# Dionysus in the Mirror of Late Antiquity: Religion, Philosophy and Politics

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## Introduction

Among all the gods of ancient religion that stood out in the syncretic theology of Late Antiquity, Dionysus became the clearest example of the figure of 'God the son of God',[1] a saviour figure who mediated between both worlds. This god of many functions and invocations[2] will have a final resurgence in Late Antiquity. At this time, Dionysus undergoes a two-fold transformation. On the one hand, Dionysus will be modelled with greater emphasis as a god of salvation in the hereafter, especially due to his connection with the mysteries and the evident comparison with Christ.[3] In the first part of this chapter, therefore, we aim to examine the development of Dionysus as a philosophical god, mediator between the intelligible and the material worlds, the divine and the human spheres. The myth of Dionysus-Zagreus, as told and interpreted by the Neoplatonists, will provide a frame for the metaphysical, ethical and even aesthetical relevance of this god in Late Antiquity.

On the other hand, there is evidence that the god was also used by Neoplatonists as a symbol of power and civilisation for the just politics of a universal rule. Thus, in the second part of this paper, we will analyse to which extent Dionysus could be also interpreted, in spite of the obvious Christian animosity against this *alter Christus,* as a political model for the Roman Emperors and, in general, for the political or civic virtues of a community. In the Dionysian myths, the god is often depicted as a civiliser of barbarians and establishes a kind of *Pax Dionysiaca*, like Rome itself. At the same time, following the ethical implications of his figure in Neoplatonism, Dionysus could also represent good instance of political mediation and civic behaviour in Late Antique society, as a patron of a sort of 'inner Kingdom' and a 'mediator between the worlds', in the Neoplatonic *politeia*, if we interpret some key passages devoted to the god in Proclus (v.gr. *in Tim.*1.407.21-408.2), Damascius (*in Phaed.* I 4) and Olympiodorus (*in Phd.* 1.5) as we shall see.

Evidently, Christ was to be understood, from the fourth century onwards, as the only valid model for the citizen, the philosopher and, above all, for the *Imperator*

*Christianissimus*[4], and his Kingdom was to prevail to the 'reign of Dionysus', as Olympiodorus would put it (*in Phd.* 1.5) . But there is still research to be done to examine the multi-faceted but ill-fated success in the predominant Neoplatonic ideology of the Late Antique Dionysus as God the Son, model for human life, symbol of learning and justice at the same time.

## Dionysus in Late Antiquity

Greek literature of the Imperial era reflects a new sort of Dionysism, between religion, philosophy and politics, already from the time of the Second Sophistic with the speech that Aelius Aristides[5] dedicated to Dionysus, or Lucian's pages on the conquest of India by this god.[6] Many other Greek writers dealt with the theme of Dionysus, which also became fashionable after certain rulers were identified with him (from Mark Antony to Galerius[7]) in Roman times. Hence, at this time, it was possible for a poet like Nonnus of Panopolis to praise in an epic a god that in earlier times was not so propitious for this genre. Dionysus could be eulogised as a conqueror – an Alexander – who civilises the peoples,[8] at the same time that he was commended as a saviour in line with the monarchs named *Soter* or according to Late Antique spirituality. This 'new' Dionysus was halfway between a religious and a political figure, as we shall see. This vision of the god is connected to his Neoplatonic interpretation, key to the mythical allegories with which this philosophical school, the true ideological 'engine' of Late Antiquity, symbolises divine knowledge.

As the scholars of the Dionysian cult during the Roman Empire have pointed out,[9] the Dionysus of Late Antiquity plays an important role in the henotheistic tendency of paganism that began to be accentuated around the third century, and according to which this ancient god of vegetation and the grape vine came to occupy almost exclusively a conceptual space related to metaphysics. His traditional character as a saviour (already seen in the classical period, as his gift of wine frees people from pain as *lysiponos*), turned into redemption in Late Antiquity. This will be in clear concurrence with other gods, and after the evolution of paganism, Dionysus will compete directly with Christ. Indeed, the cult of Dionysus is one of the most entrenched and persistent in the system of classical paganism. Nevertheless, from the fourth century onwards the presence of paganism in the public sphere gradually decreases and yet the literary sources refer to the vigour of Dionysus's cult during the first years of the Christian empire. We see an

example even under Emperor Valens, who died in 378 in the battle of Adrianople against the Goths. At this time, there was a Dionysian cult in Antioch, a bastion city of the new Christian religion and the headquarters of prestigious schools of philosophy and rhetoric. It seems that the emperor himself, who spent a long time in Antioch in 370, was perhaps more concerned about the Nicene-Arian controversy and he granted relative immunity to the pagans of the city, allowing them to celebrate the rituals of Dionysus, among other gods.[10] As the ecclesiastical historian Theodoret recalls, scandalised, 'the initiates in the mysteries of Dionysus ran with goat skins, tearing dogs to pieces and, insane, they went into ecstasy'.[11] This situation lasted until the edicts of Theodosius against paganism. Beyond that, in the middle of the fourth century, the Christian historian Sozomen also refers to the punishment of two Christian clerics of Laodicea for having recited certain Bacchic verses reserved only for the initiated.[12] Also, in the Latin West, Augustine of Hippo recalls in one of his *Epistles* (17.4) the familiarity of his urban environment with the rites and festivities in honour of Dionysus. All strata of the still important pagan population of the Late Roman Empire persisted in the veneration of Dionysus, focused on his salvific and metaphysical role.

Indeed, the presence of Dionysus and his myths in third and fourth century funerary art is also very remarkable[13], as shown by sarcophagi representing with special emphasis the story of the child Dionysus and Ariadne[14]. Also funerary epigraphy attest a proliferation of epitaphs in Greek and Latin devoted to the god's myths and cultic associations[15]. a Late Antique Macedonian verse epitaph in Latin alludes to a dead 'puer' who will become a Satyr of the god and another one from Thrace (nowadays Cekacenvo) speaks of a girl as an *ancilla* of the god[16]. In the sixth century, Syria and Egypt will become bastions of Dionysus, a god followed by many people of different social and intellectual strata,[17]. Thus, Dionysus provided salvation and views on metaphysics in quite an interclassist way, for the intellectual elite of the time also followed him closely, considering his important role in the Neoplatonic system, that we will examine in the next section. We know from the Byzantine Suidas lexicon that another deceased, called Heraiskos, a pagan from an educated family of fifth-century Egypt, was mummified and then 'became Bacchus'.[18] It is especially interesting to see how the pagan 'intelligentsia', from different philosophical spheres, turned Dionysus into the essence of divinity or the 'intellect of Zeus' (*Dios nous*). In its Neoplatonic interpretation, Dionysus appears as a symbol of alternation, as the second hypostasis, soul of the world or mediator in the contact between the intellect and the world of the

senses. The religious assimilation of the second hypostasis in the Neoplatonic system, that is the *logos* that evidently in Christianity corresponded to Christ, was a little more discussed in pagan henotheism. For the most part, the theologians of Late Antiquity refer to Phoebus-Apollo or Dionysus: but sometimes they seemed both to be the same god with two faces or at two different times, since the well-known myth of Dionysus' rule in Delphi during Apollo's absence (see e.g. Plutarch's *Moralia* 388f–389b). The theological assimilations favoured eclectic systems parallel to the Neoplatonic one and that denoted a programme with the Sun (Helios, or Apollo/Dionysus) at the top. A good example of these currents of solar theology is the *Saturnalia* of Macrobius, one of the most notable pagans of his time, where there is a single god that appears in two phases, celestial or underground, day or night, being called Apollo or Dionysus alternately (again, the old identification with his brother). It is the same god who changes according to whether he is in the world of the living or the dead.[19]But he is also considered the same deity as Hades, as in Heraclitus' well-known fragment 15 DK: moreover, in one of the most famous theological oracles of late antiquity, the sanctuary of Apollo in Claros, held forth that Zeus, Hades, Dionysus and Helios were all one and the same god[20].

The emphasis on a philosophical interpretation of Dionysus came from an ancient tradition in the Platonic Academy,[21] but with the Middle and New Academy this will become one of the favourite reasons for talking about the cycle of the soul, as shown by Plutarch's interest in the Dionysian myths in relation to physics (*De Is. et Os*. 364d–365b).[22] But the allegories around Dionysus unfolded especially from Plotinus, his disciple Porphyry, and above all, from the later Neoplatonism of Olympiodorus and Damascius. The Neoplatonic exegesis of their myths provides a metaphysical key to the explanation of the connections between the intelligible and the sensible world.[23]

We must especially mention – for its philosophical but also political relevance – the Orphic myth of Dionysus Zagreus that narrated the murder of the child-god by the Titans, after deceiving him with a mirror, and his subsequent rebirth. This first Dionysus is politically very relevant for being, even while still a child, the one chosen by Zeus as his successor to the throne of the universe. However, this succession, as it happened so many times in the reality of the Roman Empire, will be frustrated by a conspiracy. The child Dionysus is deceived by the Titans, at the behest of the jealous Hera: the Titans dupe him with children's toys and, among other things, with a mirror in which he remains looking at his reflection enraptured. Taking advantage of his

carelessness, the Titans kill him, tear him apart and eat him. The myth has interesting endings. The second Dionysus, that of the Theban myth, will emerge from his salvaged heart; the Titans are killed by an enraged Zeus with his thunderbolt, and from their ashes humanity will emerge, evil from the gods' perspective, but partially divine for having participated in the horrible banquet of the god-child. The myth was used not only as a symbolic narrative of the fate of the soul, but also as a metaphysical allegory of the transition between unity and multiplicity, the intelligible and the sensible world, the indivisible and the divisible, reality and its reflection. The Zagreus myth, probably based on an ancient story of the Orphic ritual known since the Archaic era, provided Dionysus with a deeply eschatological and soteriological dimension, within the framework of the mystery religions,[24] which would be decisive for its Neoplatonic reworking. Another theory holds that this myth was a result of a Neoplatonic interpretation of the ancient Dionysus under a new mould in a Christian context and product of a modern construction.[25]

