

NICCOLÒ PETRONIO

## Death and Rebirth of Dionysos in the New Sinai Hexameters

*The paper deals with four poetic fragments with Orphic content published in 2021 by Giulia Rossetto. The first two fragments (Ar–Av) depict a hitherto unattested encounter between Aphrodite and Persephone regarding the infant Dionysos; the others (Br–Bv) report the Orphic tale of Dionysos being lured by the Titans but with a variation involving the Giants. Based on the observations of various scholars, the paper draws attention to the similarities between the new fragments and the story of Dionysos Liknites, which frequently involves the death and rebirth of the god. Proposing to reverse the order of the fragments, it is suggested that the Sinai fragments also report this narrative and that the reunion between Dionysos and Aphrodite in Hades represents the god's rebirth. To conclude, the paper addresses the dating proposed for the fragments (4<sup>th</sup> century BC), arguing that it might challenge previous beliefs about the earliest known account of Dionysos' death and rebirth.*

**Keywords:** Orphism, Dionysos, Adonis, Giants, Titans, dismemberment, Greek fragmentary poetry, Sinai hexameters

### Introduction

In 2021, Giulia Rossetto published the *editio princeps* of four poetic fragments, containing about 90 hexameters, which once again stimulate debate regarding Orphic poetry.<sup>1</sup> The hexameters were discovered on

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<sup>1</sup> The first mention of these fragments came with a speech held by Giulia Rossetto at an International Conference on palimpsest studies (Vienna 2018); cf. ROSSETTO (2018). For the details about the manuscript, cf. ROSSETTO (2023: 58; 74). The repertoire of Orphic literature and evidence relating to ancient Orphism has continued to expand since the

sheets of a palimpsest codex in the monastery of St. Catherine on Sinai (*Sinaiticus arabicus* NF 66). Even if many verses are difficult to read since the Greek text has been overwritten with Arabic ones, the discovery of these fragments has been exceptional in that it makes it possible to delve into mythological tales previously unknown in Greek literature, constituting a significant element of interest. Furthermore, we find familiar characters and motifs employed in hitherto unexpected and poorly witnessed contexts and ways, once again testifying to the richness of the mythological heritage of Greek religion and Orphic movement.

After the *editio princeps*, some textual enhancements have been provided. Giulia Rossetto herself held a workshop with other prominent scholars, which resulted, in 2022, in the publication of a revised text.<sup>2</sup> In the same year another excellent edition was published by D'Alessio,<sup>3</sup> together with two other contributions by Kayachev<sup>4</sup> and Edmonds<sup>5</sup> respectively. Thus, despite the recent discovery of the text, there are valuable ecdothical contributions, which allow for further interpretive work. I will then focus on some exegetical points, trying to expand scholars' remarks proposed so far to a certain extent. In doing so, I will refer to D'Alessio's edition.

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second half of the last century, especially following the discovery of the Derveni Papyrus, new gold tablets, and the Olbia bone tablets. The bibliography on these topics is huge: on the Derveni Papyrus cf. BETEGH (2004) and most recently MOST (2022); on the gold tablets the most complete work, also for the bibliography, is still BERNABÉ-JIMÉNEZ (2008), while for a variety of topics and approaches cf. EDMONDS (2011); for the Olbia bone tablets cf. the introduction to OF 463–465 in BERNABÉ (2004). On Orphism in general, also in relation to other philosophical-religious currents cf. BURKERT (1985: 290–304) and BREMMER (2014: 55–80) On how the new discoveries can enhance our knowledge of ancient Orphism cf. TRZCIONKOWSKI (2017).

<sup>2</sup> ROSSETTO et al. (2022).

<sup>3</sup> D'ALESSIO (2022).

<sup>4</sup> KAYACHEV (2022).

<sup>5</sup> EDMONDS (2022).

