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Reading and Rewriting Euripides in Clement of Alexandria

Abstract: The paper analyses the Euripidean quotations in Clement of Alexandria, in order to explore the different rhetorical strategies used by the Christian author. Quantitative analyses revealed that Euripides' texts are frequently quoted (117 passages according to Stählin edition): only Plato and Homer are more popular in Clement. In the late second-century Alexandria, Euripidean tragedies are not only a key reference in the Graeco-roman *paideia*; in Clement's works, Euripides also plays a cultural role in the dialogue between "Pagans" and "Christians". To take just one example, in the last book of the *Exhortation to the Greeks*, Clement evokes some images taken from Euripides' *Bacchae* to call for conversion to Christianity: Pentheus and Tiresias are encouraged to return to Christian moderation and to reject Dionysian wine and madness on the basis of a re-reading and on a re-writing of the *Bacchae*.

According to the Christian tradition, Clement was born in Athens or in Alexandria around 150.[1] In the *Preparation for the Gospel*, Eusebius of Caesarea reports that, prior to his conversion, Clement was well-versed in the Greek religion, including perhaps the mystery cults.[2] Clement himself mentions his several journeys in the Eastern regions of the Empire – Greece, Asia Minor, Palestine and Egypt – where he had the chance to further refine his training.[3] Later on, in Alexandria, Clement joined the circle of Pantaenus, to whom he succeeded.[4] According to Eusebius of Caesarea, "having succeeded Pantaenus, Clement had charge at that time of the catechetical instruction in Alexandria" (Πάνταινον δὲ Κλήμης διαδεξάμενος, τῆς κατ' Ἀλεξάνδρειαν κατηχήσεως εἰς ἐκεῖνο τοῦ καιροῦ καθηγεῖτο).[5] Around 202–203, as persecutions against

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1 On Clement's biography, see Osborn 2005, 1–27.

2 Eus. *Praep. ev.* 2,2,64: "[...] a man who had gone through experience of all sorts, but had quickly emerged from the delusion as one who had been rescued from evil by the word of salvation and through the teaching of the Gospel" (πάντων μὲν διὰ πείρας ἐλθὼν ἀνήρ, θᾶττόν γε μὴν τῆς πλάνης ἀνανεύσας, ὡς ἂν πρὸς τοῦ σωτηρίου λόγου καὶ διὰ τῆς εὐαγγελικῆς διδασκαλίας τῶν κακῶν λελυτρωμένος). On this point, see Massa 2016 and Massa, forthcoming.

3 Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1,1,2.

4 Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 5,10,4: "Pantaenus finally became the head of the school at Alexandria, and expounded the treasures of divine doctrine both orally and in writing" (ὅ γε μὴν Πάνταινος ἐπὶ πολλοῖς κατορθώμασι τοῦ κατ' Ἀλεξάνδρειαν τελευτῶν ἡγεῖται διδασκαλείου, ζώσῃ φωνῇ καὶ διὰ συγγραμμάτων τοὺς τῶν θείων δογμάτων θησαυροὺς ὑπομνηματιζόμενος).

5 Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6,6,1.

the Christians raged in Alexandria,[6] Clement had to leave for Cappadocia. There, he found protection from Alexander, bishop of Caesarea.[7]

The Christian tradition portrays Clement as a second-century intellectual with a vast travelling experience and acquaintance with different cultural traditions of the Roman Empire. His representation recalls in some way that of a member of the Second Sophistic.[8]

From the Hellenistic period onwards, Alexandria had been the cradle of the rich knowledge and traditions of the ancient Mediterranean.[9] It had been host to refined intellectuals and seen the cohabitation of the Greek and Jewish culture, as well as of the Christian and "Gnostic" theologies. Alexandria is hence a privileged terrain to study the religious rivalries and the socio-political issues between Pagans and Christians.[10] Not coincidentally, between the 2nd and the 5th c. BC, the Alexandrian milieu included such Christian authors as Clement, Origen (and three generations before, probably also his enemy Celsus), Athanasius and Cyril. The "School of Alexandria" played a fundamental role in the construction of ancient Christian theologies.[11] Clement was, therefore, first of all, an intellectual with a strong, traditional Greek background. His sophisticated *paideia* was the result of a high-level rhetorical and philosophical training, in which Platonist and Aristotelian speculations combined with the author's specific knowledge and the fundamental texts of Greek culture.[12]

Clement's works contain more than a hundred citations of Euripides' tragedies.[13] This makes Euripides fifth among the most-cited authors – after Paul, Plato, Philon of Alexandria, and Homer – and third amongst the Pagan authors. The highest number of citations is in the *Stromata,* followed by *Protrepticus* and the *Paedagogus* – and

6 The laws were enacted in 202, under the governor Laetus, and in 206, under Subatianus Aquila, during the reign of Septimius Severus.

