



Article

Io as Isis: A Lycophronean Myth in Nonnus

Arianna Magnolo

DIRAAS (Dipartimento di Italianistica, Romanistica, Antichistica, Arti e Spettacolo), University of Genoa, 16126 Genova, Italy; arymag@hotmail.it

Abstract: This article aims to examine one of the myths belonging to the first part of Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*, i.e., that of Io. Starting from the philological analysis of the passages dealing with this myth and adopting an intertextual approach, I will argue that the Panopolitan assimilates Io to Isis following Lycophron, one of the authors employed as a model in his poem. Finally, I will also explain the meaning of this choice inside Nonnus' work, taking into account its historical context. Nonnus wants to emphasize the role of Dionysus' lineage in the civilization process, giving it an historical relevance. Therefore, the allusion to Lycophron assimilates Cadmus (Dionysus' grandfather) to Alexander the Great, who is celebrated as a peacemaker in the *Alexandra*. Furthermore, Cadmus and his offspring can be connected to the Romans, who, at the time of Nonnus, played the same role in the rising Byzantine empire.

Keywords: Nonnus; *Dionysiaca*; Lycophron; *Alexandra*; Io; Isis; Intertextuality

1. Introduction

This article aims to examine one of the myths belonging to the first part of Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*, i.e., that of Io. The *Dionysiaca* is a monumental epic-mythological poem mainly dealing with the story of the god Dionysus, starting from his ancestors, passing through his own deeds—including his victory over the impious Indians—until arriving to his apotheosis. It is clear that the poet wants to emphasize the importance of Dionysus' coming into the world, with his promise of salvation, symbolized by the wine he gives to humankind. About Nonnus we know very little. This is not the place to discuss the complex issue regarding him and his work¹. Today it is generally accepted that he was from Panopolis in Egypt, lived in the mid-fifth century CE and composed, likely in Alexandria, another poem beside the *Dionysiaca*: the *Paraphrase of Saint John's Gospel*. This Christian work, a poetic version of Saint John's Gospel, has been shown to have many similarities with the *Dionysiaca*: for example, Christ and Dionysus are represented in an analogous manner, as they both are saviors. Nonnus can thus be considered a key author of late antiquity, because he offers an example of the typically late antique syncretism, i.e., the synthesis of “pagan”, or, better, classical, and Christian elements (Shorrock 2011).

This contribution will focus on the passages of the *Dionysiaca* dealing with the myth of Io, analyzing them from a philological point of view. In a broad perspective, this myth is an episode in the conflict between Europe and Asia, which we can find, primarily, in Herodotus (1, 2, 1), where Io's abduction by the Phoenicians, the origin of the conflict, comes before Europa's abduction, as Europa is abducted in revenge for Io's abduction. In the *Dionysiaca* it is linked with the origin of Dionysus' lineage and the abductor is Zeus, as we will see.

I will argue that the Panopolitan assimilates, i.e., likens, Io to Isis following Lycophron, one of the authors employed as a model in his poem² and I will try to explain the meaning of this choice inside Nonnus' work, taking into account its historical context.

I will, thus, follow the intertextual method, which involves three steps: (1) identification of the presences of the text employed as a model (what are the presences); (2) description of the presences (how they present themselves in the text that is to be analyzed);



Citation: Magnolo, Arianna. 2022. Io as Isis: A Lycophronean Myth in Nonnus. *Literature* 2: 374–382. <https://doi.org/10.3390/literature2040031>

Academic Editors: David Hernández de la Fuente and Jerome F. Bump

Received: 7 November 2022

Accepted: 30 November 2022

Published: 9 December 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

(3) interpretation of the presences (what is their function in the text that is to be analyzed) (Hebel 1989, p. 109). I clarify right away that the presences I will take into consideration are literary allusions. Literary allusion is an intertextual category which consists of an implicit reference to the model, that, although considerably varied, can be recognized by the educated reader³ thanks to a series of indicators, as words or expressions (Pasquali 1968, pp. 275–82).

This methodology is significant insofar as it provides new keys to interpret a text. This is especially true for Nonnus, whose work cannot be understood without an accurate study and analysis of its sources. As a matter of fact, the poet conceives his *Dionysiaca* as a *summa* of the classical culture, in a transitional age, as late antiquity can be considered. He thus incorporates in his poem the authors of the Greek literary past that he considers most significant for every genre, in order to create something totally new, which, although based on the tradition, goes beyond it, and is characterized by *poikilia*, i.e., variety.

