

## *Bromios*: The God of Strange and Invasive Sounds

Dionysos is strongly identified with sound; raucous revelry defines him. He is invoked as *Euas*, *Euios*, *Dithyrambos*, *Iobacchos*, and several other names linked to noise and music. Among them, *Bromios* is perhaps the most significant and well-known. This paper examines the usage of *bromios* and the related noun *bromos* in order to reach a more nuanced understanding of the noisy god.

The Greek word *bromios*, “noisy,” is almost always associated with Dionysos. Most frequently, it appears as the name *Bromios*; on occasion, it is an adjective meaning Bacchic. Until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the word occurs in appropriately noisy contexts. In several instances, it is linked to dancing and brings to mind the music essential for this activity. Over the course of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and into the Hellenistic period, however, *Bromios* loses a clear connection to noise and becomes simply another name for Dionysos. In this time period, it is often used as a metonym for wine. I focus on the earlier uses of *Bromios* in order to explicate its original connotations.

*Bromios* is closely related to the noun *bromos*, a term for noise that is used for various sounds including thunder, crackling fire, and flutes. In the *Iliad*, Hector and Poseidon’s attack on the Greeks is favorably compared to πυρὸς τόσσός γε ποτὶ βρόμος αἰθομένοιο / οὔρεος ἐν βήσσης, ὅτε τ’ ὤρετο καίεμεν ὕλην, “the *bromos* of fire in the mountains that incites the wood to burn” (*Iliad* 14.396-7). Aeschylus refers to the sound of a charging enemy’s snorting horses as a *barbaros bromos* (*Seven Against Thebes* 463).

Like *bromios*, *bromos* is often found in conjunction with words and phrasing that bring to mind Dionysos. In *Homeric Hymn* 26, for instance, the forest is filled with *bromos* due to the revelry of Dionysos and the nymphs (*HH* 26.10). Pindar describes Semele, the mother of

Dionysos whose death is directly linked to his birth, as dying in the *bromos* of thunder (*Olympian* 2.25).

*Bromos* is also used several times to mark the sound of the *aulos*, an instrument with strong ties to Dionysos. This instrument, despite its importance in Athenian life, was rejected by Athena in myth and regarded with deep ambivalence by the Athenians for its distortive and disruptive properties (Wilson 1999). These properties are key to understanding the nature of all sounds labeled *bromoi*.

Whether or not *bromos* occurs in a Dionysiac context, it is used of strange-sounding, foreign, invasive, or abrupt noises. It is the sound of the *aulos*, never the *kithara*. A *bromos* is a noise that breaks into a space and imparts either a moment of disruption or an extended alteration of the aural environment. Dionysos as *Bromios* is the instigator of such sound.

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