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Euripides in Greek Christian Apologetics (2nd – 5th c. AD)*

Abstract: After Homer, Euripides is the most frequently quoted poet in Greek Christian apologetics (2nd-5th c. AD). He may be mentioned to illustrate the futility of Greek literature, attacked as a poet who represented indecent spectacles, or mocked as a writer flattering the Athenians and seeking vain glory. But he is more frequently quoted as a voice supporting Christianity. The Christians know passages from Euripides, especially fragments from lost plays, which they use to prove the existence of the one god, to demonstrate his providence, or to denounce Greek polytheism. Eusebius (4th c.) and Theodoretus (5th c.) continue to quote the Tragic for his supposed doctrines on God and the gods, but they also use Euripides in other ways. Theodoretus quotes him as a witness about faith, as an authority supporting biblical prophecies and as an example of the contradictions of the Greeks. All these usages of Euripides stem from Clement of Alexandria (3th c.), who appears to have been a crucial step in the history of Euripides' integration within Christian discourse. To explain why Euripides was sometimes in agreement with the Christians, the Christian writers explain that he was dependent on the Bible, that he was inspired by God, or that he had a rational access to truth. In that respect, he is sometimes presented as a philosopher, disciple of Socrates or Anaxagoras, who moved to poetry. Most of the quotations of Euripides made in the 2nd c. derive from ready-made Jewish collections (Ps.-Hecataeus and/or Aristobulus). A direct connection with a philosophical reading of Euripides is less clear, except in one text by Eusebius. Eventually, the hypothesis of a direct knowledge of Euripides merits attention. Though this hypothesis does not appear to be relevant in the case of most of the apologetic texts, Theodoretus seems to know a scholion on *The Phoenicians*. But that does not prove that he was not dependent on an intermediary.

Alongside philosophers, Greek poets are frequently quoted in Christian apologetics. In 1972, Nicole Zeegers-Vander Vorst analysed the quotations of the Greek poets used by the Christian Apologetes of the 2nd c. AD.¹ I would like to extend the chronological scope to the 5th c. AD, and concentrate on the case of Euripides.

Greek poetry has an ambiguous status in Christian ancient texts. On the one hand, it is often considered as a fundamental expression of polytheism, the medium by which the demons, through the creation of the myths, have enslaved the minds of

* I would like to thank John Granger Cook (Lagrange College) for checking my English and making a few important remarks concerning this paper.

1 Zeegers-Vander Vorst 1972. On Euripides, see 36–38.

men and transmitted to mankind erroneous doctrines.² On the other hand, the poets may also be quoted by the Christians, like the philosophers, as witnesses supporting their doctrines. We find thus two approaches of poetry in Christian apologetics: the poets may be quoted in order to illustrate polytheism or to be refuted themselves, as liars and instruments of the demons in disagreement with Christian doctrines; but they may also be quoted as authentic sources of wisdom, in agreement with the Christians. Both usages are rooted in an old tradition, especially philosophical, of quotation of the poets.³ They imply a fundamentally *doctrinal* approach to poetry, not a “literary” one, as one may be accustomed to nowadays.

Nicole Zeegers-Vander Vorst already noticed that Euripides was, with Homer, the poet who is most frequently quoted by the Christians of the 2nd c. AD.⁴ The same remains true in later apologetic texts. For instance, in Eusebius’ *Praeparatio evangelica*, composed around 320, Euripides is named 19 times, Sophocles 4 times, and Aeschylus never. In Theodoretus’ *Therapeutics of Hellenic maladies*, Euripides is named 8 times, Sophocles once, and Aeschylus never. In this study, I would like to raise the question whether the importance of Euripides in Christian apologetics was simply

² See for instance Theophilus of Antioch’s criticism of the poets (*Autol.* 2,8–9). He identifies the Muses with the demons and reproaches the poets for denying providence, for having a materialist view of the creation of the world, and for being in constant opposition to one another, since they also speak about the one god and providence. Theophilus explains this contradiction by the fact that, when they are wrong, which is the most frequent case in his view, the poets are inspired by “spirits of error” (the demons), and that, when they say the truth, it is because they sometimes managed to free themselves from the domination of the demons. Athenagoras (*Suppl.* 7,2), maybe inspired by Theophilus, explains likewise, but in a less polemical way, that the contradictions of the poets stem from the fact that they relied on conjectures, not directly on God, and that they put forward different doctrines according to their “sympathy” (συμπάθεια) with God (the demons do not play any role anymore here). He criticizes them for representing the Gods in a human manner (10,2). Like Theophilus, he identifies the Muses mentioned in Hesiod (*Theog.* 27: “we know how to speak many false things as though they were true”) as the demons and opposes the “celestial” wisdom (the prophets) and their “earthly” wisdom (24,3). Even in Clement of Alexandria, who is more favorable to Greek wisdom, we find the idea that poetry has a deep connection with lie and error (*Protr.* 73,1: poetry “hardly testifies to truth”). Before Clement, Tatian already stated that poetry was designed to corrupt the soul (*or.* 1,5). After him, Basil of Caesarea advises his reader to reject, in the poets, the mythical narratives about the gods (*Ad iuv.* 4). On the first Christian attitudes towards poetry, see Morlet 2016, 72–75.

