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The volume *Teatro tragico greco: ricostruzioni e interpretazioni*, edited by Giuseppe Zanetto and magisterially produced by Fabrizio Serra, one of the finest academic presses in Italy, collects the papers of seven Italian classicists of the younger generation. The papers were originally presented in a research seminar organized in the Università La Sapienza at Rome, under the auspices of the Consulta Universitaria del Greco, in December 2019, shortly before the outbreak of the great calamity. All seven papers examine aspects of Greek tragic drama, under specialized philological perspectives. Cutting-edge modern approaches, such as the investigation of the remains of fragmentary tragedies, and highly technical research fields, namely metrical analysis and the study of ancient scholarship, are most prominent. I shall give a brief critical presentation of each one of the seven essays, before turning in the end to a general appreciation of the volume and of its contribution to knowledge.

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The story of Atreus and Thyestes is one of the great lost cycles of Greek drama, apparently as popular on the classical stage as were the capital tragic myths of Oedipus or Medea. The murderous antagonism of the two brothers was treated in a considerable number of plays by Sophocles, Euripides and several minor tragedians. **Alice Bonandini** focuses on a range of literary and iconographic sources which point towards important aspects of plot and characterization in those lost tragedies about Thyestes. Apulian vase-paintings of episodes of the myth are examined in comparison with testimonia from Aelian, Hyginus, the Palatine Anthology, and ancient scholia. Bonandini aptly opts to consider these disparate materials as a complex network and view them in their correlations and interconnections with one another, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle which may combine to reveal portions of the image of a dramatic tradition. It is not possible to connect every one of her findings with a specific tragedy, but all of her results, in their totality, indicate important trends and tendencies in the ancient dramatic treatment of the Thyestes myth — trends which may have been developed by one or more individual poets.

The tragic plots concerning Atreus and Thyestes seem to have revolved around three major constellations of events: the conflict of the two brothers for royal power, including the adulterous affair of Aerope with Atreus and the theft of the golden ram; the notorious cannibalistic dinner, in which Atreus offered Thyestes the flesh of his own sons to eat; and Thyestes' subsequent adventures in exile, comprising his incest with his own daughter Pelopia, the birth of their son Aegisthus, and the murder of Atreus. Through her careful close readings of the pictorial and literary testimonia, Bonandini establishes that, apart from the protagonistic duo of the two brothers, a number of other personages played significant roles in the tragic treatments of the myth. Aerope, the first adulterous woman in a mythical cycle full of unfaithful females, betrays her husband Atreus, and he punishes her by drowning her in the sea. She appeared on stage lamenting with tears for her dire fate. Pelopia incestuously mates with her own father Thyestes in order to produce a son who will take revenge on Atreus. When her newborn boy is taken away to be exposed, Pelopia is emotionally shattered, but she is consoled by Amphithea and Adrastus, the ruling couple of Sicyon, where Thyestes and his daughter have taken refuge. It also seems that Poine, the personified deity of punishment, appeared in one or another of the tragedies, signalling the retribution that falls upon Atreus for his abominable crime. A terrifying figure with snakes on her head, in the tradition of such stage monsters as Aeschylus' Erinyes or Euripides' Lyssa, this daemon of judgement would have brought shudders to the audience in the Theatre of Dionysus.

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Next to Thyestes, and among other celebrated tragic figures such as Orestes and Oedipus, Aristotle also cites Telephus as one of the mythical heroes whose destiny offers suitable material for a most successful tragedy, *καλλίστη τραγωδία*. **Francesco Lupi** concentrates on the Sophoclean tragedies regarding Telephus' adventures, and provides a series of interconnected philological notes, by which he illuminates in an original manner particular problems of textual paradosis and interpretation. A choregic inscription mentions the performance of a *Telepheia* by Sophocles. This title is traditionally taken to refer to a connected trilogy, made up of the three attested Sophoclean plays which involved Telephus: *Aleadae*, *Telephus*, and *Mysians*. However, the title *Telephus* is only transmitted once in a gloss in Hesychius' *Lexicon*. Lupi thus refurbishes an older hypothesis, that *Telephus* was simply an alternative appellation for one of the other attested Telephean plays, a phenomenon that often occurs in the Greek tragic corpus (even Euripides' *Bacchae* was sometimes cited under the secondary title *Pentheus*, again from the name of its central tragic figure). Lupi takes a further

