

**THE PRESENTATION AND FUNCTIONS OF SELECTED
BATHING SCENES IN NONNOS' *DIONYSIACA****

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ABSTRACT

The *Dionysiaca* by Nonnos of Panopolis includes many episodes from everyday life of Greek mythological characters. Among other things related to issues of this kind, Nonnos mentions the bathing scenes of male, and in particular of female characters. For an instance, the author mentions the new-born Dionysus who is being bathed. Also, there are numerous scenes depicting females taking a bath (e.g. Artemis, Nicaea, Semele, Persephone). As for male bathing scenes, it is Morrheus' bath that is especially worth-noting. The article, after having given a general division of the bathing scenes included in the *Dionysiaca*, analyses their composition and meaning in the context of the poem. It mostly focuses on the activities related to taking a bath and the importance of hygiene and nakedness. The conclusion demonstrates the most important differences between Nonnos and Homer in regard to the descriptions of bathing scenes.

Key words: Nonnos of Panopolis; *Dionysiaca*; Bathing Scenes; Late Greek Epic Poetry

The *Dionysiaca* by Nonnos¹ of Panopolis² consists of 48 books, being the most ample and the last great *epos* of ancient Greek literature. It describes Dionysos' life starting from his birth, continuing through his struggles with the Indians, and ending with his apotheosis. Since in Nonnos' *epos* there can be found almost all well- and lesser-known myths, it is sometimes referred to as a compendium of mythological knowledge.³ The mythical world as depicted in the *Dionysiaca* includes many episodes from everyday life, among them being scenes of bathing⁴ male and, in particular, female characters of the poem.

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¹ On Nonnos see Accorinti (2013).

² The Greek text is quoted from the Budé edition.

³ Riemschneider (1957: 69): "Es ist nicht so, daß Nonnos mit vielem Wissen prunken will. Was er an Sagengut beibringt, wußte wohl damals jedes Kind! Aber die Art und Weise, mit der die Dinge miteinander verknüpft werden, ist reizvoll und neu."

⁴ Regarding the role and character of water in *Dionysiaca* see Newbold (2001) and Kröll (2013: 71–74; 89–90); Kröll's article generally discusses the water and swimming in the *Dionysiaca* regarding the problem of the composition of the *epos* (2013: esp. 89–90). She emphasized the importance of swimming and water (2013: 72–73) and presents swimming competition between Dionysos and Ampelos

Characteristics of bathing scenes in the *Dionysiaca*

The bathing scenes in the *Dionysiaca* include, among other things, a mention of a missed customary bath of a new-born child⁵ (Nonn. *D.* IX, 25–26), scenes of bathing after a battle (VI, 4; XL, 234–236), hunting (XV, 5–7; XV, 244–255), a sport competition (X, 380–382), or the sacrifice of an animal (VII, 166). Also, Nonnos mentions the necessity of taking a refreshing bath after a hot day (V, 483–486; V, 601–609), work (V, 601–609), or before planned intimate intercourse (XXXIII, 155–199). Being familiar with the anatomy of the human body, the author is perfectly able to depict it, as is confirmed by his detailed descriptions of female bodies⁶ as well as warriors' injuries.⁷ Such descriptions together with those referring to various diseases⁸ and pathological conditions, as well as mentions of drugs⁹ and medical treatment in general, show that Nonnos was intensely interested in medicine.¹⁰

While reading the *Dionysiaca*, one cannot stop oneself from having the impression that Nonnos displays a particular predilection for erotic descriptions of men, women, and goddesses caught in taking a bath. These bathing scenes seem to serve as mostly a pretext for a presentation of the beauty of the human body.¹¹ It must be stressed, though, that the scenes in question are for the most part of a voyeuristic nature and the victims of the voyeurs' activities¹² are those female characters who happen to take a bath. Not infrequently, their physical beauty being exposed during the hygienic activity becomes

and between Karpos and Kalamos. She indicates also the possible sources of the author of the *Dionysiaca* regarding swimming of Dionysos and water (2013: 90–96).

