

ASPECTS OF THE RECEPTION OF ILIADIC *ΟΠΛΟΠΟΙΑ* IN LATER GREEK EPIC POETRY (QUINTUS AND NONNUS)¹

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Résumé : *L'ekphrasis* du bouclier d'Achille dans *Il. XVIII* était devenue, déjà à une époque très haute, un modèle standardisé pour la poésie épique. Dans les *Posthomerica* de Quintus de Smyrne (V, 6-101) on lit une description du même bouclier, mais beaucoup de détails différent et certaines scènes sont complètement nouvelles. Ces images qui ne dérivent pas d'Homère véhiculent des allusions à la matière des *Posthomerica*, à la tradition littéraire concernant la guerre de Troie et aux propriétaires du bouclier (chez Homère, les scènes n'ont aucune relation avec l'intrigue). Ce nouveau bouclier d'Achille est aussi un symbole de la nouvelle conception épique de Quintus, étroitement liée à *l'Iliade* mais sans l'imiter servilement. Dans la poésie impériale, deux autres descriptions de boucliers partagent la même tendance à l'allusion : Quintus, VI, 196-291 (le bouclier d'Eurypylos) et Nonnos, *Dion.*, XXV, 380-567 (celui de Dionysos). L'usage de pareilles techniques allusives trouve ses prédécesseurs dans le cadre de la poésie hellénistique, et particulièrement chez Apollonius et Moschos, dont les *ekphraseis* cependant ne s'appliquent pas à des emblèmes d'héroïsme sanctionnés par la tradition. Ainsi l'innovation de la poésie épique grecque tardive consiste, dans ces textes, à fusionner le matériau épique traditionnel avec son développement hellénistique, un choix qui vise probablement à affirmer l'individualité des poètes dans le milieu de la tradition homérique.

Abstract: *The ekphrasis of the shield of Achilles in Il. XVIII became at an early stage a standard model for epic poetry. In Quintus of Smyrna's Posthom., V, 6-101, is provided a description of the same shield, but many details are different, and new images are added. Those newly introduced images*

¹ For Quintus I will use the text of Vian, Francis, *Quintus de Smyrne. La Suite d'Homère*, t. II (livres V-IX), Paris, 1966; t. III (livres X-XIV), Paris, 1969; for Nonnus Id., *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques*, t. IX (livres XXV-XXIX), Paris, 1990.

are allusive to the contents of the *Posthomerica*, to the literary tradition related to the war of Troy, and to the owners of the shield (in Homer, the scenes bear no relation to the plot). This new shield of Achilles is also symbolic of the new epic of Quintus, closely related to the *Iliad* but not slavishly imitative of it. The same allusiveness can be detected in two more shield descriptions from the imperial age, Quintus, VI, 196-291 (Eurypylus' shield) and Nonnus, Dion., XXV, 380-567, (Dionysus' one). The use of such allusive techniques had its precedents in Hellenistic poetry, especially Apollonius and Moschus, whose ekphraseis nonetheless were not concerned with emblems of heroism sanctioned by tradition. So the innovation of later Greek poets on this issue consists in blending the traditional epic set-piece with this Hellenistic development, a choice probably intended as a self-conscious affirmation of those authors against the background of Homeric tradition.

Mots clés : *ekphrasis*, épique grecque tardive, allusion littéraire, réception homérique, intertextualité.

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The shield of Achilles is the beneficiary of the most extended and well-known *ekphrasis* in the Homeric poems, giving its name (*The fabrication of the weapons*, Ὀπλοποιία) to book Σ of the *Iliad*, in the traditional Alexandrian division. *Iliad*, XVIII, 478-608 became already in antiquity the most representative example of the literary description of a work of art²: the reception of the Homeric shield can be detected already in pseudo-Hesiodic *Aspis*, dating back to 6th century BC. Due to the standard value of Homer, such descriptions of the shield of an hero and (more briefly) of his other weapons became markers of the belonging of a poem to the epic genre³. In later Hellenistic and Imperial poems, the presence of such epic set-pieces, as well as the self-conscious adoption of archaizing stylistic patterns, originally functional to oral composition, acquired the function of vindicating a place in the tradition of heroic poetry. This meta-literary dimension was fully exploited also in its other potentiality, that of signalling originality by means of the ostentatious variation and distortion of the model. An illuminating example is the Hellenistic mythological epic of Apollonius Rhodius, whose model of heroism is overwhelmingly different from the *Iliadic* one, and that coherently substitutes the description of the hero's shield with that of a lavishly embroidered δίπλαξ, with which the main male character underlines his handsomeness and charm while going to a meeting with a stranger queen, that will eventually end in an erotic adventure.

² For the broader meaning of *ekphrasis* in the teaching of ancient rhetors, contrasting with the more selective use of modern scholars (as literary description of a work of art) see Elsener, Jäs, «Introduction. The Genres of Ekphrasis», in Elsener, Jäs (ed.), *The Verbal and the Visual: Culture of Ekphrasis in Antiquity* = *Ramus* 31, 2002, pp. 1-3.

³ Cfr. Becker, Andrew S., «The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Homeric Description», *AJPh*, 110, 1990, pp. 139-41; for Quintus, Maciver, Calum A., *Quintus Smyrnaeus' Posthomerica. Engaging Homer in Late Antiquity*, Leiden - Boston, 2012, pp. 39-40.

Every later arm description can't escape the comparison with Homer: the peculiarity of Quintus Smyrnaeus consists in the fact that he describes the same object. We could expect to find a mere rewriting of the same scenes in a *tour de force* of stylistic *variatio*, except for the difference that in Quintus the object is not described while being forged by Hephaestus, and consequently the dynamic presentation that so much pleased Lessing must be substituted by a static one. This is by no means the case⁴: the shield of Achilles described in *Posthomerica*, V, 6-101, besides partial correspondences with Homer, presents striking differences. A shift from such a well-known model must have been consciously intended by the poet, and easily recognizable by contemporary recipients⁵: our purpose is to define the author's aims in leaving the Homeric path, in a poem that seems overwhelmingly loyal to its predecessor. Moreover, we will widen our scope touching briefly the other extended shield description in the poem, that of Eurypilus (VI, 200-93), and the depiction of Dionysus' shield in Nonnus' *Dionysiaka*, XXVI, 380-567.

THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES IN *ILIAD*, XVIII, 478-608, AND SOME DEVELOPMENTS IN HELLENISTIC EPIC POETRY

Our first task is to define what is a re-elaboration of the iliadic shield, and what represents an absolute innovation by Quintus (and Nonnus): so let's state some basic characteristics of the *ekphrasis* in book XVIII of the *Iliad*. It opens with a cosmic image: earth, heavens and sea are present, as well as the constellations (XVIII, 483-489). After that, the decoration turns to illustrate the deeds of mankind: we have firstly a city at peace, with marriages and trials taking place (491-508), and then another city besieged by two armies, while on the banks of a nearby river a battle is taking place for the possession of a large cattle (509-540). The description goes on with scenes of ploughing (541-549), reaping in an estate owned by a king (550-560), vintage with the accompaniment of music (561-572), cattle keeping (573-589) and dancing (590-606). The agricultural scenes show no sign of the harshness of physical labour, but share instead a joyful and gay atmosphere. The great river Ocean embraces and encircles all these images (607-608), as it embraces the earth in archaic cosmology.

Ancient interpreters took Homer's shield as an image of the *cosmos*: this interpretation is accurate, since the masterpiece of Hephaestus displays at the beginning the image of physical universe, and after that provides a portrait of the human civilization dwelling in it. The two cities, juxtaposed as to form a polarity, gave to ancient grammarians a key to read Homer's depiction of human activities: a *scholion* to XVIII, 490, extends the war-peace opposition to the whole of them. It's worth quoting a part: ἐπὶ τὰ ἐπίγεια φέρεται. διοικουμένου δὲ τοῦ βίου πολέμῳ καὶ εἰρήνῃ τὰ ἐν ἀμφοτέροις τοῖς καιροῖς

⁴ Köchly, Armin H., *Quinti Smyrnaei Posthomericon libri XIV*, Lipsiae, 1850, p. 258, makes the point that the paraphrase of longer Homeric scenes is as alien to Quintus' poetics as is widespread in his poem the imitation of Homer's language and style.

⁵ The wide-ranging implications of such an extreme case of emulation are underlined by Maciver, *Quintus Smyrnaeus' Posthomerica. Engaging Homer in Late Antiquity*, op. cit., p. 40: «The shield, more than any other part of the *Posthomerica*, represents in focus the poem's intertextual dialogue with the Homeric poems. [...] The poet has to create within a framework already created, and read and known by the reader». See also Baumbach, Manuel, «Die Poetik der Schilde: Form und Funktion von Ekphraseis in den *Posthomerica* des Quintus Smyrnaeus», in Baumbach, Manuel, et Bär, Silvio (ed.), *Quintus Smyrnaeus: Transforming Homer in Second Sophistic Epic*, Berlin – New York, 2007, pp. 110-111.

συμβαίνοντα πρὸς ἐκλογὴν τοῦ ἀμείνονος προβέβληται. Then the scholiast observes that Homer has devoted more space to peaceful scenes than to battles, and makes sense of this saying that, as the *Iliad* is basically a war poem, the poet took advantage of the *ekphrasis* in order to describe what he had to leave out of the narration. Considering the fact that the city-at-peace scene in Homer is actually much shorter than the siege and battle scenes (respectively 18 and 32 lines), we can conclude that the scholiast took the country-life scenes to belong to the same section with the city-at-peace, notwithstanding the interposition of 509-540. So everything on the shield, except for the cosmological items, can be considered an example of either war or peace. But the well-established allegorizing trend in Homeric scholarship detected in the two cities hidden physical meanings: Heraclitus' *Homeric Allegories* saw in them a precedent of Empedoclean cosmological theories, as metaphors for the universal principles of *neikos* and *philia*⁶. This idea lends to these twin images an even more general value: the shield in its entirety, being a mirror of the physical world, can be read in the light of their polarity.

