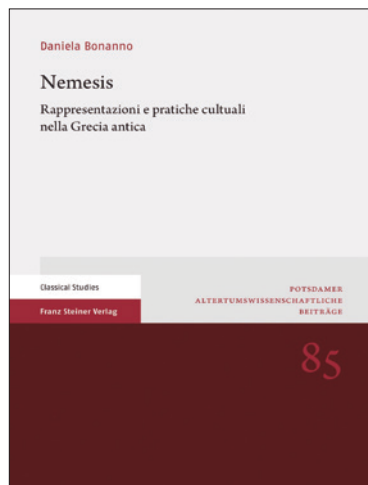


NEMESIS



BONANNO, DANIELA (2023).
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The attention that has recently been given to the study of the emotions in the classical world can certainly serve as a stimulus for a re-evaluation of divine personifications such as Nemesis, Aidos, etc., whose derivation from an emotion or a state of mind that can produce an action that can change the destiny of a person or even a people is obvious.

What are the reasons that can lead a community to create a cult specifically dedicated to an emotional state? What value does society place on this emotional state and why should this emotion be solicited among the members of a community? These are just some of the questions that the modern scholar may ask when approaching the study of these deities.

Daniela Bonanno is the author of a stimulating monograph on the cult of Nemesis, in which she carefully reconstructs the origin and development of the cult of this goddess in the Attic *demos* of Rhamnous through a comparative analysis of the archaeological, epigraphic and literary evidence. In the introduction with which the monograph begins (pp. 15-51), Bonanno explains why she has dealt with this topic and also provides a history of the studies on Nemesis. This history of studies, however, is not a simple inventory, but a well-founded analysis of the development of the figure of this divine personification through the centuries, from the Middle Ages to Dürer's depiction of Nemesis and the reflections of Johann Gottfried Herder. This part deserves to be called a brief cultural history of Nemesis over the centuries. The chapter takes a critical look at the concept of divine personification, referring to the view of the French scholar Jean-Pierre Vernant, who sees the Greek gods as active powers and not as persons (*Les dieux helléniques sont des puissances, non des personnes*). In this context, Bonanno argues that the terms "divine attributes" and "conceptual deities" are preferable to the term "personifications" in order to approach divine figures such as Nemesis (and thus follows the studies of Anna Clark and Daniele Miano on the cult of divine attributes or conceptual deities in Republican Rome).¹ In this context, Bonanno rightly places the history of Nemesis within the history of emotions, which has been one of the most fruitful strands of research in classical studies in recent decades thanks to the pioneering studies of Douglas Cairns and the research of Angelos Chaniotis.² It was precisely the emotions, as the driving forces of the human soul, that were regarded by the Greeks as one of the motors of history. Given the Greeks' capacity for abstraction, it is not surprising that cults dedicated to these movements of the soul emerged in archaic times. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod inserts these new figures into structured divine genealogies and thus contributes to a kind of canonization on a panhellenic level, given the dissemination and authority of his work. These considerations are followed by comments on the "snowball system theory" proposed by Robert Parker.³ The Oxford scholar uses this metaphor to approach Greek polytheism, in which the various deities had different functions and competences. Like a rolling snowball, each deity can take on new functions and responsibilities in the course of history. However, this process of development is linked to the historical circumstances and local contexts of worship.

1. Clark, 2007; Miano, 2018 and 2019.

2. Cairns, 1993; Chaniotis, 2012 and, more recently, 2023.

3. Parker, 2011, p. 86.

As Bonanno rightly points out, the social role of a deity is primarily linked to the way in which a community chooses to honour and represent a divine being.

