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David Parkinson 04/10/14

The Personae of Dionysos: Achilles, Alexander, and Christ in Nonnos' *Dionysiaca*

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the characterization of Dionysos in Nonnos' epic, the *Dionysiaca*. Specifically it analyzes the protean characteristics of Dionysos and how Nonnos represents him using imitations of and allusions to other classical figures from literature (particularly the Achilles of Homer's *Iliad*), from history (Alexander the Great), and from religion (Jesus Christ). The purpose of these comparisons is to demonstrate the tendency in Nonnos to show an overarching unity between different traditions, and how the Dionysos he writes about is a manifestation of this concept.

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Introduction

During the dying breaths of the classical world, a little remembered epic was written about the god Dionysos. Despite being often overlooked, this work contributes a lot to the image of Dionysos, transforming him beyond his traditional character into a figure who encompasses an undying and ever reborn spirit of greatness. In this work, I will argue that the Dionysos presented in Nonnos' *Dionysiaca* both reflects and transcends other great figures as well as being part of the same unified tradition as these other figures.

I will go about this by taking the Dionysos presented in the *Dionysiaca* and examining him in comparison to three figures: one literary, one historical, and one religious. In the first section, I will show how Dionysos is presented as a Homeric hero like Achilles. In the second, I will demonstrate how Nonnos' Dionysos imitates Alexander the Great. Finally, I will examine how Nonnos presents Dionysos and Christ as similar religious figures.

I am engaging in this argument to fill a gap in scholarship in the Classics which often overlooks Nonnos and his works, as well as a gap in scholarship on Dionysos himself, which rarely even cites the *Dionysiaca*, despite its length and abundance of unique ideas. Furthermore, I write this to satisfy personal interest in the topic, as well as a wish to reveal Dionysos as the multifaceted amorphous god which I know him to be, rather than simply a figure of excess and revelry. I believe that by writing this, I will help reveal not only how universal the figure of Dionysos is, but also expose a pattern which I believe Nonnos also discovered. This pattern joins common figures and traditions into one tradition with different manifestations rather than accepting that each are inherently at odds. With this stated purpose, I will begin with the father of Greek literature and the hero he created.

Chapter I: The Rebirth of Dionysos as a Homeric Hero

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine how Nonnos recycles scenes and general themes from Homer in order to present Dionysos as an imitation of Homer's heroes, most specifically, Achilles. I will divide this study into sections examining a few central episodes which contain allusions to and imitations of Achilles. The purpose of this will be to support the hypothesis that Nonnos was attempting to outdo Homer by creating a hero who not only imitated but also surpassed the heroes Homer wrote about. To support this I will begin with a general overview of similarities between Nonnos and Homer and then examine twelve episodes including: the opening of the *Dionysiaca* in comparison to Homeric openings, the raising of Dionysos as a youth, the story of Ampelos, three stories of the funeral games (Ampelos, Staphylos, and Opheltes), the Catalog of Armies, the use of Iris as a divine messenger, arming scenes, the ecphrasis of Dionysos's shield, warfare and the battle with Hydaspes, Lycurgus, Aiacos, and Dionysos's achievement of kleos, nostos, and full godhood.

My overall goal is to fill a gap in scholarship concerning the characterization of Dionysos. While extensive and impressive scholarship has been written about Dionysos, even the most impressive and exhaustive works such as those written by Walter Otto, Carl Kerenyi, Richard Seaford and Arthur Evans only mention Nonnos in passing. There are relatively few articles written about Nonnos in general and even fewer books. Many of the articles are focused on the more obscure mythological anecdotes which Nonnos includes in his narrative or specific thematic elements of the poem. The primary books on Nonnos include: *Studies in the Dionysiaca of Nonnus* by Neil Hopkinson, *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context: Poetry and Cultural*

Milieu in Late Antiquity edited by Konstantinos Spanoudakis, and *The Challenge of Epic: Allusive Engagement in the Dionysiaca of Nonnus* and *The Myth of Paganism: Nonnus, Dionysus, and the World of Late Antiquity* both by Robert Shorrock. While each is a valuable work, none focus on the characterization of Dionysos himself, and most have relatively little to say about Nonnos in connection to Homer beyond making the occasional note about Homeric allusions. Shorrock's *Challenge of Epic*, along with several articles,[1] provides the closest comparison between Homer and Nonnos. In the case of *The Challenge of Epic*, Shorrock does an excellent job of demonstrating that Nonnos saw Homer as a model and a literary father figure. His work focuses more on the idea of the epic tradition, however, commenting on the interplay of epic with other genres such as pastoral. My focus, on the other hand, is an examination of the characterization of Dionysos himself. As a result, deep analysis of the allusions and comparison of the characters of Dionysos and Achilles is absent from these works, although many scholars have acknowledged the similarity. Therefore through the analysis of this work, I hope to flesh out this concept, filling a gap in the scholarship and proving that Nonnos recreated the traditional character of Dionysos as a hero who surpassed the greatest heroes of Homer.

II. A General Overview of Links between Homer and Nonnos

Because the *Iliad* is seen as the first classical epic it seems fitting to begin with its relevance to the *Dionysiaca*, which is perhaps the last Greek epic composed in the classical world.[2] At the most superficial level Nonnos matches Homer in meter and language; this is significant because the meter, dactylic hexameter, had gone out of common use by the 5th century

1 Notably: D'Ippolito's "Studi nonniani: L'epillio nelle Dionisiache"; Fragoulis' "Nonnos transposant Homère: Étude du chant 37 des *Dionysiaques* de Nonnos de Panopolis"; and Vian's "Nonnos de Panopolis, *Les Dionysiaques*".

2 Fornaro (2006) 812–815.

AD.[3] Furthermore, Nonnos wrote in a Homeric dialect of Greek, a mixture of mainly Ionic and Aeolic, which would have not only been foreign to an Alexandrian Greek, but also tremendously archaic in comparison to the Koine dialect in use at the time. Therefore, Nonnos writing this work is roughly comparable to a modern author writing a play in iambic pentameter and Shakespearean English. Moreover, the epic medium was at this time no longer popular, having instead given way to prose works of literature. The last truly notable epics had been written 400 years before in the 1st century AD and in Latin. As a result, the appearance of a Greek epic during this period points more towards Homer as an inspiration rather than to concurrent trends or literary competition among contemporaneous peers.

While the use of Homeric dialect and meter is an immediate clue to Nonnos' Homeric aspirations, the division of the *Dionysiaca* into 48 books, the same number as the total number of books in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is further telling. Despite the *Dionysiaca* being only 20,426 lines, 7,377 less than the cumulative 27,803 lines of Homeric epic (15,693 for the *Iliad* and 12,110 for the *Odyssey*), it is still the longest *single* extant work of epic from the classic world. Because of this and because of the actual content of this poem, it seems that Nonnos was not only trying to emulate but also to outdo Homer.

The language of the *Dionysiaca* also suggests that Nonnos is trying to outdo Homer. Nonnos uses language that resonates with Homeric language in the way he describes certain places, things, and individuals. According to Douglas Young[4] there is a vestige of what seems to be formulaic construction within the *Dionysiaca*. While this repetition of blocks of texts and the occurrence of certain forms of words only in specific feet of a line may be merely a result of metrical convenience or systematic lack of creativity on Nonnos' part, I believe that it is more

3 The main evidence for this is the fact that, besides the *Argonautica Orphica*, the last Greek epic to have been written was Apollodorus's *Argonautica* in the 3rd century B.C., roughly 800 years before.

4 Young (1967) 279-324.

plausible that Nonnos specifically intended to recall Homer with such repetitions.[5] Using these Homeric conventions as a base, Nonnos builds on and surpasses the richness of language and the length of passages which would be Homeric, and, as a result, increases the grandeur of each scene and description beyond Homer. Thus, where Homer might take five lines to describe something, Nonnos will take ten. In this same vein, Nonnos takes and uses epithets from Homer, and then builds on this base by creating his own set of epithets.[6]

The second and more obvious way in which Nonnos imitates Homer is in his themes and episodes. Nonnos chronically rewrites sections of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, putting them in different contexts and placing Dionysos as the surrogate central figure. Even if he does not directly recreate a scene, Nonnos employs many of the same themes as Homer does, calling up the ideas of achieving glory through great works, divine intervention with the mortal, hospitality, epic battle, and homecoming.

Examining these episodes and themes will constitute the body of this chapter. My main point will not merely be to prove that Nonnos imitated scenes and ideas from Homer, however, but rather to demonstrate that Nonnos expressed these episodes and themes in superior ways to the way they are expressed in Homer. I will use the way Nonnos adapts the Homeric language to accomplish this purpose, and show how the language itself aims at surpassing Homer.

III. Invoking Homer and Introducing Dionysos

From the very beginning lines of his epic Nonnos invokes the Homeric epics. The first

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5 Young only briefly describes this concept. The details of this study are still relatively uncharted academic territory which deserve more thorough scholarly examination.

6 Nonnos uses familiar epithets such as *glaukopis*, *ennosigaios*, and *rhododaktulos*, among many others, throughout his entire work, some of them, *oinops* for example, he actually uses more times than Homer. The study of epithets in Nonnos remains a relatively unexamined aspect of the *Dionysiaca* though and deserves a much longer work dedicated to it than space allows here.

words, Εἰπέ, θεά immediately call to mind the ἔννεπε μοῦσα of the *Odyssey* mixed with the ἄειδε θεὰ of the *Iliad*. Nonnos does not neglect the Muses in the opening of his work, invoking them again in line 11, nor does he leave out the verb ἀείδω, which makes its appearance in line 12 and again in 27. Sandwiched between "telling" and "singing" the story of Dionysos, Nonnos again outdoes Homer in an act of pleonastic thoroughness by repeating εἶπον in line 3 and using the verbs μέλπω (to sing, line 17) and ὑμνέω (to hymn, line 24).

Unlike Homer, however, Nonnos shifts from the 2nd person imperative to 1st person indicative, signaling that he had been enthused by the gods, just as the followers of Dionysos are.[7] He makes this explicit by calling for the regalia of a bacchant:

> Bring me the fennel, Mimallons! On my shoulders in place of the wanted kirtle, bind, I pray, tight over my breast a dapple-back fawnskin, full of the perfume of Maronian nectar.

This signals that not only is Nonnos inspired to write an epic but specifically an epic directly pertaining to Dionysos. He goes on to directly reference Homer and what's more to imply Homer's inferiority when he consigns to Homer (line 38) φωκάων βαρύ δέρμα ("the rank skin of seals", which Menelaos wears in the *Odyssey*) instead of the "perfumed" fawnskin of Dionysos which Nonnos wears. While Shorrock argues that this reference indicates the need for deceptiveness in Homer,[8] I argue that it is more an indication of status. While Homer has his hero shipwrecked and dressed in putrid and oily seal skin, Nonnos' Dionysos and Nonnos himself wear sweet-smelling deer hide: a sign that both god and poet are superior to their

7 The author using the 1st person singular is not unheard of in Epic, hence "Arma virumque *cano*" from Virgil. It is a subject of debate whether Nonnos knew Latin or was concerned with Latin authors; Hopkinson holds that this was unlikely and others including Harries, Duc, and Frangoulis believing that he could. Others including Shorrock and D'Ippolito maintain a more neutral stance on the issue. Regardless, for my purposes, only the comparison of Nonnos to Homer is relevant and Homer does not highlight his own voice as the narrator by using the 1st singular subject, instead he very clearly attributes it directly to the muse putting himself as the object receiving the story, hence ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε (sing *to me* of the man).

8 Shorrock (2001) 118. Shorrock's argument is that Homer/Menelaos have to disguise themselves in order to accomplish their goals, but that Nonnos/Dionysos have no need of trickery, as they are able to transcend boundaries which Homer/Menelaos cannot.

Homeric equivalents. Nonnos reaffirms this idea later when he says, "Do not accept his sealskins" (*Nonn. D. 42.400*), sealskins which he describes as foul and, "breathing the filthy stink of the deep" (*Nonn. D. 42.399*). Nonnos then goes on to describe all the benefits of accepting Dionysos instead.

This introduction also intimates Nonnos' intentions of making Dionysos a Homeric hero superior to the heroes of Homer.[9] But while Homer opens with the anger of Achilles and with the man, Odysseus, with his many turns, Nonnos opens with the loftier topics of gods and changes.[10] He begins with the patronymic name of Zeus, Cronides, in what seems to be a reference to the opening lines of Hesiod's *Theogony* (*Hes. Th. 4*), but instead of describing the birth of the natural world, Nonnos describes the birth of Dionysos, in terms that suggest he is a deified personification of nature. Dionysos begins when Zeus raises him, moist, from the fires bringing forth the infant who is ἡμιτέλεστον, ("a half-finished thing", line 5). The imagery of the basic elements of fire, water, and the formation of a creation resonate as a kind of microcosmic cosmogony. This is further strengthened as Nonnos immediately compares this birth to Athena, another child of Zeus, who is described in birth as an ἄσπορον ὄγκον ἄπιστον ("incredible unbegotten lump," line 9).[11] This image further strengthens the idea that Dionysos's own birth is a process of mass changing and coming into being, very like the cosmos itself coming out of chaos.[12] Speaking of this birth in the same terms as the very birth of the universe

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9 Nonnos signals Dionysos is a Homeric hero by not only making an allusion to Menelaos as a comparative but lesser figure (being the figure who wears sealskin), but also by announcing a list of great deeds (most notably his Indian Campaign) which evoke Homeric deeds.

10 Despite our uncertainty about Nonnos' knowledge of Latin literature, I would argue this is this is very similar in tone to the opening of Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

11 This could be compared to the *rudis indigestaque moles* of Ovid (*Ov. Met. 1.7*)

12 Although Dionysos is often perceived as a disruptor of social order, as his role in Euripides' *Bacchae* suggests, I believe Nonnos views Dionysos as one who establishes order, not only as a manifestation of natural world order, but also civic order as evidenced by the concept that he "civilizes" the Indians after conquering them and establishes governors for them (*Nonn. D. 40.235-6*). Furthermore, as Shorrock (Shorrock (2001) 195.) suggests Nonnos recreates the Pentheus episode, characterizing Pentheus as a usurper. I believe Nonnos did this in order

makes Homer's heroes seem relatively insignificant and one-dimensional.

Furthermore, Dionysos is not an inert being but is described as ποικίλον εἶδος ἔχων ("having a diversity of shapes," line 15) and εἶδος ἀμείβων ("of a changing form," line 23). This metamorphic quality is so emphasized that Nonnos even invokes Proteus[13] to aid in telling the story. In challenge to even the most multifaceted of Homer's gods, Nonnos includes a list of forms which Dionysos not only can change into, but also is a master of, and which also relate to his epic (*Nonn. D. 1.14-33*). These forms (which include a serpent, a lion, a leopard, a boar, water, and a tree) happen to be the forms which Proteus takes in the *Odyssey* when Menelaos wrestles with him (*Hom. Od. 4.456-9*).[14] By doing this in the proem Nonnos effectively introduces Dionysos as character more complex, multifaceted, and powerful than even Proteus and whose impact is on the scale of nature itself. Achilles' introduction in the *Iliad* is limited to being described as having μῆνιν ("anger", *Hom. Il. 1.1*); in comparison to the magnitude of Dionysos, Achilles seems petty and one-sided.

In all of this, not only is Nonnos high-mindedly talking about gods, but he is making it clear that he actually has a god as the hero of his tale, and not merely the mortal son of a goddess nor a human who is offered deification. Furthermore, this god is not just any consistent and unchanging god, instead he is an active and multifaceted being, a trait which one may argue that the human heroes of Homer do not possess. Therefore, Nonnos, in a way, trumps Homer by having a hero superior to the human heroes of Homer because of his divinity but also because of

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to show how his overthrow was not a destruction of legitimate order but rather replacing an illegitimate regime with a legitimate one.

