



# Truly Bewept, Full of Strife: The Myth of Antigone, the Burial of Enemies, and the Ideal of Reconciliation in Ancient Greek Literature

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In the second half of the twentieth century, the myth of Antigone gained enduring prominence in Western public discourse under the influence of its rich literary, dramatic, philosophical, and philological reception.<sup>1</sup> In this reception, one can recognize some clear interpretive trends, namely: interrogating the meaning of individual and collective revolt, in-depth treatments of fundamental existential and ontological questions (seen through Antigone's situation), and more or less successful comparisons of the struggle between Antigone and Creon with modern political phenomena.

Some such traditions of reception – for instance the Slovenian, Polish, and Argentine ones – also have certain distinctive features that strongly diverge from the central interpretive trends.<sup>2</sup> Two of these distinctive features are particularly evident. The first is that connections

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2 For an introduction to these features in Slovenian and Polish tradition, see Inkret, "Agnieszka, Antigona," 361–77. For an introduction to Argentine inter-

are drawn between the myth of Antigone and the concrete historical issues of the unburied victims of mass killings in the Second World War and later conflicts of the twentieth century. The second – related to the first but raising its own set of problems – is that connections are drawn between the myth and socio-political projects of reconciliation (this holds especially true for Slovenia, where the project of so-called national reconciliation played a pivotal role in cultural life in the second half of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s).

The leading contemporary interpreters of the myth of Antigone most often deal with its most famous formulation, *Antigone* by Sophocles. Less attention is paid – hardly any of it outside philological debates – to its broader classical context, its epic sources, other tragic versions of it, and the responses to them in late antiquity. What, then, are the fundamental features of this almost thousand-year-long ancient tradition, and to what extent do they connect with the central emphases of the Slovenian – and in important ways also of the Polish and Argentine – reception of its core myth: the questions of the *unburied dead* and *reconciliation*?

## PRE-SOPHOCLEAN SOURCES OF THE ANTIGONE MYTH

Some of the key characters and motifs of the Theban myth appear for the first time in Greek literature already in Homer. Oedipus is fleetingly mentioned in Book 23 of the *Iliad* (677–80):

Εὐρύαλος δέ οἱ οἶος ἀνίστατο, ἰσόθεος φῶς,  
Μηκιστῆρος υἱὸς Ταλαϊονίδαο ἄνακτος,  
ὃς ποτε Θήβασδ' ἦλθε δεδουπότος Οἰδιπόδαο  
ἐς τάφον· ἔνθα δὲ πάντας ἐνίκα Καδμείωνας.

Euryalus alone uprose to face him, a godlike man, son of king  
Mecisteus, son of Talaus, who one time had come to Thebes for the  
burial of Oedipus, when he had fallen, and there had worsted all the  
sons of Cadmus.<sup>3</sup>

In the *Odyssey* (11.271–80), the outlines of the myth of Oedipus have already become more straightforward and its details somewhat more recognizable:

pretations of the Antigone myth, see Fradinger, “An Argentine Tradition,” 67–89.

3 Translation by A. T. Murray.

μητέρα τ' Οἰδιπόδαο ἶδον, καλὴν Ἐπικάστην,  
 ἥ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν αἰδρεῖησι νόοιο  
 γημαμένη ᾧ υἱί· ὁ δ' ὄν πατέρ' ἐξεναρίζας  
 γῆμεν· ἄφαρ δ' ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν.  
 ἄλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν Θήβῃ πολυηράτῳ ἄλγεα πάσχων  
 Καδμείων ἦνασσε θεῶν ὀλοάς διὰ βουλὰς·  
 ἡ δ' ἔβη εἰς Αἶδαο πυλάρταο κρατεροῖο,  
 ἀψαμένη βρόχον αἰπὺν ἀφ' ὑψηλοῖο μελάθρου,  
 ᾧ ἄχεϊ σχομένη· τῷ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω  
 πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα τε μητρὸς Ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσιν.

