SOPHOCLES I

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OEDIPUS THE KING
OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

Edited by David Grene and
Richmond Lattimore

Third Edition, edited by Mark Griffith and Glenn W. Most

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THE COMPLETE GREEK TRAGEDIES

Edited by David Grene & Richmond Lattimore

THIRD EDITION *Edited by Mark Griffith & Glenn W. Most*

SOPHOCLES I

ANTIGONE *Translated by Elizabeth Wyckoff*

OEDIPUS THE KING *Translated by David Grene*

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS *Translated by Robert Fitzgerald*

The University of Chicago Press CHICAGO & LONDON

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The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637
The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London
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Printed in the United States of America

25 24 23 22 21 20 19 8 9 10 11 12

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-31150-0 (cloth)
ISBN-13: 978-0-226-31151-7 (paper)
ISBN-13: 978-0-226-31153-1 (e-book)
ISBN-10: 0-226-31150-3 (cloth)
ISBN-10: 0-226-31151-1 (paper)
ISBN-10: 0-226-31153-8 (e-book)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Sophocles.
[Works. Selections. English]
Sophocles. — Third edition / edited by Mark Griffith and Glenn W. Most.
volumes. cm. — (The complete Greek tragedies)
ISBN 978-0-226-31150-0 (v. 1 : cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-226-31151-7 (v. 1 : pbk. : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-226-31153-1 (v. 1 : e-book) — ISBN 978-0-226-31154-8 (v. 2 : cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-226-31155-5 (v. 2 : pbk. : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-226-31156-2 (v. 2 : e-book) 1. Sophocles—Translations into English. 2. Greek drama (Tragedy)—Translations into English. 3. Mythology, Greek—Drama. I. Wyckoff, Elizabeth, 1915– II. Grene, David. III. Fitzgerald, Robert, 1910–1985. IV. Griffith, Mark (Classicist) V. Most, Glenn W. VI. Title. VII. Series: Complete Greek tragedies (Unnumbered)
PA4414.A1G7 2013
882'.01—dc23

2012043847

⊚ This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

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EDITORS' PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

The first edition of the *Complete Greek Tragedies*, edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, was published by the University of Chicago Press starting in 1953. But the origins of the series go back even further. David Grene had already published his translation of three of the tragedies with the same press in 1942, and some of the other translations that eventually formed part of the Chicago series had appeared even earlier. A second edition of the series, with new translations of several plays and other changes, was published in 1991. For well over six decades, these translations have proved to be extraordinarily popular and resilient, thanks to their combination of accuracy, poetic immediacy, and clarity of presentation. They have guided hundreds of thousands of teachers, students, and other readers toward a reliable understanding of the surviving masterpieces of the three great Athenian tragedians: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

But the world changes, perhaps never more rapidly than in the past half century, and whatever outlasts the day of its appearance must eventually come to terms with circumstances very different from those that prevailed at its inception. During this same period, scholarly understanding of Greek tragedy has undergone significant development, and there have been marked changes not only in the readers to whom this series is addressed, but also in the ways in which these texts are taught and studied in universities. These changes have prompted the University of Chicago Press to perform another, more systematic revision of the translations, and we are honored to have been entrusted with this delicate and important task.

Our aim in this third edition has been to preserve and strengthen as far as possible all those features that have made the Chicago translations successful for such a long time, while at the same time revising the texts carefully and tactfully to bring them up to date and equipping them with various kinds of subsidiary help, so they may continue to serve new generations of readers.

Our revisions have addressed the following issues:

- Wherever possible, we have kept the existing translations. But we have revised them where we found this to be necessary in order to bring them closer to the ancient Greek of the original texts or to replace an English idiom that has by now become antiquated or obscure. At the same time we have done our utmost to respect the original translator's individual style and meter.
- In a few cases, we have decided to substitute entirely new translations for the ones that were published in earlier editions of the series. Euripides' *Medea* has been newly translated by Oliver Taplin, *The Children of Heracles* by Mark Griffith, *Andromache* by Deborah Roberts, and *Iphigenia among the Taurians* by Anne Carson. We have also, in the case of Aeschylus, added translations and brief discussions of the fragments of lost plays that originally belonged to connected tetralogies along with the surviving tragedies, since awareness of these other lost plays is often crucial to the interpretation of the surviving ones. And in the case of Sophocles, we have included a translation of the substantial fragmentary remains of one of his satyr-dramas, *The Trackers* (*Ichneutai*). (See "How the Plays Were Originally Staged" below for explanation of "tetralogy," "satyr-drama," and other terms.)
- We have altered the distribution of the plays among the various volumes in order to reflect the chronological order in which they were written, when this is known or can be estimated with some probability. Thus the *Oresteia* appears now as volume 2 of Aeschylus' tragedies, and the sequence of Euripides' plays has been rearranged.
- We have rewritten the stage directions to make them more consistent throughout, keeping in mind current scholarly under-

standing of how Greek tragedies were staged in the fifth century BCE. In general, we have refrained from extensive stage directions of an interpretive kind, since these are necessarily speculative and modern scholars often disagree greatly about them. The Greek manuscripts themselves contain no stage directions at all.