³ Quoting the poets in order to illustrate a doctrine is already found in Plato (see Pindar in *Gorg.* 484b) and was very popular among Stoics (see note 5). The criticism of the poets, on the other hand, can be found, as it is well known, already in Xenophanes, then Plato (*Rep.* 3 and 10) and Isocrates (*Busiris*). Theodoretus explicitly refers to Plato when he explains that truth should not be demonstrated with the fables of the poets, but only with the help of the philosophers and the writers, συγγραφεῖς, a word which does not only refer to the ‘historians’, as Pierre Canivet understands it, but also to the orators, as the following pages show (*Gr. affect. cur.* 5,9; Canivet 1958, 228). That does not prevent Theodoretus from quoting the poets when he finds it useful to do so, but he sometimes remarks that the testimony of the poets may not be considered as reliable, and tries to add other kinds of testimonies (4,41; 6,91). Before the Christians, Philo of Alexandria already exhibits this two-fold usage of the poets (symphonic: *Confut.* 4; *Quaest. in Gen.* 4,8; critical: *Dec.* 156; *Virt.* 178).

⁴ Zeegers-Vander Vorst 1972, 36

the effect of the fact that he was then, as he still is now, the best preserved tragic poet, and thus the most available and easy to read – and also the most popular among philosophers, especially Stoics⁵ –, or if there were more specific reasons for his importance in the first Christian texts.

1 Hostility against Euripides

It is no surprise that we find in the first five centuries of Christian literature hostile passages against Euripides, but also more favorable ones. A first reason of the hostility of the Christians against Euripides is simply that he was a pagan writer. Theophilus mentions Euripides among a catalogue of Greek authors which aims at showing the uselessness of this literature:

For it was fit that they who wrote should themselves have been eye-witnesses of those things concerning which they made assertions, or should accurately have ascertained them from those who had seen them; for they who write of things unascertained beat the air. For what did it profit Homer to have composed the Trojan war, and to have deceived many; or Hesiod, the register of the theogony of those whom he calls gods; or Orpheus, the three hundred and sixty-five gods, whom in the end of his life he rejects, maintaining in his precepts that there is one God? What profit did the sphærography of the world's circle confer on Aratus, or those who held the same doctrine as he, except glory among men? And not even that did they reap as they deserved. And what truth did they utter? Or what good did their tragedies do to Euripides and Sophocles, or the other tragedians? Or their comedies to Menander and Aristophanes, and the other comedians? Or their histories to Herodotus and Thucydides? Or the shrines and the pillars of Hercules to Pythagoras, or the Cynic philosophy to Diogenes? What good did it do Epicurus to maintain that there is no providence; or Empedocles to teach atheism; or Socrates to swear by the dog, and the goose, and the plane-tree, and Æsculapius struck by lightning, and the demons whom he invoked? And why did he willingly die? What reward, or of what kind, did he expect to receive after death? What did Plato's system of culture profit him? Or what benefit did the *rest* of the philosophers derive from their doctrines, not to enumerate the whole of them, since they are numerous? But these things we say, for the purpose of exhibiting their useless and godless opinions. (*Autol.* 3,2, tr. Dods).

A more specific reason of the hostility of the Christians against Euripides was that he was a dramatic author. Some of them accuse him of representing indecent events on the stage. Concerning a lost play in which Alcmeon kills his mother Eryphile,⁶ Tatian writes for instance:

What advantage should I gain from him who is brought on the stage by Euripides raving mad, and acting the matricide of Alcmaeon; who does not even retain his natural behaviour, but with

⁵ Chrysippus, in particular, was known as an admirer of Euripides, who, according to Diogenes Laertius, quoted almost the whole *Medea* in one of his works (7,180). See also the contribution of Michael Schramm in this volume, p. 302 above.

⁶ See Eur. test. i-iii and fr. 65–87 Kannicht.

his mouth wide open goes about sword in hand, and, screaming aloud, is burned to death, habited in a robe unfit for man? (or. 24,1, tr. Ryland).

Clement of Alexandria, likewise, remarks that the tragic poet has represented human sacrifices on stage, which however is less, in his view, a way to attack Euripides as such than a way to attack the cruelty of the Greek gods (*Protr.* 42,3). Eusebius reproduces this passage in his *Praeparatio evangelica* (4,16,12).

The same work illustrates a third kind of criticism, but this criticism is not due to Eusebius himself, and not specific to the Christians. In books 5–6 of the *Praeparatio evangelica*, the bishop of Caesarea transmits a long series of extracts from the cynic philosopher Oenomaos (*Charlatans unmasked*) in order to refute fatalism and the practice of oracular divination. One of the arguments used by Oenomaos to ridicule the Gods is that they praised the poets in their oracles – Archilochus, Euripides and Homer. He accused Archilochus of being an obscene poet and Homer of corrupting youth. The reasons of his hostility towards Euripides are less explicit. He states that he left Socrates' school and that "his tragedies are still played on the boards" (*Praep. ev.* 5,32,2). In another passage, Oenomaos writes that he does not understand why the God praised Euripides except that he used to please the crowds and the kings and to flatter the Athenians (5,33,10–13). In other words, Euripides appeared to Oenomaos as a renegade from philosophy, and as a vain poet seeking popular glory. In a last passage, the Cynic suggests a more specific reason for his disdain for the tragic poet. He ironically mentions the "wisest men" who use Euripides in order to demonstrate that fate can coexist with freedom – he makes an allusion to the story of Laios, derived from *Phoen.* 20 (*Praep. ev.* 6,7,23–24). The "wisest men" may be the Stoics and especially Chrysippus, who was known in antiquity for quoting Euripides extensively.⁷

This series of attacks consists in denying any wisdom to Euripides and in excluding him from "philosophy", whether pagan philosophy or "the real philosophy", viz. Christianity.⁸ Many more texts, however, illustrate another usage of the tragic poet, and tend to present Euripides as a pagan witness of Christian doctrines.

2 Euripides as a Witness of Truth

Used as a writer supporting Christianity, Euripides is most frequently quoted by the apologetes in order to testify to the existence of the one god. Athenagoras, for in-

⁷ See p. 353 note 5 above.

