

**Homeric Emulation and Epic Reinvention in Nonnos' *Dionysiaka***

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Christopher David Parkinson

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### **Abstract**

The AD 5<sup>th</sup> century epic, the *Dionysiaka*, by Nonnos of Panopolis contains substantial allusions to earlier works, most notably the works of Homer. The following study examines elements in the *Dionysiaka* which emulate Homer and argues that the purpose of this emulation was to compete, and ultimately supplant, the Homeric Cycle. This work further argues that this goal was a result of the late period in which Nonnos wrote. It proposes that the *Dionysiaka* aims to outdo Homer's scenes and style mechanically but thematically it departs from Homer and attempts to reframe the traditional pagan epic to fit the culture of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Ultimately, this thesis argues that Nonnos was part of a failed movement in late antiquity to rectify no longer operative but still prevalent pre-Christian culture with Christian and Neo-Platonic ideas.

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## I. Introduction

In modern discussions about Epic, the works of Nonnos are rarely given more than a passing thought. Many of those who did early work in the study of Nonnos' *Dionysiaka* are surprisingly critical of him, often writing him off as being indulgent and unstructured. He is hailed as "unreadable as narrative" by T.P. Wiseman,<sup>1</sup> "long and very dull" by H.J. Rose,<sup>2</sup> and "so bad he's almost good" by J.W.B. Barns.<sup>3</sup> Nonnos has long been regarded as a failed "Egyptian imitator" of Homer. Robert Lind is particularly severe in his estimation, stating that, "Nonnos' chief fault is ridiculous excess," that he lacks "Homeric temperance,"<sup>4</sup> saying that, "It is, in short, a piece of barbarian literature and clearly shows the workings of the Oriental mind."<sup>5</sup>

More recent scholars have developed a less antagonistic tone towards Nonnos, with many praising his work as a treasure trove of unattested myths and a tightly structured composition.<sup>6</sup> The value of Nonnos' work is such that a student of the classics "cannot afford to neglect this belated product of the learned

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<sup>1</sup> Wiseman (1995) 47.

<sup>2</sup> Rose (1958) 156.

<sup>3</sup> West (1992) 19.

<sup>4</sup> Lind (1938) 61 & 59. Lind layers abuse upon abuse directed at Nonnos, questioning the presence of any vision, structure, or control on the part of the author. Among his most pointed statements are: "The extravagant imagery of Nonnos is that shown by every writer who to a large extent composes out of whole cloth and is incapable of observing details accurately or discriminating between effects" (59), "The Homeric technique of description is worlds away from that of Nonnos, and try as he may he cannot achieve anything like Homer's unforgettable effects, produced with a few strokes, a few well chosen words," (59) and that the *Dionysiaka* is only notable for "the humorless extravagance, the cold sensuality and cruelty, the urge towards a confused mysticism that characterize the work." (65).

<sup>5</sup> Lind (1938) 65.

<sup>6</sup> Shorrock (2001) 2.

fancy of Hellenized Egypt.”<sup>7</sup> In particular, the past 30 years have seen a significant increase in research and articles related to Nonnos. Though the amount of scholarship remains small in comparison to more notable authors, his works have begun to receive praise and acceptance for their own merits. Scholars such as Ronald Newbold have made great progress in reconstructing the psyche of the author and others, including Alan Cameron and Wolfgang Leibeshuetz, have made compelling arguments using what little biographical information is known about Nonnos and his believed association with Christianity.

The greatest hurdle scholars face concerning Nonnos is his engagement with other authors, and most specifically Homer. Nonnos, however, cannot be read in isolation as most of his meaning is derived from intertextuality; without the works of Homer there would be no Nonnos and without having knowledge of the authors which Nonnos engaged with, a great deal of his meaning is lost. Scholars in this field owe the most to Francis Vian, Neil Hopkinson, and Robert Shorrock for their work on Nonnos’ engagement with Homer. It was Vian who first introduced the idea that Nonnos was not merely poorly imitating Homer in a gaudily excessive manner, but rather trying to outdo Homer. This undeveloped idea, from a short article which Vian published in 1991,<sup>8</sup> was picked up by Hopkinson in a chapter of his 1994 book *Studies of the Dionysiaka of Nonnus* and

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<sup>7</sup> Rouse (1940) l. xix.

<sup>8</sup> This article, “Nonno ed Omero,” was initially given as an address at the University “Federico II” of Naples, before being published in “Koinonia.” It is unique because it directly addresses what Vian only suggests throughout his commentaries on the *Dionysiaka*, which he was in the midst of publishing at this time.

later by Robert Shorrock in his 2001 book *The Challenge of Epic*. Most recently Claudio De Stephani has published an article characterizing Nonnos' engagement with Homer as one of parody;<sup>9</sup> however the conclusion that Nonnos' engagement with Homer is simply a parodic one does not suffice. Nonnos is best described as agonistic with regard to Homer,<sup>10</sup> and this relationship remains insufficiently explored. This is particularly the case in terms of a number of the *Dionysiaka's* episodes which, when analyzed, provide striking evidence of Nonnos' attempts to outdo Homer. Additionally, since so very little study has been devoted to the construction of late written hexameter in comparison to oral epic, the intricacies of Nonnos' meter have never been a vehicle for furthering comparisons with Homer.

The purpose of this thesis has consequently grown out of two desires. The first is a wish to further the hypothesis of Vian with more specific examples of episodes not addressed by other authors; the second is to approach the text on a holistic level, synthesizing and building upon the work of other scholars to further the argument that Nonnos was not only attempting to surpass Homer but was succeeding.

The structure of this work, therefore, will be as follows: I will begin by addressing why Nonnos chose Dionysos as his hero; this will be followed by an analysis of the scope and major themes of the *Dionysiaka*. I will then examine

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<sup>9</sup> See De Stephani's article. "Homeric Parody in Nonnus."

<sup>10</sup> Despite much criticism of Nonnos as being "Un-Hellenic," Nonnos follows in a long tradition of competition and attempting to outdo one's predecessors. Take for example Herodotus' open antagonism with Hecataeus or Flavius Josephus' denouncement of previous historians.



direct references to Homer followed by wider textual analyses of a number of episodes from the *Dionysiaka* which attempt to mirror and surpass Homer. Lastly, I will then use the research of Robert Shorrock to make an argument that the overarching structure of the *Dionysiaka* is an attempt to outdo Homer. This thesis will not be a work of Homeric criticism, as it will only discuss Homer insofar as he relates to Nonnos' work.

## II. Why Dionysos?

Of the notable Greek gods, one can argue that Dionysos is the most underrepresented in Homer. Dionysos is mentioned only five times in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*,<sup>11</sup> and the only story related of him and his interactions with Lykourgos is hardly flattering.<sup>12</sup> The pending question is: why did Nonnos choose to write 48 books of Epic on a god who is associated primarily with drama and often excluded from the traditional 12 Olympians? Scholars have been remarkably silent on such a central question. One argument is that Dionysos is considered an unhomeric god and is regarded as out of place in the Homeric cycle and therefore ideal for an unrelated cycle.<sup>13</sup> Nonnos highlights this by focusing heavily on the episodes that imitate Homer yet ignoring many of the gods

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<sup>11</sup> *Hom. Il.* 6.132; *Hom. Il.* 6.135; *Hom. Il.* 14.325; *Hom. Od.* 11.325; and *Hom. Od.* 24.74.

<sup>12</sup> This story is a mere 13 line digression in Homer (*Hom. Il.* 6.130-143); it establishes that Thetis was one of Dionysos' nursemaids and that Lykourgos defeated him, but gives no suggestion that Dionysos triumphs eventually as Nonnos tells the story in books 20-21.

<sup>13</sup> Shorrock (2001) 26. It is part of Robert Shorrock's larger argument of structural consistency within the *Dionysiaka* that Nonnos was attempting to create a work which encapsulated a narrative on par with "the *whole* of the Trojan Cycle."

prominently featured by Homer. In doing so, Nonnos was able to centralize Dionysos throughout his work as paradoxically out of place.<sup>14</sup>

There are two other plausible factors which account for Nonnos' choice of hero. The first is that the 5th century AD was a transitional time which had both fully embraced Christianity and yet not found itself willing to part with paganism. Having a deep understanding of "pagan" myths remained a symbol of erudition in late antiquity and "moralized" mythological topics pervaded the visual and literary scene.<sup>15</sup> Well-educated Christians regularly wrote new narratives about myth. Classical works were re-read through a Christian lens or even repurposed to tell Christian stories.<sup>16</sup> In this milieu, it was not unusual for Dionysiac myth to be repurposed to tell the life of Christ,<sup>17</sup> and Nonnos was almost certainly a Christian. Nonnos, no doubt, used the triumph and ascension of the "new god" Dionysos as a metaphor for the triumph of Christianity over the old pantheon. As Shorrock would argue, it is also a triumph over the old cycle of reigning pagan

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<sup>14</sup> Miguélez Cavero (2009) 574. It is not that other gods are completely absent from the *Dionysiaka*, but rather they have very little agency in helping or hindering Dionysos during his journey. Cavero goes so far as to argue that Nonnos is attempting to undermine all of the traditional pagan pantheon of Olympians, except for Hermes because of his similarities to Christ. See Accorinti's article "Hermes e Cristo in Nonno" for further examination of this.

<sup>15</sup> Liebeschuetz (1995) 199.

<sup>16</sup> Even into the 6th c AD writers such as John Malalas and Choricius used pagan myths in their writings. Proclus, the Neoplatonist, drew moralizing Christian themes from Homer, and the story of Cupid and Psyche from the *Golden Ass* and centos such as the *Christus Patiens* of Gregory Nazianzus retold Biblical stories using lines from pagan poetry. For more details on this see Appendix 1.

<sup>17</sup> Liebeschuetz (1995) 199. There are a number of factors which link Dionysos and Christ; most notably, they are dying and reviving gods who are born from mortal women, followed by a coterie of disciples, rejected as divine in their homeland, and ascend to heaven. Both also share similar practices including a focus on the afterlife and the ritual eating and drinking of the body of the god (in the form of sparagmos/the eucharist).

literature.<sup>18</sup>

The second probable cause is that the literary world of Nonnos is one of illusion and changing forms. Dionysos, in late interpretations, by bridging the transition from animal to man to god, embodies the transcendence of the human soul from its bestial nature to its union with the divine.<sup>19</sup> It is the view of several scholars that Nonnos lives vicariously through Dionysos, blurring the lines between author and actor.<sup>20</sup> The fundamental conflict lies between Nonnos/Dionysos and Homer and his heroes (primarily Achilles). This conflict centers around superiority, with Nonnos viewing Achilles as a failed hero who does not achieve true immortality and Homer as a failed poet who told the wrong story.

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<sup>18</sup> Shorrock (2001) 27.

<sup>19</sup> This primarily Neo-platonic interpretation is supported by David Hernández de la Fuente. (Hernández de la Fuente (2011) 317-318). The different incarnations of Dionysos in the *Dionysiaka* which Hernández de la Fuente describes as reaching towards the Neo-Platonic unity is paralleled by figures in the Hindu tradition. While Vishnu is associated with different incarnations, Dionysos is most often syncretized with Shiva; this connection between the Greek and Hindu gods has been noted in relation to the *Dionysiaka* by Robert Lind and by Alain Daniélou in his book *Gods of Love and Ecstasy: The Tradition of Shiva & Dionysos, Omnipresent Gods of Transcendence*. The ancients themselves recognized this connection as early as the accounts of Alexander in India, describing him discovering Nysa and finding cults dedicated to “Dionysos” (most likely Shiva in reality) still there; Green (1974) 384.

<sup>20</sup> Shorrock (2001) 4-5.

### III: Setting a Larger Stage: Nonnos' World of Cosmic Flux vs. Homer's Static Deceptions

The proem of any highly constructed work such as the *Dionysiaka* is often the best source for discovering the intended scope of the author's work. Nonnos' introduction reveals his design to make Dionysos a hero far superior to the heroes created by Homer. While Homer opens with the anger of Achilles and the man of many turns, Odysseus, Nonnos opens with the loftier topics of gods and changes. He begins with the patronymic name of Zeus, Kronides, in what seems to be an allusion to the opening lines of Hesiod's *Theogony* (*Hes. Th. 4*), but instead of describing the birth of the natural world, Nonnos describes the birth of Dionysos, thereby suggesting that he is a deified personification of nature.<sup>21</sup> Dionysos' story begins when Zeus raises him, moist, from the fires, bringing forth the infant who is "a half-finished thing" (ἡμιτέλεστον, line 5). The imagery of the basic elements of fire and water, along with the formation of a living creature, resonates as a kind of micro-cosmology. This is further strengthened as Nonnos immediately compares this birth to Athena, another child of Zeus, who is described in birth as an "incredible unbegotten lump" (ἄσπορον ὄγκον ἄπιστον, line 9). This image further strengthens the idea that Dionysos' own birth is a process of matter

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<sup>21</sup> Newbold's article, "Some Problems of Creativity in Nonnus's *Dionysiaca*," deals with the uncomfortable relationship Nonnos seems to have with creativity and generative forces. Nonnos mirrors his version of Dionysos in that both figures flow with creative energy but both exist in the creative shadows of their respective fathers. The focus in the proem, and the poem as a whole, is not one of *original* creation but of changing the existing into new forms for a new era.

changing and coming into being, very like the cosmos itself coming out of chaos.<sup>22</sup> In a way Nonnos' choice of language describes Dionysos' birth as the birth of a universe; by doing so it renders Homer's heroes small and one-dimensional, especially in light of the fact that Thetis was rejected by Zeus as a partner and married off to the inconsequential mortal, Peleus. By all rights, Achilles *should* have been the son of Zeus, however this glory was stolen from him and consequently prevented him from reaching his full potential. Because Zeus denies his fatherhood to Achilles, this consequently keeps Homer from reaching the heights which Nonnos achieved by writing about Dionysos as the superior legitimate heir of Zeus.<sup>23</sup>

Dionysos is not an inert being but is described as “having a diversity of shapes” (ποικίλον εἶδος ἔχων, line 15) and “of a changing form” (εἶδος ἀμείβων, line 23). This metamorphic quality is so emphasized that Nonnos even invokes Proteus (*Nonn. D.* 1.14) to aid in telling the epic. In a challenge to even the most multifaceted of Homer's gods, Nonnos includes a list of forms into which Dionysos is able to transform (*Nonn. D.* 1.14-33). These forms (which include a serpent, a lion, a leopard, a boar, water, and a tree) happen to be the forms which Proteus takes in the *Odyssey* when Menelaos wrestles with him (*Hom. Od.* 4.456-

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<sup>22</sup> Despite scholarly debate as to whether Nonnos was able to read Latin, it seems almost unimaginable that Nonnos had not read a number of Latin sources- in particular Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Nonnos' propensity towards cosmic scale, inset mythological narratives, thematic focus on change, and genre fluidity are the most notable features which he shares with Ovid. This proem particularly highlights some Ovidian features. For more information on this see Eller's article, “Die Metamorphose bei Ovid und Nonnos.”

<sup>23</sup> This is much in line with what Nonnos himself says by suggesting that Thetis stole glory from Homer by having a son less worthy of an Epic than Dionysos (*Nonn. D.* 25.253-61).

9).<sup>14</sup> By doing this in the proem Nonnos effectively introduces Dionysos as a character more complex, multifaceted, and powerful than even Proteus and whose impact is on the scale of nature itself. Achilles' introduction in the *Iliad* is limited to being described as having “anger/wrath” (μῆνιν, *Hom. Il. 1.1*); furthermore, while Achilles brings “pains thousandfold upon the Achaeans” (μοῖρ’ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε, *Hom. Il. 1.2*), Dionysos brings wine as “the healer of human pain” (ἀνδρομέης παῖθόνες εἰσιν ἀνίης, *Nonn. D. 47.55*) which he regularly uses to unite, enlighten and remedy the human condition.<sup>24</sup> In comparison to the magnitude of Dionysos and his service to mankind as a whole, Achilles seems petty and undeveloped as a character.

This world of flux and change, however, seems inconsistent with Nonnos’ apparent discomfort with illusion and deception. Creating a narrative which is about primal creative forces as well as in itself an imitation of the first Epic generates what Newbold refers to as a concern for “the original and the replica.”<sup>25</sup> This causes a number of problems in that Nonnos’ world is filled with illusory imagery and heavily relies upon imitating the works of earlier authors. Dionysos himself, being a god of illusion and masks, uses wine to induce hallucinations and

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<sup>24</sup> Created from the blood of Ampelos (ἄμπελος literally being the grapevine), this life-giving substance is born from death. As with Icaros, who also dies to provide medicine to the world, this is another less than subtle nod to Nonnos’ Christian inclinations. See Spanoudakis’ article “Icarus Jesus Christ? Dionysiac Passion and Biblical Narrative in Nonnus’ Icarus Episode (*Dion. 47,1-264*)” for a fuller analysis of these themes. Concerning Dionysos’ usage of wine, the pain coming from death and strife are regularly healed by imbibing it in the *Dionysiaka*, most notably in the episode concerning the death of Staphylos in book 19.

<sup>25</sup> Newbold (2010b) 106.

yet is enraged when the veracity of his divine birth is questioned.<sup>26</sup> Despite this, Nonnos praises the “changing form” (εἶδος ἀμείβων, line 23) of his Dionysos while scorning Homer and his book for deceptiveness as well as his “many sided” (πολύτροπον) heroes.<sup>27</sup> Though fixated on the potential evils of mimesis, Nonnos uses his representations of deceptions in a manner which reveals a greater transcendent truth; specifically, Nonnos claims legitimacy by showing a figure who at the beginning of his poem can take on the illusory form of animals and by the end has transcended to the fully divine. In this, Nonnos and his Dionysos both use illusion as “a useful means of accessing the sacred and archetypal created by the Divine Artificer.”<sup>28</sup> Nonnos through his invented poem and Dionysos, through his ability to manipulate perception, teach about greater truths using accessible, didactic fantasy. This betrays Nonnos’ almost Neo-Platonic Christian philosophy;<sup>29</sup> Nonnos’ connections with Christianity are well documented and his epic can be seen as a platform for some of these ideas. Therefore, the *Dionysiaka* can be seen as not unlike the honey-rimmed cup of Lucretius’ philosophy,<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The wine is a double-edged sword, described as the “all-heal” of man’s woes as well as a dangerous weapon which can be used to destroy entire armies (as in Dionysos’ battle at the Hydaspes). Dionysos’ legitimacy, in an allusion to Euripides’ *Bacchae*, is questioned by Pentheus, who himself is taken in by Dionysiac illusion and killed.

<sup>27</sup> Even by the 5th century BC, the character of Odysseus came under scrutiny for his deceptiveness by authors including Sophocles, who depicts him as an untrustworthy figure in *Philoctetes*.

<sup>28</sup> Newbold (2010b) 89.

<sup>29</sup> Shorrock (2001), 23 and Liebeschuetz (1995), 198-204. For Nonnos’ connection to Christianity, see appendix 1; it was not uncommon in later antiquity to read classical texts as Neo-platonic allegories, for example Proclus Lycaeus’ reading of Homer (Lamberton (1986) 162-232).

<sup>30</sup> (*Lucr.* 1.936-7); continuing this metaphor, as opposed to religion as Lucretius was, he invoked Venus Genetrix (*Lucr.* 1.1) in the proem to *De Rerum Natura*- though, like Venus in this work or Psyche in *The Golden Ass*, it can be argued that Dionysos is a metaphor for Nonnos, and in the

delivering a greater and difficult message in a palatable and ornate wrapper. This illusion of narrative for Nonnos serves a didactic purpose which excuses its own poetic deceptiveness on a meta-narrative level. Within the narrative, Nonnos himself often describes wine, the agent of illusion, as “mind-waking” (ἐγερσίvoος)<sup>31</sup> and leading to a greater understanding rather than impairment through delusions.

The great irony in this is that Nonnos’ work, despite all its illusions, is designed to convey a greater and more legitimate truth than Homer’s narrative, which Nonnos claims to include false information, despite being the oldest and most respected core text of the pagan world.<sup>32</sup> Nonnos, however, addresses the issue of not writing his work before Homer by creating a narrative which happens before Homer or any other Epic for that matter. Shorrock explains this rationale by saying: “As a poem that is both pre-Homeric and pre-Apollonian, the

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context of the *Dionysiaka* is standing for the ascendancy of the human soul seeking to be joined with the divine.

