

Reading Dionysus:  
Euripides' *Bacchae* among Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World

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Courtney Jade Friesen

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Philip Sellew, Adviser

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Courtney Jade Friesen

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## ABBREVIATIONS

The abbreviations of ancient works and secondary literature follow *The SBL Handbook of Style* where possible. This has been supplemented by *L'Année philologique*. Abbreviations of ancient works have occasionally been avoided in the interest of facilitating ease of reading.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: READING DIONYSUS THEN AND NOW

#### 1.1 STAGING THE *DRAMATIS PERSONAE*

Dionysus comes in many forms. His arrivals are attended with conflicts and often result in the transformation of civilization. The most famous myth of Dionysus from antiquity is that enacted in Euripides' *Bacchae*, a drama that embodies several moments of radical social and political transition and upheaval. It is the last surviving tragedy from Classical Athens; it earned first prize for its performance at the Great Dionysia in 405 BCE after the playwright's death in exile at the closing years of the Peloponnesian War, a war that was catastrophic for Athens and resulted in a military and economic decline from which it would never fully recover. The play stages another moment of conflict and transformation. Dionysus returns to his birthplace of mythological Thebes in order to establish his cult and avenge himself upon those who refused to acknowledge that his mother Semele had been impregnated by Zeus. Pentheus, the newly installed king of Thebes, refuses to recognize the god and vigorously opposes the arrival and establishment of his cult. As champion of rationality and civic order, the young tyrant opposes the excess, madness, and sensuality of the invading barbarian cult as well as its challenge to traditional structures of Theban civilization. Over the course of the narrative, however, Pentheus' rigorous hostility gives way to his curiosity to view the women who have gone out to the mountains to engage in the frenzied worship of Dionysus. The disguised god convinces Pentheus to spy on the women who, possessed

by the god and led by his own mother Agave, unknowingly subject him to *sparagmos*, that is, tear him to pieces in an act of sacrificial ritual.

This play of Euripides was widely popular throughout antiquity. As an exploration of the contestation of political and religious power, the *Bacchae* provided repeated opportunities for readers and audiences in subsequent eras to confront their own historical moments and to interrogate the urgent problems of their own worlds. This study explores the ancient reception of this tragedy in several works of literature in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, ranging from the third century BCE to the third century CE, at various moments of crisis and transformation. Each author and text explored herein evokes Euripides' mythological world and finds in it new relevancies for voicing contemporary experiences.

The *Bacchae*'s ancient reception involves a range of materials, the study of which demands a thoroughly cross-disciplinary methodology. As this study demonstrates, ancient interest in the *Bacchae* extends well beyond the circles of the educated elite within the "pagan" Greco-Roman world. Hellenistic Jews and early Christians also engage with the tragedy in various and interesting ways. Thus, as an analysis of the reception of the *Bacchae* among Greeks and Romans, Jews and Christians, this study reevaluates the traditional historical dichotomies between "pagan," "Jew," and "Christian," together with the disciplinary divisions that undergird them. This work, therefore, is an experiment in multi-disciplinarity that attempts to bring several academic fields more fully into conversation (i.e., classical, biblical, Jewish, and early Christian studies). At the same time, it aims to provide fresh insight into the meaning of the *Bacchae* in antiquity, as well as the role of literary engagement in the process of cultural

negotiation and the construction of identity. What follows, then, is in a sense the drama of a drama, that is, the unfolding story of the variegated ways in which Euripides' powerful narrative is repeatedly revisited and reinvented for new purposes in new eras.

This introductory chapter situates this narrative within its fifth-century Athenian “origin.” First, I explore the place of Dionysus in the Greek religious imagination and the role of tragic theater in Athenian society (§ 1.2). I then outline an interpretation of the *Bacchae* that attends to its meaning in the fifth century while repeatedly anticipating the ways in which the play's interpretive puzzles and ambiguous potentialities animate and provoke the readings that are explored in subsequent chapters (§ 1.3). Finally, I survey the scholarly methodologies that inform this study (§ 1.4) and summarize the scope of inquiry (§ 1.5).

## 1.2 DIONYSUS, THE THEATER, AND ATHENS

### 1.2.1 DIONYSUS: CHARACTERIZING AN UNCHARACTERISTIC GOD

More than any other Greek god, Dionysus defies classification and characterization.<sup>1</sup> The most apt generalization is that Dionysus eludes all generalization. Indeed, as Albert Henrichs summarizes, in contrast to other deities, Dionysus “is

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<sup>1</sup> Among the many studies devoted to the god Dionysus, see Walter F. Otto, *Dionysos: Myth and Cult* (trans. Robert B. Palmer; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1965); H. Jeanmaire, *Dionysos: histoire du culte de Bacchus* (Paris: Payot, 1951); Adrien Bruhl, *Liber Pater: origine et expansion du culte dionysiaque à Rome et dans le monde romain* (Paris: Boccard, 1953); Carl Kerényi, *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life* (trans. Ralph Manheim; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Richard Seaford, *Dionysos* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Walter Burkert, “Dionysos—,different' im Wandel der Zeiten: Eine Skizze,” in *A Different God? Dionysos and Ancient Polytheism* (ed. Renate Schlesier; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 15–22; Henk S. Versnel, “*Heis Dionysos!*—One Dionysos? A Polytheistic Perspective,” in *ibid.*, 23–46.

essentially a paradox, the sum total of numerous contradictions.”<sup>2</sup> His identity modulates between Greek and barbarian, male and female, life and death, gentle and violent; he is both a founder and a destroyer of civilization, a god “most terrible yet most gentle to mortals” (δεινότατος, ἀνθρώποισι δ’ ἡπιώτατος, *Bacch.* 861). Moreover, the nature of the god and his worship varies greatly over both time and region.<sup>3</sup> Thus, to the extent that his nature and worship can be delineated at one moment or in one place, things may appear that much different at another. The reception of the *Bacchae* in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, therefore, is inevitably bound up with the development of Dionysiac religion. Variations in ancient readings of the *Bacchae* are shaped significantly by the variations of the god and his religion.

In spite of Dionysus’ elusive nature, however, several themes emerge consistently in connection with this god. As a god of life and fertility, he is the inventor of wine and his emblems include ivy and the phallus. Dionysus is associated with sensuality and his worship is often ecstatic, expressed in festivals of rustic frivolity and ritualized madness, the latter most famously in the female cults of maenadism. He is also a god who represents death. In the Dionysiac mysteries, initiation entailed a ritualized death that secured one’s rebirth ultimately into a more fortunate post-mortem life. Within Orphic religion, this was expressed by the death and dismemberment of Dionysus by the Titans

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<sup>2</sup> Albert Henrichs, “Greek and Roman Glimpses of Dionysos,” in *Dionysos and His Circle: Ancient through Modern* (ed. Caroline Houser; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Differences across place and time are emphasized respectively by Versnel, “*Heis Dionysos!*”; Burkert, “Dionysos—,different’.” For a study of the Anthesteria, a festival of Dionysus observed in Athens and many Ionian cities, that emphasizes significant transformations over time, see Sarah C. Humphreys, *The Strangeness of Gods: Historical Perspectives on the Interpretation of Athenian Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 223–75.

and subsequent rescue by Zeus and resurrection.<sup>4</sup> Dionysus was also a liberator, as evidenced in his various cult titles (*eleuthereus*, *lusios*, *luaios*). This entailed his power to release people from pain and anxiety; in the mysteries, it included the ultimate release from the vicissitudes of the mortal experience with the offer of immortality. Dionysiac liberation could also be more immediately tangible: he delivered from imprisonment and overthrew tyranny and could thus be claimed as a champion of democracy. Paradoxically, Dionysus also became a prominent symbol of imperial conquest, especially in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

### 1.2.2 GREEK TRAGEDY: THE THEATER AND ITS GOD

An additional attribute of Dionysus that was particularly important in Classical Athens and pertinent to the present study is his role as patron god of the theater. All the surviving works of the three great tragedians—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—were performed at the dramatic festivals of Athens in honor of Dionysus. The most important, the Great Dionysia, was established in the sixth century and included several days of civic rituals of Dionysus, culminating in at least three days of dramatic competitions.<sup>5</sup> On the day preceding the performances, there was a grand procession for Dionysus (*πομπή*), in which a bull and other victims were sacrificed to the god.<sup>6</sup> Institutionally, therefore, Greek tragedy in Athens is indisputably an aspect of the worship of Dionysus, a link that continues from Classical Athens into the Hellenistic and

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the Orphic myth of Dionysus, see § 7.3.2.

<sup>5</sup> For an account of the Great Dionysia, see Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 57–101. On the dramatic performances at the Lenaia, see 40–42.

<sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*, 61–63.

Roman periods in various ways.<sup>7</sup> Since antiquity, however, scholars have wondered whether the relation between tragedy and Dionysus is anything more than superficial. Dionysus is largely absent from the narratives of extant tragedy. The ancient proverb, “Nothing to do with Dionysus,” expresses perplexity over this apparent discrepancy.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the *Bacchae* is the only extant play in which Dionysus is among the *dramatis personae*.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, scholars from antiquity to the present have sought to understand the reasons for and nature of the god’s role as patron of the theater. An influential theory, developed by Aristotle in the *Poetics*, situated the origin of tragedy within Dionysiac ritual and worship. He proposed that tragedy originated from the improvisations (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτοσχεδιαστικῆς) of the leaders of dithyrambs (ἀπο τῶν ἐξαρχόντων τὸν διθύραμβον, 1449a9-11) and subsequently from satyric dance (τὸ ἐκ σατυρικοῦ μεταβαλεῖν, 1449a20). Aristotle’s interest in the link between tragedy and Dionysus concerned little more than its historical antecedents; for when it acquired its natural form (τὴν αὐτῆς φύσιν) it ceased to be Dionysiac in any meaningful way.<sup>10</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the connection was given a more far reaching and enthusiastic treatment by Friedrich Nietzsche in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*.<sup>11</sup> Here

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, § 2.2 on the “Dionysiac Guild of artists” (οἱ περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον τεχνῖται) in Alexandria.

<sup>8</sup> This proverb is applied to the tragedians Aeschylus and Phrynichus by Plutarch for altering the subject matter of tragedy away from Dionysiac myth (*Mor.* 615a). See also Lucian, *Bacch.* 5.

<sup>9</sup> He was, however, staged in several lost plays; for a list of these, see Anton F. H. Bierl, *Dionysos und die griechische Tragödie: Politische und “metatheatralische” Aspekte im Text* (Classica Monacensia 1; Tübingen: G. Narr, 1991), 10–13.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle’s central proposition in discussion the nature of tragedy is that it is “an imitation of action” (πράξεώς ἐστι μίμησις, 1449b36). He defends the value of *mimesis* in art over against the attacks of Plato; for a discussion, see John Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), esp. 21–29; see also Elizabeth S. Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 45–70 on *mimesis*.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (Leipzig: Fritzsche, 1872). Translation available in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings* (ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald

Nietzsche develops his now famous antithesis between the Apollonian and the Dionysiac, the former embodying rationality, self-control, individuality, and the respecting of boundaries and limits, the latter transgressing boundaries, celebrating excess, and destroying individuality.<sup>12</sup> For Nietzsche, the birth of tragedy and indeed the production of all art result from the synthesis of these forces. Thus, whereas Aristotle maintained that tragedy merely grew *out of* dithyrambic performance and satyric dances, Nietzsche regarded the orgiastic nature of Dionysiac song and dance as essential to the nature of tragedy (§ 6).<sup>13</sup> Dionysus is so fundamental to tragedy, according to Nietzsche, that this god alone is its proper subject matter: the primordial dismemberment of Dionysus Zagreus stands behind the suffering of all tragic heroes, who “are merely masks of that original hero, Dionysus” (§ 10).

Neither Aristotle’s nor Nietzsche’s theory of the connection between Dionysus and tragedy is now fully accepted by scholars.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, their influence upon subsequent interpreters has been profound. Few would now question that there is some historical or essential link between Dionysus and tragedy.<sup>15</sup> Little consensus exists,

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Spiers; trans. Ronald Spiers; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For a comprehensive treatment of this work, see Michael S. Silk and J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Nietzsche’s views of tragedy, although flawed, are important for the present study because they have exerted remarkable influence on modern scholarship. On Nietzsche’s influence, see Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides’ Bacchae* (enl. ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 359–62.

<sup>12</sup> On this, see Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 166–85. They note that, even though as a historical account of these two ancient deities this antithesis is deeply deficient, it is nevertheless “a uniquely productive distortion” (at 166).

<sup>13</sup> On the relationship between Nietzsche’s view and Aristotle’s *Poetics*, see *ibid.*, 225–38.

<sup>14</sup> On the deficiency of Aristotle’s theory of origins, see Scott Scullion, “‘Nothing to Do with Dionysus’: Tragedy Misconceived as Ritual,” *CQ* 52 (2002): 102–37, esp. 102–07. For criticism of Nietzsche, see Albert Henrichs, “Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence: The Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard,” *HSCP* 88 (1984): 205–40, esp. 219–23.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the most extreme exception is the view of Scullion, who suggests that Dionysus’ connection with tragedy may reflect nothing more than that the precinct of Dionysus *Eleuthereus* on the

however, on how this should be construed. One approach is to situate the origin of tragedy within the ritual of sacrifice. In the early twentieth century, scholars of the Cambridge Ritualist School developed this theory by finding ritual patterns underlying the dramatic features of Greek tragedy. Gilbert Murray, for example, like Nietzsche maintains that the death of Dionysus underlies all tragedy; even though “the content has strayed far from Dionysus, the forms of tragedy retain clear traces of the original drama of the Death and Rebirth of the Year Spirit.”<sup>16</sup> Later in the twentieth century, the anthropologist René Girard analyzed Greek tragedy along similar lines, arguing that beneath the dramatic surface of tragedy are commemorations of primitive sacrificial rituals.<sup>17</sup> Classical philologists find little merit in these theories.<sup>18</sup> There are, however, more nuanced analyses of Dionysiac ritual in tragedy.<sup>19</sup> An important exponent and leader of a renewed interest in ritual aspects of tragedy is Richard Seaford.<sup>20</sup> He

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east slope of the Acropolis proved to be the most suitable location to construct the theater (“‘Nothing to Do with Dionysus,’” 135–36).

<sup>16</sup> Gilbert Murray, “Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy,” in Jane E. Harrison *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (2d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), 241–63, at 342.

<sup>17</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (trans. Patrick Gregory; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 68–88, 119–42.

<sup>18</sup> For criticism, see esp. Henrichs, “Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence,” 229–34. Regarding Girard, Henrichs argues that he ignores too many of the varieties of Dionysiac cult within Greek culture and of the literary features of tragedy to make his emphasis on Dionysus’ inherent violence credible (232–34). The criticisms of Denis Feeney, though directed primarily toward Roman sacrifice, are apt here: “[t]he meaning of ritual is not to be found in the survival of some prehistoric trace... [i]t is always the current work of ritual that matters, not where it might once have come from” (“Interpreting Sacrificial Ritual in Roman Poetry: Disciplines and Their Models,” in *Rituals in Ink: A Conference on Religion and Literary Production in Ancient Rome* [ed. Alessandro Barchiesi, Jörg Rüpke, and Susan A. Stephens; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2004], 1–21, 2–4 [at 2]).

<sup>19</sup> A more plausible approach to the origin of tragedy in ritual sacrifice is offered by Walter Burkert. He argues that the traditional etymological connection between τραγῳδία and the songs sung at the goat-sacrifice (τράγος) to Dionysus has historical validity, although he adds “[w]hether this has any bearing on fully-developed Attic tragedy cannot be determined in advance” (“Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual,” *GRBS* 7 [1966]: 87–121 [at 88]).

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Richard Seaford, “Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries,” *CQ* 31 (1981): 252–75; Richard Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. 235–327; Richard Seaford, *Euripides: Bacchae with an*

emphasizes the importance of tragedy's religious context within the Dionysiac festivals of Athens and that Dionysus "embodies the communality of the polis." Consequently, what makes tragedy distinctively Dionysiac is that like Dionysus, whose ambiguity includes that of savagery and civilization, the narratives stage the conflict between the claims of the royal house, the autonomous household, and the polis.<sup>21</sup> Even a critic as averse to ritualist readings of tragedy as Rainer Friedrich maintains that Dionysiac ritual "gave birth to drama" primarily because it "prefigur[ed] as it did the structure of the dramatic plot." He is, however, careful to distinguish between ritual as part of drama's thematic material and "drama as ritual."<sup>22</sup>

Another approach to the problem Dionysus and tragedy has emerged in recent decades, one which emphasizes that the god's role as patron of drama derives from his distinctive powers over illusion and over ambiguities of identity.<sup>23</sup> That Dionysus was a god of illusion and disguise can be seen, for example, in the cultic representations of the god as a mask.<sup>24</sup> This cultic symbol reflects the god's role as patron of the theater and captures the paradox that his epiphanic presence coincides with the concealing of his

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*Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Plays of Euripides; Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1996), passim; Helene P. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 17–64.

<sup>21</sup> Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual*, 251–62.

<sup>22</sup> Rainer Friedrich, "Everything to Do with Dionysus? Ritualism, the Dionysiac, and the Tragic," in *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond* (ed. M. S. Silk; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 257–83, esp. 268–74 (at 269). For Friedrich's criticism of Seaford's "New Ritualism," see his "Dionysos among the Dons: The New Ritualism in Richard Seaford's Commentary on the *Bacchae*," *Arion* 7 (2000): 115–52 (at 118); for a response, see Richard Seaford, "The Dionysiac Don Responds to Don Quixote: Rainer Friedrich on the New Ritualism," *Arion* 8 (2000): 74–98.

<sup>23</sup> See here esp. Jean-Pierre Vernant, "The God of Tragic Fiction," in idem and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (trans. Janet Lloyd; New York: Zone Books, 1988), 181–88; Bierl, *Dionysos und die griechische Tragödie*, 1–25.

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant and Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, "Features of the Mask in Ancient Greece," in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, 189–206, esp. 201–05 on Dionysus. Dionysus is of course not the only god for whom the mask was a feature of ritual performance. For a general discussion of the importance of the mask in Greek tragedy, see Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*, 43–46.

identity. As Jean-Pierre Vernant argues, the theater corresponds to one of Dionysus' central traits, namely, "to confuse the boundaries between illusion and reality, to conjure up the beyond in the here and now, to make us lose our sense of self-assurance and identity."<sup>25</sup> Thus, in contrast to the approaches mentioned above that seek the Dionysiac character of tragedy through its historical antecedents or its ritual patterns, Vernant, in a partial return to Nietzsche, maintains that Dionysus is the patron of the theater because of his essential nature. While this hypothesis may not be entirely convincing as a general account of all tragic drama, as I shall argue below (§ 1.3.1), it provides several powerful insights into the meanings and effects of Euripides' *Bacchae* where the god of the theater himself appears masked on the tragic stage.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.2.3 GREEK TRAGEDY: THE THEATER AND ITS CITY

Another matter of importance for understanding Greek tragedy and one very much related to its connection with Dionysus is its place within the civic and political life of Athens. As Simon Goldhill has argued, because tragedies were performed as part of an important Athenian civic festival they should be understood "as a social, political, and theatrical phenomenon," that is, as a form of civic discourse rooted in "democratic *polis* ideology."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the entire festival functioned not only to strengthen and unify

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<sup>25</sup> Vernant, "The God of Tragic Fiction," at 187-88.

<sup>26</sup> Some have been critical of this approach, perhaps none more caustically than Friedrich: "[w]ith Vernant the Dionysiac has been attenuated to a mere metaphor: the metaphor for dramatic illusion and fictionality. It is not really a correction of the ancient view; it is rather an elegant rhetorical move, in the precious style of current Parisian theorizing, that brings tragedy in line with a discourse that prizes the Dionysiac" ("Everything to Do with Dionysus," 261-62).

<sup>27</sup> Simon Goldhill, "The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology," in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context* (ed. John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 97-129, at 98 and 114. This article is an expansion of his "The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology," *JHS* 107 (1987): 58-76. Goldhill's approach to the social context of tragedy has been

Athenian society but also, as Arthur Pickard-Cambridge notes, due to being open to the entire Greek world, it was “an effective advertisement of the wealth and power and public spirit of Athens.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the audience was made up of all classes of Athenian citizens as well as foreign delegates, and the plays were judged democratically by ten representatives, selected one from each tribe.<sup>29</sup> Within this context of collective festivity and celebration, tragic performances represent an inversion, that is, the destruction of civic order. As Goldhill suggests, what makes the tragic festival “an essentially Dionysiac event” is “the interplay of norm and transgression enacted in the festival which both lauds the *polis* and depicts the stresses and tensions of a *polis* society in conflict.”<sup>30</sup> As I discuss below (§ 1.3.3), the *Bacchae* provides a clear example of such political stresses in fifth-century Athens, and consequently its reappropriation in subsequent historical moments of political crises takes on heightened interest.

This role of Greek tragedy in the civic discourse of Athens has been supported by close readings of individual plays. Edith Hall, for example, has shown that tragedy reflects a wider literary and cultural phenomenon in Athens, in which the “barbarian” was

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accepted by many, recently, for example, with slight modifications by Natale Spineto, “Athenian Identity, Dionysiac Festivals and the Theater,” in *A Different God*, 299–313. There have been criticisms, however. Friedrich, for example, although he appreciates Goldhill’s contribution to a renewed interest in the social context for tragedy, argues that the emphasis on tragedy as a “transgressive Dionysiac force” reflects a postmodern rather than ancient ideology (“Everything to Do with Dionysus,” 265–66). P. J. Rhodes argues that Goldhill overemphasizes the *democratic* nature of the dramatic festivals; see his “Nothing to Do with Democracy: Athenian Drama and the Polis,” *JHS* 123 (2003): 104–19; “The Dionysia and Democracy Again,” *CQ* 61 (2011): 71–74.

<sup>28</sup> Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 58.

<sup>29</sup> On the procedures of selecting judges and voting, see *ibid.*, 95–99. On the composition of the audience in the theater, see Spineto, “Athenian Identity, Dionysiac Festivals and the Theater,” esp. 301–10. He observes that “[t]he form of the theatre and the relatively egalitarian nature of the seats, which except for a few cases, are all more or less the same, allude symbolically to the unity of the social fabric” (303). The presence of women at the performances is possible but uncertain (308). As Spineto observes, festivals of Dionysus in Athens afforded greater openness to segments of society that were otherwise marginalized, including foreigners. This correlates to Dionysus as a *xenos* (esp. 308–10).

<sup>30</sup> Goldhill, “The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology,” 129.

becoming an increasingly important antithesis against which Greeks constructed their own identity.<sup>31</sup> This is seen, for example, in mythological narratives where the most extreme moral outrages, such as the sacrificial killing of Pentheus, are represented as “ethnically other” and fundamentally non-Greek.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Froma Zeitlin surveys of the role of Thebes in Athenian tragedy and argues that this city functions as an “Anti-Athens,” a means for Athenians to explore questions of self and identity.<sup>33</sup> By staging the most outrageous familial and political breakdowns there, Thebes “provides the negative model to Athens’s manifest image of itself with regard to its notions of proper management of city, society, and self.”<sup>34</sup> The analyses of Hall and Zeitlin, among others, point to the importance of tragedy in the formation of Athenian identity, which was often achieved through a construction of the other. This function of tragedy in general and the *Bacchae* in particular will resurface in several chapters of this study, where these texts are reappropriated in similar ways but in very different cultural contexts.

### 1.3 EURIPIDES’ *BACCHAE*: SOME MEANINGS AND EFFECTS

Euripides’ *Bacchae* provides a promising node around which to interrogate the scholarly problems posed in the three foregoing sections; indeed, they have each been prominent in various ways within modern interpretations of this tragedy.<sup>35</sup> First, the

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<sup>31</sup> Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford Classical Monographs; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 146–48, at 147.

<sup>33</sup> Froma I. Zeitlin, “Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama,” in *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (ed. J. Peter Euben; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 101–41.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, at 102.

<sup>35</sup> The scholarly literature on the *Bacchae* is vast. Important commentaries include E. R. Dodds, *Euripides, Bacchae: Edited with Introduction and Commentary* (2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960); Jeanne Roux, *Euripide, Les Bacchantes II: commentaire* (2 vols.; Bibliothèque de la faculté des

*Bacchae* has for good reason served as a starting point for historical reconstructions of Dionysus and Dionysiac religion. Second, the *Bacchae* raises important questions about the god's relationship to tragedy generally. Third, by staging conflicts that are at once political, religious, and ethnic, the *Bacchae* engages in an ongoing civic debate over the nature of Athenian and Greek identity. In this section, I provide a brief sketch of an interpretation of the *Bacchae* that addresses these three problems in various ways. The analysis, on the one hand, attends to its context in fifth-century Athens and, on the other, anticipates the ways in which the interpretive problems resurface repeatedly in the *Bacchae*'s reception in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. As a point of departure I take a central feature of the *Bacchae*'s narrative, namely, the question of the stranger's identity (§ 1.3.1). The god's disguise and Pentheus' inability to recognize him drive the dramatic action and at the same time are self-reflexive of the illusory nature of theatrical performance. This dramatic self-reflexivity in *Bacchae* functions as "metatragedy." In the two subsequent sections, I explore the *Bacchae*'s relationship first to Dionysiac religion (§ 1.3.2) and then to politics and Greek identity (§ 1.3.3). My analysis here draws on a rich body of scholarship on the *Bacchae*, in which these issues have all been much discussed (even if little consensus has been reached). What is distinctive about this

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lettres de Lyon 21; Paris: Société d'édition "les belles lettres," 1970-1972); Seaford, *Euripides: Bacchae*. Among the many important studies are Arthur W. Verrall, *The Bacchantes of Euripides and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 1-163; R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus: An Interpretation of the Bacchae* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1969); Foley, *Ritual Irony*, 205-58; Jennifer R. March, "Euripides' *Bakchai*: A Reconsideration in the Light of Vase-Paintings," *BICS* 36 (1989): 33-65; Valdis Leinieks, *The City of Dionysos: A Study of Euripides' Bakchai* (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 88; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1996); Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*.

study, however, is its attention to the ways in which the questions posed by modern critics also factor into the tragedy's ancient reception.<sup>36</sup>

### 1.3.1 THE *BACCHAE* AS METATRAGEDY: THEORIZING A STRANGER'S IDENTITY

As Nietzsche maintained, correctly in my view, any theory of the relation of Dionysus with tragedy must account for his role in the *Bacchae*. His interpretation of the *Bacchae* emphasized that by placing the patron god of drama on the stage Euripides represents his own attitudes toward the Dionysiac (or rather in Nietzsche's view the non-Dionysiac) nature of tragedy. This self-reflexive aspect of the *Bacchae* is part of a larger theatrical technique that has been labeled "metatheater" or "metatragedy." The meaning of these terms has not acquired a universally accepted definition or application.<sup>37</sup> For my purposes, they simply indicate a dramatic device whereby the playwright signals the theatricality of the performance event. This can be achieved through a wide array of techniques; my discussion here, however, focuses primarily on the metatragic effect

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<sup>36</sup> Thus, one indirect result of this study is to counter Friedrich's criticism that the so-called "post-modern" readings of the *Bacchae* discussed here are merely reflections of a "current habit of forcing ruthlessly modern concerns and preoccupations on ancient subjects." Attention to ancient reception may reveal that these "post-modern" concerns ("the cult of transgression, subversion, anti-structure, self-referentiality, ambiguity, ambivalence, paradox, and refusal of closure") are more ancient than Friedrich appreciates ("Dionysos among the Dons," at 117).

<sup>37</sup> The term "metatheater" was apparently first coined by Lionel Abel (*Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* [New York: Hill and Wang, 1963]). The scope of his analysis ranges from ancient to contemporary drama, although he defines "metatheater" largely as a phenomenon of the twentieth century over against ancient tragedy (see esp. 113). Nevertheless, his conception of metatheater as the dramatic exploration of "our inability to distinguish between illusion and reality" (at 111) turns out also to be remarkably relevant for several ancient tragedies. Thus, I employ metatheater and metatragedy interchangeably. For discussions of metatheater focused on ancient drama, see Bierl, *Dionysos und die griechische Tragödie*, esp. 23, 111–76; Mario Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy: Theatre to Theatricality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 81–139. In her recent monograph on Euripides, Isabelle Torrance employs the term metatheater as a subset of metapoetry; the latter is an umbrella term that "encompasses all instances of poetic self-reflexivity," including both theatricality and the use of literary sources (*Metapoetry in Euripides* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], at 3). For a more cautious assessment of the use of metatheater in the interpretation of Greek tragedy, see Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, "'Metatheater': An Essay on Overload," *Arion* 10 (2002): 87–119.

produced by the dramatic presence of the patron god of theater. Anton Bierl has set out to demonstrate that almost any mention of Dionysus or the Dionysiac on stage is potentially metatragic.<sup>38</sup> My own analysis is limited to the *Bacchae*, where this device is perhaps most obvious and easily recognizable.<sup>39</sup> I organize my discussion around three central themes: the god's disguise, Pentheus as spectator, and Dionysus' palace miracle.

*The God's Disguise.* The theme of the interplay between the god's actual and disguised identities is signaled in the opening lines of the prologue:

ἦκω Διὸς παῖς τήνδε Θηβαίων χθόνα  
 Διόνυσος...  
 μορφήν δ' ἀμείψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν  
 πάρεμι...

I, Dionysus child of Zeus, have arrived at this land of the Thebans... but I am present after having taken a mortal form in exchange for that of a god. (*Bacch.* 1-2, 4-5)<sup>40</sup>

Here and throughout the prologue Euripides anticipates the persistent tension between the god's stated intention of self-disclosure, on the one hand, and his actual hiddenness, on the other. Indeed, he declares to the audience that he came "in order that I might become manifest as a god to mortals" (ἵν' εἶην ἐμφανῆς δαίμων βροτοῖς, 22) and after recalling Pentheus' and the Thebans' refusal to acknowledge him he adds, "because of these things

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<sup>38</sup> See Bierl, *Dionysos und die griechische Tragödie*, 111–76. On this, Rosenmeyer comments that "Abelians have gone overboard to convert any mention of Dionysus into a hint at metatheater." Regarding the *Bacchae*, however, he concedes that of all ancient dramas it most exhibits the phenomenon in which "the plays-within engulf the play proper" ("Metatheater," at 100–01).

<sup>39</sup> The theatrical self-reflexivity of the *Bacchae* has been explored in several important studies; see esp. Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*, 270; Foley, *Ritual Irony*, 205–58; Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Le Dionysos masqué des Bacchantes d'Euripide," *L'Homme* 25 (1985): 31–58; translated in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, 381–412; Simon Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 259–86; Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, 215–71, 369–78; James Barrett, "Pentheus and the Spectator in Euripides' *Bacchae*," *AJP* 119 (1998): 337–60.

<sup>40</sup> The Greek text of the *Bacchae* follows James Diggle, *Euripidis fabulae III: Helena, Phoenissae, Orestes, Bacchae, Iphigenia Aulidensis, Rhesus* (OCT; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Translations of all ancient texts are mine throughout.

I shall demonstrate that I am a god to [Pentheus] and all the Thebans” (ὧν οὐνεκ’ αὐτῷ θεὸς γεγὼς ἐνδείξομαι πᾶσιν τε Θηβαίοισιν, 47-48). It is striking, therefore, that in spite of this explicitly stated purpose Dionysus refers again to his costume: “because of these things I have changed and have a mortal figure; I have altered my form to the nature of a man” (ὧν οὐνεκ’ εἶδος θνητὸν ἀλλάξας ἔχω μορφήν τ’ ἐμὴν μετέβαλον εἰς ἀνδρὸς φύσιν, 53-54).

From the audience’s perspective, the prologue points to several layers of theatricality: a human actor is playing the role of Dionysus who is disguised as a human. The audience must ask along with the dramatic characters, whom they are really beholding on the stage. In the performance, this question would be underscored by the actor’s mask, regarding which there are several explicit comments throughout the drama.<sup>41</sup> With Dionysus off the stage, Pentheus recounts the rumors of the stranger’s blond curls (ξανθοῖσι βοστρύχοισιν) and ruddy complexion (οἰνωπός, 235-36), which would have corresponded to the mask. Later, as Pentheus’ servant brings the stranger bound before the tyrant, he remarks that “he did not change his ruddy appearance” (οὐδ’ ἥλλαξεν οἰνωπὸν γένυν) but was in fact “laughing” (γελῶν δέ) even as he was arrested. What the servant in the narrative takes to be a surprising indifference to misfortune, the audience recognizes to be a feature of the unchanging expression of the actor’s mask. Later, the chorus refers again to the laughing mask: in an excited song to the god, it

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<sup>41</sup> For discussions of this effect of Dionysus’ mask in the *Bacchae*, see esp. Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*, 270; Foley, *Ritual Irony*, 246–54; this is a restatement of her earlier article, “The Masque of Dionysus,” *TAPA* 110 (1980): 107–33; Vernant, “Le Dionysos masqué”; Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*, 259–61; Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, 272–73. For a discussion of wider artistic depictions of Dionysus in the fifth century and its interplay with his representation in tragic masks, see Thomas H. Carpenter, “On the Beardless Dionysus,” in *Masks of Dionysus* (ed. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 185–206.

exhorts him to bring Pentheus to his final demise by appearing (φάνηθι) as a “bull” (ταῦρος), or a “many-headed serpent” (πολύκρανος... δράκων), or a “blazing lion” (πυριφλέγων... λέων), as a “beast with a laughing face” (θήρ... γελῶντι προσώπῳ, 1017-21). This use of πρόσωπον, which can mean “theatrical mask,” is particularly striking. In contrast to the god’s ability to take on these many animal forms, his “mask” remains unchanged; and it continues laughing. When Dionysus appeared back on the stage *ex machina* in full epiphany to pronounce his final judgment (*Bacch.* 1330), we do not know whether the actor had changed his mask or costume. If, as is probable, he continued wearing the same mask, then, as Helene Foley observes, “[t]he smile of the ‘gentle’ stranger” that became “a divine sneer” finally culminates in “a ghoulis expression of inappropriate glee at vengeance too easily executed.”<sup>42</sup> While the question of Dionysus’ mask in this closing scene remains unknown to us, Cadmus returns explicitly to the theme of the conflict between Dionysus’ human and divine appearance, when he states, “in their tempers it is not appropriate for gods to be like mortals” (ὄργὰς πρέπει θεοὺς οὐχ ὁμοιοῦσθαι βροτοῖς, 1348). With this assertion, the audience is reminded of the ambiguity of the god’s identity, which was signaled by his own comments in the prologue and represented by his theatrical mask.

The effects of these self-referential pointers to the stranger’s theatrical disguise involve a series of ironies within the narrative. When Pentheus first rails against the arrival of the Dionysiac rites (215-62), he emphasizes that it is the stranger who makes claims for Dionysus’ divinity: “this man claims Dionysus is a god—this man claims he was sewn in the thigh of Zeus” (ἐκεῖνος εἶναί φησι Διόνυσον θεόν, / ἐκεῖνος ἐν μηρῶ

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<sup>42</sup> Foley, *Ritual Irony*, 249.

ποτ' ἐρράφθαι Διός, 242-43), and he adds, “the stranger, whoever he is” (ὅστις ἔστιν ὁ ξένος, 247). When the stranger and Pentheus subsequently enter into a heated exchange (461-518), Euripides exploits the stranger’s mistaken identity with a string of ironic claims and counterclaims. *Bacchae* 498 is particularly illustrative of this and is of special interest in this study because of its subsequent proverbial status: “the god himself will set me free whenever I wish it” (λύσει μ' ὁ δαίμων αὐτός, ὅταν ἐγὼ θέλω, 498).<sup>43</sup> Within the narrative, this assertion is a clear prediction of the god’s subsequent self-deliverance. In view of the wider cultic associations of Dionysiac release (*luisis*), however, this statement functions at another level entirely. Dionysus was associated with several types of *luisis*.<sup>44</sup> On the one hand, he was thought to provide tangible delivery in the here and now, such as from imprisonment and the overthrow of tyranny.<sup>45</sup> On the other, he promised the release of the soul into a more fortunate afterlife. This latter aspect is connected with the Dionysiac mysteries in which initiation provided a form of *luisis* by way of ritualized death (see § 1.3.2). This type of *luisis* is represented on two late-fourth-century gold leaves from Pelinna buried with a woman in her sarcophagus with a nearly identical formula to *Bacchae* 498 (σ' ὅτι Β<άκ>χιος αὐτός ἔλυσέ, “the Bacchic one himself has set you free”).<sup>46</sup> This ritual text points to the experience of initiation and release in the afterlife. Thus, *Bacchae* 498 employs a clear allusion to a cultic scenario and thus heightens the ambiguity of the speaker’s identity. Whereas the audience might expect the

<sup>43</sup> This line is quoted by Horace, Plutarch, Celsus, and Origen (see §§ 3.4, 3.5, 7.2.4, and 7.3.3).

<sup>44</sup> On the interconnection of the types of liberation offered by Dionysus evoked in *Bacchae* 498, see esp. Seaford, *Euripides: Bacchae*, 190.

<sup>45</sup> Anne-Françoise Jaccottet discusses several examples in which Dionysus’ cult titles *luaios/lusios* are connected to historical (rather than mythological) events of deliverance, such as the political liberation of Eretria from Ptolemy (ca. 308 BCE) and the miraculous escape of Theban prisoners from the Thracians (“Le lierre de la liberté,” *ZPE* 80 [1990]: 150–56).

<sup>46</sup> For further discussion of these leaves and references to relevant scholarship, see § 3.5.

formula, “the god himself will set me free,” to be spoken by the god’s devotee with respect to salvation at death, Euripides has the god himself, disguised as his own devotee, declare it in anticipation of his own escape from prison.<sup>47</sup>

In sum: Euripides’ emphasis on the stranger’s disguise is more than merely an aspect of the narrative plot. Within the performance, it calls attention to the illusory nature of the theater over which Dionysus himself presides. Moreover, it questions the very possibility of Dionysiac epiphany because, so it seems, the god’s self-revelation entails his own disguise. In addition, as I argue below, the irony produced by the disguised god’s prediction of his own release prepares the audience for a reevaluation of the nature and scope of Dionysiac *lusis*.

*Pentheus as Spectator.* Closely connected with Dionysus’ disguised identity is the theme of Pentheus’ desire for true vision. When he first interrogates the stranger (461-518), Pentheus demands to know the nature of the rites. The stranger repeatedly emphasizes that true knowledge of the god and his rites is only available to the initiated (472, 474, 476). He asserts that Pentheus’ exclusion from the rites results from his inability to see truly and that conversely his own knowledge of the god derives from sight: “while seeing the one who sees, he also gave me the rites” (ὁρῶν ὁρῶντα, καὶ δίδωσιν ὄργια, 470). Pentheus asks, “this god, what is his nature? For you claim to see

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<sup>47</sup> It is not possible to establish a literary relationship between these gold leaves and *Bacchae* 498. Given that the latter is about a century older, its influence on these subsequent ritual formulae is possible; see Leinieks, *The City of Dionysos*, 148–49. However, the Pelinna leaves reflect beliefs and rituals that are in continuity with a tradition dating back to at least the mid-fifth century; see Richard Seaford, “Immortality, Salvation, and the Elements,” *HSCP* 90 (1986): 1–26, esp. 4–9; Charles Segal, “Dionysus and the Gold Tablets from Pelinna,” *GRBS* 31 (1990): 411–19, esp. 412. A standard study of the gold leaves that retains its significance even though it was published prior to the discovery of the Pelinna leaves is Günther Zuntz, *Persephone: Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 275–393.

him clearly” (ὁ θεός, ὄρᾱν γὰρ φῆς σαφῶς, ποῖός τις ἦν; 477). He receives the response, “whatever he wishes” (ὁποῖος ἤθελ’, 478). Over the course of the narrative, Pentheus comes genuinely to desire to see the maenads on the mountains. When he had first learned of the activities of the Theban women, he imagined the most extreme forms of licentiousness (they “place Aphrodite before the Bacchic one,” τὴν δ’ Ἀφροδίτην πρόσθ’ ἄγειν τοῦ Βακχίου, 225; see also 260-62). He insists that he intends to prevent the stranger from ruining their marriages (353-54). Yet, even after the report of the messenger assures Pentheus of their chastity (σωφρόνως, 685-86) he does not alter his imagination. A fundamental turning point occurs at line 810. In 809, Pentheus had requested his armor so as to attack the women—after the exclamation of Dionysus in 810 (ᾄ), the god henceforth takes possession of Pentheus’ mind, driving him into madness.

The following exchange highlights Pentheus’ transformed desire for vision:

βούλη σφ’ ἐν ὄρεσι συγκαθημένας ἰδεῖν;  
 μάλιστα, μυρίον γε δοῦς χρυσοῦ σταθμόν.  
 τί δ’ εἰς ἔρωτα τοῦδε πέπτωκας μέγαν;  
 λυπρῶς νιν εἰσίδοιμ’ ἂν ἐξωνωμένας.  
 ὅμως δ’ ἴδοις ἂν ἠδέως ἅ σοι πικρά;  
 σάφ’ ἴσθι, σιγῇ γ’ ὑπ’ ἐλάταις καθήμενος.

Dionysus: Do you wish to see them reclining together on the mountain?

Pentheus: Very much indeed, I would give gold beyond measure.

Dionysus: Why have you fallen into a great passion for this?

Pentheus: With grief I would behold it, if they are drunk.

Dionysus: All the same, you would look with pleasure on what is painful to you?

Pentheus: Clearly you understand, though as I sit quietly under the pines. (810-16)

Pentheus now no longer wishes to arrest the maenads but rather to become their spectator. Whereas he had formerly intended to prosecute them because of *their* eroticism and sensuality, *he* is now the one who has fallen into *eros*. This new role as spectator for Pentheus draws attention to the tragic audience’s own position, particularly

with the emphasis on finding pleasure (ἡδέως) in viewing what is painful (λυπρῶς, πικρά).<sup>48</sup> The roles quickly reverse yet again, however. Dionysus convinces Pentheus to disguise himself as a maenad and in a humorous scene he assists the tyrant in arranging his Bacchic costume (821-46).<sup>49</sup> When Pentheus hesitates, Dionysus asks, “are you no longer an eager spectator of the maenads?” (οὐκέτι θεατῆς μαινάδων πρόθυμος εἶ; 827) The term θεατῆς, etymologically connected to θέατρον, together with the detail with which Pentheus’ disguise is described and organized, functions as a metatragic signal, in which the boundaries between actor and audience are again blurred.<sup>50</sup> After the costuming is complete, Pentheus asks, “how then do I appear?” (τί φαίνομαι δῆτ’; ) and whether he resembles Ino and Agave (925-26). Dionysus responds, “seeing you, I seem to be looking at those women themselves” (αὐτὰς ἐκεῖνας εἰσορᾶν δοκῶ σ’ ὄρων, 927).

This reversal in which Pentheus’ desire to become spectator is replaced by his role as spectacle proceeds through a series of mistaken visions culminating in his final destruction.<sup>51</sup> The deterioration of Pentheus’ sight is expressed in his famous lines, “indeed, I seem truly to see two suns and two Thebes” (καὶ μὴν ὄρᾶν μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίους

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<sup>48</sup> The discussion of Pentheus’ desire to see and the notion that viewing what is painful produces pleasure relates to Aristotle’s theoretical discussion of tragedy. He maintains that “the [tragic] poet must furnish pleasure from pity and fear through imitation” (τὴν ἀπὸ ἐλέου καὶ φόβου διὰ μιμήσεως δεῖ ἡδονὴν παρασκευάζειν τὸν ποιητὴν, *Poet.* 14.1453b 12-13). Aristotle’s view of “pleasure” (ἡδονή) and tragedy is connected with his conception of tragic *catharsis* (1449b 27-28). For an analysis of Aristotle on *catharsis*, see Elizabeth S. Belfiore, “Pleasure, Tragedy and Aristotelian Psychology,” *CQ* 35 (1985): 349–61; eadem, *Tragic Pleasures*, 337–60. “Unless we are hopelessly licentious, we also believe that unrestrained pursuit of pleasure is shameful, and we desire to avoid shame. In this way, tragedy makes us realize that we, like Pentheus, would take pleasure in seeing what is bitter to us (Euripides, *Bacchae* 815)” (at 344-45).

<sup>49</sup> On this robing scene, see Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, 223–32.

<sup>50</sup> On the significance of θεατῆς in this passage, see *ibid.*, 225–27; Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*, 274–75.

<sup>51</sup> Barrett, “Pentheus and the Spectator in Euripides’ *Bacchae*,” esp. 338–40.

δοκῶ, δισσὰς δὲ Θήβας, 918-19).<sup>52</sup> He adds that the stranger now appears to him in the form of a bull, to which Dionysus responds, “now you see the things it is necessary for you to see” (νῦν δ’ ὄρας ἄ χρή σ’ ὄρα, 924). He leads Pentheus to the mountain and sets him up on a fir tree in order that he might view the women; however, as the messenger reports, “he was seen more than he looked down upon the maenads” (ὄφθη δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ κατεῖδε μαινάδας, 1075). Although he attempts to remove his disguise and reveal his true identity to his mother so that she might spare his life (1115-17), it is too late. She tears him to shreds in her state of madness. Thus, in the destructive climax of the tragedy, as Foley observes, “the god alone remains spectator,” and it might be added that he is also the *choregos*, who ultimately directs the action.<sup>53</sup> Only upon returning to Thebes with his head in her hands, does Agave come to recognize Pentheus, after Cadmus asks, “whose face then do you hold in your arms?” (τίνος πρόσωπον δῆτ’ ἐν ἀγκάλαις ἔχεις; 1277). Thus, in yet another metatragic gesture, the point is emphatically underscored that the only remains of Pentheus’ identity is his tragic mask, thus completing his transition from spectator to spectacle.<sup>54</sup>

*The Palace Miracle.* An additional metatragic feature of the *Bacchae* is the palace miracle that occurred in connection with Dionysus’ release from imprisonment.<sup>55</sup> After Pentheus had cast the stranger into prison, the chorus begins to call on the god to destroy

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<sup>52</sup> On these lines, see Richard Seaford, “Pentheus’ Vision: *Bacchae* 918-22,” *CQ* 37 (1987): 76–78. He argues that in contrast to later readers (e.g., Clement of Alexandria) who find this double vision to be a symptom of drunkenness, it may rather be a reflection of the use of mirrors in Dionysiac initiations (on Clement’s use of these lines, see § 8.2). This view of the *Bacchae*’s relationship with the mysteries is more fully developed in Seaford, “Dionysiac Drama”; see § 1.3.2 below.

<sup>53</sup> Foley, *Ritual Irony*, at 212.

<sup>54</sup> Additional examples of spectators-in-the-text are discussed by Barrett in connection with the two messengers, both of whom describe their own viewing of the maenads (“Pentheus and the Spectator in Euripides’ *Bacchae*”).

<sup>55</sup> For this scene, Verrall, *The Bacchantes of Euripides*, 26–30, 64–82; Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, 218–223; Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*, 276–86.

the palace with earthquakes, lightning, and fire (582-603). While it is impossible to be certain what stage effects may have been employed throughout this scene, clearly they did not match the events as described. Thus, as the audience listens to the choral song, they are made aware of the discrepancy between the words sung and the theatrical realities. From their perspective, the miracles described by the chorus of maenads are simulated by their dances.<sup>56</sup> Certainly, an audience could reasonably be expected to imagine the things described as actually taking place within the narrative world even while the palace continued to stand unchanged as the theater's background (*skene*). There are, however, several ways in which Euripides emphasizes the illusory nature of the miracles. After the supposed events, the Lydian maenads had fallen to the ground from fear; Dionysus asserts, "you perceived, so it seems, the Bacchic one shaking the house of Pentheus" (ἦσθεσθ', ὡς ἔοικε, Βακχίου διατινάξαντος † δῶμα Πενθέως, 605-06). The potential discrepancy between seeming (ὡς ἔοικε) and reality underlies the dialogue that follows. Dionysus proceeds to state that he had changed his own appearance so that Pentheus perceived him as a bull (616-21) and adds not that the palace was actually on fire but merely that Pentheus was "thinking the palace was on fire" (δῶματ' αἴθεσθαι δοκῶν, 624). His subsequent language calls his entire narrative account into question: "next, Bromios, so it seems to me at least, I report my opinion, made an apparition throughout the house" (καὶθ' ὁ Βρόμιος, ὡς ἔμοιγε φαίνεται, δόξαν λέγω, φάσμι' ἐποίησεν κατ' αὐλήν, 629-30). Thus, when Dionysus reports that "he shattered the house to the ground" (δῶματ' ἔρρηξεν χαμαῖζε, 633) the audience recognizes the deception, particularly when eight lines later Pentheus walks out of that very palace

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<sup>56</sup> On this point, Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*, 279.

and observes that the stranger “appears” (φαίνη) to be standing “in front of my house” (πρὸς οἴκοις τοῖς ἑμοῖς, 646). In this scene, therefore, the distinction between narrative and theatrical realities collapses before the audience’s eyes. Consequently, the scope of Dionysus’ power is relocated, as Charles Segal observes, into “something that can hypnotize us, the audience, into thinking that we can see something occur that has not in fact occurred.” The god’s power is that “of illusionistic tragedy and of illusionistic (mimetic) art generally to reveal divinity.”<sup>57</sup>

These three aspects of the *Bacchae*’s metatragic effect relate in several salient ways to its reception explored in this study. First, the question of the stranger’s identity animates several subsequent readings and transformations of the myth. In one prominent version of the myth, the stranger is in fact not the disguised god at all but merely his devotee.<sup>58</sup> H. J. Rose has theorized that this may have been a pre-Euripidean version of the myth and that the conflation of the stranger and the god was in fact Euripides’ innovation.<sup>59</sup> While literary evidence for the myth prior to Euripides is lacking, by the second century BCE, both versions are attested and continue to be employed. Consequently, in subsequent retellings of the myth, the stranger’s disguised identity

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<sup>57</sup> Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, 220. Verrall interpreted this scene along similar lines: “[t]hus the scene, the words and actions of it, is so arranged as to produce, and to put in the strongest possible light, a contrast and contradiction between the story told by the prisoner and the facts which accompany it [...] The broad effect of the scene is to show the adept as a most dangerous mixture of enthusiasm and fraud” (*The Bacchants of Euripides*, 66–67, 81).

<sup>58</sup> The most important examples are Pacuvius’ *Pentheus* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 3.511–733; on these, see § 3.3.

<sup>59</sup> H. J. Rose, “Dionysiaca,” *Aberystwyth Studies* 4 (1922): 19–29, esp. 24–28. Rose’s theory has received little attention, perhaps because there is insufficient evidence regarding the pre-Euripidean myth of Pentheus. The *Bacchae* (and others of Euripides’ myths), however, are remarkably innovative of the received tradition. Jennifer March has argued, for example, on the basis of artistic representations that Euripides’ version was the first in which Pentheus went to Cithaeron disguised as a maenad rather than leading an armed force and in which he is killed by his own mother (“Euripides’ *Bakchai*: A Reconsideration”).

functions not only as a narrative problem but can signal a larger metaliterary engagement.<sup>60</sup> This ambiguity opens potentialities for numerous transformations, such that, for example, for Horace the stranger becomes a Roman Stoic and for Clement of Alexandria he becomes Jesus Christ.<sup>61</sup> Second, the breakdown of the distinction between Pentheus as spectator and spectacle points to the potential dangers of seeing and sensuality in the Dionysiac experience. If, as Aristotle observed, a central aim of tragedy was to produce pleasure for its audience through pity and fear, then Pentheus' failure to achieve his desired pleasure in seeing what is painful suggests the limits both of tragedy and of the Dionysiac experience. Under the influence especially of Plato, the Dionysiac experience was radically reinterpreted. Within Platonism the language of Bacchic ecstasy could be used to describe the ascent of the soul to philosophical enlightenment while replacing its traditional sensuality with a spiritual mysticism (see § 5.3 on Philo). In this context, readers of the *Bacchae* could appropriate its emphasis on "seeing" in a manner that muted its sensuality in favor of purely spiritual vision, as Clement of Alexandria does, for example, in describing initiation into Christian *gnosis* (§ 8.4). Finally, the illusory nature of the palace miracle as a theatrical event stands in contrast with the subsequent history of this trope. Whereas the *Bacchae*'s audience could well have perceived that the destruction of the palace was ultimately an aspect of Dionysus' power of illusion, several later authors would present miraculous prison escapes as authentications of true divine power, using the *Bacchae* as a point of reference.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Here, "metaliterary" (or, the closely related term "metapoetic") simply refers to presence of self-reflexivity whereby an author comments on the processes of literary production.

<sup>61</sup> These are discussed at length in §§ 3.4 and 8.4 respectively.

<sup>62</sup> This is prominent in my discussions of Artapanus (§ 4.3), Acts (§ 6.3), and Origen (§ 7.3).

### 1.3.2 THE *BACCHAE* AND DIONYSIAC RELIGION: ON PERILS AND RECONSTRUCTIONS

Every interpretation of the *Bacchae* must inevitably ask how the tragedy relates to “actual” Dionysiac religion. The cult of Dionysus is of course central to the tragedy’s subject matter. Throughout, one continuously finds cultic references that would have readily evoked practices that were well-known to a fifth-century audience. Modern scholars have therefore employed the *Bacchae* for two distinct yet interrelated questions, which, as this study demonstrates, were also of interest to ancient readers: (i) what can we learn about the nature of Dionysiac religion in fifth-century Athens? and (ii) what does Euripides want to communicate about it? In spite of extensive scholarly attention, little consensus has emerged. Regarding (ii), since antiquity Euripides had a reputation as a rationalist, a foe of traditional religion. Indeed, prior to the production of the *Bacchae*, Aristophanes had one of his characters charge, “now [Euripides] in his tragedies has persuaded men that the gods do not exist (νῦν δ’ οὗτος ἐν ταῖσιν τραγωδίαις ποιῶν τοὺς ἄνδρας ἀναπέπεικεν οὐκ εἶναι θεούς, *Thesm.* 450-51). This reputation persisted throughout antiquity and down into modern times.<sup>63</sup> The *Bacchae*’s place within Euripides’ developing religious outlook, however, is much disputed—it has been seen, on the one hand, as a last reiteration of his atheism and, on the other, as an

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<sup>63</sup> On Euripides’ ancient reputation, see Mary R. Lefkowitz, “‘Impiety’ and ‘Atheism’ in Euripides’ Dramas,” *CQ* 39 (1989): 70–82. This ancient view was reiterated by Nietzsche. In his view, Euripides was a Socratic rationalist whose works sought to “expel the original and all-powerful Dionysiac element from tragedy and to re-build tragedy in a new and pure form on the foundations of a non-Dionysiac art, morality, and view of the world” (*The Birth of Tragedy*, §§ 10–12, at 12). On Nietzsche’s view of Euripides, see Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 258–62. In an important essay, E. R. Dodds questions the characterization of Euripides as a rationalist, though without reference to Nietzsche. Dodds argues that while the playwright may not have advocated for traditional modes of piety, his own view of reality was nevertheless irrational, what Dodds labels “systematic irrationalism” (“Euripides the Irrationalist (A Paper Read before the Classical Association, April 12, 1929),” *CR* 43 [1929]: 97–104 [at 103]).

attempted repudiation of it.<sup>64</sup> This question has now long gone out of fashion—it is no longer regarded as methodologically sound to probe an author’s beliefs nor is it seen to be very interesting. Segal is undoubtedly correct that this is an “ultimately sterile debate.”<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, for ancient readers of the *Bacchae*, with whom this study is concerned, Euripides’ status as philosopher and his alleged radical religious views, were very relevant indeed.<sup>66</sup>

Regarding (i)—the nature of Dionysiac religion—the *Bacchae* has posed significant challenges both in terms of historical reconstructions and of methodologies for construing myth and ritual. A key problem is that the evidence for much of the religious practices reflected in the *Bacchae* is late (Hellenistic and Roman periods) and it is clear that due to its popularity the tragedy itself influenced subsequent developments in Dionysiac religion. This dynamic and reciprocal relation between the *Bacchae* and Dionysiac religion demands great care in historical reconstruction. For the purposes of this study, which focuses on the tragedy’s reception in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, this dynamic interplay is of central importance.<sup>67</sup> In this section, therefore, I highlight four aspects of Dionysiac religion in the *Bacchae* that are especially relevant to the ancient readers analyzed in subsequent chapters: violence and sacrifice, maenadism, mysteries, and prophecy. In each case, I attend briefly to the social and literary context

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<sup>64</sup> The latter—the theory of recantation—was adopted by Nietzsche, though he regarded it to be half-hearted and unsuccessful (*The Birth of Tragedy*, § 12). Verrall argued for the former (*The Bacchants of Euripides*, esp. 10–13). For a discussion of the interpretive issues involved in these divergent conclusions, see Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus*, 1–13.

<sup>65</sup> Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, 375. Leinieks similarly writes, “[t]he question, whether Euripides believed in the gods or not, is largely irrelevant” (*The City of Dionysos*, 40).

<sup>66</sup> That, e.g., both Clement (*Strom.* 5.11.70.2) and Origen (*Cels.* 4.77) refer to Euripides as “the philosopher of the stage” reflects the importance of this reputation in his ancient reception.

<sup>67</sup> For a discussion of methodological issues in Roman religion that emphasizes the interactive and reciprocal relationship between ritual and text, see Jörg Rüpke, “Acta aut agenda: Relations of Script and Performance,” in *Rituals in Ink*, 23–43.

of the fifth century and then observe how the tragedy relates to the broader history of Dionysiac religion and the ways in which this shapes its use by ancient readers.

*Violence and Sacrifice.* As discussed above (§ 1.2.2), Greek tragedy has been variously theorized as originating with sacrificial rituals of Dionysus. The question of tragic origins continues to be much debated by scholars; moreover, it is not clear that even if this could be established it would significantly illuminate the meaning of tragedy in the fifth century. Within this historical problematic, the *Bacchae* functions as an important test case. The killing of Pentheus is clearly presented by Euripides on the pattern of a ritual sacrifice. As Bernd Seidensticker's analysis demonstrates, many details of the preparation for and execution of Pentheus' death closely parallel well-established cultic procedures.<sup>68</sup> Such observations have led to various theories of violence and Dionysiac religion. Girard, for example, takes the *Bacchae* as evidence for his theory of the origin of religion in the containment of violence through its institutionalization: "[t]he Euripidean version of the myth emphasizes the spontaneous aspect of the ritualistic proceedings and thus affords us a fleeting glimpse—or at least a strong intimation—of a real relationship between the rite and a past event, grounded in fact and partially reconstituted by the dramatist."<sup>69</sup> This interpretation of the violent killing of Pentheus in the *Bacchae* is flawed on several grounds. On the one hand, Girard's characterization of Dionysus' fundamental nature as "the god of decisive mob action," for whom the connection with fertility, wine, and revelry is merely secondary is,

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<sup>68</sup> Bernd Seidensticker, "Sacrificial Ritual in the *Bacchae*," in *Arktouros: Hellenic Studies Presented to Bernard M. W. Knox on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (ed. Glen W. Bowersock, Walter Burkert, and Michael C. J. Putnam; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 181–90; see also, Foley, *Ritual Irony*, 208–18.

<sup>69</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 119–42 on the *Bacchae* (at 131).

as Albert Henrichs notes, an arbitrary construction (see also § 1.2.2 above).<sup>70</sup> Moreover, such an approach to the death of Pentheus fails adequately to attend to the *Bacchae*'s literary context. As Foley's study of Euripides' wider work has shown, sacrificial ritual provided him with "a kind of grammar of procedural terms to articulate in a compressed and symbolic form the nature of the relations of men in the community and of men to the larger world of animals and gods around them."<sup>71</sup> Consequently, it is methodologically problematic to reify sacrifices in tragedy as commemorations of actual violence.<sup>72</sup>

A more promising approach to the mythological killing of Pentheus and its connection with historical instances of human sacrifice to Dionysus is provided by Maria Daraki.<sup>73</sup> She argues that this myth functions as part of a wider civic discourse by illustrating the consequences of the breakdown of established ritual practice. In Greek society, men, rather than women, were supposed to perform sacrifice, and thus Agave's killing of her own child exemplifies the worst sort of human sacrifice that can result from the violation of traditional sacrificial procedures.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, to construe this act of violence as evidence of a distant "historical" event, as Girard does, overlooks this important function of the narrative. Girard's approach to Greek tragedy, however, has

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 132–36 (at 134); Henrichs, "Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence," 232–34.

<sup>71</sup> Foley, *Ritual Irony*, at 39.

<sup>72</sup> In addition to violence connected with sacrifice, violation against kinship and reciprocal relationships, as Elizabeth Belfiore's study has shown, is a central feature of the entire literary genre of tragedy (*Murder among Friends: Violation of Philia in Greek Tragedy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000]).

<sup>73</sup> Maria Daraki, "Aspects du sacrifice dionysiaque," *RHR* 197 (1980): 131–57. In a famous example reported by Plutarch (*Them.* 13), in obedience to a prophecy Themistocles sacrificed Persian prisoners to Dionysus at Salamis; on this see 135–39.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 135–43. For a recent discussion of sacrifice to Dionysus, see Stella Georgoudi, "Sacrificing to Dionysos: Regular and Particular Rituals," in *A Different God*, 47–60. Her analysis of a sacrifice to Dionysus *Anthroporrhaites* practiced at Tenedos demonstrates the difficulty in interpreting the significance of the sacrificial victim. In this case, some scholars have taken the animal victim to be a substitution for human sacrifice; others see it as representing the god's own suffering. Georgoudi disputes both explanations.

interesting analogues among ancient readers. As this study will demonstrate, several ancient critics of Greek culture and its religion employ the violence narrated in tragedy as direct evidence for the inherent moral flaws of polytheism. Such reified readings of tragedy serve as effective tools in religious polemic, so as to demonstrate, for instance, that “pagans” engaged in child sacrifice and cannibalism.<sup>75</sup>

*Maenadism.* A second important aspect of Dionysiac religion in the *Bacchae* is maenadism. Here again there is a strong contrast between its presentation in Euripides’ myth and its actual practice in Greek society.<sup>76</sup> In the former, the women of Thebes were, at least in Pentheus’ view, subversive of established familial and political hierarchies and they in fact ultimately brought about the fall of his royal house. By contrast, the historical evidence of maenadism suggests that maenadic cults were instituted and recognized in various Greek cities by the civic authorities. Although it is difficult to assess the nature of maenadism in Athens during Euripides’ lifetime because the evidence for it is almost exclusively from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, it seems certain that the irrational violence and subversion of maenads in the *Bacchae* would not have resembled any known expression of this cult in antiquity.<sup>77</sup> This contrast

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<sup>75</sup> Such uses of tragedy are discussed in my analyses of the Wisdom of Solomon and Clement of Alexandria; see §§ 4.2 and 8.3.

<sup>76</sup> Valuable studies of historical maenadism include Albert Henrichs, “Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina,” *HSCP* 82 (1978): 121–60; Henk S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion I: Ter Unus: Isis, Dionysos, Hermes, Three Studies in Henotheism* (Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 6; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 137–50; Barbara E. Goff, *Citizen Bacchae: Women’s Ritual Practice in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 213–16, 271–88.

<sup>77</sup> As Versnel observes, “[t]hrough Dionysus is an ambivalent god, his *thiasoi* were not generally distrusted as a danger for the city. Like their god they belong to routinized religion” (*Inconsistencies*, 157); see also Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, 38.

between myth and ritual provides a space within which Euripides' image of the maenad could subsequently be redeployed and modified in various directions.<sup>78</sup>

*Mysteriēs.* By contrast to sacrifice and maenadism, references to Dionysiac mystery initiation in the *Bacchae*, due to its required secrecy, are much less explicit. Mystery cults were prominent in the Greco-Roman world throughout antiquity.<sup>79</sup> In general, they consisted in secret rites and sacred formulae (*hieroi logoi*) in which initiates participated but were forbidden to reveal subsequently to outsiders. Dionysiac mysteries became particularly popular during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, although it is now generally accepted that they also were practiced in Classical Greece.<sup>80</sup> In his important article, "Dionysiac Drama and Dionysiac Mysteries," Richard Seaford argues that the *Bacchae* contains several features that may derive from the *hieroi logoi* of the Dionysiac mysteries.<sup>81</sup> On his reading, "the experiences of Pentheus seem to express the *subjective* aspect of initiation, the ignorance, fear and confusion of the initiand."<sup>82</sup> Thus, the desire of the initiate to achieve enlightenment through ritual initiation is reflected in Pentheus' desire to see the Bacchic rites. In initiation rites, various aspects of knowledge were communicated with perplexing riddles, not unlike the words spoken to Pentheus by the

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<sup>78</sup> Euripidean maenads are variously evoked and transformed by Theocritus (§ 2.3), Dio Chrysostom (§ 2.4) and Clement (§8.3). Philo alludes to maenadism generally (§5.3).

<sup>79</sup> On mystery cults generally, see Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987); Albert Henrichs, "'Hieroi Logoi' and 'Hierai Bibloi': The (Un)Written Margins of the Sacred in Ancient Greece," *HSCP* 101 (2003): 207–66.

<sup>80</sup> On the Dionysiac mysteries, see Martin P. Nilsson, *Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1957); Walter Burkert, "Bacchic Teletai in the Hellenistic Age," in *Masks of Dionysus*, 259–75; Versnel, *Inconsistencies*, 150–55. Whereas earlier scholarship viewed Dionysiac mysteries as originating in the Hellenistic period, a new consensus has emerged, as Burkert writes, "the question about Bacchic mysteries in the Hellenistic age cannot be that of invention but only of transformation" ("Bacchic Teletai," 260). Leinieks maintains, however, that Dionysiac mysteries did not exist in Athens during the fifth century (*The City of Dionysos*, 123–52).

<sup>81</sup> In this sense, he regards the *Bacchae*'s relationship with Dionysiac mysteries as analogous to that of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* with the Eleusinian Mysteries.

<sup>82</sup> Seaford, "Dionysiac Drama," at 257.

stranger in the *Bacchae* (e.g., 472, 474, 477-80).<sup>83</sup> Pentheus' transvestitism also parallels certain gender reversals that accompanied initiations.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, his costume is described as a funerary garb (*Bacch.* 857-58), which reflects the important conception of initiation as a ritualized death and rebirth. Thus, the conflictive experience of the initiate in facing fear and death while at the same time entering into divine life is well captured by the narrative. The obvious difference, of course, is that Pentheus' opposition to the god and consequent self-destruction functions as the antithesis to the initiate's enlightenment. A central interest in the Dionysiac mysteries and one which is prominent in several of the readings of the *Bacchae* explored in this study centered on one's condition in the afterlife secured through ritualized death.<sup>85</sup>

*Prophecy.* A final aspect of religion in the *Bacchae* and one that has received somewhat less attention is Euripides' presentation of Dionysiac prophecy. In the speech of Teiresias (266-327), the prophet delivers a defense of the god before Pentheus in a manner that clearly employs modes of rhetoric and argumentation common to Euripides' contemporary intellectuals.<sup>86</sup> Among Dionysus' benefactions enumerated by Teiresias is that he inspires prophecy; Teiresias declares both that the god is a prophet and that his madness provides mantic power (298-301). This passage and the nature of Dionysiac prophecy are discussed in greater detail in a later chapter (§ 6.4.2). Here it is sufficient to

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 253-55.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>85</sup> On the importance of the afterlife in the Dionysiac mysteries, see above on the gold leaves from Pelinna (§ 1.3.1); also Nilsson, *Dionysiac Mysteries*, 116-32; Seaford, "Immortality, Salvation, and the Elements," 1-26, esp. 4-9; Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 21-23; Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets* (2d ed.; London: Routledge, 2013), 94-136. Passages from the *Bacchae* are quoted by Horace, Plutarch, and Clement as relevant to their own discussions of death, virtue, and piety; see §§ 3.4, 3.5, and 8.4.

<sup>86</sup> For a discussion of the influence of the sophistic movement in the *Bacchae*, see Roux, *Euripide, Les Bacchantes I: introduction, texte et traduction*, 43-55.

observe that Teiresias' claims for Dionysus' prophetic powers pose a series of questions that recur throughout antiquity regarding the nature of Dionysiac inspiration and, in particular, whether it entails a repudiation of rationality (e.g., drunkenness).<sup>87</sup>

Throughout the *Bacchae*, Euripides challenges established conceptions of Dionysiac *mania*, particularly its opposition with *sophrosyne*. In keeping with this reevaluation in the tragedy, Dionysiac madness and possession will subsequently be understood in various ways; some will connect it with poetic inspiration, others with wine-induced prophecy.<sup>88</sup>

In sum: many of the debates in modern scholarship regarding the *Bacchae*'s relationship with Dionysiac religion are closely connected with the play's ancient reception. A reader's interpretation and application of the *Bacchae* potentially reveal a great deal about his or her experience of and attitude toward the religion. At the same time, however, it is important to observe that over the course of antiquity the symbols of Dionysiac religion became imbedded within the cultural fabric of the Greco-Roman world. Consequently, references to its mythology and cult need not reflect deeply held positions for or against it. This is well illustrated by Katherine Dunbabin's study of Roman floor mosaics. She observes that the religious subjects represented on these mosaics reflect wider cultural developments, in which "[m]ythology itself seems to have

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<sup>87</sup> It has often been observed that the sophistic content of Teiresias' speech stands in ironic contrast with what would be expected from a fifth-century prophet. As Paul Roth argues, however, this may reflect the assumptions of a modern audience more than an ancient one ("Teiresias as Mantis and Intellectual in Euripides' *Bacchae*," *TAPA* 114 [1984]: 59–69). He identifies several fifth-century prophets who also employ sophistic discourse.

<sup>88</sup> On the former, see § 3.4.1 on Horace; on the latter, see § 6.4.2 on Acts.

degenerated into a source-book of familiar motifs.”<sup>89</sup> Among the traditional deities represented, Dionysus was second only to Venus in popularity, and a variety of Dionysiac iconographic tropes appear in the mosaics. As Dunbabin observes, however, “[s]uch works cannot be taken as providing any evidence that either the patron or the mosaicist regarded Dionysus primarily as an object of worship, was interested in the details of his cult, or wished the mosaic to serve any function beyond that of pleasing the eye.”<sup>90</sup> Thus, similarly, while some ancient readers clearly encountered the *Bacchae* within the context of profound religious commitments or ideological struggles, for others, its poetry may have represented something more akin to what Dunbabin finds in Dionysiac iconography: “a half-comprehended motif almost devoid of significance.”<sup>91</sup>

### 1.3.3 THE *BACCHAE* AND POLITICS: A GOD OF CONFLICTING IDENTITIES

As discussed above, Greek tragedy served as an important venue for civic discourse in which Athenian values could be both celebrated and problematized. In keeping with this, the *Bacchae* touches on several issues of great importance to Athens at the close of the fifth century. In this section, I highlight two of these that become particularly important in subsequent eras, namely, questions of ethnic identity and of political tyranny and liberation.

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<sup>89</sup> Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage* (Oxford Monographs on Classical Archaeology; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), at 44.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 173–87 (at 174).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

One of Dionysus' distinctive ambiguities is his ethnicity. In mythology and ritual he is consistently represented as barbarian, foreign to Greece.<sup>92</sup> Consequently, prior to the discovery of Dionysus' name in the Linear B tablets from the Bronze Age, scholars generally assumed that he was in fact a late addition to Greek religion.<sup>93</sup> That Dionysus is in fact "indigenous" to Greece highlights the significance of his "foreign" status in myth. This tension is central to the *Bacchae*, where Pentheus rejects the god's cult as barbarian because he refuses to recognize that the god's mother is Theban. Henk Versnel suggests that Euripides employs this ambiguity as a means of exploring religious tensions within contemporary Athens. He observes that in fifth-century Athens, one could be prosecuted for impiety in connection with introducing new or foreign gods.<sup>94</sup> The most famous example of this is Socrates' trial.<sup>95</sup> There are, however, several additional instances of "foreign gods" that were introduced into Athens during the fifth century, many of which involved ecstatic rituals.<sup>96</sup> As Versnel argues, the disconnect between the actual Athenian practice of Dionysiac religion and the excess, violence, and subversion with which it is portrayed in the *Bacchae* is in part the result of Euripides' projection of these aspects onto invading foreign cults: "By staging Dionysos as a foreign, new god, introduced by a foreign and doubtful prophet and worshipped by an unmistakably

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<sup>92</sup> In the Anthesteria, for example, Dionysus' image was escorted into Athens on a wheeled ship representing his arrival from overseas. As Pickard-Cambridge notes, however, this may reflect either his original arrival or his return (*The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 12–13).

<sup>93</sup> In 1910, for example, Verrall could write, "[a]ccording to the legend, which to this extent may safely be accepted as historical, this orgiastic religion was introduced into Greece and specially into Delphi, at a time comparatively recent" (*The Bacchantes of Euripides*, 3). On Dionysus in the Bronze Age, see Kerényi, *Dionysos*, 5–28; Burkert, "Dionysos—different," 15–16.

<sup>94</sup> Versnel, *Inconsistencies*, 96–205; Versnel, "Heis Dionysos!," 40–46. For a broader discussion of the processes whereby new gods were introduced into Athens, see Robert Garland, *Introducing New Gods: The Politics of Athenian Religion* (London: Duckworth, 1992), esp. 160–61 on the *Bacchae*.

<sup>95</sup> On this trial, see Garland, *Introducing New Gods*, 136–51.

<sup>96</sup> Versnel, *Inconsistencies*, 102–31. These include cults of Adonis, Cybele, Bendis, Kotys, Sabazius, and Isodaites; see also Dodds, *Euripides, Bacchae*, xx–xxv.

sectarian movement, Euripides intentionally blurred the comfortable distinctions between the solid foundations of institutional religion and the deviant sects on the margin of Athenian society.”<sup>97</sup> The *Bacchae*’s fictionalized construction of a religious other within the context of fifth-century Athens anticipates the ways in which it is reused by several subsequent readers explored in this study.

The *Bacchae*’s treatment of the conflict between a foreign god and the state relates closely with the theme of political tyranny and liberation. As observed above, Euripides’ narrative exploits the interplay between various types of Dionysiac liberation (*lisis*). Moreover, in Athens Dionysus was closely connected in various ways to the democratic ideal because he was a god who leveled distinctions of class and gender. Consequently, the destruction of the royal house resulting from his arrival at Thebes can naturally be understood as a celebration of the ideals of Athenian democracy. Such a reading of the *Bacchae* must also be juxtaposed with another aspect of the narrative, however. Versnel observes that Euripides’ Dionysus anticipates the gods of the Hellenistic era, “who cherished essentially greater ambitions than any of the traditional Greek gods and whose arrival was accompanied by a radically novel religious mentality.”<sup>98</sup> Thus, while Dionysus does indeed overthrow the tyrant, he also exhibits a sort of totalizing and universal claim that anticipates his role within the Hellenistic period, in which he became a favorite patron of the Ptolemaic emperors. Within imperial ideology, Dionysus’ role as political liberator and symbol of democracy is supplanted by

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<sup>97</sup> Versnel, *Inconsistencies*, 189; see also Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 151–53, 167–68.

<sup>98</sup> Versnel, *Inconsistencies*, 189; see also Dodds, *Euripides, Bacchae*, xx.

that of universal conqueror. This inherent tension in Dionysus is revisited at various points in antiquity both by advocates and critics of imperial rule.<sup>99</sup>

## 1.4 EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*, RELIGIOUS IDENTITY, AND LITERARY RECEPTION

### 1.4.1 HYBRIDITY DIVINE: IDENTIFYING WITH DIONYSUS

This study, like the play that is its subject, explores the complex phenomena of constructing religious identity amidst social transformation and upheaval. Audiences and readers throughout antiquity encountered Euripides' *Bacchae* in a remarkably wide array of geographical, political, and religious contexts. Thus, the various ways in which this tragedy is interpreted, imitated, translated, excerpted, and debated provide important insights into the self-definition and ideology of those who employ it. As a play about the mythology and cult of Dionysus, the *Bacchae* is an especially striking text around which religious and political identities were negotiated, especially given that the god himself embodies a range of ambiguities. It is particularly interesting to observe who wishes to identify with Dionysus and for what purposes. As we shall see throughout this study, beginning in the Hellenistic period emperors (and aspiring emperors) associated with the god, some adopting the title the "New Dionysus." This epithet could symbolize universal power and also reflect Dionysiac practices of sensuality. In Rome, Dionysus' role as an imperial deity was complicated by the conflict between Antony and Octavian, where the former identified with Dionysus and the latter with Apollo. Within this political and religious context, Jewish and Christian interactions with Dionysus take on heightened

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<sup>99</sup> For discussions of place of Dionysus within both the propaganda and criticism of empires, see the discussions of Alexandria (§ 2.2), Rome (§3.2), and Philo (§5.2).

urgency. Both Yahweh and Jesus and their respective cults were conflated with Dionysus by various Greco-Roman (and modern scholarly) observers, a fact which motivated several Jewish and Christian writers to assert their religious difference.<sup>100</sup> In view of this political and religious landscape, when Jews and Christians living under Greek and Roman imperial rule reflect on the god Dionysus, it is often amidst conflict in the maintenance of their own religious commitments.

The importance of empire as a matrix within which cultural and religious identities were constructed and negotiated in antiquity has featured prominently in some recent scholarship. The influence of “postcolonial” criticism is increasingly taking hold in the various disciplines represented in this study, evidenced by a growing number of publications. Within classics, for example, a collection essays edited by Simon Goldhill explores the range of ways in which Greeks represented themselves over against the Roman Empire.<sup>101</sup> This volume demonstrates the scope of the influence of the Roman Empire upon Greek life and its role in shaping Greek cultural identities, which were formed in the intermediate spaces between Greek, barbarian, and Roman. In a recent study of Judaism in the Seleucid Empire, Anthea Portier-Young has made similar observations. She writes that “asserting and (re)defining particular Jewish identity as distinct and separate from Hellenistic ‘culture’ and identity emerges most strongly as a response to perceptions of threat originating with the Hellenistic imperial powers and those who support them.”<sup>102</sup> Her study demonstrates in particular the importance of this

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<sup>100</sup> These are discussed below in §§ 4.1.1 and 6.1.1 respectively.

<sup>101</sup> Simon Goldhill, ed., *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>102</sup> Anthea Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011), 107–14 (at 113).

perspective in the development of apocalyptic literature. Likewise in the New Testament, Stephen Moore employs a postcolonial analysis of the Book of Revelation.<sup>103</sup> He observes that “Revelation, though passionately resistant to Roman imperial ideology, paradoxically and persistently reinscribes its terms,” by employing imperial metaphors as a primary source of its theological imagination.<sup>104</sup> Regarding the appropriation of Greek philosophy by Christians in the Roman world, Sara Parvis writes of Justin Martyr that his dual identity “undermines the purity of difference and therefore its authority.” Consequently, he is “a subversive danger to both Christian orthodoxy and pure Hellenism.”<sup>105</sup>

Several insights from postcolonial theory will be relevant throughout this study. In the cultural encounters under empire, there are various modes of resistance and accommodation. Within this process, religious and political identities are negotiated often through a characterization of the other. The results can be described by what Homi Bhabha calls “the hybrid moment of political change. Here the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One* [...] *nor the Other* [...] *but something else besides*, which contests the terms and territories of both.”<sup>106</sup> Thus, identity emerges through a “Third Space,” in which “[c]ultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in relation of Self to Other.”<sup>107</sup> This study explores the ways in which Dionysus functions in antiquity as a powerful symbol of such

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<sup>103</sup> Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (The Bible in the Modern World 12; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 97–121.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, at 118.

<sup>105</sup> Rebecca Lyman, “Justin and Hellenism: Some Postcolonial Perspectives,” in *Justin Martyr and His Worlds* (ed. Sara Parvis and Paul Foster; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 160–68 (at 165).

<sup>106</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory,” in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 28–56 (at 41).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

hybridity; his distinctive ambiguities create a space for interrogating and articulating cultural change and conflict.

#### 1.4.2 LITERARY (DIF)FUSIONS: CLASSICAL TEXTS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES

Alongside Dionysus, his cult, and mythology, this study explores the role of “classical” literature as a locus of cultural interaction and contestation. Along with other ancient poets, the works of Euripides belonged to an established corpus that served as the basis of Hellenistic heritage and education (*paideia*). Very early on, they acquired the status of classics and remained so throughout antiquity and down to the present. This study attends to the concerns of authors in subsequent eras with negotiating their own positions vis-à-vis this literary tradition. The Hellenistic poets of Alexandria worked under the shadow of the Alexandrian Library, which embodied the cultural value of classical literature; yet at the same time these poets innovatively developed new modes of literary expression. Roman poets were similarly heirs of Greek models, including the *Bacchae*, which was translated into Latin; yet they transformed these into distinctively Roman products. Greek-speaking Jews similarly adapted Greek literary forms: in addition to the translation of Hebrew Scripture, they produced much literature in Greek that incorporated classical models. Christian writers also responded to and adapted Greek literature: their narratives share in Greek prose genres while at the same time developing them in new directions. Moreover, writers such as Clement and Origen engaged directly in debates over the meaning and application classical texts.

#### 1.4.3 INNOVATOR, PHILOSOPHER, AND ATHEIST: THE ANCIENT RECEPTION OF EURIPIDES

Among ancient poets, Euripides' popularity in antiquity was second only to that of Homer.<sup>108</sup> His tragedies, however, evoked diverse responses. In his own lifetime, he does not seem to have reached the status of Aeschylus or Sophocles; on the basis of his success rate in the tragic competitions, for example, he lagged far behind, winning only four times out of some 22 entries.<sup>109</sup> Aristophanes' comedies reveal a critical distaste for Euripides for, among other things, his novelty of style, his sophistry, and his religious views (see § 1.3.2 above).<sup>110</sup> Moreover, Aristotle preferred Sophocles: he identified Euripides as the "most tragic" of poets but he was highly critical of Euripidean plots for their recourse to a *deus ex machina* (*Poetics* 15). Nevertheless, already in the fourth century, Euripides' popularity began to outstrip the other tragedians. An important turning point in the reception of fifth-century tragedy in general came in 386 BCE when revivals of old plays were incorporated into the Great Dionysia in Athens. This provided an initial impetus for the establishment of a "classical canon" of Attic tragedy. Subsequently, in the 330's or 320's Lycurgus established official state texts of the extant

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<sup>108</sup> On Euripides' ancient reception, see H. Funke, "Euripides," *JAC* 8/9 (1965-1966): 233–79; Heinrich Kuch, "Zur Euripides-Rezeption im Hellenismus," *Klio* 60 (1978): 191–202; Patricia E. Easterling, "From Repertoire to Canon," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (ed. Patricia E. Easterling; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 211–27; David Kovacs, "Text and Transmission," in *A Companion to Greek Tragedy* (ed. Justina Gregory; Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 379–93; Donald J. Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides: Dramatic Technique and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1–9.

<sup>109</sup> See Kuch, "Zur Euripides-Rezeption," 196–97. Aeschylus and Sophocles, by contrast, were both successful in more than half of their entries; see Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 98–99. That his plays were repeatedly selected for competition is, however, a sign of their high estimation.

<sup>110</sup> See Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 2.

works of the three great tragedians in Athens' public archive.<sup>111</sup> The evidence for which tragedies were revived in the fourth century is very limited; there is, however, an inscription (*IG II<sup>2</sup>* 2319-23) indicating that Euripides' plays were performed for three consecutive years (341-39 BCE).<sup>112</sup> In addition to Athens, in the fourth century Euripides' plays were performed in other cities around the Greek-speaking world.<sup>113</sup> His popularity continued well beyond the fourth century. With the construction of theaters throughout the Mediterranean world, performances of his plays became widely accessible, including, as we shall see, to both Jews and Christians (see §§ 4.1.2 and 6.1.2), and at Rome, where several of his plays were translated (§ 3.3).<sup>114</sup>

The restaging of classical dramas potentially involved metatragic significance. As Kuch argues, for example, the production of Euripides' *Orestes* in 340 BCE functioned to connect the current political decline of Athens with that at the play's first staging in 408 BCE.<sup>115</sup> As in the closing years of the Peloponnesian War, so again Athens' survival was in jeopardy, this time by the threat of Macedonia. Thus, the Athenian audience of 340 BCE might recognize the similarity of their current straits both

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<sup>111</sup> Sebastiana Nervegna, "Staging Scenes or Plays? Theatrical Revivals of 'Old' Greek Drama in Antiquity," *ZPE* 162 (2007): 14–42, esp. 15–18; Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 99–100.

<sup>112</sup> On this, see Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 107–111; Kovacs, "Text and Transmission," 381–83.

<sup>113</sup> Kuch, "Zur Euripides-Rezeption," 193.

<sup>114</sup> For a standard treatment of the history of ancient theater, see Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (2d ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961). For a recent analysis of the evidence for the reproduction of classical plays in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, see Nervegna, "Staging Scenes or Plays." She argues in particular against the widespread scholarly view that these plays were increasingly performed in extracted forms. Euripides' influence is found in the development of drama, both tragedy and comedy; on his influence on Menander, see John R. Porter, "Euripides and Menander: *Epitrepontes*, Act IV," in *Euripides and Tragic Theatre in the Late Fifth Century* (ed. Martin Cropp, Kevin Lee, and David Sansone; ICS 24-25; Champaign, Ill.: Stipes, 1999-2000), 157–81. In addition, non-dramatic poetry was influenced by Euripides; see Kuch, "Zur Euripides-Rezeption," 194–96.

<sup>115</sup> Kuch, "Zur Euripides-Rezeption," 191.

to 408 BCE and to the mythological narrative; in the latter the self-destruction of civilization was averted only by the appearance of Apollo *deus ex machina*.<sup>116</sup>

The manuscript tradition also testifies to Euripides' popularity; in contrast to Aeschylus and Sophocles, two separate collections of Euripides' plays survive from antiquity and thus we have eighteen complete tragedies of Euripides compared with seven each of Aeschylus and Sophocles.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, the number of surviving papyri of Euripides is significantly greater than the others.<sup>118</sup> The frequency of Euripides among the papyri is due in part, as Raffaella Cribiore suggests, to his popularity as a school text and also his use in rhetorical training.<sup>119</sup> Euripides' poetry was also prominent in anthologies and viewed as a valuable source of gnomic wisdom.<sup>120</sup> Dio Chrysostom's advice to the aspiring orator well captures the ancient attitude toward Euripides:

ἢ τε Εὐριπίδου προσήγεια καὶ πιθανότης τοῦ μὲν τραγικοῦ ἀναστήματος καὶ ἀξιώματος τυχὸν οὐκ ἂν τελέως ἐφικνοῖτο, πολιτικῶ δὲ ἀνδρὶ πάνυ ὠφέλιμος, ἔτι δὲ ἦθη καὶ πάθη δεινὸς πληρῶσαι, καὶ γνώμας πρὸς ἅπαντα ὠφελίμους καταμίγνυσι τοῖς ποιήμασιν, ἅτε φιλοσοφίας οὐκ ἄπειρος ὢν.

Although the smoothness and persuasiveness of Euripides may not happen to reach completely the most worthy condition of tragic majesty, it is nevertheless entirely useful to the political man; he is clever at filling his works with characters

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<sup>116</sup> For a discussion of other similar reactualizations of tragic scenes in connection with historical events, see esp. Easterling, "From Repertoire to Canon," 218–24. Several examples in the Roman context are discussed below; see § 3.3; also Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy*, 91–101.

<sup>117</sup> Like other tragedians, Euripides' plays were transmitted through the Byzantine period in a "Select" edition (ten plays), fixed perhaps around 200 CE and used as a school text. In addition, Euripides' plays also survive in an alphabetical collection. On the transmission of Euripides, see esp. Günther Zuntz, *An Inquiry into the Transmission of the Plays of Euripides* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); Kovacs, "Text and Transmission," 383–87.

<sup>118</sup> Kuch enumerates 75 for Euripides, 28 for Aeschylus, and 21 for Sophocles ("Zur Euripides-Rezeption," 196).

<sup>119</sup> Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 198–99. "The papyri generally show that members of the cultivated public were very fond of Euripides; they read Aeschylus rarely, and Sophocles even more infrequently. School papyri confirm this, showing an absolute preference for Euripides and only two excerpts dated to the Ptolemaic period from Aeschylus's tragedies" (198).

