

A NOTE ON THE MEANING OF ΘΕΟΔΕΓΜΩΝ ΚΗΠΟΣ
IN A NONNIAN VERSE INSCRIPTION FROM APHRODISIAS*

by

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ABSTRACT: The author discusses the meaning of the phrase θεοδέγμων κήπος that occurs in a late antique verse inscription from Aphrodisias, drawing on the poetry of Nonnus (*Laph*2007, no. 7.2). Earlier scholars understood this expression as either Paradise, or the Mount of Olives, or the garden in which Jesus was buried. However, the facts that the adjective θεοδέγμων is an epithet of the Virgin Mary in an inscription from the church of the Dormition of the Virgin of Skripou (Orchomenus) in Boeotia and that an early Christian tradition depicts Mary as “the closed garden” (κήπος κεκλεισμένος, cf. *Sg* 4, 12) may lead to another interpretation of the expression. Θεοδέγμων κήπος may be a sublime metaphor for the Virgin Mary that brings to mind the idea of the immaculate conception.

Among the inscriptions found in Aphrodisias, one attracts the extraordinary attention of scholars¹ because it includes a couple of Nonnian phrases. The inscription, written on several marble blocks, is in a very poor state of preservation. Only four fragments have survived to date. Together they form fragments of three nonsequential verses²:

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¹ The fact that the inscription is cited in *PGL* attests to its noticeable importance.

² The piece with verse C was copied in 1893 by W. KUBITSCHKEK (K.V.6) and W. REICHEL (R.I.30). When they visited Aphrodisias during their journey across Asia Minor, they found the fragment reused in the wall of a house. H. GRÉGOIRE published it in *IGC* in the entry no. 264bis. Later it was revisited by members of the *MAMA* expedition. In 1962 J.M.R. CORMACK prepared an edition in the eighth volume of the *MAMA* series (no. 603). The fragment, including verse B, was discovered in the narthex at the Temple/Church site by P. GAUDIN, a director of the Rail Line Smyrna–Kasaba. In 1904 he acquired a license to start archaeological research in Aphrodisias that resulted in 221 squeezes and pictures of inscriptions (see REINACH 1906: 79). Part B was recorded in squeeze no. 69. Th. REINACH used it to publish the text in 1906 in “Revue des Études Grecques” (REINACH 1906, no. 207). Later H. GRÉGOIRE improved the reading and published it in *IGC*, no. 263. GRÉGOIRE was the first to link the passage with the wording of the poetry of Nonnus, but at the same time, he separated it from verse C, already known and likewise reprinted in *IGC*. Part A, the latest find, was found in section 5 of the *martyrion*, next to the southern wall. It consists of two fragments which match together; the left-hand edge is preserved. They were first noticed by the NYU Aphrodisias

A: / + ἐκ Μαρίας θεόπαιδος ἀπηνέος [- - -]
 B: [- - -] θεοδέγμονα κήπον vacat /
 C: [- - -]ΝΙ θήκα τὸ δῶμα + /

A. θεοπαῖδος ROUECHÉ || B. ΘΕΟΔΕΙΜΟΝΑ REINACH || C. ἀ]νίθηκα ROUECHÉ 1989,]ΝΙ θήκα ROUECHÉ 2004 et 2007, [ἀνε]θήκατο δῶ[μ]α (?) GRÉGOIRE, ΔΩΙΟΙΑ REICHEL, [- - -]ΝΙ θήκα τὸ νεὶ θήκατο FEISSEL, θήκατο MERKELBACH & STAUBER

Despite the serious damage to the inscription, we can still conclude that the whole poem was written in hexameter verse. Because fragment A begins with a cross and C ends with the same sign, Ch. ROUECHÉ claims that these were the opening and closing verses of the work. She proposes that it originally consisted of at least four verses³.

