We have a lot of pieces to fit together and make patterns with, but we do not know the shape or dimensions of the mosaic ...

P.E. Easterling

From Athens to Alexandria. At the time of Aristophanes’ Frogs, the canonical triad of the fifth-century tragedians was already established, but the corpora of tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides became a true theatrical repertory only after the City Dionysia of 386 BC, when ‘the tragōdoi began to stage an old tragedy out of competition’.¹ Some surviving records, from Athens as well as from outside the city, attest revivals of the tragedies that were regarded as classics. Although fragmentary, this documentation reliably reflects the taste that had become apparent by the fourth century, and which was shared by Hellenism: Aeschylus was neglected, and apart from some of Sophocles’ individual tragedies (such as Ant. and Oenomaus) and perhaps even a Telephus trilogy (probably The Sons of Aleus, The Mysians, Eurypylus) that were still performed,² Euripides was the favourite author both in Athens and in the rest of the Hellenized world.

References in the Corpus Aristotelicum seem to confirm this situation. Frequent quotations from Euripides were likely to be more easily understood by the school audience because his plays were more frequently performed: both in Rhetoric and in Poetics plays are cited that will be part of the commented selection (Hec., Or., Med., Hipp., Tr.), and others later transmitted by the ‘alphabetic’ corpus (IA and IT), as well as a large number of lost plays (Andromed., Antiop., Cresh., Phil., Melanippe Soph., Meleag., Oin., Sthen., Thy., Tel.)—but Pho. is completely missing: a fact that suggests that

¹ Easterling (2006a) 1.
² IG II² 3091 (= TrGF I, DID B 5), l. 8 (380, Attica or Athens): ‘Sophocles produced a trilogy about Telephos’; Sophocles the Younger (TrGF I 62) is likely to have been the didaskalos of his grandfather’s trilogy, if he is not the author of a new one.
this play had been appreciated as a condensation of the final episodes of the Theban saga only later. Agathon, Carcinus II, and Theodectes are quoted alongside Euripides. Aristotle cites from Sophocles’ Ant. and OT, and just once from El, and, with regard to Sophocles’ lost dramas, he quotes from Tereus, Teucer, and Tyro (we do not know from which of the two with this title), and he possibly makes reference to Those Who Dine Together and Odysseus Wounded by the Spine.

As for the staging of Sophocles’ dramas: Epigoni was performed by an actor Andronicos at the end of the fourth century BC,3 Oenomaus was staged in Collytos (Dem. 18.180, cf. TrGF IV 381), and Ant. was performed several times in Athens (Dem. 19.246). Plutarch tells us that Alexander’s treasurer Harpalos sent books of the three major tragedians to the king ‘in the interior of Asia’, and also that ‘the children of the Persians learned to chant the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides’ as part of a widespread Hellenization of those regions. It is not unlikely that these were actually staged performances.4 We know from Cicero ad Quint. fr. 2.16.3 about a performance of Those Who Dine Together in 54 BC in Rome. More generally, see Holford-Strevens (1999) and Hall (2002) 25 about the presence of Sophocles in Roman culture.

The notion of a permanent repertory assumes a text that has a fixed written form, accessible also for individual reading, as Aristotle reminds us (Poet. 1462a11–14). The typology of books containing the texts of the tragedies is various: copies deposited with the eponymous archon and then incorporated into the city archive are complemented by books for individual use that circulated in the book market (such as the copy of Euripides’ Andromeda read by Dionysus in Aristophanes, Frogs 52–53), and by those retained by the authors or their heirs.5 Occasionally, the texts of dramas by important authors were adapted, or if they were incomplete or judged to be unsatisfactory and therefore set aside, they could be significantly rewritten in order to be presented again: Euphorion, son of Aeschylus, won four times with his father’s unpublished plays;6 Euripides the Younger mounted some of his father’s unpublished works, including IA; Sophocles, son of Ariston, staged his grandfather’s unpublished OC in 401 BC and won seven times

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3 Athen. 13 584 D.
4 Plut. Alex. 668 De Alex. fort. 328 D.
6 Suda e 3800 (= TrGF I 12 T1, 1–3 = III, T71). There seem to have been a large number of stagings of unpublished works by Aeschylus, as the polis encouraged performances of his work even before 386 BC.