

Reconstructing Nonnos: a Pagan Writer and a Christian Bishop?

The 4th-5th centuries AD present us with two presumably distinct figures named Nonnos: an author and a sainted bishop. Very little information about either of these individuals has been preserved and what we do have is clouded by inconsistencies and confusing chronologies. Scholarship is divided as to whether these individuals are mutually exclusive or one and the same (Sherry 1996, Shorrock 2011). This paper suggests that the evidence is strong enough to support a syncretic view of these figures, exploring and ultimately arguing that they were the same man.

The lynchpin in this argument rests with the author, Nonnos of Panopolis, and a question of the veracity of his authorship. The two works linked to his name are the pagan epic, the *Dionysiaca*, and a paraphrase of the Gospel of John, the *Metabole*; while the former is undisputedly his, the latter is sometimes viewed as a *cento* of a later date (Whitby 2007). This inquiry will use textual analysis of the *Metabole* to show that this author held a deep understanding of both paganism and Christianity and that its language suggests it being by the same author as the *Dionysiaca* (De Stefani 2002, Shorrock 2011). Similarly, this paper will analyze select episodes of the *Dionysiaca* which reveal both a prevalence of Christian themes as well as a deep knowledge of Syria, where St. Nonnos served as bishop and where paganism persisted through this period (Spanoudakis 2007, Liebeschuetz 1996).

Within this analysis, the information will be taken and synced to the available biographical sources on both figures (including scholia and early Church records) in order to establish a potential chronology and to demonstrate that the given information about their lives is too similar to be coincidental (Lind 1934, Woods 1993).

Bibliography

- De Stefani, C. (2002) *Nonno di Panopoli, Parafrasi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni, Canto I*.
Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento. Bologna: Pàtron.
- Liebeschuetz, J. H. W. G. (1996). The use of pagan mythology in the Christian Empire with particular reference to the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus. In *The sixth century, end or beginning?* (pp. 75–91).
- Lind, L. R. (1934). The date of Nonnos of Panopolis. *Classical Philology: A Journal Devoted to Research in Classical Antiquity*, 69–73.
- Livrea, E. (1988). Towards a new edition of Nonnus' Paraphrase of St. John's Gospel. *Mnemosyne: Bibliotheca Classica Batava, XLI*, 318–324.
- Newbold, R. F. (2003). 'Appendix 3: Nonnus, Dionysus and Christianity.' In: Nonnos of Panopolis, The Paraphrase of the Gospel of John. Translation by M.A. Prost, with 4 appendices. The Writing Shop Press, 239-47.
- Sherry, L. F. (1996). The Paraphrase of St. John attributed to Nonnus. *Byzantion: Revue Internationale Des études Byzantines*, 66((2)2), 409–430.
- Shorrock, R. (2011). *The myth of paganism : Nonnus, Dionysus and the world of late antiquity*. London: Duckworth.
- Spanoudakis, K. (2007). Icarus Jesus Christ ? : Dionysiac passion and biblical narrative in Nonnus' Icarus episode (Dion. 47, 1-264). *Wiener Studien: Zeitschrift Für Klassische Philologie, Patristik Und Lateinische Tradition*, 120, 35–92.
- Whitby, M. (2007). The Bible hellenized : Nonnus' Paraphrase of St. John's gospel and Eudocia's Homeric centos. In *Texts and culture* (pp. 195–231).

Woods, D. (1993). Nonnus, an unnoticed governor of Phoenicia, and the myth of a second council of Tyre. *Latomus: Revue D'études Latines*, 52, 634–642.