica", *RAC* Suppl. 2/Lfg. 11 (2004) 376–388; and K. Clinton, "Stages of Initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Mysteries", in *Greek Mysteries. The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults* (ed. by M.B. Cosmopoulos; New York 2003) 50–78.
- 20 W. Slenczka, *Heilsgeschichte und Liturgie. Studien zum Verhältnis von Heilsgeschichte und Heilsteilnahme anhand liturgischer und katechetischer Quellen des dritten und vierten Jahrhunderts* (AKG 78; Berlin 2000).
- 21 F. Van de Pavard, *Zur Geschichte der Messliturgie in Antiocheia und Konstantinopel gegen Ende des vierten Jahrhunderts. Analyse der Quellen bei Johannes Chrysostomos* (OCA 187; Roma 1970) 42–48; S.E.J. Gerstel (ed.), *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West* (Washington, D.C. 2005).

riod that liturgical dishes – especially those for the Eucharist, which, of course, followed Baptism – were first called “holy vessels”.<sup>22</sup>

These and other circumstantial observations about the terminology adduced by Bovon corroborate a relatively late date; in fact, two of the extremely rare attestations for the term ἁγνευτήριον come from Gregory of Nazianzus and describe features of church architecture.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, the general interpretation of the “temple” as “holy” space and the prerequisite of ritual purity fit well into the era when the cultic reinterpretation of Christian liturgy – which, of course, had its roots in allegorical tendencies of earlier theology – had become dominant.<sup>24</sup>

### III. Conclusion

To sum up: It seems plausible that the Gospel fragment transmitted by P. Oxy. 840 claims the authority of the Saviour in order to polemicize against early Christian baptismal practice and theology; details of the ritual correspond with developments of the baptismal liturgy that are documented from the 4<sup>th</sup> century on.<sup>25</sup> Therefore also the theological controversy may be situated in the milieu of the post-Constantinian era, when the ritual evolution and theological interpretation of Christian liturgy was not only the expression of an unprecedented flourishing of sacramental liturgy and theology in the wake of the Christianisation of the masses, but at the

22 Bovon, “Fragment” (see n. 4), 720, with reference to Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius of Alexandria, Apostolic Constitutions, and Epiphanius of Salamis.

23 Bovon, “Fragment” (see n. 4), 718f: “This ἁγνευτήριον reminds the reader of the water basin or fountain, located outside an ancient Christian basilica, often in the middle of the atrium preceding the church. ... it is possible that Gregory of Nazianzus used the term ἁγνευτήριον to describe the place around such a water basin or fountain.”

24 Cf., among many others, H.G. Thümmel, “Versammlungsraum, Kirche, Tempel”, in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel / Community without Temple. Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum* (ed. by B. Ego, A. Lange, and P. Pilhofer; WUNT 118; Tübingen 1999) 489–504; and P. de Navascués, “El templo del cristiano. Sobre la vida litúrgica”, *RET* 66 (2006) 27–58; on the rich cultic imagery in Origen, see F. Ledegang, *Mysterium Ecclesiae. Images of the Church and its Members in Origen* (BETL 156; Leuven 2001).

25 It goes without saying that the first extant attestation of a phenomenon does not necessarily coincide with its actual origin, which means that every feature discussed above may be older than the earliest manifest references; claiming a date earlier than the 4<sup>th</sup> century for the Gospel fragment of P. Oxy. 840 would however mean that this text would be the – quite sensational – first evidence of a significant number of ritual developments which otherwise are thought to have taken place only in the era of the imperial church.

same time also a sign of its crisis,<sup>26</sup> to which the author may have responded in line with earlier anti-ritualistic texts.<sup>27</sup> The increasing sacramentalisation of common ecclesial practice and its cultic interpretation in the era of the imperial church would have provoked a cult-critical reaction. At any rate, questioning the purificatory effects of external washing demonstrates an awareness of such fundamental problems of any sacramental theology as the efficacy of liturgical rites as such, their relation to internal reality, and the correspondence between metaphor and meaning in the cultic re-interpretation of Christian liturgy.

If indeed Baptism is the ritual at stake in P. Oxy. 840, two possibilities remain for its dating: either the text, which fits well in the general picture of the developed baptismal liturgy of the imperial Church, has to be dated into the 4<sup>th</sup> century and thus significantly later than previously assumed, or it has to be taken as an exceptionally early testimony of a number of liturgical features for which no unequivocal evidence exists from ante-Nicene times. In both cases, the text has more to say about controversies over the sacramental theology of the established Church than about the Jewish milieu of earliest Christianity.

**Harald Buchinger**

Universität Regensburg  
 Fakultät für Katholische Theologie  
 Universitätsstraße 31  
 93053 Regensburg  
 Germany  
 harald.buchinger@theologie.uni-regensburg.de

**Elisabeth Hernitscheck**

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven  
 Research Unit of Biblical Studies  
 Sint-Michielsstraat 4 – box 3101  
 3000 Leuven  
 Belgium  
 elisabeth.hernitscheck@theo.kuleuven.be

26 Cf. the contributions of M. Wallraff, “Christliche Liturgie als religiöse Innovation in der Spätantike”, in *Liturgie und Ritual in der Alten Kirche. Patristische Beiträge zum Studium der gottesdienstlichen Quellen der Alten Kirche* (ed. by W. Kinzig, U. Volp, and J. Schmidt; Studien der Patristischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft 11; Leuven 2011) 69–97; and P.F. Bradshaw, “The Fourth Century: A Golden Age for Liturgy?”, in *Liturgie* (see above), 99–115.

27 To the broad stream of traditions quoted by Bovon, “Fragment” (see n. 4), 723–728, the famous example of the Gospel of Judas may now be added; cf., among many others, G. Rouwhorst, “The Gospel of Judas and Early Christian Eucharist”, in *In Search of Truth: Augustine, Manichaeism and other Gnosticism. Studies for Johannes van Oort at Sixty* (ed. by J.A. van den Berg et al.; NHS 74; Leiden 2011) 611–625; J.K. Schwarz, “Die Kultpolemik im ‘Evangelium des Judas’”, *EC 3* (2012) 59–84; H. Schmid, “Eucharistie und Opfer. Das ‘Evangelium des Judas’ im Kontext von Eucharistiedeutungen des zweiten Jahrhunderts”, *EC 3* (2012) 85–108; and T. Nicklas, “Die andere Seite: Das *Judasevangelium* und seine Polemik im Kontext altkirchlicher Diskurse”, in *The Apocryphal Gospels within the Context of Early Christian Theology* (ed. by J. Schröter; BETL 260; Leuven 2013) 127–155.