

The Oath at *A.P.* v 245.3

An epigram in the *Greek Anthology* (*A.P.* v 245) by Macedonius Consul goes as follows:

Κιχλίξεις, χρεμέτισμα γάμου προκέλευθον είίσα,  
 ἤσυχά μοι νεύεις· πάντα μάτην έρέθεις.  
 ὤμοσα τήν δυσέρωτα κόρην, τρισίν ὤμοσα πέτρας,  
 μήποτε μειλιχίους ὄμμασιν είσιδέειν.  
 παίξε μόνη τὸ φίλημα· μάτην πόππυζε σεαυτῇ  
 χείλεσι γυμνοτάοις, οὔτινι μισογομένοις.  
 αὐτὰρ έγών έτέρην ὁδὸν έρχομαι· είσὶ γὰρ ἄλλαι  
 κρέσσονες εὐλέκτρον Κύπριδος έργάτιδες.

The oath here (line 3), τρισίν ὤμοσα πέτρας, has no precise parallel in antiquity and has, accordingly, puzzled commentators. Emendation was one solution. Lennep proposed ὤμοσα Πουαίς; Eichstaedt Κόρην, τρίς έπώμοσ', έταίρην;<sup>1</sup> more recently Campbell suggested φύσιν ὤμοσα πέτρας.<sup>2</sup> Yet tampering with the Greek text will not appeal to many. The reading is the same in both the Palatine and Planudean MSS, shows no sign of corruption, and is metrically flawless. Hence Jacobs' conclusion: 'vulgatae inhaerere malim ritum ex amantium religione, nobis, ut multa huius generis, non satis cognitum significari existimans'.<sup>3</sup> Longman, however, has offered the most original solution.<sup>4</sup> He quotes from Theophrastus, *Char.* xvi (*Δεισιδαιμονίας*) 3, καὶ τήν ὁδὸν ἐὰν ὑπερδράμη γαλή, μὴ πρότερον πορευθῆναι, ἕως διεξέλθῃ τις ἢ λίθους τρεῖς ὑπὲρ τῆς ὁδοῦ διαβάλλῃ, to show that 'three stones were regarded by the superstitious as an apotropaic charm to be used upon encountering an unfavourable ἐνόδιος σύμβολος', and continues, 'in the poem under discussion the metaphor of a man on a journey is prominent. His destination, presumably, is γάμος in the wider sense of that word. The woman summons him with a χρεμέτισμα γάμου προκέλευθον. The man regards her as an ἐνόδιος σύμβολος, swears not to accept her invitation, and uses the charm of the three stones as an additional safeguard against the woman's influence. Then he says αὐτὰρ ἐγών ἐτέρην ὁδὸν ἔρχομαι. He is even more cautious than the δεισιδαίμων—he uses the charm of the three stones and he travels by a different road.' Attractive though this may at first seem, it is ultimately unconvincing: (i) there is no oath in the passage in Theophrastus and so its relevance to our problem is questionable; (ii) it appears over-subtle to separate the γάμος from the courtesan and to see the girl merely as an ἐνόδιος σύμβολος. A much more obvious interpretation is to take the γάμος and the girl as the same goal, the journey's end. This is made clear (l. 8) where the other courtesans are described as κρέσσονες εὐλέκτρον Κύπριδος έργάτιδες, the comparative adjective surely referring to their amorous technique, not to their favourableness as omens; (iii) the whole point of the ritual of the three stones in Theophrastus was that it enabled the superstitious man to continue along the same road. If a different road were taken (as in our poem, l. 7) the ritual would be unnecessary; (iv) it would seem mistaken to link the caution of Theophrastus' δεισιδαίμων to Macedonius here. Our poem is one of the most forceful of Macedonius' love poems. Its strength lies mainly in its diction, which is direct to the point of bluntness, and in its structure which

is tight and controlled. It is distinguished by its tone of sarcasm, scorn, and bitterness. In particular the contempt of the poet is emphasised by the erotic horse metaphor (cf. *Κιχλίξεις, χρεμέτισμα* (l. 1), *παίξε, πόππυζε* (l. 5)) which is dominant in the poem. The mood of the poet is undoubtedly one of self-assertive, even arrogant, rejection of the courtesan, and to speak of his caution in her regard is to destroy the total impact of the poem.

