

# Cosmic and Terrestrial Personifications in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*

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IN HIS *DIONYSIACA*, Nonnus created a fantastic mythological universe for Bacchus, in the construction of which personifications play an important role.<sup>1</sup> Some of these carry a cosmic meaning (Night, Day, Dawn, Aion, the Seasons, and the Moirai, but together with other elements which influence events on earth, such as Victory and Sleep), while others are topographical representations (rivers, cities, regions), and yet another group serve as courtiers of the divinities.<sup>2</sup> There are three obvious reasons for this abundance of personifications: 1) The long tradition of personification, both literary<sup>3</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> Already R. Keydell, "Mythendeutung in den *Dionysiaca* des Nonnus," in G. Radke (ed.), *Gedenkschrift für Georg Rohde* (Tübingen 1961) 105–114, at 112–114, noticed their importance in the *Dionysiaca*.

<sup>2</sup> On the last type see L. Miguélez-Cavero, "Personifications at the Service of Dionysus: The Bacchic Court," in K. Spanoudakis (ed.), *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context* (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> Brief history in D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford 1991) 241–249. Personifications were particularly popular in Imperial and Late Antique Latin literature. On Virgil and Ovid see Feeney 241–249; P. R. Hardie, *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion* (Cambridge 2002) 231–236; D. M. Lowe, "Personification Allegory in the *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *Mnemosyne* 61 (2008) 414–435. On Statius, Feeney 180–191; K. Coleman, "Mythological Figures as Spokespersons in Statius' *Silvae*," in F. de Angelis and S. Muth (eds.), *Im Spiegel des Mythos* (Wiesbaden 1999) 67–80. On Claudian, C. J. Classen, "*Virtutes und vitia* in Claudians Gedichten," in J.-M. Carrié and R. Lizzi Testa (eds.), *Humana sapit: Etudes d'antiquité tardive* (Turnhout 2002) 157–167; M. Roberts, "Rome Personified, Rome Epitomized," *AJP* 122 (2001) 533–563; Alan Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford 1970) 271–278.

artistic.<sup>4</sup>

2) Giving shape and visual entity to incorporeal elements makes abstract processes easier to describe, visualise, and understand.<sup>5</sup> As such, personification can be considered yet another strategy in the typically Nonnian search for *enargeia*.<sup>6</sup>

3) The visualisation of abstract elements, normally hidden from the human eye, enhances the divine and cosmic backdrop of the poem and presents both the poet and the readers as privileged onlookers beholding this world.<sup>7</sup> Nonnus thus enhances Bacchus' aspirations to being recognised as a god on Olympus (he sees the world as the gods see it), and dignifies his own *métier* and the readers' intervention.

These three factors, however, do not fully acknowledge the

<sup>4</sup> For archaic and classical times see H. A. Shapiro, *Personifications in Greek Art* (Zurich 1993); for Late Antiquity, R. Leader-Newby, "Personifications and *paideia* in Late Antique Mosaics," in E. Stafford and J. Herrin (eds.), *Personification in the Greek World* (Aldershot 2005) 231–246.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic* 380 (on Statius): "for the poem's purposes ... personifications ... are conceived of as being existing realities, abstracts which occupy their own conceptual sphere, and which must become embodied in the time, space, and conventions of the narrative's mundane reality in order to become accessible to our senses."

<sup>6</sup> On *enargeia* in Nonnus see the overview in L. Miguélez-Cavero, *Poems in Context: Greek Poetry in the Egyptian Thebaid 200–600 AD* (Berlin/New York 2008) 125–126, 135–138, 283–286.

<sup>7</sup> However, no emphasis is placed on this opening of the eyes. Contrast the opening of Aeneas' eyes, when Venus allows him to see the gods at work in the destruction of Troy: Verg. *Aen.* 2.604–623 (referring to *Il.* 5.127–132, Athena removing from Diomedes' eyes the mist that prevents distinguishing between man and god in combat). See also Statius, on whom see Coleman, in *Im Spiegel* 67 ("One of his [Statius'] techniques is to merge the real world with the imaginative world of myth, so that the mundane is elevated to the glamorous realm of fancy. One result of the fusing of myth and reality is that mythological figures appear in the poems alongside the human protagonists"), 79 ("The world of Statius' patrons is a world of enhanced reality, and it is precisely the infiltration of real, contemporary concerns by figures from mythology that makes the speeches in the *Silvae* distinctive and different from those of the 'literary' world of epic").

impact of personifications in the poem, which merits a detailed reading. This paper seeks to analyse and interpret their deployment in three areas: 1) the contribution of cosmic personifications<sup>8</sup> to the cosmic and 2) the literary décor of the poem; 3) topographical personifications as a means to create a visual geography of the poem.

1. *Cosmic décor: Personifications and Dionysus' cosmic role*

Dionysus' cosmos is sustained by the personified abstract markers of passing time (Aion, Harmonia, Chronos) and the visible, physical principles of eternal recurrence (the stars, Night, Dawn, Day, the Seasons). Their function is to emphasise Dionysus' cosmic significance by linking their survival to his,<sup>9</sup> thus boosting his divine credentials.

Nonnus allows the readers to see Physis, 'Nature',<sup>10</sup> at work

<sup>8</sup> This analysis leaves out the personifications of winds and stars (and constellations) because of their added geographic and cosmologic complexities. Also not included are the references to the gods as personified elements—Hephaestus as fire, Aphrodite as love, Ares as war. More generally on the cosmic elements of the *Dionysiaca* see F. Vian, "Préludes cosmiques dans les *Dionysiaques* de Nonnos de Panopolis," *Prometheus* 19 (1993) 39–52, and *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques* V (Paris 1995) 53–89.

<sup>9</sup> The line of reasoning is similar to that of the connection of the prosperity of the empire beyond human means to the figure of the emperor in Men. Rhet. 377.10–24.

<sup>10</sup> Physis emerged into the literary realm from philosophical texts (mainly of Stoic origin) as early as the second century A.D.: M. Aurelius 4.23; Mesomedes of Crete Hymn 4 εἰς τὴν Φύσιν (E. Heitsch, *Die griechischen Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit* [Göttingen 1963]); A.-M. Vérilhac, "La déesse ΦΥΣΙΣ dans une épigramme de Salamine de Chypre," *BCH* 96 (1972) 427–433. For John of Gaza see D. Gigli Piccardi, "L'ecfrasi come viaggio in Giovanni di Gaza," *MEG* 5 (2005) 181–199, at 198. *Natura* and *Fortuna* feature frequently in the *Panegyrici Latini*: 10.7.3; 11.2.4, 10.2; 7.3.3; 6.4.3, 5.4, 9.2, 11.2, 13.3, 15.3, 17.3, 19.2, 21.3; 5.1.2, 4.3; 12.6.2, 21.5, 22.6; 4.4.1, 11.2; 2.4.3, 19.2–3, 20.5, 22.2, 23.1, 23.4, 25.6, 28.1, 39.1, 41.1, 42.2–3. As for artistic representations, a small boy named Physis is part of a group of personifications paying homage to Homer in the marble votive relief by Archelaos of Priene (late third to mid second century B.C.), known as the Apotheosis of Homer: see F. I. Zeitlin, "Visions and Revisions of

both after a catastrophe (2.650–653, 6.387, 7.4) and at the very origin of life (41.51–58, 97–105), but the ultimate guarantors of life on earth are Harmonia and Aion. Harmonia is presented as a cosmic figure whose house replicates the shape of the cosmos (41.275–287), and as the guardian of the seven πίνακες, where all the steps of evolution are carefully engraved (41.360–398). These *pinakes* are inaccessible to simple mortals, but available for consultation by Aphrodite when she needs reassurance about the future of her daughter Beroë (41.318–337).<sup>11</sup>

Aion (Αἰών ‘eternal, cyclical Time’),<sup>12</sup> carries the immense responsibility of maintaining the structural framework of the universe through the ages.<sup>13</sup> He resents the disturbances in the universal balance (24.265–267) and requests from Zeus the introduction of a new principle to provide humanity with a better life, so that Time rolls by without difficulty (7.9–70).<sup>14</sup> The new

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Homer,” in S. Goldhill (ed.), *Being Greek under Rome* (Cambridge 2001) 195–266, at 197–203. Physis features also in the cosmological mosaic at Mérida, on which see n.12 below.

<sup>11</sup> More on Harmonia in Vian, *Prometheus* 19 (1993) 41–45; F. Jouan, “Harmonia,” in J. Duchemin (ed.), *Mythe et personnification* (Paris 1980) 113–121.

<sup>12</sup> Aion is the principle of life for all eternity (25.23–25; 38.90–93; 40.430–433; 41.83–84, 143–144, 178–182), regulating the alternation of the Seasons and ensuring the agricultural cycle. For an overview of artistic and literary instances of Aion see G. Zuntz, *Aion im Römerreich* (Heidelberg 1991), and *Aion in der Literatur der Kaiserzeit* (Vienna 1992); D. Gigli Piccardi, *Nonno di Panopoli, Le Dionisiache I* (Milan 2003) 513–515. For more complex interpretations of Aion see the ‘Mosaic of Aion’ in Philippopolis (M.-H. Quet, “La mosaïque dite d’Aïôn de Shahba-Philippopolis,” *CCG* 10 [1999] 269–330), and the cosmological mosaic at Mérida (M.-H. Quet, *La mosaïque cosmologique de Mérida* [Paris 1981], esp. 153–184).

