THE AMAZING SERIES

#3

The Gifts of Bacchus: The Little Euphoric Encyclopaedia of Amazing Wines from All Over the World

feat. Dyonisos, Frans Hals, Jan Steen, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, Picasso

Salomon W. Katz-Newburg

INTEGRAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Deities of Wine, between Bacchus and Dionysos

Dionysus or Dionysos is the god of the grape-harvest, winemaking and wine, of fertility, ritual madness, religious ecstasy, festivity and theatre in ancient Greek religion and myth.

He is also known as Bacchus, the name adopted by the Romans; the frenzy he induces is *bakkheia*. His *thyrsus*, sometimes wound with ivy and dripping with honey, is both a beneficent wand and a weapon used to destroy those who oppose his cult and the freedoms he represents. As Eleutherios ("the liberator"), his wine, music and ecstatic dance free his followers from self-conscious fear and care, and subvert the oppressive restraints of the powerful. Those who partake of his mysteries are believed to become possessed and empowered by the god himself.

In his religion, identical with or closely related to Orphism, Dionysus was believed to have been born from the union of Zeus and Persephone, and to have himself represented a chthonic or underworld aspect of Zeus. Many believed that he had been born twice, having been killed and reborn as the son of Zeus and the mortal Semele. In the Eleusinian Mysteries he was identified with Iacchus, the son (or, alternately, husband) of Demeter.

His origins are uncertain and his cults took many forms; some are described by ancient sources as Thracian, others as Greek. Though most accounts say he was born in Thrace, traveled abroad and arrived in Greece as a foreigner, evidence from the Mycenaean period of Greek history show that he is one of Greece's oldest attested gods. His attribute of "foreignness" as an arriving outsider-god may be inherent and essential to his cults, as he is a god of epiphany, sometimes called "the god that comes".

Wine played an important role in Greek culture and the cult of Dionysus was the main religious focus surrounding its consumption. Wine, as well as the vines and grapes that produce it, were seen as not only a gift of the God, but a symbolic incarnation of him on Earth. However, rather than being a god of drunkenness, as he was often stereotyped in the post-Classical era, the religion of Dionysus centered on the correct consumption of wine, which could ease suffering and bring joy, as well as inspire divine madness distinct from drunkenness. Performance art and drama were also central to his religion, and its festivals were the initial driving force behind the development of theatre. The cult of Dionysus is also a "cult of the souls"; his *maenads* feed the dead through blood-offerings, and he acts as a divine communicant between the living and the dead. He is sometimes categorised as a dying-and-rising go

Dionysus worship became firmly established by the seventh century BC. He may have been worshiped as early as c. 1500–1100 BC by Mycenaean Greeks; and traces of Dionysian-type cult have also been found in ancient Minoan Crete.

The Dionysia and Lenaia festivals were dedicated to Dionysus. The Rural Dionysia (or Lesser Dionysia) was one of the oldest festivals dedicated to Dionysus, begun in Attica, and probably celebrated the cultivation of vines. It was held during the winter month of Poseideon (the time surrounding the winter solstice, modern December or January). The Rural Dionysia centered on a procession, during which participants carried phalluses, long loaves of bread, jars of water and wine as well as other offerings, and young girls carried baskets. The procession was followed by a series of dramatic performances and drama competitions.

The City Dionysia (or Great Dionysia) took place in urban centers such as Athens and Eleusis, and was a later development, probably beginning during the sixth century BC. Held three months after the Rural Dionysia, the Greater festival fell near the spring equinox in the month of Elaphebolion (modern March or April). The procession of the City Dionysia was similar to that of the rural celebrations, but more elaborate, and led by participants carrying a wooden statue of Dionysus, and including sacrificial bulls and ornately dressed choruses. The dramatic competitions of the Greater Dionysia also featured more noteworthy poets and playwrights, and prizes for both dramatists and actors in multiple categories.

The central religious cult of Dionysus is known as the Bacchic or Dionysian Mysteries. The exact origin of this religion is unknown, though Orpheus was said to have invented the mysteries of Dionysus. Evidence suggests that many sources and rituals typically considered to be part of the similar Orphic Mysteries actually belong to Dionysian mysteries. Some scholars have suggested that, additionally, there is no difference between the Dionysian mysteries and the mysteries of Persephone, but that these were all facets of the same mystery religion, and that Dionysus and Persephone both had important roles in it. Previously considered to have been a primarily rural and fringe part of Greek religion, the major urban center of Athens played a major role in the development and spread of the Bacchic mysteries.

The Bacchic mysteries served an important role in creating ritual traditions for transitions in people's lives; originally primarily for men and male sexuality, but later also created space for ritualizing women's changing roles and celebrating changes of status in a woman's life. This was often symbolized by a meeting with the gods who rule over death and change, such as Hades and Persephone, but also with Dionysus' mother Semele, who probably served a role related to initiation into the mysteries.

