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*Condemned to Oblivion in Hades:  
some Notes on the Pirithous Attributed to Critias*

Little soul, gentle and drifting, guest and companion of my body, now you will dwell below in pallid places, stark and bare; there you will abandon your play of yore. But one moment still, let us gaze together on these familiar shores, on these objects which doubtless we shall not see again... Let us try, if we can, to enter into death with open eyes...

M. Yourcenar, *Memoirs of Hadrian*, trans. by G. Frick

**Abstract**

The relationship between *katabasis* and memory is represented by the myth of Pirithous in Hades, as suggested by *Pirithous* attributed to Critias. The meeting between Pirithous, seated on the throne of Oblivion, and Heracles takes the form of a dialogue regarding the Lapith's inability to see and hear. Pirithous' effort to recover his faculties allows to dispel the mist that separates him from the world, until the recognition through memory. Through a philological analysis, my purpose has been to show how the tragedian stages the theme of memory. Afterwards, I've reflected upon the anthropological significance of Pirithous' seated position.

Il rapporto tra *katabasis* e memoria è espresso nel mito di Piritoo nell'Ade, com'è rappresentato nel *Piritoo* attribuito a Crizia. L'incontro tra Piritoo, seduto sul trono dell'Oblio, ed Eracle assume la forma di un dialogo a proposito dell'incapacità del lapita di vedere e sentire. Lo sforzo di Piritoo per recuperare le sue facoltà permette di dissipare la nebbia che lo separa dal mondo, fino al riconoscimento per mezzo della memoria. Grazie all'analisi filologica, il mio proposito è stato mostrare in che modo il tragediografo mette in scena il motivo della memoria. Successivamente ho riflettuto sul significato antropologico della posizione seduta di Piritoo.

In the last few years, examining themes related to *katabasis*, in both ancient descent narratives and their modern adaptations, has become a popular strand of research. One of these topics is the relationship between memory and the descent into the underworld: in fact, especially in recent years, scholars have recognized the importance of memory for analysing the structures in *katabatic* tales and, particularly in her influential *Hell in Contemporary Literature* (2005), Rachel Falconer has claimed that the descent narrative is an inherently 'memorious' genre.

The close relationship between *katabasis* and memory appears to be well represented by the myth regarding the punishment of Theseus and Pirithous in Hades, and their later release at the hands of Heracles, as the extant fragments of the tragedy *Pirithous* suggest. In an anonymous *Life of Euripides*, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, it was written that, among the plays attributed to the famous tragedian, *Tennes*, *Rhadamanthys* and *Pirithous* were not considered authentic<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, possibly following another Alexandrian source<sup>2</sup>, Athenaeus of Naucratis attributed *Pirithous* to Critias or to Euripides<sup>3</sup>. Taking these facts into account, as well as the attribution of Crit. F 19 Snell, uttered by Sisyphus, to Critias (Sext. Emp. *Adv. Math.* IX 54) and to Euripides (Aët. *Plac.* I 6, 7 and 7, 2), Ulrich von Wilamowitz concluded that Critias authored the tetralogy consisting of *Tennes*, *Rhadamanthys*, *Pirithous* and the satyr play *Sisyphus*<sup>4</sup>.

Critias' familiarity with theatre is attested by Stobaeus (I 8, 10; III 14, 2 and 23, 1; IV 33, 10), who attributes to him four gnomic fragments taken from unidentified plays (Crit. F 22-25 Snell), and by Plato. In *Crit.* 108b [= Crit. T 1a Snell] Socrates urges Critias to speak after Timaeus' speech, which has met with great success among listeners making up an exacting *theatron*<sup>5</sup>; shortly afterwards (108d), Critias himself uses the same theatrical metaphor in his own speech<sup>6</sup>. In *Charm.* 162d [= Crit. T 1b Snell] Charmides, after whom the dialogue is named, struggles to define *sophrosyne*, causing the indignation of Critias, his caretaker, who is angered like a poet with an actor who has betrayed his verses<sup>7</sup>. In these passages, theatrical figures of speech are apt only if we assume that Critias was well known for his dramatic activity<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Eur. T 1. 28f. Kannicht: τούτων [*scil.* τῶν τοῦ Εὐριπίδου δραμάτων] νοθεύεται τρία, Τέννης Ῥαδάμανθους Πειρίθους. The *Life* is reported, much abbreviated and in two different ways, in some Byzantine manuscripts of Euripides (see CROPP 2020, 251f.).

<sup>2</sup> See COLLARD (1995, 184 = 2007, 57).

<sup>3</sup> XI 496b (see Crit. F 2 Snell): ὁ τὸν Πειρίθου γράψας εἴτε Κριτίας ἐστὶν ὁ τύραννος ἢ Εὐριπίδης, «the author of the *Pirithous*, who may be either the tyrant Critias or Euripides» (trans. by OLSON 2009, 415).

<sup>4</sup> Regarding this «theory of magisterial economy», as stated by COLLARD – CROPP (2008, 632), see WILAMOWITZ – MOELLENDORFF (1875, 166). Regarding Critias' work, see CENTANNI (1997); BULTRIGHINI (1999); IANNUCCI (2002).