If we are correct in this, it may be opportune to take a fresh look at the oath of the stones, to present the available evidence on the problem, and to offer what appears the most likely solution. It is best to start with the Greek of Macedonius, τρισίν ὤμοσα πέτρας. The word πέτρα normally means 'rock', 'boulder', 'ledge of rock', 'rocky peak', etc., and is to be distinguished (according to LSJ) from πέτρος (=λίθος, a small stone one takes in one's hand). We have no compelling reason to assume that Macedonius meant πέτρος when he used πέτρα. On the contrary, there is one good reason for taking πέτρα in its normal meaning. Macedonius was greatly indebted in diction, theme, and above all in metre to Nonnus, the prolific late epic poet of the *Dionysiaca*. A comparison of the hexameter techniques of Nonnus and Macedonius shows in meticulous detail the careful following of Nonnus by Macedonius.<sup>5</sup> This is noticeable, above all, in the final feet of the hexameter. The rhythm, the length, the accentuation of final words, even in many cases the final words themselves<sup>6</sup> of Nonnus' verse are so ingrained in Macedonius' mind that in the closing cadences of his own hexameters he effortlessly follows the example of his prolix model. Thus in the case of *A.P.* v 245, not only is the overall hexameter technique of Macedonius derived from Nonnus, but certain words and the *sedes* for a phrase in the epigram also echo the epic poet: (i) χρεμέτισμα (1): cf. Nonn. *D.* vi 188; xxvi 349; xxxi 220; (ii) γάμου προκέλευθον (1): cf. Nonn. *D.* xlii 513; this latter phrase is also placed by Macedonius in the same position in the hexameter as in the original. Clearly Macedonius in our poem (even more than in certain others) is deliberately recalling Nonnus for his readers. Hence Nonnus' use of πέτρα and πέτρος in the *Dionysiaca* is significant. He uses πέτρα, in all, one hundred and ten times, and in every case gives it its normal meaning 'rock', 'boulder', etc. Further, in one hundred and six of these instances he places πέτρα (in various cases) in the final *sedes* of the hexameter.<sup>7</sup> It seems most unlikely that Macedonius would end his hexameter in πέτρας and yet intend a different meaning of the word to Nonnus—without some clear hint of his intention. This is especially probable when we realise that: (i) Macedonius wrote originally to be read by his fellow poets in the *Cycle*, all of whom were as steeped in Nonnus as he, (ii) πέτρος, while metrically possible for Macedonius and used by Nonnus in the normal sense of 'small stone' (cf. e.g. *D.* xxxvii 63–6), is also used by him to mean πέτρα (=rock; cf. e.g. *D.* iii 169; xii 79–82). It is as if

<sup>3</sup> Cf. F. Jacobs, *Anthologia Graeca* (Leipzig 1794–1814) n. ad loc. (xi 214).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. G. A. Longman, 'Anth. Pal. V, 244 (245). 3' in *CR* n.s. v no. 1 (1955) 19.

<sup>5</sup> This is fully documented in a forthcoming paper, 'The Debt of Macedonius Consul to Nonnus'.

<sup>6</sup> For instances of Macedonius' borrowing of final words from Nonnus cf. e.g. *A.P.* v 240.1 with *D.* iv 301, xxii 262, xl 331, xlii 287; *A.P.* v 240.3 with *D.* vi 353, xx 231, xxxi 269, xxxii 26, xxxiii 164, xxxvii 143, xli 408; *A.P.* vi 40.1 with *D.* ii 161, iii 104, xii 210, xlvii 329; *A.P.* vi 56.3 with *D.* xii 313, 314, 320, 345, 355; *A.P.* ix 645.7 with *D.* v 279, xii 37, etc. etc.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. W. Peek, *Lexicon zu den Dionysiaca des Nonnus* (Hildesheim 1968– ), s.v. πέτρα.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. Stadtmüller, *Anthologia Graeca* (Leipzig 1894–1906), *app. crit.* ad loc.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. Y. Campbell, 'Anth. Pal. V, 244 (245). 3–4' in *CR* n.s. iii no. 1 (1953) 13.

