

## DIONYSOS AND HIS CULT IN ETRUSCAN TEXTS

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*In the present paper it will be argued that in Etruscan texts reference to the god Dionysos is made, alongside by Fufluns, by the divine name Tins or Tins'. As a corollary to this identification, the most important Etruscan religious texts in which this divine name appears will be discussed in order to see what we can learn from them about the Etruscan cult of Dionysos.*

It is a well known fact that the god Dionysos was venerated in Etruria under the cult name *Fufluns*. This is borne out of iconographical evidence provided by mirror scenes, in which Fufluns occurs together with *Semla*, the syncopated Etruscan form of the name of Dionysos' mother Semele (*ES LXXXIII*), and epigraphical evidence in the form of his association in inscriptions with the adjective *Paχie-* "Bakkhic", derived from Dionysos' nickname *Bakkhos* (*TLE 336 = Rix 1991: Vc 4.1-3*) (Pfiffig 1975, 288-95). In his standard work on Etruscan religion, Ambros J. Pfiffig even goes as far as to declare that "Der Name des Dionysos wird nicht ins Etruskische übernommen" (Pfiffig 1975, 25).

As opposed to this pertinent statement by the distinguished Austrian scholar, I have in my work on the text of the Capua tile (*TLE 2 = Rix 1991: TC, c. 475 BC*) proposed to distinguish *Tins* or *Tins'* "Dionysos" as a separate divine name instead of its usual explanation as a declined variant of the Etruscan equivalent of Greek Zeus and Latin Juppiter, *Tin* (G *Tinas*), which in mirror scenes occurs as *Tina* or *Tinia* (Woudhuizen 1998, 26, note 56; 82-3; cf. Pfiffig 1975, 231). My reason to do so was twofold. In the first place, the Capuan variant of this divine name, *Tinunus* (D-G sg. in *-s*), which also appears in this same text without the characteristic doubling of the *nu* in adjectival derivation *Tinusna-*, strikingly recalls the form *Tinnuša* (D sg. in *-a*) as attested for an Etruscan inscription on an oinochoe from Cumae, dated *c. 700-675 BC*, which in an earlier contribution I had identified as the Etruscan form of Greek Dionysos, most closely related to *Dinnusō* (G sg.) as attested for a text from Aiolian Kumē dated to the period 2 BC-AD 2 (Woudhuizen 1988-9, 102-5; cf. Woudhuizen 1998, 26, note 56). Secondly, especially the form of the root without the doubling of the *nu* as attested for the adjectival derivation *Tinusna-* cannot be separated from that of the personal name *Tinusi* "Dionysios (D sg. in *-i*)" recorded for inscriptions from Clusium

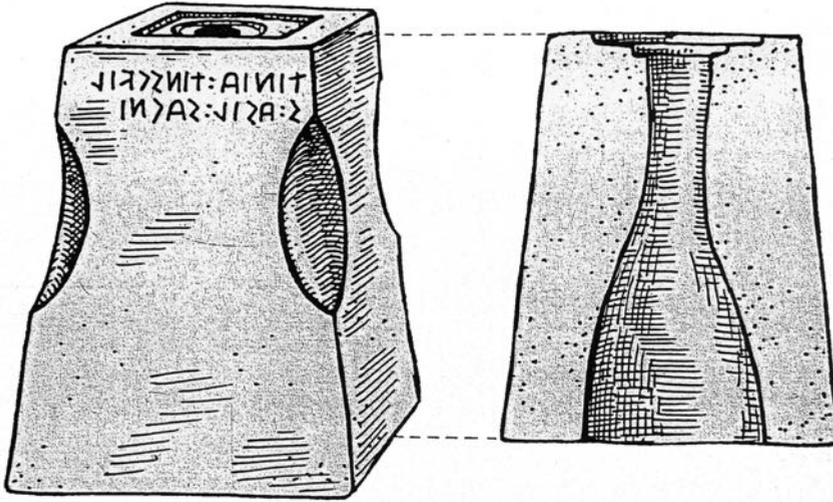


Fig. 1. Altar stone with drain for libation offerings from Volsinii (Pfiffig 1975, 77, Abb. 25).

(Woudhuizen 1998, 82-3). Note in this connection that the given forms from these early texts are still unsyncoated, and that archaic *Tin(un)us-* or *Tinnuś-* regularly becomes recent *Tins* or *Tinś*.

