

# Parnassus, Delphi, and the Thyiades

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AS AN INTERNATIONAL SANCTUARY, Delphi helped bring about the transition within the emerging *poleis* of the Archaic period to what François de Polignac has called a “more finished, ‘adult’ stage of society and institutions.”<sup>1</sup> Delphi’s business was international in scope: the sanctuary was involved in colonization, arbitration, and panhellenism.<sup>2</sup> Yet one important aspect of Delphi’s emergence as a panhellenic sanctuary rarely studied is the impact of this extraordinary status on the community of Delphi and its surrounding region. In this paper I propose that, as the sanctuary of Delphi came to represent order, conciliation, and mediation to the Greeks, the local topography of the region was made to reflect these same themes. Delphi and Mt Parnassus became, through myth and ritual, a landscape in which tensions between wildness and civilization—a polarity at the heart of the culture of the *polis*—could be narrated, enacted, and organized. Delphi and Parnassus stood for the polarities from which the *polis* was constructed. On the one side was Delphi, representing the triumph of order over chaos, as expressed in the myth of the sanctuary’s foundation, when Apollo destroys Pytho and brings culture to the original inhabitants of Parnassus (Strab. 9.3.12). On the other side was Mt Parnassus, the wilderness tamed by Apollo. These

<sup>1</sup> F. de Polignac, “Mediation, Competition, and Sovereignty: The Evolution of Rural Sanctuaries in Geometric Greece,” in S. Alcock and R. Osborne, edd., *Placing the Gods: Sanctuaries and Sacred Space in Ancient Greece* (Oxford 1994) 18.

<sup>2</sup> De Polignac (*supra* n.1) 11. On Delphi and colonization see I. Malkin, *Religion and Colonization in Ancient Greece* (London 1987) 17–22, who supports Forrest’s observation that “colonization did more for the spread of Delphoi’s influence and prestige than Delphoi itself did for colonization.” See W. G. Forrest, “Colonization and the Rise of Delphi,” *Historia* 6 (1957) 160–75. On Delphi and international arbitration see H. W. Parke, *A History of the Delphic Oracle* (Oxford 1939); J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle* (Berkeley 1978); C. Morgan, “The Origins of Panhellenism,” in N. Marinatos and R. Hägg, edd., *Greek Sanctuaries: New Approaches* (London 1993) 18–44, esp. 27–32.

mythic associations were reinforced in two ways. The first was by ritual: the mountain was the setting for the ecstatic cult of the Thyiades of Dionysus. The second was by topography: the mountain was divided into two zones, the distant wilderness of mountain peaks and a nearer, less threatening plateau suitable for cultivating and grazing. The transition between these zones, and the deeper movement from chaos to order, was located at the Corycian Cave. In short, as Delphi was transformed from a local cult into a panhellenic shrine, its authority was negatively reinforced by the figuring of Parnassus as a wild place.

The dialectic between mountain and sanctuary is part of a broader set of polarities at the heart of the early *polis*. As the inverse of the communal world of state and citizen, the mountain was marginal, a place of isolation, the reserve of the hunter and shepherd.<sup>3</sup> In this respect Delphi and Parnassus played out the familiar dialectic of city and empty space. The former was subject to control, the latter was subject to possession. The distinction was gendered: the former was primarily a male domain; the latter was figured female. As we shall also see, the relationship between the two zones was modified by other factors. Dionysus, the maenads' god, was incorporated into Delphic ritual, and the Thyiades who raved in his honor on the mountain tops also served as part of the priestly apparatus of the sanctuary.<sup>4</sup> The Thyiades were not thereby tamed, but their maenadism was complemented by other cult activities important to the ritual calendar that dominated the life of the sanctuary. The mountain was, as it were, brought into the sanctuary. The focal point for the movement between these different zones was the Corycian Cave, which marked the transition from the wilderness to culture. It was not Delphi alone, therefore, but the entire landscape around it that resonated with meaning.

<sup>3</sup> On mountains and *chorai eremoi* see G. Daverio Rocchi, *Frontiera e confini nella Grecia antica* (Rome 1988) 31–37.

<sup>4</sup> Parke (*supra* n.2: 14) suggests that Dionysus achieved prominence at Delphi as early as the sixth century. Texts relating to the cult of the Thyiades are collected by M.-C. Villanueva Puig, "À propos des Thyiades des Delphes," *L'Association dionysiaque dans les sociétés ancienne* (= *Actes de la table ronde organisée par l'École française de Rome, Rome 24–25 mai 1984* [Rome 1986]) 31–51. See also L. Weniger, *Das Collegium der Thyiaden zu Delphi* (= *Jahresbericht über das Karl-Friedrichs-Gymnasium zu Eisenach* [Eisenach 1876]). Thyiades are briefly discussed in A. Henrichs, "Greek Maenadism from Olympos to Messalina," *HSCP* 82 (1978) 121–60 at 137, 152f.

## I

The mountain overshadowed Delphi, threatening to intrude on Delphi's affirmation of order over chaos, and was rich in mythic associations. It was to Parnassus that Deucalion and Pyrrha were carried in a chest during the primordial Flood, and from here began the repopulation of the earth as the couple tossed over their shoulder stones that turned into men and women (Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.7.2). Stephanus of Byzantium (*s.v.* Παρνασσός) explains that the very name "Parnassus" is a corruption of "Larnassus," derived from the *larnax* in which Deucalion was carried. The most widely recognized religious association of the mountain was with Dionysus. This is demonstrated in four of Euripides' plays, in which Parnassus is the haunt of Dionysus. At *Ion* 714–17, for example, the chorus calls on the very terrain of Delphi to annihilate Ion, with the prayer:

ἰὼ δειράδες Παρνασοῦ πέτρας  
 ἔχουσαι σκόπελον οὐράνιον θ' ἔδραν  
 ἵνα Βάκχιος ἀμφιπύρους ἀνέχων πύκας  
 λαιμηρὰ πηδᾷ νυκτιπόλοις ἅμα σὺν Βάκχαις.