## Dionysus and Neoplatonism: Metaphysics and Aesthetics

In their work, the Neoplatonists were at least as interested in the allegorical interpretation of ancient myths as in the exegesis of Plato's works. Already Plotinus, alleged 'founder' of Neoplatonism (a modern label in any case) was keen on using classical myths to express his philosophical views and he mentions Dionysus in the *Enneads*. Just as in the myth the young god, before being torn apart, is deceived by the Titans with some toys, ritual objects and a mirror, allegorically this is explained as the process of the soul at the crossroads of the intelligible and the sensible world and as its transition between the One and the Many.[26] Plotinus interprets the mirror in the following way: 'the souls of men see their images as if they were in the mirror of Dionysus and they happen to be on that level by jumping from above, but they are not torn from their own principle and intellect'.[27] The mirror and the myths of the reflection, like that of Narcissus elsewhere (*Enn.* 1.6.8) and that of Zagreus, were used by Plotinus as a philosophical metaphor. Here Dionysus is used not only to express Neoplatonic cosmology, but also to allude to the circular journey of souls from the upper region of the celestial sphere to the world and *vice versa*; that is, both the downward movement of the progression towards the multiplicity and the ascending of reversion towards unity. The soul cycle plays an important role in Platonic and Neoplatonic eschatology and these words of Plotinus about Dionysus at the crossroads

between both worlds open the way for the philosophical appreciation of the god in other Neoplatonists.[28]

The dismemberment of Dionysus Zagreus appears in Neoplatonism as a key element to approach the henotheistic interpretation that makes Dionysus the Son of God *par excellence*, with a soteriological and eschatological function. In his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, Macrobius also alludes to the mirror that appears in this myth identifying the child-god with the 'material intellect', that is, the 'reflection' of the intelligible world over matter. He states:

> The members of the Orphic sect believe that the material intellect is represented by Bacchus himself who, born of a single father, was torn apart into separate parts. In his sacred rites, he is portrayed as being dismembered at the hands of irate Titans and emerging again safe and sound from the Titan's buried members. The explanation to this was that the *nous* or mind, by offering its undivided state to the indivisible, fulfils at the same time its earthly functions and does not abandon its secret nature.[29]

Therefore, the death of Dionysus, who is divided into many pieces after seeing his reflection in the mirror, functions as an allegory for the transition from unity to the multiplicity of the material world.

In Proclus's system, this emblematic episode, whose role in the configuration of the late antique Dionysus is key, will also have a determining cosmological aspect: the death and dismemberment of the child god are interpreted here as the symbol *par excellence* of the creation and differentiation of matter. In this system, Dionysus works as the child god or the wonderful or primordial child (*Wunderkind/Urkind*) present in various mythologies,[30] who is able to give rise to the cosmos. In the *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* by Proclus, the child Dionysus appears as an allegory of the cosmic intelligence, which undergoes a process of division to create the world.

> In fact the theologians too say that after the dismemberment of Dionysus, who shows the divisible procession into the All from the indivisible creation, the other Titans were given a different allotment by Zeus, whereas Atlas was stationed in the western regions holding up the heaven.[31]

Later on, Proclus interprets the rebirth of Dionysus from the thigh of Zeus, and its subsequent care by the nurse Hipta,[32] as the reception of the intelligible forms by the soul of the world, participating in the 'intellect of the world':

For Hipta, who is the soul of the universe…, having placed a winnowing basket on her head and wound it round with a snake, takes into her care Dionysus of the Heart; for it is with the most divine [part] of her that she becomes the recipient of intellective being and receives encosmic intellect. And [Dionysus], for his part, proceeds towards her out of the thigh of Zeus – he was united with [Zeus] at that point –and once he has [so] proceeded and has come to be participated by her, he leads her back up to the Intelligible and her own source; for she hastens to Ida, to the mother of the gods, from whom stems the whole series of souls… And this [offspring] was cosmic intellect, the child of Zeus, which has proceeded in the image of the [intellect] which has remained in Zeus. [33]

Proclus deals extensively with the subject of the mirror used by the Titans to deceive Dionysus-Zagreus in various places, following in the wake of Plotinus' ideas and taking them further. According to the myth, the pieces of Dionysus were gathered by Apollo, who took them to Delphi – the parallel with the myth of Osiris was already obvious to Plutarch and other ancient sources –. Other versions refer that Athena saved his heart (the phallus in the case of Osiris) to achieve its reintegration. For Proclus, Dionysos' heart remained undivided, as a symbol of the intellect, but his body was torn in seven pieces. Proclus sees in this process of reunification of the lost members the symbol of the harmonisation of the seven portions of the cosmic musical scale of the world soul that appeared in Plato's *Timaeus*[34].For Proclus, the mirror of Dionysus represents then 'a symbol of the ability of the Universe to be filled with the intellect' (σύμβολον πρὸς τὴν νοερὰν ἀποπλήρωσιν τοῦ παντός)[35].

Dionysos was, for Proclus, a key god in the creation of the matter: he is the leader of the 'encosmic' demiurgy and plays an important role in Proclus' complex system of demiurgies and triads. There is a 'universal' demiurgy, presided by Zeus and with a first triad, and a 'partial' (or 'divided') demiurgy, under the patronage of Dionysus, who creates universal beings in a partial way. Finally, a Dionysian triad depending upon him creates partial beings. Elsewhere, in his *Platonic Theology* and his *Commentary to Plato's Cratylus*, Proclus hints again at the role of Dionysus, the last cosmic king for the Orphics, as a Demiurge (*In Cra*. 181, p.107.18–24).[36]

Since Proclus presents the mirror as an analogy of the participation of the matter in intelligible ideas (*In Cra.* 178, p.104)[37], Dionysus in the mirror, then, could be interpreted as the god that allows human souls in some way to participate in their own mysterious, sacrificial, and cosmogonic experience in desiring to descend to the created universe. But from the ethical perspective, for Proclus, Dionysus also embodies the divine part in the human being because the intellect in us is Dionysian and an *agalma* of

Dionysus.

That the intellect in us is Dionysian and a true statue of Dionysus. Therefore, whosoever sins against it and, like the Titans, tears apart the undivided nature of it by means of much-divided falsehood, clearly trespasses against Dionysus himself, even more so than those who sin against the external statues of the gods, just as much as the degree to which our intellect is more akin to the god than other things[38].

Note that the reflection of the Dionysian in us is here described no longer as a mere mirroring or mimetic image (*eikon*), but as a divine image (*agalma*), perhaps recalling the aesthetic theory about the divine statues of Plotinus (*Enn*. 1.6.9) or Porphyry (in his lost work *Peri agalmaton*).[39] The place of Dionysus in Proclus, in the frame of the Neoplatonic debate on the metaphysical value of images, is also very relevant. For Plotinus a work of art, although it represents matter, participates in its model by virtue of the hypostatic ontology and the principle of universal sympathy (*Enn*. 4.3.11). For the Neoplatonists, in addition to the general term *eikon* ('image, representation'), the Greek language had other terms associated with cult images and theurgy, especially *agalma* ('cult representation, statue', see *Enn*. 1.6.9), words that were theorized over in this age. [40]

For Proclus, Dionysus seems to incarnate the image of the world, as he comments on the Platonic expression of the cosmos as a 'most beautiful' (*Ti*. 29a5) image. This would be a reflection of the intelligible Beauty, in form of 'replicas of Dionysus' fashioned by Orpheus, 'which preside over the process of becoming and have received the entire form of the Paradigm, so the philosopher has also given the cosmos the appellation "image of the intelligible" inasmuch as it resembles its own paradigm'.[41]

But apart from metaphysics and aesthetics, the Dionysian myth has also deep implications for the Neoplatonic ethics, as Proclus relates the debate on the virtues and emotions to the Orphic myth of Zagreus and, specifically, to the creation of men rising from the ashes of the Titans. Indeed, the Titans were fulminated by Zeus after eating the child-god and this is a key-aspect of the Orphic anthropogony. The myth of the origin of man from the ashes of the Titans – as studied by Mircea Eliade in his *History of Religious Ideas* (1976) – was basic for the Neoplatonic views on the soul's destiny of return to unity. Human soul contains a Dionysian, i.e., divine element, amidst a massive Titanic nature, which deals as a symbolic explanation of human behaviour. The intervention of the Titans, in that ethical sense similar to irrational passions, caused our

divine essence to be torn apart by the falseness of the world of appearances, with which, the reading of the ancient 'titanic nature' of human beings that is already present in the *Laws* of Plato[42] now receives a clear eschatological meaning.

Other Neoplatonists such as Olympiodorus and Damascius also refer to the myth of the dismemberment of Dionysus in a philosophical manner. From the ethical point of view, according to Olympiodorus,

> Dionysus is the patron of genesis, because he is also the patron of life and death; of life, as the patron of genesis; of death, inasmuch as wine brings about ecstasy, while, on the other hand, we also become more susceptible to ecstasy when death is drawing near... Tragedy and comedy, too, are said to be consecrated to Dionysus, comedy because it is a burlesque of life, tragedy because of passion and death.[43]

For Olympiodorus, following the Orphic myth, Dionysus was intended to be the fourth God in the kingdom of cosmos, after Uranus, Kronos and Zeus, and there is also a hint of a political theory in the case of Dionysus, as patron of genesis and death, with a key role in the mediation between the undivided and divided world, the intelligible and material. In this passage, Olympiodorus interprets the myth of succession to the divine throne both in an ethical and a political way, presenting the four Orphic reigns – those of Uranus, Kronos, Zeus and Dionysus– not in a chronological succession, but rather as constantly present realities in our souls. They symbolize different virtues, attributed to each god-king of heaven: Uranus, the all-seeing heaven, alludes to the contemplative virtue, Kronos the 'sated intelligence'[44], Zeus is the patron of civic virtues and there are also 'ethical and physical virtues, symbolized by the reign of Dionysus'.