The study of the sources of the *Dionysiaca* started approximately in the mid-twentieth century, with the works of (Stegemann 1930), dealing with the astrological sources of the poem, and (D'Ippolito 1964), dealing with the relationship between the poem and Ovid. These works have the merit of trying to interpret Nonnus' poem in its historical context, without relying on classical criteria that are definitely anachronistic for late antique literature. So, research on the sources has proved to be fundamental for the appreciation of the *Dionysiaca*. The majority of the contributions in this field have focused especially on Homer and the most famous Hellenistic poets (Callimachus, Theocritus and Apollonius), the most important models employed by the Panopolitan. Nonetheless, more in-depth studies regarding Hellenistic authors who are less famous, such as Lycophron, are needed.

2. Demonstration

The first Nonnian reference to the myth of Io can be traced in the third book of the *Dionysiaca*, where Cadmus, Dionysus' grandfather, is received at Electra's palace. In an atmosphere filled with music, he is offered a rich lunch, but he does not eat much (vv. 226–42). After lunch, Cadmus (finely described as satiated by the *aulos* rather than by the food), questioned by the queen about his lineage, answers with a long speech, in which he narrates its origins starting from Io, Inachus' daughter. Nonnus connects the abduction of the maiden by Zeus to her father's refusal to marry her to the god, due to his absolute devotion to Hera (vv. 264–67). The element on which I will focus here is Io's assimilation to the Egyptian goddess Isis (vv. 279–83):

ἦλυθεν εἰς Αἴγυπτον, ὅπη βοέην μετὰ μορφήν
δαίμονίης Ἰνδαλμα μεταλλάξασα κεραίης
280
ἔσκε θεὰ φερέκαρπος· ἀναπτομένοιο δὲ καρποῦ
Αἰγυπτίης Δήμητρος, ἐμῆς κεραελκέος Ἰοῦς,
εὐόδοις ὁμόφοιτος ἐλίσσεται ἀτμὸς ἀήταις.
(Chuvin 1976)

"She came as far as Aigyptos, where after her cow's form, after putting off the horned image ordained by heaven, she became a goddess of fruitful crops; when the fruit starts up, the fruit of Egyptian Demeter my stronghorned Io, scented vapour is carried around by the fragrant breezes".

(Rouse 1940)

These verses hint at a sacrifice in honor of "the goddess of fruitful crops", the "Egyptian Demeter", into which Io turns when she arrives to Egypt (in order to give birth to Epaphus: cf. vv. 284–86). This goddess is clearly Isis, although Nonnus does not name her, as she is goddess of fertility too (Vian 1976, p. 146; Gigli Piccardi 1998b, p. 163; 2003, pp. 308–9). The same assimilation Io–Isis can be traced in Lycophron, *Alexandra* 1291–1295, albeit in a totally different context:

ὄλονται ναῦται πρῶτα Καρνῖται κύνες,
οἳ τὴν βοῶπιν ταυροπάρθενον κόρην
Λέρνης ἀνηρείψαντο, φορτηγοὶ λύκοι,
πλᾶτιν πορεύσασαι κῆρα Μεμφίτῃ πρόμφῳ,
ἔχθρας δὲ πυρσὸν ἦραν ἡπείροις διπλαῖς.
1295

“First of all, perish the Karnitan sailor-dogs!
They abducted the ox-eyed bull-maiden, the virgin,
from Lerna, merchant-wolves that they were,
to lead her off as a ruinous wife for the Memphian lord:
they lifted up a torch of enmity for the two continents”.
1295 (Hornblower 2015)

The *Alexandra* is basically a poetic monologue by Cassandra, Priamus’ daughter, in which she predicts the war of Troy and its consequences. The *Suda* attributes it to Lycophron the Chalcidian, the poet and grammarian who was active at the court of Ptolemaeus II (third century BCE), even if some scholars do not agree on this attribution: since the final part of the poem refers to the Romans in order to celebrate them, they propose to attribute it to another Lycophron, who lived later (but not later than the end of the second century BCE)⁴. In any case, the *Alexandra* can be ascribed to the Hellenistic age.

The passage above opens the section in which Cassandra gives an answer to the question she asks herself some verses earlier, i.e., what caused the long conflict between Europe and Asia (vv. 1283–1290). This war started with Io’s abduction by the Phoenicians, who are defined with two periphrases belonging to Lycophron’s “bestiary”⁵ (Καρνῖται κύνες, “Karnitan dogs”, and φορτηγοὶ λύκοι, “merchant-wolves”). They led the maiden from Lerna (synecdoche for Argos) to Memphis, in Egypt, in order to marry her to the city’s sovereign.

