

MÉLANGE OF MELANAEGIS AND LEUKASPIS:
ON THE AETIOLOGY OF THE APATOURIA FESTIVAL*

by

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ABSTRACT: The paper discusses the sources of the aetiological myth of the Apatouria festival. The story as we know it from late sources associates the festivity with Dionysus Melanaegis. The presence of the god in the story is probably not due to the character of the religious cult, but to various literary associations.

Forty-six years after its publication, VIDAL-NAQUET's *Black Hunter*¹ seems to belong to the history of scholarship rather than to scholarship itself. That influential and brilliant work has thus far been criticised from almost all possible perspectives. Not only have its methodological premises been contested², but also some of the "facts" on the basis of which VIDAL-NAQUET constructed his theory do not seem to be facts anymore. According to the French scholar, Athenian epheby and Apatouria as we know them from late classical and Hellenistic sources represented the survival of a much older tribal initiation rite undergone by Athenian ephebes under the aegis of (*nomen-omen*) Dionysus Melanaegis. Today we are not sure if the god played a role not only in the ritual of Apatouria, but also in its early aetiological myth³. We do not know whether the epheby existed in periods prior to Lycourgos' reforms⁴ or if it took the form of a rigidly conceived *rite de*

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¹ First published in 1968. I used the edition published in 1992.

² E.g., see GRAF 2003; DODD 2003; MA 1994. Some major controversies concerning *The Black Hunter* up until 1989 have been presented by VIDAL-NAQUET himself in *Retour au chasseur noir* (1992 b).

³ This has been pointed out already by HALLIDAY 1926 and subsequently for example by LAMBERT 1993: 134–189.

⁴ LAMBERT 1993: 134–189; WINKLER 1990: 23–37.