

## THE POLITICS OF RELIGION: LIBATION AND TRUCE IN EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*\*

Euripides' *Bacchae* is one of the most intensively studied Greek tragedies. Generations of scholars have explored the play from different perspectives and offered fascinating insights. But there are still aspects that have not received the attention they deserve. One such aspect is Euripides' use of libation as a dramatic motif. Even though this motif relates directly to the question of the tragic conflict between Dionysus and Pentheus, it has never been discussed in detail and its dramatic impact has not been fully acknowledged.<sup>1</sup>

There are four passages in the *Bacchae* where libation is referred to, once in the prologue (45), twice in the first episode (284, 313) and once in the fourth episode (924). In all four passages, Euripides uses words and forms of the group σπένδω-σπονδή. This use raises two basic questions: apart from the more general question of the role of libation, there is the question of the use of the group itself. The meaning of this group is not restricted to libation; it also refers to the institution of the truce. Thus the group belongs to the religious language of ritual as well as to the political language of treaties, and, while certain words and forms of σπένδω-σπονδή refer to only one sphere of meaning, others are ambiguous and comprise both spheres.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are only few studies of libation as a literary motif. For Greek tragedy, see A. Henrichs, 'The "sobriety" of Oedipus: Sophocles *OC* 100 misunderstood', *HSPH* 87 (1983), 87–100; A. Henrichs, "'Let the good prevail": perversions of the ritual process in Greek tragedy', in D. Yatromanolakis and P. Roilos (edd.), *Greek Ritual Poetics* (Washington, D.C., 2004), 189–98. For libation in general, see J. von Fritze, *De libatione veterum Graecorum* (Berlin, 1893); K. Hanell, 'Trankopfer', *RE* 6.A.2 (1937), 2131–7; J. Rudhardt, *Notions fondamentales de la pensée religieuse et actes constitutifs du culte dans la Grèce classique* (Genève, 1958), 240–8; J. Casabona, *Recherches sur le vocabulaire des sacrifices en grec – des origines à la fin de l'époque classique* (Aix-en-Provence, 1966), 231–97; F. Graf, 'Milch, Honig und Wein. Zum Verständnis der Libation im griechischen Ritual', in *Perennitas. Studi in onore di Angelo Brelich* (Roma, 1980), 209–21; E. Simon, 'Libation', *ThesCRA* 1 (2004), 237–53; W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche* (Stuttgart, 2011<sup>2</sup>), 113–17. For libation as a motif in art, see F. Lissarrague, 'Un rituel du vin: la libation', in O. Murray and M. Tecusan, (edd.), *In Vino Veritas* (London, 1995), 126–44; M. Gaifman, *The Art of Libation in Classical Athens* (New Haven and London, 2018); and, for the theme of divine libation, K.C. Patton, *Religion of the Gods: Ritual, Paradox, and Reflexivity* (Oxford, 2009), 27–180.

<sup>2</sup> For the uses of the group σπένδω-σπονδή, and also for the libation terms of the groups χέω-χοή and λείβω-λοιβή, see Casabona (n. 1), 231–97.

My aim in this paper is to explore the motif of libation as a multifaceted feature of the *Bacchae*. In particular, I will try to show that in the four passages in question Euripides makes deliberate use of the double sense of the group σπένδω-σπονδή in order to deepen the notion of the tragic conflict from the two perspectives of religion and politics that are crucial concerns of the play. The libation motif is not just connected to questions of worship and piety; it also forms part of the depiction of the tragic conflict in terms of military action; it points, moreover, to the role of liquids as an aspect of Dionysus' nature and stands in close relation to the role of sacrifice.

The argument that Euripides plays with the double sense of the words of the group σπένδω-σπονδή is not entirely new, but has never been seriously considered. Sandys and a few other commentators in the nineteenth century suggested a double sense for σπένδεται in the first episode (284), and Segal believed as much for ἔνσπονδος in the fourth episode (924).<sup>3</sup> But these are isolated suggestions that have not been explored further. Just as it has not been asked whether there is a double sense in all four passages, so the question of its dramatic function has not been discussed. When briefly touching the motif of libation in his seminal book on the *Bacchae*, Segal does not acknowledge its full extent; in the context of a structural interpretation in terms of oppositions, libation is reduced to an aspect of 'normal civic ritual' that proves 'irrelevant' in the realm of the god.<sup>4</sup> But why does Dionysus himself mention libation in his complaint about Pentheus in the prologue (45)? Is the god's early reference to libation not a clear sign that the ritual matters to him, and are the *polis* and politics not essential spheres of his influence?<sup>5</sup> Does the libation motif in the *Bacchae* perhaps have a greater dramatic impact than interpreters have assumed?<sup>6</sup>

## 1. THE GOD'S COMPLAINT

The play opens with Dionysus explaining his arrival at Thebes. Having been rejected as a god in the town of his birth and by his own relatives, he has returned to demonstrate his divine power. The prologue makes it clear that this process has already been set in motion: the Theban women have been driven out of the city and roam, possessed by the god, through the wilderness of Mount Cithaeron (23–38). But Thebes is in danger of even greater troubles. The god wants to punish the entire city (39–40), and his anger is directed especially at Pentheus:

<sup>3</sup> For these suggestions, see below, sections 1 and 3 respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. C. Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (Princeton, 1997<sup>2</sup>), 45–6. The pertinent commentaries do not include discussion of libation as a motif in the *Bacchae*. These include E.R. Dodds, *Euripides: Bacchae* (Oxford, 1960<sup>2</sup>), R. Seaford, *Euripides: Bacchae* (Warminster, 1996) and J. Roux, *Euripide: Les Bacchantes. Vol. 2: Commentaire* (Paris, 1972).

<sup>5</sup> For Dionysus and the *polis*, see R. Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State* (Oxford, 1994), 235–327. For the historical *polis* as a background of the play, see Seaford (n. 4), 44–52; see also Segal (n. 4), ix–x. For the significance of politico-religious concepts in the *Bacchae*, see V. Leinieks, *The City of Dionysos: A Study of Euripides' Bakchai* (Stuttgart, 1996), 327–49. For the political dimension of Dionysus in tragedy in general, see A. Bierl, *Dionysos und die griechische Tragödie. Politische und 'metatheatralische' Aspekte im Text* (Tübingen, 1991), 45–110.

<sup>6</sup> Segal's narrow interpretation of libation is particularly surprising in view of the significance he attaches to the connection of Dionysus with liquids (cf. Segal [n. 4], 65, 69, 149–56) as well as to Pentheus' martial opposition to the god (cf. Segal [n. 4], 99, 105–6, 129–30). The former points to the significance of libation as a ritual centring on liquids, the latter to the relevance of the political sense of the group σπένδω-σπονδή.

ὃς θεομαχεῖ τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ καὶ σπονδῶν ἄπο  
ὠθεῖ μ' ἐν εὐχαίς τ' οὐδαμοῦ μνεῖαν ἔχει.<sup>7</sup> 45

He does battle with the god in what concerns me and pushes me away from libations / from a truce and nowhere remembers me in prayers.

It is usually taken for granted that this accusation concerns only worship and cult. Libation and prayer are, in fact, often mentioned together, and it is rightly acknowledged by scholars of Greek religion that they are complementary ritual features.<sup>8</sup> The juxtaposition of σπονδῶν and εὐχαίς may, therefore, simply refer to ritual action and speech: Pentheus refuses to pour libations in Dionysus' honour and to include the god in his prayers.<sup>9</sup> But why is his refusal of worship addressed in terms of libation (σπονδῆ) rather than sacrifice (θυσία), the main form of public worship of the gods? And how certain is it that σπονδῶν is not used here in the political sense 'truce' which it can also have?

