

**Rejection and Integration: State Reactions to the Evolution of Dionysian Mystery Cult in  
Greece and Rome**

by

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### **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the integration of Dionysian mystery cults into the state religions of Greek polis and the Roman Republic. The cults are often portrayed as controversial and immoral in myth and literature, but the official reactions of various ancient city states never restricted the cult's rituals or showed any concern over moral degeneracy. Rather, official reactions from the state pertained solely to leadership and organization of the cults. This thesis proposes that the reason for this is that Dionysian mystery cults provided an opportunity for women to obtain leadership, authority, and self definition through a means that was usually restricted to only a small number of women who obtained official state priesthoods. Therefore integration of the cults and restriction on leadership was the most common reaction, with some allowances still made for the cults to exist in private forms. When this opportunity for leadership, authority and self definition was opened up to men, as in the case of the Roman Bacchanalia, the state reacted much more harshly since the cult now provided a social structure that undermined those of the Roman Republic.

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## **Dedication**

Dedicated to Rose, Ken, Emma and Freya.

## Abbreviations

- CIL            *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Berlin, 1863–.
- FGrH           *Jacoby, Felix. Die Fragmente Der Griechischen Historiker*. Brill, 1961.
- IGUR           *L. Moretti, Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae*. Istituto Italiano per la Storia Antica, 1968-1979.
- ILS            *Dessau, Hermann. Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae. Edidit Hermannus Dessau*. Berlin, Weidmann, 1892-1916.
- IMagnesia    *O. Kern, Die Inschriften von Magnesia am Maeander*. Berlin, 1900.
- LIMC           *Ackermann, Hans Christoph., and Jean-Robert. Gisler. Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*. Artemis, 1981.
- LSAM           *Sokolowski, Franciszek. Lois sacrées de l'Asie Mineure*. E. de Boccard, 1955.
- LSCG           *Sokolowski, Franciszek. Lois sacrées des cités grecques : supplément*. E. de Boccard, 1962.
- SEG            *Supplementum epigraphicum graecum*. Brill, 1923–.

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# Introduction

Studies of ancient civilizations can often be a difficult balancing act. While plenty of accurate detail of the ancient world has survived, just as often do we find gaps in our understanding, holes that cannot be filled so easily. What has survived the ages represents only a small part of the story. Myths, stories, and fiction can be just as illuminating as any historical document, but so too can they obscure or complicate the truth. It is a tangled web, where history influenced myth, which in turn influences history again until it can be hard to discern the two.

The myths of Dionysus are notable, however, for how they contrast with reception of the historical manifestations of the cult. . Unlike many of the Olympian gods, many myths of Dionysus give great attention to not only the god, but also to his worshippers. These are most often myths of rejection, where Dionysus has to establish his divinity before doubting mortals. These exist as some of the earliest myths we have from the Greek world, for example the myth of Lycurgus' rejection of Dionysus is the god's only significant appearance in the *Iliad*.<sup>1</sup> These kinds of myths were still relevant in ancient Athens despite their very different relationship with the god. The myth of Pentheus as told in Euripides' *Bacchae* is certainly the most famous story of Dionysus' rejection, though it is not without its antecedents in Athenian tragedy. Plays about the rejection of Dionysus by Pentheus and Lycurgus had long been staged in Athens before Euripides, most notably by Aeschylus.

There is a difference, however, between the mythical and historical perception of Dionysian mystery cults. Whereas rejection myths would have you believe the cults were

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<sup>1</sup> Il. 6.130-143.



controversial due to moral concerns, the recorded laws and regulations regarding the cult, when they do exist, paint a different picture. More often than outright rejection, the mystery cults of Dionysus were integrated within the state, with ritual regulations, financial regulations, and even hereditary priesthoods or, in some cases, priesthoods sold by the state itself.<sup>2</sup> The mystery cults of Dionysus are quite distinct, however, and integrating them into the polis is not a simple matter. The nature of this kind of worship sets them apart from other state sponsored cults, and that is reflected in the evidence. The details of their integration then present an opportunity to better understand not only the cult's rituals, but how the cult propagated and most importantly, how it was organized.

The Bacchanalia of Rome stands out as an odd event not only in the history of Dionysian mystery cults, but also history of religion in Rome. It is an early and significant repression of a religion by the Roman state. That the primary literary source, Livy, presents the cult as primarily a threat to Roman moral order, would seem to correspond to the myths of rejection. The surviving inscription of the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* from Tiriolo, however, makes no mention of moral concerns. Once again this draws into question how states received and integrated the mystery cults of Dionysus. The goal of this thesis, then, is to examine more closely how these cults were received by the state in Classical and Hellenistic Greek city states, with a view towards understanding the ways in which these cults developed in such a way that the Roman Senate felt it necessary to suppress them. In effect, this is an examination not of what Dionysian mystery cults did, but of what they were thought to do, and how that perception affected them, and what we can learn about the cult from those perceptions. Ultimately these

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<sup>2</sup> LSAM 48 is the most pertinent example of a priesthood for a mystery cult of Dionysus, one that is explicitly maenadic, being sold by the state.

were cults that were allowed to exist, and sometimes allowed to thrive, within the state despite how much the literary and mythological sources presented them as dangers to the state. The intent is not to uncover any new evidence, but rather to focus on the practicalities of how these private cults fit into the religious life of the ancient Greco-Roman city state.

In this paper, I will be following a temporal structure in examining the evidence. This is partly due to the nature of the evidence, in which significant literary evidence exists quite early on but historical evidence, often in the form of official inscriptions, only becomes significant in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE onward. The first part of the paper will examine the rejection myths of Dionysus and how they relate to actual cult practice. Sometimes we find a Greek state already has Dionysian mystery cults fully accepted and integrated, and often there will be an accompanying aetiological myth. In particular I will examine the way in which these myths present Dionysian mystery cults as a danger to the state. Most notable of these cults is the Delphic Thyiades described by Pausanias and Plutarch.

Other times, as with Athens, we find evidence for the ecstatic worship of Dionysus, but no corresponding myth. This is intriguing given that Athens is perhaps our richest resource for artistic and literary depictions of Dionysus' worshippers, the most famous of all being the vastly influential *Bacchae* of Euripides. Athens also presents the first historical case of Dionysian mystery cults existing within a Greek city state without an aetiological myth, and is therefore an important case study in how these cults operated and were transmitted in the growing city states of Classical Greece.

For the Greek states of the Hellenistic period, we are much better informed, as several inscriptions pertaining to the integration of Dionysian mystery cults have survived. These are a

rich resource for understanding how these cults actually operated, and how they were integrated into the religious life of the polis in comparison to more typical state sponsored cults.

Finally, I will examine the events of the Bacchanalia in Rome, attempting to understand how the cult manifested in relation to the evidence we have for the cult in the Greek world. I will attempt to show how the ways in which Dionysian mystery cults have changed across the years from classical Greece and through the Hellenistic era caused so great a disturbance when placed into a new cultural context.

What I hope to show in this paper is that Dionysian mystery cults, though their reputation in literature is often controversial, historical cases of any sort of suppression focus almost entirely on matters of leadership and administration. This trend is present in both the Greek and Roman examples, and draws attention to the idea that leadership of the cult held a specific attraction different from simple membership in the cult, something that cannot often be gleaned from the purely literary sources.. The motivations for why people, especially women, would take on roles of leadership is an important factor in any study of Dionysian mystery cults, as is the social status of these women, as it points to the desire for and existence of a social structure that existed outside the state that held particular attraction for women due to their lack of opportunities for self definition in ancient societies.

The primary focus will then be on the evidence for historical Dionysus' mystery cults, rather than literary or mythical manifestations. The accounts such as those from Demosthenes, Plutarch, and Pausanias are vital. The mythical evidence, however, cannot be simply disregarded. Not only are such stories valuable for understanding the common perceptions that were held regarding Dionysus' cults, they also will have heavily influenced the cults themselves. No other god in the Greek pantheon is as closely associated with their worshippers as Dionysus,

and many of his myths are explicitly about how the god ought to be worshipped.<sup>3</sup> Euripides' *Bacchae*, following after a long tradition of Attic pottery and previous tragic writers, essentially fully developed the idea of what the mystery cults of Dionysus looked like. Its influence hangs over a great many of the extant sources, since many of them are from much later periods. As Henrichs notes, "the historian of Greek religion who turns to the *Bacchae* as a model of maenadic ritual faces the dilemma of a vicious circle of multiple contamination."<sup>4</sup> So too has it hung over much of the scholarship on these cults, and with good reason. Not only is it likely to have influenced the ancient cults themselves, it also remains our most vivid and detailed account of the Dionysian mystery cults, whether mythological or historical. Nevertheless, caution is imperative for any details that might be gleaned regarding actual cult in the *Bacchae* have been fully integrated with mythological and literary structure to the point that separating it all is likely impossible. While it may not work in every instance, given the nature of the topic at hand, I tend to take Versnel's position, that "myth and ritual are nowhere as intricately interwoven as in Dionysiac religion, it would be only consistent to seek the explanation of the typical blurring of boundaries and the resulting confusions first of all in the very nature of Dionysiac belief itself."<sup>5</sup>

Finally, a note regarding the terminology used in this paper. As this paper focuses on the integration of private cults into state religion, it's important to note that the distinction is somewhat fluid. Thus generally when referring to a private religion or cult, it will be a cult led by an individual without any sort of oversight from the state. Once the state becomes involved in matters such as priestly duties, selection and even sale of priesthoods and cultic regulations, it is no longer a cult operated on the impetus of an individual who founded or leads the cult as an

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<sup>3</sup> Chryssoulaki 2008 p. 268.

<sup>4</sup> Henrichs 1978 p. 122.

<sup>5</sup> Versnel 1990 p. 137.

supplement to the types of other religious activity integrated fully into the state. Since this paper focuses on leadership of Dionysian mystery cults, defining private cults by the method through which people came to found or lead such cults offers a fitting distinction. Some instances of the cult blur these lines, such as the mysteries of Dionysus at Miletus, which were a cult integrated into state religious activity that nevertheless made allowances for individual women to found their own thiasoi and conduct rituals themselves, outside of the established priesthood and rituals of the state.<sup>6</sup>

In general, I will be referring to the cults in question as Dionysian mystery cults, or mystery cults of Dionysus. I think that to some degree, no term can fully encapsulate the matter. The majority of the cults and rituals I will examine could quite easily be classified as maenadic, and maenads of myth and history are certainly one of the primary interests of this paper. I find this term perhaps a little too restrictive, however, given the nature of Dionysus and his worship. Maenadic implies exclusively female, and comes with many expectations regarding rituals. To call something maenadic implies that the worshippers must brandish their thyrsos, tear apart animals with their bear hands in ritual sparagmos, wear fawn skins, dance ecstatically, perform their oreibasia ever two years. Such things are certainly vital parts of maenadic iconography, and have been entrenched in history by the *Bacchae* of Euripides. It is, however, too narrow a definition given the variance that exists in the cults examined in this paper.

While he notes several problems with the term “mystery” when referring to these kinds of religious activities and groups, I find Burkert’s definition to fully satisfy the goals and parameters of this paper: “mysteries are initiation ceremonies, cults in which admission and

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<sup>6</sup> LSAM 48

participation depend upon some personal ritual to be performed on the initiand. Secrecy and in most cases a nocturnal setting are concomitant.”<sup>7</sup> Most importantly, this definition stands up to scrutiny when applied to the rituals of Dionysus, as varied as they may be. Marietta Horster describes the variance of Dionysian cults best when she notes that “nearly all imaginable kinds of combinations and hybrid forms of public and private organisation and funding are attested for Dionysiac cult activities.”<sup>8</sup> Thus calling them Dionysian mystery cults is a definition that fits everything from the private *thiasoi* of Glaukothea to the famous Delphic and Athenian Thyiades, and even the Bacchanals of Rome.

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<sup>7</sup> Burkert 1987 p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Horster 2011 p. 66.

## Rejection Myths and Local Cults

Perhaps one of the most striking things about Dionysus is how so many of the myths surrounding him involve the rejection of his divinity by humans. It is a popular topic, from the early Athenian playwrights, to great Latin authors like Vergil, and of course the myths are regularly referred to by Christian authors in their polemics against paganism. Dionysus is certainly not the only god to take offense at the actions of mortals and seek vengeance against them, but a core part of his identity is that he is a new god, and that his arrival amongst humans is often seen not as a boon, but a curse. Often times, Dionysus arrives from a foreign land, asking for his godhood to be recognized, and punishes the city with a plague of madness that afflicts the women who deny his worship. Male rulers are the most staunch opponents to the cult, accusing Dionysus' worshippers of all sorts of social and sexual impropriety. Generally these myths present Dionysian cults as clear threats to the ordered structure of the home and the state. These myths form an important part of how actual Dionysian mystery cults were received, and how they manifested themselves. Given the secret nature of mystery cults, and the primarily female membership that exists in the earliest manifestation, the men who will have written our extant sources will have been familiar with the cult primarily through such myths. Thus they form an important cultural foundation for how these cults were perceived. Further, since Dionysian mystery ritual is so intricately linked to myth, these myths will also have influenced and been influenced by historical manifestations of the cult.

In fact, the earliest literary source we have for Dionysus is a myth of rejection. Homer's *Iliad* does not really concern itself with the god. He is not part of the main action, and he has no stake in the conflict. Dionysus' only significant appearance in the story is reported by Diomedes

about Lycurgus' confrontation with the god.<sup>9</sup> In this story, the Thracian king of Edonia, Lycurgus, attacks Dionysus and his nurses, forcing him to flee into the arms of Thetis in the ocean. The gods of Olympus were greatly angered by this, and Zeus struck him blind. That this story is told by Diomedes is notable, as he is one of the most pious and respectable Trojans, and this story comes after the episode in book 5 when Diomedes himself attacked the gods and learned first-hand how impossible it was for him to contend against the likes of Apollo.

Also, Lycurgus' punishment for his transgression is being struck blind by Zeus. Faraone notes that this is odd, since attacks on divinities, at least when not sanctioned by another divinity in the case of Diomedes, usually result in complete destruction.<sup>10</sup> This would of course be the usual punishment in later myths of Dionysus' rejection. A scholion then explains that it was because he had been witness to the secret rites of Dionysus, and so this episode can be seen as an example of a man seeing the secret rites of the Dionysian cult, and incurring a suitable punishment for seeing things which ought not to be seen.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the earliest literary reference to Dionysus is in fact a story of what happens when mortals deny his ecstatic worship as Lycurgus does in his attack on the god and his nurses. As Otto notes, despite having no real place for Dionysus in the narrative, Homer nevertheless has a clear view of him and his worshippers as frenzied and bearing the thyrsus.<sup>12</sup> Also notable is that the women with Dionysus here are clearly called *τιθήνας*, nurses. They are not yet maenads, and this shows the original role of the women in his cult, they are the nurses who look after him after the death of his mother Semele.

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<sup>9</sup> Il. 6.130-143.

<sup>10</sup> Faraone 2013, p. 124.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 125.

<sup>12</sup> Otto 1954 pp. 153-154.



Many other versions of the Lycurgus myth do exist. Though they differ in many ways, in particular the substitution of Lycurgus' brother Boutes as the one who attacks the nurses, the version told by Diodorus Siculus tells us where the nurses fled after the attack, and is essentially an aetiology for different maenadic cults.<sup>13</sup> A later version by Apollodorus most notably has Dionysus drive Lycurgus mad, causing him to hack apart his own son with an axe, thinking he was instead chopping down vines. He is then in turn torn apart by horses under the orders of Dionysus.<sup>14</sup> This version thus makes Dionysus responsible for his own vengeance rather than Zeus, and recalls the *sparagmos* that is typical of Dionysus' divine retribution. It was also a popular tale among the tragedians of Athens. Aeschylus had a tetralogy, the *Lycurgeia*, in which the myth of Lycurgus was a focus. Only fragments survive, but they offer interesting details. Fragment 61 makes it clear that Dionysus' androgyny was not an invention of Euripides, and Fragment 57 compares the rites of Dionysus to those of the Thracian goddess Cotyto. Sophocles tells a brief version in the *Antigone*, where Lycurgus is instead trapped within a cave until his madness subsides.<sup>15</sup> Finally, a fragment of Dinarchus connects Dionysus' flight from Lycurgus to his burial at Delphi.<sup>16</sup> The Lycurgus myths also serve to connect Dionysus' origins, of which he has many, to Thrace.

Another famous Thracian rejection of Dionysus is of course that of Orpheus. Aeschylus' *Bassarae*, which is mostly lost, told the story of Orpheus' resistance to the cults of Dionysus. In it, Orpheus dedicated himself to Apollo and ceased to worship Dionysus at all. Dionysus, as part of his vengeance, sends his worshippers, here called Bassaræ for the fox skins typical of

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<sup>13</sup> Faraone 2013, p. 127; Diod 5.50.4-5.

<sup>14</sup> Apollod. 3.5.1.

<sup>15</sup> Soph. *Ant.* 955-965.

