

DISCUSSIO

OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING A NEW BOOK ABOUT PRAXITELES

ANTONIO CORSO

antoniorcorso@hotmail.com

**Luigi Todisco: Prassitele di Atene.** Maestri dell'arte classica 6. Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore 2017. – pp. XII + 148, pls 26. – ISSN 2035-3634, ISBN 978-88-7689-301-8

This new book about Praxiteles has been published in March 2017. This short book devoted to the most important Athenian sculptor of late classical times is composed of an introduction (pp. XI–XII), a first chapter about the life of the artist (pp. 3–5), a second chapter about the works of Praxiteles (pp. 9–14), a third chapter about original works and copies attributed to this master (pp. 17–39), a fourth chapter about his own style (pp. 43–49), and finally a fifth chapter about written *testimonia*.

The last chapter is followed by endnotes (pp. 115–123), references (pp. 125–140), indexes (pp. 141–148), and 26 plates.

In the introduction (p. XI) the author condemns the '*strada avventurosa, favorita da alcune ricorrenze epigrafiche e soprattutto dall'elenco disposto da Plinio il Vecchio di opere connesse con il nome di Prassitele, che hanno portato a proporre una ricostruzione ipertrofica dell'attività dello scultore e bronzista del IV secolo*'. The author clarifies that in note 4 he refers to my five books about the art of Praxiteles.<sup>1</sup>

I wish to stress that in these books I supported all of my statements with an immense body of evidence, both visual and written (from inscriptions, papyri and literary sources). Whoever wishes to object my reasoning and conclusions must specify it with a detailed analysis why these materials do not lead to the conclusions asserted by me. Dismissing my oeuvre without giving any reason is not allowed by any good scientific methodology, and foreshadows the methodological weakness that characterizes this essay.

The importance of my huge research about Praxiteles in the international scientific community is proved by the many awards lavished on me for my work (fellowships of the Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene, the German Archaeological Institute, the British Academy, the Onassis Foundation, the Institute for Advanced Study of Budapest, the 1984 Foundation of Philadelphia, the Leventis and Hellenic Foundations, the 7 Pillars of Wisdom Trust, the Lord Marks Charitable Trust, the State Scholarships Foundation of Greece, the Ministry of National Education of Greece, the Kostopoulos Foundation, etc.), by lectures and papers delivered in important academic centers such as Cambridge, the British Museum, the Institute of Classical Studies of London, the universities of Aix-en-Provence, Cologne, Berlin, Sankt Petersburg, Moscow, the Hermitage, as well as all the most important academic institutions of Greece. Moreover, my books and articles about Praxiteles have been cited by many scholars everywhere in the world, from the United States to Russia, and from Scandinavia to Greece.

<sup>1</sup> Corso 2004; 2007; 2010; 2013 and 2014.

In note 4, the author also criticizes a great scholar, Andy Stewart, who is probably the greatest living expert of classical Greek sculpture in the world. Thus I wish to thank the author for placing my name near that of such a renowned scholar.

Still, the author states in the introduction (p. XII) that *'nei primi decenni del III secolo aveva operato a Delfi un diverso scultore ateniese di nome Prassitele'*. He refers to the base of the statue of Charidemus at Delphi that, *pace*, according to Todisco bears the signature of the late classical Praxiteles and not of a later namesake. This conclusion has been proved by A. Ajootian,<sup>2</sup> and has been accepted by me.<sup>3</sup>

Then the author states that *'uno (Prassitele III) operava a Pergamo nella prima metà del II secolo'*. This Praxiteles active at Pergamum is an illusion: it has been recognized that labels bearing the name of Praxiteles on bases from Pergamum testify the collections of statues of the late classical Praxiteles by the Pergamene royalty (DNO 2014, nos 1985–1986). In note 6, the author claims that the existence of this 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC Praxiteles is proved by the inscriptions DNO, 2014, nos 3706–3710. However, these signatures come from Attica and date to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

Thus the author writes the following: *'non sussistendo, in numerosi casi, elementi tali da giustificare una selezione che riguardasse le testimonianze riferibili al maestro del IV secolo, etc.'* Evidently, when ancient writers refer to Praxiteles without specifications, they refer to the most renowned sculptor bearing this name, *i. e.* to the late classical master. My very detailed researches about the historical and monumental contexts of all works attributed to Praxiteles by ancient sources, published in my volumes, confirmed that these works had been created by the late classical master. Thus the skepticism of the author is not well-founded, unless he specifies why he does not accept these conclusions.