<sup>5</sup> Προλέγω γε μὴν, ὦ φίλε Κριτία, σοὶ τὴν τοῦ θεάτρου διάνοιαν, ὅτι θαυμαστῶς ὁ πρότερος ἠδδοκίμηκεν ἐν αὐτῷ ποιητῆς, ὥστε τῆς συγγνώμης δεήσει τινός σοι παμπόλλης, εἰ μέλλεις αὐτὰ δυνατὸς γενέσθαι παραλαβεῖν, «but now, my dear Critias, I must caution you about the attitude of your audience in this theater: the first of the poets to compete in it put on such a glorious performance that you will need a great measure of sympathy if you are going to be able to compete after him» (trans. by Diskin Clay in COOPER 1997, 1294). According to BATTEGAZZORE (1989, 449), the allusion to Critias' familiarity with theatre is transparent in this Platonic passage.

<sup>6</sup> Σχεδὸν οἶδ' ὅτι τῷδε τῷ θεάτρῳ δόξομεν τὰ προσήκοντα μετρίως ἀποτετελεκεῖναι, «you the audience in our theater will find, I am confident, that we have put on a worthy performance and acquitted ourselves of our task» (trans. by Diskin Clay in COOPER 1997, 1294). See CENTANNI (1997, 140f.).

<sup>7</sup> Ὁ δ' [*scil.* Κριτίας] οὐκ ἠνέσχετο, ἀλλὰ μοι ἔδοξεν ὀργισθῆναι αὐτῷ ὥσπερ ποιητῆς ὑποκριτῆ κακῶς διατιθέντι τὰ ἑαυτοῦ ποιήματα, «Critias couldn't put up with this but seemed to me to be angry with Charmides just the way a poet is when his verse is mangled by the actors» (trans. by Rosamond K. Sprague in COOPER 1997, 649).

<sup>8</sup> See SUTTON (1987, 8); CENTANNI (1997, 141).

Starting from the conjecture of Wilamowitz, the issue of the authorship of *Pirithous* has divided scholars between Euripides and Critias, leader of the Thirty Tyrants<sup>9</sup>. Most ancient sources tend to attribute the tragedy to Euripides (see Crit. F 1, 3, 4, 6, 10, 12, 13 and 14 Snell)<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, the *Life of Euripides* and the passage of Athenaeus quoted above show the possibility that Alexandrian scholars doubted the Euripidean authorship of *Pirithous*<sup>11</sup>.

*Sisyphus* is also an Euripidean satyr play<sup>12</sup>, which was performed in the Great Dionysia of 415 BC, together with the tragedies *Alexander*, *Palamedes* and the *Trojan Women*<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, according to Johann N. Bach, the fact that Critias' satyr play and Euripides' shared the same title may have contributed to getting the authors, their verses and their thoughts confused, and Euripides prevailed over Critias, whose plays were attributed to the more famous tragedian<sup>14</sup>. Afterwards, when discussing the number of Euripidean plays, Wilamowitz stated that the *Sisyphus* of Euripides was lost early on, and that Critias' tetralogy ended up being attributed to the 'rival' author<sup>15</sup>. More recently, Monica Centanni has assumed that *damnatio memoriae* which befell Critias, as well as his bad posthumous fame, worked against the tetralogy's attribution to the oligarch instead<sup>16</sup>.

The tragedy *Pirithous* deals with topics like friendship and Athenian patriotism, which were of interest to Critias, since he wrote on these subjects in his symposiastic elegies<sup>17</sup>. One such example is the exaltation of Athens in *Pirithous* F 7. 6-9 Snell [= POx.

<sup>9</sup> See MILLS (1997, 257, n. 118). Euripides was regarded as the author of *Pirithous* by KUIPER (1907); ALLEN – ITALIE (1954), who recorded some terms taken from these fragments as Euripidean; PAGE (1941); DIHLE (1977); METTE (1983); SUTTON (1987), who recognized the presence of the tragedian's thought and language in *Pirithous*' lines. See also CROPP (2020, 250): «my own sense is that *Pirithous* has a better chance of being by Euripides than the other two [*scil.* Rhadamanthys and Tennes]». The authorship was attributed to Critias by DIELS – KRANZ (1952); BATTEGAZZORE (1962); BATTEGAZZORE (1989); SNELL (1986<sup>2</sup>); CENTANNI (1997); DIGGLE (1998).

<sup>10</sup> In a catalogue of tragedies from Piraeus, c. 100 BC, i.e. IG II<sup>2</sup>, 2363, c. 2 [= CAT B 1 Snell], Euripides' Σίσυφος is mentioned at l. 40, and WILAMOWITZ – MOELLENDORFF (1875, 139) read Π[ερίθοος at l. 45 (see critical apparatus to Crit. T 2 Snell).

<sup>11</sup> See COLLARD (1995, 187 = 2007, 60).

<sup>12</sup> See Eur. F 673 and 674 Kannicht.

