

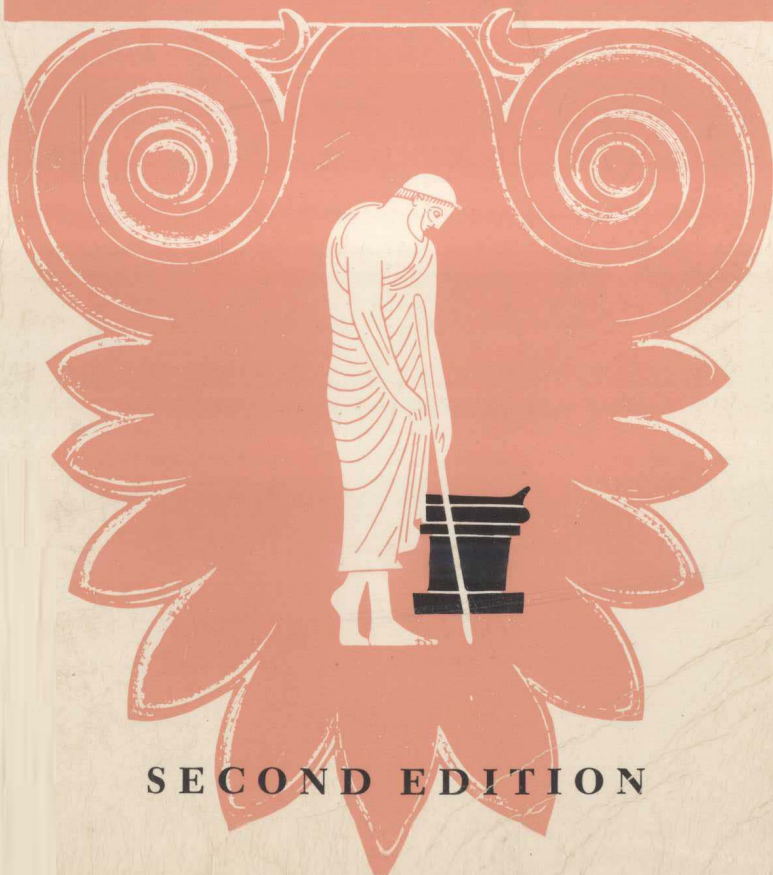
THE COMPLETE GREEK TRAGEDIES

Edited by DAVID GRENE and RICHMOND LATTIMORE

# SOPHOCLES I

*Oedipus the King*  
*Oedipus at Colonus*  
*Antigone*

Translated and with an Introduction by  
DAVID GRENE



SECOND EDITION

THE COMPLETE GREEK TRAGEDIES

*Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore*

SOPHOCLES · I

OEDIPUS THE KING

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

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ANTIGONE

藏书章

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Second Edition

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

In this edition of *Sophocles I* new translations by David Grene replace Robert Fitzgerald's translation of *Oedipus at Colonus* (1941) and Elizabeth Wyckoff's translation of *Antigone* (1954).

The complete collection of Greek tragedies edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore is available in nine paperback volumes. These are listed at the end of this volume.

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## INTRODUCTION

### “*The Theban Plays*” by Sophocles

THIS series of plays, *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*, was written over a wide interval of years. The dating is only approximate, for reliable evidence is lacking; but the *Antigone* was produced in 441 B.C. when Sophocles was probably fifty-four, and *Oedipus the King* some fourteen or fifteen years later. *Oedipus at Colonus* was apparently produced the year after its author's death at the age of ninety in 405 B.C. Thus, although the three plays are concerned with the same legend, they were not conceived and executed at the same time and with a single purpose, as is the case with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. We can here see how a story teased the imagination of Sophocles until it found its final expression. We can see the degrees of variation in treatment he gave the myth each time he handled it. And perhaps we can come to some notion of what the myths meant to Sophocles as raw material for the theater.

