



# TYCHE

Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte  
Papyrologie und Epigraphik

Herausgegeben von

Gerhard Dobesch, Hermann Harrauer  
Peter Siewert und Ekkehard Weber

Band 2, 1987

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LESLIE S. B. MACCOULL

P. Cair. Masp. II 67188 Verso 1 — 5  
The *Gnostica* of Dioscorus of Aphrodito\*

The first five lines of the verso of P. Cair. Masp. II 67188 contain a text described by Maspero as “une prière fortement tentée de gnosticisme”. This text can be more fully understood in the light of the Coptic material from Nag Hammadi, discovered long after Maspero’s editio princeps. Several of its elements are of interest both linguistically and in the context of sixth-century Egyptian Christianity.

I first reproduce Maspero’s text of 1913:

[Ϝ Ἐνορκίζω] σε, κ(ύρι)ε π[αν]τοκράτωρ πρωτογεν[έτωρ] ρ [α]ὐτογενέτωρ  
ἀσπερμολόγητε,  
..... στεφανη ὁμοπαντεπόπτης, σὺ καὶ Εἰάω Σαβαὼ Βρινθαω, ἔχε με υἱόν,  
παρ[α]φύλαξόν με ἀπὸ παντός πονηροῦ πν(εῦμ)ατος (καὶ) ὑπόταξόν μου πᾶν  
πν(εῦμ)α δαιμονίων φθειροποιῶν τῶν ἀκαθάρτων, ἐπίγαια, ὑπόγαια,  
5 ἔνυδρα (καὶ) χερσαῖα καὶ πᾶσα σκιά Ϝ

The text was republished in 1931 by Preisendanz as PGM II P. 13a (p. 222). Preisendanz restored the missing first word more plausibly as ἔξορκίζω, “I invoke (you)”, as usual in magical texts both Greek and Coptic. However, after autoptic examination of the papyrus in Cairo I see no palaeographical basis for his emendation of the last word in line 1 to ἀσπερμογόνητε. Dioscorus’ interesting hapax will have to stand for the present.

Of the four epithets by which Dioscorus invokes the Lord (κῆ) in line 1, παντοκράτωρ needs no comment. But the pairing of the next two, ‘First-begetter’ and ‘Self-begetter’, leads us straight into the world of Nag Hammadi Gnosticism. Πρωτογενέτωρ occurs<sup>1</sup> in the tractate known as the Letter of *Eugnostos the Blessed*<sup>2</sup> and in its sibling tractate, the

\* I should like to thank Kent Rigsby of Duke University; Kathleen McVey of Princeton Theological Seminary; Stephen Morse of The Rockefeller University; and especially David Packard, for letting me look up ἀσπερμολόγητος on the Ibycus TLG. And, as ever, Mirrit Boutros Ghali (Wisdom 8:9, 16 Douay).

<sup>1</sup> S.v. in F. Siegert, *Nag-Hammadi-Register*, Tübingen 1982, 298. I am grateful to Kent Rigsby and Duke University for the opportunity to use Duke’s COPLEX (Coptic Lexicon) computer program to look up words in the Nag Hammadi corpus.

<sup>2</sup> For a different interpretation see P. Bellet, *The Colophon of the Gospel of the Egyptians*, in R. McL. Wilson, ed., *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis*, Leiden 1978, 44—65, (NHS 14); according to which ‘Eugnostos’ is a title, not a name. On this tractate see the review of the Athens 1977 edition and study of D. Trakatellis in *Modern Greek*, by R. van den Broek in *VigChr* 33 (1979) 405—406, and R. van den Broek, *Jewish and Platonic Speculations in early Alexandrian Theology: Eugnostus ...*, in B. A. Pearson/J. E. Goehring, edd., *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, Philadelphia 1986, 190—203; cf. A. H. B. Logan, *The Epistle of Eugnostos and Valentinianism*, in M. Krause, ed., *Gnosis and Gnosticism*, Leiden 1981, 66—75 (NHS 17).

*Sophia of Jesus Christ*, as an epithet of the Adam of Light, the Immortal Man, and the Son of Man. For its part, ἀδοτογενέτωρ also occurs in *Soph. Jes. Chr.*<sup>3</sup>, as well as in the *Apocryphon of John* found together with it in the Berlin Gnostic papyrus codex<sup>4</sup>. The word is also found in the Paris Magical Papyrus (PGM IV), l. 1561, as an epithet of the “ever-living God Iαδ̄”. We must consider the *Sitz im Leben* of those earlier Gnostic texts, and hypothesize as to how Dioscorus in sixth-century Aphrodito (or Antinoe) could have come to have knowledge of this kind of technical vocabulary.