And I saw the mother of Oedipodes, fair Epicaste, who wrought a monstrous deed in ignorance of mind, in that she wedded her own son, and he, when he had slain his own father, wedded her, and straightway the gods made these things known among men. Howbeit he abode as lord of the Cadmeans in lovely Thebe, suffering woes through the baneful counsels of the gods, but she went down to the house of Hades, the strong warder. She made fast a noose on high from a lofty beam, overpowered by her sorrow, but for him she left behind woes full many, even all that the Avengers of a mother bring to pass.<sup>4</sup>

The passage describes Oedipus' incestuous relationship with his mother – in Homer, her name is Epicaste, in Sophocles, Iocaste – but Homer does not mention any children from this relationship. However, the *Iliad* (4.376–86) does also feature Polyneices and Eteocles (whom a vital part of the literary tradition prior to Attic tragedy held to be the sons from Oedipus' second marriage):

ἦ τοι μὲν γὰρ ἄτερ πολέμου εἰσῆλθε Μυκίνας  
 ξείνος ἄμ' ἀντιθέφ Πολυνείκει, λαὸν ἀγείρων·  
 οἱ δὲ τότε' ἐστρατόωνθ' ἱερὰ πρὸς τείχεα Θήβης,  
 καὶ ῥα μάλα λίσσοντο δόμεν κλειτοὺς ἐπικούρους·  
 οἱ δ' ἔθελον δόμεναι καὶ ἐπήνεον ὥς ἐκέλευον·  
 ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς ἔτρεψε παραΐσια σήματα φαίνων.  
 οἱ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν ᾗχοντο ἰδὲ πρὸ ὁδοῦ ἐγένοντο,  
 Ἄσωπὸν δ' ἵκοντο βαθύσχοινον λεχεποῖην,  
 ἔνθ' αὐτ' ἀγγελίην ἐπὶ Τυδῇ στείλαν Ἀχαιοί.  
 αὐτὰρ ὁ βῆ, πολέας δὲ κινήσατο Καδμείωνας  
 δαινυμένους κατὰ δῶμα βίης Ἑτεοκλήϊης.

4 Translation by A. T. Murray.

Once verily he came to Mycenae, not as an enemy, but as a guest, in company with godlike Polyneices, to gather a host; for in that day they were waging war against the sacred walls of Thebe, and earnestly did they make prayer that glorious allies be granted them; and the men of Mycenae were minded to grant them, and were assenting even as they bade, but Zeus turned their minds by showing tokens of ill. So when they had departed and were with deep reeds, that coucheth in the grass, there did the Achaeans send forth Tydeus on an embassy. And he went his way, and found the many sons of Cadmus feasting in the house of mighty Eteocles.<sup>5</sup>

A key aspect of Homer's fleeting treatments of the Theban myth is the following. Precisely due to their fleeting nature and lack of explanations, one can read out of them the presumption that they were widely familiar, from which one may deduce that the myth is considerably older yet. At the same time, it is plain that the myth differs in certain essential features from its most celebrated portrayals in Attic tragedy: the Homeric Oedipus falls in an armed struggle; there is no information in the text about his blindness or his exile; after the disclosure of his incestuous relationship, he continues to rule Thebes, where he also dies in the end (the epic tradition is consistent concerning these significant differences from Sophocles' representations).<sup>6</sup>

For our purposes here, the most crucial difference is that Antigone does not appear at all in Homer. Other vital characters from *Antigone*, however, do appear in Homer, albeit not in any way that would be comparable to their role in Sophocles' version of the Theban story: Tiresias plays a notable role in the *Odyssey* (11); the *Iliad* also mentions Haemon (4.391–400) and Creon (9.98), and the latter is also mentioned in the *Odyssey* (11.269–70).

Antigone is also absent from later sources up to the fifth century BC, although some key texts about the Theban myth – e.g., the *Thebaid*, which according to Christiane Zimmermann's speculations, is the likeliest candidate for a mention of Antigone in the early epic literature<sup>7</sup> – have been lost (except for a few fragments and testimonies that make at least a partial reconstruction possible).

