Foreword to the English translation

The original version of this book was published by the Foundation for Polish Science in the year 2016, when Nonnian studies were already an emerging field in classics. Since that time the field has gained even more prominence and attention, and is now a fully grown discipline with its own conferences, volumes and an ever-increasing number of journal articles and monographs. Out of Nonnus’ two epics, however, the Dionysiaca still keeps pride of place in scholarly literature, while the Paraphrase of St. John’s Gospel often plays second fiddle to the longer poem. This may present some obstacles to a fuller appreciation and understanding of both Nonnus’ legacy and the culture of his time. The epic tale of Jesus is no less important for gaining insight into the imaginative world of the poet and his era than that of Dionysus. To focus only on the latter would yield a picture that is if not false, then certainly incomplete (ἡμιτελής, as Nonnus would probably say). The terminology of the mysteries serves as a perfect example. Nonnus uses it frequently in both poems, but he does so differently in each. In the Dionysiaca he uses it mostly in the context of worship, and thus the terminology is to be understood in its literal sense. In the Paraphrase, on the other hand, it is often used in the best tradition of the mystery metaphor, which was fundamental to ancient religious-philosophical thought, and whose uninterrupted continuity we can trace from Plato to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and beyond.

Given the aforementioned disparity in research on Nonnus’ poems, as well as the cognitive implications that result from it, I am pleased that through this translation my book will now be available to an international audience. I hope that it will contribute at least a little to increasing interest in the Paraphrase, and thus also to a deeper understanding of Nonnus and the world of Late Antiquity. To the acknowledgements in the Polish version of the book I would like to add my thanks to its translator, Damian Jasiński, for his great diligence and infinite patience. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Foundation for Polish Science and the Faculty of Humanities of Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University in Warsaw, which jointly funded the translation of the book into English.

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