⁸ In the *Contra Celsum* (7,36), Origen argues against a long series of arguments put by Celsus in the mouth of an imaginary Jew. In order to mock this prosopopeia, the Christian compares Celsus to Euripides who, according to Aristophanes, attributed to barbarian women the words of Anaxagoras (*Ach.* 400–478). It is then, contrary to the texts we mentioned, the philosophical background of Euripides' plays which is ridiculed here.

stance, relies on three fragments which he attributes to Euripides to state that he understood the difference between the true God and the false gods (*Suppl.* 5,1–2: Eur. fr. 900, 941, 480 Kannicht). In his *Protrepticus*, Clement of Alexandria quotes another unknown fragment (Eur. fr. 1129 Nauck = TrGF 2, adesp. fr. 622 Kannicht-Snell) about God who sees everything without being seen (*Protr.* 68,3), and gives one of the fragments quoted by Athenagoras (74,1: Eur. fr. 941 Kannicht). In his *Stromateis*, the same fragment is given in a large dossier of poetical testimonies about God including a fragment from Critias' *Pirithous* (DK 88 B 19), falsely attributed here to Euripides (*Strom.* 5,114,1–2). This demonstration is reproduced word by word by Eusebius (*Praep. ev.* 13,13,41). Athenagoras quotes a passage from Euripides' *Danae* in order to show that God needs nothing (*Suppl.* 29,2).⁹

Sometimes, the tragic poet may also be used as a voice confounding the pagan gods. In a passage from *Orestes* in which the latter incriminates Apollo for having induced him to kill his mother, Clement says that Euripides “confutes” (διελέγχων) the God (*Protr.* 76,3).¹⁰ Eusebius transmits a passage from Ps.-Plutarch which attributes to Euripides a play called *Sisyphus* in which the tragic poet has denied the existence of the gods (*Praep. ev.* 13,13,41).¹¹ It is generally assumed that Ps.-Plutarch, here, has mistaken Euripides with Critias – except if the same passage could be found in Euripides. In the *De monarchia* attributed to Justin, there is a long anthology of passages from Euripides where the characters criticize the gods (*Mon.* 5,4–5,6; 5,8).¹² Theodoretus quotes *Phoen.* (546–547) to show that the sun and the night have been created by God and that the Greeks are wrong in taking them for God himself (*Gr. affect. cur.* 4,40–41).

Very often, Euripides is quoted as a voice favouring the existence of providence. Athenagoras, for instance, quotes a passage from the *Cyclops* (332–333), where he sees an indication of the general providence from which no one can escape. On the other hand, he gives an unknown fragment (fr. 901 Kannicht) to support the idea that the earthly events may not be conform with hope and justice, and that in that respect they may depend on the Demon, and not God.¹³ Euripides is thus adduced for making a distinction between a general providence and a particular providence, on which only the most worthy depend. Theophilus does not make this distinction and uses Euripides twice to support the existence of a divine providence:

⁹ Zeegers-Vander Vorst notices that a small anthology transmitted in a papyrus (Pap. Ross. Georg. I, n° 9, 62–63) contains the same passage (49).

¹⁰ See also *Prot.* 76,1, where Homer, Euripides and “other poets” are said to “confound the gods”.

¹¹ In the context of the quotations, this passage is not adduced to prove the inexistence of the gods as such, but to underline the *contradiction* of the Greeks who sometimes speak of many gods, and sometimes deny their existence.

¹² Eur. *Or.* 416–418; 591–598; fr. 445 Kannicht; *Ion* 433–451; fr. 254, 286b, 286, 832, 794, 480 Kannicht; *Tro.* 886–887.

¹³ For both quotations, see Athenag. *Suppl.* 25,1–2.

first, in a dossier of poetic witnesses on providence (*Autol.* 2,8);¹⁴ second, in another dossier of poetical witnesses about the fact that injustice is always punished (2,37).¹⁵ Ps.-Justin's *De monarchia* cites Euripides' fr. 835 Kannicht and fr. 1131 Nauck (= TrGF 2, adesp. fr. 624 Kannicht-Snell) in a unique quotation, as an illustration that the wicked are always punished by God (*Mon.* 3,3). The same composite quotation recurs in Clement (*Strom.* 5,121,3)¹⁶ and Eusebius (*Praep. ev.* 13,13,47).¹⁷

Another aspect of the supposed condemnation of polytheism that Christians connect to Euripides consists in the way they seek to present the tragic poet as an "Euhemeristic" thinker. Clement of Alexandria quotes a passage from *Alcestitis*, 3–4 (Zeus has killed Asclepios) in a discussion where he seeks to show that the pagan gods were formerly humans (*Prot.* 30,2). In the first *Stromateus*, he mentions Euripides again as a witness for the fact that Asclepios but also other gods (Hermes, Tiresias, Mantô) were former humans (*Strom.* 1,134,1). We could add a passage from Theodoretus, who alludes to *Orestes* (1689 sqq.) to show that the Greeks have divinized vile human beings, like Helen, brought to heaven, despite her many adulteries (*Gr. affect. cur.* 3,32). In another passage (8,24), he says that Homer, Euripides and "many others" have contended that Dionysos was the son of Semele, viz. a human being, and that the Greeks were wrong in considering him as a god.¹⁸ We may quote in the same category a passage in which Tatian praises Euripides for representing Helen killed by Orestes (*or.* 10,49),¹⁹ which shows, according to him, that Helen was not immortal – but that does not necessarily imply an "Euhemeristic" reading of Euripides, but simply that the tragic poet, according to Tatian, did not recognize Helen as a goddess.

These are the main themes which appear in Christian apologetics of the 2nd c. They all concern God, considered either in himself, in his providential activity or in his relation to the gods of polytheism.