- ⁵ In the *Dionysiaca* there can also be found a description of an advanced infant care, see Tsoucalas, Tsoucalas (2012). On infant bathing and general care see Sor. *Gynaec.* II, 20. For a discussion on Soranus' prescriptions see French (2004: esp. 58–59 [the subchapter *Care of the Newborn after Delivery*]). In Nonn. *D.* XXV, 488–494 there is a mention of infant bathing put in an entirely different context.
- ⁶ See the descriptions of Europe's body: I, 344–351; women's body in Homeric comparison: I, 525–534; Semele's: VII, 256–279; one of Bacchantes: XXXV, 21–36; Beroë's: XLII, 449–455; Artemis': XLVIII, 335–355. Obviously, these descriptions have an erotic subtext. See also Newbold (1998).
- ⁷ These descriptions are sometimes associated with wartime medicine. Miguélez-Cavero (2008: 249) gives a list of descriptions of wounds, injuries, and their equivalents in Homer: "D. 17.357–74 and 29.103, 264–75 should be compared with Il. 4.212–19; 5.401–2 = 900–1; 11.844–8; 15.390–4."
- ⁸ Issues like that are a focus of my forthcoming paper. As for now, it will suffice to mention X, 4–84; XVII, 357–375 etc.
- ⁹ *Pharmakon* means mostly wine (used to relieve one from grief; e.g. VII, 56; XVI, 3), as well as love (e.g. VI, 364; XI, 359). As for the medicine in Nonnos, see the commentaries on Nonn. *Paraphrasis s. Evangelii Ioannei* 5 and on *Dionysiaca* XXIX, 264–275 in Agosti (2003: 396), and Agosti (2004: 318–319). Excellent descriptions of methods of curing wounds that include cleaning, removal of poisoned arrows, application of herbs and incantations are contained in XVII, 357–375; XXIX, 87–103; XXIX, 153; XXIX, 264. In the poem, mention is also made of a mythical plant that can bring the dead back to life, see XXXV, 53–77. Moreover, Nonnos knows Brahmins who are considered by him to be the king's advisers. These sages possess the art of healing (XXIV, 164; XXXVI, 344; XXIX, 357–359). So when Morrheus, the Indian chieftain, is injured during a battle, the Brahmins cure him, relieving him of pain with the use of "the art of Apollo".
- ¹⁰ Sinko (1954: 257) points out to the description of Athamas' insanity (X, 4–84). His condition is attributed to a brain disease (X, 25–26). Some of his symptoms might indicate epilepsy. For commentary on this description see Gigli Piccardi (2003: 678–681). On medicine in Panopolis and medical descriptions in the *Dionysiaca* see Miguélez-Cavero (2008: 248–249).
- ¹¹ However, in the poem, mentions are also made of washing one's body with no such pretext, see e.g. the aforementioned scene IX, 25–26 in which a bath in water following delivery is missing.
- ¹² The sense of sight and the activity of watching are an extraordinarily important aspect of the *Dionysiaca* as has been observed by Agosti (2006: 358–359): "Le *Dionisiache* di Nonno sono il trionfo dello

a prelude to a passionate love¹³ as is the case in the episode of Semele bathing and its aftermath (see VII, 256–279).

General division of the bathing scenes

According to Winkler,¹⁴ the voyeuristic scenes in the *Dionysiaca* can be divided into two general categories and the criterion of the division is a situation in which the scenes in question take place. Beside the aforementioned bathing scenes,¹⁵ the first category includes scenes in which the description is focused on the body parts exposed by the breeze blowing up light clothes (I, 128–135; XVII, 217–224; XXXV, 103–108). The second category includes various bathing scenes in which a naked body can be seen. In my treatment I will not limit the discussion to the latter type of scenes, but I will also attempt to investigate various passages relating to those kinds of hygienic activities that are related to washing oneself and that can be found in the *mare magnum* of the *Dionysiaca*. To demonstrate the great diversity of bathing scenes that can be found in Nonnos' *epos*, I have chosen the scenes containing women, men, and a child. I will start from the description of a bathing child and then discuss selected scenes of women and men taking a bath.

Bathing of an infant

The mention of bathing an infant is a part of the adventures of new-born Dionysos¹⁶ (IX, 25–26). In the description of the vicissitudes of Semele's young son, the most unusual feature is that he had not been bathed right after his delivery. Supposedly, this act of negligence was due to Hera's vindictiveness, who, as is well known, hated the illegitimate children of her husband. In order to avoid her anger, the new-born Dionysos was hurriedly taken away from Zeus and handed over to Lamos' daughters who took care of him. See IX, 25–30:¹⁷

sguardo, specie di quello curioso, ammiccante, seducente. Il poeta è interessato alla *reazione* di chi guarda, che perlopiù si tramuta in ammirata stupefazione.”

Also, interesting comments on watching and sight can be found in Lovatt (2013). Persistent looks and peeping at the beauty of the human body is a frequently discussed phenomenon in the *Dionysiaca*. For more on these issues together with the analysis of the voyeuristic passages see Winkler (1974: passim). On the episode about Aura's rape, which will not be investigated here, see Schmiel (1993).

¹³ Friedländer (1931: 45–46): “Die Sinnlichkeit. An Stelle des Natürlichen tritt das Lüsterne. Man hat den Eindruck einer Zeit, die statt der Nacktheit nur noch die Entblößung kennt. Viele Szenen, wo ein Gott eine Jungfrau belauscht. Der Wind hebt ihr Gewand, oder im Wasser sieht der Lauscher die ἄντυγα μαζῶν, ἄντυγα μηρῶν, ὄργια κόλπου.”

¹⁴ Winkler (1974: passim). The penchant for peeping (*scopophilia*) finds its detailed discussion in Newbold (2008: 71): “The theme of scopophilia in Nonnus is illustrated by 26 voyeur or quasi-voyeuristic episodes. Their content provides an *aperçu* into the questions raised above” and Newbold (1998).

¹⁵ Winkler (1974: 4): “The voyeur's view is usually set up in one of two ways: either the person viewed is bathing in a stream or her clothes are light and wind-blown.”

¹⁶ Scenes of the god taking a bath were an iconographic theme e.g. in the form of a mosaic, see Bowersock (2006: 38–43) and Kröll (2013: 92–93; 98). About the problem of the first bath of Dionysos and its comparison to the first bath of Christ, see Jaccottet (2011) – *non vidi*.

¹⁷ Καί μιν ἄχυτλώτοιο διαῖσσοντα λοχείης
πήχει κούρον ἄδακρυν ἐκούφισε σύγγονος Ἑρμῆς.

Thus Hermes carried upon his arm the little brother who had passed through one birth without a bath, and lay now without a tear, a baby with a good pair of horns like the Moon. He gave him in charge of the daughters of Lamos, river nymphs – the son of Zeus, the vine-planter. They received Bacchos into their arms.¹⁸

In antiquity, it was a custom to bath a child right after its delivery.¹⁹ However, from the above text it follows that Dionysos' delivery was not followed by his bath.²⁰ So the fact that blood and vernix are not washed off from his body should be treated as an unusual situation and may testify to Hermes' haste.