<sup>31</sup> (*Nonn. D. 12.376, 37.673, 47.57, & 47.76*). Nonnos uses similar language in his *Paraphrase of the Gospel of St. John*, for a more complete analysis of the overlap of language between the two works see Livrea’s, “Towards a New Edition of Nonnus’ Paraphrase of St. John’s Gospel.”

<sup>32</sup> The line to which I am referring occurs in book 42 line 181, in which Nonnos disagrees on a relatively minor point with Homer but makes the shocking claim that “Homer’s book lied.” This section will be discussed in greater detail later in this work. Nonnos’ interpretation of Homer as untrustworthy resonates with Plato’s dim estimation of him and the poets in Book III and X of the *Republic* where it is ultimately concluded that they should be expelled from the ideal city. Neo-Platonic thinking in is almost certainly at work in the *Dionysiaka* which is not surprising considering the author’s Christianity, for more in depth information concerning this see Hernández de la Fuente’s article, “The One and the Many and the Circular Movement: Neo-Platonism and Poetics in Nonnus of Panopolis.”



*Dionysiaca* is thus able to claim a position of primacy at the head of the epic tradition.”<sup>33</sup>

In short, Nonnos proves his legitimacy by placing his narrative before the events of the *Iliad*, on a grander scale. The scale of his narrative is important because it proves his capacity as an author and the worth of his topic in comparison to Homer. Nonnos needed to do this to prove his legitimacy and especially his own competence, thereby dispelling the idea that his work- which aims to be greater- is not merely a lesser imitation of Homer.

#### **IV. Homer’s Muse Lied: Direct Invective Against Homer**

Homer is mentioned seven times throughout the *Dionysiaka*;<sup>34</sup> this is an honor which Nonnos pays to Homer alone despite being clearly well-read and drawing on a much larger variety of authors.<sup>35</sup> For the times Nonnos mentions Homer, it is in a critical tone.

From the very beginning lines of his epic, Nonnos invokes the Homeric epics. The first words, Εἰπέ, θεά immediately call to mind the ἔννεπε μοῦσα of the *Odyssey* mixed with the ἄειδε θεὰ of the *Iliad*. The first reference to Homer occurs in this proem<sup>36</sup> (*Nonn. D. 1.37*) in which Nonnos describes himself,

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<sup>33</sup> Shorrock (2001) 49.

<sup>34</sup> Newbold (2010a) 112. The *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* also supports this assertion.

<sup>35</sup> Most authors writing about Nonnos note the earlier sources from which he drew inspiration. The most succinct though not exhaustive source is Hollis’ 1976 article, “Some allusions to earlier Hellenistic poetry in Nonnus.”

<sup>36</sup> This proem, with its fixation on changes and a world in flux is far more Ovidian than Homeric in theme and scope. Like Ovid, Nonnos seems to place his narrative on a cosmic scale rather than

enthused to a frenzy in his work, taking up the regalia of Dionysos and rejecting

Homeric clothing (*Nonn.D. 1.34-38*):

Ἄξατέ μοι νάρθηκα, Μιμαλλόνες, ὠμαδίην δὲ  
νεβρίδα ποικιλόνωτον ἐθήμονος ἀντὶ χιτῶνος  
σφίγξατέ μοι στέρνοισι, Μαρωνίδος ἔμπλεον ὀδμῆς  
νεκταρέης, βυθίη δὲ παρ' Εἰδοθέη καὶ Ὀμήρῳ  
φωκάων βαρὺ δέρμα φυλασσέσθω Μενελάῳ.

Bring me the fennel, Mimallons! On my shoulders in place  
of the wonted kirtle, bind, I pray, tight over my breast a  
dapple-back fawnskin, full of the perfume of Maronian  
nectar; and let Homer and deep-sea Eidothea keep the rank  
skin of the seals for Menelaos.<sup>37</sup>

This scene does three things. First, it rejects the “customary chiton”-  
linking chiton (χιτῶνος), a word which is fairly frequently used in Homer,<sup>38</sup> with  
a form of the word “customary” (ἐθήμονος) which never occurs in Homer. In a  
wider context, the language here is presented in mockery of a Homeric arming  
scene but ripped from its traditional context and presented in a manner whereby  
Nonnos himself is being armed as if to do battle with Homeric tropes.

Second, if Homeric heroes, and particularly Odysseus, can be taken as  
bringers of culture and civilization then an animal skin (associated with a wild  
lack of civilization) seems to fly in the face of Homeric themes. If this is an  
arming scene mocking Homeric conventions then what Nonnos asks to be armed  
with is equally subversive, in particular the wine of Maron. This wine, produced

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the much smaller scope of the narrative within the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

<sup>37</sup> All accompanying translations of Nonnos are taken from W.H.D. Rouse's 1940 translation of the *Dionysiaka*, as this is the only English translation of the work.

<sup>38</sup> According to the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*'s word frequency tool there are 70 occurrences.

by a son of Dionysos, is the very wine Odysseus uses to trick the uncivilized Polyphemus. Wine is similarly weaponized in the *Dionysiaka* on a number of occasions including when Dionysos uses it to defeat an entire army of Indians in Book 15 and to have his way with the nymph Nicaea in Book 16. Despite the association of wine with cultivation and culture in the *Odyssey*, it is presented as a divine gift of love for humanity when it is given to Icarios in Book 47.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, despite this scene's heavy reliance upon Homer, it completely ignores his values and directly says this Dionysiac attire is preferable to that of Homer. Nonnos signals Homer's inferiority when he consigns to Homer (line 38) *φοκάων βαρὺ δέρμα* ("the rank skin of seals", which Menelaos wears in Book 4 of the *Odyssey*) instead of the "perfumed" (*νεκταρέης*) fawnskin of Dionysos which Nonnos wears. While Shorrock argues that this reference indicates that Nonnos sees Homer as deceptive,<sup>40</sup> it also seems to present a Homeric hero in a very unflattering light, shabbily dressed and having to force Proteus to help him. This would be less consequential if not for Proteus being the only named deity invoked in Nonnos' proem as a *willing* aid to Dionysos (*Nonn.D.1.14*). Nonnos reaffirms his rejection of this Homeric model later when he says, "Do not accept his seal skins" (*Nonn. D. 42.400*), seal skins which he describes as foul and, "breathing the filthy stink of the deep" (*Nonn. D. 42.399*). To make the contrast even more striking, Nonnos then goes on to describe all the benefits of accepting

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<sup>39</sup> This episode itself seems to mock the gift of cultivation which Demeter grants to Triptolemus (see *Homeric Hymn 2 To Demeter*). Nonnos goes so far as to say that the gift of wine was superior to that of grain cultivation, *Nonn. D. 47.51*.

<sup>40</sup> Shorrock (2001) 118.

Dionysos instead.

The next reference to Homer occurs in Book 13, line 50, where Nonnos begins a lengthy imitation of Homer's catalogue of ships by cataloguing all the contingents in Dionysos' army. Originally Homer calls upon the Muses (*Hom. Il.* 2.484) to help him tell of the fleet, while Nonnos rather curiously calls on Homer himself to report on this army. Nonnos has created an army so immense that he indulges himself in over 600 lines to recount it, whereas Homer uses barely more than 350. Later, in Book 25, Nonnos provides yet another description of Dionysos' army, bragging that this army is the greatest that had ever been assembled and that "No such army came to Ilion, no such host of men." (*Nonn. D.* 25.22-8). Not only is Nonnos outdoing the thousand ships of Homer by extension he also has Dionysos outdo Agamemnon by being the leader of a bigger army as well.

It is Book 25 of the *Dionysiaka* which contains the largest number of direct references to Homer; it begins with another invocation to the Muses and then says (*Nonn. D.* 25.8-9):

...τελέσας δὲ τύπον μιμηλὸν Ὀμήρου  
ἕστατον ὑμνήσω πολέμων ἔτος...

I will make my pattern like Homer and sing the last year of the war

But Nonnos calls upon Homer twice more in the same book (*Nonn. D.* 25.264-70):

ἀλλά, θεά, με κόμιζε τὸ δεύτερον εἰς μέσον Ἴνδῶν,  
 ἔμπνοον ἔγχος ἔχοντα καὶ ἀσπίδα πατρὸς Ὀμήρου,  
 μαρνάμενον Μορρῆι καὶ ἄφροني Δηριαδῆι  
 σὺν Διὶ καὶ Βρομίῳ κεκορυθμένον: ἐν δὲ κυδοιμοῖς  
 Βακχιάδος σύριγγος ἀγέστρατον ἔχων ἀκούσω  
 καὶ κτύπον οὐ λήγοντα σοφῆς σάλπιγγος Ὀμήρου,  
 ὄφρα κατακτείνω νοερῶ δορὶ λείψανον Ἴνδῶν.

Then bring me, O goddess, into the midst of the Indians again, holding the inspired spear and shield of father Homer, while I attack Morrheus and the folly of Deriedes, armed by the side of Zeus and Bromios! Let me hear the Syrinx of Bacchos summon the trumpet in Homer's verse, that I may destroy what is left of the Indians with my spear of the spirit.

As cordial as this appears, book 25 reveals both some of the most direct aggrandizement of the worth of his own work as well as the most damning criticism of Homer's.<sup>41</sup> The presence of a second invocation and proem at book 25 begins what Shorrock refers to as the “*Indiad*” section of the *Dionysiaka*.<sup>42</sup> While, structurally, it is most tempting to believe that Nonnos uses the first half of his epic to tell an *Iliad* of sorts and the second an *Odyssey*, books 25-40 most closely mirror the *Iliad*, with books 1-24 corresponding to pre-Trojan war stories from the Homeric Cycle and books 41-48 telling the story of Dionysos' *Odyssey*; Nonnos' overarching structure will be analyzed in greater detail below.

Nonnos follows his opening claim to sing of the war, by devoting most of the first 252 lines to discussing how Dionysos is superior to the non-Homeric

<sup>41</sup> Vian (1990) 11. Vian affirms that the emulation of and references to Homer in Book 25 betray rivalry.

<sup>42</sup> Shorrock (2001) 67. Shorrock outlines the relation of books between the *Dionysiaka* and the *Iliad* as such: *D.* 25= *Il.* 1, *D.* 26= *Il.* 2, *D.* 27= *Il.* 3, *D.* 29= *Il.* 4-5, *D.* 30= *Il.* 6-8, *D.* 31-35= *Il.* 14-15, *D.* 36= *Il.* 20, *D.* 37= *Il.* 23, *D.* 39= *Il.* 21, and *D.* 40= *Il.* 22-24.

heroes Perseus and Herakles. Before returning to the narrative of the Indian Campaign, Nonnos reaffirms the superiority of his narrative by saying how Homer's Muses would have done better to sing of Dionysos than Achilles (*Nonn. D. 25.253-61*):

παμφαῆς υἱὲ Μέλητος, Ἀχαιίδος ἄφθιτε κῆρυξ,  
 ἰλήκοι σέο βίβλος ὁμόχρονος ἠριγενεΐη:  
 Τρωάδος ὑσμίνης οὐ μνήσομαι: οὐ γὰρ εἴσκω  
 Αἰακίδῃ Διόνυσον ἢ Ἴκτορι Δηριαδῆα.  
 ὑμαήσειν μὲν ὄφελλε τόσον καὶ τοῖον ἀγῶνα  
 Μοῦσα τεῆ καὶ Βάκχον ἀκοντιστῆρα Γιγάντων,  
 ἄλλοις δ' ὑμνοπόλοισι πόνους Ἀχιλῆος ἔῃσαι,  
 εἰ μὴ τοῦτο Θέτις γέρας ἤρπασεν. ἀλλὰ λιγαίνειν  
 πνεῦσον ἐμοὶ τεὸν ἄσθμα θεόσσυτον

O brilliant son of Meles,<sup>43</sup> deathless herald of Achaia, may your book pardon me, immortal as the dawn!... Your Muse ought to have hymned so great and mighty a struggle, how Bacchus brought low the Giants, and ought to have left the labors of Achilles to other bards, had not Thetis stolen that glory from you. But breathe into me your inspired breath to sing my lay

This passage undermines Homer thoroughly. It describes Homer as “shining” (παμφαῆς) and “deathless” (ἄφθιτε); both words are used in Homer and carry the connotation of Achilles, who is often described with such terms. While Homer’s epithet of choice is regularly δῖος, he is also described as παμφαίνων (*Hom.II.19.398*) and ἄφθιτον is famously connected to the “undying glory” (κλέος

<sup>43</sup> Graziosi (2002) 75. The linking of Homer with the Meles- a river near Smyrna- dates at least back to the 7th c BC. This exact phrasing, however, Nonnos seems to be lifting from Hesiod. The intent is perhaps to remind the reader that Homer, like Nonnos was not from Greece proper.

ἄφθιτον) which Achilles pursued. And yet, by Nonnos' own admission, Achilles is a failed hero who does not attain the apotheosis which Dionysos achieves by the end of his epic and is not even counted among the heroes which Nonnos has just said are inferior to Dionysos. By extension, the glory of Homer is diminished, and he is left with having his agency stripped away from him by Thetis, resulting in a poem which should have been left to lesser poets about an inferior hero. While Achilles is not traditionally considered a failed hero, Vian notes that Nonnos creates a positive syncretism of Dionysos with Perseus and Herakles as examples of successful heroes,<sup>44</sup> while at the same time creating an intentional distance with the *Iliad* and Achilles.<sup>45</sup> Because the world of Nonnos is one of fluid identity and syncretism,<sup>46</sup> Nonnos not only blurs the lines between his own identity and that of Dionysos but also transfers the perceived failure of Achilles on to Homer, effectively attempting to exclude Achilles from a place among the heroes and Homer from his seat as the greatest poet.

The next reference to Homer occurs in book 32 and much like the

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<sup>44</sup> Nonnos' criticism of Achilles might find its root in book 11 of the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus speaks with Achilles in the underworld and finds him weeping and dissatisfied with his afterlife (*Hom. Od.* 11.466-504). In comparison with Achilles' morose wanderings in oblivion, Herakles is depicted as contentedly dining "at the table of the gods" with a divine bride (*Hom. Od.* 11.601-604). Herakles is a natural model for the Dionysos of Nonnos as he achieves godhood through great deeds, and having had the mortal part of him burnt away, ascends to heaven in a manner not dissimilar from the way Dionysos ascends to Olympus (see Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*). Perseus is somewhat more difficult. While he exhibits all of the traits of an archetypal hero, including divine birth, great deeds, successful homecoming, and hero cults, there is only one extant (albeit late and obscure) mention of Perseus' death (Pseudo-Hyginus, *Fabulae* 244). Modern readers are therefore left uncertain whether Nonnos considered him to be a hero who achieved godhood. Further complicating the situation, Nonnos, although praising Perseus in book 25, has him attack Dionysos and his retinue in book 47, killing Ariadne (*Non.D.* 47.665-666).

<sup>45</sup> Vian (1990) 11.

<sup>46</sup> Shorrock (2001) 5.

previous references, invokes Homer (*Nonn.D.* 32.184-5):

...Ὀμηρίδες, εἶπατε, Μοῦσαι,  
τίς θάνε, τίς δούπησεν ὑπ' ἔγχει Δηριαδῆος

Oh ye muses of Homer! Tell me who died, who fell to the spear of  
Deriades!

While not out of character to invoke Homer or the Muses, it is odd for Nonnos to call upon them for an event which happened two generations before Homer's epic although it was clearly inspired by events which happened long after Homer lived.<sup>47</sup> Nonnos' constant calling upon Homer therefore seems out of place, especially since the final callout to Homer supports the earlier assertion that Nonnos considers Homer to be deceptive<sup>48</sup> (*Nonn. D.* 42.178-181):

πάντων γὰρ κόρος ἐστὶ παρ' ἀνδράσιν, ἠδέος ὕπνου  
μολπῆς τ' εὐκελάδοιο καὶ ὀππότε κάμπτεται ἀνήρ  
εἰς δρόμον ὀρχηστῆρα: γυναιμανέοντι δὲ μούνῳ  
οὐ κόρος ἐστὶ πόθων: ἐψεύσατο βίβλος Ὀμήρου.

For men can have enough of all things, of sweet sleep and  
melodious song, and when one turns in the moving dance-  
but only the man mad for love never has enough of his  
longing; Homer's book did not tell the truth.

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<sup>47</sup> Dionysos' Indian campaign does not explicitly come into the literature or iconography about Dionysos until the Roman period. Furthermore, the battle described here occurred at the Hydaspes River, a river where Alexander the Great did battle during his Indian campaign. It is widely accepted that Nonnos had no personal knowledge of India but rather lifted his place names, descriptions, and even people (included Deriades) from accounts of Alexander the Great. For more information about Nonnos, Alexander and India see appendix 2.

<sup>48</sup> Shorrock (2001) 118. Shorrock bases his arguments around Homer/Menelaos having to disguise themselves in order to accomplish their goals whereas Nonnos/Dionysos are able to transcend without lies. For a larger discussion of deception in Homer see Louise Pratt's book *Lying and Poetry from Homer to Pindar: Falsehood and Deception in Archaic Greek Poetics*. This argument does not, for me, hold firmly because Dionysos uses illusions to manipulate and defeat other characters in the *Dionysiaka*.



Given the Greco-Roman system of literature, education, and history which so heavily relied on Homer, and indeed Nonnos' invocation of Homer, it is a striking claim that Homer was wrong and his book lied (ἐψεύσατο).<sup>49</sup> Nonnos frames his narrative between two assertions of Homer's deceptiveness and inferiority and then calls upon his name in the middle of his poem to draw attention to Homer at moments when he most imitates and outshines him.

Nonnos' ambitions are quite clear. Due to the rich Homeric allusion and the length of the work it is clear that Nonnos is following in the footsteps of "Father Homer" (*Nonn. D.* 25.265), but the references to Homer feign fealty and reveal a wish to beat the master at his own game.<sup>50</sup> Nonnos was, in part, successful as his poem was quite popular during the 5th and 6th centuries.<sup>51</sup> Nonnos sought to outdo his rival in three ways. The first was length: Nonnos intentionally made the *Dionysiaka* as long as both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined,<sup>52</sup> even though it is only one poem and there is some discussion as to

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<sup>49</sup> The lie to which Nonnos is referring is located at *Hom. Il.* 13.636-9: "Since there is satiety in all things, in sleep, and lovemaking, in the loveliness of singing and the innocent dance. In all these things a man will strive sooner to win satisfaction than in war; but in this the Trojans cannot be glutted." Nonnos might, in fact, be referring to love as Platonic "divine madness" and the centrality of love as a result of his almost certain Christianity (See Cameron's *Wandering Poet* for more on Nonnos' Christianity). The language here is much too carnal for Christianity, however, and in all likelihood, is rather as Newbold argues (See "Fear of sex in Nonnus' *Dionysiaka*"), a result of Nonnos' own repressed fixation on sexuality.

<sup>50</sup> It would not be stretching credulity to imagine Nonnos/Dionysos trying to transcend their respective fathers, Homer/Zeus. Not only is the triumph of a new generation over an older one well established in myth but almost always associated with the beginning of a new age. For more on Nonnos/Dionysos' strained relationships with their "fathers" see Newbold's article, "Some Problems of Creativity in Nonnus' *Dionysiaka*".

<sup>51</sup> Shorrock (2001) 20. Nonnos was so popular in his time that it is possible to identify an entire "Panoplian School" of imitators who followed the conventions of his construction methods (Lind (1934) 71).

<sup>52</sup> Shorrock (2001) 8. The division of the *Dionysiaka* is into 48 books, the same number as the

whether Nonnos actually completed his poem.<sup>53</sup> The second is scale: where Homer is focused on human struggles and failings, Nonnos focuses on a demigod<sup>54</sup> achieving his godhood and makes all of the battles bigger, the heroes stronger, and the stakes higher. Third, Nonnos follows in the footsteps of the Alexandrian school of authors such as Callimachus and Apollonius, and, as a result, relies on rich allusions to other authors to prove his own pedigree as an author.<sup>55</sup> This was so well received that Robert Lind credits Nonnos with beginning a literary movement of authors writing in the same referential style as Nonnos.<sup>56</sup> The result is a poem which relies on Homer above all other literary

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total number of books in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Despite the *Dionysiaka* being only 20,426 lines, 7,377 less than the cumulative 27,803 lines of Homeric epic (15,693 for the *Iliad* and 12,110 for the *Odyssey*), it is still the longest *single* extant work of epic from Greco-Roman antiquity. While the 8th c BC Sanskrit Epic the *Mahabharata* is longer, at 200,000 verses, it is unlikely that Nonnos knew of it. Based on the frequent inaccuracies Nonnos contains regarding India, scholars are fairly unanimous in their belief that Nonnos had limited knowledge of the land or its culture. There is only one other Greco-Roman work of Epic which is known to have been longer, a 60 book epic by Pisander of Laranda from the 3rd century AD (Shorrock (2001) 19).

