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Review: Renate Schlesier (ed.), *A Different God? Dionysos and Ancient Polytheism.*

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Renate Schlesier (ed.), *A Different God? Dionysos and Ancient Polytheism*. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2011. Pp. xiv, 667; 68 pp. of plates. ISBN 9783110222340. \$150.00.

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The question mark in the title may be the most significant indicator of the contents of this collected volume. This collection of 29 papers in English and German returns repeatedly to a fundamental question: how is Dionysos different? The papers take two basic approaches, some asking in what different ways Dionysos appears, others whether Dionysos really is all that different from other Greek gods. The papers come from a conference in 2009 at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin which, as the editor comments, came nearly 20 years after the ground-breaking Masks of Dionysus conference which featured many of the same scholars. Many of them took part again in another conference in Madrid in 2010 entitled "Redefining Dionysos." In all of these conferences and their subsequent publications, the identity of Dionysos is under discussion, but only this one poses it as a question.^{[1](#)}

No brief review can do justice to the richness and complexity of the twenty-nine essays, comprising more than 550 pages and supported by more than 60 pages of bibliography and nearly 40 pages of indices. The three indices of names (personal, mythic and cultic, and geographical) will be of service to anyone attempting to wade through the volume's massive amounts of information, while the indices of technical terms in Greek and Latin provide a way of tracking the discussion of important ideas throughout the volume. A few papers make reference to each other, but,

for the most part, the reader is left to sift through the indices. The indices include not just the standard index locorum of ancient texts cited, but also an index of the material evidence discussed; one of the great strengths of the collection is the way both textual and material evidence are included. The collection is lavishly illustrated with 122 illustrations on 68 pages of plates, many of them in color. While such extravagance on the part of the publisher is welcome, this book, like most of the series from this publisher, is priced out of the range of individual scholars and aimed at libraries. But the collection is in any case more likely to be consulted by scholars interested in particular topics and materials, and every serious research library should have a copy.

Most of the essays address the different appearances of Dionysos, whether across some genre of evidence or period of time. Some concentrate on a particular motif or image relating to Dionysos, while others examine specific texts or other pieces of evidence. All of these different aspects of Dionysos come together to create, as Gödde puts it, a mosaic image of the god (p. 103). Burkert presents a brief sketch of Dionysos in various genres and types of evidence, taking a whirlwind tour from the Mycenaean period to the triumph of Christianity, while essays by Leege and Sanchiño Martínez sketch the uses and appearance of Dionysos in modern literature, Leege focusing on the ways that twice-born Dionysos has been used as an image of Greece reborn as a nation in 1830 and beyond.

The essays perhaps most likely to be consulted by scholars dipping into the volume are those concerned with the different appearances of Dionysos in particular bodies of evidence. Bierl tracks the god through some of his most familiar haunts, the dramatic genres of tragedy, satyr-play, and comedy. Spineto too looks at the dramatic Dionysos, but from the angle of the festivals and the articulation of Athenian civic identity that these Dionysiac rituals involve. Both essays play with the paradoxes of order and transgression that the dramatic texts present, seeing such paradoxes as inherent in both the dramas and the god. Ford's study of the different names of Dionysos in the *Frogs* approaches the god in a different way but provides, in his connection of *koax*, *koax* to *Iakch'*, *o Iakche*, one of the best explanations for the presence of the Frogs in the *Frogs* that I have yet to see. After a brief detour into the reception of Dionysos in the *Bacchae* in recent years, Zeitlin delves into Euripides' *Ion*, showing how the play mirrors many of the themes found in Athenian tragedies about Dionysos and Thebes.

Other papers focus on less obvious sources for an understanding of Dionysos. The essays by Georgoudi and Horster examine the picture of Dionysos that appears from cultic regulations and so-called sacred laws, a body of evidence that is just beginning to be tapped for the wealth of information it contains. Georgoudi explores the kinds of sacrifice made to Dionysos, noting that this god usually receives the same kinds of offering as most other deities. Examining the evidence for Dionysos Anthororrhaistes at Tenedos, she argues that this is not a relic of human sacrifice or primeval dismemberment, pointing out that stories of Dionysiac dismemberment do not have the element of eating that is essential to sacrifice. Horster tackles the financial aspects of Dionysiac cult, observing that its incomes from land holdings, contributions, and fees are, like the expenses for buildings and sacrifices, similar to those for other deities. Cole likewise investigates Dionysos in epigraphic evidence, noting that purity regulations and other formal preparations mean that Dionysiac ritual was no more spontaneous than rituals for other deities (although she also points to the paucity of oaths taken in the name of the god). Obbink surveys the appearances of Dionysos in papyri, from the early lyrics of Archilochus to the ritual references in the Gurôb papyrus. Despite the wealth of references already uncovered, he assures us that more is yet to come from papyri as yet undeciphered in the libraries buried by Vesuvius and elsewhere, and provides as a sample a fascinating papyrus commentary containing references to the infancy of Dionysos, his nurse Hipte and her fashioning of a *rhymbos* to drown out the sound of the infant's cries.