The question of whether the plural σπονδαί means 'libations' or 'truce' depends entirely on the respective context.<sup>10</sup> While a decision is usually not difficult to make, in the present context there are several indicators that suggest that Euripides plays with both senses. Among other things, Dionysus' self-introduction is a powerful political statement that aims at the disruption of the whole *polis* (39–40, 47–8). The fact that the god speaks of Pentheus as the ruler and representative of Thebes (43–4) highlights his official role and his responsibility for the city and the well-being of its inhabitants.<sup>11</sup> More importantly, the relationship between the god and the Theban ruler is described in terms of war and fighting: in line 45, σπονδῶν is not just combined with εὐχαίς; it is also juxtaposed with θεομαχεῖ, which is first attested in the *Bacchae*<sup>12</sup> and prominently, at the beginning of the sentence, characterizes Pentheus as a person who 'does battle with the god'. The notion of violent physical action is further enhanced by the metaphor σπονδῶν ἄπο | ὠθεῖ με (45–6), which emphasizes that Pentheus is not just religiously negligent but outright hostile and aggressive. With ὠθέω Euripides uses a word that denotes, in the context of war, the forcing back of the enemy.<sup>13</sup> In reaction to Pentheus' hostility, Dionysus himself threatens to fight back with his 'army':

<sup>7</sup> The text of the *Bacchae* is cited after J. Diggle, *Euripidis fabulae. Tomus III* (Oxford, 1994). Translations from the Greek are my own.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. e.g. Hom. *Il.* 3.295–6; Xenophanes B 1.15 West; Pind. *Isthm.* 6.37–46; Thuc. 6.32.1–2; Xen. *Cyr.* 2.3.1; Dem. 19.128; see Casabona (n. 1), 255; Burkert (n. 1), 114.

<sup>9</sup> The crucial point of the complaint is Pentheus' general refusal to worship the god, which includes libations and prayers in all kinds of circumstances. Seaford (n. 4), 153 suggested that it may concern 'community (not palace) rituals'.

<sup>10</sup> For the semantic difference between the singular σπονδῆ ('libation') and the plural σπονδαί ('libations', 'truce'), see Casabona (n. 1), 253–65. The plural also denotes the so-called 'sacred truce' which was announced by heralds called σπονδοφόροι before greater festivals such as the Olympic Games (e.g. Thuc. 5.49; Pind. *Isthm.* 2.23) and the Eleusinian mysteries (e.g. *Syll.*<sup>3</sup> 42.55; Aeschin. 2.133); see A. Citron, *Semantische Untersuchungen zu σπένδεσθαι – σπένδειν – εὐχεσθαι* (Winterthur, 1965), 35–7; E. Baltrusch, *Symmachie und Spondai. Untersuchungen zum griechischen Völkerrecht der archaischen und klassischen Zeit (8.–5. Jahrhundert v. Chr.)* (Berlin, 1994), 117–22.

<sup>11</sup> For emphasis on the political aspect of the prologue, see also Segal (n. 4), 99.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. J.C. Kamerbeek, 'On the conception of θεομάχος in relation with Greek tragedy', *Mnemosyne* 1 (1948), 271–83, at 274.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. LSJ s.v. ὠθέω I 2.

ἦν δὲ Θηβαίων πόλις  
 ὀργῆι σὺν ὄπλοις ἐξ ὄρους βάκχας ἄγειν  
 ζητῆι, ξυνάψω μαινάσι στρατηλατῶν.

If the city of the Thebans seeks in anger to drive the bacchants out of the mountain with weapons, I will lead my army of maenads into battle.

Thus σπονδῶν (45) is clearly drawn into the sphere of political conflict and warfare. In view of the references to *polis*, war and fighting at the very beginning of the drama, there is good reason to believe that σπονδῶν is used to bring out the political implications of the conflict between Dionysus and Pentheus no less than to indicate its religious dimension. The god and the human ruler are opposed to each other like two parties of war, and one of them refuses to make a truce.<sup>14</sup>

The assumption that Euripides deliberately uses σπονδῶν in a double sense also receives external support from passages in Homer and Aristophanes that show the close connection of libation and truce, both in terms of institution and in terms of language. In a famous scene in *Iliad* Book 3 (264–301) the Greeks and the Trojans make an agreement in the form of an oath to decide the war through a single combat. As has been rightly noted by scholars, the pouring of a libation is a central ritual feature of the ceremony.<sup>15</sup> The narrator not only carefully prepares for the ritual by listing utensils, such as wineskin, mixing vessel and golden cups, and by alluding to the mixing of the wine; he also describes the actual performance of the libation in detail. After two lambs have been slaughtered, the wine is poured on the earth, and this ritual action, which concludes the whole ceremony, symbolically enforces the conditional curse that accompanies it.<sup>16</sup> A word of the group σπένδω-σπονδή is not used in this case, but in *Iliad* Book 4, when Agamemnon comments on Pandarus' breach of the oath, he singles out σπονδαὶ ἄκρητοι or 'unmixed libations' along with the blood of lambs and the shaking of hands as ritual features that enforce agreements (158–9). These passages contain two points of interest for the present discussion: first, the Homeric usage of the plural σπονδαί is generally held to prefigure the later usage in the sense 'truce'.<sup>17</sup> Second, the detailed description of the oath gives a vivid example of the political dimension of the libation ritual: the pouring of a liquid (wine) stands out as an essential element of a truce.<sup>18</sup>

A passage in Aristophanes' *Wasps* illustrates how a dramatist can employ the double meaning of σπονδαί. When Philocleon and his son Bdelycleon eventually agree to settle their quarrel, and Philocleon is willing to establish a law-court at home, the two make

<sup>14</sup> Euripides uses the plural σπονδαί in the sense 'truce' in *Med.* 898, *Hel.* 1235 and *Ph.* 364–6. For the truce Polynices speaks of in the latter passage, see also *Ph.* 81, 273 and 450 (ὑπόσπονδον μολεῖν); *Ph.* 171 (ἔνσπονδος). For the middle voice ἐσπέισαντο in *Ph.* 1240, see n. 33 below.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. A.H. Sommerstein and A.J. Bayliss, *Oath and State in Ancient Greece* (Berlin and Boston, 2013), 302.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Hom. *Il.* 3.245–8 (Trojans bringing wine: wineskin, mixing vessel and cup); 269–70 (mixing of the wine by heralds); 295–301 (libation and curse: οἶνον [...] ἔκχεον [...] ὄδε [...] ἐγκέφαλος χαμάδις ῥέοι ὡς ὄδε οἶνος).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Casabona (n. 1), 258; Baltrusch (n. 10), 107.

<sup>18</sup> On the connection of libations and oaths, see also A.H. Sommerstein and I.C. Torrance, *Oaths and Swearing in Ancient Greece* (Berlin and Boston, 2014), 147–8, where it is pointed out (at 147) that libations are rarely mentioned in non-political oaths. For a comparative Indo-European perspective on the political dimension of libations denoted by the group σπένδω-σπονδή, see E. Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, transl. E. Palmer (London, 1973), 470–4.

formal and ritual preparations for the new ‘institution’. The chorus are delighted about this development and express their appreciation (863–7):

καὶ μὴν ἡμεῖς  
ἐπὶ ταῖς σπονδαῖς καὶ ταῖς εὐχαῖς  
φήμην ἀγαθὴν λέξομεν ὑμῖν,  
ὅτι γενναίως ἐκ τοῦ πολέμου  
καὶ τοῦ νεῖκουσ ζυνέβητον.

We, too, will speak a good word for you on the occasion of your truce-libations and your prayers, for after this war and quarrel you have come to terms in noble fashion.

Although in this passage the juxtaposition of σπονδαῖς and εὐχαῖς is even closer than the combination of the two words in the *Bacchae*, several commentators have not hesitated to take σπονδαῖς in the technical sense ‘truce’.<sup>19</sup> There are also scholars who believe that it retains its ritual sense,<sup>20</sup> but why should either sense be excluded from the interpretation at all? The chorus describe the quarrel of the two protagonists metaphorically in terms of war (πόλεμος, 866) and agreement (ζυνέβητον, 867). This justifies taking σπονδαῖς in the political sense ‘truce’. But Bdelycleon and Philocleon also want to burn incense and say a prayer (859–62). This preparation for a religious action justifies the assumption that σπονδαῖς has a ritual sense, and may refer to libations, even though the pouring of liquids is not explicitly mentioned.<sup>21</sup> It seems that Aristophanes chose the plural of σπονδή exactly for the reason that it captures (unlike θυσία or θυμίαμα) the combination of both notions, religion and politics.

