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& María Paz de Hoz (eds.)

# The Alexandrian Tradition

Interactions between Science, Religion,  
and Literature

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## Nonnus' natural histories: anything to do with Dionysus?

The ancients would have described natural history<sup>1</sup> as the enquiry into what was remarkable in the natural world, involving mostly animals and plants. Histories had a chronological component (talking of old things), at least an appearance of impartiality, and most of the time their subject matter came from distant lands, including strange elements that elicited surprised reactions in the reading public.

Animals rendered a neutral space to talk about other subjects. They were used as spaces (or bodies) for thought and narrative in fables, where they illustrated different types of characteristically human behaviour, and in religious narratives, with deities taking different animal shapes for the sake of disguise and punishing humans with the loss of their bodies. Through these two channels, animals entered the philosophical and scientific discourse in classical Athens. Natural history became fully formed as a scientific discipline with Aristotle's studies on the natural world.<sup>2</sup> He considered an educational acquaintance with all scientific fields, including animals, was good for the liberally educated man, who should be able to appreciate and judge a discourse on animals just as well as a philosophical one, although he did not need to have a productive knowledge of them, such as a veterinary would.

Aristotle and Nonnus of Panopolis are separated by chronological, physical and literary distance, since the latter has been dated to the fifth century AD, came from Panopolis in Upper Egypt and wrote two long epic poems, the *Dionysiaca*, on the life and exploits of

1 Overview in Roger French, *Ancient Natural History. Histories of Nature*, London/New York, 1994, pp. 1–5.

2 Overview in Roger French, *Ancient Natural History*, pp. 10–15.

Dionysus, and a *Paraphrase of the Gospel of St. John*. In the centuries between the two authors, animals became the protagonists of their own genre in treatises like Aelian's *De natura animalium*, including physical descriptions, ethological notes and paradoxographical motifs. Animals, especially exotic ones, were the topic of exercises of description (*ekphrasis*) at school,<sup>3</sup> and accompanied the students in their adult lives: you ought to know about them and ought to know how to talk about them. Exotic species fascinated the learned public and provided a pleasurable topic of conversation, which is why they feature so often in novels.

Consider *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius: he includes descriptions of the phoenix (3.24.3–25.7),<sup>4</sup> the hippopotamus (4.2, followed by an account of its hunt), and the comparison of the hippopotamus with an elephant leads to the description of the elephant.<sup>5</sup> Heliodorus populates his Ethiopia with enormous animals (Hld. 9.22.6–7, 10.5.1–2), and their king is presented with very exotic beasts as gifts,<sup>6</sup> including a giraffe (10.27.1–4). Achilles' Egypt and Heliodorus' Ethiopia are credible literary creations, i. e., their authors engage with the appropriate literature on these lands: they do not describe contemporary places, they demonstrate that they know what has been said about them and that they can reproduce this in a suitably rhetorical manner.

In these two novels, content and form matter, but they are not self-sufficient, and need to be paired with a real understanding of them. Thus, Achilles' main character, Clitophon, has some information about animals and knows how to talk about them, but his failure to move from the superficial rhetorical patterns and literary genres to a comprehension of what he is saying turns him into a laughable

3 Herodotus' descriptions of the crocodile (2.68–70), the hippopotamus (71), the phoenix (73) and the ibis (76) were school models for the exercise of *ekphrasis*: Theon 118.15–17, 120.3–8.

4 Nonnus mentions the phoenix on *D.* 40.394–8.

5 Including 4.4.2 conception and life span; 4.4.3–6 physical description; 4.4.7–4.5.3 anecdotes.

6 The Seres bring robes woven from spider webs from their country (10.25.2), the Troglodytes gold and a pair of griffins (26.2), and the Blemmyes snake-bone arrowheads (26.2).

character, someone who repeatedly fails to make use of his theoretical knowledge in his own life.<sup>7</sup> In Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*, the confrontation between Persians and Ethiopians is presented as a battle between the Persian armoured cavalry and the Ethiopian elephants (9.14–20). The latter win the battle because the Ethiopian king knows how to make the most of his elephants and how to plunge the enemy's horses into disarray.

The *Dionysiaca*, being a mythological poem, has different expectations. In the context of a narrative on Dionysus, animals inevitably appear as guises adopted by the god (religious context – referred to a particular cult or not), members of his retinue (very much related to artistic representations of Dionysus)<sup>8</sup> and inhabitants of the near and distant lands he visits on his travels (historical and paradoxographical contexts – i. e., 'scientific'). In the particular case of the *Dionysiaca*, we need to take into account the following general premises: 1) religion and cult play a minor role;<sup>9</sup> 2) the intersections of art and text are not necessarily straightforward;<sup>10</sup> 3) previous studies have revealed that Nonnus enriches his description of the Dionysiac world with references to various scientific and technical fields, such as magic and divination,<sup>11</sup>

7 This is the main contention of Laura Miguélez-Cavero, "Rhetorical Displays of Knowledge in Leucippe and Clitophon: Animal Talk", *Prometheus*, 36.3 (2010), pp. 263–83.

8 Overview in Christian Augé *et al.*, "Dionysos (in peripheria orientali)", *LIMC*, 3.1 (1986), pp. 514–31; Carlo Gasparri, "Dionysos", *LIMC*, 3.1 (1986), pp. 414–514.

9 Francis Vian, "Les cultes païens dans les *Dionysiaques* de Nonnos: étude de vocabulaire", *REA*, 15 (1988), pp. 399–410; Francis Vian, "Préludes cosmiques dans les *Dionysiaques* de Nonnos de Panopolis", *Prometheus*, 19 (1993), pp. 39–52; Francis Vian, "Théogamies et sotériologie dans les *Dionysiaques* de Nonnos", *JS*, (1994), pp. 197–233.

10 Laura Miguélez-Cavero, "The Appearance of the Gods in the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus of Panopolis", *GRBS*, 49 (2009), pp. 557–83.

11 On astrology, see Simonetta Feraboli, "Astrologica in Nonno", *CL*, 4 (1985), pp. 43–55; on magic in general, see Hélène Frangoulis, "Dionysos dans les *Dionysiaques* de Nonnos de Panopolis: Dieu ou sorcier?", in *La Magie. Actes du colloque international de Montpellier 25–27 mars 1999, II. La magie dans l'antiquité grecque tardive. Les mythes*, Montpellier, 2000, pp. 143–51; on magical stones, see Hélène Frangoulis, "Les pierres magiques dans les *Dionysiaques* de Nonnos de Panopolis", in Domenico Accorinti and Pierre Chuvin eds., *Des Géants à*

medicine<sup>12</sup> and architecture,<sup>13</sup> but he does not possess a specialist's knowledge, only an educational acquaintance, and most references have some sort of connection with other literary texts, frequently with Homer. It would therefore be a mistake to conclude that Nonnus substituted a religious atmosphere for a (pseudo-)scientific one. The *Dionysiaca* is more than anything else an epic poem vying with Homer,<sup>14</sup> as literature and not religion or science. Although hailing from Panopolis, Nonnus writes his *Dionysiaca* from the point of view of Alexandria,<sup>15</sup> and this means not only religious, philosophical and scientific studies, but also literary creation of the highest order.<sup>16</sup>

Taking all this into account, this paper aims to analyse the presence of animals in the *Dionysiaca*, focusing not so much on Nonnus' religious and scientific knowledge, but on the performance of the literary filter in which they appear. This is not a case of bringing together disconnected passages, since animal discourse unfolds throughout the main narrative following a structured plan outlined in the proemium, and it has everything to do with how Nonnus builds up the figure of Dionysus. In the proemium, Proteus, the accomplished shape-shifter, is chosen as the symbol of the poem, and the singer

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*Dionysos. Mélanges de mythologie et de poésie grecques offerts à Francis Vian*, Alessandria, 2003, pp. 433–445; on divination through dreams, see Danièle Auger (2003), “Le monde des rêves dans les *Dionysiaques* de Nonnos”, in Domenico Accorinti and Pierre Chuvin eds., *Des Géants à Dionysos. Mélanges de mythologie et de poésie grecques offerts à Francis Vian*, Alessandria, 2003, pp. 415–32.

- 12 See Bernard Gerlaud, *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques*, Tome VI, Chants XIV–XVII, Paris, 1994, pp. 148–49.
- 13 Laura Miguélez-Cavero, *Poems in Context. Greek Poetry in the Egyptian Thebaid 200–600 AD*, Berlin/New York, 2008, pp. 147–51.
- 14 Explicit in the first and second proems: 1.34–8, 25.22–30.
- 15 Cf. Nonn. *D.* 1.13–14 Ἄλλὰ χοροῦ ψαύοντι Φάρω παρὰ γείτοσι νήσῳ / στήσατέ μοι Πρωτῆα πολύτροπον. Also attributed to Nonnus: *AP* 9.198 Νόννος ἐγώ· Πανός μὲν ἐμὴ πόλις, ἐν Φαρήνι δὲ / ἔγγει φωνήεντι γονὰς ἦμησα Πιγάντων.
- 16 Overviews in Glen W. Bowersock, “Late Antique Alexandria”, in *Alexandria and Alexandrianism*, Malibu, 1996, pp. 263–72; Denis Roques, “Alexandrie tardive et protobyzantine (IV<sup>e</sup>–VII<sup>e</sup> s.): témoignages d’auteurs”, in Jean Leclant ed., *Alexandrie: une mégapole cosmopolite*, Paris, 1999, pp. 202–35; Edward J. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 2006.

proposes superseding him, matching each one of his impersonations with one of Dionysus' animal episodes.<sup>17</sup> Serpent Proteus is opposed to Dionysus' victory over the serpent-haired Giants (48.1–89). A more obvious choice would have been the episode of Zagreus, whom Zeus engenders in the shape of a serpent with the Ctonic Persephone, but we will see that Bacchus' serpentine connections are underplayed in the poem. Lion Proteus is then compared with Dionysus, as the son of the lion-breeder Rhea (9.145–243). Zeus, Zagreus and Rhea are key figures in the first twelve books of the poem and, as we will see in section 1, their connection with animals prefigures the adult Dionysus (see section 2). Proteus turns into a boar and Dionysus subdues the boar-slayer Aura (48.238–968): Aura is one of several anti-Dionysiac figures seeking to usurp animal shapes and wield the power over animals to which only Dionysus is entitled, as we will see in section 3. Proteus becomes a leopard, whereas Dionysus in his leopard chariot defeats the Indians, whose symbol is the elephant (books 13–40). India and its animals will be analysed in section 4. The final section will review the occurrences of marine creatures.

17 1.16–28 εἰ γὰρ ἔφερπύσσειε δράκων κυκλοῦμενος ὄλακῶ, / μέλιψω θεῖον ἄεθλον, ὅπως κισσῶδεϊ θύρσῳ / φρικτὰ δρακοντοκόμων ἐδαΐζετο πύλα Γιγάντων· / εἰ δὲ λέων φρίξειεν ἐπαυχενίην τρίχα σείων, / 20 Βάκχον ἀνευάξω βλοσυρῆς ἐπὶ πήχει ῥείης / μαζὸν ὑποκλέπτοντα λεοντοβότοιο θεαίνης· / εἰ δὲ θυελλήεντι μετάρσιος ἄλματι ταρσῶν / πόρδαλις ἀίξη πολυδαίδαλον εἶδος ἀμείβων, / ὑμνήσω Διὸς υἱά, πόθεν γένος ἔκτανεν Ἴνδῶν / 25 πορδαλίων ὀχέεσαι καθιπεύσας ἐλεφάντων· / εἰ δέμας ἰσάζοιτο τύπῳ σός, υἱά Θυώνης / ἀείσω ποθέοντα συοκτόνον εὐγάμον Αὔρην, / ὀψιγόνου τριτάτοιο Κυβηλίδα μητέρα Βάκχου (“For if, as a serpent, he [Proteus] should glide along his winding trail, I will sing my god’s achievement, how with ivy-wreathed wand he destroyed the horrid hosts of Giants serpent-haired. If as a lion he shake his bristling mane, I will cry “Euoi!” to Bacchus on the arm of buxom Rhea, stealthily draining the breast of the lion-breeding goddess. If as a leopard he shoot up into the air with a stormy leap from his pads, changing shape like a master-craftsman, I will hymn the son of Zeus, how he slew the Indian nation, with his team of leopards riding down the elephants. If he make his figure like the shape of a boar, I will sing Thyone’s son, love-sick for Aura the desirable, boar-slayer, daughter of Cybele, mother of the third Bacchus late-born”). Greek text from Francis Vian coord, *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques*, Paris, 1976–2006; English translation adapted from William H. D. Rouse, *Nonnos, Dionysiaca*, 3 vols., Cambridge (Ma.), 1940.

## 1. Books 1–12: Rhetorical prelude

The *Dionysiaca* follows the usual structure of a βασιλικὸς λόγος or ‘royal encomium’,<sup>18</sup> through five main τόποι, homeland and ancestry (books 1–6), birth (7–8), childhood and adolescence, with special attention to education and character traits (9–12), military and peaceful exploits (13–48, with a prevalence of the former in books 13–40, and of the latter in 40–48) and death, and posthumous honours compressed into Bacchus’ apotheosis in the final lines of book 48. In fact, books 1–12 act as a prelude and justification for the rest of the poem, sustaining Dionysus’ aspirations to join the gods on Olympus through a narrative of his family history, his conception by Zeus and Semele, his extraordinary birth and the divine characteristics he shows in his childhood and adolescence.

The role played by animals in the first twelve books provides the basis for different narrative threads throughout the rest of the poem and sets the tone for the interpretation of the religious connotations of animals. In particular, Zeus’ metamorphic capacity and Rhea’s power over animals are emptied of their religious significance, grounding the presentation of the adult Dionysus as a shape-shifter and lord of beasts in his (divine) family genes. The physical connection with two powerful gods indicates that he deserves to be called a god. The underlying rhetorical *topos* is that his inclinations (*epitedeumata*) as a child and adolescent are a prelude to the adult image of the god,<sup>19</sup> who wears the *nebris* and has a court of wild animals.<sup>20</sup> Animal shapes are also applied to his maternal family, to emphasise their proximity to the gods.<sup>21</sup>

18 Edward D. Lasky, “Encomiastic Elements in the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus”, *Hermes*, 106 (1978), pp. 357–76; Francis Vian, *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques*, Tome I, Chants I–II, Paris, 1976, pp. xx–xxi; Laura Miguélez-Cavero, *Poems in Context*, pp. 355–66.