Females taking a bath

Child characters do not appear often in the *Dionysiaca*, so it is no wonder that the most frequently described hygienic treatments that can be found there are baths taken by adults. These usual and apparently trivial everyday activities serve as a pretext to demonstrate the beauty of the human body, and as a literary device used by the poet to create an erotic tension that is additionally increased by the fact that the poet leaves some of the details to the imagination of his recipient. The first one of the many bathing scenes that appear in the *Dionysiaca* shows an adult person who is taking a bath to refresh and wash herself (see V, 287–551). The passage contains a very famous scene in which young Actaeon is watching Artemis taking a bath.²¹ This excellent hunter, who, during a hunt could easily stalk game while still remaining unseen and unheard, climbed a tree to watch the goddess taking a bath in the river. However, his presence caught the eye of the nymph whom the goddess was accompanied by. See V, 304–315:²²

Καὶ βρέφος εὐκεράοιο φυῆς Ἴνδαλα Σελήνης
ὤπασε θυγατέρεςσι Λάμου ποταμηῖσι Νύμφαις,
παῖδα Διὸς κομέειν σταφυληκόμων. Αἰ δὲ λαβοῦσαι
Βάκχον ἐπηχύναντο.

¹⁸ Translation by Rouse (1940a: 307).

¹⁹ It was a usual conduct in antiquity. See Chrétien (1985: 102 *com. ad loc.*) – she mentions other baths of divine infants which are: Zeus (Call. *Iov.* 15–17) and Apollo (*h. Hom. Ap.* 120–125.; Call. *Del.* 6); Wolf (2004: 153: “*Sobald ein Kind das Licht der Welt erblickt hatte, wuschen es die Frauen, wurde es in Windeln gewickelt und gestillt (Plut. Quaest. Rom.5; vgl. Eur. Ion 1492f.)*”).

²⁰ Gigli Piccardi (2003: 638–639 *com. ad loc.*) observes that Dionysos' fiery nature was not familiar with water, and Dionysos himself flashes like a lightning (in this meaning διαίσσουσα II, 194) or flickers like a falling star (Arist. *Cael.* 395a 32). However, Chrétien (1985: 102) observes that in this passage Nonnos is in opposition to the tradition when he replaces the cleansing water with a thunderbolt that cleanses the mother as well as the child.

²¹ This scene is presented in the *Dionysiaca* twice, the second description coming from Actaeon himself (V, 476–491). See also Winkler (1974: 4–5). In addition, this scene has been described by Call. *Lav. Pall.* 109–116 and Ov. *Met.* III, 138–252. The composition of the scene and in particular the attention drawn to the act of going into water now fast and now slowly suggest, in scholars' opinion, that there may be some reminiscences of the water mimes in the *Dionysiaca*. See Gigli Piccardi (2003: 418); D'Ippolito (1962: 6–14).

²² λουομένης ἐνόησεν ὄλον δέμας Ἰοχεαίρης,
θητήρ δ' ἀκόρητος ἀθητήοιο θεαίνης
ἀγνὸν ἀνυμφεύτιο δέμας διεμέτρεε κούρης
ἀγχιφανής. Καὶ τὸν μὲν, ἀνείμονος εἶδος ἀνάσσης
ᾄμματι λαθριδίῳ δεδοκημένον ᾄμματι λοξῷ
Νηϊὰς ἀκρήδεμνος ἀπόπροθεν ἔδρακε Νύμφη·

[...] he had seen the whole body of the Archeress bathing; and gazing greedily on the goddess that none may see, he surveyed inch by inch the holy body of the unwedded virgin close at hand. A Naiad nymph unveiled espied him from afar with a sidelong look, as he stared with stolen glances on the unclothed shape of her queen, and shrieked in horror, telling her queen the wild daring of a lovesick man. Artemis half revealed caught up her dress and encircling shawl, and covered her modest breasts with the maiden zone in shame, and sank with gliding limbs into the water, until by little and little all her form was hidden.²³

In the description of the goddess' bath our attention is drawn to the fact that there are no details in it, although usually, for erotic reasons, the descriptions of bathing women in Nonnos' work are provided with numerous details (e.g. VII, 256–279). In the above quoted passage, there are no details relating to the goddess' appearance, which might be explained by the fact that naked Artemis should not be looked at. All we can infer from the text of the *Dionysiaca* is that the hunter had seen the goddess' naked body, and consequently, he was severely punished for that (V, 300–335).²⁴ By having left the more detailed aspects of the goddess' look to his recipient's imagination, the author creates an air of erotic tension. The recipient's imagination as well as his/her curiosity will be satisfied to some extent, but not until the last book of the poem where the poet mentions the goddess' bath taken at a hot day. But even there the goddess is hiding her beauty from the unwanted looks as she comes out of the water wearing her clothes. See XLVIII, 335–340:²⁵

She in the midday heat still guarded her maiden modesty in the river, moving through the water with cautious step, and lifting her tunic little by little from foot to head with the edge touching the surface, keeping the two feet and thighs close together and hiding her body as she bathed the whole by degrees.²⁶

Her beauty is described by Aura,²⁷ who while watching her, emphasises the goddess' sexual attractiveness using the following words (XLVIII, 351–356):²⁸

ταρβαλή δ' ὀλόλυξεν, ἤη δ' ἤγγειλεν ἀνάσση
 ἀνδρὸς ἔρωμανέος θράσος ἄγριον. Ἡ μίφανῆς δὲ
 Ἄρτεμις ἀρπάξασα σὺν εἴματι κυκλάδα μίτρην
 παρθενίῳ ζωστήρι σαόφρονας ἔσκεπε μαζούς,
 καὶ διεροῖς μελέεσσιν ἔσω δύνουσα ρέέθρων
 αἰδμένη κατὰ βαιὸν ὄλον δέμας ἔκρυψε κούρη.