Later at 1125ff, as the servant announces that the attempt on Ion's life has been revealed, he explains that Xouthos has gone to where the god's Bacchic fire leaps, in order to sacrifice on "the twin peaks of Dionysus" in thanks for having seen his son. At *Phoenissae* 226ff the chorus refers to Parnassus as the "Bacchic heights of Dionysus." Teiresias warns Pentheus in the *Bacchae* (306ff) that he will one day see Dionysus leaping over the peaks of Delphi waving his thyrsos. At *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (1242f) Euripides figures the very peaks of Parnassus as raving on behalf of Dionysus (τὰν ... βακχεύουσαν Διονύσῳ Παρνάσιον κόρυφαν). Little wonder that Aristophanes satirizes this association in the *Frogs*, where Euripides calls upon Dionysus of the fawnskin who leaps among the pines of Parnassus (1211ff).<sup>5</sup> In *Clouds* Aristophanes calls Dionysus the *komastes* who possesses Parnassus (602–605). To the Athenians it must have seemed as though Apollo and Dionysus had worked out a simple and equitable arrangement: Apollo was worshiped at his sanctuary, while Dionysus ranged over the mountain, taking

<sup>5</sup> On attitudes to Dionysus on the Athenian stage, see A. F. H. Bierl, *Dionysos und die griechische Tragödie* (= *Classica Monacensia* 1 [Tübingen 1991]).

possession of the shrine during the winter month, when Apollo visited the Hyperboreans.<sup>6</sup>

Despite unanimity among Athenian sources, the mountain was not the exclusive domain of Dionysus. He was joined here by Apollo Lykeios, whose presence lies behind the many local traditions involving wolves.<sup>7</sup> This is hardly surprising, as the mountain was thinly populated, the haunt of shepherds, and popular with hunters.<sup>8</sup> It was on Parnassus, for example, that Odysseus was wounded by a boar while hunting with his grandfather, Autolycus, whose name also links him to wolflore.<sup>9</sup> Evidence for shepherding on the mountain comes from the Oxyrhynchus historian (21.3 Chambers), who attributes the outbreak of the Corinthian War to one of the frequent skirmishes between the Phocians and Locrians as they grazed their flocks on the mountain. Both hunters and shepherds might be expected to take more than a passing interest in wolves and a god in wolf's clothing. The hunter, like the wolf, is a predator; and for shepherds the god who came in the shape of a wolf was paradoxically also the god who protected the flock (*Nomios*).<sup>10</sup> In his guise as wolf-god, Apollo could even function as a culture hero. This is revealed by stories of the founding of a (non-existent) city on the mountain named Lykoreia (λύκος + ὠρύομαι = "howling wolf").<sup>11</sup> In the accounts of Strabo and

<sup>6</sup> On the winter sojourn of Apollo and his *apodemia*, celebrated on the seventh day of Busios, see Weniger (*supra* n.3) 1ff; H. Daebritz, "Hyperboreer," *RE* 9.1 (1914) 262f; Plut. *Mor.* 389 (on the use of the paean for nine months and the dithyramb for the three months of winter); Paus. 10.5.7.

<sup>7</sup> On Apollo Lykeios see M. H. Jameson, "Apollo Lykeios at Athens," *Ἀρχαιογνώσια* 1 (1980) 213–36; D. E. GERSHENSON, *Apollo the Wolf God* (= *JIndo-EurSt* Mono. 8 [McLean (Virginia) 1991: hereafter 'Gershenson']).

<sup>8</sup> Wolves (and foxes) play a recurring rôle in the lore of the region: see the παραμύθια τσοπανικά collected in D. Loukopoulos, *Ποιμενικά τῆς Ρούμελης* (Athens 1930) 222–49. One of the nursery rhymes collected by Loukopoulos (255) reads: "Vlacho, Vlacho, tsintsine,/ Where are all your sheep?/ Down to the grave./ The wolf ate twelve/ and the fox ate the bones."

<sup>9</sup> Odysseus and Autolycus: *Od.* 19.386–486; on wolf names see Gershenson 9.

<sup>10</sup> On Apollo and flocks see W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods* (London 1966) 82; Gershenson 1–23.

<sup>11</sup> For the story of Parnassus and Lykoreia see Paus. 10.6.1 and, in less detail, Strab. 9.3.3., who calls Lykoreia a *topos* where the Delphians lived in earlier times; according to Steph. Byz. *s.v.* Λυκώρεια it was a *kome* of Delphi. It may have been mentioned in Alexandrides' *On the Delphic Oracle*: see Meineke's remarks (1849) *ad* Steph. Byz. *s.v.* Λύλη. Regardless of Lykoreia's vigorous *Nachleben*, the city was no more than a legend. The city is not men-

Pausanias, the oldest city in the region, which had been built by Poseidon's son Parnassus, was destroyed by the Flood. The survivors were led by a band of wolves to safety on the heights of the mountain, whereupon they founded their wolf-city. The memory of Lykoreia survives in the modern name of the higher of the twin peaks of Parnassus, Liakoura (elev. 2457 m.). Literary and epigraphical evidence confirms that behind the wolves of Lykoreia loomed Apollo. Pausanias (10.14.7) tells how the inhabitants of Delphi were led onto Parnassus by a wolf and discovered a cache of gold stolen from the sanctuary. The thief was killed by the wolf, which had been sent by Apollo, and in recognition of the god's intervention the people of Delphi erected the statue of a wolf in his honor. Apollo Lykeios was honored in the sacrificial calendar of Delphi, receiving skins dedicated to him by the Labyadae.<sup>12</sup>

The mountain was also associated, at least in some accounts, with Apollo's childhood. Apollo is usually thought to have come to Delphi from much farther east, and to have made his abode there after slaying the serpent, Pytho, but in the *Hymn to Hermes* (550–67) Apollo is said to have been taught divination when still a young boy herding cattle by the Thriai, who dwelled "under the fold of Parnassus." Little is known about the Thriai, but they were evidently associated with bees. They are described in the *Hymn to Hermes* as three holy sisters, but also as winged, and feeding on honey. They prophesied through pebbles (θηρία) and may represent an oracular tradition that predates the phenomenal growth of

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tioned in a Delphic inscription that describes in close detail the border between Delphi and Ambrysos. See *FdD* III.2 136.18–33; Daverio Rocchi (*supra* n.3) 134–42. The border ran directly towards the mountain peak. Had there been a city here it surely would have been named. As for the village named by Stephanus, if this notice has any substance, it might refer to a village above Delphi, further up the mountain, which Pouqueville apparently identified as Lykoreia in 1826. See F. C. H. L. Pouqueville, *Voyage de la Grèce* (Paris 1826). Fortifications have been reported at Elaphokastro, not far from the summer *kalyvia* of Delphi: see P. Dasios, Συμβολή στην Τοπογραφία της αρχαίας Φωκίδας (Amphissa 1992) 70. Those seeking the historical kernel of the story linking Lykoreia to the survivors of the Flood may note that traces of human habitation on Mt Parnassus date as early as Middle and Late Helladic: see P. Amandry, *L'Antre corycien* I (= *BCH* Suppl. 7 [Paris 1981]) 183–93.