19 On the combination of *paideia* and *epitedeumata* (including the forging of the profession and character of the *laudandus*) as *topoi* of the encomium, see Laurent Pernot, *La Rhétorique de l’éloge dans le monde gréco-romain*, Paris, 1993, pp. 161–65.

20 Cf. e.g. 14.230b–46.

21 His family has ‘served’ Zeus loyally for two generations: Dionysus’ great-aunt Europa is kidnapped and raped by Zeus; his grandfather, Cadmus, helps Zeus to

a. *Zeus undergoes several animal metamorphoses* in the early books of the poem up to the birth of Dionysus, all of them narrated so as to minimise their religious content while highlighting literary parallels. The *Dionysiaca* begins with Zeus courting Europa in the shape of a bull,<sup>22</sup> although Nonnus' main references here are not religious, but literary: Moschus' *Europa*<sup>23</sup> and the initial *ekphrasis* of a painting of Europa and Zeus in *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius.<sup>24</sup>

In his first attempt to sire a Dionysus-like deity, Zeus becomes a serpent to fool the two serpents guarding the cave of Persephone, and fathers Zagreus in this guise (6.155–68).<sup>25</sup> Zagreus himself undergoes several metamorphoses in his failed attempt to escape the Titans (6.174–99): the four ages of man (not in chronological order though: maturity, old age, childhood and adolescence) and five animals (a roaring lion, a wild stallion, a whistling snake,<sup>26</sup> a tiger and a bellowing bull). Zagreus' five animal shapes are meant to prelude different aspects of Dionysus: he entwines snakes in his hair and is driven in a chariot pulled by lions and tigers; he takes the real or false shape of a lion, a bull and a serpent.<sup>27</sup> The serpent has Ctonic and Orphic connections,<sup>28</sup> and the bull sacrificed by the Titans is a

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defeat Typhoeus, who has stolen Zeus' weapons; all Cadmus' children are affected in one way or the other by their proximity to Zeus.

22 See esp. the description in 1.46–57. The motif reappears in 41.237–46.

23 Mary Whitby, "From Moschus to Nonnus: The Evolution of the Nonnian Style", in Neil Hopkinson ed., *Studies in the Dionysiaca of Nonnus*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 101–5.

24 Daria Gigli Piccardi, "Alcune nuove concordanze fra Nonno ed Achille Tazio", in Enrico Livrea and G. Aurelio Privitera eds., *Studi in onore di Anthos Ardizzoni*, Rome, 1978, p. 431; Daria Gigli Piccardi, *Nonno di Panopoli, Le Dionisiache (Canti I–XII), Volume Primo*, Milan, 2003, p. 128 (n. to 46).

25 Daria Gigli Piccardi, *Nonno di Panopoli*, p. 482 (n. to 162) identifies a literary precedent: E. *Ba.* 697 ff.

26 Zagreus is the son of Persephone, the queen of the Underworld, symbolised by the serpent. He is also the grandson of Demeter, presented in the *Dionysiaca* driving a chariot pulled by snakes: 6.109–18, 13.188–92.

27 As we will see in section 2. Compare with E. *Bacch.* 1017–19 φάνηθι ταῦρος ἢ πολύκρανος ἰδεῖν / δράκων ἢ πυριφλέγων / ὄρᾶσθαι λέων.

28 On Dionysus as a Ctonic deity, see Anne-France Morand, *Études sur les hymnes orphiques*, Leiden, 2001, pp. 209–10.

particularly well known Orphic motif,<sup>29</sup> which gives the passage a religious flavour, albeit not defined by detailed expressions of cult.

Only the horse does not have a correspondence in the god's adult shapes or appearance. The religious context of the passage explains why Chuvin and Gigli Piccardi<sup>30</sup> search for an explanation in neo-Platonic texts.<sup>31</sup> The other possible option is to consider the horse a voluntary intruder and think that Nonnus used it to dissipate the religious atmosphere inherent to such a key Orphic myth. We may even consider a literary referent: the Homeric comparisons of Paris (*Il.* 6.506–14) and Hector (*Il.* 15.263–9) to horses running joyfully across the plain, as exhilarating images of vigorous youthfulness doomed to be annihilated soon.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, when courting Semele to sire Dionysus, Zeus becomes a bull, a lion, a panther and a snake (7.318–43),<sup>33</sup> and the whole pas-

- 29 On Dionysus as a bull (including references to Nonnus), see Emma Aston, *Mixanthrôpoi: Animal-human Hybrid Deities in Greek Religion*, Liège, 2011, pp. 128–32; Anne-France Morand, *Études sur les hymnes*, pp. 249–50. On the death of the first Dionysus, see *ibid.*, pp. 159–60, 216–17. On the similarities between the *Dionysiaca* and the *Orphic Hymns*, focusing on hymnic passages, see *ibid.*, pp. 83–6.
- 30 Pierre Chuvin, *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques*, Tome III, Chants VI–VIII, Paris, 1992, n. ad loc.; Daria Gigli Piccardi, *Nonno di Panopoli*, p. 486, n. to 182–99.
- 31 Rosa García-Gasco, “Orfeo y el orfismo en las Dionisiácas de Nono”, in Alberto Bernabé and Francesc Casadesús eds., *Orfeo y la tradición órfica: un reencuentro*, Madrid, 2008, p. 1593, suggests that Nonnus introduces the horse in this narrative for the sake of variation (*poikilia*).
- 32 See also Triph. 152b–8 (Neoptolemus, the first to volunteer to hide in the wooden horse, is likened to a colt running through a plain, taking pride in its new ornaments and anticipating the orders of his charioteer); QS 7.317–25 (Neoptolemus is eager to go to war like an impatient horse that is difficult to restrain). These are all images of power and dangerous impetuosity. Daria Gigli Piccardi, *Nonno di Panopoli*, p. 487, n. to 187–90) notes that there is a similar image of a powerful horse in a description of a battle in *D.* 36.224–33, although in the context of a *sparagmos*.
- 33 After the transformation into a bull, lion and panther (see also 8.343–4), he becomes a serpent: 7.325–8a his head is crowned with serpents, vine shoots and ivy; 328b–33 he slides around Semele's body in the shape of a serpent; 334–43 he joins Semele in wedlock, carrying the thyrsus, the narthex and the nebris. According to Daria Gigli Piccardi, *Nonno di Panopoli*, p. 568 (n. to 334–43) the passage is more reminiscent of a scene from the wine harvest than a sexual union.

sage heralds the changeling nature and attributes of his son (esp. 319–24), with no religious connotation at all.

*b. Rhea/Cibele's power over animals, especially lions*

Semele's untimely death leaves Dionysus an orphan, and the female presence in his upbringing involves his aunt Ino and her servant Mystis. After Ino falls prey to Hera's attack, Hermes hands the infant Dionysus over to Rhea (9.145 ff.), thus paralleling Zeus's own childhood.<sup>34</sup> Little attention is paid to Rhea/Cibele herself, but she is usually introduced in the poem as a lion-breeder or having a chariot pulled by lions<sup>35</sup> and, just as Mystis introduces the young god to mystic rites (9.111–31), Rhea trains him to deal with wild beasts (9.160–1).

At the tender age of nine, the young god hunts timid animals such as hares, prickets and fawns (9.169–72), and exerts an effortless mastery over savage beasts.<sup>36</sup> By the time he reaches adolescence, he reveals a fully formed personality directly linked to those of Rhea and Zeus: he dons the nebris, the animal version of his father's starry sky,<sup>37</sup> and uses savage beasts to pull his chariot in the manner of Rhea (9.188–93), with a boldness inherited from Zeus (9.194–9).

34 Hermes and Semele highlight the parallel: 9.153–4, 218–27.

35 1.21 λεοντοβότοιο θεαίνης; 9.147 λεοντοβότω... ῥεῖω; 9.191–3; 11.338–9 οὐδὲ λεόντων / ῥεῖης ἡμετέρης ποτὲ φείσομαι; 13.8–10; 14.1–2; 25.310–79; 43.88–90.

36 9.173–9 καὶ θρασὺν αἰολόνωτον ἔχων τετανυσμένον ὤμω / τίγριν ἄνω κοφύριζε μετάρσιον ἔκτοθι δεσμοῦ / 175 σκύμνους χερσὶν ἔχων ἐπεδείκνυε μητέρι ῥεῖη, / ἀρπάξας νέα τέκνα πολυγλαγέων ἀπὸ μαζῶν, / σμερδαλέους δὲ λέοντας ἔτι ζῶοντας ἐρύσσας / μητέρι δῶρα τίταινε, ἵνα ζεύξειεν ἀπήνη, / δίξυγας ἀμφοτέρησι πόδας παλάμησι πιέζων (“he would hold lightly aloft stretched on his shoulders a bold fellstriped tiger unshackled, and brought in hand to show Mother Rhea the cubs he had torn newborn from the dam's milky teats. He dragged horrible lions still alive, and clutching a couple of feet in each hand presented them to the Mother that she might yoke them to her car”). Retold in 25.184–95.

37 9.184–7 καὶ χοροῖ λαχνηέντας ἀνεχλαίνωσε χιτῶνας / Εὐῖος ἀρτιτέλεστον ἔχων παιδίον ἡβην, / δαιδαλέην ἐλάφοιο φέρων ὤμοισι καλύπτρην, / αἰθερίων μιμηλὸν ἔχων τύπον αἰόλον ἄστρων (“The time of boyhood just come, Euios draped furry tunics upon his body, and carried to cover his shoulders the dappled skin of a stag, imitating the sky spotted with stars”).

The presentation of the nebris as a terrestrial version of the sky, though originally Orphic,<sup>38</sup> is diluted in the playful context of the passage. The mystic elements of the god's early years are concentrated in the intervention of the nurse Mystis (9.111–31), who initiates the young god into his own mysteries,<sup>39</sup> and even this episode is tempered by the recreational context of the passage, since the bronze caskets, the nebris and the mystical casket are used as toys (παίγνια) by the young god (9.125–8).

Representations of the childhood of Dionysus donning different Bacchic accoutrements, surrounded by Satyrs and Maenads and occasionally some animals, had become popular mainly on sarcophagi for children.<sup>40</sup> More generally, hunting and fishing putti or children were a common topic in artistic ornament, and are considered part of the Dionysiac repertoire.<sup>41</sup> The *epitedeumata* (youthful inclinations of a character) are a regular feature of the encomium and the main reason for including these episodes in the poem, but the presentation of the god playfully engaged as a child in what should be grown-up pursuits also plays down religious aspects of Dionysus, such as his theriomorphic appearance or his being a divinity of nature, a lord of the beasts.

### *c) Animal shapes on his maternal side*

Animal metamorphoses and connections are not restricted to Dionysus' paternal family: some members of the family are compared with animals for their inhuman like behaviour,<sup>42</sup> his cousin Actaeon is turned

38 Fr. 238 Kern. See Daria Gigli Piccardi, *Nonno di Panopoli*, pp. 661–2, n. to 184–7.

39 Ino has previously introduced in Delphi the cult of Bacchus 'still a child' (εἰσέτι νηπιάχοιο χοροῦς... Βάκχου), in connection with the tradition of Dionysus as healer of madness: 9.284–9.

40 On which see Friedrich Matz, ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΑΚΗ ΤΕΛΕΘΗ. *Archäologische Untersuchungen zum Dionysoskult in hellenistischer und römischer Zeit*, Wiesbaden, 1964, pp. 1400–5; Friedrich Matz, *Die Dionysischen Sarkophage*, Berlin, 1969, III pp. 345–59; Robert Turcan, *Les sarcophages romains à représentations dionysiaques*, Paris, 1966, pp. 406–17.

41 Christine Kondoleon, *Domestic and Divine: Roman Mosaics in the House of Dionysos*, Ithaca/London, 1995, pp. 259–69.

42 10.7–13 Athamas flogs a goat thinking it to be Ino; 10.50–64 Athamas kills his son Learchos thinking he is a stag. See also Pentheus and Agave as lions in the following section.

into a stag for watching Artemis naked and his grandparents Cadmus and Harmonia become serpents.

The latter occurs beyond the chronological boundaries of the poem, but it is mentioned in most episodes narrating the story of Cadmus and his family, which is the main theme of the poem's opening and final books (1–10, 44–46). In the initial collaboration between Cadmus and Zeus to defeat Typhoeus, Zeus warns Cadmus against offending Ares Dircaian by killing the serpent, advising him to appease the god with two common remedies for serpent bites.<sup>43</sup> When Cadmus is about to sacrifice the cow that leads him to the future site of Thebes, the serpent attacks and kills several of his companions and then curls around him (4.356–88). Only when Athena gives him instructions to attack the animal (4.389–408a), does he kill it (409a–16a), thus incurring Ares' wrath and bringing about his subsequent transformation into a serpent.<sup>44</sup> Cadmus and Harmonia enter their nuptial chamber under the constellation Draco,<sup>45</sup> and the most notable of the wedding presents given to the couple is a necklace (5.143–89) in the shape of a double-headed amphisbaena.<sup>46</sup>

The allusions return at the beginning and end of the *Pentheid*, when Agave tries to reverse the ill-omina about her son with a sacrifice<sup>47</sup>

43 2.669–78 – to be read with Daria Gigli Piccardi, *Nonno di Panopoli*, p. 254, n. 672–6.

44 4.417–20 χωομένου δὲ / Κάδμος ἀμειβομένων μελέων ἐλικώδεϊ μορφῇ / ἄλλοφυῆς ἤμελλε παρ' Ἰλλυρίδος σφυρὰ γαίης / ξεῖνον ἔχειν Ἴνδαλαμ δρακοντείοιο προσώπου “Because of [Ares'] wrath Cadmus was destined to change his limbs for a curling shape, and to have a strange aspect of dragon's countenance at the ends of the Illyrian country”.

