Resistance to Origins

Cult Foundation in the Myths of Dionysus, Apollo, and Demeter

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1 Introduction

Aetiological myths exercise a particular fascination by virtue not only of their content, but also their incongruous use of a common narratological practice: they construct their plots backwards, starting the creative process not from the beginning, but from the end.¹ Once the beginning – the cause and explanation of an already well-known result – has been identified, the mythic events can, of course, be related in chronological order. The interpreter should therefore bear in mind that the course of the story has not necessarily been shaped by a logical sequence of individual narrative elements, but predominately by the intended outcome. When regarded in this way, aetiological myths can be said to reverse the temporal order of beginning and end by emphasising the end more strongly than the beginning, the consequence more than the cause. At the same time, *aitia* are emphatically interested in beginnings and origins. It is the beginning that is meant to lend dignity and meaning to the resultant and contemporary practice or institution.

The interpreter is invited to read aetiological myths in two different ways. Anyone who follows the conventional reading practice of reading from beginning to end and who understands the outcome as the result of the preceding parts of the plot must, at the same time, take into account that the end of the story was known to the author before its beginning. The reader who begins at the end, however, and moves ‘backwards’ towards the beginning will realise the beginning’s dependency on the end. This manner of reading necessarily entails the question of whether the events related provide the only possible explanation for the *explanandum*. This problem becomes more prominent when we encounter multiple aetiologies competing for a single outcome.² Similarly, aetiologies in which an asymmetrical relationship exists between the explanation and the thing explained also give rise to doubts regarding the

1 On reverse composition in aetiological narratives see most recently Gödde 2019.

2 See Loehr 1996.

stringency and monocausality of a given explanation. This leads to the question how – and how clearly and in what terms – aetiological myths lay claim to the *factuality* and *truth* of the explanations they offer.³ Do they present one possible explanation amongst many? Or is the myth presented intended as the only possible explanation, and therefore as the true explanation?

Authors of aetiological myths, by speaking from the perspective of the present, in most cases, acknowledge at least implicitly that they were not themselves witnesses to the past of which they tell, but can access and analyse it only by means of narrative.⁴ This underscores the often *fictional status* of aetiological stories. The presence of the narrator, and the (usually distant) past in which the narrated origin is situated, stand in marked contrast to one another. In view of this divide, scholarship has tended to emphasise the ability of aetiological myths to establish continuity between the past and the present.⁵ Aetiological myths are commonly said to make it easier to cope with and control the past by constructing it not just as the *origin* of, but also as the *reason* for the present. In other words, it is claimed that aetiologies serve as a strategy for appropriating history for ideological use. This has been shown most recently by Jacqueline Klooster in her work on Apollonius of Rhodes, whose aetiological narrative she characterises as the “Hellenising of the known world”.⁶ At the same time, however, Klooster emphasises that it is “useless to know what Apollonius actually believed to be true”, since the Argo voyages over an “imaginary map”.⁷

Although the terms ‘aetiology’ and ‘aetiological’ are frequently strengthened by attributes such as ‘authenticating’ and ‘foundational’ (in both its emphatic and literal senses), their use should not obscure the fact that the aetiological *explanandum* alone constitutes a historical fact, while the narrative itself should be considered a poetic fiction. This distinction, which also applies to the original use of the term by the Old Testament scholar Hermann Gunkel,⁸ is commonly ignored in the different theoretical approaches to mythology.

3 A thorough examination of these questions can be found in Veyne 1983.

4 For an exception to this, in which an aetiological myth is reported within a narrative, see Verg. *A.* 8.184–305, where Evander refers to the foundation of the cult of Heracles at the Ara Maxima. I thank the anonymous reviewer from Brill for this reference. On this passage see also Alexander Kirichenko's chapter in this volume.

5 For the construction of the past in mythology, see e.g. Dowden 1992; for Hellenistic literature, see Bing 1988; cf. also Veyne 1983, who emphasises aetiology's obsession with origins in his chapter ‘Restoring Etiological Truth to Myth’ (English translation: Veyne 1988, 71–78).

6 Klooster 2014, 531.

7 *Ibid.*, 536.

8 Waldner 2014, 35. On Gunkel see also the introduction and Jacqueline Klooster's chapter in this volume.

Proponents of a phenomenological approach to the study of religion, such as Mircea Eliade, understand myths as being *per se* aetiological, because, in their view, all myths claim to handle fundamental aspects of human existence.⁹ Under different auspices, 19th century analysts of myth, such as the classicist Karl Otfried Müller in Göttingen, postulated a close connection between mythology and history. According to this perspective, each and every myth refers back to and explains a historical event, and thereby gains, in the words of Müller, “faktische Wahrheit” (‘factual truth’), with the result that “in ihm das Faktische mit dem Gedachten verschmolzen [ist]” (‘facts and imagination coalesce with each other’).¹⁰

As these brief remarks on conceptualising aetiology show, the term encompasses an entire spectrum of types of explanations. These range from the ‘foundation’ of the human condition, as in Hesiod’s Prometheus narrative,¹¹ to the politico-ideological construction of territorial relations that we see in Apollonius¹² (amongst others). They also include what I have called ‘asymmetrical’ aetiologies, in which the *aition* functions to a certain extent as a pretext for telling a story that could have achieved essentially the same effect without providing a final explanation of how something came into the world. (I think we can safely say that this holds true for many stories in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.) Aetiologies can therefore be regarded as oscillating between poetic fiction and claims to historical facticity. They play with possible realities.

In their function of conveying knowledge about something previously unknown and explaining what has not yet been understood, aetiologies also present a dichotomy between known and unknown as well as between rational and irrational. Their tone is always rationalising, inasmuch as they create, explain, and organise contexts and correlations. Viewed from this perspective, aetiologies may also be said to challenge something – or, put more concretely: with their impetus to rationalise, aetiologies oppose the irrational, which they retrospectively domesticate and make comprehensible. They thereby contribute decisively to the debates surrounding religious institutions and rituals. Whether aetiologies confirm these institutions and rituals, or instead question them critically from an ‘enlightened’ standpoint, remains to be analysed.

In what follows, I would like to focus on three cultic aetiologies which, in my view, do not only explain and legitimate the development of their respective

9 Ibid., 34.

10 Müller 1825, 67 and 70.

11 Cf. Vernant 1974, 1979 and 1987; see also Renger 2012.

12 On Apollonius Rhodius see Annette Harder’s chapter in this volume.

cults, but, at the same time, designate it as *problematic* and *oppositional*, and even *defer* the ultimate moment of foundation in and by the narrative itself. The aetiologies in question are those of ecstatic Dionysian ritual, Apollo's cults in Delos and Delphi, and the Eleusinian mysteries. I hope to show how aetiological explanations can depict not only the origin of cults, but also a certain resistance to the foundation of these cults – a resistance which brings into relief the stunning otherness of the divine presence and which should not be seen as reflecting actual historical opposition to a cult.

