

International Conference „Religion and Politics: The Cult Of Dionysus in the Graeco-Roman World”

The international conference „Religion and Politics: The Cult Of Dionysus in the Graeco-Roman World”, co-organised by the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in Warsaw, and Teologia Polityczna is currently taking place in the College of Europe in Natolin. Watch online here!

Religion and Politics: The Cult Of Dionysus in the Graeco-Roman World

When: **18/01/2019**

Where: **College of Europe in Natolin, Warsaw**

Begins at 9.30 AM

For registration to the conference please contact Filip Doroszewski at f.doroszewski@uksw.edu.pl

The aim of the conference is to debate the relationship between religion and politics in antiquity – by politics we mean not only actions pursued by the state but also the sum of factors that allowed communities of the ancient world to identify and justify their place in the world. Dionysus played a key role in Greek thinking on the essence and order of the polis. He also embodied a civilising and unifying force, which can very well be observed in the legend of Alexander the Great that was purposefully modelled on Dionysian myths. These ideas

entered Roman culture, i.e. the cult of Dionysus was seen by some as an alternative to the existing political order, yet it became a part of the image of a victorious ruler that was created by Roman politicians, leaders and emperors. Importantly, Dionysian mythology, particularly as depicted in Euripides' *Bacchae*, was used by Christian communities in the early Empire to present their political identity.

Key-note speakers:

Cornelia Isler-Kerényi (Zurich)

Richard Seaford (Exeter)

Speakers:

Filip Doroszewski (Warsaw)

Dariusz Karłowicz (Warsaw)

Małgorzata Krawczyk (Warsaw)

David Hernández de la Fuente (Madrid)

Fiachra Mac Góráin (London)

Conference programme:

9.30-9.45 Coffee

9.45–10.00 Opening address

10.00-11.20 **Session 1.** Chair: Filip Doroszewski

10.00-10.30 Cornelia Isler-Kerényi (Zurich) key-note

speaker: *Dionysos, la polis, le pouvoir*

10 min. discussion

10.40-11.10 Małgorzata Krawczyk (Warszawa): *The role of the di patrii in the Severan religious policy: the numismatic and epigraphic evidence*

10 min. discussion

11.30-12.30 Lunch

12.30-13.50 **Session 2.** Chair: David Hernández de la Fuente

12.30-13.00 Richard Seaford (Exeter) key-note speaker: *Religion and Politics in Euripides' Bacchae*

10 min. discussion

13.10-13.40 Dariusz Karłowicz (Warszawa): *Ariadne and Aristotle*

10 min. discussion

13.50-14.20 Coffee break

14.20 – 16.20 **Session 3.** Chair: Dariusz Karłowicz

14.20-14.50 Filip Doroszewski (Warszawa) *The state as crater: Dionysiac motifs in Plutarch's Lives of Crassus, Anthony and Caesar*

10 min. discussion

15.00-15.30 Fiachra Mac Góráin (London) *Augustus and the Neoi Dionysoi*

10 min. discussion

15.40-16.10 David Hernández de la Fuente (Madrid) *Dionysus in the Mirror of Late Antiquity: from Religion to Politics*

10 min. discussion

16.20-16.30 Closing of the Conference

Dinner

Abstracts in alphabetical order:

Filip Doroszewski, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University (Warsaw)
The state as crater: Dionysiac motifs in Plutarch's Lives of Crassus, Anthony and Caesar

Dionysus occupies an important place in Plutarch's literary output. The Lives are no exception: the Dionysiac references often mark turning points in the careers of Greek and Roman leaders. Interestingly, such is the case with three prominent Roman politicians who lived at the end of the Republic, i.e. Crassus, Anthony, and Caesar. As observed by Christopher Pelling, the three texts belong to a group of six late Roman lives prepared by Plutarch simultaneously, as a separate and consistent project. This makes it tempting to look at the Dionysiac imagery occurring in the three lives as yet another element contributing to the consistency of the group. In the present paper, we will argue that the Dionysiac motifs in Crassus, Anthony, and Caesar play a significant role in portraying three different ways of running the state. Crassus, whose head is used after his death as Pentheus' head in staging the Bacchae of Euripides, is a typical theomachos, a ruler ignoring divine will and blind to the common good. Anthony, who poses as a Dionysus, tries to replace the political with the Dionysiac, a project doomed to

failure from its very beginning. Finally, Caesar meets the fate of Dionysus himself: although predestined to rule the world and to keep it in balance, he dies in a violent sparagmos.

