

BOOK REVIEW

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. Edited by HERBERT BANNERT and NICOLE KRÖLL. Leiden, NL: Brill, 2018. Pp. xviii + 436. Paperback, \$127.00. ISBN 978-90-04-34119-7.

The context of this volume of essays is clearly indicated by the full title, with the range of content being noted by the primary sub-title. The major part of the content is divided into three parts: Part I, *The Poetry of the Dionysiacs*, Part II, *The Poetry of the Paraphrase* and Part III, *Nonnus in Context*. Front matter includes a preface by the editors, lists of abbreviations and illustrations and a particularly fine resumé of the history of Nonnian scholarship since the 1930s by the dedicatee of the volume Professeur Émérite Pierre Chuvin, who sadly passed away on December 26 of 2016. This essay is a delight to read, adding as it does snippets of personality to names with which we are all familiar (e.g. 5, Werner Peek and Rudolph Keydell were friends and both students of Wilamowitz; 7, Francis Vian was an atheist). I cannot recommend this essay highly enough as an introduction to Nonnus, his oeuvre and how it has been studied and understood to date.

Michael Paschalis opens Part I with a wide-ranging study of the Cadmus narrative. Katerina Carvounis focuses on the Ampelus episode in her exploration of mythological *exempla*. Laura Miguélez-Cavero investigates Nonnus' use of three types of catalogue as structural elements; programmatic catalogues, those which catalogue somehow geographically and those which work chronologically. Simon Zunenelli posits a mythographic encyclopedia with entries arranged thematically and/or alphabetically as a *vade-mecum* to which our author referred in the course of composition. Camille Geisz explores Nonnus' use of similes and comparisons. Coffey's 1957 definition is her datum (I paraphrase: "comparisons are short and lack a finite verb, similes are longer and have a finite verb"), so I wonder if Ready's definition would have affected her conclusions significantly ("a defining feature of simile is dissimilarity and that of comparison is similarity," J. L. Ready, *Character, Narrator, and Simile in the Iliad*, Cambridge 2011, page 15). Character-text is studied in Berenice Verhelst's paper where she focuses on anonymous observers and

their reactions by comparing Nonnus' technique to similar one used by Homer, Apollonius Rhodius and Quintus Smyrnaeus. The first section concludes with Joshua Fincher's intriguing paper, which proposes a metapoetic reading of Books 12 and 41 concerning the Tablets of Harmonia.

Six papers constitute Part II. Jane L. Lightfoot in a very useful essay revisits the relationship between the *Dionysiaca* and the *Paraphrase*, drawing on models of interpretation previously employed; viz. syncretism, accommodationism, *Kontrastimitation* and the idea put forward by Enrico Livrea, namely, that elements of Christianity were already present in paganism and therefore the *Dionysiaca* was bound to reflect that. Fabian Sieber brings theological dogma to bear on interpreting the *Paraphrase* via a short and ultimately inconclusive essay on the words *theētókos* and *martus*. I say inconclusive less as a subjective criticism than as an objective statement of fact with respect to extant evidence. *Characterization of Persons and Groups of Persons in the Metabole* is the only joint contribution. Maria Ypsilanti and Laura Franco investigate how Nonnus describes people, and their research includes some fascinating evidence that Jews in general and Annas and Caiaphas in particular are treated less neutrally than they are in St John's Gospel. Filipino Doroszewski's contribution, *The Wise Mysteries of the Sacrificial Hour*, studies *John* 4.1-42 and how Nonnus rewrites it in *Par.* 4.89-118, showing that he is interested in providing exegesis by arguing cogently for a connection between this verse, Jesus' comment to his disciples before the Feast of Tabernacles (*John* 7.8) and the Crucifixion. In an in-depth study of *Par.* 7.143-48, Roberta Franchi shows that water and its associated imagery are symbolic of God's prerogative. However, since water is absolutely vital for all life regardless of religious leaning, one wonders how specific this discussion is to Christians and Nonnus' paraphrase; indeed, it may simply be a basic aspect or component of all religious interpretation. The final paper in the section is by the instigator of the "Nonnus of Panopolis in Context" brand, Konstantinos Spanoudakis. He studies the Staphylus/Botrys episode (*Dion.* books 18-20), its relationship with *Par.* 11 (his contribution to Prof. E Livrea's series of *Paraphrase* texts and commentaries was on this chapter), and in a fascinating new twist he stands the extant fragments of the Secret Gospel of Mark (SGM) alongside Nonnus' texts. Spanoudakis finds enough evidence that the *Dionysiaca* episodes "could" be modelled to some extent on the SGM, and he therefore feels confident enough to assert that the SGM is now less likely to be a modern forgery, as some scholars have claimed.

Part III opens with an outstanding contribution by Daria Gigli Piccardi, in which she suggests a new approach to investigating how the presence of Pindar

can be felt in Nonnus. Clearly differing generic metrical schemata preclude extensive direct verbal echoing, so the suggestion is to compare constructions of phrase and metaphor in modern theoretical terms while keeping an eye on ancient philology, especially that which we can still read in Eustathius' commentary on Pindar and other scholia. This very exciting proposition promises much valuable reward. Mary Whitby focuses on Christodorus and his poem describing statues in Constantinople and the extent to which it may be interpreted literally, as a true account of physical objects, or whether the poem should better be regarded as part of a literary tradition. Nestan Egetashvili provides us with a fascinating array of references to the Caucasus in Greek and other ancient languages. Two essays in German follow: Claudio de Stefano reassesses some epigrams from the Justinian era found in the Cycle of Agathias, concluding that we may be over-zealous in emending their texts in order to comply rigidly with Nonnus' metrical practice. Domenico Accorinti contributes a syncretism of what we know about the lives of Nonnus and Synesius of Crete—they both apparently converted to Christianity—and how they appear to use myth as a bridge to cross the ideological gap. David Hernández de la Fuente reminds us that we have no ancient *Life of Nonnus* before arraying the evidence which we do have and what has been imagined since, either as serious study or as pure literature in its own right. This paper sits comfortably alongside Pierre Chuvin's introduction. The final contribution is Robert Shorrock's refreshing multi-disciplinary approach to the Europa episode. He cleverly combines art criticism with a close reading to show that the 18th-century artist Noël-Nicolas Coypel had Nonnus' text in mind as he was painting *L'Enlèvement d'Europe*.

Back matter consists of a short but informative appendix by Michael Zach, which puts Panopolis in geographical, intellectual and social contexts from the 4th century to the present day; a large bibliography; an index of passages which the publisher admits is not exhaustive; an index of Greek words (which, at barely 60 entries, is clearly not exhaustive); and a six-page general index. Brill currently offers its new publications electronically as well as in hardback form, so one assumes that full-text searches will be easy and effective; however, review copies are "MyBook" paperbacks, which complement the e-book editions so sadly at the moment that only a fraction of the goodies within are on display in the indices. But what about the ability to satisfactorily search the hardback copies? On a positive note, no typo affected the reading pleasure unduly, while the fourteen plates (all but two naturally being associated with Shorrock's art criticism) added significantly to it.

The series of conferences continues apace, with Nonnus of Panopolis in Context III and IV having already taken place in Warsaw, September 2015 and Ghent, April 2018 respectively. We await their collected volumes with great enthusiasm.

PAUL MCKENNA

Independent scholar; paul2.mckenna@me.com