

Dionysos in late archaic Athens

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Introduction

A rapid glance at the Addenda of R. Parker's book, *Athenian Religion, A History*, reveals the significant shift that occurred in the study of Archaic Athens during the late 1980's and the 1990's¹. After a long period, when almost everything that was built during the archaic age in Attica was attributed to Pisistratus and his sons, a new paradigm emerged, one which dates the major Athenian monuments either to the post- tyrannic era (the temple of Athena on the Acropolis, the *Telesterion* in Eleusis, and all the public monuments of the late archaic period in the Agora), or in times before Pisistratus' first tyranny in 561/560 BC (the city Eleusinion)². In a word, the old model of Pisistratus as the opportunist tyrant who patronized cults and erected numerous buildings in order to reinforce his regime, is no longer regarded as valid³. Instead, scholars find much more attractive the idea that the newly established democratic regime initiated a conscious policy of transforming Athens into a powerful state, not least by the institution of religious rituals and the transformation of urban space⁴.

Inevitably, the cult of Dionysos, so often regarded in the past as the best example of Pisistratus' manipulation of the religious feelings of his fellow Athenians⁵, has been at the fore of the discussions. What may be called a paradigm shift occurred after the publication of a seminal article by W.R. Connor in 1989⁶, who argued persuasively that

¹ Parker 1996, 342-343.

² *Archaios neos*: Childs 1994, 1-6 (after 510). *Telesterion*: Hayashi 1992, 20-22 and Clinton 1994, 162 (under the Peisistratids or under the early democracy). *City Eleusinion*: Hayashi 1992, 19-20 (predating Peisistratus). Agora: Shear 1994. For the earlier consensus, see Boersma 1970.

³ For a critic, see Blok 1990 and Paleothodoros 1999.

⁴ The more comprehensive treatment is Anderson 2003.

⁵ Most notably in de Romilly 1973, 15: "Pisistrate, en un sens, c'est Dionysos. Le tyran athénien avait développé le culte de Dionysos ... », cited by Martin 1995, 15. See also Parke 1977, 128, Shapiro 1989, 84, Frost 1990, 3-5.

⁶ Connor 1989. See also Connor 1996a and b.

1. The traditional date of 534 BCE for the establishment of the first dramatic contexts is inaccurate.
2. The City Dionysia are a festival instituted by the Athenian Democracy, only after 511/510, and more probably after 507/506 BCE.
3. The festival was inaugurated to celebrate the annexation of Boeotian town Eleutherai, in the early years of the democracy, being followed by the appropriation from the part of the Athenians of the eponymous god of the newly annexed territory, Dionysos Eleuthereus, who was symbolically regarded as a god of liberation.

To be sure, the fact that the City Dionysia was a “recent” festival was never put in question, as there is compelling ancient evidence pointing to that direction: Thucydides (2.15.4) mentions the Anthesteria as the “Older Dionysia”, inherently implying the recent date of the other major dionysiac festival. The Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians* (*Ath. Pol.* 57.1) underlines the fact that the old festivals fell in the responsibility of the Archon *Basileus*, while the City Dionysia were conducted by the Eponymous Archon⁷.

Despite criticism on various part of Connor’s argumentation (either on his readings of the relative entries of the so-called *Marmor Parium* [*FGrHist* 239 A43], an inscribed chronicle of Paros dating to the 3rd century BC⁸, or on the character of the Great Dionysia as a “liberation festival”⁹), this scheme has been received favorably in recent scholarship¹⁰. In a sense, this theory should be regarded as a corrective of the earlier assumption that sometime around the end of the 6th century

⁷ Sourvinou-Inwood 2011, 312-339 has shown beyond any reasonable doubt that there was no traditional gentilicial connection between the cult of Dionysos Eleuthereus and the attic *genos* of Bachhiadai. This fact is in line with the general argument put forth by Connor 1989, that the City Dionysia postdate the foundation of democracy, although of course it does not preclude the possibility of a foundation date under the Peisistratids (*ib.*, 337).

⁸ Burnett 2003.

