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Maria Ypsilanti/Laura Franco: *Nonnus' Paraphrase between Poetry, Rhetoric and Theology. Rewriting the Fourth Gospel in the Fifth Century. With the Collaboration of Filip Doroszewski and Claudia Greco.* Leiden/Boston: Brill 2021 (Mnemosyne. Supplements 436). XI, 317 p., 4 ill. € 134.82/\$ 152.00. ISBN: 978-90-04-37341-9.

As Tim Whitmarsh recently wrote, Nonnus of Panopolis is “big news in contemporary scholarship”¹. In recent years Nonnus scholarship has flourished unprecedentedly. There has been a watershed of scholarly publications on his poetry, including various monographs, dedicated edited volumes and a Brill’s Companion.² The academic interest in Nonnus is also reflected in the success of the “Nonnus in Context” conference series, which started in 2011. The forthcoming new English translations of both the *Dionysiaca* and the *Paraphrase of St. John’s Gospel* that are being prepared with the University of California Press (series editor: Tim Whitmarsh) will mark another step in Nonnus’ gradual transition from a marginal figure to his new position at the top of the post-classical Greek canon.

And yet, there is a clear imbalance in the level of scholarly attention that is given to Nonnus’ two poems, both in terms of text editions and literary studies. The *Dionysiaca* is particularly well-served. Since the completion of the now standard text edition in the “Belles Lettres” series (Francis Vian, Pierre Chuvin et al. 1976–2006), multiple monographs have appeared, either

- 1 T. Whitmarsh: Big Data and Dionysiac Poetics. In: B. Verhelst (ed.): *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context IV: Poetry at the Crossroads.* Leuven/Paris/Bristol, CT 2022 (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 314 = *Bibliothèque de Byzantion* 29), pp. 169–192, p. 169.
- 2 K. Spanoudakis (ed.): *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context. Poetry and Cultural Milieu in Late Antiquity with a Section on Nonnus and the Modern World.* Berlin/Boston 2014 (*Trends in Classics. Supplementary Volumes* 24); H. Bannert/N. Kröll (eds.): *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context II: Poetry, Religion, and Society.* Proceedings of the International Conference on Nonnus of Panopolis, 26th–29th September 2013, University of Vienna, Austria. Leiden/Boston 2018 (Mnemosyne. Supplements 408); F. Doroszewski/K. Jazdzewska (eds.): *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context III: Old Questions and New Perspectives.* Leiden/Boston 2021 (Mnemosyne. Supplements 438); Verhelst (ed.): *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context IV* (note 1); D. Accorinti (ed.): *Brill’s Companion to Nonnus of Panopolis.* Leiden/Boston 2016 (*Brill’s Companions in Classical Studies*), reviewed by E. Greensmith in: *Plekos* 20, 2018, pp. 263–273, URL: <http://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2018/r-accorinti.pdf>.

focusing on specific episodes³ or on the narrative structure of the poem as a whole.⁴ For the *Paraphrase*, the completion of the new text edition is still very much a desideratum. Although for a majority of the individual books, we now have a revised critical edition and detailed commentary (starting with Enrico Livrea 1989, ongoing),⁵ the fact that we still rely on the edition of Augustin Scheindler⁶ (1881) for substantial parts of the poem, can be seen as an obstacle preventing discussion of the poem as a unified whole. The book under consideration is, at least to my knowledge, the first monograph presenting a literary analysis of the *Paraphrase* in English, and therefore very welcome to help restore the balance of scholarly attention and open this fascinating poem to new readers. We now also have “Orgies of Words”, a translation of Filip Doroszewski’s 2016 monograph, originally written in Polish.⁷

The book under consideration is – *contradictio in terminis* – a multi-authored monograph, with two main author-editors, Maria Ypsilanti and Laura

- 3 E.g. N. Kröll: Die Jugend des Dionysos. Die Ampelos-Episode in den *Dionysiaka* des Nonnos von Panopolis. Berlin/Boston 2016 (Millennium-Studien 62), reviewed by B. Verhelst in: *Plekos* 20, 2018, pp. 219–225, URL: <http://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2018/r-kroell.pdf>; S. Zuenelli: Das 12. Buch der *Dionysiaka* des Nonnos aus Panopolis. Ein literarischer Kommentar. Göttingen 2022 (Hypomnemata 213).
- 4 E.g. B. Verhelst: Direct Speech in Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca*. Narrative and Rhetorical Functions of the Characters’ “Varied” and “Many-Faceted” Words. Leiden/Boston 2017 (Mnemosyne. Supplements 397), reviewed by N. Kröll in: *Plekos* 19, 2017, p. 391–399, URL: <http://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2017/r-verhelst.pdf>; C. Geisz: A Study of the Narrator in Nonnus of Panopolis’ *Dionysiaca*. Storytelling in Late Antique Epic. Leiden/Boston 2018 (Amsterdam Studies in Classical Philology 25).
- 5 Nonno di Panopoli: Parafrasi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni. Canto XVIII. Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commentario a cura di E. Livrea. Napoli 1989 (Speculum 9).
- 6 Nonni Panopolitani paraphrasis S. Evangelii Ioannei. Ed. A. Scheindler. Leipzig 1881 (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana).
- 7 F. Doroszewski: Orgies of Words. Mystery Terminology in the “Paraphrase of St. John’s Gospel” by Nonnus of Panopolis. Translated from Polish by D. Jasiński. Berlin/Boston 2022 (Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 154), reviewed by Mary Whitby in: *Plekos* 25, 2023, pp. 717–727, URL: <https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2023/r-doroszewski.pdf>; F. Doroszewski.: Orgie słów. Terminologia mis-teriów w *Parafrazie Ewangelii wg św. Jana* Nonnosa z Panopolis. Warsaw/Toruń 2016.

