

Nonnus and the Didactic Tradition

This paper explores the reception of didactic poetry in Book 41 of Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*, which takes as its central theme Beroe, the sea-nymph identified with the city of Beirut. I first suggest that Nonnus makes a particular allusion to the *Phaenomena* of Aratus in his description of the birth and rearing of Beroe, through the figure of the virgin Astraia, the nursemaid of Aphrodite's daughter. I further explore echoes of Hesiodic poetry in the description of the foundation of Beirut and argue that Nonnus alludes to Empedocles near the outset of the book. The evocation of these didactic models is then considered in the light of Nonnus' striking claim that the story of Beroe's birth by Aphrodite is an *ὀπλοτέρη φάτις* (41. 155). The unique nature of the phrase places a particular emphasis upon 'old' and 'new', both mythological and poetic (cf. Bajoni, 198). I propose that, through his echoes of earlier models, Nonnus demonstrates awareness of the tradition of Greek didactic poetry and consciously plays with the concepts of new and old.

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