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The Textual Transmission of Euripides' Dramas

P. J. Finglass

1. Introduction

The City Dionysia at Athens saw ninety new tragedies, plus thirty new satyr plays, every decade. Still more tragedies were performed at the Lenaea, also a city festival, and at the Rural Dionysia in the demes. Venues for tragedy outside Attica featured already in the fifth century, and with increasing importance in the fourth and beyond. The total number of tragedies and satyr plays composed for performance at Greek festivals in antiquity is likely to have been in the low thousands. Of these, barely a handful remain; yet the tragedian to whom this Companion is devoted was more fortunate, in terms of the survival of his work, than any other. Six of Aeschylus' ninety or so plays remain, seven of Sophocles hundred and twenty-three.¹ Yet for Euripides, fully eighteen out of a total output of around eighty have come down to us: almost a quarter of his output.² And the fragments of his lost plays are far more substantial than those of Aeschylus and Sophocles.

Why did some of Euripides' plays survive, in full or in part, when the overwhelming majority of Greek tragedies were lost? Why did such a high proportion of his plays survive compared to the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles? What lay behind the survival of particular plays, and the loss of others? For what purposes were

I am grateful to Professor David Kovacs for helpful comments.

¹ For the total number of Aeschylus' plays, see Sommerstein (2008) I xxii with n. 31; for Sophocles', see Sommerstein (2012) 191-2.

² The figure of eighteen does not include *Rhesus*, a drama transmitted with the plays of Euripides but incorrectly attributed to him.

Euripides' plays transmitted? What impact did ancient scholarship have on the transmission of the plays? Which plays were being read during the mediaeval period? What impact did the invention of the printing press have on the process of transmission? Has scholarship since the end of antiquity assisted that process? And how will the transmission continue into the future? No mere chapter can deal adequately with even one of these questions. My hope is that this essay may nevertheless give a general outline that students and scholars will find useful, and that it may stimulate deeper inquiry.³

2. Euripides to Lycurgus

Euripides' career began in 455 and lasted until his death in 406. Throughout that period he was one of the most prominent dramatists in Athens, although not among the most successful; he was placed first only five times (including one posthumous victory) at the Dionysia.⁴ But his frequent presence there as a competitor, when the number of competitors in any one year was limited to three, is testimony to his wide and persistent appeal.⁵ The repeated jibes of comic poets show that he was easily

³ This piece inevitably overlaps with Finglass (2012), which is concerned with the transmission of Sophocles; in this study, however, I have spent more time on the ancient transmission, since the evidence is more abundant than in the case of Sophocles. Even so, much relevant material has been omitted – for example, an account of the use of Euripides made by other ancient writers and the implications that this has for familiarity with Euripides' works. For excellent accounts of the transmission of Euripides, which more than complement my own piece, see Barrett (1964) 45-84 and Parker (2007) lvii-lxvii. An important analysis of the transmission of tragedy in general can be found in Garland (2004).

⁴ Eur. test. 1.IB.5, 3.5 *TrGF*.

⁵ See Stevens (1956) 91-4.

parodied, but not that he was held in contempt; quite the reverse, in fact, since only a popular poet would warrant such a sustained level of parody.⁶ His fame spread beyond Athens: he wrote tragedies for the king of Macedon, and his *Andromache* apparently had its première outside Euripides' home city.⁷ And it is likely his plays were the subject of frequent reperformance as early as the fifth century.⁸

Such popularity was a necessary, if not a sufficient, condition for the transmission of his plays. For any ancient text to be preserved, people had to be sufficiently interested in it to want to have it copied, and thus to pay for the writing material (papyrus, ink) and the labour (by the scribe) that this required. Bookish spectators will have wanted to acquire copies of plays that they had enjoyed in the theatre.⁹ Reperformance will have been a key factor, stimulating interest in particular plays, as well as necessitating the creation of new copies for the benefit of actors.¹⁰ Euripides himself will have kept copies of his plays – for directing reperformances, for reading them to stimulate his creativity when composing fresh works, and as an inheritance for his family. But even in the fifth century, these will have been far from the only copies available.

The cultural significance, and popularity, of Euripides is evident from Aristophanes' *Frogs* in 405, where, despite all the mockery of his poetic style, his and

⁶ Indeed, 'there is a correlation between the tragedies whose comic parodies and allusions we can identify and those which enjoyed a vibrant afterlife more generally' (Hanink (2014) 161).

⁷ Eur. test. 112-20 *TrGF*; Σ Eur. *Andr.* 445 (II 284.20-1 Schwartz).

⁸ For the evidence see Fantuzzi (2016); much of the discussion of Sophoclean reperformance in Finglass (2015a) can also be applied to Euripides.

⁹ In Aristophanes' *Frogs* Dionysus is said to have been reading Euripides' *Andromeda* on board a ship in 405, seven years after its first performance in 412.

¹⁰ For the importance of reperformance for the transmission of texts see Finglass (2015b).

