



Reading Dionysus: Euripides' Bacchae and the Cultural Contestations of Greeks, Jews, Romans, and Christians (Studien Und Texte Zu Antike Und ... and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity)

Courtney J. P. Friesen

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Courtney J. P. Friesen explores shifting boundaries of ancient religions by way of the reception of a popular tragedy, Euripides' Bacchae. As a play staging political crises provoked by the arrival of the "foreign" god Dionysus and his ecstatic cult, audiences and readers found resonances with their own cultural moments. This dramatic deity became emblematic of exuberant and liberating spirituality and, at the same time, a symbol of imperial conquest. Thus, readings of the Bacchae frequently foreground conflicts between religious autonomy and political authority, and between ethnic diversity and social cohesion. This cross-disciplinary study traces appropriations and evocations of this drama ranging from the fifth century BCE through Byzantium not only among "pagans" but also Jews and Christians. Writers variously articulated their religious visions over against Dionysus, often while paradoxically adopting the god's language and symbols. Consequently, imitation and emulation are at times indistinguishable from polemics and subversion.

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