Dionysus’ complaint in the prologue of the *Bacchae* gains dramatic depth if σπονδῶν is understood in the double sense of ‘libations’ and ‘truce’.<sup>22</sup> The ambiguity of religion and politics has a signal function, as it prepares for two aspects that prove crucial to the play. It not only addresses Pentheus’ neglect of ritual action and verbal acknowledgement in a general religious sense, but also shows that the encounter between Dionysus and the Theban ruler takes the form of a violent conflict that has the impact of a war. Moreover, the mention of libations prefigures Dionysus’ close associations with liquids, especially wine, and points to his role in the socio-religious framework of the *polis*. The

<sup>19</sup> Cf. D.M. MacDowell, *Aristophanes: Wasps* (Oxford, 1971), 247 (‘reconciliation’); A.H. Sommerstein, *The Comedies of Aristophanes. Vol. 4: Wasps* (Warminster, 1983), 85 and 209 (‘peace agreement’); Z.P. Biles and S.D. Olson, *Aristophanes: Wasps* (Oxford, 2015), 343 (‘reconciliation’); see also J. Henderson, *Aristophanes II: Clouds, Wasps, Peace* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1998), 333 (‘truce’).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. P. Rau, *Aristophanes, Komödien. Band 2* (Darmstadt, 2016), 75 (‘Zeremonie’); V. Coulon and H. van Daele, *Aristophane. Tome II: Les Guêpes – La Paix* (Paris, 1964<sup>3</sup>), 54 (‘ces libations’).

<sup>21</sup> Two explanations seem equally possible: either σπονδοί is used here as a generic ritual term, regardless of whether the pouring of wine is involved in the religious ceremony or not, or the combined performance of burning incense and pouring a libation is implied. In several literary texts there are, in fact, passages where the burning of incense and the pouring of liquids are combined; cf. H. von Fritze, *Die Rauchopfer bei den Griechen* (Berlin, 1894), 3 and 35–7, who discusses Hom. *Od.* 15.222, Paus. 5.15.10 and Diod. Sic. 13.3; see also Empedocles B 128 DK; E. Simon, ‘Archäologisches zu Spende und Gebet in Griechenland und Rom’, in F. Graf (ed.), *Ansichten griechischer Rituale: Geburtstags-Symposium für Walter Burkert, Castelen bei Basel, 15. bis 18. März 1996* (Stuttgart, 1998), 126–42, especially 127–8.

<sup>22</sup> The double meaning of σπονδῶν is also reflected by the compound θεομαχεῖ (45) which unites the notions of divinity and war. θεομαχεῖ also points to an ambiguity concerning the standings of the two opponents. The fact that the god himself makes the complaint seems to imply that he takes Pentheus seriously as an opponent. It fits into this notion that in the play Pentheus is not just described as a human ruler but also compared with a ‘murderous giant’ (543–4); cf. Segal (n. 4), 129–30.

complaint implies that Pentheus does not take part in or allow any form of Dionysiac worship, which, within the *polis*, means in particular that no festivals are held in the god's honour.

## 2. TIRESIAS' WARNINGS

The motif of libation is taken up in the first episode. In a controversy about the divine status of Dionysus, the seer Tiresias tries to convince the young ruler Pentheus that Dionysus is a god and deserves worship. It has long been noted that his speech (266–327) follows the pattern of contemporary Greek oratorical practice and has a formal structure that includes an introduction, a series of proofs or pleas and a peroration.<sup>23</sup>

In the first proof, the seer addresses the greatness of the god in terms of wine (272–85). He states that 'there are two primary things among humanity' (274–5).<sup>24</sup> The first 'primary thing' is the goddess Demeter. She, the seer says, is earth (γῆ)<sup>25</sup> and nurtures humans with solid food (275–7). The second 'primary thing' is Dionysus. Tiresias first asserts that the son of Semele discovered wine<sup>26</sup> and introduced it to humanity (279–80). He then enumerates the benefits from this drink (280–3), saying that it 'frees distressed mortals from pain, when they have a fill' of it, that it 'gives sleep, which makes them forget their daily hardships', and that 'there is no other medicine against suffering' (ὁ παύει τοὺς ταλαιπώρους βροτούς | λύτης, ὅταν πλησθῶσιν ἀμπέλου ροῆς, | ὕπνον τε λήθην πῶν καθ' ἡμέραν κακῶν | δίδωσιν, οὐδ' ἔστ' ἄλλο φάρμακον πόνων). After that, he concludes (284–5):

οὗτος θεοῖσι σπένδεται θεὸς γεγώς,  
ὥστε διὰ τοῦτον τάγαθ' ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν.

He, being a god, is poured in libations to the gods / makes a truce with the gods, so that because of him men have all the good things.

What are the meaning and the function of this sentence in the context of Tiresias' argument and in the wider context of play? How does it relate to Pentheus' prejudice against Dionysus, and what does it say about libation and the nature of the god?

In the pertinent interpretations of the *Bacchae* it is taken for granted that σπένδεται has only one meaning and that Tiresias says that the god Dionysus is poured in libations to the gods. Accordingly, the discussion centres on the question of how to make sense of this enigmatic statement. Based on the notion of an identification or equation of the god with his gift of wine, one group of scholars sees it as part of a satirical characterization of Tiresias. Winnington-Ingram, for instance, interpreted it in a Socratic fashion, arguing that it is a *reductio ad absurdum* that 'men bribe the gods by offering up a god to

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Dodds (n. 4), 103; see also P. Roth, 'Tiresias as *mantis* and intellectual in Euripides' *Bacchae*', *TAPhA* 114 (1984), 59–69, at 60; Seaford (n. 4), 174.

<sup>24</sup> Usually, τὰ πρῶτα (275) is explained in the sense of 'first elements' (cf. e.g. Dodds [n. 4], 104), but, in view of the formulation (τὰ πρῶτ' ἐν ἀνθρώποισι) and the context, it 'should perhaps be taken as "the best, most important things"', as B. Seidensticker, 'The figure of Tiresias in Euripides' *Bacchae*', in P. Kyriakou and A. Rengakos (edd.), *Wisdom and Folly in Euripides* (Berlin and Boston, 2016), 275–83, at 280 n. 32 has pointed out.

<sup>25</sup> Diggle writes Γῆ in 276 with a capital Γ, but a small γ seems preferable, for the main notion is the rationalization of the personal goddess Demeter as earth.

<sup>26</sup> Literally, Tiresias speaks of 'the moist drink of the vine' (βότρυος ὑγρὸν πῶμα).

them'.<sup>27</sup> According to Segal, Tiresias' explanation of Dionysus in terms of wine has a religious value, but is, nevertheless, part of a severe misconception of the nature of the god.<sup>28</sup> Another group believes instead that Tiresias' words have a deep religious meaning. Dodds interpreted them as an expression of a 'primitive' feeling comparable to the 'complete identification in Indian thought of the god Soma with the drink Soma [...]'.<sup>29</sup> Burkert and Gallistl took Tiresias' statement as an expression of a sacramental notion that implies the death of the god; and against the background of Dionysiac mystery cult, Seaford described it as 'a kind of mystic instruction'.<sup>30</sup>

As different as these interpretations are, they all have in common the assumption that σπένδεται must be passive. However, just as in the case of σπονδῶν in the prologue, this assumption appears to be a self-imposed limitation. The form σπένδεται itself is ambiguous, since it can represent not only the passive but also the middle voice. While the passive refers to the performance of the libation ritual, the middle has a different meaning and refers to the conclusion of a truce. With σπένδεται in the passive, Tiresias says: 'He, being a god, is poured in libations to the gods, so that because of him men have all the good things.' With σπένδεται in the middle, the sense changes to: 'He, being a god, makes a truce with the gods, so that because of him men have all the good things.'

