

PERFORMING PLOUTOS. EXPLORATIONS  
INTO THE RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE OF 4<sup>TH</sup>  
CENTURY ATHENS\*

PLUTO A ESCENA. EXPLORACIONES DEL DISCURSO  
RELIGIOSO DE LA ATENAS DEL SIGLO IV

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ABSTRACT

The question of the relation of ritual and theatre has long been debated and may never come to a satisfying result. Nevertheless, certain features of theatrical performances, especially in the ancient Greek *poleis*, show a close connection of both performative acts. In particular, there is

RESUMEN

La cuestión de la relación entre ritual y teatro ha sido ampliamente debatida, y posiblemente nunca alcance una conclusión satisfactoria. Sin embargo, algunos elementos de las actuaciones teatrales, especialmente en las *poleis* de la antigua Grecia, muestran una estrecha relación entre ambos actos perfor-

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\* In order to facilitate the differentiation of the personification and the homonymous play, the personification is in capital letters (Ploutos) while the play is cursive (*Ploutos*).

a strong interdependence of the dramatic *agon* and religious festivals, such as the Great Dionysia and the Lenaia. The aim of this article is to shed a new light not only on the relation of theatre and ritual, but also on the reception of theatre in the visual arts and the impact it had on religious developments of that time. I hereby focus on the heightened emergence of personifications in the middle of the 5th century BC which is reflected in a number of personifications who appear on stage in the Aristophanic comedies. One of them is PLOUTOS, the personified Wealth and one of the main characters in the homonymous play. By combining the representation of PLOUTOS in the visual arts with the literary sources on his person, a new image of this personification emerges. Through recapturing fragments and fractures of the multifaceted personification PLOUTOS, a process of transformation and adaption shows through that accommodates not only the relation of ritual and theatre, but also highlights the extraordinary standing of personification in the ancient Greek pantheon.

mativos. En particular, hay una gran interdependencia entre el *agon* teatral y los festivales religiosos, como las Grandes Dionisias y las Leneas. El objetivo de este artículo es arrojar una nueva luz, no solo sobre la relación entre teatro y ritual, sino también sobre la recepción del teatro en las artes visuales y en el impacto que tuvo en las dinámicas religiosas del momento. Por la presente, me centro en el surgimiento de personificaciones a mediados del siglo V a.C., lo que se refleja en la aparición en escena de una serie de personificaciones en las comedias de Aristófanes. Uno de ellos es PLUTO, la riqueza personificada y uno de los personajes principales de la obra homónima. Al combinar la representación de PLUTO en las artes plásticas con las fuentes literarias sobre su figura, surge una nueva imagen de esta personificación. Mediante la recolección de fragmentos y pedazos de la polifacética personificación de PLUTO, se muestra un proceso de transformación y adaptación que, no solo comprende la relación entre ritual y teatro, sino que también resalta la extraordinaria posición de la personificación en el panteón de la antigua Grecia.

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#### KEYWORDS

Mysteries; Old Comedy; Performance; Personification; Ritual; Visual Arts; Wealth

#### PALABRAS CLAVE

Actuación; Artes visuales; Comedia arcaica; Misterios; Personificación; Riqueza; Ritual

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THE CLOSE RELATION OF RITUAL AND THEATRE has been scrutinised in scholarship over a long period of time.<sup>1</sup> In the following I want to follow mainly the extensive and in its entirety comprehensive study of Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood focussing on ritual and tragedy.<sup>2</sup> Her discussion of the ritualistic elements of tragedy illuminates particularly the origins and implementations into religious contexts of this genre. One of these elements is the ritualistic *xenismos*, i.e. the welcoming and reception of the god in the city, which will be one of the focal points of the following analysis. Though Sourvinou-Inwood concentrates her study on tragedy, the ritual elements of the performance and its background are transferable to theatrical performances in general and hence to comedy as well. The play primarily discussed here will be *Ploutos*, an Aristophanic comedy performed in 388 BCE.<sup>3</sup> This comedy and especially its role in religious discourse has received some scholarly attention in the last decades.<sup>4</sup> Especially the thorough work of Francisco Barrenechea has taken a major role in the discussion thereof.<sup>5</sup> In order to expand this debate on the ritualistic and religious aspects of theatre and especially comedy I want to introduce and highlight the role of personification as a special coping mechanism. Through thoroughly discussing the personification of PLOUTOS in the play of Aristophanes

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1. See Schechner, 1998; Nünning, Rupp & Ahn, 2013; Braungart, 2016. With a focus on ancient drama, see Foley, 1985; Aronen, 1992; Bowie, 1993; Bierl, 2007, with extensive bibliography on what he terms *Rito- und Mythopoetik*.

2. Sourvinou-Inwood, 2002.

3. There appears to be an earlier version of the play probably dating to 408 BCE. As the play of 388 BCE is the one fully transmitted, I focus on this later version.

4. The most influential ones are Konstan & Dillon, 1981; Sommerstein, 1984; Olson, 1990; Sommerstein, 2001. For a full account of bibliography and the most recent study see Barrenechea, 2018.

5. Barrenechea, 2018.

and his representations in the visual arts, this paper aims to shed a new light on the role of comedy in Athenian religious discourse.

