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New Evidence for the Dionysiac Mysteries.

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In two previous papers I have treated the Dionysiac mysteries in the Roman age.¹ The reason why I come back to this subject is a recently published inscription from Smyrna which gives valuable information concerning the contents of the mysteries and is the more valuable as it comes from a Greek city.² When HEBERDEY copied it the stone was in a private collection at Smyrna; it is now in the museum at Leiden. The inscription is written in good letters of the second century A. D. and is composed in hexameters. It was set up by a man whose name is lost except the ending -της, son of Menandros. He styles himself *θεογράφης*. We come back to this title below (p. 32). The editor suggests (p. 18) that the inscription comes from the sanctuary of Dionysos Breïseus which was situated outside the town, for we know that mysteries were attached to this old cult in the Roman age.³ This is possible, not more.

¹ Dionysos Liknites, Bull. de la Société des lettres, Lund, 1950, 51, No. 1, and especially The Bacchic Mysteries of the Roman Age, Harvard Theological Review, XLVI, 1953, pp. 177 ff.

² J. KEN, Inschriften aus Smyrna, Anzeiger d. österreich. Akad. Wien, 89, 1953, pp. 10 ff. No. 1.

³ See my Gesch. d. griech. Religion II, p. 311. This was an association of actors who called themselves mystae. There was another mystery cult at Smyrna: *οἱ τοῦ θεοτέτοτος θεοῦ Διονύσου Κορηέων ἀσχηρόων μύσται*, Österr. Jahresh. xviii, 1920, Beibl. p. 205. Suppl. epigr. Graecum, iv, 522. The word is peculiar: *ἀσχος* is a coarse cloth of hair, esp. goats' hair, a garment or sack made of such cloth. Perhaps it may be mentioned that the goat is especially connected with Dionysos.

After the preamble the text begins prescribing the periods of time which must elapse before anyone who has contracted an impurity is allowed to enter the sanctuary of the god, here called *Bromios*. The first of these prescriptions is remarkable and unique: if anyone has exposed a child, the time prescribed is forty days, the longest period ever mentioned and as long as that prescribed for a woman who has miscarried (v. 5). The editor asks (p. 18 n. 4) if this is due to a condemnation of this usage which was common in ancient times. One may also refer to the increasing love of children in the Roman age, but I think that there is a more special reason. Small children, even babies, were in this age initiated into the Bacchic mysteries.⁴ Whoever exposed a child deprived it of the boon of a happy afterlife, promised even to children by the Dionysiac mysteries. Perhaps the crime of the Titans against the child Dionysos (cf. below p. 32) lurks in the background. The following lines, vv. 6-9, prescribe the usual periods for anyone who has come into contact with a death in his family, the third part of a month, or elsewhere, three days.

The editor makes the pertinent remark (p. 19) that the periods usually prescribed after sexual intercourse are missing. This is perhaps not accidental. The pleasures of Aphrodite were not absent from the happy afterlife promised to the Bacchic mystae and they may not have been averse to them in this life.

The most interesting part of this inscription is the following lines which contain certain prescriptions especially referring to the mystery cult. It is a pity that precisely these lines are mutilated at the end, but the sense is clear in most of them. The editor rightly mentions Orphic influence, but there is also a Pythagorean influence. Pythagoreanism and Orphism went together in this age.

⁴ See my Bacchic mysteries, pp. 179 f. I take the opportunity of calling attention to a monument, recently published, a relief at Bologna said to have been found at Alexandria, K. SCHAEFERHOFF, Arch. Jahrb. lxxviii, 1953, p. 79, with fig. 23. A boy, whose age, according to the inscription, was three years and two months, is lying on a couch holding a thyrsos and a kantharos. This suggests the happy afterlife promised to the mystae of Bacchus, and it is reasonable to think that the boy had been initiated into these mysteries before he died.

The first of these prescriptions, v. 11, not to approach the altars of the god in black clothes (*μελανφάρους*) needs no comment. Black was the colour of sorrow and the mysteries ought to be a joyous feast.

