

Berenice Verhelst (ed.): *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context IV. Poetry at the Crossroads*. Leuven/Paris/Bristol, CT: Peeters 2022 (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 314 = *Bibliothèque de Byzantion* 29). XVI, 589 pp., 11 ill. € 195.00. ISBN: 978-90-429-4516-6.

The fourth volume of the series “Nonnus of Panopolis in Context”, edited by Berenice Verhelst, stems from a conference which took place in 2018 in Ghent, the fourth out of a series of five conferences (the latest was held in Madrid in 2023, the first inaugurated in Rethymnon in 2011), all of which have resulted (or will result) in published proceedings. The obligatory opening gambit in any review on a book about late antique Greek poetry, namely about the now burgeoning and diverse range of scholarship on Nonnus of recent years, is never not worth repeating, especially so given the next few years promise further monographs, commentaries and translations (one looks forward, especially, to the impact that the forthcoming translation by Tim Whitmarsh et al. of the *Dionysiaca* will have on an even wider readership).

As the editor clarifies in the book’s preamble (pp. IX–XII), the subtitle “Poetry at the Crossroads” reflects the diverse range of contributions, which cover Nonnus’ place within the cultural-religious context of Panopolis and of the late antique world more generally, Nonnus’ *Nachleben* as well as studies of Nonnus’ use of tradition. What is most apparent (and admirable), and reflective of more recent trends on both the *Dionysiaca* and the *Paraphrase*, is that the majority of the volume’s writers discuss both of Nonnus’ poems as carefully interlinked, interactive literary outputs. There are seven sections in total, covering 506 pages, an extensive bibliography (pp. 511–556) as well as general index (pp. 557–568) and *index locorum* (pp. 569–576). The chapters by Hélène Frangoulis, Halima Benchikh-Lehocine/Christophe Cusset and Thomas Gärtner are not in English (previous “Nonnus in Context” volumes have been multi-lingual, too, and one hopes this practice will long continue). Abstracts, all in English, of each chapter can be found at the very end of the volume (pp. 577–590).

Described by Verhelst in the introduction as the “Nestor at the Ghent conference” (p. X), Gennaro D’Ippolito, one of the true pioneers of modern Nonnian studies, opens Part 1 (“Roadmarks and Directions. Nonnian Authorship and Poetics”, pp. 3–73) with a chapter on the thematic and poetological unity of the two Nonnian poems (“Nonnus’ Poetic Activity as an Ex-

pression of a Unitary Ideological and Artistic Programme”, pp. 3–22). This is a good starting-point for those wishing to read an overview of the scholarly debates, to date, on the authorship of both poems, on their unifying principles and structures and the fundamental idea (now current in scholarship) that both poems were composed simultaneously. D’Ippolito is unhesitating in identifying our poet as the Bishop of Edessa, and also ascribes the famous epigram Anth. Gr. 9.198 (Νόννος ἐγώ [...]) to Nonnian authorship. The latter assertion is based on metrical and verbal parallels in the *Dionysiaca* in particular, but such evidence can also point to an expert imitator; the former claim is unlikely to convince all, but reflects the emphasis in the chapter on uncovering “characteristics of the author’s personality” (p. 12). Discussion of Anth. Gr. 9.198 continues in Simon Zuenelli’s meticulous study, which analyses that epigram against the received principles of composition underlying the genre of funerary epigrams and book epigrams [“Nonnus, a Classic in the Making: The Book Epigram on the *Dionysiaca* (A.P. 9.198)”, pp. 23–42]. Zuenelli demonstrates that the epigram plays with the πεπαιδευμένος-reader’s generic expectations in that it is a hybrid of features of an epitaph and a substantiation of an authorial portrait, both of which modes serve to underscore the status of the *Dionysiaca* as a ‘literary classic’. Zuenelli is surely correct to stop short of definitively identifying the *ego* of the text as Nonnus himself; but on the subject of the leading appellation in the epigram, he persuasively explores the possibility that the text (given the deictic nature of the initial *ego*) was accompanied by an image of the author as a frontispiece of a luxury edition, and so served as a literary representation of the author, cleverly allusive of certain key literary strategies of the epic.