<sup>13</sup> See Ael. *Var. Hist.* II 8 [= DID C 14 Snell].

<sup>14</sup> See BACH (1827, 73).

<sup>15</sup> See WILAMOWITZ – MOELLENDORFF (1875, 144-66). POHLENZ (1930, 469) thought the tetralogy was included in Euripides' works, since Critias imitated him to the point of quoting entire lines: in fact, in Crit. F 1. 9 Snell from *Pirithous*, we read the line Ζεύς, ὡς λέλεκται τῆς ἀληθείας ὑπο which is identical to Eur. F 481. 1 Kannicht from *Melanippe the Wise*; this could be taken as evidence of Euripides' influence on a younger generation of playwrights (see BLUMENTHAL 1923, 25). Therefore, any analysis of linguistic similarities between the verses attributed to Critias and various passages from Euripidean tragedies (see KUIPER 1907; SUTTON 1987) is not enough to disprove Wilamowitz's argument. Regarding the problematical authorship of the plays attributed to Critias by Wilamowitz, see CROPP (2019, 181-85); CROPP (2020).

<sup>16</sup> See CENTANNI (1997, 140).

<sup>17</sup> See SUTTON (1987, 9). In Crit. F 1. 14 Gentili – Prato, the poet celebrates Athens as the *polis* which triumphed at Marathon: ἡ τὸ καλὸν Μαραθῶνι καταστήσασα τρόπαιον. Regarding the topic of friendship,

XVII, 2078 fr. 2 + 3]: after Theseus declares it shameful to betray a faithful friend, Heracles answers that this statement is worthy of Athens and of the Athenian hero (ΘΗΣ. πιστὸν γὰρ ἄνδρα καὶ φίλον / [αἰσχροὺν πρ]οδοῦναι ... ΗΡ. [σαυτῷ τε,] Θησεῦ, τῆ τ' Ἀθηναίων πό[λει] / πρέποντ' ἔλεξας)<sup>18</sup>.

According to the tragedy's *hypothesis*, Pirithous, who is guilty of having attempted to abduct Persephone with the help of Theseus, is fettered to a seat upon a rock in Hades<sup>19</sup> and guarded by gaping serpents. Theseus, thinking it shameful to abandon his friend Pirithous, decides to share his lot in the underworld<sup>20</sup>. The rocky seat is identified by Pseudo-Apollodorus as the Λήθης θρόνος<sup>21</sup>, the «throne of Oblivion» to which the two companions' flesh is literally fused, as reported by Panyassis fr. 17 West [= Paus. X 29, 9]: Πανύασσις δὲ ἐποίησεν ὡς Θησεὺς καὶ Πειρίθους ἐπὶ τῶν θρόνων παράσχοιντο σχῆμα οὐ κατὰ δεσμώτας, προσφυῆ δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ χρωτὸς ἀντὶ δεσμῶν σφισιν ἔφη τὴν πέτραν, «Panyassis wrote that Theseus and Pirithous on their chairs did not give the appearance of being bound there, but that instead of bonds the rock had grown onto their flesh»<sup>22</sup>. In the same passage, Pausanias informs us that Polygnotus painted Theseus and Pirithous sitting upon thrones in his *Nekyia* at Delphi<sup>23</sup>. The two heroes are also depicted as sitting on thrones on the bronze foil of a shield from Olympia dated to the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC; Heracles is also represented next to the prisoners, in the act of

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see for example Crit. F 2 and 3 Gentili – Prato about the ambiguous relations between Critias and Alcibiades (see also LAPINI 1995; IANNUCCI 2003).

<sup>18</sup> See MILLS (1997, 260): «Theseus epitomizes Athens' steadfast loyalty to friends – especially those who are vulnerable and can be turned into clients of the city or its representatives – as he refuses to desert his “dear and trusted friend”». Regarding the friendship between Theseus and Pirithous, see ANGIÒ (1989, 143) and CENTANNI (1997, 159-70).

<sup>19</sup> See *schol.* Ap.Rh. I 101: ἐπὶ τινος πέτρας καθεσθέντες [*scil.* Θησεὺς καὶ Πειρίθους] αὐθις ἀναστήναι οὐ δεδύνηνται.

<sup>20</sup> See Crit. F 1. 1-4 Snell, with some changes: Πειρίθους ἐπὶ τὴν Περσεφόνης μνηστείαν μετὰ Θησεῶς εἰς Ἄϊδου καταβάς τιμωρίας ἔτυχε τῆς πρεπούσης· αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ ἐπὶ πέτρας ἀκινήτῳ καθέδρῳ πεδηθεὶς δρακόντων ἐφρουρεῖτο χάσμασιν, Θησεὺς δὲ τὸν φίλον ἐγκαταλιπεῖν αἰσχροὺν ἡγούμενος βίου εἴλετο τὴν ἐν Ἄϊδου ζῶην.

