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Harmonia's necklace (Nonn. *D.* 5.135-189): a set of jewellery, *ekphrasis* and a narrative node

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According to Theon, author of the earliest treatise of *Progymnasmata* or preliminary rhetorical exercises, an ἔκφρασις (*ekphrasis*) is a composition that exposes in detail (λόγος περιηγηματικός) and brings what is portrayed clearly before sight (ὕπ' ὄψιν ἄγων ἐναργῶς τὸ δηλούμενον -Theon *Prog.* 118.7.8).[1] This definition illustrates to what point *ekphrasis* exceeded its translation as simply "description" and implied a complex interplay of rhetoric, visuality/visibility, imagination and suggestion.[2] *Ekphrasis* is thus a powerful space for interrogation on the intersections of rhetoric and the society that produces and uses it: artistic and literary trends, perceptions on images and their propagandistic exploitation are all somehow reflected in these compositions.

A book on rhetorical strategies in late antique literature would be incomplete without a chapter on *ekphrasis*, especially since Michael Roberts published in 1989 his *The Jeweled Style*, a subtle invitation to appreciate the visual aesthetic that informs late antique poetry, but an overview of the rhetorical and literary impact of *ekphrasis* in late antique poetry would exceed the limits of this article. Instead, the following pages focus on one particular *ekphrasis*, that of the necklace given by Aphrodite to Harmonia as a wedding present in the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus of Panopolis (5.135–189).[3] I shall discuss how a late antique reader would have responded to it, both imaginatively and intellectually, and exploring Nonnus' play with visual and literary traditions. Nonnus'

[1] For a good overview on what *ekphrasis* meant in Antiquity, see Webb (2009).

[2] Compare the definition given by Mitchell (1994: 152): "ekphrasis, the verbal representation of visual representation". Mitchell analyses three moments of realisation of the reader of an ekphrasis (1994: 152-159): ekphrastic indifference (grown out of a common-sense perception that ekphrasis is impossible: a verbal representation cannot represent its object in the same way a visual representation can), ekphrastic hope or fascination (the impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in metaphor when we discover that language can make us see in a different sense: once the estrangement of the image/text division is overcome a verbal icon or image-text arises in its place) and ekphrastic fear (it occurs when we sense that the difference between verbal and visual representation may collapse and the figurative nature of ekphrasis might become real: as a consequence we try to regulate the borders between the senses, modes of representation and objects proper to each). More recently Zeitlin (2013: 17): "*Ekphrasis* is a slippery topic… [It can be] defined as a rhetorical exercise, a literary genre (or mode), a narrative digression, a species of description, or a poetic (even metapoetic or meta-representational) technique… involving aesthetic considerations, theories of vision, modes of viewing, mental impressions, and the complex relationships between word and image".

[3] Greek text from Vian (1976-2006); translation adapted from Rouse, Rose and Lind (1940). Nonnus of Panopolis was an Egyptian Christian poet who wrote first the *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John* (21 books) and then the *Dionysiaca*. He lived in the fifth century AD. On Nonnus' works, date and religion, see now Accorinti (2016). On the *ekphrasis* in the *Dionysiaca*, see Faber (2016).

readers did not expect this description to refer to a real, existing object:[4] by definition *ekphraseis* did not seek to represent a tangible reality, but to appeal to the images the listener or reader preserved in their memory, defined by cultural conventions and values.[5] On the other hand, how the readers constructed the image suggested by Nonnus was inevitably informed by literary and visual parallels, by what they had seen and read before,[6] which is why this paper starts with a preliminary overview of the connections of the description and the world in which it was produced.

The second section reviews the ekphrastic strategies at work in Nonn. *D.* 5.135-189, contending that they are similar to those operative in other late antique works, and were designed to appeal to contemporary tastes. Finally, the third section illustrates how the *ekphrasis* seeps on the *Dionysiaca* as a whole,[7] both in its most immediate context as a form of characterisation of Harmonia, and as a narrative node that grounds later plot developments and extradiegetic connections. The latter point wants to contribute to long-standing efforts to understand the late antique conception of narrative.[8]

1. Harmonia's necklace: an overview

The narrative of the *Dionysiaca* begins with the rape of Europa (1.45 ff.), whose disappearance forces her brother Cadmus (Dionysus' maternal grandfather) to leave his home and search for her. Zeus recruits Cadmus for his fight against Typhoeus, the gigantic son of Earth who has brought chaos to the universe and menaces to destabilise it forever. In exchange for his help, Zeus gives Cadmus the hand of Harmonia, daughter of Aphrodite and Ares, raised by Electra in Samothrace.

Electra is instructed by Hermes to please Zeus and the immortals by giving her daughter to Cadmus without a dowry (3.425-44), but Harmonia refuses to marry Cadmus because he is a vagrant and will give her no marriage gifts (4.20-66). The solution to the impasse comes by divine intervention: taking the shape of a girl of the

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[4] Nugent (1990: 31): "From Achilles' shield to Thetis' coverlet, the narrative exuberance of *ekphrasis* is often *ipso facto* impossible to contain within two (or three) physical dimensions: it is a vision necessarily conveyed verbally, and the attempt to read its protean images back into an original object may be mistaken".

[5] On the interplay of memory and imagination, see Webb (1997: esp. 236, 238); Leader-Newby (2004: 133); Roberts (1989: 69-70).

[6] In *De Trinitate* 8.6.68-89 Augustine describes how, when he hears a description of Alexandria (the topic of the exercise of description in Aphth. *Prog.* 12.4.12 Patillon -see also Ach. Tat. 5.1), a city he has never seen by himself, he imagines it as best he can by drawing on his knowledge of the closest sight within his experience, the city of Carthage.

[7] Whitmarsh (2002: 111): "ekphrastic 'contagion': the power of the visual icon to infect its surrounding discourses with ontological and perceptual uncertainty. Ekphraseis, that is to say, *seep*".

[8] Roberts (1989); Nugent (1990); Miller (1998). For *ekphrasis* as a proleptic device, Harrison (2001).

neighbourhood, Aphrodite praises Cadmus' appearance and seduces Harmonia, who then leaves with him (67-176). Their wedding is postponed to book 5, after the foundation of Thebes, and the gods make up for the lack of dowry with their presents (5.125-89): Zeus gives success in all things, Poseidon the gifts of the sea, Hermes a sceptre, Ares a spear, Apollo a bow, Hephaestus a diadem, Hera a golden throne, and Aphrodite a necklace.

... Πολυφράδμων <δ'> Ἀφροδίτη
χρύσεον ὅρμον ἔχοντα λίθων πολυδαίδαλον αἴγλην
λευκὸν ἐρευθιόωντι συνήρμοσεν αὐχένι κούρης,
Ἡφαίστου σοφὸν ἔργον, ὅ περ κάμε Κυπρογενείῃ,
τοξευτῆρος Ἔρωτος ὅπως ὀπτήριον εἴη.
Ἔλπετο γὰρ Κυθέρειαν ἀεὶ βαρύγουνος ἀκοίτης
υἷα τεκεῖν σκάζοντα, ποδῶν μίμημα τοκῆος·
ἀλλὰ μάτην ἐδόκησε, καὶ ἀρτίπον υἷα νοήσας
λαμπόμενον πτερύγεσσιν ὁμοίιον υἱέι Μαίης
ποικίλον ὅρμον ἔτευξεν, ὃς ἀστεροφεγγέι νώτῳ
ὡς ὄφις ἦν ἑλικῶδες ἔχων δέμας. – Οἷα γὰρ αὐτὴ
δίστομος ἀμφίσβαινα μέσῳ μηρύεται ὁλκῷ
ἰὸν ἀποπτύουσα δι' ἀμφοτέροιο καρήνου,
ἀμφελελιζομένη μελέων ἑτερόζυγι παλμῷ,
ἐς κεφαλὴν δὲ κάρηνον ἐφερπύζουσα συνάπτει,
λοξῇ καμπύλα νῶτα περισκαίρουσα πορείῃ·
ὣς ὅ γε ποικίλος ὅρμος ἐαγότα νῶτα τιταίνων
κάμπτετο, κυρτωθεῖσαν ἔχων διδυμάονα δειρήν,
ἀμφιλαφὴς φολίδεσσιν ἐς ὀμφαλὸν ἄχρις ἰκάνων
πλεκτὸς ὄφις δικάρηνος. Ὑπὸ στροφάλιγγι δὲ τέχνης
χρύσεος ὁλκαίης ἐλελίζετο κύκλος ἀκάνθης·
καί οἱ ἑλισσομένης κεφαλὴ πολυδινέι παλμῷ
ψευδαλέον σύριγμα διήρυγεν ἀνθερεῶνος. –
Καὶ στομάτων ἑκάτερθεν, ὅπῃ τέλος ἐστὶ καὶ ἀρχή,
αἰετὸς ἦν χρύσειος, ἅτε πλατὺν ἠέρα τέμνων,
ὀρθὸς ἐχιδναίων διδύμων μεσσηγὺ καρήνων,
ὑψιφανὴς πτερύγων πισύρων τετράζυγι κημῷ·

τῇ μὲν ξανθὸς ἴασπις ἐπέτρεχε· τῇ δὲ Σελήνης
εἶχε λίθον πάνλευκον, ὃς εὐκεράοιο θεαίνης
λειπομένης μινύθει καὶ ἀέξεται, ὁππότε Μήνη
ἀρτιφαὴς σέλας ὑγρὸν ἀποστίλβουσα κεραίης
Ἠελίου γενετῆρος ἀμέλγεται αὐτόγονον πῦρ·
ἄλλη μάργαρον εἶχε φαεσφόρον, οὗ χάριν αἴγλης
γλαυκὸν Ἐρυθραίης ἀμαρύσσεται οἶδμα θαλάσσης
λαμπομένης· ἑτέρης δὲ μεσόμφαλος αἴθοπι κόσμῳ
λεπτοφαὴς σέλας ὑγρὸν ἀπέπτυεν Ἰνδὸς ἀχάτης. –
Ἀλλήλαις δ’ ἑκάτερθε συναπτομένων κεφαλάων
χάσματα δισσὰ δράκοντος ἀνευρύνοντο καρήνων,
αἰετὸν ἀμφοτέροισι περικλείοντα γενείοις
σύμπλοκον ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα. Δι’ εὐφαέος δὲ προσώπου
λυχνίδες ἠκόντιζον ἐν ὄμμασι σύμφυτον αἴγλην
ὀξὺ σέλας πέμπουσαν, ὁμοίιον αἴθοπι λύχνῳ
ἁπτομένῳ. – Κομόων δὲ λίθων πολυειδέι μορφῇ
πόντος ἔην, γλαυκῆς δὲ λίθος χλοάουσα μαράγδου
δεξαμένη κρύσταλλον ὁμόζυγον εἴκελον ἀφρῷ
εἶχε φαληριόωντα μελαινομένης τύπον ἅλμης.
Τῷ ἔνι δαίδαλα πολλὰ τετεύχατο, τῷ ἔνι πάντα
χρυσοφαῆ μάρμαιρεν ἁλίτροφα πώεα λίμνης,
οἷα περισκαίροντα· πολὺς δέ τις ὑγρὸς ὁδίτης
μεσσοφανὴς ἐχόρευεν ἐπιξύων ἅλα δελφίς,
ψευδαλέην δ’ ἐλέλιζεν ἐὴν αὐτόσσυτον οὐρήν·
καὶ χορὸς ὀρνίθων ἑτερόχροος, ὧν τάχα φαίης
ἱπταμένων πτερύγων ἀνεμώδεα δοῦπον ἀκούειν.
Οἷον <.....
ὅρμον> ἑῇ Κυθέρεια γέρας δωρήσατο κούρῃ
χρύσεον, εὐλάιγγα, παρήορον αὐχένι νύμφης.