Franco and two collaborators, Claudia Greco and Filip Doroszewski, who were responsible for specific sections, as specified in detail in the table of contents. It results from a joint project at the University of Cyprus (PI: Ypsilanti) that ran from 2010 to 2012. Given that the bulk of the research must date from this period, one cannot but applaud the authors for the considerable efforts taken to engage with scholarship that has appeared since, including the translation of Fotini Hadjittofi (still forthcoming) that is used to elucidate the many quoted examples from the *Paraphrase*.

The volume starts with a learned introduction on Nonnus' identity and authorship, including an extensive overview of theories regarding his person and the relation between the *Dionysiaca* and the *Paraphrase* (Laura Franco, pp. 1–35). In the subsection dealing with the *Dionysiaca*, the authors align themselves with the current *communis opinio*, accepting the theory that Nonnus simultaneously worked on both poems. What is missing in the first paragraphs of the book (or in its preface), however, is a clear statement indicating what questions the book will be answering. This comes late, at the end of the introduction (p. 32), and therefore risks missing its effect on those readers who are less acquainted with the *Paraphrase* and will have difficulties imagining what kind of rhetorical transformations are to be expected in Nonnus' poetical re-writing of the Gospel of John. The reader has to wait until chapter three for a first example of Nonnus' paraphrastic technique. Thus, despite its potential to open the *Paraphrase* to new segments of the scholarly audience, the book slightly misses the mark as a reader's first introduction to this exciting late antique material.

The second chapter deals with ancient rhetorical theory and school exercises regarding the technique of paraphrasing a preexisting text (Claudia Greco/Maria Ypsilanti: "The Rhetorical Background to the Paraphrase in the Light of Ancient Rhetorical Treatises," pp. 36–49). This chapter is less well-integrated in the rest of the book and seems slightly outdated. The reference in the introduction to Laura Miguélez Caveró's 2008 monograph⁸ – truly relevant to this section! – reads as an afterthought. The discussion of ancient rhetorical theory lacks direction. The ancient sources are quoted exhaustively, but discussed minimally, so that it remains unclear to the reader what to take away from the theory to gain insights into Nonnus' practice. The

8 L. Miguélez Caveró: *Poems in Context. Greek Poetry in the Egyptian Thebaid 200–600 AD*. Berlin/New York 2008 (Sozomena 2).

more theoretical and reflective sections in later chapters refer to this chapter but also frequently add elements of discussion that one would ideally already expect to find in this dedicated chapter.

The third (Laura Franco/Maria Ypsilanti: “Non-amplificatory Paraphrase,” pp. 50–71) and fourth chapter (Laura Franco/Maria Ypsilanti: “Amplificatio,” pp. 72–285) are the core of the present study. The nuanced discussions of specific passages as well as more general trends and careful comparisons between the *Paraphrase* and its Gospel *Vorlage* form an important contribution to Nonnus scholarship and our understanding of his poetic technique. The authors start with probably the least exiting, but also least complex category of examples, the non-amplificatory paraphrase (chapter three): small omissions, abbreviations, confluents and shifts in the narrative sequence are explained in relation to Nonnus’ strive for variation (*ποιικιλία*), as a technique to give emphasis to specific elements in the gospel, or to smoothen out the natural flow of the narrative. Ancient rhetorical theory is effectively combined with insights drawing on narratology. All examples are carefully chosen, and the authors proceed with great caution when they give indications of the frequency of occurrence of the observed phenomena, steering away from quantitative statements. While this caution is commendable in itself, the vagueness of expression (“sometimes,” “somewhat limited,” “rather mild,” “occasionally,” “fairly frequent”) at times makes it difficult to assess the degree of exhaustivity and representative nature of the examples.

Calling chapter four a “chapter” seems misleading, because it is actually at least three or four chapters in one and takes up three quarters of the entire book. Indeed, Nonnus’ paraphrastic technique is mostly amplificatory. Three perspectives are combined in this chapter, the rhetorical (especially in sections A–C and the theoretical approach to *ῥητορικὴ* in section G), what I would call the narratological (D–E: imagery and visual elements, F: the handling of speech, G: characterization strategies), and the theological (H: on elements of Christian exegesis).

