



## THE MANY FACES OF DIONYSUS IN THE HEXAMETERS OF THE SINAI PALIMPSEST (SIN. AR. NF 66)

### ABSTRACT

*The fragments of a hexameter poem about Dionysus recently discovered in a palimpsest (Sin. Ar. NF 66) reveal some different faces of Dionysus, including an Adonis-figure at the heart of a dispute between two goddesses (Persephone and Aphrodite), and a personified wine-god, Oinos, threatened by the machinations of his enemies in the court of Zeus. These palimpsest texts help to illuminate some of the allusions to the early life of the god that have long puzzled scholars, especially in some of the early Christian apologists and the collection of Orphic Hymns.*

**Keywords:** Dionysus; Adonis; Aphrodite; Persephone; Orphic; *thronôsis*; Korybantēs; dismemberment

The newly discovered hexameters uncovered by Giulia Rossetto in a palimpsest from a codex in the library of the Monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai must rank as one of the most exciting recent discoveries for the study of Greek mythology.<sup>1</sup> The codex contains an Arabic text of some saints' *Lives*, written somewhere between 903 and 925 C.E. at the Monastery of Mar Saba by the scribe Dawid al Himsi (or David of Homs, known as 'the carpenter'), but it is the underlying erased Greek hexameters recounting some episodes from the life of the Greek god Dionysus that provide new glimpses of hitherto unknown strands of Greek mythology and illuminate previously obscure references. The four fragments seem to recount two episodes, a scene with Aphrodite, the young Dionysus and his mother Persephone (A & B), and another that features Dionysus enthroned on the seat of Zeus with various attendants around, including minions of the jealous Hera who seek to harm him (C & D). These palimpsest texts illuminate long-puzzling allusions to the early life of the god, especially in some of the early Christian apologists and the collection of Orphic *Hymns*. These new texts reveal some different faces of Dionysus, an Adonis-figure at the heart of a dispute between two goddesses, and a personified wine-god, Oinos, threatened by the machinations of his enemies in the court of Zeus.

In September 2021, Rossetto convened an online interdisciplinary workshop to explore this text further, which produced many new suggestions and corrections to the text itself. The assembled scholars also wrestled with some of the peculiar features of the mythic narrative in the texts, since the fragments reveal unusual variants of stories familiar from the mythic tradition. One of the most striking features of the poem in the palimpsest text is the interaction of Aphrodite and Persephone, two goddesses not often found in each other's company. However, the tale of their quarrel over the handsome

<sup>1</sup> G. Rossetto, 'Fragments from the Orphic *Rhapsodies*? Hitherto unknown hexameters in the palimpsest Sin. Ar. NF 66', *ZPE* 219 (2021), 34–60; G. Rossetto et al., 'A revised text of the poem with Orphic content in ms. Sin. ar. NF 66', *ZPE* 222 (2022), 9–16, whose fragment divisions and numbering I follow.

youth Adonis is recounted briefly in the mythographic collections of Apollodorus and Hyginus:

ὄν Ἀφροδίτη διὰ κάλλος ἔτι νήπιον κρύφα θεῶν εἰς λάρνακα κρύψασα Περσεφόνῃ παρίστατο. ἐκείνη δὲ ὡς ἐθεάσατο, οὐκ ἀπεδίδου. κρίσεως δὲ ἐπὶ Διὸς γενομένης εἰς τρεῖς μοίρας διηρέθη ὁ ἐνιαυτός, καὶ μίαν μὲν παρ' ἑαυτῷ μένειν τὸν Ἄδωνιν, μίαν δὲ παρὰ Περσεφόνῃ προσέταξε, τὴν δὲ ἑτέραν παρ' Ἀφροδίτῃ· ὁ δὲ Ἄδωνις ταύτη προσένευε καὶ τὴν ἰδίαν μοῖραν.

