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**Archeboule's *Epistomion* from Amphipolis**

DOI 10.1515/tc-2016-0004

**Abstract:** Publication of Archeboule's gold *epistomion* from Amphipolis, inscribed with a text dated to ca 300 BCE, in which Dionysus Bachchios is mentioned and purity is stressed.

**Keywords:** Archeboule, Antidoros, Dionysus, Bachchios, purity

Over the four years from 1999 to 2002, widening works on the main Amphipolis-Drama road led the Serres Ephorate of Antiquities (former 18th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities in Kavala) to carry out rescue excavations in the Eastern Cemetery at Amphipolis.<sup>1</sup> On the basis of the data thus far, the graves unearthed date from between the second half of the 5th century BCE and late imperial times. In total, approximately 800 graves of various types came to light on either side of the road.<sup>2</sup> These belonged to an extensive graveyard and represent all social classes, offering a window on the city's long life and shedding light on significant aspects of its development.

**Context and Chronology.** The incised gold *epistomion* was found during the 2001 excavation season, in Section H of the Eastern Cemetery, east of the existing road and north-west of large Macedonian grave B. Eighty-two (82) graves were unearthed and investigated in Section H (fig. 1), of which 47 were pit-graves, 11 cremations in pit-graves, 6 cist burials, 6 tiled graves, 2 tiled hut-graves, 3 cremations in tiled graves, 3 limestone sarcophagi, 2 jar-burials and 2 cremation urns. The unearthed graves were relatively close together, while abutting them to the north were the four-sided foundations of a stone platform measuring 3.30 × 2.90 m., probably used for rituals and offerings to the dead. A second smaller devotional

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1 We are indebted to the editors of *Trends in Classics*, Franco Montanari and Antonios Rengakos, and to the anonymous readers for their constructive suggestions and improvements.

2 For more information on the eastern cemetery see: Nikolaïdou-Patera 1992; Malama 2000, 2001, 2007a, 2007b, 2015; Malama/Triantaphyllou 2000; Malama/Gardeisen 2005.

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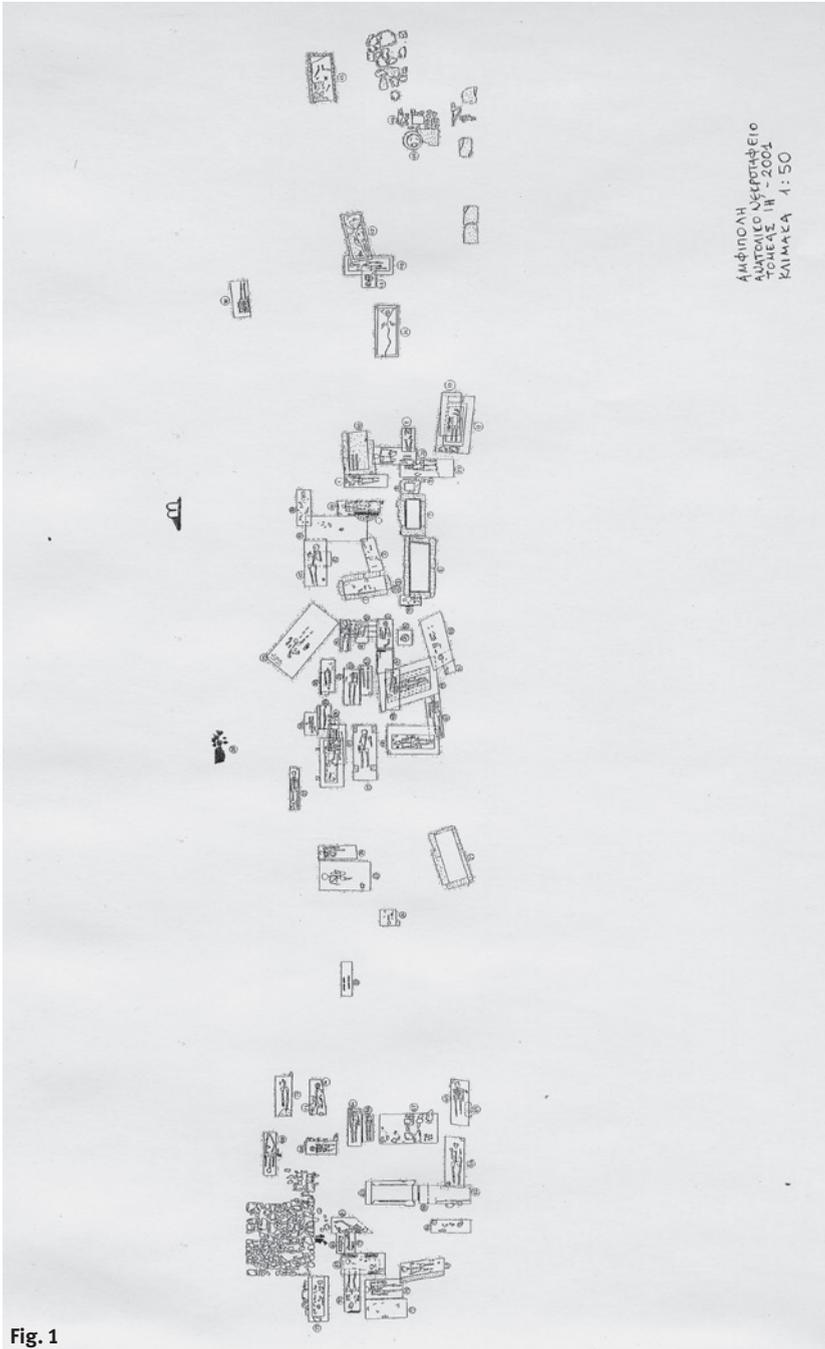


