

ποικιλόνωτος άνήρ: Clothing Metaphors and Nonnus' Ambiguous Christology
in the *Paraphrase of the Gospel according to John*

Abstract: This article examines three passages in Nonnus' *Paraphrase of the Gospel according to John* (19.21-25; 19.118-132; 20.81-82), all of which mention pieces of clothing in the context of Christ's passion and resurrection. It argues that Nonnus allows, and indeed encourages, both literal readings and metaphorical interpretations of the garments as stand-ins for Christ's body. The readings which do not turn garments into symbols of the body would be more in agreement with the Orthodox theology of Nonnus' time, while the metaphorical interpretations would be more amenable to a heterodox (Origenist or Nestorian) construal. The poem's ambivalence in the employment of clothing metaphors indicates an attitude that is less strictly Alexandrian / Orthodox and more polyphonic than has so far been assumed.

Keywords: Nonnus, *Paraphrase*, Clothing, Origenism, Nestorianism; Christology

Nonnus' rendition of John 19 begins with Pilate releasing Barabbas¹, just as the senseless multitude had boisterously requested, while Christ is scourged (v. 5), mocked by the soldiers (v. 6), has a crown made of thorns placed on his head (vv. 7-8) and a purple robe cast on his back (vv. 9-11). Pilate then runs outside his palace to say to the people he has found no fault in Christ, who is now described thus (vv. 21-25):

ἀχράντοις δὲ πόδεσσι διέστιχε νόσφι μελάθρου
καὶ στέφος ὄξυέθειρος ὁμόπλοκον εἶχεν ἀκάνθης
πορφυρέην τ' ἐσθήτα διάβροχον αἵματι κόχλου·
καὶ Πιλάτος κατέλεξε πάλιν ζηλήμονι λαῶ·
ἠνίδε ποικιλόνωτος ἀναίτιος ἴσταται ἀνήρ.

With immaculate feet He marched through and out the hall,
and He was wearing the crown weaved out of sharp-haired thorns
and the purple garment soaked in the blood of the shellfish.
And Pilate spoke again to the envious multitude:

¹ Barabbas is mentioned at the end of John 18, where the people ask that Pilate pardon him and not Christ, but his actual release is not described in John 19. Nonnus is amplifying on his source, dwelling on the contrast between the thief who walks away unharmed and the innocent, but tortured Christ. *Paraphrase* 19, like other Books in this work, actually begins mid-verse, suggesting the division into Books corresponding to John's Chapters is the result of later editorial work. It has been suggested that individual episodes would have been recited in performances focusing on a particular theme (e.g. Christ's miracles or his passion), without much regard for Book or Chapter division; see Gianfranco Agosti, "L'epillio nelle *Dionisiache*? Strutture dell'epica nonniana e contesto culturale", in *Aitia* 6 (2016) 27 (available online: <http://aitia.revues.org/1579?lang=en>).

“Behold, a guiltless man stands with his back mottled².”

What does it mean to have Christ described here as ποικιλόνωτος άνήρ? In what sense exactly is his back “mottled”? Shorrock understands this as referring to the royal, purple robe, which the soldiers mockingly cast on Christ’s back. Drawing a connection between the Christ of the *Paraphrase* and the Dionysus of Nonnus’ secular epic, the *Dionysiaca*, Shorrock says, “whereas Christ – dressed in a rich purple tunic supplied by Pilate – is described as ‘dapple-backed’ (ποικιλόνωτος, 19.25), Dionysus is presented wearing a dappled fawnskin (νεβρίδα ποικιλόνωτον, *Dion.* 1.35; 43.78)³.” Apart from the fawnskin, the adjective ποικιλόνωτος is used to qualify several other types of garments Nonnian characters put on. For example, in the *Dionysiaca*, a Bacchant covers her chest with the “dappled skin of panthers”⁴, while Pentheus, after falling into a Dionysiac trance, puts on “the mottled robe of Agave”, which, in the immediately previous verse, is also described as “dyed with the purple of the Sidonian sea”⁵ – just as the royal robe of Christ is

² All translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

³ Robert Shorrock, *The Myth of Paganism. Nonnus, Dionysus and the World of Late Antiquity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011) 73. In fact, in both passages from the *Dionysiaca*, it is not Dionysus who wears the fawnskin, but rather the poet in 1.35 and Proteus in 43.78 – the fawnskin, is, however, a Dionysiac attribute.

⁴ Nonn. *D.* 14.357-358: ἄλλη ποικιλόνωτον ἐπὶ στέρνοιο καλύπτρην / πορδαλίω.

⁵ Nonn. *D.* 46.109-110: Σιδονίης ἀλιπόρφυρα πέπλα θαλάσσης / καὶ χροῖ ποικιλόνωτον ἐδύσατο πέπλον Ἀγαύης. For Pentheus’ garments here as specifically female and also evoking the transformation of Actaeon into fawn see Michael Paschalis, “Ovidian Metamorphosis and Nonnian poikilon eidos”, in ed. K. Spanoudakis, *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context. Poetry and Cultural Milieu in Late Antiquity* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014) 97-122, at 114-115.

described in the richly alliterative v. 10 as “shining with the subtle sparks of the Sidonian sea” (Σιδωνίης στίλβοντα σοφῶ σπινθήρι θαλάσσης)⁶. Furthermore, in the only other attestation of this adjective in the *Paraphrase*, in 6.68, it qualifies the tunic of personified Night, which is “mottled” in that it is decorated with stars⁷. There are, then, good reasons to take Christ’s “mottled back” as “his back, adorned with the purple robe”, which he is to be imagined as wearing.

A different interpretation is possible however. Accorinti briefly comments on this passage as a “metafora protobizantina”, and speaks of the “*poikilia squisitamente barocca del dorso screziato*” – that is, he takes the adjective ποικιλόνωτος as referring to Christ’s own back, which had been whipped and is, therefore, to be imagined as bloodied and, in an aestheticised way, “mottled”⁸. Accorinti subsequently drives a wedge between Christ as, first, the earthly ποικιλόνωτος ἀνήρ in Book 19 and, later on, as the ἀχάρακτος ἀστήρ, “the undimmed (literally: uncut/unhurt) star”, which appears in the first lines of the following Book (20.4) to mark the beginning of a new day and, according

⁶ The conjunction σοφῶ σπινθήρι is an *unicum* in the *Paraphrase*, and could equally be translated as “intellectual sparks”; see Domenico Accorinti, “Una crux nella *Parafrasi Nonniana*”, *Prometheus* 12 (1986) 182-188, at 188, n. 35.

