

## Reflections on the Use of the Name Yahuwah (Yahweh) or IAO in the Early Church Communities

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### Abstract

*The purpose of the research was to investigate the evidence that the memorial name of Israel's God Yahuwah/IAO was in use among the Christians in the early Church. The principal result of the research was that there is clear evidence that IAO operated as a transliteration of the Tetragram in what are the earliest strata of the LXX. This Old Testament (LXX) of the early Greek speaking Church was often cited by the New Testament writers. It was also noted that in some parts of the second and third century Church, the name IAO was in use in the Scriptures, in prayers, in Biblical commentaries and in baptisms. The appearance of a form of the Tetragram in a Christian baptism has consequences for the way scholars of the New Testament will read the book of Acts and other texts where kurios is supposed to have replaced the Tetragram in citations from the LXX.*

**Keywords:** Reflections, Use, Name, Yahuwah, Iao, Early Church Communities

### 1. Introduction

In this paper, we survey evidence that the early Church and her contemporaries used the name Yahuwah in their ceremonial and in their spiritual life. The evidence points to the fact that during the first centuries of the Christian Church there were groups who claimed to be Christians or followers of Jesus and yet at the same time saw efficacy in calling on the name Yahuwah or its Greek equivalent *Iao*. This paper has considered four main points. Firstly, it reviews the use of terms in the present 3-5<sup>th</sup> century-Greek manuscripts of the Bible with special focus on the New Testament. Secondly, it demonstrates that *Iao* is the true Greek equivalent of Yahuwah, and that it was in some earlier texts of OT manuscripts. Thirdly, that there is evidence in the period of late antiquity that groups of Jews themselves were in the habit of calling on and using the great name Yahuwah to attain their desired ends and, finally, that Jesus and the early Christian literature and inscriptions continued this tradition of using the real name alongside the use of the name of Jesus.

#### 1.1 Kurios in the Christian Greek Scriptures

The uncial manuscripts of the Church from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE give us a picture of the treatment of the name Yahuwah in Christian texts from that period. This picture covers the Old and the New Testament. In them the name Yahuwah is in most cases replaced with either the term *kurios* (KS) or *theos* (THS). The word KS has wider use than representing the tetragrammaton but our focus is only on its replacement of the tetragrammaton. In the New Testament, *kurios* occurs in place of the tetragrammaton with many different phrases which in Hebrew would include Yahuwah (yod heh vav heh).

Kittel in his observations notes that the article is often omitted in the use of *kurios* in the New Testament and notes that “LXX influence is also discerned in certain fixed expressions” (Kittel, 1965). The expressions he mentions where the article is omitted are *cheir kuriou*, *angelos kuriou*, *onoma kuriou*, *pneuma kuriou*, and *legei kurios* (This he states replaced phesin kurios of the LXX). Cases in which the article is retained include *ho logos tou kuriou* (The word of the Lord). The apocalypse often uses the Old Testament *kurios ho theos* (Lord God, For a list of scriptural passages using these phrases see Kittel Vol III p1087. These are the hand, angel, name, spirit and body of the Lord).

In noting the uses the noun *kurios* is put to in the NT when replacing Yahuwah we can see the uses to which the Jewish community and the early church may have put the tetragrammaton or its Greek transliteration in the first centuries of the Church.