## The fragments

On the basis of the narrative told in the verses, it is possible to divide the fragments into two pairs. Indeed, the first two fragments show a hitherto unattested encounter between Aphrodite and Persephone. In the incomplete beginning of the *A-recto* (Ar) fragment, we find Persephone telling Aphrodite about a prophecy that Night allegedly addressed to Zeus in Crete concerning privileges probably intended for Dionysos.<sup>6</sup> At this point, Persephone goes inside her palace and returns holding the baby Dionysos,<sup>7</sup> which is placed on the knees of Aphrodite.<sup>8</sup> From the final verses, we can only infer that there was to be a second speech of Persephone to Aphrodite.<sup>9</sup>

The second part of the scene, the *A-verso* (Av) fragment, consists of a speech by Aphrodite, as is evident from verse 14.<sup>10</sup> She tells about when she had raised Dionysos in Nysa<sup>11</sup> and his disappearance,<sup>12</sup> after which the goddess had left on a journey in search of him. Aphrodite, in pain, travels through the earth, sea, and aether until she reaches Hades, where precisely the reunion with Dionysos takes place.<sup>13</sup> So, out of joy at finding the god again, she caresses him affectionately, holding him

<sup>6</sup> Ar 8–10: Νυκτὸς τ' ἀμβ[ροσίης· τ]ά ῥά οἱ γέ[α] θεσπεσίη Νύξ / Ζηνὶ κελαϊνεφ[εῖ] Κρήτ]ηι ἐνι π[αιπαλο]έσσηι / ἔχρης' Ἰδαίοισιν ἐν[οῦρεσι] ±3 δ[ι] ±7[ροις].

<sup>7</sup> Ar 13–14: ρεύατό τ' εἰς ἄδυτον[· ±6 κ]ρυφίοιο μελ[ά]θρου, / ἐκ δ' εἶλεν Διόνυσον ἐρίβρομον Εἰραφιώτην, 17 παῖδ' ἐν χειρὶ[ν] ἔ[χ]οντα νέον περικαλλὲς ἀγαλμα.

<sup>8</sup> Ar 19: καὶ ῥ' ἐπὶ γούνασι θῆκε φιλοῦμ' μειδοῦς Ἀφρο[δίτης].

<sup>9</sup> Ar 20–21: καὶ μιν φωνή[ας] / ἀφρογενὲς Κυθέ[ρεια]; 24 ὥς φάτο Φερσεφό[ν]η.

<sup>10</sup> Av 14: ὥς φάτο Κύπρις ἄνασσα.

<sup>11</sup> Av 1–2: ὅν ποτε κισσοφ[ό]ρου Νύκ[ης] ἐνὶ δασκίῳ ἄντρωι / ἔτρεφον, ἀμβ[ροσί]οις δ' ἐπεκόσμεον εἴμα[σι] καλοῖς.

<sup>12</sup> Av 6–7: ὥστε τις εὐ[ ±5 ]φος ὄρνις ἀγα[λλ]όμενος λίπες εὐνή(ν) / πάμπαν ἄϊστος ἅπ[υ]τος εμο[ι]. [ ±7 ] . τεθνεώς.

<sup>13</sup> Av 11–13: ἔτλην δ' εἰς Αἴδαο δόμους σκοτ[ί]ους καταβῆναι / Ἥελίου προλιποῦσα ἄφαός' λαμπράν τε Σελήνην / οὐράνιον τε πόλον διὰ σὸν πόθον, ἄμβροτε κούρε.

on her lap.<sup>14</sup> The last understandable part of this fragment informs us of Aphrodite's decision to remain in Hades alongside Dionysos, who is called τρίγωνος, πολυώνυμος and Ἡρικεπαῖος.<sup>15</sup>

The other two fragments, B-*recto* (Br) and B-*verso* (Bv), bear the episode of the Titans trying to lure Dionysos to kill him; despite that, here the Giants are on stage. In the former, we see them failing an initial attempt to lure Dionysos,<sup>16</sup> after which they perform a strange ritual dance around the god.<sup>17</sup> Then, in fragment Bv, the Giants reveal their intent and openly attack Dionysos;<sup>18</sup> thus, we witness the fight between Akmon, a character who in Nonnus appears as one of the Corybantes,<sup>19</sup> and the mysterious Kyrbas. Here, the text breaks off.

### The Locrian *pinakes* and the child in the chest

Scholars have focused on the syncretism between Dionysos and Adonis in the Sinai fragments, mainly drawing on the collection of the *Orphic Hymns*.<sup>20</sup> While the myth of Adonis portrays a struggle between Aphrodite and Persephone for the love of the infant,<sup>21</sup> the Sinai hexameters

<sup>14</sup> Av 15–16: ἀσπαρίως ἀγάπαζε χέρας περὶ γυῖα [β]αλοῦσα / καὶ τρέφεν ἡδ' ἀτίταλλεν ἐν ἀγκαλίδεσσιν ἔχουσα.