“[135] Aphrodite, in the deep shrewdness of her mind, / clasped a golden necklace, richly wrought and sparkling with gems, / but showing pale about the girl’s blushing neck. / This was a wise work of Hephaestus, who had made it for the Cyprus-born, / a gift for his first glimpse of archer Eros. / [140] For the heavy-

knee husband always expected that Cytherea / would bear him a hobbling son, the image of his father in his feet. / But his thought was mistaken; and when he beheld a son sound of feet, / brilliant, with wings like Maia's son, / he made this variegated necklace, similar to a serpent / [145] with coiling shape, the back shining with stars.

For just / as the amphisbaena of two mouths winds its coils in the centre / and spits her poison from either head, / curls on both sides with the dual vibration of her limbs, / and one head creeping joins the other head, / [150] when she advances jumping on her curved back with slanting gait, / so that variegated necklace twisted shaking its crooked back, / with its pair of curving neck, / which came to meet at the midnipple, a flexible two-headed serpent, / thick with scales. And by art's curving joints / [155] the golden circle of the moving spine bent round, / and the head slid about with undulating movement / and belched a mimic hissing through the jaws.

With the two mouths on each side, where is the beginning and the end, / was a golden eagle that seemed to be cutting the open air, / [160] upright between the serpent's twin heads, / high-shining with fourfold nozzle of the four wings. / One was covered with yellowish jasper, one had the all-white / stone of Selene, which fades as the horned / goddess wanes, and waxes when Mene / [165] new-kindled distils her horn's liquid light / and milks out the self-begotten fire of her father Helios. / Other had the gleaming pearl, which by its gleam / makes the grey swell of the Erythrean Sea sparkle / shining. Right in the middle of the other, in bright beauty, / [170] the Indian agate spat out its liquid light, shining gently. / Where the two heads came together from both sides, / the mouths of the serpent opened a double chasm / to enclose the eagle with both their jaws, / enfolding it from this side and that. Over the shining face, / [175] rubies in the eyes shot their native brilliancy, / which sent forth a sharp gleam, like a fiery lamp when it is kindled.

Adorned with the multiform beauty of the stones / was a sea, and an emerald stone grass-green, / receiving the adjacent foam-like crystal, / [180] showed an image of the white-crested brine becoming dark. / Here all sorts of decorations were fashioned, here all / the brine-bred herds of the deep sparkled in shining gold, / as though leaping about, and many a supple traveller / danced half-seen, the dolphin skimming the brine / [185] and wagging its false tail self-moved; / and

a chorus of many-coloured birds -you might almost think / you heard the windy beat of their flapping wings. /
Such was the present that Cytherea offered her daughter / <… a necklace> / golden, bejewelled, suspended on the bride's neck."

The description is formally a self-contained unit: it starts with Aphrodite adjusting the necklace to Harmonia's neck (135b-137), proposes a genealogy to the object (138-143), compares the necklace with a snake and describes its serpentine elements (144-157); in between the two serpent heads there is an eagle, and the points of contact between the two animals are four gems (158-174a); the eagle itself is decorated with a sea (174b-187). The description concludes where it started, with Aphrodite giving the necklace to Harmonia, as if emerging from a timeless bubble.

The description begins in a traditional manner: Hephaestus gives Harmonia a jewelled diadem, just as in Hes. *Th.* 578-584 he gives Pandora a golden diadem; Hera gives her a golden throne similar to hers, just as in *Il.* 14.238-241 she promises one to Sleep in exchange for his help. The *D.* comprises similar catalogues of gods offering gifts to a bride, including one in which Hephaestus offers a necklace to Persephone (5.578-592).[9] Jewels are frequent too in different erotic contexts: they are gifts for the loved one,[10] especially as a dowry,[11] although the loved one is worth more than gems,[12] and although jewels are only beautiful because they are set in contrast with a woman's beauty.[13] All this is consistent with the frequent use of jewels in antiquity, sometimes with inlaid gems, as love tokens and love amulets.[14]

We should also note that Aphrodite's necklace was not Nonnus' invention: Pindar (*Pyth.* 3.88-92), Pausanias (3.18.12), Apollodorus (3.25) and Diodorus Siculus (4.2.1, 5.48.5, 5.49.1) narrate how the gods attend the wedding and bring presents, including a necklace made by Hephaestus. The "normality" of the introduction contrasts

[9] Nonn. *D.* 5.570-585 (the gods court Persephone), 8.216-263 (Hera wonders who has stolen Semele's maidenhood and suggests that she asks for a suitable bride price), 42.492-496 (Hephaestus and Dionysus court Beroe). Compare Beroe's marriage to Poseidon: 43.383-420a.
[10] 40.266-268; 42.238-240: ἕδνα δὲ σεῖο πόθοιο, τεῆς κειμήλια νύμφης, / μὴ λίθον Ἰνδῴην, μὴ μάργαρα χειρὶ τινάξῃς, / οἷα γυναιμανέοντι πέλει θέμις ("For lovegifts to be treasures for your bride, / do not display the Indian jewel, or pearls, / as is the way of mad lovers").
[11] 34.172-174: "For the Indian chieftain had received no marriage gift / for his daughter, no precious gold, no bright stone / of the sea [173-174: οὐ λίθον ἅλμης / μαρμαρέην]".
[12] 4.120-123 Peisinoe on Cadmus; 11.307-312 Dionysus on Ampelos.
[13] Nonn. *D.* 5.135-137, 188-189; 42.422-426. Compare the new Posidippus 6.5-6, 7.4-6. Text and translation from Austin and Bastianini (2002).
[14] See Henig (2006) and Molesworth and Henig (2011) on love tokens; Michel (2001: cat. nos. 110-114) and Faraone (2011: 54-55), on love amulets.

with the strangeness of the gift: the necklace was made by Hephaestus for Aphrodite after the birth of their son Eros (Nonn. *D.* 5.138-144a), and now Aphrodite gives it to the daughter she had with Ares out of wedlock.

The beginning of the description itself is dominated by a double comparison:[15] first a short one with a snake (144b-145a: ὃς ἀστεροφεγγέι νώτῳ / ὡς ὄφις ἦν ἑλικῶδες ἔχων δέμας) and then a long one with an amphisbaena (145b-151: οἷα γὰρ αὐτὴ / δίστομος ἀμφίσβαινα…ὣς ὅ γε ποικίλος ὅρμος).[16] Contemporary audiences would have easily visualised this object, since snakes were common as finials of necklaces,[17] and would appear to look like an amphisbaena (see fig. 1). ἑλικῶδες (145) could be taken to refer to the twists of a braided chain (see fig. 1), easily assimilated to the scales of a serpent, and particularly shiny (144: ἀστεροφεγγέι νώτῳ).

Fig. 1 Necklace with large open-work disk and snakes' head closure. Third century AD. Bought in Cairo in the antiquities market, now Walters Art Museum, inv. 57.515.

The comparison with a living snake is enhanced with references to the appearance and behaviour of a real animal, for which Nonnus incorporates elements from Nicander's *Theriaca*[18] and his own descriptions of serpents in movement.[19] This

[15] This double presentation has antecedents in earlier descriptions of objects: Hesiod's Pandora has the likeness of a maiden (Hes. *Th.* 572: παρθένῳ αἰδοίῃ ἴκελον; *Op.* 63: παρθενικῆς καλὸν εἶδος ἐπήρατον, 71 παρθένῳ αἰδοίῃ ἴκελον) and Posidippus' magnet is like a magnet (17.3-4: τῆιδε μὲν ἕλκει ῥεῖα τὸν ἀντήεντα σίδηρον / μάγνης οἷα λίθος – "On the one hand it easily attracts iron that stands in the way, / just like a magnet").

[16] A real animal in Antiquity: Nic. *Ther.* 372-383; Plin. *NH* 30.25; Ael. *NA* 8.8, 9.23.

[17] Compare BGU 4.1065 (AD 97), a service contract for a pair of magical bracelets with snake finials (on which Whitehorne [1983]; Gigli Piccardi [2003: 398, n. to 144 ff.]); Russo (1999, 144-145, no. 17); PGM VII 579-590 (Thebes, third century AD), design of a magical phylactery with a snake biting its tail, which encircles and is surrounded by letters.

[18] *D.* 5.144: ἀστεροφεγγέι νώτῳ ~ Nic. *Ther.* 376: περιστιγὲς αἰόλον ἕρφος; *D.* 5.145-146: οἷα γὰρ αὐτὴ / δίστομος ἀμφίσβαινα μέσῳ μηρύεται ὁλκῷ ~ Nic. *Ther.* 266: αὐτὰρ ὅγε σκαιὸς μεσάτῳ ἐπαλίνδεται ὁλκῷ; *D.* 5.150: λοξῇ καμπύλα νῶτα περισκαίρουσα πορείῃ ~ Nic. *Ther.* 296-297: γαίῃ ἐπιθλίβων νηδύν,

improves and vitalises the visibility of the lifeless object, and also praises its workmanship (the necklace is so well-wrought that it looks like a real serpent). At the same time, the remarks on the apparent movement of the inert object and of its sounds (153-158) are curtailed by reminders of the artist's intervention and falseness of the noise (154: ὑπὸ στροφάλιγγι δὲ τέχνης, 157: ψευδαλέον σύριγμα),[20] and some common elements of the descriptions of real snakes are downplayed. In particular, the focus on the animal's movement masks the lack of concern about its dangerousness: there are only brief references to its venom (147: ἰὸν ἀποπτύουσα) and hissing (157: ψευδαλέον σύριγμα διήρυγεν ἀνθερεῶνος).