As has been mentioned, some commentators acknowledged the ambiguity of σπένδεται. According to Sandys, the middle voice is grammatically applicable to the god himself, while the passive involves a reference to his gift of wine.<sup>31</sup> Yet, unfortunately neither Sandys nor any other scholar posed the question of the dramatic function of such a double sense, and, ever since Dodds refuted the middle voice as meaningless in the context, this possibility has played practically no role in the scholarly discussion.<sup>32</sup> There is, however, good reason to believe that the choice of the ambiguous form is deliberate and that Euripides plays with both senses of σπένδεται.

<sup>27</sup> R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus: An Interpretation of the Bacchae* (Cambridge, 1948), 50.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Segal (n. 4), 292–305, especially 294–5 and 300. B. Seidensticker, *Palintonos Harmonia. Studien zu komischen Elementen in der griechischen Tragödie* (Göttingen, 1982), 115–23 (cf. Seidensticker [n. 24], 281–2) also understands Tiresias' speech as a satire, but rightly notes that this does not exclude the possibility that his words also contain 'deep truths'.

<sup>29</sup> Dodds (n. 4), 105 (see also 106). For the comparison with the Vedic concept of Soma, see also L.R. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States. Volume V* (Oxford, 1909), 121; W. Burkert, *Homo Necans. Interpretationen altgriechischer Opferriten und Mythen* (Berlin, 1972), 248.

<sup>30</sup> Burkert (n. 29), 248–50; B. Gallistl, *Teiresias in den Bakchen des Euripides* (Zürich, 1979), 66–7; Seaford (n. 4), 176 (on *Bacch.* 283); also D. Obbink, 'Dionysus poured out: ancient and modern theories of sacrifice and cultural formation', in T.H. Carpenter and C.A. Faraone (edd.), *Masks of Dionysus* (Ithaca, NY, 1993), 65–86, at 78–9. On the difficulties concerning the whole issue of Dionysiac mysteries, see A. Henrichs, 'Mystika, Orphika, Dionysiaka. Esoterische Gruppenbildungen, Glaubensinhalte und Verhaltensweisen in der griechischen Religion', in A. Bierl and W. Braungart (edd.), *Gewalt und Opfer. Im Dialog mit Walter Burkert* (Berlin and New York, 2010), 87–114.

<sup>31</sup> J.E. Sandys, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (Cambridge, 1880), 140; see also F.A. Paley, *Euripides. Volume 2* (London, 1858), 416; R.Y. Tyrrell, *Εὐριπίδου Βάκχαι. The Bacchae of Euripides* (London, 1892), 86. W.B. Stanford, *Ambiguity in Greek Literature: Studies in Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 1939), 175 takes the double sense of σπένδεται as a fact. He simply lists it as an instance of ambiguity in the *Bacchae*, but does not discuss it.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Dodds (n. 4), 105–6. For Roth, who seems to be the only exception, see n. 36 below. Contrary to the general trend, F. Kraus, *Euripides, ein bekehrter Rationalist?* (Passau, 1898), 8 took σπένδεται only as middle voice.

First, the middle sense ‘to make a truce’ is frequently attested in historical writings of the classical time and also used by Euripides three times outside the *Bacchae*.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, the passive sense ‘to be poured in libations’ or ‘as a libation’ is not problematic in itself, but it is not found in classical literature outside the *Bacchae*.<sup>34</sup> Grammatically, both the passive voice and the middle voice are equally possible in the case of Tiresias’ statement. In the passive, the dative θεοῖσι refers to the gods as divine recipients of the libations; in the middle, it denotes the gods as the party with which the truce is made.<sup>35</sup>

Second, a play with the ambiguity and the double sense of σπένδεται accords with the sophistic argumentation and the rhetorical character of Tiresias’ speech.<sup>36</sup> Pentheus is opposed to everything that relates to Dionysus, and is determined to fight the god even with physical force. Tiresias is concerned for the Theban ruler and tries to change his mindset by proving him wrong about the god. The central point of the first proof, which focusses on the greatness of Dionysus in terms of wine, seems to be the identification or equation of the god with his liquid gift. But this notion is only evoked by the context.<sup>37</sup> It can be said to serve as a theological premise, based on which the god is associated with the performance of libations. The identification is prepared for by the abstract expression δῦο [...] τὰ πρῶτα (274–5) and by the claim that the goddess Demeter is earth (275–6). Ambiguity is also characteristic of the phraseology in lines 284–5. On the one hand, θεὸς γεγώς, which may mean both ‘being a god’ and ‘coming into existence as a god’, evokes the notion of Dionysus as an anthropomorphic god and benefactor. A personal subject accords well with the middle sense of σπένδεται. On the other hand, Tiresias mentions concrete benefits of wine (without using the word οἶνος once), and an impersonal subject fits σπένδεται in the passive voice. Ambiguity helps strengthen Tiresias’ argument, as it allows the seer to allude to the god in a rationalistic way as wine without abandoning the notion of Dionysus as a personal god. Pentheus’

<sup>33</sup> For the use of the middle voice of σπένδω, see Citron (n. 10), 3–48; Casabona (n. 1), 241–6; see also LSJ s.vv. σπένδω, σπονδή. While agreeing in general on the usage of the middle voice, Citron and Casabona differ in that the former maintains that the middle always has the sense ‘to make a truce’, whereas the latter believes that there are a few cases in which it has the concrete sense of pouring a libation (in the context of a truce). For discussions of historical *spondai*-treaties, with consideration also of the ritual features, see Baltrusch (n. 10), 92–188, especially 99–104; Sommerstein and Bayliss (n. 15), 241–306. For σπένδομαι as middle voice in Euripides, see *Ph.* 1240–1, *Med.* 1140, *Or.* 1680–1. In the latter two passages the middle refers not to a truce proper but to a settlement in a private quarrel.

<sup>34</sup> The only evidence in the archaic and classical times comes from two cult inscriptions; cf. *LSS* 62 (Paros); *LSAM* 50.7–8, 50.16–17, a Hellenistic inscription, containing much older regulations of the Molpoi from Miletus. For this inscription, see A. Herda, *Der Apollon-Delphinios-Kult in Milet und die Neujahrsprozession nach Didyma: Ein neuer Kommentar der sog. Molpoi-Satzung* (Mainz am Rhein, 2006). For post-classical usage of the passive voice, see e.g. *Σ Soph. OC* 100; Nicomachus, *FGrHist* 662 F 1. For metaphorical use of the passive, see e.g. Philo, *Quaest. in Ex.* 2.14 Petit; *NT Ep. Phil.* 2.17; 2 *Ep. Tim.* 4.6. The latter two passages have often been cited by commentators of *Bacch.* 284–5, but M. Lacroix, *Les Bacchantes d’Euripide* (Paris, 1976), 164 rightly warns of the danger of a Christian interpretation.

<sup>35</sup> For the function of the dative in the case of the middle σπένδομαι, see Casabona (n. 1), 242–3. It refers either to the other party of a truce or to the party in whose interest a truce is made. In *Bacch.* 284–5, the latter is excluded because of ὥστε with infinitive, which identifies humanity as the party of interest.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Roth (n. 23), 62–3, who rightly lists the ambiguity of σπένδεται among the rhetorical features of Tiresias’ speech, but offers no discussion. In general, for ambiguity and double meanings in the *Bacchae*, see Stanford (n. 31), 174–9; C. Segal, ‘Etymologies and double meanings in Euripides’ *Bacchae*’, *Glotta* 60 (1982), 81–93.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Leinieks (n. 5), 230; see also Seidensticker (n. 24), 280 n. 32.



rejection of the god is thus not just addressed from one angle but from two different perspectives.