13 Nonnos very conspicuously calls Proteus "Πρωτῆα πολύτροπον" (line 14) in what seems to be an allusion to the proem of the *Odyssey*. Furthermore, Menelaos wrestles with Proteus in Egypt, Nonnos' own homeland. It is possible Nonnos highlights Proteus because of this connection.

14 These same forms are used in describing the forms of Proteus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Ov. Met. 8.731-40*). One other being who has many changing forms is Thetis, the mother of Achilles, while the comparison is not direct, it is possible Nonnos has this fact at play in the background. If so, the implicit idea is that Dionysos is superior to even the mother of Achilles.

his great depth and complexity of character.

IV. Common Beginnings and Youths of Achilles and Dionysos

Though not strictly contained within the narrative of Homer himself, there are prolific stories about Achilles which are supplementary to Homer,[15] but which Nonnos likely accepted as part of the tradition. Shorrock has done an excellent job dealing with some of this, in context to comparing the births and childhoods of the two figures. The points he makes are relevant enough to my own theses that I will describe and expound upon them.

Firstly, Shorrock[16] points out that the marriage of Cadmus[17] to Harmonia described in Nonnos is similar to that of Peleus and Thetis, not only in the details of the marriage itself but also in that each brings about a prominent child, although for Cadmus it is as a grandson rather than son. Each of these children undergo flaming second births of a sort: Dionysos from scorched womb of Semele (and subsequently the thigh of Zeus) and Achilles by having most of his mortality burnt away by Thetis (*Apollod. Bibl. 3.13.6*). Their names reflect this in that one etymology of Dionysos (the one which Nonnos himself provides, *Nonn. D. 9.18-20*) is "Zeus-Limp," revealing the limp which Zeus had as a result of bearing a baby god in his thigh.[18] Achilles, according to Apollodorus (*Apollod. Bibl. 3.13.6*), means "lacking lips" because he was

15 Besides other authors who wrote on Homeric topics, there are other bodies of work which attributed to Homer but most likely not written by him. Such Pseudo-Homeric works include the *Nostoi*, the *Little Iliad*, the *Epigoni*, and the *Cypria*.

16 Shorrock (2001) 55-9.

17 Nonnos spends a fair amount of time describing Cadmus as a singer and relating how his music helped Zeus fight Typhon (books 1 and 2). Nonnos makes several other prominent bards make appearances, especially during the song contest at the funeral of Staphylos (book 19). I believe that this is self-reflective of Nonnos' own position as a composer of epic, and relevant by showing how the songs of Cadmus were powerful enough to help even great Zeus and that a contest of songs is superior to a struggle of brute force and physical skill. The appearance of bards such as Oiagros and Erechtheus (*Nonn. D. 19.66-117*) bear similarities to Demodocus and Phemius from Homer. Cadmus is, in a way, an avatar of Nonnos himself, and as Cadmus is the progenitor of Dionysos, so is Nonnos the parent of Dionysos's epic.

18 I believe that it is unlikely that this etymology is correct. Its etymological validity is not relevant so much as its role in interpreting Nonnos' ideas about Dionysos.

never suckled as an infant. Furthermore, both are raised by surrogate parents in pastoral settings, hunting at young ages, and being dressed effeminately.[19]

Shorrock fleshes out the details of these connections, but sees them exclusively as them as evidence of Nonnos imitating information about a Homeric figure from Psuedo-Homeric or non-Homeric sources. Still, Shorrock does not touch on the implications of the characterization of Dionysos himself. Stories of Dionysos's youth were widely recorded by many authors throughout the classical world.[20] Where Nonnos differs is that he seems to be trying to clarify and synthesize many of these tales. Firstly, most agree that Dionysos was taken by Hermes to be raised by Ino, Semele's sister. Nonnos preserves this detail, as well as separating out the myths about Persephone raising (or in some cases mothering) Dionysos by telling how this was in fact another, earlier, Dionysos, whom Nonnos refers to as either "the older Dionysos" (παλαιγενὴς Διόνυσος, *Nonn. D. 5.56;* παλαίτερος Διόνυσος, *Nonn. D. 27.340*; πρότερος Διόνυσος *Nonn. D. 48.29*) or Zagreus.[21] He retains this story because of the ubiquitous association of Dionysos with the mystery cults of Demeter and Kore. Furthermore, Nonnos, who seems fixated on giving his Dionysos a plethora of mother figures (whom he generally refers to as nurses- μαῖαι or τιθήνη), then adds one final detail by saying that Dionysos was taken from Ino to Rheia as a nurse. Not only does this effectively give Dionysos the same mother figure as Zeus, but it also associates him with more cult worship (links which Strabo, *str. 2.29*, and Apollodorus, *apollod. 10.3.13*, have also made). Not only would Rheia-Kybele cults (along with the Persephone/Demeter cults) have been common during Nonnos' period but this also links back to the older practice of hero cults. Hero cults were not exclusive to figures like Heracles, but Achilles himself had a cult on

19 The psuedo-Homeric *Cypria*, Pindar's *Odes* (specifically *Nemean 3*), and Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* all discuss such aspects of Achilles' childhood.

20 To cite just the more prominent of the Greek sources: *Hes. Th. 940 ff, E. Ba. 1 ff, Apollod. 3-26-9, A.R. 4. 1128 ff, D.S. 4. 2. 3 , Paus. 3. 24. 3 – 4.*

21 Diodorus Siculus also shares an account of these figures being two separate entities, *D.S. 4.4.5* and *D.S. 4.5.2.*

the island of Leuce through at least the Roman period.[22] Therefore, beyond Nonnos using the stories of Dionysos's youth to draw a parallel to the youth of Achilles, he also ties Dionysos (and give a reason why he should be tied) to the cults which were far more widespread at this time than those of Achilles ever had been.

V. Dionysos and Ampelos

The next notable episode which overtly draws parallels between Dionysos and Achilles occurs in books 10 through 12. While there are eight books in between the opening and this episode, which include many Homeric parallels, Dionysos himself does not appear in these books, focusing instead on the founding of Thebes and the events leading up to the birth of Dionysos. As soon as Dionysos becomes present as an active character in the narrative, however, Nonnos wastes no time in creating an episode with inescapable connections to Achilles.

This section begins by setting up Dionysos and Ampelos as boyhood friends and lovers, which creates an immediate comparison to Achilles and Patroclus. Although it is not explicitly stated in the *Iliad* that Achilles and Patroclus were lovers, later Greeks clearly interpreted their relationship this way.[23] Their relationship, and their childhood together, is mentioned by the ghost of Patroclus in the *Iliad* (*Hom. Il. 23.82-6*):

> Let not my bones be laid apart from yours, Achilles, but with them. Even as we were brought up together in your own home, what time Menoetius brought me to you as a child from Opoeis

Nonnos elaborates on the boys' youth and the impassioned infatuation Dionysos has with Ampelos. As foreshadowing to Ampelos' death, Dionysos goes through a lengthy prayer to his

22 Hedreen (1991) 313–330.

23 The most notable discussion of this occurs in Plato's *Symposium* (*Plat. Sym. 180a*) but it is also present in a section of Aeschylus' fragmentary play, *Myrmidons* (*fragment 135*), as well as being mentioned by the Athenian politician Aeschines.

father that he may not lose his lover (*Nonn. D. 10.287-320*). The supplication of a hero to his divine parent calls to mind supplications Achilles makes to his mother (*Hom. Il. 1.351-413* and *Hom. Il. 18.79-127*), where he first complains that Zeus neither honors nor aids him and second laments the loss of his lover. While Achilles' prayers are negative, Dionysos's prayers are positive, showing that he has greater favor from Zeus. Furthermore, prayer to their respective parents reminds the reader that both Dionysos and Achilles are sons of deities by mortal parents. During his prayer, Dionysos references the stories of Hyacinthus and Ganymedes, two other famous, attractive boys- beloveds (ἐρώμενοι), implicitly drawing a comparison between them and Ampelos. Hyacinthus was killed by Zephyrus, the same god who helped light the fire of Patroclus' funeral pyre (*Hom. Il. 23.192-211*). The accounts of Ganymede in both Homer and Nonnos are linked; like Homer, Nonnos refers to him using a form of οἰνοχοεύω ("wine-pouring" *Hom. Il. 20.234* and *Nonn. D. 10.315*), which takes on extra significance when placed in the context of Dionysos and his wine producing vine (ἄμπελος). Furthermore, Homer describes him as, "godlike Ganymedes who was the loveliest born of the race of mortals," (*Hom. Il. 20.232*) but Nonnos goes beyond this giving a lengthy section (*Nonn. D. 10.196-216*) in which Dionysos praises Ampelos as being surely of divine blood and then tops this off by saying, "Lovely Ampelos outshines Ganymedes, he has a brilliancy in his countenance more radiant- the Tmolian beats the Idaian!" (*Nonn. D. 10.317-8*). In no way could Nonnos be more explicit in saying that Dionysos is superior, even in choosing lovers; so much so that his lover trumps the lover Zeus takes on in the *Iliad* and, by extension, most certainly outdoes Achilles. What is more, the association cannot be ignored, since Ganymedes, a Trojan, again calls the reader's attention back to the events leading up to the Homeric Epics.

VI: Funeral Games

A. Ampelos

After this prayer, Dionysos holds athletic competitions, which offer an unmistakable parallel to the funeral games of Patroclus. The first game in Nonnos' account is wrestling, which Homer refers to as a "painful art" (παλαισμοσύνης ἀλεγεινῆς, *Hom. Il. 23.701*) but in Nonnos is a "friendly sport" (παλαισμοσύνης φιλοπαίγμονος, *Nonn. D. 10.332*). Nonnos opens with a discussion of the prizes to be awarded. These prizes are described as being "no tripod was their prize, no flowergraven cauldron lay ready for victory, no horses from the grass, but a double pipe of love" (*Nonn. D. 10.332-5*); in ironic contrast these are prizes among those offered in the funeral games of Patroclus. Achilles offers a tripod as prize in both the chariot race (*Hom. Il. 23.264*) and wrestling (*Hom. Il. 23.702*), cauldrons in both the chariot race (Achilles actually offers two cauldrons as prizes for this race, *Hom. Il. 23.267-8*) and archery contests (the one as the archery prize being specifically described as embossed with flowers, *Hom. Il. 23.885*), and a horse as a prize for the chariot race (*Hom. Il. 23.265*). The three prizes mentioned as not the reward of the first contest in Nonnos, are precisely the prizes for the first competition in Homer, the chariot race.

While in Homer the contest between Ajax and Odysseus is a painful and harsh encounter, in Nonnos the description is not nearly so intense. Instead of athletes competing in hard opposition, Dionysos and Ampelos are described as "love's athletes" (ἀεθλητῆρες Ἐρώτων, *Nonn. D. 10.339*) and their wrestling romp is much closer to a sexual encounter than a legitimate contest. Still, both accounts share details that show Nonnos is deliberately imitating Homer. In both accounts, the contestants enter the ring and lock hands and begin the contest (*Hom Il. 23.710-4* and *Nonn. D. 10.339-44*). In the *Iliad* Ajax lifts Odysseus and Odysseus kicks out his knee in a act of brain over brawn (*Hom. Il. 23.726-32*):

> He lifted (ἀνάειρε) him from the ground (1) as he spoke, but Odysseus did not forget his cunning. He hit Ajax in the hollow at back of his knee (2), so that he could not keep his feet, but fell on his back (3) with Odysseus lying upon his chest (4), and all who saw it marveled. Then Odysseus in turn lifted Ajax and stirred him a little from the ground but could not lift him right off it, his knee sank under him, and the two fell side by side on the ground and were all begrimed with dust (5).

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

> Next Bacchos ran his two hands round the young man's waist squeezing the body with a loving grip, and lifted (ἀνῃώρησε) Ampelos high (1); but the other kicked Bromios neatly behind the knee (2); and Euios laughing merrily at the blow from his comrade's tender foot, let himself fall on his back in the dust (3). Thus while Bacchos lay willingly on the ground the boy sat across his naked belly (4), and Bacchos in delight lay stretching at full length on the ground sustaining the sweet burden on his paunch... Both rolled in the dust (5), and the sweat poured out to tell that they were tired.

While the content of these two passages is very close, the tenor of the language is very different in that the first emphasizes pain and the second pleasure. The details are, however, unmistakably similar. First, in both fights, one athlete lifts the other (1). Next, the contender being lifted catches the other behind the knee (2) and both fall to the ground (3) with the one having been lifted being on top of the upper body of the other (4). Finally, the fight ends with both wrestling on the ground in the dust (5). The similarities between the contests of the *Dionysiaca* and those in Homer do not end there.

The next event is the footrace in the *Dionysiaca*. In the *Iliad*, the footraces begin, "The course was set out for them from the starting posts" (τοῖσι δ' ἀπὸ νύσσης τετατο δρόμος, *Hom. Il. 23.758*). This same idea is mirrored and elaborated in Nonnos (*Nonn. D. 10.393-7*):

> Then Bromios measured the ground for the furlong race. He measured the stretch between the two ends of the course, and set up a tall stake in the ground, ten palms high, to make the finish of the race; at the other end he raised and planted a thyrsus on the river bank to show the turning point.

After this point the race becomes shockingly similar to the one described in the *Iliad*. In the

Iliad the contestants "stood side by side" (στὰν δὲ μεταστοιχί, *Hom. Il. 23.756*), and in the Dionysiaca they "stood in a row" (στοιχὸν ἐφεστασαν, *Nonn. D. 10.403*). Then, in Homer, Ajax (the son of Oileus) takes the immediate lead, with Odysseus directly behind him (*Hom. Il. 23.759-65*):

> Odysseus was so close behind him as the shuttle is to a woman's bosom when she throws the woof across the warp and holds it close to her, even so close behind him was Odysseus- treading his footprints before the dust could settle there, and Ajax could feel his breath on the back of his head as he ran swiftly on.

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

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

Still neither Cissos nor Leneus (which though portrayed here as Satyrs, are in other traditions cult titles of Dionysos himself) is meant to win this race. Instead, Ampelos gets divine assistance from Dionysos who causes Cissos to slip on a wet place in the same way that Athena assists Odysseus in winning the race in the *Iliad* by causing Ajax to stumble on the offal of slaughtered cattle. Again the details of the action here are too close to be coincidence. Instead of directly taking lines from the *Iliad* though, Nonnos writes the same scenes in his own words, often elaborating in more detail than Homer.[24] Finally, Ampelos takes the first prize and Cissos the second, grumbling to himself about Dionysos causing him to falter, details which again are reflective of Odysseus winning the first prize and Ajax complaining about Athena's intervention in the *Iliad*. With all these details, it is clear that Nonnos is trying to bring Homeric context to mind.

Thus both Dionysos and Achilles oversee games which are remarkably similar, but the

[24] This is an example of Nonnos' tendency to try to outdo Homer with style and language, as I discussed earlier.

association becomes even more pronounced when the deaths of Patroclus and Ampelos are analyzed in comparison. Patroclus and Ampelos both die apart from their lovers, pinned to the ground and penetrated by adversaries who bear considerable resemblances to their lovers. Hector is a reflection of Achilles because both are clearly the best in their respective armies. Moreover, after Hector has taken Achilles' armor off of the dead Patroclus and puts it on, Homer says, ἰνδάλλετο δέ σφισι πᾶσι τεύχεσι λαμπόμενος μεγαθύμου Πηλεΐωνος (his armor flashed about him so that he seemed to all of them like the great son of Peleus himself, *Hom. Il. 17.213-4*). The act of putting on Achilles' armor, highlights the similarities between himself and Achilles; in a sense Hector, in a Dionysiac fashion, puts on the mask of Achilles and as a result becomes Achilles. Therefore, Achilles, who may be seen as responsible for the death of Patroclus because he allowed him to be put in danger, kills Hector as an act of killing a lesser form of himself. This interpretation fits in with the narrative of Nonnos well because in Nonnos Ampelos is killed by a bull, and outside Nonnos the link between Dionysos and the bull is already well established. Therefore, the act of killing the bull, which became a central part of Dionysiac worship, was as J.G. Frazer suggests[25] an act of killing a lesser form of Dionysos himself, in order to transcend it.

