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Proteus and *Poikilia*. The Influence of Philostratus the Elder on the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus of Panopolis, with Particular Emphasis on Ekphrastic and Metamorphic Elements

by

John Charles Pickstone

BA (Hons), LLB (Hons), UTAS

College of Arts, Law and Education

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Statements and Declarations

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Abstract

Proteus and *Poikilia*. The influence of Philostratus the Elder on the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus of Panopolis, with Particular Emphasis on Ekphrastic and Metamorphic Elements

Nonnus of Panopolis' works show in striking fashion the interplay between the worlds of Greek paganism and traditional Greek *paideia* and that of rising Christianity: his *Dionysiaca* continues and indeed may be said to sum up the tradition of the Greek epic poem; his *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John* applies a traditional Greek literary form to one of the founding texts of Christianity. Recent scholarly work shows the fluidity and complexity of the Christian and pagan influence in Late Antiquity.

Scholars have demonstrated the influence of Greek epic and other verse works on the *Dionysiaca*, influences reaching from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, Callimachus' *Hymns* and Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Fall of Troy*, as well as the *Greek Anthology*. Scholars have also explored the relationship of the *Dionysiaca* to prose works of the second and third centuries of the Common Era. Frangoulis has convincingly demonstrated the influence of the ancient Greek novel, specifically of the Sophistic Novel, on certain episodes of Nonnus' fifth-century epic (Hélène Frangoulis: *Du roman à l'épopée*, Besançon, 2014).

One of the most interesting Greek prose writers under the Roman Empire is Philostratus the Elder, the writer who coined the term "Second Sophistic". This term is used to describe a flowering of Greek literary culture in the second and third centuries and in turn has led to the description "sophistic novel" given in our time to the works of Longus, Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus. Philostratus' own work is no longer usually numbered among the novels, yet it shares many of their characteristics. This in itself justifies a close examination of the work in the light of the *Dionysiaca*. Furthermore, there are elements in Philostratus which immediately suggest a possible connection between the two works. In Philostratus, there is an overarching concern with Greek *paideia* which is also evident throughout the *Dionysiaca*. More specifically, in both the *Vita Apollonii* (VA) and the *Imagines* considerable space is given to Dionysus, his cult and his following. In the VA, as in Nonnus' epic, we have Indian wars, gods interfering in the life of humans, a great interest in omens and divination and a particular fascination with the figure of Proteus. Ekphrasis is prominent in both the *Dionysiaca* and the VA, while the *Imagines* is a collection of ekphrases of pictures in a gallery.

Scholars have long noted specific instances of similarity between the *Dionysiaca* and Philostratus' works, but there has not hitherto been a systematic investigation into the extent and nature of the relationship between them. In this project, we have compared the VA and *Imagines* with the *Dionysiaca*, particularly concentrating on those areas that are common in prominence in the works of both writers: Proteus as emblematic of the literary agenda in the VA and the *Dionysiaca*; *poikilia* as a key technique and unifying aesthetic in all three works.

The conclusion of the research is that, although Philostratus is only occasionally a dominant and recognisable source in Nonnus' epic, there are intriguing synergies between the works in many matters of detail as well as in a broader aesthetic. Philostratus in the *Imagines* and the VA and Nonnus in the *Dionysiaca* also demonstrate a common adherence to *poikilia*, not only as a feature of

their respective works, but indeed as a hallmark of them. The importance of this to both is evidenced by their use of the figure of Proteus in the *Dionysiaca* and the *VA*. There are clear overlaps of taste and sensibility, particularly in the use of colour and particularly, but not exclusively in ekphrastic passages. The numerous examples of coincidences of detail between the works that are consistent with Nonnus being familiar with Philostratus' works and with his taking such details for use in his own poem, just as he seems to do with many other writers and are suggestive of a closer connection than merely shared heritage and aesthetics.

Introduction

This study explores the links between the third-century sophist and prose writer Philostratus and the fifth century epic poet Nonnus of Panopolis. Specifically, we seek to elucidate traces of influence of the earlier writer on Nonnus' great poem, the *Dionysiaca*.

Nonnus, as far as we know, was from the city of Panopolis on the Nile in Upper Egypt. This town, now Akhmi, was something of a hotbed of culture in the late Roman Empire, producing, besides Nonnus, Triphiodorus the Epic Poet, Zosimus the Alchemist and Shenoute the Abbot.¹ Nothing is known of Nonnus' upbringing, but he was clearly highly educated as his works, as we shall see, are full of literary and intellectual references. He was also a very keen collector of unusual versions of myths and of foundation stories, and up until well into the 20th century this was probably his main interest for scholars. One eminent Nonnian scholar has identified him with Nonnus, Bishop of Edessa,² though his arguments have not been generally accepted.

He was active in Alexandria and is the author of 2 surviving works. One is an enormously long epic in Homeric verse called the *Dionysiaca*. This is about 21,000 lines long, much longer than either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, and is often referred to as the longest and last of the Greek epics and indeed may be said to sum up the tradition of the Greek epic poem. His other work is strikingly different: a paraphrase, in the same dactylic hexameters, of the *Gospel of St John*. The fact that the one writer has written both an extremely enthusiastic pagan work and an extremely enthusiastic Christian work has always caused debate. As recently as 20 years ago one scholar³ was prepared to declare that they were written by different writers, though most who have read them together agree they must be by the same author. A once popular theory was that Nonnus was a pagan who in later life

¹ Van Minnen, Peter, "Nonnus' Panopolis," in in Accorinti, Domenico: *The Brill Companion to Nonnus of Panopolis*, Leiden and Boston (Brill), 2016, pp.54-74 at p.54

² Livrea, Enrico: "The Nonnian Question Revisited" in Accorinti, Domenico: *Des Géants à Dionysos*, Alessandria (Edizioni dell'Orso), 2003, pp.447-451, passim

³ Sherry, L.F.: "The Paraphrase of St John attributed to Nonnus," *Byzantion* 66 (1996), 409-430

converted to Christianity, though few would now agree that the *Paraphrase* is a later work. Views have become more nuanced as further study of late antiquity has revealed the extraordinary mixture of cultures and beliefs coexisting at that time. In any event, internal evidence in the *Dionysiaca* and the *Paraphrase* suggest that Nonnus was writing in the mid fifth century, at some time between 450 and 470 in our era.⁴ The time and place suggest he was a Christian.⁵

Dionysiaca

The *Dionysiaca* is a verse epic tracing the origins, birth, life on earth and final apotheosis of Dionysus. In 48 books, it takes his story from his ancestry (at the start of the poem his maternal grandfather Cadmus helps Zeus fighting the monster Typhon) to his spectacular birth from Zeus' thigh, to his long wars against the Indians, to his triumphal progress through the East and Greece and finally to his elevation to Olympus.⁶ The poem is characterised by extravagance, colour, variety and apparent confusion. It has many literary antecedents. First and foremost, it is firmly in the tradition of the Greek epic. In fact, it is simply unthinkable without Homer and the *Iliad* and, to a lesser extent, the *Odyssey*. Nonnus uses Homer's language, his verse forms, his literary techniques and his characters, or at least character types (the *Dionysiaca* is set a couple of generations before Troy) – though Nonnus has no great interest in human characters. But this relationship is not simple and it is not always easy. For Nonnus, Homer is both his model and his rival, and he adapts rather than adopts Homeric features. For example, he uses Homeric metre, but a very strict version, allowing only nine variants, as opposed to Homer's 28, with much tighter adherence to rules, and much greater

⁴ Vian, Francis (Ed.): *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques, Chants 1-2, Tome 1*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1976, p.XVII

⁵ There has been considerably scholarly interest in Christian elements in the *Dionysiaca* in recent decades. For example: Hernández de la Fuente, David: "*Bakhos Anax*" *Un Estudio sobre Nonno de Panópolis*, Madrid (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas), 2008, pp.209-225

⁶ Hernández de la Fuente describes Nonnus' poem as the most notable attempt in Greek literature to produce a global biography of Dionysus. Hernández de la Fuente, David: *El despertar del alma*, Barcelona (Ariel), 2017, p.238

emphasis on dactyls.⁷ He also uses Homeric vocabulary, though not always in a very Homeric way. Only one of the 48 books can be seen as a direct parallel to Homer (Book 37, where he copies or paraphrases the funeral games for Patroclus). This influence has been well and truly documented over the years, with the best-known contemporary researcher in this field being Shorrock.⁸

Apart from Homer, scholars have demonstrated influences from or references to the other Greek epics: Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*; Quintus of Smyrna's *Posthomerica* and Triphiodorus' *Taking of Ilion*. The literary influences are not confined to the epic poets, for the *Dionysiaca* is more than a simple epic, and demonstrates influences from several other genres. Other literary influences that have been detected in the poem include *Homeric Hymns*, Hesiod, Callimachus, Theocritus, the Classical dramatists, Lucian, Aratus, Oppian and many more. A special place must go to Euripides: Books 44 to 46 of the poem are taken up by the so-called Pentheid, which is Nonnus' "paraphrase" of the dramatist's *Bacchae*. This influence has been thoroughly documented by Tissoni.⁹

Clearly, the *Dionysiaca* is full of literary influences. Just as clearly, the nature and extent of such influences varies from case to case. Homer stands in a special category of his own, as to some extent does Euripides, at least as far as the *Bacchai* is concerned. Other literary texts at times seem to provide inspiration, ideas or knowledge, metaphors, language, or may even be used just to show – or show off - his familiarity with them.

Influences are more than purely literary: Chuvin¹⁰ has demonstrated that the poem contains references to many local foundation stories and local myths, especially in the east. As we have mentioned, Nonnus is fond of presenting unusual or less-well-known versions of well-known myths and even using different versions of the same story in different parts of the poem, as they suit his needs. An example of this is the Ariadne story. Commentators have also detected the influence of

⁷ Vian, Francis 1976, pp. L-LV

⁸ Shorrock, Robert: *The Challenge of Epic*, Leiden (Brill), 2001

⁹ Tissoni, Francesco: *Nonno di Panopoli. I Canti di Penteo (Dionisiache 44-46). Commento*, Florence (La Nuova Italia Editrice), 1998

¹⁰ Chuvin, Pierre: *Mythologie et géographie dionysiaques*, Clermont-Ferrand (ADOSA), 1991

contemporary intellectual movements, such as Neo-Platonism¹¹ and even Christian theology¹². In the last 30 or 40 years scholars have shown the connection between the literature of Late Antiquity and iconographical sources – after all, *ekphrasis* is an important element in much Latin and Greek writing of the Imperial Period.¹³ Recent research has highlighted Nonnus' own particular debt to iconography.¹⁴

As we can see from this brief overview, Nonnus' work is by no means a traditional epic. In fact, it can be seen as a summary or compendium of Greek culture from the time of Homer to the fifth century CE. He is a kind of cultural vacuum cleaner, catching up, it seems, all that Hellenic culture before him had to offer. Daria Gigli Piccardi puts this idea much more elegantly when she describes Nonnus' epic as "the last fascinating attempt to recover the Greek literary tradition in its entirety."¹⁵

Nonnus and Philostratus

It is against this background of well-established literary and cultural borrowings, re-workings and influences in the *Dionysiaca* that this study is placed.

In addition to the authors and works already mentioned, it has long been noted that Nonnus' poem reflects the influence of prose works of the second and third centuries of the Common Era. This has been the subject of a good deal of recent research. In particular, Frangoulis has convincingly demonstrated the influence of the ancient Greek novel, specifically of the Sophistic Novel - that is to

¹¹ Hernández de la Fuente, David: "Neoplatonic Form and Content in Nonnus: Towards a New Reading of Nonnian Poetics," in Spanoudakis, Konstantinos (Ed.): *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context*, Berlin and Boston (De Gruyter), 2014, pp.229-250

¹² Shorrock, Robert: "Christian Themes in the *Dionysiaca*," in Accorinti, 2016, pp.577-600

¹³ See, for example Roberts, Michael: *The Jeweled Style*, Ithaca and London (Cornell University Press), 1989, especially Chapter 3, "Poetry and the Visual Arts."

¹⁴ Agosti, Gianfranco, "Contextualizing Nonnus' Visual World," in Spanoudakis, 2014, pp.141-174; Kristensen, Troels Myrup: "Nonnus and the Art of Late Antiquity," in Accorinti, 2016, pp.460-480

¹⁵ Gigli Piccardi, Daria: "Nonnus' Poetics," in Accorinti, 2016, pp.422-442 at p.442

say the novels of Achilles Tatius, Longus and Heliodorus - on certain episodes of Nonnus' fifth century epic.¹⁶

One of the most interesting and versatile of Greek prose writers under the Roman Empire is Philostratus the Elder,¹⁷ the very writer who coined the term "Second Sophistic." This term is now used to describe a flowering of Greek literary culture in the second and third centuries¹⁸ and in turn has led to the description "sophistic novel" given in our time to the works of Longus, Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus, those very writers that Frangoulis and others have demonstrated to be linked to Nonnus. Philostratus, although he writes in many different genres, is not a novelist. It should be noted however, that at times his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (VA) has been treated as a novel.¹⁹ Scholars have also commented on "often noted novelistic features of the VA and *Heroicus*" and "the compatibility and common ground of much of Philostratus' work with the novel."²⁰ Given the proven links of the novels to Nonnus, this in itself would justify a close comparison of the two writers.

Of course, there are many things that differentiate Philostratus from Nonnus. Unlike Nonnus, he was a Greek, an Athenian with family links to Samos,²¹ far from Alexandria and the Eastern Empire. He was not a poet, as far as we know. All his extant works are prose works.²² Nevertheless, besides obvious differences there are also obvious similarities. In Philostratus, there is the same overarching concern with Greek *paideia* which is also evident throughout the *Dionysiaca*. Unlike some of the Greek-language writers of the Imperial age - for example, the novelists - both Philostratus and

¹⁶ Frangoulis, Hélène: *Du roman à l'épopée: influence du roman grec sur les Dionysiaques de Nonnos de Panopolis*, Besançon (Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté), 2014

¹⁷ A number of members of the same family shared the name Philostratus, causing some confusion. For a recent discussion of this issue: Follet, Simone (Ed, trans.): *Philostrate. Sur les héros*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 2017, pp. X-XXII

¹⁸ Whitmarsh, Tim: *The Second Sophistic*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press), 2005

¹⁹ It was, for example, included in the volume of Greek and Roman novels in the prestigious "Pléiade" series in the 1950s: Grimal Pierre (Ed., trans.): *Romans Grecs et Latins*, Paris (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), 1958

²⁰ Miles, Graeme: *Philostratus: Interpreters and Interpretation*, London (Routledge), 2018, p.12

²¹ For biographical information on Philostratus: Bowie, Ewen: "Philostratus the Life of a Sophist" in Bowie, Ewen and Jaś Elsner: *Philostratus*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press), 2009, pp.19-32.

²² The *Heroicus* contains a hymn to Thetis (53.10) and Achilles' song to Echo (55.3)

Nonnus do acknowledge the existence of Rome. In the *VA*, Rome plays quite a significant role; in the *Dionysiaca*, one of the major episodes (the fight between Dionysus and Poseidon over Beroe) takes place in Beroe (Beirut), site of a famous Roman law school. But their works are full of tributes to Hellenic culture. Philostratus' *Imagines* is the description of a collection of paintings which, for the most part, are scenes from Greek literature and myth. His *Heroicus* is a kind of continuation of Homer. His *Gymnasticus* is about Greek physical culture. The *Letters* are in the tradition of Greek literary letters. His *Lives of the Sophists* shows his engagement in the Greek intellectual life of his time.

The writers also share specific interests. In both the *VA* and the *Imagines*, Philostratus devotes considerable space to Dionysus, his life, his cult and his following. In the *VA*, too, as in Nonnus' epic, we have Indian wars, gods interfering in the life of humans, a great interest in omens and divination and a particular fascination with the figure of Proteus. We will return to this last point later.

In saying that Nonnus and Philostratus are both very much concerned with Greek *paideia*, it is also necessary to note that both writers demonstrate in their writings that they are highly educated with a comprehensive knowledge of the Greek cultural heritage and skill in rhetorical methods and techniques. They are, in other words, intellectuals, writing for educated audiences.

One element in particular suggests a connection between the authors and their works: both make great use of *ekphrasis*. Philostratus, of course, produced an entire work, the *Imagines*, consisting of *ekphraseis* in the narrowest sense, that is, descriptions of works of art, real or imagined.²³ However, his other works, especially the *Life of Apollonius*, also include many examples of *ekphrasis*, both in this narrow sense and in the broader sense of any set-piece description. *Ekphrasis* was one of the exercises forming part of young men's education in rhetoric, and the literary and rhetorical origin is evident in its literary form: it is typically highly artificial and often highly-coloured, making use of

²³ Webb, Ruth: *Ekphrasis Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*, Farnham (Ashgate), 2009

sophisticated rhetorical figures and full of reference to classical Greek culture. The original *ekphrasis* is of course, Homer's description of Achilles' Shield.

Nonnus is recognised as a highly visual writer and highly-coloured and highly-elaborate *ekphraseis* can be found throughout the *Dionysiaca*. Given that the poem is written in dactylic hexameters, the artificiality of the device is highlighted, as are its rhetorical antecedents. Recent scholarship has uncovered instances of Christian imagery in the iconography of the poem.²⁴ Yet, like Philostratus, Nonnus in his *ekphraseis* makes frequent references to the pagan heritage and is clearly championing Greek *paideia*.

Given the acknowledged influence on Nonnus' poem of prose writers who were near contemporaries of Philostratus and who shared both his education and a range of literary interests and techniques with him and given the synergies we have already noted between Philostratus and Nonnus, it is appropriate to investigate Philostratus' possible influence on the later writer. This is not to suggest that Philostratus was a fundamental influence on the *Dionysiaca* in the same way as Homer, but, rather, one influence among the later prose writers. I have therefore examined Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* in the light of the work of Philostratus the Elder, with particular emphasis on those elements and techniques, including *ekphrasis*, which are such striking features of both the older and the younger writer. I will also explore the way in which they serve the cause of Greek *paideia* and Hellenistic cultural heritage in the changing environment of Late Antiquity.

The title includes the words: Proteus and *Poikilia*.

The word "*poikilia*" is familiar to anyone working in Late Antiquity. The *LSJ* lists a variety of meanings. In fact, variety is at the core of the meaning of the words, along with pattern, colour and changeableness. *Poikilia* is something of a cliché when talking of the *Dionysiaca*. It is used by commentators to refer to everything from the dappled fawn skin that Dionysus wears, to the poet's

²⁴ Spanoudakis, Konstantinos: "The Shield of Salvation: Dionysus' Shield in Nonnus," in Spanoudakis, 2014, pp.333-371

extravagant vocabulary and imagery, to Nonnus' penchant for jumping without transition from one scene to another, to his mixing up of genres, to his view of the universe. Nonnus himself uses the adjective some 40 times in the poem.²⁵

This is a word that can just as well be used of Philostratus' work, especially in the *Imagines* and also in the *VA*. Indeed, Philostratus' literary output as a whole could well be described as *poikilos*. He might not have Nonnus' extravagance, but his oeuvre is amazingly varied.

We have also singled out Proteus, the shape-changing deity. Metamorphosis has a striking place in both writers. The *Dionysiaca* is all about Dionysus, who is constantly changing form. As for Philostratus, many of the pieces in the *Imagines* feature Dionysus. But more than this, both Nonnus' poem and Philostratus' *VA* stand as it were under the influence of Proteus. In the *VA*, Proteus appears in a dream to Apollonius' pregnant mother (Life of Apollonius 1.4), the first, as Miles points out, of a small but significant number of appearances in the work.²⁶ "By allusion to Proteus the *Life* indicates its own stylistic *poikilia*, the versatility of Apollonius and the changeability of the mythic paradigms used for his metaphoric characterisation."²⁷ In the *Dionysiaca* Proteus appears in line 13 of Book 1, right at the beginning of the work in the Proem, which it has recently been noted "establishes *poikilia* ... as its stylistic motto and the changing Proteus as its symbol."²⁸ Already in 1976, in the first volume of the great 19 volume Budé edition of the *Dionysiaca*, Vian spoke of Nonnus' principle of "*poikilia protéiforme*" in relation to this passage.²⁹

Scholars and editors of Nonnus have long noticed similarities between various passages in the *Dionysiaca* and various works of Philostratus mostly in the *VA* and the *Imagines*.³⁰ No-one has as yet

²⁵ He also uses it four times in the *Paraphrase of the Gospel of St John*.

²⁶ Miles, Graeme: "Incarnating Proteus in Philostratus' *Apollonius of Tyana*", *Ancient Narrative*, Vol.13 (2016), pp.139-157, at p.140

²⁷ Miles, op. cit. p.15

²⁸ Miguélez-Cavero, Laura: "Nonnus and the Novel" in Accorinti, 2016, pp.549-576

²⁹ Vian, 1976, pp.8-9; p.134, n. to 16-33

³⁰ For example, the editors of the BUR edition of the *Dionysiaca* note over 20 such passages.

published a systematic study investigating the nature of the connection between the two writers. In this project I have undertaken such a systematic study, using a close reading of the works of both writers to compare them in detail. It also considers the other writers and cultural forces that have or may have influenced them. Clearly my research also feeds off the substantial body of scholarship concerning Nonnus and Philostratus in particular, and Late Antiquity in general.

This type of research presents its own difficulties and dangers. Firstly, we have already noted that Philostratus and Nonnus treated several of the same stories. This particularly applies to the well-known myths and legends that are described in the *Images* and that are also presented in the *Dionysiaca*, and of the stories of Indians in the *Life* that have parallels in Nonnus' poem. As Frangoulis notes in her book on Nonnus and the Greek novelists, it is difficult to talk of direct borrowings when you are dealing with commonplaces.³¹

Another related difficulty is pointed out by Gerlaud in the introduction to his edition of Triphiodorus, a poet who was writing a hundred years or more before Nonnus. Gerlaud talks of "poetico-rhetorical *topoi* "developed during the Second Sophistic, from which writers could select at will. This, he argues, makes it difficult to judge whether a borrowing is taken from a direct reading of a particular author or just comes from this poetico-rhetorical tradition.³²

Professor Livrea has written of the closely woven poetic intertextualities hidden in filigree behind every line of Nonnus' verse.³³ In this project I have sought to tease out those threads that seem to bear some mark of Philostratus, while being mindful of the difficulties previously mentioned.

³¹ "Il est bien sûr difficile de parler d'emprunt direct quand il s'agit de lieux communs." Frangoulis, 2014, p.107

³² "il est difficile de distinguer, pour une source, s'il s'agit d'une dérivation directe issue d'une lecture de l'auteur ou d'une dérivation indirecte provenant de la tradition rhétorico-poétique." Gerlaud, Bernard: *Triphiodore. La prise d'Illion*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1982

³³ "... la fitta trama degli intertesti poetici che si cela in filigrana dietro ogni verso del Panopolitano..." Livrea, Enrico: "Premessa" in Greco, Claudia: *Nonno di Panopoli. Parafrasi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni. Canto tredicesimo*, Alessandria (Edizioni dell'Orso), 2004, p. V

In so doing, I will attempt to answer the following questions: Was Philostratus an influence on the *Dionysiaca*? If he was an influence, how and to what extent did he influence Nonnus? If the evidence does not support the view that Philostratus was a direct influence, what then is the nature of the apparent connections between them, and what does this tell us of *paideia* and aesthetics in Late Antiquity?

Part A. The *Imagines* and the *Dionysiaca*

Many of the pictures that are described by Philostratus' *Sophist* in the *Imagines* deal with subjects that also appear in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*. Sometimes these treatments involve whole episodes, sometimes it is a matter of fragmentary or partial treatment of the same subject matter. In this section we compare these treatments by the two writers in order to elucidate their similarities and differences and consider what conclusions can be drawn from them.

Chapter 1: Dionysus in the *Imagines* and the *Dionysiaca*

The *Imagines* and the *Dionysiaca* are two very different works. The *Imagines* is a collection of prose descriptions of paintings, real or imagined,³⁴ with a stated pedagogical aim; the *Dionysiaca* is a long epic poem relating the life of Dionysus, written in Homeric hexameters and with a strong Homeric inspiration. Yet, in spite of these differences, it is hardly surprising that they should have such an overlap of shared material: it is largely material from the common store of Greek cultural heritage, treated by many writers from Homer onwards. Much of this shared material involves Dionysus himself: indeed, five of the paintings described in the *Imagines* specifically involve parts of the Dionysus story.³⁵ But, as we will see, these are far from exhausting the material common to both works, but they provide a convenient starting point for comparisons between the two works.

³⁴ Lehmann-Hartleben, Karl: "The *Imagines* of the Elder Philostratus," in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (March 1941), pp. 16-44; Webb, Ruth: "The *Imagines* as a fictional text: *Ekphrasis*, *Apaté* and Illusion," in Costantini, Michel, Graziani, Françoise, Rolet, Stéphane: *Le défi de l'art*, Rennes (Presses Universitaires de Rennes), pp.113-136;

³⁵ 1.14; 1.15; 1.18; 1.19; 1.25. See, for example: Baumann, Mario: *Bilder Schreiben*, Berlin, New York (De Gruyter), 2011. P.92

Semele

The story of Semele,³⁶ mother of Dionysus, appears briefly in Homer, where she is mentioned as Zeus' lover in Thebes and mother of Dionysus (ἦ δὲ Διώνυσον Σεμέλη τέκε χάρμα βροτοῖσιν *Iliad* 14.325). Hesiod mentions her apotheosis through Zeus (τὴν δὲ οἱ ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀγέρων θῆκε Κρονίων *Theogony* 949). Pindar mentions her life on Olympus after being killed by the thunderbolt (ζῶει μὲν ἐν Ὀλυμπίοις ἀποθανοῖσα βρόμῳ κεραυνοῦ τανυέθειρα Σεμέλα *Olympian Ode* 2.25). There is an oblique reference to her in a fragment by Sophocles (Θήβας ... οὗ δὴ μόνον τίκτουςιν αἱ θνηταὶ θεοὺς *Fragment* 773). Euripides introduces her in both the *Bacchae* and *Hippolytus*. In the *Bacchae* he tells how Semele was struck by the thunderbolt, gave birth and died, and how Zeus sewed Dionysus in his thigh to hide him from Hera (88-98); in *Hippolytus* she is merely mentioned as mother of Dionysus (τοκάδα τὰν διγόνοιο Βάκ-/χου *Hippolytus* 560-1). Euripides does not mention her apotheosis. *Orphic Hymn* 44 also talks of the lightning (πυρφόρῳι αὐγῇ, 44.4), but assigns a role to Persephone. Apollodorus (3.4.3) gives all the well-known elements of the story: Hera's jealousy of Zeus' love for Semele, her deception of the girl, the death from seeing the lightning, the sewing in Zeus' thigh. Her apotheosis appears at 3.5.3. Lucian mentions the story in several works, for example in *The Dance* (81). In the *Dialogue of the Gods* 12 (Poseidon and Hermes), Hermes reports that Semele died in the fire (ἡ Σεμέλη μὲν διαφθείρεται ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρός 12.2). There is no mention of her in heaven.

Philostratus: Semele, *Imagines* 1.14

Semele is the first of a number of pieces in the first part of the *Imagines*³⁷ dealing with Dionysus and his followers. It is a short but quite dense piece, which is surprisingly difficult to describe briefly.

³⁶ For a review of the early versions of the Semele story refer: Chuvin, Pierre: *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome 3, Chants 6-8*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1992, p.110ff.

³⁷ The full sequence is 1.14, 15, 18, 19, 35.

The short description of the painting given by Schönberger in his commentary, so useful in other cases, here hardly seems to capture the picture.³⁸ It is perhaps telling that Schönberger makes no mention at all of Semele herself. For, in spite of the title she does not feature at all prominently in the painting.³⁹

Philostratus opens with thunder and lightning. But they are personified. Bronte is grim-faced (ἐν εἶδει σκληρῷ 1.14.1) and Astrape has flashing eyes (σέλας ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἰεῖσα 1.14.1). It then moves to raging fire (πῦρ τε ῥαγδαῖον 1.14.1) coming from the heavens to lay hold of the king's house. He establishes here the light/dark contrast: no colour, just light and dark. This fire cloud, he tells us, suggests the story he will tell, if it is not familiar (εἰ μὴ ἀγνοεῖς 1.14.1). Of course, given the title, the tale will be familiar, to the reader if not to the boy. The doubt gives an excuse to re-tell it.

In the second part, Philostratus combines a continuation of the description and its light/dark contrasts with a potted version of the Zeus-Semele-Hera story. This section starts with a fiery cloud (πυρὸς νεφέλη 1.14.2) engulfing Thebes and breaking into Cadmus' palace. This, we are told is Zeus wooing Semele (κωμάσαντος ἐπὶ τὴν Σεμέλην 1.14.2). Philostratus has given the outline of the story with remarkable economy. The section continues in contrasts: Semele dies (ἀπόλλυται μὲν 1.14.2) through the fire, Dionysus is born (τίκτεται δὲ 1.14.2) under it; Semele goes up to heaven (ιοῦσης ἐς οὐρανόν 1.14.2) out of the picture, Dionysus jumps out of her womb (ἐκθρῶσκει ῥαγείσης τὴν γαστέρα 1.14.2) into the picture; the figure of Semele is dim and barely discernible (εἶδος ἀμυδρόν διαφαίνεται 1.14.2); Dionysus outshines the fire (τὸ δὲ πῦρ ἀχλυῶδες ἐργάζεται φαιδρὸς αὐτὸς 1.14.2), like a star. But here again, the statements are hedged about with doubt: Semele seems to (ὥς δοκοῦμεν 1.14.2) have been killed; the Sophist thinks (οἶμαι 1.14.2) Dionysus has been born.

What is the purpose of the doubts? Is it to add a sense of realism to the story, to give the sense of

³⁸ "Ein Wunder geschieht; himmlisches Feuer zerstört das irdische Gefäß göttlicher Entstehung und umgibt das Kind des Zeus, ohne ihm zu schaden. Geister am Himmel wirken mit, Pan jubelt über das Geburt des Gottes., andere Dämonen sind Zeugen." Schönberger, Otto (Trans. Ed.) *Philostratos. Eikones*, Munich (Ernst Heimeran Verlag), 1968, p. 325

³⁹ Miles, Graeme: *Philostratus: Interpreters and Interpretation*, London and New York (Routledge), 2018, p.91

the Sophist puzzling over the meaning of the painting? Or is it a call to the reader, prompting the memories of the well-known story? Semele's form is only dimly seen (ἀμυδρὸν διαφαίνεται 1.14.2) as she goes to the heavens (ἰούσης ἐς οὐρανόν 1.14.2), where she will be the object of praise (αἱ Μοῦσαι αὐτὴν ἐκεῖ ᾄσονται 1.14.2).

The next section moves the scene away from Thebes – and from Semele. There will be no further mention of her. The screen of fire parts to reveal dimly a cave for Dionysus (ἄντρον τι τῷ Διονύσῳ 1.14.3). The focus is now firmly on Dionysus himself and his upbringing. The cave refers to the young Dionysus hidden from the wrath of Hera by Hermes. According to Apollonius of Rhodes he was received by Macris (*Argonautica* 11.540; 11.134-138).⁴⁰ We will discuss this aspect more when looking at Nonnus. The cave is more charming than any in Lydia and Assyria (παντὸς ἥδιον Ἀσσυρίου τε καὶ Λυδίου 1.14.3). Schönberger sees this as at once a reference to Dionysus' later travels in the East and to his Greek heritage.⁴¹ The cave is surrounded by typical Dionysian symbols: ivy, grapes, thyrsus. We must not be surprised (οὐ χρὴ θαυμάζειν 1.14.3) if the fire is crowned by the earth in honour of Dionysus (εἰ στεφανοῖ τὸ πῦρ ἐπὶ τῷ Διονύσῳ ἡ γῆ 1.14.3) for the earth with join with fire in the revels (ἡ γε καὶ συμβακχεύσει αὐτῷ 1.14.3). What is the reader to make of this? The passage goes on to say that Earth will make it possible to draw wine and milk as if from breasts (οἶον ἀπὸ μαζῶν 1.14.3). Fairbanks⁴² and Schönberger⁴³ trace these references to Euripides' *Bacchae* (726-7; 706-711). We will see a fountain of wine again in *Imagines* 1.19. By the end of this section we have moved from Dionysus' birth to signs or hints of his later life and deeds.

Section Four features neither Semele nor Dionysus. Instead we have Pan, and the personifications of Mt Cithaeron and Megaira. The reader is invited to hear Pan seeming to hymn Dionysus (ὥς τὸν Διόνυσον ᾄδειν 1.14.4) on Cithaeron. The singing and dancing Pan, a traditional companion to

⁴⁰ See Schönberger, 1968, p.134.

⁴¹ Schönberger, loc. cit.

⁴² Fairbanks, Arthur (Trans, ed.): *Philostratus Imagines. Callistratus Descriptions*, London and Cambridge (Loeb), 1931 p.60 n1

⁴³ Schönberger, loc. cit.

Dionysus, will be a familiar figure in the suite of Dionysian pictures in the *Imagines*. The place draws us further into the world of the *Bacchae*. All the more so, when the personified Cithaeron (ὁ Κιθαίρων ... ἐν εἶδει ἀνθρώπου 1.14.4) is described lamenting the sad deeds that will soon be done (τὰ μικρὸν ὕστερον ἐν αὐτῷ ἄχη 1.14.4). The point is emphasised by the ivy wreath slipping from his head (ἀποκλίνοντα τῆς κεφαλῆς 1.14.4), a wreath that he wears unwillingly (ἄκων 1.14.4). For the reader – and presumably for the Boy, as no additional explanation is offered by the Sophist – this immediately evokes the fate of Pentheus at the hands of Agave and the Theban women in their Bacchic rage. The piece ends with another personification and further literary/mythical allusions. Megaera causes a fir to grow (ἐλάτην τε αὐτῷ παραφυτεύει Μέγαιρα 1.14.4), recalling the tree from which Pentheus spied on his mother and the other Theban women.

Summary

The educated reader confronted with the title “Semele” would no doubt have certain expectations of the content: Thebes, Semele’s parents and sisters, the story of her wooing by Zeus and of her being tricked by the jealous Hera. Philostratus seems to play with these expectations. He introduces Thebes, Cadmus and Zeus briefly - but from then on his depiction is anything but expected. The piece turns out not to be about Semele and her story at all – she appears as a vague figure after her death – but about Dionysus. This is perhaps appropriate, given that this is the first of a series about Dionysus. Yet even the Dionysus story in the piece goes against expectations. No mention of the familiar stories of Dionysus sewn into his father’s thigh, nor of his “second birth” from the thigh. Rather there are allusions to his upbringing and his subsequent triumphs, as well as the later sorrow brought to Thebes and Cadmus, along with the depiction of many Dionysian symbols. In short, what connect the four sections of the piece are Dionysus and his links to Thebes. The allusions to his triumphs go no further than his punishment of Pentheus on his return to his mother’s city.

Philostratus uses his familiar techniques to make the description more vivid, such as his exhortation to listen (ἄκουε τοῦ Πανός 1.14.4) and the use of doubt (οἴμαι 1.14.4) to make the reader a

participant in the “decoding” of the painting which is supposed to be the basis of the description.

Also striking are the uses of literary allusions throughout the piece, and in particular the allusions to Euripides *Bacchae*.

Nonnus of Panopolis: *Dionysiaca* Book 8

As a work centred on the life of Dionysus, the *Dionysiaca* naturally gives detailed accounts of Dionysus’ birth and youth. Unlike the *Imagines*, which gives a brief and allusive account of Semele’s death and Dionysus’ future deeds, relying to a great extent on the reader knowing the story, the *Dionysiaca* treats Zeus’ first sight of Semele, his wooing of her, her background, her tricking by the jealous Hera (an element totally omitted from Philostratus’ account) in great detail, as it does Dionysus’ birth, youth and progress. In this section we will concentrate on those areas of the *Dionysiaca* where there is a clear overlap with Philostratus’ piece.

We have seen that *Imagines* 1.14 opens with the personification of Thunder and Lightning. The equivalent scene in Nonnus, contains no such personification. Yet, fascinatingly, just a hundred lines before Semele is struck down, Hera, still raging in her jealousy of Semele, addresses in person Zeus’ thunder and lightning. She has just returned to Olympus from Thebes, where, disguised as an old nurse, she has tricked Semele into demanding from Zeus that he appear to her armed with just these weapons of his (ἐλθέτω εἰς σέο λέκτρα σὺν ἱμερόεντι κεραυνῷ,/ἀστεροπῇ γαμῖη κεκορυθμένος 8.248-9). She finds Zeus’ weapons lying abandoned by the side of his throne and addresses them in “friendly cajoling words”⁴⁴ (φίλῳ μελίζατο μύθῳ 8.269). In the following 14-line speech she, in effect, encourages them to do their worst against Semele because of Zeus’ neglect. Starting with an appeal to “deserted” Thunder (“βροντή, καὶ σὲ λέλοιπεν ἔμῳς νεφεληγερέτα Ζεὺς; 8.270), Hera continues to press this point in various ways until she makes this call to them:

⁴⁴ Rouse’s translation. Rouse, W.H.D.: *Nonnos. Dionysiaca*, London and Cambridge (Loeb), 3 vols, 1940, vol 1

ἀστεροπαί, Κρονίωνι πυρώδεα ῥήξατε φωνήν,
 Ζηνὶ γυναιμανέοντι, φίλοι, φθέγξασθε, κεραυνοί. (8.279-80)

This seems to bring Nonnus remarkably close to the opening sentence of *Images* 1.14: it is precisely what Thunder and Lightning personified are described as doing.

If the Semele/Dionysus story starts with her death by fire in the *Images*, in the *Dionysiaca* it comes after a slow build up taking up most of Book 8, involving preparatory speeches by both Zeus and Semele. In a long speech (8.290-348), following on directly from the scene with Hera in Olympus, Semele takes on the points put to her by the “nurse” and expands on them.⁴⁵ As she cannot have the nuptials of a Danae or a Europa - in fact, she would disdain to accept anything a mere mortal has already had (οὐκ ἐθέλω γέρας ἴσον, ὃ περ χθονίη λάχε νύμφη 8.301) - she wants nothing less than Hera’s honours (Ἡρῆς μοῦνος ἔχει με γάμων φθόνος 8.303). More than accepting Hera’s words as the “nurse,” Semele is amplifying them.⁴⁶ She wants the pleasure of touching the thunder and lightning (ἀστεροπῆς ψάουσας καὶ ἀμφαφώσας κεραυνούς 8.311). In other words, she is reaching beyond the earthly to the godly.⁴⁷ She further complains that a furtive love affair is bringing shame to her father (8.329ff) and she reminds Zeus of his help against Typhon (8.328ff). Running through all of Semele’s speech is the idea that she has been tricked and does not realise it: a source of fun for the reader, reaching a high point when she mentions her “garrulous nurse” (ἄσιγῆτοιο τιθήνης 8.335).⁴⁸

Semele’s end still does not come until after a speech from Zeus, warning Semele of the trick and her fate (8.357ff) and a haughty rebuff from her (αὐχένα γαῦρον ἄειρε καὶ ὑψινόω φάτο φωνῇ 8.375).

At last the reluctant Zeus (οὐκ ἐθέλων 8.370) dances (ἐχόρευε 8.371⁴⁹) into Semele’s presence

⁴⁵ “Il discorso di Semele riprende i motivi proposti dalle parole ingannevoli di Era.” Gigli Piccardi, Daria: *Nonno di Panopoli: Le Dionisiache, Vol 1, Canti 1-12*, Milan (BUR), 2003, p.603, n. to 290ff

⁴⁶ Chuvin, 1992, p.198

⁴⁷ “Questo “toccare il fulmine” rende evidente l’atto di partecipazione a qualcosa di divino.” Gigli Piccardi, 2003, p.604 n. to 311

⁴⁸ “Trait d’ironie nonnienne.” Chuvin, 1992, p.133 n.1

⁴⁹ Though see the note by Chuvin to this word, op. cit. p.199

carrying his lightning in his hand. There is a brief picture of the lightning making Thebes twinkle (ἀμαρύσσετο 8.374) and the River Ismenos glow (σελάγιζεν 8.374). In Nonnus' account Semele is no passive bystander in the scene. She makes a final speech, stressing the superiority of her wedding (αἰθερίας δὲ/δαλὸς ἐμῶν θαλάμων στεροπῆς σέλας 8.379-80) and comparing herself to Hera (Σεμέλη λάχε σύγγαμον Ἡρην 8.384). She then deliberately and willingly grasps the deadly lightning (ἤθελε χερσὶν ἀφάσσειν/ἀστεροπὴν ὀλέτειραν 8.389-90). In Nonnus' portrayal Semele is not merely a foolish girl tricked by someone out of her league, but a proud and ambitious princess determined to be a queen. Nonnus describes her grasping the lightning bolt boldly (τολμηρῇ παλάμῃ 8.391). She sees her own fiery end (Σεμέλη πυρόεσσαν ἐσαθρήσασα τελευτὴν 8.402) – the reader is reminded that fire and light are so often associated with the gods in Nonnus⁵⁰ – and rejoices in her “childbearing death”⁵¹ (λόχιον μόρον 8.403). The image of fire and light is taken up again by Nonnus in Semele's apotheosis, with her “new body” bathed in purifying light (καθαρῶ λούσασα νέον δέμας αἴθοπι πυρσῶ 8.413) and Semele has immortal life in Olympus (βίον ἄφθιτον ἔσχεν Ὀλύμπιον 8.414). We might say that Semele in Nonnus' version has been vindicated: although tricked by Hera, Zeus has given her the heavens as her wedding gift (πόλον ἔδον ἔδεκτο 8.417). This is a significant moment in the *Dionysiaca* as Semele's ascension to Olympus “is the only realised promise of immortality”⁵² in the whole poem.

Before Semele's apotheosis, the half-formed (ἡμιτέλεστον 8.405) Dionysus, born unharmed, is also washed in heavenly fire (8.406) and is carried by Hermes to Zeus. There is no mention at this point of him being sewn into Zeus' thigh: those details are given at the start of Book 9, just before his “second birth” is described (9.1-15).

⁵⁰ See also references to gods and fire at *Iliad* 5.4-7 and 18.202 ff.

⁵¹ Rouse's translation

⁵² Bernabé, Alberto and Rosa Garcia-Gasco: “Nonnus and Dionysiac-Orphic Religion,” in Accorinti, 2016, pp.91-110 at p.107

As for Dionysus, on his “untimely” (ήλιτόμνηνον 8.400) birth, he is likewise washed by fire and remains unharmed (ἄσθμασι φειδομένοισιν ἐχτυλώσαντο κεραυνοί 8.401). His story is taken up in Book 9. After the second birth, we are told of Hermes taking him first to the river nymphs, daughters of Lamos (9.28), who care for him until Hera sends them mad (9.38-9). Hermes rescues Dionysus and takes him to Semele’s sister, Ino, who is nursing Melicertes (8.54). Ino in turn entrusts the baby to her servant Mystis.⁵³ While he is here, Dionysus is shut away in a dark cavern (ζοφόντι κατεκλήισε βερέθρῳ 9.102). But this darkness is illuminated by the radiance emanating from the hidden Dionysus himself (ζόφον ἔκρυφε φέγγος ἀθηήτου Διονύσου 9.106), a sign that he is indeed the son of Zeus (Διὸς αὐτοβόητος ἀπαγγέλλουσα λοχείην 9.104). It is Mystis, in Nonnus’ version, who introduces Dionysus to the mystical rites (9.114) and to the things that typically accompany him: rattle, ivy, fawn skin, thyrsus, vipers. It is she too, who first lights the torch that accompanies the night dances (πρώτη νυκτιχόρευτον ἀναψαμένη φλόγα πεύκης 9.118). When Hera discovers his whereabouts, Hermes again rescues him (9.137) and entrusts him to the care of Rheia, mother of Zeus (9.147). It is while in Rheia’s care that he is surrounded by the Corybants (9.168), starts hunting wild animals (9.170), amid Pans (9.202).

This scene of the young Dionysus brings us, in the *Dionysiaca*, back to Semele. She is now in Olympus (9.206) and is still haughty (αὐχένα γαῦρον ἄειρε 9.207). She addresses a speech to Hera, exulting in her own triumph and Hera’s defeat (Ἥρη, ἐσυλήθης· Σεμέλης τόκος ἐστὶν ἀρείων 9.208).

As we have seen, in *Imagines* 1.14.4 Cithaeron is personified as a man who is lamenting in human form (ὀλοφύρεται ἐν εἵδει ἀνθρώπου 1.14.4) at the woes soon to strike, a brief but clear reference to Pentheus and his death at the hands of his mother Agave after she is driven mad by Dionysus. In the *Dionysiaca* three whole books are devoted to this story, Books 44 to 46, with Nonnus following Euripides’ *Bacchae*. But Nonnus does not follow Euripides slavishly. At *Bacchae* 1216, Cadmus

⁵³ Chrétien notes that this episode with its dual carers “manque de clarté”: Chrétien, Gisèle (Ed.): *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome 4. Chants 9-10*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1985, p.18

enters with followers carrying the remains of his son, joining Agave who has been boasting of killing a mountain lion. Cadmus commences a speech of lament. He blames Dionysus for the ruin of his family (Βρόμιος ἄναξ ἀπώλεσ' 1250). Agave comes to her senses when on Cadmus' direction she looks to the heavens (γίγνομαι δέ πως/ἔννους, μετασταθεῖσα τῶν πάρος φρενῶν 1269-70). The equivalent scene in the *Dionysiaca* does not follow the Euripidean model. In Nonnus' version, when Agave presents the severed head of Pentheus to Cadmus, he is given a speech. First of all, he addresses the deluded Agave (46.242-251). Following this he aims reproaches at Dionysus (46.253-262). Then he speaks directly to Cithaeron, where the slaughter took place, cursing him for the deaths of both Pentheus and Actaion (ἔρρε, Κιθαιρῶν (46.262). This reproach obviously touches old Cithaeron because he wails (γόον 46) and poured out tears from his springs (δάκρυσι πηγαίοισι γέρων ἔκλαυσε Κιθαιρῶν 46.266). In other words, Nonnus, unlike Euripides but like Philostratus, personifies Cithaeron in this section of the Pentheid.⁵⁴

Comparison

In one sense a comparison between *Imagines* 1.14 and *Dionysiaca* Book 8 highlights the differences between the two works. In Philostratus the Semele piece is, it is true, one of a Dionysian series, but essentially just one of 75 pictures on a variety of subjects. In Nonnus, on the contrary, the death of Semele and the birth of Dionysus are necessarily fundamental to the epic. This difference stands out particularly if we consider how brief the death of Semele/birth of Dionysus scene is in *Imagines*, and how extensively it is treated in the *Dionysiaca*. For example, Semele makes the briefest and vaguest of appearances in the piece named after her; in the *Dionysiaca* she continues to make appearances long after her earthly death. If we expand the comparison to include the hints of things to come in the latter part of *Imagines* 1.14, Philostratus is covering in a few lines what Nonnus tells over several

⁵⁴ The similarity between the two is noted by Simon. Simon, Bernadette (Ed.): *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome 16. Chants 44-46*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 2004, p.247 n. to 265-271

books. Nor is the subject matter unusual or original: we have seen that most of the elements are to be found in one or other of the surviving versions.

And yet, there are obvious links between the two works that lead Gigli Piccardi to find that Nonnus' retelling of the Semele death scene "deve qualcosa a" Philostratus.⁵⁵ She notes first of all the similarity between Philostratus' description of Zeus coming to woo Semele (κω μάσαντος ἐπὶ τὴν Σεμέλην τοῦ Διός 1.14.2) and Nonnus writing of Zeus dancing into her room (εἰς Σεμέλην δ' ἐχόρευε 8.371). Furthermore, she points out that Philostratus' image of a cloud of fire surrounding Thebes (πυρὸς νεφέλη περισχοῦσα τὰς Θήβας 1.14.1) is echoed by Nonnus' description of Thebes in flames (8.373-4). We might take this point of comparison further and note that both the opening of *Imagines* 1.14 and the Zeus-Semele-Dionysus passages of *Dionysiaca* 8 are dominated by light, dark and above all by fire. Neither writer mentions colour in this segment.

The second part of *Imagines* 1.14 likewise opens with a scene that it echoed in Nonnus. Here we see Dionysus in a cave. In the *Dionysiaca*, the young Dionysus is hidden. There is an argument about whether the cavern in which Dionysus is hidden by Mystis in the *Dionysiaca* is a natural formation, as clearly the cave is in *Imagines* 1.14.3, or part of a building.⁵⁶ In any case, in both writers we see the same idea: the god hidden, his light in the darkness. In Philostratus, the cave is seen through the curtain of flame (διασχοῦσα δὲ ἡ φλόξ ἄντρον 1.14.3); in Nonnus, it is the light from Dionysus himself which illuminates the darkness of his hiding place (ζόφον ἔκρυφε φέγγος ἀθηήτου Διονύσου 9.106), with the light clearly a sign of the deity. This idea of the child Dionysus shining so brightly echoes, as Chrétien notes, the description of baby Dionysus dimming the fire with his light in *Imagines* 14.1.2 (τὸ δὲ πῦρ ἀχλυῶδες ἐργάζεται 1.14.2).⁵⁷ The ivy, thyrsus and grape-vines of *Imagines* 1.14.3 are matched in Nonnus by the description of the ivy and thyrsus as he tells of

⁵⁵ Gigli Piccardi, 2003, p.610, n. to 371-74

⁵⁶ See discussion at Chrétien, 1985, p.108, n. to 104

⁵⁷ Chrétien, 1985, n. to 106. In this passage she also discusses the use of light in Nonnus.

Mystis' teaching of Dionysus (9.120ff). The grapevine first appears in Nonnus following the Ampelos episode.

Other aspects of the Philostratus piece also have echoes in the *Dionysiaca*. For example, there is the insistence on milk and breasts in section 3. The *Dionysiaca* is notoriously prolific in breasts and milk.⁵⁸ Even if we confine ourselves to Dionysus' childhood, they are still numerous: the breasts of the ten daughters of Lamos⁵⁹, his first nurses before they are driven mad (9.31); Ino's breasts (9.57, 9.97), as she feeds him along with Palaimon/Melicertes. Nor are springs which bring forth wine uncommon in Nonnus. For example, at 48.977 Aurora drinks from just such a fountain of wine prepared by Dionysus.

However, perhaps the most striking point of connection between the two texts is the use of personification for Cithaeron. Of course, the use of personification as a literary and rhetorical device is in itself unexceptional in Greek literature⁶⁰ and indeed in Nonnus.⁶¹ The personification of Cithaeron first appears in the *Dionysiaca* in Book 5 (ὤϊα, πάτερ, στενάχισε, τὸν οὐκ ἐφύλαξε Κιθαίων 5.428). In his commentary on this line, Chuvín⁶² suggests that it is reminiscent of the personification of Helicon in Callimachus Hymn 5 (ὦ ὄρος, ὦ Ἑλικῶν οὐκέτι μοι παριτέ 5.90). Tissoni⁶³ reviews these references and suggests that both Callimachus and Nonnus may have been influenced by Euripides *Bacchae* (1384). Cithaeron appears again in the Second Proem in Book 25, an old man, a mournful figure stretching out his hand (πενθαλέην ἔο χεῖρα γέρων ὥρεξε Κιθαίων 25.14) to the poet, wanting him to sing of Thebes rather than of Oedipus. Agosti notes a possible

⁵⁸ "The *Dionysiaca* projects a multinippled cosmos." Newbold, R.F.: "Breasts and Milk in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*," in *The Classical World*, Vol. 94, No.1 (Autumn, 2000), pp. 11-23 at p. 14

⁵⁹ They are named by Nonnus in Book 21 as Ambrosia, Bromie, Cleite, Eriphe, Gigarto, Phasyleia, Polyxo, Theope and Cisseis.

⁶⁰ Stafford, Emma and Judith Herrin: *Personification in the Greek World*, Aldershot (Ashgate), 2004

⁶¹ Miguélez-Cavero, Laura: "Cosmic and Terrestrial Personifications in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*," in *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 53 (2013, pp. 350-378); Miguélez-Cavero, Laura: "Personifications at the Service of Dionysius: The Bacchic Court," in Spanoudakis, 2014, pp.175-191

⁶² Chuvín, Pierre (Ed): *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome 2. Chants 3-4*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1976, p.188, n. to 428

⁶³ Tissoni, 1998, p.324, n. to 198

link to Philostratus' portrait in 1.14.⁶⁴ The personification of Cithaeron at both in *Imagines* 1.14.4 and *Dionysiaca* 25.13-15 and 46.265-6 is more vivid and the mountain is given a more active role, as it were, and is used in both Nonnus and Philostratus to express sorrow and dismay. The use of these three personifications in this context in the two writers is striking.

In brief we can say that while Philostratus' piece on Semele is quite short, it is also quite dense and conveys not only a surprising amount of the story of the death of Semele and the birth of Dionysus, but also many allusions to the future of both mother and son. When the treatment in *Imagines* 1.14 is compared to the much more extensive and detailed treatment by Nonnus, we are struck by the points of connection between them, which, when taken together, suggest more than shared sources.

⁶⁴ Agosti, Gianfranco (Ed.): *Nonno di Panopoli. Le Dionisiache Volume Terzo*, Milan (BUR), 2004, p.72, n. to 14-16. The passage is also discussed in Geisz, Camille: *A Study of the Narrator in Nonnus of Panopolis' Dionysiaca*, Leiden (Brill), 2018, p.29

Ariadne

The story of Ariadne, daughter of Minos, who helps Theseus escape from the Minotaur, follows him, is eventually deserted and is then found by Dionysus, is one frequently found in ancient literature, in both Greek and Roman writers.⁶⁵ There is a brief mention at *Odyssey* 321-324, but with no detail and no mention of Dionysus. In other versions, Theseus has no choice but to leave her. According to Apollodorus Theseus took Ariadne to Naxos and there Dionysus fell in love with her and carried her off (Epitome, 1.8-9). Plutarch reviews several different versions of the story (Life of Theseus, Ch. 20). Pausanias (10.29.4) says explicitly that Ariadne was taken from Theseus by Dionysus. Quintus Smyrnaeus also says that Theseus left Ariadne unwillingly (κάλλιπεν οὐκ ἐθέλων 4.389) on Dio. The later versions tend to stress Ariadne's lament at her betrayal.

The most famous version is that of Catullus 64. This poem is concerned with the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, but the larger part of it, over 200 lines, tells the story of Ariadne, as an *ekphrasis* of the embroidered cover on the marriage bed. In this version Theseus unquestionably deserts Ariadne, leaving her asleep on the beach (*devinctam lumina somno*, 64.122) as he sails off to Athens. The greater part of it is told as a lament by Ariadne standing on the shore (*fluentis sono prospectans litore Diae*, 64.52) watching him sail off. Dionysus (Iacchus) is described burning with love as he seeks her (*te quaerens, Ariadna, tuoque incensus amore* 64.253).

⁶⁵ For a review of the earlier versions involving Ariadne abandoned see: Fayant, Marie-Christine (Ed.), *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome XVII. Chant 47*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 2000, pp.49-53. Hernández de la Fuente has devoted a book to a study of the Dionysus-Ariadne relationship: Hernández de la Fuente, 2017.

Philostratus: *Imagines* 1.15

Philostratus' retelling is brief and the painting he describes captures one aspect only of the story:

Ariadne still sleeping while Theseus sails off towards Athens.

From the beginning, Philostratus plays on the cultural and literary notoriety of the story by having the Sophist tell the boy that he has probably already heard it from his nurse (τάχα που καὶ τίτθης διακήκοας 1.15.1). He uses the hypothetical nurse to set the scene for Ariadne's lament (δακρύουσιν ἐπ' αὐτοῖς, ὅταν ἐθέλωσιν 1.15), even though *Imagines* 1.15 does not include this part of the story. He even manages to convey in the first sentence the different versions of the story, where the fault sometimes lies with Theseus, sometimes with Dionysus (ἄδικα οὐκ ἄδικά 1.15.1). The whole of the first section is in this playful manner, as he points out Theseus, Dionysus and the sleeping Ariadne in the painting by saying he does not need to name them. By the end of the brief first section, consisting of only two sentences, the reader has learned the main features of the painting.

This playfulness continues in section 2. If the first section has told the reader how well-known the story is, Philostratus now stresses how the painter has exceeded the commonplace depiction of a story, by supplying first a description of what the painting is not. It is not the conventional portrayal of a beautiful Ariadne and Theseus, for that is too easy (ῥᾶδιον γὰρ ἅπαντι καλὴν μὲν τὴν Ἀριάδνην γράφειν, καλὸν δὲ τὸν Θησέα 1.15.2); nor is it the depiction of Dionysus through the countless conventional signs (μυρία φάσματα 1.15.2) as is usual with painters and sculptors. He even enumerates the signs that do not appear: ivy clusters, horns, panthers. For, the painter has characterised the god through love alone (ἐκ μόνου τοῦ ἐρᾶν 1.15.2). And yet in the very next sentence he introduces several of these conventional signs associated with Dionysus, though in a kind of negative way. Embroidered garments, thyrsi and fawn skins have been "cast aside" (ἔρριπται 1.15.2) as inappropriate (ἔξω τοῦ καιροῦ 1.15.2). Dionysus' usual companions - Bacchantes, satyrs

and Pan himself - are also present, but behaving against type, as it were. The Bacchantes are not using their cymbals, nor the satyrs playing their flutes (οὐδὲ κυμβάλοις αἱ Βάκχαι χρῶνται νῦν οὐδὲ οἱ Σάτυροι αὐλοῦσιν 1.15.2) and Pan stops his frolicking (κατέχει τὸ σκίρτημα 1.15.2), so as not to wake Ariadne. In place of his usual garments and trappings, Dionysus is now clothed in purple (άλουργίδι τε στείλας ἑαυτὸν 1.5.2) and wreathed with roses (τὴν κεφαλὴν ῥόδοις ἀνθίσας 1.15.2), references at once to his majesty and to love. He is described as coming to Ariadne's side (ἔρχεται παρὰ τὴν Ἀριάδνην 1.15.2). We are, of course, presumed to be looking at a painting, where figures do not move. This use of a verb of motion is a typical Philostrateian touch to add vividness to his description. Dionysus is described in a quotation from Anacreon⁶⁶ as drunk with love (μεθύων ἔρωτι 1.15.2), a choice of terms that also reminds the reader of the other sort of drunkenness associated with Dionysus.

Section 3 continues the theme of love and transfers it this time to Theseus. But, in contrast to Dionysus, his love - for, we are told, he is indeed in love (ἐρᾷ μὲν 1.15.3) - is for the smoke of Athens. This is another literary allusion, this time to the *Odyssey*.⁶⁷ Theseus has moved past his love for Ariadne. He can no longer remember her (οὔτε οἶδεν ἔτι οὔτε ἔγνω ποτέ 1.15.3), he has forgotten the labyrinth (ἐκλελῆσθαι καὶ τοῦ λαβυρίνθου 1.15.2) and the mission to Crete. This forgetting of Ariadne is another literary allusion, this time to Theocritus.⁶⁸ He is looking forward (μόνον τὰ ἐκ πρῶρας βλέπει 1.15.3), away from Naxos and Ariadne. Thus, Philostratus tells us of Theseus's change of heart, reinforces the idea of desertion and at the same time encapsulates the main features of the Ariadne-Theseus love story. The Sophist now tells the Boy (and the reader) to look at sleeping Ariadne (ὄρα 1.15.3). This use of verbs of perception is another technique used by Philostratus to heighten "the reader's reception to the visual impact."⁶⁹ What we are invited to see

⁶⁶ Anacreon, Fragment 19. Refer Schönberger, 1968, p.328.

⁶⁷ "αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεύς, ἰέμενος καὶ καπνὸν ἀποθρώσκοντα νοῆσαι ἥς γαίης, θανέειν ἰμείρεται." *Odyssey* 1.58-59

⁶⁸ "... τόσσον ἔχει λάθας ὅσον ποκὰ Θησέα φαντί / ἐν Δίᾳ λασθῆμεν ἐυπλοκάμῳ Ἀριάδνας." Theocritus, Idyll 2.45-46

⁶⁹ Webb, in Costantini, Graziani and Rolet, 2006, p.121.

is indeed a semi-naked Ariadne. She is sleeping in such a position that she is bare to the waist (γυμνὰ μὲν εἰς ὀμφαλὸν), though the position of her hand on her clothes prevents her from being further uncovered (ἡ δὲ ἑτέρα χεὶρ ἐπικείται τῇ χλαίνῃ... 1.15.3). Philostratus mentions her delicate throat (ἀπαλὴ φάρυγξ 1.15.3), but otherwise does not especially dwell on physical details: for example, he does not describe her breasts, although they are bared. Yet, while he seems not to linger over erotically charged details, he achieves a similar effect by means of a literary quotation. Philostratus has the Sophist address the Dionysus in the painting directly, another way of adding vividness. He invites Dionysus to acknowledge the sweetness of Ariadne's breath. He will find when he kisses her whether it is the fragrance of apples or grapes (καὶ ὡς ἡδὺ τὸ ἄσθμα. εἰ δὲ μήλων ἢ βοτρυῶν ἀπόζει, φιλήσας ἐρεῖς 1.15.3). This comes virtually word for word from Aristainetos' Letter 12,⁷⁰ a letter from a man in praise of his mistress.

The story of Ariadne is, then, treated by Philostratus in a playful manner, quite different to the more dramatic or emotive versions of some predecessors. It is a brief piece, but in spite of its brevity it conveys a lot of meaning in a particularly artful manner, stressing the playfulness and downplaying the darker and more serious elements. Philostratus plays on the familiarity of the Ariadne-Theseus story to build up a coherent narrative by means of hints and gives it depth and texture by the use of literary allusions. These literary allusions suppose on the part of the reader a familiarity with Anacreon, Theocritus, Homer and Aristainetus. While there is no doubting that there was plenty of iconographic material that may have influenced Philostratus' Ariadne - Fairbanks includes a red figured vase depicting Ariadne deserted⁷¹ and Schönberger⁷² notes several others - the assertion that the idea this piece might follow a literary original is "absurd"⁷³ seems unjustified. It is also interesting to find that the literary allusions seem to vary from being little more than ornaments

⁷⁰ "...καὶ τὸ ἄσθμα ἡδὺ· εἰ δὲ μήλων ἢ ῥόδων πόμασι συμμιγέντων ἀπόζει, φιλήσας ἐρεῖς." 12.1. The erotic nature of the quotation is confirmed by the continuation in Aristainetus: "τοῖς δὲ στέρνοις τῆς καλῆς ἐπιθεῖς τὴν κεφαλὴν ἡγρύπνουν, αὐτὸ καταφιλῶν τὸ πῆδημα τῆς καρδίας."

⁷¹ Fairbanks, 1931, p.63

⁷² Schönberger, 1968, p.329

⁷³ Schönberger, loc. cit.

(Anacreon and Theocritus perhaps) to demonstrating depth of feeling (Homer, perhaps) to providing an addition – for those in the know - to Philostratus' own words (Aristainetus).

Nonnus: *Dionysiaca*, Book 47

Nonnus treats the usual aspects of the Ariadne story: her desertion by Theseus on Naxos, her lament and her discovery on the beach by Dionysus. As well as these elements he also treats her marriage to the god, her death and catasterisation. She is one of the most significant female figures in the poem,⁷⁴ and of all the women Dionysus loves, “la seule qui mérite le nom d’épouse.”⁷⁵ In this discussion we will concentrate on the beach scene, where Ariadne is discovered sleeping by Dionysus after her desertion by Theseus.

Ariadne has a complicated history in the *Dionysiaca*. The first mention of Ariadne is, anachronistically, as a constellation in the very first book (1.201),⁷⁶ at a time before Dionysus is even born. This anachronism is far from unique in the *Dionysiaca*: “in Nonno sono lo spazio e il tempo reali che si adattano alla situazione contingente, non viceversa.”⁷⁷ In Book 25, well before her discovery by Dionysus in Book 47 and their marriage, Ariadne dies, killed in the syncrisis between Dionysus and Perseus. She is reported killed by Perseus' spear (25.110),⁷⁸ accidentally, as he was aiming for Dionysus. In the same book we are told of her catasterism (25.145-6). Ariadne finally appears at a chronologically appropriate moment, as it were, in Book 43. Her name is brought up by Eros, who offers the prospect of marriage to her as sort of consolation prize after Dionysus has lost his battle for Beroë. She is, Eros tells Dionysus, more charming than Beroë (ἄβροτέρην 43.426) and

⁷⁴ Hernández de la Fuente discusses Ariadne in the context of the theme of salvation and Christian links. Hernández de la Fuente, 2017, pp.241-247

⁷⁵ Vian, Francis (ed.): *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Chant 48. Tome 18*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 2003, p.87

⁷⁶ Vian, 1976, p.148. There are other mentions of the constellation at 8.98 and 33.373.

⁷⁷ Gigli Piccardi, 2003, p.147, n. to 201

⁷⁸ A quite different version of her death is presented at 47.665-6, where Perseus petrifies her deliberately with Medusa's eye.

a member of Dionysus' own family (ὁμόγνιον 43.427): she is the granddaughter of Europa and Dionysus is the grandson of Europa's brother, Cadmos.⁷⁹ Thus, the reader knows well in advance that the pair will marry.

This then is the background to the encounter in Naxos, related in Book 47. Dionysus arrives with his entourage (47.266). This entourage consists of Eros, Bacchantes, Maron and Pan, as well as Cytherea. For this is a wedding procession, Dionysus is on his way to be married (μελλογάμου 47.268). The narrator finishes with the Theseus story in a line or two: he has heartlessly sailed away (ἀμείλιχος ἔπλεε Θησεύς 47.270) for his homeland, leaving the Ariadne and throwing his promises to the wind (συνθεσίας δ' ἀνέμοισιν ἐπέτρεπεν 47.271). We then immediately pass to Dionysus' discovery of the sleeping Ariadne. As soon as he sees her (ἀθρήσας 45.272), he is struck by a mixture of love and wonder (θαύματι μῖξεν ἔρωτα 47.273). Love at first sight is of course a staple of the Greek novel,⁸⁰ and "l'amour né du regard est aussi lié à l'admiration de l'objet aimé."⁸¹ In fact, Miguélez-Cavero points out how close Nonnus gets to the "novelistic pattern" in this episode.⁸² The Bassarids accompanying Dionysus are dancing and banging their cymbals and playing their flutes, as might be expected, and the first thing that he does while contemplating Ariadne is to tell them in an admiring voice (γλώσση θαμβαλέη 47.274) to stop their dancing and noise so to let her sleep (ἐάσσετε Κύπριν ἰαύειν 47.276). Verhelst describes this silence as a "striking parallel" to *Imagines* 1.15.2, where Dionysus' entourage is also silent.⁸³ He called her Cypris, as he does not yet know who she is. In his speech to his entourage, he uses a rhetorical technique that Nonnus uses elsewhere in the *Dionysiaca* and used by other writers, of comparing the unknown girl to a series of goddesses.⁸⁴ One by one, he compares the sleeping figure to Aphrodite, Pasithea, Hebe, Selene,

⁷⁹ Refer Chuvin, Pierre and Fayant, Marie-Christine (Eds.): *Nonnos. Les Dionysiaques. Chants 41-43*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 2006, p.209, n. to 427

⁸⁰ Miguélez-Cavero, 2016, p.557

⁸¹ Frangoulis, 2014, p.49. She notes several other examples.

⁸² Miguélez-Cavero, op. cit., p.557

⁸³ Verhelst, Berenice: "What a Wonder! Looking through the Internal Observer's Eyes in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*," in Bannert, Herbert and Nicole Kröll (Eds.): *Nonnus in Context 2: Poetry Religion and Society*, Leiden (Brill), 2018, pp.98-119 at p.114

⁸⁴ Fayant, 2000, p.44

Thetis, Artemis and Athena. She is just as beautiful as the goddesses, of course, but she has no cestus, like Aphrodite, is not naked, like Pasithea, she has no cup like Hebe, she is not with Endymion, like Selene, she is not naked, like Thetis, she wears long robes, unlike Artemis and she has no helmet like Athena.

Whatever the literary value of this technique might be, this list does confirm that Ariadne is exceptionally beautiful and that she is not naked, that indeed she is wearing a long robe (Ἀρτεμιν ἐλκεχίτωνα τίς ἔδρακε; 47.290). As Accorinti observes,⁸⁵ it is striking that in this passage Nonnus insists no less than three times on the fact that Ariadne is clothed, when common versions in literature and iconography present her as at least semi-naked. Moreover, this is in a work in which “non sono rare le scene di voyeurismo.”⁸⁶ Accorinti points to the scene at 48.341ff in which Aura gazes on Athena’s nakedness and, a few lines later, strokes the goddess’s breasts. In another long scene at 7.210ff Zeus contemplates the bathing Semele, mother-to-be of Dionysus himself and Nonnus particularly emphasises her “arrow-shooting” breasts (κατὰ Κρονίδαο δὲ γυμνοὶ/μαζοὶ ἐθωρήθησαν ἀκοντιστῆρες Ἑρώτων 7.263-4).⁸⁷ So it is hardly prudery or a concern for the dignity of an important character, future mother of Dionysus’ children⁸⁸ that is in play here. Perhaps we should see here in Nonnus’ playing against, as it were, well-known graphic and written versions of the scene, at once his propensity to use the material available to him as he saw fit⁸⁹ and his particular sense of humour. It is certain, at any rate, that at least in the Ariadne episodes recounted in Book 47 he presents a very favourable view of Dionysus.⁹⁰ This part of the Ariadne story ends

⁸⁵ Accorinti, Dimenico (Ed.), *Nonno di Panopoli. Le Dionisiache. Vol Quarto. Canti 40-48*, Milan (BUR), 2004, p.541, n. to 280b

⁸⁶ Accorinti, loc. cit.

⁸⁷ Hadjittori notes “a set of metaphors very dear to Nonnus, according to which breasts, thighs, eyebrows and ... eyes shoot forth arrows and wound men more fatally than actual weapons.” Hadjittori, Fotini: “Major Themes and Motives in the *Dionysiaca*,” in Accorinti, 2016, pp.125-151 at p.149

⁸⁸ Aura, mother of the third Dionysus, suffers worse indignities.

⁸⁹ “Il n’hésite pas à s’écarter notablement de la tradition, voire à l’ignorer totalement.” Fayant, 2000, p.58

⁹⁰ Fayant, op. cit. p.56

with perhaps another display of Nonnus' humour: she wakens almost immediately after Dionysus' call to his entourage to be silent (47.290-293).

Comparison

If we compare these pieces, we must first note the biggest difference: in Nonnus, the scene of Dionysus watching Ariadne on the beach is part of a broader and more important story, forming part of the progress of Dionysus through the *Dionysiaca*, rich in meanings and textures,⁹¹ whereas in Philostratus the Ariadne story is not developed any further after *Imagines* 1.15. Ariadne does not appear again in the *Imagines* or in any of Philostratus' other works, apart from what appears to be a mistaken reference in *Heroicus* 11.8.⁹² There are other differences. In Philostratus, Theseus is part of the scene, his figure appearing in a tripartite picture, along with Dionysus and Ariadne and indeed he is given as much space as Ariadne; in Nonnus, Theseus is dismissed as if with contempt in a line or two. In Philostratus too, Dionysus gazes on the semi-naked Ariadne; in Nonnus, she is clothed in long robes.