Aphrodite, on account of his beauty concealing him from the gods in a chest while he was still an infant, brought him to Persephone. But she, when she saw him, did not give him back. When the dispute was brought to Zeus, the year was divided up into three parts, and for one Adonis was to remain by himself, for another he was delegated to be with Persephone, and for the other to be with Aphrodite. But Adonis allotted his own turn to Aphrodite.<sup>2</sup>

In the first fragment of the text (A), after Persephone reminds Aphrodite of a prophecy made by Night (presumably about the fate of this child), she brings out from a hidden chamber a radiantly beautiful child, identified as Dionysus and addressed with the familiar Dionysiac epithets of Eribromos and Eiraphiotes.<sup>3</sup> Persephone sets this child, extraordinarily beautiful (*περικαλλές*) and possessing his awesome beauty from the Graces (*αἰνὸ[v] καρποφόρων Χαρίτων ἄπο κάλλος ἔχ[οντα]*), upon the lap of Aphrodite, in a pose familiar from figurines of great kourotrophic goddesses with small mortals on their laps.<sup>4</sup> This beautiful boy, shared between Persephone and Aphrodite, is not called Adonis, however; even when Aphrodite addresses him in the second fragment (fr. B.13), she calls him simply ἄμβροτε κοῦρε, 'immortal youth'.<sup>5</sup> This direct address indicates that she is not merely recalling her favourite Adonis while she speaks to Dionysus; Dionysus here *is* Adonis, the youth beloved of Aphrodite over whom she wrangles with Persephone.

Such an identification of Dionysus with Adonis, though startling to the modern reader, may have been less surprising to ancient audiences. Plutarch indeed claims that those partaking in the rituals make this identification on the basis of the similarities of the rituals dedicated to the two figures:

τὸν δ' Ἄδωνιν οὐχ ἕτερον ἀλλὰ Διόνυσον εἶναι νομίζουσιν, καὶ πολλὰ τῶν τελουμένων ἑκατέρῳ περὶ τὰς ἐορτάς βεβαίῳ τὸν λόγον.

They consider Adonis to be none other than Dionysus, and there are many things for those undergoing the rituals with regard to the festivals of both of these two that confirm this reasoning.<sup>6</sup>

As so often, the ancient thinkers make their conflation of deities not from the mythic stories more familiar to moderns but on the basis of ritual similarities that leave only

<sup>2</sup> Hyg. *Astrologia* II.6 provides a briefer account, dividing the year in half, a division also made in other allusions such as Σ Theoc. 3.48, Ael. *NA* 9.36.

<sup>3</sup> Fr. A.14 Διόνυσον ἐρίβρομον εἰραφιώτην; the same also in *Hymn. Orph.* 48.2 to Sabazios. Both epithets appear in the *Homeric Hymns*; Ἐρίβρομος means 'loud-shouting', but Εἰραφιώτης is given various explanations (e.g. Eur. *Bacch.* 286, Cornutus 30).

<sup>4</sup> E.g. the statuette perhaps of Demeter with Triptolemos, in T. Hadzisteliou-Price, *Kourotrophos: Cults and Representations of the Greek Nursing Deities* (Leiden, 1978), §585, fig. 49 (Spurlock Museum 1928.01.0006). Fr. A.17–18 παῖδ' ἐν χερσὶ[v] ἐλ]οῦσα γέον περικαλλές ἀγαλμα, | αἰνὸ[v] καρποφόρων Χαρίτων ἄπο κάλλος ἔχ[οντα].

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Hymn. Orph.* 55.26 ἄμβροτον ἀγνὸν Ἄδωνιν.

<sup>6</sup> Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 671B–C.

faint traces in the evidence.<sup>7</sup> While Plutarch can make his point in the assumption that his readers will understand the resemblances he means, we can only speculate what similarities Plutarch might see.

The collection of the late Orphic *Hymns* provides potentially illuminating parallels, since the figures of Dionysus and Adonis seem blurred in several of these hymns, and the fragments can also help to understand some of the previously puzzling elements of these mysterious texts. As Morand notes, ‘La figure d’Adonis est donc très proche de celle de Dionysos’, because he is addressed with the Dionysiac epithet of Eubouleus and described as horned, as Dionysus is in an earlier hymn.<sup>8</sup> Most peculiarly, and significantly, Adonis is said to have been born in the childbed of Persephone, making the underworld queen the mother of Adonis just as she is of Dionysus.<sup>9</sup> This parentage for Adonis appears nowhere else, not even in the tales where Persephone takes an interest in Adonis as an infant.

