

MAENADISM

(based especially on Henrichs 1978)

1. Magnesia ad Maeandrum (*IMagn* 215)

Roman copy of a Hellenistic inscription; its authenticity is defended by Henrichs 1978

The cult of Dionysus at Magnesia (celebrated by men and women) is well attested from the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. The preface to this local chronicle account, which dates to ca. 200 B.C., says that the Delphic oracle was consulted because the Magnesians found an image of Dionysus in a plane tree κατά την πόλιν, which a storm had left cloven.

The Delphic oracle is reported:

ἐλθέτε δὲ ἐς Θήβης ἱερὸν πέδον, ὄφρα λάβητε
μαινάδας, αἱ γενεῆς Εἰνοῦς ἄπο Καδμηείης·
αἱ δ' ὑμῖν δώσουσι καὶ ὄργια καὶ νόμιμα ἐσθλὰ
καὶ θιάσους Βάκχοιο καθειδρύσουσιν ἐν ἄστει.

and this prose postscript is added:

κατὰ τὸν χρησμὸν διὰ τῶν θεοπρόπων¹ ἐδόθησαν ἐκ Θηβῶν Μαινάδες τρεῖς Κοσκῶ Βαυβῶ
Θετταλή, καὶ ἡ μὲν Κοσκῶ συνήγαγεν θίασον τὸν Πλατανιστηνῶν,² ἡ δὲ Βαυβῶ τὸν πρὸ
πόλεως, ἡ δὲ Θετταλή τὸν τῶν Καταιβατῶν³ θανοῦσαι δὲ αὗται ἐτάφησαν ὑπὸ Μαγνήτων, καὶ
ἡ μὲν Κοσκῶ κεῖται ἐν Κοσκωβούνω,⁴ ἡ δὲ Βαυβῶ ἐν Ταβάρνει, ἡ δὲ Θετταλή πρὸς τῷ θεάτρῳ.

¹ θεοπρόπος ον, *prophetic; public messenger sent to inquire of an oracle*, Ion. for θεωρός

² Henrichs 1978, p. 132: “The grove of plane trees from which the second thiasus of Πλατανιστηνοί or Πλατανιστηναί derived its name had been the scene of a miraculous epiphany of Dionysus Dendrites” (see P. Wendland and O. Kern, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie und Religion*, Berlin, 1895, p. 92 [available from Vassar: B689.Z7 W4]).

³ καταί-βάτης ου ό, a name of Zeus as *descending in thunder and lightning*; of Hermes, *who led souls down to the nether world*; of Ἀχέρων, *that to which one descends, downward* (E. Ba. 1360); καταίβάται, οί, members of a thiasos of worshipers of Dionysus (*Inscr. Magn.* 215a36)

⁴ βουνός ου ό, *hill, mound*

2. Late 3rd or 2nd c. epitaph of a maenad, Miletus (Th. Wiegand, *Sitzb. Berl. Akad.* 1905, 547)

τὴν ὄσιν χαίρειμ πολιήτιδες εἶπατε βάκχαι
ἱρείην· χρηστῇ τοῦτο γυναικὶ θέμις.
ὕμᾱς κεῖς ὄρος ἦγε καὶ ὄργια πάντα καὶ ἱρὰ
ἦνικεμ πάσης ἐρχομένη πρὸ πόλεως.
τοῦνομα δ' εἴ τις ξεῖνος ἀνείρεται· Ἀλκμειωνὶς
ἡ Ῥοδίου, καλῶμ μοῖραν ἐπισταμένη.

Cf. the remarks of Henrichs 1978, pp. 149f., concerning an earlier Milesian inscription:

Like the maenads of Magnesia, Alkemonis was involved in religious rites which were both maenadic and nonmaenadic. She was an official priestess in the public cult of Dionysus throughout the year, and organized a troop of maenads every other year. An earlier Milesian inscription of 276/75 B.C. confirms these conclusions and provides further valuable detail.⁹⁰ The text is a contract for the sale of the priesthood of Dionysos Bakchios designed to guarantee the privileges of the purchaser, who was a woman. Her duties were similar to those of Alkmeonis. She presided over a public thiasus of women which is carefully distinguished from other private thiasi. The detailed regulations of the contract suggest that private thiasi of maenads must have been numerous in and around Miletus, and that they existed long before the public thiasus was established. Every woman could form her own thiasus and enroll other women in it, provided she paid the official priestess a prescribed fee every other year (*κατ' ἐκάστην τριετηρίδα*). The biennial periodicity of admission shows that the thiasi were maenadic. Women who wished to be admitted into such a thiasus had to undergo certain initiation rites which are not described; the technical terms *τελεῖν* and *τέλεστρον* indicate that some sort of initiation was required.