After an interesting, short piece by Michael Paschalis on parallels between Hesiod’s self-representation in the *Theogony* and the depiction of John the Baptist in the *Paraphrase* (“The Lure of Paganism: Nonnus’ *Paraphrasis of the Gospel of John* and Hesiod’s *Theogony*”, pp. 43–52), Emma Greensmith offers one of the volume’s most ambitious interpretations (“The Miracle Baby. Zagreus and the Poetics of Mutation”, pp. 53–74). Greensmith sees in the figure of Zagreus not, *pace* Robert Shorrock,<sup>1</sup> an isolated site of Nonnus’ failed poetic experimentation, that is, in the symbol of a first-try Dionysus which fades into the background once the proper Dionysus is born, we can read Nonnus’ first attempts in his poetic enterprise fizzle out;

1 R. Shorrock: *The Challenge of Epic. Allusive Engagement in the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus*. Leiden/Boston/Cologne 2001 (Mnemosyne. Supplements 210).

rather, she sees in the early version of the epic's divine hero a "guide for how to read the multiplex poetics" (p. 63) of the poem as a whole, given the swirling echoes in the Zagreus passage of the Protean fabric of the poem, as seen especially the proem, and of the νόθον εἶδος Zagreus sees imaged back to him as he inspects his mirrored self. Greensmith's argument is more than convincing, given the complex play with the poem's poetic programme in the episode which she evinces. The focus of the chapter, however, is on one line (6.175), and the παλινώγρετον beginning of Dionysus which Zagreus' τέρμα βίου marks. The resurrection, Greensmith argues, is an earlier and equally important configuration of Nonnus' play with Christian motifs of the Lazarus-like revivifications of Ampelus and Tylus, resurrections which pointedly echo the narrative of Lazarus in *Paraphrase* 11. Against the otherwise piquant textual analysis and conclusions made in the chapter – Greensmith has surely established a key role for the Zagreus episode in our understanding of Nonnus' literary patterning of regenerational poetics – Shorrock's thesis can still stand, given that Zagreus represents an earlier, but failed, attempt at poetic enterprise, as Zagreus does die in that form, as a facet of Dionysian identities, just as Ampelus has a fatal accident and is reborn in *another* form.

Parts two ("Off the Beaten Track", pp. 77–130) and three ("Roads under Construction", pp. 133–192), on Nonnus' "Creative Use of Models" and "Nonnian Innovations and Their Precedents", may be discussed together. Nicole Kröll uses as a test case the goddess Athena to ascertain the extent to which Nonnus carries over the traditional Homeric construction of divine characteristics ("Shape-Shifting Athena: On the Transformation of Homeric Characters in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*", pp. 77–102). Kröll, through a series of cases studies on the typical traits associated with the goddess, from weaving to self-transformation and martial prowess among others, proves that Nonnus, rather, adapts the goddess's traditional modes to something more suitable for the Dionysian spirit of his own poem. Athena is assimilated closely to Dionysus' own traits, a connection enhanced programmatically in the proem itself, where the two unconventional births are set side by side (1.8–10). Héléne Frangoulis presents a detailed analysis of Artemis-Aura scene in *Dionysiaca* 48 ("Nonnos et Callimaque: Une scène de bain dans les *Dionysiaques*", pp. 103–118), by comparing it closely not only with its counterpart scene of Actaeon's tragic viewing in Book 5, but also with its careful intertextual grounding in Callimachean texts, especially the *Bath of Pallas*

(*Hymn* 5). The analysis is detailed and cogent, and the resulting interconnections between Artemis and Athena and Aura and Chariclo underscored.

