

CHRISTOPHER G. BROWN

ACTAEON AND MODAEUS: DIONYSIUS FR. 19^V LIVREA

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 80 (1990) 19–22

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn

ACTAEON AND MODAEUS: DIONYSIUS FR. 19^v LIVREA

Fr. 19^v Livrea of Dionysius' *Bassarica* preserves a portion of an account of a nocturnal encounter between Dionysus and his adversary Deriades.¹ The text begins with the killing and skinning of a stag by, it seems, minions of Dionysus (1-8):

δὴ γάρ μιν Πρόθοός τε Πυλάων τε Θράσιός τε
 Βόμβου κεκλομένοιο διαθρώσκοντα κιχλόντες
 σφάξαν, ἀτὰρ δείραντε καὶ ἐκ δέρος εἰρύσαντε
 κόσμεον ἀνέρα λυγρὸν ἀπὸ κρατός τε καὶ ὤμων,
 ἀμφὶ δέ οἱ νεόδαρτος ἐνὶ χροῖ δύετο ῥινός
 ἐντυπάζ, ἀτὰρ ὑπερθε κ[έ]ρα πάμφαινεν ἰδ[έ]σθαι
 τηλόθεν, οὐδέ τι θηρὸς ἐ[λ]είπετο δερκομένοισιν.
 ὥς οἱ μὲν ποιητὸν ἐπ' ἀ[ν]έρι θῆρα τίθησκον.

The object of this strange treatment seems to be identified in line 19 as Modaeus. This name is also borne by an opponent of Dionysus in Nonnus (32.165, 40.236). Although Nonnus seems to have been much indebted to Dionysius' poem, his treatment of Modaeus seems to be independent; the later poem provides no parallel for the present passage, in which Modaeus is the victim of *σπαραγμός* and *ὠμοφαγία*.²

Wilamowitz assumed that it is the corpse of Modaeus that is fitted with the stag-skin, but this is unlikely.³ The victim of the Dionysiac *σπαραγμός* must be living, and in this case line 34 makes it explicit (*ὠμάδια κρέα θηρὸς ἀπὸ ζωοῦ φάγη[τε]*).⁴ What about Modae-

¹ H. Livrea *Dionysii Bassaricon et Gigantiadis Fragmenta* (Rome 1973). The text is also printed in D. L. Page, *Select Papyri* 3 (Cambridge, Mass. 1941) 536-541 (no. 134); E. Heitsch, *Die griechischen Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit*² 1 (Göttingen 1963) XIX fr.9^v. For comment and advice I am indebted to Professors R. L. Fowler, D. E. Gerber, and E. Robbins.

² See lines 35-37. It is perhaps suggestive to note that in Nonn. 32.165 Ares takes the field in the form of Modaeus against the army of Dionysus. It is possible that Modaeus was in some way connected with Ares in the *Bassarica*. If so, Modaeus may well be the mysterious son of Ares mentioned in line 55 ("Ἄρεος υἱὰ κελαινὸν"). R. Keydell, *Gnomon* 48 (1976) 507, argues on the basis of fr. 20^v that Modaeus is not actually killed by the followers of Deriades, but rather that a ram is slaughtered in his place. This is certainly possible and more consistent with Nonnus' poem, in which Modaeus is not killed, but the fragmentary state of fr.20^v and the uncertainty of its precise relationship to fr. 19^v make this dubious.

³ U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *APF* 7 (1924) 11, who offers no justification for this assumption. As R. L. Fowler suggests, he may have been influenced by *ἔλωρ καὶ κύρμα* in line 24, a phrase regularly applied to unburied corpses in epic. Wilamowitz has been followed on this point by Page (above, note 1). See the much more cautious assessment of the contents of the papyrus in Livrea's edition, pp. 27-29.

⁴ *σπαραγμός* and *ὠμοφαγία* remain problematic aspects of Dionysiac religion. For discussion, see Dodds' edition of the *Bacchae* (Oxford 1960²) xvi ff.; A. Henrichs, *HSCP* 82 (1978) 147 ff.; J. Bremmer, *ZPE* 55 (1984) 275 ff.

us is more difficult to determine, however, is the precise nature of his condition. It is generally believed that Modaeus is simply covered by the stag-skin, thus taking on the semblance of a stag.⁵ Yet this may not be what the text implies. I suggest that Dionysius, drawing on a tradition of depictions of animal-metamorphosis, is here describing the transformation of Modaeus into a stag as a kind of magical rite.