Another reference to maenadism occurs in the first extant entry of the contract: "Whenever the priestess performs the rites of sacrifice (*τὰ ἱερά*) on behalf of the whole city, nobody must *ὠμοφάγιον ἐμβαλεῖν* before the priestess has done so on behalf of the city." This sentence is of capital importance for our knowledge of Greek maenadism in the Hellenistic period. But its meaning is obscured by the puzzling phrase *ὠμοφάγιον ἐμβαλεῖν* which has eluded explanation. The word *ὠμοφάγιον*, which is not attested elsewhere, recalls the *ὠμοφαγία* (Plutarch's term), or Dionysiac diet of raw flesh, first mentioned in the *parodos* of the *Bacchae* (138f): *ἀγρεύων αἶμα τραγοκτόνον, ὠμοφάγον χάριν*, sings the chorus in lines which describe Dionysus as a wild hunter. Scholars tend to forget, or deny, that it is Dionysus, and not the maenads, who takes pleasure in this bloody diet. The Dionysus who hunts, kills, and devours his victims raw is the same Dionysus whom Alcaeus knew as Raw-Eater and who seems to underlie a divine figure of Greek myth known as Zagreus, "the great hunter."⁹¹ Despite its obscurity, the Milesian inscription hardly allows the interpretation that the *ὠμοφάγιον* was eaten by the priestess or other participants in the public sacrifice. In fact the verb *ἐμβάλλειν* itself proves that the *ὠμοφάγιον* was a deposit of some sort and either placed before someone or thrown into something. Th. Wiegand, the first editor, suggested that sacrificial animals

Here is the inscription in question: Miletus, 276/275 B.C. (LSAM 48)

..... ὅταν δὲ ἡ ἱέρεια ἐπι[5·]ηι {ἐπι[κηρύξ]ηι} τὰ ἱερὰ ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλ[εω]ς
[.....] μὴ ἐξεῖναι ὠμοφάγιον ἐμβαλεῖν μηθενὶ πρότερον
[ἢ ἡ ἱέρεια ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως ἐμβάλῃ, μὴ ἐξεῖναι δὲ μηδὲ
[συν]αγαγεῖν τὸν θίασον μηθενὶ πρότερον τοῦ δημοσίου·
[ἐὰ]ν δὲ τις ἀνὴρ ἢ γυνὴ βούληται θύειν τῶι Διονύσῳ,
[πρ]οϊεράσθω ὀπότερον ἂν βούληται ὁ θύων καὶ λαμβανέτω
[τὰ] γέρη ὁ προϊερώμενος τὴν δὲ τιμὴν καταβάλλειν ἐν ἔτεσιν
[δέ]κα, δέκατομ μέρος ἔτους ἐκάστου, τὴμ μὲν πρώτην κατα-
[βολὴν] ἐμ μηνὶ Ἀπατουριῶνι τῶι ἐπὶ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ μετὰ
[Πο]σειδίππον τῆι τετράδι ἰσταμένου, τὰς δὲ λοιπὰς ἐν τοῖς
[ἐχ]ομένοις ἔτεσιν μηνὸς Ἀρτεμισιῶνος τετράδι ἰσταμένου.
[-----]
[.....] δὲ τὴν ἱέρειαν γυναῖκας διδόναι {10 units, 6 units} INΛ[---]
[..... τ]ὰ δὲ τέλεστρα {καὶ τελεστ} παρέχ[ειν ταῖς]
[γυναιξίν] ἐν τοῖς ὀργί[οις πᾶ]σιν· ἐὰν δὲ τις θύειν βούλ[ηται]
[τῶ]ι Διονύσῳ γυνή, διδόντω γέρη τῆι ἱερείαι σπλάγχνα, νεφ[ρόν],
σκολιόν, ἱεράμ μοῖραν, γλῶσσαν, σκέλος εἰς κοτυληδὸνα [ἐκ]-
[τ]ετμημένον· καὶ ἐὰν τις γυνὴ βούληται τελεῖν τῶι Διονύσῳ
τῶι Βακχίῳ ἐν τῆι πόλει ἢ ἐν τῆι χώρῳ ἢ ἐν ταῖς νήσοις, [ἀπο]-
διδόντω τῆι ἱερείαι στατῆρα κατ' ἐκάστην τριετηρίδα·
τοῖς δὲ Καταγωγίοις κατάγειν τὸν Διόνυσον τοὺς ἱερεῖ[ς]
καὶ τὰς ἱερείας τοῦ [Διονύ]σου τοῦ Βακχίου μετὰ τοῦ [ιερῆως]
[κα]ὶ τῆς ἱερείας πρ[ὸ τ]ῆ[ς] ἡμέρας μέχρι τ[ῆς] ἡλίου δύσεως]
[..... τ]ῆς πόλεως.