Dionysus, then, is a guide of the human soul in the transition from contemplation to politics and ethics, from the metaphysical to the physical reality. But the myth of Zagreus stands again as an example of how politics and even economy rule the 'reign of Dionysus', for in our material world he who leads a virtuous life is often

> torn to pieces, because these virtues do not imply each other and the Titans chew his flesh, mastication standing for extreme division, because Dionysus is the patron of this world, where extreme division prevails because of 'mine' and 'thine'.[45]

Olympiodorus also refers to the figure of Dionysus speaking of the gift of prophecy, which is also a prerogative of the true philosopher, in the broad Neoplatonic sense. In

Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates claimed that those who are called 'Bacchus' by mystical authors – that is, those who have been purified of this life and dwell with the gods – are really the philosophers who have lived in a contemplative and just way, far from civic life.[46] In his commentary on this famous quote ('there are many thyrsus-bearers but few *bacchi*', *Phd.* 69c), Olympiodorus explains what Plato meant: Dionysus is the way to lead us back to metaphysical unity, in virtue of his mediating role, and only someone who leads a philosophical life can become a 'Bacchus':

> meaning by those who carry the thyrsus without becoming Bacchus philosophers still involved in civic life, while the thyrsus-bearers and Bacchants are those on the way of purification. We are chained to matter as Titans by extreme partition, in a world where mine and thine prevail, but we are resuscitated as Bacchus; hence we become more receptive to the gift of prophecy as death draws near, and Dionysus is the patron of death because he is the patron of ecstasy in any form.[47]

Olympiodorus also interprets the figure of Ariadne in a similar way, sometimes speaking of her crown,[48] other times considering Ariadne's thread as a symbol of the Platonic-Pythagorean monad which, in her cosmogonic aspect, was considered to be the 'first being', the incarnation of the divinity, or the whole. From it, the dyad was generated and, in turn, from her, the numbers, the geometric figures and from there all the sensible world. In the path of the soul, the monad was the guide to not losing the connection with unity, and in that, it recalls the thread of Ariadne. As Olympiodorus says: 'it is also necessary that the soul, descending in the genesis, which is a labyrinth, makes use of the monad as the thread for wandering around, just as Theseus used Ariadne's thread in the Cretan labyrinth'.[49] On the ethical level, Ariadne's thread is also referred to as a guide to get out of the labyrinth and defeat the Minotaur, according to the allegory: 'because the Minotaur means the bestial passions that exist in us, the thread means the divine power that we have within and the labyrinth signifies the twisted and variegated nature of life'.[50]

For his part, Damascius interprets the demiurgic function of Dionysus as possessing a double purpose that, again, is reflected on both metaphysical and ethical levels. Fulfilling the mediating function attributed to it by tradition, Dionysus helps the sensible world to participate in the intellect, while the Titans represent the bonds that unite the soul to the body. The dismemberment and rebirth of Dionysus, then, represent mythically for the Neoplatonists the guarantee of the cycle of the soul, in a process of fragmentation and connection with the corporeal world and of a later liberation. The

Dionysian life, then, is an ascesis in this world for the philosopher who prepares, through this ritualisation that imitates the myth, for the other reality. Let us remember the mystical and ascetic side that Neoplatonic thought had already developed in Damascius' time, following the works of Porphyry and Iamblichus.

Already in Plotinus there were various ways to achieve mystical elevation through aesthetics, love, and philosophy, which provided to the philosopher superior contemplation and elevation on the material world, but without separating him from it, in order to ascend to the Good and perceive the path from the Many to the One (*Enn*. 6.9.3). Following in the footsteps of his teacher, Porphyry delved into this trend by also connecting the contrast between the sensible and the intelligible world with the systems of classical polytheism and, above all, of the mysteries. The influences between both worlds and their scales and hierarchies appear intermingled in the notions that allow us to make use of intermediate beings or daemons in mediating functions between our diverse world and the divine and unitary world.[51] A development of these tendencies will be the so-called 'theurgy', which arises from a deep reading of the Greek mantic tradition[52] and is a term that is etymologically derived from words meaning both 'to exercise an action on the gods' and 'to act as a god'. *Theourgia* becomes a independent path that leads to the divine, in clear contrast to the path of thought and mysticism, the theoretical work (*theoria*) and religious science (*theologia*). This track will also be followed by Iamblichus, who opts for a total amalgam of philosophy and religion, harmonising Platonism with the traditional religious wisdom of the mysteries and oracles.[53] From this moment on, Neoplatonism makes explicit a double way to obtain *henosis*, or union with the divinity, with practices of meditation and prayer on the one hand, and with symbols and mysteries on the other.[54]

No other thing, in our view, represents the myth of Dionysus in the Neoplatonic context: his experience of dismemberment not only made him as a god closer to men, but also the divinisation of his closest acolytes, such as Ariadne, will symbolise early on the transit of the soul, on the one hand, and a whole programme of ascetic life centred on the reversion of the philosopher's soul towards the union with the divine on the other. Thus, in Dionysus we see not only the traditional Neoplatonic interpretation of myths in an allegorical way that harmonises the poetic wisdom of old paganism with the Platonic postulates, but also some concrete religious practices of late antiquity in a last survival of a renewed Greek religion.

This can be demonstrated by practices such as the aforementioned theurgy –where it

is likely that statues of Dionysus and toys related with the Zagreus' myth played an important role. The spinning top, for example, of the toys with which the Titans deceive the child Dionysus, was one of the attributes of Hekate in the *Chaldaean Oracles* and had a role in this 'white magic' called theurgy[55]. Another proof of Dionysus' relevance was his funerary presence, since the dead of different social strata could 'become a Dionysus', as epitaphs, sarcophagi and testimonies show, alluding to the traditional mysteries and the inherited pagan cult. Thirdly, the use of Dionysus as a model for a philosophical way of life was justified in the prestigious writings of the Platonic-Pythagorean tradition that the Neoplatonists rework and comment on. The most striking feature, then, in this ancient late Dionysianism that makes Dionysus the mediator *par excellence* between the human soul and the divine is his total transversality: the humble ones that are buried under the sign of Dionysus in rural areas following the inveterate agricultural aspect of their cult, share the same belief as those who study Neoplatonic philosophy in Alexandria or Athens, with the convoluted intellectualisation of the god.

Thus, it is not surprising that, at the beginning of the sixth century and before being banished at the time of Justinian to the Persian court of Ctesiphon, as we shall briefly discuss, Damascius, the last scholar of the Academy before its closure, wrote the following words as an ethical guide for the philosophical way of life:

> The first Bacchus is Dionysus, whose ecstasy manifests itself in dancing and shouting, that is in every form of movement, of which he is the cause according to the Laws [672a5–d4]; but one who has dedicated himself to Dionysus, having become his image, shares his name also. And when a man leads a Dionysian life, his troubles are already ended and he is free from his bonds and released from custody, or rather from the confined form of life; such a man is the philosopher in the stage of purification.[56]

Indeed, at the end of paganism, Dionysus appears as a new religious-philosophical model of an old ideal of Platonic-Pythagorean roots. This path is transmitted by Porphyry in his *Pythagorean Life*, which corresponds to the mystical path of reversion to the one divinised, according to the Pythagorean maxim of 'follow the god' (*akolouthein to theo*) together with its Platonic adaptation of 'assimilation with the god' (*homoiosis theo*).[57] In Neoplatonism this way is affirmed, and it seems that a 'Dionysian life' is postulated to establish a concrete path – a ritual one also, not only philosophical – that establishes a special relationship with the divine and a capacity to ascend in its knowledge.

Damascius, who also discussed Greek myths in an allegorical sense like Olympiodorus, wrote a commentary on the famous passage on the 'Bacchus' in Plato's *Phaedo* by exhorting a unitary philosophy that connects religion and thought, metaphysics, ethics and theurgy that he believed Plato himself would have defended. Combining the two avenues of earlier Neoplatonism, Damascius writes a fundamental passage for the reception of Dionysus as the epitome of all philosophy, from Plato to his own exegetical school:

> To some philosophy is primary, as to Porphyry and Plotinus and a great many other philosophers; to others hieratic practice, as to Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus, and the hieratic school generally. Plato, however, recognizing that strong arguments can be advanced from both sides, has united the two into one single truth by calling the philosopher a 'Bacchus'; for by using the notion of a man who has detached himself from genesis as an intermediate term, we can identify the one with the other. Still it remains evident that he intends to honor the philosopher by the title of Bacchus, as we honor the Intelligence by calling it God, or profane light by giving it the same as to mystic light. [58]

## Dionysus in Late Roman politics and society

Dionysus was into politics from Archaic Greece[59], but after Alexander's exploits the analogies between the god's Indian expedition and the spread of Greek civilisation and culture were often politically exploited. The precedents of the use of Dionysus in politics are seen above all in the case of Alexander who, as Nock has already studied, evidently used the mythical parallels of the god's oriental expedition.[60] This was probably a Macedonian heritage[61] which went far beyond Alexander, since Dionysus became one of the favourite gods for the deification of human rulers, especially taking into consideration the various *neoi Dionysoi* of Hellenistic and Roman politics.[62]

The Ptolemies strengthed their connection with Dionysus, starting from the founder of the dynasty[63], probably at first searching legitimation in an *imitatio Alexandri* . They made this connection to the point of exploiting the arts that served them as propaganda, with the idea of a kinship of Lagid lineage, in the wake of Alexander and the Argeads, with this god.[64] Athenaeus (5.197) mentions a procession in Alexandria in the times of Ptolemy II with a representation of the return of Dionysos from India and later on Ptolemy IV established an important state cult of Dionysos in Alexandria and became an active devotee of the god[65]. He depicted himself in coins in Dionysiac costume with ivy, nebris, and thyrsus, it seems that his body was tattooed with ivy leaves in honour to Dionysus[66] and he claimed to be a 'Neos Dionysos'[67], a title used officially by Ptolemy

XII, Cleopatra's father[68].