Jaccottet surveys the evidence for Dionysiac clubs, examining how they integrate Dionysiac wildness and otherness into the civic order, while Fuhrer looks at the ways Bacchus is used in depicting the divinization of rulers in the Roman period. Wildberg makes an intriguing trek through some philosophical sources, from Heraclitus to Plato to the Neoplatonist Plotinus (with a detour through Lacan), arguing that these philosophers too 'instrumentalize' Dionysos for their own agendas, be it the union of opposites, the domestication of madness in the service of philosophy, or even the explanation of the mystery of embodiment. Schlesier also works through Heraclitus and Plato as she explores the aspect of bacchic madness in testimonies to Dionysos, while Borgeaud traces changes in the story of Ikarios from Athenian imperial propaganda to a new Hellenistic cosmopolitanism. Frateantonio likewise locates Pausanias' denial of the identity of Dionysos and Osiris within the context of the Hellenistic world where the dynamic of cultural power between Greece and Egypt has

shifted.

Henrichs examines another facet of the god, his nature as the god who appears, pointing out that epiphanies of the god appear more in literary sources than in the epigraphic sources that attest to the epiphanies of deities such as Asclepius and Isis. Moraw, by contrast, shows that the visual evidence is rich in appearances of the god, and surveys a number of motifs covered in more detail in other essays. Schmitt Pantel examines vases depicting Dionysos with a female, arguing for marriage imagery in a variety of such scenes, while Sabetai studies a new krater by the Dinos painter, seeing such scenes as a model of marriage, the mortal bride joined to a divine bridegroom. This epiphany of the god on the banquet couch is also studied by Heinemann, who examines the way in which some Greek motifs are transformed in Roman art. Carpenter looks at a variety of Apulian red-figure kraters with Dionysiac imagery, suggesting that the nude youth represents the deceased, perhaps assimilated to Dionysos, whereas Bowersock begins the volume with a look into an episode that appears in iconography rather than text, the first bath of the infant Dionysos, and traces the ways in which the motif is used in the iconography of Achilles, Alexander the Great, and Christ. These essays are illustrated with color plates, which might better have been integrated with the text rather than tucked away at the back of the volume.

All of these articles contribute to the vast mosaic built up by the volume, showing how differently Dionysos appears in different contexts. A few of the essays, however, address the other question implicit in the title: is Dionysos really a different god? Versnel looks at Dionysos within the larger context of Greek polytheism, concluding that Dionysos, like other gods, is the same god across all of his different manifestations, epithets, and appearances, but at the same time is also multiple divinities, different from and inconsistent with one another. Versnel's essay frames the question, implicit in all the essays in the collection, about the identity of the god, and traces the issue in contemporary scholarship. Gehrke juxtaposes Versnel's approach to Dionysos with the structuralist approach of Vernant, arguing for a *coincidentia oppositorum* in which the Dionysiac represents both part of the world of the polis and a subversive opposition to it. Isler-Kerényi examines the changing manifestations of Dionysos in the city of Pergamon as the deity shifted with the city from a polis structure to an imperial one. In these papers and others throughout the volume it is worth noting the eclipse of the structuralist theories of Vernant and Detienne, not just by the more recent ideas of Versnel, Seaford and Goldhill but by

references to the older theories of Otto and Brelich. Konaris surveys a similar shift in nineteenth-century understandings of the god, pointing out that earlier models, such as Indo-European gods of nature or historicizing ideas of a local god from a time of primordial Urmonotheismus, treated Dionysos just like other gods. These models were replaced in the scholarship by anthropological models, such as Lang's totemism and Frazer's dying and rising vegetation god, or Romantic models (from Hölderlin to Nietzsche) that stressed the god's subversive difference.

Many of the essays that treat a particular aspect of Dionysos conclude that Dionysos is, in this specific regard, not so different from other gods, even if this particular aspect is itself different from the aspects of other gods. Gödde's article, an expanded version of her roundtable discussion paper at the conference, perhaps articulates the issues mostly clearly of all, looking back at earlier modern scholarly models of understanding Dionysos. While noting five features that characterize much of the evidence (a dead mother, a double birth, the issue of life and death, reciprocal madness, and the struggle with *theomachoi*), Gödde nevertheless argues that local differences and inconsistencies make any grand unifying theory inadequate – for Dionysos or any other deity. However, she also proposes that it may be more useful to look to ancient ideas of the god as a *xenos*, with all the paradoxes that an outsider welcomed inside brings, than to modern ideas of the Other. Judging by the number of times and ways the idea of a *xenos* or scenes of *xenia* came up in the various essays in the volume, this appeal to ancient categories and understandings seems to me extremely fruitful. Following Gödde's lead, it may be better to think of Dionysos, not as the 'different' god, but as the 'stranger' god.

Notes:

1. T. H. Carpenter, C. A. Faraone (eds.), *Masks of Dionysus* (Ithaca, 1993). A. Bernabé, M. Herrero de Jáuregui, A. I. Jiménez San Cristóbal (eds.), *Redefining Dionysos* (Berlin, 2013).

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