3. The decline of maenadism. 2nd c. A.D. inscription, Physkos in Western Lokris (LSCG 181).

This cult regulation is concerned with the financial contributions required of thiasos members (male and female) and the penalties to which they are liable for various omissions. One of these:

[ὁ δὲ] κ' εἰς ὄρος μὴ συνελθὼν [ἀποτ]ίσι τῶ κοινῶ δ(ραχμὰς) ε·

4. From Methymna on Lesbos, 4th c. B.C. (LSCG 127)

[- -]ενα περιβώμ[ια - - - - -]
[- μὴ ἐμποδί]σωσιν ἀλλάλοις [- - - - -]
[- - οἱ διακ]ονέοντες τῷ βωμ[ῶ καὶ - - -]
[- - - - τοῦ]το μὲν κάρυγμα τέλε[ον ἔστω]
[ὁ δὲ γυναι]κονόμος ἔστω μὲν Μαθύ[μναιος]
[πολίτας μ]ὴ νεώτερος ἐτέων τεσ[σαράκοντα]
[περιμενέτω] δὲ ὑπὸ τὰν πάννουχιν ἔξω [τᾶν]
[θυρᾶν τᾶν] δύο καὶ ἐπιμελήσ[θ]ω [ὄ]πω[ς αὐ]
[τὸς μόνος κ]αὶ μηδεὶς ἄνηρ ἕτερος εἰσ[ίη]
[εἶς τὸ ἱερόν], ἄλλο δὲ μηδὲν τύχ[η] ἀσεβέες ὄπ[ι]
[ως δὲ ὡς δέο]ν συντελέωνται ἐμ Μα[θύμνα]
[τοῖς θεοῖς] τοῖς πατρώϊοις [αἱ θυσίαι]
[καὶ τὰ μυστήρια, ο]ἱ μὲν θύρσο[υς ἔχοντες -]
[- - - - -]

5. Theocritus 26.1-9

Ἴνῳ καῦτονόα χά μαλοπάραυος Ἀγαύα	<i>apple-cheeked</i>
τρεῖς θιάσως ἐς ὄρος τρεῖς ἄγαγον αὐταὶ ἐοῖσαι.	
χαῖ μὲν ἀμερξάμεναι λασίας δρυὸς ἄγρια φύλλα,	<i>plucking the bushy oak's wild leaves</i>
κισσόν τε ζῶοντα καὶ ἀσφόδελον τὸν ὑπὲρ γᾶς,	
ἐν καθαρῷ λειμῶνι κάμον δυοκαίδεκα βωμῶς,	
τὼς τρεῖς τᾶ Σεμέλα, τὼς ἐννέα τῷ Διονύσῳ.	
ἱερὰ δ' ἐκ κίστας πεποναμένα χερσὶν ἐλοῖσαι	<i>from a basket</i>
εὐφάμως κατέθεντο νεοδρέπτων ἐπὶ βωμῶν,	<i>νεοδ., wreathed w/ fresh-plucked leaves</i>
ὡς ἐδίδαξ', ὡς αὐτὸς ἐθυμάρει Διόνυσος.	<i>θυμαρέω, to be well-pleased</i>
Πενθεὺς δ' ἀλιβάτω πέτρας ἄπο πάντ' ἐθεώρει...	<i>ἠλίβατος, high, steep</i>

