

Dionysus and Aphrodite in Ancient Greece and Beyond (Madrid, 16-20 Jun 25)

Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Jun 18–20, 2025

Deadline: Feb 28, 2025

Jesús Muñoz Morcillo

Ana Isabel Jiménez San Cristóbal, Bartek Bednarek, Jesús Muñoz Morcillo and Pasquale Ferrara are delighted to invite you to the conference “Love and Frenzy: Dionysus and Aphrodite in Ancient Greece and Beyond”.

As several scholars have observed, the study of ancient religion in the twentieth century has seemed to ignore divinities, while focusing on the origin and function of rituals. This has changed in recent decades thanks to such scholars as Henk Versnel, Jan Bremmer, and Susan Deacy, whose work shows that deities conceived of as persons with their own biographies, peculiarities and social networks were central to ancient religious experience. It remains a separate question as to what extent a worshipper would take entire mythical material at face value.

Slightly less common remains a model of research pioneered by J.-P. Vernant in his *Hestia-Hermes: Sur l'expression religieuse de l'espace et du mouvement chez les Grecs*. In spite of its questionable premise that the ancient pantheon formed a well-defined and rigid system that could be taken as an expression of non-religious concepts, this model remains valuable for showing that addressing a divinity without considering its relationship to other members of the divine family would not allow us to grasp some of the crucial aspects of the divinities. Admittedly, when discussing some deities, this approach seems to be taken for granted. For example, it is difficult to talk about Demeter or Persephone without referring to the other. Nevertheless, some other divine constellations are less obvious but can be even more intriguing. For example, it would be tempting to ask why Hera's relationship with Zeus was so toxic, why Aphrodite preferred Ares to Hephaestus and why Alexander identified himself with Dionysus rather than with Heracles.

Our conference focuses on Aphrodite and Dionysus, two divinities very often thought of as working in synergy. Perhaps the best example of this synergy is provided by Euripides' *Bacchae*, in which time and again Pentheus expresses the suspicion that the Bacchic cult only provides an excuse for erotic transgression. Not much different is the criticism expressed by several Christian authors or by Roman authorities in *Livy* in the context of the Bacchanalia affair. On a more positive note, the relationship between eroticism and intoxication is a commonplace in sympotic poetry. Perhaps even more famously, Plato referred to Dionysian and erotic frenzy as akin to one another. Moreover, starting from the end of the 5th century BCE, both in Greece and in its western and eastern colonies, the spheres of Dionysus and Aphrodite began to intertwine in figurative art. This trend became even more pronounced during the Hellenistic period, eventually becoming standardized in the Roman Imperial era. For example, in frescoes, mosaics, and decorative artifacts, erotes, nymphs, maenads, and satyrs emerged as standard erotic-Dionysian motifs, symbolizing

the pleasures of both earthly and otherworldly life.

The question we would like to ask is whether these instances of bringing Dionysus and Aphrodite together are merely a matter of artistic convention or a poetic trope that served humorous or purely ornamental purposes. Thus, we will inquire into various instances in which Dionysus and Aphrodite have been brought together. Possible research problems include:

1. Myths in which Dionysus meets Aphrodite.
2. Myths in which Dionysus meets someone akin to Aphrodite (who is Ariadne?) and vice versa (who is Phaon or Adonis?).
3. Instances of joint cults.
4. Cult analogies: do Dionysus and Aphrodite like similar forms of worship?
5. Cult restrictions that could exclude joint cults (e.g., through sexual abstinence). Other forms of stark contrasts in cult behavior.
6. Topography of sacred places.
7. Philosophical and theological reflection.
8. Evidence of the intertwining of Aphrodite's and Dionysus's spheres in material culture and figurative arts from the 7th century BCE through Late Antiquity.
9. Transcultural case studies (e.g., Dionysus-Aphrodite in the Italian Peninsula, Anatolia, or Egypt).
10. Post-Classical reception (e.g., Early Modern Art and/Literature, Modernity, Postmodernity).
11. Beyond ancient Greece: Anatolia, Italy, Christianity, mediaeval, modern, post-modern reception, etc.

The conference will take place at the Complutense University of Madrid on June 18-20. 2025.

Confirmed participants are Alberto Bernabé, Jan Bremmer, Susan Deacy, Radcliffe Edmonds, David Hernández de la Fuente, Emilio Suárez de la Torre, and Yulia Ustinova

If you wish to participate, please send an anonymised abstract (max. 300 words excl. bibliography) to dionysaphrodite@gmail.com by February 28th, 2025. The results of the selection process will be communicated by March 15th, 2025.

There will be no conference fee. Unfortunately, we cannot subsidise your stay (although we are still trying various options to make it more affordable).

Reference:

CFP: Dionysus and Aphrodite in Ancient Greece and Beyond (Madrid, 16-20 Jun 25). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 20, 2025 (accessed Jan 28, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/43740>>.