

**Sophocles, *Antigone*:  
The Freedom to Do the Morally  
Right (or Wrong) Thing**

GRE2405 Greek Drama  
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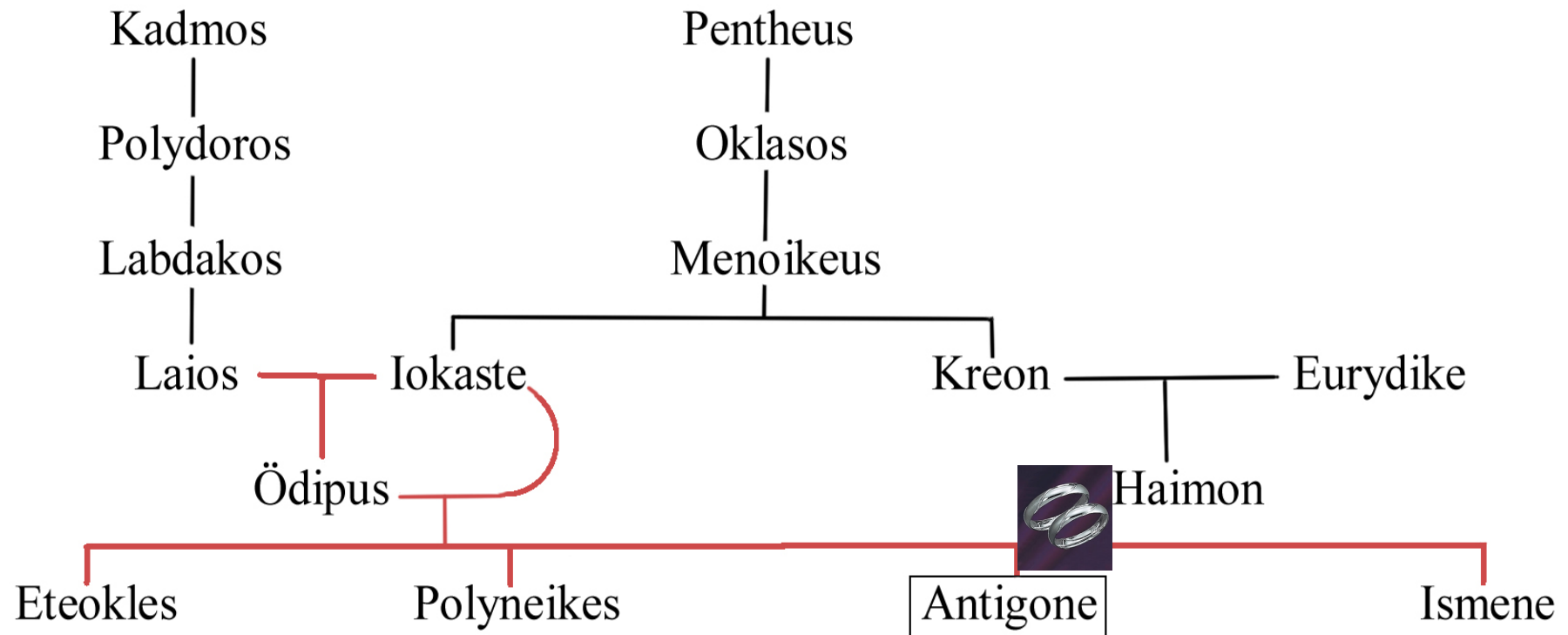
# Overview of the Lecture

- Introductory part:
  - Background information on Antigone
  - *Antigone* within Sophocles' oeuvre
  - Content of Sophocles' *Antigone*
  - Interpretive approaches

# Overview of the Lecture

- Main part: close analysis of Antigone's last words (Antigone's soliloquy, *Ant.* 891–928):
  - Structure of the passage
  - Rhetorical/Stylistic devices
  - Authenticity of *Ant.* 904–920
- Summary, conclusion
- Questions, discussion

# Genealogical Tree of Antigone



(source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Genealogical\\_tree\\_of\\_Antigone.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Genealogical_tree_of_Antigone.jpg))

# *Antigone* within Sophocles' Œuvre

- Total of c. 120 tragedies
  - 7 fully preserved
  - 3 of them centre on the Oedipus-Antigone-myth:
    - *Antigone* (442 BC [?])
    - *King Oedipus* (434/2 BC)
    - *Oedipus on Colonus* (401 BC)
- (dating: cf. Latacz 1993: 392–5)

# *Antigone* within Sophocles' Œuvre

The Oedipus-Antigone-tragedies in mythological order:

- *King Oedipus* (434/2 BC)  
Oedipus king of Thebes
- *Oedipus on Colonus* (401 BC)  
Oedipus as an old man
- *Antigone* (442 BC [?])  
Oedipus already dead

# Content of Sophocles' *Antigone*

Background (what happened before):

- Oedipus and Iocaste: dead
- Creon = old king of Thebes
- Polyneices and Eteocles: quarrel over leadership
  - Polyneices goes to war against Eteocles and Thebes: Seven against Thebes
  - Polyneices and Eteocles kill each other in battle
- Creon again king of Thebes