Sophocles' deaths are presented as robbing Athens of their last great tragic poets; from the the decision by the actors to introduce a reperformance of old tragedy at the Dionysia in 386, thereby introducing to the greatest festival of tragedy something that had been in operation for some decades in the demes and abroad; and by his popularity outside Attica, something that we can infer chiefly from the vases in south Italy and Sicily which seem to illustrate individual dramas of his.¹¹ We do not know which play was chosen for reperformance in 386, and the decision to introduce reperformances probably reflects the popularity of more than one tragedian. Nevertheless, when (very limited) data become available later that century, it is Euripides who dominates: one of his *Iphigenia* plays (341) his *Orestes* (340), and another play by him (339) were performed at the Dionysia.¹² Three successive years, then, saw reperformances of a play by Euripides; variation among the tragedians, even among the three 'old masters', does not seem to have been a priority for the actors, or, it would appear, for their audiences. We may infer that even in the fourth

¹¹ See Taplin (2007) 108-219.

¹² See Millis and Olson (2012) 65. The *Iphigenia* might have been *Iphigenia in Tauris* rather than *Iphigenia at Aulis* (thus Taplin (2007) 149), since there are four fourth-century vases which could reflect the influence of the former play (*ibid.* 149-56), and none for the latter. But this assumes that the same plays enjoyed popularity in Magna Graecia, where the vases are found, and in Athens, which might well not be the case; and vase numbers are so small that it is risky to make this kind of inference. The interpolations in the *Iphigenia at Aulis* presumably reflect the consequences of reperformances, perhaps including one in 341 (thus Kovacs (2007) 269 n. 13, referring to *id.* (2003b)). The fact that one of the two named plays is *Orestes* may be significant, as this would turn out to be one of the most popular plays over the succeeding centuries. There are no vases which reflect the influence of *Orestes*, or indeed *Phoenician Women*, and only one which could show the influence of *Hecuba* (Taplin (2007) 141-2, 156), to cite the three plays of the so-called Triad, a concept which will be elucidated below; but again it is unsafe to draw conclusions from this.

century Euripides' popularity outshone that of his rivals, granting him a position in death that he never quite saw in life;¹³ his huge influence on Menander, greater than the influence on that poet of Aeschylus and Sophocles put together, lends further support to this proposition.¹⁴ References to actors in this period, in the orators and elsewhere, often mention performances of Euripides.¹⁵ It is very likely that, in the fourth century, getting hold of a copy of almost any play by Euripides would not have been difficult in Athens, and indeed should have been possible in many other towns, not least in Magna Graecia.

Little quality control was exercised over these copies. Each had to be made by hand, with all the potential for error that this involved – the beginning of a process of deterioration that lasted until the invention of printing. And although reperformance was of crucial importance in ensuring continued interest in, and thus the continued availability of, Euripidean drama, it also had a significant impact on the quality of the texts that it helped to preserve. The actors who reperformed Euripides were not bound to reproduce his plays exactly as he had scripted them. In a world where, as Aristotle remarked, actors were more important than poets,¹⁶ we should expect that actors (and directors) will have reshaped dramas for their own ends – to lengthen the lead part, say, thereby giving the chief actor a more impressive vehicle in which to display his talents. So Aristotle tells of an actor who insisted that he should always speak the opening lines of a play; as Hall says, ‘this must in practice have meant that new prologues needed to be created hastily and prefixed to favourite plays in the

¹³ See Vahtikari (2014) 217-19.

¹⁴ See Meineke (1841) 705-9, Porter (1994) 1-2.

¹⁵ For the evidence see Nervegna (2007) 17-18.

¹⁶ Arist. *Rhet.* 1403b33 ἐκεῖ (*sc.* at theatrical festivals) μείζον δύνανται νῦν τῶν ποιητῶν οἱ ὑποκριταί.

repertoire'.¹⁷ Scholars later in antiquity were aware that actors sometimes changed the texts; although none of their specific diagnoses of the phenomenon is convincing,¹⁸ that does not mean that this kind of interference did not occur, as the next paragraph will show. Such interaction with the text is itself a mark of cultural vitality, and should not simply be seen as just one more type of textual corruption. Nevertheless, from the point of anyone concerned to recover what Euripides actually wrote, the continuing health of the theatrical tradition was a decidedly ambiguous blessing.

The decision of Lycurgus, an Athenian statesman active in the 330s, to establish an official state copy of the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, which it was henceforth compulsory for actors to use, marks a watershed in the transmission of the plays.¹⁹ For the first time, we can identify a recognition that corruption was afflicting the texts of the tragedians, and that actors in particular had to be restrained from making changes to the plays. And since Euripides was already the most popular of three 'old masters' – a status that he would retain for the rest of antiquity – we may imagine that these processes had a particular impact on the text of his dramas. On the other hand, Lycurgus' official text may also have had the effect of canonising error. There is no reason to think that the text of Euripides that he used to create his copy was a particularly good one; its quality may have varied considerably

¹⁷ Arist. *Pol.* 1336b27-31 οὐ κακῶς ἔλεγε τὸ τοιοῦτον Θεόδωρος ὁ τῆς τραγωδίας ὑποκριτῆς· οὐθενὶ γὰρ πρῶποτε παρῆκεν ἑαυτοῦ προεισάγειν, οὐδὲ τῶν εὐτελῶν ὑποκριτῶν, ὡς οἰκειομένων τῶν θεατῶν ταῖς πρώταις ἀκοαῖς; Hall (2010) 161.

