

Dionysus – Equally Worshipped by the Greeks and the Thracians Sanctuaries in the Rhodopes Mountains and Pistiros

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Rezumat: *Articolul de față pornește de la o ipoteză a lui Mieczyslaw Domaradzki cu privire la mormintele din apropiere de Pistiros. Cercetarea recentă a tumulilor din apropierea emporion-ului, au evidențiat prezența uneia dintre cele mai timpurii construcții cu boltă cunoscute până în prezent.*

Cuvinte cheie: *Dyonysus, mitologie greacă și tracică, perioada arhaică, Pistiros, necropola de la Akandjievo.*

Key words: *Dionysus, Greek and Thracian Mythology, Archaic Period, Pistiros, Akandjievo necropolis.*

We both enjoyed the splendid hospitality of Prof. Simion during his conferences, so we like to send him our congratulations together with aspects of the spirit of good wine and his gifts in our Pistiros. Among the greatest deities who according to myth came to Greece from Thrace was the god of wine and ecstatic joy, Dionysus. According to the most popular version of the story he was born as the son of the god Zeus and of Semele, the daughter of the founder of the Samothracian sanctuary, Kadmos. His mortal mother Semele wished to see the ruler of gods in his real appearance. Zeus was refusing for a long time but in the end he could not withstand the pleas of his beloved and what he expected happened. The lightning of his shining appearance burned Semele and Zeus had to carry Dionysus (out of the womb) in his own thigh¹.

According to Orphic teaching, which was probably closer to Thracian tradition, this was already the second birth of Dionysus, respectively Zagreus, as he was called by his second name. First he was the child of Zeus and of Demeter's daughter Persephone. He was to have become the new ruler of the world but the Titans, the ancient barbarian demigods, tore Zagreus into pieces and ate him. Zeus killed them by lightning. Apollo collected the parts of Zagreus body that remained in the ashes after the meal of Titans, and brought them to Delphi. Wise Athena saved the heart of Zagreus and Zeus from it begot a new Dionysus with Semele.

Dionysus first entered Thrace from Asia Minor and after his arrival he severely punished the Thracian king Lykurgos, who killed the maenads who were sent ahead by the god to Europe². Dionysus was accompanied by a joyful, wine-drunk procession of Satyrs, Silens and maenads. Satyrs had human head but horse's ears and tail and always erected phallus. Silens were so similar that we often cannot distinguish them on pictures from the former, but it is easier to recognize their leader, the wise old Silenus from whom it was possible to learn a lot if he did not fall asleep from excessive drinking. With Silens and Satyrs maenads danced; they were mortal women dressed in animal skins and carrying thyrsus, a stick with a pinecone as the finial.

In drunken state of religious exaltation the maenads ran about in the mountains together with Satyrs or Silens, who often approached them with sexual expectations. However, according to numerous pictures on vases it does not seem that – before Hellenism – they often got what they wanted. The maenads usually pushed them away with thyrsus and rather enjoyed their dancing. In their holy ecstasy the maenads tore animals to pieces and once they even killed the Thracian king Orpheus, the second greatest figure of Thracian religion for the Greeks. In Thrace Dionysus was not only the patron of orgiastic feasts and common drinking in Thracian military elites: in Pangaem, the Rhodopes and maybe also in Haemus there were Dionysus' oracles.

The Thracian king Rhesus, who took part in the Trojan War and was murdered there by Odysseus and Diomedes, became after his death the keeper of Dionysus' oracle in the Pangaion mountains, in the area of the Bessi. Many Thracian sanctuaries are known now, certainly not of dedicated to Dionysus, but in many cases the cult there is probably his³.

¹ Cf. e.g. Gassari-Veneri 1986.

² Fol 1993; Fol 1995; Fol 2002; Archibald 1999; Bouzek 1999; Popov 1989.

³ Domaradzki 1994; Fol 1993; Venedikov, Fol 1980.

In the Pistiros inscription, Dionysus is mentioned as the most important divinity of the emporion, as worshipped both by the Greeks and the Thracians; the famous contract was closed under his patronage, Dionysus guaranteed the oath confirming the contract between the emporitai and the Thracian ruler (Fig. 1).

The Spirit of Wine had access to all, who liked drinking alcoholic beverages, and also to those who tried to approach the divine world through a kind of ecstatic rituals. What we know from the inscription, can also be found in dedications known from the city.

The dedications to deities represent roughly the half of the graffiti found so far. Many seem to be dedications to Apollo – ΑΠ, ΑΠΑΟ, ΑΠΙ..ΡΥ., Α.

Several specimens are marked with letter Δ. ΔΙ⁴; these are dedications to Dionysus or to Zeus. The Theophoric name published by her ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙ.. may also underline the importance Dionysus played in the emporion. The altars found with figures may well have served for oracula; the most important oracula in Thrace were connected with the cult of Dionysos⁵. Dionysus was one of the most popular deities also in Thasos and Maroneia, the cities from which most of the emporitai of Pistiros came⁶.

