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## **DIONYSOS, ORPHEUS AND ARGEAD MACEDONIA**

### **OVERVIEW AND PERSPECTIVES<sup>1</sup>**

**SUMMARY:** The cult of Dionysos in ancient Macedonia and its possible relation to the Orphic beliefs is one of the most interesting aspects of the Macedonian culture, one, however, accessible to us only via very fragmentary and indirect evidence, partly textual, partly archaeological. The paper summarizes the most important aspects according to the status quaestionis and proposes some interpretations of the problem.

**KEYWORDS:** Dionysos, Orphism, ancient Macedonia

The region to the south of today's Rhodope Mountains, around the modern town of Drama and close to ancient Philippi, is believed to be one of the earliest sites of viniculture in Europe, and, consequently, in the world,<sup>2</sup> since traces of organized cultivation of grapevine and

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<sup>1</sup> The present paper is an adaptation of my talk at the "IV Kolokwia Orfickie" conference held in Nieborów, Oct. 4-6, 2012. A version of the text appeared also in the online journal *Littera Antiqua* (8); it is related to the conference presentation and was published by the conference organizers, without any authorial changes.

<sup>2</sup> Like numerous basic inventions, viniculture and winemaking was most likely introduced roughly at the same time (or at the same stage of Neolithic development) in various areas of the Mediterranean, wherever grapevine was an indigenous plant, although certainly there are supporters of the hypothesis of one-time invention which

possibly also production of wine in that area date back to the Neolithic age, and the indigenous character of wild grapevine (*Vitis vinifera sylvestris*) in this region is attested by palynological material from the Palaeolithic age; the late Bronze Age sees probable increase in viniculture.<sup>3</sup> In historical times viniculture is attested in all important centres of Thrace and Macedonia by traces of advanced methods of cultivation, such as special trenches, structures, and tools used for wine production, as well as testimonies of the protection of vineyards (Adam-Veleni 2011: 228-230). Wines from Mende and Thasos, as well as grapes from Pella, were among the most valued in antiquity (Papadopoulos, Paspalas 1999: 161; Akamatis et al. 2004: 139), and the habit of drinking undiluted wine (*akratos oinos*) was among the traits that earned the Macedonians the label of barbarians among the Greeks (see e.g. Plato, *Grg.* 471a-c; Diod. 16.87.1; Ath. 12.537d; Ephippus apud Ath. 3.120d-e for the accounts of excessive use of wine in Macedonia; see also Ath. 10.432a, after Plato (*Lg.* 1.637d-e, with discrepancies) for Thrace and Macedonia).

The main problem with the history of ancient Macedonia is the scarcity of written sources, especially those preceding the Roman era. Apart from relatively ample account in not necessarily reliable Herodotus (5.16-22, 7.173, 8.136-144), the Greek sources mostly consist of casual remarks in e.g. Thucydides (2.98-101) for the 5<sup>th</sup> century authors, Plato (*Grg.* 470d-471d, *Alc.* 2.141d), Aeschines 2.32 and Aristotle (e.g. *Pol.* 5.1311b) for the 4<sup>th</sup> century; for the Roman period the most exhaustive extant sources for history other than the reign of Alexander the Great, which does possess a large corpus of its own historians, are

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later spread from one centre. For both an outline of the legends surrounding the beginnings of the production of wine, and discussion on the archaeological evidence thereof, see McGovern 2003: esp. 1-15. The oldest preserved resinated wine known so far was found in the territory of today's Iran and is ca. 7400 years old (McGovern 2003: 239 and chapter 4 in general); the earliest traces of viniculture come from today's Georgia, and are dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC (McGovern 2003). The earliest evidence for domesticated grapevine (*Vitis vinifera vinifera*) in Greece comes from the Neolithic site of Dimitra in Eastern Macedonia, dated to ca. 4300-2800 BC, but no material was found there to shed light on the organization of cultivation and production (McGovern 2003: 257).

<sup>3</sup> For further reference see McGovern 2003; Stefani 2011.

Diodorus 12-14, Justin, *Epit.* 7-9, and Solinus 9-10. Moreover, a large body of our knowledge about the early history of the kingdom that was about to conquer the eastern Mediterranean world in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC consists of legendary or at least anecdotic material, scattered among various authors; apart from the aforementioned, e.g. Strabo, Polyaeus, Pausanias, Aelian, Athenaios.

Very little is known from these sources about the religious beliefs and cult practices of the Macedonians, especially before Alexander, since the remarks in the early authors concern mostly political issues.<sup>4</sup> Also archaeological knowledge is still limited, due to the fact that the interest in the northern areas of Greece began only at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and until the uncovering of the royal tombs in the Great Tumulus of Vergina in the 1970s the excavations had not yielded any material that would stir the imagination of broad public, thus resulting in financing research. Recent decades of systematic excavations conducted primarily by the 16-19 and 27-30 Ephorates of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, rendered huge number of discoveries that can change our perception of the early Macedonian state, but these are largely only preliminarily published, if at all. In this paper I would like to present the outline of present knowledge concerning the cult of Dionysos, its relation to other mystery cults in Argead Macedonia, and its possible connections with the spread of Orphic beliefs as well as the legend of Orpheus himself.

