



Ritual for the Dionysia ta Astika City Dionysia 10-17 Elaphebolion

Introduction:

Richard Seaford, Professor Emeritus of the Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Exeter, a leading scholar in the study of Dionysos and relevance in both ancient times and in our time, writes “I am strongly committed to the view that the study of ancient culture is a vital form of liberation (from the triviality and increasing narrowness of our own media culture).

From Richard Seaford’s book *Dionysos*:

Dionysos is our oldest living symbol. First mentioned in texts of the thirteenth century BC, he was for the ancient Greeks the divine embodiment of wine, of mystery-cult, and of the theatre, and even today is valued as a symbol of something fundamental to being human. With the power of his epiphany Dionysos broke down the barriers of individual consciousness, he merged the individual into the group. He did it not only by wine, but also in the transformation of individuals in the theatre, and in the rehearsal of death in mysterycult. In this way Dionysos could embody the whole community, but could also be a refined philosophical symbol.

And indeed Dionysos – more than any other ancient Greek deity – fills a modern need. He remains a symbol of something important that cannot be so effectively expressed in any other way.

My overall conception arises from the power of Dionysos to *transform individual identity*. The primary context for such transformation is mystery-cult, which accordingly is the theme of my longest chapter (5). It is from this perspective, I believe, that the material acquires most coherence.

Dionysos exists in our own world, as an irreducible symbol for the antithesis of something basically wrong with our society.

Dionysos is especially given to epiphanies. The key document for understanding them is Euripides’ *Bacchae*, which dramatises an aetiological myth of his cult. The drama consists of an epiphany of the god, or rather of a series of epiphanies, both public (to the whole polis) and private (to his thiasos, or as in mystic ritual). The myth is about crises produced by resistance to the god. But these crises lead to the establishment of the cult, in which the epiphanies, which serve to unite the group (polis or thiasos), are invoked and controlled by ritual.

“Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries” *Classical Quarterly* 31 (02):252- (1981)

Abstract

In Euripides' *Bacchae* Dionysos visits Thebes in disguise to establish his mysteries there. And so, given normal Euripidean practice, it is almost certain that in the lost part of his final speech Dionysos actually prescribed the establishment of his mysteries in Thebes. In the same way the Homeric Hymn to Demeter tells how the goddess came in disguise to Eleusis and finally established her mysteries there. After coming to Eleusis she performs certain actions in the house of king Celeus, for example the drinking of the κῶκεν, which have long been recognized as corresponding to ritual undergone by the initiands in the Eleusinian mysteries. It is the main thesis of this paper that just as elements of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter seem to derive from a ερς λγος of the Eleusinian mysteries, so certain elements of the *Bacchae* derive from a ερς λγος of the mysteries of Dionysos, and that furthermore Euripides consciously alludes to the Dionysiac mysteries for a dramatic effect dependent on the religiosity of his audience, rather as Aeschylus alludes in the *Oresteia*, on the principle μαθοσιν αδ, to the mysteries of Eleusis. This case will suffer from two drawbacks. Firstly there is the general scepticism about ritual patterns in drama arising as a reaction to the excesses of, for example, Murray and Cornford. This means that a far greater degree of probability seems to be required from suggestions of this kind than from the more traditional mode of speculation of, say, textual criticism. And secondly, it must be immediately and frankly admitted both that we do not know much about the mysteries of Dionysos and that most of what we do know is from the Hellenistic and Roman period. In the argument that follows recourse will sometimes be had to two assumptions. The first is to suppose a degree of continuity between the Dionysiac mysteries of the classical and later periods. This assumption is based firstly on the observable continuity of the mysteries: for example the antiquity of the Eleusinian ritual described by Plutarch, which will form an important part of my argument, is attested by Aristophanes and Plato. And it is based secondly on general considerations: conservatism is of the essence of those rituals in which a community such as a thiasos perpetuates itself by the transmission of a ritual treasured as originally taught by their god. The second assumption is to suppose, on the basis of numerous observable similarities, an essential similarity between the Dionysiac mysteries and the Eleusinian, about which we are well informed even for the classical period

We will honor Dionysos throughout the City Dionysia by reading and studying the *Bacchae* by Euripides in light of the work of Richard Seaford.