²³ Translation by Rouse (1940a: 191).

²⁴ A more detailed analysis of the abovementioned episode can be found in Newbold (2008: 71–73), where the author claims that Actaeon saw only a part of the goddess' body, see also Gigli Piccardi (2003: 416–421 *com. ad loc.*).

²⁵ Ἡ δὲ μεσημβρίζουσα σέβας φιλοπάρθενον αἰδοῦς
 ἐν προχοαῖς ἐφύλαξε, διερπύζουσα βόων
 ἴχνησι φειδομένοισι, καὶ ἐκ ποδὸς ἄχρι καρῆνου
 ἀκροβαφῆ κατὰ βαιὸν ἀναστείλασα χιτῶνα,
 ἀμφιπερισφίγγουσα πόδας διδυμάονι μηρῷ
 κρυπτόμενον μετρηδὸν ὄλον δέμας ἔκλυσε κούρη.

²⁶ Translation by Rouse (1940c: 449).

²⁷ In the further part of her speech, Aura claims to be more beautiful than Artemis. This brings on her a terrible punishment because she is raped by Dionysos. See Schmiel (1993).

²⁸ Ἄρτεμι, μοῦνον ἔχεις φιλοπάρθενον οὖνομα κούρης,
 ὅτι διὰ στέρνων κεχαλασμένον ἄντυγα θηλῆς

Artemis, you only have the name of a virgin maid, because your rounded breasts are full and soft a woman's breasts like the Paphian, not a man's like Athena, and your cheeks shed a rosy radiance! Well, since you have a body like that desirous goddess, why not be queen of marriage as well as Cythereia [...]?²⁹

Another scene depicting a beautiful woman taking a bath after the toils of hunting can be found in Book 15, where we read about Hymnos' love madness (XV, 169–422). This young oxherd fell unhappily in love with the huntress Nicaea who rejected him with disdain. Nonetheless, bewitched Hymnos watched her while she was busy with her everyday activities, and observed her with pleasure when sweaty and tired with a long hunt she was taking a bath³⁰ (XV, 244–254).³¹

So the young man, cherishing under his heart the wound of love, whether near or whether far, kept his mind on the girl: how she drew the arrow for a shot against the mountain bear; how she fastened hand on the lion's neck, circling about it her two arms in betraying noose; how again, after toil and sweat, she washed her in the flow of a brook, half-showing, ever more careful of her kirtle. When, the breeze would shake it and lift it up to the mid-nipple, and shoot out the flower of the beauty laid bare. Keeping this in memory, he conjured again the sweet winds, to raise the deep-folded robe.³²

This image does not appear as a direct observation but as a memory of a scene that was seen a long time before. The evoked image contains Hymnos' hidden dreams of seeing his chosen one during her bath once again.³³ As rightly pointed out by Gonnelli,³⁴ the bathing scene in question has been presented very succinctly, which may be due to the fact that it does not anticipate events so tragic as Artemis' bath was for Actaeon. It must be added, though, that the consequences of falling in love with a huntress are tragic for

θῆλυν ἔχεις Παφίης, οὐκ ἄρσενα μαζὸν Ἀθήνης,
καὶ ῥοδέουσι σπινθήρας οἰστεύουσι παρειαί.
Ἄλλὰ δέμας μεθέπουσα ποθοβλήτοιο θεαίνης
καὶ σὺ γάμων βασίλευε σὺν ἄβροκόμῳ Κυθερείῃ [...]

²⁹ Translation by Rouse (1940c: 449).

³⁰ The motif of desire to see her bathing obsessively recurs in XV, 270–272 as has been correctly noticed by Gerlaud (1994: 59).

³¹ Καὶ νέος, ἀμφιπέπων ὑποκάρδιον ἔλκος Ἐρώτων,
ἐγγυὸς ἔων καὶ νόσφιν ἔων ἐμνώετο κούρης,
πῶς βέλος εἰς σκοπὸν εἶλκεν ὄρειάδος ἀντίον ἄρκτου,
πῶς δὲ λεοντείῃ παλάμην ἐσφίγξατο δειρῆ
δίζυγα γυρώσασα βραχίονα μάρτυρι δεσμῶ,
πῶς πάλιν ιδρώουσα λοέσσατο χεῦματι πηγῆς
ἡμιφανῆς, καὶ μᾶλλον αἰεὶ μιμνήσκετο πέπλου,
ὅππότε μιν δονέων καὶ ἐς ὄμφαλὸν ἄχρισ ἀείρων
γυμνώσας χροὸς ἄνθος ἀνηκόντιζεν ἀήτης·
κείνου μνήστιν ἔχων γλυκεράς ἰκέτευεν ἀέλλας,
ὄφρα πάλιν βαθύκολπον ἀναστειλωσι χιτῶνα.

³² Translation by Rouse (1940a: 519).

³³ Actually, the scenes of growing passion aroused by seeing a nude or semi-nude person are a topos in the *Dionysiaca*, see Schulze (1968: 7). His desire has been emphasised by the adverb πάλιν. The word πάλιν might suggest that the bath described here is merely a recollection of Hymnos who once saw Nicaea bathing. Some interesting deliberations on this scene can be found in Gerlaud (1994: 58–59).