45 5.121–5 καὶ γαμίους θαλάμοισι φέρων νυμφοστόλον ὄρην / Ἄρκτῶης ἀνέτελλε Δράκωνόμοφοιτος Ἀμάξης, / ἄγγελος ἐσομένων, ὅτι σύννομος ἦλικι νύμφη / ἐκ βροτέης ἤμελλεν ἔχειν ὀφιώδεα μορφήν / νυμφίος Ἄρμονίης “And when the hour of escorting the bride to the marriage chambers arrived, then rose the Serpent, companion of the northern Waggon, a messenger of things to come: for Harmonia's bridegroom along with his agemate wife was destined to change his human shape for a serpent's”.

46 Though according to Pierre Chuvin, *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques*, Tome II, Chants III–V, Paris, 1976, pp. 83–7, and Hélène Frangoulis, “Les pierres magiques”, it does not have a symbolic or magical meaning.

47 44.107–18 Two serpents creep around Cadmus and Harmonia, a presage of their future guise.

and after the death of Pentheus, as the whole family mourns.<sup>48</sup> Both Ino and Agave blame Dionysus for their misfortune, presenting him as a god who is cruel to his own kin,<sup>49</sup> but these metamorphoses emphasise their proximity to the gods, thereby rendering them a very special human family. In other words, Dionysus boasts of his divine filiation on his paternal side and on his proximity to the gods on his maternal (human) side.<sup>50</sup> The latter goes beyond the usual forms of collaboration (Cadmus helps Zeus to defeat Typhoeus) and ancestry (Harmonia is the daughter of Aphrodite and Ares) to a change in their human shape.

The descriptions of the animal features of Dionysus' ancestors (voluntary metamorphoses of Zeus, Rhea's power over animals, involuntary metamorphoses in his maternal family) and the formation of his own in his youth make the god's adult appearance and his powers more rationally credible. Without the first twelve books of the poem, Nonnus' Dionysus and his animals would be deprived of a vital con-

48 46.364–7 Ἰλλυρίην δ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν ἐς Ἑσπερίου στόμα πόντου / Ἄρμονίην λιπόπατριν ὀμόστολον ἤλικι Κάδμῳ / ἀμφοτέρους πόμπευεν ἀλήμιονας, οἷς χρόνος ἔρπων / ὤπασε πετρήεσαν ἔχειν ὀφιδώδεα μορφήν (“Over the Illyrian country, to the mouth of the Western sea, he [Dionysus] sped, and banished Harmonia with Cadmus her agemate, both wanderers, for whom creeping Time had in store a change into the shape of snaky stone”)

49 10.85–95 Ino complains that her caring for Dionysus has only brought her pains; 46.283 (Agave on discovering that she has killed Pentheus) νηλειῆς Διόνυσε, τεῆς ἀκόρητε γενέθλης (“Cruel Dionysus, insatiable persecutor of your family!”)... 294–7 Ζεὺς Σεμέλην παρίαυεν, ὅπως Πενθήῃ γοήσω / Ζεὺς γενέτης Διόνυσσον ἐῶ τεκνώσατο μηρῶ, / Καδμείην ἴνα πᾶσαν αἰστώσειε γενέθλην. / ἰλήκοι Διόνυσσος· ὅλον γένος ὤλεσε Κάδμου (“Zeus slept with Semele only that I might mourn Pentheus; Zeus the father childed Dionysus from his own thigh, only to destroy the whole family of Cadmus. May Dionysus forgive me, he has destroyed the whole race of Cadmus”).

50 Compare with Men. Rh. 403.18–21 on how to reconcile the different statuses of the families of the bride and the bridegroom in the *epithalamium*: ἐὰν δὲ τὸ μὲν ἔνδοξον τῶν γενῶν τυγχάνῃ, τὸ δὲ μὴ πάνυ, ἀντίθεος τῷ ἐνδόξῳ τὰς ἀρετάς, σωφροσύνην, ἐπιείκειαν τοῦ ἐτέρου γένους· οὐ γὰρ ἀπορήσεις ἀφορμῶν (“If one of the families is distinguished and the other not, set against the distinction the other family's virtues (temperance, moderation). You will find there is no shortage of starting-points”). Text and translation from Donald A. Russell and Nigel G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor*, Oxford, 1981.

nection with the rational basis of their mythical world. Animals are placed within the broader rhetorical framework of the poem, thus performing a structural function. Religious motifs are suggested but underplayed, and scientific data on animals is virtually absent.

## 2. Adult Dionysus: Animals as a fictional and literary resource

The appearance of adult Dionysus<sup>51</sup> is a natural consequence of the elements repeated in the introductory books: he dons serpents or serpent knots on his head, wears a fawn-skin over his chest and is driven with a chariot pulled by panthers, lions or leopards for the sake of variation.<sup>52</sup> This chariot symbolises his power over wild animals, as highlighted also when beasts fight for him or are instantly tamed by him.<sup>53</sup>

Bacchus himself adopts animal features, the most frequent of which are the horns of a bull.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, bulls act as his alter egos,<sup>55</sup>

- 51 E.g. 14.233b–9 when Bacchus went to battle: *καρήνου / ἄπλοκον ἐσφήκωσε δρακοντείῳ τρίχα δεσμῶ, / 235 κράασι κυκλώσας βλοσυρὸν στέφος: ἀντὶ δὲ τυκτῆς / δαιδαλέης κνημῖδος ἕως ἐπιγουνίδος ἄκρης / ἄργυφα πορφυρέοις ἐνεθήκατο ταρσὰ κοθόρονοις, / νεβρίδα λαχνήεσαν ἐπὶ στέρνοιο καθάψας, / στικτὸν ἔχων θώρηκα, τύπον κεχαραγμένον ἄστρων* (“He only tied his loose tresses with serpent-knots, a grim garland for his head; instead of fine-wrought greaves, from ankle to thigh he wore purple buskins on his silvery feet. He hung a furry fawn-skin over his chest, a chest-piece dappled with spots like the stars”). Also Bacchants and other members of his *thiasos*: 14.128–31, 14.340–1, 14.355–60, 24.132–4...
- 52 11.63–70, 11.119–27, 11.341–2, 14.260–3, 16.140–3, 18.10–14, 18.47–51, 20.70–3, 20.107–8, 20.297–8, 23.125–7, 42.19–22, 48.1–3. In art depictions, Dionysus often appears riding a tiger or being driven in a chariot pulled by panthers or tigers: e.g., on Dionysiac sarcophagi, see Friedrich Matz, *Die Dionysischen Sarkophage*, I. pp. 157–64, II. pp. 212–244, 279–86, III. pp. 307–313.
- 53 11.78–9, 11.337–42, 16.94–105, 24.342–4, 32.125–42, 36.164–97. Also to be taken into account: 12.292 ff. discovery of the wine attributed to a serpent (esp. 12.319–36).
- 54 9.13–15, 9.146 *κερασφόρον υἷα*, 17.239–42, 20.314 *κερασφόρε Βάκχε*, 27.23 *κερασφόρον υἷα Θυώνης*, 32.127–9, 45.89–91.
- 55 E.g., 15.25–31: a drunken Indian drags a bull thinking it to be Dionysus.

especially in his clash with Pentheus.<sup>56</sup> However, in the *omina* sent by Zeus to foretell the outcome of wars, Dionysus takes a winged shape: he is an eagle and the Indian king Deriades appears as a serpent in the portents foretelling both the outcome of the Indian war (38.26–8)<sup>57</sup> and his confrontation with Poseidon over Beroe (42.534–40a), where a falcon (Dionysus) loses a pigeon (Beroe) to an osprey (Poseidon). By contrast, lion features on Dionysus are rare.<sup>58</sup>

The god's animal features are amplified by those of his entourage, with Bacchantes and other members of his retinue regularly mastering wild animals,<sup>59</sup> including some descriptions of a *sparagmos*,<sup>60</sup> and they lose this power when they are not inspired or Dionysus is not with them.<sup>61</sup>

Regarding his adult metamorphoses, the most important one occurs in his duel with Deriades (36.291–333), in front of whom he becomes a storm of fire, running water, a lion, a tree, a panther, lightning and a boar.<sup>62</sup> Contrary to what happened with the metamorphoses of Zagreus, in this case the transformations themselves do not generate a supernatural aura, they merely insist upon Dionysus' characteristic multiplicity (ποικιλία) and elaboration,<sup>63</sup> and the nar-

56 Most significantly in 45.239–72.

57 Idmon interprets the omen in 38.61–9. Aiacos asks for a similar prophecy, interpreting the eagle as a symbol of Zeus both as his father and Dionysus' (39.153–64a).

58 25.306–9 παπταίνων δὲ λέοντας ἀεργηλῆ παρὰ φάτνη / ... / ... / οἷα λέων βρυχᾶτο (“On seeing the lions idle beside their manger... he roared like a lion”).

59 14.361–81, 20.110–19, 24.129–38, 25.233–5, 28.7–17, 43.346–50, 45.287–93, 45.315–22.

60 14.370–81, 45.287–93.

61 32.249–54, 34.145–8.

62 Deriades' subsequent speech (36.339–49) mentions only the panther, the bear and the lion. He later says (40.37–60) that he could not fight Dionysus because he successively changed his shape into a panther, a lion, a serpent, a bear, a flying flame, a boar, a bull, a tree and rolling water. Compare also with the metamorphoses of Proteus: 1.16–28 (serpent, lion, leopard and boar), 43.230–42 (panther, tree, serpent, lion, boar and water).

63 36.294–5 μετάρτροπον εἶδος ἀμείβων / δύσατο παντοίης πολυδαίδαλα φάσματα μορφῆς, 304 πολυδαίδαλον εἶδος, 338 πολυειδέι Βάκχῳ.

rative insists on the falseness of the imitated shape.<sup>64</sup> However, Deriades adds mystique to the scene, when with his mind bemuddled by Hera's lies he attributes his opponent's changing shapes to sorcery and seeks to respond to them through the mystic powers of his Brahmins, capable of interfering with the paths of the Moon and the Sun (36.344–9). He does not go into details, however.<sup>65</sup>

Dionysus' animal shapes, accoutrements and power are rationalised by the description of their origins in the poem's first twelve books. However, this rhetorical rationality does not stretch to the point of making those animals and animal features real through physical descriptions (including ethological notes) or paradoxographical narratives characteristic of natural history treatises. There are two exceptions to this. 1) The descriptions of serpents spitting poison (1.266–8, 2.31, 5.147, 5.231, 18.275, 43.241), according to Gigli Piccardi,<sup>66</sup> refer to the cobra and testify to Nonnus' Egyptian background. Nonnus probably meant to emphasise the serpentine features of Dionysus with a visual detail that did not have an immediate religious connection. 2) The ferocity of the members of the Dionysiac *thiasos* is compared or related to the newly delivered lioness, which protects her litter with her life,<sup>67</sup> and can be easily linked to the

64 36.298 ἀπατήλιον... ὕδωρ, 299–300 ἀμφιέπων δὲ / ἰσοφυῆς μίμημα λεοντείοιο προσώπου, 305 εἵκελος ἔρνεϊ γαίης, 307–8 ἀμειβομένου δὲ καρήνου / μιμηλοῖς πετάλοισι νόθην δενδρώσατο χαίτην, 313 τύπον μιμηλὸν ὑφαίνων, 334 Δηριάδης δ' ὑπέροπλος ἐμάρατο φάσματι κωφῶ, 335–7, 340 Δηριάδην τρομέων πολυδαίδαλον εἶδος ἀμείβεις, 343 ψευδομένου δὲ λέοντος ἐγὼ κενεῶνα χαράξω, 350 παπταίνων ἐτερότροπα φάσματα Βάκχου.

65 36.352–3 τέχνην φαρμακόμεσαν ἐπιγράψας Διονύσῳ / ἔλπετο νικήσειν Διὸς υἷα μύστιδι τέχνῃ (“he hoped to contrive some scheme of magic against Dionysus, and to conquer the son of Zeus by mystic arts”).

66 Daria Gigli Piccardi, *Nonno di Panopoli*, pp. 154–5, n. to 268.

67 28.25–6 καὶ τις ὄρεσσινὸμων Σατύρων, ἄτε πῶλον ἐλαύνων, / ποσὶ διχαζομένοισιν ὑπὲρ ῥάχιν ἦστο λεαίνης (“And a Satyr of the mountains sat astride on the back of a lioness, as if he were riding a colt”); 38.2–5 ἀγρονόμοι δὲ / Πᾶνες ἐναυλίζοντο χαραδραίοισι μελάθοις, / αὐτοπαγῆ ναίνοντες ἐρημάδος ἄντρα λεαίνης / ἐσπέριοι (“The rustic Pans housed themselves under shelter in the ravines, for they occupied at evening time the natural caverns of a lioness in the wilds”). 32.249–54 a Bacchante avoids the lair of the lioness because she no longer has Bacchus' power.

Dionysiac motif of the Bacchantes suckling lion cubs.<sup>68</sup> As we will see in the following section, there is a structural reason for this emphasis, but the motif of the lioness robbed of her cubs has a long epic tradition that goes back to the *Iliad* (18.318–22).<sup>69</sup>

The constant references to the accoutrements of the god and of his court, especially of the Bacchantes, and the animals forming part of his entourage, build up a fantastic, and therefore fictional, world for Dionysus to inhabit.<sup>70</sup> Nonnus brings it together by mixing elements of the artistic representations of the Dionysiac triumph, often including animals.<sup>71</sup> A literary referent, Euripides' *Bacchae*, is also behind three elements: the descriptions of the ritual killing of animals, or *sparagmos* (E. *Ba.* 743ff.), the natural phenomena caused by the presence of Dionysus and his Bacchantes, such as the peace of the animals<sup>72</sup> (including Bacchantes suckling wild cubs: E. *Bacch.* 695–703) and the bull shapes of Dionysus before Pentheus.<sup>73</sup>

Nonnus seems to suggest that the animal side of the god and his bestial companions can only occur in a literary and artistic context.

68 14.361–2 (ἄλλη σκύμνον ἔχουσα δασυστέρνοιο λεαίνης / ἀνδρομέφ γλαγόνεντι νόθφ πιστώσατομαζῶ “Another [Bassarid] held the cub of a shaggy lioness, and gave it a milky human breast in exchange”), 24.129–31, 43.314, 45.304–5.

69 In the Homeric poems, lions also attack herds (*Il.* 5.161–2, 11.172–6, 17.61–5, 18.579–83) and fighters are compared with them (e. g. *Il.* 5.782).