Thus, if we were to assume it was not forbidden to use Yahuwah, we would find the name may have been used in greetings (Lk 1:28), in citation of scripture (Mt 3:3; Jn 12:38; Ac 2:34, 3:22, 4:26, 7:49; Rom 10:13, 11:3, 34, 12:19, 14:11, 15:11<sup>1</sup>; 1 Cor 1:31, 2:16, 3:20, 10:26, 14:21; Heb 1.10, 7:21. 8:2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 10:16, 30, 12:5, 6, 13.6; 2 Pet 3:8), in spiritual warfare when dealing with the devil (Mt 4.7, 10; Lk 4:8, 12; Ju 9), in teaching (Mt 5:33), in debate between Jesus and his opponents and the confession of the Shema and the reciting of the commandments (Mt 22:37, 43, 44; Mk 12:29; Lk 20:37, 42), in welcoming the Messiah no doubt with singing psalms and shouting (Mt 23:39; Mk 11:9-10; Lk 13:35; Jn 12:13), in testifying to the great acts of Yahuwah on your behalf (Matt 5:19; Lk 1:45; 2:15)<sup>2</sup>, in describing those things that have their origin in Yahuwah and that bear his name (Lk 1:6; Lk 1:9; Lk 1:11, 38, 66, 76, 2:9, 2:23, 4:18, 19, 5:17; Ac 2:20, 21, 3:19, 5:9, 19, 7:30, 31, 33, 8:25, 26, 39, 9:31, 11:21, 13:10, 11, 12, 48, 49, 21:14; Rom 10:13; Ja 5:7, 8, 10, 11) in identifying Yahuwah God of Israel (Lk 1:15, 2:22, 23, 38; Ac 2:25, 39, 3:22, 7:37, 8:24, 11:32, 13:47, 1 Pet 1:25, 3:15; Ju 4) in prophesying (Lk 1:16, 17, 25, 32, 76) in praising Yahuwah (Lk 1:46, 58, 68; 1 Pet 2:3) in addressing Yahuwah in prayer (Lu 2:29; Ac 4:29, 7:60), baptising in the name of Yahuwah (Acts 10:48[Metzger, 1971]<sup>3</sup>; 22:16<sup>4</sup>). These are just the uses in the Gospels and Acts. The Epistles repeat many of these and in addition use the title *kurios sabaot* or *kuriou sabaot* (Rom 9:29; Jam 5:4) in anointing the sick for healing (Jam 5:14, 15).

When we consider the prevalence of this word *kurios* in these late manuscripts we come across a very interesting and perhaps perplexing historical problem. In no manuscript of the LXX before the 150AD is the tetragram replaced by *kurios*. Another very interesting factor in this period is that *adon* or *adonai* for which the Greek *kurios* is a translation is rarely used as a substitute for the tetragrammaton in the dead sea scrolls.

The reason the LXX is important is because the New Testament writers appear to have cited the LXX regularly. Whereas more than 70 years ago Baudissin could complete his mammoth study (Giessen, 1929) of *kurios* and conclude that “the ancient LXX read *kurios* as a surrogate for *Yhwh*” (Pietersma 1984) more recent evidence has led to scholars challenging Baudissin's conclusions. All the manuscript evidence from before 150 point to the presence of the tetragrammaton in one of four forms. It appears as a Greek transliteration of the name Yahuwah in the form IAO (iota alpha omega), it appears in paleo hebrew script, Assyrian square script or in Greek letters pipi (pai iota pai iota) which looks similar to the Assyrian square script (Jellicoe, 1969; Conzelman, 1969). With the publication of the first manuscript of this kind Waddell concluded Baudissin was wrong (Wadell, 1944).

Howard's (1977) study of the tetragram in the NT takes into account this new evidence.<sup>5</sup> On the basis of this evidence and his analysis he arrives at a very interesting and important conclusion:

From these findings we can now say with almost absolute certainty that the divine name..., was not rendered by *kurios* in the pre-Christian Bible, as so often has been thought. Usually the Tetragram was written out in Aramaic or in paleo-Hebrew or was transliterated into Greek letters (Howard, 1977).

From this conclusion Howard (ibid.) deduces quite reasonably that the NT writers, when citing the LXX or the Greek OT with the tetragrammaton, would have naturally included the tetragram in their citations. For him this would have maintained the distinction which he feels should have been maintained between the Lord God and the Lord Christ. His conclusions however have more recently come under challenge by Pietersma (1984). Having argued that there are four main sources of evidence that point to the priority of the tetragrammaton in the LXX Pietersma tries to show that

<sup>1</sup> From Psalm 117:1 Hallelu et Yahuwah, aineite panta ta ethne ton kurion