Some resources:

“The *Bacchae*: Euripides’ Critical Portrayal Of the Cult of Dionysus” by Glenn Kurpiel, Coe College

<http://d2oqb2vjj999su.cloudfront.net/users/000/058/912/086/attachments/The%20Bacchae%20-%20Euripides'%20Critical%20Portrayal%20of%20the%20Cult%20of%20Dionysus.pdf>

***The Bacchae* by Euripides, A new translation for performance and study with introduction and notes by Matt Neuburg**

<http://sbc.apeth.com/downloads/bacchae.pdf>

Perseus: Euripides, *Bacchae* translated by T. A. Buckley

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0092>



Ritual for the Dionysia ta Astika City Dionysia 10 Elaphebolion

- ◆ **Ritual washing**
- ◆ **Ritual washing with invocation to Okeanos**

Okeanos whose nature ever flows, from whom at first both Gods and men arose; sire incorruptible, whose waves surround, and earth's all-terminating circle bound: hence every river, hence the spreading sea, and earth's pure bubbling fountains spring from thee. Hear, mighty sire, for boundless bliss is thine, greatest cathartic of the powers divine: earth's friendly limit, fountain of the pole, whose waves wide spreading and circumfluent roll. Approach benevolent, with placid mind, and be forever to thy mystics kind.

- ◆ **Purification – khernips (holy water) sprinkled from a bay branch – “Be gone all corruption and evil” (three times).**

“Blessed Okeanos, may your bright waters purify this space, and prepare both me, and it, for the rites that are about to unfold.”

- ◆ **Euphemia sto, euphemia sto, eukhomai tois Theois pasi kai pasais.**
(Let there be words of good omen, Let there be words of good omen, pray to the Gods and Goddesses.)
- ◆ **Who is present? Those attending answer: All good people!**
- ◆ **Lighting of the lamp for Hestia with invocation: Daughter of Kronos, You whose eternal flame illumines all our worship, come to this oikos with blessings . . .**
- ◆ **Lighting of the sacrificial fire**
- ◆ **Libation of honey sweet wine**
- ◆ **Homeric Hymn 24 to Hestia**

To Hestia

Hestia, you that tend the far-shooting lord Apollo's sacred house at holy Pytho, from your locks the oozing oil ever drips down. Come to this house in kindly (?) heart, together with Zeus the resourceful, and bestow beauty on my singing.

Translated by Martin L. West

- ◆ **Strewing of barley groats around the altar (circling clockwise three times)**
- ◆ **To Gaia**

First of all, in my prayers, before all other Gods, I call upon the foremost prophetess Gaia.

Aeschylus – Eumenides (opening lines)

- ◆ **Invocation to Gaia: Gaia, to you who nurtures us into being, who nurtures us through life, and who accepts us once again unto Thee, blessed Kourotrophos, I honor you with khernips**
- ◆ **Offering of khernips poured out**
- ◆ **Orphic Hymn 26 To Earth**

Ges

[Gaia Thea/], mother of men and of the blessed Gods,
 you nourish all, you give all, you bring all to fruition, and you destroy all.
 When the season is fair you are heavy with fruit and growing blossoms;
 and, O multiform maiden, you are the seat of the immortal cosmos,
 and in the pains of labor you bring forth fruit of all kinds.
 Eternal, reverend, deep-bosomed, and blessed,
 you delight in the sweet breath of grass, O Goddess bedecked with flowers.
 Yours is the joy of the rain, and round you the intricate realm of the stars
 revolves in endless and awesome flow.
 But, O blessed Goddess, may you multiply the gladsome fruits
 and, together with the beautiful seasons, grant me favor.