⁷ For the rich literary and pictorial tradition of imagining the starry sky as a veil worn by a personified Night see Maria Ypsilanti, “Image-Making and the Art of Paraphrasing: Aspects of Darkness and Light in the *Metabole*”, in ed. K. Spanoudakis, *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context. Poetry and Cultural Milieu in Late Antiquity* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014) 123-137, at 124-130. Ypsilanti (*ibid.*, 127) also draws connections between the Night’s veil and the mantle of Heracles Astrochiton in Nonn. *D.* 40.407-408 and 416, which is described as ποικίλον and symbolises cosmic power.

⁸ See Domenico Accorinti, ed. trans., *Nonno di Panopoli, Parafrasi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni, Canto XX* (Pisa: Edizioni della Scuola normale superiore, 1996) 34.

to him, symbolises Christ's glorious, divine self⁹. Again, there are valid reasons to take ποικιλόνωτος as referring to Christ's scourged body, and not his garment. Within v. 25 itself, there is a strong caesura between ποικιλόνωτος and ἀναίτιος, suggesting, perhaps, an unsettling disjunction between the two adjectives: Christ has his back mottled by whipping, *although* he is, in fact, guiltless – and this also makes sense from the perspective of Pilate, the protesting, reluctant torturer, who speaks these words. Moreover, the very first verse to describe Christ's passion in this Book, v. 5: ῥιγεδανῆ Χριστοῖο δέμας φοίνιξεν ἰμάσθλη (“the body of Christ he made blood-red by the dreadful scourge”), uses the verb φοινίσσω, which means “make purple”, as well as “make red”, and has its etymological origin in the same “Phoenician purple” with which the royal robe is dyed. Already in this verse, then, Christ's body is being turned into an aestheticised purple/red garment, analogous to (or equivalent with) the robe he is wearing. The ubiquitous ancient notion of the body (Christ's or, in general, man's) as a piece of clothing¹⁰, which covers (or even imprisons) the soul or inner self would make such an allegorical interpretation a very easy step to take.

⁹ Arianna Rotondo, “La vera fede, eterna madre del cosmo’: ortodossia e influenze cirilliane nella *Parafraasi* del Nonno di Panopoli”, in *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 140 (2014) 603-624, at 613 agrees with Accorinti's interpretation, and offers connections with further astral imagery which is also applied to Christ in the *Paraphrase*. Gianfranco Agosti, “L'alba notturna (ἔννυχος ἡώς)”, in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 121 (1998) 53–58, at 56 also agrees, and sees a parallel in the representation of Christ as *dominus lucis* in Juvenecus.

¹⁰ See, for example, Marcello Gigante, *L'ultima tunica* (Naples: Ferraro, 1973), and Pier Franco Beatrice, “Soma chiton”, in ed. U. Bianchi, *La tradizione dell'enkrateia. Motivazioni ontologiche e protologiche* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985) 433-445.

Before moving on from the ambiguous use of ποικιλόνωτος in this passage, I would first like to consider two further, and rather more speculative, frames of reference which might have pulled Nonnus' readers towards the direction of either "body, possibly seen allegorically as garment" or "simply garment". First, "body". A recurrent motif in the comedies of Plautus is the humorous description of a slave's back as "mottled" (*varium* – the Latin equivalent of ποικίλον) by whipping¹¹. While shockingly cruel for a modern readership, Plautus' Roman spectators would relish the joke that flogging would make a slave's back look like the hide of an animal such as a panther, a deer or a snake, all of which are stereotypically described as "mottled" in both Greek and Latin¹². The slave's "mottled back" is also attested in Greek: in Lucian's *Lexiphanes* (9) a slave or freedman is introduced as "Chaereas the goldsmith, with the mottled back" (Χαιρέας ὁ χρυσοτέκτων ὁ κατὰ νώτου ποικίλος). Chaereas is not explicitly said to be a slave, but he appears in the company of other men of low social standing, including a pugilist. The brief, probably humorous, description of his back as "mottled" would have been enough to indicate to Lucian's readers that Chaereas is (or was until recently) a slave, who would receive regular whippings on his back. If the "mottled back"

¹¹ See Pl., *Epid.* 17-18; *Mil.* 216; *Ps.* 145. A "mottled back" (*tergum varium*) is also attested in a fragmentary Atellan farce by L. Pomponius Bononiensis; see F. 135 in P. Frassinetti, ed., *Atellanae Fabulae* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1967).

¹² In fact, in its earliest attestations ποικιλόνωτος consistently refers to the hide of an animal: a deer in E. *HF* 376, and a snake in Pi. *P.* 4.249 and E. *IT* 1245. In Plautus' *Epidicus* 17-18 the slave with the mottled back is said to be a "goatish or panther-like kind" (*capreaginum ... neque pantherinum genus*).

strongly evoked flogging, and could stand as shorthand for “slave”, as Lucian’s text suggests, then, perhaps, Nonnus’ readers would take Christ’s “mottled back” as not only referring to his physical body, but also echoing the widespread trope according to which he, the Lord, put on the form a slave (as if it were a garment) in order to set the human race – which was enslaved to sin – free¹³. This trope also appears in Cyril of Alexandria’s Commentary on John’s Gospel, to which Nonnus definitely had access¹⁴.

The frame of reference which would favour the interpretation “mottled garment” (and not body) has more to do with the social or even liturgical context in which the text of the *Paraphrase* would have been received. I would like to start considering this context by having a closer look at v. 23: πορφυρέην τ' ἐσθήτα διάβροχον αἵματι κόχλου (“and the purple garment soaked in the blood of the shellfish”). The *iunctura* αἵματι κόχλου appears in three earlier or contemporaneous hexameter poems (including once in Nonnus’ own *Dionysiaca*), always, as here, at the end of the hexameter and in connection with garments and how they are dyed in the Phoenician purple (derived from the blood of shellfish)¹⁵. In spite of the likely formulaic nature of

¹³ The basis for such expressions is Philippians 2:7: ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος (“he emptied himself by taking the form of a slave, being made in human likeness”).

¹⁴ *in Jo.* 1.141 (ed. Pusey): οὐκοῦν ἐν Χριστῷ μὲν ἀληθινῶς ἐλευθεροῦται τὸ δούλον, ἀναβαῖνον εἰς ἐνότητα τὴν μυστικὴν τῷ φορέσαντι τὴν τοῦ δούλου μορφὴν (“therefore in Christ truly are the enslaved made free, ascending into a mystic union with Him who wore the form of a slave”). For further examples see Ath., *Ar.* 2 (PG 26.176); [Ath.], *pass.* (PG 28.249); Thdt., *inc.* (PG 75.1428).

