



ILLUSTRATED

COMPLETE WORKS OF SOPHOCLES

AJAX, ANTIGONE,
THE WOMEN OF TRACHIS,
PHILOCTETES,
ELECTRA AND OTHERS

Complete Works of Sophocles
(497/6-406/5 BC)

Sophocles is one of three ancient Greek tragedians (also Aeschylus and Euripides) whose plays have survived. His characters spoke in a way that was more natural to them and more expressive of their individual character feelings. The most famous tragedies of Sophocles feature Oedipus and Antigone: they are generally known as the Theban plays.

The Translations

1. AJAX
2. ANTIGONE
3. THE WOMEN OF TRACHIS
4. OEDIPUS THE KING
5. PHILOCTETES
6. ELECTRA
7. OEDIPUS AT COLONUS
8. FRAGMENTS
9. MINOR FRAGMENTS

The Greek Texts

1. Αίας — AJAX
2. Τραχινίαι — THE WOMEN OF TRACHIS
3. Οιδίπους Τύραννος — OEDIPUS THE KING
4. Φιλοκτήτης — PHILOCTETES
5. Οιδίπους επί Κολωνώ — OEDIPUS AT COLONUS
6. FRAGMENTS

The Biographies

INTRODUCTION TO SOPHOCLES
SOPHOCLES

Contents:

The Translations

[AJAX Translated by Lewis Campbell](#)

[ANTIGONE Translated by F. Storr](#)

[THE WOMEN OF TRACHIS Translated by Lewis Campbell](#)

[OEDIPUS THE KING Translated by F. Storr](#)

[PHILOCTETES Translated by Lewis Campbell](#)

[ELECTRA Translated by Lewis Campbell](#)

[OEDIPUS AT COLONUS Translated by F. Storr](#)

[FRAGMENTS Translated by Arthur S Hunt](#)

[MINOR FRAGMENTS Translated by E. H Plumptre](#)

The Greek Texts

[Αἴας — AJAX](#)

[Τραχινίαι — THE WOMEN OF TRACHIS](#)

[Οιδίπους Τύραννος — OEDIPUS THE KING](#)

[Φιλοκτήτης — PHILOCTETES](#)

[Οιδίπους επί Κολωνῶ — OEDIPUS AT COLONUS](#)

[FRAGMENTS](#)

The Biographies

[INTRODUCTION TO SOPHOCLES by F. Storr](#)

[SOPHOCLES by T. W. Lumb](#)

The Translations



Kolonos, a northern district of Athens — Sophocles' birthplace



A reconstruction of ancient Athens



Another reconstruction of the ancient city, as seen from the Pnyx

AJAX

Translated by Lewis Campbell

Regarded by most scholars as an early work, from 450–430 BC, this tragedy chronicles the fate of the warrior Ajax after the events of Homer's Iliad, but before the end of the Trojan War. At the onset of the play, Ajax is enraged when Achilles' armour was awarded to Odysseus instead of to him and so he vows to kill the Greek leaders that have disgraced him. Before he can enact his revenge, he is deceived by the goddess Athena into believing that the sheep and cattle that were taken by the Achaeans as spoil are the Greek leaders. He slaughters some of them and takes the others back to his home to torture, including a ram which he believes to be his main rival, Odysseus.

When Ajax realises what he has done, he suffers great agony over his actions, believing the other Greek warriors are laughing at him and so contemplates ending his life due to his shame. His concubine, Tecmessa, pleads for him not to leave her and her child unprotected. Ajax then gives his son, Eurysakes, his shield. He leaves the house saying that he is going out to purify himself and bury the sword given to him by Hector. Teukros, Ajax's brother, arrives in the Greek camp and is taunted by his fellow soldiers. Kalchas warns that Ajax should not be allowed to leave his tent until the end of the day or he will die. Teukros sends a messenger to Ajax's campsite with word of Kalchas' prophesy. Tecmessa and soldiers try to track him down, but are too late. Ajax had indeed buried the sword, but has left the blade sticking out of the ground and has impaled himself upon it.