2 Dionysus and the Resistance Myths

Among the myths surrounding the god Dionysus can be found a cluster of stories commonly referred to as 'resistance myths'.¹³ In this type of myth, the protagonists – whether individually or as a collective – refuse Dionysus cult worship, and, as a rule, also reject the accompanying ecstatic practices or, in some versions, his notably strange and unfamiliar cultic image and attributes. At least nine instances of resistance to his cult can be traced in extant literary, historical, philological, and lexicographical works, in each of which the resistance myth tends to assume a different narrative role and religious meaning. While examining these sources, we must always take the individual context into consideration and carefully avoid subsuming the divergent versions indiscriminately under an allegedly common story pattern. An extensive discussion of the general relationship between myth and literature¹⁴ and the question whether distinct mythical story patterns exist independently of their poetic adaptations, however, lies beyond the scope of this chapter. The focus will instead be on the aetiological dimension of these stories, i.e. on the possible connection between resistance – or, in some cases, delay – and foundation.

The first variant of the above-mentioned pattern is the myth of Icarus:¹⁵ here, resistance and rejection are not openly directed against the god himself,

13 Both complete and partial lists of stories belonging to this pattern can be found, together with comments on this underlying motif, in Kolb 1977, esp. 116, n. 97; Kerényi 1976, ch. 4.5; Sourvinou-Inwood 1994; Cole 2007, 330sq.; Lämmle 2007, esp. 372, n. 132; Gödde 2011, 101–103.

14 For brief remarks on the relation between myth and religion and their dependence on literature, see Gödde 2016, 121–123; for a more extensive treatment, see Graf 1991, especially chapters 3–7.

15 Eratosthenes, *Erigone* frgg. 22–26 Powell; for the latest discussion of the fragments, possible sources and variants of the story, and further bibliography, see Rosokoki 1995. The most detailed version of the story is found in Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 47.34–264. For the Icarus myth as reflecting resistance to the cult of Dionysus, see Lämmle 2007, 372, n. 132;

but against the gift of wine which Dionysus has brought to the Attic farmer Icarius. Icarius, in turn, brings wine and the knowledge of its cultivation to his neighbours, who promptly fall victim to the effects of drinking it unmixed and kill Icarius in their intoxication. Icarius' corpse is found by his daughter, Erigone, who hangs herself for grief. Some versions¹⁶ relate that the young girls of Athens were in consequence stricken with madness and followed Erigone's example by hanging themselves; the oracle of Apollo at Delphi thereupon advised the Athenians to honour Icarius and Erigone with annual rites. The murder of Icarius, the bearer of Dionysus' gift, can here be seen as the equivalent of the immediate rejection of the god's cult in other versions of the motif. Primarily, however, the story serves to explain the practice of paying cult to Icarius and Erigone.

In another myth, the daughters of Eleuther (2) are reported to have mocked the appearance of Dionysus, who, draped in a black goatskin, came to them in a vision. In retribution for their disobedience, he drove them mad; only after consenting to honour the god were they freed from this state.¹⁷

An analogous myth tells of the Athenians' (3) rejection of a particular statue of the god which Pegasus brought from Eleutherae in Boeotia to Attica. The Athenians spurned the god and in return were punished with a disease of the male genitals. In order to be released from this epidemic, they sought the advice of the Delphic Oracle, who instructed them to accept and honour the god in their city. 'The Athenians', as a scholiast has it, 'complied with the oracle's instructions and made phalloi, both publicly and privately, and honoured the god with them in memory of their affliction, but perhaps also because the god is the cause [αἴτιος] of the procreation of children (for drunkenness excites pleasure and acts as an aphrodisiac)'.¹⁸

Burkert 1972, 247–249 and Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 187, n. 54 both discuss the relation of this myth to the festival of the *Choes* during the Anthesteria. The Icarius myth also contains familiar elements of the *theoxenia*-motif, whose probable relation to the foundation of the *Choes* is discussed by Rosokoki 1995, 107–114 and Flückiger-Guggenheim 1984, 108–111.

16 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.4.196sq.; schol. Bernens. in Verg. *G.* 1.33; Hyg. *Fab.* 130; Ael. *NA* 7.28; see Rosokoki 1995, 50sq. and 57.

17 Suda s.v. μέλαν: [...] καὶ Μελαναιγίδα Διόνυσον ἰδρύσαντο ἐκ τοιαύτης αἰτίας. αἱ τοῦ Ἐλευθήρος θυγατέρες θεασάμεναι φάσμα τοῦ Διονύσου ἔχον μελάνην αἰγίδα ἐμέμψαντο· ὁ δὲ ὀργισθεὶς ἐξέμηνεν αὐτάς. μετὰ ταῦτα ὁ Ἐλευθὴρ ἔλαβε χρησμὸν ἐπὶ παύσει τῆς μανίας τιμῆσαι Μελαναιγίδα Διόνυσον.

18 Schol. ad. Ar. *Ach.* 243a: περὶ δὲ αὐτοῦ τοῦ φαλλοῦ τοιαῦτα λέγεται. Πήγασος ἐκ τῶν Ἐλευθερῶν – αἱ δὲ Ἐλευθεραὶ πόλις εἰσὶ τῆς Βοιωτίας – λαβὼν τοῦ Διονύσου τὸ ἄγαλμα ἦκεν εἰς τὴν Ἀττικὴν. οἱ δὲ Ἀττικοὶ οὐκ ἐδέξαντο μετὰ τιμῆς τὸν θεόν, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀμισθὶ γε αὐτοῖς ταῦτα βουλευσαμένοις ἀπέβη. μηνίσαντος γάρ τοῦ θεοῦ νόσος κατέσκηψεν εἰς τὰ αἰδοῖα τῶν ἀνδρῶν

In two partly parallel myths, the daughters of Minyas (4)¹⁹ and the daughters of Proetus (5),²⁰ respectively, reject the ecstatic rites of Dionysus and prefer to remain at home working at their looms. Both groups of maidens go mad, and one of the Minyades is reported to have killed her son in her madness. Plutarch links the story of the Minyades' fate with the Agrionia festival, at which a priest of Dionysus pursued the fleeing daughters with a sword. Ovid and some Hellenistic poets conclude the myth with the transformation of the girls into birds. Whether the sequence of resistance and punishment is meant to be an *aition* for the ultimate installation of the cult is not revealed explicitly by Plutarch.²¹ As for the Proetides, in most versions, the girls are healed by the seer Melampus, considered by Herodotus as the founder of the cult of Dionysus in Greece (2.49).²²