<sup>15</sup> Av 17–18: μίμ[ν]ε δ' ἄρ' εἰν Αἰδαο δόμοις ὑπὸ κεύθει γαίης / ±4 ] .[.]ρωι τρίγόνωι πολυωνύμωι Ἡρικεπαῖωι. τρίγωνος: Hymn. Orph. 30, 2; πολυώνυμος: Hymn. Orph. 42, 2; 45, 2; Ἡρικεπαῖος: Hymn. Orph. 52, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Br 5–8: ὥς δ' οὐ πειθον παῖδα Διὸς καὶ Φερσεφονείης / δώροισι παντοίοις ὁπόσα τρέφει εὐ[ρ]εῖα χθών / οὐδ' ἀπάτη(ι)ς δολίησι παρὰ[.]φρασίησι τε μύθων / ἐκ θρόνου ἀνστήναι βασιλῆιου, αὐτίκ' ἄρ' οἱ γέ.

<sup>17</sup> Br 11: κύκλωι δ' ἐστιχώντο.

<sup>18</sup> Bv 7–8: καὶ τότε δὴ τομὸν ἦλ[θεν] ἐὼν πέλεκυν τολυπεύ(ν) / Ἄκμων παιδ[ὶ]ος δ' ἔναντα κατεστάθη.

<sup>19</sup> Nonn. D. 13.143.

<sup>20</sup> D'ALESSIO (2022: 33–36); EDMONDS (2022: 532–536).

<sup>21</sup> E.g. Bion. *Adon. Epitaph*. 54–57: λάμβανε, Περσεφόνα, τὸν ἐμὸν πόσιν· ἐσσι γὰρ αὐτὰ / πολλὸν ἐμεῦ κρέσσω, τὸ δὲ πᾶν καλὸν ἐς σέ καταρρεῖ. / ἐμμί δ' ἐγὼ πανάποτμος, ἔχω δ' ἀκόρεστον ἀνίαν / καὶ κλαίω τὸν Ἀδωνιν, ὃ μοι θάνε, καὶ σε φοβεῦμαι, with FANTUZZI (1985 *ad loc.*) and REED (1997 *ad loc.*).

depict them in agreement. An iconographical tradition pointed out by D'Alessio,<sup>22</sup> in which the two deities also appear to agree is particularly interesting to our purpose.

It is the case of the *pinakes* from Locri Epizephyrii in southern Italy, a group of relief tablets dedicated by devotees in the local shrine of Aphrodite on the wedding occasion. Within the collection, the so-called type with *cista mystica*, which features a chest in which a child is kept, representing the offspring of the couple who made the offering, is remarkable. This type occurs in two subgroups:<sup>23</sup> i) the *cista* rests on a κιβωτός facing a female figure who opens it; ii) the *cista* rests on the knees of a seated goddess who opens it facing a female figure. Regarding the similarities between the second type and the A fragments, it is worth noting that the deity who opens the chest is identified as Persephone, while the goddess to whom the child is presented is Aphrodite. Within the symbolic structure of the *pinakes*, Aphrodite represents the bride, despite the child likely being Adonis.<sup>24</sup> It is striking how this iconography resembles the situation of A fragments: some *pinakes* show architectural details that can be compared to the palace of Hades in fr. Ar.,<sup>25</sup> additionally, we see Aphrodite placing a crown on the head of the child, just as Dionysos appears crowned in the same fragment.<sup>26</sup>

Although there are some slight variations between the *pinakes* and the Sinai hexameters, mainly that in the latter Persephone does not show the baby to Aphrodite directly from the chest, but instead goes inside

<sup>22</sup> D'ALESSIO (2022: 34).

<sup>23</sup> MARRONI-TORELLI (2016: 74–75).

<sup>24</sup> MARRONI-TORELLI (2016: 101). Scholars have long debated about the identification of the child; for example, PRÜCKNER (1968: 32–36) and SIMON (1977: 19) thought that it should be interpreted as Dionysos. Even though this seems improbable since in the *pinakes* Dionysos is often represented as adult and bearded, the discovery of the Sinai fragments can shed new light on this matter.

