

Testing Models, Shifting Paradigms

Swapping Drinking Songs for Spiritual Songs: *Skolia* and Possession in Ephesians 5 and Mozambique

by Alan B. Howell

Certain aspects of the cultures of the Bible are more easily grasped today by Africans than by Westerners.¹ By recognizing important parallels to Greco-Roman culture, Africa can serve as a “laboratory,” an appropriate setting, for reading both the Classics and the New Testament well.² Reading the biblical text in the “laboratory” of Mozambique, for example, led to observations and connections that, although surprising to me, in retrospect, have been there all along.

The Makua-Metto Christians made a number of insightful observations as we studied Ephesians 5: 15-20 together, connecting Paul’s counsel for the church in Ephesus to our context in northern Mozambique.³ We noted how the verb *wiipa* in the Makua-Metto language means both “to swell” and “to sing.” That semantic connection fit well with the instruction in the text to be filled, or swell, with the Holy Spirit while singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The conversation took another direction when one person brought up the prevalence of drinking songs and how drunkenness is an overwhelming problem for the people in this region. Additionally, this condition seemed wedded to fear as lives are deeply affected by the occult and spirit possession. It seemed plausible to them that fear, magic, and alcohol were also an integrated problem in first century Ephesus. That led them to connect Paul’s instructions about drinking wine, songs, and spirit possession this way: *Paul is telling the believers not to sing drinking songs, because that will lead to foolish living and possession by a corrupt spirit. Instead, as followers of Jesus, we should sing spiritual songs, which fill us with the Holy Spirit and help us to live lives full of thankfulness.*

As a foreigner, I was only minimally familiar with Makua-Metto drinking songs. So, after conducting interviews and collecting popular drinking songs in their language, I learned to set up a contrast between drinking songs and songs of the Holy Spirit when teaching Ephesians 5.⁴ This interpretation was such a helpful and natural reading of the text in the “laboratory” of Mozambique that

Alan B. Howell, his wife Rachel, and their three daughters resided in Mozambique from 2003 to 2018 as part of a team working among the Makua-Metto people. Alan (MDiv) is currently serving as the Visiting Professor of Missions at Harding University.

it led me to investigate how well this “swapping songs” approach to 5:18-19 fit the original context of the church in Ephesus.

In the first section of this article, we will briefly explore the situation in Ephesus. We will look at the settings in which people drank wine across that city, from the *symposium* (in ancient Greece, a convivial discussion or drinking party held after a banquet) to the mystery cult of Dionysus. Along the way, we will note the important connection of that whole region to the genre of drinking songs (σκόλια—*skolia* or *scolia*).⁵ We will then examine the rhetoric of a first century Greek orator, Dio Chrysostom, whose explicit contrast of drinking songs with morally instructive songs is similar to the argument made by the Apostle Paul. In the second section, we will jump to the context of Mozambique and examine the content of five popular Makua-Metto drinking songs, noting their inherent spirituality. Finally, we will turn to a reading of Ephesians 5 in light of spirit possession and potential applications for swapping drinking songs with spiritual songs.

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Ephesians 5 in Context Skolia and Symposium

Gatherings where people would eat and drink together are an important cultural artifact of the first century. The end of a banquet, the symposium, would often include the drinking of a wine “libation, followed by the singing of a song, usually a hymn of praise to a god, and then by entertainment, . . . further extended discussion, or perhaps more singing.”⁶ Discussion and debate could occur, or the drinking might cause the crowd to descend into a drunken orgy.⁷ Wright notes that, “music was an integral component of banqueting activities. Singing games were frequently played by participants.”⁸

There were three types of skolia (σκόλια), a genre of drinking songs, present at such gatherings.⁹ The first type was to be sung as a chorus, while the second in a regular succession. The third type—where the skolia actually derive their name—come from the fact that instead of following the order of seating, the turn-taking would be in an irregular or crooked pattern.¹⁰ Athenaeus notes that participants would often perform one *skolion* after another, and lists twenty-five examples, including this one: “Would that I might become a lovely ivory lyre, and that lovely lads might take me to join the chorus of Dionysus.”¹¹ Also: “Drink with me, sport with me, love with me, wear wreaths with me, rage with me when I am raging, be sober when I am sober.”¹² One of the