<sup>21</sup> See [Apollod.] *Epit.* I 24: Θησεὺς δὲ μετὰ Πειρίθου παραγενόμενος εἰς Ἄϊδου ἐξαπατᾶται, καὶ ὃς ὡς ξενίων μεταληψομένους πρῶτον ἐν τῷ τῆς Λήθης εἶπε καθεσθῆναι θρόνῳ, ᾧ προσφυέντες σπείραις δρακόντων κατείχοντο, «but when Theseus arrived with Pirithous in Hades, he was beguiled; for, on the pretence that they were about to partake of good cheer, Hades bade them first be seated on the Chair of Forgetfulness, to which they grew and were held fast by coils of serpents» (trans. by FRAZER 1921, 153). Plutarch (*Quaest. conv.* 741b) informs us that at Athens, in the Erechtheion, there was an altar dedicated to Λήθῃ, which sanctioned the reconciliation after the quarrel between Athena and Poseidon over possession of the new city (see LORAUX 1997, 43f. and 153f.).

<sup>22</sup> Trans. by WEST (2003, 205). Regarding the possibility that Critias knew the *Heraclea* of Panyassis, see STOESSL (1949, 914). See also *schol.* Ar. *Eq.* 1368: καὶ πλάττονται τὸν περὶ Θησεῶς μῦθον, ὅτι ἐλκόμενος ὑπὸ Ἡρακλέους κατέλιπεν ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν τὴν πυγὴν.

<sup>23</sup> See Paus. X 29, 9: ἐπὶ θρόνων καθεζόμενοι Θησεὺς μὲν τὰ ξίφη τό τε Πειρίθου καὶ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ταῖς χερσὶν ἀμφοτέραις ἔχει, ὁ δὲ ἐς τὰ ξίφη βλέπων ἐστὶν ὁ Πειρίθους· εἰκάσαις ἂν ἄχθεσθαι τοῖς ξίφεσιν αὐτὸν ὡς ἀχρείοις καὶ ὄφελος σφισιν οὐ γεγενημένοις ἐς τὰ τολμήματα, «Theseus and Peirithoüs sitting upon chairs. The former is holding in his hands the sword of Peirithoüs and his own. Peirithoüs is looking at the swords, and you might conjecture that he is angry with them for having been useless and of no help in their daring adventures» (trans. by JONES 1935, 539).

cutting their chains with his sword<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, I chose to interpret the expression *Lethaea ... vincula* used by Horace to mean the chains holding Pirithous<sup>25</sup>, precisely with reference to the throne of Oblivion, unlike previous commentators, who have usually regarded *Lethaea* as being synonymous with *inferna*<sup>26</sup>, or interpreted it with reference to Pirithous being chained near the river of forgetfulness, namely Lethe<sup>27</sup>.

Although Theseus generally shares Pirithous' torment in mythic sources, Helen M. Cockle rightly pointed out that there is no evidence of this in *Pirithous' hypothesis* and fragments, and that the presence of two motionless characters on stage might significantly limit the dramatic possibilities<sup>28</sup>. Therefore, one can easily imagine that Pirithous might have kept still for most of the play, with the action taking place around him; Theseus might instead have remained beside his friend, whilst maintaining the ability to move. Forgetfulness did indeed affect the Lapith hero, who, sitting on his throne, might have looked like a stone, or someone who is already dead<sup>29</sup>. As stated by Theogn. I 705, Persephone, who is death personified, actually «impairs the mind of mortals and brings them forgetfulness»<sup>30</sup> (βροτοῖς παρέχει λήθην βλάπτουσα νόοιο).

Therefore, the fact that Pirithous, a hero whose distinguishing feature was mobility, is punished with forgetfulness and immobility, is a prime example of tragic irony. The reversal of his fate is similar to that of Aeschylus' Prometheus<sup>31</sup>. The punishment goes so far as to deny Pirithous' name and identity<sup>32</sup>, since ancient etymology connected the name of the hero with the verb περιθέω, which means «to run around»<sup>33</sup>. Regarding this etymology, see *schol. D in Il. I 263* van Thiel (Πειρίθουν, ὃς ὠνομάσθη ἀπὸ τοῦ περιθεῖν ἵππῳ ὁμοιωθέντα τὸν Δία ἐν τῷ μίγνυσθαι τῇ μητρὶ αὐτοῦ) and *Epim. Hom. Il. I 263* Dyck (Πειρίθοον· διὰ τῆς εἰ διφθόγγου γράφεται. ὁ γὰρ Ζεὺς ὁμοιωθεὶς ἵππῳ περιέτρεχε τὴν μητέρα τούτου Δίαν καὶ οὕτω συνεγένετο αὐτῇ, καὶ ἐκεῖθεν οὗτος ἐτέχθη· παρὰ οὖν τὸ περιθεῖν γέγονε Περίθους, καὶ πλεονασμῶ τοῦ ἰ Πειρίθους)<sup>34</sup>. So Pirithous' name would bear witness to the memory of horse-like Zeus' romantic run around the Lapith's mother, namely Dia<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> See KUNZE (1950, 112); BATTEGAZZORE (1970, 75, n. 11).