Fig. 1

platform was unearthed in the part of Section H further south, as was part of a limestone block retaining wall that ran north-south to a total length of 5.70 m. In places this was destroyed down to its foundations, but formed a kind of boundary wall for Graves 44 and 45 (fig. 2). To the north-west of the limestone sarcophagus in Grave 45 where the incised gold lamella was found, a cylindrical limestone case came to light (Grave 44). This contained a late 5th century BCE bronze cremation urn with a relief decoration of a siren at the base of its vertical handle, and a gold-plated bronze wreath of berries and ivy leaves around the neck. The offerings in nearby Graves 45 and 44 are clearly Dionysiac in character; the deceased may have belonged to a group of Bacchic followers who held such beliefs.

Grave 45, oriented north-south and measuring 2.15 m. × 1.08 m., had three limestone covering slabs, with a pediment on the southernmost one. The middle slab was found broken in the middle, allowing earth and pieces of modern wood to enter through the gap (fig. 3). The main grave is a sarcophagus carved from a single block of limestone with a well-shaped floor (fig. 4). The north side of the grave was found destroyed, with the bones of a female skeleton mixed at the north end. The grave offerings probably escaped spoliation and were found where the left arm would have been (fig. 5). They included a solid gold band (MA 7574, figs. 6a–b), together with a cast gold ring (MA 7575, fig. 7a–c) consisting of a convex band and an undecorated oval bezel.<sup>3</sup> The Charon's obol found in the cranium was a small silver coin (MA 7576, fig. 8a–b) featuring a male head in left profile on the obverse and a thunderbolt on the reverse. This remains unidentified, but on the basis of its features is probably Macedonian, dating to the second half of the 4th century BCE.

**Inscription** (MA 7573, fig. 9). The incised gold lamella, folded thrice horizontally and once vertically, was located on the deceased's breast. It is preserved in excellent condition.