Both Nonnian references have long been recognised. They reveal that the author of the inscription was evidently inspired by the *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John*⁴. The first reference occurs in verse A: the word θεόπαις resembles a passage from Nonn. *Par.* XIX 138. The Nonnian context of the second word, the adjective θεοδέγμων, raises no doubts either. It was the proposal of H. GRÉGOIRE⁵ to correct REINACH's reading of ΘΕΟΔΕΙΜΟΝΑ in verse B to θεοδέγμονα and to compare it with the poetry of Nonnus. GRÉGOIRE was, of course, aware that the whole expression θεοδέγμων κήπος did not occur in Nonnus' poems, so he searched for similar passages⁶. It was likewise GRÉGOIRE who suggested the

expedition in 1961, then in 1962 and in 1969. Verses A, B and C were identified as deriving from the same inscription and published by ROUECHÉ in 1989 (no. 100; the entry was briefly commented on by FEISSEL 1991: 372, n. 25). Later she reprinted the inscription in ROUECHÉ, *ALA* 2004, no. 100 and in *I Aph* 2007, no. 7.2. MERKELBACH and STAUBER also included them in *SGO* I, no. 02/09/97.

³ ROUECHÉ, *ALA* 2004, ch. VII.16. Actually it is difficult to estimate the length of the inscription based on other monuments of this kind. In Late Antiquity Anatolian dedicatory inscriptions could consist of several verses but even a single hexameter verse was acceptable (see e.g. *SGO* III, no. 15/02/10 = *RECAM* II, no. 211 which commemorates the embellishment of a *martyrion* of St. Theodotus near Ancyra). Peculiar examples of extremely elaborate dedicatory poems are provided by imperial inscriptions. The foundation of the church of St. Polyeuctus in Constantinople by Anicia Juliana was commemorated with a poem consisting of 167 verses (see SHAHID 2003: 476–480).

⁴ Nonnus' authorship of the *Paraphrase* has been questioned (see SHERRY 1991 [a doctoral thesis]; SHERRY 1996, and in the introduction to *Thesaurus Pseudo-Nonni quondam Panopolitani*, pp. VII–XXIV). SHERRY argues that metric discrepancies between the *Dionysiaca* and the *Paraphrase* are too serious to allow the supposition that both works come from the same author. Subsequent studies conducted in this field led, however, to the dismissal of this view (see SHORROCK 2013: 51). Differences may be the result of the complex procedure of writing such a peculiar work as the *Paraphrase*. On the other hand, some quotations from Callimachus and an analysis of the tradition of authorship may also support the thesis that Nonnus wrote both works.

⁵ GRÉGOIRE, *IGC*, no. 263.

⁶ Paying more attention to the word κήπος than to θεοδέγμων, he identified first: *Par.* XVI-II 15: ἤλυθεν ἀλλοπρόσαλλος ἐς ἠθάδα κήπον Ἰούδας, but then also *Par.* XVIII 73: Χριστῶ σύνδρομος ἤλυθεν ἔσω θεοδέγμονος αὐλής.

literal interpretation of the phrase as “a garden”: either Paradise or the Mount of Olives. The literal interpretation was supported by subsequent scholars dealing with this text. G.W.H. LAMPE accepted both possibilities⁷. Ch. ROUECHÉ⁸ opted for another, still similar, meaning. She understood θεοδέγμων κήπος as the garden in which Jesus was buried⁹. She went one step further and suggested that the actual theme of the poem was the life of Jesus – first his birth followed by “the harsh experiences of His life” and finally the burial. ROUECHÉ was also keen to consider the inscription as a kind of label which could accompany a series of paintings showing the life of Jesus¹⁰.

It is true that in the *Paraphrase* the word κήπος refers either to the Mount of Olives¹¹ or to the garden in which Jesus’ tomb is situated¹², or to “a regular garden”¹³. It was also a very old, originally pagan custom to locate tombs in gardens¹⁴. Our sources give an account of graves adorned with flowers, trees and vine sprouts¹⁵ (but it is not always clear then whether this means a whole garden). In other cases there is little doubt that a large garden is indeed implied¹⁶. Such an establishment is, for example, mentioned in an inscription from Alexandria

⁷ PGL, s.v. θεοδέγμων 1.

⁸ ROUECHÉ, *ALA* 2004, ch. VII.16.

