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Religion, State, and Democracy.  
A Reappraisal of the 5<sup>th</sup>-Cent. B.C. Libations to Dionysus  
in the Theatre Attested in Plut. *Cim.* 8, 8-9

*Introduction*

In his *Life of Cimon*, Plutarch narrates that, during the Athenian Great Dionysia of 468 B.C., the archon *eponymous* Apsephion surprisingly appointed Cimon and his fellow generals as judges of the tragic agon. The ten generals, after having poured the libations to Dionysus in the theatre, swore an oath and probably took a seat in the first row. About this obscure episode, Simon Goldhill stated: «on the major state occasion of the Great Dionysia it was, then, the most influential and important representatives of the state who were involved in the opening religious ceremony»<sup>1</sup>; «the presence of the ten generals in the theatre is always a way of staging the authority of the democratic state»<sup>2</sup>. This paper will focus on these two major assumptions in the attempt to provide a thorough reassessment of the practice of libating to Dionysus. In order to do so, it is vital 1) to visualise and understand libations both as a theatre ceremony and as an independent ritual, 2) to investigate on the identity of the ceremony's performers, and 3) to determine whether the ceremony (together with its performers and features) was linked to democracy and democratic ideology or if it was a mixture of civic and religious

\* I am grateful to all those who read earlier drafts of this paper, including Andrea Capra, Barnaby Chesterton, Phillip S. Horky, and Peter J. Rhodes. Thanks also to the two anonymous referees who provided me with precious comments and suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Goldhill 1987, 60 = 1990, 101.

<sup>2</sup> Goldhill 2000, 44.

elements<sup>3</sup>. Overall, I ask: can we deduce an explicit political ideology from the gesture of pouring out wine by the city's generals? I will show here why the ceremony should be appreciated as a normal communion between religious and civic elements which did not necessarily imply a display/promotion of democratic values.

Plutarch's anecdote, and especially his mention of the curious ceremony of offering libations to Dionysus made by the ten generals, have been an object of those Goldhill's studies concerning an un-investigated field of Greek drama and dramatic festivals, *i.e.* the so-called four 'pre-play ceremonies' of the Athenian Great Dionysia – the libations to Dionysus poured by the ten generals, the display of the allies' tributes<sup>4</sup>, the war-orphans' parade<sup>5</sup> and the public proclamations of honours for foreign benefactors<sup>6</sup> – which he connected to the political sphere of Athens, in particular to democratic ideology<sup>7</sup>. Goldhill considered not only tragic representations but also the whole Dionysia and its pre-play ceremonies as an authentic product of Athenian democracy. In his opinion, «the festival itself, in organization and structure, despite earlier origins and later development, is in the fifth century fully an institution of the democratic polis»<sup>8</sup>. Through his analysis of the ceremonies which were celebrated immediately before the plays, Goldhill detected the civic and democratic spirit of the dramatic festival. According to his assessment, these four events were particular expressions of democratic ideology: a religious libation to Dionysus poured by the most important figures in

<sup>3</sup> That said, I do not aim to deal here with the wider issue of the 'polis religion', about which two major and contrasting studies are ex. Sourvinou-Inwood 2000a (with 2000b) and Kindt 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Attested by: Aristoph. *Ach.* 502-506; Σ *ad* Aristoph. *Ach.* 504; Isocr. *Pac.* [VIII] 82-84. Testimonies of the payment of the tributes (without the display in the theatre) are: *IG I<sup>3</sup>* 259-290; Thuc. I 96; D.S. XI 47, 1; Plut. *Arist.* 24, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Attested by: Lys. fr. 129 C. (col. i) 23-47; Isocr. *Pac.* [VIII] 82-83; Aeschin. *Ctes.* [III] 154-155. Cfr. also: Thuc. II 46, 1; *SEG* XXVIII.46 (Theozotides' decree); Heraclid. Pont. fr. 149 W.; [Aristot.] *Ath. Pol.* 24, 3; Aristot. *Pol.* 1268a 6-11; Plut. *Sol.* 31, 2-5; D.L. I 55. Overall, see Giannotti - Proietti 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Earliest testimonies: *IG I<sup>3</sup>* 102 (honours for Thrasybulus of Calydon and others for having killed the oligarch Phrynichus; 410/9 B.C.); *IG I<sup>3</sup>* 125 (honours for Epiclerdes of Cyrene for helping Athenian prisoners in Sicily; 405/4 B.C.); *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 2/*SEG* XXXII.38 (honours for Arist[oxenus?] from Boeotia; 403/2 or 382/1 B.C.); *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 20 + *Add.* p. 656 (honours for Euagoras of Salamis for defeating the Spartan fleet, together with Conon; 394/3 B.C.). Specifically on the democratic value of these early public proclamations of honours, see: Wilson 2009; Rhodes 2011; Shear 2011, 147-154. For the suitability of the Great Dionysia's tragic contest for public proclamations of honours at Athens (but not outside Athens), see Ceccarelli 2010. For the spatial value of the *stelai* including these four public honours, see Giannotti 2021b (forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of the theatrical dimension of the pre-play ceremonies, see Giannotti 2021a (forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup> Goldhill 2000, 35 (Goldhill 1987, 68 = 1990, 114 had already claimed that the Great Dionysia «is fundamentally and essentially a festival of the democratic polis»).

government would have showed democracy's participation in that religious moment; the displays of the allied cities' tributes would have revealed the power of democracy and the Delian League in front of the whole audience; the war-orphan's parade would have showed how the sons of those who died fighting for democratic Athens were safeguarded and honoured; and finally, the proclamations of honours would have encouraged the audience to emulate those who assisted the democratic government<sup>9</sup>. Goldhill's studies on the pre-play ceremonies as paradigms of the City Dionysia's larger democratic context are persuasive, but have equally generated significant disagreement among scholars of the day, whose attention was drawn to the value of the dramatic festival and its plays<sup>10</sup>. However, this paper will not deal with the socio-political interpretation of the whole Great Dionysia. Rather, it considers the least attested and studied pre-play ceremony: the libations to Dionysus poured by the ten generals in the theatre, as attested in Plutarch's *Life of Cimon*. The four pre-play ceremonies have always been treated as a whole performance, but David Carter – raising some doubts about their unity – has concluded that «on the question of whether the four ceremonies took place annually in the fifth century, then, we have a yes (*sc.* the libations), two maybes (*sc.* the display of the tributes and the war-orphan's parade) and a no (*sc.* the proclamations of honours)»<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, there is no testimony on their temporal concurrence. Particularly as for the libations to Dionysus, we are on insecure grounds: if we want to test the frequency of the ceremony, we can only rely on Plutarch's τὰς νενομισμένους σπονδάς, and all those inscriptions which attest to the proclamations of honours in the theatre μετὰ τὰς σπονδάς<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Goldhill 2000, 38 includes in such a democratic machine also «the funding of chorus or festival; the choregia as a specifically democratic system; the selection of judges and chorus and actors by democratic procedure; the possibility of tribal seating, and the certainty of seating according to political position in democracy (*e.g.* the seats for the boule); the procedure for getting tickets via inscription on the deme roll; the dating of the innovation of the pre-play ceremonies; the assembly in the theatre to discuss the theatre – indeed the whole gamut of performances which are instituted by democracy, and function as signs and symptoms of democracy in action».

<sup>10</sup> The relationship between the ancient Greek theatre and the πόλις has always been a debated issue which has produced a massive amount of bibliography (see the *status quaestionis* in: Saïd 1998; Carter 2007, 21-89; Di Donato 2002; Giannotti 2020b). Among the studies which oppose to Goldhill's reading of the Athenian City Dionysia, it is worthwhile mentioning: Rhodes 2003; Carter 2004; Spineto 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Carter 2004, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Few Athenian inscriptions show that announcements of crowns were made 'after the libations' (though not at the Dionysia nor from the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.): *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 1263; *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 1273; *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 1282; *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 1297; *MDAI(A)* 66 (1941) 228.4; *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 1325. Conversely, several non-Athenian inscriptions (beyond the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.) denote announcements of crowns after libations at the local Dionysia, *ex.*: *Tit. Calymnii* 64 (ll. 4-9 face B); *Magnesia* 32 (ll. 30-32); *Priene* 16 (ll. 30-33), 33 (ll. 104-108), 35

However likely it is that libations in honour of Dionysus usually occurred during the Great Dionysia in the theatre of Dionysus, we have no strong evidence to confirm that libations took place *annually* in the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. As for the display of the tributes and the war-orphans' parade, we know that these took place during the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. only (the former approximately between 453 and 413-404 B.C.)<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, it is likely that – given that the display occurred exclusively during the period of the Athenian empire – the war orphans' parade, having archaic origins, was 'older' than the display of the tributes, so that the two pre-play ceremonies did not always take place together. Also, we can be certain that both were no longer performed during Isocrates' and Aeschines' time. Lastly, we have three attestations of public proclamations of honours during the very late 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. (plus one at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.)<sup>14</sup>. Besides those cases (410/9, 405/4, and 403/2 B.C.) in which at least two pre-play ceremonies out of four – proclamations of honours and war-orphans' parade – were performed together, there is no occasion in which we can be positively confident that the four pre-play ceremonies were celebrated all together at the same Great Dionysia. Despite such a problematic and fragmentary scenario, libations can be analysed *qua* independent event. Indeed, as far as we know, the other pre-play ceremonies were performed nowhere else during the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. in Athens: the theatre was the ultimate realisation for this set of rituals. Conversely, the libations, as we will see shortly, were a common ritual which used to be celebrated outside the theatre and the Dionysia as well. This allows us to isolate the ceremony and then assess to what extent its religious and/or political value was determined by the fact of being performed during the Dionysia (along with the other ceremonies). Most of all, given that the libations to Dionysus in the theatre are reliant on sparse evidence and that no scholar has dedicated a specific study to the ceremony, it is worthwhile analysing the ceremony, its context, and officers with the aim of highlighting its pure essence, understanding its organisation and mechanisms, and better assessing its meaning and function.

(Il. 21-24), 39 (Il. 6-8), 51 (Il. 256-260), 66 (Il. 330-335); *IK Laodikeia am Lykos* 5 (Il. 26-33); *SEG* XXVI.677 (Il. 79-83), XLVIII.1110 (Il. 24-27), XLVIII.1112 (Il. 41-43), LIII.860 (Il. 6-10), LIII.861 (Il. 2-7), LIII.862 (Il. 5-9); *IG* IV<sup>2</sup>.1 66 (l. 68); *IK Knidos I* 74 (Il. 9-15).