The internal dramatic dates of the three plays do not agree with the order of their composition. As far as the legend is concerned, the story runs in sequence: *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone*. But Sophocles wrote them in the order: *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*. In view of this and the long interval between the composition of the individual plays, we would expect some inconsistencies between the three versions. And there are fairly serious inconsistencies—in facts, for instance. At the conclusion of *Oedipus the King*, Creon is in undisputed authority after the removal of Oedipus. Though he appeals to him to look after his daughters, Oedipus refrains from asking Creon to do anything for his sons, who, he says, will be all right on their own (OK 1460). It is Creon who will succeed Oedipus in Thebes, and there is no question of any

legitimate claim of Oedipus' descendants (OK 1418). But in *Antigone*, Creon tells the chorus that he has favorably observed their loyalty first to Oedipus and then to his sons, and so has hope of their devotion to himself. In *Oedipus at Colonus*—the last of the three plays he wrote—Sophocles makes one of his very few clumsy efforts to patch the discrepancies together. In *Oedipus at Colonus* (ll. 367 ff.), Ismene says that at first the two sons were willing to leave the throne to Creon in view of their fatal family heritage, but after a while they decided to take over the monarchy and the quarrel was only between themselves as to who should succeed. At this point Creon has vanished out of the picture altogether! Again, the responsibility for the decision to expel Oedipus from Thebes and keep him out rests, in *Oedipus the King*, entirely with Creon, who announces that he will consult Apollo in the matter. In *Oedipus at Colonus* his sons' guilt in condemning their father to exile is one of the bitterest counts in Oedipus' indictment of them (OC 1360 ff.). These are important differences. We do not know anything really certain about the manner of publication of the plays after their production. We know even less about Sophocles' treatment of his own scripts. Maybe he simply did not bother to keep them after he saw them as far as the stage, though that seems unlikely. Or it is possible and likelier that Sophocles, as he wrote the last play in extreme old age and in what seems to be the characteristic self-absorption of the last years of his life, cared little about whether *Oedipus at Colonus* exactly tallied, in its presentation, with the stories he had written thirty-seven and twenty-two years earlier.

Let us for the moment disregard the details of the story and concentrate on what would seem to be the central theme of the first two plays in order of composition. And here we find something very curious. Most critics have felt the significance of the *Antigone* to lie in the opposition of Creon and Antigone and all that this opposition represents. It is thus a play about something quite different from *Oedipus the King*. And yet what a remarkable similarity there is in the dilemma of Creon in *Antigone* and Oedipus himself in the first Oedipus play. In both of them a king has taken a decision which is disobeyed or questioned by his subjects. In both, the ruler mis-

construes the role of the rebel and his own as a sovereign. In both, he has a crucial encounter with the priest Teiresias, who warns him that the forces of religion are against him. In both, he charges that the priest has been suborned. There the resemblance ends; for, after abusing the old prophet, Creon is overcome with fear of his authority and, too late, tries to undo his mistake. In *Oedipus the King* the king defies all assaults upon his decision until the deadly self-knowledge which starts to work in him has accomplished its course and he is convicted out of his own mouth.

Usually, as we know, the *Antigone* is interpreted entirely as the conflict between Creon and Antigone. It has often been regarded as the classical statement of the struggle between the law of the individual conscience and the central power of the state. Unquestionably, these issues are inherent in the play. Unquestionably, even, Sophocles would understand the modern way of seeing his play, for the issue of the opposition of the individual and the state was sufficiently present to his mind to make this significant for him. But can the parallelism between the position of Oedipus in the one play and Creon in the other be quite irrelevant to the interpretation of the two? And is it not very striking that such a large share of the *Antigone* should be devoted to the conclusion of the conflict, as far as Creon is concerned, and to the destruction of his human happiness?

What I would suggest is this: that Sophocles had at the time of writing the first play (in 442 B.C.) a theme in mind which centered in the Theban trilogy. One might express it by saying that it is the story of a ruler who makes a mistaken decision, though in good faith, and who then finds himself opposed in a fashion which he misunderstands and which induces him to persist in his mistake. This story is later on going to be that of a man who breaks divine law without realizing that he is doing so, and whose destruction is then brought about by the voice of the divine law in society. Between the *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King*, the theme has developed further, for in the latter play Sophocles is showing how the ruler who breaks the divine law may, for all he can see and understand, be entirely innocent, but nonetheless his guilt is an objective fact. In the third play, *Oedipus at Colonus*, this issue reaches its final statement. The



old Oedipus is admittedly a kind of monster. Wherever he comes, people shrink from him. Yet his guilt carries with it some sort of innocence on which God will set his seal. For the old man is both cursed and blessed. The god gives him an extraordinary end, and the last place of his mortal habitation is blessed forever.

