

# WORD PATTERNS IN NONNUS'S DIONYSIACA

---

## Summary

This book presents the findings of research into the use of word patterns in the work of Nonnus and other poets of Late Antiquity: Triphiodorus, Musaeus and Colluthus. Word patterns are hexameters with a specific number and order of verb, noun and adjectival forms. As my research shows, it is not syntax that determines the nature of such Late Antiquity verse, but merely the features described above. The following can be produced as an analogous example of two identical word patterns: “Yes, Chryses approached the Achaeans’ fast ships” and “The king dismissed the priest with a brutal order”. Both verses are characterised by the same order and number of noun forms N (“Chryses” and “king”, “Achaeans” and “priest”, “ships” and “order”), verb forms V (“approached” and “dismissed”) and adjectives A (“fast” and “brutal”). Both represent the category NVNAN, regardless of their syntactic differences, as well as the presence of particles (yes), articles (a, the) and prepositions (with). In the book arguments are presented supporting the idea that a word pattern is an innovative compositional tool, which the poets of Late Antiquity used consciously. This means that analysing particular hexameters as word patterns allows a range of stylistic phenomena and compositional solutions to be revealed, inaccessible through other research methods. These have a significant impact on the originality of Nonnus’s style, as well as that of Triphiodorus, Musaeus and Colluthus.

In the introduction, I explain what a word pattern is. I also quote examples of particular expressions of iconic nature in Nonnus’s verse. These examples aim to show that in some cases the poet counts words in verse, not taking particles, prepositions and conjunctions into consideration. Next, I indicate formal relations between verses that are significantly distant from each other and share no lexical items of the same meaning. In practical terms, it is only possible to discern such relations when we analyse the verses in question as word patterns. This first example illustrates that syntax does not have an influence on the identity of given word patterns. In addition, I provide statistics on their quantity. These data reveal important stylistic differences between the language of selected Hellenistic poets and that of the Late Antiquity, especially Nonnus.

In Chapter One *Relations within categories*, I discuss various categories of word patterns. Such an approach allows existing relations between verses belonging to a given category to be observed. The frequently uniform or symmetrical character of these relations makes it possible to state that the poets of Late Antiquity control the way specific word patterns occur and follow each other. The observations presented in this chapter also suggest that these poets ‘read’ the hexameters of their predecessors as word patterns. Such a practice resulted in imitations and references based on the occurrence of a common word pattern.

Chapter 2, entitled *The iconicity of tetrakoloi*, discusses the similarities between the form and content of verses comprising four components. The first part of the analysis presents word patterns with a symmetrical construction (e.g. NVVN, NAAN, VNVN, ANAN, etc.). These examples show that as a form this type of structure might enter into similarity relations with specific content and also with or without the defined participation of syntax. To maintain balance, the second part of this

chapter includes examples of iconicity, whose basis is only syntax, and word order in particular. In this case the research material is word patterns, whose construction is not symmetrical, but fosters obtaining syntactic configurations, which are of use in terms of similarity relations between form and content.

These relations are also the subject of Chapter 3 *Golden Line in Dionysiaca*, in which I describe this unique stylistic tool. From the examples collected it transpires that Nonnus, on the one hand, uses the double *hyperbaton* of the Golden Line as a syntactic form, which reveals a similarity in relation to repeated types of content. On the other hand, he treats this hexameter as a word pattern with a symmetrical AAVNN construction. Among other things, this leads to the emergence of refined formal relations between Golden Line and others representing the AAVNN category.

In Chapter 4 *The NAVN word pattern in Dionysiaca*, I analyse one of the most frequently occurring categories of word pattern in *Dionysiaca*. Using the NAVN category, I explain and document selected compositional techniques based on this word pattern. Particular attention is paid to lexical similarities (or the lack of them) between compositionally related NAVN patterns. Such a research approach reveals a clearly marked tendency: in cases where identical word patterns do not exhibit lexical similarities, such similarities do occur in their immediate environment, and passages using such word patterns are similar with regard to context. In cases where they share lexical similarities, their immediate surroundings do not exhibit such properties, and passages using them are characterised by a mutual contrast. Such a compositional phenomenon points to the intentional use of word patterns.

In Chapter 5 *NAVN- and ANVN-category compositional relations*, I first discuss the ANVN pattern from the same research perspective as in the previous chapter. I go on to analyse continuous groups of text in which the NAVN and ANVN word patterns occur. I also apply the same analysis to passages of text quite removed from each other, but connected by motifs in their content. The results of this research show that Nonnus made use of both similarity (the common element of VN) and also the oppositional aspect in the construction of these patterns (NA vs. AN order). This is proved mainly by the fact that the NAVN and ANVN examples being compared are characterised by a mutual contrast and opposition in terms of content.

In the conclusion, I focus mainly on the prospects offered by my research approach.

*Translated by Rob Pagett*