³⁴ Gonnelli (2003: 207).

both Actaeon (punished with death) and Hymnos (dying by own wish), as they both die a violent death.

In the investigated episode, Hymnos' love remains unrequited,³⁵ as the huntress rejects him, so the poor oxherd asks Nicaea to kill him (XV, 316–341). The cruel girl grants his wish and ends his life³⁶ by shooting him with a bow and arrow into his throat³⁷ (XV, 363–369). Her deed was severely punished by Eros, the god of love, who made Dionysos, the god of wine, see beautiful Nicaea while she was taking a bath (XVI, 3–13). This moment becomes the beginning of Dionysos' fascination for the young huntress (XVI, 14–147). Nicaea rejects his advances, too, and flees him (XVI, 148–181). One day, when she is tired and thirsty, she falls asleep drunk after having drunk from a river whose water had been changed into wine (XVI, 250–262). During her sleep, she is approached by Dionysos, who steals her virginity against her will (XVI, 263–291), and then the oxherd, once neglected by her, appears mocking her (XVI, 292–305).

Of crucial importance for the development of the action of the poem is the scene in which we see the bathing Semele, Dionysos' mother (VII, 184–279). In this passage she is making a sacrifice of a goat in Zeus' honour. During the process, she got splashed with the blood of the animal and then went to the nearby Asopos River to wash herself. And that was where she was spotted by Zeus, unable to satisfy his eyes' cravings for the charms of the young Cadmos' daughter. Consumed by love, he seduced her and, as a consequence, he gave up his divine duties to spend more time with his beloved one in Thebes. See VII, 166–174 and 184–189:³⁸

Now the maiden went forth from the city to kindle the altar of Zeus Lord of Lightning. She stood by the victims and sprinkled her bosom with the blood; her body was drenched with

³⁵ Scholars observe correctly that the topics and characters (unhappy love, Daphne's transformation) recalled by Hymnos are related to the bucolic tradition. See Gerlaud (1994: 62–67); Schulze (1968: 19: "Die folgenden Verse erinnern in Aufbau und Stimmung an Theokrit und die Klagegesänge des Bion und Moschos."). A detailed analysis of the text with regard to its dependence on literary sources is offered by Tissoni (1999: 220–229).

³⁶ Riemschneider (1957: 64) claims that Theocritus' proverbial expression "it must be sweet to die by your hand", as it is conceived of by Nicaea, should be viewed as an example a particular mannerist humour, see also Gonnelli (2003: 218–219).

³⁷ Hymnos' name might be a personification of a song. Therefore, it should be assumed that the very description of the young man is symbolic to some extent because Hymnos died after he had been wounded in his throat with an arrow. See: Gonnelli (2003: 212–219); Lasek (2009: 76–77; 88–89; 95–96).

³⁸ Ἐνθεν ἔβη πρὸ πόλῃος, ὅπως Διὶ βωμὸν ἀνάψῃ,
ἀστεροπῆς μεδέοντι· παρισταμένη δὲ θυηλαῖς
αἵματι κόλπον ἔδευσε, φόνῳ δ' ἔρραίνετο κούρη·
καὶ πλοκάμους ἐδίηναν ἀφειδέες αἵματος ὄλκοι,
καὶ βοέαις λιβάδεσσιν ἐπορφύροντο χιτῶνες.
Καὶ δρόμον ἰθύνοῦσα βαθυσχοῖνῳ παρὰ ποίῃ
γείτονος Ἀσωποῖο μετέστιχε πάτριον ὕδωρ
παρθένος αἰολόπεπλος, ἵνα σμῆξειε ρέεθρος
στικτὰ πολυρραθάμιγγι δεδευμένα φάρεα λύθρω
[...] Κεῖθι δέμας φαίδρυνε, σὺν ἀμφιπόλοισι δὲ γυμνῇ
χεῖρας ἐρετωμάσασα δι' ὕδατος ἔτρεχε κούρη.
Καὶ κεφαλὴν ἀδιάντων ἐκούφισεν ἴδμονι τέχνῃ
ὑψι τιτανομένην ὑπὲρ οἴδατος, ἄχρι κομάων
ὕγροβαφῆς, καὶ στέρνον ἐπιστορέσασα ρέεθρῳ
ποσσὶν ἀμοιβαιοῖσιν ὀπίστερον ὤθεεν ὕδωρ.

blood, plentiful streams of blood soaked her hair, her clothes were crimsoned with drops from the bull. Then with robes discoloured she made her way along the meadow deep in rushes, beside Asopos the river of her birthplace, and plunged in his waters to wash clean the garments which had been drenched and marked by the showers of blood. (...) There the maiden cleansed her body, and naked with her attendants moved through the water with paddling hands; she kept her head stretched well above the stream unwetted, by the art she knew so well, under water to the hair and no farther, breasting the current and treading the water back with alternate feet.³⁹

Zeus often falls in love with mortal woman whom he happens to see while she is taking a bath (it can be even claimed that this is a literary motif that Nonnos willingly makes use of).⁴⁰ Another woman whom Zeus fell in love with is the bathing Persephone (V, 601–608):⁴¹

Once in the scorching steam of thirsty heat, the girl would cease the loomtoiling labours of her shuttle at midday to shun the tread of the parching season, and wipe the running sweat from her face; she loosed the modest bodice which held her breast so tight, and moistened her skin with a refreshing bath, floating in the cool running stream, and left behind her threads fixt on the loom of Pallas.⁴²

The necessity to wash oneself from dirt after a tiring day serves as a pretext to show Persephone's bath. In the discussed description, a strong emphasis has been put on the refreshing function of the bath taken during a hot day. Indirectly, the emphasis relates also to a pleasure given to a fatigued body by ablutions in a cool spring. As is the case with all the bathing scenes that have been discussed so far, Persephone's bath is taking place in a river, too. The receiver's attention is drawn to the bared charms of the bathing virgin by means of the description of her taking off her clothes before going into the stream (V, 604–606). And this is when she gets spotted by the Olympians' king (V, 609). Gazing upon her naked body makes Zeus immediately burn with desire⁴³ (VI, 610–621).