After Patroclus and Ampelos have been killed in their respective narratives, news is then brought to their lovers (*Hom. Il. 18.1-21* and *Nonn. D. 11.224-5*). In both cases the news is followed by lengthy mourning in which Achilles cries out to his mother Thetis (*Hom. Il. 18.35-147*) and Dionysos to his father Zeus (*Nonn. D. 11.315-24*). In both narratives, the body of the dead is beautified/adorned; while Patroclus is simply washed, anointed and dressed in white linen (*Hom. Il. 344-55*), Ampelos is dressed in full Bacchic regalia (*Nonn. D. 11.232-9*).

25 See Chapter XLIX.1 *Dionysus, the Goat and Bull* and Chapter L. *Eating the God* from Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.

Furthermore, both bodies are anointed with ambrosia to ward off putrefaction (from Thetis in the *Iliad*, *Hom. Il. 19.37-9*, and Rhea in the *Dionysiaca*, *Nonn. D. 11.241-4*).[26] Finally, both Achilles and Dionysos cut off locks of their hair and lay them upon their dead companions (*Hom. Il. 23.140-53* and *Nonn. D. 11.238-41*); a scene which also is present in the micronarrative of Carpus and Calamus (*Nonn. D. 11.464-69*).

This micronarrative (*Nonn. D. 11.369-481*) is told to Dionysos by his didactic satyr companion, Silenus, after Ampelos had been killed by the bull. This feature also has a parallel in Homer: the story of Meleager and Cleopatra (*Hom. Il. 9.529-99*), told to Achilles by his former teacher, Phoenix, before the death of Patroclus. In the context of Nonnos, Calamus and Carpus, who themselves bear vegetative names (καρπός meaning fruit and κάλαμος meaning reed) and their story foreshadow the rebirth of Ampelos as a vine. Similarly, the story that Phoenix tells Achilles about Meleager and Cleopatra (whose name is a reversal of Patroclus's own) foreshadows the death of Patrolcus.[27]

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

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[26] This is an honor which was also bestowed upon the body of Hector (*Hom. Il. 23.186*).

27 Furthermore, this story has another Dionysiac link in that Meleager's father, who also takes part in this story, is named Oineus; this is relevant because his name means "wine man", and because he is related to Dionysos according to Apollodorus' *Biliotheke*, 1.8.1. Furthermore another character occurring in this narrative is named Euenus, a name which is a cult title of Dionysos himself.

men from death (*Ov. Met. 2.644*). In contrast, Dionysos, through the help of the Fates and his father, brings Ampelos back not only as a vine (*Nonn. D. 12.173-87*), but also as a fundamentally immortal being, similar to Adonis (who is even mentioned by Nonnos in this episode, *Nonn. D. 11.500*) or Attis who were also resurrected as vegetation. Therefore, where Achilles was not able preserve his own life, let alone that of his friend, Dionysos was, and therefore is the greater of the two.

B. Staphylos

As though the elaborate lengths which Nonnos goes to with the episode of Ampelos do not draw enough from the death and funeral of Patroclus, Nonnos includes another set of funeral games in book 19. In this episode, the events actually occur after the death of one of Dionysos's friends and without an overt resurrection, even though there is a section that implies it will occur.[28] The language of this passage does not have the same level of direct parallels which the Ampelos episode does. Though the types of events are the same, the responses are inverted, creating, in a sense, an opposite form of the same scene. For example, instead of going through the elaborate mourning which Achilles goes through at the death of Patroclus, Dionysos is described as having a "laughing face" (*Nonn. D. 19.42*). Furthermore, he cheers up all those mourning when he arrives on the scene at the end of book 18: "Then beside the tomb of reeling Staphylos, Dionysos, the foe of mourning, held a contest where no mourning was." (*Nonn. D. 19.59-60*). Beyond this, Dionysos may hold a game for his dead friend but Nonnos emphasizes that it is different from those held for Patroclus, and with mostly different prizes (*Nonn. D. 19.145-52*):

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

> I will give no shining tripod and no swift horse, no spear and corselet stained with blood of Indians; I will make no summons for marksmen for straight throwing with the quoit; this is no race for speed of foot, no spear cast at a distance... I offer no prize for wrestlers with straining muscles, this is no game for horsemanship...

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

The act of placing a second set of games in *Dionysiaca* clearly reflects Nonnos' desire to imitate Homer. By describing a second set of games, Nonnus makes Dionysos surpass Achilles who only held one. Beyond this, it shows that Dionysos could provide a happy funeral setting and that he could diverge from the Homeric party plan, while still sticking to the basic format and being more magnificent with respect to gifts.

C. Opheltes

As if two funerals with games were not enough, book 37 of the Dionysiaca brings what Robert Shorrock has referred to as "the 'closest' imitation of Homer"[29] in Nonnos. Shorrock says, "Nonnos' text is so close to the Homeric original that it leaves no room for originality of its own."[30] Shorrock does not closely analyze these similarities though, instead focusing on the father/son relationship of Aristaeus and Actaeon.[31] The similarities of book 37 of the *Dionysiaca* to book 23 of the *Iliad* are so numerous that a line by line comparison of the exact language used would not only be tedious and extraneous but also outside the scope of my own purpose of demonstrating Achilles/Dionysos linkage. Instead, I will provide a general overview of similarities, highlighting points which support what I am attempting to argue.

Book 37 of the *Dionysiaca* begins as book 23 of the *Iliad* does, with the hero's army resting (*Nonn. D. 37.6* and *Hom. Il. 23.2-3*). Both the Mimallones of Dionysos and the Myrmidons of Achilles mourn the dead friend of their leader and men and mules are sent out to collect wood for the pyre (*Nonn. D. 37.8* and *Hom. Il. 23.111*). Then all the men of the armies collect around the respective bodies of Patroclus and Opheltes, laying locks of hair on the corpses. Lastly, Achilles and Dionysos cut and lay locks of their own hair (*Nonn. D. 37.37-44* and *Hom. Il. 127-51*). Then Dionysos has twelve Indians, oxen, sheep, cattle, and horses butchered as well as jars of honey and oil placed at the pyre, wrapping the fat of the slaughtered animals around the body of Opheltes (*Nonn. D. 37.44-55*). Not surprisingly, Achilles offers the same things at the pyre of Patroclus, but killing twelve Trojans instead of Indians and dogs instead of cattle (*Hom. Il. 23.161-83*). After this both Dionysos and Achilles have trouble

29 Shorrock (2001) 188.
30 Shorrock (2001) 179. Shorrock is not the only scholar to have noted the striking imitation of Homer in this chapter, Vian, Willis, Frangoulis, and Hopkinson all have made this connection.
31 This concept is tied into Shorrock's larger argument that Nonnos views Homer as a father figure.

lighting their pyres but while Achilles calls upon the west and north winds, Zephyrus and Boreas, to help kindle the fire (*Hom. Il. 23.192-211*) Dionysos calls upon the east wind, Euros (*Nonn. D. 37.70-85*). After the body has been cremated, both Opheltes's and Patroclus's bones are placed in layers of fat and put into golden urns (*Nonn. D. 37.91-3* and *Hom. Il. 24.240-5*). Dionysos slightly deviates from Achilles when his Corybants immediately construct a grand tomb for Opheltes (*Nonn. D. 37.94-102*), whereas Achilles says, "As for the barrow, labor not to raise a great one now but such as is reasonable" (*Hom. Il. 23.180*). He follows this up by saying that another better one can be constructed later. In Nonnos, there is some interesting detail put into the description of the tomb; he mentions that Opheltes is from Crete and that a tomb would be built for him according to the custom of his land.[32] This draws attention to the idea that he is being buried on foreign soil, a land which Nonnos describes as a "haunt of Ida" (*Nonn. D. 37.94*), he uses the Greek, "ἔνδιον Ἴδης" not only does this prophetical sound like "Ἰνδόν" (Indian) but it links India to the mountain in Ilium where Paris made his judgment reinforcing that Dionysos is invading an Indian Troy. Furthermore, Nonnos describes the construction using a comparative adjective saying, "They built up the barrow with *taller* stones" ("καὶ τάφον αἰπυτέροισιν ἀνεστήσαντο δομαίοις", *Nonn. D. 37.99*). The comparatives suggest that the tomb Dionysos is having built is being compared to something else; considering all of the comparisons to Achilles' achievements present before this, I do not believe that it is stretching the bounds of rationality in assuming this refers to the structure Achilles erected as being shorter and therefore inferior. Returning to the comparisons which I made to *krater* size earlier, Nonnos is again making an argument that size does, in fact, matter.

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

After the funeral, Achilles and Dionysos both initiate their own respective funeral games. Each brings out an assortment of prizes which are to a certain degree comparable but in general Dionysos's are more grand. For example, Achilles brings out, "cauldrons, tripods, horses and mules, noble oxen, women with fair girdles, and swart iron" (*Hom. Il. 23.260-1*); Dionysos, in comparison, brings forth, "cauldrons, tripods, shields, horses, silver, Indian jewels, and Pactolian silt" (*Nonn. D. 37.114-5*).[33]

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

The second game is boxing (*Nonn. D. 37.485-545* and *Hom. Il. 23.653-99*), the lines of which are so closely lifted from Homer that at face value they present their own evidence for Homeric imitation. The prizes here are comparable (a bull and shield from Dionysos and a mule and cup from Achilles) so no real analysis is necessary.

The third contest is wrestling (*Nonn. D. 37.546-613* and *Hom. Il. 23.700-39*), which is imitated just as clearly as it was in book 10 of the *Dionysiaca*, though without the sexual overtones this time. The prizes (a tripod and a cauldron from Dionysos, and a tripod and woman from Achilles) here are roughly comparable, the tripod of Dionysos does seem to have a slight advantage at it is described as being of "twenty-measures" whereas Achilles' tripod is only described as "great". The main way evidence for Nonnos' narrative's superiority is in the length,

33 i.e. gold.

running at almost double the line length of Homer's account.[34]

The final four contests are all short and follow the pattern set above of fairly explicit Homeric imitation and Dionysos offering prizes equivalent to or better than Achilles. The contests in order are as follows: running (*Nonn. D. 37.614-73* and *Hom. Il. 23.739-98*), quoit hurling (*Nonn. D. 37.674-702* and *Hom. Il. 23.826-49*), archery (*Nonn. D. 37.703-49* and *Hom. Il. 23.850-83*), and javelin throwing/sparring (*Nonn. D. 37.750-78* and *Hom. Il. 23.884-97*). Nevertheless, as a whole, book 37 of the *Dionysiaca* proves that Dionysos can throw a funeral and funeral games which are just as lavish as those held by Achilles, if not more so.

VII. Dionysos's Catalog of Armies

The attempt to outdo Homer does not end there. When Dionysos is assembling his army to attack the Indians who, being Asian, stand as surrogate Trojans, the list of armies and warriors assembled is a blatant copy of the Catalog of Ships from the *Iliad* (*Hom. Il. 2.484ff*). Not only does he do this but he also directly invokes Homer at the beginning of his catalog (*Nonn. D. 13.50*). Later, in another description of Dionysos's army, Nonnos brags that this army is the greatest that had ever been assembled and that "No such army came to Ilion, no such host of men." (*Nonn. D. 25.22-8*). Not only is Nonnos outdoing the thousand ships of Homer, but he also has Dionysos outdo Agamemnon by being the leader of a bigger army as well as Achilles by being as its most outstanding warrior. The attempt to trump Homer does not end there, however as Nonnos goes on to say how Homer's Muses would have been better to sing of Dionysos than Achilles (*Nonn. D. 25.253-61*):

> O brilliant son of Meles, deathless herald of Achaia, may your book pardon me, immortal as the dawn!... Your Muse ought to have hymned so great and mighty a

[34] Here is another example in which Nonnos seems to be demonstrating that he believes that sheer quantity of words and elaboration of descriptions will render him superior to Homer.

> struggle, how Bacchus brought low the Giants, and ought to have left the labors of Achilles to other bards, had not Thetis stolen that glory from you.

At every turn, Nonnos seeks to represent his story as superior to that of Homer and more importantly to re-envision Dionysos as a character, though fundamentally absent from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, superior to the heroes of Homer.

VIII. Divine Messenger: The Use of Iris

This army was not assembled merely on the whim of Dionysos; instead, Zeus sends Iris, a messenger of the gods, to commission Dionysos to destroy the Indians (*Nonn. D. 13.1-24*). As Lasky[35] has noted, this scene parallels the scenes in the *Iliad* in which Iris is sent with directives to Hector (*Hom. Il. 2.786-810* and *11.185*) and Achilles (*Hom. Il. 18.165-86*). While Iris is also used as a messenger between the gods in Homer, Nonnos seems to use this to identify Dionysos more as a hero than a god, and specifically as a Homeric hero at that.

This commission Zeus gives to Dionysos "to destroy the race of Indians, untaught of piety" (*Nonn. D. 13.19-20*) seems like a rather flimsy and spontaneous reason for such a grand campaign. Still, not only does it attempt to provide a reason for the rather curious link that Dionysos has with India, a link Alain Danielou[36] elucidates on excellently, but more importantly it sets up India as a new and more grandiose Ilium. Firstly, the Greeks had the propensity to fit all peoples into dichotomous categories of Greek and barbarian and, although they were doubtless cognizant of subtler differences, one Asiatic people would likely conceptually be similar to any other. Pericles Georges[37] specifically has done work on the conceptions Greeks had about Asiatic peoples, linking Ilium to Persia and even the distant India described in

35 Lasky (1978) 370.
36 See Danielou's unique and enlightening work *Gods of Love and Ecstasy: The Traditions of Shiva and Dionysus*.
37 Georges (1994)

Herodotus (*Hdt. 3.98-106*). Nonnos himself draws links between the invasion of Ilium and that of India with his boasts in Book 25 concerning the scale of Dionysos's great army (*Nonn. D. 25.25*). Such details continue to point to the Indian campaign as a more magnificent Trojan War, a greater war for a greater hero: Dionysos.

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

IX. Arming Scenes from Homer to Nonnos

As with the heroes of Homer, the hero of Nonnos would not be prepared for battle without arming scenes of sorts. Nonnos does not dogmatically stick to the formula shown in the arming scenes of either Achilles (*Hom. Il. 19.369-91*) or Patroclus (*Hom. Il. 16.130-40*) however. The most notable arming scene from the *Dionysiaca* occurs in book 18 (*Nonn. D. 18.196-202*). In this scene, Nonnos deviates from the standard Homeric order of greaves, corselet, shield, sword, and helm, supplanting it with the revised order of corselet, circlet, buskskin boots, and thyrsus. Furthermore, he replaces the Homeric items with Bacchic regalia, which makes more sense when placed in context with several other scenes, specifically those occurring in books 27 and 30 in which there are discussions of giving up greaves for buskskins and helms for circlets (*Nonn. D. 27.209-12*):

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

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

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

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

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

The point in all these quotes, I believe, is to juxtapose Bacchic regalia to that worn in Homer. Furthermore, each of these instances demonstrates the superiority of the dress of Dionysos and his followers to actual armor. Not only does this explain why such vestments have been substituted in Dionysos's own arming scene, but also gives credence to the idea that this attire is better than that which Achilles wore, even though the realities of ancient warfare would dictate otherwise.

As a further extrapolation of this, I would propose logic similar to Beowulf's idea of proving his worth by not using a weapon during his fight with Grendel. In like way, Dionysos proves how truly powerful he is by defeating his enemies using what would widely be accepted as inferior means, especially since the means are in direct comparison to their Homeric alternatives.

