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AN IMPERIAL PALACE GUARD IN HEAVEN: THE DATE OF THE VISION OF
DOROTHEUS

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THE DATE OF THE VISION OF DOROTHEUS

In 1984 an equipe from Geneva published a fascinating Greek poem, the first nine pages of P.Bodm. 29.¹ The poem's author, Dorotheus, relates a vision he had while he was sitting (l.4, cf. Appendix) in the imperial palace. In the vision he finds himself in God's heavenly palace, which is evidently closely modelled on the emperor's earthly one. First, he is ostiarius:²

- | | |
|----|---|
| 16 | τοίως μοι κραδίη ἰνδάλλετο· ὡς τὸ [π]άρο[ς περ |
| 17 | ἤμην πραιποσίτοιειν ἐνὶ μ[έττοις]ι θυ[ρωρός |
| 18 | καί τε δομέτικος ἦεν ἄνα[κτος· ὃ μοι π]ρος[έειπεν· |
| 16 | This is how my heart pictured it: as before |
| 17 | I was sitting as a doorkeeper in the middle of the praepositi |
| 18 | and there also was a domesticus of the Lord. He said to me: |

Subsequently (after a heavily mutilated passage which is difficult to understand), Dorotheus becomes tiro, forsakes his duty, is punished, taken on again and, finally, asks God for a more important duty. When his request is refused, he wakes up and decides "to sing about the deeds of the righteous and also of Christ the Lord, year after year ever more delightfully for a singer" (l. 342f).

Palaeographical criteria date the papyrus to the period around 400,³ but the first editors suggest that the poem was written around the turn of the third and fourth century on the basis of the name of the poet, Dorotheus son of Quintus (l. 300: in the view of the ed. pr. Quintus Smyrnaeus), and the mention of a Dorotheus who was martyred under Diocletian (Eus. HE. 8.1.4). Van Berchem seems to put the date a little later as he compares the outfit of Dorotheus (cf. below on lines 330ff) with that of the soldiers on Galerius' arch at Thessalonika, but the ed. pr. is followed by my compatriots Kessels and Van der Horst, who have now published a greatly improved text and translation.⁴ Enrico Livrea, on the other hand, proposes a date between 342-362 on the basis of an eighth-century tradition that

¹ A.Hurst, O.Reverdin, J.Rudhardt, Papyrus Bodmer XXIX, Vision de Dorotheos (Cologne-Geneva 1984).

² The function is not discussed by A.v.Domaszewski, Die Rangordnung des römischen Heeres, ed. B.Dobson (Köln/Graz 1967²) or D.Hoffmann, Das spätrömische Bewegungsheer und die Notitia Dignitatum (Düsseldorf 1969). For pre-fourth century testimonia see A.v.Domaszewski, Germania 1 (1917) 174f.

³ R.Kasser and G.Cavallo, Description et datation du codex des Visions, ed. pr. (n. 1), Appendice.

⁴ D.van Berchem, 'Des soldats chrétiens dans la garde impériale: observations sur le texte de la Vision de Dorotheos (Papyrus Bodmer XXIX)', Studii Clasice 24 (1986) 155-163; A.H.M. Kessels and P.W. van der Horst, 'The Vision of Dorotheus (Pap.Bodmer 29)', Vigiliae Christianae 41 (1987) 313-359. I quote from this text and translation, if with some minor changes.

a 107 (!) year old Christian, Dorotheus, was martyred under Julian the Apostate.⁵ Curiously, none of these authors has studied in any depth the many realia in this poem which are much more trustworthy indications for its date than the arguments produced so far. By choosing this approach we hope (1) to lay a more solid basis for future attempts at dating the poem and (2) to show that the poem is a key source for the military organisation at the imperial court in the second half of the fourth century.

After Dorotheus had been ostiarius, he received a new privilege:

42 ἀλλοίως δὲ ἐὼν γέρας ἔλλαχον ὡς τὸ πάρος περ·
 43 π[ραιπο]σίτοις δόμοισιν ἔην τίρων ἄγχι βιάρχων
 44 .[6]λος καὶ ῥ' οὔτιν' ὑπέικεον οὐδ' ἀλέγιζον.
 45 οὐ γὰρ ἐμῆς ἀρετῆς ἔνεκ' ἔκτυγον, ἀλλὰ χοροῖο
 46 δεῖδ[ιότε]ς γεραρὸν καὶ ῥ' αὐτοῦ πραιποσίτοιο.