⁹ Critics include Sourvinou-Inwood 1994 and 2003, who argued that the City Dionysia are a festival of “xenismos”, about the first introduction of Dionysos in Athens, and has nothing to do with the recent history of the city or the annexation of Eleutherai. See also Versnel 1995, 377-378, Noel 1997, 71 & Kolb 1999. Against the concept of Dionysos Eleuthereus as a “Liberator”, see Raaflaub 2000: 255-260, who otherwise does not touch upon the question of the chronology of the festival’s foundation. In the same line of argument may be counted also Anderson 2003: 182-183, who does not accept the concept of Dionysos as liberator, but instead believes that the Festival originated in the memorable fact of the annexation of Eleutherai. Martin 1995: 24-25, while accepting the traditional dates for the foundation of the dramatic contest, believes that tragedy grew as an Alcmeonid initiative, but in the chronological framework of the Peisistratid regime.

¹⁰ Shapiro 1995, 19, Osborne 1996, 308-311, Parker 1996, 92, Cartledge 1997, 23-24, Paleothodoros 1999. Spineto 2005, 212, is inconclusive. Curiously Connor’s theory has been completely ignored by Angiollilo 1997 and Zatta 2010.

the allegedly Peisistratidean Dionysia were reformed, to account for the conspicuous presence of the Clisthenic tribal system in the organization of dramatic contests¹¹.

The aim of the present paper is to review all the available evidence for the instauration of the festival during the closing years of the 6th century and to adduce some fresh evidence from vase-painting, which supports this chronology¹².

Literary and Epigraphic Evidence

Connor's thesis is ultimately based on a revision of the traditional dates given mainly by the *Marmor Parium* for the institution of the first dramatic contests in the City Dionysia¹³. It is argued that the dating of Thespis' first dramatic production under 534/533 need not refer to an official contest, taking place in the city, but to a performance in a rural *deme* of Attica more likely Thespis' homeplace, Ikarion¹⁴. This alternative reading lies on the elimination of the emendation *en astei* from the text of the *Marmor Parium*. Thus, while it is not denied that Thespis' career largely falls under the Peisistratids – a fact established by many individual sources of the Hellenistic and Roman period¹⁵ – it is further proposed that this first contest was not part of the City Dionysia and should not be taken as evidence for the dating of the institution of the festival. On the contrary, the date of the institution of the contest is given by the so-called *Fasti* (IG ii² 2318), a long inscription recording the dithyrambic, comic and tragic victors in the festival, set up c. 346 BC. The list of tragic victors starts in 502/501 BC, and a likely date is further suggested by the fragmentary list of victorious tragedians (IG ii² 2325), leaving only 8 lines space

¹¹ See f.e. Capps 1943, 10, Pickard-Cambridge 1968, 59, Winkler 1990, 49-50, Burnett 2003, 180.

¹² Lack of space prevented me from studying the City Dionysia in depth. Recent overviews include see Paleothodoros 1999, Parker 2005, 291-326, Spineto 2005, 185-325 and 2011.

¹³ As Connor 1989, 26, states, "(t)he case for believing that there was already a City Dionysia under Pisistratus, comes down, in the last analysis, to a single passage on the *Marmor Parium*".

¹⁴ Connor 1989, 26-32. See also Scullion 2002a, 81, n. 4 and Anderson 2003, 178-182. Burnett 2003, 174, raised the objection that a major event like the invention of the City Dionysia, would certainly be noticed in the Parian Chronicle.

¹⁵ *The Marmor Parium* dates him somewhere between 538 and 528, Eusebius' Chronicle around 540/539, the Suda entry Thespis puts his floruit in the 61st Olympiad (535-532), Plutarch, *Solon*, 29.6-7, has Thespis performing before an elderly Solon (but see Podlecki 1987, who thinks that Plutarch's source has confounded Solon with Pisistratus): see West 1989, 252 and Martin 1995, 20. In that respect, the objection of Burnett 2003, 173, that if the Dionysia start at 501 BC, all the important innovations till Aeschylus would have taken place within a decade, is unfounded, since nothing precludes that some at least of these developments took place outside the official framework of the city festival.

before the name of Aeschylus (whose first victory is dated in 484 BC). Assuming that only eight poets won the competition from 534/533 to 484 is an implausible suggestion¹⁶, a date after 510 BC must be necessarily envisaged. A date from 503 to 501 is generally considered more likely¹⁷. Scholars have tended to reconcile the two contradictory dates, 534/533 and 502/501, by assuming that the latter date marks the beginning of a new choragic system, and thus was considered suitable for heading the *Fasti*¹⁸.

Independently, Martin West has shown that the dates for the *floruit* of the major early tragic poets transmitted by the lexicographical tradition cannot be regarded as historical, being based on unacceptable calculations, each early poet made to be performing exactly three Olympiads before his successor¹⁹.

