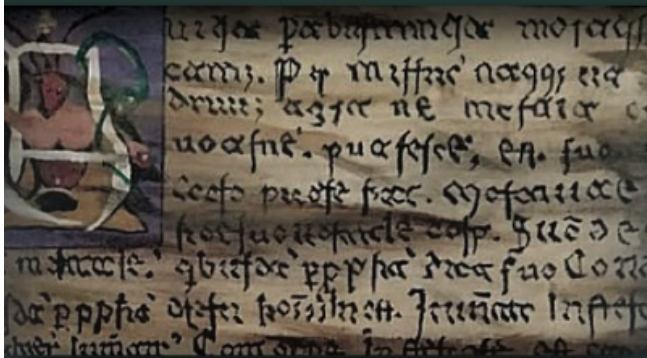


...ESPECIALLY THE PARCHMENTS



Jim Throne

20th century discoveries of ancient writings have changed the understanding of biblical times. Would the recent discovery and translations of dozens of ancient parchments cause even greater changes?

...Especially the Parchments

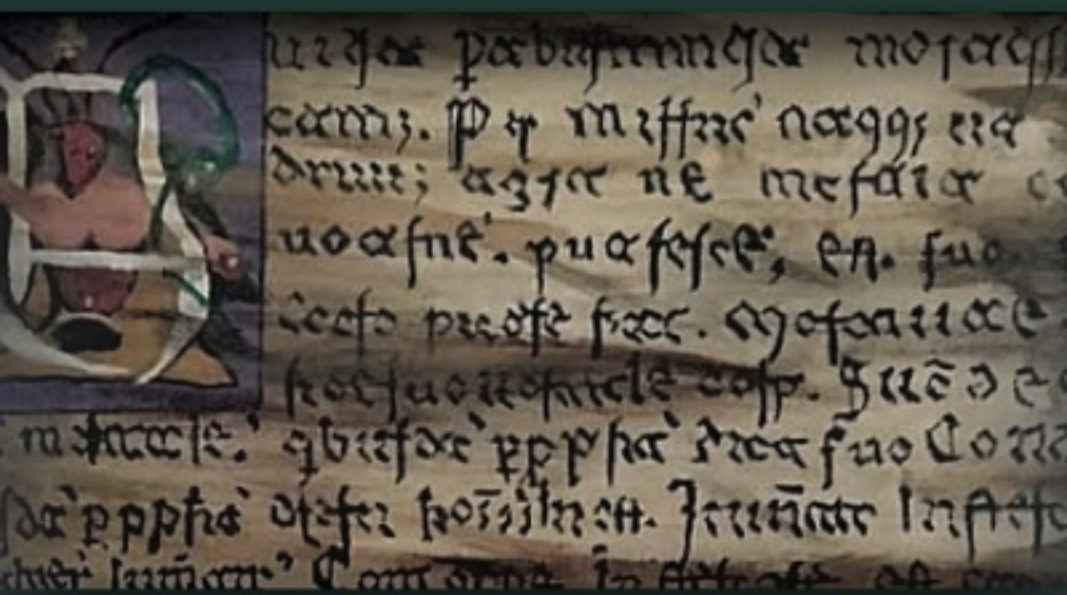
By Jim Throne

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...ESPECIALLY THE PARCHMENTS



Jim Throne

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◆◆◆**Especially the Parchments**

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One

There it is again! I wasn't dreaming. Someone is tapping on the office door.

Sample opened one eye to focus on the pebbled glass door. A shadow stood to the left of the door knob. "Go away!" he gruffed, spewing cookie crumbs from his walrus mustache onto his rotund belly. Doctor Oscar Sample, Professor of Early Christianity at prestigious Saint Tomas the Confessor University, had finished his lunch sometime earlier and had been deep into his reverie. His afternoon siesta. A sacrosanct time to him. A time invaded at great personal risk only by the great unwashed, the unknowing, or even worse, the goddamned administration.

He listened with half an ear to the sounds beyond the door. *Aha! Silence. The 'DO NOT DISTURB' sign must be working.*

Once again he resumed his meditation only to be roused a minute or so later by someone tap-tap-tapping on the glass. The tapping seemed a bit more emphatic.