A third point concerns the ritual nature and the cultural significance of the libation ritual. Some scholars have suggested that Euripides wants to allude here to sacrifice and/or the death of Dionysus,<sup>38</sup> but this would clearly undermine Tiresias' argument of the greatness of the god. More importantly, the seer does not use a sacrificial term. The very use of a form of *σπένδω* makes it clear that the focus is on libation, and this includes particular aspects and general associations of the ritual as well as the situational contexts in which it is performed. Libation is first and foremost a religious action that centres on liquids and pouring. It fits these characteristics that Tiresias not only speaks of Dionysus as the inventor of wine but also juxtaposes wine drinking (280–3) and libation (284–5). Considering that both wine drinking and libations (*σπονδαί*) belong together in various situations, it becomes clear that their juxtaposition in the speech is not a mere rhetorical exercise; rather, it is charged with religious meaning and highlights both actions as interrelated manifestations of Dionysus.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Tiresias' description of Dionysus' greatness in terms of a liquid and its uses corresponds with the miraculous flows and springs of liquids which the maenads experience during their celebrations with the god in the mountains.<sup>40</sup>

In her commentary, Roux rightly pointed out the religious significance of libation in the fifth century.<sup>41</sup> In fact, the ritual pouring of liquids is omnipresent in Greek culture from the earliest times.<sup>42</sup> Libation is a feature of private as well as of public worship, and figures prominently in various situations and institutions of socio-political concern. Libations (*σπονδαί*) not only form part of the performance of animal sacrifice (which makes them a noticeable aspect of public cult) but also belong to everyday life and to situations of departure and arrival, and, while their socio-religious dimension is highlighted at the symposium, their political dimension is stressed in the context of oath-ceremonies and truces.<sup>43</sup> Libation is a ritual that creates positive reciprocity with the gods, the heroes and the dead, and expresses piety, *εὐσέβεια*, on a fundamental level; but, at the same time, it is also a ritual that serves to create close bonds between

<sup>38</sup> See Burkert (n. 29), 248–9; Gallistl (n. 30), 66–7.

<sup>39</sup> For the complexity of the connection between Dionysus and wine, see W.F. Otto, *Dionysos: Mythos und Kultus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1933), 130–8.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Bacch.* 142–3, where the chorus sing of the earth flowing with milk, wine and honey; *Bacch.* 704–11, where the messenger describes how the Theban women caused springs of water, milk, wine and honey. For these Dionysiac miracles, see also Dodds (n. 4), 163–4; Seaford (n. 4), 165. In this regard, two points are worth noting. First, the liquids commonly used for libations are the same as the liquids of the miraculous springs; second, libations performed by humans have a counterpart in divine libations. For the much-debated motif of divine libation, see e.g. Patton (n. 1), 27–180; Gaifman (n. 1), 117–49. In a wider sense, the theme of liquids also comprises associations of Dionysus and the maenads with rivers and their water; cf. *Bacch.* 519–36 (hymn to Dirce); 406–8 and 565–75 (rivers as markers of Dionysus' journeys and as sources of blessing and fertility); 1051 and 1093 (water forming part of the natural setting of the maenads' worship of the god and reflecting their moods and actions); see also Segal (n. 4), 150–6. For the mention of blood in the *Bacchae*, see n. 72 below.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Roux (n. 4), 347.

<sup>42</sup> For libation in Mycenaean culture, see R. Hägg, 'The role of libations in Mycenaean ceremony and cult', in R. Hägg and G.C. Nordquist (edd.), *Celebrations of Death and Divinity in the Bronze Age Argolid: Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens, 11–13 June, 1988* (Stockholm, 1990), 177–84. For the archaic and classical periods, see n. 1 above.

<sup>43</sup> This list does not aim at completeness; it excludes, for instance, libations of the *χοαί* kind which are associated primarily with funerals and the cult of the dead. For situational contexts of *σπονδαί*, see also Rudhardt (n. 1), 244.

those who take part in its performance.<sup>44</sup> Wine, whether mixed or unmixed, used alone or in combination with other liquids, is the liquid that is most commonly used in and associated with libations, whether at the symposium and at festive sacrificial feasts or in oath-ceremonies and truces.<sup>45</sup>

Against the background of these general considerations, Tiresias' statement can be interpreted as comprising three interrelated aspects:

- (1) With *σπένδεται* in the passive, the religious aspect of the libation ritual is highlighted. The statement forms a paradox, raising the question of how a god can be poured out as a libation. This paradox is resolved by the implied identification of Dionysus with wine.<sup>46</sup> The word *θεός* indicates that Dionysus' power is present and reveals itself whenever libations with wine are poured to any of the gods (*θεοῖσι*).<sup>47</sup> What Tiresias tells Pentheus is that, just as humans benefit from Dionysus by drinking his liquid gift, they also benefit from him by using it in the performance of the libation ritual. Therefore, whenever Pentheus pours wine as a libation to the gods and asks them for a favour in return, he shows them their due respect, which allows him to expect a positive reaction. He benefits from Dionysus' mediation, whether wine is regarded as his divine gift or the god's power is considered present in the liquid.<sup>48</sup> If Pentheus accepts this, and he must, lest he prove himself to be *ἄσεβής*, 'impious',<sup>49</sup> he must also acknowledge that Dionysus is in fact a very powerful god who influences the relationship between humans and gods in fundamental ways. Thus, instead of alluding to the death of the god in a sacrificial sense, Tiresias' statement clearly indicates, as part of a religious argument, that the power of the god is present in the libation ritual and that Pentheus should honour him.
- (2) At the same time the notion of a truce, which belongs to the middle sense of *σπένδεται*, is evoked by the context (and reinforced by the frequent use of the middle in general). Pentheus is the king and political representative of Thebes, and throughout the drama his relationship with Dionysus is described in terms of war and fighting. As a *θεομάχος*, for instance, he is characterized not only by Dionysus in the prologue (45) and in the third episode (635–6) but also by the chorus in the second stasimon (544) and by his own mother Agaue in the exodus (1255). Most importantly for the present discussion, Tiresias also holds this view, as he makes clear at the end of his speech (325). Tiresias' words relate, moreover, to Dionysus' threat in the prologue to wage war against Thebes and its ruler with his army of maenads (50–2). The seer mentions the god's involvement in the sphere of war not just in general terms, but highlights his capacity to stir

<sup>44</sup> These aspects are also a major feature in art; cf. Gaifman (n. 1), 151, who argues that the 'images draw attention to the performance of the libation and highlight its communicative role in giving physical expression to the affirmation of ties and hierarchies among mortals and immortals'.

<sup>45</sup> For wine as the main libation liquid, see e.g. Burkert (n. 1), 114; also Graf (n. 1), 209–21, who proposes a structural explanation according to which libations with mixed wine stand for normality, while libations without wine as well as those with unmixed wine represent marginality.

<sup>46</sup> The whole first argument centres on the connection of the god with his gift of wine.

<sup>47</sup> For the statement as a paradox and for the notion of Dionysus' power being present in wine, see also Roux (n. 4), 347.

<sup>48</sup> For a different explanation of the mediating function of Dionysus, see Gallistl (n. 30), 66–9.

<sup>49</sup> Pentheus' impiety is highlighted in several passages; cf. *Bacch.* 263, 476, 490, 502, 1015, 1302. For *τυμή* with regard to Dionysus, see *Bacch.* 192, 208, 220, 321, 329, 342; see also *Bacch.* 1008–10.

panic in an army (302–4).<sup>50</sup> Roth argued that the mention of Dionysus' role in war serves as a warning for Pentheus.<sup>51</sup> An allusion to a truce not only fits this warning but also enhances it, for it stresses the urgency for Pentheus to come to terms with his enemy. If the young ruler is reasonable and listens carefully to the seer, he will understand *σπένδεται* as a hint to *σπονδαί* in the sense of a 'truce', and will try to make peace with his enemy, who has already demonstrated his power over the city of Thebes.