<sup>25</sup> See *Carm. IV 7, 25-28*: *infernis neque enim tenebris Diana pudicum / liberat Hippolytum, / nec Lethaea valet Theseus abrumpere caro / vincula Pirithoo*, «neither does Diana set Hippolytus free from the infernal darkness, for all his purity, nor has Theseus the power to break the fetters of Lethe that bind Pirithous, however much he loves him» (trans. by RUDD 2004, 241).

<sup>26</sup> See FEDELI – CICCARELLI (2008, 362).

<sup>27</sup> See QUINN (1985, 4).

<sup>28</sup> See COCKLE (1983, 32).

<sup>29</sup> See DELCOURT (1982<sup>2</sup>, 98); DETIENNE (1967, 167, n. 84). Regarding the connection between death and stones, see e.g. Pind. *Pyth. X 48* with reference to the Gorgon's eyes: λίθινον θάνατον, «stony death».

<sup>30</sup> Trans. by GERBER (1999, 277).

<sup>31</sup> COCKLE (1983, 32) regards *Pirithous* as «a sort of cross between the *Prometheus vincetus* and the *Frogs*».

<sup>32</sup> See BATTEGAZZORE (1989, 455).

<sup>33</sup> See WILAMOWITZ – MOELLENDORFF (1884, 324).

<sup>34</sup> See CRAMER (1835, 370. 4-7).

<sup>35</sup> See BRILLANTE (1998, 46-47, n. 19).

The meeting between Pirithous and Heracles, who has descended into the underworld to capture Cerberus, takes the form of a dialogue focused on the inability of the prisoner to see and hear his interlocutor well. This exchange, possibly taken from the first part of the tragedy<sup>36</sup>, is reported in POx. L, 3531 [= Crit. F 4a Snell], which is dated to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD<sup>37</sup>:

⟨ΠΕΙΡΙΘ.⟩		δρακοντ[ τηνου[ ὄργην .[ ἐπίσταμ[αι
XO.	5	ὄψὲ ξυνεῖς [...].ο..[ θεοὺς σεβεσθ[αι
ΗΡΑΚΛ.		Ἴξιονος πα[ῖ, πο]λλὰ δ[ εἶδον λόγῳ τ' ἤκουσα [
	10	οὐδ' ἐγγὺς οὐδέν' ἤμ[ισθὸμ τῆ σῆ πελάζοντ' ἀλ[λ δυσπραξίᾳ τοὺς π[ σκῆψιν τίν' ἢ τίν' [
ΠΕΙΡΙΘ.		ἄτης ἀπροϋπτως .[ ἦδ' οὐκέτ' ἐστ' ἄσημος [
	15	ὄνειρατώδης ἀλλ' ο[ Ἕλληνας· ἰδεῖν δὲ τὸν λέ[γοντα οἴός τ' ἂν εἶην. πέπτατ[αι ἀχλὺς πάροιθε τῶν ἐμῶ[ν ἄθλους ἐρωτᾶς τοὺς ἐμο[ύς
ΗΡΑΚΛ.	20	γλώσσης γὰρ ἠχῶ τῆσδε πρ..[ οὐδέν τι πάντως θαυμ[α ἀπεστερησθαι <σ' > ἐστὶν α..[ καὶ φθέγμα καὶ σχῆμα .[ πολλὰ διήλθον τῆς ἐ[μῆς
ΠΕΙΡΙΘ.	25	καὶ σῆς· ἀναμνήσω δὲ .[ σίγησον· ἀρ[...].[ φωγ[ της[

⟨PIRITHOUS⟩

[...] serpent(s) [...] anger [...] (I) know [...]

CHORUS

Your understanding is late [...] to respect the gods [...]

HERACLES

Son of Ixion, many [...] have I seen and heard told [...] (but? I have learned) of no one (ever) closely approaching your (misfortune); but in harshness of outcome (you far surpass) those [...] what excuse or what [...] (for?) ruin unforeseeably [...]

PIRITHOUS

<sup>36</sup> See BATTEGAZZORE (1989, 453).

<sup>37</sup> The papyrus fragment was edited by COCKLE (1983).

This (voice) is no longer unintelligible (nor) [...] dream-like, but [...] (is?) Greek. I would be able to see the (speaker) [...] (but?) a mist has spread before my (eyes?) [...] You ask about my ordeal [...]: for an echo of those words [...]

HERACLES

It is absolutely no wonder [...] that (you) are deprived [...] (my?) voice and appearance [...] Many (days?) [...] of (my and) your [...] have lapsed. I will remind (you) [...]