Nonnus' penchant for astrological description is pervasive in the *Dionysiaca*. Arianna Magnolo analyses Aratean intertextuality in the *Dionysiaca* ("How Nonnus Employs Aratus' *Astronomy* in the *Dionysiaca*: A Case Study", pp. 119–130). After a theoretical framework (one might question the focus on "intentionality" [p. 120] given its essential un-recoverability), the author uses a passage from the Typhonomachy (1.448–467) as a case study to illustrate examples of Nonnus' embedding of allusions to Aratus. A different intertextual path is explored by Katerina Carvounis and Sophia Papaioannou, who of late have been leading the recent scholarly trend of arguing for Latin intertexts in Nonnus ("Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* and the Written Word", pp. 133–150). In their contribution on the *Dionysiaca* and "the written word", the authors have produced a characteristically excellent critical overview of the nature and function of writing, catalogues and inscriptions in the poem. The section on funerary epigrams is especially instructive. It is not entirely implausible to suppose that Nonnus took his cue from Ovid in his representation of the written word within his epic, and shaped it to fit the characteristics of his own poetic identity, but, for example, the parallel the contributors point to, to cement a parallel between the stories of Orontes and Phaethon, namely ἐνθάδε καί ται (37.101) and *hic situs est* (met. 327), is unlikely to have occurred to Nonnus' own readership.

Formulae and compound adjectives are the focus of the remaining two chapters of the section. Alexandra Madela examines the formulaic diction of the *Orphic Argonautica* ("The Formulaic Diction of the *Orphic Argonautica* in Context: A Comparison with Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*", pp. 151–168), and illustrates the late-antique innovations in formulae-composition, that is, formulae which are non-Homeric, which are such a feature of Nonnus' practice, are already present, but to a lesser extent, in the *Orphic Argonautica*, even if that latter poem exhibits a more Quintus-like tendency for archaic borrowings, too. The author makes a strong grounding for the possibility of influence of late-antique formulae in the *Orphic Argonautica* on the *Dionysiaca*, to a greater extent than has been previously recognised. Tim Whitmarsh introduces the subject of "Big Data and Dionysiac Poetics" (pp. 169–192). He provides data on πολυ- and ἄπο- compound adjectives to read the text: through analysis of the instances of such adjectives, he approaches the text in a non-linear way, by means of what he calls "oblique slicing" (p. 170). The

results (there are many pages of tables) are very interesting indeed. The high incidence of *πολυ-* compounds for curving, whirling and arching are striking (something not characteristic of the *Paraphrase*); Whitmarsh is right to relate this to the “thematic centrality” (p. 179) of snakes, and the corresponding serpentine quality of Nonnian poetics; but of course one could more readily relate such adjectives to the vine and to ivy, and the privileging of plant-based metaphors for the poem’s intoxicating poetics. Even more fascinating is the data for *ἄτο-* compounds: the preponderance of occurrences is very much an imperial Greek, and especially Nonnian, peculiarity. Whitmarsh is surely right to see, in the prevalence of self-originating adjectives, something “significantly more conceptually adventurous” (p. 189), in that they are indicative of Nonnus’ thematics on divinity transcending humanity and mortality.

Parts four and five are comprised of two different “Road Junctions”, to repeat the editor’s unifying metaphor. The “Dionysiac Road to India” (pp. 195–242) features three chapters on Nonnus’ representation of the Indians. The first two, by Luise Marion Frenkel (“Spicing Nonnus up: Commercial and Religious Crossroads and Nonnus’ Representation of the East”, pp. 195–212) and Richard Stoneman (“Nymphs and Elephants. Nonnus’ Depiction of India”, pp. 213–226), come to similar conclusions on the early antecedents for Nonnus’ representation of Indians, and the prioritising of mythographic traditions over contemporary, actual knowledge. Frenkel does show, however, in an insightful and thorough examination of the trade routes with India in Nonnus’ time, that Nonnus, “an epic historiographer”, provides a range of rich material for his contemporary learned audience even if his representation of India “does not represent accurately how it mattered for the people of the Roman Empire” (p. 196). Stoneman, in a beautifully illustrated and persuasive piece, proves that Nonnus relies on (post-Megasthenes) literary descriptions of elephants over actual observation. Fotini Hadjittofi’s study is an extremely rich one (“Nonnus’ Indians between Conversion and Acculturation”, pp. 227–242): its concluding focus is on the ‘main event’ of the poem, namely Dionysus’ defeat of the Indians, and on the nature of conversion in Late Antiquity, and the lack of true conversions in the Augustinian sense in the *Dionysiaca*. Part of the author’s examination of Nonnus’ representation of Dionysus’ enemies in the first half of the chapter focusses on the fact that the Indians are so often compared with the Achaeans who fought at Troy; they may be, on the one hand, the dehuman-

ised “black manifestations of impiety” (p. 231), but Nonnus paints within this broader canvass such seemingly positive intertextual archetypes. Hadjitofti’s cogent analysis could be expanded to consider the broader battle Nonnus wages with Homer in the poem’s second half above all, which might be encoded too in Homeric guises of the Indians.