In the first chapter (pp. 52-81), Bonanno examines the occurrences of the term *nemesis* and its derivatives in the Homeric poems. In the Homeric tradition, *nemesis* can be defined as a term that expresses the indignation that arises in response to behaviour that violates social norms. Behaviour that needs to be sanctioned and deserves punishment, like the one poor Thersites receives from Odysseus (it is no coincidence that the verb *nemes(s)ao* is used in this context). The counterpart to this emotion is *aidos*, a term that describes the modesty and shame that a person feels in the face of their actions. As several scholars have noted, the terms *nemesis* and *aidos* take on the role of guiding values in a highly normative society such as the Homeric one. This chapter is full of interesting observations that cannot be discussed in detail here. Noteworthy is the analysis of three Homeric heroes in the light of the concept of *nemesis*: Telemachus, Achilles and Paris. While Telemachus seems to be aware of how important it is to control *nemesis*, Achilles allows himself to be controlled by her. Paris, on the other hand, is indifferent to her and does not care about the indignation that his deceitful behaviour could cause among humans and gods.

The second chapter (pp. 82-95) examines the role of *nemesis* among the gods in the Homeric poems. The textual analysis shows that *nemesis* in the *Iliad* is mainly the prerogative of Apollo, Poseidon and Hera. In this case, *nemesis*, i.e. the feeling of indignation that a deity can feel towards a human action, causes man to remain isolated in his relationship with the deity until he has righted his wrong.

In the third chapter (pp. 96-118), an analysis of the literary tradition reconstructs the divine profile of Nemesis. In Hesiod's *Theogony* (Th. 211-226), *Nemesis* is described as the daughter of Night, but her birth takes place without Night having joined another deity. As several scholars have already noted, the poet of Askra depicts the night as the place where all those forces that can disturb the balance of the cosmos mature. The characterization we find in *Erga*, on the other hand, is different, where Nemesis in combination with Aidos represents a kind of bulwark for the generation of the Iron Age that can save them from destruction. Nemesis and Aidos do indeed contribute to social cohesion and thus to the preservation of humanity. From a fragment of the *Kypria* (Ath. 8.10, 334b-d=Fr. 10 West), a famous epic poem that recounts the origins of the Trojan War, we learn of the union between Nemesis and Zeus, from which Helena is said to have emerged. According to this tradition, Nemesis tried to escape the King of Olympus by changing her form and transforming herself into a goose. A trick that did her no good, however, as Zeus took on the form of a swan and managed to unite with her. This union

resulted in an egg, from which Helena was later born. The story is similar to that of Metis, who did not want to unite with a mortal, Peleus, and tried to escape him by changing her form. In Euripides' *Phoeniciae* (182-185) we then find the first mention of Nemesis as a deity to be invoked alongside Zeus.

The fourth chapter (pp. 119-138) analyses the function of this concept in the service of the ethics of *meden agan*, i.e. the boundaries that must not be crossed, primarily by analysing the mentions of *nemesis* in Theognis and Herodotus. Of particular interest is the examination of the tradition about Croesus, in which Herodotus' conception of *nemesis* as a kind of divine intervention with mortals as recipients comes to light. In the case of the sad story of the Lydian king, the cause lies in the undeserved bestowal of an honour (time) that contradicts what the Moira has established.⁴

The fifth chapter (pp. 139-161) deals with the Orphic hymn dedicated to Nemesis and that of the poet of Hadrian's epoch, Mesomedes. Both texts deserve attention because of the cultic epithets with which the goddess is invoked. Her association with Dike, whose daughter she is considered to be, underlines the sanctioning role of this deity, which can also be read in the literary texts mentioned above. The chapter also analyses the identification of the goddess with *Adrasteia*, a topic to which Bonanno had already devoted a detailed article.⁵

The sixth chapter (pp. 162-168) analyses the nuances of the concept of *nemesis* in Aristotle's text. Noteworthy is a passage from the *Etica Eudemia* (3.1233b, 22-26), in which the antiquity of the concept of *nemesis* as a normative emotion among the Greeks, from which a cult would later develop, is emphasised.