6. The Delphic-Attic Thyiads

Pausanias 10.4.3

τὸ ἕτερον δὲ οὐκ ἐδυνήθην συμβαλέσθαι πρότερον, ἐφ' ὅτῳ καλλίχορον τὸν Πανοπέα εἴρηκε, πρὶν ἢ ἐδιδάχθην ὑπὸ τῶν παρ' Ἀθηναίοις καλουμένων Θυιάδων. αἱ δὲ Θυιάδες γυναῖκες μὲν εἰσὶν Ἀττικάι, φοιτῶσαι δὲ ἐς τὸν Παρνασσὸν παρὰ ἔτος αὐταὶ τε καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες Δελφῶν ἄγουσιν ὄργια Διονύσῳ. ταύταις ταῖς Θυιάσι κατὰ τὴν ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν ὁδὸν καὶ ἀλλαχοῦ χοροὺς ἰσάναι καὶ παρὰ τοῖς Πανοπεῦσι καθέστηκε καὶ ἡ ἐπὶ κλησὶς ἡ ἐς τὸν Πανοπέα Ὀμήρου ὑποσημαίνει τῶν Θυιάδων δοκεῖ τὸν χορόν.

Τῶν ἐν Φωκεῦσι τυράννων κατειληφόντων Δελφούς καὶ τὸν ἱερὸν κληθέντα πόλεμον Θηβαίων πολεμούντων πρὸς αὐτούς, αἱ περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον γυναῖκες, ἃς Θυιάδας ὀνομάζουσιν, ἐκμανεῖσαι καὶ περιπλανηθεῖσαι νυκτὸς ἔλαθον ἐν Ἀμφίσσῃ γενόμεναι· κατάκοποι⁵ δ' οὔσαι καὶ μηδέπω τοῦ φρονεῖν παρόντος αὐταῖς ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ προέμεναι τὰ σώματα σποράδην ἔκειντο καθεύδουσαι. τῶν δ' Ἀμφισσέων αἱ γυναῖκες, φοβηθεῖσαι μὴ διὰ τὸ σύμμαχον τὴν πόλιν Φωκῆων γεγονέναι καὶ συχνοὺς στρατιώτας παρεῖναι τῶν τυράννων ἀγνωμονηθῶσιν αἱ Θυιάδες, ἐξέδραμον 249.F εἰς τὴν ἀγορὰν ἅπασαι καὶ κύκλῳ περιστᾶσαι σιωπῇ κοιμωμέναις μὲν οὐ προσήεσαν, ἐπεὶ δ' ἐξανέστησαν, ἄλλαι περὶ ἄλλας ἐγίνοντο θεραπεύουσαι καὶ τροφήν προσφέρουσαι· τέλος δὲ πείσασαι τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐπηκολούθησαν αὐταῖς ἄχρι τῶν ὄρων ἀσφαλῶς προπεμπομέναις

7. Rome, 186 B.C.

A. Livy 39.8-19

During the following year, the consuls Spurius Postumius Albinus and Quintus Marcius Philippus were diverted from the army and the administration of wars and provinces to the suppression of an internal conspiracy.... A lowborn Greek came first into Etruria [Tuscany], a man who was possessed of none of the numerous arts which [the Greeks] have introduced among us for the cultivation of mind and body. He was a mere sacrificer and a fortuneteller--not even one of those who imbue men's minds with error by preaching their creed in public and professing their business openly; instead he was a hierophant of secret nocturnal rites. At first these were divulged to only a few. Then they began to spread widely among men, and women. To the religious content were added the pleasures of wine and feasting--to attract a greater number.