<sup>120</sup> See Mastrorarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 6–9. The importance of gnomic anthologies is discussed in connection with Clement (§ 8.2).

and experiences and he mixes gnomic wisdom into his poetry that is useful for all occasions, being that he is not inexperienced in philosophy. (*Or.* 18.7)

Dio's comments reveal a range of factors contributing to Euripides' widespread appeal.<sup>121</sup> Kuch proposes that the growth of his plays' popularity beyond the fifth century may be because they express views that anticipated those of the Hellenistic world.<sup>122</sup> In addition, as mentioned above and underscored here by Dio, Euripides was known for being a philosophical playwright. Given this reputation, philosophical debates over the meaning and application of his poetry are particularly interesting. John Dillon, for example, traces the dispute over the meaning of *Medea* 1078-79, which presents the internal struggle between the heroine's rationality and her passions.<sup>123</sup> He observes the various ways in which this passage was employed "as a proof text in philosophical discussion of psychology, ethics, and the problem of free will and determinism down through later antiquity."<sup>124</sup> In sum, the plays of Euripides were encountered extensively throughout antiquity: they were often restaged both in Greek and Latin; moreover, they were read widely in education, quoted by orators, and debated by philosophers.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Dio's own use of the *Bacchae* is discussed below in § 2.4.3.

<sup>122</sup> Kuch mentions, for example, that the Euripides' plays were less tied to *polis*-society and more in keeping with the cosmopolitan outlook of the Hellenistic age ("Zur Euripides-Rezeption," 197–202).

<sup>123</sup> καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἷα τολμήσω κακά, θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων, "indeed, while I understand the extent of the evils I shall dare to perform, my passion is stronger than my counsels."

<sup>124</sup> John M. Dillon, "Medea among the Philosophers," in *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art* (ed. James Joseph Clauss and Sarah Iles Johnston; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 211–28 (at 217).

<sup>125</sup> Kuch concludes, "[d]ie Tragödie des Euripides läßt sich in besonderem Maße als ein 'historisches Produkt' ansehen, das in das lebendige literarische Schaffen der jeweiligen Epochen eingegangen ist, und zugleich als ein 'produktives Moment' der jeweils gegenwärtigen Kultur, 'das in der Geschichte wurzelt.' In dieser Weise hat die Euripideische Tragödie die antike Literatur vielfältig befruchtet, ja hat sie die Weltliteratur bereichert bis in unsere Zeit" ("Zur Euripides-Rezeption," 201–02).

#### 1.4.4 THE *BACCHAE*'S ANCIENT AUDIENCE

In addition to Euripides' general status in antiquity, the *Bacchae*'s popularity in particular is also well attested.<sup>126</sup> The aim of this study is not the production of an exhaustive catalogue of quotations from and references to the *Bacchae*; rather, the individual examples explored in each chapter represent a limited selection (see § 1.5 below for a summary). In addition to these detailed studies, a brief survey here will function to illustrate the extent of the interest in this play throughout antiquity. On the one hand, the *Bacchae* inspired and influenced subsequent retellings of the myth of Pentheus; it was translated into Latin drama by Accius and adapted for epic by Ovid (*Metam.* 5.513-733) and Nonnus (*Dion.* 44-46).<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, the *Bacchae* was read, performed, quoted, and studied in a wide array of settings, from the mundane to the momentous. For example, an epigram of Callimachus complains of the frequency with which school children quote from the play (Pfeiffer 48).<sup>128</sup> Moreover, in an amusing anecdote, Lucian reports that the Cynic Demetrius (first century CE) encountered in Corinth “an illiterate man reading a beautiful volume” (ἀπαίδευτόν τινα βιβλίον κάλλιστον ἀναγιγνώσκοντα) of the *Bacchae*. At the scene of the rending of Pentheus, Demetrius “snatched the book and tore it apart, saying, ‘it is better for Pentheus to suffer *sparagmos* once by me than frequently by you’” (ἀρπάσας διέσπασεν αὐτὸ εἰπὼν, ‘ἄμεινόν ἐστι τῷ Πενθεῖ ἅπαξ σπαραχθῆναι ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ ἢ ὑπὸ σοῦ πολλάκις,’ *Ind.* 19). According to Dio Cassius, Nero may have sung extracts from the play accompanied by

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<sup>126</sup> On the reception and transmission of the play, see Roux, *Euripide, Les Bacchantes I*, 72–77; Seaford, *Euripides: Bacchae*, 52–54; Zuntz, *An Inquiry*, 110–25.

<sup>127</sup> The myth of Pentheus is also mentioned by Ps.-Apollodorus (3.5.2), Ps.-Hyginus (*Fab.* 184), and Pausanias (1.20.3, 2.2.7, 9.5.4).

<sup>128</sup> This is quoted in § 2.2 below.

the kithara (61.20).<sup>129</sup> A performance of part of the *Bacchae* is attributed to a significant historical event. According to Plutarch, when the severed head of Crassus was brought to the kings of Parthia and Artashat, they were enjoying a production of the *Bacchae*. Jason, an actor, employed it as a prop for Pentheus' head in his role as Agave and recited *Bacchae* 1169-71.<sup>130</sup> In addition, as suggested by Dio's remarks quoted above, the *Bacchae* was studied by orators. For example, in his third-century CE treatise, the *Art of Rhetoric*, Aspines of Gadara employs the *Bacchae* as a model for arousing pity (*eleos*) among the judges: "Euripides employed this method when he wished to arouse pity for Pentheus; as his mother grasped each of his limbs in her hands she lamented over them one by one" (τοῦτον τὸν τόπον κεκίνηκεν Εὐριπίδης οἶκτον ἐπὶ τῷ Πενθεῖ κινήσαι βουλόμενος· ἕκαστον γὰρ αὐτοῦ τῶν μελῶν ἢ μήτηρ ἐν ταῖς χερσὶ κρατοῦσα καθ' ἕκαστον αὐτῶν οἰκτιρίζεται, 10.41).<sup>131</sup> Finally, and of particular interest for this study, in the eleventh or twelfth century, the *Bacchae* formed the basis of the *Christus patiens*, a Christian drama about Christ's suffering, traditionally attributed to Gregory of Nazianzus.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> See Roux, *Euripide, Les Bacchantes I*, 74; Seaford, *Euripides: Bacchae*, 53. Other emperors are said to have quoted from the *Bacchae*. According to Plutarch, Alexander quoted *Bacch.* 266 (*Alex.* 53); Dio Cassius (79.8) reports that the emperor Caracalla quoted *Bacch.* 1388-92 on his deathbed.

<sup>130</sup> φέρομεν ἐξ ὄρέων / ἔλικά νεότομον ἐπὶ μέλαθρα, / μαράριον θήραν, "We are bringing from the mountains a fresh cut to the halls, a blessed prey" (*Crass.* 33); see Seaford, *Euripides: Bacchae*, 242-43; Easterling, "From Repertoire to Canon," 221-22.

<sup>131</sup> See Mervin R. Dilts and George A. Kennedy, *Two Greek Rhetorical Treatises from the Roman Empire: Introduction, Text, and Translation of the Arts of Rhetoric Attributed to Anonymous Seguerianus and to Aspines of Gadara* (Mnemosyne 168; Leiden: Brill, 1997). Aspines' assertion is, of course, debatable. As shall be seen in connection with Theocritus (§ 2.3.2), whether or not Euripides evokes pity for Pentheus is very much an open question.

<sup>132</sup> See André Tuilier, ed., *Grégoire de Nazianze: La Passion du Christ, tragédie: introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et index* (SC 149; Paris: Cerf, 1969); F. L. Van Cleef, "The Pseudo-Gregorian Drama *Christos Paschon* in Its Relation to the Text of Euripides," *TWASAL* 8 (1888-1891): 363-78.

In sum: the *Bacchae*'s ancient reception encompasses a remarkably wide variety of mediums and contexts. It was reused and transformed in a plethora of literary genres for a range of purposes. Before turning to a detailed analysis of these, some further theoretical considerations are necessary.

#### 1.4.5 TEXTUAL *SPARAGMOS*: THEORIZING RECEPTION

The methodologies in the study of literary reception are highly contested by scholars. Delineating various modes of textual relationships has been a major preoccupation in the scholarship of recent decades.<sup>133</sup> The various disciplines and sub-disciplines in the study of antiquity, however, often carry out their work with little cross-disciplinary interaction.<sup>134</sup> One aim of this study, therefore, is to challenge these traditional separations by bringing into closer conversation ancient authors and texts as well as the work of modern scholars, which are frequently separated by disciplinary divisions. This cross-disciplinary approach produces a fuller appreciation of the wide scope of the *Bacchae*'s interest and influence in antiquity, while at the same time problematizing both the categories of “pagan,” “Jew,” and “Christian” and the segregations in the modern academy that are organized around them. This section

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<sup>133</sup> In classical studies, there is now a sub-discipline of “reception studies,” which is interested in the reception of the classics in all periods of history; see Lorna Hardwick, *Reception Studies* (Greece & Rome: New Surveys in the Classics 33; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), esp. 12–31 on antiquity. In the study of the New Testament and early Christianity, see, e.g., the essays in Dennis R. MacDonald, ed., *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2001).

<sup>134</sup> On this point, Bernard Levinson calls for a greater degree of conversation between the discipline of biblical studies and other fields of the humanities (*Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 1–11).

provides a brief survey of the various methodological approaches that inform the subsequent analyses.

Within biblical criticism, one of the more influential methodologies since the turn of the twentieth century has been form criticism. While its initial impetus came in the study of the Pentateuch, it took hold in New Testament studies as a means of analyzing the development of individual components of narratives such as parables and miracles. In the study of Euripides' *Bacchae* and the New Testament, the seminal work of form criticism is Otto Weinreich's *Gebet und Wunder*, published in 1929.<sup>135</sup> This work brings together a several ancient accounts of prison escape miracles, including the *Bacchae*, in an effort delineate the formal elements. His approach has been widely influential and, although my own study does not directly employ form criticism, Weinreich provides a necessary starting point in the study of Artapanus and Acts (see §§ 4.3 and 6.3.2).

Another method of analyzing the relationship of a text to a predecessor that has acquired renewed popularity in recent decades and one that spans the disciplines of classical and biblical studies is *mimesis*-criticism. In his study of Greek literature in the Roman Empire, for example, Tim Whitmarsh emphasizes that a distinctive characteristic of literary activity in this period “was necessarily to anchor the present in tradition and reanimate the past.”<sup>136</sup> For elite Greeks living under Rome, as we shall see at several points of this study, establishing of one's status as a literary and cultural heir of Classical Greece offered potential political and economic payoffs. Consequently, *mimesis* “was not simply a means of marking a stable relationship between two fixed coordinates, the

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<sup>135</sup> Otto Weinreich, *Gebet und Wunder: Zwei Abhandlungen zur Religions- und Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1929).

<sup>136</sup> Tim Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), at 26.

present and the past; it was a locus of conflict between various groups trying (vainly) to define that relationship in different ways.”<sup>137</sup> Within New Testament studies, the most influential advocate of *mimesis*-criticism is Dennis MacDonald. His primary focus has been on the relationship of the Homeric epics with biblical and related narratives; several of the texts explored in this study have also been analyzed by MacDonald under the rubric of *mimesis*-criticism.<sup>138</sup> Here, I outline the six criteria he has developed for detecting *mimesis* in ancient texts: (i) *accessibility*: “the physical distribution of the model and its likely availability to the author of the imitation”; (ii) *analogy*: “examples of imitations of the same story by other authors. If no analogy exists, the case for dependence weakens” and vice versa; (iii) *density*: “the volume of parallels between two texts”; (iv) *order*: similarity in the sequence of the parallels; (v) *distinctive traits*: unusual characteristics shared with the model often signals *mimesis*; (vi) *interpretability*: “an assessment of why the author may have targeted the model for imitation, such as the replacement of its values with different ones.”<sup>139</sup>

An additional and perhaps more controversial theoretical construct, which is also important for this study, is “intertextuality.” The challenge in employing this term arises in part from the divergent ways in which scholars of various fields apply it. It is, for example, often used to refer to any instance of the influence of one text upon another. It is also employed as the analysis of a text’s sources. This study will be interested in both of these; however, neither corresponds to the meaning of intertextuality in its initial

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>138</sup> See my discussions of Artapanus (§ 4.3) and Acts (§ 6.3.1) with further bibliographical references to MacDonald’s works.

<sup>139</sup> For this concise summary, see MacDonald, “Introduction,” in *Mimesis and Intertextuality*, 1–9, esp. 2–3.

coinage by Julia Kristeva.<sup>140</sup> For Kristeva intertextuality was a means of describing the status of a text, or word, in relation to two axes: the horizontal—“the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee”—and the vertical—“the word in the text is oriented toward an anterior or synchronic literary corpus.” Within Kristeva’s framework, “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.”<sup>141</sup>

Kristeva’s intertextuality has been enthusiastically applied by some and strongly resisted by others. My aim is not to enter into the many and complex theoretical issues involved in this ongoing debate. Here, I note a framework outlined by Stephen Hinds that is particularly useful for navigating this controversy.<sup>142</sup> Although his focus is on Latin poetry, his discussion is relevant to this study in several ways. Hinds observes a split in the study of Latin poetry between “intertextualists” and “philological fundamentalists.”<sup>143</sup> The latter maintain a sharp distinction between “the clearly defined allusion,” on the one hand, and the “accidental confluence” of language, on the other. The former, in keeping with Kristeva, hold that the traditional application of “allusion,” to the extent that it depends on authorial intention, must be replaced by intertextual relationships in which the meaning is ultimately constructed by the reader. Hinds negotiates a middle ground between these two extremes. On the one hand, against the philological fundamentalists he argues that “there is no such thing as a wholly non-

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<sup>140</sup> See esp. “Word, Dialogue, and Novel” in Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (ed. Leon S. Roudiez; trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 64–91 (orig. 1969).

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, at 66.

<sup>142</sup> Stephen Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Roman Literature and Its Contexts; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>143</sup> On this, see *ibid.*, 16–51.

negotiable confluence.”<sup>144</sup> As for the intertextualists, while he accepts their larger epistemological position, Hinds wishes to maintain for literary critics the conceptual apparatus associated with the “intention-bearing author” even if this process entails “a considerable amount of inefficient circumlocution.”<sup>145</sup> Thus, in Hinds’ model, there is room to speak of “allusion” while not falling prey to the intentional fallacy.<sup>146</sup>

In sum: in view of the diversity of the modes of reception of the *Bacchae* in antiquity, an equally wide range of methodological tools is required. This study, therefore, draws on a variety of theoretical approaches developed from different disciplines, while at the same time acknowledging their contested status.

## 1.5 SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

The material chosen for analysis in a study such as this is necessarily selective and potentially arbitrary. It would be profitable, for example, to include more extensive explorations of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Plutarch’s various quotations, additional treatises of Philo, or the Maccabean literature. Some readers will no doubt be disappointed to find that there are only passing references to the Septuagint, the apocryphal Acts, Neoplatonists, Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca*, and the *Christus patiens*, and none to the Emperor Julian, Basil, or Augustine. There is, nevertheless, a logic and coherence underlying my presentation of authors and texts. First, in order to produce a study that genuinely cuts across disciplinary boundaries, I have selected materials that traditionally fall into

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 49–50.

<sup>146</sup> For an additional study that effectively navigates the tensions between allusion and authorial attention, see William Irwin, “What Is an Allusion?,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59 (2001): 287–97.

categories of classical, Jewish, biblical, and early Christian studies. Moreover, the range of genres analyzed includes poetry, philosophy, oratory, prose narrative, biblical exegesis, and religious polemic and apologetic. Second, this study explores texts and authors that are situated at moments of conflict and transformation that in various ways reflect the *Bacchae*'s own narrative and interpretive problems. In addition to the selection of material, its organization provides distinctive challenges. The threefold structure that I have employed runs the risk of reasserting the very dichotomies of "pagan," "Jew," and "Christian" that this study seeks to problematize. In order to address this problem, throughout each chapter I have cross-referenced repeatedly other materials in order to signal interrelationships among various authors. Moreover, over the course of the investigation additional organizational nodes emerge—e.g., geographical, chronological, thematic, philosophical—that challenge other binaries.

The following history of the *Bacchae*'s reception begins in Part I at Alexandria. This city plays a central historical role in the establishment and preservation of what becomes "classical" literature. Moreover, at Alexandria Dionysus figures prominently in the Ptolemies' self-presentation and ideology. Thus, chapter two explores the twenty-sixth *Idyll* of Theocritus, a poem that is the earliest extant retelling of Euripides' tragedy and also anticipates the various literary, religious, and political interests that animate the play's subsequent reception. The Alexandrian poet adapts the Euripidean presentation of maenadism with a view to the interests of his Ptolemaic patron. Also in Alexandria, though performed nearly 400 years later, Dio Chrysostom's *Alexandrian Oration* employs the *Bacchae*'s description of mythological maenads in order to characterize the violent and unruly behavior of the city's mob. Chapter three continues the exploration of

“Reading Dionysus under Empire,” moving to Rome, where the tragedy and its god appear in various ways. This chapter’s central focus is on Horace’s *Epistles* 1.16, which adapts a scene from the *Bacchae*. His treatment of the stranger’s conflict with the Theban tyrant reveals his own attitudes toward Augustan Rome and also provides important evidence for a developing tradition of philosophical interpretation of the *Bacchae*, which is seen through a comparison with Epictetus and Plutarch.

Part II, “Jews Reading Dionysus,” begins with an introduction to Jewish interactions with Dionysus and Greek tragedy as an aspect of the encounter between Judaism and Hellenism. Chapter four then examines two biblical narratives which are both recreated in view of the *Bacchae*. First, the Wisdom of Solomon reimagines the conquest of Canaan by characterizing the religion of its inhabitants as entailing child sacrifice and cannibalism. For his conceptual vocabulary, the author evokes various Greek tragedies, including the *Bacchae*. Second, Artapanus creates a romanticized narrative of the exodus in which Moses’ confrontation with the pharaoh includes an imprisonment and miraculous escape that strikingly resemble those of Dionysus. Chapter five explores two treatises of Philo as an example of broader Jewish engagement with Dionysus and the theater. First, in the *Legatio ad Gaium*, Philo criticizes the emperor’s Dionysiac and theatrical pretensions; second, in *De ebrietate* he employs Dionysiac religion as a negative foil in his construction of ideal piety.

Part III, “Christians Reading Dionysus,” opens in chapter six with survey of Christian engagement with Dionysus and attitudes toward the theater. It then analyzes the relationship between the Acts of the Apostles and the *Bacchae*. Although “the problem of Acts and the *Bacchae*” has stimulated a flood of scholarship since 1900, little

attention has been paid to the tragedy's treatment of madness (*mania*) and moderation (*sophrosyne*), drunkenness and sobriety, as important religious counterpoints against which Acts constructs its Christian values. Thus, chapter six examines not only possible allusions to the *Bacchae* in Acts but also its larger interest in shared religious themes. Chapter seven explores the dispute between Celsus and Origen preserved in the *Contra Celsum* over the proper comparison of the *Bacchae* and New Testament narratives. Finally, chapter eight considers Clement of Alexandria's various uses of the *Bacchae*, in particular, his transformation of Dionysus' conflict with Pentheus in *Stromateis* 4, in which the former becomes Christ the mystagogue and the latter the potential Christian initiate.

## PART I

### Reading Dionysus under Empire

ναρθηκοφόροι μὲν πολλοί, βάκχοι δὲ τε παῦροι.

“Thyrsus bearers are many, but true Bacchic ones few.”  
(Plato, *Phaedrus* 69c)

*Dulce periculum est, o Lenaeae, sequi deum cingentem viridi tempora pampino.*

“It is a sweet danger, O Lenaeian one, to follow the god, wreathing my temples with a  
fresh vine.”  
(Horace, *Odes* 3.25.18-20)

## CHAPTER TWO

### EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE* AT ALEXANDRIA:

#### THEOCRITUS, DIO CHRYSOSTOM, AND THE POLITICS OF MAENADISM

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The history of the ancient reception of Euripides' *Bacchae* is bound up with political and religious conflict and transformation. The drama stages the contestation of power between Dionysus and the Theban tyrant and was first performed in Athens as the city was suffering the consequences of its own failed imperial enterprise. Therefore, the ways in which the *Bacchae* is redeployed and adapted at new moments of transition and crisis are particularly striking. The two chapters of Part I explore several of these under the rubric "Reading Dionysus under Empire," first at Alexandria then at Rome. Within the Ptolemaic and Roman Empires, where Dionysus was variously appropriated in imperial ideology, the *Bacchae* would afford opportunities for exploring the tension between Dionysiac liberation and universal power. For poets, such as Theocritus and Horace, working under imperial patronage, autocratic authority complicates the processes of poetic composition. Their respective adaptations of the Euripidean myth reveal important aspects of their literary strategies that are at once intertextual, political, and religious. In juxtaposition with these two poets, I examine philosophers and orators who also employ the *Bacchae* as a means of expressing their own attitudes toward the empires in which they lived.

This chapter begins the literary history of the *Bacchae* in Alexandria with the poetry of Theocritus, who provides the first extant retelling of the tragedy in his twenty-sixth *Idyll*. Theocritus was a court poet of the Ptolemies, who patronized various cults of Dionysus as well a library that established a classical corpus of Greek literature. My reading of *Idyll 26* suggests that Theocritus draws on Euripides' description of maenads but transforms them so that they are no longer political subversives who undermine and ultimately destroy the monarch; rather, his maenads are submissive imperial subjects. A second Alexandrian example in which Euripides' maenads are redeployed is in Dio Chrysostom's *Alexandrian Oration* (*Or.* 32). He compares them with the Alexandrian mob whose riots had brought on military action from Rome. His use of the *Bacchae* functions to highlight the moral shortcomings of the Alexandrian people, which, he argues, are the ultimate cause for their imperial subjugation. Before considering Theocritus and Dio, however, I briefly sketch the history of Euripides' *Bacchae* and Dionysiac religion in Alexandria, noting in particular their importance to the Ptolemies.

## 2.2 THE ARRIVAL OF EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE* AND DIONYSUS IN ALEXANDRIA

With the conquests of Alexander and the founding of Alexandria, Euripides' *Bacchae* arrived in Egypt as part of the process of Hellenization. Indeed, Alexander's successors the diadochi constructed Greek theaters throughout the conquered lands of the east and Euripides' *Bacchae* would certainly have been staged in Alexandria (even if direct evidence is unavailable).<sup>1</sup> More readily demonstrable is that the play was well

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the practice of restaging fifth-century plays, see § 1.4.3 above. The Ptolemaic theater in Alexandria has left no remains. For a presentation of the archaeological remains of

known through reading and education. By founding the Alexandrian Library and employing international scholars, the Ptolemies sought to lay claim to the heritage of classical Greek literature, of which the Attic tragedians held pride of place, second only to Homer. Moreover, the education of the young consisted in learning and copying lines of poetry, of both epic and drama.<sup>2</sup> The popularity of the *Bacchae*, in particular, is reflected in an epigram of Callimachus (Pfeiffer 48), in which the poet speaks through the voice of a tragic mask of Dionysus dedicated by one Simos to the Muses. It complains of school children who repeatedly parrot *Bacchae* 494: “they are saying, ‘sacred is my hair.’ This is my dream” (οἱ δὲ λέγουσιν, ‘ἱερὸς ὁ πλόκαμος,’ τοῦ μὲν ὄνειρα ἐμοί, 4-5).<sup>3</sup>

In addition to employing scholars of classical literature, the Ptolemies patronized many poets and commissioned new literary works. Indeed, much of the poetry that survives from Ptolemaic Alexandria was produced by court poets, some explicitly encomiastic, others not (see § 2.3.1 below). Moreover, several prominent literary figures (e.g., Callimachus and Apollonius) were both scholars at the library and poets engaged in their own literary activities. Thus, Hellenistic poetry must be understood as a negotiation between past and present, in which the authors were establishing the corpus of literature that embodied the ideals of Greek civilization and yet at the same time innovating for a new era.<sup>4</sup> In Hellenistic Alexandria, the Greek city-state was no longer the dominant

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other major Hellenistic theaters, see Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (2d ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 108–28.

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the role of poetry in grammatical education in Egypt based on evidence from school papyri, see Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 185–219. On the popularity of Euripides, see 198–99. Of Euripides’ works, the *Phoenissae* was the most popular both in education and in general.

<sup>3</sup> The translations of all ancient texts are mine throughout, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of the distinctive literary characteristics of Hellenistic poetry, see G. O. Hutchinson, *Hellenistic Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1–25; Marco Fantuzzi and

political entity within which poetry was composed and performed; centuries-old civic cults were replaced by new ones, tailored to serve the purposes of the imperial regime. In this context, the production and performance of poetry became tightly entwined in new ways with Dionysus and his cult. Ptolemy II Philadelphus supported a Dionysiac Guild of artists (οἱ περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον τεχνῖται, Athenaeus 198c), which may have included both performers and poets and which produced tragic drama (though not exclusively).<sup>5</sup> The close relationship between Dionysiac cult and tragic poetry in Alexandria can be seen in Philadelphus' patronage. In the 270's BCE, Philadelphus put on a famous religious festival, the Grand Procession, which is known to us from the detailed description given by Callixenus of Rhodes, excerpted by Athenaeus (197c-203b).<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that the tragic poet Philicus, who was also a priest of Dionysus, marched with the Dionysiac Guild. Thus, in the imperial advancement of Hellenism, tragic poetry and Dionysiac cult were intimately connected as modes of cultural and religious propaganda.<sup>7</sup>

The importance of Dionysus to Hellenistic imperial ideology can be seen from very early on in Alexandria.<sup>8</sup> Soon after his death, Alexander became identified with

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Richard Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–41.

<sup>5</sup> See Peter M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (3 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 1.618–20; 2.816 n. 2; E. E. Rice, *The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 55–58; Walter Burkert, “Bacchic Teletai in the Hellenistic Age,” in *Masks of Dionysus* (ed. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 259–75, esp. 263.

<sup>6</sup> The most comprehensive commentary and analysis along with a critical text and translation is given in Rice, *The Grand Procession*; see also H. Jeanmaire, *Dionysos: histoire du culte de Bacchus* (Paris: Payot, 1951), 448–49; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1.202–03.

<sup>7</sup> Burkert stresses that in the Hellenistic period, the spread of Dionysiac religion was “linked with two new forms of ‘show’ that were gaining control of the ‘media’ in that period: the theater and theatrical life that was spreading everywhere, and the royal parades of the Hellenistic kings” (“Bacchic Teletai,” 261).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Julien Tondriau, “Les thiasés dionysiaques royaux de la cour Ptolémaïque,” *ChrEg* 21 (1946): 149–71; Jeanmaire, *Dionysos*, 446–53; Martin P. Nilsson, *Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1957), 11–12; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1.201–

Dionysus.<sup>9</sup> In his homeland of Macedonia, Dionysiac cult had been particularly popular, and Alexander's mother Olympias was known to have been a maenad. According to legends recounted by Plutarch, her conception of Alexander resembles Semele's of Dionysus (*Alex.* 2).<sup>10</sup> The Ptolemies openly exploited the connection between Alexander and Dionysus, seen most prominently in the Grand Procession. Although several Greek deities were featured, they were all subordinated to Dionysus.<sup>11</sup> He was represented by a 15 foot statue and accompanied by an extravagant retinue of figures both from his mythology and cult (Athenaeus 197e-200c). A second larger statue of Dionysus staged his triumphant return from India including a statue of an elephant (200c-201c).<sup>12</sup> Next followed statues of Alexander and Ptolemy I Soter in a manner that suggested unambiguously that Alexander's conquests were to be understood as analogous to those of Dionysiac mythology. If the Procession fell short of directly identifying Ptolemy I with Dionysus, such claims would be soon to follow. Ptolemy IV Philopator is apparently the first to be given the name the "New Dionysus" and this title was

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07; Burkert, "Bacchic Teletai," esp. 261-70. It is significant that Herodotus (2.42.2) had identified Dionysus with Osiris, who himself had close association with the pharaohs.

<sup>9</sup> On Alexander's identification with Dionysus, see Arthur Darby Nock, "Notes on Ruler-Cult I-IV," in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (ed. Zeph Stewart; 2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1.134-59, esp. 134-44.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander was represented with various divine attributes in royal portraiture, including those of Dionysus, Zeus, Ammon, and Heracles; see R. R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 38-45.

<sup>11</sup> As Fraser notes, "[t]his subordination of the other Olympian deities, including the Father of the Gods, to Dionysus, is in fact characteristic of official Alexandrian religion" (*Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1.194).

<sup>12</sup> The elephant was an important symbol of Dionysiac triumph, employed by the Ptolemies in several other contexts. As early as the 310's BCE, coins of Ptolemy I depicted Alexander with elephant scalp; see Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits*, pl. 74.1-2. A statue of Ptolemy II in the British Museum (BM 38442) shows the ruler with elephant scalp as well as club (attribute of Heracles); see *ibid.*, 44; pl. 70.6.

subsequently adopted by others (Ptolemy XII Auletes and Marc Antony).<sup>13</sup> Prior to Ptolemy IV, however, Dionysus may already have been included in the Ptolemaic divine lineage.<sup>14</sup> In short, Dionysus was an important ideological symbol of the Ptolemies' imperial power.

Philadelphus' Grand Procession is representative of larger transformations in religious practice in the Hellenistic world. As Ellen Rice points out, when Greek religious festivals were transferred to foreign lands, they became divorced from their traditional civic settings. As such, several gods could be honored simultaneously and consequently there were greater possibilities for the inclusion of ruler cult as mentioned above.<sup>15</sup> The Grand Procession also illustrates the great varieties of Dionysiac religion that Philadelphus supported. In addition to the Dionysiac Guild of artists mentioned above, there are a variety of cultic officials in the Procession. It is also possible that initiates of Dionysiac mystery cults were included, which would reflect the increased popularity of mysteries (Dionysiac and others) in the Hellenistic period.<sup>16</sup> There were "all sorts of sacred bands" (θίασοι παντοδαποί), "women bearing winnowing fans" (τὰ λίκνα φέρουσαι), and, particularly important for the discussion below, maenads identified

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<sup>13</sup> The title first occurs in the fragmentary poem of Euphronius, the *Priapeia*: "Not to be trodden, O initiates of the New Dionysus," (Οὐ βέβηλος, ὃ τελεταὶ τοῦ νέου Διονύσου). The text is in G. U. Powell, *Collectanea Alexandrina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), 176. For a discussion of the meaning and application of the title "New Dionysus," see Nock, "Notes on Ruler-Cult I-IV," 144–52.

<sup>14</sup> For a presentation of the evidence for each of the deities with which individual Ptolemies were identified, see Julien Tondriau, "Rois lagides comparés ou identifiés à des divinités," *ChrEg* 23 (1948): 127–46.

<sup>15</sup> Rice, *The Grand Procession*, 26–27.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.*, 60–61, 187–90. The text of Athenaeus mentions "initiates" (περσειστελεταί, 198E) but here the text is corrupt. On the development of Dionysiac mysteries in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, see, e.g., Nilsson, *Dionysiac Mysteries*, 4–21; Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 21–23. Burkert emphasizes that it is now well established that mystery cults were already widespread in Classical Greece and that the Hellenistic period sees their transformation not their invention ("Bacchic Teletai," 259–61).

by Callixenus as “Macedonian women, who were called Mimallones, Bassarai, and Lydai” (Μακέται αἱ καλούμεναι Μιμαλλόνες καὶ Βασσάραι καὶ Λυδαί, 198e). Although maenadism is known from at least as early as Homer (*Il.* 22.460), historical evidence for its establishment in Greek cities comes largely from the Hellenistic period. For example, a Roman copy of a Hellenistic inscription on a tombstone at Magnesia in Ionia (*IMagn.* 215) records a Delphic oracle instructing the city to import maenads from Thebes in order to establish Bacchic *orgia* and *thiasoi* in their own city.<sup>17</sup> The names of the three Theban women and of their three *thiasoi* are recorded on the tombstone. Thus, Philadelphus’ inclusion of maenads in the Procession, complete with its three-fold structure, is consistent with a common institutionalized ritual form of maenadism found elsewhere in the Hellenistic period.<sup>18</sup>

In the decades subsequent to the Grand Procession, Ptolemaic interest in Dionysus continued. For Ptolemy IV Philopator, who reigned from 221-205 BCE, the title “New Dionysus” was symbolic not only of imperial conquest but also of his reputation for a debauched lifestyle. Moreover, as Julien Tondriau demonstrates, beginning with Philopator there is evidence that various Ptolemies sponsored royal Dionysiac *thiasoi*. Whereas early on these would have primarily been connected with mystery initiations, they came to serve a variety of purposes: they could be used both for the gratification of a

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<sup>17</sup> αἱ δ’ ὑμεῖν δώσουσι καὶ ὄργια καὶ νόμιμα ἐσθλά καὶ θιάσους Βάκχοιο καθειδρῦσουσιν ἐν ἄστει, “the women will give you rites and good ordinances and they will set up sacred bands of Bacchus in the city” (11-12). For the text of the inscription, see H. W. Parke and D. E. W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle II: The Oracular Responses* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956), 137–38 no. 338. On this inscription, see Albert Henrichs, “Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina,” *HSCP* 82 (1978): 121–60, esp. 123-37. He dates the import of the Theban maenads to between 278 and 250 BCE.

<sup>18</sup> The absence of historical evidence for maenadism in the Classical period makes it difficult to assess the extent to which the civic establishment of maenadic cult in the Hellenistic period is an innovation. For analysis of historical maenadism, see Henrichs, “Greek Maenadism”; Barbara E. Goff, *Citizen Bacchae: Women’s Ritual Practice in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 213–16, 271–88. On the nature of Euripides’ portrayal of maenadism, see § 1.3.2 above.

ruler's sensuality and as part of a wider sophisticated political strategy.<sup>19</sup> The most important evidence for such Ptolemaic oversight of Dionysiac religion comes from a papyrus in Berlin (*BGU* 1211).<sup>20</sup> It contains a Ptolemaic decree requiring all newly arriving practitioners of Dionysiac initiations (Τοὺς κατὰ τὴν χώραν τελοῦντα[ς] τῶι Διονύσῳι) to register with a court official, Aristobulus, to establish the origin of their “sacred things as far as three generations” (τὰ ἱερὰ ἕως γενε[ῶν] τρι[ῶν]), and to present a sealed copy of their *hieros logos* (τὸν ἱερὸν λόγον ἐ[σφ]ραγίς[μένον]). The interpretation and date of this decree are much disputed. It is generally attributed to Ptolemy IV Philopator but it is unclear whether it is designed to promote or to curb the spread of the mysteries.<sup>21</sup> In any case, it establishes that from early on (i.e., at least “three generations” prior to the decree) the mysteries of Dionysus were widespread and that the Ptolemies had reason to concern themselves with how they were practiced. Unfortunately, due to the secretive nature of Greek mysteries, the contents of the *hieroi logoi* in view in the decree are unknown.<sup>22</sup> For the purposes of the present study it is

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<sup>19</sup> Tondriau, “Les thiasos dionysiaques royaux,” 149–56 on Philopator. In addition to Philopator, he finds evidence for royal *thiasoi* sponsored by Ptolemy XII Auletes and Cleopatra and Antony.

<sup>20</sup> The text first published in 1916 is reprinted in Marie-Thérèse Lenger, *Corpus des ordonnances des Ptolémées (C. Ord. Ptol.)* (Brussels: Académie royale de Belgique, 1964), 71 no. 29; it is also printed in Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 2.345 n. 114. For discussion of the edict, see Tondriau, “Les thiasos dionysiaques royaux,” 155–56; Jeanmaire, *Dionysos*, 447–48; Günther Zuntz, “Once More: The So-Called ‘Edict of Philopator on the Dionysiac Mysteries’ (BGU 1211),” in *Opuscula Selecta: Classica, Hellenistica, Christiana* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), 88–101; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1.204; Albert Henrichs, “‘Hieroi Logoi’ and ‘Hierai Bibloi’: The (Un)Written Margins of the Sacred in Ancient Greece,” *HSCP* 101 (2003): 207–66, esp. 224–31.

<sup>21</sup> Zuntz, for example, suggests a later date and argues that the decree is not aimed at promoting Dionysiac mysteries but rather limiting the influx of religious personnel who promoted unauthorized cults largely among lower classes (“Once More”).

<sup>22</sup> Albert Henrichs has suggested that a good candidate might be found in the fragmentary papyrus, *P. Gurob I* in Dublin. This text is concerned with both myths and rituals of Dionysus (though not exclusively) and seems to have been intended for initiates with the sort of secrecy expected for a *hieros logos* (“‘Hieroi Logoi’ and ‘Hierai Bibloi’,” esp. 233–35). Although *hieroi logoi* were intended to be kept secret, scholars have attempted to find traces of them in various extant literature. Regarding Dionysiac

sufficient to observe that *BGU* 1211 points to a Ptolemaic interest in Dionysiac mystery cults. This official oversight of the mysteries of Dionysus is consistent with other evidence of Ptolemaic religious policies. Martin Nilsson, for example, has analyzed another fragmentary papyrus (Antinoopolis Papyrus no. 18) in which he finds “royal mysteries,” that is, a conflation of ruler and mystery cults.<sup>23</sup> Taken together, these observations point to a shift in Dionysiac religion in which “‘Royal mysteries’ take precedence over private cults practiced in the corner” such that “the charisma of power is seen to override other forms of reverential awe.”<sup>24</sup>

The foregoing discussion has established two points that are fundamentally important for this study. The arrivals of Euripides’ *Bacchae* and Dionysus in Alexandria were intimately tied to Ptolemaic imperial power and ideology. They represent Greek cultural and religious identity in ways that were central to Ptolemaic interests. Any reading of the *Bacchae* in Alexandria must therefore be attentive to these political and religious realities. The two authors discussed below (Theocritus and Dio Chrysostom) powerfully illustrate these interconnections in an Alexandrian context. Both evoke the words of Euripides’ play in order to construct a portrait of maenads; and both do so with a view to the implications of maenadism for the context of Greek and Roman imperial rule in Egypt.

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*hieroi logoi* in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, for example, see Richard Seaford, “Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries,” *CQ* 31 (1981): 252–75.

<sup>23</sup> Martin P. Nilsson, “Royal Mysteries in Egypt,” *HTR* 50 (1957): 65–66. The papyrus is from the second century CE but its content seems to have originated in the Ptolemaic period.

<sup>24</sup> Burkert, “Bacchic Teletai,” 269.

## 2.3 THEOCRITUS' *IDYLL* 26 AND EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*: FROM SUBVERSIVE

### MAENADISM TO COURT POETRY

In his twenty-sixth *Idyll* (Λῆναι ἢ Βάκχαι, or the *Bacchantes*), Theocritus presents the myth of the death of Pentheus at the hands of Agave and her sisters. This hymn-like poem serves as a useful starting point for this larger study because it is the earliest extant adaptation of Euripides' tragedy and thus sets the stage for many subsequent literary efforts. Moreover, the chronological and geographical gap between Euripides and Theocritus represents a transformational historical moment over which fundamental political, religious, and literary changes occurred. Euripides' works are literary products of the *polis* of Athens, performed at civic festivals of Dionysus. His tragedies were composed for the Athenian *demos* and judged democratically by citizens selected, one from each of the ten tribes.<sup>25</sup> The circumstances of the *Bacchae*'s production and performance are distinctive, however: Euripides wrote it in exile at Macedonia, and it was performed posthumously in Athens. By contrast, Theocritus worked primarily in Alexandria and his poetry probably never reached the masses; rather, his audience was limited to his Ptolemaic patrons and others of his literary circles.<sup>26</sup> Instead of writing for the favor a democratic audience, Theocritus required the approval of his royal patron. In both Classical Athens and Ptolemaic Alexandria, Dionysus was a central figure in official cults and closely connected with the production and performance of poetry; yet, as discussed above, several transformations occurred under the Ptolemies in the function of Dionysiac religion. In my analysis of *Idyll* 26, my contention is that these crucial

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<sup>25</sup> On the place of tragedy in the civic life of Athens, see § 1.2.3.

<sup>26</sup> Hutchinson, however, warns against excessively limiting the audience of Hellenistic poetry simply because of its learned quality and royal patronage (*Hellenistic Poetry*, 5–7).

differences between the worlds of Euripides and Theocritus are central to the latter's transformation of the *Bacchae* and in my view have not received sufficient attention. Theocritus' treatment of the *Bacchae*, therefore, provides a productive site for exploring the dynamic interplay between literature, religion, and imperialism in Alexandria.

### 2.3.1 THEOCRITUS: THE POET AND HIS PATRON

Theocritus has earned a place of prominence in the history of literature primarily for his bucolic, or pastoral, poetry.<sup>27</sup> Although less than half of his works are properly characterized as pastoral, these poems have been rightly judged as masterpieces of this genre and thus tend to receive the most attention.<sup>28</sup> Little is known about Theocritus' life apart from what can be deduced from his poems.<sup>29</sup> He was born in Syracuse sometime around 300 BCE. The reasons for his subsequent move to Alexandria can be inferred from *Idylls* 16 and 17. The former appears to be a failed appeal for patronage, addressed to Hieron II, tyrant of Syracuse; the latter is an encomium to Ptolemy II Philadelphus, from whom he had subsequently acquired what he failed to obtain in his homeland. As a native of Syracuse, he employs the Doric dialect of its mother-city Corinth. Some of his pastorals evoke the rustic landscape of Syracuse, as for example *Idyll* 11, in which he

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<sup>27</sup> For general introductions to and studies of the poetry of Theocritus, see Frederick T. Griffiths, *Theocritus at Court* (Mnemosyne 55; Leiden: Brill, 1979); Steven F. Walker, *Theocritus* (Twayne's World Authors Series 609; Boston: Twayne, 1980); Hutchinson, *Hellenistic Poetry*, 143–213; Susan A. Stephens, *Seeing Double: Intercultural Poetics in Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Hellenistic Culture and Society; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 122–70; Fantuzzi and Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation*, 133–90. The most comprehensive commentary is A. S. F. Gow, *Theocritus: Edited with a Translation and Commentary* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950). Also useful for most poems is Kenneth J. Dover, *Theocritus: Select Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1971).

<sup>28</sup> Of the 32 extant poems, the pastoral corpus consists of seven (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 11). Thus, some have challenged the tendency to develop a view of the poet from these alone; see, e.g., Bernd Effe, "Die Destruktion der Tradition: Theokrits mythologische Gedichte," *RhM* 121 (1978): 48–77, esp. 48–53; Hutchinson, *Hellenistic Poetry*, 143–45.

<sup>29</sup> On which, see Gow, *Theocritus*, 1.xv–xxii; Walker, *Theocritus*, 13–31.

identifies himself with the land of Polyphemus, “the Cyclops, my countryman” (ὁ Κύκλωψ ὁ παρ' ἀμῖν, 11.7). In addition, he seems to have spent time on Cos, where he may have been connected with a prominent circle of poets.

The importance of Theocritus' Ptolemaic patron can be seen in several of his poems. The most obvious example is *Idyll* 17, which praises the ruler, his family, and his administration. Although it falls short of making Ptolemy himself a god, it celebrates his divine lineage (17.13-33) and compares his marriage to Arsinoë with that of Zeus and Hera.<sup>30</sup> Yet even in poems that do not explicitly mention the ruler, Ptolemaic references can be detected. As Frederick Griffiths has demonstrated regarding several mythological poems, Theocritus shapes his materials so as to indulge “the interests of the court as his audience.”<sup>31</sup> In *Idyll* 24, the *Heracliscus*, for example, he recreates the hero's youth as a “Ptolemaic Heracles,” who lacks the excessive passions of earlier traditions so as to become “a Hellenistic gentleman.”<sup>32</sup> This refined version of Heracles would have played well in a court where this hero was as an especially prominent ancestor (e.g., *Id.* 17.13-33).

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<sup>30</sup> See Richard L. Hunter, *Theocritus, Encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus: Text and Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), esp. 24-45 for a discussion of Theocritus' Ptolemaic patronage; see also Stephens, *Seeing Double*, 147-70.

<sup>31</sup> Griffiths, *Theocritus at Court*, 51-106 (at 57). For discussions of Theocritus' wider treatment of classical mythology, see Effe, “Die Destruktion der Tradition”; Graham Zanker, “Current Trends in the Study of Hellenic Myth in Early Third-Century Alexandrian Poetry: The Case of Theocritus,” *A&A* 35 (1989): 83-103; Maria Christoforidou, “Mythological Figures in the Bucolic Idylls of Theocritus,” *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 55 (2005): 31-60.

<sup>32</sup> Griffiths, *Theocritus at Court*, 91-98 (at 92); see similarly Stephens, *Seeing Double*, 123-46. She emphasizes that Theocritus also adapts Egyptian mythology in his representation of Heracles.

### 2.3.2 IDYLL 26: EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE* REVISITED OR REVISED?

As with *Idyll 24*, the twenty-sixth reworks a well-known myth.<sup>33</sup> The poem opens with a narrative (1-26) that describes Ino, Autoñoë, and Agave leading three sacred bands (*thiasoi*) to the mountain and preparing to make their sacred offering to Semele and Dionysus in the manner that the god had taught them (1-9). As they are about to perform their rites, Pentheus enters the narrative, spying on them from a crag (10-11). When Autoñoë spots him, she quickly conceals the sacred objects (12-14), and after a brief pursuit and exchange of words (18-19), in a maddened state the three maenads tear him apart and return him bloody to Thebes (20-26). The narrative is followed by a moralizing reflection in which the poet disavows any sympathy for one such as Pentheus who acts as an enemy to Dionysus (27-32).<sup>34</sup>

οὐκ ἀλέγω· μηδ' ἄλλος ἀπεχθομένω Διονύσῳ  
φροντίζοι, μηδ' εἰ χαλεπώτερα τῶνδ' μογήσαι,  
εἴη δ' ἐνναέτης ἢ καὶ δεκάτω ἐπιβαίνοι.  
αὐτὸς δ' εὐαγέοιμι καὶ εὐαγέεσσιν ἄδοιμι.  
ἐκ Διὸς αἰγιόχῳ τιμὰν ἔχει αἰετὸς οὔτως.  
εὐσεβέων παίδεσσι τὰ λώια, δυσσεβέων δ' οὔ.

I do not care; nor should another give a thought to one who is an enemy of  
Dionysus not even if he should suffer more painfully than these things and should

<sup>33</sup> Several scholars have produced important interpretations and analyses of *Idyll 26*, in spite of Walker's view that it is "not a very interesting poem in itself" (*Theocritus*, 111); see Jean Carrière, "Théocrite et les Bacchantes," *Pallas* 6 (1958): 7–19; B. A. van Groningen, "Les Bacchantes de Théocrite," in *Miscellanea di studi alessandrini in memoria di Augusto Rostagni* (ed. Leonardo Ferrero et al.; Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1963), 338–49; M. H. A. L. H. van der Valk, "Theocritus XXVI," *AC* 34 (1965): 84–96; K. J. McKay, "Theokritos' *Bacchantes* Re-examined," *Antichthon* 1 (1967): 16–28; Daniel E. Gershenson, "Theocritus 26. 31," *CR* 18 (1968): 148; Effe, "Die Destruktion der Tradition", 71-74; Griffiths, *Theocritus at Court*, 98–104; Hutchinson, *Hellenistic Poetry*, 160–62; Zanker, "Current Trends in the Study of Hellenic Myth", 87-88; Francis Cairns, "Theocritus, *Idyll 26*," *PCPS* 38 (1992): 1–38; Christophe Cusset, "Théocrite, lecteur d'Euripide: l'exemple des *Bacchantes*," *REG* 110 (1997): 454–68. In addition to the commentaries of Gow and Dover, there is also a commentary devoted entirely to *Idyll 26*: Christophe Cusset, *Les Bacchantes de Théocrite: texte, corps et morceaux: édition, traduction et commentaire de l'Idylle 26* (Etudes grecques; Paris: Harmattan, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> The Greek text follows A. S. F. Gow, *Bucolici Graeci* (OCT; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952). Translations are mine throughout. These lines contain several text critical problems; for a discussion supporting the emendations, see Gow, *Theocritus*, 2.480–83.

be nine years old or even coming onto his tenth. For my part, I wish to be pure and to please those who are pure. Thus the eagle possesses honor from aegis-bearing Zeus. Better things belong to the children of the pious but not to those of the impious.

Piety is thus the poet's utmost concern and, he insists, those who lack it should suffer the consequences. The closing lines (33-38) consist of a hymnic farewell to Dionysus, Semele, and her sisters (Χαίροι μὲν Διόνυσος..., 33) and a justification of "this deed" (τόδε ἔργον) as "not blameworthy" (οὐκ ἐπιωματόν) because it was performed with "Dionysus instigating" (ὀρίναντος Διονύσω, 37-38). Thus, Theocritus closes: "Let no one revile the things of the gods" (μηδεὶς τὰ θεῶν ὀνόσαιτο, 38).

Most scholars agree that *Idyll 26* has some relationship to Dionysiac cult. It has, for example, several generic features of a hymn, such as its mythological narrative and closing farewell. The absence of a hymnic opening, however, is problematic for such a characterization. *Idyll 26* is often compared with Callimachus' mimetic *Hymns*, which relate to ritual occasions, even though they are literary rather than genuinely cultic.<sup>35</sup> As Andrew Gow suggests, "it seems likely that, though the poem may be connected with or suggested by ritual, it was not itself designed for performance as part of the ritual."<sup>36</sup>

Scholars have detected ritualized formulae, as for example in the exchange between

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<sup>35</sup> See Cairns, "Theocritus, *Idyll 26*," 2-4, 13-16; Cusset, *Les Bacchantes de Théocrite*, 26-27. *Idyll 26* in fact shares several literary features with Callimachus' *Hymns*. For example, its response to Pentheus' suffering is analogous to the "mock-nervous prayer" with which Callimachus' *Hymn 6* responds to the fate of Erysichthon (Δάματερ, μὴ τήνος ἐμὶν φίλος, ὅς τοι ἀπεχθής, / εἴη μηδ' ὀμότιχος, "O Demeter, may one who is your enemy be neither my friend nor neighbor," 116-17); see Hutchinson, *Hellenistic Poetry*, 161. In addition, a similar ritual formula seems to underlie *Idyll 26.30* (αὐτὸς δ' εὐαγέοιμι καὶ εὐαγέεσσιν ἄδοιμι) and Callimachus' *Hymn 4.97*, where the unborn Apollo rejects Boeotia and Cithaeron as his birth place: "being pure I would care for those who are pure" (εὐαγέων δὲ καὶ εὐαγέεσσι μελοίμην); see Gow, *Theocritus*, 2.483.

<sup>36</sup> Gow, *Theocritus*, 2.475.

Autonoë and Pentheus in lines 18-19.<sup>37</sup> There is, however, no consensus in identifying the rituals in view. Ernst Maass, for example, drew attention to a parallel between the *Idyll*'s three-fold structure of maenadic *thiasoi* and the Hellenistic inscription at Magnesia (*IMagn.* 215) that sanctioned the importation of three *thiasoi* from Thebes.<sup>38</sup> Others have emphasized possible connections between the mythological death of Pentheus and Dionysiac mystery initiations.<sup>39</sup> Given the importance of Dionysiac religion to the Ptolemies, it is also possible that official Ptolemaic rituals are in view. As noted above, *thiasoi* and maenads were included in Philadelphus' Grand Procession. Moreover, as in *Idyll* 26, the Procession gave Semele a prominent position within the cult of Dionysus (Athenaeus 200b).<sup>40</sup>

It is not possible to establish conclusively the specific ritual resonances in this poem. More pertinent for this study is the relationship of *Idyll* 26 with Euripides' *Bacchae*. Most scholars maintain that the *Bacchae* is the primary literary source that informs Theocritus' presentation of the myth.<sup>41</sup> There are in fact several unmistakable

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<sup>37</sup> Cairns suggests that the repetition of τόδ' ἔειπε in 18-19 may reflect ritualized speech (Πενθεὺς μὲν τόδ' ἔειπε· 'τίνας κέχρησθε, γυναῖκες;' / Αὐτονόα τόδ' ἔειπε· 'τάχα γνώση πρὶν ἀκοῦσαι,' "Pentheus said this: 'O women, what do you want?' And Autonoë said this: 'You will learn quickly before you hear'" ("Theocritus, *Idyll* 26," 7).

<sup>38</sup> Ernst Maass, "Theokrits Dionysos aus einer Inschrift erläutert," *Hermes* 26 (1891): 182–84. On which, see § 2.2 above.

<sup>39</sup> With particular attention to the *Bacchae*, see Seaford, "Dionysiac Drama," esp. 274 n. 212 on *Idyll* 26. J. M. Edmonds suggests that the suffering of the nine or ten year old child refers to a ritualized death involved in his initiation (*The Greek Bucolic Poets* [LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1912], 325).

<sup>40</sup> See Rice, *The Grand Procession*, 78–81.

<sup>41</sup> Gow, *Theocritus*, 2.476 (with qualification: "the debt to Euripides is slight"); Carrière, "Théocrite et les Baccantes," passim; McKay, "Theokritos' *Bacchantes* Re-examined," passim; Effe, "Die Destruktion der Tradition," 71–74; Griffiths, *Theocritus at Court*, 102–03; Zanker, "Current Trends in the Study of Hellenic Myth," 87–88; Cusset, "Théocrite, lecteur d'Euripide"; Cusset, *Les Bacchantes de Théocrite*, 9–15. Van Groningen theorizes that *Idyll* 26 may have been written in response to a performance of Euripides' *Bacchae* ("Les Bacchantes de Théocrite," esp. 347–49). Other sources are of course possible (e.g., Aeschylus) but none are extant. Other scholars point out that some of the shared features may result from a common ritual source rather than literary dependence; see, e.g., Cairns,

borrowings and yet at the same time some important differences, both of which are relevant for interpreting the *Idyll*.<sup>42</sup> The *Idyll*'s opening with the three women leading three *thiasoi* (τρεῖς θιάσως ἐς ὄρος τρεῖς ἄγαγον αὐταὶ ἐοῖσαι, “these three led three sacred bands to the mountain,” 2) closely follows the structure of *Bacchae* 680-82.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, as in *Bacchae* 115-16, Theocritus' *thiasoi* are led “to the mountain” (ἐς ὄρος).<sup>44</sup> In both cases, Pentheus spies on the women: in the *Bacchae* he did so from the top of a pine tree (1063-74) whereas Theocritus has him on a steep crag hiding in a mastich bush.<sup>45</sup> In both, Pentheus' fundamental error is related to “seeing” and as a result profaning the “sacred things” (ὄργια, *Bacch.* 470-76; 1080-81; *Id.* 26.10-14). In Theocritus, the subsequent exchange between Pentheus and the women is altered slightly. Euripides had Pentheus plead for mercy but receive no reply (*Bacch.* 1118-21); rather, in her state of madness his mother mistakes him for an animal which she hunts and kills (1122-1152). By contrast, Theocritus has Autoño give an answer (τάχα γνώση πρὶν ἀκοῦσαι, “quickly you will know before you hear,” 19) reminiscent of Dionysus' warning to Pentheus in *Bacchae* 474 (οὐ θέμις ἀκοῦσαί σ', ἔστι δ' ἄξι' εἰδέναι, “it is not permitted for you to hear [the rites] although they are worth knowing”). As Agave tears her son apart, in Theocritus she roars like a lion (ὅσσον περ τοκάδος τελέθει μύκημα

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“Theocritus, *Idyll* 26,” 5–7. He maintains that Euripides and Theocritus “are patently not model and imitation but two variants on the same ritual model” (7).

<sup>42</sup> The relationship between them is set out concisely in a table in Dover, *Theocritus*, 263–64. A thorough survey and analysis of all the literary borrowings is conducted by Cusset, “Théocrite, lecteur d'Euripide.”

<sup>43</sup> ὄρω δὲ θιάσους τρεῖς γυναικείων χορῶν, / ὧν ἦρχ' ἐνὸς μὲν Αὐτονόη, τοῦ δευτέρου / μήτηρ Ἀγαυή σή, τρίτου δ' Ἴνῶ χοροῦ, “I see three sacred bands of female choruses, of which Autoño leads one, your mother Agave the second, and Ino a third chorus.” Given that this three-fold structure was common in Hellenistic maenadic rituals, however, this does not establish literary dependence.

<sup>44</sup> Βρόμιος εὐτ' ἂν ἄγη θιάσους / εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος, “Bromios would lead the sacred bands from mountain to mountain” (*Bacch.* 115-16).

<sup>45</sup> Πενθεὺς δ' ἀλιβάτου πέτρας ἄπο πάντ' ἐθεώρει, / σχῖνον ἐς ἀρχαίαν καταδύς, “Pentheus was observing everything from a steep crag, having gone into an ancient mastich bush” (*Id.* 26.10-11).

λεαίνας, “a roar occurred as of a lioness with her brood,” 21), whereas in the *Bacchae* she mistakes Pentheus’ head for that of a lion cub (τάνδε λεοντοφυᾶ, 1196). Finally, in both cases the sisters return Pentheus’ body bloody to Thebes.<sup>46</sup> Although Theocritus’ narrative ends here, his moral conclusion echoes the sentiments of Euripides’ messenger, who averred, “it is best to be moderate and to reverence the things of the gods” (τὸ σωφρονεῖν δὲ καὶ σέβειν τὰ τῶν θεῶν κάλλιστον, 1150-51). Theocritus similarly connects religious piety with a disavowal of sympathy for Pentheus: “I myself would be pure and would please those who are pure... Better things belong to the children of the pious but not to those of the impious” (αὐτὸς δ’ εὐαγέοιμι καὶ εὐαγέεσσιν ἄδοιμι... εὐσεβέων παίδεσσι τὰ λῶια, δυσσεβέων δ’ οὐ, 30, 32).

The nature of Theocritus’ use of Euripides has generated significant scholarly attention; there is, however, little agreement on how to understand it. Among scholars who emphasize Theocritus’ dependence on Euripides, some stress the continuity between the Alexandrian poet and his classical model. Christophe Cusset, for example, maintains that the differences in Theocritus’ poem can be largely accounted for by the change of genre and from Theocritus’ interposition of different scenes from Euripides within the limits of a 26 line narrative. Theocritus has merely exploited “indécisions ou alternatives” inherent in the tragedy and thus *Idyll 26* reinforces “[I]a continuité entre l’*époque classique* et l’*alexandrinisme*.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> At this point, Theocritus plays on the name Pentheus: “They brought grief and not Pentheus from the mountain” (ἐξ ὄρεος πένθημα καὶ οὐ Πενθήα φέροισαι, 26). This recalls Teiresias’ words in the *Bacchae*: “may Pentheus not thus bring grief to your house” (Πενθεὺς δ’ ὅπως μὴ πένθος εἰσοίσει δόμοις τοῖς σοῖσι, *Bacch.* 367-68).

<sup>47</sup> Cusset, “Théocrite, lecteur d’Euripide,” at 468.

Other scholars find greater consequence in Theocritus' departures from Euripides and detect in them evidence for his own ideological tendencies. Here, however, there is remarkable diversity of opinion in the meaning of the divergences. This can be illustrated by contrasting the interpretation of two scholars, Jean Carrière and Bernd Effe. Carrière sees Theocritus as a critic of Euripides' theological liberalism, noting that in antiquity Euripides had a reputation for impiety and acquired the title "censeur des actes divins."<sup>48</sup> In the *Bacchae*, Euripides' impiety reveals itself through various expressions of sympathy for Pentheus' sufferings and outrage at the violence of Dionysus.<sup>49</sup> Carrière finds Theocritus' narrative to have removed these sentiments and he makes lines 27-29 a centerpiece of his interpretation (quoted above). He sees ἄλλος in v. 27 not as a generalizing statement but a specific allusion to Euripides himself, whose impious tragedy rendered him an enemy of Dionysus. Moreover, he argues that the reference to the age of nine or ten years is not to literal years but rather "great years" (= eight years) which is thus 72-80 years, the very age of Euripides when he wrote the *Bacchae*.<sup>50</sup> Although most scholars have found this line of argument more fantastic than persuasive, it nevertheless illustrates in its most extreme form the view that Theocritus was a true Dionysiac devotee who rewrote the *Bacchae* so as to purge it of its liberalizing and anti-Dionysiac tendencies.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast to Carrière, Effe finds a very different motivation underlying Theocritus' transformation of Euripides. He concurs that Theocritus has downplayed the

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<sup>48</sup> Carrière, "Théocrite et les Baccantes," 19. On Euripides' reputation, see § 1.4.3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 12. In the third-century CE, Aspines of Gadara takes Euripides to be evoking pity for Pentheus; see § 1.4.4.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 10-12, 16-17.

<sup>51</sup> Van Groningen also finds *Idyll* 26 to be the work of a true devotee of Dionysus but without taking it as a radical repudiation of Euripides ("Les Bacchantes de Théocrite," esp. 348-49).

pathos and sympathy for Pentheus found in Euripides but argues that the Alexandrian poet does this ironically.<sup>52</sup> In Effe's view, Theocritus emphasizes the brutality and absurdity of the slaughter so as to contrast sharply with the poet's subsequent claims of pious purity. The reader would be expected to recognize that the piety presented in the *Idyll*'s narrative was unacceptable and that it "kann sich nicht ernsthaft auf den Boden dieses traditionellen, naiv-religiösen Bekenntnisses stellen."<sup>53</sup> Effe's analysis of *Idyll* 26 fits within his larger view of Theocritus' approach to the classical mythic tradition, which he characterizes as "das Moment der ironischen Distanz."<sup>54</sup> Thus, where Carrière found Theocritus' transformation of the *Bacchae* to be the work of a true believer who was troubled by Euripides' religious innovation, in Effe's view Theocritus regarded the myth of Pentheus narrated by Euripides as an unsavory remnant of a less sophisticated religious past and thus repudiated it through irony.

Most interpreters of *Idyll* 26 find middle ground between these two extremes and offer more nuanced analyses.<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, however, Theocritus' personal religious commitments lie beyond the scope of literary investigation and thus the detection of irony may depend more on the ideology of his readers (ancient or modern) than the author

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<sup>52</sup> Effe, "Die Destruktion der Tradition," 71–72.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 50. Others have come to similar conclusions. Valk also emphasizes that Theocritus has eliminated the pathos found in Euripides and can "scarcely believe that in the euhemeristic Alexandrian age a poet who introduced this religious sentiment, should be taken serious and should wish to be taken so" ("Theocritus XXVI," 92–96, at 92). Similarly, Hutchinson maintains that "[t]he attitude proclaimed [in lines 27-38] is obviously intended to conflict with the attitudes aroused in the reader by the narrative" (*Hellenistic Poetry*, 161).

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., Zanker, "Current Trends in the Study of Hellenic Myth," 87–88. Particularly interesting is McKay's theory that in addition to the *Bacchae* Theocritus' recreation of the scene may have been influenced by artistic representations of the myth and thus need not imply a critical stance toward Euripides ("Theokritos' *Bacchantes* Re-examined," 19–22). He cites, for example, the painting of the myth described in Philostratus, *Imagines* 1.18.

himself.<sup>56</sup> I propose a different line of investigation of the *Idyll* in the hope of providing a way forward through this scholarly impasse.

### 2.3.3 THEOCRITICAN MAENADS AS IMPERIAL SUBJECTS

Although there has been much scholarly attention to Theocritus' works as Hellenistic poetry and as such his relationship to the classical literary tradition, the implications of his relationship with the Ptolemaic court for understanding *Idyll* 26 have not been fully explored.<sup>57</sup> Griffiths' analysis has been most attentive to the implications of this connection and thus his reading of *Idyll* 26 serves as a valuable starting point. As Griffiths points out, "[n]o Ptolemaic ancestor figures more largely in cult than Dionysus"; consequently, he argues that Theocritus' transformation of the myth is in keeping with the Ptolemies' larger propagandistic interests in mythology.<sup>58</sup> Thus, for example, the Alexandrian poet names a lesser known birth place of Dionysus, Dracanus or Dracantum (ἐν Δρακάνῳ νιφόμεντι, *Id.* 26.33), which Griffiths proposes may recall Drecanon (Δρεκάνων) a mountain on Cos, the birthplace of Philadelphus. While he advances this proposal with caution, he notes that it would cohere well with the works of other Hellenistic poets who sought to bring divine biographies into line with those of the

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<sup>56</sup> As, for example, Zanker notes in his criticism of Effe, his interpretation "shows the danger involved in importing modern sensibility into ancient literature" ("Current Trends in the Study of Hellenic Myth," 88).

<sup>57</sup> Cusset, for example, is dubious about "une portée politique" in *Idyll* 26, noting that in other poems there are precise indications of Theocritus' political interpretations of myths (e.g., *Id.* 17 and 24), whereas here there are not (*Les Bacchantes de Théocrite*, 25–26).

<sup>58</sup> Griffiths, *Theocritus at Court*, 98–104 (at 98). It should be stressed, however, as Griffiths acknowledges, that the explicit identification of a Ptolemy with Dionysus occurs somewhat later; the adoption of Heracles as a Ptolemaic ancestor occurred earlier. When Theocritus arrived in Alexandria, "Dionysus was in the process of being adopted." It is noteworthy that in *Idyll* 17.13–33, "Dionysus does not appear in the ancestral portrait gallery" (53 n. 9). On the divine identifications of the Ptolemies, see § 2.2 above.

Ptolemies, such as Callimachus' *Hymn to Delos*.<sup>59</sup> More importantly, Griffiths doubts, in contrast to Effe, that Theocritus would ironically pillory the cult of Dionysus which was of such great importance to his patron; rather, he argues that Theocritus has transformed the myth to make it more appealing for Philadelphus.<sup>60</sup> Thus, in contrast to Euripides, Theocritus presents the women's actions more as a rational and just retribution. While they did act in a maddened frenzy (15), this was the result of Pentheus' transgression and not the normal state of their religious experience. As such, Theocritus emphasizes the guilt of Pentheus by presenting his transgression as premeditated rather than, as in Euripides' version, the result of Dionysus' own instigation. This alteration negates any pathos and sympathy that had been permitted in Euripides' tragedy.<sup>61</sup> Theocritus' Dionysus is thus more a god with whom Ptolemy might identify, one who is purely Greek (not the foreign invader of Euripides), and one whose religion is characterized by piety and just retribution rather than uncivilized ecstasy and violence.<sup>62</sup>

An additional indicator of a Ptolemaic background to *Idyll* 26 is found in v. 31 (quoted above). Kenneth McKay suggests that Theocritus is developing an analogy between the eagle and the poet. As the eagle had earned honor (τιμή) from Zeus for service rendered, so also the poet should be honored by his patron.<sup>63</sup> In *Idyll* 16, he bemoans his failure to procure patronage and the cold reply of a would-be patron, "the

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 100–01.

<sup>60</sup> See also *Idyll* 17.112, in which Theocritus praises Philadelphus for sponsoring Dionysiac competitions.

<sup>61</sup> Griffiths, *Theocritus at Court*, 102–03.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 103–04. Griffiths concludes interestingly (even if more speculatively) that Theocritus' Hellenization of Dionysus may have had an instructional component: "Theocritus has refashioned Dionysus not only to be susceptible to the king's vanity, but perhaps to lure that vanity from the oriental to the Hellenic" (104).

<sup>63</sup> McKay, "Theokritos' *Bacchantes* Re-examined," 25–26. On the proverbial nature of the eagle in this line, see Gershenson, "Theocritus 26. 31."

gods honor poets” (θεοὶ τιμῶσιν ἀοιδούς, 19). Theocritus would later receive such honor from Philadelphus, whom he consequently compares with Zeus (*Id.* 17.133-34). If McKay’s reading of the eagle is correct, then in *Idyll* 26.27-32 Theocritus presents Pentheus as a foil for his own literary activities, which are acts of piety deserving of honor from his royal patron.<sup>64</sup> Thus, his desire to be “pure” (εὐαγέοιμι) and to “please those who are pure” (εὐαγέεσσιν ἄδοιμι) together with his assertion that “better things” (τὰ λώια) come “to the children of the pious” (εὐσεβέων παίδεσσι) should be understood as describing his desired relationship with Philadelphus as much as for his ritual status.<sup>65</sup>

Building on these observations, I suggest there is an additional difference in Theocritus’ presentation of the myth that has gone largely unnoticed by scholars, namely, that his maenads are engaged in what appears to be an officially sanctioned and rationally organized cult. The spatial symmetry evoked by Theocritus, and his use of ritual terminology suggest an orderly observance. Thus, for example, the three women construct twelve altars (δουκαίδεκα βωμός, 5), three for Semele and nine for Dionysus (6).<sup>66</sup> They then “take the sacred objects made with their hands out of the chest” (ἱερά δ’ ἐκ κίστας πεποναμένα χερσὶν ἐλοῖσαι, 7), which they place reverently (εὐφάμως) on the altars as Dionysus had taught them. This is clearly suggestive of well-known mystery cults. Clement of Alexandria, for example, uses similar language in describing the

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<sup>64</sup> Valk thinks that in v. 31 Theocritus alludes to *Iliad* 12.243 in which a bird (οἰωνός) is an omen from Zeus; the omen is that “[t]he offspring of pious men are bound to be happy” (“Theocritus XXVI,” 91–93, at 92).

<sup>65</sup> Ludwig Koenen demonstrates how in the Ptolemaic period terms of religious impurity (e.g., *asebeia* and *anosios*) began to be used in reference to political enemies of the state especially as the rulers came increasingly to identify themselves with gods (“ΘΕΟΙΣΙΝ ΕΧΘΡΟΣ: Ein einheimischer Gegenkönig in Ägypten (132/1a),” *ChrEg* 34 [1959]: 103–19, esp. 106–12).

<sup>66</sup> As noted above (§ 2.2), Semele was also included in the Dionysiac Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus.

Eleusinian Mysteries.<sup>67</sup> The *ιερά* in *Idyll* 26 are most likely, as Gow suggests, sacrificial cakes that “have been molded into shapes.”<sup>68</sup> It is these cultic objects that Pentheus conspires to see, and when Autoño noticed him “she scattered the sacred things with her feet” (σὺν δ’ ἐτάραξε ποσὶν... ὄργια, 13).<sup>69</sup> The impression of these Theban maenads given by Euripides is vastly different. There are no altars for Dionysus or Semele.<sup>70</sup> Although in Euripides the Theban women possess certain Dionysiac implements (e.g., *thyrsoi* and fawnskins), there are no sacred objects as in Theocritus that the women had prepared in advance (πεποναμένα) and placed in a chest (κίστας, 7). By contrast, in the *Bacchae* *ιερά* and *ὄργια* refer to ecstatic ritual actions, especially the song and dance of the maenads, and invite Pentheus’ suspicions of unregulated sensuality (e.g., 161-62, 262, 470-74, 482, 485, 1080-81).<sup>71</sup> Theocritus’ narrative effectively elides this sensual aspect of the maenadic rituals. Indeed, one wonders whether, if Euripides’ Pentheus had encountered Theocritus’ bland and innocuous descriptions of the maenads, his interest would have been aroused at all.

In connection with the innocuous nature of Theocritus’ maenads, it is noteworthy that the motivations for Pentheus’ actions are not given. Euripides’ narrative had

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<sup>67</sup> He discloses the sacred Eleusinian formula as “I fasted, I drank the sacred drink, I took from the sacred chest” (ἐνήστευσα, ἔπιον τὸν κυκεῶνα, ἔλαβον ἐκ κίστης, *Protr.* 2.21.2). He later speaks generally of mysteries as employing αἱ κίσται αἱ μυστικάι that contain various sacred objects (2.22.1-7). On Clement’s view of the mysteries, see § 8.3 below.

<sup>68</sup> Gow, *Theocritus*, 478.

<sup>69</sup> Gow’s view that the *ὄργια* in v. 13 are identical with the *ιερά* in v. 7 seems correct (*ibid.*, 479).

<sup>70</sup> Dionysus in fact praises Cadmus, who was apparently alone in hallowing the place of his mother’s death (*Bacch.* 10-11).

<sup>71</sup> Cusset is aware of the possible conflict between the use of *ὄργια* by Euripides and Theocritus, by which the former does not have “le sens étroit d’‘object rituels’” but rather “il désigne au sens large les ‘mystères’ de Dionysos.” He minimizes this difference by noting that σὺν δ’ ἐτάραξε ποσὶν... ὄργια in *Id.* 26.13 need not mean that Autoño scattered *ὄργια* to keep Pentheus from seeing them. After all, he had already seen them all in v. 10. Rather, he suggests that “elle déchaîna avec ses pieds les mystères” (“Théocrite, lecteur d’Euripide,” 465–66); see also Cusset, *Les Bacchantes de Théocrite*, 81–83.

emphasized that, as Thebes' newly installed king, Pentheus sought to maintain civic order and feminine chastity against which he viewed Dionysiac cult as an imminent threat.<sup>72</sup>

The fall of the royal house in the conclusion of Euripides' narrative in fact demonstrates that his fears were in part well-founded. Within Theocritus' narrative, Pentheus' role as tyrant of Thebes, all-important in the *Bacchae*, also goes unmentioned. For Theocritus, the political and social threat inherent in the women's departure to the mountain is absent; their maenadic cult is apparently already naturalized within the civic order.<sup>73</sup>

Indeed, the *Idyll* creates the impression that maenadism was by then an existing institution at Thebes. Thus, Pentheus is shown to be acting against an established cult rather than opposing the incursion of a new one as he had in Euripides.<sup>74</sup>

This presentation of maenadism in the myth by Theocritus may reflect developments in its institutionalization in the Hellenistic world generally and in Alexandria in particular. As evidenced by the Grand Procession of Philadelphus and the Hellenistic inscription from Magnesia discussed above (§ 2.2), the three-fold structure of the *thiasoi* in *Idyll* 26 (and the *Bacchae*) corresponds to established ritual practice. At the same time, in contrast to Euripides, clearly neither the maenadism imported to Magnesia nor that supported by the Ptolemies was subversive; indeed, they were instituted by the civic authorities. Thus, as a poet of the court, it was in Theocritus' interest to depict Dionysiac religion in general and maenadism in particular in a positive light. Not only does Theocritus show maenads, as Griffiths argues, to be just and rational, he has

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<sup>72</sup> At the same time, by the end of the tragedy Pentheus' motivation to see the maenads has shifted as he gradually developed the desire to play the voyeur.

<sup>73</sup> Here Griffiths' observation that Theocritus' Dionysus is fully Greek and not foreign is particularly pertinent (*Theocritus at Court*, 103–04).

<sup>74</sup> For a discussion of the *Bacchae*'s presentation of Dionysiac religion as "foreign," see § 1.3.3.

eliminated their politically destructive aspect. At the same time, he leaves no opportunity for the Alexandrian monarch to be identified with his Theban counterpart. Indeed, as a vigorous patron of Dionysus, such a comparison would be inappropriate for Philadelphus.

In sum: Theocritus' *Idyll 26* is a distinctly Hellenistic retelling of Euripides' *Bacchae* that was both modeled on the tragedy and at the same time diverges from it in important ways. Attempts to detect Theocritus' own religious ideology in his transformation of the narrative have proven inconclusive. He has been variously characterized, ranging from a rigorous Dionysiac devotee, on the one hand, to an exponent of Euhemerism, on the other. I have suggested that a more productive approach to *Idyll 26* attends to the poet's relationship with the Ptolemaic court, whose interest in Dionysus was well known. In Theocritus' myth, the maenads are no longer disruptive of the political order; they are practicing well-established and rational rituals. Pentheus thus becomes the transgressor not the champion of traditional religion. In this transformation, therefore, Theocritus has provided a version of the myth in which maenadism is properly subjected to imperial power.

## 2.4 DIO CHRYSOSTOM'S *ALEXANDRIAN ORATION*: EURIPIDES' MAENADS AND

### THE ALEXANDRIAN MOB

Nearly 400 years after Theocritus composed the twenty-sixth *Idyll*, Dio Chrysostom delivered his *Alexandrian Oration* (*Or.* 32). Like Theocritus, Dio was not native to Alexandria but nevertheless composed his material with careful attention to the cultural and political distinctiveness of his Alexandrian audience. Between Theocritus

and Dio, Ptolemaic rule in Alexandria had been replaced by Rome. Whereas Theocritus' poetic career depended on royal patronage, Dio's orations were aimed at addressing a range of political issues pertinent to the Greek cities of the Roman Empire. What makes Dio's *Alexandrian Oration* a striking point of comparison with Theocritus is that like the latter he employs Euripides' *Bacchae* as a means of portraying maenads in Alexandria. As with the maenads described by Theocritus in *Idyll 26*, Dio has reinvented the Alexandrian maenad with a view to her place within the empire. Whereas Theocritus transformed the maenads so that they were now practitioners of an established civic cult rather than the political subversives of the tragedy, Dio's Alexandrian maenads are disruptive of Roman rule. He draws an ironic comparison between Euripides' maenads and the Alexandrian mob that serves an important function within his political rhetoric. Before examining Dio's use of the *Bacchae* (§ 2.4.3), however, it is necessary to provide context and background both of his life and career generally (§ 2.4.1) and of the *Alexandrian Oration* in particular (§ 2.4.2).

#### 2.4.1 DIO CHRYSOSTOM: ORATOR AND EMPIRE

Modern interest in Dio is stimulated by several wider concerns.<sup>75</sup> He provides excellent historical evidence for the nature of Roman rule in the Greek East and in

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<sup>75</sup> Important studies and discussion of the life and work of Dio include Hans von Arnim, *Leben und Werke des Dio von Prusa* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1898); P. A. Brunt, "Aspects of the Social Thought of Dio Chrysostom and of the Stoics," *PCPS* 19 (1973): 9–34; C. P. Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); John Moles, "The Career and Conversion of Dio Chrysostom," *JHS* 98 (1978): 79–100; Simon Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, AD 50-250* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 187–241. A valuable collection of essays covering a range of important issues in the study of Dio is found in Simon Swain, ed., *Dio Chrysostom: Politics, Letters, and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). On Dio's political relationship with Rome, in addition to the general studies above, see esp. John Moles, "Dio Chrysostom, Greece, and Rome," in *Ethics and Rhetoric: Classical Essays for Donald Russell on His*

particular the political and cultural condition of Greek cities. As a leading citizen of Prusa in Bithynia, he, like other elite Greeks of this period, acted as a benefactor to his own community and even as an ambassador to the emperor Trajan, obtaining benefits for his city.<sup>76</sup> His speeches are largely political in nature and provide a window into Greek civic life from the perspective of the elite class. Dio also attracts scholarly attention for his contributions to the development of Greek intellectual life in the Second Sophistic.<sup>77</sup> He was well trained in rhetoric, philosophy, and classical literature and brought all of these together skillfully within his political oratory.<sup>78</sup> At a time when increasingly Greeks were gaining status and influence with Rome, Greek *paideia* became an important locus in the cultural negotiation of Greek identity within the nexus of Roman power.<sup>79</sup> Over the course of Dio's life, Roman attitudes toward Greek *paideia* varied greatly from Domitian's expulsion of philosophers from Rome around 93 CE to Trajan's cultivation of them.<sup>80</sup>

Dio occupied a complex place within Greek society under Rome. Although he had a prestigious place in the local social fabric of Prusa, Dio's relationship with his city

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*Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (ed. Doreen Innes, Harry M. Hine, and C. B. R. Pelling; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 177–92; Giovanni Salmeri, “Dio, Rome, and the Civic Life of Asia Minor,” in *Dio Chrysostom*, 53–92.

<sup>76</sup> See Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom*, 19–20, 104–14. Dio asserts, for example, that for their generosity the Prusans praise him and his peers as “Olympians, saviors, and nourishers” (τοὺς δὲ Ὀλυμπίους, τοὺς δὲ σωτῆρας, τοὺς δὲ τροφέας, *Or.* 48.10); on his embassy to Trajan, see *Oration* 44.

<sup>77</sup> For discussions of Dio within the context of the Second Sophistic, see esp. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*, 187–241; Tim Whitmarsh, “‘Greece Is the World’: Exile and Identity in the Second Sophistic,” in *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* (ed. Simon Goldhill; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 269–305, esp. 285–94; Tim Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 156–67. On the Second Sophistic generally, see also Glen W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); Tim Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (Greece & Rome: New Surveys in the Classics 35; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>78</sup> See Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom*, 8–18.

<sup>79</sup> Greeks, for example, began to gain entrance into the Roman senate; see Salmeri, “Dio, Rome, and the Civic Life”, 57–60.

<sup>80</sup> See Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, 15–16.

was not always smooth. During the reign of Vespasian there was a shortage of grain; as a wealthy and influential member of the elite, the people of Prusa suspected Dio of fixing the prices and thus rioted at his house (see *Or.* 46).<sup>81</sup> These events well illustrate the place of Dio and others of the Greek elite within the Roman world. In contrast to the lower classes, upper class Greeks benefited greatly from the maintenance of peace and stability in their cities. Rome largely granted cities autonomy to govern their own affairs and only intervened in cases of disturbance and disorder. Thus, many of Dio's speeches are aimed at preserving the (at times tenuous) harmony in various Greek cities. At the same time, although he was often an active supporter of Roman rule, his own relationship with the empire was complicated. Under Domitian, in 83 CE Dio was exiled from Italy and Bithynia and was only recalled after the emperor's assassination in 96. In his post-exilic career Dio enjoyed increased prominence with Rome and seems to have developed a positive relationship with Trajan.<sup>82</sup> His four orations *On Kingship*, for example, speak positively of Trajan (albeit without naming him). Viewed broadly, Dio's attitude toward Rome is complex and dynamic, varying significantly depending on circumstances and audiences.<sup>83</sup>

Dio's political career is inextricably tied to his intellectual development and literary output. He shifts between philosophy and oratory in such a way that makes him

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<sup>81</sup> On the riot, see Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom*, 19–25.

<sup>82</sup> This relationship is prominent, for example, in von Arnim's interpretation of the *Alexandrian Oration* discussed below (*Leben und Werke*, 435–38); see also Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom*, 115–23.

<sup>83</sup> Some scholars emphasize that Dio's praise of Trajan and Roman administration should not be taken at face value and that his attitude toward Rome is in fact rather ambivalent; see, e.g., Moles, "Dio Chrysostom, Greece, and Rome"; Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*, 192–206. Salmeri, however, maintains that even though Dio can deflate Roman origins and criticize Roman morality and individual emperors (e.g., Nero and Domitian), none of this amounts to "real polemics against the Romans." Even "the sense of superiority displayed by the Greek Dio never, let us repeat, resolves itself into defiance of the Empire" ("Dio, Rome, and the Civic Life," 86–92 [at 88]).

difficult to categorize. Philostratus, the third-century biographer of the Second Sophistic, for example, includes him among “the philosophers with an appearance of being a sophist” (τοὺς φιλοσοφήσαντας ἐν δόξῃ τοῦ σοφιστεῦσαι, *Vit. soph.* pref). Thus, his career was viewed primarily as that of a philosopher; he could, however, also deliver sophistic discourses, such as the *Praise of a Parrot* (1.7).<sup>84</sup> Synesius, a fourth or fifth-century biographer of Dio, solved the apparent conflict between the sophistic and philosophical character of Dio’s orations by positing a conversion from rhetoric to philosophy that took place during his exile. Several aspects of his career support such a schema; in addition to a detectable increase in the philosophical content in his later speeches, after his exile he began wearing the garb of a Cynic so as to underscore his ideological commitments. This theory has remained influential down to modern times, in large part due to its adoption in the seminal work of Hans von Arnim in 1898.<sup>85</sup> Beginning with studies by Christopher Jones and John Moles in the 1970’s, however, this view has been significantly challenged.<sup>86</sup> It now seems best to understand Dio as employing elements drawn from both sophistic rhetoric and philosophy throughout his career to suit the occasion and audience.<sup>87</sup> Thus, his adoption of the philosopher’s garb

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<sup>84</sup> Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom*, 8–18.

<sup>85</sup> *Leben und Werke*.

<sup>86</sup> With respect to *Or.* 32, see C. P. Jones, “The Date of Dio of Prusa’s Alexandrian Oration,” *Historia* 22 (1973): 302–9, esp. 308. Building on Jones’ work, Moles issues a full scale refutation of a reconstruction of Dio’s life based on a division between sophistic and philosophic (“The Career and Conversion of Dio Chrysostom”). Moles’ position is now widely accepted; see, e.g., Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom*, 8–18; Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*, 187–92; Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, 158–59.

<sup>87</sup> Dio’s contemporary Plutarch provides an interesting point of comparison. Although he was known primarily as a philosopher, he made some attempts at oratory; see C. P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 14–16, 67–71. For a comparison of the careers of Plutarch and Dio, see 34–37. On Plutarch, see also § 3.5 below.

after his exile is more propaganda and dramatic self-presentation than the result of a genuine conversion.<sup>88</sup>

In view of Dio's position within the political and intellectual world of the Roman Empire, his use of mythology takes on particular interest.<sup>89</sup> On the one hand, Homer and other classical authors form the basis for Greek *paideia* and consequently reanimating this literary past was a means by which Greek intellectuals could assert cultural superiority in the Roman world. At the same time, however, this literary heritage was itself in flux and a matter of dispute among Greeks themselves. As a philosopher, Dio can also use mythology within the tradition of Plato, inventing his own myths in the service of ethical precepts.<sup>90</sup> Dio could also treat myths as a sophist, employing them as "a convenient repertoire of similes" and "a store of examples"; in addition, like Lucian, he could treat mythology with sarcasm and parody.<sup>91</sup> He also often uses mythology in the service of his political interests. In the *Trojan Oration* (*Or.* 11), for example, he engages in perhaps his strongest criticism of traditional Greek mythology, refuting Homer's account of the Trojan War. He insists that it was in fact the Greeks not the

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<sup>88</sup> Moles, "The Career and Conversion of Dio Chrysostom," 96–100; Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*, 189–91. For a discussion of the place of Dio's exile in his self-presentation, see Paolo Desideri, "Dio's Exile: Politics, Philosophy, Literature," in *Writing Exile: The Discourse of Displacement in Greco-Roman Antiquity and Beyond* (ed. Jan Felix Gaertner; Mnemosyne 83; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 193–207. Whitmarsh emphasizes that Dio employs his exile as a means of establishing his philosophical authority ("Greece Is the World," 285–94). It may also be added that Dio's deployment of various philosophical positions has distinctive pragmatic functions. As Michael Trapp suggests regarding his use of Stoic political theory, "philosophical argumentation linking political concord either with the order of the cosmos, or with good states of the individual character, could be seen not as pure high-minded idealism, but as an example of complicity with the values and interests of the socially and politically dominant class" (*Philosophy in the Roman Empire: Ethics, Politics and Society* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007], 185–210 [at 195]).

<sup>89</sup> On this, see Suzanne Saïd, "Dio's Use of Mythology," in *Dio Chrysostom*, 161–86; Anne Gangloff, *Dion Chrysostome et les mythes: hellénisme, communication et philosophie politique* (Grenoble: J. Millon, 2006).

<sup>90</sup> Saïd, "Dio's Use of Mythology," 171–74.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. 164–71 (at 164–65).

Trojans who were defeated, basing his arguments largely on internal contradictions within the epic. His rewriting of the mythological past here is shaped at least in part by the interests of his local audience. He enhances the heritage of the Trojans while at the same time flattering the Romans by claiming that Aeneas was sent by a victorious Hector to colonize Italy rather than fleeing conquered (*Or.* 11.137).<sup>92</sup>

#### 2.4.2 THE ALEXANDRIAN ORATION: ON PERFORMANCES AND MOBS

In his *Alexandrian Oration*, Dio is concerned with the relationship between the city's populace and the Roman Empire.<sup>93</sup> In particular, he chastises the Alexandrians for their unruly behavior in the public events at the theater and the stadium. Based upon the strength of Dio's support of Roman interests in this oration, von Arnim asserts that at this time Dio was a confidant (or even an agent) of the emperor himself. Dio contrasts the current emperor with Nero, asking whether the Alexandrians wish "to appear to have the same disease as Nero" (Νέρωνι φαίνεσθαι τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχοντες νόσον, 60), who, like them, suffered from an infatuation for music.<sup>94</sup> On the contrary, "how much better indeed to imitate the present ruler who attends to culture and reason" (καὶ πόσῳ κρεῖττον μιμεῖσθαι τὸν νῦν ἄρχοντα παιδείᾳ καὶ λόγῳ προσέχοντα, 60). There is no consensus as to which

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<sup>92</sup> Saïd notes, however, that the entire *Trojan Oration* cannot be sufficiently explained as Roman propaganda (ibid., 178–79). See also Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*, 210–11.