70 On the *thiasos* as a plural reflection of the animal nature of Dionysus, see Aston, 2011, pp. 299–310.

71 See Carlo Gasparri, “Dionysos”, and Christian Augé *et al.*, “Dionysos”, for an overview.

72 The peace of the animals (22.28–54 upon the arrival of the Bacchic expedition, 40.185–203 celebrating the birth of Beroe, 44.30–4 when the Bacchantes approach Thebes) is a popular theme in late antique mosaics, inspired by *Is.* 11.7: see e. g., Janine Balty, *Mosaiques antiques de Syrie*, Brussels, 1977, nos. 58 Fruit tree and panther (Damas, réserves du Musée national, provenant de Halawé, 471; pp. 126–127), 60 Vision of the Paradise (Damas, réserves du Musée national, provenant d'Oumm Harteyn, 499/500; pp. 130–32); Doro Levy, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, Princeton, 1947, pp. 317–19 (Antioch, Hall of Philia), 359–63 (Antioch, Martyrion of Seleucia); Michele Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, Amman, 1993, 119 (Madaba, Baptristry Chapel, peace of the animals), 128 (Madaba, Mosaic of the Paradise, scene of philia of the animals).

73 Nonn. *D.* 45.239ff. after E. *Bacch.* 616ff.

The fictional credibility of the presentation underlines the situation's lack of realism: Dionysus is only real in artistic depictions and flamboyant poems. The addition of realistic descriptions of animals or motifs present in treatises on natural history would have generated a connection with the real world that is generally avoided in the poem. Scientific and paradoxographic motifs must therefore have an added role to play.

### 3. Usurpers as spurious animal masters and false lions

While the Bacchantes are described as alter egos of Dionysus, with his abilities to control animals and his animal accoutrements,<sup>74</sup> a series of anti-Dionysiac characters seek his appearance or his power without being entitled to them. Their attempts to subvert the established order are severely punished.

Well before Dionysus is born, giant Typhoeus sets a precedent when he tries to usurp Zeus' power by stealing his weapon, the lightning (books 1–2). Had he succeeded, Zeus would have not begotten Dionysus, but this crisis forces the father of the gods to request the help of Cadmus, Dionysus' maternal grandfather. Typhoeus is a monster endowed with the heads of different beasts, which yell in a bestial war cry<sup>75</sup> and

74 For a comprehensive overview on the lion in the *Dionysiaca*, see H el ene Frangoulis, "Nonnus and Homeric Similes: The Image of Lions in the *Dionysiaca*", in K. Spanoudakis ed., *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context. Poetry and Cultural Milieu in Late Antiquity*, Berlin/New York, forth.

75 1.156–62 (πετάσας δ  βαρυσμαράγων στίχα λαιμῶν / παντοίην ἀλάλαξεν ὄμοφθόγγων ὅσα θηρῶν / συμφυέες δ  δράκοντες ἐπερρώοντο προσώπῳ / πορδαλίῳν, βλοσυράς δ  κόμας λιχμῶντο λεόντων, / 160 καὶ βοέας σπειρηδὸν ἐμιτρώσαντο κεραίας / οὐραίαις ἐλίκεσσι, τανυγλώσσων δ  γενείων / ἰδὼν ἀκοντιστήρα συῶν ἐπεμίγνυον ἄφρῳ [Typhoeus] "then spreading his row of rumble-rattling throats, he yelled as his war cry the cries of all wild beasts together: the snakes that grew from him waved over his leopards' heads, licked the grim lions' manes, girdled with their curly tails spiral-wise round the bulls' horns, mingled the shooting poison of their long thin tongues with the foam-spittle of the boars"), 2.250–6.

attack similar animals.<sup>76</sup> After killing him, Zeus delivers a scornful speech, mocking the uselessness of his animal shapes (2.610–19).

The episode of Typhoeus sets a trend for the behaviour and punishment of Dionysus' opponents, mainly two women (Nicaea and Aura)<sup>77</sup> and two men (Lycurgus and Pentheus), which Nonnus presents as usurpers of the god's image. Regarding the women, Nicaea<sup>78</sup> hunts wild beasts, such as lions and bears,<sup>79</sup> which is unusual even for a hunting virgin whose model, Artemis, restricts her activities to small game. She is acknowledged as more powerful than a newly delivered lioness by the animal itself (15.194–203). Nicaea kills her suitor Hymnos and refuses to abandon her adolescent (androgynous) pursuits. For both these crimes, she is punished with the loss of her virginity and an unwanted pregnancy.

76 1.266–83, 2.42–51 (ὄμοβόροι γὰρ / ἄρκτοι ἐδαιτρεύοντο Τυφαιονίοιο προσώπου / ἄρκτῶναις γενύεσσι, λεοντείων δὲ καρήνων / 45 γλαυκὰ δασυστέρνων ἐλαφύσσετο γυῖα λεόντων / χάσμασιν ἰσοτύποισιν, ἐχιδνήεντι δὲ λαιμῷ / ψυχρὰ πεδοτρεφῶν ἐδαΐξετο νῶτα δρακόντων, / ἠερίουσ δ' ὄρνιθας ἐδαίνυτο γείτονι λαιμῷ / ἵπταμένους ἀβάτοιο δι' αἰθέρος, ἀρχιφανῆ δὲ / 50 αἰετὸν ἦσθιε μᾶλλον, ἐπεὶ Διὸς ὄρνις ἀκούει· / ἦσθιε βοῦν ἄροτῆρα “Raw-ravens bears made a meal for the jaws of Typhaon's bear heads; tawny bodies of chest-bristling lions were swallowed by the gaping jaws of his own lion-heads; his snaky throats devoured the cold shapes of earth-fed serpents; birds of the air, flying through untrodden space, there met neighbours to gulp them down their throats – he found the eagle in his home, and that was the food he relished most, because it is called the Bird of Zeus. He ate up the ploughing ox”).

77 On the interrelation of the two episodes, see Jane L. Lightfoot, “The Bonds of Cypris. Nonnus' Aura”, *GRBS*, 39 (1998), pp. 293–306; Fotini Hadjittofi, “The Death of Love in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*. The Rapes of Nicaea and Aura”, *Ramus*, 37 (2008), pp. 114–35.

78 The episode of Nicaea and Hymnos runs from 15.169 to 16.405.

79 15.184–9 ἀλλὰ περιζεύξασα δαφοινήεντις χαλινῷ / γλαυκὰ δασυστέρνων ἐπεμάστιε νῶτα λεόντων, / πολλάκι δ' ἔγχος ἄειρε καταντία λυσσάδος ἄρκτου· / μέμφετο δ' Ἴοχέαιραν ἐκηβόλον, ὅτι λιποῦσα / στικτῶν πορδαλίων γενεῆν καὶ φῦλα λεόντων / οὔτιδαναῖς ἐλάφοισιν ἐὴν ἔξευξεν ἀπήνην (“but [Nicaea] fitted the hairy lion with a blood-red bridle, and whipped his gray flanks and often lifted spear against a maddened bear; and she blamed the far-shooting Archeress, for letting alone the generation of speckled leopards and the tribes of lions, and yoking worthless deer to her car”); 15.246–8.

Like Nicaea, Aura hunts only bigger animals, especially lions (48.251–6).<sup>80</sup> She has a premonitory dream in which she has the shape of a lioness and is forced by Eros to pay homage to Aphrodite, whom she had previously despised (48.271–83). Dionysus compares her with a bear and a lioness,<sup>81</sup> and she often enters the cave of a newly delivered lioness, making the animal flee at her sheer presence (48.736–40). She even insults Artemis comparing her body with Aphrodite's and proclaiming herself a better (more masculine) hunter than the goddess. Punishment for her *hybris* and her departure from feminine standards comes when Dionysus rapes her while asleep and impregnates her. Even then she is incapable of accepting her transformation into a woman with feminine responsibilities. She goes into labour roaring like a lioness,<sup>82</sup> and after delivering twins she tries to have herself and her children killed by the animals that previously feared her (48.892–910). These nurse the babies for the sake of Dionysus (48.911–16), and Aura has to play the role of the beast, killing and cannibalising one of her twins (48.917–24).

In Dionysus' fictional world, women are meant to stay at home and be dependent on men. Nicaea and Aura try to lead an independent life under the sign of the lion, and are punished for this crime. Along the same lines, Bacchantes are allowed to display violent behaviour, similar to that of a wild lioness, only when they depend on Dionysus. When the god is not present they become shy women.<sup>83</sup>

About men, Lycurgus dares to attack Dionysus and his troops, and for this he is twice punished, being ignominiously overcome by Ambrosia in the shape of a frail vine and a group of Bacchantes (21.1–89), with Zeus subsequently turning him into a blind wanderer (21.162–9).

80 The contrast with Artemis, who drives a chariot pulled by prickets is emphasised: 48.309–12, 328–30, 449–51. On Artemis' restrictive hunting, see also 36.48–57.

81 48.501–3 [Dionysus on Aura] ἔρωμανὲς ὄμμα τιταίνων / τίς γαμίους ὄαροιαι παραπλάζει φρένας ἄρκτου / εἰς Παφίην, ἐξ Ἔρωτα; τίς ὠμίλησε λεαίνῃ; (“Who by love mad looks or wooing whispers could seduce the heart of a female bear to the Paphian, to Eros? Who discourses to a lioness?”).

82 48.787–8 ὄξυ βέλος μετέπουσα δηπαθείς τοκετοῖο / φρικαλέον βρύχημα λεχωίδος εἶχε λεαίνης (“when [Aura] felt the cruel throes of childbirth pangs, her voice roared terrible as a lioness in labour”).

83 In general the *Dionysiaca* support a traditional model of femininity, Laura Miguélez-Cavero, “The Appearance of the Gods”, pp. 575–582.

The narrative of the *Dionysiaca* explicitly gives Lycurgus the shape of a lion in two dreams: Dionysus has a premonition of his future confrontation with him when he dreams of a bold lion who makes him flee and attacks his Bacchantes (18.176–95); two books later, Lycurgus himself is said to have dreamt of a lion chasing deer thought to be Bacchantes (20.256–61).<sup>84</sup>

In the episode of Pentheus, Agave dreams of Pentheus sitting in a tree, being first surrounded and then killed by wild beasts, with herself as a lioness and other Bacchantes as bears (44.58–71). When the dream comes true, Agave, in a state of frenzy, sees Pentheus as a lion and calls upon the Bacchantes to attack it (46.176–9). Pentheus fails to dissipate her confusion when showing her that he is no lion but her son (192–208), so she dismembers him (210–16) and presents herself to her father, Cadmus, as the proud hunter of a lion (217–38). Cadmus finally manages to make her see what she has done and she regains her sanity (242–319).<sup>85</sup>

Lycurgus and Pentheus consider themselves to be as strong and bold as lions and become θεόμαχοι. Their *hybris* is punished with an effective attack on their macho shape: Lycurgus is immobilised, not by a Bacchante, but by Dionysus' frail plant alter ego, Ambrosia turned into a vine. Dionysus does not even need to use his power against him. The god intervenes in person in the episode of Pentheus, persuading him to dress in his mother's colourful clothing (46.81–115), but the punishment for opposing him is delivered by Agave. Dionysus helps to expose the false lions, but he does not behave like a lion himself: incapable of seducing Nicaea and Aura, he rapes them only when they are asleep; he flees from Lycurgus (20.343–53) and leaves his Bacchantes to punish him, and Agave performs the unpleasant task of dispatching Pentheus.

Nonnus extends the wild images of the lion and the lioness as an archetype of boldness to cover a whole range of opponents, but shows

84 Both dreams come true: 20.325–345; 21.1–89, 124–69.

85 The episode of Pentheus is prefigured by the narrative on his cousin Actaeon: a successful hunter, with a particular inclination to master the wildest beasts (5.287–98), he sits up on a tree and gazes at the nude body of the goddess Artemis, who punishes him by changing him into a stag and having him devoured by his own dogs (299–335).

no interest in expanding the motif into a 'scientific' description of the species. Dionysus' opponents usurp the shape of the lion and are punished for it, yet although the god exerts his power over lions, panthers and leopards by having them yoked to his chariot, the lion imagery is only seldom applied to him in the poem. Indeed, despite constant claims that he is bold, from his childhood and adolescence onward he begins to behave in a rather cowardly manner. The body of the lion is left vacant.<sup>86</sup>

We should also notice that, in Nonnus' time, usurpers (i.e., persons aiming to occupy or *de facto* occupying posts to which they are not entitled, especially the imperial throne) are frequently presented as monsters, e.g., Typhoeus. Poetic propaganda and partisan historiography often turned the political enemy into some sort of demon or monster to belittle him in juxtaposition to the *laudandus*.<sup>87</sup> Nonnus' lion imagery distances his poem from the encomiastic genres and brings it closer to epic forms, but Nonnus' protagonist is no lion, and his epic takes a different programmatic course.

#### 4. Elephantastic: India as land of Elephants

The war against the Indians occupies the central books of the *Dionysiaca* (13–40). India had captured the imagination of the Greeks, especially following Alexander's conquest of the East and the subsequent popularisation of the description of its exotic peoples, animals and plants. Indian animals, especially the elephant, feature in Aristotle's treatises

86 See Laura Miguélez-Cavero, "The Appearance of the Gods", pp. 570–5 on the deconstruction of masculine models in the *Dionysiaca*.

87 See Domenico Lassandro, "La demonizzazione del nemico politico nei *Panegirici Latini*", in M. Sordi ed., *Religione e politica nel mondo antico*, Milan, 1981, pp. 237–49; Valerio Neri, "L'usurpatore come tiranno nel lessico politico della tarda antichità", in François Paschoud and Joachim Szidat eds., *Usurpationen in der Spätantike*, Stuttgart, 1997, pp. 71–86 (esp. p. 75 on Typhoeus as image for usurpers); Pierre-Louis Malosse, "Le 'modèle' du mauvais empereur chez Libanios", *Pallas*, 60 (2002), pp. 165–74.

on animals<sup>88</sup> and in books by the historians of Alexander,<sup>89</sup> making their way into collections of paradoxography and natural history, such as Aelian's *De natura animalium*. Ancient readers derived so much pleasure from their descriptions that they featured in novels, a genre designed for the narrative entertainment of their audiences. For their popularity and because of the association between Alexander's and Dionysus' voyages to the East,<sup>90</sup> Nonnus had no choice but to mention Indian animals, especially elephants.