What this interpretation would mean, if correct, is that Sophocles started to write about the Theban legend, the story of Oedipus and his children, without having fully understood what he wanted to say about it. He may have been, and probably was, drawn, unknown to himself, to the dramatization of this particular legend because in it lay the material of the greatest theme of his later artistic life. But first he tried his hand at it in the opposition of Creon and Antigone. However, even while he did this, the character of Creon and his role in the play were shaping what was to be the decisive turn in the story he was going to write—the Oedipus saga.

Thus there is a certain elasticity in the entire treatment of myth. The author will accent a certain character at one time to suit a play and change the accent to suit another. Or he may even discover the same theme in a different myth. This is suggested by a short comparison of the *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, both written in the last few years of Sophocles' life. The figure of Philoctetes, though occurring in a totally different legend from Oedipus, is a twin child with Oedipus in Sophocles' dramatic imagination. In both these plays, the *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, the hero is a man whose value is inextricably coupled with his offensive quality. Philoctetes is the archer whose bow will overcome Troy. He is also the creature whose stinking infested wound moves everyone to disgust who has to do with him. Oedipus is accursed in the sight of all men; he had committed the two crimes, parricide and incest, which rendered him an outcast in any human society. But he is also the one to whom, at his end, God will give the marks of his favor, and the place where he is last seen on earth will be lucky and blessed. This combination of the evil and the good is too marked, in these two plays, to be accidental. It is surely the idea which inspired the old Sophocles for his two last plays. There is, however, an important further development of the theme in the *Oedipus at Colonus*. For there in Oedipus' <sup>exile</sup>

mind the rational innocence—the fact that he had committed the offenses unknowingly—is, for him at least, important in God's final justification of him. Sophocles is declaring that the sin of Oedipus is real; that the consequences in the form of the loneliness, neglect, and suffering of the years of wandering are inevitable; but that the will and the consciousness are also some measure of man's sin—and when the sinner sinned necessarily and unwittingly, his suffering can be compensation enough for his guilt. He may at the end be blessed and a blessing.) This is not the same doctrine as that of Aeschylus, when he asserts that through suffering comes wisdom. Nor is it the Christian doctrine of a man purified by suffering as by fire. Oedipus in his contact with Creon, in his interview with Polyneices shows himself as bitter, sudden in anger, and implacable as ever. He is indeed a monstrous old man. But at the last, he is, in a measure, *vindicated*. Yet in *Philoctetes* the theme of the union of the offensive and the beneficial, which in *Oedipus at Colonus* becomes the curse and the blessing, is seen without the addition of conscious innocence and unconscious guilt. Can we say that Sophocles finally felt that the consciousness of innocence in Oedipus is the balancing factor in the story? That in this sense *Oedipus at Colonus* is the further step beyond *Philoctetes* in the clarification of the dramatic subject which occupied the very old author? Or that the consciousness of innocence when linked with objective guilt is only the human shield against the cruelty of the irrational—that Oedipus is meaningful in his combination of guilt and innocence as a manifestation of God and of destiny and that his explanation of his conscious innocence is only the poor human inadequate explanation? Everyone will answer this according to his own choice. But, clearly, the theme of *Philoctetes* and the theme of the old Oedipus are connected.