<sup>13</sup> 6.371–372, καὶ νύ κε κόσμος ἄκοσμος ἐγίνετο, καὶ νύ κεν ἀνδρῶν / ἄσπορον ἀρμονίην ἀνελύσατο πάντροφος Αἰών.

<sup>14</sup> Aion makes Time roll: 36.422–423, καὶ τότε, τετραπόροιο χρόνου / στροφάλιγγα κυλίνδων, / ἰππεύων ἔτος ἕκτον ἐλίσσετο καμπύλος Αἰών. In the early empire Aion was often juxtaposed with the ruling power, though by Late Antiquity mystical connotations were more relevant: see G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor 1990) 23–28.

principle granted by Zeus (7.71–109) is none other than Dionysus, with his vegetal and liquid alter egos, the vine and the wine.

Aion is different from Chronos, ‘measurable Time’,<sup>15</sup> father of Lycabas, ‘the Year’ (40.372), and grandfather of the Seasons (7.16; 11.486; 12.19, 65), the twelve Hours of the day, and the twelve Months (12.15–17).<sup>16</sup> Chronos has a more discreet presence in the *Dionysiaca*, as an attribute of the power of Zeus,<sup>17</sup> and refers to the rolling of time and the temporal allocation of events.<sup>18</sup> Nonnus seems to prefer Aion because he offers more complex cosmic evocations.

In the *Dionysiaca*, as Vian concludes,<sup>19</sup> Nonnus promotes cosmic divinities such as Aion and Harmonia to take the place occupied in the Homeric tradition by the divinities of destiny,

<sup>15</sup> Helios, explaining his role in the creation of time measurement: 38.236–238, 248–252.

<sup>16</sup> As explained by Vian, *Prometheus* 19 (1993) 46–48. See Ch. Kondoleon, “Timing Spectacles: Roman Domestic Art and Performance,” in B. Bergmann and Ch. Kondoleon (eds.), *The Art of Ancient Spectacle* (Washington/New Haven 1999) 320–341, at 323–337, on the imagery of time in domestic spaces as a double celebration of the yearly cycle and eternal time.

<sup>17</sup> 2.420–423, ἐπαιγίζων δὲ θυέλλαις / ἠερόθεν πεφόρητο μετάρσιος αἰγίοχος Ζεύς, / ἐζόμενος πτερόεντι Χρόνου τετράζυγι δίφρω / ἵπποι δὲ Κρονίωνος ὀμόζυγες ἦσαν ἀῆται; 3.195–204, birth of Dardanos, the Seasons bear the sceptre of Zeus, the robe of Time (197, πέπλα Χρόνου), and the staff of Olympus to prophesy the dominion of the Romans.

<sup>18</sup> 5.211 = 21.162, καὶ τὰ μὲν ὡς ἡμελλε γέρων χρόνος ὄψὲ τελέσσαι; 11.358–360, παλαιότεροιο γὰρ αἰεὶ / φάρμακόν ἐστιν ἔρωτος ἔρωσ νέος· οὐ γὰρ ὀλέσσαι / ὁ χρόνος οἶδεν ἔρωτα, καὶ εἰ μάθε πάντα καλύπτειν; 35.76–77, καὶ βίον ἔλκεις / ἄμβροτον, ἀνάοιο χρόνου κυκλούμενος ὀλκῶ; 36.422–423, καὶ τότε, τετραπόροιο χρόνου στροφάλιγγα κυλίνδων, / ἵπεύων ἔτος ἔκτον ἐλίσσετο καμπύλος Αἰών; 38.10–12, ἐπεὶ τότε κυκλάδι νύσση / Μυγδονίου πολέμοιο καὶ Ἰνδῶοιο κυδοιμοῦ / ἀμβολίην ἐτάνυσσεν ἔλιξ χρόνος; 40.397, τίκτεται ἰσοτύποιο χρόνου παλινάγρετος εἰκῶν; 46.366–367, οἷς χρόνος ἔρπων / ὤπασε πετρήεσσαν ἔχειν ὀφιδεα μορφῆν; 47.472–473, καὶ δολιχὴν πολιοῖο χρόνου στροφάλιγγα κυλίνδων / μητέρος εὐώδινος ἐῆς ἐμνήσατο Πρείης.

<sup>19</sup> Vian, *Prometheus* 19 (1993) 52.

such as the Moirai. References to the Moirai are limited, and mostly brief.<sup>20</sup> Ate appears only once (11.113–154), and Ἀνάγκη<sup>21</sup> and Τύχη<sup>22</sup> twice each. Compared with the Moirai, Aion and Harmonia are less active (they are passive depositories of the established order, whereas the Moirai were forever busy interweaving human lives) and less negative (it is the disturbance of the established order by embodiments of chaos such as Typhon and Phaethon that is negative; on the contrary, the very existence of the Moirai, deciding how long and how well humans will live, is pessimistic). This change in the epic *Weltanschauung* seems to be Nonnus' choice, since the divinities of destiny retain their impact e.g. in the *Posthomerica* of Quintus of Smyrna.<sup>23</sup>

The trend of de-Homerisation and abstraction seems to operate behind yet another Nonnian choice: whereas the plots of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* advanced with the succession of nights and days,<sup>24</sup> in the *Dionysiaca* only some episodes still

<sup>20</sup> 1.366–367, 482–484; 2.677–679, 690; 3.329–330, 355–357; 8.351–352, 367–368, 689–691; 11.255; 24.280–285; 25.439–441, 463–467; 28.118–119; 30.130b–132, 144–146a; 38.166, 217b–219; 39.232–235; 40.1–2, 170–171; 42.528–529; 45.54–55; 46.73–74; 47.694. Dionysus defeats the Moirai when the death of Ampelos, which they had foreseen, is reversed with his metamorphosis into a vine: 12.143–144, 212–216.

<sup>21</sup> 2.677–678; 10.90, Ἀναγκαίη μεγάλη θεός (after Callim. *Hymn to Delos* 4.122).

<sup>22</sup> 2.669–671; 16.220–221. The Τύχη and εὐτυχία of the *laudandus* are important elements in an encomium (L. Pernot, “Chance et destin dans la rhétorique épideictique grecque à l'époque impériale,” in F. Jouan (ed.), *Visages du destin dans les mythologies* [Paris 1983] 121–129), which makes their absence from the *Dionysiaca* more relevant, given that it is an encomium of Dionysus (see Miguélez-Cavero, *Poems in Context* 355 ff.).

<sup>23</sup> See U. Gärtner, “Zur Rolle der Personifikationen des Schicksals in den *Posthomerica*,” in M. Baumbach and S. Bär (eds.), *Quintus Smyrnaeus: Transforming Homer in Second Sophistic Epic* (Berlin 2007) 211–240.

<sup>24</sup> Night, Dawn, and Day mark the passing of time in the Homeric poems: see F. Létoublon, “Le jour et la nuit,” in F. Létoublon (ed.), *Hommage à Milman Parry* (Amsterdam 1997) 137–146; A. W. James, “Night and Day in Epic Narrative from Homer to Quintus of Smyrna,” *MPhL* 3 (1978) 153–

begin and finish with references to them<sup>25</sup> and the life of the main character is directly linked to the primeval figures sustaining the universe. Not only Aion needs Dionysus, but also the Seasons request his existence, thus inscribing his life on earth in the machinery of the cosmic order.

In the *Iliad* (8.393) the Seasons are the guardians of the gates of heaven, a role they maintain in the *Dionysiaca* (2.176, 13.22–24, 38.329–332), where they are also the daughters of Lycabas, ‘the Year’ (7.15–17, 11.485–486). They are related to the passage of time (25.363–364, 38.15–17) and to the stars (1.224; 2.175; 38.233b–238, 267–290), especially to Helios, on whom they attend (2.177a, 269–271; 38.297–300, 412–415). Their significance is emphasised by references to their closeness to Zeus (3.195–200, 8.3–5, 28.329–330) and to their prophetic powers (3.195–200, 7.178–179, 8.31–33, 9.11–15, 38.131–132). Thus, when they pay homage to Dionysus even before his birth (7.178–179; 8.3–5, 31–33; 9.11–15; 10.171–173), their status enhances his.

Beyond these general references, the key episode regarding the Seasons is inserted in Books 11 and 12. It begins with a long description of the four of them in their anthropomorphic shapes (11.485–521):<sup>26</sup> they all carry a vegetal adornment,<sup>27</sup>

183, at 153–164.

<sup>25</sup> 2.163–169; 3.18, 35, 55–58; 18.154–161, 166–168; 22.136–137; 25.568–570; 36.391–393; 37.86–89. On the Nonnian formulae for dawn and sunset see G. D’Ippolito, “Sulle tracce di una koinè formulare nell’epica tardogreca,” in D. Accorinti and P. Chuvin (eds.), *Des Géants à Dionysos* (Alessandria 2003) 501–520, at 513–519; A. W. James, “Night and Day in the Epic Narrative of Nonnus and Others,” *MPhL* 4 (1981) 115–142, at 118–137. Note the description of Dawn in 1.171–172, (Typhoeus stretches out his hands and disrupts the upper air) εἴρυσεν Ἡριγένειαν, ἐρυκομένοιο δὲ τὰύρου / ἄχρονος ἡμιτέλεστος ἐλώφειν ἰππότις Ὠρη.