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<sup>3</sup> This type of ring with undecorated oval bezel appeared in the second half of the 4th century BCE, spread in the 3rd, but did not survive in the 2nd century BCE. A similar ring (unpublished) was unearthed in Grave 302 of Section E in the East Cemetery (the grave goods of this grave, – a bronze coin of Philip II, black-glazed small skyphoi with impressed decoration, black-glazed type A skyphos – are dated in the second half of the 4th century BCE). For this type of ring see: Boardman 1970, 213–214, type IX; similar rings were found in graves from Derveni, for which see: Themelis/Touratsoglou 1997, 90 no. B134 (unincised), pl. 102 no. B134, and 128 no. Z9 (gold ring incised), pl. 27 no. Z9 (photos also in Despoini 1996, 45; and Tsigarida 1997, 136, fig. 133).

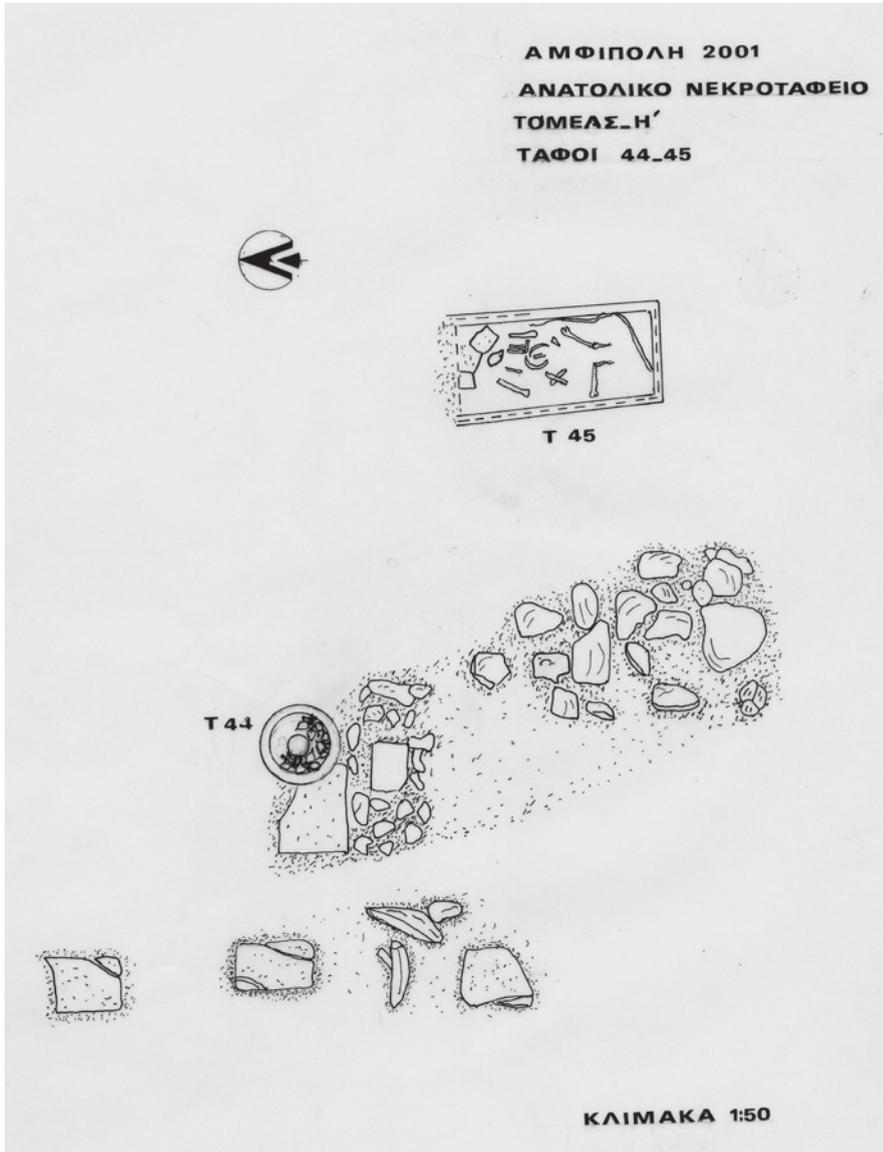


Fig. 2



Fig. 3

**Bibliography:** Malama 2000, 55–70; Malama 2001, 117–118 (preliminary ed.); EBGR 2001.118; SEG 51.788; BE 2003.378; Bernabé 2005, fr. 496n; Graf/Johnston 2013, 40–41 no. 30; Tzifopoulos 2010, 270–271 no. D4; Edmonds 2011, 38 no. D4.

