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# Dionysus/Bacchus/Liber in Cicero

**Abstract:** This chapter examines the occurrence of the god's different appellations Dionysus, Bacchus and Liber in the works of Cicero as well as their various functions and connotations. A range of perspectives on the god emerges across the surviving corpus of Cicero's works: philosophical, oratorical, rhetorical and epistolographic. The view taken of the god generally corresponds to the immediate rhetorical aim of Cicero or whichever of his characters is speaking. Significant examples are discussed under several headings: cultural theologies, metonymical value of *Bacchus/Liber*, Bacchic raving and *Liberalia* – a festival of freedom? From a linguistic point of view, Cicero employs all three names depending on the context: he refers to Liber when pointing out positive aspects of the Roman god and the associated festival and cult, chooses the name Bacchus metonymically for wine and its derivatives to illustrate raving, and speaks of Dionysus in discussions of the Greek god and his genealogy. The term Bacchus and related words tend to appear in passages with more negative connotations than the designation Liber; similarly, Cicero regarded the erection of statues of Bacchantes in his house as inappropriate for his image.

## Introduction

When in 496 BCE the Romans were hard pressed because of famine and opposition from the Latins, A. Postumius Albus Regillensis vowed the building of a temple for the divine triad of Ceres, Liber and Libera, prompted by the Sibylline books (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.17.2–4). This temple, located close to the Aventine, was dedicated in 493 BCE (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.94.3) and developed into an important centre for the plebeians during the Republican period.<sup>1</sup> While the three gods are often referred to by the modern term 'Aventine Triad', in contrast to the (more patrician) 'Capitoline Triad' (Jupiter, Juno, Minerva), distinctions between the three fertility deities constituting the former 'Triad' seem to have existed from the start. The (old-Italic) god Liber (along with his female equivalent Libera) was a god of fecundity with regard to agriculture, viticulture, cattle breeding as well

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Bernstein 1998, 80–82 (with further references to sources and secondary literature).

as human fertility,<sup>2</sup> and he may also have been regarded as a divine personification of liberty. The god was celebrated at the festival of *Liberalia*, held annually on 17 March, when young males coming of age put on the virile toga for the first time.<sup>3</sup>

In the course of Rome's engagement with Greek culture, the 'Aventine Triad' was linked to the Greek equivalents Demeter, Dionysus and Kore / Persephone, including their characteristics, myths and cults.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, imported Dionysian cults were apparently practised in Rome in such a way that the Senate felt obliged to issue the well-known *Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* of 186 BCE and to forbid at least extreme forms and escalating ecstasy, since it was believed that this might threaten public morals and order.<sup>5</sup> By Cicero's time both the traditional Roman version of the god as well as his Greek form had been accepted in Rome (and fused to some extent); in addition to the old Italic appellation of the god as Liber, out of the god's Greek names, Bacchus in particular was used.<sup>6</sup>

While Cicero's works do not include extended discussions of the god Dionysus / Bacchus / Liber and his cult, which would reveal his own attitude in detail as well as give hints on contemporary thinking, Cicero mentions the god a number of times by different appellations and in different contexts, which provides enough material to enable some conclusions. This evidence is worth examining since Cicero is known to have engaged with philosophical and theological matters and thus may have had considered opinions on the role and perception of

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**2** In Augustine's polemical discussion (taking up Varro, *ARD*, F 93 C.) Jupiter, as Liber, is described as a god of 'the seeds of men' and, as Libera, as a goddess of 'the seeds of women'; thus, Liber is mainly seen as representing sexuality (*De civ. D.* 4.11).

**3** On the *Liberalia* see Musiał 2013. – On Ovid's views on the rituals for that day and their possible origin see *Ov. Fast.* 3.713–90. – The famous fragment from a *fabula palliata* by Naevius *libera lingua loquemur ludis Liberalibus* (*Naev. Pall.* 113 R.<sup>2-3</sup> = *Inc.* 27 W.), which is consistent with the standard boastful language of slaves in comedy, may have a specific meaning in its context on the basis of a pun on *liber*. The line has been understood in a metadramatic sense or been seen as evidence for the *Liberalia* (on 'Liber and his *ludi*' see Wiseman 2000, who assumes their early existence).

**4** On the character and historical development of Dionysus / Bacchus / Liber in Rome and the relationship between the traditional Roman and the Greek elements of the god see e.g. Radke 1965, 175–83; Wacht / Rickert 2010; on the god's role in Rome in the first century BCE see Bruhl 1953, 117–59, esp. 119–32.

**5** On this issue see also Steinhauer in this volume. – On the Greek and Roman aspects of the god as demonstrated in works of art see Wyler in this volume.

**6** For the variety of names of the god see e.g. *Ov. Met.* 4.11–17 and already *Enn. Trag.* 107–11 R.<sup>2-3</sup> = 123–27 V.<sup>2</sup> = 120–24 *Joc.* = 42 *TrRF.* – For an overview of the epithets applied to Dionysus see Bruchmann 1893, 78–94.

particular gods. In addition, because of the appearance of statements in public-facing genres and texts written for his peers, the totality of Cicero's comments, when viewed against their respective contexts, allows inferences on views current among the educated elite in the late Republic during a crucial period of transition.

Cicero makes a number of references to the god with his various names, employing all three common names. Among Roman authors of the archaic and classical periods, the god's Greek name Dionysus only appears in Cicero (*Nat. D.* 3.53; 3.58), apart from one occurrence each in the works of the Republican dramatists Plautus (*Plaut. Stich.* 661) and Accius (*Acc. Trag.* 240–2 R.<sup>2-3</sup> = 204–5 W.), for which there are local reasons: in Plautus the word is used metonymically, and in Accius the phrase occurs in the play *Bacchae*.<sup>7</sup> The following discussion will explore whether in Cicero's uses of the different names in different contexts specific nuances of meaning can be discerned, enabling conclusions on attitudes to the god and to what he represents held by Cicero and his contemporaries.

