"STONE" AND "WOOD" IN OXYRHYNCHUS PAPYRUS I

BY

A. F. WALLS

Whatever the relationship between Oxyrhynchus Papyri 1, 654, 655 on the one hand, and the Coptic text of the Gospel of Thomas on the other, it seems clear that the latter represents a different, and probably more Gnostic, recension of the material, and not a simple translation of the Greek of the fragments; and thus that independent exegesis of each recension is necessary. 1

This has been particularly recognised for the fifth saying of O.P. 1 and its parallels, since the two members of the Oxyrhynchus logion are found in different contexts in Thomas.

The Greek, very uncertain in its first member, reads 2


In Thomas we have

Jesus said: Where there are three gods, they are gods; where there are two or one, I am with him. (Log. 30).3

Jesus said: I am the light that is above them all, I am the All, the All came forth from Me and the All attained to Me. Cleave a (piece of) wood, I am there; lift up the stone and you will find Me there. (Log. 77).


2 The text is that of H. G. Evelyn White, The sayings of Jesus from Oxyrhynchus, 1920, p. 35, who adopts the restoration of Blass for the first member. Even if the Coptic Thomas has reduced confidence in this brilliant conjecture (cf. Wilson, op. cit., p. 121) there is no major uncertainty about the second member, which is our main concern here.

3 The enumeration and translation of the Coptic Thomas is always that of A. Guillaumont, H.-C. Puech, G. Quispel, W. Till and Yassah 'Abd al Masih, The Gospel according to Thomas, 1959.
Interpreters of Thomas commonly, and doubtless rightly, read the last saying in a pantheistic, or, more strictly, a "panchristic" Gnostic sense: Christ the light, the All, the source and end of all, indwells the All: He is to be found under every stone and in every tree. Even when only the Oxyrhynchus version of the saying was extant, this interpretation was not infrequently adopted. In the Oxyrhynchus version, however, the context is less obviously in favour of it. The pronouncement beginning "I am the light" is absent, and the first member of the logion (corresponding to Thomas log. 30) implies the ubiquity of Christ only in the sense of Mt. xviii. 20 and xxviii. 19. Shorn of this support from context, a "panchristic" meaning in the words is by no means obvious; for why should the presence be found under the stone, and not in it, as with the wood? Moreover, on the panchristic interpretation, Εἰρήσεις would be meaningless; whereas, following as it does the two imperatives, it looks uncommonly like a promise to be fulfilled, with all the solemnity of the "finding" in the first saying of O.P. 654.

Another line of interpretation, associated particularly with Harnack and recently given new force by Jeremias, has achieved much popularity. Briefly, this sees the raising of the stone and the cleaving of the wood as symbolic of manual occupations, and the

---

6 Kasser, loc. cit., holds that the "signification panthéiste" would be evident in any setting. Cf. A. J. B. Higgins, Non-Gnostic Sayings in the Gospel of Thomas, Novum Testamentum IV, 1960, p. 302, where it is held that the meaning is not drastically different in the two contexts. Dr Higgins, however, does not closely define the meaning in a pantheistic sense.
7 Corresponding to Thomas, Logion 2. Cf. J. Jeremias, Unknown Sayings of Jesus, ET 1957, p. 96, who points to "the twice repeated use of the imperative in place of a protasis with the apodosis added in parataxis" as one of the marked Semitic features of the language.

The same consideration would militate against the view that the wood and stone figure the Cross and Tomb. This view, put forward long ago for the Greek fragments (cf. White, p. 39), has been revived for Thomas by M. J. Doresse, L'Evangile selon Thomas, 1959, pp. 188 f.