X. The Shield of Dionysos

Despite putting the arms of Homeric warriors in a directly antagonistic relationship to those of Dionysos, Nonnos does not hesitate to present a scene in which Dionysos receives a shield much the same and in much the same way as Achilles does (*Nonn. D. 25.336-567* and *Hom. Il. 18.478-608*). The main differences are that Dionysos's shield is acquired by Rheia and delivered by Attis as opposed to the Homeric Thetis and that the scenes depicted on each shield are different. Shorrock has done an excellent job fleshing out the details of the language and themes which are both shared and divergent between Nonnos and Homer during this scene. He

has also postulated that the appearance of this shield has a plot driving purpose.[38] This supports his overarching goal of linking Nonnos and Homer as authors. I side more with Hopkinson who views the presentation of this shield as not being brought about by anything in the plot.[39] I believe that Nonnos was more following the heroic protocol of the *Iliad* and as a result of Achilles receiving a shield made by Hephaistos, felt compelled to have his own hero receive a similar gift. I believe the reasoning for this is that a divine shield is such a notable and precious gift, that if Dionysos did not have at least an equivalent item, it would render him less relevant than Achilles in the eyes of the gods. Since I believe Nonnos was pushing towards upholding Dionysos as a superior hero, not including this scene would have undermined the overarching goal.

XI. Warfare in the *Dionysiaca*

Battles in Homer, much like other aspects of his epics, contain recurrent elements including the *aristeia*, an epic scene in which a hero is an unstoppable battlefield force and the *androktasiai*, gory descriptions of death and carnage. Furthermore, as Charles Rowan Beye has determined, Homeric battles follow a pattern of presenting the narrative in three parts: basic information, an anecdote, and contextual information.[40] Not only does Nonnos use these elements and conform to this pattern, but goes as far as paraphrasing and directly lifting battle lines from the *Iliad*.

Although this is endemic throughout the entire work, the section which I will analyze to demonstrate this is an episode in books 22 through 24 in which Dionysos fights the Indian army and then Hydaspes. I have chosen this episode because I believe it most highlights the parallel

38 Shorrock (2001) 70-1 and 174-8.
39 Hopkinson (1994) 23.
40 Beye (1964) 345-373.

between Dionysos and Achilles, and while the link has been noted by Edward Lasky,[41] it has not been the subject of its own study.

To begin, this section is filled with reference to Homer, mentioning Homeric figures who fought in the Trojan war including Glaucus[42] and Protesilaus [43] along with other unrelated yet still Homeric figures such as Circe and Lycurgus. Furthermore, Nonnos describes the Indian soldiers assembling in book 22.180-5 as follows:

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

This is a clear paraphrase of the forming up of the Trojans in the *Iliad* (13.131-5):

> fencing spear with spear, and shield with serried shield; buckler pressed on buckler, helm on helm, and man on man; and the horse-hair crests on the bright helmet-ridges touched each other, as the men moved their heads, in such close array stood they one by another, and spears in stout hands overlapped each other, as they were brandished, and their minds swerved not, but they were fain to fight.

As well as in the *Iliad* (16.211-7):

> So saying, he aroused the strength and spirit of every man, and yet closer were their ranks serried when they heard their king. And as when a man buildeth the wall of a high house with close-set stones, to avoid the might of the winds, even so close were arrayed their helms and bossed shields; buckler pressed on buckler, helm upon helm, and man on man. The horse-hair crests on the bright helmet-ridges touched each other, as the men moved their heads, in such close array stood they one by another.

Directly following this scene, Nonnos almost directly lifts the line Ἔνθα τίνα πρῶτον, τίνα δ' ὕστατον Ἄιδι πέμπων ("Here whom first, whom last (did Oiagros) send to Hades", *Nonn. D. 22.187*) from the *Iliad* (16.692) ἔνθα τίνα πρῶτον τίνα δ' ὕστατον ἐξενάριξας. This is then followed by another scene (*Nonn. D. 22.202-3*) which is paraphrased from two other Homeric

41 Lasky (1978) 357-376.
42 *Nonn. D. 22.147* and *Hom. Il. 6.236.*
43 *Nonn. D. 24.192-5* and *Hom. Il. 2.695-709.*

scenes (*Hom. Il. 16.856-7* and *Hom. Il. 362-3*).

While there are more similarities and allusions to Homer throughout this and other battle scenes in Homer, I have only gone over this to demonstrate proof of this trend, not exhaustively discuss it. As I mentioned, these scenes are part of an ongoing narrative in which Dionysos and his army push the Indian army back past the river Hydaspes which parallels Achilles' assault which drives the Trojans back behind the Scamander. Nonnos acknowledges this parallel towards the end of book 22, stating that "he slew his enemies in the river, a watery battle, a conflict among the waves, as if to foretell the unfinished battle for Achilles in the time to come at the river Camandros"[44] (*Nonn. D. 22. 385-8*). Nonnos also states, "Not one Lycaon alone did he slay... but innumerable enemies he destroyed" (*Nonn. D. 22.380*) referencing and superseding the scene in which Achilles kills Lycaon (*Hom. Il. 21.134*) and alludes to slaughter at the Scamander in lines 382-3 by paraphrasing a line from the *Iliad* (*Hom. Il. 22.116*) and adapting the scene to the carnage at the Hydaspes.

This skirmish at the river climaxes in book 23 with the Hydaspes manifesting itself and engaging in combat with Dionysos. As Edward Lasky and Robert Shorrock[45] have noted, this scene is a clear imitation of the battle between Achilles and Scamander in book 21 of the *Iliad*. Breaking the scene down, the impetus of the Scamander's actions was being choked up with dead warriors (*Hom. Il. 145-150*); Nonnos dramatizes the scene with Hydaspes more, going through great details of the carnage (*Nonn. D. 23.1-77*) and then has a dying Indian cry out to the river (*Nonn. D. 23.78-103*), who finally is urged on by Hera to wrath against Dionysos (*Nonn. D. 117-9*).[46] Not only does the Hydaspes have better cause to rage against Dionysos than the Scamander

44 Nonnos uses a form of Scamander which lacks the sigma, the best explanation I can provide for this is metrical convenience, as the alternative form would lengthen the preceding vowel of the line.

45 Shorrock (2001) 65. Lasky (1978) 370.

46 This is where Nonnos departs from Homer, in that Hera is, even from the beginning, an ever malignant adversary

against Achilles, he actually has divine commission to do so. Dionysos, unlike Achilles, has no divine assistance. The Hydaspes, like the Scamander (*Hom. Il. 21.308*), calls upon his brother river (*Nonn. D. 23.162-4*) and then rushes forth with waves pushing the armies of Dionysos out of the river (*Nonn. D. 23.192-220*) as Scamander had done to Achilles (*Hom. Il. 21.240-4*). It is here that Nonnos pauses to again reaffirm the link to Achilles, and to describe his narrative as superior (*Nonn. D. 23.220-5*):

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

Despite the raging assault of the Scamander being less furious than that of the Hydaspes, Achilles is overcome by the river and calls out to Zeus for aid (*Hom. Il. 21.264-75*) Much to the contrary, Dionysos by his own power beats back Hydaspes, and manages to even set his waters on fire (*Nonn. D. 23.256-71*). This is again a parallel to what Hephaistos does in the *Iliad* when he set the fields adjoining the river on fire and throws burning trees into its waters in order to save Achilles (*Hom. Il. 21.343-360*). This show of power is so much that Zeus has to "to restrain the wrath of Dionysos's fiery power" in order to save Hydaspes. In addition, the river god himself becomes a suppliant to Dionysos, begging for mercy in exchange for loyalty and service.

The entirety of this episode points to the superiority of Dionysos over Achilles. Not only is the battle leading up to the fight between hero and river more grand and gory but Dionysos single-handedly overcomes a river whose wrath dwarfs that of the Homeric equivalent.

XII. Lycurgus

At face value, one of the more peculiar sections of the *Dionysiaca* is the story of Lycurgus. Even though this episode is extrapolated from a scarce thirteen lines in Homer (*Hom.*

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of Dionysos; still, what makes him less like Achilles, at the same time leads to parallels with Aeneas.

Il. 6.130-43), it takes up the entirety of book 20 in the *Dionysiaca.*[47] Shorrock comments on this episode, postulating that it shows a clash of two sons of gods (Dionysos being the son of Zeus, and Lycurgus being a descendant of Ares). What is more, he takes Dionysos's jumping into the water to escape Lycurgus as a demonstration of his power to cross boundaries rather than his cowardice at running away.[48] I agree with this interpretation, supporting the view of Dionysos as a god of liminality, both social and physical. In many ways, the point of this thesis is to show how Nonnos' Dionysos is successfully able to transform into other figures while still maintaining his own identity, fundamentally making him a Schrödinger's cat of personae.

Still, I want to append several more points onto this in correlation to this episode. Firstly, the Lycurgus episode contains the only extended reference to Dionysos in either the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. In fact Dionysos's name is only mentioned five times[49] in the entirety of the Homeric corpus (if one excludes the pseudo-Homeric *Homeric Hymns*). This conspicuous absence makes Dionysos the only other (besides Demeter) member of the twelve Olympians who does not make a significant contribution in Homer. I believe that Nonnos wrote his epic partially to answer to and rectify this Dionysiac absence and, as a result, it would be odd if Nonnos did not touch on this episode in some way.

Firstly, it is interesting that upon jumping into the water, Dionysos runs into the arms of Thetis, the mother of Achilles. The presence of Thetis, the mother of Achilles, in this capacity is extremely interesting in the context of Nonnos because it strengthens the connection between

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[47] Yet another example of Nonnos thinking more and bigger is superior.

[48] One detail that is apparent in Homer is that Dionysos is a baby when this occurs. In Nonnos, Dionysos is at most puerile but certainly not infantile. What is an expression of childish fear in Homer is turned into an expression of divine transcendence in Nonnos.

49 The references are as follows: *Hom. Il. 6.132, Hom. Il. 6.135,* both of these occur during the Lycurgus episode; *Hom. Il.14.325,* which is part of a list of gods and heroes born of divine seed and refers to Dionysos's birth from Semele; *Hom. Od. 11.325,* which alludes to Dionysos's rescue of Ariadne and her relationship with Theseus; and *Hom. Od. 24.74,* quite interestingly says that the bones of Patroclus and Achilles were laid in a golden urn that was wrought by Hephaistos but was a gift from Dionysos.

Dionysos and Achilles, since Thetis acts as one of Dionysos's nursemaids, virtually a surrogate mother. The discussion of the many nursemaids of Dionysos in the *Dionysiaca* deserves a closer study, but the absence of Semele as a mother leads Nonnos to use nurses as surrogate mothers to his coming-of-age god. The most prominent of these surrogate mothers is Rheia. As a result, Thetis acts as a mother figure to Dionysos in this episode, which by extension makes Achilles a brother of sorts.[50]

XIII. Aiacos: The Hidden Connection

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

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

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

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50 This is supported by the fraternal way Dionysos treats Aiacos, Achilles' grandfather.

inspiration from his grandfather, who in turn got his inspiration from Dionysos.

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

XIV. Glory, Homecoming, and Godhood

As Shorrock has noted,[51] although Nonnos wrote long after Homer, he forces his epic to come before the events of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* chronologically. Nonnos hints at this not only by putting Achilles' grandfather in the work but also when he says, “he slew his enemies in the river, a watery battle, a conflict among the waves, as if to foretell the unfinished battle for Achilles in time to come at the river Camandros” (*Nonn. D. 22.386-8*). Despite the rampant imitation throughout the poem, Nonnos still attempts to give chronological primacy to Dionysos as a way of establishing legitimacy. Therefore, even though Homer wrote about Achilles' deeds first, Dionysos still did everything first. This makes Achilles, in a way, the imitator and the inferior successor of Dionysos' path to apotheosis.

Perhaps one of the most telling yet unstated parts about Dionysos's epic is what he achieves in comparison to the Homeric heroes. For Achilles, there is the clear choice of the

51 Shorrock only makes a passing reference to this in footnote 250 on page 182 in *The Challenge of Epic*. The context of this is in reference Nonnos viewing Homer as a father but the implications of this are left undeveloped.

undying glory that comes through his great deeds or else a long life which fades into obscurity. For Odysseus, a choice comes between staying with Calypso and having his story veiled from posterity yet becoming a god in the process or else leaving and receiving the honor of his homecoming. Unlike Achilles and Odysseus, Dionysos is not bound by these constraints. Dionysos achieves deeds greater than Achilles without suffering death and still receives the glories of his accomplishment; furthermore, he has his homecoming to Thebes and in the very end ascends to Olympus as an apotheosized hero. These accomplishments not only surpass Homer's heroes at every turn, but are very telling about the way Nonnos treated Dionysos as a character. Dionysos is represented as an almost human hero, while still being acknowledged as divine. This treatment is partially based on Nonnos' association with Christianity, a topic which I will return to later, which led Nonnos to treat Dionysos as a Christ-figure. It also probably stems from the long standing Greek tradition of human heroes born from divine seed achieving apotheosis. This association of apotheosis to heroes is revealed many times but most obviously in book 25, the better part of which is used to compare Dionysos to other heroes, or as Nonnos writes, "I will set up the toils and sweat of Dionysos in rivalry both new and old; I will judge the manhood of the sons of Zeus." (*Nonn. D. 25.26-30*). He then spends the rest of the chapter going through in great detail the deeds of Perseus and Heracles, two others born of mortals who had been apotheosized. After these two lengthy sections Nonnos proceeds to nod his hat to Homer in a rather condescending way by simply saying:

> I will not speak of the Trojan War; for I do not compare Dionysos to Aiacides, or Deriades to Hector. Your Muse ought to have hymned so great and mighty a struggle, how Bacchos brought low the Giants, and ought to have left the labours of Achilles to other bards, had not Thetis stolen that glory from you.

The entirety of this section is a scant ten lines (*Nonn. D. 25.253-263*) and seems to suggest that the deeds of Homer's heroes aren't worth discussing. Instead, Dionysos is at the top of a superior

class of heroes, a class which is born of mortal blood and divine seed and which claims godhood through great deeds as is described in the last lines of the *Dionysiaca* (*Nonn. D. 48.474-7*):

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

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

Chapter II: Dionysos and Alexander

I. Introduction

It has long been accepted that Alexander the Great modeled himself after several heroes and gods during his reign, building up a mythology which led him to be apotheosized as a god incarnate. The figures Alexander emulated, most notably Dionysos, Achilles, and Heracles, accomplished great tasks and became venerated in cults. While the concept of Alexander emulating these figures is not an undeveloped area of study, the idea that Nonnos modeled his version of Dionysos on Alexander is an unapproached concept.[52] Robert Shorrock has acknowledged a link between Nonnos' Dionysos and Alexander,[53] but the references never extend beyond single sentence statements alluding to the similarity but not justifying the link with evidence. As a result, this is unforged academic territory, and the purpose of this chapter is to flesh out the arguments behind the presumption.

II. Nonnos and Alexander

Before going straight into direct comparative textual analysis, I first want to give biographical details about Nonnos which connect him with Alexander. Although knowledge about Nonnos' life is scarce, we know that he was a native of Panopolis (modern day Akhmim), though it is widely accepted that he lived in Alexandria.[54] His themes, topics, and location

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

53 Shorrock (2001) 5.

54 See The *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece*'s, entry on "Nonnos". (pg 506 Andromache). Further evidence which links Nonnos to Alexandria is his only other surviving work, a paraphrase of the Biblical gospel of John. This

strongly suggest that he was as a member of the Alexandrian school of literature,[55] a group of Greek authors which included early notables such as Callimachus, Apollodorus, Apollonius of Rhodes and extended into the later Christian period, producing such scholars as Origen and Clement of Alexandria. Prominent members of the school such as Cleitarchus, Timaeus, and Polybius were noted scholars of the life of Alexander the Great. Alexander's prominence in the culture of Alexandria was strong. Alexander had built the city, it had been the seat of power for the subsequent Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt, and it held Alexander's tomb. As a result of the prominence of Alexander in Alexandria, the scholarship produced there about Alexander, and the great library there that would almost certainly have contained other prominent works on Alexander, there can be little doubt that Nonnos was well acquainted with the details of Alexander's life and legend. Given this context, it seems likely that Alexander was a source of inspiration for Nonnos

III. Dionysos, Alexander, and Achilles

I will begin with a brief overview of the essential similarities shared among Alexander, Dionysos, and Achilles. I present this to avoid the obvious redundancy of going over sections which I have already presented but instead describing Alexander instead of Achilles. Because all three share some episodes with the same basic details and overall significance, I will allow my earlier analysis to suffice, and instead provide brief explanations.

