

BRIDEGROOM NILE AND BRIDE EGYPT
(PSI VII 845^r = XXXIX 1–11 HEITSCH = 43(A) PERALE)*

by

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ABSTRACT: The article discusses some questions related to the interpretation of the hexametric poem preserved on the recto of PSI VII 845. An important issue here is the relationship between the fragment on the papyrus and the epithalamic literary tradition.

Αἰγύπτῳ Ζεῦ Νεῖλ'
(SH 604A = POWELL, CA, p. 237)

The theme of “the currents of the Nile, who floods the flats of Egypt” – to quote the famous beginning of Euripides’ *Helen*¹ – often appearing in Greek literature of all periods², has also its epithalamic treatment. The theme can be found in Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca*³ and in the anonymous hymn to the Nile⁴. A reference to the marriage of the Nile and Egypt occurs also in an epigram on Augustus’ victory at Actium⁵. There is one more text that expands our view of this motif’s employment in late Greek poetry, underestimated by scholars, as it seems. In what follows I will discuss this text and attempt to define the genre and the function of the hexametric composition.

In 1925 Medea NORSÄ published in the seventh volume of PSI⁶ the remnants of hexametric lines preserved on the recto and the verso of a sheet of a papyrus

* I would like to express my gratitude to Jakub PIGOŃ for his comments that improved this paper in many ways.

¹ Eur. *Hel.* 1–3: Νείλου [...] ῥοαί, / ὅς [...] Αἰγύπτου πέδον / [...] ὑγραίνει.

² See the wide-ranging study by Helen TOD devoted to this subject, *Rewriting the Egyptian River: The Nile in Hellenistic and Imperial Greek Literature*, Oxford 2014 (<https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:ed3c2d53-f7d6-4208-8a4c-cb84b5c27854>).

³ XXVI 235.

⁴ See the Louvre hymn to the Nile (esp. lines 7–8) with a commentary by Raffaella CRIBIORE, *A Hymn to the Nile*, ZPE CVI 1995, pp. 97–106, esp. p. 102, and TOD, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 172–180.

⁵ SH 982, 9–10.

⁶ M. NORSÄ, *Frammenti di poemetti epici*, Pubblicazioni della Società Italiana per la ricerca dei papiri greci e latini in Egitto. Papiri Greci e Latini VII 1925, pp. 149–150. See also <http://www.psi-online.it/documents/psi;7;845>. The papyrus is also recorded in MP³ as 01835.000 and in LDAB as 566.

codex⁷. The place of its acquisition is Hermoupolis Magna⁸ and one can assume that it is also the codex's origin. Dating of the codex and the text is 5th/6th century CE. The text must be later than Nonnus and Colluthus with whom it shares metrical and stylistic features⁹. Judging from what has survived NORSÄ expresses her unfavourable opinion about the anonymous composer of hexametric lines calling him a "poetastro"¹⁰. KÖRTE shares her opinion naming these literary fragments hopeless¹¹, and KEYDELL speaks of the clumsiness of linguistic expression¹². Indeed, it is not a composition of good quality. But this text, preserved on the small piece of a papyrus sheet, currently located in the Laurentian Library in Florence¹³, deserves – in spite of its mediocrity – a closer look and deeper examination¹⁴. It could reveal an interesting way of exploiting the theme

⁷ The dimension of the piece is 15 x 5 cm. E.G. TURNER, *The Typology of the Early Codex*, Philadelphia 1977, p. 116, notes the codex under number 314 on the list of codices consulted and estimates that there was only one column per page consisting of at least 19 lines. Overall page dimension and the dimension of the written area of the codex remain unknown. See A. KÖRTE, *Literarische Texte mit Ausschluß der christlichen*, APF VIII 1927, p. 255. R. KEYDELL, *Zwei Stücke griechisch-ägyptischer Poesie*, Hermes IX 1934, p. 420: "Nach der vorliegenden Resten scheint dieses Buch kleinere Gedichte in der Art der Carmina minora Claudians erhalten zu haben".

⁸ See R. PINTAUDI, *Le venti cassette di papiri del secondo scavo di Ashmunên*, *Analecta Papyrologica VII/VIII 1996–1997*, p. 242, who enumerates PSI VII 845 among the papyri "di sicura provenienza ermopolitana". See also D. MORELLI, R. PINTAUDI (eds.), *Cinquant'anni di papirologia in Italia. Carteggi Breccia – Comparetti – Norsa – Vitelli*, Napoli 1983, vol. I, p. 27, where "materiale per un volume VII di PSI" is defined as "i resti dei primi scavi della Società ad Hermoupolis Magna".