<sup>12</sup> Sokolowski, *LSCG* 152–57; *CID* I.1 9; *SEG* XXXVI (1986) 520; see also W. Burkert, "Apellai und Apollo" *RhM* 118 (1975) 1–21, esp. 10.

Delphi in the Archaic period.<sup>13</sup> There is some archaeological evidence to support the notion of a mantic tradition in the region independent of Delphi, and Larsen has recently proposed that the Thriai should be identified with the nymphs of the Corcyrian Cave.<sup>14</sup> The excavator of the Cave, Pierre Amandry, did not consider this possibility, but the Cave has yielded thousands of knuckle-bones, which may have been used for divination and then offered as dedications by those who had consulted the Thriai.<sup>15</sup> Yet another possible cult site is located at Marmara, less than 4.5 km. northwest of Delphi.<sup>16</sup> In addition to these sites on the lower slopes, the wild peaks of the mountain were considered holy and were associated with the ecstatic followers of Apollo and Dionysus, the Thyiades (Paus. 10.32.7). Whether the cult of the Thriai was located at the Corycian Cave or not, Strabo was hardly exaggerating when he wrote that the entire mountain was considered sacred, with its caves and other holy places.<sup>17</sup>

Parnassus then was sacred to both Dionysus and Apollo just as they shared the sanctuary of Delphi, not as oppositional forces, but as twins: Apollo Lykeios and Dionysus Lykos.<sup>18</sup> The Homeric Hymns hint at this complementarity. Apollo, assuming the shape of a dolphin, guides a Cretan crew to Delphi where they will serve as his priests. In a comic inversion of this, Dionysus is shanghaied by a crew of pirates whom he turns into dolphins.<sup>19</sup> This pairing found its most explicit expression in the pediments of the fourth-century temple. The eastern

<sup>13</sup> Callim. *Ap.* 45 with Σ; *Etym. Magn. s.v.* θρία; Hesych. *s.v.* θριαί; see in particular Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.2 with Frazer's note (Loeb edition).

<sup>14</sup> J. Larsen, "The Corycian Nymphs and the Bee Maidens of the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, *GRBS* 36 (1995) 341–57.

<sup>15</sup> P. Amandry, "Os et coquilles," *L'Antre corycien* II (=BCH Suppl. 9 [Paris 1984]: hereafter 'L'Antre II') 378; on divination using knuckle bones (*astragalomantis*) see Artem. 2.69.

<sup>16</sup> P. Amandry, "Marmara," *L'Antre* II 427–52, reports six bases found here, but their function and that of the site from which they come remain unclear.

<sup>17</sup> Strab. 9.3.1; see J. Schmidt, *Heilige Berge Griechenlands in alter und neuer Zeit* (=Texte und Forschungen zur byzantinisch-neugriechischen Philologie 37 [Athens 1939]) 24–37.

<sup>18</sup> Gershenson 140–43; on Dionysus as the complement of Apollo see Farnell, *Cults* I (Oxford 1896) 204–208.

<sup>19</sup> *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 388–543; *Hymn. Hom. Bacch.* 32–55. See also the tondo of the well-known kylix by Exekias, *ABV* 146.21, showing the god reclining on the boat like a symposiast as a grapevine overgrows the mast and dolphins leap around him.

pediment showed Apollo driving the chariot of the sun accompanied by Leto, Artemis, and the Muses, while the eastern pediment showed the setting sun and Dionysus, accompanied by the Thyiades.<sup>20</sup>

## II

By far the best attested cult activity on Parnassus is the maenadism of the worshippers of Dionysus. At Delphi these women were known as the Thyiades, but the same name was also applied to nymphs. The scholiast to Homer remarks, "there are many sorts of nymphs, as Alcman says (*Poet. Mel. Gr.* fr. 63): Ναῦιδες τε Λαμπάδες τε Θυιάδες τε." Their name derived from an adjective meaning "possessed" or "raving," as an anecdote in Plutarch's *Moralia* demonstrates. During a performance in Athens of his *Artemis*, the poet Timotheus recited the line θυιάδα φοιβάδα μαινάδα λυσσάδα, at which the lyric poet Cinesias jumped up from the audience and said, "May you have such a daughter!"<sup>21</sup> The pleonasm that provoked Cinesias' exasperation involved four terms describing the frenzy of spiritual possession. We could translate the line as "possessed, inspired, raving, raging." The first of these adjectives, θυιάς, continued to serve as a general term for divine inspiration and is used frequently by Nonnus, who applies it both to maidens and such less corporeal entities as breezes. A favorite line ending in the *Dionysiaca* is θυιάδι φωνῆ or θυιάδα φωνῆ.<sup>22</sup>

It is unclear when exactly the term was adopted as the name of a Dionysiac *thiasos*, but various traditions from Delphi at least give the Thyiades a respectable genealogy. One story maintained that Thyia was the daughter of Castalius and the first priestess of Dionysus to celebrate rites in his honor (Paus. 10.6.4). Some even regarded Thyia as the mother of Delphus by Apollo, making the connection to the principal god at Delphi even closer. None of these traditions, however, are reported

<sup>20</sup> Paus. 10.19.4. On the significance of these pediments see A. Stewart, "Dionysus at Delphi: The Pediments of the Sixth Century Temple of Apollo and Religious Reform in the Age of Alexander," in B. Barr-Sharar and E. Borza, edd., *Macedonia and Greece in Late Classical and Early Hellenistic Times* (= *Studies in the History of Art* 10 [Washington, DC 1982]) 204–27.

<sup>21</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 170; for Timotheus see *Poet. Mel. Gr.* 778b.

<sup>22</sup> Nonnus, *Dion.* 4.272, 307; 8.24; 10.33; 16.71; 23.225; 28.82; 37.772; 39.77; 44.282; 47.612.

prior to Pausanias; earlier genealogies say nothing about Thyia's relation to Apollo and Dionysus. Hesiod included Thyia in the *Ehoiai* as the daughter of Deucalion and the mother by Zeus of Magnes and Macednon.<sup>23</sup> The only connection to Parnassus in this lineage arises from her relationship to Deucalion. Another genealogy connecting her to Parnassus but again not directly to Delphi is in Herodotus, who reports that as Xerxes' fleet was preparing to sail south from Therme, the Delphians erected an altar to the winds "at Thyia, where now is located the sanctuary of Thyia, the daughter of Cephisus."<sup>24</sup> The Cephisus River flows through a fertile valley on the northern side of Parnassus, but the sanctuary dedicated to Thyia probably lay at Arachova, ancient Anemoreia ("Wind-Mountain" or "Wind-Fort"). An altar dedicated to the winds was identified here a century ago, and it is possible that Thyia was originally associated with the district east of Delphi.<sup>25</sup> It is safe to conclude that Thyia was a local nymph of the Parnassus region and probable that she was not integrated into Delphic genealogies before the Classical period.