Translation by Apostolos N. Athanassakis

- ◆ **Invocations and prayers to Themis: To you who sits leaning against Zeus, who consults closely with Zeus, and who are the just order of all things**
- ◆ **Libation of honey sweet wine**

Leap for goodly Themis

From the Hymn of the Kouretes

- ◆ **Lighting of the incense burner with storax**
- ◆ **Invocation to Dionysos: Khaire Dionysos, bull-horned God, bringer of the vine, who liberates us through revel and renews us**
- ◆ **Libation of honey sweet wine**
- ◆ **Homeric Hymns 26 To Dionysos**

To Dionysos

I begin to sing of ivy-crowned Dionysus, the loud-crying god, splendid son of Zeus and glorious Semele. The rich-haired Nymphs received him in their bosoms from the lord his father and fostered and nurtured him carefully in the dells of Nysa, where by the will of his father he grew up in a sweet-smelling cave, being reckoned among the immortals. But when the goddesses had brought him up, a god oft hymned, then began he to wander continually through the woody coombes, thickly wreathed with ivy and laurel. And the Nymphs followed in his train with him for their leader; and the boundless forest was filled with their outcry. And so hail to you, Dionysus, god of abundant clusters! Grant that we may come again rejoicing to this season, and from that season onwards for many a year.

Translated by Hugh G. Evelyn White

- ◆ **Prayers (for abundance in food, wine, and freedom, for reveling in the joys of nature, and for the joys of life)**

At the Theatre of Dionysos, the *ithyphalloi* enter the portal and reach the center of the orchestra and turn to the audience:

‘Give way, give way! Make room for the God! For the God wishes to march through your midst, uplifted to the point of bursting.’

The *phallophoroi* march in and recite:

‘To Thee, Bacchos, we raise this glorifying song, pouring forth a simple measure in varied melody – a song new and virginal, in no wise used in earlier lays; no, undefiled is the hymn we consecrate.’

From Athenaeus’ *The Deipnosophists*

Come, hero Dionysos, to the holy temple of the Eleans along with the Graces, to the temple, raging with your ox foot. Worthy bull, worthy bull!

From Plutarch *Moralia*, The Greek Questions, 299, Translated by Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library, 1936, pages 218-219

Shout aloud to Him! We shall sing to Dionysos on these holy days: He has been absent for twelve months, but now the springtime is here and all the flowers

From a dithyramb, *Greek Lyric*

Enjoy the play and copious wine.

- ◆ **Incense: storax**
- ◆ **Libation of honey sweet wine**
- ◆ **Offering**
- ◆ **Orphic Hymn 30 To Dionysos**

To Dionysos

I call upon loud-roaring, reveling Dionysos,
primeval, two-natured, thrice-born Bacchic lord,
savage, ineffable, secretive, two-horned and two-shaped,
ivy-covered, bull-faced, warlike, howling, pure.
You take raw flesh in triennial feasts, wrapped in foliage,
decked with grape clusters,
resourceful Eubouleus, immortal god sired by Zeus
when he mated with Persephone in unspeakable union.
Hearken to my voice, O blessed one, you and your fair-girdled nurses,
breathe on me in spirit of perfect kindness.

Translation by Apostolos N. Athanassakis (revised edition)

- ◆ **Incense: myrrh**
- ◆ **Invocation to Zeus: Khaire Zeus, Councilor, fulfiller, Savior, to you King of all who rules with Hera Queen of heaven . . .**
- ◆ **Libation of honey sweet wine**
- ◆ **Homeric Hymn 23 To Zeus**

To Zeus

Of Zeus, best and greatest of the gods, I will sing, the wide-sounding ruler,
the one that brings to fulfillment, who consults closely with Themis as she sits leaning
against him.

Be favorable, wide-sounding son of Kronos, greatest and most glorious.