Attic skolia references the patron goddess of Ephesus, Artemis.¹³ The skolia were apparently known for being composed in the Ionian mode,¹⁴ another connection to the region where the city of Ephesus is located.¹⁵ Collins notes that

contrary to what we might think always constituted a spirit of conviviality, wine drinking for Greek symposiasts could be lighthearted on the surface while underneath it was an acknowledged doorway into hidden intentions

as the spirit of competition could take over the group while they attempted to best each other with their skolion lyrics.¹⁶

Plutarch saw potential danger in the way music affected people, and since he knew that music was unlikely to be eliminated from the symposium, he cautioned participants to use it wisely and be aware of its potentially dangerous effects on the soul.¹⁷ He

lists the “singing of any kind of song” as one of many undesirable activities taking place when drinking parties got out of hand. Yet simultaneously he shows how the scolon was known to have filled a religious purpose.¹⁸

There was certainly a spiritual dimension to similar gatherings, one intricately connected to the consumption of alcohol.

Dionysus

Rogers argues that the cult of Dionysus (or Bacchus) plays an important part in the background of Ephesians 5,

It would seem that the cult of Dionysus was so widespread and common that anything having to do with grapes, wine, ivy, or any other Dionysian motif was at once connected to Dionysus and his worship. Many pagans even accused the Jews of worshipping Dionysus, simply because certain things in Judaism appeared to have Dionysian motifs. To talk of wine and drinking immediately brought Dionysian expressions in the conversation, and to live a riotous, wanton, debauched, drunken life was characterized as a “Dionysian mode of life.” The cult was so widespread that it was part of common everyday life in the ancient world.¹⁹

The influence of this cult was significant.

Dionysus flourished in the Roman world, both East and West, simultaneously in the form of a mystery religion and in the iconography of mosaics, paintings and sculptures. This imagery does not always, everywhere and necessarily have a cultic significance—far from it . . . But it carries references to a cult and a myth whose popularity it both reflects and reinforces, because it makes a visual impression.²⁰

So, who is this Greek god Dionysus and how should we think about his impact? Meyer notes that he

had numerous manifestations and his worship was incredibly diverse... The worshippers of Dionysos acknowledged his presence in the raw flesh of the wild beasts as well as the goblet of wine, in the phallus concealed in the *liknon* (a winnowing basket that may be used as a cradle for a baby), and also (among the Orphics) in the immortal human soul. Thus, one who was confronted with the presence of Dionysos and possessed by him might feel his power variously: in ecstasy, in inebriation, in sexuality, in spiritual bliss. Such a person became one with Dionysos, and in fact may be called Bacche (feminine) or Bacchos (masculine) after the god himself. Little is known of the actual mysteries of Dionysos, but presumably they were as diverse as the manifestations of the god... The holy drink of initiates that initiates consume was ordinary wine, since wine was the special gift of the god. Sexual practices must have been a part of some Bacchic festivals.²¹

The goal of Dionysism, then, was “to become a *Bacchos*, that is to say, to become identified with the god.”²² In Euripides’ play, *The Bacchanals*, we are told that humans can rest from their grief when wine fills (πλησθῶσιν) them.²³ Interestingly, in Ephesians 5:18–19, Paul tells the believers to be filled (πληροῦσθε) with the Spirit, with singing that included hymns (ᾠμοίς). During Euripides’ play, the chorus sings,

Dionysus ordains, will I chant him, his hymn (ὑμνήσω) out—O happy to whom is the blessedness given, To be taught the Mysteries sent from heaven, Who is pure in his life, through whose soul the unsleeping Revel goes sweeping!²⁴

And later,

One dancing-band (θάλασσοις) shall be all the land when, led by the Clamour-king, his revel-rout fills the hills—the hills where thy women come whom the Vine-god chasing, in frenzy racing, Hunted from shuttle and loom.²⁵

Euripides describes the identification with the deity or possession this way,

A prophet is this God (δαίμων): the Bacchic frenzy and ecstasy are full-fraught with prophecy: For, in his fullness when he floods our frame, He makes his maddened votaries tell the future... thrilled with panic (φόβος)... This too is a frenzy Dionysus sends.²⁶

In being filled with wine, Dionysus entered the intoxicated worshippers’ bodies, thus allowing them to comply with the deity’s will.²⁷ In addition, music played an important role in this inebriated process of possession.²⁸ And their singing was known such that Philo of Alexandria, writing in the first century CE, remarks on the superiority of a Judean group’s singing in honor of God, of their beautiful fashion in comparison with the symposia of others, including the Bacchic festivities.²⁹