V. 11. *μηδ' ἀθέτοις θυσίαις ἔρῳ ἐπὶ χίτου ἰάλλειν*. The editor's supplement seems certain because of the allusion to a Homeric phrase. This line and the following give prescriptions for the sacred meal. Sacred meals were parts of other mysteries too¹, e. g. those of Mithras. It may be surmised that they were not much more than a plentiful dinner to the mystae of Bacchus who were fond of the pleasures of life. The prescriptions seem to aim at preventing such a desacralization. The word *ἀθετος* may signify either «what has not been sacrificed» or «what is not allowed to be sacrificed». If the former sense is preferred it is forbidden to begin the meal until the dishes have been sacrificed, i. e. devoted to the god, sacralized. If the latter sense is preferable, the sentence refers to the following prohibitions of certain food stuffs.² In every case the sacred character of the meal is stressed against misuses which might be feared. The interesting result is that our knowledge of the Dionysiac mysteries is enriched by the fact that they comprised a sacral meal.

In line 12, *μηδ' ἐν Βακχείαις ὄον ποτὶ δαῖτα τ[ίθεσθαι]*, the mysteries are called Baccheia and the meal is expressly mentioned. It is forbidden to serve an egg at the sacred meal. Eggs are mentioned among the food prohibited by the Pythagoreans,³ but this prohibition has a deeper ground in Orphic doctrine. The

¹ Cf. CUMONT, *Gaïonas, le δειπνοκορτής*, *Compte-rendu de l'Acad. des inscriptions*, 1917, pp. 275 ff.

² Cf. the Pythagorean prescription: *Θυσίμων χορὴ ἐσθίειν μόνον*, Aristotle in Jamblichus, *vita Pythag.* 85.

³ In the review of the Pythagorean prohibitions in Diogenes Laertius, viii. 32, together with certain fish, animals which lay eggs, beans. Also in the scholion on the *Halos* to Lucianus, dial. mer. vii. 4, published by ROHDE, *Rhein. Mus.* xxv. 1870, pp. 558 ff. (p. 279, 24 RANZ; reprinted by DEUNER, *Attische Feste*, p. 61, n. 5). It concerns a women's festival localized in Eleusis, but the origin is certainly Pythagorean. Plenty of food is served except such as is prohibited by the mystics (*ἐν τῷ μυστικῷ*): pomegranates, apples, fowl, eggs, and certain fish.

Bacchic mysteries had taken over the cosmic egg from Orphism and it was sacred to them because, as Plutarch says, it was an imitation of that which produces and in itself encloses all.¹ As it was highly venerated by the mystae of Dionysos it ought not to be served and eaten, although it was otherwise a common and well-liked food.

The following three lines refer to Pythagorean customs. L. 13, *καὶ καρδίην καρποῶν ἑρσοῖς βωμοῖς . . .* A negative word must be supplemented, e. g. *ἀλέασθαι*. *καρποῶν* signifies «burn».² A much quoted Pythagorean sentence forbade eating the heart,³ much less ought it to be offered to the god himself. One may perhaps be reminded of the myth that Athena saved the heart of the Dionysos child and brought it to Zeus.

Vv. 14 ff. *ἡδὲ ὁσμοῦ τ' ἀπέχεσθαι, δν ΜΗ'*
ἐχθροτάτην ὀίζαν κοάμων ἐκ σπυ

To try and supplement these verses is of no use. The supplement of the editor *σπέ[ρματος]* is very dubious. He takes the two verses to form one sentence but even this may be doubted. He takes the word *ὁσμός* to signify «smell» (p. 26) and says that he does not understand its reference. Nor did I, until Professor WIFSTRAND helped me and sagaciously solved the riddle. The word is extremely rare and never recorded in the significance of «smell». It occurs only once in an addendum to the *Herbarium* of Dioscurides.⁴ It is said to designate the same plant as *μήδιον*. As this is a leguminous plant like the bean, it is understandable that this too was prohibited by the Pythagoreans. The phrase «the most odious root of the beans» is, according to Professor WIFSTRAND, only a poetical metaphrasis, and this seems to be right.