<sup>93</sup> For discussions of the *Alexandrian Oration*, see Arnim, *Leben und Werke*, 435–38; Eugen Wilmes, "Beiträge zur Alexandrinerrede (or. 32) des Dion Chrysostomos" (Diss., Bonn, 1970); E. K. Borthwick, "Dio Chrysostom on the Mob at Alexandria," *CR* 22 (1972): 1–3; Jones, "The Date of Dio of Prusa's Alexandrian Oration"; Moles, "The Career and Conversion of Dio Chrysostom," passim; Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom*, 36–44; William D. Barry, "Aristocrats, Orators, and the 'Mob': Dio Chrysostom and the World of the Alexandrians," *Historia* 42 (1993): 82–103; Michael B. Trapp, "Sense of Place in the Orations of Dio Chrysostom," in *Ethics and Rhetoric*, 163–75, esp. 167–75; Saïd, "Dio's Use of Mythology," 169–71; Gangloff, *Dion Chrysostome et les mythes*, 273–78.

<sup>94</sup> The Greek text follows Hans von Arnim, *Dionis Prusaensis quem vocant Chrysostomum quae extant omnia* (2 vols.; Berlin: Weidmann, 1893-1896). Translations are mine.

ruler is in view. Von Arnim offers several arguments in support of his view that the unnamed emperor (τὸν νῦν ἄρχοντα) must be Trajan. First, clearly Domitian is excluded. Moreover, he disqualifies Vespasian, the most viable alternative to Trajan, on the grounds that Dio refers to generous public works bestowed upon Alexandria by the current emperor (*Or.* 32.95), whereas Suetonius claims that Vespasian was unpopular there (*Vesp.* 19).<sup>95</sup> Dio’s description of the emperor coheres with what is known about Trajan; indeed, earlier in the oration (25-26), he contrasts the good king (*basileus*) with the tyrant (*tyrannos*) in a manner resembling his characterization of Trajan in his kingship orations (*Orr.* 1-4).<sup>96</sup> A less central facet of von Arnim’s case for Trajan—but one that has been most strongly criticized—is Dio’s self-presentation as a philosopher. In 22, Dio points out that he is wearing a threadbare cloak (τριβώνιον), a distinguishing characteristic of philosophers.<sup>97</sup> Here von Arnim is dependent on the larger theory of Dio’s exilic conversion to philosophy, which, as noted above, has come under attack. Thus, some scholars now prefer a pre-exilic date under Vespasian.<sup>98</sup>

Dio delivered his oration in the Alexandrian theater, a setting which he evokes strategically in positioning his performance in relation to his audience. He begins by requesting their attention: “Would you at least be willing, O men, to be earnest for a short time and pay attention?” (Ἄρά γε βούλοισθ’ ἄν, ὦ ἄνδρες, σπουδάσαι χρόνον μικρὸν

<sup>95</sup> Arnim, *Leben und Werke*, 436–37.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 435.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 435–36.

<sup>98</sup> A remarkable amount of scholarly attention has been devoted to the debate over the dating of the *Alexandrian Oration*. In favor the reign of Vespasian, see Jones, “The Date of Dio of Prusa’s *Alexandrian Oration*”; *idem*, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom*, 134; Moles, “The Career and Conversion of Dio Chrysostom”; Barry, “Aristocrats, Orators, and the ‘Mob’,” 98–103. In support of Trajan, see Wilmes, “Beiträge zur Alexandrinerrede,” 123–24; Jan Fredrik Kindstrand, “The Date of Dio of Prusa’s *Alexandrian Oration*: A Reply,” *Historia* 27 (1978): 378–83; Harry Sidebottom, “The Date of Dio of Prusa’s *Rhodian and Alexandrian Orations*,” *Historia* 41 (1992): 407–19, esp. 415–18 (though arguing on grounds other than Dio’s conversion); Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*, 428–29.

καὶ προσέχειν; 1) He proceeds to chastise them for their collective frivolity—“I see that there is an entire lack of seriousness among you,” σπουδῆς δὲ ὑμῖν τὴν πᾶσαν ἔνδειαν ὀρῶ οὖσαν (1)—and compares them to a chorus; whereas “it is praiseworthy for a chorus to speak in unison” (χοροῦ μὲν γὰρ ἔπαινος τὸ ἅμα εἰπεῖν), “for the populace it is [praiseworthy] to listen well” (δήμου δὲ τὸ καλῶς ἀκοῦσαι, 2). Indeed, the theater in which he stood was a central venue for the Alexandrians’ collective vice: “into this [the theater], nothing or scarcely anything good or honorable ever enters among you” (εἰς τοῦτο [τὸ θέατρον] δὲ καλὸν μὲν ἢ τίμιον οὐδὲν ὑμῖν ἢ σπανίως ποτὲ εἰσέρχεται, 4). On the contrary, not only are the entertainments in their theaters devoid of virtuous and pious content (4-6), we later learn that they are occasions for violent rioting (41-42).

Alexandria lacked the benefit found in Athens, where the poets were given freedom “to reproach not only individual men but also the city collectively” (μὴ μόνον τοὺς κατ’ ἄνδρα ἐλέγχειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ κοινῇ τὴν πόλιν, 6).<sup>99</sup> He continues: “You have neither such a chorus nor poet nor anyone else, who will reprove you with goodwill and make manifest the illnesses of the city” (ὑμῖν δὲ οὔτε χορός ἐστι τοιοῦτος οὔτε ποιητὴς οὔτε ἄλλος οὐδεὶς, ὃς ὑμῖν ὀνειδιεῖ μετ’ εὐνοίας καὶ φανερὰ ποιήσει τὰ τῆς πόλεως ἀρρωστήματα, 7). In the absence of such dramatic productions, he offers his own present discourse as that by which “people become happy, better, and wiser, and are able to inhabit their cities more excellently” (ἄνθρωποι εὐδαιμονοῦσι καὶ κρείττους καὶ σωφρονέστεροι γίνονται καὶ βέλτιον οἰκεῖν δύνανται τὰς πόλεις, 7).<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> He quotes Aristophanes, *Knights* 2-3 and a fragment of Eupolis: κωμωδίας λέγεσθαι· δῆμος πυκνίτης, δύσκολον γερόντιον, ὑπόκωφον, καὶ ‘τί δ’ ἐστ’ Ἀθηναίοισι πρᾶγμ’ ἀπώμοτον,’ “it is said in the comedies, ‘people of the Phyx, miserable, aged, dumb,’ and ‘what action is not forbidden in Athens?’”

<sup>100</sup> In 8-9 he similarly criticizes the philosophers (esp. the Cynics) for failing in their duty to foster virtue in the people.

Dio's self-positioning within the theater both physically as speaker and metaphorically as comic poet provides an important frame for the subsequent sections in which he criticizes their behaviors at public events, first music (47-74) then races (75-95). From within this theatrical venue, he is able to provide culture (*paideia*) and reason (*logos*) as the divine drug (*pharmakon*) that might heal the Alexandrians of their inordinate addiction to frivolous entertainments (16). At the same time, it is important to note how the theme of rioting at performances relates to Dio's concern with fostering a better relationship with Rome. As von Arnim suggests, Dio implies a correlation between the Alexandrians' behavior at concerts and races and their deteriorating relationship with Rome.<sup>101</sup> He notes that in 71-72 Dio reminds them of a recent incident in which their singing and feasting escalated into a lethal confrontation with the Roman army. Moreover, in 51 Dio hints that the consequence of these riots was the presence of Roman soldiers, not merely stationed within the city, but at the very theater where he was speaking.<sup>102</sup> In connection with von Arnim's observations, it should be added that Dio asserts that Alexandria's captivity to Rome is directly related to (if not the result of) their abandonment of "nobler pursuits" (τῶν κρειττόνων ἐπιτηδευμάτων), while "being seized by drunkenness, or the singing of women, or chariots" (αἰρεθεῖσα ὑπὸ μέθης ἢ ᾠδῆς γυναικῶν ἢ ἁρμάτων, 90).

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<sup>101</sup> Arnim, *Leben und Werke*, 437–38.

<sup>102</sup> τοιγαροῦν ὡς παισὶν ὑμῖν παιδαγωγοὺς δέδωκε τοὺς φρονιμωτέρους τῆς πόλεως, μεθ' ὧν καὶ θεωρεῖτε καὶ τᾶλλα ἄμεινον πράττετε, "consequently, he has appointed men who are wiser than this city as tutors for you all, with whom you are better both as an audience and at doing everything else" (51). The implication seems to be that the only thing that kept them from rioting during Dio's present speech was the presence of the army at the theater.

### 2.4.3 ALEXANDRIANS AND THE CREDIBILITY OF EURIPIDES' MYTHOLOGY

Throughout this oration, Dio's description of the Alexandrian mob is significantly colored by mythological literature.<sup>103</sup> In his criticism of the Alexandrians' response to musical performances (47-74), Dio employs a number of mythological comparisons.<sup>104</sup> He asserts, for example, that their entertainers affect them as Sirens (47) and that, by contrast to the music of Orpheus, which tamed wild beasts, their musicians turn humans into beasts (62). For my purposes here, however, his comparison to maenads is of special interest. Whereas music ought to have a calming effect on its audience for them it is the opposite. In a reversal of the experience of most others for whom drunkenness is an inducement to song and dance, for the Alexandrians, "song brings about drunkenness and madness" (ἡ γὰρ ᾠδὴ μέθην ἐμποιεῖ καὶ παράνοιαν, 55). This reversal of the effects of wine and music leads to his comparison with maenads:

οὐ γὰρ ἐκ Μουσῶν, ἀλλ' ἐκ Κορυβάντων τινῶν κατέχεσθε, καὶ πιστὰ ποιεῖτε τὰ τῶν ποιητῶν μυθολογήματα· ὡς ἐκεῖνοί γε παρεισάγουσι Βάκχας τινὰς μαινομένας ὑπὸ μέλους καὶ Σατύρους·

You are not possessed of Muses but of Corybantes and you make credible the mythologies of the poets; as they indeed lead about certain Bacchants and Satyrs maddened by a song. (58)

For Dio, "Bacchants" serve as a useful way of characterizing the Alexandrian populace.

Like maenads, they are possessed, not by the Muses but as shown by poets of mythology

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<sup>103</sup> Thus, as Barry demonstrates, Dio's account of the mob is informed at least as much by poets (esp. Homer) as by factual observation or reports ("Aristocrats, Orators, and the 'Mob,'" 95–98). Moreover, his views are influenced by his own aristocratic prejudices and encounter with the bread riot in Prusa (84-89). Consequently, according to Barry, the *Alexandrian Oration* has little merit as a historical document.

<sup>104</sup> His procedure here is consistent with Saïd's observation that in mythology Dio finds a "convenient repertoire of similes" ("Dio's Use of Mythology," 164). For a discussion of the wider use of mythology in this oration, see Gangloff, *Dion Chrysostome et les mythes*, 273–78. She emphasizes the distinctly political nature of Dio's choice of myths: "Les exemples choisis par Dion insistent sur la mission éducative et politique de la musique, que les Alexandrins ont oubliée au point d'aboutir, au contraire, à l'absence d'harmonie" (276).

they are “maddened by a song.” Several salient features emerge from this comparison. First, Dio reverses the normal rhetorical pattern, which is to quote from a standard poet in order to supply credibility to one’s own argument. On the contrary, Dio suggests that the Alexandrians’ behavior lends credibility to the poets, that is, by establishing their μυθολογήματα as πιστά.<sup>105</sup> The allusions and quotation that follow indicate that Euripides is the primary poet in view.<sup>106</sup>

At the same time, it becomes evident that his assertion that the Alexandrians “make credible the mythologies of the poets” is ironic because in what follows he says much more about how they are *unlike* maenads. “With you there are no fawnskins or *thyrsos* nor is there carrying of lions in your arms” (οὐκοῦν ὑμῖν τὰ τῶν νεβρίδων τε καὶ θύρσων ἐνδεῖ καὶ τὸ λέοντας φέρειν ἐν ταῖς ἀγκάλαις, 58).<sup>107</sup> Dio then returns directly to the similarities: “In every other way, indeed, you seem to me to be entirely like Nymphs and Satyrs; for [you are] always cheerful, lovers of laughter, and lovers of dancing” (τὰ δὲ ἄλλα καὶ πάνυ μοι δοκεῖτε εἰκέναι Νύμφαις καὶ Σατύροις. ἰλαροί τε γὰρ αἰεὶ καὶ φιλογέλωτες καὶ φιλορρησταί, 58-59). These traits, however, are rather general and certainly not unique to maenads or to any particular poet’s description of them. He follows immediately with more differences: “except that for you, when you thirst, wine

<sup>105</sup> See Saïd, “Dio’s Use of Mythology,” 169; Gangloff, *Dion Chrysostome et les mythes*, 246.

<sup>106</sup> See also Wilmes, “Beiträge zur Alexandrinerrede,” 73–74; Gangloff, *Dion Chrysostome et les mythes*, 276.

<sup>107</sup> There is nothing unique to Euripides about the fawnskin (νεβρίς) and *thyrsos*; these are common maenadic attributes. Wilmes regards Dio’s reference to carrying lions (τὸ λέοντας φέρειν ἐν ταῖς ἀγκάλαις) as an inaccurate allusion to *Bacchae* 699-700, in which the maenads are described as “holding deer and wild cubs of wolves in their arms” (αἰ δ’ ἀγκάλαισι δορκάδ’ ἢ σκύμους λύκων ἀγρίουσιν ἔχουσαι) (“Beiträge zur Alexandrinerrede,” 74). The carrying of lions, however, may recall Agave carrying the head of Pentheus atop her *thyrsos* “as though of a mountain lion” (ὡς ὄρεστέρου... λέοντος, 1141-42) and Cadmus and Agave’s later exchange: Cadmus: “Whose face then do you have in your arms?” Agave: “A lion’s. At least so the hunting women were saying” (τίνοσιν πρόσωπον δῆτ’ ἐν ἀγκάλαις ἔχεις; λέοντος, ὃ γ’ ἔφασκον αἰ θηρόμεναι, 1277-78; see also 1215, 1283).

does not bubble up spontaneously from some rock somewhere or from a glen; nor are you able to have milk and honey so easily by scratching the ground with your fingertips” (πλὴν οὐκ αὐτόματος ὑμῖν ἀναβλύει διψήσασιν ὁ οἶνος ἐκ πέτρας ποθέν τινος ἢ νάπησ, οὐδὲ γάλα καὶ μέλι δύνασθε εὐχερῶς οὕτως ἔχειν ἄκροισι δακτύλοισι διαμῶντες χθόνα, 59). Here Dio quotes from Euripides *Bacchae* 709, where the messenger reports that the maenads were “scratching the ground with their fingertips” (ἄκροισι δακτύλοισι διαμῶσαι χθόνα). This quote confirms that Euripides is the primary poet to whose mythology Dio was referring. In addition, it signals Dio’s interest in the larger context of *Bacchae* 704-11, where the messenger reports Dionysus’ miraculous provisions for the maenads.<sup>108</sup> As in Dio, in the tragedy there refers to liquid springing miraculously from a rock and also wine, milk, and honey from the ground. Dio also employs the term αὐτόματος, which, although only found once in the *Bacchae* describing the maenads’ escape from prison (447), in later Dionysiac mythology becomes important term.<sup>109</sup>

The function of these poetic allusions, however, is ironically not, as he had initially asserted, to *confirm* the mythologies of the poets but rather to *contrast* with the Alexandrians’ political and economic subjugation to Rome. Dio proceeds: “Water does not come to you here spontaneously nor presumably do you have bread within your own authority, but even this you take from the hand of the stronger” (ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ τὸ ὕδωρ ὑμῖν ἀφικνεῖται δεῦρο αὐτόματον οὐδὲ τὴν μᾶζαν ἔχετε ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ δήπουθεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ

<sup>108</sup> *Bacchae* 704-11: θύρσον δέ τις λαβοῦσ’ ἐπαισεν ἐς πέτραν, / ὄθεν δροσώδης ὕδατος ἐκπηδᾷ νοτίσ· / ἄλλη δὲ νάρθηκ’ ἐς πέδον καθήκε γῆς / καὶ τῆιδε κρήνην ἐξανῆκ’ οἴνου θεός· / ὄσαισ δὲ λευκοῦ πάματος πόθος παρήν, / ἄκροισι δακτύλοισι διαμῶσαι χθόνα / γάλακτος ἐσμὸς εἶχον· ἐκ δὲ κισσίνων / θύρσων γλυκεῖαι μέλιτος ἔσταζον ῥοαί, “One [maenad] took a thyrsus and struck a rock; from there moisture of fresh water sprung forth; another placed a fennel on the foot of the earth and at that place the god sent forth a spring of wine. As many as had a desire for milk, scratching the ground with their fingertips, they acquired streams of milk. From their ivied *thyrsoi*, sweet streams of honey were dripping.”

<sup>109</sup> See, for example, §§ 4.3.2 and 6.3 on Artapanus and Acts.

ταύτην ἐκ τῆς τῶν κρειττόνων χειρὸς λαμβάνετε, 59).<sup>110</sup> Dio’s halting comparison of his audience to maenads recalls the oration’s opening where he began to compare his audience to a dramatic chorus but quickly pulled back, preferring instead that they listen rather than sing (2, see above). Similarly, here again, he begins to compare his audience to the chorus of maenads from Euripides’ *Bacchae* only finally to emphasize that their situation is unlike those maenads. He nevertheless concludes his comparison by exhorting them to give up their maenadic behavior: “So it was perhaps time for you to cease your Bacchic revels and attend more to yourselves. But now, should you listen only to the lyre string, as though you heard a war trumpet, you would no longer be able to maintain peace” (ὥστε ἴσως καιρὸς ἦν ὑμᾶς παύσασθαι βακχειῶν καὶ προσέχειν μᾶλλον αὐτοῖς. νυνὶ δὲ ἂν μόνον ἀκούσητε χορδῆς, ὥσπερ σάλπιγγος ἀκηκοότες, οὐκέτι δύνασθε εἰρήνην ἄγειν, 59). In this way, Dio brings his mythological discussion to bear on his larger political goals of fostering a more peaceful relationship with Rome.<sup>111</sup>

Thus, when viewed in terms of Alexandria’s position within the Roman Empire, Dio’s comparison with maenads cuts in two directions. On the one hand, their public disorder—a central cause of political conflict—is likened to maenadic madness. On the other, their political subjugation and economic dependency is entirely unlike the maenads of Euripides where Dionysiac religion provided a release from Pentheus’ tyranny and where the god lavished his devotees with abundance. It is clear from the rest of the

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<sup>110</sup> As Wilmes suggests, these references to water and bread would evoke Rome’s control over the Nile (e.g., Augustus’ repairing of the Alexandrian dykes and canals) and the grain supply (cf. Pliny, *Pan* 31.3, which praises Trajan for this aspect of his administration of Egypt) (“Beiträge zur Alexandrinerrede,” 76–78). The term *automatos* was used by Herodotus (2.14) to describe the flooding of the Nile.

<sup>111</sup> Dio further develops the connection between music and war in the following section by noting that the ancient Spartans made war to the accompaniment of the kithara.

oration that Dio viewed these as closely connected: their collective licentiousness was in large part responsible for their political captivity (see e.g., 88-90).<sup>112</sup>

## 2.5 EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE* AT ALEXANDRIA: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has traced several ways in which Euripides' *Bacchae* was reappropriated at Alexandria amidst religious and political transformation and upheaval. From the founding of Alexandria, tragic poetry and Dionysiac religion were integral parts of imperial self-presentation and ideology. Evocations of this famous tragedy, therefore, provided powerful potentialities for exploring central tensions within Greek society. For Theocritus, a poet of the imperial court, subtle transformations of Euripides' narrative allowed him to construct maenadism in a different light. Far from radical and frenzied innovators who destroy the royal house, Theocritus' maenads are civilized and rational, acting according to established norms of justice and propriety. Dio Chrysostom addresses an Alexandrian audience now subject to Roman rule and observes that their public rioting was like the maenadic madness portrayed by Euripides. In contrast to the mythological maenads, however, the Alexandrians lacked political and economic benefits provided by the god in the tragedy. Dio warns that if they persisted in such behavior, they would continue to suffer repression at the hands of the Roman army. Thus, in

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<sup>112</sup> Gangloff's analysis of Dio's use of the *Bacchae* is consistent with my interpretation here; she argues that it functions as a means of warning the Alexandrians about the consequences of their behavior with respect to the Romans. In contrast to my reading, however, she proposes that Dio evokes the danger faced by Pentheus at the hand of Agave, which Dio makes analogous to their own political danger (*Dion Chrysostome et les mythes*, 276–77). While I do not dispute that Agave's dismemberment of Pentheus is in view with the evocation of the *Bacchae*, Dio's own emphasis moves in another direction. He neither mentions Pentheus nor alludes to the *sparagmos*. Moreover, he makes the Alexandrians analogous to the maenads rather than their victim.

keeping with its function in fifth-century Athens, the *Bacchae* continued to serve as a means of reevaluating the relationship between religion and absolute power.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE* AT ROME:

#### HORACE ON BACCHUS AS TRAGIC HERO AND STOIC SAGE

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The reception of Euripides' *Bacchae* at Rome occurs amidst a range of tensions and conflicts and highlights several fundamental problems in Roman society. As in Alexandria, Dionysus was first introduced to Italy by Greeks. Subsequently, he was introduced to Rome by the Senate, and at various points in its history the Roman administration took an interest in and patronized his cult. Tragic drama was also introduced to Rome from Greece, and the influence of the *Bacchae* is found early on in Latin drama. This chapter surveys a range of Roman interactions with the *Bacchae* in various genres, culminating with Horace's adaptation of the conflict between Pentheus and the disguised stranger (*Bacch.* 492-98) in *Epistles* 1.16 (§ 3.4). I situate Horace's use of this scene within the larger religious and political context of Rome, where both Dionysus and the theater function as focal points in contestations of power. My analysis addresses the interrelationship of two larger problems in Horatian studies, namely, the poet's attitude toward Augustan Rome and the nature of his Bacchic poetics. Although attempts to approach these two aspects of Horace's work in a unified manner have been made, recently in an essay by Alessandro Schiesaro, their scope is limited to Horace's *Odes* to the exclusion of *Epistles* 1.16. In addition, in the history of the interpretation of the *Bacchae*, Horace represents an important nexus of shifting literary and ideological

interests. He provides the first extant instance of a philosophically informed allegorical reading of the tragedy in which Dionysus has become a model Stoic sage, prepared to face death virtuously. Two salient features implicit in Horace's reading of the *Bacchae* are prominently developed by two subsequent readers, Plutarch and Epictetus (§ 3.5). Both apply the same tragic scene to the death of the sage yet with very different emphases: the former is interested in achieving tranquility through a resignation to the divine will, the latter in valorizing the courage to resist Roman tyranny.

### 3.2 THE ARRIVAL OF DIONYSUS AT ROME

In the eighth century BCE, Greek colonists arrived in the south of Italy and brought with them Dionysiac religion.<sup>1</sup> Evidence for the practice of Dionysiac cult by Greeks in Magna Graecia is available from the fifth century. For example, a famous mid-fifth-century burial inscription from Cumae indicates a relationship between Bacchic initiation and funerary rites: “it is not permitted to lie here if someone is not initiated into Bacchus” (Οὐ θέμις ἐντοῦθα κεῖσθαι ἰ μὲ τὸν βεβαχχευμένον).<sup>2</sup> A connection between Dionysus and the afterlife is also found on a gold leaf from a burial chamber in Hipponion (ca. 400 BCE), which speaks of “*bacchoi*” traveling along the sacred road in the underworld.<sup>3</sup> Thus, based on the limited evidence available, early Greek practice of

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<sup>1</sup> The most comprehensive account of Dionysus in the Roman world is Adrien Bruhl, *Liber Pater: origine et expansion du culte dionysiaque à Rome et dans le monde romain* (Paris: Boccard, 1953); see also H. Jeanmaire, *Dionysos: histoire du culte de Bacchus* (Paris: Payot, 1951), 453–82; Richard Seaford, *Dionysos* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 58–70.

<sup>2</sup> Greek text follows Franciszek Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques: supplément* (Ecole française d'Athènes: travaux et mémoires 11; Paris: Boccard, 1962), 202–03 no. 120.

<sup>3</sup> For the text, see Radcliffe G. Edmonds, ed., *The “Orphic” Gold Tablets and Greek Religion: Further along the Path* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 30–31. On the importance of the afterlife in Dionysiac ritual more generally, see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*

Dionysiac ritual in Italy seems to have been especially interested in death and the afterlife.<sup>4</sup>

Dionysus was known to Romans as Bacchus and also acquired the title Liber Pater. This latter name came from an Italian fertility god who was associated with the plebian class and made up part of the divine triad Ceres, Liber, and Libera. The process of assimilation between the Italian god Liber and the Greek Dionysus is complex and occurred over an extended period of cultural interactions.<sup>5</sup> A series of significant historical events in this process occurred in the 490's BCE. According to the Roman annalistic tradition, in response to a famine, in 496 the consul Aulus Postumius consulted the sibylline oracle and was instructed to introduce a cult of three Greek agrarian deities Demeter, Dionysus, and Kore (Dion. Hal., *Ant. rom.* 6.17). Consequently, the Romans adopted them under the names Ceres, Liber, and Libera, and in 493 a temple was dedicated to this triad on the Aventine Hill, which was later restored by Augustus and Tiberius (17 CE).<sup>6</sup>

A full account of the history of Bacchus in the Roman world is beyond the scope of this study. Here, I briefly sketch two historical developments in Bacchic religion that are most pertinent for the subsequent analysis, particularly because they illustrate the

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(Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 293–95; with reference to the Bacchic gold tablets, see Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets* (2d ed.; London: Routledge, 2013), 94–136.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Burkert argues that the Dionysiac mysteries had a focus on the afterlife which they developed “especially in Italy as a kind of analogue to the Eleusinian rites” (*Ancient Mystery Cults* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987], 21–23 [at 22]).

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of this period, see Bruhl, *Liber Pater*, 13–45.

<sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*, 30–45; Mary Beard, John A. North, and S. R. F. Price, *Religions of Rome I: A History* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 64–66. On the varying attitudes of Romans toward the reception of Greek religion more generally, see also Denis Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome: Cultures, Contexts, and Beliefs* (Roman Literature and Its Contexts; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 25–28.

interconnection between Bacchus, political power, and questions of morality. The first is the Bacchanalia affair of 186 BCE.<sup>7</sup> These events are known to us primarily through two sources: Livy's account (39.8-19) and an inscription of a senatorial decree on a bronze tablet, known as the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* (ILS 18; ILLRP 511).<sup>8</sup> Livy's account is highly romanticized and may reveal more about his own religious prejudices in Augustan Rome than it does about the early second century. Nevertheless, in conjunction with the *senatus consultum* and other historical evidence, various reconstructions have been attempted. Several elements of Livy's narrative are noteworthy. He regarded the affair as a political conspiracy (*coniuratio*) that the Senate was compelled to put down (39.8.1-2), resulting in the trials and executions of seven thousand (39.17-18). The Bacchic rites came from Etruria, according to Livy, and were introduced to Rome by a Greek of low status (*graecus ignobilis*); they consisted of all kinds of debauchery and drunkenness, even murder, and they included the mixing of men and women, slave and free, and young and old (39.8.3-8). Livy's introduction is followed by a comic tale whereby the consul came to learn of the conspiracy and reported it to the Senate. The story involves one Publius Aebutius and a scheme hatched by his mother and stepfather to ruin him by having him initiated into the mysteries; he is dissuaded by his mistress and consequently the secret workings of the cult come to the attention of the consul.

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<sup>7</sup> A comprehensive study of the Bacchanalia affair is Jean-Marie Pailler, *Bacchanalia: la répression de 186 av. J.-C. à Rome et en Italie: vestiges, images, tradition* (Paris: Boccard, 1988); see also Jeanmaire, *Dionysos*, 545–58; Bruhl, *Liber Pater*, 49–116; Martin P. Nilsson, *Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1957), 12–21; John A. North, "Religious Toleration in Republican Rome," *PCPS* 25 (1979): 85–103; Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 33–35, 52–53; P. G. Walsh, "Making a Drama out of a Crisis: Livy on the Bacchanalia," *GR* 43 (1996): 188–203; Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome I*, 91–96; Sarolta A. Takács, "Politics and Religion in the Bacchanalian Affair of 186 B.C.E.," *HSCP* 100 (2000): 301–10.

<sup>8</sup> A translation of the *senatus consultum* is available in Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome II: A Sourcebook*, 290–91.

As P. G. Walsh suggests, Livy's narrative resembles a comic drama more than a historical account.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, several of Livy's details of the Senate's decree (39.19.8-9) are verified by the inscription of the *senatus consultum*. In both texts, the Senate outlawed new organizations of mysteries; those that continued to exist would require special permission and have limitations on the number of participants and on the mixing of genders. In other aspects, however, Livy's version of events is historically problematic. For example, he supposes that the Senate came to learn of the existence of the mysteries for the first time in 186, when in fact it is clear particularly from the comedies of Plautus that this religion was well known prior to this.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps more significantly, whereas Livy is deeply concerned with the debauchery of Bacchic religion and presents it as part of his larger narrative of the decline of Rome's morality, most scholars maintain that the Senate's actions arose not from moral concerns but were aimed more at the consolidation of its political power because the egalitarian structure of Bacchic groups "evades the normal basis of State control and supervision of religion at all levels."<sup>11</sup>

The Bacchanalia affair illustrates several key features of Bacchic religion in the Roman world. First, it was seen as a threat to political stability. As Livy's account suggests, Dionysiac religion was fundamentally un-Roman yet it had attracted a multitude so large that "it now was nearly another nation" (*alterum iam prope populum*

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<sup>9</sup> Walsh, "Making a Drama out of a Crisis."

<sup>10</sup> North, "Religious Toleration in Republican Rome," 88; Walsh, "Making a Drama out of a Crisis," 191-92; Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome I*, 93.

<sup>11</sup> North, "Religious Toleration in Republican Rome," 93. Bruhl allowed for the genuine coexistence of concerns over morality and political interests (*Liber Pater*, 114-16). North's argument, however, has been widely accepted; see Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome I*, 95-96; Takács, "Politics and Religion in the Bacchanalian Affair."

*esse*, 39.13.14). Indeed, Bacchic cult consisted of a well-structured organization that transgressed conventional boundaries of gender and class, which is precisely the aspect targeted in the *senatus consultum*.<sup>12</sup> The need for the Senate to regulate these religious organizations is comparable to the decree of Ptolemy IV Philopator discussed above (*BGU* 1211; see § 2.2).<sup>13</sup> Underlying both decrees is an anxiety about the threat of Dionysiac religion; it seems that its implicit promise of freedom in every aspect of human experience stood in constant tension and potential conflict with political authority and social hierarchy. This tension will emerge again below in my analysis of Horace’s poetry where the demands of praising Augustan power conflict (at least potentially) with the freedom promoted in Bacchic religious experience.<sup>14</sup> Second, from Livy’s perspective, Bacchic religion is morally suspicious; its nocturnal rites, excessive wine and feasting, mixing of gender, class, and age all threaten “to extinguish every distinction of modesty” (*discrimen omne pudoris exstinxissent*, 39.8.6). This moral reputation of Bacchic religion is important both for understanding the official attitudes of Augustan Rome and for subsequent centuries, in which Bacchic associations functioned as an effective means of slandering religious opponents.<sup>15</sup>

The political and moral aspects of Bacchic religion come together again in the career of Marc Antony. Antony took on the title “New Dionysus,” an appellation which developed from his relationship with Cleopatra and was in keeping with Ptolemaic

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<sup>12</sup> See Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome I*, 95–96.

<sup>13</sup> Upon the discovery and publication of the Ptolemaic decree in 1917, some scholars in fact postulated a direct relationship between the Dionysiac organizations in Alexandria and Rome. For a discussion and criticism of this theory, see Pailler, *Bacchanalia*, 73–75.

<sup>14</sup> See also the discussion of various types of Dionysiac *luisis* above (§§ 1.3.1 and 1.3.3).

<sup>15</sup> Pliny the Younger’s attitudes toward the Christian community in Bithynia, for example, seem to have been influenced by Livy’s account of the Bacchanalia; see § 6.1.1 below.

tradition (see § 2.2 above).<sup>16</sup> According to Plutarch, Antony was received in Ephesus amidst a Dionysiac *thiasos*, where in addition to the “New Dionysus” he was hailed with several others of the god’s epithets (*Ant.* 24). Antony’s Dionysiac pretensions would have entailed a connection with the Ptolemaic line and thus been aimed at establishing his right to rule their empire with Cleopatra.<sup>17</sup> In addition, in keeping with the moral reputation of Dionysiac religion, Antony’s association with Dionysus, according to Plutarch, involved him in a debauched lifestyle.<sup>18</sup> Finally, Plutarch’s narrative of Antony’s final days before his suicide in Alexandria surrounded by Octavian’s army is particularly striking. In the middle of a quiet night, there was suddenly heard the sound of a Dionysiac *thiasos* of revelers passing through the middle of the city and out of the gate toward Octavian’s camp. “To those who were interpreting the sign it seemed that the god to whom Antony most likened and attached himself throughout his life was abandoning him” (ἐδόκει δὲ τοῖς ἀναλογιζομένοις τὸ σημεῖον ἀπολείπειν ὁ θεὸς Ἀντώνιον, ᾧ μάλιστα συνεξομοιῶν καὶ συνοικειῶν ἑαυτὸν διετέλεσεν, 73.4). Thus, with Antony’s final political and military defeat it was evident that Dionysus must no longer be in his camp.

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<sup>16</sup> On which, see Jeanmaire, *Dionysos*, 464–68; Bruhl, *Liber Pater*, 127–32; Arthur Darby Nock, “Notes on Ruler-Cult I-IV,” in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (ed. Zeph Stewart; 2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1.134–59; Frederick E. Brenk, “Heroic Anti-Heroes: Ruler Cult and Divine Assimilations in Plutarch’s ‘Lives’ of Demetrios and Antonius,” in *Relighting the Souls: Studies in Plutarch, in Greek Literature, Religion, and Philosophy, and in the New Testament Background* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1998), 152–69, esp. 159–68.

<sup>17</sup> As Nock observes, “[i]t is now clear that that Antony and Cleopatra, in posing as Dionysus-Osiris and Isis-Aphrodite, were assuming an attitude deliberately for political ends and pressed these claims to divinity: they were merely accepting the homage that offered itself” (“Notes on Ruler-Cult I-IV,” 147).

<sup>18</sup> For a similar perspective on Antony’s Dionysiac debauchery, see Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 4.148b-c. He quotes Socrates of Rhodes’ description of Antony’s visit to Athens, where he constructed a scaffold above the theater and engaged in nocturnal Bacchic revels in view of the entire city. As Bruhl notes, however, this widespread view of Antony may have been at least in part the product of Octavian’s propaganda (*Liber Pater*, 130–31); see also Brenk, “Heroic Anti-Heroes,” 163–64. For a related use of this trope in political rhetoric, see the discussion of Philo’s *Legatio ad Gaium* (§ 5.2).

In sum: Dionysus first arrived in Italy with Greek colonists and subsequently was adopted into the Roman world through assimilation with the Italian god Liber. Early evidence for Dionysiac rituals in Magna Graecia points to a particular interest in death and the afterlife; yet, at Rome the religion of Bacchus developed in various other directions. As in the Greek world, Bacchus came to be associated with licentious behavior. Moreover, in Rome he came to have distinctive political connections as illustrated, for example, in the “conspiracy” of the Bacchanalia affair and the aspirations of Marc Antony.

### 3.3 EURIPIDES’ *BACCHAE* ON THE ROMAN STAGE AND IN IMPERIAL EPIC

The reception of Euripides’ *Bacchae* in Rome must be understood through its adaptation in Roman tragedy.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the first Latin tragedy performed in Rome was adapted from a Greek original and written by a native Greek speaker, Livius Andronicus.<sup>20</sup> It was staged in 240 BCE at a festival for Jupiter to celebrate Roman victory in the first Punic War. Livius’ subsequent tragedies would pave the way for the transformation of the Greek medium for a Roman context. In Rome, the production and performance of tragedy differed from its Greek antecedents in several important ways. In Athens, all drama (both tragedy and comedy) belonged to the sphere of Dionysus and

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<sup>19</sup> The foundational study of Roman tragedy in the Republic is Otto Ribbeck, *Die römische Tragödie im Zeitalter der Republik* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1875). He has also produced the standard collection of fragments: Otto Ribbeck, *Scenicae Romanorum poesis fragmenta I: tragicorum romanorum fragmenta* (3d ed.; Leipzig: Teubner, 1897). These have been updated in Alfred Klotz, *Scaenicae Romanorum fragmenta I: tragicorum fragmenta* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1953). For a general introduction to Roman Republican tragedy, see W. Beare, *The Roman Stage: A Short History of Latin Drama in the Time of the Republic* (3d ed.; London: Methuen, 1964). A more recent study by Mario Erasmo provides a compelling survey of the history of Roman tragedy with attention to performance criticism and metatragedy (*Roman Tragedy: Theatre to Theatricality* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004]).

<sup>20</sup> On Livius, see Beare, *The Roman Stage*, 25–32; Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy*, 9–14.

was performed at fixed Dionysiac festivals. The production of plays was carried out in keeping with Athenian democracy: the *choregos* was chosen by lot and the winner was selected by a vote of citizens (see § 1.2.3). In Rome, plays were chosen by an official (*aedile* or *praetor urbanus*); performances could be held at various *ludi* and could be put on by any individual with sufficient wealth. Although in Rome drama was not attached to Dionysus to the extent that it was in Athens, it is an interesting historical coincidence that our knowledge of the development of Bacchic religion in Rome is connected to the stage. As mentioned above, the primary historical evidence for the existence of Bacchic religion in Rome prior to 186 is found in the comedies of Plautus, which repeatedly present Bacchic cult as something familiar to Roman audiences.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the events of the Bacchanalia as reported by Livy follow a narrative pattern resembling Roman comedy.<sup>22</sup>

The role of tragedy in the celebration of and contestation for political and military power is particularly striking. Romans frequently staged dramas from recent or mythological history, often depicting the achievements of a contemporary aristocrat or his ancestors.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, past tragedies could be restaged in subsequent historical or

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<sup>21</sup> Most scholars of Roman religion accept that Plautus' depiction of Bacchic religion is reliable evidence against Livy for its existence prior to 186; see Nilsson, *Dionysiac Mysteries*, 12–14; North, "Religious Toleration in Republican Rome," 88; Walsh, "Making a Drama out of a Crisis," 191–92; Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome I*, 93 n. 77. Robert Rousselle, however, cautions that his portrait of this religion may develop from his Greek literary prototypes more than actual Roman practice ("Liber-Dionysus in Early Roman Drama," *CJ* 82 [1987]: 193–98).

<sup>22</sup> Walsh, "Making a Drama out of a Crisis," esp. 195–99. He finds in Livy's account a prologue and five acts in the manner of Plautus' dramas.

<sup>23</sup> On the Roman dramatic genre of historical tragedy (*fabula praetexta*), see Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy*, 52–80.

political moments and thus acquire a new saliency.<sup>24</sup> A striking example is Accius' *Brutus*, a play that dramatizes the actions of Brutus, the traditional founder of the republic who overthrew the last king Tarquin. In 57 BCE, while Cicero was in exile, it was restaged at the *ludi Apollinares*.<sup>25</sup> In a later speech, Cicero would find a reference to himself in the play's mention of King Servius Tullius: "I am the one called by name in the *Brutus*: 'Tullius, who had established freedom for the people'" (*nominatim sum appellatus in Bruto: 'tullius, qui libertatem civibus stabiliverat', Pro Sestio* 123). Indeed, the play's actor Aesopus was a friend and supporter of Cicero, who throughout that theatrical program, Cicero claims, had made interpolations so as to plead Cicero's case on the stage (120-21). Speaking of another play about Brutus, Cicero asserts that there was no place in which there was not "some remark by the poet that would seem to apply to our time" (*aliquid a poeta dictum cadere in tempus nostrum videretur*, 118). In 44 BCE after the assassination of Julius Caesar, the tyrannicide Brutus sought to have Accius' play staged again, presumably to associate himself with his heroic ancestor; he was, however, prevented by Marc Antony's brother Gaius.<sup>26</sup> These observations indicate that Roman audiences were prepared to find contemporary political allusions in tragedies

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<sup>24</sup> See Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 36–38; Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy*, 81–121. For a discussion of significant restagings of classical Greek plays, see § 1.4.3.

<sup>25</sup> On this, see esp. Frank Frost Abbott, "The Theatre as a Factor in Roman Politics under the Republic," *TAPA* 38 (1907): 49–56, esp. 55–56; Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy*, 91–96.

<sup>26</sup> See MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 17; Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy*, 96–101. Erasmo analyzes another example of contemporary allusions in tragedy in Octavian's commissioning of *Thyestes* by Varius to be performed in 29 BCE for the celebration of his victory over Antony at Actium. He notes two potential allusions in the choice of this tragedy. First, there is an implied analogy between the victors (Atreus and Augustus) and the vanquished (Thyestes and Antony). These are admittedly vague, not least because Atreus' serving the unknowing Thyestes his own sons would have been an awkward association for Augustus. Second, there may also be a metaliterary allusion to Pompey's choice to stage a Thyestes play at the opening of his theater in 55 BCE (*ibid.*, 101–17).

(both from historical and mythological narratives), not least in matters relating to tyranny and liberation.

The earliest known Latin adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae* is the *Pentheus* of Pacuvius (ca. 220-130 BCE), although the *Bacchae*'s wider influence on Roman theater can be found earlier.<sup>27</sup> Of Pacuvius' *Pentheus*, unfortunately, no fragments remain.<sup>28</sup> For its content, we are dependent on the fourth or fifth-century (?) commentary, *Servius Danielis*, on Vergil's *Aeneid*. At 4.469, where Vergil briefly compares Pentheus' madness with Dido's, the commentator provides a summary of the plot of the *Pentheus*.<sup>29</sup> Its major deviation from Euripides is that the imprisoned stranger is not Dionysus but rather one of his devotees Acoetes (*unum ex comitibus eius Acoeten*, 13-14). A second Latin adaptation is the *Bacchae* of Accius (ca. 170-86 BCE).<sup>30</sup> Of this tragedy, several fragments remain (19 according to Ribbeck), which show that it is largely a translation of Euripides.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to the innovation in Pacuvius' plot, Accius follows his Euripidean model, in that Pentheus' prisoner is Dionysus himself.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Zeph Stewart argues that the *Amphitruo* of Plautus (ca. 254-184 BCE) is in part an imitation of Euripides' play. He finds several comic allusions to the *Bacchae* and shared themes which he suggests must come either from Euripides or possibly an earlier now unknown Latin version ("The *Amphitruo* of Plautus and Euripides' *Bacchae*," *TAPA* 89 [1958]: 348-73). For a general discussion of the appropriation and adaptation of Greek mythology by the Romans, see Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome*, 47-75.

<sup>28</sup> See Ribbeck, *Die römische Tragödie*, 280-81. For general discussion of the tragedies of Pacuvius, see Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy*, 34-42.

<sup>29</sup> Text of Servius is in Arthur Frederick Stocker and Albert Hartman Travis, *Servianorum in Vergilii carmina commentariorum III: quod in Aeneidos libros III-V* (Editionis Harvardianae; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 403-04. This tragedy of Pacuvius is mentioned by Servius (*Pacuvii tragoediam*) in connection to Pentheus' madness; the summary of the play is given in the later additions to the commentary, *Servius Danielis*. In this passage of the *Aeneid*, Vergil seems to have been dependent on Euripides. The phrase, "and a twin sun and a double Thebes appear" (*et solem geminum et duplices se ostendere Thebas*, 4.470), derives from *Bacchae* 918-19 (καὶ μὴν ὄρᾶν μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίουσδε δοκῶ / δισσοῦσδε δὲ Θήβας, "I seem at least to see two suns and two Thebes"). On this line *Servius Danielis* notes that Vergil "imitated Euripides" (*imitatus Euripidem*).

<sup>30</sup> On Accius generally, see Beare, *The Roman Stage*, 119-27; Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy*, 42-51.

<sup>31</sup> See Ribbeck, *Die römische Tragödie*, 569-76. He notes that the greatest divergences from Euripides are observable in the lyric sections. In addition to Ribbeck's fragments, a more recent edition of

The most complete extant Latin adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae* postdates Horace; it is not a tragedy but rather an episode from Ovid's epic, the *Metamorphoses* (3.511-733). While a full analysis of Ovid's treatment of the *Bacchae* is beyond the scope of this study, several observations are relevant. Although it is clear that Ovid knew the Euripidean version, he nevertheless diverges from it in important ways.<sup>33</sup> As in Pacuvius' *Pentheus*, the captured stranger is Acoetes rather than the god himself.<sup>34</sup> The effect of the god's absence from this scene of conflict is to mute Euripides' emphasis on the god's vindictiveness in orchestrating the tragic events of Pentheus' destruction. For Ovid, however, the introduction of Acoetes allows for the inset narrative of the Tyrrhenian pirates, where the god's vengeance returns to the forefront.<sup>35</sup> Especially interesting are the ways in which Ovid's myth of Pentheus has been reshaped with a view to Rome. As Philip Hardie has shown regarding Ovid's larger Theban cycle (books 3 and

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Accius is available: Jacqueline Dangel, *Accius, oeuvres (fragments)* (Paris: Société d'édition "les belles lettres," 1995). On the *Bacchae*, see 190-94 with commentary on 340-44.

<sup>32</sup> This is evident from fragments 11-13 (Ribbeck), in which the messenger describes his arrest of the god (11) and Pentheus remarks on his effeminate appearance (12-13). The latter two fragments are modeled closely on the exchange between Pentheus and Dionysus in the *Bacchae* (esp. 453, 455-56); see Ribbeck, *Die römische Tragödie*, 572-73; Dangel, *Accius*, 343.

<sup>33</sup> See William S. Anderson, *Ovid's "Metamorphoses": Books 1-5* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 388-89.

<sup>34</sup> It is likely, therefore, that Ovid derived this element of the plot from Pacuvius; see H. MacL. Currie, "Ovid and the Roman Stage," *ANRW* 31.4: 2701-42, esp. 2717-18. It is impossible to be certain, however, as Ribbeck notes, because of the absence of evidence regarding the Pentheus plays by Aeschylus, Iophon, and Lycophron (*Die römische Tragödie*, 281). Moreover, as H. J. Rose argues, the version of the story in which the captured stranger is a human rather than the god himself should be given precedence to Euripides' version ("Dionysiaca," *Aberystwyth Studies* 4 [1922]: 19-29, esp. 24-28). For discussions of the larger influence of tragedy on Latin epic poetry (esp. Vergil), see Stanisław Stabryła, *Latin Tragedy in Virgil's Poetry* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1970); Philip Hardie, "Virgil and Tragedy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil* (ed. Charles Martindale; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 312-26.

<sup>35</sup> This story is known from the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*. Currie suggests the possibility that the attribution of the story of the Tyrrhenian pirates to Acoetes had come from Pacuvius ("Ovid and the Roman Stage," 2717). The summary of *Servius Danielis*, however, is silent on this point. For an analysis of Ovid's narrative techniques in this scene, in particular his use of this type of "interrupting and interrupted dialogue," see Joanne McNamara, "The Frustration of Pentheus: Narrative Momentum in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 3.511-731," *CQ* 60 (2010): 173-93 (at 174).

4), the poet has composed a sort of tragic response to Vergil's epic treatment of Rome (an "anti-*Aeneid*").<sup>36</sup> Building on Froma Zeitlin's conception of Thebes as "an anti-Athens" in Greek tragedy, Hardie shows that, for Ovid, Cadmus' founding of Thebes and the tragic events of Theban mythic history provided negative examples and warnings for his Roman audience.<sup>37</sup> In the conflicts and familial strife of mythological Thebes, Romans might recognize their own recent history of civil wars. Ovid's narrative signals such an analogy in several ways. Pentheus describes his Theban ancestors as having wandered to Thebes with their Penates, which recalls Vergil's Trojan founders of Rome in the *Aeneid* more than the myth of Cadmus.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, in Ovid, Pentheus' conflict with the maenads has become sharply militarized. Pentheus views the invasion of Bacchus and his maenads as an act of war and an attempt at military conquest (3.531-63). When Pentheus later goes out to the mountain to pursue the maenads, in contrast to Euripides where he had been feminized and disguised as a maenad, Ovid's Pentheus "snorts as a fierce horse" (*ut fremit acer equus*) prepared for battle (704-09).<sup>39</sup> That Ovid has Pentheus advocate for the Roman virtues of manliness and courage is perhaps not without

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<sup>36</sup> Philip Hardie, "Ovid's Theban History: The First 'Anti-*Aeneid*'?," *CQ* 40 (1990): 224–35.

<sup>37</sup> See *ibid.*, 229; Froma I. Zeitlin, "Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama," in *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (ed. J. Peter Euben; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 101–41. On this function of Attic drama, see § 1.2.3. Hardie's treatment of Ovid's Theban cycle has been remarkably influential; he did not, however, fully explore the implications for the Pentheus episode. A recent study by Micaela Janan, which employs a Lacanian analysis, develops Hardie's observations and devotes a chapter to Pentheus ("Pentheus Monsters Thebes") (*Reflections in a Serpent's Eye: Thebes in Ovid's Metamorphoses* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 185–223). This is an adaptation of her earlier article, "The Snake Sheds Its Skin: Pentheus (Re)Imagines Thebes," *CP* 99 (2004): 130–46.

<sup>38</sup> So Anderson, *Ovid's "Metamorphoses,"* 392.

<sup>39</sup> Martial language is not absent from Euripides (see, e.g., *Bacch.* 50-52, where Dionysus describes his maenads as an army); it is, however, far less central to Euripides' narrative than to Ovid's. Moreover, Jennifer March argues that the absence of military action on the part of Pentheus is in fact a narrative innovation of Euripides ("Euripides' *Bakchai*: A Reconsideration in the Light of Vase-Paintings," *BICS* 36 [1989]: 33–65, esp. 35-43).

some irony.<sup>40</sup> Pentheus' discourse appears to represent an official Augustan response to Bacchic religion, which can be seen through a comparison with Livy's account of the Bacchanalia affair. For example, like the latter and in contrast to Euripides, a central problem with Bacchic *thiasoi* for Ovid's Pentheus is their transgression of distinctions of gender, age, and class (3.528-30; Livy 39.8.3-8).<sup>41</sup>

In sum: as in the Roman history of the god Bacchus discussed above, tragic drama was taken over from the Greeks and adapted for the Roman world. Moreover, like the god, Roman tragedy became variously emblematic for political contestations, as for example in the struggles between liberty and tyranny. In view of this, the myth of Pentheus, most closely associated with Euripides' *Bacchae*, is an especially salient drama for exploring such societal struggles. This Greek play went through various Latin adaptations so that by the time of Ovid it could function as an expression of thoroughly Roman political and social interests. The tragedy's meaning and application, however, remained very much open. Indeed, from a metaliterary perspective, there is no clear consensus on the identity of the players: for example, is Pentheus' prisoner a man or a god? Perhaps more fundamentally, the play's central problem turns out also to be a perennial problem for Rome: what is to be the relationship between the Bacchic impulse, on the one hand, and the authority and stability of the Roman political establishment, on the other?

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<sup>40</sup> Janan remarks on 3.543-47, where Pentheus harangues the Thebans to turn from Bacchic worship by appealing to the courage of their ancestor, the serpent that "Ovid, making the monster snake into an icon of macho patriotism, stretches Pentheus' speech into satire" (*Reflections in a Serpent's Eye*, 193-97 [at 196]).

<sup>41</sup> See *ibid.*, 191-92.

### 3.4 HORACE'S *EPISTLES* 1.16 AND EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*: FROM CITHAERON TO

#### SABINE ESTATE

##### 3.4.1 HORACE: THE POET, THE EMPEROR, AND BACCHUS

Horace's life and career are better known to us than perhaps those of any other ancient poet due to the autobiographical nature of his poems and Suetonius' *Vita Horati*.<sup>42</sup> He was born in 65 BCE in Venusia (southern Italy) to a freedman who had acquired considerable wealth as an auctioneer (*coactor*). Thus, although Horace was an outsider to the elite circles of power and influence in Rome—a point for which he apparently bore some resentment (see, e.g., *Sat.* 1.6.71-75)—his father was able to secure for him an expensive education, first in Rome, then in the Academy at Athens. In Athens, he studied both Greek poetry and philosophy. This period of his life came to an end, however, with civil war. In 44 BCE, Brutus arrived in Athens and Horace joined him in resistance to Antony and Octavian. The Republican cause was lost at the battle of Philippi in 42; Brutus committed suicide and Horace, who had commanded one of the legions, as he later admits, fled “unwell, having left my shield” (*relicta non bene parmula, Odes* 2.7.10).<sup>43</sup> Although he was granted amnesty, upon his return to Italy his father's estate had been confiscated. He became a clerk in the Treasury but it was only through obtaining the patronage of Maecenas, an extraordinarily rich advisor to Octavian, that he returned to a position of wealth. Maecenas gave Horace a Sabine farm which, as

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<sup>42</sup> The standard work on the life and poetry of Horace is Eduard Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957). For a concise introduction to Horace, see David Armstrong, *Horace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). For a recent discussion of Horace's biography, see Robin G. M. Nisbet, “Horace: Life and Chronology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace* (ed. Stephen J. Harrison; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7–21.

<sup>43</sup> The Latin text follows D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Q. Horatius Flaccus: opera* (4th ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008). All translations are mine.

we shall see, would become profoundly important to him. He later quips that “bold poverty compelled me to compose poetry” (*paupertas implulit audax ut versus facerem*, *Ep.* 2.2.51-52). This assertion, as Eduard Fraenkel remarks, cannot mean that he took up poetry in the hopes of making his fortune—an improbable economic scheme—but rather that had he not lost his property he would not have taken up poetry as a vocation.<sup>44</sup>

Through Maecenas, therefore, Horace would gradually develop a relationship with Octavian. The latter would later offer him a position as his secretary, although Horace declined.

Octavian/Augustus figured prominently in the poetry of the late Republic and early Empire. Horace’s preoccupation with the power of the *princeps* is in keeping with the work of other important poets, such as Vergil and Ovid. As Michèle Lowrie observes, Octavian “posed an aesthetic problem: how to represent absolute power and still maintain poetic independence.”<sup>45</sup> Yet, although the poet’s relationship with him has been the focus of considerable scholarly attention, there is little consensus as to how it should be understood. The first three books of his *Odes*, primarily written after Octavian’s victory at Actium (31 BCE) and completed around 23 BCE, express open praise of him. He hails Octavian as nothing short of the savior of the state (e.g., *Odes* 1.2; 3.24). Fraenkel viewed Horace as ungrudging in his praise of the *princeps* in *Odes* books 1-3; his poetic creativity was aimed at navigating between Hellenistic modes of ruler-deification and “the bounds of strictest Roman propriety.”<sup>46</sup> That Horace was chosen to compose the *Carmen saeculare*, a hymn for the *ludi saeculares* (17 BCE)

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<sup>44</sup> Fraenkel, *Horace*, 13–14.

<sup>45</sup> Michèle Lowrie, “Horace and Augustus,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, 77–89, at 78.

<sup>46</sup> Fraenkel, *Horace*, 239–97 (at 297).

celebrating a new era inaugurated by the reign of Augustus, indicates that the emperor regarded his poetry as a desirable medium to commemorate his achievements.<sup>47</sup> Since Fraenkel, however, not all critics have read Horace's admiration for Augustus in an equally straightforward manner. Don Fowler, for example, argues that the poetic and philosophical traditions from which Horace draws stand in ironic contradiction to the very Augustan panegyric that his poetry expresses. His Callimachean poetics (appreciation for the small) together with his Epicureanism (endorsement of the simple life) "makes it impossible to produce successful panegyric."<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, in an influential essay, Duncan Kennedy problematizes the categories of "Augustan" and "Anti-Augustan" poetry. Whether a poem was read as subversive or not "will have been a function of the reading practices of the day. Those reading practices and the institutions, both official and unofficial, that fostered them were presumably so constituted as to reproduce the discourse which created and sustained the position of Augustus."<sup>49</sup> Moreover, as Lowrie suggests, it is often difficult to determine whether Horace's poetry was aimed at influencing Augustus' policies or whether it simply parrots official attitudes.<sup>50</sup> She well captures the interpretive complexities involved in assessing Horace's relation to Augustus, noting that not only do Horace's political views reflect a wide range and variation over the course of some three decades of writing, even in his

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<sup>47</sup> See *ibid.*, 364–82. On Horace's literary and religious strategies in the *Carmen*, see Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome*, 32–38.

<sup>48</sup> D. P. Fowler, "Horace and the Aesthetics of Politics," in *Homage to Horace: A Bimillenary Celebration* (ed. Stephen J. Harrison; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 248–66, at 264.

<sup>49</sup> Duncan F. Kennedy, "'Augustan' and 'Anti-Augustan': Reflections on Terms of Reference," in *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus* (ed. Anton Powell; London: Bristol Classical Press, 1992), 26–58, at 46.

<sup>50</sup> Lowrie, "Horace and Augustus," 78–79. She points, for example, to the restoration of the temples in *Odes* 3.6.1–4

praise of Augustus often “it is impossible for us to choose between his acceptance of the ideology and his understanding it for what it is.”<sup>51</sup>

The treatment of Bacchus in Horace’s poetry provides a complex and striking nexus of these political, religious, and literary interests.<sup>52</sup> Throughout his works, Bacchus figures variously as the god of wine and the symposium (e.g., *Odes* 1.18) and as a symbol of human culture and civilization (e.g., *Odes* 2.19). In *Odes* 3.25, Horace connects Bacchus with poetic inspiration and his desire to immortalize Augustus:

Quo me, Bacche, rapis tui  
plenum? quae nemora aut quos agor in specus  
velox mente nova? quibus  
antris egregii Caesaris audiar  
aeternum meditans decus  
stellis inserere et consilio Iovis?

Whither do you seize me, O Bacchus, full as I am with you? Into what groves or caverns am I led, swift with a renewed mind? In what grotto would I be heard practicing the implantation of the eternal glory of the eminent Caesar among the stars and the council of Jove? (1-6)<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 85. See also Spencer Cole’s analysis of *Odes* 1-3 (“The Dynamics of Deification in Horace’s *Odes* 1-3,” in *Between Magic and Religion: Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and Society* [ed. Sulochana R. Asirvatham, Corinne Ondine Pache, and John Watrous; Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001], 67–91). He emphasizes that in his treatment of questions of Augustus’ deification Horace exploits poetic ambiguities and carefully employs inconsistencies so as to leave the emperor’s divine status undecided.

<sup>52</sup> On Bacchus in Horace’s poetry, see Bruhl, *Liber Pater*, 135–39; Teivas Oksala, *Religion und Mythologie bei Horaz: Eine literarhistorische Untersuchung* (Commentationes humanarum litterarum 51; Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1973), 43–52; Emily E. Batinski, “Horace’s Rehabilitation of Bacchus,” *CW* 84 (1991): 361–78; Alessandro Schiesaro, “Horace’s Bacchic Poetics,” in *Perceptions of Horace: A Roman Poet and His Readers* (ed. L. B. T. Houghton and Maria Wyke; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 61–79. With particular attention to his treatment of sympotic themes, see Gregson Davis, “Wine and the Symposium,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, 207–20.

<sup>53</sup> On this ode, see Bruhl, *Liber Pater*, 138–39; Fraenkel, *Horace*, 257–60; Oksala, *Religion und Mythologie bei Horaz*, 48–50; Schiesaro, “Horace’s Bacchic Poetics,” 61–64. Cole notes that in this passage Horace “merges the posthumous fates of poet and *princeps* and makes them both ultimately contingent upon the reception of the *Odes*”; in so doing, he has thus subtly subordinated Augustus’ deity to his own poetic project (“The Dynamics of Deification,” 88–89 [at 88]).

Emily Batinski argues that readers of this and other Bacchic odes would have recalled Marc Antony's close association with Dionysus.<sup>54</sup> Augustus by contrast had chosen Apollo as the emblem of his victories, who was also the more popular god of poetic inspiration.<sup>55</sup> Batinski suggests, therefore, that Horace's treatment of Bacchus here represents not only his "rehabilitation" of this god by incorporating him into Augustan propaganda but also "Horace's own reconciliation to the Augustan regime."<sup>56</sup>

A similar move can be seen in *Odes* 2.19, a hymn to Bacchus, where the poet speaks of an epiphanic experience of possession with the god (*plenoque Bacchi*, 6). As in *Odes* 3.25, Horace describes his poetic inspiration as Bacchic ecstasy (1-8). He later credits Bacchus with several remarkable deeds, including victory in the Gigantomachy (21-24), which is striking both because this is not ordinarily associated with Bacchus and because the Gigantomachy had become a symbol for Octavian's triumph over Antony (e.g., *Odes* 3.4).<sup>57</sup> In this ode, then, Bacchus is given a heightened role in both poetic

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<sup>54</sup> For Antony's identification with Dionysus, see § 3.2 above.

<sup>55</sup> On the importance of Apollo and Dionysus for Octavian and Antony respectively in their mythological propaganda and artistic representation, see Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (trans. Alan Shapiro; Jerome Lectures; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 44–53. He argues that for Octavian the identification with Apollo developed at least in part as a response to his opponent's identification with Dionysus.

<sup>56</sup> Batinski, "Horace's Rehabilitation of Bacchus," 374. An earlier example of a poem that connects Bacchus with the praise of a contemporary political figure is Vergil's fifth *Eclogue*, composed around 42 BCE. This pastoral poem narrates the death of the shepherd Daphnis and his subsequent apotheosis. He is hailed as the one who "instituted the *thiasoi* of Bacchus" (*thiasos inducere Bacchi*, 30). Many scholars take the deification of Daphnis as an allegory for that of Julius Caesar one year earlier; see, e.g., H. J. Rose, *The Eclogues of Vergil* (Sather Classical Lectures 16; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942), 117–38. Martin Pulbrook, however, argues that Daphnis in this poem better represents Octavian ("Octavian and Virgil's Fifth *Eclogue*," *Maynooth Review* 4 [1978]: 31–40).

<sup>57</sup> See Fraenkel, *Horace*, 199–201; Oksala, *Religion und Mythologie bei Horaz*, 45–48; Batinski, "Horace's Rehabilitation of Bacchus," 372; Schiesaro, "Horace's Bacchic Poetics," 66.

inspiration and in the primordial combat against the foes of Jupiter.<sup>58</sup> Horace later contrasts his own distinctly Augustan Bacchus with other opinions:

quamquam choreis aptior et iocis  
ludoque dictus non sat idoneus  
pugnae ferebaris; sed idem  
pacis eras mediusque belli.

Although it is said that you are more suited for choruses and jests and games and you are reported not to be sufficiently fitted for battle, you have nevertheless been in the midst of both peace and war. (25-28)

Given the political subtext in this poem, Horace's use of three mythological exempla (Ariadne, Pentheus, and Lycurgus) in 13-16 is particularly significant:

fas et beatæ coniugis additum  
stellis honorem tectaque Penthei  
disiecta non leni ruina  
Thracis et exitium Lycurgi.

It is permitted [to sing] the honor of your blessed consort [Ariadne] fixed among the stars and the house of Pentheus torn apart with no gentle destruction and the ruin of the Thracian Lycurgus. (13-16)

Here, the myth of Dionysus' destruction of Pentheus functions along with those of Ariadne and Lycurgus to heighten the fear of Bacchus and emphasize the inevitability of his triumph.<sup>59</sup> This use of myths of Dionysiac conquest in imperial propaganda is consistent with Hellenistic ideology going back to Alexander (see § 2.2). It is also noteworthy that Euripides' *Bacchæ* appears to be his source. Although an intermediary Latin version cannot be ruled out (e.g., Pavucius or Accius), the resemblance of lines 14-15 to *Bacchæ* 587-88 is unmistakable: "At once the palace of Pentheus was shaken with

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<sup>58</sup> David West similarly sees *Odes* 2.19 as adapting Bacchus to make him appropriate for the Augustan religious program (*Horace Odes II: vatis amici* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998], 144).

<sup>59</sup> See Batinski, "Horace's Rehabilitation of Bacchus," 372.

a fall” (τάχα τὰ Πενθέως μέλαθρα διατινάξεται πεσήμασιν).<sup>60</sup> This use of the *Bacchae* to express the god’s conquest with distinctly Augustan associations contrasts sharply, as I suggest below, with Horace’s application of the same myth in his moral instruction in *Epistles* 1.16.<sup>61</sup>

### 3.4.2 HORACE’S *EPISTLES* BOOK 1: BEYOND ROME

Horace’s *Epistles* are distinctive both among his own works and within ancient literature generally.<sup>62</sup> The first book contains twenty verse epistles addressed to various individuals covering a wide range of topics. Their composition was begun shortly after the publication of the *Odes* (23 BCE), and they were published in 20 or 19 BCE. In their use of hexameter and their ethical themes, they are similar to his early work in the

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<sup>60</sup> As Oksala suggests: “Der Einsturz des Palastes des Pentheus ist durch Worte ausgedrückt, die sich als Hinweise auf die Erdbebenszene in den *Bakchai* des Euripides betrachten lassen” (*Religion und Mythologie bei Horaz*, 46). Robin Nisbet and Margaret Hubbard note that the plural *tecta* and “the *litotes non leni ruina* both have a flavour of tragic diction” (*A Commentary on Horace: Odes, Book II* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978], 323). The connection with Euripides’ *Bacchae* may be suggested further by the preceding lines (9-12), in which Horace describes maenads obtaining wine, milk, and honey through “hollow trunks” (*truncis cavis*; cf. *Bacchae* 142-43, 704-11; and Dio, *Or.* 32.59 quoted in § 2.4.3). These, however, are standard miracles of Dionysus and therefore do not conclusively establish an allusion to Euripides.

<sup>61</sup> Another political allusion in Horace’s Bacchic mythology may be found in *Odes* 1.18, which advocates for moderation in the consumption of wine and gives negative exempla of mythological figures who were destroyed as a result of excess. Bruhl suggests that Antony’s Bacchic pretensions and consequent defeat at Actium are in view: “Horace ne veut pas laisser doute de son adhésion à la saine politique religieuse d’Auguste opposée à celle du vaincu” (*Liber Pater*, 135–37 [at 136]).

<sup>62</sup> For discussions of various aspects of the *Epistles*, see Edmond Courbaud, *Horace, sa vie et sa pensée à l’époque des Épîtres: étude sur le premier livre* (Paris: Hachette, 1914); Fraenkel, *Horace*, 308–63; M. J. McGann, *Studies in Horace’s First Book of Epistles* (Collection Latomus 100; Brussels: Latomus, 1969); Ross S. Kilpatrick, *The Poetry of Friendship: Horace, Epistles I* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986); Armstrong, *Horace*, 117–35; W. R. Johnson, *Horace and the Dialectic of Freedom: Readings in Epistles I* (Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 53; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); John Moles, “Poetry, Philosophy, Politics and Play: *Epistles* 1,” in *Traditions and Contexts in the Poetry of Horace* (ed. Tony Woodman and Denis Feeney; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 141–57; Rolando Ferri, “The *Epistles*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, 121–31. Commentaries include Adolf Kiessling and Richard Heinze, *Q. Horatius Flaccus: Briefe* (Berlin: Weidmannsche, 1957); O. A. W. Dilke, *Horace: Epistles Book 1* (3d ed.; London: Methuen, 1966); Roland Mayer, *Horace: Epistles Book 1* (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

*Satires*.<sup>63</sup> The verse epistle is itself not Horace's invention. Various precedents exist in Greek and Latin literature; however, "an entire book of poems purporting to be a collection of private letters was a novelty among ancient poetic genres, and one which Horace must have initiated with some determination."<sup>64</sup> There is broad agreement that the collection has been shaped by Horace into its final form and thus must be understood as a unified literary work, in which there are consistent themes developed over the course of the book.<sup>65</sup> Whether any of the letters originally functioned as genuine epistles, as they stand within the collection Horace has incorporated them into a single, cohesive book.<sup>66</sup> Various prominent themes emerge over the course of the *Epistles*. Philosophy, for example, figures more prominently than in Horace's other poems. The philosophical positions espoused are uneven, however, drawing on both Epicureanism and Stoicism. Edmond Courbaud concluded the *Epistles* reflect a conversion to philosophy and their inconstancies are the result of an intellectual transformation beginning with an earlier Epicureanism and culminating in a robust and rigorous Stoicism.<sup>67</sup> Courbaud's theory is not necessary, however; as M. J. McGann suggests, Horace's emphasis on philosophy in the *Epistles* is not a radical departure from his earlier work but rather "the culmination of one of his interests."<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the coexistence of Epicurean and Stoic elements is

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<sup>63</sup> "Horace's *Epistles* are an organic continuation of his *Satires*" (Fraenkel, *Horace*, 310).

<sup>64</sup> Ferri, "The *Epistles*," 121–25 (at 122).

<sup>65</sup> As Ferri argues, "[t]he *Epistles* are perhaps, among the works of Horace, the work that has been most consciously planned and set up as a book: the letters gain enormously from being read one after the other, indeed, they require a continuous reading, in which even backslidings, second thoughts, contradictions are parts of a planned overall effect on the reader" (ibid., 125).

<sup>66</sup> Fraenkel, for example, argues that *Epistles* 1.14 appears to be a genuine letter (*Horace*, 310–14). Armstrong, by contrast, regards them all as "imaginary letters" (*Horace*, 117).

<sup>67</sup> For Courbaud's chronological reconstruction based on this theory, see *Horace, sa vie et sa pensée*, 345–63. According to Courbaud, *Epistles* 10, 11, 14, 16, and 20 are the most Stoic and thus the latest. Fraenkel also speaks of Horace's "retiring into philosophical thought" (*Horace*, 308).

<sup>68</sup> McGann, *Studies in Horace's First Book of Epistles*, 32.

representative of much of the non-dogmatic, eclectic philosophy of his contemporaries.<sup>69</sup> Together with moral philosophy, other important themes in the *Epistles* include friendship and freedom.<sup>70</sup>

Horace's attitude toward Augustus in the *Epistles* is also a matter of debate. In Fraenkel's view, Horace's admiration for the emperor increased over the course of his career and he never abandons the patriotism of his earlier *Odes*.<sup>71</sup> Other scholars have been more attentive to the subversive elements in the *Epistles*. One striking feature of these poems is the very absence of overt political themes as found in his earlier poetry. The addressees are largely individuals of lesser significance rather than the major power brokers of Rome.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the apolitical fictional world of relationships created in these correspondences, together with its strong preference for retirement from Rome, is itself a political statement, which, as I shall suggest, is a means of repudiating the very idea of Rome.<sup>73</sup>

Before turning to *Epistles* 1.16, a brief discussion of *Epistles* 1.1, the programmatic poem for the collection, will be helpful in illustrating Horace's larger political and philosophical program.<sup>74</sup> As with his earlier books of poetry, he begins by mentioning Maecenas; here, however, rather than his usual dedication of the work to his

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<sup>69</sup> For a careful analysis of the relationship of the *Epistles* to Hellenistic philosophy, see esp. *ibid.*, 9–32. McGann notes in particular Horace's knowledge of the philosophical ideals of *decorum* and *tranquillitas*, demonstrated by his knowledge of the Stoic Panaetius (by way of Cicero) and by his similarities with the later writings of Seneca and Plutarch; see also Kilpatrick, *The Poetry of Friendship*, xvii–xxii; Moles, "Poetry, Philosophy, Politics," 149–51.

<sup>70</sup> See, respectively, Kilpatrick, *The Poetry of Friendship*; Johnson, *Horace and the Dialectic of Freedom*.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, his discussion of *Epistles* 1.13, a message dispatching one Vinius with a delivery of his poems to the emperor (Fraenkel, *Horace*, 350–56).

<sup>72</sup> Ferri regards this as a deliberate choice by Horace ("The *Epistles*," 125–26).

<sup>73</sup> See similarly Johnson, *Horace and the Dialectic of Freedom*, 40–53.

<sup>74</sup> On the programmatic function of *Epistles* 1.1 for the collection, see McGann, *Studies in Horace's First Book of Epistles*, 33–37; Mayer, *Horace: Epistles Book 1*, 110–11.

patron, he declines his request for more poems, complaining that Maecenas would “lock me up in my old game” (*antiquo me includere ludo*, 3). *Ludus* here introduces an analogy between Horace as poet and Veianius (4-7), a gladiator who was now retired from competition and “lies hidden in a field” (*latet abditus agro*, 5). Like Veianius, Horace would prefer the country to the demands of the watching Roman *populus*. Whereas the gladiator had laid down his arms (*armis... fixis*, 4-5), for Horace, retirement entailed the cessation from poetic composition: “Now, therefore, I lay down verses and other sports; I attend to what is true and decent, interrogate it, and am engrossed in it” (*Nunc itaque et versus et cetera ludicra pono; quid verum atque decens curo et rogo et omnis in hoc sum*, 10-11). This setting aside of *versus* may contrast his former lyric poetry in the *Odes* with his present more serious and philosophical literary project written in hexameter. It is of course ironic, however, that Horace here rejects the composition of *versus* by means of *versus*. Thus, as Roland Mayer observes, this opening serves as a sort of “un-dedication” that as such paradoxically introduces a major theme throughout the *Epistles*: independence.<sup>75</sup> This independence is not merely freedom from the demands of his patron; it is a repudiation of the *populus Romanus*, of their desires and passions, greed and hypocrisy (70-79). The closing lines of *Epistles* 1.1 both summarize this epistle and anticipate important themes throughout the collection:

Ad summam, sapiens uno minor est Iove, dives,  
 liber, honoratus, pulcher, rex denique regum,  
 praecipue sanus—nisi cum pituita molesta est.

In sum: the sage is less than Jove alone; he is rich, free, honorable, beautiful, indeed, king of kings and above all of sound mind, except when he has a troublesome cough. (106-08)

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<sup>75</sup> See Mayer, *Horace: Epistles Book I*, 110–11.

Here Horace signals his larger interest in the Stoic ideal of wisdom while at the same time employing his ironic wit in satirizing Stoic philosophers.<sup>76</sup>

### 3.4.3 *EPISTLES* 1.16 AND THE CHANGING OF DRAMATIC IDENTITIES

*Epistles* 1.16 has been admired by critics as “[l]a pièce maîtresse du recueil” and as the “the greatest of the twenty poems.”<sup>77</sup> It is addressed to Quinctius, who, although he is now unknown to us, seems to have had some status in Rome. Horace opens by responding to Quinctius’ implied question in regard Horace’s Sabine farm (*ne perconteris*, “Lest you should ask...,” 1) and proceeds with a sprawling (*loquaciter*, 4) description (1-16). As McGann notes, Horace’s use of *si*-clauses and non-indicative verbs throughout out the description of his farm (only one indicative) indicates his desire to persuade Quinctius of the truth of his account and makes him the judge of its reality.<sup>78</sup> This section concludes thus: “This retreat, sweet and now, if you believe it, delightful, keeps me in good condition in your interest in the September season” (*Hae latebrae dulces, etiam, si credis, amoenae, incolumem tibi me praestant Septembribus horis*, 15-16). This juxtaposition of Horace’s experience of his farm and Quinctius’ judgment of it signals a central theme in the epistle: the distinction between *esse* (being) and *videri*

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<sup>76</sup> As Mayer suggests, Horace’s use of *pituuta* is “a jibe at tiresome Stoic disquisitions about indifference to illness” (*ibid.*, 109).

<sup>77</sup> Respectively, Courbaud, *Horace, sa vie et sa pensée*, 168; Armstrong, *Horace*, 127. On *Epistles* 1.16, see Courbaud, *Horace, sa vie et sa pensée*, 168–89; M. J. McGann, “The Sixteenth Epistle of Horace,” *CQ* 10 (1960): 205–12; McGann, *Studies in Horace’s First Book of Epistles*, 73–75; Jonathan Foster, “Horace, Epistles, 1.16.35ff,” *CQ* 21 (1971): 214; Kilpatrick, *The Poetry of Friendship*, 96–102; Armstrong, *Horace*, 127–31; Johnson, *Horace and the Dialectic of Freedom*, 43–46; Moles, “Poetry, Philosophy, Politics,” 152–55.

<sup>78</sup> McGann, “The Sixteenth Epistle of Horace,” 205–06.

(seeming).<sup>79</sup> In line 17, without transition, the focus shifts from Horace's Sabine estate to Quinctius at Rome: "You are living rightly, if you take care to be what you hear" (*Tu recte vivis, si curas esse quod audis*, 17).<sup>80</sup> It becomes clear, however, that *Tu recte vivis* is ambivalent because in the subsequent lines Horace demonstrates how Rome's false and fickle opinions (*quod audis*) are a fundamental obstacle to living rightly. In Rome, Quinctius has a good reputation but Horace fears "lest you believe someone else's opinion about you more than yourself" (*ne cui de te plus quam tibi credas*, 19). The praise of the people is both incorrect and unpredictable (17-40). One example of such praise Horace provides is Augustan panegyric inappropriately applied to flatter another man for his military achievements (25-29).

In the middle of the poem, Horace introduces its central question: "Who is the good man?" (*Vir bonus est quis*, 40) He proceeds to show that the *vir bonus* is not necessarily the man who settles matters in a court of law; for such a man may be foul within (41-45). Nor is it the upright slave; for he merely obeys from fear of punishment (46-56). By contrast, "good men hate to err from love of virtue" (*oderunt peccare boni virtutis amore*, 52). Indeed, slavery and freedom are not at all as they seem. One who is greedy (*averus*) is no freer than the slave; for cupidity is the cause of true bondage (63-72).

Horace transitions to the myth of Pentheus in the closing lines (73-79) with a brief introduction of the speaker as *vir bonus et sapiens*, thus suggesting an answer to the

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<sup>79</sup> On this, see esp. Courbaud, *Horace, sa vie et sa pensée*, 175-79.

<sup>80</sup> Commentators stress the striking effect of this lack of transition between 16 and 17; see, e.g., *ibid.*, 175.

question he raised in line 40. Then, in the subsequent narrative, he shifts into direct discourse.

Vir bonus et sapiens audebit dicere: ‘Pentheu,  
rector Thebarum, quid me perferre patique  
indignum coges?’ ‘adimam bona.’ ‘nempe pecus, rem,  
lectos, argentum: tollas licet.’ ‘in manicis et  
compedibus saevo te sub custode tenebo.’  
‘ipse deus, simul atque volam, me solvet.’ opinor,  
hoc sentit, ‘moriar.’ mors ultima linea rerum est.

The good and wise man will dare to say, ‘Pentheus, ruler of Thebes, what indignity will you compel me to bear and endure?’ ‘I shall confiscate your possessions.’ ‘Indeed, flocks, business, beds, and silver, it is permitted for you to take these.’ ‘I shall hold you in bonds and chains under a fierce guard.’ ‘The god himself will set me free whenever I wish it.’ I suppose this means, ‘I shall die.’ Death is the ultimate goal of things. (*Ep.* 1.16.73-79)

This section corresponds to *Bacchae* 492-98 with some important alterations.

Three lines, in particular, from Euripides have evidently been translated into Latin. First, the question of the *vir bonus* in 73-74 (*quid me perferre patique indignum coges?*) reflects that of Dionysus in *Bacchae* 492: “Tell me, what is it necessary to suffer? What terrible thing would you do to me?” (εἴφ’ ὅτι παθεῖν δεῖ· τί με τὸ δεινὸν ἐργάσῃ;). Second, Pentheus’ threat in Horace (*in manicis et compedibus saevo te sub custode tenebo*, 76-77) is that of *Bacchae* 497: “We shall guard your body within the prison” (εἰρκταῖσί τ’ ἔνδον σῶμα σὸν φυλάξομεν). Finally, the closest philological parallel is found in Dionysus’ response: “The god himself will set me free whenever I wish it” (λύσει μ’ ὁ δαίμων αὐτός, ὅταν ἐγὼ θέλω, 498; *ipse deus, simul atque volam, me solvet*). It is uncertain whether Horace has adapted this scene directly from Euripides or whether

these translations are from Pacuvius' *Pentheus*.<sup>81</sup> In favor of the latter, H. J. Rose observes that elsewhere when Horace translates directly from a Greek poet, he tends to render his model as accurately as he can within his own linguistic and metrical constraints.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, when adapting a Latin poet, he follows his source as closely as his meter will allow.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, important divergences from Euripides point to an intermediate source. Most notably, Horace transforms Pentheus' threat; whereas, in the *Bacchae*, he declared that he would cut off Dionysus' hair (493) and confiscate his *thyrsos* (495), for Horace this becomes a seizure of material goods and economic livelihood ('*adimam bona. 'nempe pecus, rem, lectos, argentum: tollas licet'*, 75-76). Indeed, the possession of furniture and livestock would not make sense if the prisoner was Dionysus disguised as a travelling priest. Nor, however, could Ovid's Acoetes, who was a foreign sailor, be expected to have such possessions. Rose maintains, therefore, that these possessions only make sense if the prisoner is a local Theban and thus he infers that this must also have been the case for the prisoner in Pacuvius' *Pentheus*.

In the absence of further evidence regarding the content of Pacuvius' *Pentheus*, it is not possible to settle the question of Horace's literary source with certainty. Less controversial, however, is that Horace depends on a traditional Stoic allegorical

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<sup>81</sup> Scholars are divided. Some regard Horace's scene as an adaptation from Euripides; see Kiessling and Heinze, *Q. Horatius Flaccus: Briefe*, 145; Kilpatrick, *The Poetry of Friendship*, 100; Mayer, *Horace: Epistles Book 1*, 229–30. In favor of Pacuvius, see H. J. Rose, "Horace and Pacuvius," *CQ* 20 (1926): 204–6; McGann, "The Sixteenth Epistle of Horace," 211–12. Others express uncertainty; see Courbaud, *Horace, sa vie et sa pensée*, 183–87; Oksala, *Religion und Mythologie bei Horaz*, 59. To my knowledge, no scholar has proposed Accius' *Bacchae*. Although parts from Accius' translation of this larger scene from Euripides are preserved (Ribbeck frags. 12-13; *Bacch.* 453, 455-56), lines 492-98 are not.

<sup>82</sup> Rose, "Horace and Pacuvius," 204. He points to the translation of the opening lines of the *Odyssey* in *Ars poetica* 141 and of *Odyssey* 4.601-05 in *Epistles* 1.7.41-43.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 204–05. Here he notes Horace's adaptation of Terence's *Eunuchus* 46-63 in *Satires* 2.3.262-71. Carl Becker disputes Rose on this point noting that elsewhere Horace similarly transforms quotations from other literary genres for the context of a *sermo* (e.g., Eur., *Hipp.* 478 in *Ep.* 1.1.34) (*Das Spätwerk des Horaz* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963], 39 n. 4).

interpretation of the tragedy. Whereas in the original context, *Bacchae* 498 (λύσει μ' ὁ δαίμων αὐτός) was an ironic prediction of the god's own escape from prison, Horace interprets this line as a reference to death (*opinor, hoc sentit, 'moriar'*). This same scene is evoked by Epictetus (Arrian, *Epict. diss.* 1.1.22-25) and Plutarch (*Tranq. an.* 476b-c) who both, like Horace, apply it in a similarly Stoic manner to the sage's attitude toward death (see below). If, as seems likely, Horace, Epictetus, and Plutarch derive this interpretation independently of each other, there must be some common Stoic tradition upon which they depend.<sup>84</sup> Within a Stoic context, the interpretation "I shall die" (*moriar*) brings to mind the notion that for the sage suicide is the final expression of one's self-determination.<sup>85</sup> Such a death in the face of tyranny suggested by Horace's scene evokes famous Stoic heroes, such as Cato the Younger and Brutus, both of whom took their own lives as their final acts of political opposition to tyranny.<sup>86</sup> Thus, some scholars suggest that by quoting *Bacchae* 498 with this Stoic interpretation, Horace's Pentheus may in some way represent Rome generally or even Augustus himself.<sup>87</sup> As John Moles argues, it is particularly remarkable that, in spite of all the benefits Horace

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<sup>84</sup> That a tragic scene from Euripides became important for Stoic ideas about death and suicide is consistent with Catherine Edwards' discussion of the importance of theatrical imagery for Stoics (esp. Seneca) in narrating death scenes (*Death in Ancient Rome* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007], 144–60).

<sup>85</sup> Most scholars see *moriar* as a reference to suicide; see Courbaud, *Horace, sa vie et sa pensée*, 185; Kiessling and Heinze, *Q. Horatius Flaccus: Briefe*, 145; McGann, "The Sixteenth Epistle of Horace," 211; Dilke, *Horace: Epistles Book 1*, 131; Johnson, *Horace and the Dialectic of Freedom*, 46. Others suggest that Horace is expressing a more generalized Stoic resignation to the acceptance of one's final fate rather than suicide; see Kilpatrick, *The Poetry of Friendship*, 101; Mayer, *Horace: Epistles Book 1*, 230.

<sup>86</sup> On Cato and Brutus and the legacy of the opposition to tyranny in subsequent generations, see MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 1–45; Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome*, 1–18.

<sup>87</sup> Armstrong, *Horace*, 130–31; Moles, "Poetry, Philosophy, Politics," 154–55. Johnson finds the tyranny implied in this scene as a more general reference to his life under the patronage of Maecenas (*Horace and the Dialectic of Freedom*, 45–47). McGann argues, however, that whereas Epictetus could later use this scene in relation to Nero, it is not appropriate to read Horace's Pentheus as an allusion to conflict in his own time but rather as a general reference to the potential of political tyranny ("The Sixteenth Epistle of Horace," 211–12).

received from both Augustus and Maecenas, he here alludes to the extreme cost potentially involved in maintaining one's virtue in Rome. With this dramatic scene, Horace "voices his existential struggle between Stoic virtue and Caesarian tyranny."<sup>88</sup>

If we accept that Horace's adaptation of this tragic scene allows such a political reading, more attention is needed to how the conflict between Dionysus/Acoetes and Pentheus functions within the wider context of the epistle. Moles' interpretation provides a compelling starting point. He notes that "[t]he poem operates with a *rus*/Epicurean-Rome/Stoic contrast."<sup>89</sup> The persistent tension is between the ideals of Epicurean withdrawal and Stoic engagement, the former represented by Horace's preference for retreat to his farm, the latter in the virtue of resistance to tyranny. In view of this larger theme in *Epistles* 1.16, Horace's adaption of the myth of Pentheus at the closing of the epistle should be read in closer conjunction with his desire for retreat from Rome expressed earlier. In Euripides' version of the myth, the arrival of Dionysus stirred up conflict, inexorably leading to the destruction of the civic order. In the prologue, Dionysus declares that he is prepared to lead an army of maenads (*Bacch.* 52) and throughout the tragedy he acts with decisive and strategic force so as to bring down the royal house of Thebes. The mountain of Cithaeron stands in opposition to the city of Thebes as a symbol of the repudiation of Theban civilization. In Horace, by contrast, although Pentheus' prisoner is also opposed to the city, he is not an advocate of the savagery of Cithaeron but rather a spokesman for Horace's rustic and cultivated Sabine estate. He is not at the head of an invading barbarian army but is rather prepared to hand

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<sup>88</sup> Moles, "Poetry, Philosophy, Politics," 155.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

over his possessions at the first request of the tyrant. Whereas in the tragedy, it is clear from the opening lines that Pentheus will suffer a violent slaughter, in Horace's version it is the prisoner who willingly offers up his own life.<sup>90</sup> Thus, the actions of Horace's Stoic sage are not those of statesmen or tyrannicides, such as Cato and Brutus. Horace's sage, by contrast, enacts his resistance to tyranny through a rejection of Rome's moral code, by withdrawing into the Sabine farm and, from the wider perspective of the book of epistles, into an imaginary world of friendships between refined Roman gentlemen. Thus, in bringing the myth of Pentheus together with Stoic ideals of virtue, Horace has transformed both. Now, both Bacchus and the Stoic sage are passive, cultivated, and rustic.<sup>91</sup>

At the same time, the epistle's closing dialogue between Dionysus/Acoetes and Pentheus should be understood as corresponding to his opening conversation with Quinctius, in which Horace made the latter the judge of the true beauty of his estate in contrast to the mere appearances that inform opinions at Rome. This reversion to the opening conversation is achieved in part by presenting this tragic scene in direct discourse in place of a closing greeting. Moreover, in several ways this scene also reiterates the poem's central problem of distinguishing between *esse* and *videri*. The central irony in the scene in Euripides had arisen from the god's speaking in disguise about his own self-deliverance. In keeping with this theme, for Horace, the inability of Pentheus to recognize the disguised god is analogous to the Roman people's inability to

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<sup>90</sup> This contrasts sharply also with the conquering Bacchus of *Odes* 2.19 discussed above.