<sup>26</sup> Other descriptions of the Seasons in the *Dionysiaca*: 3.10–16, 34.105–116, 42.282–302.

<sup>27</sup> Winter, evergreen garland; Spring, rose; Summer, head of grain; Autumn, olive twigs.

there is reference to a specific event,<sup>28</sup> and their dress is mentioned.<sup>29</sup> Once described, the Seasons visit Helios to learn about the prophecy of the apparition of the vine (12.1–217): just as Aion had pointed out to Zeus the need to have Dionysus on earth, so the Seasons (especially Autumn) confirm that the cosmic balance embodied in their continuous succession will only be complete when Ampelos is metamorphosed into a vine, and wine discovered. Dionysus' cosmic role becomes more physical because of the anthropomorphic description of the Seasons: one of the four women lacks her characteristic iconographic element (Autumn needs her vine leaves).

The human race needs Dionysus for the gift of wine, but the fact that cosmic divinities are aware that the universe is incomplete and unbalanced without him lends his appearance on earth a cosmic significance. The terrible consequences of the disruption of the natural order as described in the Typhonomachy (Books 1–2) and the episode of Phaethon (Book 38) highlight that humans and gods need Bacchus if they want the cosmos to survive unchanged.

However, the staging of these cosmic personifications is not as abstract as one might have expected. Aion is pictured as an old man yearning for retirement because age is making his duties too burdensome for him (7.22–28), and Harmonia is a lady of the home who leaves her loom and smartens herself up to welcome an unexpected visitor (41.288–310). In the mosaics of the houses of the rich in Late Antiquity portraits of the four Seasons featured frequently as images of a prosperous life,<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Winter, snow and rain; Spring, arrival of swallows and Zephyrus, dance of Adonis and Aphrodite; Summer, wheat harvest represented by the sickle; Autumn, ploughing, trees losing their leaves, fruit harvest without the grape.

<sup>29</sup> Winter, a snowy, rain-producing veil, with snow covering her breast and shoes of hailstones; Spring, a fragrance of roses pervading her robe; Summer, white linen, sweating; Autumn, olive twigs.

<sup>30</sup> Though usually represented by busts, with vegetal adornments on the head (see Ch. Kondoleon, *Domestic and Divine* [Ithaca/London 1995] 85–



and their descriptions were common in rhetorical treatises<sup>31</sup> and literary works alike.<sup>32</sup> This *réalisme bourgeois* makes abstract principles more credible: Nonnus' Dionysiac world functions credibly because the reader is given an insight into the hidden forces that make it work. The world inhabited by Dionysus is not made of atoms but of tangible realities, a fictional credibility. At the same time, these human-like presentations 1) block possible transcendent readings of the poem, 2) are coherent with a humanised image of Dionysus, who falls in love with a satyr who is not particularly attractive (Ampelos: 10.175 ff.) and flees from a martial enemy (Lycurgus: 20.346–353).

Whereas in his *Silvae* Statius incorporates mythological figures to enhance the glamour of the human world, here Nonnus takes the opposite direction, demoting the mythological world to a quasi-human status, for which we can find a parallel in the contemporary secularisation of mythology.<sup>33</sup> Mythology is approached as a fundamental part of *paideia*, and not as a generator of religious beliefs or truths.<sup>34</sup> The descriptions of the daily lives of deities who would otherwise have been scarcely

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106), there are also full-body images, such as those in the Constantinian Villa of Antioch, Room 1 (D. Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements I* [Princeton 1947] 230–236; F. Baratte, *Catalogue des mosaïques romaines et paléochrétiennes du Musée du Louvre* [Paris 1978] 99–118).

<sup>31</sup> Men. Rhet. 408.8–26, 410.30–411.2; Lib. VIII 479.15–482.17 Förster. Topic for description in the *Progymnasmata*: Theon 118.20–21 Patillon; Hermog. *Prog.* 10.2 Patillon; Aphth. 12.1.8–9 Patillon; Nicolaus *Prog.* 68.15 Felten.

<sup>32</sup> Philostr. *Imag.* 2.34; Longus *Daphnis and Chloe* 1.9, 1.23, 2.1, 3.3, 3.12, 3.24; Opp. *Hal.* 1.446–508 (Springtime); Quint. Smyrn. 10.335 ff. (the Seasons); Description of a Spring or Autumn Day, attributed to Pamprepius (E. Livrea, *Pamprepii Panopolitani Carmina (P.Gr. Vindob. 29788 A–C)* [Leipzig 1979]); *Anth.Gr.* 9.363; Joh. Gaz. *Ekph.Pinak.* 2.259–312.

<sup>33</sup> See R. Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot 2004) 141–158.

<sup>34</sup> Compare the use of personifications in Neoplatonic environments, as studied in L. Siorvanes, “Neo-Platonic Personification,” in *Personification in the Greek World* 77–96.

visible also testifies to the need to endow mythological fictions with a veneer of (fictional) verisimilitude.

The cosmic dimension of the *Dionysiaca*, built up through the constant use of personifications of elements with cosmic resonances, makes up for the lack of other references to Dionysus as a god, such as descriptions of his cult. This is a tale of immanence and established order, more abstract and complex than the Homeric cosmos, and yet at the same time not more transcendental. The Nonnian breach of the (faked) continuity with Homer plays upon a readership which goes beyond basic Homeric constructions, has a taste for slightly philosophical allegory, and conceives the cosmos as a place full of contradicting forces (see section 2), held together by the principles of eternal recurrence, no longer in the hands of the gods. These personifications or allegories are better suited to attract the interest of the cultivated few than the frequently repeated narratives of Zeus' love affairs, and have the added benefit of appealing to both a pagan and a Christian audience.

## 2. *Literary décor: Personifications of abstract concepts (allegories) and their literary referents*

We have seen that Nonnus prefers Aion and Harmonia to the more Homeric Moirai. This is part of a more general Nonnian trend of suggesting a Homeric reference as the beginning of a generally un-Homeric construction,<sup>35</sup> of which we can quote two more cases, those of Enyo and Sleep. Just as in the *Iliad*,<sup>36</sup> in the *Dionysiaca* Enyo is the synonym for battle, the signal for its beginning and the primary power which fills combatants with rage at each other,<sup>37</sup> but she does not play a major

<sup>35</sup> His usual attitude towards Homer: see F. Vian, "Nonno ed Omero," *Koivwvía* 15 (1991) 5–18; N. Hopkinson, "Nonnus and Homer," in N. Hopkinson (ed.), *Studies in the Dionysiaca of Nonnus* (Cambridge 1994) 9–42.

<sup>36</sup> *Il.* 4.439–445; 5.592–595; 11.3–14, 73–77; 13.298–300; 18.535–540.

<sup>37</sup> 2.475–476a, 605; 4.455–459; 7.29–31; 17.315–321a; 20.110–112; 30.186b–187; 39.361–363. Along with other personified forces, such as Eris (5.41—also on her own in 20.35–98; see N. Hopkinson and F. Vian, *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques VIII* [Paris 1994] 5–6, on the minor role she

role. Hera's seduction of Zeus, whose vigilance is annihilated by Sleep, follows a similar pattern in the *Iliad* and in the *Dionysiaca*.<sup>38</sup> In the *Dionysiaca*, however, the role of Sleep is expanded, for he is a regular companion and ally of Dionysus, as a natural consequence of wine. Wine and Sleep defeat the Indians (15.87–91, 113b–119) and two women, Nicaea<sup>39</sup> and Aura.<sup>40</sup> It is Sleep, too, who leads to the abandonment of Ariadne.<sup>41</sup>

Nonnus also recruits a group of personifications who do not feature in the Homeric poems, but are included in Hesiod's *Theogony*.<sup>42</sup> For instance, to exact her revenge on Semele, Hera resorts to Ἀπάτη, 'Deceit' (8.110–175), an un-Homeric figure, which occurs in *Theog.* 224.<sup>43</sup> Ἴμερος, 'Desire' (*Dion.* 1.68b, 34.34–35, 35.134–136), also refers back to Hesiod (*Theog.* 64, 201).<sup>44</sup> The case of Δίκη, 'Justice', is slightly different: in the

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plays in the *Dion.*) and Philopis/Tumult (5.42).

<sup>38</sup> *Il.* 14.224–291, 352–361; *Dion.* 31.26–29, 106–123, 128–137; 32.97; 35.262–263, 275–277.

<sup>39</sup> 16.260–262, 281–284, 298–299, 343–345, 358–359, 386–387.

<sup>40</sup> First the admonitory dream in 48.258–291, followed by the one which defeats her, 564–569, 621–627, 635–639a, 652–653, 752.

