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THE DIONYSIAC MYSTERIES IN PELLA

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## THE DIONYSIAC MYSTERIES IN PELLA

In a recent issue of the journal *Τὸ Ἀρχαιολογικὸ Ἔργο εἰς τὴν Μακεδονία καὶ Θράκη* 3 (1989) [1992] 91-101, Maria Lilimbake-Akamate reports on the excavation undertaken by herself in the autumn of 1989 (beginning of September until the end of November) of some cist-graves and chamber-tombs in a Cemetery lying to the south-east of the main settlement of Pella.<sup>1</sup> She dates the cist-graves to the second half of the 4th century B.C. and the chamber-tombs to the first half of the 3rd century B.C. The considerable degree of care that had gone into the building of the cist-graves and the presence in their immediate vicinity of the foundations of a building with the facade of an Ionic temple suggest to the excavator that those buried in the tombs were persons of some importance. The reasons for the dating are not spelled out, but are presumably based on a development in the form of the graves. In two of the cist-graves, dated to the end of the 4th century B.C., were found two gold lamellae, both described as being in the shape of a laurel-leaf from a wreath and both of virtually the same dimensions; both have short stems (Lilimbake-Akamate 101, pls. 8 & 9).<sup>2</sup> One of them had on it, hastily and superficially engraved, only what was presumably the name of the deceased: ΦΙΛΟΞΕΝΑ; the other was more informative; written carefully in letters made by punching small dots into the metal and forming three lines is:<sup>3</sup>

ΦΕΡΣΕΦΟΝΗΙ  
ΠΟΣΕΙΔΙΠΠΟΣ ΜΥΤΗΘ  
ΕΥΣΕΒΗΘ

This paper has three objectives: 1) to define what the function of leaf-shaped lamellae of the kind discovered at Pella is; 2) to assemble such information as we have about initiates in the mysteries from Pella, since we already know of an initiate from Pella, the epigrammatist Poseidippos; 3) to consider what sort of leaves the lamellae from Pella and elsewhere were meant to represent and what the significance of the leaf was.

As a parallel for lamellae in what she says is the form of a laurel-leaf Lilimbake-Akamate cites a gold lamella also said to be in the form of a laurel-leaf found in a Hellenistic cist-grave at Aigion in Achaea (*Arch. Delt.* 32 [1977] B1 94, pl. 63 β). On it was engraved one word: ΜΥΤΗΘ.<sup>4</sup> Two further examples of similar lamellae have come to light in Aigion in two Hellenistic cist-graves: one has the inscription ΔΕΞΙΛΑΘ ΜΥΤΗΘ on it and is said to

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Christopher Faraone for constructive criticism of the form of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> There is a good photograph of the second leaf (Pella Archaeological Museum no. 1989/75) in the exhibition-catalogue, *Greek Civilization: Macedonia, Kingdom of Alexander the Great* (Athens 1993) no. 316. Unfortunately the transcript of the inscription is inaccurate.

<sup>3</sup> The dimensions are 2.8 and 2.35 cm, respectively, at the broadest point and 8.2 and 8.3 cm in length.

<sup>4</sup> The commentary to *SEG* 34 (1984) 338 rather puzzlingly describes the lamella as Roman and shaped like an olive-leaf. In fact, it is virtually impossible to distinguish between representations of olive- and laurel-wreathes.

be leaf-shaped; the other is inscribed ΦΙΛΩΝ ΜΥCΤΗC and is almond-shaped (*Arch. Delt.* 42 [1987] B1 153). Besides these lamellae there is reported from what is said to be a 4th-century cist-grave in Macedonian Methone a gold lamella, whose shape has not yet been revealed, but which had been placed in the mouth of the deceased; on it was engraved a woman's name ΦΥΛΟΜΑΓΑ (*Arch. Delt.* 41 [1986] 142-43). Finally, there has been reported from Pella the discovery of fifteen cist-graves, again said to belong to the 4th century, in which were found an undisclosed number of lamellae with names written on them; they too had been set in the mouths of the deceased.<sup>5</sup> It is reasonable to suppose that all of these lamellae were meant to perform the same or much the same function for the dead person to whom they were attached. The lamella for Poseidippos, since it is the longest and most explicit of these leaf-shaped lamellae, provides the clearest clue to what the function of these objects was.