- We have indicated certain fundamental differences in the meters and modes of delivery of all the verse of these plays. Spoken language (a kind of heightened ordinary speech, usually in the iambic trimeter rhythm) in which the characters of tragedy regularly engage in dialogue and monologue is printed in ordinary Roman font; the sung verse of choral and individual lyric odes (using a large variety of different meters), and the chanted verse recited by the chorus or individual characters (always using the anapestic meter), are rendered in *italics*, with parentheses added where necessary to indicate whether the passage is sung or chanted. In this way, readers will be able to tell at a glance how the playwright intended a given passage to be delivered in the theater, and how these shifting dynamics of poetic register contribute to the overall dramatic effect.
- All the Greek tragedies that survive alternate scenes of action or dialogue, in which individual actors speak all the lines, with formal songs performed by the chorus. Occasionally individual characters sing formal songs too, or they and the chorus may alternate lyrics and spoken verse within the same scene. Most of the formal songs are structured as a series of pairs of stanzas of which the metrical form of the first one ("strophe") is repeated exactly by a second one ("antistrophe"). Thus the metrical structure will be, e.g., strophe A, antistrophe A, strophe B, antistrophe B, with each pair of stanzas consisting of a different sequence of rhythms. Occasionally a short stanza in a different metrical form ("mesode") is inserted in the middle between one strophe and the corresponding antistrophe, and sometimes the end of the whole series is marked with a single stanza in a different metrical form ("epode")—thus, e.g., strophe A, mesode, antistrophe A; or strophe A, antistrophe A, strophe B, antistrophe B, epode. We have indicated these metrical structures by inserting the terms

STROPHE, ANTISTROPHE, MESODE, and EPODE above the first line of the relevant stanzas so that readers can easily recognize the compositional structure of these songs.

- In each play we have indicated by the symbol ° those lines or words for which there are significant uncertainties regarding the transmitted text, and we have explained as simply as possible in textual notes at the end of the volume just what the nature and degree of those uncertainties are. These notes are not at all intended to provide anything like a full scholarly apparatus of textual variants, but instead to make readers aware of places where the text transmitted by the manuscripts may not exactly reflect the poet's own words, or where the interpretation of those words is seriously in doubt.
- For each play we have provided a brief introduction that gives essential information about the first production of the tragedy, the mythical or historical background of its plot, and its reception in antiquity and thereafter.
- For each of the three great tragedians we have provided an introduction to his life and work. It is reproduced at the beginning of each volume containing his tragedies.
- We have also provided at the end of each volume a glossary explaining the names of all persons and geographical features that are mentioned in any of the plays in that volume.

It is our hope that our work will help ensure that these translations continue to delight, to move, to astonish, to disturb, and to instruct many new readers in coming generations.

MARK GRIFFITH, *Berkeley*
GLENN W. MOST, *Florence*

INTRODUCTION TO SOPHOCLES

Sophocles was born in about 495 BCE, into a wealthy family from the deme of Colonus, close to the city center of Athens. He was thus about thirty years younger than Aeschylus (who died in 455), and about ten or fifteen years older than Euripides (who died just a few months before Sophocles, in 405).

In addition to being the most successful tragedian of his time, Sophocles was active in Athenian public life: he was appointed a treasurer (*hellenotamias*) in 443–42, elected a general (*strategos*) in 441–40 along with Pericles, and perhaps again in the 420s with Nicias; and he was selected to be a special magistrate (*probou-los*) during the emergency administration of 412–11, all of this in marked contrast to the apolitical life of Euripides. There was also an ancient tradition (perhaps apocryphal) that when the cult of the healing god Asclepius was first brought to Athens, it was for a while located in Sophocles' house.

Although we know for certain few details of Sophocles' personal life, he apparently had at least one son, Iophon, by his wife Nicostrate, and another, Ariston, by his mistress Theoris. Ariston's son was in turn named Sophocles, and both Iophon and Sophocles Jr. became successful tragedians. Among his friends were such luminaries as Herodotus, Pericles, and Ion of Chios, and he was said to be sociable and a "good-natured" man. He had a reputation for being something of a flirt and bisexual playboy. Stories that were later told of the octogenarian Sophocles' legal feuds with his sons may have been triggered by his depiction of fierce, lonely, embittered men in his plays (Ajax, Philoctetes,

Teiresias, and especially Oedipus cursing his son in *Oedipus at Colonus*).