¹⁸ For this topic in detail see Finglass (2006), (2015b).

¹⁹ [Plut.] *Vit. X Or.* 841f εἰσήνεγκε δὲ καὶ νόμους, τὸν μὲν περὶ τῶν κωμῶδων . . . τὸν δέ, ὡς χαλκᾶς εἰκόνας ἀναθεῖναι τῶν ποιητῶν Αἰσχύλου Σοφοκλέους Εὐριπίδου καὶ τὰς τραγωδίας αὐτῶν ἐν κοινῷ γραψαμένους φυλάττειν καὶ τὸν τῆς πόλεως γραμματέα παραναγινώσκειν τοῖς ὑποκρινομένοις· οὐκ ἐξεῖναι γὰρ <παρ> αὐτὰς ὑποκρίνεσθαι; cf. Hanink (2014) 60-74.

from one play to another.²⁰ Nor should we imagine that Lycurgus or those working on his behalf had a particular talent for textual criticism; they will not have collated one manuscript against others to obtain a more accurate text. So any mistakes present in the copy used to create the Lycurgan recension would now be immortalised, at least at performances at the Dionysia – and perhaps down to our own day, depending on the next stages of the transmission, to which we now turn.

3. Alexandria to late antiquity

We cannot know for sure how early Euripides' plays made their way to the great Library of Alexandria, there to be studied and edited by the leading scholars of the age. We may imagine that it was early in the third century; Euripides was already a popular classic author, and it is hard to imagine that many others (Homer apart) were studied in preference to him. Very probably the great majority of his tragedies made the transition to Alexandria, although it seems that some of the satyr-plays had already been lost by this time.²¹ According to an anecdote in Galen, Ptolemy Euergetes (probably Ptolemy III, 246-221) acquired τὰ βιβλία – “the books”, or perhaps “the famous books” – of tragedy from Athens, leaving them a deposit of fifteen silver talents which he proceeded to forfeit, although he did make splendid copies of the manuscripts which he had ‘borrowed’ and sent them in place of the originals.²² If we can trust this account, the books in question are likely to have been

²⁰ Cf. Barrett (1964) 47, Garland (2004) 28.

²¹ The evidence is sifted by Kannicht (1996), whose conclusions are slightly modified by Scullion (2006) 187, 197-8 n. 7.

²² Galen, *Commentary on the Epidemics of Hippocrates* 2.4 (= Eur. test. 219 *TrGF*). See Handis (2013) for a sceptical account of this story.

the official Lycurgan text; and if that text was still the same one written in the 330s, and not a copy subsequently made to replace it, that would mean that the Alexandrian library would have thereby obtained a text free from a century or so of further textual corruption. But even if these hypotheses are correct, we have no way of knowing how much of an impact, if any, the Lycurgan text had on the edition(s) of Euripides that came out of Alexandria.

Ancient scholarship on Euripides is certainly attested.²³ Even before the Alexandrians, he was the subject (or co-subject) of monographs by Aristotle, Philochorus, Duris, and Heraclides Ponticus; Aristoxenus and Dicaearchus also wrote on him. From the scholia we know of a variety of scholars, usually of unknown date, who studied individual plays: Aeschines, Apollodorus of Cyrene, Apollodorus of Tarsus, Parmeniscus, Timachidas of Rhodes. But as for complete editions, we are not very well informed. Alexander of Aetolia was commissioned by Ptolemy II Philadelphus (sole ruler 283-246) to produce a διόρθωσις of all of tragedy and satyr-play.²⁴ Even if Alexander set out with the intention of correcting as many errors in the texts as possible, the sheer size of this undertaking will have limited the impact that he had on the text of any individual play; and the loss of his work on drama means that we cannot form even a provisional assessment of his capability as a critic. A few variant readings, as well as the use of critical signs, by Aristophanes of Byzantium (257-180 BC) are attested in the scholia on *Orestes* and *Hippolytus*;²⁵ he also wrote hypotheses to at least some of the plays, which included a brief summary both of the

²³ See Eur. test. 206-17 *TrGF* (which contains the references for the statements that follow), McNamee (2012).

²⁴ Alex. Aet. test. 7 Magnelli.

²⁵ For references see Schwartz (1887-91) II 380.

plot and of the circumstances of the first performance.²⁶ Hard evidence that he produced an edition of the whole Euripidean corpus, however, is lacking.²⁷ Even if he was nominally responsible for a complete edition, much of the work may have been undertaken by subordinates, supervised, to whatever degree, by the great master. Confident assertions about the scope of his editorial activity, in tragedy as well as in lyric poetry, should be treated with scepticism.