In conclusion, epigraphic and literary sources are in conflict, which can be plausibly resolved only in accepting one of the two speculative hypothesis advanced thus far in scholarly literature: either that the Dionysia were completely reshaped after the introduction of the democracy, or that the earlier tragic competitions have had taken place in other occasions, until they were incorporated in the official program of the festival, somewhere in the closing years of the 6th century. Comedy was soon to come, in 486 BC, while the dithyrambic contests were incorporated during the first years of the democracy and the new tribal system established by Cleisthenes' reforms. The second line of argumentation is certainly more consistent with the literary tradition that seeks the origins of tragedy well before the years of Cleisthenes and with the commonsensical argument that since Thespis is regarded as the founder of tragedy it would have taken him some time to form other tragedians in order to compete with them. Otherwise, a contest with Thespis as the sole competitor would

¹⁶ West 1989, 251; see also Scullion 2002a, 81. On the *Fasti*, see also Capps 1943 and Pickard-Cambridge 1968, 101-107. Burnett 2003, 175, finds it possible that the list starts at 528 BC.

¹⁷ Scullion 2002a, 84, with earlier bibliography. Burnett 2003, 175, is one of the few scholars to assume that not only one, but two columns might be missing, giving a starting date in the 530's or the 520's.

¹⁸ See the criticism in Scullion 2002a, 81.

¹⁹ West 1989, 251: Thespis comes three Olympiads before Choerilus, who in his turn comes three Olympiads before Phrynichus. West argues that the first accurate date transmitted by the literary tradition is the contest between Pratinas, Aeschylus and Choerilus in the 70th Olympiad (499-496): Suda, s.v. Pratinas. Further, it is specified that in this contest, Aeschylus was 25 years old, and since his birth date is known from other sources, the exact date is 498 BC. For Scullion 2002a, 81-82, even the latter date is probably unreliable.

be completely alien to the Greek agonistic tradition. Thus, tragedy necessarily existed before the City Dionysia in Athens²⁰.

Archaeological evidence

Recent studies on the monuments from the sanctuary of Dionysos on the southern slope of the Acropolis have shown that the temple and theatre cannot be dated before the first decade of the 5th century. The sanctuary of Dionysos has been identified since Wilhelm Dörpfeld's study²¹, thanks to Pausanias (I, 20.3) unambiguous description: "the earliest sanctuary of Dionysos lies near the theatre". The sanctuary was defined by a peribolos wall in Piraeus poros, later to be implemented by the *propylaea* to the East. The temple, facing to the East, is restored as a building consisting of a pronaos and a naos, in the forme of a tetrastyle prostyle or distyle in antis. Several blocks of archaic age have been assigned to the temple: drums with twenty flutes, triglyphs, a Doric anta capital and parts of a façade²². The sculptural decoration of the temple has been studied in an important article by George Despinis, who proved that the famous relief Athens 3131, showing satyrs and women dancing, did not belong to the late archaic temple, but to another, still unknown monument of the 540's. Despinis was able to identify, among debris from the excavations of Dörpfeld stored in the National Museum of Athens, two fragments of a pediment, the naked torso of an ithyphallic male figure (probably a satyr) and the torso of a warrior. Other sculptural fragments including *metopai* featuring an Amazonomachy are also tentatively associated with the same monument.

Despinis' conclusion is that at least one of the pediments might illustrate a dionysiac subject, while the subject of the other pediment was possibly a Gigantomachy²³. On iconographic reasons, it is not impossible that both fragments

²⁰ One should not forget the tradition reported by Herodotus (5.67.5), the Cleisthenes of Sicyon, maternal grandfather of his Athenian namesake, introduced tragic choruses (but not competitions) in Sikyon, to replace the mourning for the Argive hero Adrastus. In fact, as West 1989, 252, argues, this tradition may explain the assertion of some of our latest sources (Suda, s.v. *Thespis*), that the founder of tragedy was not Thespis, but Epigenes of Sicyon, Thespis being the 16th or the 2nd in the chronological list of tragic poets.

²¹ Dörpfeld & Reisch 1896, 10-24.

²² Moretti 1999-2000, 380.