<sup>53</sup> Keydell (1936) 910.60-911.30. The argument is less that Nonnos intended to write more books to this epic, since the final apotheosis of Dionysos in book 48 makes a reasonable end point to Nonnos' narrative; instead it is believed that Nonnos might not have completed editing and adding to the content of each book. In particular, book 39 seems less polished and less well meshed with the rest of the work, especially in comparison to the earlier books.

<sup>54</sup> While Achilles is born from a goddess, Nonnos treats him as failed in comparison to figures such as Herakles and Dionysos who complete their ascension to Olympos. Both Herakles and Dionysos survive death completely, and in so doing have the mortal part burnt away, leaving only the divine, whereas Achilles died from his mortal heel. While Dionysos is usually depicted as a full god in most myths, Nonnos depicts him still as a child coming into his full divinity.

<sup>55</sup> See Hollis' article "Some Allusions to Earlier Hellenistic Poetry in Nonnus" as well as Rose's "Mythological Introduction" to Rouse's 1940 edition of the *Dionysiaka*, vol. I, pg. x-xi; Understanding the full extent of Nonnos' knowledge of and allusion to earlier authors is impossible as a result of not having all of the texts which he was likely alluding to. Even the study of Nonnos' relationship to extant authors has proven too daunting for any exhaustive work to be produced on the subject. That Nonnos was inspired largely by the conventions of Hellenistic poets such as Callimachus and Euphorion is evident however.

<sup>56</sup> The allusions to other authors are well documented by authors such as Vian and therefore are not in need of further examination in this work. With regard to this "Nonnian School" of authors such as Kolouthos and Tryphiodoros, Lind and Leibesheutz have stated that the language and form of their hexameters, mimic those of Nonnos; for an analysis of the meter of Nonnos see chapter 4

sources and systematically overachieves in every manner in order to outshine its literary ancestor and rival.

## V. Episodes Modeled on and Surpassing Homer

The most apparent allusions to Homer are in the scenes which Nonnos imitates and repurposes to fit the life of Dionysos. While these scenes are often in different contexts from those of Homer, the unifying trait of each is that the traditional Homeric context is undermined and the general scale is increased. While it has been long observed that the language of Nonnos is on a grander scale than Homer, it has not been meaningfully analyzed until recently.<sup>57</sup> The idea that these scenes are related to Homer is not new, with many authors making note of related scenes and language directly borrowed from Homer. This information, however, only existed as scattered references until Francis Vian produced his commentaries are the most exhaustive sources for Homeric allusion in Nonnos. As a result, there is a lack of analysis regarding the Homer-Nonnos relationship in his commentaries. In truth, there are too many references to examine all of them in a work of this length; therefore this study is focused on examining a selection of episodes including: the story of Ampelos, three stories of competitions (Ampelos, Staphylos, and Opheltes), the Lycurgus episode, a number of elements

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of this work.

<sup>57</sup> Lind (1938) 61: Lind notes battle scenes in Nonnos as “overdone” in comparison to Homer and Lind (1935a) 18: describes the ekphrasis of the palace of Staphylos as being “straight out of the Arabian Nights,” although he fails to note the scene’s relation to Homer’s description of the palace of Menelaus, a comparison which has been noted by Riemer Faber in his article “The description of Staphylos' Palace (*Dionysiaka* 18.69-86) and the principle of ΠΟΙΚΙΛΙΑ”.

from the Indian Campaign (including the use of Iris as a divine messenger, the Catalogue of Armies, arming scenes, the ekphrasis of Dionysos' shield, warfare and the battle with Hydaspes), and finally the inclusion of Achilles' grandfather, Aiakos.

### A. Dionysos and Ampelos

While not found within the texts of Homer, the childhood of Achilles was well attested in the Homeric cycle.<sup>58</sup> His childhood in which he was raised in the wilderness dressed as a female and where he meets his closest friend, Patroclus, is closely mirrored by a long bucolic section of the *Dionysiaka* outlining Dionysos' youth in books 10 through 12.<sup>59</sup>

This section begins by setting up Dionysos and Ampelos as boyhood friends and lovers, which invites an immediate comparison to Achilles and Patroclus. Although it is not explicitly stated in the *Iliad* that Achilles and Patroclus were lovers, later Greeks interpreted their relationship in this way.<sup>60</sup> Their relationship, and their childhood together, is mentioned by the ghost of Patroclus in the *Iliad* (*Hom. Il. 23.83-6*):

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<sup>58</sup> In particular in the *Cypria* of Stasinus although there are a number of other sources outside the Homeric Cycle, most notably Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* (see Book 3 chapter 13).

<sup>59</sup> Shorrock (2001) 55.

<sup>60</sup> Whether they are lovers becomes an important point of argument in Plato's *Symposium*; whether Homer intended them to be lovers is a source of scholarly debate. For the purposes of this argument, however, it is reasonable to assume that the prevailing view at the time of Nonnos would be that Achilles and Patroclus were lovers and that Nonnos would have written based on this supposition.

μη ἐμὰ σῶν ἀπάνευθε τιθήμεναι ὅστε' Ἀχιλλεῦ,  
 ἀλλ' ὁμοῦ ὡς ἐτρέφημεν ἐν ὑμετέροισι δόμοισιν,  
 εὐτέ με τυτθὸν ἔοντα Μενοίτιος ἐξ Ὀπόεντος  
 ἤγαγεν ὑμέτερόνδ'...

Do not let my bones be laid  
 apart from yours, Achilleus,  
 but with them, just as we  
 grew up together in your  
 house, when Menoetius  
 brought me there from  
 Opoeus when I was little...<sup>61</sup>

Similar to Achilles' and Patroclus' relationship, Nonnos elaborates on the Dionysos' youth and his impassioned infatuation with Ampelos. As a foreshadowing of Ampelos' death, Dionysos goes through a lengthy prayer to his father that he may not lose his lover (*Nonn. D. 10.287-320*). The supplication of a hero to his divine parent calls to mind supplications Achilles makes to his mother (*Hom. Il. 1.351-413* and *Hom. Il. 18.79-127*), where he first complains that Zeus neither honors nor aids him and then laments the loss of his lover.<sup>62</sup> While Achilles spends a great deal of his time in his prayers complaining about how dissatisfied he is with his lot in life, Dionysos' prayers are much more positive in tone. He praises Zeus for his fortune in having a lover as lovely as Ampelos and despite Ampelos' death, Dionysos counts his resurrection as a vine to be a gift from his father, saying: “Zeus gave to Phoibos the prophetic laurel, red roses to the rosy Aphrodite, the green-leaf olive to Athena Greyeyes, corn to demeter, vine to Dionysos” (Φοίβῳ Ζεὺς ἐπένευσεν ἔχειν μαντώδεια δάφνην, καὶ ρόδα

<sup>61</sup> The translations of Homeric passages are taken from Richard Lattimore's translations.

<sup>62</sup> The second prayer which Achilles makes is a direct result of Zeus denying part of a prayer which Achilles makes to him (*Hom. Il. 16.231-257*)- notably that Patroclus will survive.

φοινίσσοντα ῥοδόχροϊ Κυπρογενεΐη, γλαυκὸν Ἀθηναίη γλαυκώπιδι θαλλὸν ἐλαίης, καὶ στάχυας Δήμητρι, καὶ ἡμερίδας Διονύσῳ, *Nonn. D.12.110-113*). That Dionysos maintains a positive relationship with his father and receives the vine<sup>63</sup> as a result of this relationship shows that he has greater favor from Zeus than Achilles. This reminds the audience that not only is Achilles not the son of Zeus but that he lacks his support and approval and therefore the opportunity to achieve godhood.<sup>64</sup>

During his prayer, Dionysos references the stories of Hyacinthus and Ganymedes, two other famous, attractive boys who were beloveds (ἐρόμενοι) of the gods, implicitly drawing a comparison between them and Ampelos. Hyacinthus was killed by Zephyrus, the same god who helped light the fire of Patroclus' funeral pyre (*Hom. Il. 23.192-211*). The accounts of Ganymede in both Homer and Nonnos are linked;<sup>65</sup> like Homer, Nonnos refers to him using a form of οἶνοχοεῦω (“wine-pouring” *Hom. Il. 20.234* and *Nonn. D. 10.315*), which takes

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<sup>63</sup> If this episode is analysed under a Christian lens, Dionysos prayer may be seen as analogous to Christ's prayer in Gethsemane, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (*Matthew 26:39*). Dionysos does not want to accept the bitter fate of Ampelos' death but trusts his father. Through the price of death and resurrection greater life is born in the form of the vine which becomes the source of life-giving “all-heal” (ἄκεσσιπόνιοι, *Nonn. D. 7.86*) and “no-sorrow” (ἄπενθέα, *Nonn. D. 7.87*) wine. Much in the same way that Christ proclaims that, “I am the vine” (*John 15:5*) and that wine represents blood “which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (*Matthew 26:28*), Ampelos' blood is spilled for rebirth and salvation for all who accept the sacred dances of Dionysos.

<sup>64</sup> If one is to accept that Nonnos was attempting to set up Dionysos as the harbinger of a new era in heaven, replacing that of Zeus, then one must recall that Zeus rejected Thetis as his betrothed from fear of having a son strong enough to replace him. In this manner, Nonnos' Dionysos fulfilled the role which Achilles fell short of just as Nonnos is hoping to fulfill a role which he seems to suggest Homer has fallen short of. Furthermore, much of what Zeus does to help Achilles is prompted by Thetis' involvement with Zeus and her intercession on behalf of her son.

<sup>65</sup> Lind (1938) 58. Lind suggests that Nonnos' inclusion of Ganymede is presented, “for no reason whatever”; Lind regularly sees Nonnos' details to be functionless ornamentation rather than meaningful allusion.

on extra significance when placed in the context of Dionysos and his wine-producing vine (ἄμπελος). Furthermore, Homer describes him as, “godlike Ganymedes who was the loveliest born of the race of mortals,” (ἀντίθεος Γανυμήδης, ὃς δὴ κάλλιστος γένετο θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων, *Hom. Il. 20.232-3*) but Nonnos goes beyond this providing a lengthy section (*Nonn. D. 10.196-216*) in which Dionysos praises Ampelos as being surely of divine blood and then flatters him by saying, “Lovely Ampelos outshines Ganymedes, he has a brilliancy in his countenance more radiant- the Tmolian beats the Idaian!” (φαεινότεροιο φέρων ἀμάρυγμα προσώπου Ἄμπελος ἡμερόεις Γανυμήδεος εἶδος ἐλέγχει: Τμῶλιος Ἰδαίου πέλε φέρτερος, *Nonn. D. 10.317-8*). In no way could Nonnos be less subtle in saying that Dionysos is superior. He is superior in choosing lovers (so much so that his lover trumps the lover Zeus takes on in the *Iliad*) and most certainly outdoes Achilles. This association cannot be ignored since Ganymedes, a Trojan, again calls the reader's attention back to the Homeric Epics.

The premature death of Ampelos, like Patroclus, serves as an impetus for Dionysos to spread the newly created salve for human pain- wine.<sup>66</sup> While the death of Patroclus provokes Achilles' wrath which ultimately leads to mass destruction and his own demise, Ampelos' death initiates his rebirth. Through love, he is then transformed into all-healing wine<sup>67</sup> and results in the mission of Dionysos to spread this healing to all men. Dionysos' campaign, despite being

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<sup>66</sup> Shorrock (2001) 59.

<sup>67</sup> Lind refers to the invention of wine in the context of “a panacea for grief” as being in line with the “characteristic stupidity” of Nonnos' world. Lind (1938) 62.

grander than that of the *Iliad*, is comparatively less focused on violence<sup>68</sup> and therefore takes on more of the vestments of religious conversion than actual conquest.<sup>69</sup> Without their respective calls to action Achilles would have returned to Phthia and never achieved κλέος ἄφθιτον and Dionysos would have remained in the bucolic wilderness of Lydia and not attained godhood.

### **B. Competitions in the *Dionysiaka***

The world of the *Dionysiaka* is one of competitions and contests, but in this world there are three sets of funeral games which are meant to mirror and themselves compete with the funeral games of Patroclus in book 23 of the *Iliad*. Each relates to Homer in a different way, however, but contribute to Nonnos' overarching goal of proving himself to be more a true poet than Homer himself.

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<sup>68</sup> Kauffman (2016) 754-755. Kauffman argues that Nonnos is following the conventions of the conquer and convert doctrines of his day which are not based around killing but rather teaching Christianity. This is not to say that the *Dionysiaka* is not violent; there are a number of scenes of blood and gore which parallel and even surpass the degree of the *Iliad*. Lind notes what he considers gaudy excess in this regard (Lind (1938) 61-62); the inclusion of gory violence, however, simply comes with the territory of the genre and is no more than topical ornamentation to comply with the conventions of the Homeric Epic. A thematic core in the *Iliad* is wrath and the violence depicted in the work supports this. The *Dionysiaka*, on the other hand, is more concerned with salvation and rebirth, therefore the depiction of graphic warfare is cosmetic rather than thematic. Concerning Nonnos' adherence to the rules of genre, despite stylistically incorporating features from a number of different genres, technically Nonnos is quite rigid. While not much work has been done on the meter of Nonnos, Gianfranco Agosti wrote a book chapter which analysed a number of Nonnos' compositional trends and discovered that he adhered to a number of strict practices. He ossifies his hexameters down to only 9 variations (in comparison Homer has 32 variations), almost exclusively uses weak caesura, rarely uses bucolic diaeresis (unless it is followed by enjambment), and rarely allows elision (see Agosti's "Materiali per la storia dell'esametro nei poeti cristiani greci"). Regarding his language, Nonnos tends to create compound words and to stack adjectives to fit the intense constraints of his meter; this results in his words ossifying in specific metric positions based on their scansion footprint.

<sup>69</sup> A further analysis of this will be undertaken later, however, Dionysos' primary goal for his campaign is never phrased in terms of gaining land holdings but rather to spread Bacchic rites; in this manner it parallels the spread of Christianity which functioned under a "great commission" in which "the gospel must first be published among all nations" (*Mark* 13:10).



## 1. Ampelos

The first game in Nonnos' account is wrestling,<sup>70</sup> which Homer refers to as a "painful art" (παλαιμοσύνης ἀλεγεινῆς, *Hom. Il.* 23.701) despite Nonnos' description of it being a "friendly sport" (παλαιμοσύνης φιλοπαίγμονος, *Nonn. D.* 10.332). Nonnos opens with a discussion of the prizes to be awarded. These prizes are described as being "no tripod was their prize, no flowergraven cauldron lay ready for victory, no horses from the grass, but a double pipe of love" (*Nonn. D.* 10.332-5); Nonnos is drawing an ironic contrast with the prizes offered in the funeral games of Patroclus. Achilles offers a tripod as prize in both the chariot race (*Hom. Il.* 23.264) and wrestling (*Hom. Il.* 23.702), cauldrons in both the chariot race (Achilles actually offers two cauldrons as prizes for this race, *Hom. Il.* 23.267-8) and archery contests (one archery prize is specifically described as embossed with flowers, *Hom. Il.* 23.885), and a horse as a prize for the chariot race (*Hom. Il.* 23.265). The three prizes specifically discounted in the first contest in Nonnos, are precisely the prizes for the first competition in Homer, the chariot race.

While in Homer the contest between Ajax and Odysseus is a painful and harsh encounter, in Nonnos the description is not nearly so intense. Instead of athletes competing in hard opposition, Dionysos and Ampelos are described as

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<sup>70</sup> See Greene's article, "A Wrestling Match in Nonnus." This work from 1911 demonstrates that scholars were keenly aware of Nonnos' textual imitation of Homer but offered no explanation as to what that imitation means.

“love's athletes” (ἀεθλητῆρες Ἐρώτων, *Nonn. D. 10.339*) and their wrestling romp is much closer to a sexual encounter than a legitimate contest. Still, both accounts share details that show Nonnos is deliberately imitating Homer. In both accounts, the contestants enter the ring and lock hands and begin the contest (*Hom. Il. 23.710-4* and *Nonn. D. 10.339-44*). In the *Iliad* Ajax lifts Odysseus and Odysseus kicks out his knee in an act of brain over brawn (*Hom. Il. 23.726-32*):

ὡς εἰπὼν ἀνάειρε: δόλου δ' οὐ λήθετ' Ὀδυσσεύς:  
 κόψ' ὄπιθεν κώληπα τυχών, ὑπέλυσε δὲ γυῖα,  
 κὰδ δ' ἔβαλ' ἐξοπίσω: ἐπὶ δὲ στήθεσσιν Ὀδυσσεὺς  
 κάππεσε: λαοὶ δ' αὖ θεῦντό τε θάμβησάν τε.  
 δεῦτερος αὖτ' ἀνάειρε πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς,  
 κίνησεν δ' ἄρα τυτθὸν ἀπὸ χθονός, οὐδ' ἔτ' ἄειρεν,  
 ἐν δὲ γόνυ γνάμψεν: ἐπὶ δὲ χθονὶ κάππεσον ἄμφω  
 πλησίοι ἀλλήλοισι, μίανθησαν δὲ κονίη.

He spoke, and heaved; (1) but not forgetting his craft Odysseus: he caught him with a stroke behind the hollow of the knee, (2) and he unnerved the tendons, and threw him over backwards, (3) so that Odysseus fell on his chest (4) as the people gazed upon them and wondered. Next, brilliant much-enduring Odysseus endeavored to lift him and budged him a little from the ground, but still could not raise him clear, then hooked a knee behind, so that both of them went down together to the ground, and lay close, and were soiled in the dust. (5)

In Nonnos (*Nonn. D. 10.352-72*), the details are nearly identical but far more playful:

Βάκχος ἐρωμανέεσσι δέμας παλάμησι πιέζων,  
 ἄμπελον ἠέρταζεν, ὁ δὲ Βρομίοιο τυχήσας  
 κόψε ποδὸς κώληπα: καὶ Εὖιος ἠδὲ γελάσσας,  
 ἤλικος ἠιθέοιο τυπεὶς ἀπαλόχροϊ ταρσῶ,  
 ὕπτιος αὐτοκύλιστος ἐπωλίσθησε κονίη:  
 καὶ χθονὶ κεκλιμένοιο θελήμονος ὑψόθι Βάκχου

γυμνῆ νηδύι κοῦρος ἐφίζανεν: αὐτὰρ ὁ χαίρων  
 ἔκταδὸν ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα χυθεὶς ἐπεκέκλιτο γαίῃ  
 γαστέρι κουφίζων γλυκερὸν βάρος: ἰθυτενὲς δὲ  
 ἄκρον ὑπὲρ ψαμάθοιο πεδοτριβὲς ἴχνος ἐρείσας  
 νῶτον ἀνηώρησε μετάτροπον, ἠνορέην δὲ  
 φειδομένην ἀνέφηνεν, ἀμιλλητῆρι δὲ παλμῶ  
 χειρὸς ἀναινομένης ἀπεσεύσατο φόρτον Ἑρώτων:  
 πλευρὰ δὲ δοχμῶσας, πελάσας δ' ἀγκῶνα κονίη,  
 ἠβητῆρ πολυίδρις ἐπ' ἀντιπάλου θόρε νώτου  
 λοξὸς ἐπὶ πλευρῆσιν, ὑπὲρ λαγόνων δὲ καθάψας  
 ἄκρα ποδὸς κώληπι, παρὰ σφυρὸν ἴχνος ἐρείσας,  
 γαστέρα διχθαδίῳ μεσάτην μιτρώσατο δεσμῶ,  
 πλευρὰ περιθλίβων, ὑπὸ γούνατι ταρσὸν ἐλίξας  
 ὄρθιον ἀπλωθέντα: κυλινδομένων δὲ κονίη  
 ἀμφοτέρων καμάτοιο προάγγελος ἔρρεεν ἰδρώς.