The same is true in the case of Aristarchus (c. 220-143 BC), where the evidence for his work on Sophocles is actually stronger than for any engagement with Euripides.²⁸ Work by Didymus (c. 65 BC – AD 10) on Euripides is attested in the scholia to six different plays, from which we may conclude that he produced a commentary on at least part of Euripides' oeuvre; but nothing suggests that he produced an edition too.²⁹ Any edition of Euripides that did come out of Alexandria would have had considerable prestige, and would probably have made quite an impact on the textual tradition. But texts of Euripides continued to circulate outside that city, and it seems unlikely that an Alexandrian edition could have entirely dominated the tradition of a poet increasingly read over the Greek-speaking Mediterranean.

We can observe the changing fortunes of different plays over the centuries, thanks to the recent magnificent study of the ancient manuscripts (papyri) by Paolo Carrara.³⁰ The evidence is almost completely limited to Egypt, and a great proportion

²⁶ See Pfeiffer (1968) 192-4, Van Rossum-Steenbeek (1998) 32-6, Carrara (2009) 243-52; also Brown (1987), who argues that many of these hypotheses do not originate with Aristophanes.

²⁷ For a discussion see Carrara (2007).

²⁸ See Pfeiffer (1968) 222-4, Finglass (2012) 12.

²⁹ For references see Schwartz (1887-91) II 382; also Pfeiffer (1968) 277.

³⁰ Carrara (2009). Four Euripidean papyri known to me post-date Carrara's book: a first-century papyrus of *Alexandros* (see Henry (2014)), a first- or second-century papyrus of *Orestes* (see F. Morelli

of it comes from a single town, Oxyrhynchus. No doubt there were variations across the Greek-speaking world in terms of which plays were especially popular in different periods. But we have no reason to think that Egypt or Oxyrhynchus were so culturally peculiar that we cannot make at least some broad inferences about the transmission.³¹

Before we consider the papyri in detail, however, we need to jump ahead for a moment, and note which plays did in fact survive antiquity; it will be important to bear this information in mind as we consider which plays seem to have been most popular at different stages in the transmission.³² The plays that survived can be divided into two groups. The first consists of nine dramas, namely *Alcestis*, *Andromache*, *Bacchae*, *Hecuba*, *Hippolytus*, *Medea*, *Orestes*, *Phoenician Women*, and *Trojan Women*, which survive in many mediaeval manuscripts.³³ These plays are known as ‘the Selection’, a term that will be examined later. Three of them, *Hecuba*, *Orestes*, and *Phoenician Women*, evidently enjoyed a special popularity, at least in very late antiquity and in the middle ages, since they are found in so many more manuscripts than the others; these are called ‘the Triad’. The second group of plays, also nine in number, is made up of *Cyclops*, *Electra*, *Helen*, *Heracles*, *Heraclidae*, *Ion*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Suppliant Women*. These survive in only

(2015)), a third-century papyrus of *Ino* (see Luppe and Henry (2012), Finglass (2014), (2016)), and a fifth-century papyrus of *Bacchae* (see Henry (2015)). These are included where relevant in the lists below.

³¹ Our Egyptian papyri may have been more influenced by the Alexandrian edition(s) of Euripides than the (lost) papyri from elsewhere in the Roman empire; this may mean that they offer a more accurate text than would a comparable set of papyri from another place.

³² A full account of this question would also consider the frequency of quotations from different plays in antiquity, a topic beyond the limits of this essay.

³³ *Rhesus* is also part of this group.

one mediaeval manuscript, plus in others copied from that sole manuscript. The tenuous nature of this transmission, coupled with the alphabetic proximity of these titles in Greek, suggests that a single book from a multi-volume edition of Euripides somehow survived the destruction of its fellows and lasted long enough to be copied. This freakishly fortunate occurrence was the only thing that stood between these plays and oblivion. The upshot is that we cannot simply separate the plays of Euripides into those that survived and those that did not; such a division makes far too much of the contingent survival of a single ancient book. The real divide is between the plays of the Selection and all the others. It is also worth looking out for the Triad, to see when these three plays began to achieve prominence.³⁴

Even as early as the third century BC, which is when the first papyri are found, there may be a bias in favour of the Selection: four of eleven papyri are taken from this group, including one from the Triad.³⁵ This fact needs to be treated with care. Three further papyri from this period might belong to Euripides, all to plays outside the Selection; four out of fourteen is not as impressive a percentage, though still more than we would expect for a group that makes up just over 10% of Euripides' output. (*Ex hypothesi* it will always be possible to attribute papyri of plays already known to be by Euripides to the correct author, whereas with lost plays we must rely on there being sufficient text for us to establish a connexion by means of language or style; there is thus always a chance of skewed picture.) But already in papyri from the second to first centuries BC that picture begins to change: by this time six out of

³⁴ Papyrus dates are taken from Carrara (2009), whose use of overlapping chronological periods reminds us that dating papyri is not an exact science.

