

New Evidence for the Mysteries of Dionysos

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IN 1969 the grave of a woman was excavated at ancient Hipponion, a colony of Lokroi in southern Italy.¹ The grave contained a skeleton, eight vases, two oil lamps, some bronze fragments, and a small folded gold tablet. Unfolded, the tablet measures 5 cm. by 3 cm.; it is inscribed with sixteen verses in dactylic hexameter which in style and content show similarities to fifteen other gold tablets from Italy and Greece.² Except for a text from Rome, which is dated to about A.D. 300, all are of the fourth and third centuries B.C. The new lamella from Hipponion is the earliest, dated by the pottery in the grave and by the style of its lettering to the very end of the fifth century or the beginning of the fourth.³

The gold tablets can be divided into two groups. The first group, written for the most part in the first person singular, seem intended to indicate the words spoken by the dead person upon arrival in the underworld.⁴ These tablets have been found at Thurii (three

¹ G. Foti and G. Pugliese Carratelli, "Un sepolcro di Hipponion e un nuovo testo orfico," *ParPass* 29 (1974) 91–126 (cited hereafter by authors' names alone).

² Most recent commentary on these, with full bibliography: G. Zuntz, *Persephone* (Oxford 1971) 277–393 (hereafter 'Zuntz').

³ Foti 104–06. The text has been edited and discussed several times, beginning with Pugliese Carratelli 108–26. For other editions see M. Guarducci, "Qualche osservazione sulla laminetta orfica di Hipponion," *Epigraphica* 37 (1975) 19–24; R. Merkelbach, "Bakchisches Goldtäfelchen aus Hipponion," *ZPE* 17 (1975) 8–9; M. L. West, "Zum neuen Goldplättchen aus Hipponion," *ZPE* 18 (1975) 229–36; M. Marcovich, "The Gold-leaf from Hipponion," *ZPE* 23 (1976) 221–24; G. Zuntz, "Die Goldlamelle von Hipponion," *WS N.F.* 10 (1976) 129–51; *SEG* XXVI 1139. For notes and commentary on the text, see M. Gigante, "Per l'esegesi del testo orfico Vibonese," *ParPass* 30 (1975) 223–25; H. Lloyd-Jones, "On the Orphic Tablet from Hipponion," *ParPass* 30 (1975) 225–26; G. Pugliese Carratelli, "Sulla lamina orfica di Hipponion," *ParPass* 30 (1975) 226–31, and "Ancora sulla lamina orfica di Hipponion," *ParPass* 31 (1976) 458–66. For general commentary: W. Burkert, "Le laminette auree: da Orfeo a Lampone," in *Orfismo in Magna Grecia* (Atti del Quattordicesimo Convegno di Studi sulla Magna Grecia [Taranto 1975]) 81–104; O. Musso, "Eufemismo e antifrasi nella laminetta aurea di Hipponion?" *GIF* 29 (1977) 172–75; F. Prontera, "Sulla laminetta di Hipponion," *ParPass* 33 (1978) 48–58.

⁴ Zuntz calls these the A tablets, for which see *Persephone* 287–343. A4 is cast in the

from separate graves in one mound) and at Rome. Those of the second group combine advice to the dead person, addressed in the second person singular, with responses in the first person singular to be spoken by the dead person to the guardians of the underworld. The second group differs from the first in representing the underworld as divided into two parts, one dangerous and the other pleasant. The tablets of the second group come from Petelia, Eleutherna, Pharsalos, and another, unknown place in Thessaly.⁵

The tablet from Hipponion is unusual in two respects. First, it does not share any characteristics with the group from nearby Thuri, but belongs instead to the second group, only one of which comes from Italy.⁶ Second, the new tablet describes the inhabitants of the preferred area of the underworld as *mystai* and *bakchoi*. None of the previously known tablets uses terms that would associate the owner of the tablet with a particular cult. The fact that the new tablet has introduced specific religious terminology has made it the subject of considerable discussion.

The new tablet begins, as do the others in the second group, with specific instructions for the dead person to avoid a certain spring near a shining cypress. The souls of the dead who drink from this spring grow cold. The new arrival to the underworld is advised instead to approach the guardians of the lake of Mnemosyne and ask for water from that source. The soul who drinks from this water will tread a sacred road in the underworld which other *mystai* and *bakchoi* also tread. The text is as follows:⁷

second person singular instead of the first, but it shares phrases and themes with the other tablets in this group. A1 does contain one line in the second person singular, but otherwise the text is cast in the first person.

⁵ Zuntz calls these the B tablets, 355–64. The new tablet from Thessaly belongs to this group, published by J. Breslin, *A Greek Prayer* (Pasadena 1977); cf. R. Merkelbach, "Ein neues 'orphisches' Goldblättchen," *ZPE* 25 (1977) 276, and W. Burkert, *Orphism and Bacchic Mysteries: New Evidence and Old Problems of Interpretation* (Protocol of the Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies 28 [Berkeley 1977]) 10.

⁶ The single example from Italy, B1 (Petelia), is highly unusual because although the tablet itself is dated to the fourth century B.C., the case in which it was found is of the second or third century A.D. Zuntz 356 suggests that the tablet need not originally have come from Petelia.

⁷ The text printed here follows the orthography of the tablet, and in most respects is identical with that of Merkelbach. Difficulties remain, some apparently the result of careless copying or imperfect recollection of an original version (e.g., the extra metrical feet in lines 2 and 14). Others seem to reflect dialectic variation—so *σπίον* for *θπίον* in line 1, explained by Marcovich (*supra* n.3) 222. The four letters in the right margin have not been explained; for suggestions see Marcovich 224.