<sup>13</sup> The tribute was replaced by a harbour tax in 413 B.C. (cfr. Thuc. VII 28, 4), and if it was reinstated later (which is not certain) that happened under the restored democracy of 410 B.C.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. *supra* n. 6. The practice seems to have become regular only during the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.: see ex. Lambert 2012, 337-362 and 2018, 71-111.

*Visualising and Understanding Libations as Religious Rituals*

Let us start from the passage of Plutarch's *Life of Cimon* (8, 8-9)<sup>15</sup>:

πρώτην γὰρ διδασκαλίαν τοῦ Σοφοκλέους ἔπι νέου καθέντος, Ἀψεφίων ὁ ἄρχων, φιλονικίας οὔσης καὶ παρατάξεως τῶν θεατῶν, κριτὰς μὲν οὐκ ἐκλήρωσε τοῦ ἀγῶνος, ὡς δὲ Κίμων μετὰ τῶν συστρατήγων παρελθὼν εἰς τὸ θέατρον ἐποίησατο τῷ θεῷ τὰς νεομισμένας σπονδάς, οὐκ ἐφῆκεν αὐτοὺς ἀπελθεῖν, ἀλλ' ὀρκώσας ἠνάγκασε καθίσαι καὶ κρίναι δέκα ὄντας, ἀπὸ φυλῆς μιᾶς ἕκαστον. ὁ μὲν οὖν ἀγὼν καὶ διὰ τὸ τῶν κριτῶν ἀξίωμα τὴν φιλοτιμίαν ὑπερέβαλε.

«For when Sophocles, still young, staged his first drama, the archon Apsephion (*sc.* 469/8 B.C.)<sup>16</sup>, when there was rivalry and discord among the spectators, did not appoint by lot the judges of the agon; but when Cimon, coming to the theatre together with the generals, made the customary libations to the god, he did not let them go away, but he forced them to sit and judge after they had sworn: they were ten, one for each tribe. Thus, the agon exceeded in ambition also due to the judges' reputation»<sup>17</sup>.

If Plutarch is really offering an accurate report and if these libations were a custom, this would indicate a significant involvement of political figures of the Athenian government within an important religious ceremony<sup>18</sup>. Epigraphically

<sup>15</sup> As Zaccarini 2017, 19 warns, «the fact that Plutarch's *Cimon* combines, juxtaposes, and (rarely) compares so many different and ancient sources – each, in turn, originally arguing for its personal agenda – represents both a boon and a problem for the modern scholarship. The original context of most of these fragments» – *sc.* Ion of Chios, Stesimbrotus of Thasos, Attic comedy, Archelaus' and Melanthius' poems, and Thucydides (see Carena - Manfredini - Piccirilli 2001<sup>3</sup>, xxxv-xxxvii, and Vanotti 2011, 67-68) – «is indeterminable, just like the extent and scope of Plutarch's own intervention on his sources: as a consequence, the *Cimon* is as rich as troublesome a resource for the reconstruction of the period under study». Against the credibility and the chronology of the episode (particularly in relation to the contest between Aeschylus and Sophocles, and the date of Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women*), see Scullion 2002, 87-90.

<sup>16</sup> See Develin 1989, 70.

<sup>17</sup> The translation is mine.

<sup>18</sup> Csapo - Slater 1994, 107 consider the ceremony as politically influenced. Conversely, Sommerstein 2010, 127 does not believe in the historical authenticity of Plutarch's tale, nor does he ascribe political importance to this episode. Goldhill 2000, 44 does not consider the possibility that the anecdote was manufactured, rather he believes that Plutarch's story, «although a late source and possibly informed by later attitudes, is instructive».

speaking, only one 4<sup>th</sup>-cent. B.C. inscription supports the notion of political involvement: *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1496*, which attests to the presence of the generals at the Dionysia. The inscription (the text of which is highly problematic) mentions the generals in relation to some sacrifices at festivals (ll. 84-85, 94-95, 96-97, 115-116, 127-128, 131-132, 140-141), including the Great Dionysia (ll. 105-107, 111-112, 144-149). It is true that the inscription «confirms that the generals were involved religiously in the dramatic festivals»<sup>19</sup>, but can just one inscription (even more so, not from the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.) make us suppose with certainty that the ceremony was *annually* celebrated, *always* performed by the ten generals, and, because of this, *always* displaying democratic values? Hardly. Beyond the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C., we have further inscriptions – such as *IG II<sup>2</sup> 693* (beginning of 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. B.C.), *IG II<sup>3</sup> 1218* (ca 210 B.C.), *IG II<sup>3</sup> 1278* (ca 188/7 B.C.) – which attest to the presence of the generals during the Dionysia, even in another pre-play ceremony of great political value, the public proclamation of honours. Therefore, as the generals would appear to be involved – although we do not know precisely in what measure – in the conferral of crowns on the benefactors of the city, their presence in the theatre should not be assumed as something totally unusual. Yet despite this and Plutarch's testimony, no explicit literary nor epigraphic evidence of further libations regularly poured by the ten generals in the theatre for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. survives.

In order to fully understand the libations to Dionysus in the theatre, we need to start with a description and contextualisation of the original religious dimension of the practice. We may establish what performers of libations did from a general definition of the practice:

«A libation is a ritual outpouring of liquids. Libations were part of all sacrifices but could also be performed as independent rituals. The common terms for the rituals are *spondai* and *choai*. The former term is most frequent and referred to a controlled outpouring of a small amount of liquid for the Olympian gods by the help of a jug and a phiale. *Choai* were poured out entirely and were used for libations to the gods of the underworld, the heroes and the dead. Regular animal sacrifices were concluded with a libation of wine and water over the fire on the altar, but every invocation or prayer to the gods or heroes was accompanied by libations. Unmixed wine, milk, oil, and honey were less frequently used and seem to have marked particular parts of the ritual or specific traits in the recipient. Also the blood of the sacrificial victim could be poured out, though such rituals were rare, as the blood of the victim was

<sup>19</sup> Goldhill 1987, 60 = 1990, 101.

usually kept and eaten. Before any meal some wine would be poured out, while at symposia three libations were performed at the start. Journeys, sea voyages, and departure for battle were accompanied by libations. Oaths, contracts, and truces were concluded with libations, and the term *spondai* eventually came to mean a peace treaty<sup>20</sup>. Libations were made for the dead as part of funerary cult, but could also be used to contact and invigorate the departed. Greek art represents libations at animal sacrifice, at scene of warriors' departure, and also gods libating<sup>21</sup>.

From this comprehensive description, we need to move to the context of the libations in honour of Dionysus and, even more specifically, of those performed during the Dionysia. Offerings and sacrifices to Dionysus were common in Athens (as well as all over the Greek world), both during the Dionysia and at many other festive and religious occasions<sup>22</sup>. Libations were usually a part of broader rituals which could include prayers, oaths, processions, and sacrifices. It seems, however, that sacrifices and parades in honour of Dionysus were much more common (and attested) than libations, which could also occur independently. This is the case in Plutarch's passage: here we encounter an isolated libation without any sacrifice, as Plutarch does not say anything about a sacrifice. Csapo and Slater state that the first day of the festival was opened by «a ritual purification of the theater»<sup>23</sup>: only the lemma καθάρσιον in the Suda<sup>24</sup> testifies sacrifices among/during

<sup>20</sup> It is worth recalling the ambivalence of the Greek word σπονδή, as it means 'drink-offering/libation' in the singular and, usually, 'solemn treaty/truce' (which, when established, was often celebrated with libations and sacrifices) in the plural: see Karavites 1984. In Aristoph. *Ach.* 178-203, for example, Dikaiopolis and Amphitheus play on the double meaning of σπονδή (see Olson 2002, 86-87 and 127). Thus, it is not always clear when it is being utilised in reference to libations and when it refers to treaties. See also Burkert 1985, 71: «normally there is no other word for armistice or peace treaty than simply *spondai*. "We, the polis, have made libation", means: we have resolved and committed ourselves». For the relationship between oaths, truces, and libations, see Sommerstein - Bayliss 2013, 151-155 and 241-244.

<sup>21</sup> Ekroth 2012. See also: Burkert 1985, 70-73; Simon 2004, 239-245; Patton 2009, 27-29 (although Patton deals more specifically with libations made by the gods).

<sup>22</sup> See ex. Evans 2010, 170-207. For libations during a private occasion cfr.: Hes. *Op.* 338; Antipho 1, 18-20; Plat. *Smp.* 176a. Herodotus (VI 57) says that pouring libations was a prerogative of the kings of the Spartaiatai (cfr. also Xen. *Ages.* 3, 1). Cfr. also Hdt. VII 223, where Xerxes pours libations (although Hdt. I 132 says that Persians did not pour libations; but cfr. Xen. *Cyr.* II 3, 1; III 3, 40; IV 1, 6; VI 4, 1).

<sup>23</sup> Csapo - Slater 1994, 107 and 117.

<sup>24</sup> Rehm 2002, 50 too argues that «the first such ceremony involved the purification of the theater by carrying a bleeding piglet, whose throat has been cut, around the orchestra». We know for sure that sacrifices were celebrated on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Elaphebolion, during or soon after the πομπή (cfr.

libations and the other pre-play ceremonies in the theatre. The libations Plutarch is talking about were an independent ritual aiming at purifying<sup>25</sup> the theatre and opening the dramatic performances. It goes without saying that, because Dionysus was the god of wine, libations in his honour were always included in Dionysiac festivals<sup>26</sup> (certainly during the days *Pithoigia* and *Choes* at the Dionysiac festival of the Anthesteria, where tastings of wine and drinking competitions took place)<sup>27</sup>. If we rely on Plutarch's passage, the opening scene was chaired by the archon; next, the ten generals (perhaps, together with the priest[s] of Dionysus) all arrived together in the theatre, near the altar, and made libations. We can assume that they took the stage with their elegant clothes: generals might have their armour or a long *chiton* with (or without) a *himation* (probably all white)<sup>28</sup>, whilst priests had purple garments, gold crowns and rings<sup>29</sup>. Considering the high status of the performers, undoubtedly it would have been a polished ritual. But if we seek further information from our direct source, we are disappointed, because no further details are provided by Plutarch. Athenian tragedy, with its usual libation-scenes (which seemingly resemble actual practices)<sup>30</sup>, is a useful tool which can

*IG II<sup>2</sup> 1496*; for an in-depth analysis of sacrificing practice in Greek religion, see Parker 2011, 124-170 with a wealth of primary and secondary bibliographic references). The Suda's lemma says: «the Athenians were accustomed to purify the Assembly and the theaters and practically all gatherings of the people by sacrificing very small piglets, which they called "purificatory". This the so called *peristiarchoi* do, whose name comes either from lustration (*peristichēin*) or from the hearth (*hestia*)». The source is late but, if there were *peristiarchoi*, it follows that the ten generals were not expert in animal sacrifices so to preside over and perform the slaughter of a piglet. It remains unclear when (and if) the sacrifice was performed in relation to the libations.