## Cultural theologies

By the time Cicero composed the treatise *De natura deorum* (45 BCE), presenting the views on the gods promoted by different philosophical schools, he had familiarized himself with various Greek and Roman traditions, starting from his early education.

The treatise's section on Stoic doctrine includes a discussion of the different manifestations and genealogies of gods. This is part of the argument of the interlocutor C. Aurelius Cotta (who criticizes Stoic theology) to disprove that the gods currently honoured have been turned from humans into gods (*Cic. Nat. D.* 3.53); he gives a list of a range of narratives for different gods and ends by voicing the view that such stories must be rejected (*Cic. Nat. D.* 3.60). Early on Cotta mentions

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<sup>7</sup> The term *Dionysia* (with reference to a festival) frequently occurs in Roman Republican comedy, albeit in the Greek setting of the *palliata* and with no specific Roman colouring in the contexts (*Plaut. Cist.* 89–90; 156; *Curc.* 644; *Pseud.* 58–59; *Ter. Haut.* 162; 733). – When Wyler (2011, 193) notes that *Dionysus* only occurs in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, this is not fully accurate. – Appellations specifically connected with the god's role as a god of wine, such as *vindemitor* (e.g. *Ov. Fast.* 3.407) or *vitisator* (e.g. *Ov. Fast.* 3.725), are not found in Cicero.

the Dioscuri and reports that according to one version Dionysus belongs a group of three Dioscuri:<sup>8</sup>

Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.53: Dioscoroe etiam apud Graios multis modis nominantur: primi tres, qui appellantur Anactes Athenis, ex rege Iove antiquissimo et Proserpina nati, Tritopatrus, Eubuleus, Dionysus; secundi ...

‘The Dioscuri as well lend their names to numerous manifestations among the Greeks. The first three, who are called ‘kings’ at Athens, are Tritopatrus, Eubouleus, and Dionysus, sons of the oldest Jupiter (called ‘King’) and of Proserpina. The second Dioscuri ...’ [trans. P.G. Walsh]

In line with the argumentative structure of this sequence, Cicero does not have the interlocutor comment on the alternatives. Still, the name Dionysus appears in a learned context and provides a rather unusual perspective. Slightly later Cotta reports a distinction between five different Dionysi with different genealogies:<sup>9</sup>

Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.58: Dionysos multos habemus, primum Iove et Proserpina natum, secundum Nilo, qui Nysam dicitur interemisse, tertium Cabiro patre, eumque regem Asiae praefuisse dicunt, cui Sabazia sunt instituta, quartum Iove et Luna, cui sacra Orphica putantur confici, quintum Nyso natum et Thyone, a quo trieterides constitutae putantur.

‘We have a host of gods called Dionysus. The first is the son of Jupiter and Proserpina, the second the son of the Nile and allegedly the assassin of Nysa; the third, the son of Cabirus, was said to have been king of Asia, and to have had the Sabazian festival inaugurated in his honour. The fourth was the son of Jupiter and Luna; the Orphic rites are believed to be an offering to him. The fifth, the son of Nysus and Thyone, is thought to have established the triennial festival.’ [trans. P.G. Walsh]

The descent of Dionysus as a son of Jupiter and Semele, well known since Homer and Hesiod (Hom. *Il.* 14.325; Hes. *Theog.* 940–42; see also e.g. Ov. *Met.* 3.253–315; *Fast.* 3.715–18), does not appear in this list (but see Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.62; *Tusc.* 1.28 [see below]). According to the context of the passage, these other, more obscure versions seem to have been adopted from traditions that had emerged in Greece

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**8** Since Eubuleus is also an epithet of Dionysus (Macr. *Sat.* 1.18.12 = *PEGr* F Orph. 540.3–4), the distinction between Eubuleus and Dionysus is not entirely clear, but the sequence here is certainly meant to be a list of three (see also Pease 1958, *ad loc.*).

**9** On this passage see Walsh 1997, 205–6; Wyler 2011: 193–94. – For the realization that one god with the same name can appear differently in different contexts see Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.82.

(though presented partly in Latin terminology):<sup>10</sup> Cotta reports the state of affairs one is currently faced with; although he is made not to subscribe to these theories, the long list of different manifestations of several gods provides the opportunity to present them without any obvious position being taken.

In the previous book Cicero has the Stoic interlocutor Q. Lucilius Balbus talk about great men who were later deified (including Liber).<sup>11</sup> There he distinguishes between Liber as the son of Semele (i.e. the Greek Dionysus) and the Roman god Liber, for whose name he provides an etymological explanation:<sup>12</sup>

Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.62: susceperit autem vita hominum consuetudoque communis ut beneficiis excellentis viros in caelum fama ac voluntate tollerent. hinc Hercules, hinc Castor et Pollux, hinc Aesculapius, hinc Liber etiam (hunc dico Liberum Semela natum, non eum quem nostri maiores auguste sancteque Liberum cum Cerere et Libera consecraverunt, quod quale sit ex mysteriis intellegi potest; sed quod ex nobis natos liberos appellamus, idcirco Cerere nati nominati sunt Liber et Libera, quod in Libera servant, in Libero non item) – hinc etiam Romulum, quem quidam eundem esse Quirinum putant. quorum cum remanerent animi atque aeternitate fruerentur, rite di sunt habiti, cum et optimi essent et aeterni.