A. Heroic Funerals

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reflects the shift in trends in Alexandrian literature at this time since, by the 5th c. AD, Alexandria had become a center for theological study.

[55] Nonnos' focus on geography, astronomy, and historical themes fall in line with other notable Alexandrian works. His interplay of epic and pastoral also signals this link, as well as his link to Christian theology.

Firstly, all three had boyhood friends who became lovers, died, and had funeral games. Those of Dionysos and Achilles have been described in the previous chapter. In the case of Alexander it was Hephaestion, who had grown up with him in Macedon and whom he made into a commander over his cavalry. Hephaestion's death occurs on campaign[56] and is followed by a magnificent set of games and funeral described by both Plutarch and Arrian (*Plut. Alex 72* and *Arr. 7.14-5*). Not only does this even happen in the same basic way, on campaign, but the basic details coincide in the laying of cut hair upon the dead, slaying enemies at the tomb, playing games, and constructing a tomb. It is my belief that Alexander knew of Patroclus' funeral, and tried to outdo it. Nonnos, coming later, knew both sets of stories and, as a result, outdid both to show Dionysos's superiority.

B. Mentors and Nursemaids

All three figures also shared the presence of childhood mentors; Alexander's mentors were Aristotle and Leonidas,[57] and Achilles' were Phoenix and Chiron. While the Dionysos of Nonnos was accompanied by Seilenos, his traditional mentor, the more important figures in his development are female. These figures, often called as "nursemaids" (τιθῆναι), include Ino, Mystis, Cybele/Rheia and Thetis[58] and act as surrogate mother figures but nonetheless instruct him, primarily in cult activity. I believe that the predominance of females in his education is a

56 The timing of this occurs at a time and place roughly equivalent to that of both Patroclus and Opheiltes, that is to say, while on campaign.

57 Aristotle is the more notable of the teachers who Plutarch recorded as sleeping with an edition of the *Iliad* edited by Aristotle under his pillow (*Plut. Alex. 8.2*). Leonidas (of Epirus, not Sparta), though not quite as know added to Alexander's Achillean fixation in that he, "called himself Phoenix, Alexander Achilles, and Philip Peleus" (*Plut. Alex. 5.5*).

58 The presence of a mother figure is essential for Dionysos as a cult figure. The fact that Cybele and Mystis are deeply connected to cult practice is evidence for this concept. Most cults prominently had mother figures (one might argue the Virgin Mary serves this function in Catholicism), something which Dionysos, naturally lacks. Nonnos is compensating for this by providing mothers who are cult figures themselves. Furthermore, Nonnos makes Persephone, who was a central figure in the Eleusinian Mysteries, the earlier Dionysos's mother. Again, this shows that Dionysos is part of a cult tradition to Nonnos.

result of having lost his mother before he knew her; in this he differs from Achilles and Alexander who both were close to their respective mothers.[59] The gender of these mentors, though personally meaningful for Dionysos, is incidental in the broader scope. The primary idea that I wish to call attention towards is that Dionysos, like Achilles and Alexander, had didactic role-models from which he learned. Furthermore, these figures are superior to the mentors of Achilles and Alexander because they are mostly divine. Ino, for example becomes the goddess Leucothea,[60] a transformation which occurs in the *Dionysiaca* (*Nonn. D. 5.556-9*). Thetis, the mother of Achilles, is also a goddess and Rheia, the mother of Zeus, is a very prominent deity. Nonnos draws attention to the fact that Rheia, who he describes as "the mother of the greatest" (*Nonn. D. 9.148*) also nursed Dionysos, saying: "Let the mother of Zeus be nanny to Dionysos-mother of Zeus and Nurse of her grandson." (*Nonn. D. 9.153-5*). In short, while all three figures had mentors, Alexander had a man, Achilles had a centaur, but Dionysos had goddesses attending to him.

C. Layers of Imitation

In synthesis, the reason the stories of these three characters overlap is because both Alexander and the Dionysos of Nonnos were imitating Achilles. Alexander's imitation of Achilles is widely established, even in the classical sources; and I discussed Dionysos's imitation of Achilles in the previous chapter. The fact that they both share this trait does not discredit Dionysos's imitation of Alexander, however, but rather strengthens their connection, demonstrating that, in Nonnos' mind, they are both part of the same tradition. In fact, in my

59 The relationship of Achilles to Thetis is highlighted in the *Iliad* by the hero running to his mother and complaining about his misfortunes. Alexander was specifically close to Olympias siding with her over his father, with whom he was often in open conflict, and in fact was briefly exiled for. Some historians cite that it is only because of Olympias' machinations that Alexander succeeded his father rather than his younger half-brother. Also added to this, Thetis and her nymphs are named among Dionysos's nursemaids (*Nonn. D. 20. 350 ff* and *Nonn. D. 21. 170 ff*). Furthermore, Thetis's own name is believed to be derived from "τίτθη" via "τήθη" meaning "nurse".

60 Leucothea is the goddess who helps Odysseus ashore to the land of the Phaeaecians (*Hom. Od. 5.533 ff*).

opinion, Nonnos exploits the similarities among Dionysos, Alexander, and Achilles in order to emphasize the god's superiority to these two greatest of men. For example, Dionysos outdid the funeral games of Achilles, Alexander similarly tried to outdo Achilles' games. In the end, Dionysos outdoes both. Moreover, Achilles and Alexander are taught by mortal beings, Dionysos learned from gods, and not just any, but mostly from the mother of supreme Zeus himself.

IV. The Indian War

A. The Primacy of the Indian Expedition

The single event which fundamentally is at the center of Nonnos' plot is Dionysos's campaign in India. This more than anything else suggests that Nonnos deliberately set up a comparison between Dionysos and Alexander because it is a central episode in Alexander's life and it is paralleled nowhere else in classical literature; only Dionysos and Alexander invaded India. Furthermore, before the *Dionysiaca*, there are very few mentions of Dionysos in India.[61] The first Greek[62] reference to this is found in Strabo, the 1st century AD geographer, who not only links the campaigns of Alexander in India to those of Dionysos and Heracles but also goes on to say that "the expedition of Dionysos and Herakles to the country of the Indians looks like a mythical story of later date" (*Strab.11.5.5*), showing that even Strabo seemed to believe that the story of Dionysos in India came about after Alexander's campaign. Before this, most Greek sources only mention that Dionysos traveled in Thrace and Phrygia; Euripides (*Eur. Bacc. 14ff*)

61 These references include: *Pausanias, Description of Greece 10. 29. 4 , Philostratus, Life of Apollonius of Tyana 2. 6-10, 2.33, 3-13, Pseudo-Hyginus, Fabulae 131, 191, Ovid, Metamorphoses 4. 20 ff ,4. 605 ff; Seneca, Oedipus 112 ff, Oedipus 425 ff; Seneca, Phaedra 753 ff; Pliny the Elder, Natural History 4. 39, 6. 59.*

62 Ovid, writing around the same time as Strabo makes reference to the Indian campaign of Dionysos in his *Metamorphoses* (*Ov. Met. 4. 20 ff , and Ov. Met. 4. 605*). These references are brief though and, while likely inspired by some earlier Greek source, still are long enough after the campaign of Alexander to not interfere with the interpretation that such stories arose after Alexander's own campaign.

mentions Asia but without specifying India. Early sources on Dionysos predating the campaigns of Alexander himself mention neither India nor a campaign. Later sources, however, take for granted that these stories predate Alexander and that Alexander was, himself imitating Dionysos by invading India. Pliny the Elder, for example, wrote, "(Alexander the Great) proved the conqueror of India, thus treading in the footsteps of Father Liber and of Hercules" (*Pli. Nat. 4.17.39*), and going on to even give an exact amount of time between the conquest of India by both Dionysos and Alexander: "From the time of Father Liber to that of Alexander the Great, one hundred and fifty-three kings of India are reckoned, extending over a period of six thousand four hundred and fifty-one years and three months." (*Plin. Nat. 6.21.69*). Plutarch even records that Alexander himself was aware that the invasion of India was an imitation of Dionysos by writing that Alexander said:

> I imitate Heracles, and emulate Perseus, and follow in the footsteps of Dionysus, the divine author and progenitor of my family, and desire that victorious Greeks should dance again in India and revive the memory of the Bacchic revels among the savage mountain tribes beyond the Caucasus.[63]

Nevertheless, all the surviving sources describing Alexander as an imitator of Dionysos are late, having been written at least two hundred years after Alexander's death, and a few hundred years before Nonnos. Personally, I believe that the idea of Dionysos being in or going to Asia existed before Alexander but that there were no specific narratives of Dionysos in India to imitate. Instead, Alexander was using the ambiguity of the mythology to create a set of deeds equal to a god, and therefore lend grandeur to his own actions, which is perhaps another reason that he declared that he found Nysa in India despite no other sources placing it in India. As a result, I am convinced that Nonnos was imitating Alexander and all the stories which had been told of his excursion into India.

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63 Plutarch, *On the Fortune of Alexander,* from *Moralia 332a.*

B. Alexander in India as an Impetus for Stories about Dionysos

Furthermore, I believe that because Alexander's conquest became linked to the story of a theoretically earlier Dionysiac campaign, it is very likely that the popularity of myths about Alexander led to later stories about Dionysos invading India becoming more widespread. I believe that this is the case and that the *Dionysiaca* was directly influenced by this trend. The evidence, as I have discussed earlier, is the lack of extant texts (or even references to once extant texts) concerning Dionysos in India before Alexander, and the appearance of references afterward, very often in connection to Alexander's own campaign.

Even with these late references to a Bacchic Indian expedition, we do not have any central text, or even extended narrative, describing what Dionysos did when he was in India. It cannot be that the Greeks were unaware of India prior to Alexander, for the first references to the land come in the 6th c. BC in Aesop's *Fables* (*Aesop. Prov. 41*) and the fragments of Hecataeus' *Περίοδος γῆς* (*Hecat. frag.296.1, frag.299.2*), and Herodotus discussed the land in some detail. Still, I believe that the Greek conception of India up to the time of Alexander was roughly equivalent to the American conception of Japan up to the time of the Second World War- that is to say, one of mystery and mythic tales. The act of invading India demystified the land and inspired popular interest in it. It was in this environment of interest that Nonnos wrote. The apparent lack of clear details on Dionysos's excursion gave Nonnos latitude to write his own epic story without conflicting with an already preeminent source. But just as Nonnos borrowed liberally from the epics of Homer, likewise he turned to stories about Alexander's Indian Campaign to create Dionysos's Indian Campaign. In further support of this, since Nonnos

demonstrates personal ignorance of India in his writings,[64] it is likely that he lacked firsthand knowledge of India. Therefore, I believe Nonnos would have had to use other sources to get his information about India, and it seems plausible that he would have extracted this information from writings about Alexander's travels, which would have been ripe sources of details about the land itself.

C. The Catalog of Indians

Using the corpus of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, I have done the first study that I am aware of to see exactly what prominent places from the primary narrative of Alexander's campaigns made it into Nonnos. A surprising number did, in fact, get transferred between accounts. Notable ethnic groups that factored into Alexander's conquests such as the Massagetai, Sibai, Illyrians, Taulanti, Parsii, and Baktrians all make an appearance. The technical hiccup which occurs, however, is that Nonnos is neither a strategist nor a geographer. Unlike the winding campaigns of Alexander, Nonnos opted for the more direct approach of simply having all the Indian (and otherwise) tribes amassed in one place under an Indian King. In fact, Nonnos spends the entirety of Book 26 creating a "Catalog of Indians"[65] in which he lists the Indian nations amassed and talks about the exploits of their heroes. This giant multiethnic mass contained not only tribes from India but also Arabia and North Africa, which was either part of Nonnos' attempt to channel the widespread power of the Persian army which Alexander fought

64 Most notably, Nonnos seems to have believed that Indians are extremely dark skinned, like Ethiopians. On top of this, he did not have a clear spatial sense of real Indian geography.

65 I refer to this list as such because it seems to parallel the "Catalog of Ships" in book 2 of the *Iliad*. Nonnos does this, I believe, to show how great the army was that Dionysos conquered. I believe it is safe to conclude that Nonnos was trying to elaborate on how truly huge the Indian army was because, while he does not give specific troop strengths, the sheer number of nationalities that he mentions implies a truly massive host and is in many ways reminiscent of the 1,700,000 man army Xerses raises described in book 7 of Herodotus. Since this host may be likely interpreted as greater than that which Achilles or Alexander fought, I believe, it shows how tremendously great the task was to conquer them.

into the Indian Army which Dionysos fought, or just geographic ignorance. Furthermore, Nonnos adds a lot of extra names of Indian places and tribes into the mix. Mostly these tribes all conveniently come to Dionysos, presumably to save Dionysos the effort of having to go to them. Furthermore, Nonnos conveys the idea that his Dionysos is not only fighting more Indians than Alexander did, but also that he was fighting them all at once. Going through these apparently vestigial names of supplementary Indian tribes, I wondered where Nonnos had acquired them. Again using the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, I found a pattern of sources with only ten outlying regional/tribal names which occur nowhere besides Nonnos[66]. All the other names, thirty-four by my count, occur elsewhere in Greek writings before Nonnos. Almost all of these names, not surprisingly, occur in the same few texts by Strabo, Arrian, Plutarch, Ptolemy, Diodorus Siculus, Dionysius Periegetae, and Pausanius (and often the same name occurs in all or most). Further unsurprising is that several of these are Alexandrian geographers, making it seem likely that Nonnos would have had access to their texts (and further validating him writing from Alexandria). What is more, Arrian, Plutarch, and Diodorus Siculus all had written substantial and definitive works on Alexander the Great's life and conquests, and the other authors (being geographers) were more than aware of Alexander and his travels.

D. Tactics and the Battle of the Hydaspes

The single greatest clue in the Indian Campaign that Nonnos models his Dionysos on Alexander is the battle at the Hydaspes. Although many of its details are Homeric rather than Alexandrian, the location, the combatants, and the outcome solidly link it to Alexander, who himself fought a battle at the Hydaspes in 326 BC. For example, beyond being located at the

66 This includes Ombelos, Baidios, Rhodoe, Orycie, Dussaioi, Hysporos, Areizanteia, Eukollos, Goryandis, Eristobarea.

same river, this battle secures the victory of the Indian Campaign for both Dionysos and Alexander. It also is directly overseen by the Indian king (Deriades for Dionysos and Porus for Alexander). Both these kings end up submitting to their conquerors, but only after losing their son. In Nonnos, Deriades' son is named Orontes, which is, not surprisingly, the name of a general who fought against Alexander at the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BC. Both battles at the Hydaspes also included elephants, a unique detail which Nonnos almost certainly took from Alexandrian accounts. Where Nonnos' account begins to diverge from those of Alexander is in the details of the warfare itself.

While historians emphasized Alexander's skill as a warrior, describing such feats as being the first to scale the walls during the siege of Malli in 326 BC[67] as well as fighting so fiercely that he received eight serious wounds, the primary strength of Alexander was his strategy and brilliance as a general. In fact, Alexander only won the Battle at the Hydaspes because of his superior tactics, even though he had inferior numbers. Putting the tactics in simple terms, Alexander encamped across the monsoon-swollen Hydaspes, opposite of Porus's army. After some time, the Indians became convinced that Alexander was waiting for the river level to lower before fording. Alexander then left part of his army behind and secretly moved most of his army downstream and forded there. The Indian army became trapped between the two forces and was either destroyed or captured.

