The Reception of Nonnus in Late Antiquity, Byzantine, and Renaissance Literature

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1 Late Antiquity

The metric and stylistic novelty of Nonnus’ work was immediately appreciated by a large group of poets, who recognized him as a model and imitated him. Francis Vian has remarked the contradictory nature of Nonnus’ legacy in Late Antiquity: Nonnus was a very influential poet in his own time and beyond until the seventh century; however, evidence for this influence can be patchy and not easy to pinpoint, given the penury of direct references to the Dionysiaca or the Paraphrase.¹

Nonnus’ leading role, as well as the existence of a ‘Nonnian school’, were first highlighted by Gottfried Hermann² and have become a commonplace in scholarship from the eighteenth century onward. Even Vian still regarded as legitimate the use of the handy label ‘école nonnienne’.³ More recent scholars, rather than using ‘Nonnian school’, have shown a preference for ‘modern style’, while restricting the use of ‘Nonnian’ to those authors who had patently adopted his metrical innovations and expressive solutions.⁴

All things considered, there is little doubt that by the second half of the fifth century Nonnus had become a classic. His modern style became popular in Egypt, Constantinople, Asia Minor and Palestine.⁵ Nonnus is likely to have exercised his magisterium both directly through public recitals of the Dionysiaca or the Paraphrase,⁶ and indirectly as a set author of the school canon next to the Homeric texts.⁷

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¹ Vian (1976) lvi–lxi.
² Miguélez Cavero (2008) 94.
³ Vian (1976) lvi, lix.
From the earliest group of followers of Nonnus, one has preliminarily to remove Triphiodorus of Panopolis, a grammarian who wrote a short poem in 691 hexameters on the Sack of Troy. Thanks to *P.Oxy. XLI* 2946, his poem can be dated to the second half of the third century. Before the publication of the papyrus, Triphiodorus was considered a slovenly disciple of Nonnus, owing to the resemblance of his style and metrics to those of Nonnus. It is now evident that he was a precursor of the modern style.

The relationship between Nonnus and his compatriot Cyrus has been the subject of a long debate. During the reign of Theodosius II (408–450), Cyrus was Prefect of Constantinople and Praetorian Prefect of the East in 439. While holding the consulate in 441, he fell into disgrace and became a bishop in a small town in Phrygia. It was thought that Nonnus had imitated Cyrus, notably on account of the citation in *Dion.* 16.321 and 20.372 of the first line of *AP 9.136 Αἴθε πατὴρ μ’ ἐδίδαξε δασύτριχα μῆλα νομεύειν;* however, Alan Cameron argued that Cyrus could be instead regarded as ‘the earliest extant reader of Nonnus’ known to us. The sinking of the work of Cyrus, with the exception of seven epigrams ascribed to him in the *Greek Anthology* (not all authentic), preclude a more detailed analysis. It cannot be excluded, therefore, that the two authors had known and imitated each other.

Similarly controversial is the relationship between Nonnus’ *Paraphrase* and the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum*, which manuscripts ascribe to Apollinarius of Laodicea. The author, probably an Egyptian who composed the *Metaphrasis* around 460, appears to adhere to an archaizing style, which he considers apt to translate the Psalms into Homeric language. In the prologue, on the other hand, language and meter are reminiscent of Nonnus. As De Stefani has already argued, the author of the *Metaphrasis* can hardly be considered an orthodox follower of the Nonnian style.

A further example of Nonnian influence is, according to Daria Gigli Piccardi, the second section of the Oracle of Apollo as transmitted by the *Theosophia Tubingensis*, a text of uncertain dating ascribable between the fifth and sixth centuries. It shows numerous Nonnian references, which should thus be regarded as the earliest echoes of the *Paraphrase* in Christian circles.

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8 Al. Cameron (1965) 478–482.
9 Wernicke (1899); Weinberger (1896); Wifstrand (1933).
10 See Monaco (2007) and Miguélez Cavero (2013c).
11 Friedländer (1912a).