https://www.doi.org/10.17234/9789533791074.10

# LOCATING DIONYSUS AT THE ISIAC SANCTUARY OF THESSALONIKI

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## Abstract

*In the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki, there is evidence that several deities, not typically associated with the Egyptian gods, were also venerated. One particularly intriguing example is Dionysus. While Dionysus may be considered as an interpretatio graeca of Osiris, he appears in a unique manner among the finds from the sanctuary, notably in an inscription dedicated to Zeus Dionysus Gongylos. These three names together refer to a single deity, whose identity has intrigued scholars since the inscription emerged. This paper examines the available data about this cult, aiming to clarify what is known, what can be hypothesised, and what remains uncertain. Beyond Zeus Dionysus Gongylos, the sanctuary revealed additional Dionysiac elements, like a second-century CE votive relief dedicated to Dionysus as a listening deity, and some indirect references. Together, this evidence sheds light on the religious practices and cult adherents in Thessaloniki during the Imperial era and underscores the intercultural nature of the city's Isiac sanctuary.**

**Keywords:** *Thessaloniki – Dionysos/Dionysus – Zeus – Osiris – Harpocrates.*

## Introduction

Cities, along with their monuments and buildings, have their own fates. Since its founding by Cassander in 316/5 BCE, Thessaloniki has had a continuous existence.

* It is a pleasure to thank Laurent Bricault, Elias Sverkos, Emmanuel Voutiras for their support in this article and especially Annareta Touloumtzidou, who works with me in the study of the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki and always shares with extreme generosity the results of her own research.The figures in this paper are copyrighted by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture / Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Θεσσαλονίκης (figs. 1–4 and 6–12) and Εφορεία Πόλης Θεσσαλονίκης (fig. 5). I am indebted to the staff of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki and the Ephorate of the City of Thessaloniki, in particular Styliana Galiniki and Andreas Stangos, for their assistance with the photographs and the permission to publish them.

The modern city preserves its past through layers of material remains beneath the surface, but uninterrupted use has made unearthing this history quite challenging. The planning works undertaken after the Great Fire of Thessaloniki in 1917, which ravaged over half of the city centre, provided an opportunity to delve beneath the surface. Rescue excavations from 1921 to 1925 revealed unexpected ruins of a sanctuary dedicated to Sarapis and other Egyptian gods. Subsequent discoveries in 1939 and in the late 1950s expanded our knowledge of it. However, the sanctuary has not been entirely excavated and both its boundaries and surroundings, including potential adjacent sanctuaries, remain elusive.[1]

The sanctuary must have been established during the early 3rd century BCE and it grew over time to include several temples, dedicated to different deities. Four temple structures have been discovered, and more may have existed. Epigraphic evidence attests to an *Osirieon*, a precinct of Osiris,[2] a temple of Isis *Memphitis*,[3] and probably to a *Sarapieion*, a precinct of Sarapis,[4] as well as a *sekos*, a sacred enclosure, of Hermanubis.[5] As for the temple discovered in 1921 and immediately labelled as the temple of Sarapis,[6] a recent evaluation of its findings attributes it to the cult of Aphrodite.[7]

The sanctuary was located in the sacred area of the city,[8] but it is difficult to assess its significance within its urban context. This is due to the lack of comparable data from nearby sanctuaries, as they have not yet been unearthed, with one exception – the partial excavation of an Ionian podium temple to the north of the Isiac sanctuary, constructed with reused architectural elements from the Late Archaic period.[9] Nevertheless, several inscriptions retrieved from the site indicate that the Isiac sanctuary was continuously evolving. Already in the early 2nd century BCE, it must have been a prosperous site.[10] A particular problem is posed by the finds that do not correlate, at least directly, to the cults of the *gens isiaca* or, in general, of the Egyptian gods. The image that we derive from the excavations corresponds to its late phases and especially to the situation right before and after its abandonment. Broken sculptures and inscriptions were used as building material in late Roman walls. While this practice contributed to their preservation, it makes it difficult to assess the provenance of this debris, namely whether it was related to the Isiac sanctuary or to other neighbouring or even more distant ones.

1 On these subjects see Christodoulou 2021; Christodoulou and Touloumtzidou 2021, with previous bibliography.

2 Christodoulou 2021, 460–462.

3 *IG* X.2.1 102, 2nd c. CE; Christodoulou 2009, 342.

4 Christodoulou 2021, 457–458.

5 The mention of σηκοβάται in an inscription by an association of Hermanubiasts (*IG* X.2.1 220 = *RICIS* 113/0576) led L. Bricault to assume that, since the σηκοβάται must have been allowed to enter the σηκός, Hermanubis probably had his own chapel, even if it was modestly sized.

6 Cf. Christodoulou 2021, 452.

7 Christodoulou and Touloumtzidou 2021.

8 Vickers 1972, 164; Vitti 1996, 88–92; Steimle 2008, 23–28.

9 Bakalakis 1983 suggested identifying it as the temple of Dionysus. A more recent study proposed that this temple was dedicated to the cult of *dea* Roma, Zeus *Eleutherios*, and the Emperor, cf. Stefanidou-Tiveriou 2012, with further references regarding previous proposals for attributing the temple.

10 Christodoulou 2021, 456.

For example, a marble block of a statuary base that was found built into the "late Roman" wall of a portico bears a 2nd-century BCE inscription (fig. 1). It records a dedication to Dionysus by the city of Thessaloniki and mentions the names of two politarchs, the city's annually-elected, executive magistrates at the time.[11] The dedication should have belonged to the Dionysiac sanctuary of the city, but the wall into which the block was incorporated seems to have been situated in the area of the Isiac sanctuary. However, this is not the only find from the Isiac sanctuary related to Dionysus. There are three further finds that will be discussed here: a first century CE inscription with a dedication to Zeus Dionysus Gongylos by members of a *thiasos*, a second century CE votive relief dedicated to Dionysus as a listening deity, and a fragment from a statue of Dionysus.

***Fig. 1. Marble block with dedication to Dionysus, inv. No. ΜΘ 860 (photo: author)***

The cult of Dionysus had an early and prominent presence in Thessaloniki,[12] which is evident through various factors. One of the city's tribes, the *phyle Dionysias*,[13] was named after the god. The reference to the politarchs in the aforementioned inscription[14] affirms the status of the Dionysiac cult as a city cult. In fact, many late Hellenistic coin issues of Thessaloniki depicted Dionysus on the reverse[15] and the city celebrated an annual festival dedicated to Dionysus, the *Dionysieia*.[16] There were several Dionysiac religious associations – more than for any other deity,[17] and Dionysus-re-

11 Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, inv. no. ΜΘ 860; Pelekidis 1934, 25 and 91 fig. 3; *IG* X.2.1 28; Hatzopoulos 1996b, 90 no. 72: ἡ πόλις | Διονύσωι, | πολιταρχούντων | Ἀριστάνδρου τοῦ Ἀριστόνου, | Ἀντιμάχου τοῦ Ἀριστοξένου. It is unclear whether the inscription dates from before or after the Roman conquest of Macedon, i.e. before or after 168 BCE. In this respect, a decisive factor is the long-disputed question of whether the politarchate was a magistracy introduced by the Romans or if it originated during the period under the kings. It is however beyond doubt that the earlier certain mention of politarchs dates from immediately after 168 BCE. On this controversial question, which is beyond the scope of this article and cannot be considered to be fully resolved, see Voutiras 1986, 353–355; Papazoglou 1986, 441–444; Hatzopoulos 1996a, 134–138; Mari 2017, 344–350; Nigdelis and Anagnostoudis 2017, 303–305; Mari 2018, 190–193; Rousset 2017, 69 n. 26 and 84 – all with further references.

12 Edson 1948, 160; for a more recent and nuanced approach to the subject, see Steimle 2008, 172–173; Tzanavari 2011, 112–115.

13 The tribe is mentioned in *IG* X.2.1 185; Edson (1948, 160 n. 4) suggested that it was instituted when Cassander founded Thessaloniki through synoecism.

14 See above, n. 11.

15 Kourempanas 2016, pls. 4–18 (140–115 BCE), 28–30 (114–100 BCE), 46 (100–85 BCE), 50–52 (80–50 BCE); Kourempanas 2021, 111–112. However, it is noteworthy that, during the Imperial period, there are no known coin issues from Thessaloniki that depict Dionysus.

16 *IG* X.2.1 5 ([Διο]νυσιείοις) and 12 ([Διο]νυσιήοις).

17 Nigdelis 2006, 101–146; Steimle 2008, 174–183; Nigdelis 2010, 14–16, 28–33 (taking into account the modifications to the reading of *IG* X 2.1 261 by Martín González and Hallof 2020, 236–237).

lated theophoric names were in considerable use.[18] The appeal of the Dionysiac cult and its integration into Thessaloniki is further demonstrated by several sculptures, which vary from monumental to smaller in size,[19] an impressive mosaic floor from a *villa urbana* that depicts Dionysus' encounter with Ariadne on Naxos,[20] as well as clay artefacts.[21] A significant sanctuary dedicated to the god must, therefore, have existed in the city.[22] As a 9th century source reveals, it was also the centre of annual festivities that involved a procession, in which a phallus was carried.[23]

It is possible to imagine the Dionysiac finds from the Isiac sanctuary as associated with the sanctuary of Dionysus. Nonetheless, considering that Dionysus was linked with Osiris[24] or Sarapis[25] and he was even mentioned or alluded to in Isiac Aretalogies,[26] it is also possible to consider his presence within the context of the Isiac sanctuary as a reflection of such links. This holds true for other Isiac sanctuaries outside Egypt, where, although rare, dedications to or representations of Dionysus,[27] along with objects featuring Dionysiac elements,[28] have also been discovered.

## Zeus Dionysus Gongylos and his mystai

### *The inscription*

The rescue excavation of 1939 by Stratis Pelekidis and Charalampos Makaronas, conducted near the area explored in 1921–1925, revealed a small Roman temple with an apse over a narrow, vaulted, underground *crypta*, auxiliary buildings containing small

18 The most common is Διονύσιος, followed by Διονυσία; there are also instances of Διονῦς, Διονυσιάς, Διονύσις, Διονυσογένης, Διονυσόδωρος, Διονυσοφάνης, as well as Βάκχιος, Βάκχις, Βακχύλος and Θύρσος; cf. *IG* X.2.1 and *IG* X.2.1s, *passim*.

19 Despinis et al. 1997, 137–138 no. 109 fig. 309–310 (Θ. Στεφανίδου-Τιβερίου); 184–189 no. 141 fig. 364–365 (Θ. Στεφανίδου-Τιβερίου); Stefanidou-Tiveriou and Voutiras 2020, 17–18 no. 666 fig. 1858–1864 (Ε. Τρακοσοπούλου-Σαλακίδου); 18–19 no. 667 fig. 1865–1868 (Κ. Τζαναβάρη); see Stefanidou Tiveriou 1985, 49–55 nos. 6–7, for two marble table supports; Adam-Veleni 1995 for a further marble table support. For the pillars with depictions of Dionysus and Ariadne of the so-called portico of the *Incantadas*, which stood near the *forum*, see Descamps-Lequime and Charatzopoulou 2011, 582 nos. 364/2–3 (L. Laugier and M. Sève).