The interest in theology is already prepared in the choice of examples in earlier sections (e.g., in B.1 [Maria Ypsilanti: “Simple Additions of Adjectives/Participles”, pp. 82–84] on the addition of adjectives which focuses on the presentation of Christ). Section C (Maria Ypsilanti/Laura Franco: “Explanations”, pp. 90–105) introduces a helpful definition of philological exegesis, which operates on a lexical level and ties in with the didacticism inherent to the genre (cf. Nonnus’ didactic epic models), as opposed to Christian

exegesis, which operates at the level of theological interpretation and reflects the contemporary debates about the nature of Christ and the status of Mary.

In section D (Maria Ypsilanti/Laura Franco: “Imagery with Theological Significance”, pp. 105–128) it is convincingly argued that by using the word *τύπος* to hint at the relationship between John and the Old Testament, Nonnus makes the implicit intertextuality explicit, drawing attention to his own role as poet-exegete. It is a beautiful example of what Alessandro Barchiesi calls a “trope[...] of intertextuality”⁹. Section E (Maria Ypsilanti/Laura Franco: “‘Theatrical’ Elements: Impressive Visualisation, Description of Scenery, Effects of Sound”, pp. 129–159) uses the term “Theatrical” (I would personally use ‘ekphrastic’ throughout) for the vivid details in Nonnus’ descriptions of people, actions, and scenery, and suggests interesting parallels in contemporary and later Christian iconography.

Section F [Maria Ypsilanti/Laura Franco: “Handling of Speech (Direct/Indirect/Dialogue)”, pp. 159–183] is again of a more technical nature and points at some striking exceptions to the general rule that Nonnus’ *Paraphrase* uses direct speech wherever his Gospel model does so. Speeches are also elaborated upon (F.3 [Maria Ypsilanti/Laura Franco: “Amplificatio in Dialogue”, pp. 167–170] discusses a representative example) and more extensively commented upon by the Nonnian narrator (F.4 [Maria Ypsilanti: “Introductory and Other ‘Comments’ in Dialogic Speech Exchanges”, pp. 170–178] on introductory and other comments). On the handling of speech in Nonnus (*Dionysiaca* as well as *Paraphrase*), see now also my own contribution with similar observations and some quantitative data.¹⁰

In section G (Maria Ypsilanti/Claudia Greco/Laura Franco: “Character Sketching: Between Theatricality, Exegesis and Ethopoea”, pp. 183–218), the authors choose to use the ancient rhetorical term *ῥητορικά* not in its more common sense as a speech that is written to reflect the character of the speaker, but more broadly (as also attested in ancient sources) as everything that contributes to character sketching, either in speech, narrative, or description. This section consists of a fine-grained and convincing analysis of

9 A. Barchiesi: *Speaking Volumes. Narrative and Intertext in Ovid and Other Latin Poets*. Edited and translated by M. Fox and S. Marchesi. London 2001, p. 130.

10 B. Verhelst: *Nonnus*. In: M. de Bakker/I. J. F. de Jong (eds.): *Speech in Ancient Greek Literature*. Leiden/Boston 2022 (*Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative* 5 = *Mnemosyne. Supplements* 448), pp. 172–194.

the characterization of four characters (Peter, Mary of Magdala, Judas and Pontius Pilate, each with a relatively minor role in the Gospel narrative, but of strong symbolical significance in the Christian tradition.

Finally, Section H (Laura Franco/Maria Ypsilanti/Filip Doroszewski: “Interpretatio”, pp. 218–285) discusses in a detailed and nuanced way aspects of theological *interpretatio* in the *Paraphrase*, comparing extensively with the extant exegetical tradition, especially Cyril of Alexandria, on whose work Nonnus drew. It highlights the concern for orthodoxy in the *Paraphrase*, especially with regard to Mary’s virginity and status as θεοτόκος (cf. the controversy between Cyril and Nestorius) and with regard to the relationship between the persons of the Trinity (cf. the controversy between Cyril and Arianism).

The book concludes with chapter five (Maria Ypsilanti: “Conclusions,” pp. 286–290), helpfully summarizing the most important findings. Can we, given the unique features of the *Paraphrase*, really conclude that it is “a (or, probably, *the* most) typical product of Christian Greek paraphrastic poetry” (p. 289)?

There is a particularly useful “Index of Places” (pp. 312), “of Historical and Mythical Persons” (pp. 313–314) and “of Ancient Authors” (pp. 315–317), but unfortunately no *index locorum*. The regular cross-references throughout the volume are very welcome and could in fact be expanded, especially when the same example is discussed a second time in a different context (as e.g., on p. 52 and 91, which both discuss *Paraphrase* 6.10 in a slightly contradictory fashion). The choice not to refer to page numbers in these cross-references, but to the titles of chapters, sections, and subsections, makes them bulky and difficult to navigate. There are very few typos and other glitches, apart from the recurring references to emphasized words as “underlined” whereas they are consistently printed in italics. More unfortunate are the occasional differences in interpretation that are apparent between the translation of Hadjittofi and the discussion in the main text. Generally, these differences are not pointed out to the reader (with one exception at p. 162) and may cause confusion.

Despite some minor points of criticism, it is clear that this is an important volume for the study of Nonnus’ *Paraphrase*. It is impressively rich in observations and smoothly combines the perspectives of ancient rhetoric, narratology, and theology.

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