There are, however, many similarities. The central part of the scene is very similar: Dionysus gazing in love at Ariadne. His entourage is similar in both accounts – Bacchantes, satyrs, Pan – though Philostratus makes no mention of Maron or Cytherea. A most striking similarity is the silence of this entourage: dancing and music has stopped in both so as not to wake Ariadne (Philostratus: μὴ διαλύσειε τὸν ὕπνον 1.15.2; Nonnus: μὴ σκεδάσειας ἑώιον ὕπνον 47.292). The details differ – in Philostratus Pan dances (ὁ Πάν κατέχει τὸ σκίρτημα 1.15.2); in Nonnus he sings (λῆγε λιγαίνων, / Πάν φίλε 47.291-2)⁹³ – but the essence of the scene is the same: Dionysus gazes on Ariadne in silence.

⁹¹ Shorrock, Robert: "A Classical Myth in a Christian World: Nonnus' Ariadne Episode (*Dion.* 47.265-475)" in Spanoudakis, 2014, pp.313-332

⁹² In *Heroicus* 11.8 the Vinedresser appears to mistake Ariadne for Evadne in a list of wives who died following their husbands: Rusten, Jeffrey and König, Jason (Eds.): *Philostratus. Heroicus. Gymnasticus. Discourses 1 and 2*, Cambridge and London (Loeb), 2014, pp. 37 and 141

⁹³ Maron is portrayed as a dancer throughout the *Dionysiaca* and wins the dancing contest in funeral games for Staphylos: 19.158-348

Even where there are differences, there are sometimes seeming echoes in Nonnus of Philostratus' picture. We have already noted that Philostratus both used and played against traditional Bacchic motifs in his description of Dionysus and his band. For example, we saw that in the *Imagines* the gazing Dionysus is dressed in a purple robe and a wreath of roses (1.15.2). Nonnus does not give a description of Dionysus at this point, but later on in the Ariadne episode we find an echo of both the colour and the rose-garland as Eros plaits a wreath for the wedding (πορφυρέοις δὲ ῥόδοιαι περίτροχον... 47.466).

Similarly, when Nonnus for his part presents the sleeping Ariadne as fully clothed - and goes to some pains to stress the point - he is playing both against the literary and iconographical tradition and against his own readers' expectations. Furthermore, Shorrock notes that the insistent mentions of naked goddesses in the scene, as we noted above, "inevitably heightens the erotic tone of the scene."⁹⁴ For, as we have discussed above, elsewhere in the *Dionysiaca* Nonnus shows himself to be particularly fond of such scenes of voyeurism involving semi-nakedness, especially naked breasts.⁹⁵ Chuvin talks of Nonnus' frequent "erotic lookout" scenes.⁹⁶ Indeed, Newbold notes several scenes where "the sight of even the covered breast can awake fevered imaginings."⁹⁷ In a way, both writers here are playing with the reader: Philostratus presents Ariadne in a rather contrived pose to show her bared breasts, but, as we have seen, uses literary allusion rather than his own words to emphasise the eroticism of the scene; Nonnus is relying both on his reader's familiarity with previous scenes in the *Dionysiaca* and ensuring they are not forgotten by insisting again and again that Ariadne is *not* naked. In short, both writers are using referencing to eroticise the scene.

⁹⁴ Shorrock, 2014, pp.313-332 at p. 320

⁹⁵ Nonnus' fascination with breasts can be seen in his 121 uses of μαζός and frequent uses of words such as στέρνον and στήθος in the *Dionysiaca*. Refer: Newbold, 2000 at p.11

⁹⁶ Chuvin, Pierre: "The Poet of Dionysus. Birth of the Last among the Gods," in Accorinti, 2016, pp.111-124

⁹⁷ Newbold, 2000, p.17

We have already seen that scholars have long noted the iconographic equivalents of the scene of Dionysus discovering and the likely influence of these pictorial sources on the writers.⁹⁸ In addition we have already noted the role that literary allusion plays in the pieces by both writers. In Philostratus the number of these allusions in such a short piece does seem quite exceptional for the *Imagines*. They seem to be part of the general playful tone of 1.15. In Nonnus, we have noted the amount of self-reference in this piece, with him playing this version against others elsewhere in the *Dionysiaca*. But, as might be expected with him, there is play with other writers as well. Hollis has demonstrated how Nonnus' "clever adaptation of earlier poetry contributes to the humour, high spirits, and versatility of his own epic"⁹⁹ and in particular in his use of Hellenistic poetry. Specifically for our present purposes he regards the rhetorical question at 47.280-281 (τίς παρὰ Νάξω,/ τίς Χάριν ἐχλαίνωσεν ἀνείμονα;) as a pointed reference to Callimachus (ἀνείμον[ες] ὥς ἀπὸ κόλπου / μητρὸς Ἐλειθυίης ἦλθετ[ε] β[ο]ύλομένης *Aetia* fr. 7.9), which his readers might be expected to pick and recognise as a joke.¹⁰⁰ In other words, both Philostratus and Nonnus are relying on literary allusions to complete their pieces and bring out their full meaning.

It is apparent then that there are a number of points of similarity between Philostratus' and Nonnus' treatment of this story. Of course, the Ariadne story is a common theme in both iconography and literature over a long period of time. Nevertheless, there are here striking similarities, as we have noted. As Frangoulis has warned it is difficult 'de parler d'emprunt direct quand il s'agit de lieux communs.'¹⁰¹ Yet here, both writers have gone beyond the commonplaces of the Ariadne story. They have both taken a common element in the story, particularly well-known from iconography - the discovery by Dionysus of the sleeping Ariadne - and treated it in a playful and sexy way. Their

⁹⁸ See for example, Shorrock, 2014, pp.314-318.

⁹⁹ Hollis, Adrian: "Nonnus and Hellenistic Poetry," in Hopkinson, Neil (Ed.): *Studies in the Dionysiaca of Nonnus*, Cambridge (Cambridge Philological Society), 1994a, pp.43-62 at p.44

¹⁰⁰ Hollis explains the joke thus: "if Dionysus were on the nearby island of Paros, there would be no surprise in finding a clothed Grace. But on *Naxos*...?" Hollis, loc. cit.

¹⁰¹ Frangoulis, 2014, p.107

playfulness relies in large measure on literary allusion and the “sexiness” depends on their readers’ knowledge of other writers (and, in Nonnus’ case, of their knowledge of his own other writing).

Bacchantes

We have already seen in our discussion of *Imagines* 1.14 hints of the end of Pentheus on Cithaeron. In *Imagines* 1.18 and *Dionysiaca* Book 46 we see a full treatment of this episode by both writers. Of particular interest is that there is a single basic source for both: Euripides' *Bacchae*. Neither is thinkable without the influence of Euripides.¹⁰² This is not in itself surprising given the widespread interest in the *Bacchae* which "faisait partie du repertoire culturel de tous les lettrés (presqu'au même titre que la poésie homérique) jusque dans l'Antiquité tardive".¹⁰³ Nevertheless, such a close link to one work is unusual. Indeed, in *Dionysiaca* 44 to 46, Nonnus follows step by step the *Bacchae*; likewise, we will see that most of *Imagines* 1.18 can be traced to the play. Yet even where Nonnus and Philostratus maintain a close link to their main source, in this case Euripides, they are still open to making changes and adding touches that suit their own style and artistic agenda.

Philostratus: *Imagines* 1.18

Philostratus describes a rather complicated painting, containing, it would seem, two or three separate scenes. This has raised discussion among commentators as to whether or not it is a single painting, with different actions in the fore- and background, or separate images.¹⁰⁴ In any event, this is another example of a relatively brief piece by Philostratus which manages to present quite a large slice of the *Bacchae* in a short space.

In Section 1, the Sophist introduces the Boy to the scene and its meaning with elements taken directly from Euripides. The scene is set on Mount Cithaeron. Philostratus writes of the earth

¹⁰² Part of the story, the end of Pentheus, is the subject of Theocritus' *Idyll* 26. He presents a slightly different version - Pentheus is watching from a rock rather than a fir tree (line 10) - but we will discuss it in relation to the tearing apart of Pentheus.

¹⁰³ Belayche, Nicole, preface to Massa, Francesco: *Tra la vigne e la croce*, Stuttgart (Franz Steiner Verlag), 2014, p.6

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of this issue: Schönberger, 1968, p.335

enriching the soil with milk (ὥς γάλακτι τὴν βῶλον ἢ γῆ λυπαίνει 1.18.1): Euripides writes of milk flowing (ῥεῖ δὲ γάλακτι πέδον 142). Philostratus continues with typical Dionysian touches of ivy, serpents and thyrsus. It is at the mention of a fallen fir tree (ἐλάτη χαμαὶ 18.1.1) that the reader becomes aware that the scene being described is the aftermath of the killing of Pentheus. For, we are told that this felling is the work of women brought on by Dionysus (γυναικῶν ἔργον ἐκ Διονύσου 1.18.1). The details of the event match the details given by Euripides.¹⁰⁵ Philostratus states that as the tree fell it shook off Pentheus in the shape of a lion (ἐν εἶδει λέοντος 1.18.1); in the *Bacchae* Agave carries her son's head as if it were that of a mountain lion (ὥς ὄρεστέρου/φέρει λέοντος 1141-2). Philostratus goes on to describe Agave's sisters tearing off his arms as she drags him by the hair; in Euripides, Agave tears out an arm while her sisters attack the rest (1127ff). Simon points out that Philostratus details the splashes of blood as touches of colour in the picture;¹⁰⁶ we might add that these are the only splashes of colour in 1.18. In Philostratus' description of the painting, Dionysus is standing watching the women, full of anger, and goading them on with a Bacchic rage (τὸν δὲ οἷστρον προσβακχεύσας ταῖς γυναιξίν 1.18.1). This is not a literal quote from the play - though it is not far from Agave's own explanation to the Chorus¹⁰⁷ - but provides a kind of short hand plot summary of the lead up to the murder and dismemberment, as a neat potted account of Dionysus' anger at Pentheus' arrogance and of his driving the Theban women mad.

The final sentence of this first section is a typical touch: the women do not see what they are doing and apparently (φασι 1.18.1) when Pentheus begs them (ἰκετεύει 1.18.1) they hear a lion. Taken literally, this is quite strange, as if the woman had been interviewed after the event. What is happening is that Philostratus is using one of his favourite techniques for enlivening his picture pieces: introducing sound and voices.

¹⁰⁵ Fairbanks, pp.72f and Schönberger, pp.337f give lists of related passages.

¹⁰⁶ Simon, Bernadette: "Ésthétique d'un récit de *diasparagmos*: exuberance ou sobriété," in Accorinti, Domenico and Pierre Chuvin (Eds.): *Des Géants à Dionysos*, Alessandria (Edizioni dell'Orso), 2003, pp.483-487 at p.484

¹⁰⁷ "ὁ Βάκχιος κυναγέτας / σοφὸς σοφῶς ἀνέπηλ' ἐπὶ θῆρα / τόνδε μαινάδας" 1189-91.

In Section 2 the scene shifts to Thebes and Cadmus' palace where amid lamentations Pentheus' relatives (οἱ προσήκοντες 1.18.2) are trying to fit the pieces of his body together. Although the scene has changed, the close connection to *Bacchae* continues.¹⁰⁸ The final part of this section, which concentrates on a description of Pentheus' severed head, does not derive from any particular part of the *Bacchae*. Rather, Philostratus first gives a description of a youthful face then tells us what Pentheus did *not* look like: his hair was not wreathed (οὔτε κιττὸς ἤρεψεν 1.18.2) and his locks not disordered by flute or frenzy (οὔτε αὐλὸς ἔσεισέ τις οὔτ' οἴστρος 1.18.2). This of course is shorthand for his refusal to accept Dionysus that is the starting point for Euripides' play. Philostratus makes this clear in a final bit of word-play: his madness is refusing to join in Dionysus' madness (ἐμαίνετο δὲ αὐτὸ τὸ μὴ μετὰ Διονύσου μαίνεσθαι 1.18.2). Schönberger¹⁰⁹ sees in this a similarity to the play on drunkenness in *Greek Anthology* 11.429;¹¹⁰ for our purposes, the main point is that he has found a brief and witty way to express the core of the *Bacchae*.

In Section 3 Philostratus turns to Agave and her sisters. Philostratus (or the Sophist) asks what they knew on Cithaeron (οἷα δὲ ἐνταῦθα γινώσκουσιν 1.18.3) and what they did not know. This alone is enough for the educated reader to be reminded of Euripides and of the scene in the *Bacchae* between Agave and her father, starting at 1216, and particularly of the stichomythia starting at 1263. He then presents contrasting word-pictures, firstly of the women wildly rushing about the mountain and secondly of their current downcast inaction as they realise what they have done (εἰς νοῦν τῶν βεβακχευμένων ἤκουσιν 1.18.3). For they have lost not only their madness (ἀπολέλουπε δὲ αὐτὰς οὐχ ἡ μανία μόνον 1.18.3) but also their Bacchic strength. They are presented in sorrow, sinking to the ground (ιζάνουσαί τε κατὰ τῆς γῆς 1.18.3), head on knee (εἰς γόνατα ἢ κεφαλὴ βρίθει 1.18.3),¹¹¹ in various attitudes of despair. The end of the section is reserved for Agave, her body

¹⁰⁸ There is no equivalent in Euripides to this exact idea of relatives assembling the body, although there are lacunae in the text of the play after lines 1300 and 1329.

¹⁰⁹ Schönberger, 1968, p.336

¹¹⁰ "Ἐν πᾶσιν μεθύουσιν Ἀκίνδυνος ἤθελε νήφειν, / τοῦνεκα καὶ μεθύειν αὐτὸς ἔδοξε μόνος."

¹¹¹ Schönberger points out a very similar phrase in Aristainetus: "τοτὲ μὲν οὖν εἰς τὰ γόνατα ἢ κεφαλὴ βρίθει," *Letters* 2.5. These letters are usually considered to have been written in the 5th century, so cannot be a source.

smeared with her son's blood (προσμέμικται δ' αὐτῇ τὸ τοῦ παιδὸς αἷμα τὸ μὲν ἐς χεῖρας 1.18.3).

This is, again, not a literal reference to Euripides, but captures the events in a form appropriate to a painting.

The final section focuses on Cadmus and Harmonia. They are pictured in the process turning into snakes (δράκοντες γὰρ ἦδη ἐκ μηρῶν γίνονται 1.18.4), just as Dionysus predicts in the *Bacchae* (δράκων γενήσῃ μεταβαλὼν 1330). The final description is of them in mid-metamorphosis, clinging to one another (περιβάλλουσιν ἀλλήλους 1.18.4). Dionysus's prophecy also says that after a separation they will end up together in the land of the blessed (1338-9): perhaps this picture of the two clinging together is a hint of that end.

The overall impression from *Imagines* 1.18 is one of a skilful and imaginative reworking of the *Bacchae* from a play into a quite different literary form.¹¹² In a page or two of prose, Philostratus has managed to convey most of the plot of the play, especially the end phase, include most of the characters except for Teiresias and virtually all of the main elements: Dionysus' anger and revenge, Pentheus' fate, Agave's realisation and suffering, the metamorphosis of Cadmus and Agave. It is a piece that only makes complete sense if the reader is familiar with the original work and can therefore appreciate the writer's skill: a kind of connivance between artist and audience.

Nonnus: *Dionysiaca* Book 46

Just as we have seen with *Imagines* 1.18, the starting point and main inspiration for Nonnus in Books 44 to 46 of the *Dionysiaca* is Euripides. This part of the poem, often known as the Pentheid, is shorter than the *Bacchae* (1045 as against 1392 lines¹¹³), but considerably longer than Philostratus'

See, for example, Conca, Fabrizio and Giuseppe Zanetto: *Alcifrone. Filostrato. Aristeneto. Lettere d'Amore*, Milan (BUR), 2005, p.38f.

¹¹² Elsner, J.: "Philostratus Visualizes the Tragic: Some Ecphrastic and Pictorial Receptions of Greek Tragedy in the Roman Era," in C.S. Knaus, S. Goldhill, H.P. Foley and J. Elsner (Eds.): *Visualizing the Tragic: Drama, Myth and Ritual in Greek Art and Literature*, Oxford (Oxford University Press), 2007, pp.309-337 at pp. 312-3

¹¹³ Simon notes that if the choruses are extracted, they are much the same length: Simon, 2004, p.131, n.1

piece, and includes the whole of the plot and main characters. Of course, it also has a narrative form. As we will see, Nonnus, like Philostratus, allows himself freedom to depart from the Euripidean model where it suits either his thematic or stylistic concerns, while remaining essentially faithful to the original.

Like Philostratus, Nonnus sets the scene of Pentheus' death in the mountain forest (ὄρειάδος ἔνδοθι λόχμης 46.145) and in all three writers it is in a great fir tree that he sits before meeting his fate. Likewise, here the tree is brought down by the crazed women and Agave, though in Nonnus it seems to be Agave who has the biggest part in this deed (πρυμνόθεν αὐτόρριζον ἀνέσπασε δένδρον Ἀγαύη 46.185). Nonnus adds a typical touch not found in the others, as he describes the acrobatic fall of Pentheus (κύμβαχος ἡερόθεν κεκυλισμένος ἤριπε Πενθεύς 46.188). He also gives him a twenty-line speech (46.192-208) in his newly recovered sanity before the dismemberment scene. If the tree scene includes additional elements, the dismemberment scene itself is uncharacteristically brief, just a few lines between speeches (46.210-18) and uncharacteristically reserved.

In an article dedicated to this scene,¹¹⁴ Simon compares Nonnus' version to those of Euripides, Theocritus and Philostratus. She notes that Nonnus does not shrink from dismemberment scenes in the *Dionysiaca*, citing 43.40 and 14.377, but argues that in this scene the other three writers were much keener to present a violent scene and that Nonnus was deliberately more moderate in his language. She says that Nonnus is not interested in imitating Euripides in horror, but in this scene he adopts "une esthétique plus homérique que tragique."¹¹⁵ In her edition of the text she notes that Nonnus reduces the dismemberment scene to three gestures: ripping off the right arm and the left arm and the decapitation.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Simon, 2003,

¹¹⁵ Simon, 2003, p. 487

¹¹⁶ Simon, 2004, p. 120

It is certain that this scene in Nonnus is unusually brief and it is uncontroversial that Nonnus is in no way a slave to Euripides.¹¹⁷ However, can it be said that Philostratus is more violent in this regard than Nonnus? Leaving aside the splashes of blood we have already noted and which are not mentioned by Nonnus, the description in *Imagines* 1.18 is not inconsistent with that in the *Dionysiaca*. Pentheus is indeed described as being torn to pieces by the Bacchantes (ἀποσεισαμένη ταῖς Βάκχαις 1.18.1), but the details are of his arms being torn off by the Agave's sisters (αἱ μὲν ἀπορρηγνῦσα τὰς χεῖρας 1.18.1) while she herself drags him by the hair (ἡ δὲ ἐπισπῶσα τὸν υἱὸν τῆς χαίτης 1.18.1). This is very similar to the three gestures Nonnus paints and, even allowing for the brevity of the piece, considerably more restrained than the corresponding scene in the *Bacchae*. (We saw in our discussion of *Imagines* 1.18.1 that Dionysus appears in his anger goading on the Bacchantes against Pentheus.)

In the section of the poem that equates to the scene before Thebes in *Imagines* 1.18.2, where we see Cadmus lamenting Pentheus' fate, Nonnus has the old man, in tears, deliver a speech (46.242-264). At the end of the speech, Dionysus is moved by his suffering (πολὴν δὲ κόμην ἠδέσσατο Κάδμου/καὶ στοναχὴν Διόνυσος 46.268-69), just as he will be moved by the suffering of Autonoë and Agave (Βάκχος ἄναξ ἐλέαιρε 46.357). In fact, the god is in tears. This is in contrast to the Dionysus of the *Bacchae*, but in line with Philostratus where the sight of Pentheus' severed head shows Dionysus to be capable of pity (οἷα καὶ τῷ Διονύσῳ ἐλεεῖν 1.18.2).

Just as in *Imagines* 1.18.3 Philostratus contrasts the women in their Bacchic frenzy with their state after having recovered their senses, so Nonnus too makes much of this contrast. In the *Bacchae* Agave comes out of her frenzy during a scene with her father, after he has her look into the sky (1264ff.). In the *Dionysiaca* it is Dionysus himself who gives her back her reason (πάλιν ἔμφρονα θῆκεν 46.271). When Agave realises what she has done she falls to the ground (46.275) and rolls in the dust (βόστρυχον αἰσχύνουσα χυτῇ κεκύλιστο κόνιῃ 46.276). As we have seen, in 1.18.3

¹¹⁷ Simon, 2003, p. 487

Philostratus also describes a woman sinking to the ground. In Nonnus' version, much is made of the contrast between red and white: there is the red of Pentheus' bloodied head (ἐρευθομένοιο καρήνου 46.281) and the pallor of his face (ἔγχλοα κύκλα προσώπου 46.280); and the blood leaves red traces on Agave's unclothed breast (ἀσκεπέων πτύχα μαζῶν 46.279). Philostratus does not make as much of the colour red, but he does picture Agave with Pentheus' blood on her hands, cheek and naked breast (τὰ γυμνὰ τοῦ μαζοῦ 1.18.3). In Nonnus, Agave kisses (κύσεν) her son's eyes cheeks and hair (46.280-1); in Philostratus she wants to embrace (περιβάλλειν) her son.

Book 46 ends on a consolatory note. Seeing the lamentations of the women, Dionysus takes pity on them (Βάκχος ἄναξ ἐλέειρε 46.357). He mixes a drink to alleviate their troubles, a drink of forgetfulness (δῶκε ποτὸν ληθαῖον 46.360) and sends Agave and Autonoe to bed with oracles telling of coming hope (ἐλπίδος ἐσσομένης 46.363). This passage has been the subject of much discussion. Chuvin points out that in the *Dionysiaca* "even the most unfortunate Nonnian heroines" have a coming hope.¹¹⁸ To others, this has raised questions of the Christian influence in the poem. For example, there is the use of the word "λυσίπονος" to describe the wine that Dionysus mixes to relieve the women's troubles.¹¹⁹

Comparison

We have seen that for both Philostratus and Nonnus the main inspiration and source is without doubt Euripides. Yet, as we have also seen, neither of them is entirely constrained by the *Bacchae*, and both writers are prepared to adapt the material to reflect their own interest and artistic needs, as well as the different literary forms they are using. All of the versions we have discussed - Euripides, Theocritus, Philostratus, Nonnus - stress Dionysus' ire at the impiety of Pentheus and agree on the punishment. Nonnus stands out in being the only one who ends on a conciliatory note

¹¹⁸ Chuvin, Pierre: "The Poet of Dionysus. Birth of the Last among the Gods," in Accorinti, 2016, p.122

¹¹⁹ Discussed in Shorrock, Robert: *The Myth of Paganism*, London (Bristol Classical Press), 2011, pp.111-12

that suggests some sort of hope, as well as being unusually reticent in his depiction of the dismemberment of Pentheus.

We can state, therefore, that Books 44 to 46 are clearly above all an engagement with Euripides. Nevertheless, there are intriguing similarities of detail between Nonnus and Philostratus: in the details of Pentheus' punishment; in his mother's reaction to her deed; and in Dionysus' display of pity at the human consequences. In other words, further hints at Nonnus' making use of details from the *Imagines* as they suit his purpose.

The Tyrrhenian Pirates

The story of the Tyrrhenian pirates is frequently told in Greek and Latin literature. The first full treatment of the story of the Tyrrhenian Pirates is found in *Homeric Hymn 7 (To Dionysus)*,¹²⁰ but there are many other retellings.¹²¹ The unfolding story may be summarised as follows:

Dionysus, in the form of a young man, appears by the seashore at an unnamed place. He is marked by his dark locks and his purple cloak. The pirates think him the son of a rich family, seize and bind him. But the bonds will not hold him (τὸν δ' οὐκ ἴσχανε δεσμά, 7.13). The helmsman realises he must be a god (Ζεὺς ὅδε γ' ἐστὶν ἢ ἀργυρότοξος Ἀπόλλων/ἢ ἐ Ποσειδάων 7.19-20), but the captain and crew ignore his warning and prepare to sail off. Amazing things start to happen: wine gushes (οἶνος μὲν πρώτιστα θοὴν ἀνὰ νῆα 7.35); then vines appear (ἐξετανύσθη/ἄμπελος ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα 7.38-39); then ivy starts growing over the ship (ἀμφ' ἱστὸν δὲ μέλας εἰλίσσετο κισσὸς 7.40). By this stage, the crew want to turn back, but the god metamorphoses into a lion (ὁ δ' ἄρα σφι λέων γένετ' ἔνδοθι νηὸς 7.44) and makes a bear (ἄρκτον ἐποίησεν λασιαύχενα 7.46). The lion seizes the captain and the crew leap into the sea to escape and are turned into dolphins (δελφῖνες δ' ἐγένοντο, 7.53). But the god takes pity on the helmsman and introduces himself as Dionysus “the mighty roarer” (ἐρίβρομος 7.560), son of Semele and Zeus.

Perhaps the best known of the retellings of the story is in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book 3, as part of the story of Pentheus. In that version, the tale is told by Acoetes, follower of Bacchus (comitem famulumque sacrorum 3.574). He tells the tale how as the navigator of a ship of rogues, his companions come across a beautiful boy wandering alone (3.607), seemingly either drunk or sleepy

¹²⁰ First mentioned by Pindar in fr. 236 Snell: West, Martin L. (Ed.): *Homeric Hymns. Homeric Apocrypha. Lives of Homer*, Cambridge and London (Loeb), 2003, p16 n.18.

¹²¹ Other well-known retellings of the story are in Hyginus *Fabulae* 134 and Pseudo-Apollodorus *Library*, 3.5.3.

(ille mero somnoque gravis titubare videtur 3.608). Acoetes is sure the boy is a god (corpore numen in isto est 3.612), but his companions are blinded by their thirst for booty (praedae tam caeca cupido est 3.612), a fight ensues and Acoetes is sidelined. Bacchus asks to be taken to Naxos, but the ship is steered in the opposite direction (3.649). Bacchus toys with the pirates (inludens 3.650), pretending to be upset (flenti similis, 3.652), before bringing the ship to a stop (stetit aequore puppis 3.660). Ivy starts to wind about the oars and ship and Bacchus appears garlanded with vines and grapes (ipse racemiferis frontem circumdatus uvis 3.666). The visions of tigers, lynxes and panthers surround him, so that the crew jump overboard, driven by madness or fear (sive hoc insania fecit / sive timor 3.670-1). In an extraordinary sequence, as the men leap into the sea, Ovid describes them turning into dolphins (671-685). Only Acoetes is spared and joins the Bacchants.

Philostratus: *Imagines* 1.19

The first sentence declares that the painting is of two contrasting ships. They are described as a sacred ship and a pirate ship (Ναῦς θεωρὶς καὶ ναῦς ληστρική 1.19.1). The first section continues with two further contrasts. Dionysus is on one ship; pirates are on the other. Dionysus is sailing amidst revels and the cries of Bacchantes on the sea which yields its back to him (ὑπέχει τῷ Διονύσῳ τὰ ἑαυτῆς νῶτα 1.19.1); the pirates are going mad, have forgotten to row and many have lost their hands (ἀπολώλασιν ἤδη αἱ χεῖρες 1.19.1).¹²²

The second section begins by posing a question: what is the painting about (τίς ἡ γραφή; 1.19.2)? He then answers the question by giving a quick version of the story: the pirates are lying in wait for Dionysus (Διόνυσον ... λοχῶσι Τυρρηνοὶ 1.19.2), having heard¹²³ that the ship is full of gold, that Dionysus is effeminate (θῆλύς 1.19.2) and that there are nothing but Lydian women, satyrs and flute

¹²² Oppositions and contrasts are familiar devices used by Philostratus in the *Imagines*. See, for example, the comment by Miles on the description of Abradates: "The description of Abradates is composed of a series of oppositions." Miles, 2018, p.91.

¹²³ "...Erzählung des Mythos. Sehr geschickt in die Form des Gerüchtes gekleidet." Schönberger, 1968, p.341

players on board (γύναιά ... Λύδια καὶ Σάτυροι [καὶ] αὐλήται 1.19.2), as well as a few Bacchic hangers-on like Silenus¹²⁴ and Maron (ναρθηκοφόρος γέρων καὶ οἶνος Μαρώνειος). In other words, there is no one on board capable of fighting the pirates. It ends with a joke: the Pans will get the she-goats while the pirates take the Bacchantes (αὐτοὶ μὲν ἄξεσθαι τὰς Βάκχας 1.19.2).

The third section is a description of the pirate ship. The essence of the ship is that it is warlike (μάχιμον πλεῖ τῶν τρόπων 1.19.3), equipped for battle (ἐπωτίσι τε γὰρ κατεσκευάσται καὶ ἐμβόλῳ 1.19.3) and well-armed (σιδηραῖ αὐτῇ χεῖρες καὶ αἰχμαὶ καὶ δρέπανα ἐπὶ δοράτων 1.19.3). Not only is it equipped for fighting, it is made to look fierce and warlike, so as to strike with fear those it encounters (ὥς <δ> ἐκπλήττοι τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας 1.19.3). For this purpose it is painted in bright colours (γλαυκοῖς μὲν γέγραπται χρώμασι 1.19.3¹²⁵), has eyes painted on the prow (βλοσυροῖς δὲ κατὰ πρῶραν ὀφθαλμοῖς 1.19.3) and a stern that is reminiscent of a fish tail (καθάπερ τὰ τελευτῶντα τῶν ἰχθύων 1.19.3).

Dionysus' ship, described in section 4 could hardly be more different, though the text of the first line is doubtful.¹²⁶ Instead of prow-beams and beak, Dionysus's ship has a prow in the form of a golden leopardess (1.19.4).¹²⁷ This is an animal dear to Dionysus because it is the most passionate of animals (θερμότατον τῶν ζώων 1.19.4)¹²⁸ and as nimble as a Bacchante (πηδᾷ κοῦφα καὶ ἴσα εὐάδι 1.19.4). The mast is a thyrsus (θύρσος δὲ οὕτωσιν ἐκ μέσης νεὼς ἐκπέφυκε τὰ τοῦ ἱστοῦ πράσσω 1.19.4). The ship can however match the bright colours of the pirate vessel, with gleaming purple sails (άλουργῇ μεταυγάζοντα ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ 1.19.4) woven with golden scenes of Bacchantes and Dionysus (χρυσᾷ δὲ ἐνύφονται Βάκχαι ... 1.19.4). If the pirate ship has a stern resembling a fish tail, Dionysus' vessel seems to have fish scales (φολιδωτὴ δὲ ὁρᾶται 1.19.4) because of the cymbals set in rows to ensure that Dionysus never has to travel in silence (μὴ ἀψοφητὶ πλέοι 1.19.4). But above

¹²⁴ Schönberger, op. cit. p.339

¹²⁵ Schönberger translates this phrase as "mit blauer Farbe angemalt": op. cit. p. 139

¹²⁶ It is hard to see what "like a pyramid" might mean: Schönberger, op. cit. p.340

¹²⁷ "Der Goldpanther ist das sog. Paraemon des Schiffes": Schönberger, loc. cit.

¹²⁸ Apollonius mentions this characteristic of the animal at VA 2.14.2

all Dionysus' is a ship of wonder: firstly because of the ivy and grapevines covering it (θαῦμα μὲν 1.19.4), but even more so (θαυμασιωτέρα δὲ 1.19.4) because of the wine gushing from the ship.

Section 5 takes us back to the pirates, who are now in the process of metamorphosing into dolphins. The first thing we are told is that this is happening under Dionysus' power, when he drives them mad (ὁ γὰρ Διόνυσος αὐτοὺς ἐκμήνας 1.19.5). The metamorphosis itself is highly reminiscent of Ovid's description, though here there are eight rather than four pirates involved.

In the final section we are presented with a happy Dionysus laughing at the metamorphosis (ὁ δὲ Διόνυσος ἐκ πρώρας γελᾷ ταῦτα 1.19.6). The metamorphosis of the pirates into dolphins has led to a change from bad to good (ἦθη χρηστοῖς ἐκ φάυλων 1.19.6). As examples he proposes the stories of Palaimon, the subject of 2.16, and of Arion.¹²⁹ The piece ends with high praise for the dolphins, companions (ἐταίρους 1.19.6) of men, of the sort who could line up against pirates (οἷους παρατάξασθαι πρὸς ληστὰς 1.19.6).

If we compare Philostratus' version to earlier versions, there appear to be significant differences: we have seen that in *Homeric Hymn 7* and Ovid, Dionysus is picked up from the land by the pirate vessel and "fooled" by the pirates. Philostratus' painting shows two ships, one the pirate vessel and the other Dionysus' ship in full Bacchic regalia, with the pirates at the moment of metamorphosis into dolphins and the Bacchic crew celebrating. But is it necessary to take a literal reading of the picture? Philostratus' paintings are not always "moment in time" snapshots of the action. The pictures as described by the Sophist often present more than one phase of the action: for example, consider the treatment of the Cassandra story at 2.10, where the reader is given details of Clytemnestra slaying her husband while she is poised to kill Priam's daughter (2.10.1), or the presentation of the phases of the wrestling match between Heracles and Antaeus at 2.22.¹³⁰ Philostratus "turns pictures into

¹²⁹ Herodotus 1.23; Lucian, *Dialogues of the Sea-Gods* 5. See Schönberger, loc. cit.

¹³⁰ Bachmann, Cordula: *Wenn man die Welt als Gemälde betrachtet*, Heidelberg (Verlag Antike), 2015, p.203

narrations”¹³¹ and “allows the reader to enjoy the sensation of being pulled in by a fiction.”¹³² It is therefore not unreasonable to assume a similar process here, giving us, as it were a “before and after” view of the action. He is going beyond the literal to seek meaning. His method is characterised by “eine Strategie der Aneignung der Gemälde durch eine kontextualisierende Hermeneutik.”¹³³ In essence for the painting Philostratus is presenting the final stages of the story, missing out the build-up as it were,¹³⁴ no doubt assuming it to be well-known, and leaving the reader/viewer with two key elements in a striking image: the triumph of Dionysus (the Bacchic ship) and the punishment of the pirates (the metamorphosis into dolphins).

Nonnus: *Dionysiaca* Book 45

Nonnus’ extended version of the Tyrrhenian pirates comes in the middle of his Pentheid (Books 44-46), in what has been described as a “character-text digression.”¹³⁵ As in Ovid’s version, it is a story told by a narrator. It is told here as a warning by Teiresias to Pentheus to avoid Dionysus’ anger (ἀλλὰ χόλον Βρομίοιο φυλάσσεο 45.103) by telling a story of the consequences of impiety (δυσσεβίης δὲ / ... τινα μῦθον ἐνίψω 45.103-4).

In keeping with this purpose, the first part of the tale relates the misdeeds of the pirates.

Just as Philostratus’ view of the story is in two parts - the triumphant Dionysus and the metamorphosing pirates - so Nonnus concentrates on two elements: the wickedness of the pirates and the power of Dionysus. Nonnus expands on the earlier versions, being the only one to paint in such detail the violent actions of the pirates, setting the scene for their impiety towards Dionysus.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Bartsch, Shadi: *Decoding the Ancient Novel*, Princeton (Princeton University Press), 1989, p. 17

¹³² Webb, in Costantini, Graziani and Rolet, 2006, p.132

¹³³ Baumann, 2011, p.34.

¹³⁴ The descriptions of the armaments of the vessel hint at the beginning of the story.

¹³⁵ Geisz, Camille: “Narrative and Digression in the *Dionysiaca*,” in Accorinti, 2016, p.185

¹³⁶ Simon notes similar descriptions at 9.252-274, 25.472-480 and 45.176-194: “Nonnos s’imite donc lui-même” (Simon, 2004, p.66).

The pirates are introduced as murderous wandering thieves (ξεινοφόννοι, πλωτῆρες ἀλήμονες, ἄρπαγες ὄλβου 45.106). Nonnus gives three examples of their usual misdeeds: they cast the crews of captured ships to the waters (εἰς μόρον ὕδατόεντα γέρων ἐκυλίνδετο ναύτης 45.109); they leave the shepherd defending his flock with his grey hair covered in gore (πολιῆσι φόνω 45.111); they rob the merchant and leave him in chains far from home (ἄρπαμένοιο λιπόπτολις ἄμμορος ὄλβου 45.118). Both the sailors and shepherd are described as old, as if to stress the impiety of their actions.

Dionysus is introduced as he changes form to trick the pirates (ἀλλὰ δόλῳ Διόνυσος ἐπὶ κλοπὸν εἶδος ἀμείψας / Τυρσηνοὺς ἀπάφησε 45.119-20). This again is an expansion on the earlier versions. His appearance however is similar to that of the Dionysus of the *Homeric Hymn* and Ovid, a charming youth (ἱμερόεις ἄτε κοῦρος ἔχων ἀχάρακτον ὑπὴν ἡν 45.121)¹³⁷ In the *Homeric Hymn* he is wearing a purple cloak,¹³⁸ but here his dress is even more magnificent clothes, leading to comparisons with the dawn (δύσατο πέπλα φαάντερα κυκλάδος Ἡοῦς 45.126) and he is adorned with both gold (αὐχένι κόσμον ἔχων χρυσήλατον 45.122) and magnificent jewels (ἐγγλοα νῶτα μαράγδου, / καὶ λίθος Ἰνδῶν 45.124-5). The most magnificent part of his appearance is however the shining wreath he wears (στέμματος ἀστράπτοντος ἔην αὐτόσσυτος αἶγλη / λυχνίδος ἀσβέστοιο 45.23-4). The spontaneous nature of the glow and the fact that it is inextinguishable are clear signs of his godly status.¹³⁹ Naturally, the pirates are blind to this, seize him and strip him of his possessions (κτεάνων γύμνωσαν 45.131).

¹³⁷ The Dionysus of *Hymn 7* is very similar: νεηνίη ἀνδρὶ ἐοικώς / πρωθήβη (4-5). The Dionysus in Ovid is perhaps younger: “virginea puerum ducit per litora forma.” (*Metamorphoses* 3.607).

¹³⁸ Accorinti, 2004, p.418

¹³⁹ “L’abondance du vocabulaire de la lumière ... marque ici un rayonnement divin.” Simon, 2004, p.206, n.to 119-127

What happens next is quite different to anything in the earlier versions and seems to be a Nonnian touch:¹⁴⁰ suddenly Dionysus grows tall (νέος ἐξαπίνης μέγας ἔπλετο 45.133), monstrously tall,¹⁴¹ tall enough in fact to reach Olympus (ὑψούμενος ἄχρις Ὀλύμπου 45.134).¹⁴² Moreover he is wonderfully beautiful (θέσπιδι μορφῇ 45.133), a human figure but with horns (ἀνδροφυῆς κερόεις 45.134) and he roars¹⁴³ like a nine thousand strong army (ὡς στρατὸς ἐννεάχιλος ἑῷ μυκήσατο λαίμῳ 45.136). Ropes become snakes (45.139-40); a horned viper runs high up with its coiling tail (κεράστης / ὀλκαίαις ἐλίκεσσιν ἀνέδραμεν εἰς κέρας ἱστοῦ 45.139-40¹⁴⁴); the mast is an exceedingly tall cypress (ἱστὸς ἦν κυπάρισσος ὑπέρτατος 45.142) with ivy wound about it like a rope (κισσὸς ἀερσιπότητος... / σειρὴν αὐτοέλικτον ἐπιπλέξας κυπαρίσσω 45.144).¹⁴⁵ This last phrase is very similar to Nonnus' own line from Dionysus' visit to Beroë in Book 41 (κισσὸς ἀερσιπότητος ἐμιτρώθη κυπαρίσσω 41.9),¹⁴⁶ involving both the ivy and the cypress.¹⁴⁷ Grape vines come from the sea heavy with fruit (ἀμφὶ δὲ πηδαλίοισιν ὑπερκύψασα θαλάσσης / Βακχιάς ἀμπελόεντι κάμαξ ἐβαρύνετο καρπῷ 45.145-6) and there is a fountain of wine (οἶνον ἀναβλύζουσα μέθης βακχεύετο πηγῇ 45.148). Wild animals roam the deck (ἀμφὶ δὲ σέλματα πάντα ... θῆρες ἀεξήθησαν 45.150).

Nonnus' telling ends with the pirates, in an extraordinary passage that stresses above all the madness brought on them by Dionysus¹⁴⁸ as they are driven through madness to fear (ἐβακχεύοντο δὲ λύσση/εἰς φόβον οἰστροθέντες 45.152-3).

¹⁴⁰ Accorinti, 2004, p.418

¹⁴¹ "die Schreckensepiphanie des zum Himmel Ragenden mit dem areshaften Brüllen à la Homer," Fauth, Wolfgang: *Eidos Poikilon*, Göttingen (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 1981, p.109

¹⁴² Simon, 2004, p.208, n. to 133-151, points out that in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 173, the goddess is of a prodigious size, though in her case she reaches only to the ceiling.

¹⁴³ In *Homeric Hymn* 7 Dionysus becomes a lion and roars loudly (μέγα δ' ἔβραχεν 45)

¹⁴⁴ "la predilezione mostrata da Nonno a descrivere il movimento circolare e la linea curva." Gigli Piccardi, Daria: *Metafora e Poetica in Nonno di Panopoli*, Florence (Università degli Studi di Firenze), 1985, p.218

¹⁴⁵ *Homeric Hymn* 7.40: ἀμφ' ἱστὸν δὲ μέλας εἰλίσσετο κισσὸς. Cf. *Metamorphoses* 3.664: inpediunt hederæ remos

¹⁴⁶ Self-imitation is so common in the *Dionysiaca* that Hadjittofi talks of Nonnus' "obsessive intratextuality." Hadjittofi, Fotini: "Major Themes and Motifs in the *Dionysiaca*" in Accorinti, 2016, pp. 125-151 at p.126

¹⁴⁷ Refer discussion of the repetition of ἀερσιπότητος in Chuvin and Fayant, 2006, p.153. The cypress reappears half a dozen times apart from the Tyrrhenian Pirates episode.

¹⁴⁸ "Dionysos est le dieu "dément" par nature." Vian, Francis: *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome X. Chants 30-32*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1997, p.3

We have already seen the takeover of the pirate ship by the Bacchic vine, fruit, wine and animals.

Now, in a turn of events that does not appear in any of the earlier versions we have mentioned¹⁴⁹, the sea itself becomes a garden:

ἀξιφύτοιο δὲ πόντου

ἄνθεα κυματόεντες ἀπέπτυν ὕδατος ὀλκοί·

καὶ ῥόδον ἐβλάστησε, καὶ ὑψόθεν, ὥς ἐνὶ κήπῳ,

ἀφροτόκοι κενεῶνες ἐφοινίσσοντο θαλάσσης,

καὶ κρίνον ἐν ῥοθίοις ἀμαρύσσετο. (45.153-157)

Is there really a garden in the sea? That is what the pirates perceive, but the perception is false, the meadows are “counterfeit,” an illusion brought on by their madness (δερκομένων δὲ/ψευδομένους λειμῶνας ἐβακχεύθησαν ὀπωπαί 45.157-8). The illusions continue to multiply, from flowery meadows to hills and trees and shepherds and the sound of flutes¹⁵⁰ (45.159-165) - until it seems to mirror the hallucinatory frenzy of Bacchic ritual. Finally, deprived of their wits by madness (ἀμερσινώω δ' ὑπὸ λύσση 45.165) and under the illusion they have found dry land (γαῖαν ἰδεῖν ἐδόκησαν 45.165), they leap into the sea and are changed into dolphins (45.166-7).

Teiresias, the narrator, draws the moral from this – do not provoke the anger of Lyaios (χόλον πεφύλαξο Λυαίου 45.169).¹⁵¹

If we are to consider Nonnus' version in relation to the earlier ones, it is clear that it follows the general lines of the well-known story: pirates attempt to capture Dionysus and are punished. Like

¹⁴⁹ However, Tissoni notes a similar passage involving Nereus in Seneca's *Oedipus* 449ff: Tissoni, 1998, p.232, n. to 152-3

¹⁵⁰ “L'hallucination auditive est caractéristique de la folie.” Simon, 2004, p.210, n. to 152-168

¹⁵¹ Carvounis, Katerina: “Dionysus, Ampelus, and Mythological Examples in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*,” in Bannert and Kröll, 2018, pp.33-49, at p.45

Philostratus, he has removed the “good helmsman” element used in *Homeric Hymn* 7 and Ovid.¹⁵²

Nor does Nonnus (or Philostratus) use the characterisation and naming of the pirates as in Ovid.¹⁵³

As in the *Homeric Hymn*, Dionysus is here a tempter.¹⁵⁴ One unusual feature in Nonnus is his placing the scene around Sicily (Σικελόν τινα μῦθον ἐνίψω 45.104),¹⁵⁵ and he has added the “giant” Dionysus discussed above. Above all, Nonnus has turned up the volume, as it were, on the earlier versions, taking the elements to the extremes.

If we compare Nonnus’ treatment of the Tyrrhenian Pirates episode to Philostratus’ piece, one of the first things to strike us is the different treatment of the pirates as dolphins. We have already noted that in *Imagines* 1.19, when they are changed into dolphins, the pirates also undergo a moral transformation from being bad to being good (ἦθη χρηστοῖς ἐκ φάυλων 1.19.6). Aside from this episode, there are a few examples of dolphins in Philostratus’ works. In the *Imagines* itself, Palaemon (Palaemon/Melicertes make multiple appearances in the *Dionysiaca*) is pictured being carried on the back of a dolphin (2.16.2). Another reference is made to this in *Lives of the Sophists*, though here under the name of Melicertes (τὸν τοῦ Μελικέρτου παρελθὼν δελφῖνα 2.551.10). Dolphins appear again at *Heroicus* 45.3. The overall impression, then, from these works, is that dolphins are good. This is in accord with the general positive take on dolphins in ancient Greek literature. For example, Oppian discusses dolphins in a positive way throughout the *Halieutica*, and even when he tells how Dionysus turns men into dolphins, he insists that they preserve a part of their humanity (θυμὸς ἐναΐσιμος εἰσέτι φωτῶν / ῥύεται ἀνδρομέην ἡμὲν φρόνιν ἡδὲ καὶ ἔργα 1.652-3). Indeed, he berates the men who hunt dolphins as “ἀταρτηροὶ καὶ ἀτάσθαλοι” (5.523).

¹⁵² Verhelst notes the profusion of characters in the *Dionysiaca* and gives the example of Hera’s ruse against Semele where, compared to Ovid’s version, Nonnus adds characters: Verhelst, Berenice: “Minor Characters in the *Dionysiaca*,” in Accorinti, 2016, pp. 152-172 at p.166. Here, on the other hand, we have an example of Nonnus using fewer characters compared to Ovid.

¹⁵³ Hyginus (*Fabulae*, 134) names each of the pirates; Ovid uses some of the names 671-679. Nonnus generally shows little interest in human characters.

¹⁵⁴ Simon, 2004, p.66

¹⁵⁵ Accorinti discusses the difficulties of the text: Accorinti 2004, pp.414-5 n. to 104

Dolphins are frequently mentioned in the *Dionysiaca*. In some instances, dolphins are just animals among others (1.277; 3.26; 6.266; 39.334; 43.191). They are frequently being ridden, usually by Nereids (1.73; 6.297; 43.285), but also by Echo (3.08) and by Aphrodite (13.438. In this passage Cyprus is described as shaped like a dolphin). There is even a description of a dolphin on the necklace fashioned by Hephaestus for Harmonia's wedding to Cadmus (5.184). On the basis of these passages, the overall impression of dolphins in the *Dionysiaca* is the standard positive one.

The situation is, however, different when we look at dolphins mentioned in relation to the Tyrrhenian Pirates. Dolphins are mentioned as part of the Tyrrhenian Pirates story no less than three times (44.241-250; 45.105-168; 47.629-632¹⁵⁶), the first two forming part of the Pentheid, Nonnus' retelling of Euripides' *Bacchae*. In order to reach a conclusion on the meaning of this negative view of dolphins, we need to put each of these mentions of the Tyrrhenian episode in its particular context within the *Dionysiaca*.

The episode is rather briefly related in Book 44.210-249. Of particular note here is Nonnus' description of dolphins as "senseless" (ἄφραδέες) at 44.247 when he has described them earlier in the poem as having an "intelligent mind" (ἔμφρονα θυμὸν ἔχων 13.442).¹⁵⁷ The word "ἄφραδέες" is even more jarring when we consider that this adjective is used elsewhere in the *Dionysiaca* to describe Actaeon's dogs (5.442).¹⁵⁸ The context in Book 44 is that of Dionysus calling for the help of the gods in his fight against Pentheus' impiety. In answer to his prayer, Mene¹⁵⁹ promises her help (44.218-253). She also reminds him of what he has already achieved, and "cita quattro *exempla* di ὕβρις" to demonstrate his power.¹⁶⁰ Tissoni notes that "a Nonno qui non interessa, a quanto sembra, discutere sulla natura del delfino ma solo insistere sull'esemplare punizione subita dagli empi Tirreni."¹⁶¹ However we look at it, he concludes, a dolphin can never be as intelligent as a

¹⁵⁶ In the last instance they are referred to as "ἰχθύες ὀρχηστῆρες" (47.632) rather than as dolphins.

¹⁵⁷ "C'est ainsi qu'on considère le dauphin dans l'antiquité." Simon, 2004, p.185

¹⁵⁸ Simon, loc. cit.

¹⁵⁹ "Perséphone est identique à Méné:" Vian, 1997, p.46

¹⁶⁰ Accorinti, 2004, p.342

¹⁶¹ Tissoni, 1998, p.167

man.¹⁶² The story in Book 45 is, as we have seen, told by Tiresias to warn Pentheus of the consequences of defying Dionysus. It is paired as a warning with the story of the Giant Alpos which followed it immediately. The end of the story here is somewhat ambivalent towards dolphins. There is no lingering on the shape changing that is prominent in both Philostratus and Ovid (ἀμειβομένου δὲ προσώπου 45.167), and there is no doubt that the pirates have changed their nature from human to “fishy” (εἰς φύσιν ἰχθυόεσσαν ἐμορφώθη γένος ἀνδρῶν 45.168). But while this is clearly a punishment (δολόεντα χόλον πεφύλαξο Λυαίου 45.169), there is neither an insistence on the “stupidity” of dolphins, nor a mention of their goodness. The last brief mention of the pirate episode at 47.629-632 is in the context of Dionysus boasting of his own powers and deeds¹⁶³ to Perseus. He recalls his victory over both the pirates and Alpos¹⁶⁴ from Book 45. Here his treatment of the dolphins is “traditional,”¹⁶⁵ characterising them as dancers of the sea (ὀρχηστῆρες ἐπισκαίρουσι θαλάσση 47.632).

A clue as to what is going on here may be found in the very first mention of the Tyrrhenian Pirates in the *Dionysiaca* at 31.89-92, even though nothing is said here of the dolphins. In this passage Hera is using Zeus’ inaction on the pirate menace as an excuse to Megaira, one of the Furies, in her plot against Dionysus and Zeus (Τυρσηνοῖς ἀδίκους οὐ μάρναται 31.89). As Vian notes: “le lecteur ne manque pas de sourire ..., car il sait que c’est Dionysos qui punira leur ἀδικία.”¹⁶⁶ In other words, this is an example of Nonnus using one version of a story to fit a particular circumstance, while not losing sight of the larger context of the poem, as well as playing on the reader’s knowledge of the a

¹⁶² Tissoni, loc. cit.

¹⁶³ Fayant, 2000, p.68

¹⁶⁴ In a typically Nonnian way the order of the episodes from Book 45 is here reversed.

¹⁶⁵ Gigli Piccardi, 1985, p.204, n.106, quoted by Fayant, 2003, p.189, n. to 618-632

¹⁶⁶ Vian, Francis: *Les Dionysiaques, Chants 30-32*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1997, p.50. Also: “L’accento ai pirati tirreni è in realtà un altro elemento di scorno per Era ...; il lettore sa bene che sarà proprio Dioniso a punirli...” Agosti, 2004 p.397, n to 88-91

well-known story.¹⁶⁷ This is surely what is happening with the dolphins. In Book 44 and in Book 45 the point of the story is Dionysus' power and it is this element that is emphasised.

If the treatment of the dolphins provides a clear point of difference between Nonnus' and Philostratus' retelling of the Tyrrhenian pirate stories, they also share elements of similarity. Let us consider the pirates' leap into the sea. The *Homeric Hymn* says that they jumped into the sea to avoid their doom (κακὸν μόρον ἐξαλύοντες 51); according to Apollodorus they went mad (οἱ δὲ ἐμμανεῖς 3.5.3); Hyginus says they were afraid (timentes *Fabulae* 134); Ovid says they were either afraid or mad (siue hoc insania fecit / siue timor 670-1). In other words, there is a tradition of pirate madness in the story, but it is hardly emphasised, with fear being the main impulse. Both Nonnus and Philostratus, however, stress the madness of the pirates. In Philostratus, madness is introduced from the beginning (μαίνονται 1.19.1) and this continues through the piece (ἐκμήνας 1.19.5); in typically exuberant fashion, in Nonnus this madness of the pirates becomes a veritable mass hallucination,¹⁶⁸ as they suffer the delusion that the sea is a garden (45.154ff).

Madness plays a large role in the *Dionysiaca*. As Vian has pointed out 'madness' has at least two meanings here: "il faut distinguer la *mania* divine, qui possède habituellement Dionysos et qu'il communique à ses fidèles, et une autre *mania*, qui est une maladie ... provoquée par une vengeance divine."¹⁶⁹ Both types are much in evidence in the *Dionysiaca* and it is not always Dionysus who is handing out the punishment.¹⁷⁰ The punishment of the pirates is for both writers an expression of the god's power.¹⁷¹ The difference between the two is the description of the madness. Philostratus

¹⁶⁷ There is one more reference to the Tyrrhenian Pirates story in the *Dionysiaca*: at 47.508 Nonnus refers to the pirate ship being turned to stone (ὀλκάδα λαϊνέην Τυρσηνίδα πῆξε θαλάσση). No other example of this version of the story is known, though it may be based on *Odyssey* 13.162ff. (Chuvin, 1991, p.77, n.56; Fayant, 2003, p. 181, n. to 507-519). This is both an example of Nonnus' predilection for displaying knowledge of unusual versions of myths and of his willingness to use alternative versions of the same stories in different contexts.

¹⁶⁸ "L'allucinazione collettiva": Tissoni, 1998, p.232, n. to 154

¹⁶⁹ Vian, 1997, p.39

¹⁷⁰ As part of a plot by Hera, who champions the Indians in the war, Dionysus is struck by madness in Book 32 (32.110) and does not recover until freed by Hera at Zeus' insistence in Book 35 (35.321)

¹⁷¹ Pentheus, of course, will feel this power in Book 46 when he is torn to pieces by his mother and aunts under the influence of Bacchic madness.

concentrates on the metamorphosis of the pirates, their gradual transformation into dolphins; Nonnus expands on the idea of their delusion to create a bravura description of the non-existent land covering 20 lines of verse, full of colour (ἀφροτόκοι κενεῶνες ἐφοινίσσοντο θαλάσσης 45.156) and sound (κτύπον ὠίσαντο λιγυφθόγγοιο νομῆος 45.161) and rich in literary allusions,¹⁷² rare words and neologisms (ἀφροτόκοι 45.156; ἀμερσινόω 45.165¹⁷³) and bold metaphor (ἄνθεα κυματόεντες ἀπέπτυνον ὕδατος ὀλοκοί 45.154). Yet, even if there is no such sea-and-land hallucination in Philostratus, there is sea-and-land metaphor: the sea, the Sophist tell the boy at the very beginning of the piece, yields to Dionysus just as readily the land of the Lydians does (κατηχεῖ τῆς θαλάττης, ἡ δὲ ὑπέχει τῷ Διονύσῳ τὰ ἑαυτῆς νῶτα, καθάπερ ἡ Λυδῶν γῆ 1.19.1). The intriguing similarity may, of course, be explained by coincidence.

If we consider the “other” madness, the Bacchic frenzy of Dionysus and his followers, which will appear so often in the *Dionysiaca*, it appears in Philostratus’ piece from the first mention of the “sacred ship” (ἱερὰ ναῦς 1.19.1), where Dionysus and his Bacchantes are engaged in revels (βακχεύει ἐν αὐτῇ Διόνυσος καὶ ἐπιπροθοῦσιν / αἱ Βάκχαι 1.19.1). Of particular interest is the specific mention of Maron as one of Dionysus’ companions on the ship: Maron appears frequently throughout the *Dionysiaca*, as Dionysus’ companion and chariot driver. He is of course particularly associated with wine and drunkenness and has his own starring role as the winner of the dance contest in the Funeral Games for Opheltēs (19.158-224). In the Funeral Games as usual it is his great age (τριγέρων ... Μάρων 19.159) and fondness for wine (ἔρωσ δέ μιν ἡδέος οἴνου / θῆκε νέον 19.163-4) that are stressed. It is this kind of reputation that Philostratus plays on to show why the pirates think they will have no trouble attacking Dionysus’ ship.

As we have already discussed above, both Philostratus and Nonnus give highly-coloured pictures of both Dionysus and the ships. There is little mention of colour in the earlier versions and what

¹⁷² Including Homer, Apollonius of Rhodes. Theocritus and Oppian: Simon, 2004, pp.210-11; Tissoni, 1998, 232-35; Accorinti, 2004, pp.422-23, n. to 159-165

¹⁷³ Tissoni, 1998, p.233, n. to 159; p.235, n. to 165

mentions there are, are of dark shades: in *Homeric Hymn 7*, the ship is, in a common formula, dark (νῆα μέλαιναν 35) as is the ivy that winds around the mast (μέλας ειλίσσετο κισσὸς 40); Ovid first mentions colour as the members of the crew begin to darken as they turn into dolphins (Medon nigrescere coepit 3.671). Strong colour does not feature in all of the pieces of the *Imagines*, but is prominent in several of them, for example “Rhodogoune” (2.5); vivid colour is present throughout the *Dionysiaca*, part of Nonnus’ aesthetic of *poikilia*.

Both Philostratus and Nonnus take up the detail of the gushing wine, one of the wonders (θαυματὰ ἔργα 7.34) from *Homeric Hymn 7* (7.35f), a detail omitted by Ovid, Apollodorus and Hyginus. For Philostratus, this flow of wine is also a wonder, one even more wondrous than the growth of ivy, vine and grapes around the ship (θαυμασιωτέρα δὲ ἡ πηγὴ τοῦ οἴνου 1.19.4). For Nonnus, the wine spouting up (ἀναβλύζουσα 45.148) on the ship is just one instance among so many in the *Dionysiaca*,¹⁷⁴ a work in which wine has such a central place in its connection with Dionysus.

Another spontaneous spouting of wine appears again in the last book of the *Dionysiaca* (ἀνέβλυε 48.878), in a context where once more the power of Dionysus is on display.¹⁷⁵

In the *Imagines*, the pictures described are usually focalized by the old Sophist. The situation in the *Dionysiaca* is much more complex, which is hardly surprising given the nature and length of the work. The episode we are discussing is, of course, not the description of a work of art but a verse narrative. It follows the events in a chronological order (the pirates commit misdeeds, they pick up and attack Dionysus, the metamorphosis begins, the pirates are punished). But in this narrative, there are many ekphrastic elements: descriptions of Dionysus’ clothes, of the ships, the “sea-garden.” In the same way, the *ekphrasis* in Philostratus contains narrative elements, as the Sophist describes the events pictured. The focaliser in Nonnus’ case is Teiresias, who takes on a role

¹⁷⁴ Gerbeau notes several instances of this in the first 20 books of the poem, e.g. 12.301; 12.358; 14.240; 18.150. Gerbeau, Joëlle and Francis Vian: *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques, Chants 18 et 19. Vol. 7*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1992, p.168

¹⁷⁵ In this later passage Dionysus tells Nicaia that he has tricked another maiden, Aura, into marriage by the use of wine.

remarkably similar to the Sophist in *Imagines* 1.19. The Sophist is explaining to the boy the picture with the purpose of elucidating its meaning, that meaning being a demonstration of the god's power; Teiresias is attempting to warn Pentheus against confronting Dionysus, by demonstrating the god's power.¹⁷⁶

We have already noted that Philostratus' *Imagines* 1.19 differs from the other retellings of the Tyrrhenian Pirates in that it does not present the whole narrative. Of course, Philostratus may well have been describing an existing painting,¹⁷⁷ and in any event a prose *ekphrasis* presents different challenges to those facing the writer of a verse narrative. Nevertheless, there were many ways of presenting the story in the form of a painting: as a series of panels, for example, depicting stages of the story, or a single picture showing, perhaps, the ship in mid-transformation. Philostratus has chosen to present the viewer/reader with a strong double image: on the one hand, the "holy" ship, Dionysus on board, full of Bacchic symbols and celebration; on the other the war-like ship of the pirates, with the pirates themselves in mid-transformation to dolphins. On the surface this is strikingly different to Nonnus' version, which essentially follows the narrative chronology. Yet, the Tyrrhenian Pirates episode cannot be considered in isolation: it is part of a doublet with the story of Alpos the Giant (45.172-213).¹⁷⁸ Just as the picture of the two ships demonstrates the power of Dionysus, so both tales in the Tyrrhenian Pirate/Alpos doublet end with a warning for Pentheus to "beware" (πεφύλαξο 45.169, 214).

The only noise mentioned in *Homeric Hymn 7* is the lion's roar (7.45); the only noise in Ovid is the noise of the fighting crew members that wakens Dionysus (3.630); Apollodorus mentions only that Dionysus fills the ship with the sounds of flutes (3.5.3); there is no mention of noise in Hyginus' brief

¹⁷⁶ "The figure of the learned interpreter does not occur in the ekphraseis of archaic or Hellenistic epic poetry, and Nonnus may have modelled this focalizer on precedents in the Second Sophistic:" Faber, Riemer A., "Nonnus and the Poetry of Ekphrasis in the *Dionysiaca*" in Accorinti, 2016, pp.443-459 at p.456

¹⁷⁷ The arguments about whether the artworks in the *Imagines* are real or imagined are set out in Schönberger, op. cit. pp.26-37.

¹⁷⁸ Simon is correct in pointing out that the Alpos episode is not an exact doublet of the Tyrrhenian pirates (Simon, 2004, p.70). The two episodes are, however, both clearly designed to warn Pentheus of Dionysus' power and of the danger he is running in defying the god by showing the consequences of doing so.

account. In contrast, the versions of both Philostratus and Nonnus seem filled with noise. In Philostratus we learn in the second sentence that the Bacchantes are making a noise (ἐπιρροθοῦσιν αἱ Βάκχαι 1.19.1) and the “sound” words continue from there. There is music (ἁρμονία δέ κατηχεῖ τῆς θαλάττης 1.19.1); there are flute-playing satyrs (Σάτυροι [καὶ] αὐληταὶ 1.19.2); there are cymbals so Dionysus is never in silence (ὁ Διόνυσος μὴ ἀψοφητὶ πλέοι 1.19.4); Dionysus laughs and calls to the pirates as they change into dolphins (ὁ δὲ Διόνυσος ... γελᾷ ταῦτα καὶ κελεύει τοῖς Τυρρηνοῖς 1.19.6). We note an identical number of sound references in Nonnus. We have already mentioned Dionysus roaring as loud as an army of nine thousand (45.136). The ship’s stay-ropes hiss (πρότονοι σύριζον 45.139); bulls bellow (ἐμυκήσαντο δὲ ταῦροι 45.150); a lion roars (βλοσυρὸν κελάδημα λέων βρυχήσατο λαίμῳ 45.151); the pirates think they can hear a herdsman playing his pipes (κτύπον ὤισαντο λιγυφθόγγοιο νομῆος / ποιμενίῃ σύριγγι μελιζόμενοι νοῆσαι 45.161-2). The difference between the two is that the noise in Philostratus is celebratory and in Nonnus it is the sound of fear and punishment. This is an indication of the context rather than any different view of Dionysus: elsewhere in the *Dionysiaca*, for example, there are over seventy references to pipes, including flute-playing satyrs (e.g. Σατύριοι φιλεύιος αὐλὸς 43.153) and the word κύμβαλον appears over twenty times (e.g. ἐκροτάλιζεν ὁμόζυγα κύμβαλα Βάκχη 43.347).

All the versions of the story feature the covering of the ship with ivy, vines, grapes and animals. For the *Homeric Hymn 7* these are the wonders (θαυματὰ ἔργα 7.34) of Dionysus. In Ovid, these wonders take up a mere five lines (664-9), as much of his retelling centres on the ructions between the pirates. Philostratus and Nonnus, as we have already noted, have both taken up these elements with enthusiasm, but with different emphasis. Philostratus’ description of the Bacchic ship is substantially that of the metamorphosed pirate ship of *Homeric Hymn 7*, as far as the description of the Dionysian foliage is concerned. The difference is in the animals. According to the hymn, Dionysus became a lion in the bows of the ship (ἐπ’ ἀκροτάτης 7.45) and made a bear amidships (7.46). There are no live animals on Dionysus’ ship in Philostratus, but the bow of the ship is in the form of a golden leopard or panther (τὴν δὲ πρῶραν ἐς χρυσοῦν πάρδαλιν εἵκασται τε καὶ ἐξήκται

1.19.4), seemingly nodding to the *Homeric Hymn's* description. We have already seen how Nonnus has taken and expanded the description of vegetation, and the same applies to the animals.

Comparison

If we then consider in summary the Nonnus and Philostratus versions of the Tyrrhenian Pirates by Nonnus and Philostratus, there are both striking differences and striking similarities in their respective treatments of the story.

Differences can be seen in the slightly different version of the pirate story used by Philostratus (unless, as we have suggested, this is simply a device to enable Philostratus to present the whole story in one image). There is thus no indication of the pirates' past wrongs and no description of Dionysus' anger in Philostratus, only, as it were, of the consequences of those actions and that anger, whereas the depiction of the pirates' misdeed and the god's anger plays a large part of the story in Nonnus. While both share the metamorphosis into dolphins, in Philostratus this has a strong redemptory flavour emphasised by the Sophist; this is entirely lacking in Nonnus, where the dolphins share the disapproval shown to the pirates. Moreover, in the *Dionysiaca*, the tale of the Tyrrhenian Pirates is part of a doublet with the tale of Alpos.

On the other hand, there are striking similarities. Whatever the differences, both show a strong link to *Homeric Hymn 7*. Indeed, the two writers have chosen to include and omit the same parts: neither Philostratus nor Nonnus is interested in the "good helmsman" part of the story, or the conflict between the pirates. The focus in both is firmly on the god, on his power and on his punishment of impiety and in the contrast between Dionysus and the impious pirates. Both have chosen to include the fountain of wine from the *Homeric Hymn*. Most strikingly, perhaps, both have chosen to add strong and vibrant colour to the rather colourless *Homeric Hymn*. In fact, as we have seen, the earlier versions are all rather lacking in colour. On top of this is the emphasis on sound: both Philostratus and Nonnus give us loud portraits of the god and his followers.

Nonnus and Philostratus are writing in quite different genres. But here the genres overlap:

Philostratus' *ekphrasis* includes narrative elements; Nonnus' epic verse includes *ekphrasis*. The similarities are underlined in this episode by the focalisers. As throughout the *Imagines*, the Sophist is explaining the meaning of the painting to his pupil; in quite a rare moment for the *Dionysiaca*, Nonnus uses a narrator, Teiresias, to draw out the meaning of the events narrated for the benefit of Pentheus. The Sophist and Teiresias draw similar messages from what they describe: Dionysus is powerful and must be respected.

Andrians

Philostratus: *Imagines* 1.25

Imagines 1.25 could well be described as being very similar to the river at the centre of the piece: small, but rich. It is only three sections long but seems to yield a wealth of meaning. Miles is able to see in 1.25 a “reflection on art” which is “concerned both with the influence of Callimachus ... and the Dionysian.”¹⁷⁹ Another way of approaching the piece is to see it as a kind of contrast to “Bacchantes” and “The Tyrrhenian Pirates”: if in those Philostratus shows us the punishment to be expected when Dionysus is opposed or attacked, in this he shows us the rewards he offers. We will see that in fact “Andrians” provides both contrast to and an expansion of those pieces. At first view it is quite different: there is very little in the way of narrative content here. On the other hand, it is far from being merely an *ekphrasis*.

The first section introduces us to the island of Andros, at the tip of Boeotia, and to Dionysus’ river of wine. We have already met a fountain of wine, in *Imagines* 1.19. As noted in the discussion of that section, this motif can be traced back until at least *Homeric Hymn* 7. In *Hymn* 7 and *Imagines* 1.19, the fountain is on the ship. In *Imagines* 1.19, the fountain is a sign of Dionysus’ triumph, contrasting with the picture of the fate of the pirates. In *Imagines* 1.25, the scene is enlarged to include the Islanders, for the fountain is on land and has become a river.¹⁸⁰ Through the power of Dionysus (ἐκ Διονύσου 1.25.1), the wine has broken through the drunken earth (γῆ ὑπαινοῦς ῥήγνυται 1.25.1) and given them (αὐτοῖς ἀναδίδωσιν 1.25.1) a veritable river. The indication that Dionysus has made this wine-river “for them” shows that this is no longer a celebration of victory, as in 1.19, but a demonstration of the rewards that the followers of the god can expect. There follows a play on the concept of great and small. If this river is compared to the rivers that flow with water, it is not big – but because it is wine it is great and divine (μέγας ὁ ποταμὸς καὶ θεῖος 1.25.1)). Philostratus gives the reason for this: whoever has taken from the river of wine can look down on the Nile and the

¹⁷⁹ Miles, 2018, p.115

¹⁸⁰ Schönberger points out that in *Bacchae* 141, 703 Euripides paints similar scenes: 1968, p. 356

Danube (Νείλου τε ὑπεριδεῖν καὶ Ἰστροῦ 1.25.1) and think they would be better if they were smaller but had such streams (τοιοῦτοι ῥέοντες 1.25.1).

The second part shows the reader why Dionysus' river of wine is superior. Philostratus - or the Sophist - describes men adorned with Dionysian accoutrements of ivy and bryony dancing and singing to the women and children, as they gather around the river of wine. Their song, the Sophist says, is likely (εἰκὸς δέ 1.25.2) to be a song in praise of Dionysus' river, comparing it to other famous rivers and finding them less than a match. The Acheloüs has its reeds; the Peneius waters Tempe and the Pactolus has its flowers - but Dionysus' river has special powers. In fact, it has the power to transform. Thus, it can make men rich (πλουσίους 1.25.1), powerful in the assembly, helpful to their friends, and beautiful and tall. This may be "a beautiful illusion rather than a true transformation"¹⁸¹ but is it really "just a drunken dream."¹⁸² Philostratus makes clear that this is happening in the mind when one has drunk enough of the river (ἔστι γὰρ κορεσθέντι αὐτοῦ συλλέγεσθαι ταῦτα καὶ ἐσάγεσθαι ἐς τὴν γνώμην. 1.25.2), but there is no indication here that this is in any way something inferior to everyday reality. One might also note that the dream is on the part of the Sophist rather than of those pictured in the painting. The reader and the boy are invited to hear the singing of the drinking, or drunken, men. The Sophist is sure what they are singing about (ᾄδουσι δέ που 1.25.2): that the wine that flows from Dionysus (οἶνοχοεῖται μὲν ἐκ Διονύσου 1.25.2) is not touched by animals, is drunk unmixed (πίνεται δὲ ἀκήρατος 1.25.2). The word "ἀκήρατος" fits into Philostratus' presentation of the scene as a set of contrasts, because of its varying shades of meaning, from "pure," often in a sexual sense, to "unmixed with water" when referring to wine, with its overtones of excess.¹⁸³ It is particularly appropriate here where we have a scene of demonstrating the power of Dionysus, with connotations not only of divinity but also of extravagance or lack of moderation. The section ends with an exhortation (ἡγοῦ 1.25.2) for us to believe that this is what some of them

¹⁸¹ Miles, 2018, p.116

¹⁸² Miles, loc. cit.