20 Asimakopoulou-Atzaka 2011, 375–380.

21 Cf. an alabastron from the *forum* of Thessaloniki in the form of a phallus with a bearded head of Dionysus in relief, Descamps-Lequime and Charatzopoulou, 505 no. 319 (P. Adam-Veleni); a mask of Dionysus with bull's horns and *mitra*, Tsamisis 2016, 9 fig. 2, 73 (erroneously identified as Isis-Selene).

22 Bakalakis 1983 addresses the importance of the Dionysiac sanctuary in Thessaloniki. On the location of this sanctuary, to the northeast of and in considerable distance from the Isiac one, see Voutiras 1999, 1337–1341.

23 Bakalakis 1983, 38–42; Voutiras 2012, 566, with further references.

24 Cf. Stambaugh 1972, 53–55; Coulon 2013, 167–190; Smith 2017, 409–411; Koemoth 2006.

25 Stambaugh 1972, 55–59.

26 *RICIS* 104/0206 (l. 8, 10), 112/0201 (l. 15).

27 *RICIS* 202/0131, 202/0165; Bulard et al. 1907, 524–525 fig. 23; Swetnam-Burland 2015, 37–40 fig. 1.12; 113–114, 121–122 fig. 3.16; Blaževska and Radnjanski 2015, 228 no. 20; Stampolidis et al. 2018, 340 no. 325.

28 Dekoulakou 2003; Dekoulakou 2011.

rooms, and numerous artefacts, including "around 35 inscriptions […] that contribute to the history of the cults of the Egyptian gods in Thessaloniki".[29] One of these inscriptions stands out from the rest because it refers to a three-named god who is not part of the Isiac pantheon (fig. 2; Annex, no. 1), Zeus Dionysus Gongylos.[30] Whilst the three names might suggest multiple deities, the mention "for the god" – τῷ θεῷ – in line 3 indicates that the three names define a single god.[31] The inscription records the consecration of a vineyard and its bequest to an association of *mystai* of the god, provided that they celebrate certain rituals and banquets annually. It is noteworthy that references of *mystai* occur only in four more inscriptions from Thessaloniki, all related to Dionysiac associations.[32] Two questions arise. What is the identity of this god, and is there any connection between this particular cult or its *mystai* and the Isiac sanctuary? These and similar topics have attracted the attention of many scholars since the discovery of the inscription.[33]

***Fig. 2. Stele of mystai of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos, inv. No. ΜΘ 983 (archive photo: Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Θεσσαλονίκης)***

### *Zeus and Dionysus: shared cult*

Dionysus was Zeus' son and Zeus carried him within his thigh until he was born.[34] Connections between the two gods can be traced back to the Mycenaean period.[35] In one of the surviving fragments of Euripides' *Cretans* (F 472), the chorus alludes to mystic rites of Zeus *Idaios* and Zagreus, a

29 Makaronas 1940, 465; Walter 1940, 264.

30 Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Θεσσαλονίκης, inv. no. ΜΘ 983; *IG* X.2.1 259; *RICIS* 113/0537; Daux 1980, 531–532.

31 Daux 1972, 481. For a different opinion see Versnel 1990, 237 n. 151; Jaccottet 2002b, 51, expresses some reservations, mainly because she deems it impossible to determine the precise meaning of the term *Gongylos*.

32 *IG* X.2.1 260, 309 and 506; *IG* X.2.1s 1077; Jaccottet 2002b, 53–58 nos. 20–22; Nigdelis 2006; cf. above, n. 17.

33 Daux 1972; Wild 1981, 192–194; Kubińska 2001, 156–159; Jaccottet 2002a, 57, 85–86; Jaccottet 2002b, 49–53 no. 19; Steimle 2006, 32–35; Steimle 2008, 183–184; Christodoulou 2009, 338–339; Nigdelis 2010, 30–33; Kloppenborg and Ascough 2011, 352–356 no. 76; *CAPInv.* 716 (P. Paschidis), http://ancientassociations.ku.dk/assoc/716.

34 Cf. Leitao 2012, 58–99 for insights into this myth.

35 Duev 2007; Bernabé 2013; cf. Liapis 2007, 392–394. On the joint cult of Zeus, Hera, and Dionysos in Lesbos as attested in fragments of Sappho and Alcaeus, see Picard 1946; Jiménez San Cristóbal 2017. For an analysis of the links between "Zeus and Dionysos" see Cook 1925, 267–291.

god often identified with Dionysus.[36] This "is a highly poetic description and argument persists, in what sense Euripides' detail may be judged accurate",[37] but what is important here is the general image, and Strabo (10.3.11) also refers to a Cretan cult of Zeus with Dionysiac elements. In addition, a small series of inscriptions from Delos, Lebadeia, Thrace and Asia Minor attest to a shared cult of Zeus and Dionysus. However, as we will see, they often record quite different circumstances and do not lend themselves to a single interpretation.

A Delian inscription records a dedication to Zeus *Eleutherios* and Dionysos in the name of the competaliasts, a Delian association of *liberti* and slaves. The dedication comprised the statues of the two gods, a sundial, an altar, and possibly a temple.[38] Of the epigraphic evidence presented here, this inscription, dated to after 125 BCE, is the oldest. It stands apart from the rest because it refers to the links between and the assimilation of Jupiter, Liber Pater, and Dionysus as deities connected to viticulture.[39] In fact, a bilingual inscription from the agora of the competaliasts, recording the dedication of a statue of Zeus, translates Zeus *Eleutherios* – Δία Ἐλευθέριον ἀνέθηκαν – as Jupiter *Liber – Iovem Leiberum statuer(unt)*.[40]

One of the later records on this topic, a 3rd century CE inscription from Lebadeia, demonstrates a connection between the two gods in the person of a single priest serving both cults. It records the dedication of a Dionysus statue by the priest of Zeus *Trophonios*, who also presided over a congregation of Bacchic worshipers.[41] This double role should be seen in the context of the increased level of interactions between various cults during this period.

At Thracian Maroneia, situated in an area renowned for producing some of the finest wine in Antiquity, a series of small altars dedicated during the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE by priests of "Zeus, Roma, Dionysus, and Maron" indicate a joint cult of these four deities.[42] This appears to be a case of assembling the important cults of the city during the Imperial period. The cult of Zeus and Roma is already attested by an inscription on a 2nd century BCE small altar;[43] Dionysus, the god of wine, and Maron, the local deity of wine, sometimes considered the grandson or son of Dionysus, have an obvious significance for the wine-producing region. A further testimony from Thrace, a dedication of an altar to Zeus and Dionysus from Bizye,[44] will be examined below in the context of two other inscriptions from the same city that suggest the identification of the two gods.

36 Liapis 2007, 392–393; Bernabé Pajares 2016, 191–193; Tralau 2017, 437–442. Some scholars think that, in this fragment, Euripides avoids the explicit identification of Zagreus and Dionysus, Jouan and van Looy 2002, 311–312. One cannot fail to remark, however, the expression βάκχος ἐκλήθην ὁσιωθείς, "I was consecrated and named a Bacchus".

37 Collard et al. 1995, 67.

38 *ID* 1770.

39 On Jupiter, Liber Pater and their assimilation to Dionysus see De Cazanove 1988.

40 *ID* 1771.

41 Jaccottet 2002b, 42 no. 10.

42 *ΕΘΑ* E188–E198.

43 *ΕΘΑ* E187.

44 *IGBulg* V 5659 (211–217 CE).

Asia Minor offers two additional inscriptions documenting the shared cult of Zeus and Dionysus. A dedication from *Dios Hieron* in Lydia addresses Zeus, Dionysus, and the Emperors (*Sebastoi*),[45] and an inscription from Hadrianoi in Mysia bears a dedication to Zeus *Ophelios* and Dionysus.[46]

### *Zeus and Dionysus: identification*

In the 2nd century CE, Aelius Aristides claims to have heard that "Zeus himself is Dionysus" – ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ Ζεὺς εἴη ὁ Διόνυσος.[47] At least six inscriptions from Thrace and Asia Minor provide evidence of the identification of the two gods. The two Thracian inscriptions come from monuments that originate from Bizye: in both cases, a priest of the *baccheion*[48] offered an altar to Zeus Dionysus.[49] Of the remaining four inscriptions, from Asia Minor, an inscription from Pergamon contains an oracle of Claros (166–215 CE), which prescribes the sacrifice of a three-year old ox to both Zeus and Zeus Bacchus.[50] Three altars come from the area of Dorylaion in Phrygia, all adorned with various forms of Dionysiac ornamentation. Two of them were dedicated by associations of *mystai* who probably identified themselves by their ethnic names (Κ̣ηιουερηνοὶ and Κορoσεανοί, corresponding to otherwise unattested rural settlements),[51] and the third by an association of youths from another unknown settlement (Ταναιτηνῶν νεανίαι).[52] In fact, a seventh inscription exists, one from Scythopolis in the province of Syria Palaestina (today Bet She'an in Israel). It appears to bear a dedication to Zeus Bacchus – Διὶ Βάκχ̣[ωι] – despite the fact that this reading has been contested.[53]

The inscriptions from Bizye suggest that there was a temple in the city dedicated to Zeus Dionysus, or to Zeus and Dionysus.[54] As happens very often in such cases,

45 *SEG* 31, 993.

46 *IHadr* 10 (2nd/3rd c. CE).

47 Prose hymn to Dionysus (XLI), 4.

48 According to Slavova 2002, 139–140, the word βακχεῖον means "both 'a Dionysiac mystery club' and 'the place where it gathers'".

49 *IGBulg* III,2 1864 and 1865

50 *IvP* II 324, l. 32: τριένου δὲ βοὸς Διὶ καὶ Διὶ Βάκχωι. To deliver Pergamon from a plague, the Oracle of Apollo at Claros had suggested honouring the gods most favourable to the people of Pergamon through hymns and sacrifices. See further Picard 1922; Várhelyi 2001, 24–26; Busine 2013, 178–180, 185–186; Nissinen 2017, 126–127.

51 Haspels 1971, 352 no.139 and 354 no. 144.

52 *MAMA* IV 360; cf. Haspels 1962, 287; Golubtsova 1977, 86.