The origins of the Thyiades certainly go back no earlier than the incorporation of Thyia into Delphic myth, but this is about all that we can say concerning the cult's origins. We are on surer ground for how the cult functioned. Plutarch (*Mor.* 953D) places the Thyiades on the heights of the mountain, recalling the occasion on which a search party was sent out to save the Thyiades after they were caught in a snow storm. Even better known is the story told in the *Mulierum Virtutes*,<sup>26</sup> of a band of Thyiades who lose their way towards the end of their frenzied wanderings on Mt Parnassus. They arrive one night at Amphissa, where, "exhausted and still not returned to their senses, they threw themselves down here and there in the agora and

<sup>23</sup> Hes. *Catal.* fr. 7; see M. L. West, *The Hesiodic "Catalogue of Women": Its Nature, Structure, and Origins* (Oxford 1985) 51ff.

<sup>24</sup> Hdt. 7.178; on the cult of the winds see G. Roux, *Delphi. Orakel und Kultstätten* (Munich 1971: hereafter 'Roux') 179f. The association of Thyia with the winds is otherwise unexplained. Gershenson (1-44) argues that wolves in folklore often represent the wind and identifies Apollo Lykeios as an example. It might help to explain the genealogy that made Thyia the consort of Apollo and the mother of Delphos.

<sup>25</sup> See G. Kremmos, *Ιστορική Γεωγραφία* (Athens 1876) 87, cited by Dasios (*supra* n.11) 69.

<sup>26</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 249E; see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley 1951) 271.

fell asleep." The women of Amphissa discover them and are afraid that they will come to harm and so form a silent human barrier around the sleeping women. Next morning, when the Thyiades awake, the women of Amphissa individually take care of them, feed them, and finally, with their husbands' consent, lead them safely to the border.

The episode takes place during the Third Sacred War, and according to Plutarch the Amphissan women are afraid for the Thyiades because Amphissa is allied to Phocis, and the Phocian tyrants currently held Delphi. For this reason many of the tyrants' soldiers are in Amphissa. But there is an undercurrent of deeper anxiety beneath the concerns about rough soldiers and vulnerable women. After all, if these women were on Mt Parnassus they would still be vulnerable to the threat of violence from armed men. Or would they? On the heights of the mountain, above the clouds, where it is hard for even a strong man to climb, there the Thyiades run raving (*mainontai*) for Dionysus and Apollo, Pausanias tells us (10.32.7). Theirs is the empty land on the margins of civilization; and as anyone who has watched a performance of the *Bacchae* knows, in that territory they are invulnerable. The drama of the episode at Amphissa arises not just from the pathos of women saved in the nick of time by their sisters, but also from the deeper, more disquieting juxtaposition of the normative and the liminal. What happens when, over night, the *agora*, center of male, civic space, is invaded by women—and not just any women but a group of raving marauders whose behavior, in contemporary terms, could be called "wilding"?<sup>27</sup> Even if they are coming down from the ecstasy of their possession, the threat is still present because the divine possession that these women experience is hyper-real: it not only challenges normative behavior but even normative consciousness. Their very presence in Amphissa is a transgression and invites a response. The threat posed by the Thyiades is female and wild; it provokes the response of an equal and opposite violence, male and harnessed in defence of the civic order. Only the intercession of the Amphissan women—silent, still, and subservient—successfully mediates

<sup>27</sup> The raving of the Thyiades is consistent with the presentation of maenadism in the *Bacchae*: see L. Portefaix, "Concepts of Ecstasy in Euripides' 'Bacchanals' and their Interpretation," in N. Holm, ed., *Religious Ecstasy* (=Papers read at the Symposium on Religious Ecstasy held at Åbo, Finland, on the 26<sup>th</sup>–28<sup>th</sup> of August 1981 [Stockholm 1982]) 201–10.

between the poles of imminent violence and defuses the situation.

Like Amazons the Thyiades give a female face to masculine fear and anxiety.<sup>28</sup> The treatment of these two groups represent different ways of controlling those fears: Amazons are defeated, and Thyiades are made to operate beyond the borders of orderly society. They are literally marginalized. But the comparison between Amazons and Thyiades is potentially misleading, because the two groups operate in quite different ways. Amazons exist only in the realm of myth, even if an Amazonomachy can represent an historical event such as the Greek triumph over the Persians. On the other hand, although the Thyiades have a mythical component to their identity, they also exist as real, not to mention Greek, women. In the second century the *archeis* of the Thyiades was Clea, a friend of Plutarch, and it is clear from the opening chapters of the *Mulierum Virtutes*, which is addressed to her, that she was a well educated member of the local élite.<sup>29</sup> We are dealing then with more than cultic behavior relegated to the mountainous margin of Delphi's territory. At another level these women were a part of the established order of society.

Plutarch's references to the Thyiades points to a corporation at the center of Delphi's religious life. In the *Quaestiones Graecae* (*Mor.* 293D) Plutarch reports that the Herois was a Delphic festival consisting primarily of secret formulas known only to the Thyiades but that the public actions of the festivity plainly suggested a connection with Semele. Although the reference is opaque, these rites may have celebrated the birth of Dionysus. Certainly, the Thyiades were responsible for other rituals conducted within the sanctuary and related to Dionysus. Inside the temple of Apollo, they performed a secret sacrifice, according to Plutarch, "when the Thyiades awaken Dionysus Liknites."<sup>30</sup> Because this ritual involved the use of a winnowing-fan or basket (*liknon*) the Thyiades' performance was probably

<sup>28</sup> On Amazons see J. Boardman, "Herakles, Theseus and Amazons," in D. Kurtz and B. Sparkes, edd., *The Eye of Greece. Studies in the Art of Athens* (Cambridge 1982) 13; D. von Bothmer, *Amazons in Greek Art* (Oxford 1957), chapters 8, 10; W. B. Tyrrell, *Amazons. A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (Baltimore 1984) 9–22.

<sup>29</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 242; for Clea as *archeis* see Plut. *Mor.* 364E. The title recurs in other Delphic inscriptions of the Antonine period: see J. Jannoray, "Inscriptions delphiques d'époque tardive," *BCH* 90 (1946) 256–59.