Contemporary scholarship agrees with ancient interpreters on some basic matters: the ambition of the shield to be an image of the world, and the fundamental un-relatedness of the *ekphrasis* to the *Iliad* as a whole. This un-relatedness is thematic only, for this description can't be seen as merely decorative: in fact, it plays a major role in the economy of the poem, laying emphasis on the return of Achilles to war after the death of Patroclus⁷. But as far as the iconographic program of the shield is concerned, there is no evident relation with the plot, or with Achilles himself. A major characteristic of those scenes is the complete absence of personal, chronological and spatial determinations: this is striking in a contest such as Homeric narration, where even lesser warriors, that appear only at the moment of being slain on battlefield, are granted a name and a genealogical background⁸. The universality of the shield decoration has been recognized by twentieth century scholarship, particularly German, as the most characteristic item of the *ekphrasis*: Schadewaldt has argued that it portrays the whole world reduced to its basic forms, and ordained by the principle of polarity⁹. Reinhardt has insisted on the concept of the continuity of life («Kontinuität des Lebens»), so calling the aforementioned lack of individuation, that renders the carvings universally valid¹⁰.

Yet some attempts have been made to interpret the scenes on the shield as thematically bound to the plot of the poem¹¹. Øvind Andersen tried to detect allusions to main themes

⁶ In Heraclitus' perspective, Empedocles borrowed his *Σικελικὴν δόξαν* directly from Homer: see *Hom. All.*, 49, 2. Hardie, Philip R., «Imago Mundi: cosmological and ideological aspects of the shield of Achilles», *JHS*, 105, 1985, pp. 15-16, argues that the allegories on *Iliad* XVIII derived from Pergamene Stoic-oriented scholarship, in particular from Crates of Mallus.

⁷ For the functionality of the *ekphrasis* in the *Iliad* see Perutelli, Alessandro, «L'inversione speculare: per una retorica dell'*ekphrasis*», *MD*, 1, 1978, p. 88, who starting from an intuition by Ernesto Di Martino argues that the view of the richly carved shield shakes Achilles from his grief and moves him toward action.

⁸ See Giuliani, Luca, *Bild und Mythos. Geschichte der Bildererzählung in der griechischen Kunst*, München, 2003, pp. 42-44.

⁹ Schadewaldt, Wolfgang, *Von Homers Welt und Werk*, Stuttgart, 1951, pp. 362-371.

¹⁰ Reinhardt, Karl, *Die Ilias und ihr Dichter*, Göttingen, 1961, pp. 401-411.

¹¹ I will not discuss here other interesting approaches to the matter, that have tried to define the function of the Shield in the frame of the *Iliad* on other grounds than the thematic relation between the images and the poem. See in particular Becker, Andrew S., «The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Homeric Description», *AJPh*, 110, 1990, pp. 139-53, and Id., *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis*, London, 1995, in particular

of the *Iliad* and events of the Trojan cycle, seeing for instance in the weddings of ll. 491-497 a hint to the wedding of Helen, or in the *νεῖκος* scene of ll. 497-508 an allusion to the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon¹². But this attempt suffers from the vagueness of the correspondences proposed. Hans Gärtner took the other way round, and tried to make sense of the predominance of joyful and serene scenes, detecting in them a description of the blessed life of peaceful kingship that Thetis wished for his son, but which Achilles refused in order to gain un-perishable renown¹³. This is charming, but absolutely not provable. Byre has tried to lay more solid foundations for his attempt¹⁴, and starts from a division between descriptive scenes, displaying tableaux finished in themselves (the agricultural ones), and narrative scenes, characterised by the lack of conclusion (the scenes of conflict): the second type is thematically closer to the plot of the poem. I fear nonetheless that this distinction is very subjective (both types describe a work in progress, and are equally “un-finished”). Actually, the shield of Achilles is related to the plot of the *Iliad* only as far as it has the ambition to represent the world of men: so the war scene at ll. 509-40 has something to do with the war taking place at Troy, only inasmuch the former stands for every community besieged by hosts. Following partly the fine reading of Oliver Taplin, we could say that the shield is a microcosm, and if a reference to the plot of the *Iliad* is at all meant, «the city on the shield puts the *Iliad* itself into perspective; it puts war and prowess into perspective within the world as a whole»¹⁵.

The sub-genre of epic *ekphrasis* had a long evolution, and some ten centuries lay between the *Iliad* and Quintus of Smyrna. What were the main evolutions from the situation until now described, and at what stage did they take place? We have said that a major example of the potentiality for meta-poetic reflection of the *ekphrasis* is the description of Jason’s cloak in *Argonautica*, I, 721-68: ancient interpreters had observed that the substitution of the arms with a precious piece of clothing is related with the erotic (rather than heroic) characteristics of the poem’s male protagonist¹⁶. Modern scholars extend this observation to the *Stimmung* of Apollonius’ poem: it is not a war epic like the *Iliad*, so the marked element of *ekphrasis* must change subject¹⁷. But the *δίπλαξ* has also another function: as a fundamental study

pp. 41-45: starting from the consideration that the *ekphrasis* offers in fact a miniature mirror of the poetics at work in the *Iliad*, and that the description is accompanied by commentaries suggesting to the recipients their response to the beauty of the object, Becker argues that this *ekphrasis* is meant as a model for the proper aesthetic reception of the whole poem. A similar approach in De Jong, Irene J. F., «The Shield of Achilles: from Metalepsis to Mise en Abyme», *Ramus*, 40, 2011, pp. 1-14.

¹² Andersen, Øivind, «Some Thoughts on the Shield of Achilles», *SO*, 51, 1976, pp. 5-18.

¹³ Gärtner, Hans A., «Beobachtungen zum Schild des Achilleus», in Görgemanns, Herwig et Schmidt, Ernst A., *Studien zum antiken Epos*, Meisenheim am Glan, 1976, pp. 46-65.

¹⁴ Byre, Calvin S., «The Shield of Achilles», *CJ*, 88, 1992, pp. 33-42.

¹⁵ Taplin, Oliver, «The Shield of Achilles within the *Iliad*», in Cairns, David (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Homer’s Iliad*, Oxford, 2001, p. 357.

¹⁶ Cfr. a *scholion* to *Arg.*, I, 721-722: Jason is introduced *οὐ πολεμικῆ σκευῆ χρώμενον, ἀλλ’ ἐσθῆτι κοσμούμενον*, because the character is *ἀπόλεμος* and because he is going to a gathering of ladies.

¹⁷ On Apollonius’ choice of a cloak in opposition to Homer see Friedländer, Paul, *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentiarius*, Leipzig, 1912, p. 11; Hunter, Richard, *The Argonautica of Apollonius. Literary Studies*, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 52-59; Manakidou, Flora, *Beschreibung von Kunstwerken in der Hellenistischen Dichtung*, Stuttgart, 1993, pp. 121-124; Rengakos, Antonios, «“Du würdest Dich in Deinem Sinn täuschen lassen”. Zur Ekphrasis in der hellenistischen Poesie», in Ratkowitsch, Christine (ed.), *Die poetische Ekphrasis von Kunstwerken*, Wien, 2006, p. 11.

by Massimo Fusillo¹⁸ has shown, all the seven scenes embroidered on it by Athena's hand bear a recognizable relation with main themes and aspects of the poem: the image of Aphrodite looking at her own image in Ares' shield (I, 742-746), for instance, is both allusive to the new deal of Apollonius' epics, where love casts out heroic warfare as chief element, and proleptic of the goddess's own intervention in *Argonautica*, III, where she is likewise presented while caring for her appearance (III, 45-50). As Fusillo points out, this relation is indirect and allusive: a "figural" relationship, active at the level of connotation, not of denotation¹⁹. Yet the last image is openly referred to the Argonautic saga: it portrays the antecedent of Jason's quest, the boy Phrixos with the ram with the golden fleece (I, 763-767) – an explicit element, which suggests to the recipients how to read the other scenes.

This new semantics of description are made possible by abolishing the universal scope of Homer's shield: the seven scenes that constitute the decoration of Jason's cloak display no anonymous characters and undetermined settings, but well known gods and heroes, and in five cases a precise mythic episode. This shift from anonymity narrows the scope and allows the allusion to individual aspects of the *Argonautica*²⁰.

Another major Hellenistic example of an *ekphrasis* alluding to the plot of the embedding poem is offered by Moschus' *Europa*. In the description of the engraved casket of the heroine (ll. 37-62) her soon-to-follow union with Zeus, disguised as a bull, is foreshadowed by the representation of the *affaire* of the god with Io, in which a similar metamorphosis takes place (but there is the beloved woman who has been changed into a cow)²¹. Moschus' allusion is much more direct, because the plot of the epyllion is mirrored in an almost identical story: yet the reference is still delivered obliquely, because of the inversion of the rôles between Zeus and his lover²². A famous example for the application of such Hellenistic techniques to the more traditional case of a shield description is that of Aeneas' shield in *Aeneid*, VIII, 626-728, where Vulcanus has forged a celebration of the future national achievements of Rome.

THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES (*POSTHOMERICA*, V, 6-101)²³

Matters of structure

Let's state the division of the scenes in Quintus' version of the shield of Achilles²⁴, as it was established in Köchly's seminal edition:

6-16 Cosmic images: Aither and the Sky, the Air; Sea, Ocean and rivers

¹⁸ See Fusillo, Massimo, «Decorazione e racconto: sulla "retorica dell'oggetto" in Apollonio Rodio», *MD*, 10-11, 1983, pp. 83-96.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁰ See Rengakos, «"Du würdest Dich in Deinem Sinn tauschen lassen", *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12. It's revealing of the predominance in antiquity of the cosmic interpretation of the shield of Achilles, the fact that a *scholion* to *Arg.*, I, 763-764a, argues that also the cloak of Jason portrays οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ τὴν κοσμικὴν τάξιν καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράξεις.

²¹ Friedländer, *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentiarius*, *op. cit.*, p. 15, considered Moschus' casket the first example of an *ekphrasis* thematically related to the plot of the embedding poem – because he failed to see the allusive nature of Apollonius' cloak.

²² This technique of inversed reflection enjoyed much fortune in Roman poetry, most famously in Catullus, 64; see Perutelli, «L'inversione speculare: per una retorica dell'*ekphrasis*», *op. cit.*, pp. 87-96.

²³ There are three recent studies exploring the function of Quintus' *ekphrasis* in the frame of the *Posthomeric*:

- 17-24 Wild beasts on the mountains and men hunting with dogs
- 25-37 Battles and personifications of war
- 38-42 Gorgons with snakes
- 45-8 Peaceful cities: personification of *Dike*, prosperous fields
- 49-56 Allegory of the mountain of *Arete*
- 57-65 Harvest and plough with oxen
- 66-8 Music and dances
- 69-72 *Cypris anadyomene*
- 73-79 The Wedding of Thetis and Peleus
- 80-87 Ships troubled by a sea storm
- 88-96 The carriage of Poseidon escorted by dolphins

The whole of this is contained, as in Homer²⁵, by the flow of Okeanos (99-101). Two passages are left out, containing commentaries by the narrator: ll. 43-44 underline the shift from a section to the following one: *καὶ τὰ μὲν ἄρ πολέμοιο τεράατα πάντα τέτυκτο·/ εἰρήνης δ' ἀπάνευθεν ἔσαν περικάλλεα ἔργα*; ll. 97-98 advise the readers that this description isn't intended to be exhaustive (*ἄλλα δὲ μυρία κεῖτο κατ' ἀσπίδα*, 97). Both observations are important: the first one gives an order to the iconographic program of the shield (war first, peace then); the second leaves discreetly open the possibility of according this version of the shield with the *Iliad*, suggesting that the two poets could have chosen and told in their own way two partially overlapping selections from a much richer decoration²⁶. The division between war and peace marks also the text in the sense of the reception of the iliadic shield: we have seen how this polarity had been taken by ancient commentators as an exegetical tool applied to the entire *ekphrasis*, and we can assume that Quintus knew that widespread interpretation, as well as “philosophical” readings such as that proposed by Heraclitus²⁷. The relative position of the *πολέμοιο τεράατα* and the *εἰρήνης ἔργα* in contrast with *Il.*, XVIII, 490-540 strengthen this idea: in Homer the city at peace precedes the besieged one, but from line 541 onwards no more words are spent about battles, and the shield is

Baumbach, «Die Poetik der Schilde: Form und Funktion von Ekphraseis in den *Posthomerica* des Quintus Smyrnaeus», *op. cit.*; Maciver, «Returning to the Mountain of Arete: Reading Ecphrasis, Constructing Ethics in Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica*», *op. cit.*; Id., *Quintus Smyrnaeus' Posthomerica. Engaging Homer in Late Antiquity*, *op. cit.* My approach will be different, so I won't discuss in detail their contents, but quote them wherever necessary.

²⁴ See Köchly, *Quinti Smyrnaei Posthomericonum libri XIV*, *op. cit.*, p. 259. Other scholars divide the *ekphrasis* in different ways, the number of scenes varying between 7 and 12: see Κακρίδης, Φάνης I., *Κόντος Σμυρναίος. Γενική μελέτη των Μεθ' Ὀμηρον και του ποιητή τους*, Αθήνα, 1962, 53-57; Vian, Francis, *Quintus de Smyrne. La Suite d'Homère*, *op. cit.*, t. II, pp. 5-7; Byre, Calvin S., «Per aspera (et arborem) ad astra. Ramifications of the Allegory of Arete in Quintus Smyrnaeus *Posthomerica* 5, 49-68», *Hermes*, 110, 1983, pp. 184-185; James, Alan W. and Lee, Kevin H., *A commentary on Quintus of Smyrna Posthomerica V*, Leiden – Boston – Köln, 2000, pp. 34-35; Baumbach, «Die Poetik der Schilde: Form und Funktion von Ekphraseis in den *Posthomerica* des Quintus Smyrnaeus», *op. cit.*, pp. 112-118; Maciver, *Quintus Smyrnaeus' Posthomerica. Engaging Homer in Late Antiquity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

²⁵ See also Ps.-Hes., *Aspis*, 314-315.

²⁶ See Baumbach, «Die Poetik der Schilde: Form und Funktion von Ekphraseis in den *Posthomerica* des Quintus Smyrnaeus», *op. cit.*, p. 111.

²⁷ Hardie, Philip R., «Imago Mundi: cosmological and ideological aspects of the shield of Achilles», *op. cit.*, p. 17, goes as far as writing that «Quintus retranslates into verse an allegorizing interpretation of the shield close to that found in Heraclitus».

embellished again with peaceful images. This interposition can be perceived as disorder in composition: that binary opposition fails to account for it²⁸.

We can suppose that the different order in Quintus aims at a clear-cut division, with no coming back from peace to war: a correction or an improvement of his model. But does this division apply to the whole of the shield decoration?²⁹ I think that it's quite difficult to account for the pertinence of all the images on the shield to one and the same poetic plan, because the last four images do not fit well in this schema: they are not *εἰρήνης περιβάλλεα ἔργα*, at least not in the way the previous ones are (rightfully administered cities, farming activities, dances) – they simply abstain from portraying explicitly³⁰ images of struggle and violence. I prefer to start from the question: what is a (free) revision of Homer, and what is not? A distinctive element is the difference exposed in the previous chapter: everything that can be conceived as a variation on Homer, in *Posthomerica*, V, 6-101, consists in images displaying general and anonymous scenes: some men are hunting or fighting, some warriors are dealing with battle and death, some peasants are earning their bread by husbandry. This is the Homeric way observed in *Il.* XVIII, where the characters have no name³¹, and no character from well-known myths is portrayed³². On the contrary, in the last section of Quintus' *ekphrasis* (69-96) appear familiar divinities from the classical pantheon, and one of the most famous episodes from ancient mythical lore, the wedding of Thetis and Peleus (73-79).

From a thematic point of view, except for lines 49-56 Quintus keeps (broadly speaking) the Homeric design until line 68, improving it with the inversion of war- and peace scenes. We have an introductory, cosmological description (6-16), corresponding to *Il.*, XVIII, 483-489; then battle scenes³³, cities at peace, farming activities and dancing festivities. The aforementioned functional division (generic/individuated scenes) corresponds to another twofold division, that pertaining to the thematic continuity with Homer. From line 69 onwards we have entirely unprecedented images: Afrodite emerging from the sea, the wedding of Thetis, the sea storm and Poseidon. Almost in the middle of the *Ekphrasis* (42 lines after the beginning and some 45 before its conclusion) we have the even more un-Homeric allegorical rep-

²⁸ Also in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Aspis* the reciprocal position of the city at war and the city at peace is reversed, but that doesn't imply a sharp division as in Quintus: before I, 237 (the beginning of the war section) battle and peace scenes are mixed as in Homer.

²⁹ Cfr. James, Alan W., and Lee, Kevin H., *A commentary on Quintus of Smyrna Posthomerica V*, *op. cit.*, p. 34: «Q[uintus] introduces an emphatic break between the two preceding scenes of war and the five following ones of peace, thereby extending and making explicit the H[omeric] contrast between the two cities». See Köchly, *Quinti Smyrnaei Posthomeri corum libri XIV*, *op. cit.*, p. 259; Vian, *Quintus de Smyrne. La Suite d'Homère*, *op. cit.*, t. II, 6; Byre «Per aspera (et arborem) ad astra. Ramifications of the Allegory of Arete in Quintus Smyrnaeus *Posthomerica* 5, 49-68», *op. cit.*, pp. 185-6; Maciver, *Quintus Smyrnaeus' Posthomerica. Engaging Homer in Late Antiquity*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

³⁰ Emphasis laid on the adverb «explicitly»: in fact, as I will argue later, this scenes allude to the war of Troy.

³¹ Safe for personified concepts like *Eris*, *Kudoimos*, *Ker*, whose identity does not imply a real individuality.

³² At lines 591-592 are recorded the city of Cnossus with two of its mythical inhabitants (Daedalus and Ariadne), but they are not carved on the shield, but just proposed by the narrator as a comparison for the *χορός* actually portrayed by Hephaestus.