The aspect of violence is intensified in two variants of the resistance-motif: the myths of the *theomachoi* Perseus (6)²³ and Lycurgus (7),²⁴ who prosecute Dionysus and his female followers. Whilst Lycurgus is punished by Zeus with

καὶ τὸ δεινὸν ἀνήκεστον ἦν. ὥς δὲ ἀπείπον πρὸς τὴν νόσον κρείττω γενομένην πάσης ἀνθρωπείας μαγγανείας καὶ τέχνης, ἀπεστάλησαν θεωροὶ μετὰ σπουδῆς· οἱ δὲ ἐπανελθόντες ἔφασαν ἴασιν ταύτην εἶναι μόνην, εἰ διὰ τιμῆς ἀπάσης ἀγοιεν τὸν θεόν. πεισθέντες οὖν τοῖς ἡγγελέμενοις οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι φαλλοῦς ἰδίᾳ τε καὶ δημοσίᾳ κατεσκεύασαν, καὶ τούτοις ἐγέραιρον τὸν θεόν, ὑπόμνημα ποιοῦμενοι τοῦ πάθους. ἴσως δὲ καὶ ὅτι παίδων γενέσεως αἴτιος ὁ θεός· ἡδονὴν γὰρ καὶ ἀφροδίσια μέθῃ ἐξανίστησι (Text: Wilson 1975; English translation adapted from that of Ridgeway 1910, 51sq.; see also Paus. 1.2.5; Philochorus *FGrH* 328 F5).

- 19 Daughters of Minyas: Plu. *Quaestiones Graecae* 299e–f; Ael. *VH* 3.42; Ov. *Met.* 4.1–40, 390–415.
- 20 Daughters of Proetus: Hes. fr. 79 Most [131 Merkelbach-West]; Pherecydes *FGrH* 3 F114; Acusilaos *FGrH* 2 F29; Apollod. 1.9.12 and 2.2.2. For further commentary on this myth and its different versions, see Mattes 1970, 22sq. and 55; Henrichs 1974; Dowden 1989, 71–96; Gantz 1993, 188sq. and Cole 2007, 330.
- 21 On the Agrionia, see Burkert 1972, 189–200. Burkert's treatment of the difficult material is, unfortunately, as obscure and elusive as the sources themselves.
- 22 Dowden 1989, 71–95 claims that there were originally two different traditions (one for the 'Proetides' and one for 'Women of Argos'), and that these were contaminated. According to Dowden, whilst the original version of the Proetides' story related that the girls were driven mad by Hera and healed by Artemis (which then lead to the foundation of the cult of Artemis Hemera at Lousoi), a 'Dionysiac source', which was similar to or identical with the Hesiodic *Melampodia* (see Löffler 1963), related that the women of Argos were maddened by Dionysus and healed by Melampus. This version of the myth does not explicitly include a cult foundation, *pace* Seaford 1994, 254, who concludes, referring to the Proetides as well as to the Minyades, that "in both cases the divine imposition of horror must be motivated – by the rejection of his cult, which is nevertheless eventually installed".
- 23 Perseus fighting against Dionysus: Paus. 2.20.4; 2.37.7–8. On *theomachoi* in tragedy, see Kamerbeek 1948.
- 24 Lycurgus prosecuting Dionysus: *Il.* 6.130–140.

blindness for his aggression towards Dionysus, the outcome of Perseus' struggle with Dionysus is more difficult to assess. The myth of Perseus is unique insofar as the sources make no mention of the god being initially rejected by mortals, but instead begin with Dionysus' assault on the Argives. Perseus is able to ward off Dionysus and his maenads, whose tombs were still shown to visitors in Pausanias' time as relics of these mythical events. Although this conflict, apparently initiated by Dionysus, ends in his defeat, it nevertheless leads to the establishment of a temple and cult in his honour – this time without the god's retaliation against his former human opponents. Pausanias reports: '[...] there is [...] a temple of Cretan Dionysus. For they say that the god, having made war on Perseus, afterwards laid aside his enmity, and received great honours at the hands of the Argives, including this precinct set specially apart for himself.'²⁵ The victory of Perseus is singular in the resistance myths surrounding Dionysus.

A further variant of the resistance myth can be seen in the failure of the Tyrrhenian pirates (8) to recognise the god's divinity, as told in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*. The best known – and most complex example – of conflict arising over the cult of Dionysus is, of course, that found in Euripides' *Bacchae* (9).²⁶

In almost all of these myths, it is possible to construe Dionysus' reaction to being rejected, at least at first glance, as 'punishment': the daughters of Eleuther, as well as those of Minyas, Proetus, and, in the *Bacchae*, of Cadmus, are driven into the very frenzy that they had sought to spurn, and kill their own or another's children. The Tyrrhenian sailors of the Homeric hymn are transformed into dolphins, and Lycurgus is punished with blindness – by Zeus, however, and not by Dionysus; in later versions of the story, Lycurgus also kills his own son. The only figure for whom the sources have not transmitted a punishment is Perseus, whose opposition to Dionysus possibly has a different status from the campaigns of other *theomachoi*. Icarius also might be regarded as a special case, since his neighbours rebel against the gift of Dionysus by killing its bearer (i.e. Icarius), but are not themselves punished. The myth is probably

25 Paus. 2.23.8 (transl. W.H.S. Jones and H.A. Ormerod 1918). See also Burkert 1972, 197, n. 33, whose reconstruction of the Argive events includes the death of Dionysus (Burkert does not cite a source for Dionysus' death in this context, however, and I am unable to locate any reference to it in the ancient texts).