The *Thebaid* is part of the Theban cycle, which included the *Oedipodea* and two works of lesser relevance for our topic, the *Epigoni* and the *Alcmeonis*. The *Thebaid* and the *Oedipodea* held an important

5 Translation by A. T. Murray.

6 Cf. Cingano, "Oedipodea," 221.

7 Zimmermann, *Der Antigone-Mythos*, 66.

place in ancient Greek literature: the Greek geographer Pausanias, who lived around 110–180 CE, bestowed on the *Thebaid* the title of the third most crucial poetic work after the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.<sup>8</sup> They also formed the primary written source of Theban mythology in the Greek world before the Attic tragedy (and were also the primary source on which the tragedians drew for their fresh interpretation of this mythological material).<sup>9</sup> Together they form an extensive poetic work, comparable to the *Odyssey* in length, in terms of the total verse count. Their authorship has often been attributed to Homer, although even ancient writers already had their doubts. The present-day consensus on their dating holds that they are younger than the Homeric epics but that places in the latter indicate knowledge of the *Thebaid* and summarize it. Therefore, researchers speculate that this poetry had lived in the oral tradition before the *Iliad* was composed and was most likely written down in the first half of the sixth century BC.<sup>10</sup> The *Oedipodea* is, in all probability, the first poem in the Theban cycle and is, therefore, older than the *Thebaid*; however, it is currently not possible to date its composition more accurately.<sup>11</sup>

What characteristic contents, then, can one reconstruct from the few fragments (two fragments of the *Oedipodea* and eleven fragments of the *Thebaid*) and testimonies available to us? The two preserved fragments of the *Oedipodea*<sup>12</sup> are both extremely intriguing concerning the broader context of the myth of Antigone, and they offer insights into the originality of Sophocles' approach to the inherited myth. In the first fragment, we learn that the Sphinx killed "great and small," among them also "the most handsome and loveliest of all, the dear son of blameless Creon (Κρείοντος ἀμύμονος), noble Haemon." Here for the first time, the family relationship between Haemon and Creon is defined the way we know it from *Antigone*. However, at the same time, the content of the fragment is entirely different from Sophocles' story: Creon is characterized in a very positive way as a noble man free of any guilt, and Haemon dies as a victim of the Sphinx, a creature that Oedipus will later defeat, thus triggering the tragic unfolding of his story. This means, of course, that the Haemon of the *Oedipodea* is considerably older than the Haemon in Sophocles (and the Haemon in later variations on the story of Antigone), and that he plays no role

8 Cf. West, *Greek Epic Fragments*, 42–43; Torres-Guerra, "Thebaid," 228.

9 Torres-Guerra, "Thebaid," 227.

10 Ibid., 243.

11 Cingano, "Oedipodea," 214–215.

12 Cf. West, *Greek Epic Fragments*, 38–43.

in the crucial events of Theban mythology which follow. From the perspective of our topic, he died before Antigone was even born.<sup>13</sup>

In the second fragment – summarized from Pausanias' testimony – one learns that Oedipus did not have children with his mother Epicaste / Iocaste in the *Oedipodea* either, but instead had his "four children" with his next wife, Euryganeia. From the information about the number of children, one may conclude (though only contingently, as Pausanias relies on the broader pre-tragic outlines of the myth and uses the *Oedipodea* only as proof of the true mother of Oedipus' children) that the two sisters of Polyneices and Eteocles had already appeared in the Theban cycle. They might have at least been mentioned, even though they do not appear in the preserved fragments. Pausanias begins his testimony with the words "That he [Oedipus] had children by his mother, I do not believe," supporting his view with an interpretation of Homer's *Odyssey* and a reference to the content of the *Oedipodea* (9.5.10–9.5.11). Here, then, Pausanias uses older sources to polemicize against the later transformation of the myth of Oedipus that characterizes Sophocles' Theban trilogy. Why was this emphasis so crucial to the ancient geographer, and why did it also interest the Greek epic poets, as it clearly did? According to one of the most convincing historical explanations, the reason is that Greek aristocratic families often justified their status with their blood descent from the heroic lineages of epic mythology, including that of Oedipus; the emphatic rejection of his incestuous offspring thus served an understandable function in affirming this tradition.<sup>14</sup> From the fragment under discussion and its historical background, one may deduce that Attic tragedy – with Sophocles leading the charge – provocatively sharpened the elements of incest in the myth of Oedipus and, thereby, the starting points for the tragic fates of his four children.