The last part of the drama revolves around the dispute over what to do with Ajax's body. Ajax's half brother Teukros intends on burying him despite the demands of Menelaus and Agamemnon that the corpse is not to be buried. Odysseus, although previously Ajax's enemy, steps in and persuades them to allow Ajax a proper funeral by pointing out that even one's enemies deserve respect in death, if they were noble.



An Athenian vase depicting Odysseus and Ajax



An ancient depiction of the suicide of Ajax

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ATHENA.

ODYSSEUS.

AIAS, *the son of Telamon.*

CHORUS *of Salaminian Mariners.*

TECMESSA.

A Messenger.

TEUCER, *half brother of Aias.*

MENELAUS.

AGAMEMNON.

EURYSAKÈS, *the child of Aias and Tecmessa, appears, but does not speak.*

SCENE. Before the encampment of Aias on the shore of the Troad. Afterwards a lonely place beyond Rhoeteum.

Time, towards the end of the Trojan War.

ARGUMENT

'A wounded spirit who can bear?'

After the death of Achilles, the armour made for him by Hephaestus was to be given to the worthiest of the surviving Greeks. Although Aias was the most valiant, the judges made the award to Odysseus, because he was the wisest.

Aias in his rage attempts to kill the generals; but Athena sends madness upon him, and he makes a raid upon the flocks and herds of the army, imagining the bulls and rams to be the Argive chiefs. On awakening from his delusion, he finds that he has fallen irrecoverably from honour and from the favour of the Greeks. He also imagines that the anger of Athena is unappeasable. Under this impression he eludes the loving eyes of his captive-bride Tecmessa, and of his Salaminian comrades, and falls on his sword. ('The soul and body rive not more in parting Than greatness going off.')

But it is revealed through the prophet Calchas, that the wrath of Athena will last only for a day; and on the return of Teucer, Aias receives an honoured funeral, the tyrannical reclamations of the two sons of Atreus being overcome by the firm fidelity of Teucer and the magnanimity of Odysseus, who has been inspired for this purpose by Athena.

ATHENA (above). ODYSSEUS.

ATHENA.

Oft have I seen thee, Laërtiades,
Intent on some surprisal of thy foes;
As now I find thee by the seaward camp,
Where Aias holds the last place in your line,
Lingering in quest, and scanning the fresh print
Of his late footsteps, to be certified
If he keep house or no. Right well thy sense
Hath led thee forth, like some keen hound of Sparta!
The man is even but now come home, his head
And slaughterous hands reeking with ardent toil.
Thou, then, no longer strain thy gaze within
Yon gateway, but declare what eager chase
Thou followest, that a god may give thee light.

ODYSSEUS.

Athena, 'tis thy voice! Dearest in heaven,
How well discerned and welcome to my soul
From that dim distance doth thine utterance fly
In tones as of Tyrrhenian trumpet clang!
Rightly hast thou divined mine errand here,
Beating this ground for Aias of the shield,
The lion-quarry whom I track to day.
For he hath wrought on us to night a deed
Past thought — if he be doer of this thing;
We drift in ignorant doubt, unsatisfied —
And I unbidden have bound me to this toil.
Brief time hath flown since suddenly we knew
That all our gathered spoil was reaved and slaughtered,
Flocks, herds, and herdmen, by some human hand,
All tongues, then, lay this deed at Aias' door.
And one, a scout who had marked him, all alone,
With new-fleshed weapon bounding o'er the plain,
Gave me to know it, when immediately
I darted on the trail, and here in part
I find some trace to guide me, but in part
I halt, amazed, and know not where to look.
Thou com'st full timely. For my venturous course,
Past or to come, is governed by thy will.

ATH.

I knew thy doubts, Odysseus, and came forth
Zealous to guard thy perilous hunting-path.

OD.

Dear Queen! and am I labouring to an end?

ATH.

Thou schem'st not idly. This is Aias' deed.

OD.

What can have roused him to a work so wild?

ATH.

His grievous anger for Achilles' arms.

OD.

But wherefore on the flock this violent raid?

ATH.