David Hernández de la Fuente, Universidad Complutense (Madrid)
Dionysus in the Mirror of Late Antiquity: from Religion to Politics

This contribution aims to provide an overview of the implications of the god Dionysus in Late Antiquity, from the 3rd to the 6th century AD. The interpretations of this god, as in a distorting mirror, reflected new nuances in that period as a result of the Neoplatonic readings on the Dionysian features already present in traditional Platonism (in some key areas as symposia, inspired madness, poetry and mysteries), but also in the general tendency of this Late Antique philosophy toward mysticism. Zeus' favorite son was to become alternatively, and among other things, the essence of divinity, the second hypostasis, the model of the philosopher's reversion to divine knowledge or the representation of the transition from the One to the Many and the fall of the Soul. Dionysus was in any case a strong source of inspiration for this philosophic school, after a reworking of his presence in Plato and of the orphic myth of Dionysus Zagreus, heir of Zeus' throne, both in a philosophical and political sense. We will focus especially on the mythical scene of Dionysus Zagreus lost in the mirror, as one of the most powerful metaphors of the relevance of this god in Neoplatonic thought. We will then survey the presence of Dionysus as a powerful symbol in the period between Plotinus and Damascius, with some examples of the implications of Late Antique Dionysism in literature.

Cornelia Isler-Kerényi, Zurich (key-note speaker)

Dionysos, la polis, le pouvoir

Dionysos, divinité « autre », avec son thiasse de satyres et bacchantes est un des sujets préférés par les imagiers de la céramique athénienne. Toutefois, par ses fêtes il se situe au cœur de la polis d'Athènes soit au niveau publique officiel, soit au niveau privé domestique. Mais l'imagerie, depuis l'âge de Solon, le montre aussi dans des contextes mythologiques tels les noces de Pelée, le retour d'Héphaïstos, la naissance d'Athéna, etc.. Dans ces occasions Dionysos se place toujours à côté de Zeus en soutenant l'ordre cosmique. Cela est particulièrement évident dans les représentations de la gigantomachie. Nous suivons le parcours de Dionysos gigantomachos sur l'arrière-plan de la situation historique à partir du VI^e siècle jusqu'à la floraison de Pergame, centre majeur du culte dionysiaque. Le but de cette vue d'ensemble iconographique est de mieux comprendre comment ce patron de la polis démocratique a pu, dans le monde hellénistique et enfin dans la Rome d'Auguste, « incarner la figure singulière du Souverain » (Vernant 1986).

Dariusz Karłowicz, Teologia Polityczna (Warsaw)

Ariadne and Aristotle

It is believed that the Greek concepts of anthropology and politics are deeply intertwined. According to Aristotle, the human being is a zoon politikon. What does that mean? The ability to create (and participate in) political community is a distinct human trait, differentiating us from animals. This political potential is not only the hallmark of

human intellect, but is also the only available way for humans to overcome weakness. Humans are not self-sufficient. Without political community, the division of work – which provides food, clothing, shelter, and safety – is impossible. Likewise, the human's moral and spiritual potential cannot be fulfilled. Without polis there is no happiness, no virtue, nor perfection.

Anthropology, which is so tightly bounded with politics, creates a sort of polis-centrism of Greek culture. If humans are political animals, what are they apart from that? Animals? Beasts? Gods?

Dionysian religion seems to be a source of an alternative anthropology. I believe that this may be a source from which emerges the vision of an autonomous individual (human being separate from polis). Dionysus, in particular Dionysus from the myths, is presented as an un-political god, what in highly political language of Greek means un-rational, un-civilized, un-good – in short – barbarian. Dionysian apophatic theology is correlated with a Dionysian apophatic anthropology. Dionysian man is an a-politikon zoon. This line of thought is clear in the myth on Ariadne. If a Dionysian follower leaving the city is, at least for a moment, un-political, then Ariadne on Naxos is un-political in a total way. The myth describing the princess' trip to Naxos appears to be an effort taken to answer the question what is a human after removing politicalness from within us. Whom did Dionysus meet on Naxos? Is a non-political being possible? Can it be rational, good, virtuous, pious in some other sense of these words? What is a non-political being?