To these two arguments, a third one can be added. This is provided by the inscription of recent date on an altar with drain for libation offerings from Volsinii (*TLE* 205 = Rix 1991: Vs 4.13), which runs as follows: *Tinia Tinscvil s Asil sacni* (see Fig. 1). Of this inscription, the first section, *Tinia Tinscvil*, also appears separately on stone bases of recent date (*TLE* 258-9 = Rix 1991: Vs 4.10-11). Now, the exact meaning of the element *cvil* (paralleled in writing variant for the female personal name *Θanyvil*) eludes us, but it is evident that it expresses the relationship of *Tins* to *Tinia* or vice versa, something like “son of” (*Tinia*, son of *Tins*) or “begetter of” (*Tinia*, begetter of *Tins*)<sup>1</sup>. If our identification of *Tins* as the Etruscan form of *Dionysos* applies, the relationship in question is actually visualized in the mirror scene on the birth of *Dionysos* (*ES* LXXXII), where, unfortunately, the name of the newborn child is not specified in like manner as that of the other deities, including his father *Tinia* (see Fig. 2)<sup>2</sup>. At any rate, the expression *Tinia*

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note in this connection that the Greek name *Dionysos* is usually explained as “son of Zeus (*G Dios*)”, from which it follows that the enigmatic element *nysō-* (metathesis of Proto-Indo-European *\*sunus?*) means “son”.

<sup>2</sup> Note that *Tins* or *Tinś* has no occurrence in the legends of the mirrors, with the exception of its derivation *Tinstā*, which is used as an apposition to *Maris* in *ES* CCLXXXIV.



Fig. 2. Mirror with the scene of the birth of Dionysos (ES LXXXII).

*Tinsvil* rules out that Tinia and Tins are both forms of the name of one and the same divinity, because that would lead to the absurd consequence that Tinia is his own son or begetter! As far as the inscription on the altar stone in sum is concerned, this may, on the analogy of Oscan *Appellounēi sakoro* “Dedicated to Apollo” (Buck 1905, 152, no. 62), be interpreted as “Dedicated to Tinia, begetter of Dionysos, and Asia”—the third deity being known from scenes on mirrors as well, where she appears as *Esia*, once even in combination with *Fufluns*<sup>3</sup>.

It should be noted, however, that our identification of Tins or Tins with Dionysos collides with the evidence from a semi-bilingual inscription of recent date from a grave in Perugia (*TLE* 608 = Rix 1991: Pe 1.661), according to which the family name *Tins* corresponds with Latin *Iuentius*, i.e. a derivative of the divine name *Juppiter* (*G Iovis*), thus indicating the identification of Tins or Tins with the supre-

<sup>3</sup> Van der Meer 1987, 55, nos. 16-7. The given interpretation of the inscription on the altar stone improves the one offered in Woudhuizen 1992a, 107, but note that the correspondence of the element *s* to the Lycian conjunction *se* “and” and of *Asil* to Lydian *Asi<sub>1</sub>il* (both D-G sg. in -l) as given in the dictionary part, s.v., still applies.

me deity of the Etruscan pantheon, Tin, instead of with his son (Pfiffig 1975, 231; Beekes/van der Meer 1991, 29). Facing this evidence, it should be realized that at such a late date in the history of the Etruscan civilization mistaken identifications are not unparalleled. One could think in this connection of the fact that the name of the female deity *Aisera-* (= Phoenician *Asherah*) as attested for the text on the Magliano disc considering the gloss *TLE* 803 at a later date is reinterpreted as a word for “god” in general, and subsequently by the Etruscologists even as a plural of that same word. Yet another argument against our identification of Tins or Tinsí with Dionysos might be formed by the fact that in that case Dionysos is mentioned in two distinct ways on the Piacenza bronze liver (*TLE* 719 = Rix 1991: Pa 4.2), namely as *Tins* (3x) and as *Fuflu(n)s* (2x). But reference to a deity or deities with more than one cult name is a very common feature, compare for example the identification of the Kabeiroi with the Dioskouroi or Penates, or the fact that *Astre-* “Astarte” appears as recipient deity in the longer version of the text on the Pyrgi gold tablets, whereas in the shorter one this position is taken by *Etana-* “Athena”<sup>4</sup>. On balance, then, I believe that the evidence in favor of our identification of Tins or Tinsí as Dionysos outweighs that in favor of its identification as a declined form of Tin.