Dimensions: H. 0.035 m. (left)-0,036 m. (right), W. 0.057 m., Th. 0.0007 m., Weight 0.1062 gr., LH. 0.0014 m. (O), 0.0035 m. (A), 0.0046 m. (P), 0.006 m. (Y), interlinear space 0.002–0.0037 m. (from left to right).

ca 300 BCE

εὐαγής, ἱερὰ Διονύ-  
σου Βαχχίου εἰμι  
3 Ἀρχεβούλη  
Ἄντιδώρου.

Pure (unstained), holy of (belonging to) Dionysos Bachchios, I am Archeboule of Antidoros.

The lettering is characteristic of the fourth or third century BCE. The letters, some of which are elegant, are carefully incised and lean to the right; the engraver aligns the text to the left and respects word divisions. All the strokes are curving and do not always cross over. Characteristic letter shapes include the following: the alpha with a small horizontal crossbar or a crossbar leaning in either direc-



Fig. 4

tion and the slanting strokes sometimes overextended; the beta with a larger upper half and the vertical extended on the bottom; the gamma with a vertical overextended on top; two deltas, one narrow and the other wide; the epsilon with a vertical overextended on top and a very small middle horizontal; the eta wide and symmetrical; the lambda with the slanting strokes overextended to the left or the right; the mu and nu wide and asymmetrical; the omicron very small and incised on top of the letter space as if 'hanging'; the rho with an overextended curving vertical and a small circle; the two sigmas, one lunate (C) and the other almost angular (<); the upsilon with two or three strokes and the curving vertical overextended; and the omega closed with very small horizontals.

**Commentary.** It is not certain if the text's punctuation is the correct one. Perhaps the two initial epithets – or if not both, then at least the first – should be taken as exclamatory tokens of the deceased, i.e.: “I am unstained!”, according to the scenario proposed by Ch. Riedweg (2011). Neither epithet, however, seems to belong exclusively to the category of catchwords, like the usual identity formulae in certain texts or the strange words in others (Tzifopoulos 2010, 255–276 Groups A–F), since they are also employed in funerary epigrams. The syntax intended by the placement of the verb is that “Archeboule (daughter/wife) of Antidoros is a follower of (belongs to) Dionysus Bachchios”.

Of the personal names, Antidoros, the father or husband of Archeboule, is common throughout the Greek world, unlike its feminine form (LGPN, s.v.). The name Archeboule is rare and, according to one anonymous reader, “seems a very upper class name, which fits into the sociology of other users of gold tablets.” It occurs only once more, in a funerary marble stele from Oropos dated to the 3rd century BCE (I. Oropos 558); in Oropos the name Antidoros, patronym of the proxenos Sokrates (probably an Athenian), is also attested (I. Oropos 105). Exactly why personal names were employed on the gold *epistomia* from Macedonia and the NW Peloponnese remains a mystery. These initiates seem to follow a different set of specifications for incision on the gold *epistomia*, as they incise a very short text (mostly only their name) to declare their initiation into the Bacchic-Orphic ritual.

Undoubtedly the most significant contribution of the text is the name and title of the god, Dionysus Bachchios (Bacchios also elsewhere),<sup>4</sup> none other than the son of Zeus and Persephone.<sup>5</sup> This epithet of Dionysus, without the name,

4 Threatte (1980, 541–543) offers examples of the geminated aspirate stops -κχ- or -χχ-, which seem to be variant spellings of uncertain phonetic value.