Unlike Alexander however, Dionysos does not employ strategy to win this battle, but instead Achillean valor. In fact, the main action of the combat is Dionysos charging into the Hydaspes and having a grand aristeia with help from Aiacos. In this narrative, very little mention is given to Dionysos's troops, and they seem to have almost no bearing on the action of the battle. The explanation for Nonnos' emphasis on Dionysos's heroic individuality is

67 *Arr. 6.11.1, Diod. 17.99.4* and, *Curt. 9.5.20.*

threefold: firstly, it is more exciting to read about the exploits of a single character than about those of an entire army maneuvering around another; secondly, it emphasizes Dionysos's personal strength, as though he single-handedly won the battle; and finally, I do not believe that Nonnos had even the most distant understanding of warfare beyond what he was able to glean from reading literature. Strategy is completely absent. Despite this, Dionysos is not rendered less than Alexander. On the contrary, even though Dionysos has a huge army, he is so personally powerful that he almost seems as though he does not need it. In the tradition of Achilles, being able to carry the weight of the battle on his own shoulders renders Dionysos more impressive than Alexander.

V. Dionysos and Alexander: Generals, Conquerors, Administrators

In the creative hands of Nonnos, Dionysos, the god of masks, added several masks to his repertoire in order to play and outperform parts filled by others such as Alexander. As I have discussed, Nonnos had a fairly blank slate upon which to construct the story of an Indian Campaign, and he did so by adding new facets to this many-faced god. As I have mentioned, Nonnos alludes to this at the very beginning of his work by invoking Proteus and by describing the many forms which Dionysos can assume. To Dionysos's already diverse portfolio, Nonnos adds hero, general/conqueror, administrator and savior to the list. I have already discussed Dionysos as a hero, and will approach the idea of salvation[68] later; right now I will discuss his roles as a general and administrator.

A. Dionysos the General

68 While some might argue that Dionysos already had this role in the 5th c. BC. I use the term "savior" very selectively, and would argue that it was not until the rise of mystery religions that the idea of spiritual salvation and pleasant afterlives also arose.

Despite highlighting Dionysos as a warrior, Nonnos constantly draws attention to the idea that Dionysos is a general in charge of a large group of "soldiers," even though he has only slightly more interplay with his troops than Achilles has with his Myrmidons. In fact, Nonnos' representation of Dionysos as a general is one of the characteristics of Nonnos' Dionysos that distinguishes him from other, earlier representations. While traditionally Dionysos does have a ragtag band of Bassarids gathered around him, these followers generally have neither the organization nor the structure which is inherent to a military unit. While the traditional maenads may be described as zealous in their fervor, they exhibit this only in an animalistic, not a militant, way. In many ways, one may argue that recreating the maenads as an organized body of soldiers is antithetical to the traditional character of Dionysos as a dissolver of structure. Recreating this aspect of both Dionysos and his followers is, however, necessary for Nonnos in order to make him a conqueror like Achilles and Alexander. Furthermore, it is essential for Dionysos's role as a cult figure, which is an aspect of his persona to which I will return in the next chapter.

B. Dionysos the Administrator

Beyond becoming a general, Nonnos' Dionysos, the god who under normal circumstances breaks down social order, also becomes a social organizer in order to follow in Alexander's legacy. Despite Nonnos' apparent lack of understanding military procedure, Dionysos wins the battle of the Hydaspes, and like Alexander, he does not destroy his enemy's land and city. Robert Shorrock has commented on this, saying: "The lack of Posthomeric allusion from Nonnus' cycle highlights the fact that Dionysos is a benign victor, who operates under a different ethical code (than the Greeks at Ilium). Dionysos does not destroy his enemies,

he seeks to pacify them; he does not raze the city to the ground but leaves the fabric and social structure largely intact, assigns the city a pious governor, and holds a reconciliatory feast for both sides [40.235-6]."[69] Although Shorrock does not apparently make the connection, the actions which he describes and attributes as Nonnos forging his own way as an author (in the absence of a canonical Posthomeric narrative) are, in fact, those regularly employed by Alexander the Great.

After converting the Indians to his worship, Dionysos follows in Alexander's steps by setting up a governor, Modaios, who was an Indian rather than a Greek (*Nonn. D. 32.175*). By doing this, not only did Dionysos establish an administrative infrastructure rather than destroying the land, as Ilium was destroyed, but he also allowed the Indians to (fundamentally) continue being self-ruled. Nonnos' motives in this, as an author, I believe, were different from Alexander's, as a conqueror. Alexander wisely knew that a native would understand the workings of his own land better than a foreigner, and that allowing stable continuation of power would engender trust and cooperation rather than resentment of subjugation. For Dionysos, however, there is a far more moral aspect to his conquering, almost as though it was not just for the physical conquest but also the spiritual one. Dionysos did not conquer India for the same reason as Alexander; instead, he was propagating his cult and spreading his religion, which I believe Nonnos would view as a higher calling. This commission is divinely sent directly from Zeus via Iris, the messenger of the gods, who instructs him to, "teach all nations the sacred dances of the vigil and the purple fruit of the vintage" (*Nonn. D. 13.6-7*); this directive was aimed at the Indian nations, and is the impetus of Dionysos's excursion. As a result, Dionysos's own calling was one of spiritual enlightenment of towards the "Indians, untaught of piety" (*Nonn. D. 13.20*). I consider this aspect of Nonnos' Dionysos essential, and, as a result, will return to this topic later. First I want to discuss the ideas of birth and succession in reference to

69 Shorrock (2001) 90.

Dionysos and Alexander.

VI. The Divine Birth Stories of Dionysos and Alexander

Dionysos also shares a common birth story with Alexander; but it is not the story of his birth by Semele which suggests this comparison, but rather an earlier birth by a different mother.[70] I believe that this birth story was created by Nonnos in order to better align him with Alexander.

Plutarch tells us that Olympias, the mother of Alexander, had a dream in which her womb was struck by lightning (*Plut. Alex. 2.2*);[71] afterward Philip of Macedon, her husband, spied Olympias lying with a snake (*Plut. Alex. 2.4* and *3.1*). According to Plutarch, as well as most other sources, this snake, which was Zeus in disguise, impregnated her with Alexander.

While the most common birth story of Dionysos is that of his transplant from the fiery womb of Semele to the thigh of Zeus, Nonnos also tells another birth story of another Dionysos, the elder Dionysos, whom Nonnos often refers to as Zagreus. The story of his conception and birth takes up the last part of book 5 and all of book 6 of the *Dionysiaca*. The most interesting part of this comes in book 6 lines 155-68, which describes how Persephone was impregnated by Zeus in the form of a serpent:

> Ah maiden Persephoneia! You could not find how to escape your mating![72] No, a dragon[73] was your mate, when Zeus changed his face and came, rolling in a many a loving coil thrugh the dark to the corner of the maiden's chamber, and shaking

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

71 The thunderbolt, a clear sign of Zeus, also has a distant resonance with Semele, who also received a lightning bolt to the womb. Being physical rather that oneiric, the effects on Semele are, not shockingly, fatal.

72 The rather unforgivable tactic of drugging maidens and "unloosing their chaste girdle" while they slumber is a practice which Dionysos also employs, much to the chagrin of Nicaea and Aura.

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

> his hairy chaps: he lulled to sleep as he crept the eyes of those creatures of his own shape who gaurded the door. He licked girl's form gently with wooing lips. By this marriage with the heavenly dragon, the womb of Persephone swelled with living fruit, and she bore Zagreus the horned baby, who by himself climbed upon the throne of Zeus and brandished lightning in his little hand

By the later classical world, it was rationalized that there were two Dionysoses, an earlier and a later.[74] Zagreus, the earlier Dionysos, was a figure attested in many other classical sources[75] and generally was seen as the son of Zeus and Persephone. He was also commonly the Dionysos linked to the Eleusinian Mysteries. In this vein, as part of his narrative of Alexander's conception, Plutarch notes that Olympias was a member of the Samothracian Mysteries, a mystery cult which worshiped both Dionysos and Persephone (*Plut. Alex 2.1*). Furthermore, Plutarch calls Olympias a "Mimallone" (*Plut. Alex. 2.5*), an obscure term for a Bacchant which Nonnos also uses (*Nonn. D. 1.34* and *45.31*). Plutarch specifically notes that Olympias was part of the orgiastic rights of Dionysos,[76] but he does not just say "Dionysos", but instead qualifies this, saying that she specifically reverenced the Dionysos "from the ancient times" (*Plut. Alex. 2.5*). The word Plutarch uses to describe the older cult-related Dionysos is παλαιός one of the words which Nonnos uses to describe Zagreus.

While these common details strengthen the bond between the two stories, the primary evidence that Nonnos used the story of Alexander as inspiration for his story of Zagreus is that this story is absent from all other narratives of Zagreus's birth. Because this story of Zagreus's birth has no clear external influence or parallel, besides the story of Alexander's birth, I believe that it is safe to conclude that the details are too close to be coincidental, and that therefore

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74 Diondorus Siculus has a wonderful delineation of this (*Diod. 3.63*).

75 A compelling aspect of this is that the majority of the sources referencing Zagreus are relatively late and include Pausanias, Hyginus, Clement of Alexandria, and Diodorus Siculus. This is an interesting collection of names because all of these authors wrote on geography and mythology, two subjects which Nonnos includes prominently in his work. More importantly, all included Alexander in their works, and Diodorus Siculus also happens to be one of Alexander the Great's most notable biographers.

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

Nonnos took these details in order to create a birth that evoked Alexander's own birth.

I believe Nonnos created this parallel because he wanted to strengthen the connection between his Dionysos and Alexander; in fact, I believe it would be strange if he did not, as the episode describing Zagreus's birth has no real bearing on the main action of the story otherwise. Going further with this concept, I believe that Nonnos viewed the relationship of Dionysos and Alexander as similar to that of Dionysos and Zagreus in that they are manifestations of the same being. In the case of Alexander, I believe Nonnos saw Alexander as a lesser manifestation in the tradition of Dionysiac rebirth. Nonnos betrays this with the emphasis he places on Dionysos's ability to take different forms and be reborn at different times.[77] This concept makes more sense when it is viewed in context of India, and specifically Shiva.

VII. Dionysos's Cult in India

A. Dionysianism: an Import or an Export?

To Nonnos, and very likely the rest of the Hellenistic world, Dionysos spread his worship into India as a result of his conquests.[78] The idea that Dionysos spread his religion to India is interesting because most modern scholars believe that Dionysos was originally a foreign god who was imported to Greece via overland trade with India through Thrace. According to this theory, the god which was imported was some iteration of Shiva.[79] This is compelling not only because Shiva was seen as both capable of destruction and redemption (and therefore exhibiting some of the dualistic polarity of Dionysos), but also because Shiva was and is believed to take

77 Nonnos makes this explicit in his introduction, where he invokes Proteus and describes all the forms Dionysos can take. The reincarnation of Zagreus as the later Dionysos is the other strong piece of evidence.

78 Nonnos has Iris commission Dionysos with the conversion of the Indians (*Nonn. D. 13.6-7*), and Alexander, during his Indian campaign, claims to have found Nysa where the Indian's still worshiped the religion which Dionysos had brought to them (Green (1974) 384.).

79 The association and similarities between these two deities is astounding; a book which explores this is Alain Danielou's *Gods of Love and Ecstasy: The Traditions of Shiva and Dionysus*. Also see Chapter IV of *The God of Ecstasy;*Evans (1988) 128-144.

the form of eight avatars which span the spectrum of beast to man to god.[80] In these forms, Shiva not only encapsulates the liminality, and theatricality of Dionysos but also the cyclical nature of death and revival inherent to his character.[81] Moreover, Shiva's mount was a bull and he was sometimes depicted as being physically androgynous,[82] both of these associations are extremely Dionysian. To cement this association, the followers of Dionysos, in Greece, were called "*bakkhoi*" (βακχοι) and the followers of Shiva, in India, were called "*bhaktas.*"[83]

B. Dionysos as an Indian God and Alexander as his Son

The connection of Dionysos to Shiva is interesting because, famously, when Alexander entered India he found a village which was overgrown with ivy, the sacred plant of Dionysos, and proclaimed that this was Nysa.[84] He also decreed that the local deity, which was doubtless Shiva, was one and the same as Dionysos, his purported forefather. This was a brilliant tool for gaining support and legitimacy in each region conquered. Nonnos, who was most likely ignorant of the idea that Dionysos came from India, probably did know this story of Alexander "identifying" Nysa in India. If the reader of Nonnos' time took the *Dionysiaca* as divinely inspired gospel truth about the life of Dionysos, and if the reader also knew of Alexander's travels, then the episode of Alexander discovering worshipers of Dionysos in India would validate that Dionysos had been there and that his cult of Dionysos was still alive and well. This would have been a testament to Dionysos's potency as a religious figure.

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80 Dionysos, as I have discussed many times before, is depicted in Nonnos as not only taking many froms (both animal and anthropomorphic) but also undergoes reincarnation (as Zagreus and Dionysos).

81 See J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (see Chapter LXIII)

82 This androgynous form is called "Ardhanarishvara" and is very similar in form to the European Sabbatic Goat diety sometimes called Baphomet.

83 Danielou, (1984) 16. Arthur Evans (1988) 133. Peter Green (1974) 128 and 478.

84 Bosworth (1988) 121-2. Green (1974) 384. Nysa was held to be either the name of the nurse or the town to which Dionysos was sent (after being reborn from Zeus' thigh) in order to be removed from Hera's awareness, and thus vengeance.

VIII. Dionysos and Alexander as Heirs Coming Home

Alexander and Dionysos were both kings who went abroad from their homelands to achieve great deeds; however, upon returning to Thebes, were refused their right to inherit their kingdoms. I believe that Alexander's and Dionysos's episodes at Thebes bond these two figures together, as well as reinforcing the superiority of Dionysos's divine power.

A. The Odyssean *Nostos*

After Dionysos's Indian Campaign and peripatetic travels, he has his homecoming to Thebes, an episode which takes up Books 44 through 46 of Nonnos. While the episode's basic content is taken from Euripide's *Bacchae*, for Shorrock it mirrors Odysseus's *nostos* to Ithaca.[85] Shorrock argues that Pentheus is equivalent to Penelope's suitors who were usurpers of the power of the true master of the household. Dionysos, being the son of Semele, was the rightful heir of Thebes, just as Odysseus was the true master of Ithaca. For Shorrock, this idea of legitimacy of succession is strong in Nonnos, mostly because he believes Nonnos was trying to justify his succession into the poetic heritage of Homer. For my purposes, however, the idea of succession fits very well with the topic of Alexander.

Alexander was wise enough to understand the idea of legitimacy being gained through blood relation. For this reason, he propagated[86] stories that suggested he was the ancestor of the kings or gods of the places he conquered. In Greece, he was the child of Zeus and the relative of Heracles and Dionysos. In Persia, there was a story that he was actually Darius' half brother,

85 Shorrock (2001) 97.

86 The propagation of these stories is demonstrated by Alexander's actions, though his biographers never directly state that he used this tactic as a play for legitimacy. Instead, his biographers simply accept each new layer of claims which they record Alexander to have made.

thus suggesting that the Persian Empire was not defeated by a foreigner but rather reclaimed by a long lost legitimate heir.[87] In Egypt, he became the son of either Ammon, or else Nectanebo, the last Pharoah of Egypt.[88] In India, Alexander was still brother to Darius but also became the son of Shiva.[89] As a result of this, Alexander relied heavily on fabricating blood ties to prove his own legitimacy of rule and, thereby, to discredit others.

B. The Inheritance of Thebes

In 338 BC, when Alexander returned from Thrace, a place often associated with Dionysos, to Thebes in order to quell a revolt, he invoked his supposed heritage with Dionysos to support that the rejection of his authority was invalid. In one account, an inhabitant named Ismenias came to Alexander pleading with him as descendant of Dionysos to stop the destruction of Thebes. Alexander, refused, responding that if they had know that he had descended from Heracles and Dionysos, they should not, as kinsmen, have rebelled against him.[90] In his wrath, Alexander followed in the footsteps of Euripides's Dionysos, and destroyed Thebes.

