

## About Alfred Baeumler's Nietzsche. 3. 'Bachofen and Nietzsche'

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DOI: [10.36348/jaep.2023.v07i11.005](https://doi.org/10.36348/jaep.2023.v07i11.005)

| Received: 08.10.2023 | Accepted: 14.11.2023 | Published: 17.11.2023

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### Abstract

In this third part, we present the English translation of the text 'Bachofen and Nietzsche', written by the philosopher Alfred Baeumler. Baeumler's text explores the relationship between Friedrich Nietzsche and Johann Jakob Bachofen, two influential figures in the fields of philosophy, anthropology, and history. Baeumler argues that Nietzsche's philosophy was deeply influenced by Bachofen's ideas on matriarchy, Antiquity, and the feminine. Baeumler suggests that Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian was inspired by Bachofen's theory of the chthonic and the matriarchal. Baeumler also argues that Bachofen's ideas on matriarchy and the feminine challenged the traditional patriarchal order of Western civilization, and that Nietzsche's philosophy continued this challenge by advocating for a new, life-affirming culture based on the principles of the Dionysian. Finally, Baeumler suggests that Nietzsche's philosophy can be seen as a critical response to Bachofen's romanticism, and that it offers a more nuanced and complex understanding of the relationship between the past and the present.

**Keywords:** Friedrich Nietzsche, Alfred Baeumler, matriarchy, Antiquity, historicism, Hegel, Fichte, Burckhardt, Dionysus.

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### INTRODUCTION

As a new contribution for the analysis of the different aspects of the works of the philosopher Alfred Baeumler, we present here the English translation of its text entitled 'Bachofen and Nietzsche', appeared during year 1929. See parts 1 and 2 of this series for Baeumler's biographical data (Gómez-Jeria, 2023a, 2023b).

Johann Jakob Bachofen (born 22 December 1815) was an antiquarian, anthropologist, jurist,

philologist, and professor of Roman law at the University of Basel from 1841 to 1845. Although he was born in Basel, his family was originally from Germany. His father was a prominent lawyer and politician in Basel. Bachofen studied at the universities of Basel, Berlin, and Göttingen, where he was a student of the famous historian Barthold Georg Niebuhr, who influenced his interest in antiquity. During his studies, he became fluent in several ancient languages, including Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit.

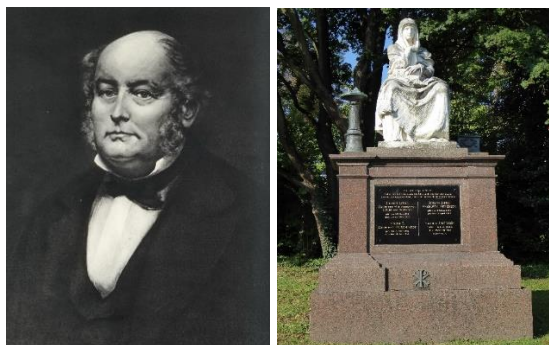


Figure 1: Left. Johann Jakob Bachofen. Right. Bachofen's tomb

In 1841, Bachofen traveled to Italy and Sicily, where he studied archaeological sites and works of art from antiquity. These trips were decisive in his formation as a historian. He resigned his university professorship in 1845 to devote himself to his research independently, living off his personal fortune for the rest of his life. Bachofen specialized in the study of various ancient civilizations, such as Lycia, Crete, Greece, Egypt, India, and Spain, and sought to reconstruct their history from myths, traditions, and symbols. His research focused on the prehistory of humankind and the origin of social and political institutions.

His theories were rejected by his contemporaries as speculative and method-devoid, and certain scholars have argued that his theories lack solid empirical evidence and that his focus on matriarchy as the original form of social organization is simplistic. Specifically, anthropologists like Lewis Henry Morgan dismissed Bachofen's ideas due to lack of evidence. Morgan believed human society developed from primitive to civilized rather than from matriarchal to patriarchal as Bachofen theorized. Historians also took issue with Bachofen's reliance on myth and literature rather than physical artifacts and records. Classicists like Karl Otfried Müller argued that there was no trace of matriarchal society in their studies of ancient civilizations. Additional scholars who rejected Bachofen's theories include: Edward Tylor, anthropologist, believed matriarchy was an erroneous theory, James Frazer, anthropologist, found no solid evidence for Bachofen's matriarchal ideas, Emile Durkheim, sociologist, called Bachofen's work 'conjectural', Max Weber, sociologist, dismissed Bachofen as unscientific, Jane Ellen Harrison, classicist, critiqued Bachofen's 'romantic symbolism', and Jacob Burckhardt, historian, considered Bachofen's ideas unfounded.

Despite these criticisms, his work remains important in the development of gender theory, family history, the study of family structures, and in the discussion of the role of women in society. Only in the 1970s with the rise of feminist scholarship did Bachofen's theories find more positive reassessment.

Bachofen died on 20 November 1867 in Basel. Although he had little recognition during his lifetime, his ideas and theories have been valued and have inspired numerous thinkers and writers, such as Joseph Campbell, Friedrich Engels, Robert Graves, Thomas Mann, and Rainer Maria Rilke. His most famous work, *The Matriarchy: An Inquiry into the Religious and Legal Character of Matriarchy in the Ancient World* continues to be an important reference in the study of society and culture (Bachofen, 1987; Bachofen & Manheim, 1967; Bachofen & Partenheimer, 2007).

We have made every effort to make a good translation without betraying the substance of the text.