step and suggests that there is no need to search for a third Sophoclean tragedy focusing on the Mysian hero: *Aleadae* and *Mysians* might form a tragic dilogy destined for the festival of the Lenaia, in which tragic poets competed with two plays each. Although this attractive theory cannot be definitively proved, it usefully reminds us of the fact that some of the attested dramas of Sophocles and Euripides must indeed have been produced at the Lenaia, the second most important dramatic venue of Classical Athens. Sophocles' Telephus plays may be added to the probable candidates for this festival, together with the extant *Ajax*.

Lupi further investigates two fragments from the *Aleadae*, the first play of the putative Telephus dilogy. One of them, a high-style poetic description of the doe that nurtured the infant Telephus in the wilderness, is assigned to a choral song after careful analysis of its metre and lyrical language. The other is a long gnomic passage on the advantages of wealth, which enables men to acquire everything desirable in life. Lupi contributes to the textual restoration of a corrupt line, reconstructing with plausibility the logical flow of the speaker's thoughts. He detects sophistic ideas in the text, which seems to envisage wealth as a particular demonstration of the hallowed antithesis between *nomos* and *physis*: love of wealth is *physis* for humans, while hatred of riches is not natural. We may indeed imagine a disciple of Thrasymachus or Callicles advocating such a thesis; Protagoras would also be welcomed for it in the milieu of his rich patrons, such as Callias, while Prodicus appears to have adopted it as a principle in his personal life. Who might be the speaker of this *apologia pro divitiis* in the context of Telephus' story, is left to the readers' imagination.

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The contribution of **Francesca Biondi** exemplifies another area of scholarship in which Italian philologists have excelled for long and continue to produce work of prime quality: the investigation of the ancient grammatical and scholiastic tradition, the appreciation of the work of Hellenistic and later grammarians, as recorded in the voluminous corpus of ancient scholia and lexica. Biondi singles out and studies the comments of the grammarian Didymus that are incorporated in the *scholia vetera* to Sophocles' *Antigone*; she includes both the statements expressly attributed to Didymus and a few additional remarks that may be plausibly traced back to the same Alexandrian scholar, because they contain recognizable elements of his method of work and his critical jargon.

Through Biondi's meticulous examination, a series of characteristic features of Didymus' philological approach are highlighted in the relevant scholia on the *Antigone*. The chalciferous Alexandrian grammarian was sensitive to textual problems, which have tantalized critics of Sophocles ever

since; he treated defective passages in an analytical way, focusing on the transmitted text *per se*, without recourse to variant readings or conjectures. Didymus utilized the principle of *συνήθεια*, the *usus scribendi* of an author or a genre, in order to explicate the style and language of a text. He seems to have composed a *hypomnema* on Sophocles' plays, in which he provided exegetical interpretation of the tragic text, mainly through paraphrase. He also cited propositions from earlier such *hypomnemata* in his commentary. In his lexicographical work on tragic vocabulary, the *Λέξις τραγική*, Didymus habitually adduced parallels from the texts of the same author in order to explain individual tragic locutions. All these observations are useful for the reconstruction of the methods and mentality of Alexandrian scholarship.

The scholia on Sophocles have attracted considerable attention lately: after my own teacher, George Christodoulou, who edited in a masterful manner the scholia on *Ajax* in the seventies, another Greek colleague, Georgios Xenis, has curated handy editions of the ancient commentaries on three Sophoclean tragedies (*Electra*, *Trachiniae*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*). Perhaps we could expect now an exemplary edition of the scholia on *Antigone* from a team of Italian scholars.

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**Alessandro Boschi** concentrates on the tragic productions of one of the most fascinating “dark geniuses” of the Greek world: Critias, the man who —by virtue of his immense cultural and intellectual powers— could have saved Athenian politics from degenerate demagogy, and yet ended up fostering a bloody regime of terror. What remains of Critias' versatile literary, poetic and philosophical writings is permeated by a radically antidemocratic discourse, an attempt to counter the prevalent egalitarian and imperialistic ideology of post-Periclean Athens with genuinely aristocratic moral principles. Boschi shows that the same holds true of the tragic plays attributed to Critias, especially his two tragedies associated with underworld themes, *Peirithous* and *Rhadamanthus*.