³⁵ *Alexander, Antiope, Erechtheus, Heracles (2), Hippolytus (2), Hypsipyle, Iphigenia in Tauris, Medea, Orestes.*

eleven papyri are from the Selection, and fully five from the Triad.³⁶ This is far more than we would expect if all the dramas were equally popular. We are dealing with small numbers, yet the picture is consistent. As Mastronarde notes, ‘it does not take very long for the popularity among readers (and students and teachers) of most of <the> select plays to be evident in their survival in the known fragments, and in particular the triad plays . . . emerge already in the Roman period as abundantly attested’.³⁷ Nevertheless, at least one play outside the Selection enjoyed popularity during this period, if the three attested fragments of *Cresphontes* are anything to go by.

From the first century BC to the first century AD six fragments out of seven are from the Selection, and three from the Triad.³⁸ The smaller number of fragments from this period ‘is mirrored in all kinds of papyri and relates to survival rather than production’.³⁹ Papyri are more numerous from the first to the second centuries AD, with thirty-seven separate texts.⁴⁰ Sixteen come from the Triad, and eight more from the rest of the Selection, leaving only thirteen for the rest, or a just over a third of the papyri for approximately 90% of Euripides’ plays. In the third century twenty-five

³⁶ *Cresphontes* (3, though one is doubtful), *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Medea*, *Orestes* (4), *Phoenician Women*, *Phrixus A?*

³⁷ Mastronarde (2011) 193.

³⁸ *Alcestis*, *Bacchae*, *Helen*, *Orestes* (2), *Phoenician Women*, *Trojan Women*.

³⁹ Thus Morgan (2003) 188; she adds (with regard to the data for all tragedy, not just Euripides) that ‘if anything these figures are relatively high for this period, so interest in tragedy seems to have continued healthy’.

⁴⁰ *Alcmeon*, *Alexandros*, *Andromache* (3), *Andromeda*, *Antigone*, *Bacchae* (2), *Cretans*, *Cresphontes*, *Hecuba* (3), *Hippolytus*, *Hippolytus Veiled*, *Hypsipyle*, *Iphigenia in Tauris* (2), *Medea* (2), *Orestes* (6), *Phoenician Women* (7), *Phrixus A or B*, *Telephus*, and one fragment not certainly attributed to any play.

papyri are divided fifteen for the Selection (with nine for the Triad), ten for the rest.⁴¹ Numbers start to decline only in the fourth century, when eight papyri are represented: six from the Selection (only one from the Triad), two from the other plays.⁴² The last papyri come from the fifth to seventh centuries. During this period twenty-five papyri are attested, all but one from the Selection, and with eleven attestations of the Triad.⁴³

From this rather breathless survey various points emerge. First, the sheer number of Euripidean papyri is remarkable:⁴⁴ far more in every period than those of Aeschylus or Sophocles.⁴⁵ Second, the plays of the Selection are somewhat

⁴¹ *Alcestis, Andromache (2), Archelaus, Cretans, Cresphontes, Electra, Hecuba (3), Heracles (2), Ino, Iphigenia in Aulis, Iphigenia in Tauris, Medea (2), Orestes (2), Phoenician Women (4), Theseus, Trojan Women.*

⁴² *Andromache (2), Cyclops, Hecuba, Medea (2), Melanippe, Oedipus.* As Morgan (2003) 188 notes, ‘it is possible that as the reading of Christian texts increased at this time, the reading of tragedy dropped sharply except (probably) among small groups of the highly cultured’. I do not include in these figures, though do mention here, the line of *Hypsipyle* recently discovered in Trimithis on the wall of a school building from the mid-fourth century (see Criboire and Davoli (2013) 11-13).

⁴³ *Andromache (6), Bacchae (6), Hecuba (2), Hippolytus, Medea (4), Orestes (4), Phaethon, Phoenician Women (5).* This list includes four papyri containing (at least) two plays each. The text of *Phaethon* was probably written in the fifth century, outside Egypt. Cf. Morgan (2003) 201: ‘during the later Roman period the reading of tragedy declines steadily, but among a few keen communities or individuals it hangs on right up to the Arab conquest’.

⁴⁴ Cf. Morgan (2003) 189: ‘Euripides appears somewhere in Egypt in every century and at every findspot at some time, and there are no obvious gaps where excavation turned up large numbers of other literary papyri, but no Euripides.’

⁴⁵ A survey of quotations or literary allusions would complement this picture. For example, Plutarch quotes Euripides 359 times, more than any other author except for Plato (915 times) and Homer (889), and more than twice as often as Sophocles (140); for the figures see Morgan (1998) 318-19.

overrepresented even among the third-century BC papyri, and by the second to first centuries BC both the Selection in general, and the Triad in particular, make up a decisive preponderance of the attested texts.⁴⁶ This contrasts with the picture for Sophocles, where in the distribution of papyri ‘there is nothing to suggest that, before AD 100, any group of plays was being read, performed, and copied . . . more than any other’.⁴⁷ Third, although it follows that the non-selected plays are not as numerous as they might be, at any period for which papyri are attested, they nevertheless continue to be attested down to the fifth century. One of them, *Cresphontes*, has fully five attestations in the papyri between the second century BC and third century AD, which suggests particular fame; further indications of this play’s popularity will be noted below. This again contrasts with the picture from Sophocles, where we encounter ‘the complete absence of plays outside the Seven from the fourth century onwards’.⁴⁸ Euripides’ greater popularity is manifested by the survival, for a longer time, of a greater proportion of his poetry. Fourth, the dominance of the Triad can be observed from the second century BC onwards, but this dominance is not absolute. If we did not know otherwise, we might have included *Medea* and *Andromache* alongside *Hecuba*, *Orestes*, and *Phoenician Women*, since we have an impressive twelve and thirteen papyri respectively of those plays. Within the triad, *Orestes* and *Phoenician Women* are better attested than *Hecuba*, and in terms of quotations ‘*Hecuba* does not share

