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Walter F. Otto's *Dionysos* (1933)

The first modern, book-length study of the god Dionysos, Walter F. Otto's *Dionysos. Mythos und Kultus* of that fateful year 1933, is not a very big book.¹ Its actual text contains less than 200 pages, of which a quarter is taken up by a discussion of myth and ritual. Yet its pioneering character and its modern influence warrant a fresh look at this, Otto's *Meisterwerk*.² The book was Otto's last, more or less traditional scholarly work before he was exiled to Königsberg in 1934 for political reasons.³ I will first look at what Otto has to say about myth and ritual in connection with Dionysos (§ 1). I will then survey the rest of the book and concentrate on a few questions, which have not received sufficient attention in recent times, namely the nature of Semele and the festival of the Agrionia. I will conclude by asking if Otto's book can still be considered a valuable contribution to the study of Dionysos.

1 Myth and Ritual

Although Otto's first chapter is called 'Mythos und Kultus,' it actually offers much more than a discussion of these two well-known concepts. Otto starts by claiming that the study of ancient Greek religion wavers between two opposing schools, the anthropological and philological ones. The first school compares the beliefs and practices of 'primitives' and outlying European peasants. It tries to go back to the earliest stages of a divinity and looks for its primeval uses, an approach that has given us terms like *Vegetationsgott*, 'fertility god' (11).⁴ The other school, represented by Wilamowitz, whose book on Greek religion had appeared only two years earlier,⁵ is not much better and lets the gods develop from rather simple functions, such as Hermes from being a protector. Not unreasonably, Otto fulminates against an all too historicising approach that leaves us only rather *blutleere Schemen* (15). Yet he does not help us any further by claiming that we need to look for an *Offenbarung des Göttlichen* (16), an idea that he had developed in his earlier

1 Otto 1933 (1938²). Note that the next full-length study, Jeanmaire 1951, almost totally neglects Otto and spells his name wrongly in the index.

2 Cancik 1998, 165–186.

3 On Otto see Lossau 1994; Stavru 2005² (with excellent bibliography).

4 For such German coinages as *Vegetationsgott*, *Seegott*, etc., see Graf 2009, 36–43.

5 Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1931–1932.

Die Götter Griechenlands of 1929.⁶ It is one of the paradoxes of Otto's religious development that he could not give up Christian terminology, even though he had renounced the Christian faith.⁷

Having thus put the two dominant schools into their places, Otto goes on to note that they both agree in stating that only cult genuinely attests religious belief (16); moreover, according to them, cultic acts aim at utilitarian purposes (17). Otto strongly opposes that approach and claims that man's first reaction was rather *Entzückung, Andacht, Huldigung und Preis*. That is why we also have to take into account what myth tells about the gods (18). From a contemporary point of view, it is highly interesting to note that Otto, who had followed Usener's lectures in Bonn,⁸ took myth very seriously. He noted that in the cult of Dionysos, but also in that of other gods, myths often reflected rituals (19). But whereas it is often naively assumed that rituals reflect myths, the *neuere Wissenschaft* explains myth from ritual, an idea that Otto seems to accept in the case of aetiological myths (20). In the end, though he rejects a dependency of myth on ritual or ritual on myth (20). But what is his alternative?

Otto first discusses what *Kultus* means according to him.⁹ The answer is a highly Romantic, imaginative idea of cult as an act that motivated by *die Berührung mit dem Göttlichem* – an idea that is completely unsupported by any evidence. Originally, cultic acts were not utilitarian, but their character was determined by the fact that their first performers *das Wünschenswerteste – die Gottesnähe – besaßen* (35). *Mythos* only started to originate when *Kultus* had lost its freshness (24), and it is also more informative as the forms of the cult are often less known to us; in fact, it is the most important aspect of Greek religion (24–25). Yet it seems as if Otto finds it easier to discuss cults, as he notes that *Kultus* attests *der Erscheinung des Göttlichen* (29) and *immer steht am Anfang der Gott* (31). It looks as if *Das Urphänomen des Mythos* exists, for Otto, between *die Erscheinung der Gottheit* and the appearance of culture and society (32).

Sometimes, Otto seems to identify cult and myth, as when he notes in his discussion of the scapegoat ritual: *Ihr Mythos war die kultische Handlung selbst* (40); both, in fact, *sind aus demselben Geiste geboren* (44). But he also notes that many cultic acts of the *Dionysische Religion* are reflections of *eines übermenschlichen Seins und Geschehens* (43), which seems to prioritise myth. In any case, Otto stresses that we cannot separate myth from cult, and thus comes close to a position defended, in a well-known article, by Henk Versnel, who also noted the

⁶ Otto 1929, 163–164, 231, cf. Cancik 1998, 139–163.

⁷ Otto 1923 and Otto 1929, 79, 233.

⁸ For Usener's influence on Otto see Wessels 2003, 189–225.

⁹ For this under-researched term see Bredholt Christensen 2009, 13–27.

similarity, to some extent, with Otto's position.¹⁰ Even if he was right for the wrong reasons, Otto did see the close connection of myth and ritual in ancient Greece much more clearly than many of his contemporaries.

2 Dionysos' Biography

Having looked at myth and ritual, as we would say today (but Otto also uses Usener's terminology of *Heilige Handlung* where we would say 'ritual'),¹¹ albeit in a rather unusual manner, Otto proceeded with a discussion of Dionysos along rather traditional lines. Otto rightly observes that Homer knows the cult and mythology of Dionysos well, from which he concludes that he must have been indigenous at least at the end of the second millennium (56), a date confirmed by the discovery of Dionysos' name in the Linear-B tablets. We should note the date proposed by Otto, as Cancik reproached him for never mentioning a date,¹² which is clearly not true. As regarding Dionysos' place of origin, Otto rightly remained sceptical of the possibility of determining a precise place and rightly rejected the current proposals of Thracia and Asia Minor as unconvincing (60–62).