26 For the motif of resistance as an important aspect for interpreting Euripides' *Bacchae*, see especially Seaford 1994, 254sq. with n. 96 and 293: "[...] the myth of Pentheus, which relates the institution of Dionysiac cult at Thebes, is typical of the aetiological myth of cult in describing the catastrophe or savagery that preceded the institution of the cult."

meant to give an explanation not only for the veneration of Icarius and his daughter, but also for the practice of drinking wine mixed with water.²⁷

I have shown in an earlier article how singular and significant the pattern of resistance is in myths of Dionysus;²⁸ in no other myth about a god do we find this motif with the same vividness.²⁹ The motif has often been seen as reflecting Dionysus' foreignness, i.e. the notion that he came to Greece from distant Lydia in the east or Thrace in the north, and that he and his apparently 'barbaric' ecstatic rituals were rejected because of this. His origin, however, has since been decisively proven to be Greek. Furthermore, it must be considered that the motif of resisting Dionysus belongs exclusively to mythological narratives. It bears no correspondence to any historically documented religious-political measures taken against his cult, which in fact maintained a respectable reputation alongside other divine cults until the Roman Bacchanalian scandal of 186 BCE.³⁰ The resistance-motif should clearly be understood as reflecting the otherness of Dionysus,³¹ as an "attestation to the violent intensity of his epiphany",³² or as an articulation of "ritual tensions and symbolic opposition" in his cult.³³ In what follows, I would like to expand upon these earlier observations by delving deeper into the aetiological structure of these myths, and by presenting a comparable motif from the myths of other gods: the opposition to establishing a divine cult. This approach allows aetiologies to be seen as a narrative form that not only validates religious cults, but also defamiliarises them and calls them into question.

The Dionysian resistance myths are frequently – and perhaps incautiously – subsumed under a single rubric. In his book *Introducing New Gods*, for example, Robert Garland summarises this rubric in a chapter titled "The World of the Athenian *Aition*" as a succession of four stages: "petition, rejection, reprisal and cult of atonement".³⁴ Garland's thesis that this aetiological rubric represents an attempt to explain the *historical* fact of Dionysus' introduction into Greece, i.e. his geographical and cultural otherness and strangeness, need not concern us here. The postulated four-stage model can also, as I would like

27 Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1994, 274, who regards the Icarius myth as reflecting the notion of a loss of control over oneself, parallel to the disturbance of societal order caused by Dionysus' cult in the myths of Pentheus and Lycurgus.

28 Gödde 2011.

29 Traces of this motif may, however, also appear in the myths of Apollo and Demeter, as I will show below.

30 For this important observation, see Versnel 1990, 149sq.

31 Parker 1996, 160.

32 Otto 1933, 71sq.

33 Sourvinou-Inwood 1994, 274.

34 Garland 1992, 158.

to propose, be detached from historical developments and instead seen as reflecting the cult symbolically or even psychologically. In this case, it is not so much that the myth attempts to explain an actual foreign origin of Dionysus, but rather that it represents a way to process and understand the cultic experience of 'otherness' that accompanies ecstatic ritual. The *theomachoi* would then represent – on the level of myth – a rational opposition to the god. The act of resistance explains first and foremost the introduction of the cult, which is established in reciprocity for relief from divine punishment and as reparation for initially rejecting the cult. Garland, in strongly theological terms, speaks here of a 'cult of atonement'.

The following aetiological scenario – although admittedly hypothetical and primarily heuristic – is conceivable: confronted with the venerable cult practice of Dionysian ecstatic ritual, writers of local and cult histories recognised the need to explain and legitimise the behaviour of the practitioners – behaviour which was not always easy to understand and certainly did not seem very rational at first sight. They then imposed rationalising logic to the effect that a society could hardly be willing to tolerate and integrate such strange and possibly even dangerous conduct. This could only come to pass as a consequence of the god's power and his threat – or implementation – of punishment. With the invention of a *forced* acceptance of Dionysian cult under opposition, Greek culture could save, as it were, its rationality – without having to abolish ecstatic Dionysian ritual (which may not have been so unpleasant after all).

To some extent, this explanation is based on an idealised typology of the narrative pattern and the cult behind it. It assumes that the Greeks imagined, on the level of mythological thought and aetiological reflection, that they had accepted the cult only under compulsion, in order to avoid being punished with enduring and violent ecstatic frenzy. This could instead be directed into controllable channels without being abolished. Dionysus enforces his cult and protects it against the resistance of future cult participants by threatening them with prolonged, self-destructive violence: the authors of local cult history use this recurrent narrative to justify excessive behaviour at particular festivals as a form of ritual observance, without which the god would inflict something far worse upon them.

In contrast both to Sourvinou-Inwood, who analyses the myth's content as chiefly psychological and didactic,³⁵ as well as to Garland, whose interpretation is dominated by the nexus of guilt and punishment, Walter Burkert proposes an explanation with a stronger structural emphasis. Referring to the Agrionia ritual, Burkert speaks of the "polar tension between divine madness

35 Sourvinou-Inwood 1994, 289.

and human order as acted out in a singular ritual”,³⁶ but he refers also – in the context of foundational violence – to the “reestablishment of order in the polis [as] the antithesis of perversion”.³⁷

The status of aetiology in the resistance myths discussed is, without doubt, also largely dependent upon the genre and type of text in which a myth is transmitted. Once a basic model has been developed for the relevant material, this model must be examined against a possible counter-model and critical attention given to the differences. Violent conflicts between the *theomachoi* and the god do not always result in the immediate establishment or renewal of the god’s cult. Specifically, Euripides’ *Bacchae* does not end with Dionysus’ victorious entrance into the city of Thebes, as the interpretation of René Girard and others imply,³⁸ unless we conjecture that this was the logical consequence of the dramatic plot and took place outside of it. According to the Athenian *aitia*, known to us primarily from ancient local historians and commentators, the daughters of Eleuther are punished with madness and the Athenians with a disease of the genitals.³⁹ While in these *aitia* both punishments are in fact brought to an end with the establishment of cults – that of Dionysus Melanaigis and the phallic procession in Athens, respectively – the same is clearly not the case in the Homeric version of the Lycurgus myth, in which Dionysus flees to the protection of the sea-goddess Thetis. As these examples show, it is reasonable to differentiate between what one might call ‘closed’ aetiologies – those involving a resolution to the conflict and compensation for initial cult rejection, and which are to be found mainly in non-poetic sources – and

36 Burkert 1972, 198; transl. P. Bing 1983, 177.

37 Burkert 1972, 193; transl. P. Bing 1983, 172. The assumption that the violence acted out in myth is only the precedent of re-established order is also crucial for Dowden’s interpretation of the material. He writes of the Agrionia festival (1989, 84) that “[t]he rhythm implies that female superiority and *sparagmos* of the male, suspending the norms of civilized society, are the centre of the festival. But male pursuit restores the status quo. For society as a whole this is a new beginning apparently celebrated in a New Year ritual [...]”