The *Thebaid* described the dispute between Polyneices and Eteocles and the ensuing military campaign of the seven – Polyneices and the six Argive heroes (with their accompanying army) – against Thebes (with its seven city gates and their seven defenders, headed by Eteocles), in which the Argives were defeated and the two brothers killed each other, thus fulfilling the curse pronounced on them by Oedipus. From the preserved fragments<sup>15</sup> we learn some details about

13 Walter Kaufmann sees this detail as one of the most significant illustrations of Sophocles' original departures from the mythological source material: Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy*, 110.

14 Cingano, "Oedipodea," 223.

15 Cf. West, *Greek Epic Fragments*, 42–54.

the background of Oedipus' curse on his sons. However, these details presuppose an acquaintance with an essential segment of Oedipus' personal history. As we know from the wider Theban mythology, Oedipus as a young man, on his way to Thebes, killed a stranger who, he would later learn, was his father and the former king of Thebes, Laius; thus was fulfilled the first part of the prophecy that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother.<sup>16</sup> In one of the fragments of the *Thebaid*, Polyneices gifts his father a table and a cup that had belonged to King Laius, and Oedipus sees his son as trying to evoke the memory of his patricide, seeking to weaken his authority. In this fragment, he curses his sons: they shall not divide their inheritance amicably; rather, the inheritance shall be the cause of unending strife and fighting. In the second fragment, one learns that at every sacrificial slaughter, following custom, Eteocles and Polyneices sent their father the ritually prescribed part of the animal; this time, however, they had sent him an inappropriate, inferior part. The reasons why this troubled Oedipus vary – some researchers see it simply as a mocking dereliction of duty, continuing his sons' weakening of the authority of their king and father, whereas others, in line with the previous fragment, also see in it a symbolic hint about the incest committed by Oedipus.<sup>17</sup> Either way, having received this dishonorable gift, Oedipus radically intensifies his curse and prays to Zeus that his sons kill each other in combat.

16 The classical sources differ over how Laius had earned this curse. The pre-Sophocleans, such as Pindar (the second Olympian Ode 39–42), above all mention his disobedience to the oracle of Apollo. The tragic writers, especially Euripides (the lost play *Chrysippus*), and later texts add the rape of Chrysippus, one of the sons of Pelops (Pelops prayed to Zeus for Laius to be punished, and his prayer was heard through the intervention of Apollo). Some researchers think rape was the primary cause of the curse in older versions of the myth as well. Cf. Lloyd-Jones, *Justice of Zeus*, 120. In any case, the transgressions of Laius stand at the beginning of the tragic fate that befell his line. Cf. Kyriakou, *The Past in Aeschylus and Sophocles*, 45–48. The motif of Laius' rape of Chrysippus may also have been present in Aeschylus's lost tragedy *Laius*. Cf. Kovacs, "The Role of Apollo in Oedipus Tyrannus," 367. Kovacs speculates that Sophocles did not go over this background in his trilogy because it was already general knowledge at the time. Ibid.; cf. also Lamari, "Phoenician Women," 264. Thomas K. Hubbard holds that Euripides' treatment of Laius' rape (as the source of the curse on his descendants) – which he, contrary to Lloyd-Jones, interprets as the tragedian's invention – is a sign of changes in the Athenian sexual culture at the end of the fifth century BC. Hubbard, "History's First Child Molester," 223–244.

17 Torres-Guerra, "Thebaid," 231.

The other preserved fragments do not refer to motifs of particular relevance to the development of Antigone's background. In the secondary testimonies about the narrative arch of the *Thebaid*, however, there is a critical connection to our topic: Adrastus, king of Argos, who had managed to flee the clash of the seven, after the battle expresses the wish to bury his fallen comrades-in-arms; the Thebans grant his request (ibid. 227). Moreover, in connection with this episode, the secondary sources attribute excellent oratorical skills to Adrastus.<sup>18</sup> The pre-tragic myth of the clash between Eteocles and Polyneices already describes the beginnings of the unburied attackers of Thebes. However, in the *Thebaid*, it is resolved without further conflict, and personal distinctions are attributed to the leading actor in this agreement (the later tradition, e.g., Aeschylus, ascribes the central role in this resolution to Theseus).<sup>19</sup>