- Μναμοσύνας τόδε σρίον, ἐπεὶ ἄμ μέλλῃσι θανέσθαι.*
εἰς Ἀἶδαο δόμος εὐερέας ἐστ' ἐπὶ δ(ε)ξιά κρῆνα TN
πὰρ δ' αὐτὰν ἔστακῦα λευκὰ κυπάρισ(σ)ος· AO
 4 *ἔνθα κατερχόμεναι ψυχαὶ νεκῶν ψύχονται.*
ταύτας τὰς κράνας μεδὲ σχεδὸν ἐνγύθεν ἔλθεις·
πρόσθεν δὲ ηευρέσεις τὰς Μναμοσύνας ἀπὸ λίμνας
ψυχρὸν (h)ύδωρ προρέον· φύλακες δὲ ἐπύπερθεν ἔασι·
 8 *[h]οὶ δέ σε εἰρέσονται ἐν(ι) φρασί πευκαλίμαισι*
[h]ότ(τ)ι δὲ ἐξερέεις Ἄϊδος σκότος ὀλοέεντος.
εἶπον (h)υὸς Βαρέας καὶ Ὀρανὸ ἄστερόεντος·
δίψαι δ' ἐμὶ αἴος καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι· ἀλ(λ)ὰ δότ' ὀ[κα]
 12 *ψυχρὸν (h)ύδωρ π[ρο]ρέον τῆς Μνεμοσύνῃς ἀπὸ λίμ[νῆς].*
καὶ δὲ τοι ἐλεῶσιν ἠυποχθονίῳ βασιλεῖ
καὶ δὲ τοι δόσοσι πιῆν τὰς Μναμοσύνας ἀπὸ λίμνα[ς]
καὶ δὲ καὶ συχνὸν ἠοδὸν ἔρχεα(ι) ἠάν τε καὶ ἄλλοι
 16 *μύσται καὶ βάχχοι ἠιεράν στείχοσι κλ(ε)εινοί.*

1 Marcovich: (θ)ρίον West, ἐρίον Pugliese Carratelli *et al.* 2 εἶσ' Zuntz, εἰς Ἀἶδαο δόμονος εὐήρεας (e.g., *ἠως ἀφικάνεις, ἠευρήσεις μελάνυδρον ἐκεῖθ'*) {ἐστ'} ἐπὶ δ(ε)ξιά κρήνα(v) Marcovich. 3 λευκὰ(v) ἔστακυ(ι)α(v) κυπάρισ(σ)ον Marcovich. 4 ΨΥΚΑΙ lamella. 8 (h)οὶ δὲ σ' ἐ(π)ειρήσονται Lloyd-Jones; ἐν Pugliese Carratelli, Guarducci. 10 Γαίας Zuntz. 11 εἶμι Pugliese Carratelli, ἠμι Zuntz. 13 Marcovich: αἰ δ' αὐτοί (σ') ἐλεήουσιν {υπο} χθόνιοι βασιλῆες Lloyd-Jones; (h)υπὸ χθονίῳ Pugliese Carratelli, Guarducci. 14 (ταύτας ἀπὸ) {τὰς Μναμοσύνας} λίμνας Marcovich; ἀπὸ κρήνης Lloyd-Jones. 15 συχνὰν Burkert, Zuntz; συχνήν Lloyd-Jones.

Ever since the first of the gold tablets was published in 1836, there has been debate about the religious context to which they belong. Early commentators were convinced that they were evidence for Orphic mysteries.⁸ In recent years Zuntz has tried to show that the tablets have a Pythagorean origin (321–22, 337–39). The Hipponion tablet, however, where the terms *mystai* and *bakchoi* appear for the first time in these texts, introduces a new element into the discussion. It now seems that the tablets can be associated with mysteries, but the problem of identifying these mysteries has

⁸ The first tablet discovered is the one from Petelia (B1 Zuntz), found in 1835 and published in 1836. As Zuntz says (277), “The interpretation of these texts has never, so far, overcome the effects of the accident that the first of them was published in 1835 [*sic*] when, in the aura of Creuzer and E. Gerhard, it was natural to hail it as a testimony to ‘Orphic’ mysteries.”

caused some controversy. Pugliese Carratelli, the original editor, seems to see the tablet as basically Orphic in character.⁹ Burkert, while admitting that there is considerable interconnection between what is Eleusinian, Bacchic, Orphic, and Pythagorean, both in the tablets and in contemporary literature, nevertheless understands the new text as evidence for Bacchic mysteries.¹⁰ Zuntz, in his detailed analysis of fourteen of the tablets (323–27, 407–11), argued against those who find allusions to Dionysos in that group; he sought to associate the tablets with Pythagoreanism rather than ‘Orphism’ and seemed to believe that any traces of Dionysos necessarily imply an Orphic context for the lamellae. Zuntz describes the new text from Hipponion as Pythagorean in content and suggests that the last two lines are only a highly personal and idiosyncratic statement tacked on at the end to accommodate the religious beliefs of the owner.¹¹ M. L. West has taken a position more extreme than that of Zuntz, arguing not only that the new tablet has nothing to do with Dionysos, but also that the term *bakchos* is not necessarily associated with Dionysos before the fourth century.¹²

A key problem therefore is the meaning of the term *bakchoi*, which we must examine in the context of fifth-century religious practice. West distinguishes between *bakchos* and its derivatives *bakcheus* and *bakchios* and shows that while Dionysos is often called by the latter, he is rarely called *bakchos*. Citing examples from Archilochos to Aristophanes, West argues that all these terms are used of those who have undergone some ritual purification and ritual ecstasy, but that this state need not be associated with Dionysos, for *bakchos* and its derivatives are associated with other gods.

