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Wild Wild West: How Greek are Dionysiac Mysteries in the Roman World?

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Abstract

‘Dionysiac Mysteries’ look like they were entirely Greek for Roman worshippers: feature of the god and of the cult, terminology, myths, images, discourses and criticism, everything directs them towards the East part of the Empire. And yet a lot of the historical evidence, from the Augustan time onward, comes from Rome and the area around. This paper intends to question the “Greekness” of that kind of cult -imported, preserved, acculturated, made up or (re)created- through texts and images from Roman Italy (1st century BC-2nd century AD). It echoes the recent research on the ‘mystery cults’ in the Ancient world (e.g. “Les ‘mystères’: questionner une catégorie”, *Mètis* n.s. 14, 2016).