7 Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6,2,2. On these events, see Le Boulluec 2006, 44.

8 The cultural *koine* of this "Greco-Roman" Empire, to quote Veyne 2005, was shared by most of the Greek and Roman authors who had received the same training and *paideia*. On this point, see Pouderon and Doré 1998; Eshleman 2012, 199–202; and Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen 2015.

9 On the historical situation in Egypt, and particularly in Alexandria, see Bowersock 1996; Haas 1997; Harris and Ruffini 2004; and Arcari 2016. See also Martin 1996, 117–201 and Le Boulluec 2006, 29–60.

10 I shall use the terms "Pagans" and "Christians" only to separate the worshippers of traditional religions and the followers of Jesus. On the problematic use of these terms as religious categories, see Chuvin 2011, 15–20, North 2005 and Cameron 2011, 14–32.

11 On the cohabitation of Christians, Gnostics, and Jews in the Alexandria of the 2nd c. AD, see Arcari 2016 and more precisely Pouderon 2016.

12 See Chadwick 1966 and Le Boulluec 2006.

13 Stählin 1936, 1–66, provides a useful index of the more than three hundreds quotations featuring in the works of Clement. For an analysis of some specific cases, see des Places 1986, 1988, 1990a and 1990b. More generally, on the role of Euripides in Christian apologetic works, see Zeegers-Vander Vorst 1972, 36–38.

not surprisingly so, considering that the *Stromata* are presented as an anthology.[14] Clement cites thirty-one plays in total, twelve of which are still known today in their totality.[15] As André Tuillier has noted, the plays cited by Clement include "the most popular tragedies of all periods, in the Orient and the Occident: *Medea*, *Orestes*, the *Phoenician Women* and the *Bacchae*."[16] Tuillier also remarks that, except from three, all the plays cited by Clement are also presented by Plutarch. In contrast, Clement has only ten plays in common with the *Deipnosophistae* of Athenaeus of Naucratis: *Antigone*, *Antiope*, *Auge*, *Bacchae*, *Medea*, *Oeneus*, *Orestes*, (*Pirithous*), *Telephus* and the *Phoenician Women*.[17] As Annewies Van Den Hoek suggested, "[s]ome borrowings certainly came in a more direct way, namely through first-hand acquaintance with individual authors. Some may initially have come through memory."[18]

1 Reading Euripides

In order to understand the importance of Clement of Alexandria in the Euripides tradition, a preliminary consideration is in order. Before the end of the 4th c. AD, there was no real difference in scholarly training and induction between the Pagans and the Christians.[19] The canonical literary and rhetorical texts continued to be the same. These texts established the standards of the Greek-Roman *paideia* and underlined what Peter Brown referred to as a *koine* of the religious and social experience.[20] The Euripidean verses lend themselves to different functions and objectives in the works of Clement. Below I try to classify these uses.

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14 In *Stromata*, Clement quotes twenty Euripidean plays: *Aegeus*, *Alexander*, *Antigone*, *Antiope*, *Auge*, *Bacchae*, *Erechtheus*, *Cresphontes*, *Medea*, *Oeneus*, *Oenomaus*, *Orestes*, (*Pirithous*), *Protesilaus*, *Telephus*, *Temenides*, *Hypsipyle*, *Phoenician Women*, *Phoenix*, *Chrysippus*. In the *Protrepticus*, he cites seven known plays – *Alcestis*, *Bacchae*, *Ion*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Orestes*, *Phoenician Women*, *Trojan Women* – plus several fragments. In the *Paedagogus*, he cites five known plays – *Bacchae*, *Hecuba*, *Hippolytus*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Orestes* – plus two fragments.
15 Van Den Hoek 1996, 231.
16 Tuillier 1968, 86 (translation of the author).
17 Tuillier 1968, 87.
18 Van Den Hoek 1996, 224.
19 On the absence of "Christian schools" in Roman Empire, see Marrou 1958, 416. For a bibliographical analysis, see Lugaresi 2004. Pouderon 1998 suggests that during the 2nd c. AD, some places of the Empire – particularly Alexandria, Rome and Athens – had become "intellectual centres" of a Christian teaching tradition.
20 According to Brown 1978, 97, this *koine* unified the peoples of the cities of the ancient Mediterranean Sea.