⁹ NORSÄ, *op. cit.* (n. 6), p. 149: "Non sarebbe difficile citare a confronto lessicale e ritmico, quasi di ciascun verso, molti luoghi di Nonno e dei Nonniani". KEYDELL, *op. cit.* (n. 7), pp. 420–421, takes into consideration not only a poet from among "Hexameter der Nonnianischen Schule" or "die Nähe von Kolluthos", but the authorship of Colluthus himself ("so daß er ganz gut selbst der Verfasser sein könnte"). Orsolina MONTEVECCHI, *La papirologia*, Milano 2008³, p. 393, takes into consideration Colluthus' authorship: "Di Colluto è forse un frammento epico trovato in un papiro della raccolta fiorentina (PSI VII, 845)". For the characterisation of Nonnus' school, see Laura MIGUÉLEZ CAVERO, *Poems in Context. Greek Poetry in the Egyptian Thebaid 200–600 AD*, Berlin–New York 2008, esp. pp. 1–105.

¹⁰ NORSÄ, *op. cit.* (n. 6), p. 149.

¹¹ KÖRTE, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 251, characterises the seventh volume of PSI as "Band" including "nur eine Anzahl ganz kleiner, meist hoffnungsloser literarischer Bruchstücke".

¹² KEYDELL, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 421: "die Unbeholfenheit des sprachlichen Ausdrucks, die man besonders an den Versen des Verso spürt, weist ihn [i.e. den Verfasser] in die Nähe von Kolluthos".

¹³ Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana (BML), inv. 18766. The photograph of the papyrus is stored in the photographic archives of the CEDOPAL (Centre de Documentation de Papyrologie Littéraire). My great debt is to Prof. Marie-Hélène MARGANNE, Director of the CEDOPAL, who sent me the scan of the photo of PSI VII 845. I have relied on it, since the inspection of the papyrus was not possible.

¹⁴ Helen TOD in her recent work, *op. cit.* (n. 2), p. 171, dedicates to the poem only one sentence, including obvious information about its content: "In these verses the Nile is invoked as the bridegroom of Egypt and the inundation is envisaged as the wedding of the two".

“water/land union”, relatively popular in Greek literature with reference to the Nile and Egypt¹⁵.

Not counting the *editrix princeps*, three scholars have so far offered editions of the text. Denys PAGE’s edition of 1950¹⁶ contains lines 1–6 of the verso¹⁷ and lines 2–4 of the recto (in that order) with the title *Address to the Nile*. Ernst HEITSCH’s edition, which appeared in 1961¹⁸, provides us with all the readable lines of both sides of the sheet, i.e. 11 lines of the recto and 8 lines of the verso (in that order). The editor calls the piece *carmen in Nilum crescentem*. In Marco PERALE’s recent edition the text is entitled *Address to the Nile, Bridegroom of Egyptian Land*¹⁹.

Apart from the difficulties in reading and restoring the text itself (readings of some bits of it are particularly uncertain and very few lines are entirely preserved), there are two other, not less problematic, issues concerning these hexametric lines. The first one is the number of compositions we are dealing with here. The second one regards its/their genre and function. In this place I shall only briefly mention some points that concern the first question, which seem important for our further considerations.

Medea NORSÄ in her edition places the text from the reverse side of the papyrus first and suspects – judging from some expressions visible on the recto – that it is the beginning of a short epithalamic poem²⁰, but adds that it is difficult to restore the lines and the sense, especially of the text on the recto²¹. She

¹⁵ It is rooted not only in the Greek representations of geographic phenomena as personifications (the earliest attestation of the Nile personified in Greek literature is Hesiod’s *Theogony* 337–338, who says that Tethys bore the river to Ocean), but also in early Egyptians’ beliefs who regarded, as Plutarch attests (*De Is. et Os.* 38–39 = *Mor.* 366C), the Egyptian land as the body of Isis and the Nile as the effusion of Osiris who, uniting with it, covers and fertilises it. For the place of the Nile in the Egyptian religious imagination, see J. LEBOVITCH, *Gods in Agriculture and Welfare in Ancient Egypt*, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* XII 1953, pp. 77, 105–110. For the Nile and Egypt as bridegroom and bride, see also Heliod. *Aeth.* IX 9.