Several objections may be offered. One case seems based on insufficient evidence. West concludes that Archilochos’ poem *Iobakchoi* (fr.322 West) concerns not Dionysos but Demeter and Kore, simply because the only extant fragment mentions these two divinities and no others. But as West himself points out elsewhere, *iò Bákχαι* is an invocation used by worshippers of Dionysos in Euripides (*Bacch.* 577).¹³ The poem of Archilochos could well

⁹ *ParPass* 29 (1974) 126, 134–44; 31 (1976) 465–66.

¹⁰ Burkert (*supra* n.5) 2, 6–7.

¹¹ Zuntz (*supra* n.3) 146–47.

¹² West (*supra* n.3) 234–35.

¹³ *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus* (Berlin 1974) 24. An Athenian festival in honor of Dionysos was named *Iobakcheia*: [Dem.] 59.78; in a late inscription worshippers of

have referred also to Dionysos.¹⁴ Dionysos was well known to Archilochos (fr.120, 194, 251 West), was worshipped with Demeter in secret ceremonies at Lerna, and seems to have been identified with Iakchos at Eleusis.¹⁵ Without more of Archilochos' poem it seems unreasonable to assume that a similar association was impossible on Paros.¹⁶

Moreover, West does not distinguish between literal and figurative uses of bacchic terminology. Some of his examples, rather than stemming from actual cult usage, are simply literary allusions to bacchic phenomena. Thus when Euripides addresses Apollo as *Bakchos*,¹⁷ he is using the term to suggest the similarity of the divine mania of Dionysos and the mantic possession of Apollo. When Aischylos says that a warrior, inspired with Ares, rages (*βακχᾶ*) toward the battle line like a mad person (*Sept.* 498), he makes an implied comparison between Dionysiac mania and the lust for battle which Ares inspires. The comparison draws its meaning from the traditional association of bacchic terminology with Dionysiac worship.

Two of West's examples of bacchic terminology, instead of having nothing to do with Dionysos as he claims, actually derive their significance from the Dionysiac theme of the total work. In the first, Pindar describes Artemis yoking a pair of lions as acting with "bacchic impulses" (*Dith.* 2.20–21); Pindar does not say that Artemis is *bakchos*, but that she acts as one inspired by *Bakchos*. The poet speaks of Artemis in figurative language appropriate to this dithyramb in honor of Dionysos, and the description derives its significance from the total context of the poem. The second example is from Aischylos' *Edonians* (fr.76 Mette), where West holds the verb *bakcheuein* to refer to religious ecstasy in general

Dionysos are called Iobakchoi: IG II² 1368 (Syll.³ 1109; F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques* [Paris 1969] no. 51).

¹⁴ As Pugliese Carratelli points out, *ParPass* 31 (1976) 464.

¹⁵ Lerna: IG IV 666; Pausanias 2.36.7–37. Eleusis: see F. Graf, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin 1974) 51–65.

¹⁶ Archilochos was of course familiar with both Paros and Thasos. At Thasos a sanctuary of Dionysos seems to have been located near a sanctuary of Demeter: J. Pouilloux, "Trois notes thasiennes," *BCH* 75 (1951) 90–95.

¹⁷ Fr.477 Nauck; cf. Aischylos fr.86 Mette. G. Aurelio Privitera, *Dioniso in Omero e nella poesia Greca arcaica* (Rome 1970) 125–26, argues that there were similarities between Dionysos and Apollo at Delphi. Pugliese Carratelli, *ParPass* 31 (1976) 464, following Privitera and arguing against West, claims that Apollo is called by a Dionysiac epithet because of these similarities between the two gods at Delphi.

and not necessarily to the mania of Dionysos. This play, however, is from the Lykourgos trilogy, whose subject was Dionysos, and the source for the fragment not only says that the line describes an epiphany of Dionysos,¹⁸ but also adduces a line of Euripides where the identical situation occurs (*Bacch.* 726).

Again, when Theseus tells Hippolytos to go and rant (*βάκχευε*) with his lord Orpheus, his vegetarian diet, and his sacred texts (*Hipp.* 954), he is taking a word from a particular context and applying it mistakenly in a general way to characterize those who worship in small, private, exclusive groups. Theseus uses the term derisively to describe a sort of religious devotion (Hippolytos' attachment to Artemis) which he does not in fact understand. What seems evident from this passage is not that *bakcheuein* has a general sense, but that some bacchic groups caused irritation such as Theseus here shows. Demosthenes shows a similar contempt for such groups when he attacks Aischines for helping his mother with her private initiation ceremonies (18.259 and 19.199). West argues that when Dionysos is called bacchic, he is so called as a god of *teletai* (Hdt. 4.79, *Διονύσω Βακχείω τελεσθῆναι*). West would sharply distinguish this aspect of Dionysiac worship from all others. Taking as accurate Theseus' labeling Hippolytos' asceticism 'bacchic', West associates this asceticism with Orphic and Pythagorean traits as described by Herodotos (2.81), maintaining that such *teletai* had serious eschatological concerns but that Dionysos himself played no part in them. The phrase *βακχεῖ' ἐτελέσθη* in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (357) West would refer not to Dionysiac rites but to something more general. In the context of the passage, however, where Aristophanes' chorus describes the performance of comedies as Dionysiac *teletai* (368), the comparison derives its point from the fact that there were special Dionysiac *bakcheia* (like the rites described at Hdt. 4.79) which were in some respects similar to but not identical with other mystery rites.