<sup>91</sup> Horace's idealization of rustic piety in this epistle coheres well with a larger trope in Roman poetry discussed by Feeney: "[i]t is crucial to recognize that the Romans' nostalgia for rustic or private piety is not a natural reflection of a really existing phenomenon, but one element of a highly complex and self-conscious cultural debate" (*Literature and Religion at Rome*, 133–36, at 135).

see beneath surface appearances to discover the identity of the true *vir bonus*. In this regard, it may be significant that Horace never explicitly identifies the speaker but leaves this ambiguous. The reader must choose between established alternatives: Dionysus in Euripides and Accius; Acoetes in Pacuvius. Thus, the question of identity, central to Euripides' *Bacchae*, becomes for Horace a metaliterary problem, which functions to reiterate the question of line 40: *Vir bonus est quis?*<sup>92</sup> Now again Quinctius must distinguish at various levels between conflicting identities. Can he recognize the stranger's identity or is he like Pentheus blind to true virtue and divinity? More importantly, he must decide which role he himself would play in the drama. Will he be the *vir bonus* or he will side with the city and thus become Pentheus? By the end of the epistle, however, Quinctius has faded from view, and thus Horace draws in his wider audience of readers, which would include both Maecenas and Augustus. While he falls short of identifying Penthean Thebes with Augustan Rome, the poem nevertheless invites Maecenas and Augustus to assess their own role in this dramatic conflict. Given the confiscation of Horace's own family's wealth after his defeat at Philippi, Pentheus' threat, *adimam bona*, must have had some personal resonance. Consequently, beneath these tragic utterances one might hear echoes of an Augustan voice.

In sum: Horace's use of the *Bacchae* in *Epistles* 1.16 highlights the inherent tensions between the poetics and mythology of Dionysus and imperial power. In his earlier odes, Horace had found ways to reconcile Bacchus to the Augustan regime in the wake of the defeat of Antony whose Dionysiac pretensions had entailed both a licentious

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<sup>92</sup> On the importance of the stranger's disguise in the *Bacchae* and its metatragic effect, see § 1.3.1.

lifestyle and a claim to Ptolemaic legitimacy. In this context, Dionysus' defeat of Pentheus was one among many of the god's accomplishments which could be reclaimed to serve as imperial propaganda. In contrast to Horace's earlier Dionysiac enthusiasm for Augustus, the epistles reflect a disillusionment with Rome. The myth of Pentheus no longer expresses imperial triumph but rather the ways in which the man of virtue may be required to relinquish his worldly possessions and even his life in order to maintain his virtue in the face of tyranny. To be sure, Horace never openly renounced his own support for Augustus and he would return again to the composition of Augustan panegyric. In *Epistles* 1.16, however, he expresses a certain ambivalence about absolute power. The shifting and ambiguous identities of the dramatic players signal an underlying unease about Rome itself.<sup>93</sup>

### 3.5 THE *BACCHAE* AND RITUAL DEATH FROM THE GOLD TABLES TO PLUTARCH AND EPICTETUS

In the foregoing discussion of Horace's allegorical interpretation of *Bacchae* 498 as a reference to death, I noted that he was drawing on a larger Stoic interpretive tradition shared independently by Epictetus and Plutarch in their use of the same passage. The conception of Dionysiac release (*lisis*) as death, however, can be found much earlier. On

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<sup>93</sup> A similar line of interpretation of the *Epistles* is given by Johnson who focuses especially on the consequences of Horace's acceptance of patronage on his freedom as poet. He thus sees Horace's use of the *Bacchae* as a response to the threat of enslavement through poetic patronage: "the mention of suicide is not an idle or hysterical threat, screamed in a moment of panic and sudden realization that enslavement has begun; it is a reasoned alternative to the possibility of enslavement" (*Horace and the Dialectic of Freedom*, 45).

two late-fourth-century BCE gold tablets from a woman's sarcophagus in Pelinna, a ritual text is inscribed in which the opening lines strikingly resemble *Bacchae* 498:

νῦν ἔθανες καὶ νῦν ἐγένου, τρισόλβιε, ἄματι τῶιδε.  
εἰπεῖν Φερσεφόναί σ' ὅτι Β<άκ>χιος αὐτὸς ἔλυσε.

Now you have died and now you have come to be, O Thrice-born one, on this very day. Tell Persephone that the Bacchic one himself has set you free.<sup>94</sup>

This text belongs to the religious context of Orphism and the Dionysiac mysteries and given its metrical composition reflects a ritual formula (*legomena*).<sup>95</sup> The emphasis of νῦν and ἄματι τῶιδε points to the moment of the ritual enunciation, although it is uncertain whether these utterances belonged to initiatory or funerary rites. Most important for the present analysis is that this deliverance by Dionysus is understood to be a rebirth into life by way of death.<sup>96</sup> For those among the audience and later readers of the *Bacchae* who were familiar with this ritual conception of Dionysiac *lisis*, the phrase λύσει μ' ὁ δαίμων αὐτός would most naturally be understood as a reference to such a release at death for an initiate. Indeed, this recognition would function to accentuate the irony of its use in the tragedy, in which the god speaks it in reference to his own escape from prison.<sup>97</sup> Thus, although the later Stoic interpretation of this line is a wide departure

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<sup>94</sup> The text is printed in Edmonds, ed., *The "Orphic" Gold Tablets*, 36–37. It is seven lines long and nearly identical on both tablets. For interpretation of the text and its religious context, see Charles Segal, "Dionysus and the Gold Tablets from Pelinna," *GRBS* 31 (1990): 411–19; Fritz Graf, "Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology: New Texts and Old Questions," in *Masks of Dionysus* (ed. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 239–58; Christopher A. Faraone, "Rushing into Milk: New Perspectives on the Gold Tablets," in *The "Orphic" Gold Tablets*, 310–30; Alberto Bernabé and Ana I. Jiménez San Cristóbal, "Are the 'Orphic' Gold Leaves Orphic?," in *ibid.*, 68–101, esp. 82–84.

<sup>95</sup> See Graf, "Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology," 247–50.

<sup>96</sup> Graf sees this as entailing both the soul's release from the body and also freedom from post-mortem punishments (*ibid.*, 242–44).

<sup>97</sup> For a discussion of how the *Bacchae* exploits the ambiguities between various types of Dionysiac *lisis*, see § 1.3.1.

from its meaning in the narrative context of Euripides, it is in fact coherent with the religious conceptions of *luisis* in the Dionysiac mysteries.<sup>98</sup>

Plutarch (ca. 46-120 CE) quotes *Bacchae* 498 in his treatise, *On Tranquility of Mind*, instructing his addressee Paccius on how he might obtain the philosophical ideal of tranquility (*euthumia*). The fear of death, Plutarch teaches, is a central obstacle to *euthumia*. Only when one has arrived at “fearlessness in the face of death” (τὴν πρὸς τὸν θάνατον ἀφοβίαν) will one experience it; such a person is prepared to “depart [life] without fear, saying, ‘the god himself will set me free whenever I wish it’; what difficulty or pain or trouble would we suppose could fall on this man?” (ἀδεῶς ἀπελθεῖν εἰπόντα ‘λύσει μ’ ὁ δαίμων αὐτός, ὅταν ἐγὼ θέλω,’ τί ἂν τούτῳ χαλεπὸν ἢ δύσκολον ἢ ταραχῶδες ἐμπίπτον ἐπινοήσαιμεν; *Tranq. an.* 476b-c) Without entering the scholarly debate regarding the philosophical sources employed by Plutarch in the treatise, it is sufficient for my purposes to observe, as McGann has demonstrated, that he is drawing on the same Hellenistic philosophical writings as Horace was.<sup>99</sup> In addition to the philosophical influence on Plutarch’s attitude toward death, however, it is also important to note that he himself was a Dionysiac initiate. In his consolation to his wife at the death of their child, he refutes the Epicurean conception of the afterlife that “there is nothing evil or painful for anyone who undergoes dissolution” (οὐδὲν οὐδαμῆ τῷ διαλυθέντι κακὸν οὐδὲ λυπηρὸν ἔστιν) by appealing to the *hieros logos* of the mysteries: “the ancestral teaching

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<sup>98</sup> That language in the *Bacchae* reflects *hieroi logoi* used in Dionysiac mystery initiations associated with ritual death supports the theory of Richard Seaford, which he developed prior to the discovery of the Pelinna tablets (“Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries,” *CQ* 31 [1981]: 252–75).

<sup>99</sup> McGann, *Studies in Horace’s First Book of Epistles*, 9–32. He establishes that Plutarch is dependent on a work of the Stoic Panaetius, whose influence can also be found in Horace’s *Epistles* book 1 and Cicero’s *De officiis*. Plutarch is primarily a Platonist; it is, however, not unusual for a Platonist of this period to draw heavily on Stoicism; see John M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (rev. ed.; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 184–230.

and the mystic symbols of the rites of Dionysus, which we know, we who shared them in common with each other” (ὁ πάτριος λόγος καὶ τὰ μυστικὰ σύμβολα τῶν περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον ὀργιασμῶν, ἃ σύνισμεν ἀλλήλοις οἱ κοινωνοῦντες, *Cons. ux.* 611c).<sup>100</sup> He follows with a summary of this *hieros logos* that emphasizes the imperishability of the soul (ἄφθαρτον οὖσαν τὴν ψυχὴν) and the desirability of its release from the body (611e-f).<sup>101</sup> Thus, Plutarch’s interpretation of *Bacchae* 498 in application to death and the afterlife is both Stoic and at the same time confirmed by his own experience as an initiate into Dionysiac mysteries.<sup>102</sup>

In Plutarch’s gnomic use of *Bacchae* 498 in the context of Stoic ethics and Dionysiac initiation, he stripped it of its political meaning so that no echoes of the underlying conflict with tyranny remain.<sup>103</sup> Epictetus (ca. 55-135 CE), by contrast, moves Euripides’ scene in precisely the opposite direction. He alludes to the Euripidean passage in the midst of a discussion of the virtuous sufferings of three members of the

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<sup>100</sup> On this letter, see Sarah B. Pomeroy, “Reflections on Plutarch, *A Consolation to His Wife*,” in *Plutarch’s Advice to the Bride and Groom and A Consolation to His Wife: English Translations, Commentary, Interpretive Essays, and Bibliography* (ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 75–81.

<sup>101</sup> In a fragment preserved by Stobaeus (4.52.49), Plutarch offers a related explanation of the relationship between the mysteries and the afterlife. He compares the wandering and confusion of the soul at the point of death to the experience (*pathos*) of “those initiated into the Great [Eleusinian] Mysteries” (οἱ τελεταῖς μεγάλας κατοργαζόμενοι).

<sup>102</sup> Clement of Alexandria reads the *Bacchae* in similar ways; see § 8.4 below.

<sup>103</sup> On Plutarch’s attitude toward Roman rule, see C. P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 122–30; Simon Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, AD 50-250* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 135–86. Plutarch had an especially positive view of the benefits of Roman government for Greeks; he can even speak of Rome’s conquest of Greece as divinely providential. Moreover, as Dillon observes, Plutarch’s political attitudes shared more in common with Platonists, who in contrast to Stoics expressed little philosophical opposition to the monarchy: “[w]e hear of no ‘Platonist Opposition’ to the Principate to match the Stoic Opposition” (*The Middle Platonists*, 198).

Pisonian conspiracy against Nero (*Epict. diss.* 1.1.18-32).<sup>104</sup> Lateranus stretched out his neck before the axe for a second blow after the first was unsuccessful (1.1.27); Thræsea committed suicide (1.1.27); Agrippinus willingly accepted exile (1.1.28-32). In this context, Epictetus evokes the *Bacchæ* in a hypothetical dialogue between the sage and the tyrant:

‘ἀλλὰ δῆσω σε.’ ἄνθρωπε. τί λέγεις; ἐμέ; τὸ σκέλος μου δῆσεις, τὴν προαίρεσιν δὲ οὐδ’ ὁ Ζεὺς νικῆσαι δύναται. ‘εἰς φυλακὴν σε βαλῶ.’ τὸ σωματίον.  
 ‘ἀποκεφαλίσω σε.’ πότε οὖν σοὶ εἶπον, ὅτι μόνου ἐμοῦ ὁ τράχηλος ἀναπότμητός ἐστιν;

“But I shall bind you.” “What do you mean, man? Me? You will bind my leg but Zeus is able to conquer my intention.” “I shall cast you into prison.” “Merely the body.” “I shall behead you.” “When did I tell you that mine was the only unseverable neck?”

Epictetus’ literary dependence on the *Bacchæ* is less direct than Horace and Plutarch; his language is at most a loose paraphrase of Euripides. In his adaptation, the dramatic conflict of this scene comes to represent a genuine struggle against a real emperor. Given his own relationship with Rome, it is no surprise that Epictetus employs this scene in such a way. He had been a slave in Rome and because he was a philosopher he was exiled under Domitian probably in 92 or 93 CE.<sup>105</sup> In Arrian’s account of Epictetus’ teachings in the *Discourses* the emperor frequently plays an important role against which Stoic morality is to be lived out. The Stoic ideal of freedom from external constraints is vividly demonstrated by those who repudiate dependency on the emperor; the reigns of Nero and Domitian provided a full storehouse of examples of such Stoic virtue in the face

<sup>104</sup> On this passage, see Robert F. Dobbin, *Epictetus: Discourses Book 1* (Clarendon Later Ancient Philosophers; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 74–78. For a discussion of the Pisonian conspiracy, see MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 21–27.

<sup>105</sup> On Epictetus’ relationship with Rome and its emperors, see Chester G. Starr, Jr., “Epictetus and the Tyrant,” *CP* 44 (1949): 20–29; Fergus Millar, “Epictetus and the Imperial Court,” *JRS* 55 (1965): 141–48.

of imperial persecution.<sup>106</sup> Epictetus was especially contemptuous of those who attached themselves to the emperor.<sup>107</sup>

This comparison between Horace, Plutarch, and Epictetus is particularly instructive; in each case, the scene is far removed from its original narrative context and redeployed with fresh religious and ideological import. Whereas Horace had left the analogy between Pentheus and Rome as an ambiguous potentiality, Epictetus removes any such subtlety, making Rome the oppressive Penthean tyrant. Plutarch quotes a line from the very same scene as a means of expressing the dynamics of inner peace and he consequently mutes its underlying narrative of political struggle.

### 3.6 EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE* AT ROME: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has explored the interplay between the *Bacchae*'s reception at Rome and a wider history of political and religious conflict. Bacchus was associated with political conspiracy in the Bacchanalia affair and the failed imperial aspirations of Antony. With Augustus' consolidation of political power, the god would be reinvented within the new regime, but not without transformations and persistent tensions. Tragic drama in Rome also functioned as an expression of political contestation, and thus the conflict between Dionysus and Pentheus is replete with potential contemporary allusions. Horace's Bacchic poetry exploits these in various directions. While his earlier odes

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<sup>106</sup> See, e.g., the discussion of Dio Chrysostom above (§ 2.4.1). For a discussion of the wider tension between philosophers and the principate, see MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 46–94; Michael B. Trapp, *Philosophy in the Roman Empire: Ethics, Politics and Society* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 226–43. As MacMullen observes more generally about the philosophers of this period, their philosophy “made them see and hate the inner, moral consequences of subjection to any ruler or higher rank” (*Enemies of the Roman Order*, 56).

<sup>107</sup> See Millar, “Epictetus and the Imperial Court,” 144–45.

employ the mythology of Bacchus in imperial propaganda, his use of *Bacchae* 492-98 in *Epistles* 1.16 expresses deep ambivalence regarding imperial power. His alteration of the scene makes its hero not the barbarian destroyer of an autocratic civilization but a passive sage who peacefully relinquishes his possessions and even his life to the tyrant. Horace's tragic hero does not inhabit savage Cithaeron but prefers the refined Sabine estate.

Drawing on the same Stoic allegorical tradition, Plutarch and Epictetus both find in this dramatic scene a depiction of the sage's attitude toward death; the former as a resignation to the divine will, the latter in the struggle against Roman tyranny. In all these ways, Euripides' *Bacchae* continued to be reenacted amidst a continuously changing cast of protagonists.

## PART II

### Jews Reading Dionysus

אלהים לא תקלל

“You shall not curse (the) God(s).”  
(Exodus 22:27)

ἐμίμησω Διόνυσον;

“Have you imitated Dionysus?”  
(Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 88)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE* AND THE REINVENTION OF EXODUS AND CONQUEST IN THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON AND ARTAPANUS' MOSES FRAGMENT

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION: JUDAISM AND THE ENCOUNTER WITH HELLENISM

In the wake of Alexander's conquests in the east, Judaism was faced with the necessity of confronting the realities of Hellenistic culture. The resulting interactions produced a wide array of conflicts and transformations that collectively entail the complex phenomenon now labeled "Hellenistic Judaism." This category is itself a matter of scholarly debate and continues to shift as new evidence emerges and new theories are developed that refine our historical understanding. The nodes of cultural interaction involve every aspect of human experience, including politics, religion, intellectual life (philosophy, literature, and education), and economics. It is now widely accepted, for example, that a sharp distinction cannot be drawn between Diaspora and Palestinian Judaism as it relates to the phenomenon of Hellenization. As Martin Hengel has argued, in his influential study of Hellenism in Israel, "[f]rom the middle of the third century BC *all Judaism* must really be designated '*Hellenistic Judaism*' in the strict sense."<sup>1</sup> Hengel's thesis has been widely accepted.<sup>2</sup> Gregory Sterling, for example,

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (trans. John Bowden; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 1.104. He adds, however, that "a better differentiation could be made between the Greek-speaking Judaism of the Western Diaspora and the Aramaic/Hebrew-speaking Judaism of Palestine and Babylonia. But even this distinction is one-sided" (1.104).

<sup>2</sup> Gregory E. Sterling, "Judaism between Jerusalem and Alexandria," in *Hellenism in the Land of Israel* (ed. John J. Collins and Gregory E. Sterling; Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 13; Notre Dame:

reaffirms Hengel's view by comparing cultural aspects of the communities of Jerusalem and Alexandria. He notes, however, that Hengel's conclusion does not "mean that Jews in Judaea enculturated Hellenism in the same way that Jews in the Diaspora did nor that all Diaspora communities did so in the same ways or to the same degree."<sup>3</sup> Thus, in these two chapters, Hellenistic Judaism will be treated as entailing complex and dynamic attempts to negotiate Jewish identity in the face of Greek and Roman imperial power with its associated religious and intellectual hegemonies. It will be seen that these interactions range from the appropriation to the repudiation of Hellenism and often it is difficult to distinguish between the two.<sup>4</sup>

Dionysus and Euripides' *Bacchae* provide a particularly promising site for the exploration of these dynamics. Judaism interacts with the god Dionysus at several important historical and literary moments. Moreover, Greek tragedy, a characteristically Greek cultural product, was exported to conquered lands through the processes of Hellenization; its influence is evidenced both in the construction of theaters and through literature. Furthermore, these two aspects of Hellenization—Dionysus and Greek tragedy—complicate the distinction between Diaspora and Palestinian Judaism. Although the central focus of these chapters is on Alexandrian Judaism where Dionysiac

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University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 263–301; so also John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 16–18.

<sup>3</sup> Sterling, "Judaism between Jerusalem and Alexandria," 264.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the view of Collins that all the writings of Hellenistic Jews "in various ways, reflect attempts to discriminate between aspects of the culture that they embrace, beginning with the Greek language and literary forms, and those elements that were unacceptable, primarily in matters of religion and cult" (*Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 24). See also the survey of wide range of Jewish attitudes toward Greek culture in Erich S. Gruen, "Jewish Perspectives on Greek Culture and Ethnicity," in *Hellenism in the Land of Israel*, 62–93.

religion and tragic performance were prominent cultural institutions, it should also be noted that they were also important features in the Hellenization of Judea.

In the Hellenistic period, Jews had new reasons for retelling their traditional foundation narratives. As Martin Braun's important study of the literature of the Hellenized east shows, Jewish literature participates in larger cultural developments. Throughout the east, conquered peoples were producing their own histories as expressions of "national antagonisms." Greek subjects in Syria and Mesopotamia expressed their ideals in such a way that "[h]istory becomes legend and myth" in the form of "something which can be called romance."<sup>5</sup> In this context, some of the Jewish histories produced during this time were aimed at countering anti-Jewish portrayals written by Greeks; others were aimed at enhancing the status of Jews within the Greek world. More recent scholars have characterized such literature as "competitive" or "apologetic historiography."<sup>6</sup> This chapter explores two examples of this—the Wisdom of Solomon and Artapanus' Moses fragment—both of which creatively adapt Euripides' *Bacchae* in the service of the reinvention of their own historical traditions.<sup>7</sup> First, I argue that the Wisdom of Solomon characterizes the religion of the ancient Canaanites by employing mythological rituals from Greek tragedy, most prominently the cannibalistic

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Braun, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1938), at 3.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion of these, see Gregory E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (NovTSup 64; Leiden: Brill, 1992); Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 137–88; Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 29–63. Gruen, however, is critical of these terms. He is concerned rather to emphasize the creative ingenuity and influence of Hellenistic Jewish literature rather than its passive reception of Greek influence; see, e.g., *Heritage and Hellenism*, xiv–xv.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that 3 Maccabees, roughly contemporary with the Wisdom of Solomon, is also concerned with the threat imposed by Dionysiac religion to the Jews. J. R. C. Cousland argues that the author has employed themes from Euripides' *Bacchae* in order to subvert Greek religious claims and the Dionysiac pretensions of the Ptolemaic ruler ("Dionysus Theomachos? Echoes of the *Bacchae* in 3 Maccabees," *Bib* 82 [2001]: 539–48).

child sacrifice of Pentheus (§ 4.2). The author's adaptation of the *Bacchae* functions to justify the conquest of Canaan as an act of divine justice and at the same time serves as an indirect attack on the religion of his Greek contemporaries. Artapanus transforms the biblical narrative of Exodus by introducing a miraculous prison escape with spontaneously opening doors reminiscent of scenes from the *Bacchae* (§ 4.3). By presenting Moses and his God as surpassing Dionysus, he subtly subverts the claims of Dionysiac religion in Alexandrian culture. Prior to these analyses, however, I provide a general survey of the wider interaction of the Jews with Dionysus and the theater in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

#### 4.1.1 DIONYSUS AND THE JEWS: CONFLICTS AND CONFLATIONS

In the wake of the conquests of Alexander, Dionysus became a key feature of imperial Hellenism. Alexander himself identified strongly with Dionysus. Macedonia had a particular interest in this god; Alexander's own mother Olympias was known to be a maenad (Plut., *Alex.* 2.5). Alexander's conquest of India was naturally understood as analogous to the exploits of Dionysus and his portraits often depict him with Dionysiac attributes.<sup>8</sup> Dionysus continued to be a most important god in the empires of Alexander's successors. It is no surprise, therefore, that Jews in conquered lands should encounter Dionysus in various and usually unhappy ways. In Palestine, the religious campaign of Antiochus IV against the Jews recounted in 2 Maccabees included the compulsion to participate in Dionysiac processions (2 Macc 6:7). Later, Nicanor, a Seleucid governor

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<sup>8</sup> See R. R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), esp. 41–44.

of Judea, threatened to destroy the temple in Jerusalem and replace it with one to Dionysus (2 Macc 14:33).<sup>9</sup>

In Alexandria, the influence of Dionysiac religion was more pervasive.<sup>10</sup> As discussed in detail above (§ 2.2), early on the Ptolemies patronized cults of Dionysus and regulated the practice of the Dionysiac mysteries; Dionysus, moreover, remained prominent in Alexandria into the Roman period. As we shall see below, the Ptolemaic interests in promoting and regulating these cults had important consequences for Alexandrian Jews. While, for the most part, Jews in Ptolemaic and Roman Alexandria were permitted to practice their own religion and were not compelled to participate in other cults, on various occasions, disputes arose involving the Jews' distinctive ethnic and religious identity. Under the Romans, the conflict between Alexandrian citizenship and Jewish identity was exacerbated with the institution of the *laographia* (poll tax) in 24/23 BCE.<sup>11</sup> This Roman tax was imposed on native Egyptians whereas the Greek citizens of Alexandria were exempt. Jews in Alexandria occupied an intermediate status; although at various times some Jews had acquired citizenship most did not. Under the *laographia*, therefore, the political and economic consequences of one's ethnic and religious identity became more pronounced. In addition, educational status was closely connected with ethnicity and citizenship in Alexandria. Education in the gymnasium and

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<sup>9</sup> On this, see Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1.298–99.

<sup>10</sup> On Dionysus in Alexandria, see Peter M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (3 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 1.201–06.

<sup>11</sup> E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian, a Study in Political Relations* (2d ed.; SJLA 20; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 220–35; John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 142–47; Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 115–18. Additional important historical studies of Diaspora Judaism in this period include Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959); John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

membership in the *ephebeia* were necessary elements of citizenship. While some well-off Jews, such as Philo, may have been educated there, most were not.<sup>12</sup> The emperor Claudius' *Letter to the Alexandrians* (CPJ 153), written following the unrest of 38-41 CE under Gaius, reveals several important aspects of the status of Jews in Alexandria. First, Claudius reaffirms their right to practice their own religion, which had eroded during the reign of Gaius. Second, he limits the Jews' ability to pursue citizenship and participate in gymnasia, thus implying that some Jews aspired to these and that such aspirations were in part responsible for the animosity of the Greek citizens.<sup>13</sup>

In the mind of some at least, Dionysiac religion played a central role in this conflict over Jewish identity and their level of access to the political and social world of Alexandria. Third Maccabees, which was written sometime after the institution of the *laographia* but describes (largely fictional) events in the late third century BCE, reports that Philopator ordered that Jews be registered for a *laographia* and branded with the ivy-leaf of Dionysus but that any who agreed to be initiated into the mysteries would acquire "equal status to Alexandrian citizens" (ἰσοπολίτας Ἀλεξανδρεῦσιν, 3 Macc 2:28-30). Although most scholars grant little historical value to 3 Maccabees, it indicates in any case that for its author in the Roman period the devotion of imperial powers to Dionysus was viewed as a threat to the maintenance of Jewish religious identity. That Dionysus

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<sup>12</sup> On the education of Jews in Alexandrian gymnasia, see Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 148–53. As evidence, Collins points to several passages in Philo (e.g., *Spec.* 2.230; *Congr.* 74-76) which seem to reflect his own experience of education in the gymnasium; see also Alan Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo of Alexandria* (HUCM 7; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1982), 28–33. Harry Wolfson, however, maintains that the education of Philo and other Alexandrian Jews must have been conducted in Jewish institutions in large part because the inherently religious character of the gymnasia would have been unacceptable to Jews (*Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* [2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1947], 1.78–81).

<sup>13</sup> On the *Letter*, see Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule*, 248–49; Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 199–22.

was a political danger to the Jews is further evidenced in Philo's *Legatio ad Gaium* where he finds the emperor's self-identification as a "New Dionysus" particularly threatening to the Jews' political and social position (see § 5.2). In sum, in both Palestine and the Greek Diaspora, Dionysus was a prominent feature in the process of Hellenization and Jews at various times found him to be a threat to their own religious practice and identity.

The frequency with which Dionysus comes into conflict with Judaism may arise in part from the conflation between Dionysus and Yahweh made by some Greeks and Romans. Among Greeks it was common to identify foreign gods with Greek names and accept them as equivalents to those already in their pantheon. This process of *Interpretatio Graeca* or *theokrasia* was variously applied to the Jewish God.<sup>14</sup> Valerius Maximus famously observes that before 139 BCE Jews in Rome worshiped Jupiter Sabazius (who was also identified with Dionysus), an identification apparently drawn from the similarity of names (Iao Sabaoth = Iupiter Sabazius; Val. Max. 1.3.2).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, both Plutarch (*Quaest. conv.* 4.6.12) and Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.5.4-5) are aware of the identification between the Jewish God and Dionysus and present several arguments for and against it; Tacitus concludes by rejecting it.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to these examples of *Interpretatio Graeca*, some scholars have found an important connection between Dionysiac religion and Judaism in the practice of

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<sup>14</sup> On this, see Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1.261–67.

<sup>15</sup> This text is greatly debated. Hengel, for example, notes that it is unclear whether the identification is based on a misunderstanding by Valerius or his source or whether the Jews in Rome were in fact observing a syncretistic cult (*ibid.*, 1.263; 2.174 n. 41–42). Eugene Lane challenges both theories, noting a textual problem that casts doubt on the association between Jews and the cult of Sabazius ("Sabazius and the Jews in Valerius Maximus: A Re-Examination," *JRS* 69 [1979]: 35–38).

<sup>16</sup> Morton Smith has argued that the attribution of Dionysiac attributes to Yahweh in fact precedes the Maccabean revolt and he attempts to trace it to the Persian period ("On the Wine God in Palestine (Gen. 18, Jn. 2, and Achilles Tatius)," in *Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee I* [Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1974], 815–29, esp. 820–29). Smith finds evidence for the wine god within the Hebrew Bible itself (824–27).

Hellenistic mystery cults. In the early twentieth century, several prominent scholars advanced the theory that a significant minority of Hellenistic Jews adopted the beliefs and ritual initiations of such cults. The most significant advocate of this view was Erwin Goodenough in his 1935 study, *By Light, Light*.<sup>17</sup> The evidence for his theory came largely from Philo, who presents the Torah as a *hieros logos* and Moses as a mystic hierophant. Goodenough's theory has been widely criticized, most influentially by Arthur Darby Nock.<sup>18</sup> Among other things, Nock faults Goodenough for taking Philo's use of mystery language literally rather than recognizing that he, following earlier Greek philosophers, was employing initiation terminology metaphorically in order to portray a unique access to the divine.<sup>19</sup> Nock's observation has revealed a fundamental flaw in Goodenough's (and others') theory of "Jewish mysteries." In subsequent scholarship, it has now become axiomatic that Philo's mystery language is metaphorical (see esp. § 5.3 below).<sup>20</sup> There may be more at work, however, in the literary confluences between Judaism and the mystery cults. In view of the conflicts between Judaism and Dionysiac religion described above, the presentation by Jews of their own religion in terms of Dionysiac mysteries has rhetorical and ideological functions. As Lucien Cerfaux

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<sup>17</sup> Erwin R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935).

<sup>18</sup> Arthur Darby Nock, "The Question of Jewish Mysteries," in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (ed. Zeph Stewart; 2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1.459–68 (orig. 1937).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.466–68.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Wolfson, *Philo*, 1.36–55; Henry Chadwick, "Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (ed. A. H. Armstrong; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 133–92, esp. 152–54; Gary Lease, "Jewish Mystery Cults since Goodenough," *ANRW* 20.2.858–80, esp. 868–71; Christoph Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandria* (Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 26; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), 70–115; Dorothy I. Sly, *Philo's Alexandria* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 99–107; Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 212–18. For a recent study of Philo's adaptation of mystery language in his biblical exegesis that emphasizes the ways in which his conception of union with the divine anticipates Neoplatonism and medieval mysticism, see Adam Afterman, "From Philo to Plotinus: The Emergence of Mystical Union," *JR* 93 (2013): 177–96.

observed regarding pre-Philonic Judaism, the literary presentation of Judaism as a mystery cult should be understood at least in part as an ideological response to the perceived threat of mystery religions to Judaism.<sup>21</sup> In a recent paper on the *Letter of Aristeas*, James Scott has advanced a similar view to that of Cerfaux.<sup>22</sup> He notes several ways in which the *Letter* presents Judaism as a Dionysiac mystery cult, most importantly in its characterization of the Septuagint as a *hieros logos*. Like Cerfaux, Scott suggests that the Ptolemaic edict (*BGU* 1211) requiring the submission of a sealed *hieros logos* to a royal official should be understood as underlying the *Letter*'s narrative of the Septuagint's translation and presentation in Alexandria.<sup>23</sup> My interest in this chapter is not in a reexamination of the question of Jewish mystery cults per se but rather in the ways in which Dionysus and Dionysiac religion function within Jewish religious discourse in constructing their religious identity in the Hellenistic world.

#### 4.1.2 THEATER AND THE JEWS: ACTING GREEK

Greek tragedy was disseminated throughout the Hellenistic world both as literary products and through stage performance.<sup>24</sup> Poetry was fundamental to Greek *paideia*; while Homer held pride of place, the Attic tragedians, and Euripides in particular, were

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<sup>21</sup> Lucien Cerfaux, "Influence des mystères sur le judaïsme Alexandrin avant Philon," in *Recueil Lucien Cerfaux I* (Gembloux: Université de Louvain, 1954), 65–112 (orig. 1924). He argues that at least two centuries prior to Philo, Judaism had begun to present itself in several ways as a mystery cult, for example, by emphasizing the power of the divine name, sacred oracles, and mystery formulas.

<sup>22</sup> James M. Scott, "Dionysus and the *Letter of Aristeas*," in *XIII Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Ljubljana, 2007* (ed. Melvin K. H. Peters; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 325–38.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 335–36. For Cerfaux's view of a Jewish *hieros logos* and its relation to *BGU* 1211, see "Influence des mystères," 71–85. The significance of *BGU* 1211 for Judaism will be discussed below in § 4.3.2.

<sup>24</sup> On the transmission of tragic texts in general and the *Bacchae* in particular as well as the performance of tragedy in the Greco-Roman world, see § 1.4.3.

an important part of literary education. Within the context of Greek and Roman imperial power, one's relationship to the classical literary tradition played a central role in the construction of one's identity and formed a locus of intellectual and political conflict (see, e.g., § 1.4.2 above). From the perspective of Judaism, the influence of classical Greek literature was felt both in Palestine and the Diaspora. There is evidence for a significant presence of classical literature in Palestine. In Jerusalem, for example, Herod built a library patterned after that of Augustus in Rome that made classical texts available at the geographical center of Judaism.<sup>25</sup> Greek literary texts were discovered among the documents found at Wadi Murabba'at, the location associated with the Bar Kochba revolt. P. Murabba'at 108 is particularly interesting as it has been variously identified as a philosophical work and a comic fragment.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the oldest known papyrus fragment of Virgil's *Aeneid* was discovered in Masada, where it was probably deposited by a Roman officer, thus illustrating the close connection between poetic texts and the advancement of imperial power.<sup>27</sup>

That some Jews were deeply engaged with Greek tragedy is clearly evident. A fragmentary Jewish tragedy survives, the *Exagoge*, composed by Ezekiel in Alexandria probably in the second century BCE. The play retells the biblical Exodus and is influenced by Aeschylus' historical tragedy, the *Persae*, as well as the style and structure

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<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of this library and the works it contained, see Ben Zion Wacholder, "Greek Authors in Herod's Library," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 5 (1961): 102–9.

<sup>26</sup> The editors of its first publication identified it as a philosophical text. See Pierre Benoit, J. T. Milik, and Roland de Vaux, *Les grottes de Murabba'at* (2 vols.; DJD II; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961). It has subsequently been identified as a comic fragment; see Colin Austin, ed., *Comicorum Graecorum fragmenta in papyris reperta* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973).

<sup>27</sup> H. M. Cotton and J. Geiger, eds., *Masada II: The Latin and Greek Documents* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and the Hebrew University, 1989), 31–35.

of Euripides.<sup>28</sup> This text is particularly illuminating for the present chapter because it illustrates how Alexandrian Jews were engaged in reformulating the own historical narratives in view of Greek tragedy, which underlies, I shall argue, the strategies of the Wisdom of Solomon and Artapanus. For some Jewish writers, Greek tragedy was an important locus for the cultural negotiation of Hellenism, which can be seen in the collections of *florilegia*, gathered from classical poets (including some forgeries) for the apologetic purpose of establishing the antiquity of Jewish beliefs.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Moses Hadas has found Jewish interaction with Greek tragedy to be so extensive as to conclude (perhaps with some hyperbole) that “[e]very work of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament has expressions from or allusions to tragedy which the reader was obviously expected to recognize.”<sup>30</sup>

In addition to written texts, many Jews encountered tragedy by attending performances. The Hellenistic empires built theaters in many cities throughout their territories. In Palestine, theaters did not arrive until the Roman period under the reign of Herod, who built them in Caesarea, Jerusalem, and Jericho.<sup>31</sup> As Eric Meyers observes

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<sup>28</sup> See Howard Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 23–25.

<sup>29</sup> The most important example of this comes from Aristobulus, whose fragments are collected in Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors III: Aristobulus* (Pseudepigrapha Series 13; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995). See also the discussions of Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman; 3 vols. in 4; rev. ed.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1973-1987), 3.1.656–71; Gruen, “Jewish Perspectives on Greek Culture,” esp. 72–74.

<sup>30</sup> Moses Hadas, *Hellenistic Culture: Fusion and Diffusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 130. He notes in particular the Book of Job and 4 Maccabees. On the latter, see also Moses Hadas, *The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees* (JAL; New York: Harper, 1953), 100–03. Klaus Baltzer proposes earlier influence of Greek drama on biblical literature in his discussion of Deutero-Isaiah. While he falls short of arguing for a direct relationship, he employs Attic tragedy and comedy as comparative material in developing his theory of Deutero-Isaiah as “liturgical drama” (*Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55* [Hermeneia 23; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001], 11–14).

<sup>31</sup> On these, see Arthur Segal, *Theatres in Roman Palestine and Provincia Arabia* (Mnemosyne 140; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 4–5.

regarding a later Roman theater in Sepphoris, its construction contributed to the city's Hellenization and would have been "a tool for Roman propaganda."<sup>32</sup> Josephus, commenting on Herod's construction of the theater in Jerusalem, observes that it was "foreign to the custom of the Judeans" (τοῦ δὲ κατὰ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἔθους ἀλλότρια, *Ant.* 15.268).<sup>33</sup> In Alexandria, the theater was less "foreign"; indeed, early on the Ptolemies patronized performers of both tragedy and comedy (see § 2.2).<sup>34</sup> From the Roman period, we know that Philo frequented the theater; he in fact comments on being among an audience experiencing elation and excitement at a performance of Euripides (*Prob.* 141; also *Ebr.* 177).<sup>35</sup>

In sum, as prominent facets of the process of Hellenization, Dionysus and Greek tragedy provide many valuable opportunities to explore interactions between Judaism and Hellenism as Jews sought to negotiate their cultural identity within the Greek and Roman world.

#### 4.2 THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON AND THE CANAANITE DIONYSUS

In Wisdom 12:3-7, the author paints a vivid picture of the religious practices of ancient Canaanites. His descriptions are hyperbolic and polemical. In this section, I argue that the author has invented a religious history of the Canaanites by characterizing them as Dionysiac devotees. His account shares more in common with mythology, in particular, Euripides' *Bacchae*, than the actual religious practices either of ancient

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<sup>32</sup> Eric M. Meyers, "The Challenge of Hellenism for Early Judaism and Christianity," *BA* 55 (1992): 84-91 (at 88).

<sup>33</sup> See Sterling, "Judaism between Jerusalem and Alexandria," 275.

<sup>34</sup> See Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1.618-20.

<sup>35</sup> On Philo and Greek tragedy, see § 5.2.

Canaan or of his own contemporaries. After surveying the larger historical and religious context of Wisdom (§ 4.2.1), I examine the relationship between Wisdom 12:3-7 and Euripides' *Bacchae* (§ 4.2.2). Finally, I explore the implications of these observations for the function of Wisdom's characterization of the Canaanites, suggesting that it serves both as a justification for Israel's conquest of Canaan and as polemic against Greek religion in general.

#### 4.2.1 THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON: HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

The Wisdom of Solomon was written by an unknown author, most likely in Alexandria during the first century of Roman rule (30 BCE-70 CE).<sup>36</sup> David Winston has argued for the more precise date of the reign of Gaius Caligula (37-41 CE).<sup>37</sup> The language and philosophical character of Wisdom suggest that the author had received a high level of Greek education.<sup>38</sup> He belongs to a similar intellectual milieu as Philo; indeed, Winston has compiled an extensive list of linguistic and thematic parallels between Wisdom and the works of Philo and concluded that one must be dependent on the other.<sup>39</sup> It is uncertain where the author of Wisdom received his education but it is

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<sup>36</sup> Important commentaries of the Wisdom of Solomon include Johannes Fichtner, *Weisheit Salomos* (HAT 2.6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1938); David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 43; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979); Dieter Georgi, *Weisheit Salomos* (JSHRZ III/4; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1980) (annotated translation); C. Larcher, *Le Livre de la Sagesse ou La Sagesse de Salomon* (3 vols.; EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1983-1985). Among the many valuable studies of Wisdom are Patrick W. Skehan, "The Text and Structure of the Book of Wisdom," *Traditio* 3 (1945): 1-12; James M. Reese, *Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom and Its Consequences* (AnBib 41; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970); Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 135-232; Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 195-202.

<sup>37</sup> Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 20-25; Collins argues that the date cannot be determined more precisely than 30 BCE-70 CE. See *Jewish Wisdom*, 178-79.

<sup>38</sup> On the high literary style of Wisdom's Greek relative to other biblical texts, see Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 14-18.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-63.

not unlikely that it was in a Greek gymnasium.<sup>40</sup> Like Philo, Wisdom belongs to the intellectual context of Middle-Platonism, a distinctive characteristic of which is an openness to draw on various philosophical schools, such as the Stoics and Peripatetics.<sup>41</sup> Thus, for example, it adapts for Jewish theology the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul as formulated by Plato and the *pneuma* or *logos* of the Stoics.<sup>42</sup>

Given the extent of the author's education in Greek literature and philosophy, his criticism of Greek religion provides a particularly rich site for exploring the formation of Jewish identity in the context of Roman imperial power. As discussed above (§ 4.1.1), with the Romans' introduction of the *laographia*, the stakes of religious identity and Alexandrian citizenship increased and in 38 CE culminated in riots against the Jews. This may account for the harsh tone of Wisdom's invective, which sharply contrasts with the more conciliatory approach of some earlier Hellenistic Jewish authors, such as Pseudo-Aristeas. The author exhorts the reader to pursue divine Wisdom and contrasts such people with the ungodly, who not only do not know God and his ways (2:21-24), they also oppress the righteous and the helpless (2:10-12). Such enemies of God will ultimately be destroyed in a fiery judgment (5:17-23).<sup>43</sup> His polemic against idolatry, though vehement, is complex and subtle, reflecting his distinct position between biblical Judaism and the Hellenistic world. Thus, on the one hand, his attitudes toward idolatry

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<sup>40</sup> See Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 148–53. As noted above in § 4.1.2, Wolfson argues that educated Jews in Alexandria must have participated in Jewish rather than Greek institutions (*Philo*, 1.78–80).

<sup>41</sup> Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 33–38; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 185–93, 200–02; on Philo, see John M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (rev. ed.; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 139–83.

<sup>42</sup> Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 185–87, 196–99.

<sup>43</sup> Winston argues that the author's vehemence against the wicked is a response to the outbreak of persecution against Jews in Alexandria in 38 CE (*Wisdom of Solomon*, 22–24). Collins, however, maintains that Wisdom does not have specific social circumstances in view but is rather making a general statement about the best way of life (*Jewish Wisdom*, 193–95).

are clearly informed by the biblical tradition (e.g., Deutero-Isaiah).<sup>44</sup> At the same time, in 14:12-31 he accounts for the origins of idolatry in a manner reminiscent of the Greek mythographer Euhemerus.<sup>45</sup> The author suggests that idolatry could arise from a father who in his bereavement for his deceased child sets up an image (τοῦ ταχέως ἀφαιρεθέντος τέκνου εἰκόνα) which subsequently “he honored as a god and passed down to his descendents mysteries and rites” (ὡς θεὸν ἐτίμησεν καὶ παρέδωκεν τοῖς ὑποχειρίοις μυστήρια καὶ τελετάς, 14:15).<sup>46</sup>

In addition to employing both biblical and Greek philosophical arguments, a prominent strategy in his polemic against idolatry is to proceed indirectly. That is, rather than criticizing the religion of his Alexandrian contemporaries, he focuses on those of the ancient Egyptians and Canaanites, for which most of his educated contemporaries would have shared his disdain. As Winston observes, “the ancient Egyptians and Canaanites merely served the author as symbols for the hated Alexandrians and Romans of his own day, upon whom he visited an apocalyptic vengeance in chap. 5.”<sup>47</sup> Even though on the surface Wisdom targets Egyptian and Canaanite religion, on several occasions it contrasts Judaism with contemporary mystery religion. In 2:21, Solomon asserts of the wicked, “they did not recognize the mysteries of God” (οὐκ ἔγνωσαν μυστήρια θεοῦ). At the

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<sup>44</sup> Wisdom 13:10-19, for example, describes a woodcutter who fashions an idol from one part of a tree, to which he prays and worship, whereas the other part is used for firewood. This discussion recalls that of Isaiah 44:9-20.

<sup>45</sup> See Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 273–77.

<sup>46</sup> Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionum* preserves a similar tradition about Dionysus as son of a Cretan king named Jupiter; see Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 275.

<sup>47</sup> Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 45. Collins offers a similar assessment that Wisdom’s critique of idolatry is not “an unqualified opposition to the Gentile world” but rather “the author was attempting to make common cause with enlightened Greeks who would share his contempt for popular superstition, and especially for the crass forms of idolatry practiced in Egypt. Moreover, he lumps together with idolatry all manner of abuses associated with ‘secret mysteries’ and ‘strange laws’ of which cultured Greeks and Romans would disapprove” (*Jewish Wisdom*, 212–13).

final judgment, the tables are turned and the wicked themselves now learn of the righteous, “we fools regarded his life as madness and his death as without reward” (οἱ ἄφρονες τὸν βίον αὐτοῦ ἐλογισάμεθα μανίαν καὶ τὴν τελευτὴν αὐτοῦ ἄτιμον, 5:4). We later learn that, over against the promises of divine knowledge offered by the Greek mysteries, it is Wisdom herself who is “an initiate into the knowledge of God and a partisan of his works” (μύστις γάρ ἐστὶν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιστήμης καὶ αἰρετὶς τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ, 8:4).

#### 4.2.2 TRAGIC RITUALS AND THE CANAANITE DIONYSUS

Wisdom 12:3-7 is part of an excursus (11:15-12:22) within a larger exposition of Exodus in chapters 11-19.<sup>48</sup> In these chapters, the author reflects extensively upon why and how the Egyptians were punished. Rather than destroying them outright, God chose to punish them by sending a series of plagues brought about by “a multitude of irrational creatures” (πλῆθος ἀλόγων ζώων), which were their objects of worship, “in order that they may learn that one is punished through the very things through which one sins” (ἵνα γνῶσιν ὅτι δι’ ὧν τις ἀμαρτάνει διὰ τούτων κολάζεται, 12:15-16). God’s punishment is delayed for the sake of repentance: “you have pity on all because you can do all things and overlook the sins of humans for repentance” (ἐλεεῖς δὲ πάντας ὅτι πάντα δύνασαι καὶ παρορᾷς ἀμαρτήματα ἀνθρώπων εἰς μετάνοιαν, 11:23). In short, “you reprove those who fall away little by little” (τοὺς παραπίπτοντας κατ’ ὀλίγον ἐλέγχεις, 12:2). He corroborates his analysis of God’s punishments of the Egyptians by providing an

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<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of the literary structure of Wisdom, see Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 4–14; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 179–82. Against earlier scholarship that sought to divide various portions of Wisdom between multiple authors, both Winston and Collins argue that Wisdom’s various genres and themes form a coherent whole and should be understood as the work of a single author.

additional example of the ancient Canaanites in 12:3-7, whose sacrificial practices he describes in gruesome detail. The function of this discussion is at least twofold. First, by portraying Canaanites as child-slaughtering cannibals, Wisdom provides justification for their conquest by the Israelites, a concern also of several other Jewish-Hellenistic writings.<sup>49</sup> Second, within the larger argument of Wisdom 11-19, the exemplum of ancient Canaan functions as a paradigm for God's mercy on all humanity: as he allowed the Canaanites and Egyptians opportunity for repentance, so also now God's judgment on the wicked is delayed (12:19-22). Before returning to his discussion of Exodus in chapter 16, he provides an extensive account of the folly of polytheism (chs. 13-15). This structure underscores the paradigmatic function of Egypt and Canaan for polytheism generally.

My analysis of the description of Canaanite religion in Wisdom 12:3-7 suggests first that there are several resonances with Dionysiac religion, then that there are strong linguistic parallels with a few Greek tragedies and with Euripides' *Bacchae* in particular.<sup>50</sup>

(3) καὶ γὰρ τοὺς πάλαι οἰκήτορας τῆς ἀγίας σου γῆς  
 (4) μισήσας ἐπὶ τῷ ἔχθιστα πράσσειν,  
 ἔργα φαρμακειῶν καὶ τελετὰς ἀνοσίου  
 (5) τέκνων τε φονέας ἀνελεήμονας  
 καὶ σπλαγχνοφάγον ἀνθρωπίνων σαρκῶν θοῖναν,  
 καὶ αἵματος<sup>51</sup> ἐκ μέσου μύστας θιάσου

<sup>49</sup> See Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 238. He notes, for example, that *Jubilees*' rewriting of Genesis seeks to prove that Shem not Canaan was the legal recipient of the land (e.g., 8:8-11; 9:14-15; 10:29-34). Similarly, Philo insists that the inhabitants of the land surrendered it voluntarily (*Hypoth.* 356).

<sup>50</sup> Text follows Joseph Ziegler, *Sapientia Salomonis* (Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum 12.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962). Translations are mine throughout.

<sup>51</sup> Ziegler places καὶ αἵματος with the previous stich (*ibid.*); so also Larcher, *Le Livre de la Sagesse*, 3.707-08. For a discussion of the text-critical problems with 12:5, see Skehan, "Text and Structure," 10-11. My punctuation follows Fichtner, *Weisheit Salomos*, 46; Reese, *Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom*, 2; Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 237, 240.

(6) καὶ αὐθέντας γονεῖς ψυχῶν ἀβοηθήτων  
ἐβουλήθης ἀπολέσαι διὰ χειρῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν  
(7) ἵνα ἀξίαν ἀποικίαν δέξηται θεοῦ παίδων  
ἢ παρὰ σοὶ πασῶν τιμιωτάτη γῆ.

For you also despised the ancient inhabitants of your holy land for performing the most hateful actions: works of sorcery and unholy rites; merciless murders of children, a sacrificial meal of the internal organs of human flesh, initiates of blood from the midst of a throng, and parents who are murderers of helpless souls; these you wished to destroy through the hands of our fathers in order that the land most of all honored with you might receive a worthy colony of the children of God. (Wisdom 12:3-7)

Most of the features of Wisdom's description of ancient Canaanite religious practice do not derive from biblical sources.<sup>52</sup> Although the author could have learned of child sacrifice from Deuteronomy 18:10, the biblical accounts do not suggest cannibalism. Stronger parallels with his descriptions can in fact be found in Dionysiac rituals. As viewed by Greeks, child sacrifice and cannibalism are not necessarily uniquely connected to Dionysus, although they are prominent in the mythology (most famously in the *Bacchae* as discussed below).<sup>53</sup> Such rites could in fact be attributed to various barbarian peoples. Nevertheless, Wisdom 12:3-7 employs terms that have specific usage in Dionysiac cults. A *thiasos* (12:5), although it can refer to various sorts of troupes or bands of people, most frequently refers to Dionysiac revelers, such as maenads.<sup>54</sup> The terms *telete* (12:4) and *mystes* (12:5) are both used in the context of Dionysiac mystery initiations. *Telete*, a rare word in biblical Greek, in its only two other

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<sup>52</sup> On Wisdom's use of religious vocabulary in his critique of idolatry, see Reese, *Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom*, 6–12. He established that the author had an extensive knowledge of religious terminology derived from literary sources, greatly surpassing that of the LXX.

<sup>53</sup> Porphyry, *De abstinentia* 2.55 reports human sacrifice to Dionysus in Chios and Tenedos.

<sup>54</sup> So also Larcher, *Le Livre de la Sagesse*, 1.709. In the LXX, *thiasos* occurs elsewhere only in Jer 18:5.

occurrences in Wisdom is used in conjunction with *mysteria* (14:15, 23).<sup>55</sup> In 14:23, *telete* is used in a distinctly Dionysiac context, describing those who observe ruler cult as, “conducting either child-slaughtering initiations or secret mysteries or frenzied revels of alien ordinances” (ἡ γὰρ τεκνοφόνους τελετὰς ἢ κρύφια μυστήρια ἢ ἐμμανεῖς ἐξάλλων θεσμῶν κόμους ἄγοντες).<sup>56</sup> In 3 Maccabees, a roughly contemporary work, *telete* occurs in an explicitly Dionysiac context. It narrates events in which Ptolemy IV Philopator decrees that the Jews of Alexandria be branded “with the ivy-leaf symbol of Dionysus” (παρασήμῳ Διονύσου κισσοφύλλῳ) and reduced “into a limited status” (εἰς τὴν προσυνεσταλμένην αὐθεντίαν) except for those who choose to “join with those initiated according to the mystic rites” (ἐν τοῖς κατὰ τὰς τελετὰς μεμνημένοις ἀναστρέφεσθαι, 2:29-30).<sup>57</sup> In addition, the religious practice of eating internal organs (σπλαγχοφάγον, 12:5) might also have associations with Dionysus, though by no means exclusively.<sup>58</sup> Second Maccabees 6, which like 3 Maccabees describes the imposition of Gentile religion upon Jews, connects a monthly celebration of the king’s birthday that included the consumption of internal organs with Dionysiac feasts: “they led [the Jews] with bitter necessity to the birthday of the king each month for the consumption of organs and when

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<sup>55</sup> Within biblical books, Apocrypha, and Pseudepigrapha, outside of Wis 12:4; 14:15, 23, *telete* occurs only in 1 Kgs 15:12; Amos 7:9; 3 Macc 2:30; *Sib. Or.* 5.596.

<sup>56</sup> Larcher notes that the term κρύφια (“secret”) is frequently used to describe nocturnal Dionysiac mysteries (*Le Livre de la Sagesse*, 3.827–28). Moreover, in Wisdom 14:15 (quoted above), although there is nothing necessarily Dionysiac about the *mysteria* and *teletai*, it is interesting that scholars have found a close parallel with a Euhemeristic account of the birth of Dionysus preserved by Firmicus Maternus (Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 275; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 210).

<sup>57</sup> As Winston suggests, 3 Maccabees and Wisdom both share in a new Jewish disillusionment with Greco-Roman culture after 24/23 BCE and similarly repudiate earlier more conciliatory approaches (*Wisdom of Solomon*, 2–3).

<sup>58</sup> Porphyry, *De abstinentia* 2.51, for example, reports that “many barbarians” use human entrails for divination.

the feast of the Dionysia occurred [ἐπὶ σπλαγγισμὸν γενομένης δὲ Διονυσίων ἑορτῆς], they were forced to wear ivy and process for Dionysus” (6:7).<sup>59</sup>

In spite of these several resonances with Dionysiac cult, there is little historical evidence apart from that mentioned by Porphyry (*Abst.* 2.55) for human sacrifice or cannibalism in religious rituals of Dionysus.<sup>60</sup> As Winston suggests, these descriptions are polemical exaggerations aimed at turning “the tables on those who (like Damocritus and Apion) had hurled this against the Jews.”<sup>61</sup> Yet, the sources of Wisdom’s account of cannibalistic child sacrifice remain to be explored. David Gill has suggested that for these descriptions, the author draws on Greek tragedies, particularly those in which the theme of child-killing and/or cannibalism is prominent (e.g., Euripides’ *Medea*, *Bacchae*, *Heracles Furens*, and the House of Atreus cycle).<sup>62</sup> He notes, for example, that Wisdom 12:4-5 employs similar language to that used by Medea in Euripides’ play, in which she describes her actions as “a murder of my dearest children” (φιλάτων παιδῶν φόνον, 795; cf. τέκνων τε φονέας) and “a most unholy deed” (ἔργον ἀνοσιώτατον, 796; cf. τελετὰς ἀνοσίους). Moreover, she performed her actions by means of “these sorceries” (τοιιοῖσδε φαρμάκοις, 789; cf. ἔργα φαρμακειῶν).<sup>63</sup> Wisdom 12:5 also recalls language from

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<sup>59</sup> On these religious feasts, see Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1.298–99. The text is ambiguous regarding the nature of the connection between the celebration of the king’s birthday and the Dionysiac procession.

<sup>60</sup> Nor is their convincing evidence for it among the Canaanites. Given the lack of evidence for cannibalism in Canaan, Fichtner suggests that Wisdom attributes the crimes known from other peoples to the Canaanites (*Weisheit Salomos*, 46). For a discussion of the evidence, see Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 239–40; Larcher, *Le Livre de la Sagesse*, 3.707–08.

<sup>61</sup> Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 240. For the accusation of human sacrifice and cannibalism made against the Jews by Apion and Damocritus, see Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (3 vols.; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974), 1.410–12; 530–31.

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of violence against kin in Greek tragedy see § 1.2.2 above and esp. Elizabeth S. Belfiore, *Murder among Friends: Violation of Philia in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>63</sup> David Gill, “The Greek Sources of Wisdom XII 3-7,” *VT* 15 (1965): 384.

Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Clytemnestra alludes to the child-cannibalism of "Atreus, the grievous lord of a feast" (Ἀτρέως χαλεποῦ θοινατῆρος, 1502; cf. θοῖναν). In addition, the rare term σπλαγχοφάγος in Wisdom 12:5 and the notion of eating human organs recalls Cassandra's allusion to a father (Agamemnon?) eating the organs of a child: "the organs with the inner parts, which the father tasted" (σὺν ἐντέροις τε σπλάγχν'... ὧν πατὴρ ἐγεύσατο, 1221-22).<sup>64</sup>

Gill suggests that "[m]ore than other plays, Euripides' *Bacchae* is rich in parallels."<sup>65</sup> Given the strong Dionysiac resonances in Wisdom 12:3-7 discussed above, these parallels are particularly fitting. Gill notes the high frequency of the terms *thiasos* and *telete* in the *Bacchae*.<sup>66</sup> For example, the play describes one who "sees the rites of the gods" (τελετὰς θεῶν εἰδώς, 73) and "joins their soul to a throng" (θιασεύεται ψυχάν, 75).<sup>67</sup> Moreover, after killing Pentheus, Agave asserts that she will be called "blessed Agave among the throngs" (μάκαιρ' Ἀγαύη... ἐν θιάσοις, 1180) and commands the chorus to "share now in the sacrificial meals" (μέτεχέ νυν θοίνας, 1184). Earlier Pentheus had warned Teiresias that if it were not for his old age, he would sit "bound among the Bacchae for introducing evil rites" (ἐν βάκχαισι δέσμιος μέσαις / τελετὰς πονηρὰς εἰσάγων, 259-60), which resonates with the τελετὰς ἀνοσίους in Wisdom 12:4.<sup>68</sup>

Gill's analysis effectively establishes that the author has borrowed "consciously or unconsciously" from the stories of tragic sacrifices for his own purposes in 12:3-7. He

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 385. σπλαγχοφάγος occurs elsewhere only in Ps.-Plutarch, *De fluviis* 282b.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> τελετή occurs in *Bacch.* 22; 74; 238; 260; 465. θιάσος in *Bacch.* 56; 115; 136; 221; 532; 558; 584; 680; 978; 1180; θιασεύω in *Bacch.* 75; 379; θιασώτης in *Bacch.* 548.

<sup>67</sup> Gill, "The Greek Sources of Wisdom XII 3-7," 384.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 385. In addition to the parallels mentioned here, Gill also finds similarities with Wisdom's language in Euripides, *Orestes* 814-18, *Heracles furens* 1183-84, and Aeschylus, *Choephoroi* 804-06.

concludes that the author of *Wisdom* does not employ direct quotations; rather, “when he came to write about people who slaughtered children for religious rites [...] [t]hese stories were part of his mental equipment, and in this case they came naturally to the surface as perhaps the only terms in which he could express appropriately such a phenomenon.”<sup>69</sup> His brief study focuses largely on similarities of words and phrases and provides a useful starting point for further comparison. In the following analysis, I suggest that there are more linguistic affinities between *Wisdom* and the *Bacchae* than Gill has identified, which I highlight below. More interestingly for my purposes here is that both narratives explore the same religious and cultural problems. A central concern in both texts is the distinction between foreign and barbarian on the one hand and indigenous and civilized on the other. In both cases, the characterization of one group’s rituals as entailing child sacrifice and cannibalism functions to establish the distinction.

*Wisdom* narrates the transition in which “your holy land” (τῆς ἁγίας σου γῆς) would no longer be the possession of its “ancient inhabitants” (τοὺς πάλαι οἰκήτορας, 12:3) but rather would be “a worthy colony of the children of God” (ἄξιαν ἀποικίαν δέξεται θεοῦ παίδων, 12:7). God spared the Canaanites, sending wasps that “that they might destroy them little by little” (αὐτοὺς κατὰ βραχὺ ἐξολεθρεύσωσιν, 12:8) so they would have “a place for repentance” (τόπον μετανοίας, 12:10). As a result of God’s intervention in Canaan, a true and peaceful religion would be established in its place.

In Euripides’ *Bacchae*, the portrayal of one society’s religion as bloody and violent over against another’s is also central to the plot. Yet, in Euripides’ narrative, these themes are treated with ironic reversal. A fundamental question is whether

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, at 383, 385–86.

Dionysus himself is indigenous to Thebes; Pentheus and his family's refusal to recognize him as such results in the god's retributive judgment. When he arrives at Thebes from Asia, Dionysus describes the Lydian maenads who followed as "my sacred throng, women whom I led out from the barbarians" (θίασος ἐμός, γυναῖκες ἅς ἐκ βαρβάρων ἐκόμισα, 56-57). He asserts that he had already established his *teletai* in the barbarian lands of Asia (13-22) and now Thebes would be the first Greek city to welcome him (23-31). Yet contrary to the expectations and accusations of Pentheus (and perhaps also the expectations of the Athenian audience), over the course of the play it becomes clear that the barbarian rituals are holy (*hosios*) whereas those of the Thebans are not. In its entrance song (64-166), the chorus of Lydian maenads declares, "O blessed man, happy is the one who purifies his life by seeing the rites of the gods, performing Bacchic rites in the hills with holy cleansings" (ὦ μάκαρ, ὅστις εὐδαίμων τελετὰς θεῶν εἰδὼς βιοτὰν ἀγιστεύει καὶ θιασεύεται ψυχὰν ἐν ὄρεσσι βακχεύων ὁσίοις καθαρμοῖσιν, 73-77). Holiness is a central theme throughout the choral odes (cf. τελετὰς ἀνοσίου in Wis 12:4). In 370-431, the chorus addresses a hymn to "Holiness, queen of the gods" (Ὀσία πύτνα θεῶν, 370), and asserts that Pentheus, in his opposition to Dionysus was in fact guilty of "unholy violence" (οὐχ ὁσίαν ὕβριν, 374-75). Later the chorus describes Pentheus as an "unholy man" (ἀνδρὸς ἀνοσίου) for his imprisonment of the god (613). This claim stands in contrast to Pentheus' accusation against Teiresias, a Dionysiac sympathizer, for "introducing wicked rites" (τελετὰς πονηρὰς εἰσάγων, 260).

The plot of the tragedy unfolds against the backdrop of these claims and counter-claims regarding the barbarian rites, whether they are holy or wicked. Of course, the narrative vindicates the Lydian maenads, whereas Pentheus and his family prove to be

guilty. As in Wisdom 12:3-7, the distinguishing characteristic of “unholy rites” turns out to be child sacrifice and cannibalism. A key term to describe the acts of violence in both Wisdom and the *Bacchae* is *phoneus* and its cognates, which, although they denote homicide generally, in both cases here are linked to sacrificial and cannibalistic contexts. First, Pentheus is described as murderous for his opposition to Dionysus. The chorus asserts that he was the offspring of one who was “murderous, as a giant opposed to the gods” (φόνιον δ’ ὥστε γίγαντ’ ἀντίπαλον θεοῖς, 544); they pray that Dionysus “check the violence of a murderous man” (φονίου δ’ ἀνδρὸς ὕβριν κατάσχες, 555). When the disguised Dionysus exhorts Pentheus to sacrifice to the god rather than resist (794-95), Pentheus rebuts, “I shall sacrifice, at least a female murder” (θύσω, φόνον γε θῆλυν, 796). With this statement, Pentheus reveals his own murderous intentions while at the same time ironically foreshadowing his own demise. Indeed, the murder unfolds in a distinctly feminine manner. First, the chorus prays, “let Justice come manifestly, let her come carrying dagger and performing murder” (ἴτω δίκαια φανερός, ἴτω ξιφηφόρος φονεύουσα, 992-94; 1011-13). Subsequently, it is his mother who initiates the slaughter: “First his mother, the priestess, began the murder” (πρώτη δὲ μήτηρ ἤρξεν ἱερέα φόνου, 1114). That Agave intended her ritual murder to result in a sacrificial meal becomes clear as she returns to the city. She carries Pentheus’ dismembered body into Thebes imagining that she has slaughtered the cub of a mountain lion and invites the chorus to “share now in the sacrificial meals” (μέτεχέ νυν θοίνας, 1184). Cadmus, seeing what has happened, recognizes the cannibalistic implications of his daughter’s actions:

ὦ πένθος οὐ μετρητὸν, οὐδ’ οἶόν τ’ ἰδεῖν  
 φόνον ταλαίναις χερσὶν ἐξειργασμένων.  
 καλὸν τὸ θῦμα καταβαλοῦσα δαίμοσιν

ἐπὶ δαῖτα Θήβας τάσδε κάμῃ παρακαλεῖς.

O grief beyond measure, it is not possible to look upon a murder by the wretched hands of those who performed it. Having cast down the beautiful sacrifice to the gods you are inviting this Thebes and me to a feast. (1244-47)

In this lament, Cadmus has linked murder (*phonos*), human sacrifice (*thuma*), and a cannibalistic meal (*dais*), emphasized by their placement at the beginning of three successive lines. Thus, in the end, the Greeks of Thebes were guilty of murderous rites and cannibalistic sacrifices; it was they, not the barbarians, who practice wicked initiations. Dionysus was vindicated as the true Theban and his foreign devotees were justified in introducing his rites.

#### 4.2.3 THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated that there are a significant number of similarities in the religious terminologies employed by the *Bacchae* and the Wisdom of Solomon in describing cannibalistic child sacrifice. To those noted by Gill (*telete*, *thiasos*, *thoina*) should be added (*an*)*osios* and *phoneus*.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, deeper similarities exist at the narrative level. In the *Bacchae*, the Thebans are shown to practice an unholy and murderous ritual and they are consequently punished by the god in the process of the establishment of his new cult. Similarly, Wisdom asserts that the religion of the ancient Canaanites also consisted of such rites and therefore their punishment by God and displacement by the Israelites was justified. In this way, both authors recreate a

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<sup>70</sup> An additional common term is *pharmakon*. Wisdom condemns “deeds of sorcery” (ἔργα φαρμακειῶν, 12:4); LXX Deut 18:10 had similarly used *pharmakon* to describe Canaanite sorcery. In the *Bacchae*, the term *pharmakon* also occurs twice in the speech of Teirseias. First, he observes that wine is an inducement to sleep and forgetting one’s miseries: “there is no other antidote for woes” (οὐδ’ ἔστ’ ἄλλο φάρμακον πόνων, 283). Subsequently he warns Pentheus that for his madness in which he fights against the god, there is no cure by means of a *pharmakon* (326).

traditional story from their own literary heritage in order to problematize the identification of foreign and indigenous. Contrary to the perspective of many of his Greek contemporaries, Euripides presents the barbarians as religiously pure in contrast to the Greeks and challenges the very idea of being Greek over against barbarian. Indeed, Dionysus himself is simultaneously foreign and indigenous, a “new god” returning to the city of his birth. As discussed above in the introductory chapter (§ 1.3.3), Euripides’ blurring of the distinctions between foreign and indigenous functions in part as an exploration of the religious tensions in fifth-century Athens resulting from the introduction of various new gods.<sup>71</sup> Like Dionysus and his Lydian maenads, Wisdom presents the Israelites as “migrants” or “colonists” (ἀξίαν ἀποικίαν, 12:7) while at the same time maintaining that the land had always belonged to their God: it was always “your holy land” (τῆς ἁγίας σου γῆς, 12:3) and “most honored with you” (παρὰ σοὶ πασῶν τιμωτάτη, 12:7). Thus, their arrival put an end to a temporary and degenerate condition. At the same time, Wisdom functions at another level. In view of the contemporary political and ethnic tensions in Alexandria, Wisdom calls for a reevaluation of the distinction between citizen and foreign status. Purity of life turns out to be more important than other religious or cultural markers. Thus, by employing terminology taken from the Greeks’ mythological presentations of their own cults in his denunciation of Canaanites, the author indirectly attacks Hellenistic religions and any Jews who may have been tempted to participate in them.

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<sup>71</sup> On this point, see esp. Henk S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion I: Terminus: Isis, Dionysos, Hermes, Three Studies in Henotheism* (Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 6; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 96–205.

### 4.3 ARTAPANUS' MOSES FRAGMENT AND DIONYSIAC PRISON ESCAPE

Artapanus' depiction of Moses in his work *Concerning the Jews* provides a striking juxtaposition with the Wisdom of Solomon. Like the latter, Artapanus reshapes the biblical Exodus narrative in a variety of interesting ways in the service of his own ideological ends. Both authors provide justifications for the Israelites' actions in exodus and conquest: whereas Wisdom presents the conquest of Canaan as God's (merciful) judgment against child sacrificing cannibals, Artapanus' exodus results from the king's mistreatment of Moses, who was in fact Egypt's greatest national hero. At the same time, there are some striking contrasts between their religious outlooks. In Wisdom, Egyptian animal cults are presented as the pinnacle of human folly; Artapanus presents Moses as their inventor (see below).

In light of these observations, it is noteworthy that, as with Wisdom, Artapanus also resembles Euripides' *Bacchae* in important ways. Yet little consensus exists among scholars regarding the nature of this relationship. Otto Weinreich's 1929 study, *Gebet und Wunder*, presents the first analysis of the correspondence between the narrative of Moses' miraculous prison escape in Artapanus and those in the *Bacchae*.<sup>72</sup> As I suggest below, although Weinreich's investigation provides an indispensable starting point, he underestimated the extent of the similarities between the two. Subsequent scholarship has variously criticized (and misunderstood) Weinreich's treatment of the literary relationship. My analysis explores the relationship between Artapanus and the *Bacchae* as a means of shedding light on several persistent questions in the study of Artapanus: the

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<sup>72</sup> Otto Weinreich, *Gebet und Wunder: Zwei Abhandlungen zur Religions- und Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1929).

relationship between his treatment of Moses and the Hellenistic divine man, the nature of his Jewish identity, and his overall literary quality. Before addressing his relationship with the *Bacchae*, however, I provide a brief discussion of Artapanus' historical and literary context.

#### 4.3.1 ARTAPANUS: HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

Little is known about Artapanus.<sup>73</sup> Our knowledge is limited to the three fragments from *Concerning the Jews* that were preserved by Alexander Polyhistor and subsequently by Eusebius, treating Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, respectively (*Praep. ev.* 9.18.1 = frag. 1; 9.23.1-4 = frag. 2; 9.27.1-37 = frag.3).<sup>74</sup> The section of the Moses fragment describing his miraculous prison escape (3.23-25) is also preserved by Clement of Alexandria, with some important variations (*Strom.* 1.23.154.2-3 = frag. 3b.2-3). Artapanus' detailed knowledge of local Egyptian traditions places him securely in Egypt, likely—though not certainly—in Alexandria. He can be dated approximately around the

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<sup>73</sup> The first major study of Artapanus is Jacob Freudenthal, *Hellenistische Studien, 1-2: Alexander Polyhistor und die von ihm erhaltenen Reste jüdischer und samaritanischer Geschichtswerke* (Breslau: H. Skutsch, 1875), 143–74. Subsequent treatments that are important for the present analysis include Weinreich, *Gebet und Wunder*, 298–309; Braun, *History and Romance*, esp. 26–31; Cerfaux, “Influence des mystères,” esp. 81–85; David Lenz Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (SBLDS 1; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1972), 146–77; Nikolaus Walter, *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit: Band I: Historische und legendarische Erzählungen: Fragmente jüdisch-hellenistischer Historiker* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1976), 121–26; Carl R. Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism: A Critique of the Use of This Category in New Testament Christology* (SBLDS 40; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 199–232; Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 155–60; Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 37–46; Nikolaus Walter, “Der Mose-Roman des Artapanus und die Frage nach einer Theios-Anēr-Vorstellung im hellenistischen Judentum sowie nach ‘paganen’ Einflüssen auf die neutestamentliche Christologie,” in *Jüdische Schriften in ihrem antik-jüdischen und urchristlichen Kontext* (ed. Hermann Lichtenberger and Gerbern S. Oegema; Studien zu den Jüdischen Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit 1; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002), 284–303 esp. 288–93; John B. Weaver, *Plots of Epiphany: Prison-Escape in Acts of the Apostles* (BZNW 131; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 64–78; Howard Jacobson, “Artapanus Judaeus,” *JJS* 57 (2006): 210–21.

<sup>74</sup> The fragments are collected with text-critical apparatus and annotated translation in Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors I: Historians* (Pseudepigrapha Series 10; Chico, Calif: Scholars Press, 1983), 189–243. Translations are mine throughout.

second century BCE. A *terminus post quem* is established by his use of the Septuagint and the strong likelihood that his work responds to Manetho's (third-century) anti-Jewish account of Egyptian history.<sup>75</sup> His *terminus ante quem* is Alexander Polyhistor (first century BCE) who extracted his work.<sup>76</sup> Much more difficult to establish, however, are his religious loyalties and literary aims. The greatest interpretive challenge arises, as I discuss below, from his remarkably favorable presentation of Egyptian religion, which has proven difficult for scholars to reconcile with his identity as a Jew.

A brief summary of the Moses fragment will be valuable. It begins with the transition of power in Egypt to Palmanothes, who began to mistreat the Jews (3.1-2). His daughter Merris was barren and adopted Moses as her own child (3.3). The first half of the fragment (3.1-21) is largely devoted to presenting Moses as the great benefactor of Egyptian civilization: "when he became a man, he furnished many useful things to humans" (ἀνδρωθέντα δ' αὐτὸν πολλὰ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις εὐχρηστα παραδοῦναι, 3.4). The Greeks identify him as "Mousaios," the teacher of Orpheus through whom sacred wisdom came to the Greeks (3.3-4).<sup>77</sup> In addition to the inventions of ships, machines, weapons, philosophy, and writing, he is attributed with dividing Egypt into 36 nomes and assigning gods to each of them, including "cats, dogs, and ibises" (3.4). He also discovered the usefulness of oxen for tilling which results in the establishment of the cult of Apis (3.12). Not only was Moses the founder of Egypt's animal cults, he himself "was deemed worthy of honor equal to the gods by the priests" (ὑπὸ τῶν ἱερέων ἰσοθέου τιμῆς

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<sup>75</sup> Manetho's account is summarized and refuted by Josephus in *C. Ap.* 1.228-230; see Braun, *History and Romance*, 26-27; Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 39-41.

<sup>76</sup> Collins suggests a date anywhere between 250-100 BCE (*Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 38-39).

<sup>77</sup> This is a reversal of the Greek tradition, which gives precedence to Orpheus.

καταξιωθέντα, 3.6). He was “addressed as Hermes because of his interpretation of the sacred writings” (προσαγορευθῆναι Ἑρμῆν, διὰ τὴν τῶν ἱερῶν γραμμάτων ἑρμηνείαν, 3.6) and subsequently because of its power to perform miracles in the plagues, “the Egyptians consecrate his rod in every temple, as they also do for Isis” (τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους τὴν ῥάβδον ἀνατιθέναι εἰς πᾶν ἱερόν, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τῇ Ἴσιδι, 3.32). In spite of his loyalty to the monarch (“he did all these things in order to defend the monarchy as secure for Chenephres,” ταῦτα δὲ πάντα ποιῆσαι χάριν τοῦ τὴν μοναρχίαν βεβαίαν τῷ Χενεφρῆ διαφυλάξαι, 3.5), the king became jealous (3.7). A series of conflicts ensue. Plots are hatched against Moses’ life; he flees to Arabia and finally returns prepared to lead an army against the Egyptians (3.13-21). In the second half of the fragment (3.22-37), the emphasis shifts to Moses’ miraculous powers. When Moses returns to Egypt after his flight, “having taken courage [from his encounter with God at the burning bush], he intended to lead a military force against the Egyptians” (τὸν δὲ θαρρήσαντα δύναμιν πολεμίαν ἐπάγειν διαγνῶναι τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις, 3.22). The king summons him to ask why he has come; Moses replies that “the lord of the world orders him to release the Jews” (προστάσσειν αὐτῷ τὸν τῆς οἰκουμένης δεσπότην ἀπολῦσαι τοὺς Ἰουδαίους, 3.22), in response to which the king imprisons him. He escapes miraculously and returns to address the king (3.23-25, quoted below). Thereafter, the Jews are released only as a result of several plagues that Moses inflicts upon the Egyptians. The last of these is a combination of hail and earthquakes with the result that results in the destruction of houses and temples (3.33, quoted below). Upon their release, the Jews plunder the goods of the Egyptians who are destroyed in the sea while in pursuit (3.28-37).

This brief summary reveals the extent to which Artapanus has freely adapted and diverged from the biblical account of Exodus. That he knew and used the Septuagint is certain.<sup>78</sup> Yet, his version of the life of Moses incorporates a remarkable range of religious and legendary traditions, attributing to Moses the accomplishments of various heroes and gods. Based on these features, Braun situated Artapanus' "Moses Romance" within other popular literature of the Hellenistic east, in which individual legendary figures took on an increasing number of deeds and qualities as a way of expressing "national antagonisms."<sup>79</sup> Artapanus represents the earliest example of a Jewish "national romance," portraying Moses as a composite figure, who was Egypt's greatest benefactor, in order to counter contemporary accounts which portrayed Moses and the Jews negatively.<sup>80</sup> According to Braun, Artapanus wrote a sort of Jewish apologetic, seeking to enhance the status of Jews in Egypt. Thus, Moses is responsible for a number of accomplishments traditionally attributed by Egyptians to the legendary hero Sesostris.<sup>81</sup> He also surpasses the deeds of gods; whereas Hermes is the traditional inventor of hieroglyphics and even Isis herself was taught by Hermes (Diod. 1.17.3; 1.27.4), Artapanus credits Moses with this thus supplanting them both (3.6).

A related theory is advanced by Weinreich, who argues that Artapanus composed a "Mosesbios" according to the "hellenistischen Ideal des θεῖος ἀνὴρ."<sup>82</sup> His study consists largely of a form-critical analysis of ancient *Befreiungswunder* and notes that

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<sup>78</sup> See Holladay, *Fragments: Historians*, 192 n. 19.

<sup>79</sup> Braun, *History and Romance*, 1–6 (at 4).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 26–31. For a discussion of various anti-Jewish adaptations of Exodus, see Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 41–72.

<sup>81</sup> See, e.g., Herodotus 2.102–11; Diodorus 1.54–58. For further discussion, see Braun, *History and Romance*, 26; Tiede, *Charismatic Figure*, 153–55.

<sup>82</sup> Weinreich, *Gebet und Wunder*, 299.

such narratives belong primarily to Dionysiac mythology and legends of divine men, such as Apollonius of Tyana. While Weinreich's treatment of Artapanus has been widely influential, it has not gone unchallenged. David Tiede's work on the category of *theios aner* in antiquity provides a significant criticism of Weinreich's work. His central insight is that there was not a single model for the *theios aner*; rather, the *theios aner* in the Hellenistic period can be seen as broadly developing in two directions. One is the man of philosophical virtue, exemplified for example by Plato's Socrates; the other is the miracle worker, often found in the context of religious and cultic propaganda. Tiede demonstrates the existence of these two types within Hellenistic Judaism by comparing various treatments of Moses as divine figure.<sup>83</sup> Philo and Josephus are exponents of the former type in contrast to Artapanus, whose Moses conforms to the latter.<sup>84</sup> Yet, even here Tiede argues that Artapanus' presentation of Moses is better understood in relationship with the romantic legends of Sesostris than the Hellenistic divine man as Weinreich proposed.<sup>85</sup> Building on Tiede's work, Carl Holladay similarly argues that Artapanus was interested in "a pro-Egyptian Moses, and it seems never to occurred to him that designating any of Israel's heroes as *theios aner* would have any propagandistic value."<sup>86</sup>

Most scholars maintain that Artapanus' literary objectives were largely apologetic and propagandistic, aimed at refuting anti-Jewish polemic. Some elements of the text, however, complicate this thesis. As Tiede observes, Artapanus' assertion that the Jews plundered Egyptian property (3.34-35), particularly when the biblical narrative has the

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<sup>83</sup> Tiede, *Charismatic Figure*, 101–240.

<sup>84</sup> On Philo, Josephus, and Artapanus, see respectively *ibid.*, 101–37, 207–40, 146–77.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 152–60.

<sup>86</sup> Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism*, 232.

Egyptians giving the Jews their goods, would hardly serve as effective apologetic. Tiede, therefore, regards Artapanus' audience as "a Jewish population which was in danger of losing its national identity under Egyptian domination."<sup>87</sup> Other features have caused some to question Artapanus' Jewish identity altogether. That Moses was "deemed worthy of honor equal to the gods" (3.6) or that he was the inventor of animal cults can scarcely pass as "orthodox" Judaism. Consequently, in his influential work on Artapanus, Jacob Freudenthal suggested that Artapanus was a Jew writing under the guise of a Gentile.<sup>88</sup> Although this theory has not been widely adopted, Howard Jacobson has recently called for a reevaluation of Artapanus' identification with Judaism.<sup>89</sup> He maintains that a Jewish writer could not have presented animal worship in such a favorable light. Moreover, it is not the case, as some scholars suppose, that in order to produce a positive portrayal of a culture one must necessarily be part of that culture; indeed, other ancient authors have done analogous things, most famously Herodotus on the Egyptians.<sup>90</sup> A more nuanced alternative is offered by Nikolaus Walter.<sup>91</sup> He is confident of Artapanus' Jewish identity; yet he is not satisfied with characterizing Artapanus' incorporation of Egyptian religious elements as "syncretism."<sup>92</sup> He suggests, rather, that more attention to the work's use of irony is needed. For

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<sup>87</sup> Tiede, *Charismatic Figure*, 176. As Collins suggests, however, regarding Diaspora literature, outward apologetics and an internal Jewish audience may not be mutually exclusive (*Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 14–16). Consequently, Artapanus' "propaganda is directed to both Gentile and Jew, with the complementary objectives of inspiring respect from without and self-respect from within" (44).

<sup>88</sup> Freudenthal, *Hellenistische Studien*, 150–51.

<sup>89</sup> Jacobson, "Artapanus Judaicus."

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 216–19. It is interesting to note that, whatever scholars might theorize regarding Artapanus' intended audience, the first concrete evidence of someone reading Artapanus is from the "pagan," Alexander Polyhistor.

<sup>91</sup> Walter, "Der Mose-Roman des Artapanus."

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 291–93.

example, the attribution of divine honor to Moses is made by the Egyptian priests and thus functions as a demonstration of their gullibility.<sup>93</sup>

In this way, two central interpretive challenges in the study of Artapanus can be viewed as fundamentally interrelated: the nature of his Jewish identity and the degree of his literary sophistication. Among those who wish to “save” his Jewish identity (and most scholars do) in spite of his positive treatment of polytheism, some have characterized him as an inferior intellect. Holladay, for example, asserts, “[f]ar from being a creative piece of work, it merely assembles traditions and legends indiscriminately.” It is “a type of popular Jewish propaganda capable of being produced within the lower classes,” perhaps of the sort one might encounter in a synagogue sermon.<sup>94</sup> More recent assessments have acknowledged aspects of literary sophistication. Erich Gruen, for example, emphasizes Artapanus’ use of wit and playfulness. Far from being a thoughtless compiler of traditional materials, Artapanus “relished the process of inverting and reshaping traditions.” He employed “a caprice and whimsy that tampered liberally with the Scriptures and inverted or transposed Gentile traditions to place the figures of Jewish legend at the center [...] What stands out is not so much polemics as invective imagination.”<sup>95</sup> Within this larger debate over Artapanus’ religious identity and literary capabilities, therefore, an examination of his relationship with Euripides’ *Bacchae* provides a valuable test case.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 289. Other scholars have similarly recognized that Artapanus’ “positive” presentation of Egyptian religion is not as straightforward as it may appear; see, for example, Tiede, *Charismatic Figure*, 161; Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism*, 229–31; Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 155–60. Collins notes that Artapanus provides a euhemeristic interpretation of the Egyptian divinities—they only worship animals that Moses deemed useful to humanity—whereas Artapanus never treated the God of the Jews in this way (*Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 42–43).

<sup>94</sup> Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism*, 217.

<sup>95</sup> Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 159–60.

#### 4.3.2 ARTAPANUS AND EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*

Among the many extra-biblical features Artapanus introduces into his Moses narrative, two resemble Euripides' *Bacchae*: the miraculous prison escape (3.23-25) and the destruction of houses and temples by earthquakes (3.33). In Euripides' tragedy, there are two miraculous prison escapes: first, the bacchantes whom Pentheus had imprisoned went free (*Bacch.* 443-50); later, Pentheus imprisons Dionysus who frees himself with his own miraculous power (509-656). This latter escape occurs amidst lightning and earthquakes that destroy Pentheus' palace. Artapanus' prison escape narrative is as follows:

(23) τὸν δὲ πυθόμενον εἰς φυλακὴν αὐτὸν καθεῖρξαι· νυκτὸς δὲ ἐπιγενομένης τὰς τε θύρας πάσας αὐτομάτως ἀνοιχθῆναι τοῦ δεσμωτηρίου καὶ τῶν φυλάκων οὓς μὲν τελευτῆσαι, τινὰς δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ ὕπνου παρεθῆναι τὰ τε ὄπλα κατεαγῆναι. (24) ἐξελθόντα δὲ τὸν Μῶυσον ἐπὶ τὰ βασιλεία ἐλθεῖν· εὐρόντα δὲ ἀνεωγμένας τὰς θύρας εἰσελθεῖν καὶ ἐνθάδε τῶν φυλάκων παρεμμένων τὸν βασιλέα ἐξεγεῖραι. τὸν δὲ ἐκπλαγέντα ἐπὶ τῷ γεγονότι κελεῦσαι τῷ Μῶυσῳ τὸ τοῦ πέμψαντος αὐτὸν θεοῦ εἰπεῖν ὄνομα, διαχλευάσαντα αὐτόν· (25) τὸν δὲ προσκύψαντα πρὸς τὸ οὖς εἰπεῖν, ἀκούσαντα δὲ τὸν βασιλέα πεσεῖν ἄφωνον, διακρατηθέντα δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ Μῶυσου πάλιν ἀναβιῶσαι·

(23) And when [the king] learned this, he confined [Moses] in prison. When night came on, all the doors of the prison opened spontaneously and some of the guards died and some were overcome by sleep and their weapons were shattered. (24) When Moses came out, he went to the palace; finding the doors had been opened, he entered and there, while the guards were overcome, he awoke the king. He was amazed at what had happened and ordered Moses to say the name of the God who had sent him, mocking him. (25) He leaned forward and spoke it in his ear; the king heard it and fell down mute but after he was lifted up by Moses, he came back to life again. (3.23-25)

The starting point for an exploration of Artapanus' source(s) is the biblical narratives; indeed, Weinreich began his analysis with the observation that there are no

substantial biblical parallels to Artapanus' invention.<sup>96</sup> Not only is Moses not imprisoned in the biblical Exodus or any other known version of the story, a central feature of the narrative—spontaneously opening doors (αὐτομάτως)—has no basis in any other Jewish *Befreiungswunder*. Weinreich surveys other passages in the Hebrew Bible where there are *Befreiungswunder* in order to demonstrate that in contrast to Artapanus these texts emphasize *Yahweh's* power to perform acts of deliverance.<sup>97</sup> Two passages are noteworthy. First, Psalm 107:10-16, in the context of extolling *Yahweh* for his acts of deliverance in both(?) exile and the exodus, describes salvation as release from prison. Here Weinreich observes that in this text the emphasis is on *Yahweh's* activities and has nothing reflecting the αὐτομάτως of Artapanus. Although this text indicates that in one tradition, at least, the exodus could be described in language of prison escape, Psalm 107 makes no suggestion of Moses himself as victim of imprisonment, nor does the language from the Psalm imply Artapanus' dependence on it.<sup>98</sup> A stronger verbal parallel is found in LXX Isaiah 45:1, where *Yahweh* declares regarding Cyrus, "I shall open up doors before him" (ἀνοίξω ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ θύρας). The combination of ἀνοίγω and θύρα also occurs twice in Artapanus' prison narrative (3.23, 24). It should be noted, however, that Isaiah 45 has no explicit connection with Moses, the exodus, or an actual prison. Moreover, Artapanus' passive verbs (ἀνοιχθῆναι; ἀνεωγμένας) and adverb αὐτομάτως, contrast with Isaiah's first-person active, ἀνοίξω.