Otto's subsequent discussion of Semele (62–70) is neglected in recent discussions, just as is Semele herself. Otto does not figure in the study of heroine cult by Larson, who has dedicated some unsatisfactory pages to her, nor does Semele even figure in the index of Seaford's recent book on Dionysos.¹³ What do we actually know about Semele?¹⁴

Semele is already mentioned by Homer as the Theban mother of Dionysos, who is a 'joy for mortals' (*Il.* 14.323–5), in a series of Zeus' girl friends, divine and mortal, and her motherhood is also mentioned by Eumelos (fr. 11 Bernabé = *Europa* fr. 1 Davies) and Tyrtaeus (20.2). Thebes clearly belongs to the oldest tradition, even though many other places claimed to be the birthplace of the god, such as Naxos, Kos and Ikaros, in the later seventh-century *Homeric Hymn to Dionysos* (A 2–3 West).¹⁵ Yet none of these mentions Dionysos' mother, whom we also find in Hesiod(?) (fr. 162.6 Most), Bacchylides (19.49–50) and Pindar (fr. 75.19 Maehler). She clearly was still a girl when Zeus approached her, as Euripides

10 Versnel 1993, 15–88 at 48 n. 87. I critically discuss this position in Bremmer 2005 and 2010, both to be added to Parker 2011, 22–23, 213.

11 Otto 1933 (1938²), 74, 81; for Usener's terminology see Bremmer 2011.

12 Cancik 1998, 145

13 Larson 1995, 93–96; Seaford 2006.

14 For a full bibliography see Kossatz-Deissmann 1994, 718–26 and Wilson 2009, 448–450.

15 West 2003, 7.

(Ba. 2) calls her *korê Kadmou*, ‘daughter of Kadmos.’ As such, she was one of four sisters, whose names are already mentioned by Hesiod (*Th.* 976),¹⁶ and the same number occurs in Pindar (*P.* 3.98–99). Of the names of these sisters – Semele, Ino, Agaue and Autonoe – the last three are all connected with the sea, Ino being a marine goddess,¹⁷ and Agaue and Autonoe being names of Nereids (West *ad loc.*). This seems to suggest that the names have been invented relatively recently, and that Semele does not originally belong to this group. With his attention to myth and ritual, Otto (64) notes that Semele is treated differently from the other three sisters in Pindar (*P.* 3.97–99) and illuminatingly connects the triad of sisters with the threefold organisation of the maenadic thiasoi elsewhere in Greek cult, to start with in Euripides’ *Bacchae* (680).¹⁸ The fact that there are three Proitids and three Minyads (below) suggests that this maenadic organisation went back well into pre-Archaic times. In Thebes, Semele may well have played an important role in such maenadic thiasoi, as Euripides (*Ph.* 1754–1757) lets Antigone mention that she dressed in the ‘Kadmeian *nebris*’ and ‘led upon the mountains the sacred thiasos of Semele in dancing.’

According to Otto (67–68), Semele is called Thyone to denote her immortal aspect, but he clearly did not properly collect and evaluate the relevant evidence; moreover, he also overlooked the late nature of our sources in this respect. We find the name Thyone first in Sappho (17.9–10 Voigt), who calls Dionysos Thyone’s son. As his parents are Zeus and Hera, Sappho clearly has the same Lesbian divine triad in mind as Alcaeus (129.5–8 Voigt), who mentions Zeus, Hera and Dionysos. The fact that Zeus and Hera already have a son, Drimios (PY Tn 316.8–9), in Mycenaean times, suggests continuity, even though Drimios is no longer attested in the first millennium. The name Thyone for Dionysos’ mother also occurs in the somewhat later ending of the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysos* (D 12 West), was probably mentioned in Aeschylus’ *Semele or the Watercarriers*,¹⁹ is certainly used by Pindar (*P.* 3.99), occurs on two late fifth-century Attic vases,²⁰ and is used instead of Semele by Philodamos (I.7 Furley-Bremer) in the middle of the fourth century. Finally, Dionysos was worshipped as Thyonidas on Rhodes (Hsch. s.v. Θυωνίδα), as Thyonais he is mentioned by Oppian (*C.* 1.27, 4.285), and Ovid (*Met.* 4.13) even calls him Thyoneus.

16 Note also Hyg. 79.1: Semele, Ino, Agaue and Autonoe.

17 Ino is already daughter of Kadmos in *Od.* 5.333 and Hes. *Th.* 937. She is a nurse of Dionysos since Pherecydes *FGrHist* 3 F 90 = Fowler F 90cd; Apollod. 3.4.3; Kühr 2006, 280–281.