PIRITHOUS

Quiet! [...] voice [...]?<sup>38</sup>

After the lines attributed to Pirithous, in which he claims to have learned from his fate what the anger of the gods is<sup>39</sup>, and following the moralizing speech delivered by the chorus<sup>40</sup>, made up of initiates into the Eleusinian mysteries<sup>41</sup>, Heracles refers to Pirithous' suffering, and he mentions ἄτη, the «ruin» (see l. 13). Afterwards, the poet expands on the topic of the prisoner's (in)capacity to see and hear, since his sensorial faculties are evidently inhibited by the influence of the throne of Oblivion<sup>42</sup>. On the contrary, Heracles' sight and hearing appear to be completely intact, since they have allowed him to take in different realities during his mythical journeys around the world, as expressed by the verbs εἶδον and ἤκουσα at l. 8<sup>43</sup>. Heracles states that, though he has seen and heard about many misfortunes, he has never known such a miserable condition as that of Pirithous. The prisoner then claims to recognize the indistinct sound he is hearing as a Greek voice; nevertheless, he can't see the speaker, namely Heracles, because a mist has spread before his eyes<sup>44</sup>. At l. 19 Pirithous says Heracles has just asked him questions about ἄθλοι, i.e. Pirithous' «ordeal», whose account the captive possibly gave at the end of the fragment (ll. 26ff.), presumably starting from the misfortunes which his father Ixion<sup>45</sup> had experienced for having attempted to possess Hera. Ixion's troubles are indeed told by

<sup>38</sup> Trans. by COLLARD – CROPP (2008, 647-51).

<sup>39</sup> Regarding Peter J. Parsons' interpretation of ll. 3f., see COCKLE (1983, 34).

<sup>40</sup> See COCKLE (1983, 34): «the general sense might be, “at last realizing what the gods' anger can do, you”, or “a mortal”, “learn to honour them”; or, “you understand too late that reverence for the gods is the only sensible policy for mortal men”».

<sup>41</sup> An evidence of this is Crit. F 2 Snell [= Ath. XI 496a-b] from the *parodos*, where the chorus performs the rite celebrated on the final day of the mysteries: πλημοχόη ... χρώνται δὲ αὐτῷ [scil. τῷ σκεύει] ἐν Ἐλευσίνι τῇ τελευταίᾳ τῶν μυστηρίων ἡμέρᾳ, ἦν καὶ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ προσαγορεύουσι Πλημοχόας ... μνημονεῖ αὐτῶν καὶ ὁ τὸν Πειρίθουν γράψας εἴτε Κριτίας ἐστὶν ὁ τύραννος ἢ Εὐριπίδης λέγων οὕτως: ἵνα πλημοχόας τάσδ' εἰς χθόνιον / χάσμι' εὐφήμως προχέωμεν, «*plēmochoē* [...] it is used at Eleusis on the final day of the Mysteries, which is accordingly referred to as *Plēmochoai* [...] They are mentioned by the author of the *Pirithous*, who may be either the tyrant Critias or Euripides, and who says the following: in order that we may silently pour these / *plēmochoes* into the chasm in the earth» (trans. by OLSON 2009, 413-15). See also MYLONAS (1961, 279). The theme of initiation can be related to the myth of Heracles: before descending into the underworld, the hero is initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries (see Eur. *Herc.* 613; Diod.Sic. IV 25, 1; [Apollod.] *Bibl.* II 5, 12). According to CROPP (2019, 195), a production of *Pirithous* at Eleusis is an attractive possibility.

<sup>42</sup> See GAULY (1991, 284, n. 4).

<sup>43</sup> See also the integrations to Crit. F 4a. 9 Snell proposed by Peter J. Parsons: ἤ[σθόμεσθα or ἤ[σθόμην.

<sup>44</sup> See BATTEGAZZORE (1989, 453f.).

<sup>45</sup> Pirithous is Zeus' son in Hom. *Il.* II 741 and XIV 317f.



by the relegation of both of them to the margins of the divine sphere which they have attempted to violate: Ixion, who tried to possess the Olympian queen, is condemned to spin across the heavens eternally tied to a wheel<sup>51</sup>, and Pirithous, who attempted to abduct Persephone, is paralyzed on the throne of Oblivion, near the gates of Hades<sup>52</sup>.

The theme of ἄτη, mentioned at l. 8 with reference to Ixion's fate, is a point of junction between this fragment and the above-quoted Crit. F 4a Snell, where the mist before Pirithous' eyes is the tangible proof of the realization of ἄτη, since it is a dimming of the cognitive faculty<sup>53</sup>. The metaphorical meaning of the term ἀχλύς is already documented in Homer, where it means either the mist of weakness and pain, which descends on the eyes of wounded and dying, or the prodigious cloud sent by the deity in order to protect a warrior or to obstruct his freedom of action. Regarding sight as the start of real knowledge, one need only think of Pallas' words to Diomedes in Hom. *Il.* V 127f.: ἀχλὺν δ' αὖ τοι ἀπ' ὀφθαλμῶν ἔλλον, ἢ πρὶν ἐπῆεν, / ὄφρ' εὖ γινώσκεις ἡμὲν θεὸν ἢ δὲ καὶ ἄνδρα, «and I have taken from your eyes the mist that was there before, / so that you can easily distinguish between god and man»<sup>54</sup>. Pirithous and Heracles are indeed united in desire for knowledge: Pirithous strives to recognize who is speaking to him, and Heracles wishes to be informed about the events which led the Lapith hero to infernal captivity<sup>55</sup>.