In the *Dionysiaca*, India<sup>91</sup> is described in the catalogue of Indian troops gathered by Deriades in book 26, a paradoxographical construct bringing together snippets from different historians in an arbitrary manner.<sup>92</sup> Part of this information had already made its way into poetry and literature on Dionysus in an earlier poem, the *Bassarica*, by the first-century poet Dionysius.<sup>93</sup> In the *Dionysiaca*, strange tribes such as the Sabeiroi, whose heart is covered with hair (26.91–3), and the Ouatokoitai, who sleep wrapped in their ears (26.94–5), are matched with local plants (e.g. 26.183–200, the honey tree from Areizanteia) and animals. Of the latter, Nonnus describes two fantastic birds, the orion and the catreus,<sup>94</sup> the hippopotamus

88 Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World*, London, 1974, pp. 37–52.

89 Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pp. 52–60; Klaus Karttunen, *India and the Hellenistic World*, Helsinki, 1997, pp. 187–201.

90 E.g., Arrian 4.10, 5.1–2.

91 On India in the *Dionysiaca*, see Pierre Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie dionysiaques*, Clermont-Ferrand, 1991, pp. 284–312.

92 Summary in Laura Miguélez-Cavero, *Poems in Context*, 274–6: including Herodotus, Strabo, Ctesias and first- or second-hand information from Hellenistic historians (Megasthenes, Onesicritus, Cleitarchus – for which see Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pp. 52–60).

93 Dionysius *Bassarica*, fragments 1–18 (Enrico Livrea, *Dionysii Bassaricon et Gigantiadis fragmenta*, Rome, 1973) describe several Indian tribes. By contrast, fragment 19v. features a confrontation between Dionysus and Deriades over the eating of the raw meat of a deer as a symbol of conversion to Dionysism that is not mentioned in the *Dionysiaca*.

94 26.201–6.212–14.207–11: ἦχι μελισταγέεσσιν ἐπ' ἀκρεμόνεσσιν ἀεῖδει / ὦριον, γλυκὺς ὄρνις, ὁμοίος ἔμφροσι κύκνω· / οὐ μὲν ἀνακροῦει Ζεφυρηίδι σύνθροος αὔρη / ὕμνοτόκων περὺγων νεμῶδεα ῥοῖζον ἰάλλων, / 205 ἀλλὰ σοφοῖς στομάτεσσι μελίξεται, οἷά τις ἀνήρ / 206

(236–44) common to the Indus and the Nile,<sup>95</sup> and the elephants of Oita (295–335).<sup>96</sup>

A second, more general description of the exotic nature of India comes at the end of the war, in the distribution of the plunder (40.251–74).<sup>97</sup> This includes gemstones,<sup>98</sup> elephants,<sup>99</sup> Indian lions, panthers, tigers,<sup>100</sup> sugar cane,<sup>101</sup> pearls<sup>102</sup> and black women. Bacchic soldiers make a triumphal return to Greece, laden with shining treasures of

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πηκτίδι νυφοκόμφ θαλαμηπόλον ὕμνον ἀράσσων. / 212 κατρεὺς δ' ἔσσομένοιο προθεσπίζει χύσιν ὄμβρου, / ξανθοφυχῆς, λιγύφωνος· ἀπὸ βλεφάρων δέ οἱ αἴγλη / πέμπεται ὀρθρινῆσι βολαῖς ἀντίρροπος Ἡοῦς· / 207 πολλαῖα δ' ἠνεμόεντος ὑπὲρ δένδροιο λιγαίνων / σύνθορος ὄριωνος ἀνέπλεκε γείτονα μολπὴν, / φοινικέαις πτερύγεσσι κεκασμένος· ἧ τάχα φαίης, / 210 μελλομένου κατρηῆος ἑώιον ὕμνον ἀκούων, / ὄρθριον αἰολόδειρον ἀηδόνα κῶμον ὑφαίνειν “There on the honey-dropping branches sings that sweet bird the orion, similar to the inspired swan. He does not strike up in tune with the west wind whirring in the air with musical wings; but he sings a lay with understanding beak, like a man twanging the strings for a wedding hymn to wait upon a bride. There the catreus foretells a shower of rain to come, golden yellow, of clear voice; sparkles flash from his eyes like the morning gleams of Dawn. Often trilling upon a treetop in the air he weaves a song in tune with the orion beside him, splendid with purple wings; if you hear the catreus singing his early hymn, you might almost say it was the nightingale pouring her morning music from her changeful throat”.

95 Pierre Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie*, pp. 288–9. On the frequent comparisons between the Nile and Indian rivers and the theories of the Eastern origin of the Nile, see Pierre Schneider, *Éthiopie et l'Inde: interférences et confusions aux extrémités du monde antique (VIII siècle avant J. C. - VI siècle après J. C.)*, Rome, 2004, pp. 35–40. On the presence of the hippopotamus in the Indus and the Nile, see *ibid.*, pp. 164–5.

96 On Oita, see Pierre Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie*, pp. 307–8.

97 Analysis of this passage in Pierre Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie*, pp. 290–2.

98 On the perception of India as a country of precious stones, see Klaus Karttunen, *India*, pp. 233–52.

99 Other mentions of elephants as Indian booty: 15.157b–9; 26.329–30; 40.258–9.

100 All three exotic animals linked to the traditional image of India: see Klaus Karttunen, *India*, pp. 168–74.

101 40.267 φυταλιὴν εὐδομον ἀλιτρεφέων ἀλίηων. To be read with Domenico Accorinti, *Nonno di Panopoli, Le Dionisiache (Canti XL–XLVIII)*, Volume Quarto, Milan, 2004, pp. 105–6, n. to 267f. Survey of the Indian plants known in the Hellenistic world in Klaus Karttunen, *India*, pp. 129–67.

102 40.268 καὶ λίθον ἀστράπτουσαν, Ἐρυθραίης κτέρας ἄλμηξ.

the Eastern sea (40.278 μάρμαρα... ἑώια δῶρα θαλάσσης) and birds of variegated shapes (40.279 ὄρνεά τ' αἰολόμορφα), referring to the aforementioned orion and catreus.

The descriptions of the orion, the catreus, the hippopotamus and the elephant illustrate different aspects of India. The presence of the hippopotamus both in India and in Egypt unites the two lands at the ends of the earth.<sup>103</sup> Descriptions of the orion and the catreus<sup>104</sup> feature also in Aelian (*NA* 17.22–3), who mentions that his source is Cleitarchus.<sup>105</sup> Nonnus is fully aware that the traditional image of India includes birds of variegated plumage and fine songs<sup>106</sup> and incorporates the description of these two birds to highlight the exotic nature of the land.

Of all the animals featured in the *Dionysiaca*, the elephant is the one that receives the most attention, as a national symbol of India.<sup>107</sup> Its long description (26.295–335)<sup>108</sup> covers enough physical elements to render the animal imaginable for a reader who has never seen it (hence the comparison with similar animals):

26.301–15 γναθομοῖς μηκεδανοῖσιν ἔχων προβλήτας ὀδόοντας  
 δίζυγας, ἀμητῆρι τύφῳ γαμψώνυχος ἄρπη,  
 θηγαλέῳ τημητῆρι, διαστείχων στίχα δένδρων  
 ποσσι τανυκνήμοισιν, ἔχων ἴνδαλμα καμήλων  
 305 καὶ λοφυῖν ἐπίκυρτον, ἐῶ πολυχανδέι νότῳ  
 ἐσμὸν ἄγων νῆριθμον ἐπασσύτερων ἐλατήρων,  
 δινεύων στατὸν ἔχνος ἀκαμπεί γούνατος ὀλκῶ,  
 καὶ τύπον εὐρυμέτωπον ἐχιδιναίοιο καρῆνου,

103 See the conclusions on the description of India in Pierre Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie*, p. 294.

104 Francis Vian, “À propos de deux oiseaux indiens: l’orion et le catreus”, *Koinonia*, 12 (1988), pp. 5–16, linked the names of the orion and the catreus to two legendary heroes from Crete (Catreus and his son Orion). According to this author, the motif of the birds’ sweet song as a consequence of living in trees whose leaves produce honey, and also turn the venom of serpents into honey, may be derived from a similar legend narrated by Herodotus (3.107) and developed by Pausanias (9.28.4).

105 Analysis in Klaus Karttunen, *India*, pp. 206–7.

106 Survey in Klaus Karttunen, *India*, pp. 201–11.

107 Just as the cicada is the symbol of Athens: 13.199–200.

108 See the careful analysis of the passage in Francis Vian, *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques*, Tome IX, Chants XXV–XXIX, Paris, 1990, pp. 285–90.

αὐχένα βαιὸν ἔχων κυρτούμενον· εἶχε δὲ λεπτὸν  
 310 ὄμμασιν ἰσοτύποισι συνὼν Ἴνδαλμα προσώπου,  
 ὑψιφανής, περίμετρος· ἐλισσομένου δὲ πορείῃ  
 οὐατα μὲν λιπόσαρκα, παρήγορα γείτοσι κόρσῃ,  
 λεπταλέων ἀνέμων ὀλίγη ριπίζεται αὔρη·  
 πυκνὰ δὲ μαστίζουσα δέμας νομήτορι παλμῶ  
 315 λεπτοφυῆς ἐλάχεια τινάσσεται ἄστατος οὐρή.<sup>109</sup>

Nonnus does not restrict his attention to the most obvious features, the trunk and the tusks,<sup>110</sup> although he does not expand his description to a full scientific account, such as Aelian's (*NA* 4.31), who refers to the tusks, feet, legs, abdomen, trunk, head and inner body, as well as to a series of curious snippets of information (pregnancy, copulation, drinking habits, sleeping while standing, longevity and the animal's aversion to cold). Nonnus does not seem to be seeking to impress with his scientific knowledge, but rather show off his ability for description, ultimately conjuring up a visual image of the described object,<sup>111</sup> effective even for the readers who have never seen the animal.<sup>112</sup>

Nonnus also mentions its blackness, which makes it the perfect match for the black Indians,<sup>113</sup> and two of the usual topics of interest

109 “[The elephant] has projecting teeth on his long jaws, two of them, hooked like a reaper's sickle, sharp cutters, and he marches through the ranks of trees on his long legs; he has a curved spine like a camel, and on his capacious back he carries an innumerable swarm of riders in rows, swinging a firm foot with unbending knees. He has a short curved neck, and a wide forehead shaped like a snake. The eyes on his face are like the little eyes of a pig, but he is towering, enormous. As he rolls along, the skinny ears close to the temple on each side move like fans in the lightest breath of air. A thin little restless waving tail whips the body with a continual regular movement”.

110 Compare with Ach. Tat. 4.4.3–6, physical description of trunk and tusks and their uses.

111 Cf. Theon 118.7–8 Ἔκφρασις ἐστὶ λόγος περιηγηματικὸς ἐναργῶς ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγων τὸ δηλούμενον.

112 This may be a common place: cf. Ach. Tat. *Leucippe* 4.4.1 (Charmides describes the elephant for Clitophon, who has only seen it in pictures).

113 26.300 ἐκ ποδὸς ἀκροτάτου μελανόχροος ἄχρι καρῆνου “Black they are from the point of the foot to the head”. Other references: 15.158 θῆρα κελαινόρρινον; 24.137 μελαρρῖνων... θηρῶν; 28.74 αὐχένη κυανέω. Compare with the description of the elephant by Aretaeus of Cappadocia, a first-century AD physician, writing about elephantiasis: *De causis et signis diuturnorum morborum* 2.13.2 χροίην μὲν μέλανες κατακορέως ἅπαντες καὶ δι' ὅλου

about the animal, repeated along the poem, namely, its longevity<sup>114</sup> and the lack of joints in its legs, which forces it to sleep standing.<sup>115</sup> Nonnus does not mention its long gestation period, a common topic when referring to elephants.<sup>116</sup> Although elephants are usually presented as peaceful animals, obedient to their riders,<sup>117</sup> Nonnus describes them as violent fighters that make the most of their sharp tusks and enormous size (26.316–29), thereby emphasising the formidable nature of the enemy Dionysus and his troops are going to face in the war against the Indians. The description ends with a reference to the elephants as Dionysus' spoils of the war,<sup>118</sup> thus anticipating the god's triumph over them and over the Indians they represent.

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- τοῦ σιγήνεος... 3 ἑλέφαντες δὲ μοῦνοι μέλανες, ζοφοειδέες τὴν χροίην, νυκτὶ δὲ καὶ θανάτῳ ἴκελοι (“then, as to colour, they are all intensely black, and that all over their whole body... elephants alone are black, of dark skin, like to night and death” – translation from Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, p. 220).
- 114 26.296–9 ἀμετροβίων ἐλεφάντων, / οἷς φύσις ὥπασε κύκλα διηκοσίων ἐνιαυτῶν / ζῶειν ἀενάοιο χρόνου πολυκαμπέι νύσση, / ἠὲ τριηκοσίων (“of long-living elephants, to which nature has granted to live through two hundred rolling years, rounding so often the turning-point of eternal time, or even three hundred”). Also 17.382 ἀμετροβίων ἐλεφάντων; 36.162 ἀμετροβίων ἐλεφάντων. A common notion: Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pp. 45–6 (Aristotle). According to Aelian (*NA* 4.31, 17.7) elephants reach maturity at the age of sixty and their life span extends to two or three hundred years.
- 115 26.307 δινεύων στατὸν ἴχνος ἀκαμπέι γούνατος ὄλκῳ (“swinging a firm foot with unbending knees”), 26.334–5 Πυλοίτης, / ὀρθοπόδη ἐλέφαντα κατὰ κλόνον ἠνιοχεύων “Pyloites... driving a straight legged elephant into the fray”. Also 15.148 ἀκαμπτοπόδων ἐλεφάντων; 27.72 ὀρθοπόδη ἐλέφαντα; 33.278–9; 36.184–5 ὀρθοπόδων... ἐλεφάντων; 36.188 τανυκνήμων ἐλεφάντων; 40.259 ὄρθιον ἴχνος... ἐλεφάντων; 43.337–9. Aristotle criticised this notion (texts gathered in Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pp. 39–40).
- 116 Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pp. 44–45.
- 117 E. g., Ach. Tat. 4.6–7 (peaceful character, obedience to its driver); Philostr. *Vita Apollonii* 2.11 on the docility of elephants, ridden even by children.
- 118 26.329–32 τοὺς μὲν ἀναξ Διόνυσος ἄγων μετὰ φύλοπιν Ἴνδῶν / Καυκασίηναρὰ πέζαν Ἀμαζονίου ποταμοῖο / εἰς φόβον εὐπήληκας ἀνεπτοίησε γυναικάς, / ἠλιβάτων λοφιῆσιν ἐφεδρήσασαν ἐλεφάντων “These creatures after the Indian war Lord Dionysus led to the Caucasian district by the Amazonian River, and scattered those helmeted women, as he sat on the back of a mountainous elephant”).