### **Text of 'Bachofen and Nietzsche' by Prof. Dr. Alfred Baeumler (Baeumler, 1929)**

Towards the end of 1876, just at the time of his stay in Sorrento, Nietzsche received a letter from his friend Overbeck from Basel, at the end of which we read: 'The Bachofens, who paid us a visit yesterday, send you many greetings. Bachofen, as he himself often does, invites you to stay away from everything that is outdated.' This passage is one of the few truthful information we have about the personal relationship between Bachofen and Nietzsche. In the first place, we are struck by the unusual fact of a piece of advice addressed to Nietzsche. The considerable age difference between the two (about 29 years, or almost a generation) can be cited as a motivation, which would have been reflected in their relationship. The older one tries to guide and advise the younger one, even through a letter from a colleague. We hardly believe that such a caring and paternal attitude would have been to the liking of the young Nietzsche, restless and conscious of his worth. Rather, we should assume the opposite: Nietzsche was not at all accustomed to being treated in this way. The hearts of the younger ones were open to him, while the older ones, like his teachers Ritschl and Burckhardt, had great respect for him.

We do not know what Burckhardt was really thinking about himself in the course of his relationship with Nietzsche. There is also a certain difference in age between Burckhardt and Nietzsche, although this difference is less than that between Bachofen and Nietzsche, amounting to 26 years; the age difference between Burckhardt and Nietzsche is, however, less relevant since Burckhardt was celibate. Their attitude towards each other is that of two celibate colleagues, united by common interests and ideas. On the other hand, in his relationship with Bachofen, Nietzsche does not have to deal with an eagle that nests alone and which he accompanies in flight, sometimes even managing to fly higher: on the contrary, in this case the bourgeois home of the Bachofen, spacious, comfortable, and respectable, with the imprints of the will of the householder who behaves like a patriarch, is opened to Nietzsche.

In the Bachofen dwelling, which overlooks Cathedral Square, any guest must submit to a strict law, and if he ever breaks it, he is subject to an equally severe reprimand. It is true that Nietzsche cares about good manners, but he also knows how to see the difference between the social tenor of the secret councilor of Naumburg and the life of the patriciate of Basel, that is, between the social conventions of the higher officials of Central Germany and the rigid tradition of the old bourgeoisie of Basel. Even in the good manners dictated by the best education, Nietzsche was wont to reveal his state of mind, and for this reason he can only perceive around him nothing but commiseration and even ill-concealed astonishment. And in particular, once in front of the grand piano, he no longer notices either conventions or good manners. His lyrical-orgiastic

euphoria is unheard of in Bachofen's house, and we should not be surprised if his piano displays are abhorred here.

On the other hand, the discipline of the Bachofen house, however, all the joviality and cordiality of the householder, is absolutely alien to Nietzsche. The Bachofen house is so strange to him that it seems to him almost like a boulder thrown into the path of his life, a boulder that he surrounds in contemptuous silence.

Bachofen's name does not appear either in Nietzsche's edited works or in the published portions of his legacy. On June 18, 1871, Nietzsche borrowed from the University Library of Basel Bachofen's first work on myth, 'Study on the Funerary Symbolism of the Ancients'. Only those who do not know the customs of scholars will infer from this that Nietzsche has actually read Bachofen's volume. We know that, from Nietzsche, Bachofen appreciated 'The Birth of Tragedy'; while we have no Nietzsche judgment of Bachofen. Perhaps, this is evident in those phrases in which Nietzsche relates the sound of a warm contralto voice with the idea that there are women destined to dominate men: here he recalls his colloquies with Bachofen. We should rather speak of a more general influence of Bachofen on Nietzsche, for in this respect, that is, in the field of the study of antiquity, we find no allusion of Nietzsche to Bachofen.

This silence is all the more singular if we consider that Nietzsche is always looking for those who do not share the 'madness of progress' of his time. Among these, in addition to Schopenhauer, Wagner and Burckhardt, there is also Bachofen. The pessimism of the latter – if it can be said so, since it is not a philosophical conviction, since Bachofen did not study Schopenhauer or the other philosophers of modernity – is born of a personal intuition and of the awareness of an irreparable loss, of an abyss of decadence, from which neither individuals nor people are able to detach themselves by their own strength.

For Bachofen world history is a struggle between two principles, and not an incessant 'progress in the consciousness of freedom', within which each evolutionary stage must be considered in the light of success and vice versa. But at one-point Bachofen is optimistic: his conviction is that Christianity has imposed itself on the world once and for all. On the whole, despite many setbacks, human evolution proceeds gradually from the lowest plane of matriarchy to the highest plane of patriarchy. That is why Bachofen considers the evolutionary present positively, since it is integrated into Christianity, that is, into a patriarchal religion. Under the protective mantle of this religion, Bachofen feels safe. Under the shelter of the Cathedral, he reads its Greek and Roman authors, and observes their votive vases and stelae. For Bachofen, Christianity and classical antiquity constitute two totally separate spheres and, at the same time, redirected to the same impersonal

unity, to which both seem to converge in the course of human history.

Just as the Christian and the ancient epochs are distinctly separated on the historical plane, while at the same time partaking of the same historical unity, so Bachofen separates and unifies with great ease, within his work, the Christian, and the ancient elements. There can be no conflict between these two elements: Christianity is ultimately victorious, but antiquity departed with the highest honors and its religious symbols remain imperishable signs of the eternal tension of the human mind.

Nietzsche behaves in a radically opposite way! He, too, shows an exclusive interest in spiritual greatness which is precisely called Christianity and antiquity. But the epistolary passage quoted at the beginning of this essay clearly refers to the crux of this diversity. Bachofen advises the young Nietzsche, 'as he himself is wont to do', to stay away from everything that is outdated. Bachofen looks at Nietzsche very differently from how we see him today. In Nietzsche we distinguish a fighter of his time, while Bachofen shows an aversion to what is 'outdated'. And why? Bachofen, in keeping with his contemplative nature, lives in timelessness. He notices the relevance of Christianity and antiquity, despite having passed away, and he glimpses continuity from the perspective of the symbol. The gaze that lingers serenely on the Mediterranean coasts transcends the mass of ideas of its time.