‘Our human experience and the common practice have ensured that men who conferred outstanding benefits were translated to heaven through their fame and our gratitude. Examples are Hercules, Castor and Pollux, Aesculapius, and Liber as well (by Liber I mean the son of Semele, not the Liber whom our ancestors solemnly and piously deified with Ceres and Libera, the nature of whose worship can be gathered from the mysteries. Because we call our children *liberi*, the offspring of Ceres were named Liber and Libera; the sense of ‘offspring’ has been retained in the case of Libera, but not in that of Liber). Romulus is a further example; people identify him with Quirinus. These men were duly regarded as gods because their souls survived to enjoy eternal life, for they were both outstandingly good and immortal.’ [trans. P.G. Walsh]

The need to separate the ‘Greek Liber’, whose descent is given in its canonical form (son of Semele), from the ‘Roman Liber’ arises from the fact that the Greek god is referred to by his Latin name, rather than as Dionysus (or Bacchus). Apparently Cicero thereby has the speaker indicate that, despite the (now) identical name there is a factual difference; at the same time he makes him not only establish an etymological connection with *liberi*, who are the intended result of human fertility, but also create a connection to the ‘Aventine Triad’. That Libera kept her

<sup>10</sup> For a story of Liber / Dionysus as son of Jupiter and Proserpina, also mentioning Semele and Nysus, see Hyg. *Fab.* 167.

<sup>11</sup> See also Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.4–10.

<sup>12</sup> On this passage see Wyler 2011, 193.

name while Liber has also adopted others is alluded to, but the name Liber is central to the argument.

The distinction between a ‘Greek Liber’ and a ‘Roman Liber’ does not apply to all works by Cicero. In *Tusculan Disputations* (45 BCE) Liber recurs as an example of semi-divine beings deified after death. Because of the identification by descent the Greek god is presumably meant:

Cic. *Tusc.* 1.28: ex hoc et nostrorum opinione ‘Romulus in caelo cum diis agit aevum’, ut famae adsentiens dixit Ennius, et apud Graecos indeque perlapsus ad nos et usque ad Oceanum Hercules tantus et tam praesens habetur deus; hinc Liber Semela natus eademque famae celebritate Tyndaridae fratres, qui non modo adiutores in proeliis victoriae populi Romani, sed etiam nuntii fuisse perhibentur.

‘It is because of this that we Romans believe that ‘Romulus passes his days in heaven with the gods’, as Ennius said in conformity with tradition; and amongst the Greeks, from where he passed to us as far as Ocean, Hercules is considered so great and so helpful a god. Because of this, Liber, Semele’s son, is so regarded, and the brothers, sons of Tyndareus, traditionally enjoy the same distinction: it is said of them that they not merely helped the Romans to victory in battle but carried the news of it as well.’ [trans. A.E. Douglas]

An equally positive assessment of Liber is found in *De finibus* (45 BCE):

Cic. *Fin.* 3.66: atque ut tauris natura datum est ut pro vitulis contra leones summa vi impetuque contendant, sic ii qui valent opibus atque id facere possunt, ut de Hercule et de Libero accepimus, ad servandum genus hominum natura incitantur.

‘Nature has given bulls the instinct to defend their calves against lions with immense passion and force. In the same way, those with great talent and the capacity for achievement, as is said of Hercules and Liber, have a natural inclination to help the human race.’ [trans. R. Woolf]

The discussions in the philosophical works suggest that the name Liber, if the god is at issue, provokes a positive portrait, either by a link to Italic traditions or by a reference to the deification of the demi-god.

Cicero also chooses the name Liber in one of his speeches against Verres, when he puts forward the charge that on Verres’ orders a statue of Aristaeus was stolen from the Temple of Liber in Syracuse. Cicero adds about Aristaeus that he was regarded as the inventor of oil and was honoured together with Liber in this temple:

Cic. *Verr.* 2.4.128: quid? ex aede Liberi simulacrum Aristaei non tuo imperio palam ablatum est? quid? ex aede Iovis religiosissimum simulacrum Iovis Imperatoris, quem Graeci Urion nominant, pulcherrime factum nonne abstulisti? quid? ex aede Liberae agninum [Peterson

: parinum *codd.* : porcinum *Georges* : aprinum *Schlenger* : porinum *Fröhner* : puerinum *Rich-ter* : Paninum *Halm*] caput illud pulcherrimum, quod visere solebamus, num dubitasti tol-  
lere? atque ille Paeon sacrificiis anniversariis simul cum Aesculapio apud illos colebatur;  
Aristaeus, qui [ut Graeci ferunt, Liberi filius] [*del. Ernesti*] inventor olei esse dicitur, una  
cum Libero Patre apud illos eodem erat in templo consecratus.

‘Was not an image of Aristaeus, moreover, openly removed by your orders from the temple  
of Liber? And did you not carry away from the temple of Jupiter the most beautiful and  
deeply revered image of Jupiter Imperator, whom the Greeks call Urios? And did you  
hesitate to remove from the temple of Libera that really lovely head of ..., which we used to  
go there to see? And that Paeon was worshipped among those [i.e. the Syracusans] with  
annual sacrifices, together with Aesculapius; Aristaeus [as the Greeks transmit, Liber’s  
son], who is said to have discovered the olive, was honoured like a god along with Father  
Liber in the same temple by them.’ [trans. L.H.G. Greenwood, adapted]

The constitution of the text is difficult, but the phrase describing Aristaeus as Li-  
ber’s son according to a Greek view should most likely be deleted (as Ernesti sug-  
gested): it would be awkward to have two unconnected descriptions of Aristaeus  
next to each other, each referred to unconfirmed traditions (*ut Graeci ferunt* and  
*dicitur*); and if a familial relationship was in Cicero’s mind, he would probably  
have stressed that the statue of Aristaeus was taken from the temple of the god’s  
father. This means that Cicero uses the Roman cult title Liber Pater in the context  
of cult activity set in a Greek environment, though not for the official identifica-  
tion of the temple (see also Cic. *Verr.* 2.4.108): the emphasis on Liber (and Libera)  
may contribute to making Verres’ deed appear more outrageous and as ignoring  
both Greek and Roman traditions and values.