53 Lifshitz 1961, 189–190; Nieto Ibáñez 1999, 263–264. Seyrig 1962, 208–210, who tentatively dated the inscription to between 26 and 35 CE, disputed the reading ΒΑΚΧ̣[ΩΙ], with a valid argument, namely that the letter following BAK (only a part of it is preserved) cannot be a *chi*, as it lacks the upper left stroke. However, it is worth noting that the vertical stroke of the *kappa* in BAK is somewhat inclined (see Lifshitz 1961, pl. 8, B; the drawing in Seyrig 1962, 209 fig. 1 is not accurate in this respect). Therefore, the only slightly more inclined stroke that follows could potentially belong to another *kappa*, resulting in Βάκκ[ωι]; cf. Βακκικός for Βακχικός on two Orphic gems, Mastrocinque 1993, 16, 21; Βακκύλου for Βακχύλου in *SEG* 32, 1427; also, inversely, νεόβαχχοι for νεόβακχοι, in Haspels 1971, 354 no. 144, l. 2, or Βαχχίου for Βακχίου in *SEG* 53, 726. On this phenomenon, cf. Hatzopoulos and Loukopoulou 1996, 231. Another possibility would be that the upper left stroke of *chi* was omitted by the letter-cutter and added in paint.

54 See Velkov 1978, in particular 178–180.

the boundaries separating shared cult and identification are vague. There are three inscriptions, all dedications of altars, but each one refers somewhat differently to the two gods. A dedication for the welfare of the Emperor Caracalla and Julia Domna is addressed to Zeus *and* Dionysus, Διὶ καὶ Διονύσῳ.[55] The other two dedications, made by priests of the *baccheion*, refer unequivocally to one double-named god. One is addressed to the god Zeus Dionysus, θεῷ Διὶ Διονύσῳ, and the other to the god Zeus who is Dionysus, θεῷ Διὶ τῷ Διονύσῳ.[56]

Within a Thracian context, a surprising connection between Zeus and Dionysus emerges. Pausanias records a triad of statues in Olympia, "works of the Argive Dionysius", believed to be part of the numerous offerings made to the sanctuary by the tyrant of Rhegium Micythus around 460 BCE, after retiring in Tegea, for the return to health of his seriously ill son. The three statues were Dionysus, Orpheus the Thracian, and Zeus "represented as a beardless youth".[57] Pausanias' description raises many questions. One such query pertains to whether Dionysus was also depicted without a beard, something that would be somewhat surprising for the timeframe just prior to the middle of the 5th century BCE.[58] Consequently, there might be doubts as to the veracity of the narrative connecting these sculptures to the dedications of Micythus. Nevertheless, the narratives circulating in Olympia during the 2nd century CE, the era of Pausanias, concerning older offerings, are only marginally relevant to our inquiry. What remains significant, is the portrayal of a youthful Zeus positioned alongside Dionysus and Orpheus. In the absence of specific information, we can reasonably assume that the Dionysus sculpture depicted him in a youthful form, consistent with his canonical representation since the late 5th century. In this context, Zeus' youthful appearance most probably signified an equal partnership with Dionysus and possibly also Orpheus.

Orpheus' presence in Olympia together with Zeus and Dionysus could imply a connection between the bond of the two deities and Orphic ideas.[59] Interestingly, Zeus is the most frequently mentioned deity in the Orphic fragments, followed by Dionysus.[60] Furthermore, there are two Orphic fragments that also attest to the identification of Zeus and Dionysus: an invocation to the "resplendent Zeus Dionysus" – ἀγλαὲ Ζεῦ Διόνυσε[61] – and the henotheistic acclamation that Zeus, Hades, Helios, and Dionysus are one – εἷς Ζεύς, εἷς Ἀΐδης, εἷς Ἥλιος, εἷς Διόνυσος.[62]

Regarding the study of the monuments from the Phrygian highlands, which comprise dedications to either Dionysus or Zeus Dionysus, Emilie Haspels referred to the similarities in their decoration. This led her to conclude that "they must refer to

55 See above, n. 44.

56 See above, n. 49.

57 Paus. 5.26.3–4, together with 5.24.6.

58 See Carpenter 1993; Jameson 1993, 48–50.

59 Cf. Fol 1993, 183–186.

60 Zhmud 1992, 163, with reference to Kern 1922: "Zeus […] is mentioned more than 100 times, while Dionysus (together with the names of gods identified with him) almost half as often, and Apollo – one eighth as often".

61 Kern 1922, 249 no. 236, l. 3.

62 Kern 1922, 251 no. 239 b; cf. Sfameni Gasparro 2013, 445 with n. 50.

the same deity", whose character "may quite well be definable in such a way that the names Dionysos and Zeus Dionysos both do him justice".[63] It is true that in Phrygia and other regions of Asia Minor, many cults, especially those of Zeus, had a pronounced local character.

Recently, Robert Parker, without addressing the pairing of Zeus and Dionysus, pointed out that, in Phrygia, Zeus "stretches out beyond the scope of his Greek equivalent in apparently being concerned with the cultivation of vines", whilst "Dionysus presided over the drinking of wine, not the making of it".[64] It is possible that such a redefinition of their roles contributed to a closer association or interconnection between the two gods in the area. In any event, as shown above, the links between Zeus and Dionysus, as well as their identification, are complex and are found in several regions,[65] with the testimonies from Dorylaion in Phrygia and Bizye in Thrace being the most conspicuous – at least on the basis of the evidence available to us so far.

### *The epithet Gongylos*

In the Thessalonian inscription, the god Zeus Dionysus bears the epithet *Gongylos*.[66] A closely related term, *Goggylates* (Γογγυλάτης), is used by Lycophron in Alexandra as an obscure epithet of Zeus.[67] Additionally, Dionysus takes on the attribute *Gongylōn* (Γονγύλων, in the genitive plural) in a mid- 2nd century CE inscription that was discovered in the village of Kentrikon near Kilkis,[68] which possibly corresponds to the location of the ancient city of Ioron.[69]

Tzetzes, in his *Scholia* on Lycophron (12th century), cryptically explained Zeus' epithet *Goggylates* as the one "through whom the γογγύλαι and the clenched hands are set in motion" – Γογγυλάτης, δι' οὗ αἱ γογγύλαι καὶ αἱ συνεσφιγμέναι χεῖρες κινοῦνται. The term γογγύλη could refer to a turnip or, as an adjective, denote a round-shaped object. In this case the word has been interpreted as possibly referring to Zeus' thunderbolts. Consequently, Γογγυλάτης was translated as "hurling balls of fire".[70] Such an explanation is not totally convincing, especially considering the fact that Athenaeus presents a much less dignified use of the word *Goggyloi*. This pertains to certain peo-

63 Haspels 1962, 287.

64 Parker 2023, 180.

65 Cf. Scott 2008, 328.

66 In *IG* X.2.1 259, Edson states that Γογγύλος has the same meaning as the adjective στρογγύλος, "round" or "compact", but remarks that, as an epithet, it is entirely obscure.

67 Lyc. 435: ὃν Γογγυλάτης εἶλε Βουλαῖος Μυλεύς. *N.b.* that Zeus is not named directly; the fact that the three epithets refer to Zeus is implied from the narration, the story of the punishment of Kapaneus by Zeus, who blasted him with his thunderbolt; it can also be deduced by the mention of *Boulaios*, which is an epithet known in its masculine form only for Zeus (cf. Paus. 1.3.5; Hornblower 2014, 109 n. 82) – whereas *Boulaia* could be Athena, Hestia, Themis, or Artemis (cf. *LSJ*, s.v. βουλαῖος).

68 *ΕΑΜΦΑ* 44 (Π. Μ. Νίγδελης and Η. Κ. Σβέρκος); n.b. that the editors raise some doubts concerning the exact provenance of the inscription. The third line of the inscription reads: ἱεροῦ Διονύσου Γονγύλων Ι[– – –].

69 On Ioron and its possible location, Zannis 2008, esp. 106–107, in regard to the cult of Dionysus in the ancient site near the villages Kentriko and Palatiano.

70 *LSJ*, s.v. γογγυλάτης; cf. Hornblower 2014, 115; Hornblower 2015, 87 and 214.

ple on Delos: "I am not unaware of what Apollodorus of Athens said about the Delians: they used to provide cooking and table-setting services to those who attended the sacred rites; they had names that reflected their roles, such as Cakes (Μαγίδες) and Doughnuts (Γογγύλοι). This was because, during the banquets, as Aristophanes says, they spent their days kneading round cakes and serving them, as women do."[71]

However, another approach is possible. We have three words from the same root that define Zeus in one case, Zeus Dionysus in another, and simply Dionysus in a third one. The key is provided by the genitive plural *Gongylōn,* which means "of *Gongyla"* or "of *Gongyloi"*, and presumably refers to a place name. *Goggylates* functions perfectly as a toponymic epithet as well,[72] as does *Gongylos*.[73] These variants should not be surprising, as variations in toponymic epithets did occur.[74] Consequently, Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* must have been a god of a particular settlement. Considering that toponymic epithets ending in -ος often correspond to place names in the form of neuter plurals ending in -α, we can assume that the name Γόγγυλα rather than Γογγύλοι would be the most plausible one for that settlement.[75] Nevertheless, it is not easy to determine whether this unknown place, where the cult must have originated, was either in the vicinity of Ioron and Thessaloniki,[76] or in Thrace, or in Asia Minor. What is however evident from the preceding discussion, is that the cult of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos must in some way be related to similar Zeno-Dionysiac cults.

### *Members and dignitaries of the Thessalonian association*

Let us now shift our attention to the members of the association, the *mystai*. The name of the dedicant appears in the third line of the inscription, immediately below the dedication to the Good Fortune of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos: Γ̣(άϊος) Ἰούλιος Βησάρτης. C. Julius consecrated to the god and bequeathed to "the current and future *mystai"* one-third of a vineyard. The remaining two thirds of the vineyard were consecrated by the "undersigned *mystai*", recorded in a list following the main text of the dedication. The text states that the revenue generated from the vineyard is to be used to conduct three annual ceremonial feasts on specific dates. These events were meant to commemorate deceased members, probably the founders, of the association.[77] The list of the "undersigned *mystai*" contains seventeen names, starting with the name of the

71 Ath. 4.73: οὐκ ἀγνοῶν δὲ καὶ περὶ Δηλίων ἃ Ἀπολλόδωρος ὁ Ἀθηναῖος εἴρηκεν ὅτι μαγείρων καὶ τραπεζοποιῶν παρείχοντο χρείας τοῖς παραγινομένοις πρὸς τὰς ἱερουργίας, καὶ ὅτι ἦν αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν πράξεων ὀνόματα Μαγίδες καὶ Γογγύλοι, ἐπειδὴ τὰς μάζας, φησὶν Ἀριστοφάνης, ἐν ταῖς θοίναις δι᾽ ἡμέρας τρίβοντες παρεῖχον ὥσπερ ἐν γυναιξὶ γογγύλας μεμαγμένας.

72 Cf. Zeus *Krokeatas* at Κροκέαι (Paus. 3.21.4, reference to a statue Διὸς Κροκεάτα); Zeus *Boudiates*, the Zeus of Βούδιον/Βούδειον, a town in Thessaly (*IG* IV².1 516, from Epidauros, dedication Διὶ Βουδιάτ̣ῃ).