³³ In a very broad sense, including also hunt. Cfr. Vian, *Quintus de Smyrne. La Suite d'Homère*, *op. cit.*, t. II, p. 6. To the war section belong also the demonic entities at ll. 29-37, and the Gorgons at ll. 38-42 (a frequent subject on real shield decorations): they must not be considered mythic characters, or supposed to imply a reference to individual myths, because they are just personifications of abstract concepts and bogey-like figures.

resentation of the mountain of *Arete*. It is commonly seen as pertaining to the peace section, but its position (which interrupts the flow of Homeric scenes) cannot fail to produce troubles. It's worth spending a few words on this. This is the city-at-peace scene, in Quintus' version:

ἀμφὶ δὲ μυρία φύλα πολυτλήτων ἀνθρώπων
 ἄστεα καλὰ νέμοντο· Δίκη δ' ἐπεδέρκετο πάντα·
 ἄλλοι δ' ἄλλ' ἐπὶ ἔργα χέρας φέρον· ἀμφὶ δ' ἄλωαὶ
 καρποῖσι βρίζοντο· μέλαινα δὲ γαῖα τεθήλει. (V.45-8)

The corresponding Homeric image (*Iliad*, XVIII, 480-508) has nothing to do with the land outside the city walls: nuptial processions are going on in the streets, justice is being administered in the *agora*. In Quintus there is only the bare mention of the busy mankind living in the *ἄστεα καλὰ*, under the supervision of Justice. The vines and the black earth, unknown to Homer as components of the civic landscape, are proleptic elements for the following agricultural scenes of ll. 57-65³⁴; but they are also tokens of the fact that the imperial poet is contaminating Homer with Hesiod (*Erga*, 225-237) and Aratus (*Phaen.*, 98-136), where the presence of Justice in human communities (as in *Posthom.*, V, 46) is connected with peaceful farming activities (*Erga*, 230-233, *Phaen.*, 110-113)³⁵. As the poet took the pain of inserting this proleptic elements, we cannot but feel uncomfortable with the insertion of the allegory: a shift from line 48 to l. 57, ἐν δ' ἔσαν ἀμητῆρες ἀνὰ πλατὺν ὄγμον ἰόντες, would have seemed much more fitting. Moreover, this allegory pertains to the concept of *Arete*, whose more obvious meaning in epic is strength and courage in battle; yet ἀρετή here isn't explicitly identified with the warrior's *virtus*, and Maciver has shown that this concept is broader than that (although encompassing it)³⁶. At any rate, it is not properly an example of the «wonderful deeds of peace» announced at l. 44. I think that its unsatisfying position is due mainly to the fact that here is the middle of the *ekphrasis*, that is, the middle of the shield as an object. We can guess that the author wished to emphasise this image, and so he put it in the most central position, notwithstanding its only partial relevance to the immediate context. The reason will bother us later.

In conclusion: we have a flow of scenes corresponding to those on the Homeric shield, from the cosmological tableau to the feast at ll. 66-68, except for the mountain of *Arete*. The images following line 68 have nothing to do with the iliadic shield, and can be considered as an entirely original contribution by Quintus. These unprecedented scenes are intrinsically un-Homeric, not generic nor anonymous. Besides this division between Homeric and non-Homeric scenes, all the images are disposed according to a general rule of gradual shift:

³⁴ See Vian, *Quintus de Smyrne. La Suite d'Homère*, *op. cit.*, t. II, p. 6, n. 4; cfr. also Byre, «Per aspera (et arborem) ad astra. Ramifications of the Allegory of *Arete* in Quintus Smyrnaeus *Posthomerica* 5, 49-68», *op. cit.*, p. 186.

³⁵ See James and Lee, *A commentary on Quintus of Smyrna Posthomerica V*, *op. cit.*, p. 51; Maciver, *Quintus Smyrnaeus' Posthomerica. Engaging Homer in Late Antiquity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-9. This models can account also for the absence of a judgement scene (see in particular Aratus, *Phaen.*, 108: οὐπω λευγαλέου τότε νείκεος ἠπίσταντο). This can be seen as an improvement on Homer, because the judgement about a murder in ll. XVIII, 497-508, introduces an unsound instance of *neikos* in the peaceful city.

³⁶ See Maciver, *Quintus Smyrnaeus' Posthomerica. Engaging Homer in Late Antiquity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-86. I am not wholly persuaded by Maciver's idea of a strong Stoic connotation of Quintus' concept of *Virtue*.

every image must have something in common with the previous one, avoiding thus harsh contrasts between neighbouring scenes; where a sharper change from peace to war is involved, the discontinuity is mediated by the narrator's remark (43-44). The progression is linear, from the preceding image to the following one: not a centripetal architecture, but a sequence. This thematic progression is inscribed in a parallel geographic progression from the sky and the air, to the earth (mountains first), the seashores, the sea and the Ocean, as pointed out by Vian³⁷.

Homeric scenes: re-writing archaic models

Let's observe more closely those items that we have defined Homeric: indeed, not everything in *Posthomerica*, V, 6-49, 57-68, is taken from *Iliad*, XVIII, but we can easily recognize that a scene like the hunt of ll. 17-24 is at least "Homer-like": it is anonymous and undetermined, can be easily inserted in the war-peace polarity, and although not granted independent existence in the iliadic shield, it has something to do with it. An Homeric precedent for the struggle between men and beasts is provided by the ending of the cattle-keeping scene of *Il.*, XVIII, 579-586, where two lions attack a bull and are consequently fought by the herdsmen and their dogs. Another *sensu lato* "Homeric" element is the coherence of these scenes with Homeric poetry in general: similar scenes appear frequently in Homeric similes, but an extensive hunting scene is also recollected in *Od.*, XIX, 427-458³⁸. The same is true for the demonic personifications of the various aspects of battle, that occupy much of ll. 25-37. In fact, real warfare is limited to the first few lines (25-28), and even that passage is wholly descriptive (a dreadful image of slaughter) – unlike Homer's city-at-war, where we see two besieging armies taking council and an expedition for the pillage of cattle. In Quintus the real protagonists are the personifications of Fear (*Phobos*, line 29) and Terror (*Deimos*, 29), the warlike goddess Enyō (29), Strife (*Eris*, 31) and the *Erinyes* (31), the *Keres* (34), Death (*Thanatos*, 35), and Battles (*Hysminai*, 36). All these personifications are acting on the battlefield, while the warriors are involved exclusively in the action of dying: *περικτείνοντο δὲ λαοὶ / μίγδα θοοῖς ἵπποισι* (26-27). This ghastly *Götterapparat* is, for the reader, an old acquaintance from Homeric battles: such entities appear also on the Homeric shield, but play a minor role: see *Il.*, XVIII, 535-540 (*Eris*, *Kudoimos* and *Ker*). So the general theme is taken from the Homeric shield, but handled in a different way: through the substitution of narration with allegory, not otherwise than in the city-at-peace scene, where instead of narrating the activities of the citizens the poet simply places among them *Dike*.

Quintus strove to be at once Homeric and un-Homeric. His scenes are briefer than the Homeric ones, and in many ways akin to those of the pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield of Heracles*. Quintus looks constantly at it: this is clear from the presence of the wild beasts (see *Aspis*, 168-177), the overwhelming attention paid to the war demons (see *Aspis*, 147-160, 249-270), the presence of the Gorgons with their snakes (see *Aspis*, 160-167, for the snakes; 223-237, for the Gorgons), associated with the *τερράτα* of war. We may say that Quintus uses pseudo-Hesiod as a source to correct Homer, but takes from the former only the elements that he can insert in the schema inherited by *Iliad*, XVIII. Why did he act like this, besides for the

³⁷ See Vian, *Quintus de Smyrne. La Suite d'Homère*, op. cit., t. II, p. 5.

³⁸ A hunting scene (a dog catching a fawn) appears in another famous Homeric *ekphrasis*, that of the buckle of Odysseus' cloak described in *Od.*, XIX, 226-231.

sake of *ποικιλία*? The variations introduced by ps.-Hesiod must have been, to his mind, more fit for his peculiar aesthetic aims. We can remind that the iliadic Shield of Achilles had been deemed spurious by Zenodotus: we do not know exactly why, but we can guess that it was because of its length and its little relevance to the plot of the *Iliad*. Quintus (the Homeric part of whose *ekphrasis* is less than a half long than the model) could have been looking for an answer to such criticisms in the ps.-Hesiodic *Aspis*. In itself this poem shares the blames possibly reproached to Homer's shield, but it presents also many innovations: it displays named characters and mythical episodes, along with generic scenes, and this is virtually exploitable to establish a net of allusions to the main plot (this is not the case in Ps.-Hesiod)³⁹. Moreover, its scenes had a less pronounced narrative character, and many figures were present without being involved in any action, but simply as symbols of power and might, or of dread and horror; Quintus could have found there an inspiration for his struggle scenes, substituting lengthy narrations with the portrayal of war demons and Gorgons, that convey with their bare name the notion of death and slaughter.

Our approach emphasizes the relation with Homer, in continuity and break: we assume that the presence of scenes derived from the *Iliad*, with a cosmological frame and the division between war and peace, aim at marking the poem as a traditional heroic epos. Baumbach has argued that those scenes have also a proleptic value: he divides the description in just seven sections⁴⁰, the first four of which are the cosmic image (6-16), the hunt scene (17-24), the war images (25-42), and the peace section, comprehending the allegory of *Arete* and the agricultural labours (43-65). In his opinion, these images must be read as a sort of evolutionary history of mankind⁴¹, and at the same time provide a dynamic plan of the *Posthomerica*: the succession war and violence / peace and justice would mirror the evolution of the plot, which narrates battles and slaughter but will end with the victory of the Achaeans and the achievement of peace and prosperity⁴². This teleological reading seems to me unsustainable, because the Trojan war is an act of vengeance, and does not aim at the restoration of peace. Moreover, the Achaean victory will eventually bring no peace nor justice: the war ends with an horrible carnage, and few of the Greeks will reach their homelands without troubles: many are drowned in the great storm of book XIV, and we know that the *nostoi* of many heroes ended with death, exile or year-long wanderings at sea. But also a reading of the shield as an history of mankind is unlikely; ancient interpretations of the Homeric shield presented the war-peace opposition as synchronic and eternally valid: there was no expectation of a future life of peace opposed to a present of violence, nor any idea of progress, but a polarity of principles which provide the *cosmos* with an order.