²³ A Gigantomachy including Dionysos was the subject of the west pediment of the archaic temple of Apollo at Delphi, a monument erected by the Alcmeonids, according to Euripides' *Ion*, 205-218. The

belong to the same pediment. The Gigantomachy of Dionysos is illustrated on numerous vases of the later 6th and the first half of the fifth centuries. Satyrs are often included, although none appears before the beginning of the fifth century²⁴. It might further be argued, albeit tentatively, that the torso of the warrior belongs to another mythological narrative, still more relevant for the decoration of the temple of Dionysos Eleuthereus, the duel between the Boeotian king Melanthios and the Xanthos the Athenian, when Dionysos Melanaigis made an apparition helping the Athenian champion to overcome his opponent²⁵.

Despinis findings clarify a crucial issue on the dating of the temple: it cannot be dated after 480 BCE and on stylistic grounds it should be placed in the decade 500-490 BCE²⁶. This is the most straightforward piece of evidence supporting Connor's scheme, although, as Despinis saw, there remains the problem of the much earlier relief Athens 3131²⁷, which can be considered as either part of an earlier, otherwise unknown monument, or as part of an altar, which already existed in the same spot, several decades before the erection of the temple²⁸. Thus, we should probably envisage the possibility that the area where the temple of Dionysos was erected in the beginning of the 5th century has already been devoted to the god, in a much earlier, Pisistratid date.

The early remains of the theatre, which lies beneath the temple, have been studied recently by Jean-Marc Moretti. The early orchestra has been restored as trapezoidal/rectangular, and the koilon in the shape of the letter Π, consistently with other early theatres from other parts of Attica (Thorikos, Ikarion, Euonymon) and from the northwestern Peloponnesus (Argos, Corinth, Isthmia)²⁹. The discovery of

remaining fragments (De La Coste-Messelière 1931, pl. XXXVI) do not allow the reconstruction proposed by Euripides. On this problem, see Winnington-Ingram 1976, 500 & Arnott 1996, 113-115.

²⁴ On dionysiac Gigantomachies, see Lissarrague 1987 & Paleothodoros 2007. Armed satyrs appear at first in contexts that are not connected to the Gigantomachy. The earliest document where satyrs make part of the escort of Dionysus in Gigantomachy is probably a fragmentary cup from Athens: Maffre 1972, 225-229.

²⁵ Halliday 1926 & Robertson 1988. The story is normally connected with the Apaturia. The equation of Dionysos Melanaigis with Dionysos Eleuthereus and the connection of the story with the City Dionysia is examined in detail by Winkler 1990, 23-37.

²⁶ Earlier scholarship favours a sixth century date, precisely on the evidence of the existence of the Dionysia in the times of Pisistratus: i.e. Wiles 1997, 55.

²⁷ Despinis 1996/1997, 196, fig. 3 and n. 6, with earlier bibliography.

²⁸ Despinis 1996/1997, 212-214.

²⁹ Moretti 2000/2002, 284-286, with earlier references. See also Moretti 1999/2000. For a good survey of scholarship on the problem of the shape of early theatres, see Wiles 1997, 23-62.

rectilinear stone seats shows that there must have been three banks of stone seats, combined with the wooden benches, mentioned by ancient authors³⁰.

Two questions remain to be answered. When was the theatre erected? What was its initial relation to the sanctuary of Dionysos? Ancient sources are explicit in that the dionysiac contests took place in the Agora, before moving to the theatre. Whether this is meant to be the so-called “Ancient Agora”, or the area excavated by the American School of Classical Studies in Athens and known to be the Classical and later Agora of Athens, is a difficult matter that need not get an answer here. The transfer of the dramatic performances is usually related to the collapse of the wooden scaffolding, the so-called *ikria* in 498 BCE, mentioned in ancient sources³¹ and accepted by the majority of scholars³². However, a recent reexamination of the evidence shows that the events, the collapse of the *ikria* and the transfer need not be connected and certainly no ancient source tells us that they did³³. On the other hand, Moretti observed that the situation as it appears in the later 5th century, with the sanctuary clearly divided from the theatre, need not be the original arrangement. It rather reflects a later development, when the construction of the Propylaea and the altar of the sanctuary, the erection of the stoa beneath the stage building and of the Periclean Odeon to the east of the *cavea*, altered in a significant way the overall configuration of the area³⁴. In the initial plan, theatre and sanctuary lied in close proximity and connection. Assuming an early 5th century date for the temple, we are obliged to accept that the theatre was built at the same time, or later. It is tempting to regard the temple of Dionysos and the adjacent theatrical structures as part of one and the same building program, undertaken during the first decade of the 5th century, some years after the institution of the Dionysia. It is however probable that the area of the southern slope of the Acropolis was sacred to Dionysos at least from the early years of the second half of the 6th century, on the evidence of the relief Athens 3131, unless we accept that that the relief was erected elsewhere and subsequently was brought to the newly founded sanctuary.