73 Cf. Zeus *Panamaros* at Panamara (*IStr* 217 and 244: Διὶ Παναμάρῳ); Zeus *Narasos* at Narasa (*IStr* 16, 289, 291, 293, 296a, 1028, mentions of priests Διὸς Ναράσου).

74 Gavrilović Vitas and Dana 2022, 203; cf. the numerous variants for the epithet of Zeus from Labranda in Caria, among which Λάβρανδος, Λαβρανδεύς, Λαβρανδηνός, Dimakopoulos 2009, 117.

75 Cf. Chaniotis 2004, 393, arguing about the possible origin of the epithet of Zeus *Nineudios* from "a place name Νίνευδα (rather than Νίνευδος or Νίνευδον), probably the earlier name of Aphrodisias."

76 Voutiras 1987, 169, suggests that Zeus Dionysus Gongylos was most probably a local deity of the region.

77 Nigdelis 2010, 30–33; cf. Mitrev 2002, 294–296.

priest Lucius Fulvius Felix. The names cited may not encompass all the *mystai* of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos at the time, since they are referenced due to their links with the specific donation. The inscription concludes with mention of the priest who facilitated the setting-up of the stele. Charles Edson dated the inscription to the 1st century CE.

***Fig. 3. Fragmentary marble stele, inv. No. ΜΘ 972 (archive photo: Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Θεσσαλονίκης)***

What appears to be the *cognomen* of the dedicant, Besartes, is a word attested only here and in another inscription, also discovered during the 1939 excavation. This inscription (Annex, no. 3) is preserved on a fragment from the lower part of a marble stele that contains a list of names in two columns and is dated to the second century CE (fig. 3).[78] Edson in *IG* already associated it with the *mystai* of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos. In this inscription, the word *besartes* comes after a name written according to Greek naming conventions, Alexandros, son of Alexandros (Ἀλέξανδρος Ἀλεξάνδρου, βησάρτης). This indicates that the word describes a cult official, which does not exclude its potential use as a *cognomen*,[79] especially if the relevant sacred office was highly significant.

Before discussing the possible meaning of *besartes*, it is important to note that the inscription with the name list preserves two more titles of cult officials: βοωφόρος (held by one Προτάκιος Πρίσκος) and ἀρχιναοκόρος (held by a certain Φούριος Πριμιγᾶς). While the first one is a *hapax legomenon*, the term ἀρχιναοκόρος/ἀρχινεωκόρος is well-attested. In a larger sanctuary, with several temples, it presupposes a hierarchy of *neokoroi*, custodians of a temple, and their chief custodian, i.e. the *archineokoros*. The term appears in eight additional inscriptions from Thessaloniki.[80] Four of them were discovered in the Isiac sanctuary.[81] An additional one, an honorary stele for members of an association of Hermanubiasts,[82] is related to the Isiac cults and was initially erected in the sanctuary. One is a second mention of Furius Primigas on a triangular

78 ΜΘ 972; *IG* X.2.1 244; *RICIS* 113/0561.

79 Cf. Paschidis 2022, 64 n. 25. It is highly improbable that C. Julius Besartes appears later in the list with his "real" *cognomen*, either as C. Julius Agathopous, as proposed by Daux 1972, 482, or as C. Julius Felix, as proposed by Kloppenborg and Ascough 2011, 354. Such a reference would contradict the text of the deed, which distinctly separates the two donations and explicitly states that C. Julius Besartes donates one-third of the vineyard, while the remaining two thirds are contributed by the "undersigned *mystai*".

80 Cf. Robert 1974, 195–196.

81 *IG* X.2.1 37, 114, 115 and 118 = *RICIS* 113/0564, 113/0556, 113/0547 and 113/0542.

82 *IG* X.2.1 220 = *RICIS* 113/0576; first published by Picard and Avezou 1913, 94–97 no. 6, this has been one of the earliest known Isiac inscriptions from Thessaloniki.

base that is relevant to the cult of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos;[83] it will be discussed below. A sixth one pertains to the cult of Cybele/Magna Mater.[84] The last one is on the plinth of a male statue, the exact provenance of which is unknown, with only the feet preserved.[85]

The Isiac sanctuary is the only one in the city excavated so far. It is therefore natural that we are aware of significantly more monuments from this site. Even so, the predominance of inscriptions mentioning *archineokoroi* that relate to it is probably due to its special circumstances. As Laurent Bricault has aptly suggested, "the multiplication of buildings and chapels through the generosity of the faithful, … which required the appointment of a *neokoros* for each of them, naturally led to the creation of the position of *archineokoros*, a kind of supervisor of the regular *neokoroi* and direct assistant to the head priest."[86]

Concerning the *boöphoros*, the authors of the *DGE* suggest that it probably refers to a cult official entrusted with the task of bringing the ox to sacrifice.[87] However, within the context of an inscription found at Torre Nova, in Rome, dated to 160–165 CE, which records the dedication of a sculpture of the priestess Agrippinilla by a Dionysiac association,[88] the suffix -φόρος (from the verb φέρω, "to bear") denotes individuals responsible for carrying sacred objects or the image of the god during processions.[89] In this respect, the proposal that a *boöphoros* would carry the image of Apis – or another deity in the form of a bull – in processions makes much more sense.[90]

The word βησάρτης presents greater difficulties in deciphering, although there are only a few words that begin with βησ-. Nevertheless, it would be quite surprising if the suggestion to link βησάρτης with βάσσαρος / βασσάρα, "a title used in Dionysiac cult",[91] were valid, because it fails to explain the inclusion of the *tau*. Instead, the *tau* is explained if we consider the suffix -άρτης as presumably deriving from the verb αἴρω, "to raise/lift up". An attempt to link βησάρτης to βήσομαι,[92] the future of the verb βαίνω, is not conclusive either. Georges Daux was the first to propose the Egyptian god Bes, in Greek Βησᾶς, as a possible root of the word, albeit with reasonable reticence.[93]

83 *IG* X.2.1 60 = *RICIS* 113/0562; see Annex, no. 4.

84 *IG* X.2.1 65; Robert 1934, 795–812; for different attributions than to the cult of Cybele, see the literature cited in *IG* X.2.1s.2 65; however, any doubts are unfounded. Louis Robert repeated his basic arguments very succinctly in *Bull. épigr.* 1965, 262: "What matters for the altar of Thessaloniki is its decoration, whose symbols (*pedum*, caduceus, and torches) are appropriate for the triad Cybele, Attis, and Hermes." M. J. Vermaseren appropriately included the altar as Metroac testimony in *CCCA* VI, 64–65 no. 197.

85 *IG* X.2.1 272; Stefanidou-Tiveriou and Voutiras 2020, 94–95 no. 736 (Ε. Βουτυράς).

86 Comments on l. 12 of *RICIS* 113/0520; cf. the comments on l. 6–7 of *RICIS* 113/0542.

87 *DGE*, *s.v.* βοωφόρος:"conductor del buey al sacrificio, tít. de cierto sacerdote del culto báquico encargado de tal labor".

88 Vogliano 1933; *IGUR* I, 160; Jaccottet 2002b, 302–310 no. 188.

89 Jaccottet 2002a, 44–45; Slavova 2002, 141–142, 148.

90 L. Bricault in *RICIS* 113/0561, comment on Col. I l. 4; cf. Touloumtzidou in this volume.

91 Kloppenborg and Ascough 2011, 354; for the title, cf. Slavova 2002, 141.

92 Mitrev 2002, 293.

93 Daux 1972, 486.

Bes is a dwarf god with protective and apotropaic qualities, who does not directly belong to the "Isiac family", but often appears as its companion. It seems that, apart from Italy, there are relatively few testimonies linking him to Isiac sanctuaries outside of Egypt,[94] but more thorough research into old findings and new discoveries[95] may challenge this assessment. Already in the Ptolemaic period, Bes' perceived bestial characteristics and his dancing prowess, among other things, led to comparisons with Satyrs and Silenus, despite their differences.[96]

Although the connection of Bes to the Isiac deities and the Dionysian retinue is an established fact, his association with the word *besartes* needs further consideration. Similar to *boöphoros* and the other titles mentioned earlier, this term may indicate the role of the individual concerned during religious processions. In this context, *besartes* might refer to the person responsible for holding or "raising" an image of Bes. This remains a hypothesis, but it gains support from visual representations of individuals, possibly priests, impersonating Bes by wearing a mask with the god's image.[97]

If true, this interpretation of the term *besartes* provides a link between the *mystai* of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos and the Isiac sanctuary. An additional link to the Isiac sanctuary is implied by the concluding two lines of the inscription: "(the stele) was set up under the licence of Straton, son of Epicrates, and by birth son of Dionysios, priest for the second year." The priest mentioned here is not the Dionysiac priest of the association, L. Fulvius Felix, who figures among the signatories of the deed, but a priest who had authority over the sanctuary hosting the association.[98] A recently published artefact, discovered in 1972 roughly in the area of the Isiac sanctuary, further supports the idea that Straton was indeed an Isiac priest. It is a table support inscribed on the front (fig. 4).[99] The inscription (Annex, no. 2) consists only of his name and the mention of his priesthood. The dedication and the name of the table's dedicant would have originally appeared on the horizontal element and a corresponding support. Because of the mention of an adoptive and a natural father, Straton's name is too specific for this to be a case of two individuals (for example grandfather and

94 Malaise 2004, 280–290.

95 Cf. for example the Bes statuettes found in Kentrikon, the place where the inscription of Dionysus Gongylon was also discovered, Nigdelis 2010, 16 and n. 17, with further references. Malaise (2004, 291) remarks that Bes' presence at a site can be an indication for the existence of Isiac cults there.

96 Volokhine 2010, 248–253. For a terracotta figurine of Bes-Silenus from Delos, see Barrett 2011, 278–279; for a Bes-Silenus plastic vase from Crete, Vogeikoff-Brogan 2016. An epigram by Hedylus (Ath. 11.497d) describes a rhyton dedicated at the temple of Aphrodite-Arsinoe in Alexandria, shaped in the form of Bes, Gow and Page 1965a, 101 IV; Gow and Page 1965b, 292–293; Sens 2015. This poem illustrates the links forged between Bes and the Dionysiac world (represented by the rhyton and the wine) and suggests a Ptolemaic support for the new interpretation of the god.

97 See an Egyptian schist figure from Rome dated to the 1st c. BCE–1st c. CE at the British Museum (inv. no. EA47973; Walker and Higgs 2001, 326 no. 344), as well as a fresco from Herculaneum (Tran Tam Tinh 1971, 29. 40–42. 85 and pl. 28; Malaise 2004, 287–288). In this volume, based on the Herculaneum fresco, A. Touloumtzidou proposes that the term *besartes* refers to a person disguised and dancing as an armour-wearing Bes.

98 In this sense, cf. Wild 1981, 192; Chaniotis and Mylonopoulos 2004, 222 no. 104 (A. Chaniotis); *contra* Daux 1972, 480.

99 Inv. no. MΘ 6089; Stefanidou-Tiveriou and Voutiras 2020, 579 no. 1191 (E. Voutiras); *Bull. épigr*. 2021, 287 (P. Paschidis).