In this collection of hymns, Dionysus also seems to take on characteristics of Adonis. In the Orphic *Hymn to Miso*, the masculine-feminine aspect of the god, the deity is described as the one enjoying Cyprus with Cytherean Aphrodite, a role more often imagined for Adonis.<sup>10</sup> This gender-fluid divinity, with male and female elements, also resembles the androgynous Adonis, described in his own hymn as both youth and maiden.<sup>11</sup> In the Orphic *Hymn to Dionysus Liknites*, Dionysus is described (‘curieusement’, as Fayant says ad loc.) not just as the ‘beloved sprout of the Nymphs’ but also ‘of well-crowned Aphrodite’, while Adonis is likewise ‘the sweet scion of Cyprus’.<sup>12</sup> The presence of Aphrodite among the nurses of Dionysus in the *Hymn* does not fit with the descriptions of his infancy in other sources, but it does match with Aphrodite’s appearance in these palimpsest fragments, where her interest in the young Dionysus is remarkable.

In the second fragment (B, 8–9, 11–12), Aphrodite recounts how, after Dionysus has left the nymphs who reared him, she searched the whole world to find him, finally reaching him only in the underworld:

σῶι δὲ πόθωι χ[θόνα] πᾶσαν [ἐπέδραμο]ν αἰθέρα θ’ ἄγνόν  
 πόντον τ’ ἠδ’ [Αχ]έροντος [ὑπὸ χ]θονὶ χεῦμα κελαιόν,  
 ...  
 ἔτλην δ’ εἰς Αἴδαο δόμους σκοτ[ί]ους καταβῆναι  
 ἠελίου προλιπούσα φάος λαμπράν τε σελήνην,  
 οὐράνιον τε πόλον διὰ σὸν πόθον, ἄμβροτε κούρε.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. R. Edmonds, ‘Dionysus in Egypt? Ephraian Dionysos in the Orphic *Hymns*’, in A. Bernabé, M. Herrero de Jáuregui, A.I. Jiménez San Cristóbal, R. Martín Hernández (edd.), *Redefining Dionysos* (Berlin and Boston, 2013), 415–32.

<sup>8</sup> A.-F. Morand, *Études sur les Hymnes orphiques* (Leiden / Boston / Cologne, 2001), 167. Adonis is Eubouleus in *Hymn. Orph.* 56.3 and horned δίκερως in 56.6; cf. δίκερῶτα of Dionysus in *Hymn. Orph.* 30.3. G. Ricciardelli, *Inni orfici* (Milan, 2000) provides helpful commentary on these epithets ad loc.

<sup>9</sup> *Hymn. Orph.* 56.9 Φερσεφόνης ἐρασπλοκάμου λέκτροισι λοχευθεῖς.

<sup>10</sup> *Hymn. Orph.* 42.7 ἢ Κύπρωι τέρπητι σὺν εὐστεφάνωι Κυθερείηι. Indeed, Adonis is named as her companion in the hymn to Aphrodite (55.24–6): εἴτ’ ἐν Κύπρωι, ἄνασσα, τροφῶι σέο, ἔνθα καλαί τε | παρθένωι ἄδμηται νύμφαι τ’ ἄνὰ πάντ’ ἐνιαυτὸν | ὕμνοῦσιν, σέ, μάκαιρα, καὶ ἄμβροτον ἄγνὸν Ἄδωνι. However, Aphrodite is named there as accompanied by Bacchos, σερμηὶ Βάκχοιο πάρεδρε (55.7).

<sup>11</sup> *Hymn. Orph.* 42.4 ἄρσενά καὶ θῆλυν, διφυῆ; cf. 56.4 κούρη καὶ κόρη.

<sup>12</sup> *Hymn. Orph.* 46.3 νυμφῶν ἔρνος ἐραστὸν εὐστεφάνου τ’ Ἀφροδίτης, and cf. 56.8 Κύπριδος γλυκερὸν θάλος; M.-C. Fayant, *Hymnes Orphiques* (Paris, 2014).

In my longing for you, I ran over the whole earth and the holy sea and even the dark flow of Acheron beneath the earth. ... I dared to descend into the shadowy halls of Hades, leaving behind the light of the sun and the bright moon and the celestial pole through my longing for you, immortal youth.