38 Girard 1972, 185sq.: “Après avoir causé la mort de Penthée, le dieu chasse de la ville les restes de cette famille. La paix et l’ordre peuvent revenir dans une Thèbes qui rendra, désormais, à la nouvelle divinité, le culte qu’elle réclame.” Cf. also *ibid.*, 190: “La légitimité du dieu se reconnaît non pas au fait qu’il trouble la paix mais qu’il restaure lui-même la paix qu’il a troublée, ce qui le justifie *a posteriori* de l’avoir troublée, l’action divine se muant en colère légitime contre une *hubris* blasphématoire dont rien, jusqu’à l’unanimité fondatrice, ne le différencie.” (German translation: Girard 1994, 194 and 198sq.). See also Seaford 1994, 254–256 with n. 96, who implies that Dionysus announced the installation of his cult in the lost part of his final speech and who writes, 255: “The *Bacchae* provides us with another crisis that ends with the creation of a polis cult for Dionysos.” See further *ibid.*, 293 and n. 26 above.

39 See above notes 17 and 18.

a tendential disinclination from monocausal and stabilising aetiologies in epic and tragic sources.

According to Plutarch, the myths of the daughters of Minyas were commemorated and re-enacted in the Agrionia ritual. The mimetic and mnemonic relationship that Plutarch establishes between early times and his own day represents a further variety of aetiological narrative. Analysis is complicated not only because the myths of the Minyades and Proetides partly overlap one another, but also because the transmission of the myths and reports of the ritual is fragmentary. It would be incautious to see the establishment of the Agrionia festival as equivalent to the introduction of the cult of Dionysus Melanaigis by Eleuther, the Athenian *phallophoria*, or the erection of a temple for Dionysus in Argos after his unsuccessful confrontation with Perseus. The foundation of the Agrionia is not part of the mythological account of the Minyades story, but rather a ritual and mimetic reflection of it.⁴⁰ Although it is tempting to insert the ultimate acceptance and cultic veneration of the god into the narrative at the same point where it is found in other stories of this pattern, we must bear in mind that this element is absent from sources on the Minyades and Proetides and can only be added by analogy. The order of the polis, which Walter Burkert and others regard as being evoked by the Agrionia in 'antithesis' to the perversion of order, might however be present in the conclusion of the story, when the girls are healed from their madness.

Dionysian resistance myths represent a unique group of aetiological myths, because they tentatively make a moment of negation into the motivating cause for reflecting and explaining a cult. In most cases, this opens the possibility of joining the foundation of a cult with the impressive entrance of its god, who asserts himself against opposition. The cult is thereby rationalised and, at the same time, rendered problematic. If we accept this as conventional, then the two cases that deviate from this model take on added significance. As mentioned above, Dionysus' cult never comes to be established in Euripides' *Bacchae*, because the 'punishment' is so violent as to be beyond redress;⁴¹ in the Homeric version of the Lycurgus myth, the cult cannot be founded, because Dionysus, himself the victim of violent pursuit, finds himself in a position too weak for asserting his power and defending his cult.

40 In the case of the Agrionia, the exact relation between myth and ritual is especially difficult to grasp. Does the ritual reflect an antecedent myth, as assumed above, or, conversely, is the myth to be understood as the retrospective explanation of an existent ritual? This question has occupied scholars of myth since the beginnings of the discipline. See e.g. Graf 1991, ch. 5, and below, n. 46.

41 But compare the opposite position taken by Seaford 1994, see above, notes 26 and 38.

In the remainder of this chapter, I would like to look briefly at the motif of resisting cult foundation in the Homeric hymns to Apollo and Demeter. It must be taken into account that these works differ from the narratives of resistance to Dionysus not only by nature of their genre, but also in that they present a more general aetiological feature: both hymns relate how a particular divinity comes into being and acquires the *timai* for which he or she receives veneration.⁴² The obstacles encountered by Apollo and Demeter merely delay the foundation of their cults and must be distinguished from the active resistance met by Dionysus. These obstacles nevertheless deserve a closer look: why have the poets of the hymns chosen to render the establishment of the cults as problematic at all? Does this choice reflect a way of thinking critically about gods and their cults? Or is it rather a narrative feature to provide entertainment and increase the suspense, or a rhetorical device meant to accentuate the power of the gods?

3 Apollo and Cult Foundation in Delos and Delphi

In the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, opposition to the birth and cult of Apollo first arises on the divine plane, amongst gods and local deities personifying places. Fear of the powerful new god as articulated by 'lesser' deities can, however, readily be interpreted as a projection of human anxieties upon divine protagonists.⁴³ Leto's desperate search for a place to bear her two children, Artemis and Apollo, belongs to the myth of Apollo since the *Homeric Hymns*, in which the god and his mother are turned away by virtually the entire Mediterranean world. The narrator explains that the reason for this was fear of Apollo: 'they were very tremulous and afraid, and none, however rich, ventured to accept

42 On the general aetiological features of the Homeric hymns, see Parker 1991 and Chappell 2006. Both papers draw attention to aspects that provide the starting point for this chapter as well; cf. Parker 1991, 11: "[I]n a 'theogonic' and aetiological poem, the reader can indeed make sense of the narrative, but in terms less of motives than of results"; Chappell 2006, 336: "Since the purpose of the narrative is to tell how the god came to have some of his present functions, the structure is often determined by this rather than by what we would consider logically or psychologically motivated reasons."

43 The motif of fear is central for the interpretation of the hymn presented by Strauss Clay 1989, 208sq., who criticises the attempt of most scholars to mitigate the aggressive tone of the opening lines. Her reading recalls the structural sequence of resistance and reparation in the Dionysus myths: "Initial fear yielding to subsequent joy accompanies his [sc. Apollo's] manifestations throughout the hymn and forms the identifying feature of the god" (29). In the course of the *Hymn to Apollo*, it becomes clear that, as in the narratives about Dionysus, epiphany is intimately interwoven with the motifs of fear and resistance.

Phoibos' (47–48).⁴⁴ This is not the first mention of fear in connection with Apollo; the hymn had already introduced the motif in its opening scene, where the Olympian gods themselves 'tremble' at his entry (τρομέουσιν, 2). As Leto fails to move the isle of Delos to receive her even with promises of future fame, the motif of fear remains present: 'they say', replies (the personified) island of Delos, '[that] Apollo will be an all too wild sort (λίην ... ἀτάσθαλον), and lord it greatly over immortals and mortals across the grain-giving land. So my heart is terribly afraid that as soon as he sees the light of the sun he may spurn this island, as I am indeed rocky of soil, and kick it over into the sea's expanses' (67–73).⁴⁵ Only by swearing a powerful oath that Apollo will honour the island beyond all measure can Leto assuage Delos' fear and win her binding pledge to receive the god.⁴⁶

In later versions of the myth, most prominently in Callimachus' *Delian Hymn*, the motif of Leto's wandering and her repeated rejection are caused by personal animosity: here, it is Hera who threatens lands, cities, islands, and rivers with violence should they receive her rival Leto. The fearful, panicked reaction of these localities is, in Callimachus, thus directed primarily towards Hera, and not at Apollo⁴⁷ – an indirect and playful way of delaying the birth of the god in the poem, and, at the same time, a way of 'correcting' a perceived demonisation of the god.