This Lagid tradition will certainly have an important inheritance in Roman Egypt, especially in the first *neos Dionysos* of the time, Mark Antony himself[69]. As consort of Cleopatra VII, Mark Antony assumed the title of 'Neos Dionysos' from Ptolemy XII and celebrated magnificent festivals in honour of Dionysos in Samos or Ephesos[70]. Not only Antony, but also Caesar and other later Roman leaders would use Dionysian imagery. The Dionysian triumphal entries of the Hellenistic monarchs, imitated by Antony, became a model for later Roman triumphs, in coins of Augustus, Domitian, Trajan, and Hadrian representing the emperor in a quadriga drawn by elephants[71].The shadow of the political Dionysus is found all along Roman history, as a triumphal god for Roman Emperors. Many emperors of the second and third centuries were associated with Dionysos, such Trajan or Commodus. In 123 Hadrian was officially celebrated in Ancyra as 'Neos Dionysos' and his successor Antoninus Pius, constructor of a Dionysus' temple in Baalbek, exploited the iconography of the Dionysian triumph.

Thus, the Roman political use of Bacchus was enriched in the iconographic tradition with the inclusion of diverse elements: not only animals for the triumphs, such like panthers, tigers or elephants, but also women such as the Maenads but, above all, Ariadne, who was especially useful for the imperial ideology. Just some examples: In 145, when Marcus Aurelius married Faustina Minor, he appeared in medallion in a Bacchic procession, in 149 Pius, Marcus and their wives appeared together with Bacchus and, in 157, the imperial couple of Marcus and Faustina was assimilated to Bacchus and Ariadne[72]. Later on Caracalla and Elagabalus were also celebrated as Bacchus, following the long Roman tradition of *Neoi Dionysoi*[73].

Late Antiquity was no exception, as we will now see, and Dionysus continued as an important reference for Roman emperors but, from Gallienus onwards, we have to add new interpretive nuances of the god, since both the philosophical views on Dionysus and his transversal popularity as a saviour influenced his political use. These new Dionysian features appear progressively in the iconography related to the political implication of the god. For example, there is an emphasis in providing a complete biographical account of Dionysus, and some scenes have remarkable parallels with Imperial iconography.

A first example is the presence of the *manuum velatio*, a Late Roman court ceremonial practice, in the mosaic of Dionysus in Nea Paphos (Cyprus). In the scene (*Fig*. 1), Hermes is presenting baby Dionysus, as an heir to the cosmic throne, for the

adoration of several symbolic figures and he holds carefully the child-god with veiled hands. Apart from the obvious Christian parallels in a scene similar to that of the Adoration of the Magi –like that almost contemporary in a mosaic of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna[74]- the *manuum velatio* was historically rooted in Roman imperial iconography, a ritual probably of Persian origin but officially adopted as a part of his court ceremonies by Diocletian in the third century[75].

Another example is the so-called 'mural (or turreted) crown', an iconographical element normally awarded to the Roman conquerors of a city, which was also incorporated to the Dionysian triumphs in Late Antiquity. Some emperors, such as Gallienus, used it in coins celebrating his victories in the East, but there is a Coptic textile of Dionysus at the Metropolitan Museum of New York portraying the god with this military attribute (*Fig*. 2). This has been interpreted as an oriental influence, comparing this Dionysus to the military gods of Palmyra or to some representations of the Persian Great Kings, such as Shapur I in his triumph over the Roman emperor Valerian or Shapur II[76].

We might ask ourselves now what is the relation between the theoretical background of Dionysus in Late Antiquity and these practical applications of his political relevance in Late Roman iconography. In the previous section we have sketched the importance of Dionysus for the predominant philosophy of Late Antiquity in three main areas, metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics, in order to underline the god's relevance in the intellectual discourse of the last pagan thinkers of the Roman Empire. But we can ask ourselves now whether this Neoplatonic Dionysus also had political implications in this epoch, by way of conclusion and in order to open new paths of future research. The relation of Neoplatonism and Imperial politics is one of the most important but too often neglected issue of Late Antique studies. Needless to say, many Neoplatonists – especially from Porphyry onwards– were especially concerned with the preservation of pagan tradition, which they in a way updated philosophically[77], in an age when Christianity was increasingly entangled in the socio-political network of the Empire.

The Neoplatonic school appears to have had a direct political influence on the emperors of the first Late Antique period, at least from Gordian (reign 238–244) to Diocletian's Tetrarchic System, far from the mystical image that this philosophy has. As O'Meara has shown, these thinkers also had a penchant for political philosophy and their late antique legacy cast a long shadow well into the Middle Ages.[78] If Plotinus followed Emperor Gordian in his campaign against Persia and suggested to his

successor Gallienus to build a Platonopolis,[79] some authors tend to identify Plotinus' disciple Porphyry as an active agent and an intellectual supporter of the persecutions of the Christians under the rule of emperors Diocletian and Galerius. It is disputed whether he was the pagan 'priest of the philosophers' of the Diocletian government referred to by Lactantius in his *Divine Institutions* (5.2).[80]

Plotinus still lived in a clearly pagan society but his disciple Porphyry probably had a slightly different experience. At their lifetimes (c. 244–305), in any case, Neoplatonists had no doubt political influence. But the fourth century was no doubt a turning point, the age of 'the final pagan generation' (Watts 2015, 220), ranging from the Tetrarchs' defense of polytheism during the first decade of this century to the Christian devotion under the Theodosian dynasty. The beginning of it all is well known, as Constantine, in the battle at Pons Milvius in 312, implored the help of the new Christian god in a difficult situation, received a sign of his triumph and showed his gratitude afterwards[81]. But let us not forget that he was just following a Late Antique Roman tradition: his predecessor Aurelian already did the same, when he had a vision of Helios before the decisive battle of Emesa (272) and, after his victory, he devoted a temple in Rome to his celestial protector[82]. And the persecutor Galerius probably did the same with Dionysus, dedicating his palace and burial place at Felix Romuliana to the god, after obtaining important victories against the Persians, as we will see.

We must rethink then the role that Neoplatonism, the ideological base of the late Roman Empire, could have played in the preferent adoption, first, of Dionysus as a political god and, secondly, in his substitution by Christ, a parallel figure in many aspects.[83] On the one hand, it must be emphasised that both the ontological hierarchy of Neoplatonism and its hypostasis as the insistence during late antiquity on 'theological' oracles that describe the divine world as an equally descending pyramid with a god at the top, suggests a direct relationship with the political system of the Late Roman Empire, and specifically of the Tetrarchy, as a sort of reflection of the pyramid structure of late Roman society.[84] Moreover, the Neoplatonic political model also appears both in the aforementioned Aurelian and in Diocletian's Tetrarchy. The Sun God, El-Gabal, Sol Invictus, Helios or Phoebus Apollo, was, no doubt, one of the most important political gods to be identified with Late Roman Emperors, from Aurelian to Julian, and his closeness to Dionysus as a sort of 'underground Sun', following Macrobius' interpretation, was already commented[85]. Porphyry's support to the Tetrarchy is also very relevant in this context. This quadruple system of senior and younger emperors

was protected by pagan deities, in sharp contrast with the later support of Christian thinkers such as Lactantius to Constantine's monotheistic monarchy. These are two distinctly different political models from the Roman Empire, advocated by paganism and Christianity and are, as a result, like polytheism/henotheism and monotheism, mutually exclusive.[86]

But where is Dionysus in the Roman politics of Late Antiquity? To begin with, in the tetrarchy. In a 1984 paper, Nicholson convincingly showed that Galerius's divine patronage corresponded to Dionysus, as Diocletian to Zeus and Maximinus to Hercules.[87] Galerius stood out for his mentioned victory over the Persians in the year 298 and celebrated an overwhelming triumph in front of an enemy who forty years earlier had humiliated Emperor Valerian by taking him captive and then flaying him after his death. We do not have any information of any Dionysian visions before the Battles of Satala and Theodosiopolis (298) but upon the return of the victorious Galerius to the West he rejected the tetrarchy title of Caesar. On the contrary, he wanted to emulate Alexander and the Hellenistic monarchs in their patronage of Dionysus, describing his feat in the East as similar to that of the god in India. In the iconographic programme[88] commemorating Galerius' victory after his triumphant return, this comparison is especially strong since next to his conquest is that of Dionysus' in India and his return to the West. In addition, Dionysus occupied a place of honour in the great palace that Galerius built in Thessaloniki. There was a blossoming of Dionysian art in Macedonia (*Fig*. 3), as the Tetrarch fixed his residence in its capital after his Persian campaign[89] and, especially in the palace complex of Felix Romuliana, in Dacia, the current Gamzigrad (Serbia), where a Dionysian mosaic stands out (*Fig*. 4). But, above all, Nicholson's argument focuses on the veiled references that Galerius' great enemy, the Christian writer Lactanctius – who he devotes a central part of *De mortibus persecutorum* to the emperor as the main instigator of the great persecution – dedicates to him through his criticism of the pagan gods, and to *Liber-Dionysus*, in his *Divine Institutions*, written between 305 and 311 (1.10.9), shortly after Galerius' painful death, probably because of a cancer (in the opinion of his detractors, to be sure, a divine punishment).