A golden eagle is then located between the heads of the amphisbaena (158-61):

Καὶ στομάτων ἑκάτερθεν, ὅπῃ τέλος ἐστὶ καὶ ἀρχή,
αἰετὸς ἦν χρύσειος, ἅτε πλατὺν ἠέρα τέμνων,
160 ὀρθὸς ἐχιδναίων διδύμων μεσσηγὺ καρήνων,
ὑψιφανὴς πτερύγων πισύρων τετράζυγι κημῷ

With the two mouths on each side, where is the beginning and the end, / was a golden eagle that seemed to be cutting the open air, / [160] upright between the serpent's twin heads, / high-shining with fourfold nozzle of the four wings.[21]

The meaning of line 161, describing the attachment of the eagle to the two serpent heads, is uncertain. Κημός is usually a horse's muzzle,[22] a non epic word, here applied to the element linking the eagle to the serpent in four different places (τετράζυγι), through what are called "four wings" (πτερύγων πισύρων). Several interpretations have been offered: 1) there are two eagles amounting for a total of four wings;[23] 2) one eagle with two wings and two legs;[24] 3) one eagle with four wings, as in oriental daemons

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φολίσιν δὲ καὶ ὁλκῷ / παῦρον ὑποψοφέων καλάμης χύσιν οἷα διέρπει. For the movement starting from the middle of the body (*D.* 5.146b: μέσῳ μηρύεται ὁλκῷ, 153: ἀμφιλαφὴς φολίδεσσιν ἐς ὀμφαλὸν ἄχρις ἱκάνων) ~ Nic. *Ther.* 295: μέσσου ὅγ' ἐκ νώτου βαιὸν πλόον αἰὲν ὀκέλλει. The description of the movement of the animal (*D.* 5.148-150 crawls on its side, maintaining a U-shape, similar to that of the necklace around the maiden's neck) does not concur with Aelian *HA* 9.23, according to whom it advances using only one head while the rest of the body follows. For 152 (κυρτωθεῖσαν ἔχων διδυμάονα δειρήν), note [Hes.] *Sc.* 233-234: ἐπὶ δὲ ζώνῃσι δράκοντε / δοιὼ ἀπηωρεῦντ' ἐπικυρτώοντε κάρηνα.

[19] *D.* 5.147: ἰὸν ἀποπτύουσα ~ 1.268, 26.199-200, 43.240-241, 44.112, 48.62. *D.* 5.148-150 is similar to other descriptions of snake movement (e.g. 4.375-376; 22.29-35).

[20] A Homeric strategy: Becker (1995: 27-30, 79-86). On the sounds of *ekphrasis*: Leach (2000: 248-250).

[21] The notion is repeated in *D.* 5.171-174.

[22] *AP* 6.233.1-2 Maecius, 246.1-2 Philodemus or Argentarius; 7.424.9-10 Antipater of Sidon. However, note Hesych. κημός… γυναικεῖον προκόσμημα (LSJ *s.v.* III).

[23] Deonna (1955: 51-120).

[24] Rouse, Rose and Lind (1940, vol. I: 181, n. 2): "The wings and legs outspread join with four nozzles". His translation: "high-shining with fourfold nozzle of the four wings".

with four wings;[25] 4) one eagle attached to the necklace with four wing-like plates.[26] The passage clearly states that there is only one eagle (159: αἰετὸς ἦν χρύσειος, 173: αἰετόν) and the key for the interpretation is πτέρυξ in line 161: the usual meaning is "wing",[27] but it could refer to anything that resembles a wing.[28]

The four points of contact between the serpent heads and the eagle are adorned with four gems: a jasper (162: τῇ μὲν ξανθὸς ἴασπις ἐπέτρεχε), later mentioned as part of the Indian booty (40.256: Ἰνδὸν ἴασπιν); a white selenite which, like the moon, has the ability of reflecting light (162b-166);[29] an Indian pearl, of notorious gleam (167-169a);[30] and a gently-shining Indian agate (169b-170), which also features in Staphylos' palace (18.78). The four stones seem to be chosen for their brilliance as a means of contrast with the golden background in which they are set.[31]

Contemporary readers could have imagined this as a "body-chain" or "breast-chain",[32] i.e. four chains passed over the shoulders and under the arms of the wearer, and joined on the chest and the back with a central clasp, for which we have numerous Egyptian examples,[33] and that were considered as suitable jewellery for a bride.[34] A particularly good parallel is the body chain from the Hoxne Treasure (fig. 2),[35] combining animal heads as finials of a golden chain and the setting of the gems, as if

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[25] Chuvin (1976: 84-85): "planant haut sur ses quatre ailes au quadruple ferment".
[26] Gigli Piccardi (2003: 399, ll. 158-61): "che appare alta a formare un fermaglio con quattro lamine".
[27] *D.* 1.135, 2.128, 2.181, 4.241, 5.112, 5.143, 5.187, 6.248, 6.388, 13.8, 18.259 (ἵπτατο κυανέων πτερύγων ἑτερόζυγι παλμῷ), 22.42 (ὑψιπόρων πτερύγων διεμέτρεε δίζυγι παλμῷ), 25.436, 26.193, 26.209, 26.204, 31.15, 33.129, 33.141, 33.192, 37.90, 37.642, 39.163, 42.11, 43.438, 48.635. 40.488-489 (ὁμοπλεκέων... / ...πτερύγων) could be wings or feathers.
[28] LSJ *s.v.* πτέρυξ II and III.
[29] Compare the description of the phases of the moon in *D.* 4.275-284. A selenite is inset in Hera's crown (32.22-23).
[30] Compare Nonn. *D.* 42.238-239; Heliod. 2.30.3: μαργαρίδες... λευκότητι πλεῖστον ἀγλαϊζόμεναι.
[31] Plantzos (1999: 36): "The contrast of the translucent stone against the golden background of the ring was thought to be a merit of the jewel", citing Pliny *NH* 37.106 and 112. Compare Luc. *De domo* 8; Ach. Tat. 2.11.3 (ἀμέθυσος δὲ ἐπορφύρετο τοῦ χρυσοῦ πλησίον); Claud. *IV Cons. Hon.* 585-588. Contra Chuvin (1976: 177, n. to 170): "Nonnos nomme deux pierres blanches et deux pierres fauves, le jaspe et l'agate… qui imitent ainsi le plumage de l'aigle… purement décoratif".
[32] See Johns (2003) and Hawkesford (2006: 37-45), for a comprehensive introduction.
[33] Second century mummy portrait of unknown provenance catalogued in Parlasca (1977: cat. no. 271), now Stadtmuseum, Simeonstift, Trier, inv. no III/640; terracotta figure of a standing woman, first-second century AD, Fayum, now British Museum (reg. no. 1926,0930.42 -see Wamser [2004: cat. no. 494]); terracotta statue of a dancer (late second or early third century AD, Fayum; now Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerve, Inv. no. 1989.326 -see von Falck [1996: cat. no. 120]); terracotta statue of a sitting *orans* female (early third century, Egyptian provenance; now Frankfurt, Liebieghaus, Museum alter Plastik, inv. no. 2400.1717 -see von Falck [1996: cat. no. 123a]); gold opus interrasile breast-chain, of a treasure found near Assiut/Lycopolis, or at Sheikh Ibada/Antinoopolis, dated to the sixth century AD, now British Museum (reg. no. 1916,0704.1 -see Wamser [2004: cat. no. 493]); Duthuit (1933: pl. XXIX.a).
[34] Johns (2010: 27); Hawkesford (2006, 46-47, 54).
[35] Description and analysis in Johns (2010: 23-29); Hawkesford (2006).

the lions were gaping towards the now lost pearls, which seem to contain the central amethyst.

Figure 2. Gold body-chain from the Hoxne hoard, now British Museum (Reg. no. 1994,0408.1). © Trustees of the British Museum.

There were also bracelets consisting of a broad flat band and a movable part, whose fasteners are formed from cylinders connected by a screw or pin (fig. 3), sometimes with pearl finials (fig. 4).[36] The movable part, usually round, was adorned with inset jewels (as in fig. 3). When combined with animal shapes (figs. 3, 4)[37] these seem to gape towards the central adornment, of which the finials look like projections or wings. It seems to be the case of a "wing on wing" word game: the two-winged eagle on the central pendant is attached to the serpents on the collar with four wing–like elements.

Figure 3. Gold bracelet, serpent-shaped, first-second century AD. Found in Dolaucothy, Llandovery, Carmathen (Wales), now British Museum (Reg. no. 1824,K/Serpent.2). © Trustees of the British Museum.

[36] For an overview of late antique examples of this type of bracelet in gold pierced work, see Yeroulanou (1999: 62-64 and cat. nos. 223-231; 2010: 45-47).
[37] For fig. 5 s. Yeroulanou (1999: cat. no 234 and page 65); Ross, Boyd, and Zwirn (2005: cat. no 47).

Figure 4. Bracelet with confronted panthers, their forelegs holding a mount for a precious stone. Dumbarton Oaks Collection (Acc. no. 3866). © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.

The eyes of the eagle are inset with rubies (175: λυχνίδες… ἐν ὄμμασι), the plural implying a frontal representation of the animal, not one facing one side and showing only one eye.[38] Rubies feature in the poem on several other occasions, with recurrent references to their brilliance and playing the same etymological name with a lamp (λύχνος),[39] also mentioned by Dionysius Periegetes (328-329).

Spatial connections with the eagle or any other part of the necklace are lacking in what follows. There is a sea adorned with gems of different shapes (177-178a: κομόων δὲ λίθων πολυειδέι μορφῇ / πόντος ἔην), including a brilliant emerald (178b: γλαυκῆς δὲ λίθος χλοάουσα μαράγδου)[40] and close to it a crystal or diamond (179a: δεξαμένη κρύσταλλον ὁμόζυγον).[41] The crystal is of a colour similar to foam (179b: εἴκελον ἀφρῷ) and its combination with the emerald makes the viewer think of the sea, white on the foamy surface and darker below (180: εἶχε φαληριόωντα μελαινομένης τύπον ἅλμης). The text does not say that the two stones "make" the sea, but that the

[38] I.e. not the stylised type of eagle reproduced on the mounts of coins used as medallions: Yeroulanou (1999), cat. nos. 101 (third century AD, pendant, Autun, Musée Rolin), 102 (third century AD, pendant, The Hague, Koninklijk Kabinet van Munten, 8692), 104 (third century AD, pendant Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles 147), 105 (third century AD, pendant, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles, 149), 106 (third century AD pendant, found in Rennes, now lost).

[39] Nonn. *D.* 18.74-75 Staphylos' palace; 32.19-21 Hera's crown; 42.425-426 Dionysus complimenting Beroe; 45.122-124 Dionysus' chaplet.

[40] The emerald features in Staphylos' palace (18.80) and Indian booty (40.257=45.124).