<sup>2</sup> This idea of foreigner going back to his people and testifying what great things Yahuwah had done for him may be a reflection on the gospel writers seeing Jesus fulfilling one purpose in Solomons prayer at the dedication of the temple, see 2 Chron 6:32)

<sup>3</sup> Metzger in *A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament* (stuttgart: ubs, 1971) notes “ It may be argued that the primitive reading was *tou kuriou*, which was expanded or supplanted ...in order to denote more precisely the specific character of the baptism”. P 383

<sup>4</sup> Again some manuscripts read his name not the *to onoma to kuriou*

<sup>5</sup> It is actually not so new because Origen argues for this position back in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, however this brings us no closer to the form of the tetragram or a surrogate in the first rescensions of the LXX which were written all 500 years before Origen's time. However it is important evidence for the state of some Greek texts at the time of Origen.

Of the four early texts that have been cited in support of an original tetragram, one gives no evidence at all, a second is non Septuagintal, and a third contains hebraizing revisions (including at least one instance of the tetragram. Only one text, 4QLXXLevb, would seem to have good credentials as a typical exemplar of the LXX (ibid., p. 92).

The four texts Pietersma refers to are P.Fouad 266 (Rahlfs 848), P. Ryl. Gk 458 (Rahlfs 957), 8 HevXIIgr (Rahlfs 943) and 4QLXXLevb. Of these four, the only one which contains IAO as a transliteration of Yahuwah is 4QlxxLevb. This paper is presented as one answer to the criticism of Pietersma (ibi.d).

If then the NT writers were to have come across IAO in their texts it would be that name which they would naturally have incorporated into their citations from the LXX or other texts using that form of the name Iao. Our purpose in this paper is to look at other evidence which would support the idea that the early church not only had IAO in the scriptures they read but included it in their prayers and even in their baptismal confessions.

## 1.2 The Memorial Name in Greek Texts

According to the *Letter to Aristeeas* the translation of the first five books of Moses began in the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.) in the city of Alexandria in Egypt. Although the idea that there were 70 translators is deemed legendary, the name Septuagint or LXX has been retained. Thus began what may be the memorial Yahuwah's first major encounter with the Greek script and Greek beliefs and practices. The writings which demonstrate the use of the name in this language range from 285 B.C. with first translation of the Torah into Greek to after 1000 A.D. with Greek magical texts which reflect earlier Greek practices in the treatment of the name. Thus we are dealing initially with the foundational writings of Hellenistic Judaism. Our texts, then, begin with early fragments of the so called LXX and recensions and developments which sprung from that and dealing with what is called the "Old Greek". We also have the witness of Diodoros of Sicily, Philo, the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, the New Testament, and Josephus. In addition, we have the translations of Aquila, Symmachus, and other Greek translations. We also have the "Christian" Gnostic writings and those of the "Orthodox" Church of the second to tenth century, the Apostolic Fathers, the Apologists particularly Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius, Theodoret and Jerome. In addition we have the Greek "magical" papyri stretching from the second to the eleventh century A.D.

## 2. Main Discussion

### 2.1 That Iao is Yahuwah

The first piece of evidence we will consider that indicates that Iao (iota, alpha, omicron or omega) is in many cases the Greek transliteration of Yahuwah comes from a scroll of the Judean desert. 4QLXXpapLevb (Skehan, 1957; Parsons, 1992) renders the name Yahuwah with the letters *iota alph omega* (IAO). It does this in two passages, namely Leviticus 3:12 and 4:27. This is done in the context of a scripture leaving no doubt that *Iao* here is the equivalent of the memorial name. The pronunciation of the final *heh* apparently left silent. The script used is uncial and the script of the name is the same as the script of the rest of the text, there is nothing there to indicate that the name should be treated in any way different to the rest of the text when it would come to reading it. De Troyer (2005) observes "In this Old Greek Text of the Book of Leviticus the name of God is written □ □ □ □ □ Skehan, the editor of the text, suggests that the reading IAW is more original than  $\kappa\iota\omicron\varsigma$ : "This new evidence strongly suggests that the usage in question goes back for some books at least to the beginning of the Septuagint rendering" (De Troyer, 2005). She also observes the importance of the fact that the name is written simply and with no modification. This indicates no special treatment was assigned to the name in a period when some expect the name to be treated as too holy to be read. This evidence is contrary to that and indicates the name was read as other words in scripture were read. De Troyer (ibid.) notes "The appearance of IAO in the Leviticus scroll has left many scholars baffled. Is it proof that the Tetragrammaton was still pronounced in the first century BCE?" (ibid.).