On the philosophical level, it can also be properly justified that Dionysus would be the patron god of a ruler placed in the background after Zeus, since Dionysus Zagreus is heir to the divine throne. In addition, Dionysus will also be seen as the god of philosophical divinisation, as O'Meara has demonstrated in his texts on political life

and divinisation in Neoplatonism.[90] The idea of assimilation to the divine of the Platonic tradition,[91] in which the philosopher must escape the world and assimilate as much as possible to a god,[92] admits, according to this author, an interesting comparison with *Enneads* 1.2.1, where the virtues, also the civic or political, are described as inspired by divine models in a typically Platonic ascent to the God. This can also be related to Porphyry and Iamblichus in connection to the tradition of the Pythagorean life, in the sense that the contemplative philosophy has as its goal assimilation to the god, but the example of Pythagoras shows what the political implications are for a philosopher within his community.[93] In the case of Proclus, the political model of Neoplatonism is more evident. Neoplatonic hypostases, that is, the three levels of descending reality that already appeared in Plotinus, also represent here models for three levels of political reform.[94] Proclus identifies them as Zeus, Dionysus, and Adonis, in a descending way – in the One, the henads and the intelligible reality – with three types of demiurges that correspond, according Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus* (8.15–20), with three types of government. Without delving into the complex details of Proclus' system of demiurges, the importance of Dionysus is observed as he places him in second place, after the supreme god, in a way that could interest the Tetrarchy system and the deification of the ruler. In addition, it had at the same time the aforementioned background of Dionysus as a divine part of the soul that ends up returning to the primordial unity. In a sort of 'divine city' the order of the gods constitutes a political model, as it appears already outlined in the last works by Plato, especially in the *Laws* Dionysus' political relevance for Proclus is based upon his role in the demiurgy and can be related to Platonic ideal cities. For Proclus, Plato's Republic provided a first and divine image of the cosmic *politeia* (*in Remp*. I 10.4–8) and, when at *Laws* 739e5, the Athenian Stranger alludes to a third *politeia* (after that of the *Republic* and of the *Laws*), the comparison with high and low demiurges – Zeus and Dionysos/Adonis – was a natural step (*in Remp.* II 8.15-23 and *in Tim.* I 446.5).[95]

Of course, the main adversary of a political Dionysus was the growing influence of the Christian Church upon Imperial politics, from Constantine's Edict of Tolerance onwards. The concurrence of another model of 'divine city', that of Augustine and, in general, of Patristic Literature, hindered the practical application of this Dionysian 'Kallipolis' of the Neoplatonists. The Emperor needed a clear godly protector and, needless to say, in an increasingly Christian environment as the Late Roman Empire, the only choice was Christ. Even after Constantine's triumph the progress of Christianity

did not proceed linearly, at least in the first years of his reign[96].

Constantine tried to reconcile the imperial cult and the worship of himself as a divine being –following the Roman tradition of the emperors as *neoi* gods– with his own worship of Christ[97]. His pre-eminence as an alter Christus in the Councils, seated among the bishops as Christ among the Apostles, points out that he wanted to represent himself as Christ. It is well-known that, at the same time, Constantine did not renounce to his category of 'divine emperor' and was portrayed often as the solar God Apollo: most famously in the Column of Constantine, built in 330 between the Hippodrome and the Forum of Constantinople in commemoration of the new capital. But Constantine was also portrayed as Dionysus in a sardonyx cameo, known as the Hague or the Great Cameo, probably made in connexion with the celebrations of the *decennalia* of 315. This piece (FIG. 5), originally at the Geldmuseum of Utrecht and now at Dutch National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, shows Constantine and his second wife, Fausta, riding in a chariot pulled by two centaurs in a sort of Dionysiac triumph, as Ariadne and Dionysus. As Bardill, who examined this representation in the frame of his study of Constantine godly models and assimilations, has put it:

> While a Victory flies overhead and crowns Constantine, centaurs erect a trophy and trample defeated soldiers. Constantine wields Jupiter's thunderbolt, and below the chariot an upturned calyx *kratēr* for mixing wine hints that he is the New Dionysus. …It is striking that it gives no hint that the Christian God played any part in securing the military success of the emperor [*scil.* at Pons Milvius].[98]

Constantine was fully aware of the political theology and iconography of the Tetrarchy (Juppiter-Hercules) and shrewdly combined tradition with innovation by choosing the support of a new God the Son in order to climb to the Olympus of Roman politics[99].

The effects of the pro-Christian legislation of the successors of Constantine changed the scenario for the old political gods. That was especially evident when Theodosius on February 27th 380, issued an edict at Thessalonica with a clear commitment to the Nicene Christian creed and a condemnation of all other religious tendencies. Undoubtedly, Christianity gained a lot of weight after 380, but this did not imply a complete disappearance of the pagan cults. Pagan intellectuals were still active everywhere: around the year 500, Zosimus was able to write a pagan-oriented Roman History, as a counterpoint to the Christian interpretation of Augustine and Orosius, in which he virulently attacked the Christian inclinations of Constantine and Theodosius[100], declaring

them responsible for the decline of the Empire. Another pagan historian, Ammianus Marcellinus, shows a rather philosophical attitude with regard to religion, focusing on a common ethic of Neoplatonic origin –accepted both by Christians and pagans–, demanding a peaceful coexistence between the different religious currents with an implicit criticism of Theodosius' militant Christian position.[101] In any case, the contrast between Constantine's pre-eminence in the Church almost as an *alter Christus* and Theodosius' submission to bishops such as Ambrose is very significant of the evolution of the Roman emperor in front of the new God the Son[102].

However, Dionysus continued to be felt by the Christian writers as a threat for the growing omnipresence of the new monotheistic 'God the Son of God' figure, Christ, with particular reference to the episode of Zagreus' death, consumption by the Titans and resurrection. Already in Apostolic and Apologetic writers we have found testimonies of a careful analysis of the metaphysical, ethical and political implications of the myth of Dionysus Zagreus, no doubt as an implicit response to its importance in Neoplatonic thought. The archetype of the child-god or dying god, in the case of Zagreus, and the obvious analogy of blood and wine was well-known to Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria[103]. The metaphor of the 'true mysteries' – that of Christianism – in opposition to the false mysteries of Dionysos ('true vine', as in John 15, 1–6, against a purported 'false vine') is clear in Clement, who holds a strong position against Dionysus: words related to Dionysian cult are subtly interpreted for the new religious context[104].

But in the fourth century, from the Constantinian to the Theodosian Age, the Christian intellectuals of the Patristic Golden Age were also aware of the danger of this ideological emphasis on the god Dionysus for his evident parallels with Christ. Christian writers such as Eusebius, John Chrysostomos and other Christian Fathers will desperately try to distance Dionysus and Christ as two separate spheres, false and true mysteries[105]. John Chrysostom wrote some rhetorical works and homilies reporting pagan ecstatic rites in Antioch and other places. Although he does not mention Dionysus, his references to dance and inebriation allow to think that these are evidences of a late survival of urban and rural cults to the god, in occasions such as the Saturnalia, Brumalia or the Kalends[106]. In the fourth century the tendency, already attested in Justin and Clement to underline the 'true Christian mysteries' in comparison to the false and useless intoxication of paganism, continues in the case of John Chrysostom and is, indeed, an appropriation of the Dionysian metaphors of ecstasy, inebriation and mystery

terminology[107]. As Massa has studied, the discursive strategy of this process of Christian appropriation of the popular devotion to Dionysus starts with a condemnation of the ritual festivities, as in the cases mentioned before, as a wild and inappropriate behaviour.[108] But immediately after there is a contrast with the Christian rites of joy and inebriation, which must be preferred by everyone because they are real and true and not false or superficial.

After 380 against, in any case, pagan Neoplatonists could no longer think that the religious order of the past would last forever. Their relation with political power was now problematic and the anti-pagan legislation was dramatically affecting the practice of Neoplatonism in some schools, at least those devoting to theurgy and divination, condemned by the Christian Imperial authorities. In Egypt in general –and in Alexandria in particular –violent groups of Christian monks were acting as an armed wing of the Church, with the excuse of the Imperial decrees, as some of the most conspicuous crisis show: the destruction of the Serapeum (probably in 391) and the anti-pagan riot which led to Hypatia's murder in 415. Those riots against pagan philosophers in the old centre of learning probably caused the exile of the most militant Iamblichean philosophers of the School of Alexandria[109]. Some year later it seems that Neoplatonists and Christian leaders reached an 'entente cordiale', and the philosophers could continue teaching for a long time, under the new head of the School, Ammonius Hermeiou. The situation in Athens was very different.

The very Pagan scholarch Proclus probably compared his own role the the Academy with one of his demiurges (Dionysus or, perhaps, Adonis, as argued by Baltzly 2017, 272) and kept alive the flame of theurgy, as shown by his biographer Marinus. But, in order to examine the political differences between Alexandrian and Athenian Neoplatonists, let us focus now on the Dionysian philosopher Damascius, one of the Neoplatonists who, as we saw in the previous section, devoted more attention to Dionysus, he studied under Ammonius and Heliodorus in Alexandria and went afterwards to Athens as the last director of the Athenian School. While Ammonius probably agreed with the Christian authorities to mitigate the pagan-oriented teaching in order to keep his school open in Alexandria, much to Damascius' disappointment, the members of the School of Athens resisted the pression of the authorities as practitioners of hieratic rituals[110]. From its very re-foundation under Plutarch, the School of Athens was keen on Iamblichean Neoplatonism and practiced theurgy and ritual paganism[111], so that the conflict with Christianity was unavoidable.

The closure of the School of Athens by Justinian (529) was a result of his anti-pagan policy, since the Neoplatonists, under Damascius' guidance, still practiced rites of theurgy and led a philosophical life under the sign of Dionysus and the pagan gods.[112] The last director of the Academy, Damascius and his disciples went to the court of Chosroes,[113] but soon returned to the Empire again (532), and founded a new School, probably in Harran.[114]

Did Dionysian ethics, politics and metaphysics defended by Neoplatonists survive in Persia or in the border with the Sassanid (and soon Arab) world? We simply cannot tell. However, some interesting example of cross-cultural references between Persian, Roman and Coptic iconography, such as the Dionysus textile at the Metropolitan Museums, among others, deserve careful attention, although this is out of the scope of this chapter.