[41] Compare DP 780-782: κείνου δ' ἂν ποταμοῖο περὶ κρυμώδεας ὄχθας / τέμνοις κρυστάλλου καθαρὸν λίθον, οἷά τε πάχνην / χειμερίην ("Around that river's icy banks, you could / extract pure rock-crystal, like hoary frost / in winter - from Lightfoot [2014]); Heliod. *Aethiop.* 2.30.3 ("emeralds, as green as grass in springtime, their depths glowing with a luster as clear and supple as olive oil").

interaction of the light they shed makes the educated reader think and talk of the sea, as happens in similar literary descriptions of gems.[42]

The sea is inhabited by an unknown number of animals, which glitter with gold (181-183). The narrator mentions one dolphin cavorting in the waters (183-185) and birds of different colours (186: ἑτερόχροος), so real that the viewer thinks he can hear the flapping of their wings (186-187). Both the fish and the birds are at first expected to be made of gold, but Nonnus is not explicit about the material of the birds, and ἑτερόχροος seems to suggest the use of more gems. Nonnus emphasises here, as with the snakes earlier (153-158) the impression of movement, curtailed by references to its falseness.[43] Both dolphins and all sorts of birds were popular in late antique and early Byzantine jewellery.[44]

The pendant or central medallion of the necklace, then, features: a golden eagle with rubies for eyes, a golden sea adorned by at least one emerald and one crystal and several golden fish (182: χρυσοφαῆ… ἁλίτροφα πώεα λίμνης), including one dolphin; birds of different colours seem to fly above the sea. This part of the description is incomplete:[45] the sea is adorned with jewels, of which only two are described (177b-180); of the animals in the sea only a dolphin is mentioned (181-185); we are not told either how many birds there are. More generally, there is no information about how the animals represented on the different parts of the necklace relate to each other: do the serpent heads attack the eagle?, is the eagle rejecting an attack?, how does the eagle relate to the birds in the pendant?, are the fish in the sea (especially the dolphin) aware of the presence of the amphisbaena, the eagle and the chorus of birds?

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[42] Ach. Tat. 2.11.2-3 ("The stones vied with each other: [3] the ruby was a rose in a stone, the amethyst's purple flushed next to the gold. In the centre were three stones, their colours shading into one another. The three stones had been set together, so that the base of this single stone was black, the middle part was white but interpenetrating the black, and, next to the white, the remainder of the stone at the peak was a blazing red" -adapted from Whitmarsh [2001]); Heliod. 2.30.3 ("the latter exactly the colour of the sea in the shadow of a tall cliff, sparkling on the surface and a deep violet within" -from Reardon [1989]); and the sea in Hom. *Il.* 13.797-799, and Nonn. *D.* 3.33-34, 12.306.

[43] Fish: 181b-183a (τῷ ἕνι πάντα / χρυσοφαῆ μάρμαιρεν ἁλίτροφα πώεα λίμνης, / οἷα περισκαίροντα). Dolphins in particular (183b-185: πολὺς δέ τις ὑγρὸς ὀδίτης /μεσσοφανὴς ἐχόρευεν ἐπιξύων ἅλα δελφίς, / ψευδαλέην δ' ἐλέλιζεν ἐὴν αὐτόσσυτον οὐρήν), with parallels with descriptions of real ones: 1.277, 3.25-26, 39.334-337: εἰς ῥαχίην δελφῖνος ἐποίπνυε λοίγιος αἰχμή, / κυρτὸς ὅπῃ λοφιῇσι συνάπτεται ἰχθύος αὐχήν, / δελφὶς δ' αὐτοέλικτος ἐθήμονι κυκλάδι νύσσῃ / ἠμιθανὴς σκίρτησε χορίτιδος ἅλματι Μοίρης, 43.281-285, 44.245-247, 45.166-167a. For 5.185b (αὐτόσσυτον οὐρήν), see the death of a snake in 25.533b-534 (ἄλλο δὲ σείων / ἠμιτελὴς νέκυς ἦεν ἔχων αὐτόσσυτον ὁρμήν).
Birds: 186-187 (καὶ χορὸς ὀρνίθων ἑτερόχροος, ὧν τάχα φαίης / ἰπταμένων πτερύγων ἀνεμώδεα δοῦπον ἀκούειν), with parallels with descriptions of real ones: 6.387b-388 (συνιπταμένων δὲ θυέλλαις / ὀρνίθων πτερύγεσσιν ἐρετμώθη πάλιν ἀήρ, 18.259 ἵπτατο κυανέων πτερύγων ἑτερόζυγι παλμῷ), 22.41-42, 42.11.

[44] See Yeroulanou (1999: 171-174, on dolphins; 177-188, on birds).

[45] Compare QS *Posthom.* 5.97-98, at the end of his account of the shield of Achilles Quintus says that there were countless other scenes depicted on the shield which are not included in his description.

The central concept of the *ekphrasis* is brilliance. Gold is enhanced with five white stones that are particularly bright[46] and two more adding colour (174-177: λυχνίδες, 178: γλαυκῆς δὲ λίθος χλοάουσα μαράγδου), so that the resulting piece can be called a ποικίλος ὅρμος (144, 151). The selenite, whose flow is linked to the phase of the moon (162b-166), and the ruby compared with a lamp (174b-177a) seem to be voluntarily shedding a steady flow of light. Similar strains of thought are developed for the pearl (167-169a), the agate (170: λεπτοφαὴς σέλας ὑγρὸν ἀπέπτυεν Ἰνδὸς ἀχάτης), and the joint action of the emerald and the crystal, compared with the two colours of the sea, in constant movement (178-180).

2. Harmonia's necklace: ekphrastic strategies

Nonnus' contemporary learned readers confronted this *ekphrasis* with a visual and artistic baggage, and their rhetorical training modelled their response:[47] the educated reaction before a beautiful object was either to vie with it in words, with an *ekphrasis*,[48] or to appreciate this *ekphrasis* as an expression of culture and refinement. In this section I shall analyse the ekphrastic techniques at work in this passage and relate them to similar late antique instances.

I mentioned earlier that the *ekphrasis* of the necklace ends where it started, closing as a self-contained unit, with no time elapsed. The Ring Komposition movement emphasises the isolation of the object and the passage. This formal isolation was a regular feature in late antique *ekphraseis*,[49] and was regularly interpreted by the reader as a call to re-construct the elliptic *nexi* with the rest of the narrative. Ausonius makes this explicit in the first preface of his *Technopaenion* (Praef. 1):[50]

> *quae lecturus es monosyllaba sunt, quasi quaedam puncta sermonum… set cohaerent ita, ut circuli catenarum separate… tu facies, ut sint aliquid. Nam sine te monosyllaba erunt vel si quid minus*

[46] 5.162a: ξανθὸς ἴασπις, 162b-163: Σελήνης / … λίθον πάνλευκον, 167: μάργαρον... φαεσφόρον, 170: λεπτοφαὴς σέλας ὑγρὸν… Ἰνδὸς ἀχάτης, 179: κρύσταλλον… εἴκελον ἀφρῷ.

[47] This reaction is what in Luc. *De domo* 2 makes the difference between the educated connoisseur, in love with beauty, and common men characterised by ἀγροικία δὲ πολλὴ καὶ ἀπειροκαλία καὶ προσέτι γε ἀμουσία.

[48] Again Luc. *De domo*, to be read with Newby (2002).

[49] Roberts (1989: 44): "the typical late antique passage… functions as a self-contained and self-defining oratory".

[50] To be read with Miller (1998: 128). See also ibid. (116-119): in fourth century sarcophagi the parataxis of self-contained scenes requires that the viewer constructs narratives of theological meaning that arise from the juxtaposition of images.

> These verses you are about to read deal with monosyllables which serve, if I may put it in that way, as so many full-stops… They merely hold together like the individual links in a chain… You will endow them with a certain value. For without you they will be just monosyllables or, if possible, something still smaller (Text and transl. Evelyn White 1919).

Nonnus' readers, then, were expected to make sense of the *ekphrasis* of the necklace in its immediate context and in the broader frame of the poem.

A second strategy that strikes first-time readers of the *Dionysiaca* is how Nonnus enlivens the description comparing elements of the necklace with real-life counterparts.[51] This accumulation of reality effects makes the description more lively, though not necessarily more real or realistic, and recurs in the *D.* in all descriptions (e.g. descriptions of actions: 19.198-294 pantomime; 37.504-545 pugilism; 37.553-609 wrestling). Nonnus' usual strategy is to break the whole (be this an action, an object, a person) down into minute descriptions of every detail, each one enhanced with a reality effect, which regularly results in a visual nightmare for the non-initiated. He seems to aim for a broad visual impression (synaesthetic, if we take into account his regular appeals to other senses) rather than a clear image.[52]

Attention to detail had always been a characteristic of *ekphraseis* as a means to achieve *enargeia*,[53] but in Late Antiquity there was a call to fill details with realism, to turn every detail into a reality effect, a choice that has been diversely labelled "exaggerated realism", "hyper-realism" and "pictorial theatricality".[54] Nugent (1990: 31-32) relates to this phenomenon the evocation of non-visual sensations (tactile, aural, kinetic, olfactory) that draws upon a kind of synaesthetic response in the reader, who must sense something that cannot strictly or literally be seen.

To this we can link the common ekphrastic strategy, also deployed by Nonnus here, of advertising that the description is only partial (see the end of the previous section) and calling readers to evoke what is not in the text.[55] The audience is called to

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[51] Two comparisons with real life snakes (145-146: ὡς ὄφις… οἷα γὰρ αὐτὴ / δίστομος ἀμφίσβαινα), further enhanced with vibration (148), kinetic sensation (151-153), undulating movement (157). The eagle seemed to be cutting the open air (159). Selenite compared to the moon and its phases (163-166), the ruby with a lamp (175-177), stones adorning the eagle compared to the sea in movement (178-180). Quasi-real presentation of the dolphin and birds (183-187), including non-visual sensations.

[52] Zanker (1987: 50): "realism may only pretend to present what is real". Matthews (1989: 460), on Ammianus: "we are talking not only of factual reality but of a symbolic mode or representing it: or was it that in some cases factual reality had adopted a symbolic form?"

[53] E.g. Nicolaus 68.19-20, 69.2-3. See Roberts (1989: 40-43).

[54] Miller (1998: 128-129, 131); Nugent (1990: 30-37).

[55] Miller (1998: 128-132).

supplement the text in the most appealing manner to their tastes and making the whole passage alive throughout.[56] This ambiguity also allows more space to find similarities with other passages in the poem.[57]

In this same direction go the constant emphasis of the "near-reality"[58] of the comparisons (the necklace is like a living snake)[59] and the straight references to the falseness of the described. Two passages are key to this regard:

> 156-157 καί οἱ ἑλισσομένης κεφαλὴ πολυδινέι παλμῷ
> ψευδαλέον σύριγμα διήρυγεν ἀνθερεῶνος
> and the head slid about with undulating movement / and belched a mimic hissing through the jaws
> 183b-185 πολὺς δέ τις ὑγρὸς ὁδίτης
> μεσσοφανὴς ἐχόρευεν ἐπιξύων ἅλα δελφίς,
> ψευδαλέην δ' ἐλέλιζεν ἐὴν αὐτόσσυτον οὐρήν
> and many a supple traveller / danced half-seen, the dolphin skimming the brine / [185] and wagging its false tail self-moved

This comments on the deceptive nature of images both verbal and visual, and on the ontological instability of the ekphrasis and its object, caught between the poles of reality and illusion, statism and movement. Nonnus performs a gradual movement of detachment in his description of Harmonia's necklace: the amphisbaena is made concrete by the comparisons with real animals, and the eagle is between the two serpent heads, but from 174b (eyes made of rubies) the rest of the elements are not clearly located within the general frame. The description supersedes the physical and the plainly descriptive by both disregarding physical elements and focusing on what can not be physically seen.[60]

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[56] Webb (1997: 242): "On pourrait s'attendre que les rhéteurs laissent les descriptions suffisamment ouvertes pour permettre à chacun de fournir les détails selon ses connaissances. C'est ainsi que les orateurs évitent le plus souvent l'accumulation de détails spécifiques".