The discussion starts with a brief exposé of the broad field of religion, ritual and theatrical performances and moves further by paradigmatically focussing on the personification of *PLOUTOS* in the eponymous play and in a wealth of literary sources. The last section discusses first the representations of *PLOUTOS* in material culture. Further, his embeddedness into the Eleusinian mysteries and the relationship to Hades-Plouton is scrutinized. Not only will this enable a better understanding of the personification of *PLOUTOS* as such, but it may also tell us more about the reception of comedy in general and its interdependency with religious currents.

### 1. RITUAL AND NARRATIVES IN THEATRICAL PERFORMANCES

The ritual origins of theatre have been elaborately explored by Sourvinou-Inwood. Dramatic performances played an important part not only in Athenian society but also in the working of the whole city state. These plays were staged at – and therefore embedded in – a communal feast devoted to Dionysos which is either the Great Dionysia or the Lenaia. Sourvinou-Inwood has shown in her monograph that this context of feasting is of particular importance when speaking about the impact of dramatic performances.<sup>6</sup> The City Dionysia – as the Great Dionysia is also called – has its origins in a ritual *xenismos* that is “the reception and welcoming and entertainment of the god”.<sup>7</sup> The god in this case is Dionysos who after several failed attempts of cult instalment was finally received in the city of Athens.<sup>8</sup> Another important feature of this “original” ritual is the *komos*, a procession taking place during the Great Dionysia. This *komos* is open to the public, so that everyone can partake. People in the *komos* usually dress up and wear masks, a loose atmosphere of drinking and feasting ensues. This *komos* is generally seen as the origin of comedy, *komodoi* being those people who sing in the *komos*.<sup>9</sup> So, while the *komos* provides the ritualis-

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6. Riu 1999; Sourvinou-Inwood, 2002, esp. pp. 141-172.

7. Sourvinou-Inwood, 2002, p. 73.

8. The whole mythological background that Sourvinou-Inwood tackles in her reconstruction of the earliest version of the Great Dionysia is here not important. It may be said that in the instalment of Dionysos in Athens the fear of retaliation in the case of non-instalment played a rather big role. This may be kept in mind for the instalment of yet another cult, the one for *Ploutos*. See Sourvinou-Inwood, 2002, pp. 72-73 and 77-78.

9. Sourvinou-Inwood, 2002, pp. 172-177.

tic background of comedy, the *xenismos* is of particular importance, further enhanced by the multitude of new introduction of gods in the late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE.<sup>10</sup>

Another important feature of bringing dramatic plays and ritual together is the role of narratives. Their particular standing in the making of religion has again lately been enhanced.<sup>11</sup> Narratives provide not only meaning and order, but mostly an ordered way of communication. These narratives may “be understood as a complex form of mimesis: they not only represent a certain status quo which exists outside the ritual or narrative, but they envisage and enact what might seem to be possible and ethically desirable in relation to a given situation by engaging in symbolic communication.”<sup>12</sup> The term *mimesis* is already referred to by Aristoteles in his *Poetic* and clearly reflects upon theatrical performances: In the *Poetic*, the *mimesis*, i.e. the imitation, of *praxeis* is the definition of *mythos* (Arist., *Poet.* 1450a). To phrase it differently: by acting out certain ritualistic schemes or incidents on stage the plot of tragedy is formed.<sup>13</sup> To truly understand the implications of this observation and of its relevance for comedy, it is necessary to have a closer look at the relationship of tragedy and comedy.

The relationship of tragedy and comedy reflects itself already in the performance: both are part of the *agon* during the Great Dionysia and as such form complementary parts of a religious festival. Generally speaking, both genres offer comments on the current socio-political situation. While tragedy transmits its messages hidden in the re-enactment of known myths, comedy’s central feature is the proposition of a fantastic solution known as the “comic plan”. As several scholars have already convincingly shown comedy was meant to be a parody of tragedy.<sup>14</sup> In this regard we may also understand the part comedy takes up in religious discourses of its time in correlation to that of tragedy. “Tragedy depicted the divine as a greater whole, encountered by the human as necessity, but which also gives the human its meaning. Comedy presented its audience with the opposite picture, of the divine as

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10. As an example, Asklepios will be dealt with later on in this article. Additionally, Pan, Nike or Nemesis are to be named as divine qualities that make an early entrance into the Greek pantheon. Regarding the development in Lycurgan times, see also Gilliland, 2006, who names six personifications with a cult in these times. Aristophanes himself plays with his cult introduction in the *Eirene* which is also referred to later on.

11. Albrecht *et al.*, 2018, pp. 574-575.

12. Nünning, Rupp & Ahn, 2013, p. 15.

13. On the close relation of mimesis, aesthetics and performances, see also Kidd, 2019. He explains also how the illusion of play may reflect upon the acceptance and embracing of the enacted scenes.