If an analysis such as this has importance, it is to show the relation of Sophocles to the raw material of his plays—the myth. It is to show the maturing of a theme in Sophocles' mind and his successive treatments of it in the same and different legends. In the Oedipus story it is a certain fundamental situation which becomes significant for Sophocles, and the characters are altered to suit the story. Creon in the first, Oedipus in the second, are examples of the same sort of

dilemma, even though the dilemma of Creon in the *Antigone* is incidental to the main emphasis of the play, which is on Antigone. But the dilemma was to be much more fruitful for Sophocles as a writer and thinker than the plain issue between Antigone and Creon. The dilemma resolves itself in the last play at the end of Sophocles' life into the dramatic statement of a principle, of the union of the blessed and the cursed, of the just and the unjust, and sometimes (not always) of the consciously innocent and the unconsciously guilty. The fact that Sophocles could in two successive treatments of the play fifteen years apart switch the parts of Creon and Oedipus indicates that neither the moral color of the characters nor even their identity was absolutely fixed in his mind. The same conclusion is borne out by the great similarity between the *Philoctetes* and the *Oedipus at Colonus*. Sophocles in his last days was incessantly thinking of the man who is blessed and cursed. For the theater he became once the lame castaway Philoctetes, who yet, in virtue of his archery, is to be the conqueror of Troy; in the next play he is Oedipus, who sinned against the order of human society but is still to be the blessing of Athens and the patron saint of Colonus. It is the theme and not the man that matters. Consequently, it is the kernel of the legend, as he saw it for the moment, that is sacred for Sophocles, not the identification of all the characters in a certain relation to one another. True, he has treated the Oedipus story three times in his life, which means that the Oedipus story had a certain fascination for him—that somehow hidden in it he knew there was what he wanted to say. But he did not have to think of the whole story and the interdependence of its characters when he made his changes each time. One stage of the theme borne by the hero is given to a character in a totally different myth. The sequence is Creon, Oedipus, Philoctetes, Oedipus. It may seem absurd to link Creon, the obvious form of tyrant (as conceived by the Athenians), and Philoctetes. But it is the progression we should notice. The tyrant who with true and good intentions orders what is wrong, morally and religiously, is crudely represented in Creon; he is much more subtly represented in Oedipus himself in the next play. But the similarity of the situation and the nature of the opposition to him proves how generically the

character is conceived. You can switch the labels, and Creon becomes Oedipus. But if the character is generic, the situation is deepening. We are beginning to understand<sup>why</sup> a certain sort of tyrant may be a tyrant and in a shadowy way how conscious and unconscious guilt are related. In the *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus* the situation is being seen in its last stages. We are no longer concerned with how Philoctetes came to sin or how Oedipus is the author of his own ruin. But only how does it feel to be an object both of disgust and of fear to your fellows, while you yourself are simultaneously aware of the injustice of your treatment and at last, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, of the objective proofs of God's favor.

For Sophocles the myth was the treatment of the generic aspect of human dilemmas. What he made of the myth in his plays was neither history nor the kind of dramatic creation represented by *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. Not history, for in no sense is the uniqueness of the event or the uniqueness of the character important; not drama in the Shakespearean sense, because Sophocles' figures do not have, as Shakespeare's do, the timeless and complete reality in themselves. Behind the figure of Oedipus or Creon stands the tyrant of the legend; and behind the tyrant of the legend, the meaning of all despotic authority. Behind the old Oedipus is the beggar and wanderer of the legend, and behind him the mysterious human combination of opposites—opposites in meaning and in fact. And so the character may fluctuate or the names may vary. It is the theme, the generic side of tragedy, which is important; it is there that the emphasis of the play rests.

## FURTHER INTRODUCTORY NOTE, 1991

My version of *Oedipus the King* was written fifty years ago. Of the two other translations which also formerly appeared in this volume, Robert Fitzgerald's *Oedipus at Colonus* is of almost the same vintage and Elizabeth Wyckoff's *Antigone* is more than thirty years old. As the remaining editor of *The Complete Greek*

*Tragedies* I have been looking through the series, at the suggestion of the Press, and have been making some alterations. Perhaps some of my criticisms may have been misplaced, but certain features of these translations by Wyckoff and Fitzgerald seemed unsatisfactory. Besides, despite the small inconsistencies in the story of the three plays, which I mentioned earlier, there is certainly a unity of tone and style in these Theban plays that greatly favors the same translator for all of them. So I have translated the *Antigone* and the *Oedipus at Colonus* and have substituted them for the previous renderings of Wyckoff and Fitzgerald.