⁴⁶ Quotations show a similar pattern: ‘the select plays are increasingly dominant over the others; within the others the proportion of alphabetical to lost plays is fairly constant’ (Heath (1987) 41).

⁴⁷ Finglass (2012) 13 (note that a number of instances of ‘AD’ in my typescript were rendered as ‘BCE’ [sic] in the published text; I have cited above the text as it should be written). This is based on a sample of only six papyri, of which one is from the seven plays that survived; the picture could change if we had more fragments.

⁴⁸ Finglass (2012) 13 (‘the Seven’ denotes the seven plays of Sophocles that have survived complete).

either in the early dominance of the “triad” or in its late increase’;⁴⁹ but thanks to recent papyrus publications the popularity of this play in antiquity can be discerned.

The term ‘the Selection’ is handy but question-begging: it implies that somebody made a deliberate choice of these particular plays. This was the view of Wilamowitz, according to whom a choice was made for educational purposes in the second century; from that point on, these plays alone were read, and the others were duly lost.⁵⁰ Wilamowitz had nevertheless to admit that two plays of the selection, *Orestes* and *Phoenician Women*, had begun to enjoy popularity long before the date of this putative selection.⁵¹ And the evidence from the papyri, as we have seen, tends to underline the significance of that admission.⁵² Ascribing the survival of certain plays to the intervention of a single Selector parallels the ancient tendency to credit to one *πρῶτος εὑρετής* or *primus inventor* phenomena which today we would see as the results of a long process of development involving many people.⁵³ Thanks to the papyri, we can see that the plays of the so-called Selection are strongly overrepresented from at least the second century BC; we also know that plays outside that Selection were being read as late as the fifth century AD. Both these data tell against the idea of a single moment of choice. It is better to see the survival of certain

⁴⁹ Heath (1987) 41.

⁵⁰ Wilamowitz (1907) 195-7, 201-3; cf. the summary in Barrett (1964) 51-2.

⁵¹ Wilamowitz (1907) 201.

⁵² So Roberts (1953) 271 (‘thus the selection – in other words, the formation of the classical tradition – is seen not to have been an arbitrary act but in keeping with the general taste of the Hellenistic age’), Barrett (1964) 52 (‘the evidence of the papyri . . . indicates that some at any rate of the select plays had established an ascendancy long before that date’), Garland (2004) 69-70.

⁵³ Cf. the language of Wilamowitz (1907) 195: ‘Ein mann ist es gewesen, der damals für den unterricht eine auswahl von tragödien der drei tragiker veranstaltet hat . . .’

plays as the result of a centuries-long period of change. As the use of Euripides in educational contexts, and the performance of his plays, became less frequent, certain dramas stopped being copied, which resulted in the relatively small number of plays that reached the middle ages.⁵⁴

Why certain plays remained popular, and why others faded away, is impossible to tell. The hypothesis to Euripides' *Phoenician Women* emphasises both the emotional impact caused by the many deaths in the drama, and the many maxims that it contains; such a combination would make it ideal both for performance and for use in the schoolroom, and may explain its success.⁵⁵ But many other Euripidean plays might be expected to excite the passions of their audiences, and maxims are hardly in short supply elsewhere in this author. Moreover, we have no way of assessing the supposed demerits of the many plays which have perished. The greater success of Euripides compared to that of Sophocles or Aeschylus is perhaps easier to explain; his language is simpler than that of his two fifth-century rivals. Aeschylus' language is the most difficult of the three (as is already recognised in Aristophanes' *Frogs*), and it is no coincidence that his plays turned out to be the least popular in succeeding centuries.

It may be that choices made quite early on in the story of the transmission, in the fourth and third centuries BC, as to which plays were worth reviving, continued to have an impact in subsequent centuries by sheer force of inertia. If a play dropped out of the general repertoire of actors, it would have been difficult for it to find a way back in. An actor would have had to make quite an investment of time and effort to

⁵⁴ The name 'the Selection' nevertheless remains a convenient shorthand, as long as we remember that any process of selection was more akin to Natural Selection than to any discrete moment of choice.

⁵⁵ Hyp. Eur. *Phoen.* (1 243.1-7 Schwartz). See Cribiore (2001).

learn a play that was no longer being performed; and there was a risk that audiences would not take as well to material that had become unfamiliar. We should not think, then, in terms of each successive generation assessing all the plays of Euripides independently and deciding which ones they liked best; inherited patterns of availability will have limited the plays with which they are likely to have come into contact. And as opportunities for performance of entire tragedies dwindled, we may imagine that actors fell back on a smaller and smaller repertoire, with inevitable consequences for the copying of the plays.