Two complete oenochoai and three fragmentary items have been found with imprints of gems from the Dionysiac circle. One bears a satyr's mask (Fig. 2/A, B), the other is decorated with imprints of gems on which a satyr is represented abducting maenad (Fig. 3/A, B), a subject well known from Thasian coins and also from their Thracian imitations⁷. Figurine of a youth from a large vessel similar to the Derveni krater probably represents a young satyr, too (Fig. 4).

The good wine was apparently well accessible at Pistiros, as we know from a large number of transport amphorae found there. The following table gives the proportional number of amphorae analyzed in detail until now⁸.

Centre	Specification	Number Toes	Percent	Number Stamps	Percent
Thasos	pithoid	10	total	54	72 %
	conical/biconical	22, total 32	24 %		
Mende		7	6 %	2	3 %
Peparetos	(Solocha I + II)	32	23 %	7	10 %
“Thasian circle”		13	10 %	Ainos 4	5 %
Lesbos	red + black	17	12 %		
Chios		17	12 %		
Knidos		7	5 %	1	1 %
Heraclea		12	9 %	5	7 %

Other centers are represented by very few items only.

The imports started in late 5th century and the flow continued until the end of the 4th century B.C. After 300 B.C. the impoverished city imported only very limited amount of fine wine and, after its destruction by the Celts, the imports were stopped.

Among the imported Thasian trade amphorae, those with early stamps bear nice representations of Satyrs or Silens⁹ (Fig. 5/A, B). This all are direct and indirect proofs of the importance not only of wine, the substance of Dionysus', but also for his worship among the inhabitants of the emporion.

⁴ Domaradzka 2002, 209.

⁵ Cf. Domaradzka 2007, 222 with reference to earlier items Publisher by Domaradzki 1996, 33-35; cf., also Katinčarova 2007, 43, pl. 13. fig. 35

⁶ Cf. Domaradzka, 2002, 209; Domaradzka 2007, 222.

⁷ Domaradzki 1997, 68 fig. 2-3

⁸ Velkov – Domaradzka 1996, cf. Bouzek 2007.

⁹ Bouzek 2007, 134, pl. 35, 38.

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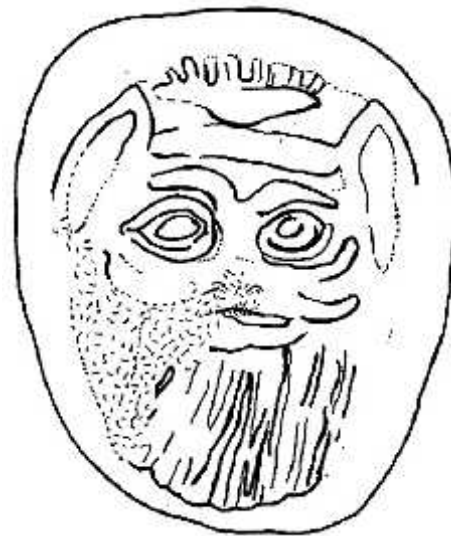
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Fig. 1. The Pistiros inscription, the contract between Kotys and the emporitai was closed under the patronage of Dionysus.



A

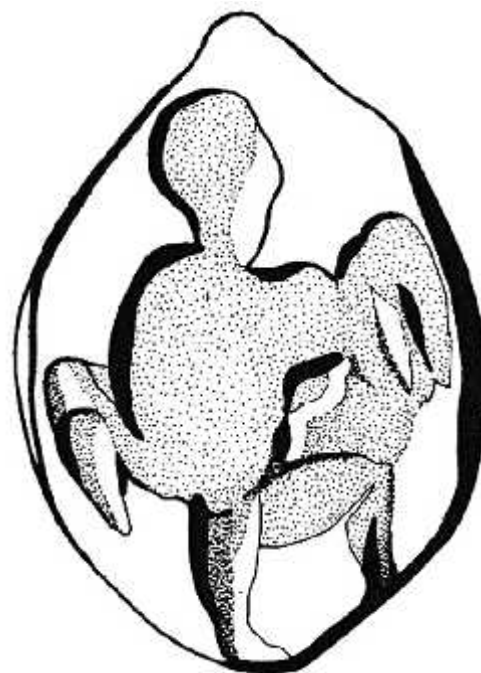


B

Fig. 2. A, B – Satyr head imprinted on a local pitcher



A



B

Fig. 3. A, B – Satyr carrying Maenad; imprints of a gem or finger-ring on a local pitcher.



Fig. 4. Bronze statuette of a young Satyr; appliqué of a bronze vessel (?).



Fig. 5. A, B – Stamps on Thasian amphorae from Pistiros: heads of Satyr.