18 But note also [Theoc.] 26.2; Prop. 3.17.24; *I. Magnesia* 215 = Sokolowski, *LSAM*, 48 = Jaccottet 2003, 2.146.

19 See Radt *ad loc.* (p. 355).

20 Kossatz-Deissmann 1994, nn. 28–29.

However, Panyassis (fr. 5 Davies = fr. 8 Bernabé) and Pherecydes (F 90d Fowler), undoubtedly early and good sources, employ Thyone as the name for Dionysos' nurse; moreover, on several Attic vases a maenad is called Thyone.²¹ The name, then, seems to have originated as an independent tradition in the eastern Aegean. It can hardly be separated from the Thyiades, a different name of the maenads,²² and the rather rare month name Thyios with its festival Thyia, which is attested in Elis (Paus. 6.26.1–2) and Thessaly.²³ It is perhaps not surprising that later sources used the two names to differentiate between Semele and Thyone and called her Thyone after her death and ascension from the underworld into heaven.²⁴ The ascension itself was already attested on Attic vases from about 520 BCE onwards,²⁵ and the tradition of Dionysos' *katabasis* into the underworld to rescue his mother was treated in a tragedy of Iophon (*TGrF* 22 F 3). Did the theme perhaps develop in Bacchic mysteries?²⁶

We find the same alternation of a name between Dionysos' mother and his nurse elsewhere in the mythological tradition. Euripides (fr. 177 Kannicht; note also *TrGF* Adesp. 204) called Dionysos' mother Dione but that was also the name of one of Dionysos' nurses according to Pherecydes (F 90b Fowler).²⁷ As Dione survived in outlying Dodona as Zeus' wife, just as did Diwia in outlying Pamphylia,²⁸ she seems to have been relatively ancient, even though arguments claiming an Indo-European existence are somewhat tenuous.²⁹ Comparing all these data, we can conclude that the name of Dionysos' mother was not fixed, even though Semele proved to be the most popular name. The variety is once again an interesting illustration of the fact that in Greek mythology the names of women

21 Kossatz-Deissmann 1991, 191.

22 Thy(i)ades: Alc. fr. 63.1 Davies; S. *Ant.* 1151; Timotheus, fr. 2b Page; Lyc. 143, 505; Cat. 64.391; Verg. *Aen.* 4.302 (with Pease *ad loc.*); Hor. *C.* 2.19.9, 3.15.10 (with Nisbet and Rudd); Prop. 3.18.14 (with Fedeli); Plin. *HN* 36.23.3: *Maenades et quas Thyidas vocant*; Statius *Theb.* 12.792; Val. Flac. 8.447; Plu. *M.* 293F, 364E, cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 2005, 211–213; Paus. 10.6.4; Serv. *Aen.* 4.302: *thyias Baccha*; Eust. *in Il.* I.342 (= I p. 179.5).

23 Trümper 1997, 199–200, 225.

24 D.S. 4.25.4; Charax *FGrHist* 103 F 14; Apollod. 3.5.3; Hsch. *Suda s.v.* Θυώνη.

25 Kossatz-Deissmann 1994 nn. 19–26; Wilson 2009, add. 3.

26 D.S. 4.25.4; Hyg. *Fab.* 251, *Astr.* 2.5 (Argive historians as source); Plu. *Quaest. Rom. et Gr.* 293D (Delphi as surmised by Plutarch: possible but not necessarily convincing); Apollod. 3.38; Paus. 2.31.5 (Troizen), 2.37.5 (Lerna) For Semele's *anodos*, see Moret 1993, 293–351; Kossatz-Deissmann 1994, nn. 19–26; Wilson 2009, add. 4; Parker 2011, 181–182.

27 Note that in fr. 90b Valckenaer wanted to emend Διώνη in Θυώνη, whereas in fr. 90d Carl Robert wanted to emend *Thyene* into *Dione*.

28 Brixhe 2002, 54–55 (Pamphylia); Rougemont 2005, 337 n. 63.

29 Dunkel 1988–1990 claims an Indo-European ancestry for Dione, but note the objections of West 2007, 192.

were much more fluid than those of men, even those of women whom we would have thought to be of prime importance.³⁰

Semele's fatal love for Zeus is not mentioned before the fifth century, as the second ending of the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysos* seems to be somewhat later than the first ending.³¹ Later authors had much to tell about the way Semele was deceived by Hera, who transformed herself into Semele's nurse Beroe, but none is earlier than the first century BCE.³² This seems to point to a motif from the Hellenistic era rather than from the classical period. In any case, all agree that Semele perished through the lightning of Zeus, but that Dionysos was saved. There are a few Greek iconographic representations of her death, starting around 390 BCE, but in Roman times Semele's death became a popular theme in art.³³

The place where Semele was supposed to have met Zeus and her death was treated as an ἄβατον, called a σηκός and remembered as her grave and her θάλαμος, 'bridal room'.³⁴ This spot was located on the Theban acropolis. On the other hand, according to Pausanias the tomb of Semele was found in the Lower Town near the Proetid Gate, a location that is confirmed by a passage from Hyginus that has been overlooked in the commentaries.³⁵ Moreover, there also was a σηκός ἄβατος, which was considered as her tomb, on Mount Kithairon, where the already mentioned 'thiasos of Semele' performed their maenadic dances.³⁶ Traditionally, the qualification as ἄβατον points to a more than normal status for the person killed by lightning, and it was not different in the case of Semele. Hesiod already mentions her divine status, and this is confirmed by a series of later authors.³⁷ The location of Semele's place of death on the acropolis was hardly chance. Not only was the acropolis the most important place of Thebes, but its inhabitants could also see there the remains of a Mycenaean palace that had been destroyed by a big fire.³⁸ It was this ruin with its ashes, which was still visible in Pausanias' time (9.12.3–4), that must have given rise to

30 For this phenomenon see Bremmer 1988², 45.

31 West 2003, 31.

32 D.S. 3.63.3–4, 4.2.2–3; Ov. *Met.* 3.256–315; Hyg. *Fab.* 167, 179; Apollod. 3.4.3.

33 Kossatz-Deissmann 1994, nn. 6–17 and Wilson 2009, add. 3.

34 Ἄβατον: E. *Ba.* 10; Aristid. 25.2; Paus. 9.12.3, cf. Parker 1983, 167 note 132. Σηκός: *FD* III.1.351, 17, 28 and p. 200 = *SEG* 19.379. Grave: E. *Ba.* 596–600. Θάλαμος: Statius *Theb.* 7.602; Paus. 9.12.3.