<sup>41</sup> 47.295b–302, 320–327, 336, 345–349. On the traditional presence of Sleep in this episode see E. J. Stafford, "Brother, Son, Friend and Healer: Sleep the God," in K. Dowden and T. Wiedemann (eds.), *Sleep* (Bari 2003) 70–106, at 83–89.

<sup>42</sup> On the nature of Hesiodic personifications see W. Burkert, "Hesiod in Context: Abstractions and Divinities in an Aegean-Eastern koiné," in *Personification in the Greek World* 3–20.

<sup>43</sup> Apate is also mentioned in *Anth.Gr.* 7.145 (Asclepiades) and 146 (Antipater of Sidon). Her aspect is described also in Dio Chrys. 4.114–115 and *Tab.Ceb.* 5.2, 14.3, 19.5. Iconographic commentary in G. G. Belloni, "Apate," *LIMC* 1.1 (1981) 875–876.

<sup>44</sup> See also also Quint. Smyrn. 5.71b. In contrast, Πόθος only occurs in Nonnus: 35.111–117; 25.154, 156–160, 168; 33.112; 35.115–116; 47.341–342, 442–443. He also mentions Γάμος (40.402–406), perhaps obscure in epic poetry (see P. Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie dionysiaques. Recherches sur l'œuvre de Nonnos de Panopolis* [Clermont-Ferrand 1991] 236–237; B. Simon, *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques XIV* [Paris 1999] 292, n. to 402–406),

*Dionysiaca*, Dike functions both as a companion of Zeus and a guarantee of cosmic order.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately Nonnus goes back to Hesiod (*Op.* 220–221, 256–257; *Theog.* 901–902), but Dike also occurs in authors who are chronologically closer to him, such as Aratus (1.105, 113, 133–134), Oppian (*Hal.* 2.654–655, 664–665, 680–681), and Quintus of Smyrna (5.46, 13.378), which suggests that Nonnus was listening to contemporary tastes in this case.

Similarly, the messenger of Zeus in the Homeric poems is Ὀσσα (*Il.* 2.93, *Od.* 24.413), but the personification that bears the news in the *Dionysiaca* is Φήμη.<sup>46</sup> Though first attested in Hesiod (*Op.* 760–764), her principal development in the Greek epic (and related genres) seems to be in the Late Antique period,<sup>47</sup> if we are to judge by her presence in *P.Ross.Georg.* I 11 (hymn to Dionysus, third century A.D.: lines 31 and 34),<sup>48</sup> *Triph.* 235–237,<sup>49</sup> and *Arg.Orph.* 594–595.

In some other cases, Nonnus' inspiration is at least partially Callimachean. Φθόνος, 'Envy', inspires in Hera the desire for revenge on Semele (8.34–108), just as in Callimachus Φθόνος tries to persuade Apollo to punish the poet for writing a short hymn.<sup>50</sup> However, a figure in the fourth-century 'voile d'An-

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but described by Men. Rhet. in his epithalamium (404.29–405.13).

<sup>45</sup> 3.196; 6.249; 13.151–152; 31.240; 41.145, 178–179, 322–335; 44.1–2; 48.95b–98, 209.

<sup>46</sup> 5.370–371, 13.335–338, 18.1–4, 24.179–180, 26.275–278, 41.1–3, 44.123–124, 47.1–4. On Ossa and Φήμη see F. Larran, *Le bruit qui vole* (Toulouse 2011) 26–30.

<sup>47</sup> Also in the novel, for which see G. Schmeling, "Callirhoe: God-like Beauty and the Making of a Celebrity," in S. Harrison et al. (eds.), *Metaphor and the Ancient Novel* (Groningen 2005) 36–49, citing earlier bibliography.

<sup>48</sup> Though the latest editor does not consider the possibility of a personification here: W. D. Furley, "A Lesson to All: Lykurgos' Fate in the Tbilisi Hymn (P.Ross.Georg. I.11)," *ZPE* 162 (2007) 63–84.

<sup>49</sup> B. Gerlaud, *Triphiodore, La Prise d'Iliion* (Paris 1982), prints Φήμη; E. Livrea, *Triphiodorus, Ilii excidium* (Leipzig 1982), has φήμη.

<sup>50</sup> *Hymn.Ap.* 105–113. Analysis in D. Gigli Piccardi, *Metafora e poetica in Nonno di Panopoli* (Florence 1985) 93–94.

tinoc' may well represent Envy, in the shape of Ares, stirring up the hatred of Hera, thus adding some evidence from the visual arts.<sup>51</sup> Νέμεσις could be related to Hes. *Theog.* 223–224 and *Op.* 197–201, but in the *Dionysiaca* she often acts under the name of Adrasteia, ostensibly because the two were often identified with each other, from Hellenistic times onwards.<sup>52</sup> Adrasteia punishes Typhoeus,<sup>53</sup> Nicaea (15.392–395a, 416b–419; 16.263–264), Achates (37.422–423), and especially Aura (48.375–388, 451–469).

As illustrated by this brief overview, these personifications create a varied literary backdrop for the poem, ensuring that it is not suffocated by Homer's authority. Nonnus is Homeric but not excessively so, and Hesiodic when in need of cosmic resonances. He pays tribute to Callimachus, and responds to tastes that are chronologically closer to himself. Divinities who played an important role in the lives of the Homeric heroes and were no longer popular in Nonnus' time lost ground in the face of the advance of divinities to whom Hesiod had given some consideration and whose role had expanded in later literature. After all, Homeric personifications offered a simplistic view of the cosmos when compared with later reflections on conflicting human emotions and inclinations.

Personifications help Nonnus to bridge the gap between the world of the Homeric poems and his own. The constrictions of

<sup>51</sup> Veil from Antinoopolis (Paris, Louvre, Egyptian Antiquities inv. 11102). The lower part depicts a Bacchic procession, while the upper band traces the birth and childhood of Dionysus: 1) Semele lying on her couch, struck by a thunderbolt in the presence of a winged Zeus; 2) birth and first bath of Dionysus; 3) Hera attacking Silenus, who sits holding Dionysus on a rock covered with an animal skin, while a figure dressed as Ares may represent Envy inciting Hera's hatred; 4) Hermes delivering Dionysus to Rhea or the nymphs(?). Drawing and analysis in M.-H. Rutschowskaya, *Coptic Fabrics* (Paris 1990) 28–29, 82.

<sup>52</sup> See Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 150, 178–179.

<sup>53</sup> 1.481, Ἀδρήστεια τόσην ἐγράψατο φωνήν, clearly after Callim. *Hymn. Ceres* 56, εἶπεν ὁ παῖς, Νέμεσις δὲ κακὰν ἐγράψατο φωνάν. See F. Vian, *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques* I (Paris 1976) 162.

the genre force the poet to maintain at least an appearance of archaism, but the late antique *pepaideumenos* would not accept the definition of a cosmic frame of reference into which human action is inserted as based on a simple succession of nights and days. The thread cut by the Moirai could only be a metaphor, as it could not compete with the combined action of the personified forces that populated late antique visual arts and literature. This use of personifications is yet another of Nonnus' strategies to supersede Homer, adapting him to the aesthetics of his time.

### 3. *Geographical décor: Personifications of waters, mountains, towns, and regions*

In this tension between archaism and modernity there is yet another element to take into account: Dionysus' life on earth is set at a time when the world has not reached its classical shape. For the duration of the poem we see civilisation evolving as heroes with a direct connection with the gods found important cities (e.g. Thebes is founded by Dionysus' maternal grandfather, Cadmus). Nonnus is not simply describing a mythologised version of the contemporary world. His geography is inextricably linked with mythography,<sup>54</sup> but it is also reliant on different types of topographical personifications and embodiments.

The mythic paradigms for personifications are two deities with topographical implications, Gea and Oceanus, whose physical appearance Nonnus describes with a combination of human limbs and geographical features.<sup>55</sup> Gea has an earth-like bosom (2.239–243, 21.24–32), and begs the natural ele-

<sup>54</sup> As illustrated in Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie*.

<sup>55</sup> On Nonnus' anthropomorphic metaphors to describe nature see Gigli Piccardi, *Metafora* 187–190, 195–202. The same correspondence between a human body and a natural element occurs in the *Dionysiaca* in descriptions of metamorphoses of mythological characters into rivers (Seilenos and Aura, on which see below) and plants (Ampelos becomes a vine, 12.173–187, 226–228). See also Lucian, *On the Hall* 7–8, 16–17, where the hall is compared to a beautiful woman.

ments to help her son Typhoeus (2.540–552) as a human mother would beg for her son to be spared. She expresses her mourning by tearing at her tunic of rocks and her veil of forests (2.554–556a, 637–643) and by uttering sorrowful speeches (22.273–275).<sup>56</sup> Oceanus<sup>57</sup> possesses a multi-fountain throat (2.276b–277, 38.140b–141, 43.287), a loud murmuring voice (38.108, 42.480, 43.288), and an ever-flowing belt (1.495–497, 41.175–177). From him pour rivers of tears (6.224–225), and he plays with his grandchild Phaethon in his own waters (38.155–166). As we shall see, topographical features rarely achieve this degree of anthropomorphism.