<sup>25</sup> Ar 13:  $\epsilon\epsilon\upsilon\alpha\tau\acute{o}\ \tau' \epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \alpha\delta\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu\ \left[ \pm 6\ \kappa\right]\rho\upsilon\phi\acute{\iota}\omicron\iota\omicron\ \mu\epsilon\lambda[\acute{\alpha}]\theta\rho\omicron\upsilon.$

<sup>26</sup> Ar 16  $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\alpha\varsigma\ \tau\epsilon\ \varsigma\tau[\acute{\iota}\lambda\beta]\omicron\nu\tau\alpha\ \kappa\alpha\acute{\iota}\ \acute{\iota}\mu\epsilon\rho\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma\ \varsigma\tau\epsilon\phi\acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\iota\varsigma\iota\nu.$

the palace and brings him outside to put him on Aphrodite's knees,<sup>27</sup> it is plausible to suggest that here the goddess has just retrieved Dionysos outside a chest, according to a well-known Dionysiac motif which we will explore shortly. Indeed, this becomes even more likely if, as D'Alessio suggests, one compares the use of ἐξαίρειω in Ar 14 ἐκ δ' εἶλεν<sup>28</sup> Διόνυσον ἐρίβρομον Εἰραφιώτην with Il. 24, 228–229 ἧ καὶ φωριαμῶν ἐπιθήματα κάλ' ἀνέωγεν / ἔνθεν δώδεκα μὲν περικαλλέας ἔξελε πέπλους, where we see Priamus pulling peplums out of a crate.

It is probable then that the narrative of the Sinai hexameters, which implies the little Dionysos closed inside a chest and held by Persephone, was also favoured by the fact that in the traditional story of Adonis, the infant god is put inside a box (λάβρα) by Aphrodite and delivered to Persephone;<sup>29</sup> already Càssola suggested that Dionysos and Adonis were united by their connection to the mythological pattern of the child enclosed in a box.<sup>30</sup>

### Dionysos Liknites

What is more striking is that the overall pattern of the A fragments, along with the detail of Dionysos kept inside a chest, is so close to the *Orphic Hymn* 46 to Dionysos Liknites, where the god is said to be the off-

<sup>27</sup> As noted by EDMONDS (2022: 533), this scene resembles the mythological figure of the kourotrophic goddess, i.e. a female deity who takes care of a child, mortal or immortal. Cf. also PRICE (1978) and BEAUMONT (2012: 64–67).

<sup>28</sup> The reading ἐκ δ' εἶλεν by D'ALESSIO (2022: 22) seems to fit better both the paleographical evidence and the sense of the verse. ROSSETTO et al. (2022: 4) provide ἔκκλησεν (i.e. ἔκκλησεν) and interpret it as *invocavit*, but since a few verses later we find Persephone holding the baby in her hands (Ar 17 παῖδ' ἐν χειρὶ[v] ἔ[χ]ουσα), it is preferable to think about a verb which implies the sense of 'taking out'. For the same reason, KAYACHEV'S (2022: 4) interpretation {ἐ}κλήϊσεν doesn't seem likely.

<sup>29</sup> [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 3.14.4. In a mirror from Praeneste, we have the visual representation of Aphrodite and Persephone with Zeus in front of a chest, which contains the baby Adonis; cf. VAN DER MEER (2016: 74–75).

<sup>30</sup> CÀSSOLA (1975: 7).

shoot of the Nymphs and Aphrodite but led to Persephone according to the will of Zeus.<sup>31</sup> While the figure of Dionysos Liknites does not seem so attested in the literature, his connection with the λίκνον appears in several passages.<sup>32</sup> It is now time to briefly examine the stories concerning this divine figure to provide a tentative interpretation of the overall narrative of the Sinai hexameters.