The effort made by Pirithous to recover his sensory faculties, repressed by the influence of the Λήθης θρόνος, allows to dispel the metaphorical mist that separates him from sounds and images of the world, represented by Heracles' Greek voice and countenance (see φθέγμα καὶ σχῆμα in Crit. F 4a. 23 Snell). In the end, there is the recognition through memory, a reference to which is in Crit. F 4a. 25 Snell, where the future ἀναμνήσω is uttered by Heracles. Peter J. Parsons interprets *Il.* 24f. like thus: «many a day has gone by since you and I last met; but I shall remind you...»; therefore, ἀναμνήσω may refer to the long lapse of time since the last meeting between Heracles and Pirithous. Although there is no evidence in our sources for an earlier acquaintance of the two heroes<sup>56</sup>, the context to which their last meeting may be traced back is the expedition of the Argonauts, supposing the tragedian, as well as Hyg. *Fab.* XIV 5-10,

<sup>51</sup> In later myth, firstly documented in Ap.Rh. III 61f., Ixion is punished in Hades.

<sup>52</sup> See BRILLANTE (1998, 74). Regarding Theseus and Pirithous located near the gates of Hades, see [Apollod.] *Bibl.* II 5, 12: [*scil.* Ἡρακλῆς] πλησίον δὲ τῶν Ἄιδου πυλῶν γενόμενος Θησέα εὖρε καὶ Πειρίθου.

<sup>53</sup> In his *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* in verse, Critias describes in similar terms the effects of drinking without measure (see Crit. F 4. 10-12 Gentili – Prato): πρὸς δ' ὄμι' ἀχλὺς ἀμβλωπὸς ἐφίζει, / λῆστις δ' ἐκτῆκει μνημοσύνην πραπίδων, / νοῦς δὲ παρέσφαλται, «upon their eyes a dark mist settles, oblivion melts away memory from their minds, and reason is tripped up» (trans. by GERBER 1999, 467). Regarding this passage, see SIMONDON (1982, 175).

<sup>54</sup> Trans. by Anthony Verity (see VERITY – GRAZIOSI 2011, 71).

<sup>55</sup> See BATTEGAZZORE (1989, 459).

<sup>56</sup> See COCKLE (1983, 36); GAULY (1991, 284, n. 5).

included Theseus and Pirithous, besides Heracles, among Jason's companions (unlike [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 1, 9, 16 and Plut. *Thes.* 29, who mention only Theseus)<sup>57</sup>.

The dulling of Pirithous' senses closely recalls the condition which characterizes primitive men in the Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound*, before Prometheus' teachings contribute to the progress of civilization: in fact, at the dawn of history, though people had eyes, they did not see; though they had ears, they did not hear (see Il. 447f.: οἱ πρῶτα μὲν βλέποντες ἔβλεπον μάτην, / κλύοντες οὐκ ἤκουον). Moreover, men led a life of confusion in the grip of chance, like dream-figures (see Il. 448-50: ἀλλ' ὄνειράτων / ἀλίγκιοι μορφῆσι τὸν μακρὸν βίον / ἔφυρον εἰκῆ πάντα; compare the significant *hapax legomenon* ὄνειρατώδης, «dream-like» in Crit. F 4a. 15 Snell). Finally, primitive men dwelt beneath the ground like swarming ants, in sunless caves (see Il. 452f.: κατώρυχες δ' ἔναιον ὥστ' ἀήσυροι / μύρμηκες ἄντρων ἐν μυχοῖς ἀνηλίοις; in the same way, the tragedy *Pirithous* is set in μυχοί, where Heracles says he has just arrived, speaking to Aeacus in Crit. F 1. 16 Snell). Pirithous' captivity in Hades may be regarded, in a certain way, as a regression to a primitive state, as before the beginning of associated life. The recognition of Heracles' voice, culturally characterized as Greek (see Crit. F 4a. 16 Snell), allows quasi-dead Pirithous, who has thus far been forced to stay separate from the living, to break through the mist under which he has been clouded, and to regain, at least in memory, the relationship between him and the world of living. This can be seen as a return to civilization.

The peculiar torment to which Pirithous is condemned has also an anthropological significance: the motif of the seated position was distinctive of ancient manners of punishment and funeral rites, and it symbolized the annihilation not only of those who were guilty, but also of those living who, overcome with sorrow, consciously chose to make themselves similar to the deceased, just as Theseus chooses to share Pirithous' torment according to mythic sources<sup>58</sup>. On this point, the writer of the tragedy's *hypothesis* alludes to the throne of Oblivion using the term καθέδρα (see Crit. F 1. 2 Snell), which was also used in funerary rites to indicate the position of the dead, as well as that of the living relatives who symbolically made themselves similar to them<sup>59</sup>.

In antiquity, according to Pausanias (IX 39, 5ff.), the throne of Oblivion had an opposite in the θρόνος Μνημοσύνης, the «throne of Memory», located in the oracular shrine of Trophonius at Lebadea in Boeotia<sup>60</sup>. At night, before entering the sanctuary, the individual wishing to consult the oracle paused at two neighboring springs, called *Lethe* and *Mnemosyne*, «Forgetfulness» and «Memory»:

<sup>57</sup> See HERTER (1936, 1206. 57-1207. 28).