As has been shown, the later apologies – Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica*, in the 4th c., Theodoretus' *Therapeutic of the Hellenic maladies*, in the 5th c. – continue this usage of Euripides as a voice supporting the Christian conception of God. In Theodoretus, however, other usages may be found. For instance, the bishop of Cyrrhus quotes several passages from Euripides in order to show the necessity of possessing faith before learning the doctrines (*Gr. affect. cur.* 1,86–87).²⁰ He also quotes two

14 Eur. fr. 391, 1089 Kannicht (Theophilus is the only witness of the latter fragment).

15 Eur. fr. 1090, 1091, 1092, 303 Kannicht; *IA* 396.

16 Attributed to Diphilus.

17 The first part (fr. 835 Kannicht) is already quoted by Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 1,274 and 287) and recurs later in Stobaeus (1,3,15).

18 Cf. Eur. *Ba.* 1 sqq.

19 Tatian may refer either to *Or.* 1423 and 1512, where Helen's death is alluded to, or to the character of Cytemnestra, which, in this case, he mistakes for Helen (see H. Grelier Deneux's note in Pouderon i.a. 2017, 1313 n. 44).

20 Eur. *Ba.* 472 (from Clem. Al. *Strom.* 4,25,162), *Phoen.* 471–472 (from Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1,8,40), fr. 432 Kannicht (Clem. Al. *Strom.* 6,2,10; 5,3,16).

texts from the tragic poet (*Oenomaos*, fr. 574 and *Phoenix*, fr. 811 Kannicht) in order to invite the reader to rely on the biblical prophecies – in the two passages, Euripides writes that we can infer what cannot be seen from the clues which can be seen (*Gr. affect. cur.* 6,90). In another passage, Euripides is quoted in a dossier about the traditional topic of the contradictions of the Greeks: some have said that human life was happy – Theodoretus does not quote any text here –, some, like Homer, Theognis, Euripides (fr. 449,3–6 Kannicht) and Solon, have presented it as doomed to unhappiness. The tragic poet, here, is not used anymore as a voice supporting Christianity, but as a good example of the contradictory views of the Greeks (*Gr. affect. cur.* 5,12). In all these passages, Theodoretus is inspired by Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis*.²¹ We have here a good illustration of the influence of a writing, which was not properly speaking an “apology”, on the apologetic tradition.²²

3 Explanations of the Agreement between Euripides and the Christians

The first Christian thinkers did not find it difficult to account for the fact that the poets may not tell the truth. In this case, they naturally explained that they were inspired by the demons, or at least, lacked God's revelation.²³ The fact that they may also be true was more difficult to account for. In the Christian texts of antiquity, three explanations can be found:

- 1) They have “stolen” pieces of revelation from the Prophets, either by reading Scripture or receiving this gift by the demons.
- 2) They were in a way, like the Prophets, inspired by God.
- 3) They knew the Logos by their use of reason – this is the *logoi spermatikoi* explanation given by Justin, for example.²⁴

Sometimes, explanations 2 and 3 are mixed – the rational research of truth being considered, then, as a “natural” revelation.²⁵

In the case of Euripides, each explanation may be found. The most polemical one, viz. the first one, is used by Theophilus who, after quoting Euripides and

²¹ See above, p. 257.

²² Clement was certainly the best Christian reader of Euripides in antiquity: he quotes many more texts than his predecessors, and testifies to more diverse usages than the “theological” use of Euripides in the apologetes of the 2nd c. AD. On Euripides in Clement, see, in this volume, Francesco Massa's contribution.

²³ See p. 351 note 1 above.

²⁴ See Iust. Mart. *Apol.* 2,7,1–2; 10,8; 13,3–5.

²⁵ For a more general overview of the ancient Christian reflexion on the agreement between Greek literature and Christianity, see Morlet 2019: Sébastien Morlet, *Symphonia. La concorde des textes et des doctrines dans la littérature grecque jusqu'à Origène*, Paris.

other poets, states that they have stolen their words from the Law and the Prophets and expressed oracles against themselves (*Autol.* 2,37). The same passage also expresses the idea that the Greeks played the role of *witnesses* of truth before the coming of Christ, in order to confirm in advance the truth of his doctrine.

The second explanation – viz. the Greeks were inspired by God – is suggested in a passage of Clement, who, before quoting Euripides, states that “into all men whatever, especially those who are occupied with intellectual pursuits (τοῖς περὶ λόγους ἐνδιατρίβουσιν), a certain divine effluence (ἀπορροία θεϊκή) has been instilled” (*Protr.* 68,2, tr. Wilson). It is obvious here that Clement conceives this inspiration in a rational sense – it is the study of reason which is a participation to God, or at least *implies* or *results in* such a participation –, which is not always clearly the case.²⁶

Most often, indeed, the apologetic texts stress the rational side of Euripides’ drama to account for his wisdom. Before citing Euripides about the one God, Eusebius, quoting Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 5,113,4) says that “Tragedy also draws us away from the idols, and teaches us to look up to heaven” (*Praep. ev.* 13,13,40). In order to justify Euripides’s wisdom, the Christians recall his supposed relations with philosophers. Clement for instance, says that the tragic poet was “worthy of Socrates’s school” (ἄξιος [...] Σωκρατικῆς διατριβῆς, *Protr.* 7,76,3). Eusebius makes him a disciple of Anaxagoras who “moved to poetry” (ἐπὶ ποιητικὴν μεταβάς) and was called “the philosopher on the stage” (*Praep. ev.* 10,14,13 = T 37d Kannicht).²⁷

It is interesting to see here how Clement and Eusebius try to integrate Euripides in the history of philosophy, or, more precisely, to situate him between philosophy and poetry proper. Origen also, though despising dramas, writes that, in the famous oracle in which Apollo presents Socrates as the most sage of all men, the God added: “Sophocles is wise, but Euripides is wiser” (c. *Cels.* 7,6).²⁸ This passage is significant for the intermediary status of Euripides in the mind of the Christians.