Next Bacchos ran his two hands round the young man's waist squeezing the body with a loving grip, and lifted (ἀνηώρησε) Ampelos high (1); but the other kicked Bromios neatly behind the knee (2); and Euios laughing merrily at the blow from his comrade's tender foot, let himself fall on his back in the dust (3). Thus while Bacchos lay willingly on the ground the boy sat across his naked belly (4), and Bacchos in delight lay stretching at full length on the ground sustaining the sweet burden on his paunch. Now raising one of his legs he sets the sole of the foot firmly upon the sand and raised his overturned back; but he showed mercy in his strength, as with a rival movement of a reluctant hand he dislodged the reluctant burden. The young man, no novice at the game, turned sideways and rested his elbows on the ground, then jumped across his adversary's back, then over his flanks with a foot behind one knee and another set on the other ankle he encircled the waist with a double bond and squeezed the ribs and pressed flat and straight out the lifted leg under his knee. Both rolled in the dust (5), and the sweat poured out to tell that they were tired

While the content of these two passages is very close, the tenor of the language is very different in that the first emphasizes pain and the second pleasure. The details are, however, unmistakably similar. First, in both fights, one athlete lifts

the other (1). Next, the contender being lifted catches the other behind the knee (2) and both fall to the ground (3), with the one having been lifted being on top of the upper body of the other (4). Finally, the fight ends with both wrestling on the ground in the dust (5).

The next event is the 'foot-race' in the *Dionysiaka* which is strikingly similar to one described in the *Iliad*. In the *Iliad* the contestants “stood side by side” (στὰν δὲ μεταστοιχί, *Hom. Il.* 23.756), and in the *Dionysiaka* they “stood in a row” (στοιχὸν ἐφεστασαν, *Nonn. D.* 10.403). Then, in Homer, Ajax (the son of Oileus) takes the immediate lead, with Odysseus directly behind him (*Hom. Il.* 23.759-65):

...ἐπὶ δ' ὄρνυτο δῖος Ὀδυσσεὺς  
 ἄγχι μάλ', ὥς ὅτε τίς τε γυναικὸς εὐζώνοιο  
 στήθεός ἐστι κανών, ὅν τ' εὖ μάλα χερσὶ τανύσση  
 πηνίον ἐξέλκουσα παρὲκ μίτον, ἀγρόθι δ' ἴσχει  
 στήθεος: ὡς Ὀδυσσεὺς θέεν ἐγγύθεν, αὐτὰρ ὀπισθεν  
 ἴχνια τύπτε πόδεσσι πάρος κόνιν ἀμφιχυθῆναι:  
 καὶ δ' ἄρα οἱ κεφαλῆς γέ' αὐτμένα δῖος Ὀδυσσεὺς

But brilliant Odysseus overhauled him close, as near as to the breast of a woman fair-girdled is the rod she pulls in her hands carefully as she draws the spool out and along the warp, and holds it close to her chest. So Odysseus ran close up, but behind him, and his feet were hitting the other's tracks before the dust settled. Great Odysseus was breathing on the back of the head of Aias as he ran and held his speed...

In Nonnos, it is Kissos in the lead and Leneus fast upon him (*Nonn. D.* 10.407-12):

Ληνεὺς ἠερίησιν ἐπέτρεχε σύνδρομος αὔραις,  
 ἀγχιφανῆς προθέοντος, ὀπισθοπόροιο δὲ ταρσοῦ  
 ἴχνεσιν ἴχνια τύψε χυτῆς ψαύοντα κονίης·  
 καὶ τόσος ἀμφοτέρων ἀπελείπετο μέσσον ὀρίζων,  
 ὀππόσον ἴστοπόνοιο κανῶν πρὸς στήθει κούρης  
 μεσσοφανῆς λάχε χῶρον ἀκαμπεί γείτονα μαζῶ.

Leneus was running behind him quick as the winds of heaven and warming the back of the sprinter with his breath, close behind the leader, and he touched footstep with footstep on the dust as it dropped, with following feet: the space between them was no more that the rod leaves open before the bosom of a girl working at the loom, close to the firm breast.

Still neither Kissos nor Leneus (who, though portrayed here as Satyrs, are in other traditions cult titles of Dionysos himself) is meant to win this race. Instead, Ampelos gets divine assistance from Dionysos who causes Kissos to slip on a wet place in the same way that Athena assists Odysseus in winning the race in the *Iliad* by causing Ajax to stumble on the offal of slaughtered cattle. Again the details of the action here are too close to be coincidence. Instead of directly taking lines from the *Iliad* though, Nonnos writes the same scenes in his own words, often elaborating in more detail than Homer. At the conclusion of the race, Ampelos takes the first prize and Kissos the second despite grumbling to himself about Dionysos causing him to falter. These details are again reflective of Odysseus winning the first prize and Ajax complaining about Athena's intervention in the *Iliad*. With all these details, it is clear that Nonnos is trying to bring the Homeric passage to mind and encouraging his readers to note the differences and their implications.

Thus, both Dionysos and Achilles oversee games which are remarkably similar, but the association becomes even more pronounced when the deaths of Patroclus and Ampelos are analyzed in comparison. Patroclus and Ampelos both die apart from their lovers, pinned to the ground and penetrated by adversaries who bear considerable resemblances to their lovers. Hector is a reflection of Achilles because both are clearly the best in their respective armies. Moreover, after Hector has taken Achilles' armor off the dead Patroclus and puts it on, Homer says he, “figured before them flaming in the battle gear of great-hearted Peleion” (ἰνδάλλετο δέ σφισι πᾶσι τεύχεσι λαμπόμενος μεγαθύμου Πηλείωνος, *Hom. Il. 17.213-4*). Hector's act of putting on Achilles' armor highlights the similarities between himself and Achilles; in a sense Hector, in a Dionysiac fashion, puts on the mask of Achilles and as a result becomes Achilles. Therefore, Achilles, who may be seen as responsible for the death of Patroclus because he allowed him to be put in danger, kills Hector as an act of killing a lesser form of himself. Whereas Achilles' wrath is responsible for the death of his lover, this wrath never allows him to transcend the very thing which led to Patroclus' death and ultimately Achilles dies in his wrath. Dionysos, on the other hand, transcends a physical representation of his lower self in this episode.<sup>71</sup> This interpretation fits

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<sup>71</sup> This interpretation is based on the underlying idea that Nonnos was influenced by Neo-Platonist ideas. Because of Nonnos' focus on the dangers of pure imitation and his insistence on having Dionysos compete with Homeric models to prove his superiority as a hero more ideal (in the Platonic and Christian sense) Nonnos must constantly show how his hero is aiming towards the ideal form, in this case apotheosis. Other comparative models from other authors are therefore presented as lesser representations of this divine hero archetype. As a result, Nonnos regularly sets them up against his Dionysos so that he can have them defeated, further justifying his own

the narrative of Nonnos well because Ampelos is killed by a bull, and outside of Nonnos' works the link between Dionysos and the bull is already well established, appearing in the *Dionysiaka* as the tauriform failed first incarnation of Dionysos referred to as Zagreus. Therefore, the act of killing the bull, which became a central part of Dionysiac worship, was an act of killing a lesser form of Dionysos himself in order to transcend it.<sup>72</sup> Through Dionysos' act of destroying the beast, Ampelos is reborn through an act of love as the pain-curing wine. In contrast, Achilles' rage results in him and his lover being dragged down to the underworld.

After Patroclus and Ampelos have been killed in their respective narratives, news is then brought to their lovers (*Hom. Il. 18.1-21* and *Nonn. D. 11.224-5*). In both cases the news is followed by lengthy mourning in which Achilles cries out to his mother Thetis (*Hom. Il. 18.35-147*) and Dionysos to his father Zeus (*Nonn. D. 11.315-24*). In both narratives, the body of the dead is beautified and adorned; while Patroclus is simply washed, anointed and dressed in white linen (*Hom. Il. 344-55*), Ampelos is dressed in full Bacchic regalia (*Nonn. D. 11.232-9*). Furthermore, both bodies are anointed with ambrosia to ward off putrefaction (from Thetis in the *Iliad*, *Hom. Il. 19.37-9*, and Rhea in the *Dionysiaka*, *Nonn. D. 11.241-4*). Finally, both Achilles and Dionysos cut off locks of their hair and lay them upon their dead companions (*Hom. Il. 23.140-53*

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position of superiority. See Hernández de la Fuente's article, "The One and the Many and the Circular Movement: Neo-Platonism and Poetics in Nonnus of Panopolis" for further analysis.

<sup>72</sup> See Chapter XLIX.1 "Dionysus, the Goat and Bull" and Chapter L. "Eating the God" from Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.

and *Nonn. D. 11.238-41*); a scene which also is present in the micronarrative of Carpus and Calamus (*Nonn. D. 11.464-69*).

This micronarrative (*Nonn. D. 11.369-481*) is told to Dionysos by his didactic satyr companion, Silenus, after Ampelos had been killed by the bull. This feature also has a parallel in Homer: the story of Meleager and Cleopatra (*Hom. Il. 9.529-99*), told to Achilles by his former teacher, Phoenix, before the death of Patroclus. In the context of Nonnos, the story of Calamus and Carpus (who themselves bear vegetative names- καρπός meaning fruit and κάλαμος meaning reed), foreshadows the rebirth of Ampelos as a vine. Similarly, the story that Phoenix tells Achilles about Meleager and Cleopatra (whose name is a reversal of Patroclus's own) foreshadows the death of Patroclus.<sup>73</sup>

While the similarities between the stories of Patroclus and Ampelos are enough to make their relation certain, it is their difference that is essential. For Achilles, the death of Patroclus was his undoing, triggering him to go off and fight in a war that he knew would lead to his own death. Furthermore, Patroclus' death was an irreversible condition over which the mortal Achilles held no power. Achilles was not able to resurrect Patroclus even though he was the son of a goddess who had himself been instructed in medicine, “since Cheiron, most righteous of Centaurs, told him about them” (*Hom. Il. 11.832*), the very same Cheiron who had instructed Aesclepius (*Hom. Il. 4.215*), the healer who was able

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<sup>73</sup> This story has another Dionysiac link in that Meleager's father, who also takes part in this story, is named Oineus; this is relevant because his name means “wine man”, and because he is related to Dionysos according to Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*, 1.8.1. Another character occurring in this narrative is named Euenus, a name which is a cult title of Dionysos himself.



to return men from death (*Ov. Met.* 2.644). In contrast, Dionysos, through the help of the fates and his father, brings Ampelos back not only as a vine (*Nonn. D.* 12.173-87), but also as a fundamentally immortal being, similar to Adonis (who is even mentioned by Nonnos in this episode, *Nonn. D.* 11.500) or Attis (*Nonn. D.* 25.310) who were also resurrected as vegetation. Therefore, the essential difference is that Achilles' wrath "brought countless ills upon the Achaeans. Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades" (ἦ μὲν Ἰφίτιος ἄλγε' ἔθηκε, πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν), whereas Dionysos brings comfort and rebirth to all mankind.

## 2. Opheltes

Book 37 of the *Dionysiaka* brings what Robert Shorrock has referred to as "the 'closest' imitation of Homer"<sup>74</sup> in Nonnos. Shorrock says, "Nonnos' text is so close to the Homeric original that it leaves no room for originality of its own".<sup>75</sup> Shorrock does not closely analyze these similarities though, instead focusing on the father/son relationship of Aristaeus and Actaeon. The similarities of book 37 of the *Dionysiaka* to book 23 of the *Iliad* are so numerous that a line by line comparison of the exact language used would not only be tedious but also outside the scope of my goal of demonstrating the Achilles/Dionysos linkage. Instead, this section will provide a general overview of similarities, highlighting points which support my argument.

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<sup>74</sup> Shorrock (2001) 188.

<sup>75</sup> Shorrock (2001) 179.

Book 37 of the *Dionysiaka* begins, as does book 23 of the *Iliad*, with the hero's army resting (*Nonn. D.* 37.6 and *Hom. Il.* 23.2-3). Both the Mimallones of Dionysos and the Myrmidons of Achilles mourn the dead friend of their leader and men and mules are sent out to collect wood for the pyre (*Nonn. D.* 37.8 and *Hom. Il.* 23.111). Then all the men of the armies gather around the respective bodies of Patroclus and Opheltes, laying locks of hair on the corpses. Lastly, Achilles and Dionysos cut and lay locks of their own hair (*Nonn. D.* 37.37-44 and *Hom. Il.* 23.127-51). Then Dionysos has twelve Indians, oxen, sheep, cattle, and horses butchered as well as jars of honey and oil placed at the pyre, wrapping the fat of the slaughtered animals around the body of Opheltes (*Nonn. D.* 37.44-55). Not surprisingly, Achilles offers the same things at the pyre of Patroclus, but killing twelve Trojans instead of Indians and dogs instead of cattle (*Hom. Il.* 23.161-83). After this, both Dionysos and Achilles have trouble lighting their pyres but while Achilles calls upon the west and north winds, Zephyrus and Boreas, to help kindle the fire (*Hom. Il.* 23.192-211). Dionysos calls upon the east wind, Euros (*Nonn. D.* 37.70-85). After the body has been cremated, both Opheltes' and Patroclus' bones are placed in layers of fat and put into golden urns (*Nonn. D.* 37.91-3 and *Hom. Il.* 24.240-5). Dionysos slightly deviates from Achilles when his Corybants immediately construct a grand tomb for Opheltes (*Nonn. D.* 37.94-102), whereas Achilles says, "I would have you build a grave mound which is not very great but such as is fitting" (*Hom. Il.* 23.245). He follows this up by saying that another better one can be constructed later. In

Nonnos, there is some interesting detail put into the description of the tomb; he mentions that Opheltes is from Crete and that a tomb would be built for him according to the custom of his land.<sup>76</sup> This draws attention to the fact that he is being buried on foreign soil, a land which Nonnos describes as a “haunt of Ida” (*Nonn. D. 37.94*). He uses the Greek, “ἔνδιον Ἰδης,” which not only sounds like “Ἰνδόν” (Indian) but it links India to the mountain in Ilium where Paris made his fateful judgment of the goddesses, reinforcing the notion that Dionysos is invading an Indian Troy. Furthermore, Nonnos describes the construction using a comparative adjective saying, “They built up the barrow with *taller* stones” (καὶ τάφον αἰπυτέροισιν ἀνεστήσαντο δομαίοις, *Nonn. D. 37.99*). The comparatives suggest that the tomb which Dionysos is having built is being compared to something else; considering all of the comparisons made to Achilles' achievements before this, I do not believe that it is a stretch to suggest that this points to the structure Achilles erected as being shorter and therefore inferior. Nonnos is again making an argument that size does, in fact, matter.

After the funeral, Achilles and Dionysos both initiate their own respective funeral games. Each brings out an assortment of prizes which are to a certain degree comparable but in general Dionysos' are more grand. For example, Achilles brings out, “cauldrons and tripods, and horses and mules and the

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<sup>76</sup> Nonnos, in an interesting feat of accuracy, goes on to describe a Bronze Age tholos. This is interesting because of a perhaps tenuous connection in that these tholoi were built near dancing circles; the *Iliad* references these referring to them as “Ariadne's dancing floors” (*Hom. Il. 18.590-606*). Ariadne, the Cretan princess, has an obvious connection to Dionysos, who married her after rescuing her from the island of Naxos; a story which Nonnos tells in book 47 of the *Dionysiaka*.

powerful high heads of cattle and fair-girdled women and gray iron” (*Hom. Il.* 23.260-1); Dionysos, in comparison, brings forth, “cauldrons, tripods, shields, horses, silver, Indian jewels, and Pactolian silt.” (*Nonn. D.* 37.114-5).

The first game for both heroes is the chariot race, which Nonnos describes over the lengthy span of over 350 lines (*Nonn. D.* 37.116-484) surpassing Homer's 223-line description (*Hom. Il.* 23.262-586) and including the expected degree of Homeric paraphrase. Again, the primary way Dionysos surpasses Achilles is in the offering of grand prizes, including two full ingots of gold (*Nonn. D.* 37.129) as opposed to the two talents of Achilles (*Hom. Il.* 23.269)<sup>77</sup> an Amazonian woman (*Nonn. D.* 37.117-9), and a shield made by Hephaistos (*Nonn. D.* 37.125-8).

The second game is boxing (*Nonn. D.* 37.485-545 and *Hom. Il.* 23.653-99), the lines of which are so closely lifted from Homer that there is no doubt that he is engaging in Homeric imitation. The prizes here are comparable (a bull and shield from Dionysos and a mule and cup from Achilles).

The third contest is wrestling (*Nonn. D.* 37.546-613 and *Hom. Il.* 23.700-39), which is imitated just as clearly as it was in book 10 of the *Dionysiaka*, though without the sexual overtones this time. The prizes (a tripod and a cauldron from Dionysos, and a tripod and a woman from Achilles) here are roughly comparable, though the tripod of Dionysos does seem to have a slight advantage

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<sup>77</sup> The matter of weights and currency is complicated. Seltman puts the average weight of a gold talent at 8.5 grams (Seltman (1924) 114) and the British museum has a gold ingot from near the time of Nonnos weighing at 476.2 grams. Regardless of the period, one can safely conclude that Nonnos intended this weight to be larger than that of Homer.

as it is described as being of “twenty-measures” whereas Achilles' tripod is only described as “great”. While the degree of difference is less obvious than in other scenes, the main evidence for Nonnos' narrative's superiority is in lushness of its language and the length of the episode, running to almost double the length of Homer's account.

The final four contests are all short and follow the pattern set above of fairly explicit Homeric imitation, with the contests being run in the same order and Dionysos offering prizes equivalent to or better than Achilles. The contests in order are as follows: running (*Nonn. D.* 37.614-73 and *Hom. Il.* 23.739-98), quoit hurling (*Nonn. D.* 37.674-702 and *Hom. Il.* 23.826-49), archery (*Nonn. D.* 37.703-49 and *Hom. Il.* 23.850-83), and javelin throwing/sparring (*Nonn. D.* 37.750-78 and *Hom. Il.* 23.884-97). Nevertheless, as a whole, book 37 of the *Dionysiaka* proves that Dionysos can hold a funeral and funeral games which are just as lavish as those held by Achilles, if not more so. Where Nonnos does not obviously surpass Homer in the degree to which he describe his imitations of Homer, he makes it nonetheless evident by his attempt to outdo Homer metrically and thematically.

### **3. Staphylos**

Nonnos includes another set of funeral games in book 19; in this episode, the events actually occur after the death of one of Dionysos' friends and without

an overt resurrection, even though it is implied it will occur.<sup>78</sup> The language of this passage does not have the same level of direct parallels to Homer as the Ampelos episode. Though the types of events are the same, the responses are inverted, creating, in a sense, an opposite form of the same scene. For example, instead of going through the elaborate mourning which Achilles goes through at the death of Patroclus, Dionysos is described as having a “laughing face” (*Nonn. D.* 19.42). Furthermore, he cheers up all those in mourning when he arrives on the scene at the end of book 18: “Then beside the tomb of reeling Staphylos, Dionysos, the foe of mourning, held a contest where no mourning was.” (ὡς εἰπὼν Σταφύλοιο μεθυσφαλέος παρὰ τύμβῳ νηπενθῆς Διόνυσος ἀπειθέα θῆκεν ἄγῶνα, *Nonn. D.* 19.59-60). Beyond this, Dionysos holds games for his dead friend but Nonnos emphasizes that it is different from those held for Patroclus, and with mostly different prizes (*Nonn. D.* 19.145-52):

οὐ τρίποδα στίλβοντα καὶ οὐ ταχὺν ἵππον ὀπάσσω,  
οὐ δόρυ καὶ θώρηκα φόνῳ πεπαλαγμένον Ἴνδῶν,  
δίσκον ἐς ἰθυκέλευθον ἀκοντιστῆρας ἐγείρων:  
οὐδὲ ποδωκείης τέταται δρόμος, οὐ δορὸς αἰχμῆ  
τηλεφόρου: Σταφύλῳ δέ, καταφθιμένῳ Βασιλῆϊ,  
ἀνδρὶ φιλοσκάρθμῳ, φιλοπαίγμονα ταρσὰ γεραίρω:  
οὐδὲ παλαισμοσύνη μυιαλκεί δῶρα τιταίνω,  
οὐ δρόμος ἵπποσύνης...

I will give no shining tripod and no swift horse, no spear and corselet stained with blood of Indians; I will make no summons for marksmen for straight throwing with the quoit; this is no race for

<sup>78</sup> In lines 104-5 of book 19, Oiairos sings, “Apollo brought to life again his longhair'd Hyacinthos: Staphylos will be made to live for aye by Dionysos”. Beyond another reference to Hyacinth, this is another vegetative rebirth, as σταφυλή means “a bunch of grapes”. Unlike Ampelos, no physical rebirth/transfiguration occurs though.

speed of foot, no spear cast at a distance... I offer no prize for wrestlers with straining muscles, this is no game for horsemanship...