A partial answer to that telling question may be indicated by our second source of evidence that *Iao* is Yahuwah in the Greek script. Here we turn to the testimony of a pagan from the first century B.C., Diodorus of Sicily (60-30 B. C.). Diodorus had some connection with the Jews and testified to their usage of the name IAW saying "Amongst the Jews Moses pretended that the god surnamed Iao gave him his laws" (Diodorus, 49B.C.; King, 1887, p. 319).

There is then some evidence that seems to indicate the name Yahuwah was present in the earliest Greek translations of the scriptures as opposed to the later and secondary *kurios*. It was present in the form IAO. This is the conclusion of Skehan (1957) and De Troyer (ibid.).

We can go further than this, there is also evidence that seems to indicate that Christians of the second and third century contained the name *Iao* in the scriptures in use in their circles. This evidence is secondary but nevertheless clear. Our first source of this evidence is Tertullian who relates the Valentinian explanation as to the reason the name came to be in the Scriptures. It is related the story of the Gnostic Sophia meeting Horus in the Valentinian myth Tertullian (ANF 03 Latin Christianity its Founder Tertullian).

Try, however, she did, and perhaps would have found Him, had not the self-same Horos, who had met her mother so opportunely, fallen in with the daughter quite as unseasonably, so as to exclaim at her IAO! just as we hear the cry “Porro Quirites” (“Out of the way, Romans!”), or else Fidem Cæsaris!” (“By the faith of Cæsar!”), whence (as they will have it) the name IAO comes to be found in the Scriptures (ibid., p. 511).

We see that Tertullian (160-225) does not dispute the fact that the name *Iao* is in the scriptures but relates the story as to why the Valentinians believe the name is present in the scriptures. This is very important evidence that the scriptures of Christians both “orthodox” and “heterodox” contained the name *Iao* in the second and third century. Considering that there is no textual evidence indicating Christians had the name *Iao* in their scriptures, this evidence has more importance attached to it. If Tertullian did not have IAO in his scriptures he would of course not have paid attention to this story of the Valentinians, but he was clearly aware of the presence of the name in the Scriptures and is relating their tradition as to how it got there. Origen (185-254) is in agreement with Tertullian and the Valentians regarding the presence of IAO in the scripture. In his *Against Celsus* (185-254) chapter 32 Origen (185-254) discusses the schemes of sorcerers. He makes the point that they mix names in their magic using names from the Scripture and names from magic.

It must be noticed, too, that those who have drawn up this array of fictions, have, from neither understanding magic, nor discriminating the holy scripture, thrown everything into confusion; seeing they have borrowed from magic the name Ialdaboth, and Astaphæus, and Horæus, and from the Hebrew Scriptures him who is termed Iao or Jah, and Sabaoth, and Adonæus, and Eloæus. Now the names taken from the Scriptures are names of the one and the same God; which not being understood by the enemies of God, as even themselves acknowledge, led to their imagining Iao was a different God, and Sabaoth another, and Adonæus whom the Scriptures term *adonai*, a third besides, and that Eloæus, whom the prophets name in Hebrew Eloi, was also different (ANF04).