⁹ J. 19, 41: ἦν δὲ ἐν τῷ τόπῳ ὅπου ἐσταυρώθη κήπος, καὶ ἐν τῷ κήπῳ μνημεῖον καινὸν ἐν ᾧ οὐδέπω οὐδεὶς ἦν τεθειμένος.

¹⁰ ROUECHÉ, *ALA* 2004, ch. VII.16.

¹¹ Nonn. *Par.* XVIII 5–7: ἀγχιφανῆς ὅτι κήπος εὐχλοος, ὃν παραμείβων/ κοίρανος ἔνδον ἵκανε ἐθήμονος οἶά τε βαίνων/ φυταλιῆν εὐδομον ἀειθαλέος παραδείσου; XVIII 15: ἤλυθεν ἀλλοπρόσαλλος ἐς ἠθάδα κήπον Ἰούδας; XVIII 26: αὐτοκέλευστος ἀνέδραμε κήπον ἐάσας; XVIII 126 f.: οὐ σε μετ’ αὐτοῦ/ εἶδον ἐγὼ δρυόνεντος ὀμέστιον ἔνδοθι κήπου.

¹² Nonn. *Par.* XIX 213: ἦν δὲ τις αὐτοθι κήπος ἀερσιλόφω παρὰ χώρω; XIX 215: ἐνὶ γείτονι κήπῳ; XX 64: καὶ ξείνος ἀνήρ ἄτε κήπον ὀδεύων.

¹³ Nonn. *Par.* XII 55: ἀπ’ εὐδένδροιο δὲ κήπου/ ἀκροκόμους φοίνικας ἐγυμνώσαντο κορύμβων.

¹⁴ For the description of functions and shapes of ancient gardens see: CARROLL-SPILLECKE 2003 (especially chapter “Gardens of the Dead”, pp. 72–79); CARROLL-SPILLECKE *et al.* 1992; CARROLL-SPILLECKE 1989. The so called κηποτάφια (tomb gardens) were maintained not only for aesthetic reasons. They were sometimes leased and the income they generated (from growing vegetables and fruits) was spent on the upkeep of the tombs.

¹⁵ (a) SGO III, no. 15/02/06 = PEEK *GV* 469 = KAIBEL *EG* 400: ἔρνεσιν εὐπετάλοις (...) [ἔχει σκιερὸν] (a grave shaded by trees; perhaps from Ancyra in Galatia); (b) SEG XLI 855 = KAIBEL *EG* 1135: Νώτωι <μὲν> μολάκην τε καὶ ἀσφόδ<ε>λον πολύριζον (...) ἔχω (mallow – *malva silvestris* and asphodel – *asphodelus ramosus*; from Lucania in Italy); (c) IG XIV 2294 = KAIBEL *EG* 720: ἀλλὰ σε καλύ|πτουσι <θ>αλερ<ή> (?) ἄμπελος | καὶ γῆα ἐν Μεδιωλάνῳ (vine sprouts; from Milan); (d) the epitaph of a certain Patron from the city of Rome (2nd c. AD) likewise mentions only some trees surrounding the grave: IGUR III 1303f, ll. 3 f.: ἀλλὰ με πᾶν δένδρος χαρίεν περιρίσκον ἀνέρπει | κυκλόθεν, εὐκάρποις κλωσὶν ἀγαλλόμενον (= PEEK *GV* 2027 = IG XIV 1934 = KAIBEL *EG* 546, see also: PEEK 1979: 258–260).

¹⁶ See KUBIŃSKA 1968: 142–147; JASHEMSKI 1970/1971 (a description of tomb gardens in Pompeii).

in Egypt recording a very interesting case of an illegal sale of a large tomb garden¹⁷. The term used here is κηπότηφον, which means that the funerary garden was actually indistinguishable from the tomb itself. The third peculiar possibility was burial in an already existing regular garden: a certain inhabitant of Rome says, in the epitaph for his wife, that he buried her in her favourite garden¹⁸.