¹⁸³ Miles, loc. cit.

are singing, though they are inarticulate (κατεψελλισμένων 1.25.2¹⁸⁴) because of the wine. These final words bring us back to the everyday reality of drunkenness, in something of a contrast to the foregoing.

In Section 3 we are finally given a full view and description of the painting, putting what we have already seen into perspective and introducing new elements. Dionysus' river is portrayed, as so often in this period, as a personification. He lies on a bed of grapes (ἐν βοτρυῶν εὐνῇ κεῖται 1.25.3) and pours out a flow of wine. The description of the river (ἄκρατός τε καὶ ὀργῶν τὸ εἶδος 1.25.3) is translated by Fairbanks as "undiluted and of agitated appearance," adding in his note: "A river of pure wine undiluted with water, and turgid, as if under the influence of wine."¹⁸⁵ Schönberger seems to capture the spirit of this section better: "seine Gestalt ist von schwellender Fülle."¹⁸⁶ Instead of reeds around this river grow thyrsi and travelling further past the groups of drinkers (presumably those described in Section 2), the river at its mouth comes upon Tritons, using their signature shells to scoop up wine (ἀρύονται κόχλοις τοῦ οἴνου 1.25.3); like the singers, some are drunk and dancing (εἰσὶ δ' οἳ καὶ μεθύουσι τῶν Τριτώνων καὶ ὀρχοῦνται 1.25.3). "Andrians" ends with Dionysus on his ship with his Satyrs and Bacchae and Seileni,¹⁸⁷ as if he has just sailed from his encounter with the Tyrrhenian pirates in 1.19. He has two additional passengers, Laughter and Revel (τὸν Γέλωτά τε ἄγει καὶ τὸν Κῶμον 1.25.3), to emphasis the happy celebratory nature of the scene, as these two are the most cheerful and the fondest of drinking (ἰλαρωτάτω καὶ ξυμποτικωτάτω 1.25.3). Dionysus wishes to harvest (τρυγῶτο 1.25.3) the river as pleasantly as possible (ὥς ἥδιστα 1.25.3).

All in all, then, 1.25 gives us the happiest and most positive view of Dionysus' gift: wine. The piece is full of song and dance and happiness, with no mention of the darker side of drunkenness. There is no hint here of the Dionysus who punished the Pirates and Pentheus.

¹⁸⁴ A term first found here: Schönberger, 1968, p. 357

¹⁸⁵ Fairbanks, 1931, p.99 and n.1

¹⁸⁶ Schönberger, p.153

¹⁸⁷ Schönberger translates as "in bunter Fülle," loc. cit.

Nonnus: Rivers of Wine, Fountains of Blood

There is no mention of Andros or the Andrians in the *Dionysiaca*, and there is no scene where Dionysus sails to the mouth of a river of wine. But many of the elements in *Imagines* 1.25 do have equivalents, and it goes without saying that wine and drunkenness and rivers of wine play a significant part in Nonnus' epic. We shall therefore consider the place of, and depiction of wine in the *Dionysiaca* and consider whether there is any connection between Philostratus and Nonnus in this respect. To do so, we will need to broaden the focus to examine aspects of the drunken scene in *Imagines* 2.10 as well.

Wine is central in the Dionysus story: "The human race needs Dionysus for the gift of wine."¹⁸⁸ In the brief Dionysus series in the *Imagines*, wine is a given; in the *Dionysiaca*, the invention of wine is an important episode. In fact, Nonnus gives two versions of this key event. It first appears at the end of the story of Dionysus' youthful love for the satyr Ampelos: after Atropos, one of the Fates, has proclaimed perhaps the most famous words in the poem (Βάκχος ἄναξ δάκρυσε, βροτῶν ἵνα δάκρυα λύσῃ 12.171) the dead Ampelos is metamorphosed into the vine (12.173ff) and finally Dionysus invents the sweetest of drinks (γλυκερὸν ποτὸν εὔρε 12.201). Indeed, Dionysus declares – in specific rivalry to Deo and her grain, a rivalry that becomes a thread running through the poem – that wine is more than a drink, it is sustenance (εἶδαρ ἐγὼ μερόπεσσι καὶ οὐ πόμα μοῦνον ὀπάσσω 12.211). But Nonnus also gives a second version of the discovery of wine: "Nonnos aime faire preuve ainsi d'érudition en juxtaposant des versions différentes."¹⁸⁹ This second version is, he tells us, an older legend (ἄλλη πρεσβυτέρη πέλεται φάτις 12.294). In this account, a liquor (ἰχώρ 12.295) falls from heaven and produces fruit throughout the forest. When Dionysus sees a snake eating a

¹⁸⁸ Miguélez-Cavero, Laura: "Cosmic and Terrestrial Personifications in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*," in *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 53 (2013), pp. 350-378 at p.357

¹⁸⁹ Vian, Francis: *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome 5. Chants 11-13*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1995, p.75

grape, he remembers a prediction made by Rhea (12.330) and makes the first wine press in a rock and crushes the fruit with his own feet (12.350).

This second version is of interest for present purposes because it ends with scenes of wine-induced gaiety reminiscent of *Imagines* 1.25. As we shall see, in Nonnus there is often a darker side to wine and drunkenness, but here, right at the beginning, there is pure joy in broad daylight, as satyrs dance under the influence of pain-assuaging wine (ἀκεσσιπόνιοιο πιὼν ῥόον ἄσχετον οἴνου 12.369) like the Tritons at 1.25.3. The resemblance ceases when the dancing turns to cavorting and chasing of nymphs and Naiads (12.372ff), for among its other qualities, wine awakens love (νέον οἶστρον ὑπὸ φρένα, πομπὸν Ἑρώτων 12.384); Philostratus' picture in 1.25 is quite free of sexual references. In this respect it is perhaps more appropriate to compare it to the drinking scene in Book 18 of the *Dionysiaca*. In this book Dionysus is in Assyria and is entertained by King Staphylus, Queen Methe and their son Botrys, with their servant Pithos. Leaving aside the matter of their names,¹⁹⁰ of interest to us here is the dance they perform, after dining and getting drunk on Dionysus' wine, a "danse en joyeux trio."¹⁹¹ Like the dancers in 1.25.2, King Staphylos is crowned with ivy (πλοκαμῖδας ἀήθει δήσατο κισσῶ/μιτρώσας στεφανηδόν 18.136-7); the dance scene also appears to be during the day (καὶ πῖον εἰς ὄλον ἥμαρ 18.154). However, while it is a scene of joy and abandon, the setting is different, and the descriptions are altogether more intense.

This second Nonnian version of the discovery of wine is further interesting because it presents parallels to another Dionysian scene in the *Imagines*: the description of Dionysus' island in 2.17.5. In this piece, Philostratus describes an island dedicated to Dionysus, though Dionysus is presently absent. In fact, the island is all but deserted, with a collection of Dionysian objects lying around, clearly recently abandoned. It calls to mind the mysterious scene on the beach at the beginning of Heliodorus' novel (*Aethiopica* 1.1), with an important difference. Here Philostratus/the Sophist is

¹⁹⁰ For a discussion of this episode and its place in the *Dionysiaca* refer: Gerbeau and Vian, 1992, pp.5-18

¹⁹¹ Gerbeau and Vian, op. cit. p. 18

confident he knows where everyone has gone: Dionysus is off revelling on the mainland (ἐν ἡπείρῳ που βακχεύειν 2.17.7). Besides the familiar objects, there are familiar creature: serpents, some wound around thyrsi, some for Bacchantes to use as girdles (παρεῖνται ζώννυσθαι αὐτοὺς ταῖς βάκχαις 2.17.5). Winding snakes, friendly and unfriendly are, of course, common in the *Dionysiaca*, for example girdling Harmonia's head (ὄφις μιτρώσατο κόρσιν/Ἀρμονίης 44.113); one even girdles Chalcone to protect her virtue (25.210-11).¹⁹² There is one creature, however, in Philostratus' *ekphrasis* that does not fit in with the *Dionysiaca*. He tells the story, which also appears in *Life of Apollonius* (3.40), of the owl's egg that makes men dislike wine (τοῖς ἀνθρώποις διαβάλλει τὸν οἶνον 2.17.7). This story does not appear in the *Dionysiaca*; in fact, an owl is mentioned only once (31.101).

For all the similarities we have discussed in 2.17.5 so far, there is nothing so particular in Philostratus as to strongly suggest of itself a connection to Nonnus. But of interest here is Philostratus' detailed description on the grapes on the island:

βότρυς δὲ οἱ μὲν ὀργῶσιν, οἱ δὲ περκάζουσιν, οἱ δ' ὄμφακες, οἱ δ' οἰνάνθαι δοκοῦσι
σεσοφισμένου τοῦ Διονύσου τὰς ὥρας τῶν ἀμπέλων, ὡς ἀεὶ τρυγῶν. 2.17.5

Francis Vian¹⁹³ noted the parallels between this description of the grapes in various stages of growth - swollen, becoming darker, still green - in Philostratus and the even more detailed descriptions of the various grapes and their shades of colour in Nonnus' telling of the second version of the invention of wine (12.304.313).

In both 1.26 and 2.17 Philostratus presents wine as something overwhelmingly positive and joyous. These are happy scenes. As we would expect, given that wine is Dionysus' great gift to mankind, wine is also given a very positive presentation in the *Dionysiaca*. We need only consider some of the

¹⁹² They are also of course familiar from the *Bacchae*, where the Chorus introduces Dionysus wearing a garland of snakes (101).

¹⁹³ Vian, 1995, p.204, n. to 12.309

adjectives that Nonnus uses with wine. Many are positive. Some of these stress the soothing and healing qualities of wine, particularly on the mind: ἀκεσσιπόνος, λυσιμέριμος, ἀλεξίκακος, λυσίπονος; others stress the physical qualities of sight sense and smell: ἡδύποτος, ἡδύς, θυώδης, μελιδής, γλυκύς. Other adjectives however - ἐγερσίνοος, ἀμερσίνοος – point to its more dangerous qualities and others - ἐπικλοπος, γαμοστόλος - specifically to sexual danger. While in the Dionysus sequence in the *Imagines* wine is always positive in its effects, and intoxication is associated with song, dance and merriment, in the *Dionysiaca* many episodes also show the more dangerous sides to wine and intoxication, particularly when rivers, lakes and springs are turned to wine. In the Indian War, Dionysus uses wine as a weapon when he changes river waters to wine and the drunken Indian fighters are overcome in their intoxication (14.417 – 15.118). Both Nicaia and Aura are tricked into drinking waters turned to wine¹⁹⁴ and when they lie in a drunken stupor they are raped by Dionysus. Of course, the Indians are the enemy that Dionysus has been sent by Zeus to defeat and both the Nicaia and Aura stories involve elements of fault towards the gods.¹⁹⁵ The story of Icarios (47.70-147) is of a different nature. Dionysus rewards the old gardener Icarios for the hospitality shown by him and his daughter Erigone by first introducing him to wine and then showing him how to cultivate the vine. But when the old man in turn introduces other countrymen¹⁹⁶ (ἄλλους δ' ἄγρονόμοισι 47.70) to the joys of wine, in their drunken madness (θυιάδι λύσση 47.117) they batter him to death (47.116ff.) and his heartbroken daughter in sober madness (σαόφρονι μαίνεται λύσση 47.214) hangs herself (47.223).

Yet if there is no hint in the Dionysus sequence of this violent aspect of wine, we do get some idea of it in *Imagines* 2.10, “Cassandra,” which depicts Agamemnon’s murder by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. The interest here is not the story itself - the events happen well after the time of the

¹⁹⁴ Nicaia drinks from the same river of wine as the Indians (16.253-254); Dionysus creates a spring of wine for Aura by striking the ground with his thyrsus (48.575).

¹⁹⁵ Nicaia killed Hymnos (15.367); Aura taunted Artemis about her breasts (48.352-3)

¹⁹⁶ Commentators have noted the connections between aspects of the Icarios story and Achilles Tatius, particularly the speech of the peasant at 47.78-103. Refer: Frangoulis, 2014, pp.115-118

Dionysiaca - but the depiction of violence and the role of wine. The assailants here are able to do their work because their victims are drunk, so drunk as to embolden even the cowardly Aegisthus (οὕτω μεθύοντας, ὡς καὶ τὸν Αἰγισθὸν θαρσῆσαι τὸ ἔργον 2.10.1). This is similar to the situation when the Indian soldiers have drunk from the river of wine and are left in a helpless state (15.119). Although here Dionysus instructs his troops to bind and take the enemy prisoner without bloodshed (ἀναιμάκτῳ ζωγρήσατε δηιοτῆτι 15.123), the passage describing Indian soldiers lying in various positions in their stupor (15.92-118), weighed down by wine (οἶνοβαρῆς 15.109) recalls Philostratus' description of the murdered men in various positions and unable to flee because fettered by drunkenness (οἶον πέδης ἐμβεβλημένης αὐτῷ τῆς μέθης 2.10). The violence depicted in the killing of Icarion episode, where "Nonno descrive con macabre gusto le sequenze di una morte "teatrale,"¹⁹⁷ however, is in many ways similar to Philostratus' description of the banquet scene, even if here there is only one victim. Perhaps even more so are the many descriptions of the dead and dying in the Indian War where Nonnus delights in enumerating the ways of death of the slain and the positions of their corpses. By way of way of example, let us consider the battle scenes in the early part of Book 28 of the *Dionysiaca*.

In *Imagines* 2.10, Philostratus is clearly fascinated by what we might call the aesthetics of the massacre, in particular the various picturesque ways the men have died, the attitudes of their bodies in death and of the fallen objects, as well as the colours.¹⁹⁸ Although there are small numbers involved, he seems keen to invest the scene with variety: no two deaths are the same, a throat cut here, a head cut off there, here a hand hacked off among the followers, not to mention Agamemnon's death by axe-blow. The Sophist tells us that we have here a great tragedy acted out in a small time (τετραγῶδεται μέγала ἐν μικρῷ 2.10.1) and certainly Philostratus seems intent on providing as much drama, movement and colour as possible in a short piece, so much indeed that it

¹⁹⁷ Accorinti, 2004, p.494

¹⁹⁸ This is not an isolated instance. "Rhodogoune" (*Im.* 2.5) starts with a grotesque scene of blood and fallen bodies.

comes close to the edge of the comic. In Book 28, Nonnus' goals are not quite the same. He is not at all concerned with brevity, as he multiplies his descriptions of the ways a soldier can die and the attitudes his body can take in death, and there is no real concern to construct a drama. But if the descriptions of death and dying are even more extravagant and definitely more extensive than those of Philostratus, they are clearly in the same mould.

Book 28 is entirely concerned with war, as the armies of Deriades and Dionysus continue the battle begun in Book 27 and which will continue until night falls in Book 29. It is not surprising, therefore, that scholars should have noted Homeric influences,¹⁹⁹ just as Homeric influences are clear in *Imagines* 2.10.²⁰⁰ Yet Shorrock writes that the account of the fighting in Book 28 "suggests little specific Homeric resonance."²⁰¹ Gigli Piccardi writes that Nonnus here "del realismo e della crudezza iliadica non conserva davvero proprio nulla; anzi in diversi situazioni ... il tono sfiora accenti eroicomici e grotteschi."²⁰² It is this element of the grotesque, which is already present in *Imagines* 2.10, that is taken to an extreme. Both writers, as might be expected in scenes of slaughter, mention blood. Philostratus talks of the many cups in the interrupted banquet filled with gore (πλήρεις αἱ πολλὰι λύθρου 2.10.2); Nonnus repeatedly reminds the reader of the presence of blood. He uses the term "λύθρον" only once in this chapter, when describing the very unusual Bacchic army (σπονδῇ λύθρον ἔμιξε 28.44), though elsewhere it is very common in the *Dionysiaca*.²⁰³ Here he favours the terms blood-soaked (αἰμοβαφῆς 28.54; αἰμοβαφῇ 28.76) and bloody (αἱμαλέη ῥαθάμιγγι 28.95; φοινήεντι ... σιδήρῳ 28.107), but even features a great spout of blood (αἱμαλέης ἔρραιεν ἐκηβόλος ὀλκὸς ἔέρσης / πορφυρέαις λιβάδεσσιν 28.137-8).

Both writers strive to show variety in their depictions. In Philostratus, one man has had his throat cut (ὁ μὲν ἐκτέμνεται τὴν φάρυγγα 2.10.3); in Book 28 this happens three times in forty lines (28.52;

¹⁹⁹ Vian, Francis: *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome 9. Chants 25-29*, Paris, (Les Belles Lettres), 1990, pp.156-9

²⁰⁰ See, for example, the notes to 2.10 in Fairbanks, 1931, pp.171ff

²⁰¹ Shorrock, 2001, p.73

²⁰² Gigli Piccardi, 1985, p.142

²⁰³ It appears some 45 times in the poem.

28.64; 28.93), and two of those have their heads cut off as well (this happens once in *Im.* 2.10). In Philostratus one man has his hand cut off (ὁ δὲ ἀπήρακται τὴν χεῖρα 2.10.3); in Nonnus an Athenian first has his right arm cut off with shoulder attached (28.128-9), then his left arm (28.133). Nonnus then describes the hand rolling along the ground, spouting blood and grasping at the dust (28.136-141) as if still grasping his shield-strap (οἷα περισφίγγουσα πάλιν τελαμῶνα βοείης 28.142). The episode does not end here: the armless Athenian makes a speech in which he resolves to fight on (28.144-149) and we see the “half soldier” (πρόμον ἡμιτέλεστον 28.153) back in the thick of battle. In Philostratus one of the slain falls head first (κύμβαχος 2.10.3); in Nonnus it is a rider who falls (εἰς χθόνα πίπτων / κύμβαχος 28.169-70) and the poet has the opportunity to describe how he is dragged along still attached to his horse. In other words, both Philostratus and Nonnus, the first in a miniature mode, the latter in full-blown epic, demonstrate their insistence on *poikilia* in their descriptions of the dead and dying, in quite similar ways. The essential difference is that Nonnus pushes his descriptions to extremes.

Summary

In *Imagines* 2.10 Philostratus presents us a picture of the river of wine so associated with Dionysus and gives us a scene of the joy associated with the gift of wine, one largely consisting of common Dionysian elements and with no hint of the darker side of wine and the god which are so marked in the *Dionysiaca*. But if we cast the net wider in the *Imagines*, beyond the Dionysian sequence, in 2.17.5 we find details of description in a Dionysian scene that do indeed seem to establish a closer connection with Nonnus. We also find, in 2.10, both an association of wine with violence and a way of describing that violence and its after-effects that invite comparison to similar passages in Nonnus. Both writers show a fascination with death and blood that, in Philostratus’ case, borders on the grotesque and, in Nonnus’ case, steps well over that border.

Chapter 2: Wrestling Matches in the *Imagines* and the *Dionysiaca*

Wrestling from Homer to Quintus Smyrnaeus

We have so far examined and compared instances where there are direct parallels between Philostratus' *ekphraseis* in the *Imagines* and passages in the *Dionysiaca*: the figure of Dionysus himself. In this chapter we examine instances where they have both treated a motif with clear Homeric antecedents: the wrestling contest. We will see that the wrestling match has quite a history in Greek literature, a history that begins with Homer's *Iliad*, the wrestling match between Ajax and Odysseus in Book 23.

A glance at the list of paintings described in the *Imagines* shows Philostratus' interest in a wide range of the Greek cultural heritage, especially myths but also literary works. There is nothing, however, to suggest a particular engagement with Homer. This is not to say that Homer was not important to him as a writer and cultural icon – we have only to remember another of Philostratus' works, the *Heroicus*. There is at least one Homeric motif that recurs in Philostratus, and that is wrestling. Besides the *Gymnasticus*, in which Philostratus goes into considerable detail about wrestling and wrestlers, the *Imagines* also includes three *ekphraseis* with wrestling subjects. Two of these involve actual wrestling matches. Even if they do not involve Homeric figures, or even Homeric styles of wrestling, we will see that they can clearly be traced back to the *Iliad*, though mediated by intervening writers and Philostratus' own interests, particularly aesthetic interests. Especially fascinating is his *ekphrasis* of Palaestra, personification of wrestling. This ambiguous figure, part male, part female, with strong erotic overtones, seems to point towards a series of figures in Nonnus.

Of all the literary influences discernible in Nonnus' poem the most obvious and most important is Homer. From Homer Nonnus has taken his genre, his form, his meter and even his language. Homer

is indeed his acknowledged master. But the relationship between the two is not simple. Nonnus is an artist who is not prepared to bow before any predecessor. Even if he is an Egyptian whose first language is not Greek, he clearly considers himself more than a match for any Greek poet of any age. So Homer, besides being his master, is also his rival. And Homer is not so prestigious that he cannot also be the butt of the odd joke or two. Among the things he has taken from Homer is wrestling. We will see that Nonnus uses this motive three times, in three quite different contexts and in quite different ways. We will see that Nonnus takes on Homer head-on, by reproducing the Ajax/Odysseus match from the Funeral Games for Patroclus in a very similar context, in an episode that is somewhere between a tribute to his master and an “anything-you-can-do-I-can-do-better” act of defiance. The match between young Dionysus and Ampelos is a mixture of homo-erotic dalliance and comedy, with the emphasis on comedy, including some barbs for Homer and hints of future greatness. Finally, the bout between the mature Dionysus and bride-to-be Pallene emphasises the erotic and what comedy there is includes dark overtones. Fascinatingly, in this final match Nonnus seems to be forgetting the Homeric model and copying himself.

By the end of our survey will we see that these matches provide an insight not only into Nonnus’ relationship to Homer, but also into the wider issue of his adoption and re-working of material from a plethora of literary and cultural sources. For, even though the most obvious starting point for Nonnus in his wrestling matches is Homer, like Philostratus, he is also influenced by the writers of the intervening centuries. In particular, for our purposes we will see how Nonnus’ use of wrestling is also mediated by the descriptions of Philostratus in the *Imagines*.

Homer

The first wrestling match described in Greek literature is between Ajax and Odysseus in Book 23 of the *Iliad*. The context is the funeral games held in honour of Patroclus. The two heroes were

fighting for a first prize of a large tripod (μέγαν τρίποδ' ἔμπυριβήτην, 703), valued at 12 oxen, with the loser gaining a multi-skilled woman (πολλὰ δ' ἐπίστατο ἔργα, 705) valued at four oxen.

The wrestling match follows the boxing. The bouts follow the same pattern. Achilles calls for volunteers, who quickly stand. Wrestling, like boxing, is described as painful (ἀλεγεινῆς, 653,701). Like the boxers the wrestlers “gird” themselves (ζωσαμένω, 710). Just as with the boxers’ clash is described with a complex metaphor (692), so the wrestlers’ clash is described with an extended building metaphor (711-13). While the boxers’ metaphor highlighted nimbleness (ὥς δ' ὄθ' ὑπὸ φρικὸς Βορέω ἀναπάλλεται ἰχθὺς, 692), for the wrestlers Homer emphasises strength and sturdiness (ὥς ὄτ' ἀμείβοντες, τοὺς τε κλυτὸς ἦραρε τέκτων / δώματος ὑψηλοῖο βίας ἀνέμων ἀλεείνων, 712-13).

The bout is, of course, a public spectacle in front of an audience of the assembled Achaeans (ἐς μέσσον ἀγῶνα, 711). The reactions of the onlookers to the contest taking place in their midst forms part of the description (λαοὶ δ' αὖ θεεῦντό τε θάμβησάν τε 728), stressing the magnificence of the fighters and adding life to the scene. The two heroes play their usual roles: Homer almost uses shorthand to describe the pair (μέγας Τελαμώνιος Αἴας, ἄνδ' Ὀδυσσεὺς πολύμητις 708-9). In the end, although Odysseus can use his guile to bring Ajax to the ground, in spite of his superior weight (724-5), in the end there is no clear winner and Achilles calls off the bout (736). Interestingly he tells the pair to share the prizes equally (ἀέθλια δ' ἴσ' ἀνελόντες, 736), though it is by no means clear how this is to be done.

The style of wrestling seems to be that normally referred to as “ὀρθὴ πάλη.”²⁰⁴ The contestants fight standing and the bout is strictly controlled.²⁰⁵ The effort involved leads to blood and sweat

²⁰⁴ Gardiner, E. Norman: “Wrestling” in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 25 (1905), pp. 14-31 at p.19

²⁰⁵ Gardiner, op. cit. pp.30-31, summarizes the rules of wrestling as follows: 1. If a wrestler was thrown on his knee, hip, back, or shoulder, it was a fair fall. 2.If both wrestlers fell together, nothing was counted. 3. Three falls or the best of five bouts were necessary to secure victory. 4. No holds were allowed below the waist. 5. Tripping with the feet was allowed.

(κατὰ δὲ νότιος ῥέεν ἰδρώς, / πυκναὶ δὲ σμώδιγγες ἀνὰ πλευράς τε καὶ ὤμους/αἶματι φοινικόεσσαι ἀνέδραμον 715-7), and they are covered in dust (μιάνθησαν δὲ κόνιη, 732), but there is no physical damage to the heroes, in contrast to the boxing. We will see that in later literary descriptions, bouts can be much fiercer and the style closer to that of the pankration. Nothing is made of their near nudity: there are no lingering descriptions of naked limbs and nothing in the way of eroticism.

Nudity and eroticism will play a much bigger role in some later works.

These 40 or so lines from the *Iliad*, therefore, provide something of a model for descriptions of wrestling in later writers, though there will be endless variants. For example, the basic vocabulary is set: later descriptions will routinely include blood, sweat and dust. It is perhaps surprising that there is no mention of oil here: anointing with oil will be the other commonplace of later wrestling scenes.

Lucian

Lucian, writing in the second century, gives a description of wrestling in his dialogue *Anacharsis, or Athletics*. The interlocutors are Anacharsis, king of the Scythians, and the legislator Solon.

Anacharsis, a Barbarian if ever there was one, has been watching young Greek men practising wrestling and boxing. In his amusement - and bemusement - he gives a description of wrestling that includes the elements we have just seen in Homer: undress (ἀποδυσάμενοι, 1.5), mud (πηλόν, 1.10), sweat (ἐν ἰδρῶτι ἅμα πολλῷ, 1.19) and dust (αὐτοὶ ἐκόντες ἐπαμῶνται τὴν κόνιν, 2.4), as well as anointing with oil (λίπα τε ἠλείψαντο, 1.6). Far from finding their actions heroic, he finds their activities ludicrous (γέλωτα ἔμοι γοῦν παρέχουσιν, 1.20). He demands an explanation from Solon as to what good they are doing as it appears to him to be madness (ἔμοιγε μανίᾳ μᾶλλον εὐκέναι δοκεῖ τὸ πρᾶγμα 5.1).

Of course, this is the view of an outsider, and Lucian is playing the scene for laughs. The reader can enjoy the spectacle of the Barbarian who does not understand the finer points of Greek culture,

while at the same time appreciating the digs at that very culture. This is a genre which continues to have success into the modern era: consider Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* and similar works which have followed. Solon the lawmaker, famous for his wisdom, is both the defender of Greek culture and a kind of devil's advocate. Anacharsis, while a Barbarian, is a particularly civilised Barbarian.

To achieve this effect, Lucan uses the standard vocabulary of wrestling and the pankration, but takes it out of context, viewed by someone who does not know the rules and the point. In this way the reader sees both the silliness of the activities viewed from the outside by a Barbarian who comes to seem not so very barbaric, while at the same time appreciating its essential "Greekness" as opposed to the Barbarian.

Heliodorus

Throughout the *Aethiopica*, Heliodorus strives to give his main characters noble and heroic qualities. One of his ways of doing this is through emulation of feats from Homer and the classics. In Book 10 we can see this tendency in Theagenes' wrestling match with the Ethiopian (10.35-6), which seems to reference the bout between Ajax and Odysseus in *Iliad* 23. The circumstances are different, the opponents are not exactly Achaean war heroes and the wrestling style has undergone some change, but the essence is the same. In effect, Heliodorus has Theagenes play the Odysseus to the Ethiopian's Ajax.

The context is not that of funeral games. It is in the final book of the novel, when the young hero is about to be sacrificed on the pyre in a Barbaric ritual, close to, but yet separated from the heroine, Chariclea. He has already gained the favour of the assembled crowd, and the King is forced by the clamour of the throng to allow him to wrestle.

The scene is familiar: two willing contestants, each exceptional in strength and courage, participate in a wrestling match refereed by the acknowledged leader in front of the assembled people. In each

case, the bout is a spectacle and at stake is honour and glory. The contestants quickly take on the roles of Ajax and Odysseus. At first glance this hardly seems likely: these contestants are by no means great leaders of men, like Homer's figures: one is hardly more than a boy; the other is some sort of barbarian oaf. They are not equals, as in Homer: if they were, the bout would not be as exciting as it is as the reader gets the pleasure of seeing the underdog triumph. But, of course, for an educated audience part of the fun comes as much from the differences as the similarities.

The first part of the fun comes from the recognition of the Homeric precedent. Heliodorus' "hero" figures have both demonstrated a certain heroic stature before this very crowd. As Hydaspes notes ironically, one has won an elephant (i.e., his appearance and reputation were enough to scare off any would-be opponents) and the other has captured a bull (Ὁ τὸν ἐλέφαντα λαβὼν τῷ τὸν ταῦρον ἐλόντι, 10.30.7.7). The Ethiopian even has something of Ajax's famous stature (μέγεθος καὶ οὕτως ὠγύγιος ἄνθρωπος 10.25.1.2). The adjective ὠγύγιος, pointing to his essential barbarity, just makes the implied comparison even more fun for those in the know.

As for Theagenes, Heliodorus has spent the novel emphasising his manly beauty, and his recent clash with the raging bull (10.30) has amply demonstrated both his strength and courage. His inexperience and youth again make the implied comparison with Odysseus even more piquant.²⁰⁶

Once the wrestling match starts, the comparisons become stronger. The Ethiopian, in his size and sureness, seems indeed to have the qualities of the "bulwark of the Achaeans," while Theagenes slips more and more into the role of the "wily" Odysseus. When it is clear that the strength of his opponent is far superior, he decides to outwit him (ἐμπειρίᾳ δὲ τὴν ἄγροικον ἰσχὺν κατασοφίσασθαι, 31.5.6). This is all the more amusing as so far in the novel he has shown precious few signs of wiles and guile, with Charikleia the one usually managing to save the pair from their

²⁰⁶ For Heliodorus' relationship to Homer see, for example: Whitmarsh, Tim: "The Birth of a Prodigy: Heliodorus and the Genealogy of Hellenism," in Hunter, Richard (Ed.): *Studies in Heliodorus*, Cambridge (Cambridge Philological Society), 1998, pp.93-124; Morgan, John and Stephen Harrison: "Intertextuality," in Whitmarsh, Tim (Ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel*, Cambridge (CUP) 2008, pp. 218-36, at pp. 224-6

numerous scrapes. Putting his plan into action, he pretends to fall under the Ethiopian's blow (καὶ καταφέρεσθαι ἐπὶ πρόσωπον ἐσχηματίζετο, 10.31.6.5). In the end he outsmarts him by the use of some tricky moves and has him flat on his face (καὶ ὦμους ἀνέλκων ἐφαπλῶσαι τῇ γῇ τὴν γαστέρα κατηνάγκασε, 10.32.5.8).

Theagenes' victory is not only due to his Odyssean guile. It is also due to his skill in wrestling, an art, Heliodorus makes a point of telling us, that he has practised since boyhood (Ὁ δὲ Θεαγένης, οἷα δὲ γυμνασίων ἀνὴρ καὶ ἀλοιφῆς ἐκ νέων ἀσκητὴς τὴν τε ἐναγώνιον Ἑρμοῦ τέχνην ἠκριβωκῶς, 10.31.5.1). Rattenbury notes of the description of the bout that "ce passage décrit les phases ordinaires de la lutte," and refers to the painting described by Philostratus in *Imagines* 2.6.²⁰⁷ Indeed, the bout in Heliodorus is much more extended than in Homer and clearly involves a form of wrestling that has developed since Homer's day to include moves that would not have been accepted.

Quintus Smyrnaeus

In the *Posthomerica*, Quintus takes Homer as his model for a wrestling bout. The wrestling (Book 4, 220-283) contains elements from both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. While it follows in many ways the pattern of the Ajax/Odysseus match in *Iliad* 23, the setting is that of the funeral games for Achilles mentioned in *Odyssey* 24. The ghosts of Penelope's suitors are led to the ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα (24.13) where they see the shades of Achilles, Agamemnon, Patroclus and Ajax and hear the story of the funeral games held after the death of Achilles, when Thetis supplied the prizes (24.92).

In the *Posthomerica*, the combatants are Ajax and Diomedes. The prizes, presented by Thetis, were four handmaids who had belonged to Achilles (4.272-277). The bout follows the pattern set in the *Iliad*. Here, Nestor is the referee. The combatants are eager to fight (καρπαλίμως, 4.216) and are

²⁰⁷ Rattenbury, R.M. and Lumb, T.W: *Héliodore, Les Ethiopiques*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1960, p.116, n.1

fabulously strong (κρατερόφρονε φῶτε, 4.216). As in the *Iliad*, the wrestlers are in centre stage before the assembled Achaeans. The spectators, as in Homer, are part of the action from the beginning (Θάμβος δ' ἔχεν ἀθρήσαντας/Ἀργείους, 4.218-9), making a theatrical scene. The familiar elements of dust (κόνιν, 4.234; κόνις, 4.237; κονιόμενοι, 4.240) and sweat (Ἐκ δὲ μετώπων/χερσὶν ἄδην μόρξαντο κατεσσύμενόν περ ἰδρωῶτα, 4.269-70) are present. The bout itself follows its Homeric model: each wrestler wins a throw before the referee declares the match a draw and requests the wrestlers to share the prizes.

There are notable differences to the *Iliad* though. The essential strength/guile nature of the match is lost in Odysseus' absence. Odysseus, indeed, plays little role in the *Posthomeric*, being “intenzionalmente emarginato in Quinto.”²⁰⁸ The opponents are hardly differentiated: they are standard god-like hero-types (ἄμφω γὰρ ἔσαν μακάρεσσιν ὅμοιοι, 4.219), both able to strike wonder into the heart of mere mortals (Θάμβος δ' ἔχεν ἀθρήσαντας/Ἀργείους, 4.218-9). However, Quintus has enlivened the scene by using metaphors from nature to emphasise the strength and ferocity of the pair.²⁰⁹ In their ferocity they are like wild animals fighting over prey (4.220-1) and they are both like fearless bulls (4.237-8). Perhaps more surprising, and therefore more striking, is the introduction of a metaphor involving trees. The blows from their hands are likened to the noise of mountain trees hitting together (εὔτ' ἐν ὄρεσσι / δένδρε' ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισι βαλόντ' ἐριθηλέας ὄζους 4.248-9). More striking still is the description of the contestants at the end of the match. Take, for example, their reaction to the prizes they are to share: two of four serving women (τὰς δ' αὐτοὶ ἐθηήσαντο ἰδόντες / ἥρωες κρατεροὶ καὶ ἀταρβέες 4.473-4).

Somehow this seems an over-reaction on the part of heroes. For these women, Quintus tells us, were not the most beautiful and skilful, but the most beautiful and skilful *apart from* Briseis, even if they had been hand-picked and enjoyed by Achilles (4.274-7). Even more surprising is the fact that

²⁰⁸ Lelli, Emanuele (Ed.): *Quinto di Smyrne. Il Seguito dell'Iliade*, Milan (Bompiani), 2013, p. xxxvi

²⁰⁹ Enrico Cerroni notes the metaphors we discuss here and speaks of “un linguaggio figurale molto ricco” and of Quintus’ “inistito ricorso a motivi figurative colti di un mondo montano”: in Lelli, 2013, p. 723

they are described as kissing one another (κύσσαν δ' ἀλλήλους, φιλότῃτι δὲ δῆριν ἔθεντο 4.271).

This does not occur in the *Iliad*. Cerroni notes that such a kiss was not part of the Homeric tradition, although in certain circumstances there might be kisses on the eyes or on the hand.²¹⁰ Interestingly though the use of κυνέω rather than φιλέω is indeed Homeric. Lelli sees the description of the kiss as a “sfumatura tinta di propensione sentimentalistica di sapore squisitamente ellenistico.”²¹¹

Wrestling in Philostratus

Philostratus describes paintings of two wrestling matches and one of Palaestra, the daughter of Hermes, who “discovered” wrestling.

Palaestra: *Imagines* 2.32

In his portrait of wrestling, or the wrestling school, personified, Philostratus presents a striking, static, image of the young woman seated as the various types of wrestling, shown as children, dance around her. As the portrait develops, we will see Palaestra become at the same time less “womanly” and more eroticised.

Not all commentators accept this categorisation of Palestra as a personification: according to Schönberger, she is not the personification of the wrestling school, but the discoverer of wrestling.²¹² This seems to ignore the evidence of her name. Miles talks of her complex status of both real person (inventor of wrestling) and personification:²¹³ this seems to fit better with the text.

²¹⁰ Lelli, op. cit., p. 28, n. 28

²¹¹ Lelli, op. cit. pp. XXXVI-XXXVII

²¹² Schönberger, 1968, p.472

²¹³ Miles, 2018, p.99

Imagines 2.32 starts with an introduction of the location and of the figure of Palaestra. Palaestra, daughter of Hermes,²¹⁴ is just at the cusp of adulthood (ἡβήσασα 2.32.1). She is described as being from the part of Arcadia called Olympia.²¹⁵ According to Philostratus she discovered wrestling (πάλην εὔρηκε 2.32.1.5). In other words, he is describing a time before Homer's games. But it looks forward to the Homeric match: for if there is "as yet" no wrestling prize, there will be (ἄθλον δὲ οὐπω πάλης ... ἀλλ' ἔσται 2.32.1.3-4). And wrestling brings joy to the world because arms will be laid aside during the truce (ἐνσπονδος ἀποκείσεται 2.32.1.7) and men will take more pleasure in the stadium (στάδια δὲ ἡδίω στρατοπέδων δόξει 2.32.1.8) and will enjoy contending naked (ἀγωνιοῦνται γυμνοί 2.32.1.8-9). This surely is a reference to the Funeral Games in *Iliad* 23. We will not learn until the final section that Palaestra is seated.

In the second section, Philostratus introduces a new group of figures, described by Philostratus as "παλαίσματα παιδία" (2.32.2): presumably the reader is to understand that these figures are the various forms of wrestling or wrestling holds personified as children, as will become clearer from the final sentence of this section. At first, we have a bucolic scene, as these children dance and skip around Palaestra, bowing to her (λυγίζοντα 2.32.2). Like children around a mother, the reader might think. But Philostratus soon disabuses us: they must be children of the earth (εἶη δ' ἄν γηγενῆ 2.32.2), for Palaestra's "manliness" (ἀνδρείας 2.32.2.4) shows that she would never willingly marry or bear children (2.32.2.4-5). The final sentence of this section returns rather awkwardly to the "παλαίσματα": we are told that they differ from one another (διαπέφυκε δὲ ἀπ' ἀλλήλων 2.32.2), though, in the current state of the text at least, there is no description of these differences. Philostratus does seem to say that the pankration is the best (κράτιστον γὰρ τὸ ξυνημμένον τῇ πάλῃ 2.32.2).²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Schönberger, loc. cit.

²¹⁵ For commentary of location of Olympia in Arcadia see Fairbanks, 1931, p.262, n.1

²¹⁶ Schönberger regards this as a "Wortspiel": p.473, n. to 2.23.2

The third section is a description of Palaestra. The description is based on a paradox: compared to a girl she looks like a boy (εἰ μὲν ἐφήβῳ εἰκάζοιτο, κόρη ἔσται 2.32.3), compared to a boy she looks like a girl (εἰ δὲ ἐς κόρην λαμβάνοιτο, ἔφηβος δόξει 2.32.3). Philostratus gives us the details. Her hair is so short that it could not be arranged (κόμη τε γὰρ ὄση μὴδ' ἀναπλέκεσθαι 2.32.3), her breasts are no more developed than a youth's (2.32.3.8-9) and her look could be of either sex (2.32.3.4). It is in this section that the issues of wrestling and eroticism, violence, and androgyny really come to the fore, as pointed out by Miles.²¹⁷ Furthermore, many of the features can no doubt be accounted for by "the logic of personification,"²¹⁸ "wrestling" of course being a feminine noun in Greek. Love of paradox is also not to be ignored. It is clear, though, that Philostratus, or the Sophist, seems to relish in lingering over these elements. He is particularly fascinated by Palaestra's breasts. They are signs both of her femininity and her lack of it. For, we are told, she claims (φησὶ γὰρ 2.32.3) that she can resist lovers and wrestlers and that not even in wrestling could they touch her breasts (μαζῶν τε οὐδ' ἂν παλαίοντα θιγεῖν τινά 2.32.3). Of course, the wrestling schools themselves are well known as centres of love intrigue.²¹⁹ Her breasts, indeed, are like those of a tender youth (ὥσπερ ἐν μαιράκιῳ ἀπαλῶ 2.32.3). The description continues with the paradox of the woman eschewing femininity. But as Philostratus goes on to tell the reader that Palaestra does not even want a woman's white skin (οὐδὲ λευκώλενος θέλει εἶναι 2.32.3), he is not only continuing with the masculine-feminine opposition, he is also introducing some favourite play on the aesthetics of colour. Here it is particularly the contrast between white and red, as the sun heeds her pleas and reddens her (φοινίπτει τὴν κόρην 2.32.3).

In the final section Philostratus reveals that Palestra is a seated figure. Here he is concerned with the skill of the painter (πάνσοφόν τι τοῦ ζωγράφου 2.32.4), as the Sophist explains to the boy the technical difficulty of handling the shadows on such figures. But again we have a return to

²¹⁷ Miles, 2018, pp.99-100

²¹⁸ Miles, op. cit., p.99

²¹⁹ Schönberger, op. cit., p.473

Palaestra's naked chest, this time as it is covered by an olive branch (ὁ θαλλὸς τῆς ἐλαίας ἐν γυμνῷ τῷ κόλπῳ 2.32.4). Besides giving another opportunity to present nudity and contrast colour against skin, the olive is itself, of course, closely connected with wrestling: the olive oil used by wrestlers to grease their bodies, and the olive wreaths of the victors.²²⁰

If we consider the *ekphrasis* as a whole, it is first of all clear that in this portrait of Palaestra, purportedly the inventor of wrestling, Philostratus has moved a long way from the wrestling in the *Iliad*. Leaving aside the types of wrestling depicted in the child figures, which point to later holds unknown in Homer, the figure of the woman-boy is a long way from the warring heroes of the epic. Palaestra may be a doubtful woman of doubtful femininity, but she is hardly a warrior, not even an Amazon. Her manliness, if such it be, is presented as defensive, not offensive: she would not allow a lover or wrestler to touch her chest. Philostratus' interests here are clearly more to do with eroticism and aesthetics than with athletic contests.

Arrichion: *Imagines* 2.6

The first section of the piece at once sets the scene and jumps straight to the outcome of the wrestling bout: we are at the Olympic Games, Arrichion²²¹ is being crowned winner of the pankration, the noblest of the contests (τῶν ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ τὸ κάλλιστον 2.6.1) and he is dead (στεφανοῦται δὲ αὐτὸ Ἀρριχίων ἐπαποθανὼν τῇ νίκῃ 2.6.1). He is being crowned by a true judge (ἐπιμελεῖσθαι ἀληθείας 2.6.1). The scene is a valley used as a natural stadium, through which the River Alpheius flows, surrounded by olive trees. The only colour mentioned is the grey-green of the trees (ἐν γλαυκῷ εἶδει 2.6.1). The fact that the contest is the pankration immediately distances Philostratus from the "pure" wrestling of Homer's *Iliad*.

²²⁰ Schönberger, loc. cit.

²²¹ Commentators have noted Philostratus' debt to Pausanias' story at 8.40.1-2. See Fairbanks, op. cit., p.149, n.3; Schönberger op. cit. p.392. Philostratus mentions the story again in *Heroicus* 21.

Having in a few sentences described the subject of the painting, in the second section Philostratus takes the reader back to the time before the bout ended (πρὶν ἢ παύσασθαι αὐτό 1.6.2). This allows him to present both the picture as it stands and the backstory that led to it. In this particular section what is principally described is the reaction of the spectators, for, as Philostratus puts it, Arrichion has not only conquered his opponent (μὴ τοῦ ἀντιπάλου μόνον 2.6.2) but he has also won over the Hellenes (ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ κεκρατηκέναι 2.6.2). As we shall see, crowd reaction is an important element in both Homer and later writers like Heliodorus and Nonnus. Here the crowd is shouting and leaping about (βοῶσι γοῦν ἀναπηδήσαντες τῶν θάκων 2.6.2), as such crowds are wont to do. Philostratus continues with the crowd reaction as a way of underlining the enormity of what has happened. For this is more than his two previous Olympic victories (τοῦ δις ἤδη νικῆσαι τὰ Ὀλύμπια μεῖζον 2.6.2): he has paid for it with his life (τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτὰ κτησάμενος 2.6.2). But, Philostratus stresses, the victory is not a matter of chance (μὴ δὲ συντυχία νοείσθω τοῦτο 2.6.2) but a cunning plan (σοφώτατα γὰρ προυνοήθη 2.6.2).

In the third section the pedagogical mode comes to the fore, as the Sophist gives the Boy a lesson about the pankration, its historical background and what it involves. First of all, it is dangerous and daring (κεκινδυνευμένη 2.6.3). He then describes the holds, which, he explains, allow everything but biting and gouging (πλὴν τοῦ δάκνειν καὶ ὀρύττειν 2.6.3), although the Spartans allowed them as training for war (ἀπογυμνάζοντες 2.6.3).

In Section 4, the reader is given a description of the match itself. We should note here that Arrichion's adversary is unnamed, referred to only as ὁ ἀντίπαλος (2.6.4), most unusual for any contest between heroes or athletes. This suggests either that no opponent is mentioned in his sources,²²² or that he is entirely focussed on the paradoxical or extraordinary nature of Arrichion's feat. Be that as it may, the description Philostratus offers of the holds of the wrestlers is extremely detailed, explaining each phase of the bout, so that the reader may understand how it is that

²²² For example, no name is given for the opponent by Pausanias (8.40.2).

Arrichion wins while dying, even if the description is not always entirely clear. The description cannot be of the painting itself as it covers all phases of the bout.

The short final section describes the style and colouring of the painted figures. Once more Philostratus shows his predilection for contrast and paradox. Here we have loser and victor or, as Philostratus puts it, the man who is choking Arrichion (ὁ μὲν ἀποπνίξας 2.6.5) and Arrichion (ὁ δὲ Ἀρριχίων 2.6.5). But Philostratus draws a further contrast from this, for he tells us that the anonymous loser is portrayed as a corpse (νεκρῷ εἰκάσαι 2.6.5) while Arrichion, who is also dead of course, is presented as a victor (νικῶντες γέγραπται 2.6.5), smiling as if he were still living and aware of his victory (καθάπερ οἱ ζῶντες, ἐπειδὴν νίκης αἰσθάνωνται 2.6.5).

In *Imagines* 2.6, Philostratus has moved away from the Homeric wrestling match, describing as he does the non-Homeric pankration. The basic elements, however, remain: a referee (Ἑλλανοδίκης 2.6.1); a gathered crowd of onlookers, whose reaction forms part of the scene (2.6); a worthy (if anonymous) opponent; blood and sweat (2.6.5); and a detailed description of the match, which to be won by guile rather than mere brute strength. Above all, perhaps, there is a long description of the bout.

Antaeus Imagines 2.21

The third *ekphrasis* with a wrestling theme in the *Imagines* is the encounter between Heracles and the giant Antaeus, as Heracles is on his way back through Libya with the Golden Apples of the Hesperides. This description is in a group devoted to depictions of Heracles (2.20-25).²²³ It provides another example of the technique that Philostratus used in *Imagines* 1.19: scenes that appear to follow on from one another.²²⁴

In Section 1, Philostratus sets the scene for a wrestling bout in the very first sentence: sand, oil and two athletes (κόνις οἷα ἐν πάλαις ἐκείνῃ ἐπὶ πηγῇ ἐλαίου καὶ δυοῖν ἀθληταῖν 2.21.1). Already the wrestlers are differentiated: one is putting on ear covers (ὁ μὲν ξυνδέων τὸ οὖς),²²⁵ while the other is taking off his lion skin (ὁ δὲ ἀπολύων λεοντῆς τὸν ὦμον 2.21.1). The lion-skin at once identifies Heracles. But more than this, this first opposition (ὁ μὲν ὁ δὲ ...) sets up a contrast that will continue throughout the piece: the Greek versus the Barbarian. For ear covers are not worn by Greeks in wrestling, but in boxing matches and Greek wrestlers are traditionally naked.²²⁶

Philostratus next reminds the reader of Antaeus' barbarity by mentioning the funeral mounds of his slain opponents. For, he tells us, the scene is Libya and Earth has sent Antaeus (ἀνῆκε 2.21.1) to harm and plunder strangers (σίνεσθαι τοὺς ξένους 2.21.1). Indeed, to do this with what he assumes to be "piratical" wrestling (ληστρικῇ, οἶμαι, πάλη 2.21.1). In other words, this single bout is set up as Hellenic civilisation versus Barbarity. This brief opening section is an excellent example of Philostratus' ability to cram a good deal of information into a very few words, something that is characteristic of so much of the *Imagines*.

²²³ For a discussion of the connection between the Heracles *ekphraseis* see: Baumann, 2011, pp.133f.

²²⁴ Bachmann, 2015, p.203

²²⁵ Schönberger, 1968, p.445

²²⁶ Schönberger, loc. cit.

In the second section, Philostratus contrasts Antaeus' deeds - he has buried his opponents on the wrestling ground (θάπτοντι οὐς ἀπώλλυε περὶ αὐτήν, ὡς ὀρᾷς, τὴν παλαιστράν 2.21.2) - with the rather more glorious deeds of Heracles. The deeds mentioned are his gathering of the Golden Apples of the Hesperides and his defeat of the Serpent. Both of these involve the use of guile, as he tricked Atlas to get away with the apples²²⁷ and worked out how to escape the heads of the Hydra and kill it. This latter Philostratus (or the Sophist) says is the more to be wondered at (οὐκ ἐκείνας ἐλεῖν θαῦμα τοῦ Ἡρακλέους, ἀλλ' ὁ δράκων 2.21.2), perhaps because it involved a dangerous battle as well as intelligence. In any event, the mention of these victories makes it clear that the oafish Antaeus has no chance. Contrasts continue. For Heracles, who is stripping for the bout while still panting from his journey (ἐν τῷ τῆς ὁδοπορίας ἄσθματι 2.21.2), is focussed on the upcoming bout (οἷον διάσκεψιν τῆς πάλης 2.21.2) and in control of his temper (ἐμβέβληκέ τε ἡνίαν τῷ θυμῷ 2.21.2), so that he is not carried beyond reasoning (μὴ ἐκφέρειν αὐτὸν τοῦ λογισμοῦ 2.21.2). Philostratus then contrasts the cool, calculating, rational Greek with Antaeus who is arrogant towards his rival (ὑπερφρονῶν δὲ ὁ Ἀνταῖος 2.21.2), as though giving himself strength through his insolence (ῥωννύς αὐτὸν τῇ ὕβρει 2.21.2).

The third and fourth sections continue the contrast between the opponents, this time contrasting their physical attributes. Heracles is perfectly built for wrestling: not only is he strong but also well proportioned (εὐαρμοστίαν τοῦ σώματος 2.21.3). He is the size of a giant (πελώριος 2.21.3), much bigger than any man (τὸ εἶδος ἐν ὑπερβολῇ ἀνθρώπου 2.21.3). He has the colour of blood (ἄνθος αἵματος 2.21.3),²²⁸ and his veins swollen as if by a passion held under control (ἐν ὠδίνι θυμοῦ τινος ὑποδεδυκότος 2.21.3). On the other hand, the Sophist tells the boy that he might well fear (δέδιας 2.21.4) Antaeus, who is like a wild animal (θηρίῳ γάρ τινι ἔοικεν 2.21.4). Everything about him is massive and awkward (ἴσος εἶναι τῷ μήκει καὶ τὸ εὖρος, καὶ ὁ αὐχὴν ἐπέζευκται τοῖς ὤμοις 21.2.4).

²²⁷ Part of the Atlas story appears in *Imagines* 2.20.

²²⁸ Schönberger, op. cit. p.239: "Er ist hochrot im Gesicht"; Fairbanks, op. cit. p.XX: "He is red-blooded." See also the discussion of Philostratus' use of the word "ἄνθος:" Miles, 2018, p.97

He is far from the perfection of Heracles for his leg is crooked (μὴ ὀρθὸν τῆς κνήμης 21.2.4) and while showing strength also shows a lack of skill (ξυνδεδεμένον μὴν καὶ οὐκ ἔσω τέχνης 21.2.4). In other words, Philostratus endows Antaeus with just those features that make his unsuitable as a wrestler.²²⁹ There is one final contrast between them: Antaeus is “black” (μέλας ὁ Ἄνταϊος 21.2.4), coloured by the sun.

In the fifth section Philostratus describes the bout itself, or rather its outcome. We have here, as in 2.6, the moment of victory, the moment actually pictured. As in the Arrichion match we have an extraordinary outcome removed from any normal wrestling match. For Heracles, Philostratus tells us, is not only fighting Antaeus, but also his mother, the Earth. He tells us this with a piece of wordplay: Heracles defeats him above the earth (καταπαλαίει δὲ αὐτὸν ἄνω τῆς γῆς 21.2.5), for the Earth is wrestling with Antaeus (ἡ γῆ τῷ Ἄνταϊῳ συνεπάλαιε 2.21.5). When Heracles tries to bring Antaeus to the ground, the Earth curves upwards to hold him (κυρτουμένη καὶ μετοχλίζουσα αὐτόν 2.21.5). After a moment of hesitation where Heracles is at a loss what to do (ἀπορῶν 2.21.5), the next part of the description reverts to a more usual wrestling description, recalling the Arrichion bout. Heracles grasps his opponent around the waist in a manner reminiscent of Arrichion’s anonymous opponent. There is indeed brute force involved: he kills Antaeus by crushing him so that his broken ribs pierce his liver (ὀξεῖαις ταῖς πλευραῖς ἐπιστραφείσαις ἐς τὸ ἥπαρ 2.21.5). But to get to this point he has had to work out how to remove him from the protective power of the Earth: this he does by holding Antaeus off the ground on his own leg (κατὰ τοῦ μηροῦ ὀρθὸν ἀναθέμενος 2.21.5). The section ends on a further contrast, as Antaeus, with no strength, groans and looks to the earth (οἰμώζοντα καὶ βλέποντα ἐς τὴν γῆν 2.21.5), while the strong Heracles has a smirk of satisfaction at his own deed (μειδιῶντα τῷ ἔργῳ 2.21.5).

The final section might also be seen as reinforcing the contrast between the two as our attention is taken from the earth - Antaeus, of course, owed his strength to his mother the Earth - to the

²²⁹ Schönberger, *op. cit.* p.446; Bachmann, 2015, p.222

heavens. The reader/viewer is asked to look carefully at the mountain peaks (τὴν κορυφὴν τοῦ ὄρους μὴ ἀργῶς ἴδης 2.21.6). For the gods have probably been spectators of the match, as is witnessed by the gold-painted cloud (χρυσοῦν γέγραπται νέφος 2.21.6). The *ekphrasis* concludes with Hermes, god of wrestling, entering the scene to present Heracles with his victory wreath, because he had given him with such a fine display of wrestling (αὐτῷ καλῶς ὑποκρίνεται τὴν πάλην 2.21.6).

Of course, a match between such contestants cannot be a “normal” wrestling match and Philostratus makes much of this. Indeed, it is the out-of-the-ordinary nature of the bout that draws him to it in the first place. Yet, for all the differences, this is in essence another contest between brawn and brains, with Antaeus taking the role of Ajax and Heracles-Odysseus outfoxing him. The method is different (Heracles lifts Antaeus off the ground so that his mother cannot give him strength) and the wrestling style is far from ὀρθὴ πάλη, but the essence is the same. There is more than a hint of an audience as well: rather than the army, it is the gods who are the spectators (2.21.6).

This *ekphrasis* lacks the rich colour of “Rhodogoune,” though gold is mentioned twice. But it displays Philostratus’ love of contrast and paradox and uses his familiar techniques to enliven the description.

Philostratus and Wrestling: Summary

As we have seen, wrestling gives Philostratus the opportunity for drama, violence, movement and colour in his *ekphraseis*. He is drawn by those contests that suit his taste for contrast and paradox. Greek versus Barbarian and brain versus brawn contests may be commonplace, but Philostratus always adds an additional element: a victor dies as he wins; a wrestler wins by lifting his opponent off, rather than pinning him to the ground; the figure of wrestling personified is a woman barely distinguishable from a male. There is no real hint of an interest in wrestling in itself or as an athletic

contest in these particular descriptions, in spite of the sometimes baffling detail of the holds and moves, but the Homeric wrestling contests are always in the background as a cultural and literary reference point.

Wrestling in Nonnus

The Funeral Games: *Dionysiaca* Book 37

In Book 37 of the *Dionysiaca*, Nonnus describes the funeral games held in honour of Opheltès, killed by Deriades. The games are closely modelled on those held for Patroclus in Book 23 of Homer's *Iliad*, though Homer is far from being the only influence.²³⁰ Although Homer is the model, and Nonnus includes the same events (apart from javelin throwing), there are significant differences, as we will see in our discussion of wrestling. One difference that strikes the reader immediately is that Opheltès, in whose honour the games are being held, is far from being as important a figure in the *Dionysiaca* as Patroclus is in the *Iliad*.²³¹

Nonnus has a complex relationship with Homer. On one level, he is copying and continuing Homer - consider his use of Homeric language and metre - but on another level, he is also trying to outdo him. Both of these traits come to the fore in Book 37. It is "a veritable laboratory of close Nonnian adaptation" and "Nonnus' assimilation to and appropriation of Homer ... should be seen as one more tactic in the continuing rivalry of the two poets."²³² The parallel funeral games in Nonnus is an exercise "destinato ai lettori colti, capaci di cogliere ogni sfumatura della sapientia riscrittura ... e di apprezzare le piccole differenze."²³³

²³⁰ Frangoulis notes Virgil, Statius, Silius Italicus and Quintus Smyrnaeus for funeral games, as well as the *Odyssey*, Sophocles, Apollonius of Rhodes and Theocritus for individual contests: Frangoulis, Hélène (Ed.): *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome 13. Chant 37*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1999, pp. 6-7.

²³¹ Frangoulis, 1999, p. 3.

²³² Hopkinson, Neil: "Nonnus and Homer" in: Hopkinson, Neil (ed.): *Studies in the Dionysiaca of Nonnus*, Cambridge (Cambridge Philological Society), 1994a, pp.9-42, at p. 31.

²³³ Agosti, Gianfranco, 2004, p. 674-5.

This certainly applies to the wrestling bout. From the very first line, the similarities and differences become apparent. As one might expect from Nonnus - the *Dionysiaca* is not noted for brevity – his wrestling match is not far from twice as long as Homer’s. The prizes also differ: in both bouts the first prize is a great tripod (μέγαν τρίποδ’ ἔμπυριβήτην, *Iliad* 23:703; τρίπος εἰκοσίμετρος ἀέθλιον ἴστατο νίκης, *Dionysiaca*, 37:548). In Nonnus rather than a slave girl, the second prize is a fancy silver cauldron (ἀνθεμόεντα λέβητα, 37:548). The one calling for contestants is here Dionysus himself and the bout is supervised by anonymous “chosen heralds” (κεκρήμενοι κήρυκες, 37:603).

The contestants who come forward for the contest are Aristaeus and Aiacos. Aristaeus is the son of Apollo and the father of Actaion. Aiacos is the father of Peleus and Telamon. In other words, not only are they heroes worthy of Homer - even if they don’t play a role in the *Dionysiaca* as great as those of Ajax and Odysseus in the *Iliad* - but also one of them is the grandfather of the great Ajax who fought in the wrestling bout in the *Iliad*. The fact that Nonnus is copying a wrestling match that was held after the wrestling match he is writing about is part of the fun. This is not unique in the *Dionysiaca*: “Nonnos aime rappeler qu’il chante des événements plus anciens que ceux que raconte l’*Iliade*, bien que cette épopée ait été composée antérieurement.”²³⁴

The modern reader must, of course, bear in mind that the description of the match in this poem can in no way be compared to a modern-day sporting match description on radio or television. To begin with, there is no real excitement or suspense about the outcome: that has been decided by Nonnus’ choice of model. Nor is there a “human interest” element: there is no character differentiation between the contestants. There is no room for spontaneity: this is a highly artificial construct, written in a very strict adaptation of Homer’s own verse form in a literary language far from daily idiom, even in the author’s day. The interest for the reader is literary and aesthetic, with a full

²³⁴Hopkinson, Neil: *Nonnos di Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome 8. Chants 20-24*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1994, p. 76, n.2

appreciation and understanding depending on a close knowledge of literary antecedents and, possibly, iconography.

We are accustomed to illustrations of Greek athletes, including wrestlers, competing in the nude. However Nonnus tells us that Aristaeus and Aiacos are wearing loin-clothes, like Homer's wrestlers: total nudity for athletes was not introduced until sometime between the end of the Homeric and beginning of the classical period.²³⁵ As in much of Book 37, this part at least of the wrestling match follows Homer closely, although he seems to feel it necessary to add an explanation (ζώματι δὲ σκεπώοντες ἀθηήτου φύσιν αἰδοῦς / γυμνοὶ ἀεθλεύοντες ἐφέστασαν 37.556-7). The start of the bout also follows the original: the two take up the positions and attempt the moves typical of the "ὀρθὴ πάλῃ:" they face one another, grab their opponent's wrists and attempt to throw one another (37.558-60). Homer uses an extended metaphor of gable rafters to express the wrestlers' strength as they struggle against one another (*Iliad* 23. 713ff); at a later point in the bout, after the first fall, Nonnus, who is much less fond of extended similes,²³⁶ echoes this with his own architectural metaphor (ἴσον ἀμειβόντεσσιν ἔχων τύπον, οὐς κάμε τέκτων / πρηϋνῶν ἀνέμοιο θυελλήεσσιν ἀνάγκην 37.592-3). This is close to Homer, but noticeably different: Nonnus "never repeats a comparison or simile verbatim but rephrases it in his own words."²³⁷

Nonnus follows Homer's description of sweat, blood and tightening muscles at *Iliad* 23.572ff with similar descriptions of his own, with much running sweat (θερμὴν τριβομένοιο κατ' αὐχένος ἰκμάδα πέμπων, 37.571). He turns the redness on their skin into typical Nonnian patchwork patterns: αἵματι θερμῷ / αἰόλα πορφύρουσα· δέμας δ' ἐστίζετο φωτῶν (37.574-5).²³⁸ The same outcome is reached as in Homer to this first struggle: one wrestler uses guile to bring the other to the ground. Here Aiacos plays the role of crafty Odysseus (Αἰακὸς αἰολόμητις, 37.580) and brings Aristaeus down.

²³⁵ Poliakof, Michael B: *Combat Sports in the Ancient World*, New Haven and London (Yale University Press), 1987, p.33; Newby, Zahra: *Athletics in the Ancient World*, London (Bristol Classical Press), 2006, p.71

²³⁶ Geisz, Camille: "Similes and Comparisons in the *Dionysiaca*: Imitation, Innovation, Erudition," in Bannert and Kröll, 2018a, p.87-97, at p.87

²³⁷ Geisz, 2018a, p.92. She also discusses this very passage in Geisz, 2018b, pp.222-3

²³⁸ Frangoulis points to several similar Nonnian word-pictures: Frangoulis, 1999, p.168, n. to 586-593

Aristaeus plays the role of great Ajax, falling, in Rouse's translation, like a cliff²³⁹ (ἡλιβάτω πρηῶνι πανείκελον, 37.583).

Nonnus continues to play his game with time: by managing to fell Aristaeus, Aiacos is described as setting an example for his sons (έσσομένην ἀρετὴν τεκέεσσι φυλάσσω, 37.588), pointing forward to the prowess of his grandson.²⁴⁰ Part of the fun is that Ajax's grandfather here gets to play the role of crafty Odysseus in the Homeric bout.

At this point Nonnus involves the crowd in the struggle, as he describes their amazement that the son of Phoebus (τηλίκον αὐχήμεντα βοώμενον υἱέα Φοίβου 37.584) should be brought to the ground. It is indeed an "amplificazione della reazione degli astanti in //23.728,"²⁴¹ where Homer gives a rather terse note of the crowd reaction (λαοὶ δ' αὖ θεῶν τε θάμβησάν τε). Yet it can hardly be compared to the vividness of the crowd scene painted by Nonnus in the chariot race at 37.269-78, where Nonnus makes the reader feel the excitement of the crowd by describing the varied reactions of individual spectators (θαρσύνων, γελῶν, τρομέων, ἐλατῆρι κελεύων 27.278). This passage represents perhaps the liveliest writing in the whole of Book 37. As in Homer, by far the greatest coverage is given to the chariot race and there is consequently greater development of all aspects. Nevertheless, the two and a half lines devoted to the crowd in the wrestling match serve to remind the reader of their presence, to enliven the events and to emphasise the achievements of Aiacos.

As Agosti notes, throughout the *Dionysiaca* Nonnus demonstrates "un certo compiacimento per la termonologie e le questione tecniche"²⁴² and this comes to the fore in the following part of the match. It is Aiacos' turn to try to lift Aristaeus. Having done this effortlessly (ἀμογητὶ, 37.587)²⁴³ he throws his opponent to the ground and jumps upon him.

²³⁹ Rouse, 1940, vol. 3, p. 77

²⁴⁰ Cf. Frangoulis, 1999, p. 168.

²⁴¹ Agosti, 2004, p.735 n. to 583-585

²⁴² Agosti, op. cit., p. 673

²⁴³ "Colpisce la grande facilità con cui Eaco solleva Aristeo, che contrasta con gli inutile sforzi di Odisseo per sollevare Aiace." Agosto, 2013³, p.736, n. to 586-587

To this point the match has been conducted, like the bout between Ajax and Odysseus, within the rules of the “ὀρθὴ πάλη.” Now that changes and becomes the “other” style of wrestling “ground wrestling” (κύλις or ἀλίνδης), in which the struggle was continued on the ground until one or other of the combatants acknowledged defeat.”²⁴⁴ This style did not belong to the Homeric period. It was the style of wrestling belonging to the “region of the pankration and the gladiatorial shows, and the particular trick described is ... that known as κλιμκισμός.”²⁴⁵ The ground wrestling scene is not easy to follow in detail and has been the subject of much debate about exactly what the holds Aiacos uses and how the bout is ended.²⁴⁶

Unlike the Homeric bout, there is a clear winner here: Aiacos takes off the prize. In the end this bout, so closely modelled on Homer’s, is significantly different to it. It is clear that while copying Homer, demonstrating that he is completely familiar with the *Iliad*, he is at the same time distinguishing his own poem from it by introducing some minor - and some not so minor - changes. These changes sometimes add layers of interest and humour to the story (for example, Aiacos being the grandfather of Ajax), sometimes bring the poem into a more contemporary focus (for example, the changes in the rules of wrestling). A good example of Nonnus’ game playing occurs at 37.605-9, where the poet refers to the rules regarding the submission of a wrestler who cannot speak and can barely move. “It was not then the rule” (οὐ γὰρ ἔην τότε θεσμός), says Nonnus, “then” being the time of the bout, a couple of generations before Homer. Yet, as we have seen, these wrestling moves necessitating such a rule were not accepted until well after the Homeric period.

For all the game-playing it is clear that in the wrestling sequence, as in Book 37 as a whole, Nonnus has taken on his model and rival in his own wrestling match. He seems determined to show that he can beat Homer at his own game. Despite the irony, intertextual play and additions, neither the wrestling match nor the book as a whole show Nonnus at his most engaging, lacking the liveliness

²⁴⁴ Gardiner, E. Norman: *Athletics of the Ancient World*, Oxford (Oxford University Press), 1930, p.182

²⁴⁵ Gardiner, 1905), p.26

²⁴⁶ Frangoulis, 1999, 168-9.

and inventiveness that we will see in the bouts with Ampelos and Pallene. The detailed, and somewhat confusing, description of the wrestlers on the ground adds no element of excitement to the scene. It is as if the fetters that he has laid on himself have impeded him from showing the best of his writing and imagining: the lesson seems to be that Nonnus is at his best when he gives himself his head. In the end the match between Aiacos and Aristaeus does not top Achilles and Odysseus. As has been mentioned on so many occasions by commentators he is not primarily interested in character depiction: this may explain why the Homeric match is more engaging for the reader. Also, the playfulness of the scene adds a dimension of parody which distances the reader.

Dionysus v Ampelos: *Dionysiaca* Book 10

As we have seen, the wrestling match in Book 37 is closely modelled on the *Iliad* and is in most respects “homergetreu.”²⁴⁷ In Book 10 Nonnus presents a wrestling match which, while owing just as much to Homer, stands in a much more complicated relationship to the earlier work. If the Aiacos/Aristaeus bout allowed us to identify several strands both of Nonnus’ somewhat intricate relationship to Homer, the Dionysus/Ampelos match throws further light on Nonnus’ own technique and aesthetic.

The match in Book 37 was in almost exactly the same context as that in Homer: two great champions fighting in funeral games for honour and prizes before their men and their peers. The context here could hardly be more different: two youngsters, one a god, one a satyr, play at wrestling alone – apart from the presence of the god of love. The bout does not occur during a break in a war, but in the midst of a courtship episode. This episode will end in Ampelos’ death and metamorphosis (as his talking name suggests) into a vine. The talking name and metamorphosis alert us that this episode is

²⁴⁷ Kröll, Nicole: *Die Jugend des Dionysos*, Berlin and Boston (De Gruyter), 2016, p. 108

pregnant with meaning. In fact, it runs from Book 10 through to Book 12. For present purposes, we will concentrate on the wrestling.