The survey of evidence for Dionysiac cults and motifs in the broad territory of historical Macedonia is limited in this paper to the period closing with the emergence of the Hellenistic kingdoms after the extinction of the Argeads (i.e. ca. the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC). The reason for such limitation is that, in the Hellenistic age, new ideas and concepts concerning e.g. the divine status of the king came to prominence, and the role Dionysos played in the legend of Alexander's Indian expedition, as well as in the propaganda of Macedonian dynasties both in the vast expanses of the former empire of Alexander (especially the Ptolemies in Egypt), and the Antigonids in Macedonia, albeit certainly

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<sup>4</sup> For general overview of religious beliefs of the Macedonians see Baege 1913; Christesen, Murray 2010; Düll 1977 for the Roman period.

based on former beliefs and traditions of their native land, took an entirely new form and shape, and should become the subject of a separate study.<sup>5</sup> For obvious reasons, the archaeological material whose dating is broad is being treated here, but the new forms of Dionysiac cult, connected directly with the ruler cult and public image, are left out and only remarked upon if the context requires it.

## **WINE DEITIES IN EARLY MACEDONIA AND THRACE – LITERARY TESTIMONIES**

Our literary sources relate stories that place elements of the early myth of Dionysos in the Thraco-Macedonian lands. The most important of these is the account in Herodotus (8.138) within the story of how the Argead (Temenid) dynasty was established in Macedonia:

So the brothers [i.e. the sons of Temenus] came to another part of Macedonia and settled near the place called the garden of Midas son of Gordias, where roses grow of themselves, each bearing sixty blossoms and of surpassing fragrance. In this garden, according to the Macedonian story, Silenus was taken captive. Above it rises the mountain called Bermius, which none can ascend for the wintry cold. From there they issued forth when they had won that country and presently subdued also the rest of Macedonia (trans. A. D. Godley).

This account situates one of the most prominent legends concerning Dionysos and his thiasos not in Asia Minor, but in the heart of Macedonia, since the Bermion mountains are those at whose feet the first Macedonian capital, Aigai (today's Vergina), as well as a number of important settlements were situated, among them Beroia and Mieza. Later authors, apart from Konon who follows Herodotus' account (FrGHist 26, fr. 1), removed the story from the Pierian area, and placed it either in Thrace (Bion), perceived apparently as the regions to the east

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<sup>5</sup> The reader may find basic information concerning the connection between Dionysos and the Hellenistic kings in the classic study of J. Tondra 1952: 441-466; see also papers in: *École Française* 1986.

of Macedonia proper, or in Asian Phrygia (Xenophon, Theopompus, Pausanias), and this change may reflect the shift in perception of king Midas' seat to his natural milieu from the perspective of the Greeks of the Classical age and onwards. Herodotus' view, however, can relay the Macedonian point of view, and – which is of greater consequence – the memory of the Phrygian presence in today's northern Greece, in the area which later became Eordaea and the heart of the Macedonian kingdom. The Phrygians moved to Asia Minor upon the coming of the Bottiaians, who in turn were pushed towards the east by the Macedonians (Borza 1990: 64-65).<sup>6</sup> The contacts and influences between Phrygia and Macedonia may have survived these population changes, because elements of Phrygian culture and religion appear very early in the Thraco-Macedonian territories. Also, the various attested versions of the founding legend of Gordium, which played essential role in Alexander's claim for the rule of Asia, connect Phrygia and Macedonia (Roller 1984). From the perspective of the present paper, however, the most important fact is that according to the earliest known version of the myth, the incident with the captive sylen took place in the very heart of what later became historical Macedonia, and that the Macedonians themselves apparently valued this legend as their own. It may be of consequence, too, for the tradition and also for the Alexander legend, which cannot be elaborated on in the present paper, that according to Justin (*Epit.* 11.7) Midas was an initiate of Orpheus himself.

In the light of the Herodotus testimony it is also argued that the 'sun/star of Vergina' symbol, actually a variation of an ancient solar symbol quite omnipresent in the Mediterranean, which appears among others in the context of the royal burials in the Great Tumulus in Vergina, may be connected with the worship of a solar Dionysos (Greenwalt 1994; Fredriksmeyer 1997: 103; for the solar Dionysos associated with Apollo see Macr. 1.18). This deity, in turn, would be connected with an earlier episode in the story related by Herodotus, when Perdikkas (the founder

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<sup>6</sup> The Phrygians began their migration from Central Europe, and were originally related to the southern Lusatian culture, known from the territory of modern Poland and parts of the neighbouring lands. They were known as Bryges in Macedonia, and labelled their *synoikoi* (Hdt. 8.183). Their presence as a dominant culture in the area is attested from ca. 1200 to ca. 1050, i.e. from the later Bronze Age to the early Iron Age.

of the dynasty in this account) is mocked by the king with a gift of sun beams, and accepts this reward, to the bewilderment of everyone around.

Also of interest, in the context of mystery cults and their complexity, is that in Macedonia, according to ancient sources, sylens were called *sauadai*, *saudoi* (Hes. s.v. Σαῦαδαι), or *seuidai* (Cornut. 30) – i.e. with names that can be related to the Phrygian Sabazios, son of Kybele, whose name in turn is being connected with the stem meaning liberation, as in the numerous epicleses of Dionysos/Bacchus (Leinicks 1996: 305; Roller 1999: 152-153).<sup>7</sup> The connection between the Thraco-Macedonian cult of Dionysos and his retinue, and Phrygian deities such as Kybele, Attis and Sabazios, demands further study, while in the current paper it can only be pointed out as one of the most important directions for research.