Bachofen is completely indifferent to the present, to this time. He considers even a single minute spent on modern ideas wasted. Christianity is the only modern element that it takes into consideration. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, it is quite the opposite: he too sees modernity in Christianity and vice versa. *But Christianity is essentially what it does not accept, for it represents the veil of fog that covers the solar landscape of antiquity.* We are no longer allowed to see, look, and enjoy the view. Nietzsche turns incessantly from the present to the past, and from the past back to the present. And since he wants to decide, he continues to ask himself these questions: what attitude should we assume today towards antiquity and Christianity? Who are we? Are we Greeks or Christians? And what should we be? Nietzsche's spiritual development can only be understood in the light of these pressing questions. But we must also avoid the mistake of believing that in Nietzsche there was a 'conflict' between the pagan world and the Christian world.

In Christianity Nietzsche immediately saw the adversary: and not because he himself was a half-Christian or in a room, but because he perceived life in a pagan way, and from this life perceived in a pagan way he felt compelled to strike an attack on modern Christianity. Nietzsche appears to us in his indomitable attitude as a fighter against Christianity, as emerges from

the background of 'The Birth of Tragedy' and 'Untimely Considerations'. For Nietzsche, the question of antiquity is inseparable from the modern Christian world. In this regard, the unpublished untimely consideration entitled 'We the Philologists' seems decisive. In this essay, Nietzsche sets out to consider antiquity from the highest perspective, seeking to examine the 'philosophical premises of classical philology'.

Nietzsche asks (and the genius consists precisely in the simplicity with which the question is posed here): how can antiquity be 'classical', that is, constitute a model for a type of culture that declares itself Christian? The answer goes like this: it may be because of the imperfection of modern man, and in particular because of the vileness and mendacity of the man of science. 'Classical culture! If only there were at least that little bit of paganism which Goethe recognized and praised in Winckelmann, and it would never be too much! But now there is all the mendacious modern Christianity in addition to or even mixed with classical culture; this is too much for me and I can barely contain myself from vomiting.' Classical philology 'mixed' with Christianity embitters Nietzsche.

He contrasts the real Greeks and the humanist philologists: 'The Greeks are for the symbolic element and possess a free virility and a pure view of the world; philologists have no attitude towards the symbol, they are servants to the manger of the State, clumsy Christians.'

And how Christian one must be to consider the Greeks among the first monotheists! Here is Nietzsche mocking Welcker, the highest authority in the philological field. 'A real propensity for antiquity makes anti-Christians.' Nietzsche's contemporaries are blamed for having made classical studies take a harmless turn. It was this turn that transformed him into a mere 'scholar', which deep down he still is. In a neutral study you can put everything together, even paganism and Christianity. But we only want what we feel and think, we live precisely before the need to make a choice.

Nietzsche makes his decision: in 'The Birth of Tragedy' he has maintained a hostile silence on Christianity. The task of 'Untimely Considerations' is to bring an ancient spiritual attitude into dynamic expression. The struggle against the epoch itself, which they inaugurate, is the struggle against that Christianity which has determined this epoch.

To the ideal context of the essay entitled 'We Philologists' belong the same lectures on 'The Future of Our Schools', given by Nietzsche in Basel in the winter of 1872; conferences which, because of their historical significance, I have no qualms about equating Fichte's 'Discourses on the German Nation'. Nietzsche states in the second lecture that the feeling for Hellenism, once awakened, immediately makes itself felt with arrogance.

'Antiquity renders it out of date', we read in 'We Philologists'.

At this point we must complete the interpretation of the epistolary passage quoted at the beginning. Bachofen cannot help but see in the 'unactual' Nietzsche the Antichrist who is hostile to him, while Nietzsche glimpses in Bachofen's exhortation the ignorance of his innermost feeling. With the publication of 'Human, All Too Human', Nietzsche's frequentation of the Bachofen house was interrupted. The contrast that has always existed between the two thus leads to a definitive clarification. The moment Nietzsche explicitly proclaims himself an opponent of Christianity, Bachofen bids him farewell once and for all. No other solution would have been possible, considering its characteristics.

In the contrast between the two, which by chance brought them together in Basel, the problem of modern culture appears as clearly as ever before. Modern culture is founded on both antiquity and Christianity; the ancient and the Christian elements are everywhere intermingled in the modern mind, and in particular precisely in the modern sciences of antiquity. The modern soul can be examined from the classical philologists; referring to the same model, Nietzsche has investigated the irresolution and incompleteness, the ambiguity and 'dialectic' of modern man. It is not by chance that dialectics is spoken of here: in the 'culture' of his time Nietzsche actually combats Hegel's dialectic. The modern philologist as a servant of the state: in him the Hegelian system is realized.

Hegel had shown how antiquity and Christianity can be 'reconciled' in a big way. He was Hölderlin's friend and truly loved antiquity. But he also wanted to be the philosopher of Christianity, the final moment of the Reformation. Impelled by this necessity, Hegel configured his dialectic in this way: the thesis put forward by antiquity, which in Logic corresponds to pure being, to pure affirmation, is followed by the antithesis of Christianity, in Logic by pure negativity. Thus Hegel sets out to erect the cathedral of his system out of affirmation and negation, of idealized antiquity and secularized Christianity. But what Hegel erects here is only the cathedral of cultural formation; therefore, not an authentic Gothic cathedral, but an example of neo-Gothic, of an artificial Gothic. It is only in the man of culture that antiquity and Christianity are reconciled effortlessly, that is, dialectically.

The whole process takes place, in fact, in the realm of speculation: absolute spirit is 'substance', which is what some of the ancients thought. But it is also a 'subject', in the sense of Christianity. Hegel was proud of his task of unifying the system of substance with that of the subject. The philologist moves within the same dialectic. If, on the one hand, one has been a Christian, on the other, one assumes antiquity by becoming a classic, but of course only as a matter of taste. Thus a



weakened Christianity is connected with a benevolent aestheticism. One consoles oneself with the fact of historical fact that antiquity has been 'superseded' by Christianity. Once this is established, you can safely move on to the ancients. In this way, the sciences of antiquity become a historical discipline, while Christianity becomes a historical problem.