So, in the course of their frolics, Dionysus and Ampelos wrestle. Indeed, there is a question as to whether Nonnus is writing here of one bout or of one of many. The text is:

καί ποτε μουνωθέντες ἐρημάδος ὑψόθεν ὄχθης,
 ἐν ψαμάθοις παίζοντες ἐυκροκάλου ποταμοῖο,
 ἀμφὶ παλαιμοσύνης φιλοπαίγμονος εἶχον ἀγῶνα (10.330-2)

Some translators have regarded the “καί ποτε εἶχον ἀγῶνα” as referring to more than one match,²⁴⁸ although most regard this to mean it is a single bout.²⁴⁹

In either case, the opening of the episode at once emphasizes its links to Homer and at the same time clearly differentiates it from Homer. The prize here, we are specifically told as if to remind the reader of Homer, will *not* be a tripod (οὐ τρίπος ἦεν ἀέθλιον 10.333) as in the *Iliad* but the double pipe of love (διδυμόθροος αὐλὸς Ἑρώτων 10.335). Moreover, far from being a serious contest of force and skill, the bout is a pleasure for them (ἔρις ἦεν ἐπήρατος 10.336), part of their erotic playfulness (φιλοπαίγμονος 10.332). To emphasise this difference, and underline the erotic nature of the bout, the referee is libertine Eros (μάργος Ἑρως 10. 337).²⁵⁰ In making a love garland the god is not only emphasising the erotic element, he is in his choice of the hyacinth and narcissus foretelling the untimely end of Ampelos (στέμμα πόθου νάρκισσον ἐπιπλέξας ὑακίνθω 10.338).²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Rouse: “Sometimes alone on a deserted bank, they ... had a wrestling-bout”; Manterola and Pinkler: “En otras ... jugaban ... y sostenían en alegre lucha una contienda”. (Manterola, S. and L. Pinkler (Eds., trans.): *Dionisiácas. Cantos 1-12*, Madrid (Gredos), 2008)

²⁴⁹ Chrétien, 1985: “Et un jour ... ils se livrent à un concours de lutte”; Gigli Piccardi, 2003: “Un giorno ... si misero a gareggiare nella lotta;” Maletta: “E un giorno ... contesero ... in una gara di lotta” (in Del Corno, 1997); Ebener: “Einstmals ... wollten sich die Liebenden dort sich im Ringkampfe messen.” (Ebener, Dietrich: *Nonnos. Werke. Bd. 1*, Berlin (Aufbau), 1985); Kröll, 2016: “Und einmal sonderten sie sich ab Und traten einen sportlichen Wettkampf im Ringen an.”

²⁵⁰ Translators have struggled with the adjective, trying to fit in all shades of meaning contained in the Greek word: e. g., “libertino” (Gigli Piccardi); “insolent” (Chrétien); “mad” (Rouse).

²⁵¹ Gigli Piccardi, 2003, p. 719, n. to 333-8

As is appropriate for a scene between lovers, it is not before a crowd, but in private (ἐρημάδος ὑψόθεν ὄχθης 10.330) - aside from the referee, of course.

The tension between obvious closeness to the Homeric model and equally obvious differences continues throughout the piece. If, as we have suggested, parody played a role in the match in Book 37, the feeling of parody is even stronger here.

So, the start of the wrestling match follows the Homeric pattern: the two contestants stand face to face and grasp one another, each trying in turn to lift the other. But this grasping and lifting has a far different meaning to that of Ajax and Odysseus. To begin with, Nonnus seems to depart from the Homeric model and his own tribute to it in Book 37 in presenting his contestants nude (10.358).

Furthermore, these are not two hulking heroes. They are both very young, barely more than boys (if one can speak of a god and a satyr in such terms). Dionysus is often described in terms of weakness and femininity, so he makes an unconvincing - or amusing - tough guy. In fact, as the match progresses, we see that Dionysus is placed in the role of Ajax, leaving his young opponent in that of Odysseus. Nonnus describes Ampelos as “πολύδρις” (10.366) and Kröll²⁵² likens this to Homer’s description of Odysseus as πολύμητις (*Iliad*, 23.709). This is surely meant ironically if we consider that lack of guile that he is to display and that will lead to his untimely end. And besides, what sort of match can it be, a god against a satyr?

Even more “un-Homeric” is Dionysus’ reaction to the struggle. Nonnus says (in Rouse’s translation) that “Bacchos was in heaven amid this honeysweet wrestling” (καὶ ἤπτετο Βάκχος Ὀλύμπου ἄμφι παλαιμοσύνης μελιδέος 10.344/5). Keydell describes the “touching heaven” phrase as “proverbium apud Aristaenetum.”²⁵³ It is an extraordinary start to a wrestling match and so it continues, with similar descriptions of Dionysus’ pleasure in the struggle. Note that this particular

²⁵² Kröll, 2016, p. 107

²⁵³ Keydell, R: *Nonni Panoploiotani Dyonyysiaca* 1, Berlin (Weidmann), 1959, p. 217, n. ad. loc. Gigli Piccardi also notes use by Quintus Smirnaeus: Gigli Piccardi, 2003, p. 720, n. to 344-6.

type of pleasure is described on the god's side only: Ampelos remains focused on the game. Using Odysseus' move he kicks Dionysus behind the knee and the two of them fall to the ground (κόψε ποδὸς κώληπα 10:354), where the struggle continues: but only because Dionysus chooses to fall – with a merry laugh (ἡδὺ γέλασας 10:354). If the dust that they roll in (10:356) is authentically Homeric, the rest is far from it. There could be few things less Homeric than the picture painted by Nonnus of the naked Dionysus happily lying on the ground with Ampelos astride him, even if the model is Odysseus falling atop Ajax:

καὶ χθονὶ κεκλιμένοιο θελήμονος ὑψόθι Βάκχου
 γυμνῇ νηδύι κοῦρος ἐφίζανεν (10.357-8)

The erotic tone continues with the description of Dionysus' pleasure in his sweet burden:

αὐτὰρ ὁ χαίρων
 ἑκταδὸν ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα χυθεὶς ἐπεκέκλιτο γαίῃ
 γαστέρι κουφίζων γλυκερὸν βάρος (10.358-9)

Once the wrestling shifts to a struggle on the ground, as discussed in relation to Book 37, we are outside the “ὀρθὴ πάλη.” More than that, we are well and truly outside the spirit of the Homeric bout. Nonnus continues the description of the “battle” on the ground for another 20 lines. Again, as in Book 37, the exact moves are not easy to follow, but are in a similar spirit. The bout reaches its conclusion in a combination of sweat and dust, typical of the wrestling scenes we have followed (10.371-2). It is then that Dionysius, “νικηθέντος, ἀνικῆτου περ ἑόντος” (10.273), concedes the bout. Not only is the invincible defeated, he is defeated willingly (ἐκούσιος). This, of course, is the only way that Ampelos could win. It is definitely not a Homeric ending.

The scene, however un-Homeric in nature, is firmly anchored in the *Iliad*, and, as we have shown, keeps returning to Homer, as if to remind the reader of the connection. Exactly like the wrestling

scene in Book 37, this scene does not make complete sense without the reader's (or listener's) awareness of the Homeric scene.

Furthermore, there is no avoiding the presence of an erotic element. According to Gigli Piccardi,²⁵⁴ the wrestling is just an excuse for Dionysus to get close to his loved one and get him in the right frame of mind. Kröll describes it as "ein erotisches Spiel mit Augenzwinkern ... eine regelrechte Kontrafaktur."²⁵⁵ There is no doubt that the scene is erotic, being part of Dionysus' wooing of Ampelos. But considered in its particular context the "game" is far more important in this episode than the erotic content. Or rather, the erotic content is an important part of the game.

The erotic vocabulary of the wrestling match is quite general and vague. The terms used are around nakedness and pleasure (on Dionysus' part). There are no lingering descriptions of particular attractions, such as are found elsewhere in the *Dionysiaca*, including in other parts of the Dionysus/Ampelos story. In other words, it is not the erotic as such that is emphasised in this section; rather, the erotic is used as a foil to bring out the un-heroic, un-Homeric nature of the encounter. The erotic context makes the whole thing comic.

This comic element is more than a wink. Comedy is the essence of the scene. It goes from the unevenness of the contest, to the unheroic contestants, to the unlikely referee, and is built into the very language. Take for example the use of the word "πολύιδρις" (10.366) to describe Ampelos. This is ultimately a Homeric word and means "of much wisdom, knowledge" (*LSJ*) or "that knows many things, wise, knowledgeable" (*BrillDAG*). This is a serious word. It is used on two other occasions in the *Dionysiaca*: at 17.106 it is used to describe Dionysus himself; at 38.46 it is used to describe the seer Idmon (whose talking name of course means "expert"). In the *Odyssey* it is used by Penelope to describe the old nurse Eurycleia (23.82). The tendency of the translators has been to downplay the word: "no novice at the game" (Rouse); "con molta astuzia" (Gigli Piccardi); "habile"

²⁵⁴ Gigli Piccardi, 2003, p. 632

²⁵⁵ Kröll, 2016, p. 106

(Chrétien); “Schlau” (Kröll); “allenato all lotta” (Maletta); “wohl erfahren im Ringen” (Ebener); “muy astuto” (Manterola and Pinkler). So Kröll is right to draw the comparison to Odysseus. But this comparison is itself comic: there is nothing in the boy Ampelos that invites serious comparison to the hero.

Kröll is also right to talk of a “contrafactum.” Nonnus has taken Homer’s text and turned it to something closer to farce. This comic view seems also seems to reflect back, as it were, on the Homeric bout. It is part of the continuing dialogue which continues throughout the *Dionysiaca*.

There is more going on here, though. As we have discussed, in the end, Dionysus “throws” the match (νικήθη Διόνυσος ἐκούσιος 10.375). This is more than a comic, un-Homeric ending to a comic, un-Homeric bout. For his willing defeat at the hands of Ampelos is likened to the defeat of Zeus at the hands of Heracles (10.36-7), a rare myth only mentioned by Lycophron (*Alexander*, 40:2).²⁵⁶ This comparison to Zeus has been explained as working towards the goal of the epic, making Dionysus a fully-fledged Olympian god.²⁵⁷ Be that as it may, it is certainly true that it is typical of Nonnus to introduce into his poem either little known myths, or little known versions of myths.

The final act in this scene is a bath which expands on Homer. Rather than simply wiping themselves of dust and sweat, Ampelos bathes in the river. The reader is presented with the vision of a shining Ampelos (λουομένου δὲ / ἐκ χροὸς ἰδρώοντος ἐπήρατος ἔρρεεν αἶγλη 10.381-2). Kröll²⁵⁸ compares this to the scene of Dionysus bathing earlier in the book (10.172-175) which she describes as “göttliche Epiphanie.”²⁵⁹ We have moved beyond a simple wrestling match.

²⁵⁶ Chrétien, 1985, p.155; Gigli Piccardi, 2003, p. 724, n. to 373-7.

²⁵⁷ Kröll, 2016, p.107

²⁵⁸ Kröll, op. cit. p.109

²⁵⁹ Kröll, op. cit. p.25

Dionysus v Pallene: *Dionysiaca* Book 48

The third wrestling match – and surely one of the strangest in Greek literature - is in the very last book of the *Dionysiaca*, Book 48, and again features Dionysus himself. This time, he is no longer a youngster. He has already won the Indian Wars and has almost completed his triumphal procession through the world before his apotheosis. It is a particularly unusual and fascinating match: no longer man against man, as in Book 37, or god against man, as in Book 10, but god against woman, with the prize being marriage with the woman opponent, as Dionysus fights Pallene, daughter of Sithon, in Thrace.

We have already noted that it is a characteristic of the *Dionysiaca* that Nonnus weaves into the poem little known, or local myths and unusual versions of well-known myths. As is often the case, it is not easy to be sure of the source of this episode. In one version of the Pallene story, Sithon forces his daughter Pallene's suitors to fight him. He always won and killed them, until one day she fell in love with one of them, invented a ruse which succeeded but was discovered, and was saved from her father's wrath by Aphrodite.²⁶⁰ Some commentators see the source of Nonnus' version in a brief mention in one of Philostratus' letters.²⁶¹ The idea of the contest being a wrestling match at least seems to be Nonnus' invention. It has also been suggested that the similarities between the name "Pallene" and Greek "πάλη" (wrestling) suggested this form of trial.²⁶²

There is little background to the bout. Dionysus pauses in his journey, we are told, to kill Pallene's murderous father (48.92-3). This father had an unlawful passion (οἷστρον ἔχων ἀθέμιστον, 48.94) for his daughter, although there is never any doubt that she is still a virgin. Dionysus comes as a champion of Justice (ἵκανε Δίκης πρόμος, 48.98), so for a very serious purpose, but as written the episode combines "érotisme et recherche de l'effet comique."²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Vian, 2003, p.12; Accorinti, 2004, p.603

²⁶¹ Vian, loc. cit.; Accorinti, op. cit. p.604

²⁶² Chuvin, 1991, p.88

²⁶³ Vian, 2003, p.16

Pallene's father insists on a wrestling match, with marriage as the prize. The outcome is never in doubt. For a start, the bout and its outcome were foretold several books earlier by Dionysus' brother Eros after Dionysus had lost his fight with Poseidon for Beroe (ἤχι καὶ αὐτὴ / Παλλήνη καλέει σε δορυσσόος, ἥς παρὰ παστῶ / ἀθλοφόρον γαμίοισι περιστέψω σε κορύμβοις / ἱμερτὴν τελέσαντα παλαιμοσύνην Ἀφροδίτης 43.433-36). So not only do we know the outcome, but we also know that there will be a strong erotic element to the bout.

Not that Pallene is presented as a helpless maiden. She is introduced as a bold (δορυσσόος, 48.104) warrior, with spear and shield (48.104-5), leading many to believe that this is "a remnant of some other version."²⁶⁴ Be that as it may, we are quickly into the erotic sphere. The bout is presided over by the naked Eros (48.107). Peitho clads Pallene in a silver robe, foretelling, as Nonnus notes himself, Dionysus's victory and wedding (νίκην μελλογάμοιο προθεσπίζουσα Λυαίου, 48.110), but the girl almost immediately performs a striptease, until she appears in only breastband and loincloth (Her appearance has been likened to the "bikini girls" in the mosaic of the Piazza Armerina²⁶⁵) Nonnus spends a dozen lines describing her semi-nakedness. We are clearly getting further away from Homer, but very close to Nonnus' other erotic scenes. Interestingly, in his rather detailed description of Pallene oiling her body for the bout, he manages to combine his erotic interests with a standard element of post-Homeric wrestling scenes (48.121-23).

The bout follows the standard pattern of the wrestling contest, with Pallene displaying her fierceness (48.124-5), but quickly changes its character, as Dionysus is obviously the superior, and it becomes clear that he is toying with her. So, from the start Dionysus can easily shake off Pallene's grip (δεσμοῖς θηλυτέροισι περίπλοκον αὐχένα σείων, 48.129) and he pretends to struggle but is really just drawing out his pleasure in their embrace (οὐδὲ τόσον μενέαιεν ἐπὶ χθονὶ παῖδα κυλίνδειν, / ὅσσον ἐπιψάυειν ἀπαλοῦ χροός, ἡδέϊ μόχθῳ /τερπόμενος, 48.134-37). Throughout this

²⁶⁴ Rouse, 1940, vol 3, p.431n

²⁶⁵ Koster quoted by Vian, 2003, p.102 n.3

episode we notice in the language the contrast between godly and human, and between male and female. At all times Dionysus is in control, with the usual wrestling moves taking on an erotic meaning. As in his other Nonnian bouts, the exact moves are difficult to follow. For example, Rouse renders lines 151-52 (καὶ τροχαλῇ Διόνυσος ἀφειδέι γούνατος ὀρμῇ / γαστέρα Παλλήνης κρατέων ἑτεραλκεί παλμῶ) as “mercilessly set his knee against Pallene’s belly,” an interpretation disputed by other translators. As Vian puts it, “les éléments érotiques priment sur les détails techniques.”²⁶⁶

As in the Ampelos episode the two end up rolling in the dust, with Dionysus thoroughly enjoying himself. In fact, once we are past the long description of her charms, there is virtually no mention of Pallene as a participant at all, even less than of Ampelos. It is all about Dionysus, his strength, and his pleasure. We have clearly moved a long way from Homer, to the extent that the reference text here seems no longer to be the *Iliad*, but Nonnus’ own presentation of the Ampelos bout. Indeed scholars have demonstrated that the two episodes reveal an extraordinary number of similarities, with eight passages in each text revealing parallels.²⁶⁷ For example, the description of Bacchus lying on the ground bearing Ampelos willingly on his naked belly (χθονὶ κεκλιμένοιο θελήμονος ὑψόθι Βάκχου / γυμνῇ νηδύι κοῦρος ἐφίζανεν 10.357-8) is echoed in the description of Bacchus lovingly bearing Pallene (κουφίζων ἐρόεις ἐπὶ νηδύι 48.162).

The similarity between the two texts invites the conclusion that Nonnus chose to make the Pallene contest a wrestling match so as to allow such parallels. The interplay between the two bouts is an example of a familiar device in Nonnus, the variation on a theme. The most striking examples of this device are the two long episodes in which unwillingly virgins are made drunk to the point of unconsciousness by Dionysus turning their drinking water into wine and are then raped by him: Nicaia in Book 16 and Aura later in Book 48.

²⁶⁶ Vian, op. cit. p.147

²⁶⁷ Chrétien (quoting Schulze), 1985, p.76, n.3; Accorinti, 2004, p.605. The passages are: 10.33 8 – 48.106f; 10.340 – 48.130; 10.342b – 48.126b; 10.347-350 – 48.132f; 10.354-356 – 48.159-161; 10.357f – 48.161f; 10.363f – 48.145; 10.364b – 48.163b

How, then does his match with Pallene differ from the match with Ampelos? Clearly the context is different: this is not a game. While the Ampelos story as a whole is far more than a simple dalliance, the wrestling bout itself is in the context of play and fun. As we have noted, Dionysus comes to the Pallene bout as the Champion of Justice, but this seriousness of purpose is hardly to be seen in the description of the match. The emphasis here is firmly on the erotic element, as perhaps is fitting in a match with a wedding as prize. For example, Dionysus here takes the role of the voyeur, a role often taken elsewhere by the narrator himself (καὶ δολίοις βλεφάροισιν ἔην ἐλέλιζεν ὀπωπὴν, / κούρης ἀβροκόμου κεκονιμένα γυῖα δοκεύων 48.147-8).

The end of the bout is frankly erotic as “love-mad Dionysus” (48.166) lays Pallene flat on her back in the dirt (καὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ κέκλιτο κούρη / χεῖρας ἐφαπλώσασα· τιταινομένης δὲ πιέσσας 48.169-70). At this point the match is called off, not by the intervention of the referee, but by the intervention of her father. The reason given is that he feared Dionysus would kill his daughter (48.170), though there is clearly an overtone of sexual jealousy. Eros, with Zeus’ personal approval, crowns Dionysus with a wedding wreath (48.177-8). Dionysus, returning to his role as Champion of Justice, immediately kills the father and presents his bloodied thyrsus to Pallene as a wedding gift (48.185-7).

Wedding celebrations are held (48.188-202), Dionysus makes a speech to cheer up his bride (48.205-33), “lingered for a time beside his wedded bride, taking his joy in the love of his new marriage” (48.236-7), and that is the end of it. No further mention of Pallene and, surprisingly, no mention of any offspring.

Wrestling in Philostratus and Nonnus: A comparison

We have seen that the wrestling matches in both Philostratus and Nonnus derive directly and indirectly from Homer's *Iliad*. We have also seen that Nonnus' relationship with Homer is much more complex than Philostratus' and of much greater significance to the shaping of his work as a whole. The wrestling matches in Philostratus and Nonnus follow the Homeric pattern: the triumph of brains over brawn. We have also seen that, in spite of this connection to Homer, neither writer is slavishly copying the master. Each describes wrestling matches with the rules and moves of their own era rather than Homer's and in line with later literary treatments of the theme. What we will now examine is whether there are indications that Nonnus' treatment of wrestling scenes is in any way connected with Philostratus'.

No simple direct comparisons can be made between the writers' wrestling matches: they do not treat the same matches between the same opponents. Nevertheless, it is interesting to compare their handling of the nitty-gritty of the bouts. For Philostratus gives a very detailed description of the wrestling holds and moves, even if, as we have seen, he is not always clear. Editors have noted that Nonnus may well have been inspired by just such a description for both the Dionysus/Ampelos bout²⁶⁸ and the Aiaceus/Aristtaeus match.²⁶⁹ We will therefore firstly examine elements of the writers' wrestling descriptions, also taking into account descriptions in Homer, Lucian, Heliodorus and Quintus Smyrnaeus.

In the *Iliad*, the wrestling match between Ajax and Odysseus starts with the opponents grasping one another, presumably around the waist (ἀγκὰς δ' ἀλλήλων λαβέτην χερσὶ στιβαρῆσιν 23.711), each trying to throw and lift the other. Not all of the bouts in subsequent writers start in such fashion, but such holds are common in the descriptions, naturally enough. Heliodorus in the *Aethiopica*

²⁶⁸ Chrétien, 1985, pp. 75-6 and p.75 n.4; Gigli-Piccardi, 2003, p.722

²⁶⁹ Frangoulis, 1999, p.170

introduces the comic or grotesque when Theagenes attempting such a hold, struggles to put his arms around the huge stomach of his giant Ethiopian opponent (10.32.2). In Quintus Smyrnaeus' description of the bout between Ajax and Diomedes in the *Posthomerica*, the direct connection to Homer is clearly seen in his choice of language (ὁψὲ δ' ἄρ' Αἴας / Τυδείδην συνέμαρψεν ὑπὸ στιβαρῆσι χέρεσσιν / ἄξαι ἐπειγόμενος 4.224-6), confirming the link we have noted earlier in this chapter. Philostratus describes such holds in both *Imagines* 2.6 and 2.21 but does not adopt Homer's language. Instead, he uses similar language in both pieces, but not deriving from *Iliad* 23 (τὸν Ἀρριχίωνα μέσον ἤδη ἥρηκώς ὁ ἀντίπαλος 2.6.4; ὁ Ἡρακλῆς ... συνέιληφε τὸν Ἀνταῖον μέσον ἄνω κενεῶνος 2.21.5). Likewise, in two of the passages from the *Dionysiaca*, involving wrestling with Ampelus and Pallene, Nonnus repeats phrasing that has no connection to Homer, using two of his favourite words (παλάμας στεφανηδὸν ἐλιξάμενοι διὰ νώτου 10.340; διδύμας στεφανηδὸν ἐπ' ἰξύι χεῖρας ἐλίξας 48.1300).²⁷⁰ The third example in Nonnus, involving the wrestling bout in the Funeral Games, is particularly interesting. In that instance where, as we have discussed, Nonnus is closely modelling his episode on the *Iliad*, we might expect him to stay close to Homer's words. Instead, he seems to be borrowing from Lucian, though not from the Lucian of the *Anacharsis*. Here the word he uses for the grasping move is "συνοχμάζω" (συνοχμάζοντο γὰρ ἄμφω/χερσὶν ἀμοιβαίησιν 37.563-4), a word used only here in the *Dionysiaca* by Nonnus, and indeed a very uncommon word. It is used by Lucian in his *Podagra* (συνοχμάσας δεσμῷ πόδα 216), in the context of binding feet.

This survey involving just one type of hold shows the complexity of the issue: we see that even in those descriptions with direct equivalents in Homer, later writers like Philostratus, Heliodorus and Nonnus have no qualms in borrowing from others as well as following their own artistic and aesthetic goals. If we consider the bouts described by Nonnus in more detail, we will find that they move further from Homer and display a much closer connection to the later writers as the wrestling

²⁷⁰ Nonnus uses "στεφανηδόν" some 30 times in the poem; "ἐλίσσω" in its various forms appear over 100 times.

moves change to those in use closer to his own age. As Chrétien puts it, if he follows Homer, Nonnus “se laisse influencer néanmoins par les pratiques en usage à l’époque impériale.”²⁷¹ It is in particular in the descriptions of these practices that, as one might expect, the connections become clearer.

If we narrow our focus to the five wrestling matches in Philostratus and Nonnus, some of the differences and similarities stand out. For example, in Philostratus there is no ground wrestling, as in Nonnus, which will necessarily limit the similarities in description. Nor is there any hint of erotic content in the bouts with Arrichion and Antaeus in the *Imagines*, while both the Ampelos and Pallene bouts in the *Dionysiaca* are overtly erotic and, indeed, this erotic element is a major part of their interest.²⁷² With the possible exception of the bout in the Funeral Games, none of the matches in either writer is in any way a standard athletic event. Philostratus presents us with two matches to the death, one fought by a god; Nonnus has a match between a god and the boy he is in love with, and one between a god and his bride-to-be. Even the Aristaeus-Aiacos bout is far from “normal”, being, as we have seen, as much a battle between Nonnus and Homer as between the two heroes. In other words, the wrestling matches in both Philostratus and Nonnus gain their interest precisely from not being standard wrestling matches, even though the standard matches - especially as represented by *Iliad* 23 - remain a necessary reference point. In this way, they seem to differ from other later writers like Lucian and Quintus, closer to the spirit of Heliodorus.

A common move in any wrestling match is one wrestler lifting or attempting to lift the other. Such a move occurs in *Imagines* 2.21. Here Philostratus uses the verb “μετοχλίζω” for the lifting action (μετοχλίζουσα αὐτόν, ὅτε κέοιτο 21.2.5), as Heracles keeps Antaeus from touching his source of strength, the earth. This word appears once in each of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the *Iliad*, Homer uses it in reference to pulling back the bolt on a door (οὐδέ κ’ ὀχῆα / ῥεῖα μετοχλίσσειε θυράων

²⁷¹ Chrétien, 1985, p.76

²⁷² The erotic element is of course present in Philostratus’ description of Palaestra.

ἡμετεράων 566-7); in the *Odyssey*, it is in Odysseus' angry response to Penelope's suggestion about the moving of his bed (ἀνδρῶν δ' οὐ κέν τις ζωὸς βροτός, οὐδὲ μάλ' ἡβῶν, / ῥεῖα μετοχλίσσειεν 23.187-8). Neither of these Homeric uses seems quite to fit with Philostratus: if the notion of leverage is there in all three examples, in Philostratus it seems to be the lifting or holding aloft that is emphasised. The word "μετοχλίζω" is not used by Nonnus in any of the wrestling scenes, but it does appear four times elsewhere in the *Dionysiaca*. Vian notes that "μετοχλίζειν" means "'soulever", "arracher"' but that it "peut prendre le sens de "bouleverser," "jeter la perturbation dans."²⁷³ Examples of this latter usage may be found at 2.284 and 36.100. It is the former sense that interests us here. Both of these examples occur in the Pentheid, Nonnus' adaptation of the *Bacchae*. In Book 44 he uses it of the action of uprooting a tree (δένδρον ἀπειλητῆρι μετοχλίζοντες ὀδόντι 44.62). Simon notes that the word "marque un effort"²⁷⁴ and refers to a use of the word in the *Palatine Anthology* (in the context of forcing the bolts on a tomb: 9.81.5). This use seems to accord with the Homeric use. However, the last use of the word in the *Dionysiaca* is slightly different. While the inspiration for the passage is clearly Euripides' *Bacchae* 945-956 and 949-950,²⁷⁵ his use of the word "μετοχλίζω" at 46.126-7 (ἔλπετο δ' ἀκαμάτων ἐπικείμενον ὑψόθεν ὤμων/ Θήβης ἐπταπόροιο μετοχλίζειν πυλεῶνα) seems particularly close to that of Philostratus in *Imagines* 2.21.5.

The figure of Palaestra (*Imagines* 2.32) does not appear at all in the *Dionysiaca*, although Nonnus does make frequent use of personification in his poem. As Miguélez-Cavero has demonstrated, "both the cosmic and earthly frames of Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* benefit from the deployment of personifications."²⁷⁶ There is no personification of wrestling, but one of the wrestlers in Nonnus is a personification: Ampelus. As we saw in our earlier discussion of the Dionysus-Ampelus bout, Ampelus, like Palaestra, is a more complex figure than a mere personification. Nonnus' use of

²⁷³ Vian, 1976, p.116, n.6

²⁷⁴ Simon, 2004, p.161

²⁷⁵ Simon, op. cit. p.237, n. to 116-127

²⁷⁶ Miguélez-Cavero, 2013, p.377

personification is extensive: other personifications around wine, for example, include Staphylos, Botrus, Methe, Pithos and Ambrosia.²⁷⁷

Although Palaestra herself does not appear in the *Dionysiaca*, Dionysus' wrestling opponent and future wife Pallene shares some of her characteristics, both physical and moral. We should note at the start, however, that two physical characteristics immediately differentiate Palaestra from Pallene and other desirable female characters in the *Dionysiaca*: as we have seen, Palaestra has short hair and her skin is coloured by the sun.²⁷⁸ Pallene has very long hair (ἀμετρήτων δὲ κομῶν 48.116) and her skin is pink (ρόδης παλάμης 48.132) and white (χιονώδεα χεῖρα 48.133), as one would expect in Nonnus. There is a further difference, in that Palaestra is naked to the waist, while Pallene wears a red breast band (48.115). Nevertheless, a close examination reveals that they do have important elements in common.

Palaestra, like Pallene, is young (ῥήβησσα 2.32.1). Philostratus does not specifically mention her beauty, but as she is the daughter of Hermes, the reader can safely assume it; Nonnus tells us that Pallene, who is of less exalted stock, is lovely (Παλλήνη δ' ἐρόεσσα 48.138). They are both skilled wrestlers: Palaestra, Philostratus tells us, is superior in the art (περιεῖναι τῆς τέχνης 2.32.3); Pallene demonstrates that she knows the wrestling moves (τεχνήμονι παλμῶ 48.138). Wrestling is, of course, not a usual occupation for a young woman in antiquity²⁷⁹ and as we have seen, both writers make much of this. Indeed, this apparent paradox is the basis of both the *ekphraseis* of the inventor of wrestling and of the wrestling match with Dionysus. Philostratus makes much of the androgynous nature of Palaestra, while Nonnus leaves the reader in no doubt, through the descriptions of Pallene's hair, complexion, skin and loveliness that she is feminine. Yet Nonnus introduces Pallene at the beginning of the wrestling match as very much a masculine figure, a bold spear-bearer

²⁷⁷ Verhelst, in Accorinti, 2016, pp.152-172 at p.163

²⁷⁸ When he is wooing Nicaia, Dionysus urges her not to let the sun darken her skin (μὴ σέλας Ἡελίου μελέων ἀκτῖνα μαραίνῃ 16.115).

²⁷⁹ Based on the scarcity of references to women wrestling in the texts that have come down to us.

(τολμήεσσα δορυσσόος ἵστατο κούρη 48.104). Even though there is no mention for Pallene of Palaestra's "manliness" (ἀνδρείας 2.23.2), Nonnus' description of the girl as scary (ῥιγεδανῆς ... κούρης 48.100) and her limbs as strong (βριαρῶν μελέων 48.111) would fit well with Palaestra.

We should not forget that both are portrayed with olive oil, befitting wrestlers. Palaestra sits holding an olive branch; Pallene covers herself with the oil (48.121).

Accorinti notes that Pallene, when she lays off her cloak, "si riappropria della sua femminilità, apparendo θηλυφανής."²⁸⁰ It is true that from this point on - that is, during the conduct of the bout, when she is in physical contact with Dionysus - her femininity is emphasised, as both the comic element of the woman versus god mismatch and the erotic element take over. She remains, however, a game fighter, not surrendering to superior force and indeed carrying on seemingly undaunted. In other words, she continues to behave in a "manly" way.

There are no other women wrestlers in the *Dionysiaca*, but there is no shortage of feisty females. In particular, two important figures, Nicaia and Aura, bear similarities to Palaestra. Nicaia is a nymph and huntress, whose story takes up a good part of Books 15 and 16.²⁸¹ The first part of her story involves the pursuit of Nicaia by the love-struck herdsman Hymnos, whom she kills; the second part is her punishment by Dionysus, ending in her rape and the birth of Telete. Unlike Palaestra and like Pallene, her skin is white (χιονώδεα κούρην 15.213) and pink (ροδοειδέα κύκλα προσώπου 15.219) and she has long hair (βότρυν ... κόμης 15.230), though she has no interest in perfume (οὐδὲ μύρω μεμέλητο 15.190). She is of course beautiful (καλλιφύης Νίκαια 15.171). There is no direct reference to "manliness" and her spear-lifting is no doubt common for a huntress (πολλάκι δ' ἔγχος ἄειρε... 15.186), but she seems to take the hunting to extremes of daring and show strength beyond that of a man. Nonnus shows her in action, often through the eyes of the watching Hymnos, and she is at her most daring and demonstrates the greatest strength when he sees her "wrestling" a lioness:

²⁸⁰ Accorinti, 2004, p.634, n. to 111ff.

²⁸¹ 15.169 to 16.342.

πῶς δὲ λεοντείη παλάμην ἐσφίγξατο δειρῇ

δίζυγα γυρώσασα βραχίονα μάρτυρι δεσμῷ (15.247-8)

Gerlaud in his edition traces Nicaia's origins through the literary tradition of hunting nymphs.²⁸² He also notes how Nonnus takes his portrait beyond the hunting nymph: "Nicaia apparaît comme une force de la nature et elle garde envers et contre tout une admirable force de caractère."²⁸³ He also notes how Nonnus plays on the gender paradox, by making Nicaia the strong active one and Hymnos the weaker, softer creature.²⁸⁴ Nicaia not only defends her virginity, she defends it "trop cruellement."²⁸⁵ As we have noted, the story of Nicaia spreads over two books of the *Dionysiaca* and there is space for the portrait of the nymph to develop. Philostratus' *ekphrasis*, by contrast, is short and sharp, the description, supposedly, of a painting. Nevertheless, despite the difference in scale and context, and despite the physical differences between the women already discussed, there seems an affinity between them. Both are young, forceful – indeed aggressive – women, of considerable physical force and skill, both determined to keep away from love.

The story of Aura, in many ways a doublet of the Nicaia story, appears in Book 48, immediately following the Pallene episode, right at the end of the *Dionysiaca*,²⁸⁶ after a first mention right at the beginning.²⁸⁷ Like Nicaia, Pallene and Palaestra, she is young and beautiful (ὑπέρτερος ἥλικος ἥβης 48.249); like Nicaia and Pallene, she is pink-skinned (ροδόπηχυσ 48.250). The only obvious physical difference between her and the other two Nonnian women is that there is no mention of her hair. Like Nicaia she is a hunter of wild beasts, including the lioness (καταιχμάζουσα λεαίνης 48.252), although she brings down the lioness with her spear rather than her bare hands. In her "manliness" (ἀντιάνειραν 48.247), Vian specifically draws parallels between Aura and Pallene: she is "à la fois

²⁸² Gerlaud, Bernard: *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome 6. Chants 14-17*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1994, pp.51-53.

²⁸³ Gerlaud, op. cit. p.56

²⁸⁴ Gerlaud, op. cit. p.57

²⁸⁵ Gerlaud, op. cit. p.56

²⁸⁶ 48.238-651

²⁸⁷ 1.27-28

semblable à un homme (“virile”) et adversaire du mâle: a cet égard elle ressemble à Palléné.”²⁸⁸

Considering her treatment of Hymnos, we might extend the parallel to Nicaia. Like Nicaia, she is a companion of Artemis. When Nonnus first describes her, he says that she is ignorant of love (νήλις Ἐρωτος 48.243), but it becomes clear that she is just as fiercely defensive of her virginity as Nicaia, Pallene or Palaestra. When she has a dream under a daphne bush predicting her marriage, not only is she described during the dream by Eros as “loving virginity” (φιλοπάρθενον Αὔρην 48.280), she is so angry with the tree on waking (μαίνεται δάφνη 48.287) that she reproaches the tree for not being “philoparthenos” as she had a right to expect (48.295). It is this fury that will lead to her scornful treatment of Artemis and ultimately to her rape and the birth of the third Dionysus.

In the Aura episode, as we have seen, the incident that brings on Artemis’ anger at Aura is her mocking of the size and shape of the goddess’ breasts. Indeed, if we leave aside the fact that unlike Palaestra at least Pallene and Aura wear breast bands,²⁸⁹ breasts seem indicative of the strong link between Philostratus’ Palaestra and Nonnus’ Pallene, Nicaia and Aura. In the short description of Palaestra, her breasts are given significant emphasis and both her skill at wrestling and her antipathy to love are discussed in reference to them. The expression of their size is slightly mysterious (μικρὰ τῆς ὀμῆς 2.32.3) but seems to mean that they are small and only just swelling. Pallene’s breasts are described, again slightly mysteriously, as circular (τροχόεσσιν ἔσταν 48.115) and firm (ἀκλινέων ... μαζῶν 48.115). Taken in the context of her comparison to Artemis, this seems to amount to the same thing. In the text of the *Dionysiaca* as it stands, Nicaia’s breasts are described only by colour (μαζῶν/χιονέω 15.261-2; ῥοδόεντι ... μαζῶν 15.334). Tantalisingly, there is a gap in the text just at the point where Nicaia’s charms are being described (15.229). Gerlaud speculates that this gap “devait mentionner la poitrine de Nicaia.”²⁹⁰ In Aura’s case, the character herself draws attention to the importance of breast size and shape. Not only does she mock the goddess, but she also describes

²⁸⁸ Vian, 2003, p.156

²⁸⁹ Hymnos describes Nicaia as having no breast band (ἔκτοθι μίτρης 15.262)

²⁹⁰ Gerlaud, 1994, p.216

both the appropriate breasts for a virgin and her own in a way that links back to Palaestra. She talks of the “male breast” of Athena (ἄρσενα μαζὸν Ἀθήνης 48.353) as the sign of the virgin; her own are fruits just ripening (ὄμφακας οἰδαίνοντας 48.365) and, significantly, “not feminine” (ἀθήλεας). She had already described her own form as “male” (μορφὴν / ἄρσενα 48.362-3). To return to Nicaia, there seems to be a connection to the *ekphrasis* of Palaestra in Hymnos’ dreams of being able to touch her breasts. He first imagines being the strained bowstring stretched back to her breast (15.261-2) as he sees her, untouchable; he returns to this picture of the bowstring touching her breast as he imagines her shooting him - indeed he dares her to shoot him - with her arrow (πελαζομένην σέο μαζῷ 15.334). This brings to mind Philostratus’ report of Palaestra’s claim that no-one would ever touch her breast (2.32.4).

One might expect that aggressive young women who scorn men would invite comparisons to Amazons. In fact, Nonnus only uses the word “Ἀμαζών” several times in relation to Nicaia: after she points her spear at Hymnos (15.314); when Dionysus is thinking of her (16.26); when he is speaking to her (16.137); when he is pursuing her (16.245); and once Nicaia uses the word to describe her former self while addressing Aura (48.826). Vian notes that Nonnus customarily uses the term Amazon “au sens large pour désigner une vierge guerrière ou chasserresse,”²⁹¹ though we note that of the women we have been discussing Nicaia is the only man-slayer, so perhaps comes closest to the warrior Amazons. He does not use the term for Pallene or Aura. On the other hand, he does use the Homeric term “ἀντιάειραν” for Aura (48.247), an uncommon word used in the *Iliad* to refer to Amazons (3.189).²⁹² In other words, Nonnus does not see the three young women as true Amazon types, except in the loosest way. There are of course “real” Amazons in the *Dionysiaca*. Thus, the image or example of the Amazons is clearly present but does not fully explain the particular type of young woman represented in these figures.

²⁹¹ Vian, 2003, p.202

²⁹² Vian, 2003, p.156, n. to 243-257

If we consider these points together, it is clear that for both Philostratus and Nonnus, as for the other writers of Late Antiquity we have discussed, the basis of wrestling descriptions is the *Iliad* and the connection remains central. We have seen that while a writer like Quintus remained close to the original, stressing the athletic contest, others, like Lucian, used variations on the theme for their own wider purposes. For his part, Philostratus in the *Imagines* was attracted by the movement and colour of the contest and stressed the unusual and paradoxical elements. He also introduced the figure of Palaestra, a somewhat enigmatic figure difficult to pin down, part mother, part athlete, part ferocious virgin, part personification. Like Philostratus, Nonnus found the wrestling contest interesting enough to use beyond the strictly athletic, Homer-inspired context and like him emphasised the unusual and paradoxical. In the details of the contests described by Nonnus, as we have seen, and in a shared aesthetic, hints of Philostratus emerge. Beyond this, Nonnus like Philostratus introduces a female element into the male world of wrestling. Nonnus does not imitate Palaestra's looks in his own characters, but he has Pallene put into action Palaestra's virgin ferocity. Indeed, there are hints in Nonnus' Nicaia and Aura of Philostratus' intriguing figure.

Chapter 3: Amphion and Phaethon

In the first two chapters we examined aspects of the *Imagines* and the *Dionysiaca* that have what we might describe as strong thematic links within each of the works. In Chapter 1 we considered the treatment of the figure of Dionysus and his followers by the two authors. Dionysus is important enough to Philostratus to be presented in a grouping of works within the *Imagines*; it goes without saying that Dionysus is fundamental to the *Dionysiaca*. Chapter 2 dealt not with characters common to the two works, but with an activity that appears on several occasions within each work: wrestling. We saw that this unremarkable gymnastic activity was used in quite remarkable ways by both writers.

In this chapter we consider two characters, Amphion and Phaeton, familiar from earlier Greek literature, but having no particular links to one another. Each figure appears in one picture in the *Imagines*, though they both appear on several occasions in the course of the *Dionysiaca*. For our purposes, the appearances of these characters in the works are important as providing further examples of the connection between the two writers. Just what these connections might be is considered in Summary sections of the discussions below.

Amphion

The twin sons of Antiope and Zeus, Amphion and Zethus, first appear in literature in Homer.²⁹³

There is a brief mention of Amphion in the *Iliad* (13.692), but no mention of his brother. In the *Odyssey*, Amphion and Zethus are mentioned when Odysseus sees Antiope in Hades. While Homer

²⁹³ A biography of the brothers appears in Apollodorus: *Library* 3.5.5.

mentions the two sons and that they built Thebes and its walls (Θήβης ἔδος ἔκτισαν ἑπταπύλοιο, / πύργωσάν τ' 13.263-4), as Pausanias points out in his *Description of Greece*, there is no mention in Homer of Amphion building the wall with his lyre (ὅτι δὲ Ἀμφίων ἦδε καὶ τὸ τεῖχος ἐξεργάζετο πρὸς τὴν λύραν, οὐδένα ἐποιήσατο λόγον ἐν τοῖς ἔπεσι 9.5.7). It is just this story, the story of the building of the walls of Thebes with the power of music that later writers will favour.

In the *Argonautica*, Apollonius Rhodius presents the story of Amphion and Zethus as part of his *ekphrasis* of the fabulous cloak given to Jason by Athena (1.721-68). The story is one of the many intricate designs (δαίδαλα πολλὰ 1.729) on the cloak. Both the brothers are present, working on the building of Thebes, which still has no walls (ἀπύργωτος 1.736). A clear distinction is drawn between the two: Zethus is labouring (μογέοντι ἐοικώς 1.739), shifting mountains, while Amphion plays his lyre and the stones follow him (μετ' ἔχνια νίσσετο πέτρῃ 1.740). The clear implication is of the superiority of music over brute force.²⁹⁴ It is thus the distinction between the brothers that is important for Apollonius.²⁹⁵ Note that here Amphion's lyre is described as golden (χρυσέῃ φόρμιγγι 1.740).

Philostratus: *Imagines* 1.10

Philostratus starts his piece with a potted history of the lyre: how it was made by Hermes, given first to Apollo and the Muses and then to Amphion, who used it to build the walls of Thebes. The second section is a detailed description of the lyre itself and is reminiscent of the description of Hermes' invention of the lyre in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 41-54. There is a difference, however, in the materials used in the construction of the respective lyres (tortoiseshell, reeds, ox hide and sheep-gut for the *Hymn*; horn, boxwood and tortoiseshell for Philostratus). Philostratus is much more detailed

²⁹⁴ "la forza bruta è un element sempre svalutato nel poema." Paduano, Guido and Massimo Fusillo (Eds.): *Apollonio Rodio. Le Argonautiche*, Milan (BUR), 1986, p.179, n. to 735-41

²⁹⁵ Vian notes the Zethus-Amphion opposition in the fragments of Euripides' *Antiope*: Vian, Francis (Ed.): *Apollonios de Rhodes. Argonautiques. Tome 1. Chants 1-2*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1974, p.258, n. to 741

in his description. Of course, this might be expected in a book of *ekphraseis*, but is also in keeping with the particular aesthetic we have observed throughout the *Imagines*. Besides making much of the difference in materials,²⁹⁶ he makes much of contrasting colours and shapes, particularly the circles covering the lyre.

In the third section he concentrates on Amphion himself. He is singing and playing, but Philostratus' attention is on his appearance and on his clothes. His hair is not only lovely (ἡδεῖα 1.10.3), but even shimmers with gold (χρυσοῦ τι ἐπιφαίνουσα 1.10.3). But it is for his clothing, including his most beautiful headband (ἄγαλμα ἡδιστον), and especially for his iridescent cloak (οὐ γὰρ ἐφ' ἐνὸς μένει χρώματος, ἀλλὰ τρέπεται καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἴριν μετανθεῖ 1.10.3) that Philostratus reserves his greatest effort. Dubel notes Philostratus' fondness for iridescence and remarks that with this cloak "this unstable polychromy begins to get out of hand."²⁹⁷ As Baumann notes, this seems to be part of a wider desire in the *Imagines* to demonstrate virtuosity, including in the handling of colour.²⁹⁸ The Sophist tells us that he thinks (δοκῶ μοι 1.10.3) both the lyre and cloak were gifts of Hermes. In this section Amphion is already singing and playing and the walls are being formed of their own accord (αὐτόματα 1.10.3).

Section 4 is a description of the seated Amphion playing, a description that is somewhat confusing.²⁹⁹ Section 5 describes the movement of the stones, drawn by the music (ἀκούουσι καὶ γίνονται τεῖχος 1.10.5). The stones themselves take on almost human characteristics (φιλότιμοι καὶ ἡδεῖς 1.10.5) as they serve music (θητεύοντες μουσικῇ 1.10.5). The piece ends by stating that the walls of Thebes have seven gates, just as the lyre has seven strings.

Considered as a whole, one of the most striking features of this piece is the importance of colour and form. The detailed description of lyre and clothing goes well beyond anything in the *Homeric Hymn*

²⁹⁶ Dubel, Sandrine: "Colour in Philostratus' *Imagines*," in Bowie and Elsner, 2009, pp.309-321 at p.315 n.23

²⁹⁷ Dubel, op. cit. p.317

²⁹⁸ Baumann, 2011, p.175

²⁹⁹ Schönberger, 1968, p.310

to *Hermes*. Apollonius in his brief version does not go into such details about the Amphion story, though it is part of a larger *ekphrasis* of Jason's cloak. Thebes is commonly known for its seven gates, but Philostratus makes a particular point, right at the end of the piece, of drawing the parallel between the number of gates and the number of strings.

Nonnus: *Dionysiaca* Book 25

Thebes and the Thebans have a special place in the *Dionysiaca*. Cadmus is first mentioned at 1.45 and we meet him as he wanders looking for his sister Europa. Thanks to his quick wit, he subsequently helps Zeus in his fight against Typhon (Books 1 and 2). We follow his wanderings (Book 3), his wooing of Harmonia (Book 4) and his foundation of Thebes and wedding (Book 5).³⁰⁰ We are presented with the story of Zeus and Semele and the birth of Dionysus (Books 7 and 8). The story of the building of Thebes appears again in the Proem to the second half of the *Dionysiaca* (Book 25). Cadmus and his family appear again in Thebes in the Pentheid (Books 44-46).

Amphion first appears in Book 5, as Cadmus builds his city. In this first narrative of the building of Thebes there is no mention of his brother Zethus. Cadmus is making an earthly version of Olympus (ποικίλον ἀσκήσας χθόνιον τύπον, ἴσον Ὀλύμπῳ 5.87), and uses his own skill to reproduce the seven zones of heaven (οὐρανὸν ἐπτάζωνον 5.65) and build seven gates to represent the seven planets (5.67-8), while Amphion is left the more mundane task of providing walls for the future inhabitants with his "tower-building lyre" (πυργοδόμῳ κιθάρῃ 5.67.68). No further details of Amphion's wall-building are provided.

A much fuller account is provided in Book 25. The context here is quite different. Here we are not in a narrative, but an *ekphrasis* in which Nonnus describes the shield, made by Hephaestus, given to Dionysus by Attis on behalf of Rhea. The building of Thebes, the birthplace of Dionysus, is one of the

³⁰⁰ A different version of the wedding, this time in Libya, appears at 13.333-392.

scenes on the shield. Of course, as the *ekphrasis* is the description of a shield, especially one made by Hephaestus, there is an immediate link to Achilles' shield in *Iliad* 18, one that must have been obvious to any of Nonnus' readers and is in itself rich in layers of meaning.³⁰¹ The wall-building section is just part of a whole that also includes "the rapture of Ganymedes by Zeus' eagle; the resurrection of Tylus; and the disgorgement of Chronus' children through a ploy of Rhea."³⁰² The Tylus episode is particularly interesting in that it seems to go beyond the limits of the *ekphrasis*; the element of resurrection in this episode has drawn much interest from those interested in the *Dionysiaca*'s Christian links.³⁰³

As for the wall-building section, the connection to Apollonius of Rhodes is also clear, as the scene follows the pattern of the corresponding scene in the *Argonautica*.³⁰⁴ As in the *Argonautica*, both Zethus and Amphion appear, and as in that poem, their respective actions are contrasted. Just as Zethus was labouring in Apollonius (μογέοντι ἐοικώς 1.739), so he is here (κάμνων 25.147). The language is very similar (*Argonautica*: ἐπωμαδὸν ἠέρταζεν 1.738; *Dionysiaca*: ἐπωμίδι φόρτον ἀείρων 25.418); Nonnus too mentions Zethus' labours, although his burden is uncharacteristically downplayed here: there is no mention of him carrying a mountain top, just a stony burden (25.417). Nonnus does stress the selflessness of his actions (περὶ πατρίδι 25.417). But unlike Apollonius and exactly like Philostratus, Nonnus' main interest is in Amphion. He notes the difference in the brothers' efforts, but does not turn it into an opposition, as Apollonius does.

Of particular interest for current purposes here is that Nonnus' description of the building of the walls is, like *Argonautica* 1.735-741 and *Imagines* 1.10, part of an *ekphrasis* of a work of art, rather than a description arising in the course of the narrative. The types of objects described in the three works differ: in Apollonius it is a cloak, a textile; in Philostratus it is a painting; in Nonnus it is a

³⁰¹ Shorrock, Robert, 2001, pp.174-8

³⁰² Spanoudakis in Spanoudakis, 2014, p.333

³⁰³ Spanoudakis, op. cit. pp.337-58

³⁰⁴ Vian, 2003, p.262, n. to 414-421

shield, metalwork. Nevertheless, if the materials and techniques vary, all three are skilful pictorial representations. Comparisons between the works are therefore particularly telling. When Nonnus moves to the longer part of his description of wall-building, the part concerned with Amphion, he makes much of the relationship between the depiction on the shield and the viewer, and connections to Philostratus become clearer.

What is pictured by Nonnus is Amphion playing his harp (ἐλίγαινε λυροκτύπος 25.419) and a “hill” dancing to the music (ἐχόρευε κολώνη). It is a very simple image, expressed with not many more words than Apollonius’ and even with echoes of his language (φόρμιγγι λιγαίνων 1.740). Where it differs is in the development of this simple picture. It is built on the contrast between the fixed figures on the shield and movement, between silence and music and between art and reality. The whole is described in an atmosphere of wonder and enchantment (οἷά τε θελγομένη 25.421), with some typical Nonnian verbal touches (αὐτοκύλιστον ἔλιξ 25.420). Nonnus stresses that what he is describing is a made object (ποιητὴν περ ἑοῦσαν 25.422), and it is this that gives the scene wonder, in a series of paradoxes. For the unmoving rock dances (ἄκινήτης ἐλελίζετο παλμός ἐρίπνης 25.423) to a silent lyre (σιγαλή δὲ λύρη 25.424) and the rock itself is fictitious (ψευδήμονι πέτρῃ 25.425).

Nonnus brings the reader into the scene (τάχα φαίης 25.421; ἄγχι μολεῖν ἔσπευδες 25), to bear witness, as it were, to the near reality of the fiction. What is stressed here is what the reader hears: it might bring pleasure to his heart (ὑμετέρην φρένα τέρψης 25.427). We have already seen in this and other *ekphraseis* that Philostratus commonly introduces senses other than sight into his descriptions.³⁰⁵ Nonnus’ commentators note that the idea that things described appear real is a commonplace in *ekphrasis* and that use of hearing is not new.³⁰⁶ Nevertheless, as we have seen, Philostratus introduces the senses into so many of his works, usually as a way of heightening the

³⁰⁵ “Within the Sophist’s discourse, the ability to perceive the sounds and scents of the painting is an important aspect of the perceptual world of the gallery.” Webb in Costantini, Graziani and Rolet, 2006, p.131

³⁰⁶ Vian, for example, quotes Quintus Smyrnaeus (φαίης κε ζῶντας 5.13). Vian, 2003, p.263, n. to 421-423. He also notes, p. 263, n. to 424-428, that Apollonius of Rhodes mentions “paroles qu’on croirait entendre” (ψεύδοιό τε θυμόν, / ἐλπόμενος πυκινὴν τιν’ ἀπὸ σφείων ἑσακοῦσαι / βάζειν 1.765-7)

description, that he can be said to have made this technique his own. Nonnus builds up the Amphion scene to such a degree that it has been described as “on the borderline between description and narrative.”³⁰⁷ this would also apply to many of the scenes we have discussed from the *Imagines*.

There are two other details which coincide in Nonnus’ and Philostratus’ description of the building of Thebes. As we have seen, Philostratus describes the stones as running together towards the music (ἐπὶ τὴν ψδὴν συνθέουσι 1.10.5); this is very similar in Nonnus (ἀμφὶ δὲ μολπῆ/εις δρόμον... 25.420-1).³⁰⁸ Philostratus ends his piece by stressing the number seven, remarking that the number of strings on the lyre match the number of gates to the city (1.10.5); Nonnus writes of Amphion’s “seven-toned” song (μολπῆς ἑπτατόνοιο 25.428). This “fait allusion à la fois à la lyre à sept cordes et à Thèbes aux sept portes.”³⁰⁹ The number seven has already come up in the *ekphrasis* of Dionysus’ shield, when he referred to the seven zones of heaven (25.396) and the seven gates of Thebes (25.416).

Comparison

We have seen that there are similarities and differences in the respective treatments of the building of Thebes by Nonnus and Philostratus. The main difference is the absence of the figure of Zethus in *Imagines* 1.10. As for their treatment of Amphion and the building of the walls, while both Nonnus and Philostratus may well have been influenced by the *Argonautica*, neither shows much interest in Zethus. Even Nonnus, who does mention him, devotes only two lines to his efforts and describes them quite soberly, in contrast to the space and enthusiasm he devotes to Amphion. There are also small but striking similarities of detail in their *ekphraseis* that do not seem to be fully explained by this influence. This is not to suggest that Philostratus is the main or only influence for Nonnus’

³⁰⁷ Geisz, 2018a, p.147

³⁰⁸ Agosti, 2004, p.121, n. to 420

³⁰⁹ Vian, 2003, p..263 n. to 424-428

description of the building scene. But the similarities of detail do suggest that Nonnus was aware of *Imagines* 1.10.

Phaethon

Background

The story of the son of Clymene and Helius, who begged his father to be allowed to drive the fiery chariot and was finally allowed to do so with disastrous results, was treated by several Greek and Latin writers.³¹⁰ There are fragments of a *Heliades* by Aeschylus and a *Phaethon* by Euripides and versions of the story in Lucian³¹¹ and Hyginus.³¹² There are mentions of the myth in Plato³¹³ and Apollonius of Rhodes,³¹⁴ amongst others. The longest and most famous of the surviving versions appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.³¹⁵ It is this version that is most often discussed in connection with Nonnus.

Euripides

(*Phaethon*)

This tragedy has survived only in fragmentary form.³¹⁶ The surviving text of over two hundred lines, along with mentions in other authors, is sufficient to piece together some major elements of Euripides' treatment of the story, though much remains unclear or the subject of speculation. In this version, Clymene, daughter of Oceanus, is married to Merops, but neither her husband nor her son Phaethon realise that his real father is Helius. When Merops decides that Phaethon is to marry, Clymene tells her son about his father. He is not convinced but agrees to ask Helius for a gift that only a father could give. A messenger tells of his death in Helius' chariot and his smouldering body is

³¹⁰ For a list and discussion of versions up until the time of Nonnus refer Simon, Bernadette (Ed.): *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome 14. Chants 38-40*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1999, pp.23-28

³¹¹ *Dialogues of the Gods* 25

³¹² *Fables*, 152A.

³¹³ *Timaeus* 22C

³¹⁴ *Argonautica* 4.624

³¹⁵ 1.750-2.400

³¹⁶ For a discussion of the surviving text refer: Collard, Christopher and Martin Cropp: *Euripides. Fragments. Oedipus – Chrysippus. Other Fragments*, Cambridge and London (Loeb), 2008, pp.323-329. See also Simon, 1999, pp.23-24

delivered to Clymene, who cannot hide it from Merops. We learn of Merops' sorrow, but it is not clear whether he knows of Phaethon's parentage. The ending is unclear, but it has been suggested that Clymene is saved from Merops' anger by her father Oceanus.³¹⁷ There is no reference in the surviving text to the Heliades, but they are mentioned in his *Hippolytus* (ἄκτᾱς Ἡριδανοῦ θ' ὕδωρ, / ἔνθα πορφύρεον σταλάσ- / σουσ' ἐς οἶδμα τάλαιναι / κόραι Φαέθοντος οἴκτῳ δακρύων / τὰς ἠλεκτροφαεῖς αὐγὰς 737-741).³¹⁸

As we will see, the "family drama" aspect of Euripides' Phaethon is not taken up by later writers, although the character of Merops re-appears in Ovid.

Ovid

(*Metamorphoses* 1.750-2.400)

In Ovid's version, as in Euripides', Phaethon is the illegitimate son of Phoebus and Clymene, his mother, is married to Merops.

The long Phaethon episode in the *Metamorphoses* (1.750-2.400) begins with an argument between Clymene's son and his companion, Epaphus, the son of Io, when Phaethon boasts that he is the son of Phoebus. From the start then, Phaethon's pride is emphasised (*superbum* 1.751; *tumidus* 1.753) as is his tempestuousness (*ferox* 1.758). After pleading with his mother for reassurance that the sun is indeed his father (1.758-64), and having received her assurance, he sets off, at Clymene's suggestion, to confront Phoebus (1.168-779). After a description of Phoebus' palace (2.1-19), there is another pleading scene, where Phaethon asks for proof that the Sun is his father (2.38). Phoebus' answer is to swear to give him anything he wants (2.44), which leads to the fatal request to drive Phoebus' chariot for a day (2.47). After a long warning scene (2.49-102), followed by descriptions of

³¹⁷ Collard and Cropp, 2008, p.327

³¹⁸ Simon, 1999, p.24

the car and the dawn, and advice for the novice driver (2.103-49), Phaethon drives off in the chariot. There is soon trouble as with the young and inexperienced driver the chariot is as if empty (*similisque est currus inani* 2.166). There follows a long description of the chaos it causes in the order of the heavens and the fiery destruction it brings to earth. In the end, Earth (Tellus) begs for help (2.280-300), Jupiter hurls a lightning bolt at Phaethon (2.311-12) and he falls into the River Eridanus. After Phaethon's death, Ovid tells of Clymene's grief and of the metamorphosis of her daughters, the Heliades, into trees (2.345-363). Their tears turn to amber (*stillataque sole rigescunt / de ramis electra novis* 2.364-5). The distressed Phoebus is finally forced by Jupiter to resume his daily chariot ride, but he does so while taking it out his sorrow at the death of his son on his horses (*Phoebus equos stimuloque dolens et verbera saevit* 2.399).

Lucian (*Dialogues of the Gods* 25)

Lucian presents the story of Phaethon in a comic dialogue between Zeus and Helios. Zeus upbraids Helios for letting his son drive his chariot (μειρακίῳ ἀνοήτῳ πιστεύσας τὸ ἄρμα) while Helios justifies himself as best he can. No mention here of Merops, but Clymene, according to Helios, is partly to blame for joining in her son's entreaties to be allowed to drive his father's chariot (καὶ ἡ μήτηρ Κλυμένη μετ' αὐτοῦ). The usual elements are present: the boy loses control, the chariot goes off track, and Zeus launches a thunderbolt that brings him down to stop further damage. At the end, Zeus orders that Phaethon's sisters bury him by the Eridanus, that they be changed into poplars and that they weep tears of amber.

As Simon notes,³¹⁹ Phaethon is shown here as fearful (οἶμαι δεδιώς μὴ ἐκπέσῃ αὐτός). She also notes that the damage done by the chariot going off course is to the Earth (ἀπολώλεκας τὰ ἐν τῇ γῇ ἅπαντα), with no mention of any universal dislocation. We might add that in this comic piece, Helios

³¹⁹ Simon, 1999, p.27

is depicted - or depicts himself though his excuses - as something between a hen-pecked husband and a foolish, doting father.

Philostratus: *Imagines* 1.11

The opening sentence of *Imagines* 1.11 has been noted for its striking use of hyperbaton adding to its vividness (χρυσᾶ τῶν Ἡλιάδων τὰ δάκρυα 1.11.1).³²⁰ Philostratus' version of the Phaethon story as presented in Section 1 might serve as a summary of Ovid, with Philostratus adding to its vividness by presenting not only the first sentence, but the summary itself in reverse order. Thus, we learn that the Heliades are shedding golden tears; that they are being shed for Phaethon; that he drove his father's chariot and that he fell into the Eridanus (1.11.1). But the first section ends rather ironically with a dismissal by the Sophist of any interpretation of the scene by learned men (τοῖς μὲν σοφοῖς 1.11.1), stressing instead the pictorial element: horses and chariot (ἵπποι καὶ ἄρμα 1.11.1).³²¹ This seems an unusual beginning by the Sophist, whose role is nominally to show the boy how to interpret the paintings in the gallery.³²² But here, as might be expected of a depiction of Phaethon, Philostratus does stress fire.³²³

In section 2, where the "real description begins,"³²⁴ Philostratus describes the heavens in uproar (συγχεῖται τὰ οὐράνια 1.11.2). Night chases day (νὺξ μὲν ἐκ μεσημβρίας ἐλαύνει τὴν ἡμέραν); the sun moves towards earth, drawing the stars with it; the Horae leave the gates and flee into the darkness; the horses throw off their yokes; the Earth raises her hands as a suppliant as fire rushes towards her. Finally, Phaethon is falling, hair ablaze, towards the Eridanus. The description is pithy, as if itself a summary, and full of movement, in fact dense with verbs of motion (ρέων; ἔλκει;

³²⁰ Webb in Constantine, Graziani and Rolet, 2006, p.121

³²¹ Refer also: Newby, Zahra: "Absorption and Erudition in Philostratus' *Imagines*," in Bowie and Elsner, 2009, pp.322-42, at p.332

³²² But "this claim to be educating the young in the manner of interpreting painting should be treated with caution": Miles, 2018, p.83

³²³ Both Fairbanks (p.46, n.1) and Schönberger (p. 312) reference here Lucretius 2.392ff.

³²⁴ "Die eigentliche Beschreibung beginnt." Schönberger, p.313

φεύγουσιν; ἐκπεσόντες; αἶρει; αἶρει; ἐκπίπτει; καταφέρεται; ἐμπεσεῖται 1.11.2). The insistence on movement is, we have already seen in considering the *Imagines*, one of the techniques Philostratus frequently uses to increase the vividness of his *ekphraseis*. The themes of light versus dark and of fire continue from Section One. Philostratus' word picture is largely consistent with Ovid's account, perhaps with the exception of the fleeing Horae. Although Phaethon is described as being on fire, there is no mention here of Zeus or his thunderbolt: but what has burnt him, if not lightning?³²⁵ The brief picture of the pleading Earth raising her hands (ἡ Γῆ καὶ τὰς χεῖρας αἶρει ἄνω 1.11.2) seems to match the much longer speech scene in Ovid where Earth raises her hand to her brow (*opposuitque manum fronti* 2.276). The section ends in a change to future tense: when Phaethon falls into the Eridanus (Ἡριδανῷ ἐμπεσεῖται 1.11.3), this will give the Eridanus a "mythos" (παρέξει μῦθόν τινα τῷ ὕδατι 1.11.2). Philostratus is at once taking the story beyond what is pictured (presumably Phaethon in mid-air) and connecting it firmly with well-known myth.

The next section continues the use of the future tense. What Philostratus seems to be describing is swans pictured on the river with the personified wind blowing through their feathers (ταῦτά τοι καὶ πάρεστι τοῖς ὄρνισιν, ὥστε ὦρα ... 1.11.3). But before the reader gets to the point of understanding this, Philostratus tells the "mythos" of the Eridanus. Swans will make songs of Phaethon (ποιήσονται ὥδῃν 1.11.3) and will sing (ᾄδουσιν 1.11.3) to the Cayster and the Ister. This is a reference to the myth of Cycnus, related to Phaethon, who was turned into a swan after witnessing the amber tears of the Heliades. This is told by Ovid as part of the Phaethon story (2.367ff.), although this is only one of many retellings.³²⁶ The other element is the figure of Zephyrus, another personification.

The fourth section returns to the Heliades, whose tears were first mentioned at the start of the piece. After reminding the reader that the painting "knows" the well-known story (ἡ γραφή ταῦτα οἶδε 1.11.4), Philostratus expands on that brief summary and it becomes a detailed *ekphrasis* of the

³²⁵ Schönberger, p. 314

³²⁶ For another version of Cycnus see Schönberger, loc. cit.

Heliades standing on the banks of the Eridanus, emphasising light and colour. Philostratus' description of the painting captures the women at the time they are metamorphosing into poplars because of their brother (ἐπὶ τῷ ἀδελφῷ 1.11.4). The details of the metamorphosis are consistent with Ovid's descriptions in the equivalent passage in the *Metamorphoses*: feet taking root (*subita radice retenta est* 2.349; ῥίζας γὰρ βαλλομένη τοῖς σφυροῖς 1.11.4); arms turning to branches (*illa dolet fieri longos sua brachia ramos* 2.352; τὰς δὲ χεῖρας ὄζοι φθάνουσι 1.11.4); turning into trees to the waist (*complectitur inguina cortex* 2.353; ἐς ὀμφαλὸν δένδρα 1.11.4). In Ovid, Phaethon's sisters are horrified at their metamorphosis, while in Philostratus there is no suggestion of anything but sorrow at their brother's fate. Of course, Philostratus' piece is much shorter and is an *ekphrasis* rather than a narrative. This section takes up the golden tears of Section 1, while the fire of Section 2 becomes here the shining of their eyes and the glitter of the tears, with the addition of a note of red (ἔρρευθος 1.11.4) in their cheeks.

The final section presents a personification of the river. Like the Heliades, the river laments Phaethon's fate (θρηνεῖ 1011.5). Philostratus also tells the reader what is going to happen, rather than simply what the painting actually displays, thus expanding the *ekphrasis* to complete the story, just as in Section 1 he has given us the background to the painting. There are two actions relayed in the future tense. Firstly, the river will receive Phaethon into its bosom, or so the attitude of the River suggests (τὸ γὰρ σκῆμα δεξαμένου 1.11.5). Secondly, the River will harvest (γεωργήσῃ 1.11.5) the tears of the Heliades, turning them into stone (λιθουργήσῃ 1.11.5). This at once provides an explanation for amber (τὰ τῶν αἰγείρων ψήγματα 1.11.5³²⁷) and introduces a new and contrasting element to the *ekphrasis*: cold. So far the description has associated brightness and gleaming, so much a part of this piece, with fire and heat, just as Phaethon is naturally associated with the sun; but now we still have that brightness in the river (διὰ φαιδροῦ τοῦ ὕδατος 1.11.5), but also winds and frosty cold (αὔραις γὰρ καὶ κρυμοῖς 1.11.5).

³²⁷ "So heißen die Tränen der Heliaden wegen ihrer Ähnlichkeit mit Gold." Schönberger, p.315

Thus in 1.11, Philostratus gives us an *ekphrasis* with some of his favourite elements, particularly brightness and fire, with colours of red and gold. He has of course included the most obvious element of the story, Phaethon's fall from the heavens. But half of the piece is taken up by the Eridanus, Cycnus and the Heliades. Besides the aesthetic concerns, the element of *paideia* is strong here, as Philostratus - or the Sophist - provides additional details and explanations, beyond the immediate subject of the painting.

Nonnus: *Dionysiaca*, Book 38

The fullest and longest treatment of the Phaethon story in the *Dionysiaca* appears in Book 38. But this is far from being the first mention of the myth in the poem. A quick glance at the general index to the Budé edition shows how often Phaethon is mentioned in the *Dionysiaca*.³²⁸ Simon³²⁹ notes that the references tend to fall into three categories: sorrow, reminding the author of the sorrow of the Heliades;³³⁰ the mention of amber;³³¹ and a river reminding Nonnus of the Eridanus.³³² There is a particular instance in Book 30.110-116, where the Phaethon story is the subject of a pantomime, or, rather, the memory of a pantomime. In that passage, after Morrheus has slain Phlogius, Nonnus reminds the reader that Phlogius was one of Dionysus' dancers and recounts his mime of the death of Phaethon for Dionysus. As Agosti notes,³³³ the reader is not unprepared when confronted with the main story of Phaethon in Book 38.

Nonnus' fullest account of the Phaethon story comes in the context of the truce between the Indian army and Dionysus, following immediately upon the funeral games of Book 37, and at the beginning of the seventh year of the war. The book starts with two premonitions, designed to reassure about

³²⁸ Vian, Francis and Marie-Christine Fayant: *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome 19. Index général des noms propres*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 2006

³²⁹ Simon, 1999, p.22

³³⁰ E.g. 2.152-157; 27.201-203; 15.381f; 19.184-186

³³¹ E.g. 38.434; 42.419-423; 43.414-416

³³² E.g. 23.89-93, 241-251; 11.32-34

³³³ Agosti, 2004, p.760

the favourable outcome of the war. The first is from the seer Idmon (38.31-374), in his only appearance in the *Dionysiaca*, who reassures Erechtheus, son of Hephaestus and leader of one of the contingents fighting for Dionysus. The second is from Hermes (38.75-95), who reassures Dionysus himself. During this premonition Hermes mentions the story of Phaethon (38.90-95) and it is at the instigation of Dionysus (38.96-102) that he tells the story that will take up the rest of the book, making it one of the longest “digressions” in the *Dionysiaca*.³³⁴

Nonnus’ version of the myth, as told by Hermes, presents, like Ovid’s, an exhaustive account of the story, starting with the birth of Phaethon’s mother, Clymene, continuing with her courtship with Helios, their wedding, the birth of Phaethon and his childhood. In other words, it covers many of the elements not mentioned in *Imagines* 1.11 and we will concentrate on those parts of the story covered by both writers. Nevertheless, there are interesting points in some of the extended story that are worth mentioning for our purposes. Firstly, as Geisz notes, digression in Nonnus presents an opportunity “to engage in a game of repetition of themes and scenes.”³³⁵ So it is in this episode. We have already noted the references to Phaethon earlier in the *Dionysiaca*, as if Nonnus were building up for the complete story. Besides this, we are given a further example of Nonnus’ fascination with bathing scenes, as Helios sees Clymene bathing naked (38.120-129). The scene contains the typical elements of such Nonnian scenes: the bather unaware that she is being watched, the naked body half-concealed by water, the roundness and whiteness of her breasts. The episode shows again Nonnus’ love of repetition with variation, as we see, for example, parallels between the wedding of Clymene and Helios and that of Harmonia and Cadmus in Book 5.³³⁶ There is even repetition within the episode, as we see the child Phaethon first playing with a make-believe

³³⁴ This digression has received much comment. Refer Simon, 1999, pp.5-6

³³⁵ Geisz, in Accorinti, 2016, p.189

³³⁶ Simon, 1999, pp. 8-9

chariot and then with his father's real chariot (38.167-183).³³⁷ The episode also includes scenes of the stars and planets, much favoured in the *Dionysiaca*.