<sup>25</sup> In much the same way, the Pnyx, before the meetings of the Assembly, was purified with offerings and sacrifices perhaps made by the herald or the *prytaneis* (cf. ex. Aeschin. *Tim.* [I] 23). For examples of 'inner purity' while drinking, see Petrovic - Petrovic 2016, 103-114.

<sup>26</sup> For an analysis of Dionysiac rituals, see Obbink 1993, 65-86, and Parker 2005, 290-326. For an overview as well as detailed analysis of rituals and processions at the Dionysia, see Pickard-Cambridge 1996, 79-176, and Spineto 2005, 185-326 (see also Sourvinou-Inwood 1994 and Cole 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 3, 7, 1, 655 e. For an analysis of the Anthesteria see: Pickard-Cambridge 1996, 1-34; Burkert 1985, 237-242; Parker 2005, 290-316.

<sup>28</sup> For ancient Greek garments, see Lee 2015, 89-126.

<sup>29</sup> See Jones 1999 (especially 248-249), useful also for a collection of sources about colours and clothing in Greek processions. For a detailed analysis of Greek dress in social context, see Lee 2015, 198-229. A ca 470 B.C. *kylix* of the Villa Giulia painter (The Metropolitan Museum of Art 1979.11.15) shows a woman pouring a libation with a purple mantle. For few artistic examples of Greek processions, see also Neils 1996.

<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, Athenian tragedy does not provide long dramatic passages specifically related to *spondai*. Here and there we find references to *spondai* during banquets (especially in comedy), but overall – given that in tragedy there are more sacrifices and mourning scenes than libations for the gods above – *choai* scenes prevail. For a study on the interactions between theatre and rituals,



provide us with several details about the ceremony: the ‘dramatic version’ of the ceremony found in the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides’ (and, further, Aristophanes) can help us to envisage the movements, gestures and objects<sup>31</sup> that were used in actual practice. Visually speaking, dramatic libations were indeed a scene rich in gestures, movements and objects, and it is not difficult to reconstruct the scene. Just like actors entering the stage to perform their role, the performers of the pre-play libations had to come on stage either from the *eisodoi* – like the dozen libation bearers at the beginning of Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi* – or (if they were already seated) from the first row of seats (which were intentionally reserved for holders of important offices), and moved towards the centre of the orchestra (near the θυμέλη), called by the archon. It is likely that the performers, as Eur. *Ba.* 313<sup>32</sup> and Aristoph. *Eq.* 221 suggest, wore ivy or golden crowns: we also have a fragmentary cup from Athens’ acropolis (Athens Acr. 434 [ARV<sup>2</sup> 330.5] and Paris Louvre G 133) in which a bearded and crowned man is pouring a libation from a *phiale* (either during a banquet or a public sacrifice)<sup>33</sup>. Once they reached the orchestra, the performers washed their hands and might have taken vessels (*oinochoai* or *hydriai*) and poured the liquid into several golden or silver cups or *phialai* (as in Eur. *Hec.* 527-529, *Ion* 1175 and 1181-1182, *IT* 167-168, and Aristoph. *Pax* 423-425). All these objects could be either on a table, as Aristoph. *Pax* 1059 suggests, or on the ground, like the vessels full of water in Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* καθαρός scene. It is likely that the performers raised the cups, and whispered a prayer to Dionysus, while the audience was silent, as Odysseus in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, Talthybius in Euripides’ *Hecuba*, and the servant in Euripides’ *Ion* testify. They then poured the liquid (wine, perhaps mixed with water, is the best candidate) on the ground either directly or from the *oinochoe/hydria* through *phialai* (as represented in the *lekythos* Carlsruhe 234): since *spondai* consisted of pouring a few drops of liquid, we can be quite sure that the liquid was poured out from small containers. The usual number for libations was three, and the generals might have poured out a few drops of wine three times, and then drank from the cups. We do not know precisely the divine addressees of the performers’ prayers and libations: if we assume that there were three libations

see Kavoulaki 1999 and Chaniotis 2007, 48-66. For an analysis of libation scenes in Athenian tragedy, see Jouanna 1992a and 1992b. See also Konstantakos 2005, 183-217.

<sup>31</sup> For the description of stage action in Athenian tragedy, see: Di Benedetto - Medda 1997; Taplin 2003<sup>2</sup> (1978); Ley 2007.

<sup>32</sup> For the motif of the libation/truce in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, see Zerhoch 2020.

<sup>33</sup> See Lissarague 1995, 128-129. It seems that the *phiale* could have different dimensions: during libations, a flat *phiale* was used; in Hom. *Il.* XXIII 243, a golden *phiale* is used to contain Patroclus’ bones; in Plat. *Smp.* 223c, Agathon, Aristophanes, and Socrates are drinking from a large *phiale*, akin to a cup.

(including prayers), we can hypothesise that the first was dedicated to Hestia<sup>34</sup>, the second to Dionysus as god of the theatre, and the last one to Zeus Soter<sup>35</sup>. Next, having made the libations, the generals walked away (perhaps without looking back, as in Aesch. *Ch.* 99 and Soph. *OC* 490) to take their seats in the first row. This could be the theatrical sketch, full of «pictorial impression», that spectators watched and experienced<sup>36</sup>.

As we can deduce, pouring wine<sup>37</sup> in honour of Dionysus (but also other gods) was considered a proper ritual during which «the drinker of wine would be drinking the god himself»<sup>38</sup>: in such a way, all participants experienced and consumed Dionysus. This allows us to investigate a core issue: who were the participants? Athenian drama with its libation scenes has anticipated the answer: not specifically and exclusively priests. Libations (like several other religious practices) did not have any specific or prescribed performers, as they could be priests and/or magistrates (and, of course, any citizen during private occasions). Athenian drama shows no priests at all pouring libations: rather, we see several characters, such as Atossa, Electra, Danaus' daughters, Oedipus, Neoptolemus<sup>39</sup>, Xuthus, and Pentheus, who perform religious libations. If in the tragic world libations were

<sup>34</sup> In *h.Hom* XXIX 4-6 we read that during banquets the first and the last libation were dedicated to Hestia. See Finglass 2007, 180 and Olson 2012, 318-319 for literary occurrences of Hestia as first addressee during banquet libations and sacrifices.

<sup>35</sup> Lee 1997, 286, commenting on Eur. *Ion* 1192ss. (where the Servant describes Ion's libation to the god), says that «three libations were made: to Zeus Olympios and the Olympian gods; to the Heroes; to Zeus Soter (cf. Schol. Plato *Phileb.* 66d)» and that the singular god «may be used loosely for Zeus Olympios standing for all the Olympians as a group». Conversely, Martin 2018, 444 thinks that «the most plausible god to receive Ion's libation is Apollo, as the god to whom libations were poured at the start of a symposion could apparently be freely chosen: cfr. esp. Athen. 692F πλείστων τῶν μὲν Ἀγαθοῦ Δαίμονος αἰτούντων ποτήριον, τῶν δὲ Διὸς Σωτήρος, ἄλλων δὲ Ὑγείας καὶ ἑτέρων ἑτέρου ἐπιλεγόντων».

<sup>36</sup> Further dramatic passages: (Aeschylus) *A.* 69, 1395-1396; *Ch.* 15, 23, 87, 92, 97, 129, 149, 156, 164, 291-292, 486-487, 515, 525, 538; *Eu.* 107; *Pers.* 202-204, 219-220, 522-524, 623-627; *Supp.* 980-982; (Sophocles) *Aj.* 1199-200; *Ant.* 430-431; *El.* 269-270, 434; *Ph.* 1032-1033; (Euripides) *Alc.* 796-798, 1015-1016; *Ba.* 81, 177, 253, 341-342, 376-377, 383-384, 702-703; *Cyc.* 469-471, 545, 556, 558-559; *El.* 511-512, 1321-1322, 1333-1334; *Hec.* 529-530, 532-536, 542; *IT* 159-168; *Ion* 705-707; *Or.* 96, 113, 472, 1187; *Ph.* 1240; *Tr.* 1063.

<sup>37</sup> Plutarch does not say that it was wine, we can only suppose that it was. In Soph. *OC* 469-484, we have libations with honey and water. Phanodemus (*FGrH* 325 F 12) says that libations were made with must and water, whilst Philochorus with unmixed wine (*FGrH* 328 F 5a) or wine mixed with water (*FGrH* 328 F 5b): see Graf 1980. For a brief overview of the usage and function of wine in Greece, see Frontisi-Ducroux - Lissarague 1988.

<sup>38</sup> Obbink 1993, 79. More generally, see Frontisi-Ducroux 1991.

<sup>39</sup> It is interesting how, in Eur. *Hec.* 223-224, Neoptolemus (a general) is appointed to conduct Polyxena's sacrifice (which included libations) and is called ἐπιστάτης and ἱερεύς.

not the prerogatives of priests, what about the real world? The ease of the act of pouring libations suggests that the practice did not require religious specialists. Robert Parker's detailed analysis of Greek rituals and performers considers an extended number of examples of preliminary rituals, such as sacrifices, swearing of oaths and consultations of oracles<sup>40</sup>, and, although libations are not contemplated in his investigation, he demonstrates how in Greek society it was the *demos*, through its institutions, who used to give orders on religious matters to priests<sup>41</sup>, and not *vice versa*:

«Priests do not give orders to the assembly, but the assembly to priests. Priests are in a sense officers of the state, and, if Aristotle in *Politics* [cf. 1299a, 15-19; 1322b, 18-29; 1331b, 4-5] hesitates to class them among the regular magistrates and in *Constitution of the Athenians* largely ignores them, this is because their duties (and sometimes terms of service) differ from those of ordinary magistrates, not because they serve an institution, the Church, that is separate from the city. No such institution existed anywhere in Greece. Were it sensible to talk in such terms at all, one would have to say that Church was part of State. The individual who had the highest responsibility in religious affairs was a magistrate, the *basileus*»<sup>42</sup>.