<sup>58</sup> See GERNET (1936, 332-37) and GERNET (1968, 288-301).

<sup>59</sup> See BATTEGAZZORE (1970, 76f. and n. 17). See also Phot. *Lex. s.v.* καθέδρα II 345 Theodoridis: τῇ πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ τελευτήσαντος οἱ προσήκοντες συνελθόντες ἐδείπνουν ἐπὶ τῷ τελευτήσαντι κοινῆ· ἐκαλεῖτο δὲ καθέδρα, ὅτι καθεζόμενοι ἐδείπνουν καὶ τὰ νομιζόμενα ἐπλήρουν.

<sup>60</sup> The oracle of Trophonius is mentioned in Euripides' *Ion* (see Il. 300, 393 and 405), since the childless Xuthus consults it on his way to Delphi.

the water from the first spring obliterated the memory of human life, while the water from the second allowed the individual to remember everything he saw and heard in the otherworld [*during the consultation*]. After drinking from both springs, he slipped [...] into the “mouth” of the oracle’s cave. [...] After a spell of unconsciousness, the patient was retrieved by those who tended the oracle and was seated on the throne of memory, not far from the oracle’s “mouth”<sup>61</sup>.

Afterwards, the priests asked of him, when seated there, all he had seen or learned, and the inquirer gradually recovered all his faculties. Moreover, those who had descended into the shrine of Trophonius were obliged to dedicate a tablet on which was written all that each had heard or seen<sup>62</sup>. Therefore, this was no doubt a journey into the supernatural and invisible world:

by drinking the water of *Lēthē*, that is, the water of death that opened the gates to Hades, the individual consulting the oracle became like one of the dead; he assumed the mask of the deceased and slipped into the bosom of Mother Earth. [...] the initiate was endowed with a memory, the same gift of second sight as that of the [...] diviners. [...] Like Tiresias and Amphiaraus, he became one of the living among the dead<sup>63</sup>.

In the case Critias was the author of *Pirithous*, the future tyrant, writing on the hero condemned to immobility and oblivion, could not expect himself to fall victim to a similar ‘tragic irony’<sup>64</sup>. The Platonic Critias who had appealed to Memory above all other gods, being on the point of telling the story regarding Atlantis and ancient Athens<sup>65</sup>, was affected by *damnatio memoriae* in accordance with the Athenian amnesty of 403 BC<sup>66</sup>, after the downfall of the Thirty’s regime and Critias’ slaying at Munychia. Following the

<sup>61</sup> See DETIENNE (1967, 63f.). See also Paus. IX 39, 13: τὸν δὲ ἀναβάντα παρὰ τοῦ Τροφωνίου παραλαβόντες αὐτοῖς οἱ ἱερεῖς καθίζουσιν ἐπὶ θρόνον Μνημοσύνης μὲν καλούμενον, κείται δὲ οὐ πόρρω τοῦ ἄδύτου.

<sup>62</sup> See trans. by JONES (1935, 355).

<sup>63</sup> See DETIENNE (1967, 64).

<sup>64</sup> RAOSS (1951, 256, n. 38) dated Critias’ plays before 407 BC, i.e. before his exile in Thessaly.

<sup>65</sup> See Plat. *Crit.* 108d: πρὸς οἷς θεοῖς εἶπες, τοὺς τε ἄλλους κλητέον καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα Μνημοσύνην. Σχεδὸν γὰρ τὰ μέγιστα ἡμῖν τῶν λόγων ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ θεῷ πάντ’ ἐστί, «I must [...], in addition to the gods you just named, invoke the other gods and make a special prayer to Mnemosyne. The success or failure of just about everything that is most important in our speech lies in the lap of this goddess» (trans. by Diskin Clay in COOPER 1997, 1294).

<sup>66</sup> Regarding this reconciliation agreement based on μὴ μνησικακεῖν, «to not remember past injuries», see And. *De Myst.* 81f.: περὶ πλείονος ἐποιήσασθε σώζειν τὴν πόλιν ἢ τὰς ἰδίας τιμωρίας, καὶ ἔδοξε μὴ μνησικακεῖν ἀλλήλοις τῶν γεγενημένων, «you [...] placed more value on saving the city than private retributions; and you resolved not to recall grievances with one another over what had happened» (trans. by EDWARDS 1995, 61); Aristot. *Ath.* 39, 6: τῶν δὲ παρεληλυθότων μηδενὶ πρὸς μηδένα μνησικακεῖν ἐξεῖναι, «and that there be a universal amnesty for past events, covering everybody» (trans. by RACKHAM 1935, 111). See also LOENING (1987); NATALICCHIO (1997); LORAUX (1997, 29, 42 and 371-98); MOGGI (2009).

attempt to efface the memory of Critias' work, his plays were probably included within the *corpus* of Euripides, thus preserving at least a fragmentary memory of them<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> See CENTANNI (1997, 140); CANFORA (2001, 199). See also CROPP (2020, 240): «the disputed plays probably entered the Euripidean corpus *via* Callimachus's *Pinakes*, which necessarily assigned works to authors».

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