It seems fitting that Paul would follow his instruction on songs and wine with a section on household codes (beginning with the conduct of women and men in marriage, 5:21–33), as the rites of Dionysus were connected with disorganization, disruption, and a “dangerous level of possession. . . . More specifically, it is through his effect on women that Dionysus’ terrifying ability to overturn the normal order of things is demonstrated.”³⁰ Blundell notes that,

The participants were known as Maenads (*mainades* or “mad women”), a word which signifies possession by a god but which at the same time carries derogatory connotations, implying masculine disapproval of uncontrolled female behavior.³¹

Maenadic worship likely included, “ritual chants and frenzied dancing to the music of drums and flutes (thrillingly evoked in one of the choral odes of the *Bacchae*, lines 152–69).”³² The effect of Dionysus on women was said to have caused madness and leaving of one’s home, “rushing away from domestic life . . . with hair disheveled to the choral dances of Dionysus.”³³

In 41 BCE, according to Plutarch,

when Antony made his entry into Ephesus, women arrayed like Bacchanals, and men and boys like Satyrs and Pans, led the way before him, and the city was full of ivy and thyrsuwands and harps and pipes and flutes, the people hailing him as Dionysus, Giver of Joy and Beneficent. For he was such, undoubtedly, to some; but to the greater part he was Dionysus Carnivorous and Savage. For he took their property from well-born men and bestowed it on flatterers and scoundrels.³⁴

We know that Dionysus played a significant part of “the Ephesian pantheon, even before Roman times.”³⁵ Oster states that “in addition to legendary episodes which place the god Dionysus in Ephesus, there is abundant additional evidence that Dionysus was revered and his cult was faithfully maintained there.”³⁶ According to Aurenhammer, “the majority of Dionysiac sculptures feature the god alone or grouped with members of his thiasos.”³⁷ These groups, the *thiasoi*, who drank and worshipped together, could refer to a bacchic cult or they could have been more like a funerary association.³⁸ Some of the thiasoi had “nothing ‘mystic’ or even ‘of mystery’ about them” as those groups may have functioned more like drinking clubs.³⁹ Turcan notes that this

...Dionysism with a middle-class bent, patronized by local notabilities in Italy as in Asia Minor, was a religion of festive euphoria and well-being guaranteed by the Pax Romana. Furthermore, it often went hand in hand with the imperial cult.⁴⁰

Dio Chrysostom

Another resource that informs our understanding of the background of Ephesians 5 comes from Dio Chrysostom’s *Second Discourse on Kingship*. That speech is set up as a

dramatic conversation between Philip of Macedon and his son, Alexander, holding out the Stoic ideal of kingship, drawing from Homer's writings.⁴¹ He affirms that "the king should not offer such prayers as other men do," and should not "call upon the gods with such a petition as Anacreon, the Ionian poet, makes."⁴² Dio Chrysostom references two prayers, or *skolia* (interestingly, both specifically reference Dionysus), and counsel is given that while these "ballads and drinking-songs of the Attic symposia" are appropriate for "country folk and for the merry and boisterous clan-meetings," they are not suitable for kings.⁴³ Instead, we are told, it would be better to pray like Homer's king of the Greeks in the *Iliad*, leading into a section on the proper qualities and conduct of a king.⁴⁴

Dio Chrysostom's work follows a similar rhetorical approach to our reading of Ephesians 5, where Paul contrasts drinking songs with songs of the Holy Spirit which then leads into a section on proper behavior. Hengel notes that Paul's description of these songs shows their inspiration by means of the Spirit, "given its concrete form in worship," and that Paul is not distinguishing between the three terms, "psalms," "hymns," and "songs," since these titles are used interchangeably in the LXX for religious songs.⁴⁵ It is unlikely, then, that Paul mentions these three terms for songs to specifically highlight the contrast with the three "competing" kinds of *skolia*. What seems clear, though, is that the Dionysian cult forms

a very real and present background for the statements by Paul in Eph 5:18–19. The more we learn about this cult and its presence in Asia Minor, the more likely it becomes that Paul was responding directly to the influence of the cult in the church at Ephesus.⁴⁶

While this text may give little attention to the form of worship, it is clearly focused on the content and orientation of that worship and the way that worship fills us, forms us, and transforms us by means of the Spirit, into a people with the character of God.