In this last regard, it is important to point out that the archon *basileus* was not even the superintendent of the Great Dionysia. Rather, it was the archon *eponymous* who was responsible for the dramatic festival. If the highest responsible magistrate in religious affairs was not supervising the dramatic festival of the Great Dionysia, dedicated to the god Dionysus, could the appointment of magistrates in place of priests to perform the libations to Dionysus have been unpredictable? Although libations were a religious ceremony, spectators did not necessarily expect a priest to pour out wine in the orchestra<sup>43</sup>. Dirk Obbink states that «the

<sup>40</sup> See Parker 2005, 89-115.

<sup>41</sup> Consider the Eleusinian regulations (*OR* 106; before 460 B.C.), Athens' appointment of a priestess and building of a temple to Athena Nike (*OR* 137; 438-435 or 450-445 B.C.; cfr. also *OR* 156), the Athenian decree regulating the offering of first fruits at Eleusis (*OR* 141; ca 435 B.C.), and the Athenian decree about the sanctuary of Neleus, Basile and Codrus (*OR* 167; 418/17 B.C.). Moreover, that it was the city to deal with religious affairs, it is clear from the fact that trials on religious matters took place before civic courts. For the Council's involvement in religious affairs, see Rhodes 1972, 88-113 and 122-134. For demes' involvement in religious cults, see Whitehead 1986, 178-185. For the religious role of public officials, see also Harris 2006, 54-55.

<sup>42</sup> Parker 2005, 90-91.

<sup>43</sup> We will see, in the next section, that the legitimate performer of the libations in the theatre could have been the archon *polemarchos*. Moreover, regarding the Great Dionysia, if we date the

ancient theories depict Dionysiac ritual as positive, as an expression of order and solidarity and health in a world of sometimes uncontrollable conflicts with humans and with nature»<sup>44</sup>: thus, the appointment of the ten generals as official offerors could be seen as a union between state and religion, in the name of order and harmony. More than practical competence, it seems more a matter of social cohesion. Priesthood was undoubtedly a respected office, and it did have some kinds of prerogative<sup>45</sup>, and, because of their importance, priests had the front row of seats (the *proedria*) reserved for them. However, that front row of seats was also reserved for important magistrates of the city, including the generals: they were equally remarkable figures and, along with priests, were representatives of the establishment of the society. Furthermore, sitting in the *proedria* was an honour which was usually granted to whoever provided beneficial services to the city, including sacrifices and prayers. But the evidence shows that these kinds of religious services could be made by magistrates as well as priests<sup>46</sup>. Demosthenes' *Against Meidias* is the clearest proof of that, especially when the orator says (at 114-115) that he conducted initiatory rites and sacrifices, inaugurated victims on behalf of the city, and was head of the Sacred Embassy. This proves a kind of equality between magistrates and priests and it allowed an interchange among the religious offices<sup>47</sup>: the ceremonies did not undergo any change, since both the priests and the magistrates stood for the city itself, and its community<sup>48</sup>. In much

beginning of the dramatic contests to the 530's, then it falls before the institution of the ten generals as annual officials. If we follow Connor 1990 and date the festival to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C., that is when the ten generals were still recent and had not yet become the important officials they became during and after the Persian Wars. In either case, it would be surprising if already from the beginning of the dramatic contests it was the ten generals who made libations at the Dionysia. Rather, it is more appropriate to think it was one or all of the archons.

<sup>44</sup> Obbink 1993, 86.

<sup>45</sup> Although Garland 1984, 77 points out that «the sphere of religious activity of the Greek priest was on the whole less interesting than the constraints and limitations to which his office was subject».

<sup>46</sup> See the evidence provided by Parker 2005, 96 n. 20, 97 n. 24, 98 n. 31.

<sup>47</sup> See also Vernant 1990, 76-77 *passim* (talking about the sacrifice): «le sacré et le profane n'y forment pas deux catégories radicalement contraires, exclusives l'une de l'autre. [...] Dans la cité, on ne trouve pas de coupure entre prêtrise et magistrature. Il y a des prêtrises qui sont dévolues et occupées comme des magistratures et tout magistrat, dans ses fonctions, revêt un caractère sacré».

<sup>48</sup> See Parker 2005, 89-115. At 97 he concludes that «both categories could indeed sacrifice for the city» and that «either could perform the same central acts with the same results, though tradition may have insisted that one or the other should do so in a particular case. Aristotle in fact, in a passage which should be decisive (*sc. Pol.* 1322b 26-9), recognizes two types of “public sacrifices”, those “assigned by convention to priests” and those performed by officials who “derive their position from the common hearth”». See also Parker 2011, 40-63 (with references).

the same way, the ten generals, by celebrating the libations to Dionysus in the theatre, were not seizing control over a sphere that did not belong to them.

We could explore the field of non 5<sup>th</sup>-cent. B.C. attestations and infer that the ten generals were not the unique officers involved during libations from the consideration of a few Attic inscriptions which mention announcements of crowns (though not during the Dionysia) μετὰ τὰς σπονδάς: *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1263* (300/299 B.C.), *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1273* (281/0 B.C.), *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1282* (262/1 B.C.), *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1297* (ca 237/6 B.C.), *MDAI(A) 66* (1941) 228,4 (end of 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. B.C. - beginning of 1<sup>st</sup> cent. B.C.), *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1325* (185/4 B.C.). The crownings are performed by ἱεροποιοί, θιασῶται, a γραμματεὺς and ἐπιμεληταί (all religious assistants except the secretary). Here we have the reversed case, *i.e.* a more civic/political ceremony performed by religious officers: another proof of Greek large variety in performing ceremonies and rituals. Also, since the two ceremonies were linked in terms of schedule, we could hypothesise that the officers were the same for both ceremonies, libations as well as crownings<sup>49</sup>. If this happened, it should not be regarded as surprising, as Walter Burkert points out when he describes priests in ancient Greek society:

«Greek religion might almost be called a religion without priests: there is no priestly caste as a closed group with fixed tradition, education, initiation, and hierarchy, and even in the permanently established cults there is no *disciplina*, but only usage, *nomos*. The god in principle admits anyone, as long as he respects the *nomos*, that is, as long as he is willing to fit into the local community; [...]. At every major cultic occasion there must, of course, be someone who assumes the leadership, who begins, speaks the prayer, and makes the libation. Prerequisite for this role is a certain authority and economic power»<sup>50</sup>.

‘Authority and economic power’: was not it so also for the ten generals? Plutarch reports exactly this: the archon Apsephion did appoint the ten generals as judges due to their authority and reputation (ἄξιωμα). It can be inferred from Plutarch’s wording that this was an unusual procedure: «when Cimon, coming to the theatre together with the generals, made the customary libations to the god, he did not let them go away, *but* he forced them to sit and judge after they had sworn». The description of the ten generals pouring libations appears ordinary, while the exceptional thing is the archon’s act of forcing the ten generals to stay (οὐκ ἐφῆκεν αὐτοὺς ἀπελθεῖν, ἀλλ’ [...]) ἠνάγκασε [...]): that is the principal clause which indicates the focus of the anecdote. It was for *that* specific reason

<sup>49</sup> For a list of non- and para-priestly functionaries of ritual/cultic practices, see Garland 1984 and Pirenne-Delforge - Georgoudi 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Burkert 1985, 95. However, Parker 2011, 50 describes Burkert’s statement as «very bold».

that «the agon exceeded in ambition», and certainly not because the ten generals poured the libations. Plutarch's anecdote (if historically reliable) aims to highlight more Sophocles' first victory at the Great Dionysia and his relationship<sup>51</sup> with Cimon rather than the ritual performance of the ten generals, which, conversely, seems a detail mentioned in passing. Accordingly, the (most likely, factional) «rivalry and discord» among the spectators – in terms of support for particular plays – could have ceased only by appointing the generals as judges: spectators would have recognised their civic authority (for sure higher than that of an average citizen) and appreciated the fact that, on that occasion, judgements on dramatic performances would have been expressed by such eminent figures. It is clear how this was a matter of appointing distinguished judges, not political performers of libations. In this last regard, it is possible either that the ten generals were chosen to perform libations (and in much the same way, «since they came [normally or unusually?]<sup>52</sup> from each of the ten tribes»<sup>53</sup>, they were appointed as judges), or that the ten generals were already authorised to conduct the ritual without appointment by the archon *eponymous*.

It would be helpful to find other examples of the Athenian practice of libations during the Dionysia in the theatre, but, as noted, we possess no further evidence of this. Of course, libations were not a practice exclusively restricted to the context of the Greek Dionysia. Rather, they were a common practice in ancient societies widespread from the Aegean islands to Asia Minor, to Egypt and Nubia. In some cases, they were celebrated during festivals; in others during private or independent religious occasions, even inside a temple (mostly in Egypt)<sup>54</sup>. From non-Athenian evidence we can certify a wider involvement of political figures in the libations: inscriptions show that archons, *prytaneis*, *tamiai*, and different kinds of magistrates were all involved in celebrating libations<sup>55</sup>. Yet, the scarcity of

<sup>51</sup> See Zaccarini 2017, 277-278.

<sup>52</sup> At first regularly one from each tribe (cfr. [Aristot.] *Ath. Pol.* 22, 2). The first year for which it seems certain that exceptions were possible is 441/40 B.C. (cfr. *infra* n. 93), but Fornara 1971, 19-27 thought that the tribal link was totally abandoned in 462/1 B.C.

<sup>53</sup> Csapo - Slater 1994, 160. We do not know if this is true, since in the annual lists of generals we find only Cimon in 469/8 B.C. (see Fornara 1971, 43).

<sup>54</sup> Cfr.: *HGK* 1; *Simuri* 17; *IG XI,2* 161; *IG XI,2* 203; *IG XI,2* 224, 505, 506, 506[1]; *Prose sur pierre* 14, 18, 19, 22, 32; *Teos* 25, 32, 33, 34\*5, 45; *IG XII,5* 818, 863, 864, 865; *Bernand, Mus. du Louvre* 3; *OGIS* 56,A and B, 90,A and B, 130, 139, 168; *IG XII,7* 237; *ID* 1417, 1435; *Philae* 19; *IG XII,3* 249; *Fayoum* 2:112, 2:113, 2:114, 2:116, 2:117, 2:118, 2:135, 2:136, 3:152; *Didyma* 454, 473, 481, 490, 557; *Tit. Cam.* 87a.

