



Zadaný cizojazyčný text:

Walter F. Otto: DIONYSUS, MYTH AND CULT

Translated by ROBERT B. PALMER

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ALL of antiquity extolled Dionysus as the god who gave man wine. However, he was known also as the raving god whose presence makes man mad and incites him to savagery and even to lust for blood. He was the confidant and companion of the spirits of the dead. Mysterious dedications called him the Lord of Souls. To his worship belonged the drama which has enriched the world with a miracle of the spirit. The flowers of spring bore witness to him, too. The ivy, the pine, the fig tree were dear to him. Yet far above all of these blessings in the natural world of vegetation stood the gift of the vine, which has been blessed a thousandfold. Dionysus was the god of the most blessed ecstasy and the most enraptured love. But he was also the persecuted god, the suffering and dying god, and all whom he loved, all who attended him, had to share his tragic fate.

The most distinguished poets and thinkers sensed in this diversity a reality of inexpressible depth. But modern scholars are still completely baffled by it. No matter how often they have attempted to trace the diverse back to the simple, the meaning of the collective whole has always escaped them.

Lately they have been astonishingly unanimous in their endorsement of an explanation which can probably be said to be by far the least satisfactory of all such explanations. Dionysus is called "a god of vegetation." Yet, it is obvious that he was known to reveal himself not in the plant world, as such, but in the life of certain specific plants, among which the vine is incomparably the most important. Is it not more likely, rather, that it is the particular nature of precisely these plants which bore witness to the efficacy of the god, and is it not this which can give us an indication of his specific nature? However, such clues are not pursued. Instead, one prefers to believe that Dionysus, for unknown reasons, limited himself, in the course of time, to a special area even though there is no evidence in the sources for a more inclusive area. On the contrary, this can be surmised only through hypotheses, and this is done only because one wishes to derive the remarkable belief, of which the Greek sources speak, from the simplest of concepts. Hence, all of the great attributes which make up the character of Dionysus are supposed to have come together purely by accident, from the outside, and not to have arisen out of an inner necessity because of what he was.

This attempted explanation actually renounces all understanding. It is based on a preconceived idea of nature deities, and disregards everything which is peculiar to the Greek god. In the terrible image of the frenzied god it sees only that which we already know or believe we know from other religions. The obsession of the women, the miracle of the wine, the proximity of death, the tragic drama—these and other essentials of the cult and the myth mean nothing to it. But as long as it is not seen that the manifestation of the divine reality which is called Dionysus is to be discerned in these great forms in which he appears, the inquiry into the religion of Dionysus has not even begun.

An intoxicated god, a mad god! Truly an idea which demands our deepest thought. The ready hypotheses which reduce everything significant to the level of the commonplace have only served to keep us from seeing the tremendous force of this idea. History, however, bears witness to its might and its truth. It revealed to the Greeks such a great and extensive insight into what intoxication meant that thousands of years after the decline of Greek culture a Hölderlin and a Nietzsche could still express their ultimate, their most profound thoughts in the name of Dionysus. So, too, Hegel,¹ who conceived truth in a Dionysiac image, saying it was "the bacchanalian revel in which no member is not intoxicated."

¹ Georg Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 45 of the prologue in Vol. II of the *Sämtliche Werke*, H. Glockner, ed. (Stuttgart, 1927).