Małgorzata Krawczyk, University of Warsaw

The role of the di patrii in the Severan religious policy: the numismatic and epigraphic evidence

The tutelary gods of Leptis Magna, the hometown of Septimius Severus, were Liber Pater and Hercules, both Roman interpretations of Punic deities. The aim of this paper is to discuss the role of the Leptician gods in the religious policy of Severus and his sons in the light of coin and epigraphic evidence. Their importance to the emperor is attested by the joint appearance of both Liber Pater and Hercules on several coin issues minted between 194 and 210 AD. It is also indicated by several inscriptions in which they appeared as the tutelary deities of his reign. The analysis of the source material proves that the emperor was proud of his origin and showed piety towards his paternal deities. He considered them responsible for his military successes as well as the divine supporters of his dynastic claims.

Fiachra Mac Góráin, University College London

Augustus and the Neoi Dionysoi

Anchises famously compares Augustus to Bacchus and Hercules in the parade of heroes in Virgil's *Aeneid*, 6.801–805:

nec uero Alcides tantum telluris obiuit,
fixerit aripedem ceruam licet, aut Erymanthi
pacarit nemora et Lernam tremefecerit arcu;

nec qui pampineis uictor iuga flectit habenis
Liber, agens celso Nysae de uertice tigris.

In an influential article, Norden (1899) put these lines in the context of the tradition of panegyric on Alexander. More recently, Becher (1976) addressed head-on the issue of what Augustus' relationship with Dionysus was in the wake of Mark Antony's cultivation of a Dionysian persona. Some scholars have remained sceptical about a connection between Augustus and Dionysus, especially since Augustus did not complete the restoration of the temple of Ceres, Liber and Libera (e.g., Miller 2002); while others have built a case for an Augustan rehabilitation or reintegration of Bacchus based on poetry (Smith 2007; Schiesaro 2009) or visual and plastic media (Wylter 2005-2013; Castriota 1995).

This paper will consider what work the Dionysian reference is doing at this point in Virgil's epic. Anchises' comparison is formulated in apophatic terms (*nec ... nec ...*), which allows Virgil to conjure a relationship between Augustus and Bacchus and to harness the image of a victorious Liber, but without committing himself to the kind of identification that was pursued by the *Neoi Dionysoi*. The investigation will survey a range of backgrounds and consider several ways in which the Dionysian comparison reflects on Augustus, positively and negatively. These backgrounds include: (i) cultivation of Dionysus by Greek rulers; (ii) the dynamics of identification and association between Alexander and Dionysus; (iii) cultivation of Dionysus by Hellenistic rulers; (iv) Dionysian motifs in Roman dynasts' imitation of Alexander; and (v) the Euhemerist tradition, which held that Hercules and Dionysus were divinized for their benefactions to mankind. It emerges that Dionysus is a useful and productive symbol in Augustan

culture in that he signals charismatic authority that verges of the threatening; triumph and imperial conquest; power over the natural world; and power of increase, comparable with what Octavian claimed for himself in the adoption of the name Augustus.

Richard Seaford, University of Exeter (key-note speaker)

Religion and Politics in Euripides' Bacchae

The profound political significance of Dionysos in Euripides' *Bacchae* has never been understood. This is partly because of the apolitical Dionysos exemplified (and promoted) by Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, and partly because of a scholarly tendency to associate Pentheus with civic order and Dionysos with unrestrainedness. This tendency represents the opposite of the truth. The self-restraint and the communality of the chorus of *Bacchae* embody civic order, which is threatened by the unrestrained individualism of the tyrannos Pentheus. This self-restrained communality is at the heart of mystic initiation, which (unrecognised by scholars) pervades the drama. I will pursue this theme (and its association with the individualism promoted by monetisation) also in other Dionysiac texts, as well as in the poems of Solon and the myth of Midas.

The *Bacchae* has no concern with the postmodern fads of metatheatricality, unanswerable questions, and celebrating ambivalence. It was produced at a time when the very existence of Athens was threatened by internal division – yet another consideration almost entirely ignored in the numerous interpretations of the drama.

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Faculty of Humanities of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in
Warsaw

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The Teologia Polityczna Annual Review

Organising Committee

Filip Doroszewski (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw)

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Joanna Paciorek (Teologia Polityczna)

The conference is organised within the framework of a research project titled Dionysus in the religious policy of the Roman emperors from Augustus to the end of the Severan dynasty which has been generously funded by the National Programme for the Development of Humanities as established by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.