For the moment, to proceed in the order of the papyrus: the hapax ἀσπερμολόγητος at the end of line 1 deserves comment. At first it looks indeed to be some sort of epithet referring to the incarnation and divine birth — without human insemination — of Christ: hence Preisendanz’s attempted emendation. But in its form the word itself as it stands on the papyrus is closest to the New Testament hapax of Acts 17,18, σπερμολόγος, which is what the Athenians mockingly called Paul: “this babblers”. Dioscorus reworks both word and content. The alpha privative is of course a common way to make a divine epithet; Dioscorus’ term has, also, not the active -λόγος, but the medio-passive -λόγητος. I am led to think that the σπέρματα in Dioscorus’ concept have something in common with the Stoic λόγος σπερματικός of Philo, Origen, and Justin. Dioscorus is invoking God/Christ as one who is not subject to the natural laws that operate here in the sublunary world. “I adjure you, Lord Almighty”, he writes, “First-begetter, Self-begetter, you who are not bound by the ordinary laws of nature: ... take me under your protection (l. 2)”. We shall see below what Dioscorus is asking to be protected from.

In line 2, the patristic epithet παντεπόπτης is favored by Cyril of Alexandria as a title of Christ (Lampe s. v.): Dioscorus, ever a Cyrillian<sup>5</sup>, has compounded it with ὄμο- to create a new divine attribute, “the one who beholds all things at once”, ὄμοπαντεπόπτης; reminiscent of the Boethian definition of the simultaneously beheld plenitude of eternity in the mind of God (in Coptic ΠΡΕΦΝΑΥ ΕΠΤΗΡΥ 2 ΙΟΥΣΟΠ or the like). The previous -φανη on the papyrus combined with the traces of letters just preceding might possibly be read as πυριφανή (as in P.Mag. Par. 3023, also in the context of a request for protection against demons). Of the three Gnostic divine names, Iao Sabao(th) are universally found; but I can find no parallels to Brinthao. Is it a hybrid from βριθω, “the Preponderant One” (cf. Wisdom 9, 15 LXX)?

After the invocation comes the request. In line 3 Dioscorus asks the deity to protect him from “every evil spirit”. To the πονηρὸν πνεῦμα of l. 3 and the πνεῦμα δαιμόνιον φθειροποιόν of l. 4 we may compare the ‘evil spirit’ or ‘demon’ cited as grounds for divorce in the contracts of divorce drawn up by Dioscorus during his career as a notary: P.Cair. Masp. II 67153, 11—12, φθονοῦ πονηροῦ δαίμονος (7. v. 568); III 67311, 15—16, ἐκ σκαιοῦ πονηροῦ δαίμονος (ca. 570); I 67121, 9, πονηροῦ δαίμονος φθονήσαντος (15. ix. 573); II 67154, 9—10, ἐκ σκαιοῦ δαίμονος ἐπιφθονήσαντος. These demonic disruptive presences were very real in sixth-century Egypt<sup>6</sup>: lawyers acknowledged that they broke up households, monks fought against them, amulets were produced to repel them. Dioscorus

<sup>3</sup> S.v. in *Nag-Hammadi-Register*, 223—224.

<sup>4</sup> See W. C. Till, *Texte und Untersuchungen* 60 (1955).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. L. S. B. MacCoull, *BSAC* 24 (1982) 103—110.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. P. R. L. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 1978, 20—21; 90—91.



may have easily come to think that his financial troubles, often alluded to in his poems, were caused by a more than human agency.

He asks (ll. 4—5) to be guarded against “unclean spirits, whether above the earth or under the earth, in the wet or the dry land”. The same juxtaposition of ἐπίγειος/ὕπόγειος is found in the Paris Magical Papyrus, line 3043, in the same anti-demon spell cited above. “The wet and the dry”, the inundated and uninundated land of Egypt where uncanny powers might lurk, seems to be an original formulation contributed by Dioscorus.

It remains to speculate on how Dioscorus may have become acquainted with the sort of Gnostic texts deposited at Nag Hammadi. Chenoboskion was just across the river from Shenoute’s White Monastery, an establishment from which, according to some<sup>7</sup>, Shenoute himself wrote anti-Gnostic denunciations and even sallied forth with bands of his monks to destroy Gnostic books — thus showing awareness of their existence. We know that in the sixth century there was contact between Aphrodito/Antinoe and the White Monastery: on 31. iii. 567 Dioscorus drew up the will of Flavius Theodore, *exceptor* on the staff of the Duke of the Thebaid (P.Cair. Masp. III 67312), in which Theodore bequeathed landed property in several nomes as well as his family house in Antinoe to the White Monastery (ll. 38—40, 52—79), to be used for pious purposes and for ransoming captives of the Blemmyes. (Cf. also Dioscorus’ fragmentary poem, P.Cair. Masp. III 67338, 2—3.) One might hypothesize a transmission of Gnostic writings from Sohag downriver to Antinoe<sup>8</sup>, and/or all the way to Alexandria where Dioscorus had studied philosophy as well as rhetoric<sup>9</sup>. The thread is admittedly slender. But Dioscorus, a poet and lawyer ever in search of the m o t j u s t e, always chose his words with exactitude and from a wide range of sources covering many different currents of thought of his time, of both the ‘high’ and the ‘popular’ culture. In these five lines we see him, in typical Egyptian fashion, making his own deal with the unseen.

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<sup>7</sup> Bellet, *Colophon*, (above n. 2) 64—65.

<sup>8</sup> The Horapollon papers were part of Dioscorus’ archive: P.Cair. Masp III 67295.

<sup>9</sup> L. S. B. MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphrodito and John Philoponus*, *Studia Patristica* (Kalamazoo), to appear.