14. E.g. Rau, 1967; latest Nelson, 2016 with extended bibliography.

an oppressive and meddlesome appendage to human life – a view that created the urge to transgress in the first place”.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, Given has recently taken a closer look at the acting characters on stage and found – in coherence with Nelson – that while in tragedy gods, in comedy it is human actors who work as the motor of the plot.<sup>16</sup>

Greek polytheism was a complex system of belief that had no fixed theology and no holy scripture. Studies of Greek religion therefore reiterately highlight narratives’ importance in the making and shaping of religion.<sup>17</sup> As such comedy and tragedy both – among other genres – opened up spaces for negotiating religious matters. Not only were they part of ritually coined festival structure but they also brought religious contents literally in front of the spectators’ eyes. With no fixed scripture, though, the standing of dramatic performances was even more important because of what Richard Schechner terms “recoding of behaviour”.<sup>18</sup> Thus, through the performances of ritual acts on stage these rituals were altered in the perception of the audience as well as that of the actors themselves. Therefore, while the actions of tragedy formed and constructed the myth on stage, i.e. the tragic plot, comedy challenged the same existing norms. It is this experimental freedom of comedy in dealing with divine characters that is rather connected with the thoughts and terminologies of the Sophists than with a mere utopian/carnavalesque understanding of the divine that manifests comedy’s stand in the contemporary religious and political discourse.

Nelson also claimed – and this might be equally important in this context – that while tragedy mainly consisted of divine and heroic characters, comedy’s characters are mostly human.<sup>19</sup> This, at the same time, includes the “ordinary people”, i.e. the audience. The background of the play is neither locally nor temporally too far from Athenian daily life, it is not mythical as in tragedy. Therefore, people in the audience may feel responsible for what is happening, not only on stage but also in real life. This is equally important when speaking about comedy’s standing in religious issues. “Aristophanes, who sees the divine as largely defined by the human, is as interested in the fissures and self-contradictions of such a view as he is in the freedom it implies”.<sup>20</sup>

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15. Nelson, 2016, p. 207.

16. Given, 2009. John Given divides the Gods who appear in Old comedy into two categories: divine opponents (pp. 112-114) or divine helpers (pp. 114-117). None determines the plot as divine characters (e.g. *deus ex machina*) does in tragedy.

17. Albrecht *et al.*, 2018; Eidinow, Kindt & Osborne, 2016, esp. ch. 6 & 9.

18. Schechner, 1998, esp. pp. 415-433.

19. Nelson, 2016, pp. 54-70.

20. Nelson, 2016, p. 208.

Here, two key terms of the concept of *Lived Ancient Religion* come together.<sup>21</sup> On the one hand the comedies are – though based in a ritualistic surrounding – reflections of a current political, social and even religious situation in the polis – in Athens – which are enacted on stage. This accounts for the situational construction of meaning. On the other hand comedy explores what in terms of the concept is meant by competence: As Martin Revermann has shown, most of the Athenian male populace took part in theatrical performances, mostly as part of the chorus, at one point in their lives which accounts for the people/audience feeling drawn towards and emotionally attracted by the comedies and the characters in it especially.<sup>22</sup> The religious competence not only shifts to human agents in the course of the play, rather the audience is truly part of the comic performances. In this case, metatheatricity, i.e. playing with the illusion and the conception of the comedy as a theatrical performance, is a means of creating an even more intense feeling of being part of the on-stage actions. The exact identity of the audience in Attic drama is, of course, a matter of debate, and a topic too big to be explored here properly. If we take into account that the plots of the plays were probably discussed in public or private spaces anyway – at least we do see comic and tragic scenes on drinking cups for example – the composition of the audience is of course important, but does not affect my line of argument.

In the context of ritual and theatre or more closely ritual and comedy another feature plays an interesting role: in 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE comedies we can observe the heightened emergence of the use of personifications as on-stage characters – an interesting stylistic device which had a huge impact on the effects of the genre. Two examples of personifications in ancient Greek comedy naturally come to mind when considered in the light of the ritualistic background of theatre discussed above. Both are comedies that include the ritual installation of a cult, i.e. the *xenismos*, for the enacted personification on stage, one being Eirene in the eponymous play and the other Ploutos, which brings them both even further in line with the origins of the ritual festival.

## 2. DEFINING PERSONIFICATION

Studies of personifications in ancient Greek art are numerous and it is especially difficult to come to a definition of this term as such.<sup>23</sup> To put it simply, a personification is the rendering of an abstract notion, value, geographical or topographical point or na-

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21. Albrecht *et al.*, 2018, p. 572.