42 Being changed I received a privilege as before:
 43 the praepositi of the palace had me as a tiro near the biarchoi
 44 ... I (they?) did not yield to anyone nor did I (they?) take heed.
 45 For they did not abhor because of my quality, but out of fear
 46 for the majesty of the company and that of the praepositus
 himself

How do we approach the various ranks mentioned in this passage? Given the presence of these soldiers in a military organisation close to God in his heavenly palace, it seems a reasonable working hypothesis that Dorotheus has transferred the organisation of the imperial guards to God's palace. Now if the poem dates from the period of Diocletian, we would expect to find a reflection of the organisation of the praetorian guards. On the other hand, if the poem is of a later date, we may expect to find the cavalry units which Constantine introduced after he disbanded the praetorians in 312.⁶ And indeed, cavalry ranks are exactly what we find here, witness the well-known passage from Hieronymus *Contra Ioan. Hierosolym.* 19 (PL XXIII, col. 386): *Finge aliquem tribuniciae potestatis suo vitio regradatum per singula militiae equestris officia ad tironis vocabulum devolutum: numquid ex tribuno statim fit tiro? non, sed ante primicerius, deinde senator, ducenarius, centenarius, biarchus, circitor, eques, dein tiro.* A corollary of this conclusion is that the vision is an important source for the organisation of the imperial guards in the fourth century.

Now the presence of the biarchus - a rank first attested in 327 - in the imperial schola was already known from two inscriptions,⁷ but regarding the tiro R.I.Frank could still write

⁵ E.Livrea, review of the ed. pr., *Gnomon* 58 (1986) 687-711.

⁶ Cf. Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, I, 52.

⁷ CIL VI 32949; E.Popescu, *Inscripțiile grecești și latine etc.* (Bucharest 1976) no. 206.3. Date of the rank: R.Grosse, *Klio* 15 (1918) 128f.

that "recruits in the scholae probably skipped the rank of tiro".⁸ If indeed, as seems to be the case, we have to do here with a heavenly schola palatina, this conclusion has now become untenable. In addition to the biarchus and tiro, the passage also mentions the praepositi (l. 43) and the "praepositus himself" (l. 46). The precise meaning of the term praepositus is of course often hard to pin down and regarding the "praepositus himself" one could in principle think of the praepositus sacri cubiculi, but in this case he is closely associated to the company of the guards (l. 45f.). It seems therefore more likely to see in him the commander of Dorotheus' schola, as the tribunus regularly was called praepositus.⁹

Finally, the vision also mentions the primicerius,¹⁰ the highest non-commissioned officer:

- 126 ἀντί[κα] μειδιῶν κέλεεν πριμικήρα καλεῖσθαι
 127 ἐξ[ειπ]ῶν τινα φῶτα παρεταότων πρὸ δόμοιο
 126 Forthwith he smiled and gave order to call the primicerius
 127 designating some man among those standing in front of the house

As we already observed, these cavalry grades would not have been part of the palace guard before 312 when Constantine disbanded the praetorians. Consequently, the dating of the poem to the period of Diocletian by the first editors is too early.

We can narrow down the date of the vision still further. In l. 86f we hear of a domesticus (the function is also mentioned in l. 18 quoted above) who is apparently closely connected with the praepositus:

- 86 ἔργα δομετῆκοιο παρατροπέων ἀγόρ[ε]υο]ν
 87 πραιποσίτω· τὰ ἕκαστα δ' ὅσα μεγάροις[ι λέ]ληθεν
 88 ἀρπάζων φορέεσκεν ἐὼν δόμον·
 86 perverting the deeds of the domesticus I told them
 87 to the praepositus: "All the things he happened to steal
 88 unobserved in the palace he used to take home."

