

ΚΡΟΝΙΔΑΣ ΖΕΥΣ: EURIPIDES BACCHAE 95

In the *parodos* of the *Bacchae* the chorus of Asian maenads explains the circumstances of Dionysus' birth. After the pregnant Semele was stricken by the thunderbolt and sent the fetal Dionysus from her womb, Zeus received and hid him in his thigh to conceal him from Hera (94–98)¹:

λοχίους δ' αὐτίκα νιν δέ-
ξατο θαλάμαις Κρονίδας Ζεύς, 95
κατὰ μηρῶ δὲ καλύψας
χρυσέαισιν συνερείδει
περόναις κρυπτὸν ἄφ' Ἡρας.

Understandably the story of Dionysus' double birth with the concealment in Zeus' thigh described here has attracted much interest; but one detail of Euripides' account has failed to attract proper attention, the adjective used to describe Zeus, Κρονίδας. Although common in epic, Pindar and Bacchylides², this patronymic was extremely rare in tragedy. It occurs nowhere in Aeschylus³, once in Sophocles (*Trach.* 128), and twice in Euripides (*Hec.* 474 and in this passage in *Bacchae*)⁴. The adjective is thus marked and given prominence by its rarity. Why did Euripides choose this word here? J. Roux, the play's only commentator even to address the issue, suggests that the word, with its epic associations, lends a "saveur homérique . . . peu édifiante mais traditionnelle" to the tale⁵. But another of Zeus' many epic epithets (e.g., μητίετα, εὐρύσπα, or πατήρ, all of which could fit readily into the ionic *a minore* rhythm of the song) could have served this purpose. The word's context suggests a more particular reason for its selection.

In this passage Zeus is described keeping his own child hidden by concealing him in his own body (καλύψας and κρυπτὸν together highlight this). Zeus' father Cronus also hid his children in his own body (for a different purpose, of course) in the story well known from Hesiod's account in the *Theogony* (453 ff.). Euripides employs this patronymic, which draws attention to itself by its rarity in tragic diction, to call to mind Zeus' own father and his actions. He thereby enriches the narrative with the reference to the earlier tale and suggests a contrast between Zeus' beneficial action here (he saves his son) and Cronus' hostile and nearly ruinous action against his children. By alluding to the well known tale, Euripides highlights the positive nature of Zeus' behavior towards his son. And this is in keeping with

1) The text cited is that of G. Murray, *Euripidis Fabulae*, vol. 3, 2nd ed. (Oxford 1913).

2) It occurs, in its Ionic form Κρονίδης, over forty times in Homer and sixteen in Hesiod (the alternate patronymic Κρονίων is also very common); and it is found fourteen times in Pindar (of which occurrences four are in the plural) and six times in Bacchylides.

3) Κρόνυε is found at [PV] 577.

4) Forms of the adjective Κρόνιος are found at *Tr.* 1288 and [Rh.] 36.

5) Euripide: *Les Bacchantes*, vol. 2 (Paris 1972) ad 94–95. Roux, it should be pointed out, also comments on the word's rarity in tragedy.

the emphasis given in the play, especially in the immediately preceding prologue (e.g., 1–3, 26–31, 41–42), to Zeus as father of Dionysus⁶).

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6) C. Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (Princeton 1982) 179, without commenting on the word's rarity in tragedy, refers in passing to the significance of the epithet here. His interpretation is psychoanalytic in general ("For Dionysus too there are hints of the savage father and hostile Evil Mother") and in this particular the opposite of the one I propose.