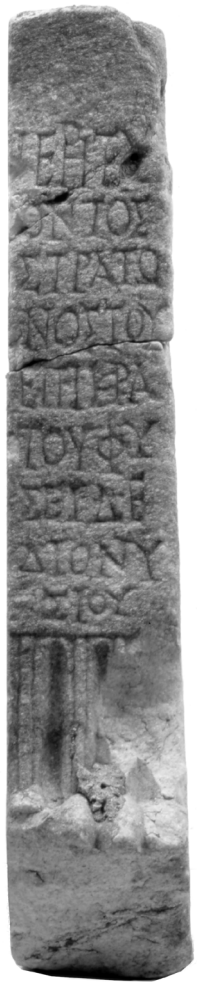

***Fig. 4. Table support, inv. No. ΜΘ 6089 (photo: K. V. von Eickstedt)***

grandson) sharing the same name. Therefore, there should be no doubt that the two inscriptions refer to the same person. The only difference between the two mentions is that, on the table support, the year of Straton's priestship is not specified. This may imply that the support was dedicated during his first year as a priest, dating it one year before, or in any event very close to, the Zeus Dionysus Gongylos inscription. The latter has been dated to the 1st century CE, with some scholars leaning towards an earlier rather than later date within that century.[100] Yet, the form of the letters on the table support,[101] especially the ligature for the letters *rho* and *eta* in ΙΕΡΗΤΕΥΟΝΤΟΣ, suggests a possible later date for both inscriptions, probably towards the 2nd century and certainly not before the end of the 1st century CE.

The names of the *mystai* in the inscription for Zeus Dionysus Gongylos (Annex, no. 1) do not match the names on the fragment with the list (Annex, no. 3), except for one: the *nomen* Ἀβούδιος. It is followed by a different *cognomen* in each case: in no. 1, l. 24, a *cognomen* ending in -ων; in no. 3, col. I, l. 12, the *cognomen* is, fittingly for a Dionysiac adherent, Θύρσος.[102] The *nomen* Abudius only appears on two other occasions in Greek texts: in a third inscription from Thessaloniki[103] and in an inscription from Demetrias.[104] In Latin inscriptions, it is encountered primarily in the Western part of the Empire.[105] Given the rarity of the name, the two Abudii must have been related, with Thyrsos probably being a descendant of the other.

Another person from fragment no. 3, the *archineokoros* Furius Primigas, appears with the same title in the inscription on a marble triangular base, the precise findspot of which in Thessaloniki remains elusive.[106] This inscription covered one side of the base and the semi-columns flanking it (figs. 5–7; Annex, no. 4). The name of the current priest was written on the left semi-column (I, fig. 6), while Furius Primigas is mentioned on the right semi-column (III, fig. 7). Edson did not decipher the name of the priest, but the thor-

100 In *IG* X.2.1 259, Edson remarks that almost all the *gentilicia* in the list of the *mystai* belong to the periods of the Second Triumvirate and the reign of Emperor Augustus; cf. Jaccottet 2002b, 49 no. 19: beginning of the 1st c. CE, with a question mark, but Daux (1972, 480) prefers to stay vaguer: 1st c. CE, "sans plus de precision" ("without getting to be more specific").

101 On the basis of the letter forms, Voutiras (see n. 99) dated the inscription to the 2nd c. CE (the mention π.Χ. – meaning BCE – in the text is obviously a typographical error).

102 Cf. above, n. 18.

103 *IG* X.2.1 744 (2nd–3rd c.).

104 *IG* IX.2 1162.

105 Research in the "Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss – Slaby" reveals 28 instances of Abudius/Abudia, five of which are manufacturer stamps on roof tiles (*CIL* V, 8110, 34a–e). All relevant monuments were discovered in the West, with the exception of one found in Dalmatia and two in Moesia superior.

106 Thessaloniki, in the garden of the Παλαιό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο, inv. no. ΜΘ 1729; *IG* X.2.1 60; *RICIS* 113/0562; Robert 1974, 196 n. 86, 198 n. 106–107; Kubińska 2001, 157–158.

*Fig. 5. Triangular base, inv. No. ΜΘ 1729 (photo: author)*

*Fig. 6. Triangular base, inv. No. ΜΘ 1729, detail (archive photo: Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Θεσσαλονίκης)*

*Fig. 7. Triangular base, inv. No. ΜΘ 1729, detail (archive photo: Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Θεσσαλονίκης)*

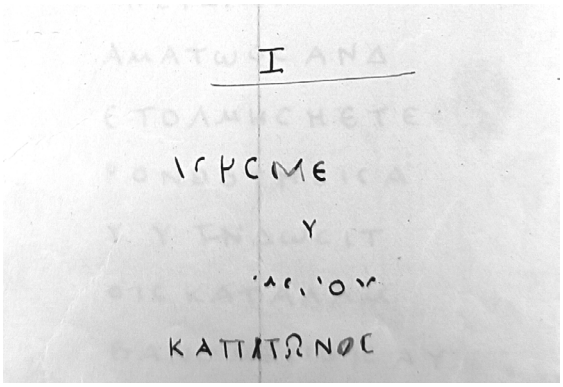


***Fig. 8. Transcription of the inscription of ΜΘ 1729 in the Museum inventory, part I (photo: Styliana Galiniki)***

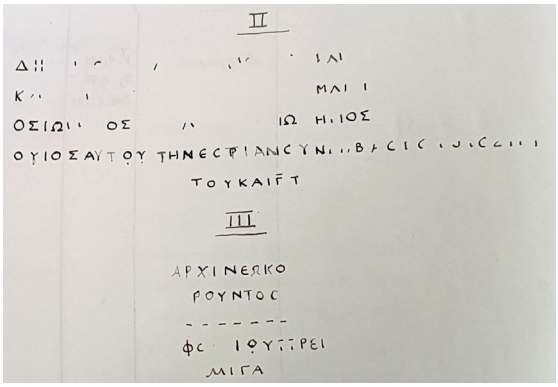


***Fig. 9. Transcription of the inscription of ΜΘ 1729 in the Museum inventory, parts II and III (photo: Styliana Galiniki)***

ough transcription by Makaronas in the inventory of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki in the late 1950s (fig. 8), when he was Ephor of antiquities of Macedonia, as well as the photograph from the archives of the Museum dating from the same period (fig. 6), assist in tentatively restoring it as [ – – ]merios Kapiton. It is very tempting to identify him with Kamerios Kapiton, who appears on l. 19 of inscription no. 3. Kapiton is not referred to as a priest there, but this is not a problem, as there must have been some time distance between the two inscriptions.

Edson had already linked inscription no. 4 with the cult of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos due to the mention of Furius Primigas. Makaronas' transcription of the central part of the inscription (II) in the Museum's inventory further confirms this (fig. 9): the first three letters of the first line are ΔΙΙ, the dative of Zeus. Διὶ may well have been followed by Διονύσῳ Γονγύλῳ. This inscription is all the more important, because it is precisely dated to 155/6 CE, suggesting a close dating for the list in inscription no. 3. The dating is given in the two last lines of this part of the inscription, together with a description of the dedication, which involved "the hearth together with its base" – τὴν ἑστί[α]ν σὺν τῇ βάσι.

### *On the triangular base*

While the word βάσις can be readily translated as "base", the term ἑστία, "hearth" or "altar",[107] requires further discussion to understand its precise meaning. Louis Robert attempted to interpret the word on the basis of other epigraphic instances of *hestiae* dedications.[108] These dedications are essentially marble rectangular altars and do not conform to our case, where it appears that *hestia* designated a separate element placed atop the marble base. Unfortunately, this element, likely made of metal, has not survived. This layout brings to mind the "small hearth set upon a stone base" – ἐσχαρὶς ἐπὶ τὸν λίθον παγεῖσα – mentioned in an account of the *epistatai* of Eleusis.[109]

107 *LSJ*, s.v. ἑστία.

108 Robert 1974, 198 n. 107; Robert 1958, 32–33.

109 *IG* II² 1673 (327/6 BCE).

Historically, marble triangular bases were commonly employed, from the Archaic period, for the placement of bronze tripods. These tripods were dedicated in Greek sanctuaries or erected in public spaces as prizes awarded to *choregoi* for their victory in dramatic contests, such as those of *Dionysia* in Athens.[110] In Macedon, the only known examples of triangular stone bases for tripods come from the late Classical palace of Pella[111] and one found in the sanctuary of Zeus at Dion.[112] We can imagine the Thessaloniki base being completed with a tripod, most probably made of bronze, featuring three feet corresponding to the three semi-columns of the base.

Tripods have been associated with Apollo, being one of his customary attributes, as well as with his oracles – a symbol well-recognised in Greco-Roman art and literature.[113] However, they are also closely linked to Dionysus. A decree by an association of Dionysiac *technitai* honouring the Argive Zenon, son of Hekatodoros, highlights Zenon's contributions to the *temenos* of the god in Argos and mentions, among other objects, Bacchic tripods.[114] Some claimed that Dionysus delivered oracles on the prophetic tripod before Apollo's arrival in Delphi[115] and in Euripides' *Bacchae* (v. 298–301), Teiresias praises Dionysus as a god of prophecy, affirming the mantic powers associated with Bacchic frenzy.[116] Notably, an oracle of Dionysus existed in Amphikleia, Phocis,[117] and there is evidence of Dionysian oracles in Thrace.[118]

Returning to Macedon, the Pseudo-Aristotelian *De mirabilibus auscultationibus* (122) recounts a large and beautiful temple of Dionysus in Crestonia, near the land of the Bisaltians. When the god intended to bless the year with fertility, a great flame of fire appeared, visible to all within the sacred area. Conversely, in barren years, the light did not appear, and darkness shrouded the site. This sanctuary has been tentatively identified with the one that existed in Palatiano-Kentrikon,[119] a site where two marble sculptures of Dionysus[120] and the inscription mentioning Dionysus *Gongylon* were found. In this context, Dionysus was evidently venerated as a god of fertility, who also possessed the power to predict the year's harvest.[121]

110 Amandry 1976; Amandry and Ducat 1973; Amandry and Spyropoulos 1974.

111 Makaronas 1960, 81 pl. 60.

112 Unpublished. Personal communication with Dr. Ioanna Vasileiadou.

113 *LIMC* II, s.v. Apollon, 232–233 (W. Lambrinudakis).

114 *IG* IV 558 (114 BC), l. 20: τρίπ[οδες] Βακ[χεῖοι].

115 τοῦ προφητικοῦ τρίποδος, ἐν ᾧ πρῶτος Διόνυσος ἐθεμίστευσε: *Hypothesis Pythiorum* in *ScholiaPyth*, 2; cf. Dietrich 1992, 45.