35 Hyg. 9.1 *Semelae bustum*; Paus. 9.16.7; for the location, Symeonoglou 1985, 190.

36 E. *Ph.* 1751–56 with scholiast *ad loc.*

37 Hes. *Th.* 942; Pi. *O.* 2.25, *P.* 11.1; D.S. 5.52; Charax *FGrHist* 103 F 14; Ach. Tat. 2.37.4; Aristid. 41.3; Philostr. *Iun. Im.* 1.14.

38 Symeonoglou 1985, 57, 137–8, 186; Kühr 2006, 220–222.

the myth of Zeus' lightning: an interesting example how a topographical feature can give rise to a specific motif in myth.³⁹

Despite Otto's rejection (66), Semele's name is generally accepted as being of Thracian origin and meaning 'Earth,' a meaning that was already surmised by the great Apollodorus (*FGrHist* 244 F). She is most likely an old goddess, who must be related to the Indo-European Plataia, 'Broad earth,' the eponymous nymph of Boeotian Plataiai and a consort of Zeus (Paus. 9.3.1).⁴⁰ Apparently, the same goddess had been imported by small groups of invading Indo-Europeans, but in the course of time the name and the status of the goddess had become differentiated. In any case, the evidence we have, however debated sometimes, clearly points into a different direction than Otto's insistence on Semele being a purely human girl (67). Walter Burkert, who, strangely enough, discusses Dionysos twice in his history of Greek religion, situates the death of Semele in the maenadic complex, but that is hardly persuasive.⁴¹ I would rather stress that Dionysos' human birth is not really human because of the lightning that killed his mother, which turned her into a goddess. His birth suggests something of the ambivalent nature of Dionysos between Olympos and Thebes, order and disorder, nature and culture. In this respect Otto is perhaps not that far from the mark when he notes that the god *also schon durch seine Abkunft ein Angehöriger zweier Reiche war* (70).

After Semele, Otto proceeds to discuss the myths of Dionysos' epiphany. One must immediately grant him that in this respect he was ahead of his time, as he rejected the idea that the myths of Dionysos' arrival reflected a historical truth (72), as Welcker and Rohde had argued before him and Nilsson still maintained after him.⁴² According to Otto, the myths reflected the power of the god, which humans could not easily accept. Cult and myth thus reflected the same nature of the god (71–75). The arrival was imagined in all kinds of ways, which Otto persuasively analyses in a kind of structural approach *avant la lettre*; especially the role of noise as breaking normality is interestingly elaborated (86–88). The climax (a somewhat dubious pun in this respect) of his arrivals was the wedding of the god with the wife of the Athenian ἄρχων βασιλεύς, where Otto's reticence (79–81) is much more persuasive than Burkert's explicit mention of sex.⁴³ Finally, Otto sees the mask as a symbol of the arrival and presence of Dionysos, and the

³⁹ See also Schachter 1981, 187–188.

⁴⁰ R. Janko on *Il.* 14.323–325; West 2007, 175, 182.

⁴¹ Burkert 1985, 161–167, 222–225 at 165 (= 2011a, 254).

⁴² Nilsson 1967³, 564–568.

⁴³ Burkert 1983, 233. Otto has been overlooked in the most recent discussion: Parker 2005, 303–305.

language of his analysis – *Die letzten Geheimnisse des Daseins und Nichtseins starren den Menschen mit ungeheuren Augen an* – is impressive, but too Romantic and philosophical to be persuasive to this non-German author (81–85).

What does all this emotion and noise announce? Otto (89–95) now combines a number of aspects of Dionysiac myth and ritual, a way of proceeding that we find repeated in Versnel's excellent discussion of the *Bacchae*.⁴⁴ Yet it also seems to me that he combines different aspects that should be kept separate. On the one hand, there is the appearance of milk, honey and wine that shows that the god has manifested himself.⁴⁵ These are not the primordial gifts that Dionysos has bestowed on humanity, as Versnel claims⁴⁶ – as Dionysos did not give milk or water to mankind – but the most valuable fluids for mankind. Their appearance is a typical product of the mythical imagination, even if later on transposed into cult, at least to some extent, as we do not find Dionysiac wells of milk or water.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the violence of the maenads is also a mythical motif, but this is caused by their ecstasy and the probably concomitant lack of pain of the maenads during their ecstatic dances in the winter;⁴⁸ in other words, this is a motif that originated in ritual, and the two should not be confused.

Yet, claims Otto (96), the splendour of the wonderful gifts is suddenly overcast by a profound darkness, which is expressed in all kinds of ritual acts. Otto (96–112) now collects each and every Dionysiac myth and ritual where murder, cannibalism, violence or cruelty is attested, which are all categorised as madness.⁴⁹ Moreover, and not wrongly, Otto connects the *diasparagmos* by the women with the fate of the god suffered from the hands of the Titans (100). As before, Otto stresses the oppositions within the persona of Dionysos, as he is both the nurturing and enchanting god as well as the 'eater of raw flesh' and 'render of men.'⁵⁰ According to Otto, death is an important feature of the latter side of the god, and the expression 'raw eating' can be found *nur bei den Ungeheuern der Totenwelt* (106). This is of course not true,⁵¹ as the epithet is already used by Homer (*Il.* 11.454, 24.82) for birds and fishes, and by Aeschylus

44 Versnel 1990, 165–167.

45 *E. Hyps.* fr. 758a Kannicht (wine, milk, honey); see also *E. Ba.* 142–143 (milk, wine, honey), 704–711 (water, wine, milk, honey); *Pl. Io* 354a (milk and honey), *cf.* Usener 1913, 398–417; Nisbet and Hubbard on *Hor. C.* 2.19.10; Graf 1980, 209–221.