22. Revermann, 2006, pp. 108-112.

23. Shapiro, 1993; Stafford, 2000; Borg, 2002; Gilliland, 2006; Smith, 2011.

tural phenomenon into a person/a human in order to make it seem more understandable and relatable.<sup>24</sup> This definition is rather easy to understand from a monotheistic worldview: there is only one God which gives everything else a different, “un-godly” standing in the religious “hierarchy”. In ancient Greece, this understanding of personifications was more complex. Today, an easy way to discern a personification in the English language is above all the capital letter they start with. Contrarily to this practice, the ancient Greek language did not – initially – know any difference between capitals and lowercase letters in the writing which means that for every single case attested in the literary sources, it is generally up to the audience/reader to decide how to understand the presentation. In some places, this decision is facilitated by a verb or a description that hints at an agent rather than a thing, while there are many cases that remain unclear even nowadays. The use of personifications in comedy differs in this point mainly through the setting on stage where personifications appear as characters. The audience may therefore from the beginning experience them as living beings, who are emotionally and visually tangible. Thus, the theatrical play facilitates the understanding of the abstract concepts as a person representing a concept.<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, in the Greek pantheon a lot of things, places, etc. appear to be demons or at least to have demonic features and can thereby be characterised as divine.<sup>26</sup> This makes it even more difficult to truly understand the character of a personification, whether s/he is seen as a god, a demon or anything else. Following Barbara Borg,<sup>27</sup> I will take these personifications as generally being part of the pantheon. I will not try to define their status in it, because most of the time scholars of antiquity do not have enough indications for these assumptions. I will rather, and here I am again following Borg, point to the difference between a mere personification and an allegory as their defining feature.

Borg differentiates between personification and allegory. One central aspect in her definitions of personification and allegory – which take up the whole first part of her book – is that allegory includes a (critical) commentary on the addressed personi-

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24. Borg, 2002, p. 49.

25. In some cases – such as that of *PLOUTOS* here – this understanding does not necessarily coincide with the easy recognition of the concept. Of course, displaying an old and filthy man on stage would not have led the audience to recognizing *PLOUTOS*, unlike other characters such as *Herakles* or *Dionysos* in *Frogs*. This fact, however, enhances the hypothesis that especially personifications were rather adaptable to different situations and needs.

26. Webster, 1954, p. 10.

27. Borg, 2002, p. 49.



fication.<sup>28</sup> This differs from earlier scholarship in so far as allegory was usually seen as a compilation of different personifications which – being put together as a group – made this commentary function possible. To put it differently: only the clustering of different personifications transmits their intentional reading. This assumption was challenged by Borg. She shows that some personifications do comment on themselves without a second personification to interact with. Even a personification in itself can therefore be seen as a self-reflective figure which already provokes a critical reading of itself without the aid of different personifications.<sup>29</sup> This is especially true for personifications appearing on stage: while the presentation of the personification is one thing, their interpretation by the audience and the spectators is their individual apprehension. Through interaction, a changing appearance and a changing perception, personifications may become multifaceted, an element of religious discourse as such.

One such example, as will become apparent in due course, is the personified PLOUTOS in the correspondent Aristophanic comedy.

### 3. PLOUTOS IN LITERARY EVIDENCE

In the pre-existing literary tradition there are two recurring themes when it comes to myths about PLOUTOS. First and foremost, PLOUTOS is described as the son of Demeter and Iasion, first in Hesiod's *Theogony* (969-973). He is portrayed there as a young boy bringing agricultural wealth together with his mother. Thus, Demeter takes on the role of the *kourotrophic*, i.e. nurturing, deity. Apart from Demeter, there are several other deities that do act as *kourotrophos* to the young PLOUTOS: for instance, Eirene or Gaia, and even Persephone in the Eleusinian mysteries, as will be shown later on. Apart from Demeter, though, none of the above mentioned is also understood as the mother of PLOUTOS; their part is reduced to solely nurturing the child. In addition to the *Theogony* some other sources tell us about this youthful agricultural Wealth that is seen completely positively: Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousai* (295-299) and the *Orphic Hymn to Demeter*, in particular, show that there is a strong connection to the thematic complex of Eleusis, Demeter and Kore. A similar direction is taken up by Kratinos in his paratragic commentary on the *Prometheus Unbound*

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28. Borg, 2002, p. 87.

29. This line of thought is not necessarily new in regard to Aristophanes' *Wealth* (Hertel, 1969), but the breadth of Borg's study highlights the discursive element that is inherent in personification (Borg, 2002, p. 193).

where the titans, who are depicted as bringing wealth and peace to the people, are called *Ploutoi* which is presumably also the title of this comedy.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, another strand of literary sources is preoccupied with the negative effects of the accumulation of wealth in communities. A skolion by Timokreon of Rhodes takes the blind Wealth to be responsible for all the evil in the world by unfairly distributing his goods to the people:

“If only, blind Wealth,  
you had never appeared  
on land or on sea or on the continent  
but had dwelt in Tartarus  
and Acheron; for it is because of you  
that men have all evils always”.<sup>31</sup>

Hipponax fr. 67 and fragment 63 of Amphis’ comedy *Kouris* are other examples for taking up the blindness of Wealth.<sup>32</sup> In yet another case, namely Antiphanes fr. 63 Kassel/Austin, it is Wealth who makes the people blind. This wealth is responsible for a lot of evil in the world and is thus negatively connoted.