¹⁵ See Nonn. *D.* 40.308-310 (describing the invention of the purple dye from the blood of the shellfish), and the contemporary epigram by Proclus the Successor, where Dionysus is

this *iunctura*, however, the notion that Christ’s purple robe is soaked in the blood of an animal, and not his own, as a reader could reasonably expect in the context of Christ’s passion, is potentially jarring. Indeed, the same (or almost the same) *iunctura* appears twice in prose orations precisely to make the point that the earthly purple, dipped in the blood of shellfish, is to be spurned in favour of the heavenly purple, which shines with the blood of Christ¹⁶. Why is Nonnus passing up the opportunity to speak of Christ’s blood? Αἷματι Χριστοῦ would even be metrically equivalent to αἷματι κόχλου.

Perhaps the story of Joseph in Genesis 37, commemorated in Eastern Christianity during the week of Passion as a “type” of Christ’s sufferings, is relevant both for the remarkable absence of Christ’s blood here and his “mottled back”. In the Genesis chapter, Joseph, Jacob’s favourite son, receives from his father what is called in the Septuagint a χιτῶνα ποικίλον — traditionally translated in English as “a coat of many colours”, although “a mottled tunic” would probably be a more accurate translation¹⁷. This extraordinary garment makes his brothers hate and envy him even more than

described as wearing a purple robe (2.5: βαπτὰ δὲ πέπλα φέροντα κατὰ χροὸς αἷματι κόχλου). Slightly earlier (probably mid-fourth century) is the fragment by Naumachius in which the narrator advises his female addressee to avoid the purple garments (v. 62: εἴματα δ’ εἰναλῆς ἐρυθαίνεται αἷματι κόχλου) of which light-minded women are proud. After Nonnus it also appears in Paul. Sil., *ambo*. 147.

¹⁶ See Gr. Nyss., *Placill.* (ed. A. Spira) 486: τὴν ὧδε πορφύραν ἀκούω αἷματι κόχλου τινὸς θαλασσίας φοινίσσεσθαι, τὴν δὲ ἄνω πορφύραν τὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ αἷμα λάμπειν ποιεῖ; [Chrys.] *Laz. et div.* (PG 59.593): πορφύραν εἶχεν, οὐ τῷ αἷματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐβράντισμένην, ἀλλ’ ἐξ αἵματος κοχλίου θαλάσσης βεβαμμένην.

¹⁷ It now appears that the original Hebrew in fact spoke of a “long robe with sleeves”, which was a rather feminine garment; see Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *Jacob’s Wound. Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel* (New York / London: Continuum, 2005) 178-182.

they did before, prompting them first to abandon him in an empty well and then sell him to some passing Ishmaelite merchants. The tunic is afterwards dyed in a goat's blood and presented to Jacob as evidence of Joseph's death (Gen. 37:23-32). The parallels with Christ's story are many and were pointed out early on: a beloved son, hated by his "brothers", descends into an earthly pit, from which he will re-emerge, his garments bloodied but he himself remaining unhurt¹⁸. Significantly, Cyril of Alexandria provides one of the most extensive typological readings of Genesis 37 to have survived in Greek¹⁹.

By the fifth century, when the *Paraphrase* was written, the Genesis chapter was read, commented on, and sung about during some of the many services that are held in the week of Passion. In the Greek Orthodox Church it was (and still is) read on Holy Monday²⁰. In the Syriac-speaking areas, where the figure of Joseph was particularly popular, Genesis 37 was prescribed for Holy Thursday, while other chapters relating the rest of Joseph's story were recommended for Good Friday and Holy Saturday²¹. In the Coptic Church,

¹⁸ For a detailed list of correspondences between Joseph and Christ in Syriac literature from the fourth century onwards see Kristian S. Heal, "Joseph as a Type of Christ in Syriac Literature", in *BYU Studies* 41 (2002) 29-49. Typological readings of Joseph's story in Greek can be found in Ast. Soph., *hom.* 11.5, Proc. G., *Gen.* (PG 87.1.469-472), and [Chrys.] *neg.* (PG 59.615).

¹⁹ See *Glaph. Gen.* (PG 69.301-305). Cyril's Sermon 140 from the Syriac version of his Commentary on Luke (trans. R. Payne Smith, Oxford: University Press, 1859), bearing the indication that it should be read on Holy Thursday, mentions as "types" of the Pharisees' envy against Christ first Cain and Abel and then Joseph and his brothers.

²⁰ Romanos the Melodist composed two Kontakia for Joseph to be performed on this day (*Hymns* 5 and 6, both mentioning the "mottled tunic"). A spurious homily attributed to John Chrysostom, bearing the indication that it is to be read on Holy Monday, speaks of Joseph as an image of Christ (*hom. in Jo. II:47*, PG 59.528: Χριστοῦ εἰκόνα).

²¹ See Heal (2002) esp. 46, n. 3.

excerpts from the story of Joseph are read on Good Friday. Even more significantly for Nonnus' Egyptian context, some fifty-four Coptic, late antique textiles show the life of Joseph as told in Genesis 37 (and only in this chapter), including the scene in which Joseph's brothers stain his "mottled tunic" with the blood of a goat²². Although these surviving textiles (tunic ornaments made primarily of linen, but also wool or silk) are a bit later than the *Paraphrase*, mostly dating from the late sixth and seventh centuries, we know from Nonnus' contemporary and compatriot, the archimandrite Shenoute, that linen clothes decorated with representations from both the New and the Old Testament were already being produced and worn in the environs of fifth-century Panopolis²³. It is conceivable that at least some of Nonnus' Egyptian readers, themselves clothed in tunics "mottled" with representations of Joseph's proverbially "mottled tunic"²⁴, would be reminded

²² On these textiles see Gary Vikan, "Joseph Iconography on Coptic Textiles", *Gesta* 18.1 (1979) 99-108; Henry Maguire, "Garments Pleasing to God: The Significance of Domestic Textile Designs in the Early Byzantine Period", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990) 215-224, esp. 221-224. I have not been able to consult the most extensive study on the topic: Laila Halim Abdel-Malek, *Joseph Tapestries and Related Coptic Textiles* (Boston: PhD dissertation, 1980).