In order to evaluate West's arguments fully, it is necessary to consider the history of the word *bakchos* and related terms *bakchios* and *bakcheuein*. None of these terms occurs in Homer or Hesiod. Dionysos Bakcheios is mentioned once in the Homeric Hymns (19.46), but this hymn is almost certainly late. The terms are rare in early lyric, but Alkman mentions *Bakchai* in connection with Kadmos (7.14 Page), and Archilochos associates the word *βακχίη* with the drinking of wine (fr.194 West). The term

¹⁸ [Longinus] *Subl.* 15.6, noted by Pugliese Carratelli, *ibid.*

βάκχοι seems to have been used by Xenophanes to mean 'branches' (Diels, *Vorsokr.* 21F17). West suggests that the term refers to the branches carried by Dionysos and his followers, branches which are often represented on early vase paintings showing Dionysiac *thiasoi*.¹⁹ Those who carry the branch are named for the branch itself, and the ritual activity, where the madness of the god manifests itself in the dancing and inspired behavior of the worshippers, is described by the verb *bakcheuein*. The worshipper and the god are both described by the activity of the ritual. *Bakchos* therefore is not a name but an epithet.²⁰ Because the worshipper is in some sense identified with the god, both god and follower can be called by the same term.²¹ When other gods are described as bacchic, they are so described because they are infused with some such inspiration as are the worshippers of Dionysos himself.

Early writers use bacchic language to describe Dionysiac poetry and ritual,²² but it is only with Euripides that bacchic terminology comes into its own.²³ Euripides' use of bacchic language is grounded in Dionysiac cult, and his extended and metaphorical uses of such language derive meaning and power from this fact. In *Bacchae* Euripides naturally uses bacchic language to describe Dionysiac ritual and Dionysiac madness (e.g., 40, 76, 864, 1057,

¹⁹ *Hesiod, Works and Days* (Oxford 1978) 373–75, where he does not mention his earlier discussion. For a summary of other suggestions about the etymology of *bakchos*, see W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche* (Stuttgart 1977) 253–54.

²⁰ Pugliese Carratelli 126.

²¹ Burkert (*supra* n.3) 90 has shown that the term *bakchos* is never identical to Dionysos. Dionysos can be called *bakchos*, a worshipper can be called *bakchos*, but a worshipper is never called Dionysos.

²² Dithyrambic contests are called bacchic in *Anth.Pal.* 13.28. The terminology also appears in a traditional song used in the Dionysiac *phallophoria* (851b.1 Page). Herodotos describes *teletai* of Dionysos *Bakcheios* (4.79) and associates *βακχεύειν* with the Dionysiac *trietêris* (4.108). Aischylos uses bacchic terminology as metaphor (*Sept.* 498; *Cho.* 698), but he also connects this metaphor with its Dionysiac source (*Eum.* 25). Sophokles is more literal. He calls Dionysos "wine-red *Bakchos*" (*OT* 211), *ὁ βακχεῖος θεός* (*OT* 1105), *Βακχεύς* (*Ant.* 1121), *Βάκχιος* (*Ant.* 154), and *βακχιώτας* (*OC* 678). He describes bacchic dancing (*Trach.* 219) and calls the grape vine bacchic (*Trach.* 704). Thebes is *bakcheia* because of its association with Dionysos (*Trach.* 510). Only once does Sophokles use bacchic language metaphorically, and that is to describe the frenzy with which Polyneikes attacks Thebes (*Ant.* 136).

²³ The two plays where Dionysos is most often called *bakchios*, etc., are *Cyclops* and *Bacchae*. In the latter he is called *bakchos* twice (623, 1020) and *bakchios* a dozen times (67, 195, 225, 366, 528, 605, 632, 998, 1124, 1145, 1153, 1189). Dionysos is 'twice-born *Bakchos*' at *Hipp.* 560, and he is *bakchos* often in other plays (e.g., *IT* 164, *IA* 1061) and also *bakchios* (*Cyc.* 575, *Ion* 716, *IT* 953, etc.).

1124, 1295); but also elsewhere he applies it to madness which is not due to Dionysos. The madness brought on by Lyssa (*HF* 1119, 1122, 1142), the Furies (*Or.* 411, 835), or Apollo (*Hec.* 676; *Tro.* 341, 367)²⁴ is not identical with the madness inspired by Dionysos. Nor are those possessed by this madness *bakchoi* in the technical religious sense: they are not worshippers of Lyssa or the Furies. Rather, the bacchic language used to describe their madness calls attention to its violence and power. By alluding to bacchic madness, the poet emphasizes this violence, and the emphasis derives its point from the reputation of Dionysiac mania.

West argues that Dionysos himself is rarely called *bakchos*, but more often *bakchios*. This observation, while correct, is not relevant to the use of the term *bakchoi* in the Hipponion text, which mentions not Dionysos but his worshippers. The use of the feminine form *bakchai* for female worshippers of Dionysos is commonplace by the fifth century. Ritual maenadism is by definition restricted to women; therefore *bakchai* is far more common than the masculine *bakchos*. There were, however, forms of Dionysiac worship in which men participated. The initiation of the Skythian king Skyles into Dionysiac *teletai* (*Hdt.* 4.79) is a case in point. In *Bacchae* Pentheus calls the Lydian stranger a clever *bakchos* (491). A man, therefore, can be called *bakchos*. While it is possible to refer to gods other than Dionysos metaphorically as *bakchos*, *bakchios*, etc., these words, when applied to mortals, are used only of the worshippers of Dionysos and not those of other gods.²⁵

²⁴ For a discussion of Euripides' use of bacchic language to describe Cassandra, see P. G. Mason, "Cassandra," *JHS* 79 (1959) 87, 89, 92.