Another story related to the early period of Macedonian history, which is centred around Dionysos, concerns the Illyrian invasion, dated broadly to ca. 900-650 BC, i.e. the half-legendary age, known only from unreliable and usually late accounts, as well as from archaeological data. This story is an aetiological account of the establishment of the solely Macedonian cult of Dionysos with the epiclesis Pseudanor, i.e. ‘false man’, and it was relayed to us by Polyaeus (4.1), after Callimachus’ *Aetia* (Bremmer 1999: 185-186).<sup>8</sup> Since the text of Polyaeus

<sup>7</sup> See also the ritual cries as quoted by Demosthenes, *De Cor.* 260; Fol (1993: 439) suggests a link between the Phrygian name Sabazios and the epithet Bakchos.

<sup>8</sup> There is no information about Callimachus’ sources, so it is not entirely impossible that the story is a Hellenistic fabrication; however, such notion is not very plausible, because it would not serve any obvious purpose in the Hellenistic period, therefore Callimachus may have elaborated on an existing Macedonian legend as well. Hatzopoulos (1994: 81) makes a point of one detail in Athenaios’ description of the great *pompe* of Ptolemy Philadelphus in Alexandria ca. 275/274 BC, which indeed was a huge display of Dionysiac traditions, namely the employment of the word ‘Mimallones’ for Macedonian maenads, and the mention of daggers in the hands of some of the participating women (Ath. 5.197c). However, Athenaios lists several other names for the Bacchae in the procession, and concludes with general remark that some of them held daggers, and some snakes in their hands, which does not allow for certainty that it was the Mimallones who were armed; moreover, according to Callimachus/Polyaeus, their weapons of choice should be thyrsos imitating spears. It would not be impossible, though, to link the account in the *Aetia* with the increase of the popularity of Dionysiac cults in Lagid Alexandria.

is not easily available in modern translations, I quote the pertinent fragment *in extenso*:

In the reign of Argaeus king of Macedonia, the Taulantii under their king Galaurus made an incursion into Macedonia. Argaeus, whose force was very small, directed the Macedonian young women, as the enemy advanced, to show themselves from mount Ereboea. They accordingly did so; and in a numerous body they poured down from the mountain, their faces covered by wreaths, and brandishing their thyrsi instead of spears. Galaurus, intimidated by the numbers of those, whom instead of women he supposed to be men, sounded a retreat; whereupon the Taulantii, throwing away their weapons, and whatever else might retard their escape, abandoned themselves to a precipitate flight. Argaeus, having thus obtained a victory without the hazard of a battle, erected a temple to Dionysus Pseudanor; and ordered the priestesses of the god, who were before called *Kladones* by the Macedonians, to ever afterwards be distinguished by the title of *Mimallones*.<sup>9</sup>

Stories of women fighting in the absence or shortage of men is not entirely absent from other Greek centres, e.g. Messene, Tegea, Argos – noteworthy all of them traditionally Doric, like Macedonia<sup>10</sup> – and all of them serve as aetiological accounts for cults or rituals involving transgenderism (Graf 1984: 246-249; Christesen, Murray 2010: 432). In every other instance, however, women are actually involved in the battle, unlike in the Macedonian case where the central element is a ruse and a victory without fighting, but by merely scaring the enemies away (note that in myths Dionysos rarely resorts to killing his antagonists, choosing madness or fear instead). In his analysis of the Pseudanor myth, Miltiades B. Hatzopoulos elaborates on the meaning of *Kladones* as spinners, i.e. women devoted to typically female tasks who disguise

<sup>9</sup> Translation after: Shepherd 1973 [2012]. A more recent translation exists (Krentz, Wheeler 1994), but its critical reception was ambiguous; one of the few languages into which the *Stratagems* were translated is Polish (Borowska 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Doric traditions appear to be of great importance in Macedonia, which is evident e.g. in the traditional lineage of the Argeads from Heracles and in the calendar. One of the epithets of Dionysos known from Macedonia, Agrieus, is also attested mostly in the Doric milieu (Guettel Cole 2007: 329).

as men in a ritual, and thus attain sexual ambiguity reflected in their new name (Hatzopoulos 1994: 79-82),<sup>11</sup> and consequently proposes to interpret another testimony concerning relatively early history of Macedonia similarly, i.e. the account given by Herodotus (5.17-21) about the killing of the Persian envoys by young men disguised as women, seeing in both stories the echo of the same type of initiation rite, in both cases employing transgender change of costume. Such trait was characteristic for the Dionysiac rites, as attested for instance by Euripides in his *Bacchae*, the very play that traditionally is connected with the playwright's visit in Macedonia and his employment at the court of Archelaos. It is not the place here to discuss the complicated question of the historicity of Euripides' sojourn in Pella and the connection between his Dionysiac plays and the trilogy recounting the mythical origins of the Argead dynasty, as well as the details and circumstance of the writing of the latter.<sup>12</sup> One detail from the *Bacchae*, however, should draw our attention: in *Bacch.* 761ff. the maddened women of Thebes attack the Boeotian countrymen unwilling to accept Dionysos with thyrsos used as spears and *the effectiveness of their thyrsos is contrasted with the ineffectiveness of the spears of the opposing men. The effectiveness of the thyrsos as weapons is directly ascribed to the power of the god* (Leinicks 1996: 76).