<sup>55</sup> As Csapo - Wilson 2015, 345 have noticed, recent studies about the inscriptions on the seats of Epidaurus' theatre show that «the Epidaurians conceived of their theater as serving a primarily religious (festival) function: many [sc. inscriptions] are explicitly dedicated “to Dionysus” and all are dedicated by officials (*damiourgoi* and *phrouroi*) whose primary duties, so far as we can tell, were

Athenian evidence necessarily can only lead us to conclude that 1) libations were poured *also* by the ten generals and that 2) this was not something particularly unusual or special<sup>56</sup>. In this way, it is right to say that the pre-play ceremonies proclaimed social norms and that «ritual (*sc.* the libations to Dionysus, in our case) is designed to leave the structural positions of society legitimized»<sup>57</sup>: the generals, by pouring libations to Dionysus in the theatre, did not alter or transgress any social norm. Rather, their presence as major civic representatives within a religious context proves that a stabilised interconnection/collaboration between the religious sphere and the political sphere existed. This explains why an exaggerated focus on the ten generals as performers of the ceremony risks being misleading in as much as it would characterise them as overwhelming figures who, in the name of democracy, were appropriating a religious rite. But this was not the case because the ‘functional equipollence’ between magistrates and priests made their presence, so to speak, neutrally fortuitous.

It is time now to turn to the profile of the ten generals, whose origins, appointment both as judges and performers of the ceremony, and political authority had, in my opinion, little to do with democratic ideology. It will follow that a libation to Dionysus could have been performed by any representative of any type of government, without specific ideological (particularly, democratic) implications<sup>58</sup>.

religious». Thus, it is likely that in Epidaurus’ theatre too such officials with religious duties were involved in libations/sacrifices to Dionysus (see Petrounakos 2015).

<sup>56</sup> Alternatively, Rehm 2002, 50 stresses the point more on the concept of opportunity rather than politics and religion: «the fact that these libations were offered by the leading military personnel of the city, and not the priest of Dionysus or the annually appointed archon *eponymous* (who oversaw the festival), indicated the complicated weave into which tragic performances fit. The festival took place shortly before the election of the *stratēgoi*, and the appearance of those “incumbents” in the orchestra who were candidates for re-election might have helped their chances». Of course, Rehm relies on Plutarch’s testimony and considers it truthful. However, what I find particularly doubtful in his statement is the ‘complicated weave’ he mentions. If this has to be related to proximity with the elections of the generals, it should be noticed that the Athenian Dionysia took place in Elaphebolion (early March) because seas were more navigable and overseas Greeks could go to Athens (and bring their tributes) more easily. Moreover, spring and summer were war seasons, and it was natural to elect generals at the beginning of the war period. Lastly, the generals would have been present in the orchestra in any case, as the first rows of seats were always reserved to them: I do not see how pouring out wine in the orchestra would have increased the chances to be re-elected. Hence, I think that such a ‘complicated weave’ is more a matter of coincidence than strategy.

<sup>57</sup> Goldhill 1990, 127-128.

<sup>58</sup> In this regard, future studies need to address the fundamental issue of the Dionysia’s pre-play ceremonies outside Athens, in order to understand their civic/political value beyond the Athenian democratic *milieu*. As Rhodes 2003, 112 argues regarding Plutarch’s testimony, «we know nothing about that beyond what we read in this story; Csapo and Slater say, “It is of some interest to

*The Political Dimension of the Libations: The Ten Generals and Democratic Ideology*

We have said that one could see a pattern of political activity which affects the religious environment in Athens, since we have major officials of the Athenian state (the ten generals) performing a religious ritual such a libation. It is true that Plutarch's passage must be regarded as the only literary attestation of the ten generals pouring libations in the theatre, but I am not sure that this is the best candidate to rely on to talk about the ideological (specifically democratic) value<sup>59</sup> the generals' presence might have displayed. Recently, Synnøve des Bouvrie has claimed that the libations poured by the ten generals (and the display of the tributes) were «a demonstration of power and excellence [which] undoubtedly

see that the libation was poured out not by the priest of Dionysus or any other sacred office but by civic heads of state”, but there is nothing in the story to suggest that only the generals made libations; libations by the generals are political, but could have occurred in any state in which generals were important officials». We have seen that libations (and public conferral of crowns) were indeed celebrated also during the festivals of Greek cities (cfr. *supra* n. 12). Those inscriptions which attest to public libations do not say who was responsible for the libations. It is likely that we should consider the proclaimers of crowns as responsible for the libations too: thus, we read of *agonothetai*, secretaries of the Assembly and Council, ambassadors, administrators, commanders, and sacred heralds who could all be candidates for the performance. In particular, *SEG* XXVI.677, LIII.860, LIII.861 and LIII.862 (from Thessaly and Cos) provide examples of involvement of generals in conferrals of crowns (after the libations) in the theatre. We cannot know precisely if they poured libations too, but, in that case, we would have parallels (though later) to Cimon's episode. Focusing on those four inscriptions, it goes without saying that if the libations to Dionysus in the theatre had a specifically democratic value, this needs to be ascribed *exclusively* to the case of Athens. The τρυγίαι in Thessaly and προστάται in Cos were hardly a symbol of democracy (see ex.: Sordi 1958; Westlake 1968<sup>2</sup> [1935]; Rhodes - Lewis 1997, 238; Carlsson 2004, 109-118, and 2010). Hence, it is problematic to adopt an Athenocentric perspective while assessing the value of the pouring of the libations in other Greek cities: other Dionysia (and dramatic festivals) with their own pre-play ceremonies might have existed, and the political value (if there was any) of the festivals could be different depending on the city in which the festivals were celebrated. Given the late dates of the above-mentioned inscriptions, one could argue that the Dionysia and its pre-play ceremonies originated in Athens, with a specific value, and then were copied by other cities. Indeed, this is a hypothesis worth considering, although we cannot prove with testimonies that this process of imitation occurred: the only hint is provided by the later date of non-Athenian Dionysia's pre-play ceremonies. The evidence collected by Csapo - Wilson 2015 «falsifies the notion that Athens had a monopoly on drama until well into the fourth century». And, as they point out, «it is not clear that Athens ever had a monopoly, but if it did, it did not last long» (381). What future studies should ask is: did such a monopoly include the pre-play ceremonies? If Athens really had a monopoly on drama and if this monopoly did not last long, was that short period enough to other πόλεις to copy the programme of the Athenian Great Dionysia?

<sup>59</sup> For a brief and useful overview of modern studies on the relationship between ideology and Athenian democracy, see Barbato 2020, 3-21.



proclaimed the civic order of the polis in a parade mirroring the ideal Athenian polis»<sup>60</sup>. But, *what* power? Goldhill is convinced that, as «the ten most powerful military and political leaders, the *stratēgoi*, who were actively involved before the whole city»<sup>61</sup>, «this places the drama festival under the aegis of the authority of the democratic polis»<sup>62</sup>. It is interesting how the term ‘aegis’ is used because, in this way, this pre-play ceremony must be fundamental to the democratic argument: as the ten generals would appear to represent the ‘aegis’ – *i.e.* the emblem – of democratic authority, the people would have believed that they truly represented the very democratic politicisation of the festival or, at least, of the ceremony. However, can we be sure that the ten generals were thought by the audience to reflect democratic authority in that moment? In addition to this, what did the generals do to bolster democratic feelings or display democratic ideology? We have seen that a simple gesture of pouring out wine and praying to Dionysus was something which any member of the society (government representatives included) could have performed in the name of the city as a whole (and not of democracy in particular). If it appears more logical to talk about a politico-ideological display when publicly showing the allies’ tributes, or when making the orphans of the city soldiers’ parade on stage in full armour, supporting their growth with state funds until adulthood, or even when rewarding publicly the benefactors of the city, it conversely seems risky to think of specific politico-ideological messages related to democracy when pouring out wine. Or better, such a hypothesis deserves greater exploration. First, the functional equivalence between magistrate and priests alleviates the (supposed) ‘cumbersome’ presence of the ten generals in the orchestra. Then we need to ask *where* or *through what* democratic ideology was asserted. It is clear that the primary suspects are the performers of the ceremony. Was it all about the ten generals’ presence/figures? Or is just their appointment by the archon *eponymous* which supplies evidence of democratic policy? These questions can create some difficulties for pro-democracy arguments. Therefore, in order to evaluate the ten generals’ political characterisation,

<sup>60</sup> des Bouvrie 2012, 71.

<sup>61</sup> Goldhill 1987, 60 = 1990, 101.

<sup>62</sup> Goldhill 2000, 44. Shear 2011, 148 follows Goldhill’s interpretation and hypothesises the presence of Thrasyllus and other generals at the Dionysia in 409 B.C. (on the occasion of democracy’s restoration) to celebrate the libations: «as elected officials of the *demōs*, their presence on this particular occasion ought to have reminded spectators that the city was now democratically ruled. Their role as military leaders should have complemented the images of the Athenians marshalled by tribe and by deme, the same divisions in which they fought for the city, as they had sworn Demophantus’ oath a few days earlier». However, we do not have any testimony that mentions Thrasyllus and the other generals as performers of the libations to Dionysus at the Dionysia in 409 B.C. See also Canevaro - Harris 2012 and their compelling arguments against the date and authenticity of the text of decree of Demophantos contained in Andocides.

we need to look closely at their office and examine *how* (and *how far*)<sup>63</sup> they represented democracy, considering their origins and powers.

The evidence which we must start from is the passage of the author of the *Athenian Constitution* where the institution of the ten generals is mentioned in this way (22, 2):

Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ἔτει ὀγδόῳ μετὰ ταύτην τὴν κατάστασιν ἐφ’ Ἑρμοκρέοντος ἄρχοντος τῆι βουλῆι τοῖς πεντακοσίοις τὸν ὄρκον ἐποίησαν ὃν ἔτι καὶ νῦν ὀμνυουσιν. Ἔπειτα τοὺς στρατηγούς ἠροῦντο κατὰ φυλάς, ἐξ ἑκάστης φυλῆς ἓνα, τῆς δὲ ἀπάσης στρατιᾶς ἡγεμῶν ἦν ὁ πολέμαρχος.

«First, in the eighth<sup>64</sup> year after this settlement [*sc.* 501/500 B.C.], in the archonship of Hermocreon, they created for the council of five-hundred the oath which they still swear now. Next they elected the generals by tribes, one from each tribe, but the leader of the whole army was the polemarch»<sup>65</sup>.