116 Eur. *Ba*. 298–299: μάντις δ' ὁ δαίμων ὅδε: τὸ γὰρ βακχεύσιμον καὶ τὸ μανιῶδες μαντικὴν πολλὴν ἔχει.

117 Paus. 10.33.11 describes a dream and healing oracle.

118 Iliev 2013.

119 Hammond 1972, 181–182.

120 Savvopoulou 1998, 106. 108 fig. 49, 114 fig. 54.

121 Iliev 2013, 64–65.

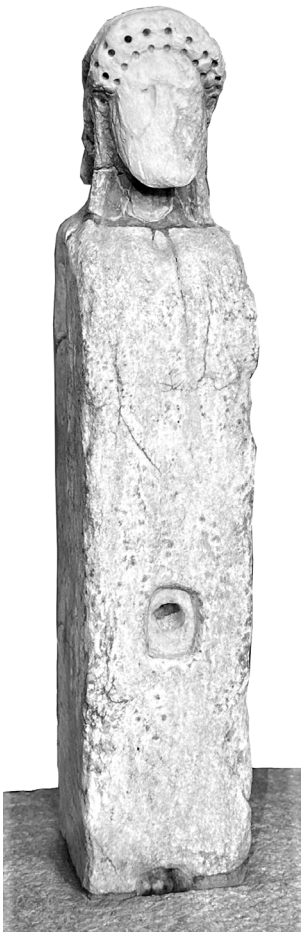

***Fig. 10. Small herm, inv. No. ΜΘ 1074 (photo: author)***

***Summary***

The preceding analysis of the few sources regarding Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* reveals that this cult can be compared to regional cults of Zeus Dionysus. It was active in Thessaloniki during at least the 1st and 2nd centuries CE and involved a guild of *mystai*. While the origins of this local deity remain uncertain, it is evident that he was a god of fertility with prophetic abilities, and his cult incorporated mystical elements. The connections to the Isiac sanctuary may not be immediately apparent, but there are several hints: the authorisation given by the priest Straton, son of Epikrates, to erect the stele (no. 1); certain religious roles, especially the *besartes*, which could be linked to *isiaci*; and, possibly, the reference to the title *archineokoros* in two inscriptions (nos. 3 and 4), as it implies a sanctuary with multiple precincts and temples, resembling what we know about the layout of the Isiac sanctuary.

Speculation surrounds the reasons for the inclusion of the Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos*' *mystai* association into the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki. As a distinctive cult, it was not compatible with the Dionysiac sanctuary of the city. Its incorporation in the Isiac sanctuary may have been the result of endeavours by individual worshippers of both cults. There must have been similarities that would facilitate the correlation of the cults. In the religious landscape of the Roman Imperial period, such accommodations were not uncommon. This cannot imply, however, that Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* was worshipped as a "hybrid deity, […] an assimilation of Serapis and Bes", as has been suggested.[122] The Egyptian beliefs associated Bes, a solar god, with Horus the child and Harpocrates,[123] not with Sarapis. In the following, the connection of Harpocrates to Dionysus in the sanctuary of Thessaloniki will become more apparent.[124]

The *Gongylos* inscription was discovered at the site that also yielded the significant relief dedicated to Osiris Mystes and all Osirian inscriptions of the sanctuary,[125] a strong indication that the 1939 excavation revolved around the *Osirieon*. It remains unclear, though, whether Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* was connected to the mystical cult of Osiris as practiced in Thessaloniki. Nonetheless, the welcoming of the Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* cult in the sanctuary shows the inclusiveness and adaptability of the Isiac cults; it could also hint at an "oriental" origin of Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos*, perhaps from Thrace or Asia Minor.

122 Paschidis 2022, 64.

123 Malaise 1989, 54–56; Malaise 1990, in particular 701–717.

124 See below the chapter "Dionysiac attributes, Harpocrates, and an epithet", with a discussion on the ivy wreath on Harpocrates' head.

125 See recently Christodoulou 2021, 460–461, with further references.

***An erroneous identification***

In his overview of the crypt discovered in 1939, Robert Wild considered that the inscription of Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* "may very well have been connected in some way with the herm found in the crypt" and speculated that the small herm (fig. 10), in the type of Alcamenes' Hermes,[126] "depicted either Dionysus or Zeus Dionysus Gongylos".[127] Some authors, including myself, found this proposal appealing.[128] However, upon reflection, it does not make much sense to use an established Hermes' type to represent Dionysus.[129] Hermes was not misplaced in the Isiac sanctuary. He was linked to the Isiac cults as the *interpretatio graeca* of Thoth[130] and of Anubis,[131] whose worship as Hermanubis is testified in Thessaloniki.[132] If the crypt was used for mystery rites as Makaronas suggests[133] and its layout implies, Hermes would assume there Anubis' role of *inventor et custos sacrorum*[134] as a matter of course.

## Dionysus' hearkening ears

A votive relief, discovered during the excavations of 1921–25 by Pelekidis, depicts two ears crowned by two curved vine branches with four leaves, from which hang three bunches of grapes (fig. 11).[135] The craftsmanship is rather poor. Instead of the usual hand-shaped vine leaves, the leaves are elliptical. Below the image, there is an awkwardly chiseled inscription:[136]

Θεῶι Διονύσῳ

ἀκοὰς κατ' εὐχ-

ὴν *hedera* Ἄγχὶς ἀνέθηκε.

"Anchis dedicated the listening ears to god Dionysus, following a vow."

126 Inv. no. ΜΘ 1074; Despinis et al. 1997, 61–62 no. 45 (G. Despinis).

127 Wild 1981, 193.

128 Steimle 2008, 101; Despinis et al. 1997, 62 n. 2; Christodoulou 2021, 466.

129 On herms of Dionysus see Wrede 1985, 21–22; they all have Dionysiac attributes. Two herms of the Alcamenes' Hermes type may be associated with the sanctuary of Serapis at Ostia: Rodà 2001, 242–243 no. 17 and 250–251 no. 26.

130 Cf. the aretalogies of Maroneia, *RICIS* 114/0202, l. 25: αὕτη μεθ' ἑρμοῦ γράμμαθ' εὗρεν, and Andros, *RICIS* 202/1801, l. 10–11: δειφαλέω δ' ἑρμᾶνος ἀπόκρυφα σύνβολα δέλτων εὑρομένα γραφίδεσσι κατέξυσα. Cf. Christodoulou 2011, 370 and n. 28.

131 For the ancient sources on Anubis' and Hermes' blending see Grenier 1977, 53–59.

132 See above, n. 5 and 82. On Hermanubis, see Grenier 1977, 171–175; Christodoulou 2011, 372, with further references.

133 Makaronas 1940, 464: φαίνεται ὅτι ἦτο τόπος μυστικῆς λατρείας.

134 For this expression from an inscription on an altar found on the island of Pag, Croatia, see Grisonic et al. 2022, 234, 236.

135 Inv. no. ΜΘ 829; Despinis et al. 2010, 206–207 no. 529 (E. Voutiras).

136 *IG* X.2.1 59 = *RICIS* 113/0558; *RICIS suppl. III,* 142–143.

***Fig. 11. Votive relief to Dionysus, inv. No. ΜΘ 829 (photo: author)***

Emmanuel Voutiras dated the relief to the 2nd century CE, "not before the reign of Hadrian", based on the overall shape of the letters and the ligature of *kappa* and *epsilon* in the last syllable of the inscription.[137]

The name of the dedicant has caused some confusion. There is no consensus, especially regarding its initial letter and where its accent falls.[138] At the point where the name begins, there is a sign that might either be a *hedera*[139] or a *delta*.[140] Following this sign, the stone clearly displays the letters ΑΓΧΙΣ. Contrary to what some scholars propose,[141] there is no need to correct the name. The letter-cutter had already made all necessary corrections in other parts of the inscription.[142] Given the two possible readings, ΑΓΧΙΣ and ΔΑΓΧΙΣ, the preferred choice is Ἀγχίς, which is the only one attested as a name in this exact form. In the Septuagint (*Genesis* 46.21), Ἀγχὶς is one of Benjamin's grandsons. Thus, Ἀγχὶς is the Greek rendering of a male Semitic name that translates to "(my) brother" (אָחִי – *Aḥi* in Hebrew,[143] *ʾḤ *ʾaḥī* in Phoenician[144]) and our Anchis must have had Phoenician/Syrian origins.

The inscription uses the word ἀκοαὶ instead of ὦτα to describe the ears depicted on the relief. The same word, however in singular, appears in another inscription from the Thessalonian Isiac sanctuary, the dedication of a relief depicting two ears by a woman named Fuficia: κατ' εὐχὴν · Φουφι|κία · Ἴσιδι · ἀκοήν, "following a vow, Fuficia

137 Despinis et al. 2010, 207 (no. 529)

138 See all propositions in *IG* X.2.1s.2 59.

139 Edson in *IG* X.2.1 59.

140 Voutiras in Despinis et al. 2010, 206 (no. 529).

141 Edson: Ἀ(γκ)ὶς (*IG* X.2.1 59); Hallof: Βαυχίς (*IG* X.2.1s.2 59).

142 Namely ΟΕΟΥ to ΟΕΩΙ and ΑΚΟΔC to ΑΚΟΑC. The missing horizontal stroke of the θῆτα would have been added in paint.

143 *DAHPN* ID b86, version 211 and *DAHPN* ID b85, version 211 (Hans Rechenmacher); Ilan 2002, 61–62; Ilan 2011, 56–59; Ilan and Hünefeld 2012, 60–62. On "names that mean members of family", cf. Ilan 2002, 15 1.5.1.

144 Benz 1972, 263; Krahmalkov 2001, 37.

145 Inv. no. ΜΘ 995; *IG* X.2.1 100 = *RICIS* 113/0550; Despinis et al. 1997, 68 no. 51 (E. Voutiras); Gasparini 2016, 568 no. 10.