Without any plausible testimony for the origins of the Pseudanor account found in Polyaeus it is impossible to assess the relationship between the episode in Euripides and the Macedonian legend, but the resemblance is striking, and to the knowledge of the present author such incidents are not present in other sources of the Dionysos myth. Also noteworthy in this context is the information related by Hyginus in his epitome of Euripides' *Archelaos* (Hyg. *Fab.* 219), that in the lost Macedonian trilogy of Euripides, in the account of the legendary founder of

<sup>11</sup> The meaning and linguistic associations of both the *kladones* the *mimallones* are subject of scholarly discussion, whose details fall outside the scope of the present paper, for whose purpose Polyaeus' wordplay is of more consequence than actual morphological reconstruction of the words and their origins (these are discussed by Macurdy 1913: esp. 192, with further reference).

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Ridgway 1923; Harder 1985: 125-131; Scullion 2003 for the discussion on this subject; the present author is in favour of the tradition that places the last years of Euripides' life in Macedonia.



the dynasty, Archelaos, the local king whom the Temenids had to struggle for power with was named Kisseus – a name related to Dionysiac imagery, and also to the epicleses of several gods, including Dionysos and Apollo and also born by the Homeric Thracian king, father of Antenor's wife Theano (*RE*, s.v. *Kisseus* 1 and s.v. *Theano* 2). The earliest known version of this myth is in Herodotus 8.137-139, who does not give the name of the antagonist.<sup>13</sup>

The only historical account for possible employment of a stratagem related to this mythical narrative in actual military context comes from Douris of Samos (apud Ath. 13.560f.), and noteworthy concerns Olympias, who allegedly confronted the troops of her stepdaughter Adea-Euridice during the struggle for power after Alexander's death in the costume of a maenad, which made the Macedonians leave Adea's side and join the forces of the old queen.<sup>14</sup> The authenticity of this anecdote is contested by some scholars<sup>15</sup> but the story recorded by Polyaeus seems to act in its favour, since it would provide Olympias with the model of belligerent maenad.

In the context of early literary sources linking the cults of Dionysos with the Thraco-Macedonian area, one more author of the Athenian tragedy should be mentioned: Aeschylus, in his lost *Bassarids*, located the death of Orpheus at the hands of the Maenads in the Pangaion mountains, placing the latter in what he calls the Macedonian – not Thracian<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Herodotus also has Perdiccas as the founder of the dynasty instead of Archelaos, but it is likely that Euripides took the liberty of introducing the ruling king's name-sake in the same function; otherwise Archelaos as the first king is unknown from other sources. Also, the scarcity of preserved fragments from the Macedonian trilogy makes poor evidence for detailed analysis of Euripides' version. For an overview of accounts of the early/legendary history of Macedonia see Sprawski 2010: 127-131.

<sup>14</sup> An 'inverted analogy' for this account is found in the same Douris (apud Ath. 4.155c) and relates to the same period: the regent Polyperchon is said to have dressed as a woman at drinking parties.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Macurdy 1932: 41 in favour of it; Stephens 2005: 240 for the doubts.

<sup>16</sup> This detail is of consequence for the modern scholar because, according to historical and archaeological data, this area was in the power of the Thracian dynasts and Athenian colonists, until the conquest of Philip II in the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century. Aeschylus' testimony, more importantly repeated – without the Orphic context – in his *Persae*, shows that for the 5<sup>th</sup> century Athenian mind the area around Amphipolis and Neapolis

– territory. Later sources such as, for instance, the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC Konon and 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD Pausanias, point at the area of Dion as the place where the murder of Orpheus took place, which still locates the myth within the historical Macedonian territory since Dion was the most important cult centre for the Macedonians, one that was supposed to contend with the main pan-Hellenic sanctuaries. The Pierian area was also the original land of the Thracians, who later migrated to the northern coast of the Aegean, therefore even if the myth of Orpheus preserved the original geographical setting, it is unlikely that the 4<sup>th</sup> century on authors would have it in mind when placing the events around Dion, in spite of Aeschylean testimony: more possibly, they related to a tradition lost to us, which in turn was rooted in the earlier times.

For the importance of the Dionysos cult in the historical times the primary source is Arrian (4.8.1; cf. 4.9.5; Curt. 8.2.6), who gives testimony to the royal cult of Dionysos in the form of annual celebrations conducted by the kings. Ample presence of Dionysiac elements in the royal burials corroborates the pre-eminence of this particular cult among the Macedonian aristocracy, and the prominence of the god as a tutelary deity of numerous Hellenistic kings seems to draw, among others, on this particular tradition, together with the Indian connotations exploited in the legend of Alexander. E. A. Fredriksmeyer (1997: 102ff.) goes as far as to trace the origins of the most important and commonly used attribute of royal power in the Hellenistic age, the fillet diadema, from Dionysiac imagery, but his argumentation, however attractive, is not entirely convincing.

## **CULT OF WINE DEITIES IN MACEDONIA – ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE**

Around mid-5<sup>th</sup> century BC, in the whole area of Thraco-Macedonia, an increase of Dionysiac elements in the material culture can be observed. In this chapter, the main categories of artefacts or contexts thereof will

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(today's Kavala) was apparently 'Macedonia', not Thrace. However, Thucydides (2.99) claims that the tribes living in the north-eastern territories were not Macedonians. For a detailed discussion of sources see Ridgway 1926: 2-3.

be listed with a short commentary. Emphasis is given to direct traces of the cult of Dionysos and his retinue, but other mystery cults' divinities are also mentioned, since at least from the late Classical period onwards their worship appears to be increasingly interrelated and their personae undergo complex syncretisations.