<sup>16</sup> Dinarchus FGrH 339 F 1.

Thracian maenads, who tear him limb from limb.<sup>17</sup> This myth is told again by Ovid, with an important difference. He is still torn apart by the ecstatic worshippers of Dionysus, but this time it is because Orpheus has scorned their company, and Dionysus even punishes his worshippers for killing his favourite singer.<sup>18</sup> These further the connection between Thrace and the ecstatic worship of Dionysus and is also to some degree an aetiological myth for why Orpheus and Dionysus are so closely linked in the relevant mystery cults.

The story of the rejection of Dionysus by the daughters of Minyas, Leukippe, Arsippe, and Alkathoe, often called the Minyades, is another myth that occurs frequently. The women refused to leave their work at the loom or their children to go join in the worship of Dionysus, so he drives them mad, and in that madness they tear apart Leukippe's son and are eventually turned into flying creatures.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Plutarch connects this myth with the Agrionia of Orchomenos, linking it to a ritual in which a priest of Dionysus armed with a sword chases the descendents of the Minyads, considered murderesses and called the Oleiai. If he manages to catch one, he can kill her.<sup>20</sup> Burkert presumes that there was a preceding ritual, something more maenadic in nature like a gruesome nocturnal sacrifice, corresponding to the murder of Leukippe's child.<sup>21</sup> Similar to this myth is the myth of the Proetids, the daughters of king Proetus, who went mad and were pursued and eventually cured by Melampus, a priest of Dionysus.<sup>22</sup> Apollodorus, following Hesiod, links this to their refusal to worship Dionysus, and Diodorus Siculus says much the same.<sup>23</sup> Other sources instead list Hera as the one who sent

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<sup>17</sup> Eratosth. *Cat.* 24.

<sup>18</sup> Ov. *Met.* 11.1-84.

<sup>19</sup> Ov. *Met.* 4.1-54, 389-415. Ant. Lib. *Met.* 10, Ael. *VH.* 3.42.

<sup>20</sup> Plut. *Quaes. Gr.* 38.

<sup>21</sup> Burkert 1983 p. 175.

<sup>22</sup> Hdt. 9.34; Hdt. 2.49.

<sup>23</sup> Apollod. 2.2; Diod. 4.68.4

down the curse, and it would seem that perhaps this is originally a Boeotian myth that made its way to Argos.<sup>24</sup> Given that the story of Melampus' chase of the Proetids matches so well with the ritual Plutarch described at Orchomenos, there certainly seems to be a link between these myths and rituals of Argos and Orchomenos. Argos even has a second, quite different myth about rejecting the cults of Dionysus, in which he was defeated in battle by Perseus, and possibly even killed in some versions.<sup>25</sup>

The Agrionia was a common festival though, celebrated throughout Greece. Plutarch notes a similar ritual in his home town of Chaironea, where the women go out and search for the baby Dionysus. Eventually they conclude that the muses have taken him away to hide him, and after dinner, they pose riddles to each other.<sup>26</sup> The women are clearly playing the role of nurses once again in this ritual, but the most fascinating part of is the riddles. Plutarch argues that much like how Dionysus is hidden away by the muses, proper intellectual discourse, itself the domain of the muses, can help suppress the ἄγριον καὶ μανικόν of such celebrations. Thus the women, while playing the roles of maenads for a little with their frantic searching, are not crazed as we find in some other Dionysian rituals. This ritual would seem to correspond to the myth of Lycurgus, when Dionysus had to escape as a child and his nurses were left behind.

The most important myth of rejection is that of Pentheus. While the *Bacchae* of Euripides is by far the most famous version, it was not the first. Aeschylus, for example, had his own version, though it does not survive. Because of the popularity of Euripides' version, however, and the fact that it is the earliest and most detailed version of the story that actually survives, it is hard to discern what differences in the myths might exist. Dionysus as an effeminate foreigner is

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<sup>24</sup> Robertson 2003 p. 228.

<sup>25</sup> Paus. 2.20.4, 2.22.1; LIMC Dionysos 800-801.

<sup>26</sup> Plut. Quaes. Conv. 717a.

not a Euripidean invention, and possibly originates in Aeschylus' *Lycurgeia*.<sup>27</sup> What may originate with Euripides is Pentheus' transvestitism, as earlier artistic evidence generally has Pentheus armed as he goes to confront the maenads.<sup>28</sup>

A short summary of the myth is as follows: Dionysus comes to Thebes, the home of his mother Semele, demanding that he be recognized as a god and worshipped by the women of the town. It is clear from the prologue that Dionysus is here to take vengeance on his aunts for treatment of his mother as well, and Macleod notes that throughout the play, Dionysus knows exactly what is going to happen. In essence, he is in control and the destruction that follows was not only unavoidable, but planned by the god himself.<sup>29</sup> When his aunts inevitably refuse to worship him, and the king Pentheus resists as well, he drives all the women of Thebes mad. They go out to the mountain, having abandoned all their usual duties at home, and engage in the ecstatic worship of their god. If anyone tries to approach, they react with the utmost violence, and they are completely immune to any weapons brought to bear against them. Eventually, Dionysus persuades Pentheus to go spy on the maenads himself, to see what it is they are doing, and the latter is torn apart by his own mother and her two sisters.

Pausanias connects this story to the origins of the worship of *Dionysus Λύσιος* and *Βάκχειος*.<sup>30</sup> It is an inscription from Magnesia that is most interesting, as it describes how that city brought three maenads descended from Ino to organize new *thiasoi* in the city.<sup>31</sup> This shows quite clearly that the myth of Pentheus was in fact related to actual ritual. That the maenads are organized into three *thiasoi*, as in the *Bacchae*, seems to indicate it as a characteristic of Theban

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<sup>27</sup> Lopez-Pedraza 2000 p. 52.

<sup>28</sup> Gantz 1993 p. 483.

<sup>29</sup> Macleod 2006, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Paus. 2.2.6-7.

<sup>31</sup> I Mag. 215.

cults of Dionysus.<sup>32</sup> Once again, however, it is perhaps impossible to delineate which came first, the myth or the ritual organization.

As is clear, these myths often serve aetiological purposes for the regions they are native to. They explain why Dionysus must be worshipped in particular way, and thus they are the first evidence of how states dealt with the cults of Dionysus. Furthermore, it reinforces established structures by providing priesthoods with “a justification and warrant of antiquity for why it did what it did.”<sup>33</sup> There need not be some historical event for the myths to allude to, some ancient king that opposed the cult of Dionysus and suffered some great woe because of it. The presence of an aetiological myth shows how some states did not in fact need to encounter the more ecstatic elements of Dionysian worship, since the practices were already familiar through these myths, and those states have local rituals that reflect this.

These myths are also useful in that they certainly had an effect on the general view of Dionysus’ worshippers, whether historical or mythical. Common elements present themselves across these myths. Generally, male and female resistance to the cults of Dionysus are punished by madness that results in the violent *sparagmos* of one’s own children. In this way, it is possible to see such myths as representing things such as the dangers of unchecked women, and how new and foreign religions can tear apart the most important social structures of ancient Greek life: the home and the state. To have women run off to the mountain, tear animals apart as sacrifice and kill any man who attempts to spy on them is a clear inversion of the norms of Greek society. In other words, the mysteries of Dionysus represent a clear ideological inversion of the two primary social structure of the ancient world. This inversion, however, is not uncommon in Greek

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<sup>32</sup> Eur. Ba. 680; Henrichs 1978 p. 138.

<sup>33</sup> Garland 1992 p. 152.

religion, since activities that are unacceptable within Greek society are often featured in ritual, which reenacts everything from theft to murder.<sup>34</sup> Ritual emulated myth as a means of avoiding the sinister elements that are more pronounced in myth.<sup>35</sup> While he notes that the situation regarding the *Bacchae* is more complicated given the circumstances under which it was written, I generally agree with Seaford's statement that "Dionysiac cult and myth, and the confusion of opposites that they embody, served to affirm the ordered cohesion of the polis."<sup>36</sup> By representing through myth and ritual what is not normal, it reinforces and lends strength to what is considered normal. Similarly, portraying women as wild, out of control, and existing outside the state reaffirms women's lesser status within the state.<sup>37</sup> Dionysus' foreign nature, which is so often stressed in his myths of rejection, has sometimes been taken as evidence for his late arrival in the Greek Pantheon. Evidence from several Linear B tablets, however, points to Dionysus instead being quite an old god, clearly familiar to the Greeks, rather than being a late arrival.<sup>38</sup> Thus his foreignness must not be mistaken for actual unfamiliarity, but once again his foreignness is part of his subversive nature. The controversy of the cult which we find in myth is not necessarily one we find in the historical record, at least among pagan sources. This is important for later sources, as the message is that though these cults do undermine the normal social structures of ancient life, a controlled, willful inversion of these structures through ritual is healthy, whereas to deny this inversion wholesale, as we see in myth, offers an even greater threat to the state.

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<sup>34</sup> Burkert 1985 p. 248.

<sup>35</sup> Henrichs 1990 p. 258.

<sup>36</sup> Seaford 1996 p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> Zeitlin 1982 p. 134.

<sup>38</sup> Bernabé 2013 examines the evidence in detail and concludes that Dionysus either as a god or a hero, was familiar to the Mycenaeans and thus would have been present in the Hellenistic pantheon from very early on..

# Dionysian Mystery Cults in Athens and Delphi

The cases for Athens and Delphi are slightly different from the manifestations of the cult and its aetiological myths previously examined, and the unique circumstances of Dionysian mystery cults in these two states deserve special attention, as they present the clearest historical case of a somewhat state integrated Dionysiac thiasos existing alongside private thiasoi. It is also in the evidence of Athens and Delphi where matters of leading a Dionysian thiasos, more specifically the responsibilities and benefits gained by women leading such rituals, first become apparent. Examining the role of Dionysian mystery cults at Athens puts into focus the degree to which class and gender affected the appeal of Dionysian mystery cults, and how private cults can exist alongside similar rituals more integrated into the state.

## Athenian Rejection Myths

We find no myths of rejection that have analogous ecstatic rituals, and in the case of Athens, its connection with Dionysian mystery cults is perhaps the most complex out of any state, a surprising fact given that it is responsible for essentially codifying the ancient idea of a maenad through its art and literature.<sup>39</sup> The lack of an aetiological myth for Dionysian mystery cults in Athens means there is no mythical precedent, no divine command, that he must be celebrated in this way. Athens as a cultural centre of Greece will of course be intimately familiar with the myths of Dionysus' rejection, as can be seen as early as the works of Aeschylus, who

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<sup>39</sup> Carpenter 1986 p. 124.

wrote numerous plays on the topic, but these take place in Thebes and Thrace.<sup>40</sup> They show why other places must worship Dionysus in that way, but not necessarily why Athens must.

Athens does, however, have its own rejection narratives that are to some degree clearly aetiological, but they have no relation to the ecstatic rites we see in Dionysian mystery cults. The myth of Icarius does not fully match the general outline of rejection myth. Dionysus comes to Attica and is met by Icarius, to whom he gives the gift of wine. When Icarius introduces this gift to others, they think he has poisoned them and in retaliation murder him, hiding the body. When his granddaughter discovers the body, often with the help of Icarius' famously loyal dog, she hangs herself.<sup>41</sup> As a result, Dionysus strikes the men with a plague which does not subside until not only Dionysus, but also the spirits of Icarius, his granddaughter are appeased. The oldest surviving attestation to the story seems to be in Eratosthenes by way of Pseudo-Plutarch.<sup>42</sup> Kerényi, however, notes that this story shows elements hinting that it is much older.<sup>43</sup> Obbink posits that this story is not only the aetiology for mortals having wine, but that the gruesome end of the story was also the impetus for Dionysus to teach men to mix wine with water, and thus avoid such violent outcomes, effectively serving as a double myth of arrival for Dionysus.<sup>44</sup> This myth is also likely tied to the ritual of swinging girls present at the Aiora during the Anthesteria.<sup>45</sup> It should also be noted that the Attic deme of Ikarion, named after Icarius, is associated with the worship of Dionysus from quite an early age, as is evidenced by a cultic

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<sup>40</sup> Aeschylus' *Wool-Carters*, *Pentheus*, *Semele* and his tetralogy the *Lycurgeia* all deal with various myths of Dionysus' rejection, though only fragments survive.

<sup>41</sup> Ael. NA 7.28.

<sup>42</sup> Ps.Plut. Parallela Graeca et Romana 9.

<sup>43</sup> Kerényi 1976 p. 152.

<sup>44</sup> Obbink 1993 p. 82; Kerényi 1976 p 164.

<sup>45</sup> Dillon 2002 p.69.



statue found at the site during the late 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>46</sup> Ikarion is also an important site for the theatre, and an inscription detailing the Dionysia at Ikarion is some of the best evidence that exists for the Rural Dionysia.<sup>47</sup>

A similar story is preserved in a scholion to Aristophanes' *Acharnians*. Here, Dionysus comes to Attica, but is rejected. As punishment, he inflicts a plague of priapism that is only relieved when Attica begins to venerate him, at the orders of the oracles of Apollo.<sup>48</sup> Here we see an aetiological myth for the phallic imagery so commonly associated with Dionysus in Athens, and particularly the presence of the phallus in the Rural Dionysia. By contrast, Herodotus puts forward that it was Melampus who brought such phallic imagery to Athens from Egypt.<sup>49</sup> It is important to note, as well, that this myth is doubly authoritative, as not only does it bear the usual authority of an aetiological myth, but it also clearly states that the rituals were advised by the oracles of Apollo. Oracular command often lies behind the instillation of new cults throughout ancient history and myth, as seen above in the previously mentioned inscription from Magnesia.<sup>50</sup> It essentially uses an existing respected religious structure, one whose authority is clearly established, to justify something that would normally be inadmissible or fall far outside the usual bounds of a given state's religious life. The oracles could only sanction cults, however. They rarely if ever took the initiative or interfered in any matters without first being consulted, and the state ultimately decided what matters to bring before an oracle.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Romano 1982 has a detailed analysis of the statue and its chronology, and favours the interpretation of the statue as a cultic one rather than dedicatory, due to its excellent preservation likely from being housed indoors, p. 407.

<sup>47</sup> Wilson 2015 provides a thorough analysis of the inscription and the nature of the Dionysia at Ikarion.

<sup>48</sup> Schol. Aristoph. Ach. 243.

<sup>49</sup> Hdt. 2.49.

<sup>50</sup> IMagn. 215.

<sup>51</sup> Garland 1984 p. 119.

The myth of Dionysus' plague of priapism, alongside the myth of Icarus, clearly fits the pattern of an aetiological myth for Dionysus, and as such they reflect what was most prominent in Athenian rituals to the god: wine and the phallus. Athens had no aetiological myth related to Dionysus' ecstatic mystery cults, and thus they seem to exist on the edge of Athenian religious life. Nevertheless, Athens was clearly no stranger to myths of the violence and sorrow that follow Dionysus almost wherever he happens to wander. This makes the evidence for the participation of Athenians in Dionysian mystery cults all the more fascinating.

### The Thyiades of Delphi and Athens

The combined Dionysian *thiasoi* of Delphi and Athens are perhaps the most well documented historical Dionysian mystery cult, thanks to the writings of Plutarch. Plutarch seems to get much of his information due to his close association with Clea, the leader of the Delphic Thyiades, and to whom he addresses his examination of the cults of Isis and Osiris.<sup>52</sup> In that work, he draws a significant number of comparisons between Dionysus and Osiris, and states quite plainly that the Delphic ritual is rooted in the myth that Dionysus died and was buried at Delphi, which corresponds with several other myths about Dionysus being buried there.<sup>53</sup> More particularly, Pausanias notes that Onomacritus was the one who first made orgies to Dionysus and tied them to the god's destruction by the titans.<sup>54</sup> The Dinachus fragment mentioned above ties the myth to the story of Lycurgus, and a fragment of Philochorus also mentions that Dionysus the son of Semele, as opposed to one of the other versions of Dionysus' birth, is buried

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<sup>52</sup> Plut. De Iside 35.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Paus. 8.37.5/

at Delphi.<sup>55</sup> Other versions of the myth connect the burial of Dionysus at Delphi to the death of the god at the hands of the titans. Clement of Alexandria has Apollo himself bring the remains of Dionysus to Delphi to be buried.<sup>56</sup> While his account is certainly late, it is likely based on an older pagan account.<sup>57</sup> Placing these tales at Delphi of course links the myths to the Orphic theogony, but it seems most likely that Orphism was a synthesis of several Greek practices and the Delphic tradition is independent, but compatible with Orphic belief.<sup>58</sup> Guépin posits another possibility, that the introduction of ecstatic Dionysian rituals to Delphi was a case of Attic “missionary activity”, and that it was a conscious spread of Orphic traditions from Athens to Delphi.<sup>59</sup> If that were the case, however, we would expect to find Orphic and Bacchic rituals more thoroughly integrated into Athenian religion. Nevertheless, there is some indication that the Dionysian mysteries of Delphi were concerned with what happened to the souls of the initiates in the afterlife.<sup>60</sup>

The details Pausanias gives of the thyiades of Delphi paint an interesting picture as well. The first Thyiad was the mother of Delphus, the namesake of Delphi, by Apollo. She was the first to be a priestess of Dionysus and the first to celebrate the orgies of Dionysus.<sup>61</sup> It seems likely that the rites celebrated there were to emulate the Corycian nymphs who cared for Dionysus, especially given Plutarch’s reference to awakening the god from his basket, or rather cradle.<sup>62</sup> Most interesting is the following passage of Pausanias:

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<sup>55</sup> FGrH 328 F 7.