In the *Peirithous*, the figure of Theseus is constructed as a heroic embodiment of the aristocratic ethical and social code. Theseus chooses to remain in the underworld not because he is himself incarcerated there but out of loyalty to his captive friend and companion Peirithous. The nobleman's duty towards his *philoï*, his avoidance of everything shameful and dishonourable, his unflinching and steadfast moral character, above all his obedience to his inner sense of *aidos* and his inherent ethical compass, these are highlighted as the ultimate ideals in the fragments of Critias' drama. If in the plays of Sophocles and Euripides Theseus functioned as the archetype of the virtues of democratic

Athens, Critias turns this democratic emblem inside out and transforms the same hero into a spokesman for the aristocratic elite and the oligarchic *hetaireia*. Critias also puts on his characters' lips typical keywords of the aristocratic ideological discourse (*chrestos*, *aidos*) or even misappropriates central terms of Periclean democratic rhetoric, invests them with elite overtones, and uses them as weapons to attack the populist orators. The noble Rhadamanthus, in the homonymous tragedy, similarly reproduces basic tenets of aristocratic ideology: he criticizes the fallacious demagogic rhetoric and the financial greed of the newly-rich, endemic ills of democratic Athens, and upholds (like an epic or Pindaric hero) the pursuit of glory as the only worthwhile value in life.

As noted by Boschi, perhaps the most durable legacy of Critias' thought was its influence on the Platonic conception of political utopia, as seen in Plato's mature dialogues, the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*. It would have been better for the *polis* of Athens as well, if Critias' aristocratic political programme had been kept on the level of purely utopian discourse. In an ideal state, such as the Platonic Atlantis, Critias' tragedies would have been revered as canonical texts and expressions of the normative public ideals. In historical reality, they represent a singularity: genuinely oligarchic tragedies produced in the context of an emblematically democratic, polyphonic art form — as though Friedrich Nietzsche had mounted on the pulpit to preach in a Christian church.

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Before becoming an intradramatic symbol of Athenian democratic values in the tragedies of the years of the great war, Theseus was already featured in earlier plays of Euripides, the *Aegeus* and the homonymous drama *Theseus*, which treated the hero's adventures as a young man. **Anna Lisa Maffione** discusses the remains of *Theseus*, a tragedy which was set outside the great labyrinth of Crete and dramatized the hero's fight with the Minotaur. According to mythical tradition, Theseus was accompanied in this mission by a group of Athenian boys and girls sent as tribute to the Cretan king Minos, to be sacrificed and devoured by the monster in the labyrinth. These young personages must have appeared also in Euripides' play in some capacity, probably as a secondary Chorus. The parodos of Aristophanes' *Wasps*, as noted in the ancient scholia, parodies some material from this Euripidean drama. In the Aristophanic comedy the Chorus of old dicasts are accompanied by their young sons, as they walk to court in early morning, and sing a lyric dialogue with one of their boys, lamenting their poverty and dire fate.

Maffione takes note especially of a comment by the Byzantine grammarian Demetrius Triclinius on this comic parodos, according to which

Aristophanes is imitating here an *amoibaion* song between the young Athenian boys and their fathers from Euripides' *Theseus*. Maffione thus argues that in the Euripidean version the fathers must have accompanied their sons to Crete and presumably formed the primary Chorus of the tragedy. The Athenian youths would have appeared as a secondary *parachoregema* and would have sung an *amoibaion* lyric in alternation with their fathers, to deplore their impending end at the hands of the Minotaur. A similar lyric dialogue between primary and secondary Chorus is found later in Euripides' *Supplices*, involving again a main Chorus of parents (the mothers of the seven heroes who fell at Thebes) and a *parachoregema* of young men (the sons of those same heroes, the Epigoni). Euripides was generally fond of including lyric pieces for young boys in his earlier tragedies, whether solo songs or choral parts. Maffione's attractive hypothesis opens a new and interesting perspective on Euripides' dramaturgical experimentations.