The religion of Dionysus often included rituals involving the sacrifice of goats or bulls, and at least some participants and dancers wore wooden masks associated with the god. In some instances, records show the god participating in the ritual via a masked and clothed pillar, pole, or tree is used, while his worshipers eat bread and drink wine. The significance of masks and goats to the worship of Dionysus seems to date back to the earliest days of his worship, and these symbols have been found together at a Minoan tomb near Phaistos in Crete.

As early as the fifth century BC, Dionysus became identified with Iacchus, a minor deity from the tradition of the Eleusinian mysteries. This association may have arisen because of the homophony of the names Iacchus and Bacchus. Two black-figure lekythoi (c. 500 BC), possibly represent the earliest evidence for such an association. The nearly-identical vases, one in Berlin, the other in Rome, depict Dionysus.

And even more early evidence can be found in the works of the fifth-century BC Athenian tragedians Sophocles and Euripides. In Sophocles' drama *Antigone* (c. 441 BC), an ode to Dionysus begins by addressing Dionysus as the “God of Many Names”, who rules over the glens of Demeter's Eleusis, and ends by identifying him with “Iacchus the Giver”, who leads “the chorus of the stars whose breath is fire” and whose “attendant Thyiads” dance in “night-long frenzy”. And in a fragment from a lost play, Sophocles describes Nysa, Dionysus' traditional place of nurture: “From here I caught sight of Nysa, haunt of Bacchus, famed among mortals, which Iacchus of the bull's horns counts as his beloved nurse”. In Euripides' *Bacchae* (c. 405 BC), a messenger, describing the Bacchic revelries on mount Cithaeron, associates Iacchus with Bromius, another of the names of Dionysus, saying, they “began to wave the thyrsos... calling on Iacchus, the son of Zeus, Bromius, with united voice”.

An inscription found on a stone stele (c. 340 BC), found at Delphi, contains a paean to Dionysus, which describes his travels. From Thebes, where he was born, he first went to Delphi where he displayed his “starry body”, and with “Delphian girls” took his “place on the folds of Parnassus”, then next to Eleusis, where he is called “Iacchus”:

> *And in your hand brandishing your night-*
> *lighting flame, with god-possessed frenzy*
> *you went to the vales of Eleusis*
> *...*
> *where the whole people of Hellas'*
> *land, alongside your own native witnesses*
> *of the holy mysteries, calls upon you*
> *as Iacchus: for mortals from their pains*
> *you have opened a haven without toils.*

Strabo, says that Greeks “give the name 'Iacchus' not only to Dionysus but also to the leader-in-chief of the mysteries”. In particular, Iacchus was identified with the Orphic Dionysus, who was a son of Persephone. Sophocles mentions “Iacchus of the bull's horns”, and according to the first-century BC historian Diodorus Siculus, it was this older Dionysus who was represented in paintings and sculptures with horns, because he “excelled in sagacity and was the first to attempt the yoking of oxen and by their aid to effect the sowing of the seed”. Arrian, the second-century Greek historian, wrote that it was to this Dionysus, the son of Zeus and Persephone, “not the Theban Dionysus, that the mystic chant 'Iacchus' is sung”. The second-century poet Lucian also referred to the “dismemberment of Iacchus”.

The fourth- or fifth-century poet Nonnus associated the name Iacchus with the “third” Dionysus. He described the Athenian celebrations given to the first Dionysus Zagreus, son of Persephone, the second Dionysus Bromios, son of Semele, and the third Dionysus Iacchus: “They [the Athenians] honoured him as a god next after the son of Persephoneia, and after Semele's son; they established sacrifices for Dionysos late born and Dionysos first born, and third they chanted a new hymn for Iacchos. In these three celebrations Athens held high revel; in the dance lately made, the Athenians beat the step in honour of Zagreus and Bromios and Iacchos all together”.

By some accounts, Iacchus was the husband of Demeter. Several other sources identify Iacchus as Demeter's son. The earliest such source, a fourth-century BC vase fragment at Oxford, shows Demeter holding the child Dionysus on her lap. By the first-century BC, Demeter suckling Iacchus had become such a common motif, that the Latin poet Lucretius could use it as an apparently recognizable example of a lover's euphemism. A scholiast on the second-century AD Aristides, explicitly names Demeter as Iacchus' mother.

In the Orphic tradition, the “first Dionysus” was the son of Zeus and Persephone, and was dismembered by the Titans before being reborn. Dionysus was the patron god of the Orphics, who they connected to death and immortality, and he symbolized the one who guides the process of reincarnation.