Let us briefly turn, lastly, to the situation of the School of Alexandria, in order to compare Damascius' political environment with that of Olympiodorus, the second 'Dionysian' philosopher quoted in the previous section. In Alexandria it is very likely that Ammonius and patriarch Peter Mongus were able to reach an agreement so that Neoplatonic teaching was able to co-exist with the Christian religion for more than a century after the end of the School of Athens in 529, producing important figures such as Olympiodorus, a late pupil of Ammonius and a devotee of Dionysus. His aforementioned account of the myth of Zagreus is, no doubt, the most complete of all and in his commentary in Plato's *Phaedo* he also defends a Dionysian philosophy as a key way for the understanding of the relation between this world's politics and the divine model. Olympiodorus was a contemporary of Emperor Justinian and his life is an evidence for the useful survival of Neoplatonic Schools for a Christianised audience: in contrast with the Athenian School, closed and expropriated by the authorities around 529 to avoid the pagan Neoplatonic way of life, it was evident that the Roman elite still needed training in classical philosophy both for a career in the administration and for the subtle theological discussions around Christ's nature[115].

Why was relevant for an Eastern Roman civil servant or politician to learn in his youth Dionysus' story in the Neoplatonic reworking? It was probably interpreted not only in metaphysic terms, but also in the light of the usual curriculum of political Platonic dialogues, especially when we take into account the implicit presence of the god in the *Republic* and the *Laws*[116]. According to the Orphic myth Dionysus Zagreus was a failed monarch of the cosmos, for Hera's conspiracy and the Titans' crime

hindered him from inheriting the universal throne, but Olympiodorus allegorized the myth for its ethical and political use, in a very Platonic fashion, as a sort of 'paradigm in heaven' (Pl. *R*. 592b). Dionysus, as a forerunner for the human experience from the physical to the metaphysical reality, teaches ethics, politics and economy rule, since in the Dionysian experience the virtuous man must suffer and be 'torn to pieces' by Titanic forces of this world where extreme division prevails because of 'mine' and 'thine'.[117] For Olympiodorus, Dionysus is an archetype for the human experience of this temporary life and shows also some coincidences with Christian ideas such as life and body as temples devoted to God: for example, in a famous passages, the Alexandrian philosopher argues that suicide is immoral and must be forbidden because 'human bodies belong to Dionysus' (*in Phd.* 1.3).

On the other side, the political relevance of the model can be seen if we consider a possible implicit reference here to Plato's *Republic* 462c4, against a city where words such as 'mine' and 'not mine' can be uttered at the same time. The other implicit reference of Olympiodorus is ethical and bring us back to the discussion mentioned above on the possible ancient sources of the myth of Zagreus, and specifically Plato's second ideal city, that of the *Laws*, and the utopian impulse to flee from that 'Titanic nature' (701c) in our soul. Neoplatonic politics play with visible and invisible realm in such a fashion that Dionysus reign shows some interesting resemblances with Christ's Kingdom: it is interior, ethical and self-realisable when practising the right behaviour. Almost a new *politeia*. The competition between these two parallel divinities of the inner realms was too evident.

## By way of conclusion

As can be seen in these pages, whether as saviour, mediator between the divine and the human world, symbol for the perfect philosopher or model for the wise prince, Dionysus appears as a powerful hermeneutic key for the understanding of the ideological conglomerate of Late Antiquity and, especially, of the 'final pagan generation', as Edward Watts would put it. His polyvalence as a symbol for transition, adaptation, transformation and mediation permeates, thanks to the henotheist and Neoplatonic interpretations, various interpretive levels in the Late Antique philosophical and political discourse. In any case, it is remarkable to notice how long Dionysus resisted as a last bulwark of pagan tradition and in such an inter-class manner,

both for the general public and for the intellectuals. The success of his diverse symbolic values in Late Antiquity, from viticulture to imperial politics, from ethics to metaphysics, is hard to underestimate.

The Christian sources of the fourth and fifth centuries contain several evidences – Augustine, Theodoret, Chrysostom, etc.[118]– of the importance of Dionysus for the political discourse of this time of change. One of the fronts of the final confrontation is religion in its most popular approach and in the agricultural tradition. Church documents as canon 69 of the Council of Carthage (419) confirm the popularity of Bacchic dances and rituals in many regions of the empire. Even as late as the late seventh century, at the Council of Constantinople in Trullo, the so-called Quinisext Council (692), the Christian authorities under Justinian II banned certain traditions which were thought to have a pagan origin in the agriculture and civic life, as the Kalends or the Brumalia, which John Chrysostom had already criticised. The council includes an explicit condemnation, with threat of excommunication, for those who invoked 'the name of the execrable Dionysus' (τοῦ βδελυκτοῦ Διόνυσου ὄνομα, canon 62). There were probably similar old pagan habits for wine-making all across the Eastern Empire and devoted to different moments, when squeezing the grapes in the wine presses or when opening the wine jars.[119] However, these practices were doomed to extinction or to collections of rustic anecdotes.

Most relevantly for our purpose is the survival of Dionysian features in the intellectual discourse of philosophy. A philosophically symbolical deity as Dionysus could, no doubt, represent, for this last pagan generation of Neoplatonists the transition between the world they knew and the new Christianised Empire. But his legacy in Byzantine Platonism was kept alive all across the centuries in what Siniossoglou rightly calls "underground Platonism",[120] that is to say, a philosophical current in Byzantium stemming from the Pagan Neoplatonic roots of late antiquity, the so-called 'golden chain' of Hierocles. Psellos' short treaty on daemonology, known by its Latin title *Graecorum opiniones de daemonibus*, mention some examples of Dionysian rituals with fascination, although pretending to keep his due distance as a Christian[121]. The final example of this Byzantine survival of pagan hellenism, Pletho's Neopaganism in the 15th century will incorporate Dionysus, as the other children of Zeus, in his ontological hierarchy.[122] However, and regardless of the survival of Dionysian manifestations among the elites, from the sixth century onwards one must be careful with the use of accusations of paganism in the political discourse, as Watts has rightly

pointed out[123]. Accusations of paganism will last long during the Byzantine period and are still controversial and ambivalent for modern scholarship, as the same cases of Psellos and Plethon go to show[124].

Dionysus, however, survived especially through the rich imperial and Christian iconography, the *adoratio*, the *manuum velatio* and the mural crown being just a few examples: vine and grapes will be omnipresent also in Christian funerary and sacred iconography. Dionysus also survived in sacred language and literature, as shown by the Eucharistic metaphorical language, which inherited all the Dionysian mystery discourse through the rehabilitation of all that vocabulary by Church Fathers as Clement.

As in Zagreus' mirror, Late Antique Dionysus enjoyed a multi-faceted success in the predominant Neoplatonic ideology as God the Son, model for human life, symbol of learning and justice at the same time. He even played a role of a 'mirror for princes', in the case of imperial triumph, symbolic for civilisation and fight against the barbarians. Finally, however, it is clear that his position was soon to be occupied more successfully by Christ as the new official religion of the Empire triumphed. But the legacy of this Late Antique, many-sided, Neoplatonic Dionysus in posterity seems impossible to ignore.

ILLUSTRATIONS

FIG.1: Birth of Dionysos with manuum velatio. Mosaic at the House of Aion, Nea Paphos (Cyprus) 4th century A.D. Source: Wikimedia commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paphos_Haus_des_Aion_-_Geburt_Dionysos_3.jpg

FIG. 2: Indian Triumph of Dionysus with mural crown (4th-6th cent.). Textile in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; acc. no. 90.5.873. Public Domain.

FIG. 3. Mosaic showing Ariadne and a Dionysiac scene from Thessaloniki. Thessaloniki, Archaeological Museum, Inv. 6733 Γ. Source: Wikimedia Commons https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/01/Dionysusariadne.jpg

FIG. 4: Dionysian Mosaic at Felix Romuliana, current Gamzigrad (Serbia), Source: Wikimedia Commons: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d6/Felix_Romuliana_mosaic.jpg

FIG. 5: Hague Cameo. 4th century. Dutch National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden (Holland). Source: Wikimedia commons : https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1d/Batavia_cameo.jpg

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[1] Regarding the syncretism around Dionysus see Burckhardt 1945, 179–187.

[2] Cic. *N.D.* 3.58; D.S. 5.75.4. See Bierl 2018 for a complete study and catalogue of the god's names.

[3] For a previous version of the following four paragraphs see Hernández de la Fuente 2013a.

[4] Borrowing the title from Gross-Albenhausen 1999, 113–119, referred to Theodosius.

[5] Aristid. *Or.* 41; see Cortés Copete 1999, 145–154.

[6] Lucianus *Bacch*. *passim.*

[7] Bowersock 1990, 160.

[8] In general, Bowersock 1990, 157–166.

[9] Bruhl 1953, 249–267, Bowersock 1990, 41–53.

[10] Thdt. *H.E.* 4.24, Blázquez Martínez 2010, 372.

[11] Thdt. *H.E.* 5.20–21 καὶ οἱ τοῦ Διονύσου τὰ ὄργια τετελεσμένοι μετὰ τῶν αἰγίδων ἔτρεχον, τοὺς κύνας διασπῶντες καὶ μεμηνότες καὶ βακχεύοντες καὶ τὰ ἄλλα δρῶντες ἃ τὴν τοῦ διδασκάλου πονηρίαν δηλοῖ. See Blázquez Martínez 2010, 380. Translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

[12] Soz. *H.E.* 6.25.

[13] E.g. Thomas 2000, 54 and conclusions in 83.

[14] Huskinson 1996, 33–35.

[15] As studied by Jacottet 2003.

[16] OF580 Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2011, 86.

[17] Bowersock 1990, 41; Massa 2014, 27–31.

[18] Suda s.v. Ἡραΐσκος: καὶ ἐγεγόνει ὁ Ἡραΐσκος Βάκχος, ὡς ὄνειρος αὐτὸν κατεμήνυσεν.

[19] Macr. *Sat*. 1.18.7 Cum in supero, id est in diurno, hemisphaerio est, Apollo vocitetur; cum in infero, id est nocturno, Dionysus, qui est Liber pater, habeatur. See also Mart. Cap. 2.185. For a study of solar syncretism in late antiquity see Fauth 1995, 165–183.