## Cult places

Historical evidence for relatively early cult of Dionysos in the broad Thraco-Macedonian area comes from Herodotus (7.111), who mentions the 'oracle of Dionysos' in the land of the Satrai – one of the Thracian tribes inhabiting the foothills of the Rhodopes, described by the historian as the only tribe in his time independent of any rulers. According to Herodotus, the organization of the oracle was similar to that of Apollo in Delphi, and, noteworthy, Dionysos was allegedly the resident deity in Delphi before Apollo (Guthrie 1993: 43), and even afterwards the two gods shared the sanctuary. Of interest in the context of the Thracian oracle is the passage in Pausanias (10.5.7-8), with the history of the Delphic oracle: it does not mention Dionysos among its deities, but relates the story that the oracle was founded by the 'comers from the Hyperboreans'. Moreover, when quoting the 'hexameter of Boeo', Pausanias names 'sons of the Hyperboreans, Pagasus and divine Agyieus' as the founders of the oracle; Agyieus being in the first place an epiclesis of Apollo as protector of the streets among the Doric peoples (Farnell 1907: 308), but apparently also of Dionysos (*Suda*, s.v. ἀγυιαί, Adler α 383). In the Orphic context another passage in Pausanias (10.5.9-13) may be of interest: in the account of the temples erected in Delphi, the 'second' one is mentioned, which is most certainly a mythical one, since it is described as woven by bees from wax and wings, which may connect it to Aristaios. The proximity of Apollo and Dionysos is stressed by Aeschylus, who, in one of the preserved fragments of his *Bassarids*, calls Apollo *kisseus* and *baccheiomantis* (Fr. 86 Mette; Macr. 1.18: ὁ Κισσευ ζ' Ἀπόλλων, ὁ Βακχεῖος, ὁ μάντις). It is, therefore, probable that indeed the oracles of the Satrai and in Delphi did share common origins and character.

Among the most plausible candidates for the site of the Thracian oracle of Dionysos are 1) today's Videnitsa peak, where traces of architectonic structures were found, and which is known for springs of mineral waters with medicinal properties; 2) the excavated town of Perperikon.<sup>17</sup> Detienne's (2002: 164) suggestion that the site of the oracle might be mount Pangaion is unfounded in any archaeological evidence and is probably based only on the aforementioned fact that Aeschylus placed the death of Orpheus at the hands of the maenads in the area of this particular mountain, which was famous in antiquity because of its silver and gold mines – the main the source of Thracian and Macedonian wealth apart from the wine.

The earliest place in northern Greece where actual cult of a wine deity most likely named Dionysos is attested is the city of Aphytis (modern Afitos) on the Chalkidian peninsula. The city is better known as the place of the only sanctuary of Libyan Ammon in northern Greece, established at the turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC by the Spartan general Lysander (Plut. *Lys.* 20; Iambl. *Myst.* 3.3), but an earlier shrine of Dionysos (whose cult is attested for this site by Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.19) was unearthed to the southeast of the large temple of Ammon, while traces of a wine deity cult dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC were discovered in a cave which was incorporated into the shrine at a later phase (Voutiras 2000: 632). Epigraphic evidence for Dionysos cult in Aphytis comes from as late as the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (Voutiras 2000: 636), but it should be noted that similar dating applies to the earliest testimonies of this kind in the area in general; also the finds of the earliest sculptural and other material remains can be dated to the same period. The early finds from the cave, consisting mostly of votive offerings, only allow for indirect interpretation in the context of the worship of nymphs and deities of nature, including wine gods.

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<sup>17</sup> The area of Videnitsa was indicated as the possible site of the oracle as early as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the pioneers of Bulgarian history and archaeology, Stefan Zahariev and, consequently, Konstantin J. Jireček. The excavations in Perperikon (Ovtcharov 2005; the most accessible and up-to-date reference is the website <http://www.perperikon.bg>) show that the site hosted a sanctuary but its interpretation is not clear. To the best knowledge of the present author the site of the Dionysos oracle has not been confirmed yet.

Among the places that give archaeological testimonies to the cult of Dionysos and his retinue the island of Thasos should be named, with its famous city gate relief representing a marching sylen with a kantharos (early 5<sup>th</sup> century BC). The cult of Orpheus is attested by literary sources in connection with the place indicated as the location of the hero's death and burial, i.e. Leibethra in Pieria, not far from the main Macedonian sanctuary in Dion. Pausanias (9.30.7-11; Guthrie 1993: 34) relates the local legend which connects the sacred character of the burial place with the Thracian oracle of Dionysos, and continues with the story of the removal of the Orpheus' relics 'to Macedonia' by the people of Dion after the destruction of Leibethra. The place itself allegedly hosted the cults of nymphs and Muses (Plin. *HN* 4.16; Larson 2001: 169). Excavations of the site identified with this town have not yielded conclusive evidence as for the Dionysos or Orpheus cults or activities as yet.<sup>18</sup>

## Coins

The earliest – dated to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC – coinage in the area is that of the Thracian tribes and dynasts, followed by the coinage of Greek colonies. Among the most important types of the Orrescii and Laeaei tribes (Tsangari 2009: cat. Nos. 5 and 7), as well as of the cities of Thasos and Mende (both famous for wine production), are those showing scenes with mythological figures that would later be identified with the Dionysiac thiasos and the god of wine himself. The repertoire of topics varies from one centre to another: in case of the tribes, the most common are the scenes with strong erotic undertone, featuring satyrs and nymphs on the obverses (with the *quadratum incusum* on the reverses); in Thasos, the head of Dionysos appears on the obverses, while the reverse is occupied by the other main deity worshipped on the island – the hero Heracles; ca. 460 BC Mende chose the image of mature, bearded Dionysos riding a donkey or a mule for the obverse, and