At these critical points in the development of the Theban myth, too, we are still lacking any preserved source for the character of Antigone. In connection with this, it is particularly intriguing that her sister in Sophocles' work, Ismene, appears as a heroine of Greek literature already in the seventh century BC with the poet Mimnermus.<sup>20</sup> Although Ismene does not explicitly have family ties to the Theban royal family, she does appear in the battle for Thebes. However, this love story between her and one of the Theban warriors ends with her murder. Early Greek literature thus connects Ismene to the motif of the juvenile love affair that leads to death, which C. Zimmermann sees as one of the (minor) precursors to the Antigone myth.<sup>21</sup> One may see this as extending and confirming the speculative framework for the supposition that Sophocles – whose Ismene is a minor character with no explicitly tragic fate – developed the character, motivation, and fate of Antigone by displacing, merging, and accentuating some aspects from the secondary characters and motifs of the Theban epic heritage. At the same time, the case of the pre-Sophoclean Ismene again confirms, as does that of Haemon, that Sophocles' depiction of events after the attack of the seven features characters whom earlier portrayals of the myth had let die during the battle or even well before it.

We will touch on one more pre-tragic source of significance to our topic. The Theban myth appears in the poet Stesichorus (630–555 BC),

18 Torres-Guerra, "Thebaid," 237.

19 Cf. Sommerstein, "Tragedy and the Epic Cycle," 470.

20 Cf. Allen, *The Fragments of Mimnermus*, 133–144.

21 Zimmermann, *Antigone-Mythos*, 70.



in an untitled poem that the philological reception likewise has named the *Thebaid*. Here, an important role is played by the queen of Thebes, the mother of Eteocles and Polyneices. It is not entirely clear whether this is Iocaste / Epicaste or Oedipus' second wife (in light of the historical reasons described above, researchers incline toward the latter), but her role is, in any case, more prominent than in previous portrayals of the mother of Oedipus' children. In Stesichorus, the *queen* resolutely intervenes in the beginning stages of the dispute between her sons and attempts (unsuccessfully) to achieve their reconciliation.<sup>22</sup>

Here, then, there appears for the first time in connection with the dispute between Polyneices and Eteocles, a female character with strong family ties, one who stands for the values of love and reconciliation at the outset of a lethal conflict in the family and the state.<sup>23</sup> In this, one may, of course (under the speculative framework outlined above), recognize yet another pre-tragic motif that found a place in Sophocles' condensed and transformed version of the myth, both in the context of Antigone's (equally unsuccessful) attempt at reconciliation in *Oedipus at Colonus* and in the *love-hate* dichotomy that is a distinctive dimension of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Stesichorus' queen character, whose speech implicitly reveals that saving her sons matters more to her than the fate of the polis, also foreshadows the treatment of the tension between γένος and πόλις in tragedy.<sup>24</sup>

In the pre-Sophoclean tragic corpus, the first significant milestone in developing the Antigone elements in Theban myth is the lost tragedy of Aeschylus, the *Eleusinians* (*Eleusínioi*, approx. 475 BC). Thanks to Plutarch's *Life of Theseus*,<sup>25</sup> we know that this is the earliest known work to touch the question of the unburied attackers against Thebes and deal explicitly with the dispute over their burial. A key role in its resolution is played by Theseus, the mythic founder of Athens, who, just like Adrastus – who here asks Theseus for help – distinguishes himself with his peaceful, diplomatic approach. Plutarch adds that the bodies obtained were consequently buried in Attic soil.<sup>26</sup> From this development of the myth and the role that Theseus, the leading Athenian hero, gains in it, one may read a strong connection between Attic cultural identity and the issue of burying wartime enemies.