[20] See Merkelbach 1996 and Busine 2005, 205. In fact, the name is Iao, commonly identified with Dionysos in this age. For the theological oracles of Late Antiquity see in general Busine 2005, 154–224.

[21] Hernández de la Fuente 2013b.

[22] Tarrant 2010, 85.

[23] See in general Mariño Sánchez 2007, 373–383, summarised here.

[24] See Bernabé 2002 and 2008, 602–605 for the evidence dating back to Ancient Greece, especially Plato's *Laws* 701b.

[25] Edmonds 1999 and 2013. See a summary in Massa 2014, 95–96.

[26] See Plot. *Enn*. 3.13.25, 4.3.12, Procl. *In Tim*. 2.78.12, etc.

[27] Plot. *Enn*. 4.3.12 Ἀνθρώπων δὲ ψυχαὶ εἴδωλα αὐτῶν ἰδοῦσαι οἷον Διονύσου ἐν κατόπτρῳ ἐκεῖ ἐγένοντο ἄνωθεν ὁρμηθεῖσαι, οὐκ ἀποτμηθεῖσαι οὐδ' αὗται τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἀρχῆς τε καὶ νοῦ.

[28] To be sure, Dionysus was already an important god in the Platonic dialogues, as shown in Hernández de la Fuente 2013b. More details on the Neoplatonic eschatology of this myth and a comparison between Macrobius and Plotinus in Mariño Sánchez 2007, 378–80 (reedited in 2014, 336–338).

[29] Macr. *Somn. Scip*. 1.12.12 Ipsum autem Liberum Patrem Orphaici νοῦν ὑλικόν suspicantur intellegi, qui ab illo indiuiduo natus in singulos ipse diuiditur. Ideo in illorum sacris traditur Titanio furore in membra discerptus et frustis sepultis, rursus unus et integer emersisse, quia νοῦς, quem diximus mentem uocari, ex indiuiduo praebendo se diuidendum, et rursus ex diuiso ad indiuiduum reuertendo et mundi implet officia et naturae suae arcana non deserit. Tr. Stahl 1952.

[30] Kerényi 1940.

[31] Procl. *In Tim*. 1.173.1; tr. Tarrant 2007, 272.

[32] Hipta, with a past as a goddess of Asia Minor and present in epigraphy, is related to Dionysus-Sabazios. In the Orphic myth, she is cited as a nurse to whom Zeus gives young Dionysus, Orph. *H*. 48 and 49, cf. OF 329F Bernabé. Cf. Mariño Sánchez 2007, 376, 380. In general, see the 2nd ed. of Mariño Sánchez's analysis (2014), whose commentaries regarding the Neoplatonic Dionysus I have used in this case.

[33] Procl. *In Ti.* 2.407.25–408.10; tr. Runia and Share 2008, 285–286.

[34] Procl. *In Ti.* 1.407.21-408.2; 2.197.15–30. See Opsomer 2000, 121-122.

[35] Procl. *In Ti*. 2.80.21.

[36] See Van den Berg 2008, 192–195 and Opsomer 2017, 146-147 with a table of demiurgies in p. 147.

[37] Procl. *In Cra.* 178, p.104 τί οὖν δεῖ Λητὼ καλεῖν τὴν ὕλην, ὡς εὐτράπελον καὶ ἐμμαγεῖον πᾶσι προκειμένην τοῖς εἴδεσιν, οἷον κάτοπτρον πάντων τὰς ἐμφάσεις δεχομένην, ὡς λήθης δὲ αἰτίαν τοῖς εἰς αὐτὴν ὁρῶσι; 'Can there be any question of calling matter "Leto", since it is changeable and a matrix present to all the Forms, receives like a mirror the appearances of all things and is cause of forgetfulness (*lethe*) for those who look to it?'. Tr. B. Duvick.

[38] Procl. *In Crat.* 133 p. 77.24–78.3 Ὅτι ὁ ἐν ἡμῖν νοῦς Διονυσιακός ἐστιν καὶ ἄγαλμα ὄντως τοῦ Διονύσου. ὅστις οὖν εἰς αὐτὸν πλημμελῇ καὶ τὴν ἀμερῆ αὐτοῦ φύσιν διασπᾷ Τιτανικῶς διὰ τοῦ πολυσχιδοῦς ψεύδους, οὗτος δηλονότι εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν Διόνυσον ἁμαρτάνει, καὶ μᾶλλον τῶν εἰς τὰ ἐκτὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἀγάλματα πλημμελούντων, ὅσον ὁ νοῦς μᾶλλον τῶν ἄλλων συγγενής ἐστι τῷ θεῷ. Tr. B. Duvick.

[39] Plotinus emphasizes the continuity between the material and the intelligible world through this word, *Enn*. 1.6.9: 'But how are you to see into a virtuous soul and know its loveliness? …Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue (οἷα ποιητὴς ἀγάλματος) that is to be made beautiful… and never cease chiselling your statue (καὶ μὴ παύσῃ τεκταίνων τὸ σὸν ἄγαλμα), until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue' (see also *Enn*. 5.8.31); tr. S. MacKenna. Cf. Hernández de la Fuente 2011, 312–314.

[40] See in general Grabar 1945, Alexandrakis and Moutafakis 2002 and Mariev 2013.

[41] Procl. *In Ti*. 1.336–337 τὰ τὴν γένεσιν ἐπιτροπεύοντα καὶ τὸ εἶδος ὅλον ὑποδεξάμενα τοῦ παραδείγματος, οὕτως καὶ ὁ φιλόσοφος εἰκόνα τὸν κόσμον τοῦ νοητοῦ προσεῖπεν, ὡς ἐοικότα τῷ σφετέρῳ παραδείγματι. Tr. Runia and Share 2008, 193.

[42] Plat. *Lg*. 701b–c.

[43] Olymp. *In Phd.* 1.6 καὶ γενέσεως ἄλλως ἔφορός ἐστιν ὁ Διόνυσος, διότι καὶ ζωῆς καὶ τελευτῆς· ζωῆς μὲν γὰρ ἔφορος, ἐπειδὴ καὶ τῆς γενέσεως, τελευτῆς δέ, διότι ἐνθουσιᾶν ὁ οἶνος ποιεῖ καὶ περὶ τὴν τελευτὴν δὲ ἐνθουσιαστικώτεροι γινόμεθα… καὶ τὴν τραγῳδίαν δὲ καὶ τὴν κωμῳδίαν ἀνεῖσθαί φασι τῷ Διονύσῳ τὴν μὲν κωμῳδίαν παίγνιον οὖσαν τοῦ βίου, τὴν δὲ τραγῳδίαν διὰ τὰ πάθη καὶ τὴν τελευτήν. Tr. Westerink 1976.

[44] The Neoplatonic identification of Kronos with the popular etymology *koros nous* is also known to Plotinus (*Enn*. 5.1.4 and 5.1) and Augustine (*Cons. Evang*. 1.23.25 *satur nus*) and appears also in Olympiodorus (*In Grg.* 47.3; cf. Plat. *Crat*. 396b).

[45] Olymp. *In Phd.* 1.5 διὸ καὶ σπαράττεται, διότι οὐκ ἀντακολουθοῦσιν ἀλλήλαις αἱ ἀρεταί. καὶ τὰς σάρκας μασῶνται οἱ Τιτᾶνες, τῆς μασήσεως δηλούσης τὸν πολὺν μερισμόν, διότι τῶν τῇδε ἔφορός ἐστιν, ἔνθα ὁ πολὺς μερισμὸς διὰ τὸ ἐμὸν καὶ σόν. Tr. L.G. Westerink.

[46] Plat. *Phd*. 69d1.

[47] Olymp. *In Phd.* 8.7 ναρθηκοφόρους οὐ μὴν Βάκχους τοὺς πολιτικοὺς καλῶν, ναρθηκοφόρους δὲ καὶ Βάκχους τοὺς καθαρτικούς. καὶ γὰρ ἐνδούμεθα μὲν τῇ ὕλῃ ὡς Τιτᾶνες διὰ τὸν πολὺν μερισμόν – πολὺ γὰρ τὸ ἐμὸν καὶ σόν – ἀνεγειρόμεθα δὲ ὡς Βάκχοι·διὸ καὶ περὶ τὸν θάνατον μαντικώτεροι γινόμεθα, καὶ ἔφορος δὲ τοῦ θανάτου ὁ Διόνυσος, διότι καὶ πάσης βακχείας. Tr. L.G. Westerink 1976. In the Greek tradition the closeness of death usually endows the gift of prophecy, as seen in the case of the dying heroes of the *Iliad* (16.851–854, 22.358–360). See also, in the Platonic tradition, Socrates' final remarks to the jury in Plat. *Ap.* 39c: 'And after that I want to give you a prophecy, you who voted against me. For indeed I'm already at that point where people generally do make prophecies: when they're about to die'; tr. Ch. Emlyn-Jones and W. Preddy.

[48] Olymp. *In Mete.*191.14.

[49] Olymp. *In Alc.* 48.19–21 δεῖ δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν κατιοῦσαν εἰς γένεσιν λαβύρινθον οὖσαν καθάπερ μίτῳ κεχρῆσθαι τῇ μονάδι πρὸς τὴν ἐνταῦθα πλάνην, καθάπερ καὶ ὁ Θησεὺς τῷ τῆς Ἀριάδνης μίτῳ πρὸς τὸν Κρητικὸν λαβύρινθον. See also Griffin 2014, 116.

[50] Olymp. *In Grg.* 44.5 ὁ μὲν γὰρ Μινώταυρος τὰ ἐν ἡμῖν θηριώδη πάθη σημαίνει, ὁ δὲ μίτος θείαν τινὰ δύναμιν ἐξημμένην, ὁ δὲ λαβύρινθος τὸ σκολιὸν καὶ πολυποίκιλον τοῦ βίου. See also Jackson and Lycos and Tarrant 1998, 282–283.