<sup>56</sup> Clem. Al. Protr. 2.18.1.

<sup>57</sup> Robertson 2003 224.

<sup>58</sup> De la Torre 2013 p. 66.

<sup>59</sup> Guépin 1968 p. 263.

<sup>60</sup> Cole 1980, p. 232.

<sup>61</sup> Paus. 10.6.3-4.

<sup>62</sup> Paus. 10.32.7.

τὸ ἕτερον δὲ οὐκ ἐδυνήθηεν συμβαλέσθαι πρότερον, ἐφ' ὅτῳ καλλίχορον τὸν Πανοπέα εἶρηκε, πρὶν ἢ ἐδιδάχθην ὑπὸ τῶν παρ' Ἀθηναίοις καλουμένων Θυιάδων. αἱ δὲ Θυιάδες γυναῖκες μὲν εἰσιν Ἀττικάι, φοιτῶσαι δὲ ἐς τὸν Παρνασσὸν παρὰ ἔτος αὐταί τε καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες Δελφῶν ἄγουσιν ὄργια Διονύσω. ταύταις ταῖς Θυιάσι κατὰ τὴν ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν ὁδὸν καὶ ἀλλαχοῦ χοροὺς ἰστάναι καὶ παρὰ τοῖς Πανοπεῦσι καθέστηκε: καὶ ἡ ἐπίκλησις ἡ ἐς τὸν Πανοπέα Ὀμήρου ὑποσημαίνει τῶν Θυιάδων δοκεῖ τὸν χορόν.<sup>63</sup>

This passage tells us that Athens sends women every other year to Delphi, commonly referred to as trieteric rituals in the sources, that the maenads did not just perform their trieteric rites on the mountain, but held smaller ritual dances at other times and places. Plutarch also confirms that the Thyiades took part in other festivals.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, while Pausanias is certainly writing quite late, he says that these practices date back to at least the time of Homer. There is no way to verify whether or not Pausanias' claim is accurate, but it at least implies that the Thyiades of Delphi, and Athenian participation in the practice, have existed from an early date. At the very least, it seems likely that the practice existed as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> the century, as indicated by the presence of Thyiades on the pediment of a temple dating to the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Athenian tragedians frequently reference the maenadic rites that occurred at Delphi, directly referring to the Corycian nymphs and the torches that burn on the mountain.<sup>66</sup> That they were so familiar with the rites, and given the other deep connections between Athens and Delphi, it seems likely that Athenian Thyiades participated at Delphi from an early time.

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<sup>63</sup> Paus. 10.4.3. See Appendix 1 for english translation.

<sup>64</sup> Plut. Quaes. Gr. 293c-f.

<sup>65</sup> Guépin 1968 pp. 262-3.

<sup>66</sup> Soph. Ant. 1126; Eur. IT 1243; Aesch. Eum. 24; Aristoph. Cl. 603; Eur. Ion 550-6, 714-718.

Further descriptions attest to the hardiness and independence of the Delphic and Athenian Thyiades. To be able to climb Mount Parnassus was no easy feat for anyone.<sup>67</sup> Only when there was exceptionally bad weather did they find themselves needing any assistance, otherwise they were left to their own devices in circumstances vastly different from their day to day lives.<sup>68</sup> While the famous episode of the Amphissan women aiding the Thyiades of Phocis is the most historical case we have for actual altered cognitive states amongst maenadic worship, it also indicates that the women did in fact travel without any significant male supervision.<sup>69</sup> Goff best describes how exceptional the case of the Delphic Thyiades is: “It is hard to reconstruct the event without concluding that the women drew on techniques of large-scale organization and management, probably forming temporary alliances and networks of acquaintance that extended well beyond the family and neighborhood.”<sup>70</sup> This is an example of what she refers to as a “city of women” due to the opportunity for female leadership and organizational skills that does not occur often for women in the ancient world, especially not in classical Greece. Dillon rightly points out that this cult was thus for wealthy women, given that the costs of such an expedition would have put it beyond the means of many Athenian women. This lines up with most of the other Dionysiac mystery cults examined thus far, as noble lineage is apparent in the Oleiai of Orchomenos, the maenads shipped from Thebes to Magnesia, and there is reason to believe Klea was of aristocratic birth.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the Sixteen at Elis seem to be an aristocratic Dionysiac *Thiasos* with limited membership.<sup>72</sup> Though it is hard to say just how maenadic they may have been, Elis did have a festival called the Thyia that took place outside the city, though it was

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<sup>67</sup> Paus. 10.32.7.

<sup>68</sup> Plut. De Primo 18.

<sup>69</sup> Plut. Mulier. 13 = Plut. Mulier. 249<sup>e</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> Goff 2004 p. 215.

<sup>71</sup> Dillon 2002, p. 147.

<sup>72</sup> Plut. Mulier. 15; Bremmer 1984, p. 285.

connected with Dionysus as a wine god.<sup>73</sup> Festivals such as the Thesmophoria and Skyra were known to cost a fair amount of money, which the husbands of the participants had to pay, and paying for a group of women to journey all the way out to Delphi, with numerous stops along the way for dancing, would not have come cheap.<sup>74</sup> Thus, it is clear that the Thyiades sent from Athens to Delphi certainly were a select group, limited in size. It is not clear, however, how many Delphic Thyiades there were.

These details, however, also point to some problems with the common perception of women's cults as being opportunities for female social release and freedom. Dillon argues that the trieteric nature of the cults means this social release is too rare to matter.<sup>75</sup> I think this is true on a broad scale: institutionalized maenadism such as we see at Delphi will not allow a generalized social release for women. Given the restrictive conditions of being a woman in ancient Athens, however, any exceptions to the daily norm, no matter how far apart or exclusionary, will have been significant to the individual. Similarly, since the Athenian and Delphic Thyiades likely relied on male expenditure for the festivals, as they would for other festivals exclusive to women, this financial dependence limits their ability to truly be autonomous. To some degree, spending money on religious matters for the women in the family benefitted the family as a whole.<sup>76</sup> Burkert argues that this, and the corresponding entwining of Apollo and Dionysus, presents the incorporation and legalization of Dionyisan mystery cults, while at the same time confining them.<sup>77</sup> Thus, we have another case of the mystery cults of Dionysus being fully integrated into the state, but the involvement of Athens is strange, as the

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<sup>73</sup> Paus. 6.26.1.

<sup>74</sup> Isaios 3.80, Men. Epit. 749-50.

<sup>75</sup> Dillon 2002, p. 148.

<sup>76</sup> Goff 2004 p 75.

<sup>77</sup> Burkert 1985 p 224.

cults are effectively kept at a distance. There is the possibility that this was done because of the prominence of Eleusinian mysteries. Callimachus and Eurphorion both tell of a story where Dionysus, as the son of Persephone, was laid to rest at Delphi.<sup>78</sup> If this was the popular basis for Dionysian rites in mainland Greece at the time, then to fully integrate the cult into Athenian religious life could have an impact on the Eleusinian mysteries that were so important to civic life in Athens.

### Private *Thiasoi* in Classical Athens

The presence of Dionysian mystery cults in Athens is a complicated matter. The prevalence of maenadic imagery on Athenian pottery shows the fact that the myths of Pentheus, Orpheus, and Lycurgus were the foundation for several tragedies by numerous tragedians. Outside of Athenian participation in the Dionysian rites on Mount Parnassus, however, there is no explicit evidence for the ecstatic worship of Dionysus. The evidence that we do have is muddled by syncretism, both in contemporary accounts and the ones that follow.

Syncretism is a common feature in ancient literature. The nature of polytheism meant accepting the existence of numerous gods, but at the same time new gods would often be merged with more familiar ones when compatible. In the case of Dionysus, a god who even within Greece comes in numerous forms, syncretism happens both early and often in ancient sources. As mentioned before, Herodotus says that the phallic aspects of Athenian public worship of Dionysus bear strong connections with similar rites in Egypt, and further ties it to the hero Cadmus.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, he notes that Orphic and Bacchic practices are actually Egyptian and

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<sup>78</sup> Callim. Fr. 643; Eurphorion fr. 12.

<sup>79</sup> Hdt. 2.49.

Pythagorean in origin.<sup>80</sup> He even goes as far as to connect the mysteries of Eleusis with Egypt, though of course he wishes to divulge none of the secret aspects.<sup>81</sup> Part of this is because an Egyptian origin would instill a certain level of prestige, showing that the cult is truly ancient.

As for gods syncretized with Dionysus in classical Athens, early on we find mention of Cotyto in a very bacchic context. Aeschylus Fragment 57, part of the *Edonians*, mentions the rites of Cotyto. That the *Edonians* is a play about Lycurgus and Dionysus, and that the rites of Cotyto match up so thoroughly with common depictions of Dionysian mystery cults, with clashing cymbals, pipes, and other cacophonous sounds, clearly points to some degree of syncretism. That being said, Cotyto may have been more analogous to a Thracian Artemis, though most of the sources for Cotyto in Athens derive from Eupolis.<sup>82</sup>

Most famous of the private Bacchic rites in classical Athens are those tied to Sabazius, a Thracio-Phrygian version of Dionysus that was so different that he was seen as a totally new god in Athens.<sup>83</sup> The earliest mention is in Aristophanes' *Wasps*, where he is connected more to Corybantic rites.<sup>84</sup> Corybantic and maenadic rites are often merged in the literature, so the scene still bears a distinctly Bacchic atmosphere.<sup>85</sup> In any case, this passage provides 422 BCE as a firm terminus post quem for the worship of Sabazios in Athens. Also notable is the fact that the two characters professing to be worshippers of Sabazios are slaves. While there are clear connections to ecstatic rituals as the cause of their incessant nodding, the scene fits a common trope of drunk slaves.<sup>86</sup> The most important references of course occur in the *Lysistrata*. The

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<sup>80</sup> Hdt. 2.81.

<sup>81</sup> Hdt. 2.171.

<sup>82</sup> Versnel 1990 p. 113.

<sup>83</sup> Versnel 1990 p. 114.

<sup>84</sup> Ar. Vesp. 8-10.

<sup>85</sup> Eur. Ba. 120-129; Eur. Fr. 472; Plat. Ion 534a; Plat. Laws 7.790d; Philo De. Vit. Cont. 12; Clem. Al. Protr. 2.17-8.

<sup>86</sup> Borthwick 1992, p. 274.



very first lines of the play reference the Bacchanals of women, celebrated with drums in the streets, among other rites.<sup>87</sup> Later in the play, Aristophanes attests to the worship of Sabazios and Adonis in Athens, with supposedly drunk women making a clamour right as the Sicilian Expedition is being debated.<sup>88</sup> Finally, though it does not survive, Aristophanes wrote a play in which foreign gods were expelled from Athens.<sup>89</sup> Cicero not only mentions Sabazius by name, the only foreign god to be mentioned, but also connects Athenian rejection of foreign gods with the Senate's suppression of the Bacchanalia. There is a further reference to the cults of Sabazius, including male initiations, in Theophrastus.<sup>90</sup> These passages imply that the cult of Sabazius was well known in Athens. Aristophanes expected his audience to know it well if he mentions it so often, but given that his objective is ridicule in the service of comedy, it is hard to take his more pointed accusations at face value.

The most substantial evidence for the presence of Bacchic rites in Athens comes from Demosthenes. Glaukothea, the mother of his frequent opponent Aeschines, was a priestess of Sabazios, and this of course was a valuable tool to be used in his speeches. In his *On the Crown* he describes a cult with clear Bacchic elements:

οικέτου τάξιν, οὐκ ἐλευθέρου παιδὸς ἔχων, ἀνὴρ δὲ γενόμενος τῇ μητρὶ τελούσῃ τὰς βίβλους ἀνεγίνωσκες καὶ τᾶλλα συνεσκευωροῦ, τὴν μὲν νύκτα νεβρίζων καὶ κρατηρίζων καὶ καθαίρων τοὺς τελουμένους καὶ ἀπομάττων τῷ πηλῷ καὶ τοῖς πιτύροις, καὶ ἀνιστὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ καθαρμοῦ κελεύων λέγειν ἔφυγον κακόν, εὖρον ἄμεινον, ἐπὶ τῷ μηδένα πάποτε τηλικουτ' ὀλολύξαι σεμνυνόμενος (καὶ ἔγωγε νομίζω: μὴ γὰρ οἶεσθ')

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<sup>87</sup> Ar. Lys. 1-5.

<sup>88</sup> Aristoph. Lys. 387-398.

<sup>89</sup> Cic. Leg. 2.37.

<sup>90</sup> Theophr. Char. 16.4, 27.8.

αὐτὸν φθέγγεσθαι μὲν οὕτω μέγα, ὀλολύζειν δ' οὐχ ὑπέρλαμπρον) , ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις τοὺς καλοὺς θιάσους ἄγων διὰ τῶν ὁδῶν, τοὺς ἐστεφανωμένους τῷ μαράθῳ καὶ τῇ λεύκῃ, τοὺς ὄφεις τοὺς παρείας θλίβων καὶ ὑπὲρ τῆς κεφαλῆς αἰωρῶν, καὶ βοῶν 'εὐοῖ σαβοῖ,' καὶ ἐπορχούμενος 'ὕῃς ἄττης ἄττης ὕῃς,' ἔξαρχος καὶ προηγεμὼν καὶ κιττοφόρος καὶ λικνοφόρος καὶ τοιαῦθ' ὑπὸ τῶν γραδίων προσαγορευόμενος, μισθὸν λαμβάνων τούτων ἔνθρυπτα καὶ στρεπτοὺς καὶ νεήλατα, ἐφ' οἷς τίς οὐκ ἂν ὡς ἀληθῶς αὐτὸν εὐδαιμονίσειε καὶ τὴν αὐτοῦ τύχην.<sup>91</sup>

This passage is the most vivid description we have of Dionysian mystery cults in Athens. Notable features of the cult are the books, the fawn skins, the purification with mud and bran, the cultic, the presence of snakes, the cultic shouts of “εὐοῖ σαβοῖ” and “ὕῃς ἄττης ἄττης ὕῃς”.

Furthermore, that the primary members of the cult seem to be old women, *γραφίδιον*, yet Aeschines is a grown man is perhaps evidence for early male participation in Bacchic cults. The phrase “οὐκ ἐλευθέρου παιδὸς ἔχων, ἀνὴρ δὲ γενόμενος,” however, complicates matters.

Demosthenes' goal here is ridicule, and by saying he participated in the cult upon becoming a man could be interpreted in many ways. It could just be that male membership in the cult was a taboo, or that by participating as an adult, no longer a child, he had somehow crossed the line. In another speech, Demosthenes brings up Aeschines' participation in the cult as a child, and says that he was present around *μεθύουσιν ἀνθρώποις*. The induction of men and the fact that, instead of nocturnal rites on a mountainside, at least some part of the ritual seems to have been an ecstatic procession through the streets, seems to correspond to Herodotus' account of the Scythian King Scyles joining the Bacchic mysteries.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, Euripides' *Ion* implies that

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<sup>91</sup> Dem. 18.259-260. See Appendix 2 for English Translation

<sup>92</sup> Hdt. 4.79.

even at Delphi the Thyiades had some kind of public performance or procession in addition to the dances conducted elsewhere mentioned by Pausanias.<sup>93</sup> Further details of Glaukothea's role in the cult can be found in the speeches of Demosthenes. Evidently Aeschines' family was poor, but still full Athenian citizens.<sup>94</sup> She tried to make money from her rituals and performing purifications, καθαίρουσα.<sup>95</sup> Also interesting to note is that she seemed to come from a family of seers, and that may have been another service she offered.<sup>96</sup>

Bremmer is correct to note that this is a complicated passage where Demosthenes mixes together elements from numerous ecstatic cults, even if it generally appears to be an ecstatic cult to Dionysus.<sup>97</sup> Some scholars even think there may be no connection between Sabazios and Dionysus at all, that any connection is made by sources hostile to the cult.<sup>98</sup> The motive of Demosthenes to compare Dionysus to Sabazios, however, would then imply that the cult was Dionysian in nature to begin with. For the purposes of invective, it makes no sense to equate a popular local god with the foreign cult being targeted. Furthermore, Kraemer published a convincing article examining closely the main reason scholars have long associated the cult led by Glaukothea with the shout of “ἐνοῖ σαβοῖ”.<sup>99</sup> He found it more likely that it may have referred to a cultic role rather than the deity they worship, and that the terms sabos or saboi are never connected to Sabazios outside of explicit connections to Dionysus.<sup>100</sup> Thus, the cult of Glaukothea may have been an explicitly Dionysian mystery cult, and since such rites were not common within Athens itself but bore a greater resemblance to the rites of foreign deities,

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<sup>93</sup> Eur. Ion 550-6; Paus. 10.4.3.