This classical custom seems to support the suppositions of GRÉGOIRE and ROUECHÉ. Certainly it was easy for the ancients to associate a garden with a tomb. Nevertheless, after closer examination, the identification of the θεοδέγμων κήπος with the tomb of Jesus seems questionable. In my opinion, there is at least a theoretical possibility that the expression θεοδέγμων κήπος was in this peculiar case metaphorically used to represent the Virgin Mary and the idea of the immaculate conception rather than any of the gardens mentioned in the Scriptures. There are two major arguments that allow for such a supposition.

The first argument is that before the 12th c. the adjective θεοδέγμων was never associated either with regular gardens or with the tomb of Jesus¹⁹. It was in fact a very uncommon word in ancient literature. It first appeared in the Hellenistic period, but then it was abandoned²⁰ until Late Antiquity when Nonnus revived it²¹. Though he did it in the *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John*, he did

¹⁷ See FRASER, NICHOLAS 1958 and further remarks in FRASER, NICHOLAS 1962.

¹⁸ IGUR III 1273: τοιγὰρ ἐγὼ τότε σῆμα φίλοις σταδίοισιν ἔτευξα (= PEEK *GV* 1478 = *IG* XIV 1853).

¹⁹ The word θεοδέγμων becomes an epithet of Christ's tomb not earlier than in the Middle Byzantine period: from the 12th c. onwards we observe several occurrences of the very unambiguous phrase, θεοδέγμων τάφος (12th c.: Nicetas Choniates, *Historia de Manuele Comneno lib. I, PG* CXXXIX, col. 404: ἡμεῖς ἔσμεν οἱ δυνατοὶ καὶ διεσπασμένοι πάντες ῥομφαίαν καὶ ὡς κλίνην περιέποντες Σολομώντειον τὸν ζωοδόχον τάφον καὶ θεοδέγμονα; *Halosis, PG* CXXXIX, col. 976: τοῖς ἰκέταις ὑμῶν χεῖρα ὀρέξατε, ναὶ πρὸς τοῦ τάφου τοῦ θεοδέγμονος καὶ τῶν Χριστοῦ παραιφάσεων; 13th c.: Germanus II Nauplius, *Oratio II (PG* XCVIII, col. 243): ἐπεὶ δὲ τῶ μεγάλῳ ἐρύματι τῆς ἀφθάρτου θεότητος, καὶ τῇ πέτρᾳ τοῦ θεοδέγμονος προσέβηκε τάφου; 15th c.: Joannes Argyporulus, *Epistula ad papam Nicolaum* 159β (ed. S.P. LAMBROS, p. 130): ἦς ἴσον τὸ κέρδος ἤγημαι τοῖς εἰς Παλαιστίνην ἀπαίρουσιν ἐφ' ᾧ τῶ θεοδέγμονι τάφῳ προσκυνῆσαι, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ μείζον).

²⁰ Its first occurrence is in a poem by Arcestratus of Gela (fr. 13 ed. BRANDT = fr. 41 ed. RIBBECK, l. 8), a 4th c. BC hedonistic writer from Sicily praising wine and culinary pleasures. The poem, and the word, are cited with disgust by Athenaeus (Ath. VII 113, 320 B): πάσσειν δ' ἄλοσι κυμινοτρίβοις καὶ γλαυκῶ ἐλαίῳ/ ἐκ χειρὸς κατακρουνίζων θεοδέγμονα πηγῆν). Then the word disappears until Late Antiquity.

²¹ In *Par.* Nonnus uses the word θεοδέγμων nine times: I 23: θεοδέγμονι λαῶ; I 148: θεοδέγμονος αὐλῆς; III 155: θεοδέγμονος ἴκετο κόλπου; IV 137: θεοδέγμονι πηγῆ; V 127: θεοδέγμονος ὀμφῆς; VII 150: θεοδέγμονι θυμῶ; X 55: θεοδέγμονος αὐλῆς; XVII 73: θεοδέγμονος αὐλῆς; XIX 203: θεοδέγμονι κείμενον ὦμο. The word is also used in the *Dionysiaca*. ROUECHÉ provides a single reference, XVIII 88, where it appears in a literary sense: καὶ μόγις ἴχνος ἔκαμψεν ἔσω θεοδέγμονος αὐλῆς, but the word θεοδέγμων occurs in this work in six different verses. Because of the topic of the poem, the word must refer to pagan gods, although some phrases are identical to those from the *Paraphrase*, cf. IX 162: θεοδέγμονος αὐλῆς; XIII 435:

not connect it to the garden tomb of Jesus. Actually, in none of the phrases does Nonnus ever put emphasis on any gardens. He describes them as εὔδενδροι (XII 55: “well-wooded”), as εὔχλοοι (XVIII 5: “ever green”), or as γείτονες (XIX 215: “nearby”). For him they are just plain elements of the setting. To say that a garden was endowed with divine grace or that it was host to God is much too lofty for Nonnus.

In contrast, the dedicatory inscription from the church of the Dormition of the Virgin of Skripou²² (Orchomenus) in Boeotia (AD 873/874), consisting of 12 Homeric hexametres, clearly shows that the word θεοδέγμων fits the Virgin Mary perfectly. The crucial reference is in lines 5 f., which read: μητρὸς ἀπειρογάμου, θεοδέγμονος ἰφινάσσης,/ τερπνὸν ἀποστίλβον περικαλλέα πάντοθεν αἴγλην (“of the virgin Mother, the great sovereign who received God,/ a delight, such a beautiful brightness gleaming all around”, transl. by PRIETO-DOMÍNGUEZ 2013: 168 f.).

Also the fact that even Nonnus was apt to associate the adjective θεοδέγμων with the birth (not the burial) of Jesus may be strengthened by a closer examination of a certain passage from the *Paraphrase*. Three verses from the third book (III 155–157) read:

Κύπρον ἐπιπερύγων θεοδέγμονα νῆσον Ἐρώτων; XX 222: θεοδέγμονος ἔνδοθι νηοῦ; XXVII 242: θεοδέγμονος αὐλῆς; XL 412: θεοδέγμονος ἔνδοθι νηοῦ; XLVIII 955: Παλλὰς ἀνυμφεύτω θεοδέγμονι δέξατο κόλπῳ. It is only a guess where Nonnus learned the word θεοδέγμων, but its occurrence in the *Dionysiaca* may be something more than a mere coincidence. It is tempting to assume that Nonnus borrowed the word from genuine Dionysian literature, because it occurs in an inscription from Epidauros, dated to AD 308, which was erected by a Dionysian priest (*IG IV*² 1, no. 436): σεῖο, μάκαρ, βουλαῖσιν ὑπ’ ἀρρήτοισιν ὀνίροις | ἀρητήρ γεγαῶς *vac.* ἰκόνα σὴν ἔθετο | Πλούταρχος, κλεινῆς θεοδέγμονος Ἀτθίδος αἴης | ἀρχιερεὺς κεδνοῦ τ’ *vac.* ἱροπόλος Βρομίου | ἱεραπολήσας ἔτους ρπε’. A poem from *Anth. Gr.* VII 363, l. 4 associates the word with Orpheus (the initial four lines are: † Τετμενάνης ὄδε τύμβος ἐνγλύπτιοι μετάλλου/ ἦρωος μεγάλου νέκυος κατὰ σῶμα καλύπτει,/ Ζηνοδότου· ψυχὴ δὲ κατ’ οὐρανόν, ἦχι περ’ Ὀρφεύς,/ ἦχι Πλάτων, ἱερὸν θεοδέγμονα θῶκον ἐφεῦρεν; “This tomb of polished metal covers the body of the great hero Zenodotus; but his soul has found in heavens, where Orpheus and Plato are, a holy seat fit to receive god”; transl. by W.R. PATON) which also points at a Dionysian milieu. One can wonder whether or not the worshippers of Dionysus appropriated it directly from the wine-loving Archestratus or via Athenaeus. Other channels of transmission are also possible, but this topic is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonnus’ influence caused late antique and Byzantine authors to use the word θεοδέγμων in various contexts. For example, it was familiar to Dioscorus of Aphrodito, who used it in his encomium of the emperor Justin II (*P.Aphrod.Lit.*, fr. IV 17, v. 25 = *P.Cair.Masp.* II, 67183 verso, v. 6: [πίστ]ιν ἀεργάσεις θεοδέγμονα κυδιανείρην: this is a corrected reading of θεοδεγμονα). Two other 6th c. poets – John of Gaza (Jo. Gaz. *Descriptio tabulae mundi* I 38: καὶ γραμμῆς διδύμης θεοδέγμονος εὐδίου εἰκῶν/ χρυσοφαῆς μάρμαρειν) and Paulus Silentiarius (Paul. Sil. *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae* v. 787: Παῦλος, ὅλης σοφῆς θεοδέγμονος ἔμπλεος ἀνήρ; *Descriptio ambonis*, v. 298–302: πολυστέπτοις δ’ ἐπὶ δώροις/ καὶ σέλας ἀστυόχοιο εἰς ἀνέθηκε γαλήνης/ νηὸν ὑπὲρ πολύμνον, ὅπως θεοδέγμονι βουλήι/ ἔμπροσθεν ἰδρύσειε γέρας κοσμήτορι κόσμου,/ Χριστῶι παμβασιλῆι) also incorporated the word in their works.