Translated by Martin L. West

He does not sit upon his throne by mandate of another and hold his dominion beneath a
mightier. No one sits above him whose power he holds in awe. He speaks, and it is done
– he hastens to execute whatever his counseling mind conceives.

Aeschylus – Suppliant Maidens, Chorus

- ◆ **Prayers (for blessings, renewal, and understanding, etc.)**
- ◆ **Lighting of the incense burner with storax**
- ◆ **Invocation to Semele: Khaire fair-faced and glorious Semele, Mother of Dionysos of the vine...**
- ◆ **Libation of honey sweet wine**
- ◆ **Orphic Hymn 44 To Semele**

To Semele

I call upon the daughter of Kadmos, queen of all,
fair Semele of the lovely tresses, of the full bosom,
mother of thyrsus-bearing, joyous Dionysos.
She was driven to great pain by the blazing thunderbolt,
which, through the counsels of Kronian Zeus, the immortal god, burned her.
Noble Persephone granted her honors
among mortal men, honors given every third year.
For all mortal men reenact your travail for your son Bacchos:
the sacred ritual of the table, the ritual of the holy mysteries.

Translation by Apostolos N. Athanassakis (revised edition)

- ◆ **Libation of honey sweet wine**

“Then may blessings go with us, and may Dionysos grant us renewal, joy, and insight and
favorable fortunes!”

Adapted from Aeschylus – Libation Bearers – Chorus

- ◆ **Invocation to Hestia: Daughter of Kronos, You whose eternal flame illumines all our worship, we have honored You in first place with a libation of honey sweet wine and will honor you in last place with a libation of honey sweet wine:**
- ◆ **Homeric Hymn 29 to Hestia**

To Hestia

Hestia, you that in the high dwellings of all, both immortal gods and men who walk on earth, have been assigned an everlasting seat as the privilege of seniority, and enjoy a fine honor and privilege, for mortals have no feasts without you where the libation-pourer does not begin by offering honey-sweet wine to Hestia in first place and last: and you, Argus-slayer, son of Zeus and Maia, messenger of the blessed ones, gold-wand, giver of blessings, be favorable and assist together with Hestia whom you love and revere. For both of you dwell in the fine houses of men on earth, in friendship towards each other, fine supports (of the house), and you attend intelligence and youth.

I salute you, daughter of Kronos, and you too, gold-wand Hermes. And I will take heed both for you and for other singing.

Translated by Martin L. West

- ◆ **Libation of honey sweet wine to Hestia**

“Blessed Hestia, Goddess of home and hearth, to you we offer last of all a libation of honey sweet wine, as a pious mortal should. Tend to those whom we love and guard the houses of the pious. As the Gods will it, so shall it be!”

- ◆ **Extinguishing of the lamp**

Begin the play!



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- ◆ **Ritual washing**
- ◆ **Ritual washing with invocation to Okeanos**

Okeanos whose nature ever flows, from whom at first both Gods and men arose; sire incorruptible, whose waves surround, and earth's all-terminating circle bound: hence every river, hence the spreading sea, and earth's pure bubbling fountains spring from thee. Hear, mighty sire, for boundless bliss is thine, greatest cathartic of the powers divine: earth's friendly limit, fountain of the pole, whose waves wide spreading and circumfluent roll. Approach benevolent, with placid mind, and be forever to thy mystics kind.

- ◆ **Purification – khernips (holy water) sprinkled from a bay branch – “Be gone all corruption and evil” (three times).**

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[Gaia Thea/], mother of men and of the blessed Gods,
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 and, O multiform maiden, you are the seat of the immortal cosmos,
 and in the pains of labor you bring forth fruit of all kinds.
 Eternal, reverend, deep-bosomed, and blessed,
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 Yours is the joy of the rain, and round you the intricate realm of the stars
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Leap for goodly Themis

From the Hymn of the Kouretes

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Shout aloud to Him! We shall sing to Dionysos on these holy days: He has been absent for twelve months, but now the springtime is here and all the flowers

From a dithyramb, *Greek Lyric*

- ◆ **Libation of honey sweet wine**

“May Dionysos bring renewed life, inspiration, joy, and fulfillment and may the Gods watch benevolently over us and guide us with favorable fortunes!”