Whereas the descriptions of the orion, the catreus and the hippopotamus are simply part of the general 'décor' of India, elephants recur in the confrontation between the Indians and the Bacchic troops as symbols of India. In fact, starting with the proem (1.22–5), the Indian war is presented as a confrontation between tigers and lions on the Dionysiac side and elephants on the Indian side.<sup>119</sup> Although elsewhere there are some depictions of fights between lions and elephants,<sup>120</sup> the usual motif is the combat between the elephant and the serpent.<sup>121</sup> The choice of the elephant to represent India is directly linked to the symbolic importance this animal has in Alexander's conquest of the East:<sup>122</sup> both the Persians and the Indian king Poros used elephants in battle, with Alexander appropriating them both physically and symbolically.

Nonnus portrays the Indians riding their elephants into battle,<sup>123</sup> and sometimes refers to the use of an armour to protect the animals.<sup>124</sup> Neither of these two elements reveals a real knowledge of how elephants were actually used in battle or of literary accounts of fictional or historical battles.<sup>125</sup> The Indian king Deriades is consistently presented riding a chariot pulled by elephants!<sup>126</sup>

119 18.235–6; 27.132–5; 27.237–8; 36.184–8; 36.313–18.

120 Cf. lion fighting with an elephant – mosaic in the Hormisdas Palace, Istanbul (Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pl. XVIIa). According to Aelian (*NA* 7.36) lions fear elephants when in herds.

121 See Pierre Schneider, *Éthiopie et l'Inde*, p. 153 (ancient sources), 157 (analysis).

122 On the role of the elephants in Alexander's conquest of the East, see Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pp. 64–76.

123 17.382; 24.173–5; 26.305–6; 27.136–7; 39.91. The Bacchantes imitate the Indians in this: 24.137–8.

124 27.135 κορυσσομένων ἐλεφάντων; 27.137 σιδηροφόρων ἐλεφάντων.

125 On the role of riders and the use of turrets, see Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pp. 240–45. The armour of the elephants is mentioned in Heliodorus *Aethiopica* 9.18.8 as a reinforcement of the animal's tough hide. On the use of trappings for war elephants, see Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pp. 238–40.

126 Not sitting on the neck of the animal or in a turret as, e.g., Heliodorus' Hydaspes does (9.20.2 Ὁ δὲ Ὑδάσπης ὡσπερ ἀπὸ σκοπῆς τοῦ πύργου λαμπρᾶς ἦδη τῆς νίκης θεωρὸς γινόμενος...).

- 21.212–14 ὅπη διδυμόζυγι δίφρω / ἔζετο Δηριάδης περιμήκετος, ὄρχαμος ἀνδρῶν, / ἠλιβάτων στατὸν ἵχνος ἀναστέλλων ἐλεφάντων  
 (“where huge Deriades, that king of men, sat in his chariot-board, checking the rigid steps of his towering elephants”);
- 23.188–191 οὐ ποτε τολμήεντες ἐμὸν ῥόον ἐπλεον Ἴνδοι / ἄρμασιν ἠλιβάτοισι, καὶ οὐ πατρίων ὕδωρ / Δηριάδης ἐχάραξεν ἐφ’ περιμήκεϊ δίφρω, / ὑπιλόφων λοφιῆσιν ἐφεδρήσων ἐλεφάντων  
 [Hydaspes] “Never have the bold Indians navigated my streams with towering chariots, never has Deriades scored his father’s water with his huge chariot, attached to the nape of high-crested elephants”.<sup>127</sup>

Nonnus even takes the trouble of applying the Homeric battle motifs of the death and substitution of the horses to this strange chariot, with a somewhat strange result (28.70–80).<sup>128</sup> These elephantine chariots contrast with Dionysus’ one pulled by lions or other large cats,<sup>129</sup> and they are not as fantastic as they may sound at first.

The notion that Indian kings had many elephants and used them in war goes back to Ctesias’ *Indika*.<sup>130</sup> Alexander the Great incorporated elephant units into his own army,<sup>131</sup> and with him the elephant also entered the symbolic representations of monarchy.<sup>132</sup> He and some of his successors (especially Seleucus I and Ptolemy I) appropriated the Indian royal privilege of being carried on an elephant and portrayed themselves on coins riding chariots pulled by elephants. The motif was supposed to enhance their image as invincible kings,

127 Also 36.316–18 ἐλέφας δὲ παρήορον ἄρμα τινάσσων / εἰς πέδον ἠκόντιζε θεημάχον ἠνιοχῆα, / σείων φαιδρὰ λέπαδνα καὶ ἀγκύλα κύκλα χαλινῶν  
 “the elephant lunging sideways smashed the car and shot the impious driver to the ground, shaking off yokepads and bit and bridle”.

128 Gianfranco Agosti, *Nonno di Panopoli, Le Dionisiache (Canti XXV–XXXIX), Volume Terzo*, Milan, 2004, p. 253, n. to 70–80, points out to *Il.* 8.81–9 (Nestor cuts the bridle of one of his horses, killed by Paris) and 16.466–76 (Sarpedon hits one of the horses pulling Patroclus’ chariot).

129 See the individual combat between Dionysus and Deriades in his chariot: 36.365–71, 382–5.

130 Full account in Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pp. 35–36; Pierre Schneider, “De l’Hydaspe à Raphia: rois, éléphants et propagande d’Alexandre le grand à Ptolémée IV”, *ChrEg.*, 84 (2009), pp. 310–313.

131 Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pp. 64–76.

132 Full analysis in Pierre Schneider, “De l’Hydaspe à Raphia”, pp. 310–334.

lords of the ends of the earth, akin to mythical heroes. Seleucus I and Ptolemy I developed this motif as part of their royal imagery with the added reason of presenting themselves as successors to Alexander,<sup>133</sup> and Ptolemy II and Ptolemy III continued to use it with different (African) variants. When Ptolemy II organised a grand procession,<sup>134</sup> he paraded a portrait of Dionysus triumphantly returning from India reclining upon an elephant's back (Athen. 5.200.d)<sup>135</sup> and another of Alexander on a chariot pulled by elephants (Athen. 5.200.a). The triumphs of Dionysus and Alexander were thus linked and associated to elephants.

This ceremonial motif seems to have travelled to the Roman world,<sup>136</sup> since Roman generals employed elephants as victory symbols at least from the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC.<sup>137</sup> Pompey even tried to celebrate his first triumph entering Rome in a quadriga drawn by four elephants, but the *porta triumphalis* was too narrow and he had to change to the traditional horses.<sup>138</sup> The elephant has usually been seen as an emblem of Africa, and its parade as a visual symbol of the submission of Africa, but not all instances have an African connection, which leads Ida Östenberg (*Staging the World*, pp. 180–4) to conclude that the Romans had imported the idea of elephants as escorts and symbols of victorious gods and semi-divine rulers. Elephants disappeared from battles in the final years of the Republic, at the same time as

133 Ptolemy minted a gold stater depicting Alexander as Zeus-Ammon, standing in a chariot drawn by four elephants (image in Scullard, 1974, pl. XV.c). Antiochus I minted a silver tetradrachm with Athena driven in an elephant quadriga (image in Scullard, 1974, pl. XV.d). On the presence of elephants in ancient coins, see Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pp. 254–7.

134 Described in full by Athenaeus: 5.197c–203b.

135 According to Diod. Sic. 4.3.1 Dionysus was the first man ever to celebrate a triumph seated on an Indian elephant. See also Heliodorus *Aethiopica* 9.22.2: the Ethiopian king makes his triumphal entry into Syene on an elephant.

136 On what follows, see Ida Östenberg, *Staging the World: Spoils, captives, and representations in the Roman triumphal procession*, Oxford/New York, 2009, pp. 168–84.

137 Cf. Suet. *Nero* 2.1–2: Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus celebrated his victory against the Allobroges and the Arverni riding through the province on an elephant's back.

138 Pliny *NH* 8.2.4; Plut. *Pomp.* 14.4–5.

their ceremonial and symbolic role was reinforced both in public processions<sup>139</sup> and on coins.<sup>140</sup> They still appeared on the ivory diptych of the Symmachi, now at the British Museum (M&ME 1857,10–13,1), featuring a bearded man carried on a wheeled carriage drawn by four elephants with their riders, made at the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth c. AD.<sup>141</sup>

Furthermore, the public display of elephants always meant an allusion to distant lands. For instance, according to the *Historia Augusta*,<sup>142</sup> elephants and other exotic animals featured in several processions held by Roman emperors. As Ida Östenberg (*Staging the World*, p. 178) notes, “rather than denoting a particularly fierce enemy defeated in combat, the elephants here, together with the other species, transmitted an image of the worldwide fauna, now embraced by the Roman hegemony”.

At the same time, the Indian triumph of Dionysus, featuring the god in a chariot pulled by beasts accompanied by a court of Bacchic and Indian characters and wild beasts (among which were elephants), was popular in different forms of art depictions,<sup>143</sup> especially on sarco-

139 AP 9.285 (Philip of Thessalonica) commemorates the introduction of an elephant biga carrying the image of Divus Augustus at a circus procession organised by Tiberius or Caligula. Analysis in Ida Östenberg, *Staging the World*, p. 184; Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, p. 257.

140 Cf. Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pl. XXIV: a. silver denarius of C. Caecilius Metellus (consul in 113 BC?), featuring Jupiter driving a biga of elephants; f. deified Augustus in elephant quadriga on sestertius of Tiberius; g. elephant quadriga on sestertius of Lucius Verus; h. elephant quadriga on gold medallion of L. Verus. Ida Östenberg, *Staging the World*, pp. 182–3 (with fig. 21), adds an aureus from 17 BC celebrating Augustus’ repairs of roads (an arch on a viaduct is crowned by a statue of the emperor, who stands in an elephant-drawn chariot accompanied by a winged Victoria). See also the wall-painting of Venus in a boat drawn by four African elephants at the entrance to a shop on the Via Dell’ Abbondanza in Pompeii (Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pl. XX).

141 See the analysis in Sabine G. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, 1981, pp. 141–3.

142 *Gord.* 33.1–2, *Aurel.* 33.4.

143 Overviews in Carlo Gasparri, “Dionysos”, nos. 241–7; Christian Augé *et al.*, “Dionysos”, nos. 125–41.

phagi.<sup>144</sup> By the second century AD, Dionysus' Indian triumph, with the god riding an elephant, appeared on sarcophagi, because these processions celebrated the joy of victory over death, and the elephants were favourites of the Sun-god and represented the triumph of light over darkness.<sup>145</sup>

To conclude regarding the descriptions of the orion, the catreus, the hippopotamus and the elephant, Nonnus does not fabricate his facts and works on the traditional image of the country. He can be said to boast some scientific knowledge on animals from distant lands and to display the appropriate rhetorical form with his descriptions, especially the highly visual image of the elephant, but this is not the whole picture. The repeated presentation of the Indian war as a confrontation between Dionysiac felines and Indian elephants is an effective leitmotif for a 27-book narrative (*D.* 13–40), and the historiographical background makes Nonnus' India more fictionally credible without being historical, since it retains a marvellous component.

The introduction of the long description of the elephant has everything to do with both Nonnus' interest in showing his prowess at the composition of *ekphraseis*<sup>146</sup> and the pleasure of reading about an exotic animal. Nonnus knew that elephants were key elements in the traditional view of India, especially for their use in war, although he did not know (or was not interested in showing) how they were actually deployed in battle. This is not surprising since elephants had

144 Overview in Friedrich Matz, *Die Dionysischen Sarkophage*, II pp. 267–79 (nos. 130–41). E. g., the 2<sup>nd</sup>-c. sarcophagus found in Rome, now in Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum (acc. no. 23.31 – analysis and pictures in Peter Kragelund *et al.*, *The Licinian Tomb: Fact or Fiction?*, Copenhagen, 2003, no. 22): from left to right, Dionysus rides a chariot pulled by panthers, preceded by a Bacchic procession including an elephant, a lion and a giraffe. Also, the third-century AD marble sarcophagus with the triumph of Dionysus, at the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), acc. no. 1972.650: Dionysus steps onto a chariot pulled by two elephants under the legs of which two panthers play; he is preceded by a Bacchic procession including a lion. Images and analysis in Mary B. Comstock and Cornelius C. Vermeule, *Sculpture in Stone: the Greek, Roman and Etruscan collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, Boston, 1976, pp. 152–3, no 244.

145 Howard H. Scullard, *The Elephant*, pp. 254–5.

146 On the presence of *ekphrasis* in the *Dionysiaca*, see Laura Miguélez-Cavero, *Poems in Context*, pp. 293–4, 298–300, 304–7.

long vanished from the battlefields, although their ceremonial symbolism seems to have reached Nonnus' times.

Nonnus is aware that the Indian king had the privilege of being transported by an elephant, in a stately chariot, and that Dionysus had celebrated his triumph over the Indians by riding an elephant,<sup>147</sup> but 1) he does not even mention the elephants when briefly describing the triumphal return of the god and his troops,<sup>148</sup> and 2) he does not expand on the description of the Indian triumph even though it was a popular subject in visual culture.

Alexander had defeated India and used the elephants as the image of this triumph, taking the place of the Indian king by riding his elephants and parading them as symbols of the extension of his empire. Dionysus wanted to be recognised as a god, not an emperor, and he had not gone to India to appropriate it, but to convert it to his cult,<sup>149</sup> which is why Nonnus does not exploit the imperial link. However, he

147 26.329–32 τοὺς μὲν ἄναξ Διόνυσος ἄγων μετὰ φύλοπιν Ἴνδῶν / Καυκασίην παρὰ πέζαν Ἰμαζονίου ποταμοῖο / εἰς φόβον εὐπήληκας ἀνεπτοίησε γυναῖκας, / ἠλιβάτων λοφιῆσιν ἐφεδρήσων ἐλεφάντων  
“These creatures after the Indian war Lord Dionysus led to the Caucasian district by the Amazonian River, and scattered those helmeted women, as he sat on the back of a mountainous elephant”).