"Jesus Fuckin' Christ!" he snarled. *Them goddamned kids can't read.* "Go away!" he shouted. "Read the goddamned sign. Office hours start at two and according to my watch, it ain't two yet, goddammit! So go away! Now!"

Of course, by now his nap had been thoroughly destroyed. He tried to conjure up a good Gregorian chant but for some reason all he could generate was '*Help, I need somebody. Help, not just anybody...*'

As he struggled to extricate those lyrics from his frontal lobe, the figure on the other side of the wavy glass began tap-tap-tapping again. This time insistently. "Jesus fuckin' Christ!" he growled under his breath. "It can't be students. By now they'd be cowed by my shouting and blustering. The fear of God. Or at least the fear that this almighty God-incarnate Professor might flunk the little fuckers."

He scratched his belly and pushed his hand between his gut and the desk to pull at the crotch of his trousers. *Y'know, it's probably Wally, on some goddamned pretense. Lessee, what the hell will he fake borrowing this time? Jes' an opportunity to bullshit! Jesus! I wish his ol' lady'd...* The impatience of the rat-a-tat-tat drove his thoughts away. "Alright, Wally, fer God sakes, don't break down the goddamned door!" *Jesus! Les' find out what the creep wants.*

Wally was Walter Thornton. Professor Walter Thorton. The Regents Professor Walter Thorton, a learned expert in international Hinduism. A man who was sought worldwide for his opinions on the historical conflict between Hindus, Buddhists and Islamists. And a royal pain in the royal ass when it came to borrowing - whining and mewling and begging for the most trivial things. File folders or paper clips or rubber bands.

Sample scanned the desk for his glasses, digging under this pile of papers and ferreting under that one before realizing they were perched atop his bald head. He pushed his chair back from the desk. It crashed against the bookcase behind him. The chair back hooked under the second bookshelf from the bottom. He snorted as he laboriously eased his foot from the lowest shelf of the desk before pulling himself to his feet. His corpulence rearranged the papers at the edge of the desk as he did.

He oozed between the desk and a file cabinet stacked with at least two feet of detritus – old research papers, student theses he'd never returned, administration edicts he'd never read. *This fuckin' administration*, he grouched, *needs to understand that some of us larger than life people need something larger than a goddamned eight-by-eight cubbyhole to spend our every waking hour in.*

He limped to the door, his knee threatening to give out again as he practiced his negativistic argument when he came face to face with Wally. He threw open the door. He was about to yell “Whatever you want, Wally, you ain't getting' it!” when, instead he came face to face with a priest. A diminutive man of the cloth, wearing a traditional black Cossack and a funny four-cornered cap with the pom-pom. *A biretta*, thought Sample. The man was carrying an oversized briefcase, and an umbrella. *Must be raining again.*

“Father?” Sample tried to mask his surprise.

“Professor Sample,” the frocked man said, looking up at him, a half-smile across his wan face. He was easily a head shorter than Sample's six-two. And undoubtedly less than half Sample's nearly three hundred pounds. “I'm sorry to interrupt but I need your counsel...”

Sample huffed. “You do realize that you are interrupting my study time, don't you?” he snapped, pointing at the placard on the door. “My office hours do not start until two this afternoon, sir.” Although he wanted to close the door on his intruder, he hesitated doing so. The moral and ethical obligation of civilly greeting a man of God intercepted that less-than-civil action.

“Oh...” The priest looked crestfallen, tearful. “I am truly sorry.” He half-turned before saying, “I was hoping that maybe you could see me now. You see, I need to get back to New Orleans before the Cleric becomes concerned.”

“Whoa here. Did you say you’ve come from New Orleans? Just to see me?”

“Yessir.”

He was astounded. Nobody, particularly a priest, had ever traveled any distance just to see him. He wistfully contemplated his interrupted nap before sighing deeply. “Okay, c’mon in.” His voice emphasized strong resignation. He backed into his office and eased himself back behind his desk, unmindful that this time his butt was un-rearranging those same papers. “Sit down,” he said, easing into his chair.

The man followed Sample into his office, closing the door behind him. He leaned his umbrella against the door where it quickly dripped a sizable puddle. He stood before the desk, holding his briefcase before him, unsure whether he had been truly welcomed into Sample’s inner sanctum.

