

Nicole Kröll: *Die Jugend des Dionysos. Die Ampelos-Episode in den Dionysiaka des Nonnos von Panopolis*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2016 (Millennium-Studien 62). XVI, 343 S., 2 Abb. € 119.95/\$ 168.00/£ 108.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-041205-5.

Nonnus of Panopolis and especially his *Dionysiaca* is the subject of much scholarly interest nowadays. After the completion of the much-praised Budé edition of the *Dionysiaca* (1976–2006, 19 volumes), new publications on Nonnus followed at an impressive speed. I can only mention a selection. A series of biennial Nonnus conferences was founded in 2011, the same year that also R. Shorrock's famous *Myth of Paganism* was published. The publication of this first conference's proceedings in 2014 (ed. K. Spanoudakis) was also the first edited volume of articles exclusively dealing with the subject since N. Hopkinson's (ed.) 1994 *Studies in the Dionysiaca of Nonnus*. Also H. Frangoulis' monograph on the *Dionysiaca* and K. Spanoudakis' edition and commentary of *Paraphrase XI* appeared the same year. In 2016, the monumental *Brill's Companion to Nonnus* (ed. D. Accorinti) appeared as well as no less than two new monographs on the *Dionysiaca* (N. Kröll's and my own) and one on the *Paraphrase* (F. Doroszewski). With the proceedings of the second Nonnus conference (H. Bannert and – again – N. Kröll) and yet another monograph on the *Dionysiaca* (C. Geisz) also 2017 turned out extremely fruitful, and further announcements of new initiatives and upcoming publications make it quite clear that Nonnus' 21st century heyday is not over yet.

While Nonnus, at least from the point of view of the booming scholarship on Late Antiquity, is turning into 'a classic', it becomes an increasingly important question how best to use this momentum in order to further our understanding of this fascinating poet. For the *Paraphrase* and the *Dionysiaca* very different choices have been made in the past. For the *Dionysiaca* the Budé edition (with an elaborate introduction to every book) has provided a solid basis for further studies of literary, metrical, linguistic and socio-cultural aspects of the poem in its entirety as well as for many detailed studies of specific passages and episodes. A full philological commentary on the poem, is, however, still lacking and the few books (or parts thereof) of which there is a commentary at present only cover a very small part of this 48 book epic: C. Selzer 1995 (commentary on book 47, 1–495, unpublished dissertation), F. Tissoni 1998 (commentary on books 44–46) and most recently

S. Zuenelli 2013 (commentary on book 12, unpublished dissertation). For the *Paraphrase*, the situation is entirely opposite. There is still no complete modern edition – which is felt as a serious obstacle for a more profound literary analysis of the poem as a whole – but the series of critical editions and commentaries (per gospel chapter) initiated by Enrico Livrea (1989; book 18) at present covers 13 (9 published, 4 unpublished dissertations) of all 21 ‘books’ of this much shorter poem (3640 lines).

Is a similar series of commentaries also a *desideratum* for the *Dionysiaca*? Would it at all be feasible? And what would be the intrinsic value and status of single volumes of such a commentary if the ambitious project would remain unfinished for several decades to come? The size of the *Dionysiaca* (21 286 lines in total) is always a factor when determining new topics for research. Studies of the poem as a whole cannot attain a significant depth of analysis unless by singling out a range of shorter passages, whereas in detailed studies of specific passages it remains a huge challenge to reconnect the observations made to the poem as a whole. The present book by N. Kröll offers a very interesting solution to this problem with its clear focus on one quite substantial episode, its multi-angled approach to it and the systematic way in which her analysis of this episode is embedded in and connected with more general findings on the poem as a whole.

As Kröll clearly shows throughout her book, the Ampelus episode (books 10–12), which brings closure to the first quarter of the poem, is not only a key-passage for the structure of the *Dionysiaca* and with the ‘invention’ of the wine an essential step of Dionysus’ road to Olympus. It can in many respects also be read as a *pars pro toto* for the poem in its entirety. Kröll’s book is not a commentary (certainly not in the traditional philological sense of the word) but will serve any reader as an excellent companion to this intriguing episode and guide him/her to the interesting features in probably a more insightful and complete way than would have been possible in the traditional format of a commentary. Because of the way she systematically starts each chapter with a thorough discussion of the relevant findings in scholarship on Nonnus, her study of the Ampelus episode can moreover also be read as an accessible (because of the Ampelus episode as an ‘easy way in’) but already very comprehensive (also because of her multi-angled approach) introduction to the *Dionysiaca* for new readers of Nonnus.