[57] Something similar happens with the initial *ekphrasis* in Ach. Tat. *L&C*: see Reeves (2007: 88-89).

[58] Becker (1995: 27-28).

[59] 145-146: ὡς ὄφις… Οἷα γὰρ αὐτὴ / δίστομος ἀμφίσβαινα, 151: ὣς ὅ γε ποικίλος ὅρμος, 159: ἅτε πλατὺν ἠέρα τέμνων, 176-177: ὁμοίιον αἴθοπι λύχνῳ / ἁπτομένῳ, 179: δεξαμένη κρύσταλλον ὁμόζυγον εἴκελον ἀφρῷ, 183: οἷα περισκαίροντα, 186-187. See Becker (1995: 49-50), on simile and *ekphrasis*.

[60] Compare the description of Dionysus' shield (25.380-572): the ekphrasis alternates narratives that are linked to the images that adorn the shield, such as Amphion and Zethos building Thebes (415-428, with an emphasis on the naturalism and illusion of ekphrasis, esp. 419b-425 -to be read with Agnosini 2010: 344, 346), the apotheosis of Ganymedes (429-450, with references to the physical nature of the described work: 433a οἷα καὶ ἐν γραφίδεσσι , 445b-446a ἕζετο δ' Ἥρη / οἷα χολωομένη καὶ ἐν ἀσπίδι -to be read with Agnosini 2010: 346-348 and Cronos deceived by Rhea after the birth of Zeus (553-562, to be read with Agnosini 2010: 350 "Il fatto che in chiusura sia posto proprio un mito di inganno è emblematico

In a similar way, when describing the river in his *Mosella* Ausonius starts with a description of the river-bed as clearly visible through the water surface (55-64), but then focuses on the false images reflected by the same water surface, depending on the incidence of the light at different times of the day (189-199, 222-239),[61] and notes the pleasure derived from the play between real and illusory images.[62] The illusions reflected by the water are as unreliable as his own techniques of representation,[63] and the dissolution of the plastic image can be read, both in Ausonius and in Nonnus, as a means to value the knowing eyes of the savvy reader faced with an impossible verbal picture and the self-sufficiency of the illusionistic poetic text over a physical image and reality itself.[64]

Similarly, when Lucian describes the set of paintings decorating the hall in his *De domo*, he starts with a detailed description of the first image (Perseus and Andromeda, § 22). Some detail is also given to the second (Orestes and Pylades killing Aegisthus, § 23), whereas subject matters are identified in the next few (§§ 24-31), but the precise features are passed over and the speaker seems more interested in showing the links between them. Newby (2002: 132-133) suggests that this is a strategy to rid the audience of their wonder before the (visual) beauty of the hall and to impose on them an intellectualised discourse on the image, so that words dominate the visual and the intellects. In other words, a real image may seduce and absorb the viewer, but both Lucian's and Nonnus' descriptions seek to surpass the power of the image by

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dell'importanza che Nonno attribuiva alla problematica della finzione"), with a narrative that emancipates from the ekphrasis, that of the death and resurrection of Tylos (451-552).

[61] Falseness: 189 (*species*), 190 (*videntur*), 196 (*derisus navita*), 337 (*simulacra*), 228 (*simulamine*). Reflection of the light on the water surface: 192-193: *quis color ille vadis, seras cum propulit umbras / Hesperus et viridi perfundit monte Mosellam!* ("What a hue is on the waters when Hesperus has driven forward the lagging shadows and overspreads Moselle with the green of the reflected height"), 222-224: *hos Hyperionio cum sol perfuderit aestu, / reddit nautales vitreo sub gurgite formas / et redigit pandas inversi corporis umbras* ("But when Hyperion pours down the sun's full heat, the crystal flood reflects sailor-shapes and throws back crooked picture of their downward forms").

[62] 228-229: *ipsa suo gaudet simulamine nautical pubes, / fallaces fluvio mirata redire figuras* ("The boys themselves delight in their own counterfeits, wondering at the illusive forms which the river gives back"), 238-239: *talis ad umbrarum ludibria nautical pubes / ambiguis fuitur very falsique figuris* ("even so, at the sight of the reflections which mock them, the lads afloat amuse themselves with shapes which waver between false and true").

[63] Nugent (1990: 32, 34); Miller (1998: 129).

[64] On Ausonius, see Mattiacci (2013: 217, 223). On Nonnus, Agnosini (2010: 351), concludes: "l'episodio di Ganimede e l'epillio di Tilo hanno messo a confronto arte e poesia nella rappresentazione dei sentimenti sfruttando la possibilità poetica della trasformazione della descrizione in narrazione, per finire con la fondamentale antitesi che è poi la dialettica della mimesi: l'eterno conflitto tra realtà e illusione. Una mimesi dunque illusionistica… per eccesso di potenzialità raffigurativa e verisimiglianza, di andare oltre il vero".

challenging the reader to a combined intellectual and visual comprehension, which is ultimately impossible because the image does not exist.

Nonnus' focus on detail and brilliance implies that his reader strives to integrate the individual details into the whole of the composition. This strain of the eye is dramatised in Procopius' reflection on the beholder of St Sophia (a real object) (*De Aed*. 1.1.47-49):

> All these details, fitted together with incredible skill in mid-air and floating off from each other and resting only on the parts next to them, produce a single and most extraordinary harmony in the work and yet do not permit the spectator to linger much over the study of any one of them, but each detail attracts the eye and draws it irresistibly to itself. So the vision constantly shifts suddenly, for the beholder is utterly unable to select which particular detail he should admire more than all the others. But even so, though they turn their attention to every side and look with contracted brows upon every detail, observers are still unable to understand the skilful craftsmanship, but they always depart from there overwhelmed by the bewildering sight.[65]

Analysing this passage, Kiilerich (2012: 22-24) notes that there are two manners of viewing an artwork: the initial viewing or global impression is followed by more directed viewing or focal attention. According to Procopius, late antique spectators of St Sophia failed in focal attention, bound to remain dispersed, and thus they eschewed the concrete details, to linger in an immaterial experience.[66]

The conflict between the whole and the detail in Nonnus' description testifies in late antique standards to the quality of the described object and of the author of the description, capable of rendering this virtue. Late antique readers (and viewers) were used to analysing self-contained units, whose colourful elements interacted with each other vying for attention.[67] Hence the appreciation of descriptions of gold and gems[68] and the tendency towards exhaustiveness, the crowded effect, seeking an eye expert in rhetorical patterns to exact meaning and aesthetic pleasure of what the layman perceives as a colourful confusion.

Along this line of argumentation, the rich materials employed both in Harmonia's necklace and in St Sophia (the emperor ordered to bring materials from the

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[65] Translation from Dewing (1940). To be read with Roberts (1989: 74-75); Elsner (2004: 308-309).
[66] Kiilerich (2012: 23-24).
[67] Roberts (1989: 64-65).
[68] Roberts (1989: 53-55).

four corners of the world to build the church), are the springboard for rhetorical and aesthetic elaboration, not an end in themselves. Emphasis on the pecuniary value of the necklace would have made Harmonia and Cadmus look like barbaric *nouveaux riches*,[69] incapable of seeing beyond the details. Nonnus' (and Ausonius') *ekphrasis* thus settles for an artistic definition of paideia.

It is now popular to interpret the mythological scenes displayed on different domestic spaces (mosaics, paintings, tableware) as statements of paideia. Members of the upper classes carefully selected how they wanted to appear before their guests and used mythological images to prove that they were part of the elite united by a common educational training and a shared idea of culture.[70] They certainly were, and Nonnus plays on this in his description of the shield of Dionysus (25.384-567), placed under the aegis of the Homeric shield of Achilles.[71] The *ekphrasis* of Harmonia's necklace, not adorned with mythological scenes, denotes a more subtle conception of paideia, based on aesthetic (and rhetorical) display and fruition, not confined to a mythical narrative, even if the object imagined plays a role in a mythical account.

The connoisseur reader of the *ekphrasis* of Harmonia's necklace is expected to go beyond the simple enjoyment of mythical narratives that form the base of paideia to be seduced by an artistic celebration of anything beautiful. When the described object displays a (mythical) narrative, this offers an appropriate starting point for the discourse (as is the case in e.g. Philostratus' *Imagines*, constantly drawing on literary sources), whereas non-narrative objects are more challenging for both the speaker and his audience. In the absence of a narrative frame the discourse cannot be derived from a literary (contextualising) narrative as a means for concretion,[72] and will therefore be more abstract (thus more difficult to enact and apprehend).

3. *Ekphrasis* and narrative

[69] Compare Lucian *De domo* 5: "the Great King's plane tree… was wonderful only on account of its cost; there was no craftsmanship or beauty or charm or symmetry or grace wrought into the gold or combined with it. The thing was barbarous, nothing but money, a source of envy to those who saw it, and of felicitation to those who owned it. There was nothing praiseworthy about it. The Arsacids neither cared for beauty nor aimed at attractiveness in making their display nor minded whether the spectators praised or not, as long as they were astounded. The barbarians are not beauty-lovers; they are money-lovers" (translation from Harmon 1913, to be read with Newby [(2002: 129)]. Also, Heliod. 5.13-15, Calasiris rewards Nausicles (a down-to-earth merchant) for rescuing Chariclea with a ring inset with an Ethiopian amethyst, which Nausicles estimates to be worth as much as all he possesses (5.15.1), in contrast with the artistic appreciation of the jewel promoted by the novelist with his previous *ekphrasis* of the piece.

[70] Particularly commendable: Leader-Newby (2004).

[71] See Hopkinson (1994: 22-24); Vian (1990: 33-42).

[72] Compare Elsner (1995: 21-22) on the *Imagines* of Philostratus and the *Tabula* of Cebes.

We have seen that the *ekphrasis* of Harmonia's necklace did not emerge from Nonnus' quill in a cultural and textual vacuum: it could be related by his readers to real life jewellery, the literary tradition of descriptions of beautiful objects crafted by Hephaestus and contemporary rhetorical trends of description. In the context of the latter, readers were called to make sense of the passage in the narrative in which it was inset, which, I shall try to show, in this case meant (1) a metonymic use of the necklace for its bearer, and (2) the *ekphrasis* as a narrative node or launching platform of narrative threads.

