

ΤΡΑΓΙΚΩΤΑΤΟΝ ΠΑΘΟΣ: The Neglect of Euripides

It is tragic that our knowledge of Euripides is so limited by lack of evidence, but still more tragic that we ignore so much available evidence. Simply put, through negligence we have not sufficiently examined a vast range of material on Euripides that needs careful attention. In this paper I will highlight some consequences of omitting, and rewards for investigating, this evidence: the scholia to the tragedies of Euripides.

A single example will show how this neglect hinders us in biographical terms. That Euripides was a student of Anaxagoras is claimed by a scholion to *Orestes* 982 as an explanation for a description of the sun: Ἀναξαγόρου δὲ μαθητῆς γενόμενος ὁ Εὐριπίδης μύδρον λέγει τὸν ἥλιον. An additional note at *Troïades* 884 suggests that Euripides' treatment of νοῦς as a divine force comes from Anaxagorean teaching: ὁρμῶνται δὲ ἐκ τῶν Ἀναξαγορείων λόγων. Our lack of familiarity with the Euripidean scholia and its origins has discouraged us from engaging appropriately with this information. It is telling that when Dillon (2004) recently investigated the role of contemporary intellectual thought in Euripides, he did not mention the scholion to *Orestes* 982, and only briefly touched on *Troïades* 884. Further, the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* and *Brill's New Pauly* do not contain the name of Anaxagoras even once in their entries for Euripides. Even if ancient biographical traditions are distrusted, does not the evidence warrant at least a mention-with-disclaimer so that we can consider its significance? Critically studying the scholia and their sources can help us formulate an accurate appraisal of such "facts."

Consider also our paltry understanding of ancient literary criticism as pertains to Euripides and the ancient scholars who transmitted this information. Richardson (1980) elucidated some basic principles of literary appreciation found in the scholia to the *Iliad*, but where is the corresponding study for Euripides? A basic reading of both sets of scholia

demonstrates a striking similarity in exegetical methodology and aesthetic standards, ranging from narrative arrangement to demands for realism to propriety of characterization (see the scholia to *Iliad* 11.616, *Hecuba* 342, and *Orestes* 99). What are the implications of this overlap for ancient conceptions of genre and the history of literary interpretation?

We also under-emphasize the study of ancient conceptions of intertextuality, though evidence exists (the first-century BCE scholar Didymus, according to a scholion at *Phoenissae* 751, said that Eteocles refused to name the generals guarding the Theban gates because Aeschlyus had already named them in his *Seven Against Thebes*). Our ignorance extends also to the interrelationship between sets of scholia. How are we to interpret, for instance, the nearly identical notes to *Hecuba* 4 and *Iliad* 3.184 regarding the conflation of the names “Phrygia” and “Troy,” and what does this tell us about ancient commentaries in general?

We are also missing out on some simple Euripidean fun. The scholia contain many gems, such as the fact that Thebes had seven gates because Amphion constructed it with a seven-chorded lyre (*Phoenissae* 287), or that rivers are appropriately depicted as having bull heads because rushing water sounds like mooing (ὅτι παραπλησία τῷ μυκῆματι τῶν ταύρων, *Orestes* 1378), or that Orphic tradition called pigs “Hecabes” because of their analogous fecundity (*Hecuba* 3).

Let the sparseness of this abstract’s bibliography be noted, for there is not much secondary material available. Some may argue in favor of this omission in view of the alleged incompetence of ancient scholars, especially Didymus “Bronze-Guts,” a chief source for much of our extant scholia who has been maligned for his “Chalcenteric Negligence” (West 1970, Harris 1989). If Didymus were alive, he would respond sharply with an article or two about our “Hapalenteric Negligence.” Thus, in order to encourage us to fill the empty shelves on our

scholarly Palatine, as it were, I will attempt to demonstrate the importance of knowing the Euripidean scholia, with a glimpse at some potential rewards.

Works Cited

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