148 40.279–84 παλιννόστω δὲ πορείῃ / κῶμον ἀνευάζοντες ἀνικίτῳ Διονύσῳ / πάντες βακχεύοντο, πολυκμήτοιο λιπόντες / μνήστιν ὄλην πολέμοιο, Βορειάδι σύνδρομον αὔρη / σκιδναμένην· καὶ ἕκαστος ἔχων ἀναθήματα νίκης / ὄψιμον εἰς δόμον ἦλθε παλίνδρομος (“With the return of the expedition, their return was a triumphal march celebrating Dionysus the invincible with cries of joy, all engaged in Bacchic revels, for they left behind them all memory of that toilsome war, to blow away with the north wind, and each came back home, though late, with the trophies of victory”).

149 13.1–7 Ζεὺς δὲ πατήρ προέηκεν ἑς αὔλια θέσκελα Ῥείης / Ἴριν ἀπαγγέλλουσαν ἐγερασιμόθῳ Διονύσῳ, / ὄφρα δίκης ἀδίδακτον ὑπερφιάλων γένος Ἴνδῶν / Ἀσίδος ἐξελάσειεν ἐφ’ ποινήτορι θύρῳ, / 5 ναύμαχον ἀμήσας ποταμήιον υἷα κεράστην, / Δηριάδην βασιλῆα, καὶ ἔθνεα πάντα διδάξῃ / ὄργια νυκτιχόρευτα καὶ οἴνοπα καρπὸν ὀπώρης (“Father Zeus sent Iris to the divine halls of Rhea to announce battle-stirring Dionysus, that he must drive out of Asia with his avenging thyrsus the proud race of Indians untaught of justice: he was to sweep from the sea the horned son of a river, Deriades the king, and teach all nations the sacred dances of the vigil and the purple fruit of vintage”). See also Robert Turcan, *Les sarcophages romains*, pp. 448–56, on the missionary context of the triumph and its civilizing aspects.

did not avoid the references to Alexander's India as portrayed by Hellenistic historians,<sup>150</sup> and elephants are later incorporated into the Dionysiac army in the god's battle against Poseidon.<sup>151</sup> There is no way of knowing whether Nonnus was aware of the symbolic use of the elephant in royal displays (both coins and public triumphal processions).

From a literary point of view, the treatment of the elephant does not point so much to treatises on natural history and collections of *paradoxa* as to the historiography of Alexander's conquest of India and to the tradition of literary *ekphraseis* as a source of learned delight, also present in the novel. Nevertheless, the descriptions of animals in *Leucippe and Clitophon* offer *de facto* some sort of commentary on the main plot,<sup>152</sup> while the elephant in the *Dionysiaca* stubbornly resists a more profound interpretation.

## 5. What about the sea? Marine creatures and didactic poetry

The literary referents for India and its fauna are the prose accounts of Alexander's conquest of the East, and India had also entered the poetic world with texts such as Dionysius' *Bassarica*, also known to Nonnus. Animals do not feature in the extant fragments of this poem, and thus we cannot know how heavily Nonnus relied on Dionysius for his poetic diction on animals. By contrast, Oppian's *Halieutica*, which had turned fish into an epic subject, is still extant and we can read it together with Nonnus' 'scientific' information on fish: when and how does he introduce it?

We might expect him to add a scientific nuance to animal narratives from the Homeric tradition, to give them a novel twist; in general, however, he does not. For a Homeric episode featuring sea ani-

150 Although Alexander himself is not mentioned, Nonnus does include references to historical figures and times that go well beyond the narrative: e. g., Cynegiros the Marathon fighter in 28.126–57; Beryto, as the seat of the school of law in Late Antiquity (41.155–84).

151 43.29–33, 255, 337–9.

152 Laura Miguélez-Cavero, "Rhetorical Displays of Knowledge", pp. 263–83.

mals, we can think of how Menelaus and his companions hide under reeking seal skins to catch Proteus and force him to prophesy for them (*Od.* 4.400–9, 435–43). Nonnus turns this Homeric episode into a symbol of Homer’s outdated epic, in contraposition with his own poem, composed with the nebris and wine as symbols.<sup>153</sup> There are three references to Proteus and his seals in the poem,<sup>154</sup> and yet Nonnus does not add any more information about the animals, save for a tendency to belch water.<sup>155</sup> Furthermore in the *Iliad* fishes eat the bodies of the dead after the μάχη παραποτάμιος,<sup>156</sup> and the Nonnian take on this motif insists upon the disgusting details, without adding anything of interest about the fishes involved.<sup>157</sup>

- 153 1.34–8 ἄξατέ μοι νάρθηκα, Μιμαλλόνες, ὠμαδίηνδὲ / νεβρίδα ποικιλόνω-  
τον ἐθήμονος ἀντι χιτῶνος / σφίγξατέ μοι στέρνοισι, Μαρωνίδος ἔμπλεον  
ὄδυης / νεκταρέης, βυθίη δὲ παρ’ Εἰδοθέη καὶ Ὀμήρω / φωκῶων βαρὺ  
δέρμα φυλασέσθω Μενελάω (“Bring me the fennel, Mimallons! On my  
shoulders in place of the wonted kirtle, bind tight over my breast a dapple-back  
fawn-skin, impregnated with the perfume of Maronian nectar; and let Homer and  
deep-sea Eidothea keep the rank skin of the seals for Menelaus”).
- 154 43.76–9 (Dionysus harangues his army before the battle) καὶ πλοκάμους Πρω-  
τήος ἀήθει δήσατε κισσῶ, / καὶ Φαρίου πόντοιο λιπὼν Αἰγύπτιον ὕδωρ, /  
νεβρίδα ποικιλόνωτον ἔχων μετὰ δέρματα φώκης (“Go, tie up the hair of  
Proteus with ivy, something new for him! Let him leave the Egyptian water of  
the Pharian Sea, and change his sealskins for a speckled fawn-skin”); 43.225–6  
Πρωτεύς δ’ Ἴσθμιον οἶδμα λιπὼν Παλληνίδος ἄλμης / εἰναλίω θώρηκι  
κορύσσετο, δέρματι φώκης (“Proteus left the Isthmian sea of Pallene, and  
armed him in a cuirass of the brine, the sealskin”); 43.250–2. Other references to  
the rancid smell of the seal-skins: 42.396–400a.
- 155 43.251–2 φιλοψαμάθοιο δὲ φώκης / οἰγομένῳ βαρύδουπον ὕδωρ ἐπεπά-  
φλασε λαιμῶ (“water splashed with a heavy roar from the open mouths of the  
sand-loving seals”). Also 39.241–2 φώκη, / ξανθὸν ἐρευγομένη κόρον  
αἵματος (“a seal belched out a stream of brownish blood”).
- 156 *Il.* 21.1–380, esp. 21.122–3, 126–7, 203–4.
- 157 39.239–42 καὶ τάφος ἔπλετο πόντος. ἐτυμβεύοντο δὲ πολλοὶ / κητεῖοις  
γενύεσσι, ἐν ἰχθυόεντι δὲ λαιμῶ / ἄπνοον αἰθύσουσα νέκυν τυμβεύσατο  
φώκη, / ξανθὸν ἐρευγομένη κόρον αἵματος (“the sea was their grave. Many  
again had sepulture in the maw of seamonsters, or the darting seal entombed the  
inanimate corpse in her fishy throat and belched out a stream of brownish blood”);  
39.297–9 ξανθῆς δ’ Ἐννοσίγαιος ἐθάμβεε νῶτα θαλάσσης, / ἰχθύας  
ἀνδροφάγους ὀρώων καὶ πληθύι νεκρῶν / γείτονος ἄβροχα νῶτα  
γεφυρωθέντα θαλάσσης (“Earthshaker was amazed at the brownish surface

The type of scientific information that appears in the *Halieutica* is repeated in the *Dionysiaca* for two main purposes: emphasis and variation. Hence their insertion in catalogues within a marine context, seeking to emphasise the high number of animals affected by a circumstance.<sup>158</sup> For instance, when Typhoeus invades the sea, launching his own animals as predators, marine creatures flee (1.271–83). Sea-lions and dolphins simply hide,<sup>159</sup> but the rest of the animals mentioned are given some more detail: seals make a noise similar to a cow's lowing,<sup>160</sup> the behaviour of the octopus falls within the usual canons:

1.278–80 καὶ σκολιαῖς ἐλίκεσσι περίπλοκον ὄλκον ὑφαίνων  
 πούλυπος αἰολόμητις ἐθήμονι πήγγυτο πέτρῃ,  
 καὶ μελέων Ἰνδαλμα χαραδραίῃ πέλε μορφῇ

(“and the octopus, master of many wiles, weaving a trailing web with his crooked tentacles, stuck fast on his familiar rock, and made his limbs look like a pattern on the stone”)

That is, there is a reference to its proverbial intelligence, attachment to a rock with its tentacles as a method of defence and change of colour as a method of camouflage, the three of which appear in Opp. *H.* 2.232–6,<sup>161</sup> albeit without phraseological parallels. Finally, re-

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of the deep, as he saw fishes eating men, and the back of the neighbouring sea bridged over dry with the heaps of corpses”).

158 On the popularity of mass descriptions in late antique literature and its counterpart in artistic depictions, see Michael Roberts, *The Jeweled Style. Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity*, Ithaca-London, 1989, pp. 66 ff. (including a comparison of the catalogue of fish in the *Mosella* and fish featuring in mosaics), who notes that in both cases the density of incident and the elaboration of detail stand out. The rhetorical resource consisting of splitting a crowd into smaller units and describing each one of them to give a sensation of abundance is called μερισμός (lat. *distributio*): see Laura Miguélez-Cavero, *Poems in Context*, p. 287.

159 1.273 πόντιος ἰλυόνετι λέων ἐκαλύπτετο κόλπῳ “the sea-lion lurked in the oozy gulf”; 1.277 καὶ βυθίῃ δελφῖνες ἐνεκρύπτοντο θαλάσση “the dolphins hid in the deep water”.

160 1.276 ἐμυκήσαντοδὲ φῶκαι (“the seals mooed”). A similar comment is made by Aristotle (*Hist. an.* 567.a.12). Cf. Daria Gigli Piccardi, *Nonno di Panopoli*, p. 155, n. to 276.

161 Opp. *H.* 2.232–6 Πουλυπόδωνδ' οὐπω τιν' ὄϊομαι ἔμμεν' ἄπυστον / τέχνης, οἱ πέτρῃσιν ὁμοῖοι ἰνδάλλονται, / τήν κε ποτιπτύξωσι περὶ σπεύρης τε βάλλονται. / ἄνδρας δ' ἀγρευτήρας ὁμῶς καὶ κρέσσονας ἰχθῦς / ῥηϊδίως

garding the sea-eel, Nonnus mentions the famous motif of her passion for the sea-serpent,<sup>162</sup> without expanding on it, so we cannot track it back to any other of the narratives on this curious couple.<sup>163</sup>

The universal deluge (6.249ff.) provokes a similar situation of chaos: an opportunity for land and sea animals to mingle and for Nonnus to expand on their appearance and behaviour, but this time the poet is more interested in what minor deities, such as the Nereids, Pan and the Tritons do. Hence the short catalogue of marine deities riding different species (6.292–7 Thetis on a triton, Agave on a pilot fish, Doris on a dolphin),<sup>164</sup> as when they form the retinue of different sea gods.<sup>165</sup> Animals receive very little attention,<sup>166</sup> but the juxtaposition of land and sea creatures is similar to the topic of the enmities of the animals, which Oppian marks in the proem of the

ἀπάτησι παραπλάγγαντες ἄλυξαν (“No one, I think, is ignorant of the craft of the octopuses, which make themselves like the rocks, even whatsoever rock they embrace and entwine with their tentacles. By their deceits they easily mislead and escape fishers and stronger fishes alike”). Text and translation adapted from Alexander W. Mair, *Oppian, Colluthus, Tryphiodorus*, London/New York, 1928.

162 1.281–3 μετερχομένη δὲ καὶ αὐτὴ / οἰστρομανῆς μύραινα δρακοντεΐης πόθον εὐνήης / ποντοπόρων ἔφριξε θεημάχον ἄσθημα δρακόντων (“even the love-maddened sea-eel, drawn by her passion for the serpent’s bed, shivered under the god-desecrating breath of [Typhoeus’] seafaring serpents”).

163 Ach. Tat. 1.18.3–5; Aelian *NA* 1.50, 9.66; Opp. *H.* 1.555–79.

164 Similar passages: 1.72–9 (Nereid riding a dolphin), 43.264–9 + 281–5 (Panope on a female sea-lion, Eido on a pilot fish, anonymous Nereid on a dolphin).

165 Noëlle Icard-Gianolio, N. – Anne-Violaine Szabados, “Nereides”, *LIMC* 6.1 (1992), pp. 785–824.

166 6.263–9 ποντοπόροι δὲ λέοντες ἀήθεος ἔνδοθι πέτρης / χερσαίων ἐχόρευον ἐνὶ σπήλυγγι λεόντων / μυδαλέοις μελέεσσι· χαραδραῖω δ’ ἐνὶ κόλπῳ / εἰναλῶ δελίῳ συνήντετο κάπρος ἀλήτης· / καὶ ξυνοῖς ῥοθιοῖσιν ὄρεσιχύτου νιφετοῖο / θῆρες ἔναυτίλλοντο σὺν ἰχθύσιν· εἰλικόεις δὲ / πούλυπος οὐρεσίφοιτος ἐπεσκίρτησε λαγωῶ (“Sea-lions now leaped with dripping limbs in the land-lions’ cave among rocks they knew not, and in the depths of a mountain-torrent a stray boar met with a dolphin of the sea. Wild beasts and fishes navigated in common stormy floods that poured from the mountains. The many-footed squid dragged his many coils into the hills, and pounced on the hare”), 6.298–9 καὶ βυθίη φάλλαινα περισκαίρουσα κολώναις / πλάζετο, μαστεύουσα χαμεινάδος ἄντρα λεαίνης (“A whale of the deep sea leaped about the hills and sought the cave of the earthbedded lioness”).