Sophocles' career as a dramatist was long, prolific, and immensely successful. His first production in the annual tragedy competition at Athens was in 468 BCE. The plays he entered are not known, but they resulted in a victory over Aeschylus. Sophocles was still composing plays right up to his death in 405 (*Philoctetes*, produced in 409; *Oedipus at Colonus*, produced posthumously in 401).

Ancient sources knew the titles of 120 plays by Sophocles, which should mean thirty groups of four for the annual competition, each comprising three tragedies and a satyr-play. It is recorded that he won eighteen victories (thus even outdoing Aeschylus' thirteen, and far more than Euripides' five), and that he was never ranked lower than second in the competition. Unlike Aeschylus, Sophocles never composed a connected trilogy, that is, a sequence of plays performed together that focused on the same characters or family (like, for example, the *Oresteia*). Unfortunately we do not know what principles he may have used in designing each set of four plays in any given year. All of the seven plays we possess seem to have been performed in different years, and we do not even know the titles of any of the lost plays that accompanied them. As far as we can tell, however, each play was intended to be treated as a separate masterpiece—fully intelligible and self-contained on its own terms.

Any attempt to trace a development in Sophocles' style or worldview during his long career is hampered not only by the loss of all but seven of his plays, but also by the uncertain dating of several of the ones we do have. Sophocles' tragedies rarely contain references to actual current events or issues, and they rarely elicited parodies from Aristophanes (as several of Euripides' did). For only two Sophoclean plays do we possess definite information about their date of production, based on the original fifth-century festival competition records: *Philoctetes* (409) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (405/401). There is good external evidence for dating *Antigone* to 442 or 441, but for the other four plays we have

to rely on stylistic—hence subjective—criteria. Most scholars nowadays are inclined to date *Ajax* and *The Women of Trachis* quite early (to the 460s–440s). *Electra* is probably late (perhaps 415–10). The date of *Oedipus the King* is uncertain, though many would like to place it in the early 420s because of its vivid depiction of plague—not a compelling argument.

Sophocles inherited from Aeschylus and the other early tragedians a well-established set of dramatic conventions and formal structures, and he does not appear to have made radical innovations of his own, except perhaps in the musical aspects, since he is credited with being the first Athenian playwright to introduce "Phrygian" and "Lydian" scales into the melodies of his lyrics. (None of this music survives.) Ancient critics disagreed as to whether it was Aeschylus or Sophocles who first employed a third speaking actor—earlier the rule had been that only two were allowed. Aristotle says that Sophocles was first, and that he also introduced scene-painting. In general, however, it was Euripides, along with his younger contemporary Agathon, who were generally regarded as the chief iconoclasts and experimenters in artistic forms and subject matter. Sophocles' gifts lay rather in refining and elaborating the possibilities of the tragic form: tightly constructed plots, more complex dialogue scenes, exploration of extreme emotional states and character contrasts, the subtle interweaving of spoken and musical elements, and an extraordinary richness and fluidity of verbal expression that is often very difficult to capture in English translation. To Aristotle in the fourth century, as to many lovers of drama since, Sophocles' plays appear to represent the pinnacle of what Greek tragedy was capable of achieving, the fulfilment of its very "nature."

After Sophocles died, his plays continued for centuries to be widely read and (presumably) performed all over the Greek-speaking world. A more or less complete collection of his plays was made in Alexandria during the third century BCE, though this no longer exists. Hundreds of fragments from his lost plays are found in quotations by other authors and in anthologies, and while he was never as widely read or imitated as Euripides

or Menander (let alone Homer), Sophocles remained a classic both in the ancient schools and among later practitioners of the dramatic arts (including Ennius, Accius, and Pacuvius; Seneca; Corneille and Racine). The seven plays we possess today were probably selected in the second century CE, and from that point gradually the other plays ceased to be copied, and thus eventually were lost to posterity. At Byzantium (Constantinople, now Istanbul), three plays in particular were most widely copied: the "triad" of *Ajax*, *Electra*, and *Oedipus the King*. But the rest were never as close to extinction as the tragedies of Aeschylus, whose difficult style and more old-fashioned dramaturgy made his works less appealing to later readers.

A large papyrus unearthed at Oxyrhynchus (first published in 1912) contains a substantial chunk of the previously lost satyr-play titled *The Trackers* (*Ichneutai*), which is included in translation in this new edition of the Chicago Greek tragedies. Further papyrus finds have continued to add important scraps to our knowledge both of Sophocles' tragedies and of his satyr-dramas. But for the most part, even though we know that, for example, his *Phaedra* was influential and popular throughout antiquity, as were *Polyxena*, *Thyestes*, *Tereus* (about Procne and Philomela), *Inachus* (a satyr-play about Zeus and Io), and numerous other lost plays, Sophocles' reputation in the modern era has rested almost entirely on the seven plays that survive in medieval manuscripts. Of these, *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone*, and *Electra* have always been the most widely read and often staged, but all seven have been central to the discussions of theater historians, philosophers, and theorists of tragedy, and all of them have provoked adaptations, paintings, and translations in abundance, all over the world. Indeed, since the late eighteenth century, for many critics and philosophers it has been Sophocles' plays—along with Shakespeare's—that have been taken to represent the culmination of the genre of tragedy and its capacity to represent human experience and heroic suffering.