Elsewhere in the speech Cicero illustrates by parallels how painful the loss of  
cult statues is for those who are victims of Verres’ thefts:

Cic. *Verr.* 2.4.135: quid arbitramini Reginos, qui iam cives Romani sunt, merere velle ut ab  
iis marmorea Venus illa auferatur? ..., quid Athenienses ut ex marmore Iacchum aut  
Paralum pictum aut ex aere Myronis buculam? longum est et non necessarium com-  
memorare quae apud quosque visenda sint tota Asia et Graecia; verum illud est quam ob  
rem haec commemorem, quod existimare hoc vos volo, mirum quendam dolorem accipere  
eos ex quorum urbibus haec auferantur.

‘What sum of money do you imagine the people of Regium, now Roman citizens, would  
demand before parting with their famous marble Venus? ... or the Athenians for their marble  
Iacchus, their picture of Paralus, or their bronze heifer by Myron? It would be tedious, and  
needless, to mention all the noteworthy sights to be found in the several towns of Greece  
and Asia: my purpose in mentioning these few is to convince you that an extraordinary de-  
gree of pain has been caused to those whose towns have been robbed of such treasures.’  
[trans. L.H.G. Greenwood]

These examples include a marble statue of Iacchus from Athens: Cicero chooses a form of the god's name probably common in Athens with reference to this statue. This appellation is developed from the Greek cult, where Iacchus became identified with Dionysus / Bacchus; his name was then used interchangeably by Greek and Roman poets (e.g. *Soph. Ant.* 1152; *Catull.* 64.251; *Virg. E.* 6.15 [metonymically]).<sup>13</sup>

Cicero speaks of Iacchus again, in a different context in *De legibus* (c. 50s BCE), when 'Marcus' and 'Atticus' discuss regulating nocturnal rites. 'Marcus' asks the ('Athenian') 'Atticus' (*Cic. Leg.* 2.35 [trans. C.W. Keyes]): *quid ergo aget Iacchus Eumolpidaeque nostri et augusta illa mysteria, siquidem sacra nocturna tollimus?* – 'Then what will become of our Iacchus and Eumolpidae and their impressive mysteries, if we abolish nocturnal rites?' In Cicero the use of this name seems to be restricted to contexts of cult matters, while it remains uncertain whether he intends an association between Bacchus and the Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>14</sup>

The appellation of Dionysus as Euhius, equally derived from a ritual cry in the cult,<sup>15</sup> and the name Nysius, referring to Nysa, the mythical birthplace of Dionysus, are employed by Cicero elsewhere. In the speech *Pro Flacco* (59 BCE) he tries to defend the accused by undermining the trustworthiness of the 'Asian' witnesses when he argues that they had honoured Mithridates, Rome's enemy, as a god and called him by Dionysiac names. Owing to the thrust of the argument, Cicero does not make a direct comment on Mithridates (who is known to have adopted the name Dionysus [*App. Mithr.* 2.10; *Plut. Quaest. conv.* 1.6.2]) and rather criticizes the conduct of the people around him:

*Cic. Flacc.* 60: quae quidem a me si, ut dicenda sunt, dicerentur, gravius agerem, iudices, quam adhuc egi, quantam Asiaticis testibus fidem habere vos conveniret; revocarem animos vestros ad Mithridatici belli memoriam, ad illam universorum civium Romanorum per

**13** On 'Iacchus' and the relationship to Dionysus / Bacchus see Kern 1914.

**14** In contrast to the translation by C.W. Keyes in the *Loeb* series (see above), J.E.G. Zetzel (in the *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* series) translates 'what will become of Iacchus and our Eumolpids, and those revered mysteries'. In the context, referring *nostri* only to *Eumolpidae* seems preferable, since this prepares the distinction between the Bacchanalia and the mysteries in what follows: 'Cicero' makes an exception for the Eleusinian mysteries, which he praises, speaking to the 'Athenian Atticus', and in which many Romans, including the interlocutors, were initiated (*Leg.* 2.36) while he goes on to approve of the ancestors' sternness towards the Bacchanalia (*Leg.* 2.37), which implies some reservation and makes claiming that god as 'ours' less likely.

**15** This term is already attested for Ennius, even though the text is corrupt (*Enn. Trag.* 107–11 R.<sup>2–3</sup> = 123–27 V.<sup>2</sup> = 120–24 *Joc.* = 42 *TrRF*).



tot urbis uno puncto temporis miseram crudelemque caedem, praetores nostros deditos, legatos in vincla coniectos, nominis prope Romani memoriam cum vestigio <omni> [suppl. *Oetting*] imperi non modo ex sedibus Graecorum verum etiam ex litteris esse deletam. Mithridatem dominum [*Lambinus* : deum *vel* dñm *vel* demum *vel* deinde *codd.*], illum patrem, illum conservatorem Asiae, illum Euhium, Nysium, Bacchum, Liberum nominabant.

‘If, gentlemen, I were saying what the facts require me to say, I should be dealing more harshly than I have hitherto with the degree of trust that you should place in Asiatic witnesses; I should be taking your minds back to recall the Mithridatic War, to the horror of that barbarous massacre inflicted simultaneously upon all Roman citizens in every city, to the surrender of our praetors, the imprisonment of their officers and the almost total obliteration of all memory of the name of Rome and of every trace of our rule from the Greek settlements and from their very records. They called Mithridates Lord, Father, Saviour of Asia, Euhius, Nysius, Bacchus, Liber.’ [trans. C. MacDonald]

The appellation of a man like Mithridates as described by Cicero with sacred names is meant to appear as a particular sacrilege. Moreover, Cicero does not seem to be attempting to record what the ‘Asians’ said, but to illustrate their assimilation of Mithridates with Dionysus by giving a list of cult titles to make their behaviour appear more outrageous. Cicero has the series end climactically with Liber, a name that the ‘Asians’ will hardly have used, but that, as a result of its range of meanings, may trigger associations of ‘freedom’, which contrasts with the Roman view of their enemy Mithridates.