44 αἱ δὲ μάλ' ἐτρόμεον καὶ ἐδεΐδισαν, οὐδέ τις ἔτλη/Φοῖβον δέξασθαι καὶ πιστέρη περ ἐοῦσα. Greek text: Allen, Halliday, and Sikes 1936; English translation: West 2003.

45 Together with the opening of the hymn, this scene has been frequently dismissed as humorous or grotesque: for a contrary stance see Strauss Clay 1989, 35–37, who views the term ἀτάσθαλος as expressing the "savagely lawless and overbearing nature" of the god (quotation: 36). Strauss Clay's reading focusses on the theogonic pattern of the succession myth and sees Apollo as "the potential violator of the Olympian order" (38). Nevertheless, she concludes that Apollo eventually "proves to be a formidable guarantor of his father's order" (94). My interpretation here follows a similar line and holds that fear of the god builds part of a dynamic which questions and delays the destined installation of his cult.

46 For a more structural interpretation of the *aition*, see Graf 1991, 101 who writes: "Doch der Mythos ist intimer mit dem Kultort verflochten, als daß er eine bloß äußerliche Begründung für die Heiligkeit des Ortes gäbe. Dem Paradox der Geburt des so mächtigen Gottes auf der winzigen Insel [...] entspricht das Paradox des Kultes, daß die kleine Insel Ort eines so bedeutenden Heiligtums wurde [...]."

47 Hera's jealousy also makes a brief appearance in the *Hymn to Apollo*. Cf. Richardson 2010, 90: "This motif is alluded to at 97–107, where Hera tries to prevent Eileithyia from assisting the birth, but it is not given full prominence." Strauss Clay 1989, 42sq. assesses the twofold explanation of Leto's rejection as follows: "The divine hostility of Hera to the new god runs parallel to the terrestrial fear. Both, presumably, do no more than amplify the greatness of Apollo. But we have already seen that the fear of the nations, which may be our poet's innovation, introduces a whole new cosmic and theogonic dimension into the hymn."

In the second or 'Delphic' part of the poem, the Homeric hymn continues its narrative of the god's violent and fear-inspiring entrance into the world as he begins his search for a suitable site to found an oracle. Here, the Telpousa episode (255–276) varies the motif of fear to one of rivalry. The spring Telpousa finds reason to dissuade the god from building his temple next to her, claiming that the location would be much too bustling and noisy for this – a pretext to avoid being supplanted by the more powerful god Apollo. Following the foundation of his sanctuary in Delphi, Apollo returns and destroys the spring (375–387). The episode provides an *aition* for the epithet and cult honours of Apollo Telpousios,⁴⁸ and suggests that the god was only able to win the location for himself by means of violence in the face of opposition. Again, it is important to remember that the epithet and corresponding cult in which the episode results have, in fact, provided the starting point for the creation of the story, and that the quarrel between the god and the nymph represents only one of many possible ways to reach this outcome. The cult epithet opens up a gap in the narrative, which the poet then fills with a programmatic aetiology that characterises the god in a certain way.⁴⁹ At the same time, Apollo's violent appropriation of the cult site can also be said to reveal his authority and power, and to expose the distance felt by the environment towards the god.

The motif of slaying a dragon, which stands at the beginning of numerous foundation acts in Greek myth,⁵⁰ involves a form of opposition that belongs to

48 This is one of three *aitia* in the hymn which explain a cult name of Apollo: Pythios (372–374), Telpousios (385–387), and Delphinios (493–495). Telpousa has been interpreted as one of the opponents of the god, similar to Hera and the Delphic serpent: see Strauss Clay 1989, 73 with n. 176. For the general aetiological character of this hymn, see e.g. Kolk 1963, who connects the hymn's narrative with the Delphic Septerion festival, at which the slaying of the dragon was re-enacted every year. The connection between the myth and the ritual was already a matter of dispute for ancient interpreters. Kolk's emphasis on Apollo's atonement as being at the centre of this ritual misses the point of the hymn, which is clearly not interested in Apollo's expiation following the killing, a fact which Kolk himself mentions several times (11, 26, 52), but does not allow to divert him from his central argument. On this complex, see Chappell 2006, 339sq., who also has a valuable discussion on the general aetiological nature of the Homeric hymns on p. 336. More recent scholarship on the nexus of myth and ritual tends to see a much looser relationship between the two categories: see e.g. Graf 1991, 111: "Mythos und Ritual sind also eigenständige Gebilde, die sich zwar punktuell berühren können, aber eigenen Strukturgesetzen folgen." See also Strauss Clay 1989, 49 who opts for a Panhellenic reading of the Homeric hymns and against tying "these compositions to specific locations and occasions".

49 It is, of course, difficult to determine to what extent a given aetiological narrative has been supplied by an older tradition and to what extent it can be regarded as a poetic innovation supporting a particular intention.

50 Cf. Trumpf 1958.

a different class from the instances previously discussed. What all these variations on the theme of resistance have in common is their rhetorical structure: they help to establish Apollo as a god who overcomes numerous obstacles – obstacles which ultimately cannot hinder his victorious arrival. Apollo's fight for a place in the pantheon is initially carried out at the divine level amongst gods and nature deities.⁵¹ Unlike the Dionysian resistance myths, it is not the humans who here reject the god and his cult. Rather, it is the divine order itself that is depicted as contested and rife with conflict. This dimension of the story is emphasised most prominently by the long digression on the creation of a second monster, Typhon.⁵² Generated by Earth at Hera's behest, Typhon is given to the Delphic dragon as a nursling – a plot development that, at first glance, seems rather loosely motivated. By creating Typhon as a double of the first wild monster, which soon after receives the name of Python, the poet is able to allude to a significant episode of the Hesiodic *Theogony* and to form a parallel between Apollo's rise to power and the ascent of Zeus to the position of king over gods and men. In addition, the role of Hera as a goddess who initiates strife and obstructs Zeus's mighty progeny is again emphasised. Although the actual enemy of Apollo is not Typhon, but the dragon Python, the digression expands and augments the theme of resistance and delay by evoking another power struggle amongst the Olympic gods. The digression even replaces a detailed report of Apollo's combat with the dragon, which is instead related in only a few verses.