We have looked at the ways the symposia, *skolia*, the Cult of Dionysus and the rhetoric of Dio Chrysostom construct a backdrop for reading Ephesians 5:18–19 as an appeal to swap drinking songs for songs of the Holy Spirit. The main contrast being made is between two conditions, or two types of possession, that of being filled with wine (Dionysus and drunkenness) and another of being filled with the Spirit.

Wine is the content (the beverage) that is consumed and that renders one drunk. By analogy, the Spirit is the content

that the believer takes in and with which he or she is filled. This overall conclusion then makes Paul's statement thoroughly consistent with Luke's repeated references to believers being filled with the Spirit in the book of Acts.⁴⁷

Instead of possession by a capricious spirit,

the hallmark gift of the new covenant is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Paul calls believers to yield their lives completely to the Spirit's influence and to resist coming under the pull of other mind-altering and numbing substances.⁴⁸

And the way the follower of Jesus participates in being filled by the Spirit is to fill the mind and heart with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.⁴⁹ In that way, the church becomes a radically different kind of *thiasoi*, a community of worshippers filled not with wine, but with the Holy Spirit.

Drinking Songs and Spirit Possession in Mozambique

In this section, we will look at the context of Mozambique and show how drinking songs are both powerful and inherently spiritual among the Makua-Metto people. We will begin by summarizing the message of five drinking songs (with samples from lines of two of them) and make observations about the kind of spirit they promote.⁵⁰

1. "*Uwurya akinbiya*" ("I won't stop drinking"): The singer, Mpakala, borrowed the chorus from a traditional drinking song, adapting it and the rhythm into a modern format. The singer pledges his allegiance to *niipha* (local moonshine) and states that people shouldn't complain about him drinking because he's using his own money that he earned from cutting and selling firewood.
2. "*Nanbapaliya Khanliyala Itoroku*" ("Drunks don't forget their change"): This famous song, that is often sung when people drink together, was written by Nigabozoni. Even though it is a song about drinking, it starts by mentioning God and later invoking God to get justice for the drinker, to get his change back from the owner of the bar. The message is: "Don't try to take advantage of me, just because I'm drunk. I can still control my own money."
3. "*Anonkoma ukabankani*" ("Sitting at the place of drinking"): The words of this song by Mukopola sound similar to a lament. It tells how people sit and drink all day long. It is not typically sung where people drink, but about people who drink.

The main contrast is between two types of possession: being filled with wine and being filled with the Spirit.

4. “*Ixima ni Royali Yo Civa*” (“*Xima* or Royal Gin, which is Sweet?”): *Xima* is a staple food for people in northern Mozambique, while Royal is a well-known brand of gin. The song lists various types of foods, asking if any can compare to Royal Gin. The song’s answer is that Royal Gin is best. At one point, reference is made to a wound that the singer has. His response was that it is better that he fall and cut himself rather than stop drinking alcohol. In commenting on this song, a Mozambican Christian said that this person is a slave to alcohol.

Mwani mi ilansoruwaka inovithiya; iximaka kakimeliya; nkora aka yovithiyaa; mi nsuruku aka wira Royal aka khanompwanya. Nula navithiye isokwaka ni kahalaa ka uhuruwe nennonihukunno kanavithiya. When they hid my bed sheet; didn’t share my xima with me; hid my bed from me and my money, at least my Royal Gin they did not get. If they had done that, I would have hit them and on the same day they would bury me.

Ala yakwaka nsalapaaya ukokhala wo siyani ala? Uhapaliya tho. So, the cross I will die on, what will it be? Just Drunkenness.

Não precisa wo thapwa, só cathukanihaciyaru ikarafacixo chesiyaka wimuru no, nsalapakava uhotosa. I don’t need one made of wooden boards, just join together bottles, and put them next to my head, that will be my cross there—that’s enough.

5. “*Uhapaliya Kakinhiya Itampi Nimpanka Nkhayi*” (“We won’t stop being drunk, it’s a sin we do together”): The message of the song is that everyone has their own destiny, and the singer says his destiny is drunkenness. The singer makes fun of religious people who tell him to stop because they have their own set of sins. At the end of the song, the singer says that his family blames their problems on his drunkenness, but he uses drunkenness as a mask to do what he wants.

Akinhiya! Uhapaliya mi akinhiya. I won’t stop! I won’t stop getting drunk.

Nluku nawumpa anatamu awe pwavahaka uhapaliya ntuuniyani. (x2) God made and possesses humans and gave drunkenness to the world.