²⁵ The only possible exception is Euripides' application of *bakchos* and *bakchai* to worshippers of a cult which he calls Cretan. At *Bacch.* 129, when describing the invention of the tympanon by the Kouretes and its transfer to the cult of Dionysos, the chorus calls the women who worship Rhea *bakchai*. This passage has "troubled editors," as E. R. Dodds says, *Bacchae*² (Oxford 1960) 85: I suggest that Euripides uses the term *bakchai* not because this was the actual Cretan usage but because he is pointing up a basic similarity in the ecstatic dancing found in both the Cretan cult and that of Dionysos. In reference to the Cretan cult Euripides elsewhere uses *mystes* and *bakchos* to describe a worshipper of Idean Zeus, the Mountain Mother, Zagreus, and the Kouretes (fr.472 Nauck = *Cretans* fr.79 Austin). This is the only contemporary text in which the two terms of the Hipponion tablet appear together; consequently it is tempting to draw parallels. West (*supra* n.3) 234 argues that because Dionysos is not mentioned by Euripides, the fragment is evidence that the term *bakchos* was not restricted to worshippers of Dionysos. But from a fragment without context it is difficult to determine just how the events described relate to actual cult practice. The reference to *omophagia* suggests a Dionysiac context, but the description is contaminated by literary syncretism, which makes it impossible to use as a source for a particular cult. Cf. C. Austin, *Nova Fragmenta Euripidea* (Berlin 1968) 51: "Poeta varios cultus in

The overwhelming association of the terms *bakchos* and *bakchios* with Dionysos in fifth-century literature indicates that the primary reference of *bakchos* would be to Dionysos and his worshippers. This is consistent with later epigraphical use of these terms to refer to Dionysos and participants in his cult.²⁶ The *bakchoi* of the tablet from Hipponion, then, should be considered to be followers of Dionysos.

The *bakchoi* of the Hipponion tablet have certain expectations after death. The poem describes two different possibilities and implies that the correct choice leads to a special route in the underworld, a sacred road reserved for *mystai* and *bakchoi*. The last two lines of the poem can be compared to a fifth-century inscription from a chamber tomb at Cumae: οὐ θέμις ἐντοῦθα κείσθαι ἢ μὲ τὸν βεβαχχενμένον, "it is not right for anyone who has not become a *bakchos* or a *bakchē* to lie here."²⁷ The tomb is reserved for those who have become *bakchoi*, who evidently did not want their tomb to be contaminated by others who would not be able to accompany them on the sacred road of the Hipponion text. Burkert has pointed out that this sacred road in the underworld is likely to be the same road which a poet of the third century B.C. describes as a "mystic path": αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ | γήραϊ μυστικὸν οἶμον ἐπὶ Ῥαδάμανθυν ἰκοίμην.²⁸ Rhadamanthys is associated with the isles of the blessed as early as Pindar (*Ol.* 2.127–36), and it was a com-

unum contraxit . . ." On the problem of literary syncretism and the identification of the Megalē Mētēr, see A. Henrichs, "Despoina Kybele: Ein Beitrag zur religiösen Namenskunde," *HSCP* 80 (1976) 253–54 n.3. In "Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina," *HSCP* 82 (1978) 151 n.96, Henrichs suggests that Euripides identified Zagreus with Dionysos. This identification would explain not only *omophagia* but also *mystēs* and *bakchos* in the same passage.

²⁶ *Mystai* of Dionysos are called *bakchoi* and *bakchai* in the inscription from Torre Nova (second century A.D.): A. Vogliano, "La grande iscrizione bacchica del Metropolitan Museum," *AJA* 37 (1933) 215–31. *Bakchai* appear for the first time in an inscription from Miletos of the late third or early second century B.C.: Th. Wiegand, *SitzBerl* 1905, 547, discussed by Henrichs, *HSCP* 82 (1978) 148–49. *Bakchai* are also mentioned in a fragmentary inscription of the first or second century A.D. found at Gomphi, *SEG* II 359. The masculine form, when referring to worshippers, is often found in compounds. For ἀρχίβακχος see *IG* II² 1368 (*supra* n.13); for νεόβακχος see Sokolowski (*supra* n.13) no. 90 and C. Haspels, *The Highlands of Phrygia* I (Princeton 1971) 354 no. 144.

²⁷ F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques*, Supplément (Paris 1962) no. 120. The association of this inscription with the tablet from Hipponion has been pointed out by many commentators and originally by Pugliese Carratelli 122.

²⁸ Burkert (*supra* n.3) 85 and (*supra* n.19) 437. The poem, probably by Poseidippos of Pella, is preserved on two wax tablets in Berlin; see H. Lloyd-Jones, "The Seal of Posidippos," *JHS* 83 (1963) 75–99.

mon element of popular belief by the end of the fifth century that there were distinctions in the underworld between the initiated and the uninitiated. This distinction was portrayed by Polygnotos in a painting at Delphi where the uninitiated were shown carrying water with leaky vessels.²⁹ In poetry the earliest allusion to such a distinction occurs in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (480–82). The same sentiments are repeated by Pindar (fr.137 Snell) and Sophokles (fr.837 Radt).³⁰ The new tablet from Hipponion, by associating the special road in the underworld with *bakchoi*, implies that certain worshippers of Dionysos are eligible to join the company on that road to the land of the blessed.

The conjunction of the terms *mystai* and *bakchoi* in the tablet indicates that the special bacchic experience was initiation. For *mystēs* and its cognates, despite their frequent application to Eleusis in Attic literature, were generic terms, not pointing to any particular cult. So the mysteries at Eleusis are called *orgia* in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (273, 476) and [ἄ]ρρητος τελετή in an Athenian epigram of the mid-fifth century.³¹ The earliest occurrence of *mystēria* in literature is in Herakleitos, in reference to mysteries in general: τὰ . . . νομιζόμενα κατ' ἀνθρώπους ἀνιερωστὶ μνοῦνται.³² Slightly older is the appearance of the word *mysta* on a late black-figured *pelike* depicting a man and woman seated on a couch facing a man who holds a portable *naiskos* on a pole, a

²⁹ Paus. 10.31.9ff. For inscriptions on Polygnotos' painting, see E. Keuls, *The Water Carriers in Hades: A Study of Catharsis through Toil in Classical Antiquity* (Amsterdam 1974) 39–41.