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<sup>96</sup> Weinreich, *Gebet und Wunder*, 302–03.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 417–18.

<sup>98</sup> The language used, however, in both the Hebrew and Greek is sufficiently general so as to apply to slavery, not necessarily prison; see, e.g., אֲסִירֵי עֲנִי וּבְרוּל, πεπεδημένους ἐν πτωχεία καὶ σιδήρῳ, "those bound in affliction and iron" (Ps 107:10); וּמוֹסְרוֹתֵיהֶם יִתַּק, καὶ τοὺς δεσμοὺς αὐτῶν διέρρηξεν, "and he shattered their bonds" (Ps 107:14).

Another noteworthy extra-biblical addition to Artapanus' narrative, though not included in Weinreich's analysis, is the earthquakes and destruction of buildings. Throughout 3.28-32, Artapanus freely reworks the biblical plagues and in this last case he combines the seventh biblical plague of hail from Exodus 9:19-34 with earthquakes.

τὸν Μώϋσον χάλαζάν τε καὶ σεισμοὺς διὰ νυκτὸς ἀποτελέσαι, ὥστε τοὺς τὸν σεισμὸν φεύγοντας ἀπὸ τῆς χαλάζης ἀναιρεῖσθαι τοὺς τε τὴν χάλαζαν ἐκκλίνοντας ὑπὸ τῶν σεισμῶν διαφθεῖρεσθαι. συμπεσεῖν δὲ τότε τὰς μὲν οἰκίας πάσας τῶν τε ναῶν τοὺς πλείστους.

Moses brought about hail and earthquakes during the night so that those fleeing the earthquake died from the hail and those escaping the hail were destroyed by the earthquakes. Then all the houses and most of the temples fell down. (3.33)

Artapanus employs the term χάλαζα (“hail”) with which the LXX translated the Hebrew דָּבָר but its combination with earthquakes has no parallel in the narrative of Exodus. Nikolaus Walter, however, points to Psalm 77:17-19, which includes earthquakes among the deeds of Yahweh in the exodus.<sup>99</sup> This Psalm potentially helps to explain the origin of Artapanus' association of earthquakes with the exodus. The language in the Psalm, however (ἐσαλεύθη καὶ ἔντρομος ἐγενήθη ἡ γῆ, “the earth shook and began trembling,” LXX Ps 76:19), differs from Artapanus who uses σεισμὸς exclusively. Nor is there any mention in the Psalm of earthquakes resulting in the destruction of Egyptian buildings. Thus, biblical passages describing prison escapes and earthquakes in the exodus are insufficient to account for the manner in which Artapanus narrates them.

In the absence of biblical analogies to Artapanus' prison escape, Weinreich finds that his narrative has more in common with ancient Hellenistic aretalogies. “Er hat das

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<sup>99</sup> Walter, *Jüdische Schriften*, note at 3.33.

antike ἀπομάτωσ der Türöffnung vor dem θεῖος ἀνὴρ, wie wir es bei den Mysten des Dionysos und bei Apollonios von Tyana kennen lernten, schwerlich einer jüdischen Überlieferung entnommen.”<sup>100</sup> Contrary to the assumptions of later scholars, however, Weinreich never in fact argues for Artapanus’ dependence on or direct knowledge of the *Bacchae*.<sup>101</sup> Rather, in his form-critical analysis, he examines a wide range of ancient narratives containing *Türöffnung im Befreiungswunder* and identifies 12 common and recurring motifs.<sup>102</sup> Of these elements, he only finds three in Artapanus, of which only one—the spontaneously opening doors—is also found in the *Bacchae*.<sup>103</sup> Thus, although he concludes that the three narrative motifs that Artapanus shares with other ancient *Befreiungswunder* are sufficient to establish that his account was derived from Greco-Roman materials, Weinreich conceives of Artapanus’ sources as ancient aretalogies generally rather than the *Bacchae* in particular. Indeed, Weinreich contrasts Artapanus’ dependence on a Dionysian aretalogy with others, such as Ezekiel the tragedian and the Acts of the Apostles, who, he argues, employ the *Bacchae* directly as a source.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Weinreich, *Gebet und Wunder*, 302–03.

<sup>101</sup> Holladay, for example, twice states that Weinreich’s view was that Artapanus was “incorporating a scene from the *Bacchae*” (Theios Aner in *Hellenistic-Judaism*, 207, 208). Holladay also suggests (alternatively?) that Weinreich’s argument assumes “Artapanus’ acquaintance with sophisticated Greek literature, either directly or indirectly” (206). Holladay’s assessment of Weinreich has been repeated in subsequent scholarship. Weaver (a student of Holladay) avers that “Weinreich and others since him have argued for dependency on the miraculous liberations of the god Dionysus in Euripides’ *Bacchae*” (*Plots of Epiphany*, 71).

<sup>102</sup> They are: (a) during the night; (b) role for the guards; (c) shackles falling off; (d) doors opening by themselves; (e) *angelos kuriou*; (f) angel opening; (g) light shining; (i) earth and prison shaking; (j) sleep; (k) all the prisoners escape; (l) doors shut after miracle; (m) authorities participate in mistreatment or abuse (Weinreich, *Gebet und Wunder*, 329–30).

<sup>103</sup> The other two are a role for the guards (in the *Bacchae* they are sympathetic whereas in Artapanus they suffer death and sleep) and its occurrence in the night (not mentioned in the *Bacchae*). Weinreich suggests that the occurrence during the night may be lacking from Euripides’ narrative due to the limitations imposed by its performance in a theater during the day (*ibid.*, 329).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 308–09, 332–41.

I suggest, however, that Weinreich underestimates the similarities between Artapanus and the *Bacchae*. He and subsequent scholars have correctly recognized that the strongest verbal parallel is αὐτομάτως; as the doors open “spontaneously” for Moses, so also Pentheus’ servant reports that for the imprisoned Bacchants, “their bonds released from their feet spontaneously” (αὐτόματα δ’ αὐταῖς δεσμὰ διελύθη ποδῶν, 447).<sup>105</sup> Yet Weinreich’s survey of *Befreiungswunder* in ancient literature demonstrates that this motif is far too broadly attested to establish Artapanus’ literary dependence on the *Bacchae*. Further analysis, however, reveals more extensive parallels. At the narrative level, in both cases a “divine” figure arrives in the land, is summoned by the king who perceives him as a threat and imprisons him. The hero escapes through doors that open spontaneously and returns directly to the king so as to confront him and vindicate the divine authority of his mission. A conflict follows in which the king’s obstinacy leads ultimately to his own destruction. Given that (as we saw above) Artapanus has taken over the deeds of several other heroes and gods from various Greek and Egyptian sources into his Moses narrative, the attribution of Dionysiac miracles to Moses coheres well with his larger narrative strategies. Indeed, one of Artapanus’ aims in taking over such feats is to establish the divine sanction of Moses’ larger activities over against a hostile tyrant, an analogous function to the escape of Dionysus in Euripides’ narrative.

Moreover, there is a striking similarity in the reactions of Artapanus’ king and Euripides’ Lydian maenads. When the king sees Moses after his escape, “he was amazed at what had happened” (τὸν δὲ ἐκπλαγέντα ἐπὶ τῷ γεγονότι, 3.24). After asking Moses

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<sup>105</sup> Although in the *Bacchae* it is “bonds” (δεσμὰ) not “doors” (θύραι) as in Artapanus that open “spontaneously,” in the next line Pentheus’ servant adds that “keys opened doors without a mortal hand” (κλῆιδές τ’ ἀνήκαν θύρετρα ἄνευ θνητῆς χερρός, *Bacch.* 448), employing θύρετρα, which is related to Artapanus’ θύραι.

the name of his God, “the king heard it and fell down mute but after he was lifted up by Moses, he came back to life again” (ἀκούσαντα δὲ τὸν βασιλέα πεσεῖν ἄφωνον, διακρατηθέντα δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ Μωϋσοῦ πάλιν ἀναβιώσαι, 3.25). Analogously, when Dionysus reappears onto the stage among the chorus of maenads after his escape from prison, he asks them, “are you so struck with fear that you have fallen to the ground” (οὕτως ἐκπεπληγμένοι φόβῳ πρὸς πέδῳ πεπτώκατ’, *Bacch.* 604-05). He then orders them to “stand up and take courage” (ἐξανίστατε σῶμα καὶ θαρσεῖτε, 606-07). In both cases, therefore, the amazement (ἐκπλήσσω) of the observers causes them to fall to the ground (πίπτω), and the released hero subsequently returns them to standing.

Other (perhaps less precise) similarities between Artapanus and the *Bacchae* can be observed. In Euripides’ narrative of Dionysus’ prison escape (*Bacch.* 509-656), a central focus is the occurrence of lightning and earthquakes that destroy the palace. In a manner reminiscent of the *Bacchae*, Artapanus adds earthquakes and their destruction of houses and temples to the biblical plague of hail.<sup>106</sup> In Artapanus, however, the earthquakes do not occur as part of the prison miracle. In addition to earthquakes, the inducement of sleep upon the guards in 3.23 resembles an important attribute of Dionysus in the *Bacchae*. Although sleep is not directly part of Euripides’ prison escape narratives,

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<sup>106</sup> See Jacobson, “Artapanus Judaeus,” 212 n. 6: “The earthquake and the collapse of the temples—neither in the Biblical narrative—suspiciously recall the earthquake and palace’s collapse at *Bacchae* 585–87.” It should be noted, however, that the term σεισμός, used three times by Artapanus, does not occur in the *Bacchae*. It is interesting that Weinreich does not mention earthquakes in his discussion of Artapanus, though they are included among the 12 common features of *Befreiungswunder*.

in a different context Teiresias praises this as one of the properties of wine, the god's benefaction (*Bacch.* 282, 385).<sup>107</sup>

These additional narrative and verbal parallels that I have adduced do not decisively establish literary dependence on the *Bacchae*; nor do they exclude the possibility that other ancient sources may also have influenced or inspired Artapanus' narrative. Indeed, scholars have proposed alternatives. Dennis MacDonald, for example, has argued that Artapanus was not inspired by a miracle of Dionysus but rather Priam's miraculous entrance and exit from the camp of Achilles in Homer's *Iliad* 24.<sup>108</sup> Tiede draws attention to "comparable features" in the legend of Sesostris' escape from a fire (Hdt. 2.107; Diod. Sic. 1.57.7-8).<sup>109</sup> That other scholars have detected various possible sources contributing to Artapanus' account highlights the need for caution in approaching his relationship to his mythological and legendary materials. Indeed, a central feature of his literary method is the conflation and transformation of a wide range of traditional materials within his own narrative. Consequently, the ability of scholars to find multiple inspirations for the same scene should not be surprising; nor are they mutually exclusive.

As noted above, Weinreich's larger conception of Artapanus' application of the Hellenistic *theios aner* has been criticized by several scholars. The question of whether and how Artapanus attributes a miracle of Dionysus to Moses is an important node in this

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<sup>107</sup> Although Weinreich includes sleep among the 12 motifs in ancient *Befreiungswunder*, curiously in his summary comparison he does not mention that Artapanus includes this element, whereas he indicates that Euripides does (*Gebet und Wunder*, 330).

<sup>108</sup> Dennis R. MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 128–29.

<sup>109</sup> Tiede, *Charismatic Figure*, 165–68. Holladay sees this parallel as "farfetched" (*Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism*, 206 n. 30). Tiede, however, does not overstate his case: "The Moses legend does not parallel this escape story closely enough to suggest any direct associations, but the marvelous escape of the romantic hero is fully consistent with the expectation of such popular legends that the hero would be confirmed by miraculous and magical displays" (*Charismatic Figure*, 167).

debate.<sup>110</sup> Holladay advances the most pointed criticism of the view that “Artapanus incorporates a similar prison-escape scene [to that in the *Bacchae*] into his Moses romance, replaces Dionysus with Moses, allowing the reader to draw the obvious conclusion.”<sup>111</sup> There are two central facets to Holladay’s argument. First, he suggests that in Artapanus’ narrative it is Yahweh whose miraculous power is emphasized not Moses’ and thus Yahweh not Moses would serve as Dionysus’ competitor. Holladay states that the prison scene (3.23-25) is inserted “precisely at the point where Yahweh, not Moses, has been thrust into the center of the stage. In F 3.1-20 Moses is featured alone, whereas in 3.21-39 he is paired with ὁ θεός.”<sup>112</sup> Indeed, as Holladay observes, Moses’ imprisonment results from his claim to be sent by the “lord of the world” (τὸν τῆς οἰκουμένης δεσπότην, 3.22) and following the prison scene in 3.26, “it is the name of Yahweh, not Moses, which has magical powers.”<sup>113</sup> Holladay’s insistence, however, that in the prison scene “it is Yahweh [not Moses] who is being introduced [by Artapanus] as the real competitor of Dionysus” is not as unambiguous as he suggests.<sup>114</sup> Within the prison escape scene itself, the miracles are not explicitly attributed to *any* particular divinity. Rather, doors “open” with passive verbs, in the first instance “spontaneously” (τάς τε θύρας πάσας αὐτομάτως ἀνοιχθῆναι, 3.23; ἀνεωγμένας τὰς θύρας, 3.24).

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<sup>110</sup> In his criticism of Weinreich’s use of this (and other) miracle(s) to classify Artapanus’ account of Moses as a *bios* of a *theios aner*, Tiede makes no mention of its similarities with the *Bacchae*. Rather, he asserts that “the parochial legends of Egyptian national heroes ought to be examined before citing Artapanus as evidence of the emergence of a general Hellenistic conception of the divine man” (*Charismatic Figure*, 165–68 at 166).

<sup>111</sup> Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism*, 205–09 (at 205–06).

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 208. After Moses speaks the name of his θεός in 3.25 and writes it on a tablet in 3.26, however, Moses proceeds to perform miracles and inflict plagues on Egypt with no mention of God (3.27-36). Only at the very end, does God reappear once more in the narrative to give the Israelites bread in the desert (3.37).

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

Moreover, the agent causing the infliction upon the guards is likewise unspecified (οὐς μὲν τελευτήσαι, τινὰς δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ ὕπνου παρεθῆναι τὰ τε ὄπλα κατεαγῆναι, 3.23).<sup>115</sup> At least one ancient reader found Artapanus' ambiguity on this point unsatisfactory. The revision of Artapanus preserved by Clement (frag. 3b) eliminates αὐτομάτως so that "the prison opened by the will of God" (ἀνοιχθέντος τοῦ δεσμωτηρίου κατὰ βούλησιν τοῦ θεοῦ, 3b. 2) and also omits the afflictions on the guards.<sup>116</sup> The need (for Clement or his source) to "improve" upon Artapanus' narrative by explicitly mentioning God's intervention suggests that, in contrast to Holladay's assertion, Artapanus' original version may not have sufficiently moved Yahweh to center stage.

A second facet of Holladay's argument depends on assessments of Artapanus' literary and intellectual capabilities. He observes that employing a scene from the *Bacchae* "and shifting Yahweh into the center of the stage would have achieved tactical advantage and thus have served his propagandistic ends, but it would presume an intellectual subtlety not everyone is willing to grant Artapanus."<sup>117</sup> Holladay's appraisal of Artapanus' lack of "intellectual subtlety" is not unfounded; judging by the fragments we have, most scholars conclude that his is not a high level of literary achievement. That Artapanus has not produced a piece of high literature, however, should not lead to the conclusion that it does not employ subtle ironies to gain "tactical advantage." Indeed, scholars have become increasingly aware his creativity and ingenuity. Walter, for example, as noted above, suggests that Artapanus' portrayal of Moses is not simplistic

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<sup>115</sup> τελευτήσαι is intransitive; παρεθῆναι and κατεαγῆναι are passive.

<sup>116</sup> There is general consensus that Clement's fragment represents a secondary revision, either his own or more likely his source; see Weinreich, *Gebet und Wunder*, 303; Holladay, *Fragments: Historians*, 192.

<sup>117</sup> Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism*, 208.

syncretism but rather marked by polemical irony.<sup>118</sup> Thus, one’s assessment of Artapanus’ literary capabilities should not pre-determine one’s judgment of whether and how he might use his literary sources. Analyses should rather proceed in the opposite direction. In sum, Holladay’s arguments against Artapanus’ narrative containing a transformation of material from Euripides’ *Bacchae* are inadequate.<sup>119</sup>

An additional observation from the immediate context suggests that the prison escape scene should be read against the background of Dionysiac religion. Directly after Moses’ escape, “[the king] wrote the name [of Moses’ God] on a tablet and sealed it. One of the priests debased the things written in the tablet and departed from his life with a convulsion” (γράφαντα δὲ τοῦνομα εἰς δέλτον κατασφραγίσασθαι τῶν τε ἱερέων τὸν φαυλίσαντα ἐν τῇ πινακίδι τὰ γεγραμμένα μετὰ σπασμοῦ τὸν βίον ἐκλιμπάνειν, 3:26). Lucien Cerfaux proposes that underlying this invention of Artapanus is the famous Ptolemaic decree regarding the Dionysiac mysteries (*BGU* 1211).<sup>120</sup> In this edict, generally thought to come from the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator (221-205 BCE), it was decreed that all “who perform initiations for Dionysus throughout the country, sailing to Alexandria” (τοὺς κατὰ τὴν χώραν τελοῦντα[ς] τῷ Διονύσῳ καταπλεῖν εἰς Ἀλε[ξ]άνδρειαν) must register with an official, one Aristobulus. The most striking similarity with Artapanus is that these officials must register themselves and “submit

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<sup>118</sup> Walter, “Der Mose-Roman des Artapanus,” 292–93; see also Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 159–60, quoted above.

<sup>119</sup> It should be noted that Holladay leaves open the possibility that Artapanus may have known or used the *Bacchae*, directly or indirectly. His central interest is maintaining that Artapanus’ presentation of Moses as *theios aner* was not shaped by Euripides’ representation of Dionysus. “The *theios aner* concept is alien to the *Sitz im Leben* out of which Artapanus springs.” If he is borrowing motifs from the *Bacchae*, “he seems to be countering Dionysiac traditions by shifting Yahweh to the center of the stage *vis à vis* Dionysus” (*Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism*, 231–32).

<sup>120</sup> Cerfaux, “Influence des mystères,” 81–83. On the decree, see § 2.2 above. The text follows Marie-Thérèse Lenger, *Corpus des ordonnances des Ptolémées (C. Ord. Ptol.)* (Brussels: Academie royale de Belgique, 1964), 71 no. 29; it is also printed in Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 2.345 n. 114.

their sealed *hieros logos*, after writing each individual name” (διδόναι τὸν ἱερόν λόγον ἐ[σφ]ραγίς[μένον] ἐπιγράψαντα [[τὸ ὄνομα]] ἕκαστ[ον] τὸ ἀψ[το]ῦ ὄνομα). As Cerfaux points out, in both Artapanus frag. 3.26 and *BGU* 1211, a king wishes to learn the *hieros logos* of a “foreign” cult and have it sealed. In Artapanus’ narrative, the tablet produces the magical effect one might expect from such a sacred writing; the difference is, however, that in Artapanus’ account, it is only the sacred name of the Jewish God that functions as the *hieros logos*.<sup>121</sup>

Cerfaux supports his interpretation of Artapanus by reading it in conjunction with 3 Maccabees where Philopator is the central antagonist.<sup>122</sup> In this latter narrative, Philopator’s conflict with the Jews consists in large part in his attempt to enforce Dionysiac religion upon them (esp. 3 Macc 2:28-30). Cerfaux views 3 Maccabees as reflecting a memory of some actual historical persecution under the reign of Philopator (not merely of events during Caligula’s rule) and notes the long established identification of Dionysus with Yahweh (i.e., Sabaoth = Sabiazos-Dionysus). He proposes that the king, in an attempt to consolidate political and religious cohesion in his empire, may very well have sought to forcefully establish Dionysiac cult among the Jews, particularly in view of his own Dionysiac commitments and the common association made by Greeks of the Jewish God with Dionysus. Consequently, Cerfaux proposes that the Jews themselves may have been somehow entailed in the Ptolemaic decree regulating the incursion of foreign *hieroi logoi*.<sup>123</sup> If this theory is valid, Artapanus’ narrative, by illustrating the disastrous results upon the Egyptians for their attempt to record and seal

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<sup>121</sup> Cerfaux, “Influence des mystères,” 83.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 83–85.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

the name of the Jewish God, advances a subtle polemic against attempts by the Ptolemies to regulate Jewish religion as they did with that of Dionysus. Furthermore, if Artapanus is responding to this decree and supplanting the *hieros logos* of the Dionysiac mysteries with the name of Yahweh, then it is natural to read the prison escape against a Dionysiac background. Indeed, by attributing a Dionysiac prison escape to Moses, Artapanus has expressed the superiority of Moses to Dionysus as he does by attributing to Yahweh's name the miraculous powers of a *hieros logos* of Dionysus.<sup>124</sup>

#### 4.3.3 ARTAPANUS: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

My analysis of Artapanus' Moses fragment has suggested Moses' prison escape shares greater similarities with those in Euripides' *Bacchae* than scholars have previously appreciated. Both belong to a narrative context in which the protagonist confronts an unjust tyrant who imprisons him in response to a perceived threat. Both heroes subsequently escape through spontaneously opening doors, return to confront the king and vindicate their mission. Those who subsequently see the hero fall to the ground from amazement in response to which the hero raises them back to their feet. In both cases the king's unrelenting opposition results in his own destruction. Among the consequences of the king's opposition are earthquakes that cause the destruction of buildings. These parallels may not be sufficient to establish direct literary dependence; they nevertheless point strongly to Artapanus' use of a closely related source of Dionysiac mythology.

Furthermore, the attribution of a feat of Dionysus to Moses is consistent with Artapanus'

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<sup>124</sup> It is worth noting that the function of the divine name as a *hieros logos* in Artapanus contrasts with the ordinary content of *hieroi logoi* in Greek religion, which consisted of mythological material or ritual utterances; for a fuller discussion, see Albert Henrichs, "'Hieroi Logoi' and 'Hierai Bibloi': The (Un)Written Margins of the Sacred in Ancient Greece," *HSCP* 101 (2003): 207–66.

larger aim of demonstrating that Moses surpasses even the gods (cf., e.g., Hermes' invention of Hieroglyphs). Moreover, his treatment of the name of the Jewish God as a *hieros logos* with miraculous powers in the context of the prison escape corroborates Artapanus' intention to supplant Dionysus.

These observations have implications for our larger understanding of Artapanus. It should not be assumed, for example, that by attributing a Dionysiac miracle to Moses Artapanus is attempting to portray him as a Hellenistic divine man. Indeed, when the subtle and subversive nature of his literary transformations is more fully appreciated, his attribution of a miracle of Dionysus to Moses does not read as a straightforward Hellenistic deification of the latter. Rather, Artapanus has produced an entertaining narrative in which he has freely adapted his materials so that Moses outshines as many Greek and Egyptian gods and heroes as possible. It seems unlikely that his narrative would have played well with a Gentile audience, though Alexander Polyhistor deemed it worth extracting in part. Certainly some Alexandrian Jews must have found amusement in this retelling of the exodus. It seems unwarranted, however, to draw strong conclusions regarding Artapanus' Jewish identity or orthodoxy based upon a work that is more a romance than serious biblical exegesis.

#### 4.4 CONCLUSIONS

The encounter between Judaism and Hellenism is a complex and dynamic process in which the Jews sought to navigate their identity amid the cultural and political hegemony of Greek and Roman imperial power. The diversity and creativity involved in these cultural negotiations can be seen in many facets of Jewish life during this period.

Exploring these historical and literary phenomena under the rubric of Dionysus and Euripides' *Bacchae* proves to be a productive means for elucidating various literatures of Hellenistic Judaism. In this chapter, I have explored how in both the Wisdom of Solomon and Artapanus' Moses fragment the biblical presentation of exodus and conquest are reinvented with reference to the *Bacchae*. Wisdom creates a portrait of ancient Canaanite religion as consisting of cannibalistic child sacrifice in order to justify and explain the divine justice and intervention in the conquest of their land. In his depiction of their rites, he employs the language of Greek tragedy, where such slaughters are common. The parallels with Agave's killing of Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae* are particularly rich and suggest that the author portrayed Canaanite religion as akin to Dionysiac *thiasoi* and mystery cults so as to simultaneously implicate his contemporaries. Moreover, both the *Bacchae* and Wisdom problematize prevailing notions of Greek and barbarian, indigenous and foreign, which for Jews in Roman Alexandria would have particular salience. Indeed, this challenge is inherent in the very nature of Dionysus.

Like Wisdom, Artapanus reinvents a biblical story. In his *Concerning the Jews*, he produces a portrait of Moses that presents him as Egyptian civilization's greatest benefactor by attributing to him deeds traditionally associated with gods and heroes. Among these, the prison escape narrative resembles similar miracles in Euripides' *Bacchae*, most strikingly, in that the escape occurs through spontaneously opening doors. Moreover, both narratives present the arrival of a "divine" figure in the land and his imprisonment by a hostile tyrant, who even after the hero is vindicated by the miraculous escape continues in his opposition and is consequently destroyed. Whether or not Artapanus is directly dependent on the *Bacchae* is less important than that he has taken

over a Dionysiac miracle in order to demonstrate the superiority of Moses and his God to Dionysus while subtly subverting the position of Dionysiac religion in Alexandrian culture. Artapanus' blending of religious and literary traditions indicates less about his Jewish identity than it does about his ironic and subversive literary style.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA'S DIONYSIAC AND TRAGIC AMBIVALENCES

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The foregoing chapter explored various ways in which Jews encountered Dionysus and Greek tragedy as factor in the process of Hellenization. Both the Wisdom of Solomon and Artapanus' Moses fragment reinvent Israel's foundation narratives while employing scenes reminiscent of Euripides' *Bacchae*. In both cases, these literary strategies are aimed at glorifying Jewish origins while at the same time subverting the claims of contemporary Greco-Roman religion. In this chapter, I investigate Philo of Alexandria's interactions with Dionysus and Greek tragedy. Philo was broadly acquainted with both.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, although the analysis in this chapter is not of Euripides' *Bacchae* in particular, it provides important insights into the ways Jews encountered these two pervasive features of Hellenistic culture. The degree of Philo's integration of Judaism and its scriptures with Hellenistic philosophy and literature is unsurpassed by any other author of his age. A reconstruction or review of the wider contours of Philo's thought throughout his extensive corpus is beyond the scope of this chapter.<sup>2</sup> Here, I limit my analysis to two of Philo's treatises, both of which employ a

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding tragedy, for example, Philo both describes his experience attending the theater (*Prob.* 141; *Ebr.* 177) and frequently quotes from plays. On Philo's use of Euripides, see, e.g., H. Funke, "Euripides," *JAC* 8/9 (1965-1966): 233-79, esp. 253.

<sup>2</sup> Many valuable studies of Philo are available; the most comprehensive study is Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1947); for a concise overview of Philo's thought, see Henry Chadwick, "Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (ed. A. H. Armstrong; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 137-57;

different strategy of “reading” Dionysus. In the *Legatio ad Gaium*, Philo criticizes both the Dionysiac and theatrical aspirations of the emperor. In his interpretation of biblical teachings regarding wine and drunkenness in *De ebrietate*, Philo employs anti-Dionysiac hermeneutics so as to construct ideal piety over against the experience of Dionysiac religion. Over the course of the following discussion, it will become clear that Philo’s interest in Dionysus and Greek tragedy intersects in several important ways with those of the Wisdom of Solomon and Artapanus discussed in the foregoing chapter. As in their case, Philo is eager to appropriate aspects of Hellenistic culture; this dynamic process of appropriation entails transformations of both Hellenism and Judaism.

## 5.2 *LEGATIO AD GAIUM*: IMITATING DIONYSUS AND (EN)ACTING TRAGEDY

Beginning in the year 38 CE, tensions in Alexandria had escalated to the point of culminating in riots and outbreaks of violence against the Jews. These events were the result of complex political and ethnic tensions which have been well documented by historians.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of the present study, what is particularly interesting is the manner in which Philo represents the religious and political conflicts, which he discusses

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on Philo’s allegorical exegesis, see David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 73–126; helpful discussions of Philo’s intellectual, cultural, and political context are provided by Alan Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo of Alexandria* (HUCM 7; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1982); John M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (rev. ed.; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 139–83; Dorothy I. Sly, *Philo’s Alexandria* (New York: Routledge, 1996); John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 131–38; on biographical reconstruction, see Daniel R. Schwartz, “Philo, His Family, and His Times,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo* (ed. Adam Kamesar; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9–31.

<sup>3</sup> See § 4.1.1 above. For further discussion, see E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian, a Study in Political Relations* (2d ed.; SJLA 20; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 235–50; Sly, *Philo’s Alexandria*, 167–80; Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 118–22; Schwartz, “Philo, His Family, and His Times,” 27–31.

in his *Legatio ad Gaium* and *In Flaccum*. The *Legatio* consists primarily of a narrative of injustices against the Jews and his efforts as a member of an Alexandrian Jewish embassy to request the emperor Gaius to intervene on their behalf.<sup>4</sup> Underlying the conflicts was the question of the status of Jews in Alexandria. As early as the second century BCE, they were recognized as a *politeuma*, which gave them some degree of civic autonomy. Moreover, they were accorded freedoms to practice their own religion. Nevertheless, for the most part, they did not have the full rights of Greek citizens of Alexandria, a reality that became particularly relevant after the *laographia* imposed by Rome in 24/23 BCE (see § 4.1.1 above). The immediate cause that sparked the riots against the Jews in 38 CE was the visit of King Agrippa to Alexandria.<sup>5</sup> As Philo describes the events, Alexandrian Greeks began to use the Jews' refusal to pay divine honors to the emperor as a means of turning Roman authorities against them. Knowing that Gaius was eager to receive divine honors, the Greeks sought to ingratiate themselves to him by setting up images of Gaius in Jewish synagogues (*Legat.* 134-35). As a result of the riots, Flaccus the Roman prefect declared the Jews "foreigners and strangers" (ξένους καὶ ἐπήλυδας, *Flacc.* 54). Thus, the opponents of the Jews turned their religious commitments against them so as to reduce their social and political standing.

Two related features of the *Legatio* emerge as relevant for the present study. (i) The first is his discussion of Dionysus. Philo provides a detailed account of Gaius' divine aspirations, which he presents as a two stage process. First, "he began to liken himself to the so-called demigods" (ἤρχετο γὰρ ἐξομοιοῦν τὸ πρῶτον τοῖς λεγομένοις

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<sup>4</sup> For an introduction, text, translation, and commentary, see E. Mary Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini Legatio ad Gaium* (2d ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule*, 237–39.

ἡμιθέοις ἑαυτόν, 78).<sup>6</sup> These included Dionysus, Heracles, and the Dioscuri (78-92). Next, his madness was so great that he left behind the demigods for the full divinities: Hermes, Apollo, and Ares (93-113).<sup>7</sup> He presents a straightforward argument, applied consistently throughout these sections: because Gaius' actions for his subjects do not reflect any of the benefits to humanity attributed to these gods and demigods, he is not worthy to receive their divine honors. Regarding Dionysus, Philo lists the god's benefactions upon humanity: he "cultivated the vine and poured out from it the sweetest drink" (ἡμερώσας ἄμπελον καὶ ποτὸν ἐξ αὐτῆς ἀναχέας ἡδιστον, 82). This gift of Dionysus brings great health and happiness to humanity, "producing forgetfulness of woes and hopes for good things" (κακῶν λήθην καὶ ἀγαθῶν ἐλπίδας ἐνεργαζόμενος, 82).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Dionysus' benefactions of abundance and feasting are not limited to one ethnicity; rather, he granted it "to all cities, both Greek and barbarian" (πάσαις πόλεσιν Ἑλληνικαῖς τε καὶ βαρβαρικαῖς, 83). Here Philo appeals to a central characteristic of Dionysus: he is at once foreign and Greek, therefore, a god of both Greeks and barbarians. Thus, given that the political conflict in Alexandria under Roman administration centered on the necessity of being Greek to attain the full benefit of Alexandrian citizenship, Philo points out that Dionysus was a god who challenges the very existence of such a distinction.

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<sup>6</sup> The Greek text follows Leopold Cohn and Paul Wendland, *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt* (8 vols.; Berlin: Reimer, 1896-1930). Translations are mine throughout.

<sup>7</sup> Smallwood notes the distinctiveness of Philo's account. No other source presents the stages in Gaius' divine aspirations as moving from demigods to full divinities. Moreover, elsewhere Dionysus is often included among the 12 great gods (*Philonis Alexandrini Legatio*, 193-94).

<sup>8</sup> In the *Bacchae*, Teiresias similarly praises wine for its ability to induce "sleep, a forgetfulness of daily woes" (ὑπνον τε λήθην τῶν καθ' ἡμέραν κακῶν, 282). Moreover, Dionysus is poured out as a libation to the gods "so that because of him humans might possess good things" (ὥστε διὰ τοῦτον τὰγάθ' ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν, 285).

Philo proceeds with a series of questions aimed at highlighting the difference between Gaius and Dionysus: “Have you imitated Dionysus? Have you become an inventor of new gifts, as he has? Have you filled the inhabited world with happiness? Do Asia and Europe not easily contain the gifts produced by you?” (ἐμμήσω Διόνυσον; εὐρετῆς τῆς καινῶν γέγονας χαρίτων ὡς ἐκεῖνος; εὐφροσύνης κατέπλησας τὴν οἰκουμένην; Ἀσία καὶ Εὐρώπη τὰς ἐκ σοῦ γεγενημένας δωρεὰς οὐ χωρεῖ; 88). Philo then asserts that Gaius had indeed invented “new arts and sciences” (καινὰς μὲν οὖν τέχνας καὶ ἐπιστήμας) but these were “as a common destroyer and murderer” (ὡς κοινὸς λυμεῶν καὶ παλαμναῖος, 89). He follows with a list of these evils “invented” by Gaius and he concludes, “because of these things you have appeared to us as the New Dionysus” (διὰ ταῦτα ὁ νέος Διόνυσος ἡμῖν ἀνεφάνης, 89).<sup>9</sup> To be sure, Philo’s attribution is intended to be ironic. Nevertheless, it reveals an awareness of Dionysus’ dual nature, as both a beneficent and vindictive force. This dual nature of Dionysus is of course well known from mythology, as for example, in the *Bacchae* where he is at once gentle and destructive. It also features in other statesmen with Dionysiac aspirations. Plutarch’s assessment of Marc Antony, another “New Dionysus” (*Ant.* 60.3), provides an illuminating parallel. Antony was received in Ephesus by a Dionysiac *thiasos* that hailed him with the god’s epithets (“they called him Dionysus, giver of joy [χαριδότην] and gentle [μειλίχιον],” *Ant.* 24.3). In contrast to these Dionysiac attributes, Plutarch observes that in reality, Antony’s conduct to the Ephesians reflected the other aspect of Dionysus: “but to the masses he was raw-flesh consuming and savage” (τοῖς δὲ πολλοῖς

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<sup>9</sup> On Gaius’ title the “New Dionysus,” see also Athen., *Deipn.* 4.148d.

ὠμηστῆς καὶ ἀγριώνιος, 24.4).<sup>10</sup> Thus, for the Dionysiac statesman, both aspects of the god's nature provided potential models for imitation. As with Plutarch's Antony, Philo's Gaius embodied the latter; Philo urged him to "imitate" the former.

(ii) Closely related to Gaius' desire to liken himself to demigods and gods was his predilection for theatrical performance. Indeed, "he would take up some costume or another, as in a theater" (ὥσπερ ἐν θεάτρῳ σκευὴν ἄλλοτε ἀλλοίαν ἀνελάμβανε), at times as Heracles or the Dioscuri, "and at times he was with ivy, a thyrsus, and fawn skins, so as to train for (the role of?) Dionysus" (ἔστι δὲ ὅτε κιττῶ καὶ θύρσῳ καὶ νεβρίσιν εἰς Διόνυσον ἠσκεῖτο, *Legat.* 79).<sup>11</sup> In Roman society, acting was a morally questionable profession. Gaius' well-known desire to be an actor—he apparently performed in actual tragedies—met with strong disapproval among many Romans (Suetonius, *Cal.* 18.54-55; Dio Cassius 59.5.2-5).<sup>12</sup> In keeping with contemporary sentiment, Philo also regards actors as morally suspect. He notes Gaius' close association with Apelles, a tragic actor from Ascalon, a coastal town in Judea. For Philo, not only is Apelles' profession and consequently Gaius' connection with him problematic, he impugns all those in nearby Jamnia who attend the theater, asking ironically, "as many as go onto the stage, selling themselves to the audience, and as many as are in the theater, are they lovers of modesty and moderation rather than shamelessness and the highest disorder?" (ὅσοι δὲ σκηνοβατοῦσιν ἐμπορευόμενοι θεαταῖς καὶ θεάτροις, αἰδοῦς εἰσι καὶ σωφροσύνης ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀναισχυντίας καὶ ἀκοσμίας ἐρασταὶ τῆς ἀνωτάτω; *Legat.* 204).<sup>13</sup> Jamnia had been a

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<sup>10</sup> On Antony's assimilation with Dionysus, see also § 3.2 above.

<sup>11</sup> Athenaeus also reports that Gaius wore the costume of Dionysus (*Deipn.* 4.148d). Josephus notes that he dressed up as a woman in the Eleusinian mysteries (*A.J.* 19.30).

<sup>12</sup> See Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini Legatio*, 181.

<sup>13</sup> On Apelles, see *ibid.*, 264–65.

central node for religious and political tensions. Philo reports that Gentile inhabitants had constructed an altar in honor of Gaius in order to provoke the Jews, who, incensed at the offense, destroyed it. As a result of their action, Gaius decreed that a statue of himself be set up in the temple in Jerusalem (*Legat.* 200-03).<sup>14</sup>

For Philo, Gaius' love of performing tragedies was directly related to his mistreatment of the Jews. While in Rome, Philo learned that Gaius had ordered that a statue of himself be erected in the temple in Jerusalem (*Legat.* 188). Jews from all around the area of Syria gathered there to petition Petronius, the Roman governor. In their desperation to preserve the sanctity of the temple, they declared their willingness to submit themselves and their own families to death in exchange (233-36). "We are gladly prepared for the slaughtering: let [the Roman soldiers] slaughter, let them sacrifice, let them divide the meat without battle and without bloodshed" παρέχομεν ἐν ἐτοιμῷ τὰς σφαγὰς ἄσμενοι κτεινέτωσαν ἱερευέτωσαν, κρεανομείτωσαν ἀμαχεί καὶ ἀναιμωτί, 233). There would in fact be no need of an army: the Jewish elders offer to perform the deeds themselves.<sup>15</sup>

αὐτοὶ κατάρξομεν τῶν θυμάτων οἱ καλοὶ ἱερεῖς παραστησόμενοι τῷ ἱερῷ  
γυναῖκας οἱ γυναικοκτόνοι, ἀδελφοὺς καὶ ἀδελφὰς οἱ ἀδελφοκτόνοι, κούρους καὶ  
κόρας τὴν ἄκακον ἡλικίαν οἱ παιδοφόνται· τραγικῶν γὰρ ὀνομάτων δεῖ τοῖς τὰς  
τραγικὰς συμφορὰς ὑπομένουσιν.

We ourselves as noble priests will lead off the sacrifices, bringing to the temple wives as wife-slayers, brothers and sisters as sibling-slayers, sons and daughters at an innocent age as child-killers. For there is need of tragic language for those who endure tragic misfortunes. (234)

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<sup>14</sup> On this, see Schwartz, "Philo, His Family, and His Times," 28–29.

<sup>15</sup> Reading these comments in view of twentieth-century atrocities against Jews is deeply unsettling.

According to these Jewish elders, the need for “tragic language” (τραγικῶν ὀνομάτων) arises from the acts of shedding “kindred blood” and self-slaughter (see also 235). The ὀνόματα in view are the three terms, γυναικοκτόνος (“wife-slayer”), ἀδελφοκτόνος (“sibling-slayer”), and παιδοφόντης (“child-killer”). These could call to mind any number of scenes from classical tragedy, though they do not belong exclusively or even primarily to the language of any extant tragedies.<sup>16</sup> γυναικοκτόνος, for example, is unattested in Classical Greek, nevertheless, it readily evokes, for example, Heracles’ fit of madness in which he slew both his wife and children (Euripides, *Herc. fur.*). παιδοφόντης could likewise apply to many tragic characters (e.g., Agave in Euripides’ *Bacchae*) and the same root (παιδοφόνος) is used twice by Euripides describing the deeds of Medea and Heracles (*Med.* 1407; *Herc. fur.* 1201).<sup>17</sup> ἀδελφοκτόνος (and words of the same root), by contrast with the other terms, is well attested in classical literature (though not in extant tragedy) as well as in Philo and contemporary Jewish literature. Even though the term ἀδελφοκτόνος is not attested in extant tragedy, sibling-slaughter is of course not uncommon (e.g., Aesch. *Sept.*; Eur. *Iph. taur.*). Thus, the assertion of the need for “tragic language” does not imply precise allusions to specific tragedies but rather evokes in a general manner the importance of kindred-killings within tragic plots, where these acts of violence are often portrayed as ritual sacrifice. This explicit association with tragedy made by the Jewish elders is analogous to the implicit literary strategy in

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<sup>16</sup> For a categorized list of the types of *philia* relationships (both kinship and other reciprocal relationships) violated in all extant Greek tragedies, see Elizabeth S. Belfiore, *Murder among Friends: Violation of Philia in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 123–60. For a discussion of Euripides’ use of sacrificial language, see the introductory chapter (§§ 1.2.2 and 1.3.2) and Helene P. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> παιδοφόντης is unattested in extant classical texts; beyond its one occurrence in Philo, it is attested only in two unidentified tragic fragments: Snell 327a; Snell and Kannicht 327b.

Wisdom 12:3-7 discussed above (§ 4.2.2), where the author borrows terminology from tragedies in order to describe the misdeeds of the Canaanites.

Later in the *Legatio*, in recounting his own Alexandrian delegation's hearing before Gaius (349-67), Philo describes the process thus: "upon us who were there, a dramatic production was about to be staged against the entire nation" (ἐπι παροῦσιν ἡμῶν ἢ κατὰ παντὸς τοῦ ἔθνους ἔμελλε σκηνοβατεῖσθαι δραματοποιία, 351). Indeed, the Jewish delegation was mocked "as in theatrical mimes" (ὡς ἐν θεατρικοῖς μίμοις, 359) and Philo concludes that "they had fled such a theater and also a prison rather than a court of law; for as in a theater there was a sound of clucking from people hissing, mocking, and jeering without measure" (τοιούτων ἀντὶ δικαστηρίου θέατρον ὁμοῦ καὶ δεσμοπήριον ἐκφυγόντες - ὡς μὲν γὰρ ἐν θεάτρῳ κλωσμός συριπτόνων, καταμωκωμένων, ἄμετρα χλευάζόντων, 368).

Thus, according to Philo's presentation of Gaius in the *Legatio*, his love for acting in tragic drama went beyond the mere social transgression of associating with the guild of actors. Gaius' political administration was an enactment of tragic theater in which the Jews themselves were becoming victims in his most destructive plot.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, within his theatrical world, Gaius saw himself as playing the roles of demigods and gods. Philo argues that Gaius had failed to live up to the divinities whose divine honors he claimed for himself. If Gaius wished to be Dionysus, for example, he must seek truly to

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<sup>18</sup> In view of this discussion by Philo in the *Legatio*, it is striking that Gaius' assassination is reported to have occurred in connection with the theater. Suetonius indicates that he was stabbed in the theater during a rehearsal and that this death had been portended in a tragedy he viewed a few days earlier (*Cal.* 57-58). Josephus reports that he was killed while leaving the theater (*Ant.* 19.90-113). For a discussion of the significance of these, see Patricia E. Easterling, "From Repertoire to Canon," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (ed. Patricia E. Easterling; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 211-27, esp. 219-20.

imitate him by offering happiness and festivity to all humanity. Like Dionysus, Gaius must not distinguish between Greek and barbarian. Applied to Alexandria, Gaius' identification with Dionysus stands in contradiction with the ethnic policies of the Roman administration.

### 5.3 (ANTI-)DIONYSIAC HERMENEUTICS IN *DE EBRIETATE*: MALE MAENADS AND SOBER INEBRIATION

In his treatise *De ebrietate*, Philo sets out to examine the question, “will a wise man get drunk?” Whereas in the preceding work (*De plantatione* 140-77) he had addressed the philosophers' views on the question, here he turns to the teachings of Moses (*Ebr.* 1). His exposition engages in allegorical exegesis of a wide range of biblical texts that relate (in varying degrees) to wine and drunkenness. Given the nature of the topic, Dionysiac religion provides a natural point for comparison. Indeed, as I demonstrate below, at several points Philo employs the language of Bacchic frenzy both as a negative foil for his construction of ideal (Jewish) piety and as a metaphorical description of the mystical ascent of the soul.<sup>19</sup> Such a strategy is attested elsewhere in Philo. For example, in *De vita contemplativa*, which describes the Therapeutae, Philo uses Dionysiac language similar to that in *De ebrietate*. Recent analyses of this work have explored how Philo depicts the Therapeutae as ideals of Jewish piety against the backdrop of the debaucheries associated with “pagan” Dionysiac drunkenness.<sup>20</sup> Philo

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<sup>19</sup> On the larger question of Philo and Jewish mysteries, see the discussion in § 4.1.1 above.

<sup>20</sup> David M. Hay, “Foil for the Therapeutae: References to Other Texts and Persons in Philo's *De vita contemplativa*,” in *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen* (ed. David E.

in fact labels the latter as “the symposia of others” (τὰ τῶν ἄλλων συμπόσια, *Contempl.* 40). His aim was to produce pride in Jewish piety among those who might otherwise be enamored with Dionysiac religion and Greek symposia. By contrast to *De vita contemplativa*, *De ebrietate* is a work of biblical hermeneutics; yet, as my analysis demonstrates, it exhibits similar literary strategies. I designate these as Philo’s anti-Dionysiac hermeneutics. An additional aspect of Philo’s idealization of Jewish piety over against “paganism” that needs more attention is his treatment of gender.<sup>21</sup> Within the context of Dionysiac religion, the transgression of gender boundaries is a central feature. Consequently, I argue that Philo’s anti-Dionysiac hermeneutics functions to negate two prominent features of the religion of Dionysus: a distinctively feminine religious experience (e.g., through maenadism) and the use of wine for the inducement of spiritual ecstasy.<sup>22</sup> I demonstrate that such hermeneutics can be seen in Philo’s interpretation of several biblical passages in *De ebrietate*, culminating in his discussion of Hannah’s alleged drunkenness in 1 Samuel 1 (*Ebr.* 143-53).

The treatise opens with the observation that Moses permits some but forbids others to drink wine (*Ebr.* 2).<sup>23</sup> The key text for the treatise is Deuteronomy 21:18-21, which legislates the course of action for parents of the most unruly sons. They are to

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Aune, Torrey Seland, and Jarl Henning Ulrichsen; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 330–48; James M. Scott, “Dionysus in Philo of Alexandria: A Study of *De vita contemplativa*,” *SPhilo* 20 (2008): 33–54.

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of gender in *De vita contemplativa*, see Ross S. Kraemer, “The Other as Woman: An Aspect of Polemic among Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World,” in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity* (ed. Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn; New Perspectives on Jewish Studies; New York: New York University Press, 1994), 121–44 esp. 133-35. She observes that Philo presents the participants in other symposia as feminine and the women of the Therapeutae as masculine. On Philo’s views of women generally, see Dorothy I. Sly, *Philo’s Perception of Women* (BJS 209; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> On maenadism, see §§ 1.3.2, 2.3, and 2.4.

<sup>23</sup> The latter group includes those who took “the great vow” (the Nazarites; see e.g., Num 6:2, 20) and priests (Lev 10:9).

bring such a one to the elders of the city and declare, “this son of ours is disobedient and contentious, he does not listen to our voice, he is a drunkard, giving himself over to feasting” (ὁ υἱὸς ἡμῶν οὗτος ἀπειθεῖ καὶ ἐρεθίζει, οὐκ εἰσακούει τῆς φωνῆς ἡμῶν, συμβολοκοπῶν οἰνοφλυγεῖ, *Ebr.* 14; quoting LXX Deut 21:20). In such a case, the men of the city are to stone the offender (Deut 21:21). Philo finds four vices in this passage which reach their climax in the last: disobedience (ἀπειθεῖ), contentiousness (ἐρεθίζει), feasting (συμβολοκοπῶν), and drunkenness (οἰνοφλυγεῖ). Drunkenness (μέθη) is the worst offense because it is the “cause of ecstasy and madness” (τὴν ἐκστάσεως καὶ παραφροσύνης αἰτίαν, *Ebr.* 15).

Later in the treatise, Philo allegorizes the parents of Deuteronomy 21:18-21, the father as δημιουργός, maker of the cosmos, and the mother as ἐπιστήμη, the skill by which the δημιουργός fashioned it. Within this division, “we say then that the father is the masculine, perfect, and right reason, whereas the mother is the intermediate and encyclical dancing and instruction” (πατέρα τοίνυν εἶναι φαμεν τὸν ἄρρενα καὶ τέλειον καὶ ὀρθὸν λόγον, μητέρα δὲ τὴν μέσην καὶ ἐγκύκλιον χορείαν τε καὶ παιδείαν, 33). The mother instructs the child in obedience to “custom” (ἔθος) which is the property “of the weaker more feminine soul” (ἀσθενεστέρας καὶ θηλυτέρας ψυχῆς) so that one might “follow a nature characterized by reason, truly strong and masculine” (ἐρρωμένου καὶ ἄρρενος ὡς ἀληθῶς λογισμοῦ ἔπεσθαι φύσει, 55). The notion that progress in virtue requires one to leave the feminine and become masculine is in fact common in Philo. For example, he regards Sarah as a “virtue-loving mind” (τὴν φιλάρετον διάνοιαν) but only because she “left behind all the ways of women” (τὰ γυναικεῖα πάντ’ ἐκλιποῦσα, *Ebr.* 59-

60, quoting LXX Gen 18:11).<sup>24</sup> With his allegorization of the father and mother in Deuteronomy 21:18-21, Philo establishes that drunkenness entails an offense both against the feminine (custom and education) and the masculine (right reason).

Philo later provides an interpretation of the incident of the golden calf in Exodus 32 that is relevant for his conception of Dionysus in *De ebrietate*. When Joshua and Moses descend from the mountain and observe the revelry in the Israelite camp, Joshua supposes it is a sound of war but Moses asserts, “it is neither a sound of those leading out for a victory nor a sound of those leading out from a defeat; rather, I hear a sound of those leading out from wine” (οὐκ ἔστι φωνὴ ἐξαρχόντων κατ’ ἰσχὺν οὐδὲ φωνὴ ἐξαρχόντων τροπῆς, ἀλλὰ φωνὴν ἐξαρχόντων οἴνου ἐγὼ ἀκούω, *Ebr.* 96; LXX Exod 32:18). Thus, according to the Septuagint, wine was central to one of the Israel’s worst religious failures.<sup>25</sup> What is most interesting for my purposes is how Philo’s interpretation of this event relates to Dionysiac religion. First, he connects the Israelite’s golden statue to the Egyptian bull-god Apis, observing that “they formed the god vanity, especially honored by the Egyptians, of which the construction of the golden bull was a symbol” (θεοπλαστεῖν δὲ τὸν παρ’ Αἰγυπτίοις μάλιστα τιμώμενον τῦφον, οὗ σύμβολον ἢ τοῦ χρυσοῦ ταύρου κατασκευή, *Ebr.* 95).<sup>26</sup> Yet, in spite of the correspondence between the cult statues, Philo immediately contrasts the worship of Apis with the wine revelry

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<sup>24</sup> On the larger treatment of Sarah in the works of Philo, see Sly, *Philo’s Perception of Women*, 147–54.

<sup>25</sup> It is noteworthy that MT Exod 32:18 does not mention wine; nor do other ancient versions. The MT reads ויאמר אין קול ענות גבורה ואין קול ענות חלושה קול ענות אנכי שמע שמע, “He said, ‘it is not a sound singing for victory and it is not a sound of singing for defeat; I hear a sound of singing.’”

<sup>26</sup> ταῦρος does not occur in LXX Exod 32; μόσχος is used to render עגל. Both words are used by Philo in his interpretation. It is noteworthy that the bull is often connected with Dionysus; in *Bacchae* 920–21, for example, he appears to Pentheus as a ταῦρος. Philo, however, connects Dionysus with Exod 32 through wine-revelry rather than the image of the bull.

that occurred in the Israelite camp: the former consists of “a true dirge as for those who have died” (τὸν ὡς ἐπὶ τεθνεῶσιν ἀληθῆ θρῆνον) and “not a song of wine and revelry as the sweetest song in banquets and feastings” (οὐ παροίνιον καὶ κωμαστικὸν οἶα ἐν ἑορταῖς καὶ θαλίαις ἥδιστον μέλος, *Ebr.* 95).

Although this is a relatively generic description of Greek religious revelry, there are several indicators that Philo implies Dionysiac religion. His adjective κωμαστικόν calls to mind Dionysus’ epithet κωμαστής (“reveler,” e.g., Aristoph., *Nub.* 606). Moreover, in a later interpretation of the “sound of wine” in Exodus 32:18, Philo describes the festivities of the Israelite camp in explicitly Dionysiac terms: “this is not [a sound] of those who have taken in madness unwillingly but of those who have engaged in Bacchic frenzy with a willing blow to the mind” (τουτέστιν οὐκ ἀκούσιον ἐνδεδεγμένων μανίαν, ἀλλ’ ἐκουσίῳ φρενοβλαβείᾳ βεβακχευμένων, *Ebr.* 123). Thus, in the incident of the golden calf, although Philo views the cult statue as of Egyptian origin, the ritual consumption of wine and ecstatic worship was akin to that of Dionysus. In contrast to this Dionysiac religion practiced by the Israelites in Exodus 32, Philo emphasizes Moses’ later instructions for the priests, that they were forbidden to drink wine when they served in the tabernacle (*Ebr.* 127-143; Lev 10:8-10). Indeed, “the one who offers sober sacrifices shall not die” (οὐδ’ ἀποθανεῖται ὁ νηράλια θύων, *Ebr.* 140).<sup>27</sup> Thus, ideal Mosaic religion stands against the drunken madness inspired by Dionysus, which at least once in Israelite history had proven fatally alluring.

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<sup>27</sup> He makes the connection between “wineless sacrifice” and immortality based on the statement in Lev 10:9 that the prohibition is an “eternal statute” (νόμιμον αἰώνιον).

Philo's interpretation of Hannah's alleged drunkenness in 1 Samuel 1 (*Ebr.* 143-53) brings together both these aspects of his anti-Dionysiac hermeneutics discussed above, namely, the questions of the role of gender and wine in the religious experience.<sup>28</sup> He begins by introducing Samuel as "the greatest of both kings and prophets" (ὁ καὶ βασιλέων καὶ προφητῶν μέγιστος) then quotes the oath that Samuel's mother Hannah made to the Lord in her prayer for a child: "'wine and strong drink,' as the sacred word says, 'he will not drink until death'" (οἶνον καὶ μέθυσμα, ὡς ὁ ἱερὸς λόγος φησὶν, ἄχρι τελευτῆς οὐ πίνεται', *Ebr.* 143; 1 Sam 1:11).<sup>29</sup> In Philo's allegorical interpretation, Samuel is "a mind rejoicing only in the service and worship of God" (νοῦς λατρεία καὶ θεραπεία θεοῦ μόνῃ χαίρων, 144). For her part, Hannah's name means "grace" (χάρις), which is what enables the soul to enter immortality. Philo then describes the experience of the soul with Dionysiac language: "Whatever soul is filled with grace rejoices at once, smiles and dances; for it is in a state of Bacchic frenzy, so that to the masses of the uninitiated it appears to be drunk, filled with wine, and ecstatic" (χάριτος δ' ἥτις ἂν πληρωθῆ ψυχῇ, γέγηθεν εὐθύς καὶ μειδιᾷ καὶ ἀνορχεῖται· βεβάκχεται γάρ, ὡς πολλοῖς τῶν ἀνοργιάστων μεθύειν καὶ παροινεῖν καὶ ἐξεστάναι ἂν δόξαι, 146). Within the narrative, Eli's servant represents the uninitiated who cannot distinguish between the influence of true divine grace and the state induced by wine. He asks, "how long will

<sup>28</sup> On Philo's interpretation of Hannah in other passages, see Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women*, 177.

<sup>29</sup> This clause in the LXX has nothing corresponding in the Hebrew of the MT. Whereas in the MT, Hannah's vow is only regarding the use of razor, the LXX has the additional element of abstinence from alcohol. In this way, the LXX connects Hannah's vow more directly to the Nazirite vow (e.g., Num 6:2-5). The language of LXX 1 Sam 1:11 most closely reflects the story of Samson (LXX Judg 13:4, 7). 4QSam frag. b preserves part of 1 Sam 1:11 and, although the portion in question is lacunary, the text's editors suggest that the space of the lacuna requires a reconstruction that would correspond to the plus in the LXX; see Frank Moore Cross et al., *Qumran Cave 4, XII: 1-2 Samuel* (DJD XVII; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 29-30.

you be drunk? Put away your wine” (ἕως πότε μεθυσθήσῃ; περιελοῦ τὸν οἶνόν σου, 146; 1 Sam 1:14).<sup>30</sup>

The inability of the uninitiated to make such a distinction leads Philo to contrast drunkenness and sobriety with the following oxymoronic expression:

καίτοι γε ἐκεῖνοι μὲν τρόπον τινὰ μεθύουσιν οἱ νήφοντες τὰ ἀγαθὰ ἀθρόα ἡκρατισμένοι καὶ τὰς προπόσεις παρὰ τελείας ἀρετῆς δεξάμενοι, οἱ δὲ τὴν ἀπὸ οἴνου μεθύοντες μέθην ἄγευστοι φρονήσεως διετέλεσαν νηστείαν συνεχῆ καὶ λιμὸν αὐτῆς ἄγοντες.

Indeed, some who are sober are drunk in a certain manner, having consumed abundant good things unmixed and having received drinks from perfect virtue; others, being drunk with a drunkenness from wine, have completed a fast without a taste of intelligence, observing a famine from it. (*Ebr.* 148)

Philo uses the ironic combination of “sober inebriation” on several occasions elsewhere in his writings.<sup>31</sup> Hans Lewy has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of these and concluded that he uses it to express a mystical state that can only be achieved by the connection of a human’s spiritual element with the divine essence.<sup>32</sup> He observes that Philo’s transformation of drunkenness into the spiritual realm entails a rejection of materiality in favor of the ascetic life.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Lewy explores this oxymoron in other contexts in order to shed light on the origin of its use by Philo.<sup>34</sup> He concludes that

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<sup>30</sup> In the MT, Eli asks this question rather than his servant as in the LXX.

<sup>31</sup> *Opif.* 71; *Leg.* 3.82; *Fug.* 166; *Praem.* 122; *Contempl.* 85; *Prob.* 13-14; *QG* 2.68.

<sup>32</sup> Yochanan Lewy, *Sobria ebrietas: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der antiken Mystik* (BZNBW 9; Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1929), 3–41. “Der Begriff bezeichnet einen mystischen Zustand, der nur durch Vereinigung des rein geistigen Elements im Menschen mit dem göttlichen Wesen erreicht werden kann” (40). On *De ebrietate*, see 3-8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 40–41.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 42–72. The concept is attested in a few interesting texts. An epigram on a ring claiming to be the possession of Cleopatra (*Anth. pal.* 9.752) speaks as drunkenness personified (“I am Methe,” Εἰμι Μέθη). It asserts, “for on the hand of the queen, the goddess must be sober even while drunk” (ἐν γὰρ ἀνάσσης χειρὶ θεὸν νήφειν καὶ μεθύουσιν ἔδει). The epigram’s author is uncertain, as is the identity of the Cleopatra to which it refers; see A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, eds., *The Greek Anthology, Hellenistic Epigrams II: Commentary and Indexes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 148–49. Plutarch writes of Bacchic women for whom the chewing of ivy produces madness and “brings on a drunkenness

Philo's concept does not have a Dionysiac origin on the grounds that his formulation is developed in opposition to μέθη ἀπ' οἴνου, whereas in Dionysiac contexts the common expression was θεία μέθη.<sup>35</sup> Henry Chadwick criticizes Lewy on this point, however. He suggests that "the oxymoron may be a pre-Philonic coinage of Dionysiac origin with a metaphorical currency in Neopythagorean circles."<sup>36</sup> Additional support for a Dionysiac background to Philo's discussion of sober inebriation in *De ebrietate* 147-48 is provided by the larger anti-Dionysiac polemic underlying his interpretation of Exodus 32 discussed above. That is, Philo's characterization of the idolatry of the golden calf as Dionysiac revelry points to his larger interest in Dionysus as a foil for biblical piety. Thus, in the wider context of *De ebrietate*, regardless of its ultimate origin, Philo's conception of "sober inebriation" should be understood as a feature of his anti-Dionysiac hermeneutics.

Following his reflections on sober inebriation, he returns to the narrative of 1 Samuel 1. Hannah answers the servant by denying that she was drunk but rather that "I shall pour out my soul before the Lord" (ἐκχεῶ τὴν ψυχὴν μου ἐνώπιον κυρίου, *Ebr.* 149; 1 Sam 1:15). Philo interprets her pouring out of her soul thus: "from this it happens that the mind, having been filled with unmixed sobriety, becomes wholly a libation through its entirety and is poured out to God" (ἐκ τούτου δὲ συμβαίνει νήψεως ἀκράτου τὸν νοῦν ἐμφορηθέντα σπονδὴν ὅλον δι' ὅλων γίνεσθαι τε καὶ σπένδεσθαι θεῷ, 152). He then concludes his interpretation by describing several ways in which the soul is poured out in the process of spiritual ascent to a vision of the divine. A fundamental shift occurs, however. Although he repeats the clause ἐκχεῶ τὴν ψυχὴν μου ἐνώπιον κυρίου, Hannah

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entirely without wine" (ὅλως ἄοινον ἐπάγει μέθη, *Quaest. rom.* 112). In Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius* there is mention of prophetic inspiration that comes to "Bacchants of sobriety" (βάκχοι τοῦ νήφειν, 2.37).

<sup>35</sup> Lewy, *Sobria ebrietas*, 62–63.

<sup>36</sup> Chadwick, "Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought," 150 n. 4.

is no longer the subject of ἐκχεῶ; rather, it is now the masculine νοῦς (= Samuel) that pours itself out and achieves the mystical vision, a process that Philo proceeds to express with masculine rather than feminine verb forms.<sup>37</sup> Given Philo's denial of advanced spiritual virtue to the feminine in other contexts, it is not surprising that here also it is not Hannah as woman but rather the masculine νοῦς that achieves the divine vision. At the same time, Philo denies that true divine grace is mediated through wine as practiced in Bacchic ecstasy. Thus, whereas Hannah's religious experience appeared to an observer to be that of a maenad, this is the mistaken perception of the uninitiated. For, according to Philo, true divine grace is not mediated through wine.

Thus, Philo's biblical hermeneutics in *De ebrietate* is anti-Dionysiac in two important ways. Whereas Dionysiac religion provided women with distinctive opportunities for autonomous spiritual expression through maenadism, Philo maintains that in order to attain philosophical virtue and divine vision one must become male. Similarly, whereas in Dionysiac religion the consumption of wine served as an important means whereby the god's presence might be experienced, Philo argues that spiritual drunkenness is achieved paradoxically through physical sobriety.

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<sup>37</sup> ἐκχεῶ τὴν ψυχὴν μου ἐναντίον κυρίου ἢ σύμπασαν αὐτὴν ἀνιερώσω, δεσμὰ μὲν οἷς πρότερον ἐσφίγγετο, ἃ περιῆψαν αἱ τοῦ θνητοῦ βίου κεναὶ σπουδαί, πάντα λύσας, προαγαγὼν δὲ ἔξω καὶ τείνας καὶ ἀναχέας τοσοῦτον, ὡς καὶ τῶν τοῦ παντὸς ἄψασθαι περάτων καὶ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ ἀγενήτου παγκάλην καὶ ἀοίδιμον θεῶν ἐπειχθῆναι, “I shall pour out my soul before the Lord’ or, I shall consecrate it entirely; the bonds by which it was formerly bound, around which the empty pursuits of the mortal life attaches, having loosed these, proceeding outward, stretching and pouring forth to such an extent so as to lay hold of the boundaries of the universe and to arrive at the celebrated and all beautiful vision of the unbegotten” (*Ebr.* 152).

## 5.4 CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing discussion illustrates the wide range and creativity in Philo's interactions with Dionysus and Greek tragedy. The contrast between his positive and negative treatments of these important features of Hellenism is striking. On the one hand, he can speak of the elation experienced in the audience of a performance of Euripides (*Prob.* 141) and can use Euripides' tragic heroes as models of virtue (e.g., Heracles in *Prob.* 100-02). On the other hand, along with many of his contemporaries, he was suspicious of the profession of acting and thus disapproved of Gaius' theatrical aspirations. In Philo's estimation in the *Legatio*, however, Gaius' tragic performance extended beyond the theater; it in fact characterized his administration such that the Jews were becoming tragic victims on his political stage (*Legat.* 233-34). Similarly, Philo can view Dionysus (with some irony) as a great benefactor of human civilization (*Legat.* 82-83). Yet, at the same time, he recognizes another side to the god. He alludes to this when he asserts that Gaius' title, the New Dionysus, derives from his violence not his gentleness (*Legat.* 89). That Dionysus was not merely connected with innocuous expressions of rustic revelry is underscored in Philo's exegetical work *De ebrietate*. Here he indicates the Israelites' idolatrous worship at Sinai was in fact a wine-induced Bacchic frenzy. Indeed, throughout his biblical exegesis in this work, Philo employs anti-Dionysiac hermeneutics in order to idealize true piety while negating two central features of the religion of Dionysus: a distinctly feminine religious experience and the role of wine in spiritual ecstasy.

This analysis of Philo reveals several commonalities with the Wisdom of Solomon and Artapanus discussed in the previous chapter. Like Wisdom, for example,

Philo finds Greek tragedy to be a useful vehicle whereby to describe the inhumanity of human sacrifice. Whereas Wisdom presents the child sacrificing cannibalism of Canaanite religion in terms of tragic rituals, Philo observes that under Gaius' administration the Jews were becoming victims on his tragic stage. Moreover, Dionysiac cult provided a productive foil against which to present biblical religion. Philo could observe with irony that Gaius failed to live up to his identification with Dionysus because, unlike the latter, he was not a benefactor of abundance and revelry for both Greeks and barbarians alike. Indeed, his administration proved to be particularly unfavorable to the Jews. Thus, both Wisdom and Philo exploit the stereotype of Dionysiac religion as fundamentally characterized by violence, madness, and debauchery. Moreover, like Artapanus, Philo employs the foil of Dionysus as a means of demonstrating the preferability of Judaism. Thus, for example, whereas Artapanus presents Moses' miraculous powers as outstripping those of Dionysus, Philo presents true spiritual vision of God as an experience of sober inebriation in contrast to the sensuality of the worship of Dionysus.

In sum: several common threads run through the Wisdom of Solomon, Artapanus, and Philo and at the same time their diversity testifies to the remarkable literary creativity achieved in Judaism during this period of cultural interactions. Moreover, each of these authors points in different ways to the dynamic complexity of constructing and maintaining Jewish identity in the world of Greek and Roman imperial power. Indeed, the very distinctions between Greek and barbarian, between Jew and Gentile, and between the appropriation and repudiation of Hellenism remain at times difficult to identify.

## PART III

### Christians Reading Dionysus

καθάπερ αἱ βάκχαι τὰ τοῦ Πενθέως διαφορήσασαι μέλη αἱ τῆς φιλοσοφίας τῆς τε βαρβάρου τῆς τε Ἑλληνικῆς αἰρέσεις... οὕτως οὖν ἢ τε βάρβαρος ἢ τε Ἑλληνικὴ φιλοσοφία τὴν αἰδίων ἀλήθειαν σπαραγμὸν τινα, οὐ τῆς Διονύσου μυθολογίας, τῆς δὲ τοῦ λόγου τοῦ ὄντος ἀεὶ θεολογίας πεποιήται.

“Just as the Bacchae tore to pieces the limbs of Pentheus, so also have the sects of barbarian and Greek philosophy... So then, barbarian and Greek philosophy has made the eternal truth into a *sparagmos* for themselves, not of the mythology of Dionysus but of the theology of the ever existing logos.”

(Clement, *Stromateis* 1.13.57.1, 6)

*Si scaenicae doctrinae delectant, satis nobis litterarum est... sed simplicitates.*

“If theatrical learning is pleasing to you, we have sufficient literature of our own... only, it is straightforward.”

(Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 29.4)

## CHAPTER SIX

### NARRATING MADNESS AND MODERATION IN EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE* AND THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION: CHRISTIANITY AND ITS GRECO-ROMAN WORLDS

Christianity emerged in a world dominated by Roman power and Hellenistic culture. As with Judaism in which Christianity originated, Christian identity was constructed amidst a nexus of conflicting interests. It was shaped, on the one hand, by its distinctive conception of Jesus and commitments to an authoritative scriptural tradition and, on the other, by the religious, intellectual, and political realities of the Greco-Roman world. Within these relationships, Christian interactions with Euripides' *Bacchae* provide a striking view of the larger dynamics of these cultural negotiations. The three chapters in Part III explore three moments in the development of early Christianity in which the *Bacchae* functions as a node of contrast and conflict, transformation and debate. The three central texts under consideration—the Acts of the Apostles, Origen's *Contra Celsum*, and Clement's *Stromateis*—collectively signal an interest in Dionysus and the *Bacchae* at a transitional historical moment. Indeed, this literary interplay anticipates the Christianization of Greco-Roman civilization. The importance of the *Bacchae* as a dramatic symbol of this larger historical transformation is suggested by its ultimate “conversion” in Pseudo-Gregory's *Christus patiens* in the eleventh or twelfth century, a drama which transforms Euripides' poetry for the passion narrative.

Before analyzing these three texts, I survey two aspects of early Christianity that provide necessary background to the subsequent analyses, namely, the place of Dionysus and Greek drama in Christian origins.

#### 6.1.1 DIONYSUS AND CHRISTIAN ORIGINS: CONFLICTS AND CONFLATIONS

Dionysiac themes are present in some of the earliest Christian practices and writings. Indeed, the numerous similarities between Christianity and Dionysiac myth and ritual make thematic comparison particularly fitting: both Jesus and Dionysus are the offspring of a divine father and human mother (which was subsequently suspected as a cover-up for illegitimacy); both are from the east and transfer their cult into Greece as part of its universal expansion; both bestow wine to their devotees and have wine as a sacred element in their ritual observances; both had private cults; both were known for close association with women devotees; and both were subjected to violent deaths and subsequently came back to life.<sup>1</sup> By the middle of the second century, observations of such relationships are made explicitly and are subsequently developed in various directions. Juxtapositions of Jesus and Dionysus can be seen, for example, in polemical and apologetic writings.<sup>2</sup> Two examples of these are considered in the following

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<sup>1</sup> As Albert Henrichs observes “of Hellenistic soteriological religions” there is an especially “high suitability of the cult of Dionysus for a comparative study of Judaeo-Christian versus pagan self-definition and religious identity” (“Changing Dionysiac Identities,” in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition III: Self-Definition in the Greco-Roman World* [ed. Ben F. Meyer and E. P. Sanders; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982], 137–60 [at 137]).

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the conflation of Dionysiac myth and cult with the Christian Eucharist in a late-second-century Greek novel, see Courtney J. P. Friesen, “Dionysus as Jesus: The Incongruity of a Love Feast in Achilles Tatius’ *Leucippe and Clitophon* 2.2,” *HTR* (forthcoming).

chapters, first Celsus and Origen, then Clement of Alexandria. In addition to literary representations, Christian and Dionysiac themes are frequently conflated in visual art.<sup>3</sup>

Even though the earliest explicit mentions of Dionysus by Christians begin in the mid-second century, evidence for interaction with the god is found as early as Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians (ca. 53 CE).<sup>4</sup> The Christian community founded by Paul in Corinth was made up largely of converts from polytheism (1 Cor 12:2). The city was home to many types of Greco-Roman religion; at Isthmia, an important Corinthian cult site, there was a temple of Dionysus in the Sacred Glen.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps most important for the development of Christianity in Corinth are the mystery cults. Not only does Paul employ language that reflects mystery cults in several places,<sup>6</sup> his Christian community resembles

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<sup>3</sup> Some of the earliest examples of Christian art, the "Callistus" catacombs at Rome (ca. 200 CE), employ Dionysiac iconography; see Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 146–230. While these paintings are largely concerned with biblical themes, Finney observes that they "involved Christians turning to pagan workshops and exploring their already existing iconographic repertoires," among which were "subjects that are Dionysiac by derivation" (at 152 and 187). Recently Anne-Françoise Jaccottet has similarly argued that early Christian representations of Christ's infant baptism were influenced by Dionysiac iconography, particularly of the initiation of the young god ("Du baptême de Dionysos à l'initiation du Christ: langage iconographique et identité religieuse," in *L'Oiseau et le poisson: cohabitations religieuses dans les mondes grec et romain* [ed. Nicole Belayche and Jean-Daniel Dubois; Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2011], 203–25). On the wider popularity of Dionysiac iconography in this period, see Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage* (Oxford Monographs on Classical Archaeology; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 173–87. This interplay between Christian and Dionysiac iconography provides an important cultural analogue to the literary materials considered in these chapters.

<sup>4</sup> To my knowledge, Justin Martyr is the first extant author to compare Jesus and Dionysus explicitly (ca. 155 CE) (*1 Apol.* 21.1-23.3).

<sup>5</sup> Oscar Broneer, "Paul and the Pagan Cults at Isthmia," *HTR* 64 (1971): 169–87 (esp. 182). In Hellenistic times, a Dionysiac guild of artists is attested at Isthmia (see 179). For a general discussion of Dionysus in the time Paul, particularly in relation to the imperial policy of Claudius, see David Alvarez Cineira, *Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Claudius und die paulinische Mission* (Freiburg: Herder, 1999), 134–37. Two important ways in which Claudius sponsored Dionysiac religion in the east were through his reconstruction of a temple of Dionysus/Liber Pater at Samos (ca. 47-48 CE) and his support of Dionysiac artist guilds.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Richard Seaford has argued that Paul's phrase, "for now we see through a mirror in a riddle" (βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι, 1 Cor 13:12), derives from a specific function in mystery initiations, which Paul uses metaphorically for indirect knowledge of the divine ("1 Corinthians XIII. 12," *JTS* 35 [1984]: 117–20). Six of eight occurrences of μυστήριον in the undisputed Pauline epistles occur in 1 Corinthians (2:1, 7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51). It occurs 28 times in the New Testament; but as Klauck observes its sense is often closer to Jewish apocalyptic (e.g., Dan 2:27-29) than to the

them in various ways.<sup>7</sup> They met in secret or exclusive groups, employed esoteric symbols, and practiced initiations, which involved identification with the god's suffering and rebirth.<sup>8</sup> Particularly Dionysiac is the ritualized consumption of wine in private gatherings (1 Cor 11:17-34).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the Corinthian practices of prophecy and glossolalia criticized by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12-14 resemble the ecstatic experience of Dionysiac religion.<sup>10</sup> As in the discussion of Hellenistic Judaism above (§ 4.1.1), these and other similarities led several early-twentieth-century scholars of the History of Religions School to situate the origins of Christianity in Hellenistic mystery cults.<sup>11</sup> This is not the place to re-open this question; here it is sufficient to observe that as with Judaism much of the use of mystery cult language by Christian authors is metaphorical and does not imply that Christianity originated as such a cult.<sup>12</sup> What is important for my purposes is the *perception* of similarity. Paul's perception that Greco-Roman polytheism

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mystery cults ("Die antiken Mysterienkulte und das Urchristentum: Anknüpfung und Widerspruch," in *Religion und Gesellschaft im frühen Christentum: Neutestamentliche Studien* [WUNT 152; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], 176–79); see also Arthur Darby Nock, "Hellenistic Mysteries and Christian Sacraments," in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (ed. Zeph Stewart; 2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 2.791–820, esp. 809–10.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion focusing on Paul's Corinthian correspondence in relation to ancient mystery cults generally, see Klauck, "Die antiken Mysterienkulte und das Urchristentum," esp. 184–89.

<sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*, 179–81.

<sup>9</sup> As Henrichs observes, "organized worshippers of Dionysus elevated social wine-drinking to a ritualized form of religious group experience, thus making it a hallmark of their Dionysiac identity" ("Changing Dionysiac Identities," 141).

<sup>10</sup> Klauck, "Die antiken Mysterienkulte und das Urchristentum," 184–85. This section of 1 Corinthians is considered below in connection to Acts 2 (§ 6.4.2).

<sup>11</sup> For these scholars, the fundamental characteristics of Hellenistic mystery religions were that they were "soteriological" in orientation and "oriental" in origin. Influential studies include Franz Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (2d ed.; New York: Dover Publications, 1956) (2d. ed.: 1909; org. 1906); Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions: Their Basic Ideas and Significance* (trans. John E. Steely; PTMS 15; Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978) (3d. ed. 1927; org. 1910). The scholarly literature on this topic is vast; see Bruce M. Metzger, "A Classified Bibliography of the Graeco-Roman Mystery Religions, 1924–1973, with a Supplement, 1974–1977," *ANRW* 17.3:1259–1423.

<sup>12</sup> See esp. Nock, "Hellenistic Mysteries and Christian Sacraments"; Bruce M. Metzger, "Considerations of Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Early Christianity," *HTR* 48 (1955): 1–20; Christoph Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandrien* (Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 26; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987).

was influencing Corinthian and other Christians underlies many of the instructions in his epistles. Moreover, the perception of Christianity's similarity to mystery cults provided outsider observers with a means of characterizing and criticizing Christian communities.

Another New Testament writing that invites a juxtaposition of Jesus and Dionysus is the Gospel of John, in which the former is credited with a distinctively Dionysiac miracle in the wedding at Cana, the transformation of water into wine (2:1-11). In the Hellenistic world, there were many myths of Dionysus' miraculous production of wine.<sup>13</sup> For a polytheistic Greek audience, a Dionysiac resonance in Jesus' wine miracle would have been unmistakable. To be sure, scholars are divided as to whether John's account is inspired by a polytheistic legend; some emphasize rather its affinity with the Jewish biblical tradition.<sup>14</sup> In view of the pervasiveness of Hellenism, however, such a distinction is likely not sustainable. Moreover, John's Gospel employs further Dionysiac imagery when Jesus later declares, "I am the true vine" (Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή,

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<sup>13</sup> On wine miracles generally, see Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult* (trans. Robert B. Palmer; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1965), 96–102. With particular attention to miracles that transform water into wine, see Ingo Broer, "Das Weinwunder zu Kana (Joh 2, 1-11) und die Weinwunder der Antike," in *Das Urchristentum in seiner literarischen Geschichte: Festschrift für Jürgen Becker zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Ulrich Mell and Ulrich B. Müller; BZNW 100; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 291–308. On the wine miracle in Achilles Tatius' *Leuc. Clit. 2.2* in connection with Christianity, see Friesen, "Dionysus as Jesus."

<sup>14</sup> Rudolf Bultmann asserts that "[t]here can be no doubt that the story has been taken over from heathen legend and ascribed to Jesus" (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary* [trans. George Raymond Beasley-Murray; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 118). This view is criticized by Heinz Noetzel, *Christus und Dionysos: Bemerkungen zum religionsgeschichtlichen Hintergrund von Johannes 2, 1-11* (AzTh 1; Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1960), esp. 57–58; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII): Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 29; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 101–02; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1991-2009), 2.934–50, esp. 1021–22. Such a sharp distinction between Jewish and Hellenistic background is challenged by Morton Smith, who notes that Dionysiac cult motifs had been present in Palestine from before the Maccabean revolt ("On the Wine God in Palestine (Gen. 18, Jn. 2, and Achilles Tatius)," in *Salomon Wittmayer Baron Jubilee I* [Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1974], 815–29 esp. 821–29); see also Martin Hengel, "The Interpretation of the Wine Miracle at Cana: John 2:1-11," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird* (ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 83–112; Broer, "Das Weinwunder zu Kana"; Peter Wick, "Jesus gegen Dionysos? Ein Beitrag zur Kontextualisierung des Johannesevangeliums," *Bib* 85 (2004): 179–98.

15:1).<sup>15</sup> Therefore, John’s Jesus presents himself not merely as a “New Dionysus” but one who supplants and replaces him.<sup>16</sup>

Early observers of Christianity also noted its resemblances with Dionysiac religion. Pliny the Younger, for example, the earliest extant writer on Christianity, in his famous letter to Emperor Trajan in 112 CE (*Ep.* 10.96), describes Christian activities in Bithynia and requests the emperor’s advice on how to proceed. Robert Grant has argued that Pliny’s account is significantly shaped by the description of the Bacchanalia affair written by Livy, whom Pliny was known to have read and admired.<sup>17</sup> As in Livy, the Christians meet at night, they sing hymns and take oaths, and they share a common meal (*Ep.* 10.96.7; Livy 39.8, 18). Moreover, contrary to accepted social and religious practice, as in Livy, participants include a mixture of class, gender, and age, and come from both the city and the country (*Ep.* 10.96.9; Livy 39.8-9).<sup>18</sup> Jean-Marie Pailler builds

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<sup>15</sup> The Greek text of the New Testament follows the twenty-seventh edition of Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Translations are mine throughout. Wick argues that John employs a series of allusions to Dionysus so as to demonstrate how Jesus surpasses him. John’s Christian community sought to maintain its commitment to Jewish tradition while at the same time confronting the dominant Hellenistic culture; John’s subversive treatment of Dionysiac themes is one aspect of this larger cultural negotiation. As Wick argues, the imagery of the vine in John 15:1-11 well illustrates this because it is both a common symbol for Israel in the Hebrew Bible and a prominent attribute of Dionysus (“Jesus gegen Dionysos,” 192–93).

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of several Ptolemies and Marc Antony, who were explicitly titled “New Dionysus,” see §§ 2.2 and 3.3 above. Clement of Alexandria has Jesus replace Dionysus in his dramatic role in the *Bacchae*; see § 8.4.

<sup>17</sup> Robert M. Grant, “Pliny and the Christians,” *HTR* 41 (1948): 273–74. On Livy and the Bacchanalia, see § 3.2 above.

<sup>18</sup> Grant’s view was sharply criticized by A. N. Sherwin-White as “subversive criticism” and because book 10 of Pliny’s *Epistles* consists of “factual report[s] to the Princeps” wherein such literary borrowing would be out of place (*The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968], 692). As Grant points out in response to Sherwin-White, however, Pliny’s literary recollection is not incompatible with his presentation of a “factual report”; see his *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 29–30, 203–05. Sherwin-White’s dismissal of Pliny’s similarities with Livy is also criticized by Jean-Marie Pailler, *Bacchanalia: la répression de 186 av. J.-C. à Rome et en Italie: vestiges, images, tradition* (Paris: Boccard, 1988), 759–70. Sherwin-White asserts, for example, that a more immediate influence on Pliny may have been an annalistic account from the Julio-Claudian period of “measures taken to repress Druids, Magians, or Jews” but fails to cite any source for this claim; see *ibid.*, 761.

on these observations, arguing that in addition to the verbal parallels adduced by Grant, there are wider similarities in the manner in which Pliny conducted his investigation. His request for direction in policy from the emperor is analogous to that of the consul's relationship with the Senate in Livy; his question as to whether Christians should be punished because of the name itself (*nomen ipsum*) or only for offences committed (*flagitia*, 10.96.2) follows the distinction made by Livy in the prosecution of the Bacchanalia affair between those who were merely initiated (*initiati erant*) and those who committed actual crimes (39.18.3-4). In addition, Pailler argues that Pliny's description of the Christians' folly appears "bien 'bachique'": "Others were of the same madness" (*Fuerunt alii similis amentiae*, 10.96.4).<sup>19</sup> If the thesis of Grant and Pailler is correct, then Pliny's *Epistles* 10.96 indicates that at least one early observer of Christians—the earliest extant example—interpreted their religious behaviors in close connection to Dionysiac mystery cults. In the following chapter, we will see that this perception continues with Celsus who, writing about six decades later, similarly compares Christianity with Dionysiac mystery cults and contrasts Jesus with Dionysus.

In sum: early Christian identity developed in contrast to and often in conflict with Greco-Roman polytheism. Several Christian writers worked at differentiating their religion and asserting its superiority to Dionysiac myth and ritual. Attention to these relationships is evident both in some of the earliest Christian writings (e.g., Paul and John) as well as those of their earliest critics (e.g., Pliny and Celsus). Indeed, the juxtaposition of Jesus and Dionysus develops into a well-established trope, both in literary and artistic representation.

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<sup>19</sup> Pailler, *Bacchanalia*, 62–65 (at 63).

### 6.1.2 GREEK DRAMA AND CHRISTIAN ORIGINS: VIOLENT SPECTACLES AND THEIR TEXTS

Among the earliest Christian writers, there is some direct evidence for attitudes toward the theater and knowledge of drama. It can be inferred, given what is known about the ubiquity of theaters in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, that New Testament writers and their communities would have had access to performances. Not only were there theaters in the predominantly Greek cities of Paul's churches, they were constructed even within Palestine (see § 4.1.2). Paul speaks metaphorically of the theater as the site for a cosmic struggle in which Christians suffer as a dramatic spectacle: "For I suppose that God has displayed us apostles to be last, as condemned to death; for we have become a theater for the cosmos, both for angels and humans" (δοκῶ γάρ, ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀποστόλους ἐσχάτους ἀπέδειξεν ὡς ἐπιθανατίους, ὅτι θέατρον ἐγενήθημεν τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ ἀγγέλοις καὶ ἀνθρώποις, 1 Cor 4:9). In the only other occurrences of θέατρον in the New Testament (Acts 19:29, 31), it is the site to which Paul and his companions are dragged violently in Ephesus.<sup>20</sup>

When Christians begin writing explicitly about the theater, their attitudes are overwhelmingly negative. The first full-scale Christian treatise on the theater is Tertullian's sweeping denunciation in *De spectaculis* (ca. 200 CE).<sup>21</sup> Christians, he

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<sup>20</sup> The Epistle to the Hebrews uses a verb θεατριζῶ in reference to public persecution: "[we are] publicly subjected to ridicules and persecutions" (ὀνειδισμοῖς τε καὶ θλίψεσιν θεατριζόμενοι, Heb 10:33). Thus, in the New Testament, as in Philo (see § 5.2), the theater functioned as a symbol for public persecution both literally and figuratively; see also the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 20-21.