## Metonymical value of Bacchus / Liber

Cicero is aware that the name Liber does not always refer to the god, but may have a metonymical function with reference to the product he is mainly associated with in his role as a rural fertility deity. In *De natura deorum* Cicero has Balbus consider the metonymical force of divine names, such as ‘Liber’ for ‘wine’, and explain it by the recognition of their benefits:

Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.60: multae autem aliae naturae deorum ex magnis beneficiis eorum non sine causa et a Graeciae sapientissimis et a maioribus nostris constitutae nominataeque sunt. quicquid enim magnam utilitatem generi adferret humano, id non sine divina bonitate erga

homines fieri arbitrabantur. itaque tum illud quod erat a deo natum nomine ipsius dei nuncupabant, ut cum fruges Cererem appellamus, vinum autem Liberum, ex quo illud Terenti [Eun. 732] ‘sine Cerere et Libero friget Venus’.<sup>16</sup>

‘With some justification, however, both the wisest men of Greece and our own ancestors have set up and lent names to many other divine natures because of the great benefits which they have conferred. They did this because they believed that anything which bestows some great service on the human race did not originate without divine beneficence. So they then applied the name of the deity itself to what that deity had brought forth. This is why we call corn Ceres, and wine Liber, as in that tag of Terence: ‘Ceres and Liber, if not there, / The heat of Venus do impair.’ [trans. P.G. Walsh]

These examples of metonymical use of names of gods are taken up elsewhere in Cicero’s works:

Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.41: cum fruges Cererem, vinum Liberum dicimus, genere nos quidem sermonis utimur usitato, sed ecquem tam amentem esse putas qui illud quo vescatur deum credat esse?

‘When we label the harvest as Ceres, and our wine as Liber, we are of course using a familiar turn of speech, but do you imagine that anyone is so mindless as to think that what he eats is a deity?’ [trans. P.G. Walsh]

Cic. *De or.* 3.167: gravis est modus in ornatu orationis et saepe sumendus; ex quo genere haec sunt, ‘Martem belli’ esse ‘communem’, ‘Cererem’ pro frugibus, ‘Liberum’ appellare pro vino, ‘Neptunum’ pro mari, ‘curiam’ pro senatu, ‘campum’ pro comitiis, ‘togam’ pro pace, ‘arma’ ac ‘tela’ pro bello.

‘The method is effective in ornamenting the style, and should often be adopted; and to the same class belong the phrase ‘the impartiality of the War-god’ and the use of the terms ‘Ceres’ for corn, ‘Liber’ for wine, ‘Neptune’ for the sea, ‘the House’ for parliament, ‘the polling booth’ for elections, ‘civilian dress’ for peace, ‘arms’ or ‘guns’ for war; ...’ [trans. H. Rackham]

In these passages Cicero discusses or explains the metonymical designation of *vinum*, using the name Liber (cf. *Lucretius* 2.655–57). In other contexts, Liber appears instead of wine without any further comment. In one of the speeches against Verres Cicero alleges that the accused first used a bedroom to make political and legal decisions on the basis of bribery and then to indulge in love and wine:

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**16** This line of Terence is quoted frequently by grammarians as an example of metonymy (for a list of passages see Pease 1958, *ad loc.*). – Donatus (*ad loc.*) notes the three-fold metonymy and tries to explain the proverb.

Cic. *Verr.* 2.5.27: sic confecto itinere cum ad aliquod oppidum venerat, eadem lectica usque in cubiculum deferebatur. eo veniebant Siculorum magistratus, veniebant equites Romani, id quod ex multis iuratis audistis; controversiae secreto deferebantur, paulo post palam decreta auferebantur. deinde, ubi paulisper in cubiculo pretio, non aequitate iura discriperat, Veneri iam et Libero reliquum tempus deberi arbitrabatur.

‘Whenever, his journey thus effected, he reached a town, he would be carried, in this same litter, direct to his bed-chamber. To this apartment Sicilian magistrates, to this apartment Roman knights betook themselves – you have heard many witnesses swear to the truth of this. Legal controversies were there brought before him privately, and shortly afterwards his decisions were brought away from him openly. Having thus briefly administered the law in his bedroom for an hour or two on principles more profitable than equitable, he felt it his duty to devote the rest of the day to the service of Venus and Bacchus.’ [trans. L.H.G. Greenwood]

Because of the context, indulging in wine can only have negative connotations, particularly since Cicero goes on to describe Verres’ excessive feasts in greater detail, while he ironically remarks on his enjoyment of wine: *qui populi Romani legibus numquam paruisset, illis legibus quae in poculis ponebantur diligenter obtemperabat* – ‘who never in his life obeyed the laws of Rome, was none the less most careful to observe all the laws prescribed for the drinking of wine’ (Cic. *Verr.* 2.5.28 [trans. L.H.G. Greenwood]). In metonymical usage, the term Liber does not necessarily indicate something positive to Cicero and his audience.<sup>17</sup>

## Bacchic raving

In the discussion with ‘Atticus’ about nocturnal rites in *De legibus* (Cic. *Leg.* 2.35) ‘Marcus’ refers to the famous issue of the Bacchanalia and the resulting Senate decree of 186 BCE (*CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 581; Liv. 39.8–18) as a precedent for the envisaged restrictive arrangements for nocturnal rites according to the laws for Rome presented in this treatise (Cic. *Leg.* 2.37).<sup>18</sup> A little earlier ‘Marcus’ notes that the comic poets indicated what he dislikes about nocturnal rites (Cic. *Leg.* 2.36):<sup>19</sup> this

<sup>17</sup> Apart from the god’s genealogy, Cicero does not engage with mythical stories connected with the god as an anthropomorphic being, such as Bacchus and Ariadne (e.g. Ov. *Fast.* 3.460–516).