1.1 Gnomic Value

The first, and most neutral, function of Euripidean verses has to do with their gnomic value. This use follows in the footsteps of a many-century-long tradition. In the third book of the *Paedagogus*, for instance, Clement expounds on couple's life. Talking about chastity, the author cites three verses from the *Orestes*:

Ὅρα·φησὶν ἡ τραγῳδία,
  "Ὀδυσσέως ἄλοχον οὐ κατέκτανε
  Τηλέμαχος· οὐ γὰρ ἐπεγάμει πόσει πόσιν,
  μένει δὲ ἐν οἴκοις ὑγιὲς εὐναστήριον." (*Or.* 588–590)
Ὀνειδίζων τις μοιχείαν ἀσελγῆ καλὴν εἰκόνα σωφροσύνης ἐδείκνυεν φιλανδρίαν.

See, says the tragedy,
  "The consort of Ulysses was not killed
  by Telemachus; for she did not take a husband in addition to a husband,
  but in the house the marriage-bed remains unpolluted." (*Or.* 588–590)
Reproaching foul adultery, he showed the fair image of chastity in affection to her husband. (*Paed.* 3,41,4, tr. Wilson)

The plot of the play is not important here. The verses serve rather as evidence of the wisdom contained in the behaviour advocated by Clement.

1.2 Antipagan Polemic

Secondly, Euripides' verses can enter into Clement's anti-pagan polemic. In this case, citing a verse serves to point to a Pagan belief or practice that is worth of condemnation. An apt illustration is in the *Paedagogus*, where Clement bashes the use of crowns by citing two verses from the *Hippolytus:*

Τοιαύτη δὲ καὶ τῶν στεφάνων ἡ χρῆσις, κωμαστικὴ καὶ πάροινος·
  "ἄπερρε·μή μοι στέφανον ἀμφιθῇς κάρα." (*Hipp.* 73–74)
Ἦρος μὲν γὰρ ὥρᾳ λειμῶσιν ἐνδρόσοις καὶ μαλακοῖς, ποικίλοις χλοάζουσιν ἄνθεσιν, ἐνδιαιτᾶσθαι καλόν, αὐτοφυεῖ καὶ εἰλικρινεῖ τινι εὐωδίᾳ καθάπερ τὰς μελίττας τρεφομένους· τὸ δὲ "πλεκτὸν στέφανον ἐξ ἀκράτου λειμῶνος" κοσμήσαντας οἴκοι περιφέρειν οὐ σωφρόνων· οὐ γὰρ ἁρμόδιον ῥόδων κάλυξιν ἢ ἴοις ἢ κρίνοις ἢ ἄλλοις τισὶ τοιούτοις ἄνθεσι χαίτην πυκάζεσθαι κωμαστικήν, διανθιζομένους τὴν χλόην. Ἐμψύχει γὰρ χαίτην ἄλλως ὁ στέφανος περικείμενος καὶ δι' ὑγρότητά [τε] καὶ διὰ ψυχρότητα.

Such a use of crowns, also, has degenerated to scenes of revelry and intoxication. "Do not encircle my head with a crown" (*Hipp.* 73–74), for in the springtime it is delightful to while away the time on the dewy meads, while soft and many-coloured flowers are in bloom, and, like the bees, enjoy a natural and pure fragrance. But to adorn one's self with "a crown woven from the fresh mead," and wear it at home, were unfit for a man of temperance. For it is not suitable to fill the wanton hair with rose-leaves, or violets, or lilies, or other such flowers, stripping the sward of its flowers. For a crown encircling the head cools the hair, both on account of its moisture and its coolness. (*Paed.* 2,70,2, tr. Wilson)

The source of the first verse is unknown, but the other two verses are from Euripides' *Hippolytus*. Both examples serve to stress the contrast between the life of Pagans and that of Christians. Christians, so the plea goes, shall avoid all Pagan practices not only for the sake of their soul's salvation, but also for their physical health and well-being.

Elsewhere, the anti-pagan polemic targets at ancient authors and blames them of plagiarism and theft from the Scriptures. In the sixth book of the *Stromata*, Clement offers a long list of citations that would illustrate this plagiarism. Commenting about wealth in a fragment of *Chrysippus:*[21]

> Εὐριπίδης ἐν Χρυσίππῳ (fr. 839 Kannicht) μεταγράφει·
> "θνήσκει δὲ οὐδὲν τῶν γινομένων,
> διακρινόμενον δ' ἄλλο πρὸς ἄλλο
> μορφὴν ἑτέραν ἐπέδειξεν."

> Euripides transcribes in *Chrysippus* (fr. 839 Kannicht):
> "But nothing dies
> of things that are; but being dissolved,
> one from the other,
> shows another form." (*Strom.* 6,24,3: tr. Wilson)

Here too the context of the scene is of little relevance. The goal is to show the unmatched superiority of the Christian creed over the pagan one.