Imagines 1.11 does not include the birth of Phaethon, but parallels have been drawn to the description of the birth of Dionysus in *Imagines* 1.14. Nonnus describes the baby Phaethon at birth as "jumping out" (ἀποθρώσκοντα 38.146) of his mother's womb; Philostratus uses almost identical language in his description of the birth of Dionysus (ὁ δὲ Διόνυσος τῆς μὲν μητρὸς ἐκθρώσκει ῥαγείσης τὴν γαστέρα). Agosti remarks that this passage "forse ha agito da catalizzatore per il riuso di una metafora che il poeta ritrovava nel linguaggio caldaico a lui familiare."³³⁸

The length and detail of Nonnus' treatment of Phaethon is in itself enough to raise questions of the nature of the connection between the poet and Ovid. Of course, this is part of a wider question about the two poets, one that has exercised Nonnus experts for a long time, particularly since the publication of Braune's study.³³⁹ This question and the debate surrounding it - "un problema spinosa"³⁴⁰ - are outside our scope. In her edition of the *Dionysiaca*, Simon discusses the issue in some detail.³⁴¹ Suffice it here to say that there are many similarities, and quite a number of differences. As an example of the latter: in Ovid, Clymene is married to Merops; in Nonnus, Clymene is married to Helios and there is no question of his paternity.

The elements that are common to Nonnus and Philostratus concern the final part of the story: the chaos in the heavens; Phaethon on fire and his fall; the Eridanus; the Heliades, their sorrow, their metamorphosis and their tears turning to amber. Of the more than 300 lines devoted to the myth of Phaethon in Book 38, nearly a third (38.318-409) concern the loss of control of the chariot by Phaethon and the ensuing chaos caused by the erratic gallop of the horses. Yet before this section,

³³⁷ Simon, 1999, pp. 12-13

³³⁸ Agosti, 2004, p.788, n. to 146. See also the other references quoted by Agosti in this passage.

³³⁹ Braune, Julius: *Nonnus und Ovid*, Greifswald (Greifswald), 1935

³⁴⁰ Agosti, 2004, p.762

³⁴¹ Simon, 1999, pp.28-40. See also: Chuvin, Pierre: "Nonnus from Our Time to His," in Bannert and Kröll 2018, pp.1-18 at pp.11-12

Nonnus already devotes considerable space to the description of the heavens and their workings during Helios' speech to his son before the boy's departure (38.220-290). These verses seem to be part showing off of Nonnus' knowledge, and part fascination with a topic that appears again and again in the *Dionysiaca*. In particular there is the insistence on the order of the universe and of Phaethon's obligation to observe and preserve this order by following the proper course set by his father: for example, in a passage of six lines, three start with "μηδέ" and one with "μή" (38.256-262).

It is the breaking of this universal order and the onset of chaos when Phaethon loses control of the chariot and it races off course that Nonnus describes most forcibly and with the greatest apparent relish. It is a theme, to which he returns again and again in the *Dionysiaca*, starting in the very first book, though it is here that he gives his most extended description of chaos in the heavens. As Simon points out, he lets his imagination run free, without worrying about completeness or orthodoxy, and he treats at length what is only mentioned briefly in the battle against Typhon (2.654-659).³⁴²

Phaethon's end comes quickly and without transition in Nonnus. In just two lines we learn that Zeus has knocked him from the heavens with a lightning bolt (Ζεὺς δὲ πατὴρ Φαέθοντα κατεπρήνιξε κεραυνῷ 38.410) and that he has fallen into the Eridanus (ὑψόθεν αὐτοκύλιστον ὑπὲρ ῥόον Ἥριδανοῖο 38.411). Rather than focussing on the details of Phaethon's destruction,³⁴³ Nonnus concentrates on the restoration of order. Zeus returns the horses to Helios and the heavens return to normal (38.412-415). The Earth is smiling again (γαῖα δὲ πᾶσα γέλασσε τὸ δεύτερον 38.416) as the fires caused by the heavenly horses are extinguished by Zeus' rain (38.416-420) and the fields laugh again as the Sun drives his chariot again and crops grow (38.421-424). The fate of the other actors in the drama are quickly explained, with both Phaethon (38.425-428) and the Eridanus

³⁴² Simon, 1999, p.20

³⁴³ "Nono accenna solo al momento della caduta dell'eroe." Agosti, 2004, p.821, n. to 400-405

(38.429-431) catasterised. The final lines of the book deal with the metamorphosis of the Heliades. In a rather oblique reference to the story of their amber tears, Nonnus talks of “rich dew” from the leaves of the “mourning trees” (ὀδυρομένων δ’ ἀπὸ δένδρων / ἀφνειὴν³⁴⁴ πετάλοισι κατασταλάουσιν ἑέρσην 38.433-434). Thus, Nonnus completes the book with a tetracolon,³⁴⁵ adding a display of virtuosity to a rather hurried ending to the Phaethon story.

Considered as a whole, this long digression which at first might appear quite foreign to a history of Dionysus has been moulded by the poet to reflect a number of his favourite themes and concerns, especially the concern with order and chaos.³⁴⁶

We have already mentioned that Book 38 presents the longest version of the myth in the *Dionysiaca*, but by no means its only mention. For example, in a passage we have already discussed above, Nonnus has Maron presenting in pantomime Phaethon’s fall. Here, not only does he describe Phaethon as tumbling, using one of his favourite words (αὐτοκύλιστον 30.115), also used in the later description (38.411), but adds a detail he omits in Book 38, Phaethon on fire (αἰθαλόεντα 30.115).

The Heliades and their sorrow at their brother’s loss are mentioned a dozen times in the *Dionysiaca*, usually as a way of expressing other great losses by comparison. In some instances, the references are more explicit, providing details not mentioned in Book 38. For example, in the very first instance in Book 2, a nymph mentions that the tree is a poplar (γείτονος αἰγείροιο 2.155), and talks of “rich tears” (δάκρυσιν ἀφνειοῖσιν 2.156), in a similar expression to that to be used at 38.433. The Heliades’ tears are elsewhere specified as amber (Ἡλιάδων ἤλεκτρον 4.122; ἡλέκτροισι 11.34; Ἡλιάδων ἤλεκτρα 43.415).

³⁴⁴ Simon notes the similar use of the word by Quintus Smyrnaeus: Simon, 1999, p.63

³⁴⁵ Nonnus produces a tetracolon on exactly the same subject in similar terms at 38.101

³⁴⁶ Phaethon, threatening cosmic disorder, presents a contrast to Nonnus’ Amphion, producing order and harmony.

Comparison

There is no doubt that the versions of the Phaethon myths presented by Philostratus and Nonnus have many features in common. Of course, this in itself is of no great weight when considering the possible influence of the version in *Imagines* 1.11 on Nonnus, as writers such as Ovid³⁴⁷ present similar versions.

Furthermore, as usual in considering the connection between the writings of Philostratus and Nonnus, we must acknowledge the difference in genres, the expansive verse narrative and short *ekphrasis*. We have thus seen that in Book 38 Nonnus lingers on elements of the Phaethon story not dealt with at all by Philostratus, who ignores the story of Helios' marriage to Clymene and Phaethon's childhood. Nonnus is also concerned to show the positive after-effects of the fall, as the universe returns to its ordered state. On the other hand, Philostratus is much more interested in the metamorphosis of the Heliades and Nonnus ignores Cynos. Their visions may even be said to clash: in Philostratus as Phaethon falls the Earth has quite a different reaction to her joy as described by Nonnus (ἀπαγορεύει δὲ ἡ Γῆ καὶ τὰς χεῖρας αἶρει ἄνω 1.11.2; γαῖα δὲ πᾶσα γέλασσε τὸ δεύτερον 38.416). Nevertheless, there are significant concordances. "Filistrato insiste en dos aspectos que marcan la versión: 1. el amor que impulse a Faetonte a su exceso (κατὰ ἔρωτα); 2. el caos resultante in el firmament."³⁴⁸

Hernández de la Fuente introduces the words quoted above with the observation that Philostratus' *Imagines* 1.11 is of particular interest for the possible influence of iconography on Nonnus.³⁴⁹ This seems to suggest that Philostratus' piece is indeed a description of an actual painting, something which we have seen is far from settled. In any event, if we leave aside for the moment the depiction of chaos and concentrate on the idea of love and desire, it is difficult to see how this would have

³⁴⁷ But see comments above re the scholarly debate surrounding Ovid and Nonnus.

³⁴⁸ Hernández de la Fuente, David: *"Bakchos Anax."* *Un Estudio sobre Nono de Panópolis*, Madrid (Nueva Roma), 2008, p.169

³⁴⁹ "... por la posible influencia en Nono de la iconografía..." loc. cit.

been depicted in an iconographical representation. As the piece stands, the Sophist's remark is in the context of his narration of that earlier part of the myth that does not appear in the painting, real or imagined, being described. Later in the same chapter,³⁵⁰ Hernández de la Fuente makes the point that the cause of the misfortunes of this type of hero is overweening arrogance and draws together lines from Nonnus (πατὴρ ἐοῦ ζαθέοιο φέρων πόθον ἡνιοχῆος 38.171) and Philostratus (τοῦτον γὰρ παῖδα Ἥλιου γενόμενον ἐπιτολμῆσαι τῷ πατρίδι δίφρῳ κατὰ ἔρωτα ἡνιοχίσεως καὶ μὴ κατασχόντα τὴν ἡνίαν σφαλῆναι 1.11.1). These quotations not only show the agreement between the writers in the matter of Phaethon's hubris,³⁵¹ but also the close linguistic connection between the writers in their expressions of Phaethon's desire.

As for the emphasis on the chaos caused by Phaethon throwing the universe out of balance, this is clear in both works. We have seen that the description of the chaos seems to have been particularly relished by Nonnus and is given significant space in his retelling. The description of chaos in Philostratus (1.11.2), on the other hand, is quite brief, though in the context of such a short work it is far from insignificant. The main features, such as darkness at midday, are common to both. However, unlike the description of Phaethon's motives, there are here no specific linguistic similarities that might provide some evidence of or at least clue to a closer relationship between these parts of the texts. Moreover, as noted earlier, the "order versus chaos" theme runs deep in the *Dionysiaca*³⁵² and is hardly likely to have been suggested to the poet by Philostratus.

Yet the choice of the Phaethon story as the subject of a long digression as part of the *Dionysiaca* is not an obvious one. There is little if anything, for example, in the Euripidean version - even allowing for its present fragmentary nature - that would have inspired Nonnus' use of the myth. Many written versions of the myth, including later ones, make little of the particular arrogant attitude of

³⁵⁰ Hernández de la Fuente, 2008, p.171 and n.28

³⁵¹ C.f. the description of Phaethon at *Dionysiaca* 23.238 (ἡελίου θρασὺν υἱά).

³⁵² Further remarks on the chaos theme specifically in relation to Phaethon can be found in Fauth, 1981, pp.170-171.

Phaethon or the universal nature of the chaos shown by Ovid and Philostratus, although at least the latter may have been apparent in the iconography of the period. Furthermore, as we have seen, there is a clear linguistic connection between Nonnus' description of the birth of Phaethon (38.146) and Philostratus' description of the birth of Semele (1.14). There is no conclusive evidence, but a strong suggestion that this is another case where Nonnus is influenced by details in Philostratus which strike his imagination and fit with his literary agenda, whether those details be of a linguistic or aesthetic nature.

Part B. The *Vita Apollonii* and the *Dionysiaca*

Chapter 4: Philostratus, Nonnus and Proteus

Introduction and Background

For all their differences, the *Vita Apollonii* and the *Dionysiaca* have a striking element in common: the sea god Proteus. Proteus appears prominently in the opening sections of both works and is attributed a significant amount of importance. This importance has been recognized by scholars, who have established that it applies both to the central figures of the respective works, Apollonius and Dionysus, and to the fabric of the works themselves. In this chapter, we will examine the writers' choice and use of the Old Man of the Sea in their works, in an attempt to elucidate the significance of that choice. We will also consider the "other" Proteus, the figure that first appears in Herodotus and later in other writers such as Euripides.

The purpose of this examination is to consider the connections between the *VA* and the *Dionysiaca*. In the course of the examination, we will concentrate on answering three questions that seem to us important for understanding the significance of Proteus in these works:

1. Why did both Philostratus and Nonnus choose the Homeric Proteus?
2. Why did Philostratus introduce the "other" Proteus into the *VA*?
3. Why did Nonnus have Proteus lead a contingent of troops against Dionysus in the *Dionysiaca*?

The figure of Proteus that we find in the opening sections of these works comes from Homer. The reader is in no doubt about this because both Philostratus and Nonnus mark this clearly: Philostratus states it outright when introducing him (ὁ Πρωτεύς ὁ παρὰ τῷ Ὅμηρῳ ἐξαλλάττων 1.4); Nonnus marks it by the similarities with Homer's Proteus. We have already seen in the examination of the

Imagines in relation to the *Dionysiaca* that both writers use Homeric references for their own artistic purposes. In particular, we have noted the rather complex relationship of Nonnus to Homer, involving imitation and rivalry. We will see further manifestations of this relationship in this discussion. As regards Philostratus, in the pieces we discussed from the *Imagines* there was no equivalent complex relationship to Homer.³⁵³ In the VA however, we will see Philostratus introduce an element that is particularly strong in his *Heroicus*: he “corrects” certain elements of the Homeric account of the Trojan War.

Proteus in the *Odyssey*

Proteus makes his appearance in Book 4 of the *Odyssey*.

Menelaus, in telling his tale to Telemachus, introduces him as “the infallible old man of the sea” (γέρων ἄλιος νημερτής 4.349). On his journey home from Troy, Menelaus and his men have been on the island of Pharos, not far from the coast of Egypt, for twenty days, waiting with increasing desperation for fair winds to sail onwards towards home (4.351-262). At this point, he meets Eidothea, “daughter of valiant Proteus” (Πρωτέος ἰφθίμου θυγάτηρ ἄλιόιο γέροντος 4.365) who tells him that her father, “immortal Proteus of Egypt” (ἄθάνατος Πρωτεὺς Αἰγύπτιος 4.385), “servant of Poseidon” (Ποσειδάωνος ὑποδμῶς 4.386) will be able to answer his questions and help his return home. Firstly, though, she says, Menelaus needs to trap and capture (λοχησάμενος λελαβέσθαι 4.388) the old man. At this point, Menelaus throws the responsibility for working out a trap to Eidothea, for, he says, it is difficult for a mortal to master a god (ἀργαλέος γάρ τ’ ἐστὶ θεὸς βροτῶ ἀνδρὶ δαμῆναι 4.397). We will return to this point in the course of our discussions.

³⁵³ See though the more complex relationship to Homer in “Scamander” (*Im.*, 1.1): Elsner in Knaus, Goldhill, Foley and Elsner, 2007, p.315

As the episode continues, we learn that Proteus emerges from the sea at midday each day to sleep amongst his seals. Eidothea's plot involves disguising Menelaus and three of his men under sealskins. When the old man is asleep, they are to pounce on him and hold him. He will keep changing shape in order to escape - in fact, he will assume the shape of all things on earth and water and fire (4.17-18) - but they must keep hold and in the end, he will return to his normal shape. Then, when he is free, Menelaus will be able to ask him which of the gods is angry and how can return home (4.423-4). As the episode unfolds, Eidothea supplies the Achaeans with newly flayed sealskins (4.436-7) to hide under among the flock of seals, and even places ambrosia under the men's noses to fight the seal stench (4.445). When Proteus, emerging from the sea, lies down with his seals he does not realise that there is an ambush planned (οὐδέ τι θυμῷ / ὥσθ' ἔθ' ἄλ' ὅλ' ἔιναι 4.452-3). The four men leap on him and pin him down (4.453-4). Although he has not anticipated their wiles, Proteus still has not forgotten his own wiles (οὐδ' ὁ γέρων δολίης ἐπελήθετο τέχνης 4.455). As they hold him, he changes in turn into a lion, a serpent, a leopard, a boar, water and a tree (4.456-8). When, as Eidothea said, he tires and gives in, Proteus, although he is full of wiles (ὀλοφώϊα εἰδώς 4.460) does not know who betrayed him (4.462-3). Menelaus receives from the old man the advice he needs to get home and information on the fate other Achaeans (4.470-569) before Proteus dives back into the sea. He does not appear again in the *Odyssey*.

This brief summary does not do justice to the richness of the Proteus episode, but it does serve to highlight important elements of the Proteus figure that will re-appear in discussions of Philostratus and Nonnus. This is a list of the characteristics of Homer's Proteus evident from the summary:

- He is old;
- He lives in the sea;
- He is a follower of Poseidon;
- He has a daughter called Eidothea;
- He is immortal;

- He knows everything;
- He is full of cunning and wiles;
- He is infallible;
- He has a flock of seals;
- He lives in Egypt;
- He can turn into any shape he likes;
- After changing shape he returns to his earlier form;
- He only gives out his knowledge to men when forced to.

But we also know that in spite of being all-knowing and infallible:

- He did not know there was an ambush for him;
- He did not detect the Achaeans hidden amongst his flock of seals; and
- He did not know who had told Menelaus how to capture him.

Proteus, then, as presented by Homer, is a complex and somewhat ambiguous figure. He is immortal, has powers of transformation, and is a seer. Yet he is a seer who cannot see, or foresee, everything, a trickster who can be out-tricked and be caught by humans.³⁵⁴ Indeed, it is his being tricked and caught that is surely the crux of the story in the *Odyssey*. Even if one takes the view that the real trickster here is not Menelaus but Eidothea, Proteus' own daughter, rather than a mortal, it remains strange that the old man does not know who was responsible.

Zatta points out that Eidothea's plot combines a number of significant features that facilitate his capture.³⁵⁵ Her plot involves attacking Proteus while he is on land and in the sun, that is, outside his natural element - the darkness of the depths of the sea - where he is normally out of sight of humans. Moreover, the chosen time is midday, when the sun is at full strength, "un'ora di grande

³⁵⁴ Thomas Schirren: *Philosophos Bios. Die antike Philosophenbiographie als symbolische Form*, Heidelberg (Winter), 2005, pp.47-8

³⁵⁵ Claudia Zatta: *Incontri con Proteo*, Venice (Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti), 1997, Chapter 2, "L'incontro con il Dio," passim

Potenza.”³⁵⁶ Furthermore, Eidothea’s plot requires her father to be asleep, and so at his most vulnerable.³⁵⁷

Proteus is obviously not the only god with the power of metamorphosis and knowledge. Zeus and the other Olympian gods demonstrate their metamorphic powers often enough and are omniscient. But Proteus belongs to a different group of deities, distinct from the Olympians, mainly sea-gods. They include Phorcus, Glaucus, Nereus and Thetis.³⁵⁸ For these, metamorphosis is “une façon d’être et de paraître, qui fait leur force et parfois leur vulnérabilité.”³⁵⁹ All of these sea-gods possess “polimorfia, intelligenza astute e sapere oracolare.”³⁶⁰ Yet, as Gourmelen points out, for all their powers, these gods cannot avoid capture.³⁶¹ Anne Rolet summarises thus:

Protée incarne ainsi le paradoxe d’un univers inquiétant, labile, changeant, “protéiforme”, qui se place sous le signe de la métamorphose, de la ruse et de l’illusion, mais aussi de la vérité prophétique dont le héros en quête de sagesse doit s’emparer dans la violence et par la contrainte.

As in the case of Eidothea for Menelaus, an intermediary figure is usually necessary if the hero is to overcome one of these gods.³⁶²

For his part, Forbes Irving, in his discussion of metamorphosis in Homer, numbers Proteus among the “magicians.” Lumping Proteus together with Circe, who turns Odysseus’ men into pigs, he states that although they are “technically gods they are sinister amoral beings who live on magical islands far away from the normal heroic and divine world.”³⁶³ He goes on to distinguish Proteus (and his

³⁵⁶ Zatta, 1997, p.33

³⁵⁷ Zatta refers to sleep as “l’elemento neutralizzante della potenza di metamorfosi di Proteo”: op. cit. p.52

³⁵⁸ Gourmelen, Laurent: “Protée tel qu’en lui-même,” in Rolet, Anne (Ed.): *Protée trompe-l’œil*, Rennes (PUR), 2009, pp.27-48 at p.33

³⁵⁹ Frontisi-Ducroux, Françoise: *L’Homme-cerf et la femme-araignée*, Paris (Seuil), 2003, p.52. Quoted by Gourmelen, op. cit., p.37

³⁶⁰ Zatta, 1997, p.51

³⁶¹ Gourmelen, in Rolet, 2009, p.37

³⁶² Frontisi-Ducroux, 2003, p.48

³⁶³ Forbes Irving, P.M.C., *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, Oxford (Clarendon Press), 1990, p.8

kind) from the Olympian gods by the possession of four features.³⁶⁴ Firstly, he possesses foreknowledge, which he only parts with grudgingly. Foreknowledge is unusual in Olympian gods. Secondly, unlike the Olympians, he is old. Thirdly, his power is “a succession of magical tricks.”³⁶⁵ Finally, his home is the sea, “an alternative, older and sometimes subversive world that is contrasted with the world of Olympians and of men.”³⁶⁶ As Frontisi-Ducroux puts it, the world is full of gods and “ceux qui peuplent les mers sont particulièrement étranges.”³⁶⁷

Perhaps the most fitting description of the sea-god as we have seen him in Homer, then, is that given to him by Silius Italicus in the *Punica*: “*ambiguus vates*” (7.436). As presented by Homer, in spite of his undoubted powers - powers that are eventually turned to Menelaus’ advantage - Proteus is a figure with more than a hint of shadiness. In part at least, he is a trickster or magician. If Philostratus and Nonnus have chosen to use the figure of Proteus for their own purposes, it is in the knowledge that he does indeed carry a combination of negative and positive connotations from his first appearance in the *Odyssey*.

Proteus after Homer

We have already noted that in considering why both Philostratus and Nonnus have given Proteus such a privileged position in their works, we must start with Homer. There is no doubt that Homer is the main inspiration for the use of Proteus: Philostratus names him and Nonnus uses the same metamorphoses. Yet, the discussion of the Proteus episode in the *Odyssey* also demonstrates that the writers have not taken everything that appears in the Homer episode. This is no doubt mainly

³⁶⁴ Forbes Irving, op. cit. pp.176-179

³⁶⁵ Forbes Irving, op. cit., p.177

³⁶⁶ Forbes Irving, op. cit., p.178. The same author notes that while Poseidon “moves perfectly easily between Olympus and the sea ... it is impossible to imagine Proteus on Olympus.” Loc. cit. Buxton contests Forbes Irving’s view of a group of “shape-shifters” sharing the same characteristics: Buxton, Richard: *Forms of Astonishment. Greek Myths of Metamorphosis*, Oxford (OUP), 2009, p.175

³⁶⁷ Frontisi-Ducroux, 2003, p.45

due to artistic choice, and we will discuss the choices of each writer later. Nevertheless, it is also likely that some of these choices were influenced or coloured by the reputation Proteus had gained through his appearance in the works of the intervening generations of writers.

Virgil: *Georgics*, Book 4

In Book 4 of Virgil's *Georgics*, we find a very similar situation to that of Menelaus in the *Odyssey*: a hero who needs to find out the reasons for the antagonism of the gods towards him. In this case, Aristaeus' mother, the nymph Cyrene, directs her son to consult Proteus to discover the reason for his misfortunes and the means to recover from them. As in Homer, Proteus is here a sea-dwelling seer (*vates / caeruleus Proteus* 4.387-8); he knows the past and the future (*quae sint, quae fuerint, quae mox ventura trahantur* 4.393); he herds seals (*turpes pascit sub gurgite phocas* 4.395); he does not share his knowledge willingly (*sine vi non ulla dabit praecepta* 4.398). As in Homer's version, an ambush is necessary, as he must be chained (*vinclis capiendus* 4.396). As in Homer, Proteus emerges at midday (*medium sol igneus orbem* 4.426) and counts his flock (*numerusque recenset* 4.436) before lying down to sleep. When he is shackled, he goes through his metamorphoses before answering Aristaeus' questions. Interestingly, Clymene pours ambrosia over Aristaeus (4.415-6) as in the *Odyssey*; here, however, the ambrosia is not to protect him from the stench of the seals, but to give him strength (*habilis membris venit vigor* 4.418). Indeed, not everything in *Georgics* 4 follows the Homeric pattern. Unlike Menelaus in Homer, Aristaeus confronts Proteus alone, without a band of helpers; he does not bind Proteus with his own arms, but with chains.³⁶⁸ Perhaps more significantly, there is no Egyptian connection: Proteus lives in "Carpathian water" (4.387) and visits his "native Pallene" (4.391).

³⁶⁸ Zatta, 1997, p.52 n.96

Thus, we see that Virgil has adopted - and adapted - much of the Proteus/Menelaus episode for the Proteus/Aristaeus episode, in an extensive form, using a good many of the Homeric elements. Like Menelaus, Aristaeus is a hero seeking knowledge to help him perform a difficult task and like Proteus in the *Odyssey*, the Virgilian Proteus will only share that knowledge when forced. Again, as in the *Odyssey*, the Virgilian Proteus uses metamorphosis as an escape mechanism and, as in the *Odyssey*, is unsuccessful against a combination of heroic force and feminine, if non-human, guile. In the *Georgics*, Virgil depicts the episode with the same seriousness as Homer in the original. Not only has he adopted for his own work Proteus' main strength - his gift of knowledge - but also his particular weakness, his vulnerability to capture through the use of guile.

Ovid: *Metamorphoses*, Book 11

This is not true for Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*. The poet here is not attempting a faithful rendition or even a close adaptation of the Homeric material, nor indeed of the Virgilian version. Yet, there is a clear and close relationship between Ovid's Proteus episode and those of the earlier poets.

Indeed, Ovid's use of the earlier texts in the *Metamorphoses* has been described as "une réécriture soigneuse mais distanciée."³⁶⁹ In Book 11, Proteus is still an old man (*senex ... Proteus* 11.221), he is still a water-dwelling seer, a Carpathian as in Virgil (*Carpathius medio de gurgite vates* 11.249), who disappears back into the water once he has delivered his knowledge (11.255). But his role here is quite different. While in both Homer and Virgil Proteus was unwilling to impart his knowledge - indeed, the struggle to outwit him into divulging this knowledge was a large part of both episodes - here he is free and open with the knowledge. Furthermore, the context is quite different: no hero warrior seeking to know the reasons for his misfortunes, but the quest for a bride.

³⁶⁹ Tronchet, Gilles: "Protée volubile ou l'antre des métamorphoses captives (Ovide, *Métamorphoses*, XI, 221-265)", in Rolet, 2009, pp.203-249 at p.217

Proteus enters the story on two occasions, both vital to its outcome.³⁷⁰ On the first occasion, at an indeterminate time, he tells Thetis, daughter of Nereus, that she will give birth to a son greater than his father (*maiorque vocabitur illo* 11.423). Hearing this, Zeus decides against becoming her lover and instead encourages Peleus, son of Aeacus, to woo her (11.225-8). As Peleus pursues the unwilling nymph, it is Thetis, and not Proteus, who uses metamorphosis to escape when Peleus seizes her while she sleeps in her grotto (11.238-46). Her use of metamorphosis is, we might note, successful, unlike Proteus' in the *Odyssey*: when she assumes the form of a "spotted tiger" (*maculosae tigridis* 11.245), Peleus lets go in fear. After Peleus prays and sacrifices to the sea-gods (11.247-8), Proteus emerges from the waters willingly to offer his advice: Peleus must keep hold of her until Thetis reverts to her normal form (11.254).

Thus, Ovid integrates the Homeric and Virgilian versions,³⁷¹ varying some of the elements (time of day; type of metamorphoses), as well as adding touches of his own. In particular, Proteus goes from being the victim of a cunning plot, to being the cunning plotter himself,³⁷² from a seer who is unwilling to share his knowledge, to one only too happy to offer advice. If many of the features of both versions are included, even if varied, others are ignored together, for example his flock of seals.

In other parts of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid offers more conventional references to Proteus. In Book 8, the various transformations Proteus is capable of are itemised: a youth, a lion, a boar, a serpent, a bull, a stone, a tree, a stream and fire (8.731-7). Elsewhere in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid mentions Proteus briefly, in one passage as shorthand for changeability, with overtones of shadiness (*Proteaue ambiguum* 2.9). The context of this mention is a list of dark-hued sea-gods (*Caeruleos habet unda deos* 2.8). In brief, Ovid takes the narrative of Proteus, as presented in Homer and Virgil and plays with and on its elements, as well as using his name elsewhere for its well-known connotations.

³⁷⁰ Indeed, "le moteur de l'action": Tronchet, op. cit. p.216

³⁷¹ Tronchet, op. cit. p.220

³⁷² "Proteo da vittima dell'inganno, diventa, quindi, maestro d'astuzie." Zatta, 1997, p.110

Silius Italicus: *Punica*, Book 7

In Silius Italicus' *Punica*, Proteus is still an "*ambiguus vates*" (7.436), he still knows everything (*sat gnarus enim* 7.422) and he still lives in a cave in the middle of the sea (7.419-21). When the Nereids, who clearly know exactly who to ask and where to find him, seek him out to ask what is happening to Carthage, he escapes, as in Homer and Virgil, by metamorphosis. But there are differences. Here he lives in the realm of the Teleboans (7.418). There is no mention of him as a herder of seals. He displays his metamorphic skills, but only his change to a serpent and lion are mentioned (7.423-5). There is no question of the Nereids binding him: he merely stops changing shapes and asks the nymphs what they fear and what they want (although the reader has already been told that he knows). He seems here more like Ovid's willing helper. This version is in a way the opposite of the ones we have so far mentioned: in previous versions, there was a long build up to the point where Proteus shares his knowledge. Then the actual advice is pithy and brief. In Silius, finding Proteus and persuading him to provide the desired knowledge takes up less than twenty lines, while Proteus' explanation takes up sixty. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that Silius gives an abbreviated account in the build-up to the prediction, relying on the reader's familiarity with Proteus and his ways. Somewhat surprising, however, is his introduction of the sea-god as "*immanis*" (7.419).

Lucian

Lucian uses Proteus' name as a kind of shorthand for his well-known powers or characteristics, especially in a negative or mocking context. In *De sacrificiis*, during a description of Zeus' ability - or tendency - to change shape, he describes the god as more changeable than Proteus (ὄλως ποικιλωτέρος αὐτοῦ Πρωτέως 5). The negative overtones of such versatility are clear. In *De morte*

Peregrini, the unflattering portrait of a cynic philosopher who styled himself Peregrinus Proteus, Lucian takes the opportunity to use the name, with its unfavourable connotations of opportunistic versatility, to mock his subject. Peregrinus has, he says, performed a great number of transformations (μυρίας τροπὰς τραπόμενος 1) to gain glory (δόξης ἕνεκα 1). Lucian has great fun with his “last transformation into fire” (τὰ τελευταῖα ταῦτα καὶ πῦρ ἐγένετο), Peregrinus’ self-immolation. This use of metamorphosis depends, of course, on the reader’s knowledge of Homer. Clearly, the mere mention of Proteus is enough for the writer to be confident that the reader will understand without any further need for explanation or elaboration. Lucian also makes mention of Proteus’ other gift, foreknowledge, and his Egyptian heritage. Later in *De morte Peregrini*, Lucian mentions his soothsaying (Πρωτεύς ... μαντικὸς ἦν 28); in *De saltatione*, he refers to him as Proteus the Egyptian (19). In this work, he offers a “rationalist perspective”³⁷³ on the Proteus story, as Lycinus explains to Crato that Proteus was merely a particularly able dancer, who could change into anything he pleased (πρὸς πάντα σχηματίζεσθαι καὶ μεταβάλλεσθαι δυνάμενον 19).

The Homeric Proteus takes a lead role in one of the *Dialogi Marini*. Indeed, here his interlocutor is Menelaus, his captor from the *Odyssey*. In this dialogue, which is both funny and a little mysterious, fire is once again in the foreground, as it was in *De morte Peregrini*. Menelaus insists that he would be prepared to believe that Proteus could change into water, a tree and even a lion, but not into fire - as he lives in the water (τοῦτο πάνυ θαυμάζω καὶ ἀπιστῶ 4.298). He cannot even believe his own eyes (εἶδον καὶ αὐτός 4.298) but is convinced that it is a trick (γοητεῖαν τινὰ 4.298). These words will find particular resonance when we discuss Philostratus’ Apollonius. Proteus’ retort that everything happened in clear sight (4.299), fails to convince. His “rational” example of the octopus who can change colour to escape detection (4.300) has no more success in convincing Menelaus. The dialogue ends in a kind of stalemate, as Menelaus repeats his assertion that he saw it but cannot

³⁷³ Frontisi-Ducroux, 2003, p.85

believe that one person can be fire and water. The reader will note that in the *Odyssey* Homer does not mention transformation into fire.

The Other Proteus

Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea, as presented by Homer, is not the only Proteus to feature in classical literature. He also appears again as an Egyptian king, most notably in Herodotus, when Herodotus presents Proteus in a revised version of Homer's story of Paris and Helen. In Herodotus' version, told to him by Egyptian priests, Proteus is a king of Egypt, in Memphis. When Paris and Helen arrive in Egypt on their way to Troy, King Proteus orders Paris to leave Helen and the plunder stolen from his host with him in Egypt (2.113-5). Paris has broken the laws of hospitality (ξενίων τυχών ἔργον ἀνοσιώτατον ἐργάσασθαι 2.115.4) and it is only these same laws that prevent Proteus killing Paris (2.115.4). Helen was never at Troy at any stage during the course of the Trojan War (2.118). At the end of the way, Menelaus reclaims his wife from King Proteus (2.119.1).

There is no role for the gods in Herodotus' version of the story. However, in Euripides' *Helen*, the Proteus story is given a twist in which Hera plays an important part. Proteus himself is (or was – he is already dead when the play opens) an Egyptian king. As in Herodotus' version, Helen remains in Egypt under Proteus' care and never goes to Troy. In this version, however, Hera, angered by Paris' choice in her contest with Aphrodite and Athena, sends merely a "breathing image" (εἶδωλον ἔμπνουν 34) with him to Troy. Although he is dead, and the action of the play involves his son, Theoclymenos, Proteus remains, through his tomb, a silent presence throughout until its happy ending. Zatta notes that there are sufficient points of similarity to connect King Proteus to the Proteus of the *Odyssey*, but that "what appeared once a god was in fact a human being,"³⁷⁴ with his

³⁷⁴ Zatta, Claudia: "The Last Metamorphosis of Proteus in Euripides' *Helen*," in Rolet, 2009, pp.129-138, at p.131

“aquatic nature, metamorphic power, and the contact with seals that belonged to Proteus in Homer ... transferred to Psamathe,” his wife. The old man, she says, has become a hero.³⁷⁵

Scholars have asked whether Proteus, Homer’s Old Man of the Sea and King Proteus are in fact two separate figures, or whether there is a link between them. Forbes Irving describes the Egyptian king tradition as “probably rationalizing.”³⁷⁶ This may account for Herodotus’ version, but hardly seems a satisfactory or complete explanation for Euripides’ version in *Helen*, where, as we have seen, if Proteus is no longer a god himself, there is still a significant involvement with the gods. Kefallonitis writes that in all his literary manifestations, Proteus is recognisable by certain features, the chief of which is his extraordinary wisdom.³⁷⁷ This certainly seems to be true of both Herodotus and Euripides. It is also clear that however the details have changed, there are still traces of Homer’s version in the *Odyssey*.

³⁷⁵ Zatta 2009, p.133

³⁷⁶ Forbes Irving, op. cit., p.175, n.13

³⁷⁷ Kefallonitis, Stavroula: “Protée, figure amphibie de l’historiographie grecque,” in Rolet, 2009, pp.263-281 at p.109.

Proteus in Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii*

We started our discussion of Proteus by considering the various elements of the Proteus story in the *Odyssey*. We have seen how later writers have used, adapted and alluded to this episode. As he appears in some writers, the figure of Proteus had become emblematic of wisdom, foreknowledge and shape changing, both literally and in a metaphorical sense. We have also seen that it was not only positive features of Proteus that the later writers highlight, but that some also link Proteus with magic and trickery.

Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii* is a work that is difficult to categorise, seeming to combine elements of biography, hagiography, travelogue and even the novel,³⁷⁸ while on close examination not fitting into any of those categories. For example, it bears sufficient resemblance to the ancient novels to be included in a prestigious collection of translations of Greek and Roman novels,³⁷⁹ yet it also looks like an "anti-novel."³⁸⁰ We will return to this hybrid nature of the work later in the discussion. At this stage it is already obvious that this work differs greatly from the *Imagines*, as it presents the life of Apollonius of Tyana from birth to death, and perhaps beyond.

Philostratus gives Proteus a prominent role in the *VA*, a role that not only takes from and builds on Homer and later writers, but also seems to include a significant original element. Proteus appears early in the *VA*, in a position that indicates the importance that Philostratus attaches to this figure. Not, we note, at the very beginning. The first figure introduced - in the very first line - is Pythagoras. Indeed, the first chapter is entirely concerned with Pythagoras' life and work, with no mention even of Apollonius himself. This is hardly surprising as Pythagoras and the Pythagorean way of life are

³⁷⁸ Miles, Graeme: "Philostratus," in Richter, Daniel S. and William A. Johnson: *The Oxford Handbook of the Second Sophistic*, Oxford (OUP), 2017, pp.273-289 at p.277.

³⁷⁹ Grimal, 1958

³⁸⁰ Billault, Alain: *L'Univers de Philostrate*, Brussels (Latomus), 2000, p.105

constant references for both the narrator and Apollonius himself.³⁸¹ Pythagoras is “the first and in many respects the most important of the paradigms for Apollonius.”³⁸²

In the second chapter, Philostratus introduces Apollonius by comparing him to Pythagoras. In comparing the two, Philostratus says that Apollonius approaches knowledge in a godlier way (θειότερον 1.2.1) than Pythagoras does: we will return to this claim of superiority later. He specifically tackles those who accuse Apollonius of being a sorcerer: they are wrong (κακῶς γινώσκοντες 1.2.1). He then discusses his subject’s life and deeds, and his resolve to make sure Apollonius is given due credit and that he and his deeds be known accurately (ἐξακριβῶσαι τὸν ἄνδρα 1.2.3). He then discusses his sources. This discussion continues in the third chapter, where he introduces the figure of Damis,³⁸³ a follower of Apollonius who kept written notes of his life and words. These writings, we are told (3.1) are the basis of the VA. He also states the aims of his book are twofold. Firstly, his aim is to bring honour to his master (ἐχέτω δὲ ὁ λόγος τῷ ... ἀνδρὶ τιμὴν 1.3.2); secondly, to bring profit to those wanting to learn (φιλομαθεστέροις ὠφέλειαν 1.3.2).

It is in the fourth chapter that Philostratus introduces Proteus. He starts the chapter by telling briefly of Apollonius’ parentage, with an emphasis on wealth and Greek heritage: he might come from the wilds of Cappadocia, but Tyana is most definitely a Greek city (Τύανα πόλις Ἑλλάς 4.1),³⁸⁴ He then tells of Proteus’ appearance to Apollonius’ mother in a dream while she is pregnant.³⁸⁵ Philostratus immediately tells us two things about Proteus: he is an Egyptian “daimon” (Αἰγυπτίου δαίμονος 4.1); and he is the one changing shape (ἐξαλλάττων 4.1)³⁸⁶ in Homer. The reader, then,

³⁸¹ Flinterman, Jaap-Jan: “‘The ancestor of my wisdom’: Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism in *Life of Apollonius*,” in Bowie and Elsner, 2009, pp.154-175 at p.157

³⁸² Miles, 2016, p.140

³⁸³ Damis is usually considered a fiction invented by Philostratus. See, for example: Mumprecht, Vroni (Ed., trans.): *Philostratos. Das Leben des Apollonios von Tyana*, Munich and Zurich (Artemis), 1983, p.991ff.

³⁸⁴ This is re-emphasised in Chapter 7, where we are told that he speaks Attic Greek with no local accent (οὐδ’ ἀπήχθη τὴν φωνὴν ὑπὸ τοῦ ἔθνους 7.1).

³⁸⁵ For other instances of dream signs to fathers and mothers of godly offspring, see: Mumprecht, 1983, p.1026 n. 22

³⁸⁶ Note that Nonnus commonly uses the words “δέμας ἀλλάσσω” for transformations of shape in the *Dionysiaca*, e.g. 33.349, 48.296, among many instances.

after such a specific reference to Homer, can be in no doubt as to who and what is meant. As he describes the dream, Philostratus spells it out in more detail. This is what the reader takes from it.

Proteus is:

- Egyptian (Αἰγύπτιος);
- A god (θεός);
- Wise (σοφίαν);
- Multiform (ποικίλος);
- Able to overcome capture (κρείπτων τοῦ ἀλῶναι);
- Seeming to know everything (γινώσκειν τε ὡς ἐδόκει ... πάντα); and
- Seeming to have foreknowledge of everything (καὶ προγινώσκειν).

Philostratus finishes this passage by underlining the significance of Proteus' appearance in the dream, as he asks the reader to bear him in mind (μεμνηῖσθαι χρὴ τοῦ Πρωτέως 4.1) when reading of Apollonius' life. For, Apollonius, it will be shown, was superior to Proteus in at least two ways. He has greater foreknowledge than Proteus (πλείω μὲν ἢ ὁ Πρωτεύς προγνόντα 4.1) and he overcame many difficult situations. In other words, Apollonius is superior not only to Pythagoras, as we read in Chapter 2, but also superior to the god Proteus.

If we return to the list of characteristics of the Homeric Proteus, we note that several details are missing. There is no mention of the Old Man of the Sea. Indeed, the sea, the seals, the midday sun, the caverns, and the daughter have no place in the VA, nor does his allegiance to Poseidon. One might assume, from the way that the VA develops, that these are unimportant or irrelevant details for Philostratus' purposes. Nor is there any mention of the unwillingness of the Homeric Proteus to share his (fore-) knowledge with humans. There is no mention of infallibility, though perhaps this is included in his all-knowingness. This raises the question, however: to what extent is the reader of the VA expected to bear in mind the unmentioned aspects of Proteus, as well as the contributions of other writers? Does the reader also need to bear in mind the less positive aspects of the Proteus

story? We will return to this question. Suffice it to say at this stage that when Apollonius' mother asks Proteus in her dream who her child will be his answer is "Me" (ὁ δὲ 'ἐμέ' εἶπε 4.1).

To summarise what we have learned about Apollonius from his mother's dream: he "is" Proteus. Given the importance attributed to Pythagoras in the early chapters, researchers have considered the connection between the figure of Proteus and Pythagoras,³⁸⁷ though clear proofs seem to be lacking.³⁸⁸ We will therefore move to considering the connections Philostratus draws between Proteus and Apollonius.

Exactly what Philostratus is intending to convey when Proteus in the dream tells Apollonius' mother that she will give birth to "me" is unclear, especially when the reader is also told that Apollonius is superior to Proteus. It is at least clear that this must include that he is god-like, has an association with Egypt, is capable of using his powers to escape, is wise, and possesses knowledge of all things. His closeness to the gods and "all the things he became" (ὅποσα ὁδὲ ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐγένετο 5.1) is underlined by the circumstances surrounding his birth in Chapter 5 and will resonate at various stages throughout the *VA*, nowhere more so than at the very end of the work. There is likewise no need to dwell on Apollonius' wisdom, which Philostratus demonstrates again and again in the course of the work.

Apollonius, then, is shown at the very start of the *VA*, before and at the moment of his birth, as being superior to Pythagoras and Proteus. During the course of the narrative he will be compared to many other "icons of Greek culture" and will be shown to be to "surpass or at least equal" them all.³⁸⁹ These include Alexander, Heracles and Socrates.³⁹⁰ As the book goes on, and he travels

³⁸⁷ Le Blay, Frédéric: "Protée et Pythagore dans *La vie d'Apollonios de Tyane* de Philostrate," in Rolet, 2009, pp.263-281, at pp.272-6

³⁸⁸ "En somme, nous trouvons en Protée une figure qui pourrait parfaitement prendre place dans la tradition pythagoricienne, même si les témoignages manquent pour passer de l'hypothèse à la certitude." Le Blay, op. cit. p.276

³⁸⁹ Gyselinck, Wannes and Kristoffel Demoen: "Author and Narrator: Fiction and Metafiction in Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii*," in Demoen, Kristoffel and Danny Praet (Eds.): *Theios Sophistes. Essays on Flavius Philostratus' Vita Apollonii*, Leiden and Boston (Brill), 2009, pp.95-127 at p.107

³⁹⁰ Gyselinck and Demoen, loc. cit.

outside the Greek world, the figure of Apollonius, who has been set up to be an outstanding representative of Greek culture, also becomes “une sorte d’encyclopédie vivante de l’hellénisme en prodiguant son savoir à chaque étape.”³⁹¹ This idea of Proteus as an icon of and sort of emblem for Greek culture, used to boost Apollonius’ cultural credentials, is, however, by no means the full picture of Proteus’ role in the *VA*, not indeed the main part of it.

The main quality for which Proteus is famous, and which was emphasised in the Greek and Latin writers we have discussed, is his ability to change his shape. One recent translator of the *VA* asks of the passage in Chapter 4 where Proteus appears to Apollonius’ mother why, after such an “annunciation” there is no further mention of it in the book.³⁹² We have seen shape changing in Homer, in Virgil and Ovid, even - in a metaphorical sense, with a touch of tongue in cheek - in Lucian. Where should we look for shape changing in the *VA*? Clearly, it is not present in any obvious physical sense: Apollonius does not become a lion, a serpent, a leopard, a boar, water or a tree. Indeed, Apollonius himself addresses this directly in Book 7 of the *VA*. When Emperor Domitian has imprisoned Apollonius, he says, in an obvious reference to the *Odyssey*, that he will not free him until he turns himself into an animal, water or a tree (7.34.1). Apollonius reply is that he would not do this, even if he could (οὐδ’ εἰ δυνάμην 7.34). Leaving aside the reason for his refusal - which is beyond the scope of our current discussion - it seems from his own words that Apollonius does not have this power to change his physical shape like Homer’s Proteus. Yet, if we bear in mind that the purpose of Proteus’ shape shifting was to escape, Apollonius certainly does possess physical powers for this, powers that he demonstrates on the very same occasion: he shows Damis that he can pull his leg out of the fetters binding him (ἐξήγαγε τὸ σκέλος τοῦ δεσμοῦ 7.38.2). He also seems to be

³⁹¹ Billault, 2000 p.120

³⁹² “Pese a la importancia concedida a Proteo en esta especie de “anunciación” que nos presenta Filóstrato, no se vuelve a hablar de este tema en todo el resto de la obra.” Pajares, Alberto Bernabé (Ed., Trans): *Filóstrato. Vida de Apolonio de Tiana*, Madrid (Gredos), 1992, p.67 n.29

able to move in a supernatural way out of difficult situations (ἀπῆλθε τοῦ δικαστηρίου δαιμόνιον τε καὶ οὐ ῥάδιον εἰπεῖν τρόπον 8.8.1). We will return to the question of his “magic powers.”

As for a broader or less literal view of shape shifting, Le Blay sees the mention of Proteus in Book 1.4 as another reference to Pythagoras and metempsychosis.³⁹³ Billault writes of the “catactère insaisissable” of Apollonius³⁹⁴ and, elsewhere, of the “mille formes” that his life will take.³⁹⁵ Miles agrees at least that his travels and encounters “imply a certain versatility and resourcefulness” but considers there is little room for character change.³⁹⁶ But, Miles notes, there are in the VA “changing patterns of characterisation by allusion”³⁹⁷ as Apollonius is compared with figures such as Odysseus, Heracles, Dionysus and Alexander and Proteus is the first of these figures.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Apollonius’ description of Proteus is his use of the word “ποικίλος” (1.4.1), a term that will also be important in our discussion of Nonnus and Proteus.

Gyselinck and Demoen describe the use of this as “a metafictional commentary by the author on the overall formal and stylistic versatility that he is about to display” in writing the VA.³⁹⁸ The authors go on to expand on this versatility, stressing the connection to rhetorical exercises in this “sophistic *magnum opus* of a virtuoso-writer.”³⁹⁹ They write of the “intertextual opulence”⁴⁰⁰ of the VA, as they describe the web of literary allusion created by Philostratus. They suggest that by the “playful manner” in which Philostratus uses sophisticated techniques to lend credibility to Apollonius, he achieves an air of literary truthfulness: “Very much like Lucian or Antonius Diogenes, by stressing the

³⁹³ Le Blay, 2009, p.279

³⁹⁴ Billault, 2000, p.113

³⁹⁵ Billault, Alain: “Les choix narratifs de Philostrate dans la *Vie d’Apollonios de Tyane*,” in Demoen and Praet, 2009, pp.3-20, at p.8

³⁹⁶ Miles, 2016, p.6

³⁹⁷ Miles, 2016, loc. cit.

³⁹⁸ Gyselinck and Demoen, 2009, p.117. Quoted by Miles, 2016, p.6

³⁹⁹ Gyselinck and Demoen, op. cit. p.99

⁴⁰⁰ Gyselinck and Demoen, op. cit. p.114

literariness of his narration, he subtly flaunts the mechanisms of make-believe.”⁴⁰¹ It is hard not to agree that Proteus’ changeability refers to the literary construct itself.

Gyselinck and Demoen also point out that the playfulness of the text and the richness of intertextual allusions both brings Apollonius closer to the great icons of Greek culture and at the same time alienates the reader by stressing the literariness of the text.⁴⁰² One might also note that if the reader is to properly appreciate and enjoy Philostratus’ clever games, especially the intertextuality, that reader must be familiar with the texts he has referenced. Thus, we may assume that Philostratus would expect his readers to be familiar with the Proteus episode of the *Odyssey* and, no doubt, the treatment of Proteus in literature since that time. But what would this entail? For example, the Homeric Proteus, as we have seen, has metamorphic powers in order to escape, yet “the god does not defy capture nor does he escape the hands of Menelaus”; nor does he foresee the attack.⁴⁰³ Is this what Philostratus means when he claims that Apollonius - who demonstrates his ability to escape in the VA - is superior to Proteus (1.4.1)? Or is this an ironic suggestion that Apollonius himself has feet of clay? Or is this another game? If so, what is the nature of the game?

Part of the answer is perhaps to be found in Schirren’s observation that Apollonius’ ability to escape can also be taken in a less literal way, as a “poetic construct”: “Denn wenn der Sophistengott unfassbar ist, denn ist es auch der Sophist als der schreibende Autor und dessen Erzeugnis, zumal wenn er über diesen Gott schreibt.”⁴⁰⁴ But we also need to be able to account for Philostratus’ adoption of Proteus as a figure who not only seems to have less than perfect powers but also a reputation that is not exactly untarnished.

In the discussion on Homer, we noted that Proteus was one of a group of deities, sea gods, quite separate from the Olympians, and with a somewhat murky reputation. We have also seen how in a

⁴⁰¹ Gyselinck and Demoen, op. cit. p.126

⁴⁰² Gyselinck and Demoen, op cit. p.114

⁴⁰³ Schirren, Thomas: “Irony Versus Eulogy. The *Vita Apollonii* as Metabiographical Fiction,” in Demoen and Praet, 2009, pp.161-186 at p.163

⁴⁰⁴ Schirren 2005, p.49

later writer like Lucian, Proteus' most striking ability - metamorphosis - has taken on a negative rather than positive connotation. Philostratus from the beginning of the VA has tackled people's perceptions of Apollonius being a sorcerer (μάγον ἡγοῦνται αὐτὸν καὶ διαβάλλουσιν ὡς βιαίως σοφόν 1.2.1) and vigorously denied that this is the case, putting it down to ignorance (κακῶς γινώσκοντες 1.2.1). This in itself shows that Apollonius was at the least a controversial figure. Therefore, the connection with Proteus, "the archetypal sorcerer,"⁴⁰⁵ here so closely aligned with Apollonius' birth, is hardly likely to allay suspicions that Apollonius' own dubious reputation was justified. Flinterman notes, for example, in relation to the passage we have already discussed, that freeing themselves from bonds was a trick much practised by magicians; furthermore, the timing of his self-liberation is "rather unhelpful from an apologetic point of view."⁴⁰⁶ In short, it is impossible to escape the view that Philostratus, by his very choice of Proteus and his use of him in conjunction with Apollonius in the text, has deliberately chosen a complex figure, part of whose complexity is a decidedly questionable reputation.

The second explicit mention of Proteus in the VA occurs in 3.24. In one sense, this mention is quite straightforward: Apollonius talks of the island of Pharos, once home of Proteus (περὶ τὴν νῆσον τὴν Φάρον, οὗ πάλαι ποτὲ ὁ Πρωτεύς ῥκει 3.24.1). The allusion is clearly to the Homeric Proteus and might seem a neat reminder of Proteus' appearance in 1.4. The complication is the context. The allusion is made by Apollonius himself when he is telling of a past life. In this life he is a sailor whose claim to distinction is that he does not accept the money of Phoenician pirates. As Mumprecht points out, if Apollonius is a Pythagorean, he must have a former life, hence this life as a sailor. On the other hand, as he is an incarnation of Proteus in Chapter 1.4, the mention of Proteus here is not accidental.⁴⁰⁷ But, as Miles notes, this invites the question: how are we to reconcile these two incarnations, the divine and the decidedly non-divine?⁴⁰⁸ The answer, he suggests, is in the notion of

⁴⁰⁵ Flinterman, Jaap-Jan: "Apollonius' Ascension," in Demoen and Praet, 2009, pp.225-248 at p.233

⁴⁰⁶ Flinterman, loc. cit.

⁴⁰⁷ Mumprecht, 1983, p.1060, n.52

⁴⁰⁸ Miles, 2016, p.11

“divine processions;” the invocation of Proteus “contributes to Philostratus’ game of denying that Apollonius was a sophist and magician, while leaving open the possibility that he might have been just that after all.”⁴⁰⁹ We might query, however, whether this view gives sufficient weight to the negative aspects of Proteus’ reputation that we have been discussing.

So far, we have concentrated on the Homeric Proteus, or at least the Proteus strongly influenced by the Old Man of the Sea of the *Odyssey*, the god and shape-changer, in VA 1.4. We must also consider the remaining references that Philostratus makes to Proteus, including those to the “other” Proteus King Proteus, familiar from Herodotus and Euripides. After all, there is no reason to believe that the later references are any less deliberate and calculated than the appearance of the god at Apollonius’ birth. This Proteus also leads us back to Homer: if Helen was with King Proteus in Egypt rather than with Paris in Troy, clearly the *Iliad* is in question. Our interest in these allusions is here not to examine Philostratus’ wider relationship to Homer, but specifically to consider the connection between Proteus the God and King Proteus in the VA. Are the two figures indeed linked? Did Philostratus expect the reader to recognise links between the two? If so, what conclusions can we draw?

The first mention of King Proteus is in Book 4. The context is Apollonius’ account to his companions of his conversation with Achilles in a vision at the hero’s burial mound. Achilles in this vision permits Apollonius to ask him five questions. For present purposes, the third question is of particular interest. Apollonius asks whether Helen in fact came to Troy, as accepted by Homer. Achilles answers that rather than coming to Troy she was indeed living in the house of Proteus in Egypt (ἢ δ’ Αἴγυπτον τε ὕκει καὶ τὸν Πρωτέως οἶκον 4.16.5) and that the Achaeans only kept fighting at Troy to save their honour. As Schirren writes, this episode is an example of “ein gerade in der Zweiten Sophistik beliebtes literarisches Spiel,” that is “die Korrektur des Homer.”⁴¹⁰ We should note that

⁴⁰⁹ Miles, op. cit. p.15

⁴¹⁰ Schirren, 2005, p.301.

King Proteus, whether it be in Herodotus or Euripides is in no way a bad character: he stands up for Greek values and indeed does not seem to have the questionable side of Proteus the God. The point is, rather, that he is not a god and not as portrayed by Homer. The episode has also been used to show that even if the Homer “of the epic” is challenged by Philostratus, the Homer “of the legend” is not.⁴¹¹ In the context of the presence of Proteus in the VA, the interesting point is whether the reader is expected to regard the god and the king as completely separate or as somehow linked. We should bear in mind that King Proteus is introduced into the VA in a speech by Apollonius himself, who, we have found out in Chapter 4, “is” Proteus the God.

The final appearance of Proteus by name provides a further clue.⁴¹² The context is a conversation between Apollonius and Damis while Apollonius is in prison in Rome. Apollonius mentions Helen putting a soothing drug into wine, referencing *Odyssey* 4.222, saying she must have known Egyptian charms (λόγους Αἰγυπτίους ἐκμαθοῦσαν 7.22.1). Damis agrees, saying she had either been to Egypt and met Proteus (ἐς Αἴγυπτόν τε ἦλθε καὶ ὠμίλησε τῷ Πρωτεῖ 7.22.2), a reference to King Proteus, or “as Homer thought” (ὡς Ὅμηρῳ δοκεῖ 7.22.2), was a friend of Polydamna, a reference to *Odyssey* 4.228. In other words, in a scene involving Apollonius himself, Philostratus is close to mentioning both Proteus the God and King Proteus. We should also note that this scene, with its talk of Egyptian drugs, also necessarily draws the reader’s attention to thoughts of magic and magicians, thus reminding the reader that Philostratus has strenuously denied charges that Apollonius was a sorcerer (μάγον ἡγοῦνται αὐτόν 1.2). It also seems to emphasise Proteus’ “Egyptian-ness”, that is, the darker side of this Greek cultural icon. If we combine this with Apollonius’ chain slipping episode later in the book (7.38), then the reader is getting plenty of hints about Apollonius the sorcerer.

⁴¹¹ Grossardt, Peter: “How to Become a Poet,” in Demoen and Praet, 2009, pp.75-94 at p.93

⁴¹² We have already seen that the Homeric Proteus is referred to though not named in 7.34.

Summary: Philostratus, Apollonius and Proteus

We have seen that Philostratus introduced Proteus into the Apollonius story at a significant moment, the time of his birth, a moment that underlines the importance Philostratus attaches to Proteus. In introducing him, he immediately aligned him to the Homeric figure, by naming Homer. And yet, his Proteus is not the Old Man of the Sea of the *Odyssey*, with his seals and daughter and reluctance to aid humans. This Proteus is more a stripped-down figure, reduced to his main characteristics, his wisdom and changeability, as we have seen emerging in writings after Homer. Philostratus stresses his knowledge, his foreknowledge and his wisdom. He also stresses Apollonius' superiority to Proteus.

A particularly interesting aspect is the way Proteus' power of metamorphosis plays out in the VA. As discussed, Philostratus turns this into a cypher for the variety and changing nature of the work itself, something we will see reflected in Nonnus.

While building up Apollonius with this Egyptian God, Philostratus was simultaneously, albeit subtly bringing him down. For the Homeric Proteus was a far from entirely positive figure, and this is reflected in later writers like Lucian. Philostratus has in mind that the reader would be aware of these associations. In a further complication, Philostratus introduces into the VA the "other" Proteus, King Proteus, as known from Herodotus and Euripides. The upshot, then, is that we have seen Philostratus playing what seems to be a double game, not only with the figure of Proteus, and, through him, with Apollonius, but also with Homer. This game, of course, is not restricted to the VA: a considerable part of the *Heroicus* is devoted to 'correcting' Homer.

In Book One, Philostratus - or his narrator - expressed the hope that his work would bring honour to Apollonius (1.3.2). The greater part of the work does indeed seem to aim at just that, with Apollonius shown in the best possible light in all sorts of situations and with all sorts of people, including Roman emperors. Indeed, this is why it has been sometimes categorised as hagiography. Yet, the Proteus figure is, we have seen, working both towards and against this goal. In the end,

Proteus adds to the difficulty of categorising this work and to the elusiveness of Philostratus' aims in writing it. To the mix of biography, hagiography, travel story, and collection of wonders, Proteus - or, rather, the two Proteuses - adds or emphasises a ludic element. For the reader sufficiently versed in the literary tradition involving Proteus, it seems to add a touch of playful doubt.

Proteus in the *Dionysiaca*

Nonnus uses Proteus in the *Dionysiaca* in a variety of situations for a variety of different purposes - variety indeed being the operative word - starting at the very opening of the poem, with Proteus' final appearance by name being in Book 43. We will see that, like Philostratus, Nonnus assigns to Proteus both major and minor roles in his work, roles that are quite different and at first view even contradictory, or at least paradoxical. Firstly, and most importantly, in the Proem, Proteus becomes an emblem with his metamorphoses of *poikilia*, and through this role informs the entire poem. He reappears much later, in character, with full Homeric trappings, again performing his metamorphoses, this time siding against Dionysus in the contest for Beroe. On this occasion, he has a bit part in an episode that undermines rather than builds up Dionysus. In between these relatively extended appearances, Proteus is briefly mentioned as a wise man, a seer and a friend of Dionysus. Although there are numerous Homeric references, there are also hints of non-Homeric origins of the Old Man of the Sea.

Proteus and *poikilia* in Book 1

Proteus is first named in Book 1, line 14 of the *Dionysiaca*, in the Proem to the poem. The prominence of this position - even more prominent than that of Proteus in the VA - has long drawn the attention of scholars. His appearance is almost immediately after the opening reference to Homer (εἰπέ, θεά 1.1), with its echoes of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Hence, we can say that with Proteus Nonnus begins the engagement with Homer that will persist throughout the poem. The context of his appearance is the poet's invocation of the Muses, a familiar device in epic poets of Late Antiquity.⁴¹³

⁴¹³ Vian, 1976, p.7

After a brief account of Dionysus' birth, the narrator asks the goddess to make Proteus appear (στήσατέ μοι Πρωτῆα 1.14). The Homeric reference in this appearance of Proteus is immediately clear with the mention of the "nearby island of Pharos" (Φάρω παρὰ γείτονι νήσῳ 1.13). The first adjective applied to him (πολύτροπον 1.14), was applied by Homer to Odysseus.⁴¹⁴ The Homeric connection is strengthened when Nonnus describes the metamorphoses of Proteus in a way that almost, but not quite, matches those in *Odyssey* Book 4. The Homeric connection is not that of simple imitation: "from the start he demonstrates a desire to be different, mixing imitation with innovation in an attempt to surpass his predecessor."⁴¹⁵

Before examining the metamorphoses in detail, we should consider how Proteus fits with Dionysus. In the first few lines of the poem, Nonnus refers to Dionysus' fiery birth after his mother Semele is burned by Zeus' lightning bolt. Nonnus writes of the "fiery bed (αἶθοπος εὐνῆς 1.1) and "marital spark" (νυμφιδίῳ σπινθῆρι 1.2); of Zeus lifting Dionysus from the fire (ἐκ πυρὸς 1.4). This association of Dionysus with fire contrasts with the watery context of the sea-god Proteus. As Gigli Piccardi notes, Proteus is an "antitypos" of Dionysus, being similar in that both share "il potere magico metamorfico", but different in the opposition of fire and water.⁴¹⁶ We will see this opposition play out in the contest with Poseidon for Beroe in Book 43.

The metamorphoses noted in the Proem are serpent (1.16); lion (1.19); leopard (1.23); boar (1.26); water (1.29); and tree (1.31). These are the same as Proteus' metamorphoses in *Odyssey* 4, with the difference that the appearances of the serpent and lion are reversed here. This passage not only refers back to Homer, but also points forward to the events of the *Dionysiaca* itself, or at least to the events of the first half of the poem. In order, they refer to his battle with the Giants; his childhood with Rheia; his war with the Indians; his pursuit of Aura; the episode with Lycurgus; and the story of

⁴¹⁴ Gigli Piccardi, 2003, p.121, n. to 13

⁴¹⁵ Shorrock, 2001, p.117

⁴¹⁶ Gigli Piccardi, 2003, loc. cit.

Icaros.⁴¹⁷ The inversion of the first two Homeric metamorphoses allows Nonnus to alternate scenes of war and peace and thus affirm from the beginning “sa préférence pour l’antithèse formelle au détriment de la succession chronologique.”⁴¹⁸ The scene itself will be mimicked with variations later in the poem, twice by Dionysus himself and once by Proteus in the contest for Beroe. We have already seen that such repetition with variation is one of Nonnus’ favourite devices.

The introduction of Proteus into the poem goes further than marking the connection to Homer, pointing to upcoming actions and providing a motif to be repeated and varied. With Proteus, Nonnus sets out his program for the *Dionysiaca*. He evokes Proteus thus:

ἀλλὰ χοροῦ ψαύοντα, Φάρω παρὰ γείτονι νήσῳ,

στήσατέ μοι Πρωτῆα πολύτροπον, ὅφρα φανείη

ποικίλον εἶδος ἔχων, ὅτι ποικίλον ὕμνον ἀράσσω 1.13-15

Vian notes that *poikilia* is particularly at home in a poem about Dionysus as Dionysus is himself “un dieu aux aspects et aux contrastes multiples.”⁴¹⁹ Furthermore, this passage not only talks of the many-shaped Proteus, and his varied forms, but specifically talks of the poem itself. For Nonnus says that he will sing a “varied song” (ποικίλον ὕμνον). He then demonstrates this *poikilia* through the series of metamorphoses we have already discussed, where he relates each of the Protean metamorphoses to the various events in Dionysus’ life which will come up in the first half of the poem. More than this, as Giraudet has demonstrated in his detailed analysis of this passage,⁴²⁰ the careful arrangement of the verses, the pattern of scansion and sound, and the use of various forms before returning to the original pattern: “Nonnos donne à travers ce passage un équivalent poétique

⁴¹⁷ Vian, 1976, p.8

⁴¹⁸ Vian, op. cit. p.9; Gigli Piccardi, 2003, p.122, n. to 16-33

⁴¹⁹ Vian, op. cit. p.9

⁴²⁰ Giraudet, Vincent: “L’un et le multiple: Protée ou le style métamorphique chez Nonnos de Panopolis,” in Rolet, 2009, pp.313-333, at pp.324-7

du cycle des metamorphoses de Protée.”⁴²¹ He further argues that while Nonnus’ description of the variations does resemble Roberts’ “jewelled style,” discussed in an earlier chapter, his particular way of rendering the flow from one metamorphosis to another is quite personal, and in itself characteristic of Proteus’ metamorphoses.⁴²² By introducing Proteus in the Proem, he establishes the metamorphic style as forming the unity of work as a whole.⁴²³ Elsewhere Giraudet proposes that Nonnus does not have episodes in the poem follow one another but, rather, metamorphose from the one into the other.⁴²⁴ Hence, Proteus in the Proem is emblematic of the *poikilia* ruling both the aesthetics and structure of Nonnus’ epic. In other words, this Protean influence is integral to the *Dionysiaca* as a work of art.

The Wise Seer Proteus

In the *Odyssey*, the purpose of Proteus’ metamorphoses is to escape capture by Menelaus and his men. The reason Menelaus wants to capture him is to obtain the knowledge necessary for him to return home. The wise Proteus, Proteus the seer, commonly appears in post-Homeric writers, as we have seen. There is no hint of this aspect of Proteus in the Proem, but there are brief mentions later in the poem. He is mentioned by Dionysus’ enemy Lycurgus in Book 21, where he is described as a “prophet-wizard”⁴²⁵ (μαντιπόλῳ γὰρ / Πρωτεί 21.143-4). This seems to be either a reference to Proteus the seer, or a distortion by Lycurgus.⁴²⁶ Later in the same book Dionysus reports that he heard from Proteus of Lycurgus’ fate (21.288-9). Proteus reappears in a completely different context

⁴²¹ Giraudet, op. cit. p.327

⁴²² “Nonnos les investit d’une façon tout à fait personnelle pour rendre sensible la labilité des formes et la fluidité du passage de l’une à l’autre qui caractérisent les metamorphoses de Protée.” Giraudet, op. cit. p.328

⁴²³ Giraudet, op. cit. p.333

⁴²⁴ Giraudet, Vincent: *Le monstre et la mosaïque. Recherches sur la poétique des Dionysiaques de Nonnos de Panopolis*, thesis, Sorbonne, 2010, p.455

⁴²⁵ Rouse’s translation

⁴²⁶ Gonnelli comments that “il nemico immaginario diviene poi addirittura Proteo, il cui potere metamorfico è svilito ad abilità di stregone.” Gonnelli, Fabrizio: *Nonno di Panopoli. Le Dionisiache. Vol.2. Canti 13-24*, Milan (BUR), 2003, p.471, n. to 135ff.

in Book 39. On this occasion the context is the prelude to the sea-battle with Deriades, and Proteus, along with the other sea-gods, is mentioned by Dionysus himself in his exhortation to his troops before the battle begins. He is described as an old man and seer (μαντιπόλου δὲ γέροντος 39.106). He also describes him as his friend, a description we will discuss in relation to Dionysus' contest for Beroe's hand. It would seem then that Nonnus was content to adopt the traditional use of Proteus as seer, especially in marine situations. Again, as we saw with shape-changing in Book 1, Proteus is viewed as a benign figure in respect to Dionysus.

Beroe, Poseidon, Dionysus and Proteus

Books 41 to 43 of the *Dionysiaca* tell of Dionysus' wooing of Beroe, daughter of Ocean and Tethys, his battle with Poseidon for her possession, and his ultimate defeat, when Zeus intervenes. In this long and complex episode, Proteus again makes an appearance and plays a small but far from insignificant role. The Beroe episode fits into the *Dionysiaca* in a number of ways. It is one of a series of pursuits of unwilling nymphs by the god; it includes another *ekphrasis* of a city and another foundation myth; it includes another battle, indeed another sea-battle; it is the final step in Dionysus' progression in triumph through the world before he arrives in Europe; metamorphosis plays a significant role. Much of this episode is concerned with matters outside the scope of our discussion of Proteus in the *Dionysiaca*. However, to understand the nature and importance of Proteus' appearance, we need to understand its context within the episode.