¹⁶ D.L. PAGE, *Select Papyri*, vol. III: *Poetry*, London–New York 1950, pp. 604–607.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 606: δεῦρο λύρη μ[ὲν] ἄ|ειδε παρ’ ἡ|όνεσσ[ι] θαλάσσης, / δεῦρο μὲν [ἡ|όν]εσσιν ἀείσομεν ἄ[σθ]ματα μολπῆς· / κ|υδαίν[ει]ν ἐδ[άη]ν τῇν οὐ δεδάσαι γυναῖκες. / θηλυτέρης δὲ νόος χαλεπώτερός ἐστ[ι] θ|αλάσ[σης]· / Ὀρφεῖνι καὶ πρόσθεν ὑπέεικαθε πόντ[ος] αἰοιδῇ / καὶ θῆρες θέλγοντο καὶ οὐ θέλγοντο [γυναῖκες].

¹⁸ E. HEITSCH, *Die griechischen Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Göttingen 1961, pp. 125–126.

¹⁹ M. PERALE, *Adespota Papyracea Hexametra Graeca. Hexameters of Unknown or Uncertain Authorship from Graeco-Roman Egypt*, vol. I, Berlin–Boston 2020, pp. 385. Marco PERALE generously let me see his unpublished work on PSI VII 845. I wish to express my gratitude for his kindness here. I am also grateful for his having noted some of my proposals to supplement the text, which I shared with him (by correspondence), in the apparatus.

²⁰ NORSÄ, *op. cit.* (n. 6), p. 149: “con l’attuale r. 1 cominciava un poemetto (epitalamico?, a giudicare dai rr. 11sq)”.

²¹ *Ibid.*: “difficile è, almeno a noi, restituire versi o senso, principalmente nel *recto*”.

consequently treats the texts preserved on both sides of the sheet as belonging to a single poem, although the text eludes interpretation. HEITSCH proposes putting both fragments in the order: recto + verso, and regards them as parts of two separate poems²². According to KÖRTE, we are dealing here with one epithalamic poem dedicated to a nobleman, which seems to begin on the verso²³. KEYDELL assigns the texts on both sides of the papyrus to two separate poems: in his opinion the verso contains the beginning of a poem on the sea, the recto consists of lines belonging not to an epithalamium, but to a hymnic poem on the rise of the Nile sung during a celebration of the Nile's overflowing²⁴. Toivo VILJAMAA in turn, based on the mentions of Dionysus' falling in love with Ariadne (*r*) and of the "persuading of women" (*v*), puts a clear diagnosis in favour of both preserved pieces as being fragments of the same epithalamic poem²⁵. Finally, Laura CAVERO, giving different titles to the remains of the text on the recto (*Bridegroom Nile and Bride Egypt*) and the verso (*Song of the Sea*), seems to think of two separate, perhaps both epithalamic, poems, declaring, however, her dependence on previous research on this occasion²⁶. The thought of two poems has also been preferred by PERALE who stresses "the anthological character of the manuscript"²⁷. I think that the verso and the recto might be two parts of the same composition. In this paper I must, however, limit myself to discussing some problems concerning the interpretation of the text preserved on the recto only. The detailed analysis of the verso and an attempt to make the interpretation of the whole composition will be made in a separate article.

Here is the text preserved on the recto²⁸:

²² HEITSCH, *op. cit.* (n. 18), p. 126: "*verso* alieni carminis esse videtur".

²³ KÖRTE, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 255: "Das Gedicht scheint auf dem verso zu beginnen und die Hochzeit eines vornehmen Mannes in nonnianischer Technik zu feiern".

²⁴ KEYDELL, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 420: "Auf dem Verso beginnt ein Gedicht auf das Meer", and – about the recto – "Das ist kein Epithalamium, sondern ein Gedicht auf die Nilschwelle".

²⁵ T. VILJAMAA, *Studies in Greek Encomiastic Poetry of the Early Byzantine Period*, Helsinki 1968, p. 130: "PSI 845 [...] contains part of a poem written by some imitator of Nonnus", p. 131: "since persuading of women (of a bride?) is spoken about on the *verso*, and a bridegroom is urged to embrace his bride on the *r*, the most natural assumption is that the papyrus [...] contains part of a wedding poem. [...] Dionysus' falling in love with Ariadne is undoubtedly meant here; mentioning of this popular love story proves most clearly that the poem is an *epithalamium*".

²⁶ CAVERO, *op. cit.* (n. 9), pp. 70–71.

²⁷ PERALE, *op. cit.* (n. 19), p. 383, gives the title „Address to the Nile, Bridegroom of Egyptian Land" to the text of the recto, and "Hymn to the Muse / Orpheus?" to that preserved on the verso.