The passage which attests the origins of the board of generals has received different interpretations and given rise to much discussion. For example, Theodore Wade-Gery<sup>66</sup> believed that the ten generals were created by Cleisthenes, whilst Charles Hignett<sup>67</sup> noted that the author of the *Athenian Constitution* says that they existed in the time of Dracon<sup>68</sup>. At any rate, whereas some men can be referred to as *strategoí* before 501/500 B.C., it is only then that *strategos* became a regular office to which appointments were made every year. And of course,

<sup>63</sup> This is not to weigh the amount of democratic value of specific offices: it is unlikely that the 5<sup>th</sup>-cent. B.C. Athenian audience was concerned in judging/considering who was ‘more democratic’ than the other in front of them. The purpose here is to assess whether the ten generals could be really considered the best champions of the 5<sup>th</sup>-cent. B.C. Athenian democratic *milieu*.

<sup>64</sup> The papyrus has πέμπτῳ for ὀγδόῳ, but, as Rhodes 2017, 249-250 notices, «the next archonship mentioned is that of Phaenippus, 490/89 (22. 3): the fifth year after Isagoras, 504/3, is occupied by Acestorides (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* V. 37. 1), but the twelfth year before Phaenippus, 501/0, is not otherwise occupied, so Hermocreon should belong to that year, the eighth after Isagoras, and to make *A.P.*’s chronology coherent the papyrus’ “fifth” should be emended to “eighth”».

<sup>65</sup> Translation of Rhodes 2017.

<sup>66</sup> Wade-Gery 1933, 28.

<sup>67</sup> Hignett 1952, 169.

<sup>68</sup> Despite this, Hignett 1952, 162 n. 3 says: «unless we assume that the “constitution of Dracon” was a last-minute addition to the *A.P.*, unknown to the author when he was writing 22.2». See de Ste Croix 2004, 223-224 (with footnotes) for a list of interpretations of that passage of the Athenian Constitution. Fornara 1971, 7 considers that chapter ‘unhistorical’. Conversely, both Hammond 1969, 112-113 and Develin 1989, 3 believe that the office of general already existed in 6<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.

since the ten tribes were created by Cleisthenes, if there were regular generals before then, there will likely not have been ten of them. Whatever view we take about the existence of the ten generals before Cleisthenes, it is worth highlighting the fact that from Cleisthenes' reforms to the reforms of 487 B.C., the power of the archon polemarch had been under attack. In fact, the military powers of the polemarch, who was the τῆς δὲ ἀπάσης στρατιᾶς ἡγεμῶν (perhaps still at Marathon in 490 B.C.)<sup>69</sup>, were transferred to the generals in 487 B.C. At that time, the reforms were concerned with the archons (and perhaps also with the introduction of ostracism), who were previously elected but now came to be appointed by lot<sup>70</sup>. Then, the author of the *Athenian Constitution* says (at 26, 2) that the *zeugitai* were admitted to the appointment by lot to the archonship thanks to the reform of 457/6 B.C. In this way, the archons, despite the reforms of 487 B.C., were still from the upper classes until the reforms of 457/6 B.C. which were more democratic, while the ten generals, by that date, became definitively more important than the archons. But were the reforms of 487 B.C. – *i.e.* the ones which gave power to the generals – really democratic? Geoffrey de Ste Croix thought that «to conclude that the reform of 487 was especially “democratic” would be entirely fallacious», and that it was rather «part of a vitally necessary improvement in the efficiency of the organization of the State»<sup>71</sup>. Indeed, an election, even by lot, among upper classes cannot be labelled as exclusively democratic<sup>72</sup>. On the other hand, Charles

<sup>69</sup> [Aristot.] *Ath. Pol.* 22, 2. Scholars usually rely on Herodotus' problematic account of the battle (VI 105-117). From this account, we can see that the polemarch was the commander-in-chief of the army along with the ten generals. Scholars think that the presence of the polemarch at Marathon stands for his persistent importance, while the generals seem to have had an inferior role (see Hignett 1952, 170-171). It is true that in Herodotus' narrative all decisions are taken by the generals until Miltiades brings in the polemarch to resolve the disagreement among the generals. Rhodes 1993, 264-266 believes that, from 501/500 B.C., the generals were the effective commanders of the army, and that the polemarch went to Marathon and occupied the commander's position on the right wing because the whole army's going to Marathon was an exceptional reaction to the exceptional foreign invasion of Attica.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. [Aristot.] *Ath. Pol.* 22, 5. What is problematic here is the shortlist of 500 candidates from the demes for the nine archonships: it looks as if there is a confusion with the council of the Five Hundred. For the relationship between the generals and the archon polemarch, see Hamel 1998, 79-83. Badian 1971, 25 believed that the board of Cleisthenic archons was elected «and the men then drew lots for their particular posts».

<sup>71</sup> de Ste Croix 2004, 217.

<sup>72</sup> However, Isocr. *Areop.* [VII] 23, talking about the ancient democracy, states: ἔπειτα καὶ δημοτικωτέραν ἐνόμιζον εἶναι ταύτην τὴν κατάστασιν ἢ τὴν διὰ τοῦ λαγχάνειν γιγνομένην· ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῇ κληρώσει τὴν τύχην βραβεύσιν καὶ πολλάκις λήψεσθαι τὰς ἀρχὰς τοὺς ὀλιγαρχίας ἐπιθυμοῦντας, ἐν δὲ τῷ προκρίνειν τοὺς ἐπικεικεστάτους τὸν δῆμον ἔσεσθαι κύριον ἐλέσθαι τοὺς ἀγαπῶντας μάλιστα τὴν καθεστῶσαν πολιτείαν («Furthermore they considered that this way of appointing magistrates was also more democratic than the casting of lots,

Fornara argued that the purpose of the reforms was to remove offices «from the sphere of competition by the powerful»<sup>73</sup>, and that from Cleisthenes' reforms onwards Athens experienced a gradual democratisation of its army and commanders.

It becomes essential to know what was behind the reforms of 487 B.C., through which the archons – the powerful – lost (or, at least, began to lose) their great powers<sup>74</sup>: it is possible that the archon polemarch was no longer the commander-in-chief of the army<sup>75</sup>, that the archon *eponymous* ceased to be the president of the Assembly and Council, and that the judicial roles of the archons were drastically reduced. But, as de Ste Croix warned<sup>76</sup>, we have no clear evidence for these changes: it is possible that the archons maintained their powers until Ephialtes' reforms<sup>77</sup>. de Ste Croix considered Herodotus' account of the battle of Marathon, although this account is considered unsatisfactory and confused, since the author says that, at the time of Marathon, the polemarch was already elected by lot. Trusting Herodotus' description of the ten generals as important leaders, de Ste Croix particularly believed that:

«[The ten generals] were always, from the very first [*sc.* 501/500 B.C.], general staff officers, with a sphere of competence that was not limited to the regiment of each general's own particular tribe (although he

since under the plan of election by lot chance would decide the issue and the partisans of oligarchy would often get the offices; whereas under the plan of selecting the worthiest men, the people would have in their hands the power to choose those who were most attached to the existing constitution». Translation of Norlin 1920). The opposite opinion can be found in Aristot. *Pol.* 1294b 8-11: λέγω δ' οἷον δοκεῖ δημοκρατικὸν μὲν εἶναι τὸ κληρωτὰς εἶναι τὰς ἀρχάς, τὸ δ' αἰρετὰς ὀλιγαρχικόν, καὶ δημοκρατικὸν μὲν τὸ μὴ ἀπὸ τιμῆματος, ὀλιγαρχικὸν δὲ τὸ ἀπὸ τιμῆματος («I mean, for example, that it is thought to be democratic for the offices to be assigned by lot, for them to be elected oligarchic, and democratic for them not to have a property-qualification, oligarchic to have one». Translation of Rackham 1944).

<sup>73</sup> Fornara 1971, 11.

<sup>74</sup> As Rhodes 1993, 74 points out, «the precise significance of this reform within the process is harder to determine. [...] The reform may as well be a response to a decline in the archonship that had already begun as a revolutionary move intended to bring about a decline [...]». For sure, we can accept that from 487 B.C. onwards the ten generals became very important figures in Athenian politics. As for the decline in the quality of the archons, Badian 1971 was less convinced and he also argued (see especially 21-30) that, overall, the reforms of 487 B.C. were not so drastic and revolutionary as it was usually claimed.

<sup>75</sup> Badian 1971, 26 thought that «still commander-in-chief in name, he [*sc.* the polemarch at Marathon] has lost tactical command to the *strategoí*, who take it in turn» and that «he was, by now, a civil magistrate with residual military functions».

<sup>76</sup> See de Ste Croix 2004, 225.

<sup>77</sup> See de Ste Croix 2004, 171-179, 183-186, 188-189, 195-197.

would doubtless march at the head of that regiment into battle), but included the whole army. Two arguments are strongly in favour of this: the statement of Herodotus (V 69.2) that Cleisthenes “made ten phylarchs instead of four” (implying that phylarchs continued to exercise the same military functions as before: the command of their tribal regiments), and the etymology of the word στρατηγός. Tribal commanders might be called phylarchs [...], or taxiarchs [...]; but a στρατηγός is surely a man who leads, solely or jointly, an army or an expedition and not a mere segment of it»<sup>78</sup>.

We can be quite sure that since 487 B.C. the generals had gained all the military powers previously held by the archon polemarch. However, the archon polemarch kept hold of some important functions (moreover, he did so down into the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.): he remained the organiser of the Epitaphia, the performer of sacrifices to Artemis Agrotera, and offeror to the war dead and Harmodios and Aristogeiton<sup>79</sup>. Nicholas Hammond argued that, until ca 478/7 B.C., the archon polemarch had further duties which were then gradually transferred to the ten generals (or other magistrates): the delivery of the speech in honour of the soldiers who died at Marathon; the sacrifice to Dionysus at the Great Dionysia; the function of leading out the hoplites; the right-hand position in the battle<sup>80</sup>. It would be unfair to measure all these duties on an ‘importance scale’, but it comes naturally to ask: is it not quite evident that the organisation of the Epitaphia and the offerings to war dead and the tyrant-slayers were the ceremonies most related to democratic ideology<sup>81</sup>? Given this, it is worth noticing the fact that the celebration of those two ceremonies continued to be a prerogative of the archon polemarch, *i.e.* the powerful magistrate whose duties had been gradually reduced. Conversely, the ten generals were given the duties of sacrificing to Dionysus, leading out the

<sup>78</sup> de Ste Croix 2004, 225.