5 For detailed discussions of these Bacchic-Orphic texts with extensive bibliography see: Chrys-

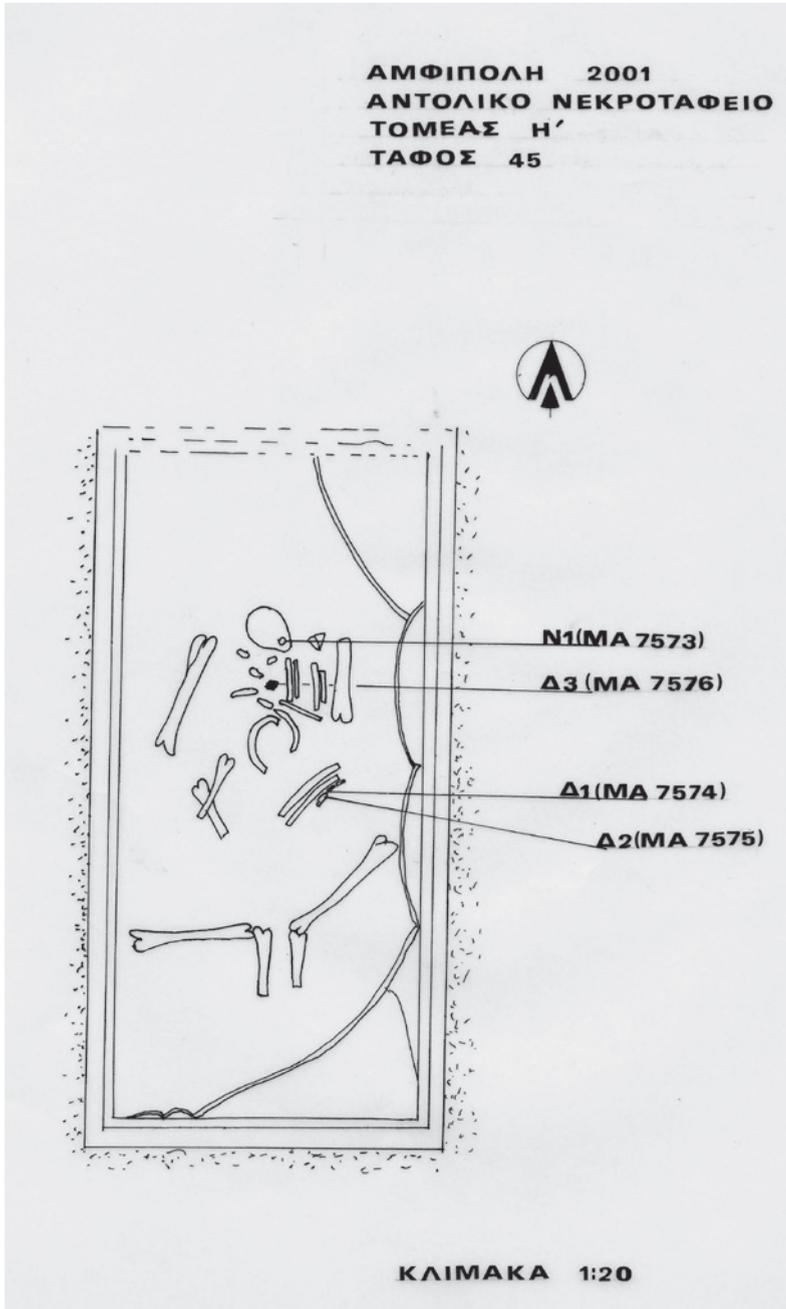


Fig. 5



Fig. 6a



Fig. 6b

was hitherto attested only in the text from Pelinna in Thessaly, where Dionysus appears to be the intermediary between the initiate and Persephone.<sup>6</sup> As the Amphipolis text suggests, this role of Dionysus Bacchios was not exceptional, but thought of as integral for at least some Bacchic-Orphic initiates.

The appearance of Dionysus Bacchios in Thessaly and Macedonia does not seem to be a coincidence, as these two areas share similarities, especially after the reign of Philip II, not only on account of their geographical affinity but also in terms of the Bacchic-Orphic mysteries.<sup>7</sup> Amphipolis was the most important city and harbor in the eastern part of the Macedonian kingdom, and scattered pieces of information attest to the presence of Dionysus from early on.