Another proleptic function of those images, in Baumbach's view, is that of preparing the following dispute between Ajax and Odysseus for the possession of the weapons, resulting

³⁹ The mythic episodes represented on the ps.-Hesiodic shield are the battle between Lapiths and Centaurs (ll. 178-90) and Perseus escaping from the Gorgons (216-237); there are also divine scenes not belonging to a specific myth: Ares with his horses and esquires (191-196), Athena (197-200), Apollo and the Muses making music (201-206). The two divinities of war are also on Achilles' shield at *Il.*, XVIII, 515-519, but they are a detail in the city-at-war section, while in the *Aspis* they are granted autonomous existence.

⁴⁰ Baumbach, «Die Poetik der Schilde: Form und Funktion von Ekphraseis in den *Posthomerica* des Quintus Smyrnaeus», *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 114-115.

in the former's suicide: the king of Ithaca would prove to be a competent interpreter of the shield's iconography⁴³, and so a fitting owner, because in referring in his speech the achievements of human mind he mentions stone-quarrying on mountains, seafaring and hunting wild animals (V, 243-50), items present on the shield; moreover, during his embassy to Neoptolemus, he tries to persuade Achilles' son to come to Troy by promising him the shield, described correctly as representing *γαῖα καὶ οὐρανὸς ἠδὲ θάλασσα* (VII, 201) and *ζῶα... ἐοικότα κινυμένοισι* (203). But I see no point in these parallels: the first one has nothing to do with the *ekphrasis*, it's a rather common-place rhetoric exaltation of human intelligence, more similar to Soph., *Ant.*, 332-362 than to *Posthom.*, V, 6-101⁴⁴. As for Odysseus' words to Neoptolemus, he is describing the shield itself: no wonder that he recalls some items of its carvings – far from accurately, I would say. The real heir of the weapons will be Neoptolemus: explicit references to the family of Achilles are displayed in the un-Homeric section of the shield. Odysseus will own the weapons for a few days, and won't ever use them. No point for Quintus to underline with faint parallelisms his non-existent right to the shield.

Non Homeric scenes: mythological tableaux

The four scenes after line 68 (we could as well speak of three, because the sea storm and Poseidon form a diptych), all of them placed by the sea or in a marine environment, avoid the universalizing character, anonymity and loss of determination of the previous ones. We have two well known divinities (Aphrodite with *Himeros* and the Graces, Poseidon riding his chariot) and an extended mythological scene, representing the marriage of Peleus and Thetis on the idyllic background of Mount Pelion (V, 73-79):

ἐν δ' ἄρ' ἔσαν Νηρηῶς ὑπερθύμοιο θύγατρεις
 ἐξ ἄλός εὐρυπόροιο κασιγνήτην ἀνάγουσαι
 ἐς γάμον Αἰακίδαο δαΐφρονος. ἀμφὶ δὲ πάντες
 ἀθάνατοι δαίνυντο μακρὴν ἀνὰ Πηλίου ἄκρην·
 ἀμφὶ δ' ἄρ' ὕδρηλοί τε καὶ εὐθαλέες λειμῶνες
 ἔσκον, ἀπειρεσίοισι κεκασμένοι ἄνθεσι ποίης,
 ἄλσεά τε κρῆναί τε διειδέες ὕδατι καλῶ.

This episode has very strong connections with the Trojan lore, for it was narrated in the *Cypria*⁴⁵, and contains a plain allusion to Achilles, whose birth is the consequence of that wedding. But this image is also related to other passages in the *Posthomerica*, because in the three books devoted to the death of Achilles and its aftermaths the marriage of Peleus and Thetis is remembered five more times: III, 98-127, 611-26; IV, 49-55, 131-143; V, 338-345. Except for IV, 131-143, where the event is referred by Nestor, all the occurrences are recollections by various goddesses⁴⁶, who underline sympathetically the cruelty of the hero's

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-23. A similar view in Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica*. *Engaging Homer in Late Antiquity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-55.

⁴⁴ Only a few details of which are remembered there – I would say, only the hunting scene, because the celebration of seafaring at V, 245, is at variance with the wretched sailors of V, 83-87, and the mountains, on the shield, aren't connected with stone-quarrying.

⁴⁵ See *Cypria*, *argumentum*, p. 38, 4-8 Bernabé.

⁴⁶ Hera (III, 98-127; IV, 49-55); Thetis (III, 611-626); the Nereids (V, 338-345).

destiny, the grief of Thetis, forced to beget a mortal son, and the cynic play of Zeus and the Olympians with them. Those bitter commentaries throw a sinister light on the merry image carved on the shield, with its wonderful natural setting and its glorious divine apparatus: it is an emblem meant to glorify the lineage of the owner, but also an omen of his immature death, and a prelude to the dreadful war to come.

The allusiveness of this image encourages us to look for something similar in the other divine scenes. Aphrodite, portrayed while emerging from the sea and attended by some of her companions (Il. 69-72), is as much involved in the *Antehomerica* as Peleus and Thetis. In the *Cypria* their marriage was narrated precisely because, in that occasion, arose the quarrel between the goddesses about the primacy of beauty, eventually won by Aphrodite by promising to Paris the hand of Helen; the proximity to the wedding scene encourages the reader to detect also in the presence of the goddess an allusion to the origins of the war: another image of radiant beauty reveals disturbing associations.

The last two images are clearly complementary. The first one displays a fleet having a hard time during a sea storm; the second one Poseidon driving his chariot and escorted by dolphins, the sea turning quiet at his coming. Are we to understand that Poseidon comes to rescue the troubled seamen of Il. 80-87? Vian and others are of this advice⁴⁷; but in fact the god is juxtaposed to the previous image, not part of it, and the formulation of Il. 83-93 lets us think more to an opposition than to an inclusion:

ναῦται δὲ τεθηπότες ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος
 ἐσσυμένας φοβέοντο καταγιγίδας, ὡς ἕτερόν περ,
 λαίφεα λεύκ' ἐρύοντες, ἔν' ἐκ θανάτοιο φύγωσιν·
 οἳ δ' ἔζοντ' ἐπ' ἔρετμὰ πονεύμενοι· ἀμφὶ δὲ νηυσὶ
 πυκνὸν ἔρεσσομένησι μέλας λευκαίνετο πόντος.
 τοῖς δ' ἐπὶ μειδιῶν <ἐν> κήτεσιν εἰναλίοισιν
 ἤσκητ' Ἐννοσίγαιος· ἀελλόποδες δὲ μιν ἵπποι,
 ὡς ἕτερόν, σπεύδοντες ὑπὲρ πόντοιο φέρεσκον
 χρυσεῖη μάστιγι πεπληγότες· ἀμφὶ δὲ κύμα
 στόρνυτ' ἐπεσσυμένων, ὁμαλή δ' ἄρα πρόσθε γαλήνη
 ἔπλετο.

The expression ἐπὶ τοῖς means nothing more than «near them» or «after them», and is referred merely to the fact that one scene follows the other on the surface of the shield; moreover, the sharp contrast between the mortal danger of human seafarers and the security of the smiling god, encircled by his sea creatures, underlines the divine distance of Poseidon

⁴⁷ Cfr. Vian, *Quintus de Smyrne. La Suite d'Homère, op. cit.*, t. II, p. 7 (the French scholar argues for an imitation of Verg. *Aen.* I, 142-147). Baumbach, «Die Poetik der Schilde: Form und Funktion von Ekphraseis in den *Posthomerica* des Quintus Smyrnaeus», *op. cit.*, pp. 125-127, thinks that the image must be interpreted as an allusion to Homer, because in *Il.*, XV, 624-628, the Achaeans under Hector's attack are compared to sailors in a storm, while Poseidon on his chariot reminds *Il.*, XIII, 25-31, where the same god comes to help the Greeks. I am sceptical: I can't imagine why Quintus should allude to the *Iliad* as a whole by recalling two minor details, a simile and a description with no relation with each other. Moreover, I don't see any relation between the storm scene and the comparison of *Il.*, XV. The only real similarities are the κήτεα escorting the chariot of the sea god (*Il.*, XIII, 27; *Posthom.*, V, 88), and the golden whip (*Il.*, XIII, 25-26; *Posthom.*, V, 91): if a phenomenon of intertextuality is at stake, it doesn't go farther than these pictorial details.

from the sailors. The sea is said to calm down all around the god's chariot (91-93), i. e. to his sole advantage: his serene confidence can be an ostentation of indifference. Voyage by ship is an important element of the Trojan saga, and no less than three storms were narrated in the *Cypria*⁴⁸; but most famous was that occurred after the *halosis* and caused by the impiety of Ajax son of Oileus, who outraged Athena by raping the suppliant Cassandra. It is narrated in *Posthomerica*, XIV: the god plays a major rôle. He rises a tempest out of regard for her niece (XIV, 507-508) and gives the final strike to Ajax, when the hero's seeking rescue on the Capharean rocks⁴⁹; after that, Poseidon drowns part of the Achaean fleet, harking to the prayers of his son Nauplius (see XIV, 611-621). The most famous victim of the god's wrath was obviously Odysseus: the later vicissitudes by sea of this hero are foreshadowed at XIV, 628-631. Quintus' poem ends with an apocalyptic scene of shaken nature (XIV, 632-654), with the sea invading the Trojan plane and the local rivers overflowing their banks to destroy the Greek's camp walls, at the command of Poseidon and Apollo⁵⁰, and the surviving ships driven out of their route (655-658).