Performance of tragedy, sometimes without the choruses, can be traced for hundreds of years after the classical period.⁵⁶ A third-century BC inscription from Tegea celebrates the victories of a tragic actor at different contents, and lists seven by name (leaving another eighty-eight unenumerated); of the seven, five involve plays by Euripides.⁵⁷ One is the familiar *Orestes*, which the actor put on at the Athenian Dionysia; but *Heracles* and *Archelaus* are also attested twice, and performed at different festivals. The repetition implies that these plays formed part of the repertoire, and thus that audiences in this period were still enthusiastic for a range of Euripides' plays, not just the ones destined to survive. Later, Plutarch and Philostratus refer to performances of two of Euripides' dramas, both from outside the Selection;⁵⁸ a few papyri from the imperial period look as if they were used in the context of performance.⁵⁹ In addition to complete plays, extracts were also performed, both in

⁵⁶ See Nervegna (2007), (2014), Finglass (2014) 77-9.

⁵⁷ *TrGF* I DID B 11 (276-219 BC). The other two plays are by Arcestratus and Chaereon.

⁵⁸ Plut. *De sera numinis vindicta* 556a (*Ino*), *De esu carnium* II 998de (*Cresphontes*), also Pseudo-Plutarch, *Consolatio ad Apollonium* 110c (*Cresphontes*); Philostr. *Vita Apollonii* 7.5 (*Ino*).

⁵⁹ P.Oxy. 4546 (first century BC or first half of the first century AD, *Alcestis*), P.Oxy. 2458 (3rd century, *Cresphontes*), P.Oxy. 5131 (3rd century, *Ino*).

the theatre and in smaller gatherings.⁶⁰ As in the very earliest stages of the transmission, these reperformances of various types stimulated interest in the plays and demand for texts. It may be no coincidence that the range of surviving Euripidean plays contracts not long after performances appear to cease in the early third century.

4. The Mediaeval Transmission

‘I assume that by the 7th cent<ury>, there existed in metropolitan Greece a considerable number of codices containing the select plays of Euripides (or, in some cases, some of them), many of them with marginal annotations in a form resembling the medieval scholia. Then come the dark centuries; then in the later 9th and the 10th cent<uries> some of these codices are rediscovered, text and annotations are transcribed from the ancient uncial into minuscule, and the mediaeval tradition begins.’ Thus begins Barrett’s masterly survey of the transmission of Euripides in the middle ages.⁶¹ He goes on to argue that the variety of readings in the mediaeval tradition of the plays from the Selection can be explained only by supposing the survival of more than one manuscript from antiquity.⁶² We have already discussed the division of Euripides plays into the Selection (which includes the Triad) and the Alphabetic plays. Scores of manuscripts contain the Triad,⁶³ far fewer the Selection: sixteen for

⁶⁰ See Garland (2004) 63-4.

⁶¹ Barrett (1964) 57-8. For the Byzantines and Euripides see also Baldwin (2009).

⁶² *Ibid.* 58-60.

⁶³ For *Hecuba* see Matthiessen (1974); for *Orestes*, Diggle (1991), for *Phoenician Women*, Mastronarde/Bremer (1982). Turyn (1957) remains a useful account of individual manuscripts, but its account of the relationship between them has been discredited by subsequent scholarship (see Barrett (2007) 420-31, a review that remained unpublished for half a century after the appearance of Turyn’s book).

Hippolytus, say, and a still smaller number for other plays. The oldest manuscript was written in the tenth or eleventh century, and contains the Triad plus *Andromache*, *Hippolytus*, and *Medea*; about two centuries later the Euripidean text was imperfectly deleted to make room for a commentary on Old Testament prophets. The limited classical curriculum of the Byzantine period focussed on the three plays of the Triad above all, which explains their frequency in the manuscripts. In this period Euripides was appreciated not by audiences but by readers, whether they were students or people with literary interests more generally.

For the Alphabetic plays, there is only one witness, the fourteenth-century manuscript L. Another manuscript containing the same plays, P, also from the fourteenth century, is a copy of L, and thus not an independent witness; it is nonetheless useful, since it sometimes tells us L's likely reading when the latter has been obscured or obliterated.⁶⁴ There are a handful of further apographa from the fifteenth century. The survival of so few manuscripts from the middle ages containing the Alphabetic plays suggests that they were barely read, and certainly not on the school curriculum. L's readings are sometimes unclear because it was worked on, more than once, by Triclinius (active c. 1320), the most important Byzantine scholar of Euripides. His particular contribution was to rediscover the principle of strophic responson in the lyric of tragedy, which allowed him to make many successful interventions in the text. It is with him that modern scholarship on Euripides begins, long before the printing press.

⁶⁴ Zuntz (1965) is the definitive account of the relationship between these two manuscripts, as well as of their fortunes.