¹ See my *Bacchic Mysteries*, pp. 189 ff.

² P. STENGEL, *Opferbräuche der Griechen*, pp. 110 ff.

³ See F. BOEHM, *De symbolis Pythagoreis*, Diss. Berlin 1905, pp. 23 f. with references.

⁴ Dioscurides, II § 147; in the latest edition by WELLMANN I, p. 213, is conjectured *ὁσμηρός*. This will be the reason why the word is left out in the latest edition of LIDDELL and SCOTT. Our inscription proves that the conjecture is erroneous.

What is left of 1.16, *Τετάρων προλέγειν μύσταις* — — —, is clear, although the end is missing. Something is to be expounded to the mystae about the Titans. This cannot be anything but their crime against the child Dionysos. It is extremely important to know that this main myth of Orphism was taken over by the Dionysiac mysteries in the Roman age, although, of course, we are not entitled to conclude that it was part of them everywhere. This lends some colour to the information that dances performed by Titans, Corybants, Satyrs, and Boukoloi were popular in Asia Minor.¹

The lines 17 and 18, *καὶ καλύμνισι χροττεῖν οὐ θύο[μιν] — — —*, *ἤμασι σὺ μύσται θεοῖ — — —*, seem less important. It is forbidden to use reeds as castanets, which happened sometimes.² The mystae had to use other instruments of a similar kind. On the great painting in Villa Igem a nude dancing girl clashes cymbals over her head. Only a few letters are left of the last line. We cannot tell whether the inscription continued or not.

The discussion of the title *θεοφάντης*, which the priest who set up the inscription gives to himself, was deferred until now. This word and others like it are well known.³ *ἱεροφάντης* is the oldest of them. It designated the highest functionary of the Eleusinian mysteries, who showed the *ἱερά*, the holy things, and was the leader of the mysteries. Accordingly the words *ὀρχιοφάντης*, *τελευσιφάντης* were coined. The concrete significance is a little obscured in these words, for the orgia are not objects. The *ὀρχιοφάντης* is the man who performs the rites of the orgia. The word *σεβαστοφάντης*, which was coined in the so-called mysteries devoted to the emperor in the Roman age, can be understood as meaning that he showed an image of the emperor to the mystae, and the word *θεοφάντης* likewise; this would mean that this man showed an image of the god, i. e. Dionysos.

I think that this is hardly likely. We do not hear of any such ceremony in these mysteries, but, having regard to our scanty knowledge of them, this is not decisive. However, I am inclined

¹ Lucianus, de salt., 79, cp. my *Gesch. d. griech. Religion* II, p. 341.

² Schol. Aristoph. Nubes, v. 260, quoted by the author l. c. p. 29, n. 7.

³ Quoted by KERN, l. c. p. 18, n. 3.

to suggest that the *θεοφάντης* as well as the *σεβαστοφάντης* showed the power of the god Dionysos or the emperor respectively praising them, their power and their deeds in words. We know the *ἐμνοδοί* in the cult of the emperor in Asia Minor, associations of prominent men who sang hymns in the honour of the emperor. As to Dionysos we read in the Orphic hymnbook, which certainly emanated from some mystery cult, probably at Pergamon, ten hymns to Dionysos, more than to any other god.⁴ In the mysteries of Dionysos Kathegemon at Pergamon a *ἐμνοδοδιάσχαλος* appears. Such hymns were a constant element of the cults of this age. The part of the *θεοφάντης* was that of a *θεολόγος*, as these are called who preach the god's virtues.⁵

The explanation of the title *θεοφάντης* may be, says KERN (p. 18 n. 3), that the god has to announce himself, but that it is not certain if we are allowed to conclude from the title that the priest appeared in the role of the god and announced something to the mystae in sacred ceremonies. In certain Bacchic associations, at least in that of the Iobacchi in Athens, the members played the role of some gods;⁶ we may also remember the Bacchic dances which were very popular in Asia Minor.