Later, Nonnos reiterates and adds to this by saying, “There was no boxing, no running, no quoit in that contest,” (οὐ τότε πυγμή, οὐ δρόμος, οὐ τότε δίσκος ἀέθλια, *Nonn. D.* 19.229-30). There is almost no way for Nonnos to state more clearly that he is copying Homer, but at the same time decidedly not copying Homer. As mentioned before, the tripod and horse are prizes in the chariot race for Patroclus' funeral (*Hom. Il.* 23.265-70), the spear is a prize for the archery contest (*Hom. Il.* 23.884) along with being part of the panoply of Sarpedon's armor offered for winning the mock combat (*Hom. Il.* 23.799-800), and finally the corselet is the consolation prize which Eumelus received from the chariot race (*Hom. Il.* 23.560). Furthermore, it calls to mind the armor of Achilles itself, which was made a prize and won by Odysseus. The only thing he does not seem to prohibit is the prize of a mixing bowl, which Nonnos describes in great detail and very prominently notes “ἄσπετα μέτρα κεχανδότα” (“held infinite measures”, *Nonn. D.* 19.121). In comparison with the mixing bowl which Achilles presents as prize for the footrace which only holds six measures (*Hom. Il.* 23.741), Nonnos is clearly playing the age-old game of “my *krater* is than yours.”

This inundation of competitive feats is almost unexplainably excessive if not for the fact that a primary purpose of Nonnos' work is to compete. Newbold has argued that the prolific presence of agonistic scenes and themes in the

*Dionysiaka* is a result of Nonnos' own need for validation in his competition with Homer bleeding into the psyche of his Dionysos character. According to Newbold, just as Nonnos has to prove himself as a Christian in a traditionally pagan genre, so his Dionysos has to prove himself in a world filled with competition.<sup>79</sup> Nonnos himself explains this motive by saying (*Nonn. D.* 13.22-24):

...ἐπεὶ Διὸς ἄμβροτος αὐλή  
οὗ σε πόνων ἀπάνευθε δεδέξεται, οὐδέ σοι Ὕραι  
μή πο' ἀεθλεύσαντι πύλας πετάσωσιν Ὀλύμπου:

‘the immortal palace of Zeus will not receive you without hard  
toil... and the  
Seasons will not unbar the gates of Olympus unless you have  
struggled and  
contended

The clear recurrent theme is one of proving legitimacy through performance. Just as most of the episodes contribute to Dionysos proving his worthiness to achieve godhood, so the poem itself is Nonnos' own attempt to demonstrate his skill as an author and the superiority of his own topic.

### C. Lykourgos

At face value, one of the more peculiar sections of the *Dionysiaka* is the story of Lykourgos. Even though this episode is extrapolated from a scarce thirteen lines in Homer (*Hom. Il.* 6.130-43), it takes up the entirety of book 20 and

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<sup>79</sup> Newbold (2010a) 113.



some of book 21 in the *Dionysiaka*. Naturally, there are no notable links in the language of the two stories by nature of the difference in length and tone. The easiest manner of explaining this section is that it is Nonnos engaging in apologetics for his hero in opposition to Homer's "false book." The plot which Nonnos presents does everything to depict Dionysos as not at fault for the events. Notably he makes the event a trick created by the ever-jealous Hera, he depicts Dionysos as coming in peace to Lykourgos and Lykourgos as being a worse and more violent host than even Polyphemus. Shorrock comments on this episode, postulating that it shows a clash of two sons of gods (Dionysos being the son of Zeus, and Lykourgos being a descendant of Ares). What is more, he takes Dionysos' jumping into the water to escape Lykourgos as a demonstration of his power to cross boundaries rather than his cowardice at running away.<sup>80</sup> In other words, Nonnos reframes the narrative to make Dionysos a powerful figure of change in the face of deception<sup>81</sup> comfortably forgetting Homer's depiction of Dionysos as a child. This interpretation, supporting the view of Dionysos as a god of liminality, both social and physical is sound, but because the Lykourgos episode is the only extended reference to Dionysos in either the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, it made it necessary for Nonnos to address it and make his narrative fit into the

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<sup>80</sup> Shorrock (2001) 161-164. One detail that is apparent in Homer is that Dionysos is a baby when this occurs. In Nonnos, Dionysos is at most puerile but certainly not infantile. What is an expression of childish fear in Homer is turned into an expression of divine transcendence in Nonnos.

<sup>81</sup> As always, the themes of change, deception, originality /imitation and competition surface in this episode.

pre-existing canon of texts.<sup>82</sup> The otherwise conspicuous absence of Dionysos in Homer makes him the only member (besides Demeter) of the twelve Olympians who does not make a significant contribution in the Homeric Epics. Newbold says that the episode is a further example of Nonnos' fixation with contests and depicting Dionysos as a triumphant god in all the many contests which Nonnos throws in his path to godhood.<sup>83</sup> I would argue still further that Nonnos wanted to take Dionysos at his "most unflattering"<sup>84</sup> and still depict him as superior to Homeric models; in Christian terms, I believe that Nonnos wrote his epic, in part to take "the stone the builders rejected" and to make it the "cornerstone" of his work.<sup>85</sup>

Additionally, it is interesting that after jumping into the water, Dionysos runs into the arms of Thetis, the mother of Achilles. The presence of Thetis in this capacity, is extremely compelling in the context of Nonnos because it strengthens the connection between Dionysos and Achilles. This is particularly relevant because Thetis acted as one of Dionysos' nursemaids<sup>86</sup> and therefore acted as a stronger maternal figure in Dionysos' youth than in Achilles' own youth spent at Mount Pelion and Skyros.

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<sup>82</sup> Shorrock (2001) 161.

<sup>83</sup> Newbold (2010a) 124.

<sup>84</sup> Shorrock (2001) 161.

<sup>85</sup> *Matthew* 21:42; it is possible to read a great deal of Christian imagery into Nonnos; I do so here cautiously but with well accepted scholarly support of Nonnos' Christian agenda.

<sup>86</sup> The discussion of the many nursemaids of Dionysos in the *Dionysiaka* deserves a closer study, but the absence of Semele as a mother leads Nonnos to use nurses as surrogate mothers to his coming-of-age god. The most prominent of these surrogate mothers is Rheia.

#### **D. The *Indiad*: War in the *Dionysiaka***

A great deal of the *Dionysiaka* is a story of the war in India and this conflict is, at face value, an imitation of the Trojan War.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to separate the ways in which Nonnos' war differs from Homer's in terms of plot, language, theme, and purpose of the episodes to the larger works as a whole. In examining a number of scenes from the war's inception to its resolution, this section will put forward the argument that Nonnos only imitated Homer's style of depicting warfare in order to match and surpass Homer's model with complex literary devices, language and scale. Nonnos' thematic goals, however, were not focused on war and destruction but rather about spreading a religion and healing human pain.

##### **1. The Great Commission and the Greatest Army**

Unlike the Trojan War, which arose from strife and human covetousness, Dionysos' Indian Campaign is divinely inspired. What links these wars is the use of Iris, who in Nonnos is sent by Zeus to deliver his commission to Dionysos (*Nonn. D. 13.1-24*). Edward Lasky<sup>88</sup> notes that this scene parallels the scenes in the *Iliad* in which Iris is sent with directives to Hector (*Hom. Il. 2.786-810* and *11.185-194*) and Achilles (*Hom. Il. 18.165-86*) thereby linking Dionysos to these Homeric heroes. The use of Iris is a verbal allusion to Homer which is an almost

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<sup>87</sup> Kauffman (2016) 766.

<sup>88</sup> Lasky (1978) 370.

entirely superficial link, with the importance lying in how Nonnos' war differs from Homer's.

Shorrock argues that Zeus, "says nothing explicit about the killing of Indians, but focuses instead on their re-education".<sup>89</sup> The specific plan is for Dionysos to "teach all nations the sacred dances of the vigil and the purple fruit of vintage" (ἔθνεα πάντα διδάξει ὄργια νυκτιχόρευτα καὶ οἴνοπα καρπὸν ὀπώρας. *Nonn.D.* 13.6-7), whereas the goal of the Trojan War was simply to destroy Troy and reclaim Helen. While there are more than enough scenes of death and carnage in the *Dionysiaka* during the war, Dionysos' treatment of the conquered Indians is remarkably clement.<sup>90</sup> Kauffman believes this shift in tone to be a product of Nonnos' own Christian world, with the language of Dionysos' commission being similar to the language which Christian Emperors used to justify conquering and converting.<sup>91</sup> After converting the Indians to his worship, Dionysos sets up a governor, Modaios, who was an Indian rather than a Greek (*Nonn. D.* 32.175). By doing this, not only did Dionysos establish an administrative infrastructure rather than destroying the land, as Ilium was destroyed, but he also allowed the Indians to (fundamentally) continue being

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<sup>89</sup> Shorrock (2001) 60, footnote 104. Kauffman also supports Shorrock by saying that the tone of this commission is pedagogical rather than destructive, and that it is a message aimed at his own time rather than Homer's (Kauffman (2016) 742 & 748).

<sup>90</sup> As Shorrock notes: "Dionysos is a benign victor, who operates under a different ethical code (than the Greeks at Ilium). Dionysos does not destroy his enemies, he seeks to pacify them; he does not raze the city to the ground but leaves the fabric and social structure largely intact, assigns the city a pious governor, and holds a reconciliatory feast for both sides" (Shorrock (2001) 90).

<sup>91</sup> Kauffman (2016) 746-747.

autarkic.<sup>92</sup> For Dionysos, however, it is not just a physical conquest but also a spiritual one; Dionysos conquered India to propagate his cult and spread his religion. As a result, Dionysos' own calling was one of spiritual enlightenment of the “Indians, untaught of piety” (*Nonn. D.* 13.20), giving these peoples a remedy for their souls both through his wine and through his worship.<sup>93</sup> Dionysos' mission was therefore one of unification as he holds a reconciliatory banquet with his newly converted followers (*Nonn. D.* 40.235-6).<sup>94</sup>

Dionysos' invasion of India, which was not invented by Nonnos, contains a number of curious links to Alexanders' campaign and the indigenous religions, some of which Alain Danielou<sup>95</sup> has elucidated brilliantly; most importantly, however, it allows Nonnos to establish India as a new and more grandiose Ilium.<sup>96</sup>

The Greeks had a propensity to fit all peoples into dichotomous categories of

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<sup>92</sup> Shorrock notes the oddness of this stance towards a conquered people but assigns it neither to the Christian ideas of Nonnos' time nor the potential of imitating Alexander the Great's treatment of conquered Indians (Shorrock (2001) 90). See appendix 2 for a greater analysis of the links between Alexander and Dionysos.

<sup>93</sup> Between the commission of conversion and Dionysos' final assumption into heaven, there are clear parallels between Nonnos' Dionysos and Christ. In a moment mirroring “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 13:36) and “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house” (Mark 6:4), Nonnos says that Dionysos didn't genuinely care about the physical kingdom of Thebes (*Nonn. D.* 46.63-5): “I need not the earthly palace of Pentheus; the home of Dionysos is in his father's heaven. If there were a choice between earth and starry Olympos, tell me I ask, which could you call better yourself, sevenzoned heaven or the land of sevingate Thebes? I do not need the earthly palace of Pentheus!” The Pentheus episode, therefore, is more about the Thebans rejecting him as a god and as the inheritor of his heavenly father's kingdom than as a physical king. See Konstantinos' article “Icarius Jesus Christ? Dionysiac Passion and Biblical Narrative in Nonnus' Icarius Episode (*Dion.* 47,1-264)” for more information along these lines.

<sup>94</sup> Feasting plays a significant role in the *Dionysiaka*- often in conjunction with wine and people accepting Dionysos' worship (e.g. at the palace of Staphylos in Book 18 and in the finale of the work after Thebes has accepted him and he earns his place in heaven).

<sup>95</sup> See Danielou's unique and enlightening work *Gods of Love and Ecstasy: The Traditions of Shiva and Dionysus*.

<sup>96</sup> Shorrock (2001) 91.

Greek and barbarian and, although they were doubtless cognizant of more subtle differences, they tend to regard one Asiatic people as conceptually similar to any other. Pericles Georges<sup>97</sup> has done work on the conceptions Greeks had about Asiatic peoples, linking Ilium to Persia and even the distant India described in Herodotus (*Hdt.* 3.98-106). Nonnos himself draws contrasts between the invasion of Ilium and that of India with his boasts in Book 25 concerning the scale of Dionysos' great army (*Nonn. D.* 25.25). The scene in which Dionysos assembles his army to attack India is a blatant copy of the Catalog of Ships from the *Iliad* (*Hom. Il.* 2.484ff).<sup>98</sup> Not only does he do this but he also directly invokes Homer at the beginning of his catalog (*Nonn. D.* 13.50). Later, in another description of Dionysos' army, Nonnos brags that this army is the greatest that had ever been assembled and that “No such army came to Ilion, no such host of men.” (οὐδὲ τόσος στρατὸς ἤλθεν ἐς Ἴλιον, οὐ στόλος ἀνδρῶν, *Nonn. D.* 25.26). Not only is Nonnos outdoing the thousand ships of Homer, but he also has Dionysos outdo Agamemnon by being the leader of a bigger army. Such details continue to point to the Indian campaign as a more magnificent Trojan War, a greater war for a greater hero: Dionysos.

With the Indian War established as the new Trojan War and Dionysos as the hero of this conflict, it is not surprising that Nonnos filled the *Dionysiaka* with Homeric battle scenes.

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<sup>97</sup> Georges (1994).

<sup>98</sup> Shorrock (2001) 60-61.

## 2. Arming Scenes in Homer and Nonnos

As with the heroes of Homer, the hero of Nonnos would not be prepared for battle without arming scenes of some sort. However, Nonnos does not dogmatically stick to the formula shown in the arming scenes of either Achilles (*Hom. Il. 19.369-91*) or Patroclus (*Hom. Il. 16.130-40*). The most notable arming scene in the *Dionysiaka* occurs in book 18 (*Nonn. D. 18.196-202*). In this scene, Nonnos deviates from the standard Homeric order of greaves, corselet, shield, sword, and helm, supplanting it with the revised order of corselet, circlet, buskin boots, and thyrsus. Furthermore, he replaces the Homeric items with Bacchic regalia, which becomes clearer when viewed in the context of several other scenes, specifically those occurring in books 27 and 30, in which there is talk of giving up greaves for buskins and helms for circlets (*Nonn. D. 27.210-12*):

κρείσσονι λαγήεντι δέμας θώρηκι καλύπτων,  
καὶ πόδα πορφυρέοισι περισφίγγειε κοθόρνοις  
ἀργυρέας ἀνέμοισιν ἔας κνημίδας ἔασας

throw his corselet to the winds covering his body in a better corselet of fur. Let him press his foot into purple buskins, and leave silver greaves to the breezes.

As well as (*Nonn. D. 28.29-32*):

στέμματα μὲν κορύθεσσιν, ἐπέκτυπε δ' αἰγίδι θώρηξ,  
ἔγχεσι θύρσος ἔθυσσε, καὶ ἰσάζοντο κοθόρνοις  
ἀντίτυποι κνημίδες...

Garlands knocked against helmets, corselets against goatskin,  
thyrsus rushed against spear, greaves were matched against  
buskins

And finally (*Nonn. D. 30.26-33*):

δὸς καὶ ἐμοὶ κλονέειν γλοερὸν βέλος: ἡμέτεροι γὰρ  
ἀπτολέμου νάρθηκος ἐνικήθησαν ὀιστοί:  
δὸς μοι ξανθὰ πέδιλα φορήμεναι, ὅτι καὶ αὐταὶ  
ἀρραγέες κνημίδες ὑπεκλίνοντο κοθόρνοις.  
τί πλέον, εἰ χάλκειον ἔχω σάκος, εὔτε γυναῖκες  
μᾶλλον ἀριστεύουσιν ἀτευχέες, ἐν δὲ κυδοιμοῖς  
κύμβαλα δινεύουσι, καὶ ὀκλάζουσι μαχηταί,  
καὶ στεφάνοις τρυφάλεια καὶ εἴκαθε νεβρίδι θώρηξ

Give me too a green weapon to shake! For our arrows have been  
beaten by the unwarlike fennel. Give me yellow boots to wear,  
since our unbreakable greaves have given way to the buskins...  
while helmets yields to garlands and corselets to fawnskin

The point in all these examples is to juxtapose Bacchic regalia to the arms and armor worn in Homer. Furthermore, each of these instances demonstrates the superiority of the dress of Dionysos and his followers to actual armor. Not only does this explain why such vestments have been substituted in Dionysos' own arming scene, but also gives credence to the idea that this attire is better than that which Achilles wore. This is the sort of subversion which Claudio de Stefani would classify as Homeric parody, though he has nothing to say on the subject of arming scenes; the true purpose lies deeper, however, and brings us back to Nonnos' own "arming scene" in the proem (*Nonn. D. 1.11-44*) and the larger purpose of Dionysos' campaign. Nonnos subverts Homeric arming scenes not in parody but rather to highlight that his war is not one of physical conquest. This



regalia is thoroughly unsuited for warfare and yet easily capable of triumphing on an ideological battlefield.<sup>99</sup>

### 3. The Shield of Dionysos

Unlike many of the episodes examined in this thesis, the ekphrasis of the “Shield of Dionysos” from book 25 has received more scholarly attention because of its blatant copying of Achilles own shield (*Nonn. D. 25.336-567* and *Hom. Il. 18.478-608*).<sup>100</sup> There is no clear scholarly consensus on this scene, with some scholars claiming it has no purpose besides ornament,<sup>101</sup> others claiming that the images on the shield are meaningful but that its introduction into the narrative is not,<sup>102</sup> and others claiming that it is meaningful on both levels;<sup>103</sup> this has little bearing on the wide set of opinions as to what the images on the shield itself mean.

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<sup>99</sup> Kauffman (2016) 754-755. Kauffman brushes off depictions of violence in the *Dionysiaka* as only superficial nods to Homer. He cites the scenes of Bacchic arming as being anti-Homeric because of their obvious inadequacy on an actual battlefield. This both subverts Homer as well as highlights that, “What ultimately wins the battle is not human effort, skill with the spear or shield; it is rather devotion to and worship of the god.” The idea that the followers of Dionysos do not need actual weapons is not original to Nonnos, however, as the Bacchantes of Euripides’ *Bacchae* are able to stand up to armed soldiers just as the armies of the *Dionysiaka* are. On a separate note and from a Christianized point of view, a comparison may be made with spiritual warriors such as John the Baptist who wore animal skins (*Matthew: 3.4*).

<sup>100</sup> The most relevant sources on this shield are Agnosini’s article, “Lo scudo di Dioniso (*Dionysiaca* 25.380-572)” and Spanoudakis’ article, “The Shield of Salvation: Dionysus’ Shield in Nonnus *Dionysiaca* 25.380–572.”

<sup>101</sup> Rose *apud* Rouse (1940) vol. 2 pg. 274. Rose says that “Nonnos is more than usually tasteless in providing divine armour for Dionysos, who is divine already.”

<sup>102</sup> Hopkinson (1994) 23.

<sup>103</sup> Shorrock (2001) 70-1 and 174-8.

On the surface, the inclusion of this shield seems puzzling and the images depicted on it do not *necessarily* seem out of place. Like the shield of Achilles, it has constellations and a city depicted on it (in this case Thebes). Where it differs is in the inclusion of a scene of banqueting gods on Olympos and the otherwise unattested myth of Tylus and Moria.

All of these scenes make perfect sense in the context of Dionysos as he is represented in this thesis, that is to say, a god focused on rebirth and divine ascension. While the shield itself is not per se described as being any more lavish or special than that of Achilles, the three scenes point towards Nonnos' higher aims for Dionysos. The story of Tylus, a shepherd who dies from a serpent bite and is brought back to life is now accepted as a metaphor for spiritual rebirth and has functionally been compared to the role of Lazarus in the Christian tradition.<sup>104</sup> Thebes, similarly, can be seen to represent Jerusalem, places where neither Dionysos nor Jesus are accepted into their kingship despite having the right by both divine and human bloodlines.<sup>105</sup> Finally, the banquet of Olympos foreshadows Dionysos' eventual ascension to sit at the table of his father just as Christ also did. The details of these scenes and their meaning, however, is not relevant to Homer; what is relevant is what this signifies in comparison to Homer.

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<sup>104</sup> See Spanoudakis' article, "The Resurrections of Tylus and Lazarus in Nonnus of Panopolis." Spanoudakis' examination of this narrative with its underlying Neo-Platonic themes is excellent though beyond the scope of this work.

<sup>105</sup> "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." (Matthew 13.57).