The presence of the name Persephone in the dative on the Poseidippos-lamella leads Lilimbake-Akamate to ask whether it is in her rôle as goddess of the Underworld that Poseidippos dedicates the lamella to Persephone or is it the name of the deity into whose cult Poseidippos had been initiated. What the function of the dative is in this case Lilimbake-Akamate does not make clear. She then goes on to suggest that if the second is the correct answer and if it is assumed that Poseidippus was not an initiate of the Eleusinian or Samothracian Mysteries, then the lamella is evidence for a cult of the goddess of the Underworld in Pella (97).

The recent publication by K. Tsantsanoglou and G.M. Parássoglou from Pelinna in Thessaly of two gold lamellae, this time in the form of leaves of ivy, datable on the basis of numismatic evidence to the end of the 4th century B.C., points to a rather different explanation from either of those put forward by Lilimbake-Akamate (*Hellenika* 38 [1987] 3-17). They had been placed on the chest of a female skeleton. The text of both lamellae is substantially the same and coincides in the first two lines, which are the crucial one for the interpretation of the Poseidippos-lamella:

νῦν ἔθανεε καὶ νῦν ἐγένου, τρικόλβιε, ἄματι τῶιδε.  
εἰπεῖν Φερσεφόνα ε' ὅτι Βά[κ]χιος αὐτὸς ἔλυσε.

Persephone in the dative in the lamella from Pella is not, accordingly, a dative of dedication but means something like: "Tell Persephone", or "This is for Persephone's attention." It, in other words, draws to Persephone's attention or tells the goddess of Poseidippos' status as an initiate in the mysteries, so that she may grant him a favourable position in the Underworld. Persephone's function at this point is spelled out in two of the lamellae found in the necropolis at Thourioi in southern Italy: the deceased initiate says that he comes as a suppliant to Persephone that she may willingly escort him to the seats of the blessed ones (G. Zuntz, *Persephone* [Oxford 1971] A2 & A3.6-7). We may further infer that the lamellae from Aigion with a Man's name followed by the word μύκτης or with the word μύκτης alone carry the same message to Persephone in a more abbreviated form and that those lamellae

<sup>5</sup> A. Pariente, *BCH* 14 (1990) 787. The excavation was carried out by the Greek Archaeological Service.

bearing only the name of a man or woman are a yet more truncated version of the same message. The final inference is strengthened by the identical shape of the two lamellae from the cemetery at Pella, that for Poseidippos with its fairly explicit message and that for Philoxena with only her name. That inference is corroborated by the existence of lamellae placed in the mouth of the deceased with his or her name on them. It is as though they were meant to utter the name of the deceased on his or her behalf.

That it is Persephone to whom the lamella is to convey the information that Poseidippos was a pious initiate does not mean that Poseidippos had been initiated into a mystery-cult of Persephone as distinct from that of Dionysos. As Fritz Graf has demonstrated, it is now clear that there are not discrete mystery-cults for, on the one hand, Persephone, and on the other, Dionysos, but that both deities have different rôles to play within the same cult.<sup>6</sup>

The gold lamellae found in cist-graves in Pella point to the existence of a mystery-cult in that community, although there is always the possibility that all of those buried with lamellae were initiated elsewhere. To the citizens of Pella initiated in the mysteries should be added the name of Poseidippos the epigrammatist. He was born in Pella and, despite going to Alexandria to pursue his career in that city, he did not acquire Alexandrian citizenship, but, like many men who made their way to that metropolis, he retained his allegiance to his native community. An honorific inscription of the Aetolian League from Thermon of the year 263/2 B.C. testifies to his continuing identification with his native city (Πο[ς]ειδίππῳ τῷ ἐπιγραμματοποιῷ Πελλαίῳ IG 9.1<sup>2</sup>.17.24).<sup>7</sup> Not only did he retain his Pellaean citizenship, it was Pella even in his later years that held his emotional loyalty, as he makes clear in the elegiacs celebrating his old age that were surely, as Lloyd-Jones has suggested, a *κορηγίς*, for a collection of his epigrams: he declares that he is of Pellaean stock and hopes that he may be represented in the agora there unrolling a papyrus-roll (*SH* 705.16-17).<sup>8</sup> In the same poem, he alludes fairly directly to his having been initiated into the mysteries in bidding that no tear be shed for him and in praying that at the end of a long life he may follow the mystic way to Rhadamanthys, longed for by his community and people:

μηδέ τις οὖν χεύαι δάκρυον. ἀντάρ ἐγὼ  
γῆραι μυστικὸν οἶμον ἐπὶ Ῥαδάμανθον ἰκοίμην  
δήμῳ καὶ λαῶι παντὶ ποθεινὸς ἐών (*SH* 705.21-23).

What he looks forward to, in other words, is reaching the privileged section of the Underworld, set aside for pious initiates in the mysteries.<sup>9</sup> It is the area of the Underworld presid-

<sup>6</sup> "Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology: New Texts and Old Questions", in *Masks of Dionysus* eds. T. Carpenter and C. Faraone (Ithaca and London 1993) 239-58.

<sup>7</sup> On citizenship in Ptolemaic Alexandria, see P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* I (Oxford 1972) 52.

<sup>8</sup> H. Lloyd-Jones, "The Seal of Poseidippus", *JHS* 83 (1963) 95-96 (repr. in *Greek Comedy, Hellenistic Literature, Greek Religion and Miscellanea: The Academic Papers of Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones* [Oxford 1990] 190-91).

<sup>9</sup> Lloyd-Jones (n. 8) 93 (*Greek Comedy* 187) suggests that in following the "mystic path" Poseidippos may mean no more than that he belongs to a select company or that he is an initiate into the mysteries of the Muses.

ed over by Kronos and his nephew Rhadamanthys that Pindar describes in the Second Olympian (2.68-77).<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, his emotional ties, as he contemplates his death, are still to Pella and perhaps also to Macedonia, for he hopes that his community and people will feel his loss.<sup>11</sup> That rather suggests that he hoped and expected to be buried in Pella.

That the name Poseidippos is a common one throughout the Greek world Lilimbake-Akamate demonstrates (96 n. 19). It is also found several times on amphora-seals from the agora of Pella itself (Lilimbake-Akamate 96 n. 20), but whether more than one Poseidippos is involved is uncertain. Despite the commonness of the name, it is still very likely that there is a family-relationship between the Poseidippos of the lamella and his namesake the poet. I find it hard to accept that there were two persons from Pella with the same name who were alive in the same period, were initiates in the mysteries and bore no relationship to each other. It would be re-assuring to know on what grounds the grave of Poseidippos is dated to the late 4th century B.C. But assuming the dating is correct we would seem to have two Poseidippi from Pella, both inducted into the mysteries, the earlier belonging to the generation of the poet's grandfather. If that is correct, we have reason to think that initiation into the mysteries ran in families.<sup>12</sup>

It is a matter of some moment to determine what sort of leaf it is that the lamella placed on the dead initiate represents. The two lamellae from the female burial at Pelinna in Thessaly are ivy-leaves, and there is no mistaking the identity of that leaf, the lamellae reported from Aigion are variously described as almond-shaped, a laurel-leaf and a leaf, the two lamellae from Pella that have been published are identical in shape and size and are called laurel-leaves. The lamellae from Thurii and Hipponium, on the other hand, are basically thin square or rectangular sheets of metal, sometimes with the ends rounded off, that were then rolled up.<sup>13</sup> They have no apparent symbolic significance.

It would not be surprising that initiates into the mysteries should carry with them on their journey into the afterlife a leaf of the plant particularly associated with Dionysos and his worshipper, the ivy.<sup>14</sup> Yet a scholiast to Arist. *Ran.* 330 says that initiates into the mysteries wore a wreath of myrtle, not, as some think, of ivy. It sounds as if the scholiast is being pedantic and that ivy-wreathes were either worn by some initiates or worn in certain circumstances.