²⁸ Verbal forms in the apparatus are in the plural. I want to mark in this way Jerzy DANIELEWICZ's contribution to supplementing and interpreting selected lines of the text. I would like to thank him most sincerely in this place for his helpful feedback on the first draft of this paper. Some supplements (where even the number of missing letters is not certain) are exemplary and intend to reflect the general sense of the text.

recto

καὶ θυεν οἰσ.[
 νυμφίε μὴ δῆθυνε, τεὸν δ' ἐπ[
 ἄνθει κυμα[τ]όεντι φερέσταχ[υν] ἄμφεπε νύμφην,
 ὑμετέρων [δ' ἅ]πτόναιο πολυρροθ[ίων] ὑμεναίων.
 ..]ραπὸ[.] ἐννοσίγαιος ἐπ' Αἰγυπτ[. . . .] . ἦσα 5
] . . . υσειεν ἀγάρροον ον . [.] . . . [.] . . υ
] Διόνυσσον εὐσταφύλω ἐνὶ Νάξω.
] . . μενος γλυκερὴν τε . ε χαιρεῖ
] . . . εχει καὶ ἀπόπροθι μοῦνος ἐρύκει
 ἵ]να μὴ διαίστωσαις ὀπώρην 10
]εναῖσιν ἀναθρώσκων πο[

2 δε π *Norsa* : ἐπὶ ἔργον ἐπείγου *supplevimus* || 3 *suppl. Norsa* || 4 . [.]πο-
 νηο? *Norsa* : δ' ἀπόναιο *Keydell* || 5 .. ραπο[.] *Norsa* : ἀτ]ραπὸ[ς] *Keydell* :
 ἐκτ]ράπο[ν] *malumus* | Αἰγύπτ[ω ὑδά]τη σά *coniecimus* || 6 *possis* ἡ δὲ λα-
 βεῖν σπε]ύσειεν ἀγάρροον ὄντ' [ύ]μέν[α]ιον *vel* ἡ δὲ λαβεῖν σπε]ύσειεν ἀγάρρο-
 ον ὄντ[α] σύν[ευ]νον *vel* ἡ δὲ λαβεῖν σπε]ύσειεν ἀγάρροον ὕγρον ἀκοίτην (*vide*
comm. infra) || 7 *fort.* Κρησσ' ὥς τὸν || 8 'Αβρὴν θ' εὐ]ρόμενος *e.g. supplevimus*
 | τε . ε χαιρεῖ *Norsa, Heitsch* : *fort.* τ' ἐπ' ἔρωτι χαιρεῖ, cf. Theoc. *Id.* 18, 57:
 γάμω ἐπὶ τῷδε χαιρεῖς || 9 *e.g.* νυμφίος

Wedding imagery is conspicuous in the text: such terms as νυμφίος (line 2), νύμφην (line 3), ὑμεναίων (line 4) directly confirm the nuptial setting, and μὴ δῆθυνε (line 2), ἄμφεπε (line 3) as well as the remains of the optative forms in lines 6 and 8 (-υσειεν, χαιρεῖ). They refer to their marriage, a motif which was conventional in the epithalamic genre²⁹. The significant number of elements in the surviving text makes us suspect that the well-known epic motif: ὕγρος ἀκοίτης – διψὰς νύμφη was developed here. The Nile as watery consort and Egypt as thirsty bride in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* is a very good example of it in late poetry³⁰. It may be that the exhortation (“do not dally”) is developed in the second part of line 2. It is tempting to suggest supplementing the line with an expression

²⁹ See the large number of imperatives in Catullus' epithalamic poems (61, 62, 64). Claudian's panegyric epithalamia provide us with splendid examples of such a stylistic matrix, i.e. using imperative or hortatory expressions (e.g. *Fesc.* 4, 5: “ne cessa, iuvenis, comminus adgredi”), see pseudo-Claudian's *Epithalamium Laurentii*: “surge age iam, iuvenis” (64), “tuque, puella [...] non cunctante gradu gressum comitare mariti” (65–66), “ite pares tandemque toro recubate potito” (79).

³⁰ Nonn. *Dion.* III 27 and VI 342. In XXVI 231–232 the inundation of the river Indos is compared to a watery husband who rejoices a thirsty bride with his moist kisses (“so Nile in Egypt, and the eastern Hydaspes in India”, adds Nonnus in XXVI 235). See also XL 324–326 with the comparison of Poseidon holding the city “in a firm bond” to a watery bridegroom (νυμφίος ὕδατόεις) embracing the neck of his bride; 562 with an example of ἵμερος ὕδατόεις (the river Alpheios who embraces Arethusa with watery hands). Cf. XLI 30–31 where Poseidon is mentioned as ὕγρος ἀκοίτης putting moist kisses on the bride's (i.e. Beroe's) lips. See also the anonymous epigrammatic treatment of this theme, *Anth. Pal.* IX 362 (νυμφίος Alpheus as a watery bed-fellow of νύμφη Arethusa).