The epithet Liknites, which also occurs in *Orphic Hymn* 52 to Dionysos Trieteric,<sup>33</sup> derives from the stories in which the little god is hidden inside a chest (λίκνον) to be kept safe from the enemies who want to kill him. For example, in the Dionysiac excursus of the fourth book of Oppianus' *Cynegetica*,<sup>34</sup> Ino, Autonoe, and Agave hide the baby Dionysos inside a chest to protect him from the rage of Hera and Pentheus.<sup>35</sup> In the text, the box is usually referred to as χηλός,<sup>36</sup> but in one case, it is defined as λάρναξ,<sup>37</sup> and so it is in the paraphrase of the *Cynegetica*<sup>38</sup> — which brings us very close to the story of the baby Adonis.

Interestingly enough, in some mythological traditions concerning Dionysos, the chest is linked with the story of his dismemberment at the hands of the Titans, which we glimpse in the B fragments with the variation of the Giants. The Cristian apologist Firmicus Maternus, in his work *De errore profanarum religionum*, reports a euhemeristic version of

<sup>31</sup> RICCIARDELLI (2000: 413–417).

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Dem. *De cor.* 260, where he says that Aeschines, during dionysiac rituals, was called ἑξαρχος καὶ προηγγεμένων καὶ κιττοφόρος καὶ λικνοφόρος, on which cf. WANKEL (1976) *ad loc.* and PARKER (1996) 159sq. Cf. also AP. 6, 165, 5–7: ἡδὲ φορηθὲν / πολλαὶ μιτροδέτου λίκνον ὑπερθε κόμης / Εὐάνθη Βάκχω.

<sup>33</sup> *Hymn. Orph.* 52, 3: μηροτρεφής, Λικνίτης, † πυριπόλε καὶ [QUANDT (1955): μυστιπόλων RICCIARDELLI (2000)] τελετάρχα.

<sup>34</sup> Opp. C. 4, 230–319.

<sup>35</sup> For the connotation of the god as Liknites cf. also ZUMBO (2000: 716sq.).

<sup>36</sup> Opp. C. 4, 244: εἰλατίνη χηλῶ διὸν γένος ἐγκατέθεντο; 4, 255 χηλὸν δ' ἀρρήτην; 4, 274 δεδεγμένος ἐκ χηλοῖο.

<sup>37</sup> Opp. C. 249: περὶ λάρνακι.

<sup>38</sup> PΑΡΑΘΟΜΟΡΟΥΛΟΣ (2003: 221).

the tale, in which Zeus is interpreted as the king of Crete.<sup>39</sup> The plot is familiar: Hera, out of jealousy toward Zeus' adulterous loves, orders the Titans to kill the baby Dionysos, who is thus dismembered and eaten after being boiled. Only the heart remains intact, kept by Athena inside a chest and delivered to Zeus; the latter places it inside a chalk statue and erects a temple in honor of Dionysos. This is the aetiology—says Firmicus—of a Cretan cult where, along with other features peculiar to Dionysiac ritual, *praefertur cista in qua cor soror latenter absconderat*.<sup>40</sup>

Even if in the rationalizing story told by Firmicus this detail is omitted, in various versions of the myth the preservation of the heart in the *cista*/λίκνον represents the stage before his resurrection: this is the case, for example, in Proclus' *Hymn to Athena*, where it is said that thanks to the saving action of Athena, the cosmos could see a 'new Dionysos'.<sup>41</sup>

In a famous passage of Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*, the characterization of Dionysos as Liknites is expressly linked with his rebirth. Plutarch draws a parallel between the cults of Dionysos and Osiris, highlighting how the Delphians, like the Egyptians in many other places for Osiris, showcase the tomb of Dionysos Liknites, which the Thyads awaken.<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere, the story of Dionysos' death and burying at Delphi is linked with the Titans.<sup>43</sup> If it seems agreeable that the divine figure of Dionysos

<sup>39</sup> Firm. Mat. Err. prof. rel. 6, 2–5.

<sup>40</sup> Firm. Mat. Err. prof. rel. 6, 5 (= OF 332). On the sources of Firmicus' tale cf. HERRERO (2010: 158–159).

<sup>41</sup> Procl. H. 7, 11–15 (= OF 327 II): ἡ (sc. Πάλλας) κραδίην ἐσάωσας ἀμιστύλλευτον ἄνακτος / αἰθέρος ἐν γυάλοισι μεριζομένου ποτὲ Βάκχου / Τιτῆνων ὑπὸ χειρῶν, πόρες δὲ ἐπατρὶ φέρουσα, / ὅφρα νέος βουλήσιν ὑπ' ἀρρήτοις τοκῆος / ἐκ Σεμέλης περὶ κόσμον ἀναβῆσθαι Διόνυσος. Cf. VAN DEN BERG (2001: 288–293).