3.1 The necklace as a metonym of its bearer, Harmonia

Ancient rhetors mention amongst the possible characterisation techniques metonymy,[73] by which one of the distinctive features of a person, e.g. physical appearance, is used as an indicator of his/her character. In this case, I would like to argue, the beauty of the necklace not only enhances Harmonia's beauty, but acts as a foil or metonym for it.[74] The introduction and conclusion of the *ekphrasis* insist that despite the gold and gems, the necklace looks pale when compared with Harmonia's beauty (134-135, 189).[75] The description works as an implied or truncated priamel:[76] each reference to the gold and gems, and to the animals so well wrought that they look real, serves as a foil for the point of interest (Harmonia's beauty), the accumulation of them building an *in crescendo* movement. At the same time, the elaboration on the beauty of the jewel is a foil for the lack of physical description of the bride, matching up Menander Rhetor's advice to the author of an epithalamium to avoid giving too much physical information about a bride, which could give the wrong impression that he is interested in her.[77]

Further on, the necklace contributes to the characterisation of Harmonia for its link to the crown Hephaestus made for Pandora, described by Hesiod, and from which

[73] De Temmerman (2014: 30-31, 35-41).

[74] Compare *Od.* 19.226-231 Odysseus' brooch, adorned with a dog grasping a fawn, an anticipation of the predatory slaying of the suitors and representation of Odysseus' general intentions at the time of the description -see Harrison (2001: 74-75). Also in Heliod. *Aeth.* 3.4, Chariclea wears in her first appearance at the procession in Delphi an extraordinary breast band, intricately adorned with two serpents, which do not inspire fright, but are lulled by the sensuous warmth of Charicleia's bosom: the potential disruption of the serpents (Chariclea's sensual power) is restrained by her virtue.

[75] The same motif recurs in 42.422-426: βολαῖς δ' ἀντίρροπος Ἠοῦς / εἴκελος ἠλέκτρῳ Βερόης ἀμαρύσσεται αὐχήν / καὶ λίθον ἀστράπτοντα ("The neck of Beroe / is like the gleams of Dawn, it shines like amber, / [outshines] a sparkling jewel").

[76] Definitions of priamel: Bundy (1986: esp. 4-10); Race (1982: 7-17).

[77] Men. Rh. 404.11-14: "As for the girl, be cautious in describing her beauty because of the scandal that may be caused, unless you are a relation and can speak as one who cannot help knowing, or unless you can remove the objection by saying 'I have heard…'". Translation from Russell and Wilson (1981).

Nonnus picks up elements of the phrasing and decoration.[78] Pandora is a common enterprise of the gods, who array her in all finery, each of them giving something out to make her an attractive bride, an invincible weapon complete to the last detail (Hes. *Th.* 585-589), to punish the race of men. Harmonia is also bedecked by all the gods, but in gratitude to Cadmus for helping to save them from Typhoeus. Pandora's diadem was part of the deception of others, whereas Harmonia's necklace is part of her own deception: she was aware that nothing good could come from marrying a vagrant with no means of giving her a comfortable existence (Nonn. *D.* 4.36-63), but Aphrodite deluded her into falling in love with Cadmus (4.67-178) and the necklace makes her believe that hers is an advantageous marriage.

Finally, the description of Harmonia at her wedding as a heavily bejewelled woman brings in contemporary connotations. In Nonnus' own time, gold and silver jewellery were still common in dowries,[79] and a woman's jewellery was a means to display the husband's wealth in public.[80] The best-known heavily adorned woman was the empress,[81] whose image was endlessly replicated and circulated widely on coins.[82] From an iconographic point of view, empresses, like emperors, had no personal identity: theirs was the image of a female member of the imperial house who embodied state authority.[83] In the fifth century AD, the representation of women of the Imperial household was particularly elaborate.[84] Take, for instance, a golden solidus representing Licinia Eudoxia (fig. 5). On the obverse, her bust is draped and cuirassed, adorned with a jewelled brooch with three pendants on her right shoulder. She is wearing a three-row necklace, pearl earrings and an elaborate crown adorned with pinnacles and a central cross, with long *pendilia* hanging to the level of her shoulders. On the reverse she is

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[78] Nonn. 5.181a: Τῷ ἔνι δαίδαλα πολλὰ τετεύχατο ~ Hes. *Th.* 581a: τῇ δ' ἔνι δαίδαλα πολλὰ τετεύχατο; Nonn. 5.182: ἁλίτροφα πώεα λίμνης ~ Hes. *Th.* 582: κνώδαλ' ὅσ' ἤπειρος δεινὰ τρέφει ἠδὲ θάλασσα; Nonn. 5.186b-187: ὧν τάχα φαίης / ἱπταμένων πτερύγων ἀνεμώδεα δοῦπον ἀκούειν ~ Hes. *Th.* 584: ζωοῖσιν ἐοικότα φωνήεσσιν.

[79] Krause (1994-1995: II, 256-263).

[80] E.g. necklaces in female busts in fourth century AD sarcophagi: Birk (2013: 141-142, and cat. nos 11, 23, 431-433).

[81] Roughly contemporary with Nonnus: Eudoxia, wife of Arcadius, Augusta 400-404 (Grierson and Mays 1992: 133-135, cat. nos. 273-294); Pulcheria, sister of Theodosius II, Augusta 414-453 (Grierson and Mays 1992: 152-154, cat. nos. 436-453); Eudocia, wife of Theodosius II, Augusta 423-460 (Grierson and Mays 1992: 155-156, cat. nos. 454-475); Verina, wife of Leo I, Augusta 457-484 (Grierson and Mays 1992: 170-171, cat. nos. 593-598); Ariadne, wife first of Zeno and then of Anastasius, Augusta 474(?)-515 (Grierson and Mays 1992: 176, cat. nos. 606); Licinia Eudoxia, wife of Valentinian III, Augusta 439-490 (Grierson and Mays 1992: 244-246, cat. nos. 395, 870-873).

[82] See also steelyard weights in the shape of the bust of an empress, with jewelled diadem, single-row necklace and *pendilia* hanging from the headdress. For a full study, see McClanan (2002).

[83] McClanan (2002: 1-5).

[84] On the evolution of the diadem, see Stout (1994: esp. 93-96). Overall see Kent (1994: 52-54: RIC 10).

represented seated on a throne, carrying a globe, holding a cross in her right hand and a longer one in her left hand. She is wearing a crown with long *pendilia*, a single-row necklace and, under her breast, a circular brooch held in place by a two-side strand. The individual disappears under the weight of the jewellery with which she represents the wealth of the State.

Figure 5. Solidus of Valentinian III, minted in Ravenna, 439-455, now at the British Museum (reg. no. 1860,0329.228) (Kent 1994: RIC 10.2023). © Trustees of the British Museum.

The representation of the empress can be related to the ancient perception of how jewellery affected a woman's image. In Lucian's *De domo*, the first speaker (§ 7) considers that a beautiful woman should use only delicate and limited jewellery to enhance her beauty, because only unattractive courtesans cover themselves in gold and purple to conceal their lack of beauty. According to the second speaker (§ 15), abundant jewellery distracts viewers, who focus their eyes only on gold and gems instead of the woman's beauty. Thus an excess of adornment is detrimental for women who want to be appreciated for themselves, and can be used as a means of concealment.

Both parameters can be applied to Harmonia. Before getting married we hear her speaking up against an unwelcome marriage (4.20-66), but once she wears the jewellery given at her wedding by the gods -Hephaestus crown, Hera's throne and Aphrodite's necklace give her an imperial appearance- she becomes a mute icon: her divine ascendance contributes to the splendour of the future Theban royal family (and their heir, Dionysus), but her words are no longer required. The jewellery can also be said to conceal Harmonia from indiscreet looks and to obviate the need for further developing her character beyond the narrative of her wedding.

4.2 The *ekphrasis* as a narrative node

As demonstrated by Roberts (1989 *passim*) and Miller (1998), late antique art and literature have in common the construction of a narrative out of formally disconnected fragments which demand the intervention of the viewer and reader to supply the elliptic nexi and re-construct the underlining thread(s) of thought. This mode of narration is more challenging for the reader and viewer and tends to be non-lineal: e.g. the episodes decorating a fourth century sarcophagus illustrate one or more theological concepts (Christ as teacher, Christ as saviour) and at the same time engage individually in games of parallelism and opposition with each other and with other Bible episodes not represented in the sarcophagus. In the case of descriptive text units this urge to interpret was further encouraged by the frequent deployment of *ekphrasis* as a proleptic device.[85] This means that Nonnus' *ekphrasis* of the necklace would have been expected to be connected with the rest of the poem, taking part in more than one narrative thread.

For instance, we can interpret this *ekphrasis* as part of an iterative narrative: the use of the necklace in the past determines its use in the present.[86] Thus, the necklace is given to Harmonia, with Cadmus standing alongside, but the focus of the scene falls on her mother Aphrodite (135-137, 188-189), so that the description reflects what Aphrodite sees and thinks at the moment:[87] for her the necklace is an exquisite jewel, which Hephaestus gave her out of happiness for the birth of a healthy child (5.138-144), and she bequeaths it to her daughter as a token of fertility.

The erotic elements of the description seep into the context: Aphrodite, the goddess of love is the one giving the necklace away as a present in an erotic context, that of a wedding (135b-137), the vocabulary of interlacing (in particular the interlacing

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[85] What follows is based on Harrison (2001). See also Frangoulis (2013), on the proleptic functions of Nonnus' *ekphraseis* of Europa (*D.* 1.46-137) and Tereus, Philomela and Procne (*D.* 4.319-330).

[86] On retrospective or analeptic ekphrasis, see Harrison (2001: 75-76, baldric of Heracles in *Od.* 11.609-612; 84, on Moschus *Europa* 43-62; 90-91, on Verg. *Aen.* 10.495–505, both analeptic and proleptic; 92, n. 47, Valerius Flaccus *Arg.* 5.433-455, operating both analeptically and proleptically). The most complete case of iterative *ekphrasis* in Nonn. *D.* is that of Hera's toilet (32.10-37), a quasi ritual repetition of her preparation for her first (successful) encounter with Zeus (in lines 32-35 she wears the same robe she wore on that occasion), wishing to achieve the same result in the present narrative, and at the same time mirroring her preparation to deceive Zeus in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 14.153-360, 15.1-77 -on Nonnus' adaptation of the Homeric episode, s. Hopkinson [1994: 31-32]). The Iliadic description is textually a flash-back of the *D.*, but chronologically a flash-forward, since Dionysus' war against the Indians precedes the Trojan war.

