

locorum. In the Introduction, the editor passes the following judgment: “In my view, the value of any companion, including this one, lies in its capacity not only to collect and synthesize existing scholarship but also to open new avenues of research and to show what remains to be done in a field of study” (p. IX). As a reader, I can agree with this judgment in general and in this particular case.

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FRANCESCO MASSA: *Tra la vigna e la croce. Dioniso nei discorsi letterari e figurativi cristiani (II–IV secolo)*. Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 47. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2014. ISBN 978-3-515-10631-3. 325 pp. EUR 62.

This monograph by the Italian scholar Francesco Massa (henceforth F.M.) represents the result of his PhD thesis, discussed at the École Pratique des Hautes Études de Paris and at the Fondazione San Carlo di Modena. The focus is on the Greek god Dionysus – not merely the deity related to vines and wine, but above all the deity of cosmic dynamism – and his variegated connections to Jesus Christ. The similarities between Dionysus and Christ have been pointed out by Christian and Pagan writers from the first centuries onward: they were both born from a supreme god and were bearers of crucial innovations in life and in religion. They were also both killed violently and were then reborn and raised to heaven. Dionysus was, moreover, also – so to speak – *unus et trinus*, if we think of Nonnus of Panopolis’ *Dionysiaca*, in which Zagreus, Dionysus and Iacchus/Bacchus appear. The latter, from which derives the verb *bakkhéuo*, is often related to Maenadism and its rituals, as for example E.R. Dodds, HThR 33.3 (1940), 155–176 notes. There are also similarities with other ancient gods or heroes, such as Asclepius and Herakles. F.M. retraces the information not only at the level of literary sources, but also at the level of figurative representations, offering a complete sketch of the issues. His field of investigation is limited to the period from the II to the IV century AD, but he often wanders with ease among other historical periods, taking the reader on a journey of cultural mediation.

In taking a general look at the work’s structure, we will for practical reasons follow its order. I agree with what Nicole Belayche points out in the preface (pp. 5–7) that the great merit of the author is the attention he gives to a very variegated problem without using outdated functional oppositions, such as the dichotomy between Paganism and Christianity. Instead he chooses a new path for research based on the communication channels between these two subjects. Their great similarity – we no doubt anticipate this – is wine (along with its uses and values), while the two crucial matters of the study are the contacts between these two possibly competing cults and their definitions of

identity. Wine, indeed, was a very important element not only in daily life, but also at the level of cultural representations (being set in opposition to other substances, like milk and honey). Especially in Roman society, there were strict laws that controlled its consumption (for instance by women, see M. Bettini, *Affari di famiglia*, Bologna 2009, Ch. 9).

The purposes of the book are defined by F.M. in the Introduction (pp. 15–46): his aim is to illustrate the dynamics and the reasons for literary and iconographic representations of Dionysus in Christian production from the II to the IV century AD. The task is accomplished in two steps: the first clarifies the “value” of religion in the ancient Greek world, while the second is a historiography of the researches from the end of the nineteenth century up to our times. In such a way, we can draw a mental map of the *status quaestionis* directly from the opinions (often these are real ideologies) of many scholars. It is significant that F.M. has decided to begin in this way, because he accurately gives his interpretation of ancient religion as related to a specific *ethnos*, as did Belayche before him, and we can see it from the words of the first Christian authors, who considered their religion as the “third pole” between Paganism (the *Gentiles*) and Hebraism. Among the many positions explored by F.M. those worth mentioning are Burkert’s (the expression “Mystery religions” is not satisfactory though, because the rites of Demeter and Dionysus were well known to everybody), Loisy’s, Lagrange’s and Jeanmaire’s, without forgetting the contributions of the Italian scholar Macchioro, who pointed out the affinities between Zagreus (the Orphic Dionysus) and Christ.