So Lycophron, in the wake of Herodotus, follows, as for Europa⁶, the rationalistic version of the myth: indeed, the abductors are mortals. Nonetheless, there are also traces of the “traditional” version of the myth, at v. 1292, where the epithet ταυροπάρθενον (*hapax*) has raised problems: indeed, it is referred to Io even if Io is a cow (and not a bull). We know that Io was abducted by Zeus and turned into a cow in order to avoid Hera’s jealousy, and, as Aeschylus recounts⁷, the god approached her in the form of a bull. Therefore, in my opinion it is perfectly plausible, according to this version⁸, that the abovementioned epithet alludes to the bull-Zeus and is thus to be intended as “bull’s maid” (Griffiths 1986, pp. 472–73)⁹. Anyway, the other epithet attributed to Io, βοῶπιν, is understandable and hints at the most common version of the myth. Now, the identification of Io with Isis is linked to these epithets and to the myth they refer to. The first aspect to be taken into account is drawn from v. 1294, where Lycophron narrates that Io is married to Memphis’ sovereign, who, according to the scholia, is no doubt Osiris, Isis’ groom¹⁰. As to the epithet ταυροπάρθενον, if understood as explained above, it could hint also at Epaphus, generated by Io and assimilated to the Egyptian bull Apis, generated by Isis (Hdt. 2, 153), so it could support the identification of the maiden with the Egyptian goddess. Besides, this identification is supported by scholars who provide a different interpretation of the epithet: Stephanie West (1984, p. 153), for example, considers it an allusion to the procreation of Harpocrates by Isis and this element would act as a link between Isis and Io. In addition, Herodotus, who is Lycophron’s main source, compares them in 2, 41, 2, pointing out that both are represented with horns¹¹:

τὸ γὰρ τῆς Ἰσίδος ἄγαλμα ἐὼν γυναικίον βούκερὼν ἐστὶ κατὰ περ Ἑλλήνες
τὴν Ἰοῦν γράφουσι, καὶ τὰς βοῦς τὰς θηλέας Αἰγύπτιοι πάντες ὁμοίως σέβονται
προβάτων πάντων μάλιστα μακρῶ. (Wilson 2015)

“The statue of this goddess has the form of a woman but with horns like a cow, resembling thus the Greek representation of Io; and the Egyptians, one and all, venerate cows much more highly than any other animal”. (Rawlinson 1880)

Instead, the element of the marriage, introduced by the word *πλᾶτιν* at v. 1294, as it has been noted (West 1984, pp. 151–52), does not come from Herodotus and it is very difficult to define its source. On the ground that the Lycophronean version of the myth is rationalistic, some have thought that the groom could be a mortal, for example Telegonus, the Egyptian king mentioned by Apollodorus 2, 1, 3¹². However, as Griffiths (1986, p. 474) observes, his identification with Osiris—suggested also by the scholia—would create a connection with Isis and offer a correspondence with the Greek myth, to which Lycophron alludes some verses before: according to this myth, it is a god (Zeus) who sleeps with Io. The marriage could thus be interpreted as a hint at Isis, Osiris’ bride, but also at the Greek myth of Zeus and Io. Therefore, I think that it is possible to detect an interweaving of elements of the Egyptian and Greek myth.

I would also like to highlight that, in my opinion, the problem of the identification of the groom is independent from that of the word attributed to Io as a bride, i.e., *κῆρα* at v. 1294. This word could simply allude to the fact that she is considered the origin of the conflict between Europe and Asia (Hornblower 2015, p. 456)¹³: indeed, this adjective, connected with the term *Κήρ*, referring to the goddess of death or negative fate, hints at a broader destiny (that of the two continents), rather than at the individual destiny of Isis’ groom (West 1984, p. 152)¹⁴, whoever he is.

As to the comparison with the Nonnian passage, Isis is not named because, as (Gigli Piccardi 1998b, p. 163) underlines, the poet wants to assign to Dionysus’ family, and not to Egyptian gods, the main contributions to the development of civilization; as the scholar explains, this is also the reason for the other two silent allusions to the Egyptian goddess in the Nonnian poem.

The first one, the most interesting for our purposes, can be traced in *Dionysiaca* 31, 37–40, where Hera tries to persuade Persephone to drive Dionysus mad, unleashing the Erinyes on him, so as to depart him from the Indian war. The queen of gods points out that in Egypt the celebration of Io has replaced that of Demeter, Persephone’s mother:

παρὰ σταχυώδεϊ Νείλῳ
 ἀντὶ τεῆς Δήμητρος ἀμαλλοτόκοιο τεκούσης
 ἄλλη κῶμον ἄγουσι, νόθη δέ τις ὄμπνια Δηῶ
 ταυροφυῆς κερόεσσα φατίζεται Ἰναχίς Ἰώ.
 40 (Vian 1997)