Adapted from Aeschylus – Libation Bearers – Chorus

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◆ **Extinguishing of the lamp**

Continue reading and enjoy the play and copious wine!



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Translation by Apostolos N. Athanassakis (revised edition)

- ◆ **Invocation to Zeus: Khaire Zeus, Councilor, fulfiller, Savior, to you King of all who rules with Hera Queen of heaven . . .**
- ◆ **Libation of honey sweet wine**
- ◆ **Homeric Hymn 23 To Zeus**

To Zeus

Of Zeus, best and greatest of the gods, I will sing, the wide-sounding ruler,
the one that brings to fulfillment, who consults closely with Themis as she sits leaning
against him.

Be favorable, wide-sounding son of Kronos, greatest and most glorious.

Translated by Martin L. West

He does not sit upon his throne by mandate of another and hold his dominion beneath a
mightier. No one sits above him whose power he holds in awe. He speaks, and it is done
– he hastens to execute whatever his counseling mind conceives.

Aeschylus – Suppliant Maidens, Chorus

- ◆ **Prayers (for blessings, renewal, and understanding, etc.)**
- ◆ **Lighting of the incense burner with storax**
- ◆ **Invocation to Semele: Khaire fair-faced and glorious Semele, Mother of Dionysos of the vine...**
- ◆ **Libation of honey sweet wine**
- ◆ **Orphic Hymn 44 To Semele**

To Semele

I call upon the daughter of Kadmos, queen of all,
fair Semele of the lovely tresses, of the full bosom,
mother of thyrsus-bearing, joyous Dionysos.
She was driven to great pain by the blazing thunderbolt,
which, through the counsels of Kronion Zeus, the immortal god, burned her.
Noble Persephone granted her honors
among mortal men, honors given every third year.
For all mortal men reenact your travail for your son Bacchos:
the sacred ritual of the table, the ritual of the holy mysteries.
Now you, goddess, do I beseech, daughter of Kadmos, queen,
Always to be gentle-minded towards the initiates.

Translation by Apostolos N. Athanassakis (revised edition)

- ◆ **Libation of honey sweet wine**

“Then may blessings go with us, and may Dionysos grant us renewal, joy, and insight and favorable fortunes!”

Adapted from Aeschylus – Libation Bearers – Chorus

- ◆ **Invocation to Hestia: Daughter of Kronos, You whose eternal flame illumines all our**

worship, we have honored You in first place with a libation of honey sweet wine and will honor you in last place with a libation of honey sweet wine:

◆ **Homeric Hymn 29 to Hestia**

To Hestia

Hestia, you that in the high dwellings of all, both immortal gods and men who walk on earth, have been assigned an everlasting seat as the privilege of seniority, and enjoy a fine honor and privilege, for mortals have no feasts without you where the libation-pourer does not begin by offering honey-sweet wine to Hestia in first place and last: and you, Argus-slayer, son of Zeus and Maia, messenger of the blessed ones, gold-wand, giver of blessings, be favorable and assist together with Hestia whom you love and revere. For both of you dwell in the fine houses of men on earth, in friendship towards each other, fine supports (of the house), and you attend intelligence and youth.

I salute you, daughter of Kronos, and you too, gold-wand Hermes. And I will take heed both for you and for other singing.

Translated by Martin L. West

◆ **Libation of honey sweet wine to Hestia**

“Blessed Hestia, Goddess of home and hearth, to you we offer last of all a libation of honey sweet wine, as a pious mortal should. Tend to those whom we love and guard the houses of the pious. As the Gods will it, so shall it be!”

◆ **Extinguishing of the lamp**

Think of the play and the resource reading and what it means to you and how Dionysos is a living God in your life – share your thoughts!