Origen’s understanding shows that IAO was seen as a direct transliteration of Yahuwah, for he may be read as contrasting *Iao* with *Jah*. Another piece of evidence deriving from Origen that he as a member of the second and third century Church; read *Iao* in the scripture and taught on it is shown in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. There he connects the name with the ministry of Jeremiah. He explains that Jeremiah was lifted up by divine elation and the Word came to him. “For *Iao* means etymologically lifting up, elation” (Schaff, 1819-1863). Tertullian (160-225) and Irenæus (120-202) both explain the origin and the function of *Iao* in the Valentinian systems. Of all the Gnostics groups the Valentians were some of the closest to “orthodoxy”. According to some sources Valentinus was a respected teacher in the Catholic Church in Rome sometime in the middle of the second century. Irenæus was asked to expose the Valentians because their beliefs were not so publicly heretical. So Pagels (1979) states “the majority of Christians did not recognize the followers of Valentinus as heretics. Most could not tell the difference between Valentinian and orthodox teaching” (Pagels, 1979, p. 32) Irenæus was trying to smoke out the Valentinians because they were not so obviously different. Valentinus claimed to be a disciple of Theodosias who was a disciple of the Apostle Paul to all intents and purposes to outsiders and even to many insiders the Valentinians during the mid second century were “Christians”. In their tradition the word *Iao* was first spoken rather as an exclamation. For Tertullian this was the Valentinian explanation as to how the word came to be in the Scripture, but for Irenæus it represented the origin of the word (Irenæus, ibid).

Having seen that the name IAO was present not only in pre Christians texts of the Pentateuch and in the Scriptures of the Valentinians and Tertullian, we would naturally expect the name to make its appearance in early Christian liturgy, prayers and teaching.

## 2.2 Christian Gnostic Ascension Confession to Iao

Some Gnostics explain that *Iao* was son of Ialdabot and from Iao derived Sabaoth and four other aeons afterwards. Iao and Sabaoth are both scriptural terms which correspond with the New Testament *kuriou sabaoth*. Origen in Book VI and Chapter XXXI of *Against Celsus* explains that when a sorcerer descended or ascended through the aeons he had certain declarations to make in each realm. He would reach the realm of *Iao* having left the realm of Ialdabot (In some systems of Gnosticism Iao was the son of Ialdaboth). On travelling through the realm he was to say to *Iao*

Thou, O Second Iao, who shinest by night, who art the ruler of the secret mysteries of son and father, first prince of death. And portion of the innocent, bearing down now mine own beard as symbol, I am ready to pass through thy realm, having strengthened him who is born of thee by the living God. Grace be with me; father let it be with me (ANF04., p. 588)<sup>6</sup>.

Here *Iao* seems to be identified with the moon. Gnostics had many ascensions where they went through the realms of different aeons. *Iao* was perceived as one of these aeons. Although Origen identifies the speakers as sorcerers the term Iao, Sabaoth, Father, Son and living God and “grace be with me” all point to Christian or Biblical influences<sup>7</sup>.

## 2.3 Christian Gnostic Baptismal Confession

Perhaps the most striking text is that of a baptismal confession containing *Iao*. In Book I chapter XXI of Irenaeus (180)<sup>8</sup> *Against Heresies* he begins to talk about the views of redemption held by various groups. He covers a number of schemes of redemption where the groups practice different baptisms. He describes how one group sees the baptism initiated by Jesus as that for the remission of sins, but the redemption by the Christ who descended on Jesus as baptism for perfection. Others perceive the baptism as a spiritual marriage and they perform mystic rites based around them. He then describes how some groups use Hebrew words and he gives transliteration of certain words. Finally he comes to a baptismal ceremony which involves a declaration by the initiator and a response by the initiate:

Initiator: I do not divide the Spirit of Christ. Neither the heart nor the supercelestial power which is merciful, may I enjoy thy name, O saviour of truth!

Initiate: I am established, and I am redeemed. I redeem my soul from this age (world), and from all things connected with it *in the name of Iao*<sup>9</sup>, who redeemed his own soul into the redemption of Christ who liveth (ANF01).

Another translation reads

I am strengthened and redeemed, and I redeem my soul from this age, and from all things connected with it in the name of Iao, who redeemed his soul to full redemption in the living Christ<sup>10</sup>.