“Beside the Nile with his harvests they hold festival for another, instead of your sheafbearing mother Demeter; they tell of a spurious bountiful Deo, bullbred, horned, Inachos’s daughter Io”. (Rouse 1940)

In this passage the identification of Demeter with Io-Isis becomes an opposition, providing a character with a reason to impede the protagonist (and so to expand the narration), while in the passage from the third book it is inserted in the speech of an ancestor of the protagonist. So, Nonnus employs, as usual, the same motive for opposite purposes. But I would like to focus on another aspect. At v. 40 we discover, late as usual in the poet, the identity of the false Demeter, who has replaced the real one: it is Io, Inachos’ daughter, who is defined as “bullbred” and “horned”. I would like to highlight that the first epithet, *ταυροφυῆς*, can be compared with *ταυροπάρθενον* at v. 1292 of Lycophron’s passage: the compound, which can be found only in Nonnus¹⁵, is similar and the common element, i.e., the bull, could indicate that the silent assimilation Io-Isis comes from the Hellenistic poet¹⁶. As to the problems of translation raised by the Lycophronean epithet, perhaps the Panopolitan interpreted it as “with a bovine appearance”¹⁷ and so decided to replace it with the term *ταυροφυῆς*, whose meaning is clearer¹⁸: it could thus be a case of *interpretatio*, a procedure Nonnus very often uses when employing Hellenistic models (Magnolo 2020a). This seems to be confirmed by *Dionysiaca* 32, 68–70, in which Zeus, seduced by Hera, who wants to distract him in order to take control of the Indian war, tells her that he has never been so burning with desire, not even for Io: this time, in order to

define the maiden (here too designated as “Inachus’ daughter”), the poet uses the adjective ταυρῶπις, which means the same as ταυροφυής and is an epithet of Isis in Samothrace¹⁹.

The second silent allusion to Isis can be found in *Dionysiaca* 40, 346–350, but concerns her assimilation only to Demeter and not to Io, so I will not take it into account. I would only like to specify that this implicit assimilation does not contradict that of Io to Isis (Gigli Piccardi 1998b, pp. 163–64), which is here discussed, all the more as it involves, in this passage, a different aspect, i.e., that linked to the sea and not that linked to the harvest. Nonnus in different passages assimilates Isis to different Greek goddesses, depending on the field to which he refers in each case.

Of course, it is important to clarify that Lycophron is not the only one to assimilate Io to Isis. Nonetheless, the first evidence of a real assimilation seems to date back to the Hellenistic age and, more precisely, to be ascribed to Callimachus (West 1984, p. 152), who, in an epigram (*Anthologia Graeca* 6, 150), writes:

Ἰναχίης ἔστηκεν ἐν Ἰσιδος ἢ Θάλεω παῖς
Αἰσχυλὶς Εἰρήνης μητρὸς ὑποσχέσῃ.

“In the temple of Isis, the Inachian, stands Aeschylis, Thales’ daughter, as a vow from her mother, Eirene”²⁰.

As it can be seen, Isis is named “Inachian”, a clear reference to Io, Inachus’ daughter. The epigram refers to the votive statue of a maiden, Aeschylis, placed in one of the goddess’ temples. It is not the context to be relevant here (as the myth of Io, to which both Lycophron and Nonnus refer, is not narrated), but, rather, the epithet attributed to Isis, which implies her assimilation to Io and, however, is not employed by Nonnus in reference to the goddess. The same explicit assimilation can be detected in Apollodorus 2, 1, 3²¹ and in Lucian (*DDeor.* 3). In Lucian’s dialogue, Zeus explains to Hermes that Io has been turned into a cow by Hera and tells him to lead her to Egypt and turn her into Isis: therefore, the author proposes an *aition* suggested by the zoomorphic representation of Isis, as the Egyptian goddess is represented as a woman with a cow’s head and horns.

Instead, Lycophron and Nonnus, as already noted, prefer to simply allude to the assimilation. It is true that the reasons for this choice are different: in the case of Lycophron, they depend on the oracular component of the poem, which requires a certain degree of obscurity; in the case of Nonnus, they are narrative²². However, it is also plausible that Nonnus is influenced by his model. Moreover, in both poets the presence of Egypt has not so much space, despite what we could expect from two authors that have a special connection with this country, even if for different reasons²³: the fact that we can find the same allusion to the Egyptian culture (the assimilation of Io to Isis) in their work seems to me a further element supporting the hypothesis of a relationship between them. In fact, the parts of the poem in which Nonnus shows an interest for his homeland are the ones pertaining to the so-called “Dionysian pre-history”, that is, to Dionysus’ genealogy (Gigli Piccardi 1998a, pp. 61–62): the passage analyzed belongs to this section. Among other things, the silent reference to Isis leads directly to Dionysus, as Osiris was assimilated to this god, to whom Alexander the Great, in which Ptolemaeus II identified himself, was assimilated. So, through the Egyptian myth, a link between the most important figure of Nonnus’ and Lycophron’s poems (Dionysus and Alexander, respectively) is established. In other words, Lycophron’s work could have been taken into consideration by Nonnus for the opportunity it offers to establish this link²⁴, reminding the reader of the association I have highlighted and giving Dionysus a sort of historical importance²⁵.