- (3) Beside this indirect evocation of the notion of a truce, the middle sense *σπένδεται* becomes relevant also in a direct way. With *σπένδεται* in the middle voice, the sentence literally means that Dionysus 'makes a truce with the gods'.<sup>52</sup> The context makes it clear that this is to be understood metaphorically.<sup>53</sup> In lines 280–3, the seer describes the human condition principally as a state of suffering and hardship that wine helps to alleviate and forget.<sup>54</sup> Against this background, the notion that Dionysus makes a truce with the gods serves as a metaphor for the benefits Tiresias associates with wine drinking: whenever humans find, through wine drinking, temporary relief and liberation from their struggles, Dionysus makes a 'truce' with the gods on their behalf. Thus Tiresias does not introduce a new point in lines 284–5, but summarizes in a metaphor what he has said before about the benefits of wine, emphasizing the role of the god.<sup>55</sup>

This metaphor is not a mere sophism, but forms part of a sophisticated usage of *σπένδεται* that points, in a deeper sense, to the well-being of the *polis* and its citizens under the auspices of Dionysus. Libations of wine (*σπονδαί*) and wine drinking have a prominent place in the context of festivals and symposia, two central institutions of the *polis*, and it is in the context of these institutions that they are often associated with notions and experiences to which Tiresias alludes in his argument.

The assumption that *σπένδεται* points to the socio-religious framework of the *polis* and Dionysus' role in it finds strong support in the first stasimon (370–433). There, libations are not mentioned, but the Asian bacchants, who sing and dance in praise of

<sup>50</sup> For further passages where the relationship of Pentheus and Dionysus is described in terms of war and military, see *Bacch.* 778–86, 789, 798–9, 804, 809, 837, 845; see also Segal (n. 4), 99. For *κατάσκοπος*, another military term, see n. 69 below.

<sup>51</sup> Roth (n. 23), 61.

<sup>52</sup> For the function of the dative, see n. 35 above. It should be noted that the meaning of the middle is not that Dionysus 'makes libations to the gods'.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Kraus (n. 32), 8, who rightly took the middle voice metaphorically ('gleichsam ein Abkommen'), but failed to acknowledge the ambiguity of *σπένδεται*. For the notion, in a comic setting, of gods trying to make *σπονδαί* on behalf of humans, see *Ar. Pax* 212–13.

<sup>54</sup> For the pessimistic view in Tiresias' speech, see H. Rohdich, *Die Euripideische Tragödie. Untersuchungen zu ihrer Tragik* (Heidelberg, 1968), 139.

<sup>55</sup> As regards Dionysus' role as a 'truce-maker', it is worth mentioning that the god is associated aetiologically with the institution of the truce in a myth told by Diodorus. In 3.71.6 the historian narrates that Dionysus, after defeating the Titans in battle, offered each of his prisoners of war a libation of wine (*διδόντα σπονδῆν οἴνου*) and made them swear to join his campaign. The aetiological point of the story is stressed, when Diodorus comments that it is because of these past events (and the Titans being the first to be called *ὑπόσπονδοι*, 'protected under a truce') that truces have been given the name *σπονδαί*. Unfortunately, we do not know whether a version of this story was already current in Euripides' time. But, in any case, it is remarkable that there is a myth which tells of a war between Dionysus and other divine beings, makes the god himself the first to offer libations for the purpose of a truce, and plays with the double sense of the group *σπένδω-σπονδή*. For Diodorus' source of the account of the Libyan Dionysus, see J.S. Rusten, *Dionysius Scytobrachion* (Opladen, 1982), 102–12. Seaford (n. 4), 224 suggests a link between this story and mystic initiation, but the story's explicit aetiological function speaks against this.

Dionysus, single out public festivities as a central sphere of the god's influence. Their words echo Tiresias' earlier words about the benefits from wine drinking (378–85):

ὄς τάδ' ἔχει,  
 θιασεύειν τε χοροῖς  
 μετὰ τ' ἀύλου γέλασαι  
 ἀποπαύσαι τε μερίμνας,  
 ὅπότεν βότρυος ἔλθῃ  
 γάνος ἐν δαιτὶ θεῶν, κισ-  
 σοφόροις δ' ἐν θαλίαις ἀν-  
 δράσι κρατῆρ ὕπνον ἀμφιβάλλῃ.

380

He is in charge of these things: to celebrate in the *thiasos* with dancing, to laugh to the sound of the *aulos*, and to make an end of anxieties, whenever the joy of the grape cluster comes to the feast of the gods and the mixing vessel throws sleep around ivy-wreathed men at festivities.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, and this lends further support to the assumption that σπένδεται in line 284 has a double sense, at the end of the first stasimon the chorus sing (417–20):

ὁ δαίμων ὁ Διὸς παῖς  
 χαίρει μὲν θαλίασιν,  
 φιλεῖ δ' ὀλβοδότειραν Εἰ-  
 ρήναν, κουροτρόφον θεάν.

The god, Zeus's son, enjoys festivities, and he loves Peace, the giver of happiness, the goddess who rears the youth.

Dionysus is described here as a political god who cares for the well-being of the citizens. He is associated not only with festivities (θαλίασιν) but also with Εἰρήνη, Peace herself, who provides wealth and happiness (ὄλβος) and takes care of the city's continuity by tending the young (κουροτρόφον).<sup>57</sup> What matters most for the present discussion is that the notions expressed by the chorus recall not only the actual function of a truce (σπονδαί) as a means to end war and establish peace but also the close association of the word σπονδαί itself with wine and peace.

Similar ideas are expressed in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* with great clarity. There, σπονδαί (in the double sense of 'truce' and 'wine' as used in libations), Dionysus and festive joys form a powerful triad that symbolizes peace and the well-being of the community in opposition to war and destruction: no sooner has Dicaeopolis received private σπονδαί (that is, a thirty-year treaty which he samples as if it were a fine old wine) from Sparta than he announces the celebration of the rural Dionysia (later in the play, he even enjoys the Dionysiac Anthesteria).<sup>58</sup> Aristophanes' explicit play with the double meaning of σπονδαί is not just meant to arouse laughter; it also has

<sup>56</sup> For the joy of the grape cluster and relief through wine, see also *Bacch.* 534–6 and 770–4 respectively. For the intransitive use of θιασεύειν, see Roux (n. 4), 377–8; Seaford (n. 4), 183; see also R. Schlesier, 'Die Seele im Thiasos. Zu Euripides, *Bacchae* 75', in J. Holzhausen (ed.), *ψυχή – Seele – anima. Festschrift für Karin Alt zum 7. Mai 1998* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1998), 37–72, at 41.

<sup>57</sup> Dionysus' association with civic festivity seems unambiguous. For a suggestion that the first stasimon may also allude to mystery cult, see Seaford (n. 4), 182. For Dionysus as a god of peace, see also Diod. Sic. 3.64.7.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Ar. Ach.* 194–279, 961–1234. For Dionysus, festivity and peace in the *Acharnians*, see also A. Henrichs, 'Between country and city: cultic dimensions of Dionysus in Athens and Attica', in M. Griffith and D.J. Mastronarde (edd.), *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer* (Atlanta, Ga., 1990), 257–77, at 269–71.

serious connotations, as it makes the abstract notion of peace a tangible reality. The close connection of libations (with wine) and peace also becomes clear, by contrast, when, in a later passage (*Ach.* 977–87), personified War is associated with the destruction of the vines and the violent spilling of wine.

In Tiresias' first proof, the double sense of *σπένδεται* turns out to have an important function. As part of a sophistic and sophisticated argumentation, which includes rhetorical means, such as ambiguity, paradox and metaphor, it addresses the politico-religious shortcomings of Pentheus. It highlights libation as a basic expression of piety and wine as a central feature of Dionysus' nature; it hints at the importance of recognizing Dionysus' place in the sphere of the *polis*; and it provides a strong warning and reminder for Pentheus. As ruler of Thebes, Pentheus cannot neglect or offend the new god if he wants his city to prosper and enjoy peace.

Tiresias mentions libation not just once but twice. At the end of the proof section he emphatically urges Pentheus to follow his advice (309–13). After telling him (312) to 'welcome the god in the country' (τὸν θεὸν δ' ἐς γῆν δέχου), he specifies (313):

καὶ σπένδε καὶ βάκχευε καὶ στέφου κάρα.

Pour libations, take part in Bacchic celebration, and garland your head!