The cult of Dionysos was very popular in Etruria. In pictorial evidence of offering scenes the men are dressed up like Satyrs and the women like Maenads, i.e. as followers of Dionysos (Woudhuizen 1998, 69-70; 75; figs. 7, 9, 10, and 12). In order to curb the negative effects of the orgies in honor of Dionysos on the norms and values of society—the situation being especially critical in the region of Campania and southern Italy—the Roman senate felt forced to take measures and edicted the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* in 186 BC. Of special interest to our purpose, however, is, given the identification of Tins or Tinsí as Dionysos, the answer to the question: what do the Etruscan texts tell us about his cult?

The first text which is of relevance to this question, is the so-called Liber linteus (*TLE* 1 = Rix 1991: LL) of recent date. Here Tins turns up in the recurrent combination *Tinsí Tiuri-m* “for Dionysos and the sun-god”, with *Tiuri* (D sg. in *-i*) originating from Luwian hieroglyphic *Tiwata-* “sun-god”, of which the second dental in the Early Iron Age became liable to rhotacism, hence *Tiwara-* (*TLE* 1, ii, 6, etc.; Woudhuizen 1992a, s.v. *tiuras*; Woudhuizen 1998, s.v.). This combination of Dionysos with the sun-god is reflected in the indication of the magistracy *maru paxathuras Caθs-c* “priest of the Bakkhic society and Cautha-” from a funeral inscription from Tuscania (*TLE* 190 = Rix 1991: AT 1.32), if only we realize that Cautha- is yet another form of address of the sun-god (Woudhuizen 1992a, s.v.). Now, comparative evidence for the combination of Dionysos with the sun-god is forthcoming from Thracian, which civilization extended into the north Aegean

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<sup>4</sup> Best/Woudhuizen 1989, 158; 165; 175; Woudhuizen 1992a, s.v.; Woudhuizen 1998, 170. Note that *uni-* in this same text is not a proper name, but the form of address “lady”.

region—the homeland of the Tyrsenian ancestors of the Etruscans<sup>5</sup>. As the foremost specialist in the field, Alexander Fol, explains: in Thrace Apollo and Dionysos were the same god, “The “mystery” of the faith was for the Sun to be called Apollo when in the upper hemisphere, i.e. during the day, and Dionysos when it is in the lower hemisphere, i.e. during the night.” (Fol 1998, 82). As it seems, then, the Etruscans shared this belief with the Thracians, who, in turn, as we will see below, shared it with the Greeks.

Yet another text with information on the cult of Dionysos is the Magliano disc (*TLE* 359 = Rix 1991: AV 4.1, c. 470 BC). Here Tins is staged as the third deity of the divine triad on the back side of the discus, further consisting of Calu- and Thanr- to which the preceding fourth section is dedicated. As both these latter gods by means of the form *tiuras* (D dual) are addressed as sun-gods, it lies at hand to identify Calu- as a variant cult name of the sun-god Cautha- as recorded for the first section of the text on the A side of the discus, reserved for his infernal aspect. Furthermore, it deserves our attention in this connection that the specification of Thanr- as a sun-goddess ties in with Hubert Petersmann’s (1986) identification of the Greek equivalent of Thanr-, Persephone, as the sun-maiden on account of the fact that the first element of her name, *perse-*, consists of an earlier reflex (cf. Linear B *pe-re-swa*) of the same root from which Greek *pérra* “sun” originates. If we further realize that, as shown by Michael Janda (2000), the Eleusinian mysteries were focussed on the yearly birth of Persephone’s child, who can be positively identified as Dionysos, and that this child was a personification of fire in like manner as in Indic religion the child of the sun-maiden, *Uśas*, is none other than *Agnis* “Fire”, it stands to reason to consider Tins in the fifth and final section of the text as a form of address of the vegetation god Maris- of the third section of the text on the A side of the discus in his infernal aspect. At any rate, it seems clear from the text on the discus (= a solar symbol [sic!]) of Magliano that Tins is the son of the sun-god, which explains his association with the latter in the text of the *Liber linteus* and the indication of a magistracy in the funeral inscription referred to above, and that of his symbol the phallos with the sun as attested for a lid from an ash container from Assissi (see Fig. 3). In its entirety, the final section of the text on the discus runs as follows: *Tins* “for Dionysos”, *lursθ* “a lustrum”, *tev<i> ilax̄e huvi* “or, (if) he has favored you <pl>”, *θun lursθ* “a second lustrum”, *sal af̄rs naces* “the first during the latter half of April” (cf. Woudhuizen 1992b, 195 ff., esp. 225; Woudhuizen 1998, 156-7).