46 Versnel 1990, 167.

47 Kany 1988, 5–23; Sourvinou-Inwood 2005, 152–155; Parker 2011, 183.

48 Bremmer 1984, 272 and 2006, 40.

49 This is stressed by Cancik 1998, 177 note 60.

50 For Dionysos as 'Raw Eater,' see most recently Parker 2011, 165–167.

51 Otto is too quickly followed by Nisbet and Hubbard on *Hor. C.* 2.29.29.

(A. 827) for the lion. Similarly unconvincing is his connection of Dionysos with the Erinyes because both share the epithet *melanaigis*,⁵² and his comparison of Euripides' expression 'hellish Bacchants' in the *Hecuba* (1119). Admittedly, Dionysos is connected to Persephone by the Orphics,⁵³ but that connection should not be generalised to Greek religion *tout court*. Even the connection of Dionysiac Greek festivals with the dead is problematic, although the famous conundrum Kares/Keres of the Anthesteria is rather peremptorily dismissed by Robert Parker,⁵⁴ and the interpretation of the Agriania in Argos as Nekysia is attested only in Hesychius (α 788), where it seems to be a later interpretation of the commemoration of Iphinoe, as we will see shortly. The only certain connection between Dionysos and death seems to be found on the black seems to be on funerary black-figure lekythoi, but even here the god disappears with the arrival of red-figure.⁵⁵

The Agrionia are a central element of Otto's argument (110–112), and it is therefore not surprising that Hubert Cancik in his rather critical discussion of Otto's *Dionysos* directed his arrows against Otto's analysis of this festival. Cancik argues not only that Otto much too often uses the term *grausam*, 'cruel,' in his analysis, but also that the festival is attested only in Plutarch, far too late a testimony to be valid for the *Urzeit*. Its ancient character is not proven and the Lyncurus myth from the *Iliad* wrongly adduced in this connection.⁵⁶ Whereas Cancik is right regarding Otto's over-emphasis on cruelty, his objections to Otto's general interpretation are much less convincing. Let us take a fresh look at the festival.

The first aspect that must strike every student that comes new to the problem is that all recent scholars call the festival Agrionia in their texts.⁵⁷ The preference for this version of the festival's name is clearly influenced by the description in Plutarch, who is our best source. Yet the tradition also presents the name Agriania, though the variants Agrionia (Plu. *Quaest. Conv.* 717) and Agrania (Hsch. α 750) both occur in literature only and, in the light of the epigraphical evidence, are clearly manuscript errors.⁵⁸ As none of the recent discussions has presented the full evidence, it may be useful to do that first.

52 Cf. Hutchinson on A. *Th.* 699.

53 See now especially Sourvinou-Inwood 2005, 169–189.

54 Parker 2005, 297.

55 Van de Put 2009.

56 Cancik 1998, 174–176.

57 Burkert 1983, 168–179; Graf 1985, 79–80; Sourvinou-Inwood 2005, 347–350.

58 *Contra* Trümpy 1997, 126 note 258, who mistakes manuscript errors for dialectical developments.

The festival is called Agrionia in Boeotia. Here it is attested in Orchomenos (Plu. *Quaest. Rom. et Gr.* 299F), where we also find the personal name Agrionios (*IG* VII.3219), Chaeroneia (Plu. *Quaest. conv.* 717A) and Thebes (*IG* VII.2447; Hsch. α 788).⁵⁹ The month name Agrionios is found in Oropos (*IG* VII.247) and Lebadeia (*IG* VII.382),⁶⁰ and from Boeotia the month name clearly wandered to Melitaia in Achaia Phthiotis (*IG* IX. 2.206). Plutarch (*Ant.* 24.5) also mentions the epithet Agrionios for Dionysos, which is lacking in Farnell's *Cults of the Greek States*, who was perhaps influenced by Nilsson's comment that the epithet must have been late and *ohne weitere Bedeutung*.⁶¹ But Plutarch is an excellent source, and there seems to be no reason to doubt the existence of the epithet that fits the Boeotian spelling, the less so as more recently the epithet Agrios for Dionysos has turned up in Macedonia (*SEG* 48.748.IV).

On the other hand, the festival is called Agriania in Dorian areas. Here we find the festival itself mentioned only for Argos, but the corresponding month name Agrianios has recently been found there as well, as was to be expected.⁶² The month name was fairly widespread. On the Peloponnese we find it not only in Corinth, from where colonists exported it to Ambracia (*SEG* 35.665), Illyria (*SEG* 36.565, 38.468) and Epirus (*SEG* 33.473),⁶³ but also in Messene (*IG* V.1.1447), Megara (to judge by its colony Byzantium),⁶⁴ and Epidaurus.⁶⁵ From the Peloponnese the month was also exported to the south where we find a cluster in Rhodos (passim) and the neighbouring islands Syme (*IG* XII.3 *Suppl.* 1269) and Telos (*SEG* 14.715) as well as in Kos with its neighbour Kalymna, where the month was the beginning of the second semester.⁶⁶ Finally, we find the month in Cretan Olus where it may have come directly from the Peloponnese (*IC* I.16.3).⁶⁷

Finally, in Eresos on Aeolian Lesbos the month name was Agerranios (*IG* XII.2 527), a variant that has now also turned up in Pamphylian Aspendos.⁶⁸ There can be little doubt, then, that the month name is very old, just like the concomitant

⁵⁹ See also Knoepfler 2004, 1247–1252.