³⁰ Moretti 2000/2002, 286-287, Lech 2009.

³¹ See above, n. 19.

³² See Meineck 2012, 20-22, for references. The existence of dionysiac performances before the erection of the theatre invalidates Scot Scullion’s assumption that drama was connected with Dionysos by chance, because in his sanctuary the Athenians found the available space necessary for the permanent installation of a theatrical structure (Scullion 2002b, 125).

³³ Meineck 2012, 23.

³⁴ Moretti 1999-2000, 378-380.

Iconographic Evidence: the ship-cart procession

Athenian vases have long been an important source of information for the Dionysiac movement in Athens. In Ludwig Deubner's book on Athenian Festivals, the section devoted to Dionysos is to a great extent the commentary of vase-paintings that allegedly illustrate rituals taking place in the Dionysiac festivals sponsored by the Athenian State³⁵. Unfortunately, much less attention was paid to the chronological implications of the appearance of ritual images on Athenian vase-painting. In this section, it is proposed that a group of vases appearing suddenly at the end of the sixth century only to disappear some years later should be linked to the City Dionysia.

Four black-figured vases closely related in style and dating from the end of the 6th century show a procession of Dionysos on board of a wheel-cart in the form of a ship **[FIGURE 1]**³⁶. The god is flanked by two piping satyrs and the group is sometimes framed by a procession that also includes satyrs, humans and sacrificial animals. The same type of ship cart is presented on the four vases: the mast is lacking, the wheels are of a primitive type, there is no visible means of propulsion, the prow takes the form of an animal head (boar or dog) and a screen with a criss-crossed hatched pattern is visible on the stern. It might be argued that the screen is not an indispensable item in navigation³⁷, since it is absent on all other representations of ships in attic vase painting, with the exception of an amphora in Tarquinia showing Dionysos navigating in the company of satyrs and maenads dancing, making music and steering the ship³⁸.

³⁵ Deubner 1932, 93-151.

³⁶ **1.** London, The British Museum 1836.2-24.62 (B 79), from Acrai in Sicily. Kerényi 1976, fig. 58-59; Gasparri 1986, Dionysos 828, pl. 398; Borgers 2004, 144, no. 8, pl. 4a; Fritzilas 2006, 62, no. 20, pl. 8.20. **2.** Athens, National Museum, Acropolis Collection 1281, from the Acropolis of Athens: Kerényi 1976, fig. 57; Guarducci 1983, 109, pl. I; Gasparri 1986, 492, Dionysos 827; Hedreen 1992, pl. 2; Borgers 2004, 143, no. 2, pl. 2a; Broder 2008, 126, fig. 2. **3.** Bologna, Museo Civico 130, from Bologna: Kerényi 1976, fig. 56; Guarducci 1983, 111, pl. II; Gasparri 1986, Dionysos 829, pl. 392; Göttlicher 1992, 104, fig. 59; Broder 2008, 127, fig. 3. **4.** Tübingen, Universität, 1497 (D 53) fr. of unknown provenance: Auffarth 1991, fig. 5; Göttlicher 1992, 105, fig. 60. The same subject appears on a lead strip from Montagna di Marzo in Sicily, which may, or may not be connected to Athenian practices: De Miro 1982. For a thorough examination of this group of vases, see Paleothodoros 2012, 463-465, with earlier references.

³⁷ See Göttlicher 1992, 104-105; Tassignon 2003, 87 and Mackay 2010, 233.

³⁸ Tarquinia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 678, from Tarquinia, dating from around 510 BCE. Frickenhaus 1912, 76-77, fig. 1-2; Kerényi 1976, fig. 49-50; Gasparri 1986, Dionysos 792, pl. 392; Hedreen 1992, pl. 23; Tassignon 2003, fig. 2; Broder 2008, 125, fig. 1. The scenes on the two sides of the amphora are virtually identical.