²³ Shenoute reports a conversation he had with certain monks while inspecting embroidered textiles; see his discourse *And it happened one day*, p. 37 in the translation by David Brakke and Andrew Crislip, *Selected Discourses of Shenoute the Great: Community, Theology, and Social Conflict in Late Antique Egypt* (Cambridge: University Press, 2015): "[as we were asking], 'Of which apostle is this the image, and to which **prophet** does this belong, and which saint?' – we came upon that which belongs to the Savior and holy Mary, inscribed, 'Mary, the God-bearer.'" Shenoute goes on to use the textiles as part of his anti-Nestorian teaching. Before Shenoute, in the fourth century, Asterius of Amaseia (*hom.* 1 [PG 40.165–168]) famously complained that wealthy Christians in his parish wore such decorated tunics, but Asterius speaks of exclusively Christological imagery. Naturally, these garments are also qualified as ποικίλα: μυρίοις εἰδώλοις **πεποικιλμένην** φιλοτεχνούσιν ἐσθήτα.

²⁴ In late antiquity Joseph's "mottled tunic" becomes so proverbial that the *Physiologus*, an ascetically inflected text composed in late third- or fourth-century Egypt (see Alan Scott, "The

of Joseph and his χιτώνα ποικίλον – a symbol of Christ’s glory, according to Cyril²⁵ – when reading (or listening), perhaps during the week of Easter, about Christ as a ποικιλόνωτος άνήρ. Christ’s “mottled back”, if read typologically as the fulfilment of Joseph’s “mottled tunic”, could thus be constructed as a reference to his purple robe, which was soaked in the blood of an animal (instead of his own blood), and whose extraordinary beauty symbolises Christ’s manifold virtues and glory.

Remarkably, the same ambivalence regarding Christ’s clothes as either literal garments or allegorical stand-ins for his body can be detected in at least two further passages in the *Paraphrase*. In the same Book as the passage discussed thus far, in 19.118-132, Nonnus paraphrases the famous division of Christ’s garments among the soldiers and their decision to cast dice for his unusual, seamless tunic. The detail which could possibly (but not necessarily)

Date of the *Physiologus*”, in *Vigiliae Christianae* 52 [1998] 430-441), is able to liken the stereotypically mottled panther to Joseph’s tunic (16.1: παμποϊκίλον έστιν ώς ό χιτών του Ίωσήφ). The text goes on to say that both the wisdom of God and Christ himself are “mottled” with virtues (Παμποϊκίλος έστιν ή νοερά σοφία του Θεου ... Παμποϊκίλος έστιν ό Χριστός, αυτός ών παρθενία, έγκράτεια, έλεημοσύνη, πίστις, άρετή, όμόνοια, ειρήνη, μακροθυμία). Outside Egypt, now, when John Chrysostom summarises the story of Joseph from Genesis 37, he playfully transfers the epithet “mottled” from the tunic, where the reader would expect to find it, to Jacob’s grief: Joseph’s brothers “dye his little tunic with blood, and showed it to their father, causing him ‘mottled’ grief” (*Stag.* 1, *PG* 47.468: τον χιτωνίσκον τον εκείνου βάψαντες αίματι και επιδείξαντες τώ πατρι, ποικίλον αύτώ τώ πένθος ειργάσαντο).

²⁵ See *Glaph. Gen.* (*PG* 69.301): Έπεμαίνοντο δέ και οι Φαρισαίοι τώ ήγαπημένω, τουτέστι Χριστώ, διά τοι τώ παρ ά Θεου και Πατρός ποικιλότηρον τινα κατημφέσθαι δόξαν. Τεθαύμαστο γάρ κατά πολλούς, οίμαι, τρόπους· τουτο μόν ώς ζωοποιός, τουτο δέ ώς φώς και καταφωτίζειν οίός τε τούς έν σκότω, ώς λεπρούς καθαρίζων, και νεκρούς καν ήδη δυσωδούντας ρήστα έγείρων, ώς θαλάσσαις επιπιμών, και αύτοίς έπ' έξουσίας έποχούμενος κύμασι). Here, Christ is dressed by his father in “mottled” glory – given the power to raise the dead, illuminate those in darkness, cleanse lepers, and calm the seas. This was by no means the only allegorical interpretation of Joseph’s tunic (for different ones see Philo, *De Jos.* 23; Clem. *Str.* 5.8.53-54; Or., *sel. in Gen.* [*PG* 12.128]), but it is the one chronologically and geographically closer to Nonnus.

suggest an allegorical reading is that the tunic is described by the soldiers as “wine-red” (v. 123: οἴνοπα). The colour of this tunic is not specified in John’s Gospel. Nonnus’ “painting” of it red could be explained as an attempt to reconcile two variant traditions regarding the colour of the robe which the soldiers had cast on his back earlier in the same Book. In John 19:2 we find an ἱμάτιον πορφυροῦν, a “purple robe”, whose colour agrees with the πορφυρέην τ' ἐσθῆτα we have seen in *Par.* 19.23. Matthew, on the other hand, mentions a “scarlet military robe” (27:28: χλαμύδα κοκκίνην). In making the seamless tunic red, Nonnus could be alluding to (or even trying to “correct”) this discrepancy between the two Gospels.

However, it is surely relevant here that Cyril’s commentary on John’s Gospel provides an interpretation of this seamless tunic as a symbol of Christ’s body, “which came into being without any union or intercourse between man and woman, but woven into its appropriate shape by the action and power of the Spirit from above²⁶.” If this tunic “is” Christ’s body, it makes

²⁶ *in Jo.* 3.89 (ed. Pusey): διὰ τὸ συνόδου καὶ οἰονεὶ συμβολῆς τινος δίχα τῆς ἀνδρός τε καὶ γυναικὸς γενέσθαι τοῦτο, τῇ δὲ τοῦ Πνεύματος ἐνεργείᾳ καὶ τῇ δυνάμει τῇ ἄνωθεν εἰς τὸ αὐτῷ πρέπον ἐξυφάνθαι σχῆμα. Cf. [Ath.], *pass.* (PG 28.221): οὐκ ἐρράμμενον εἶχε τὸ σῶμα ἐξ ἀνδρός καὶ γυναικός, ἀλλ' ἐκ Παρθένου μόνης, ὑφασμένον τῇ τοῦ Πνεύματος τέχνῃ. For the seamless tunic as a symbol of Christ’s body in Nonnus’ contemporary, Proclus of Constantinople, see Nicholas Constatas, “Weaving the Body of God: Proclus of Constantinople, the Theotokos and the Loom of the Flesh”, in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3.2 (1995) 169-194, esp. 182-183; also, in more detail, idem, *Proclus of Constantinople and the cult of the Virgin in late antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) 318-325. Both Proclus and Nonnus dwell on the strange shape of this tunic: cf. *Par.* 19.123-124: μὴ σχίζοιμεν ἀήθεα τόνδε χιτῶνα/θέσκελον, ἀμφιέποντα τύπον ξένον, and Procl. CP, *hom.* 4.2 (PG 65.712): ξένον τὸ ἔνδυμα καὶ καινότερον τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ ἡ πῆξις παράδοξος ὡς ἀνθρωπίνης τέχνης ἀμέτοχος. For an overview of Christological readings of this tunic see Michel Aubineau, *Recherches patristiques: Enquêtes sur des manuscrits. Textes inédits. Etudes* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1974) 362-365.