Modern historicism is all here: the Hegelian system symbolically foreshadows it. Historicism, 'culture', means this: neither paganism nor Christianity is taken seriously anymore. Historicism becomes the content of 'generalized state instruction' according to the Prussian model, that is, of that state culture which Nietzsche first combated in his Basel lectures.

If we define the historicism of the nineteenth century in the way it did a moment ago, that is, as a neutralization of Christianity through antiquity and vice versa, we see in Bachofen and Nietzsche, reunited in their time, the true bitter enemies of Hegelian cultural optimism. In contrast to the veiled connection between antiquity and Christianity, Bachofen and Nietzsche oppose the separation of the two spheres. Bachofen and Nietzsche, within their respective perspectives, dissolve the Hegelian synthesis: in this respect, they can be approximated to Kierkegaard, whose pseudonymous writings are all destined to the task of sharply redrawing the line of demarcation between paganism and Christianity. And if the friends of antiquity are to recognize how, within modern culture, Christianity has entirely corrupted antiquity, a true Christian, like Kierkegaard, cannot fail to see how, within that same culture, Christianity has in turn been radically distorted by antiquity.

For Bachofen, whose thought is all marked by the unity between the study of ancient symbolism and the Protestant faith, nothing seems more absurd than the division between paganism and Christianity! In Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, on the other hand, the distinction between the two worlds emerges. From his earliest works, Nietzsche considers such a separation an inescapable necessity, a principle dictated by intellectual honesty. For Kierkegaard, the radical elimination of any pagan element from the notion of Christianity constitutes the task assigned by Providence on the basis of the need of its time. But is it possible to find in Bachofen's thought any element in favor of the split?

Yes, Bachofen does not shy away from such a problem. The distinction is implicit in its peculiar relation to antiquity. Bachofen approached antiquity on the basis of internal and external presuppositions radically opposed to those of Nietzsche. Bachofen envisioned his path not as a philologist, but as a legal historian and archaeologist. In Bachofen, the vision of antiquity developed independently of the idea that modern aesthetics has made of the ancients, nourished only by the deepest experiences of the scholar, by

maternal love and by the link with the historical school of law and with the romanticism of Heidelberg.

Bachofen's is a true contemplation, not an ethical-aesthetic conception. He does not confront texts in which the aesthetic perspective culminates but deals with codes and legal documents that immediately introduce him into the life of the ancients. Subsequently, his gaze was fixed on the sepulchral chambers and funerary vessels, then always on real and visible elements. Well, Nietzsche also turned his gaze to the Greeks, but paying more attention to feeling than to reality. With gallant arrogance and without lingering too long on preliminaries, he sketched out a new and daring sentiment of antiquity: Nietzsche had nothing to do with empirical inquiry. The inner vision and the intoxicating aroma of ancient Greece are enough for him.

Bachofen, on the other hand, whose masters already predominate empirical inquiry, feels the need to see with his own eyes the relics of the ancient world. Basically, Nietzsche and Bachofen differ because while the former never felt the need to have before him the ruins of the Hellenic temples, the latter finds peace only after 'having become acquainted with the principal scenes of the ancient world'.

Considered from the perspective of philology, in Bachofen the absence of inhibitions, typical of the amateur, represents only an epiphenomenon. Alongside it intervenes a deeper and more substantial freedom, which I only define and in the opposite direction as the absence of 'humanitarianism'. The latter represents the ultimate and largely abstract effort to reunify paganism and Christianity. The young Nietzsche opposed with all his might the realization of this historical perspective. 'The *human* to which antiquity refers should not be confused with the *Human*' (3[12] in (Nietzsche, 2008)). Or again: 'How is it possible to consider the ancients only in the aspect of humanity!' Such a crisp exclamation is inconceivable in Bachofen, who never attempted to represent the ancients on the model of a classical humanity. He, on the other hand, always saw ancient humanity exclusively under the profile of the man of nature, without ever corrupting that image through the implication of ethical value judgments.

Bachofen thoroughly grasped the 'double aspect' of man, which is both animal and spiritual. Bachofen knows nothing of man 'in himself', an entity of only spirit and person, since he does not start from a false and idealized image of man, nor does he dialectically surpass the animal; rather, it considers men and women for what they really are. Without being influenced by this moralism tending above all to 'moralize' the natural element, Bachofen's free gaze testifies to how nature penetrates man in depth. In its original meaning, 'nature' is identified with sex. Throughout his work on myth, Bachofen contests the bourgeois moralization of natural forces, the attempt of the benevolent to distort nature.



**Figure 2: The Triumph of Bacchus (Nicolas Poussin, 1594-1665)**



**Figure 3: The Triumph of Apollo (Stefano Tofanelli, 1752-1812)**

The nineteenth century knows no force more decidedly anti-bourgeois than the Bachofenian interpretation of the symbol; even the realism of the second half of the century does not succeed in uprooting bourgeois ethics as deeply as Bachofen did.

Let us now return to explain the disintegration of the bourgeois synthesis, which Bachofen's symbolism has effected on the basis of the sexual sphere. According to the current opinion, in love, and still more in marriage, the natural instinct is raised to a higher degree: in this way the natural instinct becomes ethical, directing itself to the good of the other and contributing to the preservation of the State. The ethicization of natural instinct corresponds to its psychological translation into poetry: in poetry, sexual life is transmuted into a sphere

of sublimated experiences. The ethicization of marriage and romantic literature go hand in hand.

Bachofen radically overcomes the ethical and psychological falsification of the sexual sphere thanks to the method by which, far from interpreting reality unilaterally or subjectively, in the light of personal ideas or desires, he puts himself in a position to grasp objective facts and to recognize the real potentialities of natural life in all their force and vigor.

