

Alessandro Boschi

Crizia tragico. Testimonianze e frammenti

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It is a good time to be a fragmentary Greek tragedian. Against the backdrop of a renewed interest in fragments, scholarship on Greek tragedy has been increasingly looking beyond the canon. Just in the past six years, the so-called ‘minor tragedians’ have been devoted a monograph (Wright 2016) and a new edition in two volumes, equipped with English translation and commentary (Cropp 2019; 2021). Both works promise to make these authors more easily accessible to students and a broader audience of classicists. Different aims but a similar impetus towards the valorisation of this fragmentary and varied corpus informs the new Italian series “I frammenti dei tragici greci minori”, directed by Emanuele Dettori and published by Edizioni Tored of the University of Rome Tor Vergata. This peer-reviewed series promises a more monumental approach to these often neglected authors: each volume is devoted to a single tragedian, and includes a new critical edition, translation and commentary of all relevant testimonia and fragments.



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Providing “un commentario dettagliato” is among the goals of the series.¹ Cropp’s *Minor Greek Tragedians* is certainly short of being detailed if compared to the first two instalments of the Tored series: both Valerio Pacelli’s *Astidamante di Atene* (2020) and Alessandro Boschi’s *Crizia tragico* (2021) span well over 300 pages, whereas Cropp devotes to the two authors 30 and 55 pages respectively. Boschi’s *Crizia tragico*, the volume under review here, could indeed be characterised as encyclopaedic in its approach: not only are all testimonia and fragments included, but each item is equipped with an extensive, non-selective critical apparatus and an all-embracing commentary.

Before moving to the assessment of this volume, the very notion of ‘tragic Critias’ requires some qualification. Boschi is here repurposing the now conventional practice of ascribing to Critias – more or less convincingly – the three tragedies *Tennes*, *Rhadamanthus* and *Pirithous*, which one of the lives of Euripides lists as the latter’s spurious tragedies, and a fourth play which included the so-called ‘Sisyphus fragment’, an atheistic *rhesis* spoken by Sisyphus. The attribution to Critias of these four plays is “a theory of magisterial economy”² first proposed by Wilamowitz, and based on the fact that both the *Pirithous* and the Sisyphus fragment were alternately assigned to Critias and Euripides in antiquity. According to Wilamowitz’s reconstruction, the three tragedies named in the *Vita Euripidis* and a satyr play titled *Sisyphus* formed a Critian tetralogy, which entered the Euripidean corpus and was thereby saved from oblivion. While Boschi embraces the widespread theory according to which this inclusion is what saved Critias’ plays from *damnatio memoriae*, he is very cautious, and rather sceptical, in his assessment of Wilamowitz’ thesis, and although this thesis inevitably underlies the very corpus Boschi edits, he advocates – like other scholars before him – an approach that evaluates each play individually. Indeed, ‘*Crizia tragico*’ is no more than a modern (re)construction, and Boschi’s work sensibly brings this to the fore. Boschi considers Critias an unlikely author for the *Tennes*, is cautious but optimistic about the ascription of the *Rhadamanthus* to Critias and ultimately seems to consider Critias’ authorship virtually certain in the case of the *Pirithous* and the Sisyphus-fragment. This is a sensible stance, especially since it is grounded in the ancient evidence: Critias’ authorship is indeed only attested for the *Pirithous* and the Sisyphus-fragment, and there is no compelling reason to believe that all the (allegedly) spurious plays that Alexandrian scholars identified in the Euripidean corpus were by one and the same author.

1 A full description is available at <https://www.edizionitored.it/categoria-prodotto/i-frammenti-dei-tragici-greci-minori/>.