The biography of Praxiteles at pp. 3–5 is correct and offers a good synthesis.

The second chapter – about the oeuvre of the master – begins with a short summary about his signatures on bases of statues (pp. 9–10). At p. 10, the author mentions *'firme in latino incise sulle statue romane di Afrodite con Eros (Parigi, Louvre) etc.'* However, the Praxiteles label on this group in the Louvre has been written in Greek (DNO 2014, no. 1997). This mistake is a serious one and suggests a rather superficial and perhaps too quick compilation of this short book.

The section about the inscriptions is followed by one about statues of deities in marble (pp. 10–11). This part bears the following title: *'opere attribuite ad uno scultore e/o bronzista di nome Prassitele'*, which suggests that this sculptor is not always the late classical one, but sometimes a later namesake. This skepticism is not acceptable in view of the above written considerations.

In the section about marble statues of deities, the author specifies (p. 10) that *'una copia dell'Eros di Tespie era molto probabilmente la statua sottratta da Verre alla collezione di Eio di Messana'*. However, Cicero's testimony and historical considerations make it clear that this Eros was an original statue of Phryne's lover.<sup>4</sup>

At pp. 13–14 the author writes that *'quali autori di non poche di queste opere bisogna individuare maestri di nome Prassitele diversi dall'artista del IV secolo'*. However, ancient writers attribute these works to Praxiteles *sic et simpliciter*, and thus associate them with the most famous sculptor with this name, *i. e.* the late classical one. Thus Todisco's proposal works only in case we admit that these ancient writers were unable to distinct late classical statues from others that were much later. I wish to stress that several of these writers were experts in the field of the *videndae artes*, such as Cicero, Plinius, Pausanias, and Callistratus. It is very unlikely that these experts committed such glaring mistakes, because at their times the most important masterpieces of the classical past were still preserved. Thus in this respect they were in the same situation that we enjoy: we can still admire the most noteworthy works of art from the Late Middle Ages onwards, which is why we would never attribute a neoclassical work to the late Gothic period.

The author also states (p. 14) that *'non e' possibile escludere, come provare, che il Prassitele del IV secolo abbia realizzato opere (...) per Megara (Attica), Platea (Beozia), Tebe (Beozia), Libadeia (Beozia), Anticira (Focide), Argo (Argolide), Mantinea (Arcadia), Elis (Elide), Alessandria (Caria), Parion (Propontide).'* On the contrary, the knowledge of the monumental contexts of several of these works as well as of their historical contexts makes it clear that these statues were works of the late classical Praxiteles, as I demonstrated in my books. If the author doubts my conclusions, he should demonstrate why I am wrong by a detailed analysis.

<sup>2</sup> AJOOTIAN 2007, 31, note 22.

<sup>4</sup> CORSO 2012.

<sup>3</sup> CORSO 2014, 55–56.

To continue this way, with unsupported sentences, is not scientific.

Then the author explains his considerations of the works attributed to Praxiteles (pp. 17–39), beginning with a few original sculptures dating to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (pp. 17–21). The author begins this survey with the Aberdeen head (pp. 17–18), and then he analyzes the Despina head (pp. 18–19). The statement of the author (p. 11) about the ‘*statua di Artemide Brauronia, ricordata da Pausania quale prodotto della techne di uno scultore di nome Prassitele*’ stresses his determination to demolish the personality of Phryne’s lover, distributing his works among several namesakes who flourished until the Roman period. I have already explained why this opinion has no scientific basis.

Thus the author, on the same page, remembers ‘*altre statue di un Prassitele, quali l’Era Teleia a Platea (marmo) e l’Artemide ad Anticira*’. These statues were made by Praxiteles – the late classical master – and not by an undetermined Praxiteles. In my books I provided a detailed analysis of the monumental and historical contexts of these statues that make their attributions to late Hellenistic or Roman namesakes entirely impossible. Moreover, both these statues are recorded by Pausanias who rarely mentions late Hellenistic or Roman statues.