In the sphere of sexual life and marriage, moral norms are not fulfilled, and values are not realized: instead, cosmic powers, divinities, are revealed. This realm certainly does not include individual experiences or 'sensations' that can be traced back to subjective pleasure, but rather profoundly significant universal

phenomena that continually return. The sexual relationship possesses within itself an unlimited depth. The changes in world history in the customs of associated life, the law and the State are closely connected with the changes in the relations between men and women. In the light of his analysis of the symbolic meaning of sexual intercourse, Bachofen has narrated the history of humanity in a radically new way. And this was possible for him because he knew how to listen like no other to the secret language of mute symbols, which includes nothing of what men usually say or think. What man thinks is by no means the deepest. The deepest realities are discovered, on the other hand, in what men do not know how to express and in what, without the need for words or thoughts, is protected and celebrated through worship and customary customs. Only those who understand the language of symbols are in a position to interpret the life they live and are transfused into it.

Bachofen turned his gaze to the past with an incomparable force of symbolic introspection. Among the hundreds of symbols he discovered, I would like to refer here only to those that refer to the various possible forms of coexistence between man and woman. In this regard, we are presented with a whole series of symbolic figures. Here we find the moist force that generates uninhibited, carefree fertility of the father: the symbol of the swamp. From the masculine side, the unknown, anonymous, indifferent parent corresponds to him.

Here we find the hetaira that is given to the first one who arrives: the symbol of Aphrodite. To this corresponds the tyrant, the sovereign who takes power from the woman (of essentially oriental origin). Then we find the Maenad, the Dionysian bacchante, the maddened woman who excites the man. It corresponds to the man who makes the woman fall in love, but then corrupts her and leads her to ruin: the symbol of Dionysus. Successively we are faced with the woman who lives within the marriage bond: the symbol of the fertility of the fields, the symbol of Demeter. Its corresponding is the Apollonian father who transmits his name to his children.

Bachofen shows a particular predilection for portraying the virgin hostile to man, the Amazon. The series closes with the Roman matron, who is subject by right to the male, but who nevertheless retains a high religious dignity. Its correspondent is the *pater familias*, the *dominus* of the woman, of the house, and of the State.

Through the study of ancient symbols and myths, Bachofen has illuminated all these figures and breathed fiery life into them from his own passionate interiority. Of particular suggestion in Bachofen is the vision of the world in which 'virile power' is represented as a 'leaf at the mercy of the wind': the matriarchal world. Bachofen teaches us to turn our gaze towards a dense network of feelings, thoughts, cults and customs, religious and legal systems that all revolve around the

power of natural fertility and its corresponding symbol, the woman-mother.

Within the religion of Mother Earth are intertwined birth and death, living and perishing, drunkenness and despair, songs of joy and funeral laments, all intoned in the same mournful horror: a chord that Bachofen never tired of resounding. He defines 'gynecocracy' as this cultural stage that has now disappeared in which female divinities are venerated. Bachofen was the first to bring back to light, from the bosom of Mother Earth of the ancient tradition, this 'epoch of the independent world' together with its 'original rules of life'.

Bachofen also found an ancient symbology for the asexual and immaterial substance, that is, for the spirit. The highest degree of patriarchy is the Apollonian, which is untouched by death or perishing. For Bachofen, the whole history of the cosmos and of man consists of the conflict between the material and feminine force, blindly stretched out to embrace, to procreation, but also destined to the funeral lament, and the paternal principle, immaterial and pure. And in the victory of the Apollonian principle, Bachofen glimpses the deep meaning of history.

He pauses to lovingly portray a moment of the conflict between the maternal, material principle, and the paternal, immaterial one. It is that phase of Greek history in which the tide of Dionysian delirium floods Helena. Dionysus, the male divinity, first induces women to furious madness. 'Caught in her bed, the woman then wanders furiously through the silent mountain peaks, in pursuit of the God, where he makes himself known by the cries he loves to utter on the heights. The maiden finds delight in the still-throbbing flesh of the freshly slaughtered kid, involuntary cruelty has no mercy for a flourishing young life [...]'. This is how Bachofen portrays the woman possessed by Dionysus: in her orgiastic fury, a mixture of religion and sensuality, she at times rises above the man.

In honor of Dionysus there stands not the 'chaste pedestal which befits Phoebus Apollo, the pure solar divinity which knows no change', but the savage dithyrambs, who calls Dionysus *dithyrambogenes*, the author of sudden changes of mood, ambiguity, and equivocations. Dionysus is the enigmatic divinity of the world in continual becoming, in whose honor fables and riddles are recited; Dionysus is never in relation to order and seriousness always equal to itself, but to mockery, deceit, rapture, fickleness, always inclined to illusion by changing colors, and closely united to dualism, destined to perish along with his own creation and buried at the feet of the Delphic god.

The description of the god Dionysus is the only passage in all of Bachofen's work that refers to Nietzsche: he too has depicted Dionysus as a labyrinthine



and enigmatic divinity, playful and cruel, deceitful and a lover of becoming. As for Bachofen, so for Nietzsche Apollo functions as an antithesis to Dionysus. Nietzsche declares that the contrast between Apollonian and Dionysian represents in the Greek soul one of the enigmas to which he has been most attracted when confronted with the Hellenic essence.

He tried to understand why it was precisely Greek Apollinism that emerged from the Dionysian substratum, noting how Apollo imposed himself precisely where Dionysus previously dominated. And so logic makes its appearance, prevailing over the whims of the passions, beauty triumphs over demonic monstrosity, order overcomes chaos, and divine proportion prevails over excess. The Nietzschean antithesis between Apollonian and Dionysian, that is, between 'measure' and 'excess', has nothing to do with the opposition expressed in Bachofen between Dionysian and Apollonian symbols.

In Bachofen, Dionysus and Apollo are contrasted not in terms of 'excess' and 'measure', but as earth and sky, the entities linked to matter and immaterial being. The antithesis between Dionysian and Apollonian in Bachofen coincides with that between 'chthonic' and 'uranic'.

Bachofen's influence and fame lie in the vastness and depth of his vision of myth. The flaws of Bachofen's work manifest themselves wherever it transcends history. Bachofen does not accept a distinction between historical time and mythical time, between historical inquiry and mythological inquiry. With caution and deep reflection, he revokes the boundary between the time of history and the time of myth, already drawn at the time by Schelling, taking the side in favor of the 'continuity of human evolution'. For Bachofen, the beginning and the end, myth and history are one and the same.