³⁰ These passages and others are discussed by N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974) 313–14 and Graf (*supra* n.15) 79–81.

³¹ R. E. Wycherley, *The Athenian Agora III* (Princeton 1957) 82 no. 226.

³² Fr.87a Marcovich, preserved by Clement of Alexandria (*Protr.* 22.2), and preceded by a question and answer: τίσι δὴ μαντεύεται Ἡράκλειτος ὁ Ἐφέσιος; νεκτιπόλοις, μάγοις, Βάκχοις, Αἰῆναις, μύσταις. Scholars have disagreed over the attribution of these five datives to Herakleitos himself. The fragment is accepted as authentic by Diels-Kranz (*Vorsokr.* 22F14), followed by many others. For a survey of opinion see M. Marcovich, *Heraclitus* (Merida 1967) 465. Some recent commentators accept the fragment as genuine: C. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge 1979) 262–63, and G. Colli, *La sapienza greca III Eraclito* (Milan 1980) 14 A 59a. Marcovich, however, raises serious objections (465–67). He points out that νεκτιπόλοι is likely to be an invention of Euripides (*Ion* 718) and should be understood in Clement as an adjective and not a substantive. He argues that Αἰῆναι is probably the only term used by Herakleitos himself (*cf.* F15, ληναῖζουσιν). His strongest point, the lack of evidence for mysteries of Dionysos before Euripides' *Bacchae*, is now somewhat weakened by the text from Hipponion. But in view of the doubts about its authenticity, the fragment cannot serve as evidence for the use of the terms *mystai* and *bakchoi* prior to the Hipponion tablet.

liknon, a small branch, and a drinking vessel.³³ Although the work is Attic, the picture contains no direct allusion to Eleusis, and presumably neither does the term; indeed, the scene may be bacchic, in view of the large branch in the background. The Eleusinian rites are called τὸ μυστικὸν τέλος by Aischylos (fr.741 Mette) and *mystēria* first in an Athenian inscription ca 460 (*LSCGSuppl.* 3C; cf. Hdt. 8.65) and by Euripides (*Hipp.* 25) and often (and with cognates) by Aristophanes in *Frogs*; but the verb *μυεῖσθαι* is used by both Herodotos (2.51) and Aristophanes (*Pax* 276–79) of the Samothracian mysteries as well.

Mystēria thus were any secret ceremonies of initiation, and *mystai* were those who had shared in them. The *mystai* and *bakchoi* of the Hipponion tablet have taken part in secret ceremonies, and the god in whose honor the ceremonies are held must be Dionysos. This claim finds support in Euripides' *Bacchae*. When Pentheus, curious about the cult that he despises, asks if the *orgia* of Dionysos have any special content, the god answers: ἄρρητ' ἀβακχεύτοισιν εἰδέναι βροτῶν (472).³⁴ Later the messenger, about to describe the *sparagmos* of Pentheus, cautions: μηδ' ἀπαγγείλη θεοῦ | χοροῦς κρυφαίους (1108–09). The implication of these lines is that there are certain secrets available only to *bakchoi*. The ways of Dionysos are not fathomable to those who do not understand his rites. Dionysos early in the play says to the persistent Pentheus: οὐ θέμις ἀκοῦσαι σ', ἔστι δ' ἄξι' εἰδέναι (474). The rites of Dionysos impart a special knowledge. The chorus has already said that the *teletai* of Dionysos involve knowledge, and that the knowledge leads to a blessed state: μάκαρ, ὅστις εὐδαίμων τελετὰς θεῶν εἰδὼς βιοτὰν ἀγιστεύει καὶ θιασεύεται ψυχὰν ἐν ὄρεσσι βακχεύων ὁσίοις καθαρμοῖσιν (72–76). The initial word of this hymn is *makar*, a term used primarily of the gods. The initiate becomes *makar* through knowledge, and he joins the ranks of the blessed who have become like the gods.³⁵ In the gold tablets the

³³ Beazley, ABV 338 no. 3. The vase is illustrated by J. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*³ (Cambridge 1922) 157 fig. 14, and by H. Metzger, *Recherches sur l'imagerie athénienne* (Paris 1965) pl. IX.

³⁴ Burkert (*supra* n.19) 435 adduces *Bacch.* 460–76 as evidence for the secrecy of the Dionysiac rites.

³⁵ A. J. Festugière, "La signification religieuse de la parodos des Bacchantes," *Eranos* 54 (1956) 79–82 (*Études de religion grecque et hellénistique* [Paris 1972] 73–76). In the plural *makar* usually refers to the gods, but exceptions are frequent. In Hesiod the plural is used of mortals who have exceptional good fortune, either in wealth (*Op.* 549) or after death (*Op.* 141, 171; *Cat.* fr.204.102). For general comments see E. Vermeule, *Aspects of*

final achievement of this blessed state occurs after death. One of the tablets from Thurii addresses the dead person with these words: ὄλβιε καὶ μακαριστέ, θεὸς δ' ἔσῃ ἀντὶ βροτοῖο.³⁶

In the choral passage of Euripides quoted above, one of the ways by which the worshipper of Dionysos achieves a blessed state is by becoming a *bakchos*. Not every worshipper, however, will achieve this state. In *Phaedo* Plato quotes a saying that emphasizes that only a select few of the worshippers of Dionysos can become true *bakchoi*: *ναρθηκοφόροι μὲν πολλοί, βάκχοι δέ τε παῦροι* (69c). The immediate context of this quotation is important. Sokrates, making a distinction between the initiated and the uninitiated, says that upon arrival in the underworld the uninitiated will lie in the mud, but the initiated will dwell with the gods. He quotes the line about the narthex-bearers to show the difficulty of reaching the higher stage. According to his analogy, those who carry the narthex are the uninitiated, but those who have undergone a bacchic experience are the initiates: the ordinary worshipper of Dionysos does not count as an initiate, but only those who have become *bakchoi*, and these will dwell with the gods.