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEBAN PLAYS

Unlike Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and the trilogy that included his *Seven against Thebes*, the three Sophoclean plays we possess that deal with the family of Oedipus were not written to be performed together. Indeed, they seem to have been composed over several decades. *Antigone* was probably first performed in 442 or 441. The date of *Oedipus the King* is quite uncertain, though often surmised as being in the 420s. *Oedipus at Colonus* was produced posthumously by Sophocles' son in 401. The three plays occasionally disagree with one another in factual details, and in several passages of *Oedipus at Colonus* the hero is found correcting or critiquing ideas that had been propounded in the earlier *Oedipus the King*. Nonetheless, there are many respects in which the three plays speak to one another and convey a consistent portrayal of this family's terrible history, so it makes sense to consider them together in this introduction, even while it must be emphasized again that this is not a "trilogy" in the proper sense of that term.

The Myth

The story of the doomed descendants of King Labdacus of Thebes—Laius, Oedipus, and the sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polyneices—was extremely well known and often recounted in early Greek literature. The saga rivaled that of the Trojan War in popularity and significance, and various parts of it were narrated in epic poems (including the *Thebais* and the *Oedipodeia*, both now lost) attributed to Homer or one of his successors. It was also taken up in many lyric poems (including one by Stesi-

chorus, of which fragments survive on papyrus). There were, of course, many different versions of the whole story, but the main outlines remain fairly consistent: King Laius and his wife, Jocasta (sometimes she has a different name), are informed by the oracle of Apollo that if she conceives and bears a son, he will grow up to kill his father and marry his mother. They do proceed to have a baby son, however, whom (in Sophocles' version, at least) they leave on a deserted hillside to die. He is rescued by a shepherd, and adopted by King Polybus of Corinth and his wife, Merope. The boy, named Oedipus, grows up believing himself to be Polybus' son and heir.

In due course, Oedipus encounters his real father at a crossroads, though neither recognizes the other. They fight and Oedipus kills Laius. He then comes to Thebes, which is being terrorized by the monstrous Sphinx. Oedipus solves the Sphinx's riddle and is hailed as the new king by the Thebans, which entails marrying the widow of the recently deceased king, Laius—she is, of course, his mother. In Sophocles' version of the story Oedipus and Jocasta have four children: two boys, Polyneices and Eteocles, and two girls, Antigone and Ismene. Eventually, the truth about Oedipus' identity (and the parricide and incest) is discovered.

What happens next varies from version to version. In some, Jocasta commits suicide, in others not. In some Oedipus continues to be the king of Thebes, in others, he either goes into exile or is deposed from the throne but remains in Thebes; in some, he blinds himself. It is not known when this detail of self-blinding was invented: it may have been Sophocles' innovation, though there seem to be hints of it in Aeschylus' (earlier) *Seven against Thebes*.

The ghastly problems continue into the next generation, with Oedipus' two sons quarreling violently about the succession. (In some versions of the story, Oedipus is still alive; in others he has already died.) Again, different versions account differently for this quarrel and its consequences; but in all of them Polyneices goes to live for a while in Argos, marries the daughter of the Argive king, Adrastus, and persuades the Argives to provide him with an army, with the intention of regaining the Theban

throne by force. He and six other champions (the "Seven against Thebes") attack the city at its seven gates, while Eteocles organizes its defense. In the battle, the two brothers meet face to face and kill one another. Still, the defenders are victorious and the city is not captured.

Creon, Jocasta's brother and a leading military commander and former advisor to Oedipus, takes over as ruler. He decides to give honorific burial to Eteocles, but denies it to Polyneices (and in most versions, he denies burial also to the Argive dead). A dispute arises over the matter: in some versions (for example, in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*) the Athenians send an army to help the Argives defeat Creon and force the Thebans to surrender the Argive dead for proper burial. Sophocles seems to be innovating in *Antigone* by having only the corpse of Polyneices be the object of dispute, with the dead man's sister, Antigone, being the one who is resisting Creon and demanding the burial.

Where Oedipus was finally laid to rest seems to have been quite open-ended. Other elements in the story too, such as the role of Ismene or the possible intervention of Teiresias at one point or another, were handled quite differently by various authors, as was the issue of Apollo's oracle and its possible significance.

Of the surviving thirty-two Greek tragedies, no fewer than six are based on this Theban saga: apart from these three plays of Sophocles, we have Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* and Euripides' *Suppliant Women* and *Phoenician Women*. In addition, we know of numerous lost tragedies that dealt with this myth, including an *Antigone* and an *Oedipus* by Euripides and the two other plays of the Theban trilogy by Aeschylus (*Laius* and *Oedipus*).