Chapters 14–17 (“Epic and Christian Imagery in the *Paraphrase*”, pp. 245–320) are, for the most part, concerned with the *Paraphrase*. Emilie van Opstall studies metaphors in both of Nonnus’ poems, with a concentration of the analysis on the *Paraphrase* (“At a Long Leafy Table. Metaphors in Nonnus’ *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John*”, pp. 245–262). This detailed and useful examination does not conclude with any surprises, given the constraints of the *Paraphrase*’s nature in comparison with the free rein given to Nonnus in the (as van Opstall describes it) baroque *Dionysiaca*. Laura Franco also analyses metaphors, this time specifically metaphors of silence in the *Paraphrase* which are adumbrated by corresponding images in the *Dionysiaca* (“The Sound of Silence. Metaphors of Silent Eloquence in Nonnus’ Poetry”, pp. 263–280). The analysis of the passages from both texts builds on a number of existing studies, but adds a number of original observations, especially on the exegetical function of these metaphors in the *Paraphrase*. Halima Benchikh-Lehocine and Christophe Cusset focus on the metaphor of the road/journey in the *Paraphrase* [“Je suis la vie, la vérité et le droit chemin’ (*Par.* 14.20): Routes et chemins dans la *Paraphrase de Saint Jean* de Nonnos de Panopolis”, pp. 281–294], not only on the variety of embodiments of this metaphor and those who are journeying, but of course in the poem’s ultimate symbol of the “way”, Jesus himself. This is a rich study, and one which illustrates the multi-layered exegetical possibilities in the symbol(s). The final chapter of the section is by Anna Lefteratou, on the Samaritan Woman in Eudocia and Nonnus, whose recent monograph on Homeric centos was especially welcome (“The Woman at the Well: Epic Variations of the Samaritan Woman in Eudocia’s *Homeric Centos* and in Nonnus’ *Paraphrasis of St. John’s Gospel*”, pp. 295–320). This (longish) contribution on the Samaritan Woman is a similarly detailed and acute analysis of the primary texts, which highlights the Alexandrian roots of Nonnus’ representation in the *Paraphrase*, one which is both allegorical in nature but also Platonic in its staging of a Socratic Jesus, whereas the *Homeric Cento* engages in a more typical *ethopoea*.

The setting of Nonnus’ poems within the philosophical and religious milieu of Late Antiquity forms the essence of Part Six (“Multiple Crossings. Non-

nian Poetry and the World of Late Antiquity”, pp. 323–397). Between two city-focused studies, Cristiano Minuto’s measured and conclusive discussion of the influence of ‘second sophistic’ encomiastic practice on Nonnus’ encomium of Berytus in *Dionysiaca* 41 [“Nonnus of Panopolis between Poetry and Rhetoric: The Encomium of Berytus (*Dion.* 41.14–154)”, pp. 323–334], and Nestan Egetashvili’s insightful analysis of the representation of Thebes in the *Dionysiaca* (“The City of Thebes in the *Dionysiaca* by Nonnus”, pp. 383–398), are two contributions on contemporary influences in Nonnus. David Hernández de la Fuente unravels the influence of Neoplatonic Gnoseology, in particular through the lens of *φαντασία*, in the *Dionysiaca* (“A Dionysian *φαντασία*? Echoes of Neoplatonic Gnoseology in Nonnus”, pp. 335–354). Zagreus forms part of the focus of this chapter (and thus this study overlaps with Greensmith’s) as does Narcissus in Book 48. The author makes a compelling case for a careful calibration by Nonnus on the Neoplatonic debates on the mirror as a reflection (pun intended) on the relation of the soul with the intelligible world. In a very original contribution, Flor Herrero Valdés gathers together possible allusions to the Greek *Magical Papyri* in both of Nonnus’ works (“Nonnus and Graeco-Egyptian Magic: Crossroads, Poetic Confluences and Fringe States”, pp. 355–382). This study may not convince in every parallel adduced, but the cultural and textual confluences discussed offer important insights into the knowledge Nonnus had of the corpus.