<sup>30</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 365A; Hesych. s.v. Λικνίτης; Paus. 10.4.3.

part of a harvest festival, although Daraki has challenged this interpretation. She prefers to interpret the trieteric festival as "le garant d'un mouvement circulaire qui réalise la jonction dynamique de deux espaces, le monde souterrain et le monde terrestre."<sup>31</sup> Her reason for rejecting the 'awakening' of the god as a cereal festival is that "la végétation n'attend pas deux ans pour accomplir son cycle." This is incorrect. Olives, for example, are a biennial crop. In addition, strategies of mixed farming, involving arboriculture, viticulture, and the cultivation of legumes and cereals, combined with the practice of fallowing, often involved crop planning over two years.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Amouretti has demonstrated that the agricultural rhythm of cereal farming, measured from crop preparation through harvest and on to preparation of the following crop extended over a cycle of not one year but sixteen months. This corresponds nicely to the cycle of the rites of Dionysus Liknites, which were celebrated in February and November. In the case of a *trieteris* falling, as we would say, in alternating years, the actual period between the November rites of one year and the February rites of the next celebration would be fifteen months. The festival of Dionysus Liknites therefore looks very much like a celebration of the agricultural cycle. This was a rôle for the Thyiades very different from enacting the mountain drama of the wild Dionysus. They also celebrated within the community of Delphi the fecundity of the vegetation god.<sup>33</sup>

The nexus of death, rebirth, and communal prosperity underlay a second performance of the Thyiades, played out more publicly in the enneateric festival commemorating Charila. According to Plutarch the Delphians were once afflicted by a terrible draught and famine. They approached their king with their wives and children in supplication and he responded by distributing grain and legumes to the leading men alone, for there was not enough for everyone. The king was also approached by a young orphan girl who appealed to him but whom he answered by striking her face with his sandal. The girl, who was poor and alone but noble of heart, departed and hanged herself with her belt. The famine worsened, aggravated

<sup>31</sup> See M. Daraki, *Dionysos* (Paris 1985) 20.

<sup>32</sup> M.-C. Amouretti, "Les rythmes agraires dans la Grèce antique," in M.-C. Cauvin, ed., *Rites et rythmes agraires* (= *Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient* [Paris 1991]) 119–26.

<sup>33</sup> Roux (154f) also draws attention to the very clear association of the Semele myth with the seasonal cycle of plant growth.

by disease, until the Pythia ordered the king to atone for the suicide of the virgin. Scarcely able to find out even the dead girl's name, the Delphians performed a sacrifice and purification that they continue to perform, according to Plutarch, every eight years. On the occasion of this rite the king distributes grain and legumes to everyone, foreigners and citizens alike, while carrying a doll representing Charila. When everyone has received a portion of the food, the king strikes the effigy with his sandal and then hands it over to the leader of the Thyiades, who takes the doll to a ravine. The effigy is interred, where Charila was buried after she had hanged herself.<sup>34</sup>

The wrongdoing for which the king of Delphi is forced to atone is evident in the narrative of the mistreatment of Charila, but that act of abuse and its atonement arise from a deeper disquiet. The myth is structured around tensions of inclusion and exclusion: all the Delphians approach their king, but only the leading citizens are taken care of; a single defenseless girl seeks help and is roughly rejected, for which the entire community is punished. The act of atonement identifies what is problematic by guaranteeing a portion to everyone, citizen and stranger alike: what is troubling is that the prosperity of Delphi should be shared by only a few, and those the most powerful. The ritual is most important for what it says to the community, that all must be fed, that to ignore the weakest is to threaten the well-being of the entire community. Given the phenomenal wealth of Delphi, thanks to its panhellenic status, it is perhaps not surprising that some anxiety should arise over how the community distributed that wealth, but why are the Thyiades involved? It is notable that Plutarch twice speaks of the distribution of grain and legumes but at no point mentions meat. This myth originates not in the milieu of sacrifice and feasting but in the harvest and storage of agricultural products. This is not the domain of Apollo, who in the Homeric Hymn (*Ap.* 534–37) guarantees a perennial supply of sheep to his new cadre of priests, and whose sacred land was left uncultivated, but of the

<sup>34</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 293E; Roux 155f; J. Larsen, *Greek Heroine Cults* (Madison 1995) 134, 140, 142, who points out (144) that “heroic cults centering on wrongful death reflect and reinforce the Greeks’ gender expectations for both men and women through narrative motifs.” Larsen identifies twenty-four cults associated with wrongful death, but virtually all are restricted to annual sacrifices or tomb cults. Charila’s cult was much more, a communal festival that was administered on behalf of the entire community by, in effect, a female priestly clan.

deity who keeps Delphi supplied with the more mundane produce of the soil, Dionysus. It is as his representatives that the Thyiades accomplish the purification of Delphi. The reenactment of Charila's abuse makes them protectors of the welfare of the entire Delphian community, ensuring that everyone, including the most vulnerable, will share in Delphi's prosperity. Far from being wild women whose presence threatens the city, in this guise they are agents of Delphi's restoration. This function is further suggested by the timing of the festival, which was enneateric. This is significant because the interval of eight years between festivals corresponds to the period during which the lunar and solar calendar grew increasingly out of alignment. Every ninth year was thus a 'Great Year', when the lunar and solar calendars were brought back into alignment by the insertion of an intercalated month. It was a fitting time for the Thyiades' purification of Delphi: the restoration of astronomical order supplied the occasion for a corresponding restoration of social order (Roux 152-56).

It is certainly not unusual for female figures such as Amazons, Furies, or Bacchantes to personify terrifying forces that are perceived as a threat to order. The Thyiades are a part of that tradition, giving expression to a host of anxieties centered on Delphi. They bring the discourse on order and chaos vividly alive. But the Thyiades are very different from Amazons, Furies, and the Bacchantes of the theater, because their performance is not restricted to the realms of myth or drama. While possessed by Dionysus, they inhabit the wilderness of the mountain, where their savagery reaffirms the imperatives of order. Accordingly, all Parnassus is transformed into a theater for their performance. At the same time their association with Dionysus proved useful to a sanctuary that remained, however great its panhellenic prestige, connected to a local community. The cult of Apollo, as an international oracle, may have demanded burnt offerings, but Delphi also had to find religious expression for the less exotic concerns of a community of farmers and ordinary folk. So, while Apollo's oracle served nations, Dionysus and the Thyiades served the community. This multiplicity of meaning had a correlate in the landscape, a cult place marking the transition from wilderness to civilization, a place outside the sanctuary but not on the mountain tops, where nymphs are possessed and tamed by gods: the Corycian Cave.