1.3 Euripides as Witness of Christian Truth

The third way in which Clement uses quotations from Euripides is as evidence that certain Pagans already knew the Christian truth.[22] In the sixth chapter of his *Protrepticus,* after a long critique of Greek philosophers and their mistakes, Clement tries to show that Greek thought was not completely alien to Christian revelation. For instance, Clement concedes that Plato was rights about the nature of God:

> Εὖ γε, ὦ Πλάτων, ἐπαφᾶσαι τῆς ἀληθείας· ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀποκάμῃς. ξύν μοι λαβοῦ τῆς ζητήσεως τἀγαθοῦ πέρι· πᾶσιν γὰρ ἀπαξαπλῶς ἀνθρώποις, μάλιστα δὲ τοῖς περὶ λόγους ἐνδιατρίβουσιν ἐνέστακταί τις ἀπόρροια θεϊκή. Οὗ δὴ χάριν καὶ ἄκοντες μὲν ὁμολογοῦσιν ἕνα τε εἶναι θεόν, ἀνώλεθρον καὶ ἀγένητον τοῦτον, ἄνω πού περὶ τὰ νῶτα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ καὶ οἰκείᾳ περιωπῇ ὄντως ὄντα ἀεί·

> Well done, Plato! Thou hast touched on the truth. But do not flag. Undertake with me the inquiry respecting the Good. For into all men whatever, especially those who are occupied with intellectual pursuits, a certain divine effluence has been instilled; wherefore, though reluctantly, they

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21 For a commentary on fr. 839, see Jouan and Van Looy 2002, 386–387.
22 On this rhetorical strategy in Christian works see, Ridings 1995 and Herrero 2010, 224–238. On the Platonic influence on Clement's works, see Lilla 1971, 41–45; Le Boulluec 2006, 63–79; and Riedweg 1987, 117–161.

confess that God is one, indestructible, unbegotten, and that somewhere above in the tracts of heaven, in His own peculiar appropriate eminence, whence He surveys all things, He has an existence true and eternal. (*Protr.* 6,68,2, tr. Butterworth)

In order to confirm that, he cites a fragment that he attributes explicitly to Euripides (fr. 1129 Nauck = TrGF 2, adesp. fr. 622 Kannicht-Snell):

"θεὸν δὲ ποῖον εἰπέ μοι νοητέον;
Τὸν πάνθ᾽ ὁρῶντα καὐτὸν οὐχ ὁρώμενον,"
Εὐριπίδης λέγει.

"Tell me what I am to conceive God to be,
Who sees all things, and is Himself unseen,"
Euripides says. (*Protr.* 6,68,3, tr. Butterworth)

The same fragment features in another Christian text, but it is probably inauthentic.[23] What matters here is that Clement is using the *auctoritas* of Euripides to confirm his opinion about Plato.

2 Rewriting Euripides' *Bacchae*

Aside from these specific uses, quotations from Euripides pervade the rhetoric of Clement and become a crucial component of his discourse. In what follows, I shall focus on this widespread mode of citation, which brings into full light the significance of Euripides in Clement's work.

The most interesting example of this rewriting concerns the *Bacchae*. This text is not only of literary interest to Christian authors. It also offered them the chance to deal with the Dionysian matter, by bringing selected words and images into new Christian context. In the eyes of certain Christian authors, the *Bacchae* tragedy plays then almost as a reference text to the new cult.[24] The intrigue of Euripides' last tragedy allowed a series of analogies between the history of Dionysus and that of Christ. The arrival of the Greek god at Thebes in the form of a man; the opposition of the political power towards its new cult; the imprisonment as well as the interrogation of Dionysus – all these themes lend themselves to suggestive parallels with the vicissitudes recounted in the Christians' Scriptures.[25]

Against this backdrop, a crucial point to highlight is that Clement uses the *Bacchae* differently depending on the context. The citations serve therefore to a panoply of objectives in Clement's works.

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23 Ps.-Justin, *De monarchia* 2. On the inauthenticity of the fragment, see Kannicht 1981, 172. See also Zeegers-Vander Vorst 1972, 208 and Riedweg 1994, 355.
24 Among the many publications on this question, see the recent works of Herrero 2010; Jourdan 2010, 195–220; Massa 2014, 167–188; and Friesen 2015, 120–133.
25 On these parallels, see also Seaford 1997 and Seaford 2006, 122–129.