Which domesticus is meant here? Theoretically, we could think of the domesticus of the praepositus sacri cubiculi,¹¹ but it seems more likely to think once again, as in l. 46, of the domesticus of the tribunus of the schola. Although the domesticus of the praepositus is only very rarely mentioned, it would fit our passage that he was charged with the administration

⁸ R.I.Frank, *Scholae palatinae. The Palace Guards of the Later Roman Empire* (Rome 1969) 56. Tirones in the cavalry are mentioned in CIL V 944, 8278; AE 1981, 777.

⁹ Praepositus: R.Grosse, *Römische Militärgeschichte von Gallienus bis zum Beginn der byzantinischen Themenverfassung* (Berlin 1920) 143f; W.Ensslin, *RE Suppl.* 8 (1956) 554 (on the tribunus as praepositus in the schola palatina). On the great power of the praepositus sacri cubiculi see the most recent bibliography in J. den Boeft, D. den Hengst, H.C.Teitler, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XX* (Groningen 1987) 14.

¹⁰ Primicerius: Grosse, 122; idem, *Klio* 15 (1918) 133; W.Ensslin, *RE Suppl.* 8 (1956) 614-624.

¹¹ For this domesticus see *Acta Conc. Oec. I. IV. pars II.* 224f., Malalas, 410.

of the company's provisions.¹² The first domesticus is mentioned in 355 (Amm. Marc. 15.6.1), but Seeck (RE 5, 1905, 1296) has observed that only under Valentinian I the rank "seine feste amtliche Stellung erhielt". A similar terminus post quem seems to be suggested by the mention of the Lord's primicerius:

- 48 τοῦ[....]ι προφάνεσκεν ὅ τοι γεράεσσι γέραιρον
 49 οιο[....]γίοιαι καὶ δ' αὖ πριμικῆρος ἄνακτος
 50 πρ[ό]θεν Γ]αβριήλ ἦεν, ἕοικα δὲ ἕξ τὸν ἀριθμὸν
 51 τάξι[αι τ]ῶν ὄχ' ἀρίτων.
 48 ... showed forth what they were venerating with honours
 49 ... and on the other hand in front of the Lord's primicerius
 50 Gabriel was standing, and I seemed to draw up six in all
 51 from the very best.

Like the domesticus, the primicerius occurs at various levels of the military and imperial hierarchy. Considering his position, it seems excluded that he is the kind of non-commissioned officer mentioned in 1.126. It also seems unlikely that he is the primicerius sacri cubiculi, who would hardly have such a position near Gabriel.¹³ A possibility is the primicerius domesticorum, whose position must have been important enough for Iovianus to become emperor in 363.¹⁴ However, as this function was only a stepping-stone for higher positions, a more likely candidate is perhaps the primicerius notariorum. The term itself is first attested in 381 (CTh 6.10.2), but Ammianus (25.8.18) already mentions a primus inter notarios omnes in 363 and Libanius' correspondence with Bassus suggests that the latter was primicerius notariorum in 358. Given the ascendancy of the notarii under Constantius II, it is possible to think of a date for the vision during that emperor's reign. However, the fact that those members of the schola notariorum who were above the grade of domestici et notarii became clarissimi after 367 perhaps rather points to the time of Valentinian I; the more so as Julian had greatly reduced the number of notarii.¹⁵ Both the domesticus and this primicerius, then, suggest a terminus post quem of 363. In the light of this conclusion the date proposed by Livrea seems less probable: even if the primicerius pointed to the 350s – an

¹² Domesticus: Nov. Th. 21.1; Cod. Iust I.42.2 (and tribunus), XII.37.19 beginning and par. 4 (provisions); Grosse, *Römische Militärgeschichte*, 120f; Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, III, 179 n.95; Frank, *Scholae palatinae*, 57f.

¹³ On this primicerius nothing is known, as his chapter is missing in Not.Dig.Or. and defective in Not. Dig.Occ. XIV, cf. Jones, *LRE*, III, 162 n.7.

¹⁴ Primicerius domesticorum: Jones, *LRE* II, 638f.; H.J.Diesner, *RE Suppl.* 11 (1968) 117f. Iovianus: Hieronymus Chron. 243 (Helm); Amm.Marc. 25.5.4; Eutrop. 10.17.1.