Humans first come into play as Apollo recruits members for his priesthood from a Cretan trading ship. Taking the form of a large and uncanny sea monster, an enormous dolphin, Apollo appears to the Cretans and strikes fear and terror amongst the crew (400–404). He then takes control of the helm and steers the ship off its original course, instead sailing towards Crisa, near Delphi, where the crew members will serve him from then on.⁵³ His arrival in Crisa is accompanied by the radiance of his epiphany as a star and celestial fire, and inspires fear (δέος) in those present (440–447). It remains only for

51 It is telling that the hymn does not mention any previous owner of the oracular site such as Themis or Gaia, who are found in other sources, e.g. A. *Eu.* 1–20 and E. *IT* 1234–1283; see Strauss Clay 1989, 61 with n. 122. On chronology of the myths surrounding the divine ownership of the Delphic oracle, see also Sourvinou-Inwood 1987.

52 On the Typhon digression, see Strauss Clay 1989, 63–74 and Yasumura 2011, 117–131.

53 This part of the narrative is reminiscent of Dionysus' capture of the pirate ship in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* (see above, § 2, number 8): there, all but one of the sailors fail to recognise the god and are transformed into dolphins. The steersman, the only member of the crew to show respect towards Dionysus, should perhaps be interpreted as the first follower or priest of the newly established cult; compare the role of the Cretans in the *Hymn to Apollo*.

Apollo to give instructions for cult observance; the aetiology here follows the basic formula of command and execution. His cult is then inaugurated with its first sacrifice, procession, and choral performance. Resistance is suppressed, for the Cretans, overwhelmed by the god's presence, are speechless with fear and can only do as they are bidden. With consummate authority, Apollo leads and shows them (δεῖξε δ' ἄγων, 523) his temple in Parnassus, where they are to dwell; the cautious objection of the Cretans, who ask the very human question of how they are to provide themselves with food in this rugged place (526–530), is dismissed with divine arrogance as reflecting human folly and lowliness (531–533).

In the narrative patterns we looked at earlier, Dionysus forces his cult upon humans as punishment for – and in spite of – their opposition. In the foundation of Apollonian cult, on the other hand, which is no less forceful than its Dionysian counterpart, the fear-inspiring epiphanies of the god forestall opposition from arising in the first place. The emphasis on the terror present at the inception of his cult, however, suggests rejection and resistance, at least for the hymn's audience. Aetiology thus becomes a narrative mode of problematisation; its object is not only to support and establish a theology, but also to prompt a debate about religious ideas and practices.

4 Demeter and the Foundation of the Eleusinian Mysteries

The precise relationship between the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the Eleusinian mysteries is, as is well known, a much debated topic in scholarship, and interpreters are frequently warned against reading the hymn all too narrowly against the background of the large and influential mystery cult.⁵⁴ For our purposes, it is sufficient to analyse the aetiological connection inherent

54 The hymn is, in spite of all controversy, often regarded as 'the foundation myth of the Mysteries' and believed to have been acted out during the initiation ceremony at Eleusis as a 'mystic drama': this view is defended by, amongst others, Richardson 1974, Parker 1991, 4, and Bremmer 2011, 383 (who, however, bases his reconstruction primarily on other sources). For criticism of this position, see Clinton 1992, who contends that the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, especially the Iambe episode, is an *aition* for the Thesmophoria. Strauss Clay 1989, *passim*, argues against reading cultic ceremonies into the hymn and claims that the poem is to be understood as a "deemphasizing of local cult in the interest of a broader Panhellenic perspective" (231). Verses 192–311 are, however, in her view, "overtly etiological, reflecting the preliminary ritual preceding initiation" (233). In 473–479, Strauss Clay likewise sees the "establishment of the [Eleusinian] Mysteries", which she calls "the final goal of the narrative" (261). For an overview of sources and older scholarship, see Richardson 1974, 12–30.

in the hymn: as in the *Hymn to Apollo*, the close nexus between cult foundation and the acts of the god does not remain external to the poem, but instead forms part of the narrative. It is therefore legitimate to ask whether the temple which Demeter commands the Eleusinians to build (270–274) and the rites which she ‘shows’ them (473–479) can be understood as a means of reconciliation in response to an earlier conflict. It is this question on which the remaining discussion centres; the exact analogy between the poetic narrative and the historical cult is less important for our purposes and will be left aside.

As Jenny Strauss Clay has shown, communication is established in the hymn between all three ‘cosmic’ spheres: the world of the Olympians, the world of human beings, and the underworld. The overarching theme of the hymn is, as in the *Hymn to Apollo*, the negotiation and division of various realms of power and influence amongst the gods.⁵⁵ The cult foundation itself is, like its counterpart in the Dionysian narratives, a form of redress and way to appease Demeter’s anger.⁵⁶ In other words, it functions to replace and compensate for the attempt to make Demophon immortal, which had failed due to the folly and human weakness of his mother, Metaneira. From a structural point of view, mortals, represented by Metaneira, have ‘rejected’ a divine gift – immortality for Demophon – by showing that they were incapable of accepting or coping with such a gift. At the same time, the episode illustrates that immortality is not assumed to belong to the human condition. The denial of a divine gift is something different from the refusal of mortals to accept a divinity’s cult entirely (as in the case of Dionysus) or their being paralysed with terror at the god’s coming into power and epiphany (as in the case of Apollo). Nevertheless, in the Homeric hymn, Demeter demands the erection of a temple (270) as well as worship and propitiation (ὄργια ... ἐμὸν νόον ἱλάσκεισθε, 273–274) in the very moment that her undertaking has been frustrated by a mortal woman, whom Demeter then rebukes for her foolishness and lack of understanding (Νῆϊδες ἄνθρωποι καὶ ἀφράδμονες, 256). Cult, according to this aetiological narrative,

55 Strauss Clay 1989, 202–266 sees the Demeter of the *Hymn* as challenging Zeus’s power. On the whole, however, the hymn demonstrates how divine power relations are reorganised, how Zeus’s authority is reconfirmed, and how Demeter acquires new *timai*.