Antigone

Sophocles is reported to have won first prize with his production of *Antigone* (probably in 442 or 441 BCE). We do not know the names of the other three plays that he presented that year. The play's considerable success and popularity seem to have influenced other writers and theater-makers profoundly, to the extent that Aeschy-

lus' *Seven against Thebes* (first produced in 467) was extensively revised—some decades after its author's death—to make the final scenes follow the same dramatic course as Sophocles' play.

The idea of building a tragic plot around the bold and defiant resistance of Oedipus' daughter to Creon's authority, out of loyalty to her brother, seems to have originated with this play. Indeed, Antigone as a character may herself have been Sophocles' invention. (By contrast, Ismene, the other daughter, who is a more cautious and conventionally minded foil to her extraordinary sister in this play, had a more significant role in previous versions of the story.) Likewise, the theme of Haemon's (Creon's son's) betrothal to one of Oedipus' daughters may have been an innovation, together with the concentration on the internal family conflict concerning the burial of the two brothers, rather than on the Argive demand that their soldiers be properly buried. Haemon's suicide, and that of Creon's wife Eurydice, as well as Teiresias' intervention and warnings, are also probably new twists introduced by Sophocles—all of them serving to highlight the shocking downfall and misery of Creon.

In Sophocles' strikingly original play, the collision between the two major characters, Antigone and Creon, and the principles that each of them asserts has captured the imaginations of audiences, critics, and philosophers through the centuries. We may note that it is unusual for Sophocles to have a male chorus when his chief character is female; Antigone's isolation is thereby much enhanced, while the audience's sympathies, like the chorus', end up being divided between them.

The play seems to have been quite frequently performed in the fourth century and later, though direct evidence for this is slim, and it was clearly not as popular as Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, whose plot covered some of the same material (in a very different way). Euripides' *Antigone* (now lost) was also well known, and quite different. Although we know little about its date or contents, it appears that Antigone did not die in Euripides' version, but married Haemon and had a son with him. Representations of scenes from our play in ancient art are few. But *Antigone* eventu-

ally became one of the seven Sophoclean plays that were selected for standard school use in antiquity, and thus survived into the Byzantine era. About a dozen medieval manuscripts contain the play.

During the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, it was the Latin *Thebais* by Statius and the (incomplete) *Phoenician Women* by Seneca that were best known; and these are the basis for Boccaccio in his *De claris mulieribus* (*On Famous Women*). Since the eighteenth century, however, it has been above all Sophocles' treatment of Antigone, along with his two *Oedipus* plays, that have come to eclipse all others. Poems, letters, and essays by Shelley, De Quincey, Goethe, and many others were devoted to Antigone, and she was constantly depicted as the embodiment of virginal purity, sisterly love, and self-sacrifice. Especially notable are Hölderlin's translation of the play (1804), the opera by Mendelssohn (1841), and essays by Matthew Arnold (1849), George Eliot (1856), and Søren Kierkegaard (1843, and elsewhere), along with the lectures of G. W. F. Hegel (1818–1835).

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, writers, performers, critics, political scientists, and philosophers have continued to turn to Sophocles' heroine as a model of individual resistance to totalitarian rule, and/or as a martyr to the cause of family, or religion, or women's rights: for example, the composers Arthur Honegger (1927) and Carl Orff (1949), and playwright Bertolt Brecht (1947). Jean Anouilh's drama *Antigone* (1944) and Athol Fugard's *The Island* (1973) offer contrasting but equally brilliant variations on Sophocles' original; likewise the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1959) and the philosopher Judith Butler (2000). Meanwhile Sophocles' play itself continues to stand out as one of the three or four most widely performed, read, discussed, and admired of all Greek tragedies.

Oedipus the King

When the play was composed and first performed is unknown. Many scholars have suggested the mid-420s because of the por-

trayal of the plague, but there is little evidence to support this or any other date. We are informed that Sophocles did not win first prize with *Oedipus the King*, but we do not know which other plays he presented with it, so the failure may not have been the result of the audience's dislike of this play in particular. Certainly we have plenty of evidence that the play did not take long to establish itself as one of Sophocles' best known and most admired.

The title of the play in antiquity was *Oedipus Tyrannos*, a designation signaling that Oedipus' position as ruler of Thebes was not inherited but came to him through some other kind of intervention or invitation: the word *tyrannos* did not necessarily carry pejorative associations (though it often did). We do not know who first attached this label to the play, or why—it may not have occurred until after the composition of *Oedipus at Colonus*, when scholars and commentators would have needed to distinguish the two. In Latin, the play has always been titled *Oedipus Rex*.