For geographical purposes, references to waters are more frequent than those to cities and regions, because in the internal chronology of the poem cities are still being created, whereas river gods are the ancestors of heroes in Dionysus' army (e.g. the river Asopos is Aeacus' grandfather). Equally, personified rivers and the Ocean featured frequently in ancient mythology, while personified cities, regions, and mountains did not, and were perceived differently from a rhetorical point of view. In general, the attribution of speeches to personifications of abstract ideas (*prosopopoeae*)<sup>58</sup> was common in judiciary and deliberative eloquence from classical times onwards, in both the Greek- and Latin-speaking worlds (e.g. Demosthenes and Cicero). In Imperial times they became more frequent,<sup>59</sup> and

<sup>56</sup> Gea's sons, the Giants, are described in a similar fashion: Typhoeus (2.291–295, 370–379); Damasen (25.515, σκοπέλοισιν εοικότα γυῖα τινάσσων), Alpo (45.196–197), brief gigantomachy (48.31–42, 71–80).

<sup>57</sup> Oceanus is represented in the outer rim of Achilles' shield in the *Iliad* (18.607–608) and Heracles' pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield* (314–319), which Nonnus transfers not to Dionysus' shield (Oceanus is only briefly mentioned among the stars: 25.398–399) but to Harmonia's tapestry: 41.301–302, καὶ πυμάτην παρὰ πέζαν ἐκλώστοιο χιτῶνος / ὠκεανὸν κύκλωσε περίδρομον ἄντυγι κόσμου.

<sup>58</sup> L. Pernot, *La rhétorique de l'éloge dans le monde gréco-romain* (Paris 1993) 399–403.

<sup>59</sup> Personifications became common in consolations (Dio Chrys. 30.8–44; Luc. *Luctu* 16–19), *epibaterioi logoi* (Men. Rhet. 381.13–23), epithalamia and

were employed as a means of attributing an exhortation or congratulation to a figure more persuasive than the speaker himself.<sup>60</sup> Menander Rhetor (374.6–19) advises introducing speeches by towns and rivers as a means of relaxing the oration, but he mentions only one poetic model, for the personified intervention of rivers, the Homeric confrontation between Achilles and the Scamander (*Il.* 20.379–21.382).<sup>61</sup> Thus, personification of rivers could be traced back to their poetic origins, whereas personifications of towns and regions were mostly linked to prose genres, the different types of encomia, in which they were used to pay homage to the emperor and his officials.

a) Waters

Personifications of rivers occur in the *Dionysiaca* in different degrees. The most basic is the presentation of rivers as conscious of the course which their waters take,<sup>62</sup> and rivers reflecting their emotions in their currents.<sup>63</sup> Nonnus alludes

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bedroom speeches (400.31–401.26, 404.29–405.13, 406.18–25, 407.7–8, 410.21–25), *proshonetikoi logoi* (417.24–26), *kletikoi logoi* (427.27–30), and different types of hymns (333.21–24, 340.31–343.20, 438.10–24). This expansion was boosted by school practice: Quintilian 9.2.32; Hermog. *Prog.* 9.1; Aphth. 11.1.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Coleman, in *Im Spiegel* 73: “By definition it is the lot of the humble encomiast to lack authority. He cannot assert himself ... The poet’s lack of authority is replaced by the ‘authority’ of a mythical alibi. The mythological mouthpiece is the ‘focalizer’ for the discourse.” For instance, personifications of towns and regions are common in the *Panegyrici Latini*: 10.2.2, 14.1–3; 11.4.2, 5.3, 12.1; 8.10.3; 7.8.8, 10.1–11.2; 6.9.1–2; 5.1.1–2; 4.3.3, 13.1, 26.5, 31.1–2, 32.8, 35.2, 36.2; 2.22.4, 39.1 Mynors.

<sup>61</sup> In fact, the speech of the Scamander had become a popular model of *prosopopoea* for panegyrists. E.g. in Latin, Plin. *Pan.* 12, 16, 82; Symmachus *Laud. in Val.* 26. See also the *Panegyrici Latini*, featuring personified rivers in 12.17.2, 18.1–2; 4.30.1, 32.7. In Greek, Dio Chrys. 4.85, 11.32; Them. *Or.* 10.133b; also Luc. *Dial.mar.* 10. Cf. D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford 1981) 279, n. to 374.14–15.

<sup>62</sup> 10.144b–146a, 11.379b–383, 17.33b–37.

<sup>63</sup> Happiness: 2.634–636, 44.8–10. Mourning: 12.122b–130a. Oracular



several times to the well-known topic of the love affairs of waters and rivers as an image of the power of love.<sup>64</sup> Clearly he operates with a catalogue that includes the Nile and Egypt (extended to the Hydaspes in 26.352–365), Alpheios and Arethusa,<sup>65</sup> and Pyramos and Thisbe,<sup>66</sup> which he presents completely or in part,<sup>67</sup> aware that the topic cannot be applied to every river or water source.<sup>68</sup> Nonnus does not endow these rivers with human form, but the literary tradition presupposes it, thus making the reference unnecessary.

Waterways can also reflect the physical shape of the individuals who were metamorphosed into them. Thus, when Seilenos becomes a river his body corresponds to the features of the river,<sup>69</sup> and Aura's body becomes a fountain, which fully reflects her status at the time of her death, formerly a maiden hunter, now unwillingly turned into a mother.<sup>70</sup> This does not

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capacity: 4.309b–310.

<sup>64</sup> Men. Rhet. 401.28–402.2 recommends in epithalamia narratives about the loves of rivers as images of the power of love.

<sup>65</sup> On which see H. Frangoulis, *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques XIII* (Paris 1999) 126–127, n. to 37.170–173.

<sup>66</sup> On which see Vian, *Nonnos V* 189, n. to 84–85; Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 176.

<sup>67</sup> 6.339–355 (Nile and Egypt, Alpheios and Arethusa, Pyramos and Thisbe), 12.84–85 (Pyramos and Thisbe), 13.323–327 (Arethusa and Alpheios), 30.210–213 (Alpheios), 37.169–173 (Alpheios), 40.558–563 (Arethusa and Alpheios), 42.104–107 (Alpheios).

<sup>68</sup> See 6.348, ὄλβιος Εὐφρήτης, ὅτι μὴ λάχε κέντρον Ἐρώτων.

<sup>69</sup> 19.285–294, καὶ τότε γούνατα κάμνε, τινασσομένου δὲ καρήνου / ὕπτιος αὐτοκύλιστος ἐπωλίσθησεν ἀρούρη· / καὶ ποταμὸς μορφοῦτο· δέμας δὲ οἱ ἔβλυεν ὕδωρ / χεύμασιν αὐτομάτοισιν· ἀμειβομένου δὲ μετώπου / εἰς προχοῆν ἐπίκυρτον ἐκυμαίνοντο κεράϊαι, / καὶ ῥόθιον κορυφοῦτο κυκώμενον ὕψι καρήνου, / καὶ βυθὸς ἰχθυόεις ψαμάθῳ κοιλαίνετο γαστήρ· / Σιληνοῦ δὲ χυθέντος ἀμειβομένη πέλε χαιτή / εἰς θρόνον αὐτοτέλεστον· ὑπὲρ ποταμοῖο δὲ γείτων / ὄξυτενῆς σύριζε δόναξ δεδονημένος αὔραις / αὐτοφυῆς. See Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 193–196, on sources called Marsyas or Silenus.

<sup>70</sup> 48.931–942, Σαγγαρίου σχεδὸν ἦλθεν· ὀπισθοτόνω δ' ἅμα τόξω / εἰς προχοῶς ἀκόμιστον ἔην ἔρριψε φαρέτρην, / καὶ βυθίῳ προκάρηνος ἐπεσκή-

need to be so, however: Orontes gives his name to the river by throwing himself into it (17.287–289, 40.115–122, 44.250–252), but he does not become part of the river and his body comes up on a bank and is buried at Daphne, the suburb of Antioch (17.306–314).<sup>71</sup>

Moving up the scale towards a complete human body, we find references to watery equivalents of human limbs.<sup>72</sup> The Hydaspes is credited with a human form and the horns with which Greek iconography usually endows rivers,<sup>73</sup> not a frequent image in the *Dionysiaca*.<sup>74</sup> Finally, in two cases rivers are said to be represented in human form in works of art, following the usual types seen in contemporary pieces.<sup>75</sup> Aeacus'

ρτησε ρέεθρφ / ὄμμασιν αἰδομένοισιν ἀναινομένη φάος Ἡοῦς, / καὶ ῥοθίοις ποταμοῖο καλύπτετο· τὴν δὲ Κρονίων / εἰς κρήνην μετάμειψεν· ὄρεσσιχῦτοιο δὲ πηγῆς / μαζοὶ κρουνοῦς ἔην, προχοῆ δέμας, ἄνθεα χαίται, / καὶ κέρασ ἐπλετο τόξον ἑυκράϊρου ποταμοῖο / ταυροφυές, καὶ σχοῖνος ἀμειβομένη πέλε νευρή, / καὶ δόνακες γεγαῶτες ἐπερροίζησαν οἰστοί, / καὶ βυθὸν ἰλυόεντα διεσσυμένη ποταμοῖο / εἰς γλαφυρὸν κευθμῶνα χυτὴ κελάρυζε φαρέρτη.