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There is an unpublished relief in the Carl Milles collection at Lidingö near Stockholm (Fig. 1) which may lend some colour to this suggestion. I owe the photograph and an exact description to Dr A. ANDRÉN, sometime keeper of this collection.⁷ »A marble plaque, breadth 35.5 cm., height 46 cm. The main figure has naked feet and is clad in a chiton reaching down to the feet with half-length sleeves; over this he wears a himation which is fastened on the left shoulder and round the waist a broad girdle;

⁴ Cf. my *Gesch. d. griech. Religion*, II, pp. 347 and 411; see also my *Dionysos Liknites*, pp. 11 f. and 14.

⁵ See my *Gesch. d. griech. Religion* II, pp. 362 f. In the mysteries of Demeter at Smyrna two sisters are mentioned as *θεολόγοι*, *ibid.* p. 410.

⁶ See *ibid.* II, p. 346.

⁷ Cf. his *Guide to the Collection of ancient Sculptures*, Stockholm 1932, No. 74.



Fig. 1. Relief in the Carl Milles Collection.

the head and the forepaws hang down on the breast. His hair and beard are stylized in archaic fashion, long, spiral-form locks hang down on the back and the shoulders and shorter ones on the forehead; around the head is a diadem. The lowered left hand holds a cluster of grapes, the right a horn from which a libation

is poured on the altar before him. The altar is square and profiled at the top and the bottom and decorated with a garland. A heap of round fruits is laid on the top of it and on this the head of a goat with long, curved horns, striated transversally.¹ At the corner of the altar stands the base of a much smaller figure of Priapus. The lower part of the figure is formed as a tapering square pillar or herm without feet, the upper part as a naked man, ithyphallic and with a bearded head, it wears a head gear similar to a tutulus and on the shoulders a hide or mantle which hangs down over the arms and is knotted on the breast. The figure holds in its raised right hand a cornucopia and in the lowered left hand an object which on close consideration is not to be taken for a *pedum*² but for a gardener's knife of the type which is seen e. g. on the Antinoos relief³ and on two reliefs in the Vatican, representing shops where knives are made or sold.⁴ Similar knives are still used in Italy today. Behind Dionysos (or his priest) is a palm tree and behind the figure of Priapus a tree of another kind. The phallus of Priapus is broken off, so also a bit of the left arm of the main figure, this part is, however, stuck on again with gypsum. Traces of the drill in the fruits, the garland, the cornucopia, the tree, and the grape cluster as well as the archaic type of Dionysos seem to date the relief in the second century A. D.⁵

At the first glance one would say that Dionysos is represented sacrificing to Priapus, but there are very serious objections to such an interpretation. Miss SIMON has given the title «Opfernde Götter» to an interesting book⁶; it is misleading, for it suggests a god offering a sacrifice to some other god. In fact such a god

¹ ZANCANI MONTUORI (quoted below p. 36, n. 5) explains the curved object, seen on the burning altar on some vase pictures (her figs 6, 7 and 8), which generally is taken to be the tail of the sacrificed animal, as a goat's horn. The Keraton at Delos and the altar at Dieros prove that special attention was paid to goats' horns at the sacrifice, but, as far as I know, they were not nailed up like the bucrania.

² As I have done in my Guide, I. c. (ANDRÉN).

³ DUCATI, L'arte in Roma dalle origini al secolo VIII, Tav. CXXXV (ANDRÉN).

⁴ H. E. PAULI, Das Leben im alten Rom, pl. lix (ANDRÉN).