[87] Harrison (2001: 71): "If a description within a narrative signifies future events, it is likely to do so from a particular point of view, focalized by a particular character. The characters of the narrative, unless they themselves have gifts of foresight or of prophetic interpretation, will naturally be unable to recognize the significance of the proleptic ekphrasis in predicting the future course of the narrative, and the resulting gap of knowledge between the non-omniscient character and the omniscient (second-time) reader, is frequently a source of dramatic irony and pathos".

of the serpents in 148-150, 152-153)[88] and gleam (162-170, 174b-180). Note especially the conclusion of the section:

> 5.190-192a καὶ γαμίων ζευχθεῖσα πόθων ἰθύντορι κεστῷ
> Ἁρμονίη πολύπαιδα γονὴν μαιώσατο κόλπῳ
> τικτομένην κατὰ βαιόν
> Soon Harmonia yoked by the cestus-girdle that guides wedded desire, / carried in her womb the seed of many children / whom she brought forth one by one.

Harmonia is presented under the influence not of the necklace (188: ὅρμον) but of the girdle (190: κεστῷ), described as director of the passions related to marriage (γαμίων... πόθων ἰθύντορι), Aphrodite's most characteristic attribute, the site of her power,[89] which she lends to other women.[90] This explains why the description is followed without explanatory nexi by the account of Harmonia's subsequent pregnancies (191-192a).

At the same time, the object described has negative connotations that are not explicit in the text, but could be reconstructed by Nonnus' readers. To start with, Aphrodite's choice of gift is slightly strange: it was made by Hephaestus for her after the birth of their son Eros, and now she gives it to the daughter she had with Ares out of wedlock. Hephaestus could be seen creating the necklace as a deferred punishment for his unfaithful wife and Aphrodite giving it to her adulterine daughter, unawares of the additional meanings it could convey.[91] This is what happens in Statius *Theb.* 2.269–305: Vulcanus creates the necklace as an ominous wedding gift for Harmonia, and through it he punishes her mother Venus for her adultery with Mars. It has been suggested that Statius had before him an elaborate description of the necklace (by Callimachus?),

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[88] The same strategy is employed in the description of Electra's garden: Nonn. *D.* 3.142b-163.

[89] See esp. 4.67-68: ἀλλὰ περισφίγξασα δέμας φρενοθελγέι κεστῷ, / κερδαλέῳ ζωστῆρι, δολοφράδμων Ἀφροδίτη ("But now [before confronting Harmonia] tricky-minded Aphrodite girt her body in the heart-bewitching cestus-belt") and 177-178: Ἁρμονίην φυγοδέμνιον ἤλασε κεστῷ / εἰς πόθον οἰστρήσασα δόλῳ πειθήμονα κούρην ("and with her girdle drove bedshy Harmonia / to her voyage, stung as with a gadfly and now obedient to desire"), and more generally: 8.175: Παφίης φρενοθελγέα κεστόν; 15.210-212; 24.245, 297, 317-318; 31.201: κεστὸν… πόθου θελξίφρονα μίτρην, 273: κεστὸν ἱμάντα, τεὴν πανθέλγεα μίτρην; 32.4-8; 36.59-61a; 42.369-370a, 379; 47.276b-277; 48.690b-692.

[90] 31.199-32.8 (Aphrodite lends the cestus to Hera who wants to charm Zeus), with the description of its effect (32.38-40) and how Zeus recognises its influx on him (32.63-64). Apate (Deceit) keeps a similar girdle she lends to Hera to deceive Semele (8.109-177; description of the girdle in 121-123).

[91] A parallel for this is the treatment of Jason's cloak in Apollonius Rhodius: the women of Lemnos admire the beauty of Jason's clothes (1.774-186), unawares that they do not only enhance his appearance but also advertise his destructiveness. See Harrison (2001: 81-83).

which he summarised,[92] and could have been available to Nonnus, but in any case the serpentine necklace is part of a tradition of serpent-related destructive gadgets.

In early epic, serpents adorned weapons, such as Agamemnon's cuirass (*Il.* 11.19-28) and a shoulder belt sporting a three-headed serpent (11.38-40), designed to inspire terror on the enemies.[93] The serpentine girdle of the Gorgons emblazoned on the shield of Heracles ([Hes.] *Sc.* 233-236) has a similar function. In Euripides' *Ion* (1412-1436), Ion's birth tokens include her mother's first weaving adorned with a gorgon edged with snakes, a golden necklace decorated with two snakes[94] and an olive garland. These tokens counteract the earlier reference to Erichthonius' golden bracelet keeping two drops of Gorgon's blood (one for healing, one for killing) with which Creusa plans to poison Ion (999-1038).

To add to this, the description of the necklace is unusual in not reflecting on the sinister overtones of the serpents and in presenting them in harmony with an eagle, when their encounter is usually presented as a fight. Natural history treatises put their traditional enmity down to practical terms (eagles eat snakes),[95] and their fight is a confrontation between the forces of light and air (the eagle as Zeus' bird) and chthonic powers, represented by the snake. As such, eagle and snake feature from an early date in mantic texts, starting with the Iliadic portent of an eagle dropping a serpent on the Trojan army to predict the lack of success of their initiative (*Il.* 12.200-210).[96]

The image had a long tradition in Greek art and Christian contexts.[97] Both pagan and Christian images are designed to reflect on the fight of evil and good and an optimistic outcome (the eagle is presented defeating the snake). [98] For instance, in a sarcophagus of San Lorenzo fuori le Mura (fig. 6), decorated with vintaging Erotes as a Bacchic celebration of life after death, this motif features on one of the corners of the laterals. In the fifth-sixth century mosaic of the Imperial palace in Constantinople (fig. 7), it appears in conjunction with a deer killing a snake and a griffin eating a lizard, all

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[92] Vessey (1973: 138-139). In Verg. *Aen.* 7.341-358 the Gorgon Allecto poisons Amata by throwing at her one of her snakes, which glides around her limbs and becomes a golden necklace around her neck.
[93] Harrison (2001: 73) notes that Agamemnon's armour represents his character and intentions.
[94] After the Athenian custom, in memory of Erichthonius: Eur. *Ion* 24-26.
[95] Arist. *HA* 609a; Aelian, *NA* 2.26; Fable 395 Perry (Aphthonius 28).
[96] In S. *Ant.* 110-126 the fight of eagle and snake is a simile for the fighting armies. Aristophanes' parody (*Eq.* 197-198) of an omen with a serpent and an eagle attests to its popularity in predictions.
[97] Overview in Wittkower (1977: 26-35).
[98] The motif was attributed healing powers: *Kyranides* 1.9.12-16 (a jasper engraved with the image of a kite biting a snake improves the digestion of the bearer). An example of this is a jasper gem from the Hermitage, St Petersburg (Inv. no. Ж.6673), for which see Nagy (2011: 76).

of them interpreted as allegories of the struggle between good and evil, light and darkness, Christ and Satan.[99]

Fig. 6. Dionysiac sarcophagus, made in Athens (Third century AD), now San Lorenzo fuori le Mura (Rome). © Ekaterina Averina.

Fig. 7. Eagle and snake, fifth-sixth AD, mosaic flooring Constantinople, Imperial Palace. © Livius.org.

What these images have in common with the decoration of the necklace is revealed by two passages featuring the eagle and the snake: the omen sent to Dionysus

[99] Trilling (1989: 59). In the context of the mosaic they represent the natural dangers disturbing an essentially idyllic rural life, connecting agricultural and political issues: Trilling (1989: 62 f.).

at a moment of stalemate of the war (38.26-29) and the foundation myth of Tyre (40.469-500).[100]

The founders of Tyre are requested to reach the place of the ambrosial rocks, where they will find an olive tree on fire and an eagle, a bowl and a serpent on its branches (40.467-477). The sight is unnatural because the fire does not consume the wood, the eagle and the snake do not attack each other and the bowl is not destabilised by the gusts of wind (478-492).[101] The future Tyrians must catch the eagle and sacrifice it to Poseidon to fix the ambrosial rocks at the bottom of the sea, and found Tyre at the site (493-500). All elements play a role in the narrative with the exception of the serpent:[102] the ambrosial rocks become the ground on which the city is built, the olive tree represents Athena and the fire is Hephaestus (the two patrons of the new foundation), the eagle is used for the sacrifice and the cup for the libation. The serpent is introduced to emphasise the strangeness of the phenomenon, and at the same time highlights the oddity of the decoration of the necklace.

Regarding the omens at the end of the war, Dionysus and his army witness two prodigies sent by Zeus: a solar eclipse (38.15-25) and an eagle dropping a serpent in the river Hydaspes (38.26-30). The soothsayer Idmon (46-72) interprets the second omen as a sign of their future victory over the Indians, with Deriades being swallowed in the river like the snake. Dionysus takes the shape of the eagle like his father Zeus. Hermes then reads the eclipse as a sign of Dionysus' victory (75-102): light-bringing Bacchos will defeat the dark Indians, just as the sun defeats the shadows. The two omens are complementary and add up to the double equivalence of Indians/darkness and Dionysus/light pervasive in the narrative of the war.[103]

Read from the end of the poem, Harmonia's necklace is an emblem of the fight of her grandson Dionysus against the Indians. The eagle of the *ekphrasis* does not attack the serpent and the serpent of the omen gets loose from the eagle's grip and sinks in the river, just as Dionysus will avoid being harsh on the Indians, dark and impious though they are: he defeats them with wine (14.411-15.168), Orontes commits suicide (17.262-

[100] More vaguely related: *D.* 25.4-10 omen of the snake that eats several chicks and their mother as a prediction of the end of the war (after Hom. *Il.* 2.308 ff.).
[101] Grotanelli (1972: 56-58) and Accorinti (2004: n. to 40.478-91) suggest that the eagle and the serpent coexist peacefully because they symbolise the complementarity of the earth and the sky. See also Gigli-Piccardi (2003: 402-403, n. to 5.171–174).
[102] Simon (1999: 153-155).
[103] Overview: Gerlaud (2005: 238-243); Frangoulis (2009).

289), Morrheus is tamed by a woman (35.98-222), Deriades drowns in the waters of the Hydaspes (40.82-95).

However, the *ekphrasis* describes an eagle and a two-headed amphisbaena, not a simple snake. This could represent Cadmus and Harmonia, who become serpents, joined by a common destiny.[104] This happens beyond the chronological boundaries of the narrative, but the episode is anticipated several times in the poem.[105] Right before the description of the necklace, Cadmus and Harmonia enter their nuptial chamber under the constellation Draco (5.121-125) and references come back at the end of the poem: when Agaue tries to avert the ill omina about her son with a sacrifice, two serpents creep around Cadmus and Harmonia, a presage of their future shape (44.107-118); after the death of Pentheus, as the whole family mourns, the narrator refers again to the future metamorphosis of the couple (46.364-367).

The two serpent heads hold the eagle,[106] just as the union of Cadmus and Harmonia holds the future of Dionysus, son of Zeus and whose symbol in the poem is sometimes an eagle.[107] The necklace is a reminder that the marriage of Cadmus and Harmonia makes the birth of Dionysus possible and as such it can be treated as a jewelled encomium of the new couple's future achievements. Further on, just as the necklace was designed to celebrate the birth of a son (Eros) who was unlike his father (138-145), it could celebrate here that the grandson was unlike his mortal grandparents.