In Nonnos, Dionysos's episode in Thebes employs the same logic used by Alexander. Notably, Nonnos draws attention to the idea that Pentheus is usurping power in Thebes, a theme absent from Euripides, and emphasizes that Dionysos is the legitimate heir to the rule. The details of Nonnos' account show much more of a militant conquest of Thebes than Euripides shows, including assault of the city with his bassarid army. The destruction of the city itself, however, is far more divinely powerful than the destruction wrought by Alexander; Dionysos causes earthquakes and flames shoot from fissures in the ground (*Nonn. D. 45.323-358*). This

87 This story comes down to the modern world through the Persian Shahnameh Epic.
88 In this story the pharaoh is disguised as Ammon when he goes in to Olympias.
89 Pillai (1937) 955-97.
90 Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Alexander Romance,* 1.46

raw display of power trumps Alexander's destruction of Thebes but this is not the essential way in which Dionysos is shown as superior to Alexander; this aspect is less overtly shown.

IX. Dionysos and Alexander as Saviors and Destroyers

In Nonnos, just as in Euripides, when Pentheus, and therefore Thebes,[91] rejects Dionysos as their king, they do not merely reject his rule; they also reject his veneration, his cult, and even his very divinity. In this there is an interesting aspect that transcends the merely physical display of power. While both Dionysos and Alexander seek acceptance as legitimate heirs, Dionysos's power exists on two levels. The most superficial is the physical kingship of Thebes but the more important is an idea of his acceptance as a god. Nonnos says that Dionysos didn't genuinely care about the physical kingdom of Thebes (*Nonn. D. 46.63-5*):

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

As a result, it is more the Thebans rejecting him as a god and as the inheritor of his heavenly father's kingdom that causes the problems.

If one looks at the grand purpose behind what Dionysos does in the *Dionysiaca*, it becomes apparent that he conquers not in order to be a king with great land holding; instead, Dionysos is a king of a different kind. He has only conquered when he has successfully converted a people to his worship. Time and time again, Nonnos describes conversions to Dionysionism; the conversions of Staphylos, Icarios, and the Hydaspes, for example, are the most notable. Oddly enough, the first convert is not even converted by Dionysos himself, but oddly enough before Dionysos is even born to a Dionysos of a different name. Nonnos writes

91 As J.G.. Frazer notes : “The king and the land are one.”

how Dionysos's grandfather, Cadmus, while on his search for Europa, visited the Egyptian Thebes and was initiated into the orgiastic rites of Osiris,[92] who Nonnos identifies as the "Egyptian Dionysos" (*Nonn. D. 4.269-70*).[93] Cadmus was so affected by this experience that it led him to found his own Thebes, an imitation of its namesake. This story is revealing because it shows how orgiastic rites, to Nonnos, are part of an ongoing tradition. Years before Dionysos's own birth, his mortal grandfather was initiated into Dionysos's own sacred rites. Dionysos, like Thebes, is a manifestation of the same tradition, in different places, and often under different names. Furthering this concept, Nonnos explicitly says that Dionysos did not create his own mysteries but rather was taught them by his nursemaids, first Mystis[94] (*Nonn. D. 9.111-31*), and then Cybele/Rheia (*Nonn. D. 9.160-246*). In his youth, Dionysos then spreads the rites to the satyrs; the Corybants of Cybele also join his company. Then he receives a great commission from Iris to "teach all nations the sacred dances of the vigil and the purple fruit of the vintage" (*Nonn. D. 13.6-7*) including the "Indians, untaught of piety" (*Nonn. D. 13.20*). Besides the more sweeping cultural conversions Dionysos makes in India and on his way home, he also directs many personal conversions including, notably, Icarios's conversion.

A. Icarios

Icarios, the Athenian farmer to whom Dionysos gives the gift of wine-making, has a double role. Firstly, he is an inheritor of a sacred cult activity. Several times Nonnos draws a comparison between Triptolemos and Icarios (Nonn. D. 27.283-6):

92This is reason why Dionysos does not go to Egypt on his way home, as it has already been propagated with his cult.

93Herodotus and Strabo make the same connection.

94Mystis, who like many other characters which have names significant to Dionysos's cult (for example Ampelos, Carpus, and Staphylos) seems to have been created by Nonnos. Her name "μύστις" means "cult initiate". In this context she is a maid of Ino (Leukothea) who teaches Dionysos before he is taken by Hermes to Rheia to escape the wrath of Hera (*Nonn. D. 9.132-8*).

> Grant this grace to old Icarios, for one day Dionysos will give his rich bunches of fruit to him also. Remember Triptolemus and the good plowman Celeos, and do not insult the fruitful baskets of Metaneira.

and again later (Nonn. D. 47.45-55)

> Sir, I deem you happy, for your fellow citizens will celebrate, proclaiming aloud that Icarios has found fame to obscure Celeos, and Erigone to outdo Metaneira. I rival Demeter of the olden days because Deo too brought a gift, the harvest-corn, to another husbandman. Triptolemos discovered corn, you the winecheeked grape of my vintage. You alone rival Ganymedes in heaven, you more blessed than Triptolemos was before; for corn does not dissolve the sorrows that eat the heart, but the wine-bearing grape is the healer of human pain.

With these quotes, not only does Nonnos make Icarios better than Triptolemos but by extension Dionysos himself gives a better gift than Demeter. The presence of Demeter and the other names hint at another comparison which Nonnos is making. Demeter was one of the main deities revered in the Eleusinian mysteries. Furthermore, Celeos and Metaneira were the king and queen of Eleusis and Triptolemos was their son. According to the story in *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* Celeos founded the Eleusian Mysteries. By making Dionysos's gift, a gift which portends to heal all human sorrow, better than that of Demeter, Nonnos also shows that Dionysos's cult is like Demeter's, and I would argue part of the same tradition, but also better. Nonnos shows how he believed in a link to the cult of Eleusis and how Dionysos would bring salvation to them through his cult (*Nonn. D. 27.304-7*):

> then the citizen of Eleuto shall sing a hymn of salvation, calling Euoi for Apuraturios the faithful son of Thyone, if Athens shall celebrate in Phrygian tune, after her Limnian Bacchos, Dionysos of Eleusis

B. Staphylos

Another very important conversion is that of the household of Staphylos. In book 18, Staphylos invites Dionysos into his house because he "heard of the unweaponed host of Satyrs,

the holy secrets of the vine and the Euian gear of Lyaios." (*Nonn. D. 18.5-6*). A grand feast follows, and then Staphylos dies and what follows is both an etiology of wine-terms as well as a conversion scene which cuts to the heart of Dionysianism (*Nonn. D. 19.23-41*):

> You have come to me, dear Bacchos, as a great light! Grief holds me no more, pain no more, now Dionysos has appeared! You have come to me dear Bacchos as a great light; for by your potion of healing wine I have quieted my tears. I mourn no more for my husband, no more for a father's death, even Botrys I will give up if it be your pleasure; for I have Bacchos as father and son both, aye and husband. I will go with you even to your house if it be your pleasure. I would join the company of Bassarids. If it be your will, I will lift your sacred gear and your lovely fruit, I will press my lips to the hoboy of the winepress. Leave me not a widow, that I may not cherish a double grief, my husband perished and Dionysos gone! You have Botrys for a servant. Let him learn the dances, the sacred rites and sacred things, and if you please, the Indian War; let me see him laughing in the inebriated winepress treading hard on the offspring of your vintage! Remember old Pithos, and leave him not untaught of your rites or without a share of your delicious wine.

Dionysos responds by granting this request (*Nonn. D. 19.50-8*):

> I will make you pourer of wine, next after Hebe goldenthrone. You shall rise a satellite star for Lyaios of the vine, ever by my side to serve the Bacchanal cups, and for man's joy, the surfeit of wine, shall bear your name Methe. I will give the name of Botrys to the careconsoling fruit of my vintage, and I will call Staphylos the cranberry bunch of grapes, which is the offspring of the grapevines full of juicy liquor. Without Methe I shall never be able to feast, without Methe I will never rouse the merry revels.

In many ways, this household represents the ideal Dionysiac conversion and the idea that Dionysos in Nonnos attempts to bring all peoples into his cult, and in so doing, save them from their woes. In the same token, directly following this episode is an episode in which Dionysos's rites are rejected.

C. The Rejection of Lycurgus and Pentheus

In the episode of Lycurgus, Dionysos goes to Lycurgus because he thinks that Lycurgus

wants to learn the sacred rites as well. This is based on a deceptive invitation Dionysos receives: "Brother, son of Zeus Allwise, put war aside and celebrate your rites with Lycurgus, a willing host." (*Nonn. D. 20.267*). Despite being rejected, he nonetheless went for the purposes of proselytizing. In the same vein, because Dionysos's main goal throughout the epic is to bring people into his cult, he returns to Thebes not only to receive his homecoming, but also to proselytize among his own family. Even though Pentheus rejects him, Nonnos highlights the idea of Dionysos initiating Agaue and the Theban women into his cult (*Nonn. D. 45.1-30*).

As a result, Dionysos's actions in Thebes go far beyond Alexander's action. While Alexander was seeking physical legitimacy as a political ruler, Dionysos had a higher calling. Therefore, the ownership of the physical place, as with any other place that Dionysos conquered was not the central issue. Instead, it was the acceptance of a spiritual kingship.

X. The Liminality of Dionysos and Alexander: Foreign yet Native

As much as Alexander and Dionysos both engage in a struggle to establishing legitimacy as Zeus's heirs, they both also shift between the ambiguous categories of being both foreign yet Greek, a status which Nonnos also shares as an Egyptian Greek. In the case of Alexander, ethnically he was a Macedonian. Macedonia, just north of Thessaly, is part of modern Greece but was not considered so in the classical period. While they worshiped the same gods and widely used Greek as their language,[95] as Borza has noted in direct reference to Macedon, "the use of the Greek language as a form of written expression does not by itself identify the ethnicity of a culture."[96] Furthermore, there is evidence that the Macedonians had their own language. In

95 Lewis & Boardman (2000) 730.
96 Borza (1992) 94.

fact, Curtius Rufus,[97] makes reference to the Macedonian language as being audibly unintelligible to Greek speakers during his narrative of Philotas' trial (Quintus Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* 7.5.33) Also, there are remnants of this language which have been preserved, mainly by the grammarian Hesychius of Alexandria.[98] Having a foreign tongue was only one of the sources of contention between Macedonians and Greeks; the main issue seems to have been the idea of kingship. To the democratic Athenians of the 3rd century BC, the Macedonians having a king seemed barbaric. Demosthenes, in his Olynthaic and Philipic orations, argued that Philip was a barbarian, equal to and perhaps in league with the Persian king (*Dem. 3.16, 3.24, 4.40, and 4.48*). He implied that Philip was a foreign tyrant attempting to conquer over Greece, rather than a Greek waging war on fellow Greeks. Alexander, as the son of Philip, no doubt inherited this image.

Ethnically there may not be any noticeable difference between Greek and Macedonian; in fact, it is possible that they had common ancestors with the Greeks.[99] During this time, however, it is clear that there was a sense that Macedonians were less cultured foreigners, which is perhaps why Philip imported Greeks like Aristotle to educate Alexander. Alexander's grandfather, Alexander I, himself tried to assert the Greekness of his Macedonian family by taking part in the Olympics, an event only open to Greeks. To do this he therefore had to prove his heritage as a Greek, which he did by tracing his lineage though the Argives back to Heracles (*Hdt. 5.22*). But Alexander's mutable heritage does not end here. As I have noted previously, Alexander also claimed heritage from Zeus, Achilles, Dionysos, Shiva, and Nectanebo as well as stating that he

97Despite being a Latin author, I do not believe citing him here conflicts with the doubtfulness that Nonnos read Latin, even though I am of the belief that he could. In this context, though, it is a separate discussion.

98Modern scholars know that this language is Indo-European and believe it to be a cousin of the Doric dialect of Greek. Roisman & Worthington (2010) 95.

99 Borza (1992) 84.

was the brother of Darius. Beyond this he is venerated in Buddhism[100] and is mentioned in the Koran as a prophet.[101] In a way, Alexander, became whatever he wanted to be in order to serve his purpose; consistently claiming native status and yet always being foreign, straddling the line between man and god.

Dionysos shares this characteristic. Even though Nonnos clearly depicts him as Greek, Dionysos spends almost no time in Greece until the very end of the book when he returns from his travels. Otherwise, after his first birth from Semele, the god is immediately taken from Greece and raised as in Phrygia (*Nonn. D. 9.188*), only returning after having achieved fame and glory from foreign lands. This connection is interesting, as I have previously noted, because of Alexander's discovery of an ivy filled village in India which he identified as Nysa, the cradle of Dionysos.[102] In doing this he linked the local god, which was likely Shiva, with Dionysos. Furthermore, as I have mentioned, Nonnos links Osiris with Dionysos, stating that they are the same god (*Nonn. D. 4.269-70*).

Like Alexander, Nonnos' Dionysos takes many faces. Nonnos highlights this many-sided nature in the opening section of his work, as I have mentioned, invoking Proteus, and describing the forms his god can take. He continues this theme with devout consistency throughout the entire work, using terms like ποικίλος (changeable)[103] and πολύτροπος (many-wayed)[104] many times. Despite this ability to cross boundaries, Dionysos and Alexander remain liminal, at the threshold of two states yet never fully crossing into one or the other. This is why the episode at Thebes is so important. For Alexander, it highlighted his rejection as a foreigner despite his

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100 See the article "The Participation of Ancient Macedonians in the Olympiads and their Contribution to the Greek Cultural Heritage" by Nicholas Martis Former Minister of Macedonia-Thrace.

101 Roisman & Worthington (2010) 122.

102 Bosworth (1988), 121-2.; Green (1974) 384.

[103] Nonnos uses forms of this word 88 times, using such suggestively metamorphic language as ποικίλον ὕμνον (a changing song, *Nonn. D. 1.15*) and ποικίλον εἶδος (a changeable form, *Nonn. D. 15.182*).

[104] Nonnos uses forms of this word 21 times, including in book 1 line 14, to describe Proteus.

claims to be native. Dionysos shares the feeling of rejection at being treated as a decadent Asiatic rather than a native Greek, but it is more than this. As with the story of Nicaea (*Nonn. D. 16.171-3*), his masculinity is rejected and his effeminacy, his long hair and softness, are highlighted. Furthermore, as I have discussed, his birth is questioned; not only does Pentheus see him as a bastard offspring rather than a legitimate heir, he also believes him to be mortal rather than divine. In this episode in Thebes, so much more is at stake for Dionysos than for Alexander, a fact which highlights Dionysos's greatness above Alexander, as well as makes his victory the more meaningful.

Chapter III: Dionysos and Christ

I. Introduction

I have now come to the synthesis of all that I have argued and it comes down to adding a final piece which I have alluded to for a long time and which I believe helps understand Nonnos' mindset: Christianity. In scholarship, the similarities between Dionysos and Christ have been noted for a long time; this connection would be difficult to miss, considering that both religions flourished side by side during the period when Mystery Religions became popular. The *Dionysiaca* is a special case, however, because it was written after Christianity had become well established, and, as a result, I believe that the Dionysos which Nonnos created strongly reflects Christ. This is different because most scholars only turn to the sources on Dionysos which predate Christianity, and therefore view Christian beliefs as imitating Dionysian. Scholarship on Nonnos' Dionysos in comparison to Christ is almost non-existent except for another book by Robert Shorrock called *The Myth of Paganism: Nonnus, Dionysos, and the World of Late Antiquity*. This book does not directly compare Dionysos to Christ though, but rather compares the *Dionysiaca* to another work which Nonnos wrote called the *Paraphrase of the Gospel of St. John*. Shorrock does conclude that the similarity of phrasing between the two works suggests that he had the two figures in mind as reflections of each other. The problem is that it cannot be determined which work was written first, and whether the *Dionysiaca* mirrored the *Paraphrase* or vice versa. If Nonnos did have Christ in mind as he wrote about Dionysos, as I believe and Shorrock supports, then it is startling because it establishes that he was the earliest known person to make a connection between these two figures.