<sup>18</sup> Gelzer (1936, 283–84) suggests that this passage and comments in Varro (Varro, *ARD*, F 93 C.) go back to the same early annalist.

<sup>19</sup> For an overview of references to the Bacchic cult in Roman drama and potential interrelationships with the historical situation see Flower 2000.

reference to the treatment of nocturnal mysteries and their consequences in comedies (e.g. Men. *Epit.* 451–52; Plaut. *Aul.* 35–36; Gell. *NA* 2.23.15–18) is given as proof of the negative consequences of the potential licentiousness during nocturnal rites, including those for Bacchus, and thus saves the speaker from explaining it in his own words. In terms of the repercussions for morally appropriate behaviour the cult of Dionysus therefore is disapproved of.

In the treatise *De divinatione* (45/44 BCE), where Cicero lists factors able to move the soul to such an extent that it enters an exceptional state, there is a reference to another literary text to illustrate the ecstasy of the soul created by strong grief: Cicero has the speaker, ‘Cicero’s brother Quintus’, mention a woman who grieves for Teucer, presumably his mother Hesione, and quotes two lines, probably from Pacuvius’ *Teucer*.<sup>20</sup> These verses illustrate the woman’s status of being out of her mind by likening it to someone moved by Bacchic rites, i.e. with reference to Bacchants (Pac. *Trag.* 422–23 R.<sup>2–3</sup> = 373–74 W. = 251 S.):<sup>21</sup>

Cic. *Div.* 1.80: fit etiam saepe specie quadam, saepe vocum gravitate et cantibus, ut pelantur animi vehementius, saepe etiam cura et timore, qualis est illa ‘flexanima tamquam lymphata aut Bacchi sacris / commota, in tumulis Teucrum commemorans suum’.

‘Also it often happens that by a certain image or depth of voice or by singing the soul is violently moved; the same thing happens often through worry or fear, just like her who: ‘with her mind changed as though mad or moved by the rites of Bacchus, was calling for her Teucer among the hills’.’ [trans. D. Wardle]

While in *De divinatione* Bacchic raving is employed as a metaphor for a specific state of the soul, without any negative evaluation, in controversies with political opponents the verb *bacchor* serves to characterize their unacceptable unrestrained behaviour negatively, which will have to do with the genre and the assumed views of the intended audience. The first metaphorical use of the verb *bacchor* in this sense occurs in the *Catilinarian Speeches*, delivered at the end of Cicero’s consular year 63 BCE: Cicero alleges that both Catiline, once he has gone from Rome to C. Manlius in Etruria, and the conspirator C. Cornelius Cethegus,

<sup>20</sup> This is suggested by its partial quotation in Varro with attribution to this poet (Varro, *Ling.* 7.87).

<sup>21</sup> For *lymphata* in connection with Bacchic rites see Catull. 64.254–55. – *sacris* is generally understood as a noun describing the rites of Bacchus and dependent on *commota*. Pease (1920, *ad loc.*), however, suggests taking *sacris* with *tumulis*; this would make construction and word order rather complex.

once the senators have been assassinated,<sup>22</sup> would be in a state of ecstasy because of joy:

Cic. *Cat.* 1.26: hic tu qua laetitia perfruere, quibus gaudiis exsultabis, quanta in voluptate bacchabere, cum in tanto numero tuorum neque audies virum bonum quemquam neque videbis!

‘What delight you will take in their company, what joy you will experience, what pleasure you will revel in, seeing that from so sizeable a gathering you will be able neither to hear nor to see a single decent man!’ [trans. D.H. Berry]

Cic. *Cat.* 4.11: ..., versatur mihi ante oculos aspectus Cethegi et furor in vestra caede bacchantis.

‘There appears before my eyes a vision of Cethegus, crazily revelling over your corpses.’ [trans. D.H. Berry]

Later, Cicero ascribes a state identified by *bacchari* to his long-standing enemy P. Clodius Pulcher in the speech *De haruspicum responsis* (56 BCE). After Cicero had gone into exile and his house had been burnt down, Clodius acquired the site by auction. In this oration *bacchari* is meant to illustrate the mind-set determining Clodius’ criminal and amoral activities (including an alleged incestuous relationship with his sister). This ecstatic state is not seen as being joyfully out of one’s mind, but rather, as Cicero’s explanation shows, a state of frenzy:

Cic. *Har. resp.* 39: tu, cum furiales in contionibus voces mittis, cum domos civium evertis, cum lapidibus optimos viros foro pellis, cum ardentis faces in vicinorum tecta iactas, cum aedes sacras inflammas, cum servos concitas, cum sacra ludosque conturbas, cum uxorem sororemque non discernis, cum quod in eas cubile non sentis, tum baccharis, tum furis, tum das eas poenas, quae solae sunt hominum sceleri a dis immortalibus constitutae.

‘When you utter your frenzied phrases at mob-meetings, when you overturn the houses of citizens, when you drive honest men with stones from the forum, when you hurl blazing torches on your neighbours’ roofs, when you set fire to sacred buildings, when you stir up slaves, when you throw sacrifices and games into turmoil, when you know no distinction between wife and sister, when you bethink you not what bed-chamber you enter, then, it is that you rave in delirium, and undergo the only punishments determined by the immortal gods to requite the wickedness of men.’ [trans. N.H. Watts]

Closer to the original relationship with the wine god Bacchus is a passage in one of the *Philippics* composed against Mark Antony (44 BCE). Here the compound

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<sup>22</sup> On Cic. *Cat.* 1.26 see Dyck 2008, *ad loc.*

*perbacchor* is employed; the word occurs only in this passage in Cicero, and this seems to be its first attestation in Latin literature. Cicero thus characterizes the continuing state of ecstatic frenzy as a result of drinking, prostitution and vomiting, which Mark Antony indulged in when residing in Varro's villa, which he had brought into his possession and where he thus introduced a completely different lifestyle, as Cicero alleges. Perhaps because this speech was never delivered, Cicero is particularly outspoken:

Cic. *Phil.* 2.104: at quam multos dies in ea villa turpissime es perbacchatus! ab hora tertia bibebatur, ludebatur, vomebatur.