Aristophanes, finally, connects both strings of literary tradition: His *PLOUTOS* is old and frail (266), blind (ἀνθρώπου τυφλοῦ, 13), dirty (ἀϋχμῶν, 84) and a coward (116-117, 123, 198-199, 203, 234-235). He is also rather self-conscious and needs Chremylus, the play’s main character to speak for him. All of these traits rather remind the audience of the second version of Wealth. But then Aristophanes gives an explanation for *PLOUTOS*’ behaviour, namely his blindness and thus his unfairness towards poor but good people: Zeus is the one responsible for blinding Wealth because he did too much good to the people and was therefore more powerful than Zeus himself. At the same time, though, most of the character traits of his appearance on stage already have an allegorical meaning in the above explained sense as they do comment on the impact that wealth can have on people. It is not Wealth *per se* who is dirty or blind or a coward. It is rather that Wealth is dirty because his “last owner” was dirty and mean; Wealth itself is not blind, but it makes people blind; and last but not least he is a coward because people owning too much are seen to be cowards as well.<sup>33</sup> To enhance this aspect, Aristophanes uses wealth sometimes as an attribute,

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30. Kratinos fr. 171, 12 Kassel/Austin.

31. Timokreon *PMG* 731, transl. by Sommerstein.

32. Both fragments are listed in *PCG* Kassel/Austin.

33. Newiger, 1957, pp. 151-153; Hertel, 1969, pp. 22-23.

sometimes as a substantive and sometimes as the name of the abstract personification, thus attaching different meanings to the word. All of the aforementioned indicates an allegorical reading of PLOUTOS. To facilitate the discussion a short summary of the hypothesis of Aristophanes' comedy follows before going any further into the discussion: Chremylus, the play's main character, lives in poverty even though he is a decent character. He then goes on a pilgrimage to Delphi to ask whether he should tell his son to live a different life so as to become wealthy. The oracle tells him to follow the first person he meets on the way back home. Chremylus then follows a frail and blind old man together with his slave Carion, who persistently complains about the whole situation. All of this is described retrospectively by Carion. When Chremylus finds out that this person is indeed PLOUTOS, who tells them about his blindness and the resulting inability to distinguish between good and bad people, he comes up with a cunning plan. He will bring PLOUTOS to the temple of Asclepius in Piraeus and heal PLOUTOS from his blindness. Penia, the personified Poverty, tries to prevent this from happening, but fails. After PLOUTOS has been healed, he is taken to the *opisthodomos* of the Athenian Acropolis, where his cult is to be installed. As these last two points are of great interest for the understanding of the comedy they will be addressed in detail in the following.

Healing PLOUTOS is a recurring theme in ancient Greek comedy.<sup>34</sup> The fact that Asclepius is the healing deity responsible for this treatment is a rather new development, though, and one that coincides with the establishment of the cult of Asclepius in Aegina around 420 BCE and the subsequent establishment of the cult and its popularity in Attica.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, he is a rather new god to the Athenian populace.

What is even more striking is the instalment of the cult of PLOUTOS on the Southern slope of the Athenian Acropolis. It correlates with Peace, or *Eirene*, yet another Aristophanic comedy that also features a personification as one of its protagonists. In both *Ploutos* and *Eirene*, the establishment of the cult for the personification is introduced on stage with the verb *hidruomai*,<sup>36</sup> which mimics the religious language of cult installation. They are also both addressed as gods even before the foundation of their cult on stage. Moreover, in both comedies, the comic plan deals with and presents a solution for difficult socio-political situations and dilemmas rather prominent in the Athenian society at the respective time of their performances: in *Eirene*, it is the Peloponnesian war that the main protagonist wants to bring

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34. E.g. Philetairos fr. 1 Kassel/Austin and Antiphanes fr. 47 Kassel/Austin.

35. Tomlinson, 1983, p. 15, pp. 22-24; Sommerstein, 2001, pp. ii-iv.

36. Arist., *Plut.* 1191-1195; *Pax* 923.

to an end, as it threatens the agricultural prosperity, the overall comfort of living in Athens and, of course, the lives of husbands and sons. In *Ploutos*, the poverty of the Athenian population, the result of several years of war and failure of the crops, is to be defeated. In both comedies, help comes from gods, *Ploutos* and *Eirene*, who are both newly installed in the course of the comedies. These comedies, as mentioned beforehand, are performed in the context of the ritual feast centering on the ritual instalment of the cult of Dionysos. So Dionysos himself not only approves of this instalment, it is already set in the appropriate ritualistic environment, and keeping in mind Dionysos' punishment for the first delays of cult instalments a similar fear of retaliation may be present. What is even more striking, the help of both gods becomes available only because the deities are instigated by the main protagonists, who also happen to be Athenian citizens. Here again, a sense of responsibility amongst the audience is sparked: any change, political or financial lies in the hands of the Athenian populace. As stated above, this is an example for comedy's focus on the human protagonist and also relates to the competence of the Athenian audience. Even more, through the invocation and the ritual instalment of the personification it is on stage turned into a deity providing it at the same time with a narrative. As the *Bacchae* do for Dionysos the comedies recount the story of cult legitimation and establishment.

On the other hand, there are also stark differences between *Eirene* and *Ploutos*. The historical situation of *Eirene* is inclined towards a peace agreement that was readily to be reached shortly after the presentation of the play. In *Ploutos*, however, the successful control of poverty and starving population is not in the realm of possibilities. Therefore, the instalment of the cult in the comedy is again used to point to this failure of the state: the cult is being established on the Southern slope of the Acropolis, or rather, as Alan H. Sommerstein points out,<sup>37</sup> in the *opisthodomos* of the Acropolis. This is the place where the city state also stores the treasury of the city. Therefore, rather than entrust the solution of these problems to the state and their treasury, the Athenians opt to welcome a new god there. Another reading may also suggest that at this point in time the *opisthodomos*, i.e. the treasury, was empty anyway.