like ἐπὶ ἔργον ἐπείγου. The expression ἐπὶ ἔργον appears in the same metrical *sedes* in Homer (*Od.* XIV 65), Hesiod (*Op.* 20) and Aratus (*Phaen.* 6); see also Gregory of Nazianzus (*MPG* 37, line 8): “Ὡς γὰρ θεσφατόν ἐστι· λόγος δ’ ἐπὶ ἔργον ὁδεύει. For the verb ἐπείγεσθαι with the reference to eagerness to take or support erotic action, see Nonn. *Dion.* III 105: δηθύνει σέο Κάδμος ἐπειγομένης Ἀφροδίτης, *Anth. Pal.* IX 362, 6: ἐπείγει ἀκοίτης; in exhortation cf. *Anth. Graec.* XI 25: ἀλλ’ ἄγ’ ἐπείγου. Cf. also the parallel expression τῷ ἐπειγομένῳ ἐπὶ ἔργον in Porph. (*ad Il.* X, section 252–253, line 176). Moreover, the play with the Greek double meaning of ἔργον – ‘deed’ and ‘cropland’ (present also in the shortened title of Hesiod’s poem, Ἔργα) seems very suitable here. For ἔργα as tilled lands, see e.g. *Il.* XII 283, *Od.* II 22.

The wedding references are made explicit in lines 3–4. Line 5 raises serious difficulties since neither the beginning of the line nor its end are preserved. KEYDELL restores ἀτ]ραπὸ[ς] at the line-beginning and claims that any other supplement is hardly possible³¹. In his opinion ἀτ]ραπὸ[ς] ἐννοσίγαιος (earth-shaking path) means a furrow. HEITSCH shares his opinion translating ἀτ]ραπὸ[ς] with Latin *sulcus*³² and points, following KEYDELL, at line 18 of Book III of Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca* where ἐννοσίγαιος is the attributive of ἐχέτλη, the plow-handle. Here ἀτ]ραπὸ[ς] must, as it seems, have meant Egyptian furrowed earth waiting for the Nile’s water³³. One may, however, imagine another possibility. If we take ἐννοσίγαιος visible on the papyrus as a predicate adjective referring to the Nile (treated as the νυμφίος encouraged *supra* with the imperatives μὴ δήθυνε and, perhaps, ἐπείγου), we may read the first word in the line as ἐκτ]ράπο[υ] and complete it with e.g. ἐπ’ Αἰγύπτ[ω] ὕδα]τῃ σά. The dynamic or intensive middle voice imperative of the Ionic form ἐκτρέπω (for ἐκτρέπω) – with the direct object like ὕδα]τῃ σά would form the continuation of a series of commands. The verb ἐκτρέπω appears in conjunction with river currents: in Hdt. (II 11, 14) with reference to the Nile (εἰ [...] ἐθελήσει ἐκτρέψαι τὸ ῥέεθρον ὃ Νεῖλος ἐς τοῦτον τὸν Ἀράβιον κόλπον)³⁴ or in Thuc. (V 65, 4) about ...καὶ ἀφικόμενος πρὸς τὴν Τεγεᾶτιν τὸ ὕδωρ ἐξέτρεπεν ἐς τὴν Μαντινικὴν. Evidence for placing possessive pronouns of the second person at the end of the hexameter can be found in *App. Anth.* 120, 5 and 127, 4 (Euripides’ dramas also provide

³¹ KEYDELL, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 421: “eine andere Ergänzung als ἀτ]ραπὸ[ς] [ist] kaum möglich”. PERALE, *op. cit.* (n. 19), p. 386, calls KEYDELL’s restoration ingenious.

³² HEITSCH, *op. cit.* (n. 18), p. 126.

³³ Let me say that originally I was more positive towards KEYDELL’s proposal; however, since there is no reason to understand ἦσα at the line-end as the remains of the aorist form in 1st pers. sg., and none of adjectives attested elsewhere may be – because of metrical reasons – put here (in the nominative feminine singular) as the alternative, I took into consideration scribal error (ἦσα for correct ἦρα) and tried to restore e.g. ἐπ’ Αἰγύπτ[ω] καὶ ξηρά (cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 1152: ξηράν δ’ ἔδευον γαῖαν αἵματος ῥοαῖς).