He thought to imbrue his hands with your heart's blood.

OD.

What? Was this planned against the Argives, then?

ATH.

Planned, and performed, had I kept careless guard.

OD.

What daring spirit, what hardihood, was here!

ATH.

Alone by night in craft he sought your tents.

OD.

How? Came he near them? Won he to his goal?

ATH.

He stood in darkness at the generals' gates.

OD.

What then restrained his eager hand from murder?

ATH.

I turned him backward from his baleful joy,
And overswayed him with blind phantasies,
To swerve against the flocks and well-watched herd
Not yet divided from the public booty.
There plunging in he hewed the horned throng,
And with him Havoc ranged: while now he thought
To kill the Atreidae with hot hand, now this
Now that commander, as the fancy grew.
I, joining with the tumult of his mind,
Flung the wild victim on the fatal net.
Anon, this toil being overpast, he draws
The living oxen and the panting sheep
With cords to his home, not as a hornèd prey,
But as in triumph marshalling his foes:
Whom now he tortures in their bonds within.
Come, thou shalt see this madness in clear day,
And tell to the Argives all I show thee here
Only stand firm and shrink not, I will turn
His eyes askance, not to distinguish thee,
Fear nought — Ho! thou that bindest to thy will
The limbs of those thy captives, come thou forth!
Aias! advance before thy palace gate!

OD.

My Queen! what dost thou? Never call him forth.

ATH.

Hush, hush! Be not so timorous, but endure.

OD.

Nay, nay! Enough. He is there, and let him bide.

ATH.

What fear you? Dares his valour from to day?

OD.

He was and is my valiant enemy.

ATH.

Then is not laughter sweetest o'er a foe?

OD.

No more! I care not he should pass abroad.

ATH.

You flinch from seeing the madman in full view.

OD.

When sane, I ne'er had flinched before his face.

ATH.

Well, but even now he shall not know thee near.

OD.

How, if his eyes be not transformed or lost?

ATH.

I will confound his sense although he see.

OD.

Well, nothing is too hard for Deity.

ATH.

Stand still and keep thy place without a word.

OD.

I must. Would I were far away from here!

ATH.

Aias! Again I summon thee. Why pay
So scanty heed to her who fights for thee?

Enter AIAS with a bloody scourge.

AIAS.

Hail, offspring of the Highest! Pallas, hail!
Well hast thou stood by me. Triumphal gold
Shall crown thy temple for this lordly prey.

ATH.

A fair intention! But resolve me this:
Hast dyed thy falchion deep in Argive blood?
AI. There is my boast; that charge I'll ne'er deny.

ATH.

Have Atreus' sons felt thy victorious might?
AI. They have. No more they'll make a scorn of me!

ATH.

I take it, then, they are dead.

AI.

Ay, now they are dead,
Let them arise and rob me of mine arms!

ATH.

Good. Next inform us of Laërtes' son;
How stands his fortune? Hast thou let him go?

AI.

The accursed fox! Dost thou inquire of him?

ATH.

Ay, of Odysseus, thy late adversary.

AI.

He sits within, dear lady, to my joy,
Bound; for I mean him not just yet to die.

ATH.

What fine advantage wouldst thou first achieve?

AI.

First, tie him to a pillar of my hall —

ATH.

Poor wretch! What torment wilt thou wreak on him?

AI.

Then stain his back with scourging till he die.

ATH.

Nay, 'tis too much. Poor caitiff! Not the scourge!

AI.

Pallas, in all things else have thou thy will,
But none shall wrest Odysseus from this doom.

ATH.

Well, since thou art determined on the deed,
Spare nought of thine intent: indulge thy hand!

AI. (*waving the bloody scourge.*)

I go! But thou, I charge thee, let thine aid
Be evermore like valiant as to-day.[Exit

ATH.

The gods are strong, Odysseus. Dost thou see?
What man than Aias was more provident,
Or who for timeliest action more approved?

OD.

I know of none. But, though he hates me sore,
I pity him, poor mortal, thus chained fast
To a wild and cruel fate, — weighing not so much
His fortune as mine own. For now I feel
All we who live are but an empty show
And idle pageant of a shadowy dream.