Most scholars believe that the subject of these vases is the ritual enactment of the mythical arrival of Dionysos in Attica³⁹. It is often assumed that the figure appearing on the ship-cart is a statue, or a priest disguised as the god⁴⁰. Opinions are divided as to whether the ritual took place during the Anthesteria⁴¹ or the Civic Dionysia⁴². The presence of a sacrificial bull in the procession on the Bologna skyphos militates against the first option⁴³. Remarkably, the iconography of the ship-cart procession died out soon after its first appearance around 500 BCE⁴⁴. The source of inspiration for the painters was apparently the introduction of the triumphal procession of the City Dionysia, which was instituted by the young Athenian democracy during the latest years of the 6th century. Subsequently, the ritual was discarded or rather painters lost interest in it. A slight glimpse of evidence in favor of the latter option has been adduced recently by Matthias Steinhart, who argued that the three 5th century marble ship-eyes discovered in the Agora of Athens belonged to the Dionysiac ship-cart⁴⁵.

Dionysos and the Dead in Athens after 500 BCE

The construction of the theatre and temple of Dionysos on the southern slope of the Acropolis, the emergence of cultic iconography relating to dionysiac festivals, the epigraphic evidence for the official organization of dramatic contests are matched

³⁹ The procession of a ship was part of a Dionysiac festival most often identified with the *Katagogia* in several East Greek cities (Smyrna, Priene, Ephesus): see Tassignon 2003. Literary and epigraphic sources are of late, Hellenistic or Roman date, but a fragmentary East Greek amphora of the 6th century BCE (Oxford 1924.264; Boardman 1958) shows four men dressed in Egyptian aprons carrying a ship on their shoulders and a satyr-like figure standing on the prow and sporting with two phalluses. Thus, similar dionysiac rituals, perhaps derived from Egyptian practice, certainly existed in the archaic period as well.

⁴⁰ Man playing the role of Dionysus: Deubner 1932, 107; Jeanmaire 1951, 49-52; Boardman 1958, 7. Image of the god: Nilsson 1908, 335; Frickenhaus 1912, 63. *Contra*, Davies 1978, 74. Romano 1980, 70 and Broder 2008, 124, who argue that Dionysos is not a statue. Mackay 2010, 234, believes that the Tarquinia amphora shows the mythological event. For Kerényi 1976, 113-115, even the skyphoi are mythological in subject.

⁴¹ Nilsson 1900, 125 & 1908: 399-402; Deubner 1932, 102-103; Guarducci 1983: 107; Simon 1983, 93; Auffarth 1990, 113, n. 3; Göttlicher 1992, 103-107; Hedreen 1992, 92, n. 10; Vidali 1997, 107-108; Spinetto 2005, 93; Mackay 2010, 234 (hesitantly).

⁴² Frickenhaus 1912, 61-62; Kerényi 1976, 167-173; Burkert 1983, 201; Gasparri 1986, 502; Robertson 1993, 218; Humphreys 2004, 230; Fritzilas 2006, 17.

⁴³ Parker 2005, 56.

⁴⁴ Borgers 2004, 92 and Parker 2005, 302.

⁴⁵ Steinhart 1995, 98-100. See also Carlson 2009, 361-362.

by the significantly increasing use of dionysiac iconography in the funerary sphere, documented in Athenian cemeteries from around 500 BCE. This development is largely due to the fact that Dionysos and his retinue start appearing in growing numbers on black-figured *lekythoi* buried in the athenian cemeteries. The situation has been aptly described in two recent papers. Winfred Van de Put has shown that Dionysos and his retinue appear more often on hydriae and lekythoi in black-figure than on sympotic vessels⁴⁶. This development is explained by reference to Dionysos' role in expressing co-operative actions among the two sexes in Athens. Marie-Christine Villanueva-Puig observed that the Dionysiac themes on black-figured *lekythoi* increased considerably after 500 BCE and offers three possible explanations for this phenomenon: a desire to offer to the dead an image of bliss exemplified by the dionysiac realm, a (doubtful) analogy between dionysiac alterity and the alterity of death, and finally the close relation of Dionysos with the dead⁴⁷.

Conclusion

The archaeological, epigraphic, literary and iconographic data shows that a significant change in the perception of Dionysos took place in the last part of the 6th and the beginning of the 5th centuries in Athens. The skeptics might argue that the developments in the cult of Dionysos were but the end of a long evolution, which has nothing to do with democracy. However, the cumulative force of the evidence better fits the hypothesis that the radical shift in the perception of the god in Athens was due to a conscious, carefully organized and masterfully executed religious reform underwent by the new democratic regime.

ILLUSTRATION

Figure 1. Bologna, Museo Civico 130 (after Kerényi 1976, fig. 56).

⁴⁶ Van de Put 2009.

⁴⁷ Villanueva-Puig 2009.

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