<sup>94</sup> Dem. 18.258.

<sup>95</sup> Dem. 19.249.

<sup>96</sup> SEG 16 no. 193.

<sup>97</sup> Bremmer 2004 p. 541.

<sup>98</sup> Johnson 1984, p. 1586; Carpenter 1997, pp. 77-78.

<sup>99</sup> Kraemer 1981.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid p. 233.

perhaps Demosthenes' collage of foreign cultic aspects was intended to emphasize the foreignness of the cult and downplay the aspects that would have seemed familiar to his audience.

### Legal Cases against Foreign Rites

Glaukothea was not charged herself for her role in leading a *thiasos*, and no legal case was brought against her. However, several women were charged in Athens, with their trials somewhat connected to their role as leaders of religious, seemingly Dionysian *thiasoi*. These cases present further evidence that it was the women who led such cults who were often the focus of controversy, and these cases help to elaborate on the existence of private cults in Classical Athens. One of the more striking elements of Demosthenes' ridicule against Aeschines is when he compares Glaukothea to another priestess who led such a *thiasos* and was put to death for it.<sup>101</sup> Two ancient scholia elaborate on it further, and give her name as Ninon. The first scholion gives the name, and says that Meneclēs accused her of selling potions.<sup>102</sup> The second, however, clarifies that she was put to death because her initiations were an insult to the Eleusinian mysteries, and that Aeschines' mother received oracular permission to take her place.<sup>103</sup> Both scholia pose certain problems. The first seems to read the Greek improperly, since there is no sense from Demosthenes' speech that he was accusing Glaukothea of selling love potions.<sup>104</sup> The second possibility seems more likely, but the story that an oracle then approved worship of the cult as led by Glaukothea is a common aetiological construction, and in particular bears resemblance to a widespread story of a priest of Cybele who was killed by the Athenians

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<sup>101</sup> Dem. 19 281.

<sup>102</sup> schol.Dem.19.281: 495A.

<sup>103</sup> schol.Dem.19.281: 495B.

<sup>104</sup> Eidinow 2016 p. 18.

for introducing a new god, only for them to suffer a plague for the murder. The plague was only stopped when, on the orders of the oracle, a temple to Cybele was established in Athens.<sup>105</sup>

Josephus says that Ninon was put to death for initiating people into a cult of a foreign god, and says that this was explicitly forbidden by law.<sup>106</sup> Whether or not such a law actually existed is hard to say, but generally it would seem that if it did, it was rarely used.<sup>107</sup> If Demosthenes was trying to use the foreignness of Glaukothea's deity as an argument, it is strange that he fails to provide greater detail or even refer to Ninon by name, instead opting for an allusion.<sup>108</sup>

There are other notable accounts of women being charged for such crimes as well. Theoris of Lemnos and her entire family was put to death for some kind of potion manufacture or sorcery, and potentially for teaching slaves to deceive.<sup>109</sup> According to Harpocration, however, Philochorus says she was instead a seer put to death for *asebeia*.<sup>110</sup> Another woman, Phryne was charged with *asebeia* as well, this time for leading *thiasoi* of both men and women in the worship of a new god in the Lyceum.<sup>111</sup> Harpocration further expands on this by saying Phryne held initiations of lower class women for the cult of Isodaites.<sup>112</sup> From later attestations and how the name recalls Euripides' *Bacchae* 421-3, Versnel argues that, like Sabazios and the cult of Glaukothea, Isodaites is effectively Dionysus, and may not even be foreign. This does not seem like an unusual *thiasos* for a foreign god.<sup>113</sup> Eidinow notes further that to two of Aesop's

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<sup>105</sup> Julian. *Or.* V, 159; *Phot. Lex.*, s.v. μητραγύρτης; Schol. Aristoph. *Plut.* 431; Suda s.v. μητραγύρτης.

<sup>106</sup> Joseph. *Ap.* 2.267-268.

<sup>107</sup> Eidinow 2016 p. 22.

<sup>108</sup> Eidinow 2016 p. 45.

<sup>109</sup> Dem. 25.79-80; Plut. Dem. 14.4

<sup>110</sup> Harp. s.v. Theoris.

<sup>111</sup> Anonymous Seguerianus 215= Euthias fr. 2.

<sup>112</sup> Harp. s.v. Isodaites.

<sup>113</sup> Eidinow 2016 p. 30.

fables bear a strong resemblance to these historical legal cases, using the same charges of innovations and *asebeia* that occur in the cases of Phryne and Ninon.<sup>114</sup>

The legal cases against these women paint a complex picture, and it is hard to determine exactly what their main offenses were. They are all connected as priestesses who led the rituals of unfamiliar gods. But at least on the surface, this should not cause a problem. Though much later, Strabo notes how Athens regularly welcomed foreign religious practices.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, a law of Solon suggested that private associations, *thiasoi*, and orgies were all valid as long as they did not violate public law.<sup>116</sup> The charge of *asebeia* seems to be intentionally unspecific enough to have wide application, which Versnel argues was its primary purpose in the charges against Socrates.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, at least two of the women, Ninon and Phryne, had their charges brought forth by known sycophants, so political motivations are not out of the question.<sup>118</sup> Given that there was no public prosecutor in Athens, cases would only be made if someone had enough motivation to prosecute, therefore many cults may have just been tolerated.<sup>119</sup> The cause of the charges of *asebeia* could also have been the claim of some personal, private connection with the divine, similar to Socrates' personal daimon.<sup>120</sup> With regards to the *φάρμακα* mentioned in the cases of Theoris and Ninon, and potentially connected to Glaukothea, it is unclear if such activities were actually illegal. If they were indeed illegal, Demosthenes would have made a more direct accusation against Eunomus instead of a comparison to Theoris.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, accusations of malefic magic and potions are common when men target women in this way, as

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<sup>114</sup> Aesop *Fables* 56, 91.

<sup>115</sup> Strabo 10.3.18.

<sup>116</sup> *Digesta* 47.22.4 = Solon Fr. 76a.

<sup>117</sup> Versnel 1990 126.

<sup>118</sup> Dem. 39.2, 40.9; Harpocration s.v. Euthias.

<sup>119</sup> Rubel 2014 p. 101.

<sup>120</sup> Eidinow 2016 p. 60.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

are accusations of love potions specifically, as they define women by the threats they pose to men.<sup>122</sup> It seems unlikely that simply leading a mystery cult would have elicited legal action on its own. Glaukothea's *thiasos* contained male members, and perhaps there was some concern that Aeschines would himself lead the *thiasos* given how vividly Demosthenes describes his role. Nevertheless, while his participation was brought up as a criticism of his character and his upbringing, no charges were made against him or his mother on these grounds. Ninon's religious charges were for ridiculing the Eleusinian Mysteries and Phryne's religious charges were for leading a mixed *thiasos* of a foreign god in a place sacred to Apollo, implying that the nature of the rituals or their location were the problem. Since early evidence exists in Aristophanes for the ecstatic cults of Sabazios, which bear a strong resemblance to the rites of Dionysus and the rites mentioned in the orations discussed above, this would mean that ecstatic cults had existed in Athens and been well known from the last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE all the way until the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It would seem that such cults could in fact exist without facing official censure, though not without some degree of suspicion and disapproval from Athenian men. It would seem as though the fundamental moral of Dionysian rejection myths is at least somewhat understood. To deny these cults outright is wrong, but even when no clear action is taken against them, that does not mean that membership in these cults was uncontroversial, and in the Athenian courts, that controversial nature could be used perhaps not as a legal charge itself, but as a blemish on someone's character.

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<sup>122</sup> Janowitz 2001 p. 7; Lefkowitz 1981 p. 37.

## Women and Dionysian cults in Classical Athens

There is still the question of how Dionysian mystery cults fit into Athenian society. Something need not be illegal to be discouraged. Social pressures are a powerful tool. Perhaps that is why in most of these cases, the leadership of the cult was female, and membership also tended to be female. While there is a male presence attested, outside of Aeschines' supposed involvement, it is unclear whether these men were citizens or not. It seems likely that men, who have much greater capability for social mobility and political involvement, would avoid such cults as they may impact their reputation. That this is an argument used against Aeschines points toward the hypothesis being true. Another curiosity is why women were allowed to take part in these cults. Nothing points towards these cults being forbidden to the female citizenry. Given how a woman's ritual activity often relied upon the approval and sometimes financial contributions of the husband, however, at least some part of the male populace of Athens had to tolerate and allow their wives and female relatives to take part. Neils provides one possible explanation when she notes that "[p]erhaps, however, just because women constituted the Other in Greek Society, their religious activities were not held accountable to "religion as usual" in the Greek polis."<sup>123</sup> I think this statement may be broadly applicable, but more specific justification may be found for specific cults.

The question of why such things were acceptable applies not only for these seemingly Dionysian cults, but also for the Adonia, as it was of course mentioned in the same context as the rites of Sabazios in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* as a women's cult, and implicitly reserved for citizens. Similar to the cults of Sabazios, the Adonia seems to date to the 420s.<sup>124</sup> Menander's

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<sup>123</sup> Neils 2008 p. 248.

<sup>124</sup> Aristoph. Peace 420.



description of the Adonia shows it to have lasted without causing significant concerns or undergoing any changes until his time. It should be pointed out that many of the characteristics often seen as controversial in Dionysian cults – ecstatic dancing and nocturnal rites – are also present in the Adonia.<sup>125</sup> While it remains true that the Adonia naturally took place within the city, on top of the women’s very own houses, the oreibasia that would have potentially been bothersome in the case of Dionysiac cults may not have occurred at all. Aristophanes, Herodotus, and Demosthenes all present the cults as having their rites in the city, in the streets.<sup>126</sup> As Henrichs notes, maenadic practices can be highly local, and hard to transplant.<sup>127</sup> Not every manifestation of such cults need be tied to a specific mountain or specific cave the way the Thyiades of Delphi are.

Furthermore, I think a comparison can be made as to why each of the cults was allowed within Athens. A compelling article by Simms examined the Adonia from the perspective of women’s lives in ancient Athens, not only in terms of what the cult offered to the women on a personal level, but also what it meant for their place in society and why it was tolerated.<sup>128</sup> She argues that the Adonia does not have any truly new rituals, as it reflects the traditional role that women would play at funerals as mourners which had been restricted under Solon.<sup>129</sup> Given the ongoing Peloponnesian war, women will have had plenty of reason to mourn, having lost fathers, brothers, sons, and husbands. In addition, given their restricted roles in society, any occasion that let them socialize with other women would have clearly been popular. Similarly, she notes that

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<sup>125</sup> Men. *Sam.* 43.

<sup>126</sup> Aristoph. *Lys.* 1-5, 387-298; *Hdt.* 4.79; *Dem.* 18.259-260.

<sup>127</sup> Henrichs 1982 p 153.

<sup>128</sup> Simms 1997 p. 126.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* p. 130-131.

any laws forbidding the participation of men are unlikely to exist, since traditional gender roles and societal pressures will have been enough.<sup>130</sup>

If we apply this same argument to the Dionysian cults in Athens, we find too a festival, primarily for women, that gained popularity during the tumultuous final third of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The rituals of Sabazios and Adonis are both seen as somewhat controversial, but show up regularly from the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century well into the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, two important questions still remain if the situation of the Adonia is to be comparable to the Dionysian cults. First, what traditional women's role was being served by the cults? Secondly, what purpose did the cult serve that would make it popular during the Peloponnesian war?

Answering the first question requires some speculation given the nature of the evidence. That the image of the ecstatic maenad is so popular in Athens has long led scholars to wonder if Athenian potters had some model on which to base their images. In a fascinating study Lawler was able to show how the maenadic dance depicted on so much attic pottery during the latter half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century does seem to present a cohesive form of dance.<sup>131</sup> The easiest explanation for this would be that Athenian potters had opportunities to witness the maenadic dancing of the Thyiades, and use their performances for inspiration.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, it has long been theorized that the Lenaia vases may in fact depict an actual ritual, with women acting as maenads. This is partly because lenai is a term for maenads elsewhere, though the festival may also refer to a wine press. Dillon argues that the vases must be connected with the Anthesteria, as the grapes would not be ready for a wine ritual during the Lenaia.<sup>133</sup> Carpenter argues that the scenes are meant to

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid. p. 132.

<sup>131</sup> Lawler 1927. See also Touchette 1995 for a modern analysis of dancing maenads in both Attic reliefs and Roman copies.

<sup>132</sup> Eur. Ion 550-6; Paus. 10.4.3

<sup>133</sup> Dillon 2002, p. 152.

be vaguely Dionysian, not representing any one ritual or myth, and were primarily made for export.<sup>134</sup> Simon, however, points to the fact that the masked idol on the images would suit the Lenaia better, as there were dramatic performances, and that maenadic dancing is more of a winter activity suited to the Lenaia.<sup>135</sup> Peirce puts forward the interesting argument that the Lenaia could correspond to the Thyia of Elis spoken of by Pausanias.<sup>136</sup> She also points to the presence of some sort of organization of all female worshippers of Dionysus mentioned on the cult calendar of the deme Erchia.<sup>137</sup> Ultimately, she argues that the scenes represent a melding of both mythical elements and historical examples of maenadic feasting that could have occurred in Athens.<sup>138</sup>

I believe that Guía provides a strong argument that might tie all these elements together. She argues that traditional maenadic cults in Athens could have been reorganized during Solon's era, which would result in private cults being folded into the Lenaia and the ecstatic worship being combined with that of the Delphic Thyiades.<sup>139</sup> Plutarch does mention quite clearly that Solon, in addition to restricting women's role as mourners, restricted their cults and festivals.<sup>140</sup> This then would mean the ecstatic rites of Dionysus were limited to those who were either chosen or who could afford to go to Delphi every two years, and that the maenadic rituals that were folded into the public festivals would likely have been diluted somewhat in the process. Thus, during the Peloponnesian War, when perhaps sending a *thiasos* of Thyiades to Delphi may have been untenable, such similar cults could gain a foothold. Furthermore, by integrating the

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<sup>134</sup> Carpenter 1997 p. 81.

<sup>135</sup> Simon 1983 p. 101.

<sup>136</sup> Peirce 1998 p. 82.

<sup>137</sup> LSCG 18.

<sup>138</sup> Peirce 1998 p. 85.

<sup>139</sup> Guía 2013 p. 113.

<sup>140</sup> Plut. Sol. 21.4-5.

cults into state festivals and likely limiting participation, what was once a popular cult would have become inaccessible to most. Even among the main festivals, outside of those specifically for all women like the Thesmophoria, religious roles were often restricted to the upper classes.<sup>141</sup> In effect Athenian religion was a reflection of Athenian society at large, democratic but with special roles for the affluent.<sup>142</sup> Often, priesthoods were selected by lot, but only from among those who have the required ancestry.<sup>143</sup> True democratic selection is most prevalent in the appointment of religious personnel for newer, foreign cults.<sup>144</sup> Therefore, a popular Dionysian mystery cult has a natural audience of those who lack the money or social connections to take part in the available alternatives. This then poses the question of what class of people took part in Dionysian mystery cults. While some of the evidence certainly seems to point toward it as an activity for the upper classes, there are problems with viewing the cults as being primarily for the affluent. Women's involvement in public life was said to have been heavily restricted, to the point they would rarely leave the house. If women were so restricted, how could popular women's cults gain any attention or traction? How could they spread, and how could the women who participated in them organize their rituals? Under such restrictions it was only really possible for the wealthy to be confined to the house, as they could afford enough slaves take care of all the chores that would require them to venture outside.<sup>145</sup> That Aristophanes has women complaining about the troubles they face when going out to fetch water points to the fact that women did go out of the house to take care of daily tasks.<sup>146</sup> They did in fact have social lives,

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<sup>141</sup> Fantham 1995 pp. 84-85.

<sup>142</sup> Jameson 2014 p. 244.

<sup>143</sup> Connelly 2008 p. 188.

<sup>144</sup> Jameson 2014 p. 251.

<sup>145</sup> Fantham 1995 p. 106. Pomeroy 1995 p. 79.