The close similarity of the scenes of Persephone's and Artemis' baths is remarkable. In both abovementioned passages, the ablutions for hygienic purposes are merely a pretext to show the beauty and the nakedness of the young women. Their nude bodies become

³⁹ Translation by Rouse (1940a: 257–259).

⁴⁰ Many bathing scenes in the *Dionysiaca* are listed by Chuvin (1992a: 183; 2003: 448), among which the following ones can be found: the descriptions of: Artemis' bath seen by Actaeon (V, 476–491); Bacchos' bath (X, 141–174); Ampelos and Bacchos swimming in the Paktolos river (XI, 7–55); Clymene's bath (XXXVIII, 108–129); Artemis peeked at by Aura (XLVIII, 302–375). Also, there is a mention of a naked girl taking a bath in XL, 319–323. See also Gigli Piccardi (2003: 448 *com. ad loc.*).

⁴¹ Καί ποτε διψαλέοιο πυραυγεί καύματος ἀτιμῶ
καρφαλέης φεύγουσα μεσημβρινὸν ἴχνηιον Ὀρης
κερκίδος ἰστοπόνων καμάτων ἀμπαυέτο κούρη
καὶ διερούς ἰδρώτας ἀποσμήξασα προσώπου,
σφιγγομένην στέρνοισι σαόφρονα λύσατο μίτηρην
καὶ χροά λυσιπόνουσι καθικμαίνουσα λοετροῖς
πηγαίῳ πεφόρητο καταψύχοντι ῥέεθρῳ,
νήματα καλλείψασα πεπαρμένα Παλλάδος ἰστέφ.

⁴² Translation by Rouse (1940a: 211).

⁴³ It could be an ironic picture of Zeus, who despite of being All-seeing, gets excited by seeing a particular naked body. More on ironic picture of Zeus see Kuhlmann (1999).

a direct cause of Zeus' burning desire (VI, 610–621; VII, 256–279). In both cases, the bath becomes for him a beginning of an erotic fascination that leads to the conception and birth (VI, 155–168) of Zagreus, the first Dionysos, as well as the second Dionysos, the Semele's son (VIII, 6–33; VIII, 396–406). As is correctly pointed out by Chuvin (1992b: 78), the similarity of these scenes is highlighted even more clearly by means of the repetition nearly of the whole verse in V, 609 and VII, 190.

Males taking a bath

It is worth noting that in the *Dionysiaca* there also appear bathing male characters. It will suffice to mention Dionysos taking a bath in a scorching hot summer day to refresh himself and to wash the dirt off his body (X, 139–144), or the young satyr Ampelo (X, 380–382) who is taking a bath in a river after athletic competition⁴⁴ to wash himself from dust and sweat. The aforementioned description serves most of all to draw our attention to the extraordinary beauty of the boy that is emphasised by the mention of the nice radiance emanating from his sweaty skin.

In comparison to the abovementioned descriptions, the scene of Morrheus' bath stands out in regard to its length (XXXV, 145; XXXV, 155–204). We see him as at the explicit Chalcomede's request he is taking a bath after the battle (XXXV, 111–127). His bath is a preparation for a long-expected intimate meeting with his beloved one (XXXV, 185–203):⁴⁵

Then Morrheus left his coat uncared-for on the seashore, glowing with sweet anxieties. Naked he bathed: the cool sea cleansed his body, but the Paphian's tiny dart was hot within him. In the waters he prayed to Erythraian Aphrodite of India, for he had learnt that Cypris is the daughter of the sea; but he came out still black from his bath, for his body was as nature had made it grow, and the brine changed not the man's body or his colour, itself red though

⁴⁴ Gigli Piccardi (2003: 724), *com. ad loc.* is right to observe that in comparison to the Homeric model (Hom. Il. XXIII, 739) in the *Dionysiaca* the bathing scene taking place after a sporting competition includes an additionally emphasised erotic element.