Poti ukona mi uhapaliya usikiya niusikiya nkhai. You may see me in my drunkenness, but we’ll be buried together.

We poti uyona usilamo itampi wimpanka nkhai. You may think you are a just person, but we are both sinners.

Yuvahale Nluku! Nna mi uokiwaha Nluku! That’s what God gave you! This is what God gave me!

Shame is an important theme in the Makua-Metto culture, and it is a powerful force in these lyrics.⁵¹ In interacting with this material, participants noted that people in their lives would sometimes shamefully admit the exorbitant cost of drunkenness. One story, in particular, was of a professor who lamented that he lost everything because of alcohol—his marriage, house, etc. While some songs served to lament the loss that drinking brings, another observation was that, for many people, music and drinking end up going together because the sound and singing drown out the shame that is associated with getting drunk.

If the Makua-Metto drinking songs are a real force hindering the flourishing of the kingdom of God in northern Mozambique, how can churches defend themselves against this enemy and these songs? One Christian commented that the secret is to bring their message into the light and work to destroy the hollow pleasure of drinking by revealing the spirit of drunkenness for what it is. The suggestion was to overtly contrast these songs with songs of the Holy Spirit and talk about the way the church can practice a robust theology of singing.

The linguistic connection between singing and swelling in the Makua-Metto verb *wiipa* has been helpful to point out that lives filled with the right songs can be lives filled with the Holy Spirit. And that way of being empowers us to be the kind of people who live by a proper ethical code (Eph. 5:21–6:9). Immediately following the household code in Ephesus, are instructions on the armor of God and how our battle is against spiritual powers (Eph. 6:10–20). Likewise, Mozambican Christians naturally heard the musical theme continuing to play in the background of that section. They noted that music plays a role on the battlefield, and songs of the Holy Spirit train us for the spiritual battle. It is common to hear soldiers most mornings as they go to and from the military base in our town in Mozambique. Singing and marching together is an important aspect of their training, and believers there were quick to note the connection to singing as part of the training for Christians to do spiritual battle against the powers of evil in this context.

In many ways, a typical African worldview is closer to the Greco-Roman worldview than the current Western perspective. In the first century, the spiritual realm was seen as omnipresent and having a real impact on the average person.⁵² Since the spirit realm is one that is perceived as both active and full of secrecy for the Makua-Metto people, it is helpful to speak openly about this topic in order to shed some light on this dark and mysterious part of life. It must expose one crucial conviction: human beings are made for possession.⁵³ That idea, that we were “made for possession,” may sound strange to Western ears, but it is one that Paul would likely

agree with.⁵⁴ Our Mozambican friends connect easily with this idea that humans were made for possession and they understand that there is a drastic difference between being possessed by God's Holy Spirit and being possessed by a lesser spirit.⁵⁵ While many people in this context are filled with destructive, divisive, deceptive, and defective spirits—including the spirit of drunkenness—all of God's children can be filled with God's Holy Spirit. Behind this whole consideration of spirit possession is another helpful conviction: all songs are spiritual.⁵⁶ When we fill our lives with drinking songs it prepares us for possession by the spirit of drunkenness, whereas “songs, hymns, and spiritual songs” prepare us for the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God.

Conclusion

The experience of reading Paul's epistle in the “laboratory” of Mozambique helps us appreciate the depth of its significance. Dionysus serves as a vivid and appropriate representation of the spirit of drunkenness—embodying the duality and contrast between the close companion (“the friendly god who lavishes blessings”), and the angry drunk who could tear you to pieces (“the bestial and wild one”).⁵⁷ Through participation in his cult, a person could become part of a community, “incorporated into the thiasus,” as well as join “a sort of divine life” through possession.⁵⁸ As we have shown, wine was so

connected with the Dionysus cult that it is hard to imagine people in Ephesus not linking the two.⁵⁹ Some residents of the city would have been embedded in the mystery cult, seeing Dionysus as their guide to eternal life, while many others may have seen these occasions as a way to enjoy themselves, get drunk, and lose their inhibitions among friends.⁶⁰