sense that it is “wine-red”: its colour and metaphorical “ingredient” evoke the rite of the Eucharist, in which the faithful receive the Lord’s sacrificed body. Another tradition may be pertinent: according to the *Infancy Gospel of James* (10-11), at the time of the Annunciation Mary was one of the maidens chosen to weave the temple’s multi-coloured curtains; among the many colours available, her lot had been the purple and the scarlet. It is precisely as she is drawing out the purple thread that the angel appears to her. This scene is obviously ripe for allegorical interpretation: Mary is “weaving” the body of Christ, the purple thread signifying his kingship and the scarlet his passion and death²⁷. By making Christ’s seamless tunic “wine-red”, Nonnus is perhaps alluding to this tradition and retrospectively identifying the purple robe earlier in the same Book as another symbol of Christ’s body: his two garments thus match exactly the colour scheme of Mary’s weaving in the *Infancy Gospel of James*.

The final passage I would like to consider comes in the immediately following Book. In 20.81-82, Mary Magdalene flies off to the disciples to tell them “that, after having his limbs bared of the earthly tunic, / she saw Christ gleaming in a mantle wrought by God” (ὅτι μετὰ χθονίου γυμνούμενα γυῖα

²⁷ See Constan (2003) 325-358, who analyses the reception of this text in later literature and iconography, as well as the prevalence of weaving metaphors in Proclus of Constantinople; cf. *ibid.* 341-342 for some brief comments on the importance of weaving in the *Dionysiaca*. For Proclus’ possible impact on Nonnus, especially in the formula ἔργον ὑφαίνω, which appears twelve times in the *Paraphrase*, see Gianfranco Agosti, ed. trans., *Nonno di Panopoli: Parafraresi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni. Canto V* (Firenze: Università degli Studi di Firenze, Dipartimento di Scienze dell’ Antichità “Giorgio Pasquali”, 2003), 420-424, n. on v. 64.

χιτῶνος / Χριστὸν ἶδε στίλβοντα θεοκμήτῳ τινὶ πέπλῳ). In John's Gospel (20:18) Mary simply announces, "I have seen the Lord". Nonnus' addition of the idea that Christ had his limbs stripped of the earthly garments and was glowing in a God-wrought mantle can definitely evoke an allegorical interpretation of his physical, human body as the garments that are now discarded. This is the view taken by Accorinti, who in his commentary provides a host of parallels for the notion of the body as tunic, from the Orphic condemnation of the body as a prison for the soul (e.g., *Catabasis Orphica* 129) to Neoplatonic philosophy (e.g., Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 209), and Origen's allegorical interpretation of the "tunics made of skin" in Genesis 3:21 (χιτῶνας δερματινούς)²⁸.

Nevertheless, a more literal reading of these verses is also defensible. Book 20 has a lot to say about actual garments. The two disciples who enter Christ's tomb at the beginning of the Book focus on his burial clothes, which now lie, unrolled, on the ground (vv. 24, 27-32, and 37). One of the two angels that Mary Magdalene sees inside the tomb is wearing a sparkling tunic (v. 56). When, later, she recognises Christ and brings her hand near his "immortal garment" (74: ἄμβροτον εἶμα), he forbids her to touch his tunics (75: ἐμῶν μὴ

²⁸ See Accorinti (1996) 190-191, n. on v. 81. For Genesis 3:21 and the history of its interpretation see Beatrice (1985). Ypsilanti (2014) 130 suggests that the divine clothing which radiates brightness is "probably intended to recall the Transfiguration of Christ", which Cyril (*in Jo.* 3.127 Pusey) also mentions in his discussion of the next Johannine scene (John 20:19), Christ's appearance to the disciples. What Cyril says, in fact, is that Christ appeared to the disciples in the same body in which he had suffered and died (see below), and *not* in the manner he had appeared during the Transfiguration.

ψαῦε χιτώνων). The reader is to imagine Christ as wearing some kind of extraordinary, divine garments – but they are literal garments. The discarded “earthly tunic” of v. 81 may just as well refer to his burial shrouds, abandoned on the (literal) earth.

With this final passage we may, at last, ask, what is at stake in reading Christ’s garments literally or allegorically? What difference does it make? It is clear in the passage from Book 20 that, if we interpret metonymically the discarded “earthly tunic” as “Christ’s physical body”, we veer into Christologically dangerous territory. As Cyril puts it in his commentary on John’s Gospel, after the resurrection, Christ

still appeared in his original shape, because he did not wish the belief in the resurrection to be transferred to another shape or body than that which he had received from the Holy Virgin, in which also he was crucified, and died, according to the Scripture, the power of death extending only over the flesh, from which also it was driven out. For if his body, after death, did not rise again, what sort of death was vanquished, and in what way was the power of corruption weakened²⁹?

²⁹ *in Jo.* 3.128 (ed. Pusey): ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις ἔτι διεφαίνετο σχήμασι, τὴν τῆς ἀναστάσεως πίστιν οὐκ ἐφ’ ἕτερόν τι σχῆμα καὶ σῶμα μετακομίζεσθαι θέλων ἢ εἰς ὅπερ ἔλαβεν ἐκ τῆς ἀγίας παρθένου, ἐν ᾧ καὶ σταυρωθεὶς ἀπέθανε κατὰ τὰς γραφάς, τῆς τοῦ θανάτου δυνάμεως κατὰ μόνης τρεχούσης τῆς σαρκός, ἐξ ἧς καὶ ἀπελήλαται. εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἀνέστη τὸ τεθνηκὸς αὐτοῦ σῶμα, ποῖος νενίκηται θάνατος, ποῦ δὲ ἠτόνησε τὸ τῆς φθορᾶς κράτος; Translation slightly adapted from P. E. Pusey.