⁴⁵ ἄγχι δὲ πόντου
καλλείψας ἀκόμιστον ἐπ' αἰγιαλοῖο χιτῶνα
θαλπόμενος γλυκερῆσι μεληδόσι λούσατο Μορρεύς,
γυμνὸς ἑὸν· ψυχρῆ δὲ δέμας φαίδρυνε θαλάσση,
θερμὸν ἔχων Παφίης ὀλίγον βέλος· ἐν δὲ ῥέεθροις
Ἴνδῶφιν ἰκέτευεν Ἐρυθραίων Ἀφροδίτην,
εἰσαῖων, ὅτι Κύπρις ἀπόσπορός ἐστι θαλάσσης·
λουσάμενος δ' ἀνέβαινε μέλας πάλιν· εἶχε δὲ μορφὴν,
ὡς φύσις ἐβλάστησε, καὶ ἀνέρος οὐ δέμας ἄλλη,
οὐ χροίην μετὰμειψεν, ἐρευθαλέη περ ἑοῦσα.
καὶ κενεῆ χροῖα λούσεν ἐπ' ἐλπίδι· χιόνεος γὰρ
ἡμερόεις μενείαινε φανήμεναι ἄζυγι κούρη·
καὶ λινέω κόσμησε δέμας χιονώδει πέπλω,
οἷον ἔσω θώρηκος αἰεὶ φορέουσι μαχηταί.
ἰσταμένη δ' ἄφθογγος ἐπ' ἠόνος εἶχε σιωπὴν
Χαλκομέδῃ δολόεσσα· μεταστρεφθεῖσα δὲ κούρη
Μορρέος ἀχλαίνιο σαόφρονας εἶλκεν ὀπωπᾶς,
ἀσκεπές αἰδομένη δέμας ἀνέρος· εἰσιδέειν γὰρ
ἄζετο θῆλυς ἑοῦσα λελουμένον ἄρσενα κούρη.

it was. So he washed his skin in a vain hope ; for he had wished to become snow-white, and so desirable to the virgin maid. He dressed himself in a snowy linen robe, such as soldiers always wear inside the mailcoat.

Chalcomede stood on the shore in silence without a word, full of her scheme. She turned aside from Morrheus unclad, withdrawing her modest looks, ashamed before the uncovered body of a man; for the girl was abashed being a woman to look on a man after the bath.⁴⁶

As has been observed, this scene of Morrheus' bath undoubtedly alludes to the ritual prenuptial bath.⁴⁷ Morrheus is dreaming of the moment of meeting his beloved one while he is taking a bath, however, the tryst that he planned ends up in a failure. Unhappy and deceived by his misleading dream that promised him the Bacchante's reciprocity, the warrior-lover puts on new linen clothes and goes to embrace his beloved one. However, his attempt to hug her fails as he is scared off by a snake guarding the girl's virginity (XXXV, 202–222). This is not surprising for the reader, who knows that Chalcomede was faking her love for the Indian chieftain (XXXV, 111–138). Morrheus as a character is depicted with humour. We see him burning with desire and trying to cool himself in the sea. Also not without humorous elements is his longing to whiten his skin by means of ablutions, which might make him more attractive to his beloved one.⁴⁸ By concentrating many comic events, the poet makes the scene resemble a comic farce.⁴⁹

Process of taking a bath

The above discussed scenes allow us to at least partially reconstruct the process of taking a bath by the characters depicted in the *Dionysiaca*. First, they often take off their clothes to take a bath – usually in a natural water body – and afterwards they put their clothes back on. These activities (getting dressed is mundane, everyday activity with no erotic significance) are not always mentioned *expressis verbis* in the *epos*. Their presence, however, can be deduced from the context. Moreover, in many bathing scenes the emphasis is put on the pleasure evoked by a bath. Stressing the refreshing effect of the bath taken after work, or a hot day proves that it is a pleasant experience.

Hygiene and nakedness

From the descriptions included in the *Dionysiaca* it follows that the hygiene of the shameful body parts requires special conditions. Anyone washing their body always wants to be secluded from the opposite sex' eyes.

⁴⁶ Translation by Rouse (1940b: 533–535).

⁴⁷ This scene's similarity to the prenuptial bath is mentioned by Agosti (2004: 580; the new revised edition of this book [2013] was not available to me); Gerlaud (2005: 20; 2006: 12–13).

⁴⁸ Agosti (2004: 580–582 *com. ad loc.*) stresses the abovementioned humoristic aspects and refers to the extensive tradition of the ancient proverb about whitening a dark-skinned person. In Agosti (2004: 467), the analysed scene is compared to the Odysseus' bath during his visit to the Phaeacians.

⁴⁹ Gerlaud (2006: 15) mentions the comic potential of some scenes that are derived from the love story of Chalcomede and Morrheus.

A young and attractive⁵⁰ individual risks exposing herself to sexual assault of which examples are the abovementioned rapes and seductions of the women (e.g. Semele, Nicaea) that were seen in bath by the male gods burning with desire. Let us notice then that the bathing scenes in Nonnos' work have an ambiguous meaning. On the one hand, a bath is a pleasant and necessary element of everyday activities, on the other, it can expose one's naked body to the dangers of lascivious looks and assaults.

Although the descriptions of baths in Nonnos do not always have an erotic aspect (e.g. IX, 26–27) and are understood here as emphasising the beauty of the human body and stressing the sensual aspect of the bath⁵¹, it must be admitted that the poet's wish to describe the beauty of the human body as well as the desire evoked by it seems to be a dominant, if not the only, cause for including the bathing scenes in the poem.

Another interesting aspect of the scenes that have been discussed above is the fact that nakedness – regardless of the admiration for the beauty of the human body – is not always treated in an unambiguously positive way. In many passages of the *Dionysiaca*, nakedness negatively affects not only a person who is being naked but also a voyeur. Let us recall the hunter Actaeon whose death was a result of his curiosity. Obviously, the bad consequences of voyeurism can be avoided by the gods thanks to their divine power.⁵² The most ambiguous value of seeing even the partially naked body that can be seen during a bath can be found in those episodes that are crucial moments in the poem having a particular meaning for its composition.⁵³

Although the healthful properties of bathing are merely a marginal aspect of the bathing scenes included in the poem, they still testify to the author's awareness regarding the necessity of maintaining one's personal hygiene. In particular, he emphasised the importance of good hygiene during hot days, after sport competitions, hunting, battle and before intimate intercourse.