⁵ ERIKA SIMON, Opfernde Götter, 1953.

is never represented; the gods of the vase paintings which she treats pour out libations holding a phiale in their hands. They are not comparable to our relief. The book ought to have been called *«Spendende Götter in der attischen Vasenmalerei»*. Two examples seem to be more relevant, showing other sacrificial implements than the phialae. A Hellenistic relief represents Artemis Iapriaxis, carrying a sacrificial basket and kindling the fire on the altar with a torch¹ but here too there is no god who receives the sacrifice. The vase painting which shows Themis with a sacrificial basket and a torch before Bendis is allegorical; it is right to venerate the newly introduced goddess Bendis;² that a god should sacrifice to another god implies a contradiction. The Greeks felt so. When Alexander the Great offered to the Ephesians to dedicate the temple of Artemis, they answered that it was not becoming for a god to make offerings to another god.³ If then it is impossible to take the said representations as sacrifices in the common sense of offerings brought to a god, another explanation must be found. In certain cases the representations are similar to a libation at a farwell or a banquet, but this is not a sufficient explanation for the scenes quoted. Vase paintings sometimes represent statues of gods with phialae in their hands.⁴ It cannot be meant that the statues are pouring out libations, likewise a cup or a kantharos is the common attribute of the gods on the votive tablets from Locri in South Italy. The gods are standing or seated, sometimes a sacrifice is brought to them;⁵

¹ *Figured Arch. Jahrb.*, xl, 1925, p. 211, fig. 1.

² V. JENSENWEIG, *Die Rechtsidee im frühen Griechentum*, 1921, pl. to p. 32, better C. WATZINGER, *Griech. Vasen in Tübingen*, 1924, pl. 40. Cf. my *Griech. d. Griech. Religion* I, p. 71 n. 1, and ed. p. 80 n. 9.

³ Strabo, xiv, p. 691. It does not matter if the anecdote is historical or not, it shows what the Greeks thought.

⁴ A vase picture recently published by E. BUCCHEREAU, *Zur griech. Vasenmalerei des 6. bis 4. Jhdts.*, 1952, pl. xxvii, shows a woman between two thyrsifera holding a phiale in each hand.

⁵ See e.g. the tablet published by E. VORA ZANCAVI, *Mostrovo, Tabella fidei huius con seculo del culto*, Rivista del R. Istituto di archeologia e storia dell' arte, vii, 1900, pp. 200 ff., pl. 1 (reconstruction), figs. 2 and 4. More in Q. GRACIARU, *Rilievi votivi arcaici in terracotta di Lokroi Epizephyriai*, *Annuaire* iii, 1906, pp. 130 ff., figs. 29, 31, 32, 33, 47, 50.

They cannot possibly be sacrificing or pouring out libations. One is reminded of the words of Aristophanes that when we pray to the gods for something good their statues stand stretching out the hand upturned, not as to give anything but to get something.¹ I think that the most common act by which veneration was paid to a god was transferred to the representations of the gods themselves in order to show their divine nature. The god's attitude is, so to speak, a projection of the worshipper's attitude.

The idea of the great god Dionysos sacrificing to Priapus seems to me to be really too strange to be accepted. If this seemingly obvious interpretation is rejected it must needs be supposed that the majestic figure is the priest who has donned the attire of the god. We remember that in certain Bacchic associations members of these appeared in the roles of certain gods; even Dionysos himself is mentioned among these in the statutes of the Iobachai. There are a few instances in which a woman appears in the attire of a goddess in a procession;² they are hardly comparable. In the mysteries at Pheneos the priest put on the mask of Demeter Kidaria and beat the *êzygion*,³ with a stick.⁴ Only this example is really relevant and belongs probably to the Hellenistic age.

I know only one monument comparable to the relief in the Carl Müller collection, a relief on a round base, formerly in the Landsdowne collection (Fig. 2).⁵ The attitude and the dress of

¹ Aristophanes, *lices*, vv. 780 ff.

² Artemis at Patrae and Delphi, Paus., vii, 18, 7; Heliodorus, *Äthiopica*, iii, 4; Athena at Pellene, Polydeus, *Strateg.*, viii, 59, a doubtful anecdote. Cf. P. BACKE, *Die Götterverkörperungen in griech. Ikonen*, *deorum vortum*, *Beiss. Berlin* 1883.

³ Paus., viii, 15, 3; *ἑζυγιον*.