After the Despina head the author discusses the slabs from Mantinea (pp. 19–21). Even in this case, the author writes that (p. 20) ‘*uno scultore di nome Prassitele eresse nel santuario dei Letoidi a Mantinea*’ statues of the Apollinean triad, once again revealing his determination to tear apart the *corpus* of the oeuvre attributed to Phryne’s lover. My criticism of this kind of reasoning also applies to this passage. Moreover, Pausanias 8. 9. 3 specifies that Praxiteles carved this triad ‘three generations after Alkamenēs’; thus no doubt can exist about the late classical chronology of this creation.

I cannot understand why the author has not included the sculptures of the late classical altar of the Artemesium in Ephesus among the original works of our master. In fact, in Strabo 14. 23 Artemidorus asserts that they were works of Praxiteles.

Then the author begins the section devoted to Praxitelean creations known through copies. He begins this series with the Pouring Satyr (pp. 21–23), and then he examines the Knidian Aphrodite (pp. 24–28). The author (p. 24) accepts the statement that the Knidia coincides with the zenith of the artist in 364–361, but does not record that this idea was suggested by me.<sup>5</sup>

At p. 25 the author asserts that the Belvedere subtype of the Knidia is closer to the original statue by Praxiteles than the Colonna subtype. In this case, he does not cite my demonstration of this conclusion either.<sup>6</sup>

At p. 27 the author suggests an interpretation of the Knidia closed in her own divine world and far from mortals. In this case, my argumentation<sup>7</sup> is not recorded either.

After the Knidia the author discusses the Apollo Sauroktonos (pp. 28–31). The author asserts (p. 28) that this statuary type ‘*e’ testimoniato da oltre venti copie romane*’, while in fact it is known thanks to 113 examples.<sup>8</sup>

Then he considers the Hermes carrying Dionysus at Olympia, which Todisco regards a neo-Attic copy and not a late classical original (pp. 31–35). The author includes ‘*la tipologia dei sandali*’ among the reasons against a 4<sup>th</sup> century dating. Thus he appears to ignore H. Froning’s studies revealing that this type of sandals was used in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup>

The anthology of Praxitelean types known by copies and suggested by Todisco ends with the Resting Satyr (pp. 35–39). Even in this case, the author does not show any care in citing his evidence: for an episode dated to 346, he cites Xenophon, Hellenics 6. 3. 3, which concerns the year 371! Immediately after this citation, he refers to the reconstruction of the walls of Thespieae, an offer by Phryne, which on the contrary concerns the walls of Thebae (Athenaeus 13.591d). Any comment is redundant.

In his analysis of the Resting Satyr, the author endorses my idea that this creation foreshadows the Arcadian dream,<sup>10</sup> however, he does not cite me.

The fourth chapter concerns the style of Praxiteles (pp. 43–49). In these pages the author links the blossoming of the art of Praxiteles with the optimism felt at Athens after the military victories reported by Chabrias and Timotheus. First of all, this notion had been forwarded by me,<sup>11</sup> and the fact that he does not record me is truly outrageous.

<sup>5</sup> CORSO 1988, 78.

<sup>6</sup> CORSO 1988, 137–138.

<sup>7</sup> CORSO 1988, 65.

<sup>8</sup> CORSO 2013, 93–99, note 135.

<sup>9</sup> FRONING 2007; FRONING 2010, 54–56, no. S 5.

<sup>10</sup> CORSO 2010, 47, 50, 55, 57 and 64.

<sup>11</sup> CORSO 2004, 91–99 and 115–134.

Another statement of Todisco concerns the link of Praxiteles with the world of the Academy: even this idea had already been suggested by me in 1988,<sup>12</sup> and was deepened afterwards.<sup>13</sup> Even in this case the author should have cited my publications.

Another statement of the author focuses on the link between Praxiteles and the Myronian tradition, which had been suggested by me first of all.<sup>14</sup> Even in this case, no information is provided that this idea is mine.