When they were heated with wine and all sense of modesty had been extinguished by the darkness of night and the commingling of males with females, tender youths with elders, then debaucheries of every kind commenced. Each had pleasures at hand to satisfy the lust to which he was most inclined. Nor was the vice confined to the promiscuous intercourse of free men and women! False witnesses and evidence, forged seals and wills, all issued from this same workshop. Also, poisonings and murders of kin, so that sometimes the bodies could not even be found for burial. Much was ventured by guile, more by violence, which was kept secret, because the cries of those calling for help amid the debauchery and murder could not be heard through the howling and the crash of drums and cymbals.

This pestilential evil spread from Etruria [Tuscany] to Rome like a contagious disease. At first, the size of the city, with room and tolerance for such evils, concealed it. But information at length reached the Consul Postumus.... Postumus laid the matter before the Senate, setting forth everything in detail--first the information he had received; and then, the results of his own investigations. The Senators were seized by a panic of fear, both for the public safety (lest these secret conspiracies and nocturnal gatherings contain some hidden harm or danger) and for themselves individually (lest some relatives be involved in this vice). They decreed a vote of thanks to the Consul for having

⁵ *exhausted* (cf. Ba.)

investigated the matter so diligently and without creating any public disturbance. Then they commissioned the consuls to conduct a special inquiry into the Bacchanalia and nocturnal rites. They directed them to see to it that Aebutius and Faecenia suffer no harm for the evidence they had given, and to offer rewards to induce other informers to come forward; the priests of these rites, whether men or women, were to be sought out not only in Rome but in every forum and conciliabulum, so that they might 'be at the disposal of' the consuls. Edicts were to be published in the City of Rome and throughout Italy, ordering that none who had been initiated into the Bacchic rites should be minded to gather or come together for the celebration of these rites, or to perform any such ritual. And above all, an inquiry was to be conducted regarding those persons who had gathered together or conspired to promote debauchery or crime.

These were the measures decreed by the Senate. The consuls ordered the Curule Aediles to search out all the priests of this cult, apprehend them, and keep them under house arrest for the inquiry; the Plebeian Aediles were to see that no rites were performed in secret. The Three Commissioners (Tresviri Capiales) were instructed to post watches throughout the City, to see to it that no nocturnal gatherings took place and to take precautions against fires. And to assist them, five men were assigned on each side of the Tiber, each to take responsibility for the buildings in his own district....

The Consuls then ordered the Decrees of the Senate to be read [in the Assembly] and they announced a reward to be paid to anyone who brought a person before them, or, in the absence of the person, reported his name. If anyone took flight after being named, the Consuls would fix a day for him to answer the charge, and on that day, if he failed to answer when called, he would be condemned in absentia. If any person were named who was beyond the confines of Italy at the time, they would set a more flexible date, in the event that he should wish to come to Rome and plead his case. Next, they ordered by edict that no person be minded to sell or buy anything for the purpose of flight; that no one harbor, conceal, or in any way assist fugitives.... Guards were posted at the gates, and during the night following the disclosure of the affair in the Assembly, many who tried to escape were arrested by the Tresviri Capiales and brought back. Many names were reported, and some of these, women as well as men, committed suicide. It was said that more than 7,000 men and women were implicated in the conspiracy.

.... Next the Consuls were given the task of destroying all places of Bacchic worship, first at Rome, and then throughout the length and breadth of Italy--except where there was an ancient altar or a sacred image. For the future, the Senate decreed that there should be NO Bacchic rites in Rome or in Italy. If any person considered such worship a necessary observance, that he could not neglect without fear of committing sacrilege, then he was to make a declaration before the Praetor Urbanus, and the Praetor would consult the Senate. IF permission were granted by the Senate (with at least one hundred senators present), he might perform that rite--provided that no more than five persons took part in the ritual, and that they had no common fund and no master or priest...."

B. Senatus consultum de bacchanalibus

[Q.] Marcius L. f., S(p.) Postumius L. f. cos. senatum
consoluerunt n(onis) Octob. apud
aedem | Duelonai.

The consuls Quintus Marcius, son of
Lucius, and Spurius Postumius, son of
Lucius, consulted the Senate on
October 7 in the Temple of Bellona.