<sup>71</sup> Nonnus narrates in 33.211–215 how Daphne became a laurel on the banks of the river Orontes. On the Orontes see Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 170–173.

<sup>72</sup> Cydnos 2.634a, ὑδρηλοῖς δὲ πόδεσσιν; Hydaspes 21.236b–237, 23.164b, πολυπίδακι λαίμῳ, 24.7 διερὴν παλάμην ὀρέγων, 27.176 εἰ μὲν ἔμοι γόνυ δοῦλον ὑποκλίνειεν Ἰδάσπης; Alpheios 40.562, ὑδρηλαῖς παλάμαις.

<sup>73</sup> 27.184, ἀνδροφυῆς κερόεσσαν ἔχων ποταμηίδα μορφήν; 29.66, ταυροφυῆς ἔχέτω κεραελκέα ταῦρον Ἰδάσπης; 30.88–89, ἦστο γὰρ ὑσμίνην δεδοκημένος ὑπόθι πέτρης, / ταυροφυῆς νόθον εἶδος ἔχων βροτοειδέι μορφή; 36.130, πάτερ ... κερασφόρε (to Hydaspes); 38.69b, βοοκράϊρω γενετῆρι. Deriades has horns because he is the son of Hydaspes: 26.155, 28.268, 39.284.

<sup>74</sup> Other rivers: Πακτωλὸς κροκόεις ἀνεσεύρασε πένθιμον ὕδωρ / ἀνδρὸς ἔχων μίμημα κατηφέος (12.127–128); Acheloos (17.238, 43.14–15).

<sup>75</sup> See J. Ostrowski, *Personifications of Rivers in Greek and Roman Art* (Kraków 1991); C. Weiss, *Griechische Flussgottheiten in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Würzburg 1984); J. Huskinson, “Rivers of Roman Antioch,” in *Personification in the Greek World* 247–264.

shield (13.214–221) displays the figure of his grandfather, the river Asopos, with only one physical note (220a, Ἄσωπὸν βαρύγουνον, “stiff-kneed Asopos”)<sup>76</sup> which implies a human form and a reference to Callim. *Del.* 78 Ἄσωπὸς βαρύγουνος. Harmonia portrays in her tapestry rivers with human faces and bull’s horns.<sup>77</sup>

In the opposite direction, rivers can embody or represent their territory. First, catalogues of rivers occasionally represent the whole earth (esp. 43.286–299, 408–418), and chaos is imaged by the rivers being out of place, i.e. the deluge (6.326–370). It is frequent that rivers embody the region in which they are situated:<sup>78</sup>

Adonis of Byblos (3.107–111, 20.143–145, 31.126–127)

Sangarios and Phrygia<sup>79</sup> (12.128–130; 14.269–271; 27.34–36; episode of Aura, esp. 48.325–327, 693–695, 931–942)

Pactolos and Lydia (10.139–174; 11.1–55; 12.126–128; 22.94–95, 146–149; 24.51–52; 25.329–332; 33.254–258; 34.211–213; 41.85–88, 440–447)

Maiandros and Apamea in Phrygia (11.379–383, 464–468; 13.362–365)<sup>80</sup>

Geudis in Alybe (17.32–36, 24.37–39, 34.214–217)<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Also 23.232, 27.274b–275, 47.531–532.

<sup>77</sup> 41.299–300, καὶ ποταμοὺς ποίκιλλεν, ἐπ’ ἀνδρομέφ δὲ μετώφω / ταυροφυῆς μορφοῦτο κερασφόρος ἔγγλοος εἰκῶν.

<sup>78</sup> A variation of this motif is that drinking the water of a river implies becoming part of the place: Dardanos leaves Samothrace to his brother Emathion and founds Dardania, where he drinks the water of Sevenstreams and the flood of Rhesos (3.188–194; with variation about the Simoeis and Thymbrios, 3.343–347); Byzas has drunk the water of the Nile and then moves to the Bosphoros (3.365–369); Indian Palthanor, transferred to Thebes after the war, drinks the water of the Ismene, having left his native Hydaspes (26.70–72); Deriades expects the enemy troops to forget their native rivers and drink the water of the Indian ones (27.34–39).

<sup>79</sup> B. Gerlaud, *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques VI* (Paris 1994) 193, n. to 270; F. Vian, *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques IX* (Paris 1990) 294, n. to 34–36.

<sup>80</sup> Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 112–125.

<sup>81</sup> Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 158–159.

Thermodon, river of the Amazons (36.260–263, 37.116–120)  
 Cydnos of Cilicia (1.259–260; 2.632–636; 23.83–84; 34.184–192;  
 40.141–145; 48.375–377, 470–471)<sup>82</sup>  
 Cephisos and Ilissos of Attica (47.13–15, 78–82)  
 Persian Euphrates (6.348, 23.82, 40.392, 43.409)<sup>83</sup>  
 Western Europe is represented by the Rhine (testing if newborns are  
 bastards by exposing them to the frozen waters of the river: 23.94–  
 97, 46.54–62) and the Eridanos (with references to the legend of  
 Phaethon and the transformation of his sisters, the Heliades, into  
 amber-weeping trees: 11.32–34, 307–309; 23.89–93; 38.90–95,  
 99–102, 432–434)<sup>84</sup>  
 The absence of Egypt from the *Dionysiaca* is somehow compensated  
 for by the references to the Nile: under the menace of Typhoeus  
 the gods flee to the Nile and take different animal shapes (1.142–  
 143, 2.167–168), Io came to Egypt (3.275–278, 32.67–70), Byzas  
 went to Egypt (3.366–368), parallels and common sources of the  
 Hydaspes and the Nile (22.1–3, 26.229–246), and simple refer-  
 ences to the river, sometimes in longer catalogues (6.339–340,  
 11.509–511, 31.37–39, 41.269–270).  
 This is magnified in the case of India and the Hydaspes.<sup>85</sup> The  
 Eastern campaign is referred to as a war against the Indians  
 and their king Deriades (13.1–7, 19–20), but also as a con-  
 frontation with Hydaspes,<sup>86</sup> its main river, whose body be-  
 comes a physical representation of India while retaining  
 natural and cosmic resonances.

In Books 21–24 battles are fought against the background of

<sup>82</sup> Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 176–178.

<sup>83</sup> Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 190–196.

<sup>84</sup> The Milky Way is known as the constellation of the River or Eridanos  
 (Aratus *Phaen.* 358 ff.): Nonn. *Dion.* 2.326–327, 23.298–301, 38.429–431.

<sup>85</sup> Other Indian rivers are mentioned, but none has the importance of the  
 Hydaspes: see Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 286–290.

<sup>86</sup> Dionysus' proposal to the Indians, through his envoy Pherespondos:  
 21.236–237, εἰ δέ κε μὴ δέξαιντο, κορύσσεται, εἰσόκε θύρσοις / Βασ-  
 σαρίδων γόνυ δοῦλον ὑποκλίνειεν Ἰδάσπης. See also Deriades' answer,  
 21.224b–226, ἦν ἐθελήσῃ, / χεύματι παφλάζοντι πατὴρ ἐμός, Ἴνδός Ἰδά-  
 σπης, / Ζηνὸς ἀποσβέσσειε πυρίπνοον ἄσθμα κεραυνοῦ.

the Hydaspes, filled with the corpses of the defeated Indians.<sup>87</sup> The river fights against the Bacchic troops with his waters, nearly drowning the whole army, and is punished by Dionysus, who sets fire to the reeds and banks (23.162–279). Hydaspes then acknowledges his defeat and asks Dionysus for mercy.<sup>88</sup> This leads to his physical transformation into a Bacchic river with winey waters,<sup>89</sup> but his admitted defeat does not bring the submission of the whole country. Though Dionysus menaces him with a powerful retaliation if he takes sides again with the Indians (27.176–185), he helps them by rescuing Deriades (28.212–213) and Morrheus (30.86–99). The Indians are finally defeated with the definitive punishment of their main symbols: Deriades drowns in the waters of his father, Hydaspes.<sup>90</sup>

Nonnus' Hydaspes is a twist on the tradition of the Homeric Scamander (*Il.* 21.205–327).<sup>91</sup> In the *Iliad*, nature, in the form of the Scamander, rebels against man-made destruction, whereas in the *Dionysiaca* the Hydaspes not only jeopardises the survival of the Bacchic army (23.162–224), but also he is about to start a rebellion which Ocean and Tethys might turn into a new and final deluge (280–320). The confrontation between Dionysus, son of Zeus, god of the sky and of all celestial entities (including the fire caused by lightning), and the Indians, children of the Earth (18.221, 22.273–284) and worshippers of Earth and Water (17.283b–285, 29.62b–67), reaches cosmic proportions, and is presented as a war of the elements sustain-

<sup>87</sup> 22.364–365, 380–383; 23.3–10, 76–112; 24.18–20.

<sup>88</sup> 24.7–67, esp. 7–9 (καὶ διερὴν παλάμην ὀρέγων οἰκτίρμονι Βάκχω / παιδὶ Διὸς πυρόεντι γέρον ἰάχησεν Ὑδάσπησ, / μῦθον ἀναβλύζων ἰκετήσιον ἀνθερεῶνος); see also 43.136–138.