[51] Porph. *Marc*. 21.

[52] For more information on theurgy in general, see the classical study of Lewy 2011 (1st ed. 1956). For theurgy in context, see Saffrey 1984, 161–171. See the valuable synthesis of the sources on theurgy in the Theodosian period by García-Gasco 2013, 197–204 whom we follow here.

[53] See in general Shaw 1971.

[54] Iamb. *Myst.* 1.12.

[55] Levaniouk 2007, 176 and n. 38.

[56] Dam. *In Phd.* (versio 1) 171 Ὅτι ὁ μὲν πρῶτος Βάκχος ὁ Διόνυσός ἐστιν, ἐνθουσιῶν βάσει τε καὶ ἰαχῇ, ὅ ἐστι πάσῃ κινήσει, ἧς δὴ καὶ αἴτιος, ὡς ἐν Νόμοις [672a5–d4]·ὁ δὲ τῷ Διονύσῳ καθιερωθεὶς ἅτε ὁμοιωθεὶς αὐτῷ μετέχει καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος.ὁ δὲ ζῶν Διονυσιακῶς ἤδη πέπαυται πόνων καὶ λέλυται τῶν δεσμῶν, ἀφεθεὶς τῆς φρουρᾶς, μᾶλλον δὲ τῆς ἀπεστενωμένης ζωῆς·ὁ δὲ τοιοῦτος ὁ καθαρτικός ἐστι φιλόσοφος. Tr. L.G. Westerink.

[57] For more information of this concept in Plato, see the comprehensive monograph by Lavecchia 2006.

[58] Dam. *In Phd.* (versio 1) 172 Ὅτι οἱ μὲν τὴν φιλοσοφίαν προτιμῶσιν, ὡς Πορφύριος καὶ Πλωτῖνος καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοὶ φιλόσοφοι· οἱ δὲ τὴν ἱερατικήν, ὡς Ἰάμβλιχος καὶ Συριανὸς καὶ Πρόκλος καὶ οἱ ἱερατικοὶ πάντες. ὁ δὲ Πλάτων τὰς ἑκατέρωθεν συνηγορίας ἐννοήσας πολλὰς οὔσας εἰς μίαν αὐτὰς συνήγαγεν ἀλήθειαν, τὸν φιλόσοφον ‘Βάκχον’ ὀνομάζων· καὶ γὰρ ὁ χωρίσας ἑαυτὸν τῆς γενέσεως εἰ τεθείη μέσος εἰς ταὐτὸν ἄξει τῷ ἑτέρῳ τὸν ἕτερον. πλὴν δῆλός ἐστιν ὅμως τῷ Βάκχῳ σεμνύνων τὸν φιλόσοφον, ὡς θεῷ τὸν νοῦν ἢ τῷ ἀπορρήτῳ φωτὶ τὸ ῥητόν. Tr. L.G. Westerink.

[59] A panorama in Dabdab Trabulsi 1990. See also Isler-Kerényi, Seaford and Karłowicz in this volume.

[60] Nock, 1928, 21–30. See also Stoneman in this volume.

[61] On Dionysus’ popularity in the Macedonian monarchy, see Greenwalt 1994 and Christesen and Murray 2011, 431–432.

[62] Nock, 1928, 38 ‘Dionysus and Heracles were the typical examples of men honoured as gods after death for their achievements, as the king might hope to be. There is, then, no reason to make “Neos Dionysos” definite and precise; it is vague, like most of the terminology applied to deified rulers.’

[63] Tondriau 1952, Hölbl 2001, 94–95 and fig. 3.4 of a horned Ptolemy.

[64] Le Guen, 2016. For Ptolemy I and II see Hölbl 2001, 39, 94–97.

[65] Plut. *Cleom*. 33.2, 34.2. See Hölbl 2001, 70–71.

[66] According to the Etymologicum Magnum (s.v. Gallos).

[67] Clem. Al., *Protr*. 4.54.2.

[68] It was, indeed, the only Ptolemy to have used it in an official coronation, see Hölbl 2001, 222–223.

[69] Dunand, 1979, 88. Hölbl 2001, 289–293. Regarding Augustus and the Roman *Neoi Dionysoi*, see the chapter by Mac Góráin in this book.

[70] Plut. *Ant*. 56.6–10

[71] Lenzen 1960, 5. On Domitian and Hadrian see Poloczek in this volume.

[72] As Antoninus Pius saw, especially from the association of the Augusta to the throne, Ariadne was a good mythical companion for a deified empress, see Levick 2014, 127.

[73] D.C. 77.7.4 and *Hist. Aug*. 17.28.2, see Fuhrer 2011, 388.

[74] For the Christian parallels and the analogy with Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca* and *Paraphrase* see Daszewski 1985, who interprets the mosaic in the henotheistic trends of late antique paganism.

[75] Kessler-Dimini 2008, 271, who defends the political and theological interpretation of Dionysus as God the Son in what she calls a ‘monotheizing trend in Dionysian religion’ (p. 266).

[76] Lentze 1960, 19–20

[77] Hernández de la Fuente 2019.

[78] O’Meara 2003.

[79] Porph. *Plot*. 12.

[80] Wilken 1984, 156–157. See also Goulet 2004, 61–109 and Wlosok 2005, 1–28 who shows that this identification is not convincing. See also Chiaradonna 2014, 39 n. 4.

[81] On the theological and political position of Constantine see Piétri 1996, 193–244.

[82] *Hist. Aug. Aurelian* 25.4–6, 24.2–8. On solar cults in the Empire see Halsberghe 1984.

[83] Hernández de la Fuente 2013a.

[84] Busine 2005, 219.

[85] On the solar theology of Late Antiquity, its Neoplatonic connections (especially in Julian and Jamblichus), and the relation between the Sun and Dionysus, see Fauth 1995, 149–164.

[86] Digeser 1998 and Nance 2002.

[87] Nicholson 1984.

[88] Nicholson 1984, 257–262.

[89] Kousser 2011, 538. For the Ariadne Mosaic, probably in an elitist private palace, see Stefanidou-Tiveriou 2011, 579–583, with an account of other Dionysian art of the Tetrarchic age in Macedonia.

[90] O'Meara 1994.

[91] Plat. *Tht*. 176b.

[92] Lavecchia 2006, 127.

[93] Hernández de la Fuente 2013c.

[94] O'Meara 2003, 96. See *Theol. Plat*. 6.6-8; *In Remp*. II 8.17–21. Proclus presents the universe as the well-governed state (cf. O'Meara 2003, 94–8)

[95] O'Meara, 2003, 92. On the relation with the Platonic cities, see Baltzly, Finamore and Miles 2018, 58 n. 39. For the political roles of Proclian demiurges, and especifically of Dionysus, see Baltzly 2017, 271-272.

[96] Barceló 2013, 39–51, for an account of Constantine ambivalent appropriation of Christ.

[97] Bardill 2013, 338–341.

[98] Bardill 2013, 171.

[99] Barceló 2013, 46–50.

[100] Zos. 3.34; 4.59.

[101] When judging positively Valentinian's religious impartiality. See Amianus Marcellinus 30.9.5.

[102] For the near relation of Constantine and the model of Christ, see Barceló 2013, 66–77. For the influential views of Ambrose and Chrysostom on how the Christian emperor should be, see Gross-Albenhausen 1999, 204–207, with reference to Theodosius.

[103] Just. *1 Apol*. 21.2, 54.6, *Dial*. 69.2; Clem. Al. *Protr*. 2.15. See in general Massa 2014, 189–190. As he points out, the parallel is very remarkable in Justin, for he uses the same vocabulary for the death, resurrection and ascension for both Dionysus and Christ (ἀποθανόντα ἀναστῆναι, εἰς οὐρανόν τε ἀνεληλυθέναι). See also Clem. Al. *Protr*. 17.2, cf. Herrero de Jáuregui 2008, 137–138.

[104] Clem. Al. *Protr*. 12.2, see Herrero de Jáuregui 2008, 130–131. See Doroszewski 2019, 68–70 for the use of *orgia*, normally a pagan term, in 12.119 (τὰ σεμνὰ τοῦ λόγου… ὄργια 'the solemn ὄργια of the Word').

[105] Eus. *P.E.* 4.16–17. See Mariño Sánchez 2014, 326–327. For the use of the mysteries terminology in philosophical and early Christian literature, see Riedweg 1987.

[106] Chrys. PG 48.963, PG 49.82, PG 48.954. See Massa 2014, 195

[107] Doroszewski 2019 studies the semantic shift in the use of pagan terminology in this age.

[108] Massa 2014, 195–199.

[109] Antoninus (Eun. *VS* 470–472) and Olympus (see Suda s.v.) were probably two of them.

[110] Sorabji 1990. See Watts 2006 for a scholarly panorama of both cities in the crucial 5th century (Athens pp. 79–110 and Alexandria 204–231). For the agreement between Ammonius and the patriarch, Watts 2006, 222–225.

[111] Watts 2006, 259

[112] Malalas *Chr.* 18.47. See also Watts 2005.

[113] Agath. 2.30.3–31.4. Watts 2005. 286.

[114] See Tardieu 1990 and, *contra*, Watts 2005, 291-292; 314-315.

[115] See Wildberg 2018.

[116] Hernández de la Fuente 2013b, 8–17.

[117] Olymp. *In Phd.* 1.5

[118] E.g. August. *Ep*. 17.4, Thdt. H.E. 5.21.4.

[119] Hamdorf 1986, 39; Massa 2014, 66–67.

[120] Siniossoglou 2011, 49.

[121] Psell. *Graec. opin*. 3.65–68, p. 101 Gautier, see Buzzetta and Napoli 2015, 176.

[122] Siniossoglou 2011, 285–287.

[123] Watts 2005, 304.

[124] See Siniossoglou 2011, 71–85 (Psellos), 141–148 (accusations against Pletho).