

What Even are Gods? The use of δαίμων and θεός in Euripides' *Hippolytus*

The term δαίμων and its semantic shifts have led to the emergence of numerous enlightening scholarly debates since its earliest attestation. The narrowing in meaning of the term – from referring to one's destiny to a specific divinity – correlates with the development of *henotheism* (Versnel [1990]) and *megatheism* (Chaniotis [2010]). Euripides, at the cusp of a new Hellenistic understanding of the δαίμων but still influenced by classical notions of the term, portrays Aphrodite and Artemis in a unique way reflective of contemporary popular religion. I explore how Euripides uses δαίμων and specifically how it differs from a θεός in the *Hippolytus*. I focus on the different roles and aspects of θεός and δαίμων in the *Hippolytus* to determine why the author chooses to employ one term over the other within specific contexts. A close analysis of when the terms δαίμων and θεός occur clarifies the distinct identities of the goddesses each term implies and how Aphrodite gets represented in such a preeminent way.

My research is seminally informed by the extensive previous scholarship on this issue in studies of Greek religion and tragedy. Most scholars, however, such as Chapouthier (1952), Luschnig (1980), and Romilly (2008), follow the classification of δαίμων as relating to human destiny. Others have already explored δαίμων in its relationship to θεός and Schlesier's (1983) view of the terms. While I keep her basic categories, my paper expands further on her definitions to arrive at a more precise understanding of what constitutes the use of the term δαίμων instead of θεός.

My reading of the *Hippolytus* reveals that Euripides uses θεός/θεά to refer to a god *de facto*. The θεός/θεά can be anthropomorphic, general or specific, and interact with mortals in a removed sense. Further, the θεός/θεά relates specifically to the deity in Ouranos from where s/he

can exercise agency remotely and send down various powers or emotions to mortals. Conversely, the δαίμων is the appearance and presence of a θεός/θεά on earth where they can manifest supreme power over mortals in a more direct manner. The δαίμων is imagined to be a specific divinity by the characters in the play and is perceived as more powerful than just the θεός/θεά counterpart.

I posit that the distribution of the terms δαίμων and θεά for Aphrodite and Artemis correspond to their characterizations in the tragedy, in particular the limitations and powers they have. Whereas both Artemis and Aphrodite are called θεά consistently by all the characters, Artemis is a δαίμων only in the mouth of Hippolytus (16, 292). To him, Artemis is separated and placed above the other gods in worship and he excludes the worship of other gods (namely Aphrodite) in favor of her. Thus, he has a distinctly *henotheistic* relationship with the goddess. He uses δαίμων for Aphrodite only at the end of the tragedy when he finally acknowledges her role in his downfall (1401, 1415). Aphrodite as the δαίμων is an unsurpassable goddess on earth who destroys Hippolytus and his family and someone against whom Artemis has no power until Hippolytus lays dying (1328-1130). Even mortals acknowledge her supremacy to the other gods (calling her δαίμων ten times) which can be seen in the nurse's realization of Phaedra's sickness: "I see now that Cypris was not a god, but she has become something else, something greater than a god (ἀλλ' εἴ τι μεῖζον ἄλλο γίγνεται θεοῦ) who has destroyed her, Phaedra, and me and the home," (359-361). Since she is the goddess bringing about the ἀπή of Hippolytus (which term is only used in the context of Aphrodite the δαίμων), displaying her full power as a δαίμων on earth, and the other gods are powerless in stopping her, she gains a *megatheistic* portrayal. In order to gain worship from a non-believer, Aphrodite manifests her divine power through bringing about his downfall. She must prove herself greatest to Hippolytus, worthy of

megatheistic worship, before she can be acknowledged by him as deserving of worship in equal manner to the other divinities.

Bibliography

- Chaniotis, Angelos. 2010. "Megatheism. The Search for the Almighty God and the Competition between Cults" in *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, edited by S. Mitchell and P. van Nuffelen. Cambridge: 112-140.
- Chapouthier, Fernand. 1952. "Euripide et l'accueil du divin" in *La Notion du Divin. Depuis Homère jusqu' à Platon*, edited by H.J. Rose et al. Vandoevres: 205-225
- Luschnig, C.A.E. 1980. "Men and Gods in Euripides' *Hippolytus*." *Ramus* 9: 89-100.
- Romilly, Jacqueline de. 2008. "Les dieux et les hommes: deux soupirs d'Euripide." *Phileuripidès*: 389-392.
- Schlesier, Renate. 1983. "Daimon und Daimones bei Euripides." *Saeculum* 34: 267-279.
- Versnel, H.S. 1990. *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion, I: Ter Unus. Isis, Dionysos, Hermes. Three Studies in Henotheism* by H.S. Versnel (SGGR 6), Leiden.