What exactly does Tiresias' advice imply, and why does the seer refer to libation a second time in his speech? Just as in the first proof, a word of the group *σπένδω-σπονδή* is used; however, unlike *σπένδεται* in line 284, *σπένδε* is unambiguous and has one particular meaning: it denotes the performance of the libation ritual. The three imperatives in line 313 can be understood as a religious reminder in which the unspecified *σπένδε* points to the importance of piety in general,<sup>59</sup> *βάκχευε* to an intrinsic form of worship of Dionysus, and *στέφου κάρα* to an outward sign of commitment to the god. At the same time, the pouring of libations is connected with the worship of Dionysus himself. It is a ritual that has to be performed in honour of this 'new' god no less than in honour of the other gods.

But as a general and unspecified admonition to pour libations, *σπένδε* also includes the particular situation of a truce, and since Tiresias' pleading at the end of his speech has a strong political flavour, there is good reason to assume that it also serves as a subtle reminder for Pentheus to end his war against the god.<sup>60</sup> The reference to libation comes after a warning of the limitations of the ruling power (κράτος) of humans (310–12) and specifies the welcome of the god in the country (312). In the peroration, moreover, the seer declares that he will not give in to Pentheus' words and he will not do battle with the god (κοῦ θεομαχίῳ ὄντων λόγων πεισθεῖς ὑπο, 325), and, while the alliteration *πύλαις-πολλοί-Πενθέως-πόλις* (319–20) underscores the political role of Pentheus, the ring composition of *πόλις* in line 320 and *πολίτης* in line 271 emphasizes the political aspect of the whole speech.

<sup>59</sup> Tiresias does not name a divine recipient in whose honour Pentheus should pour libations.

<sup>60</sup> It is noteworthy that in Thuc. 4.98.8 the active voice is likely used in the technical sense of the middle; cf. Casabona (n. 1), 244–5. The use of *σπένδω* in Cretan dialect is also interesting in this regard: in *SEG* 27 (1977), 631 the active voice has the technical sense 'to solemnly pledge, promise'; cf. L.H. Jeffery and A. Morpurgo-Davies, 'Ποινικαστάς and ποινικάζεν: BM 1969, 4–2.1, a new archaic inscription from Crete', *Kadmos* 9 (1970), 118–54, at 128. For a similar usage of *ἐπισπένδω*, both in the active voice and in the middle voice, in the law of Gortyn (*IC* IV 72 coll. IV and VI), see Casabona (n. 1), 250–1.

Thus *σπένδεται* (284) and *σπένδε* (313) reinforce each other and highlight not only the religious significance of the libation ritual with particular regard to the nature of Dionysus but also the political dimension of the conflict between the human ruler and the god.

### 3. THE GOD'S CRUEL SENSE OF IRONY

In the fourth episode, the libation-truce motif appears again in connection with Pentheus and, as in the prologue, it is the god himself who uses a word of the group *σπένδω-σπονδή*. When Pentheus comes out of the palace, dressed up as a maenad and ready to go to Mount Cithaeron, he suddenly has a vision. It seems to him that he sees two suns, two cities of Thebes, and the stranger leading the way in the shape of a bull (918–21). Astounded by this vision, he asks the stranger whether he once was an animal (922). Dionysus gives an enigmatic answer (923–4):

ὁ θεὸς ὁμαρτεῖ, πρόσθεν ὧν οὐκ εὐμενής,  
ἔνσπονδος ἡμῖν· νῦν δ' ὀραῖς ἅ χριή σ' ὀράν.

The god, who was previously not well-disposed, accompanies us as our ally. Now you see, what you must see.

There are several nominal compounds of the group *σπένδω-σπονδή*. As Casabona has pointed out, some of them belong to the language of libation, while others are part of the vocabulary of treaties.<sup>61</sup> The compound *ἔνσπονδος* clearly belongs to the latter; it denotes the state of being included in a truce and implies, in a wider sense, the notion of an ally.<sup>62</sup> There is no doubt that the meaning of *ἔνσπονδος* in line 924 accords with the general usage.<sup>63</sup> But even if *ἔνσπονδος* is not normally used for the performance of a libation itself, the ritual sense of a *σπονδή* is present and can become relevant, when the context calls for it.<sup>64</sup> This seems to be the case in the present passage. The adjective refers to the relationship of Dionysus and Pentheus in a political sense, thereby also lending support to the assumption that Euripides plays with the political meaning of *σπονδών* (45) and *σπένδεται* (284), and even uses *σπένδε* (313) to allude to the notion

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Casabona (n. 1), 265–7.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. LSJ s.v. *ἔνσπονδος*; see also Casabona (n. 1), 267; Citron (n. 10), 41–2. The first attestations of *ἔνσπονδος* are in Euripides—apart from the present passage, see Eur. *Ph.* 171 (n. 14 above)—and in Thucydides (e.g. 1.31.2).

<sup>63</sup> See also e.g. Roux (n. 4), 531; Seaford (n. 4), 117. Segal (n. 4) seems undecided: in the main text he translates *ἔνσπονδος* twice (at 46 and 300) with ‘reconciled by our libations’ (hinting at a play with the technical sense only in the second instance), whereas in a footnote (at 288 n. 20) he offers as the first sense ‘at truce with us’.

<sup>64</sup> The poetic use of *ἄσπονδος* provides a parallel. In Eur. *Alc.* 424 scholars take it either in the technical sense ‘without truce’ (cf. Casabona [n. 1], 266–7; Citron [n. 10], 39–43) or in the sense ‘without libation’ (L.P.E. Parker, *Euripides: Alcestis* [Oxford, 2007], 140–1), but there too the question arises whether it should not be taken in both senses simultaneously. For the possibility of ambiguity in the case of *ἄσπονδος* in Aesch. *Ag.* 1235, see F.I. Zeitlin, ‘Postscript to sacrificial imagery in the *Oresteia* (*Ag.* 1235–37)’, *TAPhA* 97 (1966), 645–53. Similarly, but with different emphasis, the compound *ὁμόσπονδος* refers to the social, political and religious notions associated with the communal pouring of libations and with the drinking of wine at the symposium; cf. e.g. Hdt. 9.16. In view of the passage in Herodotus, Gaifman (n. 1), 51 rightly notes that ‘libation stands alongside communal dining as a social marker of trust and friendship, even among enemies’.

of a truce. At the same time, by implying the idea of a libation, ἔνσπονδος points to the importance of piety and to Dionysus' associations with liquids.<sup>65</sup>

Dionysus uses ἔνσπονδος with a cruel sense of irony in a decisive moment of the drama that eventually leads to Pentheus' death and to the god's triumph over his human opponent.<sup>66</sup> Pentheus is misled into thinking that he is safe and part of a truce or alliance with the stranger and the god Dionysus as a third party. The ensuing tragic action shows that this is not the case. There is a particular sense of irony in that Dionysus does not specify the conditions of the truce. Pentheus is led to Mount Cithaeron completely unaware of the dangers he faces. He seems to be protected by Dionysus, but, as soon as they arrive there, the god deserts him and he falls prey to the maenads.<sup>67</sup> There is irony, moreover, not only with regard to Dionysus' anger at Pentheus for not performing libations in his honour and for not making a truce with him (45) but also with regard to Tiresias' emphatic reminder to do both (284, 313). Pentheus has not poured a libation in preparation for his journey to the mountain; he is dressed up like a maenad, but has not changed his mind about the god and his female followers.<sup>68</sup> Since he wants to spy on the maenads, just like a spy (κατάσκοπος) on the enemy's army, there is irony yet in another sense: even if the god were serious about the truce, Pentheus' hostile intentions would undermine its validity from the beginning.<sup>69</sup>

Dionysus' words indicate a shift from a situation in which libation and truce are envisaged as corresponding factors that may resolve the conflict between the Theban ruler and Dionysus to a dramatization of the tragic consequences of Pentheus' failure to pour libations in honour of the god and to make a truce with his enemy. This shift is accompanied by a change from the motif of libation and truce to the motif of animal sacrifice. As Seidensticker has demonstrated, sacrifice forms, step by step, the underlying pattern of the account of Pentheus' death in the second half of the drama.<sup>70</sup> The change of the motif is marked by the ironic use of ἔνσπονδος in line 924. On the one hand, ἔνσπονδος looks back to the first part of the drama, but, on the other, it looks ahead

<sup>65</sup> Segal (n. 4), 288 n. 20 observes a connection with the 'martial language of the god from the prologue' and an echo of the 'ritual themes of libation (*spondē*)'. Thus he rightly captures the two aspects of ἔνσπονδος, but overlooks that the double sense of the words of the group σπένδω-σπονδή is there from the first passage in the prologue. Seaford (n. 4), 224 takes ἔνσπονδος in the political sense 'at peace' and states that it 'refers literally to libation', but it is not quite clear whether he believes that ambiguity is a relevant issue in the context. Surprisingly, Dodds (n. 4), who refutes the middle sense of σπένδεται (284), makes no remarks at all about ἔνσπονδος or, for that matter, about σπονδών (45) or σπένδε (313).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Segal (n. 4), 288; Roux (n. 4), 531. Seaford (n. 4), 224 takes no account of the irony.