The Orphic Dionysus is sometimes referred to with the alternate name Zagreus. The earliest mentions of this name in literature describe him as a partner of Gaia and call him the highest god. Aeschylus linked Zagreus with Hades, as either Hades' son or Hades himself. Noting “Hades' identity as Zeus' *katachthonios* alter ego”, Timothy Gantz thought it likely that Zagreus, originally, perhaps, the son of Hades and Persephone, later merged with the Orphic Dionysus, the son of Zeus and Persephone. However, no known Orphic sources use the name “Zagreus” to refer to the Orphic Dionysus.

It is possible that the association between the two was known by the third century BC, when the poet Callimachus may have written about it in a now-lost source. Callimachus, as well as his contemporary Euphorion, told the story of the dismembered of the infant Dionysus and Byzantine sources quote Callimachus as referring to the birth of a “Dionysos Zagreus”, explaining that Zagreus was the poets' name for the *chthonic* aspect of Dionysus. The earliest definitive reference to the belief that Zagreus is another name for the Orphic Dionysus is found in the late first century writings of Plutarch. The fifth century Greek poet Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* tells the story of this Orphic Dionysus, in which Nonnus calls him the “older Dionysos... illfated Zagreus”, ”Zagreus the horned baby”, ”Zagreus, the first Dionysos”, ”Zagreus the ancient Dionysos” and “Dionysos Zagreus”.

The mystery cult of Bacchus was brought to Rome from the Greek culture of southern Italy or by way of Greek-influenced Etruria. It was established around 200 BC in the Aventine grove of Stimula by a priestess from Campania, near the temple where Liber Pater (“the Free Father”) had a State-sanctioned, popular cult. Liber was a native Roman god of wine, fertility and prophecy, patron of Rome's plebeians (citizen-commoners), and one of the members of the Aventine Triad, along with his mother Ceres and sister or consort Libera. A temple to the Triad was erected on the Aventine Hill in 493 BC, along with the institution of celebrating the festival of Liberalia. The worship of the Triad gradually took on more and more Greek influence, and by 205 BC, Liber and Libera had been formally

identified with Bacchus and Proserpina. Liber was often interchangeably identified with Dionysus and his mythology, though this identification was not universally accepted. Cicero insisted on the "non-identity of Liber and Dionysus" and described Liber and Libera as children of Ceres.

Liber, like his Aventine companions, carried various aspects of his older cults into official Roman religion. He protected various aspects of agriculture and fertility, including the vine and the "soft seed" of its grapes, wine and wine vessels, and male fertility and virility. Pliny called Liber "the first to establish the practice of buying and selling; he also invented the diadem, the emblem of royalty, and the triumphal procession". Roman mosaics and sarcophagi attest to various representations of a Dionysus-like exotic triumphal procession. In Roman and Greek literary sources from the late Republic and Imperial era, several notable triumphs feature similar, distinctively "Bacchic" processional elements, recalling the supposedly historic "Triumph of Liber".

Liber and Dionysus may have had a connection that predated Classical Greece and Rome, in the form of the Mycenaean god Eleutheros, who shared the lineage and iconography of Dionysus but whose name has the same meaning as Liber. Before the importation of the Greek cults, Liber was already strongly associated with Bacchic symbols and values, including wine and uninhibited freedom, as well as the subversion of the powerful. Several depictions from the late Republic era feature processions, depicting the "Triumph of Liber".

In Rome, the most well-known festivals of Bacchus were the Bacchanalia, based on the earlier Greek Dionysia festivals. These Bacchic rituals were said to have included omophagic practices, such as pulling live animals apart and eating the whole of them raw. This practice served not only as a reenactment of the infant death and rebirth of Bacchus, but also as a means by which Bacchic practitioners produced "enthusiasm": etymologically, to let a god enter the practitioner's body or to have her become one with Bacchus.

In Livy's account, the Bacchic mysteries were a novelty at Rome; originally restricted to women and held only three times a year, they were corrupted by an Etruscan-Greek version, and thereafter drunken, disinhibited men and women of all ages and social classes cavorted in a sexual free-for-all five times a month. Livy relates their various outrages against Rome's civil and religious laws and traditional morality (*mos maiorum*); a secretive, subversive and potentially revolutionary counter-culture. Livy's sources, and his own account of the cult, probably drew heavily on the Roman dramatic *genre* known as "Satyr plays", based on Greek originals. The cult was suppressed by the State with great ferocity; of the 7,000 arrested, most were executed. Modern scholarship treats much of Livy's account with skepticism; more certainly, a Senatorial edict, the *Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* was distributed throughout Roman and allied Italy. It banned the former Bacchic cult organisations. Each meeting must seek prior senatorial approval through a praetor. No more than three women and two men were allowed at any one meeting, Those who defied the edict risked the death penalty.