# Content of Sophocles' *Antigone*

- Creon prohibits burial of Polyneices
- Antigone trespasses Creon's edict  
→ is condemned to death by Creon
- Haemon: futile attempt at changing his father's mind
- Teiresias: changes Creon's mind – but too late:  
Antigone has already committed suicide  
→ Haemon and Eurydice also commit suicide



# Eteocles and Polyneices



Terracotta urn, Chiusi (Italy), Hellenistic period;  
Florence, Casa Buonarroti, Inv. Mus. Arch. 5719;  
LIMC s.v. Eteokles, vol. IV, n. 23a  
(source: <http://www.latigrec.ch/goetter/oidipus>)

# Antigone before Creon



Lucanian vase, Southern Italy, 4th cent. BC;  
London, British Museum, F 175;  
LIMC s.v. Antigone, vol. I, n. 12  
(source: <http://www.latigrec.ch/goetter/oidipus>)

# Antigone's Impending Death



Apulian vase, 4th cent. BC;  
Ruvo, Museo Jatta, 423;  
LIMC s.v. Antigone, vol. I, n. 14  
(source: <http://www.latigrec.ch/goetter/oidipus>)

# Conflicts in *Antigone*

- Conflict between human and divine right/laws
  - Creon <--> Antigone; Creon <--> Teiresias
- Conflict between absolute power/authority and freedom to question authorities
  - Creon <--> Antigone; Creon <--> Haemon; Ismene <--> Antigone
- Conflict between the generations
  - Creon <--> Antigone; Creon <--> Haemon
- Gender conflict
  - Creon <--> Antigone; Ismene <--> Antigone

# Interpretation: Two Traditions

Conflict between Antigone and Creon:  
who is right, who is wrong? →

– **“the orthodox view”** (Hester 1971: 12) →

Antigone is right <--> Creon is wrong

– **“the Hegelian view”** (< G.W.F. Hegel, German philosopher, 1770–1831) →

both Antigone and Creon are both (partly) right and (partly) wrong

# The Orthodox View

- “Antigone hat ganz und gar recht, Kreon hat ganz und gar unrecht.” (Müller 1967: 11)

“Antigone is fully right, Creon is fully wrong.”

- “Sie handelt *frei* und zugleich *absolut richtig* im Sinne einer höheren Gerichtsinstanz.”

(Riemer 1991: 11; author’s emphasis)

“She acts *freely* and at the same time *absolutely rightly* in the sense of a higher level of jurisdiction.” (transl. S.B.)

# The Hegelian View

- Confrontation between Creon and Antigone = conflict between state ('male') and family ('female')
- “Because Antigone and Creon defend fundamental principles, both are right, but because they are one-sided in their defense of these principles, they are wrong at the same time [...]” (Lardinois 2012: 61)

# Arguments against Orthodox View

- Creon ≠ fully wrong:
  - denial of a burial may have been considered appropriate in classical Athens under certain circumstances (cf. Hester 1971)
- Antigone ≠ fully right:
  - free speech against a ruler: unbecoming in the mouth of a woman (cf. Roisman 2004)
  - performance of funeral rites ≠ female task (cf. Hame 2008)