<sup>146</sup> Aristoph. *Lys.* 327.

and circles of friends, and would visit each other for a number of reasons.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, the stresses of the Peloponnesian war changed women's lives within the city. Financial troubles, for example, forced some women to take a variety of jobs.<sup>148</sup> Finally, older women, who seem to be particularly drawn to Dionysian mystery cults, seemed to have much more freedom.<sup>149</sup> As for restricting these cults, at least in the 4<sup>th</sup> century the job would seem to fall to the *γυναικονόμος*, whom Aristotle notes is a feature of the aristocracy, as poor women cannot help but exist in public.<sup>150</sup> This is granted further evidence by an inscription from Methymna, where a *γυναικονόμος* oversaw a *pannychis* of women, with all other men prohibited.<sup>151</sup> Henrichs notes, however, that this is by no means evidence for male participation, merely male, and state, supervision.<sup>152</sup>

As for the question of what made Dionysian mystery cults popular to both lead and join, outside of the fact that they gave women yet another opportunity to socialize, there are a number of possibilities. As mentioned above, economic troubles forced many women to seek jobs and alternate income for the house. Demosthenes directly alluded to this regarding Glaukothea, who was performing purifications and initiations for money, and whose family history may have given her some opportunities as a diviner.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, he ritual cry of “ἔφυγον κακόν, εὔρον ἄμεινο” points toward some kind of hope for a better afterlife.<sup>154</sup> All the death caused by the plague and war in the last third of the 5<sup>th</sup> century would certainly have given people reason to obtain purifications and want some hope for a better afterlife, both of which evidently could be

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<sup>147</sup> Blundell 1995 p. 137.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid p. 145.

<sup>149</sup> Hyperides frag. 205.

<sup>150</sup> Aristot. Pol. 4.1300a.

<sup>151</sup> LSCG 127.

<sup>152</sup> Henrichs 1984 pp. 81-82.

<sup>153</sup> Dem. 19.249; SEG 16 no. 193.

<sup>154</sup> Dem. 18 259.

provided by the priestess of a Dionysian mystery cult. That Demosthenes also frequently mentions the books used by Glaukothea in her rituals points us toward a confusing possibility, that the lines between what is considered Dionysian and Orphic were highly blurred. It would seem that Glaukothea fits the bill of the sort of multivalent “ἀγύρται δὲ καὶ μάντις” described by Plato, whom he mentions specifically as having the books of Orpheus and Musaeus.<sup>155</sup> Such independent religious practitioners seem to have been extremely common in ancient Athens, and seemed to have stayed so, with some even becoming quite important in political and military matters.<sup>156</sup> While Plato accuses them of targeting the rich – a valid claim, since it was the rich who had money to spare in tough times – the fact that they performed a variety of duties would mean they had a wide potential audience that could span more than just the top of the socioeconomic ladder. Though the Delphic oracle was by far the most prestigious and authoritative, it was also quite expensive, so there was plenty of room for diviners to ply their trade outside the upper classes.<sup>157</sup> This observation certainly fits with what Aristides Quintilianus claims, noting that Dionysian mysteries are catharsis for the poor.<sup>158</sup> Furthermore, the mysteries need not have appeal only to one side or the other, since citizens and metics would not necessarily have to be rich to have money to spare for such services. Plato notes how it is the poor, the sick, and the women that are always the most superstitious, and established the most shrines.<sup>159</sup> They need not even have disposable income per se, a superstitious person would think purifications and proper worship of a god to be just as important as any other aspect of ensuring their personal well being.

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<sup>155</sup> Plat. Rep. 364b-e.

<sup>156</sup> Mikalson 1983 pp. 40-41.

<sup>157</sup> Burkert 1992 p. 262.

<sup>158</sup> Aristid. Quint. 3.25.

<sup>159</sup> Plato Leg. 909e-910b

As Burkert notes, Orpheotelestai were essentially in competition with each other; they had no consistency of belief.<sup>160</sup> Furthermore, mystery cults had to also compete with philosophical discourse for attention from those seeking greater meaning.<sup>161</sup> With such an atmosphere of competition, that Orphic rites would be absorbed into more traditional ecstatic and maenadic rites seems natural, given how well they fit together, and naturally there would be some competition for prices and audience. Though the practices described in Plato seem to be at odds with our conception of Orphism from the texts, which reveals a contrast between practical rituals and purely mythical texts, there is no reason to think such ritual texts did not exist. Nor should we dismiss the idea that the myths contained in the surviving texts did not have practical application.<sup>162</sup> The frequency with which Plato discusses the healing attributes of the madness of Dionysus, something comparable to that of the Corybants, hints that Dionysian priests offered some capacity for healing as well.<sup>163</sup> Even Sophocles casts Dionysus as a healing god, so Plato was likely making such a comparison between Dionysus and the healing power of Corybantic rites expecting it to be well known.<sup>164</sup>

Furthermore, we must always remember that the ancient world was polytheistic. It is easy to think that religious devotion demands exclusivity, especially when talking about mystery cults that have so often been compared to Christianity. Ultimately, there is no reason why a wandering priest of Dionysus could not claim some oracular power from Apollo or healing power from Dionysus, and there is no reason to think every Orphic priest followed strict vegetarianism. This does not mean that true believers did not exist, or that all diviners and itinerant priests were

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<sup>160</sup> Burkert 1982 pp. 9-10.

<sup>161</sup> Waldner 2013 p. 218.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid p. 8.

<sup>163</sup> Plato Phaedrus 244f, 265b; Laws 815c; Plat. Laws 7.790d.

<sup>164</sup> Soph. Ant. 1137-1145; Scullion 1998 p. 109.

charlatans. The Derveni Papyrus itself, however, does have a low opinion of those who make such sacred rituals into a craft, which implies that even among Orphic priests there was some disagreement.<sup>165</sup> Plato's famous phrase "εἰσὶν γὰρ δὴ, ὧς φασιν οἱ περὶ τὰς τελετάς, 'ναρθηκοφόροι'" implies further that not all mysteries of Dionysus offer equal benefits, even if they outwardly appear the same.<sup>166</sup>

## The State of Dionysian Mysteries in Classical Greece

While conclusive evidence does appear to be scarce, and some degree of reconstruction needs to be done given the nature of the sources, nevertheless Dionysian mystery cults do in fact seem to have been popular in Athens. A couple of trends can now be noticed, that when Dionysian mystery cults are integrated into the state, as is the case with Orchomenos, Thebes, Delphi, or the Thyiades sent by Athens to Delphi, something of the popular element is usually lost. Not all women would always participate in the rituals, only a select few. When we do find popular cults, they are inevitably described as crowds, and generally their rituals seem to take place in the streets to some degree. This means that the idea of women leaving the city and heading up to the mountain for secret rites may not have been a core aspect of the cult in every instance, and indicates that perhaps the mystery cults of Dionysus were as varied as their god. Common elements exist across them, whether private or state sanctioned, but no cult seems to truly match up with any other, or with the maenads of myth. The fusion of the Dionysian, the Orphic, and even sometimes the Eleusinian seems only natural given the common elements they

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<sup>165</sup> Derveni Papyrus Col. XX.

<sup>166</sup> Plat. Phaedo 69c.



share.<sup>167</sup> That the individual cults or even *thiasoi* varied to an appreciable degree could help explain why some cults faced more trouble than others, since the particular blend of elements in each cult could either appear completely benign or, if it strayed too close to the Eleusinian mysteries as the *thiasos* of Ninon did, it could appear to undermine tradition.

Furthermore, in addition to the benefits offered by such mysteries to members – everything from hope for the afterlife to healing and possibly just a night out – it offered women opportunities for leadership. To take on responsibilities and potentially gain some individual recognition for leading a popular ritual is something not often afforded to women in classical Greece. There are distinct benefits for being the leader of a *thiasos*, and it is this leadership that seems often to be the biggest target for invective and legal action. By examining the reception and integration of Dionysian mystery cults in Athens, we can see how leadership of such cults brought distinct social advantages not often afforded to women, and especially not often available to women of lower classes.

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<sup>167</sup> Burkert 1977, p. 6.

# Dionysian Mysteries in Hellenistic Greece

## Regulation and Integration

Nowhere in ancient Greece do we find such rich literature on the Dionysian mystery cults as we do in Athens, but throughout the Hellenistic age there exists a great treasure of epigraphic evidence. Thus, our understanding of the cults dramatically shifts, going from something that was simply present but often only spoken of through a lease of disapproval to something proudly displayed by the state. The epigraphic evidence also gives us our most direct evidence for how these cults were treated by the state, or rather, how they were most often integrated by the state.

First is perhaps the most famous inscription on Dionysian mystery cults, the inscription from Magnesia on the Meander dating to the early to mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.<sup>168</sup> It records an epiphany of Dionysus, where an image of the god was found inside a tree, and the oracular interpretation of this sign. The oracle ordered the city to bring three maenads from Thebes. It is a Roman copy of an original likely intended to promote the cult and increase faith in the oracles of Apollo, a popular trend during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE.<sup>169</sup> Given the postscript, it seems as though it is originally copied from a local historiographer, as the recording of the initial oracle and the details of how the oracle was fulfilled, including the deaths of the maenads brought from Thebes, could not have been written at the same time. While historiographers often feature a mix of truth and fiction, it would seem that this inscription is in fact an original, as it follows common Hellenistic oracular form and seems to be largely apolitical, so any later modifications or inventions would

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<sup>168</sup> IMagn. 215.

<sup>169</sup> Henrichs 1978 p.126.

serve nobody any particular advantage.<sup>170</sup> Henrichs dates the original oracle to roughly 278-250 BCE,<sup>171</sup> while Lombardi prefers a date after 221/220 BCE, believing the inscription to date to a time when Magnesia was a member of the Delphic Amphictyony dominated by Thebes.<sup>172</sup>

Much of the scholarship has focused on the postscript to the oracle, and with good reason. It is as follows:

ἐλθέτε δὲ ἐς Θήβης ἱερὸν πέδον, ὄφρα λάβητε Μαινάδας, αἱ γενεῆς Εἰνοῦς ἄπο  
Καδμηΐης· αἱ δ' ὑμεῖν δώσουσι καὶ ὄργια καὶ νόμιμα ἐσθλά καὶ θιάσους Βάκχοιο  
καθειδρύσουσιν ἐν ἄστει. κατὰ τὸν χρησμὸν διὰ τῶν θεοπρόπων ἐδόθησαν ἐκ Θηβῶν  
Μαινάδες τρεῖς Κοσκῶ Βαυβῶ Θετταλή, καὶ ἡ μὲν Κοσκῶ συνήγαγεν θίασον τὸν  
Πλατανιστηνῶν, ἡ δὲ Βαυβῶ τὸν πρὸ πόλεως, ἡ δὲ Θετταλή τὸν τῶν Καταιβατῶν·  
θανοῦσαι δὲ αὗται ἐτάφησαν ὑπὸ Μαγνήτων, καὶ ἡ μὲν Κοσκῶ κεῖται ἐν Κοσκωβούμφῳ, ἡ  
δὲ Βαυβῶ ἐν Ταβάρνει, ἡ δὲ Θετταλή πρὸς τῷ θεάτρῳ.<sup>173</sup>

This is our only significant resource for the presence of maenadic cults not only in Magnesia but also for Thebes. The inscription bears strong resemblance to Euripides' *Bacchae*, with three women descended from the house of Cadmus leading one *thiasos* each. It is notable that each of the maenads seems to have received a state funeral, and were buried in notable places. Cosco evidently even lent her name to the site of her burial. Furthermore, given that leadership of the *thiasos* depended on their Cadmean lineage, these priesthoods likely would have continued to be matrilineal. Furthermore, that there are three *thiasoi* implies a large degree of participation in the cult, so even though the leadership is restricted, membership seems likely to have been more

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid p. 129.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. p 127.

<sup>172</sup> Lombardi 2008, 547-565.

<sup>173</sup> IMagn. 215. See Appendix 3 for English translation.

open. Tied to this are the names of the *thiasoi*. The first, led by Cosco, seems to have met perhaps not downtown, but within city limits, as they are the *thiasos* of the Πλατανιστηνῶν, which was said to have been κατὰ τὴν πόλιν. The second led by Baubo clearly met outside the city, and the fact that no more is said would imply that the other *thiasos* was not considered to be properly outside the city.<sup>174</sup> These two *thiasoi* tie together the two types of maenadic worship we have seen in other sources, the type that takes place on the mountain as with the Thyiades of Delphi, and the kind that takes place not on a mountain but more in public, such as at Athens or in the case of Scyles.

Of note is that the name of the third *thiasos*, τῶν Καταβατῶν, is masculine, which indicates some amount of male involvement and possibly a relationship with Zeus Katabates. Caballero points to this as evidence of male membership in maenadic rites, while Henrichs, the staunchest opponent to the idea of male maenadic practice, points to it rather as a case of men performing a different, parallel role in the same ceremonies.<sup>175</sup> I believe Henrichs is closer to the truth, as a parallel can be found at Delphi: “καὶ θύουσιν οἱ Ὅσιοι θυσίαν ἀπόρρητον ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος, ὅταν αἱ Θυιάδες ἐγείρωσι τὸν Λικνίτην”.<sup>176</sup> While there are certainly differences between the Dionysian mystery cults of Delphi and Thebes, in this inscription both cities are involved in the transmission of the cult, so some ties between their rituals are entirely possible. I would say, however, that if parallel but separate cult roles existed for men in Dionysian mystery cults, we could imagine that in other places, perhaps as a result of lower membership or simply evolution over time, this separation could dissolve.

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<sup>174</sup> Henrichs 1978 p. 132.

<sup>175</sup> Caballero 2013 pp. 166-167. Henrichs 1978 pp. 133-134.

<sup>176</sup> Plut. De Iside 35.

Another inscription exists honoring a priestess of Dionysian mystery cults after her death. It provides more details for the duties performed in such cults. Dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, his epitaph from Miletus provides strong evidence for what the public duties of a maenadic priestess were:

"τὴν ὅσιν χαίρειμ" πολιήτιδες εἶπατε Βάκχαι

"ἱρείην" χρηστῆ τοῦτο γυναικὶ θέμις.

ὕμᾱς κείς ὄρος ἤγε καὶ ὄργια πάντα καὶ ἰρά

ἤνικεμ πάσης ἐρχομένη πρὸ πόλεως.

τοῦνομα δ' εἴ τις ξεῖνος ἀνείρεται, Ἀλκμειωνὶς

ἢ Ῥοδίου, καλῶμ μοῖραν ἐπισταμένη.<sup>177</sup>

Once again, we have the priestess of a Dionysian mystery cult being honored after her death. There seems to be a division between two cultic rituals, the oreibasias, the journey to the mountain, and the procession before the whole city. Here we have a combination of the mountain rituals spoken of in the *Bacchae* and which occurred at Delphi with the public procession in the streets spoken of in the case of Scyles and seemingly Glaukothea's *thiasos*. This inscription, alongside the other mentions of these rituals, paints a clear picture that to some degree the ecstatic mystery cults of Dionysus occurred in public.

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<sup>177</sup> Henrichs 1978 p. 148. See Appendix 4 for English Translation.

Another inscription from Miletus is perhaps the most fascinating evidence for the integration of Dionysian mystery cults into the Greek polis. Dating to 276/5 BCE, it records the sale of a priesthood of Dionysus that provides a number of cultic regulations:<sup>178</sup>

ὅταν δὲ ἡ ἱέρεια ἐπι[τελέσ]ῃ τὰ ἱερὰ ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλ[εω]ς  
[ὄργια] μὴ ἐξεῖναι ὠμοφάγιον ἐμβαλεῖν μηθενὶ πρότερον  
[ἢ ἡ ἱέρ]εια ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως ἐμβάλῃ. μὴ ἐξεῖναι δὲ μηδὲ  
[συν]αγαγεῖν τὸν θίασον μηθενὶ πρότερον τοῦ δημοσίου·  
[ἐὰ]ν δέ τις ἀνὴρ ἢ γυνὴ βούληται θύειν τῷ Διονύσῳ,  
[πρ]οϊεράσθω ὀπότερον ἂν βούληται ὁ θύων καὶ λαμβανέτω  
[τὰ] γέρη ὁ προϊερώμενος· ...  
δὲ τὴν ἱέρειαν γυναῖκας διδόναι Δ-ΙΝΛ  
τ]ὰ δὲ τέλεστρα {καὶ τελεστ} παρέχ[ειν ταῖς]  
[γυναιξιν] ἐν τοῖς ὀργί[οις πᾶ]σιν· ἐὰν δέ τις θύειν βούλ[ηται]  
[τῷ] Διονύ[σῳ] ἢ γυνή, διδότη γέρη τῇ ἱερείᾳ σπλάγχνα, νεφ[ρόν,]  
σκολιόν, ἱεράμ μοῖραν, γλῶσσαν, σκέλος εἰς κοτυληδόνα [ἐκ]-  
[τ]ετμημένον. καὶ ἐὰν τις γυνὴ βούληται τελεῖν τῷ Διονύσῳ  
τῷ Βακχίῳ ἐν τῇ πόλει ἢ ἐν τῇ χώρῃ ἢ ἐν ταῖς νήσοις, [ἀπο]-  
διδότη τῇ ἱερείᾳ στατήρα κατ' ἐκάστην τριετηρίδα.<sup>179</sup>

The words most intriguing to scholars have long been “ὠμοφάγιον ἐμβαλεῖν”. It recalls the ritual omophagy long associated with Dionysian mystery cults, but its only real mention is in this inscription and Euripides’ *Bacchae*.<sup>180</sup> As Henrichs notes, however, there is no reason to think

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid p. 149.