ATH.

Then, warned by what thou seest, be thou not rash
To vaunt high words toward Heaven, nor swell thy port
Too proudly, if in puissance of thy hand
Thou passest others, or in mines of wealth.
Since Time abases and uplifts again
All that is human, and the modest heart
Is loved by Heaven, who hates the intemperate will.

[Exeunt.]

CHORUS *(entering)*.

Telamonian child, whose hand
Guards our wave-encircled land,
Salamis that breasts the sea,
Good of thine is joy to me;
But if One who reigns above
Smite thee, or if murmurs move
From fierce Danaäns in their hate
Full of threatening to thy state,
All my heart for fear doth sigh,
Shrinking like a dove's soft eye.
Hardly had the darkness waned,[Half-Chorus I.
When our ears were filled and pained
With huge scandal on thy fame.
Telling, thine the arm that came
To the cattle-browsèd mead,
Wild with prancing of the steed,
And that ravaged there and slew
With a sword of fiery hue
All the spoils that yet remain,
By the sweat of spearmen ta'en.
Such report against thy life,[Half-Chorus II.
Whispered words with falsehood rife,
Wise Odysseus bringing near
Shrewdly gaineth many an ear:
Since invention against thee
Findeth hearing speedily,
Tallying with the moment's birth;
And with loudly waxing mirth
Heaping insult on thy grief,
Each who hears it glories more
Than the tongue that told before.
Every slander wins belief
Aimed at souls whose worth is chief:
Shot at me, or one so small,
Such a bolt might harmless fall.
Ever toward the great and high

Creepeth climbing jealousy
Yet the low without the tall
Make at need a tottering wall
Let the strong the feeble save
And the mean support the brave.

CHORUS.

Ah! 'twere vain to tune such song
'Mid the nought discerning throng
Who are clamouring now 'gainst thee
Long and loud, and strengthless we,
Mighty chieftain, thou away,
To withstand the gathering fray
Flocking fowl with carping cry
Seem they, lurking from thine eye,
Till the royal eagle's poise
Overawe the paltry noise
Till before thy presence hushed
Sudden sink they, mute and crushed.
Did bull slaying Artemis, Zeus' cruel daughter! 1
(Ah, fearful rumour, fountain of my shame!)
Prompt thy fond heart to this disastrous slaughter
Of the full herd stored in our army's name!
Say, had her blood stained temple missed the kindness
Of some vow promised fruit of victory,
Foiled of some glorious armour through thy blindness,
Or fell some stag ungraced by gift from thee?
Or did stern Ares venge his thankless spear
Through this night foray that hath cost thee dear!
For never, if thy heart were not distracted! 2
By stings from Heaven, O child of Telamon,
Wouldst thou have bounded leftward, to have acted
Thus wildly, spoiling all our host hath won!
Madness might fall some heavenly power forbend it
But if Odysseus and the tyrant lords
Suggest a forged tale, O rise to end it,
Nor fan the fierce flame of their withering words!
Forth from thy tent, and let thine eye confound
The brood of Sisyphus that would thee wound!
Too long hast thou been fixed in grim repose, III
Heightening the haughty malice of thy foes,
That, while thou porest by the sullen sea,
Through breezy glades advanceth fearlessly,

A mounting blaze with crackling laughter fed
From myriad throats; whence pain and sorrow bred
Within my bosom are established.

Enter TECMESSA.

TECMESSA.

Helpers of Aias' vessel's speed,
Erechtheus' earth-derived seed,
Sorrows are ours who truly care
For the house of Telamon afar.
The dread, the grand, the rugged form
Of him we know,
Is stricken with a troublous storm;
Our Aias' glory droopeth low.

CHORUS.

What burden through the darkness fell
Where still at eventide 'twas well?
Phrygian Teleutas' daughter, say;
Since Aias, foremost in the fray,
Disdaining not the spear-won bride,
Still holds thee nearest at his side,
And thou may'st solve our doubts aright.

TEC.