Though the numbered lines of my *Oedipus the King* appear to match fairly thoroughly those of the Greek text, I have not been so successful with the combination of the Greek and the English in these last two plays. Often I have needed more space than the limitation of a line would allow. I decided that my numbering should correspond with the lines of the English translation rather than with those of the Greek, since if anyone wanted to cite a passage it would be unlikely that he or she would refer to the Greek. I hope this will not lead to too much confusion.

Some years ago the Court Theatre asked Wendy Doniger and me to do a new prose version of the *Antigone* for their repertory company. We worked in very close collaboration with the actors. Because the Court Theatre rendering was in prose, and all the other plays in the series of *The Complete Greek Tragedies* were overwhelmingly in verse, I decided to write the *Antigone* in my new translation in verse. But I owe a great deal to the earlier prose version, which I gladly acknowledge, and to Wendy Doniger's participation in it.

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

DAVID GRENE

# OEDIPUS THE KING

## CHARACTERS

*Oedipus, King of Thebes*

*Jocasta, His Wife*

*Creon, His Brother-in-Law*

*Teiresias, an Old Blind Prophet*

*A Priest*

*First Messenger*

*Second Messenger*

*A Herdsman*

*A Chorus of Old Men of Thebes*

## OEDIPUS THE KING

SCENE: *In front of the palace of Oedipus at Thebes. To the right of the stage near the altar stands the Priest with a crowd of children. Oedipus emerges from the central door.*

*Oedipus*

Children, young sons and daughters of old Cadmus,  
why do you sit here with your suppliant crowns?  
The town is heavy with a mingled burden  
of sounds and smells, of groans and hymns and incense;  
I did not think it fit that I should hear  
of this from messengers but came myself,—  
I Oedipus whom all men call the Great.

5

*(He turns to the Priest.)*

You're old and they are young; come, speak for them.  
What do you fear or want, that you sit here  
suppliant? Indeed I'm willing to give all  
that you may need; I would be very hard  
should I not pity suppliants like these.

10

*Priest*

O ruler of my country, Oedipus,  
you see our company around the altar;  
you see our ages; some of us, like these,  
who cannot yet fly far, and some of us  
heavy with age; these children are the chosen  
among the young, and I the priest of Zeus.  
Within the market place sit others crowned  
with suppliant garlands, at the double shrine  
of Pallas and the temple where Ismenus  
gives oracles by fire. King, you yourself  
have seen our city reeling like a wreck  
already; it can scarcely lift its prow  
out of the depths, out of the bloody surf.

15

20



A blight is on the fruitful plants of the earth, 25  
 A blight is on the cattle in the fields,  
 a blight is on our women that no children  
 are born to them; a God that carries fire,  
 a deadly pestilence, is on our town,  
 strikes us and spares not, and the house of Cadmus  
 is emptied of its people while black Death  
 grows rich in groaning and in lamentation. 30  
 We have not come as suppliants to this altar  
 because we thought of you as of a God,  
 but rather judging you the first of men  
 in all the chances of this life and when  
 we mortals have to do with more than man.  
 You came and by your coming saved our city, 35  
 freed us from tribute which we paid of old  
 to the Sphinx, cruel singer. This you did  
 in virtue of no knowledge we could give you,  
 in virtue of no teaching; it was God  
 that aided you, men say, and you are held  
 with God's assistance to have saved our lives.  
 Now Oedipus, Greatest in all men's eyes, 40  
 here falling at your feet we all entreat you,  
 find us some strength for rescue.  
 Perhaps you'll hear a wise word from some God,  
 perhaps you will learn something from a man  
 (for I have seen that for the skilled of practice  
 the outcome of their counsels live the most). 45  
 Noblest of men, go, and raise up our city,  
 go,—and give heed. For now this land of ours  
 calls you its savior since you saved it once.  
 So, let us never speak about your reign  
 as of a time when first our feet were set  
secure on high, but later fell to ruin. 50  
 Raise up our city, save it and raise it up.  
 Once you have brought us luck with happy omen;  
 be no less now in fortune.