⁶⁰ See also *IG* VII.247, 535, 2447, 3219, 3348, 3354–55, 3376, 3388, 3404.

⁶¹ Nilsson 1906, 273 note 1.

⁶² Kritzas 2006, 431, *cf.* Chauvet Gabit 2009, 206.

⁶³ As is shown by Cabanes 2003; *SEG* 56.392.

⁶⁴ Trümpy 1997, 147–149, 154.

⁶⁵ *IG* IV.2, V.1.18, 1447; *SEG* 24.277.

⁶⁶ Trümpy 1997, 179–182, now corrected by Bosnakis/Hallof 2005, 233–240.

⁶⁷ For its place in the year, see the, somewhat inconclusive discussion of Chaniotis 1996, 25–41.

⁶⁸ Brixhe/Tekoglu 2000, 25.

festival. The fact that the festival is attested rather lately is no argument against Otto, and in this respect Cancik is certainly in the wrong.

Now what do we know about the festival? As far as I can see, we have more detailed information only for four places: Peloponnesian Argos and Boeotian Orchomenos, Chaironeia and Thebes. This is not the place to analyse in detail all the myths and rituals of the festival. Here I want to concentrate especially on the structure of the whole and its message. Let us start with the Boeotian ones as they are the most detailed. In Orchomenos the Agrionia was connected with the myth of the Minyads. The myth focuses on the refusal of the daughters of Minyas to join the other women in the Dionysiac dances. When they finally gave in and joined the other women in the mountains, they were chased away, as they had killed the son of one of them, and changed into birds. In the ritual we hear of women from a specific Orchomenian family, called the Oleiai, who are pursued by a priest who tries to catch them. In Plutarch's time, the priest Zoilos was swept away by Dionysiac frenzy and actually killed one of the women. Consequently, the priesthood was taken away from his family and given to the best of all. Plutarch starts his brief notice by mentioning the husbands of the Minyads, who were called the Psoloeis, 'Black ones.' The husbands, I would suggest, must have been chasing the Minyads in the local version of the myth, and the priest Zoilos will have descended from a family that claimed descent from one of the husbands. His name, Zoilos, was very popular in Orchomenos in Plutarch's time,⁶⁹ and there seems to be no reason to doubt the latter's information.⁷⁰

In Chaironeia, as Plutarch tells, the women go out to search for Dionysos, but give up their search when they hear that he had secretly fled and hidden himself with the Muses. Subsequently, they pose one another riddles and word plays.⁷¹ As Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood persuasively argues, the mythological scheme is the same as that of Dionysos fleeing for Lycurgus and hiding with Thetis and the Nereids.⁷² The motif of being hidden is typical for Dionysos. Boeotian tradition tells us that after his birth Dionysos was handed over to his mother's sisters, Ino and Athamas, who hid him in Euboea dressed up as a girl, a characteristic

⁶⁹ Fraser/Matthews 2000, 177 list 7 examples.

⁷⁰ Ov. *Met.* 4.1–415; Plu. *Quaest. Rom. et Gr.* 299F–300A; Ael. *VH.* 3.42; Apollod. 3.5.2; Ant. Lib. 10.3 (referring to Nicander and Corinna); Schachter 1981, 180–201; Burkert 1983, 177–179; Dowden 1989, 82–84.

⁷¹ Plu. *Quaest. Conv.* 717A; Schachter 1981, 173; Parker 2011, 191.

⁷² *Il.* 6.130–37 (Lycurgus); Plu. *Quaest. Conv.* 716F–717A (Chaironeia), cf. Burkert 1983, 176–178; Franoux 1992; Sourvinou-Inwood 2005, 106–108, 203–205; Simon/Dennert 2009.

initiatory motif of course.⁷³ In Macedonia, Dionysos even received the epithet (Ἐπι)Κρυπτός, 'Hidden' (*SEG* 48.748.I, II, IV).⁷⁴

In Thebes we hear only of ἀγῶνες, which means that the musical-dramatic competitions superseded other parts of the festival in Hellenistic times and thus the later tradition,⁷⁵ but in Argos the festival was connected to the myth of the Proetids.⁷⁶ Strangely enough, Hesychius has two entries regarding the Argive Agriania, one (α 750) mentioning that it was a festival for one of the daughters of Proetus, the other (α 788) that it was a Nekysia. Burkert interprets the latter notice as a festival for the dead, but it seems more economical to combine the two and to conclude that the Nekysia refers to Iphinoe, the Proetid that was killed.⁷⁷ According to Apollodorus (2.2.2), Hesiod explained the madness of the daughters of Proetus from their refusal to accept the mysteries of Dionysos, whereas Acusilaus of Argos (*FGrHist* 2 F 28 = F 28 Fowler) states that they mocked the wooden statue of Hera. However, from other sources it is clear that Hesiod also mentioned Hera as the cause of the madness,⁷⁸ and moreover, the mysteries of Dionysos can hardly have existed already in Hesiod's time. The daughters of King Proetus of Tiryns had become mad and wandered round the country, their skins covered with a kind of white eczema, until Melampus chased them but in the pursuit also killed one of them, whose grave was shown in Sicyon: probably an indication of an Agriania festival there too.⁷⁹

It seems clear from these notices that originally a chase of Dionysiac women was part of the Agriania/Agrionia ritual and myth, even if refracted variously in later differing versions. In fact, Argive tradition also mentioned the grave of the maenad Choreia and a tomb for other maenads,⁸⁰ who had fallen in a chase of

73 *Trag. Adesp.* 646ab; Seneca, *Oed.* 418 ff; Apollod. 3.4.3; Nonn. *D.* 14.143-167, 20.229-230; Bremmer 1999.