4 Origin and Authenticity of the Quotations

It is generally assumed that most of the quotations made in the apologetic writings of the 2nd c. AD, but also in Ps.-Justin’s *Cohortatio a Graecos* (4th c. AD), derive from ready-made anthologies, and not from a direct knowledge of Euripides. Three facts may be adduced to sustain this idea:

²⁶ See *Protr.* 72,5; *Strom.* 1,42,1; 6,755, 4–56,1.

²⁷ The phrase “philosopher on (or off) the stage” is also used about Euripides by Clement (*Strom.* 5,70,2 = T 166d Kannicht). On Euripides as a pupil of Anaxagoras, see also T 35–38 Kannicht.

²⁸ Plato (*Apol.* 21a) does not give this part of the oracle. The text given by Origen can be found also in the Scholia on Aristophanes (Schol. Ar. *Nub.* 144c) and Plato (see Arethas’ scholion on *Apol.* 21a), and in the *Souda* (σ 820).

- 1) The same passages are quoted by the same writers, but differently (the same text may be quoted in a shorter or a longer form), which tends to show that they do not depend on one another, but on common sources.
- 2) The quotations are not always attributed to the same writers. For instances, Ps.-Justin (*Mon.* 2,3) attributes to Philemon a text attributed to Euripides by Clement (*Protr.* 68,3).
- 3) All the quotations made in the 2nd c. to show the concord of Euripides with Christian doctrines concern God and the Gods. It is obvious, consequently, that they all stem from the same thematical dossier – I use the word “dossier”, here, in a wide sense.

Now, two cases must be distinguished. Some Christian writers depend on other Christian writers. For instance, most of the quotations made by Eusebius and Theodoretus stem from Clement of Alexandria. The problem is more difficult in the case of 2nd c., or pseudo-2nd c. writers (Ps.-Justin). Bernard Pouderon has already noticed that the collection of poetical witnesses in Ps.-Justin’s *De monarchia* 2–4 (except two Orphic quotations) and 5 (quotation 21) find close parallels in Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromateus* 5 (the same quotations recur almost always in the same order).²⁹ Since Clement gives the name of a source (Ps.-Hecataeus’ *On the time of Abram and the Egyptians*, *Strom.* 5,113,1), Pouderon assumes that Ps.-Hecataeus may also be the source of *De monarchia* 2–4. Ps.-Hecataeus was a Jewish writer, possibly of the 2nd c. BC.³⁰ Like Aristobulus, he used quotations from Greek texts in order to confirm biblical doctrines.³¹

Pouderon also reproduces Zeegers-Vander Vorst’s hypothesis that the collection of poetical texts in *De monarchia* 5 (except quotation 21) may depend on a lost Stoic anthology, possibly composed by Chrysippus – contrary to the collection of *De monarchia* 2–4, *De monarchia* 5 contains only extracts from Euripides and Menander, always gives the titles of the plays, and the quotations are never found in Clement’s *Stromateus* 5, but may often be found in pagan writers, especially Plutarch, who, while giving the same quotation from Euripides’ *Bellerophon* (fr. 286 Kannicht) as *De monarchia* 5,6, explicitly refers to Chrysippus (*Stoic. rep.* 1049–1050).³² However, Pouderon thinks that it is improbable that Ps.-Justin knew a work by Chrysippus, and concludes as a high possibility that the whole of *De monarchia* 2–5 may stem from one and the same source, maybe a Jewish one – Ps.-Hecataeus, or another one.³³

²⁹ See Pouderon 2009, 361–380.

³⁰ On this writer, see Holladay 1983, 277–335. The first author who mentioned his work on the story of Abraham is Josephus (*Ant.* 1,159). Holladay also gives a few ancient testimonies about Ps.-Hecataeus’ *On the Jews*, which may be identical to the work *On the time of Abram and the Egyptians*.

³¹ On Aristobulus, see Holladay 1995.

³² See Pouderon 2009, 378–380.

³³ *Loc. cit.*

I agree with this analysis, but I think that further hypotheses may be made. First, Pouderon's idea that *De monarchia* 2–5 could stem from one and the same source may be sustained by the fact that, in *De monarchia* 5, one quotation (n° 21) recurs in *Stromateus* 5 (133,3), like the quotations from *De monarchia* 2–4: that would tend to indicate that the two dossiers which Pouderon distinguishes were probably one and the same in the source of *De monarchia*.

The two Orphic quotations in *De monarchia* may be found also in Clement, *Strom.* 5,123,2–124,1 and *Protr.* 74–75, and Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 13,12,5, but Pouderon shows that Eusebius depends on Aristobulus, as the bishop of Caesarea states explicitly, and the version of the Orphic text he gives is clearly different from the one which is given in *De monarchia* and by Clement.³⁴ On the other hand, slight differences between Ps-Justin and Clement do not prevent us from thinking that they *can* have the same source: not Aristobulus (Eusebius' source), but another source, which could naturally be identified to Clement's explicit source in *Stromateus* 5: Ps.-Hecataeus?

