

The question of how Christian poetry in late antiquity approached the classical tradition is an old one. Yet new ways of approaching this question are now available. With the publication of poems from the Codex of Visions from the Bodmer Papyri, we have a body of texts that speak to this question in surprising ways. In 1984 the first of these poems was published, (*Papyrus Bodmer XXIX: Vision De Dorotheos*, ed. Hurst, Reverdin, and Rudhardt, Coligny-Genève). This poem is a visionary account of a certain Dorotheus who visits heaven and tells of his journey in epic meter. Then in 1999 the remainder of the poems were published (*Codex Des Visions: Poèmes Divers*, Papyrus Bodmer, 30-37, ed. Hurst and Rudhardt, Munich). Many of the poems from the *Codex of Visions* recast Biblical episodes. These poems, from the late fourth and early fifth century, take part in Christian exegesis, but they do this in classical meters and use archaic diction. One poem ("To Abraham", P. Bodm. 30) imagines what Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac might have said before the sacrifice. Two separate poems imagine the speeches of Cain and Abel ("What would Cain have said having slain Abel," P. Bodm. 33, and "What would Abel have said after being slain" P. Bodm. 35). With the publication of these poems, an early and formative stage in this encounter between Christian exegesis and classical poetry has been recovered. I intend to show what this encounter looked like and the ways in which these new poems change our understanding of Christian poetry in Late Antiquity.

This paper will highlight particular examples from these poems to show how they engage in a melding of Christian and classical traditions. One poem addressed "To the Just" likens the paradise that awaits martyrs to Ogygia, the island where Calypso dwelt. This at first looks like unhampered syncretism. But an exegetical tradition links Ogygia with the Isles of the Blessed, and thus these Christian poets take this one step further to link Ogygia with paradise. Likewise, a poem on the binding of Isaac (P. Bodm. 33) makes use of a passage from Hesiod when it mentions the animal offered in place of Isaac. This is more than an allusion to exhibit the poet's familiarity with the classics; rather, it serves to unlock the obscure symbolism at work in the paper. These poets are employing the forms and modes of the classical tradition, but to new ends. They are not concerned with either converting educated pagans or showing off their learning. Instead these poets meld the two traditions in an attempt to write poetry that requires theological reflection and exegetical work. Finally, these poems attest to the influence of Gregory of Nazianzus on the Christian poetry of late antiquity, since these poems show on a number of occasions how they are following in Gregory's footsteps, though in slightly different ways.