2 So Collard, Cropp 2008, 632, quoted by Boschi at p. 27.

The volume opens with an introduction setting Critias' political and intellectual activity in context. There follow general *testimonia*, *testimonia* and fragments of individual plays, and fragments of uncertain plays; for each item, Boschi provides his own text, critical apparatus, translation and commentary. A useful feature of the book is that all Greek is translated, except in the commentary, where only some passages are equipped either with an existing translation or with a new translation by the author. Boschi's own translations are quite literal and give a transparent and immediate indication of the author's interpretation of the Greek. Infelicities are very rare and appear to stem from this adherence to the Greek: see e.g. p. 233 "capì di inventare" for F20.13 γνῶναι ... ἐξευρεῖν. The book is rounded off by five generally helpful indexes (*fontium*, *locorum*, *rerum*, *verborum* and *nominum*). Inevitably, both the *index locorum* and the *index rerum* are very selective, but the latter is selective to the point of tenuousness: it could have potentially been expanded to include hundreds of entries, which would have been impractical, but with just 20 items, 12 of which in Greek, it hardly does justice to the richness of the volume, and one would look in vain for key topics that are treated in detail, such as atheism, authenticity, or friendship.

Throughout the volume, Boschi's *constitutio textus* is informed by a cautious and conservative approach and based on a thorough consideration of all the available evidence. For the fragments of indirect tradition, he duly reports the readings of all manuscripts of the quoting authors and includes information on each manuscript. The context of each quotation is amply given and discussed and at times it is used to suggest lines of interpretation (the discussion is especially welcome in such cases as *Pirith.* F3 [Clement of Alexandria] and *Rhad.* F18 [Antiatticist], to name just two). Boschi has also personally inspected most of the papyrological evidence.

The book offers a number of new textual suggestions, but in line with the author's cautious approach they are usually confined to the critical apparatus and expounded in the commentary. An exception is γε for τε in F20.19, which is adopted in the text. Other interesting textual proposals are not printed: see for example the suggested deletion of βίον (omitted in part of the tradition) as an intrusive gloss for ζῶν at *Pirith.* T1.5 (see pp. 55-6 of the commentary); the tentative emendation of διδυμοί τ' ἄρκτοι to Δίδυμοί τ' ἄρκτου or ἄρκτων as equivalent to δίδυμοί τ' ἄρκτικοί at *Pirith.* F3.3, which replaces the transmitted reference to the Ursa maior and minor with one to the Gemini constellation and thus solves some incongruities of the paradosis; the supplement <κατὰ γῆν ἄπασαν> at the beginning of F20.7, based on a comparison with Thgn. 289-92 (the use of *supplevi* in the apparatus might perhaps point to a stage in which the supplement had made it into the text); the emendation of the transmitted ἄγων to δέος at F20.28 (unfortunately no explanation is given about the genesis

of ἄγων; also, the slight oddity this emendation produces – that the sky is *where* δέος is envisioned to strike mortals – is not addressed).

The critical apparatus is omnivorous but transparent and is a welcome digestion of centuries of textual attention to these fragments (a consequence of their possible ascription to Euripides is that they have received much more attention than those of any other minor tragedian). Similarly, the commentary covers a wide range of topics, from lexical and grammatical points to textual criticism, from mythological and literary aspects to philosophical issues, with the occasional anthropological incursion (see the note on καθέδρα in *Pirith.* T1 2-4n.). Overall, one can observe a strong ‘doxographical’ tendency: the views of previous scholars are extensively reported, regardless of the relevance to the point being made. Boschi’s own view is often presented as mere agreement or disagreement with other scholars, and at times other scholars’ views are simply summarised and remain undiscussed.