The most immediately relevant myth is that of the death of Actaeon. Not only does it involve transformation into a stag, but some versions connect Actaeon's fate with Semele, suggesting a link with Dionysiac myth.⁶ And moreover, the rending of Actaeon by his own hounds may suggest *σπαραγμός* (cf. the hound-imagery at Eur. *Ba.* 731 and 977). In the most celebrated account, Ovid describes in detail Actaeon's transformation into a stag and subsequent demise (*Met.* 3.194 ff.). More important for our discussion is Stesichorus, the earliest-known source, who, as paraphrased by Pausanias, appears to describe the metamorphosis in terms that are closely parallel to Dionysius' description of Modaeus: ἐλάφου περιβαλεῖν δέρμα Ἀκταίωνι τὴν θεόν (i.e. Artemis).⁷ Interpretation of this statement -- possibly close to the *ipsissima uerba* of the poet -- has proved controversial. H.J. Rose argued that Stesichorus describes the familiar metamorphosis, and adduced Aesch. *Ag.* 1147, which describes the transformation of Philomela (*Mnemosyne* 59 [1931] 431-432): *περέβαλον γάρ οἱ περοφόρον δέμας*. C.M. Bowra, however, has rejected the relevance of this passage, holding that *δέμας* invites a more metaphorical understanding of *περέβαλον* and so invalidates the parallel (*Greek Lyric Poetry*² [Oxford 1961] 100). On his view, Stesichorus' description is to be taken literally: Artemis simply flings a stag-skin over Actaeon.⁸ G. Nagy has met Bowra's objection by arguing persuasively that among Indo-European languages one's identity was equated with one's 'hide'; thus *περιβάλλειν δέρμα* and *περιβάλλειν δέμας* are comparable expressions, both suggesting metamorphosis (*HSCP* 77 [1973] 189-190).

⁵ Note Livrea's summary (pp. 27 f.) : "Agli ordini di Bombo, Protoo, Pilaone e Trasio ... uccidono un cervo, lo scuoiavano e ne avvolgono la pelle attorno ad un prigioniero ... Questi sembra ora in tutto e per tutto un cervo." That Livrea proceeds to speak of "il falso cervo" suggests that he does not believe that Modaeus has undergone metamorphosis. Cf. also Keydell (above n. 2) 507, who speaks of 'der angebliche Hirsch'.

⁶ Cf. Hes. *P.Oxy.* 30.2509 (vindicated for the *Catalogue* by R. Janko, *Phoenix* 38 [1984] 299-307); Stes. fr. 236 *PMG* (=Paus. 9.2.3.); Acus. *FGrHist* 2 F 33; P. Mich. inv. 1447^v col. II 1-6 (ed. T. Renner, *HSCP* 82 [1978] 277-293). In this version Actaeon's crime is the wooing of Semele. See the useful discussion in Renner 282 ff.

⁷ Stes. fr. 236 *PMG* (=Paus. 9.2.3.). The parallel is noted by Livrea 29 (where it is said that Actaeon "non subisce una metamorfosi ... ma viene semplicemente coperto da una pelle di cervo"). Cf. also W. Burkert, *Homo Necans* (*RGVV* 32: Berlin and New York 1972) 128 n. 15 (=122 n. 15, Engl. ed.), and Renner, *art. cit.* 286 n. 16.

⁸ Bowra notes that this is often the way Actaeon is depicted in art; but this seems simply to be a means of representing metamorphosis in visual terms. For artistic representations see L. Guimond, *LIMC* 1.1 (1981) 454-469 (with plates); for discussion, C. Schlam, *ClAnt* 3 (1984) 82-110.

Another passage that is helpful in this regard is Vergil's brief portrait of Circe's menagerie (*Aen.* 7.15-20):

hinc exaudiri gemitus iraeque leonum
uincla recusantum et sera sub nocte rudentum,
saetigerique sues atque in praesepibus ursi
saeuire ac formae magnorum ululare luporum,
quos hominum ex facie dea saeua potentibus herbis
induerat Circe in uultus ac terga ferarum.

Vergil's use of *induo* provides an exact parallel for the use of περιβάλλω discussed above.⁹ Moreover, beginning with the *Odyssey* (10.239-40), the tradition concerning Circe is uniform: there can be no doubt that Vergil is describing metamorphosis. It is also noteworthy that in the present passage, as in the others concerning animal transformation, we are dealing with animals who were once men; human sensibilities are cloaked in a bestial form.¹⁰ This is clear in the Homeric account of Circe (*Od.* 10.240, ἀντὰρ νοῦς ἦν ἔμπεδος ὡς τὸ πάρος περ), as it is in Ovid's treatment of Actaeon (*Met.* 3.203 f., *lacrimaeque per ora / non sua fluxerunt: mens tantum pristina mansit*).