22 Finglass, "Stesichorus, Master of Narrative," 90–91.

23 Zimmermann, *Antigone-Mythos*, 76.

24 Ibid., 77.

25 Perrin, *Plutarch*, 67–69.

26 Ibid., 69.

The preserved fragments of the tragedy contain a hint that one of the bodies posed a particular problem in the dispute – “the matter was urgent, the body was already putrefying”<sup>27</sup> – but have no proof that this was about Polyneices.<sup>28</sup> There is no (preserved) mention of Antigone here either, nor Ismene. At the same time, the critical difference from Sophocles’ treatment is that the issue of the unburied in the *Eleusinians* is developed and resolved primarily on the political, though inter-state, level, and not connected with the issue of religious or family obligation: the dead here belong primarily to the polis.<sup>29</sup>

## SOPHOCLES’ ANTIGONE IN LIGHT OF THE BROADER TRAGIC CORPUS

Antigone first appears by name in the fifth century BC, but is first mentioned already before Sophocles, in a fragment by the mythographer Pherecydes of Leros / Athens.<sup>30</sup> Pherecydes names all four of Oedipus’ children, but their mother is still Euryganeia, Oedipus’ second wife. As shown in our survey of the development of the Theban myth, Greek literature before Sophocles had already drawn up some of the motifs, on which Sophocles’ portrayal of Antigone is based: the issue of burying fallen enemies, the prominent role of a figure of reconciliation, the tension between obligations to one’s family and one’s state. Still, most researchers agree that the central dramatic idea of Sophocles’ *Antigone* – with all its fundamental intellectual and political consequences that have fascinated modern thought and art – is highly original. The conflict between Antigone and Creon does not appear before Sophocles; there is no similar dispute in any previous source. The uniqueness of the tragedy was recognized by Sophocles’ contemporaries, confirming his stature as a giant of tragedy, and according to traditional biographical accounts, he was even appointed a general based on the fame it brought him.<sup>31</sup> Even so, the core ideas of Sophocles’ *Antigone* were provocative both to his contemporaries and to their immediate successors.

27 Sommerstein, *Aeschylus*, 56–57.

28 Zimmermann, *Antigone-Mythos*, 85.

29 Ibid., 87.

30 Cf. Cairns, *Sophocles: Antigone*, 9; Zimmermann, *Antigone-Mythos*, 89.

31 For reservations, see Ruth Scodel, “Sophocles’ Biography,” 30–31.

## THE ENDING OF AESCHYLUS' SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (467 BC), which describes the Theban campaign and its background – especially from the perspective of Eteocles – ends in the style of Sophocles' *Antigone*, but with specific vital differences. The burial of Polyneices is not forbidden by the autocrat, but is instead an impersonal decree of the state that has been voted on and is announced by a herald; Antigone's declaration of disobedience is followed by a split in the chorus – the first half joins her, the second half goes with Ismene to the funeral of Eteocles. Some researchers<sup>32</sup> see in this a divide of chorus' opinion concerning Antigone, although the split could be understood in a less conflictual way. This dramaturgical solution, namely, has the chorus participating proportionally in both funerals, and the explanations for the decisions of the two half-choruses do not exclude each other; thus, the author of this ending is perhaps merely stating (rather guardedly) that both brothers deserved burial regardless of their blame and merit.

*Seven Against Thebes* is, of course, older than *Antigone*, but the ending outlined above is – in the opinion of most modern researchers – most likely pseudo-Aeschylean and was added to the tragedy some fifty years after it was written, due to the popularity of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Aeschylus' work is thought to have originally ended with the joint lamentation of the chorus for both brothers without problematizing the burial of Polyneices. Nevertheless, the problematic ending of the *Seven* – regardless of its authorship and exact dating – reveals essential aspects of the Attic understanding of the Antigone myth that was already pointed to in connection with the interpretation of Sophocles' *Antigone*.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, as Miola has acutely pointed out,<sup>34</sup> it is also its first literary reinterpretation (assuming that the predominant view of the dating is correct) and thus forms the beginning of a vibrant literary tradition that one can follow from antiquity to the twenty-first century.