'But how many days did you spend disgracefully carousing in that villa! From eight o'clock in the morning there was drinking, gambling, vomiting.' [trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey / J.T. Ramsey / G. Manuwald]

Cicero's negative concept of an ecstatic state described by *bacchari* is also noticeable in his theoretical works on oratory, *Brutus* and *Orator* (46 BCE). Both pieces deal with the ability of an orator to move the audience emotionally. In *Brutus* Cicero considers that M. Calidius (praet. 57 BCE), an outstanding orator in his time, might have regarded too elevated and fiery a style of speaking as bacchic raving. In *Orator* Cicero says in his own person that an orator only speaking in an elevated and copious style appeared like a drunk Bacchant among the sober:<sup>23</sup>

Cic. *Brut.* 276: ...; aberat tertia illa laus, qua permoveret atque incitaret animos, quam plurimum pollere diximus; nec erat ulla vis atque contentio, sive consilio, quod eos quorum altior oratio actioque esset ardentior furere atque bacchari arbitrareretur, sive quod natura non esset ita factus, sive quod non consuisset, sive quod non posset. hoc unum illi, si nihil utilitatis habebat, afruit, si opus erat, defuit.

'... The third merit, which consists in moving the listener and in arousing his emotions, – the orator's chief source of power, as I have said – he [i.e. Calidius] lacked, and he was in fact quite without force and intensity. This may have been due to deliberate choice, as of one holding that a more elevated style and a more vehement delivery was frenzy and delirium, or to a natural indisposition to that sort of thing, or to established habit, or to actual inability. This one quality was lacking to him; if useless, call it a lack, if essential, a defect.' [trans. G.L. Hendrickson]

Cic. *Orat.* 99: ille enim summissus, quod acute et veteratorie dicit, sapiens iam, medius suavis, hic autem copiosissimus, si nihil est aliud, vix satis sanus videri solet. qui enim nihil

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**23** The idea of a raving speech recurs elsewhere in *Brutus* without the bacchic illustration (Cic. *Brut.* 233). – The metaphor reappears in Quintilian, yet without Cicero's term *bacchari* (Quint. *Inst.* 12.10.73).

potest tranquille, nihil leniter, nihil partite, definite, distincte, facete dicere, praesertim cum causae partim totae sint eo modo partim aliqua ex parte tractandae, si is non praeparatis auribus inflammare rem coepit, furere apud sanos et quasi inter sobrios bacchari videntur videtur.

‘For the plain orator is esteemed wise because he speaks clearly and adroitly; the one who employs the middle style is charming; but the copious speaker, if he has nothing else, seems to be scarcely sane. For a man who can say nothing calmly and mildly, who pays no attention to arrangement, precision, clarity or pleasantry – especially when some cases have to be handled entirely in this latter style, and others largely so, – if without first preparing the ears of his audience he begins trying to work them up to a fiery passion, he seems to be a raving madman among the sane, like a drunken reveller in the midst of sober men.’ [trans. H.M. Hubbell]

The various metaphorical uses of *bacchari* show that Cicero does not approve of the situation of a human being described thereby, as it implies a loss of control. The original relationship to a cultic procedure is virtually ignored in this usage; it is only the ecstatic frenzied state that is at issue. The rejection of this state, which Cicero regards as sufficiently despicable so as to ascribe it to opponents, is matched, in positive terms, by a high appreciation of Roman virtues such as restraint and self-moderation (e.g. Cic. *Q. Fr.* 1.1.18).

Cicero’s ‘own’ attitude to the god Dionysus / Bacchus / Liber cannot be ascertained, as his personal religiosity is not easy to establish.<sup>24</sup> That Cicero disapproves of Bacchic raving, however, is implied by his opposition to statues of Bacchantes, Bacchus’ ecstatic followers, which a friend had organized as decoration for Cicero’s house: he regards them as inappropriate for the image of himself to be displayed:

Cic. *Fam.* 7.23.2 (to M. Fabius Gallus, Dec. 46 BCE): Bacchas istas cum Musis Metelli comparas. quid simile? primum ipsas ego Musas numquam tanti putassem atque id fecissem Musis omnibus approbantibus, sed tamen erat aptum bibliothecae studiisque nostris congruens; Bacchis vero ubi est apud me locus? at pulchellae sunt. novi optime et saepe vidi. nominatim tibi signa mihi nota mandassem si probassem. ea enim signa ego emere soleo quae ad similitudinem gymnasiorum exornent mihi in palaestra locum.

‘You compare these Bacchantes with Metellus’ Muses. Where’s the likeness? To begin with, I should never have reckoned the Muses themselves worth such a sum – and all Nine would have approved my judgement! Still, that would have made a suitable acquisition for a library, and one appropriate to my interests. But where am I going to put Bacchantes? Pretty little things, you may say. I know them well, I’ve seen them often. I should have given you a specific commission about statues which I know, if I had cared for them. My habit is to

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24 See Manuwald 2018.

buy pieces which I can use to decorate a place in my palaestra, in imitation of lecture halls.’  
[trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey]

## ***Liberalia* – a festival of freedom?**

Cicero not only uses the word *bacchari* derived from the divine name Bacchus in a metaphorical sense, but he also argues with the name of the festival of *Liberalia*, which he interprets as a festival of liberty and thus connects indirectly with the god Liber.<sup>25</sup> In the months after Caesar’s assassination on the Ides of March 44 BCE Cicero sometimes refers to the Senate meeting two days later, on 17 March (e.g. Cic. *Phil.* 1.1; 2.89; cf. App. *B Civ.* 2.126.525–26), the day of the *Liberalia*. By playing with the name of the festival, in two letters to Atticus Cicero laments that Caesar’s death has not led to liberty because Mark Antony was given the opportunity to take charge by calling a Senate meeting on that day:

Cic. *Att.* 14.10.1 (19 April 44 BCE): meministine <me> clamare illo ipso primo Capitolino die senatum in Capitolium a praetoribus vocan<dum>? di immortales, quae tum opera effici potuerunt laetantibus omnibus bonis, etiam sat bonis, fractis latronibus! Liberalia tu accusas. quid fieri tum potuit? iam pridem perieramus.