Anyone who wants to understand and love Bachofen to the end, without silencing his conscience, must reintroduce the boundaries between myth and history into his work. Such a distinction (which with Schelling I offer to Bachofen's interpretation) allows us to glimpse Bachofen's original intuition in all its grandeur and purity. His work can be read as pure mythology; this circumstance makes it possible to love Bachofen's work without a sacrifice of the intellect, a sacrifice that not all interpreters of Bachofen have been able to avoid.

Bachofen accesses historical time insofar as he understands it on the basis of mythology. Historical man has nothing to offer to the Bachofenian empirical method. Bachofen does not pretend to identify himself in the psyche of a member of the Hellenic city-state. There is always something impersonal in the symbols subjected to Bachofen's inquiry. In the men who create cults and

myths there are universal powers at work. The historical school has defined this universal-impersonal element as the 'spirit of the people'.

The world of the unconscious creation of the people, the world of symbols, remains alien to Nietzsche, who feels at ease on Greek soil, where the individual acts at the impulse of the Genius. By virtue of his instinct, Nietzsche has immediate access not to the mythical Greece of Theseus and Heracles, nor even to the aesthetic-philosophical Greece of Aristotle, but to that Greece still enveloped in the aura of a primal action. He has indeed set foot on the historical terrain, but at that precise point where it is still impregnated with the mythical night, showing the actions of primitive men in all their numinous splendor, and still nourishing themselves with the fertile nectar of myth.

Homer, Aeschylus, Heraclitus, Empedocles: these are the favorites of Nietzsche, who considers that with Socrates the decadence begins. But the significance of this astonishing assessment is not always fully understood. It is the direct consequence of the fact that Nietzsche from the beginning dwelt in heroic and primeval Hellas. It is precisely this heroic Hellas that is already sensibly imbued with history, that Bachofen does not know how to see, while Nietzsche lacks the vision of the religious reality of the symbol. For Nietzsche, myth remains essentially a poetic-theoretical creation. The Nietzschean reference to the mythical 'guild that has given birth to all that is Hellenic', after the Homeric work, nevertheless suffers from indeterminacy. Theogonic narratives are the only mythical element to which he has referred.

And yet Nietzsche conducts the psychological analysis of the Greek 'tragic' with incomparable genius. Nothing similar had yet been said in relation to greceity, nor had it been said: the joy that springs from pain, the interweaving of joy and cruelty, the excess of pain as pleasure, the becoming one with the primal pain and joy of being. These are the images with which Nietzsche has tried to express his youthful experiences. Later he defined his first work in these terms: 'A network of personal experiences that are all precocious and even rough, located in the confines of the communicable'; adding that the scientific problem constitutes his first theoretical interest. Have we not regarded 'The Birth of Tragedy' as a first fruits, with fearful respect offered in sacrifice to a Greek god, a burnt offering in honor of Dionysus? No, it is not this, but it expresses a 'countermovement', that is, a movement contrary to science, morality, Christianity. 'In this problematic book of mine, my instinct, the instinct that affirms life, has turned against morality, discovering at bottom a counter-theory and a counter-valuation of life, in essentially artistic and anti-Christian terms. How to define it then? As a philologist and a man of letters, I baptized him, not without a certain freedom—for who could know the true



name of the Antichrist?-, with the name of a Greek god: I called him a Dionysian.

Dionysus, then, is but an experimental acronym, a name which belongs to indicate something absolutely universal and actual; Dionysus represents Nietzsche's task as Antichrist. Although in 'The Birth of Tragedy' the disciple always speaks of a well-known god, he is not a disciple of the Greek god Dionysus. It is Nietzsche himself who admits it: it is I who invented Dionysus. What a blasphemous statement in Bachofen's ears! For those who cannot create or invent a god: gods exist to be understood by us in a symbolic way.

In recent critical literature on Nietzsche, the Dionysian phenomenon has been placed at the center of Nietzschean intellectual biography. But are Nietzsche's assertions about Dionysian Greekness really contained in the true understanding of its actual meaning and the core of his contribution to the interpretation of antiquity? The psychological side of the solitary ecstasy and its correlation with the Dionysian myth, both contained in 'The Birth of Tragedy', remain one of the most fascinating undertakings ever attempted by a young man. But do the Greeks have anything to do with a phenomenon that, deep down, springs from a modern soul drunk on music? And therefore of a music totally alien to the Greeks? In any respect, Nietzsche reveals himself to be a listener of Tristan trying to sketch the 'Dionysian phenomenon'. The author of 'The Birth of the Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music' is an enthusiastic cultivator of dissonance. It follows that Nietzsche did not intend to make a specific contribution to the understanding of Greek art and religion in his book.

In Nietzsche's terms, the antithesis of Dionysian and Apollonian has a general, and not specifically Greek, stamp, so much so that today it is applied a little everywhere. Nietzsche's first work is a hastily grown book and matured precociously in the tropical sun of Wagnerian genius. One cannot fail to see in the later 'Prologue' the impelling result of necessity and friendship. Now Richard Wagner's friend is going to violate the 'great Greek question' by introducing into it 'elements of modernity', that is, music, and in particular dissonance. It was Nietzsche's youthful and unconditional love of music and its genius that focused Nietzsche's early work precisely on the 'Dionysian phenomenon'.

If we look at the complete material, fragments, and essays, of the Basel Nietzsche, we find a radically different picture of Greekness. Thus we are presented with another Nietzsche. Instead of an exalted Dionysian there appears an indomitable fighter, a virile warrior; instead of the music-intoxicated mystic, the undaunted young man of the Untimely appears before our eyes. Dionysus is not spoken of in the 'Untimely Considerations': in them we find no passage that refers to 'The Birth of Tragedy'. And yet, the third of the

Untimely, 'Schopenhauer as an Educator', is the book of the young Nietzsche. He himself has claimed to have poured into it his own intimate adventures, his becoming, as well as his highest hopes. 'In him every word is lived, it is deep, intimate [...]'. ('Ecce homo'). Now, we wonder if it is possible that in a work which, for example, was entitled 'Nietzsche as an Educator', Dionysus is never mentioned in any respect. This would only be possible on the condition that the 'Dionysian' (in the musical sense) never constituted the most profound and significant thought of the young Nietzsche, and that it was the 'untimely' Nietzsche that had primacy over the 'Dionysian' Nietzsche.