The history and understanding of PLOUTOS in literature is already an intriguing field of studies. Nevertheless, to improve our understanding of the responsibilities of this personification and therefore its role in the religious sphere it is necessary to have a closer look at its representations in the visual arts.

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37. Sommerstein, 2001.

#### 4. PLOUTOS IN THE VISUAL ARTS

The identification of PLOUTOS in classical Athenian art is rather difficult. Lots of scholars, most recently Amy Smith, assigned the emergence of PLOUTOS in the visual arts to the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE, whereas Kevin Clinton already identified PLOUTOS in the Great Eleusinian Relief from the last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE.<sup>38</sup> All in all, the identification of the child as PLOUTOS remains a problem, as most of the depictions do not carry an inscription. The children depicted in these scenes are called PLOUTOS following the literary sources and the strong connection of PLOUTOS and the Eleusinian mysteries that spring from these sources. It rather, especially in the “classical” representation of PLOUTOS, reinforces the close connection of PLOUTOS and the iconography of the Eleusinian mysteries, in line with – as above mentioned – one part of the literary sources.

These – in terms of their iconography – “classical” representations show PLOUTOS as an infant/child or youth holding a cornucopia in his hands. All of them depict PLOUTOS together with his mother Demeter and Persephone/Kore. One good example may be Fig. 1 in this case. In the middle Demeter wearing a *polos* and holding a sceptre in her hand is shown. Close to her feet on the right is a young PLOUTOS, all painted in white, with an overflowing cornucopia in his right arm. Further to the right Persephone may be identified wearing a chiton and himation. Her left arm is propped on a pillar while she is holding a torch with her right hand. A variation of this scheme can be seen in four other pieces, all of them dating to the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE.<sup>39</sup> They may, as Erika Simon claimed, refer to a common prototype.<sup>40</sup>

A bit older, from around 360 BCE, is a representation on a red-figure hydria from Rhodes (Fig. 2). Here, PLOUTOS sitting on the cornucopia is handed over by Ge to his mother Demeter. To the left, Persephone is depicted. Persephone, Ge, Demeter, PLOUTOS and the other characters surrounding the scene lead again to the Eleusinian mysteries. This picture does not show the birth of PLOUTOS, as his mother is Demeter, not Ge. Rather, and that is quite interesting for the understanding of PLOUTOS, it shows the close connection of PLOUTOS, as agricultural wealth, to Ge, the personified soil which nourishes wealth.

Another quite prominent nourisher, *kourotrophos*, of Wealth is Eirene (Peace). The iconography of Eirene is especially interesting as she bears testimony to a new iconographic trope, that of the *kourotrophos*-type, which in turn coincides with the establishment of her cult in Athens around 375 BCE and her union

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38. Clinton, 1992 and 2009, p. 53; Smith, 2011, p. 114.

39. Clinton, 1992.

40. Simon, 1966, p. 86.

with the child PLOUTOS.<sup>41</sup> Before, she was shown as a maenad in the entourage of Dionysus as for example on a vase painting in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.<sup>42</sup> It is also striking that the statue by Kephisodotus is the earliest depiction of the child Ploutos. Unfortunately, this statue is only known through a series of vase paintings on Panathenaic amphoras, through Pausanias' description (IX 16, 1-2) and several Roman copies.

The best Roman copy of this statue shows Eirene larger-than-life wearing a peplos and a high-girdled himation with her hair coming down openly. All of these attributes are congruent with the depiction of a matronly character, who is thus acceptable as a nourisher of the child PLOUTOS. Whereas the loose hair could also point to a maiden and the dress was a maiden's dress in the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE, by the time the statue was sculpted both were seen as attributes of matrons in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE.<sup>43</sup> PLOUTOS is depicted as a child, in contrast to the earlier shown depictions where he is rather a youth. Eirene holds him in his left arm, but she is not directly looking at him. Additionally, PLOUTOS has the cornucopia in his left arm, while the right one is outstretched towards the head of Eirene. The close connection of these personifications is not the relationship of a mother to her son. It rather enhances the interpretation that agricultural wealth is only possible through a lasting peace. This interpretation is also distributed and promoted through its depiction on several Panathenaic amphoras of the archon Kallimedes dating to 370/369 BCE.<sup>44</sup> These depictions imply not only that the relationship of P/peace and W/wealth must have been understandable but that it seemed attractive and tangible in the different parts of Greece as well.

If – as mentioned above – there was a mutual proto-type for the vase-paintings of the Demeter-Kore- PLOUTOS-group, it means that PLOUTOS was present in two major artefacts in the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century in Athens.<sup>45</sup> The question that comes naturally into the mind, i.e. to what extent the performances on stage have influenced the visual arts or vice versa, cannot be answered with any certainty. Nevertheless, a way of promoting both the play and the vases/artefacts may be explored. We can also assume that the political atmosphere in Athens paved the way for the prominence of this personification at this time. Both the Peloponnesian and the Corinthian Wars left the countryside devastated and without the expected crops. To put it in Amy Smith's words:

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41. LIMC III 702.