The collection’s four final chapters range from Nonnus’ more immediate reception to Nonnian scholarship of the twentieth century. Arianna Gullo has recently published important studies on the *Palatine Anthology*, and she continues her work on epigrams here with a bold, but nevertheless convincing and important, piece [“Nonnian Poets (?): The Case of Julian the Egyptian”, pp. 401–420] which argues that to label Julian solely as a “Nonnian poet” is unhelpful and outmoded. Gullo proves that Julian’s debt to Nonnus is not as overwhelming as scholars have previously claimed. Julian often challenges Nonnus, Gullo also shows, by preferring Homer over the *Dionysiaca*. The editor Berenice Verhelst examines the work of Franciscus Nansius, a Flemish scholar of the sixteenth century (“Nonnus in the Low Countries. Book Epigrams and Occasional Poetry of and for Franciscus Nansius”, pp. 421–430), one of the earliest editors of the *Paraphrase* and certainly the first to produce a (scholarly) commentary on the text. The fascinating *curae secundae* of Nansius form the focus of the study: Verhelst analyses

the verses about Nonnus, as well as the verses which exhibit Nonnian linguistic and other influences. A similarly engaging study of Humanist scholarship is offered by Thomas Gärtner (“Nonnos von Panopolis im protestantischen Philhellenismus des 16./17. Jahrhunderts. Zur Nonnos-Rezeption bei Lorenz Rhodoman und Matthaëus Gothus”, pp. 431–476), whose focus is on two German (protestant) scholars, Rhodoman and Gothus, the latter of whom embodied, as Rhodoman put it, the very spirit of Nonnus. Gärtner usefully adjoins the key texts of Rhodoman and Gothus to the end of his study which form the basis of his acute textual analyses, and provides for Nonnian scholars a useful treasury of the works of these important, scholarly figures. Domenico Accorinti has the volume’s final word (“Paul Friedländer and Nonnus’ Poetry”, pp. 477–510), and fittingly so, given the important place he has occupied in the revitalisation of Nonnian scholarship. Accorinti has a strong interest in the history of scholarship, and in this contribution introduces (at least for this reviewer) the place Paul Friedländer, otherwise so well known for his work on ecphrastic theory, has in Nonnian studies. This informative and well-illustrated bringing-to-the-light of Friedländer as a scholar of Nonnus rightly includes the note that Friedländer’s framing of the nature of Nonnus’ poetry “might be considered the forerunner of the conferences on *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context*” (p. 484).

For this reviewer, this is the best volume yet in the “Nonnus in Context” series. There are some groundbreaking studies here. The editor deserves special praise for the careful ordering of the contributions. The sections work well and often one article provides a segue for the next. On the whole the editing is of a high standard, but this reviewer did find typographical errors throughout (too many to list, but for a volume of this size, perhaps not unsurprising).

The series provides a good opportunity for young scholars to make their mark on Nonnus, and the conferences which precede the publications provide excellent contexts for them to meet the larger community of Nonnian and late antique scholars. Long may it continue! A final point: one does wonder if, in future, these conferences and proceedings might focus more closely on a single theme, or parts of the poems, to better cohere the purpose and unity of the contributions.



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Calum Maciver: Rezension zu: Berenice Verhelst (ed.): Nonnus of Panopolis in Context IV. Poetry at the Crossroads. Leuven/Paris/Bristol, CT: Peeters 2022 (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 314/Bibliothèque de Byzantion 29). In: Plekos 27, 2025, S. 173–181 (URL: <https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2025/r-verhelst.pdf>).

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