There are two further pieces of literary evidence bearing on the wearing of wreathes of ivy in the Underworld, possibly by initiates in mysteries: one is of an uncertain date in an

W. Burkert, "Le laminette auree: Da Orfeo a Lampona", *Orfismo in Magna Grecia*, Atti del Quattordicesimo Convegno di Studi sulla Magna Grecia (Naples 1975) 85 plumps rather more firmly for the latter explanation.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Lloyd-Jones (n. 8) 93 (188 respectively); Burkert (n. 10) 85.

<sup>11</sup> Lloyd-Jones (n. 8) 94 (188 respectively) is inclined on the basis of Callim. fr. 1.16-17 West, where δῆμος and λαός have the same referent, to doubt whether there is a distinction.

<sup>12</sup> For the wife, when available, and the children being taken along monthly to the Orpheotelestai for an initiation-ceremony, cf. Theophr. *Char.* 16.12.

<sup>13</sup> The lamellae from Thurii are illustrated in G. Zuntz, *Persephone* (Oxford 1971) pl. 26 a,b, pl. 27 a,b, pl. 27 a,b; that from Hipponium is illustrated in G. Foti, *P.P.* 29 (1974) 107 pl. 19 a,b.

<sup>14</sup> On wreathes of ivy in the cult of Dionysus, see M. Blech, *Studien zum Kranz bei den Griechen*, *RGVV* 38 (Berlin and New York 1982) 212-16.

ancient commentary on Pi. *O.* 2.72-73, the other is from the mid-3rd century B.C. Pindar has those who have passed blamelessly through three lives weave garlands for their heads as they disport themselves in the Island of the Blest. They weave these garlands from flowers that grow on trees on dry ground and from plants that are nourished by water (72-74). A scholiast says that the trees meant are olive, myrtle and ivy and those which blossom on the ground are violet and crocus (C[b] *in O.* 2.73). This may or may not represent the flora that Pindar has in mind, but it does show what an ancient scholar thought would have been worn by those living in the Isles of the Blest. The poem of unknown authorship that addresses the Corcyrean tragic poet Philicus on his departure to the beyond speaks of his letting roll forth from his ivy-crowned head (κικκηρεφής) fair-sung words as he goes on his journey to the fair places of the pious and the islands of the blest (*SH* 980.1-4). The makarismos of the wayfarer in the first line of the poem and the repeated admonition to him to go suggest very strongly that this is a poem bidding Philicus godspeed, as he departs to follow the sacred road taken by initiates in the mysteries. The poem echoes the language and thought of the lamellae that accompanied dead initiates. Philicus' ivy-wreathed head, accordingly, does not just mean that he will enjoy Dionysiac revels in the Underworld (P.M. Fraser, *Hellenistic Alexandria* I [Oxford 1972] 608-9), but also that he wears on his journey in the Underworld one of the tokens of his initiation into the mysteries.

It goes without saying that the laurel-leaf was used in the cult of Apollo (see Blech [n. 15] 216-46). In mystery-cult its use is attested only in the 1st century B.C. at Andania in Messenia, where a wreath of laurel was donned by the initiates (πρωτομύκται), after they had doffed the *stlengis* they had been wearing (*IG* 5.1.1390 A. 14-15).<sup>15</sup> Its place in the mysteries here will not be unconnected with the part that Apollo Karneios plays in the cult; the day before the ceremony the priests are to swear in his temple (A.7) and sacrifice is made to him as well as to Demeter, *Hagna*, Hermes and the *Megaloi Theoi* (A.33-34). Andania is then not a very compelling instance of the use of laurel-wreathes in a mystery-cult. The presence of laurel-leaves in the graves of initiates is anomalous and not really explicable.