Aphrodite here takes on the role of the wandering goddess, searching all the world for her lost loved one like Demeter does for Kore, Meter for Attis, or Isis for Osiris (or even Io for Epaphos). Although these myths might all seem significantly different to the modern observer, it is worth noting once again that ancient thinkers such as Herodotus and Plutarch readily conflated them on account of the similarities of their rituals.<sup>13</sup> In the Orphic *Hymn to Mize*, the deity is called upon in multiple forms, accompanying rituals for different goddesses, Demeter, Meter, Aphrodite and Isis (*Hymn. Orph.* 42.5–10):

εἴτ' ἐν Ἐλευσίνος τέρπηι νηῶι θυόεντι,  
εἶτε καὶ ἐν Φρυγίῃ σὺν Μητέρι μυστιπολεύεις,  
ἢ Κύπρῳι τέρπηι σὺν ἐυστεφάνῳι Κυθερείῃι,  
ἢ καὶ πυροφόροις πεδίοις ἐπαγάλλεαι ἀγνοῖς  
σὺν σῆι μητρὶ θεᾷ μελανηφόρῳι Ἴσιδι σεμνήι,  
Αἰγύπτου παρὰ χεῦμα σὺν ἀμφιπόλοισι τιθήναις.

Whether you rejoice in the fragrant Eleusinian temple, or in Phrygia you perform the mysteries with the Mother, or you rejoice in Cyprus with well-crowned Kytheria, or you revel in the sacred wheat-bearing fields with your mother, the revered and black-robed goddess Isis, beside the flow of Egypt with the attendant nurses.

In these ritual contexts, all these goddesses play the same kind of role for the younger deity, whether female or male.

In myth likewise, whether the motivation is that of a mother seeking her lost child or of a lover seeking her missing beloved, the pattern of action that involves the goddess wandering with laments through every land, seeking shelter and asking the local inhabitants for news of her lost one, remains the same. Apollodorus recounts that Io, after her son Epaphos was abducted by the Kouretes at the behest of a jealous Hera, wandered around until she found him in Syria and brought him back to Egypt, where she is worshipped as Isis and Demeter (*Bibl.* 2.1.3):

Ἴὼ δὲ ἐπὶ ζήτησιν τοῦ παιδὸς ἐτρέπετο. πλανωμένη δὲ κατὰ τὴν Συρίαν ἄπασαν (ἐκεῖ γὰρ ἐμνηύετο <ὅτι ἢ> τοῦ Βυβλίῳν βασιλέως <γυνή> ἐτιθήνει τὸν υἱόν) καὶ τὸν Ἐπαφὸν εὐροῦσα, εἰς Αἰγύπτου ἐλθοῦσα ἐγαμήθη Τηλεγόνῳ τῷ βασιλεύοντι τότε Αἰγυπτίων. ἰδρῦσατο δὲ ἄγαλμα Δήμητρος, ἣν ἐκάλεσαν Ἴσιν Αἰγύπτιοι, καὶ τὴν Ἴὼ Ἴσιν ὁμοίως προσηγόρευσαν.

Io set out in search of the child. She wandered across all of Syria, for she was informed that the wife of the king of Byblos was nursing her son, and found Epaphos. Then coming to Egypt she was married to Telegonos, who was ruling the Egyptians at that time. She set up an image of Demeter, whom the Egyptians called Isis, and Io likewise they referred to as Isis.

In such tales, Aphrodite appears less often than Demeter, but an early Christian author, Aristides of Athens, bears witness to a tale of this goddess' emotional behaviour toward her adulterous lover: 'She bewailed his death, seeking her lover, and they say that she went even down to Hades so that she might redeem Adonis from Persephone' (οὔτυνος

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Edmonds (n. 7).

καὶ τὸν θάνατον κλαίει ζητοῦσα τὸν ἔραστήν αὐτῆς· ἦν λέγουσιν καὶ εἰς Ἄιδου καταβαίνειν, ὅπως ἐξαγοράσῃ τὸν Ἄδωνιν ἀπὸ τῆς Περσεφόνης, *Apologia* 11.3).

The tale in the palimpsest fragments, then, fits within this pattern of the wandering goddess seeking her lost loved one, even though the story of Aphrodite seeking the child of Persephone appears rather different from the most familiar version of the Adonis tale from Ovid, where Adonis is conceived by Myrrha, princess of Cyprus, in incest with her father, or even from the tale in Apollodorus, where Adonis becomes the object of a dispute between the goddesses that can only be settled by Zeus.