<sup>79</sup> Cfr. [Aristot.] *Ath. Pol.* 58, 1. See Rhodes 1993, 650-652.

<sup>80</sup> See Hammond 1969, 118-119 and 141-142 (see also Badian 1971, 27). As for the libations, Hammond relies exclusively (and perilously) on Plutarch’s source. Indeed, [Aristot.] *Ath. Pol.* 57-58 (seemingly talking about his times) tells us that the archon *basileus* took care of the Mysteries, the Dionysia at the Lenaeum (both the procession and competition), torch competitions, traditional sacrifices, and public lawsuits (including those about religious matters), while the archon polemarch had the duties mentioned above. Since the ten generals gradually received more powers to the detriment of the archon polemarch, and since Plutarch says that in 469/8 B.C. the libations to Dionysus in the theatre were made by the ten generals, Hammond concludes that that duty was originally a prerogative of the archon polemarch.

<sup>81</sup> For the relationship between the cult of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, democratic ideology, and the Panathenaia, see Shear 2012 (see also Shear 2011, 39, 147, 260, 318, 320-321). See also Calabi Limentani 1976.

hoplites, and holding the right-hand position in the battle<sup>82</sup>. These were ceremonies hardly suitable for an eventual display of democratic ideology. Rather, it seems that the ten generals progressively gained authority and powers, yet no ideological values: after all, they were becoming the chiefs of the Athenian (shortly afterwards, imperial) army abroad, and it is natural that they needed more military powers to exercise their command on the field (and not to display democratic ideology at home).

Accordingly, the reforms established that the office of the ten generals could be renewed<sup>83</sup>, whilst the archonship was a one-year office without any possibility of renewal. Such a measure made sense, since it allowed the best men qualified to command an army to maintain their position, avoiding the possibility of a scarcity of capable leaders available for command roles. Therefore, the whole political operation seems to be more a reform driven by necessity and advantage as opposed to democratic idealism. Indeed, the events to come were not so favourable to the Athenians, since, after Marathon, they were going to face 'internal' problems against Aegina and, later, the second Persian invasion: the military campaigns needed permanent commanders rather than an ever-changing succession of chiefs. To be sure, Athens was undergoing dramatic changes in government, and new reforms can be associated with a democratic system in development. Yet in spite of this, it remains difficult to consider the reforms of 487 B.C. and the institution of the ten generals the product of a specifically democratic urge. Of course, «when Athens was transformed into a great naval power the *strategoï* became admirals of the largest navy in Greece»<sup>84</sup>, and thus they became the generals of the fully developed democracy heralded in the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.<sup>85</sup>. But even such a detail needs further consideration: the great military as well as political power that the generals came to possess through the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. was

<sup>82</sup> Speeches in honour of the Marathon war dead were delivered by specific orators chosen by the state.

<sup>83</sup> But it is of course possible (and likely) that ever since their institution the generals had been capable of being reappointed.

<sup>84</sup> Hignett 1952, 191.

<sup>85</sup> To be sure Pericles' figure, given his crucial role in the development of the 5<sup>th</sup>-cent. B.C. Athenian democracy, was the only politician and *strategos* who was able to display democratic ideology as he was unique in both promoting and accepting the power of the people. He was an exception as «most Athenian generals after Pericles did not have the political background, the rhetorical skill, or the time to serve as active leaders of the people» (Ober 1989, 92; see also 86-91).

tempting to the upper classes<sup>86</sup>. We do not know if Dinarchus<sup>87</sup> is right when he says that the general is ordered by the law to γῆν ἐντὸς ὄρων κεκτῆσθαι («own land within the boundaries»), but we can agree with Hignett who admits that «the gifts of political leadership and military capacity which it required were in any case only to be found among the rich landowners»<sup>88</sup>. We have no evidence for a particular property requirement for the ten generals (except in the spurious constitution of Draco)<sup>89</sup>. Therefore, the assumption must be that formally (from 457/6 B.C.) they were required to be *zeugitai* or above, and that requirement would be enforced in the 5<sup>th</sup> but no longer in the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.<sup>90</sup>. In practice, it is likely that men who offered themselves as candidates for an office which would take them away from home for long periods would be men rich enough not to need to earn their living<sup>91</sup>. If the reforms of 487 B.C. cannot be considered as specifically democratic, and the office of the ten generals was more suitable to rich landowners, it is problematic to consider the presence of the generals in the orchestra of the theatre as a symbol of democratic propaganda. Which democratic aspect were they displaying? Certainly not their origins nor their amount of properties. That the ten generals displayed a democratic ideology because they were members of the government (as it is undeniable that they were integral part of the Athenian *politeia*, just like, for example, the Council of the Areopagus) and the government was democratic might not be a sufficient justification. That was an early period for Athenian democracy and, in regard to the early 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C., «to Herodotus as to Aristotle» – Fornara pointed out – «the epochal event bringing “democracy” to Athens consisted in nothing more nor less than the tribal reform of Cleisthenes»<sup>92</sup>,

<sup>86</sup> Cfr. [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 1, 3. Fornara 1971, 19 states that «it [*sc.* the office of the *strategia*] became the natural target of the responsible and ambitious». Also, as Taylor 2007, 330 indicates, «wealth was undoubtedly a factor in political activity, and the wealthy were disproportionately represented in many areas of public life. Indeed, well over half of all attested elections produced officials known to be rich, supporting the idea that certain types of political activities attracted the wealthy elite».

<sup>87</sup> Cfr. Din. 1, 71.

<sup>88</sup> Hignett 1952, 191-192.

<sup>89</sup> Cfr. [Aristot.] *Ath. Pol.* 4, 2.

<sup>90</sup> Cfr. [Aristot.] *Ath. Pol.* 7, 4.

<sup>91</sup> For a discussion on the generals and their wealth, see Davies 1981, 122-131.

<sup>92</sup> Fornara 1971, 2. Of course, Fornara does not diminish the importance of Cleisthenes' reform of the ten generals, rather he considers it revolutionary and «a remarkable and effective measure safeguarding the people – the democracy → (9) from tyranny. I partially agree with this statement, but I do not see how the board of generals – the same which included ‘authoritarian’ figures such as Pericles and Cleon, and did not avoid the establishment of the Four Hundred and the Thirty – could have acted as bulwark against non-democratic governments. Rather we should look at the Council as defence against tyranny and oligarchy: Athenian decrees of the 4<sup>th</sup>-cent. B.C. oligarchic periods

and, I would add, the great power that the Council and the Assembly gradually came to hold – not specifically the ten generals. Moreover, it was the people who elected the generals – seemingly, it was so either after a period during which the ten tribes were entitled to elect the generals<sup>93</sup> or from 501/0 B.C. onwards (with the generals always elected by the Assembly). Also, all military affairs were managed by the Council and the Assembly, which gave instructions to the generals in order to prevent an administrative chaos among them<sup>94</sup>. While the ten generals were a subordinate office – though important that office might have been – democracy and democratic decision remained with the Council and the Assembly. The ten generals were more a product of those democratic institutions, but, nevertheless, their office did not cease even during the oligarchic periods of 411 and 404/3 B.C. Should we then suppose that, during the Athenian oligarchic periods, the ten generals (if they poured the libations to Dionysus in the theatre) represented the aegis of the authority of the oligarchic *polis*? We might be entitled to think so, but this is nothing but a further reason for which the ten generals are not the best candidates to represent the ideology of democracy: they were important subordinates of the government of the day<sup>95</sup>.

The case is more delicate when we talk specifically about Cimon. Certainly, the Athenians had already experienced Cleisthenes' government, the victory against the Persians and Themistocles' policy, but Ephialtes' reforms, Pericles, and the radical (and more lavish as well as debatable) democracy had yet to come. While considering Plutarch's source, we should refer exclusively to that specific period, that of Cimon's great political influence: it is well known that Cimon was

(321-318 and 317-307 B.C.), for example, were decrees of the Assembly, that was not considered (apparently) as a specifically democratic organ, given that the oligarchs, in order to obstruct democracy, removed the Council and the *μισθός* (but the 5<sup>th</sup>-cent. B.C. honorific decree included in *JG* I<sup>3</sup> 98, enacted under the Four Hundred, was probably a decree of the Council: see Osborne - Rhodes 2017, 446-451; see also Giannotti 2020a for an analysis of the formulaic language of the 5<sup>th</sup>-cent. B.C. Athenian honorific decrees, including the oligarchic decree above mentioned).

<sup>93</sup> Such a change has, in Fornara's opinion (1971, 26), as a *terminus post quem* the year 469/8 B.C. (given that Plut. *Cim.* 8 says that the ten generals came from each tribe) and as a *terminus ante quem* the year 460/59 B.C. when two members of the same tribe were elected generals. This might have been a «“democratic” improvement permitting the entire people to elect individual generals and also permitting the generals who would be leading them without regard to tribe to be selected out of the entire citizen body without restriction» (Fornara 1971, 26 n. 57). Hence, generals elected in *that* way seem to come from a more democratic process. However, there is no certain case of two generals from the same tribe before 441/0 B.C. (Androtion *FGrH* 324 F 38).

<sup>94</sup> See Hamel 1998, 5-23 and 115-121.

<sup>95</sup> Or, with Handelman 2004, 224's stronger words, «the military leaders of the Imperial State». In the author's opinion, making the ten generals pour libations in the theatre put a «statist and civic» emphasis on the festival.



more conservative than his democratic predecessors and contemporaries<sup>96</sup>. Hence, if Plutarch is to be trusted with regard to the episode of the libations, we should equally trust the author's words (at 15, 1) when he says that Cimon took a firm position against any change of the constitution (which, conversely, was overthrown during his absence)<sup>97</sup>: «following the example of the tyrants» – Hignett boldly<sup>98</sup> states – «he tried to distract the Thetes from political agitation by promoting their material well-being. Possibly his lavish generosity was influenced by this motive»<sup>99</sup>. Cimon was far from the democratic ideals and manners of the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.: his philolaconism (however excessively described by later sources), his being *aristos*, and his aristocratic euergetism had little to do with 5<sup>th</sup>-cent. B.C. democratic ideology<sup>100</sup>; his office was still developing, and had yet to acquire that political might which Pericles, Nicias or Alcibiades would wield; the φιλοτιμία caused by Cimon and his fellow generals' reputation was a concept that, in the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C., was generally ascribed to the aristocratic sphere (and then democratised during the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.) and that, in its individual form, was particularly dangerous for the egalitarian context of Athenian democracy<sup>101</sup>.