How shall I speak the dreadful word?
How shall ye live when ye have heard?
Madness hath seized our lord by night
And blasted him with hopeless blight.
Such horrid victims mightst thou see
Huddled beneath yon canopy,
Torn by red hands and dyed in blood,
Dread offerings to his direful mood.

CH.

What news of our fierce lord thy story showeth,¹
Sharp to endure, impossible to fly!
News that on tongues of Danaäns hourly groweth,
Which Rumour's myriad voices multiply!
Alas! the approaching doom awakes my terror.
The man will die, disgraced in open day,
Whose dark dyed steel hath dared through mad brained
error
The mounted herdmen with their herds to slay.

TEC.

O horror! Then 'twas there he found
The flock he brought as captives tied,
And some he slew upon the ground,
And some, side smiting, sundered wide
Two white foot rams he backward drew,
And bound. Of one he shore and threw
The tipmost tongue and head away,
The other to an upright stay
He tied, and with a harness thong
Doubled in hand, gave whizzing blows,
Echoing his lashes with a song
More dire than mortal fury knows.

CH.

Ah! then 'tis time, our heads in mantles hiding,²
Our feet on some stol'n pathway now to ply,
Or with swift oarage o'er the billows gliding,
With ordered stroke to make the good ship fly
Such threats the Atridae, armed with two fold power,
Launch to assail us. Oh, I sadly fear
Stones from fierce hands on us and him will shower,
Whose heavy plight no comfort may come near.

TEC.

'Tis changed, his rage, like sudden blast,
Without the lightning gleam is past
And now that Reason's light returns,
New sorrow in his spirit burns.
For when we look on self made woe,
In which no hand but ours had part,
Thought of such griefs and whence they flow
Brings aching misery to the heart.

CH.

If he hath ceased to rave, he should do well
The account of evil lessens when 'tis past.

TEC.

If choice were given you, would you rather choose
Hurting your friends, yourself to feel delight,
Or share with them in one commingled pain?

CH.

The two fold trouble is more terrible.

TEC.

Then comes our torment now the fit is o'er.

CH.

How mean'st thou by that word? I fail to see.

TEC.

He in his rage had rapture of delight
And knew not how he grieved us who stood near
And saw the madding tempest ruining him.
But now 'tis over and he breathes anew,
The counterblast of sorrow shakes his soul,
Whilst our affliction vexeth as before,
Have we not double for our single woe?

CH.

I feel thy reasoning move me, and I fear
Some heavenly stroke hath fallen. How else, when the end
Of stormy sickness brings no cheering ray?

TEC.

Our state is certain. Dream not but 'tis so.

CH.

How first began the assault of misery?
Tell us the trouble, for we share the pain.

TEC.

It toucheth you indeed, and ye shall hear
All from the first. 'Twas midnight, and the lamp
Of eve had died, when, seizing his sharp blade,
He sought on some vain errand to creep forth.
I broke in with my word: 'Aias, what now?
Why thus uncalled for salliest thou? No voice
Of herald summoned thee. No trumpet blew.
What wouldst thou when the camp is hushed in sleep?'
He with few words well known to women's ears
Checked me: 'The silent partner is the best.'
I saw how 'twas and ceased. Forth then he fared
Alone — What horror passed upon the plain
This night, I know not. But he drags within,
Tied in a throng, bulls, shepherd dogs, and spoil
Of cattle and sheep. Anon he butchers them,
Felling or piercing, hacking or tearing wide,
Ribs from breast, limb from limb. Others in rage
He seized and bound and tortured, brutes for men.
Last, out he rushed before the doors, and there
Whirled forth wild language to some shadowy form,
Flouting the generals and Laërtes' son
With torrent laughter and loud triumphing
What in his raid he had wreaked to their despite.
Then diving back within — the fitful storm
Slowly assuaging left his spirit clear.
And when his eye had lightened through the room
Cumbered with ruin, smiting on his brow
He roared; and, tumbling down amid the wreck
Of woolly carnage he himself had made,
Sate with clenched hand tight twisted in his hair.
Long stayed he so in silence. Then flashed forth
Those frightful words of threatening vehemence,
That bade me show him all the night's mishap,
And whither he was fallen I, dear my friends,
Prevailed on through my fear, told all I knew.
And all at once he raised a bitter cry,