What has truly fallen under Nietzsche's gaze, what has accompanied him all his life exhorting him to action, is not the Greek image of the 'Dionysian', but of the 'heroic'. That which in 'Schopenhauer as Educator' proves to be insurmountable, that is, the heroic existence of the individual, constitutes the most significant nucleus of Nietzsche's original vision of Greekness. 'To live means first and foremost to live dangerously.' This is Nietzsche!

This is not to say that the lyrical-musical Bacchus, the ecstatic enthusiast, is not Nietzsche. But such an ecstatic-lyrical aspect, provocatively propelled to the foreground, is only one element of the whole edifice: the aspect of sensibility, of the 'nervous and cerebral life grown too much' that Nietzsche recognizes even in his own Greeks. They show, no less than Nietzsche himself, also very well the other side: the vehemence and passion of the will. However, as 'The Gaya Science' teaches us, the will is 'the affection of command, the hallmark of self-control and force'. Such affection is no less 'anti-Christian' than Dionysian drunkenness.

This dynamic aspect of Nietzsche's work has proved particularly fruitful for a discovery of the first order, namely the discovery of the agon and its significance for Greek culture. To reveal the state of mind of the victor in the contest, the typical state of mind of a Greek: this is the crucial contribution that Nietzsche has offered us for the understanding of antiquity. Already as a student he had exercised with the theme 'The Homeric Strife'. It seems that his philosophical interest in the Greeks was inflamed precisely in this respect.

The excerpt from Nachlass on 'The Homeric Strife' is among the most instructive that Nietzsche has bequeathed to us. This short essay begins by contesting humanity celebrated as that which separates and distinguishes men from nature. Such a split, Nietzsche asserts, does not exist. 'Natural and human qualities have developed in close connection with each other.' Man is in everything and for all nature, carrying within himself a disturbing 'double' aspect: it is precisely the propensity to cruelty that is in fact the fertile ground from which all humanity develops. That is why the Greeks are

distinguished by the cruel and joyful aspect of the annihilation of the adversary, just as the tiger does, a characteristic that can also be seen in Alexander the Great, and which dominates the whole of Greek history and mythology, while we, who confront the Greeks on the basis of the soft image of modern humanity, we are thrown into terror.

In the Greek city-states, there is an ethic radically different from ours. In them, the triumph and rejoicing of the victor are justified. Nothing separates the Greek world from ours so much as the high regard in which it holds envy. In envy the Greek does not see a stain, but the reflection of a beneficent divinity. 'What an abyss separates the ethical judgment of the Greeks from ours!' The young Nietzsche projects his soul into the Heraclitean vision of a cosmos permeated by eternal conflict and subjected to eternal justice; That is why we can affirm that Nietzsche's inner nature is not expressed in 'The Birth of Tragedy', but in what he has said about Heraclitus. For it was Heraclitus who explained Hesiod's good Eris as the beginning of the world.

'It is the idea of the contest so pleasing to the Greeks and to the Greek state, that, from the gymnasiums and arenas, from the artistic contests, from the clash between the political parties and between the cities, it is transferred to the universe, so that the whole cosmic gear revolves around it.' This metaphysics of the agon is poetized in a powerful mythological image: what we perceive has no existence of its own, so there are no 'things', and the world consists only of victorious instants of one quality over another. Things are but 'the glaring gleam and sparkle of a drawn sword, and the luminous aura of victory in the struggle between opposite qualities.'

Nietzsche sees the warrior, victorious and conquering man come to the fore in Greek history. He has glimpsed in the depths of his own heroic feeling the will to victory and predominance that animates all Greeks: and this also allows him to transform the notion of agony into the hinge of Greek culture. The magic of the Nietzschean image of the agon rests on the fact that the struggle is entirely interpreted from the perspective of victory. No sacrifice is too costly, no pain too intense for victory!

It is here that the relationship between the Dionysian Nietzsche and the agonal Nietzsche comes into play. And perhaps it is precisely because of Wagner's music that today we understand the psychology of ecstasy, contained in 'The Birth of Tragedy', as split from the Greek agonal psychology. That joy in annihilation which is at the heart of the Dionysian phenomenon also plays a part in the state of mind aroused by victory. 'The cruelty of the victor represents the summit of the intoxication of life.' The 'Dionysian' linked to action and victory must be understood in a heroic and not a mythical sense. In Nietzschean terms, an

authentic expression of the 'Dionysian' would not be an ephemeral intoxication to live in solitude or between two, nor a mystical fervor in and of itself, all turned to interiority, but the intense cry of joy of the victor still shaken by the spasm of the struggle.

As is well known, it was not Nietzsche, but Jakob Burckhardt, who discovered the profound meaning of the agonal instinct in the Greeks. Burckhardt's 'History of Greek Culture' contains an extensive chapter on the Greek agon. But the difference between the Burckhardtian and the Nietzschean notion of agon is, in this respect, decisive. Burckhardt describes the agonal instinct from the outside, considering it a singular fact, something related to moments of danger and to events of death. These words of his about athletes are extremely significant: 'The fact that the whole of life is subordinated to a single moment of absolute tension cannot be regarded as a positive example of happiness; In the meantime you either lose any tension or fall prey to deep anxiety about the future.'

To devote one's whole life to a moment of tremendous tension, to tend one's whole existence to the victorious instant: this is precisely what Burckhardt on the one hand rejects with a poorly concealed shudder, while on the other hand Nietzsche accepts as the only thing capable of making life worth living. As far as the agonal instinct is concerned, Nietzsche has nothing to learn from Burckhardt, since he knows it well inwardly, and therefore represents it from within.