Songs are pervasive, and it seems clear that due to the prevalence of the symposium and skolia, even non-initiates would have been very familiar with the connection between songs and possession. They would understand how this connection might require ethical instruction. Theilman reminds us of the orator Isocrates who warned Demonicus that “when the mind is impaired by wine, it is like chariots which have lost their drivers . . . The soul stumbles again and again when the intellect is impaired.”⁶¹ Paul's ethical instruction in Ephesians 5:18–19 addressed this very same milieu. It seems reasonable that the church in Ephesus would appreciate that in contrast to a life of drunken singing and possession by an unclean spirit, they have been called to swap those crooked songs, *skolia*, for songs, hymns, and spiritual songs that lead to goodness and order. This is an important word for churches in both Ephesus and Mozambique, and everywhere in between: to leave behind that twisted path and sing songs that give direction and life, songs that fill followers of Jesus with the Spirit of the living God. **IJFM**

Endnotes

- ¹ Ernest A. McFall, *Approaching the Nuer of Africa Through the Old Testament* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1970), 1–3, 90–93. Any appreciation of similarities, though, should not cause us to overlook differences.
- ² Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 252.
- ³ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 2–61. While Pauline authorship of Ephesus is a matter of debate, the Makua-Metto churches assume authorial authenticity. In light of this assumption and the reasonable argument for Pauline authorship, we will read this as a letter from the apostle Paul to the church in Ephesus.
- ⁴ After first encountering this way of interpreting the text, I did individual interviews (20–30 minutes) with five people and discussed these findings with small groups or classes of mostly men (over 100 total participants throughout the different stages in the development of these ideas).
- ⁵ The English translation of this term appears both as *skolia* and *scolia* in the literature.
- ⁶ Peter W. Gosnell, “Ephesians 5:18–20 and Mealtime Propriety,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44, no. 2 (1993): 366.
- ⁷ Gosnell, “Ephesians 5:18–20,” 366.
- ⁸ Richard A. Wright, “Drinking, Teaching, and Singing: Ephesians 5:18–19 and the Challenges of Moral Instruction at Greco-Roman Banquets,” *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Fall–Winter 2017): 93.
- ⁹ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, XV 694 a–b (Loeb Classical Library No. 345. trans. Charles Burton Gulick, Vol. 7).
- ¹⁰ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, XV 694 a–b. See also *Lyra Graeca: Being the Remains of all the Greek Lyric Poets from Eumelus to Timotheus excepting Pindar*, Vol. III, Book 7 (Loeb Classical Library No. 144. trans. J. M. Edmonds), 549–555. “The course followed among them was skolios or ‘crooked’ owing to the arrangements of the couches in polygonal rooms, which made the seating irregular. Thus, the songs, according to these authorities, were not called crooked because of their metrical structure but because of the crooked course taken by the myrtle-twig as it passed from hand to hand.”
- ¹¹ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, XV 694c–695c. Additionally, there are the eighty-seven Orphic hymns, a collection dedicated to different deities, with two of them in honor of Dionysus. Marvin W. Meyer, ed., *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 103, 105, 108.
- ¹² Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, XV 695d.
- ¹³ *Lyra Graeca*, Vol. III, Book 7. Attic Scolia number 3 (Loeb Classical Library No. 144. trans. J. M. Edmonds). The collection contains 36 skolia.
- ¹⁴ “But the character of the Ionians today is more voluptuous, and the character of their mode is much altered. They say that Pythermus of Teos composed lyric scolia (σκολιά) in this kind of mode, and since the poet was an Ionian the mode was called Ionian . . . it is to be