The seventh chapter (pp. 169-267), the longest of the book and in my opinion also the most interesting, deals with the cultic practises dedicated to Nemesis in the sanctuary of Rhamnous. The chapter is well structured, it collects and analyses the literary, epigraphic and archaeological evidence for Nemesis at Rhamnous, and all the features of the cult are clearly explained so that even the non-expert reader can expand his knowledge. This is a feature that is definitely commendable. First, the history of the *demos* of Rhamnous is presented, emphasising the important strategic position of this region opposite Euboea. The strong sense of territorial identity of the inhabitants of this *demos* is also illustrated by a famous epigraphic dedication to

4. On this text, analysed however from an Oriental perspective, see Högemann & Oettinger, 2018, pp. 276-333.

5. Bonanno, 2020.

Nemesis on a Corinthian helmet (*I.Rhamnous* 86=IG³ 522bis), which celebrates the participation of the inhabitants of Rhamnous in the colonisation of Lemnos. The inscriptions in particular are the most important source for the reconstruction of life in the sanctuary and the religious communication strategies of the Nemesis worshippers. Between the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE, the inscriptions show that other deities were worshipped alongside Nemesis, such as Themis, Dionysus, Zeus *Soter*, Athena *Soteira*, Aphrodite *Hegemone* and Agdistis, the latter a Phrygian deity associated with Cybele. This cultic diversity was certainly also due to the presence of a garrison of soldiers at this site. Athens' temporary alliance with the Ptolemies brought the cult of Isis to Rhamnous. The dedication in divine honour to Antigonos Gonatas (*I.Rhamnous* 7 = SEG XLI 75; XLII 115) and the dedication to Livia (*I.Rhamnous* 156 = IG II/3 3242), wife of Augustus and mother of the emperor Claudius, testify to the vitality of the sanctuary already in Hellenistic and imperial times. In the limited space of this review, it is not possible to discuss in detail all the observations that Bonanno makes about the sources examined. As is well known, archaeological data show the existence of temple structures related to the cult of Nemesis at Rhamnous from the first decades of the 6th century BCE. Towards the end of the 6th century BCE, a sacred tufa structure was erected, which was probably destroyed by the Persians. Another polygonal building was erected in this area, which remained in use until it was replaced by the *Nemesion*. From the 5th century BCE, the sanctuary also took on the function of a loan building. The vitality of this cult site, which was famous even outside Attica, is also attested by the cultural traditions that were created specifically for it and probably spread throughout the Greek world from the time after the Persian Wars. We can mention, for example, a passage from the comedy *Nemesis* by Cratinus (*apud* Eratosthenes, *Cat.* 25), which considers Rhamnous as the place of the union between Nemesis and Zeus and the birth of Helena. According to another tradition, Nemesis made the Persians pay for their *hybris* by helping the Athenians to defeat them at Marathon. Phidias (or one of his pupils) later sculpted the famous cult statue of Nemesis, which was later described by Pausanias (I 33, 2-4), from a block of Parian marble, which the Persians allegedly wanted to make into a trophy. The description of the cult statue of Nemesis in the Periegetes, which was very famous in antiquity, is analysed in detail by Bonanno. The proposal to interpret the presence of Okeanos and the Ethiopians with the geographical knowledge of the 5th century BCE, in which the Ethiopians, like the Hyperboreans, were located at the edge of the world, seems particularly convincing. The presence of the Ethiopians and the view of the ocean as a river was viewed critically by Pausanias due to the progress of geographical knowledge in the imperial

period. Pausanias probably did not consider that this depiction could reflect the state of common-sense geography in the 5th century BCE.

Overall, Bonanno's monograph enriches our knowledge of the cult of Nemesis in Greece and the significance of this emotion and divine entity among the Greeks. The writing style is clear and direct, making the book easy to read and understand even for non-native speakers. The bibliography is up to date and all Greek and Latin texts included have been translated. Bonanno has undoubtedly written a book that will be an important reference work for those who wish to study Nemesis in the future.

One minor criticism, however, concerns the title, which is misleading for the reader, since the core of the book is the cult of Nemesis in Rhamnous.

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