Sc(ri)bedo arf(uerunt) M.Claudi(us) M. f.,
L. Valeri(us) P. f., Q. Minuci(us) C. f.

M. Claudius, son of Marcus, L. Valerius,
son of Publius, and Q. Minucius, son of
Gaius, assisted in drafting the decree.

De Bacanalibus quei foideratei | esent, ita
exdeicendum censuere :

Regarding the Bacchanalia the
senators proposed to issue a decree as
follows to those who are allied with
us :

Neiquis eorum Bacanal habuisse uelet ; sei ques |
esent, quei sibi deicerent necesus ese Bacanal
habere, eeis utei ad pr(a)itorem) urbanum | Romam
uenirent, deque eeis rebus, ubei eorum uerba
audita esent, utei senatus | noster decerneret, dum
ne minus senatoribus C adesent [*quom e*]a res
cosoleretur. |

“No one of them shall have a place
devoted to the worship of Bacchus :
and if there are any who say that they
have a need for such a place, they shall
appear in Rome before the urban
praetor ; and when the pleas of these
men have been heard, our Senate shall
make a decision regarding these
matters, provided that not less than
100 senators are present when the
matter is discussed. No Roman citizen
or man of Latin rights or anyone of the
allies shall associate with the Bacchae,
unless they have appeared before the
urban praetor and he has given
permission, in accordance with the
opinion of the Senate, delivered while
not less than 100 senators were
present when the matter was
discussed.”

Bacas uir nequis adiese uelet ceius Romanus neue
nominus Latini neue socium | quisquam, nisei
pr(a)itorem) urbanum adiesent, isque [*d*]e senatuos
sententiad, dum ne | minus senatoribus C adesent
quom ea res cosoloretur, iouisent.

Ce[n]suere.

The proposal passed.

Sacerdos nequis uir eset ; magister neque uir neque mulier quisquam eset. | Neque pecuniam quisquam eorum comoine[m h]abuisse ue[l]et ; neque magistratum, | neque pro magistratu, neque uirum [neque mul]ierem quicumque fecisse uolet. | Neque post hac inter sed coniura[se neu]e conuocasse neque conspiciat | neque compromittat uolet, neque quisquam fidem inter sed dedit uolet. | Sacra in populo ne quisquam fecisse uolet ; neque in populo neque in | preiuratu neque extram urbem sacra quisquam fecisse uolet, nisi | praetorem urbanum adieset, isque de senatus sententia, dum ne minus | senatoribus C adessent quom ea res consuleretur, iussit.

Censuerunt. |

Homines plures uero uiri atque mulieres sacra ne quisquam | fecisse uolet, neque inter uiri plures duobus, mulieribus plures tribus | arripuisse uolent, nisi de praetoris urbane senatusque sententia, uti superius | scriptum est.

“No man shall be priest of, nor shall any man or woman be master of, such an organization ; nor shall anyone of them have a common fund ; nor shall anyone appoint any man or woman to be master of such an organization or to act as master ; nor hereafter shall anyone take common oath with them, shall make common vows, shall make stipulations with them, nor shall anyone give them surety or shall take surety from them. No one shall perform their rites in secret ; nor shall anyone perform their rites in public, in private, or outside the city, unless he has appeared before the urban praetor and he has given permission, in accordance with the opinion of the Senate, delivered while not less than 100 senators were present when the matter was discussed.”

The proposal passed.

“No one in a company of more than five persons altogether, men and women, shall perform such rites ; nor in that company shall more than two men or three women be present, unless it is in accordance with the opinion of the urban praetor and the Senate, as has been written above.”

Haice utei in couentionid exdeicatis ne minus trinum | noundinum, senatuosque sententiam utei scientes esetis, – eorum | sententia ita fuit : ‘ sei ques esent, quei aruorsum ead fecisent, quam suprad | scriptum est, eeis rem caputalem faciendam censuere ’ – atque utei | hoc in tabolam ahenam inceideretis, ita senatus aiqum censuit, | utei que eam figier ioubeatis, ubei facilumed gnoscier potisit ; atque | utei ea Bacanalia, sei qua sunt, extrad quam sei quid ibei sacri est, | ita utei suprad scriptum est, in diebus X, quibus uobeis tabelai datai | erunt, faciatis utei dismota sient.