It is my goal not only to firmly establish that Nonnos recreated Dionysos in the image of

Christ, but also that he did not viewed these figures as mutually exclusive, but rather as offshoots of the same vine. I intend to go about this by comparing scenes and language from the *Dionysiaca* as well as the Bible to reveal both common stories and common themes. I do not intend to touch on the interplay of the *Paraphrase of the Gospel of St. John* with these works, as I feel that it has already been sufficiently covered by Shorrock.

II. Nonnos: Christian and Pagan

Dionysos and Alexander are not the only ones to cross liminal boundaries. Nonnos himself has intrigued scholars with his dual citizenship, as it were, in the realms of pagan and Christian. His location in a seat of Christian theology and the fact that his only other extant work is a paraphrase of the *Gospel of John* signal a belief in Christianity as well as Paganism. I believe that Nonnos did not view these beliefs as mutually exclusive but rather complementary. To him, I believe, figures likes Achilles, Alexander, Dionysos, and Christ were part of a tradition of semi-divine beings whose great works elevated them to full god status.[105] The belief that all religions are one, a belief called omnism, is not unusual today, and was mainly developed during the enlightenment by figures like William Blake.[106] In the 5th century, however, this view would likely have been rejected by other Christians, like the earlier Alexandrian theologian Clement of Alexandria, who spoke against the practices of the Dionysiac Cults. Despite this, I believe that Nonnos held the belief that many famous figures such as those I have discussed are part of a one tradition. In this vein of thought, I believe that Nonnos likely viewed Christ and Dionysos as synonymous, being different incarnations of the same being.

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[105] One might argue that any figure who achieves venerated status through good works can be included in this list; if one extends this belief beyond the scope of the figures Nonnos knew, one could argue that the Buddha as well as Mohammed, would easily fit into this same tradition.

[106] William Blake, a Romantic and Enlightened thinker, was both mystic as well as devoutly Christian. He expresses him Omnist tendencies in a work, very blatantly, called *All Religions are One* (1788).

III. A God by Any Other Name

The Bible itself can easily be used to support for the idea that Christ could be a pagan god under a different name. In *Acts 17:22-31*, when Paul is on the Areopagus of Athens, he argues with a Greek, named Dionysius, and tells him that the Greeks already worship Christ, but that he is their "Unknown God" (Ἄγνωστος Θεός). Nonnos could likely have taken this concept and run with it, extending this idea of the unknown god not actually being unknown, but actually Dionysos being a different name or manifestation of Christ. Nonnos himself acknowledges the concept of a god going by different names amongst different peoples. For Dionysos, he says that the Egyptians knew him as Osiris (*Nonn. D. 4.269-70*), and he goes into great detail in listing the different names of Zeus before going on to describe reincarnation (*Nonn. D. 40.392-8*):

> Belos on the Euphrates, called Ammon in Libya, thou art Apis by the Nile, Arabian Cronos, Assyrian Zeus! On thy fragrant altar, that thousand-year-old wise bird the phoenix lays sweet smelling woods with his curved claw, bring in the end of one life and beginning of another; for there he is renewed- he sheds old age in fire, and from the fire takes in exchange youthful bloom.

In one section, Nonnos melds the concepts of the same god having different names as well as the same being having different lives. Applying both these concepts to Christ and Dionysos, very plausibly makes them the same being in different lives and with different names.

IV. Established Connections between Christ and Dionysos

As I have noted, the connection between Christ and Dionysos is well established from other more well-known sources than the *Dionysiaca*. Euripides' *Bacchae* is perhaps the primary text used for evidence of this connection. In the *Bacchae*, Euripides describes Dionysos as a sacrificial bull while the Bible portrays Christ as a sacrificial lamb (*John 1:29*). A section of the

drama contains a prison escape that bears strong similarities to an escape described in *Acts 16:16-40*. Furthermore, the Dionysiac "sparagmos", ripping apart and eating of a victim, has been viewed as being similar to the eucharist of the Bible. Traditionally, this similarity was first thought to have been explored in the Middle Ages, during which the *Bacchae* was rewritten, presumably by theologians, into a *cento*, a work patched together from lines of other earlier works. This cento, called the *Christus Patiens*,[107] was used to teach Biblical stories about the suffering of Christ, and reworks the character of Dionysos, using lines about Dionysos, to portray Christ.

Later scholars, like J.G. Frazer, continued to support this connection; he saw the similarities between the stories of sacrifice and rebirth which both Christ and Dionysos share, as well as many other deities who have analogous stories. In *The Golden Bough*, Frazer lumps deities including Christ and Dionysos into a broad class of beings which he titled "Dying-Reviving Gods"[108]. Like Nonnos, Frazer saw the unity shared by stories of comparable gods from different cultures and within the *Dionysiaca*, Dionysos appears more Christ-like than in another other work written during the classical world.

V. Heavenly Kingdoms

As I have noted before, Dionysos rejects the physical kingship of Thebes, stating that his kingdom is in Olympus: "I need not the earthly palace of Pentheus; the home of Dionysos is in his father's heaven" (*Nonn. D. 46.63-4*). Likewise, Christ says, "My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36) "hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (*Matthew 26:64*). Dionysos is rejected by his own people

[107]The 19th century scholar J.G. Brambs speculated that it was composed in the 15th or 16th century (Brambs (1885) 5).
[108] See Chapter XXIV of Frazer's *The Golden Bough.*

and in his own home town, just like Christ, who, after being rejected in his hometown of Nazareth said, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." (*Mark 6:4*). Both Dionysos and Christ are "in the world, but not of it" so to speak; their purpose is not to receive a spatial terrestrial place to rule, so much as a body of believers which they can inspire and raise up through worship. It is through spreading their religion that they come into the inheritance of their fathers' kingdoms.

VI. The Lamb and the Bull: Love and Sacrifice

Christ and Dionysos are often associated with animals, specifically the sacrificial animals the lamb and the bull. Although gods and animals are at opposite ends of the spectrum, both bridge this gap and share the links of divine love and overcoming the lower incarnation of the god.

Nonnos, constantly makes reference to the concept that Dionysos is a tauroform deity, using epithets such as ταυροφυής (bull-formed) and mentioning that Dionysos has horns. Furthermore, during the episode of Ampelos, Ampelos is killed by a bull and then resurrected by Dionysos, who is bull-formed. It is during this episode, after the death of Ampelos, that Dionysos institutes the practices of sparagmos (ripping apart) and omophagia (raw-eating) of bulls. Furthermore, Dionysos is divine, but the bull form which he takes is an animal and therefore represents a lower physical form. The lust which Dionysos exhibits towards Ampelos is carnal, animalistic, and ultimately destructive; it is represented by the bull. The love which Dionysos has for Ampelos is divine and ultimately the key to salvation, this is the true Dionysos. Sacrificing this lower form symbolically shows the divine overcoming its lower, bestial form and giving way to the exclusively divine.

Similarly, Christians use the lamb as a symbol of Christ as a sacrifice, Christ, as a God, was incarnate in a lower form, the death of his lower form (i.e. the human form), burns away the impure part and allow the transcendence of the divine. Moreover, this transcendence of the god, paves the way for the transcendence of the mortal man. In elaboration on this concept, Ampelos is resurrected by the love of the god; in the Bible it is said that, "God is love" (*1 John 4:16*) and that eternal life is given from love and sacrifice: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (*John 3:16*).

VII. Wine: Blood and Enthusiasm

Wine is an important ritualistic part of both Christianity and Dionysianism; for both wine seems to be a type of metaphor for a being's vital life force as well as an affirmation of life itself. When Ampelos, whose name means "vine", dies and his body turns into the vine, his blood becomes the juice of the vine, the liquid used to make wine. In Christ said, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser." (*John 15:1*). Later Christ offers his disciples a cup of wine saying that it his blood: "This cup (of wine) is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (*1 Corinthians 11:25*). In the *Dionysiaca* itself, Nonnos draws attention to the similarity between blood and wine during the Icarios episode when he says, "(he) rolled half-dead in the floor of ruddy wine: his head sank under the shower of blows from his countrymen, and drops of red blood mingled with the red wine." (*Nonn. D. 47.127-30*).

In Greece, the association of wine with blood and both with remembrance of the dead was well established. Wine and blood both seem to carry a life force within it which is somehow synonymous. Besides the fact that wine looks like blood, even the modern term alcoholic

"spirits" reflects that alcohol is perceived as bearing a life force. This is why the libation bearers of Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* pour out wine on the grave of Agamemnon, as they believed the wine would soak into through the earth into the dry bones and restore memory to the dead. This is exactly why the shades in the underworld of the *Odyssey* drink the blood of the black ram and regain their memories (*Hom. Od. 11.24-50*). The Jews/Christians also associated blood with somehow holding the spirit/life-force of a living creature, and therefore made it ritualistically impure to drink the blood of a sacrifice: "Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood *is* the life; you may not eat the life with the meat." (Deuteronomy 12:23).

Despite this prohibition, Christ commanded his disciples to drink his "blood." The reason for this is, I believe, enthusiasm, or to use another term for it: inspiration. Enthusiasm, derived from Greek, literally means "to have a god inside"; inspiration, similarly, is to have a spirit put inside you. Enthusiasm is a central concept in both Christianity and Dionysianism.

For Dionysians drink the spirit of the god though the wine and are so enthused by the god; Christians follow a similar practice at the Eucharist. Christian enthusiasm/inspiration does not end here however, it also extends to the Holy Spirit, a divine breath which fills believers and which was first given during Pentecost (*Acts 2:1-31*). Similarly, in Nonnos, most conversions are accompanied by a scene in which the new initiate drinks wine and is filled with the spirit of Dionysos's wine.

VIII. Death and Rebirth

The themes of death and rebirth are important in the stories both of Christ and of Dionysos. Dionysos himself is twice-born δισσοτόκος (*Nonn. D. 1.4*) from the waters of the Semele's womb and the thigh of ethereal Zeus, a resurrected deity who once was Zagreus, then

was born Dionysos. Christ died and was resurrected and professed second birth by saying, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (*John 3:3*) and, "I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (*John 3:5-6*). Beyond the gods themselves is a larger concept of rebirth for those who accept the good news of their ministries. This is perhaps best demonstrated by Nonnos in the story of Staphylos.

IX. Staphylos and Lazarus

The story of Staphylos is similar to that of Lazarus, a rich man who took in Jesus and his followers, accepted his teachings and thereafter died and was resurrected. Staphylos was a rich king who invited Dionysos into his household to share his teachings and then dies. As part of this, Dionysos initiates Staphylos's family, using their names as names for part of his cult.[109] The initiation of this family, which I have discussed previously, also parallels many Christian ideas. In Methe's speech towards Dionysos asking for salvation and initiation, she says that Dionysos appears, "as a light" (*Nonn. D. 19.23 and 25*) a sentiment paralleled in the New Testament: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness" (*John 1:4-5*) and "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (*John 12:8*). Next, she says "by your potion of healing wine I have quieted my tears. I mourn no more" (*Nonn. D. 19.25-7*). This is mirrored by verses such as "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

109Staphylos "σταφύλος" means a "cluster" or "bunch" of grapes, Methe "μέθη" means "drunken-ness", Pithos "πίθος" means "wine jar", and Botrys "βότρυς" also means "grape cluster". It is a common trait in Nonnos to use or make up characters with cult-relevant names, for example Ampelos "ἄμπελος"- "grape vine", Karpos "καρπός"- "fruit", Kalamos "κάλαμος" - "reed", and Mystis "μύστις"- "initiate".

(*Matthew 5:4*), and "He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain" (*Revelation 21:4*). Wine in the Bible also is associated with healing and easing of sorrows, for example: "wine that makes glad the heart of man" (*Psalms 104:15*), "Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." (*Psalm 37:1*). Lastly, Methe says "I have Bacchos as father and son both, aye and husband as well", which is echoed in the Bible thusly: "For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother." (*Mark 3:35*). Furthermore at his funeral, the resurrection of Staphylos is sung of,[110] though not ever described. I believe the implication of this is not merely one of physically rebirth but more of spiritual salvation. Like the followers of Christ, Staphylos might experience a death of the body but his eternal soul has been lifted up by accepting the cult of Dionysos.

X. Christ and Dionysos: Healers and Conquerors of Faith

As I discussed in the chapter of Alexander, Dionysos went all around from India to Arabia to Greece to "conquer" but the purpose was conversion and giving out wine "a medicine has been planted to make long suffering mortals forget their troubles, to save their lives." (*Nonn, D. 7.55-6*) "the wine-bearing grape is the healer of human pain" (*Nonn. D. 47.54-5*). Likewise, "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people." (*Matthew 9:35*) and later gives a great commission to spread Christianity throughout the whole world (*Matthew 28:18-20*):

> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the

110 "Apollo brought back to life Hyacinthos: Staphylos will be made alive again for aye by Dionysos." *Nonn. D. 19.104-5*

> name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Finally, Dionysos, at the very end of his epic is taken up to Olympus, just as Christ was received into Heaven: "So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God." (*Mark 16:19*).

As much as Dionysos is depicted as a conqueror, so is Christ. In the Middle Ages, Christ, and Christ as the Angus Dei, is often shown bearing the banner of Christianity and the cross topped orb showing dominion of the world. Aldous Huxley, in a 1925 essay,[111] argued that Piero della Francesca's *Resurrection* was the greatest painting in the world because it depicted Christ as the embodiment of the divine in man, a standing conqueror. The Dionysos of Nonnos is akin to this, and it is not surprising as the Catholic Church developed a tendency, as it converted new nations, to incorporate pagan holidays and concepts which had been Christianized into their practices. Many holidays and pieces or ritual surviving in modern Church practice and society as a whole reflect this. In further support of this, as I have mentioned earlier, Euripides' *Bacchae*, like other pagan works, was taken and rewritten as a didactic Christian story, with Christ as Dionysos. These practices perhaps stem from the mindset that Christianity was inclusive rather than exclusive. As a result, in order to initiate new believers, Christians used paganism to build Christianity off of rather than completely supplanting it, a practice which would have most likely had a far lower success rate.

XI. Conclusion: The Rebirth of the God

As a result of all the similarities and even overlap between religions, Nonnos, I believe,

111 See Huxley's essay "The Best Picture" from his book *Along the Road: Notes and Essays of a Tourist.*

used the Christian idea of inclusiveness and saw the similarities between the manifestations of an incarnate god in Christianity in many other religions, choosing to view them all inclusively. For him, the manifestation of a god/prophet/hero occurs in cycles, much like the natural world which Dionysos personifies. He is the ouroboros, the tail devouring serpent, who dies and is reborn. With each birth and rebirth, whatever form he takes, he propagates an eternal cult by different names, but which imparts the basic truths about life and nature. Nonnos shows this by blurring the lines between father and son,[112] earlier and later incarnations of the same being,[113] and figures with separate followers but common traditions. At the end of his epic Nonnos shows this by describing the veneration of three different manifestations of Dionysos (*Nonn. D. 48.964-9*):

> they established sacrifices for Dionysos lateborn and Dionysos first born, and third they chanted a new hymn for Iakkhos. In these three celebrations Athens held high revel; in the dance lately made, the Athenians beat the step in honour of Zagreus and Bromios and Iakkhos all together.

While Nonnos explicitly says this about Dionysos, he shows how Dionysos is also Achilles, and Alexander, and Christ. Like Shiva's avatars, Dionysos is manifest in each of these incarnations, but not all incarnations are equal. Achilles and Alexander are lesser copies that bear the same divine being and Dionysos is the culmination and fulfillment of this entity. In this whirling image, Dionysos, Christ, Achilles, Osiris, Shiva,[114] Alexander and countless others become one, a nous from which all emanates, and becomes distilled down to an ideal form which manifests itself into a million faces.

112Zeus, Dionysos, and Iakkhos

113Zagreus and Dionysos

114 In further support of this, Shiva, according to tradition, had eight incarnations called avatars. He manifested himself in different forms at different times, for the good of humanity.

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