Macedonius clearly had 'rock' in mind, and fearing that *πέτρος* might be ambiguous, deliberately used *πέτρα*, for it *alone* could express his sense without equivocation.

If this is right, we can now eliminate those oaths with small stones, theories about which—at least as old as Grotius' translation 'juravi manibus capiens tria saxa'<sup>8</sup>—have so often bedevilled attempts to explain Macedonius here.<sup>9</sup> Rocks or large stones, however, were used in oaths because it was thought (i) that the solidarity of the rock passed to the swearer and so guaranteed the keeping of the oath, and (ii) that the permanency of the rock represented the constancy of the swearer. The best known example of such an oath was that at the altar (*λίθος*) in the *ἀγορά* in Athens *near* (or *at*) which (*πρὸς τῷ λίθῳ*, *Arist. Ath. Pol.* 7.1) or *on* which (*ἀναβάντες δ' ἐπὶ τοῦτον* (sc. *τὸν λίθον*) *ὀμνύουσι*, *ibid.* 55.5) the Archons, Thesmothetae, arbitrators, and witnesses took their oaths.<sup>10</sup> There must have been local variations throughout the Greek world of this type of oath. Pausanias (viii 15.1–2) provides a good example at Pheneüs in Arcadia: *Πέτρωμα καλούμενον, λίθοι δύο ἡρμοσμένοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους μεγάλοι . . . οἶδα τοὺς πολλοὺς καὶ ὀμνύντας ὑπὲρ μεγίστων τῷ Πετρώματι*. Macedonius and his contemporaries who were highly educated civil servants and lawyers thoroughly grounded in the Greek classics would certainly have known of the oath at the altar in Athens, which was so central to political life there. Indeed Plutarch, who mentions it (*Sol.* 25.3), was a writer well known at Constantinople in the reign of Justinian I<sup>11</sup> and was admired by Agathias (cf. *A.Pl.* 33.1). Yet Macedonius has hardly that specific oath in mind in our poem. The absence of a definite article with *πέτρας* suggests that he is not referring to a particular monument. Rather there arose (it would seem more likely) from the oath at Athens and from somewhat similar oaths elsewhere (e.g. that mentioned in Pausanias, *loc. cit.*) the tradition of linking the two ideas, *rock* and *swearing*, to emphasise or corroborate an oath, a tradition which would have continued after the ritual associated with it ceased to be performed.<sup>12</sup> Such a tradition must, it seems, have persisted into the Constantinople of Justinian I. The vagueness of Macedonius' phrase (without any attempt at explanation) indicates how much he took it for

granted that his readers knew exactly to what he was referring. His Greek here could be given a modern paraphrase 'I swore, on my solemn oath, never to look on that wretched girl again'.<sup>13</sup>

The remainder of the Greek poses few difficulties. The dat. *πέτρας* with *ὀμνυμι* can be translated either 'I swore to'<sup>14</sup> or 'by three rocks'. Either is grammatically correct and makes good sense.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately each means the same thing. And why *three* rocks? Because of the magical and religious associations of the number three, oaths were often repeated thrice, or in groups of three, or to three divinities etc., to guarantee their effectiveness or to stress the swearer's determination to keep his oath.<sup>16</sup> Macedonius' phrase then, 'I swore to (or by) three rocks', in which he stresses with the hyperbole<sup>17</sup> his resolution never to look at the courtesan again, is quite in accord with that tradition—one which would have been familiar to the poet from his study of the Classics.