The last text to be treated here is that of the Capua tile (*TLE* 2 = Rix 1991: TC), dating from about the same period as the Magliano disc. As we have already seen, the divine name Dionysos still occurs in this text in unsyncopated form *Tinunus*

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<sup>5</sup> Note in this connection that Dionysos is already associated with the Tyrsenians, presumably when still in their Aegean homeland, in the Homeric Hymn to Dionysos, see *Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns and Homeric* (Loeb edition, 1977), 429-33. For a discussion of the problem of Etruscan origins, see Woudhuizen 2006, section 10.

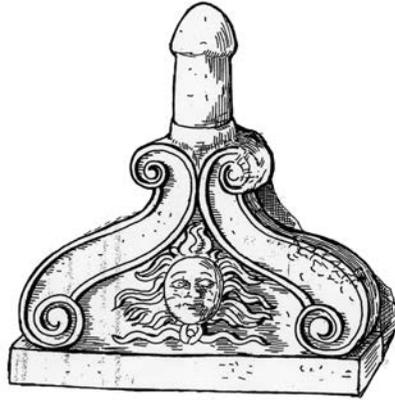


Fig. 3. Lid of an ash container from Assisi (Pfiffig 1975: 200, Abb. 90).

(D-G sg. in *-s*) and, in adjectival derivativion, *Tinusna-*, which tallies with my suggestion that the phenomenon of syncope started in the north of Etruria and reached the south only at a later time (Woudhuizen 1992a, 72; Woudhuizen 1998, 20). The section dedicated to Dionysos in combination with Sethums is the fifth one, which runs as follows (Woudhuizen 1998, 81-3):

#### Capua tile

V, 1	<i>parθumi ilu -cve</i> <i>isveitule</i> <i>Tinunus Seθumsal -c</i> <i>ilucu</i> <i>perpri cipeu tartiria</i>	“When you shall hold a feast in July, one shall hold a feast in honor of Dionysos and Sethums on the day of the opening ceremonies: a τριπτύς to be consecrated (by) the priest.”
V, 1 <sup>1</sup>	<i>va -ci fulinuśn[es a]v[θ]</i>	“And he will bring the ithyphallic (statues) of these (two gods).”
V, 2 <sup>1</sup>	<i>etul ana Tinusnal ilucu</i>	“On the idus one shall hold a feast below the (statue) of Dionysos.”
V, 2	<i>ituna fulinuśnai θenunt</i> <i>eθ U[ne]</i>	“They will hold this (feast) of the ithyphallic (statues) in the presence of U[ni].”

The word to be explained in this section is *fulinuśnes* (A(m/f) pl. in *-es*), which also appears with yet another ending as *fulinuśnai* (G pl. in *-ai*). The solution of this riddle might be provided by information on the cult of the Kabeiroi of Samothrace. On this subject, Bengt Hemberg informs us as follows:

“In dieser Hinsicht belehrend sind auch die im Anaktorion gefundenen Gegenstände, die man wahrscheinlich als *cunni* und Phalloi aufzufassen hat. Auf

phallische Riten im Adyton könnten auch die beiden vor den Türen stehenden ithyphallischen Figuren deuten. Und man fragt sich, ob nicht auch die in der Sakristei gefundene eherne Kiste Phalloi erhalten hat.” (Hemberg 1950, 106).

The suggestion that the root of our enigmatic word *fulinuśn-* shows evidence of the Greek φαλλός characterized by *a/u*-change may perhaps receive further emphasis from the next citation<sup>6</sup>:

“Die Kabiren treten uns in dem Aition des Nikolaos als zwei Jünglinge mit den fremd klingenden Namen Tottes und Onnes entgegen. Aus Phrygien kommen sie und tragen eine kleine Kiste, die dem bedrängten Assessos [near Miletos] Rettung bringt. Der Inhalt dieser Kiste, die wahrscheinlich in dem Kult eine besondere Rolle spielte, kann man erraten. Schon Kern hat auf die auf den Kabiren-kult in Thessalonike bezügliche Erzählung hingewiesen. Diese lässt uns ausdrücklich wissen, dass zwei Kabiren den Phallos des Dionysos in einer Kiste nach Tyrrien [= Etruria] tragen.”<sup>7</sup>.