In the introduction of her book, Kröll highlights the importance of the *Dionysiaca* as “zu gleichen Teilen Renaissance, Zenit und Finale des griechischen

Epos" (1). She emphasizes both the specificity of the Egyptian late antique context in which we have to situate the poem (5: "ein besonderes Spannungsfeld zwischen Heiden und Christen") as well as the characteristic way in which Nonnus' poetry combines elements from different genres and traditions. For a reader less familiar with the *Dionysiaca*, the summary (7–10) and "Forschungsgeschichte" (10–16) are extremely useful. The main goal of her book, as Kröll explains (17), is to provide a thorough survey of the characterization strategies, the role of the literary tradition and the composition in/of the Ampelus episode, both in itself and in relation to other passages and episodes. This all with special attention for the specific characteristics of Nonnian and late antique poetics.

Chapter 2, the first analytical chapter, focusses on the opening passage of the episode. Although its opening in the middle of book 10 is "abrupt und überganglos" (20) it continues relevant themes and motifs from earlier episodes (e. g. water, madness, ...). No longer an infant, Dionysus in this episode becomes a god, and this change is announced already in first lines of the episode with the Bacchic image of the young god's bath in the river Pactolus in the company of frolicking satyrs, prefiguring his later bands of followers. There is a strong visuality to be noticed, effected by a description full of *repetitio cum variatione* and by the fragmentation of actions into individual movements and phases of movement, for example by zooming in onto specific body parts.

Chapter 3 offers a survey of the tradition of the Ampelus myth, which only in Nonnus occurs in this form. The closest parallel can be found in Ovid's *Fasti*, where Ampelus, like in Nonnus, is mentioned as the beloved boy of Dionysus, but there receives the (already existing) vine as a gift from his divine lover and falls to his death while picking grapes. The only mention of Ampelus in Greek before Nonnus is in a catalogue of pagan gods and their beloved ones in the *Pseudo-Clementines*. In the second part of her chapter, Kröll explores the interesting possibility of a wider Ampelus tradition in the visual arts, but concludes that there is no real evidence. There are indeed a few instances of images of young satyrs with vine leaves and others of young boys accompanying Dionysus, which were identified as Ampelus in scholarship, but this could only be done *because* of our knowledge of Nonnus' version. All evidence of a later tradition is clearly connected to the reception of Nonnus' poetry. It cannot be denied that Nonnus must have made use of an older, probably Hellenistic, probably little-known tradition (cf. Ovid and

the *Pseudo-Clementines*), but it remains impossible to reconstruct the ‘original’ story, if this was at all a fully developed myth. “Es stellt sich nun die Frage, aus welchen Elementen Nonnos seine sonst unbekannte Geschichte zusammensetzt. Schöpft er vielleicht doch aus literarischen Quellen, um seinen Ampelos zu formen, und wenn nicht aus einem eigenen Ampelos-Mythos, so womöglich aus anderen, vergleichbaren Mythen?” (49) Kröll shows convincingly how in its Nonnian form all elements of the story prepare for the eventual metamorphosis and the theme of the wine, which is also significant for the way the story is embedded in the larger narrative of the *Dionysiaca*. Aside from the Ampelus episode itself, Ampelus is only mentioned twice, but he (the vine) immediately becomes a quintessential attribute of Dionysus (cf. Nonnus’ use of the words ἄμπελος and ἀμπελόεις in key passages, both earlier and later in the poem).

The hypothesis raised at the end of chapter 3, namely that Nonnus for his Ampelus story draws on elements from the stories of other beautiful young boys beloved by the gods, is fully developed in chapter 4. In the frequent explicit *syncretiseis* of Ampelus with several such figures, Nonnus’ narrator as it were comments on his own “Bauplan” (66) for shaping the figure of Ampelus. He has the beauty of a young god and shares a similar position as “ein Göttergeliebter” (65) with Hyacinthus (who also dies and becomes a plant). Similar connections can be drawn with the figures of Narcissus, Pelops, Ganymede, Hylas, Europa, Bellerophon and even Marsyas. In absence of a fully developed Ampelus tradition, Nonnus thus creates a literary tradition for Ampelus via these other figures by echoing earlier authors who famously portrayed them in their poetry (Pindar, Bion, Theocritus, Apollonius Rhodius, to name but a few).