Which heretofore I ne'er had heard, for still
He made us think such doleful utterance
Betokened the dull craven spirit, and still
Dumb to shrill wailings, he would only moan
With half heard muttering, like an angry bull.
But now, by such dark fortune overpowered,
Foodless and dry, amid the quivering heap
His steel hath quelled, all quietly he broods;
And out of doubt his mind intends some harm:
Such words, such groans, burst from him. O my friends. —
Therefore I hastened, — enter and give aid
If aught ye can! Men thus forgone will oft
Grow milder through the counsel of a friend.

CH.

Teleutas' child! we shudder at thy tale
That fatal frenzy wastes our hero's soul.

AIAS (*within*).

Woe's me, me, me!

TEC.

More cause anon! Hear ye not Aias there,
How sharp the cry that shrills from him?

AI.

Woe! Woe!

CH.

Madly it sounds — Or springs it of deep grief
For proofs of madness harrowing to his eye?

AI.

Boy, boy!

TEC.

What means he? Oh, Eurysakes!
He cries on thee. Where art thou? O my heart!

AI.

Teucer I call! Where 's Teucer? Will he ne'er
Come from the chase, but leave me to my doom?

CH.

Not madness now. Disclose him. Let us look.
Haply the sight of us may calm his soul.

TEC.

There, then; I open to your view the form
Of Aias, and his fortunes as they are.[AIAS is discovered

AI.

Dear comrades of the deep, whose truth and love I
Stand forth alone unbroken in my woe,
Behold what gory sea
Of storm-lashed agony
Doth round and round me flow!

CH. (*to TEC.*).

Too true thy witness: for the fact cries out
Wild thoughts were here and Reason's lamp extinct.

AI.

Strong helpers of sea-speed, whose nimble hands
Plied hither the salt oar with circling stroke,
No shepherd there was found
To give the avenging wound.
Come, lay me with the flock!

CH.

Speak no rash word! nor curing ill with ill
Augment the plague of this calamity.

AI.

Mark ye the brave and bold, II 1
Whom none could turn of old,
When once he set his face to the fierce fight?
Now beasts that thought no harm
Have felt this puissant arm.
O laughter of my foes! O mockery of my might!

TEC.

Aias, my lord! I entreat thee, speak not so!

AI.

Thou here! Away! begone, and trouble me not!
O! O!

CH.

Be softened! bear a steadier mind!

AI.

O heaven-accursèd hand
That let the ruffians go,
But falling 'midst the horn'd and bleating band,
Made darkling blood-streams flow!

CH.

Why vex thy heart with what is over and done?
Do what we may, this ne'er will alter now.

AI.

Child of Laërtes old, II 2
Thou that dost still behold
And still contrive all shapes of monstrous ill,
Winding in foulest ways
Through the army's sinful maze, —
Now even for pleasure thou may'st laugh thy fill.

CH.

Laughter and tears are in the gift of God.

AI.

Ay, might I see him, though thus broken, — ay me!
Even yet —

CH.

Nay, vaunt not. Look where thou art fallen.

AI.

Source where my life-blood springs,
O Zeus, might I but slay
That crafty plague, with those twin-sceptred kings,
Then breathe my life away!

TEC.

Pray thus, and pray that I too be no more!
If thou wert gone, what were my life to me?

AI.

Darkness! my only light! III 1
O nether gloom, to me
Brighter than morning to the wakeful eye!
Take me to dwell with thee.
Take me! What help? Zeus' daughter with fell might
Torments me sore. I may not look on high,
Nor to the tribe of momentary men. —
Oh, whither, then,
Should it avail to fly?
Ah! whither should I go and stay?
All here is ruin. This mad prey
Shames me for evermore:
Vengeance is at the door;
Yea, all the Achaean host, with armèd hand,
Is ready at command
To slay me o'er and o'er.