<sup>42</sup> Plut. Mor. 365a: καὶ Δελφοὶ τὰ τοῦ Διονύσου λείψανα παρ' αὐτοῖς παρὰ τὸ χρηστήριον ἀποκεῖσθαι νομίζουσι, καὶ θύουσιν οἱ ὅσοι θυσίαν ἀπόρρητον ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος, ὅταν αἱ Θυιάδες ἐγείρωσι τὸν Λικνίτην. The burying of Dionysos at Delphi is reported also by Philochoros (F 7a–7b FGrHist. 328); cf. COSTA (2007: 86–95).

<sup>43</sup> Tz. In Lyc. Alex. 208 (= OF 36): ἐτιμᾶτο δὲ καὶ Διόνυσος ἐν Δελφοῖς σὺν Ἀπόλλωνι οὕτως· οἱ Τιτᾶνες τὰ Διονύσου μέλη σπαράξαντες Ἀπόλλωνι ἀδελφῷ ὄντι αὐτοῦ



Liknites is in deep connection with the story of the dismemberment and the consequent rebirth of the god,<sup>44</sup> it is now the time to argue that the overall narrative of the Sinai hexameters also fits into this pattern.

### The rebirth of Dionysos

Through the comparison with the Locrian *pinakes* and the *Orphic Hymns*, we have observed that the representation of Dionysos in the Sinai hexameters closely resembles the figure of the Liknites, which often implies the death and rebirth of the god. Interestingly, this aligns with the B fragments where we witness the Giants attempting to lure Dionysos with toys,<sup>45</sup> a detail that is also present in the stories of the *σπαραγμός* of the god,<sup>46</sup> before ultimately attacking him.

Unfortunately, our fragments do not include the account of the dismemberment of the god. However, this was likely the intended outcome of the story given that in fr. Bv Dionysos is referred to as *Oinos*,<sup>47</sup> according to an allegory also witnessed in the Orphic milieu, where the god is seen as a personification of wine, and his dismemberment is interpreted as the harvest.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, it would be consistent to think that Dionysos can no longer be found by Aphrodite in his ‘nest’<sup>49</sup> precisely because he has been lured away by the Giants who presumably also proceed to kill

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παρέθεντο ἐμβάλοντες λέβητι, ὁ δὲ παρὰ τῷ τρίποδι ἀπέθετο, ὥς φησι Καλλίμαχος (fr. 643 Pfeiffer) καὶ Εὐφορίων (fr. 14 van Groningen = fr. 13 De Cuenca) λέγων ‘ἐν πυρὶ Βάκχον διόν υπερφίαλοι ἐβάλοντο’.

<sup>44</sup> JIMÉNEZ (2023: 34sqq.). This connection was already pointed out by NILSSON (1975: 38–45). Cf. also KERÉNYI (1976: 204–237).

<sup>45</sup> Br 12: μειλίχι(ι)ς καὶ πᾶσιν ἀθύρμασι νηπιάχοις.

<sup>46</sup> The most famous account is in Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2, 17, 2 (= OF 588), on which cf. LEVANIΟΥΚ (2007) and TORTORELLI GHIDINI (2016).

<sup>47</sup> Bv 4: ἦχι περ Οἶνος ἐφῆστο τετιμένος ἐκ Διὸς αἵτης.

<sup>48</sup> The only poetic witnesses are three verses quoted by Procl. in *Cra.* 108, 13 (= OF 303, 321, 331) and attributed to the *Orphic Rhapsodies*.

<sup>49</sup> Av 6–7: ὥστε τις εὐ[ ±5 ]φος ὄρνις ἀγα[λλ]όμενος λίπες εὐνή(ν) / πάμπαν ἄϊστος ἄπ[υ]τος εμο[. ] [ ±7 ] . τεθνεώς.

him, and perhaps the *τεθνεώς* of Ar 7 shows that Aphrodite herself had this very suspicion. Moreover, after wandering through the aether, the sea and the earth, the goddess can find the young god only once she arrives in the underworld,<sup>50</sup> where the god has been stored after his death at the hands of the Giants.