Now, the identification of the source of Ps.-Justin's *De monarchia* should take into account more parallels than Clement's *Stromateis* and Eusebius, especially in Athenagoras' *Supplication* 5 and Clement's *Protrepticus*. In Clement's *Stromateus* 5, the only quotation which is explicitly attributed to Ps.-Hecataeus is a fragment of Sophocles (fr. 1025 Nauck) which recurs in Athenagoras, *Suppl.* 5,3 and also in his own *Protr.* 7,74,2. That would tend to confirm that Ps.-Hecataeus was also the source of these two works here. In Clement's *Stromateus* 5, the fragment from Sophocles is followed by Euripides, fr. 941 Kannicht, which, again, is to be found in the same dossier in Athenagoras (*Suppl.* 5,1) and Clement (*Protr.* 7,74,1). Consequently, it very probably derives, once again, from the same source. If this is so, then Euripides' fr. 480 Kannicht, which is to be found at the same time in *De monarchia* 5 and Athenagoras, just after fr. 941 Kannicht, would give a further clue that *De monarchia* 5 derives from the same source as *De monarchia* 2–4 and that this source may be Ps.-Hecataeus.³⁵

I would then be less reluctant than Bernard Pouderon in assuming that Ps.-Hecataeus was the common source of most of Euripides's quotations in Athenagoras, Clement's *Stromateus* 5 and *Protrepticus*, and Ps.-Justin's *De monarchia*. From the Christian apologists, Carl R. Holladay only retains the quotation of Sophocles fr. 1025 Nauck as a fragment of Ps.-Hecataeus, because this quotation occurs just

³⁴ Pouderon 2009, 371.

³⁵ I am not convinced by Zeegers Vander-Vorst's analysis of Athenag. *Suppl.* 5. Even though she knows that fr. 480 and 941 Kannicht of Euripides were famous among Christians (164), she wants to connect them to a philosophical, Epicurean source. She is aware that Sophocles' fr. 1025 Nauck (= TrGF 2, adesp. F 618) raises a problem, and explains that Athenagoras would have added this text by memory (167). The comparison of Athenagoras' dossier with Clement and Ps.-Justin permits us to make a more economical hypothesis. The origin of part of Athenagoras' dossier may be Epicurean or more generally philosophical, but that does not mean that Athenagoras did not know these quotations through the lens of an intermediary source.

after the mention of Ps.-Hecataeus as Clement's source,³⁶ but it is obvious that at least the following quotation from Greek poets (Eur. fr. 941 Kannicht), and maybe other following quotations, also stem from the same source, and that the collection of fragments of Ps.-Hecataeus should be opened to Clement's *Protrepticus* and Athenagoras' *Supplication*.³⁷

Theoretically, some quotations of Euripides made by the Christians may stem from Aristobulus, another Jewish writer who is known to have used Greek poets and philosophers. The extant fragments, however, do not contain any quotation from Euripides.³⁸ Nonetheless, Theophilus gives a few quotations from the tragic, but none may be found in Athenagoras or Clement. This would tend to indicate that his source was not Ps.-Hecataeus.³⁹ But he quotes a passage from Aratos (1,1–9) that we know Aristobulus did mention (*Autol.* 8).⁴⁰ The latter, consequently, may be Theophilus's source.⁴¹ But it is possible that Aristobulus used Ps.-Hecataeus. If this is so, then he could also be the actual source of Athenagoras and Ps.-Justin's *De monarchia*. But this hypothesis would not be very economical.⁴² A common view is that Ps.-Hecataeus and Aristobulus were "Jewish forgers", but Nauck's judgement was a bit more cautious: in his collection of Euripides' fragments, the "dubia et spuria" begin with fr. 1107:⁴³ that would imply that part of the fragments quoted by the Christians were probably spurious, but part of them was maybe authentic.

Another theoretical source for some of the quotations made by the apologists is the philosophical literature. If a quotation is to be found again in a philosopher, we could at least wonder if a philosophical source may not lie behind this quotation, if there is no reason to think that a Jewish anthology has been used. Zeegers-Vander

³⁶ See Holladay 1983, 277–335.

³⁷ Holladay admits that perhaps the other poetical quotations in *Strom* 5,14,114,1–4 also stem from Ps.-Hecataeus, but refrains from including them in his collection of fragments (Holladay 1983, 279).

³⁸ See Holladay's edition, quoted note 31.

³⁹ Apart from the quotation Theophilus makes from Aratos (2,8: see below), absolutely no poetical quotation in *Autol.* 2,8 and 2,37 recurs in Athenag. *Suppl.* 5 or Clem. Al. *Strom* 5.

⁴⁰ The same quotation is explicitly attributed to Aristobulus by Eusebius (*Praep. ev.* 13,12,7 = Aristobulus, fr. 4,6 Holladay). Clement quotes a longer quotation of the same passage (*Strom.* 5,101,2–3). This is the only common quotation between Theophilus and Clement's *Strom.* 5. Paul, in the *Acts of the Apostles*, already quotes a short passage from the same text (*Ac* 17,28), which could indicate that Luke was already dependent on Aristobulus.

⁴¹ Zeegers-Vander Vorst thought that *Autol.* 2,8 was dependent on an "Urflorilegium" which would have been used also by Stobaeus and Orion (117). But, throughout her book, she does not seem to distinguish between the problem of the "origin" of the quotations and the question of the "sources". A parallel between a Christian writer and Stobaeus may well give an indication on the ultimate origin of the quotations, but the actual source(s) used by the Christian may be an intermediary text between him and this origin. The Jewish writers may have been intermediaries between philosophical anthologies and Christian writers. Zeegers-Vander Vorst does not think of that possibility. She draws the same kind of conclusion concerning *Autol.* 2,37 (see below).

⁴² See Pouderon 2009, 375.

⁴³ See Nauck and Snell 1964, 708.