“You can take a seat, y’know.”

The priest scanned the area around him for a place to sit before looking at Oscar and shrugging.

“Oh!” Sample laughed. “Jes’ scoop them things off onto the floor,” he said, pointing at a pile of papers on the chair nearest the door. The man put the armful of papers on the floor in front of the door and sat on the edge of the chair. His case was now clenched between his knees.

“Okay, padre, what brought you to this godforsaken corner of the universe? It must be truly something special for you to leave the comforts of New Orleans, Bourbon Street and all, to face the elements.” He pointed to the man’s hat that was dripping water onto the papers on the edge of Sample’s desk.

“Oh. Sorry,” the priest said as he quickly doffed his hat. He looked around for a place to hang it, finally depositing it on the door knob where it drip-drip-dripped into another puddle that quickly found its way under the door. “I have something to show you.”

Sample observed the little man while he fussed at the hasps on his briefcase. Wan, pale, with sparse white hair that stuck, brush-like above his ears. Pink watery eyes behind wire Ben Franklin-shaped glasses. Blotchy flushed cheeks, a weak chin, a wispy goatee. *Almost albino*, he thought, estimating his age as thirty, thirty-five at most.

“I... I... I’m sorry I interrupted your lunch,” the priest said sheepishly, nodding at the disordered boxes and papers on Sample’s desk. He continued to fuss at his briefcase.

“Finished!” Sample belched as he wrapped the carcass of Uncle Wrigley’s oven-broasted chicken in napkins, closed the deli container and deposited it in the wastebasket. He brushed crumbs from his scraggly salt-and-pepper beard onto his ample belly and onto the floor. He picked a small morsel from his well-stained University tie. He thought a moment about tossing it in the wastebasket before popping it in his mouth.

“Young man, while you are digging for whatever it is that’s in that satchel I believe you said you came here to specifically see me. Perhaps I can counsel you about this artifact that is apparently secured in that bag without seeing it. Can you describe it to me?”

“When the priest shook his head no, Sample said, in a most bombastic tone, “Well then, let’s get to it, shall we?”

“Well...” the priest hesitated in his effort to open the briefcase. “You probably don’t remember me, but I took some of your classes...”

Whenever a student started a conversation that way, Oscar’s eyes would either involuntarily roll back in his head or glaze over. “Son,” he boomed, interrupting. “I’ve been teaching for a long time. Prob’ly before you were born. I’ve attempted to teach a whole lotta kids.” He hooked his hands under his right knee and hoisted his foot onto the second drawer of the desk, grunting as he did. “Gotta trick knee,” he grunted mostly to himself.

“Yeah, I know. Old football injury. Baltimore Colts, fourth period against Giants, 1978, third quarter, defensive lineman fell on it.”

“You know?” he snickered. “So, you been doin’ a little background work, have you?”

“No,” the priest said with a half giggle. “You told us.”

“Told you? You mean, you actually did take one of my course?”

“Yeah. I think you told us during your course on ‘Origins of Greco-Roman languages.’”

Sample grunted appreciatively.

The priest continued, “and again, during your course, ‘The Source of Judeo-Christian Schism.’”

Sample grunted again, a little less appreciatively.

“.and again...”

“Okay! ’Nuff! So why the hell are you here? Now?”

“Sorry.” The priest stopped, casting his eyes to the floor. Sample sat glaring at him. After a long silence, the priest coughed once, twice, and said

meekly, "Well, you see, it was something you talked about in the course you taught on medieval religion."

"Good course. Taught it three, four times," Oscar guffawed, picking at a spot atop his nearly bald pate. "Gotta lotta flack from the bastards in History. Said I stole their course. Bitched to the dean. So, no more medieval religion." He paused before asking, "Izzat what you came about? Grade was too low or somethin'?"

The priest laughed. "No, sir. I... Well, let me start at the beginning... That is, if you have the time."

"Always got time for the pious!" he guffawed. "By the way, you know me but I don't know you." He abruptly leaned up out of his chair, wiped the chicken grease off his hand on his trouser leg, and extended it across the desk. Awkwardly as his gimpy leg was still propped precariously on the desk drawer. The priest shied at Sample's sudden action before smiling and shaking his hand. *A perfectly pious shake*, Sample thought, as his meat hook enveloped the priest's. *Clammy, cold, bony. A weak grip. Like a girl's.*

"So, who the hell... Sorry, who the heck are ya?" he said, slumping back into his desk chair.