As previously noted, the broad outline of the story of Oedipus' fateful birth, unwitting parricide and incest, and ultimate self-discovery, was already well known by the time Sophocles wrote his play. In the modern era, his version has become the standard one, and there is a tendency to see this version as simply the way "the myth" goes. But a number of elements in Sophocles' plot were probably new and perhaps unexpected to the original audience. Certainly such details as the utterances of Apollo's oracle and the involvement of Teiresias, the Corinthian messenger, and the herdsman—all of them crucial to the action—are new.

But Sophocles' most distinctive innovations seem to have consisted—as Aristotle emphasizes in the *Poetics*—in his brilliant organization of the material so as to emphasize the elements of ignorance, irony, and unexpected recognition of the truth. The tragic effect of the play depends heavily on the fact that most of the crucial events occurred in the past, and that the audience knows or suspects much more than any individual character does (except possibly Teiresias). This is most strikingly true of Oedipus' edict stating that he will track down and exile the unknown killer of Laius; but it applies also to the announcement of

the death of King Polybus of Corinth, Oedipus' supposed father. Throughout the play, it is the paradoxical—improbable, yet inevitable—process of struggling to recognize (or avoid recognizing) who is really who and what each character has already done, generally with the best of motives but terrible results, that causes Oedipus, Jocasta, and everyone else such intolerable anguish and that triggers in the audience such extraordinarily mixed feelings. This tragic tension is enhanced by the oracles of Apollo and warnings of Teiresias, by the chorus' songs of speculation and (mistaken) joy, by Jocasta's dismissal of the value of oracles, by the reports from the Corinthian messenger and the old herdsman, and above all by Oedipus' own determined pursuit of the city's salvation and the truth about himself.

The play was widely known and read throughout antiquity. Because so many other playwrights, including Aeschylus and Euripides, also composed Oedipus plays that do not survive, it is impossible to judge precisely how much the Sophocles version influenced subsequent writers. But Seneca's *Oedipus*, which had the most impact during the Renaissance, was certainly modeled on Sophocles', even while it also contains several major differences. In Byzantine times, Sophocles' play was frequently copied, so that almost two hundred manuscripts exist, most of them virtual duplicates of one another. Ever since the Renaissance, versions by Corneille (1658), Dryden and Lee (1678), Voltaire (1718), and more recently Stravinsky-Cocteau (1927; spectacularly staged by Julie Taymor in 1993), Gide (1931), and Pasolini (1967) constitute only a few of the most conspicuous examples, out of hundreds of productions and adaptations.

Sigmund Freud's exploration of the "Oedipus complex" as one of the cornerstones of his psychoanalytic theory of course added to the play's popular appeal, and it has remained the best known of all Greek tragedies throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. But other interpretations of the play too, in which a not entirely guilty hero (a scapegoat) suffers so that the community can be saved, or a culture hero dies ("winter") to ensure the rebirth of vegetation and prosperity ("spring"), have also kept *Oedi-*

pus the King enduringly in the forefront of theatrical and philosophical attention. So too has the use of Oedipus as a metaphor for every human being's quest for personal identity and self-knowledge in a world full of ignorance and hidden horrors—perhaps even one ruled by divine indifference or malevolent fate. If there is one work that is regarded as most typically reflecting the Greeks' fatalistic or pessimistic outlook, this is probably it. Yet, as Aristotle observed, this is also a play whose astonishingly elegant and intricate construction makes it uniquely satisfying and pleasurable to contemplate.

Oedipus at Colonus

This play was written late in Sophocles' life. It was not performed until after his death, when his son Iophon presented it for the dramatic competition in 401. Ancient and modern critics have observed that a striking analogy exists between ancient anecdotes about the elderly Sophocles being engaged in a bitter dispute with his son and the dramatic scene of furious confrontation between Oedipus and Polyneices. But we cannot tell which may have influenced which.

The plot of this play seems to have been distinctly new with Sophocles. Various Greek authors before him had handled the later years and death of Oedipus in very different ways. In Homer Oedipus remains ruling in Thebes even after his parricide and incest are discovered. In Euripides' *Phoenician Women* (411–409 BC), Oedipus has abdicated but is still living in the palace while his sons take turns ruling Thebes. Even at the end of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* it is not entirely clear whether or not he will go into exile, though that is his expressed wish and he is shown talking about it with his young daughters. In *Oedipus at Colonus* Sophocles continues along this trajectory, and we learn early in the play that Oedipus, now blind and weak, has been wandering for years from town to town as an outcast, attended only by Antigone. As the play proceeds, we learn that in Thebes his two sons, along with Creon, have refused to offer him shelter or support.