<sup>89</sup> 25.277–280, 29.291–292, 39.40–52.

<sup>90</sup> 40.84–95, and references to his watery death in the mourning speeches of his wife and daughters (40.115–122, 135–154, 202–212).

<sup>91</sup> Explicit comparison of the two passages at *Dion.* 23.221–224. For a global analysis of how Nonnus administers the influence of the Homeric referent in Books 22–23 see Hopkinson and Vian, *Nonnos* VIII 75–78, 84–86, 88–92, 112–124, 128–129.

ing the universe. Dionysus proves his cosmic power over the elements by defeating Hydaspes by fire and turning his waters into wine.<sup>92</sup>

However, the cosmic tinge of the episode is toned down by the motivations of Hydaspes and Dionysus' speech to the river. As to the former, though an anonymous Indian complains that the Hydaspes is drowning his own people as no decent river would (23.79–103), Hydaspes is more preoccupied with the effect this affair is going to have on his reputation: he is ashamed to appear before Oceanus and Poseidon with his waters full of blood (24.18–20) and takes offence at seeing Bacchus and his army easily crossing him (23.165–191, esp. 168–169, 179, 186–187). He does not even mention that he has been manipulated by Hera, who, in her particular crusade against Dionysus, has provoked him to attack the Bacchic troops in order to stop the slaughter of the Indians (23.117–121).

Nor does Dionysus' response to the attack on his troops (23.226–251) play the cosmic key. He asks Hydaspes to control his waters for 'scientific' and mythological reasons:<sup>93</sup> his waters come from Zeus' clouds and he can punish him with drought and thunderbolt (226–231, 234–235), as he has done several times before with other rebels (Asopos, 232–233; Helios and Phaethon, 236–242; Eridanos, 243–251).

The power exercised by Dionysus over the Hydaspes highlights his power over nature: though he is a necessary element for balance in the cosmos, Dionysus needs to assert his own space by defeating other forces and to prove that he is their equal and merits being counted among the gods on Olympus. The presentation of the Hydaspes as one of Bacchus' archetypal enemies is particularly significant because, had Nonnus

<sup>92</sup> On Dionysus' power over the four elements see L. Miguélez-Cavero, "Espectáculos acuáticos en las *Dionisiacas* de Nono de Panópolis," in A. Quiroga (ed.), *Hiera kai logoi* (Zaragoza 2011) 193–229, at 216–222.

<sup>93</sup> Hopkinson and Vian, *Nonnos VIII* 121–122.

depended on human acclaim in the form of personifications of towns and regions to illustrate Dionysus' power as a god, he would have faced two dangers: 1) downgrading him to an emperor to whom personified cities and regions paid homage on his visit; or 2) upgrading him to a real pagan god with a true cult, which was unthinkable given how carefully Nonnus avoids references to cults of any kind.<sup>94</sup> In the same line of thought, the cosmic resonance of the confrontation between Dionysus/Zeus and Hydaspes/Oceanus is underexploited, and the Homeric foil of the episode, anchoring it safely in the epic tradition, justifies its inclusion in the *Dionysiaca* without resorting to allegorical readings.

b) Regions, towns, and mountains

Regions, towns, and mountains are seldom personified in the *Dionysiaca*, and, when they are, the references are too brief to include geographical features.<sup>95</sup> As with rivers, some mountains come to embody the region where they are situated (*pars pro toto*). This is the case with Cithairon of Boeotian Thebes (engrained in the mythical fabric of the ancient Greek world),<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> As thoroughly studied by F. Vian, "Les cultes païens dans les *Dionysiaques* de Nonnos," *REA* 15 (1988) 399–410, and "Théogamies et sotériologie dans les *Dionysiaques* de Nonnos," *JSAV* (1994) 197–233.

<sup>95</sup> Hellas (1.385: doubtful), Athens (24.239b–241: doubtful), Maionia (personification on Dionysus' shield [25.251], to indicate the location of the vignette; not personified in 33.253b–254, 35.128). With geographical features: 2.622–624, ἀλλὰ βαθυκρήμοισι περισφίγγουσα κολώναις / Σικελίη τρικάρηνος ὄλον Τυφῶνα δεχέσθω / οἰκτρὰ κονιομένοις ἑκατὸν κομόωντα καρήνοισ; 25.11–14a, Θήβη δ' ἑπταπύλῳ κέρασῳ μέλος, ὅττι καὶ αὐτὴ / ἄμφ' ἐμὲ βακχευθεῖσα περιτρέχει, οἶα δὲ νύμφη / μαζὸν ἐὸν γύμνωσε κατηφέος ὑψόθι πέπλου, / μνησαμένη Πενθῆος. See also the semi-human reactions of the Taurus (2.632–633) and Cithairon (46.265b–266). On the use of specially-charged details of topography as a means of personification of the city of Rome see Roberts, *AJP* 122 (2001) 533–563.

<sup>96</sup> 5.56–61, 355–356, 428; 9.74–75, 82–83; 10.92; 25.11–17; 44.84–88, 145–146; 45.36–39; 46.186, 198–199, 262, 265–268, 340–345. Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 35 (n.4: "le Cithéron, symbole du pays").

the Taurus, loosely referring to Cilicia,<sup>97</sup> and, more interestingly, Niobe transformed into a rock. The latter was a distinctive feature of Magnesia by Sipylus, in the valley of the river Hermus, but Nonnus uses it as a mobile referent to mean ‘somewhere in Asia Minor’.<sup>98</sup> A similar process operates in India, where Dionysus simply attacks a Troy-like, anonymous city at the mouth of the Indus which represents the whole territory.<sup>99</sup>

The limited presence of personified towns and regions in the poem implies a clear break from the world of Late Antiquity, in which they were generally present in everyday life: on coins and consular diptychs, where they paid homage to the emperor or important Imperial officials like consuls, in mosaics and textiles, as part of a variety of different iconographic formulas,<sup>100</sup> and in high-brow poetry (Claudian is particularly well known for this).<sup>101</sup>

This choice is a consequence of the internal chronology of the *Dionysiaca*, set in the hazy mythological past, when gods and eponymous heroes were still founding cities.<sup>102</sup> Thus, instead of

<sup>97</sup> 2.34–41, 684–685; 17.87–397 (battle of the Taurus—to be read with Gerlaud, *Nonnos* VI 127, 134; Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 165–166), 23.83–84; 34.188–192.

<sup>98</sup> 12.79–81 (Sipylus, in Phrygia), 130–132 (Sangarius and Niobe in Phrygia); 14.269–283 (the god passed the stream of Sangarius, passed the bosom of the Phrygian land, passed the mourning rock of Niobe); 15.374–375 (Sipylus); 48.406–408 (Sipylus), 424–429 (Phrygia), 454–457 (Sipylus). See Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 100–101, 148. After Callimachus: see Vian, *Nonnos* V 189, n. to 79–81.

<sup>99</sup> 27.145–166. See Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 286; Vian, *Nonnos* IX 127.

<sup>100</sup> See e.g. the representations of Rome and Constantinople analysed in G. Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma: Stadtpersonifikationen der Spätantike* (Zurich 1995), and provinces in J. Ostrowski, *Les personifications des provinces dans l'art romain* (Warszawa 1990). For Egyptian textiles see U. Horak, “Von Alexandria bis Panopolis,” in U. Horak (ed.), *Realia Coptica* (Vienna 2001) 37–52.

<sup>101</sup> As pointed out by Cameron, *Claudian* 273–278.

<sup>102</sup> 2.679–691, Cepheus found favour with the Cephenees of Ethiopia,



personifications of cities, we find cities presented as the product of the personality of their founder. Most relevant is the city of Beroe (Beirut), whose connection with the eponymous nymph is complete:<sup>103</sup> the references, from the very birth of the nymph, to the future of the city as the seat of the school of Roman law are frequent,<sup>104</sup> the physical shape of the city is described as responding to her body, and the intimate connection of the city with the sea is a consequence of her marriage to Poseidon.<sup>105</sup> In fact, had Dionysus married her, the city's topography would have been different, more continental

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Thasos went to Thasos, Cilix is king over the Cilicians, Cadmus will be king of the Cadmeians; 3.188–194, Dardanos and Dardania; 3.300–301, Aegyptus and Egypt; 3.365–369, Byzas; 17.385–397, Blemys and the Blemyes; Books 41–43, Beroe.

<sup>103</sup> Contrast the episode of Nicaea in Books 15–16. Dionysus founds the city in double celebration of the victory (νίκη) over the Indians and over the nymph (16.403–405, καὶ πόλιν εὐλάιγγα φιλακρήτω παρὰ λίμνη / τεύξε θεὸς Νικάϊαν, ἐπώνυμον ἦν ἀπὸ νύμφης / Ἀστακίης ἐκάλεσσε καὶ Ἰνδοφόνον μετὰ νίκην), and the foundation takes place, not immediately after the first battle with the Indians and the rape of the nymph, but when Dionysus has finally defeated the Indians (on which see Gerlaud, *Nonnos* VI 238, n. to 404b–405; D. Lauritzen, “À l’ombre des jeunes villes en fleurs: les *ekphraseis* de Nicée, Tyr et Beyrouth dans les *Dionysiaques*,” in P. Odorico and C. Messis [eds.], *Villes de toute beauté* [Paris 2012] 181–214, at 186–189). Cf. Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 316: “Il faut comparer le portrait de Nicaïa avec celui d’une autre éponyme, Béroè, pour comprendre à quel point Nicaïa est détachée de la ville qu’elle patronne. Le destin de Béroè est rappelé constamment alors qu’on oublie que Nicaïa n’est qu’une ville personnifiée.”