"I'm Julian Mooney, professor. After I graduated from here, I was accepted at University of Saint Mary of the Lake. That's in Chicago. I was ordained as a transitional deacon two years ago. This year I received ordination as a priest and was assigned to the Archdiocese in New Orleans. I arrived there after Archbishop Patrick Sullivan died. Ever since then my task has been to catalogue the Archbishop's library before the new Archbishop arrives. I was nearly finished when I came across something that I was hoping you could help me with."

He returned to the briefcase, finally undoing the closure. He extracted a common manila folder and carefully opened it. It contained what appeared to be nut-colored sheets that appeared fragile. He studied them a moment, sighed, and laid them on the desk before Oscar. "Professor, can you tell me what these are?"

Sample was about to reach for them when he remembered the proper protocol. He eased his leg from the desk drawer and extracted a pair of gloves. Cotton. Lint-free. Extra-extra large. He struggled them on and reached for the sheets. The priest had proffered two thin translucent sheets, slightly smaller than standard paper. He carefully slid his hands under the first and lifted it toward the light that filtered

through the office door. It had writing on both sides. All the edges were ragged but the writing area was absent folds or missing sections.

After examining it for several moments, he set it aside and carefully lifted the second. It too contained writing on both sides. But it also had small, two-inch square drawings on both sides. Its edges were jagged and it had an unrepaired tear part way across its bottom.

Sample fished his Holmesian magnifier from the drawer and scanned the drawings. They were illuminations - colored drawings that decorated the first letters at the beginnings of indented lines. One letter was Greek. Pi. Sample couldn't make out the other letter. Around each letter were what appeared to be biblical scenes. But not classical scenes. Instead naked men and women engaged in sexual activities with each other and with animals. Goats, sheep.

"Your Archbishop was a randy old codger," Sample laughed. "Pretty neat pornography, I'd say." He glanced at the priest, who blushed red at his glance.

He put down the illuminated sheet and returned to the first one. Both sheets were so thin that script and images could easily be read through from one side to another. One side had three paragraphs filling nearly all the sheet. There were five paragraphs on the other, filling the entire sheet. Oscar thought there were three distinct languages there, each character smaller than 6 point. He counted over a hundred lines on the completed page. There was little space between the lines.

"Perfectly laid out parallel lines, top to bottom," He mused. "And besides, scriptio continua."

"What...?" the priest asked, in a whisper, so as not to disturb the Professor's thoughts.

He raised one eyebrow at the priest. "No punctuation, no separation of words. You shoulda learned that in at least one of my classes."

Father Julian reddened again.

He turned toward the loft window and held the sheet up to more natural daylight. *Not only is there read-through, there are layers of writing on each side. One language is Latin. An early medieval form. Uncial. This one, he thought, focusing on the second set of paragraphs, appears to be a form of Greek. The third set of paragraphs baffled him. He did not recognize the language or even any potential derivative of it. Maybe cursive Hebrew? Same time as the others?*

At the top of a page was written in Medieval Latin: "Mathias, copy..." He turned the copy over. The Latin writing was the second paragraph down.

“Erasmus, you need to practice...” *Instructions! Instructions to students!* He was about to tell this to the priest, but decided against it.

It was only after several minutes of examination and cogitation that he remembered that his visitor was still there and still waiting for his input. He gingerly placed the sheets on the edge of the desk, sat back, put his foot back on the desk drawer, formed a teepee with his fingers, and looked hard at Father Julian.

“Father,” he said after a long moment, during which time the priest fidgeted under his stare. “Do you think these are real?”

“I dunno. Perhaps.” He stammered his words.

“You were hoping they were, weren’t you?” Sample snorted. “So that you could sell them on the black market, right? Make a small fortune, or maybe a large one. And then what? Get rid of that oppressive frock, find a willing chick, or maybe two?”

“No, no!” Father Julian became agitated. “That’s not true! I mean, I’ve pledged my life to the work of Jesus Christ, our Savior...”

“Yeah, yeah,” Sample interrupted. “Well, what if I told you that these were fakes?”