<sup>18</sup> Preliminary excavation reports by the KZ' Ephorate of Antiquities are available at: [http://www.kz-epka.gr/mambo/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=85&Itemid=117](http://www.kz-epka.gr/mambo/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=85&Itemid=117) and [http://www.kz-epka.gr/mambo/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=86&Itemid=118](http://www.kz-epka.gr/mambo/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=86&Itemid=118) (status of Nov. 11th, 2012).

grapevine or wine krater for the reverse, while in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC the obverse was decorated with the head of young Dionysos (Mielczarek 2000: 89). Most of these motifs, originating from the Archaic age, continue in the city mints down to the end of the Antigonid dynasty in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century, and also, in some cases, under the Roman rule.

While in Thasos and Mende the choice is obvious: many cities would place their main export commodities on their coins as a means of propaganda (Mielczarek 2000: 34),<sup>19</sup> the case of the tribes is less clear. Some light can be, however, shed by the discoveries of grave gifts in the aristocratic Thracian funerals, which are incomparably rich in luxury silver vessels, in their shape related to the Persian wares, and in their meaning apparently connected with the spread of the Orphic beliefs and the concept of afterlife as a symposium (Zournatzi 2000), which would be of major importance in the kingdom of Macedonia, as we will later see.

The coins of the aforementioned city of Aphytis also feature drinking vessels (*HN* 210; *BMC Macedonia*, Aphytis 1), but their finds are scarce and the badly preserved bronzes do not allow for further interpretation, especially in the connection with the main deity appearing on these coins, i.e. Ammon.

## Grave goods and funeral contexts

Dionysiac motifs appear on objects placed in Macedonian graves at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, with the imported Athenian vases (finds from the necropoleis in Dion and around modern Thessaloniki). Their presence does not necessarily point to a dramatic change in beliefs and concepts of afterlife, but the relative number of vessels with such topics is greater than, for example, in Athens where they were imported from, while for instance the most popular grave gifts in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>19</sup> The other, not numerous, centres that minted coins decorated with the representations of either Dionysos or Dionysiac motifs in the Archaic and Classical periods were, invariably, either connected with the myth of Dionysos (Thebes), or with the wine production (the island of Naxos, its colony Naxos in Sicily, and the Sicilian city of Morgantina which produced coinage under strong Greek influence; Mielczarek 2000: 181).

Attica white ground *lekythoi* – perfume and scented oils containers, not related to symposia – are rare in Macedonian burials.<sup>20</sup> This may point to possible choice of subject, and their placement in graves may suggest a relationship between wine culture and conceptions of after-life. At the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, relatively large numbers of drinking and banquet-related bronze vessels appear in graves; most of the metal vessels found in such graves are older than the burials they appear in, which indicates that their symbolic meaning was of particular importance for the deceased.

If, on one hand, we accept the hypothesis of the influence of Orphism-related cults originating from the Black Sea area, and, on the other hand, take a close look at the increase of symposiac elements in the burial customs in Macedonia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, this 6<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> century tendency, together with noticeable changes in the burial customs, seems a natural step in the development of religious beliefs in the area.

While in the 5<sup>th</sup> century cremation burials predominate among Macedonian aristocracy, and inhumation is still widely popular, the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC sees the increase in the number of cremations in relation to inhumations.<sup>21</sup> Vessels used as ash urns comprise all kinds of large and middle size vases, both metal ware and pottery, such as hydriae, kraters and large amphorae or pelikai, but box-shaped larnakes are also

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<sup>20</sup> For a detailed repertoire of the Attic grave goods in the Archaic and Classical periods see Kurtz, Boardman 1971: 76-79 and 100-105 resp. Wine-related vessels are neither among the popular grave offerings, nor among the vessels reused as ash containers in the case of cremation.

<sup>21</sup> The practice of cremation is often associated in scholarship, among others by ethnologically oriented archaeologists, with the belief that the soul should be released from its bonds with the body and the physical world, often originating from the fear of the return of the dead, and also with the notions of purification (see e.g. Bendann 1930: 50 and *passim*; for methodological discussion see Binford 1971: esp. 12-13). Another popular explanation of the appearance of cremation in Greece is the imitation of Homeric heroic rites, but the burial practice started in the Hellenic lands around the time of Homer, while it had not been commonly practised in the Mycenaean age, despite the existence of isolated cases, probably under foreign influence (Kurtz, Boardman 1971: 25-26). Moreover, in Archaic and Classical Greece such burials were not limited to males, let alone warriors, and in the 4<sup>th</sup> century Macedonia predominated in all levels of the society.

popular, therefore one cannot argue that banqueting vessels were commonly used for the burials themselves, even though the most prominent urn, the krater from the unlooted tomb B in the necropolis of Derveni (ancient Lete), is a luxury symposium vase par excellence, and moreover features distinctive Dionysiac scenes in its decoration.

The Derveni krater (which was recently extensively and informatively published; Barr Sharar 2008) is one of the most sophisticated works of Greek toreutics known to date, and represents a Dionysiac thiasos centred around the god accompanied by Ariadne in a wedding scene. The vessel may be an Athenian import, the inscription on the lip of the vessel points to Thessalian origins of its owner – possibly, but not necessarily, identical with the man buried in the krater (Barr Sharar 2008: 5-8), but if the figure shown in one shoe beneath one of the vase's handles is the Thracian king Lykourgos, whose story resembles that of Pentheus, this inclusion of the character would situate the scene within the Thraco-Macedonian context.<sup>22</sup> The necropolis of Derveni yielded one more prominent find that attests the presence of Dionysiac/Orphic cults in connection with afterlife beliefs and burial customs in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC Macedonia – the Derveni papyrus, containing fragments of a cosmogonic text, clearly related to Orphic tradition.