In conclusion, the un-Homeric scenes at V, 69-96 can be read as a *mise en abyme* of the Trojan cycle, reduced to its initial and final stages: Aphrodite and the wedding of Thetis referring to the *Cypria* and the origin of the war, the sea storm and Poseidon as proleptic elements for its end and the *nostoi*. At the same time, there is also a phenomenon of internal intertextuality, because the first stages of the war are remembered several times in the *Posthomerica*, and its aftermaths partly narrated, partly foreseen in book XIV. This interpretation is consistent with Quintus' poetic aims, because his poem had the ambition to fulfil the Homeric narration, bridging the gap between *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and to substitute the discredited and probably already lost cyclic poems. Moreover, he is very fond of establishing connections between his work and his epic predecessors; in particular, he provides two major recapitulations of the events of the war from the beginning. In the fourth book Nestor, celebrating Achilles during his funeral games, tells a threefold panegyric, starting from the praise of the hero's mother and her wedding (IV, 131-143), then remembering all his achievements (146-162, stating some ten episodes from the *Cypria*, the *Iliad* and the *Aethiopsis*, the latter overlapping with *Posthomerica*, I-III), and finally foreshadowing the arrival of Neoptolemus (169-170), that will come to pass in book VII. In the fourteenth book, lines 125-141, a group of euphoric Greeks celebrate the *halosis* singing the main events of the past ten years: this second catalogue reaches the destruction of the city (also facts narrated in *Little Iliad* and *Ilioupersis*, and re-told in Quintus, V-XIII).

Non-Homeric scenes: the allegory of the Mountain of Arete

I think we ought now to come back to the remaining non-Homeric scene, i. e. the allegory of the mountain of *Arete*. Let's quote the passage (V, 49-56):

αἰπύτατον δ' ἐτέτυκτο θεοκμήτῳ ἐπὶ ἔργῳ
καὶ τρηχὺ ζαθέης Ἀρετῆς ὄρος· ἐν δὲ καὶ αὐτῇ

⁴⁸ See the *argumentum* of the poem: Paris and Helen are misled to Sidon by a storm; the Achaeans are led astray by another one after the expedition at Teuthrania; the fleet is held at Aulis because of the tempests sent by Artemis.

⁴⁹ See XIV, 564-589: the god is not the divinity offended by Ajax, but goes angry at him when the hero boasts that he fears neither the sea nor the gods. In this episode Ajax is compared firstly (line 550) to a Titan, traditional prototype of impiety and hatred for the gods, and then to the giant Enkelados (ll. 582-5).

⁵⁰ It is the realization of the prophecy at *Iliad*, VII, 446-463.

εἰστήκει φοίνικος ἐπεμβεβαυῖα κατ' ἄκρης
 ὑψηλὴ ψαύουσα πρὸς οὐρανόν. ἀμφὶ δὲ πάντη
 ἀτραπιτοὶ θαμέεσσι διειργόμεναι σκολόπεσσιν
 ἀνθρώπων ἀπέρυκον ἐν πάτον, οὐνεκα πολλοὶ
 εἰσοπίσω χάζοντο τεθηπότες αἰπὰ κέλευθα,
 παῦροι δ' ἔϊερόν οἴμον ἀνήιον ἰδρώοντες.

The personification of Virtue stands over the top of a palm tree⁵¹, itself staying on the top of a high mountain, which many people try to ascend, but whose top only few reach. This image belongs to a moralistic tradition, the most famous example of which is Prodicus' allegory of Heracles at the crossroad⁵²: it became a *locus communis* of ancient and medieval literature. As Quintus' main source is usually regarded *Erga*, 288-292, where Hesiod describes the antithetical paths of *Arete* and *Kakotes*: these two concepts doesn't have a strictly moral dimension, meaning «material prosperity and respectability» and «misery and social disrepute», but for Hesiod they have also an ethic relevance⁵³. Hesiod's lines imply that the path of *Arete* goes upwards: μακρὸς δὲ καὶ ὄρθιος οἴμος (*Erg.*, 290), but once you come εἰς ἄκρον (291) it becomes easier. This is likely the origin of the image of the mountain. Maciver argues that Quintus' version has a Stoic connotation⁵⁴: I won't discuss this matter (although I must confess, I think that Maciver overrates Quintus' engagement with Stoic ethics), nor am I interested in finding alternative sources⁵⁵. Here I just want to explore the allegory's potentiality for allusiveness and proleptic reference.

This allegory occurs one more time in the poem, at XIV, 195-200, where the deified Achilles appears at night to the sleeping Neoptolemos, giving him moral advices and vindicating his share in Troy's spoils: there the dead hero speaks of Virtue as an inaccessible tree (πρέμνον δύσβατον, 197), whose branches stand high in the air (197-198), and can be reached only with both labour and strength (ὀπόσοισι δὲ κάρτος ὀπηδεῖ / καὶ πόνος, ἐκ καμάτου πολυγῆθεα καρπὸν ἀμῶνται, 198-199). This time we have only the tree, but the image is clearly equivalent to that on the shield. Here the nature of this *Arete* is clearer: virtue requires both valour and hard work, and has to be acquired both on the battlefield and in peaceful dealings, if we are to judge from the advices of Achilles to his son:

⁵¹ Byre, «Per aspera (et arborem) ad astra. Ramifications of the Allegory of Arete in Quintus Smyrnaeus *Posthomerica* 5, 49-68», *op. cit.*, argues that the image of the palm tree is in fact a re-elaboration of the pythagorean symbolic use of the letter Y, to indicate the divergent path of good and evil; as observed by James and Lee, *A commentary on Quintus of Smyrna Posthomerica V*, *op. cit.*, p. 52, this theory is weakened by the fact that in Quintus the tree belongs exclusively to the image of Virtue.

⁵² 84, B 2, Diels-Kranz (*Xenoph., Mem.*, II, 1, 20-34).

⁵³ Prosperity through honest personal labour is clearly connected by Hesiod with the divine way of *Dike*, prescribed by Zeus for mankind, while Misery, leading to the unjust appropriation of other people's substance, involves violence, breaking of oaths and false witness (*Erg.*, 213-285). Basset, Samuel E., «The Hill of Success», *CJ*, 20, 1925, p. 414, argues that in Quintus' allegory too *Arete* «stands for Success, which in the epic means fame and honor».

⁵⁴ Maciver, «Returning to the Mountain of Arete: Reading Ecphrasis, Constructing Ethics in Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica*», *op. cit.*, pp. 264-267; Id., *Quintus Smyrnaeus' Posthomerica. Engaging Homer in Late Antiquity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-73, 82-83.

⁵⁵ It's quite reasonable to think that Quintus was influenced by the philosophical *vulgata* of early (until III century A. D.) Empire, i.e. a vulgarized form of Stoicism; see Κακριδής, *Κόιντος Σμυρναίος. Γενική μελέτη των Μεθ' Ὀμηρον και του ποιητή τους*, *op. cit.*

to be the first among the Greeks for ἡγορέη, and to obey to wiser and elderly people in the council (189-191). The allegory is symbolic of the moral heirloom that Achilles leaves to his son: this is a major theme in book VII, where Neoptolemus comes from Scyrus in the moment of biggest need, when Eurypilus has almost taken the camp and longs to burn the ships. The Achaeans suffer from the void left by the death of their best warrior: the situation is modelled on the central books of the *Iliad* and the attack led by Hector to the ships, which causes the intervention of Patroclus in book XVI.

Neoptolemus, in book VII, is called to act like Patroclus and wear the weapons of Achilles, in order to save camp and ships; a textual spy for this parallelism is the wish expressed by the young hero at VII, 222, ἦν τι φάος Δαναοῖσι λιλαιομένοισι γένωμαι, almost literal quotation of Patroclus' words in *Il.*, XVI, 39. This time the substitute will not only pretend to be someone else, without having his skills: he is repeatedly said to be a perfect image of his father, undistinguishable in height, strength and face features⁵⁶, and unlike Patroclus (see *Il.*, XVI, 141-142) he is able to pick up the enormous spear that the best of the Achaeans inherited from Peleus, that no other was able to handle. The scene of the dressing of the arms in VII, 445-451 is not only a standard element, introduced in observation of epic conventions, but a consecration of Neoptolemus as the new champion of the Greek army:

υἱὸς δ' αὖτ' Ἀχιλλῆος ἐδύσετο τεύχεα πατρός,
καὶ οἱ φαίνετο πάμπαν ἀλίγκιος· ἀμφὶ δ' ἔλαφρὰ
Ἥφαιστου παλάμησι περὶ μελέεσσιν ἀρήρει,
καὶ περ' ἐόνθ' ἑτέροισι πελώρια. (VII, 445-448)

Achilles arms fit him perfectly, because he's a fitting substitute, and unlike Patroclus he will eventually slay the champion of the Trojan.

The major rôle played by the inheritance of the arms in showing the heroic stature of Achilles' scion⁵⁷ reveals the inner meaning of the allegory of *Arete*, and explains its central place in Quintus' *ekphrasis*. It is a proleptic element, inasmuch as it shows the continuation of Achilles' virtues and mission in his son: when the dead hero gives his moral advices in book XIV, the second occurrence of the allegory of Virtue invites the recipients to read retrospectively the image on the shield as a sort of heraldic coat of arms of the line sprung from Peleus and Thetis. So the shield's decoration not only hints to his past master, but foreshadows also his future one. Once more the author does his better to lend unity to the various episodes of the Trojan lore, at the point of his poem where some heroes inherited from the *Iliad* (Achilles, Ajax) perish and new ones (Neoptolemus) come to continue their job⁵⁸.