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**Alessandra Tenore** has dedicated her labours to an exacting and subtle art: the metrical analysis of the choral parts of Greek tragedy. This is a demanding field of high specialization and technical mastery, which has been proficiently cultivated by notable Italian scholars — one need only mention the unforgettable Roberto Pretagostini and the fruitful writings of the cycle of Bruno Gentili. The younger generation of Italian philologists carries on this distinguished and precise tradition. Tenore examines the *epiparodos*, the song of the second entrance of the Chorus in Euripides' *Alcestis*, after the off-stage funeral ritual for the dead heroine. This lyric piece is constructed as a *kommos*, a reciprocal mournful song in *amoibaion* form, shared between the lamenting husband Admetus and the Chorus of women. Tenore offers a close reading of this lyric section, analyzing in detail its metrical structure and highlighting the interaction between metrical form and dramaturgy. She especially demonstrates how the combination of metrical units, syntax, and word order follows the flow of thoughts and emotions in this melodious outburst of *pathos*. The subtle interplay of rhythm and language bring forward both Admetus' sentimental (and rather melodramatic) heartbreak and the women's consolatory succour. The attentive analysis of metrical structure also enables the author to propose restorations for defective textual passages. The refined art of *metrica antica* remains in capable hands in Italy.

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**Serena De Luca** also breaks out of the circle of the three major tragic poets, to examine a play by Achaëus, one of their less celebrated fellow-dramatists and rivals. A single fragment from Achaëus' tragedy *Azanes* is preserved in the scholia to Euripides' *Orestes*. Commenting on the scene where Orestes falls to Menelaus' feet as a suppliant and begs his uncle to save him, the scholiast adduces four verses of a choral song from the *Azanes*. The Chorus of this tragedy, which consisted of inhabitants of Azania, a mountainous and isolated area in Northern Arcadia, offer supplication to an unnamed recipient, with suppliants' branches and holy wreaths; the Chorus-men implore their addressee to stop a particular kind of cruel sacrifice.

Because this passage is quoted in the scholia to *Orestes*, in connection with Orestes' own supplication of his uncle, De Luca favours the earlier scholarly hypothesis that Orestes himself played some part in Achaëus' tragedy. A period of exile of Orestes in Arcadia, in atonement of his crime of matricide, is mentioned in the exodus of the Euripidean tragedy. Perhaps, then, Achaëus' drama revolved around Orestes' adventures in Arcadia, in the company of a Chorus of Azanian locals. The cruel ritual, for the cessation of which the Chorus are praying, could refer to the human sacrifices offered to the Lycaean Zeus; these are mentioned in various mythographical sources as a custom practised in Arcadia in times of old, instituted by King Lycaon, the archetypical mythical werewolf. De Luca discusses these hypotheses with the required cautiousness and reservations. Her paper offers a fine example of the questions and ambiguities that lurk in the research concerning minor tragedians and obscure mythical traditions.

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In conclusion, this elegant volume offers a cross-section of the research trends that prevail nowadays and will doubtless hold the stage also in the future with regard to the philological study of Greek tragic drama. The reconstruction and analysis of fragmentary remains and lost tragedies occupy a central place, as is generally the case in contemporary cutting-edge approaches to ancient dramaturgy. In the eyes of most classicists today, it is clear that the large corpus of dramatic fragments offers the broader literary and spiritual context, within which the canon of surviving tragedies must be interpreted and assessed. The other essays of the volume bring to the fore highly specialized and technical philological disciplines, such as metrical analysis and the study of ancient scholarship, which can illuminate important facets of tragic dramaturgy and hermeneutics. If something is missing from this little book, it is the broader view, some reflection on how these specialized approaches may contribute to the

overall understanding and appreciation of tragedy as a poetic creation and a cultural phenomenon. But this would be more appropriate in a general monograph or a literary-historical synthesis, than in a collection of well-focused seminar papers.

Italian scholarship has long been a major international power in the philological exegesis of ancient Greek literature. This volume, made up of contributions by some of the best among the younger generation of Italian classicists, creates high expectations that Italian *filologia* will keep its top-ranking position in the decades to come.