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<sup>22</sup> Beryl Barr Sharar (2008: 149-153) identifies the figure in question with a 'non-Euripidean Pentheus', but she bases her interpretation – apart from the possible Athenian workshop of the vessel – on the painting on a lost late 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Athenian red figure pyxis, whose crucial parts (i.a. legs and face) were damaged at the time of its publication in 1929, so that they would not allow for certainty in comparison. Even though, some of the arguments raised may favour Pentheus (but the death and dismemberment, allegedly alluded at by hunt symbolism, make for similar episodes in the myths of the two kings, so they do not constitute decisive evidence). The single boot, however, hardly relates to reliable testimonies concerning Pentheus, while it does appear in a poem concerning a statue of Lykourgos (*Anth. Pal.* 16.127.1: μονοκρηπίδα Λυκοῦργον); moreover, Barr Sharar herself admits that an analogy portraying the Thracian king with one shoe does exist in vase painting. The scholar argues that representations with one shoe are not specific for Lykourgos only (Barr Sharar 2008: 152-153) but the argumentation presented cannot be treated as decisive. The figure was identified as Lykourgos by Robertson 1972, and accepted i.a. by Guettel Cole 2007: 338-341.



Despite relatively scarce use of wine vessels for urns, the grave offerings together with the decoration of several graves give a tell-tale testimony to the importance of wine in afterlife rites and beliefs. Both in the graves of commoners and, most of all, those of the aristocracy, large numbers of gifts related to the symposia were uncovered. The offerings found in the unlooted Tomb II in the Great Tumulus in Vergina, identified by a majority of scholars with the grave of Philip II, contain a whole set of luxury silver vessels, most of which served for the drinking of wine (e.g. oinochoai and other types of jugs, kylikes and skyphoi, strainers and ladles, some of them decorated with heads of sylens/satyrs; Andronicos 1993: 146-160). Similar but not so numerous artefacts were found in Tomb III, nicknamed the 'Tomb of the Prince', and attributed either to Philip Arrhidaeus or Alexander IV. In both cases, also the wooden *klinai* (replicas of the actual beds on which the bodies were placed for cremation) were decorated, among others, with Dionysiac motifs, of which the ivory plaque with Dionysos, a maenad, and a satyr from Tomb III is the best known example.

Assuming that Andronikos' identification is proper, and it is indeed Philip II who was buried in Tomb II of the Great Tumulus, we must emphasize that all the goods placed in this grave would precede Alexander's expedition to India, which resulted in the popularity of Dionysiac elements in the Hellenistic court culture, due to certain aspects of Alexander's apotheosis. In the light of the historical sources, Philip's associations with Dionysos should not come as a surprise, given, for instance, that he allegedly met Olympias during the mysteries of the Kabeiroi on Samothrace, a festival closely related to the Dionysiac cults, and Elizabeth Carney (2010: 416) sees Alexander's mother as a priestess of Dionysos.

The banquet-related beliefs concerning the afterlife<sup>23</sup> are also attested by the painting over the lintel of the monumental tomb in the Macedonian type (one or two chamber constructed tombs with decorative façades, which appear in their developed form ca. the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century)

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<sup>23</sup> For general discussion on the topic of the feasts of the dead in the Greek world see Thönges Stringaris 1965; see also Garland 1985: 70 for the change in imagery concerning the afterlife in the Classical age, in particular in comparison with the Homeric view.

from Agios Athanassios in Thessaloniki (Tomb III).<sup>24</sup> The frieze depicts a banquet scene, which gives one of the richest repertoires for Macedonian iconography, but what should draw our attention at this moment is not only the presence of the golden wreaths on the heads of the banqueters (such wreaths appear commonly in archaeological material from Macedonian burials, including those of the royalty in Vergina) and the generally wine-related character of the event, but its context and interpretation. Both Maria Tsimbidou-Avloniti (2002: 39) in her short report on the tomb, and Hariclia Brecolouaki (2006: 273) in her detailed analysis of the painting, point out that the scene could represent after-life, with the heroized character in the centre of the scene (an ancestor of the deceased buried in the tomb is suggested), but in these tentative interpretations the scholars focus on the figures and vessels, while there is one class of objects in the painting that have not received proper attention, and appear to indicate afterlife context beyond doubt. These are the conical objects placed on two small tables laden with food that stand before the banqueters – they can be only interpreted as the wheat and honey cakes known as *πυραμίδες*, which, however described in sources among other sweets varieties (Ath. 14.647c), in art appear solely in funerary banquets and ritual *agapai* (Davidson, Burr Thompson, Thompson 1943: 109-110 and Figs 49-50, also on the etymology of the name and its connection with the architectural term). Since the latter usage is out of the question in this case, given the private space shown in the scene, the only possibility that remains is a funeral context, i.e. representation of the afterlife of the deceased.