According to mythology, Mount Pangaeon was closely associated with Dionysus in particular, though also with Orpheus who was torn to pieces by maenads for scorning the Dionysiac mysteries. Furthermore, the myth of Lycurgus, king of

ostomou 1998; Bernabé/Jimenez San Cristóbal 2008; Graf/Johnston 2013; Tzifopoulos 2010; and the contributions in Edmonds 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Tsantsanoglou/Parássoglou 1987; Graf 1991 and 1993. For the meaning of this epithet, which does not necessarily imply the Bacchic-Orphic mysteries, see Graf 1985, 285–291, and especially Santamaría 2013.

<sup>7</sup> For the corpus of Bacchic-Orphic texts from Macedonia see Tzifopoulos 2012 and Tzifopoulos 2010–2013.



Fig. 7a



Fig. 7b



Fig. 8a



Fig. 8b



Fig. 9

the Edoni, is linked to Dionysiac worship and viniculture on Mount Pangaeon. The underground caves of the “silver mountain” were inhabited by the mythical king Rhesus, son of Strymon (or Eioneus) and one of the Muses (either Euterpe or Kalliope or Terpsichore), heroized after his death at Troy as a chthonic “anthropodaemon” and “prophet of Bacchus” (Eur. *Rhesus* 970–973). Herodotus (7.110–113) relates that the main part of the mountain was inhabited by the Satrae, owners of the one and only oracle of Dionysus in the Greek world, where the Bessi were priests.<sup>8</sup>

Archaeological research at Amphipolis and its wider environs as well as chance finds confirm the presence of Dionysus, though not necessarily Dionysus Bacchios. Together with masks and figurines of actors, pots from graves in the Amphipolis cemeteries bearing depictions of Dionysus or the cycle dedicated to him constitute strong evidence of Dionysiac worship and the existence of a

<sup>8</sup> Perdrietz 1910, 37–39; and Tzifopoulos 2010, 226–229. For Rhesus and Amphipolis see Mari 2014 with extensive bibliography.

theatre. No sanctuary to Dionysus has yet been positively identified in Amphipolis, but in 1989 a tripartite building oriented east-west was unearthed in the vicinity of the ancient gymnasium, north of the *xystos*.<sup>9</sup> On the basis of stratigraphy and masonry, the earliest phase must derive from the first half of the 4th century BCE. Research in the interior of the building yielded potsherds and figurines pointing to the Dionysiac cycle, while many lamps and lamp stands were found between the building itself and the *xystos*. This building with its *peribolos*, the deposit-pits and the fragmentary yet important finds may belong to the storage areas of a sanctuary probably associated with the worship of Dionysus. Besides, the building cannot be situated at random. Geomorphological indicators northwest of the Gymnasium, at the site known locally as Skalakia, confirm what the late Dimitris Lazaridis, excavator of Amphipolis, believed: that this was where the city's theatre lay, next to the point where the important building was unearthed.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the proximity of the Theatre to the Gymnasium must have had a particular role to play in the education of youths in Amphipolis, as is further testified by the relevant chapter in the Ephebic Law found in the Palaestra.

Finds from other sites are similar. A monumental red-figured Attic krater from the sanctuary of Parthenos near Kavala (now in the Kavala Museum),<sup>11</sup> attributed to the Louvre Painter (G.433) and dating to the late 5th century BCE, has a depiction of a Dionysiac troupe on its neck: maenads are dancing on tiptoe, clad in transparent garments that show their beautiful naked bodies, and silenoi (satyrs) are dancing ecstatically, holding thyrsi, swords, panther skins, snakes and young lambs, while the natural mountain landscape is indicated by means of bushes between the ritual dancers. There is also a similar number of pots with Dionysiac troupe scenes on display in the Museums at Kavala and Amphipolis, deriving from the necropolises in ancient Galepsos and Oisyme, in the vicinity of Mount Pangaeon.