Christ needs to rise again with the same body he received from Mary, the same body that was crucified and died, if death is to be vanquished. Even if this body is viewed as a garment – and Cyril uses the clothing metaphor only a few lines above the passage quoted here (3.127: καὶ ὅπερ πεφόρεκε σῶμα) – it is not a garment of which his resurrected self is made bare³⁰. The Origenist controversy that had flared up in late fourth- and early fifth-century Egypt turned Origen’s notion of the resurrected Christ (or man) as an incorporeal *eidos* (a form of body entirely divested of its flesh) into a real threat, and valid target, for Orthodox theologians³¹. Coupled with this incorporeal, resurrected Christ is the Origenist denigration of the human body as “a chastisement of the soul and its prison” – attacked in these terms by Shenoute in his anti-Origenist *I am amazed*, where the archimandrite also inveighs against those who deny the final judgment and resurrection³².

³⁰ Cf. *in Jo.* 3.126 (ed. Pusey): οἰηθῆς διὰ τοῦτο μὴ μετὰ τοῦδε τοῦ σώματος ἐγγεῖρθαι τὸν Κύριον, γυμνὸν δὲ σαρκός. Epiphanius of Salamis had also pressed this point in *Anc.* 65: δηλονότι οὐκ ἦν γυμνός, implying that the Origenist position would be that Christ rose without the body, because he had left his “clothes” in the tomb.

³¹ For the Origenist dispute in Egypt see Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy. The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: University Press, 1992) 151-157. Cf. David Brakke, “The Egyptian Afterlife of Origenism: Conflicts over Embodiment in Coptic Sermons” in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 66 (2000) 277–293, esp. 285-286 for the denial of bodily resurrection as a hallmark of Origenism and the Orthodox resistance by Epiphanius and Shenoute.

³² The quotation is taken from the translation by Brakke – Crislip (2015) 68. Hugo Lundhaug, “‘Tell Me What Shall Arise’: Conflicting Notions of the Resurrection Body in Fourth- and Fifth-Century Egypt” in eds. F. S. Tappenden and C. Daniel-Hughes, *Coming Back to Life: The Permeability of Past and Present, Mortality and Immortality, Death and Life in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Montreal, QC: McGill, 2017) [Online: <http://comingbacktolife.mcgill.ca>] 215–236, at 218-220 cites relevant passages from the partly preserved (and unpublished) *Who Speaks Through the Prophet* in which Shenoute attacks the Origenist denial of bodily resurrection.

Origen's suggestion that Christ's (as well as man's) resurrection body did not have a material nature, but was divine and ethereal, destined to dwell "in the ether and the realms above it³³", could, indeed, encourage a reader who would be so inclined to read *Par.* 20.4 (νυκτιφανής ἀχάρακτος ἑώιος ἦεν ἄσπῆρ) as a reference to Christ's resurrected, ethereal body³⁴. Needless to say, however, that such a position would not be approved by the anti-Origenist, Orthodox theologians, who press literal readings and insist on a bodily resurrection. Origen's speculations regarding the stars, their nature, and their relationship with God would seem positively heretical in the fifth century. Tellingly, Shenoute's *I am amazed* contains a section which deals with Origen's (or Origenism's) interest in the heavenly bodies, ridiculing the idea that God could be traveling or moving in the stars (and notice here Nonnus' ἦεν): "he does not move in them, but they all move and they are activated by his command. But he does not move³⁵."

³³ *CCel.* 3.41 (on Christ's resurrection body): τί θαυμαστόν τήν ποιότητα τοῦ θνητοῦ κατὰ τὸ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ σῶμα προνοία θεοῦ βουληθέντος μεταβαλεῖν εἰς αἰθέριον καὶ θεῖαν ποιότητα; Later on (3.42) this "body" is said to dwell in or above the ether: ὅποῖαν ἐχρῆν εἶναι τὴν ἐν αἰθέρι καὶ τοῖς ἀνωτέρω αὐτοῦ τόποις πολιτευομένην. For discussion and comparison with Origen's notion of a human resurrection body see Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars. A History of an Idea* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 154-157.

³⁴ A reader with Origenist inclinations might also be encouraged by *Par.* 20.43 (ἀναβήσεται εἰς πόλον ἄσπρων), where the resurrected Christ is said to "ascend again onto the astral pole"; here the metaphorical interpretation (that he simply returns to heaven, to the Father) would be the more Orthodox one. It should be noted that Nonnus does not highlight the bodily (or non-bodily) presence of Christ in the subsequent scenes that are crucial for any discussion of his resurrection body. When he enters through closed doors the house where the disciples are in hiding (20.87 and 20.118-120) and when he sits and eats with them (21.77-81), Nonnus does not in any way go beyond what is said in the Gospel, essentially leaving the question open.

³⁵ The quotation is taken from the translation by Brakke – Crislip (2015) 65. On later opponents accusing Origen of believing in astrology see Scott (1991) 144.

The great Christological controversy of Nonnus' time, however, is the one centering on Nestorius and his supposed affirmation of Christ's two (loosely attached) hypostases. Nestorian authors, especially in the Eastern Syrian Church, make remarkably extensive use of the clothing metaphor, which sees Christ "put on the robe of the body/humanity"³⁶. This, in turn, leads to increasing suspicion of the metaphor among anti-Nestorian theologians. Cyril of Alexandria himself became ever more reticent about employing the clothing metaphor to speak of the Incarnation. As Davis notes, such language might imply that the union of human and divine in Christ "was merely superficial (and potentially reversible). For Cyril, it was necessary to emphasize that this union was, rather, thoroughgoing and permanent in effect³⁷." A garment and its wearer can never truly become one. In his commentary on the prologue of John, Philoxenus of Mabbugh (early sixth century), protests that to say "Christ was clothed in the flesh" means endorsing the position of Nestorius, "who cast a body on to the Word as one does a garment on to an ordinary body, or as purple is put on emperors³⁸."

³⁶ See Sebastian Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature, Theology* (Hampshire: Ashgate / Variorum, 1992) 12-38. For Cyril's use of clothing imagery in the Commentary on John as a mere metaphor for the Incarnation, not to be taken metaphysically, see Hans van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 198; cf. *ibid.* 285 and 314 on Cyril's careful use of the metaphor, and 402 on his avoiding to take up Nestorius' clothing imagery in the *Contra Nestorium*.

³⁷ See Stephen J. Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice. Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt* (Oxford: University Press, 2008) 176-177.

³⁸ The quotation is taken from Brock (1992) 17.