To return to the *Bassarica*, I would argue that the opening lines of fr. 19^v should be understood in this light. It is important to note the stress laid on the completeness of the identification of man and animal in lines 7-8; this seems to reflect purposeful poetic design. Dionysius, however, has modified the tradition by developing the implications of words like περιβάλλω and *induo*; the resulting description makes the metaphor concrete. We have the account of the slaughter and skinning of the stag followed by the placing of the ποιητὸς θήρ on Modaeus, who then becomes the victim adorned in lines 19-20 and described by Dionysus in 35-36,

ἀλλ' ἄγετε ὀρθόκερων ἔλαφον μέγαν, ὅσ[τις] ἄριστος
Ἑλλάδος ἐξ ἱερῆς σὺν ἅμ' ἔσπετο, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι.

Implicit in this transformation is the practice of magic.¹¹ The advantage of treating Modaeus' metamorphosis in this way is that the poet is able to underline the emotional response of the victim as he meets his fate. If more of the passage had survived, the perspective of the narrative may well have shifted to Modaeus in his final moments, as it does in Euripides' account of the death of Pentheus (*Ba.* 1118 ff.).

⁹ Another close parallel is Ovid's description of Actaeon's transformation: *et uelat maculoso uellere corpus* (*Met.* 3.197). For *uelo* used of clothing, see *OLD* s.u. 1.

¹⁰ Vergil underlines this with the subtle use of *formae* (18): see K. Quinn, *Virgil's Aeneid: A Critical Description* (London 1968) 177 n.1. For the more general point concerning animal-metamorphosis, see M. Davies, *JHS* 106 (1986) 182-183 (with emphasis on artistic representations).

¹¹ Magic seems to be a part of metamorphosis as early as the Homeric poems. In the *Odyssey*, Circe transforms her victims by administering φάρμακα and touching them with a ράβδος (10.235 ff.): cf. Athena's use of a ράβδος in altering Odysseus' appearance (13.429, 16.172). In later accounts of metamorphosis description of the details of magic becomes more elaborate: cf. Petr. 62; Apul. *Met.* 3.21 ff.

It is often assumed that the sort of metamorphosis implicit in Stesichorus' account of Actaeon and frequent in artistic representations is simply a convenient means of depicting transformed humans.¹² Yet there may be a deeper dimension. Burkert has seen primitive hunting ritual in the story of the death of Actaeon and similar myths; what, on the level of ritual, would be enacted through dressing in animal-skins would, in myth, be narrated as the transformation of man into animal.¹³ Dionysius' account is heavy with the atmosphere of ritual. He uses σφάζω (3), the technical term for ritual slaughter, of the killing of the stag.¹⁴ Once transformed, Modaeus is decked out as a victim (19-20):¹⁵

Μωδαίωι τανύοντα[ς ἔπι σκέπ]ος, αὐτὰρ . . . [
 ἱερὰ λήνεα πλεκτά, τὰ τ' ἄ[.] κικλή[σκουσι].

In presenting his narrative in this way, Dionysius may well be giving us a version of a story of metamorphosis that is nearer to primitive ritual than any other preserved in the literary tradition. This arresting result was almost certainly unintentional, but Dionysius would not be the only ancient author to reach unconsciously behind the received tradition and offer an account of a myth that is close to its ritual origins.¹⁶

University of Western Ontario

Christopher G. Brown

¹² So, for example, Davies (above n. 10).

¹³ See Burkert (above n. 7) 125 ff. = 109 ff. Cf. also the function of masks in ritual: C. Calame, *History of Religions* 26 (1986) 125-142 = *Il racconto in Grecia* (Bari 1988) 95-114, for discussion.

¹⁴ Also suggestive of ritual is the reference to silver κίσται (39), as for that matter is the whole of lines 38-40.

¹⁵ The name of the λήνεα is uncertain. The only plausible supplements seem to be Wilamowitz' ἀ[γρένα] (printed by Heitsch) and ἀ[γρέτα] (Beazley), but it is difficult to decide between them. Livrea remains agnostic.

¹⁶ See H. Lloyd-Jones' discussion of Aeschylus' treatment of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, *JHS* 103 (1983) 87-102. This aspect of Lloyd-Jones' treatment of the *parodos* has troubled K. Clinton in P. Pucci (ed.), *Language and the Tragic Hero* (Atlanta 1988) 1 n.1.