It is true that the identification between Isis and Io is also common in material culture, but this does not exclude the employment of a literary source, which in Nonnian poetry usually goes hand-in-hand with references to visual arts. In this case, Nonnus could have in mind also the visual representations of Io-Isis, but, in my opinion, the intertextual connections I have traced in the passages under discussion (βοέην cf. βοῶπιν; ταυρῶπις and ταυροφυής cf. ταυροπάρθενον) show his will to refer to the *Alexandra*.

As to the interweaving of elements of the Egyptian and Greek religion, in Lycophron it appears in line with the Ptolemaic purpose of underlining the common aspects of the two religions for syncretic aims (Gigli Piccardi 1998a, p. 62)²⁶, in order to overcome the isolation into which the former had fallen. This isolation was no doubt even more marked in Nonnus' times²⁷, but the Panopolitan resumes the syncretic effort, though remaining a "Greek of Egypt" (Chuvin 1991, pp. 277–81).

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, Io's assimilation to Isis, which can be detected through the erudite Lycophronean allusion, is in line with the complexity of Nonnus' references to Egypt, which are ideologically important, but always careful to keep the features of the poet's syncretism blurred. This allusion is significant insofar as it shows, together with other passages of the *Dionysiaca* hinting at this author (Magnolo 2020b, pp. 133–48; Magnolo 2021a, pp. 403–12; Magnolo 2021b, pp. 199–13; Magnolo, forthcoming), one of the aims of the *Dionysiaca*, i.e., to emphasize the role of Dionysus' lineage in the civilization process (Magnolo 2021b, pp. 199, 210–11): Cadmus and, then, the god are assimilated to Alexander the Great, who is celebrated as a pacifier in the *Alexandra* because, being a descendant of the Trojans, redeems them with his triumph. Indeed, Lycophron also helps Nonnus to compare the Indian war, fought and won by Dionysus, with the Trojan war, with which the *Alexandra* deals, in order to underline the superiority of the first one (Magnolo 2020b, pp. 145–46; and forthcoming): the Indian war is due to religious reasons, i.e., to convert the impious Indians to the Dionysian cult, and not to revenge, as the Trojan war in Cassandra's view. So, through the allusion to Lycophron, on the one hand the Indians are implicitly compared with the Greeks as depicted by Cassandra in her monologue, i.e., as impious and evil; on the other, Dionysus and his army are implicitly compared with the Trojans as they are represented by the prophetess: they apparently are the victims, but in Cassandra's perspective they are the real winners, exactly as Dionysus and his army, since they are finally ransomed by their descendants, i.e., Alexander the Great first, and the Romans after; instead, the Greeks receive unlucky *nostoi*, since they are punished for their violence, exactly as the Indians in the *Dionysiaca*.

In this way, Dionysus and his ancestors acquire an historical relevance, in an age like that of Nonnus, in which similar figures, i.e., the "new" Romans in the rising Byzantine empire (Mazza 2010, pp. 145–63), are playing the same role²⁸.

This is an interesting case also in a broader perspective, insofar as it shows that the analysis of a literary work has to take into account the other texts on which this work relies and the historical context in which it was composed. Indeed, the author starts from the tradition in order to create something original. Therefore, it is necessary, on the one hand, to study the relationship between the author's work and its models (with the intertextual method), on the other, to clarify the meaning of the employment of these models (with the reference to the historical context), in order to reach a deep comprehension of the literary work.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ On this issue see for example the recent (D'Ippolito 2020, pp. 1–41).

² Many parallels are reported in the Italian edition of the poem (Gigli Piccardi 2003; Gonnelli 2003; Agosti 2004; Accorinti 2004). There are also some specific contributions, as De Stefani (2006, pp. 15–25) and Magnolo (2020b, pp. 129–44). On Lycophron's fortune in the Byzantine age see (De Stefani and Magnelli 2009, pp. 593–620).