74 For the 'hiding,' note also the interesting study by van Liefferinge 2008.

75 Hsch. s.v. ἀγριάτια; *IG* II².971, as corrected by L. Robert, *OMS* I, 266 note 1; *IG* VII.2447; *IG* XI.4.1061, as restored by L. Robert, *OMS* I, 266; Schachter 1981, 189-191.

76 See most recently Henrichs 1974; Bonnechere 1994, 181-201; Casadio 1994, 51-122; Kahil 1994; Dorati 2004; Cairns 2005. This makes the analysis of Burkert 1983, 170-171 less persuasive in its combination of Dionysos and Hera.

77 *Contra* Burkert 1983, 173.

78 Hes. fr. 131-132 M.-W.

79 Hes. fr. 133 M.-W.; B. 11.39-110 with Maehler; Pherecyd. *FGrHist* 3 F 114 = fr. 114 Fowler; Alex. fr. 117 K.-A.; *PHerc.* 1609 VIII, cf. Henrichs 1974; Vitruv. 8.3.51.5; Str. 8.3.19; Paus. 2.25.9, 5.5.10; St. Byz., s.v. Οἶνη; Sch. Call. *H.* 3.236. Eust. *in D.P.* 292, 15-21; Hsch. α 3345. Death of Iphinoe: Apollod. 2.2.2; *SEG* 15.195.

80 Choreia was a popular maenadic name, cf. Kossatz-Deissmann 1991, 177.

Dionysos and the maenads by Perseus.⁸¹ There can be little doubt, then, that Otto rightly compared Lycurgus' chase of Dionysos in the *Iliad* too in this context.⁸²

Somewhat surprisingly, after the Agrionia Otto (112–123) proceeds with a discussion of modern theories. Having mentioned Preller and Karl Otfried Müller, Otto (114–120) directs his arrows against Erwin Rohde, however much he admires him. He rightly criticises Rohde's use of psychology, but goes too far in his critique. Rohde convincingly stressed that the maenads created their ecstasy by certain techniques, such as the shaking of their heads and their whirling dances,⁸³ but Otto rightly asks what is the nature of the god the maenads want to take into their hearts (114–115). Rohde conceived of the god *nach orientalischen Muster* (115; Orientalism also 131)⁸⁴ – clearly not a compliment – and, even worse, compared the maenadic means of ecstasy with the smoking of hashish. Naturally Otto also disliked Rohde's comparisons with shamans and dance epidemics (116), comparisons that would be taken up in his famous commentary on the *Bacchae* by Dodds, who was not wholly unfavourable to Otto.⁸⁵ Interestingly, Otto even opposes Rohde's individualising approach by noting that the maenadic rites were a *Sache der Gemeinschaft, vor allem der Frauenwelt, mag sie auch durch Kollegien vertreten werden* (117). After some pre-feministic observations on the nature of women (117–118), Otto claims that the secret to the nature of the god is the fact that he is *ein Wahnsinniger* himself, but fiercely denies that the attitude of his followers could have influenced this conception. Neither should we accept explanations derived from Wilhelm Mannhardt,⁸⁶ whom Otto judges more favourably than we perhaps would have expected from him (120–121), or from those that see in the maenadic violence a *sakramentales Opfer* (122).

Otto takes his point of departure from the fact that Dionysos is often pictured as *der rasende Gott* (126), but such a god needs a mad world, which reveals itself through him. Yet there is no life without death, and Otto sees death as an important factor in the origin of the Dionysiac world. This god who unites life and death, this god of oppositions, is the model for his female followers, but even males have to participate in this Dionysiac condition (124–132).

Madness, then, is the essence of Dionysos,⁸⁷ but it is not a human madness. It is the madness of the womb of the mother that attends all moments of creation

81 Paus. 2.20.4, 2.22.1, 2.23.7–8, cf. Burkert 1983, 176; Sourvinou-Inwood 2005, 200–202.

82 Similarly, Burkert 1983, 176–178.

83 For these ancient 'techniques of ecstasy' see Bremmer 2008, 296 (with bibliography).

84 For Orientalism in the time of Otto and before, see Marchand 2009.

85 Dodds 1969², xii.

86 Mannhardt 1875–1877, cf. Tybjerg 1993; Kippenberg 2002, 81–87.

87 Henrichs 1994; Graf 2010.

and is expressed in music and dance. These are indeed important parts of the Dionysiac cult, and Otto well notes Dionysos' ties to the Muses, but overrates the god's connection to prophecy, which we find only in Thrace (*Ba.* 298–299) and Phokis (Paus. 10.33.11). Otto's subsequent observations on the god's ties with wine (133–141), nature (141–148), water and animals (148–158) as well as women (159–167) are hardly be very contentious today, if we subtract his Romantic vocabulary.