Book 41 opens with Dionysus arriving in Lebanon, on the site of Beirut (Beroe) immediately after his passage through Tyre. This book presents descriptions of the site of Beroe and tells of its foundation.⁴²⁷ Indeed, it includes some of Nonnus' most striking ekphrastic writing.⁴²⁸ The story of

⁴²⁷ Chuvín, Pierre: "Local Traditions and Classical Mythology in the *Dionysiaca*," in Hopkinson, 1994a, pp.167-76 at pp.168-70. See also: Chuvín, 1991

⁴²⁸ Lauritzen, Delphine: "À l'ombre des jeunes villes en fleurs: les *ekphraseis* de Nicée, Tyr et Beyrouth dans les *Dionysiaques* de Nonnos de Panopolis," in Odorico, Paolo and Charis Messis: *Villes de toute beauté. L'ekphrasis*

Beroe herself is complicated. As Geisz notes, Nonnus “plays on the confusion between Beroe the city and Beroe the girl.”⁴²⁹ In fact, she adds when talking of the following book, “Dionysus’ love for Beroe the girl undoubtedly mirrors the poet’s admiration for Beroe the city.”⁴³⁰ Furthermore, in typically disconcerting Nonnian way, “derrière le destin de l’éponyme de Beyrouth, le destin impériale de Rome se profile.”⁴³¹ Nonnus presents two versions of the origins of Beroe the girl, an “old” and a “new.” In the old version (41.150-4), Beroe is the daughter of Ocean and Tethys; in the new, the version that Nonnus will follow for the rest of the episode, Beroe is the daughter of Adonis and Aphrodite (41.155-7). It is in the passage describing Beroe’s childhood and youth that we have the first hint of the importance of water in her fate, as first she is bathed in water from the Hippocrene (41.227)⁴³² and then we learn of the outcome of Dionysus’ wooing – before his wooing of Beroe has even been suggested. Zeus is moved by Beroe’s beauty (ἄζυγα κούρην / Ζεὺς πάλιν ἐπτοίητο 41.239-40) but leaves her for his brother Poseidon as the girl is “destined to a watery wedding” (Βερόην διεροῖσιν ὀφειλομένην ὑμεναίοις 41.247). At the end of the book, in a sequence which once more displays the interlinkages in the *Dionysiaca*,⁴³³ Aphrodite sends off her son Eros to strike with the same arrow (ἴσον βέλος 41.420) both Poseidon and Dionysus (Ποσειδάωνι καὶ ἄμπελόεντι Λυαίῳ 41.421) so they will both fall in love with Beroe. From this point we have “a light-hearted love story” continuing in the following book.⁴³⁴

At the start of Book 42, Eros carries out his mother’s orders. When Poseidon and Dionysus come to the same place in the mountains of Lebanon (ἔσω Λιβάνοιο καρήνων/ῆντεον εἰς ἓνα χῶρον 42.18-19), Eros loads his bow with two arrows and strikes them both (δαίμονας ἀμφοτέρους διδυμάονι

des cités dans les littératures Byzantines et Byzantino-slaves, Paris (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales), 2012, pp.181- 214, at pp.199-208

⁴²⁹ Geisz, 2018, p.49

⁴³⁰ Geisz, op. cit. p.262

⁴³¹ Chuvin and Fayant, 2006, p.4

⁴³² Chuvin and Fayant, op. cit. p.39n.1. Also: “Questa abluzione ... sembra prefigurare le nozze di Beroe con Poseidone...” Accorinto, 2004, p.161

⁴³³ “The motif of the arrow of desire in Book 7 (Semele) is replayed in Book 41 for Beroe, where it is both amplified (since two gods are shot simultaneously) and ameliorated (since a decorous contest results and not a rape).” Lightfoot, Jane: “Oracles in the *Dionysiaca*,” in Spanoudakis, 2014, pp.39-54 at p.49

⁴³⁴ Verhelst, Berenice: *Direct Speech in Nonnus’ Dionysiaca*, Leiden and Boston (Brill), 2016, pp.277-91 at p.277

βάλλεν οἰστῷ 42.24), while Beroe is nearby (γείτονι κούρη 42.23). Eros' arrow goads Poseidon to love (οἰστρήσας δ' ἐς ἔρωτα 42.27), while Dionysus with the arrow in his heart burns (ἔφλεγε δ' 42.34). As Fauth puts it; "Wie Dionysos die Männer durch seinen Wein erhitzt, so Eros den Bakchos."⁴³⁵ In an example of Nonnus' *poikilia*, after the weighty mythical, historical and cosmic themes of the preceding book, Book 42 concentrates on the wooing of Beroe by the rival brothers, with the emphasis on comedy. Although both brothers have been struck by Eros' arrows and both are desperate to win her favours, by far the greater part of this book concentrates on Dionysus' pursuit of Aphrodite's daughter: barely 50 lines of the 540 lines of the book are devoted to Poseidon's efforts. As the reader already knows from Book 41 that Beroe will end up as Poseidon's bride, the interest in this book is not in seeing whether Dionysus will succeed, but in seeing how he will fail.

Up until this point we have not seen Dionysus wooing a woman in any traditional sense of the word, nor does it happen later in the work. In Book 16 he pursues Nicaia but ends up getting her drunk and raping her. A similar fate awaits Aura in Book 48. Ariadne will be a willing bride in Book 43, but there is no wooing to speak of. We have seen that in that same book he wrestles Pallene for her hand in marriage. The closest parallel is the story of his love for Ampelos in Books 10 to 12. Yet, there, as we have seen in our discussion of wrestling, the atmosphere is quite different. There is nowhere in the Beroe episode the joyful playfulness of the interaction of Dionysus and the boy. Both episodes end badly for Dionysus - in the earlier episode, it is, of course, because of the death of Ampelos - but only here does he lose out to a love rival. But if there is not the joy of parts of the Ampelos story, there are nonetheless parallels. Gazing secretly at the object of desire is again here a strong element (λάθριος εἰς Βερόην πεφυλαγμένον ὄμμα τιταίνων 42.45), with the voyeur unable to get enough of looking (παρθένον ὅσον ὅπωπε, τόσον πλέον ἤθελε λεύσσειν 42.48). Play in water was a key element with Ampelos; water is important here, too, as we will see, though with different

⁴³⁵ Fauth, 1981, p.74

connotations. The reader is aware that Ampelos and Dionysus were both young and carefree, so that despite the difference in status, there was a certain equality. Here, Dionysus is not only the son of Zeus, he is the general of a great army, conqueror of the Indians: the distance between him and Beroe could hardly be greater. This marks a stark difference between the two episodes.

Much of the Ampelos story was light-hearted and pleasantly erotic. There is also a certain amount of that here, as Dionysus wanders through the wood following his nymph (πλάζετο μὲν Διόνυσος ἔσω τερψίφρονος ὕλης 42.44); but very quickly the light-heartedness becomes comic, and the comedy is at Dionysus' expense. The comic tone is set early when Dionysus, traipsing along after Beroe, starts kissing the ground she walks on "with innumerable kisses" (κύσε νηρίθμοισι φιλήμασι 42.71); he is mocked by the nymph of a spring when he imitates Beroe in drinking from it (ἐρατὴν μιμήσατο κούρην 42.96); when he first tries to speak to her he is tied up with fear (φόβῳ πεπέδητο 42.139). The fun, of course, comes from his un-god-like behaviour, the high-born one debased, the fearless general made a coward (παρθένον ἔτρεμε Βάκχος, ὃν ἔτρεμε φῦλα Γιγάντων 42.143), the conqueror conquered. The scene at the spring also features Dionysus jealous of Poseidon because Beroe drinks water not wine (πίε παρθένος ὕδωρ / ἀντὶ μέθης 42.111-12). Dionysus warns her, in her absence, to beware of drinking water in case crafty Poseidon steal her virginity (μὴ σεῖο κορείην / ὕδατόεις κλέψειεν ἐν ὕδασι κυανοχαίτης 42.114-15). As Frangoulis points out, it is rather amusing to see Dionysus warning a young maiden against drinking water at a spring,⁴³⁶ considering his past actions during the pursuit of Nicaia in Book 16. This also brings to the fore water in this story, first noted in Book 41, in connection with Poseidon - and Proteus, of course - and the role it will play in this episode.

Dionysus' wooing of Beroe is played out in the poem almost entirely through speeches,⁴³⁷ in a neat pattern of episodes ending in speeches to Beroe, punctuated in the middle by a consultation on

⁴³⁶ Frangoulis, 2014, p.178 n.33

⁴³⁷ Verhelst analyses in detail four of the five speeches by Dionysus: Verhelst, 2016, pp.277-91

tactics with Pan, after the failure of his own efforts. Using this device enables Nonnus “to entertain his readers with variations on the topic of courting strategies.”⁴³⁸ His tactics involve the use of trickery, disguise, metamorphosis and flattery, all reflected in the speeches.⁴³⁹ His repertoire extends from flowery persuasion to heavy sexual innuendo, from professions of undying love to sly touching. The advice he is given by Pan, himself a failed lover as pursuer of Echo, is a miniature school of seduction (42.196-274) and has been likened to Ovid.⁴⁴⁰ Even when in the final scene between Dionysus and Beroe he reveals his identity (ὥς θεὸς ἴστατο κούρη 42.357) and speaks at length as himself, she merely blocks her ears (οὔατος ἔνδοθι κούρη/χεῖρας ἐρεισάμενη διδύμας 42.429-30). In brief, for the purposes of the present discussion the essence of the long sequence of wooing in Book 42, is that Dionysus fails and fails badly. He fails as a trickster, through his use of metamorphosis and he fails as a Pan-schooled smooth-talking seducer. Not only a failure, a figure of fun.

It is true that on his return at 42.443, Poseidon in his speech also fails to convince Beroe. The difference is that in the mere 50 lines of so allotted to him, Poseidon neither makes such a fool of himself, nor is he placed in such laughable situations as Dionysus. What Poseidon does, though, is name Proteus. This is the first time that he is named in this episode. We have seen signs earlier that hint at the connection to Proteus: metamorphosis and water. There is even a mocking mention by Dionysus of stinking sealskins as bridal gifts from the sea (δυσώδεα πόντιον ὁδμήν / δέρματα φωκάων 42.398-9), in a clear reference to the *Odyssey* (4.404-6).⁴⁴¹ Those signs might well be explained in other ways. But here he is named for the first time since Book 39, during the sea battle with Deriades. He there appears in Dionysus’ exhortation to his troops, as Dionysus boasts that Proteus is his friend (εἰμὶ φίλος Πρωτῆος 39.108). It is Proteus’ prophetic powers he stresses in that passage, calling him the “old man with prophetic powers” (μαντιπόλου δὲ γέροντος 39.106) and

⁴³⁸ Verhelst, 2016, p.289

⁴³⁹ “Three out of four of Dionysus’ speeches are marked by the deceitful and/or obscure.” Verhelst, loc. cit.

⁴⁴⁰ Chuvin and Fayant, 2006, p.59 n.2

⁴⁴¹ Accorinti, 2004, p.272, n. to 398ff

recalling that Proteus had earlier predicted his victory in the sea-battle (21.289). Poseidon, for his part, promises Beroe to give her Proteus as a servant, along with Glaucus, Nereus and Melicertes (42.478-9). These would-be servants once gave Dionysus “Schutz, Gastlichkeit und Hilfe.”⁴⁴² On the one hand, this is logical: these are gods of the deep, at his command and they make a nice contrast with Dionysus’ Bassarids and Satyrs (42.475-6) and provide a nice dig at Dionysus. Also, as we have seen in our discussion of Book 1, Proteus and Dionysus are opposites in the contrast of water and fire. On the other hand, it is not quite so evident when we consider that Poseidon is offering Beroe his rival Dionysus’ “friend” as a kind of bridal gift. We will discuss these tensions and paradoxes further when Proteus enters Book 43 as a participant in the contest.

This book, then, gives Nonnus the chance to present a full-blown comic love interlude, using techniques, tropes and even language borrowed from the novel, especially from Achilles Tatius, as has been demonstrated by Frangoulis.⁴⁴³ But, if he has borrowed from the novel, it is, as one expects from Nonnus, very much on his own terms. There is a lot more comedy than love here, and this comedy is turned against Dionysus. Frangoulis remarks that the rapes of Nicaia and Aura “ne sont en fait que des exercices permettant au lecteur de voir ce qui aurait pu advenir dans les romans grecs.”⁴⁴⁴ One might also argue that the wooing of Beroe is Nonnus’ joking, if not mocking response to the genre. In any event, Dionysus here without wine, and with his metamorphic powers ineffective, cuts a rather clownish figure. There is also a feeling that perhaps the episode is not quite as light-hearted as we first thought. Dionysus’ “friend” Proteus suddenly appears as part of Poseidon’s bride gift. Is this just part of the light-hearted fun or something more unsettling? This undercurrent appears again at the end of the book. Aphrodite proposes that her daughter’s suitors fight for her (ἄμφω ἀεθλεύσοιτε γάμου προκέλευθον ἄγῶνα 42.513) and both Dionysus and Poseidon agree. But after all the pomp and ceremony of oath-swearing and preparation, Dionysus

⁴⁴² Fauth, 1981, p.79. He adds that “pikanterweise” Nonnus leaves Ino out of the list of Beroe’s servants.

⁴⁴³ Frangoulis, 2014. For the Beroe episode see, for example, pp.74-77 and 104-108

⁴⁴⁴ Frangoulis, op. cit. p.77

receives a portent, in the form of a dream. The portent leads him to give up hope of victory (Διόνυσος ἀπέπτυνεν ἐλπίδα νίκης 42.539). Yet, Book 42 ends with a smile, as Zeus is pleased at the prospect of the upcoming contest (ὄμματι μειδιῶντι πατὴρ κεχάρητο Κρονίων 42.541).

If Book 42 is largely a light-hearted comedy, Book 43 has been described as an “*épisode héroï-comique*.”⁴⁴⁵ In this book Dionysus and Poseidon draw up their forces, in the presence of the gods, to fight a battle for the hand of Beroe. Beroe herself, we now learn, fears a watery bridechamber (ὕγρὸν ὑποβρυχίων ἐπεδείδιδε παστὸν Ἑρώτων 43.11) and would in fact prefer Dionysus (πλέον ἤθελε Βάκχον 43.12). Dionysus, indeed, is not the clownish figure of Book 42. He even claims that the contest is not only about marriage, but also about Beroe’s home city (περὶ πατρίδος 43.119)⁴⁴⁶ and making sure it will not be destroyed by Poseidon’s trident (43.120-1). Yet even if he is no longer a hapless suitor, he is presented as a rather exaggerated version of himself as war leader. In Rhea’s chariot he is entirely covered in the vine (ἄμπελος αὐτοτέλεστος ὅλον δέμας ἔσκεπε Βάκχου 43.24) and shaded by ivy (κατάσκια σύζυγι κισσῷ 43.25), so that the effect is rather comic. Not only is the lion yoked to the chariot particularly fierce (43.26-8), but he is also accompanied by an elephant (43.29-33) frightening enough to scare off a nymph from her spring (μετήγαγε διψάδα Νύμφην 43.33). Presumably, it is one of the elephants won as battle spoils in the Indian War in Book 40.⁴⁴⁷

Dionysus and Poseidon each address their troops and it is during Dionysus’ address that Proteus emerges as a combatant for Poseidon. In the four lines devoted to him here, Nonnus introduces clear Homeric pointers (Pharos, Egypt and sealskins: 43.76-8), urging his Bassarids to exchange Proteus’ sealskin for fawnskin (νεβρίδα ποικιλόνωτον ἔχων μετὰ δέρματα φώκης 43.77), bind his hair with ivy (ἀήθει δήσατε κισσῷ 43.75), move him from Egypt (43.77) and have him bow his neck before Dionysus (43.79). As Chuvín and Fayant point out, these reminders of Proteus are presented

⁴⁴⁵ Chuvín and Fayant, 2006, p.129

⁴⁴⁶ Chuvín and Fayant, op. cit. pp.109-11

⁴⁴⁷ Accorinti, 2004, p.292, n. to 29-33

here with a “tonalité humoristique.”⁴⁴⁸ Of course, Nonnus is playing with both sets of clichés, those around Proteus and those around Dionysus. The point is surely that here he is indeed playing, and we will see this tone continue.

Proteus is not the only one of Poseidon’s followers mentioned by Dionysus in his address to his troops. Proteus is just one of a list of sea-dwellers paired by Dionysus with his own troops: Maron with Glaucus (43.75), Silenus with Melicertes (43.80), Bacchants and Hydriads (43.94-5), and so on. Fauth regards this passage, especially the changes to be forced on Proteus as “beispielhaft für den Absolutheitsanspruch der bakchischen Mission, die ihre Gegner nicht nur zu besiegen, sondern in ihre Überwindung sich anzuverwandeln sucht.”⁴⁴⁹ In the context of this particular contest, however, this seems a little too serious. We have seen Dionysus a figure of fun in Book 42 and so far in this book he seems too exaggeratedly Dionysian to be taken seriously. We also know that he will not win this contest, that his plans will come to nothing and that Proteus, for example, will not wear the fawnskin for all this bluster. We can see, rather, that Nonnus is playing with past accounts of battle and in this particular passage displaying his taste for paradox and incongruity. The play element is not so evident in Poseidon’s speech (43.145-91), but it does contain much exaggeration and a considerable amount of scorn directed at Dionysus.⁴⁵⁰

Proteus appears in his own right once the speeches are over and the battle begins, described in a series of contests between individuals and groups. Proteus arrives wrapped in a sealskin, “marine armour” (εἰναλίῳ θώρηκι κορύσσετο 43.226) and is pitted against Dionysus’ Indian troops. The Indians, apart from a briefest description of their appearance, specifically their dark colouring and curly hair (αἰθοπερὶ Ἰνδοὶ 43.227; οὐλοκόμων στίχες ἀνδρῶν 43.228) and a hint of their number, at least enough to surround him (ἀμφὶ δέ μιν στεφανηδὸν ἐπέρρεον 43.227), receive little mention.

⁴⁴⁸ Chuvant and Fayant, 2006, p.193, n. to 68-80

⁴⁴⁹ Fauth, 1981, p.83

⁴⁵⁰ “Poseidon invite d’abord son adversaire, en termes méprisants, à renoncer au thyrsos et à la nébride”: Chuvant and Fayant, 2006, p.114

Nonnus concentrates on Proteus' metamorphoses as he escapes their clutches. For the only signs of combat here are that the Indians try to get hold of him (ἐπηχύναντο 43.229), and that Proteus uses his powers to escape. This, of course, is in keeping with the Proteus of the *Odyssey*, whose shape-changing, as we have seen, was a defensive manoeuvre. Here the Indians, unlike Odysseus, have no Eidothea to give them advice, so that whenever they try to grasp Proteus, they grasp nothing but water (χερσὶν ὀλισθηρήσιν ἔχων ἀπατήλιον ὕδωρ 43.245). The reminders of Homer appear again and again in this segment: Proteus is a herder of seals (φωκάων ... νομῆα 43.229); a crafty old man (κερδαλέος δὲ γέρων 43.246); and, as we will see, performs the same metamorphoses as the Homeric Proteus. There is nothing in Homer or the later writers we have discussed, to suggest any sort of warrior or champion status for Proteus: he is known for his shape-changing ability and his wisdom or foreknowledge. So, while his close connection to Poseidon explains his presence among the followers, he is nevertheless a strange choice for a combatant, at least in a serious battle. But this is a battle which has no dead or wounded.⁴⁵¹

The contest between Proteus and the Indians does not seem very serious. There are no offensive moves from Proteus and all the Indians seem to do is dance around him and lunge at him in vain. Indeed, there is an air of choreographed performance about the encounter, as Proteus moves from form to form within the circling Indians. It is this display which is at the heart of the Proteus episode. Fauth writes that here Proteus is not only symbolic of changeability, speed and fluidity, but also of the "Vergeblichkeit, Nichtigkeit, ja man könnte sagen der Scheinhaftigkeit" of the raging battle.⁴⁵² The display also recalls both Homer and earlier, very similar instances of metamorphosis in the *Dionysiaca*. He turns into a panther, a tree, a serpent, a lion, a bear, water and a bee.

⁴⁵¹ Chuvin and Fayant, 2006, p.130

⁴⁵² Fauth, 1981, p.89

The reference to the metamorphoses of Proteus in *Odyssey* 4 are obvious, and the first six are identical except for the order of the changes.⁴⁵³ This immediately links the passage to the first mention of Proteus in the First Proem to the *Dionysiaca*, discussed in detail above, demonstrating the closeness of Proteus and Dionysus. In Book 1, the metamorphoses mentioned are: serpent, lion, leopard, boar, water and tree. In Book 36, in his battle with Deriades (36.291-3330), Dionysus becomes fire, water, a lion, a tree and a panther. In book 40, Deriades answers Morrheus' reproaches by describing Dionysus changing shape into a panther, a lion, a serpent, a bear, fire, a boar, a bull, a tree and water (40.44-56). The changes of shape in the descriptions of these different metamorphoses remain largely the same, with an expanded list in Deriades' recapitulation of the event. In Proteus' changes, the difference is the inclusion of the bee, where Nonnus references the story of Heracles and Periclymenos.⁴⁵⁴

Repetition of particular scenes with minor variations is, as we have seen, a stylistic device that Nonnus uses frequently in the *Dionysiaca*. The Protean shape-changing gives scope for movement, and the display of virtuosity. In this case, virtuosity is very much on display: there is movement, not only from Proteus as he changes shape, but from the circling Indians; striking images of the creatures he turns into; clever use of language. The metamorphoses lead, as noted, back to the *Odyssey*, and the Homeric connections are stressed here, especially with the inclusion of his flock of seals. Indeed, the finale of the scene has Proteus, surrounded by his flock, the "seals who love sand" (φιλοψαμάθοιο δὲ φώκης 43.251) as he heads for dry land (χερσαίην πορείην 43.250), reminding the reader of Proteus and his seals sleeping at noon in *Odyssey* 4. If any doubt were possible about the Homeric links, Dionysus even mentions Proteus' daughter Eidothea by name in his address to his troops (43.102). Less clear is what has been achieved here. In the contest between Dionysus' Indians and Poseidon's Proteus, who has won? Neither side seems to have achieved anything. The last line of the Nonnus' depiction of the contest is full of sound, the sound of Proteus' seals,

⁴⁵³ Chuvin and Fayant, 2006, p.119

⁴⁵⁴ Accorinti, 2004, pp.314-5, n. to 247-9

described in the previous line as “sea-monsters” (πώεα κητώεντα 43.251), as they surround the old man (οἰγομένω βαρύδουπον ὕδωρ ἐπεπάφλασε λαίμῳ 43.252). It does not sound like defeat. This episode is the last mention by name of Proteus, though a Bacchant pursues the “god of Pallene” (δαίμονα Παλληναῖον 43.334) with her bloody ivy. If this is a reference to Proteus,⁴⁵⁵ we note that, in any event, she does not manage to strike him (οὐ δέ μιν ἐστυφέλιξεν 43.335).

Several other brief contests follow over the next hundred lines of the poem. The nature of each duel varies according to those involved, but they have in common that there is nothing very serious about them, certainly nothing lethal. One small section highlights the lack of martial seriousness, indeed the light-heartedness of the battle and neatly refers us back to Proteus. In three lines (43.337-9), Nonnus gives us the image of an elephant as tall as the clouds (ὑψινεφῆς 43.337) charging an “earth-bedding”⁴⁵⁶ (χαμευνάδι 43.339) seal. The elephant, of course, reminds us of Dionysus’ Indian conquests and the seal of Proteus and his flock and as such both fit in here. This unusual confrontation occurs in a fast and furious passage just before the end of the contest. The elephant and seal stand out as the only animal opponents. More than that, the use of an adjective more often used of Zeus for a lumbering elephant⁴⁵⁷ and the extraordinary image of an enormously tall creature against an adversary flat on the ground induces a smile in the reader.

The contest ends abruptly when Psamathe, previously unmentioned, begs Zeus to stop Dionysus defeating Poseidon’s forces (43.361-71) - even though it is by no means obvious to the reader that this is about to happen - and Zeus stops the contest.⁴⁵⁸ Beroe is awarded to Poseidon (43.373). Dionysus cuts a pathetic figure as he slinks off, listening “with shamed ears” (οὔασι δ’ αἰδομένοισιν 43.383) to the wedding songs. The rest of the book is taken up with the wedding. However, a scene right at the end brings Dionysus to the foreground and again highlights the rather comic and

⁴⁵⁵ Chuvin and Fayant, 2006, n. to 334

⁴⁵⁶ Rouse’s translation

⁴⁵⁷ See LSJ under “ὑψινεφής”

⁴⁵⁸ It is not entirely clear from the text just how much of a battle has taken place: refer Accorinti, 2004, p.170 and n.35

ungodlike air that follows him throughout Books 42 and 43. Eros offers to the sad Dionysus (ἄμειδῆτῳ δὲ Λυαίῳ 43.420), still jealous (φθονέοντι 43.421), some consoling words. Firstly, the excuse of sour grapes: Beroe, was not worthy of him, being nothing but a sea creature (οὔτιδανὴν δὲ / πόντιον αἶμα φέρουσιν 43.427-8). Besides showing a disconsolate and vaguely ridiculous Dionysus that he has not really lost, this assertion links in neatly with the sea-land divide that has grown throughout the episode. It is also a nod to the notion of the non-Olympian sea deities being rather doubtful figures, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Secondly, Eros promises his “love-mad brother” (γυναιμανέοντι κασιγνήτῳ 43.437) no fewer than three more suitable brides: Aura, Ariadne and Pallene. The book ends with Dionysus leaving Asia for the cities of Europe (43.449). Thus, the Beroe episode, which has not shown Dionysus at his best, ends with a return to a note of triumph.

We now return to the question posed at the beginning of the chapter: why does Nonnus have Proteus lead a contingent against Dionysus? The obvious answer is that this is a battle with Poseidon, Lord of the Sea, and it is a sea contest. Proteus, as we know from Homer, is a sea god. The Homeric links are important to Nonnus because, as we have seen, his mentions of Proteus in this episode contain many references to his appearance in the *Odyssey*. This obvious answer, though, becomes less obvious if we consider both the character of the Homeric Proteus and the previous mentions of him in the *Dionysiaca*. The Old Man of the Sea in the *Odyssey* is not in any way warlike. He is a shepherd of seals, either hidden deep in his caverns or on land surrounded by his seals. His power is that of foresight. His shape-changing ability is defensive, not offensive. Later writers do not essentially change this picture, though there is a tendency for references to Proteus to be reduced to his metamorphic powers - both in a negative and a positive way - and his prophetic powers. In other words, if Nonnus has Proteus appear to act contrary to type, this is surely a deliberate choice, in the knowledge that it will go against the reader's expectations of this well-known figure.

This is not to say that Nonnus would hesitate to change details (for example, here he has Proteus arrive from Pallene rather than Pharos, and rather than Egyptian he appears to be from Chalcidice, probably following Callimachus;⁴⁵⁹ unlike the Homeric character, Nonnus' Proteus changes into a bee) or indeed make more drastic changes that suited his purpose. The interesting part of his use of Proteus in the Beroe episode is its relationship to the sea-god's other appearances in the poem.

Proteus and Dionysus are linked from the Proem, where shape-changing Proteus is made emblematic for Nonnus' poetic method. Later in the *Dionysiaca*, Proteus is named as a friend of Dionysus. It is this change from emblem and friend to leader of an opposing troop that is difficult to reconcile. It is not a change that is comfortably explained simply by his position as a lesser sea-god in Poseidon's realm. The change from friend to enemy is surely too much of a paradox, unless the paradox itself is part of the point. The sea battle in Book 43 is not short of other paradoxical moments: the reader has only to think of the confrontation between the elephant and the seal.

The Beroe episode is a difficult one for Dionysus. He is almost entirely absent from Book 41,⁴⁶⁰ which includes the most serious parts of the episode. He is introduced when Aphrodite decides there should be a contest for her daughter. In Book 42 he is given the role of the comically hapless suitor, almost clown-like. In Book 43, Dionysus, now a puffed-up general, is no longer a clown, but nonetheless comical, presiding over a battle that is never quite a battle, ending in defeat. It is in this context that Proteus the warrior appears, in a mock battle, in an episode where Dionysus decidedly comes off second best. His presence adds a note of piquancy to the sea-fight, not only because it hardly fits in with what the reader expects of the Old Man of the Sea, who has previously not been known for martial feats, but also because the appearance of this serious figure in the battle - the shape-changing "dance" with the Indians - is tinged with comedy. It also adds another nuance to Nonnus' ongoing dialogue with Homer. More than this, the fact that he has appeared earlier in the

⁴⁵⁹ See also the reference to Torone at 21.289. Discussion in Hopkins and Vian, 1994b, p.223; Gonnelli, 2003, p.485, n. to 289-98

⁴⁶⁰ Hernández de la Fuente, David (Ed, trans.): *Nono de Panópolis. Dionisiacas. Cantos 38-48*, Madrid (Gredos), 2008, p.21

poem both as an emblem of the poem itself and as a friend of Dionysus, makes this appearance as an enemy more paradoxical, adds to the piquancy and induces a smile. It also allows Nonnus to display once more his verbal mastery in yet another Protean metamorphosis, this final one bookending Dionysus' own metamorphoses. In the end, no bones are broken and nothing very serious happens. After all, we already knew that Dionysus was not going to win Beroe. The Beroe episode ends with the promise of triumph to come for Dionysus, as he moves on to Europe and his comical discomfiture is put behind him.

The three books of the Beroe episode have also been awkward for Nonnus scholars, or at least the earlier writers.⁴⁶¹ This is partly because the episode as a whole is difficult to fit neatly into the architecture of the *Dionysiaca*. Furthermore, there is, as we have seen, something of a disconnect between the seriousness of much of Book 41 and the levity of Books 42 and 43. Proteus plays a small but not insignificant role in this levity, by being introduced in a relationship to Dionysus at odds with previous references to him in the poem and, indeed, with his traditional reputation. His appearance also allows Nonnus to continue his poem-long dialogue with Homer, this time on a comic note, as well as providing an occasion for yet another description of multiple metamorphoses.

Summary: Proteus in the *Dionysiaca*

Nonnus assigns to Proteus quite different roles in the course of the poem. In the Proem, Proteus, with his metamorphoses, is an emblem of Nonnus' literary and aesthetic undertaking, the *poikilia* that pervades the *Dionysiaca*. Yet, besides this fundamental role, Proteus is also assigned bit parts in episodes of the poem. In other words, Proteus in the *Dionysiaca* is both an emblem and a character. Nonnus, perhaps in a demonstration of *poikilia*, has Proteus as a model, a friend, and a foe. That these different roles are, as we have seen, contradictory rather than complementary, is not out of

⁴⁶¹ Collart, for example, describes Bk 41 as "verbeux et lourd" and has little better to say of Bks 42 and 43: Collart, Paul: *Nonnos de Panopolis*, Cairo (Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale), 1930, p.233. More recent commentators regard the books as among Nonnus' best: Chuvin and Fayant, 2006, p.vii

character for Nonnus. Indeed, such “inconsistency” or “sloppiness” was cited by early critics as a reason for his low ranking among poets. The better view is that Nonnus deliberately uses such devices for his literary and aesthetic purposes. In the present case, after the major use of Proteus as emblematic of *poikilia*, the minor use of Proteus as a character allows Nonnus to add to the comic effect of the Beroe episode. In this episode, with the use of friend turned enemy Proteus, he makes gentle fun both of his protagonist Dionysus and of his master and rival Homer.

We should not forget that the Protean metamorphoses fit well into Nonnus’ aesthetic and provide him an opportunity to display his virtuosity with a number of variations spaced throughout the poem.

Proteus in the *VA* and the *Dionysiaca* Compared

We have seen that both Philostratus and Nonnus have taken the Proteus of the *Odyssey* to use for their own purposes in their respective works. There is no doubt that Homer is the common source, although in Nonnus the links to the earlier poet are more pronounced, with greater detail recalling the surrounding circumstances. In the *Dionysiaca* the Old Man of the Sea not only appears as a character in the action, but there is also mention, for example, of seals, sealskins and even his daughter Eidothea. On the other hand, in the *Dionysiaca* there is much less emphasis on Proteus as seer than in the *VA*. It is only Philostratus who introduces the “second” Proteus, King Proteus.

When we now return to the questions we asked at the beginning of this chapter:

1. Why did both Philostratus and Nonnus choose the Homeric Proteus?
2. Why did Philostratus introduce the “other” Proteus into the *VA*?
3. Why did Nonnus have Proteus lead a contingent of troops against Dionysus in the *Dionysiaca*?

It is now clear that both Nonnus and Philostratus chose the shape-changing Proteus as emblematic of their literary method in the respective works. Both the *VA* and the *Dionysiaca* demonstrate *poikilia* through a remarkable variety in the presentation of the narrative, mixing and changing in quick succession, just as Proteus changes his shape. Nonnus takes this to a more radical level than Philostratus, both through more colourful use of set pieces and through the use of *poikilia* as a structural device, though we can hardly forget that in the *VA* Proteus declares that he “is” Apollonius.

For both writers, Proteus is unquestionably of Homeric descent. Yet both writers have a far from simple relationship to the earlier poet, and it is through the perspective of their relationships to Homer that we find the answers to the second and third questions. In Philostratus’ case, he is a prose writer and, in the *VA*, giving us a kind of biography. He is not an epic poet rivalling Homer. Yet, in other works, particularly in the *Heroicus*, he does follow the rhetorical tradition of correcting

Homer. Here he does it by introducing King Proteus. This seems to serve a dual purpose: firstly, it adds a touch of humour; secondly it provides a sly dig at Apollonius who is otherwise presented in an unrelentingly positively light. Nonnus has a different relationship to Homer, that of follower and rival. We can see the follower in the first presentation of Proteus in the Proem, although we may also detect the first hint of rivalry in the description of the metamorphoses. Nonnus will repeat these metamorphoses with variations throughout the poem. Something different seems to be happening, though, when the Homeric Proteus turns up in Book 43 as an opponent of Dionysus, and a character in a comedy.

In brief, we may say that Proteus fulfils for Philostratus and Nonnus, primary and secondary roles. Firstly, he provides both these writers, for all their differences in genre and period, an appropriate emblem for their literary method. But more than this, in a smaller, but nonetheless important way, the figure of Proteus allows both to undermine gently their main characters and subtly mock their great predecessor, Homer.

Table: Proteus in Homer, Philostratus and Nonnus

Homer <i>Odyssey</i> , Book 4	Philostratus <i>VA</i>	Nonnus <i>Dionysiaca</i>
Egyptian (351)	Egyptian divinity (1.4)	Pharos (1.12)
From Pharos (355)	Wise, multiform, impossible to catch (1.4)	"Of many turns" (1.14)
His daughter is Eidothea (366)	Seemed to have all knowledge and foreknowledge	Diversity of shapes (1.15)
Old man of the sea (365)	Lived on Pharos (3.24)	Not a plowman (1.111)
Unerring (384)	Different Proteus, Egyptian king (4.16.5)	Prophet-wizard (21.144)
Fostered by Zeus (385)	Egyptian king (7.22.2)	Gave Dionysus information in the sea (21.289)
Will tell what has happened (391-2)		Dionysus' friend (39.106)
Sleeps in caves (403)		Old man and seer (39.106)
Surrounded by seals (404)		Poseidon says he will be Beroe's "chamberlain" (42.477f.)
Bitter smell of seals (406)		Egyptian from the Pharian sea (43.78)
Has "wizard wiles" (410)		Sealskins (43.78)
Will assume all living shapes (417)		Fighting for Poseidon with his spear (43.160)
And of water and fire (418)		Old man, shepherd of seals, crafty (43.231ff)
Assumes the shape of lion, serpent, boar, water, tree (456ff)		Metamorphoses in battle: panther, tree with leaves, serpent, lion, boar, water (43.231-46)
Can he see the future? (490ff)		(Named by paraphrase (433-5)

Chapter 5: India and the Indians in the *VA* and the *Dionysiaca*

σοφῷ ἀνδρὶ Ἑλλάς πάντα (VA 1.35.2)

Introduction

In considering the links between the *Imagines* and the *Dionysiaca*, we were concerned overwhelmingly with the world of Greek myth and a largely mythical past. This remained the case as we considered the role of Proteus in the *Vita Apollonii* (VA) and Nonnus' poem. As we move to consider India and Indians in the VA and the *Dionysiaca*, we are closer to recorded history. This will be obvious as far as Philostratus is concerned, but even though Nonnus' epic takes place in a remote time, such features as war elephants show a certain engagement with the historical past, or at least with writings about that past. However, we will see that it is the world of wonder and colour rather than historical fact that particularly unites our authors.

India and the Indians play a vital role in both the VA and the *Dionysiaca*. In the VA, Apollonius makes the journey to India to complete his quest for knowledge and wisdom. On his journey he meets just rulers and wise men. He learns much from the Brahmins and their leader. On his return, he is ready to start his mission. His journey to India takes up Books 2 and 3 of the eight books of the VA. In the *Dionysiaca*, on the other hand, Zeus orders the young Dionysus to defeat the Indians. Once he has obeyed his father and defeated them, he begins the triumphal journey that will end in his apotheosis. His war against the Indians takes up most of the poem from Book 13 to Book 39 of the 48 books of the *Dionysiaca*. In other words, the encounter with India and Indians occurs at an important early stage of the journey of both protagonists, a stage that finishes their preparation for future triumphs.

However, just as clear from this is that India and the Indians have very different roles in the two works. In the *VA*, Indians have an overwhelmingly positive role. As we will see, from his stay with the Brahmins, his discussions with their leader and his observation of their customs, Apollonius will emerge prepared for his mission. In the *Dionysiaca*, the role of the Indians is overwhelmingly negative. The Indians are the enemy and the portrayal of individual Indians reflects this. It is by defeating them that Dionysus is prepared for his mission. If there are any lessons to be learned, it is Dionysus, rather than the Indians, giving the lessons.

In each of the works, besides the core role played by India and the Indians in preparing Apollonius and Dionysus for their respective missions, there are other ways in which they contribute to the literary fabric. For example, in the *VA*, India, and especially the journey to India, provides Philostratus with plenty of exotic material for his narrative; in the *Dionysiaca*, fighting and dying Indians present the opportunity for extraordinary descriptions. In some instances, they share an object of fascination, for example the elephant.

Of course, the fascination with India in Greek literature did not start with Philostratus. As in previous chapters we will see that both writers built on a rich tradition, in this instance going back until at least the days of Alexander. As we have seen in considering other elements in the writers' works, the portions pertaining to India and the Indians are rich with literary allusions. We will see once more that both writers used such allusion for their own purposes and in ways that support their own aesthetic and literary agenda.

In this chapter we will address the following questions:

1. Why did Philostratus choose to send Apollonius specifically to India to perfect his wisdom before he could set out on his mission across the world? Why was he so interested in Indian cultural details?⁴⁶²

⁴⁶² The *VA* is purportedly based on the eye-witness accounts of Damis, the companion of Apollonius, including his accounts of their trip to India. Whether Apollonius ever actually travelled to India is a question that has

2. Why did Nonnus (or Zeus) choose to send the young Dionysus to defeat the Indians before he could set out on his triumphal journey across the world? Why does he show such a lack of interest in Indian cultural details?
3. What links these choices made by Philostratus and Nonnus?

There is perhaps a subsidiary question which is also interesting: why are both Philostratus and Nonnus so fascinated by elephants?

In answering these questions, we will see that for all the obvious differences, there are significant links between the two writers in their treatment of India and the Indians.

been the subject of scholarly discussion for centuries. A recent account of the scholarship, in the context of Apollonius' presence in Taxila, can be found in Bäßler, Balbina and Heinz-Günther Nesselrath: *Philostrats Apollonios und seine Welt: Griechische und nichtgriechische Kunst und Religion in der Vita Apollonii*, Berlin and Boston (de Gruyter), 2016, pp. 77-89.

India: In the Footsteps of Alexander

Greeks were interested in India long before Alexander and his successes. Scylax, Ctesias of Cnidos and Herodotus described India and Indians for Greek readers long before this. The India they portray is highly coloured and full of fabulous stories and descriptions of people, places and creatures in a remote land. As Lenfant says, while one could visit that other far-off land, Persia, India was only known by hearsay.⁴⁶³ These works and their descriptions remained popular and, as we shall see, still exercised an influence on the writings of Philostratus and Nonnus, even though by the time Philostratus was writing the *VA*, India was much better known and was exotic rather than amazingly “other.”⁴⁶⁴ Furthermore, for writers of Greek under the Roman Empire, India evoked above all the name of Alexander and the tales of his eastern conquests.

His exploits in India were known from writers whose works now are known only by fragments, such as Nearchus and Megasthenes, as well as from Roman era writers such as Plutarch (*Life of Alexander*) and Arrian (*Anabasis; Indica*). Besides these works, we also have the *Alexander Romance*, combining military exploits, biography and all sorts of geographic and other wonders and exotica. Alexander’s prestige was such and his exploits in the east and in particular in India were so well known that any appearance of India in a literary work would likely invite comparison with Alexander and with the previous writings about him. In the case of the *VA*, the connections between Apollonius’ and Alexander’s journeys are made quite explicit. Indeed, as we shall see, it is soon apparent that Apollonius is following Alexander’s itinerary and the connections and the comparisons that flow from this are important as a means of establishing Apollonius’ status: Apollonius goes to places where Alexander could not go and meets people Alexander could not meet. There is no such explicit connection in the *Dionysiaca*, and there can be no question of a rivalry between Philip’s son

⁴⁶³ Lenfant, Dominique (Ed., trans.): *Ctésias. La Perse. L’Inde. Autres fragments*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 2004, p.CLVIII

⁴⁶⁴ Stoneman, Richard: *The Greek Experience of India. From Alexander to the Indo-Greeks*, Princeton and Oxford (Princeton University Press), 2019, p.477

Alexander and Zeus' son Dionysus, but echoes of Alexander and his military campaign in India are not hard to find. Beyond the military campaign and the fighting, we will see that Alexander and his myth led to an increased emphasis on and interest in Dionysus that plays out in both Philostratus and Nonnus. As Stoneman puts it, the myth of Dionysus' expedition to India grew after Alexander's death to culminate in the "massive outpouring of Nonnus."⁴⁶⁵

Echoes of Alexander in the VA

The journey of Apollonius and Damis through India in many ways mirrors Alexander's campaign. Indeed, it has been noted that their journey includes a number of "Erinnerungsorte" from Greek mythology and history,⁴⁶⁶ including famous sites from Alexander's Eastern campaign. In this section we will examine Philostratus' treatment of these sites in order to gain an understanding of the writer's intentions. Clearly, he is operating on several levels at the same time. Alexander, as we have noted, was a source of ongoing fascination to the Greeks, so part of the interest in the journey is the evocation of places and happenings familiar from the histories and the *Romance*, with the particular piquancy given by Apollonius always - here as elsewhere in the VA - being able to add to or correct the familiar tales. Thus, we have the presentation of matters interesting in themselves, as well as a demonstration of Apollonius/Philostratus being clever and knowledgeable, with the additional pleasure of variation on a theme. In addition to but intertwined with these considerations is Apollonius' serious mission. Alexander himself provides Apollonius with nothing he needs to complete his mission, but the great prestige surrounding his name and legend serve to boost Apollonius' own prestige as we see him succeed where Alexander failed. The reader gets the sense

⁴⁶⁵ Stoneman, 2019, p.98

⁴⁶⁶ Balbina and Nesselrath, 2016, p.4

that Apollonius is a latter-day Alexander, but a more successful Alexander with a different and more important mission.

Nysa and Mount Meros

According to Arrian (*Anabasis* 5.1), on his way to the Indus Alexander came across the city of Nysa, a city said to have been founded by Dionysus when he went to war against the Indians. Arrian is sceptical of this claim, not being sure, he says, who this Dionysus was or when he fought the Indians. He reports nevertheless that Alexander was happy to believe that story as it meant he had gone as far as Dionysus and would go even farther (5.2). Near the city was a mountain called Meros,⁴⁶⁷ where Alexander went to sacrifice to Dionysus, and the Macedonians were happy to find ivy growing there.⁴⁶⁸ Philostratus gives us a rather different version of this story. In this version, Nysa is a mountain,⁴⁶⁹ a sanctuary to Dionysus, described in detail, with laurels and vines planted by the god himself (VA 2.8). Philostratus gives the varying opinions of the Greeks (2.9.1) and the Indians (2.9.2) concerning the identity of this Dionysus. He, too, writes of Mount Meros, but specifically denies that Alexander sacrificed there, citing Alexander's fear that his Macedonian troops, seeing the grape vines, would be overcome by homesickness (2.9.3). It has been suggested that in adopting this version Philostratus is intent on moralising the figure of Alexander.⁴⁷⁰ Perhaps the situation here is rather more complex though. On the one hand, we see Alexander acting as an expert commander and leader of men, giving up his wish to perform this act in contemplation of his greater scheme of conquest. And yet it also contains a hint of his later abandoning the Indian advance, although interestingly he does not include the story of the unwillingness of his troops to continue. Yet, in including this variation of the Meros episode, while acknowledging Alexander's greatness, he is also showing the great man's weakness.

⁴⁶⁷ Recalling, of course, the circumstances of Dionysus' birth.

⁴⁶⁸ A similar story is found in Quintus Curtius, *Alexander*, 10.13, where the army celebrates Dionysian revels for ten days.

⁴⁶⁹ He also mentions inhabitants (οἱ δὲ τὴν Νύσαν οἰκοῦντες 2.9.3), so there is at least a settlement.

⁴⁷⁰ Pajares, 1978, p.130, n.106

Taxila

The city of Taxila has a strong connection to Alexander. Arrian notes the arrival of Alexander in this great and prosperous city (πόλιν μεγάλην καὶ εὐδαίμονα *An.* 5.8.2), the largest between the Indus and Hydaspes. It is here that Alexander will prepare his famous battle with Porus, who has his troops massed across the river. Taxila is first introduced into the VA when Apollonius and Damis cross the Indus. The sight of a herd of elephants leads the narrator to anticipate on events and tell of the travellers seeing in Taxila an elephant fighting for Porus against Alexander and subsequently dedicated by Alexander to the sun (2.12.2). We will also see later that sun worship is significant part of the Brahmins' religious practice.

In the VA Taxila is the seat of the Indian king, Phraotes, the current ruler of the land once ruled by Porus (τὴν Πώρου τότε ἀρχὴν ἄρχοντος 2.20.2). The city is for Philostratus above all a kind of memorial to Alexander and his foe turned friend Porus. Apollonius and Damis visit a temple filled with bronze panels depicting Alexander and Porus and their armies and animals (2.20.2). There is no description of the famous battle here, but Philostratus concentrates on the moral portrait of the Indian king, rather than on his qualities as warrior and general. Arrian notes the faithfulness of Porus after his magnanimous treatment by Alexander (*An.* 5.19.3), but Philostratus builds on this, so that he says that Porus mourned (πενθῆσαι 2.20.3) Alexander and lamented (ὀλοφύρασθαί 2.20.3) his death. He describes Porus as full of modesty or prudence (σωφροσύνης μεστός 2.20.3). Chapter 21 is devoted to emphasising his nobility of spirit, with examples of his attitude to the battle with Alexander, knowing he could not win, but refusing to seek help from allies or to pray against Alexander (2.21.1), and summing up his attitude by Porus' own words that he preferred to gain his enemy's admiration rather than his pity (θαυμάζεσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ ἐλεεῖσθαι 2.21.2). The effect of this portrait is not only to include a reminiscence of Alexander's most famous Indian foe, but also to magnify the greatness of both. Once the reader is made acquainted with Phraotes, the

king who is a kind of successor to the great Indian, and sees the high esteem in which he holds and is held by Apollonius, it will be difficult not to sense a parallel between the two pairs, even though neither Apollonius nor his Indian host is concerned with war. In their case, rather than being the brilliant conqueror and the valiant general, the pair will be the wise and godly man with the philosopher king.

In Arrian's version, it is at Taxila that Alexander is treated with something akin to disdain by the Naked Wise Men and their leader Dandamis (7.2.2),⁴⁷¹ although Alexander does manage to persuade one of them, named Calanus, to join him.⁴⁷² In the VA, while he is at Taxila Apollonius asks Phraotes if it is true that the Wise Men lectured Alexander about heaven (2.33). Phraotes claims that Alexander never met the Wise Men, that they lived in an area between the Hyphasis and the Ganges that Alexander had never reached, and that the so-called Wise Men he had met were actually merely Oxydracae (Ὀξυδράκαι 2.33.1),⁴⁷³ people who know nothing of real value (οὐδέν χρηστὸν εἰδότες 2.33.1). He adds that Alexander would never have been able to subdue the real Wise Men, as they were holy and beloved of the gods (ἱεροὶ καὶ θεοφιλεῖς ὄντες 2.33.1). Thus, Philostratus is already setting the scene for the superiority of Apollonius over Alexander.

Memorials of Alexander

While it is the moral rather than the martial qualities that interest Philostratus in the Alexander-Porus story, memorials of the battle are not altogether ignored. After Apollonius and Damis have left Taxila, they come to the plain where the battle is said to have taken place (2.42). This does not prompt any description of the battle itself. There is nothing here of the detail of tactics and strategy included in, for example, Arrian and Plutarch, no interest in the course of the conflict itself. Instead,

⁴⁷¹ Dandamis is also the name of the leader of the Naked Philosophers in the *Alexander Romance*, 3.5.

⁴⁷² Calanus' spectacular end is narrated in 7.2.3.

⁴⁷³ Stoneman notes that the Oxydracae is the name given to the Naked Philosophers in the *Alexander Romance* and that elsewhere it is the name of a warlike tribe: Stoneman, 2019, p.472.

Philostratus describes two gates (πύλας 2.42) erected as trophies (τροπαίων ἔνεκα ὠκοδομημένας 2.42), one with a statue of Alexander and the other with a statue of Porus, as they appeared after the battle (μετὰ τὴν μάχην 2.42). Alexander, who is portrayed on an eight-horse chariot as in his victory over Darius, is shown in a position of superiority over the Indian king. Thus, it is the fact of victory that is important, not the details of how the victory was won. This is Alexander triumphant.

But it is not only Alexander's triumphs that are marked by memorials, but also the limited nature of those triumphs. When Apollonius and Damis arrive at the River Hyphasis, they find altars and a bronze stele. Arrian reports that when Alexander and his troops arrived at the Hyphasis the troops were tired and dispirited from the rigours of the long campaign and refused to go any further (*An* 5.25.2). Alexander was unable to persuade them to continue and reluctantly decided to turn back (5.28.5), after building altars and to honour the gods who had favoured him and as memorials to his own efforts (μνημεῖα τῶν αὐτοῦ πόνων 5.29.1). Philostratus does not include the story of the troop rebellion, but when Apollonius and Damis arrive at the Hyphasis, they find altars and a bronze stele. The altars included an inscription to Ammon, Heracles, Athena Pronoia, Zeus, the Cabiri of Samothrace, Helios of India and Apollo of Delphi (2.43). The inscription of the stele said the Alexander had stopped here (ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ ΕΝΤΑΥΘΑ ΕΣΤΗ 2.43) and Philostratus notes that this was dedicated by the Indians to boast that he went no further. The obvious point here is that while Alexander's Indian expedition stopped, Apollonius' journey continues, and he will go on to meet the "true" Wise Men. More than that, he will be warmly welcomed by them.

Summary

Philostratus engages directly with the Alexander story to the extent that it is clear that Alexander is largely the reason for Apollonius' journey across India. He builds up the importance of Alexander, showing the influence that he has left on the city of Taxila, for example, and the loyalty he inspired in the noble Porus. At the same time Philostratus begins subtly to undermine him, showing little interest in his military might (and noting it would have been useless against the Wise Men) and

pointing out his failures as well as his successes. It is important for Philostratus' purpose that Alexander be a great figure, even that his greatness be magnified; but it is just as important to show that Apollonius surpasses him. In order to do this, Philostratus substitutes the pairing of warrior kings Alexander and Porus with the pairing of Apollonius the sage and Phraotes the philosopher king. More importantly, he shows that Apollonius goes beyond Alexander's capabilities, both literally, in continuing his journey beyond Alexander's stopping point, and metaphorically, in receiving the wisdom of the Brahmins.

Alexander and the *Dionysiaca*

If Philostratus engages openly and clearly with the Alexander story in the *VA*, emphasising and building on the links, the situation is somewhat different in the *Dionysiaca*. Indeed, there is only one passage in the poem that explicitly mentions the Alexander story: in this passage Nonnus names Olympias, the mother of Alexander, as one of twelve brides of Zeus (δωδέκατος τρισέλικτον Ὀλυμπιάδος πόσιν ἔλκει 7.128).⁴⁷⁴ The passage is not in the part of the poem dealing with the Indian War: it is included in the much earlier story of Zeus and Semele. There is no direct reference to Alexander or to his campaigns in the *Indiad* itself. Yet, Alexander and his eastern conquests are no less present in Nonnus' poem than in the *VA*, though, as we shall see, the Alexander references in the Indian War sequence of the *Dionysiaca* are one strand of a complex set of literary and historical references.

We saw that Philostratus sets out to establish links to Alexander's eastern expedition in Apollonius' journey through India, with specific references to sites made famous by him. There is no such direct and open engagement in the *Dionysiaca*. However, while there is no direct mention of Alexander or

⁴⁷⁴ Chamberlayne, L.P.: "A Study of Nonnus," in *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 13 No. 1 (Jan 1916), pp. 40-68, at p.47

of his eastern expeditions in the Indian Wars, the references to them are, as Chuvin noted, implicit but precise.⁴⁷⁵ To begin with, the expeditions of Alexander and Dionysus are similar.⁴⁷⁶ While it is difficult to establish accurately Dionysus' route in the Indian Wars, the action seems to be in the Indus valley, exactly the area conquered by Alexander.⁴⁷⁷ In particular, the crossing of the Hydaspes and the river battles point to Alexander's expeditions.⁴⁷⁸ Indeed, given the tremendous prestige of Alexander, and the numerous versions of his exploits in historical and literary works, both serious and popular, it is difficult to see how any account of a Greek expedition against Indians involving river battles would not bring the Macedonian to a reader's mind.

This is not to say that Nonnus in his depiction of Dionysus conquering the Indians is solely or even primarily interested in referencing the Alexander story. Rather, as mentioned, Alexander is just one of several threads intertwined in the *Dionysiaca*. The *Dionysiaca* has been described as a "vast interconnected world."⁴⁷⁹ In this world, "Nonnus and Dionysus, Achilles and Hector, Alexander and Christ all form part of one syncretistic whole."⁴⁸⁰ In the Indian War considered as a whole, Homer and the *Iliad* remain as fundamentally important as we have seen them to be throughout the poem. Thus, we can see in the river battles both Achilles and Alexander.⁴⁸¹ The dual referencing of these figures in the *Indiad* may be part of the reason that it is not easy to follow Dionysus' geographical progress. For example, Chuvin points out that Alexander's style of moving warfare is transformed into a siege imitating that of Troy.⁴⁸² The unnamed city that plays an important role, especially in Books 34 and 35, is vaguely described and can hardly be the equivalent of Philostratus' Taxila. In other words, while Alexander is not the only figure behind Dionysus' Indian expedition, his presence

⁴⁷⁵ Chuvin, 1992, p.73

⁴⁷⁶ Chuvin, op. cit. p.74

⁴⁷⁷ Chuvin, 1991. P.311

⁴⁷⁸ Hopkinson, 1994b, p. 111

⁴⁷⁹ Shorrock, 2011, p.121

⁴⁸⁰ Shorrock, 2001, p.5

⁴⁸¹ Hopkinson 1994a, p.29

⁴⁸² Chuvin, 1991, p.288

is clearly detectable and it is not possible to follow its progress without reference to the Macedonian.

We saw that Philostratus was concerned both to establish the excellence of Alexander while at the same time showing Apollonius to be superior to him. In the *Dionysiaca*, something a little different seems to be happening: scholars have pointed out that Dionysus shares a number of characteristics with Alexander. In his discussion of the “rejuvenated” God who appeared in the last three centuries BCE, Bowersock suggests the inspiration for Dionysus’ change into “a youthful, sensuous, hard-drinking international traveller” to be the exploits of Alexander.⁴⁸³ More recently, Djurslev has examined in some detail the similarities between the two in relation to the figure of Dionysus in the *Dionysiaca*.⁴⁸⁴

Firstly, there are the similarities of their birth and parentage. As we have noted, Nonnus specifically refers to Alexander’s mother Olympias being among Zeus’ human brides, implying that he visited her in the form of a snake (7.128). Plutarch also mentions Olympias being visited by Ammon, the Egyptian god equated by Greeks to Zeus, in the form of a snake (*Life of Alexander*, 2 and 3). Djurslev also compares the attitude of Zeus in the *Dionysiaca* with that of Nectanebo in the *Alexander Romance*. In the *Dionysiaca*, Zeus, whose final transformation with his bride is as a serpent, tells Semele that her son will be immortal (ἄφθιτον υἱά λόχευε 7.366). Nectanebo also approaches Olympias in the form of a serpent and tells her that her son will be invincible (AR 1.7). The word used here (ἀνίκητος) is one often used by Nonnus to describe Dionysus.⁴⁸⁵

Secondly, Alexander and Dionysus share some physical characteristics. Djurslev follows the line in the Alexander tradition that stressed his effeminacy, including his “lack of a beard, his melting eyes,

⁴⁸³ Bowersock, Glen: “Dionysus as an Epic Hero,” in Hopkinson, 1994a, pp.156-166 at p.157

⁴⁸⁴ Djurslev, Christian Thue: “The Figure of Alexander the Great and Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca*,” in Nawotka, Krzysztof and Agnieszka Wojciechowska: *Alexander the Great. History, Art, Tradition*, Wiesbaden (Harrassowitz Verlag), 2016, pp.213-221

⁴⁸⁵ Djurslev lists the occurrences of the word: op. cit., p.216, n.19

twist of the neck and his flowing hair.”⁴⁸⁶ The *Alexander Romance*, for example, highlights the difference in stature between Alexander and Porus (AR 3.4) at the time of their duel. Dionysus’ slight and unmanly figure is often commented on in the *Dionysiaca*; Djurslev offers as an example a particularly pointed description of him as weak and “feminine-formed” (ἀβροκόμην ἀσίδηπον ἀνάλκιδα θήλξ μορφῇ 16.172). This description originates with Nicaia, who will nevertheless not manage to escape Dionysus. Dionysus and Alexander also share a kind of divine radiance: Dionysus shines like Helios (17.13-14); Alexander gives off light like a star (AR 2.15.10). Furthermore, Dionysus is well-known for having horns, and is often described by Nonnus either as either “κεράσφορος” (e.g. 9.146; 27.23) or “βοόκραιπος” (e.g. 7.321; 18.95). Djurslev refers to the horn motif in the Alexander tradition.⁴⁸⁷

Djurslev also considers the similarity between Dionysus’ and Alexander’s route through India, particularly noting that the decisive battles in the *Dionysiaca* are fought at the Hydaspes, the scene of Alexander’s most famous Indian battle. He also notes that Dionysus duels with Deriades and finishes him with a single touch from his thyrsus (40.92); in the AR, Alexander kills Porus with a single thrust of his sword (AR 3.4).⁴⁸⁸ He notes other similarities between the figures which he concedes might be coincidental, before concluding that the similarities create “an intertwining interface of heroic motifs and encomiastic themes.”⁴⁸⁹

If the Alexander story can be detected clearly enough in the Indian Wars, it is never the sole or overriding reference as it is in the Indian sections of the VA. If, for example, Dionysus crossing the Hydaspes brings Alexander to the reader’s mind, it also recalls Achilles and the Scamander. Indeed, Nonnus is happy to provide a prompt to the reader in case the connection should be missed. Thus, when he describes the Hydaspes in full flood, he uses the Scamander as a comparison (οὐχ οὕτω

⁴⁸⁶ Djurslev, 2016, p.218

⁴⁸⁷ Djurslev, op. cit. pp.217-218

⁴⁸⁸ Djurslev, op. cit. p.219

⁴⁸⁹ Djurslev, op. cit. p.220

ῥόος ἔσκεν ἐγερισμόθιο Καμάνδρου... 23.221). The Homer and the Alexander references exist at the same time. As Hopkinson explains, the many allusions to Homer in the course of the *Dionysiaca* establish a syncrisis between Homer and Nonnus; likewise, the tale of the Indian war creates a syncrisis between Dionysus and Alexander.⁴⁹⁰ Nonnus' narration is more complex, he concludes, than its constituent parts.⁴⁹¹ In referencing Alexander, Nonnus seems to choose among the various versions of the story those elements that best fit in with his wider artistic and thematic concerns. Thus, he presents a version in which the logical Porus figure, Deriades, is slain, rather than becoming a loyal ally. What need has Dionysus of allies? In the end, the Alexander story is left behind. Dionysus has completed his Zeus-imposed mission of defeating the Indians and moves triumphantly onwards towards his apotheosis.

Summary

There is only one direct reference to Alexander the Great in the *Dionysiaca*, but that reference to the Macedonian's divine parentage is enough to show that Nonnus is, as one would expect, well aware of the Alexander story. The geographic and military parallels between Dionysus' campaign against the Indians and the Macedonian king's eastern campaigns are such that the reader cannot miss the references. Indeed, Alexander's eastern campaigns were so famous that they likely influenced the choice of such events in the *Dionysiaca*. However, this is not to say that the Alexander story dominates this section of the poem. Rather, it joins the Homeric element that is such a feature of the poem.

⁴⁹⁰ Hopkinson, 1994b, p.128

⁴⁹¹ Hopkinson, op. cit. p.129

Comparison

In Apollonius' journey through India and in Dionysus' campaign against the Indians the presence of Alexander is clear. The Alexander story as it appears in historians like Arrian and Quintus Curtius, biographers like Plutarch or in the manifold redactions of the *Alexander Romance* provide differing versions of the various aspects of the legend. The framework of the story used by Nonnus and Philostratus is very similar: their characters move through largely the same geographical area, the north of the Indian sub-continent, centred in present-day Pakistan, where Alexander triumphed over Porus. By the end of their Indian journey the characters have fulfilled their missions and moved on in triumph. But these missions are different and this difference is accompanied by different choices from the Alexander material. Apollonius is in India in the search of knowledge from Indians to equip him for his mission. The wars lie in the past. There are many noble "barbarians" like Porus and many who appreciate Greek *paideia*. There are also Wise Men to learn from. The aftermath of Alexander's campaign is as important as his military victory. Alexander is at once a cultural figure to be admired but also to be outdone. When Apollonius outdoes him, this increases the prestige of the sage. For Nonnus' Dionysus, the Indians are simply barbarians to be defeated. It is the military victory that matters. There is no need of a loyal, noble Porus. Indeed, there is no need to for Dionysus to prove himself in the light of Alexander. He does not need any Indian Wise Men. To find closer connections between the two writers in their Indian sections, we need to look beyond the use of the Alexander legend.

Indians: Sun and Earth

Diodorus notes that the people of India are unusually tall and heavy. This is due to the abundance of foodstuffs (πολυκαρπία *Bib* 2.36.1). This abundance is due in turn to India's great well-watered plains (*Bib*. 2.35.3). Both Philostratus and Nonnus present us with Indians well above normal human size, but neither of these writers is interested in such mundane explanations for their uniqueness. The Indians of the *VA* and the *Dionysiaca* present many unusual qualities, both moral and physical, natural and supernatural, good and bad. While Philostratus in particular shows some interest in such day-to-day matters as Indian agriculture in his description of Apollonius' travel, the interest of both writers in the particular Indians and Indian groups they engage with goes beyond any documentary realism. In different ways, Apollonius and Dionysus will discover in their engagement with Indians a crucial stage on their path to the fulfillment of their mission.

Philostratus: Apollonius and the Indians

As Apollonius makes his way from Babylon through India, he discourses with Damis at length on many topics brought to mind by the sights they see on their journey. There is much talk, for example of animals, Alexander, Dionysus, drunkenness, the origin of the Indus and all sorts of other matters. However, there are few sightings of, or discussions concerning Indian people, or at least concerning the common Indian people. When they had crossed the Caucasus (παραμείψαντες δὲ τὸν Καύκασον 2.4), they saw people who were four cubits tall and "already quite black" (ἤδη μελαίνεσθαι 2.4). Once they had crossed the Indus, the people were five cubits tall. Alexander's Indian opponent King Porus is described later as being as taller than any man since the heroes at

Troy (2.21.2).⁴⁹² On the journey we learn that Indians wear linen clothes, bark shoes (ὑποδήματα βύβλου 2.20.1) and leather hats when it rains (κυνην, ὅτε ὕοι 2.20.1). Superior Indians wear clothes of “byssos” (βύσσω 2.20.1), which comes from trees, presumably cotton. In the place of portraits of “real” Indians, we do get at least a description of an average Indian, by default as it were, when Apollonius discusses pictorial techniques with Damis in King Phraotes’ gallery. We already know that they are black, and this is confirmed. We now learn of Indians’ facial features: snub nose (τὸ γὰρ ὑπόσιμον τῆς ῥινὸς 2.22.4); large jaw (ἡ περιττὴ γένυς 2.22.4); and an astonished look in the eyes (ἡ περὶ τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς οἷον ἑκπληξίς 2.22.4). On top of this the Indian has hair that stands up (οἱ ὀρθοὶ βόστρυχοι 2.22.2). This description does not match the modern reader’s idea of an Indian, but is, as we will see, very similar to Nonnus’ descriptions of Dionysus’ Indian opponents. In fact, it has been said of Nonnus’ Indians, with their black skin and curly hair, that they are imagined as identical to Ethiopians.⁴⁹³

Whatever the racial and physical characteristics of common Indians, Philostratus’ interest is in two Indians - three, perhaps, if we include memories of Alexander’s Porus - Phraotes the king, and Iarchas, leader of the Brahmins. Of Phraotes and Iarchas, Iarchas is the more important, as it is from him that Apollonius will gain the knowledge to complete his apprenticeship, as it were. Billault sees the Brahmins as a culminating point of a spiritual progression starting with Vardanes.⁴⁹⁴ We can also see these figures as a series of contrasts, as kings are compared with kings and sages - or so-called sages - with sages.

We see King Phraotes essentially in a frame of contrasts, as he is presented to the reader after Vardanes, the Babylonian king and before the unnamed Indian king who joins the Brahmins.⁴⁹⁵ Both of these kings represent aspects of what Phraotes is not, while highlighting what he is and what he represents. Vardanes, the King of Babylon, is not an Indian of course, but he does provide a point of

⁴⁹² Mumprecht notes references to Porus’ great stature in Arrian, Diodorus and Plutarch, 1983, p.1052, n.79

⁴⁹³ Chuvin, 1991, p.293

⁴⁹⁴ Billault, 2000, p.122

⁴⁹⁵ He is perhaps also in the reader’s mind when Apollonius meets the Roman Emperor.

comparison for the qualities of kingship. Vardanes is not without good qualities. For example, he knows Greek perfectly (1.32.1) and he is aware enough of Apollonius' worth to be delighted by his visit (1.33.1). On the other hand, he is a despot whose subjects are expected to bow before a golden statue of him (1.27), who performs blood-sacrifices (1.29) and who needs luxury (1.33.1). Following a dream that he is Cyrus' son Ataxerxes, he is also fearful (περιδεῶς 1.29) that his good fortune might be about to change. However, Philostratus does not simply present the reader with a caricatural Persian ruler, the picture is more nuanced. Importantly, Vardanes, although he is a barbarian, is more than willing to accept Apollonius' advice (1.40) and at the end of their visit Apollonius tells Damis that Vardanes is too good to be ruling barbarians (κρείττω ἢ βαρβάρων ἄρχειν 1.40). To put it briefly, this king had the typical faults of the Greek idea of a barbarian (pride, grandeur, luxury, despotic power), but was already open to positive influence (he spoke perfect Greek) and was receptive to Apollonius' wisdom. Apollonius leaves Vardanes a better king.

Apollonius' introduction to the Indian king Phraotes is through his city, Taxila. The impression is favourable, not only because of the city's connection to Alexander and Porus, as we have already discussed, but also because it is like a Greek city (ὥσπερ αἱ Ἑλλάδες 2.20.2). In contrast to Babylon, things here do not appear immoderately large. Indeed, the houses are larger on the inside than their outward appearance suggests (2.23), though the objects in the temples are in the symbolic shapes used by all barbarians (βάρβαροι πάντες 2.24). The palace itself is in contrast to the inflated style of Babylon (τὰ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι φλεγμαίνοντα 2.25), plain and restrained (κεκολάσθαι 2.25). By the time they meet, Apollonius has already decided that Phraotes is a philosopher (2.26.1).

The first meeting with the king confirms and reinforces this favourable impression. We learn that the keys to the customs of the kingdom are restraint and moderation (σωφρόνως; σωφρονέστερον 2.26.1). As for Phraotes personal circumstances, he has much but needs little (δέομαι δὲ ὀλίγων 2.26.1), preferring to share with friends, which brings personal advantages, or indeed enemies, which brings advantages to the state (2.26.1). Unlike war loving Porus, he loves peace (Πῶρος' ...

‘πολέμου ἦρα, ἐγὼ δὲ εἰρήνης 2.26.1), in stark contrast to Nonnus’ King Deriades. He is a vegetarian, like Apollonius (2.27.2). He speaks Greek but did not wish to be considered bold (θρασύς δόξαι 2.27.1) by speaking it, being a barbarian. Likewise, he did not presume to invite Apollonius to his feast, regarding Apollonius as his superior (βελτίω ἐμαυτοῦ 2.27.2). The king exercises, bathes and practises with the javelin and discus like a young Greek (2.27.2). We learn from Phraotes that the Indians prize philosophy highly (μεγάλων γὰρ δὴ ἀξιουμένης φιλοσοφίας 2.30.2), and that any boy wishing to be a philosopher faces scrutiny of his family and of his own morals, as well as any number of tests (ἐλέγχοις ... μυρίοις 2.30.2). Phraotes was given a Greek education by his father, before being taken to the Wise Men - the ones Apollonius has come to see - at the age of twelve (2.31.3). The Wise Men, he says, welcome those who know Greek (ὑποδέχωνται τὴν Ἑλλήνων φωνὴν εἰδότας 2.31.3) as being of the same character as themselves (ὁμόηθες αὐτοῖς 2.31.3). Some of the descriptions of the trials of the would-be philosophers are reminiscent of Pythagoras.⁴⁹⁶ It is hard to avoid the impression, however, that much of the description of the difficulties place in the way of young Indian philosopher candidates is a dig by Philostratus at contemporary reality.

Phraotes the Indian king is considered so worthy by Apollonius that much of the time they spend together is in serious philosophical dispute. This is in contrast to decidedly inferior role allotted to his companion Damis, constantly shown to be lacking in knowledge and insight. It must be said however, that the dispute principally allows Apollonius ample opportunity to demonstrate his powers. Much of the argument between Phraotes and Apollonius centres on the use of alcohol. For if there is much in common between the two, there are also important differences. A vital difference is that for all his philosophising, Phraotes has an important practical role: he is a ruler. Phraotes himself says that there are certain practices not worthy of the philosopher that must be accepted for the sake of the law (τοῦ νόμου ἕνεκεν 2.34). Indeed, Apollonius seems to come close

⁴⁹⁶ Mumprecht, 1983, p.1053, n. 95

to chastising him for his insistence on philosophising. For, he says, philosophy in a king is fine if it is measured (ξύμμετρος 2.37.3), but bad if it is overdone (ἀκριβής 2.37.3), being perhaps a sign of pride.

There is no doubt that whatever his shortcomings, the portrait of Phraotes is overwhelmingly positive and clearly superior to the Babylonian Vardanes. He is also an important source of information. We have already seen that it is from the king that Apollonius learns the true story of Alexander and the Brahmins. It is also the king who facilitates the meeting between Apollonius and the Wise Men, the true reason for the sage's trip to India.

The third and unnamed king comes to the Wise Men to consult with them about his business matters (περὶ τῶν ἑαυτοῦ πραγμάτων 3.23.1). That he is held in some contempt is clear from the dismissive way that the news of his impending arrival is received by Iarchas: he says the king will be better for meeting a Greek (ἄνδρα Ἑλληνα 3.23.1), referring to Apollonius of course. The reason for this contempt is clear when he arrives, decked out much in the style of the Medes (μηδικώτερον κατεσκευασμένος 3.26.1) and full of majesty (ὄγκου μεστός 3.26.1). This is no philosopher king like Phraotes, in fact he is entirely inferior in this to the king in Taxila (φιλοσοφία δὲ πάση τοῦ Φραώτου λείποιο 3.26.1). He is disdainful of his family members and is covered in gold and jewels (3.27), a glutton (3.26.2), a drunkard (3.30), dismissive of philosophy (3.28) and very sensitive to flattery (3.29). If any further proof of his boorishness were needed, he does not speak Greek (3.26.2) and moreover he thinks that nothing from the Greeks is worth talking about (οὐδὲν ... τῶν παρ' Ἑλλήσιν ἔγωγε λόγου ἄξιῳ 3.29). He distracts Iarchas and Apollonius with nonsense (ἀμαθὲς λέγων 2.31.1) as they try to talk seriously, in particular with nonsense against the Greeks (2.31.2-3). But finally, moved to tears by the power of Apollonius' arguments in favour of them (2.32.1), the king acknowledges that he has been deceived about the Greeks and recognises that they are honourable and good (φιλότιμοί τε καὶ χρηστοί 2.32.1). Even Apollonius joins in a toast of friendship (2.32.2). In

spite of this sudden shift in attitude, he shows that he has not completely changed by insisting rudely that Apollonius accompany him and has to be rebuked by Iarchas (2.33.2).