- 3 Agosti underlines the high level of culture of Nonnus' public (Agosti 2012, pp. 378–80).
- 4 On this matter see, e.g., (Gigante Lanzara 2000, pp. 5–21).
- 5 On animal metaphors in the *Alexandra* see (Cusset 2001, pp. 61–72), who focuses especially on dog and wolf, to which Lycophron often associates the same characters.
- 6 Europa is abducted by the Curetes on a ship with the sign of a bull: cf. Lyc. 1296–1301.
- 7 Cf. *Supp.* 300–301: οὐκ οὐν πελάζει Ζεὺς ἐπ' εὐκραίρῳ βοῖ;/ φασίν, πρέποντα βουθόρῳ τάρῳ δέμας (“is it not true that Zeus sleeps with a cow with beautiful horns?/they say, in the form of a bull mounting a cow”—translation is mine).
- 8 On this and other versions of the myth of Io see (Gantz 1993, pp. 198–212 (p. 200 on this version)).
- 9 Griffiths highlights that the first part of the compound could work as a genitive, as in some Homeric compounds, since in the same verse we can find an Homeric epithet (βοῶπιν). According to (Gigante Lanzara 2000, p. 409) the epithet alludes simply to Io's bovine appearance.
- 10 Cf. *Sch. in Lyc.* 1294d (Leone 2002, p. 236): Μεμφίτῃ] Αἰγυπτικῶς Ὀσίριδι (“to the Memphite, in the Egyptian manner Osiris”—translation is mine) and *Sch. Tzetzae in Lyc.* 1294 (Scheer 1908, p. 366): Μέμφις πόλις Αἰγύπτου. Μεμφίτῃ οὖν τῷ Αἰγυπτίῳ. Μεμφίτῃ τῷ Ὀσίριδι, ὡς οὕτως φησι (“Memphis, city of Egypt. To the Memphite, i.e., to the Egyptian. To the Memphite, i.e., to Osiris, as he says”—translation is mine).
- 11 The same assimilation can be traced in Apollodorus 2, 1, 3, as we will see. Plutarch, in *De Iside et Osiride* 37, only writes that, according to Mnaseas, “Dionysus, Osiris and Serapis are linked to Epaphus” (τῷ Ἐπάφῳ προστιθέντα τὸν Διόνυσον καὶ τὸν Ὀσίριν καὶ τὸν Σάραπιν).
- 12 According to Apollodorus, the marriage with Telegonus comes after Io's recovery of Epaphus, disappeared by the Curetes upon Hera's request: τοῦτον δὲ Ἥρα δεῖται Κουρήτων ἀφανῆ ποιῆσαι· οἱ δὲ ἠφάνισαν αὐτόν. καὶ Ζεὺς μὲν αἰσθόμενος κτείνει Κούρητας, Ἰὼ δὲ ἐπὶ ζήτησιν τοῦ παιδὸς ἐτράπετο. πλανωμένη δὲ κατὰ τὴν Συρίαν ᾗπασαν (ἐκεῖ γὰρ ἐμνηύετο ὅτι ἢ τοῦ Βυβλίων βασιλέως γυνὴ ἐτιθήναι τὸν υἱόν) καὶ τὸν Ἐπαφὸν εὐροῦσα, εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἐλθοῦσα ἐγαμήθη Τηλεγόνῳ τῷ βασιλεύοντι τότε Αἰγυπτίων (“Hera asked the Curetes to make him invisible, and they disappeared him. Zeus, after realizing it, killed the Curetes and Io started to look for her son. Wandering around the entire Syria—indeed, it was said that the king of Byblos' wife raised the son there—and finding Epaphus, once arrived in Egypt, was married to Telegonus, who then ruled Egypt”—translation is mine).
- 13 See also *Sch. in Lyc.* 1294c (Leone 2002, p. 236): κῆρα δὲ αὐτὴν εἶπε, διότι ἀρχὴ πολέμου καὶ στάσεως ἐγένετο αὕτη αἰτία ταῖς δυσὶν ἡπείροις (“he called her ‘ruinous’ because she was the beginning and the origin of the war and the conflict for the two continents”—translation is mine).
- 14 West argues that “Egypt could not sensibly be regarded as involved in the conflict between Europe and Asia before the Persian conquest”. But, in my view, here Egypt is merely a symbol of the “other” (the East versus the West), as the passage is entirely centered on this opposition.
- 15 The word occurs nineteen times in the *Dionysiaca*.
- 16 On the bull as a cohesive element of Cadmus' story cf. (Paschalis 2017, pp. 21–32), who, however, concludes, without referring to Lycophron: “as regards the Nonnian narrative of the abduction I have argued that it's worth going back to read it without having Moschus in mind—and I would add nor Horace (*Odes* 3.27), Ovid (*Met.* 2.833–3.2) or Achilles Tatius (1.2–13)”.
- 17 All the more as, for Nonnus, ox and bull are interchangeable. The scholia are not useful in this regard: they explain the epithet assuming that the bow of the ship on which Io is carried has the shape of a bull, maybe on the wake of Europa's story (cf. *Sch. in Lyc.* 1292b, Leone (2002, p. 236): βοῶπιν δὲ καὶ ταυροπάρθενον εἶπεν, ἐπειδὴ δοκεῖ βοῦν μεταβεβλήσθαι. τὸ δὲ πλοῖον, ἐνθα ἡρπάγη, ταυρόπρωρον ἦν—“he called her ‘ox-eyed’ and ‘bull-maiden’ because she seems to have been turned into a cow and the ship on which she was abducted had a bull-shaped bow”—translation is mine).
- 18 Io is defined with the same term in *D.* 3, 266 (some verses before the passage taken into account).
- 19 Cf. *POxy.* 1380, 107 (second century CE).
- 20 Translation is mine.
- 21 ἰδρύσατο δὲ ἄγαλμα Δήμητρος, ἣν ἐκάλεσαν Ἰσιν Αἰγύπτιοι, καὶ τὴν Ἰὼ Ἰσιν ὁμοίως προσηγόρευσαν (“Stood the statue of Demeter, whom Egyptians called Isis and equally named Isis Io”—translation is mine).
- 22 A further observation is possible: the Nonnian silence could be due to a need of deconcretization, which is typical of late antique (and then Byzantine) style.
- 23 Nonnus was born in Panopolis, Lycophron composed his poem in Alexandria (as well as, probably, Nonnus).
- 24 Another famous example of this *modus operandi*, which consists in taking into account both the visual arts and the literary sources, is the episode of Europa, in the third book of the *Dionysiaca*, on which see (Paschalis 2017, pp. 21–32).
- 25 Indeed, in the *Dionysiaca* Dionysus' civilizing mission is linked to contemporary history as it is put in parallel with the establishment of the Roman order, as we can see in *D.* 41, 275–398.
- 26 This could be an element supporting the placement of the poem in the first Ptolemaic age.