# Antigone's Soliloquy (*Ant.* 891–928)

ὦ τύμβος, ὦ νυμφεῖον, ὦ κατασκαφῆς	(891)	καὶ παῖς ἀπ' ἄλλου φωτός, εἰ τοῦδ' ἤμπλακον,	(910)
οἴκησις ἀείφρουρος, οἷ πορεύομαι	(892)	μητρὸς δ' ἐν Ἴαιδου καὶ πατρὸς κεκευθότοι	(911)
πρὸς τοὺς ἐμαυτῆς, ὧν ἀριθμὸν ἐν νεκροῖς	(893)	οὐκ ἔστ' ἀδελφὸς ὅστις ἂν βλάστοι ποτέ.	(912)
πλείστον δέδεκται Φερσέφασσ' ὀλωλότων·	(894)	τοιῶδε μέντοι σ' ἐκπροτιμήσασ' ἐγὼ	(913)
ὧν λωισθία ἴγῳ καὶ κάκιστα δὴ μακρῶ	(895)	νόμῳ, Κρέοντι ταῦτ' ἔδοξ' ἀμαρτάνειν	(914)
κάτειμι, πρὶν μοι μοῖραν ἐξήκειν βίου.	(896)	καὶ δεινὰ τολμᾶν, ὧ κασίγνητον κάρα.	(915)
ἐλθοῦσα μέντοι κάρτ' ἐν ἐλπίσιν τρέφω	(897)	καὶ νῦν ἄγει με διὰ χερῶν οὔτω λαβῶν	(916)
φίλη μὲν ἤξειν πατρί, προσφιλῆς δὲ σοί,	(898)	ἄλεκτρον, ἀνυμέναιον, οὔτε του γάμου	(917)
μητρ, φίλη δὲ σοί, κασίγνητον κάρα·	(899)	μέρος λαχοῦσαν οὔτε παιδείου τροφῆς,	(918)
ἐπεὶ θανόντας αὐτόχειρ ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ	(900)	ἄλλ' ὧδ' ἐρήμος πρὸς φίλων ἢ δύσμορος	(919)
ἔλουσα κακόσμησα κάπιτυμβίους	(901)	ζῶσ' ἐς θανόντων ἔρχομαι κατασκαφάς·	(920)
χοὰς ἔδωκα· νῦν δέ, Πολύνεικες, τὸ σὸν	(902)	ποῖαν παρεξελθοῦσα δαιμόνων δίκην;	(921)
δέμας περιστέλλουσα τοιάδ' ἄρνυμαι.	(903)	τί χρή με τὴν δύστηνον ἐς θεοὺς ἔτι	(922)
καίτοι σ' ἐγὼ ἴμησα τοῖς φρονοῦσιν εὖ.	(904)	βλέπειν; τίν' αὐδᾶν ξυμμάχων; ἐπεὶ γε δὴ	(923)
οὐ γάρ ποτ' οὔτ' ἂν εἰ τέκν' ὧν μήτηρ ἔφυν	(905)	τὴν δυσσέβειαν ἐυσεβοῦσ' ἐκτησάμην.	(924)
οὔτ' εἰ πόσις μοι κατθανὼν ἐτήκετο,	(906)	ἄλλ' εἰ μὲν οὖν τάδ' ἐστὶν ἐν θεοῖς καλά,	(925)
βία πολιτῶν τόνδ' ἂν ἠρόμην πόνον.	(907)	παθόντες ἂν ξυγγοῖμεν ἠμαρτηκότες·	(926)
τίνος νόμου δὴ ταῦτα πρὸς χάριν λέγω;	(908)	εἰ δ' οἶδ' ἀμαρτάνουσι, μὴ πλείω κακὰ	(927)
πόσις μὲν ἂν μοι κατθανόντος ἄλλος ἦν,	(909)	πάθειεν ἢ καὶ δρωσιν ἐκδίκως ἐμέ.	(928)

# Structure of *Ant.* 891–928

- Lines 891–903:
  - Antigone addresses her tomb and her deceased beloved ones
  - death penalty as a reward (line 903: ἄρνυμαι)
- Lines 904–920:
  - justification of Antigone's action
  - exceptionality/irreplaceability of the brother
- Lines 921–928:
  - reference to the gods
  - no transgression of any divine law
  - wishes Creon no greater (= equal) pain

# Rhetorical/Stylistic Devices

- Opening lines (891–2): ὦ τύμβος, ἢ ὦ νυμφεῖον, ἢ ὦ κατασκαφῆς οἴκησις ἀείφρουρος
  - apostrophe to the tomb → personification
  - tricolon with anaphora
- Lines 898–9: φίλη μὲν ἤξειν πατρί, ἢ προσφιλῆς δὲ σοί, μήτερ, ἢ φίλη δὲ σοί, κασίγνητον κάρα
  - apostrophe
  - tricolon with anaphora

# Rhetorical/Stylistic Devices

- Repetition of key terms:
  - Line 891 κατασκαφής – line 920 κατασκαφάς
  - Lines 899 and 915: κασίγνητον κάρα
  - Line 908 νόμου – line 914 νόμω
  - Line 914 ἀμαρτάνειν – line 926 ἡμαρτηκότες – line 927 ἀμαρτάνουσι
- Line 924: antithesis (direct juxtaposition, oxymoron): **δυσσέβειαν ἐυσεβοῦς**'

# The Authenticity of *Ant.* 904–928

“So kommt in der *Antigone* eine Stelle vor, die mir immer als ein Flecken erscheint, und worum ich vieles geben möchte, wenn ein tüchtiger Philologe uns bewiese, sie wäre eingeschoben und unecht.” (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Gespräche*

*mit Eckermann, 28.03.1827)*

- “There is a passage in the *Antigone* that always looks to me like a stain, and I would be most grateful if a competent philologist were to prove that it was interpolated and unauthentic.”

(transl. S.B.)

# The Authenticity of *Ant.* 904–928

“Es besteht keine Hoffnung, daß die alte Diskussion ein für alle Mal entschieden werden könnte.” (Szlezák 1981: 109)

“There is no hope that the old dispute might be decided once and for all.” (transl. S.B.)

# The Authenticity of *Ant.* 904–928

“[S]ome commentators have deleted the passage [...] on the grounds that (i) it runs counter to [Antigone’s] earlier assertion about universal obedience to the divine laws [...] [and] (ii) [because] the pedantic and unemotional tenor of the argument is out of character for the ‘passionate’ Ant[igone] [...].”  
(Griffith 1999: 278)

# Summary, Conclusion

- Antigone = play full of different and complex conflicts on various levels
- Two strands of interpretation; problems of the “orthodox view”
- Antigone’s soliloquy:
  - structurally balanced speech, clear focus, clear line of thought
  - skillful and elaborate composition (rhetoric, style)
- Problematic philological quarrel