56 The foundation of her cult, however, follows in two stages, each of which is separately motivated: firstly, the erection of a temple and an altar as recompense for the failed attempt to immortalise Demophon (270–274) and, later, the establishment of the mysteries themselves in 473–479. In the first case, the propitiation of Demeter’s anger is clearly stated as the logic of the cult (274: ‘how in future you can propitiate me with holy performances’); the actual foundation of the mysteries at the end of the poem expresses the new relationship between mortals, gods, and the underworld in a more general way (see Strauss Clay 1989, 260–265) and furnishes Demeter (and Persephone) with a new realm of *timê* (see Nickel 2003).

responds to disruption by its recipients and may be seen as the result of tensions and negotiation between men and gods.

In comparison to the narratives of Dionysus and Apollo, the logic – or aetiology – of the institution of Demeter's cult is slightly different: the myth explains why Demeter cannot simply allow mortals, represented by Demophon, to share in divine immortality. The categorical difference established between gods and humans does not permit the goddess to 'enforce' her gift as Dionysus does with ecstatic worship, or Apollo with his oracle in Delphi. Two forms of compensation take the place of the intended gift of immortality. Firstly, humans must soothe the wrath of Demeter by building a temple and performing her rites (273–274).⁵⁷ Secondly, they do not receive the immortality that had nearly been granted to them, but instead receive 'only' a single aspect of it in the form of an almost divine bliss, which they can attain by initiation at Eleusis. Significantly, Demeter divests herself of her human guise and appears in all her divine radiance before the Eleusinians just as this arrangement is made (275–276).⁵⁸ It is precisely the difference between gods and humans that had ruined her original plan and brought it about that humans might partake of immortality only in a very modified form. On another level, however, the narrative also reflects tensions in the divine realm. In this respect, the failure to bestow immortality upon humankind mirrors the subordination of Demeter to Zeus's authority.⁵⁹ The literary structure of the hymn brings out these categorical differences, and turns them into the moment of opposition in the establishment of the cult.

It would assuredly be incorrect to speak of 'punishment' here. Furthermore, to speak of the 'compensation' as a 'cult of atonement', as Garland does when referring to Dionysian ecstasy,⁶⁰ is also to describe the situation in overly

57 The motif of Demeter's wrath makes a double appearance in the hymn: when she is angry at Metaneira for interfering with Demophon's immortalisation, and, on a larger scale, when she is enraged because of the rape of her daughter. Nickel 2003 examines this motif as part of a narrative pattern which he calls the 'wrath, withdrawal and return pattern' resulting in the restoration or augmentation of a god's *timê*. One might argue that the same pattern also underlies the Dionysiac resistance myths. Nickel summarises the aetiological feature of the pattern as follows (80): "The goddess's initial deprivation and dishonour must end with the restoration and augmentation of her τιμή. Along the way, her actions are determined with a view to this result."

58 As we have seen above, epiphany is a crucial point in foundation narratives: the question whether humans accept a divine cult is connected to the issue of whether they can recognise or bear the god's divine presence and appearance. At the same time, the god's epiphany is a sign for the divine power that renders human resistance useless.

59 Strauss Clay 1989, 265.

60 See above, n. 34.

strong terms. In a very general sense, however, if in part implicitly, all of the aetiologies which we have examined give as the 'reason' or basis of divine cult both human inferiority and the failure to recognise divine power.

It is not without a certain irony that Demeter, after her orders to build a temple have been dutifully carried out by the Eleusinians, is moved by her sorrow for Persephone to allow a severe drought to occur that threatens not only mortals, but also the gods (305–313). This episode, which demonstrates the extent of Demeter's wrath and power, predominantly affects the divine level of the plot. That said, it is nevertheless significant that Demeter both instructs the Eleusinian kings in cult ritual to honour her *and* lets the fruits of the fields grow again in precisely the same moment, immediately after she has received Zeus's promises of reconciliation from Rhea (473–479). In this way, the Eleusinian Mysteries founded by Demeter in the hymn reflect not only the failed immortalization of Demophon, but also the negotiation of power and the final reconciliation on the divine plane. The *aition* of the cult revolves around grief, wrath, strife, and separation, and the foundation is a complex reaction to a serious crisis. Honouring the gods does not seem to come easily to the mortals of myth; the motivations for cult foundation are complex, and veneration is authoritatively forced upon mortals by the gods.

5 Conclusion

To conclude, I would like briefly to reflect back on the different ways of conceptualising aetiology considered at the beginning of this chapter. There, I had emphasised primarily the *narrative* aspects of the concept – the interplay with realities and possibilities that stands, to a certain extent, in tension with the rationalising and explanatory character of the *aition*. An aetiological myth explaining how the present state of things arose need not be true, but merely plausible.

The three examples – the cult myths of Dionysus, Apollo, and Demeter – together represent a special case in aetiology (and we might also want to consider to what extent it is an exceptional type): all of them make use of the narrative model not just to tell of foundations, but also to call them into question. It strikes me as remarkable that the acts of explaining *and* calling into question are joined in these narratives. By approaching his material as an aetiology, an author can present the path towards founding cult as one of resistance, and the establishment of cult-worship as an overpowering divine act, one initially seen as a threat by human beings.

The rationalising character that lends itself so well to aetiologies thus operates on two levels. Firstly – and this corresponds to the conventional understanding of aetiology – it presents a series of actions to explain how a known cult came to be. Secondly, as could be shown by the Dionysian resistance myths, it opposes the divine violence that so irrationally intrudes. It effects this by incorporating the counter-reaction of the human cult recipients, who are unable and unwilling to accept the irrational.

The degree to which the myths stage the powerful god's triumph against human opposition differs in the myths discussed. Some cult aetiologies prefer a 'closed' form in which the narrative ends with the cult's foundation; others do *not* aim at narrating the establishment of a cult at the end – and it is certainly worth asking whether we should apply the term 'aetiology' to these texts at all.⁶¹ A third variant, exemplified by the sources on the Agrionia, joins a mythological event with its mimetic re-enactment in cult. In this case, we are not provided with any form of narrative or compensatory logic that might make the installation of the cult understandable; the relationship of the cult to its mythical protagonists and their fates could rather be described as commemorative.

My aim in this chapter has been to show that aetiologies, by elaborating the cause into a narrative and reflecting upon the rationale and motivation of the *explanandum*, can be used to call the *explanandum* implicitly into question. In an aetiological narrative, a cult is not only – and not always – made plausible and familiar; rather, as I hope to have shown, its complex origins, the winding path to the narrator's present, illuminate just as emphatically the cult's strangeness and unfamiliarity.⁶²

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61 See above on Euripides' *Bacchae* and the Lycurgus myth in Homer.

62 I am deeply grateful to Emrys Schlatter for his thorough translation of the German version of this chapter as well as for valuable suggestions concerning parts of the argument.

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