²² OIKONOMIDES 1994: 483–485, 489–493; PAPAEXANDROU 2000: 142–155; PRIETO-DOMÍNGUEZ 2013: 168 f.

ὅς δὲ δι' αἰθερίου θεοδέγμονος ἴκετο κόλπου,
 φθέγγεται, οὐρανόθεν τόπερ ἔκλυεν, οὐδέ τις αὐτοῦ
 μαρτυρίην ζαθέην ἐπιδέχνηται.

While he who comes from the heavenly God-receiving womb,
 Reveals what was reveal'd in heaven. And no man
 Can add unto his holy testimony.

(transl. by PROST 2003: III 155–157, slightly modified)

The quoted verses refer to the last paragraphs of the third chapter of the Gospel of St. John, especially to the passage: ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐρχόμενος ἐπάνω πάντων ἐστίν· ὁ ἐώρακεν καὶ ἤκουσεν τοῦτο μαρτυρεῖ, καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτοῦ οὐδεὶς λαμβάνει (“He that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony”, J 3, 31 f., transl. King James Version). Travesting this passage, Nonnus evidently uses the phrase θεοδέγμων κόλπος to describe the place from which Jesus came²³. While it is true that the mentioned κόλπος is not literally Mary’s womb, but rather a *heavenly* (αἰθερίος) *womb*, the character of the phrase fits well with the story about the birth of Jesus and brings to mind Mary’s role to such extent that it could easily be reshaped and put in a new context by a poet inspired by Nonnus.

The other argument supports this reasoning: the word κῆπος can equally easily refer to the Virgin Mary and virginity as it can to the tomb of Jesus. The information that Jesus was buried in a garden occurs in only one of the four canonical Gospels (the Gospel of John²⁴). The earliest Christian authors rarely mentioned this tradition. Such information was only actually repeated in the apocryphal Gospel of St. Peter (24): εἰσήγαγεν εἰς ἴδιον τάφον καλούμενον Κῆπον Ἰωσήφ (“He laid [the body] in his own tomb, called ‘the Garden of Joseph’”, transl. P. Nowakowski), but its author simply followed John’s narration. It is also remarkable that the image of Jesus as a gardener (κηπουρός) is rare in the works

²³ Yet another, this time pagan, example of this phrase is present in *Dionysiaca* XLVIII 955: Παλλὰς ἀνυμφεύτω θεοδέγμονι δέξατο κόλπω. It proves that Nonnus was quite familiar with the idea that *womb* may be shown as θεοδέγμων.