Bacchus was conscripted into the official Roman pantheon as an aspect of Liber, and his festival was inserted into the Liberalia. In Roman culture, Liber, Bacchus and Dionysus became virtually interchangeable equivalents. Thanks to his mythology involving travels and struggles on earth, Bacchus became euhemerised as a historical hero, conqueror, and founder of cities. He was a patron deity and founding hero at Leptis Magna, birthplace of the emperor Septimius Severus, who promoted his cult. In some Roman sources, the ritual procession of Bacchus in a tiger-drawn chariot, surrounded by maenads, satyrs and drunks, commemorates the god's triumphant return from the conquest of India. Pliny believed this to be the historical prototype for the Roman Triumph.

In the Neoplatonist philosophy and religion of Late Antiquity, the Olympian gods were sometimes considered to number 12 based on their spheres of influence. For example, according to Sallustius, "Jupiter, Neptune, and Vulcan fabricate the world; Ceres, Juno, and Diana animate it; Mercury, Venus, and Apollo harmonize it; and, lastly, Vesta, Minerva, and Mars preside over it with a guarding

power". The multitude of other gods, in this belief system, subsist within the primary gods and Sallustius taught that Bacchus subsisted in Jupiter.

In the Orphic tradition, a saying was supposedly given by an oracle of Apollo that stated "Zeus, Hades, [and] Helios-Dionysus" were "three gods in one godhead." This statement apparently conflated Dionysus not only with Hades, but also his father Zeus, and implied a particularly close identification with the sun-god Helios. When quoting this in his *Hymn to King Helios*, Emperor Julian substituted Dionysus' name with that of Serapis, whose Egyptian counterpart Osiris was also identified with Dionysus.

Though the last known worshippers of the Greek and Roman gods were converted before 1000 AD, there were several isolated instances of revived worship of Dionysus during the Medieval and early modern periods. With the rise of modern neopaganism, worship of the god has once again been revived.

According to the Lanercost chronicle, during Easter in 1282 in Scotland, the parish priest of Inverkeithing led young women in a dance in honor of Priapus and Father Liber, commonly identified with Dionysus. The priest danced and sang at the front, carrying a representation of the phallus on a pole. He was killed by a Christian mob later that year. Historian C. S. Watkins believes that Richard of Durham, the author of the chronicle, identified an occurrence of apotropaic magic with his knowledge of ancient Greek religion, rather than recording an actual case of survival of pagan rituals.

The late medieval Byzantine scholar Gemistus Pletho secretly advocated in favor of a return to paganism in medieval Greece.

In the eighteenth century, Hellfire Clubs sprung up in Britain and Ireland. Though activities varied between the clubs, some of them were very pagan, and included shrines and sacrifices. Dionysus was one of the most popular deities, alongside deities like Venus and Flora. Today one can still see the statue of Dionysus left behind in the Hellfire Caves.

In 1820, Ephraim Lyon founded the Church of Bacchus in Eastford, Connecticut. He declared himself High Priest, and added local drunks to the list of membership. He maintained that those who died as members would go to a Bacchanalia for their afterlife.

Modern pagan and polytheist groups often include worship of Dionysus in their traditions and practices, most prominently groups which have sought to revive Hellenic polytheism, such as the Supreme Council of Ethnic Hellenes (YSEE). In addition to libations of wine, modern worshipers of Dionysus offer the god grape vine, ivy, and various forms of incense, particularly styrax. They may also celebrate Roman festivals such as the Liberalia (March 17, close to the Spring Equinox) or Bacchanalia (Various dates), and various Greek festivals such as the Anthesteria, Lenaia, and the Greater and Lesser Dionysias, the dates of which are calculated by the lunar calendar.

In the Greek interpretation of the Egyptian pantheon, Dionysus was often identified with Osiris. Stories of the dismemberment of Osiris and the re-assembly and resurrection by Isis closely parallel those of the Orphic Dionysus and Demeter. According to Diodorus Siculus, as early as the fifth century BC, the two gods had been syncretized as a single deity known as Dionysus-Osiris. The most notable record of this belief is found in Herodotus' *Histories*. Plutarch also described his belief that Osiris and Dionysus were identical, stating that anyone familiar with the secret rituals associated with both gods would recognize obvious parallels, and that their dismemberment myths and associated public symbols are enough additional evidence that they are the same god worshiped by two different cultures.

Other syncretic Greco-Egyptian deities arose out of this conflation, including with the gods Serapis and Hermanubis. Serapis was believed to be both Hades and Osiris, and the Roman Emperor Julian considered him the same as Dionysus as well. Dionysus-Osiris was particularly popular in Ptolemaic Egypt, as the Ptolemies claimed descent from Dionysus, and as Pharaoes they had claim to the lineage