³⁴ Cf. also Hdt. I 186, 10.

significant examples of that order of words, e.g. *Tr.* 890; *Andr.* 460, 542, 668; *Cyc.* 102; *Antiope*. fr. 48, 60; *Phaëth.* 170, but not in hexameter)³⁵. The expression ἐπ' Αἰγύπτῳ presents the typical epic locative use of ἐπί, meaning 'upon', with the dative after words of motion. For τὰ ὕδ᾽ατῇ of the Nile's water, see *Adesp.* 32, 4 POWELL. So the sense of the line would be: "you, the bridegroom (i.e. Nile), conduct the streams of your water towards Egypt". The allusion to the Nile's inundation and the river's flooding the country is clear.

Line 6 must introduce a new subject. The occurrence of an optative in the third-person singular suggests that the exhortation to the νυμφίος reached its end in line 5. Now the subject must be different. A reference to the νύμφη is the obvious possibility here. It is likely that ἡ δὲ λαβεῖν σπεύσειεν or something like that is missing at the beginning of the line. Cf. Nonn. *Dion.* IV 97: σπεύσειεν ἔχειν ὑμέναιον; see also II 321 in the nuptial context. The verb λαμβάνω meaning 'receive hospitably' with the anticipation of uniting in love occurs as early as Homer (see *Od.* VII 255–256 where λαβοῦσα ἐνδυκέως, referring to Calypso, means more than simply "she took Odysseus home with kindly welcome")³⁶. Space and syntax would in turn allow something like ὄντ'³⁷ [ὑ]μέν[α]ιον at the end of the line. The weakness of this supplement is first of all the repetition of the word [ὑ]μέν[α]ιος, used here with a different meaning from that in line 4. More promising seems ἡ δὲ λαβεῖν σπεύσειεν ἀγάρροον ὄντ[α] σύν[ευ]νον³⁸, although this supplement demands an extra letter, which does not seem impossible. However, in this situation it would not perhaps be unreasonable to assume that ον after the ἀγάρροον is the result of the scribe's error: he could, rather mechanically, repeat the two last letters of the preceding word and, at the same time, omit the initial letters of the word which ends with -ον. So we could propose: ἡ δὲ λαβεῖν σπεύσειεν ἀγάρροον ὕγρον ἀκοίτην, which would perfectly fit the epithalamic context (the identical metrical *sedes* of this expression is proved by Nonnus' hexameters).

Too little remains in line 7 to be sure how the poet continues the thought in this song. The mention of Dionysus would fit in the frame of an *exemplum mythologicum*³⁹. Its presence in epithalamic poetry is widely attested in surviving

³⁵ There is another piece of evidence for this word order in late epic (Quint. Smyrn. III 357), but there the third person is used.

³⁶ For λαμβάνω with reference to marriage, see LSJ s.v. II 2 c.

³⁷ This participle (in form ἔοντα) as a predicate, see Nonn. *Dion.* IX 160, XXXVI 255.

³⁸ For σύνευνος of the husband, see LSJ s.v. Cf. also *Carm. Anacr.* 11, 13 W., Aristaenet. I 9.

³⁹ For a different opinion, see M. HOSE, *Poesie aus der Schule. Überlegungen zur spätgriechischen Dichtung*, München 2004, p. 13, n. 32, who says: "Mir scheint, daß man versuchsweise auch das anonyme Fragment über den Nil (nr. XXXIX recto Heitsch) wegen der Erwähnung von Dionysos in V. 7 einem Text über Dionysos zuordnen könnte". (I would like to thank Jan KWAPISZ for helping me to get a copy of this book.)

Greek and Latin poems⁴⁰. Also the authors of late rhetorical treatises advise incorporating mythical allusions into epithalamic speeches⁴¹. The union of Dionysus with Ariadne on Naxos is, then, a parallel to that of the divine river Nile⁴² with an earthy maiden. Also in other passages of late Greek encomiastic and epithalamic poetry Dionysus and the Nile are mentioned at the same time, as is the case in the encomium on Duke Callinicus by Dioscurus of Aphroditō⁴³ or in his epithalamium for Isacius⁴⁴. So we expect something like Κρῆσος ὥς τὸν] at the beginning of the line, but it cannot of course be verified. A flattering or complimentary comparison of the bridegroom to Dionysus appears in the epithalamium for Athanasius by Dioscurus (25, 6 HEITSCH): ὥς νέον ἄλλον ἴδον Διονύσιον⁴⁵. And the likening of the bride Theophile to Ariadne is present in the same author's epithalamium for Callinicus (21, 1–3 HEITSCH): νυμφίε, [...] νύμφης λέκτρα φέρεις παναριζήλης Ἀριάδνης⁴⁶.