Two of the gems adorning the necklace, the pearl and the agate (167-170), are related to India, and could prefigure the treasures of India, a plentiful booty for Dionysus and his troops at the end of the Indian expedition (40.255-257, 266-268, 277-

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[104] Compare the description of the metamorphosed couple into two intertwined snakes in Ovid *Met.* 4.600-601 and Stat. *Theb.* 4.553-555. See Gigli Piccardi (2003: 270). See also Nonn. *D.* 48.458b-463a (serpents as a prediction and cause of madness): ὑψινόου δὲ / αὐχένα δειλαίης ὀφιώδεϊ τύψεν ἰμάσθλῃ, / καί μιν ἀνεστυφέλιξε δίκης τροχοειδέι κύκλῳ, / καὶ νόον ἄφρονα κάμψεν ἀκαμπέος· ἀμφὶ δὲ μίτρην / παρθενικῆς ἐλέλιζεν ἐχιδνήεσσαν ἰμάσθλην / Ἀργολὶς Ἀδρήστεια ("She [Nemesis] flicked / the proud neck of the hapless girl [Aura] with her snaky whip / and struck her with the round wheel of justice, / and bent the foolish neck of unbending will. Argive Adrastea / let the whip with its vipers curl round / the maiden's girdle").

[105] In the initial collaboration of Cadmus with Zeus to defeat Typhoeus, Zeus warns Cadmus against offending Ares killing the Dircaian serpent and advises him to appease him with two common remedies for serpent bites (2.669-678) -to be read with Gigli Piccardi (2003: 254, n. to 672–676). Later, when Cadmus is about to sacrifice the cow that leads him to the future site of Thebes, the serpent kills several of his companions and then curls around him (4.356-388). Only when Athena gives him instructions to attack the animal (4.389-408a), does he kill it (409a-416a), thus bringing onto himself Ares' anger and his deferred transformation into a serpent (417-420). On extradiegetic prolepsis, see Harrison (2001: 85).

[106] Compare Philostr. *Imagines* 1.18.4 Cadmus and Harmonia are described being transformed into serpents, embracing each other, as though holding to what is left of their human bodies.

[107] Omen foretelling the result of the Indian war: 38.26-28, 61-69. Eacus asks for a similar prophecy, interpreting the eagle as a symbol of Zeus both as his father and Dionysus' (39.153-164a).

279).[108] Along these lines, the image of the sea would predict the final naval battle, in which Dionysus defeats Deriades.[109] The dolphin is the most popular fish of the *Dionysiaca*, featuring as a carrier of marine deities (1.72-79, 6.296-297, 13.435-443, 43.281-285) and the final shape of the Tyrsenian pirates (44.245-249, 45.165-168, 47.629-632 -in this episode the dolphin becomes a Dionysiac animal).[110] In the final battle, Deriades fails in his attack against Dionysus and hits a dolphin instead (39.335-338). The colourful birds flying over the sea (5.186: χορὸς ὀρνίθων ἑτερόχροος) would prepare us for the exotic birds of India (40.279: ὄρνεά τ᾽ αἰολόμορφα), in particular the orion and catreus, described in the paradoxographical catalogue of Indian curiosities (26.201-211).

A more general interpretation of the decoration is possible. The sophisticated reader may choose to interpret *ekphrasis* and necklace as representations of the cosmos,[111] in the wake of the interpretation of the Homeric *ekphrasis* of Achilles' shield (*Il.* 18) as an image of the cosmos, which Nonnus replicates and subverts elsewhere.[112] Particularly significant to this regard would be lines 158-161: the cosmos could be said to have a round (snake-like) shape[113] in which the beginning and the end are one and the same thing (158: ὅπῃ τέλος ἐστὶ καὶ ἀρχή). The interpretation would be further reinforced by the frequent connection of Aion ("eternal, cyclical Time") and the serpent: in Nonnus' poems Aion is usually referred to as having circular shape[114] and only once compared to a snake,[115] but the snake is one of the regular attributes of Aion in visual representations of the type called Aion-Chronos.[116] Furthermore, the pendant is

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[108] On India as a country of precious stones, see Karttunen (1997: 233-252).
[109] Nonn. *D.* 39.123-40.95.
[110] Dolphins are supposed to retain part of their former human intelligence (e.g. Opp. *H.* 1.649-653). Nonnus reflects this notion when referring to the dolphin (13.442: ἔμφρονα θυμὸν ἔχων), and reverses it in the story of the pirates (44.245-247).
[111] For a cosmic reading, see Gigli Piccardi (2003: 398, n. to 144 sg.; 402-403, n. to 171-174).
[112] In his descriptions of the shield of Dionysus (25.384-567: the earth and the sea at the centre of the shield, surrounded by the sky and constellations) and Harmonia's weaving (41.294-302: the earth and the sea at the centre, then come concentrically the sky and constellations and the Ocean on the outer rim). The *chiton* of Heracles is also a cosmic image (40.416).
[113] Also the constellation of the serpent, i.e. the Milky Way, on Dionysus' shield (25.402-409).
[114] Nonn. *P.* 3.78-79, 6.146-147, 8.93-94, 8.155-157, 10.101-102, 12.198-199, 13.37-38; *D.* 3.254-255, 26.422-423. More generally on Aion: *D.* 6.371-372, 7.9-10, 7.22-75, 12.25, 24.265b-267, 40.430-434, 41.83-84; *P.* 6.178-179, 9.8-9.
[115] *D.* 41.178-182: χερσὶ δὲ γηραλέῃσιν ἐς ἀρτιτόκου χρόα κούρης / σπάργανα πέπλα Δίκης ἀνεκούφισε σύντροφος Αἰών, / μάντις ἐπεσσομένων, ὅτι γήραος ἄχθος ἀμείβων, / ὡς ὄφις ἀδρανέων φολίδων σπείρημα τινάξας, / ἔμπαλιν ἠβήσειε λελουμένος οἴδμασι θεσμῶν ("Time, his coeval, with his aged hands swaddled / about the newborn girl's body the robes of Justice, / prophet of things to come; because he would put off the burden of age, / like a snake throwing off the rope-like slough of his feeble old scales, / and grow young again bathed in the waves of Law").
[116] Le Glay (1981: nos 17, 20, 21, 30, 35-41 and comm. in pages 410–411).

decorated with an eagle, the symbol of Zeus, hanging in the air (159: ἅτε πλατὺν ἠέρα τέμνων, 161: ὑψιφανής),[117] attached to the cosmos by the four elements (161: τετράζυγι κημῷ), which feature in other cosmic passages of the *Dionysiaca*.[118]

The phrasing could also support a Christian reading of the motif. Line 158 (ὅπῃ τέλος ἐστὶ καὶ ἀρχή) is similar to the definition of God as the beginning and the end, often found together with the image of Alpha and Omega.[119] Christian parallels can be invoked for the combination of the eagle with Alpha and Omega, as a Christological image.[120] In a Christian context the snake often represents evil and the devil, and the fight of the eagle and the snake can be a symbol of Christ defeating evil (see figure 9).[121] Of course, the *ekphrasis* does not define the relationship of the two animals as a fight, there is no indication of prevalence of one animal over the other and the Christian symbol is not an amphisbaena. If a reader identified the Christian overtone (or thought of the eagle as a representation of John the Evangelist, the author of the gospel Nonnus had paraphrased)[122] he would probably interpret it not as an image for the poem, but as a reminder that only Christ is the real beginning and the end -this is only a necklace.

Conclusions

As defined by Harmonia's necklace, *ekphrasis* involves the textual creation of an image combining real-life elements (analysed in section 1) and rhetorical strategies to make the image alive (analysed section 2), and the subsequent superseding of this image in pursuit of a more abstract (and learned) form of enjoyment. Both movements, firstly towards lively representation through detail and secondly towards abstraction, have consequences in the way the (poetic) narrative is conceived and developed: fake realism

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[117] Note *Il.* 12.201=219 αἰετός ὑψιπέτης.
[118] 6.99 (~ 12.169): τετράζυγι κόσμῳ, 7.6: τετράζυγι δεσμῷ, 41.54: ἀτόμων τετράζυγι δεσμῷ.
[119] Esp. *Rev.* 21:6: ἐγώ [εἰμι] τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὦ, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος; 22:13: ἐγὼ τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὦ, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος.
[120] A rampant eagle with the A and Ω features in a medallion on a mosaic of the Church of Deacon Thomas in Mount Nebo (Jordan), dated to 540s/550s AD: Piccirillo (1989: 222-223); Talgam (2014: 201-202). There is a numerous group of Coptic funerary stelae from the Thebaid (esp. Armant/Hermonthis and Esna/Letopolis) with a bird sometimes accompanied with the A and the Ω (Pelsmaekers [1982: cat. nos. 7, 9, 38, 41, 42, 47, 48]). The bird has been variously identified as an eagle or a dove, and the frequent presence of the cross allows Christological parallels: see Pelsmaekers (1982: 155-156, 160-161, 166-168, 175-179). Pelsmaekers (1982: 161) quotes as a parallel a fifth century mosaic of cubiculum 3 in the catacombs of St Gaudiosus in Naples, where a rampant bird stands upon a cross with the A and the Ω (Rotili 1978: fig. 5 and p. 32). Also (Pelsmaekers [1982: 166, no 34]) a mural painting in chapel 27 in the monastery of Bawit, picturing a dove-like bird surrounded by vegetation with the inscriptions AETOC and A Ω (three times): see Clédat (1904-1906: pl. XCIII.2, page 150).
[121] For their use as Christian symbols, see Ciccarese (2002-2007: I 109-38 'aquila', II 253-83 'serpente').
[122] The equivalence is mentioned in Irenaeus of Lyon *Adversus Haereses* 3.11.8 and Aug. *De consensus evangelistarum* 1.9 and becomes canonical in Jerome *Comm. on Matthew* (Pref. ch. 3).

and interpretative open-endedness complicate the decoding of the text even to the eyes of their contemporary learned viewers and readers, who had been trained from childhood to understand and replicate rhetorical mechanisms of communication.

When inset in a longer narrative (in this case the *Dionysiaca*) *ekphraseis* like that of Harmonia's necklace add to the ontological instability of the text as they give evidence of the porosity of the boundaries between reality and fiction, image and text, and leave behind a series of clues to the development of the plot which the reader needs to decode as s/he advances in the narrative. Especially in a 48-book narrative, the full unravelling of the "consequences" of the *ekphrasis* is difficult to appreciate in the first reading: the narrative complexity *ekphraseis* entail forces the reader to apply all of his/her rhetorical (and fictional) training to the appreciation of the text and in all probability to re-read the whole poem several times to fully apprehend their meaning. As they seep into their context *ekphrases* play on the reader's capacity to appreciate counterpoint and polyphonic plot development. Clearly this is not literature for the feeble or those in search of easy entertainment: it speaks of a poet and an audience with time and erudition to spare, and an educated taste for brilliance and narrative challenges.