You shall publish these decrees in public assembly for not less than three market days, that you may know the opinion of the Senate. For the opinion of the senators is as follows : “If there are any persons who act contrary to what has been written above, it is our opinion that a proceeding for a capital offense must be made against them” ; and you shall inscribe this on a bronze tablet, for thus the Senate voted was proper ; and you shall order it to be posted where it can be read most easily ; and, as has been written above, you shall provide within ten days after these tablets have been delivered to you that those places devoted to the worship of Bacchus shall be dismantled, if there are any such, except in case something sacred is concerned in the matter.

IN AGRO TEURANO.

To be dispatched to the Ager Teuranus.

8. Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great
(Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 2.7-9)

ἕτερος δὲ περὶ τούτων ἐστὶ λόγος, ὡς πᾶσαι μὲν αἰ τῆδε γυναῖκες ἔνοχοι τοῖς Ὀρφικοῖς οὔσαι καὶ τοῖς περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον ὀργιασμοῖς ἐκ τοῦ πάνυ παλαιοῦ, Κλώδωνές τε καὶ Μιμαλλόνες⁶ ἐπωνυμίαν ἔχουσαι, πολλὰ ταῖς Ἡδωνίσι καὶ ταῖς περὶ τὸν Αἴμον Θρηήσσαις ὅμοια δρῶσιν· ἀφ’ ὧν δοκεῖ καὶ τὸ θρησκεύειν⁷ ὄνομα ταῖς κατακόροις γενέσθαι καὶ περιέργοις⁸ ἱερουργίαις ἢ δ’ Ὀλυμπιάς μᾶλλον ἐτέρων ζηλώσασα τὰς κατοχάς, καὶ τοὺς ἐνθουσιασμοὺς ἐξάγουσα βαρβαρικώτερον, ὄφεις μεγάλους χειροθήεις ἐφείλκετο τοῖς θιάσοις, οἳ πολλάκις ἐκ τοῦ κιττοῦ καὶ τῶν μυστικῶν λίκνων⁹ παραναδυόμενοι¹⁰ καὶ περιελιττόμενοι τοῖς θύρσοις τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ τοῖς στεφάνοις, ἐξέπληττον τοὺς ἄνδρας.

⁶ a Macedonian name for maenads

⁷ The verb means *perform religious observances, worship, be a devotee*; Plutarch derives it from Θρηήσσαι (Thracian women).

⁸ *overwrought*, in the sense *superstitious*

⁹ λίκνα are the winnowing-baskets sacred to Dionysus and carried on the head at his festivals

¹⁰ *creeping/crawling out*

9. Messalina (A.D. 17-48), the third wife of the emperor Claudius
(Tacitus, *Annals* 11.31.2-3)

at Messalina non alias solutior luxu, adulto
autumno simulacrum vindemiae per
domum celebrabat. urgeri prela, fluere
lacus; et feminae pellibus accinctae
adsultabant ut sacrificantes vel insanientes
Bacchae; ipsa crine fluxo thyrsus quatiens,
iuxtaque Silius hedera vinctus, gerere
cothurnos, iacere caput, strepente circum
procaci choro. ferunt Vettium Valentem
lascivia in praealtam arborem conisum,
interrogantibus quid aspiceret, respondisse
tempestatem ab Ostia atrocem, sive
coeperat ea species, seu forte lapsa vox in
praesagium vertit.

Messalina meanwhile, more wildly
profligate than ever, was celebrating in mid
autumn a representation of the vintage in
her new home. The presses were being
trodden; the vats were overflowing; women
girt with skins were dancing, as Bacchanals
dance in their worship or their frenzy.
Messalina with flowing hair shook the
thyrsus, and Silius at her side, crowned
with ivy and wearing the buskin, moved his
head to some lascivious chorus. It is said
that one Vettius Valens climbed a very
lofty tree in sport, and when they asked
him what he saw, replied, "A terrible storm
from Ostia." Possibly some such appearance
had begun; perhaps, a word dropped by
chance became a prophecy.