In the first chapter (*Quale Dioniso per i cristiani?*, pp. 47–80), F.M. explores the many nuances of Dionysus, starting with the definitions given by Diodorus Siculus and Cicero, and then indicating the peculiarities of the myths about him. The author, it seems, could have added the passage of Plutarch (from *The E of Delphi*, 388 E–F) about the transformative power of this god. In the second part, F.M. discusses the meaning of words like *sparagmós*, *omophagía*, *mystérion* and *teleté*, which were essential in the reciprocal accusations between Pagans and Christians. Christians, for example, were accused of being eaters of their own god (*theophagía* and *omophagía*). The focus on Orphism and on the rites related to Dionysus until the Byzantine age (for instance the Brumalia) emerges as the most interesting topic. The chapter offers a complete section about the tragedy *Bacchae* and its influence both on Dionysian and Christian imagery: the anonymous tragedy *Christus patiens* – to which the last chapter is devoted – is very close to the Euripidean work in many ways and F.M. offers an updated *status quaestionis*.

We see in the second chapter (*Tra Dioniso e Cristo. Analogie riconosciute, analogie negate*, pp. 81–120) how quickly the new religion took its first steps in a *koiné* not only of rites and ceremonies, but also of expressions and visual representations. The similarities I have already highlighted were immediately adopted to contrast the new religious phenomenon or to defend it, in a tight polemic of accusations. The attention is focused on Justin (who spoke of *imitatio diabolica* to explain the

resemblances between Paganism and Christianity), Clement of Alexandria (who stressed the inferiority of pagan thinking in the search for God), and Firmicus Maternus. The latter, who lived in the fourth century AD, still adopts the strategy of *imitatio diabolica*, associating Dionysus and Evil with the image of the snake; we can see that at this chronological period the purpose was increasingly to weed out to its very roots the remaining traces of Paganism. This is particularly interesting, because traditional religion was resistant. In this sense, we could also include the example of Emperor Julian (361–363 AD), who met a Christian priest from Troy who still honoured the statue of Hector. The fascinating relations between ancient heroes and Christian saints have been studied in Italy by G. Guidorizzi and M. Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri in *Corpi gloriosi. Eroi greci e santi cristiani* (Roma – Bari 2012).

In the third chapter (*Dioniso e la costruzione del linguaggio letterario e iconografico cristiano*, pp. 121–155), the terminology referring to groups and ritual associations, such as *thíasos*, is analysed on the basis of its use by ancient authors. The strategy adopted by these writers (those already mentioned, but also Origen and John Chrysostom) was to re-semanticize words and expressions in order to give them new meanings, often close to the original ones, and to build their own identity in contrast with their “enemies”.

The fourth and fifth chapters (*Interpretazioni cristiane (I): da Alessandria ad Antiochia*, pp. 157–201, and *Interpretazioni cristiane (II): divinità tra le vigne e infanzie divine*, pp. 203–261) are devoted to the iconography and motifs visible both in Pagan and Christian supports, like frescoes and mosaics (especially those of Syria and Egypt), daily objects and, above all, on the sarcophagi. The wine and the grapes, with their meaningful value, are quite often at the centre of the representations. The sarcophagi were usually decorated with putti picking grapes or with Dionysus in triumph among the wild beasts (like Orpheus). Even the porphyry sarcophagus of Constantina, the daughter of Constantin I, is adorned with the motifs of harvesting putti. The same motif, along with maenads and griffins, is on another sarcophagus – not mentioned by F.M., but still interesting – the one of the Lombard Duke Faroald I of Spoleto (sixth century AD).

The volume is accompanied by many citations, most of them carefully translated by the author; the bibliography is wide and updated, while the images are only in black and white. I found some minimal (and negligible) mistakes, e.g. one typing error on p. 17, footn. 11 («era è molto ampio») and a wrong quotation from the *Acts of the Apostles* (XXVI: 28, not 21) on the same page. In my experience, only a few books on such a vast subject manage to be so complete and clear. The work of F.M. is destined to remain unsurpassed for a long time to come.

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