Clearly, then, not all worshippers of Dionysos will be able to be called *mystai* and *bakchoi*. The mechanism by which one group of worshippers can be distinguished from another is not easy to discover. Inscriptions and papyri from the third century B.C. to the end of paganism, from places as far apart as Italy and Phrygia, Istria and Egypt, attest private associations that practiced *teletai* by which people could become *mystai* of Dionysos. Nilsson and Festugière thought these initiation ceremonies a Hellenistic development,³⁷ but the new tablet from Hipponion suggests that such ceremonies existed far earlier.

The new evidence must be considered in the light of the history of Dionysiac religion in Italy and elsewhere. Dionysos was important in Italy and Sicily from the period of the earliest colonial development.³⁸ His portrait appears on coins of Naxos in Sicily from the middle of the sixth century; the earliest full-length por-

Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry (Berkeley 1979) 72–73, 119, 121–22, where it is argued that the term has an Egyptian origin.

³⁶ Zuntz 301, A1.8.

³⁷ M. P. Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age* (Lund 1957) 4, 47, 51, etc., and A. J. Festugière, “Les mystères de Dionysos,” *RBibl* 44 (1935) 197 (*Études* [supra n.35] 18).

³⁸ A. Bruhl, *Liber Pater* (Paris 1953) 58–69.

trait of Dionysos is found on a coin of the Serdaioi in Bruttium.³⁹ Dionysos also appears later on the coins of Metapontum, Laos, and Posidonia.⁴⁰ He is prominent at Lokroi, where a month was named for him and where the seventh-century Xenokritos wrote dithyrambs.⁴¹ Dionysos also appears on the Lokrian terracotta *pinakes* of the early fifth century, making offerings to Persephone and Hades and to Demeter.⁴² When Thurii was founded in 443 B.C. by Athenians and Sybarites, a street was named for Dionysos.⁴³

It is unusual to find large temples dedicated to Dionysos, but from a long inscription found at Herakleia, dating from the end of the fourth century B.C., it is clear that here was a considerable sanctuary of Dionysos (*IG XIV 645*). The sanctuary owned extensive land which was leased out for farming. The size of the property and the amount of revenue collected indicate that the temple was quite wealthy. There is no indication from the inscription of the function or nature of Dionysos at Herakleia, but he seems to have been one of the major divinities in that city, another being Athena Polias. The temple itself must antedate the inscription, which comes from a period after the property of the temple had long been established. Another temple of Dionysos is that at Pompeii.⁴⁴ The building is a small Doric temple with a deep pronaos; the pediment is decorated with a sculptured frieze showing Dionysos holding grapes, a woman leaning on a tympanon, a *thyrsos*, a panther, and the figure of Eros. It has been suggested that this building, which seems to date originally from before the middle of the third century B.C., housed mysteries of Dionysos. There is no evidence to support this suggestion, but the existence of a temple of Dionysos so far north in the third century indicates

³⁹ M. Bernhart, *Dionysos und seine Familie auf griechischen Münzen* (*JfNG* 1 [1949]) 18 and pl. XI.12. The exact location of this city is not known, but it was near Sybaris; for discussion see C. M. Kraay, *Greek Coins* (London 1966) 305 and *Archaic and Classical Greek Coins* (London 1976) 169.

⁴⁰ B. V. Head, *Historia Numorum*² (London 1911) 74, 77, 79, 80, 82; *BMC Italy* 237, 248, 250, 262, 264, 278; G. Giannelli, *Culti e miti della Magna Grecia* (Florence 1924) 76 (Dionysos Eriphos at Metapontum), 118, 129.

⁴¹ A. E. Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology* (Munich 1972) 138, and M. Bagnasco, *Locri Epizefiri I* (Florence 1977) 265 and 267; *Plut. Mor.* 1134E–F.

⁴² R. A. Higgins, *Greek Terracottas* (London 1967) pl. 38D; E. Langlotz, *Die Kunst der Westgriechen* (Munich 1963) 73 pl. 73.

⁴³ *Diod.* 12.10.7, adduced by Burkert (*supra* n.3) 103.

⁴⁴ O. Elia, "Il santuario dionisiaco di S. Abbondio a Pompei," in *Orfismo* (*supra* n.3) 139–40.

that the cult of Dionysos remained popular in Italy during that period and that it had spread considerably northward since the previous century. The temple continued in use to the end of Pompeii. These temples, which seem to have enjoyed considerable longevity, are evidence that the public cult of Dionysos was part of the religious life of the cities of southern Italy.⁴⁵

The evidence for the public cult of Dionysos in southern Italy is considerable; Dionysos was a well known and popular divinity in that region. But the secret rites of initiation associated with Dionysos were usually a form of private worship, not public. While the public cult of Dionysos provides a context for the private cult, evidence for the first does not necessarily constitute evidence for the second. The mysteries of Dionysos were never institutionalized by a city, as were those at Eleusis by the Athenians, nor was the performance of such mysteries confined to a specific location, as were those of Eleusis, Andania, or Samothrace. The absence of a centralized organization makes it difficult to trace the evidence for such mysteries. Nevertheless, from fourth-century literature it is clear that bacchic *teletai* and other initiation ceremonies of various kinds were practiced informally by small local or family organizations. Plato, for instance, mentions bacchic dancing associated with *teletai* and *katharmoi*, which was not connected with the *polis* (οὐκ ἔστι πολιτικόν, *Leg.* 815B–D). The initiation ceremonies that Aischines' mother offered are another example. Demosthenes says that Aischines helped his mother by dressing the initiates in fawn skins, assisting them while they performed *katharmoi* or purifications with mud and bran, teaching them to say "I fled the bad; I found the better," and reading from texts while his mother performed the ceremony (18.259, 19.199). This passage is usually associated with the rites of Sabazios (Strab. 10.3.18), but Harpokration says that white poplar wreaths, which Demosthenes says were worn by these initiates on the day after the ceremony, were worn by persons being initiated into bacchic rites.⁴⁶ Whatever the specific cult, the description by Demosthenes establishes two things. First, it shows that some initiation ceremonies depended on written texts; this would provide a means of standard-