<sup>21</sup> For the text, see Marie Turcan, *Tertullien, Les Spectacles (De spectaculis): introduction, texte critique, traduction et commentaire* (SC 332; Paris: Cerf, 1986). On this treatise, see J. H. Waszink, "Varro, Livy and Tertullian on the History of Roman Dramatic Art," *VC* 2 (1948): 224-42; Victor Power, "Tertullian: Father of Clerical Animosity toward the Theatre," *Educational Theatre Journal* 23 (1971): 36-50; T. D. Barnes, "Christians and the Theater," in *Roman Theater and Society: E. Togo Salmon Papers I* (ed. William J. Slater; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 161-80, esp. 172-74.

argues, should not seek the sorts of worldly pleasures offered by games and shows.<sup>22</sup> In keeping with the New Testament passages quoted above, in which the theater is symbolic of the suffering and persecution of Christians, Tertullian can add that pagan spectacles included the throwing of Christians to the lions (*Spect.* 27).<sup>23</sup> If this was not sufficient to keep Christians away, he adds that the theater is essentially idolatrous—it is sacred to Venus and Liber Pater (10.1-13)—and that the literature of the theater is “bloody and licentious” (*cruentae et lascivae*) and ultimately “folly to God” (*stultitiae apud deum*, 17.6-7). Moreover, Tertullian concludes that at the final return of Christ, there will be a grand reversal in the cosmic drama such that the destruction of the wicked will become the tragic spectacle to be viewed by Christ and his church (30.1-7). A similar denunciation of the theater is issued some two centuries later by John Chrysostom (*Contra ludos et theatra*), who even threatens excommunication to any in his church who attend. Nevertheless, as Timothy Barnes observes, it is unclear whether there is any correspondence between the widespread censure of the theater in preaching and what Christians actually did. In fact, even with the Christianization of the Empire, little change occurs in the prominence of theaters until at least the sixth century.<sup>24</sup>

Early Christian literature also exhibits some knowledge and use of dramatic texts.

In the New Testament, there is only one complete verse of dramatic poetry; it is quoted

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<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of Tertullian’s denunciation of visual pleasure that situates it within its larger cultural and philosophical setting, see Simon Goldhill, “The Erotic Eye: Visual Stimulation and Cultural Conflict,” in *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* (ed. Simon Goldhill; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 154–94, esp. 181–84.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of the executions of Christians as public displays especially in third-century North Africa, see David Potter, “Martyrdom as Spectacle,” in *Theater and Society in the Classical World* (ed. Ruth Scodel; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 53–88. On Clement’s and Origen’s views of martyrdom, see §§ 7.3 and 8.4.

<sup>24</sup> Barnes, “Christians and the Theater,” 161–66.

by Paul in 1 Corinthians: “Do not be mistaken: ‘bad company corrupts good characters’” (μὴ πλανᾶσθε· φθείρουσιν ἡθη χρηστὰ ὁμιλῖαι κακαί, 1 Cor 15:33). This line, widely attributed to the comic poet Menander (*Thais*, frag. 187 Koerte, 218 Kock), was proverbial and would have been known to Paul almost certainly without any connection to the context of the fourth-century comedy.<sup>25</sup> This passage is important for the present study because it illustrates that Paul, in keeping with many of his contemporaries’ approaches to poetry, used this verse as a source of gnomic wisdom. Moreover, later Christian authors would cite this and other instances of Greek poetry in the New Testament as the basis for their own attitudes toward classical literature (see, e.g., Clement, *Strom.* 1.14.59.1-60.2).<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Paul’s gnomic use of this verse of Menander is consistent with the practices of Hellenistic Judaism and later Christians, in which anthologies of classical poetry were compiled in order to support their own ideological claims.<sup>27</sup>

Although dramatic quotations in the New Testament are limited, influence from Greek drama can be observed in its narrative texts. Scholars have vigorously debated the nature and extent of the influence from Hellenistic literary genres generally on the

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<sup>25</sup> The attribution to Menander rests largely on the authority of Jerome (*Comment. ad Titum* 100.1). P. H. Ling, however, argues that this fragment should be attributed to Euripides; he notes that Clement refers to Paul’s quotation as an iambic tragic line (*Strom.* 1.14.59.4) and Socrates identifies it as Euripides (*Hist. eccl.* 3.16) (“A Quotation from Euripides,” *CQ* 19 [1925]: 22–27). Regarding Paul’s larger attitude toward dramatic poetry, Ling avers, “I really cannot imagine St. Paul taking the slightest interest in Menander, while he might be supposed to have felt some appreciation of the reputation of Euripides” (27). Robert Grant offers a very different assessment, arguing that comic poetry was particularly congenial for Christian use because it “avoided mythological themes except in order to ridicule them,” employed everyday speech, and addressed moral questions, often in the form of maxims (“Early Christianity and Greek Comic Poetry,” *CP* 60 [1965]: 157–63 [at 157]).

<sup>26</sup> Other Greek poetry in the New Testament is found in Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12. For a discussion of these and other New Testament passages that resemble classical texts, see Robert Renehan, “Classical Greek Quotations in the New Testament,” in *The Heritage of the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Georges Vasilievich Florovsky on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (ed. David Neiman and Margaret A. Schatkin; OrChrAn 195; Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973), 17–46.

<sup>27</sup> On Judaism, see §4.1.2; on Christianity, see § 8.2 on Clement.

Gospels and Acts. For perhaps obvious reasons, classical drama receives less consideration than other genres, such as history and biography.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, several scholars have been attentive to the presence of dramatic features in New Testament narratives. Regarding the Gospel of Mark, for example, as early as 1931 Ernst Burch argued that Mark's "art is clearly in correspondence with principles on which the drama of his day was constructed."<sup>29</sup> Later in the twentieth century, Burch's thesis would be supported and systematically expanded by Gilbert Bilezikian.<sup>30</sup> Although he does not insist that Mark set out to imitate a classical literary model (tragedy or otherwise), he argues that given the pervasive influence and popularity of tragedy in the Greco-Roman world it is likely that the Gospel's author knew Greek tragedy. Consequently, Bilezikian aims to demonstrate Mark's use of such dramatic features in his own narrative.<sup>31</sup> The central focus of his analysis consists in a comparison of plot; following Burch, he employs Aristotle's *Poetics* as the primary lens whereby he constructs an ideal tragic plot structure.<sup>32</sup> In keeping with Aristotle, Mark has a complication (1:1-8:26), crisis (8:27-

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<sup>28</sup> These questions will be discussed further below in connection with Acts.

<sup>29</sup> Ernest W. Burch, "Tragic Action in the Second Gospel: A Study in the Narrative of Mark," *JR* 11 (1931): 346–58 (at 58). Note also the earlier comment of J. de Zwaan that the role of the crowds in the Gospel of Luke "reminds one in a remote way of the function of the chorus in Greek tragedy" ("Was the Book of Acts a Posthumous Edition?," *HTR* 17 [1924]: 95–153 [at 102]).

<sup>30</sup> Gilbert G. Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1977).

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of the accessibility and popularity of tragedy in Mark's time, see *ibid.*, 33–50. He finds Roman "closet drama," which was intended for private reading and recitation rather than the stage, to be the closest analogy to Mark's adaptation of the tragic genre.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–106. He acknowledges, as most critics of Greek tragedy maintain, that Aristotle's conception of tragedy has many flaws as a description of fifth-century drama.

30), and denouement (8:31-16:8); moreover, the narrative's turning point consists of a recognition (*anagorisis*) in which Peter discovers Jesus' true identity.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast to Bilezikian, a radically different approach to Mark's relationship to Greek drama is taken by Dan Via.<sup>34</sup> Rather than an Aristotelian analysis of plot, Via employs a structuralist methodology and focuses primarily on comedy rather than tragedy. Via is interested in the deep structure of texts, that is, "the hidden or underlying configuration that can offer some explanation for the more or less visible or obvious pattern in the text." Here, he finds that Mark shares with the comedies of Aristophanes "the global and detailed presence of the death and *resurrection* or *life-through-death* motif."<sup>35</sup>

In sum: early Christians interacted with Greek drama in a variety of interesting ways. As with the Jewish writers discussed above, for Christians the theater functions as the literal and figurative stage upon which they suffered persecution. At the same time, dramatic texts are variously employed in Christian writings. Paul's use of a dramatic verse in 1 Corinthians anticipates what would later become, for some at least, a vigorous interest in Christian readings of classical drama. As we shall see below, both Clement

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<sup>33</sup> For an analysis of Mark that further develops Bilezikian's use of Aristotelian categories, see Stephen H. Smith, "A Divine Tragedy: Some Observations on the Dramatic Structure of Mark's Gospel," *NovT* 37 (1995): 209–31.

<sup>34</sup> Dan O. Via, *Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament: A Structuralist Approach to Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975); on Mark, see esp. 71-163.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, at 7 and 101. Via's analysis has been sharply criticized, however, for adopting a conception of Attic comedy that relies almost exclusively on Francis Cornford's theory; see Vernon K. Robbins, "Review of Dan O. Via, *Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament*," *ATHR* 58 (1976): 385–87. The Gospel of John has also been analyzed in view of Greek tragedy; for a recent study, see Jo-Ann A. Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004). As with the studies of Mark mentioned above, she does not argue that John engaged in *mimesis* of any particular text but rather that he "made use of the conventions of the Greek tragedies" (12). Her work is informed not only by Aristotelian theory of tragedy as is Bilezikian's (see, e.g., 42-63) but also by modern theatrical criticism, which allows her to explore the performative features present in the Gospel (see, e.g., 74-158).

and Origen have a thorough knowledge of dramatic texts as well as contemporary approaches to their interpretation. Finally, Christian narratives arguably exhibit influence from drama in the structures of their plots. Thus, for some Christian writers, Greek drama was a valuable point of reference whereby they could construct and communicate their own message.

## 6.2 THE LITERARY AND RELIGIOUS WORLDS OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

### 6.2.1 THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES AND EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*: INTRODUCTION

The foregoing discussion suggests the extent to which the world of early Christians was shaped by the prominence of Dionysus and Greek drama within the dominant culture. For the study of Christian receptions of Euripides' *Bacchae*, the Acts of the Apostles provides a compelling point of departure. In its narrative, Christian characters navigate the Greco-Roman world and interact with its gods and its literary traditions. Moreover, Luke, its author, clearly aspires to be a man of Greek letters.<sup>36</sup> That Luke read the *Bacchae* was first proposed by Wilhelm Nestle in his 1900 article, "Anklänge an Euripides in der Apostelgeschichte," in which he observed several striking similarities between Acts and the tragedy.<sup>37</sup> The persistent interest in "the problem of Acts and the *Bacchae*" is evidenced subsequently in the steady stream of scholarly

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<sup>36</sup> Throughout this chapter the name "Luke" is employed as the traditional author of both Acts and the Gospel of Luke. Both works are anonymous. They have traditionally been dated to the late first century. Some place it around 120 CE, however; see esp. Richard I. Pervo, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 2006)

<sup>37</sup> Wilhelm Nestle, "Anklänge an Euripides in der Apostelgeschichte," *Philologus* 59 (1900): 46–57.

publications addressing and debating it, up through a recent 2010 article by Jan Schäfer.<sup>38</sup> In addition to providing an important element to this study's larger interest in the *Bacchae*'s reception history, this scholarly problem foregrounds several persistent issues in Acts scholarship pertaining to Luke's literary and religious strategies. At the same time, it provides a test for the methodological approaches by which Acts is effectively analyzed in its Greco-Roman context. Therefore, it is necessary first to attend to larger interpretive questions regarding Acts' intellectual, literary, and religious context, with which the study of its relation to the *Bacchae* intersects (§ 6.2.2). After this discussion, I briefly survey the history of scholarship on the problem of Acts and the *Bacchae*, highlighting the wide diversity of methodological approaches that have been employed (§

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<sup>38</sup> Jan Schäfer, "Zur Funktion der Dionysosmysterien in der Apostelgeschichte: Eine intertextuelle Betrachtung der Berufungs- und Befreiungserzählungen in der Apostelgeschichte und der Bakchen des Euripides," *TZ* 66 (2010): 199–222. Among the intervening scholarship devoted to some aspect of the relationship between Acts and the *Bacchae* are Otto Weinreich, *Gebet und Wunder: Zwei Abhandlungen zur Religions- und Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1929), esp. 332–41; Alfred Vögeli, "Lukas und Euripides," *TZ* 9 (1953): 415–38; Martin Dibelius, "Literary Allusions in the Speeches in the Acts," in *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. Heinrich Greeven; London: SCM Press, 1956), 186–91, esp. 188–91; John Hackett, "Echoes of the *Bacchae* of Euripides in Acts of the Apostles," *ITQ* 23 (1956): 219–27, 350–66; Peter Colaclides, "Acts 17,28A and Bacchae 506," *VC* 27 (1973): 161–64; Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 18–24; Lilian Portefaix, *Sisters Rejoice: Paul's Letter to the Philippians and Luke-Acts as Seen by First-Century Philippian Women* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1988), 101–04, 169–71; John Clayton Lentz, *Luke's Portrait of Paul* (SNTSMS 77; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), esp. 84–86; Richard Seaford, "Thunder, Lightning, and Earthquakes in the *Bacchae* and the Acts of the Apostles," in *What Is a God? Studies in the Nature of Greek Divinity* (ed. A. B. Lloyd; London: Duckworth, 1997), 139–51; Shelly Matthews, *First Converts: Rich Pagan Women and the Rhetoric of Mission in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Contraversions; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 73–82; John B. Weaver, *Plots of Epiphany: Prison-Escape in Acts of the Apostles* (BZNW 131; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004); Dennis R. MacDonald, "Lydia and Her Sisters as Lukan Fictions," in *A Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff; Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings 9; London: T & T Clark, 2004), 105–10; Detlev Dormeyer, "Bakchos in der Apostelgeschichte," in *Griechische Mythologie und frühes Christentum* (ed. Raban von Haehling; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 153–72; S. R. Wiest, "A Propaedeutic from the *Bacchae* of Euripides for Interpreting Luke's Stephen-Section (Acts 6:1-8:4)," in *Cygnifiliana: Essays in Classics, Comparative Literature, and Philosophy Presented to Professor Roy Arthur Swanson on the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (ed. Chad M. Schroeder; New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 190–208; John Moles, "Jesus and Dionysus in the Acts of the Apostles and Early Christianity," *Hermathena* 180 (2006): 65–104; Detlef Ziegler, *Dionysos in der Apostelgeschichte: Eine intertextuelle Lektüre* (Religion und Biographie 18; Münster: Lit, 2008).

6.3). After this preliminary discussion, I offer a reading of Acts that interrogates its relationship with the *Bacchae* around the theme of *mania* and *sophrosyne* in connection with inspired speech, particularly in Paul's interaction with Festus in chapter 26 and the Pentecost narrative in chapter 2 (§ 6.4). Throughout more than 110 years of research on Acts and the *Bacchae*, it has gone largely unnoticed that this central dispute in Paul's dialogue with Festus—whether his utterances arise from *mania* (Festus' accusation) or *sophrosyne* (Paul's defense)—is also fundamental to the plot of the *Bacchae*, where the protagonists clash over their competing claims to rationality and self-restraint (see § 6.4.3). Similarly, the allegation against the apostles at Pentecost that their inspired speech was the result of drunkenness evokes a distinctive characteristic of Dionysiac prophecy that had also been raised by Euripides (§ 6.4.2). My reading of Acts and the *Bacchae* points to several ways in which Luke's literary strategies are illuminated against the well-known Dionysiac world of the *Bacchae*. It highlights how Luke's Dionysiac allusions function to navigate a Christian identity in the Roman world and amidst Greek cultural and religious hegemony.

#### 6.2.2 THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: GENRES, SOURCES, AND STYLES

Biblical scholarship has been vexed by the question of Acts' genre. Traditionally, it has been situated within historiography and scholars attempt to account for the extent to which Luke was a successful (i.e., reliable) historian. Henry Cadbury's work on Luke-Acts was been widely influential in solidifying this as a consensus approach for much of

the twentieth century.<sup>39</sup> Increasing dissatisfaction with this designation, however, has led to various alternatives and modifications.<sup>40</sup> As Loveday Alexander's influential study of the prefaces in Luke and Acts shows, they have more in common with technical or scientific writing than they do with the conventions of historiography.<sup>41</sup> Two alternative suggestions to historiography are important for the present study. First, Richard Pervo situates Acts within the world of ancient fiction, arguing that Luke shares many literary features and narrative techniques with novels and other "popular" literature.<sup>42</sup> Second, Dennis MacDonald argues that Luke consciously modeled portions of his narrative on the Homeric epics.<sup>43</sup> Building on his methodology of *mimesis*-criticism developed elsewhere, he analyzes four scenes in Acts in which he finds direct imitation of Homeric passages.<sup>44</sup> Those who continue to classify Acts as historiography have offered further clarifications in view of the wide diversity of this ancient genre. Gregory Sterling, for example, labels Luke-Acts as "apologetic historiography," which is "a host genre for

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<sup>39</sup> Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (2d ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1958) (orig. 1927). For his discussion of Acts' genre, see, e.g., 127-39. On the speeches of Luke-Acts in relation to the conventions of historiography, see 184-90.

<sup>40</sup> For review of the scholarship, see Thomas E. Phillips, "The Genre of Acts: Moving toward a Consensus?," *Currents in Biblical Research* 4 (2006): 365-96.

<sup>41</sup> Loveday C. A. Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1* (SNTSMS 78; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For a survey of prefaces in Greek historiography, see esp. 23-41.

<sup>42</sup> Pervo, *Profit with Delight*.

<sup>43</sup> Dennis R. MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). In addition, MacDonald is working on a monograph on the wider influence of tragedy in Luke and Acts and has kindly shared an initial draft with me. Another attempt to situate Luke-Acts within the genre of epic is that of Marianne Palmer Bonz, who argues that Luke imitated contemporary epic, most notably Vergil's *Aeneid* (*The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000]). She argues that the ways in which Vergil transformed Homer in his creation of a foundation narrative for Rome that demonstrated its place within a divinely orchestrated history are analogous to Luke's appropriation of Israel's history in the Septuagint.

<sup>44</sup> For an introduction to *mimesis* criticism, see Dennis R. MacDonald, "Introduction," in *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity* (ed. Dennis R. MacDonald; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2001), 1-9. For criticism, see Karl Olav Sandnes, "Imitatio Homeri? An Appraisal of Dennis R. MacDonald's 'Mimesis Criticism'," *JBL* 124 (2005): 715-32.

natives who wrote the story of their own people in the form of Hellenistic historiography.”<sup>45</sup> David Balch compares Acts to “foundation narratives” as, for example, in Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ *Roman Antiquities* and Plutarch’s *Lives*.<sup>46</sup>

Establishing the genre of Acts is beyond the scope of this study. In fact, increasingly interpreters of Acts are concluding that it cannot be fit neatly within any single genre. As Pervo asserts, “[u]nrestrained by the conventions governing elite literature, popular writers were able to blend genres and create new ones.”<sup>47</sup> The recognition that multiple and diverse literary models may be productively compared with Acts, including epics, novels, historiography, and biography, is an important development in Acts scholarship and one which should encourage the inclusion of Greek tragedy.

Alongside the question of the genre of Acts, observations regarding Luke’s educational attainment and his use of classical sources provide important background for an assessment of Acts’ relation to Euripides’ *Bacchae*. Henry Cadbury demonstrated that Luke’s Greek is much closer to Attic than other New Testament authors.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Luke’s awareness of the relationship between language, culture, and status can be seen in

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<sup>45</sup> Gregory E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (NovTSup 64; Leiden: Brill, 1992), at 16. He defines it thus: “the story of a subgroup of people in an extended prose narrative written by a member of the group who follows the group’s own traditions but Hellenizes them in an effort to establish the identity of the group within the setting of the larger world” (17). For a discussion of the larger apologetic aims of Acts, including a criticism of the category of “apologetic historiography,” see Loveday C. A. Alexander, “The Acts of the Apostles as an Apologetic Text,” in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (ed. Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman, and Simon Price; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15–44.

<sup>46</sup> David L. Balch, “ΜΕΤΑΒΟΛΗ ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΩΝ: Jesus as Founder of the Church in Luke-Acts: Form and Function,” in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (ed. Todd C. Penner and Caroline vander Stichele; SBLSymS 20; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 43–63.

<sup>47</sup> Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 14–18 (at 18); see also Phillips, “The Genre of Acts,” 382–85.

<sup>48</sup> Henry J. Cadbury, *The Style and Literary Method of Luke* (HTS 6; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1920). He does this by detailed comparisons of New Testament vocabulary (1-39); he also analyses how Luke consistently Atticizes the Greek of his Markan source (131-205).

the ways in which he varies his style according to the subject matter and occasion. Thus, for example, in Luke 1-2 he imitates the language of the LXX whereas in Acts 17 when Paul is at Athens his language is closer to Attic.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the representation of Paul reveals Luke's careful attention to matters of social class and education.<sup>50</sup> Thus, for example, Luke emphasizes Paul's Roman citizenship (22:25), a marker of high social standing, and in his dialogue with philosophers at Athens he has Paul quote from the Stoic Aratus' *Phaenomena*, an appropriate poet for his discussion with learned Stoics.<sup>51</sup> In other places, Luke's use and knowledge of classical poetry and mythology can be seen in a more indirect manner. In Acts 14 at Lystra, for example, Paul and Barnabas are mistaken for Hermes and Zeus, which reflects a similar myth of divine visitation found in Ovid (*Meta.* 8.618-724). Ovid records a myth in which Jupiter and Mercury visit Phrygia, where the rustics Baucis and Philemon are the only ones to host them and consequently the rest are destroyed. Luke's and Ovid's narratives arise from a common mythological tradition associated with that region.<sup>52</sup> In addition, Luke had some awareness of the conventions of contemporary rhetoric. Since George Kennedy's seminal study on rhetorical criticism of the New Testament, scholars have increasingly

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<sup>49</sup> On Luke's varied style of language, see Loveday C. A. Alexander, "Septuaginta, Fachprosa, Imitatio: Albert Wifstrand and the Language of Luke-Acts," in *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 231-52; Pervo, *Acts*, 7-12. Martin Dibelius argued the variations of style are due to his use of diverse sources and traditions ("Style Criticism of the Book of Acts," in *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 1-25). On the dependence of Luke 1-2 upon the LXX, see also John Drury, *Tradition and Design in Luke's Gospel: A Study in Early Christian Historiography* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976), 49-80.

<sup>50</sup> See Lentz, *Luke's Portrait of Paul*; Richard I. Pervo, *The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 149-56.

<sup>51</sup> Dibelius argued based on the content of the larger speech that "since the speaker uses this very quotation with a literary turn, it is easy to assume that he really knew Aratus' poem and not only this one half-verse taken from it" ("Paul on the Areopagus," in *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 26-71 [at 51]).

<sup>52</sup> For a detailed survey of the mythological traditions underlying Acts and Ovid, see Dean Philip Bechard, *Paul outside the Walls: A Study of Luke's Socio-Geographical Universalism in Acts 14:8-20* (AnBib 143; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), 279-337. He argues for the strong likelihood that Ovid's myth preserves an earlier Phrygian version, of which Luke also had knowledge.

found that the speeches in Acts conform to the standards of classical rhetoric.<sup>53</sup> Of particular importance for my analysis below is that several of the defense speeches employ the structure for forensic oratory as outlined in Quintilian (*Inst.* 3.9.1) and evidenced on transcripts preserved on papyri.<sup>54</sup>

This brief account of Luke's literary context suggests that to the extent that Acts' genre can be categorized within Greco-Roman literature, multiple models must be taken into account and function in different ways throughout the work. Moreover, Luke was striving for a high(er) literary style than his Christian predecessors and understood, if imperfectly, the linguistic, intellectual, and rhetorical approaches demanded by various cultural settings. His interest in positioning Christianity within the social and political structures of the Greco-Roman world is evident both in his own literary style and in the ways in which he constructs his characters. Therefore, that Luke would have used the *Bacchae* in some manner (either directly or indirectly) is perfectly in keeping with his larger literary strategies and should be understood within his wider negotiation of Christian identity.

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<sup>53</sup> George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984). On Acts, see 114-40.

<sup>54</sup> The five parts as outlined by Quintilian are exordium, narratio, probatio, refutatio, and peroratio; see esp. Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Forensic Defense Speech and Paul's Trial Speeches in Acts 22-26: Form and Function," in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar* (ed. Charles H. Talbert; New York: Crossroad, 1984), 210-24; Bruce W. Winter, "Official Proceedings and the Forensic Speeches in Acts 24-26," in *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting* (ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke; vol. 1 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 305-36.

### 6.3 THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES AND EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*: *STATUS*

#### *QUAESTIONIS*

The similarities between Acts and the *Bacchae* identified by scholars range from broad thematic parallels to specific verbal allusions.<sup>55</sup> Both texts narrate the arrival of a new deity and his cult from the east; although some accept the new religion, the plot is driven by resistance and conflict. Over the course of the narrative, there are trials and imprisonments followed by miraculous deliverances and epiphanies with earthquakes and lightning. Moreover, women occupy a prominent place among the new devotees. Given these thematic parallels, the verbal allusions take on increased resonance. Like Dionysus, Jesus is characterized as a “foreign god” (ξένων δαιμονίων, Acts 17:18; *Bacchae* 219; 256; 272; 353-54; 650). Opponents of the new cult are described as *theomachoi* (“god-fighters”) (Acts 5:39; *Bacch.* 45; 325; 1255). The analogy between Paul and Pentheus as *theomachoi*, is seen, for example, in Acts 9:1 where Paul was “breathing out threat and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (ἐμπνέων ἀπειλῆς καὶ φόνου εἰς τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ κυρίου, Act 9:1) as Pentheus was also “breathing out anger” (θυμὸν ἐκπνέων, *Bacch.* 620) against Dionysus. In Acts, Peter escapes through an iron gate “which opens spontaneously” (ἥτις αὐτομάτη ἠνοίγη, 12:10) as the maenads in the *Bacchae*: “their bonds released from their feet spontaneously” (αὐτόματα δ’ αὐταῖς δεσμὰ διελύθη ποδῶν, 447).<sup>56</sup> The most striking verbal allusion is in Acts 26:14 where Paul reports that Christ had warned him in his epiphany that “it is difficult for you to kick against the goads” (σκληρόν σοι πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζειν) as Dionysus had to Pentheus: “I would rather

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<sup>55</sup> Here I summarize the most obvious and well-known examples. For an excellent summary presentation of the evidence for the parallels, see Moles, “Jesus and Dionysus,” 65–77.

<sup>56</sup> On this point, see § 4.3.2 on Artapanus.

sacrifice to him [Dionysus] than in anger to kick against the goads, a mortal against a god” (θύοιμ’ ἄν αὐτῷ μᾶλλον ἢ θυμούμενος πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζοιμι θνητὸς ὢν θεῷ, 794-95).

While many scholars have recognized these and additional similarities between Acts and the *Bacchae* little consensus has emerged regarding how they should be interpreted. In this section, I review the vast scholarly literature on this problem; although my discussion is necessarily selective, I aim to highlight the most important contributions and to demonstrate the wide range of methodological approaches and their results.

### 6.3.1 DIRECT LITERARY DEPENDENCE: FROM *REMINISZENZEN* TO *MIMESIS*

In his initial study of this problem, Nestle argued that Luke, in keeping with his educational attainment and evident knowledge of classical literature (*der griechischen Profanlitteratur*), composed several scenes in Acts with *Reminiszenzen* from similar scenes from the *Bacchae*.<sup>57</sup> In spite of the wide influence of Nestle’s groundbreaking observations, not all scholars would accept his thesis of direct borrowing. The most decisive refutation came from Alfred Vögeli’s 1953 article, “Lukas und Euripides.”<sup>58</sup> He demonstrated that many of the similarities need not be the result of literary dependence but could be readily derived from popular culture. Thus, for example, the verbal parallel, “to kick against the goads,” was proverbial even prior to its use in the *Bacchae* (Pindar,

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<sup>57</sup> Nestle, “Anklänge an Euripides.” He focused on four features: *theomachos* (Acts 5:39); the goads-proverb (Acts 26:14); the prison escapes (Acts 12; 16); and the “new god” (Acts 17:18).

<sup>58</sup> Vögeli, “Lukas und Euripides.”

*Pyth.* 2.94ff; Aesch., *Ag.* 1624; Eur., *IT* 1396; Eur., frag. 604 [Nauck]).<sup>59</sup> After Vögeli, scholars have been largely hesitant to postulate direct borrowing from the *Bacchae*.<sup>60</sup>

Recently, however, the case for direct borrowing has been revived by Dennis MacDonald who applies *mimesis*-criticism to Acts 16. Although his most extensive analysis of *mimesis* in Acts has been in relation to Homer, he also argues that in his narrative of the conversion of Lydia (Acts 16), Luke has consciously adapted themes from the *Bacchae* to present her as a Christian maenad.<sup>61</sup>

### 6.3.2 OTHER COMPARATIVE METHODOLOGIES: FROM FORM CRITICISM TO INTERTEXTUALITY

Form criticism (and its variations) provides an alternative methodological approach to understanding the parallels. The first such analysis that incorporates both Act and the *Bacchae* is that of Otto Weinreich. He compares *Begriewungswunder*

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 417. Three years after Vögeli, John Hackett (apparently independently) issued a similar rebuttal, suggesting by contrast that the goads-proverb may be accounted for in Jewish sources (“Echoes of the *Bacchae*,” 219–27, 350–66 [esp. 355–57]).

<sup>60</sup> As Pervo observes, “it is not necessary to hypothesize that Luke made direct use of the *Bacchae*, but use is not unlikely” (*Acts*, 410 n. 91); see also Dibelius, “Literary Allusions,” 188–91; Lothar Schmid, “κέντρον,” *TDNT* 3: 663–68, esp. 666–67; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (trans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn; Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 685 n. 3; Lentz, *Luke’s Portrait of Paul*, 84–86; Weaver, *Plots of Epiphany*, 132–35; Moles, “Jesus and Dionysus,” 69; Schäfer, “Zur Funktion der Dionysosmysterien in der Apostelgeschichte,” 206–08. An additional verbal parallel with the *Bacchae* has been proposed by Colaclides. He notes that Luke’s phrase, “in him we live and move and have our being” (ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν, Acts 17:28), the source of which has eluded scholars, shares the same triadic structure as *Bacchae* 506: “you do not know what life you live, nor what you do, nor who you are” (οὐκ οἶσθ’ ὅ τι ζῆς, οὐδ’ ὅ δρῶς, οὐδ’ ὅστις εἶ) (“Acts 17,28A and *Bacchae* 506”). As with Vögeli, however, Colaclides does not argue that Euripides is Luke’s immediate source but rather that they share a common source.

<sup>61</sup> “Insofar as every detail about Lydia in Acts points to her as a Christian Maenad, it would appear that by making the first convert in Europe a woman from Lydia, named Lydia, a seller of purple garments, Luke broadcast the similarities between Paul’s mission to Greece and that of Dionysus. The parallels between the *Bacchae* and Paul’s adventures are intentional, indeed strategic” (“Lydia and Her Sisters” [at 110]). Other scholars have analyzed Acts 16 in connection with the *Bacchae* and gender, though without making a case for direct borrowing; see Portefaix, *Sisters Rejoice*, 169–71; Matthews, *First Converts*, 73–82. An additional recent argument in favor of Luke’s direct use of the *Bacchae*, not only in Acts but also in the Gospel is made by Wiest, “A Propaedeutical from the *Bacchae*.”

(“miracles of deliverance”) from a wide range of ancient sources and identifies 12 common motifs.<sup>62</sup> Weinreich’s analysis demonstrates that Luke’s prison escape narratives (in Acts 5; 12; and 16) share many features not only with the *Bacchae* but with a significant number of other ancient literary texts. Although Weinreich also maintains Luke’s literary dependence on the *Bacchae*, his methodology provides a framework for productive comparisons without necessitating direct borrowing.<sup>63</sup> Richard Pervo builds on Weinreich’s study and, in keeping with his interest in ancient fiction and apocryphal Acts, he significantly expands the scope of comparison to include over 30 tales of prison escape.<sup>64</sup> For Pervo, Luke’s use of incarcerations and miracles of deliverance represents a shared literary trope with contemporary adventure literature. More recently, John Weaver’s monograph (*Plots of Epiphany*) devoted to the prison escapes in Acts eschews the question of literary dependence in favor of a cross-cultural, comparative, or “myth-critical” approach. He aims to demonstrate that for Luke, prison escape has an analogous function to myths of Dionysus: “it is clear that the Lukan and Dionysian narratives both conceive of prison escape as a sacred event in which a deity’s power to save is reenacted in propagation of the cult.”<sup>65</sup>

Richard Seaford has provided an important methodological advance to the problem of Acts and the *Bacchae*. His 1997 article, “Thunder, Lightning, and Earthquakes,” analyzes the descriptions of Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:3-7; 22:6-11; 26:12-18) and Paul and Silas’ prison escape (Acts 16:19-40). He identifies 15 narrative

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<sup>62</sup> Weinreich, *Gebet und Wunder*. Authors include Aeschylus, Euripides, Pacuvius, Ovid, Philostratus, Nonnus, Artapanus, and Luke. On Weinreich’s treatment of Artapanus, see § 4.3.

<sup>63</sup> For Weinreich’s argument for literary dependence, see *ibid.*, 332–42.

<sup>64</sup> Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 18–24, esp. 21 n. 15.

<sup>65</sup> Weaver, *Plots of Epiphany*, at 197.

elements shared with the *Bacchae* and argues that the “detailed structural similarity” is too great to be coincidental.<sup>66</sup> Rather than literary dependence, however, he proposes that the persistence of this pattern over some five centuries may derive from the “ritual of mystic initiation.”<sup>67</sup> As he has argued elsewhere, the *Bacchae* contains elements which derive from the *hieros logos* of Dionysiac mysteries.<sup>68</sup> In the tragedy, “the experiences of Pentheus seem to express the *subjective* aspect of initiation, the ignorance, fear and confusion of the initiate.”<sup>69</sup> At the same time, Pentheus’ opposition to Dionysus and consequent self-destruction are the antithesis to the initiate; whereas Pentheus desired but failed to acquire the knowledge associated with initiation, the final experience of the initiate is enlightenment and rebirth.<sup>70</sup> In Acts, Paul and Silas’ prison escape in chapter 16, for example, reflects (or refracts, as Seaford prefers) several features of such a mystic ritual: “the animosity of the persecutor, the hymn, trembling, rushing vainly into the dark house, liberation from imprisonment, the command to rise from the ground, the light in the darkness, god as light, as well as the central element [...]: thunder, lightning and earthquake.”<sup>71</sup> In the Dionysiac ritual, the *thiasos* produced the impression of earthquakes and thunderbolts through song, dance, and drumming, which are all part of the negative aspect of the rite of passage.<sup>72</sup> These were “the most dramatic manifestations of the helplessness of humankind before the power of nature or of

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<sup>66</sup> Seaford, “Thunder, Lightning, and Earthquakes.”

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>68</sup> For the relationship between the *Bacchae* and the Dionysiac mysteries, see § 1.3.2 and esp. Richard Seaford, “Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries,” *CQ* 31 (1981): 252–75.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 253–55, 258, 260–61.

<sup>71</sup> Seaford, “Thunder, Lightning, and Earthquakes,” 143.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 142–47.

deity.”<sup>73</sup> The resemblance of Acts to the *Bacchae*, therefore, may be the result of shared ritual experience.

Following on Seaford’s emphasis on common ritual features, Detlev Dormeyer and Detlef Ziegler have undertaken reader-oriented analyses that aim to explore how Acts’ similarities with the *Bacchae* may have been read by a Greco-Roman audience.<sup>74</sup> Their intertextual methodology allows them to identify an array of “convergences” and explore how these would have been understood within the contemporary religious milieu. Dormeyer develops a “Typologie und Antitypologie” between Christianity in Acts and Dionysiac cult and notes signals whereby the reader might be expected to identify correspondences. There are several observable analogies, such as between the cautious warnings of Teiresias and Gamaliel against being a *theomachos*, Paul as Pentheus, and Christians as persecuted maenads.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, Dormeyer stresses that Luke pulls away from the Dionysiac parallels, for example, by omitting wine from Christian sacred meals.<sup>76</sup>

Each of the methodological approaches summarized above offers distinctive insights and important advances in the problem of Acts and the *Bacchae* that inform my

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 147. For a similar approach, see Moles, “Jesus and Dionysus,” 69.

<sup>74</sup> Dormeyer, “Bakchos in der Apostelgeschichte”; Ziegler, *Dionysos in der Apostelgeschichte*. Ziegler’s work is a dissertation supervised by Dormeyer and represents an expansion of his methodology and insights. Their approach shares with other recent scholarship an increased focus on Greco-Roman religion more broadly within Acts; see, e.g., Hans-Josef Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: The World of the Acts of the Apostles* (trans. Brian McNeil; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000); Lynn Allan Kauppi, *Foreign but Familiar Gods: Greco-Romans Read Religion in Acts* (Library of New Testament Studies 277; London: T & T Clark, 2006). Schäfer’s analysis of the *Bacchae* and Acts is similarly interested in an exploration of the latter’s attitude toward the Dionysiac mysteries and Greco-Roman religions more generally (“Zur Funktion der Dionysosmysterien in der Apostelgeschichte”).

<sup>75</sup> Dormeyer, “Bakchos in der Apostelgeschichte,” 155–67.

<sup>76</sup> Whereas in Luke 22:14-20 the Lord’s supper consisted of both bread and wine, in Acts the meals have only breaking of bread (2:42-47; 20:7-12); see *ibid.*, 159–60, 170–72; Ziegler, *Dionysos in der Apostelgeschichte*, 147–49. For a further discussion of the role of wine in the context of Acts 2, see § 6.4.2 below.

own analysis. In what follows, I engage in a comparative reading of the *Bacchae* and Acts that aims to demonstrate how the former illuminates the religious and literary context of the latter. The thematic convergences between the two are unmistakable. The methodology employed here, however, does not depend on a theory of literary borrowing or *mimesis*, even though such theories are not precluded. By attending to the *Bacchae* as a central text in shaping the popular understanding of Dionysiac religion, my aim is to explore how Luke positions Christianity within Greco-Roman culture.

#### 6.4 DIONYSIAC REVERSALS IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

As a starting point for interrogating the problem of Acts and the *Bacchae*, I examine the strongest verbal parallel, the phrase “to kick against the goads” (Acts 26:14; *Bacch.* 795). This is a useful point of departure because it highlights several methodological considerations. Following Vögeli’s study, it is clear that this phrase is a widely used Greek proverb and therefore need not be the result of literary borrowing. This, however, should not preclude further analysis. As I argue below, Acts 26 has several other contextual signals that support a wider comparison with the *Bacchae*, in particular the contestation over *mania* and *sophrosyne* in connection with inspired speech (§ 6.4.3). More immediately, however, it is necessary to consider the implications of Paul’s insistence in Acts 26:14 that Jesus spoke this well-known Greek proverb in the Hebrew dialect. I explore this linguistic inversion first within the immediate context of Paul’s forensic defense (§ 6.4.1), then, in connection with Luke’s wider interest in languages, noting several connections with the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2 (§ 6.4.2). Like Acts 26:14, the Pentecost narrative deprivileges Greek in favor of barbarian dialects,

and both Acts 26 and Acts 2 have broader Dionysiac resonances. In connecting these two sections of Acts, my aim is to demonstrate that Luke strategically evokes Dionysiac themes as a foil against which to present Christian inspired speech as characterized by *sophrosyne* not *mania*.

#### 6.4.1 A GREEK PROVERB IN HEBREW DIALECT: AUTHENTICATING DIVINE DISCOURSE IN ACTS 26:14

In Acts 26, Paul had been imprisoned in Caesarea for some two years and had appealed to the Emperor. Festus, having succeeded Felix as governor of Judea, wishes to send Paul to Rome with some statement of the charges against him. Consequently, he summons Paul to a hearing with Agrippa II, who happened to be visiting, in the hopes that Agrippa might provide some greater insight into the case against him. Paul is then permitted to speak; he begins his defense in 26:2 and continues until Festus interrupts him in 26:24. Paul's speech has been analyzed by Jerome Neyrey and Bruce Winter using rhetorical criticism and shown to follow the typical structure of an official forensic speech.<sup>77</sup> In the *exordium* (vv. 2-3), Paul comments on the competence of the judge and pleads for a patient hearing. Next, in the *narratio* (vv. 4-18), Paul recounts his upbringing in Judaism, his former persecution of Christians, and the events related to his conversion, including his epiphany and divine commissioning. The *narratio* includes several important forensic features, such as corroborating witnesses (his fellow Jews [vv. 4-5], and the chief priests and his fellow travelers [vv. 12-13]) and proof (*pistis*), which

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<sup>77</sup> My outline here follows Neyrey, "The Forensic Defence Speech," 210–12; and Winter, "Official Proceedings," 327–31.

involves his epiphany that persuaded him of the resurrection and altered his course of action (vv. 12-16). In the *confirmatio* (vv. 19-20), Paul emphasizes his obedience to his divine commission; in the *refutatio* (v. 21), he refutes the original charges on which he had been seized and imprisoned. Finally, in the *peroratio* (vv. 22-23), he stresses his receipt of divine aid and reasserts his faithfulness to the authorities of Moses and the prophets.

The goads-proverb occurs within the *narratio* in Paul's description of his epiphany and report of the divine message:

(11) καὶ κατὰ πάσας τὰς συναγωγὰς πολλάκις τιμωρῶν αὐτοὺς ἠνάγκαζον βλασφημεῖν περισσῶς τε ἐμμαινόμενος αὐτοῖς ἐδίωκον ἕως καὶ εἰς τὰς ἔξω πόλεις. (12) Ἐν οἷς πορευόμενος εἰς τὴν Δαμασκὸν μετ' ἐξουσίας καὶ ἐπιτροπῆς τῆς τῶν ἀρχιερέων (13) ἡμέρας μέσης κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν εἶδον, βασιλεῦ, οὐρανόθεν ὑπὲρ τὴν λαμπρότητα τοῦ ἡλίου περιλάμψαν με φῶς καὶ τοὺς σὺν ἐμοὶ πορευομένους. (14) πάντων τε καταπεσόντων ἡμῶν εἰς τὴν γῆν ἤκουσα φωνὴν λέγουσαν πρὸς με τῇ Ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτῳ· Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; σκληρόν σοι πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζειν. (15) ἐγὼ δὲ εἶπα· τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δὲ κύριος εἶπεν· ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις.

(11) And frequently punishing them throughout all the synagogues, I was forcing them to blaspheme and, filled excessively with madness against them, I was pursuing them even as far as foreign cities. (12) Amidst these things, while going to Damascus with authority and a commission from the chief priests (13) around midday I saw on the road, O king, a light from heaven more brilliant than the sun shining about me and those travelling with me. (14) When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me in the Hebrew dialect, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is difficult for you to kick against the goads.” (15) And I said, “Who are you Lord?” And the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”

It is particularly striking that Luke has Paul insist that Jesus spoke this proverb “in the Hebrew dialect.”<sup>78</sup> Indeed, as Vögeli established, this is a well attested *Greek* saying

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<sup>78</sup> Because Jesus is generally thought to have spoken Aramaic, it is usually presumed that this must be the language implied by Luke's “Hebrew dialect”; see Pervo, *Acts*, 691. As I suggest below, however, Luke's interest in establishing Jesus' language may be more rhetorical than historical; see the discussion of Papias below.

and there is no evidence for an equivalent proverb in Hebrew, Aramaic, or any other Jewish literature.<sup>79</sup> It would therefore have struck Paul’s audience (both Festus and Agrippa and educated readers of Acts) as an arresting incongruity that a proverb known to be of *Greek* origin is claimed by Paul to have been uttered by Jesus in the *Hebrew* dialect. Such a linguistic inversion must be understood as part of a larger literary strategy not only within Acts 26 but also within Luke’s larger treatment of language, dialect, and divine communication.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, as mentioned above (§ 6.2.2), more than any other New Testament author, Luke demonstrates an awareness of the cultural subtleties entailed in his use of language. The term *dialectos*, for example, occurs only in Acts (1:19; 2:6, 8; 21:40; 22:2; 26:14). Moreover, Luke is able to imitate “biblical” Greek where appropriate (as in Luke 1-2) and attempts to Atticize when establishing Paul as a man of philosophical and literary acumen (Acts 17). In addition to variations of Greek style, Luke distinguishes between the languages spoken by the characters of his narrative.<sup>81</sup> In the episode at Lystra (Acts 14:8-18), Luke presents the locals as unsophisticated provincials who, in response to Paul and Barnabas’ miracle, ignorantly mistake them for gods: “they raised their voice speaking in the Lycaonian language, ‘the gods have become like men and come down to us’” (ἐπῆραν τὴν φωνὴν αὐτῶν Λυκαονιστῖ

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<sup>79</sup> Vögeli, “Lukas und Euripides,” 416–17. He notes that κέντρον with the sense of “goads” occurs in the LXX only in Prov 26:3 and Sir 38:25 but without the verb λακτίζειν (417 n. 7). Hackett, however, proposes several texts in support of a Jewish origin for the proverb (“Echoes of the *Bacchae*,” 355–57).

<sup>80</sup> I therefore fundamentally disagree with the comment of Schmid that “[t]here is little point in labelling the minor flaw that a Greek proverb is put on the lips of one who speaks Hebrew or Aramaic” (*TDNT* 3:667).

<sup>81</sup> It is interesting by way of comparison that in the three instances in the Gospel of Luke where a Markan passage is taken over in which Mark includes an Aramaic expression followed by a translation (ὁ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνεύμενον), twice Luke includes only the Greek and omits the Aramaic (Luke 8:54 || Mark 5:41; Luke 23:33 || Mark 15:22); once he excludes both (Luke 23:36, 44-46 || Mark 15:34).

λέγοντες· οἱ θεοὶ ὁμοιωθέντες ἀνθρώποις κατέβησαν πρὸς ἡμᾶς, Act 14:11).<sup>82</sup> In this instance, the use of a local “barbarian” language is directly connected with cultural and religious backwardness.<sup>83</sup> Later, a Roman commander who has Paul in custody is surprised to hear Paul speaking Greek, having mistaken him for an Egyptian radical; he asks, “Do you know Greek?” (Ἑλληνιστὶ γινώσκεις; 21:37) As it turns out, Paul could also speak “in the Hebrew dialect” and he proceeds to do so in his address to a Jewish audience in Jerusalem (21:40; 22:2). Of course, the most striking instance in which non-Greek dialects play an important role in Acts’ narrative is the Pentecost episode of Acts 2, which is discussed below (§ 6.4.2).

Within the immediate context of Paul’s forensic defense speech, however, his identification of the dialect spoken by Jesus functions to strengthen its authenticity as evidence. This can be seen through a comparison with the other accounts of Paul’s conversion in Acts. Acts 26:12-18 is the third such account; Luke narrates it first in 9:1-9 and Paul relates it in his defense before the Jews in Jerusalem in 22:3-11. The relationship between the three accounts is complex and largely beyond the scope of this study.<sup>84</sup> The following chart, however, reveals several important points for understanding Luke’s strategy in Acts 26.

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<sup>82</sup> On the significance of Luke’s characterization of the Lycaonians for his larger socio-geographical outlook, see Bechard, *Paul outside the Walls*, 141–69.

<sup>83</sup> Luke does not employ the term “barbarian” here. He uses it only in reference to the inhabitants of Malta (28:2, 4); see also Rom 1:14; 1 Cor 14:11; Col 3:11. On the well-known reputation of the Lycaonians for being a particularly uncivilized and un-Roman people, see Bechard, *Paul outside the Walls*, 141-69.

<sup>84</sup> For a more complete analysis, see Charles W. Hedrick, “Paul’s Conversion/Call: A Comparative Analysis of the Three Reports in Acts,” *JBL* 100 (1981): 415–32. He presents a complete synoptic chart of the three accounts (417-19) and is interested in detecting Luke’s redaction of his tradition in each instance. What is lacking, however, is attention to the forensic contexts of Acts 22 and 26 in contrast to Acts 9; see also Pervo, *Acts*, 629–30.

Acts 9:4-5	Acts 22:7-8	Acts 26:14-15
(4) καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἤκουσεν φωνὴν λέγουσαν αὐτῷ·  Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις;	(7) ἔπεσά τε εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος καὶ ἤκουσα φωνῆς λεγούσης μοι·  Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις;	(14) πάντων τε καταπεσόντων ἡμῶν εἰς τὴν γῆν ἤκουσα φωνὴν λέγουσαν πρὸς με τῇ Ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτῳ·  Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; <u>σκληρόν σοι πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζειν.</u>
(5) εἶπεν δέ· τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δέ· ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις.	(8) ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπεκρίθην· τίς εἶ, κύριε; εἶπέν τε πρὸς με· ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος, ὃν σὺ διώκεις.	(15) ἐγὼ δὲ εἶπα· τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δὲ κύριος εἶπεν· ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις.
(4) And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him:  “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”	(7) I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me:  “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”	(14) When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me <u>in the Hebrew dialect,</u>  “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? <u>It is difficult for you to kick against the goads.</u> ”
(5) And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he answered, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”	(8) And I answered, “Who are you, Lord?” He answered to me, “I am Jesus, the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.”	(15) And I said, “Who are you, Lord?” And the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”

**Table 1: Acts’ Three Accounts of Paul’s Epiphany and Conversion**

Only Acts 26 includes the goads-proverb;<sup>85</sup> and only in Acts 26, does Paul himself specify Jesus’ language as the Hebrew dialect.<sup>86</sup> In Acts 9, presumably because Luke is narrating events in the third person, the identification of the language was

<sup>85</sup> A sixth-century manuscript (E) harmonizes the three accounts by adding the proverb after 9:4 and 22:7.

<sup>86</sup> This is perhaps already implicit in Jesus’ use of Paul’s Hebrew name Σαοὺλ. Saul’s Hebrew name is used in Acts only in Paul’s conversion narratives: spoken by Jesus (9:4; 22:7; 26:14) and Ananias (9:17; 22:13). In 13:21 it is used of King Saul. Elsewhere, Acts uses the Hellenized name Σαῦλος (15 times). The LXX uses Σαοὺλ exclusively.

unimportant. In chapter 22, however, Luke specifies that Paul was giving his defense to a Jewish audience “in the Hebrew dialect,” the only instance in Acts other than 26:14 where a character’s language is identified as Hebrew: “hearing that [Paul] was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect they held even greater silence” (ἀκούσαντες δὲ ὅτι τῆ Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ προσεφώνει αὐτοῖς, μᾶλλον παρέσχον ἡσυχίαν, 22:2). Consequently, identifying Jesus’ language as the Hebrew dialect would have been redundant.<sup>87</sup> In Acts 26, by contrast, Paul addresses a Gentile audience (in Greek) and therefore the identification of the language spoken by Jesus becomes important. Given that his audience (Festus and Agrippa) could be expected to know that Jesus was not a native Greek speaker, Paul’s mention of language functions as an authenticating device within the context of his defense, that is, because Paul reports Jesus’ words with awareness of the actual language Jesus spoke.

This authenticating function of “Hebrew dialect” is consistent with the strategy of another early Christian, Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis. Commenting on the apostolic origins of the Gospels, he reports the following regarding the Gospel of Matthew: “Matthew, therefore, composed the oracles in Hebrew dialect but each one interpreted [or, translated] them as he was able” (Ματθαῖος μὲν οὖν Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ τὰ λόγια συνετάξατο, ἡρμήνευσε δ’ αὐτὰ ὡς ἦν δυνατὸς ἕκαστος).<sup>88</sup> Most scholars agree that

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<sup>87</sup> The response of Paul’s audience in 22:2 is suggestive of the importance of his language to the narrative.

<sup>88</sup> This fragment is preserved by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39) and is frag. 3.16 in Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (3d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007). On this fragment, see William R. Schoedel, *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary V: Polycarp, Martyrdom of Polycarp, Fragments of Papias* (Camden, N.J.: Thomas Nelson, 1964), 109–10; Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 32–34; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 609–22.

Papias did not know of a written Hebrew version of Matthew's Gospel; his interest is rather in establishing a Hebrew oral tradition that could be traced back through the apostle to Jesus himself. Thus, what is at stake for Papias is the authenticity of the sayings of Jesus (τὰ λόγια), which is bolstered by the claim that they were passed down in the language Jesus spoke.<sup>89</sup> Analogously, Paul's claim in Acts 26:14 to have heard the words of Jesus in the Hebrew dialect points to their authenticity and thus serves to strengthen the case of his defense both for Paul's judges within the narrative and for Luke's larger audience.

While these observations may explain Paul's insistence on Jesus' use of the Hebrew dialect, they fail sufficiently to account for the ironic linguistic reversal entailed in Paul's attribution of a *Greek* proverb to Jesus speaking in *Hebrew* dialect. In order to approach this problem, it will be useful to explore Luke's wider treatment of language, dialect, and divine communication, particularly in the Pentecost narrative where these themes are also prominent.

#### 6.4.2 "EACH IN THEIR OWN DIALECT": DIONYSUS AND INSPIRED SPEECH IN ACTS 2

The Pentecost scene (2:1-13) is central to Acts—its universal vision of the Christian message is programmatic for the narrative's geographic development. It describes the sudden outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles in Jerusalem in the form of tongues of fire which empower them to speak with other languages so that people

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<sup>89</sup> Koester theorizes that Papias' reference to Matthew's Hebrew may derive from a statement from the book's original incipit, such as is known from the incipit of the *Apocryphon of James* (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, 33 n. 6). Gundry maintains, however, that Papias' claim was not in reference to Matthew's *language* but rather that διάλεκτος is meant to describe Matthew's Hebraic *style*, that is, his distinctly "Hebrew way of presenting Jesus' messiahship," such as his emphasis on the Son of David, his genealogy, and his midrashic hermeneutics (*Matthew*, 619–20).

gathered from all the nations could understand. At first, some accuse them of drunkenness (2:13) but after Peter's sermon (2:14-36) some three thousand people repent and receive baptism (2:41). This passage is interrelated with chapter 26 around two main foci. First, both engage with Dionysiac themes: Acts 26 has, in addition to the goads-proverb, famously spoken by Dionysus, several other Dionysiac resonances that I discuss below (§ 6.4.3); Acts 2, as I argue here, alludes to Dionysiac religion, particularly with respect to the question of wine and prophecy. The second theme relates to language, ethnicity, and power. As I noted above, Paul's use of the goads-proverb in 26:14 entails a surprising linguistic reversal away from Greek. In this section, I suggest that an analogous move occurs in the Pentecost miracle, in that Luke deprivileges Greek in favor of barbarian dialects. Whereas in Acts 26, Paul was negotiating the political complexities of Roman rule in the east, in Acts 2 Luke constructs an ethnic vision of Christianity that runs counter to the hegemony of Greek culture in the Roman world. Moreover, this deflation of Hellenism and blurring of distinctions between Greek and barbarian is also an important characteristic that Acts 2 shares with Dionysiac mythology, including the *Bacchae*.

#### *Drinking Early? Intoxication as Divine Inspiration*

The most obvious Dionysiac allusion called to mind in Acts 2 is the apostles' alleged drunkenness in connection their ecstatic speech: "others ridiculed them and said they were full of sweet wine" (ἄλλοι δὲ διαχλευάζοντες ἔλεγον ὅτι γλεύκους

μεμεστωμένοι εἰσίν, 2:13).<sup>90</sup> Peter defends the apostles' sobriety on the basis of the time of day: "for these men are not drunk as you suppose; indeed, it is the third hour of the day" (οὐ γὰρ ὡς ὑμεῖς ὑπολαμβάνετε οὗτοι μεθύουσιν, ἔστιν γὰρ ὥρα τρίτη τῆς ἡμέρας, 2:15). The distinctively Dionysiac character of this accusation, however, has gone almost entirely overlooked in discussions of the problem of Acts and the *Bacchae*.<sup>91</sup> Two noteworthy exceptions are the studies of Dormeyer and Ziegler, who both see the ecstatic experience of Dionysiac cult functioning as an antitype in Acts 2.<sup>92</sup> Thus, for example, the allegation of the apostles' morning drunkenness is a comic satire of Bacchic practice. The same charge—drunkenness at "the third hour"—was made, for example, by Cicero against Antony as an illustration of his licentiousness and debauchery.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, at

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<sup>90</sup> The following analysis is largely interested in exploring Luke's narrative within the context of Greek and Roman literature and religion. An impressive list of Greco-Roman texts related to Acts 2 has been compiled by Pieter W. van der Horst, "Hellenistic Parallels to the Acts of the Apostles 2:1-47," *JSNT* 25 (1985): 49–60. This should not be taken, however, as an absence of influence from Judaism. As Glen Menzies has demonstrated, for example, regarding Luke's phrase, "tongues as of fire" (γλῶσσαι ὡσεὶ πυρός, Acts 2:3), which has no exact parallel in Hellenistic sources, there are several related occurrences in the Hebrew Bible and second-temple Jewish literature, including a document from the Dead Sea Scrolls, *Liturgy of Three Tongues of Fire* ("Pre-Lucan Occurrences of the Phrase 'Tongue(s) of Fire,'" *Pneuma* 22 [2000]: 27–60). For analysis of the phenomenon of Christian prophecy and inspired speech more broadly, with attention to ancient Israelite, Jewish, and Greco-Roman influences, see David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983); Christopher B. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and Its Hellenistic Environment* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995); Laura S. Nasrallah, *"An Ecstasy of Folly": Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* (HTS 52; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>91</sup> That wine was important in Dionysiac circles, both ritually and socially, is of course well known; see Henrichs, "Changing Dionysiac Identities," 140–43.

<sup>92</sup> Dormeyer, "Bakchos in der Apostelgeschichte," 155–62; Ziegler, *Dionysos in der Apostelgeschichte*, 144–49.

<sup>93</sup> "et quam multos dies in ea villa turpissime es perbacchatus! ab hora tertia bibebatur, ludebatur, vomebatur," "how many days have you most shamefully engaged in Bacchic revelry in that villa! From the third hour there was drinking, dancing, and vomiting," (*Phil.* 2.41.104). The villa in question is that of Marcus Varro near Casinum, which Cicero accuses Antony of having acquired unjustly. On Antony's early morning drinking, see also Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 4.148c. Antony's Dionysiac associations were of course well known; see § 3.2 above.

the end the same scene Luke further distances Christianity from Dionysiac religion by omitting wine from the sacred meal (2:42-47).<sup>94</sup>

In spite of the valuable insights of Dormeyer and Ziegler, they overlook a central connection of Acts 2 with Dionysiac religion and the *Bacchae*, which yet remains to be explored, namely, the relationship between drunkenness and prophetic inspiration.

Curiously, Dormeyer asserts that “Der Bakchos-Kult kennt keine Prophetie, wohl aber Träume und Erlösungshoffnung.”<sup>95</sup> While it is true that inspiring prophetic oracles is not Dionysus’ best-known activity, this is precisely what is asserted in a famous speech by Teiresias in the *Bacchae*:

μάντις δ’ ὁ δαίμων ὄδε· τὸ γὰρ βακχεύσιμον  
καὶ τὸ μανιῶδες μαντικὴν πολλὴν ἔχει·  
ὅταν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἐς τὸ σῶμ’ ἔλθῃ πολὺς,  
λέγειν τὸ μέλλον τοὺς μεμηνότας ποιεῖ.

This god is also a prophet. For Bacchic frenzy and madness possess much prophetic art. For whenever the god fully enters the body, he causes those who are mad to declare the future. (*Bacch.* 298-301)

Here the Theban prophet is defending Dionysus before Pentheus and noting the many benefits provided by this god to humanity. In these lines, Teiresias makes a sophistic argument, moving from “madness” (μανιῶδες)—a better known aspect of Dionysiac worship—by way of an etymological association to prophetic inspiration (μαντικὴν). This etymological connection between *mania* and *mantis* is famously made explicit several decades later by Plato in *Phaedrus* 244c.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, it was a commonly held notion among Greeks that prophetic oracles, whether Dionysiac or otherwise,

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<sup>94</sup> Dormeyer, “Bakchos in der Apostelgeschichte,” 159–62; Ziegler, *Dionysos in der Apostelgeschichte*, 145–47.

<sup>95</sup> Dormeyer, “Bakchos in der Apostelgeschichte,” 161.

<sup>96</sup> Socrates argues that the addition of T is a recent innovation: “they now rashly insert the tau” (οἱ δὲ νῦν ἀπειροκάλως τὸ ταῦ ἐπεμβάλλοντες, 244c).

derived from a divine madness.<sup>97</sup> This is the view that Plato has Socrates advocate in his discussion of the benefits of divine madness, contrasting *mania* and *sophrosyne*: “The prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona, while mad, have performed many and beautiful things for Greece both in private and in public matters, but while self-controlled, little or nothing” (ἢ τε γὰρ δὴ ἐν Δελφοῖς προφητὶς αἶ τ’ ἐν Δωδώνῃ ἰέρειαι μανεῖσαι μὲν πολλὰ δὴ καὶ καλὰ ἰδίᾳ τε καὶ δημοσίᾳ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἠργάσαντο, σωφρονοῦσαι δὲ βραχέα ἢ οὐδέν, *Phaedr.* 244a). Later in the same speech, however, Socrates distinguishes between various types of madness. In contrast to Teiresias in the *Bacchae*, however, Socrates limits prophetic madness to the sphere of Apollo: “[we have] established prophetic [madness] as the inspiration of Apollo but initiatory [madness as the inspiration] of Dionysus” (μαντικὴν μὲν ἐπίπνοϊαν Ἀπόλλωνος θέντες, Διονύσου δὲ τελεστικὴν, 265b).<sup>98</sup> Thus, Euripides’ Teiresias and Plato’s Socrates share the common Greek view that prophetic inspiration comes from madness; they disagree, however, regarding the role of Dionysus.

In my discussion of *mania* and *sophrosyne* in Acts 26 below (§ 6.4.3), I survey the wider treatment of this theme in the *Bacchae*. For the purposes of Acts 2, however, it is necessary to explore further the specific connection between wine and prophecy made by Teiresias in *Bacchae* 298-301. It is possible to understand his description of the god’s entering fully into the body (ὁ θεὸς ἐς τὸ σῶμ’ ἔλθη πολὺς, 300) metaphorically. Given, however, Dionysus’ close connection with wine and its intoxicating effects and that earlier in the same speech Teiresias had equated the god with wine (“he [Dionysus],

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<sup>97</sup> On “The Blessings of Madness,” see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Sather Classical Lectures 25; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 64–82.

<sup>98</sup> On this distinction, see *ibid.*, 68–70. In Socrates’ discourse, there are four types of madness; the other two are poetic from the Muses and erotic from Eros and Aphrodite.

having become a god, is poured out to the gods,” οὗτος θεοῖσι σπένδεται θεὸς γεγώς, *Bacch.* 284), the most natural interpretation of line 300 is as a reference to literal inebriation. This is in fact how the line was commonly understood in antiquity. In an epigram preserved in the *Palatine Anthology*, for example, *Bacchae* 300 is paraphrased in describing the death of one Lacydes, apparently from intemperance: “It was clear: Dionysus, whenever he comes into a body in large quantity, he destroys the limbs. Is it not perhaps for this reason he became ‘Lyaeus’?” (ἦ σαφὲς ἦν, Διόνυσος ὅτ’ ἂν πολὺς ἐς δέμας ἔλθῃ, / λῦσε μέλη· διὸ δὴ μήτι Λυαῖος ἔφου; 7.105.3-4) In connection with prophecy, Plutarch quotes Teiresias’ speech as an illustration of the effects of divine inspiration. In his discussion of the physical alterations that may accompany oracular inspiration, he quotes *Bacchae* 298-99 as evidence, taking them as a description of literal inebriation, which is analogous to all prophetic experience (*Obsolescence of Oracles* 432e).<sup>99</sup> That mind-altering substances were used in order to achieve prophetic inspiration is widely attested in ancient Greece. Perhaps most famously, the Pythia at Delphi was thought to give her oracles in a state of trance or possession produced by the vapors emitted from beneath the temple.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> ὡς οἶνος ἀναθυμαθείς ἕτερα πολλά κινήματα καὶ λόγους ἀποκειμένους καὶ λανθάνοντας ἀποκαλύπτει ‘τὸ γὰρ βακχεύσιμον καὶ τὸ μανιῶδες μαντικὴν πολλὴν ἔχει’ κατ’ Εὐριπίδην, “As wine, when it has vaporized upward, discloses many other movements and notions that are concealed and unnoticed; ‘For Bacchic frenzy and madness possess much prophetic art,’ according to Euripides.” Plutarch interprets the same lines differently in *Questiones convivales* 7.10, which addresses the question of whether it is good to deliberate over wine. The dialogue closes with a reflection on the nature of Dionysiac prophecy: “On the contrary, the ancients called the god [Dionysus] Eleuthereus and Lysius and regarded him to possess a great portion of prophetic art not because of ‘Bacchic frenzy and madness’ [*Bacchae* 298-99], as Euripides said, but because, by removing servility, timidity, and distrust and releasing them from the soul, he grants people to speak oracles to each other with truth and boldness” (τοῦναντίον δ’ οἱ παλαιοὶ τὸν θεὸν Ἐλευθερᾶ καὶ Λύσιον ἐκάλουν καὶ ‘μαντικῆς πολλὴν’ ἔχειν ἠγοῦντο μοῖραν, οὐ διὰ ‘τὸ βακχεύσιμον καὶ μανιῶδες’ ὥσπερ Εὐριπίδης εἶπεν, ἀλλ’ ὅτι τὸ δουλοπρεπὲς καὶ περιδεὲς καὶ ἄπιστον ἐξαιρῶν καὶ ἀπολύων τῆς ψυχῆς ἀληθεία καὶ παρρησία χρῆσθαι πρὸς ἀλλήλους δίδωσιν, 716b).

<sup>100</sup> Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 71–73.

That Dionysus had oracular powers was well known, even if not widespread.<sup>101</sup>

The most famous example was associated with Thrace (Her. 7.111; Paus. 9.30.9). It was understood, at least by some, that the Thracian prophets of Dionysus acquired their inspiration from the consumption of wine. Macrobius, for instance, refers to a work of Aristotle (*Theologumena*) that describes the activity of the Thracian prophets of Dionysus thus: “In this shrine, those intending to prophesy declare oracles after the consumption of much unmixed wine, as they do at Claros by drinking much water” (*Sed in hoc adyto vaticinaturi plurimo mero sumpto, uti apud Clarium aqua pota, effantur oracula, Sat.* 1.18.1). Such a view of a distinctly Dionysiac mode of prophetic inspiration (as opposed to the sober oracles of Apollo at Claros), coheres well with Plutarch’s use of *Bacchae* 298-99 as an illustration of the altered mental state that accompanies prophecy. Athenaeus also reflects on the prophetic potentialities of wine; he observes that drunkenness is a means by which Dionysus empowers people to speak truth, although he distinguishes this from the true prophecy of Apollo.<sup>102</sup>

It is therefore clearly inaccurate to assert that “Der Bakchos-Kult kennt keine Prophetie”; on the contrary, while Dionysiac oracles were not as prominent as those of

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<sup>101</sup> See Otto, *Dionysus*, 144–45.

<sup>102</sup> Observing that an effect of wine is to cause people to reveal secrets, Athenaeus quotes two proverbs: “Hence, it is said that ‘wine is truth’ and ‘wine reveals the mind of a man’” (ὅθεν οἶνος καὶ ἀλήθεια λέγεται καὶ ἄνδρὸς δ’ οἶνος ἔδειξε νόον, 37e). He then proceeds to distinguish between different oracular vessels; both Apollo and Dionysus have their own proper vessels used in producing truthful speech. The Pythian priestesses of Apollo, for example, were said to speak truth “from the tripod” (ἐκ τρίποδος λέγειν, 37f); by contrast, the kraters for mixing wine, the property of Dionysus, produce truth in a different way: “therefore, the one [tripod] is the property of Apollo because its truth derives from prophecy; the other of Dionysus because its truth is in drunkenness (διὸ Απόλλωνος μὲν οἰκεῖος διὰ τὴν ἐκ μαντικῆς ἀλήθειαν, Διονύσου δὲ διὰ τὴν ἐν μέθῃ, 38a). Thus, while Dionysiac inspiration from wine is analogous to prophecy in that it reveals the truth, Athenaeus is careful to distinguish it from true prophecy; see similarly Plutarch, *Quest. conv.* 716b quoted above.

There is additional evidence for Dionysiac prophecy. Livy records prophecy in connection with the Bacchanalia affair: “men, as if with minds possessed, prophesy with frenzied movement of the body” (*viros, velut mente capta, cum iactatione fanatica corporis vaticinari*, 39.13.12).

Apollo, in the *Bacchae* and at Thrace, a distinctly Dionysiac form of inspiration—the consumption of wine—is attested. Moreover, there seems to have been an ongoing debate about the relationship between Dionysus, wine, and prophecy. The allegation of the apostles’ drunkenness in Acts 2, therefore, does not merely reflect Luke’s interest in ridiculing the questionable morality associated with Dionysus (i.e., inebriation at 9am), as Dormeyer maintains, but rather with the specific function of wine in Dionysiac prophecy. This observation provides necessary and in my view decisive support for Dormeyer and Ziegler’s larger contention that Dionysiac religion serves as an antitype for Christianity in Acts 2.

Peter’s response, therefore, and choice of biblical quotation is particularly fitting:

(16) ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἐστὶν τὸ εἰρημένον διὰ τοῦ προφήτου Ἰωήλ· (17) καὶ ἔσται ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις, λέγει ὁ θεός, ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα, καὶ προφητεύσουσιν οἱ υἱοὶ ὑμῶν καὶ αἱ θυγατέρες ὑμῶν...

(16) Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel, (17) ‘and it will happen in the last days,’ says God, ‘that I shall pour out from my spirit upon all flesh and your sons and daughters will prophesy...’ (Acts 2:16-17, quoting LXX Joel 3:1)

Given the accusation of the apostles’ drunkenness and its Dionysiac associations, the transferral of liquid imagery through a metaphorical use of the verb ἐκχεῶ (“I shall pour out”) provides an additional signal of Luke’s literary strategy in this passage. The apostles’ critics are exposed as ironically misreading the kind of “pouring” that had occurred, mistaking the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy for a vulgarized Dionysiac alternative.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> In this way, Luke’s interests in this passage are analogous to those of Philo in his interpretation of 1 Samuel where the same verb (ἐκχεῶ) is used and there is a similar confusion between its literal and metaphorical meaning; see § 5.3 above.

Luke's concern with distinguishing Christian inspired speech from its ecstatic Dionysiac counterparts is in keeping with a larger anxiety among early Christians, represented most influentially by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12-14. In these chapters, Paul criticizes the Corinthians for conducting their meetings in a disorderly manner and for privileging unintelligible glossolalia, which provides little benefit to the larger community. This passage is the subject of much scholarly debate, both as it characterizes Corinthian religious practices and as it relates to Luke's view of speaking in tongues in Acts. While much of this lies beyond the scope of this study, several points of relevance here.<sup>104</sup> First, Paul counsels the Corinthians not to understand their spiritual gifts as they formerly did "when you were gentiles" (ὅτε ἔθνη ἦτε, 1 Cor 12:2). This implies that the practices Paul opposes in Corinth, at least as he conceived them, were remnants of Greco-Roman polytheism.<sup>105</sup> A central emphasis for Paul in chapters 12-14 is that Christian inspired speech ought to be intelligible and thus prophecy is preferable to glossolalia. One explanation for this preference is given in 14:23: "[i]f the entire church comes together in the same place and all speak in tongues and ignorant or unbelieving people enter, will they not say that you are mad?" (Ἐὰν οὖν συνέλθῃ ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ πάντες λαλῶσιν γλώσσαις, εἰσέλθωσιν δὲ ἰδιῶται ἢ ἄπιστοι, οὐκ ἐροῦσιν ὅτι μαίνεσθε;) Thus, in Paul's view, the alternative to intelligible speech is the perception of madness (μαίνεσθε), which for his hypothetical outsider would be particularly suggestive

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<sup>104</sup> For a discussion of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12-14 in relation to its practice in early Christianity more broadly, see Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity*, 189–231. For a discussion that situates it within the epistle's larger rhetoric concerning madness and rationality, see Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly*, 61–94.

<sup>105</sup> To be sure, as Aune notes, it is extremely difficult to distinguish Greco-Roman from Israelite-Jewish elements as it relates to the ecstatic nature of glossolalia at Corinth (*Prophecy in Early Christianity*, 330); see also Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, 12–43. Nevertheless, the important point here is that Paul characterizes their ecstatic practices as pagan/gentile (ἔθνη).

of a Dionysiac practice.<sup>106</sup> That Dionysiac “madness” underlies Paul’s concerns about the Corinthian church is supported by Richard and Catherine Kroeger. They survey evidence for maenadism in Corinth and argue that it helps to account not only for 1 Corinthians 12-14 but also for Paul’s wider discussion of “dysfunction” at Corinth.<sup>107</sup> To be sure, it is impossible to know the extent to which Dionysiac influences were actually at work among the Corinthian Christians because we only have direct access to Paul’s perspective. What is clear, however, is that as in Acts 2, Paul in 1 Corinthians prefers intelligibility in inspired speech. Whereas in 1 Corinthians, Paul insists on the interpretation or translation of tongues for the benefit of the community (14:13), in Acts 2, Luke indicates that the tongues were actually understood by their audience. Richard Pervo’s assessment of the relationship between Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12-14 seems correct: “Acts 2:1-4, 13 reads like a narrative presentation of the hypothetical situation set out in 1 Cor 14:23.”<sup>108</sup> Therefore, 1 Corinthians and Acts 2 share the view that true inspired speech is (or ought to be) intelligible; in both cases, the alternative resembles a Dionysiac experience: madness in 1 Corinthians 14:23 and drunkenness in Acts 2:13.

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<sup>106</sup> Stephen Chester understands the assertion made by Paul’s hypothetical outsider (“you are mad,” μαίνεσθε) to be a recognition of divine presence, observing that in Greco-Roman religion madness was not necessarily pejorative but was often a sign of prophetic inspiration (“Divine Madness? Speaking in Tongues in 1 Corinthians 14.23,” *JSNT* 27 [2005]: 417–46). On ritual Dionysiac madness as informing μαίνεσθε in 1 Corinthians 14:23, see esp. 426–48.

<sup>107</sup> Richard Kroeger and Catherine Kroeger, “An Inquiry into Evidence of Maenadism in the Corinthian Congregation,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1978 Seminar Papers* (ed. Paul J. Achtemeier; Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1978), 331–38; see also Klauck, “Die antiken Mysterienkulte und das Urchristentum,” 184–85. This view is criticized by Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, 34–35.

<sup>108</sup> Pervo, *Acts*, 64. For Pervo’s argument that Luke knew and used Paul’s epistles, see his *Dating Acts*, 51–147. My argument here, however, does not require this hypothesis.

Having thus established Dionysiac religion as an important background to the Pentecost narrative, I now take up its treatment of language and dialect. After the house where the apostles were gathered was shaken with wind and tongues of fire rested on them, Luke presents the scene thus:

(4) καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν πάντες πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις καθὼς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐδίδου ἀποφθέγγεσθαι αὐτοῖς. (5) Ἦσαν δὲ εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ κατοικοῦντες [Ἰουδαῖοι],<sup>109</sup> ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν. (6) γενομένης δὲ τῆς φωνῆς ταύτης συνῆλθεν τὸ πλῆθος καὶ συνεχύθη, ὅτι ἤκουον εἷς ἕκαστος τῆ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλούντων αὐτῶν. (7) ἐξίσταντο δὲ καὶ ἐθαύμαζον λέγοντες· οὐχ ἰδοῦ ἅπαντες οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ λαλοῦντες Γαλιλαῖοι; (8) καὶ πῶς ἡμεῖς ἀκούομεν ἕκαστος τῆ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἡμῶν ἐν ᾗ ἐγεννήθημεν;

(4) And all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the spirit granted them utterance. (5) Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem pious men from every nation of those under heaven. (6) When this sound occurred, the crowd came together and was confused because they heard them speaking, each one in their own dialect. (7) They were amazed and marveled, saying, ‘Look, are these not all Galileans speaking? (8) Indeed, how are we hearing them each in our own dialect in which we were born? (Act 2:4-8)

This passage is important to the programmatic structure of Acts. The broad geographical distribution of the crowd in Jerusalem (ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν) recalls the Lord’s command to the apostles in Acts 1:8 to be witnesses “to the end of the earth” (ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς) and at the same time anticipates the expansion of Christianity culminating in Rome in chapter 28. Moreover, the narrative evokes several biblical texts, most notably in its reversal of the linguistic dispersal in the story of Babel (Gen 11:1-11). In verses 9-11, Luke proceeds to list the nations present at the event:

(9) Πάρθοι καὶ Μῆδοι καὶ Ἑλαμίται καὶ οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν, Ἰουδαίαν τε καὶ Καππαδοκίαν, Πόντον καὶ τὴν Ἀσίαν, (10) Φρυγίαν τε καὶ

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<sup>109</sup> Ἰουδαῖοι is lacking in Sinaiticus, which is most likely the correct reading; see Pervo, *Acts*, 65.

Παμφυλίαν, Αἴγυπτον καὶ τὰ μέρη τῆς Λιβύης τῆς κατὰ Κυρήνην, καὶ οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες Ῥωμαῖοι, (11) Ἰουδαῖοί τε καὶ προσήλυτοι, Κρήτες καὶ Ἄραβες, ἀκούομεν λαλούντων αὐτῶν ταῖς ἡμετέραις γλώσσαις τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ θεοῦ.

(9) Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and those who dwell in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, (10) Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya that are next to Cyrene, and the Romans who were visiting, both Jews and proselytes, (11) Cretans and Arabs; we hear them speaking the mighty deeds of God in our own tongues.

Interpreters have puzzled over the source and nature of this list; it has been variously connected with “ancient astrological lists, lists of the Jewish Diaspora, Gen 10 and the Table of nations, and biblical prophecies such as Isa 11:11.”<sup>110</sup> While there may be no single solution that completely accounts for this unusual list of nations, Gary Gilbert’s analysis provides an important framework for understanding it within the context of the Roman Empire. He compares Acts 2:9-11 with various lists of Roman conquests and subjects and argues that Luke’s geographical construction mirrors the imperial logic of Rome.<sup>111</sup> As a response to Roman propaganda, “Luke-Acts presents Jesus and the church as existing in competition with Rome and its leaders over the claim of universal authority.”<sup>112</sup> Gilbert’s interpretation of the list of nations as a counterpoint to Roman imperialism sheds important light on Luke’s larger political strategies. Scholars are divided, however, on how to understand Luke’s attitude toward Rome. Most see his emphasis on Christianity’s compatibility with Roman rule because, as Philip Esler

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<sup>110</sup> Gary Gilbert, “The List of Nations in Acts 2: Roman Propaganda and the Lukan Response,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 497–529 (at 500–01). For a survey of Greco-Roman and Jewish lists of nations that inform Luke’s conception of geography, see James M. Scott, “Luke’s Geographical Horizon,” in *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting* (ed. David W. J. Gill and Conrad H. Gempf; vol. 2 of *Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 483–544, esp. 527–30 on Acts 2:9-11.

<sup>111</sup> Gilbert, “The List of Nations in Acts 2,” 113–18.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 525. Gilbert seems to overstate his case, however, by insisting that Luke’s list cannot at the same time function as an assertion of Christ’s universal authority (his view), *and* as a fulfillment of prophecies of Israel’s restoration, *and* as a reversal of Babel (see, e.g., 518-19).

observes, throughout Acts Christians frequently benefit from Roman policy and when they are persecuted by Romans it is most often at Jewish instigation.<sup>113</sup> Richard Cassidy finds Luke's view of the Empire to be less favorable. While Luke's Christianity is not openly seditious, "such a clash is by no means unthinkable within the framework of Luke's work."<sup>114</sup> Yet, those who would find imperial critique in Acts must acknowledge a high degree of subtlety.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, as Richard Pervo has recently emphasized, there is often ambiguity in Luke's use of the language of empire so that it is difficult to distinguish between flattery and competition.<sup>116</sup> While Pervo concurs that Luke probably viewed Christianity as "amenable" to the Roman Empire, he is probably correct in asserting that Luke cared less about the question than modern scholars do.<sup>117</sup>

The difficulty in sorting out the ambiguities inherent to Luke's posture toward the Roman Empire can be seen through a comparison with other analyses of Acts' narrative treatment of geography. Like Gilbert, Vernon Robbins suggests that Acts' narrative map reflects a mimetic relationship with Rome; in contrast to Gilbert, however, he argues that this map "presupposes a compatible, symbiotic relationship between Christianity and Rome."<sup>118</sup> Laura Nasrallah similarly argues that Acts presents Christianity as a league of

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<sup>113</sup> Philip F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (SNTSMS 57; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 201–19.

<sup>114</sup> Richard J. Cassidy, *Society and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Orbis Books, 1987), at 124.

<sup>115</sup> See, e.g., C. Kavin Rowe, "Luke-Acts and the Imperial Cult: A Way through the Conundrum?," *JSNT* 27 (2005): 279–300.

<sup>116</sup> Richard I. Pervo, "(Not) Appealing to the Emperor: Acts (and the *Acts of Paul*)," in *Paul and the Heritage of Israel: Paul's Claim Upon Israel's Legacy in Luke and Acts in the Light of the Pauline Letters* (ed. David P. Moessner et al.; Library of New Testament Studies 452; London: T & T Clark, 2012), 165–79.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>118</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, "Luke-Acts: A Mixed Population Seeks a Home in the Roman Empire," in *Images of Empire* (ed. Loveday C. A. Alexander; JSOTSup 122; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 202–21 (at 221).

cities that “mimics the logic of empire.”<sup>119</sup> She maintains, however, that Luke’s Christianity is not seditious but rather hybridized “neatly within Rome” and that it is ultimately ambiguous whether its mimetic relationship with the Roman Empire is a move “to support it or to undermine it.”<sup>120</sup>

In conjunction with these readings of Acts 2 that view its geographical vision in part as a response to Roman imperialism, its treatment of languages and dialects should similarly be understood in connection to the privileged position of Greek culture and language in the Roman east. A striking feature of Luke’s list of nations is the absence of any mention of cities from mainland Greece or regions to which Greek language and culture were “indigenous.”<sup>121</sup> To be sure, as a result of Hellenization (and colonization), Greek would have been spoken and understood in many of the regions Luke mentions. In fact, given the widespread knowledge of Koine throughout the Roman East, it is all the more striking that in Acts 2 visitors from regions such as Pontus, Phrygia, Crete, or Rome should have needed to hear apostles “each in their own dialect,” when Greek was a functioning *lingua franca*. This downgrading of the role of the Greek language, I suggest, is part of Luke’s larger strategy of positioning Christianity within the world of Roman power and Greek cultural hegemony. Thus, alongside the analyses of Gilbert, Robbins, and Nasrallah discussed above, in which Luke’s geographical vision is seen as a response to the logic of empire, the linguistic transformations of Pentecost that

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<sup>119</sup> Laura S. Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 87–118 (at 88).

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, at 116, 117.

<sup>121</sup> Crete was largely Greek but would have been viewed as of mixed ethnicity; see, e.g., Homer, *Od.* 19.172-79. Klauck comments on the absence of Greece and argues that if, as he finds probable, Rome was also not present in the pre-Lukan tradition, the list “reflects earlier political circumstances that obtained before the Romans took power, in the period of the successor kings to Alexander the Great.” He finds an analogous list in Curtius Rufus’ *History of Alexander* 6.3.3 (*Magic and Paganism*, 10–11 [at 11]).

deprivilege Greek in favor of “barbarian” dialects should be understood analogously as a response to the social and political status of the Greek language.

The importance of the Greek language in the Roman Empire can be seen in several ways. From the time of Alexander in the fourth century BCE, the dominance of Greek language was inextricably connected to imperialism. With the rise of Rome, however, the nature of Greek hegemony needed to be re-conceptualized. This was achieved largely through the ongoing prominence of Greek *paideia*, which was acknowledged even among most Roman elites, as expressed in Horace’s famous dictum: “Captured Greece captured its fierce conqueror and transferred its arts into rustic Latium” (*Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artis intulit agresti Latio*, *Ep.* 2.1.156-57). Greeks living under Roman rule found various ways to reconcile the legitimacy of the empire to their own conceptions of the superiority of Greece. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for example, in his historical analysis of Rome’s rise to power insists that Romans were in fact Greek in origin: Rome was not a “refuge of barbarians” (βαρβάρων... καταφυγήν) but rather “a Greek city” (Ἑλλάδα πόλιν, *Ant. rom.* 1.89.1). Language plays an important part in Dionysius’ larger argument. He observes that the Latin language is of Greek origin, although it is presently a mixture of Greek and barbarian (“of which the majority is Aeolic,” ἥς ἐστὶν ἡ πλείων Αἰολίς). Over time, however, it became debased “from many mixings” (ἐκ τῶν πολλῶν ἐπιμιξιῶν, 1.90.1).<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> On Dionysius’ preference for Attic Greek, see Simon Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, AD 50-250* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 21–27. He observes that Dionysius gave significant impetus to the larger movement to recover Attic that would come to dominate the Second Sophistic. For a discussion of the Second Sophistic, see section § 2.4.1.

For Dionysius, establishing that the Romans were fundamentally Greek rather than barbarian provides legitimacy to their imperial claims.

The cultural and political importance of Greek in the east can also be seen in the considerable energy expended by non-Greeks in mastering it as a necessary prerequisite for rising to positions of prominence.<sup>123</sup> Increasingly, Attic, not merely Koine, was the marker of cultural superiority.<sup>124</sup> Lucian of Samosata, for example, was a native Semitic speaker, who nevertheless attained a high level of mastery in Greek.<sup>125</sup> He frequently employs sharp satire against the pretensions of Attic purists. A certain sophist, for example, is ridiculed by Lucian for apparently criticizing his use of the word ἀποφράς (“unlucky”) because it was non-Greek (οὐ γὰρ ἦν τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἴδιον, *Pseudol.* 11) and thus charged that “I am barbarian in language” (βάρβαρον εἶναί με τὴν φωνήν, 1). With disdain for his opponent’s laughter, Lucian mocks, “I spoke as a barbarian and a foreigner and overstepped the bounds of Attic” (ὅτι βαρβαρίζω καὶ ξενίζω καὶ ὑπερβαίνω τοὺς ὄρους τοὺς Ἀττικούς, 11), then proceeds with a mock lecture on the Attic origin of this word.<sup>126</sup>

This close connection between the purity of Greek language and imperial power is a prominent theme in Aelius Aristides’ *Panathenaic Oration* (*Or.* 1).<sup>127</sup> The speech,

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<sup>123</sup> In the mid-second century, even Marcus Aurelius, a Roman Emperor, took the effort to compose his *Meditations* in Greek.

<sup>124</sup> See Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*, 17–42.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 44–51. On the importance of Greek *paideia* for social and economic advancement, see Lucian’s *The Dream, or Lucian’s Career*.

<sup>126</sup> On common disdain for non-Greeks, as those who are “barbarian in language” (βάρβαρος τὴν φωνήν), see also *The Double Indictment 27; The Dead Come to Life, or The Fisherman* 19.