Line 8 is again a very difficult place. It seems that a new sentence starts with this line which continues the image of Dionysus. The τε . ε χαιρεῖ at the end might be read as τ' ἐπ' ἔρωτι χαιρεῖ, cf. Theoc. *Id.* 18, 57: γάμω ἐπὶ τῷδε χαιρεῖς. At the beginning of the line I suggest restoring an adjective followed by τε (to be combined with the second τε in the line) and a participle, for example: Ἀβρὴν θ' εὐ]ρόμενος. The use of the adjective ἄβρος with reference to bride / bridegroom

⁴⁰ Epithalamium was a poetical genre in which myth “was almost de rigueur”, as F. GRAF aptly put it, *Myth in Christian Authors*, in: K. DOWDEN, N. LIVINGSTONE (eds.), *A Companion to Greek Mythology*, London 2011, p. 329. For late poetry, see M. ROBERTS, *The Use of Myth in Latin Epithalamia from Statius to Venantius Fortunatus*, TAPA CXIX 1989, pp. 321–348.

⁴¹ Cf. Menander Rhetor 401, 27–402, 20. See also a review of CAVERO's book by K. SPANOUDAKIS, *Gnomon LXXXI* 2009, p. 696, who rightly stresses the influence of the epideictic rhetorical tradition on Greek poets of late antiquity: “It is a common error to discuss late antique poetry with the preconceptions of the Classical or Hellenistic heritage in mind. But these times are different. This is an era, after all, in which the precepts contained in Theon's *Progymnasmata* or in the handbook of Menander the Rhetor eclipsed Aristotle's word”.

⁴² For the Nile-θεός, see Danielle BONNEAU, *Continuité et discontinuité notionale dans la terminologie religieuse du Nil d'après la documentation grecque*, in: N. FICK, J.-C. CARRIÈRE (eds.), *Mélanges Étienne Bernand*, Paris 1991, pp. 25–28.

⁴³ *Encomium Callinici* (5, 25–27 HEITSCH): ἐπέδραμε πείρατα γαίης / Νεῖλος ἀρουροβάτης. φιλοπάρθενος [...] χορεύει [...] καὶ Διόνυσος εὐστέφανος. See J.-L. FOURNET's remark on these lines, *Hellénisme dans l'Égypte du VI^e siècle. La bibliothèque et l'oeuvre de Dioscore d'Aphrodité*, Le Caire 1999, pp. 586–587: “Parce qu'associé au mariage [...], Dionysos est lié à la fécondité comme le Nil, dont la crue est considérée comme une noce de l'eau et de la terre”.

⁴⁴ *Epithalamium for Isakios* (23, 11–12 MACCOULL): Διόνυσον ἐνὶ στεφέεσσι καὶ Νεῖλον [...] πολύτεκνον. For imagery of both Dionysus and the Nile as protectors, see Leslie S.B. MACCOULL, *Dioscurus of Aphroditō: His Work and his World*, Berkeley 1988, pp. 111–112.

⁴⁵ In line 11 of this poem the Nile is mentioned as being called upon. See MACCOULL, *op. cit.* (n. 44), pp. 87–88.

⁴⁶ For a commentary, see FOURNET, *op. cit.* (n. 43), p. 435–436; MACCOULL, *op. cit.* (n. 44), pp. 88–90.

and wedding is a close Nonnian inspiration, cf. XII 357 (of Harmonia, Cadmus' bride): ἀβροτέρη [...] νύμφη, XLII 41 (of Beroe desired by Dionysus): ἀβρόν [...] δέμας νύμφης, L 365 (of the naiad Drosera): ἀβρόν [...] νυμφήιον ὕδωρ, see also ἀβρός ἀκοίτης (XXXII 89, XXXV 146, XLIV 285); cf. XLVII 323: ἀβρός ἔην ὑμέναιος [...] Ἀριάδνης. ἀβρά as an epithet of the bride is very popular in early Greek epithalamic tradition, cf. Sapph. 44, 7 V. (about Andromache, at the beginning of the line), Alc. 42, 8 (about Thetys). For the middle participle εὐ]ρόμενος, see Hes. fr 235, 2–3 MERKELBACH–WEST (= 176, 2–3 MOST): νύμφην εὐρόμενος⁴⁷.

At first glance we would imagine μοῦνος in line 9 to have reference to Dionysus, but other words, associated with abstention and distance (ἐρύκω, ἀπόπροθι) complicate the picture. There is no way of guessing the content. Even if we assume that ὁπώρην in line 10 should be considered as conflating the idea of ripeness (with reference to fruits and yields of land as well as, metaphorically, to the bloom of a marriageable girl's virginity⁴⁸) and that of giving wedding gifts⁴⁹, any attempts to restore the text and make sense of this difficult passage are doomed to failure.