This Dionysus Adonis, however, does seem to fit within another familiar mythic pattern, one often linked with the story of the wandering goddess, that of the threatened divine child. In this schema, a child is prophesied to create some sort of trouble for the existing generation, so he is threatened by a group of older males. Sometimes others of the older generation, either nurses or male protectors, try to protect the child. The child either escapes from the threat or is somehow brought back after being thought dead, and he manifests his power. The protagonist of this story may be Dionysus (whether the son of Semele or of Persephone), but he may also be Epaphos, Apollo, or even Zeus himself. On the mortal level, Herodotus' tale of the Corinthian tyrant Cypselus fits neatly into this pattern (5.9b–e). The threat comes from a group of older men who may be named Titans, Gigantes, Kouretes, Korybantēs, Telchines, or even (in the case of Cypselus) Bacchiads, and the threat may take the form of abduction, dismemberment, or some other form of murder. Epaphus, like Adonis and Attis, is said to have suffered a hunting accident, in this case engineered by Hera and the Titans or Kouretes, and, in one version, the infant Zeus is threatened with dismemberment by the Titans and whisked to safety from Crete to Phrygia by three Korybantēs.<sup>14</sup>

The Dionysus in the palimpsest text seems unlikely to have perished in a hunting accident, but the other fragments show that the threat from the band of older males is part of this story, even if the details remain difficult to recover from the fragments. What is clear, however, is that there is a plot, engineered by Hera, that involves first an open attack (in fragment C) and then (in fragment D) a more subtle ploy designed to lure the young god off the throne of Zeus. The importance of the throne in this scenario suggests that the tale would evoke the Korybantic rites, specifically the *thronōsis* ritual, which involves the initiate being seated on a throne while armed and threatening figures whirl in a circle around him.<sup>15</sup>

Dionysus, referred to in this scene as Oinos, the personification of wine, is seated on the throne of Zeus (in accordance perhaps with the prophecy mentioned in fragment A), and he seems to be veiled, while others sing and dance in a circle around the throne. Suddenly, the veil is plucked from his eyes, and Akmon attacks him with an axe, while Kyrbas leaps to his defence.<sup>16</sup> Oinos does not leave the throne and thus escapes unscathed, but, in the next fragment, the more devious plan of Hera is put into action to lure this child of Zeus and Persephone from his father's throne. Crowning his head with wreaths of flowers and continuing to process around in a circle, the Gigantes offer enticing toys and wheedling words (fr. D.8–12).

<sup>14</sup> Zeus: *Sibylline Oracles* 3.132–41. Epaphos: Hyg. *Fab.* 150; Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.13.

<sup>15</sup> R. Edmonds, 'To sit in solemn silence? "Thronosis" in ritual, myth, and iconography', *AJPh* 127 (2006), 347–66.

<sup>16</sup> Fr. C.2–15. The reading and interpretation of these lines remains somewhat uncertain, but the names of Akmon, Oinos and Kyrbas seem clear.

αὐτίκ' ἄρ' οἱ γε  
 κόσμησαν κεφαλὴν στεφάνοις ἀνθῶν ἐρρόεντων  
 παιδὸς Ζηνὸς ἄνακτος ἐριγδοῦπιό Γίγαντες,  
 κύκλωι δ' ἐστιχόντο παραιφασίησί τε μύθων  
 μειλίχιζις καὶ πᾶσιν ἀθύρμασι νηπιάχοισι  
 δόροισι]ν τ' ἀγανοῖσι παραιπ{ε}θήμεν μεμαῶτες.

Immediately then the Gigantes adorned the head of the son of loud-thundering Zeus with crowns of lovely flowers, and in a circle they marched, striving to persuade him astray with sweet, encouraging words and all manner of childish toys and pleasing gifts.