## III

Located less than five kilometers from Delphi, as the crow flies, the Corycian Cave nevertheless occupies a very different place in the landscape of the region (see Figure 1). The sanctuary of Apollo lies between 500 and 600 m. above sea level, on the southern slopes of Parnassus, and looks south over the Crisaeon Plain towards the Gulf of Corinth. Behind the sanctuary a path ascends to the mountain plateaux behind Delphi, reaching 1,000 m. in only a little over half a kilometer. The steep rate of ascent requires a series of sharp cutbacks before the path opens on to the gentler slopes at the western edge of a broad upland plain, Livadhi. Until recently Livadhi was used as the summer pasture for flocks from Kastri (Delphi) and Arachova, and both villages maintained *kalyvia* (seasonal camps) on the edges of the plain. The Corycian Cave is located on the northwestern edge of this plain, at an elevation of 1,250 m., on the southern slopes of one of the lesser peaks (elev. 1,562 m.) of Parnassus. The cave was named for a nymph, Corycia, the mother by Apollo of Lykoros, both of whom gave their names to the heights above Delphi.<sup>35</sup> During the Persian Wars the cave served as a hideaway for many who fled from Delphi (Hdt. 8.36.9).

French excavations demonstrate that the Corycian Cave has a long history of cult activity stretching back to the Neolithic. Aside from a wide variety of small dedications—rings, *auloi*, bronze figurines, metal objects, and a wide range of ceramics—the most common dedicatory objects by far were astragals, especially of sheep and goats, of which over 22,000 were found.<sup>36</sup> Nearly 2,500 were pierced as if to be threaded like beads on a leather thong; many were also smoothed, and a small number of them were set in lead (36) or gold (2). The significance of these bone offerings is opaque. It is possible that they were gaming pieces or necklaces, but, as noted above, Lar-

<sup>35</sup> Corycia and Lykoros: Paus. 10.6.3; ΣAp. Rhod. 183.1; on Lykoreia see Plut. *Mor.* 394E–F; on the Corycian mountain see D.L. 1.118, who relates a tradition that Pherecydes died after hurling himself from here. According to Antigonos Carystius (*Rer. mirab. coll.* 127) the Delphians claimed that at certain times “the Corycian shone like gold.”

<sup>36</sup> Amandry (*supra* n.15) 348. F. Poplin, “Contribution ostéo-archéologique à la connaissance des astragales de l’Antre corycien,” *L’Antre* II 86, estimates that over 95% of all astragals from the Cave are from sheep or goats.

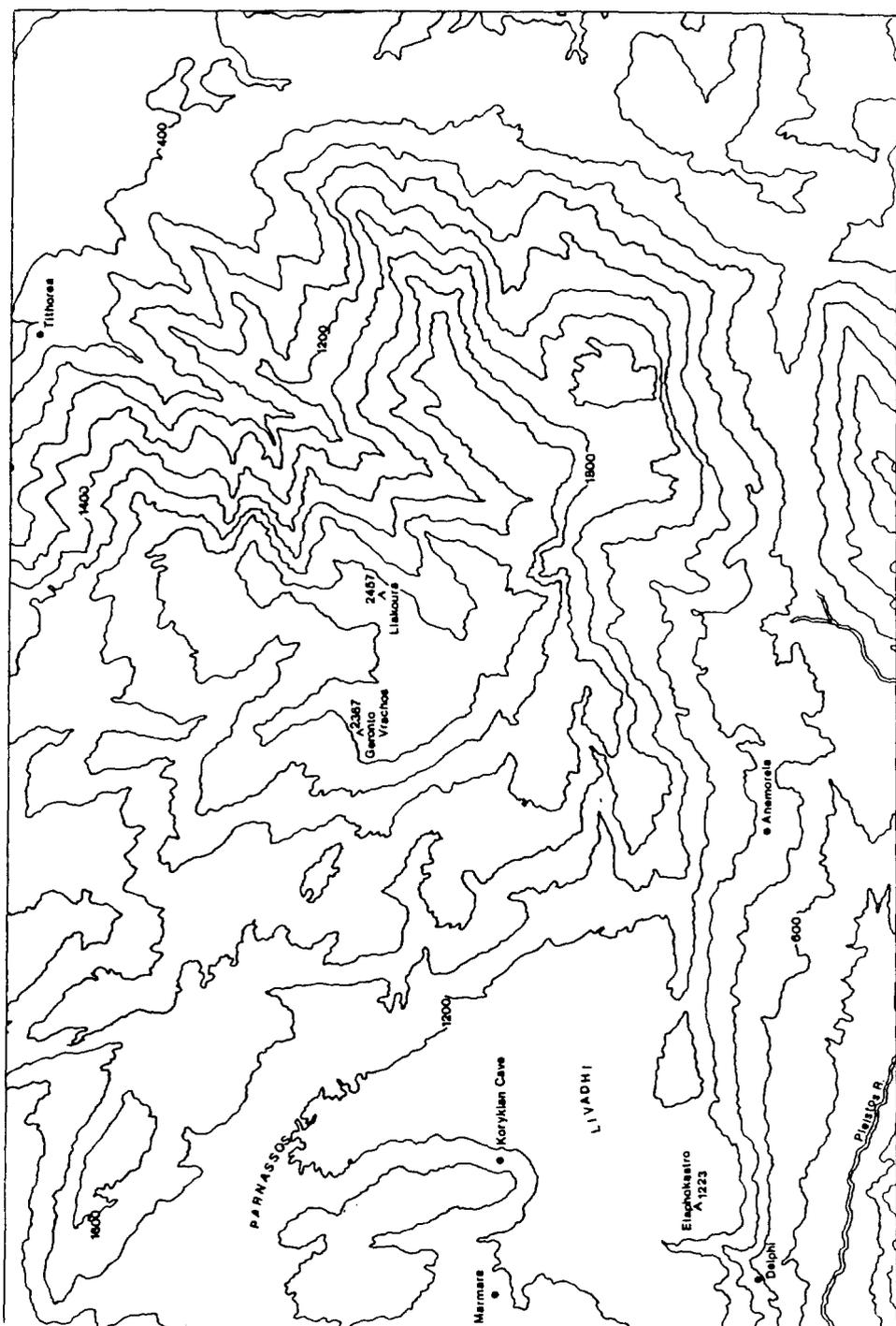


Figure 1. Map of Delphi and Parnassus

sen has recently collected abundant evidence for the use of astragals in divination and suggests equating the Corycian Nymphs with the mantic Thriai of the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*.<sup>37</sup> That so few of the knuckle-bones are from cattle, and that doe and stags are much better represented here than at the Kabeirion, suggest that those who frequented the cult were primarily shepherds, goatherds, and hunters. In this respect the dedications at the Corycian Cave reveal that it served a very different constituency from the sanctuary of Apollo.