*Halieutica* (1.6) as one of his areas of interest, and to which he devotes the second book of his poem.<sup>167</sup>

Another catalogue of fish occurs in the sea battle waged by the Dionysiac troops against the Indians (39.324–39). The information about the animals themselves provided there is minimal,<sup>168</sup> save for the final part, where Deriades fails in his attack against Dionysus and hits a dolphin instead:

333–8 ἀποπλαγθεῖσα δὲ Βάκχου  
εἰς ῥαχίην δελφίνος ἐποίπνε λοίγιος αἰχμή,  
335 κυρτὸς ὅπῃ λοφιῆσι συνάπτεται ἰχθύος αὐχίν,  
δελφίς δ' αὐτοέλικτος ἐθήμονι κυκλάδι νύσση  
ἤμιθανῆς σκίρτησε χορίτιδος ἄλματι Μοίρης.  
πολλοὶ δ' ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα κυβιστητῆρες ὀλέθρου  
ἰχθύες ὠρχήσαντο χαρασσομένων ἀπὸ νότων.<sup>169</sup>

The dolphin is the most popular fish in the *Dionysiaca*, also featuring as a carrier of marine deities (1.72–9, 6.296–7, 13.435–43, 43.281–5) and as the final form of the Tyrsenian pirates (44.245–9, 45.165–8, 47.629–32).<sup>170</sup> The passage of the sea battle plays upon the various motifs introduced throughout the poem on the animal, being a good example of Nonnus' use of what was thought to be scientific data on animals. The dolphin killed by Deriades skips quickly into the sea, as

167 Already Aristotle had written on the friendships and enmities of fish: *Hist. an.* 610b.1–19.

168 325 πουλύποδος σκολιοῖσι... κορύμβοις; 327 πομπίλον ἄλλος ἔτυψε καταχμαζῶν Διονύσου; 330 ἰχθύος ὑγροπόροιο... δίζυγον οὐρήν.

169 “The deadly point missed Bacchos and got to work on the backbone of a dolphin, where the curving neck of the fish joins the bristling back – the fish leapt of itself in its usual curving course, and already half-dead skipt with the leap of a dancing Fate. On all sides many a fish with pierced back tumbled about in his dance of death.”

170 This episode is traditionally given as the reason for the intelligence of dolphins, which retain in their animal shape part of their former human intelligence (e.g. Opp. *H.* 1.649–53). Nonnus reflects this notion when referring to the dolphin (13.442 ξυμφρονα θυμὸν ἔχων), and reverses it when narrating the story of the pirates (44.245–7 βροτέην δὲ φυτὴν καὶ ἐχέφρονα βουλήν / δυσμενέες ῥίψαντες ἀμειβομένονιο προσώπου / ἀφραδέες δελφίνες ἐνιπλώουσι θαλάσση “[Mene to Dionysus] your enemies threw off their human shape and intelligent mind and changed their looks to senseless dolphins wallowing in the sea”).

appropriate for the marine prototype of speed (43.281–5),<sup>171</sup> with its swimming being compared to a dance, and its frantic movements to the divers' plunging into the sea and subsequent rapid ascent.<sup>172</sup> Nonnus simply retakes the metaphors of fish movement present in didactic poetry<sup>173</sup> and Oppian's adaptation of the Homeric comparison between the warrior falling dead from a chariot and a diver<sup>174</sup> reflecting the frantic movements of a dolphin under attack:

Opp. *H.* 2.585–9 πάντη δὲ θρώσκει καὶ ἐλίσσεται ἄκριτα θύων,  
παφλάζων δδύνησι· κυβιστητῆρι δ' εοικῶς  
ἄλλοτε μὲν βαθὸν κῦμα διατρέχει ἠῦτε λαίλαψ,  
ἄλλοτε δ' ἐς νεάτην φέρεται βρύχα, πολλάκι δ' ἄλμηξ  
ἄφρὸν ὑπερθρώσκων ἀναπάλλεται...<sup>175</sup>

- 171 A common motif: e. g., Opp. *C.* 1.283; Opp. *H.* 2.532–52 presents the dolphins as quick and alert, the kings of the sea creatures just as the eagles reign in the air and lions on land. Nonnus also calls him ὑγρὸς ὀδίτης (1.76, 5.183, 43.284 – the same turn of phrase is used for a Triton in 6.293, for chariots crossing the Hydaspes in 23.172, for the hippopotamus in the Nile in 26.239, for Zeus as a bull carrying Europa in 31.215). On clusters with ὀδίτης, see Daria Gigli Piccardi, “Tradizione e novità in una ricorrente espressione nonniana”, *GIF*, 32 (1980), pp. 107–17.
- 172 Similarly in 3.24–6 καὶ ἀλλοπρόσαλλα θυέλλαις / οἴδματα κυρτώσας διερῆς ἀνέκοψε χορείης / σιγαλῆης δελφίνα κυβιστητῆρα γαλήνης “Soon it curved the fickle waves with its gusts, and stopt the watery dance of the dolphin, that tumbler of the quiet calm”; 44.248–9 εἰσέτι κομάζουσι καὶ ἐν ῥοθίοις Διονύσω, / οἶα κυβιστητῆρες ἐπισκαίρουσι γαλήνη “still they make revel for Dionysus even in the surge, skipping like tumblers in the calm water”; 45.165b–7a ἄμερσινὸφ δ' ὑπὸ λύσση / εἰς βυθὸν ἀίσσοντες ἐπωρχήσαντο γαλήνη, / ποντοπόροι δελφίνες “then deluded by their madness they leapt into the deep and danced in the quiet water, now dolphins of the sea”; 47.632 ἰχθύες ὄρχηστῆρες ἐπισκαίρουσι θαλάσση “they are fishes dancing and leaping in the sea”. Images of war and death as a dance are recurrent in the *Dionysiaca*: see Daria Gigli Piccardi, *Metafora e poetica in Nonno di Panopoli*, Florence, 1985, pp. 131–3.
- 173 Opp. *C.* 1.59–61 τερπωλὴ δ', ὅτε χαλκοῦ ὑπαὶ γενύεσσι τορήσας / ὕψι μάλα θρώσκοντα βυθῶν ὑπερ ἀσπαίροντα / εἰνάλιον φορέησι δι' ἠέρος ὄρχηστῆρα (“And [the fisherman] experiences joy, when he strikes home with barbs of bronze and sweeps through the air the writhing dancer of the sea, leaping high above the deeps”). See also Eur. *Hel.* 1454–6.
- 174 *Il.* 16.742–50. See also E. *Supp.* 692, *Ph.* 1150–1. Nonnus replays the comparison in several battle scenes: *D.* 22.314–17, 28.128–9, 43.162.
- 175 “Every way he leaps and turns, rushing blindly in the spasms of agony. Like a diver, now he runs over the deep waves like a whirlwind, now he plunges

What Nonnus brings into his poem is not so much scientific information about animals, but literary images that contain general notions about them.

As another good example of this, he mentions the remora (ἔχενη(ς)),<sup>176</sup> the small fish believed in Antiquity to be able to bring a ship to a halt by fastening themselves onto it. Apart from a brief initial mention, taken from Aeschylus,<sup>177</sup> the remora is used in two parallel comparisons, to amplify the image of the small and frail vine immobilising first Lycurgus<sup>178</sup> and then Deriades and his elephantine chariot.<sup>179</sup> The presentation of the remora story in any given text is indicative of the author's general attitude towards widespread animal lore: Plutarch's symposiasts<sup>180</sup> laugh at Chaeremonianus for believing the story and not searching for the rational explanation to a natural phenomenon (the ship is brought to a halt, but the explanation of the remora can only be believed by the gullible); Aelian (*HA* 2.17) calls it a θαῦμα, a

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to the nether deeps; and often he springs up and leaps above the foam of the sea."

176 On which, see Donatella Zoroddu, "Un pesce di nome Ἐχενη(ς). Storia di un prestito eschileo in Nonno di Panopoli e altre esperienze intertestuali", in *Discen-tibus Obvius. Omaggio degli allievi a D. Magnino*, Como, 1997, pp. 127–42.

177 13.113–15, after A. Ag. 148–50.

178 21.45–52 ἔκλυες εἰναλίην ἔχενη(δα, πῶς ἐνὶ πόντῳ / ἰχθὺς βαιὸς ἄναλκις ἐπέχραε πολλάκι ναύταις / ἄψ ἀνασειράζων, ὀλίγῳ δ' ὑπὸ χάσματι λαίμοῦ / μηκεδανὴν ἀνέκοψε κατάσχετον ὀγκάδα δεσμῶ; / δέξο με χερσαίην ἔχενη(δα, δέξο πετήλων / 50 αὐτοπέδην ἀσίδηρον ἐρισταφύλοιο κυδοιμοῦ ([Ambrosia to Lycurgus] "Have you heard of the sea fish called remora, how in the sea a little weak creature has often attacked a crew, pulls back their vessels, and with a small gaping mouth holds up a long freightship firm and fast? Here I am, your remora on land! Here are my leaves, with a self-acting fetter not made of steel, for the battle of the valiant vine!").

179 36.365–9 γυιοπέδην δ' ἀσίδηρον ἐπέπλεκε δίξυγι ταρσῶ, / καὶ πόδας ἐρρίζωσεν ὄμοζυγέων ἐλεφάντων... / ἄρραργός κισσῶ· καὶ οὐ τῶσαν ὀγκάδα πόντου / θηκτὰ περιπλεκέων ἔχενη(δος ἄκρα γενείων / δεσμῶ καρχαρόδοντι διεσθήριξε θαλάσση "[the vine] threw fetters not of steel about [Deriades'] feet, and rooted to the ground the legs of the yoked elephants with trails of unbreakable ivy: not so firmly is the seagoing barge held fast on the main by the toothed bond of a remora, when she fastens her sharp fangs on the timbers".

180 *Quaest. Conv.* 2.7 (*Mor.* 641.b–e).

miraculous tale that makes a good story not only in prose, but also in verse (e.g. Opp. *H.* 1.217–42); finally, St Basil (*Hom. in Hexaem.* 7.6.6) takes it into Christian territory as an *exemplum* to illustrate how what is apparently strong can be brought to a halt by what is apparently small and frail. Nonnus' *echeneis* is a literary *exemplum*: an animal story with a poetic pedigree that goes back to Aeschylus, which Oppian had successfully incorporated into the epic tradition. In Plutarch's text, the *echeneis* cannot be scientifically explained and cannot therefore be true. In Nonnus' case, the antonym of truth is not falsehood, but fiction, and the *echeneis* is a suitable parallel story for a fictitious situation. Moreover, the image has a structural function,<sup>181</sup> emphasising the similarities between two of Dionysus' enemies, Lycurgus and Deriades, whose similar ὕβρις is brought to an end by Dionysus' humble plant alter ego, the vine.

## Conclusions

Nonnus does indeed have a knowledgeable acquaintance with what were deemed by the ancient world to be scientific natural histories, although these feature only in a very small percentage of animal narratives, and when they do, the emphasis is most often placed on the use of the appropriate forms to convey them, the reference to well-known literary antecedents and their function in the general structure of the poem.

The first twelve books of the *Dionysiaca* make almost no scientific reference to animals, although they play an important part in the preparation of the adult Dionysus' personality, in two headings in the encomium: family (both divine and human) and upbringing. Nonnus' Dionysus is a mythological character who inhabits a fictional world, but both the individual and his habitat follow rhetorical rules. The god's adult identity retains the characteristics mentioned in the poem's

181 Cf. Fabrizio Gonnelli, *Nonno di Panopoli, Le Dionisiache (Canti XIII–XXIV), Volume Secondo*, Milan, 2003, pp. 462–3, n. to 45–8.

earlier books and is amplified by the presentation of his *thiasos*. Animal metamorphoses and accoutrements lack a proper religious connection and are not scaled up into longer references to the nature and behaviour of animals. The reason behind the latter may be that scientific comments on the animals would bring the Dionysiac world closer to the real one, when Nonnus is trying to avoid being overly realistic.

The main exception here is the comparison of members of the *thiasos* with the newly delivered lioness in terms of their ferocity, which generates a division in the characters in the Dionysiac world depending on where they stand: members of the *thiasos* are entitled to Bacchic attributes, including the strength of a lion, whereas anti-Dionysiac characters are punished for usurping this ferociousness, starting with the animal shapes of Typhoeus, defeated and scorned by Zeus, and followed by Nicaea, Lycurgus, Deriades and Aura. The image of the lion, however, is scarcely applied to Dionysus, who is too pusillanimous to deserve it.

Up to this point, we find very little to relate to scientific narratives on animals. Sections 4 and 5 explore two spheres where these have a more evident presence: the books on India and references to marine creatures. The former refer constantly to the historiographical tradition, which developed especially after Alexander's conquest. The influence of Dionysius' *Bassarica* cannot be measured due to the fragmentary conservation of the text. However, even if he did not expand on the descriptions of Indian animals, the mere fact that he created a poetic account of Dionysus' conquest of India contributed to dignify the historiographical elements of the topic, which surely had an effect on Nonnus.

Nonnus includes descriptions of two Indian birds (the orion and the catreus) and of the hippopotamus, contributing to the presentation of India as an exotic land at the ends of the earth. The true symbol of India is the elephant, as a consequence of its importance in Alexander's conquest of India. Physical descriptions and references to its behaviour, which fully replicate the animal's scientific tradition, are brought together in an ekphrastic attempt not only to render the animal imaginable and the narrative enjoyable, but also to create a visual leitmotif of the confrontation between Bacchic (feline) and

Indian troops (elephants). A particularly important element is the description of the Indian king, Deriades, on a chariot pulled by elephants, which goes back to the historiographical tradition on India and was appropriated by Alexander and his successors as a symbol of triumph.

The analysis of micro-narratives of different marine species reveals a frequent rapport with naturalistic commonplaces to which Oppian had given poetic form in his *Haliutica*. The cases of the dolphin and the remora are indicative of how Nonnus incorporates literary images with animals as protagonists, not natural histories for their own sake.

We can conclude that the *Dionysiaca* reveals an interest in literary images of animals which are inserted in the rhetorical structure of the poem and feature as leitmotifs. Nonnus' choice has everything to do with his presentation of Dionysus: religious details are only hinted at, realistic fictionality is encouraged.