2.1 Pentheus and Tiresias as New Christian Characters

Let us begin with the *Protrepticus*. In the last chapter of this work, after a long digression against the Pagan religion, and in particular against mystery cults, Clement advocates for following the message of Christ and for abandoning the traditions of the Greeks.[26] Rich in allegorical images and sophisticated in style, this last chapter is the climax of the entire work. And it is precisely at this point of high rhetorical tension that Clement evokes Dionysus and the imaginary of the *Bacchae*.[27]

Clement keeps the *Bacchae* in store for this last chapter. The second chapter of *Protrepticus* offers instead one of the richest reflection on the image of Dionysus by a Christian author. Early on in his work, Clement targets Dionysus as the μαινόλης – which means both "mad" and "he who renders others mad".[28] Here we see at play a strategy shared by Christian authors: redirecting the madness of his enemies to the god himself. Clement connects this representation to the celebrations where the Βάκχοι would honour the god through the "sacred madness" (ἱερομανία), and the rite of *omophagia*.[29] Dionysus and his followers appear here as sharing the same emotional state. This serves in the Christian polemic to deny the divinity of false gods. The state of madness of the god is tied to his drunkenness. Also Theophilus of Antioch, representing the Greek gods as dead men and mentioning the pagans' recounts about the horrors of their gods, cites Dionysus as he "who is drunk" (μεθύων) and "who is mad" (μαινόμενος).[30] Here we see at play another accusation typical of the Christians: the wine of Dionysus drives one to madness, while Christ taught men the value of moderation.

The citations of *Bacchae* in the second chapter do not serve to attack the mysteries of Dionysus, but rather to create a new Christian imagery. One of the most interesting examples of the operation realized on Euripides' *Bacchae* are the exhortations addressed towards Pentheus and Tiresias. Clement addresses directly the two characters of the tragedy, inviting them to abandon their previous life. This move follows the intrigue of the *Bacchae*, where Dionysus' epiphany had obliged the inhabitants of Thebes to choose between accepting back the cult of Dionysus or refusing it. The passage on Pentheus reads as follows:

> "Καὶ μὴν ὁρᾶν μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίους δοκῶ,
> δισσὰς δὲ Θήβας" (Eur. *Ba.* 918–919)
> βακχεύων ἔλεγέν τις εἰδώλοις, ἀγνοίᾳ μεθύων ἀκράτῳ ἐγὼ δ᾽ αὐτὸν οἰκτείραιμι παροινοῦντα καὶ τὸν οὕτω παρανοοῦντα ἐπὶ σωτηρίαν παρακαλέσαιμι σωφρονοῦσαν, ὅτι καὶ κύριος μετάνοιαν ἁμαρτωλοῦ καὶ οὐχὶ θάνατον ἀσπάζεται.

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26 On Clement's rhetorical strategy in the last chapter of the *Protrepticus*, see Stenecker 1967, 165–170 and Zeegers-Vander Vorst 1972, 278–285.

27 For a general interpretation of the *Bacchae,* see Beltrametti 2007 with bibliography.

28 See, for example, Corn. *Nat. deor.* 60,8.

29 See Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2,12,2.

30 Theophil. *Autol.* 1,9.

Ἧκε, ὦ παραπλήξ, μὴ θύρσῳ σκηριπτόμενος, μὴ κιττῷ ἀναδούμενος, ῥῖψον τὴν μίτραν, ῥῖψον τὴν νεβρίδα, σωφρόνησον· δείξω σοι τὸν λόγον καὶ τοῦ λόγου τὰ μυστήρια, κατὰ τὴν σὴν διηγούμενος εἰκόνα.

> "And in truth! Methinks I see a pair of suns
> And a double Thebes" (Eur. *Ba.* 918–919)

said one who was revelling in frenzy through idols, drunk with sheer ignorance. I would pity him in his drunkenness, and would appeal to him to return from this madness to sober salvation, seeing that the Lord also welcomes the repentance, and not the death, of a sinner.
Come, thou frenzy-stricken one, not resting on thy wand, not wreathed with ivy! Cast off thy headdress; cast off the fawnskin; return to soberness! I shall show you the Word, and the Word's mysteries, describing them according to thine own semblance of them.
(*Protr.* 12,118,5–119,1, tr. Butterworth)

Albeit not explicit, the reference to Pentheus is clear due to the citation of two tragic verses pronounced by the sovereign of Thebes in the beginning of the fourth episode of the tragedy.[31] Clement outright emphasizes his compassion for this drunken individual and highlights that the Christians' god appreciates the *metanoia* ("conversion") of the sinner, and not his death.[32] Here the author is clearly constructing a contrast between Christ and Dionysus, who, at the end of the Euripidean tragedy, appears distant and inaccessible after having driven Agave to butcher Pentheus, her son, in accordance with the Dionysian ritual. Wrapped in his anger, Dionysus is insensitive to supplications and suffering. His punishment descends over the city of Thebes and destroys the *genos* of Cadmus, as promised at the beginning of the tragedy.[33] In Clement, Pentheus, the punished culprit and sacrificed by the will of Dionysus, becomes one more sinner who can still aspire to salvation. The quotation of *Bacchae* serves therefore to invite Pentheus to conversion.