⁴ It is published by G. E. KIZZO, *Thiases, basileis et prêtres de la religion dionysiaque*, 1934. This is a sumptuous publication, privately printed in only 250 copies. I owe a copy to the zeal of Mr G. FURTERER, Secretary of our Institute in Rome, and the kindness of the Dottressa Maria SANTI-ASSIETO. The figure of Dionysos is again reproduced by J. MURVIEL, *Trouvailles de la maison dite de l'Hercule*, *Revue de numismatique* lxxviii, 1953, p. 507, fig. 12. The base is now in the collection of Lady C. M. WHITTALL at Haslemere.



Fig. 2. Relief on a base, formerly in the Landsdowne Collection.

Dionysos are almost identical, but on the Landsdowne relief he holds a kantharos from which he pours out a libation on the altar and he wears boots with upturned toes, while on our relief he is barefooted. The altar too is very similar, but it seems that a burnt sacrifice is offered. Four round objects, resting directly on

the surface of the altar, seem to be the ends of billets; what rests on these is indistinct, but a flame seems to be rising from it. Behind the altar there is no Priapus, a Maenad comes immediately before the god. Especially important is that Dionysos is surrounded by three ecstatically dancing Maenads.¹ They are taken from a series of eight Maenads of which certain are well known. Rizzo advances the opinion that the original composition representing the eight Maenads and Dionysos as the central figure, was due to the sculptor Kallimachos, *ὁ κατὰ ἑξῆς*, who lived in the later part of the fifth century B. C., and MARCADÉ agrees with him. The sculptor, who in the second century A. D. made the relief in the Carl Milles collection, changed his model to suit the Dionysiac cult of his time. He separated the god from his Maenads and added a Priapus to whom the sacrifice is made. This being so, colour seems to be lent to the opinion that not the god himself is meant but his priest who in this age sometimes donned the attire of Dionysos.

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The cult of Dionysos was very widespread in the Roman empire and is especially prominent in the provinces in which Dionysos was fused with indigenous gods, Africa and Pannonia. Its frequency in Thrace and the neighbouring districts depended of course on old traditions. Generally the inscriptions inform us only of its existence and at most of associations and their functionaries. This is not the place to enter into this vast subject.² I want only to point to two publications which show that the Bacchic ideas of the afterlife had penetrated the northern provinces.

One is a tombstone found at a place in Bulgaria not far from Sofia and published by Egger.³ The reliefs are poor and the

¹ RIZZO, l.c., figures 10, 11, and 13, pp. 20, 21, and 23 resp.

² For a survey see A. BREHL, *Liber pater*, 1953, pp. 213 ff.; the associations pp. 268 ff.

³ R. EGGER, *Der Grabstein von Čekančeva*, Österreichische Akad. d. Wiss., *Schriften der Balkankommission*, Antiquarische Abt., XI, 2, 1939.

Latin inscription very difficult to read and to understand. According to the editor's interpretation the stone is set up for a woman who at the age of ten years was initiated into the mysteries of Dionysos, became a servant of the local god (*domni Biacusi at(h)ensis*), died twenty-three years later and joined the thiasos of the god (*exitor ia[m] savis* [i. e. *αἴθρα*, the Thracian name of the followers of the god], *Filina comile matre* [the priestess], *Nisi ancilla* [servant of Nysius, i. e. Dionysos]). The relief on the top of the stone is interpreted as showing the woman, accompanied by the priestess, being introduced to the god.¹

The other publication is a paper by Alföldi² treating some funeral cars found in tombs in Belgica, Germania, Pannonia, and Thrace. This mode of sepulture is indigenous, but that the cars are ornamented especially with Bacchic emblems shows that the men, carried to their tombs in these cars, and their people believed in the happy afterlife promised by the Bacchic mysteries.

REFERENCES

¹ I pass over the other symbols, referring to the editor. For the detached head see also P. LAMBOURCIER, L'exaltation de la tête dans la pensée et l'art des Celtes, 1954.

² A. ALFÖLDI, Chars funéraires bacchiques dans les provinces occidentales de l'empire romain, L'Antiquité classique viii, 1939, pp. 349 ff.