We have suggested that by Macedonius' time the ritual of swearing to a stone had actually ceased and that the formula alone remained. However, there is no certain proof of this. But in any case we can be sure that Macedonius would never have taken the oath. His love poems, though often written with real feeling and a fine awareness of the tensions inherent in a romantic liaison, were literary exercises only, imaginative projections of the poet into fictive situations, and were not autobiographical. As a high official in Justinian's court Macedonius must have been a practising (and from the available evidence it seems probable) a *convinced* Christian.<sup>18</sup> The oath then at *A.P.* v 245.3, while it indicates in particular the mood of the poet in his reverie, also contributes to the pagan atmosphere of the poem—an atmosphere consciously cultivated by the poet in his attempt to maintain the traditional pagan ethos of the epigram.<sup>19</sup>

ARTHUR KEAVENEY

Hull University

JOHN A. MADDEN

University College, Galway

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Jacobs, *loc. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Small stones were used in oaths as follows: (i) at Rome a sharp cutting stone (*silex*) was used to slay a pig for sacrifice (in conjunction with the oath) and was taken to represent the constancy of the god, while the act of killing symbolised the fate of the perjurer, cf. *Liv.* i 24. 6–9; 26. 45–8; this oath is related (cf. G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion* [Chicago 1970] i 179) to (ii) the ceremony, *Jovem lapidem iurare*, in which a man held a stone in his hand and as he threw it from him prayed that he might in like manner be cast out if he broke his oath, cf. *Plb.* iii 25.8–9; *Plu. Sull.* 10.4; *Paulus, epit. Fest.* 102 L s.v. 'lapidem'; *Cic. Fam.* vii 12.2; *Aul. Gell.* i 21.4; *Apul. De Deo Soc.* 5. A confusion seems to have existed in the minds of the ancients, since the stone was also taken to symbolise the constancy of Jupiter, or (by a different theory) represent his numen (cf. F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* [Oxford 1957] i 351–3; Dumézil, *op. cit.* 18–32; 273–4). (iii) Herodotus (iii 8) narrates an Arabic custom of making pledges with seven stones smeared with the blood of both parties. Editors of the *Anthologia* have explained Macedonius' oath as a variant of either mode (i) or (ii) or a fusion of both: cf. nn. *ad loc.* in F. Duebner, *Epigrammatum Anthologia Palatina* (Paris 1864–90); P. Waltz, *Anthologie Grecque* (Paris 1928–); H. Beckby, *Anthologia Graeca* (Munich 1966–7). Yet both modes are distinctly Roman, appear not to have entered elsewhere into Greek custom, and so are less likely to have been followed by Macedonius. Also the curious Arab ritual (iii) can safely be excluded.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. also Demosth. liv 26; *Harp.* s.v. *λίθος*; J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (Cambridge 1911) i 160 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. D. A. Russell, *Plutarch* (London 1972) 146.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. R. Hirzel, *Der Eid* (Leipzig 1902) 212. For superstition in the late Empire cf. A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602* (Oxford 1964) ii 957–64.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. also the phrase 'the gospel truth', used when in fact no oath has been taken.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. C. Sittl, *Die Gebärden der Griechen und Römer* (Leipzig 1890) 140 n. 8; Hirzel, *op. cit.* 61.

<sup>15</sup> For the dative with *ὀμνυμι* to mean 'swear by' cf. *Paus.*, *loc. cit.*; *Aristoph. Nu.* 248 (v. LSJ s.v. *ὀμνυμι*).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Hirzel, *op. cit.* 82–5; H. Usener, 'Dreiheit' in *RhM* lviii (1903) 1–47; 161–208; 321–62 (esp. 17–24); cf. also R. Lasch, *Der Eid* (Stuttgart 1908) 43; E. Harrison, *Essays and Studies Presented to William Ridgeway* (Cambridge 1913) 97–8.

<sup>17</sup> We have parallels in the English phrases (also separated from the original ritual), 'I swore on a stack of Bibles', 'I swore by all that's holy'; cf. also e.g. Shakespeare, *Henry IV*, Part I, ii 4.56 'I'll be sworn upon all the books (i.e. Bibles) in England', etc.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. A. Madden, 'Macedonius Consul and Christianity', *Mnemosyne* xxx (1977) 153–9.

<sup>19</sup> For the custom among poets of the *Cycle* of writing pagan-seeming epigrams cf. A. Cameron, *Agathias* (Oxford 1970) 107.

### New Evidence on a Lost Work by Exekias

(PLATE IV)

Until the Second World War, the antiquities collection held by the university in Leipzig included a set of four