<sup>179</sup> LSAM 48. See Appendix 5 for English translation.

<sup>180</sup> Eur. Ba. 138.

omophagy was a maenadic practice. Rather, it was a characteristic of Dionysus, elsewhere attested as Dionysus Omestes.<sup>181</sup> It has been suggested that this mirrors the *sparagmos* seen in myth, where body parts are strewn about, thus the meet was scattered and sown like seeds.<sup>182</sup> Henrichs prefers to think of it as simply a sacrifice of raw meat to the god who eats such things.<sup>183</sup> Bremmer argues that this act was done inside the city or at least in public.<sup>184</sup> He is interpreting the phrase “ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως” to have a locative sense – that the ritual itself occurred in public – which certainly corresponds to the Alcmeonis inscription in which celebrations seemed to have started with a public procession.

Most fascinating for understanding the structure and integration of maenadic cults, however, is the other aspect present in the omophagion ritual: that nobody can do it before the priestess does it on behalf of the city. Fitting with this is the phrase “τ]ὰ δὲ τέλεστρα {καὶ τελεστ} παρέχ[ειν ταῖς] [γυναιξίν] ἐν τοῖς ὀργί[οις πᾶ]σιν”, particularly the τέλεστρα, likely refers to the “things needed for initiation.”<sup>185</sup> Finally, the last lines of the inscription, that women wishing to perform initiations, βούληται τελεῖν, not be initiated in a passive sense, shows that women were allowed to lead private *thiasoi* still. These specific regulations all show how the state cult allowed and regulated private *thiasoi*. Such *thiasoi* did exist, and rather than consider them to undermine the state cult, they were instead monetised. The state even provides the necessary implements. It seems that leading such a *thiasos* was in fact a popular pursuit for women. Payment was received every other year, and the fact that the city forbade anyone from performing the sacrifice before the official *thiasos* points toward the state trying to control the

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<sup>181</sup> Henrichs 1978 p. 150; Alcaeus FR. 129.

<sup>182</sup> Eur. Ba. 740-743; Halm-Tisserant 2004, pp. 119-142.

<sup>183</sup> Henrichs 1978 p. 151.

<sup>184</sup> Bremmer 1984 p. 275.

<sup>185</sup> Nilsson 1975 p. 7 note 9.

frequency of these rituals and potentially, given the cost of the rituals, the status of those leading the *thiasos*. No costs are mentioned for individuals being initiated or worshipping in the *thiasos*, though presumably individual leaders would pass down the cost from the flat fee they pay every two years. With provisions for technically unlimited *thiasos* membership and leadership, and the only restriction being time, it would seem that Dionysian mystery cults were quite popular in Miletus, and it would seem that the celebrations were taking place too often for state's liking.

This inscription is important to note in comparison to other sales of priesthoods. The cost to purchase a priesthood was regularly quite high, and the income expected back from it would not necessarily cover the purchase cost.<sup>186</sup> Sometimes, multiple people could buy and share the priesthood, dividing the purchase cost. People could even buy into a priesthood after it was already purchased, paying a fee to the original buyer.<sup>187</sup> Since priests had to be present whenever a sacrifice was held, they often had partners or even appointed a helper to manage such obligations.<sup>188</sup> The priestess of Dionysus Thylophoros had the option to appoint a sub-priestess, who had to be a citizen, and the two of them would have full monopoly on initiations.<sup>189</sup> In contrast, the cult at Miletus had no provision for a helper, instead anyone could lead a *thiasos* of their own, perhaps there was much more demand for such rituals at Miletus. Finally, it should be noted that the sale of priesthoods was often quite important for the maintenance of sanctuaries, temples, and shrines, and a fundamental part of the income of a city. Direct taxation and relying on the benevolence of the wealthy for maintaining a city's temples were no longer feasible in the Hellenistic period.<sup>190</sup> Furthermore, the sale of priesthoods and the increasing prevalence of

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<sup>186</sup> Sokolowski 1954 p. 159; Pafford 2013 p. 57.

<sup>187</sup> Sokolowski 1957 pp. 135-136.

<sup>188</sup> Sokolowski 1954 p. 159.

<sup>189</sup> Parker and Obbink 2000 p. 427; SIG 1012.

<sup>190</sup> Meier 2013, pp. 42, 44.



private cults shows a broader rise in individualism across the Hellenistic period.<sup>191</sup> It can be presumed that some amount of the revenue from Miletus went towards public works.

In general, the epigraphic evidence shows a number of interesting trends in the integration of Dionysian mystery cults into state religion. Generally, one *thiasos* is not enough, it is not a single group of women heading off into the mountain, but multiple groups that might celebrate independently. The rituals associated with these cults are consistent with earlier evidence, but seem to form a more cohesive picture. Not only did the trip to the mountain take place, but also processions and rituals in the streets were notable, so the celebrations were not strictly rural activities. Finally, these inscriptions show that leadership in such cults was also highly desirable, it could bring prestige after death and as the sale inscription from Miletus shows, specifically leading a *thiasos* was a desirable activity.

### Dionysian Mysteries in the Hellenistic Kingdoms

The primary concern of this paper is the reaction of Greek city states to Dionysian mystery cults, the challenges they supposedly present to such states, and how the states respond. The Hellenistic kingdoms represent a very different situation, and to analyze fully the role of Dionysian mystery cults the Hellenistic kingdoms would require an entire paper of its own. Some of the evidence from the Hellenistic kingdoms, however, is vital for our broader

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<sup>191</sup> Horster 2012 pp. 15-16.

understanding of Dionysian mystery cults, particularly when we examine the Ptolemaic dynasty.<sup>192</sup>

Macedon had some history with Dionysian mystery cults. Macedon was where Euripides was staying when he wrote the *Bacchae*. Alexander's mother Olympias is described as having a particular enthusiasm for maenadic rituals.<sup>193</sup> The story of a snake being present in her bed allowed for claims of Dionysian lineage for Alexander himself, and thus if the Ptolemies claimed Dionysus as their ancestor, they could legitimize their connection to the Argead dynasty.<sup>194</sup> Given the close association of Macedonian royalty with Dionysian cults, it is only natural that the Ptolemaic dynasty took advantage of the imagery and popularity of the mysteries to curate their image. The Ptolemies were still Macedonian, and the ruling class of Ptolemaic Egypt would be primarily Greek. Dionysian imagery was also suitable for royal use because Dionysus, like Alexander, is said to have conquered India. Therefore Dionysian imagery allows Ptolemaic rulers to leverage their connection with Alexander to cast as conquering heroes who provided sort of plenty and joy associated with the god of wine. Stories of Alexander's discovery of Nysa, Dionysus' mountain, furthered this connection.<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, as noted before, it is only natural to syncretize Dionysus with Osiris, and thus the Ptolemies could use this association to appeal to both the Greeks and Egyptians under their rule. The integration of Dionysian imagery into royal propoganda is most apparent in the procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus, who uses all sorts of Dionysian imagery in order to show "the conquering power bestowing riches and ease of life."<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> There is also evidence of Dionysian mystery cults at Pergamum, though much of this evidence postdates the Bacchanalia of Rome and is so highly integrated into the royal cult that it falls outside the scope of this paper. An excellent analysis of Dionysian worship being integrated into Hellenistic ruler cults of Egypt and Pergamum can be found in Burkert 1993 pp. 261-270.

<sup>193</sup> Plut. Alex. 2.

<sup>194</sup> Fraser 1972 p. 202.

<sup>195</sup> Arrian 5.1.1, Plut. Alex. 67.

<sup>196</sup> Burkert 1993 p. 263.

Particularly, he has three kinds of maenad present, the Mimallones, the Bassarai, and the Lydia, all appearing as stereotypical maenads.<sup>197</sup> Bassarai would become a common term for maenads, especially in Latin works, though it existed as early as Aeschylus. The primary distinguishing element seems to be that where Greek maenads wear fawn skins, Macedonian and Thracian ones wear fox skins. The Mimallones are attested to in a legend of the ancient king Argaeus, where they help defend against the Illyrians.<sup>198</sup> That the maenads are all called Macedonians, Μακέται, may indicate they were shipped from Macedonia similar to how the Theban maenads were sent to Magnesia.

Ptolemy Philopater furthered the connection between the royal family and Dionysian mystery cults, and would even act the part of priest of the Dionysian mysteries.<sup>199</sup> It is his edict against wandering priests of Dionysus that is most important to the current study, as it is more broadly relevant to the study of Dionysian mystery cults:

Βασ[ιλ]έως προστάξαντο[ς].

Τοὺς ξατὰ τὴν χώραν τελοῦντα[σ]

τῶι Διονύσῳι ξαταπλεῖν εἰς ' Αλεξάν-

δρειαν, τοὺς μὲν ἕως Ναυξράτε[ως] ἀ-

φ' ἧς ἡμέρας τὸ πρόσταγμα ἔχχεται

ἐν ἡμέραις ι, τοὺς δὲ ἐπάνω Ναυχράτε-

ως ἐν ἡμέραι[ς] χ, καὶ ἀπογράφεσθ[αι] πρὸ[σ]

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<sup>197</sup> Calilixenus FGrH 627 F 2 (Athen. 5.198E).

<sup>198</sup> Polyaeus 4.1.

<sup>199</sup> Plut. Cleom. 33; Moralia 60a.

Ἀριστόβουλον εἰς τὸ ξαταλογεῖον [ἀ]φ' ἧ[σ]  
ἂν ἡμέρας παραγένωνται ἐν ἡμ[έρ]αις  
τρισίν, διασαφεῖν δὲ εὐθέως καὶ π[α]ρὰ τί-  
νων παρειλήφασιν τὰ ἱερὰ ἕως γενε[ῶν] τρι-  
ῶν ξαὶ διδόναι τὸν ἱερὸν λόγον ἐ[σφ]ραγισ[μένον]  
ἐπιγράψαντα [[τὸ ὄνομα]] ἕχαστ[ον] τὸ ἀύ[το]ῦ  
ὄνομα.<sup>200</sup>

This edict clearly points to wandering priests of Dionysus still being quite common in the latter half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. That Ptolemy is concerned about them is also important. It is the clearest attempt to centralize and control Dionysian mystery cults and their rituals. It should be noted, however, that given how closely the Ptolemies associated themselves with Dionysus and his imagery, this edict is just as much an attempt to protect royal imagery and authority, to make sure that these popular cults remained inextricably tied to the royal family. The edict's restrictions on wandering priests bears importance for all the Mediterranean though. It shows that Dionysian initiators primarily worked with books, “τὸν ἱερὸν λόγον”, which once again raises the question of the melding of Orphism and Dionysian mystery cults. The Gurob papyri, containing important Orphic texts, were found in Egypt, indicating the existence of Orphism there. Given the maenadic imagery associated with the Ptolemies, however, it would seem once again that the Orphic and the Dionysian cannot be separated. Finally, the requirement to list who has passed down the books for three generations deserves some attention. The general trend was for

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<sup>200</sup> Schubart (1916/17) p. 189f. See Appendix 6 for English Translation.

itinerant charismatics to pass down their books through their family, though sometimes a charismatic's "father" could just be his teacher, with no blood relation.<sup>201</sup> A famous example of this is Thrasyllus, who made a fortune off books he received from a friend.<sup>202</sup> Zuntz notes, however, that the phrase ἕως γενεῶν τριῶν is a technical legal term, to be understood as three generations of familial relatives, so teachers and spiritual fathers would not be applicable.<sup>203</sup> Thus the edict would also reinforce the authority of established families who performed these initiations, most of which would be likely tied to specific locations and temples. Wandering priests would be excluded, and overall the edict would restrict leadership of these cults to the upper class. Yet again, it would seem, the leadership of Dionysian mystery cults is specifically regulated. As with the inscriptions from the Greek cities, we can assume that the leaders of the cults saw to the proper performance of rituals, but the strict details of how to perform rituals are rarely written down.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Burkert 1992 p. 43.

<sup>202</sup> Isocrates Or. 19.5, 45.

<sup>203</sup> Zuntz 1963 p 231.

<sup>204</sup> Henrichs 2003 p. 57.

# The Bacchanalia of Republican Rome

The situation for Dionysian mystery cults in Republican Rome is quite different. Unlike the classical and Hellenistic eras examined so far, we have both literary and epigraphical evidence, both regarding a single manifestation of the cult. Livy's account of the Bacchanalia and the surviving inscription of the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchinalibus* from Tiriolo are both rich sources, but nevertheless the truth of the event is obscured.<sup>205</sup> The *Senatus Consultum de Bacchinalibus* can only show the state's official reaction, and Livy's dramatic, often comedic narrative of the events can obscure the details of the whole event.

## Livy's Narrative

Livy's account of the suppression of the Roman Bacchanalia is nothing if not comprehensive. He spends 12 full chapters on the event, and it occupies the majority of his record for the year 186 BCE. It is a story of the morals of the Roman people being misaligned, with the humble former slave being an upstanding citizen and the elite of Roman society being morally depraved, and how the Senate acted to restore order.<sup>206</sup> Livy treated a similar situation earlier when he described how the forum was flooded by women, working class people, and soothsayers, who were performing all sorts of rites that were unfamiliar and foreign.<sup>207</sup> The grips of the Hannibalic war were causing people to turn to all sorts of itinerant priests, and Livy clearly shows this as the source of the superstitions:

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<sup>205</sup> ILS 18= *CIL* 1<sup>2</sup>.581. See appendices 8 and 9 for full Latin text and translation of the inscription of the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchinalibus*.

<sup>206</sup> Scafuro 2009 pp. 347-348;

<sup>207</sup> Livy 25.1.6-12.

sacrificuli ac vates ceperant hominum mentes, quorum numerum auxit rustica plebs, ex incultis diutino bello infestisque agris egestate et metu in urbem compulsa, et quaestus ex alieno errore facilis, quem velut concessae artis usu exercebant.<sup>208</sup>

These people, driven from the countryside, brought all of their superstitions with them, and were plying them like a technical skill, a craft, once again recalling the Derveni Papyrus. Here, like in the narrative regarding the Bacchanalia, concerned citizens are the ones who bring the matter to the attention of the Senate, which specially commissions the city praetor to suppress the practices which are implied to be more common among the upper classes.<sup>209</sup> The manner of suppression should be noted, however. The praetor confiscates the books of all the soothsayers and diviners, and bans any foreign sacrifices or rituals. Here it would seem itinerant charismatics are once again the primary concern for the state, and the Roman state targets them in a similar way to how Ptolemy IV did.

The narrative is also couched in the moral decline caused by the conquests of Roman generals in the east. Particularly, Livy targets the triumph of Cnaeus Manlius Vulso in 187 as the true turning point, ushering in a new era of wanton luxury and excess.<sup>210</sup> Yet what Livy casts as a decline into opulence began earlier. Tying together the nature of the Hannibalic war and the growing excesses of Rome in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries combine to present an interesting social situation for women. The long, difficult Hannibalic war had left many Roman women widowed, and they often had to tend the household on their own. Yet they were not exempt from the flood of wealth resulting from successes in the war, and the Lex Oppia was enacted to curtail displays of this wealth by the women. Livy's account of the debates surrounding the law, and its

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<sup>208</sup> Liv. 25.1.8

<sup>209</sup> Scheid 2016 p. 167.

<sup>210</sup> Liv. 39.6.6-9

repeal, make it clear that there were numerous concerns about the activities of women at the time, but that such concerns were not universal.<sup>211</sup> Perhaps most interesting is the argument put forward by Valerius who notes the social position of women in Rome:

non magistratus nec sacerdotia nec triumphi nec insignia nec dona aut spolia bellica iis contingere possunt; munditiae et ornatus et cultus, haec feminarum insignia sunt, his gaudent et glorientur, hunc mundum muliebrem appellarunt maiores nostri.<sup>212</sup>

Thus, with the law repealed, women once again had more personal wealth and freedom, which Valerius notes is one of the only ways women really can express themselves. These events all provide an important context to the later events of the Bacchanalia, as described by Livy.

Livy's account of the origins of the Bacchanalia is strange to say the least. Initially he notes that a nameless Greek is said to have brought the rites to Etruria, while stressing the nocturnal nature of his rituals.<sup>213</sup> This Greek individual is described in much the same terms as the soothsayers causing so much trouble in 213, a *sacrificulus et vates*. Yet no further mention is made of him. He even contradicts this account later, when Hispala says how it was Paculla Annia who innovated on the rites in all the most abhorrent ways, and particularly changed them from diurnal to nocturnal.<sup>214</sup> Another detail later recalls the influence of an itinerant priest, when Hispala describes how matrons in the cult would plunge torches into the Tiber and pull them out still lit.<sup>215</sup> Diodorus later describes a slave revolt that started with an itinerant priest who claimed to have many abilities, and would breath fire out of his mouth.<sup>216</sup> While these accounts postdate

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<sup>211</sup> Liv. 34.1-8

<sup>212</sup> Liv. 34.7.8-9. See Appendix 7 for English translation of all Livy passages quoted in this section.