Therefore, there are several reasons not to label the ten generals as bearer of democratic ideology: their origins, duties, and wealth point to a less specific sphere of belonging, competence, and activity. We are on firmer ground to say that Cimon and his fellow generals were a representative board<sup>102</sup> and 'symbol' of the Athenian government overall which was called to pour libations and

<sup>96</sup> If on the one hand Cimon's ethical traits can be labelled as aristocratic, on the other hand Zaccarini 2017, 36-38 and 254-258 quite convincingly demonstrates that, in terms of politics, the «rigid bipartition between an oligarchic Cimonian faction vs. the Themistoclean or Periclean democrats is the result of stereotypes that do not belong to the early 5th century» (256).

<sup>97</sup> Cfr. Plut. *Cim.* 15, 2. See Zaccarini 2017, 200 n. 7.

<sup>98</sup> But not unjustifiably: see Zaccarini 2017, 249-254 who lists and discusses all those (later) sources which considered Cimon's ethical and political behaviour as tyrannical.

<sup>99</sup> Hignett 1952, 193.

<sup>100</sup> If there was any consciousness of that: see ex. Harris 2016, 52-55. See Ober 1989, 84-86 on the 'elite leadership' in democratic Athens. But see the recontextualisation and reevaluation of τιμή that Edinburgh ERC Project *Honour in Classical Greece* is carrying out: <http://research.shca.ed.ac.uk/honour-in-greece/>.

<sup>101</sup> See Whitehead 1983. See also (for a good summary of sources and references) Deene 2013, 69-88.

<sup>102</sup> This could open a further investigation: can we consider the ten generals as a homogenous political group? Each general might have had his own politico-military view and it was specifically for this reason that their conduct was supervised by the people.

adjudicate in the theatre<sup>103</sup> more likely due to their reputation, than due to the ideology their office would have displayed<sup>104</sup>. Even more generally, it is appropriate to consider the pre-play ceremonies of the Athenian Great Dionysia as an inclusive and involving moment, during which many members of Athenian society – generals, archons, priests, heralds, benefactors, war-orphans, ambassadors – made themselves visible in front of a heterogeneous audience. Specifically in regard to the libations, the ten generals (who shortly afterwards might not have been re-elected) could be asked to perform a ritual on behalf of the city they served the year before during a major Athenian festival and they, undoubtedly, regarded this more as an honour than a chance to exhibit their democratic being. Simply, making the ten generals pour wine on the ground was hardly a way to democratise the festival.

### Conclusions

The analysis provided here does not aim to reopen the debate on the political value of the Athenian Great Dionysia and its pre-play ceremonies. Rather, the purpose is to provide a *desideratum* reappraisal of the oft-neglected ceremony attested by Plutarch, since too often the episode has been taken for granted without any in-depth contextualisation. The ceremony (especially its frequency) remains enigmatic, but I have shown how its vagueness can be tackled from a variety of perspectives: the remarkable concurrence of civic, governmental and religious elements testifies both to the complexity of the ceremony and the (un-surprising) interweaving of roles within Athenian society.

To conclude paradoxically, I would like to spend a few words on what one, when approaching the study of the libations to Dionysus poured by ten generals in the theatre, should look at first: the context of Plutarch's eulogy of Cimon. Now, we have seen more than once that the core of Plutarch's story was Cimon's memorable appointment as judge at the Dionysia. The fact is that the exceptional nature of that event is unavoidably confirmed also by the context of the episode. In particular, it is clear both from the sentence which introduces the episode –

<sup>103</sup> Mosconi 2008, 28 briefly argues that Cimon's role as judge in the theatre was a display of aristocratic traits: «come il predominio politico dell'aristocrazia nell'Atene areopagite trovasse espressione anche nel riconoscimento di una superiore capacità di giudizio artistico e propriamente musicale è del resto testimoniato in modo palese da quanto avvenne in occasione dell'agone teatrale del 468 a.C.».

<sup>104</sup> Blamire 1989, 122 (quoting Meiggs 1972, 82) concludes «that the presiding archon's primary concern was to maintain order in the theatre, hence his appointment of the generals, when the audience threatened to get out of hand, “needs no other explanation than the authority of their office”».

ἔθεντο δ' εἰς μνήμην αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν τῶν τραγῳδῶν κρίσιν ὀνομαστὴν γενομένην («he is remembered for his judgement of the tragic agon, which [*sc.* the judgement] became famous») – and from the content of the whole paragraph §8. Indeed, the paragraph starts referring to the *hermai* erected by Cimon for the victory at Eion and, though those did not mention Cimon, they indirectly celebrated his virtues: courage, *euergesia*, and valour on the field<sup>105</sup>. Cimon's endeavours allow Plutarch to address the value of τὸ Κίμωνος ἔργον (8, 2), and it is for this reason that he recounts Cimon's glorious return from Skyros with Theseus' bones (8, 3-7): the author is recounting the deeds which made Cimon famous among the people<sup>106</sup>, and the episode of the libations along with the appointment as judge has to be counted, coherently, as part of that list. It is possible that Plutarch put these episodes in sequence to show that the audience wanted to acclaim Cimon for his success, but actually, the recovery of Theseus' bones happened some years before 468 B.C. Alternatively, we can think that the libations made by the ten generals and their appointment as judges were a way to celebrate Cimon and his colleagues for the victory at the Eurymedon, if we accept the dating of the battle in the summer of 469 B.C.<sup>107</sup>. Even in this way, it would have been more a matter of celebrating Athenian generals thanks to the Dionysia's visibility, rather than a government displaying democratic ideology through its magistrates. The encomiastic tone of Plutarch's tale could lead us to doubt the truth of the episode, but, as Cimon's appointment as judge is the heart of the episode, our eventual uncertainty should not concern the mention of the libations. We have no reason to suspect the veracity of Plutarch's words in relation to that detail, since we know from inscriptions that sacrifices and libations did take place at the Dionysia.

Therefore, if there was a customary interchange of roles in religious duties, and if the ten generals were loosely connected to ideology, it follows that there is no explicit evidence of any «manipulation of the symbolics of the ritual»<sup>108</sup>. As for the libations, we have seen that political figures in a religious context were not unusual to the audience, and that the political sphere was not dominant over the

<sup>105</sup> See Zaccarini 2017, 61-67.

<sup>106</sup> Cfr. also D.S. XI 62, 1. For the sources' treatment of Cimon's military excellence, see Zaccarini 2017, 40-41.

<sup>107</sup> By now, the general view is that the battle at Eurymedon took place in 466 or 465 B.C. See ex.: Sordi 1971 (although Sordi 1994, 63-68 postpones the date to 465/4 B.C.); Fine 1983, 343-346; Zaccarini 2017, 119-129. 466 or 465 B.C. may be the fashionable date for the battle of the Eurymedon, but we have no other evidence: Thucydides gives a list of events in the Delian League without dates (cfr. Thuc. I 100, 1; cfr. also *FGrH* 124 F 15 [Callisthenes] and Plut. *Cim.* 12, 2 - 13, 3) and Diodorus Siculus (XI 61) narrates the Eurymedon under 470/69 B.C. (but his dating is generally rejected). For a complete list of scholars' positions about the date of the battle at Eurymedon, see Meyer 2018, 25 n. 2.

<sup>108</sup> Goldhill 2000, 44.

religious sphere. As for the appointment of the judges, it seems correct to describe it as momentous, but still delimited to that specific occasion, rather than some sort of largescale democratic manipulation. Especially, it is wrong to talk about manipulation in this specific case because the only manipulation we face when we read Plutarch's anecdote is that of Apsephion, who overrode the appointment procedure for theatre judges<sup>109</sup>: our best evidence, Isocr. *Trap.* [XVII] 33-34, tells us that a) each of the ten tribes submitted a list of candidates, b) the Council approved them, and c) the archon (perhaps advised by the *prytaneis* and/or *choregoi*) selected 10 names in front of the audience. If we look for a democratic aspect, it was precisely this mechanism of selection starting from the Council that we should regard as democratic, as it allowed a citizen of each tribe to serve as judge at one of the most important and renowned Athenian festivals. However, in 468 B.C., it seems that the archon *eponymous* changed the rules and decided *autonomously* to appoint the ten generals as judges (and perhaps as performers of the libations): there was no democratic procedure in that, because the archon ignored the usual process which imposed precise selections. Nothing scandalous, given that, as far as Plutarch says, the audience was satisfied with the archon's «bold stroke»<sup>110</sup>, which, at any rate, should not be underestimated. For, as a matter of fact, the democratic and selective process to appoint the ten judges was set aside due to the *coup de* (it is the case) *théâtre* of the archon.

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<sup>109</sup> For the complexity of which, see Csapo - Slater 1994, 157-165.

<sup>110</sup> Goldhill 1987, 60 = 1990, 100.

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*Abstract*

Il presente contributo esamina un'oscura cerimonia del V a.C.: le libagioni a Dioniso versate dai dieci generali durante le Dionisie ateniesi in teatro – una pratica attestata letterariamente solo dalla *Vita di Cimone* di Plutarco (8, 8-9). L'analisi qui fornita contestualizza le libagioni, prima di tutto, come rituale religioso e, successivamente, si concentra sugli esecutori della cerimonia da un punto di vista storico-politico, dal momento che una parte della critica moderna ha connesso la cerimonia in teatro con la democrazia ateniese. Oltre ad evidenziare le problematiche nella valutazione ed interpretazione delle libagioni come un evento limpido ed inequivocabile, il contributo studia: (a) cosa facessero realmente gli esecutori di una libagione; (b) chi fossero gli ufficiali preposti alle libagioni; e (c) in che misura l'ideologia democratica fosse coinvolta durante il rituale.

This paper examines a 5<sup>th</sup>-cent. B.C. obscure ceremony: the libations to Dionysus poured by the ten generals during the Athenian Dionysia in the theatre – a practice literarily attested only by Plutarch's *Life of Cimon* (8, 8-9). The investigation here conducted firstly contextualises the libations as a religious ritual and, secondly, analyses its performers from a historico-political perspective, since a part of modern scholarship has linked the pre-play ritual to Athenian democracy. While highlighting the problematics for assessing and interpreting the libations as an unambiguous event, the paper investigates: (a) what the performers did during a libation; (b) who were the ordinary officers of the libations; and (c) to what extent democratic ideology was involved during the ritual.