The point of this episode, beyond its inclusion as an obvious reference to Homer, is to reiterate the higher aims of salvation through conversion and the ultimate apotheosis of the work's quasi-Christian hero. By comparison it reminds the reader of the different fates of those who trusted in the old cycle heroes, many of whom ended up in Hades- a place which is notably somber as described in the *Odyssey* and which Dionysos does not visit in the *Dionysiaka* despite their being an epic precedent and other myths of Dionysos doing so.

#### **4. Warfare in the *Dionysiaka***

Battles in Homer, much like other aspects of his epics, contain recurrent elements including the *aristeia*, an epic scene in which a hero is an unstoppable battlefield force and the *androktasiai*, gory descriptions of death and carnage.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, as Charles Rowan Beye has demonstrated,<sup>107</sup> Homeric battles follow a pattern of presenting the narrative in three parts: basic information, an anecdote, and contextual information. Not only does Nonnos use these elements and conform to this pattern, but he goes so far as to paraphrase and directly lift battle lines from the *Iliad*.

Although this is widespread throughout the entire work, the section which I will analyze in order to demonstrate this is an episode in books 22 through 24 in

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<sup>106</sup> The descriptions of violence in the *Dionysiaka* which Lind believes to be excessive (Lind (1938) 61-62) Kauffman believes to be a superficial way of situating the epic in a Homeric context. The actual context, he argues, is one of relatively bloodless religious conversion in line with his own time period. See Kauffman's article, "Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* and Discourse on Warfare" for a greater analysis of this.

<sup>107</sup> Beye (1964) 345-373.

which Dionysos fights the Indian army and then the river Hydaspes.<sup>108</sup> I have chosen this episode because I believe it most clearly highlights the parallel between Dionysos and Achilles, and while the connection has been noted by Edward Lasky,<sup>109</sup> it has not been the subject of its own study.

This section is filled with references to Homer, mentioning Homeric figures who fought in the Trojan War including Glaucus<sup>110</sup> and Protesilaus<sup>111</sup> along with other Homeric figures such as Circe and Lykourgos. Furthermore, Nonnos describes the Indian soldiers assembling in book 22.180-5 as follows:

καί μιν ἐκυκλώσαντο, καὶ ἦν καλέουσι μαχηταὶ  
μιμηλὴν σακέεσσιν ἐπυργώσαντο χελώνην:  
ἴχνεσι μὲν στατὸν ἴχνος ἐρείδετο, κεκλιμένη δὲ  
ἄσπις ἔην προθέλυμνος ἀμοιβαδὶς ἀσπίδι γείτων  
στεινομένη, καὶ ἔνευε λόφῳ λόφος, ἀγχιφανῆς δὲ  
ἀνδρὸς ἀνήρ ἔψαυεν:

Now they came around him, and built what soldiers call a mimic tortoise with their shields: foot stood beside foot, shield leant on shield side by side, layer before layer pressing close, plume nodded to plume, man touched man in serried way

This scene resonates with a number of Homeric scenes such as the forming up of the Trojans in the *Iliad* (13.131-5):

ἄσπις ἄρ' ἀσπίδ' ἔρειδε, κόρυς κόρυν, ἀνέρα δ' ἀνήρ:  
ψαῦον δ' ἰππόκομοι κόρυθες λαμπροῖσι φάλιοισι  
νευόντων, ὡς πυκνοὶ ἐφέστασαν ἀλλήλοισιν:  
ἔγχεα δ' ἐπτύσσοντο θρασειάων ἀπὸ χειρῶν  
σειόμεν': οἱ δ' ἰθὺς φρόνεον, μέμασαν δὲ μάχεσθαι.

<sup>108</sup> This battle is told like a Homeric battle but has a number of links to Alexander the Great; see appendix 2 for more information on this topic.

<sup>109</sup> Lasky (1978) 357-376.

<sup>110</sup> *Nonn. D. 22.147* and *Hom. Il. 6.236*.

<sup>111</sup> *Nonn. D. 24.192-5* and *Hom. Il. 2.695-709*.

locking spear by spear, shield against shield at the base, so buckler leaned on buckler, helmet on helmet, man against man, and the horse-hair crests along the horns of their shining helmets touched as they bent their heads, so dense were they formed on each other, and the spears shaken from their daring hands made a jagged battle line. Their thoughts were driving straight ahead in the fury of fighting.

As well as *Iliad* (16.210-7):

ὡς εἰπὼν ὄτρυνε μένος καὶ θυμὸν ἐκάστου.  
 μᾶλλον δὲ στίχες ἄρθεν, ἐπεὶ βασιλῆος ἄκουσαν.  
 ὡς δ' ὅτε τοῖχον ἀνήρ ἀράρη πυκνοῖσι λίθοισι  
 δώματος ὑψηλοῖο βίας ἀνέμων ἀλεείνων,  
 ὡς ἄραρον κόρυθές τε καὶ ἀσπίδες ὀμφαλόεσσαί.  
 ἀσπίς ἄρ' ἀσπίδ' ἔρειδε, κόρυς κόρυν, ἀνέρα δ' ἀνήρ:  
 ψαῦον δ' ἰππόκομοι κόρυθες λαμπροῖσι φάλοισι  
 νευόντων, ὡς πυκνοὶ ἐφέστασαν ἀλλήλοισι.

Their thoughts were driving straight ahead in the fury of fighting. and their ranks, as they listened to the king, pulled closer together. And as a man builds solid a wall with stones set close together for the rampart of a high house keeping out the force of the winds, so close together were the helms and shields massive in the middle. For shield leaned on shield, helmet on helmet, man against man, and the horse-hair crests along the horns of the shining helmets touched as they bent their heads, so dense were they formed on each other.

Directly following this scene, Nonnos almost completely lifts the line Ἔνθα τίνα πρῶτον, τίνα δ' ὕστατον Ἄιδι πέμπων (“Here whom first, whom last (did Oiaeros) send to Hades”, *Nonn. D. 22.187*) from the *Iliad* (16.692) ἔνθα τίνα πρῶτον τίνα δ' ὕστατον ἐξενάριξας. This is then followed by another scene (*Nonn. D. 22.202-*

3) which is paraphrased from two other Homeric scenes (*Hom. Il. 16.856-7* and *Hom. Il. 362-3*).

While there are more similarities and allusions to Homer throughout this and other battle scenes in Nonnos, the only reason for the preceding discussion was to demonstrate proof of this trend, not to exhaustively discuss it. As previously discussed, these scenes are part of an ongoing narrative in which Dionysos and his army push the Indian army back across the river Hydaspes, paralleling Achilles' assault which drives the Trojans back behind the Scamander. Nonnos acknowledges this parallel towards the end of book 22, stating that “he slew his enemies in the river, a watery battle, a conflict among the waves, as if to foretell the unfinished battle for Achilles in the time to come at the river Camandros” (*Nonn. D. 22. 385-8*). Nonnos also states, “Not one Lycaon alone did he slay... but innumerable enemies he destroyed” (*Nonn. D. 22.380*), referencing and superseding the scene in which Achilles kills Lycaon (*Hom. Il. 21.134*) and alluding to slaughter at the Scamander in lines 382-3 by paraphrasing a line from the *Iliad* (*Hom. Il. 22.116*) and adapting the scene to the carnage at the Hydaspes.

This skirmish at the river climaxes in book 23 with the Hydaspes manifesting itself and engaging in combat with Dionysos. As Edward Lasky and Robert Shorrock<sup>112</sup> have noted, this scene is a clear imitation of the battle between Achilles and Scamander in book 21 of the *Iliad*. Breaking the scene down, the impetus for the Scamander's actions was that the river was being choked by the

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<sup>112</sup> Shorrock (2001) 65. Lasky (1978) 370.

bodies of dead warriors (*Hom. Il. 145-150*). Nonnos vividly dramatizes the scene with the Hydaspes, going through great details of the carnage (*Nonn. D. 23.1-77*) then having a dying Indian cry out to the river (*Nonn. D. 23.78-103*), and finally representing Hera, driven by her wrath against Dionysos, as urging on the river (*Nonn. D. 117-9*). Not only does the Hydaspes have better cause to rage against Dionysos than the Scamander against Achilles, he actually has a divine commission to do so. Dionysos, unlike Achilles, has no divine assistance. The Hydaspes, like the Scamander (*Hom. Il. 21.308*), calls upon his brother river (*Nonn. D. 23.162-4*) and then rushes forth with waves pushing the armies of Dionysos out of the river (*Nonn. D. 23.192-220*) as Scamander had done to Achilles (*Hom. Il. 21.240-4*). It is here that Nonnos pauses to again reaffirm the link to Achilles and to characterize his narrative as superior (*Nonn. D. 23.220-224*):

οὐχ οὕτω Σιμόεντος Ἀρειμανὲς ἔβρεμεν ὕδωρ,  
οὐχ οὕτω ῥόος ἔσκεν ἐγερσιμόθοιο Καμάνδρου  
χεύματι κυματόεντι κατακλύζων Ἀχιλλῆα,  
ὡς τότε Βακχείην στρατιὴν ἐδίωξεν Ὑδάσπης.

Not so furiously roared the war-mad waters of Simoeis, not so defiantly rushed Camandros to overwhelm Achilles with rolling waters, as then Hydaspes...

Despite the raging assault of the Scamander being less furious than that of the Hydaspes, Achilles is overcome by the river and calls out to Zeus for aid (*Hom. Il. 21.264-75*). Dionysos, to the contrary, beats back Hydaspes by his own power and even manages to set its waters on fire (*Nonn. D. 23.256-71*). This is, again, a

parallel to what Hephaistos does in the *Iliad* when he set the fields adjoining the river on fire and throws burning trees into its waters in order to save Achilles (*Hom. Il. 21.343-360*). Dionysos' show of power is so great that Zeus has "to restrain the wrath of Dionysos' fiery power" in order to save Hydaspes. In addition, the river god himself becomes a suppliant to Dionysos, begging for mercy in exchange for loyalty and service.

The entirety of this episode points to the superiority of Dionysos over Achilles. Not only is the battle leading up to the fight between hero and river more grand and gory but Dionysos single-handedly overcomes a river whose wrath dwarfs that of the Homeric equivalent. The inclusion of language and plot details which match those in the *Iliad* is almost certainly only performative. Considering that Dionysos' goals as a hero are very different from those of the Homeric heroes, Nonnos is only served in attempting to force Homeric-style violence on his poem by stylistically resonating with his competitor. Thematically, violence does nothing to further the Indian Campaign's goal of religious conversion but what it does accomplish is feeding Nonnos' need to turn everything into a contest with Homer. In the words of Newbold:

Christian spiritual athletes sought not just to imitate exemplars of asceticism but to surpass them and any contemporary rivals, it could be difficult to prevent (a) a noble striving for excellence becoming (b) invidious emulousness and boastfully proclaiming one has surpassed... In the end, it remains uncertain whether Nonnus narrates so much (b)-type behaviour because of



fascination and possible personal affinity with it, or to demonstrate un-Christian pride and ridiculous folly.<sup>113</sup>

It is my belief that Nonnos, rather paradoxically includes violence in spite of his message of conversion as part of his rather egotistical feud with Homer and insistence on engaging in contests to surpass him.

#### **D. Aiakos: the Grandfather's Battle**

A final clue which I believe Nonnos included in order to link Dionysos to Achilles is the presence of a rather obscure member of Dionysos' retinue during his Indian campaign named Aiakos. This figure becomes prominent in book 22, during the battle leading up to, and then at the battle at the Hydaspes. Like Dionysos, Aiakos has an *aristeia* which helps push the Indian forces back; it is at the very end of this sequence, when Dionysos' forces are at the border of the river itself, that his relevance becomes clearer. Towards the end of the description of Aiakos' valor Nonnos says of him (*Nonn. D. 22.384-9*):

Οὐδ' ἄθεεὶ πολέμιζε καὶ Αἰακός: ἀντιβίους γάρ,  
ὡς γενέτης Πηλῆος, ἔσω ποταμοῖο δαΐζων  
ἰκμαλέον μόθον εἶχε καὶ ὕδατόεσσαν Ἐνυώ,  
οἷα προθεσπίζων ποταμοῦ περὶ χεῦμα Καμάνδρου  
φύλοπιν ἡμιτέλεστον ἐπεσσομένην Ἀχιλῆϊ:  
καὶ μόθον υἱωνοῖο μόθος μαντεύσατο πάππου.

Not without god's help Aiakos also fought. As befitted the father of Peleus, he slew his enemies in the river... the grandfather's battle prophesied the son's conflict.

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<sup>113</sup> Newbold (2010a) 13.

It becomes clear here that Nonnos has created a surrogate Achilles in the flesh to fight alongside Dionysos at a river that stands as a surrogate for the Scamander. Instead of being the primary hero in the narrative though, Aiakos is more of a side-kick to Dionysos. Furthermore, Aiakos does no more than get his glory and power from the god Dionysos himself.<sup>114</sup> This mentally reverses the idea that Dionysos gets his inspiration from Achilles,<sup>115</sup> suggesting instead that Achilles got his inspiration from his grandfather, who in turn got his inspiration from Dionysos.

The comparison here continues, because Aiakos appears again during the funeral games of Opheltes, notably as the winner of two of the games, the wrestling and the javelins. From these he bears away as prizes a tripod of twenty-measures and a pair of golden greaves. The tripod is paralleled in the funeral games of Patroclus as one of the prizes offered, and perhaps Nonnos wanted the reader to believe that the tripod which Achilles gives away is the tripod which Aiakos won from Dionysos. This would neatly tie in with the connection of Aiakos to Dionysos and Achilles, as well as perhaps explaining why Nonnos seems so fixated with Achillean funeral games in his Dionysiac epic.

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<sup>114</sup> Shorrock (2001) 80.

<sup>115</sup> Hunter (1993) 24. While not altering the real world fact that Nonnos wrote more than a millennium after Homer, this ties in with the idea that Nonnos is, as Shorrock argues, attempting to gain, “a position of primacy at the head of the epic tradition,” by putting his narrative chronologically first. This points to, “not just the Homeric narratives that are posterior to the story of Dionysos but also the Argonautic narrative. Shorrock goes so far as to suggest that there are multiple sets of characters which are “pre-figurements” from the *Dionysiaka* for both sets of epics including Cadmus and Harmonia filling the roles of Jason/Medea and Odysseus/Nausicaa (Shorrock (2001) 49).

The entirety of this relationship would be less consequential if not for Nonnos' consistent anxiety about authorship and originality. Kauffman notes that Nonnos is disparaging of Achilles, referring to him as, “‘half-finished’ (ἡμιτέλεστον, 22.388), and thus inferior to his own hero.”<sup>116</sup> Hopkinson, Shorrock, and Newbold all have taken special note of the parent/child relationship between Homer and Nonnos as well as the role of parents/parental figures in the *Dionysiaka*.<sup>117</sup> Because of this, it is relevant that Nonnos chooses the progenitor of Achilles as a battle companion. This is especially compelling because Aiakos, like Dionysos, is the son of Zeus and therefore bears greater significance than Achilles by nature of birth, primacy, and participation in a superior conflict.

## VI. In his Father's Heaven: Heroic Goals in the *Dionysiaka*

As Shorrock has noted, although Nonnos wrote long after Homer, he forces his epic to come before the events of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* chronologically.<sup>118</sup> Nonnos hints at this not only by putting Achilles' grandfather in the work but also when he says, “he slew his enemies in the river, a watery battle, a conflict among the waves, as if to foretell the unfinished battle for Achilles in time to come at the river Camandros” (ἔσω ποταμοῖο δαΐζων ἰκμαλέον μόθον εἶχε καὶ ὕδατόεσσαν Ἐνυώ, οἷα προθεσπίζων ποταμοῦ περὶ χεῦμα Καμάνδρου φύλοπιν ἡμιτέλεστον ἐπεσσομένην Ἀχιλῆϊ, *Nonn. D.* 22.385-8).

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<sup>116</sup> Kauffman (2016) 766.

<sup>117</sup> Hopkinson (1994) 32; Shorrock (2001) 116-119; Newbold (1993) 95.

<sup>118</sup> Shorrock (2001) 49 & 182.

Despite the rampant imitation of earlier authors, Nonnos still attempts to give sequential primacy to his narrative as a way of establishing legitimacy over the previous Epic Cycle. Therefore, even though Homer wrote about Achilles' deeds first, the story of Dionysos which Nonnos tells still comes chronologically first. This rather bizarrely makes Homer and Achilles, in a way, the failed imitators and the inferior successors of Nonnos and Dionysos. The matter of primacy would not be significant but for Nonnos' discomfort with what divides original generative potency from the imperfect subordinate permutation of an ideal source.<sup>119</sup> This discomfort seeps into Nonnos' attitudes towards the goals of Epic heroes.

For Achilles, there is the clear choice of either the undying glory that comes through his great deeds or a long life which fades into obscurity. Odysseus' goals, which are slightly more complex, include wanting to return home to re-establish his dynasty in Ithaca, but he must choose to continue his travels despite nearly every place he visits attempting to keep him. Unlike Achilles and Odysseus, Dionysos is not bound by these constraints. Dionysos achieves deeds greater than Achilles without suffering death and still receives the glories of his

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<sup>119</sup> As I have mentioned in a number of notes, I believe there to be a strong influence of Neo-Platonism in Nonnos. If this is the case, Nonnos could likely have seen the discrepancy between the values of his day and of Homers and, as a result, come to the conclusion that Homer's work was imperfect. This might have prompted him to want to create a work which more closely fulfilled his expectation for a beautiful, technically impressive epic about a hero who also more closely represents his ideal for a divine hero. This explains why the goals of all those depicted as failed subordinate avatars to the ideal form of divine hero are different from Dionysos' goal of spreading salvation and attaining godhood.

accomplishment; furthermore, he has his homecoming to Thebes but ultimately rejects this, establishing his dynasty in Olympos, saying (*Nonn. D.* 46.63-68):

οὐ χατέω Πενθῆος ἐπιχθονίῳ μελάθρου:  
 δῶμα Διωνύσοιο πέλει πατρώιος αἰθήρ:  
 καὶ χθονός εἰ κρίσις ἦεν ἢ ἀστερόεντος Ὀλύμπου,  
 εἰπέ μοι εἰρομένω, τίνα φέρτερον αὐτὸς ἐνίψης,  
 οὐρανὸν ἐπτάζωνον ἢ ἐπταπύλου χθόνα Θήβης;  
 οὐ χατέω Πενθῆος ἐπιχθονίῳ μελάθρου.

I need not the earthly palace of Pentheus; the home of Dionysos is in his father's heaven. If there were a choice between earth and starry Olympos, tell me I ask, which could you call better yourself, sevenzoned heaven or the land of sevendate Thebes? I do not need the earthly palace of Pentheus!

Dionysos achieves and rejects the accomplishments of Homer's heroes and, by the end ascends to Olympos as not merely a hero but a full-fledged god.

This journey cuts to the heart of Nonnos' treatment and aims for Dionysos as a character; Dionysos is depicted as a model for the transcendence of the human soul to the divine, using the established pagan tradition of heroic apotheosis. This association of apotheosis with heroes is revealed many times but most obviously in book 25, the better part of which is used to compare Dionysos to other heroes, or as Nonnos writes, "I will set up the toils and sweat of Dionysos in rivalry both new and old; I will judge the manhood of the sons of Zeus." (ἀλλὰ νέοισι καὶ ἀρχεγόνοισιν ἐρίζων εὐκαμάτους ἰδρωτάς ἀναστήσω Διονύσου, κρίνων ἠγορέην τεκέων Διός, *Nonn. D.* 25.27-29). He then spends the rest of the book

going through the deeds of Perseus and Herakles in great detail, two other heroes born of mortals who had achieved apotheosis.<sup>120</sup> After these two lengthy sections Nonnos gives a nod of his hat to Homer in a rather condescending way by simply saying:

Τρωάδος ὑσμίνης οὐ μνήσομαι: οὐ γὰρ εἶσκω  
Αἰακίδῃ Διόνυσον ἢ Ἔκτορι Δηριαδῆα.

I will not speak of the Trojan War; for I do not compare Dionysos to Aiakides, or Deriades to Hector.