Despite the wealth of evidence for cult activity, the meager epigraphical evidence from the Corycian Cave, consisting of nine inscribed blocks and rupestral inscriptions, does not point to the worship of Dionysus, but rather only to Pan and the Nymphs and, in a single case, Apollo. This is confirmed by Pausanias' report (10.32.7) that those who lived in the vicinity of Parnassus regarded the Cave as especially sacred to Pan and the Nymphs. Six inscriptions name the Nymphs as recipients of the dedication. They are named alone (nos. 5?, 6), in conjunction with Pan (nos. 4, 8, 9) and in association with Pan and Apollo Nymphagetes (no. 3).<sup>38</sup> Dionysus is not named, but the eighth inscription, a badly weathered dedication cut into the bedrock, yielded to Pomtow the following reading:

Νυμφῶν κ[αὶ]  
 Πανός. καὶ [ἀπὸ]  
 Θυ(ι)αδῶν ἅ [δεκ]-  
 ἄτα ἐλήφθ[η].<sup>39</sup>

If this reading is correct, which is by no means certain, it would be the sole epigraphical evidence that the Thyiades participated in dedications at the Corycian Cave in honor of Pan and the Nymphs. And even if Pomtow's reading were correct, it would hardly constitute strong evidence of Bacchic cult activity at the Corycian Cave. Consequently, although acknowledging the frequent association of nymphs with Dionysus, Amandry has denied that there was a specific Dionysiac cult at the Corycian Cave: "Pour l'époque classique, aucune relation n'est attestée non plus entre Dionysos et les Nymphes de l'Antre."<sup>40</sup> If, however, we explore the abundant literary references to

<sup>37</sup> Larsen (*supra* n.34) 341-57.

<sup>38</sup> J.-Y. Empereur, "Inscriptions," *L'Antre* II 339-46.

<sup>39</sup> For Pomtow's text (*Philologus* 71 [1912] 91ff) as well as that of Pappadakis, who did not see any trace of "Thyiades," see Empereur (*supra* n.38) 344f, who professes to be unable to make better sense of the inscription than his predecessors.

<sup>40</sup> "Le culte des Nymphes et de Pan à l'Antre corycien," *L'Antre* II 400.

Dionysus, Nymphs, and the Corycian Cave, a consistent pattern emerges, pointing to a Dionysiac association with the spot.

In the first place, ancient authors often spoke of the mixture of wine and water as the mingling of the blood of Dionysus and the tears of the Nymphs (Ath. 11.465A–C, 15.693E). Furthermore, even nymphs connected to Pan might also be the followers of Dionysus, as a drinking song preserved in Athenaeus (15.694D) demonstrates:

ὦ Πάν, Ἄρκαδιᾶς μέδων κλεοναῶς,  
ὄρχηστὰ Βρομιάις ὅπαδὲ Νύμφαις.

The work of the tragedians is especially rich in references showing that the Nymphs of the Corycian Cave were associated with the worship of Dionysus. Aeschylus' *Eumenides* begins with an invocation addressed to the gods and oracular powers associated with Delphi. After naming the four consecutive holders of the oracular seat, Gaia, Themis, Phoibe, and Apollo, the priestess then addresses divinities who inhabit the surrounding area (22–26): Athena, worshipped at the Pronaia temple, the nymphs of the Corycian Cave, Dionysus, the springs of the Pleistos, Poseidon, and Zeus. The reference to Dionysus explicitly connects him, and his cult, to the Corycian Cave:

σέβω δὲ νύμφας, ἔνθα Κωρυκίς πέτρα  
κοίλη, φίλορνις, δαυμόνων ἀναστροφῆ.  
Βρόμιος ἔχει τὸν χῶρον, οὐδ' ἀμνημονῶ,  
ἐξ οὔτε Βάκχαις ἐστρατήγησεν θεὸς  
λαγῶ δίκην Πενθεῖ καταρράσας μόρον.

Amandry claims that any interpretation of evidence for a connection between Dionysus and the Corycian Caves relies “sur une interprétation restrictive du mot χῶρος comme désignant la grotte.” But because there is no mention of Parnassus elsewhere in the passage, there is no reason for reading χῶρος as broadly referring to the entire mountain. In fact, as the rest of the speech is specific in its reference to the sanctuary of Apollo, the Pronaia temple, and the Pleistor River, it is probable that the χῶρος in question is the Corycian Cave. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the spot was considered sacred to Dionysus. This interpretation is further borne out by a choral ode in Sophocles' *Antigone* (1125ff) addressed to Dionysus, a passage not discussed by Amandry:

σὲ δ' ὑπὲρ διλόφου πέτρας στέροψ ὄπωπε  
λιγνύς, ἔνθα Κωρύκισαι

στείχουσι Νύμφαι Βακχίδες.

Here the devotees of Dionysus (*Bacchides*) and the Nymphs of the Corycian Cave (*Korykiai Nymphai*) blend into a single entity. Similarly, when Euripides' *Bacchae* call upon their god to show himself, they cry (*Bacch.* 556–59):

πόθι Νύσας ἄρα τᾶς θη-  
ροτρόφου θυρσοφορεῖς  
θιάσους, ὦ Διόνυσ', ἦ  
κορυφαῖς Κωρυκίαις;

Even allowing for the imprecision of tragic toponomy and the demands of stylized verse, these references are remarkably consistent, and show that, to an Athenian audience at least, the Nymphs of the Corycian Cave were linked to Bacchic cult.

Part of the difficulty in understanding the position of the Corycian Cave in the cultic landscape of Parnassus arises from a tendency to think in terms of exclusive categories, but in antiquity the cult associations of Parnassus overlapped. In the *Argonautica*, for example, Orpheus sings to the Argonauts a song about Apollo's slaying of the monster Delphyne and refers to the *Korykiai Nymphai*, daughters of Pleistos, who sang the paean to Apollo the Healer (Ap. Rhod. 2.711f). The same connection occurs in a paean composed to Apollo by Aristonous towards the end of the third century (Powell, *Coll. Alex.* 1.33–37), in which the poet sings of the presents offered to Apollo by the other immortals:

Δωροῦντ[αι] δέ σ' ἀθάνατοι,  
Ποσειδῶν ἀγνοῖς δαπέδοις,  
Νύμφαι Κωρυκίοισιν ἄν-  
τροις, ἰῆ ἰὲ Παιάν,  
τριετέσιν φαναῖς Βρόμιος.