If we consider the treatment of these three kings in the *VA*, a clear hierarchy is evident. The unnamed king is at the bottom: although the word is not used, he is a typical barbarian. His unseemly behaviour, insistence on regal magnificence and ignorance lead to his condemnation by Philostratus. Above all, his disdain for philosophy and all things Greek displays his lack of worth. His “conversion” is unconvincing, more like another whim. The Babylonian king also has a taste for magnificence and luxury, but he is fluent in Greek, excited by the prospect of meeting Apollonius and, above all, eager to learn from him. Clearly the philosopher king Phraotes, with his moderation, love of simplicity, reverence for philosophy and Greek ways and humility before Apollonius is at the top of this hierarchy. Another way of putting it is that the “Greekest” of the non-Greek kings is clearly the favoured one. Throughout the scenes with the kings, part of the piquancy, part of the fun for the reader is to see just how Greek these Barbarian kings are, in another example of Philostratus’ taste for paradox.

However, as worthy as Phraotes may be as a thoroughly Hellenised barbarian king, he is of limited use to Apollonius, because, as we have seen, his duties as a ruler impose limits on him. Even if he is, as Schirren notes, the sort of philosopher-ruler unknown in the West,⁴⁹⁷ he can only live as a true philosopher up to a certain point. Apollonius is in India to learn, more specifically to increase his wisdom,⁴⁹⁸ and it is through the Brahmins, the Wise Men, who live free of such practical concerns - although the rulers rely on their advice and approval (3.10) - that he will achieve this aim. We see Apollonius among the Wise Men in a role quite foreign to him in the rest of the *VA*: that of a disciple.⁴⁹⁹ As soon as Apollonius approaches the village of the Wise Men and is sought out by their messenger he knows that he has found men of true wisdom (ἄνδρας ... σοφοὺς ἀτεχνῶς 3.12)

⁴⁹⁷ Schirren, 2005, p.233

⁴⁹⁸ Schirren, *op. cit.*, p.268

⁴⁹⁹ Billault, 2000, p.122

because they seem to have foreknowledge (ἐοίκασι γὰρ προγιγνώσκειν 3.12). They live on a hill, the very navel of India (3.14.3), owning everything and nothing (οὐδὲν κεκτημένους ἢ τὰ πάντων 3.15.1), according to Apollonius. Their situation, high above the everyday world and at the very centre of India, is emblematic of them representing the heart of Indian wisdom. Iarchas, the leader, speaks Greek and knows everything about Apollonius, including that he has come possessing some of their wisdom, but not all (ἀλλ' οὕτω πάσης 3.16.4). Iarchas is willing to teach and Apollonius is eager to learn, so the relationship is established.

Apollonius stays with the Wise Men for four months, so clearly there was plenty for him to learn. During his stay he takes in all of their public and secret teachings (λόγους φανερούς τε καὶ ἀπορρήτους 3.50). The reader is made privy to many of things Apollonius learns, which, in keeping with Philostratus' predilection for *poikilia*, are presented in a variety of forms. For example, much comes through reports from Apollonius or Damis, some directly through the words of Iarchas himself, some through dialogue between Iarchas and Apollonius or between Apollonius and Damis, some through demonstration, some through description. The types of knowledge discussed include: how to live the life of a philosopher; philosophic considerations, including discussion of metempsychosis and the previous incarnations of Iarchas and Apollonius; matters of scientific and general knowledge; wonders. We will discuss the wonders mentioned by Iarchas in the next section. There are also demonstrations of the powers of the Wise Men and the miracles they work, as we have discussed in the previous section.

There are some ways in which Apollonius and the Wise Men are already at one: they have a vegetarian diet, shun worldly goods and trappings and wear simple clothes. The Wise Men do, however, wear their hair long (3.15.4) and carry a rod and ring with great powers (δύνασθαι μὲν πάντα 3.15.4). As the descriptions continue, the Wise Men seem to combine some very familiar Greek elements with the outlandishly exotic. For example, when Apollonius asks Iarchas whether they have self-knowledge, the reply he receives is that self-knowledge is their starting point to total

knowledge (πάντα γινώσκομεν, ἐπειδὴ πρώτους ἑαυτοὺς γινώσκομεν 3.18), thus accepting the Delphic “know thyself” and moving beyond it. He goes onto say that they consider themselves gods because they are good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἔσμεν ἄνθρωποι 3.18). Iarchas agrees with what Pythagoras taught the Greeks about the soul (ὥς γε’ εἶπε Πυθαγόρας μὲν ὑμῖν 3.19), but then demonstrates a greater knowledge of the story of Troy. Rather than leading to any technical philosophical debate, the introduction of the topic of the transmigration of souls instead leads to some colourful and entertaining stories as examples of it, involving ultimately Iarchas and Apollonius. Apollonius tells the tale of how as a sea-captain he fooled the pirates (3.24). Mumprecht comments that the philosophical lectures Iarchas holds could just as well have been given by a Greek philosopher.⁵⁰⁰ The Indian sage “teaches traditional Greek cosmology.”⁵⁰¹

For all the pointers to Greek philosophy and learning, we should also note the connection between the Wise Men, indeed all the Indians, and the sun. There is no mention of any other religious practice among the Indians. Mumprecht notes what she describes as an exaggeration of the sun cult and ascribes it to a mixture of exoticism and Julia Domina’s family connection as the daughter of a priest of Helius;⁵⁰² Morgan writes of the “idealized solar state” created by Philostratus.⁵⁰³ Apollonius himself has a strong connection to the sun, as we see throughout the Indian journey and beyond. In the first we book we see him performing a sacrifice with frankincense and praying to the sun (1.31.2). In the second book he tells Phraotes that he will make his prayers to the sun while the king is busy. The Indians themselves are sun worshippers. Phraotes has a Sun Temple (2.24) and he tells of his people thanking the sun after his triumph (2.32). Philostratus describes the Brahmins’ sun worship in all its bizarre detail (3.15), including levitation so as to be above the earth like the sun

⁵⁰⁰ Mumprecht, 1983, p.1003

⁵⁰¹ Koskenniemi, Erkki: “The Philostratean Apollonius as a Teacher,” in Demoen and Praet, 2008, p.333

⁵⁰² Mumprecht, 1983, pp.1003-4

⁵⁰³ Morgan, JR: “The Emesan Connection: Philostratus and Heliodorus,” in Demoen and Praet, 2008, pp.263-282 at p.275

god himself during their rites (ὅποσα τῷ Ἡλίῳ ξυναποβαίνοντες τῆς γῆς 3.15.1). We will consider the links of Indians to sun and earth again when discussing Nonnus' depiction of them.

This long episode, which it takes up most of Book 3, does provide plenty of opportunity for exotic and picturesque touches, even if much of the Brahmins' philosophy has a distinctly Greek ring. The Indians perform unusual and remarkable ceremonies. For example, at one point the assembled Wise Men stand in the temple, strike the ground with their sticks, rise two cubits into the air and there sing a song (3.17.2). The interactions with Iarchas provide a rich variety of material, from the philosophical discussions we have mentioned, to tales of previous incarnations, to life and dietary matters, to the wonders and splendours of India, to healing miracles. These healing powers are of particular interest, as we will see that the Brahmins in the *Dionysiaca* also possess such powers. A woman approaches the Wise Men for help with her son who is possessed by a demon (3.38); a lame man is cured when the Wise Man uses his hands to fix it (αἱ χεῖρες αὐτῷ καταψῶσαι 3.39); a blind man is made to see; a man with a withered arm is cured; a husband is given advice to make sure his wife has no more miscarriages (all in 3.39); a father is told what to do to protect his sons from wine (3.40).

These stories of the Wise Men are told in a variety of forms: dialogues, direct quotation of speeches, direct and indirect narratives, *ekphraseis*. The intrusion of the Indian king adds further colour and a touch of comedy. This demonstrates that Philostratus is not only interested in the philosophical growth of his Apollonius but is just as much concerned to provide the reader with a colourful selection of exotic material to enhance the literary experience.

Just as Philostratus emphasised the worth of King Phraotes through comparisons with Vardanes and the unnamed Indian king, so he emphasises the Brahmins' worth through comparison with another group of Wise Men, the Ethiopian Gymnosophists or Naked Ones, visited by Apollonius in Book Six. The parallels are clear: a group of wise men, living a simple life, isolated on a hill. Their needs are so few that they do not even wear clothing. Like the Brahmins' Iarchas, they have their own leader,

Thespesion. They can perform miracles (6.10.3). But if the parallels are clear, so are the differences. They are river-, rather than sunworshippers (6.6.2); their hill is of a modest height (λόφου ... ξυμμέτρου 6.6.1); and they do not welcome Apollonius as the Brahmins' did. The reason for the lack of welcome is that they have been tricked by a rival into believing slanders about Apollonius (6.7). Apollonius is in no doubt of the superiority of the Indians. He notes that, unlike the Naked Ones, the Indian Wise Men knew all about him before meeting him (6.8). After listening to Thespesion, Apollonius not only explains his own path to wisdom, he also delivers a rebuke to the Gymnosophists about their path. Their nakedness is mere affectation for the sake of decoration (ὕπερ κόσμου 6.11.19). Although both Apollonius and Thespesion overcome their differences enough to engage in long discussions, to the point that this episode matches the length of the episode with the Brahmins in Book 3, Apollonius has nothing to learn from the Gymnosophists. His stay here confirms that India is indeed "le berceau de la plus haute sagesse."⁵⁰⁴ Thus, the confrontation with Thespesion and his companions demonstrates both the superiority of the Indian Wise Men and also the superiority of Apollonius who was wise enough to learn from them.

Philostratus' use of the kings and wise men reminds the reader of Nonnus' predilection for doublets and triplets that we have already seen. Philostratus, however, in this instance, has a clear aim to compare and contrast, with the ultimate goal of establishing the superiority of his main character; Nonnus, on the other hand, seems to enjoy the use of the "repetition with variation" for its own sake and as a literary and aesthetic tool.

Apollonius belonged to a long-established Greek family (1.4). His upbringing is thoroughly Greek. The same, of course, applies to Philostratus himself. Yet, while there is never any doubt in the VA of the superiority of Greek language and *paideia*, Apollonius finds the final touch of education he needs to complete his mission not among the Greeks, but among the Indians, the barbarians. Two of the three Indian characters who appear in the Indian section, Phraotes and Iarchas, are admirable in

⁵⁰⁴ Billault, 2000, p.123

their own spheres. Even if we allow that Phraotes'⁵⁰⁵ main claim to excellence is that he is Hellenised and thus possesses to a large extent what Apollonius already has, the same cannot be said for the leader of the Brahmins. For Apollonius acquires vital knowledge from him, knowledge that he knew he had to go to India to acquire. We are thus left with the paradoxical situation of the champion of Greek *paideia* - for such Apollonius will prove himself to be in the remainder of the VA - having received a barbarian polish to his own education. The final impression of the Indians, then, is overwhelmingly positive. This is in marked contrast to Nonnus and the *Dionysiaca*.

Nonnus: Dionysus and the Indians

For all the differences around Indians in Nonnus, at least there is agreement about their physical appearance: they are large and black-skinned. The poet uses several different words to describe their colour⁵⁰⁶: αἰθοψ (15.1; 16.254; 17.114; 21.211; 22.83; 28.176); ζοφόεις (14.324,331); κυανόχροος (28.229; 31.275; 34.357); μελανόχροος (15.84; 16.121; 31.173; 38.82); κυάνεος (16.123; 23.70; 28.12; 29.17; 37.48 etc); μελάρρινος (14.395; 27.204; 28.200). The choice of words shows that Indians in the *Dionysiaca* are very dark-skinned indeed, just as are those described by Philostratus (VA 2.22.4). The difference between the two writers is Nonnus' insistence on the Indians' skin colour regularly throughout the work, as demonstrated by the number of occurrences of the words. In fact, the first two Indian warriors to be named are called Melaneus and Celaineus.⁵⁰⁷ Likewise, though to a much lesser extent, Nonnus emphasises their curly hair (e.g., πολυκαμπέος ... ἐθείρης 15.154; οὐλοκάρηνον ... γένος Ἰωδῶν 25.328; οὐλοκόμων σίχες ἀνδρῶν 43.228). As in Philostratus, some Indians at least are very large, especially the leaders. Orontes and Colletes, for example, are

⁵⁰⁵ At his first meeting with Apollonius, Phraotes mentions his strategy for keeping "barbarians" from attacking his kingdom (2.26.1).

⁵⁰⁶ Gigli Piccardi, 1985, p.237, n.61

⁵⁰⁷ Gerlaud, 1994, p.195, n. to 14.296-8

each said to be nine cubits tall (34.177; 36.242). A common adjective used for these Indians is “ἄπλεθρος” (e.g. Deriades at 35.1; 39.13).

In other words, the physical attributes are much the same as described by both writers, but more is made of this physical element by Nonnus. This is easily explained by the different contexts. In the *VA*, the main Indian characters are involved in learned and philosophical discussions; in the *Dionysiaca*, they are usually involved in battle. We have also seen again and again Nonnus’ love of the paradoxical and exaggerated. Thus, when the Indians are fighting the Bacchantes and Bassarids the great physical difference between the combatants is a considerable part of the interest. For example, the enormous Colletes (ὑπέρτερος, αἰθέρι γείτων 36.251) is killed by the Bacchante Charopeia with a sharp stone (36.255-6). Here he seems to stress the difference in size, with smaller defeating larger; in play is also the difference in gender, female defeating male, the man-killing women (ἀνδροφόνους 36.260) in Dionysus’ army. The piquancy of such a scene is made even sharper by the Homeric references in the figure of the Indian warrior, an element we will discuss later.

There is clearly also an aesthetic element in Nonnus’ underlining of the Indians’ skin colour. Gerlaud notes the frequent contrasting of white, silver and black by the poet.⁵⁰⁸ To us it seems that he has a particular fondness for the contrast of red and black and the frequent battle scenes provide plenty of opportunities for the description of red blood against black skin (μέλας ἐρυθαίνετο λύθρῳ 15.43). But as strong as the aesthetic element may be, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that there is also some moral element involved⁵⁰⁹ or that this repeated insistence on their blackness has some symbolic value.⁵¹⁰ Consider this description of Dionysus:

Βάκχος Ἐρυθραῖης περιδέδρομε κόλπον ἀρούρης,

⁵⁰⁸ Gerlaud, 2005, p.243

⁵⁰⁹ Gerlaud, loc. cit.

⁵¹⁰ Gonnelli, 2003, p.157, n. to 14.296-8

χρύσεια χιονέησι παρηίσι βόστρυχα σείων. 31.2-3

What could be more different from the picture of Deriades or any of his troops than Dionysus' flowing golden hair and snow-white cheeks? Gigli Piccardi sees the contrast between skin colours as going beyond ethnic differences to a contrast between light and dark.⁵¹¹

The opposition of black and white reaches its most intense point in a comic-erotic scene. The butt of the comedy is Deriades' son-in-law Morrheus, who is vainly pursuing the Bacchante Chalcomedes. The episode involves yet another bathing scene. The black-white contrast is stated from the beginning when Morrheus is described as chasing the "white nymph" (λευκάδα νύμφην 35.108). Chalcomedes tricks her would-be lover into stripping off his armour and bathing naked so that he can "shine like Phaethon" (ὄφρα φανείης ὡς Φαέθων 35.120-1). He is so taken by Chalcomedes that he will renounce Deriades' daughter (κούρην Δηριαδῆος ἀναίνομαι 35.148), indeed he will fight and kill the Indians (Ἰνδὸν ὀλέσσω 35.151), thus renouncing his Indian identity and presumably his blackness. Once Morrheus is in the water the colour contrast is repeated in a none too subtle manner, belaboured one might say. He is still black (ἀνέβαινε μέλας πάλιν 35.192); he longed to be snow-white (χιόνεος 35.195), but this he can only achieve by adorning his body with a white tunic (χιονώδεϊ πέπλῳ 35.197). Morrheus of course looks foolish and the laugh is on him and his impossible ambitions. There are many elements at play in this long and typically dense passage, but prominent among them is the superiority of white and its associations with light and the sun, and the inferiority of black and hence of the black-skinned Indians. There is also an aesthetic element with these colours, particularly the juxtaposition of black, white and red: during the bathing scene, next to the white of Morrheus' longed-for appearance and the black of his real body, is the red of the sea (ἐρευθαλήη 25.194).

⁵¹¹ Gigli Piccardi, 1985, p.238

Perhaps surprising in Nonnus' depiction of Indians is that the descriptions of and adjectives used for the Indians remain consistent throughout most of the poem. Yet in Book 26 Nonnus provides a catalogue of the contingents joining Deriades in the war against Dionysus and this catalogue shows up a colourful variety of participants,⁵¹² many not otherwise specifically mentioned elsewhere in the poem. This catalogue will provide material for our discussion of the wonders of India. In most of the poem, Deriades' troops are simply referred to as "Indians" with no distinction of particular origins. Exceptions include the Blemys from Ethiopia.

However similar the physical attributes of the Indians portrayed by Nonnus and Philostratus may be, there is an obvious difference in the way they are treated: in the *VA* Indians are overwhelmingly presented in a positive light; in the *Dionysiaca* the opposite is true. With the possible exception of the unnamed king who joins Apollonius and Iarchas, Indians in the *VA* are worthy of interest, Greek-speaking and steeped in Greek *paideia*. Even the "unworthy" king is only gently mocked. In contrast Nonnus often describes the Indians in very unflattering terms: stupid (ἄφρονες Ἴνδοί 14.274); impious (εὐσεβίης ἀδίδακτον 13.20); unjust (ἀδίκων ... Ἴνδῶν 18.303). The few positive things that are said about them involve their behaviour in battle: fearless (ἄταρβέες 39.21⁵¹³); bold (θρασύν 35.359); brave (ἀγήνωρ 22.307). One of the most common epithets for Dionysus in the *Dionysiaca* is "Indian-Slayer" (Ἰνδοφόνος Διόνυσος 23.14). To sum up the general impression created by the Indians in the poem, fierce in battle but with little else to recommend them, we might take a line referring to "some brave Indian" (23.52) who kills himself rather than face the shame of being slain by Bacchants:

βάρβαρον αἶμα φέρων καὶ βάρβαρον ἦθος ἀέξων 23.60

In this case, however, as opposed to the *VA*, there seems little room for "good" barbarians.

⁵¹² Analysed in Frangoulis, Hélène: "Les Indiens dans les *Dionysiaques* de Nonnos de Panopolis," in *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne*, s3, 2010, pp.93-108

⁵¹³ Though the context here is that the fearless Indians tremble at the sight of Dionysus' fleet.

The essential difference between the treatment of Indians in the *VA* and in the *Dionysiaca* stems from the essential difference in the reason for their presence in the work. In the *VA*, Apollonius seeks out the Indians in order to learn; in the *Dionysiaca* is sent to destroy the Indians in order to prove himself. From the time Zeus gives Dionysus his mission to drive out the proud Indians ignorant of justice (δίκης ἀδίδακτον ὑπερφιάλων γένος Ἰνδῶν 13.3), Nonnus has very little good to say of them, even if it means going in the face of received notions about the Indians.⁵¹⁴ To take Zeus' statement as an example, it goes directly against the literary tradition that the Indians were a just people. Ctesias, as reported by Photius, says that Indians are extremely just (*Bibl* 2.46a13), a sentiment echoed by Arrian in the *Indica* (9.13). We have seen the influence of this time-honoured view of the Indians in Philostratus.

If we confine ourselves to the *Dionysiaca* itself, we see that not all the shortcomings attributed to Indians are theirs alone. For example, if we consider what Gerlaud describes as the “lubricité des Indiens,”⁵¹⁵ we might note that if it applies to Indians, it also applies to some of their opponents as well. The frequency of the occurrence of such words as “γυναϊμανής” and “γυναϊμανέων” demonstrates that it is an issue on both sides of the conflict, especially as the words are used more often than not for Dionysus himself or even for his father Zeus. We remember that Dionysus pursued and raped both Nicaia and Aura and that Zeus pursued Semele. Ironically enough, when these particular words are applied to Indians it is usually Deriades⁵¹⁶ ordering his woman-mad Indians not to touch their female foes (35.18) or warning son-in-law Morrheus not to be like the woman-mad Indians (34.208).

This is not to say that there are not plenty of examples of Indians pursuing or lusting after women, besides the story of Morrheus and Chalcomede we have already alluded to. A particularly striking example appears in a scene between an Indian soldier and a dead bacchante in Book 35. Here,

⁵¹⁴ Chuvin, 1991, pp.293-4

⁵¹⁵ Gerlaud, 2005, p.72

⁵¹⁶ Deriades himself show little interest in women, being above all a warrior and king.

Nonnus goes beyond the explicit Homeric references to the story of Achilles and Penthesilea (35.27-8)⁵¹⁷ to create in fifty lines a scene mixing the intensely erotic and the near comic. In the first part of the scene (35.21-35), an unnamed bacchante (τις ... παρθενική 35.21-2) lies dead on the ground, her tunic having moved - how? - leaving her naked to the gaze of the enemy (ἀντιβίοιο 35.25) who killed her.

In this part of this scene, the poet describes the naked bacchante and the reaction of the gazing Indian to her nakedness on display. Firstly, he describes it from the point of view of the bacchante, as it were, relying heavily on contrast and paradox: the wounded girl wounds her killer (φονῆα/οὔτασεν οὔτηθεῖσα 35.23-4), her naked thighs become arrows and she defeats him (φθιμένη νίκησε 35.24). Then Nonnus follows the lustful gaze of the Indian, which allows him to linger on details of her naked body. The soldier goes further than gazing, touching her limbs and breasts (ῆψατο πολλάκι μαζοῦ 35.33), restrained from sex only by his fear of Deriades. The second, longer part of the scene is a speech by the Indian,⁵¹⁸ which returns to and expands on the metaphor of her body as weapon. He particularly emphasises the dead/living contrast over several lines (ἄπνοος οἷστρος ἔχει με τὸν ἔμπνοον 35.46). The language becomes more explicitly sexual: there is little doubt of the nature of the wound he is touching (35.58). In the final twenty lines the speaker becomes more and more frenetic, calling up all sorts of means of restoring her to life. The scene ends abruptly as he passes on (παράμειβε 35.78).

As might be expected from Nonnus, this is not the only such scene in the *Dionysiaca*, though none match it exactly.⁵¹⁹ In Book 17 the Indian Erembeus kills the nymph Helice, but as she rolls in the dust, she modestly covers her nakedness by smoothing down her tunic (17.22). There is no hint here of necrophilic desires. The passage does, however, provide an example of Nonnus' fascination with

⁵¹⁷ Agosti analyses this scene for its connections to the Achilles-Penthesilea story in Quintus Smyrnaeus: Agosti, 2004, p.562, n. to 21-78; Frangoulis, Hélène and Gerlaud, Bernard (Eds.): *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome 12. Chants 35-36*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 2006, pp. 5-7

⁵¹⁸ Sources are discussed by Verhelst, 2016, pp.74-5

⁵¹⁹ Frangoulis and Gerlaud, 2006, p.116, n. to 21-36

the juxtaposition of red, white and black (ἄργυρον ἄντυγα μαζοῦ/αἵματι φοινίσσοντι κατέγραφε κυανή χεῖρ 17.218-9). In a passage in Chapter 30, Morrheus, who will soon be involved in his own love story with Chalcomede, mows down a number of bacchantes, one of whom is described in a similar way to the one lusted over by the unnamed Indian (30.214-8); Morrheus, however, remains unmoved at the sight.

The *Dionysiaca* contains a number of named Indian characters, though we learn nothing of most of them apart from their name. The main group of Indian characters comprises King Deriades, his sons-in-law and generals, the brothers Morrheus and Orontes, as well as his wife, Orsiboe, and daughters Cheirobia and Protonoe. Several others have roles in the war: Corumbasos, king of the Ethiopian Indians, Astraeis, Agraios and his brother Phlogios, Colletes, as well Melaneus and Kelaineus mentioned earlier. There is nothing ordinary or commonplace about any of these Indians. Deriades, for example, is the son of Hydaspes (13.5). Colletes is descended from Indos (36.241-56).

The Indian leaders are commonly referred to with reference to their huge stature (e.g., Δηριάδης δ' ἀπέλεθρος 35.1). Orontes is described at one point as being nine cubits tall (ἐννεάπηχυν Ὀρόντην 34.177), at another as all of twenty cubits (εἰκοσίπηχυν Ὀρόντης 25.252). They are warriors and are endowed with the appropriate qualities, though to a superlative level. Morrheus, for example, is described as fearless (ἄτρομε Μορρεῦ 40.37) and swift-footed (ἄελλόπος 34.260). These qualities fit in with one of the roles the Indians play in the *Dionysiaca*. The Indian War is "closely modelled on the narrative of Homer's *Iliad*."⁵²⁰ The relationship of the Indians to the Homeric characters is, however, not simple and the Indians take on Achaean and Trojan parts as needed. Thus, for example, in Book 36 Deriades might be regarded as playing Achilles to Dionysus' Hector (36.334-6),⁵²¹ while in Book 40 Dionysus/Achilles pursues the fleeing Deriades/Hector (40.84-5).⁵²² Following Deriades' death, his wife and daughters Protonoe, Cheirobie and Orsiboe present a "triple

⁵²⁰ Shorrock, 2001, p.33

⁵²¹ Shorrock, op. cit., p.83

⁵²² Shorrock, op. cit. p.87

lamentation” (40.101-212) based on *Iliad* 22 and 24.⁵²³ However, there is much more in Nonnus’ use of the Indians than a variation on Homer.

The Indian chiefs are presented almost exclusively engaged in military activities, except for Morrheus. Morrheus, whom we have seen indifferent to the charms of naked bacchantes on the battlefield, becomes involved in a love pursuit of the nymph Chalcomede that stretches from Book 33 to Book 35. As Agosti notes, this a complex and many-layered story⁵²⁴ with much use of irony and malicious humour. He notes the parallels with the stories of Medea and Jason, Apollo and Daphne and Ares and Aphrodite, as well as the Homeric links with Penthesilea and with Odysseus’ bathing in the presence of Nausicaa. He also notes the parallels to Polyphemus and Galatea. Just as clear are the internal parallels: Dionysus himself is involved in the pursuit of nymphs, though in his case his pursuits of Nicaia and Aura are “successful,” when he overcomes them by a mixture of guile and violence. In Morrheus’ case, it is the failure that is important and the circumstances of his failure. Morrheus must fail, as he is a barbarian, in the most disparaging sense of the term, and Dionysus’ enemy, but he is also made to fail as a figure of fun, when neither his wit nor his strength is sufficient. Eros causes the Indian to fall in love with Chalcomede at the behest of his mother, Aphrodite, in order to support Dionysus (33.165-74). From the very start his pretensions to the nymph are scorned:

κοῦφος ἀνὴρ, ὅτι παῖδα σαόφρονα δίζετο θέλγειν

κυανέοις μελέεσσι, καὶ οὐκ ἐμνήσατο μορφῆς. (33.206-7)

This “sarcasm”⁵²⁵ directed at Morpheus makes it clear that it is his appearance that makes his longing so ridiculous. Throughout the episode, the Indian general is made to look ever more ridiculous as he is led on by Chalcomede to believe she is as love-struck as he (35.137). The episode

⁵²³ Shorrock, op. cit., p.88

⁵²⁴ Agosti, 2004, p.468

⁵²⁵ Gerlaud, 2005, p.55

ends in more ridicule, when as he attempts to rape her (35.208) he is frightened off trembling with fear (φόβῳ δ' ἐλελίζετο 35.213) by the serpent guarding her.⁵²⁶

Of course, there is nothing in the VA to compare to this episode, nor would one expect it: its subject matter precludes such erotic pursuits. Indeed, in the Indian section, women have a very small role, far removed from any love interest.⁵²⁷ However, Philostratus' works are notoriously varied, and scholars have detected some parallels between Morrheus' speeches and passages in his *Letters*. Gigli Piccardi, for example, notes that Morrheus compares Chalcomede's rosy cheeks to a meadow in spring (106-13), while in his letter 21 Philostratus' suitor compares his love's head to a meadow bearing flowers.⁵²⁸ In another context, Geisz likens Dionysus' admiration for his beloved Beroe's foot to the sentiments expressed in Letter 18, where the letter writer praises his male lover's feet.⁵²⁹ Accorinti cites Philostratus' Letter 59 as an example of the use of a consolatory dream by an unhappy lover, while discussing Ariadne's dream of Theseus at *Dionysiaca* 47.328-349.⁵³⁰

Gerlaud discusses Nonnus' attitude to Indians as a race on the basis of the colour of their skin in an appendix to his edition of Books 33 and 34 of the *Dionysiaca*.⁵³¹ He concludes that Nonnus' frequent contrast of black and white, his depreciation of black and his opposition to the mixing of the two are essentially aesthetic in nature.⁵³² Be that as it may, there is no doubt that there are, as discussed, recurring references to skin colour and that Indians do not come off well in the poem, apart from the occasional acknowledgement of their valour as warriors. Frangoulis puts it neatly when she says that the character of Morrheus matches the blackness of his skin with the blackness of his soul.⁵³³

⁵²⁶ There is a passage, highlighted by Gerlaud, that does not quite fit in with this picture of the hapless Morrheus. At 33.283-300 he gazes at the night sky, displaying a detailed knowledge of the constellations and their attachment to love themes. As Gerlaud notes, Philostratus' Iarchas and the Wise Men know all about the stars: Gerlaud, 2005, p.34, n.1

⁵²⁷ At VA 3.38 a woman approaches the Wise Ones seeking a cure for her son.

⁵²⁸ Gigli Piccardi, 1985, p.66, n.129. See also Agosti, 2004, p.531, n. to 106-113.

⁵²⁹ Geisz, 2018, p.54

⁵³⁰ Accorinti, 2004, p.546, n. to 328-49

⁵³¹ "Nonnos 'raciste'": Gerlaud, 2005, pp.238-43

⁵³² Gerlaud, 2005, p.243

⁵³³ Frangoulis, 2014, p.39

associated with Helios is no doubt because of the association of fire with Dionysius' divinity.⁵³⁹ But the position is far from simple, for King Deriades himself has a close connection to the Sun, as the son of Hydaspes and of Astris, the daughter of Helios (26.32-4; 352-5). Yet even Deriades' genealogy is complicated, as Nonnus also mentions once, and once only, a report (φάτις δέ τις 26.354) of Deriades' mother in fact being Keto,⁵⁴⁰ daughter of Ocean (26.355).⁵⁴¹ It is hard to escape the impression that here Nonnus is playing games with the reader - why else mention Keto? - though elsewhere he seems to have genuine difficulties reconciling Deriades' ancestry with his actions and the Indian beliefs. For example, Vian points out that Deriades, while proclaiming the allegiance of the Indians to water and earth, intends to destroy the Telchines, sons of Poseidon (27.106) and the earth-born Cyclops (27.86).⁵⁴² When Orontes commits suicide after failing to defeat Dionysus, who was armed only with his thyrsus, he invokes Helios (17.271). In brief, Nonnus sets up his own version of Indian antecedents and allegiances, based on the needs of his poem. Thus, for the overall fabric of his poem, the earth-bound Indians present a fitting contrast to heavenly Dionysus. However, Nonnus does not allow this general pattern to constrain him when there are reasons for change in particular circumstances: for the sake of colour and perhaps out of playfulness (Deriades' parentage) or for the sake of a Sophoclean reference (Orontes' death), he occasionally introduces a variation.

If there are no Indian warriors in the *VA* and no philosopher Indian kings in the *Dionysiaca*, and if the religions of the Indians differ in the two works, they do at least share Brahmins and Gymnosophists and, according to one passage, the doctrine of the transmigration of souls.⁵⁴³ This last element occurs at the beginning of Book 37, as the Indians bury their dead, with tearless eyes (ὄμμασιν ἀκλαύτοισιν 37.3), as freed from the chains of life on earth (37.4). Their souls return to the

⁵³⁹ Frangoulis, 2010, p.102; Frangoulis, 2014, p.153

⁵⁴⁰ A reference to Sophocles' *Ajax*: Gerlaud 1994, p.145.

⁵⁴¹ Vian, 1990, p.75

⁵⁴² Vian, 1990, p.121

⁵⁴³ Chuvin, 1991, p.293; Frangoulis, 1999, p.105, n. to 1-6

beginning of the cycle (37.5-6). There is no further mention of Indian belief in metempsychosis in the poem.

The Brahmins appear on three occasions in the *Dionysiaca*. They are first mentioned by Thureus, another of the giant Indians and one of Deriades' commanders (Ἰνδῶου πολέμοιο πέλωρ πρόμος 22.140). Dionysus defeats his troops and kills them all except for Thureus himself, left alive to be a witness to the victory (θεοῦδέα μάρτυρα νίκης 23.116). It is in the context of Thureus' report to Deriades that the Brahmins appear. After the carnage, he advises a tactical retreat. They should, he tells Deriades, ask the wise Brahmins (σοφούς Βραχμῆνας 24.162) whether they are up against a man or god (εἰ θεὸς οὗτος ἴκανεν ἐς ἡμέας ἢ βροτὸς ἀνὴρ 24.163). They appear here as sages with the gift of foresight.⁵⁴⁴ Deriades accepts the advice (24.170), but there is no further mention of consulting the Brahmins about this.⁵⁴⁵

The second reference to the Brahmins is also related to Dionysus and battle but introduces some additional aspects. Here Deriades himself is fighting Dionysus, a Dionysus using metamorphoses to confound the Indian. Deriades, for his part, threatens him with the Brahmins, again described as wise (σοφούς Βραχμῆνας 36.344). They are, he tells Dionysus, unarmed (ἀτευχέας 36.244) and naked (γυμνοὶ 36.345), but with their incantations calling on the gods (θεοκλήτοις δ' ἐπαοιδαῖς 36.345), they can bring down the moon (36.347) and stop the sun (36.348). Thus, he will match and overcome Dionysus using their mystic craft (μύστιδι τέχνῃ 36.353). This passage is the first mention of the Brahmins' magic powers. It also suggests that Nonnus does not distinguish between Brahmins and Gymnosophists.⁵⁴⁶ There is no episode showing their powers being used as Deriades suggests here.

⁵⁴⁴ Gonelli, 2003, p.593, n. to 147-69. Gonelli points out that this is the only passage where they appear as true sages, rather than as magicians, as Nonnus elsewhere ignores the "idealising tradition" of Greek treatment of the Brahmins.

⁵⁴⁵ Hopkinson, 1994b, p.153

⁵⁴⁶ Agosti, 2004, p.652, n. to 344-9; Frangoulis and Gerlaud, 2006, p.158, n. to 334-49

The final appearance of the Brahmins, once again associated with battle, is in the *Naumachia* in Book 39. Morpheus has been injured, by Dionysus himself, and his wound is treated by a Brahmin. More specifically it is treated by the divine hand (δαμονίη χεὶρ 39.450) of a pain-relieving Brahmin (λυσιπόνου Βραχμῆνος 39.358) with Phoebus' skill (Φοιβάδι τέχνη 39.358), while murmuring a spell (39.359). This is not the first healing scene in the *Dionysiaca*. Aristaeus, son of Apollo had earlier been shown healing the Bassarids' wounds with Phoebus' skill (Φοιβάδι τέχνη 17.358), combining herbal remedies, surgery and incantation.⁵⁴⁷ These scenes have been likened to the scene in the *Odyssey* where the sons Autolycus staunches Odysseus' blood with a charm (ἐπαοιδῇ δ' αἶμα κελαϊνὸν / ἔσχεθον *Od.* 19.457-8).⁵⁴⁸ Thus, as the Indian warriors reference the Homeric heroes, so Nonnus establishes a Homeric link with the Brahmins. Nonnus also shows us Dionysus himself using his healing powers in a similar but Bacchic manner on his wounded fighters.⁵⁴⁹

If we draw together the mentions of Brahmins in the *Dionysiaca*, then, the following picture emerges: they are wise; they know the answers to questions about the future; they have powers associated with the gods and are even able to influence celestial motions; they apply their powers by the use of incantations; they are healers. Most of this we know from hearsay: on the only occasion they are shown actually using their powers, it is the healing power and it is in a scene with Homeric references. This is the only passage in which they appear in person, as it were, and they are never shown demonstrating their other powers. There are likewise no reports of the success of their powers in helping the Indians in their battles. Such successes as the Indians have through the intervention of gods are due to the gods themselves - usually Hera - rather than any intercession of Brahmins. None are named. The scarcity of references shows that they are essentially marginal figures in the *Dionysiaca*.

⁵⁴⁷ Simon, 1999, p.252, n. to 348-60; Agosti, 2004, n. to 359.

⁵⁴⁸ Agosti, 2004, p.652, n. to 344-9

⁵⁴⁹ For example, at 29.264-75

The Treatment of Indians Compared

At first sight, Indians as portrayed by Philostratus and Nonnus seem to be opposites. In the *VA*, Philostratus presents us with an idealized picture of peace-loving philosopher kings and wise ascetics, combining a deep understanding of Greek language and Hellenistic culture with particularly valuable knowledge and insights essential to Apollonius' mission; in the *Dionysiaca*, Nonnus presents us with barbarian warriors, enemies of Zeus, standing between Dionysus and his apotheosis, their occasional bravery in battle outweighed by their buffoonery and lack of insight, but with intriguing links to Homeric heroes. However, besides the obvious differences, the Indians share important roles in both works.

Indians as portrayed by Nonnus and Philostratus share physical characteristics: they tend to be large and black. Yet even here there is a difference: the blackness of the Indians, while mentioned and described in the *VA*, is not given any moral significance.⁵⁵⁰ On the other hand, it becomes quite an issue in the *Dionysiaca*, as we have seen, emblematic of their different, even contrasting roles in the respective works. Likewise, the large size of the Indian leaders in the *Dionysiaca* is a link to the Homeric heroes, while allowing a pleasing paradox when huge heavily-armed warriors are brought low by women armed with nothing more than the thyrsus; Philostratus notes the size of this exotic people as Apollonius and Damis enter India, but the real interest is in their moral and intellectual qualities. Nevertheless, the physical similarities remain striking.

The depiction of Indian religion is a particularly interesting area for comparison. On the one hand, Philostratus' Indians' worship of the sun seems quite at odds with the earth and river religion of Nonnus' Indians. And yet, on the other hand, Deriades is closely connected to Helios and the earth-

⁵⁵⁰ However, in *Imagines* 2.21, Philostratus stresses Antaeus' black skin as a sign of inferiority compared to Heracles: Bachmann, 2015, p.224

sun conflict and is thus reminiscent of the sun-focused Indians of the VA. And, as we have seen, there is at least one reference to an Indian belief in metempsychosis in the *Dionysiaca*.

Brahmans are, as we saw in a previous section, firmly part of the Alexander story both as presented by the Greek historians and in the *Alexander Romance*, so it is no surprise that they should appear in Nonnus' Indian section. Yet if we compare Nonnus' presentation with that of Philostratus, the details suggest more than a passing or general similarity, to the extent that they point towards Nonnus' familiarity with Philostratus' text.⁵⁵¹ All of the characteristics of Nonnus' Brahmanas we have discussed can be found in Philostratus: they are wise and have powers of foresight; they can cast spells; they can influence nature; they have healing powers. Although their presence in the *Dionysiaca* is limited to brief passages and stands out by its contrast to the usual treatment of Indians, they do indeed display the combination of wisdom and magic-making seen in the earlier writer. Thus, while the origin of the Brahmanas in both works is ultimately tied to the Alexander story, details of their depiction in the *Dionysiaca* link them to Philostratus.

To put it crudely, as far as depiction of the Indians is concerned, we see in Philostratus an idealizing trend, while in Nonnus we see what we might call a demonizing trend. This fits with the overall shape of the respective works and their thematic concerns. For the purposes of Philostratus in the VA, it is important that the Indians be fundamentally good; for the purposes of Nonnus in the *Dionysiaca*, it is important that they be fundamentally bad. For both writers, it is important that the Indians be "other."

In fact, it is their "otherness" which is the point of their presence in the works. This otherness is based on centuries of Greek representations of Indians in Greek culture, serious and less serious, with Philostratus and Nonnus using the parts of the traditional representations that suit their needs and adding their own touches. Given their differences, the writers use the Indians in surprisingly

⁵⁵¹ "Sin embargo, conoce a los brahmanes, posiblemente por haber leído sobre estos ascetas en Filóstrato." Hernández de la Fuente, 2001, p.311, n.29

similar ways. Philostratus emphasises the learnedness of the Indians, but he also shows up their Barbarian and comic side through the figure of the unnamed king. Nonnus makes a great deal of the barbarity and comic possibilities of the Indians, but even he gives a nod to their reputation for wisdom through the introduction of the Brahmins. But it is above all the use of the otherness of the Indians in its aesthetic manifestations that unites these writers of Late Antiquity. The different, the paradoxical, the colourful and the unusual form part of the *poikilia* characteristic of both works and the Indians, whatever the other reasons for their presence, are a significant element of this in both the *VA* and the *Dionysiaca*. This common aspect will come even more to the fore in our consideration of the animals and other wonders of India.

Wonders, Monsters and Exotic Animals

Background: Greeks and the Marvels of India

Long before Philostratus and Nonnus, India was for the Greeks a mythical land of wonder. Writers before the time of Alexander's Eastern expedition, such as Herodotus,⁵⁵² Ctesias and Scylax, told of fabulous beasts and even more fabulous people. To take just one of these figures as an example, if we consider the Indian wonders that Ctesias mentions - or, rather, that Ctesias is quoted by other writers as mentioning - there is already a long list. One of the problems in considering the legacy of Ctesias is that we no longer have access to his own works. However, there are many references to his *Indica* in other Greek writers from Aristotle onwards, including Pausanias, Aelian and Arrian, with a particularly long discussion of the wonders reported by Photius in his *Bibliotheca* (Book 72).⁵⁵³

The following is a selection of the marvels in Ctesias as reported by Photius:

- The fabulous stone, the pantarbe (παντάρβη);
- The spring that produces a hundred jugs of liquid gold a year (ἐξ ἧς ἑκατὸν πρόχοι ὀστράκινοι ἀν' ἔτος ἀρύονται);
- The martichora, which has the face of a man and is the size of a lion (ὥς τὸ πρόσωπον εἰκῶς ἀνθρώπων· μέγεθος μὲν ἐστὶν ὥσπερ λέων);
- The pygmies who use their long hair for clothing and whose genitals are so long as to reach their feet (ὥστε ψάυειν τῶν σφυρῶν αὐτῶν);
- Dog-headed men who live in the hills (οἱ Κυνοκέφαλοι οἰκοῦντες ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσιν);

⁵⁵² *History* 3, 97-106

⁵⁵³ Photius was writing long after Nonnus' death, of course, but one might assume that versions of Ctesias would have been available to Nonnus. I have used the Ctesias list as a convenient starting point for the discussion of wonders in Philostratus and Nonnus rather than suggesting evidence of a direct link.

- Unicorns, white and with great single horns (Κέρας δὲ ἔχει ἐν τῷ μετώπῳ ἐνὸς πήχεος τὸ μέγεθος).

Photius says that Ctesias assures the reader that these stories (μυθολογῶν) are true and that he has only written of things he has either seen himself (αὐτὸς ἰδὼν) or from those who have seen them (παρ' αὐτῶν μαθὼν τῶν ἰδόντων) and that he rejected many as unbelievable. The reliability of Ctesias' Indian stories has been debated over the centuries. It is now widely accepted that while he had no first-hand knowledge of India, never having travelled there himself, he did have access while in Persia to people who did.⁵⁵⁴ The essence of Ctesias' India has been happily described as “*démésure générale*”⁵⁵⁵ and this characteristic, which implies more than mere size, is one which, we will see, particularly struck both Philostratus and Nonnus.

While they were often scorned,⁵⁵⁶ Ctesias' stories of Indian wonders were nevertheless often repeated, even after Alexander's travels had provided comparatively sober and reliable reports, based on the eye-witness accounts of the likes of Nearchus and Megasthenes. After all, the longest account of Ctesias' lost works is that of Photius in the ninth century, indicating its long life among Greek readers. Leaving aside the more extravagant tales of fabulous beasts from the early writers, India still retained its air of wonder: the “real” animals and plants and unfamiliar geographic features were strange enough to Greek eyes. Indeed, it is not always easy to distinguish between the monstrous and the merely exotic.

We have seen in previous chapters that both Philostratus and Nonnus were fond of the exotic and the paradoxical. The engagement with India and the Indians gives plenty of scope for both. We will see though that the writers are not necessarily fascinated by the same things, nor do they necessarily use these wonders in the same way or for the same ends. For example, the travel

⁵⁵⁴ Stoneman, 2019, p.29

⁵⁵⁵ Lenfant, 2004, p.CLIII

⁵⁵⁶ In his *True Story* 2, Lucian has both Ctesias and Herodotus punished for writing untruths (μὴ τὰ ἀληθῆ συγγεγραφότες *VH* 2.31)

narrative aspect of the VA almost invites the description of noteworthy sights, while allowing Apollonius to demonstrate his great knowledge and to learn from the sage Iarchas. This aspect hardly applies to Nonnus' epic. Indeed, he is far less interested in the Indian wonders. The monsters that appear in the epic - one need only think of Typhon at the beginning of the poem - put Philostratus' Indian monsters in the shade. Nevertheless, there are still significant overlaps, especially where animals are concerned. We will concentrate our discussion on those overlaps.

Indian Wonders in the VA and the *Dionysiaca*

In describing Apollonius' journey through India, it can be said that Philostratus embraces all kinds of Indian wonders, natural and super-natural, with enthusiasm. To start with the list of Ctesias' wonders, we find that most have found a place in the VA. The pantarbe and its amazing powers are described at some length (3.46) as is the martichora (3.45) and the unicorn (3.2). This is not to say that Philostratus accepts everything from Ctesias: the Shadow-Foots are only mentioned to note that they are mentioned by Scylax and that they do not exist (3.47);⁵⁵⁷ there is no mention of the Dog-headed Men; when questioned by Apollonius, Iarchas has never heard of the spring of liquid gold (3.45.2).⁵⁵⁸ None of these appear in the *Dionysiaca*. Pygmies are a special case: they appear both in the VA and in the *Dionysiaca*, but in these works they are not described as the extraordinary freakish creatures described by Ctesias. In fact, they are barely mentioned at all. For Philostratus they live underground across the Ganges "as everyone says" (ὅς πᾶσιν εἴρηται 3.47);⁵⁵⁹ Nonnus mentions them in a simile in conjunction with their traditional enemy, the cranes, as a weak race (οὐτιδανῆς ... γενέθλης 14.336).

⁵⁵⁷ Philostratus attributes them to Scylax. They do appear again as a tribe in Ethiopia: 6.25.

⁵⁵⁸ There is, however, a magic well on the Brahmins' hill (3.14).

⁵⁵⁹ They are also mentioned briefly at 6.1.2 and 6.25, adding nothing to the picture except that they also live in Ethiopia. In the *Imagines*, their audacious attempt to avenge Antaeus by binding the sleeping Heracles leads to laughter (2.22.4).

In the *VA*, most of the wonders derived from Ctesias - the unicorn being an exception - are described by Iarchas and fit in with his status as a holder of arcane and fantastic knowledge that Apollonius can absorb to perfect his own learning. There is no similar teacher-student relationship in Nonnus' poem. This cannot fully explain the omissions, as there are cases of wonders derived from Ctesias and Scylax in Nonnus but not in Philostratus. For example, another outlandish group, the Uatocoitai (Οὐατοκοῖται), men who sleep wrapped in their ears, found in Scylax like the Shadow-Feet,⁵⁶⁰ do appear in the *Dionysiaca*. They are listed in the catalogue of Indian contingents (26.94-96). Ctesias reports there is a spring producing sweet wine, though it is in Naxos, not in India (κρήνην ἐξ ἧς οἶνος ἐνιότε ῥεῖ καὶ μάλα ἡδύς Photius 46a). It is hardly necessary to note the role of such springs in the *Dionysiaca*.

There are other freakish creatures appearing in the *VA* but not in the *Dionysiaca*. When Apollonius and Damis are crossing into India they come across an apparition called "empousa" (φάσμα δὲ αὐτοῖς ἐμπούσης ἐνέπεσε 2.4) which the sage, in a demonstration of his powers, quickly sends on its way. The travellers also meet a woman who is black to her chest and white from there to her feet (3.3). The griffins, said by Iarchas to live in India, are birds as big as lions, able to get the better of elephants and snakes (3.48). Neither piebald Indians nor griffins appear in the *Dionysiaca*.

The Phoenix does make an appearance in both works and in the *VA* it is part of the Indian section. It is not usual for the Phoenix to be associated with India,⁵⁶¹ however when Apollonius learns about the bird from Iarchas (3.49), he is told that while the bird is essentially Egyptian it also has a strong Indian connection. It returns to Egypt every five hundred years, but in the intervening time it flies around India (πέτεσθαι μὲν ἐν τῇ Ἰνδικῇ 3.49). In his description, it is the size of an eagle, and has a golden sheen (χρυσῷ λάμποντα 3.49). There is only one Phoenix, it comes from (ἐκδιδόμενον 3.49)

⁵⁶⁰ Agosti, 2004, p.157, n. to 90-100

⁵⁶¹ However, Mumprecht notes instances where this occurs: Mumprecht, 1983, p.1063, n.83

the sun's rays. It has a nest made from incense from the Nile and as it is burning (τηκόμενον 3.49) on its nest, it sings to itself like a swan.

The context of the bird's brief appearance in the *Dionysiaca* (40.394-8) is quite different. There is no connection to India, nor indeed to Egypt, but to Tyre and to Heracles. There is no physical description except to note its hooked talons (γαμψώνυχι ταρσῶ 40.39) carrying fragrant wood to the altar where it will burn. The thousand-year-old Phoenix dies in the fire and is reborn (τέρμα βίοιο φέρων αὐτόσπορον ἀρχήν 40.396), young again.

Frangoulis compares Nonnus' Phoenix with that of Achilles Tatius, also considering Philostratus. Her conclusion is that Nonnus is above all interested in the resurrection of the bird and in the cyclical nature of its death and rebirth.⁵⁶² Considering the context of its appearance in the VA, Philostratus seems, on the other hand, concerned to show the Phoenix's Indian connection, as yet another wonder, and as yet another demonstration of Iarchas' knowledge. Its appearance continues a fascination with gold and with creatures of shimmering gold. In other words, both writers are using the well-known motif in their own way for their own purposes, varying the details as it suits them. Both, however, stress the connection to the sun, Philostratus explicitly in the description of the Phoenix's "birth," Nonnus through the context of its particular place in the poem, as part of Heracles' prayer, in the surrounding mentions of such figures as Ammon, Zeus and Phaethon.⁵⁶³

It is not only legendary or fabulous creatures that capture Philostratus' attention in India. In his journey Apollonius also takes note of local wildlife, though the interest is in the more exotic species and for specific purposes. For example, elephants, snakes, leopards, lions, tigers, wolves, eagles, storks, dolphins, whales and seals are all used as examples in a long discussion between Damis and Apollonius on the nurture and love of animal young (2.4). The interest here is not so much in the animals themselves, more in establishing the universal validity of Apollonius' argument. Much later,

⁵⁶² Frangoulis, 2014, pp.144-5

⁵⁶³ Simon, 1999, pp.290-1, n. to 392-8

as they approach the end of their Indian journey, Philostratus briefly mentions lions, leopards and tigers again, as well as wild oxen, asses and black monkeys (3.50.2). Here the role of the animals is little more than to provide an exotic background. Of course, many of these animals appear in the *Dionysiaca*, some many times as familiars of Dionysus himself, others with more or less important roles in the epic. The writers usually give these animals their traditional characteristics, though the Indian connection is mostly absent from the *Dionysiaca*.

There is one instance where the most fearsome of Philostratus' Indian animals appear in the *Dionysiaca* with an oblique Indian connection. In Book 2, Apollonius describes the tiger as the most ferocious of the Indian animals (χαλεπωτάτην 2.14.3); he goes on to describe the fierce look of a lioness with her young (δεινὸν βλέπει 2.14.3). In Book 9 of the *Dionysiaca*, Nonnus, exploiting the fierce reputation of the beast, has the nine year old Dionysus carrying the tiger on his shoulder unshackled (ἔκτοθι δεσμοῦ 9.174); later young Dionysus rips the cubs from a lioness (9.176) and drags terrible lions (σμερδαλέους δὲ λέοντας 9.177) by the legs, much to the delight of Rheia (9.180) and Zeus (9.183). The context of the Nonnian scene is Dionysus' childhood in the care of Rheia: Zeus tells his mother that Dionysus is to fight a war against the Indians (μόθον Ἰνδῶν 9.149). It is as if young Dionysus is here in training for the Indian campaign.

When Apollonius and Damis cross the Indus into India they observe many crocodiles and hippopotamuses, "as do those who sail on the Nile" (2.19), but there are no further descriptions. The hippopotamus does appear in the *Dionysiaca* (ποταμήιος ἵππος 26.237) and in an Indian river,⁵⁶⁴ though here it is the Hydaspes rather than the Indus. Like Philostratus, Nonnus mentions that the animal also lives in the Nile (26.238), and indeed he devotes several lines to a description of the hippopotamus and its behaviour.

⁵⁶⁴ The context is the catalogue of contingents joining the Indian leader Deriades.

However, it is only in the case of snakes and elephants that both writers engage at some length with the same animals.

Snakes

Philostratus

Philostratus flags the reports of Nearchus and Orthagoras that there are particularly large snakes in India early in Book 2 (2.17) but says that he will leave his discussion of them until later. This is, in effect, a signal to the reader that Philostratus will not be dealing with the ordinary snakes known to his readers. Indeed, the reader will find few of the normal snaky attributes in the reptiles described in the VA. Of interest here is only the immense, the paradoxical, the monstrous. The English word “snake” here struggles to cover the creatures designated by the Greek “δράκων.” The snakes encountered by Apollonius and Damis in India are enormous and colourful in more ways than one.

Snakes, of course, have their own part in the Greek literary heritage and Philostratus is quick to add a reference to the snakes in Homer and other poets when Damis and Apollonius come across the reptiles in Book 3 (3.6.2).⁵⁶⁵ As one might expect, though, the snakes of India are particularly exotic and spectacular in their size, appearance and behaviour. Crossing the mountains after leaving the Wise Men, the travellers encounter a snake hunt. This provides Philostratus an opportunity - he says it would be very foolish for him to omit it - to lecture on the varieties of Indian snakes and their characteristics and he does so at quite some length.

Firstly, we are told that Indian snakes are of an enormous size (ἀπείροις μήκεσι 3.6.2). This is unlikely to have been anything new to the contemporary reader. Aelian, for example, quotes Cleitarchus in claiming that Indian snakes are up to sixteen cubits long (NA 17.2), although elsewhere

⁵⁶⁵ Mumprecht, 1983, p.1057, n.20

he tells of Alexander confronting and sparing an Indian serpent 70 cubits long (NA 15.21).

Philostratus tells us that the marsh snakes grow up to thirty cubits long.⁵⁶⁶ They are rather a dull bunch, being sluggish, dark and having no crest (3.6.2) and are quickly dealt with. The hill and plains varieties are, according to Philostratus, superior to them in every respect (πλεονεκτοῦσι δὲ τῶν ἐλείων πάντα 3.7.1) and are of much more interest to the writer. They are longer than the marsh snakes and are as fast as the fastest-flowing river (ταχύτεροι τῶν ὀξυτάτων ποταμῶν 3.7.1), so that no prey can escape them. Moreover, they are of a much more spectacular and colourful appearance.⁵⁶⁷ They have a crest which grows larger with them as they age (συναυξανομένη τε καὶ συνανιοῦσα ἐς πολὺ 3.7.1). The snakes turn flame-coloured (πυρσοί 3.7.1) and have serrated backs. They have beards, hold their necks high and their scales glitter like silver (τὴν φολίδα στίλβουσι δίκην ἀργύρου 3.7.2). Their eyeballs are like burning stone (λίθος ἐστὶ διάπυρος 3.7.2) which are said (φασιν 3.7.2) to give it mysterious powers. He does not elaborate on what these powers might be. This huge shimmering red snake, with its high crest, beard and burning eyes with mysterious powers seems far from its dull marsh cousin, a step from the factual to the fabulous. They hunt in the plain, and the fabulous element is underscored when we learn of the snake's prey: elephants. Philostratus mentions the snakes dragging away (ἐπισπάσθηται 3.7.2) elephants, leaving how this might work to our imagination. This, however, is deadly for both animals and good for human hunters, who can get hold of the snake's eyes, skin and teeth. We are not told of the uses to which these are put but learn that the teeth are like the tusks of the biggest boars (ὅμοιοι τοῖς τῶν μεγίστων συῶν 3.7.2), but light and twisted (διάστροφοι 3.7.2), with a point that never wears down (ἄτριπτοι 3.7.2), like those of fish.

If the hill or plains snake is larger than the marsh snake, then the mountain snake is even larger still (3.7.3) and yet more spectacular in appearance. The scales are of golden colour (χρυσοῖ φαίνονται

⁵⁶⁶ Mumprecht notes how often 30 cubits is mentioned as the size of snakes in other writers: 1983, p.1057, n.16

⁵⁶⁷ Aelian, in the passage at NA 17.2 noted above, also mentions red and golden snakes; Quintus Curtius describes the scales of Indian snakes shimmering with gold (*History of Alexander*, 9.1.12).

3.8.1), and it has a curly (βοστρυχώδη 3.8.1) golden beard.⁵⁶⁸ It also has very distinctive eyebrows and a terrible gaze and its flame-coloured crest burns brighter than a torch (λαμπαδίου πλέον 3.8.1). Philostratus mentions the sounds made by the snake, a bronze-like sound (ὕποχαλκόν τε ἤχῳ 3.8.1) when it burrows, the first mention of any noise made by the animal. The mountain snake too hunts elephants and is in turn hunted by the Indians. They hunt for the snake by covering the entrance to its burrow with a scarlet cloth with golden writing over which a sleeping spell has been cast (ὑπνον ἐγγοητεύσαντες 3.8.2),⁵⁶⁹ both continuing the colour theme and emphasising the exotic strangeness of Indian matters. When the snake emerges, it falls asleep and they cut off its head. Out pour stones gleaming with all colours (πάντα ἀπαυγαζούσας χρώματα 3.8.2) which the Indians steal, as the stones have magic powers. Philostratus introduces a Greek reference to parallel this, Gyges' ring, and so presumably the power involves invisibility.⁵⁷⁰ Philostratus' interest here, though, is not that of the philosopher or moralist - there is no further mention of the thieves and no lecture by Apollonius - but simply the exotic colourfulness of the tale. Danger and fear are also present, for if the snake happens not to fall asleep, it will drag the hunter into its burrow and in doing so almost (μονονοῦ 3.8.3) shake the mountain. The piece ends with some further reports (λέγονται 3.8.3) that it lives around the "Red Sea" (περὶ τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν οἰκεῖν 3.8.3) comes down to swim in the sea and that it lives to an age impossible to know and, if stated, impossible to believe (γινῶναί τε ἄτοπον καὶ εἰπεῖν ἄπιστον 3.8.3). Only here do we learn that the beast makes the traditional hiss of snakes.

The snake episode is in essence an *ekphrasis* or series of *ekphraseis* that would hardly be out of place in the *Imagines*. The picture builds from the marsh snake to the mountain snake, getting more colourful, more exotic and more fabulous at each step. There is also sound and movement, though for the reader the most striking feature is likely to be the vision of these two amazing creatures described in words emphasising metal, gems and brilliant colour as if they were oversized pieces of

⁵⁶⁸ In "Islands" in the *Imagines*, Philostratus describes golden snakes and snakes guarding gold (2.17.6).

⁵⁶⁹ Aelian notes that the Egyptians catch snakes using spells: *NA* 6.33

⁵⁷⁰ Plato, *Republic*, Bk 2. 360. See also Mumprecht, 1983, p.1058, n.26

jewellery, rather than animals like their marsh cousin. Gold and jewels are particularly associated with Philostratus' India: he tells us, for example, that gems are found from which wine bowls big enough for four people can be carved (3.27.3). There is little of the documentary or educative element in the *ekphraseis* of the snakes: the information is attributed to vague sources and does not involve input from Apollonius or Damis. We will see that there is a marked difference in this respect in the sections dealing with the elephant.

Nonnus

In contrast to the few - if very striking - mentions of snakes in the VA, snakes appear throughout the *Dionysiaca*. Indeed, they are mentioned in virtually every book, with the first mention at the beginning of Book 1 (1.16) and the last at the end of Book 48 (48.914). They come in all shapes and sizes, have all sorts of roles, both negative and positive,⁵⁷¹ are attached to friendly and to enemy characters, are sometimes dangerous and sometimes protective (though usually of bad omen),⁵⁷² they slither along the earth and fly through the heavens. They are far from being contained to the Indian sections, though they do play a significant role in the Indian Wars as well.

Snakes are closely associated with Dionysus himself.⁵⁷³ Zeus his father appears to Semele wearing a wreath of snakes (7.325) and Nonnus, emphasising the erotic, describes over several lines Zeus metamorphosed into a snake caressing Semele's body (7.328 – 333). When Dionysus is born from his father's thigh, he is immediately wreathed by the Seasons with ivy and horned snakes (εὐκεράων ... δρακόντων 9.14) and he will continue to appear wreathed with snakes throughout the poem.⁵⁷⁴ His nurse Mystis has a belt of braided snakes (9.130-2). It is a snake who teaches Dionysus the art of

⁵⁷¹ Hernández de la Fuente, 2008a, pp.90, 186. Newbold emphasises the negative aspects: Newbold, R.F.: "Discipline, Bondage, and The Serpent in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*, in *The Classical World*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (Nov – Dec 1984), pp. 89-98 at p.92

⁵⁷² Kröll, op.cit, p.201, n.8 (11.84-93)

⁵⁷³ Chrétien discusses the long links between Dionysus and snakes in her notes to 9.15 and some of her examples appear here. Chrétien, 1985, p.100. See also: Gigli Piccardi, 2003, p.514

⁵⁷⁴ For example, at 22.29ff., 25.219, 42.14

pressing grapes to produce wine (12.319-336).⁵⁷⁵ If a huge snake dragging off a fawn is a presage of the death of Dionysus' love Ampelos (11.86ff), a snake dropped by an eagle into a river foretells Dionysus' defeat of Deriades (38.66).

But even before Dionysus' birth, snakes are associated with the story of his family. In the *Dionysiaca* this starts with Zeus' battle against the avenger of the Titans, Typhon, in the first two books. Typhon has a hundred heads covered in wreathes of snakes (σκιεροῖς πλοκάμοισιν ἐχιδνοκόμων κεφαλῶν 1.173), and his multiple legs also end in snakes (ποδὸς ἀγκύλον ἵχνος ἄγων ὀφιδώδει ταρσῶ 2.30), so that at times there is such a frenzy of snakes that it is difficult to tell which part of the monster is engaged in the battle.⁵⁷⁶ The snake links to Dionysus are even closer. Not only does Zeus fight this snaky monster to save the universe, but he also takes on the form of a snake - a gentle (μείλιχος 5.569) snake - when he visits Persephone, daughter of Demeter. As a result of this union, the first Dionysus, Zagreus, is born in a snaky bed (δρακοντεῖη ... εὐνῇ 5.566). Before he is killed, Zagreus turns into a snake (9.192). In the very last book of the *Dionysiaca* Zeus' battle with Typhon is mirrored in a brief battle between Dionysus and the Giants, when Hera stirs up Gaia about Dionysus' slaughter of the Indians. In the Gigantomachia, Dionysus uses his bunch of Giant-killing vine (κόρυμβον ἔχων ὀλετῆρα Γιγάντων 48.43) to cut off the snakes from the enemy's heads (ἐδαΐζετο φῦλα δρακόντων 48.47). In the end earth-bred snakes are fleeing before snake-wreathed Dionysus (48.54f.). The final image of a snake is of one killed by Dionysus' flame spitting smoke rather than deadly poison (48.62).⁵⁷⁷

Snakes, we should note, do not only play an important part in Dionysus' family through the paternal line. Cadmus, his maternal grandfather, must fight and defeat a monstrous snake or dragon at the River Dirce (4.356-420), before he founds the city of Thebes. The weapons of this fearsome beast are its coils, its teeth and its poison, and the damage these do to Cadmus' companions is described

⁵⁷⁵ Köll, 2016, pp.143f, 174

⁵⁷⁶ Vian, 1976, p.21

⁵⁷⁷ Vian emphasises the comic element in this episode: Vian, 2003, pp.7-10

in detail (4.364-388), with the most gruesome being the oozing of a victim's melted brain (4.388). Encouraged by Athena (4.393-405), Cadmus first smashes the dragon's skull (ἄκρα δρακοντείοιο καρήατος ἔθλασε 4.11) then cuts off its head. There follows the familiar scene of the sowing of the dragon's teeth and Cadmus' reaping of the crop of giants. Much later in the *Dionysiaca*, Cadmus' daughter Agave has a vision of snakes in a dream. One twists around Cadmus' neck like a garland (στεφανηδὸν ἐλίξας 44.107), another circles Harmonia's temples (ὄφις μιν πῶσατο κόρησιν 44.113). The snakes do no harm but presage the couple being turned to stone snakes (44.117-8), as a result of Ares' anger.⁵⁷⁸ At 46.367 they take on their petrified form.

In the Indian War itself, snakes are generally on the side of the Dionysian forces, or at least are used by them in battle. Nonnus presents a Bassarid searching for poisonous snakes in their holes, so she can make a wreath of them (24.132-3). In Book 36 the snakes themselves are in the thick of battle, along with other animals, fighting for Dionysius. Nonnus often mentions snakes spitting poison,⁵⁷⁹ but here the snakes seem to surpass themselves, firing off fountains of poison through the air at the enemy from afar (τηλεβόλους πόμπευον ἐς ἡέρα πίδακας ἰοῦ 36.170), as well as launching themselves like weapons at the Indians and tying them in snaky knots (36.172-6).⁵⁸⁰ In the Indian Wars we also see snakes in the role of protectors of maidenly virtue. In Book 15, a drunken Indian chief drags off by the hair a Bacchant, an "untamed virgin" (παρθενικὴν ἀδάμαστον 15.80) and attempts to rape her. He is foiled at the last moment by a snake that crawls from her body (εἴρπε δράκων ὑποκόλπιος ἰξύι γείτων 15.81) and scares him off. The scene ends up being part erotic and part comic, as the attacker flees with frightened feet (ταρβαλέοις δὲ πόδεσσι 15.84) wearing a snaky necklace (15.85). In the *epyllion* of Morrheus and Chalcomedes, Thetis promises the Bacchant that she will be protected from the Indian general's assaults on her virtue by a huge snake (ἀπέλεθρον

⁵⁷⁸ Simon, 2004, pp.16-17

⁵⁷⁹ Gigli Piccardi lists the instances of poison-spitting snakes in the poem and identifies the probable original of these snakes as the cobra: Gigli Piccardi, 2003, p.154, n. to 1.268

⁵⁸⁰ In the battle against Typhon at the beginning of the poem, Ophiuchos fires off "ἐχιδνήεντες ὀιστοί" (1.249).

ὄφιν χραισμήτορα 33.369). Indeed, when Morrheus is about to seize her, a similar scene to that in Book 15 plays out: the snake appears from her bosom (δράκων ἀνεπήλατο κόλπου 35.209) to protect her. Morrheus trembles with fear (φόβῳ δ' ἐλελίζετο (35.213). The snake, as in the earlier scene, encircles the warrior's neck (ἐπ' αὐχένι φωτὸς ἐλίξας 35.217) and in an added touch spits poison at him (35.219). Indeed, the twisting and coiling, and the spitting of poison, so often included by Nonnus in his descriptions of snakes, are taken here to an extreme, ending in a kind of frenzy,⁵⁸¹ before the scene abruptly ends.

In the *Dionysiaca*, snakes are not only prominent in the live action, as it were, but also appear in *ekphraseis* of works fashioned by Hephaestus. Aphrodite gives Harmonia a magnificent necklace made by Hephaestus, featuring a two-headed snake (5.144ff.), gold (5.155) with jeweled eyes (5.175). Among the motifs pictured on the shield made by Hephaestus for Dionysus is the story of Tylos, his sister Moria and the giant Damosen. A major player in this story is a giant snake, of improbable length (πεντηκονταπέλεθρος ὄφιν κυκλούμενος ὀλκῷ 25.505), which would often attack passers-by and could be seen from afar eating a man whole (τηλεφανῆς ὄλον ἄνδρα κεχηνότι δέξατο λαίμῳ 25.480). We will discuss these two works in more detail below.

This brief overview hardly does justice to the profusion and variety of snakes in the *Dionysiaca*. For example, in several places Nonnus mentions the “dragons” pulling Demeter's (Deo's) chariot.⁵⁸² In the episode of the Tyrrhenian pirates, the ship's ropes turn into snakes.⁵⁸³ In other words, snakes appear throughout the *Dionysiaca*, in a variety of contexts connected with different thematic elements. There is no particular connection between snakes and India, though during the Indian Wars snakes are usually on Dionysus' side. Indeed, there is from the start a strong connection between Dionysus and the reptiles. If we consider the physical characteristics of Nonnus' snakes, they range in size from the vipers in Dionysus' hair to the tree-swallowing monster attacking Tylos.

⁵⁸¹ See Agosti, 2004, p.586, n. to 218-222; Frangoulis and Gerlaud, 2006, p.19

⁵⁸² 6.128ff; 13.192; 40.352

⁵⁸³ 45.138ff.

In general, Nonnus' snakes slither and hiss, are poisonous and aggressive, though at times they can be connected with the erotic,⁵⁸⁴ and even friendly, at least to Dionysus.⁵⁸⁵ Above all, Nonnus' snakes twist and coil. It seems to be this circular, coiling motion which so fascinates him.

Snakes in Philostratus and Nonnus Compared

Snakes appear in the VA as part of Apollonius' journey through India and are treated as a part of its wonders. They have no wider part to play. Given that the VA is centred on Apollonius who has no particular connection to the reptiles, this is not surprising. It is perhaps surprising though that nowhere are snakes mentioned in connection with Dionysus. For example, when Apollonius visits the shrine to Dionysus at Nyssa (2.8), there are mentions of ivy and grapes, but none of snakes, even in the description of the statue of the god. We also miss in description of snakes in the VA the slithering, twisting and coiling so much associated with snakes in the *Dionysiaca*. However, in the *Imagines*, in the description of an island dedicated to Dionysus, we do indeed find snakes twisted around thyrsi (ἐμπλέκονται τοῖς θύρσοις 2.17.7). There is no erotic element in the presentation of snakes in the VA, but in the passage just quoted from the *Imagines*, there are snakes ready to wind around (παρεῖνται ζώννυσθαι 2.17.7) the Bacchants sleeping off their wine. We know that the snakes in the VA are fearsome but we do not see them in war. What we do have in Philostratus' Indian snakes is, as noted, a particular jewel-like quality, monstrous but decorative. There is also more than a hint of magic in these snakes. It is in these qualities, perhaps, that we are most likely to find traces of the influence of Philostratus in Nonnus' snakes.