42. Inv. no. 1024.

43. Kader, 2003, pp. 135-136; Meyer, 2008b, p. 76.

44. Eschbach, 1986, pp. 58-70.

45. Bemann, 1994, p. 46.

“By the middle of the fourth century, agricultural imports had become a major focus of Athenian politics, with foreign alliances and trade agreements directed at engineering a final return of Ploutos to their city. His most common attribute – the *keras* – emphasises the agricultural basis of the wealth that fourth century Athenians hoped Ploutos would bring in any circumstances”.<sup>46</sup>

All of this may account for the popularity that PLOUTOS newly enjoyed in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE in Athens.

Interestingly enough, the Athenian counterpart in terms of PLOUTOS’ responsibilities is the mythical hero Triptolemos who brought the knowledge of harvesting and crops to the Athenian people. Even though Triptolemos was quite popular in the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE, the hero disappears completely from vase-paintings in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE. As both Triptolemos and Ploutos stand for agricultural wealth, a representation showing both would have been quite redundant. So it is fair to assume that PLOUTOS replaced Triptolemos in some contexts, even more so as there are no contemporary images on vases of them.<sup>47</sup> This may be due to different reasons: First, PLOUTOS was not an Attic hero, meaning that the act of having him depicted on vases that are meant for export was not a great advertisement for Athens’ hegemonic ambitions. Secondly, PLOUTOS with his horn of plenty, is far more easily understood as a bringer of wealth than Triptolemos, who is normally shown in a winged carriage carrying the gifts of agriculture to humans. Last but not least, in a time where the bringer of wealth was closely connected to Peace, this concept should be understandable for foreigners as well. PLOUTOS and Eirene on the Panathenaic Amphoras for sure were easily identified with the over-flowing horn of plenty and the overall peaceful attitude. And of course, PLOUTOS incorporates wealth literally. Whatever the reasons may have been, by the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE the role of Triptolemos as part of the Eleusinian trias rather diminished, leaving us with no representation of him in Attic vase painting of the late 5<sup>th</sup>/early 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>48</sup> Following the Peloponnesian War, it was no longer the agrarian prosperity in persona of Triptolemos that appealed to the public but rather a “*Seligkeitsbedürfnis nach einem Leben nach dem Tod*” that PLOUTOS was able to grant.<sup>49</sup> It is therefore rather a shift in society that changes the conception of PLOUTOS while Triptolemos remains a strictly agrarian hero.

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46. Smith, 2011, p. 118.

47. Smith, 2011, pp. 114-115.

48. Clinton, 2009, p. 60.

49. Hayashi, 1992, p. 68

To summarize: Different versions of literary sources were telling us about PLOUTOS as either being old, blind and frail or of the child PLOUTOS connected with Demeter and the Eleusinian mysteries. The tradition in the visual arts follows this latter PLOUTOS and scholars have frequently attributed age as the identifying feature of PLOUTOS in order to distinguish him from other mythical figures holding the cornucopia. There are several figures with a cornucopia in ancient Greek Art but the one PLOUTOS could quite easily be confused with is Hades- Plouton. The relation of both will be addressed in the following.

## 5. PLOUTOS AND PLOUTON

As mentioned above, a natural connection between PLOUTOS and Plouton is established through their obviously similar naming. A new finding, which dates to the last quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE, brings the two iconographical tropes from the literary evidence tropes that we have seen above together. On a fragment of a black-figure kantharos a bearded man is shown on the right sitting and holding a sceptre in his right hand (Fig. 3). His hair is long and he wears a *tainia* on his head. He is also clad in a chiton and himation. Directly above his head an inscription reads ΠΛΟΥΤΟΣ. In front of him, there are three women moving to the left. This representation of PLOUTOS is not only the oldest one that we know about, but it is also the only one depicting him as an old man. This, on the other hand, opens up the possibility that the differentiation of PLOUTOS and Plouton according to their represented age might not always be correct.

Even in antiquity, there was a certain danger of confusion. Already in Aristophanes' play, ΠΛΟΥΤΩΝ is written with an omega instead of ΠΛΟΥΤΟΣ with the omicron (*Plut.* 727). It was certainly not just a mistake, as the scholium *ad loc.* tells us about various other examples, namely the fragments 273 and 283 of a satyr play *Inachus* by Sophocles.<sup>50</sup> There are two explanations that could account for the merging of the two names: 1) Aristophanes may have just played around with these quite similar deities and used them to produce a comic effect; 2) there was no certain iconographical feature that made a distinction between PLOUTOS and Plouton possible. This last point is also highlighted by the strong connection the two deities shared. Plouton first appears in 5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE Eleusinian iconography. The cornucopia/horn of plenty that he is frequently depicted with marks him as a God of fertility and a chthonic deity. He is

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50. Sommerstein, 2001, *ad. loc.*



thus no longer Hades, the God of the underworld but rather appears as the husband of Kore in the Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>51</sup>

