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**Arion and Dionysos Methymnaios:
A Reading of Herodotus 1.23-4**

Herodotus' tale of the dolphin rescue of Arion, a famous musician in the time of the tyrant Periander, contains a wealth of mythic material that allows a glimpse of earlier traditions. Analysis of the episode generally concentrates on its relationship to the themes and structure of the *Histories* as a whole (Flory, Munson, Benardete). Other scholars focus on Arion's role in the development of the dithyramb (Stahl, Pickard-Cambridge, Bowra, Seaford). That Arion belongs to the sphere of Dionysos has been noticed by Burkert. I develop the implications of this connection, using linguistic and literary evidence to flesh out the Dionysiac associations of Arion, suggesting that the identification between poet and god is cemented with a hidden pun in Herodotus' text.

Herodotus' tale of rescue by dolphins has a number of parallels in folktale and Greek myth. Many of its elements appear, although in a different order, in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysos*. These include piracy, miracles, fear, leaping into the sea, and dolphins. At times the language is quite similar as well: in the Hymn the pirates are *ekplegentes* at the miracles worked by Dionysos, while the Corinthian sailors are *ekplagentas* when Arion, presumed dead, appears before them in what is clearly figured as an epiphany.

Here are traditional elements of a Dionysiac persecution myth, but with a human protagonist in the place of the god. Other texts reinforce the parallels. In *Iliad* 6.130-140, Dionysos, frightened by Lykourgos' pursuit, plunges into the sea. Sea leaps are also part of the myth of Dionysos' aunt Ino and her son Melikertes.

Arion's connection with Dionysos can be partly explained by the conventional literary history, which calls him the inventor of the dithyramb. If Herodotus' dating is correct, however, it places him later than the earliest surviving appearance of the word in Archilochos. Scholars have attempted to deal with this difficulty by assigning him a role in the evolution of the dithyramb into its later fixed form. In any case, the persistent linking of Arion with this genre seems to have given him the kind of founder status as *protos heuretes* usually associated with heroes.

If we consider Arion a "hero of the dithyramb," then the association with Dionysos is well motivated. Archilochos' description of singing the dithyramb to the god when wine has struck his wits shows that this connection goes back to the earliest mention of the genre. Another aspect of Herodotus' account strengthens the Dionysiac association. Arion is identified as *ho Mēthumnaios*, a citizen of Methymna, famous for its wine and also for a cult of Dionysos Phallen, instituted when fishermen brought up from the sea a strange olive-wood mask of the god (Paus.9.19.3). Dionysos sometimes has the epithet Methumnaios (usually with epsilon), which has been connected, although without evidence, to the Methymnaian cult. Plutarch derives the name from *methu* (wine) and Chantraine concurs, noting that the form with eta suggests a pun. The two spellings are often confused, with the result that Hesychius defines *Mēthymnaios* as *ho Dionysos*.

Behind the figure of the Herodotean and presumably historical Arion the Methymnian one seems to glimpse a heroic figure closely linked to Dionysos. The epithet calls to mind other instances in which the god's epithet links him to a hero (*e.g.* Apollo Hyakinthos). While the echoes of the *Homeric Hymn* are almost certainly the result of a conscious strategy on the part of Herodotus, we are left to wonder to what extent the other Dionysiac associations conjured up by this tale reflect local accounts used by Herodotus.