To represent the agony from the inside outwards, to justify envy, the good Eris of Hesiod: this is what it means to destroy the bourgeois world. In the realm of the latter, envy always plays a determinant role, though much less appreciated than it is in the non-bourgeois world since the bourgeois value system eradicates this primal instinct along with all other natural impulses. Without allowing himself to be involved by the illusory idea of 'humanity' typical of bourgeois morality, Nietzsche observes the real world, the world of man, with a disenchanted gaze: interwoven not so much of moral 'values', as of struggle and victory. On this point Bachofen and Nietzsche immediately stand side by side: if, thanks to his studies of myth, the former annihilates the system of bourgeois concealment in the sexual sphere, the latter destroys the same system in the sphere of the professions, striking Greek wisdom: 'The potter has sworn against the potter, and the carpenter against the carpenter, the beggar envies the beggar and the singer the singer' ('The Homeric Agony').

Considered in objective terms, in terms of content, Bachofen and Nietzsche always seem to us to be closer to each other, although not in terms of the notion of the Dionysian. What Bachofen has revealed in the context of symbol and myth, the deepest truth evoked by the abyss of the past, Nietzsche has shaped in the historical realm, sustaining the possibility of a truly

heroic existence. And if both have been able to become true interpreters of antiquity, it is because they have overcome the smokescreen of modern ideas, re-drinking themselves at the source of the human.

Their contrast must be understood on the basis of this significant coincidence of visions. Diversity concerns first and foremost their conduct of life. In terms of attitude and lifestyle, Bachofen is a nineteenth-century bourgeois. No matter how deeply he has delved into the primeval world of myth, he remains an observer. Bachofen considers antiquity, while Nietzsche wants to revive it. The contrast between Bachofen and Nietzsche thus coincides with that between Burckhardt and Nietzsche. If Burckhardt's words about the agon are those of an expert, uttered nevertheless from the ivory tower of a scholar, what Nietzsche declares about the agon springs from the mouth of a young man determined to fight and win. Bachofen's Christianity can only be understood from the perspective of his meditative and admiring attitude toward antiquity. He was able to serenely scrutinize the glittering symbols of antiquity, for he knew how to anchor his own interior and exterior existence to the Christian reality. Thanks to this anchor of security - to use an emblematic image of Burckhardt - that new synthesis was made possible, strictly Bachofenian, which reconciles Christianity and antiquity, insofar as it considers Christianity as the consummation of ancient Apollinism by the work of a superior revelation. Such a reconciliation of opposites is valid for the meditator and not for the one who acts: Bachofen is bourgeois insofar as he peacefully harmonizes the contradiction in his person and in his work, while Nietzsche represents the extreme opposition to this bourgeois type, precisely by virtue of the fact that he acts, even if his action is limited to contempt for the bourgeois world and to an irreproachable conduct of life in the clear air of self-imposed solitude.

This contrast, however, between the meditative and the dynamic, does not have the last word. The names of Bachofen and Nietzsche have a truly symbolic force and meaning because this antithesis is restated on a more recondite and decisive plane. For the moment we will limit ourselves to alluding to what this last plane entails. The ultimate contrast between Bachofen and Nietzsche, starting from their comparison, is made clear as far as the symbol is concerned (this is also the basis of the contrast between Bachofen and Burckhardt). As an inquirer, Bachofen is not a scholar or even an aesthete. But he is a particular spectator: in his observation we discover not thoughts or simple images, but symbols. To contemplate symbols, however, a special attitude is required, since even a scholar endowed with the highest aesthetic intuition does not know how to contemplate the symbol. The one who considers the symbol is not a spectator in the usual sense of the term, nor is he a scholar, but rather a 'sage'. Bachofen is therefore a sage, a seer, one who is turning away contemplating. Those who contemplate what is revealed to them no longer know how to act. A

depth of vision takes possession of him that makes him inactive. As a specific characteristic of Bachofen, this depth of vision constitutes the most intimate layer of his bourgeois life, and at the same time silences any objection raised against it.

Who is antithetical to the seer, to the sage? The psychologist! The sage stands apart: his gaze flies over his own century and past centuries until he plunges into archaic time. The psychologist, on the other hand, has his eyes turned towards his own time or in proximity to it. Nietzsche was, without a doubt, the sharpest psychologist of the nineteenth century. And his fame derives partly, if not entirely, from his psychological inquiry. If, however, we ask ourselves what is constitutive of psychology, we must answer: stillness and external security, 'securitas'. But he who lives dangerously, who sets himself a great deed, who feels himself acting, forgets all psychology. The psychological audacity of which Nietzsche is so proud was possible only against the background of the bourgeois system, of which he is nevertheless a part as a dissident. Extreme psychologism is the mental attitude that ultimately derives from bourgeois securitas. The tragic aspect of Nietzsche's life is marked by the fact that his own heroism does not succeed in definitively detaching itself from his century. Symbolic contemplation, wisdom, does not set itself a goal. Nietzsche's powerful restlessness, which impels him to action, is the exact antithesis of Bachofen's contemplative stillness. But from restlessness can only be born a subjective, psychological action, which in turn provokes subjective and psychological effects: in a word, the well-known youthful restlessness. Even today the youth is as little free from the bourgeois century as Nietzsche was. He who contemplates symbols ceases to be a bourgeois: the bourgeois spirit is in fact hostile to symbols.

Thus we have come to the end of the comparison: as a psychologist, Nietzsche reveals himself to be linked to the spirit of his century, to the same spirit which he despised as a man of action, while Bachofen, as a contemplator of symbols, has surpassed the spirit of the nineteenth century, of the same century to which he continued to belong as an empirical observer. Finally, Bachofen and Nietzsche appear to us in this way: on the one hand, the contemplative old man, the sage, and on the other, the ardent young man, thirsting for supreme action: the most beautiful, the most significant and fruitful antithesis that the century of our fathers has offered us.

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