These night-time processions of Dionysus were performed by female choruses, according to Athenaeus (13.600c). Late in the fourth century Philodamus composed a paean to Dionysus suitable for such a performance, and the hymn reveals that the procession welcomed the arrival of Dionysus into the city (*Coll. Alex.* 11ff). In the refrain the chorus sings:

ἰὲ Παιάν, ἴθι σωτήρ,  
εὐφρων τάνδε πόλιν φύλασσε  
εὐαίωνι σὺν ὄλβῳ.

But Dionysus does not enter the city along the Sacred Way or from Delphi's port at Cirrha. Instead, he is imagined as de-

scending from the heights above. The second strophe (19–23) proclaims:

πᾶσα δ' ὕμνοβρύης χόρευ-  
 ε[ν Δελφῶ]ν ἱερὰ μάκαιρα χώρα,  
 αὐτὸς δ' ἄστε[ρόεν δ]έμας  
 φαίνων Δελφίσι σὺν κόραις  
 [Παρν]ασσοῦ πτύχας ἔστας.

The maidens of Delphi are surely the Thyiades, sent to the mountain to escort Dionysus on his triumphant entry into Apollo's sanctuary. Fittingly, by the ninth strophe, the hymn takes up the question of how Dionysus will be accommodated, relaying the orders of the Far-Shooter that Dionysus be honored on Apollo's own temple. As we know, this was done, and Dionysus was shown on the western pediment flanked by the Thyiades. Towards the end of the hymn, the eleventh strophe (139ff) specifies the honors due to Dionysus: sacrifices to Dionysus during the Pythian festival, choir contests, and a splendid statue of the god to be placed in a chariot pulled by golden lions. There are also stipulations concerning the preparation of a cave fitting to the god:

. . . ζαθέω τε τ[εῦ-]  
 ξαι θεῶ πρόπον ἄντρον.

It cannot be conclusively proved that the cave in question was the Corycian, but the long standing association of Dionysus with the Corycian Nymphs makes it highly likely that the Corycian Cave was the abode of the god on the lower slopes of the mountain.

The formal procession welcoming Dionysus to Delphi must be distinguished from the wild *oribasia* for which the worshippers of Dionysus were famous. These latter performances were enacted on the upper peaks of the mountain, above the clouds, where, according to Pausanias (10.32.7), the Thyiades "run raving for Dionysus and Apollo." The Corycian Cave, therefore, marked the point of transition, where the orderly practice of a civic *pompe* between Delphi and the lower slopes of the mountain gave way to the chaotic raging of the gods' devotees on the high peaks. This transition was marked by the difference in the routes across the mountain. Discussing the road from Delphi to the Cave, Pausanias observes (10.32.2, 7) that it was easier for a fit man than a traveler on horseback, but he says nothing of any road ascending to the heights, remarking only that from the Cave it was hard going even for a fit man to reach

the peaks of the mountain where the Thyiads invoked Apollo and Dionysus.

The aetiological myth explaining the origins of *oribasia* is preserved in the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus, and the account sheds some light on the function of the Thyiads' mania. After the destruction of Semele, the infant Dionysus is entrusted by Hermes to Ino. This provokes the anger of Hera who sends Ino mad, wandering over the hills of Parnassus, where she terrorizes hunters, herdsmen, and plowmen. In most versions of her story, she hurls herself into the sea with her child Melicertes. She is then transformed into the sea goddess, Leucothea, and her son, renamed Palaemon, is carried by a dolphin to Corinth (Paus. 1.44.7f). In Nonnus' account, however, Apollo takes pity on her and causes her to fall asleep. After she awakes she stays on Parnassus for four years, founding dances for Dionysus near the oracle of Apollo. Her final healing is described by Nonnus (*Dion.* 9.286–89):

. . . σὺν ἀγρῦπνοισι δὲ πεύκαις  
Κωρυκίδες θυόεντα μετέστιχον ὄργια Βάκχαι  
καὶ ζαθέαις παλάμησιν ἀλεξητήρια λύσσης  
φάρμακα συλλέξαντο καὶ ἴησαντο γυναικά.

In the episode that follows, the female servants of Athamas, Ino's husband, wander over the hills in search of their mistress, lamenting her disappearance and that of the infant Dionysus. The myth thus authorizes both choral performances in honor of Dionysus and a re-enactment of Ino's and her servants' mad wandering across the mountain. The emphasis placed on the double healing of Ino, both by Apollo and later by the Corycian Nymphs on behalf of Dionysus points to the increasingly close association of Apollo and Dionysus from the fourth century on.

By the second century A.D. the Cave had become a spot on the Grand Tour. In Plutarch's *De Pyth. or.* (*Mor.* 394F) Philinus remarks that his guest has gone up to see the Corycian Cave and Lykoreia; but the mountain remained a place of menace, and the Cave was regarded as a safe haven. This is reflected in a text from the first century A.D., the *Pinax* by Cebes. An allegory of philosophical enlightenment, the *Pinax* centers on the interpretation of a painting, which is explained to one of the anonymous speakers by an experienced old man. Towards the end of his exegesis the old man explains that the seeker of the true way who has reached a state of perfect understanding is as safe as one who has reached the Corycian Cave. The interlocutor asks

about some threatening wild women who have been dogging his tracks, and we find that they are Physical Pain (Ὀδύνη), Grief (Λύπη), Debility (Ἀκρασία), Greed (Φιλαργυρία), and Poverty (Πενία). The Thyiades are here allegorized, but the allegory presumably works because at some level a visit to the Corycian Cave was still seen as an experience fraught with danger (*Pinax* 26.1).

Any modern visitor to Delphi and the Corycian Cave cannot but be struck by the fact that the two places, though not far apart, are located in distinctly different zones. Delphi belongs to the foothills and overlooks both plain and sea. Behind and beyond, however, is another world, that of the mountain. The Corycian Cave exists in an intermediate place, where city meets wilderness. *Oribasia* permitted the Greeks to give physical expression to that sense of threat presented by the mountain, while the Thyiades also allowed Delphi to bring Dionysus into their midst. The setting for these rites may have been more awesome than a theatrical performance, but their function, to express the imperative of order over chaos, and the triumph of civilization over nature, was in essence the same.

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