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978-0-521-13478-1 - Sophocles' *Antigone*: A New Translation

Translated and Edited by Diane J. Rayor

Excerpt

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# *Antigone*

by Sophocles

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**SCENE I:**

*Antigone enters from city path (CP); Ismene enters from skenê.*

**ANTIGONE**

My dear heart, Ismene, more than blood-sister,  
 is there even one thing from the evils of Oedipus  
 that Zeus doesn't inflict on the two of us still living?  
 There is no pain or disaster,  
 shame or dishonor that I have not seen 5  
 among these evils of yours and mine.  
 Now what is the new proclamation they say  
 the commander has just made to the whole city?  
 Did you hear anything? Or didn't you notice  
 that evils from our enemies advance upon our kin? 10

**ISMENE**

No word of our family, sweet or painful,  
 has come to me, Antigone,  
 not since the two of us lost our two brothers,  
 dead in one day by each other's hands.  
 Since the Argive army left this very night, 15  
 I know nothing more,  
 whether my fortune is brighter or doomed.

**ANTIGONE**

I thought so. I took you outside  
 the courtyard gate so you alone could hear.

**ISMENE**

What is it? You look like you're brooding over some news. 20

**ANTIGONE**

Well, hasn't Kreon honored one of our brothers  
 with proper rites, while refusing the other burial?  
 They say he buried Eteokles  
 with true observance of justice and custom,  
 honored below among the dead. 25

But the wretched corpse of Polynices?  
 They say, by proclamation to the citizens,  
 that no one may bury him or cry aloud,  
 that he be left unmourned, unburied, a sweet treasure  
 for birds spying him to eat at their pleasure. 30

That's what they say our good Kreon has proclaimed  
 to you and me – yes, to me, too.  
 He comes here to proclaim once more  
 to any who haven't heard. He's not treating this  
 as some minor matter – whoever would take action 35  
 is sentenced to death by public stoning in the city.  
 There you have it. You will soon reveal  
 whether you run true to your noble birth or not.

**ISMENE**

Poor sister, if that's how things stand,  
 what more could I offer to do or undo? 40

**ANTIGONE**

Consider whether you will share the burden and work together.

**ISMENE**

With what risk? What are you thinking of?

**ANTIGONE**

Will your hand join mine to lift his body?

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**ISMENE**

What? Do you intend to bury him, forbidden in Thebes?

**ANTIGONE**

He's my brother and – like it or not – yours, too.

45

I will not be caught betraying him.

**ISMENE**

Stubborn! Even though Kreon has spoken against it?

**ANTIGONE**

He has no right to keep me from my own.

**ISMENE**

*Oimoi!* Think, my sister, how our father,

hateful, infamous, was destroyed

50

by discovering his own crimes,

striking his eyes with his own blinding hands.

Second, mother and wife, both in one,

ended her life with a twisted noose.

Third, two brothers in one day

55

killed their miserable selves, completing

a shared doom in each other's hands.

Now, consider again that the two of us left

will be utterly destroyed if in violence against the law

we transgress the decree and power of the king.

60

We need to recognize that we are women,

not meant to fight against men.

Since we are ruled by those more powerful,

we must obey now and in yet more painful ways.

I beg those below the earth

65

for pardon since I'm forced in this matter.

I will obey the authorities.  
 To do something so extreme makes no sense.

**ANTIGONE**

I won't insist, nor if you change your mind,  
 would your assistance please me. 70

Do as you think fit. I will bury him,  
 and doing so, will find a noble death.

Having dared a holy crime, I will lie with  
 the one I loved, and be loved. I must satisfy  
 those below far longer than those here 75  
 since I'll lie there forever. But if you think it's right,  
 keep dishonoring what the gods honor.

**ISMENE**

I do no dishonor, but it goes against my nature  
 to act in violence against the people.

**ANTIGONE**

You can make these excuses. I will go 80  
 to heap up a burial mound for my dearest brother.

**ISMENE**

*Oimoi*, Antigone, I'm afraid for you!

**ANTIGONE**

Don't worry about me. Set your own fate right.