⁴⁵ C. Picard, "L'identification des temples de Sélinonte," *RA SER.* VI 8 (1936) 12–45, argues that Temple E at Selinus, usually associated with Hera, was a temple of Dionysos, but his arguments, based on a subjective interpretation of the metopes, are not convincing.

⁴⁶ *S.v.* λεύκη; the chthonic significance of white poplar is discussed by Burkert (*supra* n.19) 438.

izing a ceremony that was not controlled by a central organization. Second, it shows that there were types of initiation ceremonies that helped the participant escape unpleasantness and find something better. The choice between something bad and something good is inherent in the instructions of the tablet from Hipponion. The ceremonies in which the owner of the tablet had participated were probably similar in some respects to those described by Plato and Demosthenes. The fact that both authors speak contemptuously of these ceremonies does not mean that such private initiations were generally unpopular.

The eschatology of the tablet from Hipponion is not inconsistent with the aspirations of Dionysiac worshippers of later periods. Dionysiac *teletai* are sometimes recorded in epitaphs, as if such ceremonies were thought to make a difference for the worshipper after death (*IG* II² 11674; XIV 889, 1449). Plutarch consoles his wife on the death of their young daughter with the thought that their own bacchic initiation taught them not to fear death (*Mor.* 611D–E). Archaeological evidence from Italy indicates that such beliefs were probably common there in the fourth century B.C. Scenes of Dionysiac *thiasoi* are popular with the vase painters of Lucania, Campania, and Apulia at the close of the fifth century and during the fourth. Many of these vases, decorated with Dionysiac themes, are found in graves; some show specific items connected with the mysteries later.⁴⁷ One dead person was found with a small terracotta maenad grasped in her hand;⁴⁸ perhaps she expected to join her *thiasos* after death. The maenad, like the gold leaf from Hipponion, may have been a talisman of initiation, a reminder of the rewards that initiation guarantees.

The gold tablet itself is a reminder to the dead person to make the right choice on reaching the underworld, the waters of Mnemosyne rather than the waters of death. Burkert points out that

⁴⁷ The Apulian evidence is discussed in a confusing fashion by H. R. W. Smith, *Funerary Symbolism in Apulian Vase-Painting* (Berkeley 1972). See as examples A. D. Trendall, *Paestan Pottery* (London 1936) 32–33 pl. VIII; A. Cambitoglou and A. D. Trendall, *Apulian Red-Figured Vase-Painters of the Plain Style* (Archaeological Institute of America 1961) 20 no. 2 (pl. IV.17), 18 no. 1 (pl. V.22), 44 no. vii (pl. XXIII.110), etc.; H. Sichtermann, *Griechische Vasen in Unteritalien aus der Sammlung Jatta in Ruvo* (Tübingen 1966) no. 41 pl. 67; A. D. Trendall, *The Red-Figured Vases of Lucania, Campania, and Sicily* (Oxford 1967); M. Schmidt, A. D. Trendall, A. Cambitoglou, *Eine Gruppe apulischer Grabvasen in Basel* (Mainz 1976) 24, 36, 38; A. D. Trendall and A. Cambitoglou, *The Red-Figured Vases of Apulia* (Oxford 1978).

⁴⁸ Langlotz (*supra* n.42) 87 XI.

Mnemosyne plays an important role in Pythagoreanism,⁴⁹ and Zuntz (380–81) suggests a Pythagorean origin for the concept of Mnemosyne as expressed in the tablets. However, while the tablets may be influenced by Pythagorean ideas, the activity of initiation that the new tablet presupposes is a characteristic of religious cult and not of Pythagoreanism. Pythagoreanism later develops as a religious philosophy and as a specific way of life, but there is no evidence from the fifth or fourth centuries for Pythagorean cult activities.⁵⁰ The new tablet, because it alludes to initiation, must come from a religious context, from a cult wherein initiation ceremonies are a regular feature. The point of the appeal to Mnemosyne is to guarantee that the initiate remember to seek the benefits that initiation promised. Although it almost certainly comes from a far later period, one of the so-called Orphic hymns expresses the relation between Mnemosyne and initiation. Addressing Mnemosyne, the hymn ends: ἀλλά, μάκαιρα θεά, μύσταις μνήμην ἐπέγειρε εὐιέρου τελετῆς, λήθην δ' ἀπὸ τῶν <δ'> ἀπόπεμπε.⁵¹ The tablet from Hipponion was intended to serve the same function.⁵²

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⁴⁹ *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge 1972) 213 and *supra* n.19, 437.

⁵⁰ There is no contemporary evidence for Pythagorean communities. For a discussion of the evidence, see J. S. Morrison, "Pythagoras of Samos," *CQ* 49 (1956) 135–56.

⁵¹ G. Quandt, *Orphei Hymni*² (Berlin 1955) 53 no. 77.9–10, adduced by D. Comparetti, *Laminette orfiche* (Florence 1910) 46, and Burkert (*supra* n.19) 437.

⁵² I wish to thank Albert Henrichs, Bernard Knox, and Friedrich Solmsen for their helpful comments.