A NOTE ON ΠΑΝΑΤΙΚΤΟC IN VISIO DOROTHEI 11*

BY

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The editors of the Bodmer papyrus poem Vision of Dorotheos (P. Bodmer XXIX, edd. A. Hurst et al., Geneva 1984) call attention at several points to the hapax epithet πανατικτος applied in line 11 of the poem to the deity. This unusual word appears to be unique in early Christian literature: its philosophical background and content are of interest to students of Christian thought in the first five centuries.

It has recently been hypothesised by Professor James M. Robinson that the Bodmer 'Codex of Visions' containing this poem and others yet to be published once belonged to the library of St Pachomius' monastery at Pbow (Chenoboskion). Such an original home for the manuscript might help to lead us further toward a source and an intellectual background for the unusual epithet being discussed.

The text of lines 10-12 of the Horasis Dorotheou runs (edn., p. 53):

[και ἰδέσθαι
ἀμβρόσιον πανατικτον ἐνι μεγάροιον ἀνακτα
αὐτοφυή:'...

The editors translate: '...et que je voyais dans le palais le Seigneur immortel, inengendré, né de Lui-même' (p. 81): '...and to see in the (heavenly) hall the Lord, immortal, totally not born, grown of himself.' All three of these epithets merit consideration in context.

First, αὐτοφυής. As well as being the word employed by Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion in Isa 37:30, 'what grows of itself', this is the striking opening epithet in the third-century Oracle of Oenoanda: [Α]ὐτοφυής, ἀδίδακτος, ἀμήτωρ, ἀστυφέλικτος runs the first line of the inscription. The editors of the Vision comment that the word indicates the creative power of God alone, none other (p. 29), and cite as parallels Nonnus' Paraphrasis of John 1. 3 αὐτόφυος (not quite the same metaphor), αὐτογένεθλος in the ps.-Apollinarius Psalms paraphrase (quite different; see below), and the juxtapositions in Synesius’ poems of αὐτοπάτωρ/προπάτωρ/ἀπάτωρ and τίκτων/τικτόμενον (p. 91). A context
is beginning to emerge. But of greatest importance is the fact that ἀυτοφυς is a Gnostic word, used in the complementary Nag Hammadi tractates Eugnostos (NH Codex III, 76.16) and the Sophia of Jesus Christ (Berlin Gnostic Codex [edd. Till/Schenke, Berlin 1972] 94.1).6 Straight away we are in the Gnostic heartland of the area around Chenoboskion, where the Nag Hammadi tractates were buried and the Pachomian monastery flourished.

Next, ἀμβρόσιος is not only just a word from the epic vocabulary: it fits also into the Gnostic world, as evidenced by its use in the Acts of Thomas.7 In that text, ἀμβροσίας and ἀμβροσιώδης are used to describe either the Eucharist (with a pun on βρῶσις) or the interior spring of living water in Christ's parable. Scholarship has already begun to discern the Gnostic background to the Vision of Dorotheos, as can be seen from the parallels between that work and the Hymn of the Pearl.8 This vocabulary belongs in the same context. It makes sense that words which had acquired a Gnostic dimension would have become known to the Vision poet, working near Pbow.

Now let us consider πανάτικτος itself. The editors of the Vision comment that it signifies that God has no beginning (p. 29), and cite as a parallel the Nicene anathema of 'those who say that there was a time when he [the Son] was not, and before he was born he did not exist, or that he came to be out of non-existence, or out of another hypostasis or ousia, or that he is a creature' (p. 31).9 This notion of 'from something else, something other' may point us in the right direction. The compound formed with that favourite fifth-century epic element παν-, appears to be a hapax; the simple ἀτίκτος in its common-sense meaning of 'unborn' is used by Theodore the Studite (PG 99.757AB) to denote the fetal John the Baptist, τὸ ἀτικτὸν βρέφος, leaping in Elizabeth's womb. But as for πανάτικτος, the sense of the deity's not at all having come from something else—plus ἀυτοφυς, having come from himself, already discussed—the nearest parallel seems to be the Nag Hammadi use of ἀγνήνητος in Eugnostos (Codex III, 76.14, the same context as above) and in the Ogdoad and Ennead (Codex VI, 57.14-17 and 63.21). Also used in Eugnostos (and the Sophia Jesu Christi) are the terms from the same semantic field ἀυτογενέτωρ (Berlin Gnostic Codex 107.4 and cf. Codex III 75.6) (cf. Autogenes, the title of another Nag Hammadi tractate), ἀυτοπάτωρ (Codex III, 77.14 and cf. Berlin Gnostic Codex 95.9), and πρωτογενέτωρ (Codex III, 81.10, 83.23, 85.13). The first and third of these are used later, in the sixth century, by Dioscorus