<sup>127</sup> The most extensive introduction and commentary is James H. Oliver, “The Civilizing Power: A Study of the Panathenaic Discourse of Aelius Aristides against the Background of Literature and Cultural Conflict, with Text, Translation, and Commentary,” *TAPhS* 58 (1968): 1–223. Explanatory notes also accompany the translation of Charles A. Behr, *P. Aelius Aristides: The Complete Works I: Orations I–XVI*

likely given in 155 CE at Athens' major Panathenaia, is an extensive encomium of the city, praising its economic, political, and cultural achievements throughout history, with its successes in war taking up the majority of attention.<sup>128</sup> Aristides' encomium of Athens belongs to a well-established literary tradition, going back most famously to Pericles' funeral oration in book 2 of Thucydides, to which Aristides' oration makes several allusions.<sup>129</sup> In the opening sentence, Aristides introduces two central and related themes: "The Greeks have an ancient practice, and I suppose so also do most of the barbarians, of paying back all gratitude to their foster-fathers, as far as possible" (Νόμος ἐστὶ τοῖς Ἑλλησι παλαιός, οἶμαι δὲ καὶ τῶν βαρβάρων τοῖς πλείστοις, τροφεῦσι χάριν ἐκτίνειν ἅπασαν, ὅση δυνατή, 1).<sup>130</sup> First, he establishes the important distinction between Greeks and barbarians; second, he asserts the Athenians' status as "foster-parents" of both. Whereas "it is possible to say that others are foster-fathers of some individuals" (ἔξεστιν εἰπεῖν ἰδίᾳ μὲν ἄλλους ἄλλοις εἶναι τροφέας), of the Athenians alone can one say, "you are the common foster-fathers of all" (κοινούς δὲ πάντων τροφέας ὑμᾶς εἶναι, 1). This role for Athens is achieved primarily "in learning and discourses" (ἐν μαθήμασι καὶ λόγοις, 2), which encompasses Greek education (*paideia*) broadly.<sup>131</sup> Playing with the range of meaning in the term *logos*, Aristides asserts that oratory (specifically, his present oration) is the most appropriate means of expressing this gratitude: "so then, it is fitting to bring here this discourse concerning these things and to

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(Leiden: Brill, 1986). For larger discussions of Aristides' life and career, see *ibid.*, 1–4; Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*, 254–97.

<sup>128</sup> Behr, *P. Aelius Aristides I*, 248. Oliver, however, dates it to 167 ("The Civilizing Power," 33–34).

<sup>129</sup> On this, see esp. Oliver, "The Civilizing Power," 9–17.

<sup>130</sup> The Greek text of the oration follows Friedrich W. Lenz and Charles A. Behr, *P. Aelii Aristidis: opera quae exstant omnia I (orationes I–XVI)* (Leiden: Brill, 1976). Translations are mine.

<sup>131</sup> See Oliver, "The Civilizing Power," 91–92.

honor the city in the present circumstances” (ὥστε εἰκὸς καὶ τὸν περὶ τούτων λόγον δεῦρο κομίζειν καὶ τιμᾶν τοῖς γιγνομένοις τὴν πόλιν, 2).

Over the course of the oration, Aristides establishes Athens’ claim to being purely Greek, which makes them superior both to other Greeks and also to barbarians; central evidence for this claim is provided by their Attic dialect. So effectively had Athens “fled what is foreign and barbarian” (πέφευγε τὴν ἀλλοδαπὴν καὶ βάρβαρον) that it maintained an untainted manner of life and consequently “it introduced language that was unadulterated, pure, painless, and a model for all Greek communication” (εἰλικρινῆ δὲ καὶ καθαρὰν καὶ ἄλυπον καὶ παράδειγμα πάσης τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς ὁμιλίας φωνὴν εἰσηνέγκατο, 15). Moreover, the Athenians are so completely autochthonous that “in this land alone are both foreigners and citizens seen to be distinguished” (καὶ ξένοι καὶ πολῖται μόνῃ τῇ γῆ ταύτῃ πρέπουσι διηρῆσθαι, 26).

After an extensive discussion of Athens’ military achievements throughout history (75-321), Aristides returns to the importance of Athens’ language (322-30).<sup>132</sup> The greatest demonstration of Athens’ power, its “bloodless trophy” (ἀναίμακτον τρόπαιον), is that “all of the cities and every race of humans have turned to you and your way of life and language” (ἅπασαι γὰρ αἱ πόλεις καὶ πάντα τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένη πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ τὴν ὑμετέραν δίαιταν καὶ φωνὴν ἀπέκλινε, 322). Now, “all people have come to regard this one language as common to the human race and through you the entire inhabited world has become monolingual” (ταύτην μίαν φωνὴν κοινὴν ἅπαντες τοῦ

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<sup>132</sup> Oliver regards this section as the climax of and key to the entire oration (ibid., 14).

γένους ἐνόμισαν, καὶ δι' ὑμῶν ὁμόφωνος μὲν πᾶσα γέγονεν ἡ οἰκουμένη, 324-25).<sup>133</sup>

This linguistic unification involved both barbarians and Greeks, all of whom “have abandoned their native languages” (τὰς μὲν πατρίους φώνας ἐκλελοίπασι, 326) in favor of Athens’. Consequently, through its language, Athens has established the universal basis for all *paideia*: “this is what I call the great empire of the Athenians, not 200 or more triremes” (ταύτην ἐγὼ τὴν μεγάλην ἀρχὴν καλῶ τὴν Ἀθηναίων, οὐ τριήρεις διακοσίας, ἢ πλείους, 327). Thus, in spite of Rome’s imperial power, Athens retains its own hegemony through its language and intellectual legacy. It is interesting to compare Aristides’ comments in his *Roman Oration* (*Or.* 26), where he also describes the Romans as “foster-fathers.”<sup>134</sup> This title belongs to the latter because they have protected and cared for the Greeks (*Or.* 26.96). He further observes that for the Romans, the fundamental human division is not between Greek and barbarian but rather between Romans and non-Romans (63). This view is not necessarily in contradiction to the conventional Greek view that informs the *Panathenaic Oration*; rather, as Simon Swain observes, “in this speech the Romans stand outside the traditional division.”<sup>135</sup>

Thus, for elite Greeks in the Roman Empire, pure Greek language, which increasingly implied Attic, was essential to maintaining positions of prominence, even if ultimate political power was now firmly in the possession of Romans. The preeminence of Greece could be demonstrated through the universal reach of its language even to barbarians and Romans and by maintaining the purity of the Athenian dialect. According

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<sup>133</sup> Here Aristides ignores the distinction between Koine and Attic Greek, which Oliver regards as deliberate (*ibid.*, 141).

<sup>134</sup> On this oration, see Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*, 274–84.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 279. Oliver similarly observes that the *Panathenaic Oration* does not reflect a rejection of the view in the *Roman Oration*; Aristides continued to view Rome as a protector of the interests of Hellenism, the true origin of civilization (“The Civilizing Power,” 39).

to Aristides, imperial power and linguistic unification are analogous achievements; the former belongs to Rome, the latter to Athens. The linguistic miracle of Pentecost, therefore, is an inversion of the cultural structures of power in the Roman East.

Additional insight into Luke's treatment of ethnicity might be gained through a comparison with the *Bacchae*. As Ziegler observes, a central conflict in the *Bacchae* is between the status of barbarians in Dionysus' cult and Pentheus' Greek chauvinism.<sup>136</sup> He points out that Pentheus' objections to Dionysiac cult stem in large part from its barbarian origins:

πᾶς ἀναχορεύει βαρβάρων τὰδ' ὄργια.  
φρονοῦσι γὰρ κάκιον Ἑλλήνων πολὺ.  
τὰδ' εὖ γε μᾶλλον· οἱ νόμοι δὲ διάφοροι.

Dionysus: All of the barbarians dance these sacred rites.

Pentheus: They are far inferior in intelligence to Hellenes.

Dionysus: In respect to these things in fact they are better; but their customs differ. (482-84)

Given that both for Christianity in Acts and for Dionysiac religion in the *Bacchae*, universal religious aspirations produce conflict between east and west and barbarian and Greek, Ziegler proposes that the list of nations in Acts 2 be compared with an analogous passage in the *Bacchae*, spoken by Dionysus in the prologue:

λιπῶν δὲ Λυδῶν τοὺς πολυχρύσους γύας  
Φρυγῶν τε, Περσῶν θ' ἠλιοβλήτους πλάκας  
Βάκτριά τε τείχη τήν τε δύσχιμον χθόνα  
Μήδων ἐπελθὼν Ἀραβίαν τ' εὐδαίμονα  
Ἀσίαν τε πᾶσαν...  
ἐς τήνδε πρῶτον ἦλθον Ἑλλήνων πόλιν.

Having left the much-golden lands of the Lydians and Phrygians, and the sun-scorched plains of the Persians, and the Bactrian walls, and having passed over

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<sup>136</sup> Ziegler, *Dionysos in der Apostelgeschichte*, 144.

the terrible land of the Medes, rich Arabia, and all Asia... I have come to this city of the Hellenes first. (13-17, 20)

To be sure, there are significant differences between this list and that of Acts 2:9-11.

Nevertheless, they both reflect an analogous interest in a universal religious outreach across the inhabited world. As E. R. Dodds observes, “Euripides represents the Dionysiac cult as a sort of ‘world religion’, carried by missionaries (as no native Greek cult ever was) from one land to another.”<sup>137</sup>

In sum: Luke’s Pentecost narrative presents a geographical vision that is best understood, as several scholars have argued, as a response to the Roman Empire. In addition, its treatment of language should be understood analogously as a reversal of the cultural superiority of the Greek language in favor of barbarian dialects.<sup>138</sup> In contrast to those like Aristides, who measure the dominance of Athens by the spread of its language and *paideia*, Luke ties the success of the apostles’ message to the ability of the crowd to hear it in their native languages (τῆ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ in 2:6 and 8; ταῖς ἡμετέραις γλώσσαις in 2:11). The unification of multiple ethnicities is not achieved through monolingualism but by a linguistic miracle that encompasses diverse languages. Thus, Pentecost is in part a repudiation of the prominence of Greek. This transgression of the barrier between Greek and barbarian is also a well-known aspect of Dionysus, connected with the universal aspirations of his cult. Taken together with the Dionysiac allusions implied by the connection between wine, drunkenness, and prophecy discussed above, the Pentecost narrative is of central importance in construing Acts’ larger relationship to the *Bacchae*.

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<sup>137</sup> E. R. Dodds, *Euripides, Bacchae: Edited with Introduction and Commentary* (2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), xx; see also Henk S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion I: Ter Unus: Isis, Dionysos, Hermes, Three Studies in Henotheism* (Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 6; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 189–205.

<sup>138</sup> For a similar argument, see also Balch, “ΜΕΤΑΒΟΛΗ ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΩΝ,” esp. 151–53, 171–73.

Luke presents drunken prophecy as a negative foil for Christian inspired speech and at the same time his Christianity shares with Dionysus a preference for the barbarian.

#### 6.4.3 MADNESS OR MODERATION? PERSECUTION AND CONVERSION IN ACTS 26

The discussion above explored the function of the goads-proverb in Acts 26:14, in particular, Paul's surprising assertion that Jesus spoke it in the Hebrew dialect even though it was a well-known Greek expression. I argued first that within the context of Paul's forensic rhetoric the identification of Jesus' language functioned as an authentication of his evidence (§ 6.4.1). I further suggested that the linguistic move of Acts 26:14 should be understood in light of Pentecost, which also emphasizes the transformation of the divine message into non-Greek languages (§ 6.4.2). The Pentecost narrative also has several Dionysiac resonances, particularly in its implied association of prophecy and drunkenness. Moreover, as in Acts 26:14, the surprising inversion of dialects is part of Luke's larger strategy of negotiating Christian identity in a world dominated by the Roman power and Greek culture.

In this section, I argue that Acts 26 shares an important thematic similarity with the *Bacchae* in addition to the goads-proverb discussed above, namely, the contestation over *mania* and *sophrosyne*. In 26:11, Paul had characterizes his former persecution of Christians as a sort of madness, recalling that he was “filled excessively with madness against them” (περισσῶς τε ἐμμαινόμενος αὐτοῖς). Later, his speech ends with Festus' interruption and accusation:

(24) Ταῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀπολογουμένου ὁ Φῆστος μεγάλη τῆ φωνῆ φησιν· μαίνῃ, Παῦλε· τὰ πολλά σε γράμματα εἰς μανίαν περιτρέπει. (25) ὁ δὲ Παῦλος· οὐ

μαίνομαι, φησίν, κράτιστε Φῆστε, ἀλλὰ ἀληθείας καὶ σωφροσύνης ῥήματα ἀποφθέγομαι.

(24) While he was making this defense, Festus said in a great voice, “You are mad, Paul; much learning has driven you into madness.” (25) Paul replied, “I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but I am proclaiming words of truth and moderation.”

This opposition of *mania* and *sophrosyne* is common in Greek literature.

Scholars have rightly drawn attention to the ways in which Paul’s response here participates in well-established tropes from rhetoric and philosophy. The idea that one could be driven mad by *πολλὰ γράμματα* suggests a madness of an intellectual nature.<sup>139</sup> Eckhard Plümacher, for example, argues that the emphasis on Paul’s possession of *sophrosyne* serves to demonstrate his exemplification of *paideia*, a trait that establishes one as Greek rather than barbarian.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, John Lentz suggests that Paul’s claim to *sophrosyne* reflects Luke’s larger interest in representing Paul’s elite status, which entailed the possession of the four cardinal virtues: wisdom (*phronesis*), self-control (*sophrosyne*), bravery (*andreia*), and righteousness (*dikaiosyne*).<sup>141</sup> Abraham Malherbe also reads this passage within the context of philosophical discourse. He notes, however, that Festus’ charge of madness would have been typically associated with Cynic philosophers and it allows “Paul to claim that he has been conducting his mission in a

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<sup>139</sup> As Pervo suggests, Festus’ charge is consistent with a variety of contemporary class-based attitudes toward advanced learning. He points, for example, to Petronius’ *Satyricon*, which reflects an elite disdain for the intellectual pretensions of the growing class of wealthy freedmen: “We know that you are mad because of much learning” (*Scimus te prae litteras fatuum esse, Sat. 46*) (*Acts*, 635 n. 93).

<sup>140</sup> Eckhard Plümacher, *Lukas als hellenistischer Schriftsteller: Studien zur Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 20–22. He points, for example, to Plato, *Phaedr.* 245A; *Prot.* 323B; Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.16; see also Pervo, *Acts*, 636 n. 98.

<sup>141</sup> Lentz, *Luke’s Portrait of Paul*, 62–104, esp. 87–91. Lentz also draws attention to an interesting parallel in the dialogue between Appian and the Emperor in the *Acts of Appian*, where the contestation over madness and moderation similarly figures in a Roman trial (88–89). For a recent discussion of Luke’s presentation of Paul both as a Jew with impeccable credentials and an enlightened Greek, see also Pervo, *The Making of Paul*, 149–56.

manner befitting a responsible philosopher.”<sup>142</sup> He argues that Paul’s insistence that “this [his mission] has not been conducted in a corner” (οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐν γωνίᾳ πεπραγμένον τοῦτο, 26:26), alludes to a common phrase used pejoratively against philosophers who eschew involvement in public life.<sup>143</sup>

Without denying the value of these readings, there are also several ways in which the literary background is informed by the *Bacchae*, where the contestation over *mania* and *sophrosyne* is central to the conflict between Pentheus and Dionysus. The typology of Pentheus and Saul/Paul has been observed by several scholars.<sup>144</sup> That there is a parallel between the persecutors of Dionysus and of Christianity is seen, for example, in the warnings of Gamaliel, who like Teiresias cautioned against becoming *theomachoi* (5:39).<sup>145</sup> Throughout the subsequent narrative Saul is the archetypal Penthean *theomachos*, “breathing out threat and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (9:1). This Pentheus typology is also prominent in Paul’s speech to Festus and Agrippa in chapter 26. Paul’s description of his former persecutions as an excessive madness (περισσῶς τε ἐμμανιόμενος αὐτοῖς, 26:11) is analogous to Euripides’ characterization of Pentheus’ persecution of Dionysus, as demonstrated below. Unlike Pentheus, however, who was content merely to bar the maenads from around his own *polis*, Paul pursued them “even into foreign cities” (ἕως καὶ εἰς τὰς ἔξω πόλεις, 26:11). Later in the speech

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<sup>142</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, “‘Not in a Corner’: Early Christian Apologetic in Acts 26:26,” *SecCent* 5 (1985-1986): 193–210, esp. 206-08.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 202–03. He notes that ἐν γωνίᾳ occurs with this sense in Plato’s *Gorgias* 485D and is subsequently found in similar contexts.

<sup>144</sup> Dormeyer, “Bakchos in der Apostelgeschichte,” 163–67; Moles, “Jesus and Dionysus,” 78–79; Ziegler, *Dionysos in der Apostelgeschichte*, 177–83; Pervo, *Acts*, 631.

<sup>145</sup> On the importance of Euripides’ presentation of Pentheus in the *Bacchae* for the development of the term *theomachos*, see J. C. Kamerbeek, “On the Conception of ΘΕΟΜΑΧΟΣ in Relation with Greek Tragedy,” *Mnemosyne* 1 (1948): 271–83. He notes that the terms θεομάχος and θεομαχέω are first attested in the *Bacchae* but that the concept is central to the subject matter of tragedy more broadly. For uses of the term closer to Luke’s historical period, see esp. 272-73.

Paul describes his conversion and epiphany in a manner that shares several features with the *Bacchae*: a flashing of light (Acts 26:13; *Bacch.* 594-95); an unseen voice (Acts 26:14-18; *Bacch.* 576-79); falling to the ground (Acts 26:14; *Bacch.* 600-05); and the command to rise (Acts 26:16; *Bacch.* 606-07). To be sure, comparative studies of Paul's epiphany with other ancient epiphanic accounts demonstrate that these elements are not unique to Acts and the *Bacchae*.<sup>146</sup> Nevertheless, the insertion of the goads-proverb into only the third of Luke's epiphany accounts, a phrase which was spoken by Dionysus in a most popular tragedy, together with the wider thematic similarities between Pentheus and Paul has a cumulative effect of suggesting that Paul's former madness and his epiphany and conversion in Acts 26 are informed by the Euripides' narrative.<sup>147</sup> Yet, while several scholars have made similar suggestions, to my knowledge, there has been no attempt to compare Euripides' treatment of the conflict between *mania* and *sophrosyne* with Acts 26:24-25. This is all the more striking, given that, as I demonstrate below, this is also a central theme in the *Bacchae*.

#### *Mania and Sophrosyne in the Bacchae: Euripidean Inversions*

A common element of the dramatic plots of Euripidean tragedy is the forces of irrationality overcoming the forces of rationality. *Sophrosyne* represents the latter and, in the context of Euripides' plays, primarily entails self-control, mastery over one's

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<sup>146</sup> See Marvin W. Meyer, "The Light and Voice on the Damascus Road," *Forum* 2 (1986): 27-35; Jan N. Bremmer, "Close Encounters of the Third Kind: Heliodorus in the Temple and Paul on the Road to Damascus," in *Empsychoi Logoi--Religious Innovations in Antiquity: Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst* (ed. Alberdina Houtman, Albert de Jong, and Magdalena Wilhelmina Misset-van de Weg; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 367-84, esp. 376-84 on Acts.

<sup>147</sup> As Bremmer suggests, "Luke probably made Paul use the proverb and the allusion to Euripides in order to present him as a highly cultured man," that is, by demonstrating his knowledge of the Greek literary epiphanic *topos* ("Close Encounters," at 381).

irrational passions.<sup>148</sup> In the *Hippolytus*, for example, Aphrodite is the embodiment of irrational *eros*—Hippolytus demonstrates his *sophrosyne* ironically by his fanatical rejection of that goddess in favor of the chaste Artemis. Like Aphrodite in the *Hippolytus*, Dionysus in the *Bacchae* represents irrationality—*mania*, intoxication, and the forces of nature. When he arrives in Thebes, there is conflict between civilization and savagery, between *sophrosyne* and *mania*. The narrative thus stages an important problem in Greek society, namely, the relationship between Dionysiac worship with its attendant excesses and the political stability of the city-state. Whereas Pentheus believes that the civilization of Thebes depends on his defense of *sophrosyne* to the exclusion of Dionysiac madness, over the course of the play the citizens and the audience learn that, on the contrary, Thebes must embrace Dionysus and establish his cult in order to survive. This conflict between *sophrosyne* and *mania*, however, is more than merely an intellectual problem or a narrative device; it is in fact deeply embedded in the fabric of Greek ritual. As with other Greek rituals of initiation, the Dionysiac initiation reflected in the *Bacchae* entails a temporary reversal of the civilized order, an embrace of madness indeed of ritualized death in order to attain enlightenment and the release from suffering.<sup>149</sup> This paradoxical experience is dramatized by Euripides through the

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<sup>148</sup> For an analysis of *sophrosyne* in Euripides' plays, see Helen North, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 68–84.

<sup>149</sup> For a discussion of the wider relationship between the ritual practices of Classical Greek city states and literary representations of religion, see Richard Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). On the *Bacchae* and Dionysiac cult in Classical Athens, see esp. 254–57.

destruction of Pentheus and his royal house which is ultimately resolved with the foundation of Dionysiac cult in Thebes (in the lost section of the tragedy).<sup>150</sup>

At the same time, however, throughout the *Bacchae*, Euripides problematizes the distinction between *mania* and *sophrosyne*.<sup>151</sup> On the one hand, the drama confirms the traditional association of Dionysus with madness.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, the driving force throughout the play is that the god inflicted madness upon the daughters of Cadmus as retribution for their refusal to recognize his divine birth. In the prologue Dionysus informs the audience that he has punished them with *mania* which he connects with their adoption of his rituals: “I have stung them with madness out of their homes and they inhabit the mountain, out of their wits. I forced them to acquire the trappings of my mysteries” (τοιγάρ νιν αὐτὰς ἐκ δόμων ὤστρησ’ ἐγὼ / μανίαις, ὄρος δ’ οἰκοῦσι παράκοποι φρενῶν / σκευὴν τ’ ἔχειν ἠνάγκασ’ ὀργίων ἐμῶν, 32-34). Toward the end of the play, it is this very divine madness that leads to their unknowing slaughter of Pentheus. The messenger reports that “they were leaping through the storm-swollen glen and rocky crags, maddened by the breaths of the god” (διὰ δὲ χειμάρρου νάπης ἀγμῶν τ’ ἐπήδων θεοῦ πνοαῖσιν ἐμμανεῖς, 1093-94). Later, Cadmus provides Agave with an assessment of the events: “You were mad, the entire city was in Bacchic frenzy” (ἐμάνητε, πᾶσά τ’ ἐξεβακχεύθη πόλις, 1295).

On the other hand, however, the inverse of *mania*, the possession of *sophrosyne*, is not characterized as one might expect, namely, as the resistance to Dionysiac frenzy.

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<sup>150</sup> As Seaford notes, this *sophrosyne* envisioned in the dramatic resolution entails both a release from suffering and “social and political cohesion” (ibid., 402–05 [at 405]).

<sup>151</sup> For a discussion of *mania* in the *Bacchae*, see Valdis Leinieks, *The City of Dionysos: A Study of Euripides’ Bakchai* (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 88; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1996), 71–85.

<sup>152</sup> On the importance of madness in connection with Dionysus, Otto, *Dionysus*, 103–19.

In fact, it is the opposite. Pentheus, in spite of his vigilant efforts to bar the god of madness from Thebes, is shown to be the one lacking *sophrosyne*. As discussed above, Teiresias praises the prophetic powers of Dionysiac madness. In the same speech, however, he warns Pentheus with prescience, connecting *theomachos* with *mania*: “I shall not fight against the god, as if persuaded by your words. You are most painfully mad and in your illness are unable to find a cure either with drugs or without them” (κοὺ θεομαχίσω σῶν λόγων πεισθεὶς ὕπο. / μαΐνη γὰρ ὡς ἄλγιστα, κοῦτε φαρμάκοις / ἄκη λάβοις ἂν οὔτ’ ἄνευ τούτων νοσεῖς, 325-27). As the conflict between Pentheus and Dionysus heightens, it becomes clear that the latter is *sophron* and the former is not. Dionysus warns Pentheus, “I instruct you not to bind me, one who is moderate by those who are not” (αὐδῶ με μὴ δεῖν σωφρονῶν οὐ σῶφροσιν, 504). Later, after he escapes from Pentheus’ imprisonment, in anticipation of the latter’s frantic reaction, the god moralizes, “it is the part of a wise man to practice a self-controlled gentle temper” (πρὸς σοφοῦ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς ἀσκεῖν σῶφρον’ εὐοργησίαν, 641). The irony of this reversal becomes clearly evident when the spy whom Pentheus had sent to monitor the maenads returns and informs him that contrary to his expectations they were acting with *sophrosyne*: “in the foliage of oak, they randomly cast their heads upon the ground, chastely, not as you say, drunk from bowls of wine and the sound of the flute, hunting Aphrodite by themselves throughout the woods” (αἶ δ’ ἐν δρυὸς φύλλοισι πρὸς πέδῳ κάρα / εἰκῆ βαλοῦσαι σωφρόνως, οὐχ ὡς σὺ φῆς / ὦνωμένας κρατῆρι καὶ λωτοῦ ψόφῳ / θηρᾶν καθ’ ὕλην Κύπριν ἠρημωμένας, 685-88; cf. 317-318; 939-40). This speech arouses Pentheus’ curiosity and thereafter Dionysus convinces him to dress as a maenad so that he may become a voyeur, a move that ultimately brings about his destruction. As

Pentheus departs, the chorus sings in anticipation of his fate, observing that he went out with a “maddened heart” (μανείσα πραπίδι, 999) and death would be his final teacher of *sophrosyne*: “death without hesitation produces knowledge of moderation in things of the gods” (γνωμῶν σωφρόνα θάνατος ἀπροφάσιστος ἐς τὰ θεῶν ἔφυ, 1002-03).<sup>153</sup> The messenger, after recounting the slaughter of Pentheus on the mountain, observes, “it is best to be moderate and to reverence the things of the gods; I suppose that this is indeed the wisest possession which mortals can employ” (τὸ σωφρονεῖν δὲ καὶ σέβειν τὰ τῶν θεῶν / κάλλιστον· οἶμαι δ’ αὐτὸ καὶ σοφώτατον / θνητοῖσιν εἶναι κτῆμα τοῖσι χρωμένοις, 1150-52). Thus, in a paradoxical turn, Dionysus and his devotees are the true possessors of *sophrosyne* and his opponent is mad.<sup>154</sup> As Helen North suggests, the *Bacchae* is unique among Euripidean drama in that it “postulates the existence of another *sophrosyne* which can embrace *mania*—can, that is, understand the place of the irrational in the human soul and somehow come to terms with it.”<sup>155</sup>

This brief account of *mania* and *sophrosyne* in the *Bacchae* demonstrates their importance to the conflict of the plot. Two distinctive features of Euripides’ treatment emerge. First, as discussed in the previous section, he gives a heightened role to Dionysus in prophetic madness, one which Plato, for example would limit to Apollo. Second, Euripides treats the conventional opposition between *mania* and *sophrosyne* with ironic inversion. While his Dionysus is the god of madness, his opponent Pentheus is not in possession of *sophrosyne* but is in fact himself shown to be mad. In the world of

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<sup>153</sup> This line is emended by Dodds, *Euripides, Bacchae*.

<sup>154</sup> On this, see also R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus: An Interpretation of the Bacchae* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1969), 19–20.

<sup>155</sup> North, *Sophrosyne*, 83.

Euripides' Dionysus, therefore, *mania* and *sophrosyne* coexist and the distinction between them, which was so important to Greek moralists, is blurred.

#### MANIA, SOPHROSYNE, AND INSPIRED SPEECH IN ACTS 26:24-25

It is clear, therefore, that the literary trope of the opposition between *mania* and *sophrosyne* in Acts 26 is common, shared not only with philosophical contexts as several scholars have noted, but also with the *Bacchae*. Whereas in 26:11, Paul's former madness is analogous with Pentheus' persecution of Dionysus, in verses 24-25 a different type of madness is in view. Festus charges that Paul's madness is the result of great learning (*πολλὰ γράμματα*), to which Paul responds in turn with reference to the quality of his discourse: "I am not mad, most excellent Festus, he said, but I am proclaiming words of truth and moderation" (*οὐ μαίνομαι, φησίν, κράτιστε Φῆστε, ἀλλὰ ἀληθείας καὶ σωφροσύνης ῥήματα ἀποφθέγγομαι*, 26:25). Luke's narrative, therefore, shows that Paul's conversion entailed a repudiation of his former *mania* and the acquisition of *sophrosyne*. Christians, Paul asserts, are the true possessors of *sophrosyne*. If Euripides' narrative had blurred the distinction between them, Luke's reasserts it.

Paul's response in verse 25 also returns to the issue of divinely inspired utterance that had been raised in the Pentecost narrative. The verb, *ἀποφθέγγομαι*, occurs in the New Testament only here and in Acts 2, describing the apostles' glossolalia (2:4) and introducing Peter's subsequent sermon (2:14). Viewed within the wider context of Acts, therefore, Paul's claim in 26:25 should be understood as a defense of inspired speech within Christianity more generally. As discussed above (§ 6.4.2), one function of Luke's Pentecost narrative is to distinguish the inspired speech of Christians from Dionysiac

counterparts, a concern that seems also to be at work in 1 Corinthians 12-14. In Acts 2, this was achieved in response to the allegation that the apostles' speech was the product of drunkenness; Festus' accusation of Paul in 26:24 functions analogously.<sup>156</sup> As in Acts 2, it provides Luke occasion to reaffirm the rationality and sobriety of Christian speech. Read in conversation with Acts 2 and the *Bacchae*, Paul's claim to utter "words of truth and moderation" should be understood as a general repudiation of the notion that Christian inspired utterances derive from madness as they would have in Dionysiac contexts.

## 6.5 CONCLUSIONS

By necessity, Christians living in the Greco-Roman world interacted with Dionysus and the theater. While there is little in the way of explicit references to these in the New Testament, careful attention reveals several ways in which early Christian writers constructed their own religious identity over against Dionysus and Greek tragedy. My analysis of Acts has aimed to illuminate Luke's literary strategies through a comparison with Euripides' *Bacchae*. That Acts shares similarities with the *Bacchae* at several key points is not a new discovery. Scholars have been addressing the problem of Acts and the *Bacchae* with a range of methodological approaches since 1900. Several new insights have been proposed here. First, the goats-proverb attributed to Jesus in Acts 26:14, which was also spoken by Dionysus in the *Bacchae*, is well known in Greek. The implications, however, of Paul's claim that Jesus spoke it in the *Hebrew* dialect have

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<sup>156</sup> Pervo also sees 26:24-25 as echoing the story of Pentecost on the analogy of the charge of drunkenness and the common use of ἀποφθέγγομαι (*Acts*, 635).

been unexplored. I have argued that this identification of Jesus' language functions within Paul's immediate forensic context as an authenticating device. It also relates to Luke's larger treatment of language, particularly in the Pentecost narrative where "barbarian" dialects are privileged over against Greek. Such a transgression of the dichotomy between Greek and barbarian runs counter to the contemporary power structures in the Roman East—it is also characteristic of Dionysus, whose religion like Luke's Christianity has universal aspirations. I have argued further that Dionysus would have been understood as an anti-type in Luke's Pentecost narrative signaled particularly by the allegation that the apostles' inspired speech was the result of drunkenness at 9am, a distinctively Dionysiac phenomenon, especially with its implication of wine-induced prophecy. Within the narrative, this accusation allows Luke to emphasize Christian sobriety over against Dionysiac ecstasy. This dynamic is also central to Acts 26 where Luke contrasts *mania*—Paul's former condition and Festus' accusation—with *sophrosyne*—the quality of Paul's post-conversion discourse. Whereas Euripides' Dionysus had blurred the dichotomy between *mania* and *sophrosyne*, Luke has Paul reassert it and present his conversion as a repudiation of the former in favor of the latter.

My analysis has remained undecided on the question of whether Luke borrows directly from or imitates Euripides, or whether the confluences between Acts and the *Bacchae* are merely the product of popular culture. That Luke knew directly and responded to the *Bacchae* is not at all unlikely. For the purposes of the themes explored above, however, such a theory is not necessary. This tragedy and its associated religious practices were so widely known that the Dionysiac resonances in Luke's narrative would be readily evident to the attentive Greco-Roman reader. Of greater interest are the

implications for Luke's construction of Christianity within the Hellenistic world. In this regard, recent scholarship has rightly moved away from the approaches of the History of Religions School, which sought to locate the origins of Christianity within the Hellenistic mystery cults. Thus, Schäfer, for example, argues that Luke's references to the *Bacchae* are his literary strategies whereby the Christian gospel is enculturated and made intelligible within the Greco-Roman world (*in die hellenistische Welt des Mittelmeerraums zu inkulturieren*). Luke achieves this by demonstrating that Christianity was neatly compatible with ancient religious sentiment.<sup>157</sup> While this is a useful starting point, it does not sufficiently account for the texts explored above. Luke's Dionysiac references are not merely acknowledgements of compatibility with Greco-Roman religion; on the contrary, Luke presents a series of inversions and reversals that demonstrate precisely how Christianity is *unlike* Dionysiac religion. While Luke's Pentecost narrative reveals that like Dionysus Christ has universal aspirations that undermine traditional dichotomies between Greek and barbarian, he also emphasizes the sobriety of Christian inspired speech through an ironic contrast with the stereotypical drunkenness connected with Dionysus. Moreover, in Acts 26 Paul's former persecution of Christians, his epiphany, and conversion all reflect the *Bacchae* in important ways, including the attribution of the goads-proverb to Jesus. Here also there are significant reversals: Paul emphasizes that Jesus spoke the Greek proverb in the Hebrew dialect and Luke further differentiates Christianity from Dionysiac religion by emphasizing that

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<sup>157</sup> "Die intertextuelle Bezüge verdeutlichen, wie gut die Christusbotschaft sowie der christliche Kult in die Glaubenvorstellungen hineinpassen" (Schäfer, "Zur Funktion der Dionysosmysterien in der Apostelgeschichte," [at 200, 221]). Schäfer sees one of Luke's aims in presenting Christianity in this way to be the acquisition of the Roman status of *religio licita* (119-20).

Paul's conversion entailed a repudiation of *mania* in favor of *sophrosyne*, which stands in sharp contrast to Euripides' Dionysus who embodied both.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### A GOD DISMEMBERED OR DISMEMBERING?

#### EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE* BETWEEN CELSUS AND ORIGEN

##### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Euripides' *Bacchae* stages the consequences of conflict between a “foreign” religion and the state and involves a series of arguments and counter-arguments whereby its god's divine status might be confirmed or rejected. The arrival of this new religion results in the transformation of civilization. As such, it provides several immediate points of comparison with emerging Christianity, which were identified and exploited by Celsus, author of the *Alethes Logos* (or, *True Word*), the earliest full-scale attack against Christianity. Celsus' appropriation of the *Bacchae*, therefore, together with Origen's rebuttal in the *Contra Celsum* evokes a mythological world of religious and political struggle, though with a new cast of protagonists. In his argument from the *Bacchae*, Celsus quotes Dionysus' prescient words to Pentheus, “the god himself will set me free whenever I wish it” (λύσει μ' ὁ δαίμων αὐτός, ὅταν ἐγὼ θέλω, *Bacch.* 498; *Cels.* 2.34), as a demonstration that a true god would vindicate his deity by thwarting and ultimately destroying his human captor.<sup>1</sup> Jesus, by contrast, achieved none of this; whereas Pentheus was dismembered, Pilate was not. This juxtaposition, Celsus argues, demonstrates that Jesus is neither divine nor worthy of worship. My contention in this chapter is that the role of this tragedy within Celsus' and Origen's arguments provides

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the use of this same line by Horace and Plutarch see §§ 3.4 and 3.5.

insight in two directions. On the one hand, it highlights the *Bacchae*'s continuing popularity and the potentiality of its meanings for readers in the second and third centuries; on the other, it foregrounds several intractable issues in the ongoing conflict between Christianity and "paganism" in the Roman Empire.

Celsus' and Origen's debate over the meaning and application of the *Bacchae* should also be understood within the larger intellectual efforts of Greeks in the Roman Empire to preserve and reanimate the classical tradition as an important means of securing political and cultural status.<sup>2</sup> From Celsus' perspective, the *Bacchae* belonged to the collective tradition of Greek mythology and literature, which was to be vigorously defended over against the Christians. At the same time, however, for philosophical readers such as Celsus, the appropriation of mythology was not a straightforward matter. As Paul Veyne's study, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?*, shows, while various intellectual developments led to incredulity with respect to mythology, few would doubt that myths were in some sense "true."<sup>3</sup> He asserts, for example, that "never did anyone doubt the existence of the heroes."<sup>4</sup> Even within Euhemerism, "[i]t is impossible to believe in Hercules the god, but it is historically sound to consider Hercules, Bacchus, and the Dioscuri as great men who have, out of human gratitude, been taken for gods or sons of gods."<sup>5</sup> As my discussion below suggests, in his defense of the Greek tradition over against Christianity, Celsus, who was himself influenced by Euhemerism, balances his skepticism toward mythology with the cultural necessity of defending it.

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<sup>2</sup> On this aspect of the Second Sophistic, see §2.4.1.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* (trans. Paula Wissing; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 41–42, at 42.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

Origen's philosophical outlook differs little from Celsus'. Nevertheless, his Christian skepticism toward mythology yields a radically different result than that of Celsus. Early Christians were not content to construct their own story as one among many but rather one that subsumes all others. As Averil Cameron has argued in her study of the development of early Christian literary practices, a key factor enabling the effectiveness of Christianity was its development of a "totalizing discourse" that appealed both to popular and elite culture.<sup>6</sup> Origen's reinterpretation of the *Bacchae* well illustrates this phenomenon. While he engages with Celsus' interpretation of the tragedy, in the end his Christian commitments entail a wholesale repudiation of the Greek tradition.

The following analysis explores Celsus and Origen in two separate sections. For each author, considerable attention is first given to his wider literary and rhetorical strategies so as more effectively to situate each interpretation of the *Bacchae* within the context of a larger argument. The aim, therefore, is to use this tragedy as a means of freshly elucidating the central issues that animate Celsus' and Origen's works of polemic and apologetic.

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<sup>6</sup> Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Sather Classical Lectures 55; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), at 58. For a similar point, see also Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 129.

## 7.2 CELSUS' ARGUMENT FROM EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE* IN THE *ALETHES LOGOS*

### 7.2.1 INTRODUCTION

Celsus' attack against Christianity in his *Alethes Logos* represents the most thorough and well-informed Greco-Roman critique of Christianity to survive from the second century.<sup>7</sup> Although his treatise against Christianity is not extant in its original form, Origen's point-by-point rebuttal in the *Contra Celsum* quotes from the *Alethes Logos* to a sufficient extent that scholars are able to reconstruct its central arguments with relative confidence.<sup>8</sup> His treatise consists both of a vigorous defense of Greco-Roman religion and culture and of a multifaceted and far reaching refutation of Christianity.

Nothing is known of Celsus apart from the fragments of the *Alethes Logos* and the comments of Origen in the *Contra Celsum*. Origen, however, is uncertain as to the author's identity; his statements about Celsus are inconsistent and therefore not of much historical value.<sup>9</sup> He knew two men named Celsus, both Epicurean philosophers, one who lived during the reign of Nero, the other during the reign of Hadrian. Origen

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<sup>7</sup> Among the many introductions to and studies of Celsus and the *Alethes Logos*, see Pierre de Labriolle, *La réaction païenne: étude sur la polémique antichrétienne du Ier au VIe siècle* (Paris: L'Artisan du livre, 1934), 111–69; Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), xxiv–xxix; Carl Andresen, *Logos und Nomos: Die Polemik des Kelsos wider das Christentum* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1955); Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 22–30; Eugene V. Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician? Celsus and Origen on Jesus* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 64; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982); Harold Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century* (Patristic Monograph Series 10; Cambridge, Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983), 104–58; Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 94–125; Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 147–58; Michael Frede, "Celsus Philosophus Platonicus," *ANRW* 36.7: 5183–5213; Jeffrey W. Hargis, *Against the Christians: The Rise of Early Anti-Christian Polemic* (Patristic Studies 1; New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 17–61.

<sup>8</sup> See Labriolle, *La réaction païenne*, 115–17; Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, xxii–xxiv; Andresen, *Logos und Nomos*, 8–43. A reconstruction of the *Alethes Logos* is undertaken by Robert Bader, *Der ΑΛΗΘΗΣ ΛΟΓΟΣ des Kelsos* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1940). For a reconstruction in English translation, see R. Joseph Hoffmann, *On the True Doctrine: A Discourse against the Christians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 53–126.

<sup>9</sup> Labriolle, *La réaction païenne*, 128–37; Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, xxiv–xxvi.

presumes his opponent is the latter (*Cels.* 1.8). Elsewhere, however, he doubts the genuineness of Celsus' commitment to Epicureanism and accuses him of hiding it for fear of being accused of atheism (3.22; 4.54; 5.3). Among modern scholars, there is in fact a broad consensus that the *Alethes Logos* was written by a Platonist, not an Epicurean.<sup>10</sup> There is also uncertainty regarding the date of the *Alethes Logos*. Most scholars place it around the year 177 but some have suggested dates as late as the start of the third century.<sup>11</sup>

Celsus' knowledge of Christianity is derived from his own observations of Christian practices and from a careful reading of Christian texts, including portions of the Old and New Testaments as well as almost certainly one or more Christian apologists. The identity of the latter source has been the subject of some debate. Carl Andresen produced an extensive and detailed argument for Celsus' literary dependence on Justin Martyr, who wrote in the 150's CE.<sup>12</sup> Justin is important for the present study because he is the earliest extant author explicitly to employ Greek mythology generally and Dionysus in particular in the service of Christian theological claims (see § 6.1.1 above). As I argue below, Celsus' treatments of these same themes are targeted, if not at Justin, then some closely related source.

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<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Frede, "Celsus Philosophus Platonicus," esp. 5191–92; John M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (rev. ed.; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 400–01.

<sup>11</sup> Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, xxvi–xxviii. The security of this dating is questioned by Frede, "Celsus Philosophus Platonicus," 5188–91. Hargis proposes a date between 190 and 210 CE (*Against the Christians*, 20–24).

<sup>12</sup> Andresen, *Logos und Nomos*, 308–400. His argument has been widely influential; see, e.g., Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 22, esp. n. 59; Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict*, 153–58. For criticism of this theory, see Gary T. Burke, "Celsus and Justin: Carl Andresen Revisited," *ZNW* 76 (1985): 107–16.

In addition to biblical and apologetic writings, Celsus seems to have made use of some Jewish polemics against Christianity. In fact, for a considerable section of the *Alethes Logos* (*Cels.* 1.28-2.79), Celsus invents a Jewish interlocutor who carries out his attack against Christianity, ostensibly for its deviation from Judaism. It is, however, unclear to what extent Celsus' Jewish character reflects a genuine Jewish polemic; indeed, as Origen complains, Celsus has attributed to the Jew comments that are out of keeping with Judaism (e.g., 1.28; see § 7.3.3 below).<sup>13</sup> In addition, as we shall see below, this introduction of a Jewish character considerably influences Origen's response.<sup>14</sup> That Celsus attributes his argument from the *Bacchae* to a Jew results in some of Origen's strongest and most troubling anti-Jewish rhetoric.

## 7.2.2 CHRISTIANITY AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE: THE PROBLEM OF CULTURAL SUBVERSION

For Celsus, a central objection to Christianity is its social position within Greek society and the Roman Empire. He opens his treatise by asserting that Christians are guilty of forming secret societies, which were illegal according to Roman law.<sup>15</sup> In spite of Celsus' assertion, however, voluntary social and religious associations were not

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<sup>13</sup> For an attempt to reconstruct a genuine second-century Jewish polemic from Celsus' rhetorically constructed Jew, see Lincoln Blumell, "A Jew in Celsus' True Doctrine? An Examination of Jewish Anti-Christian Polemic in the Second Century C.E.," *SR* 36 (2007): 297–315; see also N. R. M. de Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-Century Palestine* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 25; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 66–70; Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Divinations; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 61–62.

<sup>14</sup> As Gallagher observes, "[t]he dual nature of his opponent, both Jew and Greek, allows Origen considerable leeway in the formation of his response" (*Divine Man or Magician*, 60).

<sup>15</sup> *Cels.* 1.1: συνθήκας κρύβδην πρὸς ἀλλήλους ποιουμένων Χριστιανῶν παρὰ τὰ νενομισμένα, "Christians make associations with themselves secretly, contrary to the laws"; see also 8.17. The text of the *Contra Celsum* follows Paul Koetschau, *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, Bde 2-3* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1899). Translations of all texts are mine throughout. Frequent and profitable use was also made of the translation by Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*.

necessarily illegal in the second century.<sup>16</sup> Societies organized for purposes of professional guilds, religious observances, or burial are in fact well attested; to the outside observer Christianity naturally resembled such an organization.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Tertullian makes positive use of this resemblance, presenting Christianity as a *collegium* precisely in order to demonstrate of its legitimacy within Roman law (*Apol.* 39). Celsus' claim, therefore, regarding the illegality of Christian societies (*sunthekai*) functions polemically to characterize them as politically dangerous and thus evokes the memory of other notorious religious organizations such as those in the Bacchanalia affair of 186 BCE.<sup>18</sup> While Celsus falls short of suggesting that Christians represented an immediate threat of political upheaval, he nevertheless finds their tendency toward secrecy as subversive of the traditional hierarchical religious structures upon which Roman society depended.<sup>19</sup> In addition to these political suspicions, Celsus viewed Christianity's secrecy as symptomatic of its intellectual inferiority. Christianity's success, he argues, is achieved through its avoidance of public scrutiny, oversight, and debate. Thus, Christianity is by nature fundamentally sectarian (3.9-12) and serves as a refuge for the ignorant (3.44).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the place of voluntary associations within Roman law, see Wendy Cotter, "The Collegia and Roman Law: State Restrictions on Voluntary Associations, 64 BCE-200CE," in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson; London: Routledge, 1996), 74-89.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Wilken, *The Christians*, 31-47; Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 84-89.

<sup>18</sup> On the Bacchanalia affair see § 3.2. For its influence on Greco-Roman attitudes toward Christianity, see §6.1.1.

<sup>19</sup> As Wilken observes, "[t]he Christian movement was revolutionary not because it had the men and resources to mount war against the laws of the Roman Empire, but because it created a social group that promoted its own laws and its own patterns of behavior" (*The Christians*, 117-25, at 119).

<sup>20</sup> See Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict*, 112-16; Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 37-39.

This appeal to the uneducated and ignorant is highlighted in Celsus' comparison with the Dionysiac mysteries:

καὶ οἶεταί γε ἐπὶ θάμβει τῶν ιδιωτῶν ταῦθ' ἡμᾶς ποιεῖν, οὐχὶ δὲ τάληθῆ περὶ  
κολάσεων λέγοντας ἀναγκαίων τοῖς ἡμαρτηκόσι· διόπερ ἐξομοιοῖ ἡμᾶς τοῖς ἐν  
ταῖς Βακχικαῖς τελεταῖς τὰ φάσματα καὶ τὰ δαίματα προεισάγουσι.

It seems that [Celsus] supposes that [Christians] invent these things to trouble their religious company, not speaking the truth concerning the punishments necessary for those who have sinned. Consequently, he likens us to those in the Bacchic mysteries who introduce phantasms and terrors. (4.10)

Celsus' comments on the Dionysiac mysteries illustrate a key feature of his complaint with Christianity.<sup>21</sup> According to Celsus, both are interested in post-mortem punishments for sinners.<sup>22</sup> This, of course, is not unique to Christianity and the Dionysiac mysteries—Celsus himself in fact maintains some version of it (3.16). What troubles him is that they both employ “phantoms and terrors” in order to target their message to the “uneducated” (ιδιωτῶν). Thus, in this and other instances, Celsus' arguments against Christianity are aimed at its social position as much as its doctrine.

Implicit within Celsus' criticism of Christians' repudiation of traditional state religion in favor of a private and sectarian cult is his view of the interdependence of religion and imperial power. A true god with genuine divine power would necessarily be able to establish a legally recognized cult. To be opposed and oppressed by the Roman Empire (as Jesus was and Christians are), therefore, is evidence against its validity (2.9, 12, 45). Conversely, the extent of Rome's imperial domination functions for Celsus to

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<sup>21</sup> On this, see also Labriolle, *La réaction païenne*, 117–18; Andresen, *Logos und Nomos*, 55–60.

<sup>22</sup> For the importance of the afterlife in Dionysiac mysteries, see § 1.3.2 above. On Celsus' comments here, see Martin P. Nilsson, *Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1957), 122. On the role of post-mortem punishments in the interaction between Christianity and Greco-Roman religion, see MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 18–19. He observes that “the one point of difference that seemed most salient was the antagonism inherent in [Christianity]—antagonism of God toward all other supernatural powers” (at 19).

demonstrate the existence and power of its gods. He asserts, “certainly you will not claim that if the Romans were persuaded by you and, having neglected their established practices with respect to gods and humans, they should call upon your high God, or whomever you wish, he would come down and fight on their behalf” (οὐ μὲν δὴ τοῦτο φήσεις, ὡς, ἂν πεισθέντες σοι Ῥωμαῖοι καὶ τῶν νενομισμένων αὐτοῖς πρὸς θεοῦς τε καὶ ἀνθρώπους ἀμελήσαντες τὸν σὸν Ὑψιστον, ἢ ὄντινα βούλει, προσκαλέσωνται, καταβὰς ὑπερμαχεῖται αὐτῶν, 8.69). As evidence that he would not, Celsus observes that whereas God had promised to do this very thing for Israel in “earlier times” (πρότερον), he had in fact provided no such help. Rather, “in the case of the [Jews], instead of being masters of the entire earth, neither a clod of land nor a hearth remains for them; and in the case of you [Christians], should someone wander still escaping notice, he is nevertheless sought out for the penalty of death” (ὧν τοῖς μὲν ἀντὶ <τοῦ> γῆς ἀπάσης εἶναι δεσπόταις οὐδ’ ὅποια τις βῶλος οὐδ’ ἐστία λείπεται, ὑμῶν δὲ κἂν πλανᾶται τις ἔτι λανθάνων, ἀλλὰ ζητεῖται πρὸς θανάτου δίκην, 8.69). As I demonstrate below, it is precisely this paradigm of the interrelationship between religion and empire for which Celsus finds support in his reading of Euripides’ *Bacchae*.

### 7.2.3 JESUS AMONG GODS AND HEROES: THE PROBLEM OF INCARNATION, DEATH, AND MIRACLES

In addition to the social and political problems with Christianity, Celsus objects to it on various rational grounds. As a Platonist, he finds the Christian conception of the

incarnation to be theologically untenable.<sup>23</sup> Although like his contemporary Middle-Platonists Celsus accepts the existence of *daimones*, which may variously manifest themselves among humans, as for God himself, he asserts emphatically, “no God, O Jews and Christians, or child of God has come down nor would come down” (θεὸς μὲν, ὃ Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ Χριστιανοί, καὶ θεοῦ παῖς οὐδεὶς οὔτε κατήλθεν οὔτ’ κατέλθοι, 5.2).<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere, Celsus supports his rejection of the incarnation by borrowing an argument directly from Plato:

Ὁ θεὸς ἀγαθὸς ἐστὶ καὶ καλὸς καὶ εὐδαίμων καὶ ἐν τῷ καλλίστῳ καὶ ἀρίστῳ· εἰ δὴ ἐς ἀνθρώπους κάτεισι, μεταβολῆς αὐτῷ δεῖ, μεταβολῆς δὲ ἐξ ἀγαθοῦ εἰς κακὸν καὶ ἐκ καλοῦ εἰς αἰσχρὸν καὶ ἐξ εὐδαιμονίας εἰς κακοδαιμονίαν καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀρίστου εἰς τὸ πονηρότατον. [...] οὐκ ἂν οὖν οὐδὲ ταύτην τὴν μεταβολὴν θεὸς δέχοιτο.

God is good and beautiful and blessed and in the most beautiful and excellent [place]. If, then, he comes down among humans, a change is required of him, a change from good to bad and beautiful to shameful and blessed to misfortunate and best to most vile. [...] A god would certainly not accept this change. (4.14)<sup>25</sup>

In addition to this Platonic argument against the incarnation on the grounds of divine immutability, Celsus asserts that the impregnation of a mortal woman by a god is an impossibility; he asks regarding Jesus’ mother: “If, then, the mother of Jesus was beautiful, did God indeed cohabit with her as though she was beautiful, although by nature he does not love a corruptible body” (εἰ ἄρα καλὴ ἦν ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, καὶ ὡς καλῇ αὐτῇ ἐμίγνυτο ὁ θεός, οὐ πεφυκῶς ἐρᾶν φθαρτοῦ σώματος 1.39). For Celsus, this is doubly improbable given that “she was neither prosperous nor royal” (οὔσης οὔτ’

<sup>23</sup> See Labriolle, *La réaction païenne*, 119–20; Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 26–27; Wilken, *The Christians*, 102–03.

<sup>24</sup> On demonology in Celsus and Middle-Platonism, see Wilken, *The Christians*, 104–08; Frede, “Celsus Philosophus Platonicus,” 5208–10. For a discussion that explores the range and shifting meaning of *daimones* with respect to Plutarch, see Frederick E. Brenk, “‘A Most Strange Doctrine’: Daimon in Plutarch,” *CJ* 69 (1973): 1–11; see also Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 216–24.

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Plato, *Resp.* 381b-c.

εὐδαίμονος οὔτε βασιλικῆς, 1.39). These critiques by Celsus of the incarnation reveal several inconsistencies and ambivalences within his conception of Greek gods and heroes, many of whom including Dionysus were conceived in precisely this manner.<sup>26</sup> As I observe below, Celsus' appropriation of the Greek mythological tradition employs careful strategies to negotiate these tensions.

As with the incarnation, the death of Jesus would be incompatible with Celsus' Platonic conception of divine immutability: if "coming down to men" constitutes an impossible change for God then clearly *a fortiori* so does death. Nevertheless, Celsus provides additional arguments for why Jesus' trial and execution undermine claims to his divinity. In his view, if Jesus truly possessed divine power and intelligence he would not have suffered as the Gospels' narrate.<sup>27</sup> For example, a god would not flee a human foe; Celsus asserts regarding the infant Jesus' flight to Egypt from the threat of Herod (Matt 2:13-15), "for it was not reasonable for god to fear death" (θεὸν γὰρ οὐκ εἰκὸς ἦν περὶ θανάτου δεδιέναι, 1.66). Again, when he was betrayed at the end of his life, Jesus "was captured while hiding himself and running off most ignominiously (κρυπτόμενος μὲν καὶ διαδιδράσκων ἐπονειδιστότατα ἐάλω, 2.9). Furthermore, Jesus' betrayal by his own associates demonstrates his failure of leadership. Celsus contrasts Jesus with a "good general" or a "robber chief," both of whom secure the loyalty of their subordinates. Jesus, however, "was handed over by those under him" (αὐτὸς δὲ προδοθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν ὑπ' αὐτῷ, 2.12). Celsus further observes that in anticipation of such criticism his disciples "fabricated that he foreknew and foretold everything that happened to him" (πλασαμένους

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<sup>26</sup> On this point, see Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict*, 105–16. He dubs these as Celsus' "consistent inconsistencies" (at 124); see also Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician*, 53–65.

<sup>27</sup> On these points, see also Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician*, 117–31.

ὅτι πάντα τὰ συμβάντα αὐτῷ ἐκεῖνος προήδει καὶ προειρήκει, 2.13). To Celsus, however, this claim is also self-refuting: “What god, daemon, or intelligent human, foreknowing such things would happen to him, would not have, if at all possible, avoided them rather than fallen into the things that he understood in advance” (τίς ἂν ἢ θεὸς ἢ δαίμων ἢ ἄνθρωπος φρόνιμος προειδὼς αὐτῷ τοιαῦτα συμβησόμενα οὐκ ἂν, εἴ γε ἐδύνατο, ἐξέκλινεν ἀλλὰ συνέπιπτεν οἷς προηπίστατο; 2.17). Jesus’ foreknowledge of his own betrayal and death entails an additional problem. If he foreknew that his own disciples would become traitors, he himself is complicit in their impiety for having led them into the very conspiracy which he knew they would commit: “God, therefore, led his own disciples and prophets with whom he ate and drank into this, so that they might become impious and profane” (θεὸς οὖν τοὺς αὐτοῦ μαθητὰς καὶ προφήτας, μεθ’ ὧν συνεδείπνει καὶ συνέπινεν, εἰς τοῦτο περιήγαγεν, ὥστε ἀσεβεῖς καὶ ἀνοσίους γενέσθαι, 2.20). Finally, for Celsus, condemnation to death is evidence of criminality; it is most ridiculous to say of an executed criminal “that he yet was not a robber but a god” (ὅτι οὗτός γε οὐχὶ ληστὴς ἀλλὰ θεὸς ἦν, 2.44). Rather, “for a demonstration of his divinity” (εἰς ἐπίδειξιν θεότητος) he ought “to have at once disappeared from the cross” (ἀπὸ τοῦ σκόλοπος γούν εὐθὺς ἀφανῆς γενέσθαι, 2.68; see also 2.31).

Celsus understands, however, that for Christians the death of Jesus was not construed as a sign of weakness, as the foregoing arguments suggest, but rather as “a benefit for humans” (ἐπ’ ἀνθρώπων ὠφελεία, 2.38; see also 2.73). He rejects such a Christian conception of divine suffering “that a son of god is punished by the devil teaches us also that we might patiently endure if punished by the same. Indeed, these things are utterly laughable” (ὅτι θεοῦ υἱὸν ὑπὸ διαβόλου κολάζεσθαι καὶ ἡμᾶς διδάσκει,

ὡς ἂν ὑπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ κολαζόμενοι καρτεροῖμεν. καὶ ταῦτά τὰ πάντα καταγέλαστα, 6.42).

Celsus observes that this Christian view of the conflict between Jesus and the devil is comparable with various Greek myths of divine combat and suffering, such as of the Titans and Giants and the Egyptian myths of Typhon, Horus, and Osiris. Regarding these, however, he draws on a well-established allegorical interpretive tradition, quoting Heraclitus: “it is necessary to understand that war is common to all and justice is strife and that all things come into being and proceed in accordance with strife” (εἰδέ<να> χρῆ τὸν πόλεμον ἔοντα ξυνὸν καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ’ ἔριν καὶ χωρεόμενα, 6.42). Similarly, in reference to the conflict between Zeus and Hera in *Iliad* 15.18-24 he adopts a Stoic reading that “the words of God to matter are the words of Zeus to Hera” (λόγους εἶναι τοῦ θεοῦ πρὸς τὴν ὕλην τοὺς λόγους τοῦ Διὸς πρὸς τὴν Ἥραν, 6.42).

Thus, whereas these myths of theomachy contain “divine enigmas” (θεῖα αἰνίγματα) and “mysteries” (μυστήρια), the Christian notion of “the punishment of a son of god by the devil” contains no such truths.<sup>28</sup> In fact, elsewhere Celsus is sharply critical of Jews and Christians who attempt to allegorize biblical stories, particularly those of Genesis (4.38, 48).<sup>29</sup>

Critics of Celsus, beginning with Origen, have found this application of allegory to be highly selective and inconsistent. Nevertheless, beneath Celsus’ polemically motivated interpretive method lies a Greek intellectual tradition that sees a “primitive theology” that originated in the east and was subsequently taken over by Homer and

<sup>28</sup> On Celsus’ inconsistency on this point, see Andresen, *Logos und Nomos*, 54–55.

<sup>29</sup> On the dispute over the application of allegory to the Bible and Greek mythology, see Labriolle, *La réaction païenne*, 161–63; Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 27–28; Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict*, 116–19. For a discussion of the same debate as it reoccurs later in Didymus the Blind’s dispute with Porphyry, see Philip Sellew, “Achilles or Christ? Porphyry and Didymus in Debate over Allegorical Interpretation,” *HTR* 82 (1989): 79–100, esp. 84–85, 92–94.

Hesiod.<sup>30</sup> On this view, an ancient logos is not unique to the Greeks, but there is “a kinship of the same logos with many of the nations” (Συγγένειαν παρὰ πολλοῖς τῶν ἔθνῶν [...] τοῦ αὐτοῦ λόγου) and they all “begin from such a doctrine” (ἀρξάμενα τοῦ τοιοῦδε δόγματος, 1.14). In spite of this apparent acknowledgement of the value of barbarian traditions, Celsus maintains that Greeks are the ultimate arbiters of the true logos: “The Greeks are more qualified to judge, confirm, and implement for virtue the things discovered by barbarians” (κρῖναι καὶ βεβαιώσασθαι καὶ ἀσκῆσαι πρὸς ἀρετὴν τὰ ὑπὸ βαρβάρων εὑρεθέντα ἀμείνονές εἰσιν Ἕλληνας, 1.2). Consequently, as a Greek Celsus is able to find this logos among “the Egyptians, Assyrians, Indians, Persians, Odrysians, Samothracians, and Eleusinians” (1.14), whereas Jews and Christians are excluded: “The Jews were deceived and overthrown by stupidity” (Ἰουδαῖοι ὑπὸ ἀμαθίας ἐσφάλησαν ἐξαπατώμενοι); and even worse, “such a very few years ago, [Jesus] established this teaching, being regarded by Christians as the Son of God” (αὐτὸν πρὸ πάνυ ὀλίγων ἐτῶν τῆς διδασκαλίας ταύτης καθηγήσασθαι, νομισθέντα ὑπὸ Χριστιανῶν υἱὸν εἶναι τοῦ θεοῦ, 1.26). Thus, a decisive strike against the Christian logos is its novelty.<sup>31</sup>

Celsus’ discussion of these points may be understood as a response to Justin’s theology of the logos. Andresen in fact made this a central piece of evidence for Celsus’ dependence on Justin. For the latter, the logos was the distinctive feature of his conception of the history of philosophy and culture, which allowed him, on the one hand, to lay claim to the teachings of the Greeks for himself while, on the other, to criticize

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<sup>30</sup> On which, see Robert M. Grant, *The Letter and the Spirit* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 1–30, esp. 26–28 on Celsus; Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict*, 109–10; Frede, “Celsus Philosophus Platonicus,” 5193–96.

<sup>31</sup> See also Wilken, *The Christians*, 112–17.

Greek culture as a derivation and deviation from Christian truth.<sup>32</sup> Justin exhorts the emperors that “the logos dictates that those who are truly pious and philosophers honor and cherish the truth alone, seeking to follow the opinions of the ancients” (Τοὺς κατὰ ἀλήθειαν εὐσεβεῖς καὶ φιλοσόφους μόνον τἀληθῆς τιμᾶν καὶ στέργειν ὁ λόγος ὑπαγορεύει, παραιτουμένους δόξαις παλαιῶν ἐξακολουθεῖν, *1 Apol.* 2). He later asserts, “we have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God and we announced in advance that he is the logos of which every race of humans partakes” (τὸν Χριστὸν πρωτότοκον τοῦ θεοῦ εἶναι ἐδιδάχθημεν καὶ προεμνήσαμεν λόγον ὄντα, οὗ πᾶν γένος ἀνθρώπων μετέσχε), including, “among the Greeks (ἐν Ἑλλησι μὲν), Socrates, Heraclitus” and “among the barbarians (ἐν βαρβάροις δέ), Abraham [etc.]” (46). In opposition to such claims, Celsus insists that there is an ancient logos that is the common possession of both Greeks and barbarians but that Jews and Christians are excluded (1.14, 26, quoted above).<sup>33</sup>

An additional strategy employed by Celsus in his appropriation of Greek mythology against Christianity is to draw on Euhemeristic interpretations of myth and cult.<sup>34</sup> The distinctive feature of Euhemerism is the view that the gods were once all human. Mythology, therefore, reflects underlying historical events whereby outstanding humans came to achieve apotheosis for their remarkable accomplishments. This framework allows Celsus to demonstrate Jesus’ inferiority to Greek gods and heroes

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<sup>32</sup> See Andresen, *Logos und Nomos*, 371–72. As Burke points out, however, these apologetic tropes were well-established and widespread and therefore do not establish Celsus’ dependence on Justin. Already in the second century BCE, the Jewish author Aristobulus had argued that Greek philosophy was derivative of Moses (“Celsus and Justin,” 112–13).

<sup>33</sup> As Chadwick observes, Celsus’ view of Christianity’s deviation from the ancient logos represents a reversal of Justin’s argument (*Early Christian Thought*, 23–24).

<sup>34</sup> See Harry Y. Gamble, “Euhemerism and Christology in Origen: *Contra Celsum* III 22–43,” *VC* 33 (1979): 12–29, esp. 15–22 on Celsus.

while at the same time maintaining skepticism toward their mythologies. In 3.22-43 Celsus develops a series of comparisons beginning with the Dioscuri, Heracles, Asclepius, and Dionysus, “who are believed by the Greeks to have become gods from among humans” (τοὺς ἐξ ἀνθρώπων πεπιστευμένους παρ’ Ἑλλησι γεγονέναι θεούς)” (3.22). He then observes that the very thing shared by these—that they were humans and believed to have become gods—and that Christians claim to be impossible is what they themselves maintain regarding Jesus:

καί φησιν οὐκ ἀνέχεσθαι μὲν ἡμᾶς τούτους νομίζειν θεοὺς, ὅτι ἄνθρωποι ἦσαν καὶ πρῶτοι, καίτοι πολλὰ ἐπιδειξαμένους καὶ γενναῖα ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων· τὸν δ’ Ἰησοῦν ἀποθανόντα ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων θιασωτῶν ὄφθαι φαμεν.

And [Celsus] says that we [Christians] do not bear to regard them as gods because they were also humans first, even though they showed forth many and noble deeds for the sake of humans; on the other hand, we say that Jesus, after dying, was seen by the members of his private religious company. (3.22; see also 3.42)<sup>35</sup>

Within Celsus’ reading of the Greek mythology, the central criterion he uses to exclude Jesus’ deification is the performance of “noble deeds” (γενναῖα), which in Euhemerism is presumed to underlie the traditions of apotheosis. Celsus in fact argues vigorously for the authenticity of such deeds. Regarding Asclepius, for example, he provides specific proof not only for past actions but also for ongoing ones: “a great multitude of people, both Greeks and barbarians, agree that they have frequently seen and

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<sup>35</sup> Celsus’ argumentation in this section has struck several readers as inconsistent and elusive. As observed below, Origen attributes this to Celsus’ fear that if he was entirely forthright in expressing his own views he would be charged as an atheist. As Gallagher observes, “The precise argument of Celsus in that fragment is difficult to recover. On the one hand, he seems to endorse the idea that good works for mankind can earn their perpetrators fame and honor, but, on the other hand, he stops short of accepting the idea that good works can transform humans into gods” (*Divine Man or Magician*, 105). Gamble’s analysis of the Euhemeristic background for Celsus’ arguments, however, provides significant clarification to this problem (“Euhemerism and Christology in Origen,” 15–22). On the complexity involved in conceptualizing divine figures such as Dionysus and Heracles within the philosophical milieu of the second century, see Morton Smith, “Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretologies, Divine Men, the Gospels and Jesus,” *JBL* 90 (1971): 174–99, esp. 184–85.

continue to see not this apparition itself but him healing and acting kindly and foretelling the future” (πολὺ ἀνθρώπων πλῆθος Ἑλλήνων τε καὶ βαρβάρων ὁμολογεῖ πολλάκις ἰδεῖν καὶ ἔτι ὄρᾶν, οὐ φάσμα αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἀλλὰ θεραπεύοντα καὶ εὐεργετοῦντα καὶ τὰ μέλλοντα προλέγοντα, 3.24). Celsus is aware that, like Asclepius, many miracles of healing had also been attributed to Jesus.<sup>36</sup> He in fact does not deny them outright but rather categorizes them as “magic” or “sorcery” (e.g., 1.6, 28, 38, 68, 71).<sup>37</sup> Thus, whatever Jesus may have performed, Celsus denies that these qualify as “noble deeds.” Moreover, the most decisive miracle for Christians—Jesus’ resurrection—is also disputed by Celsus. In contrast to the noble deeds of Celsus’ divinized humans which were performed broadly for humanity (ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων), Jesus appeared only to a select group (τῶν ἰδίων θιασωτῶν), which Celsus elsewhere reduces to a single “frenzied woman” (γυνὴ πάροιστρος, 2.55).<sup>38</sup>

As with Celsus’ discussion of the ancient logos, his comparison of these divinized men with Jesus also relates closely to the writings of Justin. As Andresen observed, this same group of figures—the Dioscuri, Heracles, Asclepius, and Dionysus—is compared to

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<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of this comparison, see Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict*, 104–35. On the importance of miracles in the early Christian message, see Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 8–12; MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 21–24, 108.

<sup>37</sup> See also Labriolle, *La réaction païenne*, 128–29; Wilken, *The Christians*, 98–101. Smith proposes that Celsus employed an independent non-Christian source in which Jesus was portrayed as a sorcerer or magician (*Jesus the Magician*, 57–60, 81–84). On the pejorative use of “magic” in the characterization of social or religious rivals, see Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician*, 41–53; Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict*, 67–72. It is of interest to this study that in the *Bacchae* Pentheus describes Dionysus as a “foreigner, a magician, an enchanter” (ξένος, γόης ἐπωδός, 233–34).

<sup>38</sup> On the latter point, see Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94–120. The dispute over the resurrection involves several other ideological factors; for a discussion of this see Henry Chadwick, “Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body,” *HTR* 41 (1948): 83–102; Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician*, 131–40; Wilken, *The Christians*, 103–04.

Jesus by Justin.<sup>39</sup> Justin writes, “we do not hold anything new, divergent from the things said by you regarding the sons of Zeus” (οὐ παρὰ τοὺς παρ’ ὑμῖν λεγομένους υἱοὺς τῷ Διὶ καινόν τι φέρομεν, *I Apol.* 21). Although Justin does not provide an explicitly Euhemeristic account of these figures, his mention in the same context of the apotheosis of Caesar, whose human origin would be undisputed, points in that direction. For Justin, a central question in evaluating such figures is, “what sort of deeds are recorded of each of those called sons of Zeus” (καὶ ὅποια ἐκάστου τῶν λεγομένων υἱῶν τοῦ Διὸς ἱστοροῦνται αἱ πράξεις, 21). He then adds, for the sake of argument, “if indeed [Jesus] is only a common human, he is worthy to be called Son of God because of his wisdom” (εἰ καὶ κοινῶς μόνον ἄνθρωπος, διὰ σοφίαν ἄξιός υἱὸς θεοῦ λέγεσθαι, 22). Moreover, Justin maintains that Jesus “has been demonstrated” (ἀποδέδεικται) to be greater than the reputed sons of Zeus on the basis on his actions: “for the superior one is manifest from his deeds” (ὁ γὰρ κρείττων ἐκ τῶν πράξεων φαίνεται, 22). These striking similarities between the strategies of Justin and Celsus suggest that the latter was responding to precisely this sort of Christian argument regarding Greek mythology.

A final related fragment of the *Alethes Logos* in 1.67 is noteworthy and programmatic for Celsus’ larger approach to mythology.<sup>40</sup>

οἱ μὲν παλαιοὶ μῦθοι Περσεῖ καὶ Ἀμφίονι καὶ Αἰακῶ καὶ Μίνωϊ θείαν σπορὰν  
νείμαντες (οὐδ’ αὐτοῖς ἐπιστεύσαμεν) ὅμως ἐπέδειξαν αὐτῶν ἔργα μεγάλα καὶ  
θαυμαστά ἀληθῶς τε ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων, ἵνα μὴ ἀπίθανοι δοκῶσι· σὺ δὲ δὴ, τί καλὸν  
ἢ θαυμάσιον ἔργῳ ἢ λόγῳ πεποίηκας;

<sup>39</sup> Andresen, *Logos und Nomos*, 363–65; see also Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict*, 136–41. As Burke notes, however, this list of four is common in Euhemeristic arguments, e.g., Cic., *Nat. d.* 2.24.62; 3.18.45 (“Celsus and Justin,” 113–15); see also Gamble, “Euhemerism and Christology in Origen,” 17 n. 14.

<sup>40</sup> On this passage, see Andresen, *Logos und Nomos*, 52–54.

The ancient myths maintaining the divine births of Perseus, Amphion, Aeacus, and Minos (we have not believed them) nevertheless demonstrate their great and marvelous deeds, as both genuine and for the sake of humans, lest they should be deemed improbable; but in your case, what fine or marvelous thing have you accomplished in deed or word? (1.67)

Here Celsus candidly admits his own skepticism regarding divine births. The figures mentioned are according to their mythology the products of Zeus' cohabitation with mortal women and, therefore, in his disbelief Celsus is consistent with his critique of the Christian incarnation discussed above. At the same time, however, he takes these myths as reliable evidence for these men's performance of "great and marvelous deeds," which he then contrasts with Jesus.<sup>41</sup> Thus, for Celsus, Euhemeristic interpretations of Greek myth are not destructive of the tradition; rather, they allow him both to be a skeptic and at the same time to insist upon the superiority of these Greek heroes to Jesus.

#### 7.2.4 CELSUS ON JESUS AND EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*

Celsus' argument from Euripides' *Bacchae* is closely related to the foregoing discussion; it illustrates both his conception of the relationship between religion and the state and his strategies in the appropriation of Greek mythology. His argument consists in five fragments in *Contra Celsum* 2.33-35, which are reconstructed here following Robert Bader.<sup>42</sup> It seems certain, however, as Bader argues, that Origen has abbreviated Celsus' argument because it lacks sufficient detail in the text as it stands.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of the role of civic benefactors in the Greco-Roman world as it relates to Celsus' argument, see Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician*, 140–50.

<sup>42</sup> See Bader, *Der ΑΛΗΘΗΣ ΛΟΓΟΣ des Kelsos*, 72–73. The numbering of the five fragments is mine.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 20; so also Andresen, *Logos und Nomos*, 23.

- frag. 1 Τί δέ [...] καὶ γενναῖον ἔδρασεν οἷον θεός, καταφρονῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ διαγελῶν καὶ παίζων τὸ συμβαῖνον ὁ Ἰησοῦς;  
What noble deed did he perform as a god? Did Jesus despise humans and laugh and mock at his circumstances? (2.33)
- frag. 2 τὸν Εὐριπίδου Βάκχον λέγοντα·  
λύσει μ' ὁ δαίμων αὐτός, ὅταν ἐγὼ θέλω.  
The Bacchus of Euripides says,  
“The god himself will set me free whenever I wish it.” (*Bacch.* 498) (2.34)
- frag. 3 ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὁ καταδικάσας... αὐτὸν ἔπαθέ τι, οἷον ὁ Πενθεὺς μανεῖς ἢ σπαραχθεῖς.  
But the one who condemned him did not suffer anything as Pentheus did, being driven mad or torn to shreds. (2.34)
- frag. 4 τοὺς ἐμπαίζαντας αὐτῷ καὶ φοινικίδα περιθέντας καὶ τὸν ἐξ ἀκανθῶν στέφανον καὶ τὸν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ κάλαμον.  
They mocked him and equipped him with a purple robe, a crown of thorns, and a rod in his hand. (2.34)
- frag. 5 Τί οὐκ εἰ μὴ πρόσθεν ἀλλὰ νῦν γοῦν θεῖόν τι ἐπιδείκνυται καὶ τῆς αἰσχύνῃς ταύτης ἑαυτὸν ῥύεται καὶ τοὺς ὑβρίζοντας εἰς ἑαυτὸν τε καὶ τὸν πατέρα δικαιοῖ;  
Why is he not showing forth something divine, if not before then at least now, and rescuing himself from this shame and bringing to justice those who violated him and his father? (2.35)

In this argument, in keeping with his approach of comparing Jesus with Greek gods and heroes discussed above, Celsus makes the performance of a noble deed (γενναῖον) a central criterion, which frames the larger argument. In this case, the deed expected by Celsus from a deity who is brought to trial by human authorities is informed by his reading of the trial of Dionysus by Pentheus in *Bacchae* 451-518. The god, disguised as a priest in his own cult, had been brought before the tyrant, who questions him extensively as to the nature of his cultic activities. The exchange concludes with Pentheus enraged and casting Dionysus into prison. In the line quoted by Celsus (498), the god speaks ironically of his own deliverance from prison, which he subsequently

achieved (576-62). As he later declares: “I rescued myself easily, without trouble” (αὐτὸς ἐξέσωσ’ ἑμαυτὸν ῥαδίως ἄνευ πόνου, 614). In Celsus’ view, Jesus should have done likewise, if he was truly a god, a sentiment shared by the thief on the cross in the Gospels who said, “save yourself, if you are the Son of God” (σῶσον σεαυτόν, εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, Matt 27:40; see also *Cels.* 2.68). As Celsus observes in frag. 5 (2.35), not only did Jesus fail to rescue himself then (πρόσθεν), he still also now (νῦν γοῦν) fails to “rescue himself from this shame.”

Jesus’ failure to release himself from his captors represents only one aspect of Celsus’ argument from the *Bacchae*. There are in fact several indicators that Celsus is drawing on the larger context of the tragedy. Indeed, a central conflict in the tragedy is the dispute over the divine status of a “new god” and in particular how a new god would demonstrate true divinity. Celsus’ question why Jesus is “not showing forth (ἐπιδείκνυται) something divine,” echoes Dionysus’ stated intention in the prologue: “I shall demonstrate to [Pentheus] and to all the Thebans that I am a god” (αὐτῷ θεὸς γεγῶς ἐνδείξομαι πᾶσιν τε Θηβαίοισιν, 47-48). Such a demonstration, according to Celsus, might be observed in a variety of ways. For example, a god would “despise (καταφρονῶν) humans and laugh (διαγελῶν) and mock (παίζων) at his circumstances” (frag. 1, *Cels.* 2.33). Such an attitude of contempt would demonstrate the god’s absolute mastery over the situation. This is precisely how Dionysus responded. Pentheus’ servant reports, “laughing he allowed me to bind him and lead him away” (γελῶν δὲ καὶ δεῖν κἀπάγειν ἐφίετο, *Bacch.* 439). Pentheus later complains, “he despises me and Thebes” (καταφρονεῖ με καὶ Θήβας ὄδε, 503).

Celsus also observes that Pilate, who condemned Jesus, did not suffer anything (οὐδ' ... ἔπαθέ τι) for his actions (frag. 3, 2.34). In contrast to the Christian narrative, the *Bacchae* illustrates that in a conflict between a god and his mortal opponents, the latter not the former must suffer calamity. Indeed, Euripides treats this point with his characteristic irony. At several moments in his trial, Dionysus alludes to his own suffering: “tell me what I must suffer” (εἴφ' ὅ τι παθεῖν δεῖ, 492; see also 500, 515-18, 1377). Yet, in spite of these hints at the possibility of the god’s suffering, they function merely to heighten the effect of the reversal when Pentheus and his house are finally ruined. As Dionysus observes, “in name you are well-suited to suffer misfortune” (ἐνδυστυχηῖσαι τοῦνομ' ἐπιτήδειος εἶ, 509), alluding to the etymology of Pentheus (*penthos*, “grief”; see also 367-68.) The retributive suffering that Celsus has in view in the *Bacchae* entails madness and *sparagmos* (μανεῖς ἢ σπαραχθείς), which are well-known features of Pentheus’ fate. He departs Thebes to his death with a “maddened heart” (μανεῖσα πραπίδι, 999). It is not only Pentheus who was inflicted with madness by Dionysus. As Cadmus concludes, “You were mad, the entire city was in Bacchic frenzy” (ἐμάνητε, πᾶσά τ' ἐξεβακχεύθη πόλις, 1295; see also 32-33, 326). The *sparagmos* of Pentheus, narrated in bloody detail by the messenger (1114-1152), was also instigated by Dionysus and was carried out at the hands of Pentheus’ mother and her sisters.

Closely related to Pentheus’ suffering (and Pilate’s lack of it) is the larger question of divine justice and retribution. In Celsus’ view, the subjection of Jesus and his father to hubris would require that he bring the perpetrators to justice (frag. 5, 2.35). The theme of hubris against a god also figures prominently in the *Bacchae* in the characterization of Pentheus’ actions. Dionysus remarks that he will punish Pentheus for

his hubris: “But, watch, Dionysus will execute punishments upon you for these hubristic deeds, though you claim he does not exist” (ἀτάρ τοι τῶνδ’ ἄποιν’ ὑβρισμάτων μέτεισι Διόνυσός σ’, ὄν οὐκ εἶναι λέγεις; 516-17; see also 375-76; 555). The implicit connection between hubris against the god and the denial of his divinity is made clear elsewhere: Cadmus tells Agave, “He was subjected to hubris; for you did not regard him as a god” (ὑβριν γ’ ὑβρισθείς· θεὸν γὰρ οὐχ ἠγεῖσθέ νιν, 1297); similarly Dionysus states to Cadmus, “For indeed although I am a god I was treated with hubris by you” (καὶ γὰρ πρὸς ὑμῶν θεὸς γεγῶς ὑβριζόμεν, 1347). Such violence against a god demands justice. As with the theme of suffering discussed above, Euripides treats the problem of justice with ironic reversal. Pentheus repeatedly threatens to exercise judgment against the disguised god (e.g., 345-46; 489; 676; 793); these threats, however, function in the narrative to highlight that true justice would ultimately be administered by the god and would result in Pentheus’ own destruction (847; 992-96; 1011-16; 1249-50). Celsus’ attention to hubris and divine retribution in his reading of the *Bacchae* is consistent with a recurrent theme elsewhere in the *Alethes Logos*. As he argues later, “you revile and mock their images; if, however, you should have reviled Dionysus himself or Heracles while present, you would perhaps not have gotten off with impunity” (σὺ μὲν τὰ ἀγάλματα τούτων λοιδορῶν καταγελάς, ὡς αὐτόν γε τὸν Διόνυσον ἢ τὸν Ἡρακλέα παρόντα εἰ ἐλοιδόρησας, οὐκ ἂν ἴσως χαίρων ἀπήλλαξας, 8.41).

Celsus’ argument from the *Bacchae* serves his larger polemic against Christianity in several important ways. As discussed above (§ 7.2.3), he regarded Jesus’ condemnation and death to be inconsistent with true divine intelligence and power. By contrast, throughout his trial, Dionysus remained in full control of this situation; the

momentary appearance of being bested by the tyrant merely functioned as a deception intended in the end to accentuate the god's power to avenge himself. In addition, Celsus' reading of the *Bacchae* illustrates his conception of the relationship between religion and the Roman Empire. For Celsus, the validity of a religion could be demonstrated by its connection to imperial power. In the myth, because Pentheus failed sufficiently to honor a genuine divinity by establishing his cult at Thebes, he and his royal house were brought to ruin. As with mythological Thebes, Celsus believed that the present rule of the Roman Empire depended on the gods (e.g., 8.63). He feared, however, that should the Romans fail to acknowledge the gods upon whom their emperor depended, as Penthean Thebes, the Empire might also collapse: "for if everyone would do the same as you, nothing will prevent [the emperor] from being left alone and desolate and the things on earth coming into the possession of the most lawless and savage barbarians" (εἰ γὰρ τὸ αὐτό σοι ποιήσειαν ἅπαντες, οὐδὲν κωλύσει τὸν μὲν καταλειφθῆναι μόνον καὶ ἔρημον, τὰ δ' ἐπὶ γῆς ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀνομωτάτοις τε καὶ ἀγριωτάτοις βαρβάροις γενέσθαι, 8.68).

### 7.3 ORIGEN'S RESPONSE: DEATH AS DIVINE VIRTUE

#### 7.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Origen (ca. 185-255 CE) is one of the most prolific and controversial writers of the early church.<sup>44</sup> About seventy years after Celsus' wrote his *Alethes Logos*, Origen

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<sup>44</sup> For general studies on the life and work of Origen, see Jean Daniélou, *Origen* (trans. Walter Mitchell; London: Sheed and Ward, 1955); Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 66–94; Joseph C. McLelland, *God the Anonymous: A Study in Alexandrian Philosophical Theology* (Patristic Monograph Series 4; Cambridge, Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1976), 93–135; Henri Crouzel, *Origen* (trans. A. S. Worrall; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989); Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church* (Christian Theology in Context; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

undertook a detailed response.<sup>45</sup> He was apparently the first Christian to do so.<sup>46</sup> His own education made him distinctly qualified to take on such a task. He was deeply immersed in Greek philosophy; indeed, as several scholars have observed, he worked with a nearly identical philosophical framework to that of Celsus.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Origen had an intimate knowledge of the classical literary tradition upon which Celsus placed so much value. Having obtained both a secular and biblical education, he began his career as an instructor in literature as well as a catechist (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.3).<sup>48</sup> The former came to a decisive end, however, according to Eusebius, when he sold his library for an income of four obols per day (*Hist. eccl.* 6.3.9). As Henri Crouzel observes, “[t]his gesture of selling his library marks a complete renunciation of secular studies.”<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the influence of contemporary practices in the exegesis of classical literature remained firmly impressed upon Origen’s own interpretive methods. Although his exegetical works are primarily interested in biblical texts, they are deeply indebted to his “pagan” education and teaching (*Hist. eccl.* 6.18.2-4).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> On the date (246-48 CE), see Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, xiv–xv. On Origen’s *Contra Celsum*, in addition to the studies cited above in connection with Celsus’ *Alethes Logos*, see also Daniélou, *Origen*, 97–127; de Lange, *Origen and the Jews*, 63–73; Michael Frede, “Origen’s Treatise *Against Celsus*,” in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (ed. Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman, and Simon Price; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 131–55; Michael Duncan, “The New Christian Rhetoric of Origen,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 46 (2013): 88–104.

<sup>46</sup> See Frede, “Origen’s Treatise *Against Celsus*,” 133.

<sup>47</sup> See Labriolle, *La réaction païenne*, 154–60; Daniélou, *Origen*, 103; Frede, “Celsus Philosophus Platonicus,” 5203. For a general discussion of Origen’s philosophy, see Daniélou, *Origen*, 73–98.

<sup>48</sup> See Crouzel, *Origen*, 4–8; Heine, *Origen*, 19–25.

<sup>49</sup> Crouzel, *Origen*, 8. This renunciation is, however, not absolute. Origen’s later student in Caesarea, Gregory Thaumaturgus, reports that Origen had his students read both ancient philosophers and poets except for the works of atheists (*Panegyric* 13); see also Anthony Grafton and Megan Hale Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 67–68.

<sup>50</sup> See esp. the detailed study of Bernhard Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe* (2 vols.; Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft 18; Basel: Reinhardt, 1987). Grafton and Williams demonstrate the extent to which Origen’s literary and textual work reflects that of contemporary philosophers (*Christianity and the Transformation of the Book*, 22–85). These observations, however,

Origen's knowledge of contemporary philology can be illustrated with two examples from the *Contra Celsum*, both of which are also significant for his larger approach to Euripides. First, in an effort to refute Christians' anthropocentric view of the cosmos, Celsus had disputed a line from Euripides, "the sun and night serve mortals," (ἥλιος μὲν νύξ τε δουλεύει βροτοῖς, *Phoen.* 546), observing that on the contrary, they serve "ants and flies" as much as humans (*Cels.* 4.77). Origen eagerly accepts Euripides as an ally of Jews and Christians on this point, and praises the poet as "the philosopher of the stage according to some and a hearer of Anaxagoras' lectures on nature" (ὁ κατὰ τινος σκηνικὸς φιλόσοφος καὶ φυσιολογίας τῆς Ἀναξαγόρου γενόμενος ἀκροατῆς).<sup>51</sup> He then provides an interpretation of this line, which Bernhard Neuschäfer argues, derives from his experience as a teacher of secular literature.<sup>52</sup> Origen argues by synecdoche (συνεκδοχικῶς) that the line means that "the things organized in the universe" (τεταγμένα ἐν τῷ παντί = ἥλιος μὲν νύξ τε) serve "all rational beings" (πᾶσι τοῖς λογικοῖς = βροτοῖς).

A second example of Origen's literary training relates to a category labeled by Neuschäfer as τὸ πρόσωπον τὸ λέγον, that is, the importance of fitting words that are appropriate to their speakers.<sup>53</sup> This principle was important in ancient poetic criticism and given classic expression in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1454a 33-35). As Neuschäfer demonstrates, Origen employs this elsewhere in his biblical exegesis. For my purposes

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should be balanced by the analysis of de Lange, who finds extensive influence from rabbinic exegesis in Origen derived from his interaction with Palestinian Jews during his Caesarean period (*Origen and the Jews*, 103–32); see also Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*, 60–67; Grafton and Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book*, 82–85; Heine, *Origen*, 227–31.

<sup>51</sup> Clement of Alexandria similarly calls him, "the philosopher on the stage" (ὁ ἐπὶ τῆς σκηνῆς φιλόσοφος, *Strom.* 5.11.70.2).

<sup>52</sup> Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe*, 224–25. He also provides examples of how Origen applies this principle in his biblical exegesis.