Vorst thought that *De monarchia* 5 (except quotation n° 21) was derived from a Stoic work, possibly of Chrysippus, because of a few parallel in philosophical literature. But, as we saw, though this collection exhibits parallels with Plutarch,⁴⁴ it stems more probably from a Jewish anthology, possibly deriving directly or indirectly from a Stoic anthology. Apart from the parallels with Plutarch,⁴⁵ parallels with Stobaeus are also interesting. Though this author is later than most of the apologists mentioned in this article (5th c. AD), he often draws on philosophical collections.⁴⁶ Four fragments from Euripides quoted by the apologists can also be found in Stobaeus: fr. 286b, 303, 432 and 941 Kannicht. But fr. 941, though also known to Lucian, probably derives, in the Christian apologists, from Ps.-Hecataeus.⁴⁷ The same may be true of fr. 286b. Fr. 303 raises the question of Theophilus' source in *Autol.* 2,37 – I would rather tend to ascribe it to a Jewish anthology than to a philosophical anthology, but the question needs to remain open.⁴⁸ Fr. 432 is quoted by Theodoretus (*Gr. affect. cur.* 1,87), but Theodoretus is here inspired by Clement of Alexandria. The fact that this fragment is quoted by Clement and Stobaeus could probably indicate, nonetheless, that Clement depends on a philosophical source, but his *Stromateis* are not properly speaking an “apology”. To conclude, there is no clear direct philosophical background behind the quotations of Euripides made in the apologetical writings, except the one made by Eusebius in *Praep. ev.* 14,16,1, which he explicitly draws from Ps.-Plutarch. But, as we saw, Eusebius or his source may be mistaken in attrib-

⁴⁴ See the table given by Pouderon 2009, 363–364.

⁴⁵ Another parallel, this time between Plutarch and Athenag. *Suppl.* 25 (cf. *Eur. Cycl.* 332–333) led Zeegers-Vander Vorst to assume, once again, that the Christian had a philosophical source (175–176). This conclusion raises the same problem as her book in general: though she is aware of the existence of Jewish greek anthologies of poets and of their influence on the first Christian literature, she often never mentions them in the core of her demonstration (except 186–189 about the “plagiarism anthology” used by Clement and Ps.-Justin). Based on a constant comparison between the Christians and *Greek authors*, her method cannot lead but to one and the same result: the Christians would have used pagan sources. Her analysis is precious to identify the *background* of the quotations made by the first Christians, but not necessarily their *sources*.

⁴⁶ On Stobaeus, see Reydam-Schils 2010.

⁴⁷ See above, p. 367.

⁴⁸ Zeegers Vander-Vorst notices close parallels between Theophilus and Stobaeus and concludes, once again, that both were dependent on the same source, an anthology (“un recueil unique”, 126). It is possible, but it is also possible that Theophilus was more directly dependent on an intermediary source, and not the source used by Stobaeus. She is not very clear about the identity of the source used by Theophilus (greek? Jewish? p. 306 she speaks about Antioch’s “Jewish-Christian milieu”, which would imply the use of Jewish sources). The fact that Theophilus quotes the Sibylline Oracles, a collection of Jewish origin, would theoretically sustain the assumption that this source was Jewish (Aristobulus? Ps.-Hecataeus?). Socrates of Constantinople (*Hist. eccl.* 3,16,26) was convinced that Paul himself, in 1 Cor 15, 33 (*Bad associations corrupt good morals*), had quoted a verse from Euripides (fr. 1024,4 Kannicht). This verse was sometimes thought to be from Menander (Jerome, *ep.* 70,2). Possible echoes to Euripides may be found in the Christian anonymous collections of pagan texts which Erbse called ‘theosophies’ (Erbse 1995). In the ‘Tübingen Theosophy’, there is a quotation from Euripides’ supposed *Oedipous* (fr. 554 Kannicht): see Erbse 1995, 55.

uting a play entitled *Sisyphus* to Euripides – it may be a reference to the well-known passage from Critias’ *Sisyphus* about the “invention” of the gods.⁴⁹

We have to wonder eventually if any of the quotations made by the apologists can stem from a direct reading of Euripides, but I am a bit skeptical about this idea, at least in apologetic literature proper. In Clement’s *Stromateis*, which I have excluded from this study, the case may be different since Clement quotes Euripides many times and seems to have a good knowledge of this writer. Theodoretus, who seems generally to depend on Clement when he quotes Euripides, has an interesting commentary on *Phoen.* 546–547:

Καὶ τοῦτ’ οὖν ἐν ταῖς Φοινίσσαις Εὐριπίδης δεδήλωκε, λέγων ὥδι·
εἴθ’ ἥλιος μὲν νύξ τε δουλεύει βροτοῖς,
σὺ δ’ οὐκ ἀνέξει δωμάτων ἔχειν ἴσον; (*Phoen.* 546–547)
Ἄλλ’ ὁ μὲν Εὐριπίδης τὸν ἥλιον καὶ τὴν σελήνην δουλεύειν ἔφη βροτοῖς· ὑμεῖς δὲ δουλεύειν τοῖς
ὑμετέροις γε δούλοις ἀνέχεσθαι τε καὶ τὸ θεῖον αὐτοῖς **ἀπονέμετε** σέβας.

And this is what Euripides has shown in the *Phoenician women*, where he says:

Though both sun and night are servants for mortals,

You will not be content to have an equal part of the house? (*Phoen.* 546–547)

Euripides said that sun and night are servants for mortals; but you are content to be servants for your own servants and you **assign** to them the divine honour! (Theodrt. *Gr. affect. cur.* 4,40–41)

Theodoretus uses the passage in order to show the contradiction of the pagans who worship sun and night, though they are, according to Euripides, servants for mortals. It is remarkable that, in his brief commentary, Theodoretus uses the verb ἀπονέμειν after the verbe ἀνέχειν. The latter stems directly from Euripides’ text, but not the former. Ἀπονέμειν, however, can be found in a scholion on the very same passage from Euripides:

(546.) εἴθ’ ἥλιος μὲν· εἴτα ὁ ἥλιος μὲν καὶ ἡ νύξ τῷ ἴσῳ δουλεύουσι, σὺ δ’ οὐκ ἀνέξει τῶν
δωμάτων ἔχων τὸ ἴσον δουλεύειν τῇ ἰσότητι: —MTAB
(547.) ἔχων ἴσον· ἐὰν γράφηται ἔχειν, καὶ **ἀπονέμειν**· ἐὰν δὲ ἔχων, καὶ **ἀπονέμων**: —
MTAB

“Though both sun and night”: Though both sun and night are servants for equality, you will not be content to have an equal part of the house and to be servant for equality?