The prototypical woman for Otto (168–175) is Ariadne, who was the wife of Dionysos. Unfortunately, her cult has not been studied very often,⁸⁸ and Otto's observations are not really very helpful. He suggests that by nature Ariadne belongs to the Dionysiac milieu. Yet already in our earliest testimony her role in the Cretan myth of Theseus initially is without Dionysos, who only comes in at the very end, but not even as her lover (*Od.* 11.321–325). Moreover, on Cyprus she was closely connected with Aphrodite (*Plu. Thes.* 20). In short, at two places where we would expect early traditions, she is not part of the Dionysiac milieu. Admittedly, when Theseus abandons her, Dionysos saves her as, according to Otto (175), *Erlöser und Tröster*, once again heavily Christianised language. The connection with Dionysos is certainly old and already mentioned by Hesiod (*Th.* 947–949); moreover, Aphrodite's role in this liaison also seems old, as it is already mentioned by Pherecydes (*FGrHist* 3 F 148 = fr. 148a**b Fowler). The resemblance of Ariadne's role concerning Theseus with that of Medea concerning Jason undeniably brings us into the area of ancient rites of initiation, as also seems to be the case at Naxos, where girl choruses worshipped the sleeping Ariadne (*Call.* fr. 67.13–14 Pfeiffer). Both the fact of her divinity and her prominence in the eastern part of the Mediterranean suggest that Ariadne was a more complicated mythological figure than Otto makes her out to be, and that her close connection with Dionysos is only part of her cultic, mythological and iconographical persona.⁸⁹

Having looked at the women, Otto (175–187) proceeds with the fate of Dionysos. He naturally argues that Dionysos' spirit originated from the immeasurable depths where life and death are intertwined as the god himself, in his view, combines life and death. That is why he had to die. Otto (177–182) brings here Zagreus onto the stage, but the latter is a much too 'elusive and multiform' figure to be of much help.⁹⁰ Originally, Zagreus hardly belonged to the Dionysiac milieu,⁹¹ and thus his later presence cannot be part of a prime explanation. Otto (182–185) also connects Dionysos' death with the myths of his disappearance and

88 But see Bernhard/Daszewski 1986; Pirenne-Delforge 1996; Steinhart 2008, 9–11.

89 For the difficulty of identifying Ariadne on vases, see Scheffer 2009, 165–168.

90 Sourvinou-Inwood 2005, 170.

91 For Zagreus see Lindner 1997; Gordon 2002.

in a nice structuralist manner argues that the two are rooted in the same idea. This seems attractive. Yet anyone who has tried to read Sourvinou-Inwood's latest book, realises how complicated all these myths and rituals are. As more often, a structuralist approach sometimes removes all historical developments and cultural specifics from the religious stage. Even so, Otto's approach in this chapter is well worth pondering.

It is not surprising that Otto concludes his book with a chapter on Apollo (187–193), as this relationship figured prominently in nineteenth-century German philosophy.⁹² However, this means that, as he acknowledges, he leaves out Orphism and the Bacchic Mysteries, both of which perhaps did not quite agree with his picture of Dionysos.⁹³ This final section is not the most successful part of his book, as he elaborately argues that Hyakinthos is very close to Dionysos (191), which is wholly unpersuasive.⁹⁴ On the other hand, Otto (191–192) rightly combats contemporary explanations of the co-habitation of gods as caused by the one succeeding to or expelling the other. Moreover, he also persuasively argues that we have to look for *das Sinnvolle einer Gemeinschaft* between Apollo and Dionysos and that only the combination of the two can mean *die ganze Wahrheit* (192), *das ganze Ausmass der Welt* (193). This cannot be true, of course, but a wrong answer does not invalidate a good question.

Otto (194–195) closes his book with two rather disappointing pages on tragedy. In reality, they just resume his thesis of Dionysos as *das Urphänomen der Zweierheit (und so weiter, und so weiter)* as symbolised by the mask. The spirit of madness breathed new life into the tragic myths. Thus Dionysos, still Otto, entered the spiritual world of the Greeks and *sein Kommen war so gewaltig, dass es uns heute noch erschüttert*.

To conclude, in a brief lecture one can hardly present Otto's book in more than an outline, if even that. I must confess that I was rather sceptical about Otto's book before I started to read it for the conference that was the basis for this book. I will not say that I have now seen the light and have become a convert. Otto's language, which he largely owed Nietzsche, as Cancik has shown⁹⁵ – though an investigation into his connections with older philosophers, like Schelling (46),⁹⁶

92 Kein 1935; Wilson 1996, 19–24; Henrichs 2001, 11–14; Baeumer 2007, 327–329. We still need a good modern study of the relationship, but note Calame 1996², 364–368.

93 The many findings of the last decades have made all previous literature on this matter out of date. See most recently Graf/Johnston 2007; Bernabé/Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008; Tzifopoulos 2010; Edmonds 2011.

94 For Hyacinthus see Villard/Villard 1990; Richer 2004.

95 Cancik 1998, 178–181, but see also Henrichs 1984.

96 For Schelling's Dionysos see Wilson 1996, 81–103; Baeumer 2007, 314–330.

and contemporary ones, like Heidegger, contemporary sociologists, like his Frankfurter colleague Karl Mannheim, and the Christian tradition would also pay – is certainly enough to put off anybody who is a bit allergic to all too Romantic-German. Yet when one tries to filter that out, it remains to say that Otto's book was impressively original at the time of its appearance, and that his ideas on myth and ritual as well as his conceptualisation of Dionysos were really adventurous in the early 1930s. Otto dared to go against the current of his time, and we should admire that. I have naturally concentrated on aspects I disagree with – otherwise this would have been a very short chapter – but Otto's book teems with insights and good questions. In their different ways, scholars such as Walter Burkert, Marcel Detienne, Albert Henrichs, Hugh Lloyd-Jones (1922–2009) and Jean-Pierre Vernant (1914–2007) have drunk from its waters,⁹⁷ and any student of Dionysos that neglects this book will do it at his or her own loss.⁹⁸

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⁹⁷ Henrichs 1984, 234–240 and 1993. The reasons for the attraction of Otto's book deserve further investigation, but it is clear that its Romantic, proto-structuralist and proto-post-modernist aspects as well as its modern religiosity can appeal to rather different scholars.

⁹⁸ I am most grateful to Bob Fowler, Albert Henrichs and Alessandro Stavru for their comments. Scott Scullion kindly and skilfully corrected my English.

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