This scene is familiar from Clement of Alexandria, who condemns the barbarity of the rites of Dionysus (*Protr.* 2.17.2):

τὰ γὰρ Διονύσου μυστήρια τέλεον ἀπάνθρωπα ὃν εἰσέτι παῖδα ὄντα ἐνόπλω κινήσει περιχορευόντων Κουρήτων, δόλω δὲ ὑποδύντων Τιτάνων, ἀπατήσαντες παιδαριώδεσιν ἀθύρμασιν, οὗτοι δὴ οἱ Τιτάνες διέσπασαν, ἔτι νηπίαχον ὄντα. ὡς ὁ τῆς Τελετῆς ποιητῆς Ὀρφεύς φησιν ὁ Θράκιος: “κῶνος καὶ ῥόμβος καὶ παίγνια καμπεσῖγυια, | μῆλὰ τε χρῦσεα καλὰ παρ' Ἑσπερίδων λιγυφῶνων”.

The mysteries of Dionysus are perfectly inhuman; for, when he was still a child, the Kouretes danced around him clashing their weapons, and, when the Titans came in by trickery and deceived him with childish toys, then these same Titans tore him limb from limb when still a child.<sup>17</sup>

Although our palimpsest text does not specify what the ἀθύρματα νηπίαχα are, Clement refers to verses of Orpheus that list ‘a top and a whirligig and dolls with jointed limbs, and golden apples from the high-voiced Hesperides’. A similar list appears in the Gûrob papyrus and in other accounts, with the addition of a mirror, the implement crucial in Nonnos’ version for the Titans to lure the infant Dionysus from the throne of Zeus.<sup>18</sup> To judge by these testimonies, after our fragment D ends, the toys will succeed in luring Oinos from the throne, whereupon he will be torn to pieces.

Clement’s version, which he cites from Orpheus, involves the Kouretes as protectors of Dionysus and the Titans as his destroyers, but here the Gigantes seem to take the role of the minions of Hera, while it is unclear who the defenders are. The name Kyrbas suggests one of the Korybantēs, and Nonnos lists Akmon among the Korybantēs who support Dionysus in his military campaigns, although, according to Strabo, he is more often named among the Idaian Dactyls.<sup>19</sup> To further complicate matters, in fragment D, Amalkeides is mentioned, a figure who only appears as one of the Tritopatores in a reference from an Orphic *Physika*. These Tritopatores are described by Harpokration (*Lexicon* T 32, s.v. Τριτοπάτορας) as the doorkeepers and guardians of the winds, but he notes that some make them, like the Giants or the Titans, the children of Earth and identify them with Kottos, Briareos and Gyges, the hundred-handed monsters named in Hesiod. As Gagné has shown, the Tritopatores receive

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Arn. *Adu. nat.* 5.19. A papyrus fragment, *P.Argent.* 1313 (*Orph. frag.* 593), also seems to mention ποικίλτ' ἀθύρματα in a mystic context. O. Levaniouk, ‘The toys of Dionysos’, *HSPH* 103 (2007), 165–202 provides the best study of these toys in various kinds of evidence, noting that ἄθυρμα is also used of the flower that lures Kore to her abduction site in *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 16.

<sup>18</sup> *P.Gûrob* 1 = Pack<sup>2</sup> 2464; see J. Hordern, ‘Notes on the Orphic papyrus from Gurôb (*P.Gurôb* 1; Pack<sup>2</sup> 2464)’, *ZPE* 129 (2000), 131–40 and Nonnus, *Dion.* 6.169–73, the only source to call Dionysus Zagreus in this scene. The mirror also appears in the accounts of Arnobius (see note 17 above) and Firm. Mat. *Err. prof. rel.* 6.

<sup>19</sup> Nonnus, *Dion.* 13.135–43; Strabo 10.3.22.

cult in Attica and elsewhere as ancestral spirits, the thrice-forefathers, so—again like the Kouretes, Korybantes, Titans and Giants—they fit into the category of primordial peoples from the earliest generations.<sup>20</sup> Already in antiquity Strabo comments on the interchangeability of all these figures (10.3.7):

So great is the complexity in these stories that some tales have the Korybantes, the Kabeiroi, the Idaian Dactyls and the Telchines appearing as the same as the Kouretes, but others have them all appearing as kinsmen of one another and distinguishing them from one another only with respect to some small details; but, to put it bluntly and on the whole, they are all certain inspired and Bacchic types, who, in the role of ministers, strike terror during the celebration of the sacred rites by means of armoured dances, accompanied by uproar and sound and cymbals and drums and clashing arms, and still more by pipes and shouting.

For Strabo, the confusion caused by the complexities of the myths can be resolved by noting the similarities of their roles in ritual.