Conclusion: crucial differences between Nonnos' and Homer's bathing scenes

Let us observe that Nonnos does not mention anything like bath oil or warm water which can be useful during a bath.⁵⁴ There is also no mention of sanitary equipment like bathtubs,⁵⁵ which were well-known to Homer.⁵⁶ Another feature of the bathing scenes

⁵⁰ It is worth noting that in the *Dionysiaca*, only exceptionally are mentions of ugly individuals made in the context of bathing. In this respect, Aion's bath is particularly interesting (XLI, 176–184). This bath allows him to cyclically regain his youth. See Lackeit (1916: 90).

⁵¹ Gigli Piccardi (2003: 448).

⁵² Newbold (2008: 77): "Gods who peep are powerful enough to escape dire consequences, although Zeus has to be wary of Hera finding out. Less fortunate was the shepherd Hymnus, who does not see the huntress, Nicaea, bathing naked (though he fantasises about it, and does see her bathing clothed) but does see her naked white, and rosy thighs and neck as the wind blows her robe and hair as she chases prey and he follows. He scans her as a divine voyeur would: insatiately, unseen (λαθῶν), love-mad, passionately, furtively (15.220-254)."

⁵³ These are the scenes with Ampelos, Semele, Persephone, Nicaea, and Actaeon.

⁵⁴ Hom. *Od.* VIII, 449–457. See also Yegül (1995: 6).

⁵⁵ In Homer, the only bath taking place in a river is strongly emphasised, see Hom. *Od.* VI, 216.

⁵⁶ It is worth adding that in the Nonnos' poem there is no trace of the knowledge of the Roman hygienic tradition (for which see Ashenburg 2009: 19–44). It can be assumed that the author consciously

included in the *Dionysiaca* that distinguishes Nonnos' poem from its Homeric model⁵⁷ is the fact that Nonnos' characters take a bath alone, while in Homer the heroes are often aided by others, e.g. their servants, during this activity.⁵⁸ In my opinion, the absence of servants and bathing equipment in the bathing scenes in Nonnos⁵⁹ can be explained by his attempt to archaize and at the same time to make credible the mythological world depicted in his poem and existing long before the Trojan war.⁶⁰

It should be added that in Homer⁶¹ a bath is an activity that accompanies the rituals of transition, that is, those moments in human life in which a new stage begins⁶² (in the tradition of many peoples, the Greeks included,⁶³ delivery, weddings, and funerals⁶⁴ were accompanied by a bath). The traces of this tradition can also be spotted in the *Dionysiaca*, where we find a mention of a prenuptial bath. Besides this, a bath is often a beginning of love and desire, and, as a consequence, it leads to impregnation. After all, it was the passion evoked by seeing Semele's naked body in the bath that was the starting point for Dionysos' life, who is the main character of the poem.

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decided not to mention the technological developments of his civilisation although he must have known equipment like tripod and cauldron (Hom. *Od.* XIII, 13), or basin (XIX, 467–470) that were used in bath. See Segal (2007: 12).

⁵⁷ On bath and its meaning in Homer see Segal (2007: 11–14), and Ashenburg (2009: 19–22).

⁵⁸ In Homer, an individual taking a bath was helped by other people: Hom. *Od.* VI, 211–246. In this description Odysseus does not want to be assisted during his bath due to his shyness (VI, 220–222), and this fact is very clearly stressed in the epos. In other circumstances, Odysseus and other heroes were glad to be assisted during their bath, see. Hom. *Od.* III, 48–51; VIII, 449–457; X, 358–367; XIX, 343–357.

⁵⁹ It may be that Nonnos felt that mentioning any everyday utensils would ruin the erotic air of his bathing scenes.

⁶⁰ On hygiene in the *Iliad* see e.g. Hector's warm bath XXII, 440–446. A typical bath is described in Hom. *Od.* VIII, 449–457.

⁶¹ See Segal (2007: 11–14), and Ashenburg (2009: 19–22).

⁶² Segal (2007: 11–14), and Ashenburg (2009: 23). Helen is offering a bath to Odysseus (Hom. *Od.* IV, 242–56); thanks to Athena, Odysseus' appearance changes after he has taken a bath (VI, 230–5 = XXIII, 157–162); as a result, Nausicaa falls in love with him. A rejuvenating process of bath is described once again in XXIV, 365–371 where it refers to Laertes.

⁶³ Segal (2007: 11–12).

⁶⁴ Segal (2007: 11).

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PŘEDSTAVENÍ A FUNKCE VYBRANÝCH SCÉN KOUPÁNÍ V NONNOVÝCH DIONÝSIÁKÁCH

Shrnutí

Dionýsiaka Nonna z Panopole obsahují řadu epizod z každodenního života postav řecké mytologie. Mezi jinými podobnými tématy u Nonna najdeme i scény koupele mužských a zejména ženských postav. Uvádí například scénu koupání novorozeného Dionýsa nebo četné popisy žen v lázni (např. Artemidy, Níkaie, Semelé nebo Persefoné). Z popisů mužských koupelí je nejzajímavější Morrheova. Článek nabízí obecnou typologii scén koupele v *Dionýsiákách*, rozebírá jejich stavbu a význam v kontextu celé básně. Zaměřuje se zejména na činnosti spojené s koupelí a na význam hygieny a nahoty. Závěrečná část ukazuje nejdůležitější rozdíly mezi líčením koupelí u Nonna a u Homéra.