Only near the end of the play is Oedipus informed that an oracle has recently revealed that after his death he and his tomb will provide special protection to the community that harbors him, and that the Theban rulers therefore now wish to bring him back to die close to their borders. Innovations specific to this play include the intense focus on the Attic deme of Colonus (Sophocles' own home) as Oedipus' sanctuary and final resting place, the friendship and long-term alliance between Theseus as king of Athens and Oedipus, and the predictions of future defeats of Theban forces at Colonus thanks to the protection of Oedipus' spirit. Likewise the especially close relationship between Oedipus and his daughters, and the context of his cursing of Polyneices, seem distinctive and new. (In previous versions his curse had preceded and even caused the initial quarrel between the two sons.)

There are fewer signs that this play directly influenced later writers and audiences than there are for *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King*. But the play was included among Sophocles' select seven; and although it has not been extensively performed in the modern era, it has always commanded respect for its harrowing yet inspiring portrait of the long-suffering hero and his devoted daughters, as well as for the beauty of its lyrics. One modern oratorio adaptation, *The Gospel at Colonus* (by Lee Breuer and Bob Telson, 1989), based on Robert Fitzgerald's translation in our series, has been acclaimed by critics and audiences as a high point of twentieth-century adaptation of Greek tragedy.

HOW THE PLAYS WERE ORIGINALLY STAGED

Nearly all the plays composed by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were first performed in the Theater of Dionysus at Athens, as part of the annual festival and competition in drama. This was not only a literary and musical event, but also an important religious and political ceremony for the Athenian community. Each year three tragedians were selected to compete, with each of them presenting four plays per day, a "tetralogy" of three tragedies and one satyr-play. The satyr-play was a type of drama similar to tragedy in being based on heroic myth and employing many of the same stylistic features, but distinguished by having a chorus of half-human, half-horse followers of Dionysus—sileni or satyrs—and by always ending happily. Extant examples of this genre are Euripides' *The Cyclops* (in *Euripides*, vol. 5) and Sophocles' *The Trackers* (partially preserved: in *Sophocles*, vol. 2).

The three competing tragedians were ranked by a panel of citizens functioning as amateur judges, and the winner received an honorific prize. Records of these competitions were maintained, allowing Aristotle and others later to compile lists of the dates when each of Aeschylus', Sophocles', and Euripides' plays were first performed and whether they placed first, second, or third in the competition (unfortunately we no longer possess the complete lists).

The tragedians competed on equal terms: each had at his disposal three actors (only two in Aeschylus' and in Euripides' earliest plays) who would often have to switch between roles as each play progressed, plus other nonspeaking actors to play attendants and other subsidiary characters; a chorus of twelve (in Aeschylus'

time) or fifteen (for most of the careers of Sophocles and Euripides), who would sing and dance formal songs and whose Chorus Leader would engage in dialogue with the characters or offer comment on the action; and a pipe-player, to accompany the sung portions of the play.

All the performers were men, and the actors and chorus members all wore masks. The association of masks with other Dionysian rituals may have affected their use in the theater; but masks had certain practical advantages as well—for example, making it easy to play female characters and to change quickly between roles. In general, the use of masks also meant that ancient acting techniques must have been rather different from what we are used to seeing in the modern theater. Acting in a mask requires a more frontal and presentational style of performance toward the audience than is usual with unmasked, "realistic" acting; a masked actor must communicate far more by voice and stylized bodily gesture than by facial expression, and the gradual development of a character in the course of a play could hardly be indicated by changes in his or her mask. Unfortunately, however, we know almost nothing about the acting techniques of the Athenian theater. But we do know that the chorus members were all Athenian amateurs, and so were the actors up until the later part of the fifth century, by which point a prize for the best actor had been instituted in the tragic competition, and the art of acting (which of course included solo singing and dancing) was becoming increasingly professionalized.

The tragedian himself not only wrote the words for his play but also composed the music and choreography and directed the productions. It was said that Aeschylus also acted in his plays but that Sophocles chose not to, except early in his career, because his voice was too weak. Euripides is reported to have had a collaborator who specialized in musical composition. The costs for each playwright's production were shared between an individual wealthy citizen, as a kind of "super-tax" requirement, and the city.

The Theater of Dionysus itself during most of the fifth century BCE probably consisted of a large rectangular or trapezoidal

dance floor, backed by a one-story wooden building (the *skênê*), with a large central door that opened onto the dance floor. (Some scholars have argued that two doors were used, but the evidence is thin.) Between the *skênê* and the dance floor there may have been a narrow stage on which the characters acted and which communicated easily with the dance floor. For any particular play, the *skênê* might represent a palace, a house, a temple, or a cave, for example; the interior of this "building" was generally invisible to the audience, with all the action staged in front of it. Sophocles is said to have been the first to use painted scenery; this must have been fairly simple and easy to remove, as every play had a different setting. Playwrights did not include stage directions in their texts. Instead, a play's setting was indicated explicitly by the speaking characters.