“Fakes? What do you mean?” The priest’s eyes grew huge.

“I mean I think you’ve been hoodwinked, snookered, taken for the proverbial ride, young man.” He pointed at the sheet with the writing. “Though, I must admit,” he mused. “This is a pretty good forgery, if I say so myself.”

“How... How... How do you know it’s a forgery?” the priest continued to stammer.

“Well, lessee,” Sample said, rubbing his chin. “According to the Latin, the forger makes it appear to be seventh, maybe eighth century. My guess is that the writing here is supposed to be an exercise.”

“What do you mean?”

He pointed to the page, now laying on the priest’s folder. “On this side, the top paragraph is in Medieval Latin. The next one is in early Greek, I think. And I can only guess what the third one is. Maybe Hebrew, Aramaic. So, the teacher was telling the student to copy something in Greek and something in whatever. On the other side, the Latin says something about practice. More important is the ductus.”

“The what?”

“Ductus. The cursive nature of the writing.” Sample sighed. *Another thirty second lesson coming up*, he thought. “Each of us writes with a certain mannerism, style and speed. When someone copies what we

write, he cannot duplicate our ductus. That's why we know that Paul wrote Romans but not Titus. Understand?"

The priest frowned before nodding in the affirmative.

Oscar leaned back and smiled smugly, again picking at the top of his head. "A nice job for a forgery!"

"But... But..." The priest stammered as he slumped in the chair, his eyes downcast to the floor. After a long silence, he sighed before saying, "Doctor Sample, can you read what it says?"

The priest's request caught him off-guard. He'd been able to read a smattering of the Medieval Latin, a couple of the Greek words and none of the rest. "Ah, ah, well," he harrumphed. "It'll take some time for me to work through some of this," he said guardedly. "Why don't you leave these with me for a few days..."

His words triggered frenzy in the priest who leaped from his chair, his eyes wild. "Oh, no, I can't! I've got to return them to the rest." He grabbed at his umbrella. His action caused it to slide to the floor. Flustered, he groped for it again, without success.

"Whoa!" Sample said. "Did you say 'the rest'? Are you telling me that there are more of these?"

Julian blushed again. "Yessir. Quite a few..."

"Father," Sample said quietly as he carefully closed the folder over the sheets. "Please sit." The priest hesitated. His umbrella had now slid partly under the chair he'd been sitting on.

"Why should I, Professor?"

"Because I asked you to, Father. And because I want you to tell me about the rest."

The priest slowly sat on the chair, in exactly the same manner as earlier.

Oscar ceremoniously stripped away his gloves and dropped them back into the drawer. "How many more of these are there?"

"I don't know, exactly," Julian whispered. "Maybe five... six..."

"Five or six?"

"...dozen..."

"Ah, Father Julian," Sample said even more quietly, a smirk growing under his mustache. "Please understand what I am about to say. I am an old man. I do not enjoy surprises. Of any nature. Particularly when it comes to this type of surprise. Do I make myself clear, sir?"

When the priest nodded, Oscar continued, "You did say, five or six dozen, didn't you? Like sixty or seventy, right?"

When the priest nodded again, his face now blotchy,

“You know, it’s not nice to fool an old professor, right?” He smiled patronizingly, casually nudging the folios back to the priest. “Let’s put it this way, Father. Either you’re trying to put somethin’ over on your old professor or someone’s set you up. So which is it?”

“What... What do you mean?” Julian stammered, his face continuing to redden.

“I mean, one or two medieval parchments might be real. And each worth four, maybe five figures. More than sixty ‘medieval’ parchments, in this condition, maybe two or more codices. Maybe half-a-million. Aggregate? Think about it for a moment or two, Father. Think! Even a naïve person could smell fake!”

Julian’s face turned blotchy. He slowly rose from his seat, His lower lip quivered and he wrung his hands. “Professor,” he said, obviously struggling to keep control. “I came here in good faith. I thought you were one of the few learned people who could help me understand these pages. Instead...” He paused, clenching and unclenching his fingers. “Instead, I am portrayed as naïve. A dupe. An ignoramus. I resent your demeaning and belittling attitude, sir.”