The fifth chapter deals with the written *testimonia* (pp. 53–112).

In the introduction of this chapter, the author repeats (pp. 53–54) that ‘*non si puo’ escludere, ma nemmeno provare, che il Prassitele del IV secolo abbia lavorato (...) per Megara, Lebadeia, Anticira, Tebe, Platea, Argo, Elide, Alessandria (Alinda) di Caria, Parion in Propontide*’. I have already explained above that this doubt regarding the attribution of the statues set up in these centers to the late classical Praxiteles is groundless.

The translation of these passages is often incorrect: at p. 56, μετα τα Περσικα is translated ‘*tra le spoglie persiane*’, while it means ‘after the Persian wars’.

The *testimonia* are followed by notes, references and indexes, and finally by 26 plates, provided with captions.

Plate XII depicts the bronze Sauroktonos at Cleveland, and the caption defines this statue as ‘*copia di eta’ romana*’ (!?!). I do not know whether the author travelled to Cleveland to study this important statue, however, I examined it throughout three whole days, and I can state that this statue has no peculiarities typical of the Roman Age. It is original work, probably still of late classical times, and in any case, one of the greatest masterpieces of this period. It is unbelievable that someone supposes it is a Roman copy.

In conclusion, this pamphlet is an extremist product of the tendency to interpret Greek art in primitive and minimalistic terms: according to this reasoning, we know nearly nothing of ancient masters, most works attributed to them should be in fact late Hellenistic or Roman ones, and the art of that period would be uniform and anonymous. Since many ancient authors contradict this picture, in order to make this concept of the classical period successful, it is necessary to be hyper-skeptical toward literary *testimonia*, to stress continuously that they are wrong, and that they reflect experiences and works that are much later than the classical period. In other words, if there is a conflict between the minimalist dogma and the evidence, it is the dogma that prevails upon the evidence and not *vice versa*. The followers of this pseudoscientific concept of classical Greece conquered the whole academic world in classical archaeology in Italy and are intolerant: the *damnatio memoriae* of my publications that do not support their fragile dogmas is a result of this situation in Todisco’s pamphlet.

Thus the short book reviewed here fully reflects this distressing cultural situation of classical archaeology in Italy.

#### REFERENCES

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| AJOOTIAN 2007   | = A. AJOOTIAN: Praxiteles and fourth-century Athenian portraiture. In: Early Hellenistic Portraiture. A cura di P. Schultz. Cambridge 2007, 13–33. |
| CORSO 1988      | = A. CORSO: Prassitele. Roma 1988.   |
| CORSO 1989      | = A. CORSO: Prassitele e la tradizione mironiana. NumAntCl 18 (1989) 85–117.   |
| CORSO 1997–1998 | = A. CORSO: Love as suffering. BICS 42 (1998) 63–91.   |
| CORSO 2004      | = A. CORSO: The Art of Praxiteles. Roma 2004.  |
| CORSO 2007      | = A. CORSO: The Art of Praxiteles. II. Roma 2007.  |
| CORSO 2010      | = A. CORSO: The Art of Praxiteles. III. Roma 2010.   |
| CORSO 2012      | = A. CORSO: Heius di Messana. NumAntCl 41 (2012) 91–96.  |
| CORSO 2013      | = A. CORSO: The Art of Praxiteles. IV. Roma 2013.  |
| CORSO 2014      | = A. CORSO: The Art of Praxiteles. V. Roma 2014.   |
| DNO 2014        | = Der neue Overbeck. Die antiken Schriftquellen zu den bildenden Künsten der Griechen. Hrsg. von Sascha Kansteiner <i>et al.</i> Berlin 2014.      |
| FRONING 2007    | = H. FRONING: Die Sandale des Hermes des Praxiteles in Olympia. In: Potnia Theron. Hrsg.: E. Christof <i>et al.</i> Wien 2007, 95–101.             |
| FRONING 2010    | = H. FRONING: Die Terrakotten der antiken Stadt Elis. Wiesbaden 2010.  |

<sup>12</sup> CORSO 1988, 42–43.

<sup>13</sup> CORSO 1997–1998.

<sup>14</sup> CORSO 1989.