<sup>213</sup> Liv. 39.8.3-5

<sup>214</sup> Liv. 39.13.9

<sup>215</sup> Liv. 39.13.12

<sup>216</sup> Diod. Sic. 34.2.6-7



the Bacchanalia, they show that Rome saw such things not as magic but as a way to trick those who do not know better. Both Livy and Diodorus make sure to describe the mechanics of such tricks, stressing that there is no divine power behind them but matters of chemistry and physics. In general, however, it would seem as if the phenomenon of itinerant charismatics plays little to no role in Livy's narrative.

There are also problems with Livy's account of how well known the Bacchanalia was. He casts it as spreading like a plague, and that the Roman Senate was completely unaware that it was going on until a young man, Aebutius, and his noble-hearted courtesan Hispala brought it to the attention of the Consul Postumius, who brought it before the Senate. Thus, the story can serve as an example of the speed and force with which the Roman state reacts to threats. The cult as described by Livy, however, could hardly have been unknown. Postumius himself acknowledges that the rites, or similar ones, have long existed in Italy, and that the clamour of the celebrations would certainly have been noticed.<sup>217</sup> Indeed, such cults had a long history in Magna Graecia, and that seems a likely vector from which the practice could have spread, especially given how the population of Italy flocked towards Rome during the Hannibalic War.<sup>218</sup> It could be that the issue was one of innovation, that the rites had long been known but had evolved into something malicious and secretive, using the dark and noise of their nocturnal celebrations to conceal all sorts of moral depravity, as Livy says. The plays of Plautus had long mocked both the morals and secrecy of the Bacchants. He regularly describes them as violent and secretive, and in his *Bacchides*, which may postdate the suppression of the Bacchanalia, he makes it clear that the shrine of Bacchantes is a dark place to be feared.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Liv. 39.15.6-7

<sup>218</sup> Gruen 1990 p. 49

<sup>219</sup> Pl. Aul. 3.1; Pl. Am. 2.2; Pl. Mil. 4.2; Pl. Bac. 1.1.

The clearest place in which Livy's narrative shows its theatrical origins is the method by which Postumius hears of the Bacchanalia. The entire character of Hispala and her relationship with Aebutius, though likely real as they are named in senatorial decrees, are clearly stock characters from comedy.<sup>220</sup> Walsh supposes that there was some drama about the Bacchanalia that had been passed down through annals in an attempt to make the story more interesting, and this is the account that Livy received.<sup>221</sup> New comedy and Livy's narrative regarding this period of Roman history are so inextricably tied to civic ideology that it is only natural that the two fit together so well.<sup>222</sup> Livy does, however, make a significant divergence from New Comedy, where Hispala's rewards are not gifts expected for her good character, but gifts granted by the Consul and the state.<sup>223</sup> Though focusing on individuals for much of the narrative, with the kinds of interpersonal relationships common in comedy, in the end it is the individuals' relationship with the state that matters the most.

### Morality and Administration of the Bacchanalia

While Livy's narrative shows clear influence from unhistorical sources, nevertheless it is important to not throw away the account wholesale. Since the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchinalibus* does in fact survive on the Tiriolo inscription, we can decipher some greater detail from the literary account. Ultimately, nothing about the *senatus consultum* itself is contradicted in Livy's account, in fact, Livy's account of the *consultum* itself is incredibly accurate. Rather it is the context and narrative around the Bacchanalia that seems out of place. The punishments in the decree do not seem to match the crimes in Livy's account.

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<sup>220</sup> Walsh 1996 p 197.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.* 201-202.

<sup>222</sup> Scafuro 2009 p. 322

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 348-351.

Livy's account presents primarily moral concerns from the beginning. Since his account is meant to show moral degeneracy, it is only natural that he should focus on such exaggerated deeds. Initially, it is the cult being open to both sexes, the introduction of feasting and wine, and the growing membership that leads to all sorts of licentiousness.<sup>224</sup> To this he adds numerous legitimate crimes, such as murders so foul that the bodies cannot be found and the forgery of wills and evidence, some of which was done by trickery and some by violence.<sup>225</sup> Hispala's account of the problems provides greater detail. The problems arose when the priestess of the cult, Paculla Annia, initiated men, starting with her sons, and allowed initiations to occur five nights per month instead of three nights per year.<sup>226</sup> There was homosexuality, rape, human sacrifice, and the cult would not accept anyone older than 20 years of age.<sup>227</sup> The Senate's reaction to these details is a little strange:

patres pavor ingens cepit, cum publico nomine, ne quid eae coniurationes coetusque nocturni fraudis occultae aut periculi importarent, tum privatim suorum cuiusque vicem, ne quis adfinis ei noxae esset.<sup>228</sup>

Their concern seems to be more that some kind of danger to the state develop out of these activities, though it is not yet a danger. The speech of Postumius develops this further:

quod ad multitudinem eorum attinet, si dixero multa milia hominum esse, ilico necesse est exterreamini, nisi adiunxero qui qualesque sint. primum igitur mulierum magna pars est, et is fons mali huiusce fuit; deinde simillimi feminis mares, stuprati et constupratores,

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<sup>224</sup> Liv. 39.8.5-6.

<sup>225</sup> Liv. 39.8.7-8.

<sup>226</sup> Liv. 39.13.9.

<sup>227</sup> Liv. 39.13.10-14.

<sup>228</sup> Liv. 39.14.4.

fanatici, vigiliis, vino, strepitibus clamoribusque nocturnis attoniti. nullas adhuc vires coniuratio, ceterum incrementum ingens virium habet, quod in dies plures fiunt.<sup>229</sup>

It echoes several of the accusations with which Livy began his account of the Bacchanalia, but also develops the idea that the cult's participants are numerous, but not yet numerous enough to be a proper threat. He goes on to echo several elements already mentioned, but focuses on the age limit for membership, noting how males admitted to the cult will be corrupted young and no longer be suitable soldiers.<sup>230</sup> Next, he most clearly states the threat the cult poses:

adhuc privatis noxiis, quia nondum ad rem publicam opprimendam satis virium est, coniuratio sese impia tenet. crescit et serpit cotidie malum. iam maius est quam ut capere id privata fortuna possit: ad summam rem publicam spectat. [4] nisi praecavetis, Quirites, iam huic diurnae, legitime ab consule vocatae, par nocturna contio esse poterit. nunc illi vos singuli universos contionantes timent: iam ubi vos dilapsi domos et in rura vestra eritis, illi coierint, consultabunt de sua salute simul ac vestra pernicie: tum singulis vobis universi timendi erunt.<sup>231</sup>

It is the cult presenting a united body that could grow powerful enough to challenge the state that is the primary concern. It should be noted, however, that Postumius still stresses that the cult is not at that point yet, but it has the potential to grow to such a position. His speech then ends with reference to the ways Rome has always protected its traditional religions, expelling itinerant priests and forbidding foreign rituals.<sup>232</sup> Thus the Bacchanalia presents a moral, religious, and political threat, but it is the political threat that is stressed above all other concerns.

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<sup>229</sup> Liv. 39.15.8-10.

<sup>230</sup> Liv. 39.15.13-16.

<sup>231</sup> Liv. 39.16.3-4.

<sup>232</sup> Liv. 39.16.8-9,

As for Livy's record of the actions taken, the leaders of the cult were imprisoned, among whom was the son of Paculla Annia, the priestess who was supposedly the source of all the corruption.<sup>233</sup> He is also further singled out for longer term imprisonment in Ardea, with special considerations to be taken that he not escape or commit suicide.<sup>234</sup> No more mention is made of the other leaders of the cult. Livy then notes that anyone who simply took the oath, but took no part in any depravity, was left imprisoned. All others were executed, and of those captured, most were killed.<sup>235</sup>

From here, however, his account begins to largely agree with the extant inscription of the *senatus consultum*.<sup>236</sup> No Bacchic shrines are allowed and no man, whether Roman citizen, Latin, or an ally can be a Bacchant. They can, however, seek an exception by appealing to the urban praetor and receiving a senatorial decree. Further, no man is allowed to be a priest (*sacerdos*), and no man or woman can be a magister. There can be no common fund or treasury, nobody can be a master, there can be no common oaths or agreements. None of the rites can be done in secret, and none can be done in public, private, or outside the city unless explicit permission has been given by the urban praetor and the Senate. Finally, no gathering can have more than two men and three women together, unless once again, permission is granted. To violate any of these rules results in capital punishment.

As is clear, no mention of moral concerns can be found. The age limit that was such a concern in Livy's account is not mentioned at all, nor is there any restriction on specific rituals or rites. Men and women are still allowed to worship together, despite it being one of the most

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<sup>233</sup> Liv. 39.17.6.

<sup>234</sup> Liv. 39.19.2.

<sup>235</sup> Liv. 39.18.3-4.

<sup>236</sup> Liv. 39.186-8; ILS 18= CIL 1<sup>2</sup>.581.

often-repeated issues with the cult in Livy's account. It should be noted that the process to obtain permission for a man to join the celebrations is arduous enough that few would have bothered, thus creating an implicit restriction. If the cult was such a den of debauchery as described in Livy's account, one would expect to find some mention at least of the murders and forgeries. These would be illegal anyway, and restating the fact murder and forgery is illegal would not be necessary in the *senatus consultum*. Of the restrictions we do find, they exclusively deal with membership and organization. The restriction to five individuals, however, would inherently stop any of the forged wills that Livy was concerned about, as a minimum of seven people would be legally required to create a will.<sup>237</sup>

The question thus becomes why the Bacchanals were suppressed so harshly, a move that was largely unprecedented. The most obvious answer would be the concern over religious matters, more specifically, the rejections of foreign rituals. Although Liber is not exactly a foreign deity to Rome, the insistence on referring to the deity of the Bacchanals as Bacchus, rather than the much more familiar Roman name of Liber, points to an effort to cast him as foreign. The Senate's decree, however, makes no mention of restricting the rites. As is written, a group of up to three women can go on celebrating exactly as they had been. Walsh argues that the reason the state suppressed the Bacchanalia so severely was a combination of the concern over public morality, particularly the corruption of young men, and the threat to the religious order posed by such a well administrated cult.<sup>238</sup> I think this argument is sound, and it echoes the restrictions placed on the cult of Magna Mater, which prohibited Roman citizens from becoming priests or celebrating the goddess in a Phrygian way.<sup>239</sup> Yet these observations do not fully

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<sup>237</sup> Bauman 1990 p. 342.

<sup>238</sup> Walsh 1996 pp. 200.

<sup>239</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.19.

explain why the Senate acted as it did. Gruen argues that the reason for the suppression of the Bacchanalia was largely an effort to assert the dominance of the Senate, that the Bacchanals actually posed no true threat, they were essentially a scapegoat, and that there was no conspiracy but that of the Senate to suppress the cult.<sup>240</sup> This suppression was thus an effort not only to assert senatorial control over its Italian allies, as the decree makes it clear that the Senate enforced it throughout Italy, but also to curb the growing Hellenism that was leading to the increased influence of individuals in Roman politics as a result of eastern conquests.<sup>241</sup> He also points out that the Senate's actions set a precedent for it to have increased power in legal matters, as the suppression of the Bacchanals did not follow the typical procedure.<sup>242</sup> I think the latter observation is likely correct, but deserves further elaboration.

Gruen states that it is hard to believe the cult would have posed a significant political threat.<sup>243</sup> This is true: when compared to the great personal influence wielded by triumphant generals, the Bacchanalia present no significant political threat. A case can be made, however, that they presented a similar, but lesser threat. As we discussed, the cult was initially led by a woman, Paculla Annia, and by all means it seems to have been a women's cult. The reasons women have for joining such a cult are varied, anything from personal fulfillment, to a change of pace from the societal restrictions placed upon women, even to some hope for a good afterlife. Kraemer supposes that the main function of Dionysian mystery cults was to vent frustrations, a point that likely holds true for many of the people who joined such cults.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Gruen 1990 p. 65.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 65, 69.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 42, 74.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.* p. 48.

<sup>244</sup> Kraemer 1979 p. 77.

It is important, however, to consider independently the benefits gained by leading such a cult. First, it offers women the rare opportunity to have a position of authority among their peers. There was a limited number of priestesses in the ancient world, and often such positions were held by a select few at the top of society. Consider once again the quote from Valerius above, women had limited opportunity for personal satisfaction in the ancient world.<sup>245</sup> To lead a Dionysian cult of their peers, and thus being in a position of authority over them while providing something of value to members, would give a woman something she rarely could find anywhere else in antiquity. If a society is not giving women the kinds of rewards and measures of self worth that they need, these women will seek other options, among which are Dionysian mystery cults.<sup>246</sup> Older women, childless women and widows are among the most attracted to these cults because they do not necessarily meet society's standard for social worth.<sup>247</sup> The Bacchanalia are essentially a social structure that Goff calls the "city of women," in parallel to the state, but comprised of women.<sup>248</sup> The complex administration of the cult as described by the *senatus consultum* presents a very advanced "city of women." These women need not be social outcasts either. It is clear that a significant proportion of the cult's membership was made up of Roman citizens. Matrons, respectable upper class citizen women, were among the most fanatical members of the cult.<sup>249</sup> Hispala clearly states that there were high ranking men and women among them.<sup>250</sup> The Senate fears that some of them or their families may be implicated in the cult.<sup>251</sup> Furthermore, the concern over young men being unsuitable to join the army means that

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<sup>245</sup> Liv. 34.7.8-9.

<sup>246</sup> Kraemer 1979 p. 73.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid. p. 74.

<sup>248</sup> Goff 2004 p 205.

<sup>249</sup> Liv. 39.13.12.

<sup>250</sup> Liv. 39.13.14.

<sup>251</sup> Liv. 39.14.4.



the young men in question would be citizens.<sup>252</sup> Dionysian cults that operated outside state control were not cults for the rich or poor exclusively. The god is Dionysus Isodaites, who gives his gifts to the rich and poor equally.<sup>253</sup> It seems likely the leaders of Dionysian cults would be citizens, not perhaps the societal elite, but certainly not at the bottom of the social ladder. Still, a “city of women” cannot truly threaten the state, because women simply lacked a sufficient a role in official matters.

An important aspect for the suppression of the Bacchanalia in Rome is that they were a mixed gender affair. Male citizens had access to a an alternate social structure that gave them authority, prestige and renown, but existed entirely outside the structures of the state. Similar to this are the Roman Collegia, but they were often restricted by locale or trade.<sup>254</sup> Bacchic cults in Rome had no such restrictions. Started by Paculla Annia, she eventually initiated her sons Minius and Herennius Cerrinius. When the Postumius began the arrests, the leaders of the cult were the plebs Marcus and Gaius Atinius, Lucius Opicernius, Minius Cerrinius. As Bauman points out, the Antinii were a family that had a decent record of service to the Roman state, but ultimately who sat “on the fringe of the nobility which fostered the interests of the underprivileged.”<sup>255</sup> Admitting people from all strata of society and hosting for them lavish feasts and celebrations to win popular support would not compare to the rich triumphs of military victors, but it serves a similar purpose.<sup>256</sup> As Seaford notes, it was “a focus of identity that transcended, and so threatened loyalty to, the existing structures of the Roman order.”<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Liv. 39.15.13.

<sup>253</sup> Eur. Ba. 421-423.

<sup>254</sup> North 2003 p. 212.

<sup>255</sup> Bauman 1990 p. 342.

<sup>256</sup> Liv. 39.8.5.

<sup>257</sup> Seaford 2006 pp. 60-61.

Gruen sees the suppression of the Bacchanalia as simply a matter of finding a scapegoat, that the entire affair was conjured up by the senate, and that the Bacchic cults were nothing more than a convenient target.<sup>258</sup> Gruen's use of the term scapegoat is somewhat dissonant with his own argument, as is his comparison vague comparison to later religious persecutions. If he argues that the Bacchanalia was a convenient target that allowed the senate to exert its authority. For them to be scapegoats, we would expect to find them cast as a target for wider societal woes, and that their beliefs and identity to have been more directly censured, rather than their organizational and administrative capabilities. Instead, I would say the Bacchanals had developed in such a way that was not an existential threat, but did undermine the standard paths through which one could advance one's social standing. They presented the same problem to the Roman Senate as the lavish triumphs of generals, but on a smaller scale. The Bacchanals could not give an individual enough personal influence to threaten the Senate in the same way that a general with a lavish Triumph might, but joining the cult could perhaps give someone just enough influence to punch above their weight in the political sphere, to gain what could be perceived as an unfair advantage as they climbed the *cursus honorum*. The suppression was not an act of scapegoating, since the state likely had legitimate concerns, but it certainly served to set an example for any future attempts to establish organizations that operated in parallel to but outside of accepted social structures.<sup>259</sup>

It should be noted that there were further suppressions of the Bacchanals, at least one of which targeted slaves.<sup>260</sup> These suppressions do not, however, imply that all the cults across

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<sup>258</sup> Gruen pp. 77-78.