Grave finds that are particularly interesting and important from the Dionysiac/Orphic point of view come from private burials, and are dated to the turn of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries in Pella, Amphipolis, Dion, Methone, Europos, Vergina (Aigai), and Agios Athanassios (Thessaloniki).<sup>25</sup> These are the golden leaves (*lamellae*) with names – mostly female – of the deceased incised in them, and, in one case, with a text which identifies the owner of the grave not only by his name,

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. Tsimbidou-Avloniti 2002; Tsimbidou-Avloniti 2004, with illustrations.

<sup>25</sup> Detailed provenience and original publications, where available, are given in Graf, Iles Johnston 2007: Nos. 30-38.

but also his position as an initiate: ΦΕΡΣΕΦΝΗΙ ΠΟΣΕΙΔΙΠΠΙΟΣ ΜΥΣΤΗΣ ΕΥΣΕΒΗΣ. To date, the most exhaustive discussion of the tablet itself and the possibility of the existence of Dionysiac mysteries in Pella is given by Matthew W. Dickie (1995), while Paul Christesen and Sarah C. Murray (2010: 432) argue that itinerant *teletai* were active in Macedonia, enabling initiations. As for the lamella, scholars generally agree to identify the owner of the grave in which it was found with the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC poet of the same name, originating from Pella, who was connected first of all with the Macedonian court of the Ptolemies of Egypt, but retained the citizenship of his native city. That Poseidippos was well acquainted with the Macedonian Dionysiac rituals, even those concerning women in the first place, was demonstrated by Jan N. Bremmer (2006) on the basis of epigram 44 devoted to the death of a young Macedonian girl who, apparently, was an initiate and took part in maenadic rituals.

The dedication to Persephone, most likely connected to the universon of mystery cults focused around Dionysos (Christesen, Murray 2010: 432-433), does not stand alone in the funerary contexts of late Classical and early Hellenistic Macedonia. Two of the most prominent aristocratic graves from the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, i.e. the early monumental ‘Tomb of Euridice’ (probably the burial place of queen Euridice, mother of Philip II) in Aigai/Vergina, and the ‘Tomb of Persephone’ (Tomb I of the Great Tumulus in Vergina; a looted cist grave, possibly of an aristocratic lady), contain masterpieces of Macedonian painting with representations of Hades and Persephone: in the first case it is the divine couple on a chariot, painted on the backrest of a throne, while in the latter case the rape of Persephone is represented on the north wall, and the mourning Demeter on the east wall (Andronikos 1994: 49-75). Demeter with Persephone in her arms is the subject of a rare terracotta found in Pella. These rare topics in Greek painting attest the prominence of the afterlife beliefs, regarded by modern scholarship as related to mystery cults and initiations as early as in the late Classical period in Macedonia. The sanctuary of Demeter in Dion is among the most ancient worship places uncovered in Macedonia, with the remains of the oldest temple in the area, dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC; in Pella, one of the most important cult places was the Thesmophorion.

## Votive offerings and private contexts

Apart from funeral contexts, also votive deposits found in temples and private shrines abound in figures of Dionysos and the personages from his thiasos, first of all the satyrs or sylens (see e.g. the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards finds from Pella – especially the sanctuary of Darron, a local healing deity, as well as from Veroia and sites around Thessaloniki). The importance of Dionysos in the private life is attested also by one of the most prominent masterpieces from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century: the mosaic showing the youthful god riding a panther, which decorated the floor in one of the wealthy villas in Pella (Hardiman 2010: 518).

At the same time, other mystery cults gain increasing popularity, among them in particular those of Kybele, Attis and Adonis, which is also shown first of all by the numerous finds of small objects. Of particular interest is a terracotta from Pella (Archaeological Museum, without inv. No.), representing a tree trunk wrapped in cloth, connected with a relatively little known ritual of Attis.

Sanctuaries devoted to Kybele and Attis were located in Amphipolis and Pella. Actually, traces of these Phrygian religions are attested in the area of Thraco-Macedonia quite early, judging by the 5<sup>th</sup> century finds from Olynthus (Vermaseren 1989: cat. Nos. *i. al.* 201-202, 207-208, 211-214; Roller 1999: 181); earlier presence of these cults in Europe is attested in archaeological material only in Thrace (Apollonia in today's Bulgaria and Salmydessus in today's European part of Turkey; Vermaseren 1989: cat. Nos. 361-362 and 365 for both sites resp.), which points to the route of transmission from Phrygia to Macedonia through Thrace. Interestingly, the same route might be suggested for the adoption of some funeral rites, involving the banqueting symbolism, as research on Thracian aristocratic burials and their Eastern roots shows (Zournatzi 2000).

## Perspectives

It appears that from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards Dionysiac cults and rites in Macedonia were strongly influenced by the Orphic elements on the one hand, and by the Eastern mystery cults on the other hand,

which were superimposed on the pre-existing wine deities cults, natural for peoples cultivating grapevine. To what extent these tendencies were related to the former presence of the Phrygians in the area, to the Greek colonization in the Black Sea coast and Thrace (Guettel Cole 2007: 329), and then to the Achaemenid impact on the westernmost province of the Persian empire at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, remains to be researched further, as well as the role of the Thracians and consequently the Macedonians in the origins, transmission, and propagation of Orphism in the wide Greek world. Of interest are also the contacts, similarities, and connections between Thraco-Macedonia and Magna Graecia, since many funeral practices and afterlife imagery in these two centres show a number of common features, and Italy has been established a prominent centre of Orphism in scholarship for a long time. Macedonia is, to a much greater extent, a *terra incognita*, but the increasing number of finds gives a tell-tale testimony to its, not only political, influence on the Greek world in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the Hellenistic age.

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