²⁴ Anthony M. MOORE tries to explain why the author of this Gospel claimed so. Perhaps he was simply inspired by *kepotaphia* that he knew himself, but there are more complex possibilities too. The image of the gardener and the tomb garden may refer to the Garden of Eden and show Jesus as the Creator. Yet another theological explanation is that Mary Magdalene’s confusion (she mistook Jesus for a gardener) may illustrate that seeing the resurrection does not mean understanding it. The scene may also have something in common with the Jewish polemic that asserted that a gardener removed the body of Jesus from the illegally seized tomb. See MOORE 2003: 54–93, 196–198. Interestingly, the author of the Gospel claims that this garden was located in the Kidron Valley, which is far from Golgotha. The question of the actual location of Jesus’ tomb is, however, an issue which I am not going to discuss in the present paper. See JANISZEWSKI 2009: 432 f.; KLONER, ZISSU 2007; *CIIP* I 1: 8–10.

of early Christian writers.²⁵ The literal perception of the setting depicted in this evangelical story had little significance for them.

In contrast, the connection between gardens and virginity was already noted by early Christian authors (it was also a common motive in pagan poetry)²⁶. Beginning with Origen, even the story about the garden in which Jesus was buried starts to be perceived as an allegory. In *Contra Celsum* II 69, the renowned theologian remarks that the tomb of Jesus and the womb of Mary resemble each other. Both were immaculate, pure (i.e. new, previously not used), both accepted the body of Jesus. The idea gained strength in the 4th c. with Jerome in his *Commentary to the Gospel of Matthew* (27, 60). He writes clearly that the tomb of Jesus *points to* the womb of Mary. Later, in two greetings the Virgin Mary is even explicitly called a *garden*. In the *Oratio in Sanctam Mariam Deiparam* by Chrysippus of Jerusalem²⁷, Gabriel the archangel addresses her: “the garden of the Father” (χαῖρε, ὁ κήπος ὁ τοῦ πατρός). John of Damascus²⁸ goes even further and calls Mary “the closed garden” (χαῖρε, κήπος κεκλεισμένος) accessible to no one except God.

The metaphor of the closed garden (κήπος κεκλεισμένος) is based on the contents of two verses from the fourth chapter of the *Song of Solomon* which read: κήπος κεκλεισμένος ἀδελφή μου σύμφη/ κήπος κεκλεισμένος, πηγὴ ἐσφραγισμένη. In this passage the “closed garden” is an allegory of a bride. The garden-metaphor is then repeated several times²⁹, mostly depicting *the lover entering his garden*³⁰. This metaphor, originally used to illustrate the relationship between lovers, is, as we can see, evidently borrowed and allegorically interpreted by John of Damascus to narrate the story of the *reception of God* by the Virgin.

A depiction of the Virgin accepting the Word of God and agreeing to bear God’s Son has many points of similarity to the image of the lover entering his perfect, isolated garden in the *Song of Solomon*. Thus it is reasonable to conclude that the author of the discussed inscription merged the literary tradition naming Mary the κήπος κεκλεισμένος with the Nonnian style and wording (the adjective θεοδέγμων and the *epiclesis* θεόπαις). By this literary operation he transformed the Biblical story into sublime multi-reference poetry. It is unknown whether this

²⁵ See JANISZEWSKI 2009: 429.

²⁶ Robin LANE FOX emphasises this in his recent essay on the image of gardens in Christian literature; see LANE FOX 2014: 377.

²⁷ Chrysipp. *Oratio in Mariam Deiparam* 1 (PO XIX, p. 337).

²⁸ Jo. D. *Homilia in nativ. BMV* 7 (PG XCVI, col. 692).

²⁹ Sg 4, 15; 4, 16; 5, 1; 6, 2; 6, 11; 8, 13.

³⁰ Sg 4,17: καταβήτω ἀδελφιδός μου εἰς κήπον αὐτοῦ/ καὶ φαγέτω καρπὸν ἀκροδρύων αὐτοῦ; 5, 1: εἰσῆλθον εἰς κήπόν μου; 6, 2: ἀδελφιδός μου κατέβη εἰς κήπον αὐτοῦ/ εἰς φιάλας τοῦ ἀρώματος/ ποιμαίνειν ἐν κήποις καὶ συλλέγειν κρίνα; 6, 11: εἰς κήπον καρύας κατέβην; 8, 13: ὁ καθήμενος ἐν κήποις.

poem was an original work prepared exclusively for the discussed inscription or if it was copied from another, now lost, work.

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³¹ Papyri are cited according to the abbreviations in the *Checklist of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*.

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