(offered) the listening ear to Isis".[145] The word ἀκοὴ means hearing, listening to,[146] but in these cases it is used to accentuate the benevolent listening quality of the deities' ears, their nature as hearkening gods – θεοὶ ἐπήκοοι.[147] A similar use of ἀκοαὶ is encountered in the Karpokrates' Aretalogy from Chalcis (late 3rd–early 4th c. CE) in relation to Isis; in the dedication of the first line, she is entirely defined by her ears' listening willingness: Καρποκράτῃ, Σαράπιδι, ἀκοαῖς τῆς Ἴσιδος, "to Karpokrates, Sarapis, the listening ears of Isis…".[148]

This meaning becomes clearer when considering the use of ἀκοαὶ in a 1st or 2nd-century CE inscription written transversely on the back pillar of an Isis statuette from Egypt, now in Leiden: Ἴσιδι ἀκοαῖς Διονύσιος | υἱὸς Ἀπαουὴρ εὐχαριστῶ, "I, Dionysios, son of Apaouer, bestow thanks to Isis for having listened".[149] Even more telling is the inscription on a cylindrical altar for Magna Mater (or for Isis?) from Apollonia ad Rhyndacum in Mysia, in which both ἀκοαὶ and ὦτα are used: ἀγαθῆι τύχηι· | ταῖς ἀκοαῖς τῆς | θεοῦ | Ἑ[ρ]μιανὸς ΟΚΙ[ – – ] | ζήσας ἀπέδωκεν | εὐχαριστήριον | τὰ ὦτα καὶ τὸν βω|μὸν ἐπὶ ἱερείας | Προ[……]υτης, "to good fortune; for the hearkening of the goddess, Hermianos, having survived, (gave) the ears and the altar as a thank-offering, when Pro[……]yte was priestess". In this case, the ears, apparently on a relief, and the altar were dedicated as token of gratitude because the goddess listened to Hermianos prayers and helped him survive a danger or an illness.[150]

An inscription from the area of Lanuvium, dated to the late 1st century BCE or the early 1st century CE and dedicated to Dionysus, elucidates the dual aspects of the god's listening quality. He is invoked as "listening" – ἐπήκοος – and "assisting" – βοηθός. The two epithets together define the nature of his response.[151] The epithet *epekoos* in reference to Dionysus is preserved in four more inscriptions so far. Three of them come from Asia Minor: an inscription from Silandos in Lydia mentions date, month and year, and details a dedication by a Zosimos, son of Charmos (150 CE);[152] an inscription from Daskyleion in Bithynia (212 CE) records a thanksgiving to Dionysus *Kebrenios* (the local Dionysus of Cebrene in Troad);[153] a Pisidian inscription documents an offering by a house-steward slave.[154] Finally, an inscription from the island of Aegina in Greece (after 212 CE) is addressed to a Severan Emperor (Caracalla, Elagabalus, or Alexander Severus), who is hailed as the New Dionysus, great and *epekoos* god.[155]

Dionysus' quality as *epekoos* must have been well-known already during the 3rd century BCE, for Callimachus to use the phrase Διόνυσος ἐπήκοος as a pun in one of his

146 *LSJ*, s.v. ἀκοή.

147 Robert 1974, 198 with n. 103 and 104.

148 *RICIS* 104/0206. Harder 1944, 9.

149 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, inv. no. 1960/3,1; Stricker 1960, 20.

150 Weinreich 1912, 57–58; Schwertheim 1978, 821–822; Horsley 1983, 61 rather misinterprets the text and supposes that Hermianos "recovered his hearing".

151 *SEG* 45, 1441: Διονύσῳ θεῷ | ἐπηκόῳ καὶ βο|ηθῷ Κάλλιστος | ἀνέθηκε.

152 *TAM* V.1 49.

153 Corsten 1988, 72 no. 1.

154 Corsten et al. 1998, 58 no. 6.

155 Gill 1967, 298–300.

epigrams. In it, Dionysus *epekoos* is the tragic mask listening to and enjoying the boys citing a phrase from Euripides' *Bacchae*.[156]

Numerous deities were considered *epekooi*.[157] In Hellenistic and Roman Macedon, the use of this epithet has been attested 15 times, involving various deities, some local and some of foreign origin.[158] There are also 20 known dedications featuring ear reliefs, with half of them related to the Isiac cults.[159] The dedication of the relief with ears to Dionysus, found in the Isiac sanctuary, is not devoid of Isiac connotations. It recalls the Bacchus statue from the Iseum at Pompeii, which stood in a niche flanked by a pair of big ears rendered in stucco.[160] Dionysus was possibly perceived there as a counterpart to Osiris. This is probably the link behind the dedication to Dionysus in Thessaloniki as well.[161]

## Dionysiac attributes, Harpocrates, and an epithet

A small marble fragment, measuring 20 cm in height and 10 cm in width, was discovered in 1957 within a plot in the area of the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki. Unfortunately, its current location is unknown and it has never been published or photographed. According to the brief description in the Museum's inventory, the fragment takes the form of a tree trunk entwined with vine leaves and grape bunches. The upper part of the tree trunk preserves the left forearm and hand of a figure. Based on this description and the sculpture's small dimensions, it could have belonged to either a

156 *A.P.* 6.310; Gow and Page 1965a, 63 xxvi (48); Gow and Page 1965b, 181–183.

157 For a non-exhaustive, earlier list, see Weinreich 1912, 5–25. For the epithet in connection to the Isiac deities, see Bricault and Dionysopoulou 2016, 17, 19, 83, 124 and 131.

158 The goddess Ma (Edessa, *EKM* 145, 158, 161, 162 – between 234 and 261/2 CE); Darron (Pella, *EKM* 436, first half of the 2nd c. BCE); Meter Theon/Cybele (Pella, *EKM* 447, 3rd c. BCE); the Dioscuri and Manta (from Nikiti, *SEG* 48, 811, late 3rd c. BCE); unnamed gods (from Velvendos, *EAM* 23α, 2nd–3rd c. CE); Isis (Thessaloniki, *IG* X.2.1 98, 1st c. BCE–1st c. CE, and 101, 2nd c. CE); Heron/Heros (Sanctuary of Heros Auloneites, *SEG* 51, 828; from Marvinci, *SEG* 55, 691–168 CE); Aphosikake (Neine, *IGBulg* IV, 2245); Salenos (Parthikopolis, *IGBulg* V, 5902 and 5903 – 229/230 CE). The two dedications for Isis from Thessaloniki bear ear reliefs and thus overlap with the next group (cf. n. 159).

159 The ear-reliefs in Graeco-Roman Macedon have been recently studied as a group, Fassa 2019. The author collected 17 examples in an Appendix, p. 57–58 nos. 1–17, to which four additions and one retraction must be made. This increases the Macedonian total so far to 20 reliefs. In particular, ten are from the Isiac sanctuaries of Thessaloniki (nos. 1–6; additionally, an unpublished fragment featuring one ear, MΘ 853), Dion (nos. 7–8), and Stobi (no. 10). Two ear reliefs, found in Philippi (no. 11) and Serres (no. 12), are uninscribed and one, from Aiane (no. 17), does not mention a deity. A relief found in the area of Dion (no. 9) is dedicated to the goddess Parthenos; a pediment from a votive relief found at the sanctuary of Zeus Hypsistos in Dion depicts an eagle flanked by two ears (Polymenidou 2020, 35, 196 no. 1.3.1). From the three reliefs referring to Artemis, we should retain only two (nos. 14–15); the relief from Mieza (no. 13) is unlikely to have represented an ear. There are two reliefs from Kalindoia; the first is dedicated to Nanaia (no. 16), a Babylonian goddess who was identified with Artemis (Fassa 2019, 51), but in Egypt, also with Isis (Holm 2017, 24–25); the second is an offering to Demeter (1st c. BCE), Adam-Veleni 2008, 181 no. 46 (K. Sismanidis). Finally, a relief with a single ear was dedicated to Dionysus by a certain Heliophon. It was found in Kolindros (Pieria) and is dated to the 2nd–3rd c. CE (Polymenidou 2020, 76, 225 no. 9.3.1).

160 Gasparini 2016, 564–565.

161 N.b. that Dionysus was an appropriate translation of Osiris in Phoenician theophoric names; in the Greek text of the bilingual inscriptions on the two identical "cippi of Melqart" from Malta (2nd c. BCE), the name Abd' Osir is translated as Dionysios, cf. Sznycer 1975, 197.

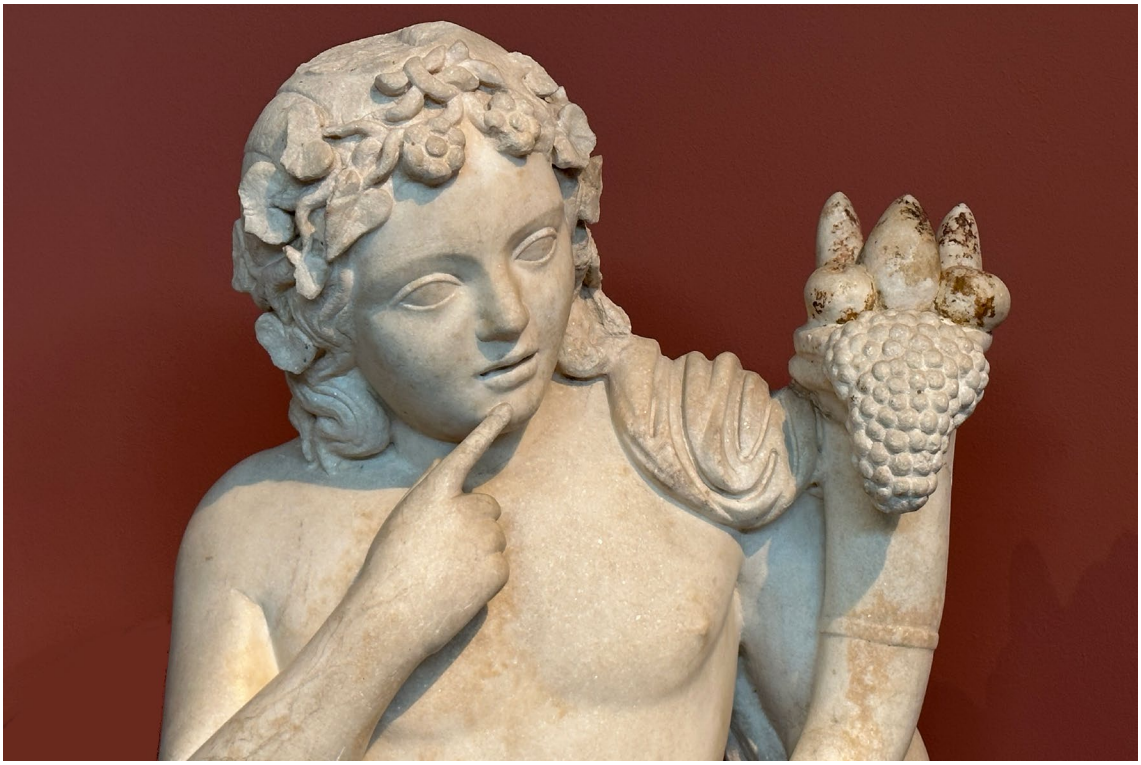

***Fig. 12. Detail of the Harpocrates statue, inv. No. ΜΘ 844 (photo: author)***

statuette or a table support depicting a standing Dionysus, resting his left arm on a tree trunk, as seen in well-preserved specimens.[162]

One remarkable feature of the Harpocrates statue[163] from the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki is the ivy wreath that he is wearing on his head, which brings him close to Dionysus (fig. 12). This is an uncommon characteristic, absent in the known marble sculptures, but sometimes occurring in minor arts.[164] Conversely, the grape bunch emerging from the cornucopia is not necessarily a Dionysiac attribute; it is often seen in cornucopias alongside other fruits, independently of the deities that hold it.

The conflation of Dionysus and Harpocrates[165] is evident in the already mentioned Aretalogy of Karpokrates from Chalcis. By means of a form of false etymology, the slight alteration of Harpocrates' name to Karpokrates, signifying the one who rules over produce (from καρπός and κρατέω), imparts to him the traits of a fertility god. The

162 For statuettes, see Papangeli 2002, 226, 278–279; for table supports, Stefanidou-Tiveriou 1993, 234 no. 6, 235 no. 10, 237–238 nos. 16–20, 239–240 nos. 23–24 and the table supports from Thessaloniki mentioned above, n. 19.