There is a higher amount of representations of older male figures holding a cornucopia from the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE on. This is in line with images associated with the Eleusinian mysteries. A bearded old Plouton is seen on different reliefs as well as (again) on a series of Panathenaic amphoras of the archon Philokles (dating to 392/391 BCE). In this series, we can see a male figure on top of a column holding the horn of plenty in his left arm. Norbert Eschbach argued quite convincingly that this figure may well be Plouton-Hades.<sup>52</sup>

Then there are three more representations dated to the first quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE that presumably show Plouton together with Herakles. In the following, I want to shed a new light on these quite interesting, iconographically connected images: On Figs. 4-5 we can see Herakles carrying an old, frail and white-haired man. He is accompanied by Hermes, both figures (Herakles and Hermes) pointing to a mythological background. The figures are moving to the right and are apparently rising. This is indicated by the fish on the ground level. We do not know about a myth that could be depicted here. In any case, Katrin Bemann – following the above-mentioned iconography – identifies the old person as Plouton.<sup>53</sup> Walther Nester, on the other hand, proposes a different reading of these images: In his book he reconstructs through different representations of Herakles and Plouton a myth in which PLOUTOS is kidnapped by Plouton and brought to the underworld. Later on, Herakles saves PLOUTOS and carries him back restoring fertility and crops to the human world.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, no literary sources attest to this myth and the whole reconstruction is solely based on several vase-paintings from the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE. Nonetheless, an account like that might show the strong connection of PLOUTOS and Plouton but also illuminates the role of PLOUTOS in the Eleusinian mysteries where he apparently played an important role. Additionally, this hypothetical myth highlights again the multifaceted ways of adaption a personification provides.

Comedy is a difficult source for it is never clear where Aristophanes is dead serious, and where he is just making fun of the existing conditions and ideas. Of course, parody has its central part in comedy. Nevertheless, following the argument

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51. Bemann, 1994, p. 81. Against it argues Diana Burton, who claims that both parts of the personality of Hades-Plouton are inextricably linked (Burton, 2011).

52. Eschbach, 1986, pp. 18-26.

53. Bemann, 1994, pp. 31-36.

54. Nester, 1973.

above there are two extremely different strands of literary tradition. These correlate with possibly two different strands of visual representations. Aristophanes is the first (and only one) that we know of who connected both strands and made them compatible. During the same time that his play is put on stage representations of PLOUTOS in the visual arts are advancing. As the impacts of dramatic performances on visual representations and vice versa are not retraceable, it may be of help to speak about an atmosphere or an understanding in Athenian society that is at the base of both developments. For sure, the community in itself understood the importance of secured wealth as a result of different historical circumstances which builds the background for this upcoming appraisal of PLOUTOS. Simultaneously, both PLOUTOS and Plouton were embedded in the Eleusinian mysteries, the two being responsible for agrarian wealth and carrying a cornucopia. This development made it even more difficult to draw a dividing line between the characters. As there was a general understanding of agrarian wealth both PLOUTOS and Plouton were in one way or the other present and interacted with each other.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Applying the methodological framework of recoded behaviour mentioned earlier it is through the theatrical performances that not only the plays in themselves but also their contents are changed on the stage. To elaborate this point a little further: PLOUTOS is iconographically coined in 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE Athens as being the son of Demeter, usually depicted as a child holding the cornucopia. Though Aristophanes brings PLOUTOS on stage, he does so by bringing this understanding together with another existing, but completely different narrative: the PLOUTOS in his play is old, frail and blind. This different coinage not only accounts for the changing perception of PLOUTOS in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, it also reflects upon the (literal) similarities of PLOUTOS and Plouton. Addressing PLOUTOS as a god during the dramatic performance completely changes his character and his perception by the audience. In a time of distress comedy presents the audience with a solution to an existing situation, i.e. the dominant poverty and the starving of the population. Additionally, it hints at a reason for this desolate state of the city: Zeus blinded Wealth who therefore cannot see where to justly distribute his goods.

Scholarship on ritual and their role in the working of society has shown that one crucial element of rituals is their part in providing order in times of crisis. The classification system procured by rituals helps society to cope with these times of crisis,

presents reasons and, in the end, opens up solutions.<sup>55</sup> The interpretation of PLOUTOS in this context helps therefore to render a changing societal situation understandable to the Athenian public and help them cope with the impacts implied.

In this light, a personification is the perfect device to use. Taking a closer look at PLOUTOS, the culmination is his sacralisation in the end of the play. A cult for PLOUTOS is – at least fictional – installed in the *opisthodomos* of the Athenian acropolis. Even more, the character on stage is turned into the cult statue worshipped in that space. Ritual elements such as the *komos* to the acropolis are combined here with comic elements such as the confusion of PLOUTOS and Plouton. Additionally, this new cult is to be placed in the (probably empty) treasury of the Athenians located in the *opisthodomos*. The emphasis is here rather on monetary than agrarian wealth. Nevertheless, it accentuates again the multifaceted adaption of personification in Greek theologies, be it a popular theology, a comic theology or those of the city state. In one way they are ideal examples of the incongruities of Greek religion: They are flexible in their mythological background, adaptable to different narratives and may even change their meaning according to the needs of different times and spaces.

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55. Braungart, 2016, pp. 34-35.

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