The dispersive nature of any commentary, a trait that is particularly prominent in such a comprehensive and doxographically oriented one, makes it difficult for an overall view to emerge, and therefore it is slightly inconvenient that the author has chosen not to prefix an introduction to each play (a laudable exception is the Sisyphus fragment, whose line-by-line commentary is preceded by five thematic sections on title, genre, attribution, style, sources and possible ascription to the *Pirithous*: more on the latter below). Much is teased out of each fragment – indeed almost every word of every fragment is dissected – but it is hard for the reader to gain a broader sense of each play from the individual notes. The general introduction would have been an ideal place for an overview of Critias’ dramatic production, but it devotes little space to the topic. Similarly, the introduction highlights the importance of a parallel appreciation of Critias’ political thought and literary output, but does not deal with the (possible) links between ‘Crizia politico’ and ‘Crizia tragico’, which are only scatteredly explored in the commentary. Even Boschi’s stance on the authorship of the plays needs to be gleaned from the commentary on the individual plays, and is not given its own place in the book (one would have expected this to happen in the introduction, too). The commentary on T1, the key passage from the *Vita Euripidis*, addresses the problem of authenticity and Wilamowitz’s thesis from a doxographical perspective, but it is hard to extricate the author’s own view from such a compilatory discussion; so, for example, to find Boschi’s balanced discussion of the authorship of *Tennes* and his good case against Critian authorship, one needs to consult the lengthy commentary on *Tenn.* T1, the hypothesis of the play.

One of the most interesting and thought-provoking ideas of this book is about the provenance of the Sisyphus fragment. The fragment is aptly placed among those *incertarum fabularum* (F20), as no play

title is preserved and the ascription to a *Sisyphus* is only conjectural. Boschi mobilises a number of mythological, literary, and iconographical clues to suggest that the fragment might stem from the *Pirithous*, and this is a theory of even more magisterial economy than Wilamowitz's reconstruction of the alleged Critian tetralogy, as it provides a single explanation for the alternate attribution attested for both the *Pirithous* and the *Sisyphus* fragment. Boschi duly notes that this view was anticipated by Stephanus in his *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (1572), where he ascribes the use of *χωρίον* (s.v.) to Critias' *Pirithous* "in versibus ab Sexto Emp. allatis" (the word is used at F20.39). Incidentally, we may add that the treatment of resolutions is similar in the *Sisyphus* fragment and in the few extant trimeters of *Pirithous*; but the latter do not seem to show any of the stylistic features of the *Sisyphus* fragment which Boschi discusses in the commentary.³ One would have liked to read more both about this potential problem and about how the contents of the *Sisyphus* fragment would fit in what we have of the *Pirithous*, and especially what one should make of the potential incongruity of the atheistic stance with an Underworld setting. Also, Boschi's understandable caution in advancing this hypothesis means that the rest of the book tends to work under the assumption that *Pirithous* is a tragedy and the *Sisyphus* fragment stems from a satyr play (see, about the latter, p. 237: "sembra assodato che si tratti di un dramma satiresco"; but the whole section five of the commentary on F20 rightfully problematises this assumption and inevitably lends some support to the opposite conclusion).

Both what I have called doxographical tendency and the non-selective nature of this book are well understandable if one considers its genesis as a doctoral dissertation, which Boschi defended at University of Pisa in 2018. Oddly, nowhere is the reader told how the book came into existence: one would look in vain for a preface or acknowledgments. The rather extensive bibliography does not include Cropp's *Minor Greek Tragedians* (vol. 1), published in 2019: perhaps a relic of the pre-2019 dissertation, and perhaps also an indication of how impractical it must have been to complete a book manuscript in 2020.⁴

In sum, there is much to be commended in this useful volume, and the author is to be congratulated for such an erudite, rich and well-produced book.⁵ A better organisation of the material, with introduc-

³ Cf. Cropp 2019, 193: "It is not easy to believe that the same poet produced both (*scil.* the *Pirithous* and the *Sisyphus* fragment)".

⁴ Cropp's most recent reassessment of the question of Critian authorship (Cropp 2020) was probably published too late for Boschi to be able to use it.

⁵ The volume's production is excellent and the book is solidly and elegantly put together (we would expect no less for the price). Typos are rare: see Ἑρακλέους for Ἡρακλέους at p. 71, 'Chronos' in the translation but χρόνος (lower case) in the Greek at F3.1, an intrusive 'secolo' in the apparatus on F20.19.

tions to individual plays and an overall assessment of ‘*Crizia tragico*’ in the introduction, would have perhaps made it more accessible and would have brought into sharper relief Boschi’s own contribution to our understanding of this intriguing tragic crux.

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