A PARTIAL CONCLUSION: SEARCHING A COMPROMISE BETWEEN ARCHAIZING POETRY AND ALEXANDRIAN ALLUSION

Quintus mingled a sequence of images that constitute a creative re-elaboration of the iconographic program of *Iliad*, XVIII, sharing its universality and anonymity, with other en-

⁵⁶ *Posthom.*, VII, 185, 446, 538, 567, 631, 653, 690-691, 726-727.

⁵⁷ At VI, 59-67, Calchas reveals that his arrival is a necessary condition for the fall of Troy.

tirely new ones, that either are specified by the identification of their characters or have a strong allusive potential due to clear correspondences within the embedding poem. The principle by which the movement from anonymity to individuation brings a greater potential for allusion seems to have been clear to the author of the *Posthomeric*. He had to choose between the faithfulness to the archaic model, to whom he is loyal to the point of omitting the proem and beginning directly from the moment when the *Iliad* ended, and the richer possibilities introduced by the Hellenistic poets. Apollonius Rhodius and Moschus had shown a way to include as an organic element of the poem what risked otherwise to be a mere decorative digression. Quintus was well acquainted with the *Argonautica*⁵⁹: the allusive play practised in his *ekphrasis* is more akin to that of Apollonius than to Moschus', because the allusion is indirect and the reader has to work out the information. The choice of describing one scene explicitly related with the context (the wedding of Thetis), among other images in which the allusion is subtler, may well have been inspired by Apollonius (Phrixus and the golden ram).

Quintus managed to find a compromise between Homer and Hellenistic poetry. On the level of poetics, he had a more conservative approach than Apollonius: his subject is heroic warfare, and the outlook of his work is thoroughly archaizing. He describes a shield: the traditional set-piece is there, marking the poem as an *epos* stemming from Homer; but he doesn't renounce to the refinement of Hellenistic literary techniques, and besides the inherited *imago mundi* there are also mythical and allegorical scenes full of Alexandrian cunning. So the shield of Achilles becomes an apt metaphor for the poetics of Quintus and the *Posthomeric* as a whole: almost the same as Homer, and yet different.

THE SHIELD OF EURYPILUS (*POSTHOM.*, VI, 200-293) AND THE RELATION BETWEEN THE TWO *EKPHRASEIS*

At the beginning of the sixth book, after the death of Achilles and the suicide of Ajax, the council of the Achaeans sends an embassy to Scyros, to summon Neoptolemus. At the same time, the last ally comes to rescue Troy from his hosts: it's the valiant king Eurypilus, son of Telephus and of a sister of Priamus, whom is lavishly received by Paris (VI, 116-191). The stage becomes apparently less Homeric, but in fact Quintus is introducing an ambitious emulation of the central books of the *Iliad*: we have seen how Neoptolemus provides the Achaeans with a new Patroclus and a new Achilles. On their behalf the Trojans need a new Hector, so they place their hopes in Eurypilus⁶⁰: Quintus underlines his importance as main antagonist of Achilles' son by devoting to his shield a second *ekphrasis* of the same length

⁵⁸ See the foreshadowing of Neoptolemus' coming in the panegyric oration by Nestor (IV, 169-170), and in Hera's lamentation for the hero's death (118-122)

⁵⁹ See Vian, Francis, «Echoes and Imitation of Apollonius Rhodius in late Greek Epic», in Papanghelis, Theodore, and Rengakos, Antonios (edd.), *A Companion to Apollonius Rhodius*, Leiden-Boston-Köln, 2001, pp. 89-114. Quintus pays a tribute to Apollonius inserting in his poem an episode of unchained womanly passion (that of Oenone, X, 411-489), inspired by Medea's love for Jason.

⁶⁰ Parallel made explicit at the end of book VII, in a double feasting scene: while in Agamemnon's tent the Greek leaders hail in Neoptolemus a new Achilles (VII, 674-706), on the other side the Trojans sit banqueting and celebrating Eurypilos «like the divine Hector, when he still slew the Argives» (VII, 730).

(96 lines: VI, 198-293). The juxtaposition of the two descriptions in the successive books V-VI can be interpreted as a preparation for their fight in books VII-VIII; but what about the images displayed on this second shield? This time Quintus has no older authoritative version to take into account, and he feels evidently much more free from the Homeric shield: following the learned Hellenistic tradition, all the eighteen scenes described are well known mythical episodes and bear a tight relation to the owner of the shield, because they portray the deeds of Eurypilus' grandfather, Heracles. Firstly there is the episode of the victory of baby Heracles over the snakes sent by Hera, then the twelve canonical ἄθλα, and at the end five of the countless *parerga* acknowledged to the hero: the liberation of Prometheus (VI, 268-272), the struggle with the Centaurs at Pholos' place (273-282), the killing of Nexos (283-285), the killing of Antaeus (286-288), the liberation of Hesione (289-291). Also this description ends with the remark that there were many more images (292-293).

The presence of the canonical deeds is to be expected; the same is true of the beginning from the infant hero and the snakes, a popular episode in Greek poetry, giving to the *ekphrasis* the air of an archaic hymn (the infancy of a god followed by his *aretologia*). The last five images, on the contrary, imply a selection: Baumbach has detected in them a search for symmetry⁶¹ (two episodes presenting Heracles as a saviour, the other three – two of which pertaining Centaurs – as an avenger) and an allusion to the ambiguity of the figure of Heracles in relation to Troy⁶², because the rescue of Hesione (daughter of Laomedon, Priam's father) hints both at the help offered by the hero to the Trojan royal house, saving her from a sea monster, and at the assault he led to the city when he was refused the reward. Trojans expect rescue from Heracles' grandson, and hold him in high esteem because of this lineage: Paris prays him to free them from the Greeks, κείνου (*scil.* Heracles) μνωόμενος φρονέων τ' ἀντάξια ἔργα (VI, 304), a disturbing request, because the praised grandfather was actually responsible for the first sacking of the city (see *Il.*, V, 638-651). The reader is called to detect an authorial irony, foreshadowing the hero's eventual failure in saving his allies⁶³.

In my opinion Quintus inserted in this description at least another allusive element. The two scenes of the battle of Heracles with the Centaurs (273-282) and that of the killing of Nexos (283-285), the only one to escape the previous slaughter (κείνης ἐκπροφυγόντα μάχης, 284), form obviously a diptych. The Centauromachy is referred to in the seventh book (VII, 107-114), in a mythological simile comparing Eurypilus to Heracles and the Achaeans to the Centaurs:

ἔπετ' Ἀργείοισι χολούμενος, εὔτε πάροιθεν
ὄβριμος Ἡρακλῆς Φολόης ἀνά μακρὰ κάρηνα
Κενταύροις ἐπόρουσεν ἑῷ μέγα κάρτεϊ θύων,
τοὺς ἅμα πάντας ἔπεφνε καὶ ὠκυτάτους περ ἔοντας. (107-110)

⁶¹ See Baumbach, «Die Poetik der Schilde: Form und Funktion von Ekphraseis in den *Posthomerica* des Quintus Smyrnaeus», *op. cit.*, p. 133.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 134. Also the father of Eurypilus, Telephus, is no reassuring omen. In the *Cypria*, the destruction of Teuthrania and the wounding of Telephus by Achilles were narrated as an antecedent to the Trojan expedition: this event is remembered by the old Phoenix in *Posthom.*, VII: there he assures Neoptolemus that he will prove superior to Eurypilus, like his father proved superior to the latter's (VII, 665-666). Moreover, after his wounding by Achilles Telephus wasn't able to recover, until it was revealed that only the spear that stroke him could heal the wound; so he was forced to ask Achilles for help, which was granted only on the condition that he would lead the Achaean army to the site of Troy – and he accepted this condition (see the *argumentum* of the *Cypria*).

Eurypilus is akin to his grandfather in his superiority over warlike enemies: but the simile says that Heracles slew all the Centaurs on Pholoe, while this it is not true – the *ekphrasis* reminds us that Nexus survived, if only to be slain later for trying to kidnap Deianeira. What it doesn't show, but all the reader of Quintus would know and the poet himself reminds at V, 644-649, is that this last victory over a Centaur will eventually cause the hero's death, with the unintended co-operation of his wife (it's the plot of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*). I think that Quintus is playing anew with the ambiguity of Eurypilus' identification with Heracles, praised by the Trojans and boasted by Eurypilus with his shield, that nevertheless foreshadows his death by the hand of the only enemy he wasn't able to overcome. Taking the risk of an over-subtle reading, I want to remind also the emphasis laid on the famous spear with which Eurypilus is slain in *Posthom.*, VIII, 199-203: the μακρὴ Πηλιάς (VIII, 199-200), πατρός ἐμοῖο μέγ' ἔγχος (215) in Neoptolemus' word, Πηλιάς ὑψοκόμοισιν ἐειδομένη ἐλάττησι (V, 119). It is an item of the original *panoplia* that Achilles brought from Phthia, and a symbol of the heroic continuity in the line of Peleus: it was famously made from a μελίη (ash) of mount Pelion, and created by the centaur Chiron as a gift for the hero's wedding: this was narrated in the *Cypria*⁶⁴ and remembered in the *Iliad* (XVI, 143-144). The emphasis on the spear may be intended to solicit the recollection of Heracles' struggle with the Centaurs (Chiron's death was caused by Heracles' confounding him with the others), that will lead to the hero's ruin⁶⁵.