As a variant of the latter myth, Saon and Aeneas are said to have brought the Penates (= Kabeiroi) from Samothrace to Italy (Hemberg 1950, 294). In this connection it is relevant to note that the cult of Aeneas is not confined to Latium, but also attested for south Etruria, as not only 5th century BC statues of Aeneas with his father on his shoulder have been found in a sanctuary at Veii (Galinsky 1969, 125; 133; Fig. 111), but also an Etruscan scarab of the late 6th century BC shows Aeneas carrying Ankhises, “who in turn solemnly holds up the *cista mystica* containing the sacred cult objects”<sup>8</sup>, presumably, as we have seen, phalloi<sup>9</sup> (cf. Fig. 4). If we are right in our assumption that *fulinuśn-* is based on a reflex of Greek φαλλός, it may reasonably be argued that we are in fact dealing with a word of similar formation as *Tinusnal* (D sg. of a derivative in *-n(a)-* of the GN *Tinus-* “Dionysos”) bearing reference to the statue of Dionysos, from which it would follow that the entire formation refers to ithyphallic statues or so-called *hermai* (cf. Fig. 5) as attested *in corpore*, as we have just seen, for the sanctuary of the Kabeiroi at Samothrace, and referred to in the literary sources by, for example, Herodotos, *Histories* II, 51 and Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* VI 27-8. If so, the Etruscan GN *Seθums* is likely to be identified with Greek *Hermes*.

Now, the scholia to Apollonios Rhodios, *Argonautica* 1, 197 and Lykophron,

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<sup>6</sup> For further correspondences in vocabulary between Etruscan and Greek, see Woudhuizen 2006, appendix II.

<sup>7</sup> Hemberg 1950, 139; cf. Pfiffig 1975, 293 “Nach Clemens v. Alexandrien (*Protrept.* II, 19, 1) hätten zwei Korybanten oder Kabiren, Söhne des Großen Mutter, den Mysterienkorb, der den Phallos des von den Titanen getöteten Dionysos enthielt, bis zu den Etruskern gebracht”.

<sup>8</sup> Galinsky 1969, 60; on the Aeneas saga in general, see Woudhuizen 2006, section 11.

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note in this connection, that, due to its cultic significance, the phallos often crowns funeral monuments in Etruria—a custom it shares with Phrygia and the region of Smyrna in Asia Minor, see Pfiffig 1975, 195 ff. (esp. 198) and cf. Hemberg 1950, 130.



Fig. 4. Amphora with the depiction of *phallos* in a cista (Ars Erotica [1985]: 35).



Fig. 5. Depiction of a cultic *herma* on an Attic cup (Ars Erotica [1985]: 34).

*Alexandra* 162 inform us about the Kabeiroi of Samothrace that according to the Tyrrhenians Kadmilos or Kasmilos is identical with Hermes. Furthermore, it is stipulated by Myrsilos of Lesbos F 8 that the Kabeiroi of Samothrace are considered Tyrrhenian gods. If we combine this information with that of the given section of the Etruscan text on the Capua tile, in which, as we have seen, Tinunus or Dionysos is closely associated with Sethums alias Hermes, it may reasonably be argued that these two gods formed a *dvandva*, commonly referred to as Kabeiroi or Dioskouroi or, in Etruscan terms, *Tinas cliniaras* “the sons of Tin [D dual]” (TLE 156 = Rix 1991: Ta 3.2, c. 500-450 BC), or, in Roman terms, the Penates, which are represented in sculptural art by ithyphallic statues on either side of the door to the adyton as this happened to be the case with the sanctuary at Samothrace. The apparent inconsistency with the tradition by Clemens of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* II, 19, 1, referred to in note 7 above, according to which the Kabeiroi have brought the phallos of the deceased Dionysos to the Etruscans, may perhaps be overcome by pointing to the fact that Dionysos is revered in the mysteries, as we have observed in connection with the text on the Magliano disc, in form of his *celestial as well as infernal aspect* and hence may appear in myth by means of *two different personifications*.

Whatever the extent of the latter suggestion, it seems that with the help of the Etruscan texts themselves we have been able to dig into the heart and core of the Etruscan Dionysos cult.

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