<sup>53</sup> See *ibid.*, 263–76.

here, however, its application in the *Contra Celsum* is of particular interest. In several places Origen complains that Celsus has attributed words to speakers that are out of keeping with their character. Regarding Celsus' Jewish interlocutor, Origen asserts, "[Celsus] has not maintained what is entirely in character for the Jew in the things spoken" (τὸ ἀρμόζον πάντῃ τῷ Ἰουδαίῳ πρόσωπον ἐν τοῖς λεγομένοις τετήρηκε, 1.28).<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere, Origen chastises Celsus for attributing statements of advanced philosophical learning to Christians in spite of his characterization of them as barbarian and illiterate. In this context, Origen compares Celsus to Euripides: whereas Homer "maintained the characters of his heroes as they themselves were established from the beginning" (τηρήσας τὰ τῶν ἡρώων πρόσωπα, ὅποια αὐτὰ ὑπέθετο ἀπ' ἀρχῆς), "Euripides is ridiculed by Aristophanes because he frequently attributes words of unfitting doctrines to barbarian women or slaves, which he learned from Anaxagoras or some other wise man" (Εὐριπίδης δὲ ὑπὸ Ἀριστοφάνους κωμωδεῖται ὡς ἀκαιρορρήμων διὰ τὸ πολλάκις περιτεθεικέναι λόγους δογμάτων, ὧν ἀπὸ Ἀναξαγόρου ἢ τινος ἔμαθε τῶν σοφῶν, βαρβάροις γυναιξὶν ἢ οἰκέταις, 7.36).<sup>55</sup> Thus, Origen brings his training in poetic criticism to bear both in his works of biblical exegesis and in his disputation with Celsus over classical literature.

Even though Origen was eminently qualified to respond to Celsus, he claims not to have done so on his own initiative but only at the request of his patron Ambrose: "O Ambrose, beloved of God, I do not know why you have desired us to compose an

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<sup>54</sup> As Blumell suggests, Origen's perceived incongruity between the words Celsus attributes to the Jew and his own conception of Judaism may arise because he was acquainted with Palestinian Judaism whereas Celsus had encountered Hellenistic Judaism ("A Jew in Celsus' True Doctrine," 300).

<sup>55</sup> On this passage, see Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe*, 269–70. See Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 393–406.

apology regarding the false testimonies against Christians in the treatise of Celsus and the accusations against the faith of the churches in his book” (σὺ δ’, ὦ φιλόθεε Ἀμβρόσιε, οὐκ οἶδ’ ὅπως πρὸς τὰς Κέλσου κατὰ Χριστιανῶν ἐν συγγράμμασι ψευδομαρτυρίας καὶ τῆς πίστεως τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν ἐν βιβλίῳ κατηγορίας ἐβουλήθης ἡμᾶς ἀπολογήσασθαι, pref. 1). Origen’s hesitancy to produce an apology is an important rhetorical strategy that frames the larger work.<sup>56</sup> He reminds Ambrose that when Jesus was accused falsely, he stood in silence and gave no reply. To give a defense, therefore, potentially detracts from the power of Jesus (pref. 3). It is not true Christians, Origen maintains, but rather only the weak in faith who need such a book (pref. 6). In Origen’s view, the Christian, like Jesus, should willingly accept unjust trial and death; for this is a fundamental marker of Christian virtue.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, martyrdom was not merely a theoretical concept for Origen; his own father had been beheaded for his faith and, according to Eusebius, Origen would have similarly suffered had his mother not hidden his clothing to prevent him (*Hist. eccl.* 6.2.5). Later, he would be arrested and tortured and although he survived he never fully recovered. In keeping with several other prominent Christians, Origen viewed martyrdom as an act of honor and triumph.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Origen sees martyrdom as a means whereby Christians defeat demonic powers (*Cels.* 8.44; *Mart.* 42). Thus, the

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<sup>56</sup> On the significance of Origen’s hesitancy to write the *Contra Celsum*, see Frede, “Origen’s Treatise *Against Celsus*,” 141–44; Duncan, “The New Christian Rhetoric of Origen,” 94–96.

<sup>57</sup> See esp. Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom*, passim; also the comments of Labriolle, *La réaction païenne*, 141–42; W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 391–99; Oliver Nicholson, “Preparation for Martyrdom in the Early Church,” in *The Great Persecution: The Proceedings of the Fifth Patristic Conference, Maynooth, 2003* (ed. Vincent Twomey and Mark Humphries; Irish Theological Quarterly Monograph 4; Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), 61–90, esp. 80–85.

<sup>58</sup> Nicholson demonstrates that Origen shares this view with, among others, Tertullian and Lactantius (“Preparation for Martyrdom in the Early Church”).

apologetic impulse is in Origen's view at odds with the essence of Christian faith. In spite of these objections, however, Origen produces the book that Ambrose requested.

### 7.3.2 ORIGEN ON DIONYSUS, NOBLE DEEDS, AND NOBLE DEATHS

Before exploring Origen's reply to Celsus' argument from the *Bacchae* in 2.33-35, it will be useful briefly to survey his larger response to the *Alethes Logos*, with particular attention to those points discussed in the foregoing sections. As we saw above, in his comparisons of Jesus with Greek gods and heroes, Celsus employed a Euhemeristic reading of the mythological tradition, while at the same time using these myths so as to demonstrate the inferiority of Jesus.<sup>59</sup> Origen accuses Celsus both of inconsistency and cowardice:

καὶ πρὸς ταῦτα δὲ φήσομεν ὅτι δεινῶς ὁ Κέλσος οὔτε σαφῶς παρέστησε μὴ σέβειν τούτους ὡς θεοὺς (εὐλαβεῖτο γὰρ τὴν δόξαν τῶν ἐντευξομένων αὐτοῦ τῆ γραφῆ, ὑποληψομένων αὐτὸν ἄθεον, εἴ τι τῆς φαινομένης αὐτῷ ἀληθείας ἐπρέσβευεν), οὔτ' αὖ προσεποιήσατο καὶ αὐτὸς αὐτοὺς θεοὺς νομίζειν.

And against these things, we shall assert that Celsus was cleverly though not openly disposed not to honor them as gods (for he was aware of the opinion of those who would happen upon his writing and suspect him of atheism if he represented any of the truth that appeared to him); at the same time, he did not pretend that he regarded them as gods. (3.22)

As for Celsus' argument that the Greek gods and heroes performed "many noble deeds for humanity," Origen responds by shifting the terms of comparison so as to focus on questions of morality.<sup>60</sup> In the case of Jesus, he asserts that "no licentiousness of his is reported" (οὐδεμία τούτου φέρεται ἀκολασία, 3.23). By contrast, the moral failings of

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<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of Origen's response to these arguments, see Gamble, "Euhemerism and Christology in Origen," 22–29.

<sup>60</sup> See Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician*, 73, 105–06.

Heracles, the Dioscuri, Asclepius, and Dionysus are widely known (3.22-23). Regarding Dionysus, Origen asks, “what reverence does Dionysus have, maddened and clad in women’s clothing, that he would be worshiped as a god?” (τί δὲ σεμνὸν ἔχει ὁ μαινόλας Διόνυσος καὶ γυναικεῖα περιβεβλημένος, ἵν’ ὡς θεὸς προσκυνηθῆ; 3.23).<sup>61</sup> In addition, Origen observes that not only do these gods and heroes act licentiously themselves, they produce no moral improvement in their devotees (3.42).

Origen also takes issue with Celsus’ selective use of allegory. As we saw above, Celsus adopted allegorical readings of various myths, such as those of theomachy, in order to reconcile them with his philosophical framework. Regarding the death of Jesus, however, he would tolerate no such approach. Origen uses the myth of Dionysus’ dismemberment by the Titans in order to counter Celsus on this point.<sup>62</sup> In 3.23, he asserts, “if indeed those defending these things take refuge in allegories, one must examine the allegories in each case as to whether they possess something useful and whether those who are torn to shreds by the Titans are able to have existence and are worthy of reverence and worship” (ἐὰν δὲ καὶ οἱ περὶ τούτων ἀπολογούμενοι ἐπὶ ἀλληγορίας καταφεύγωσιν, ἰδία μὲν ἐξεταστέον τὰς ἀλληγορίας, εἰ τὸ ὑγιὲς ἔχουσιν, ἰδία δέ, εἰ δύνανται ὑπόστασιν ἔχειν καὶ ἄξιοι εἶναι σεβασμῶν καὶ προσκυνήσεως σπαραττόμενοι ὑπὸ Τιτάνων). Later, in order to refute Celsus’ preclusion of the

<sup>61</sup> Critique of the morality of Greek gods and heroes is of course not unique to Origen; it was a well established philosophical trope that Justin had already employed in Christian interests (e.g., *1 Apol.* 25).

<sup>62</sup> This myth, which derives from Orphism often in connection with the name Zagreus, became common in Neoplatonic allegory; see Jean Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie: les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes* (rev. and enl. ed.; Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1976), 202 n. 111. For a discussion and reconstruction of the myth from the fragmentary evidence, see Ivan M. Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1941), 307–64 ; Carl Kerényi, *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life* (trans. Ralph Manheim; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 240–45; Radcliffe G. Edmonds, “Tearing Apart the Zagreus Myth: A Few Disparaging Remarks on Orphism and Original Sin,” *ClAnt* 18 (1999): 35–73.

incarnation on the grounds of a Platonic doctrine of immutability (see 4.14; § 7.2.3 above), Origen asks regarding the biblical accounts of Jesus' incarnation and other "transformations" (μεταβολαί) whether these narratives "will not appear more holy than those of Dionysus, who was deceived by the Titans, fell from the throne of Zeus, was torn to shreds by them and afterward was reconstituted and, as though revived to life, also re-ascended into heaven?" (σεμνότερα φανεῖται Διονύσου ὑπὸ τῶν Τιτάνων ἀπατωμένου καὶ ἐκπίπτοντος ἀπὸ τοῦ Διὸς θρόνου καὶ σπαρασσομένου ὑπ' αὐτῶν καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα πάλιν συντιθεμένου καὶ οἶονεὶ ἀναβιώσκοντος καὶ ἀναβαίνοντος εἰς οὐρανόν; 4.17)

Thus, in this myth of Dionysus, Origen finds that the Greek tradition does not pass the criterion that Celsus applies to Jesus. He complains that whereas the Greeks are allowed to allegorize these as referring to the soul, "for us the door is locked" (ἡμῶν δ' ἀποκέκλεισται θύρα, 4.17).<sup>63</sup>

### 7.3.3 ORIGEN ON JESUS AND EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*

Let us now consider Origen's response to Celsus' argument from the *Bacchae*. First, regarding Celsus' claim that Jesus' performed no noble deed in response to the violence of his human foes (frag. 1 above), Origen points to several events recorded in the Gospels in connection with Jesus' death: tombs opening, the rending of the temple veil, darkness in daytime, and earthquakes (2.33). For the latter two, Origen asserts that there is independent corroboration.

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<sup>63</sup> For a discussion of the function of the allegorical interpretation of scripture over against that of Greek mythology in the *Contra Celsum*, see Duncan, "The New Christian Rhetoric of Origen," 98–100. He dubs this "[t]he ultimate accommodation in Origen's rhetoric" (at 98).

Next, Origen turns to Celsus' quotation of Euripides' *Bacchae* 498 (frag. 2 above). He begins by observing that Celsus attributes this quotation to his Jewish speaker. As noted above (§ 7.3.1), Origen often identifies places in the *Alethes Logos* where Celsus attributes to his Jewish speaker opinions out of keeping with Judaism. Here Origen takes this in a particularly tendentious direction, claiming that "Jews are certainly not engaged in the philology of Greek literature" (οὐ πάνυ μὲν οὖν Ἰουδαῖοι τὰ Ἑλλήνων φιλολογοῦσιν, 2.34).<sup>64</sup> All the same, Origen responds to the substance of the argument. He refers to two stories from Acts (12:6-9; 16:24-26), where miraculous deliverances similar to those in the *Bacchae* are recorded: "Peter was also bound in prison when the angel released his bonds and he went out; and Paul together with Silas was bound under a stock in Philippi of Macedonia and was released by divine power, when also the doors of the guard were opened" (καὶ Πέτρος δεδεμένος ἐν φυλακῇ ἀγγέλου λύσαντος τοὺς δεσμοὺς ἐξῆλθε, καὶ Παῦλος μετὰ τοῦ Σίλα ἐν Φιλίπποις τῆς Μακεδονίας ὑπὸ 'ξύλον' δεδεμένος ἐλύθη θεία δυνάμει, ὅτε καὶ 'θύραι' τῆς φυλακῆς ἠνοίχθησαν' 2.34). These stories function as counter-evidence: as Dionysus had delivered himself (*Bacch.* 576-646) and his maenads (442-48) amidst earthquakes and miraculous openings of bonds and doors, so also Jesus delivered his disciples. Thus, Origen is perhaps the first reader of Acts and Euripides' *Bacchae* to identify and exploit this narrative comparison.<sup>65</sup> He questions, however, whether Celsus had read Acts: "it is

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<sup>64</sup> As de Lange notes, this statement is a blatant distortion: when "Origen says that Jews are not at all well read in Greek literature, this must be read as an 'aside' in Origen's reply to Celsus, and is not to be taken as proof that in Origen's day Jews did not read Greek writings" (*Origen and the Jews*, 6).

<sup>65</sup> On this point, see Detlev Dormeyer, "Bakchos in der Apostelgeschichte," in *Griechische Mythologie und frühes Christentum* (ed. Raban von Haehling; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 153–72, esp. 167–70. On the question of the relationship of Acts and the *Bacchae* in connection to prison escape, see § 6.3 above.

likely either that Celsus mocks these things or in fact that he has never read the story” (εἰκὸς ὅτι ταῦτα γελᾷ ὁ Κέλσος ἢ καὶ οὐδαμῶς ἀνέγνω τὴν ἱστορίαν, 2.34).<sup>66</sup> Origen theorizes that if Celsus did know these stories, he would have followed his usual procedure of attributing them to sorcery.

Origen’s rebuttal to Celsus’ next argument from the *Bacchae* (frag. 3 above) is troubling for its anti-Judaism. Quoting Matthew 27:18, which presents the Jews rather than Pilate as ultimately responsible for Jesus’ death, Origen writes that it was “the nation of the Jews” (τὸ Ἰουδαίων ἔθνος), “which was condemned by God, having been torn to shreds and dispersed into all the world beyond the tearing of Pentheus” (ὅπερ καταδεδίκασται ὑπὸ θεοῦ σπαραχθὲν καὶ εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ὑπὲρ τὸν Πενθέως σπαραγμὸν διασπαρέν, 2.34). For Origen, the proper analogy with Pentheus is not Pilate but rather the Jewish nation.<sup>67</sup> Presumably, he has in mind the events following the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-36 CE), in which Hadrian banned all Jews from Jerusalem.<sup>68</sup> Two striking features emerge from Origen’s argument. First, he employs a word play, making

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<sup>66</sup> Elsewhere, Origen makes similar observations about Celsus’ failure to read Acts. In 2.1, he uses two passages from Acts (10:9-15; 21:26) as evidence that Christians were not apostates from Judaism and then observes that Celsus must not have known these. In a different context, Celsus knows of a Christian teaching about “gates opening spontaneously” (αὐτομάτως ἀνοιγομένης πύλας, 6.34) but not in connection with prison escape.

<sup>67</sup> Christian concern over the fate of Pilate can be seen the development of various legends. In the *Acts of Pilate* (Paradosis), for example, he was beheaded by Gaius, although he and his wife were first converted. The later Latin work, *Mors Pilati*, has Pilate commit suicide at the instigation of the emperor and his body cast into the Tiber. Eusebius also reports Pilate’s suicide (*Hist. eccl.* 2.7). Thanks are due to Richard Pervo for bringing this connection to my attention. For a discussion of the historical and legendary materials regarding Pilate’s death, see Paul L. Maier, “The Fate of Pontius Pilate,” *Hermes* 99 (1971): 362–71. He argues, based on Origen’s response to Celsus’ argument from the *Bacchae* in *Cels.* 2.34, that this tradition of Pilate’s death must have developed later than Origen (or been unknown to him) (369-70).

<sup>68</sup> On this revolt, see E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian, a Study in Political Relations* (2d ed.; SJLA 20; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 428–66. The claim that the Jews were punished by the Romans as divine judgment for their treatment of Jesus is found elsewhere in the *Contra Celsum* in connection both with the First Jewish-Roman War and the destruction of the temple (4.22; 8.42) and the Bar Kokhba revolt with the resulting banishment of Jews from Jerusalem (2.8); see de Lange, *Origen and the Jews*, 75–80; Heine, *Origen*, 227–28.

an etymological connection between the Dionysiac ritual of *sparagmos* and the Jewish Diaspora by placing the two terms side by side (σπαραγμὸν διασπαρέν). The former derives from the myth of Pentheus in which he was the victim of this act of ritualized violence. The latter, διασπορά (here, in the cognate verb διασπείρω), was the common term for Jews living outside the land of Israel (e.g., LXX Deut 28:25; 30:4; John 7:35; James 1:1). By connecting them here in response to Celsus' Jewish speaker, Origen aims to underscore his claim that the Jewish Diaspora represents an act of divine *sparagmos*. He is not the first author to use the language of *sparagmos* to describe the ill-treatment of Jews. Third Maccabees narrates the results of Ptolemy IV Philopator's decree that all Jews living in Egypt be violently deported to Alexandria: young women were led off "as though torn to shreds by foreign cruelties" (ὡς ἐσπαραγμέναι σκυλμοῖς ἀλλοεθνέσιν, 3 Macc 4:6).<sup>69</sup> Second, Origen views Roman policy against the Jews as the fulfillment of divine justice. Whatever other critical attitudes Origen may have held regarding the Roman Empire, these do not preclude its role as an agent of God's purposes in the world. In 2.30, for example, he states that "God was preparing the nations for [Jesus'] teaching" (εὐτρεπίζοντος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆ διδασκαλία αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔθνη) and that he did so through Caesar Augustus who had unified "through one kingdom the majority of people on earth" (διὰ μιᾶς βασιλείας τοὺς πολλοὺς τῶν ἐπὶ γῆς).

In connection with this, Origen concludes his discussion of Celsus' argument from the *Bacchae* (in response to frag. 5 above) by taking recourse to divine providence:

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<sup>69</sup> Elsewhere in 3 Maccabees, the imposition of Dionysiac religion upon the Jews is explicit. Philopator's own connection with Dionysus is well-known; in 2:29-30, he decrees that Jews in Alexandria be branded with the ivy-leaf of Dionysus and initiated into the mysteries. J. R. C. Cousland has detected several allusions in 3 Maccabees to Euripides' *Bacchae*, which he argues the author employs so as to satirize Philopator's Dionysiac pretensions ("Dionysus Theomachos? Echoes of the *Bacchae* in 3 Maccabees," *Bib* 82 [2001]: 539-48).

λεκτέον ὅτι τὸ παραπλήσιον ἔστιν εἰπεῖν καὶ πρὸς Ἑλληνας, πρόνοιαν εἰσάγοντας καὶ θεοσημίας παραδεχομένους γενέσθαι, τί δὴ ποτε τοὺς ὑβρίζοντας τὸ θεῖον καὶ ἀναιροῦντας πρόνοιαν οὐ κολάζει ὁ θεός; ὡς γὰρ ἐὰν ἀπολογήσωνται πρὸς ταῦτα Ἑλληνας, καὶ ἡμεῖς τὰ ὅμοια ἢ καὶ κρείττονα ἐροῦμεν.

It must be stated that something similar can be said also against the Greeks who introduce providence and accept the occurrence of divine portents: why then does God never punish those who violate the divine nature and eliminate providence? For however Greeks should defend against these things, we also shall say similar or even better things. (2.35)

Here he asserts simply that, even if it were established that in the case of Jesus' trial and execution many individuals insulted God and were not punished for it, similar arguments could be advanced against Greek gods. Celsus seems to have anticipated such an argument, as seen for example in 8.41 (quoted above) in which he insists that while Christians may escape punishment for reviling the *images* of Dionysus and Heracles, they would not be so fortunate if they did so *face to face* (as Jesus' opponents did).

Finally, as perhaps the most significant aspect of his response to Celsus' argument from the *Bacchae*, Origen holds death and martyrdom in a distinctly positive regard. He asks whether the authors of the Gospels recorded Jesus' death because they supposed that "others would take as a model for despising those who laugh at and mock piety the one who readily died because of it? (ἄλλοι δὲ παράδειγμα λήψονται τοῦ καταφρονεῖν γελώντων καὶ χλευαζόντων ἐπὶ εὐσεβείᾳ τὸν δι' αὐτὴν ἐτοιμῶς ἀποθανόντα; 2.34) Thus, for Origen, Celsus' argument from the *Bacchae* fails ultimately because it rests on the assumption that death is a sign of weakness and defeat. As I observed above (§ 7.3.1), in his preface Origen frames the entire *Contra Celsum* with the observation that Jesus was silent before his prosecutors and suffered willingly. Celsus' comparison of Dionysus in

the *Bacchae* with Jesus' trial and death does not recognize this central feature of God's final plan of victory over evil.

#### 7.4 CONCLUSIONS

The *Bacchae* of Euripides represents Dionysus as a god whose arrival produces religious and political upheaval. Celsus' evocation of the struggle between a conservative tyrant and a revolutionary deity highlights a range of salient features in the ongoing disputations between Christians and "pagans." If Jesus was a deity like Dionysus, Pilate and the Roman Empire should have suffered the fate of Pentheus and Thebes. Whereas Dionysus mocked his captor and inflicted him with madness and ultimately dismemberment, Jesus was a powerless victim of Roman justice. This application of the *Bacchae* illustrates Celsus' view of the interdependence of religion and empire. At the same time, his use of this myth highlights his own ambivalences toward the mythological tradition. As is clear from his comments elsewhere, Celsus does not take Dionysus to be divine in the manner suggested by the *Bacchae* but at most a man who came to be regarded as a god due to his noble deeds, that is, his benefactions to humanity. Thus, the entire juxtaposition of Dionysus and Jesus is for Celsus in some sense a hypothetical exercise. The value of the *Bacchae* and the importance of asserting Dionysus' superiority to Jesus are rooted ultimately in their status within the Greek literary and intellectual tradition. Origen's rebuttal radically reframes the problem raised by Celsus. Within his Christian framework, the willing deaths, both of Jesus and of the martyrs, are ultimately acts of triumph not defeat, and consequently Dionysus in the *Bacchae* cannot function as a paradigm by which to measure Jesus' divine status.

Nevertheless, Origen concurs with Celsus that divine vindication must ultimately be achieved. This, however, is understood by Origen within a historical conception of divine providence that places the ultimate blame for Jesus' death on the Jews not the Romans. He therefore takes the unfortunate history of the Jewish nation in the first and second centuries, rather than Pilate and the Romans, as the appropriate analogy with Pentheus. Thus, both Celsus and Origen employ the *Bacchae* as a literary vehicle for the advancement of their own ideological programs—and Dionysus continues to function as a symbol of political and religious struggle.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA ON PLEASURE AND DYING WITH EURIPIDES'

#### *BACCHAE*

#### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

At the culmination of *Stomateis* 4, Clement (ca. 150-215 CE) quotes five lines from Euripides' *Bacchae* 470-72, 74, 76 (*Strom.* 4.25.162.3-4). In itself, such an extensive quotation is not at all unusual for Clement. The content of the quotation and the manner in which Clement alters the Euripidean material, however, are striking and deserve further analysis. It is taken from a scene of the tragedy where the disguised Dionysus plays upon Pentheus' curiosity to see the maenadic rituals but warns him of the dangers entailed for the uninitiated. In a surprising transformation, Clement attributes Dionysus' words to Christ who is now a mystagogue, addressing the potential initiate into Christian *gnosis*.

αὐτὸς οὖν ἡμᾶς ὁ σωτὴρ ἀτεχνῶς κατὰ τὴν τραγωδίαν μυσταγωγεῖ,  
ὄρων ὄρωντας, καὶ δίδωσιν ὄργια.  
κἂν πύθη·  
τὰ δ' ὄργια ἐστὶ τίν' ἰδέαν ἔχοντά σοι;  
ἀκούση πάλιν·  
ἄρρητ' ἀβακχεύτοισιν εἰδέναι βροτῶν,  
κἂν πολυπραγμονῆ τις ὅποια εἶη, αὐθις ἀκουσάτω·  
οὐ θέμις ἀκοῦσαί σε, ἔστι δ' ἄξι' εἰδέναι·  
ἀσέβειαν ἀσκοῦντα ὄργι' ἐχθαίρει θεοῦ.

The savior himself plainly initiates us according to the tragedy  
Seeing those who see, he also gives the rites. (*Bacch.* 470)  
Should you inquire:  
These rites, what form do they have for you? (*Bacch.* 471)  
You will hear again:

They are unspeakable to mortals uninitiated in Bacchic rites. (*Bacch.* 472)  
Should someone busy oneself about to learn what they are, again let him hear:  
It is not lawful for you to hear; but they are worth knowing. (*Bacch.* 474)  
The rites of God are hostile to one who practices impiety. (*Bacch.* 476)<sup>1</sup>

Clement's use of the *Bacchae* elsewhere has received attention by scholars, most notably, in *Protrepticus* 12.118-123 where he draws extensively on the tragedy in order to transform the traditional language of Dionysiac cults for the context of Christian mysteries.<sup>2</sup> His adaptation of the Dionysiac language of Euripides serves a variety of literary aims in the *Protrepticus*, not least the demonstration of the futility of traditional Greek religion. Scholars have noted that the quotation in *Stromateis* 4 reflects the same literary and religious trope as *Protrepticus* 12. Yet to my knowledge no attempt has been made to explore and analyze the distinctive features of this quotation from the *Bacchae* and its significance for Clement's larger argument in *Stromateis* 4, where his religious and literary aims are very different than in the *Protrepticus*. The central themes in *Stromateis* 4 are martyrdom and the perfection of the Christian gnostic (see § 8.4 below). True gnostic perfection entails a repudiation of sensual pleasure, which can be achieved only through the release of the soul from the bondage of the body (e.g., *Strom.* 4.3.12.5).

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<sup>1</sup> Greek texts of Clement follow Otto Stählin, *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (4 vols.; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich's Buchhandlung, 1905-1939). Translations of all ancient texts are mine throughout.

<sup>2</sup> See H. G. Marsh, "The Use of ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ in the Writings of Clement of Alexandria with Special Reference to His Sacramental Doctrine," *JTS* 37 (1936): 64–80, esp. 65 n. 2, 76-77; Arthur Darby Nock, "Hellenistic Mysteries and Christian Sacraments," in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (ed. Zeph Stewart; 2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 2.791–820, esp. 814-16 (1952); H. Steneker, *ΠΕΙΘΟΥΣ ΔΗΜΙΟΥΡΓΙΑ: observations sur la fonction du style dans le Protreptique de Clément d'Alexandrie* (Nijmegen: Dekker & van de Vegt, 1967), 147–69; Nicole Zeegers-vander Vorst, *Les citations des poètes grecs chez les apologistes chrétiens du IIe siècle* (Recueil de travaux d'histoire et de philologie 4.27; Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université, Bureau du recueil, 1972), 280–82; Christoph Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandrien* (Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 26; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), 148–58; Fabienne Jourdan, "Dionysos dans le Protreptique de Clément d'Alexandrie: initiations dionysiaques et mystères chrétiens," *RHR* 223 (2006): 265–82.

In this context, therefore, a drama about the god of sensual pleasure that stresses the necessity of embracing this god stands in sharp contrast with Clement's own moral and religious program. That Clement has Christ assume the role of the tragic Dionysus is distinctly ironic.

This chapter aims to situate this appropriation of the *Bacchae* within Clement's larger literary and religious context. First, I make general observations regarding Clement's attitude toward Greek culture more generally and poetry in particular (§ 8.2). Here it is demonstrated the Clement's use and interpretation of poetry, including Euripides' *Bacchae*, are consistent with several of his contemporaries. The following section, in anticipation of Clement's emphasis on the repudiation of pleasure in *Stromateis* 4, examines two related themes that are also central to the meaning of the *Bacchae*, the pleasures afforded by poetry and by Dionysiac sensuality (§ 8.3). Like other ancient moralists, Clement was anxious of the dangers inherent to both and consequently developed sophisticated means of regulating and transforming them. In the last section (§ 8.4), I analyze Clement's use of the *Bacchae* in the context of *Stromateis* 4 and argue that its application to the ideal of Christian martyrdom reflects both an understanding of the importance of ritualized death within the Dionysiac mysteries and an interpretive tradition of the *Bacchae* common to other philosophical readers. At the same time, by adapting the words of the Greek god of sensuality into his promotion of the Stoic ideal of *apatheia*, Clement subverts the claims of this god upon human pleasure.

## 8.2 CLEMENT, GREEK *PAIDEIA*, AND GREEK POETRY

As has been seen at several points throughout this larger study, the corpus of classical literature was fundamental to Greek identity throughout antiquity; during the so-called Second Sophistic (mid-first to mid-third centuries CE) the ideological and political importance of classical texts was particularly strong.<sup>3</sup> As Tim Whitmarsh describes it, “literary writing was in this period inherently bound up with the process of negotiation of an identity discrete from Rome.”<sup>4</sup> Greek cultural superiority was variously constructed with reference to *paideia*, a fluid category that was “a means of constructing and reifying idealized identities for Greeks and Romans, a privileged space of complex interaction.”<sup>5</sup> An important aim of literary activity was to situate oneself in relationship with a literary past and to reanimate that tradition. This literary past became a “locus of conflict” upon which various groups sought to stake their claim.<sup>6</sup>

Clement’s intellectual and religious project must be understood within this larger social and political context. His relationship with Greek *paideia* is fascinating and profoundly complex.<sup>7</sup> He ranges from ridicule and utter repudiation, on the one hand, to

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the Second Sophistic with bibliography, see § 2.4.1.

<sup>4</sup> Tim Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 29. As Simon Goldhill similarly observes regarding the writings of the Second Sophistic, “[t]he different needs of different Greek writers to articulate their position in the Empire and within a Greek intellectual tradition—and others’ responses to this varied Greekness—are significant elements in this heady cultural mix” (“Setting an Agenda: ‘Everything Is Greek to the Wise,’” in *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* [ed. Simon Goldhill; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], 1–25 [at 17]).

<sup>7</sup> For general discussions of various aspects of the work and thought of Clement, in addition to those cited above, see Eric F. Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957); Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 31–65; Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (trans. John A. Baker; Philadelphia:

admiration and appropriation, on the other. This intellectual complexity, as Henry Chadwick suggests, arose largely from pastoral concerns.<sup>8</sup> Clement sought to steer a course between “obscurantist orthodoxy”—an anti-intellectual reaction against Gnosticism because of its philosophical pretensions—and “heretical interpretations of the faith.”<sup>9</sup> Platonic philosophy serves as a starting point for Clement; he found the transcendent deity of Platonism to be compatible with the Christian God and Plato’s rejection of traditional Greek theology to be conducive to his Christian sentiment.<sup>10</sup> Along with his immersion in philosophy, his extensive use of classical poetry provides an interesting perspective into his larger attitude toward Greek culture. He quotes Homer most frequently (207 times); among the tragedians, Euripides is the most frequently quoted (119), more than four times as often as either Sophocles (27) or Aeschylus (16).<sup>11</sup>

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Westminster, 1973), 48–73; Joseph C. McLelland, *God the Anonymous: A Study in Alexandrian Philosophical Theology* (Patristic Monograph Series 4; Cambridge, Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1976), 45–92; David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 183–234; Harry O. Maier, “Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self,” *JAAR* 62 (1994): 719–45; Carl-Martin Edsman, “Clement of Alexandria and Greek Myths,” in *Studia patristica XXXI* (ed. E. A. Livingstone; Leuven: Peeters, 1997); Denise Kimber Buell, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Judith L. Kovacs, “Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher According to Clement of Alexandria,” *J ECS* 9 (2001): 3–25; Eric F. Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 33–36. On the relationship of Clement’s teaching career with the official church in Alexandria, see also Robert Louis Wilken, “Alexandria: A School for Training in Virtue,” in *Schools of Thought in the Christian Tradition* (ed. Patrick Henry; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 15–30; Annewies van den Hoek, “The ‘Catechetical’ School of Early Christian Alexandria and Its Philonic Heritage,” *HTR* 90 (1997): 59–87.

<sup>9</sup> Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 33. A broader discussion of “Gnosticism” in early Christianity is beyond the scope of this study. This category has been subjected to considerable reevaluation in recent scholarship; see, e.g., Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 38–39. On Clement’s preference for Plato, see Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 41–45.

<sup>11</sup> These numbers are tabulated from the indices of Otto Stählin’s German translation in the Bibliothek der Kirchenväter (1934 and 1938). In addition to *Strom.* 4.25.162.3–4, the *Bacchae* is used in Clement’s writings on at least six occasions: *Bacch.* 918–19 in *Protr.* 12.118.5 and *Paed.* 2.2.24.1; *Bacch.* 6

Although ancient poets propagated many unseemly myths, they could nevertheless be found in significant ways to support the Christian faith. At various times they intuited the divine nature. Comic poets, for example, were valuable because they ridiculed traditional theology and ritual.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the aim of Clement's reading of the poets and indeed the aim of a Christian evangelist was "to penetrate through the hindrances of evil tradition and idle opinion imposed by the binding force of custom and prejudice and to evoke the latent faith beneath, which is gratitude to our creator."<sup>13</sup> Underlying this project is an assumption, shared by Clement with other second-century Christians, such as Justin and Tatian, that the Greeks (Plato, in particular) had learned many truths by plagiarizing the Old Testament. While some, like Tatian, viewed this as a mark of inferiority, for Clement it allowed for the positive appropriation of many elements in Greek culture.<sup>14</sup>

Clement's use of poetry (and other sources) has received considerable attention, not least because he is a valuable source for many otherwise unknown works of literature.<sup>15</sup> It has long been established that Clement employed *florilegia*, which can be demonstrated by comparing the combinations within his poetic catena and other extant

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and 26 in *Protr.* 12.119.1; *Bacch.* 735ff in *Protr.* 12.119.1-3; a general reference to the myth in *Strom.* 1.13.57.1; *Bacch.* 1388 in *Strom.* 6.2.14.1.

<sup>12</sup> See Robert M. Grant, "Early Christianity and Greek Comic Poetry," *CP* 60 (1965): 157–63 (161–63 on Clement). On Clement's use of Menander, see also Steneker, *ΠΕΙΘΟΥΣ ΔΗΜΙΟΥΡΓΙΑ*, 82.

<sup>13</sup> Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 39.

<sup>14</sup> See Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, 48–68. Clement and other early Christians drew on a Greek tradition that there was a true, primitive theology which originated in the east; on this, see Robert M. Grant, *The Letter and the Spirit* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 18–30.

<sup>15</sup> On his use of Philo, see Annewies van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo in the Stromateis: An Early Christian Reshaping of a Jewish Model* (Supplements to *Vigiliae christianae* 3; Leiden: Brill, 1988). For surveys of his use of classical literature, see Steneker, *ΠΕΙΘΟΥΣ ΔΗΜΙΟΥΡΓΙΑ*, 77–93; see also the series of articles by Édouard des Places: "Les citations profanes de Clément d'Alexandrie dans le *IIIe Stromate*," *REG* 99 (1986): 54–62; "Les citations profanes du *IVe Stromate* de Clément d'Alexandrie," *REA* 90 (1988): 389–97; "Les citations profanes de Clément d'Alexandrie dans le *VIe Stromate*," *REA* 92 (1990): 109–19; "Les citations profanes de Clément d'Alexandrie dans le *VIIe Stromate*," *REA* 92 (1990): 297–303; and Annewies van den Hoek, "Techniques of Quotation in Clement of Alexandria: A View of Ancient Literary Working Methods," *VC* 50 (1996): 223–43.

ancient anthologies.<sup>16</sup> In addition to employing poetic anthologies common to his contemporaries, Clement's methods of interpreting poetry and mythology often reflect a common interpretive tradition shared with other philosophical and religious readers.<sup>17</sup> Nicole Zeegers-vander Vorst, who analyzes Clement's use of poetry in the *Protrepticus*, identifies many poetic texts for which Clement offers interpretations and applications strikingly similar to his contemporaries.<sup>18</sup> For example, Clement quotes a line from Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, in which Iphigenia laments the deceptive nature of her dreams ("farewell, false dreams, you were then nothing," ψευδεῖς ὄνειροι, χαίρετ' οὐδὲν ἦτ' ἄρα, 569). Clement gives this line a moralizing application, warning against the dangers of vain opinion (*Protr.* 10.101.3). Plutarch had similarly employed the same line to illustrate the importance of rejecting falsehood in the advancement of moral virtue (*Virt. prof.* 75e). Thus, in the second century, this line of tragic poetry (like many others) had become proverbial and was already embedded in a tradition of philosophical and moral reflection.<sup>19</sup> Clement's use of poetry clearly reflects this larger context of philosophical reading.

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<sup>16</sup> Henry Chadwick, for example, identifies several poetic catenae that are nearly identical in Clement and Stobaeus ("Florilegium," *RAC* 7 [1969]: 1131–59 [1144–45 on Clement]). For general discussions of poetic anthologies in antiquity, see also David Konstan, "Excerpting as a Reading Practice," in *Deciding Culture: Stobaeus' Collection of Excerpts of Ancient Greek Authors* (ed. Gretchen Reydam-Schils and Carlos Lévy; Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 9–22. Some of Clement's poetic anthologies would also have originated in the context of Hellenistic Judaism; see Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman; 3 vols. in 4; rev. ed.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1973–1987), 3.1.656–71.

<sup>17</sup> On this, see André Méhat, *Étude sur les "Stromates" de Clément d'Alexandrie* (Patristica Sorbonensia 7; Paris: Seuil, 1966), 187–88; Zeegers-vander Vorst, *Les citations des poètes grecs*, 265–285; Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 78–79; Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 198–206.

<sup>18</sup> Zeegers-vander Vorst, *Les citations des poètes grecs*, 265–85.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 270. See also § 1.4.3 on Euripides' *Medea*.

This common tradition of interpretation in which Clement participates can also be seen in his use of the *Bacchae*. In *Protrepticus* 12.118.5, for example, Clement quotes the words of Pentheus, now dressed as a maenad, possessed by the god, and prepared to go to the mountain to spy on the women of Thebes: “I seem truly to see two suns and two Thebes” (καὶ μὴν ὄρᾶν μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίους δοκῶ / δισσὰς δὲ Θήβας, *Bacch.* 918-19). Clement interprets Pentheus’ assertion as evidence of the effects of drunkenness, although the play itself suggests nothing of the actual consumption of wine.<sup>20</sup> As Zeegers-vander Vorst notes, these particular lines were frequently quoted by Clement’s contemporaries “indépendamment de leur contexte” and given a similar application to physical drunkenness (Plut., *Comm. not.* 1083e; Luc., *Pseudol.* 19; Sext. Empr., *Math.* 7.192).<sup>21</sup> Yet, although in this case Clement’s use of the *Bacchae* reflects a larger gnomic tradition of moralizing on drunkenness, elsewhere (esp. *Protrepticus* 12.119.1-2) he employs a cluster of allusions to various passages throughout the *Bacchae*, indicating a broad familiarity with the tragedy that extended beyond brief anthologized quotations.<sup>22</sup>

Clement should not be viewed, therefore, as a mere conduit of received interpretive traditions. His use of poetic texts in fact evidences a high degree of creativity and innovation, particularly in his ability to transform classical literature so as to communicate a distinctly Christian message. Two examples of Clement’s adaptation of Homer will sufficiently illustrate this and can be seen as paradigmatic for his larger

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<sup>20</sup> See also Clement, *Paed.* 2.2.24.1, where he interprets these lines in the same way. On Clement’s use of this passage, see also Steneker, *ΠΕΙΘΟΥΣ ΔΗΜΙΟΥΡΓΙΑ*, 151–53; Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie*, 150–51.

<sup>21</sup> Zeegers-vander Vorst, *Les citations des poètes grecs*, 281. Steneker similarly observes that Clement interprets these lines “contrairement à l’intention d’Euripide” (*ΠΕΙΘΟΥΣ ΔΗΜΙΟΥΡΓΙΑ*, at 152).

<sup>22</sup> Zeegers-vander Vorst, *Les citations des poètes grecs*, 280–82. For an extensive and detailed list of allusions, see Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie*, 151 n. 104.

methodology. First, in *Protrepticus* 1.9.1 Clement creates a conversation between himself, his readers, and John the Baptist regarding the nature of the *logos*: “Let us [the reader and himself] now inquire of him [John]” (πυθώμεθα τοίνυν αὐτοῦ). The discussion that follows is patterned after John 1:20-23, in which the priests and Levites come from Jerusalem to interrogate John. But there is a twist: their question is Homeric—“who are you, from where” (τίς πόθεν εἶς ἀνδρῶν, e.g., *Od.* 1.170). When it is revealed that John is the “voice of the *logos*” (φωνή τοῦ λόγου), the interlocutors ask, “what are you crying out, O voice? ‘Tell it also to us’” (τί βοᾷς, ὦ φωνή; εἰπέ καὶ ἡμῖν), again speaking with Homeric language (e.g., *Od.* 1.10). In this way, by rewriting the questions put to John by the Jews in language from the Greeks’ own poetry, Clement has placed the Homeric epics in conversation with the Gospels. The purpose, as David Dawson argues, is to suggest “that the words of Homer belong with the language of scripture at least as an equal partner,” which “illustrates [Clement’s] revisionary claim that the divine *logos* in the form of philosophy was a pedagogue leading the Greeks to Christ, just as the law led the Hebrews.”<sup>23</sup>

A second example, in which Clement creates a conversation between himself, his readers, and Homer occurs in *Protrepticus* 3.45.5. In this section, where he is chastising the Greeks for worshipping the dead, Clement inserts a line from Homer in which Telemachus castigates the suitors for their behavior: “O wretches, what is this evil you suffer? Your heads are enfolded in night” (ἄ δειλοί, τί κακὸν τόδε πάσχετε; νυκτὶ μὲν ὑμῶν εἰλύεται κεφαλαί, *Od.* 20.351-52). As Zeegers-vander Vorst notes, the function of this quotation is to give Clement’s text “*élégance et vivacité*” and at the same to save

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<sup>23</sup> Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 200.

Clement from having to engage directly in invective against his reader by putting Homer between himself as apologist and the polytheistic reader whom he addresses.<sup>24</sup>

These observations suggest that Clement is doing much more than merely taking over poetic sources from Jewish or Greco-Roman anthologies and adopting received interpretive traditions. He is in fact creatively transforming his poetic sources and often filling them with new meaning. This process of reading classical poetry is an important means by which he negotiates a complex relationship with Greek *paideia* and its central poetic heritage.

### 8.3 DANGEROUS PLEASURES: POETRY AND DIONYSUS

Clement, as other contemporary moralists, both Christian and non-Christian, was concerned with the regulation of sensual pleasure. As we shall see below, this is central to his discussion of martyrdom and moral perfection in *Stromateis* 4. First, however, it will be useful to explore Clement's wider attitude toward pleasure as it relates to poetry and Dionysus. These two themes come together distinctly in the *Bacchae* because it features the patron deity of tragic poetry and of sensual pleasure. As a drama about the reception of the god of sensuality into civilization, Charles Segal observes that it explores the power that the drive for pleasure exerts on an individual and a society and the paradoxical resistance to pleasure.<sup>25</sup> For ancient Greek society, the danger of this conflict was addressed in part by establishing official cults for Dionysus, including tragic competitions which were performed in his honor. Yet his perceived danger to civilization

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<sup>24</sup> Zeegers-vander Vorst, *Les citations des poètes grecs*, 269–71 (at 269).

<sup>25</sup> Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (enl. ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 8–14.

was always present and one of the driving forces of Greek tragedy, illustrated vividly in the destruction of Pentheus and his family. At the same time, as a drama about the arrival of the god of the theater, the *Bacchae* explores the nature and limit of this artistic medium and its ability to produce pleasure in its audiences.<sup>26</sup>

Ancient literary critics understood that tragedy (and poetry in general) aimed at pleasure. Aristotle, for example, in his analysis of the nature of tragedy, maintains that “the [tragic] poet must furnish pleasure from pity and fear through imitation” (τὴν ἀπὸ ἐλέου καὶ φόβου διὰ μιμήσεως δεῖ ἡδονὴν παρασκευάζειν τὸν ποιητὴν, *Poet.* 14.1453b 12-13). Aristotle’s view of the pleasure produced by tragic performance is debated, not least due to its relationship with *catharsis* (1449b 27-28), a term that remains obscure and undefined in the *Poetics*.<sup>27</sup> A reader and critic of poetry closer to Clement in time and one who belongs to a similar intellectual milieu is Plutarch.<sup>28</sup> His attitude toward poetry in the essay *How a Young Man Should Listen to Poetry* (*Adol. poet. aud.*) has remarkable affinities to that of Clement.<sup>29</sup> In this essay, Plutarch offers advice on the proper use of poetry in educating the young. He was keenly aware both of the dangers and of the

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 15–16. For this interpretation of the *Bacchae*, see § 1.3.1.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of Aristotle’s view of pleasure and tragedy, see § 1.3.1 above and Elizabeth S. Belfiore, “Pleasure, Tragedy and Aristotelian Psychology,” *CQ* 35 (1985): 349–61; eadem, *Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 337–60.

<sup>28</sup> Note, for example, Clement’s and Plutarch’s common use of Euripides, *Bacch.* 918-19 and *Iphigenia in Tauris* 596 cited above. For a discussion of their uses of Menander, see Grant, “Early Christianity and Greek Comic Poetry,” 162–63. On Clement’s use of poetry in relation to Plutarch and near contemporaries, see Méhat, *Étude sur les “Stromates,”* 187–88; Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 88–91.

<sup>29</sup> On this essay, see Donald A. Russell, *Plutarch* (New York: Scribner, 1973), 51–53; Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire*, 47–57; Alexey Zadorojnyi, “Safe Drugs for Good Boys: Platonism and Pedagogy in Plutarch’s *De Audiendis Poetis*,” in *Sage and Emperor: Plutarch, Greek Intellectuals, and Roman Power in the Time of Trajan (98-117 A.D.)* (ed. Luc Van der Stockt and Philip A. Stadter; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 297–314; David Konstan, “The Birth of the Reader: Plutarch as a Literary Critic,” *Scholia* 13 (2004): 3–27; David Blank, “Reading between the Lies: Plutarch and Chrysippus on the Uses of Poetry,” in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, Volume 40: Essays in Memeory of Michael Frede* (ed. James Allen et al.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 237–64; Richard L. Hunter and Donald A. Russell, eds., *Plutarch: How to Study Poetry (De Audiendis Poetis)* (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

potential pedagogical benefits of poetry's power to produce pleasure in audiences. For the young in particular, the pleasurable power of poetry made mythology more attractive than philosophical discourse (*Adol. poet. aud.* 14e-f). The essay thus seeks to reclaim an educational role for poetry from Plato's censorship.<sup>30</sup> While he is in basic agreement with Plato's assessment that poetry aims at pleasure not truth, he does not regard this as an irredeemable quality.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Plutarch recognizes that the attempt to eliminate pleasure is futile; thus, rather than forbidding the young to enjoy poetry, they should be taught "to pursue the useful and salutary from [poetry]" (τὸ χρήσιμον ἀπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ σωτήριον διώκειν, 14f). To reject poetry entirely on the grounds that its mythologies contain morally and theologically problematic doctrines, as Plato had sought to do, is as ineffectual as Lycurgus' attempt to eliminate Dionysus, the wine god, from Thrace (15e, citing *Hom., Il.* 6.130). The aim must rather be moderation: as one mixes wine with water, so with poetry, "its mythological and theatrical element" (τὸ μυθῶδες αὐτῆς καὶ θεατρικόν) must not be permitted to proceed unchecked by way of "unmixed pleasure" (ὕψ' ἡδονῆς ἀκράτου) but must be tempered by philosophy (15e-f). Thus, for Plutarch, like the sensual pleasures of Dionysus, those of poetry were to be properly moderated. Clement similarly understood the distinct power of poetry: "for the masses, poetic allurements are their veil" (παραπέτασμα δὲ αὐτοῖς πρὸς τοὺς πολλοὺς ἡ ποιητικὴ

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<sup>30</sup> As Zadorojnyi argues, however, Plutarch's views of education in this essay are much more in keeping with those of Plato than often recognized ("Safe Drugs for Good Boys," 299–305). Blank emphasizes that the more immediate philosophical context is Plutarch's defense of Chrysippus' view that poetry was a source of philosophical wisdom over against the radical criticisms of Epicurus ("Reading between the Lies," 244–53).

<sup>31</sup> See Konstan, "The Birth of the Reader," 7.

ψυχαγωγία, *Strom.* 5.4.24.2).<sup>32</sup> Moreover, like Plutarch, Clement’s pedagogical program was aimed to train susceptible minds to resist such allurements and prepare them for philosophical advancement.

Clement also knows Dionysus as god of sensuality and licentiousness; in his view, these are the defining characteristics of the Dionysiac mysteries. In *Protrepticus* 2, Clement devotes considerable effort to exposing all of the Greek mysteries as “concealed trickery” (τὴν γοητείαν τὴν ἐγκεκρυμμένην, 2.12.1). Thus, for example, he famously reveals the sacred formula of the Eleusinian Mysteries (2.21.2). Among all the mysteries, those of Dionysus are especially offensive to Clement. He describes their activities thus: “the Bacchic ones observe the rites of the maddened Dionysus, performing the sacred madness with the eating of raw flesh and, crowned with serpents, they offer up the distribution of the flesh of their murders” (Διόνυσον μαινόλην ὀργιάζουσι Βάκχοι ὠμοφαγία τὴν ἱερομανίαν ἄγοντες καὶ τελίσκουσι τὰς κρεονομίας τῶν φόνων ἀνεστεμμένοι τοῖς ὄφεσιν, 2.12.2). He then offers an etymological interpretation of the Dionysiac chant that connects it with the biblical account of the source of the world’s evil: “They chant, ‘Eva,’ that ‘Eve’ through whom error arrived” (ἐπολολύζοντες Εὐάν, Εὐάν ἐκείνην, δι’ ἣν ἡ πλάνη παρηκολούθησεν, 2.12.2). Later, he describes the origin of the phallic processions that were set up in various cities (κατὰ πόλεις, 2.34.2-5). The *aition* for these rituals according to Clement is an oath that Dionysus had taken to one Prosymnus that, in return for guidance into the underworld, he would grant Prosymnus an

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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of Clement’s warnings in the *Protrepticus* against the dangers of pleasure both in poetry and visual art, see Simon Goldhill, “The Erotic Eye: Visual Stimulation and Cultural Conflict,” in *Being Greek under Rome*, 154–94, esp. 172–80. The connection between theatrical performances and pleasure (*voluptas*) is central to Tertullian’s denunciation of it. Christians, he maintains, should not seek such sensual pleasures in this world (e.g., *De spect.* 1.1–6; 28.1–29.5). On Tertullian’s view of the theater, see § 6.1.2 above.

“aphrodisiac favor” (ἀφροδίσιος... ἡ χάρις). Before Dionysus could fulfill his oath, however, Prosymnus died. Nevertheless, “fulfilling his obligation to his lover, Dionysus rushed upon the tomb and indulged his unnatural lust” (ἀφοσιούμενος τῷ ἐραστῇ ὁ Διόνυσος ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον ὀρμᾷ καὶ πασχητιᾷ, 2.34.4). Consequently, “the phallic processions are established for Dionysus in various cities as a mystic memorial of this passion” (ὕπόμνημα τοῦ πάθους τούτου μυστικὸν φαλλοὶ κατὰ πόλεις ἀνίστανται Διονύσῳ, 2.34.5). Finally, Clement adds, Greeks honor Dionysus, “not so much because of the drunkenness of the body, I suppose, as because of the shameful initiation of licentiousness” (οὐ διὰ τὴν μέθην τοῦ σώματος, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι, τοσοῦτον ὅσον διὰ τὴν ἐπονείδιστον τῆς ἀσελγείας ἱεροφαντίαν, 2.34.5).

It is a matter of some scholarly debate whether Clement had actual knowledge of the mysteries (Dionysiac and others) that he describes. It is clear that his descriptions of the Dionysiac mysteries are heavily influenced by his reading of Euripides’ *Bacchae*. As we shall see below, in *Protrepticus* 12.118.5-119.2, where Clement borrows extensively from the tragedy in his metaphorical description of Christian initiation over against the mysteries of Dionysus, he explicitly mentions “tragedies” as his source. Yet, as Christoph Riedweg shows in a comparison of the latter passage with *Protrepticus* 2 (where Clement aims to expose “actual” mystery cults), his knowledge of these cults was significantly dependent on the tragedy.<sup>33</sup> The influence of the *Bacchae* on Clement’s discussion of contemporary Dionysiac religion, however, does not preclude more direct

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<sup>33</sup> Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie*, 152–54. He similarly doubts that Clement had direct knowledge of the Eleusinian Mysteries (158). Jourdan also argues that Clement and his audience’s knowledge of Dionysiac mysteries would have been informed entirely “de représentations théâtrales des *Bacchantes*” rather than first-hand knowledge (“Dionysos dans le Protreptique,” 272).

knowledge.<sup>34</sup> As has been seen frequently throughout this study, Dionysiac cults had been prominent in Alexandria from the time of its founding (see § 2.2). In addition, examples of prominent figures, such as Marc Antony, for whom Dionysiac religion symbolized the gratification of sensual desires, were well-known in Alexandria and throughout the Greco-Roman world.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, some two hundred years after Clement, in the fourth century, the Christian heresiologist Epiphanius describes the activities of women at Memphis and Heliopolis in a manner that resembles maenads, illustrating the persistence of such religion: they “perform ecstatic rites, with drum and flute, taking the spell upon themselves” (ὀργ<ι>ώσας, τυμπάνῳ τε καὶ αὐλῶ τὸ θέλγη[σ]τρον εἰς ἑαυτὰς λαμβανούσας, *De fide* 12.1).<sup>36</sup> It is therefore not improbable that Clement had some direct source of knowledge of the practice of these cults in addition to his literary knowledge.

Given Clement’s disdain for the Dionysiac mysteries and their attendant sensuality in *Protrepticus* 2, his extended analogy and contrast between Christian and Dionysiac initiations in 12.118.5-119.3 is all the more striking. Several features of this passage are especially relevant for the present study.<sup>37</sup> First, in his presentation of Dionysiac religion as a foil for Christianity, he explicitly identifies his source as tragedy: “there is a mountain loved by God, it does not exist within tragedies as Cithaeron but it is

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<sup>34</sup> Compare the comment of Richard Seaford: “Clement had of course profound knowledge of the pagan mysteries, and it is difficult to believe that he had not been initiated into the mysteries of Dionysos” (“Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries,” *CQ* 31 [1981]: 252–75 [260]).

<sup>35</sup> On Antony, see § 3.2.

<sup>36</sup> Greek text follows Theodoros Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae, pars 1: auctores ab Homero usque ad Diodorum continens* (Bonn: A. Marci et E. Weberi, 1922), 608. As Albert Henrichs suggests, these women “may have been maenads, or else adherents of indigenous Egyptian cults seen through Greek spectacles” (“Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina,” *HSCP* 82 [1978]: 121–60, 155 n. 106). The immediate context in fact points to a larger interest in Dionysiac worship. In *De fide* 10.5-6, Epiphanius describes mystery rituals performed by women and in 10.7 Greek maenadic rituals, though curiously performed by men.

<sup>37</sup> For detailed analysis Clement’s use of the *Bacchae* here, see esp. Steneker, *ΠΕΙΘΟΥΣ ΔΗΜΙΟΥΡΓΙΑ*, 147–69; Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie*, 148–58.

upheld by the dramas of truth, a sober mountain, shaded by sacred glens” (ὄρος ἐστὶ τοῦτο θεῶν περιλημένον, οὐ τραγωδίας ὡς Κιθαιρῶν ὑποκείμενον, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἀληθείας ἀνακείμενον δράμασιν, ὄρος νηφάλιον, ἀγναῖς ὕλαις σύσκιον, 12.119.1). This assertion signals Clement’s use of Euripides’ *Bacchae* to develop a series of contrasts between the literary maenads and virtuous Christian women.<sup>38</sup> He emphasizes that true spiritual advancement is achieved through sobriety, which is supported by way of a contrast between Mounts Cithaeron and Zion, a “sober mountain” (ὄρος νηφάλιον).<sup>39</sup> Clement notes that whereas the sisters of Semele are “maenads, initiated into an impious distribution of flesh” (αἱ μαινάδες, αἱ δύσαγνον κρεανομίαν μυσούμεναι) the “daughters of god are beautiful lambs” (αἱ τοῦ θεοῦ θυγατέρες, αἱ ἀμνάδες αἱ καλάι, 12.119.1), employing a wordplay on “maenads” (μαινάδες / ἀμνάδες). At the same time, he wishes to preserve elements of the maenadic experience for these daughters of God, at least metaphorically. These Christian women “prophesy the sacred orgies of the logos, assembling a chaste chorus” (τὰ σεμνὰ τοῦ λόγου θεσπίζουσαι ὄργια, χορὸν ἀγείρουσαι σώφρονα, 12.19.1). He adds regarding Christians generally, “they pursue the sacred band by running, those who are called hasten on, desiring to receive the father” (δρόμῳ τὸν θίασον διώκουσιν, σπεύδουσιν οἱ κεκλημένοι πατέρα ποθοῦντες ἀπολαβεῖν, 12.119.2).

In addition, Clement adapts specific terms from mystery cults to Christianity.<sup>40</sup> Christ, for example, is identified as a hierophant (ιεροφαντεῖ δὲ κύριος, 12.120.1), a distinctive functionary in mystery rituals. Philo had applied this same term to Moses

<sup>38</sup> This use of Euripides’ *Bacchae* to construct an image of maenads for rhetorical purposes is similar to that of Dio Chrysostom discussed in § 2.4.3.

<sup>39</sup> On this, see Steneker, *ΠΕΙΘΟΥΣ ΔΗΜΙΟΥΡΓΙΑ*, 159. This discussion is reminiscent of Philo’s sober inebriation in *De ebrietate*; see § 5.3 above.

<sup>40</sup> For a survey of Clement’s use and adaptation of the term μυστήριον its cognates throughout his writings, see Marsh, “The Use of ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ.”

(ἱεροφάντης ὀργίων, *Gig.* 54).<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the term δαδοῦχος (torch-bearer), which had specific application in the Eleusinian Mysteries, is used by Clement to describe Christian enlightenment by way of a Platonic interpretation (δαδουχοῦμαι, 12.120.1). Philo had already done this in the context of Judaism (cf. δαδουχοῦσα παιδεία in *Ebr.* 168).<sup>42</sup> In sum, Clement adapts the language of the Greek mysteries generally and of the *Bacchae* in particular for Christianity so as to retain aspects of them for the Christian experience. In so doing, however, he radically transforms them in keeping with his own distinctly Christian conception of virtue.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, for Clement both poetry and Dionysiac religion are dangerous pleasures. He is, however, unwilling to eliminate them entirely from the Christian experience; they must rather be carefully regulated or transformed. In the case of poetry, for example, when enjoyed within the appropriate context of Christian and philosophical education, its excesses can be avoided and it can have a valuable propaedeutic function. As we shall see below, this conviction underlies his methodology in the *Stromateis*. Similarly, Dionysus is destructive of society's morality. Nevertheless, rather than simply repudiating the god, he radically reinterprets the Dionysiac experience, as Philo had done for Judaism, in order to establish that true ecstatic vision of the divine is the property of Christian virtue, not Dionysiac sensuality.

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<sup>41</sup> Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie*, 156.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 155–56.

<sup>43</sup> This strategy is consistent with the opening of the *Protrepticus* where Clement had transformed Orpheus into a singer who prefigures Christ. Building on this opening, Jourdan suggests that Clement is primarily interested in the Orphic Dionysus, the infant Zagreus, who like Christ suffered an unjust death and subsequently was revived to life (“Dionysos dans le Protreptique,” 277–79).

## 8.4 CHRIST AS DIONYSIAC MYSTAGOGUE IN *STROMATEIS* 4

The purpose and literary character of the *Stromateis* are considerably different than the *Protrepticus*. Whereas the latter was concerned largely with addressing educated, non-Christian Greeks, the former are intended for Christians, and in particular those moving toward more advanced stages of Christian knowledge and piety.<sup>44</sup> The literary form of the *Stromateis* makes clear that they were not intended as a free-standing text but rather belonged within the context of oral instruction.<sup>45</sup> Thus, an appropriate interpretation must account for their function within Clement's larger pedagogical project.<sup>46</sup> The difficulty of interpreting the *Stromateis* is well-known and their opacity is at least in part intentional. At the outset of book 1, Clement in fact states explicitly that the aim of the *Stromateis* is to obscure and conceal the work's truths by having them mixed up with philosophical doctrines: "The *Stromateis* encompass the truth, mixed with the dogmas of philosophy, but more veiled and concealed as the edible part of the nut is with the shell" (Περιέξουσι δὲ οἱ Στρωματεῖς ἀναμεμιγμένην τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῖς φιλοσοφίας δόγμασι, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐγκεκαλυμμένην καὶ ἐπικεκρυμμένην, καθάπερ τῷ λεπύρῳ τὸ ἐδώδιμον τοῦ καρύου, 1.1.18.1). The perplexities of Clement's style in the *Stromateis* arise from his preference for oral rather than written instruction, an approach rooted in the Platonic tradition, and, as Loveday Alexander argues, one also consistent

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<sup>44</sup> See Méhat, *Étude sur les "Stromates,"* 115–47; Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 5–15.

<sup>45</sup> For a recent survey of scholarly views of the literary character of the *Stromateis*, see Andrew C. Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis of Clement of Alexandria* (Supplements to Vigiliae christianae 97; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 15–32.

<sup>46</sup> The nature of Christian education in Alexandria and Clement's role as a teacher have been much discussed by scholars; see, e.g., Méhat, *Étude sur les "Stromates,"* 54–70; Wilken, "Alexandria: A School for Training in Virtue"; Hoek, "The 'Catechetical' School"; Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis*, 7–15.

with a variety of Hellenistic philosophical schools.<sup>47</sup> Central to Clement’s project in the *Stromateis* was to provide an educational program that could bring advanced Christians into the possession of *gnosis*.<sup>48</sup> Yet, only those who were morally pure could be entrusted with the highest truths; thus, Clement’s instruction at times entails concealment and even deception, a method Clement claims to have adopted from Jesus’ own parables (*Strom.* 1.1.13.2).<sup>49</sup>

There is nevertheless a discernible structure to the *Stromateis*.<sup>50</sup> In book 4, for example, which is the focus of the present study, Clement begins by explicitly identifying the themes he intends to discuss: “concerning martyrdom and who is the perfect man” (περί τε μαρτυρίου [...] καὶ τίς ὁ τέλειος, 4.1.1.1). After briefly outlining a preview of what would follow in the subsequent books (books 5-8), he reiterates the literary strategy of the *Stromateis* he had given in book 1. For those who happen upon the *Stromateis* “at random, ignorantly,” (ἀνέδην ἀπείρως) “let my notes be varied and scattered” ([ἔ]στω δὲ ἡμῖν τὰ ὑπομνήματα [...] ποικίλως [...] διεστρωμένα, 4.2.4.1).<sup>51</sup> What follows would provide truths to the one who “seeks with reason” (ζητεῖν μετὰ λόγου, 4.2.4.3); however, “it is necessary for us also in addition to these [i.e., the *Stromateis*] to make other efforts

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<sup>47</sup> Loveday C. A. Alexander, “The Living Voice: Skepticism towards the Written Word in Early Christian and in Graeco-Roman Texts,” in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield* (ed. David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, and Stanley E. Porter; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 221–47; see also Eric F. Osborn, “Teaching and Writing in the First Chapter of the *Stromateis* of Clement of Alexandria,” *JTS* 10 (1959): 335–43; Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis*, 115–21.

<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of Clement’s conception of *gnosis* throughout the *Stromateis*, see Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 142–89.

<sup>49</sup> Kovacs, “Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher” (esp. 17–20).

<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., the summary outline of the structure of the *Stromateis* in Méhat, *Étude sur les “Stromates,”* 176–79.

<sup>51</sup> This is the most complete of the preambles in the *Stromateis*. Others are at 1.15.2; 2.1; 6.2.1; see Annewie van den Hoek, ed., *Clément d’Alexandrie, les Stromates, Stromate IV: introduction, text critique et notes* (trans. Claude Mondésert; SC 463; Paris: Cerf, 2001), 9–14.

and researches” (δεῖ δὲ καὶ ἡμᾶς τοῦτοις προσεκπονεῖν καὶ προσεφευρίσκειν ἕτερα, 4.2.4.4). Thus what one is to expect in *Stromateis* 4 is an exposition of Christian martyrdom and moral perfection presented in a way that only becomes clear to those willing to engage in it with extended effort and further study. And that is precisely what one gets.

For Clement, martyrdom is the highest state of moral perfection.<sup>52</sup> The martyr above all has been trained by true philosophy to turn from the lusts of the body so that the soul might ascend to God: “The separation, therefore, of the soul from the body practiced for one’s entire life provides a gnostic desire for the philosopher to be able contentedly to bear the death of nature, that is the dissolution of the bonds of the soul to the body” (ὁ τοίνυν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ψυχῆς χωρισμὸς ὁ πὰρ' ὅλον τὸν βίον μελετώμενος τῷ φιλοσόφῳ προθυμίαν κατασκευάζει γνωστικὴν εὐκόλως δύνασθαι φέρειν τὸν τῆς φύσεως θάνατον, διάλυσιν ὄντα τῶν πρὸς τὸ σῶμα τῆς ψυχῆς δεσμῶν, 4.3.12.5). To undergo willingly such a release in martyrdom exemplifies most fully one’s love for God and the rejection of pleasure (4.4.14.3). Of course, not every true gnostic will undergo martyrdom. The reason Clement links martyrdom to the highest state of moral advancement is that it represents the most complete repudiation of sensual pleasure, which for Clement is the essence of sin: “scripture recognizes as slaves those who are under sin and sold into sins, that is, lovers of pleasure and lovers of body” (δούλους δὲ τοὺς ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν καὶ ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις πεπραμένους, τοὺς φιληδόνους καὶ φιλοσωμάτους οἷδεν ἡ γραφή, 4.3.12.4). Martyrdom achieves perfection both because it is the clearest

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<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of Clement’s views on martyrdom in *Stromateis* 4, see Annewies van den Hoek, “Clement of Alexandria on Martyrdom,” in *Studia patristica Vol. XXVI* (ed. E. A. Livingstone; Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 324–41. On Christian martyrdom in relation to Origen, see § 7.3.1 above.

rejection of pleasure and also because only with the separation from the body at death can the soul attain perfection.<sup>53</sup>

The appropriate use of pleasure for Christians was in fact a central concern in Clement's moral reflections and his views on the matter are rather complex. As Peter Brown argues, in matters of ethics, Clement's views are in keeping with those of Stoicism; for example, he embraced the Stoic ideal of *apatheia*, a life free of passions.<sup>54</sup> Yet, Clement's goal was not simply the suspension of feeling or passion but rather, as a literary man, he was interested in refining and polishing every area of life.<sup>55</sup> Applied to sexuality, Clement's position was in fact moderate. Although he maintained that "married intercourse should be approached in the Stoic manner, as a conscious action, undertaken in the service of God," he also opposed the extreme Encratite view that sexuality was a symptom of the fall of humanity and must be rejected by Christians.<sup>56</sup> For Clement, even married Christians must learn to live "untouched by undisciplined pleasure."<sup>57</sup> The martyr and the perfect Christian, therefore, have learned that "pleasure is not a good" (τό γε μὴ εἶναι τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀγαθόν, 4.5.22.2); rather, "the martyr chooses pleasure that comes through hope amidst the present grief" (ὁ μάρτυς ἡδονὴν τὴν δι' ἐλπίδος διὰ τῆς παρούσης ἀλγηδόνης αἰρεῖται, 4.5.23.1).

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<sup>53</sup> See Maier, "Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self," esp. 733–34.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 128–30; see also Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 40–41; Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 103–06; Michel Spanneut, "L'*Apatheia* chrétienne aux quatre premiers siècles," *Proche-Orient chrétien* 52 (2002): 165–302 (247–60 on Clement). Spanneut observes, "Clément d'Alexandrie est sans doute, de tous les Pères de l'Église, celui qui insiste le plus sur l'*apatheia* de l'homme et son couplage avec l'*apatheia* divine dans la ligne platonici-stoïcienne" (at 256).

<sup>55</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 130–31.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 131–33 (at 133); see also Buell, *Making Christians*, 81–83.

<sup>57</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 136. Maier argues that in Clement's claim that Christians should attain the ideal of *apatheia* even in married intercourse, Clement goes beyond his Stoic counterparts ("Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self," 737).

Later in *Stromateis* 4 in his discussion of gnostic enlightenment, Clement identifies an insight from the experience of the Greek mystery cults that are observed during the night: at night “the soul, ceasing from physical perception, turns in upon itself and has greater possession of intelligence” (ἡ ψυχὴ πεπαυμένη τῶν αἰσθήσεων συννεύει πρὸς αὐτὴν καὶ μᾶλλον μετέχει τῆς φρονήσεως, 4.22.140.1). According to Clement, the reason mystery initiations (τελεταί) occur at night is that “in the night they indicate the limit of the connection of the soul to the body” (σημαίνουσαι τὴν ἐν νυκτὶ τῆς ψυχῆς συστολὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος, 4.22.140.2). Clement’s willingness to ascribe positive spiritual insights to Greek mystery cults recalls his transformation of mystery terminology in *Protrepticus* 12 and also anticipates his quotation from the *Bacchae* in *Stromateis* 4.25.162.3-4.

Therefore, underlying Clement’s adaptation of the language of Greek mystery cults for the context of his Christian ideals of martyrdom and the repudiation of pleasure is his interpretation of mystic initiation as a form of ritual death, a separation of soul from body. Indeed, the Dionysiac mysteries were particularly connected with death rituals securing a happy post-mortem condition (see §§ 1.3.1 and 1.3.2). In Celsus’ judgment, Christianity and the Bacchic mysteries shared precisely this distinctive emphasis (*Cels.* 4.10; see § 7.2.2). As discussed in detail above, one particular philosophical tradition of interpretation of the *Bacchae* read it as an allegory for the virtuous death, a reading that also coheres well with the Dionysiac mysteries in which the dramatized sufferings of Pentheus reflect the experience of initiation.<sup>58</sup> Thus, Horace finds in the scene of conflict between Pentheus and the stranger and the latter’s prediction of own deliverance an

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<sup>58</sup> For this reading of the *Bacchae*, see § 1.3.2 above and esp. Seaford, “Dionysiac Drama.”

expression of the Stoic's acceptance of death in the face of tyranny (§ 3.4). Similarly, in *On Tranquility of Mind*, Plutarch quotes the same line as Horace ('λύσει μ' ὁ δαίμων αὐτός, ὅταν ἐγὼ θέλω, "The god himself will set me free whenever I wish it," *Bacch.* 498) as a description of the sage's fearlessness in the face of death (476b-c; § 3.5). Elsewhere, in his consolation to his wife he appeals to the *hieros logos* of the Dionysiac mysteries as evidence of the soul's immortality (*Cons. ux.* 611c).<sup>59</sup>

In view of the emphasis on ritualized death in the Dionysiac mysteries and given that other philosophical readers of the *Bacchae* adapted it for discussions of virtuous death, Clement's quotation of *Bacchae* 470-76 in *Stromateis* 4.25.162.3-4 (quoted at the start of this chapter) is fitting at the culmination of his discussion of Christian virtue and martyrdom. As discussed above, Clement had already prepared his readers for this Christianization of Dionysiac *orgia* in *Stromateis* 4.22.140.2. Thus, analogously to Horace's and Plutarch's use of *Bacchae* 498, Clement applies Dionysus' words to Pentheus in *Bacchae* 470-76 to the attainment of Christian gnosticism, the highest expression of which is the willing death of the martyr.

Several features of Clement's use of *Bacchae* 470-76 here, however, are distinctly ironic. First, in a book of the *Stromateis* devoted to promoting the repudiation of pleasure, a quotation of the words of Dionysus, the god of sensual pleasure, in the service of this program of morality is striking. Indeed, as discussed above, Clement elsewhere denounces the Dionysiac mysteries as characterized by the worst sorts of debauchery

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<sup>59</sup> For introductions and commentaries on these two works of Plutarch with special attention to their connections to early Christian literature, see respectively Hans Dieter Betz, "De tranquillitate animi (Moralia 464E-477F)," in *Plutarch's Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature* (ed. Hans Dieter Betz; SCHNT; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 198-230; and Hubert Hubert, Jr. and Jane E. Phillips, "Consolatio ad uxorem (Moralia 608E-612B)," in *ibid.*, 394-441.

(e.g., *Protr.* 2.34.5). His description of the debauchery of Dionysiac mysteries (and mysteries in general) is a polemical conflation of mythology and actual ritual practice. Indeed, throughout the Greco-Roman world, with a few noteworthy exceptions (e.g., Marc Antony), Dionysiac mysteries were largely innocuous and not at all the occasions for licentiousness as Clement supposes. Clement's idea of the Dionysiac mysteries, therefore, is one that arises more from stereotypes than reality.<sup>60</sup> This is precisely what is at stake in the lines of the *Bacchae* that Clement quotes. At this point in the narrative Pentheus *believes* the women of Thebes were engaged in acts of illicit sexuality. Although he had initially wanted to halt their activities, hearing descriptions of them over the course of the drama awakens his urge to view them for himself.<sup>61</sup> Dionysus' emphasis on seeing (ὄρῶντας, 470), knowing (εἰδέναι, 472), and hearing (ἀκοῦσαι, 474) is aimed at rousing Pentheus' sensual desires that were masked under the pretense of moral rigor. Thus, Clement's transformation of the sensuality of the Dionysiac experience embodied in this passage into a Christian context that valorizes the Stoic ideal of *apatheia* with respect to sensual pleasure is a striking reversal of the very nature of Dionysus.

The irony of this transformation is heightened by Clement's introductory formula: "The savior himself plainly initiates us according to the tragedy" (4.25.162.3). Here Clement is emphatic that Christ himself (αὐτός... ὁ σωτήρ) has replaced Dionysus as mystagogue, although he makes no attempt to mask whose rites were envisioned in the original context (e.g., *Bacch.* 472). As has been seen over the course of this study,

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<sup>60</sup> On this point with respect to maenadism, see Henrichs, "Greek Maenadism," 136.

<sup>61</sup> For a discussion of the significance of Pentheus' desire to see, see § 1.3.1 above.

Clement's attribution of Dionysus' words from the tragedy to Christ is not the first instance in history of someone else playing the role of Dionysus. Indeed, several individuals aspired to be Dionysus. Among those identified with Dionysus include Alexander, several Ptolemies, Marc Antony, and Emperor Gaius. Moreover, Dionysiac miracles provided models the prison escapes in the Moses fragment of Artapanus and the Acts of the Apostles. Thus, Clement's positioning of Christ as a Dionysiac imitator is consistent with this well-established trope. Whereas other powerful men, however, had identified with Dionysus in order to flaunt their wealth and power or enjoy sensual license, for Clement's Christ the imitation of Dionysus moves in precisely the opposite direction. With Christ as mystagogue, one is initiated into the life of the Christian gnostic, which repudiates the pleasures that would have been associated with other Dionysiac imitators. Whereas Antony, for example, preferred nocturnal rites because they afforded him an occasion for debauchery, Clement interprets the significance of the night differently, as a time when spiritual rather than physical sight is required (*Strom.* 4.22.140.2).

In sum: the irony produced by Clement's quotation of *Bacchae* 470-76 results from his transformation of the locus of the conflict. In the tragedy, these words of Dionysus highlighted Pentheus' internal struggle in his resistance to Dionysiac *orgia* and his refusal to embrace the god's sensuality. For Clement, these words are spoken by Christ so as to highlight for the reader a general human resistance to Christian *gnosis*. By employing the words of Dionysus and explicitly identifying his source as a well-known tragedy (κατὰ τὴν τραγῳδίαν), Clement invites the reader to reexamine the power of pleasure associated not only with the god but also the god's artistic medium, tragic poetry

itself. The effect of the citation, therefore, is the subversion of the claims of both Dionysiac rites and tragic poetry upon human pleasure, which Clement achieves paradoxically by employing the very words of the tragic poet and of the god in support of his own program of Christian morality.

## 8.5 CONCLUSIONS

Clement's engagement with Greek *paideia* is far reaching, creative, and dynamic. Like many other literary Greeks in the Roman Empire, who were immersed in classical poetry, Clement sought to negotiate a relationship between himself, his Christian community, and the cultural ideals of Roman Alexandria. His transformation of Euripides' *Bacchae* in *Stromateis* 4 provides valuable insight into his larger literary and religious project. It signals, along with his many other literary borrowings, his desire to position himself among the educated elite. His attitudes toward poetry and Dionysus, however, are far from straightforward. In the wake of Plato, many philosophers viewed poetry as a dangerous pleasure; yet, Clement, like Plutarch and many others, maintained that in the appropriate pedagogical regime, poetry might be redeemed for philosophical purposes. Analogously, Dionysus represented in Clement's mind a most extreme form of debauchery in Greek religion. Nevertheless, he deploys Dionysiac language within Christianity in describing, for example, the ecstatic divine vision, while at the same time repudiating Dionysiac sensuality. Clement's quotation from the *Bacchae* in his Christian instruction on martyrdom and moral perfection in *Stromateis* 4 reflects the emphasis in the Dionysiac mysteries on initiation as ritualized death and at the same time the wider philosophical interpretive tradition as reflected in Horace and Plutarch. In view of the

centrality of the repudiation of pleasure to the moral vision in *Stromateis* 4, however, Clement's insertion of Christ into the role of Dionysus subverts the claims of the Dionysiac upon human pleasure and does so ironically with the words of the god himself in the context of his own tragic medium.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUSIONS: GATHERING UP THE SCATTERED LIMBS

From antiquity to the present, the meaning and application of Euripides' *Bacchae* have been contested. Henk Versnel's axiomatic assessment well captures the state of modern scholarship on the *Bacchae*: "[e]very reader gets the *Bacchae* he deserves."<sup>1</sup> This study has demonstrated that Versnel's axiom applies equally well to the tragedy's ancient readers.

The exploration began in fifth-century Athens, where the *Bacchae* was first performed in 405 BCE at the Great Dionysia after Euripides' death in exile. Having earned first prize, its popularity continued throughout antiquity. The ironies and ambiguities in Euripides' drama animate a wide range of divergent responses and interpretations. By staging the patron god of theater in disguise, Euripides' explores the nature of the god's powers of illusion and deception together with nature of Dionysiac *lusis*. Throughout the narrative, divine epiphany is juxtaposed with divine concealment as the god avenges himself on those who refused to acknowledge his divinity. Within this metatragic interplay, Pentheus' confrontation with the stranger foregrounds the theatrical experience, by collapsing the distinction between spectator and spectacle. Whereas he desired to view what was painful, Pentheus' own destruction would ultimately be put on display by the god.

The *Bacchae* also complicates the nature of Dionysiac religion. While the cults of Dionysus are central to its subject matter, its representation in the drama contrasts sharply

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<sup>1</sup> Henk S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion I: Ter Unus: Isis, Dionysos, Hermes, Three Studies in Henotheism* (Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 6; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 96.

with its practice in fifth-century Athens. Dionysus was present in Greece from the Bronze Age and his cults were prominent within the civic structures of Athens. Moreover, his religious festivals were occasions for inclusive communal merriment. The *Bacchae*, by contrast, presents the god as foreign and his cult as producing the destruction of the royal house of Thebes. These conflicting conceptions of Dionysus arise in part from Euripides' exploration of the religious dynamics in the fifth century, in which several ecstatic foreign cults were introduced into Athens. This tension persists in antiquity where the ordinary routinized nature of Dionysiac religion occasionally gives way to something more seditious, as for example in the Bacchanalia affair, in which the cult was perceived as conspiratorial against the Roman state.

These interpretive questions create a space within which subsequent readers and audiences of the tragedy explore new meanings and relevancies. The *Bacchae* extends the scope of its influence throughout the Mediterranean world along the channels of Hellenization; that is, its poetry belongs to the emerging corpus of "classical" literature that embodies Greekness. At the same time, the expansion of Greek power and influence produces contestations analogous to those in the tragedy between, for example, who is foreign and who is indigenous, who is Greek and who is barbarian. Moreover, within the Hellenistic world, Dionysus becomes a symbol of *Greek* power and imperial conquest of the east, in contrast to the tragedy in which he was a *barbarian* whose arrival resulted in the destruction of a *Greek* tyrant.

These shifting political and religious dynamics motivate various reconceptualizations of Euripides' myth. In Theocritus' *Idyll* 26 Euripidean maenads are transformed from disruptors of civilization into practitioners of state religion, and their

enemy is no longer their rightful king, aiming to uphold traditional religion, but rather a transgressor against this established cult. This conception of Dionysiac religion as rational and fully Greek reflects Ptolemaic interests in Dionysus as an imperial patron. In Dio Chrysostom's *Alexandrian Oration*, the Euripidean maenads are evoked again, in this case, however, emphasizing their irrational and subversive character. Dio chastises the people of Alexandria for acting as maenads in their unruly mob, which, he argues, is the cause of their repression under Roman rule. He contrasts the Alexandrians with Euripides' maenads, however; whereas the latter were abundantly provisioned by the god, the Alexandrians had control of neither their bread nor their water supply.

At Rome, the tension between Dionysus/Bacchus as symbol of liberation and destruction of political hierarchies, on the one hand, and supporter of conquest and subjugation, on the other, is also seen in various ways. Whereas Antony had identified with Bacchus, upon the rise to power of Octavian/Augustus, this god would be rehabilitated into the wider scope of imperial propaganda. The conflict inherent in Bacchus as imperial deity is illustrated vividly in the poetic career of Horace. Whereas in his early odes, Horace employs the mythology of Dionysus to celebrate imperial conquest along with poetic inspiration, later, in *Epistles* 1.16 his attitude toward Augustan Rome is ambivalent. Consequently, he employs the Euripidean narrative of conflict between the stranger and Pentheus as an expression of the challenges of maintaining poetic freedom and moral virtue at Rome. He employs the stranger's ambiguous identity as a metaliterary exploration of the nature of true virtue. The stranger's recourse to Dionysiac *lisis* in this setting becomes a statement of the Stoic valorization of virtuous death in the face of tyranny. Horace was not alone in applying this dramatic scene in this way.

Plutarch, for example, shared Horace's interpretive tradition and applied the tragic verse, "the god himself will set me free," to a release from the fear of death and a hope for a better afterlife. His reading of the tragedy lacks the political subtext found in Horace and is particularly influenced by his experience as a Dionysiac initiate. By contrast, Epictetus employs the same scene to dramatize the conflict between Stoic sage and Roman tyrant in connection with specific exempla taken from the Pisonian conspiracy.

Jews living in the Hellenistic world also encountered Dionysus and Greek tragedy in the process of cultural negotiation. At various moments, this god became a prominent symbol of political and religious struggles, especially in Roman Alexandria where questions of citizenship and ethnicity were particularly urgent for the Jewish population. In this context, responses to Dionysiac mythology in Jewish literature reflect critical moments of crisis. The Wisdom of Solomon employs tragic language from the *Bacchae* and other Attic dramas in its characterization of the "pagan" cults of the ancient Canaanites as consisting of child sacrifice and cannibalism. This evocation of Greek literature has a dual effect of rationalizing the biblical conquest narrative and also of including contemporary Alexandrian Greeks within its religious criticism. Indeed, Wisdom's recreation of the biblical narrative calls for a reevaluation of the nature of conquest and colonization and its relationship to the status of foreign and indigenous. Artapanus' presentation of the conflict between Moses and the pharaoh in the exodus also evokes the *Bacchae*; he narrates an imprisonment of Moses and his miraculous escape in a manner reminiscent of tragedy so as to present his Jewish hero as surpassing the deeds of Dionysus.

Philo also engages with Dionysiac themes in several ways. In his *Legatio ad Gaium* he reflects upon the emperor's Bacchic pretensions and observes that whereas the god was a benefactor of wine and revelry to all humanity, both Greek and barbarian, Gaius' policies failed to provide for human happiness and discriminated against the Jews as non-Greeks. Moreover, Gaius' administration is a theatrical display in which Jews were becoming the victims of his tragic plot. In his biblical exegesis in *De ebrietate*, Philo employs an anti-Dionysiac hermeneutics in which the god and his cult function as the other in contrast to which he constructs an ideal biblical piety. Thus, for example, the incident of the golden calf in Exodus 32 is presented as an incursion of Dionysiac religion and Hannah's alleged drunkenness in 1 Samuel 1 is contrasted with maenadism. At the same time, Philo describes the ascent of the soul to a divine vision with the language of Bacchic ecstasy but emphasizes that this is through a "sober inebriation." By thus denying the traditional sensuality of Dionysiac religion in favor of a Platonic mystical vision while at the same time employing the language of the Dionysiac experience, Philo subverts the claims of Dionysus upon human pleasure.

As with Jews, Christians living in the Greco-Roman world encountered Dionysus and the theater in various ways. Both are frequently and vigorously denounced by Christians as inherently licentiousness and impious. There is, nevertheless, a rich and complex interplay between Euripides' *Bacchae* and early Christian literature. The Acts of the Apostles has long been recognized as exhibiting narrative similarities with the *Bacchae*: it presents Christianity as a cult arriving in Greece from the east amidst persecution and imprisonment followed by miraculous deliverance. Even the proverbial statement, "it is difficult to kick against the goads," spoken by Jesus to Paul in his

epiphanic conversion echoes the warning of Dionysus to Pentheus in the tragedy. Yet, the importance of Dionysiac religion as a subtext in Acts against which Christian ideals are constructed and represented has not been fully appreciated. Whereas the *Bacchae* blurs the distinctions between madness (*mania*) and moderation (*sophrosyne*) and suggests that inspired speech entails a divine madness, even drunkenness, Acts reasserts their distinction and situates Christianity firmly on the side of rationality and sobriety. In this way, the narrative of Acts reflects Paul's worry that unregulated ecstatic speech in the Corinthian church might be perceived by outsiders as divine madness.

In the second and third centuries, the *Bacchae* continues to play an important role in Christian self-understanding. Celsus employed the *Bacchae* in his criticisms of the Christian Gospels, arguing that if Jesus had been a true deity, then like Dionysus he would have avenged himself on his human foe. Celsus' argument from the *Bacchae* reveals his own ambivalences toward the mythological tradition. Although he elsewhere expresses skepticism, he nevertheless employs Greek mythological literature as a superior model of truth and wisdom to that of Christianity. Origen responds by reframing the debate such that Jesus' death is construed as an act of power not weakness. Moreover, Pilate is not the appropriate analogue to Pentheus but rather the Jewish nation who, on Origen's reading of the Gospels, ultimately instigated Jesus' death. Finally, Clement of Alexandria, who quotes or alludes to the *Bacchae* on at least seven occasions, engages in a striking transformation of the tragedy for a Christian context. In *Stromateis* 4, he quotes five lines from Dionysus' and Pentheus' quarrel but radically alters the identity of the characters so that the former is Christ and the latter is the potential Christian initiate. Central to this scene in the tragedy, is the conflict between Pentheus'

desire to “see” the Dionysiac rites and his pretense of moral rigor. In view of Clement’s explicit repudiation of Dionysiac sensuality elsewhere and of his rejection of bodily pleasure in his own program of Christian morality, his adaptation of this passage is distinctly ironic. It reflects a subversion of Dionysiac religion within contemporary Alexandria while at the same time laying claim to its literary culture.

Thus, the identity of the stranger in the *Bacchae*, which powerfully drove the tragedy’s narrative and explored the nature of theatrical illusion, persists throughout antiquity as an open problem. Readers fill in this ambiguous dramatic space in the service of their own literary and ideological programs. Moreover, the conflict staged in the tragedy proves to be an enduring expression of problems confronting ancient society. It represents the perennial tension between religion and absolute power, poetic freedom and imperial patronage, and ethnic diversity and social cohesion.

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