Nestorian Christology becomes especially problematic in the context of Christ's passion and death. If his body "is" a garment, which can be easily cast off, then the divine Christ, the Word, must (or could) have done precisely that, abandoning his garment/body on the cross. Although Shenoute's *I am amazed* is primarily an anti-Origenist work, it also contains a section against Nestorius, centering exactly on Christ's passion:

This also, regarding "*Eloi, eloi, lema sabakhtanei*," he [Nestorius] said, "It is the flesh that cries out against the divinity, 'Why have you abandoned me?'" and, "The divinity ascended to the height and he left the flesh on the cross." For he said in his writings, "As for he who cries out, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' I worship him together with the divinity, because he was joined with it." But the word of the Apostle refutes his foolishness: "It is the Lord of Glory whom they crucified," [I Cor., 2:8] and, "You have killed the author of life." [Acts 3:15] He did not say, "He is a man joined to a god." ... For also divinity was not separated from the body while it was on the cross³⁹.

³⁹ Extract from the translation by Brakke – Crislip (2015) 74. Janet Timbie, "Reading and Re-reading Shenoute's *I am Amazed*. More information on Nestorius and Others" in eds. James Goehring and Janet Timbie, *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity: Language, Literature, and Social Context: Essays in Honor of David W. Johnson* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007) 61-71 argues that Shenoute seems to have relied on written sources for this Nestorian section, as the scripture-based arguments that he attributes to his opponent can be identified with the writings of Nestorius that are excerpted in the acts of the Council of Ephesus. For Shenoute's reliance on Cyril in his Christological arguments against Nestorius see Davis (2008) 70.

Apocryphal texts circulating in late antique Egypt (and predating the Nestorian controversy) contain strong elements of such a “separationist” Christology. In the fourth-century Coptic Apocalypse of Peter (81), for example, it is clear that the Jesus who dies on the cross is only a shell: the real Lord is represented as an incorporeal form who speaks with Peter during the crucifixion, and even laughs while pointing at the crucified man and saying, “this one into whose hands and feet they drive the nails is his [the living Savior’s] fleshly part, which is the substitute, being put to shame, the one who came into being in his likeness⁴⁰.” A fragment from the Gospel of Peter, excavated in the town of Akhmim (the ancient Panopolis), presents Jesus crying out on the cross, “My power, O power, you have left me”, after which he is “taken up”, even though his body remains on the cross⁴¹. If we choose to read the text of Nonnus’ *Paraphrase* symbolically, with the ποικιλόνωτος άνήρ of Book 19 referring to Christ’s body as an earthly shell or outer garment (susceptible to suffering), and the heavenly and unhurt άχάρακτος άσπήρ in 20.4 as either a manifestation of his separate, divine, impassible nature or his resurrection body, we subscribe to a heterodox

⁴⁰ For the “separationist” Christology of this text and the translation quoted here see Bart Ehrman, *Forgery and Counter-forgery. The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (Oxford: University Press, 2013) 409. For other Nag Hammadi treatises separating the suffering, human Jesus from the real Savior who cannot be killed see the First Apocalypse of James (5.3; 5.31.17-18), the Second Apocalypse of James (5.4), and the Letter of Peter to Philip (8.2; 8.139.21-11).

⁴¹ For this fragment and the history of its excavation see Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: University Press, 2005) 17-20.

Christology, just as *if* we choose to take the “earthly tunic” that is discarded in 20.81 as a reference to Christ’s physical body and not his literal garments.

This is not to say that all metaphors involving clothing are equally open to heterodox interpretations. The Egyptian Christians who wore tunics decorated with scenes from the Old and New Testament were, in a way, “clothing themselves with Christ”, as Paul’s baptismal formula (Galatians 3:27) commands, and, in another way, re-enacting Christ’s incarnation in their ritualised dress⁴². Shenoute does not object to the use of such clothing. In an anthropological (and not Christological) context, clothing metaphors seem less controversial, even in the case of martyrdom, where a division between the passible body and impassible soul is to be expected⁴³. In a spurious homily in honour of St. Stephen, attributed to John Chrysostom, the author speaks in the martyr’s voice, inviting the people about to stone him to turn his body “blood-red” (*PG* 63.932: Φοινίξατέ μοι τὸ σῶμα), just as their fathers had stained Joseph’s tunic with blood (τὸν Ἰωσήφ χιτῶνα ἐφοίνιξαν τῷ αἵματι οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν). The martyr’s body is imagined as the tunic of Joseph but also of Christ (63.931: τὸν χιτῶνα τὸν Δεσποτικὸν ἔχων), and it is mottled with wounds (τοῖς μὲν τραύμασι τὸ σῶμα ποικιλλόμενος), its beauty rivalling that of

⁴² See Davis (2008) 170-178.

⁴³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 45-46 speaks of a contradictory tendency in accounts of martyrdom between, on the one hand, an “anaesthesia of glory” which makes martyrdom bearable”, with “saints who do not even notice the most exquisite and extraordinary cruelties” because their minds are fixed on (or absorbed in) God, and, on the other hand, the need to highlight a continuity of body after the resurrection. The body that had offered up its own suffering and death could not be lost.

the starry sky (καὶ τῷ οἰκείῳ κάλλει πρὸς αὐτὸν τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀμιλλώμενος). Even though this tunic/body is explicitly an “outer garment” (τοῦ ἔξωθεν ἐνδύματος), it is through its wounds — imagined in their turn as “mottled garments” (τοῖς τραύμασιν, ὡς ποικίλοις ἡμφιεσμένος ἐνδύμασιν) — that the martyr’s soul is embellished (τὴν ψυχὴν καλλωπιζόμενος). Although by no means extraordinary, this homily displays the full range of possibilities that clothing metaphors could afford a preacher expounding on the martyr’s body, some of which intersect with what we have seen in the *Paraphrase*. Here, however, there is no question of “partitioning” the martyr into a “mottled”, suffering body and a divine nature, which can abandon the body, leaving it to be tortured alone. Martyrs, after all, become martyrs through their bodies⁴⁴.