Thereafter, Clement moves his attention on Tiresias. Here again the author makes a specific reference to the *Bacchae*, rather than more generally to the mythical tales featuring Tiresias. In the *Bacchae*, Tiresias decided to sustain the cult of the new god and, despite his old age, to take part in the Bacchic rituals celebrated on mount Cithaeron.[34] And it is precisely as supporter of the new cult that Clement addresses Tiresias:

Ἧκέ μοι, ὦ πρέσβυ, καὶ σύ, τὰς Θήβας λιπὼν καὶ τὴν μαντικὴν καὶ τὴν βακχικὴν ἀπορρίψας πρὸς ἀλήθειαν χειραγωγοῦ· ἰδού σοι τὸ ξύλον ἐπερείδεσθαι δίδωμι· σπεῦσον, Τειρεσία, πίστευσον· ὄψει. Χριστὸς ἐπιλάμπει φαιδρότερον ἡλίου, δι' ὃν ὀφθαλμοὶ τυφλῶν ἀναβλέπουσιν· νύξ σε φεύξεται, πῦρ φοβηθήσεται, θάνατος οἰχήσεται· ὄψει τοὺς οὐρανούς, ὦ γέρον, ὁ Θήβας μὴ βλέπων.

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31 On Pentheus diplopia, see Dodds 1960, 193; Seaford 1987; and Goldhill 1988.

32 On the Christian category of "conversion", see Charles-Saget 1998; Perrin 2007; and Bøgh 2014. On the difference between Dionysiac membership and Christian conversion, see Massa 2011.

33 Eur. *Ba.* 1345 (Dionysus): "You were late in understanding us. When you should have, you did not know us" (ὄψ' ἐμάθεθ' ἡμᾶς, ὅτε δ' ἐχρῆν οὐκ ᾔδετε), tr. Seaford.

34 Eur. *Ba.* 174–177.

Come to me, old man, come you too! Quit Thebes; fling away thy prophecy and Bacchic revelry and be led by the hand to truth. Behold, I give you the wood to lean upon. Haste, Teiresias, believe! You shalt have sight. Christ, by whom the eyes of the blind see again, shine upon you more brightly than the sun. Night shall flee from you; fire shall fear you; death shall depart from you. You shalt see heaven, old man, though you cannot see Thebes. (*Protr.* 12,119,3, tr. Butterworth)

In his plea for conversation, Clement recalls two aspects specific to the Tiresias of Euripides: the abandonment of Thebes, the city of the *Bacchae*, and the mantic art of Bacchic rituals.

Clement nonetheless proposes to lead Tiresias and Cadmus, whom Euripides portrays as a supporter of Tiresias,[35] into the truth of God. Clement is rewriting an episode of the *Bacchae*. Both in the play and the treatise, the blindness of Tiresias may hamper his divine election. The themes of light and sight feature prominently in Clement's theological thought. The couples youth/old age and sight/blindness stand for the contraposition between the Pagan system, dedicated to the cult of fake gods, and the renaissance through the convention to Christianity. In the *Paedagogus*, indeed, Clement uses the metaphor of blindness to describe the stage previous to that of baptism. The terms of light and of illumination (*photisma*) are at the heart of the Christian vocabulary for ancient baptism. The promise that Tiresias will regain sight – "You shalt see heaven, old man, though you cannot see Thebes" – refers to illumination, which is part of the baptismal conception of the Great Church.

This last passage concerning Tiresias contains another element worth noting. In the *Bacchae*, Tiresias was holding a thyrsus, while in the *Protrepticus* Clement offers him wood so that he can lean on it. In the Christian language, however, *xylon* indicates the wood of the cross. "To lean upon the wood" means to lean on the cross, and thus to rely on Christ. The Christian cross substituted the Dionysiac thyrsus.

The use of the *Bacchae* of Euripides is far from incidental. It rather reflects the intent to interpret the language and the characters of the tragedy according to the new Christian coordinates. As Clement himself put it in the last chapter of his *Protrepticus*, "I will show thee the Word, and the Word's mysteries, describing them according to thine own semblance of them" (δείξω σοι τὸν λόγον καὶ τοῦ λόγου τὰ μυστήρια, κατὰ τὴν σὴν διηγούμενος εἰκόνα, *Protr.* 12,119,1, tr. Butterworth). Clement is well aware that the new Christian message cannot be accepted without a process of translation into the categories of the Greek culture. And Clement, as Guy Stroumsa has noted, "prefers to transform rather than reject."[36]

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35 Eur. *Ba*. 193: "Shall I lead you like a child, although we are both old men?" (γέρων γέροντα παι-δαγωγήσω σ᾽ ἐγώ;), trans. Seaford.
36 Stroumsa 2004, 308.