The entirety of this section is a scant ten lines (*Nonn. D. 25.253-263*) and seems to suggest that the deeds of Homer's heroes aren't worth discussing. Instead, Dionysos is at the top of a superior class of heroes, a class which is born of mortal blood and divine seed and which claims godhood through great deeds, as described in the last lines of the *Dionysiaka* (*Nonn. D. 48.974-7*):

καὶ θεὸς ἀμπελόεις πατρώιον αἰθέρα βαίνων  
πατρὶ σὺν εὐώδινι μιῆς ἔψαυσε τραπέζης,  
καὶ βροτέην μετὰ δαῖτα, μετὰ προτέρεην χύσιν οἴνου  
οὐράνιον πίε νέκταρ ἀρειοτέροισι κυπέλλοις,  
σύνθρονος Ἀπόλλωνι, συνέστιος υἱεὶ Μαίης.

Then the vinegod ascended into his father's heaven, and touched one table with the father who had brought him to birth; after the banquets of mortals, after the wine once poured out, he quaffed heavenly nectar from nobler goblets, on a throne beside Apollo, at the hearth beside Maia's son.

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<sup>120</sup> There is only one extant late source which mentions Perseus' death though not his apotheosis (Pseudo-Hyginus, *Fabulae* 244). There was however a hero cult to Perseus and it is reasonable to suggest that Nonnos had sources available to him which fill in this gap in the mythology which we lack today.

Though divine, Dionysos proved his status by surpassing the deeds of others and by having these deeds recorded in a superior poem. Though Nonnos discounts Homer's heroes as unworthy of mention, their deeds are present at almost every turn as Nonnos seeks to emulate and outdo the most renowned poet of the ancient world just as the Dionysos he wrote about both emulates and outdoes Homer's heroes.

## VII. The Challenge of Structure in the *Dionysiaka*

Homer has been praised for the structure of his epics, with their chiasmic rings and stories-within-stories. Nonnos, however, has been criticized by scholars such as Rudolf Keydell<sup>121</sup> for his apparent lack of clear structuring. With Robert Lind going so far as to state “As to lack of form, it is doubtful whether Nonnos saw clearly both beginning and end of this huge poem when he began to write; the very looseness of connection between its parts present a strong argument against... its unity”<sup>122</sup> The fact that the work reads much like a patchwork of epyllia,<sup>123</sup> with a number of encomiastic elements,<sup>124</sup> and a long digression in bucolic<sup>125</sup> has contributed to the idea that Nonnos’ “baroque” style<sup>126</sup> lacks coherent structural underpinnings.

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<sup>121</sup> See Keydell’s 1936 article “Nonnos.”

<sup>122</sup> Lind (1938) 57.

<sup>123</sup> Hollis (2006) 150-151; Shorrock (2001) 16-17.

<sup>124</sup> D’Ippolito (1964) 37-57; also see Edward Lasky’s articles “The Influence of the Encomium on the Dionysiaca of Nonnus of Panopolis” and “Encomiastic Elements in the Dionysiaca of Nonnus.”

<sup>125</sup> De Stefani (2001) 68; Vian (1995) 168.

The first major contributions in defense of the *Dionysiaka* being a structured whole came from Viktor Stegemann and Paul Collart. The former argued for the order being cosmological in nature and hinging upon astrology and Dionysos' connection to natural cycles.<sup>127</sup> Collart argued that many of the episodes in the *Dionysiaka* thematically mirror later episodes creating a complex chiasmic structure.<sup>128</sup> Robert Shorrock has contributed the most recent, strongest, and so far unchallenged view of Nonnos' structure which supports the view of Vian, De Stefani and myself that Nonnos was attempting to not merely imitate but rather to surpass Homer.<sup>129</sup> Shorrock does so by suggesting that Nonnos' "diversity of songs" (ποικίλον ὕμνον, Nonn. D. 1.15) took cues from epyllia, encomia and bucolic<sup>130</sup> to imitate Dionysos' own "diversity of shapes" (ποικίλον εἶδος, Nonn. D. 1.15) outlined in the proem, creating a poem with mastery and awareness of its own fluidity. The result was a narrative which, "is not an inert and chaotic repository of Greek mythological sources; it is... a conscious attempt

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<sup>126</sup> Newbold (1993) 91.

<sup>127</sup> Stegemann (1930) 4.

<sup>128</sup> Collart (1930) 59.

<sup>129</sup> Shorrock presents this argument in his book *The Challenge of Epic*. There is another argument for structure in the *Dionysiaka* made by Newbold in his 1999 article, "Chaos theory in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*." This rather daring work attempts to explain Nonnos' epic and its apparent lack of structure in terms of the Chaos Theory. The arguments delve heavily into the theoretical but it does contribute credence to the idea that readers should view Nonnos' poem on the cosmic scale.

<sup>130</sup> Lind (1935b) 21. Lind, with his characteristic lack of faith in Nonnos, refers to the *Dionysiaka* as "a good illustration of the confusion of literary types" rather than believing the incorporation of different genres to be an intentional facet of Nonnos' fluidity.



to match, cap and replace the traditional cycle of mythology with a new, all embracing, cycle of Dionysos.”<sup>131</sup>

I would go still further and suggest that Nonnos sets his epic on a cosmic scale,<sup>132</sup> with this structure suggesting that Nonnos’ Dionysos is ushering in a new era.<sup>133</sup> Nonnos imitates scenes and stories from the Homeric Cycle not to revere them but to replace them with a grander cycle for a new Christian Era using a god more easily syncretize with Christian themes.

If one accepts the idea that Nonnos’ writings are endeavoring to surpass previous generations, then Dionysos’ assumption into heaven imitates Nonnos’ own achievement of literary godhood and besting of Homer. If this is the case, then Nonnos could be using Dionysos as an allegory for Christianity and he is claiming that the triumph of Christianity represented a cycle not dissimilar from the passing of power from Ouranos to Chronos to Zeus- especially in light of the failed attempt of Typhon to seize this position from Zeus in books 1-2.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Shorrock (2001) 27. To reduce this 245 page book to two sentences greatly diminishes the intricacy and nuance of its arguments. It categorically dissects the structure of the *Dionysiaka* from beginning to end, showing the parallelism of episodes between it and its probable sources. Where it stops short is in analysis of the language of individual episodes in comparison to Homer; furthermore, it offers nothing in regard to Nonnos’ metrical composition.

<sup>132</sup> Newbold (1993) 91; Newbold suggests that creativity in the *Dionysiaka* occurs on a cosmic level. The natural comparison here is with Ovid, both in terms of scale and smaller interconnected episodes. The link is fairly widely acknowledged although not universally accepted. For more detailed studies see Braune’s “Nonnos und Ovid” and Eller’s “Die Metamorphose bei Ovid und Nonnos.”

<sup>133</sup> Stegemann (1930) 4.

<sup>134</sup> Shorrock corroborates the ideas that Typhon represents a failed model of achieving the power which Dionysos achieves (Shorrock (2001) 4). Similarly, he confirms that Nonnos was attempting to surpass and even replace the cycle of authors which preceded him (Shorrock (2001) 26). The statement here about the conclusion of the work being a Christian allegory is the most contentious claim, but I think it holds up in light of the considerable amount of work done recently to illuminate Nonnos’ Christianity (see appendix 1).

Structurally, I would argue that Achilles also represents a similar failed model of a hero which Nonnos' Dionysos transcends, further explaining Nonnos' criticism of Homer for writing about Achilles (*Nonn. D.* 25.253-261).

Nonnos, like Dionysos, transcends boundaries in the *Dionysiaka*. Part of this involves him, as the author, donning a Dionysiac mask and, in a sense, injecting himself into his work.<sup>135</sup> The idea that Nonnos makes himself synonymous with Dionysos was first suggested by Lind- though in the context of both being excessive and "Asiatic".<sup>136</sup> R.F. Newbold takes the relationship of Nonnos and Dionysos to a psychological level, saying that "Dionysos (or Nonnus) has 'Dionysused' the rest of the cast, imbuing them with his own psychology;"<sup>137</sup> he goes on to explain how Nonnos/Dionysos share anxiety over agency and creativity because of unstable relationships with their father figures.<sup>138</sup> Robert Shorrock, in the same vein, sums up that the world of Nonnos is one of ever changing identity which is built upon interplay with and anxiety about Homer:

Nonnus exploits and explores parallelism between himself  
and his subject, Dionysos: the journey of Dionysos from  
birth to apotheosis encourages the analogy of Nonnos

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<sup>135</sup> The proem of book 1 clearly illustrates this assumption of Dionysiac practice and R.F. Newbold makes this one of the points in his article, "Some Problems of Creativity in Nonnus's *Dionysiaca*" though he argues that Nonnos living vicariously through his work is an outlet for some kind of impostor syndrome.

<sup>136</sup> Lind (1935a) 19. Lind takes a dim view of "the orient", viewing it as a culture of cruelty and excess; in his opinion, Nonnos appropriated and corrupted the more moderate and rational manner of the Greeks with his "un-hellenic" ways.

<sup>137</sup> Newbold (1993) 97.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-98. Newbold explains the relationship thusly: "an absent father, of whom he was later challenged to prove himself worthy" and "Dionysos completed the task laid upon him by his father... and thus earned his divine status."

himself, from ‘birth’ and development as an epic poet to his entry into the literary pantheon... An important aspect of the journey of both poet and subject is their ongoing and frequently anxious relationships with their respective fathers: Homer and Zeus... (this is a world) without rigid divisions and boundaries, where Nonnus and Dionysus, Achilles and Hector, Alexander and Christ all form part of one vast syncretistic whole.<sup>139</sup>

### VIII. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Dionysiaka*, for most of its existence, been misunderstood for the same reason that it has been largely ignored and undervalued: it is a product of its times. Though its text primarily engages with those of the 8th century BC its message is for an audience of the 5th century AD.<sup>140</sup> Ultimately, scholars today are left to speculate on the intent of an author about whom very little is known, through a work which is the only completely extant example from a failed genre written on the cusp of the Dark Ages. This liminal period exhibits a great deal of anxiety with respect to its own identity: while fully embracing its newfound Christianity, no culture seemed ready to abandon the “pagan” culture which had been central to its identity and learning system for well over a thousand years.<sup>141</sup> The need to make peace with this

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<sup>139</sup> Shorrock (2001) 4-5.

<sup>140</sup> Kauffman (2016) 742.

<sup>141</sup> Shorrock (2008) 107. Shorrock, in his most recent article sums up the state of scholarship on Nonnos as it now stands. Because of the recent interest in this author and because of the recent surge of articles re-examining the role and meaning of his work, it is evident that the *Dionysiaka* can no longer be viewed as a last bastion of paganism and a poor copy of Homer. Instead, “we are faced here with uncomfortable, exciting and increasingly unavoidable questions about parallels between Christ and Dionysus and more generally about just how the *Dionysiaka* was read in later antiquity.”

cultural identity-split must have created the need for a figure such as Nonnos, who himself seems caught between different worlds,<sup>142</sup> to bridge the gap between the old and new worlds. The result is a work which seems to be intent on rationalizing its own superiority to the old world by attempting to take on its core works: those in the Homeric Cycle. While the method for others of the time was to read new meaning into old works, Nonnos created a new work in the style of the old imbued with a meaning directed at his own era. He uses Dionysos as a vehicle for this because Dionysos is the god most equipped to match the liminality of this uncertain era and most adaptable to serve as an analogue for Christ. With this in mind, one may begin to understand why Nonnos was so popular in his own day when, to modern eyes, his work seems gaudy compared to the golden measure of Homer. The intertextuality and the degree by which Nonnos attempts to surpass Homer therefore cannot be analyzed through another perspective than the time and culture within which the *Dionysiaka* was written. While it is never possible to completely reconstruct what a work means to a culture during a specific time or place, I would argue that the *Dionysiaka* should be viewed as a culmination of late-antique erudition resulting in rich allusion, complex language and technical skill. Nonnos' ability to write an epic on a grander scale should be taken as an attempt to explain why the old pantheon of deities and myths are no longer in control in the 5th century AD. Put simply, this

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<sup>142</sup> Nonnos was not only caught between the learning of the pagan world and the faith of the Christian world but also must have had his own struggles with identity as an Egyptian writing a Greek Epic in Lebanon.

new era of belief with its new God could not have come into being unless it were bigger, better and stronger than the old gods. What image could have been more resonant to a world in flux than a god of change triumphing over death, spreading salvation, and finally ascending to heaven to establish a new epoch? Similarly, what could make this victory more definitive than to take the works which are arguably the closest thing to a bible that the ancient Hellenic world had- the works of Homer- and surpass them within the confines of their own genre.<sup>143</sup>

### **Appendix I: Reconstructing Nonnos: a Pagan Writer and a Christian Bishop?**

Many articles, such as those of R.F. Newbold, speculate on the psyche of the author, but very few scholars have attempted to thoroughly explore who the author was, when he lived, and where. Much of this is due to the pure lack of biographical details about Nonnos but with recent research it is possible to define with more certainty who this elusive figure was. Nonnos, the author of the *Dionysiaka*, was from Egypt, deeply knowledgeable about pagan mythology, as well as a Christian Bishop in Syro-Phoenicia; in so doing, it will attempt to

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<sup>143</sup> It is the view of several scholars that Nonnos' first attempt at writing in dactylic hexameter was his paraphrase of the gospel of John. It is my interpretation that this was also his first attempt to supplant Homeric "paganism" with a directly Christian "Epic." This paraphrase, however, lacks the scale and grandeur of Homeric works despite Nonnos' hallmark metrical control. I believe that Nonnos recognized the need for a more directly "Homeric" attempt to address the cultural uncertainty surrounding old paganism during his lifetime. It is in a way ironic that his work now only exists as a curiosity of late antiquity and as the last notable work written about a pagan god.

address and reconcile the apparent discrepancies regarding the location, timeline, and beliefs of Nonnos.

The first and easiest to address is location. Nonnos, as his name suggests,<sup>144</sup> was Egyptian, coming from Panopolis (modern day Akhim) a city near Luxor in Upper Egypt. No direct biographical information exists about Nonnos to link him to any place outside Egypt;<sup>145</sup> it is well established, however, from his extensive descriptions of locations in modern Lebanon such as Beirut, that Nonnos had personal knowledge of the area, though in what capacity is not clear.<sup>146</sup> This would not be relevant but for the presence of a number of Nonnoi recorded in early Church records for the region of Syro-Phoenicia. To be specific, there are nine Nonnoi preserved in the acts of ecumenical councils from the period, one of these being a bishop at Heliopolis (modern day Baalbek). While no historical information about this bishop survives, information about this Nonnos is preserved in the hagiography of St. Nonnos- the bishop of Heliopolis who supposedly converted St. Pelagia and 30,000 other pagans. Setting aside this legend, there is a report that St. Nonnos was originally an Egyptian monk from the Tabenna Monastery, an early cenobitic monastery in upper Egypt nearly adjacent to Panopolis. Even for scholars, such as Wolfgang Leibeschuetz, who do not accept that Nonnos of Panopolis was a Christian bishop, it has been argued

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<sup>144</sup> Cameron (2016), 2.

<sup>145</sup> The earliest reference to Nonnos is an epithet, perhaps written by the author himself, connecting Nonnos to Alexandria; see Cameron (2016), 4.

<sup>146</sup> See Ruzena Dostálová's article "Tyros und Beirut in den Dionysiaka des Nonnus aus Panopolis".

that the presence of Christian monasteries near Panopolis fueled Christian imagery within the *Dionysiaca*.<sup>147</sup>

While it is easily plausible from these extant facts to conclude that Nonnos the bishop and Nonnos the writer were both in upper Egypt and Lebanon, this leaves open the rather difficult question of dating them. Most scholars place Nonnos of Panopolis rather broadly within the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. The manuscript history is rather unhelpful as the first and only manuscript from which all editions were made comes from the 1280 Laurentianus codex.<sup>148</sup> There are a number of references to the author prior to 1280- the earliest is from Agathias Myrrhinos in 570, at least a century after the time Nonnos lived.<sup>149</sup> Dating of the works of Nonnos can therefore only be inferred. The destruction of Beirut by earthquake in AD 551 serves as the definitive *terminus ante quem* of the *Dionysiaka* since it describes the city at length, but this is still, by all accounts, too late a date. Robert Lind and Alan Cameron employing textual analysis, have suggested a “Panopolitan School” of authors<sup>150</sup> who show the direct influence of Nonnos’ language. The earliest writer showing the influence of Nonnos is Pamprepios of Panopolis, who is dated to around 470-80 AD<sup>151</sup>. One figure from this school named Triphiodorus was traditionally dated to the 6th century and was believed to be a late imitator of Nonnos; a newly recovered papyrus with a dozen

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<sup>147</sup> Leibesbuetz, 204.

<sup>148</sup> Diller, 177. This codex was brought from Constantinople to Italy only 26 years before its fall to the Turks.

<sup>149</sup> Lind (1934) 69.

<sup>150</sup> Lind (1934) 72

<sup>151</sup> Lind (1934) 72

lines from his *Sack of Troy*, however, has placed him in the second half of the 3rd century and proved him to be a less-refined precursor of Nonnos<sup>152</sup>. The earliest proposed dating for Nonnos comes from Arthur Ludwich, who calls for a dating between 390 and 405<sup>153</sup> (with a *terminus post quem* of 385) arguing that Nonnos drew upon Gregory of Nazianzos who died in 390.

The only solid dates which survive for Nonnos the bishop are those from the acts of ecumenical church councils; from these we know that he was presents at the Council of Ephesus in 431 and at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.<sup>154</sup> Again, though with skeptical caution, we must return to information recorded about Saint Nonnos; his death is traditionally set at AD 458<sup>155</sup> though it is sometimes placed as late as 471. In either case, the available information points to a floruit period for Bishop Nonnos around the first half of the 5th century AD. More specific dating is impossible without added information; nevertheless, the dating of both Nonnoi align closely enough that it does not preclude them from being the same man. What remains, however, is the reconciliation of a pagan poet and a Christian bishop.

While at first sight these two personas could not seem to be more at odds, in the 5th century, paganism- though illegal- was not as absent or taboo as we might believe. Liebeschuetz, with his article “Mythology in the Christian Empire,”

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<sup>152</sup> See Laura Miguélez-Cavero’s book *Poems in Context. Greek Poetry in the Egyptian Thebaid 200-600 AD*.

<sup>153</sup> Lind (1934) 69.

<sup>154</sup> See Vossius’ *De Historicis Graecis*, Book 2, Ch. 20.

<sup>155</sup> Bunson, 611.



and Shorrock, with his book *The Myth of Paganism*, have gone to great lengths to demonstrate that pagan religion was so deeply ingrained in the culture of the ancient world that it was not so much expunged as moralized. Motifs from myth remained a hallmark of education, and didactic stories such as that of Cupid and Psyche were repurposed for a new system of Christian morality.<sup>156</sup> A large number of writers from the period including Clement of Alexandria, Choricus of Gaza and Agathias of Myrina,<sup>157</sup> many of them connected to the Church, wrote about and used pagan myth in their works.

One of the most interesting of these writings is the *Χριστὸς Πάσχων* (Latin: *Christus Patiens*) by Gregory of Nazianzos, an important patristic father who helped establish trinitarian doctrine. That this cento tells the story of the Passion of the Christ is unsurprising, but that it does so using repurposed lines from Euripides' *Bacchae* is. Gregory, who was cited earlier as a possible influence on Nonnos, is sometimes also believed to be the author of another work called the *Metabole*, a hexameter paraphrase of the *Gospel of John*. A team of Italian scholars working with Claudio De Stephani, however, has proven the *Metabole* to be the work of Nonnos. While Nonnos is traditionally cited as its author, the authorship of Gregory was proposed because some scholars found it perplexing to imagine a pagan poet also writing a Christian poem. The first attempt to syncretize this incongruity was to suggest that Nonnos lived a pagan

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<sup>156</sup> Liebeschuetz, 194.

<sup>157</sup> Liebeschuetz, 202.

youth (during which he wrote the *Dionysiaka*) and then converted later and wrote the *Metabole*.<sup>158</sup> This, too, has been disproven, as Francis Vian conclusively argued that the *Metabole* was in fact written first.<sup>159</sup>

Robert Shorrock and Alan Cameron argue that in this era paganism- or at least pagan topics- were far more fluid and far less excluded from Christian practice than in later periods. As previously mentioned, many established Christian writers used pagan myths and many towns had a rich history of pagan tradition which existed well into the period of Christianization.<sup>160</sup> Heliopolis was one such city, possessing a massive temple to Bacchus and the local gods with which he was syncretized, and a stubborn cell of practicing pagans which was not fully extinguished until 579 AD by a Byzantine general named Theophilus. This temple to Bacchus remains one of the best preserved from antiquity because it was converted into a Church. While the argument is hypothetical, it is entirely possible that Nonnos, the Bishop of Heliopolis would have been struck by the friezes in the temple depicting the life of Dionysos and might have interpreted them in the context of Jesus' life, as Gregory of Nazianzos had done. Syncretism was an established practice in antiquity which any educated Christian of the time could hardly have ignored. Many scholars have argued for the presence of

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<sup>158</sup> Cameron (2000), 177.