The obvious identification of the bridegroom with the Nile and the bride with Egypt in the poem analysed above justifies the hypothetical link between the song and local religious festivals celebrating the beginning of the Nile's swelling⁵⁰, proposed by some scholars⁵¹. It is not, however, certain that the poem was really intended to be performed on this occasion⁵². It might have been a hexametric piece, a part of which was the epithalamium, cited in the form of independent speech, which evokes traditional hymeneal motifs. These motifs are used to present metaphorically the inundation of the Nile, the hydrological phenomenon on which the prosperity of the country depended. The presentation of the Nile flooding the Egyptian plains as a marriage of two primordial elements, water

⁴⁷ For the verb εὐρίσκω with reference to finding a spouse, see anonymous epithalamion (4th cent. CE) 25, 3–4 HEITSCH (= 139, 3–4 PAGE): ἄξιον εὐρες νυμφίον, / ἄξιον εὐρες. It is also “a wretched composition” in PAGE's opinion, PAGE, *op. cit.* (n. 16), p. 560.

⁴⁸ Cf. Aesch. *Supp.* 998, 1015.

⁴⁹ Cf. Dioscurus' epithalamium for Callinicus (42, 10 HEITSCH): ἐκ σεθεν ἀμφεκόμισσε γάμων Διόνυσος ὁπώρην, differently understood by FOURNET, *op. cit.* (n. 43), p. 567 (“En ton honneur Dionysos a apporté le fruit destiné aux nocés”) and MACCOULL, *op. cit.* (n. 44), p. 89 (“Dionysus attends the summer of your wedding”).

⁵⁰ Starting in the middle of July, it reaches its high level early in September. On this issue, see S. SEIDLMAYER, *Nile*, BNP IX (2006), coll. 758–760.

⁵¹ See KEYDELL, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 421: “Der Beginn der Nilschwelle wurde in Ägypten durch das Nilfest, die Νειλῶα oder Νειλαῖα, gefeiert. [...] An einem solchen Nilfest mag das Gedicht vorgetragen sein”.

⁵² See objections expressed by KEYDELL himself, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 421: “Zwar nicht von ἔπη, aber von Chorliedern, die bei dieser Gelegenheit dem Nil zu Ehren gesungen wurden, sprechen die Scholien zu Gregor von Nazianz”. See also VILJAMAA, *op. cit.* (n. 25), p. 131: “That explanation is plausible although no quite similar epic hymns to the Nile have been preserved”.

and earth, or the fertile union of their two qualities, wetness and dryness, is an expression of the deep cultural adaptation of the continually observed natural phenomenon to purely human, understandable, behaviour. Our poem, which utilises the conventions of traditional wedding song as well as the rules established by the late rhetorical tradition⁵³, might be just a part of a piece composed as a literary exercise, like many others in Upper Egypt in this period⁵⁴.

ADDENDUM

By way of conclusion I would like to draw readers' attention to two beautiful visual representations of the Nile and the (Egyptian) Earth which fit in with the view presented within our hexametric piece. I mean the personified Nile and Earth (ΝΕΙΛΟΣ, ΓΗ) on two Coptic woven patches (*orbiculi*), dating back to the 3rd/4th centuries CE, originally decorating the tunic (sewn below the neck notch on the front and back of the tunic). Although the two characters are not presented as a wedding couple, the message must have been clear: the Nile and the Earth are closely related. Their fruitful relationship was a remarkably stable feature in the Greek as well as in the early Christian tradition. So there is no cause for surprise that it remained a prominent source of imagery in such a late poem as that preserved on the recto on the papyrus from Hermoupolis Magna⁵⁵.



Fig. 1: The Nile and the Earth. Coptic *orbiculi*, 3rd/4th century CE.

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⁵³ See Menander Rhetor, II 399, 11–405, 13. He recommends praising the bridal pair in the form of a comparison and suggests to precede this part of encomium with a prooemium explaining the reason for the speaker's / singer's coming forward to speak or sing. It is tempting to treat the text of the verso as such a proem.

⁵⁴ For the influence of school practice on composing epithalamia, see CAVERO, *op. cit.* (n. 9), pp. 350–353.

⁵⁵ The *orbiculi* are currently located in the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg. They were exhibited at the exhibition of Coptic Art in Essen in 1963. I am grateful to Adam ŁAJTAR for having brought them to my attention and his generously finding the photos of them (the catalogue of the exhibition held at the Villa Hügel, *Koptische Kunst. Christentum am Nil*, Essen 1963, no. 265).