At this point, we can infer that the Sinai hexameters also imply the tale of the rebirth of Dionysos. Indeed, it can be suggested that this part of the narrative consists precisely of the fragment Ar. Firstly, even though it is only a detail, it may be worth noting that in Ar 15 *ἐ(ῖ)κελον ἀϋγῆ[τι]ν μηνὸς περιτελλομένοιο* Dionysos is compared to the rays of a moon at his rising, which seems entirely appropriate to describe a god who has just been reborn.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the same symbolism of the child seen at Locri Epyzephyrii is likely entailed in the Sinai fragments: just as the child in the *cista mystica* represents the birth of the offerers' offspring, the permanence of the little Dionysos in the underworld under Persephone's care could be interpreted as the rebirth of the god. It could be not by chance that, at this very moment, the poet refers to Dionysos as *τρίγονος*,<sup>52</sup> probably alluding to the fact that this one would be his final birth, which is marked with the inclusion of some elements that recall hymnodic formulaicity such as the epithets *πολυώνυμος* and *Ἡοικεπαῖος*.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, referring to the young Dionysos as *ἄμβροτος κούρος*<sup>54</sup> seems a fitting description as he is brought back to life after his

<sup>50</sup> Av 8–9 *ὣν δὲ πόθωι χ[ ±4 ]ως αν[ ±7 ]ν αἰθέρα θ' ἀγνόν / πόντον τ' ἡδ['] Ἀχ[ ]έροντος [ὑπὸ χ]θονὶ χεῦμα κελαινό(ν).*

<sup>51</sup> The nearest expression seems to be Arat. 739: *εἴρει ὅποστασίη μηνὸς περιτέλλεται ἡώς*; cf. KIDD (1997: 261), according to which the verb *περιτέλλομαι* 'describes the observed movement from east to west above the horizon of stars'.

<sup>52</sup> It is remarkable that this epithet is referred to Dionysos in the *Orphic Hymns*; cf. MACEDO et al. (2021: 177).

<sup>53</sup> Av 18: *±4 ] .[.ρωι τρίγόνωι πολωνύμωι Ἡοικεπαίωι*. The beginning of the verse has been, quite persuasively, integrated as *παρ κού]ρωι* both by D'ALESSIO (2022: 27) and Lefteratou in ROSSETTO et al. (2022: 6).

<sup>54</sup> Av 13: *ἄμβροτε κούρε*.

death. Remarkably, the same adjective ἄμβροτος is used in the *Orphic Hymn* 55,<sup>55</sup> to describe Adonis, who is widely known as a god who dies and is reborn.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, due to the uncertainty of the original placement of the folia in the manuscript,<sup>57</sup> it is possible to consider reversing the order of the fragments: this could reveal that the Oinos threatened by the Giants in B fragments and the little Dionysos cuddled by Aphrodite in the A fragments represent two distinct stages of the same narrative.

### Final remarks

To conclude, I would like to briefly consider the question of the dating of the verses to draw attention to possible implications. As already mentioned, the *scriptio inferior* of the palimpsest can be dated between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, even though the verses must surely be earlier, as they do not adhere to the metrical norms followed by the Nonnian poets.<sup>58</sup> However, since the metrical *facies* does not seem compatible with Hellenistic versification, it has been suggested that the date of composition should be placed no later than the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>59</sup> Although it should be kept in mind that this date is still hypothetical, it is interesting to note that it can fit well with some features of the Sinai hexameters.

In fr. Bv 4 Dionysos is called Oinos, based on the allegory recalled above. In addition to the Orphic verses quoted by Proclus, this interpretation is attested in a famous passage by Diodorus Siculus, who, after saying that Dionysus was dismembered and boiled ὑπὸ τῶν γηγενῶν,

<sup>55</sup> *Hymn. Orph.* 55, 26 ἄμβροτον ἄγνων Ἀδωνιν.

<sup>56</sup> E.g. Theoc. *Id.* 15, 102–103; 136–137; 144.

<sup>57</sup> Rossetto (2021: 41).

<sup>58</sup> Rossetto (2021: 42).