Euripides dealt with the Theban mythology in three works: in the *Suppliants* (423 BC), in the *Phoenician Women* (ca. 408 BC), and in *Antigone* (412–406 BC, now almost entirely lost). These works, which form the last great chapter in the Attic transformation of the Theban myth, also form a boundless laboratory for the dissection of Sophocles' inventive legacy. On the one hand, they employ recognizable (hyper-)

32 E.g., Miola, "Early Modern Antigones," 239–240.

33 See Kocijančič, "Nič drugega kot nič," 107–127.

34 Miola, "Early Modern Antigones," 239.

Sophoclean strategies for reinvigorating and re-appropriating the myth. Characters that previous versions had already buried along the various steps of the myth here survive for considerably longer (or they die considerably earlier, as in the case of Eurydice in the *Phoenician Women*), thus providing a maneuvering space for new relationships and plots; the familiar motifs of the epic, lyric and tragic heritage are gathered and fused in unpredictable reincarnations; the mythological heroes' wild character reversals breathe new meaning into inherited situations. On the other hand, the central material on which Euripides draws (and contests in many places) is Sophocles.

These procedures are perhaps at their most evident in the *Phoenician Women*. Already the first scene holds a big surprise: Iocaste, who in previous versions of the myth (from Homer to Sophocles) commits suicide when it is revealed that Oedipus is her son and her husband's killer, is here alive and introduces us to the events just before the attack of the seven. During this attack, she also plays a prominent part. One can recognize Euripides' adaptation of an older tradition of portraying the mother of Oedipus' children as striving for reconciliation between the two contending sons (see the section on Stesichorus above). Euripides nevertheless takes into account Sophocles' transposition of this motif and doubles the conciliatory figure: Iocaste is joined in her peacemaking efforts by Antigone. The attempts to bring peace end in failure in Euripides, too; the joint death of Eteocles and Polyneices is similar to those in previous portrayals. However, the background story of (and the events after) their deadly battle differs radically from previous portrayals, and it seems as if Euripides finds particular inspiration in reversing the assumptions of his tragedian predecessors.

In *Seven Against Thebes*, Aeschylus paid particular attention to Eteocles (in this play Polyneices does not even get a word in), the defender of Thebes, who, as Kajetan Gantar notes, is "portrayed in panegyric strokes as a courageous and blameless hero who is constantly consumed by the flames of patriotism; all his thoughts and actions are directed toward saving and liberating the homeland"<sup>35</sup> from the enemy army of the traitor Polyneices. Nevertheless, in the final scenes of Aeschylus' play, the evaluation of the characters and motivations of the brothers evens out (somewhat surprisingly so, considering what place Eteocles otherwise holds in the play). At the death of the brothers, the chorus tells us that they have "perished through their impious intent" (ᾠλοντ' ἀσεβεῖ διανοίᾳ, 833)

as “men of much strife” (πολυνεικεῖς, 832);<sup>36</sup> the name of Polyneices (Πολυνείκης), which is here applied in the plural to both brothers, is composed of the adjective πολὺς (many, numerous) and the noun νεῖκος (quarrel, dispute); it thus describes a person with an excessive bent for conflict (Alojz Rebula translated Polyneices as *netilec razdora*, approx. “sower of division”;<sup>37</sup> Kajetan Gantar also offers the alternatives *Mnogozdrah*, “much strife,” and *Zdrahar*, “quarrelsome”).<sup>38</sup> By naming them together in this way, Aeschylus unsettles the meaning of the name Eteocles, which is composed of the adjective ἐτεός (true, genuine) and the noun κλέος (fame): a “hero who personifies *true fame*”<sup>39</sup> or who is “justly famed.”<sup>40</sup> However, Aeschylus does not *rehabilitate* Polyneices by renaming Eteocles; what balances the scales is instead a relativizing of Eteocles’ heroic status, tending toward disclosing their shared guilt.

Helen H. Bacon and Anthony Hecht, who place this turn and its etymological dimensions at the center of their interpretation and translation of the *Seven*, point out a possible alternative etymology for the name of Eteocles, substituting the verb κλαίω (I cry, I (be)weep, I lament) for the noun κλέος. They defend this reading with the fact that in the opening address of Aeschylus’ tragedy, Eteocles first pronounces his name in connection with a warning that there will be lamentation (οἰμῳγμασίν / οἴμωγμα, 7) in the whole city (“the sea-lamentation / would sound the name ‘Eteocles’ / as wail and dirge all through the city”).<sup>41</sup> Following their interpretation, Bacon and Hecht somewhat tendentiously insert this attractive philological conjecture into the translation, where Eteocles is not only renamed from “justly famed” to “justly bewept,” but also to the “true cause of weeping.”<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, their final assessment of how Aeschylus evaluates the relationship between the two brothers does not differ substantially from Gantar’s. At the end of the tragedy, it becomes clear that “the names and fates of the brothers are interchangeable”; they are both “full of strife,” causes of the conflict, and hence “cause[s] of weeping”; and not least – with or without the controversial pseudo-Aeschylean ending – they are both *worthy of* and *subject to* being “truly bewept.”<sup>43</sup>