2.2 Dionysiac and Christian Initiations

Another example of the rewriting of the *Bacchae* of Euripides is in the *Stromata*. This is the last work of Clement, which he composed after having left Alexandria. In discussing about Gnostic perfection, the author claims the existence of secret teachings and doctrines, which can only be transmitted to those who have accomplished their specific path of initiation.[37] Although Clement is here speaking of a Christian initiation he uses – and here is the interesting point – the words of the Euripidean Dionysus in interrogation of the second episode of the drama:

> Μετιτέον δὴ ἀπὸ τῶν φυσικωτέρων ἐπὶ τὰ προφανέστερα <τὰ> ἠθικά· ὁ γὰρ περὶ ἐκείνων λόγος μετὰ τὴν ἐν χερσὶ πραγματείαν ἕψεται. αὐτὸς οὖν ἡμᾶς ὁ σωτὴρ ἀτεχνῶς κατὰ τὴν τραγῳδίαν μυσταγωγεῖ,
> > "ὁρῶν ὁρῶντας καὶ δίδωσιν ὄργια." (*Ba.* 470)
> κἂν πύθῃ·
> > "τὰ δὲ ὄργια ἐστὶ τίν' ἰδέαν ἔχοντά σοι;" (*Ba.* 471)
> ἀκούσῃ πάλιν·
> > "ἄρρητ' ἀβακχεύτοισιν εἰδέναι βροτῶν," (*Ba.* 472)
> κἂν πολυπραγμονῇ τις ὁποῖα εἴη, αὖθις ἀκουσάτω·
> > "οὐ θέμις ἀκοῦσαί σε, ἔστι[ν] δ' ἄξι' εἰδέναι·
> > ἀσέβειαν ἀσκοῦντα ὄργι' ἐχθαίρει θεοῦ." (*Ba.* 474. 476)

> But we must pass from physics to ethics, which are clearer; for the discourse concerning these will follow after the treatise in hand. The Saviour Himself, then, plainly initiates us into the mysteries, according to the words of the tragedy:
> > "Seeing those who see, he also gives the orgies." (*Ba.* 470)
> And if you ask,
> > "These orgies, what is their nature?" (*Ba.* 471)
> You will hear again:
> > "It is forbidden to mortals uninitiated in the Bacchic rites to know." (*Ba.* 472)
> And if any one will inquire curiously what they are, let him hear:
> > "It is not lawful for you to hear, but they are worth knowing;
> > The rites of the God detesthim who practices impiety." (*Ba.* 474. 476)
> (*Strom.* 4,162,2–4, tr. Wilson)

Christ uses the words of Dionysus.[38] Here I wish to draw attention to a minor change of form that Clement makes to the original text. In the entire manuscript tradition, the accusative ὁρῶντα of the Euripidean text is the plural – ὁρῶντας. This slight variation allows Clement to make of the discussion between Pentheus and Dionysus in *Bacchae* a dialogue between Christ and the Apostles. The verses about the famous

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37 On the interpretation of *gnosis* in the *Stromata*, see Osborn 2005, 255–257.
38 In the *Bacchae,* the moment of actually seeing Dionysus is a fundamental component of initiation. As Vernant 1986, 249 has noted, the reciprocity of the look is necessary, "quand, par la grâce de Dionysos, s'est instituée, comme un jeu de miroirs, une entière réversibilité entre le fidèle voyant et le dieu visible, chacun étant à la fois et en même temps, par rapport à l'autre, celui qui voit, celui qui fait voir."

rituals at the mount Cithaeron by the followers of Dionysus play as if they described in fact a Christian representation. What Euripides sets into scene becomes the instrument that allows for the understanding of the value of the mission of Christ and his disciples. The *Bacchae* seems therefore to play for Clement the role of the key text on dionysism with which he can fruitfully engage for his purposes.