The earth-born Giants and Titans are, likewise, often interchangeable in the myths of the war against the gods and the infancy of Dionysus. Certain authors, however, could favour one version over another to suit their interpretative agenda. Neoplatonic authors such as Proclus, Damascius and Olympiodorus, who read the dismemberment of Dionysus as an allegory of the movement from One to many, see the Titans as representatives of particularity, as the responsible villains. As Olympiodorus notes, ‘And he is torn apart by the Titans, of whom the *ti* [‘something’] indicates the particular. The form of the whole is torn apart in genesis, and Dionysus is the monad of the Titans.’<sup>21</sup> The Orphic texts that these Neoplatonists cite, like those of Clement, thus have Titans rather than Giants.

By contrast, the Giants (*Gégeneis* or *Gigantes*) appear more often in versions of the myth in which Dionysus is understood as an allegory for wine. Diodorus Siculus explains that the mythographers have portrayed Dionysus as being torn apart by the earth-born and brought back together by Demeter to symbolize the transformation of grapes into wine by the earth-working farmers (γηγενεῖς = γεωργοί), as well as the restoration of the integrity of the vine by the earth.<sup>22</sup> The name of Oinos for Dionysus in fragment C, together with the Gigantes in fragment D, suggests that a similar symbolism may be at play in the palimpsest text.

The hexameters from the palimpsest are thus clearly not the poem of Orpheus from which Clement and the other Christian apologists quote, nor that to which Olympiodorus and the other Neoplatonists refer. Their source has been supposed by scholars to be the *Sacred Discourses in 24 Rhapsodies* mentioned in some of the late testimonies, and the collection has been imagined to recount an epic over the course of two dozen books, like the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. Rossetto has suggested that the *psi* mark at the top of fragment A could indicate that these fragments come from Book 23 of these lost Orphic *Rhapsodies*, but the episodes in these fragments would make little sense as the penultimate chapter of a longer narrative.<sup>23</sup> These scenes of the childhood of Dionysus would need to be significantly earlier in the *Rhapsodies* collection if there were a coherent plot line that ran throughout. Nonnos puts the

<sup>20</sup> R. Gagné, ‘Winds and ancestors: the *Physika* of Orpheus’, *HSPH* 103 (2007), 1–23.

<sup>21</sup> *In Phd.* 1.5 καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Τιτάνων σπαράττεται, τοῦ “τι” μερικὸν δηλοῦντος, σπαράττεται δὲ τὸ καθόλου εἶδος ἐν τῇ γενέσει· μονὰς δὲ Τιτάνων ὁ Διόνυσος.

<sup>22</sup> 3.62.6–7. Cf. Cornutus 30 (62.10–15), where the γηγενεῖς are also called Titans.

<sup>23</sup> Rossetto (n. 1 [2021]).

dismemberment of his Dionysus Zagreus in Book 6 (out of his 41 books), while one of the few references that mentions the placement of any story within the *Rhapsodies* puts the war against the Gigantes in Book 8.<sup>24</sup>

If, however, the structure of the Orphic *Rhapsodies* were envisaged not as a coherent epic but as a loose collection of poems attributed to Orpheus, the palimpsest hexameters might have come from the twenty-third selection in such an anthology. A late collection such as the *Sibylline Oracles* provides a better model for understanding the structure of the *Rhapsodies* than the Homeric epics, since the *Sibylline Oracles* in fact often recount the same story in multiple different versions.<sup>25</sup> So too, by comparing the quotations from Lactantius with the contents of the extant *Oracles*, we can see how the selective quotation according to a theological agenda can skew the perception of the whole work, suggesting that the references from early Christian apologists and late Neoplatonists may provide a distorted picture of the contents of the *Rhapsodies*—a picture skewed to cosmogonies and the dismemberment story rather than tales of the Korybantes and the Kabeiroi, the rites of Osiris, or other selections from the full range of tales recounted in the Orphic poems.