36 Smyth, *Aeschylus: Seven Against Thebes*, available online.

37 Rebula, *Ajshil*, 57.

38 Gantar, “Ajshil,” 11–13.

39 Ibid., 11.

40 Bacon and Hecht, “Introduction,” 14.

41 Hecht and Bacon, *Aeschylus*, 21.

42 Ibid., 57.

43 Bacon and Hecht, “Introduction,” 14–15.

This intriguing highlight concludes this overview of the rich ancient tradition and its variations of Antigone's myth, which reveals the centrality of the questions of reconciliation and the duty of burial as understood in classical antiquity. These issues, while not among the main interpretative fascinations in its reception in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, have, as indicated in the introduction, a much more significant role in its Slovenian, Polish and Argentinian reception. The focus on the question of the burial of the dead and the question of reconciliation in these distinct interpretive traditions, therefore, establishes a particular bridge with an ancient sensibility that has been sidelined in the broader modern reception of the myth of Antigone.

*Translated by Christian Moe*

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## ABSTRACT

In postwar Western culture, the myth of Antigone has been the subject of noted literary, literary-critical, dramatic, philosophical, and philological treatments, not least due to the strong influence of one of the key plays of the twentieth century, Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*. The rich discussion of the myth has often dealt with its most famous formulation, Sophocles' *Antigone*, but has paid less attention to the broader ancient context; the epic sources (the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Thebaid*, and *Oedipodea*); the other tragic versions (Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes* and his lost *Eleusinians*; Euripides's *Suppliants*, *Phoenician Women*, and *Antigone*, of which only a few short fragments have been preserved); and the responses of late antiquity. This paper analyses the basic features of this nearly thousand-year-long ancient tradition and shows how they connect in surprising ways – sometimes even more directly than Sophoclean tragedy does – with the main issues in some unique contemporary traditions of its reception (especially the Slovenian, Polish and Argentine ones): the question of burying the wartime (or postwar) dead and the ideal of reconciliation.

KEYWORDS: the Antigone myth, ancient Greek literature, Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides

## OBJOKOVATI MNOGOZDRAHA: MIT O ANTIGONI, POKOP SOVRAŽNIKOV IN IDEAL SPRAVE V STAROGRŠKI LITERATURI

### IZVLEČEK

V povojni zahodni kulturi je bil mit o Antigoni predmet vidnih literarnih, literarnokritičnih, dramskih, filozofskih in filoloških obravnav, nenazadnje tudi zaradi močnega vpliva ene od ključnih iger dvajsetega stoletja, *Antigone* Jeana Anouilha. Živahna razprava o mitu se je pogosto ukvarjala z njegovo najbolj znano formulacijo, Sofoklovo *Antigono*, manj pozornosti pa je posvetila širšemu antičnemu kontekstu; virom v epiki (*Iliada*, *Odiseja*, *Tebaida* in *Ojdipodeja*); drugim tragiškim različicam (Ajshilovi *Sedmerici proti Tebam* in njegovim izgubljenim *Elevzincem*; Evripidovim *Prošnjicam*, *Feničankam* in *Antigoni*, od katere je ohranjenih le nekaj kratkih fragmentov); in odzivom pozne antike. Prispevek analizira osnovne značilnosti te skoraj tisočletne antične tradicije in kaže, kako se na presenetljive načine – včasih celo bolj neposredno kot Sofoklova tragedija – povezujejo z osrednjimi vprašanji v nekaterih sodobnih izročilnih vejah njene recepcije (zlasti slovenske, poljske in argentinske): z vprašanjem pokopa vojnih (ali povojnih) mrtvih in idealom sprave.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Antigonin mit, starogrška literatura, Homer, Ajshil, Sofokles, Evripid