Ireneus (ibid.) believes these words were initially spoken in Hebrew and he gives an interpretation. The only significant point for our purposes is the fact that this baptismal formula includes a form of the tetragrammaton. Here the establishing, redeeming and redemption of the soul from the world is all declared by the initiate in the name of *Iao* or in Hebrew terms it would have been in the name of *Yahuwah*, thus picking up on the formulaic *beshem Yahuwah* so prevalent in the Old Testament<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.vi.ix.vi.html.

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly in Book I Chapter LXXI of this same book Celsus is said to accuse Jesus of being a sorcerer. Much of made of this idea in the study of Morten Smith Jesus the Magician (Harper and Row: 1978)

<sup>8</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On\\_the\\_Detection\\_and\\_Overthrow\\_of\\_the\\_So-Called\\_Gnosis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On_the_Detection_and_Overthrow_of_the_So-Called_Gnosis) (06/12/2012) It is dated to about 180 because it mentions the Bishop of Rome. See Schaff, Philip (2001) [c. 1885] "Introductory Note to Irenaeus Against Heresies", *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume I, *Against Heresies*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

<sup>9</sup> In Hebrew this would read beshem Yahuwah that popular phrase from the scriptures. Jews also baptised in the name of God and even Toseftah Yad 2:20 points to a connection between the name and immersion.

<sup>10</sup> www.ccel.org/richardson/fathers.xi.i.iii.html?highlight=i-ao

<sup>11</sup> Gen 4:26; Gen 12:8; Psalm 118:10-12.

To find a form of Yahuwah's name in a baptismal confession should not be too surprising; for we find in the NT a clear connection between calling on the name Yahuwah (*kurios* in our texts) and baptism. Acts 2:21 says. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord"<sup>12</sup> (*kurios, Iao*) will be saved. Later on they are urged to "save themselves from the corrupt generation and told to be baptised (Acts 2:38-41)<sup>13</sup>.

This baptismal evidence also supports the idea that *Iao* was a name present in the scripture which then became a part of liturgy. This brings us to the final area we will observe today *Iao* in the prayers of the early Church. Are there texts which indicate that *Iao* as a transliteration of the tetragrammaton entered into the private spiritual life of individual Christians? For these we examine the works of Meyer and Smith (1999), *Ancient Christian Magic Coptics Texts of Ritual Power*. In these selections we find scriptures, charms, spells, prayers and confessions. The important point for our paper is that they show the combined use of the name *Iao* (*Yao* in the translations) with the name of Jesus.

Thus we find in text 36:

MS36 Grant me victories , favour, good luck with N., success with people small and great, whom I may encounter today, during all the hours of the day and the night. For I have before me Jesus Christ , who attends me and accompanies me; behind me Yao Sabaoth Ado[nai]; on my right and [left] the God of Ab[raham, Isaac, and Jacob]; over [my] face... my heart...

s can be seen the writer prays for success. He confesses that in front of him is Jesus Christ and behind him *Iao Sabaoth*. It is a papyrus and dated to around 300CE not so distant from the time of Tertullian with the scriptures containing *Iao*.

### **3. Conclusion**

We see then that *Iao* is present among Christians both Gnostic and "orthodox". It is also present in those termed sorcerers. It is clear from our short survey that the term *Iao* was not only present in pre Christian texts but also in second century Christian texts. What then should be our conclusion? We observed at the start the amazing prevalence of *kurios* in the later NT manuscripts both in citations from the LXX where tetragram was present in Hebrew. We discovered that this term *kurios* is conspicuous by its absence in the early years of the Church up until 150 AD. The form of the name which seems to have been present both in pre Christian times and in the times of the Church is *IAO* although we have no manuscript evidence from the first century we have a lot of secondary evidence from Origen, Tertullian and Ireneus. Although our paper is short it seems clear from the evidence that *Iao* has been in use in the early church much more than perhaps we would have suspected.

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<sup>12</sup>A citation from Joel 2:32 which uses the phrase *beshem yahuwah*

<sup>13</sup> A connection between immersion and calling on the name Yahuwah is also seen in the Jewish tradition. We can see in the Toseftah tractate Yadayim 21

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