¹⁵ On the ascendancy of the notarii see the detailed study by H.C.Teitler, *Notarii and Exceptores* (Amsterdam 1985) 54-72. Bassus: Teitler, *ibidem*, 118f.

earlier decade is unlikely for the domestici or the notarii - we can hardly imagine a Christian in his late nineties to be so optimistic as to sing about Christ "year after year".¹⁶

The description of the military outfit of Dorotheus at the end of the poem also seems to suggest a later date:

328 οἴο δάμοιο. ἔκηθεν ἐθάμβεον εἰς ἐμὲ [φῶτε]c
 329 οἶος μακρὸς ἔην καὶ ῥ' οὐκ ἔχον ἔνδυμ[α λιτόν,
 330 χλαῖναν δ ὥς τὸ πάρος περ ἐφεσταμένο[c θυρ]ήησιν
 331 εἶχον, ἐμοὶ ἀλλοίοις ἐνὶ λινέεσσι δυοῖς[ι.
 332 ἔκτηκ' ὠραρίοιο περὶ τραχήλου βεβαῶτ[οc
 333 ἀμφὶ δὲ ποσσὶν ἔχεσκον ἐμοῖς βράκεα ὑψ[ι βιβάντα.
 334 καὶ γὰρ ἔχον ζωστήρα παναίολον. ὥς τ[ὸ πάρος περ
 335 φαίνεσκον θυρήησιν ἐφεσταμένο[c

328 From afar the men looked at me in astonishment,
 329 seeing how big I was and that I did not have simple clothing,
 330 but a cloak, when I was standing at the gate as before,
 331 was I wearing, made for me from two different sorts of linen (?).
 332 I stood with an orarium wrapped around my neck
 333 and round my legs I wore breeches rising on high.
 334 And I also wore a glittering girdle. As before
 335 I appeared standing at the gate ...¹⁷

The passage is a description of a palace guard, which is unparalleled as regards its detailed character but unfortunately not completely clear. In the different sorts of linen we certainly should not see with Livrea "il nous a la psyche finalmente ricongiunti dopo il battesimo iniziatico",¹⁸ but in his admittedly clumsy way Dorotheus seems to say that he is now dressed in two different garments of linen. Normally, the soldiers had only a linen undergarment, the *camisia*, but the members of the *scholae palatinae* also had an overgarment of (white) linen, which gave them the name of *candidati* - a term first attested by Ammianus Marcellinus.¹⁹ The orarium is rightly identified by Van Berchem with the *focale*, the soldier's *cravat*, but it should be observed that until now in this military meaning the word has only been found in a papyrus dating from 350-450 with a list of military clothes.²⁰

¹⁶ Note that the late grand old man of the Bollandists, Baudoin de Gaiffier, *Analecta Bollandiana* 74 (1956) 19f had already argued that this tradition is completely unreliable; Livrea's many counter-arguments are not convincing.

¹⁷ I owe the supplement in l.334 to Georg Petzl, who convincingly compares l.16 (quoted above).

¹⁸ Livrea (n.5), 695. The interpretation is typical for Livrea's review which sees everywhere gnostical ideas - a tendency leading to frequent misinterpretations of the text.

¹⁹ *Candidati*: Amm.Marc. 25.3.6, 31.13.14; Hier.Ep. 60.9.2; Claud. de nupt. Hon. 295. For the linen, the *bracae* (l.333) and the *focale* see also P.Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Note Agiografiche* 7 = *Studi e Testi* 49 (Rome 1928) 203-238 (on the military outfit of the fourth century).

²⁰ SB VI 9570.5, cf. A.Bataille, *Eos* 48 (1956) 83-88.