- believed that Pythermus, being from Ionia, made the style of his lyrics fit the character of the Ionians.” Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, XIV, 625c–d (Loeb Classical Library No. 235, trans. Charles Burton Gulick, Vol. 4).
- ¹⁵ While the Seikilos epitaph, appearing on a memorial stele found in modern day Turkey (not far from the city of Ephesus), is referred to by some as the “Skolion of Seikilos” and is one of the oldest musical compositions including notation surviving today (usually dated from around the time of the New Testament), it is unlikely that this should be classified as a drinking song. For more on the Seikilos inscription see Warren D. Anderson, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Greece* (London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 222–227. For a summary of the debate surrounding the classification of the song as *skolia* or not, see Peter Jeffery, “The Lost Chant Tradition of Early Christian Jerusalem: Some Possible Melodic Survivals in the Byzantine and Latin Chant Repertories,” *Early Music History*, Vol. 11 (1992): Footnotes 37, 167, 170.
- ¹⁶ Derek Collins, *Master of the Game: Competition and Performance in Greek Poetry*, Hellenic Studies Series 7, (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2004), 109. This competitive spirit can be seen in the “numerous ritual contexts in ancient Greece that call for joking and abuse, generally termed αἰσχρολογία ‘obscurity’” (225). A term Paul also uses in Ephesians 5:4. Instead of using singing prowess to show sexual dominance (57), a type of playing (παίλειν) that contained a serious, dark side (63), Paul picks three different Greek words when he encourages Christians to speak, sing, and make melodies.
- ¹⁷ Plutarch, *Moralia, Table-Talk*, Book VII, 706A–B, 712F–713F (Loeb Classical Library No. 425, trans. Edwin Minar, F. H. Sandbach, and W. C. Helmbold, Vol. IX).
- ¹⁸ Gosnell, 367. See Plutarch, *Moralia, Table-Talk*, 1.1.614 (Loeb Classical Library No. 424, trans. P. A. Clement and H. B. Hoffleit, Vol. VIII).
- ¹⁹ Cleon L. Rogers, “The Dionysian Background of Ephesians 5:18,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136, no. 543 (July–September 1979): 253. While the cult of Dionysus “certainly involved drunkenness . . . this vice was not limited to just the one cult. Achilles Tatius relates, ‘It was the festival of Artemis and drunken people were roaming everywhere, so that all night long a crowd filled the entire agora’ (Leuc. Cli. 6.3).” Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, Paideia Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007): 25.
- ²⁰ Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, trans. Antonia Nevill, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 294. Turcan goes on to reference “a whole series of figured monuments—frescoes, stuccoes, terracotta plaques . . . picturesque reliefs, sarcophagi, mosaic floors—in the imperial period illustrates certain aspects of the initiatory ritual, at least allusively or symbolically.”
- ²¹ Marvin W. Meyer, ed., *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 63. For more see, Susan Guettel Cole, “New Evidence for the Mysteries of Dionysos,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 21, no. 3 (Autumn 1980): 233.
- ²² Turcan, *Cults of the Roman Empire*, 295.
- ²³ Euripides, Vol. 3, *The Bacchanals*, line 280–1 (Loeb Classical Library No. 11, trans. Arthur S. Way, Vol. 3).
- ²⁴ Euripides, Vol. 3, *The Bacchanals*, line 70–75. The root word for hymn matches one of the song words used by Paul in Ephesians 5.
- ²⁵ Euripides, Vol. 3, *The Bacchanals*, line 115–119.
- ²⁶ Euripides, Vol. 3, *The Bacchanals*, line 298–306.
- ²⁷ For more on inspiration by inebriation in the Dionysus cult and other bacchanalia, see Yochanan Lewy, *Sobria Ebrietas: Untersuchungen Zur Geschichte Der Antiken Mystik, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche* (Beiheft 9. Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1929).
- ²⁸ Turcan, *Cults of the Roman Empire*, 311. Hymns were even regulated by the Bacchic association; one set of rules notes that “no one is permitted to recite a speech (or: perform a hymn [?]) unless the priest or vice priest gives permission.” Richard S. Ascough, Philip A. Harland, and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., *Associations in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook* (Waco, TX: de Gruyter, 2012), 15.
- ²⁹ Ascough, Harland, and Kloppenborg, *Associations*, 244.
- ³⁰ Sue Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 166.
- ³¹ Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, 166.
- ³² Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, 167.
- ³³ Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, trans. Robert B. Palmer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1965), 134. See Apollodorus, *The Library* 3.5.2 (Loeb Classical Library No. 121, trans. J. G. Frazer, Vol. 1); and Nonnos, *Dionysiaca*, 45–47 (Loeb Classical Library No. 356, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, Vol. 3).
- ³⁴ Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives, Antony*, XXIV, 3–6 (Loeb Classical Library No. 101, trans. Bernadette Perrin, Vol. 9).
- ³⁵ Maria Aurenhammer, “Sculptures of Gods and Heroes from Ephesus,” in Helmut Koester, *Ephesos: Metropolis of Asia*, Harvard Theological Studies 41 (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 267.
- ³⁶ Richard E. Oster, “Ephesus as a Religious Center under the Principate, I. Paganism before Constantine”; German title: “Religion (Heidentum: die religiösen Verhältnisse in den Provinzen [Forts.],)” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, Teil II: Principat; Band 18:3 (New York, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 1673. In addition to epigraphical and numismatic evidence of the influence of Dionysus in Ephesus, “noteworthy is the fact that the month Lenaeon, sacred for Dionysia, was part of the Ephesian calendar” (1673–4). And it seems that even after the time of Paul, Dionysus was still affecting the church in Ephesus. Oster notes that, “a later Christian work entitled ‘Martyrium Timothei’ records a celebration of the Dionysian activities which resulted in the supposed martyrdom of the Bishop of Ephesus, Timothy.” (1674).
- ³⁷ For more on the sanctuaries, inscriptions, and statues in Ephesus related to Dionysus see Aurenhammer, “Sculptures,” 267–269. Also, for more on inscriptions see Stanley E. Porter, “Ephesians 5:18–19 and its Dionysian Background,” in *Testimony and Interpretation: Early Christology in its Judeo-Hellenistic Milieu Studies in Honour of Petr Pokorný*, eds. Jiří Mrázek and Jan Roskovec (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 68–80.