<sup>67</sup> Roux (n. 4), 531 rightly notes tragic irony (Pentheus is clearly unaware of Dionysus' intention), but her assertion that ἔνσπονδος is also used non-ironically is not convincing. The irony is taken up again in line 965.

<sup>68</sup> Pentheus' vision seems to indicate that he is ἐνθεος, possessed by the god. Does ἔνσπονδος perhaps ironically also allude to this notion? As several commentators have rightly pointed out, there is no reason to assume that Pentheus is drunk with wine. Yet, even if he is not drunk, the fact that he experiences the god in a way that is commonly associated in antiquity with drunkenness seems hardly coincidental; Arist. [*Pr.*] 3.10; Nic. *Alex.* 28–35. For discussion, see Dodds (n. 4), 193; see also Seaford (n. 4), 223, who argues that Pentheus sees double, because he looks at a mirror.

<sup>69</sup> For κατάσκοπος, see *Bacch.* 916, 956; see also *Bacch.* 838 (ἐξ κατασκοπήν). For the characterization of the relationship of Pentheus and Dionysus in military terms, see n. 50 above.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. B. Seidensticker, 'Sacrificial ritual in the *Bacchae*', in G.W. Bowersock, W. Burkert and M.C.J. Putnam (edd.), *Arktouros: Hellenic Studies Presented to Bernard M. W. Knox on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Berlin, 1979), 181–90.

to the tragic death of Pentheus, overlapping with the beginning of the sacrificial pattern.<sup>71</sup> After line 924, libation terms are not used any more, and the action turns more and more violent.<sup>72</sup> Thus the question as to why Pentheus' refusal to accept Dionysus' divinity is referred to in the first part of the drama in terms of libation finds a threefold answer. Libation is not only an expression of piety and an aspect of Dionysus' manifestations through liquids, especially wine; in its technical sense the libation terminology also refers to the martial character and political dimension of the conflict; and the ironic use of ἔσπονδος in line 924 indicates that the possibility of a peaceful outcome of the conflict has now definitively become obsolete, as libation makes way for the violence of sacrifice.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion of the four passages in which Euripides uses words of the group σπένδω-σπονδή (45, 284, 313, 924) shows that the motif of libation forms an integral part of the *Bacchae*. Euripides plays with the group's two senses 'libation' and 'truce' and thus highlights religion and politics as two interrelated and crucial perspectives of the tragic conflict between Dionysus and Pentheus.

The words and forms of the group σπένδω-σπονδή refer to libation as a basic form of worship of the gods from which Dionysus should not be excluded. The god himself makes it clear twice that libations (σπονδαί) matter to him, first in the prologue (45–6) in an angry complaint, then in the fourth episode (923–4) in an ironical remark. The importance of libation in connection with Dionysus is further indicated by Tiresias who refers to libation twice (284, 313) as part of his attempt to convince Pentheus that Dionysus is a god and deserves worship. Based on the implied identification of the god with his gift of wine, the seer describes libation as a manifestation of the power of the god and thereby urges Pentheus to honour Dionysus. The seer's argument also has wider socio-religious implications and points to the well-being of the *polis* under the auspices of Dionysus.<sup>73</sup>

At the same time, the words of the group σπένδω-σπονδή refer to the notion of a truce and thus form part of the political dimension of the play. They relate to Pentheus, the king and representative of Thebes, who has the power to go to war and make peace; they are integrated in the language of war and military conflict, which is prominently used throughout the play to characterize Pentheus' encounter with Dionysus; in particular, they highlight the failure of the human ruler, who is repeatedly described as a θεομάχος, to come to terms with his enemy. As regards the use of the political sense of the group σπένδω-σπονδή, it is noteworthy, moreover, that there are several other passages in the play where the language of agreement and treaties is

<sup>71</sup> For the dressing scene as the analogue of the first step of the sacrificial rite, see Seidensticker (n. 70), 182–3.

<sup>72</sup> The mention of blood in the context of Pentheus' death (cf. *Bacch.* 1135–6, 1163–4)—foreshadowed by references to blood in the report about the maenads' sparagmos of the cows (cf. *Ba.* 741–2, 767–8)—is not expressed in terms of libation; in the framework of the sacrificial pattern, it may be interpreted in the sense that it replaces a 'normal' libation with wine.

<sup>73</sup> An allusion to Bacchic-Dionysiac mystery cult (cf. Seaford [n. 4], 174–6) seems unlikely for dramatic reasons. It is also noteworthy that libation may not even have had a particular significance in this cult-context; cf. F. Graf and S.I. Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets* (London, 2007), 149: '[...] not everything in the panoply of the mysteries was strange and unusual: sacrifice and libation are, after all, the "staple rituals" of ancient religion'.



used for relationships between the god and his worshippers. In line 175, for instance, Tiresias speaks of an agreement (ξυνεθέμην) he made with Cadmus to become followers of Dionysus. Similarly, when Pentheus suspects (807) a secret agreement between the stranger and the Theban maenads that guarantees eternal Bacchic revelry (ξυνεθέσθε κοινῆι τάδ', ἴνα βακχεύητ' ἀεὶ), Dionysus does not deny it, but ironically replies (808) that he, indeed, made an agreement with the god (καὶ μὴν ξυνεθέμην τοῦτό γ', ἴσθι, τῶι θεῶι). Most importantly, in lines 1341–3 Dionysus proclaims that, if they had been sensible, the Thebans would now be truly happy, having the son of Zeus as their 'ally' (σύμμαχον). By showing that religion is, in fact, perceived in terms of politics in the *Bacchae*, these instances strongly support the argument that Euripides also plays with the political sense of the words of the group σπένδω-σπονδή.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, the words of the group σπένδω-σπονδή are part of a wider association of Dionysus with liquids. Whereas his manifestation through wine drinking and libations of wine is associated with one (and predominantly male) sphere of Dionysiac experience, the manifestation through miraculous springs of liquids in nature is associated with maenadism as another (and predominantly or exclusively female) sphere of Dionysiac experience.<sup>75</sup> Through the libation terms of the group σπένδω-σπονδή, Dionysus is associated with the well-being of the *polis* and her people, with liberation from hardships and with festivity, cheerfulness and peace. It is Pentheus' failure to acknowledge both the *polis* and maenadism as spheres of Dionysiac influence that has tragic consequences in the *Bacchae*.

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<sup>74</sup> The argument is further strengthened by the fact that *συμμαχία*, *συντίθεμαι* and other terms of agreement are often combined with *σπονδαί* and *σπένδομαι* in their political sense; cf. e.g. Thuc. 3.114.3, 4.119.1. For further examples, see Citron (n. 10), 3–35.

<sup>75</sup> The prevailing assumption is that maenadism was exclusively female, at least until Hellenistic times; cf. e.g. A. Henrichs, 'Male intruders among the maenads: the so-called male celebrant', in H.D. Evjen (ed.), *Mnemosyne: Classical Studies in Memory of Karl K. Hulley* (Chico, CA, 1984), 69–91. This position has been challenged by R. Schlesier, 'Der bakchische Gott', in ead. (ed.), *A Different God? Dionysos and Ancient Polytheism* (Berlin and Boston, 2011), 173–202.