The prologue to the late *Orphic Argonautica* may provide a more comprehensive picture of the themes that late imperial audiences would have expected in the poems of Orpheus. While the cosmogonic themes are mentioned, so too are less familiar tales, including (25–30):

ὄρκιά τ' Ἰδαίων, Κορυβάντων τ' ἄπλετον ἰσχύν.  
 Δήμητρὸς τε πλάνην, καὶ Φερσεφώνης μέγα πένθος,  
 θεσμοφόρος θ' ὡς ἦν· ἠδ' ἀγλαὰ δῶρα Καβείρων,  
 χρησμούς τ' ἀρρήτους Νυκτὸς περὶ Βάκχου ἄνακτος,  
 Λήμνον τε ζαθέην ἠδ' εἰναλίην Σαμοθράκην,  
 αἰπεινήν τε Κύπρον, καὶ Ἀδωναίην Ἀφροδίτην.

The oaths of the Idaians, the boundless strength of the Korybantes, the wandering of Demeter and Persephone's great grief, and how the Thesmophoros came to be. And the glittering gifts of the Kabeiroi and the ineffable oracles of Night regarding Bacchos the king, and holy Lemnos and sea-girt Samothrace, and lofty Cyprus and Adonian Aphrodite.

The references to the Idaian Dactyls and the Korybantes recall the presence of Akmon and Kyrbas in fragment C, while fragment A refers to an oracle of Night about Dionysus in the context of Aphrodite and Persephone discussing an Adonian child. None of these subjects, then, would be out of place in an Orphic poem, any more than the dismemberment of Dionysus would be.

However, none of the episodes in these hexameters would be out of place in other kinds of literature recounting the adventures of Dionysus either. The massive epic *Dionysiaca* of Nonnos makes clear that many such poems must have been circulating from which Nonnos drew his material, and it seems possible that Nonnos used this poem in his own composition. While the conflation of Dionysus with Adonis appears less frequently in our extant evidence, it would not have surprised Plutarch or the audiences of the Orphic *Hymns*. The tale of the dismemberment of Dionysus is recounted in myriad forms from the Hellenistic period (and probably earlier), even if

<sup>24</sup> *Etym. Magn.* s.v. Γίγας 231.21 Gaisford = *Orph. frag.* 188 B.

<sup>25</sup> R. Edmonds, *Redefining Ancient Orphism: A Study in Greek Religion* (Cambridge and New York, 2013), 144–59.



the anthropogonic sequel usually found in myths of the Gigantomachy or Titanomachy is only added in the sixth century C.E. by Olympiodorus.<sup>26</sup>

The fragments in the palimpsest text reveal some new pieces of this Dionysiac mythic tradition circulating in many forms. This Dionysus may be conflated with Adonis, but he is called Erikepaios, Eribromos, Eiraphiotes and Oinos, evoking many other versions of his mythology. The episodes in these fragments help to clarify the descriptions of Dionysus and Adonis in the Orphic *Hymns* that have long puzzled scholars, and they also shed new light on the range of versions of the dismemberment story, introducing new players not found in other versions and highlighting the flexibility of the tale with its many meanings among the different tellings. These fascinating new texts provide modern scholars with many new questions to answer, many new problems to solve, and many new issues to sort through, but they also provide welcome light on long-standing problems of Dionysiac mythology, as they show us many new faces of the many-named god.

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<sup>26</sup> Edmonds (n. 25), 296–391; R. Edmonds, ‘Tearing apart the Zagreus myth: a few disparaging remarks on Orphism and original sin’, *ClAnt* 18 (1999), 35–73. The fragments display none of the special seals that mark a poem as Orphic—an address to Musaeus, references to Orpheus’ life, or even the *sphragis* ‘close the doors of your ears’. Nor do we find any of the characteristic emphases on extraordinary purity or sanctity, special divine connection, extreme antiquity, or extraordinary strangeness: cf. Edmonds (n. 25), 71. However, given the brevity of the fragments, such an argument from silence cannot bear much weight. The presence of certain names, such as Ἡρικεπαῖος or Ἀμαλκειίδης, that do appear primarily only in other Orphic poems, is more suggestive. However, while Ἀμαλκειίδης appears only in a reference to a *Physika* attributed to Orpheus, Ἡρικεπαῖος appears in a dedicatory inscription on a Lydian altar to Dionysus Erikepaios (TAM V 2, n° 1256 = EBGR 1989 n° 115). This evidence suggests that Ἡρικεπαῖος may be a local epithet that made its way into the Orphic *Hymns* and (perhaps later) into the *Rhapsodies* quoted by Proclus and Damascius.