The myrtle is the plant that provides the wreath *par excellence* for initiates in the mysteries as the scholiast to Arist. *Ran.* 330 cited above tells us. This is closely connected with its place in the cult of the dead and in the worship of Demeter and Kore.<sup>16</sup> A scholiast to Pi. *I.* 4.87 in fact says that corpses wear wreathes of myrtle. The initiates in the Underworld at Arist. *Ran.* 323-31 call on Iacchos to come dance with them tossing his crown of myrtles on his head. They themselves probably wear a similar crown. We have already remarked on the scholiast to Pi. *O.* 2.73-74 who gives myrtle as one of the plants that grow in the Isles of the Blest.<sup>17</sup> At Arist. *Ran.* 156 myrtle-groves are one the delightful

<sup>15</sup> Blech (n. 15) 305-6; W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche* (Stuttgart 1977) 417-18.

<sup>16</sup> Blech (n. 15) 94. Cf. Eur. *Alc.* 172, *El.* 324, 512; Istros *FGrH* 334 F 29; Apollodorus *FGrH* 244 F 140. It is also sacred to Aphrodite: Diod. Sic. 1.17.5; Plut. *Marc.* 22.6, *Aet. Rom.* 278e; Lucian *Icar.* 27.

<sup>17</sup> Σ *in O.* 2.73 (b) says that in the Island of the Blest the blooms from trees are olive, myrtle and ivy and from flowers growing on the ground violets and crocuses.

features of the section of the Underworld inhabited by initiates. Finally, there is the funerary epigram of Theodorides on the poet Euphoriion that calls on the passer-by to give an offering of pomegranate, apple or myrtle to Euphoriion as an initiate in the mysteries, because he had loved them, while he was alive (Gow-Page, *HE* 3560-61; *AP* 7.406.3-4).<sup>18</sup> Representations of scenes of initiation from the 4th century on vases portray the initiand and the *mystagogos*-figure wearing what are generally taken to be myrtle-wreaths,<sup>19</sup> while in the Niinnion-tablet, which belongs to the first half of the 4th century, not only do figures in the three scenes of initiation represented on the plaque wear myrtle-wreaths, some of them also carry what are conspicuously sprays of myrtle (Mylonas [n. 19] fig. 88). The custom of wearing myrtle-wreaths continues into the Roman Empire: there is from Rome the statuette of a boy-initiate wearing such a wreath (K. Esdaile, *JHS* 29 [1909] pl. Ia). It is, accordingly, a myrtle-leaf not a laurel-leaf that we would expect initiates going on their journey to the Underworld to have with them.

So far as it is possible to distinguish between a laurel-leaf and a myrtle-leaf when represented in metal, the two identical lamellae from Pella have more of the look of the leaf of the myrtle to them than that of the laurel. The lamella from Aigion with the word *μύρτης* on it is a more schematic and less finely-worked representation, but it could as well be myrtle as laurel. Since the leaves of these two plants when done in metal are to all intents and purposes indistinguishable, there seems to be no good reason to suppose that almond-shaped lamellae in graves stand for laurel-leaves and not those of the much more appropriate myrtle. Context will have determined which plant was imagined to be represented.

To conclude with one further observation: it would be useful to have a map of the cemeteries at Pella and at Aigion, so far as the latter can be reconstructed from what has been found in salvage-excavations, with the graves in which lamellae have been found marked to see whether there were special areas set aside for initiates where no one else could be buried. The inscription from Cumae forbidding the burial of anyone who is not a *bacchos* in a certain chamber-tomb that has been cited by various scholars in connection with the lamella from Hipponium points to such an area being set aside at Cumae: οὐ θέμις ἐν τοῦθα κείθλαι μὲ τὸν βεβαχχευμέλνον.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The attempt of Gow and Page (commentary *ad loc.*) to interpret all of this *sensu obsceno* is unfortunate.

<sup>19</sup> G. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton 1961) figs. 78, 81, 85.

<sup>20</sup> E. Schwyzer, *Dialectorum Graecarum exempla epigraphica potiora* [Leipzig 1923] no. 792. Burkert (n. 9) 90; H. Lloyd-Jones, "Pindar in the Afterlife" in *Pindare*, Fondation Hardt, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 17 (Vandoeuvres-Geneva 1985) 264 n. 31, repr. in *Greek Comedy* (n. 8) 93 n. 31.