<sup>104</sup> Esp. 41.10–13, 159–184, 212–229, 271–272, 318–337, 389–398.

<sup>105</sup> 41.28–37, ἄλλα δὲ πὰρ πελάγεσσιν ἔχει πόλις, ἦχι τιταίνει / στέρνα Ποσειδάωνι, καὶ ἔμβρυον ἀνχένα κούρης / πήχεϊ μυδαλέω περιβάλλεται ὑγρὸς ἀκοίτης, / πέμπων ὕδατόεντα φιλήματα χεῖλεσι νύμφης / καὶ βυθίης ἀπὸ χειρὸς ὀμευνέτις ἠθάδι κόλπῳ / ἔδνα Ποσειδάωνος ἀλίτροφα πῶσα λίμνης / δέχνυται, ἰχθυόεντα πολύχροα δεῖπνα τραπέζης, / εἰναλίη Νηρήος ἐπισκαίροντα τραπέζῃ, / ἀρκύων παρὰ πέζαν, ὅπη βαθυκύμονος ἀκτῆς / μηκεδανῶ κενεῶνι Βορήιος ἔλκεται ἀλών. On the whole episode see Lauritzen, in *Villes de toute beauté* 199–209.

and mountainous, to reflect his influence.<sup>106</sup> A similar case is Tyre:<sup>107</sup> in the initial description the city, connected to the sea, is compared to a swimming girl,<sup>108</sup> and its physical distribution is later related to the ancestry of its inhabitants from Earthborn men (40.429–537) and nymphs punished by Eros for their chastity (40.538–573).<sup>109</sup>

Similar descriptive strategies, comparing topographic elements to (parts of) a body recur in Menander Rhetor's advice on how to praise countries, cities, and harbours,<sup>110</sup> which should not come as a surprise, as the episodes of Beroe and Tyre have long been considered to play upon elements of the genre of *patria* or local histories, written in verse in Late Antiquity.<sup>111</sup> This rhetorical connection with the contemporary

<sup>106</sup> 43.128–132 (Dionysus before the sea battle for the hand of Beroe), καὶ πόλιος τελέσας ἕτερον τύπον οὐ μιν ἐάσω / ἐγγυς ἀλός, κραναὰς δὲ ταμῶν νάρθηκι κολώνας / γείτονα Βηρυτοῖο γεφυρώσω βυθὸν ἄλμης, / χερσώσας σκοπέλοισιν ἀλὸς πετρούμενον ὕδωρ / τρηχαλή δὲ κέλευθος ἰσάζεται ὀξεί θύρσῳ. Dionysus says he fights both for the girl and for the city: 43.118–119.

<sup>107</sup> On Tyre see Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 224–254 (esp. 226–228, on the fountains); Lauritzen, in *Villes de toute beauté* 189–199.

<sup>108</sup> 40.319–326, νηχομένη δ' ἀτίνακτος ὁμοῖος ἔπλετο κούρη, / καὶ κεφαλήν καὶ στέρνα καὶ ἀχένα δῶκε θαλάσση, / χεῖρας ἐφαπλώσασα μέση διδυμάωνι πόντῳ, / γείτονα λευκαίνουσα θαλασσαίῳ δέμας ἀφρῶ, / καὶ πόδας ἀμφοτέρους ἐπερείσατο μητέρι γαίῃ, / καὶ πόλιν Ἐννοσίγαιος ἔχων ἀστεμφεῖ δεσμῶ / νυμφίος ὕδατοῖς περινήχεται, οἶα συνάπτων / πήχει παφλάζοντι περίπλοκον ἀχένα νύμφης.

<sup>109</sup> See esp. 40.436–439 (ὀππότε πηγαίησι παρ' εὐύδροισι χαμεύναις / ἡελίου πυρόντος ἰμασσομένης χθονὸς ἀτμῶ / τερψινόου ληθαῖον ἀμεργόμενοι πτερὸν Ὕπνου / εὐδὸν ὁμοῦ) and 570–573 (ὀπισθοτόνοιο δὲ τόξου / τριπλόα πέμπε βέλεμνα, καὶ εὐύδρῳ παρὰ παστῶ / Νηιάδων φιλότῃτη συνήρμωσεν νῆας ἀρούρης, / καὶ Τυρίης ἔσπειρε θεηγενὲς αἶμα γενέθλης). Earlier Dionysus has established a direct connection between the topography of the city and its founders and inhabitants: 40.423–427.

<sup>110</sup> Men. Rhet. 345.1–2, 346.6–7, 349.12–13, 351.4–6, 351.22–23, 351.30–352.1, 355.6–7. Note that the description of a city mixes the headings of countries and individuals: 346.27–31.

<sup>111</sup> See the detailed comparison of the *révits* of Nicaea, Tyre, and Beirut

world and puissance of both Beroe and Tyre in Nonnus' time illustrates well how Nonnus' world breaks into the apparently archaic cosmos of the *Dionysiaca*.

The presence of personifications of rivers, towns, and regions in late antique thought was so pervasive that they could not simply be brought in as such in an epic poem wanting to play a Homeric (archaic) game and referring to what was announced as an ancient episode. At the same time, they could be presented with a varied range of procedures and in different degrees of anthropomorphism. Nonnus' compromise was to present two towns to which he wanted to give the importance they had in his day, Beirut and Tyre, as reflecting the personality of their founders instead of simply personified *Tychai*. With rivers it was easier, since he could count on the Homeric episode of the Scamander as a proper epic antecedent with all the rhetorical blessings. The Homeric model of the Scamander is replayed in the episode of the Hydaspes with the cosmic resonances of an impending universal deluge and trivialised by the petty behaviour of the river, a strategy similar to the one employed for cosmic personifications.

Dionysus' earth is crossed by numerous rivers in different degrees of anthropomorphism, which at the same time come to represent their regions. Nonnus' overriding concern was not to describe a map, but to refer to an earth that was densely populated with natural elements endowed with their own will—a complex place, vaguely related to his readers' habitat, in which Dionysus should travel and assert his divine position. The looseness of the link between geographical reality and literary reference was patched up by flexible mythological lore. Thus the Hydaspes represented India but was only loosely attached to concrete points in its soil. The reader receives a clear image of him based on his anthropomorphic and iconographic features, his genealogy (son of the Ocean, father of Deriades), his importance for the Indians, and his Scamander-like role.

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with Men. Rhet. by Lauritzen, in *Villes de toute beauté* 181–214. More generally: Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie* 196–221 (Beroe), 224–250 (Tyre).

### *Conclusions*

Both the cosmic and the earthly frames of Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* benefit from the deployment of personifications. The personified markers of passing time (in particular Harmonia, Aion, and the Seasons) give an image of the world of the *Dionysiaca* as an orderly place yearning for immutability and at the same time for the advent of Dionysus in order to be complete. By making Dionysus (and his vine) a necessary element in the cosmic balance, Aion and the Seasons contribute to his characterisation as a god by birth, independently of his behaviour or martial feats.

Aion, Harmonia, and the Seasons emphasise a beyond-human view of the cosmos, more abstract and complex than Homer's, but lively details such as the descriptions of Harmonia as a lady of her home (41.288–310), of Aion as an old man yearning for retirement (7.22–28), and of the Seasons (11.485–521) as depicted in late-antique works of art and literature, provide less transcendent anchoring points for the narrative. These allegories of the cosmic forces upgrade the Dionysiac world in terms of its extraterrestrial presentation, embody epic roles sometimes assumed by the gods (especially Zeus), and do not have a concrete cultic presence in the poem or elsewhere.

From a literary point of view, the personifications and allegorical constructs of human action are, like the guiding principles of the universe, somehow connected with the early epic poems (both Homer's and Hesiod's), look forward to Callimachus, and are designed to suit the tastes of Nonnus' readers, if we are to judge by parallels in the literature of the long Imperial age.

The third section of this paper has dealt with personifications of geographical features. The chronological setting of the *Dionysiaca* at an archaic stage of the world, as well as the rhetorical and mythological status of rivers, has as a consequence that different degrees of personifications of rivers feature more prominently than the equivalent for towns and are preferred as symbols of regions. The most significant case is that of the

Hydaspes, presented in a human form and as a symbol of India. His confrontation with Dionysus acquires cosmic tinges which favour the presentation of Bacchus as a god (he subdues a powerful river), but are thwarted by the Homeric foil of the episode and, as happened with cosmic divinities, by the petty behaviour of the river. Hydaspes and other rivers endow the *Dionysiaca* with a timeless geographical frame. Personified towns are virtually non-existent in the poem, although Beroe and Tyre are described as physically bound to the bodies of their founders, thus providing a rhetorical connection with Nonnus' contemporary world.<sup>112</sup>

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