A banded gold diadem from a grave in Amphipolis dating to the late 4th century BCE shows the way in which maenads and dancers carry out ecstatic dance figures, holding thyrsi, bunches of grapes, rattles and drums, accompanied by satyrs holding flutes.<sup>12</sup> The depiction of lamp stands and the movement of some dancers with arms outstretched, raised above the head, confirms the claims

<sup>9</sup> For this new building in the vicinity of Amphipolis' Gymnasium see Lazaridi 1989a and 1989b.

<sup>10</sup> For Amphipolis' Theatre see Lazaridis 1969, 550.

<sup>11</sup> Museum of Kavala inv. no. A663; Lazaridis 1969, 103, fig. 35a and b; Koukouli-Chryssanthaki 2002, 49, fig. 56; Touratsoglou 1998, 365, fig. 467.

<sup>12</sup> The banded gold diadem (MA 2909) was found in Grave 2 (August 27, 1993) at the site Kastri; for more information see Nikolaïdou-Patera 1993, 480; Andrikou/Goulaki-Voutira/Papadopoulou 2003, 274–275, fig. 145.

in written sources that ceremonies involving ecstatic dances were held at night. Similar ceremonial scenes are depicted on the pillars of the Kasta tomb in Amphipolis.<sup>13</sup>

Similar evidence indicating the marked presence of Dionysiac worship has been located in the wider area around Mount Pangaeon, since Dionysus was one of the most important local divinities. In the ancient city of Drama there was a major sanctuary dedicated to Dionysus,<sup>14</sup> where marble busts and votive monuments dedicated to the god mark out how the ancient settlement of Drama evolved from the late 4th century BCE to Roman times. Inscriptions from this sanctuary and others found in the city from time to time reveal that the local Thracian population intermingled with its Greek counterpart early on. Ritual vessels and various small finds relating to Dionysiac worship were found in the building at Kali Vrysi, a few kilometres from Drama, which dates to the early 3rd century BCE.<sup>15</sup> The god's continuing presence in Roman times is confirmed by a bust of Dionysus as a smooth-skinned youth from the rock sanctuaries at Philippi, where devotional niches are also to be seen.<sup>16</sup> Dionysus was worshipped as Liber Pater in the sanctuary of Silvanus and in the House of wild animals at Philippi,<sup>17</sup> while dedicatory monuments and architectural members bearing scenes from the Dionysiac cycle were unearthed during recent excavations at the ancient theatre in Philippi.<sup>18</sup>

Though not necessarily directly associated with Dionysus Bacchios, the above finds from Amphipolis and its environs do testify to the presence of Dionysus, the god of many faces, from the 4th century BCE to late antiquity. The god's multi-dimensional nature – with Greek and subsequently Roman attributes, and with his interest in the life of his devotees both while alive on the earth and after death in the Underworld – is graphically illustrated in a Latin epitaph on a child's grave from Doxato near Drama, in the general vicinity of Philippi, dating to the 3rd century CE. It consists of two strophes in elegiac couplets: in the first

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**13** Public lecture delivered by the excavator Katerina Peristeri at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, on September 30th, 2015.

**14** For Dionysus' temple in Drama see Koukouli-Chryssanthaki 1992, 74–86; Trakosopoulou-Salakidou 1998, 169–182.

**15** For the building in Kali Vrysi see Peristeri 1998, 161–166.

**16** For these rock sanctuaries see Collart 1937, 421; and Koukouli-Chryssanthaki/Bakirtzis 1995, 25.

**17** For Silvanus' sanctuary see Collart 1937, 421–422; and Koukouli-Chryssanthaki/Bakirtzis 1995, 26–28.

**18** For the recent excavations in the theatre and the sanctuary of Dionysus see Koukouli-Chryssanthaki/Karadedos 1999, 76–78 and 2001, 106.