With that, he stood and carelessly tossed the folder into his case. Oscar gasped at that cavalier action. “Good day!” he said, turning toward the door and opening it. But the door opened only part way. The pile of reports he’d stacked there earlier had wedged against it. As the priest yanked at the door, his umbrella fell across the pile, jamming itself under it.

“Whoa, there!” Sample pulled his leg off the desk drawer and laboriously hoisted himself to his feet, the chair again endangering the bookcase contents. “Let’s not get so hasty, my man! If you’re so goddamned sure those things are real, you’re gonna hafta tell me why you think they’re not forgeries.”

The priest stopped hauling on the jammed door and turned toward his former teacher. He pulled himself fully upright, and glared at him. “Because, sir, they were hidden,” he said in measured tones. “If they weren’t real, why would anyone want to hide them away? And why hadn’t anyone found them? For decades? Or maybe even longer?”

“Before you depart with your treasure, can you tell me why you think they were hidden?”

“They... were...” It was apparent to Sample that the priest was struggling to speak.

“So you’re not gonna tell me where you found them, right?”

When the man shook his head no, Sample pointed to the briefcase. “And you are telling me the truth. That there are dozens of those in there?”

“Yes, sir. But not in here. In the Archdiocese. Several packets, each wrapped in coarse cloth and tied with silk ribbons. Maybe ten sheets to a packet.”

“Can you get access to them? All of them?”

The priest nodded. “But they must remain hidden.”

“How do you suppose anyone can determine their authenticity if they remain hidden?”

“I can get them from hiding, but only for a little while.”

“In other words, Father, you are stealing them?”

“No! I must return them to their hiding place before...”

He left the sentence hang. Sample, stunned, collapsed back in his chair, again exciting the artifacts on the bookshelf behind him. *Is this some kind of joke?* He remembered the TV program from his youth and wondered whether his office door would open and someone would yell, ‘Candid Camera!’

“...before someone in the church discovers that you took them,” he muttered. “These belong to the Church, don’t they, Father?”

The priest reddened and slowly nodded, his eyes downcast.

“And it is your understanding that they were hidden so long ago that no one in the current Church knows they exist, right?”

The priest nodded again.

“How many other people at your operation know about them?”

“I believe that I’m the only one, sir.” The priest had once again sat, again on the edge of the seat. “I have told no one about them.”

“And who approved of your visit to me?”

“My superior, Father Jacob. Except he approved for me to return to Chicago to visit an aged aunt who may be dying.”

“Father,” Sample said, his voice becoming authoritarian. “Do you have an aged aunt in Chicago?”

“No sir. I lied. I needed a reason to seek your help.”

Sample sighed a deep sigh. “Father Julian...” he started, paused for a long moment, rubbing a spot on his temple around and around. “If you truly want me to help you determine the authenticity of those documents, it will be necessary for me to see the entire cache.”

Before the priest could object, he continued, “If they have been hidden for a long time, bringing them here for me to examine should not cause any

consternation with your bosses. After all, you said that no one knows about them, right?”

When the priest nodded, he continued, “Does that make sense to you?”

“Yessir.”

“How many times can you use the ‘aged aunt’ ruse on your superior?”

“Maybe one or two more times, sir.”

Sample sighed again. “Well, lessee, if visiting your ailing aunt becomes a problem, I am sure that we can find you a suitable real-life stand-in. So, the next time you visit “her,” bring the entire cache. I’ll copy them here and you can return the originals to their hiding place. We may need one or two for authentication. You know, carbon dating, chemical analysis. We wouldn’t damage them. Just test small portions of them. Understand?”

After a long silence, the priest shrugged and stood, again. “Please do not tell anyone that I was here,” he said in a hoarse voice.

“I cannot promise that. I will need to bring in colleagues, experts in evaluating old documents. But you will meet all of them and I am certain that all will be discrete in dealing with you, the documents, and your position in New Orleans.”

Sample stood once again. “Before you go, I would like to make Xerox copies of those.” He again pointed to Julian’s briefcase.

* * *

A half-hour later, the priest had unjammed his umbrella and located his hat. After a perfunctory handshake, he quickly departed to brave the torrential rain. Although he’d let Oscar copy the originals he adamantly refused to let him keep the originals even overnight. Even as the man’s footsteps echoed down the hall, Sample was creating scenario after scenario.