5. The progress of scholarship⁶⁵

The first printed edition of Euripides was published at Florence in 1494 by Janus Lascaris; it contained four plays, *Alcestis*, *Andromache*, *Hippolytus*, and *Medea*. The Aldine edition followed in 1503, containing all the surviving plays except for *Electra*; this followed in an edition of 1546. Only now is the transmission of the plays secure. The works of Euripides were now to be found in many more copies and locations than ever before. Producing a new set of copies was now much easier; and the chance that any play would be lost thanks to the disappearance or decay of a handful of manuscripts, a threat all too real in previous centuries, was gone.

From this point, the story is not one of the disappearance of Euripides' texts, but of their steady improvement, always with the goal of removing the errors introduced by some two millennia of written transmission. Particular highlights include Wilhelm Canter's edition of 1571, the first to print Euripides' lyrics in responding verse; the editions by John King (1726) and Samuel Musgrave (1778), who made use of a greater number of manuscripts in establishing the text rather than simply making conjectural changes to previous editions; Lodewijk Valckenaer's edition of *Phoenician Women* (1755), the first to take seriously the possibility that interpolation had affected our texts of Euripides;⁶⁶ the editions of individual plays by Richard Porson in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which displayed (along with his posthumously printed *adversaria*) a unique critical ability; and the edition of Adolph Kirchhoff in 1855, the first to set about evaluating the manuscripts on a scientific basis by applying the method today associated with the name of Karl

⁶⁵ For this topic see in particular the elegant Latin account of Diggle (1981-94) 1 v-xi.

⁶⁶ For unpublished work by Valckenaer and his contemporaries on the text of Euripides see Finglass (2009).

Lachmann. Apart from these big names, many other scholars have contributed to the purification of Euripides' text. To make even a single conjecture that wins general approval is a valiant achievement in the perpetual scholarly struggle to increase our understanding of the past.

The discovery of papyri of Euripides from the early twentieth century onwards both enabled the recovery of substantial parts of Euripides inaccessible since antiquity, and gave us glimpses of a textual tradition for the other plays much older than that provided by the mediaeval manuscripts.⁶⁷ These new discoveries are certainly the most glamorous part of the achievement of modern scholarship; but we should not forget that the twentieth century also saw the most significant improvements to our texts of the plays that have survived complete. This was in part thanks to the studies of Zuntz, Matthiessen, Bremer/Mastrorade, and Diggle (all cited in the previous section) in untangling the relationships between individual manuscripts. This is work of permanent value; it will never need to be done again, and gives vital assistance to a modern editor of Euripides, as well as illuminating the history of the transmission. But this improvement is also due to the quality of the editions published over the last half century. Indeed, perhaps no other ancient authors was as fortunate in his modern editors as was Euripides. The Oxford Classical Text by Diggle⁶⁸ and the Loeb Classical Library edition by Kovacs,⁶⁹ accompanied by several volumes explaining their textual choices,⁷⁰ are wonderful resources for the study of the plays that have survived in full, thanks to the knowledge of Euripides' language,

⁶⁷ For the significance of papyri for the textual criticism of extant texts see Finglass (2013), (2017).

⁶⁸ Diggle (1981-94).

⁶⁹ Kovacs (1994-2002).

⁷⁰ Diggle (1981), (1994), Kovacs (1994), (1996), (2003a).

style, and dramatic technique exhibited by their editors in their textual choices. The fragments, too, have been acutely edited by Kannicht (2004). Editions of individual plays have also contributed considerably to our understanding: those by Barrett of *Hippolytus* and Mastronarde of *Phoenician Women* deserve particular mention among many outstanding contributions.⁷¹ The Aris and Phillips series, presided over for several decades by Collard and now nearing completion, often provides further useful assistance.⁷²

6. The future

Texts of Euripides have not in been in such good shape since shortly after the playwright's lifetime. A reader wanting to get a picture of the possibilities for any textual point can easily consult the editions of Diggle and Kovacs and their ancillary volumes, and several commentaries per play. It is tempting to conclude that the work is done; that progress in this area is unlikely or impossible. That would be a mistake. True, any scholar setting out today to create a complete new critical edition of the works of Euripides would be better advised pursue a different research topic. But our ever increasing understanding of Euripides' language, metre, and dramatic and literary technique, combined with the likely recovery of more Euripidean papyri, should mean that, within two or three generations, a fresh investigation would indeed bear fruit. In the meantime, detailed editions of individual plays which consider textual criticism alongside issues of literary and dramatic interpretation are still needed for several dramas, both those preserved complete and those in fragmentary form. A more pressing need today is for a proper analysis of what this chapter has

⁷¹ Barrett (1964), Mastronarde (1994).

⁷² The Teubner Euripides is in general less useful, although some volumes are worth consulting.

merely sketched: the extraordinary process by which a few of the tragedies of Euripides managed to survive antiquity, and so came down to us.⁷³

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⁷³ Nervegna (2013) provides an excellent model for such a volume, being an account of the ancient transmission of the only classical dramatist to enjoy greater popularity in antiquity than even Euripides, namely Menander.

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