All the plays were performed in the open air and in daylight. Spectators sat on wooden seats in rows, probably arranged in rectangular blocks along the curving slope of the Acropolis. (The stone semicircular remains of the Theater of Dionysus that are visible today in Athens belong to a later era.) Seating capacity seems to have been four to six thousand—thus a mass audience, but not quite on the scale of the theaters that came to be built during the fourth century BCE and later at Epidaurus, Ephesus, and many other locations all over the Mediterranean.

Alongside the *skênê*, on each side, there were passages through which actors could enter and exit. The acting area included the dance floor, the doorway, and the area immediately in front of the *skênê*. Occasionally an actor appeared on the roof or above it, as if flying. He was actually hanging from a crane (*mêchanê*: hence *deus ex machina*, "a god from the machine"). The *skênê* was also occasionally opened up—the mechanical details are uncertain—in order to show the audience what was concealed within (usually dead bodies). Announcements of entrances and exits, like the setting, were made by the characters. Although the medieval manuscripts of the surviving plays do not provide explicit stage directions, it is usually possible to infer from the words or from the context whether a particular entrance or exit is being made

through a door (into the *skênê*) or by one of the side entrances. In later antiquity, there may have been a rule that one side entrance always led to the city center, the other to the countryside or harbor. Whether such a rule was ever observed in the fifth century is uncertain.

ANTIGONE

Translated by ELIZABETH WYCKOFF

ANTIGONE

Characters	ANTIGONE, daughter of Oedipus
	ISMENE, her sister
	CHORUS of Theban elders
	CREON, king of Thebes
	A GUARD
	HAEMON, son of Creon
	TEIRESIAS
	A MESSENGER
	EURYDICE, wife of Creon

Scene: Thebes, before the royal palace.

(Antigone and Ismene enter from the palace.)

ANTIGONE

My sister, my Ismene, do you know
of any suffering from our father sprung
that Zeus does not achieve for us survivors?
There's nothing grievous, nothing full of doom,°
or shameful, or dishonored, I've not seen: 5
your sufferings and mine.
And now, what of this edict which they say
the commander has proclaimed to the whole people?
Have you heard anything? Or don't you know
that our enemies' trouble comes upon our friends? 10

ISMENE

I've heard no word, Antigone, of our friends,

not sweet nor bitter, since that single moment
when we two lost two brothers
who died on one day by a double blow.
And since the Argive army went away 15
this very night, I have no further news
of fortune or disaster for myself.

ANTIGONE

I knew it well, and brought you from the house
for just this reason, that you alone may hear.

ISMENE

What is it? Clearly some news has clouded you. 20

ANTIGONE

It has indeed. Creon will give the one
of our two brothers honor in the tomb;
the other none. Eteocles, with just observance treated,
as law provides he has hidden under earth 25
to have full honor with the dead below.
But Polyneices' corpse who died in pain,
they say he has proclaimed to the whole town
that none may bury him and none bewail,
but leave him, unwept, untombed, a rich sweet sight
for the hungry birds' beholding and devouring. 30
Such orders they say the worthy Creon gives
to you and me—yes, yes, I say to *me*—
and that he's coming to proclaim it clear
to those who know it not.
Further: he has the matter so at heart 35
that anyone who dares attempt the act
will die by public stoning in the town.
So there you have it and you soon will show
if you are noble, or worthless, despite your high birth.

ISMENE

If things have reached this stage, what can I do,
poor sister, that will help to make or mend? 40

ANTIGONE

Think, will you share my labor and my act?

ISMENE

What will you risk? And where is your intent?

ANTIGONE

Will you take up that corpse along with me?

ISMENE

To bury him you mean, when it's forbidden?

ANTIGONE

My brother, and yours, though you may wish he were not.° 45
I never shall be found to be his traitor.

ISMENE

O reckless one, when Creon spoke against it!

ANTIGONE

It's not for him to keep me from my own.

ISMENE

Alas. Remember, sister, how our father
perished abhorred, ill-famed: 50
himself with his own hand, through his own curse
destroyed both eyes.
Remember next his mother and his wife
finishing life in the shame of the twisted noose.
And third, two brothers on a single day, 55
poor creatures, murdering, a common doom
each with his arm accomplished on the other.
And now look at the two of us alone.
We'll perish terribly if we violate law
and try to cross the royal vote and power. 60
We must remember that we two are women,
so not to fight with men;
and that since we are subject to stronger power
we must hear these orders, or any that may be worse.

LITERATURE / CLASSICS

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David Grene (1913–2002) taught classics for many years at the University of Chicago. Richmond Lattimore (1906–1984) was a poet and translator best known for his translations of the Greek classics, especially his versions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Mark Griffith is professor of classics and of theater, dance, and performance studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Glenn W. Most is professor of ancient Greek at the Scuola Normale Superiore at Pisa and a visiting member of the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago.

The University of Chicago Press
www.press.uchicago.edu

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-31151-7
ISBN-10: 0-226-31151-1

BOOK AND COVER DESIGN BY MATT AVERY. COVER ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATT AVERY.