(lines 1–11) the parent describes the child's life and endearing qualities, while the second (lines 12–22 which begins with a pentameter) refers to the deceased child's status after death as a Satyr in the Elysian Fields (CIL III.686 = I. Philippi II.439 = Bernabé 2004, 61F):<sup>19</sup>

si dolor in[*f*]rac[*t*u]m potuit conve[*ll*]ere [*p*]ectus,  
     [*H*]ercu[*le*]um cur me flere tamen pigeat?  
 nam velut Aeacid[*a*]e laudavit corpus A[*ch*ill]is,  
     clarus Homerus, item non tua laus similis.  
 5 te sortita Paphon pulc[*h*]ro minus ore notabat,  
     diva set in toto cor[*d*]e plicata inerat.  
 sobria quippe tua pollebat pectore virtus,  
     non aetate minor n[*e*]c minor inde loco.  
 nec mihi per validos rapio te morte dolores,  
 10 quamvis aequanimo dat puer ut lacrimem.  
     [– – –]uciamur volnere victi.  
     et reperatus item vivis in Elysiis.  
 sic placitum est divis a[*l*]terna (*vel* a[*e*]terna) vivere forma,  
     qui bene de supero [l]umine sit meritus.  
 15 quae tibi castifico promisit munera cursu,  
     olim iussa deo simplicitas facilis.  
 nunc seu te Bromio signatae Mystidis AISE(?)  
     florigero in prato congreg[at] in satyrum,  
 sive canistriferae possunt sibi Naidis a[*e*]qu[um],  
 20 qui ducibus taedis agmina festa trahas.  
 sis quo[*d*]cunque, puer, quo te tua protulit aetas,  
     dummodo [– –].

If pain could break down and tear the heart (OR could tear the unbreakable heart) of Hercules, why should I despite all be reluctant to weep? For your praise is not the same as that which glorious Homer bestowed on the physique of Achilles, descendant of Aeacus. The goddess who has taken over Paphos did not mark you out with a handsome face, but was entwined throughout your whole disposition. For temperate goodness reigned in your breast, greater than your age and than your station too. Now that you have been taken from me by an agonizing death she allows me, calm though I am, to weep ... beaten down by the wound I am tortured ...

And you, resurrected, are alive in Elysium. This is the decree of the gods, that he who has served the divine will should live with everlasting beauty; these are the gifts, long ago ordained by the gods, which your obliging frankness promised to you because of your pure way of life. Whether in the flowery meadow, among the assembly of the Satyrs (OR among the assembly as a Satyr), the initiates marked by Bacchus with ...? demand you for them-

<sup>19</sup> *Non vidimus*, but see Perdrizet 1910, 95–97, and Papanikolaou 1998, 204–206.

selves, or the basket-bearing Naiads equally demand you to lead their festal ranks with torches preceding, be now anything to which your age has brought you, provided that ...

(trans. Courtney 1995, 174–175 no. 184 modified)

The text and its interpretation appear to present a rather clear overall picture, but the second strophe is not without difficulties: in a field full of flowers the dead youth is imagined reborn and living in Elysium, perhaps as a Satyr or as a Maenad, surrounded by welcoming Satyrs and Maenads, or as a companion of the Naïdes, because he has the “sign” of Bromius.<sup>20</sup>

Whatever the interpretation of this epigram, initiation into the mysteries of Dionysus even in Late Antiquity, in the environs of Philippi, continues to promise the initiates that life of another kind awaits them in Elysium: if not that of a Bacchus as in earlier texts on *epistomia*, at least that of a satyr, a maenad, or as a companion of the Naïdes. But making that world materialize depends on a pure and unstained life on earth,<sup>21</sup> a *curtus castificus*, not unlike Archeboule's εὐαγής life.

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<sup>20</sup> It is not certain if the expression in line 17 implies tattooing, for which see Schäfer 1991 and especially Renaut 2006, 233–238 with previous bibliography.

<sup>21</sup> Graf/Johnston 2013, especially 121–123; and Chaniotis 2012.

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