**ISMENE**

At least don't tell anyone else what you're doing.  
 Hide the secret and I will too. 85

**ANTIGONE**

*Oimoi*, call it out! Your silence will earn you  
 far more hatred than if you proclaim it aloud.

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**ISMENE**

You have a hot heart for cold matters.

**ANTIGONE**

I know I satisfy the ones I truly must please.

**ISMENE**

If you can. But you desire the impossible. 90

**ANTIGONE**

Then as soon as I lose strength, I'll stop.

**ISMENE**

It's not fitting to hunt the impossible in the first place.

**ANTIGONE**

Keep talking and I'll hate you, and you'll justly  
 lie beside your dead brother as an enemy.  
 But let me, and my ill-conceived plan, 95  
 suffer this dreadful fate – Nothing I will suffer  
 could be so terrible as to keep me from a noble death.

**ISMENE**

Go if you think it's right. Even though you act  
 without sense, to your family you are truly dear.

*Antigone exits burial path (BP); Ismene exits skenê.  
 Entrance Song: Chorus enters CP.*

**CHORUS**

Ray of sun, the loveliest 100  
 light ever to appear  
 in seven-gated Thebes,  
 you have come at last,

eye of golden day, shining  
 above the streams of Dirce. 105  
 The Argive with his white shield,  
 who fled in full armor,  
 you goaded by a sharper bit  
 into headlong flight,

who Polynices raised against our land 110  
 in his contentious quarrel.  
 That man, a screaming eagle  
 soaring over the land  
 with wings of white snow,  
 one among the many armed warriors 115  
 in crested helmets of horse-hair.

Hovering above our roofs,  
 poised to swallow the seven gates  
 surrounded by bloodthirsty spears,  
 before his jaws were sated 120  
 on our blood, he left  
 before the pine torch of Hephaistos  
 consumed our crown of towers.  
 Clamor of Ares  
 all around – matched in battle, 125  
 conquest by the Theban serpent.

Since Zeus despises  
 boasts of an arrogant tongue,  
 seeing them swarm against us  
 with presumptuous flash of gold, 130  
 he struck with his thunderbolt  
 the one on the high ramparts



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right as he began his victory cry.

He plunged to the solid earth  
 ablaze, who until then raged 135  
 with Bacchic madness, and exhaled  
 blasts of most hostile gales.  
 Things did not turn out  
 as he had planned,  
 and to the rest, powerful Ares, 140  
 striking hard, dealt other fates:

the seven captains at the seven gates,  
 face to face with seven equals, left  
 their bronze shields, fee to Zeus the Battle-turner.  
 All except the hating two, sprung 145  
 from the same father and mother, who planted  
 their double-edged spears through each other,  
 together sharing a common death.

Now great-named Victory  
 has come rejoicing with 150  
 Thebes of the many chariots.  
 Let us forget the war. Let us  
 go round to all the temples of the gods,  
 and dance all night and sing,  
 and may Theban Dionysos, 155  
 Earthshaker, lead the way!

**CHORUS LEADER**

Now here comes the king of the land,  
 Kreon son of Menoecus, new ruler

through recent fortunes from the gods.  
 What plan is he piloting that he summoned 160  
 by proclamation this special council of elders?

**SCENE 2:**

*Kreon enters skenê.*

**KREON**

Men, the affairs of state, wildly shaken  
 by the gods, have steadied aright again.  
 You, out of all the rest, I summoned here,  
 knowing well that you always 165  
 honored the power of the throne of Laius.  
 And again, when Oedipus set aright the state  
 and after he perished, you still stood  
 beside his sons with sound counsel.  
 Yet, since they were destroyed 170  
 by a double destiny in a single day, striking  
 and struck with their own stained hands,  
 I now hold all the power and the throne  
 by being next of kin to those destroyed.  
 It is impossible to learn the spirit, 175  
 mind, and judgment of any man  
 until he is tested in office and laws.  
 Whoever does not pursue the best policies  
 to steer the entire state,  
 but locks tight his tongue out of some fear, 180  
 has always seemed to me the worst.  
 And whoever thinks a friend more important