



The Theban Plays: King Oedipus, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone

Sophocles

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Sophocles or Sofokles (c496BC-c406BC) was the second of the three ancient Greek tragedians whose work has survived to the present day. His first plays were written later than those of Aeschylus, and earlier than those of Euripides. According to the Suda, a 10th century encyclopedia, Sophocles wrote 120 or more plays during the course of his life, but only seven have survived in a complete form, namely Ajax, Antigone, Trachinian Women, Oedipus the King, Electra, Philoctetes and Oedipus at Colonus. For almost 50 years, Sophocles was the most-awarded playwright in the dramatic competitions of ancient Athens that took place during the religious festivals of the Lenaea and the Dionysia. Sophocles competed in around thirty drama competitions; he won perhaps twenty four and never received lower than second place. Aeschylus won fourteen competitions and was defeated by Sophocles at times. The most famous of Sophocles's tragedies are those concerning Oedipus and Antigone: these are often known as the Theban Plays or The Oedipus Cycle, although each play was actually a part of a different trilogy, the other members of which are now lost. The Theban plays consist of three plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King (also called Oedipus Tyrannus or Oedipus Rex), and Oedipus at Colonus. All three plays concern the fate of Thebes during and after the reign of King Oedipus. Sophocles wrote the three plays for separate festival competitions, many years apart. Not only are the Theban plays not a true trilogy (three plays presented as a continuous narrative) but they are not even an intentional series and contain some inconsistencies between them. He also wrote other plays having to do with Thebes, such as The Progeny, of which only fragments have survived.

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