Three

“Oscar, we need to get the original!” It was Athena. It was also after five the following morning. Sample had tried twice to ignore the phone. He had shut his answerer off and so the phone rang and rang. Finally he acquiesced to answer it.

“Yeah!” That was all he could muster. *Gotta pee* was all he could think about.

“I’m on my way over. I wanna read you what I got here! After that, we’ll need to contact your priest!” There was a dial tone long before he could ask her if she had any idea what time it was. Or why it couldn’t wait for a decent hour.

He was in the shower when she banged on the door. He opened the door dripping wet, only his loins wrapped in a towel.

“Cute!” she said as she blew past him, to the table. She immediately flipped on the lamp, sat and unfurled the copy along with a handful of printer paper. “Okay! Ready?”

“Want coffee?” She was wearing the same outrageous outfit from the day before. *She hasn’t been to bed*, he thought. *Something on those pages must have stoked her boiler to have caused her to work through the night.*

She ignored him. “Here’s what I got off the computer so far. ‘...(something) division among (unknown). Pharisees (some names) continue (something about our Savior). (Something, something) Barnabas has returned (something). (something) Corinth. (Something) Erenius (something, something, something, something about the Lord) Hellenists. Barnabas (something, something) Ann (I think), Ruth,...’ It ends there, in mid-sentence. Oscar,” her voice becoming increasingly shrill. “I think this is real!”

He said nothing. Instead he headed to the kitchen and filled the coffee urn. He busied himself with the coffee grounds, mugs, sugar, and milk.

“Oscar? Did you hear a goddamned thing I said? I mean, man, I hope like hell you were paying attention? I said, I think this is real!” she shrieked, waving the sheaf of papers over her head.

“Sounds like a whole bunch of gibberish wrapped in ‘somethings,’” he said after a long time, his back to her as he pattered with the coffee fixings. “What about the stuff below?”

“Don’t know,” she admitted. Her voice returned to its normal nasality. “Can’t even tell what the language is. Hebrew, maybe. But I can’t parse

anything out of the writing. “But...!” she said forcefully. “What about what I read to you. Is it real?”

“Sounds pretty good,” he admitted. “Still...”

“Still, what!”

“Still, you need to figure out what all those ‘somethings’ are.”

“Yeah,” she conceded. “But you gotta admit that this is pretty good for only a couple of hours.”

“Yeah.” He sounded less than enthusiastic.

“Oscar, do you think...?”

“Do I think what? Do I think it’s biblical?” Sample asked quietly. “Could be... Savior, Barnabas, Pharisees, Hellenists... But, take a deep breath, Athena. You and I both know that there are a lot of good forgers out there. Remember the Syrian Codex? Ruse, right? ‘Member? We got sucked into that right up to our titties.”

The silence was so long that he asked, “Athena? Are you still there?”

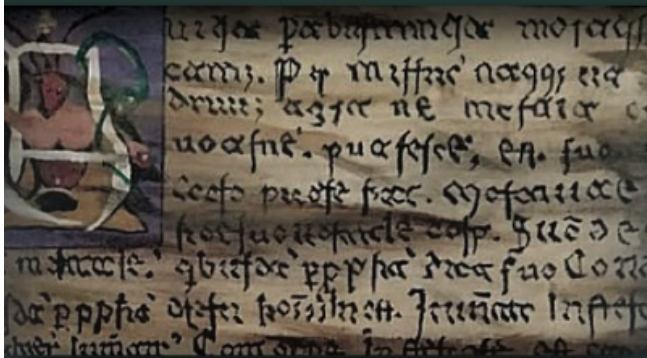
“Yeah. Titties,” she said, whispering. “You sure as hell got ‘us’ into one helluva jam over that goddamned thing, didn’t you?” When he didn’t respond, she asked, “So? How do we go about finding out whether this shit is real?”

“First,” he said, pouring two mugs of coffee. “We need to talk to Father Julian.”

“Great! You know how to get ahold of him, right? So, we’ll do it today!”

He carried two mugs to the table and sat one before her. He took a long drag from his cup, unmindful that it was ungodly hot. “I’m not sure. Let me do some digging. And no, ‘we’ won’t talk with him.” He emphasized the ‘we’. “I’ll talk with him.”

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