

Simillimi feminis mares. The problems of men's affiliation to Dionysos in Rome.

In the last few decades, the long-standing assumption that the worship of Dionysos and participation in his cult were exclusively female matters has started to crumble. Building on the groundbreaking work of scholars such as Cornelia Isler-Kerenyi, Anne-Françoise Jaccottet, Bartłomiej Bednarek and Scott Scullion, this paper aims to explore the implications of men's devotion to Dionysos (or Bacchus or Liber) in Roman society. Given the demonstrated involvement of men in Dionysian activities in both literary and material sources, this study will show that male affiliation with the "female-like" (*thelumorphos*) god often serves as a paradigm for different forms of masculinity.

The paper will discuss representative examples of men associated with Dionysos' cult or figure in Roman society, drawing on both material and literary evidence. On the one hand, it will analyse the Bacchanalia scandal recounted by Livy (*AUB* 39, 8-19) and the inscription from Tiriolo (CIL I2, 581). This episode is crucial for understanding how problematic Dionysian affiliation could be for Roman men, to the extent that it could serve as a weapon for political denigration. This is evident in the cases of Verres, Mithridates, Catilina, and Marcus Antonius – to mention the targets of Cicero's attacks only. The highest danger lay in being associated with the gender-liminal aspects of Dionysos and becoming "men very like the women".

On the other hand, the paper will discuss how the god's disruptive power was often linked to military prowess and imperial authority too. Conquering leaders, such as Gaius Marius, Pompeius Magnus, and even Augustus and later emperors, like Septimius Severus, are often associated to Semele's son, especially in his representations as triumphant conqueror.

How can these seemingly contradictory approaches coexist? Is it plausible to assume a rehabilitation of Dionysos' image under Augustus' reign, as argued by Stéphanie Wyler? Alternatively, could there be two distinct cultic paths—one more obscure and threatening to the masculinity of male affiliates, and the other more acceptable and approved by political authority? These questions form the crux of the inquiry in this paper.