The two shields in Quintus' poem are in a relation of parallelism and opposition, because both are the token of an heroic succession and of the identification of a younger generation of heroes with their predecessors: but the shield of Achilles is the model of a successful heroic heirloom, while that of Eurypilus of a failing one, because the owner will inherit his grandfather's tragic doom, and his intervention won't save Troy⁶⁶.

THE SHIELD OF DIONYSUS (*DION.*, XV., 380-567): AN *ILIADIC* SET-PIECE IN AN UN-HEROIC CONTEXT

Another late antique poem has to be considered in this comparative perspective: the description of Dionysus' shield in Nonnus' *Dionysiaka*, XXV, 380-567. If Quintus belongs to the more traditional branch of Greek epic poetry and writes a poem almost completely concerned with heroic warfare, Nonnus' program is to combine the Homeric heritage with other major literary traditions, in particular Hellenistic poetry: he is very fond of quoting and imitating Callimachus, Apollonius Rhodius, Theocritus and the minor Bucolic poets, Euphorion and others – and this is not limited to mere linguistic borrowings. His poem, along with a great war, encompasses a lot of episodes of a sort unknown to *Iliad* and *Odyssey*:

⁶⁴ See *Cypria*, fr. 3 Bernabé = *Schol. in Hom. Il.*, P 640 + Apollodor., *Bibl.*, III, 13, 5.

⁶⁵ The Centaurs on Eurypilus' shield are also fighting with rudimental spears, consisting in eradicated pines and silver firs (VI, 276-278).

⁶⁶ Baumbach, «Die Poetik der Schilde: Form und Funktion von Ekphraseis in den *Posthomerica* des Quintus Smyrnaeus», *op. cit.*, pp. 136-138, argues that in Eurypilus' shield there are also analeptic allusions to the doom of Ajax in book V: the hero would then be paralleled with Heracles and (as a consequence) with Eurypilus, thus strengthening the relation between the two shields (because Ajax was one of the pretenders to the inheritance of Achilles' weapons). But the proofs he provides seem to me insufficient: I think that the German scholar was misled by his desire to find an allusive meaning for as much scenes as he could.

love romances with both women and beautiful boys, battles with giants, foundations of cities, *aitia*, bucolic episodes, callimachean hospitality scenes, astronomic poetry, metamorphoses, punishments of impious characters, and so on. Yet the poem has also an iliadic side: the imitation of the archaic model concerns particularly the part of the poem narrating the war against the Indians (books XIII-XL, especially from book XXII onwards): in the context of the lengthy second proem (XXV, 1-270) the ambition to emulate Homer is even made explicit (Homer, the war of Troy and his protagonists are mentioned at XXV, 8, 26, 253-60, 265, 269). The Egyptian author takes pains to insert in those books the sort of thematic and stylistic devices which his learned recipients would expect as generic markers: epic set pieces and scenes closely imitated from the *Iliad*. The *ekphrasis* of the hero's shield comes immediately after the programmatic declaration of the proem-at-the-middle.

The weapons are a present from the adoptive mother of Dionysus, the goddess Rhea, who sends them with a reproach and an exhortation: it's the seventh year from the beginning of the war, and the god hasn't yet attacked in full force the enemy. The situation is modelled on *Iliad*, XVIII-XIX: the forging of new weapons sanctions Achilles' return to the battlefield, and receiving them the hero turns to action. Likewise, the arms sent by Rhea have the function of awaking Dionysus from idleness. But there is a basic difference with Homer (or Quintus): the protagonist of the poem has no real need of a traditional *panoplia*, and these new masterpieces of Hephaestus, although much admired for their beauty⁶⁷, are never used. In the poem the protagonist's style of fighting is opposed to the traditional, heroic way. The male human warriors participating to the expedition act in war just like the iliadic heroes, and so do their Indian enemies; but the god himself, and his semi-divine and paradoxical armies (the Bacchantes and other members of his *thiasos*, like the satyrs), defeat easily their opponents by performing miracles: their ivy leaves can cut the Indians' armours, their vegetal thyrsus proves more strong than swords and spears⁶⁸. This unbalance between the god's supernatural powers and traditional epic battle implies a comic and jocular attitude toward the latter, which degenerates into parody. The situation is somehow reminiscent of Apollonius' poem: heroism has lost its weight and centrality. Yet Nonnus, unlike Apollonius, chose to describe a shield, but a useless one, nothing more than a beautiful object; that is tantamount proclaiming the emptiness and incongruity of Homeric heroism in the exotic world of the *Dionysiaca*⁶⁹.

The *ekphrasis* has a twofold structure. The first part (XXV, 387-412) is closer to Homer: it shows a cosmic image – the earth, the sea, the air, the sun, the moon, and the constellations, like the corresponding *incipit* of the shield in *Iliad*, XVIII, 489-493. After line 412 the description departs radically from the archaic model, and that shift is marked by a recapitulation (413, τῶα μὲν εἰς μέσα νῶτα σοφὸς τεχνήσατο χαλκεύς); after that Nonnus turns towards Apollonius, displaying a limited number of mythological episodes: the construction of the walls of Thebes by Amphion and Zethus (415-428), the kidnapping of Ganymede by

⁶⁷ See *Dion.*, XXV, 383-386, 565-568.

⁶⁸ See the description of the god at XXII, 159-164, and his duels with Orontes (XVII, 229-289) and Deriades (XL, 1-100); a similar opposition between conventional weapons and Dionysiac miracles in Euripides' *Bacchae*, 761-764.

⁶⁹ Likewise, a "wearing of the arms" typical scene is inserted by Apollonius in *Arg.*, III, 1225-1234: the main antagonist of Jason, Aietes, gets ready for a public apparition wearing his *panoplia*. But no battle follows: his weapons are just *regalia* with no real use.

Zeus (429-450), the Lydian legend of Tylus, killed by a snake but taken back to life thanks to a magic herb (451-552), and Rhea who saves Zeus from his father's hands, replacing him with a stone (553-562). The connection of the shield to the owner is not only implied, but repeatedly underlined by the narrator at lines 414, 430-431, 451. Laura Miguélez Cavero defines the function of this *ekphrasis* in the *Dionysiaca* as «a narrative milestone, capable of sending us to what has been previously told and to what will be told later on», and even «a synecdoche of the literary work»⁷⁰, and explains the choice of the images as follows: Thebes because of the god's being born there, the ascension of Ganymede to Olympus as an allusion to Dionysus' apotheosis at the end of the poem, the herb resurrecting Tylus for the invention of the vine tree and his prodigious properties, and Zeus and Rhea for the god's genealogy.

This interpretation is likely, but I would propose a partly different explanation: it seems to me that the poet, instead of making allusion to single parts of the poem – better, along with them – is drawing a map of the main themes that bother him in writing the *Dionysiaca*, each of them recurring more than one time. In fact Nonnus is a master of *variatio*, and very keen on collecting similar episodes, establishing parallelisms, and even retelling two or three times the same story. So the scene with the construction of Thebes' walls does not only recall the history of the foundation of the city in books IV-V, but also the many other foundation legends and aetiologies present in the poem; the history of Ganymede its various *apotheseis* and *katasterismoi*, as well as the love affairs of Dionysus with beautiful boys; the resurrection of Tylus a *Leitmotiv* of the poem, that of Dionysus defeating mortality and giving wine to mankind as a remedy for human misery; and the last scene, reminding the struggles for power of the first divine generations, recalls the many stories of strife between the Olympic gods and challenging chthonic powers in the poem.

Anyway, this is not the proper occasion for examining in detail these references to the embedding poem; we will be appeased to detect their presence, and to explain them as an imitation of Apollonius Rhodius, a poet much beloved by Nonnus. This would be sufficiently proved by the similar allusive technique: but the poet from Panopolis leaves clear signs of his indebtedness to the author of the *Argonautica*. The scene of Amphion and Zethus building the wall of Thebes is taken from the embroidered cloak of Jason (*Arg.*, I, 735-741); also the scene with the flying Ganymede is artificially connected by Nonnus with the last image of Apollonius' description. There (*Arg.*, I, 763-767) is portrayed Phrixus with the flying ram; in *Dion.*, XXV, 439-441, the eagle who is carrying Ganymede (Zeus in disguise) is said to take great pains not to let the boy fall down in the nearby sea, because the honour of giving name to it is reserved to Helle:

Μοίρας δ' ἔτρεμε μάλλον, ὅπως μὴ πρῶτον ὀπάσσης
 ἠβητῆρ' ἐρόεις ἐὼν οὔνομα γείτονι πόντῳ
 ὄψιμον ἀρπάξειε γέρας πεφυλαγμένον Ἕλλη.

Helle was the sister of Phrixus, fled with him on the back of the golden ram but fallen in the sea thereafter called Hellespont.

Nonnus is more experimental than Quintus, and more self-conscious: the allusions to Apollonius Rhodius reveal in him the historian of Greek literature, having a clear vision of

⁷⁰ Miguélez Cavero, Laura, *Poems in Context. Greek Poetry in the Egyptian Thebaid 200-600 AD*, Berlin – New York, 2008, p. 298.

the evolution of the genre he is practising. But both of them face the same challenge – to place themselves in continuity with the Homeric tradition, and yet to affirm their poetic individuality and their distance from the archaic model. They find, each in his own way, a compromise between archaic epic practice and later Hellenistic evolutions, defining a common trend in large-scale imperial Greek epic: regrettably, we do not have a wider comparative basis.