2.3 Pentheus as the "Old Man"

The *Bacchae* found their way also in the *Paedagogus*, a work that collects a series of precepts and rules for abiding to the Christian teachings. In line with the function of this work, the function of citation is different than in the previous examples. In the second book, Clement analyzes the problems related to the consummation of wine by Christians. While he describes the physical effects of excessive drinking, he cites a Euripidean verse:

> Τῷ μὲν οὖν ἀναγκαίῳ τῷ ὕδατι ὡς ὅτι πλεῖστῳ ἐγκαταμικτέον καὶ τοῦ χρησίμου· οἴνῳ δὲ ἀμέτρῳ ἡ μὲν γλῶττα παραποδίζεται, παρίεται δὲ τὰ χείλη, ὀφθαλμοὶ δὲ παρατρέπονται, οἷον κολυμβώσης τῆς ὄψεως ὑπὸ τοῦ πλήθους τῆς ὑγρότητος, καὶ ψεύδεσθαι βεβιασμένοι κύκλῳ μὲν ἡγοῦνται περιφέρεσθαι τὰ πάντα, ἀριθμεῖν δὲ οὐ δύνανται τὰ πόρρω ὡς ἔστι μόνα·
> "καὶ μὴν ὁρᾶν μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίους δοκῶ," (*Ba.* 918)
> μεθύων ὁ Θηβαῖος ἔλεγεν γέρων· κινουμένη μὲν γὰρ ὑπὸ τῆς τοῦ οἴνου θερμότητος ἡ ὄψις πυκνότερον πολλαπλασίονα τοῦ ἑνὸς φαντάζεται τὴν οὐσίαν· διαφέρει δ' οὐθὲν ἢ τὴν ὄψιν κινεῖν ἢ τὸ ὁρώμενον· ταὐτὸν γὰρ ἐξ ἀμφοῖν ἡ ὄψις πέπονθεν τῆς τοῦ ὑποκειμένου καταλήψεως διὰ τὸν σάλον ἀκριβῶς ἐφικέσθαι μὴ δυναμένη.

> By an immoderate quantity of wine the tongue is impeded; the lips are relaxed; the eyes roll wildly, the sight, as it were, swimming through the quantity of moisture; and compelled to deceive, they think that everything is revolving round them, and cannot count distant objects as single.
> "And, in truth, methinks I see two suns," (*Ba.* 918)
> said the Theban old man in his cups. For the sight, being disturbed by the heat of the wine, frequently fancies the substance of one object to be manifold. And there is no difference between moving the eye or the object seen. For both have the same effect on the sight, which, on account of the fluctuation, cannot accurately obtain a perception of the object. (*Paed.* 2,24,2, tr. Wilson)

In the original scene, it is Pentheus who, on his way out of the palace disguised as a maenad, describes the altered perceptions due to wine consumption. Clement puts this verse in the mouth of an old man. This change is very unlikely a mistake, considering that Clement had already correctly cited the same verse in the *Protrepticus*.

This citation, I suggest, shall be read and interpreted in light of the specific context of the text where it finds place. The *Protrepticus* was addressed primarily to a learned audience. Clement felt therefore bound to stick precisely to the cited sources. The broader readership of the *Paedagogus*, by contrast, allows Clement more leeway in his citations. It seems to me that Clement is trying to project onto the "old drunken Theban" the image of the "old man" of the biblical scriptures, the one who was not

yet Christian, as he still belonged to the Pagan world. It is, in a way, as if Clement was saying that all Pagans are "old" men who have lived vicious lives, marked by the immoderate consumption of wine. In this perspective, we could imagine that Clement attributes this verse to Tiresias, the divine, the one who represented the religious power in the Euripidean play. In this vein, it is also important to recall that Clement wanted to link the bad consumption of wine to the devotees of the god of wine, Dionysus, in a trend that placed the Greek god in opposition to Christ.[39]

3 Conclusions

The role of religion within the Roman Empire led to the emergence of a new discourse on religion. The early and powerful influence of Christian authors built a new rhetoric, with a strong accent on distinguishing the true/unique religion (or the orthodoxy) from superstition, heresy, or false belief; in other words, from the "religions of Others" (or the heterodoxy). In order to do this, Christian authors relentlessly compared, classified, typologised, assigned spatial and temporal coordinates, and hierarchized. They did so with respect to other religions and *within* the horizon of various forms of Christianity.

The picture that I offered above shows the importance of Euripides' plays in the culture and literary construction of Clement of Alexandria. It also shows that Christians faced real-world-type of challenges. Hence condemning Dionysiac cults serves Clement not only to mark the difference between Paganism and Christianity, but also to trace the frontiers of the Christian identity through the quotations of Euripides.

The followers of Jesus underwent major processes of transcodification, exchange and assimilation under the Roman Empire. The alienation, the rejection and the stigmatisation of uses and behaviours, have been some of the most significant dynamics in the construction of the "Christian religion". Euripides, as I have tried to show, played a role in this process of cultural transfers.

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39 On the opposition between Dionysiac and Christian wine, see Massa 2014, 203–249, with bibliography.

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