- ²⁷ In this respect, (Gigli Piccardi 1998a, p. 63) points out that “l’Egitto, come si è venuto conformando dopo la riforma di Diocleziano, ha perduto molto della sua originalità; è ormai un territorio uniformato al resto dell’Impero, in cui si è verificato inevitabilmente un livellamento di civiltà e in cui l’egizianità è ormai sentita come qualcosa di esotico dagli stessi autoctoni”.
- ²⁸ For more detailed conclusions see especially (Magnolo, forthcoming).

References

- Accorinti, Domenico. 2004. *Nonno di Panopoli. Le Dionisiache. Volume IV (Canti XL–XLVIII)*. Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli. ISBN 9788817002622.
- Agosti, Gianfranco. 2004. *Nonno di Panopoli. Le Dionisiache. Volume III (Canti XXV–XXXIX)*. Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli. ISBN 9788817002615.
- Agosti, Gianfranco. 2012. Greek Poetry. In *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*. Edited by Scott Fitzgerald Johnson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 361–404. ISBN 9780195336931.
- Chuvin, Pierre. 1976. *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome II, Chants III–V*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres. ISBN 9782251002019.
- Chuvin, Pierre. 1991. *Mythologie et géographie dionysiaques. Recherches sur l’œuvre de Nonnos de Panopolis*. Clermont-Ferrand: Adosa. ISBN 9782866391164.
- Cusset, Christophe. 2001. Le bestiaire de Lycophron: Entre chien et loup. *Anthropozoologica* 33–34: 61–72.
- D’Ippolito, Gennaro. 1964. *Studi nonniani. L’epillio nelle Dionisiache*. Palermo: Presso l’Accademia.
- D’Ippolito, Gennaro. 2020. Solved and Still Unsolved Issues about Nonnus and His Works. In *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context III. Old Questions and New Perspectives*. Edited by Filip Doroszewski and Katarzyna Jazdzewska. Leiden-Boston: Brill, pp. 1–41. ISBN 9789004443235.
- De Stefani, Claudio, and Enrico Magnelli. 2009. Lycophron in Byzantine Poetry (and Prose). In *Lycophron: Éclats d’obscurité. Actes du colloque international de Lyon et Saint-Étienne, 18–20 Janvier 2007*. Edited by Christophe Cusset and Évelyne Prioux. Saint-Étienne: Publications de l’Université de Saint-Etienne, pp. 593–620. ISBN 9782862724911.
- De Stefani, Claudio. 2006. Un passo ‘callimacheo’ e ‘licofroneo’ di Nonno. *Seminari Romani* 9: 15–25.
- Gantz, Timothy. 1993. *Early Greek Myth. A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press. ISBN 9780801844102.
- Gigante Lanzara, Valeria. 2000. *Licofrone. Alessandra*. Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli. ISBN 9788817173322.
- Gigli Piccardi, Daria. 1998a. Nonno e l’Egitto (1). *Prometheus* 24: 61–82.
- Gigli Piccardi, Daria. 1998b. Nonno e l’Egitto (2). *Prometheus* 24: 161–81.
- Gigli Piccardi, Daria. 2003. *Nonno di Panopoli. Le Dionisiache. Volume I (Canti I–XII)*. Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli. ISBN 9788817107884.
- Gonnelli, Fabrizio. 2003. *Nonno di Panopoli. Le Dionisiache. Volume II (Canti XIII–XXIV)*. Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli. ISBN 9788817107891.
- Griffiths, J. Gwyn. 1986. Lycophron on Io and Isis. *The Classical Quarterly* 36: 472–77. [CrossRef]