<sup>159</sup> See Vian's commentaries on the *Dionysiaka* and his article, "μάρτυς chez Nonnos de Panopolis: Étude de sémantique et de chronologie." This argument is based on a less tight control of meter in the *Metabole* and a comparative examination of the usage of μάρτυς in both works.

<sup>160</sup> Leibshuetz, 200.

Christian imagery in the *Dionysiaka*,<sup>161</sup> but beyond imagery Nonnos establishes a triangle connecting the Greek, Egyptian and Phoenician worlds in the first book of his epic.

In this first book, Nonnos tells of a young Cadmus, during his search for Europa establishing the Greek city of Thebes. This city, Nonnos tells us, was named after the Egyptian Thebes where Cadmus had been inducted into the mysteries of Osiris, and he later sets up worship for Dionysos in his new city when the god returned triumphantly from India. The linking of Dionysos to Osiris or Christ is no more shocking than the linking of the two Thebes in Egypt and Greece, or even the two cities named Heliopolis in Egypt and Phoenicia. In all cases this first book, with its extensive proem about transitions and the differing incarnations of Dionysos, sets up a world which is both derivative and fluid. If the world of the *Dionysiaka* mirrors the mind of its author as R.F. Newbold has often argued,<sup>162</sup> and this author was undoubtedly Christian then we as readers must also assume that Nonnos saw his own world as fluid and derivative.

This does not undermine Nonnos' Christianity- no current scholarship exists which suggests that the *Dionysiaka* was being any more than playful with Christian ideas and the concepts of moralizing paganism. Instead it simply

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<sup>161</sup> See Shorrock's *The Myth of Paganism*, Livrea's "Towards a New Edition of Nonnus' Paraphrase of St John's Gospel" and Spanoudakis' "Icarius Jesus Christ? : Dionysiac passion and biblical narrative in Nonnus' Icarius episode (Dion. 47, 1-264)". All together, these works cover many of the biblical allusions in the *Dionysiaka*.

<sup>162</sup> Newbold has written a number of striking articles on the psyche of Nonnos including "Nonnus, Dionysus and Christianity" and "Some Problems of Creativity in in Nonnus's *Dionysiaca*."

suggests that Nonnos was aware of the similarities and used them. While the idea that Nonnos was a Christian is accepted by most, that he was a bishop is not. Enrico Livrea has argued for this, and Cameron has argued against it because information about figures named Nonnos in the early church is too sparse and inconsistent, while Shorrock has remained neutral. In truth, there is simply not enough information available to argue conclusively. For the moment, both the arguments for and against Nonnos of Panopolis being a bishop require further proof.

In conclusion, while I argue that the evidence is such that a conclusion cannot be definitively reached, the evidence does more to suggest that Nonnos held a position in the Church. While circumstantial, the previously undiscussed subject of Heliopolis being tied to Bacchic and continued pagan worship increases the likelihood that the bishop there would have been aware of and would have regularly had to deal with paganism in the framework of a Christian world. This is further contextualized within the longstanding tradition of members of the Church writing on pagan topics and Christianity building on paganism (as Gregory of Nazianzos and the Christianization of the Bacchic temple illustrate). The Nonnos who wrote the *Dionysiaka* certainly evokes a world in which this syncretism is possible, and he corresponds to Nonnos of Heliopolis in both time and location. Therefore, I maintain that one cannot discount the possibility that Nonnos of Panopolis could have been the bishop at Heliopolis, since it seems less

likely that two figures could share such similarities without in fact being one and the same.

## **Appendix II: Images of Alexander in Nonnos' *Dionysiaka***

### **Introduction**

The character and campaign of Dionysos in the 5<sup>th</sup> c. AD Greek epic, the *Dionysiaka* by Nonnos, contains a number of striking similarities to that of Alexander the Great; interestingly, these similarities differ from the traditional image of Dionysos.<sup>163</sup> This appendix will compare accounts of Alexander's campaigns with the events in the life of Nonnos' Dionysos in order to show that Nonnos' used Alexander's life as a model for his own God-King. To do so, this appendix will address the similarities between the main episodes in the lives of both figures; in particular, their conception myths, their campaigns in India, and their roles as kings, generals and administrators.

### **Alexander the Great as an inspiration for the *Dionysiaka***

Alexander the Great and the Dionysos of Nonnos share a striking number

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<sup>163</sup> This has been undeveloped, perhaps, because of a number of difficulties associated with the study, most notably the fact that there is not one central text on Alexander as there is with Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*. Of the works on Alexander, not all that were present in Nonnos's day still survive, and of those which do (since it is uncertain whether Nonnos could read Latin- (Shorrock (2001) 110-1.), the Latin sources cannot be counted as certain sources of information. Finally, since none of the sources are in epic form, and therefore not dactylic hexameter, it is almost impossible to do direct textual comparative analysis. Robert Shorrock has acknowledged a link between Nonnos's Dionysos and Alexander, but these assertions are vague and unsupported (Shorrock (2001) 5).

of similarities, not the least being the invasion of India. This appendix aims to outline a number of scenes which link the two figures, and ultimately lead me to believe that Nonnos used Alexander as a model. This connection has been almost thoroughly ignored by scholars save in acknowledging the potential for a link.<sup>164</sup> The underlying association of Alexander with Dionysos seems quite natural to a Nonnian view of syncretism, considering that Alexander presented himself as a chameleon who embodied the very manifestation of heroes which Nonnos' Dionysos was in competition with and was himself counted- like Dionysos- as a deified son of Zeus.

#### **A. The Divine Birth Stories of Dionysos and Alexander**

To begin, Nonnos creates a conception story for Dionysos that shares distinct similarities with that of Alexander. Nonnos tells a unique narrative of the birth of an “earlier Dionysos” (*Nonn. D.* 6.206), Zagreus, by Persephone<sup>165</sup> which both deviates from earlier sources on Dionysos and imitates the most notable story of Alexander's conception.

Nonnos' narrative of Zagreus' conception and birth is lengthy, beginning in book five and comprising most of book six of the *Dionysiaka*. The most relevant section of this narrative describes how Persephone was impregnated by Zeus in the form of a serpent (*Nonn. D.* 6.155-68):

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<sup>164</sup> Shorrock (2001) 5. Garstad (2014) 237. Garstad provides the most complete analysis of the relationship between Nonnos and Alexander to date but is still far from exhaustive.

<sup>165</sup> I am alluding to the birth of the earlier Dionysos, Zagreus. Nonnos says they are different incarnations of the same being and explains it by saying that Zeus eats the heart of Zagreus after he dies, and that this is what is used in recreating Dionysos in Semele's womb.

Ah maiden Persephoneia! You could not find how to escape your mating!<sup>166</sup> No, a dragon<sup>167</sup> was your mate, when Zeus changed his face and came, rolling in many a loving coil through the dark to the corner of the maiden's chamber, and shaking his hairy chaps: he lulled to sleep as he crept the eyes of those creatures of his own shape who guarded the door. He licked the girl's form gently with wooing lips. By this marriage with the heavenly dragon, the womb of Persephone swelled with living fruit, and she bore Zagreus the horned baby, who by himself climbed upon the throne of Zeus and brandished lightning in his little hand.

In Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, Olympias, the mother of Alexander, is spied by her husband, Philip of Macedon, lying with a snake (*Plut. Alex. 2.4* and *3.1*). According to Plutarch and other sources, this snake was Zeus in disguise who impregnates her with Alexander. In describing Zeus in both stories, both authors use the word “δράκων” to describe his serpent form (*Plut Alex. 3.1* and *Nonn. D. 6.161*). Despite the rich number of stories of Zeus' sexual exploits, these are the only two in which Zeus mates as a serpent.

Plutarch notes that Olympias was a member of the Samothracian Mysteries, a mystery cult which worshiped both Dionysos and Persephone (*Plut. Alex 2.1*). Furthermore, Plutarch calls Olympias a “Μῆμαλλών” (*Plut. Alex. 2.5*), an obscure term<sup>168</sup> for a Bacchant which Nonnos also uses (*Nonn. D. 1.34* and *45.31*). Plutarch specifically notes that Olympias was part of the orgiastic rites

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<sup>166</sup> The rather unforgivable tactic of drugging maidens and “unloosing their chaste girdle” while they slumber is a practice which Dionysos also employs, much to the chagrin of Nicaea and Aura.

<sup>167</sup> The translator, W.H.D. Rouse, chose this word. The original “δράκων”, I believe would be better translated as “serpent”, but Rouse likely used it to highlight it as a cognate. Plutarch, also uses the word “δράκων” to describe the serpent which slept with Olympias (*Plut Alex. 3.1*).

<sup>168</sup> There are only 39 occurrences of this term in the corpus of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*.

of Dionysos,<sup>169</sup> but he does not just say “Dionysos”, instead qualifying this by saying that she specifically revered the Dionysos “from the ancient times” (*Plut. Alex. 2.5*). The word Plutarch uses to describe the older cult-related Dionysos is “παλαιός” (ancient), one of the words which Nonnos uses to describe Zagreus<sup>170</sup>. The fact that Plutarch linked Olympias with Zagreus and Persephone suggests that this is the best antecedent for Nonnos creating a birth story for Zagreus, especially since the details and wording of the two accounts align so closely.

Similarly, Nonnos' proclamation of Zagreus as “the horned baby, who by himself climbed upon the throne of Zeus” (*Nonn. D. 165-166*) evokes the imagery of Alexander, who often depicted himself as the horned son of Zeus Amon, and who attempted to raise himself up to the status of Zeus and his deified half-mortal sons.

## **The Indian War**

### **A. The Primacy of the Indian Expedition**

The event at the center of Nonnos' plot is Dionysos' campaign in India. Modern scholars as well as several ancient sources state that Dionysos' campaigns in India were invented after Alexander's Indian campaign of 327-325 BC. The

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<sup>169</sup> With their focus on the afterlife, mystery cults such as this at the time often worshiped not only Dionysos, but also Demeter and Persephone because all three represent natural cycles including both death and rebirth.

<sup>170</sup> The first references to the land of India come in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC in Aesop's *Fables* (*Aesop. Prov. 41*) and the fragments of Hecataeus' *Περίοδοσ γῆς* (*Hecat. frag.296.1, frag.299.2*). Herodotus also discussed the land in some detail.



first extant Greek reference<sup>171</sup> to Dionysos in India is found in Strabo, the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC geographer, who not only links it to the campaigns of Alexander in India but also goes on to say that, “the expedition of Dionysos and Herakles to the country of the Indians looks like a mythical story of later date” (*Strab.11.5.5*).<sup>172</sup> Later sources, however, take for granted that these stories predate Alexander and that Alexander was imitating Dionysos by invading India.

Nevertheless, all the surviving sources describing Alexander as an imitator of Dionysos are late, having been written at least two hundred years after Alexander’s death and a few hundred years before Nonnos. This time-frame is reflected in the archaeological evidence, where images of Dionysos' triumph from India only begin to appear around the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD. While this does not remove the possibility of earlier sources, it suggests that stories about Dionysos in India became more prolific after Alexander. Furthermore, because the number of sources on Dionysos' Indian campaign increase at the same time that sources on Alexander occur or are found in accounts of Alexander, it also suggests that these stories became popular because of Alexander.

Since Nonnos demonstrates personal ignorance of India in his writings,<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> There were two primary earlier works, Ctesias' *Indika* and Megasthenes' *Indika*, which are now lost (Muntz 25, 36); Megasthenes was a primary source for most later authors (Muntz, 21). The fragments of neither author mention Dionysos. Ovid, writing around the same time as Strabo, makes reference to the Indian campaign of Dionysos in his *Metamorphoses* (*Ov. Met. 4. 20 ff, and Ov. Met. 4. 605*).

<sup>172</sup> Before this, most Greek sources only mention that Dionysos traveled in Thrace and Phrygia; Euripides (*Eur. Bacc. 14ff*) mentions Asia but without specifying India. Early sources on Dionysos predating the campaigns of Alexander himself mention neither India nor a campaign.

<sup>173</sup> Most notably, Nonnos does not seem to have know what Indians truly looked like nor did he have a clear spatial sense of real Indian geography.

he likely turned to stories about Alexander's Indian Campaign as a source of information about India and of inspiration in creating Dionysos' Indian Campaign. This assertion is proven by the fact that events in the *Dionysiaka* match events in the campaign of Alexander but do not follow other sources about Dionysos in India.

## **B. The Catalog of Indians**

The first example of this is geographic. Nonnos uses place names associated with Alexander but not mentioned in other accounts of Dionysos. Nonnos spends the entirety of Book 26 creating a "Catalog of Indians"<sup>174</sup> in which he lists the Indian nations and talks about the exploits of their heroes. When the names of the Indian tribes are analyzed with digital tools (such as the *Perseus Project* and the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*) a pattern of recurrent names and sources emerges. Of the forty-four tribes in this army, ten are outliers which occur nowhere besides Nonnos.<sup>175</sup> The remaining thirty-four names occur elsewhere in Greek writings before Nonnos. Almost all of these names occur in the same few texts by Strabo, Arrian, Plutarch, Ptolemy, Diodorus Siculus, Dionysius Periegetes, and Pausanias;<sup>176</sup> all of these authors, excluding Dionysius,

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<sup>174</sup> I refer to this list as such because it seems to parallel the "Catalog of Ships" in book 2 of the *Iliad*. Nonnos does this, I believe, to show how great the army was that Dionysos conquered (greater than that which Achilles or Alexander fought). As a result, it shows how tremendously great the task was to conquer them.

<sup>175</sup> This includes Ombelos, Baidios, Rhodoe, Orycie, Dussaioi, Hysporos, Areizanteia, Eukollos, Goryandis, Eristobarea.

<sup>176</sup> It is interesting to note that several of these are Alexandrian geographers.

contain narratives of Alexander.

### **C. Tactics and the Battle of the Hydaspes**

The single greatest clue in the Indian Campaign that Nonnos models his Dionysos on Alexander is the battle at the Hydaspes. Although many of its details are Homeric rather than Alexandrian, the location, the combatants, and the outcome solidly link it to Alexander, who fought a battle at the Hydaspes in 326 BC. In the Indian Campaigns of both Dionysos and Alexander, this battle is the most important event in the campaign. It also is directly overseen by the Indian king (Deriades for Dionysos and Porus for Alexander). Both of these kings end up submitting to their conquerors, but only after losing their son. In Nonnos, Deriades' son is named Orontes, which is, unsurprisingly, the name of a general who fought against Alexander at the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BC. Both battles at the Hydaspes also included elephants, a unique detail which Nonnos almost certainly took from Alexandrian accounts.<sup>177</sup>

## **Social Roles of Dionysos and Alexander**

### **A. Dionysos the General**

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<sup>177</sup> The depiction of the triumphal processions of Bacchus returning from India became ubiquitous on sarcophagi and in mosaics during the 2nd c AD and usually contain images with elephants. Furthermore, Diodorus Siculus says: "Then he made a campaign into India, whence he returned to Boeotia in the third year, bringing with him a notable quantity of booty, and he was the first man ever to celebrate a triumph seated on an Indian elephant." (*Diod.* 4.3.1). The fact that both the archaeological evidence and this source refer to triumphs, a Roman tradition, adds credence to the claim that this tradition arose after Alexander.

Nonnos constantly draws attention to the idea that Dionysos is a general in charge of a large group of “soldiers”, even though he has only slightly more interaction with his troops than Achilles has with his Myrmidons. Nonnos' representation of Dionysos as a general distinguishes him from other, earlier representations, which generally depict Dionysos with a company of Bassarids. These traditional maenads, however, exhibit only animalistic zeal in Bacchic rites, and display neither the organization nor the structure of a military unit.<sup>178</sup> In many ways, one may argue that recreating the maenads as an organized body of soldiers is antithetical to the traditional character of Dionysos as a dissolver of structure. Recreating this aspect of both Dionysos and his followers was, nevertheless, necessary for Nonnos in order to make him a conqueror like Alexander.

### **B. Dionysos the Administrator**

Despite his traditional role of breaking down social order, Nonnos' Dionysos also becomes a social organizer in order to follow in Alexander's legacy. Like Alexander, Dionysos does not destroy his enemy's city and infrastructure after conquering them. Robert Shorrock has commented on this, saying:

The lack of Posthomerian allusion from Nonnos' cycle highlights the fact that Dionysos is a benign victor, who operates under a different ethical code (than the Greeks at Ilium). Dionysos does not destroy his enemies, he seeks to pacify them; he does not raze

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<sup>178</sup> Diodorus Siculus does describe Dionysos' maenads as a “στρατόπεδον”: “He also led about with himself an army composed not only of men but of women as well, and punished such men as were unjust and impious.” (*Diod.* 4.2.6.).

the city to the ground but leaves the fabric and social structure largely intact, assigns the city a pious governor, and holds a reconciliatory feast for both sides [40.235-6].<sup>179</sup>

Although Shorrock does not make the connection, the actions which he describes as Nonnos forging his own way as an author are, in fact, those regularly used by Alexander the Great.

After converting the Indians to his worship, Dionysos follows in Alexander's steps by setting up a governor, Modaios, who was an Indian rather than a Greek (*Nonn. D. 32.175*). By doing this, not only does Dionysos establish an administrative infrastructure rather than destroying one, but also uses locals in this administration; in no other previous account does Dionysos use locals to administer India.<sup>180</sup> Alexander wisely knew that a native would understand the workings of his own land better than a foreigner, and that allowing stable continuation of power would engender trust and cooperation rather than resentment of subjugation, which is why he uses Porus, the former Indian king, to manage the lands that he once ruled. The Dionysos of Nonnos mirrors this, albeit for a different purpose; he did not conquer India for the same reason as Alexander, instead, he was propagating his cult and spreading his religion.

### **C. Dionysos and Alexander as Kings**

Nonnos depicts Dionysos, like Alexander, as a king who went abroad

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<sup>179</sup> Shorrock (2001) 90.

<sup>180</sup> Muntz 33-34

from his homeland for conquest; however, upon returning to Thebes, both were refused their right to rule.

In 335 BC, when Alexander returned from Thrace to quell a revolt in Thebes, he invoked descent from Dionysos as proof that his authority was valid. In one account, an inhabitant named Ismenias came to Alexander pleading with him as a descendant of Dionysos to stop the destruction of Thebes. Alexander refused, responding that if they had known that he had descended from Herakles and Dionysos, they should not have rebelled against him.<sup>181</sup> As the son of Philip II, the conqueror of Greece, and as the descendant of Theban Dionysos, Alexander was rejected despite a double claim to kingship; in his wrath, he destroyed Thebes, burning it to the ground.

In Nonnos, Dionysos' episode in Thebes employs the same logic used by Alexander. Notably, Nonnos draws attention to the idea that Pentheus was usurping power in Thebes, a theme absent from Euripides' drama, and emphasizes that Dionysos is the legitimate heir to the rule. The details of Nonnos' account show much more of a militant conquest of Thebes than Euripides shows, including assault of the city with his army. Like Alexander, Dionysos has a dual right to rule, by lineage from Zeus and the line of Cadmus, but he is rejected and destroys Thebes with divine flames.

In being rejected from his earthly birthright, Dionysos aims at a higher kingdom- the heavenly kingdom to which Alexander had also tried to ascend.

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<sup>181</sup> Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Alexander Romance*, 1.46

Dionysos even says in the *Dionysiaka* (Nonn. D. 63-64) that, “I do not need the earthly palace of Pentheus; the home of Dionysos is his father's heaven.” Since both Dionysos and Alexander were not given honor in their own towns and among their own relatives, they chose to define themselves not as heirs to these mortal kingdoms, but rather as heirs of their heavenly fathers.

In conclusion, this is only a brief introduction to some of the details in the *Dionysiaka* which were inspired by Alexander the Great, and a much longer examination could and should be done. The question remains, however, why Nonnos used Alexander as a model. The answer is this: Nonnos saw in Dionysos the same sets of traits as in other figures from the Classical world: Alexander and Dionysos shared half-divine birth, performed super-human feats, conquered the world (either by spear or in spirit) and were apotheosized. Scholarship by others such as Shorrock, Leibeschuetz, and Newbold have shown that Nonnos used a variety of sources as inspiration for his work, from Achilles to Christ, and Alexander is just one more figure in a succession of non-mutually exclusive mythologies which he employed to create his image of Dionysos.

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