Of the three garments (or possible garments) examined in this article, the “wine-red”, seamless tunic is the one that can function as a symbol of Christ’s body with the least Christological “trouble”. After all, this was an interpretation advanced by Cyril himself, as discussed above. It should be noted, however, that Cyril framed his allegorical reading of the seamless tunic with a certain amount of circumspection: it is an interpretation he offers, “if I have to say something as we examine the division of his garments, something that will not bring any harm, but will perhaps benefit the readers⁴⁵”. Cyril’s caution as he

⁴⁴ As Bynum (1995) 46 puts it, “Resurrection guarantees that it is *these very corpses* that achieve salvation.” [emphasis her own]

⁴⁵ *in Jo.* 3.88 (ed. Pusey): Εἰ δὲ δεῖ τι πάλιν καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν ἱματίων διανομῇ περισκεψαμένους εἰπεῖν, ὃ καὶ βλάβος μὲν οἴσει παντελῶς οὐδέν, ὀνήσει δὲ τάχα τοὺς ἐντευχομένους, ἐρῶ δὴ καὶ τοῦτο.

introduces this reading might have something to do with the fact that Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Cyril's Antiochene nemesis⁴⁶, offered a very similar interpretation, which saw the tunic as a symbol of Christ's body, weaved by the Virgin "without threads or the hands of weavers⁴⁷". According to Theodoret, Christ assumes this tunic/body and "attaches it to himself" (75.1460.55: ἑαυτῷ συνάψας). The verb συνάπτω, applied to the incarnation, was a Nestorian rallying cry: its cognate συνάφεια (a simple "conjunction" or "connection") was explicitly rejected by Cyril of Alexandria in his *contra Nestorium* (430 CE) as a term that could ever be appropriate or adequate to describe the union (his preferred term: ἔνωσις) of divine and human natures in Christ⁴⁸.

It is striking, then, to find Nonnus using precisely the verb συνάπτω to describe the incarnation in 3.67-68⁴⁹. Although, as Cutino first pointed out⁵⁰, this use of συνάπτω is not all that different from the apparently neutral (or, at

⁴⁶ See Conostas (2003) 323. Cyril's *Contra Theodoretum* was written in the spring of 431.

⁴⁷ Thdt. *inc.* (PG 75.1461): χιτώνα χωρὶς νημάτων καὶ χειρῶν ὑφαντικῶν ὑφασμένον. The *De incarnatione* was originally composed before the Nestorian controversy (pre-431), but edited in its early stages, when Theodoret assumed an anti-Cyrrillian stance; see Paul B. Clayton, Jr., *The Christology of Theodoret of Cyrus, Antiochene Christology from the Council of Ephesus (431) to the Council of Chalcedon (451)* (Oxford: University Press, 2007) 105-106.

⁴⁸ For Cyril's objections to Nestorius' use of the term συνάφεια and its cognates see van Loon (2009) 347-353 and 395-402 for the *Contra Nestorium* and *passim* for other works. Cf. Davis (2008) 35-38.

⁴⁹ Nonn. *Par.* 3.67-68: ὃς ἀθανάτην ἔο μορφὴν / οὐρανόθεν κατέβαινεν ἀήθει σαρκὶ συνάπτων ("the one who, attaching His immortal form to unfamiliar flesh, descended from heaven"). For the use of συνάπτω and its Nestorian implications in this passage see Rotondo (2014) 608-609 with further bibliography.

⁵⁰ See Michele Cutino, "Structure de la composition et exégèse dans la *Paraphrase de l'évangile de S. Jean* de Nonnos de Panopolis. Une lecture du cant III" in *Revue d'études augustiniennes et patristiques* 55 (2009) 225-246, at 237-238, followed by Rotondo (2014) 609.

least, less controversial) ξυνώω which is employed for the incarnation in a very similar distich in Book 1⁵¹, Cutino's conclusion, that the poet is not interested in the complex Christological controversies of his times, and aims, instead, to simplify the Christian message⁵², does not, in my opinion, carry conviction. Other scholars have attempted to date the *Paraphrase* to around 430 CE on the basis of both Nonnus' use of συνάπτω and the poem's lack of anti-Nestorian rhetoric⁵³. According to this theory, the *Paraphrase* was written very shortly after the publication of Cyril's Commentary on John (428 CE) and before the Nestorian controversy really took off in the early 430s. While it is not impossible that the poem was written in that very short timeframe between 428 and 430 (the date of Cyril's *contra Nestorium*), Nonnus' pointed use of the conjunction Χριστοῖο θεητόκος (in *Par.* 2.9 and 19.135) indicates, at the very least, awareness of the controversies surrounding Nestorius' infamous Χριστοτόκος. In this case, again, it is telling that we cannot be sure whether Χριστοῖο θεητόκος should be taken as a correction of Χριστοτόκος or a

⁵¹ Nonn. *Par.* 1.40-41: ἐν ἀρρήτῳ τινὶ θεσμῷ / ξυνώσας ζαθέην βροτοειδέϊ σύζυγα μορφήν ("in an ineffable manner / bringing together in a common yoke the divine and the human-like form"). The word σύζυγα, however, could be problematic here; see Aloys Grillmeier – Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in the Christian Tradition, II.4: The Church of Alexandria with Nubia and Ethiopia after 451*, trans. O. C. Dean Jr. (London: Mowbray, 1996 [Freiburg 1990]) 98: Cyril would find the designation of the humanity of Christ as σύζυγος highly suspicious.

⁵² See Cutino (2009) 244.

⁵³ See Grillmeier – Hainthaler (1996) 95-99 with further bibliography, and for a more recent overview of attempts at dating the poem Cutino (2009) 225, n. 2. Konstantinos Spanoudakis, ed. trans., *Nonnus of Panopolis. Paraphrasis of the Gospel of John XI* (Oxford: University Press, 2014) 19-20 argues that a *terminus ante quem* for the *Paraphrase* should be 438 CE, because Nonnus echoes the commentary on John's Gospel written by Theodore of Mopsuestia in the first decade of the fifth century, and "Cyril wrote *Contra Diodorum et Theodorum* c.438, where he attacks Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia as fathers of Nestorianism", unless, of course, as Spanoudakis admits, "we reckon with some pointed liberty."

conciliatory move towards (crypto-)Nestorian Christians. My argument in this article has been that Nonnus' ambiguous employment of clothing metaphors, as shown in the three passages discussed, reflects an ambiguous Christology, which was in all probability deliberately left open for interpretation according to the readers' own (Orthodox, Origenist, or Nestorian) inclinations. The *Paraphrase* might be less rigorously Alexandrian-Orthodox and more "polyphonic" than has so far been acknowledged⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ For Nonnus' Christology as entirely dependent on Cyril see the influential views of Enrico Livrea, ed. trans. *Nonno di Panopoli, Parafraresi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni, Canto XVIII* (Naples: M. D'Auria, 1989) 30-31, where he notes, but underplays the use of συνάπτω by Nonnus in 3.67-9.