‘Do you remember how that first day on the Capitol I cried out that the Senate ought to be summoned to the spot by the Praetors? Great heavens, what might not have been accomplished then amid the rejoicing of all honest men, even the moderately honest, and the discomfiture of the bandits! You blame Bacchus’ Day. What could we have done then? By that time we were long sunk.’ [trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey]

Cic. *Att.* 14.14.2–5 (28 or 29 April 44 BCE): nam Liberalibus quis potuit in senatum non venire? fac id potuisse aliquo modo; num etiam, cum venissemus, libere potuimus sententiam dicere? nonne omni ratione veterani qui armati aderant, cum praesidi nos nihil haberemus, defendendi fuerunt? ... [3] ...; istos omni cura praesidioque tueamur, et, quem ad modum tu praecipis, contenti Idibus Martiis simus; quae quidem nostris amicis divinis viris, aditum ad caelum dederunt, libertatem populo Romano non dederunt. ... [5] ... ne nos et liberati ab egregiis viris nec liberi sumus. ita laus illorum est, culpa nostra.

‘As for Bacchus’ Day, who could help coming to the Senate? Suppose that was somehow possible: when we *had* come, could we have spoken freely? Was it not essential at any cost to fend off the veterans who were standing by with arms in their hands while we were defenceless? ... Let us protect these men by every means our solicitude can devise, and be

<sup>25</sup> For Liber’s association with *liber* and *libertas* see e.g. Serv. ad Virg. *Aen.* 3.20; 4.58. – See also n. 3 above.



satisfied, as you recommend, with the Ides of March. That day opened the door of immortality to our heroic friends, but not the door of freedom to the Roman people. ... Truly we have been freed by heroes, but we are not free. Theirs then the glory, ours the blame.' [trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey]

To what extent for this interpretation of the *Liberalia* a link to the god Liber is relevant cannot be ascertained. Cicero stresses the contrast between the expectations raised by this particular festival and the true situation in the *res publica* demonstrated by Mark Antony's actions; he therefore implicitly stresses the perceived lack of freedom via an etymological pun on *liber*.

## Conclusions

The results of the analysis of Cicero's references to the god Dionysus / Bacchus / Liber and his use of terms connected with this god are diverse and wide-ranging. There are no indications that Cicero entertained any kind of 'personal' relationship to this god. Instead, he commented on him in 'theological' discussions and used words that had entered ordinary language, derived from this god's cult and special function as a god of wine. Looking at the various aspects, one might be able to say that Cicero seems to refer to Liber when pointing out the positive aspects of this Roman god and of the festival and the cult associated with him, to use the name Bacchus metonymically for wine and its derivatives to illustrate raving and to speak of Dionysus when talking of the Greek god and his genealogy. The term Bacchus and related words tend to appear in contexts with more negative connotations than the designation Liber. This agrees with the fact that Cicero regarded the erection of the apparently popular statues of Bacchantes in his house as inappropriate for his image.

To what extent Cicero's attitude towards Dionysiac divinity is representative of contemporary Romans is hard to tell: on the one hand his beliefs may be indicative of the views of the Roman elite at the time.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand Servius transmits the view that Caesar was the first to transplant the *sacra Liberi patris* to

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<sup>26</sup> See generally Beard / North / Price 1998, I 115: 'Cicero's speech *On his House* is not an isolated survival, a lucky 'one-off' for the historian of late republican religion. A leading political figure of his day, the most famous Roman orator ever, and prolific author – Cicero's writing takes the reader time and again into the immediacy of religious debate and the day-to-day operations of religious business.', and for the context see I 114–66.

Rome (Serv. ad Verg. *E.* 5.29).<sup>27</sup> The trustworthiness and interpretation of this remark are controversial; it might indicate a revitalisation of the cult or mark the introduction of a new mystery cult, or it may be a reflection of Caesar's intentions to make the cult of Dionysus official and use it in his political propaganda. At any rate support for the strong action of the Senate against the extremes of the cult of Bacchus may no longer have been as widely shared, so that such actions by powerful men became possible.<sup>28</sup> Mark Antony had himself celebrated as Dionysus when he entered Ephesus in 41 BCE, continuing the tradition of Hellenistic kings and alluding to the positive qualities of the god (Plut. *Ant.* 24.3–4), though Plutarch comments that Antony's activity was harmful to most, and his posing as Dionysus is described critically by Cassius Dio (Cass. Dio 50.5.3).<sup>29</sup> If there was a renewed interest in the Greek aspects of the god Dionysus in the first century BCE,<sup>30</sup> Cicero's engagement with the different manifestations of the god, as he explains them in *De natura deorum*, may be even more telling and have been prompted by the contemporary atmosphere. At least it can be assumed that Cicero regarded the views underlying statements in speeches as acceptable to and shared by the respective audience.

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<sup>27</sup> On the interpretation of this notice see e.g. Turcan 1977; Pailler 1988, 728–43.

<sup>28</sup> See Wardle 2009, 105.

<sup>29</sup> See Borgies 2016, 297–300. – On the functionalization of Dionysus by Mark Antony and the god's role in Augustan literature see Fuhrer 2011. – For the presentation of humans as divine, also in comparison with Ceres and Liber, see Lucr. 5.1–21.

<sup>30</sup> Thus Bruhl 1953, 122.

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