“having an equal part”: if “to have” is written, it is also “**to assign**”; if it is “having”, it is also “**assigning**”.

The scholion gives ἀπονέμειν as a synonym for ἔχειν ἴσον. As a consequence, it could well be Theodoretus’ source. If this is so, we could be tempted to conclude that the bishop of Cyrrhus had a personal knowledge of both the text of Euripides, and the commentary transmitted in the scholion. But we should be sure, first, that he could not depend on a lost intermediary. A possible intermediary could be the lost

⁴⁹ See for instance Sext. *Math.* 9,54.

section of Clement's *Stromateis*. But it could be older than Clement. *Phoen.* 546–547 does not appear to have been quoted very often in Greek literature. Among the pagan texts, we just have a fragment from Oenomaos (fr. 14), quoted by Eusebius, two passages from Origen's *Contra Celsum* (4,30 and 4,77) and one letter from Isidorus of Pelusia (Letter 1035, 1,104 Évieux). Oenomaos' use of the quotation is not in line with Theodoretus. It occurs in a series of quotations from *The Phoenicians* in order to show the impossibility of predicting the future and takes the story of Eteocles and Polynices as an example. Isidorus, however, quotes the passage in a way which echoes Theodoretus, as a pagan testimony about sun and night as creatures. In Origen's *Contra Celsum*, we learn that Celsus accused the Christians of believing that everything was created for their service. He imagines that his reader could quote *Phoen.* 546 (Εἰ δὲ καὶ τὸ εὐριπίδειον ἔρῃς, "If you mention this passage from Euripides") in order to support this view. It is difficult to understand if Celsus simply assumed that a Christian *might* quote such a text, or if he knew a Christian, or a Jewish text who *actually* quoted it – maybe in the way Theodoretus and Isidorus would do later. When Origen answers, he accuses Celsus of calumniating the Christians, and of having been inspired by a text close to *Phoen.* 546, but which never existed, or which was phrased differently.⁵⁰ But Origen may not know Celsus' actual source – if he had one – or may pretend not to know it. It remains very strange to find *Phoen.* 546 presented in a pagan work as a *possible* Christian argument about sun and night as creatures and to find again the same verse, now in an *actual* Christian text quoted with the following verse, three centuries later, in a very close way. I would be reluctant to think that Theodoretus followed the suggestion made by Celsus and actualized what Celsus simply imagined as a possibility. The most economical explanation might be that Celsus and Theodoretus are both dependent on a common Christian or Jewish source, which is now lost, and which Isidorus may also have known. And if this is so, it is impossible to know if the parallel between Theodoretus and the scholion on *Phoen.* 546–547 illustrates Theodoretus' originality, or the originality of a lost text.

5 Conclusion

There is a constant use of Euripides in Christian apologetics from the first texts to the 5th c. AD. Sometimes, the tragic poet is attacked as a pagan writer, testifying to indecent practices; but more often, he is quoted as a support for Christian doctrines.

The very first apologies seem to depend essentially on one or several ready-made collections of poetical *testimonia* about the one and provident God. At least one of these collections is to be identified to Ps.-Hecataeus' work *On the time of Abram and the Egyptians*.

50 This is, in any case, what I understand from Orig. *c. Cels.* 4,30.

A second step in this history was Clement's *Stromateis*, which were not an apology proper, but which had a strong influence on later apologists, both Eusebius and Theodoretus. Clement knew Ps.-Hecataeus, but he also knew philosophical sources and he may have had a personal knowledge of the tragic poet.

Eusebius and Theodoretus represent a third step in the history of Euripides' integration within Christian thought. In their work, the two traditions merge: the one from the 2nd c. apologists and the other from Clement.

Christian apologetics had two consequences in the reception history of Euripides' drama. First, it helped to save from oblivion a few fragments which the Christian apologists are sometimes the first, or the only ones to transmit.⁵¹ Second, apologetics, generally speaking, helped make Greek writers acceptable in the new Christian culture. Though a few quotations made by the Christians may be spurious, their apologetic use of the tragic poet gave him a place in the history of revelation, as a major pagan authority, situated between philosophy and poetry.⁵²

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51 The first ones: fr. 286b Kannicht (Ps.-Justin); fr. 303 and 391 (Theophilus); fr. 432 (Clement and Theodoretus); the only ones: fr. 286 and 445 (Ps.-Justin); fr. 574 (Clement and Theodoretus); 794 (Ps.-Justin); 811 (Clement and Theodoretus); 832 (Ps.-Justin); fr. 900–901 (Athenagoras); 1089–1092 (Theophilus).

52 A text like the *Christus patiens*, which may be late antique or medieval, would certainly never have existed if the first Christian generations of authors would not have used Euripides as the Greek poet who, like Plato among philosophers, was, in their view, the best pagan witness of Christian doctrines. Among the quotations made by the apologists, at least one is to be found again the *Christus patiens*: Ba. 472, quoted at CP 1549, and already quoted before by Clement (*Strom* 4,25,162) and Theodoretus (*Gr. aff. cur.* 1,86–87).

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