163 Inv. no. ΜΘ 844; Despinis et al. 1997, 113–114 no. 86 (G. Despinis). Descamps-Lequime and Charatzopoulou 2011, 609–610 no. 382 (K. Tzanavari).

164 Tran Tam Tinh 1964, 162–163 nos. 104, 107, 110, pls. XII.1; XXI.2; Properzio 1981, 168–171 no. 80, pl. LVI no. 159; André-Salvini et al. 2010, 335 no. 156; concerning the Dionysiac traits in the iconography of Harpocrates, cf. Touloumtzidou in this volume.

165 And through Harpocrates to Bes, see above, n. 123.

hymn attributes several epithets and qualities of Dionysus (and by analogy of Osiris) to the child god, establishing a strong connection between them.[166] In particular, a phrase in the Chalcis aretalogy – πᾶς καιρός εἰμι ἐγώ, πάντων προμηθής, ὡρῶν[167] εὑρετής: "I encompass all the right moments, provide for everything, and am the inventor of the seasons" – recalls the unique epithet of Dionysus venerated by a religious guild in Thessaloniki, Ὡροφόρος. Dionysus *Horophoros*, the Dionysus "who brings the seasons", was presumably a deity associated with nature and fertility, responsible for season changes and regeneration.[168] These aspects of both gods are shown in artefacts. In Roman Imperial art, Dionysus was occasionally represented among personifications of the seasons,[169] whilst a 2nd century CE table support in Ankara depicts Harpocrates with a *basileion*-crown, personified as *hora*, season, holding autumnal fruit and two ears of wheat.[170] Concerning the epithet *Horophoros*, Paschalis Paschidis proposed[171] "a second layer of interpretation", suggesting that for contemporaries, Dionysus might not only have brought the *horai* but also have carried Horus. This is quite hard to imagine – and it is not supported by any source, literary or visual – but what seems even less probable is that the stele documenting the association of Dionysus *Horophoros* could have been "erected at the sanctuary of the Egyptian Gods". The relevant inscription provides no indications that would link it to the Isiac sanctuary.[172]

## Conclusions

Dionysus was present in the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki, both directly and indirectly, in different manifestations, often through his amalgamation with other deities like the well-attested identification with Osiris or, as elucidated in this paper, Harpocrates. Devoid of rigid dogmas, religious practice during the Imperial period exhibited a remarkable flexibility, and was open to different interpretations. This process is exemplified through the monuments explored in this study.

At some point during the Imperial period, the Isiac sanctuary embraced the cult of Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos*, a local deity of uncertain provenance. His worship included mystic aspects and he was associated with fertility, regeneration and the commem-

166 Harder 1944, 11, 14–17, 32, 38, 55–56. N.b. that the assimilation is not only towards Dionysus. In his aretalogy, Karpokrates is also "invested with the attributes of … Apollo, Asclepius, and with a suggestion of Adonis", Nock 1949, 221.

167 Harder (1944, 8 and 12) proposed to read ὥρων, in the persuasion that it forms a phrase with πάντων προμηθής, and πάντων would presuppose a masculine or neutral word. Totti (1985, 15–16 no. 6) separated it from πάντων προμηθὴς and linked it correctly to εὑρετής, but kept the implausible ὥρων. For the correct reading ὡρῶν, see Matthey 2007, 196.

168 *IG* X.2.1s 1058; Nigdelis 2006, 129–134, esp. 130–131.

169 Nigdelis 2006, 131.

170 Ankara, Anadolu Medeniyetleri Müzesi; Kökdemir 2019.

171 Paschidis 2022, 67–68 n. 44.

172 A recent discovery from the excavations at the metro station Venizelou in Thessaloniki – a mosaic floor from a bath complex depicting a partially preserved male figure dressed in a short chiton and identified as Ὡροφόρος, (see press release of the Greek Ministry of Culture from 20 April 2022, https://www.culture.gov.gr/el/Information/SitePages/view.aspx?nID=4177) – may suggest that the epithet and its connotations were more pertinent in another part of the city.

oration of the dead. In the Isiac sanctuary, Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* was presumably linked to the solar god Bes and, through Bes, to Harpocrates – whose effigy, in Thessaloniki, also bears Dionysiac traits. This distinctive cult was most probably installed in the *Osirieon*, the precinct dedicated to Osiris within the sanctuary, and at least some of its adherents were also prominent members of the Isiac community.

In the cosmopolitan city of Thessaloniki, Isiac worshippers must have come from the most diverse ethnic backgrounds. One such example is provided by the offering made by a man of Syrian origin to Dionysus as a listening god during the 2nd century. In this instance, Dionysus may have been identified with Osiris.

These two cases, one concerning a distinctive cult and the other, humbler, related to the circumstances of a certain individual, testify both to the adaptability, inclusiveness, dynamism, and self-renewing energy inherent in the Isiac cults.

## Annex

*The inscriptions related to the cult of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos*

1. MΘ 983; *IG* X.2.1 259; *RICIS* 113/0537

[ἀγαθῆ]ι τύχηι Διὸς
Διονύσου νν Γογγύλου.
Γ. Ἰούλιος βησάρτης ἀνέθηκεν τῷ θεῷ καὶ
ἔδωκεν ἐν δόσει τοῖς τε νῦν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐσομένοις
μύσταις, ἕως ἂν συνιστῶνται, ἀμπέλων ἐν τῇ
Περδυλίᾳ ἐν τῷ ἄστυι πλέθρων πέντε τὸ τρίτον
μέρος ἐπὶ τῷδε, ἐφ' ᾧ τὴν καρπήαν ἐχόντων
καθ' ἔτος γείνηται ἡ ἐπὶ τῶν θρεψάντων
ἄρτου ἐστίασις κατὰ τὸ παραδεδομένον
καὶ τὴν δόσιν, Δύστρου ν ιθ', ν Δαισίου ν ιγ',
Γορπιαίου ν κγ', ν ὁμνύντων τῶν τε νῦν καὶ
τῶν ἐσομένων μυστῶν τὸν θεὸν καὶ τὰ ὄργια
καὶ τὸ μεσανύκτιον ἄρτου διαφυλάξειν τὴν
ἐπάνο θρησκήαν κατὰ τὴν δόσιν. ἀνέθηκαν
δὲ καὶ οἱ ὑπογεγραμμένοι μύσται, ἐφ' ᾗ τῆς καρ-
πήας μετέχωσιν τὸν τοῦ ζῆν χρόνον αὐτοὶ ἐπὶ
τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ μεταπαραλαμβάνωσιν οἱ ἐπεισι-
όντες μύσται, τοῦ αὐτοῦ πενταπλέθρου τὰ δύο
μέρη, ἐφ' ᾧ ἄπρατα διηνεκῶς μείνῃ, ὁμοσάν-
των κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ συνδιαφυλάξειν.

Λ. Φουλούιος Φῆλιξ
ἱερεύς

Γ. Ἰούλιος Ἀγαθόπους
Ἀβούδιο[ς .....]ων

Μ. Ὄμβρειος Ἔρως
Νείκανδρος Νεικάνδρου
Ἡρακλείδης Κορράγου
Γ. Ἰούλιος Φῆλιξ
Μ. Ὄμβρειος Μακεδών
Τ. Σέξτιος *vacat*
Ν. Τερραῖος Ὑάκινθος
Ἀντίγονος Νεικηφόρου
Μ. Λόλλιος Ἀττικός

Ν. Τερραῖος Φιρμανός
Μ. Λόλλιος Σαβεῖνος
Γ. Ῥάιος Ζώσιμος
Μ. Μάριος Κερεάλις
Μ. Ἀντώνιος Πρεῖμος

ἀνετέθη ἐπιτρέψαντος Στράτωνος τοῦ
Ἐπικράτους, φύσει δὲ Διονυσίου, ἱερητεύοντος
τὸ νν β'.

2. ΜΘ 6089; Stefanidou-Tiveriou and Voutiras 2020, 579 no. 1191 (E. Voutiras); *Bull. épigr*. 2021, 287 (P. Paschidis)

Ἱερητεύ-
οντος
Στράτω-
νος τοῦ
Ἐπικρά-
του, φύ-
σει δὲ
Διονυ-
σίου.

3. ΜΘ 972; *IG* X.2.1 244; *RICIS* 113/0561

*Col. I*

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[– –]νιος [– – –]
Ἄρριος Πρόκλος
Σερρουίλιος Ἐπάγαθος
Προτάκιος Πρίσκος βοωφόρος
Γρεκείνιος Σέλευκος
Κάσσιος Εὔτυχος
Φούριος Πριμιγᾶς ἀρχιναοκόρος
Αἴλιος Εὐελπίδης
Οὐίβιος Μάξιμος
Αἴλιος Ἀσκληπιάδης
Κλαύδιος Λύκος
Ἀβούδιος Θύρσος
Σουλπίκιος Πολύτιμος
Σαβιδιανὸς Μᾶρκος
Ἀλέξανδρος Διονυσίου
Ἀλέξανδρος Ἀλεξάνδρου βησάρτης
Σώσιππος Πρίμου
Σπέδιος Πρόκλος
Καμέριος Καπίτων
Τύριος Ἰοῦστος
Κλαύδιος Εὔπλους

*Col. II*

– – –
ΗΛ – – –
Πομπώνι[ος – – –]
Κλαύδιος Καιπίω[ν]
Σκρειβώνιος Νικηφόρος
Εὔνομος Εὐνόμου
Τ. · Φλ. · Γράνιος Λύκος
Λαρτιδία Ὀπτάτα
Καικιλία Ὀπτάτα
Κλαύδιος Παράμονος
Μ. · Οὔλπιος Φῆλιξ
Μ. · Οὔλπιος Τρόφιμος
Αἰλιανὸς Σεκοῦνδος
Μ. · Αἴλιος Καλάτυος

4. ΜΘ 1729; *IG* X.2.1 60; *RICIS* 113/0562; date: 155/56 CE

*I*

ἰερ̣ομέ-
ν[ου . . ]$^{v}$
[Κα]μ̣ερ̣ίου
Καπίτωνος

*II*

Δ̣ιὶ̣ [Διονύσῳ Γονγύλῳ – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – ]Μ . . ΛΙ . .
Κ [– – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – ]ΛΙ . . Ι
Ο̣ΣΙΩ̣Ν . . . ΟΣ [ – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – ]ί̣ῳν Ἡ[λ]ιος,
ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἐστίαν σὺν τ̣ῇ̣ βάσι [·] ἔτους : [ζ]π̣ρ̣΄ $^{vv}$
5 τοῦ καὶ γ̄τ΄

*III*

ἀρχινεωκο-
ροῦντος

Φο[υ]ρ[ί]ου Πρει-
5 μιγᾶ.

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