<sup>259</sup> The suppression of the Bacchanals of course draws comparison to other Roman suppressions of Religion, namely the suppression of Isis cults and the suppression of Christianity. The differences in the nature of those deities, the manner of their worship and belief and the political context at time of their suppression limit their relevance for the current discussion.

<sup>260</sup> Liv. 39.41.6-7 ; Liv. 40.19.9-10.

Rome were expected to be completely centralized. These later Bacchic groups were likely simply other Dionysian mystery cults, and the suppression of slaves is common enough that Bacchic connections could simply have been a convenient excuse. There is no reason to assume Rome was cracking down on a cult that was unified across all of Italy, run by a centralized leadership, but rather that the state was suppressing a kind of Bacchic cult that had grown in Rome, and that perhaps had taken cues from the *collegia* that already existed. Dionysian mystery cults have always shown a high degree of regional variance, an observation that likely also held true even in Italy.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Henrichs 182 p. 153.

## Conclusion

By analyzing reactions to Dionysian mystery cults across the Mediterranean, some patterns quickly emerge. Most notably is that rarely if ever are there serious restrictions, much less prohibitions, on membership or practice. The closest we see are in the legal cases against certain women in Classical Athens. The nature of those cases, however, makes it impossible to say to what degree they were sentenced because of their religious transgressions, often there was much more going on than a simple case of impiety. Even then, there are often other circumstances that take a Dionysian mystery cult from acceptable to unacceptable. In general, any official actions regarding the cults pertain to leadership positions. In our record for Athens, women are only impugned for leading such cults, and there is no mention of participation as being taboo. To lead a Dionysian cult was to find a form of self-definition that the state otherwise strictly controlled. Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* shows how a woman's life can be defined by her roles in public state cult, which were often dominated by the affluent.<sup>262</sup> Membership in and especially leadership over a mystery cult granted an opportunity for women outside that system. When the cults were integrated into the state, we still see concessions made for greater numbers of participants. The popularity of the cult seems only ever to grow. Athens sends one *thiasos* to Delphi each year, but popular private ones occur in the city and do not face great censure. Magnesia receives three maenads from Thebes who form three *thiasoi*, and Miletus allows anyone to form their own *thiasos*.

Furthermore, Dionysian mystery cults cannot be easily defined. While Euripides' *Bacchae* presents the archetypal maenadic cult, no one instance of such a cult actually presents

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<sup>262</sup> Aristoph. *Lys.* 636-647.

all the same elements as the Maenads who killed Pentheus. Not every manifestation of the cult involved a wild dance on a mountain every two years, sometimes there was no mountain, sometimes the rituals came more often. It is even hard to delineate Orphism from other Dionysian mystery cults. From what we can tell in the sources, the itinerant charismatics who spread the cults often presented a hodgepodge of Dionysian mystic elements. Not all were true believers dedicated to strict tenets, some were simply plying a trade, as the Derveni Papyrus maligns. That Ptolemy IV felt the need to establish a central authority and approve the books spread by these wandering priests shows that Dionysian mystery cults did in fact diverge substantially from one another, and that individual initiative often lay at the center of such cults.

By the time the cults had reached the Roman Republic, there was evidence for how they usually developed in prior instances. The suppression of the Bacchanalia fits a pattern of wanting to restrict the leadership of such cults above all else, how the rituals and beliefs were never truly a concern, more often an excuse. The suppression of the Bacchanalia is an unprecedented event, but the manifestation of the cult in Rome fits with how it had manifested elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, the context under which the cult developed in Rome mirrors that of Athens quite heavily. Both states were in the midst of a long war when we first hear about Dionysian mystery cults, often from comedic writers more than anyone else. The state of war not only created circumstances for people to desire alternate forms of religion, but also circumstances for women to more often escape the seclusion of their house. Rome nevertheless was a different context for the cult as compared to Athens. The socio-political atmosphere of Rome in 186 BCE provided the state with ample motivation to crack down on the cult with such fervor.

We do not hear much more from the Dionysian cults of Rome until well into the Empire, and the only regulations that exist come from within the cult itself, as evidenced by an inscription from Physkos.<sup>263</sup> What we do see is a full manifestation of what had been developing in the Republic before it was suppressed. The *thiasos* of Agripinilla shows that the cult further developed a highly complex administrative hierarchy, that male membership became normal, that the sizes of the *thiasoi* grew, likely due to popularity.<sup>264</sup> At its head is still Agripinilla, a woman who is finding leadership and self-definition through Dionysian mysteries. Even if later aspects of Dionysian mystery cults were appropriated more for lavish parties than true religious experience, as is seen in the party of Messalina, it is still a form of self definition for a woman to be able to host a party like that.<sup>265</sup> That these cults remained popular throughout the ancient world, in various societies and cultures, shows that at their core they offered something valuable to people. Often the focus is on what these cults must have meant for all participants. By looking at how the cults were perceived, how they were criticized and how they were integrated, it seems that the individual who chose to take on leadership of these cults often lies at the center of all the discourse. Perhaps the threat of popular Dionysian mystery cults is not a complete inversion and destruction of the state, but rather the circumvention of the state.

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<sup>263</sup> LSCG 181.

<sup>264</sup> IGUR 160.

<sup>265</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 11.31.10; Fernández notes that Messalina's party, although primarily performative, shows an influence of legitimate maenadic ritual, Fernández 2013 pp. 189-191.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Translation of Pausanias *Description of Greece* 10.4.3

The former passage, in which Homer speaks of the beautiful dancing-floors of Panopeus, I could not understand until I was taught by the women whom the Athenians call Thyiads. The Thyiads are Attic women, who with the Delphian women go to Parnassus every other year and celebrate orgies in honor of Dionysus. It is the custom for these Thyiads to hold dances at places, including Panopeus, along the road from Athens. The epithet Homer applies to Panopeus is thought to refer to the dance of the Thyiads.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Translated by W. H. S. Jones, 1918.

Appendix 2: Translation of Demosthenes *On the Crown* 259-260

On arriving at manhood you assisted your mother in her initiations,<sup>1</sup> reading the service-book while she performed the ritual, and helping generally with the paraphernalia. At night it was your duty to mix the libations, to clothe the catechumens in fawn-skins, to wash their bodies, to scour them with the loam and the bran, and, when their lustration was duly performed, to set them on their legs, and give out the hymn:

Here I leave my sins behind,

Here the better way I find; and it was your pride that no one ever emitted that holy ululation so powerfully as yourself. I can well believe it! When you hear the stentorian tones of the orator, can you doubt that the ejaculations of the acolyte were simply magnificent?

In day-time you marshalled your gallant throng of bacchanals through the public streets, their heads garlanded with fennel and white poplar; and, as you went, you squeezed the fat-cheeked snakes, or brandished them above your head, now shouting your *Euoi Saboi!* now footing it to the measure of *Hyes Attes! Attes Hyes!*—saluted by all the old women with such proud titles as *Master of the Ceremonies, Fugleman, Ivy-bearer, Fan-carrier;* and at last receiving your recompense of *tipsy-cakes, and cracknels, and currant-buns.* With such rewards who would not rejoice greatly, and account himself the favorite of fortune?<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Translated by C. A. Vince, 1926.

Appendix 3: Translation of IMagn. 215, and inscription detailing the foundation of Dionysian thiasoi in Magnesia.

Go to the holy plain of Thebes to fetch maenads from the race of Cadmean Ino. They will bring you maenadic rites and noble customs and will establish troops of Bacchus in your city.

“In accordance with the oracle, and through the agency of the envoys, three maenads were brought from Thebes: Cosco, Baubo and Thettale. And Cosco organized the *thiasos* named after the plane tree, Baubo the *thiasos* outside the city, and Thettale the *thiasos* named after Cataebates. After their death they were buried by the Magnesians, and Cosco lies buried in the area called the Hillock of Cosco, Baubo in the area called Tabarnis, and Thettale near the theatre.”<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Translated by Albert Henrichs in Lefkowitz and Fant , p. 274 no. 386.

Appendix 4: Translation of the Epitaph of Alcmeonis, Priestess of Dionysus From Miletus.

Bacchae of the City, say “Farewell you holy priestess.” This is what a good woman deserves. She led you to the mountain and carried all the sacred objects and implements, marching in procession before the whole city. Should some stranger ask for her name: Alcmeonis, daughter of Rhodius, who knew her share of the blessings.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Translated by Henrichs, 1978 pp. 148.

Appendix 5: Translation of LSAM 48, inscription detailing the sale of a priesthood of Dionysos on Miletus.

Whenever the priestess performs the holy rites on behalf of the city..., it is not permitted for anyone to throw the pieces of raw meat [anywhere], before the priestess has thrown them on behalf of the city, nor is it permitted for anyone to assemble a band of maenads [thiasos] before the public thiasos [has been assembled]...

...to provide [for the women] the implements for initiation in all the orgies...

And whenever a woman wishes to perform an initiation for Dionysus Bacchius in the city, in the countryside, or on the islands, she must pay a piece of gold to the priestess at each biennial celebration.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Translated by Albert Henrichs, in Lefkowitz and Fant pp. 273-274 no. 384.

## Appendix 6: Translation of the Edict of Ptolemy Philopater

By the king's decree: Let those throughout the land who perform initiations into the mysteries of Dionysos sailed down to Alexandria, those as far as Naukratis within 10 days from the day that the decree is posted, those further inland than Naukratis within 20 days, and let them register themselves with Aristoboulos at the record office, within three days from the day they arrive, and declare at once from who they have received the rites as far back as three generations, and submit their sacred text [hieros logos], sealed, having inscribed each his own name<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Translated by David Martinez 2015, p. 133.

Appendix 7: Translations of excerpts from Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*

No offices, no priesthoods, no triumphs, no decorations, no gifts, no spoils of war can come to them; elegance of appearance, adornment, apparel —these are the woman's badges of honour; in these they rejoice and take delight; these our ancestors called the woman's world. What else do they lay aside in times of mourning than purple and jewellery? (Livy 34.7.8-9)<sup>272</sup>

Great panic seized the Fathers, both on the public account, lest these conspiracies and gatherings by night might produce something of hidden treachery or danger, and privately, each for himself, lest anyone might be involved in the mischief. The senate, moreover, decreed that the consul should be thanked because he had investigated the affair both with great industry and without creating any confusion. (Liv. 39.14.4)

As regards their number, if I shall say that there are many thousands of them, it cannot but be that you are terrified, unless I shall at once add to that who and of what sort they are. First, then, a great part of them are women, and they are the source of this mischief; then there are men very like the women, debauched and debauchers, fanatical, with senses dulled by wakefulness, wine, noise and shouts at night. The conspiracy thus far has no strength, but it has an immense source of strength in that they grow more numerous day by day. (Liv. 39.15.8-10)

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<sup>272</sup> All passages of Livy in this section are from Evan T Sage's translations, 1935-1936.

Not yet have they revealed all the crimes to which they have conspired. Their impious compact still limits itself to private crimes, since as yet it does not have strength enough to crush the state. Daily the evil grows and creeps abroad. It is already too great to be purely a private matter: its objective is the control of the state. [4] Unless you are on guard betimes, citizens, as we hold this meeting in the day-time, summoned by a consul, in accordance with law, so there can be one held at night. Now, as single individuals, they stand in fear of you, gathered here all together in this assembly: presently, when you have scattered to your homes and farms, they will have come together and they will take measures [p. 265]for their own safety and at the same time for your<sup>1</sup> destruction: then you, as isolated individuals, will have to fear them as a united body. Therefore each one of you should hope that all your friends have been endowed with sound minds.

(Liv. 39.16.3-4)



Appendix 8: Text of the Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus, CIL 12.581

[Q.] Marcius L. f., S(p.) Postumius L. f. cos. senatum consoluerunt n(onis) Octob. apud aedem | Duelonai.

Sc(ribendo) arf(uerunt) M.Claudi(us) M. f., L. Valeri(us) P. f., Q. Minuci(us) C. f.

De Bacanalibus quei foederatei | esent, ita exdeicendum censuere :

Neiquis eorum Bacanal habuisse uelet ; sei ques | esent, quei sibi deicerent necesus esse Bacanal habere, eis utei ad pr(aitorem) urbanum | Romam uenirent, deque eis rebus, ubi eorum uerba audita esent, utei senatus | noster decerneret, dum ne minus senatoribus C adesent [quom e]a res cosoleretur. |

Bacas uir nequis adiese uelet ceius Romanus neue nominis Latini neue socium | quisquam, nisei pr(aitorem) urbanum adiesent, isque [d]e senatuos sententiad, dum ne | minus senatoribus C adesent quom ea res cosoloretur, iouisent.

Ce[n]suere.

Sacerdos nequis uir eset ; magister neque uir neque mulier quisquam eset. | Neue pecuniam quisquam eorum comoine[m h]abuisse ue[l]et ; neue magistratum, | neue pro magistratud, neque uirum [neque mul]ierem quiquam fecisse uelet. | Neue post hac inter sed conioura[se neu]e comuouisse neue conspondisse | neue conpromessisse uelet, neue quisquam fidem inter sed dedisse uelet. | Sacra in oquoltod ne quisquam fecisse uelet ; neue in poplicod neue in | preiuatod neue exstrad urbem sacra quisquam fecisse uelet, nisei | pr(aitorem) urbanum adieset, isque de senatuos sententiad, dum ne minus | senatoribus C adesent quom ea res cosoleretur, iouisent.

Censuere. |

Homines plous V oinuorsei uirei atque mulieres sacra ne quisquam | fecise uelet, neue  
inter ibei uirei plous duobus, mulieribus plous tribus | arfuisse uelent, nisei de pr(aitoris)  
urbani senatuosque sententiad, utei suprad | scriptum est.

Haice utei in couentionid exdeicatis ne minus trinum | noundinum, senatuosque  
sententiam utei scientes esetis, – eorum | sententia ita fuit : ‘ sei ques esent, quei  
aruorsum ead fecisent, quam suprad | scriptum est, eis rem caputalem faciendam  
censuere ’ – atque utei | hoce in tabolam ahenam inceideretis, ita senatus aikuom censuit,  
| uteique eam figier ioubeatis, ubei facilumed gnoscier potisit ; atque | utei ea Bacanalia,  
sei qua sunt, exstrad quam sei quid ibei sacri est, | ita utei suprad scriptum est, in diebus  
X, quibus uobeis tabelai datai | erunt, faciatis utei dismota sient.

IN AGRO TEURANO.

Appendix 9: Translation of the Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus, CIL 12.581

The consuls Quintus Marcius, son of Lucius, and Spurius Postumius, son of Lucius, consulted the Senate on October 7 in the Temple of Bellona.

Marcus Claudius, son of Marcus, Lucius Valerius, son of Publius, and Quintus Minucius, son of Gaius, assisted in drafting the decree.

Regarding the Bacchanalia the senators proposed to issue a decree as follows to those who are allied with us :

"No one of them shall have a place devoted to the worship of Bacchus : and if there are any who say that they have a need for such a place, they shall appear in Rome before the urban praetor ; and when the pleas of these men have been heard, our Senate shall make a decision regarding these matters, provided that not less than 100 senators are present when the matter is discussed. No Roman citizen or man of Latin rights or anyone of the allies shall associate with the Bacchae, unless they have appeared before the urban praetor and he has given permission, in accordance with the opinion of the Senate, delivered while not less than 100 senators were present when the matter was discussed."

The proposal passed.

"No man shall be priest of, nor shall any man or woman be master of, such an organization ; nor shall anyone of them have a common fund ; nor shall anyone appoint any man or woman to be master of such an organization or to act as master ; nor hereafter shall anyone take common oath with them, shall make common vows, shall make stipulations with them, nor shall anyone give them surety or shall take surety from them. No one shall perform their rites in secret ; nor shall anyone perform their rites in public,

in private, or outside the city, unless he has appeared before the urban praetor and he has given permission, in accordance with the opinion of the Senate, delivered while not less than 100 senators were present when the matter was discussed."

The proposal passed.

"No one in a company of more than five persons altogether, men and women, shall perform such rites ; nor in that company shall more than two men or three women be present, unless it is in accordance with the opinion of the urban praetor and the Senate, as has been written above."

You shall publish these decrees in public assembly for not less than three market days, that you may know the opinion of the Senate. For the opinion of the senators is as follows : "If there are any persons who act contrary to what has been written above, it is our opinion that a proceeding for a capital offense must be made against them" ; and you shall inscribe this on a bronze tablet, for thus the Senate voted was proper ; and you shall order it to be posted where it can be read most easily ; and, as has been written above, you shall provide within ten days after these tablets have been delivered to you that those places devoted to the worship of Bacchus shall be dismantled, if there are any such, except in case something sacred is concerned in the matter.

To be dispatched to the Ager Teuranus.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Translated by Johnson et al., 1961, pp. 26-27, no. 28.