If we consider Philostratus' description of both the plains and the mountain snakes, there are several similarities to the snake that killed Tylos. All of these snakes are of inordinate size: Tylos's snake can swallow a tree; both the plains and mountain snakes can hunt elephants. Tylos' snake is a man-

⁵⁸⁴ At 14.362-6 there is a lingering image of a snake wrapped around a naked sleeping Bassarid.

⁵⁸⁵ At 32.139 Dionysus, in his madness, attacks with his thyrsus some snakes gently licking him.

killer; the mountain snake sometimes drags a man into its burrow. Tylos' snake has rows of sharp teeth; the plains and mountain snakes have teeth like boar tusks. All three snakes have a link to magic: the female of Tylos' snake knows a life-restoring herb; the plains snake's eyes possess mysterious powers; the mountain snake conceals within its throat stones with magic powers. As for the jewel-like quality, the metallic sheen of the Indian snakes calls to mind Harmonia's magnificent snake necklace. The gold of the necklace recalls the living gold of the mountain snake,⁵⁸⁶ while its ruby eyes recall at once the "fiery stones" of the plains snake's eyes and the crimson crest of the mountain snake, "brighter than a torch." Lastly, there is a hint of Philostratus' bearded Indian snakes in a snake pictured drinking juice from grapes, with drops of the juice reddening its beard (πορφυρέη ῥαθάμιγγι δράκων φοίνιξεν ὑπήνην 12.323).

Elephants

Background: Elephants in Greek Literature

In at least one respect Philostratus and Nonnus are in agreement on India: they are both fascinated by its elephants. In this they join a long and enthusiastic tradition among Greek writers. This fascination shows itself in scientific works, like those of Aristotle, as well as works of history, particularly those recounting Alexander's campaigns like Arrian's *Anabasis* and *Indica*, works of interesting and colourful information like Aelian's *On Animals*, and works of the imagination, like the novels of Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus. Much of the interest, as we will see, is in the strangeness of the animals, as well as their intelligence and close links with humans. The contrast between their fierceness as wild animals and their tameness with humans is an ongoing matter of fascination. This seems to reach its highest point⁵⁸⁷ in the touching scene in Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* where King

⁵⁸⁶ Philostratus also describes a golden snake on the Acropolis in Athens: *Imagines* 2.17.6

⁵⁸⁷ Stoneman, 2019, P.42

Porus' war elephant delicately removes the enemy spears from his master's wounded body, though it is closely rivalled by the elephant in Arrian's *Indica* that dies of remorse for the consequences of its fit of anger. In Greek writing about the elephant there is tension between natural history, sentimentality, freak show and comedy. We will see how Philostratus and Nonnus were influenced by the literary tradition. In particular, as in previous discussions, we will see how they borrowed and adapted material from other writers to suit their own purposes.

Historians have attempted to establish how and when and what the Greeks knew about elephants:⁵⁸⁸ for example, did Alexander provide Aristotle with an elephant for his researches? It is also difficult to decide whether Greek writers are referring to Indian, Libyan or African elephants. For our purposes, it is the writings themselves and their possible influence on Philostratus and Nonnus that are of interest, rather than scientific accuracy or historical veracity.

Aristotle

In the *Historia Animalium* (*HA*), Aristotle gives a significant amount of detail about the elephant, ranging from its gestation to its death and including quite a lot of colourful detail. The *HA* is a scientific work and the information about the elephant is spread throughout the work as Aristotle discusses the differences between various animal types. Yet, much of the information and some of the colourful detail will reappear in later non-scientific writers, including Philostratus and Nonnus. Surprisingly little is made of the size of the elephant in the *HA*, although its huge size is made clear by mentions of its weight and strength. For example, we learn that although the elephant lives near waterways, it cannot swim far because of its weight (630b30), it can knock down walls with its tusks

⁵⁸⁸ For an extensive discussion of elephants in antiquity: Scullard, H.H.: *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World*, London (Thames and Hudson), 1974

(610a24), fell palm trees by pushing them over with its forehead (610a25), and pull up trees with its trunk (497b28).

Aristotle touches on an aspect of the elephant which later writers will make much of when he mentions at the same time the fierceness as fighters of the huge beasts and their tameness with humans (610b15, 29). This paradox, along with so much that is paradoxical about the animals, will fascinate later writers. He stresses their intelligence and ability to learn (630b18-22), another trait widely used in later writing. He discusses their longevity, citing at one place figures of 120 to 200 years (630b24), elsewhere as much as 300 years (596a14). Indeed, they are immune to sickness (ἀνόσους 604a13). Aristotle is quite clear that the elephant's tusks are large teeth (501b32): we will see that the question of whether the tusks are teeth or horns will keep re-appearing in Greek writers. While Aristotle mentions elephants fighting and their human drivers, there is only the briefest mention of the Indians' use of elephants in war (610a19). Elephants as fighting animals in human armies will play a large role in later writers. In brief, the *HA* will be a rich source of information about elephants for later writers, including Philostratus and Nonnus, even if, at times, not all that information is accepted.

Plutarch

In Plutarch, elephants appear both in a narrative context in the *Lives* as war animals, and in the *Moralia* (*De sollertia animalium*), as examples of animal intelligence.

In the *Life of Alexander*, Plutarch describes the battle of River Hydaspes also described by Arrian. The Indian king Porus has an army made up of infantry, cavalry and elephants. According to Plutarch, when Alexander is planning to attack Porus, it is Porus' "beasts" that Alexander fears (φοβηθεὶς δὲ τὰ θηρία 60.5) - the beasts being of course Porus' elephants - and he works out a

strategy to encircle and neutralise them. The idea of Alexander being afraid indicates the danger that the elephants pose.

In his description of Porus' personal elephant, the one on which he is mounted in battle, Plutarch paints an almost human portrait of the animal. Firstly, where other writers use the elephant's size to contrast with the smallness of the human driver, here he uses the elephant to emphasise Porus' own stature and majesty as Indian king. His elephant was very large (μέγιστος 60.7), yet it is suitable for Porus because of his own size (μηδὲν ἀποδεῖν πρὸς τὸν ἐλέφαντα συμμετρίᾳ διὰ τὸ μέγεθος καὶ τὸν ὄγκον τοῦ σώματος 60.6). The unnamed elephant has other remarkable qualities: its intelligence and its solicitude for the king (σύνεσιν δὲ θαυμαστὴν ἐπεδείξατο καὶ κηδεμονίαν τοῦ βασιλέως 60.7) and courage in fighting off his enemies (τοὺς προσμαχομένους ἀμυνόμενος καὶ ἀνακόπτων 60.7). The elephant even realises that the king is wounded and kneels as it fears the king will fall off (δείσας μὴ περιρρυῇ 60.7). It uses its trunk to pull the enemy spears from the king's body (τῶν δορατίων ἕκαστον ἐξήρει τοῦ σώματος 60.7). Thus, in a brief passage, Plutarch brings together a number of the elephant's most remarkable features, especially those involving its close connection with humans: it is this sense of the remarkable and wonderful that is stressed in the story of the Indian king and his elephant. It is clearly a story that resonated with him, as he uses it again in *De sollertia animalium* (970E-D).

In his *Life of Pyrrhus*, however, Plutarch concentrates on the elephant as a military weapon. In his account of Pyrrhus' battle against the Romans near the city of Asculum, he first shows how the effectiveness of the fighting elephants was neutralized when they were boxed in by woods (21.5). He then shows how deadly they could be in warfare in open ground. The bravery of the Romans could not match the elephants' strength and force (ἀλκῇ καὶ βίᾳ τῶν ἐλεφάντων, 21.7), which he describes as like the onward rush of a wave or earthquake (κύματος ἢ σειμοῦ 21.7). This stresses the strength and fearsomeness of the animals but says nothing of their sensitivity and loyalty.

In *De sollertia animalium*, on the other hand, a work in which he quotes at various stages Aristotle and Juba as his source of information, Plutarch stresses both the intelligence of elephants and their close connection to humans. In fact, he goes further than that: elephants are also said to be particularly pious and hence favourites of the gods (θεοφιλέστατον ἐστὶ τὸ θηρίον 972c). The intelligence of the animals is shown through several instances of their ability, indeed eagerness, to learn.⁵⁸⁹ They have a strong social sense and team together to free their fellow elephants from human traps (971b). But they also have a strong bond to humans, as seen in the *Life of Alexander*. The most extreme example of this is surely that of the elephant who is the rival of Aristophanes the Grammarian for the love of a flower-girl (τῆς γὰρ αὐτῆς ἥρων στεφανοπώλιδος, καὶ οὐχ ἥττον ἢν ὁ ἐλέφας διάδηλος 972d).

Plutarch explains how wild elephants cross a river (968e). We will see Philostratus' treatment of the same subject in the *VA*.

Arrian

We have already noted how Alexander's expeditions in the East heightened Greek interest in India and the Indians and have seen how this led to such works as Arrian's *Anabasis*. This work naturally contains many references to war elephants, including the role of elephants in the battle during which Porus was defeated.⁵⁹⁰ Unlike Plutarch, Arrian makes no mention of the Indian king's sensitive elephant. We know from the *Anabasis* that the elephant is a formidable war animal. In the *Indica*, a work concentrating on descriptions of India, Arrian devotes several pages to a closer consideration of the elephant as an animal and companion of men (13 and 14). A large part of the text devoted to elephants is taken up by descriptions of the capture of wild elephants. The method

⁵⁸⁹ One example among many: the slow-learning elephant who goes over the complex lesson alone in the moonlight: 968d.

⁵⁹⁰ Pausanias says that Alexander was the first to acquire elephants (1.12.3). In fact, no Greek had seen them before this (1.12.4).

used (trapping in an enclosure baited with tame female elephants, with subsequent shackling and starvation: 13.2- 13) is altogether more complicated and violent than the method described by Aristotle, though that too can involve tying the legs (610b25-34).

As for the nature of the animal, it is intelligent (θυμόσοφον⁵⁹¹ γὰρ 14.4). It is sensitive, becoming downhearted when captured so that villagers need to lull it to sleep with singing and dancing (14.3). They develop a close connection with humans. Indeed, when elephants' drivers have fallen in battle, they have been known to pick up their bodies for burial or to guard the bodies at the risk of their own life (14.4). One elephant that killed its driver in a rage died of remorse and grief (ὕπὸ μετάνοιης τε καὶ ἀθυμίας ἀπέθανεν 14.4). They enjoy dancing and playing cymbals (14.5-6). The female gestates for sixteen to eighteen months and suckles for 8 years (14.7). Elephants can live 200 years but often die earlier from disease (πολλοὶ δὲ νούσῳ προτελευτέουσιν 14.8). This contradicts Aristotle's assertion that elephants are immune to sickness (604a13). Arrian adds an interesting detail on the specific authority of Nearchus. A tiger, which is an animal as big as the largest horse (15.5), can leap onto an elephant's head and throttle it (ἄγχειν εὐπετέως 15.6).

Arrian, then, offers some further details about the elephant, some of which contradict Aristotle. His account is very much in the glow of Alexander, as it were, and carries the authority of eye-witness sources.

Aelian

Aelian, the Roman who wrote perfect Greek, the writer on animals who had never travelled,⁵⁹² clearly relies to a significant extent on Aristotle's work on animals for his own long work *On the Characteristics of Animals*. Indeed, Aelian frequently quotes Aristotle as his authority.⁵⁹³ However,

⁵⁹¹ A word also used of elephants by Aelian (HA 16.15).

⁵⁹² Philostratus: *Vitae Sophistarum*, 2.32

⁵⁹³ An example among many: he quotes Aristotle on the longevity of elephants (11.7).

according to his Prologue his aim in compiling the work is different, and he takes his material from many different sources. He says that he takes learnings from the works of many learned men and explains them in ordinary language (περιβαλὼν αὐτοῖς τὴν συνήθη λέξιν Prol). The information he is passing on demonstrates how animals share many of the superiorities of men (πολλὰ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πλεονεκτημάτων Prol). A considerable amount of space is taken in the work by the discussion of elephants. In line with the stated aim of his work, Aelian concentrates on the moral qualities of elephants.

Some of the stories are familiar. For example, Aelian includes a version of the touching story of Porus' elephant protecting his master (7.37) that is very similar to Plutarch's version, as is his description of the elephant always keeping one tusk sharp (6.56; *Moralia* 966c). On the other hand, his story of the elephant and the flower seller (7.43) takes quite a different turn from the Plutarch story.⁵⁹⁴ Aelian's description of the capture of elephants involves hunters driving them over a concealed pit (8.10) and is quite different from, say, Aristotle, where a hunter will leap on an elephant's back (610a), or Arrian (*Indica* 13), where tame females are used to lure them. But their subjugation using starvation to weaken them (10.10) follows the methods described by Arrian (*Indica* 13). An interesting note by Aelian is that elephants have been known to understand both the Greek and Indian languages (11.25).

As concerns the "horns versus teeth" tusk controversy, Aelian's position is not entirely clear. For example, when he tells us that in Mauritania elephants shed their tusks every ten years, "as stags" (ὥσπερ οὖν καὶ τὰ τῶν ἐλάφων 14.5) do yearly, it seems that we should consider them horns. On the other hand, he says elsewhere that some say the tusks are protruding teeth, others that they are horns (χαυλιόδοντάς φασιν, οἳ δὲ κέρατα 4.31), without deciding between these two views.

⁵⁹⁴ In Aelian, the elephant is used to receiving flowers from the woman and flies into a rage after she dies.

Achilles Tatius

In *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Achilles Tatius presents the reader with a lecture about elephants (4.4-5), covering in some detail the life of the animal from conception to death. The lecture is delivered to the young couple by the general Charmides who is lusting after Leucippe. Apart from giving the general an opportunity to be with Leucippe, the passage shows the Greeks' continuing fascination with the exotic animal, and it is the exotic nature of the elephant that is stressed.

The lecture starts with the circumstances surrounding the birth of the elephant: according to Charmides, the gestation period is 10 years (δέκα γὰρ ἐνιαυτοῖς 4.4.2), rather than the two years stated by Aristotle, so that when the elephant is born it is already old (ὁ τόκος γέρων γένηται 4.4.2).⁵⁹⁵ The general continues by stressing the animal's size (μέγας τὴν μορφήν 4.4.3) and strength (ἄμαχος τὴν ἀλκὴν 4.4.3). Its jaw is like the head of an ox (οἷα τοῦ βοῦς ἡ κεφαλὴ 4.4.4); we will see Nonnus referring to the elephant as bull-headed. He describes the elephant's tusks. These, he says, might look like horns (ἂν ἰδὼν εἴποις κέρας ἔχειν 4.4.4) but are in fact curved teeth (καμπύλος ὁδούς 4.4.4). He also describes the trunk, of the size and appearance of a trumpet (κατὰ σάλπιγγα μὲν καὶ τὴν ὄψιν καὶ τὸ μέγεθος 4.4.4). After a detailed description of how the elephant uses its trunk to eat, the focus shifts to the animal's interaction with its driver. If it finds a tasty morsel⁵⁹⁶ it offers it as a gift to its master (ὥρξεν ἄνω δῶρον δεσπότη 4.4.5). The elephant's solicitude here to his hypothetical master - Charmides is not describing a particular animal but talking in general terms - recalls that of Porus' elephant in the *Life of Alexander*. There is quite some stress here on the obedience, and much more is made of the coercion of the elephant by the driver than in Aristotle. In Aristotle, the driver (here called an ἐλεφανιστής rather than a δεσπότης as in Achilles Tatius) at first

⁵⁹⁵ Garnaud notes Pliny 8.28: Garnaud, Jean-Philippe (Ed., trans.): *Achille Tatius d'Alexandrie. Le roman de Leucippé et Clitophon*, Paris (Les Belles Lettres), 1991, p.110, n.2

⁵⁹⁶ The reading of the adjective is unclear: editors have suggested ἀνθρωπείων, ἀνδροτέπων, ἀβροτέρων, λαροτέρων.

uses a curved prod to direct it (κατευθύνει τῷ δρεπάνῳ 610a28), but it is soon tame and quickly learns to obey orders. The relationship described in Achilles Tatius is much more one of force and fear: the elephant fears his Ethiopian driver (φοβεῖται 4.4.6) and obeys his voice but is beaten with an iron axe (πέλεκυς σιδηροῦς 4.4.6). The essential paradox remains: a huge beast obeys a man.

There is another element of wonder in Achilles Tatius: the healing power of the elephant's breath. Charmides tells of seeing a man put his head between an elephant's jaws while the animal breathed on him. Charmides was filled with wonder (ἐθαύμαζον 4.4.7) both because of the boldness of the man (τὸν ἄνθρωπον τῆς εὐτολμίας 4.4.7) and because of the friendliness of the elephant (τὸν ἐλέφαντα τῆς φιλανθρωπίας 4.4.7). We have here the combination of the fearsomeness of the beast and its tameness around humans that is so fascinating to the ancients. Moreover, to add to the wonder, we learn that the sweet-smelling elephant breath, similar to the scents of India (προσπνεῖν γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ μόνον οὐκ ἄρωμάτων Ἰνδικῶν 4.4.8), is a cure for headaches (κεφαλῆς νοσοῦσης φάρμακον 4.4.8). But the wonder does not stop there. From being an animal beaten into submission by its master, it becomes here decidedly human-like. For, as Charmides tells us, it is well aware of the value of its remedy and demands payment up front, like a quack doctor (ἐστὶν ἱατρὸς ἀλαζὼν καὶ τὸν μισθὸν πρῶτον αἰτεῖ 4.4.8). In spite of the pseudo-scientific explanation offered in the next passage (4.4.5) for the origin of the elephant's sweet breath, it is clear that Achilles Tatius is introducing an element of comedy or at least playfulness: we are far here from the seriousness of Aristotle or the sentimentality of Plutarch's description of Porus' elephant.

In *Leucippe and Clitophon* then, the description of the elephant provides a kind of freak show. The animal is of interest because it is monstrous and picturesque. More than this, it is especially interesting because it presents a series of contrasts or paradoxes: the wild and the tame; the huge beast governed by a mere human; the ugly animal with the sweet breath ('Καὶ πόθεν' ἔφην 'οὕτως ἀμόρφῳ θηρίῳ τοσαύτη τῆς εὐωδίας ἡδονή; 4.5.1); the beast that demands a fee like a shady human. It also provides an opportunity for humour. We would do well, of course, to remember the

context of the description of the extraordinary animal: it is given by a dubious character in a romance with at least one eye on impressing the beautiful young lady in his company. Apart from this it serves no narrative purpose.

Heliodorus

In the *Aethiopica* the elephant has a small part as a fighting animal, part of Hydaspes' army in Book 9. Interestingly, Hydaspes is an Ethiopian rather than an Indian. The role of the elephant is as part of a great battle scene. As we shall see, the presence of the war elephants not only enlivens the battle with descriptions of the extraordinary animals, but also allows him to show the superiority of their general. The elephants, however, are far from being the only extraordinary elements, or indeed the most extraordinary elements, in this highly coloured scene.

The context of the appearance of the elephants is the Ethiopian siege of the city of Syene. The city is held by the Persian satrap Oroondates and besieged by King Hydaspes. Virtually the whole of Book 9 is concerned with the attempts of the Ethiopians to overrun Syene and the Persian attempts to escape, with greater part taken up by descriptions of Hydaspes' plan to end the siege by undermining the walls of the city by diverting the river waters. The elephants appear in a grandiose battle scene (9.18) as Oroondates' Persian troops, led by their fearsome cavalry attempt to break through the Ethiopian lines.

The Ethiopian elephants are by no means the only extraordinary combatants in this encounter. They are up against the Persian armoured cavalry, which stands like an impenetrable wall (τείχος ἀρραγὲς 9.14.3). For the riders are wearing a full suit of armour (πανοπλίας 9.15.1), including close fitting, face-covering helmet and a complex set of body armour. The horses have their own armour. In fact, the armour and weaponry is so complex and extraordinary that Heliodorus spends the whole of 9.15 describing and explaining it. The second extraordinary element is formed by the Blemmyes, who

lead the elephants into battle. It is not these foot-soldiers themselves who are so extraordinary, but rather their manoeuvre when the Persian cavalry is upon them: they drop to the ground and use their swords to stab the horses from below (9.18,2). Those Persian cavalymen that escape then find themselves facing the elephants. The horses unused to and frightened by the sight of the massive size of the elephants (τῷ μεγέθει 9.18.4), turn tail and flee. The result is a rout and a massacre.

The description of the elephants does not end there. Heliodorus tells us that the beasts carried towers on their backs (πύργους 9.18.5), each one holding six archers. We will meet these towers again in the VA and in the *Dionysiaca*. The elephants, we learn, were not injured by the spears of the cavalry. For, not only were they covered in iron armour for battle, but their own hide was covered with scales (φολίδος 9.18.8) tough enough to shatter any spearpoints (πᾶσαν αἰχμήν ... θραυσύσης 9.18.8).

In the *Aethiopica*, then, elephants are used, along with the other elements we have discussed, to help build up a scene full of magnificence and wonder, a scene in keeping with the Greek view of the excesses of the east in general and of Persians in particular. He does not describe elephants as interesting in themselves outside their use in battle, nor does he make anything of their intelligence or sensibility. The qualities of the elephants that Heliodorus dwells on serve a narrative and aesthetic purpose in this particular episode. Nothing more is made of elephants in the *Aethiopica*.

We are, however, left with three interesting points. Heliodorus has the elephants used by Ethiopians rather than Indians. This is perhaps simply to do with the plot: he needed Ethiopians, but the elephants were too useful an element to do without. Secondly, he makes nothing of the elephant's traditional intelligence, and yet does not explain how the animal is driven: he describes only the archers in the "towers." Thirdly, his description of the elephants as having scales.

Pseudo-Oppian

Pseudo-Oppian is the only one of the writers we are considering, apart from Nonnus, who writes of the elephant in verse. The author of the *Cynegetica* devotes several paragraphs to the elephant (2.489-550). Given the context, it is to be expected that he concentrates on the elephant as an animal to hunt. Yet, he introduces the elephant as belonging to the family of “horn-bearing” (θηρῶν κερατοφόροι 2.489) animals. As soon as he has mentioned its immense size (ἀπειρεσίῳ ἐλεφάντων 2.490) he launches into a polemic defending the proposition that the tusks are horns not teeth that stretches to 2.514, a considerable proportion of the space dedicated to the elephant. This argument, contrary to the authority of Aristotle, is reminiscent of that in Pausanias (5.12.1-3), though the argument there is even longer and Pausanias offers more “proofs.”⁵⁹⁷ We will see how Philostratus deals with this controversy.

The elephant section continues with exaggerated claims about the size and fearsomeness of the animal: it is as high as a mountain peak (κορυφὴν ὄρεος παναπερίτον 2.517) or a threatening storm cloud (νέφος αἶνόν 2.517). The author mentions the comparatively small eyes of the animal and its great nose (μεγάλῃ ῥίσι 2.522) which he describes as thin and crooked (λεπτὴ τε σκολιή τε 2.523), and which is, he says, its hand (2.254). He adds a detail, also found in Aristotle (497b24), that the forelegs are longer than the hindlegs (2.526). It has a hide tough enough to resist an iron blade (2.528-9). The poem mentions an interesting physical detail: the elephant, according to the author, has rather small ears (οὖσιν βαιοτέροις 2.519). We have here once more the opposition of the elephant as ferocious in the wild (2.531-2) but tame when around men (2.536-7): it will even put up with the yoke and the bit (ἔτλη καὶ ζεύγλην καὶ χεῖλεσι δέκτο χαλινὰ 2.538). We have the familiar picture of the huge animals commanded by boys (παῖδας νώτοις φέρει σημάτων ἔργων 2.539).

⁵⁹⁷ A.W. Mair in his edition of the *Cynegetica* notes the similarities of the passages: Mair, A.W. (Ed.): *Oppian, Colluthus, Tryphiodorus*, Cambridge and London (Loeb), 1928, notes at pp.99-101.

The most interesting aspects of the portrait in the *Cynegetica* come at the end of the section. Firstly, we are told that elephants can speak to one another (ἐπ' ἀλλήλοις λαλέουσι 2.540) but can only be heard by their tamers (τιθασεύτορες ἄνδρες 2.543). More than this, elephants have a “prophetic heart” (μαντικὸν ... ἔχειν κέαρ 2.545) and know when they are about to die.

The sixty lines that the author of the *Cynegetica* dedicated to elephants provide a mixture of commonplaces about the animal and some rather surprising additions.⁵⁹⁸

Philostratus

Given this interest in elephants shown by Greek writers from Aristotle onwards, and indeed the growing interest in them by Greek writers under the Roman Empire, it is hardly surprising that Philostratus should display such an interest in the animals in books of the *VA* dealing with Apollonius' journey to India. We have already seen the influence of Alexander's eastern conquests and the stories around him on Apollonius' journey in the *VA*. Indeed, we have seen the introduction of a figure so closely associated with both Alexander and with elephants: Porus. We cannot know which of the works we have mentioned so far Philostratus was familiar with and what other lost works he might have had access to. Aelian wrote a considerable amount about elephants, often quoting Aristotle and Juba. As Philostratus wrote about Aelian in the *VS*, we might assume a knowledge of these writings.

In Book 2 of the *VA*, Philostratus shows Apollonius, on his way to the Brahmins, giving Damis lessons on the animals. Elephants first appear in Chapter 6 of Book 12, when Apollonius and Damis have crossed the Caucasus. It is an inauspicious start, as these elephants are ridden by a poor (or perhaps nomadic) people (ἄβιοί 2.6.1). There is nothing more here than a mention. On the other hand, the next encounter with an elephant, when they near the Indus and see a boy riding and beating one

⁵⁹⁸ Pseudo-Opian uses forms of the word “ἐλέφας” in the final position three times in these sixty lines and later at 2.556. We will see a similar use by Nonnus.

(2.11), leads to a long exchange between master and pupil. Under questioning from Apollonius, Damis expresses one of the essential fascinations of the elephant we have come across time and again in our review of the literature: how such a huge beast can be governed by a human. Indeed, to Damis, the boy rider seems not only more amazing than a cavalryman in battle (θαυμασιώτερον 2.11.2), he seems more than human (δαμόνιον ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ 2.11.2), and his control of the elephant is something he would never have believed if he had been told about it (οὐδ' ἂν ἐπίστευσα ... εἰ ἑτέρου ἤκουσα 2.11.2). Apollonius mocks Damis for practically worshiping the boy rider (σὺ μόνον οὐ προσκυνεῖς ὑπὸ θαύματος 2.11.3) and responds with another commonplace, familiar since Aristotle: the elephant is a very easy animal to train (εὐπαίδευτόν τε παρὰ πάντα ἐστὶ 2.11.4).⁵⁹⁹ He illustrates this in a series of statements with a very familiar ring. So, Apollonius tells Damis that elephants adapt to humans, eat from human hands, fondle humans with their trunks, allow men to put their heads in their mouths, but grieve at night away from humans over their slavery. We have seen similar statements in other writers, with variations

Apollonius' point is that an elephant does not need to be driven, it controls itself (αὐτὸς δὴ ἑαυτοῦ ... ἄρχει 2.11.4), and thus Damis' enthusiasm for the skill of the young rider is misplaced. In other words, the aim of this scene seems to be another opportunity to demonstrate the shallowness and inadequacy of Damis' understanding, an understanding based on appearances and coloured by a naïve enthusiasm for the apparent wonder. This is to be compared with Apollonius' own thorough knowledge of the elephant. He is alert to the moral superiority of the elephant with its self-control, just as we have seen him alert to the moral superiority of Phraotes and the Wise Men.

The next discussion of elephants, in Chapter 12, tells of elephants at the Indus River. It is in the authorial voice, reporting what the travellers heard from locals. It is a varied mixture of information, just as we have come to expect from Greek writers on elephants: explanations of the different types

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *HA* 488a29; 488b22

of elephants and the relative sizes of Indian and Libyan elephants;⁶⁰⁰ use of the trunk as a hand; use of trunk for hurling spears (2.12.1). Fighting elephants, he tells us, are equipped with towers (ἐπεσκευασμένοι πύργους 12.2.1), just as we read in Heliodorus.⁶⁰¹ As Morgan notes, Heliodorus in Ethiopia and Philostratus in India, “have shared details about the archers in the towers on the elephants’ backs.”⁶⁰² The difference here is that the towers mentioned in the VA are designed to hold ten or fifteen Indians at once (κατὰ δέκα καὶ πεντεκαίδεκα ὁμοῦ τῶν Ἰνδῶν δέξασθαι 12.1.), compared to the half dozen mentioned by Heliodorus. The narrator/Damis mentions the elephant’s long life (ὥς μακροβιώτατοι 2.12.1) and, in a reference to the considerable literature on elephants, that it has already been discussed by others (εἴρηται μὲν καὶ ἑτέροις 2.12.1).

The example given to demonstrate the extraordinary length of the elephant’s life is one we have not seen before, and which brings us back to Alexander and takes us forward to the city of Taxila. For, the two, we are told, see there one of elephants that fought with Porus against Alexander 350 years earlier (2.12.1).⁶⁰³ There is considerable detail: the elephant is perfumed⁶⁰⁴ and beribboned by the locals; it was named Ajax by Alexander and has gold bangles in its tusks inscribed with a dedication by him to the Sun (ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ Ο ΔΙΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΑΙΑΝΤΑ ΤΩΙ ΗΛΙΩΙ 2.12.2).

The mention of the engraving prompts the narrator at the start of Chapter 13 to quote Juba, the King of Mauretania who was often, as we have seen, quoted by Aelian in relation to elephants. Stoneman makes an interesting distinction here: he writes that in VA 2.13 Philostratus displays his own knowledge about elephants drawn from Juba and that in the following chapter Apollonius “draws his own lessons from the behaviour of the elephants.”⁶⁰⁵ We will consider in due course whether this captures the complexity of what is going on in these chapters. In 2.13 is a story of an

⁶⁰⁰ The Libyan elephant is “the small African elephant, now extinct.” Stoneman, 2019, p.470

⁶⁰¹ *Aethiopica* 9.18.5

⁶⁰² Morgan, J.R: “The Emesan Connection. Philostratus and Heliodorus,” in Demoen and Praet, 2009, pp.263-282, at p.271

⁶⁰³ Mumprecht, 1983, p.1047, n.41

⁶⁰⁴ Mumprecht notes the connections of elephants to sweet smells noted by Aelian and Heliodorus: Mumprecht, op.cit, p.1047, n.38

⁶⁰⁵ Stoneman, 2019, p.471

elephant in Africa captured by the king four hundred years after a battle, its age proven by an incision in its tusk, which remained perfectly legible and untouched by time (οὐπω περιτετριμμένον ὑπὸ τοῦ χρόνου 2.13.1). This means that the elephant itself must be over four hundred years old, an age well above the two hundred years claimed by Aristotle (630b24). It also leads to a discussion of whether tusks are horns or teeth. Firstly, Apollonius notes Juba's arguments for regarding tusks as horns (2.13.1)⁶⁰⁶ and then produces a series of arguments to refute them and show that tusks are teeth (2.13.2). Mumprecht points out that elsewhere, in *Imagines* 1.10.2, Philostratus seems to regard tusks as horns.⁶⁰⁷ In her view, Philostratus "hat eben nur in sophistischer Manier die Streitfrage, ... vor uns aufgerollt."⁶⁰⁸ Or perhaps we could say that it is Apollonius displaying his sophistic prowess. After dismissing Juba's arguments, Apollonius then again displays the breadth of his knowledge of elephants (2.13.4).

In Chapter 14, apparently in a return from Taxila to the current time, Apollonius continues this display, as he and Damis watch a herd of elephants crossing the Indus. Plutarch says that in crossing a river, the youngest and smallest (ὁ νεώτατος καὶ μικρότατος *De sollertia animalium* 968E) go first, allowing the others to judge the depth of the water. Philostratus adds a detail: the larger elephants carry their young on their tusks, holding it safe with their trunks (2.14.1). This leads to a discussion between the two - or rather to a long lecture by Apollonius to Damis - on motherly love in the animal world. In the course of this Apollonius asserts that in intelligence, elephants are second only to humans (τὸ ζῷον δεύτερον ἀνθρώπου τάττω κατὰ ξύνεσιν τε καὶ βουλὰς 2.14.2). He then elaborates on the reasons that the smallest elephants lead the way through the river, adding defence of the rear and fear of larger elephants making the passage deeper to Plutarch's explanation (2.15.2).

⁶⁰⁶ We have seen these arguments presented by Pausanias and Pseudo-Oppian, who may have derived them from the same source.

⁶⁰⁷ See also Schönberger, 1983, p.309, n. to 1.10.2

⁶⁰⁸ Mumprecht, op. cit., p.1047, n.43. She considers that most of the knowledge Apollonius displays derives from Aristotle's *HA*.

The brief Chapter 16 is an interruption by the authorial voice (ἐγὼ δὲ 2.16), quoting Juba as authority that elephants cooperate while hunting and defend an injured elephant. This almost mirrors Plutarch's quoting of Juba.⁶⁰⁹ Philostratus also says that they carry away an injured comrade and apply ointment, standing around him like doctors (ὥσπερ ἰατροί 2.16). As if he has sufficiently displayed his own learning, Philostratus tells us that Apollonius and Damis go on with many serious discussions of such things (πολλὰ τοιαῦτα ἐφιλοσοφεῖτο 2.16) themselves.

This is the last of the discussions about elephants in the VA. However, a little further along in Apollonius' journey, we are told in Chapter 20 that on the wall of Porus' palace in Taxila are depicted, among the other military motifs, elephants (2.20.2). The mention of the wounded Porus (τὸν Πῶρον ἀνακτᾶται τετρωμένον 2.20.3) reminds the reader not only of the connection between elephants and Alexander's victories, but more specifically the stories of the wounded Porus and his caring elephant.

Elephants in the VA fill many roles, combining many of the elements we have seen in other writers. Elephants are still here objects of wonder, amazing freaks of nature, as met by travellers in exotic lands: their size, longevity and physical and behavioural peculiarities are of themselves things worthy of interest to Apollonius, Damis and the reader. Their particularly close relationship with man - especially the contrast between their "wild" and "tame" behaviour - adds to this interest. Their intelligence and ability to learn make them close to mankind, while physically so different. These are all things highlighted in the VA, just as in many Greek writers on elephants. But there are also more serious considerations of the animals, a scientific thread, as it were, that we have also seen from Aristotle onwards. The sort of information selected by Philostratus/Apollonius, though, tends to be of the kind, as found in other later Greek writers like Plutarch and Achilles Tatius, that emphasizes the moral element and allows Apollonius to "philosophise" and extrapolate from elephant to man. Thus, not only do elephants allow Apollonius once more to display his learnedness and powers of

⁶⁰⁹ *Sollertia Animalium*, 972B

reasoning, but also his superiority over Damis. He can also join the ongoing arguments as to whether tusks are horns or teeth. We have also noted the blurring between Apollonius and Philostratus himself. The introduction of the elephant's military role provides links to Heliodorus and, as we will see, to Nonnus.

Nonnus

Given the parallels between Dionysus' Indian War and Alexander's Indian campaign, it is to be expected that elephants play quite a part in the *Dionysiaca*. In fact, there are over forty mentions of elephants in the poem, most of them, of course, during the Indian War. Most of these appearances are brief, the merest of mentions, and we might be surprised that such a beast that so fascinated earlier writers was not given an even bigger role in the epic. That he knew and used earlier writers will become clear during the following discussion. It will also be clear, though, that as usual Nonnus did not allow himself to be constrained by the views and descriptions of earlier writers but takes and adapts what suits his thematic and aesthetic needs. Indeed, we shall see it is sometimes difficult to know whether Nonnus' descriptions reflect an imperfect knowledge of the animal or whether, rather, the "scientific" element is overridden by aesthetic considerations.

There is one central passage in the *Dionysiaca* where Nonnus discusses elephants and their attributes at some length, though some of these attributes have already appeared in earlier passages. This extended description is in Book 26, in the context of the catalogue of Indian forces joining Deriades in the war against Dionysus, a catalogue that as we have seen allows Nonnus to introduce the wonders of India.⁶¹⁰ It can be divided into three sections: the first part (26.295-315) deals with the physical characteristics of elephants; the second part (26.316-328) with the elephant as a war animal; and the third (26.329-338) with Dionysus' use of the animals after the Indian War.

⁶¹⁰ "Cette revue des troupes de Dériade est surtout un prétexte pour énumérer toutes sortes de *paradoxa*, de *mirabilia* et autres curiosités." Vian, 1990, p.88

The difficulties appear from the beginning of the passage, where the place of origin of the contingent that includes the elephants is a matter of disagreement among scholars.⁶¹¹ As it continues the passage is a mixture of wonders, commonplaces and the downright strange, expressed in language that is in places quite obscure. From the start, the elephants are things of wonder. They are enormously long-lived (ἀμετροβίων 26.296), they live two hundred (26.297) or even three hundred years (26.299). This particular wonder is, as we have seen, a commonplace from Aristotle onwards, though here it is expressed in rather high-blown but very Nonnian terms as circuits of eternal time (26.298). His description of the elephants as black from head to foot (ἐκ ποδὸς ἀκροτάτου μελανόχρους ἄχρι καρήνου 26.300) is not a commonplace among the Greek writers⁶¹² but fits in with his descriptions throughout the poem of their Indian masters as black. In between is the simple statement that they feed side by side (βόσκεται ἄλλος ἐπ' ἄλλῳ 26.299), which seems rather unexciting for a description of the exotic and wondrous. The description of the elephant's physical characteristics then becomes quite puzzling and, in language at least, differs from the descriptions we are familiar with. He describes the tusks as twin teeth projecting from the elephant's long jaws (γναθμοῖς μηκεδανοῖσιν ἔχων προβλήτας ὀδόντας / δίζυγας 26.301-2). Clearly Nonnus has no interest in the "horns or teeth" argument. Nor does he have a word for tusk or, as we shall see, trunk, but rather, as Vian notes, uses vague equivalents whenever he mentions them.⁶¹³ Nonnus likens these teeth to a harvester's sickle, though the adjective he uses to suggest their curved shape is more often used of the talons of birds of prey (ἀμητῆρι τύπῳ γαμφώνυχος ἄρπης 26.302). Nonnus' choice of words suggests that they are both sharp and cutting (θηγαλέῳ τμητῆρι 26.303). This is not a realistic representation of an elephant tusks, of course, but Agosti is no doubt correct in suggesting that it is intended to make the tusks seem more dangerous,⁶¹⁴ so fitting the monstrous nature of the animal. The elephants, Nonnus says, trample lines of trees

⁶¹¹ Refer Vian, op. cit. p.86, followed by Agosti, 2004. Hernández de la Fuente, 2004, follows Keydell: p90, n.37

⁶¹² Though see Vian's reference to Latin sources. Vian, 1990, p.286, n. to 300

⁶¹³ Vian, op. cit., p.108, n.1

⁶¹⁴ Agosti 2004, p.181, n. to 299-304

(διαστειβων στίχα δένδρων 26.303) with their long legs (ποσσί τανυκνήμοισιν 26.304), thus continuing this emphasis.

The following section of this description is made up of comparisons with various other animals, but the comparisons are not obvious to the modern reader at least and, as Agosti points out, the elephant ends up being a kind of mythical beast, a hircocervus.⁶¹⁵ Firstly, Nonnus says that the elephant has the appearance of a camel (ἔχων δ' ἴνδαλμα καμήλων 26.304). This is because the elephant has a curved back (λοφίην ἐπίκυρτον 26.305). Perhaps here Nonnus is thinking of the “convex” back of the Indian elephant⁶¹⁶ as compared to the camel’s hump, but this seems rather far-fetched. Furthermore, on its vast back (πολυχανδέι νώτῳ 26.305) the animal can carry a countless swarm (ἔσμον ἄγει νήριθμον 26.306) of riders. This reminds us of Heliodorus and Philostratus, though here there seem to be even more people on the animal’s back than in the VA and there is no mention of a tower to carry them.⁶¹⁷ The association of elephants and camels in Philostratus has also been noted by commentators:⁶¹⁸ Philostratus comments that some Indians ride on elephants, others on camels, used for speed (VA 2.6).

Nonnus says that the elephant has an unbending knee (ἀκαμπεί γούνατος ὀλκῷ 26.307). This is one of the most characteristic descriptions of the elephant used throughout the *Dionysiaca*, and one that distinguishes Nonnus from the other writers we have discussed. This must have been an issue in early Greek discussions of the animal because Aristotle makes a point of rebutting the idea. He states clearly that elephants do indeed bend their knees and lie down (HA 498a 8-12) and this must have been obvious when elephants became more common in the west. But, as Agosti notes,⁶¹⁹ Nonnus does not want to give up this paradox. Indeed, he seems to make the most of it. For

⁶¹⁵ Agosti, op. cit., p. 181, n. to 304-11

⁶¹⁶ Scullard, op.cit., p.19

⁶¹⁷ According to Aelian, elephants can carry armed men, though only three, either on their bare backs or in a tower, though Aelian calls the structure a “θωράκιον” (ἐπὶ τοῦ καλουμένου θωρακίου ἢ καὶ νῆ Δία τοῦ νώτου γυμνοῦ NA 13.9).

⁶¹⁸ Agosti, 2004, p.182, n. to 304-11; Vian op. cit. p.287, n. to 304-7

⁶¹⁹ Agosti, loc. cit.

example, in Book 33 he evokes a night scene in the Indian city, where all are sleeping. Among the people and animals sleeping is an elephant, sleeping standing up, leaning against a tree:

καί τις ἀερσιπόδης ἐλέφας παρὰ γείτονι τοίχῳ

ὄρθιον ὕπνον ἴαυεν, ὑπὸ δρυὶ νῶτον ἐρείσας. 33.278-9

This striking image is somewhere between beautiful, comic and grotesque: in other words, essentially Nonnian.⁶²⁰

Nonnus next likens the elephant's head to that of snake (τύπον εὐρυμέτωπον ἐχιδναίοιο καρήνου, 26.308) though at the same time he describes it as broad, using a word used by Homer for cattle.⁶²¹

To make sense of this snake reference we assume that he is referring to the elephant's trunk.

Indeed, Hélène Frangoulis suggests that Nonnus' use of the snake comparison is due to the elephant's role fighting with the Indians, establishing a parallel with the snakes fighting for Dionysus and protecting his troops,⁶²² a role we discussed in the previous section. Nonnus goes on to describe the elephant as having a small, curved neck (26.309), though it is not clear whether this curve is also a reference to the snake. The animal has small eyes, being similar in its face to a pig (σῶν ἴνδαλμα προσώπου 26.310), but is nevertheless tall and huge (ὑψιφανής, περίμετρος 26.311), in a typically Nonnian play of contrasts.

This part of the physical description ends with a mention of the elephant's rolling gait (ἐλίσσομένου δὲ πορείῃ 26.211) and an extended description of its ears. Not only is the description of the thin ears (οὖατα μὲν λιπόσαρκα 26.312), flapping in the breeze (λεπταλέων ἀνέμων ὀλίγη ῥιπίζεται αὔρη 26.9) livelier than the rather stilted picture painted so far, it is also, as Agosti points out,⁶²³ similar to

⁶²⁰ In the immediately preceding lines, Nonnus describes a sleeping snake. Thus, we have in this nocturne, as Gerlaud notes, two typically Indian animals: Gerlaud, 2005, p.62

⁶²¹ Vian 1990, p.287, n. to 308-9

⁶²² Frangoulis, 2014, pp.134-5. She also stresses Nonnus' love of paradox in his description of the elephant, p.140.

⁶²³ Agosti, 2004, n. to 313, pp.182-3

Nonnus' description of the ears of the Satyrs blown by the wind as they run (14.138-41). Movement continues in the description of the elephant's "unresting" (ἄστατος 26.315) tail, which is thin and short (λεπτοφυής ἐλάχεια 26.315), constantly whipping its body in a regular beating (νωμήτορι παλμῶ 26.314).

Whatever we make of these lines of description, one thing is certain: they do not present a realistic description of an elephant. The individual parts of the description when put together give us a beast that is as much fantasy as real. Is this a deliberate literary or aesthetic choice, or a lack of knowledge about the elephant? Scullard states that with the passage of time elephants became increasingly rare in the western Roman Empire and "older errors" about the animal were revived.⁶²⁴ He gives as an example the sixth century Roman Cassiodorus claiming that elephants cannot get up from a lying position because they have no flexible joints.⁶²⁵ This is reminiscent of Nonnus' description of elephants with unbending legs. Should we therefore assume that this also applied to the eastern Empire and thus consider Nonnus' depiction of the elephant as the result of lack of knowledge? Yet, Nonnus, as we have seen elsewhere, clearly had access to earlier texts dealing with elephants. For example, it is not from Achilles Tatius, Heliodorus or Philostratus that he would have drawn the most outrageous part of his elephant descriptions, not to mention writers such as Aristotle. This is the first long description of elephants in the *Dionysiaca*, but there are several mentions of them earlier in the work, before this long description in Book 26: Nonnus must have been confident that his readers were aware of the most striking features of the animals. A much more plausible explanation is provided by Vian in his comment made in the context of a discussion of the "unbending knees" of Nonnus' elephants, that the poet emphasized this paradoxical feature without worrying about scientific correctness.⁶²⁶ Indeed, the whole of this descriptive passage emphasises the paradoxical. Nonnus here is interested in the legendary beast rather than the living animal and creates a kind of

⁶²⁴ Scullard, 1974, p.233

⁶²⁵ Scullard, op. cit. p.234

⁶²⁶ Vian 1990, p.287, n. to 303-4

living example of *poikilia*, with the elephant becoming a Frankenstein's monster assembled from various pieces of other animals.

After the physical descriptions, Nonnus moves to the depiction of the elephant as a war machine. The movement that came at the end of the description is carried into this next passage, as Nonnus describes how the elephant "often" (Πολλάκι 26.320) behaves in battle, emphasising the size and ferocity of the animal. As it attacks, the huge (ήλίβατος 26.317) beast is described as bull-headed (ταυροκάρηνος 26.317). This is the only time such a word, with its echoes of the elephant description of Achilles Tatius,⁶²⁷ is used in the poem. The animal first uses its trunk (γένυν προβλήτα 26.316) against its armed foe as it charges. Then the tusks come into play. Nonnus again does not use a specific word for tusks but describes them in a roundabout and idiosyncratic way as strange sharp sickles (ξείνην καρχαρόδοντα ... ἄρπην 26.318), on either side of its mouth (ἑτερόστομον 26.318).⁶²⁸ Whatever Nonnus' intention in choosing these terms, this strangeness of vocabulary fits with his treatment of the elephant as a strange and paradoxical beast. And fearsome of course, for these sickles are natural spears (ἔμφυτον αἰχμήν 26.319) that the animal often uses to pierce (πεπαρμένον 26.321) an armed man - though here they are described as a rapacious throat (ἄρπαγι λαίμῳ 26.321) - and lift him into the air, complete with armour and shield (26.320), before throwing him to the ground (κατεπρήνιξεν 26.232). We have encountered nothing like this scene in our Greek sources, but it has similarities with details in a battle scene from Silius Italicus' *Punica*.⁶²⁹ This scene (9.585-90) describes the deaths of the Romans Ufens and Tadius, charged by Hannibal's elephants, pierced by their tusks and lifted in the air. In other words, details quite similar to those in Nonnus. Moreover, the elephants are described as being black (atra 9.570), just as in Nonnus, and as having blades attached to their tusks (ebori praefixa cominus hasta 9.582). This detail calls to mind the somewhat puzzling sickle and spear references in Nonnus. On the other hand, the reference by

⁶²⁷ 4.4.4. Refer Vian 1990, p.287, n. to 308-9

⁶²⁸ Vian, 1990, pp.288-9, n. to 316-9, discusses the difficulties of this line.

⁶²⁹ Vian, op. cit., p.289, n. to 320-8

Nonnus to the body as a “whirling vagabond” (παλινδίνητον ἀλήτην 26.324) has a very Nonnian ring.⁶³⁰ The use of “ἄκοντίζω” to describe the body thrown like a spear (ὕψοθεν ἡκόντιζε 26.324) recalls Philostratus’ elephants throwing spears, though in Philostratus the animal is using its trunk (χρηται αὐτῇ ἐς τὸ ἄκοντίζειν VA 2.12.1). Nowhere does Nonnus describe an elephant using its trunk as a hand, as is common in the other writers we have surveyed.

Once the Indian in Nonnus’ description has been thrown to the ground, the language and nature of the description is entirely Nonnian. Its turning movements in the swirls of dust (αὐτοκύλιστον ἐπὶ στροφάλιγγι κονίης 26.323) are described in favourite terms that remind us of - or anticipate - the wrestling bouts. Once the body is on the ground these turning movements continue as the elephant uses its trunk to spin the corpse (αἰθύσσων ἐλικηδὸν ἵπυν σκολιοῖο γενείου 26.325). Nonnus’ insistence on using roundabout expressions rather than specific terms for the trunk and tusks make for some difficulties in interpretation here,⁶³¹ but the comparison to a snake (ἀντίτυπον σπειρηδὸν ἐχιδνήεσσιν ἀκάνθαις 26.327), strongly suggests that he is referring to the elephant’s trunk.⁶³² The clear reference in the next line to the tusks (ἄορ ὀδόντων 26.328) confirms this.

We note that the war elephant is described here as a fighter in single combat with the enemy, not merely as a carrier of archers or spearmen, nor, for example, as a means to terrorise or break the ranks of infantry or cavalry. There is no hint of any tactical or strategic use of the elephant in war. Indeed, as we have noted, Nonnus here uses terms that are also used in his depictions of wrestling matches. This passage is one of many mentions of elephants in battle in the *Dionysiaca*, but by far the most extensive. In fact, surprisingly little is made of the possibilities for elephants in other battle descriptions. Elsewhere, there are additional details about the fighting elephants. In Book 27, Deriades encourages his troops to battle by telling them there is no reason to fear when they have

⁶³⁰ Nonnus uses the word “παλινδίνητος” some 25 times in the poem, while “ἀλήτης” appears with various meanings 100 times.

⁶³¹ Rouse interprets line 325 as referring to the tusks.

⁶³² Vian, 1990, p.289, n. to 320-8

armed elephants on their side (κορυσσομένων ἐλεφάντων 27.135). Nonnus then adds an intriguing detail, talking of “ironclad” elephants (σιδηροφόρων ἐλεφάντων 27.137). Are we to take this literally, and assume that they wore armour? Vian notes that the words could be understood as referring to the elephants carrying armed men,⁶³³ though there are references in the literature to armoured elephants.⁶³⁴ In any event, armour or no, the elephants later prove to be vulnerable: a spear hurled by Clytios kills an elephant by piercing its throat (28.72).

Of course, any match between a human and the huge and fiercely armed monster described in Book 26 would be a mismatch, but in most of the mentions of the war elephants in the *Dionysiaca* the beast proves no match for Dionysus’ troops and animals. The first mention of elephants is in Book 15, and from that first appearance the animals are associated with defeat rather than victory. In this first scene one of the Indians made drunk by Dionysus turning the water of the Hydaspes into wine is thrown over the back of a straight-legged (ἀκαμπτοπόδων 15.148) elephant. A few lines later, a single Bacchante drives a black-skinned beast (θῆρα κελαινόρρινον 15.158), one of the captured elephants (δορικτήτων ἐλεφάντων 15.159), away from its drunken owner. In Book 17, the defeated Indians lead off their long-lived elephants (ἀμετροβίων ἐλεφάντων 17.382) to Deriades’ headquarters to regroup. In Book 24 we have the picture of the defeated Deriades seated on the back of his retreating elephants (ἐζόμενος λοφίησι παλιννόστων ἐλεφάντων 24.175) when he is persuaded to withdraw from battle. Thus, before the centrepiece presentation of the ferocious beast in Book 26, elephants have played no very glorious role in battle and have not managed to trouble or frighten off the Dionysian forces.

In several passages, Nonnus has elephants drawing chariots, specifically Deriades’ chariot. This is not something we have seen in the earlier literature, where we are more used to towers. The most

⁶³³ Vian, 1990, p.290

⁶³⁴ Vian, loc. cit. refers to Scullard, 1974, p.339; Stoneman, 2019, p.261, refers to a later Indian source, the *Hariharaçaturanga*.

likely explanation is, as noted by Vian, a parallel to Homer's horse-drawn chariots.⁶³⁵ In Book 21 Deriades' double-yoked chariot (διδυμόζυγι δίφρω 21.212) is pulled by huge elephants (ήλιβάτων ... έλεφάντων 21.214). The picture is at times confused by mixed references to riding in a chariot and riding on the back of an elephant. For example, in Book 23, Deriades is mentioned crossing the Hydaspes in his tall chariot (περιμήκει δίφρω 23.190), and in the next line is seated on the elephant's back (λοφίησιν έφεδρήσων έλεφάντων 23.191). This passage is made even more complicated by the fact that the Hydaspes is actually talking about Deriades *not* crossing the river in the manner described. The elephant-drawn chariots do provide Nonnus with the opportunity for spectacular battle scenes late in the war, usually involving a tipping of the chariot or an entanglement. In book 28 a dying elephant crushes the chariot with its dark neck (αύχενι κυανέω 28.74). In Book 36, while fighting Deriades, Dionysus turns into a panther and lands on the back of an elephant (λοφιῆς επέβαινεν άερσιλόφων έλεφάντων 36.315), causing the animal to lurch sideways and shake the car, sending the driver to the ground. Later in the battle, Dionysus causes a vine to grow, entangling the legs of the elephants (πόδας έρρίζωσεν όμοζυγέων έλεφάντων 36.366). In spite of lashes from the driver (36.370-2), the beasts stay bound until Dionysus chooses to release them (36.385).

In general, the appearances that these huge and fierce animals make in battle scenes are surprisingly unspectacular and elephants are often dealt with by a single member of Dionysus' army. One of the more striking of these scenes is in Book 27, where one of his Satyrs scatters the enemy in their elephant-drawn chariots by whipping them with an enraged tiger (μεμηνότα τίγριν ιμάσσων 27.237).

The passage dedicated to elephants in Chapter 26 ends with Nonnus referring to Dionysus' use of captured elephants after the defeat of the Indians. Specifically, he pictures Lord Dionysus seated on the back of an elephant (λοφίησιν έφεδρήσων έλεφάντων 26.332) as he defeats the Amazons in

⁶³⁵ Vian, 1990, p.289

the Caucasus. This expedition is not described in the *Dionysiaca*,⁶³⁶ although there are several mentions of elephants after the war. In Book 40, Nonnus tells of the division of the spoils at the end of the war, including an elephant allotted to the one who captured it (40.259). They are also part of the *naumachia* between Dionysus and Poseidon in Book 43. Old Nereus leaps at the elephants, “terrible to behold” (δεινὸς ἰδεῖν 43.256). We have already mentioned the strange confrontation between elephant and seal (43.337-9) during our discussion of Proteus. Nonnus’s description of the elephant there as being as high as the clouds (ὑψινεφῆς δ’ ἐλέφας 43.337) calls to mind Pseudo-Oppian’s description of the dread cloud (νέφος αἰνὸν 2.517).

Before the *naumachia* between Poseidon and Dionysus begins, there is a brief but intriguing scene involving an elephant. First, Poseidon appears with his trident making a tremendous din (43.18-20), then Dionysus with his thyrsus on his chariot drawn by a lion (43.20-28). Then an elephant appears. It slowly advances towards a spring on its familiar unbending legs (ἀγνάμπτοιο ποδὸς 43.30) fixed in the ground (ὄρθιον ... στήριγμα κολάψας 43.30), draws up the water with its parched lips (ἀζαλέοισιν ἀνήφυσε χεῖλεσιν ὕδωρ 43.31) - as usual, there is no mention of the trunk - until the spring is dry. When the spring is dry, the elephant drives the nymph away, unclothed and thirsty (ἀχίτωνα μετήγαγε διψάδα Νύμφην 43.33). It is difficult to know what to make of this scene. It might be a prediction of the victory of Dionysus in the *naumachia*, except that there is no such victory. Fayant suggests that it recalls either the ravages of Typhon (2.53-9) or the Hydaspes being dried up by fire (23.272-79; 24.24-30),⁶³⁷ but it is difficult to see any cosmic significance here. In any event, the elephant must be part of the spoils of the Indian War.

Not all the later references to elephants are in the context of conflict. We have already discussed the scene in which Aphrodite gives birth to Beroë in Book 41. In this scene of peace and joy, the

⁶³⁶ Tissoni in Del Corno, Dario (Ed.), Maletta, Maria (Trans.), Tissoni, Francesco (Notes): *Nonno di Panopoli. Le Dionisiache III. Canti 25-36*, Milan (Adelphi), 2005, p.227, n.25

⁶³⁷ Chuvin and Fayant, 2006, p.104

traditional enemies, the elephant and the serpent, touch and the elephant's fearsome tusks are friendly (φιλίων ... ὀδόντων 41.203).

Summary

In considering the role of the elephant in the *Dionysiaca*, the first observation is that the elephant appears primarily as a war elephant. The only extended description of the animal is in Book 26, in the context of the catalogue of the Indian contingents, following not long after the hippopotamus. Many of the features described differ little from earlier descriptions we have discussed. But there are some puzzling features. Nonnus refers to the elephant time and again as unable to bend its knees, contrary to the clear statements of earlier writers. He has no specific word for either the elephant's trunk or its tusks. Elephants in Nonnus do not seem to use their trunks as hands, as is commonly described in earlier texts. When discussing Nonnus' treatment of the trunk, Marie-Christine Fayant describes his failure ever to describe the trunk as a nose as a surprising error, given that the animal was not particularly exotic in his own age.⁶³⁸ Given the amount of earlier Greek writing about the animal, such an error seems unlikely. However, Nonnus certainly does not give the impression of ever having seen a "real" elephant. Unlike the majority of Greek writers on elephants, he shows very little interest in the animals themselves, their abilities or characteristics, referring to them again and again with a small number of epithets relating to great size or age. Elephants do not seem to have fired his imagination: one might have expected greater use of an animal that seems to hold so many possibilities for colourful Nonnian scenes, especially in battle with the Dionysian troops. For example, Nonnus makes much of the drunken Indians in Book 15 and one could imagine what he might do with drunken elephants.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁸ Chuvín and Fayant, 2006, p.204, n. to 326-39

⁶³⁹ Scullard notes the appearance of elephants in *Maccabees* (5.5): Scullard, 1974, p.187

As for their use in battle, Nonnus never mentions towers on the war elephants, as Philostratus and Heliodorus do, but in several places mentions elephants yoked to chariots. Nonnus used elephants as monstrous, paradoxical beasts and that seems to have been the extent of his concern. The central passage dealing with elephants itself sets up a sort of paradox, as the reader has already seen in earlier books that this fearsome war machine has been quite ineffective against the forces of Dionysus and as the poem progresses it will continue to be ineffective. In short, Nonnus' treatment of elephants is a puzzle, leaving the reader to consider whether the poet's apparent lack of knowledge of the elephant is really due to ignorance or whether the insistence on inaccurate or incorrect features is a deliberate choice. If it is a deliberate choice, the likeliest explanation is that he wanted to emphasise the paradoxical, perhaps even comic nature of the beast.⁶⁴⁰

One noticeable feature of his use of the elephants is his use of the word “ἐλέφας” and its derivatives within the dactylic hexameter. Commonly he uses the word at the end of a line in combination with a three-syllable adjective, both in the genitive plural.

[Elephants in Nonnus and Philostratus Compared](#)

There are some clear parallels in the use of elephants in the two writers. Elephants provide another link to Alexander and his Indian conquests in both and thus connect the main figures with the glories of the Greek past. For both, the huge animals are also things of wonder, exotic and paradoxical, adding to the colour and interest of the narrative, along with other exotic creatures and alien humans.

In another sense Philostratus and Nonnus are using elephants in quite dissimilar ways. Philostratus is happy to use elephants to display his - or Apollonius' - knowledge of the animals based on the most reliable sources and to take sides in contemporary scientific arguments about their nature and

⁶⁴⁰ Nonnus commonly uses “ἐλέφας” at the end of a line with a three-syllable adjective in the genitive plural. This could be playfulness, or just a practical solution to versification. In any event we have seen a similar use in Pseudo-Oppian.

physiology. Nonnus shows no interest in zoological exactitude or scientific enquiry. Rather he is content to describe features, accurate or not, that emphasise the status of the elephant as a monstrous, paradoxical and exotic beast. Indeed, he shows very little interest in the animal as an animal, in contrast to Philostratus. Philostratus, as so many Greek writers, was fascinated by the relationship of elephants and humans, especially the loyalty of elephants to their human masters, and by the human-like qualities of the animal, such as their intelligence, and caring natures. This fascination is not apparent in the *Dionysiaca*, where references to elephants are overwhelmingly in a war context and for the most part confined to a few repeated epithets, or, following the war, to brief scenes where the elephant supplies the exotic touch.

Yet Nonnus does not avoid completely an extended treatment of the elephant, and it is in the forty or so lines devoted to the animal in Book 26 that we find some links between the writers. But besides following the general interest shown by earlier writers in the elephant, Nonnus seems to have taken even more of an individual path than usual here, ignoring some commonly accepted features, adopting some outdated or discredited features. Nevertheless, although Nonnus has clearly chosen to go his own way, we can still find traces that may indicate the influence of Philostratus.

Firstly, the elephant appears in both works in the context of a connection with the eastern campaign of Alexander the Great, and the influence of this context on their respective works. Secondly, although Nonnus may fail to convince the reader that he has any real interest in the animal, he does, in Book 26, not only introduce the elephant in the catalogue of Indian contingents, he also stops, unusually for him, to lecture the reader about its characteristics. This “lecture” is not as extensive or wide-ranging as in Philostratus, or even in Achilles Tatius, but it does present a good deal of information - at times misinformation - about an extraordinary animal, just as we find in the VA. Thirdly and more specifically, leaving aside common clichés about elephants found in many other

writers as well as in Nonnus and Philostratus,⁶⁴¹ both Philostratus and Nonnus mention the elephant and the camel together.⁶⁴² Philostratus introduces elephants into the VA accompanied by camels (2.6); Nonnus likens the elephant's neck to that of a camel (26.304-5). Fourthly, both Philostratus and Nonnus emphasise and exaggerate the elephant's ability to carry troops: according to Philostratus, an elephant can carry ten or fifteen (2.12.1) of them; according to Nonnus, an innumerable swarm (26.306). What unites Nonnus and Philostratus is the fascination with and display of knowledge about an extraordinary and paradoxical beast with important cultural and historical overtones; where they differ is that Nonnus concentrates on the extraordinary and paradoxical to the exclusion or near exclusion of interest in scientific accuracy about the animal and of interest in the interplay between beast and man evident in the VA. In other words, Nonnus shows a narrower interest in elephants but builds on and exaggerates the features that interest him for his epic.

⁶⁴¹ For example, its enormous size and great age

⁶⁴² Vian, 1990, p.287, n. to 304-7; Agosti, 2004, p.182, n. to 304-11

Conclusion

At the beginning of this study, we noted that there was no question of Philostratus being in the position of Homer or Euripides, for example, as an influence on Nonnus. His work is clearly not in any sense fundamental to the *Dionysiaca*. There is no deep engagement in the *Dionysiaca* with Philostratus as there is, for example, with Homer and Euripides. Rather, it was suggested, Philostratus' works may be one of the numerous literary sources from the length of Greek literary history upon which Nonnus drew to a greater or lesser extent and for a variety of purposes in a variety of circumstances in the composition of his epic. We noted that among the range of influences and possible influences, scholars had convincingly demonstrated that contemporaries or near contemporaries of Philostratus, the sophistic Greek novelists, had left their mark on the *Dionysiaca*. This in itself, we suggested, was enough to warrant an investigation into Philostratus' case. Furthermore, scholars have long noted many instances of similarities between the two writers, although no detailed study has previously been undertaken.

In addressing this issue, we posed a series of questions, which we undertook to answer by a close textual analysis of the *Dionysiaca* in the light of Philostratus' works, specifically the *VA* and the *Imagines*. Was Philostratus an influence on the *Dionysiaca*? If he was an influence, how and to what extent did he influence Nonnus? If the evidence does not support the view that Philostratus was a direct influence, what then is the nature of the apparent connections between them, and what does this tell us of *paideia* and aesthetics in Late Antiquity?

It is clear from the study that there are numerous instances of similarities between the *Imagines*, the *VA* and the *Dionysiaca*, in a variety of circumstances. But can we say that there is incontrovertible evidence that Philostratus was a direct influence on the *Dionysiaca*, bearing in mind that similarities

in specific cases can often be ascribed to chance, coincidence, shared aesthetic or literary concerns in Late Antiquity or, indeed, to a common source in a missing work?

At the most basic level, the two writers are both immersed in the Greek cultural heritage. It is this that remains their frame of reference, and they clearly expect their readers to be as familiar with their literary predecessors as they are. Each of the writers is prepared to use the literary and cultural heritage and play with its elements to achieve their literary goals and establish, through the demonstration of their familiarity with the material their own credentials, as it were, as writers steeped in the Greek tradition. We have seen them, for example, use different versions of the same myths as it suited their purposes. Nonnus takes this further, not only cramming his work full of familiar myths but adding foundation myths not found elsewhere and uncommon versions of myths. The *Imagines*, the *VA* and the *Dionysiaca* are full of literary allusions, as we have seen, with many shared between the writers. Both are clearly showing off their familiarity with the material and inviting their readers to do the same. This again is hardly surprising. Once more Nonnus is more radical in this respect, not only referencing Homer but also competing with him.

The writers are also united across time not only by this shared cultural heritage, but also by their aesthetic and literary choices. In the *VA*, the *Imagines* and the *Dionysiaca*, *poikilia* is not merely a part of the aesthetic of Late Antiquity, seen in various forms in other writers and artists, it is at the very heart of their works. In the *Imagines*, *poikilia* is built in as it were, through the choice of subject matter and method: a variety of paintings with a variety of subjects. But further than this, within each piece the writer uses a variety of methods to present each painting, with the constant concern to bring life through movement colour and change. Of course, this work consists almost entirely of *ekphraseis*. While *ekphraseis* are also important in the *VA* and *Dionysiaca*, these works both have a strong narrative element. The *VA* tells the story of Apollonius' life from his birth to his apparent apotheosis; the *Dionysiaca* tells the story of Dionysus' life to his apotheosis. But although the works

are essentially linear in relating the protagonist's life, this linearity is broken up by a variety of means and techniques.

In the *VA*, the presence of Damis allows for dialogue argument, philosophical discussion and explanation. There are speeches, dialogues, stories, travel descriptions, new characters. The *Dionysiaca* contains *epyllia*, myths, a great number of speeches, long descriptions and all manner of apparent digressions. In other words, in both works the linear trajectory of the account of the protagonists is regularly broken in all kinds of ways. This is particularly the case in the *Dionysiaca*, where at times the reader can struggle to see the linear element. Furthermore, the interest in variety applies not only to the overall pattern of the works, but also to individual episodes and indeed to individual passages. In other words, the works are linked by the consistent use of variety as a literary aesthetic. The link is even stronger, though, in that both works, as we have seen, are presented as under the sign of Proteus: *poikilia*, variety and changeability are at their heart.

If we consider the specific instances of similarity between the texts, they are numerous, as we have shown, but of a detailed and often quite subtle nature. As we have seen in discussions of particular passages, the similarities of detail are of various kinds, including:

- the choice of versions of stories;
- details of stories included or emphasised in the telling;
- choice of types of characters;
- selection of similar details;
- interest in similar scenes or types of scenes;
- linguistic similarities;
- similar use of colours;
- demonstration of erudition, not excluding a certain playfulness;

- similar use of the paradoxical and extraordinary.

Of the items on this list, the use of language is perhaps the least indicative of connections between the writers. Although we have highlighted intriguing instances of linguistic similarities - that is, the use of particular words, especially unusual words, in particular circumstances - between the two, such instances are not common. Nonnus' choice of language is generally much more exuberant and inventive than Philostratus' and his extraordinary vocabulary is one of the most characteristic and idiosyncratic features of his poem. It is not something he shares with Philostratus. Nonetheless, one might expect to find more linguistic clues, as it were, pointing to Philostratus as a source or as an inspiration.

Many instances of similarity might generally be described as aesthetic in nature and most often appear in *ekphraseis* or scenes with a strong ekphrastic element. They show writers who share a certain sensibility, a taste for certain colours and colour combinations (red, black, white), certain materials (metals and gems, or gem-like materials), paradoxical and monstrous touches (strange beasts and phenomena), certain types of scenes (particularly exaggerated violence and bloodshed) and similar handling of such scenes; a fascination with the paradoxical, even the monstrous. One might add that in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* these elements are invariably in a more highly coloured, exaggerated and extended form than in the *VA* and the *Imagines*. In other words, they come within the wider theme of *poikilia*, common to both writers.

Taken as a whole, the details both in their number and diversity are suggestive of a familiarity of Nonnus with Philostratus' *VA* and *Imagines*. They do not suggest a major influence of the older writer on the younger, nor do they give any sense of rivalry on Nonnus' part. Rather, they are consistent with Philostratus being one of the many earlier writers from whom the poet has gleaned ideas and suggestions to be woven into the fabric of his epic, particularly in instances where their

tastes and temperaments meet. Perhaps we could go as far as to say that the reader is being invited to detect traces of Philostratus. In a passage discussing Nonnus' humour in the *Dionysiaca*, Camille Geisz surmises that "the number of literary allusions and imitations must have been meant partly as a scholarly game of hide and seek."⁶⁴³ This seems like the sort of game that would also appealed to Philostratus. More than this, one is tempted to imagine Philostratus as one of those writers used by Nonnus in this game.

The two writers who are separated by geography, time and literary genre, thus each display a deep, intense but at the same time playful engagement with a shared cultural and literary heritage.

Philostratus in the *Imagines* and the *VA* and Nonnus in the *Dionysiaca* also demonstrate a common adherence to *poikilia*, not only as a feature of their respective works, but indeed as a hallmark of them. The importance of this to both is evidenced by their use of the figure of Proteus in the *Dionysiaca* and the *VA*. There are clear overlaps of taste and sensibility, particularly in the use of colour and particularly, but not exclusively in ekphrastic passages.

In the conclusion of her study of the influence of the Greek novel on the *Dionysiaca*, Frangoulis is able to state, justifiably it seems to us, that the poem contains "échos incontestables" of the novels of Chariton, Xenophon, Longus, Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus.⁶⁴⁴ Nonnus, she continues, is an erudite writer demonstrating a thorough and detailed knowledge of the novels, playing games with his educated readers by scattering his own work with allusions to the novels while at the same time transposing and transforming them.⁶⁴⁵ In the case of Philostratus the evidence of the connection, that we have set out above, may not be as strong. However, the numerous examples of coincidences of detail between the works are consistent with Nonnus being familiar with Philostratus' works and with his taking such details for use in his own poem, just as he has been

⁶⁴³ Geisz, 2018b, p. 263

⁶⁴⁴ Frangoulis, 2014, p.220

⁶⁴⁵ Frangoulis, loc. cit.

demonstrated to do with many other writers including the novelists. At the least, they are suggestive of a closer connection between two writers who demonstrate both erudition and playfulness than merely shared heritage and aesthetics.

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