The vision of Dorotheus, then, is an important source for our knowledge of the various grades and the uniform of the schola palatina. An analysis of those grades points to a date for the vision in the second half of the fourth century. The first editors of the poem have evidently fallen victim of an all too understandable inclination to identify the name of the poet with known Christians and with a son of Quintus Smyrnaeus. Yet, as with falsifications, the surest indications of the dates of visions remain realia which can be precisely dated.²¹

APPENDIX: MINIMA DOROTHEANA

I add a few observations on the interpretation of the text:

1.4 ἤμενον – Dorotheus receives his vision sitting. It is a recurring topos that a vision is received in a sitting position, cf. Hermas Visio V.1.1; Athan. V.Ant. 82 and 84; Historia Lausiaca 4.4 Bartelink; E.Peterson, Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis (Freiburg 1959) 272f.

1.4 μέσσω δ' ἐνὶ ἡμ[ατι – Livrea (n.5, p.707) rightly observes that "l'ora meridiana è un momento critico, spesso scelto dalla divinità per manifestarsi all'uomo" and presents an important collection of parallels; add Cosmas et Damian 18.98f; Vita S.Theod.Syk. (ed. Festugière) 16; R.Caillois, 'Les démons de midi', Rev.Hist.Rel. 115 (1937) 142-173, 116 (1937) 54-83, 143-186; J.B.Friedman, 'Euridice, Heurodis and the Noon-Day Demon', Speculum 41 (1966) 22-29; N.J.Perella, Midday in Italian Literature (Princeton 1979) with excellent bibliography.

1.131 ὁτιάρ(ιο)ν κύνοισι βαλῶν – Both the ed.pr. and Kessels/Van der Horst have realised that the signa must mean a kind of prison. We find an exact parallel in P.Lond. 1914 I.18 συνκλίσαντες αὐτοὺς ... ἐν τοῖς κύνοισι, cf. H.I.Bell, Jews and Christians in Egypt (London 1924) 65, who, in an interesting note, shows the continuity of the term in Coptic and Arabic; note also J.F.Gilliam, Roman Army Papers (Amsterdam 1986) 310f (= Bonner Historia-Augusta-Colloquium 1964/5, Bonn 1966, 921) on a strong room below or inside the signa (?the prison).

1.168ff 168 ἦλυθε δὲ Χρηστὸς φαεσίμβροτος ἐν δικ[αίο]ιαι,
 169 ἦλυθε δ' ἄγγελος ὠκύς, ὃς ἄφθιτος ἔπλετ[ο πάντων]ν.
 170 Γαβριήλ, μάλα χαῖρε, σὺ γὰρ πατὴρ ἔπλε[ο
 171 οὔτι καταφῆσας τὸν ἐμὸν νόον· ὡς ὅτε μή[τηρ
 172 ἀμφιχυθεὶς φίλον υἷα κινύρεται, ὡς σὺ [μ' ὄνησας
 173 δείξας σήματα πάντα, βαλῶν χαρίεσσαν ἀοι[δὴν]
 174 ἐν τήθεσιν ἐμοῖσιν, ὅπιν χέα[ς] ωγ[...]εφ[
 175 ἐν λιμέσιν μαλακοῖσιν ἐφεζόμενον λιτα[νεύειν].
 176 τοῖα δ' ἐνὶ τήθεσιν ἐμοῖς ποτικάμβαλες αὐδ[ὴν
 177 θέσπιν, ἵνα κλείομι τά τ' ἐσόμενα π[ρ]ό τ' ἔοντα.

²¹ A nice parallel is the Historia Augusta, as W.Eck reminds me.

The beginning of this passage contains traditional elements of the hymn, such as (1) the welcoming $\chi\acute{\alpha}\iota\rho\epsilon$, cf. Alcaeus fr.308; Cratinus fr.359 with Kassel-Austin ad loc.; E.Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957) 169, (2) $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$, cf. P.Ol. 4.2; Ar.Ra. 404, 409; E.Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (Stuttgart 1912) 157, and (3) the anaphora of $\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\acute{\iota}$, the so-called "'Du"-Stil', cf. Norden, op.cit., 143ff; Nisbet and Hubbard on Hor. C. 1.10.9; K.-D.Dorsch, *Götterhymnen in den Chorliedern der griechischen Tragiker –Form, Inhalt und Funktion–* (Diss. Münster 1982) 11f.²²

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²² I am most grateful to Hans Teitler and Klaas Worp for saving me from various errors.