- ³⁸ Turcan, *Cults of the Roman Empire*, 312–313. Philo of Alexandria comments on *thiasoi* whose fellowships were not founded on good principles. See Ascough, Harland, and Kloppenborg, *Associations*, 245.
- ³⁹ Turcan, *Cults of the Roman Empire*, 312.
- ⁴⁰ Turcan, *Cults of the Roman Empire*, 312.
- ⁴¹ Dio Chrysostom, Vol. 1 (Loeb Classical Library No. 257. Trans. J. W. Cohoon, Vol. 1), 49.
- ⁴² Dio Chrysostom, Vol. 1, 2.62.
- ⁴³ Dio Chrysostom, Vol. 1, 2.63.
- ⁴⁴ Dio Chrysostom, Vol. 1, 2.64ff.
- ⁴⁵ Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 273–4. For an exploration of the meaning of being filled with the Spirit in connection with Old Testament texts and Luke see C. John Collins, “Ephesians 5:18: What Does πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι Mean?” *Presbyterion* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 12–30.
- ⁴⁶ Porter, “Ephesians 5:18–19 and its Dionysian Background,” 73. As we noted earlier, Euripides’ *The Bacchanals* (line 281) refers to being filled with wine, while in Ephesians 5:18 it is used in reference to the Spirit.
- ⁴⁷ Clinton Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2010), 350.
- ⁴⁸ Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 348.
- ⁴⁹ For more on the exhortation to swap drinking songs for spiritual songs in the early Church, see Johannes Quasten, *Music & Worship in Pagan & Christian Antiquity*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Washington, DC: National Association of Pastoral Musicians, 1973), 121–122.
- ⁵⁰ I am deeply appreciative of Cruz Francisco Aquita’s help in transcribing and translating these songs.
- ⁵¹ For more on honor and shame in Africa see Andrew Mbuvi, “African Theology from the Perspective of Honor and Shame,” in *The Urban Face of Mission*, eds. Harvie M. Conn, Manuel Ortiz, and Susan S. Baker (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), 279–95.
- ⁵² Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 82.
- ⁵³ I am indebted to Phil Henderson for introducing me to this idea.
- ⁵⁴ Romans 7 and 8, for example, contrast how being led, controlled, or indwelt by “sin” is different than being led, controlled, or indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Romans 7:20; 8:5–7; and 8:14).
- ⁵⁵ One example that has been helpful is to think of human beings as cups. We were made to have our souls filled by something—and we will be filled by something. If nature abhors a vacuum, then it is even more true in the spiritual realm (e.g., Luke 11:24–26). And whatever we are filled with can’t remain hidden for long. There is a spillover effect into the rest of our lives.
- ⁵⁶ I am grateful to my daughter, Ellen Grace Howell, for naming this simple truth so succinctly.
- ⁵⁷ Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 110.
- ⁵⁸ Turcan, *Cults of the Roman Empire*, 311. He goes on to note Bacchic inscriptions that list names of 420 members of the *thiasos* with various titles.
- ⁵⁹ It seems like the place of wine and the Dionysus cult would be similar to my experience of African Traditional Religion in Mozambique, in that while few people are deeply committed, most people are certainly connected.
- ⁶⁰ Susan G. Cole, “Landscapes of Dionysus and Elysian Fields” in *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults*, ed. Michael Cosmopoulos (New York: Routledge, 2003), 205, 211, 237. Cole also notes one tablet in particular whose text may be of Ionian origin (201).
- ⁶¹ Frank Theilman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, eds. Robert Yarbrough, and Robert Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 358.

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