<sup>59</sup> Magnelli in Rossetto et al. (2022: 1–2).

traces the process back to the grape harvest and the boiling of wine.<sup>60</sup> In his account, the γηγενεῖς ('earthborns') are obviously the farmers, given their connection to the earth and the paraetymological pun γεωργοί-γγεγενεῖς. Based on the Sinai hexameters, where we see both Oinos and the Giants, it cannot be ruled out that in Diodorus' allegorical tale too, the γηγενεῖς represent these mythical figures rather than the Titans.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, according to Hesiod, the Giants are sons of Earth,<sup>62</sup> and their link with the earth was an obvious notion in Greek culture.<sup>63</sup> Bernabé interprets Diodorus' γηγενῶν as Τιτάνων,<sup>64</sup> probably both because the same historian, in another passage,<sup>65</sup> refers Dionysos' dismemberment to the Titans and in Cornutus' treatise this allegory is linked with the Titans too.<sup>66</sup> However, it is possible that the two passages of Diodorus should not be related: when he speaks of the Titans, he says that Dionysos is the son of Zeus and Persephone and born in Crete, according to the 'standard' Orphic version of the story, while in the allegorical account, the god is said to be the son of Demeter. In other words, Diodorus likely draws on two different sources: of these, the allegorical one could be the same as Cornutus', who may well have interpreted the

<sup>60</sup> Diod. Sic. 3, 62, 6–8 (= OF 59 III+399 III+58).

<sup>61</sup> On the overlap between the Titans and the Giants cf. VIAN (1952: 169–174) and D'ALESSIO (2015: 208–209). In a Servius' scholium to Verg. G. 1, 166 (= OF 59 V), the killing of Dionysos is attributed to the Giants but without any allegorical interpretation. It is remarkable that the same 'mythological variant' is likely to be found in the prologue of the Orphic Argonautica, if the ἔργ' αἰδήλα / Γιγάντων of vv. 17–18 is to be referred to the killing of Dionysos; cf. VIAN (1987: 5–11). For a later witness of the Giants within this allegorical pattern, cf. *Myth. Vat.* 3, 12, 5 (= OF 311 IV+326 I+333 I+672 II).

<sup>62</sup> Hes. *Theog.* 183–185.

<sup>63</sup> WEST (1978: 220). The adjective γηγενής occurs in reference to the Giants e.g. in Soph. *Trach.* 1058 ὁ γηγενὴς στρατὸς Γιγάντων, while in Eur. *Phoen.* 1131 the adjective is juxtaposed with γίγας. In Eur. *Bacch.* 994–995 Pentheus is defined as Ἐχίονος / γόνον γηγενῆ; for the representation of Pentheus as a 'Giant' cf. DI BENEDETTO (2004: 445–446; 455–456).

<sup>64</sup> BERNABÉ (2004–2005) (*ad* OF 59 III).

<sup>65</sup> Diod. Sic. 5, 75, 4 (= OF 283 I).

<sup>66</sup> Cornutus. *Theol.* 30 (= OF 59 IV).

γηγενεῖς as Titans according to the better-known version of the myth. However, since Diodorus refers to some mythographers who transmitted the story, it is sure that it circulated in the Hellenistic age (or even before),<sup>67</sup> which goes well with the dating proposed for the Sinai hexameters—whether one accepts the interpretation of the γηγενεῖς as Giants or not.

In summary, until now scholars believed that the oldest certain account of Dionysos' death and rebirth dates back to the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, based on Philodemus' mention, in his work *De pietate*, of the *Mopsopia* of Euphorion of Chalcis<sup>68</sup> as a source for this myth.<sup>69</sup> Although it is essential to keep in mind that this is a hypothetical reconstruction, the recent discovery of the Sinai hexameters may allow us to push this timeline back to at least the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC; in other words, we may face the earliest (and above all, direct) evidence of the myth of Dionysos' death and rebirth.

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<sup>67</sup> Diod. Sic. 3, 62, 6: παραδεδωκότων δὲ τῶν μυθογράφων. That this account could be quite ancient is suggested by the hint of a real παράδοσις, i.e. transmission (perhaps in the form of a ἱερὸς λόγος?).

<sup>68</sup> Fr. 39 Van Groningen; cf. VAN GRONINGEN (1977: 102–104).

<sup>69</sup> HENRICHS (2011).

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