Chapter 5, then, continues this intertextual line of Kröll’s research and highlights a number of other aspects of Nonnus’ use of the literary tradition. By focussing on the function of intertextuality, rather than on identifying “Parallelstellen” (97), Kröll here primarily aims to show Nonnus’ creative-innovative attitude towards his sources. The funeral games of Patroclus (*Iliad* 23) are an important model for several athletic and other contests in the *Dionysiaca*, including the eroticised running, wrestling and swimming contests of the Ampelus episode. Nonnus pays tribute to his model, but also playfully rejects certain Homeric elements. The long section on Homer in this chapter is followed by a relatively shorter section which discusses Nonnus’ engagement with other genres, like the bucolic or novelistic. By adding a Bacchic

flair to every scene Nonnus harmoniously intertwines the Homeric with the bucolic. When discussing the possible influence of novelistic elements, Kröll, however, remains extremely cautious. The substantial common ground between Nonnus and the Greek Novel can to a large extent be explained as the effect of a shared cultural and rhetorical background. There are only a few scenes where a specific novelistic passage comes to mind as a potential model, but even in these cases the evidence for a direct connection is considered rather weak. Finally, Kröll argues that Nonnus creates, as it were, the ultimate synthesis of the classical tradition by combining elements from as many literary genres as possible, and this not necessarily by referring to specific authors or texts, but rather combining different (hymnic, didactic, tragic) modes of expression.

With another smooth transition from the one chapter to the other, Kröll picks up the question of the rhetorical background in chapter 6. Three prominent rhetorical techniques are here brought to the fore: *syncretisis*, *encomion* and *ekphrasis*, the first of which only briefly as the frequent *syncretiseis* between Ampelus and other mythological figures are already discussed at length in chapter 4. The *encomion*, and more specifically the *basilikos logos* as it is described by Menander Rhetor, is widely considered to be fundamental for our understanding of the *Dionysiaca* as a whole, which is roughly structured as an *encomion* for the god Dionysus. Throughout the Ampelus episode, the praise for Ampelus gradually evolves into praise of the wine (which becomes a *topos* in later episodes) and (self-)praise for Dionysus. In this encomiastic line of interpretation, the final speech of Dionysus (12,207–289), which by early 20th century scholarship was considered superfluous and perhaps a later addition, becomes quintessential for the interpretation of the entire episode. It takes the rhetorical form of an *ethopoeia* (“what would the god of wine say upon tasting wine for the first time”) and thematically connects the Ampelus episode, with the second version of the myth of the ‘invention of the wine’ (12,292–397), which immediately follows the Ampelus narrative. The final part of this chapter discusses the presence of *ekphrasis*, both in the modern sense of a ‘description of a work of art’ (the tablets of Harmonia) and in the ancient sense of a character, landscape, action, and such, which is vividly described. In this latter sense, *ekphrasis* is part of the narrative, rather than a factor that interrupts the narrative flow. All senses are appealed to.

Chapter 7 discusses the overall structure of the Ampelus episode. Kröll here distinguishes between twelve individual scenes of which the first four form

the actual Ampelus narrative, whereas the final eight primarily reflect on what has happened. There are several mourning scenes, but the gayness of the first couple of scenes returns as Bacchic ecstasy in the final scenes. Regarding the use of time and space in the episode, Kröll points at the significance of the cosmic dimension. The *Dionysiaca* is set in a wide geographical area (all around the Mediterranean and even in India) but the cosmic scenes (here the Horae's visit to Helios) give the poem "einen Universalanspruch" (205). As regards time indications, the Nonnian narrator only gives scanty information and does not seem to aspire to create a stable chronology of events, but rather to stress the cyclic nature of time, especially in the cosmic scenes which have "Ewigkeitsanspruch" (208).

Finally, Chapter 8, connects the observations made in the earlier chapters with Nonnus' late antique context. It could be read as the book's conclusion because it takes up many of the subjects discussed earlier (intertextuality, fragmentation, visuality, the cosmic dimension), only to end with the question of the possible Christian influences in and interpretation of the Ampelus episode – an issue raised also in the introduction (15–16). Kröll sees the Ampelus episode as exemplary of Nonnus' "heidnisch-christliche[m] Synkretismus" (257). "Diese Doppelbödigkeit findet sich allenthalben in den *Dionysiaka*; die zugrunde liegende pagane Mythologie wird um eine spezifisch christliche Lesart erweitert, die die Rezeption auch durch ein christliches Publikum nahelegt" (262).

The book is complete with an impressive bibliography and a very useful *index locorum* and general index which allow its reader to quickly find information and further references on virtually any important topic in scholarship on the *Dionysiaca*. Its clever combination of a very wide scope (in terms of different approaches, but also in terms of the *Dionysiaca* as a whole and in terms of its use of earlier scholarship) and a manageable focus on an indeed fascinating episode, makes this beautifully edited book into a potential work of reference for future scholarship on Nonnus.

Berence Verhelst, Gent
Berence.Verhelst@UGent.be

www.plekos.de

Empfohlene Zitierweise

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