



THE ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR, Tuesday January 19, 2021 at 17h Athens time (via Zoom link).

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“Children in the thiasos?”

Evidence for the Initiation of Children into Orphic-Bacchic Mystery Cults

ABSTRACT

A wide range of iconographical, epigraphic, and literary sources have been interpreted as evidence for the amorphous Greco-Roman “Orphic” or “Bacchic” mystery cults. This paper evaluates the multi-disciplinary sources for the specific participation of children in such cults and establishes that children were indeed initiated. In light of this background for child initiation, I propose that one of the so-called “Orphic” gold *lamellae* from Pelinna in Thessaly should be associated with the burial of a child. The two ivy-shaped Pelinna tablets (Graf-Johnston nos. 26A and B) are typically considered as nearly-identical copies of the same archetypal ritual text, both belonging to the adult woman buried in the sarcophagus from which the tablets were recovered. However, the sarcophagus also contained the burial of a child, whose remains were enclosed in a bronze *kados*. I argue that material and paleographical micro-variations between the tablets suggest that the longer “A” tablet should be associated with the initiation of this child. This identification of a child *μύστης* provides further insight into the perplexing realm of Orphic-Bacchic mystery cults.