- Hebel, Udo J. 1989. *Romaninterpretation als Textarchäologie: Untersuchungen zur Intertextualität am Beispiel von F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “This Side of Paradise”*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. ISBN 9783631415665.
- Hornblower, Simon. 2015. *Lycophron. Alexandra*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780198863342.
- Leone, Pietro Luigi. 2002. *Scholia vetera et paraphrases in Lycophronis Alexandram*. Galatina: Congedo. ISBN 9788880864264.
- Magnolo, Arianna. 2020a. *La poesia nonniana dentro e oltre la volta celeste: I Fenomeni di Arato nelle Dionisiache*. Alessandria: Edizioni Dell’Orso. ISBN 9788836130672.
- Magnolo, Arianna. 2020b. The Alexandra in the Dionysiaca: Two Examples. In *Myth, Religion, Tradition, and Narrative in Late Antique Greek Poetry*. Edited by Nicole Kröll. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, pp. 129–44. ISBN 9783700185840.
- Magnolo, Arianna. 2021a. Allusioni profetiche licofronee nelle Dionisiache: La giovinezza di Dioniso. *Medioevo Greco* 21: 403–12.
- Magnolo, Arianna. 2021b. Nonno e Licofrone: Tracce dell’Alessandra nella preistoria dionisiaca. *Eikasmós* 32: 199–213.
- Magnolo, Arianna. Forthcoming. Superare Omero con Licofrone: La guerra indiana nelle Dionisiache. In *Novità nella ricerca su Nonno di Panopoli e la cultura tardoantica*. Edited by Pia Carolla and Arianna Magnolo. Genova: Genova University Press.
- Mazza, Daniele. 2010. ΚΟΙΠΑΝΙΗ ΑΥΞΟΝΙΩΝ: L’impero romano nelle “Dionisiache” di Nonno di Panopoli (III 188–201, 358–371 e XLI 155–184, 387–399). *Rivista di Cultura Classica e Medioevale* 52: 145–63.
- Paschalis, Michael. 2017. The Cadmus’ Narrative in Nonnus’ Dionysiaca. In *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context II: Poetry, Religion, and Society*. Edited by Herbert Bannert and Nicole Kröll. Leiden-Boston: Brill, pp. 21–32. ISBN 9789004341197.
- Pasquali, Giorgio. 1968. Arte allusiva. In *Pagine Stravaganti*. Edited by Giorgio Pasquali. Firenze: Biblioteca Sansoni, vol. II, pp. 275–82. ISBN 2021090142164.
- Rawlinson, George. 1880. *The History of Herodotus*, 4th ed. London: John Murray, vol. II.
- Rouse, William Henry Denham. 1940. *Nonnos. Dionysiaca*. Cambridge and London: Loeb Classical Library, vols. I–III, ISBN 9780674993792.
- Scheer, Eduard. 1908. *Lycophronis Alexandra*. Berolini: Apud Weidmannos, vol. II.
- Shorrock, Robert. 2011. *The Myth of Paganism. Nonnus, Dionysus and the World of Late Antiquity*. London: Bristol Classical Press. ISBN 9780715636688.

- Stegemann, Viktor. 1930. *Astrologie und Universalgeschichte. Studien und Interpretationen zu den Dionysiaka des Nonnos von Panopolis*. Leipzig und Berlin: Teubner.
- Vian, Francis. 1976. *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome I, Chants I–II*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres. ISBN 9782251002002.
- Vian, Francis. 1997. *Nonnos de Panopolis. Les Dionysiaques. Tome X, Chants XXX–XXII*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres. ISBN 9782251004570.
- West, Stephanie. 1984. Lycophron on Isis. *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 70: 151–54. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Wilson, Nigel G. 2015. *Herodoti Historiae Libri I–IV*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, vol. I, ISBN 9780199560707.