

I died, struck on the forehead by a missile from an eagle's claws.

They say that he put on [25] the *Persians* in Sicily at Hieron's request and was highly praised for it.

4. THE LIFE OF SOPHOCLES¹

[1] Sophocles was an Athenian by birth. He was the son of Sophillus who was not a carpenter in spite of what Aristoxenus tells us [fr. 115 Wehrli] nor a bronze-smith, nor a sword-maker by trade in spite of what Ister tells us [*FGrHist* 334F33]. As it happened, his father owned *slaves* who were bronze-smiths and carpenters. For it is not logical that a man descended from a tradesman would be considered worthy of a generalship along with Pericles and Thucydides, who were the most important men in the city. Indeed, if his father had been a tradesman, he would not have got off without abuse from the comic poets. Nor ought one to believe Ister [*FGrHist* 334F34] when he says Sophocles was not an Athenian but rather a Phliasian. Even if Sophocles' family originally came from Phlius, still one cannot find this information in any author other than Ister. In fact Sophocles was an Athenian by birth. His deme was Colonus. He was distinguished both because of his life and his poetry. He was well-educated and raised in comfortable circumstances, and he was involved in government and in embassies abroad.

[2] They say that he was born in the second year of the seventy-first Olympiad, when Philip was archon in Athens [495/4 B.C.]. He was seven years younger than Aeschylus, and twenty-four years older than Euripides.

[3] He trained with other boys both in wrestling and in music, and won crowns for both, as Ister says [*FGrHist* 334F35]. He studied music with Lamprus, and after the naval battle at Salamis, when the Athenians were standing round the victory monument, Sophocles with his lyre, naked and anointed with oil, led the chorus which sang the paean at the victory sacrifice.

¹ Ed. Radt 1977.

[4] He learned about tragedy from Aeschylus. He also was responsible for innovations in the dramatic competitions. He was the first to break the tradition of the poet's acting because his own voice was weak. For in the old days the poet himself served as one of the actors. He changed the number of chorus members from twelve to fifteen and invented the third actor.

[5] They say that he also took up the lyre and that only in the *Thamyris* did he ever sing; on account of this there is a picture of him playing a lyre in the Painted Stoa.

[6] Satyrus says [*FHG* 3.161ff.] that Sophocles invented the crooked staff himself. Ister also says [*FGrHist* 334F36] that he discovered the white half-boots that actors and chorus members wear, and that he wrote his dramas to suit their characters, and that he organised a *thiasos* to the Muses of cultivated people.

[7] In a word, his character was so charming that he was loved everywhere and by everyone.

[8] He won twenty victories, according to Carystius [*FHG* 4.359]. He often won second prize, but never third.

[9] The Athenians elected him general when he was sixty-five years old, seven years before the Peloponnesian war began, in the war against the Anaioi.

[10] He was so loyal to Athens that when many kings sent for him he did not want to leave his country.

[11] He held the priesthood of Halon, who was a hero under Chiron's tutelage along with Asclepius. After Sophocles' death Halon's shrine was maintained by his son Iophon.

[12] Sophocles was more pious than anyone else, according to what Hieronymus says [fr. 31 Wehrli] . . . about his golden crown. When this crown was stolen from the Acropolis, Heracles came to Sophocles in a dream and told him to go into the house on the right and it would be hidden there. Sophocles brought this information to the citizens and received a reward of a talent, as had been announced in advance. He used the talent to establish a shrine of Heracles Informer.

[13] The story is told by many authorities that at some point he brought a lawsuit against his son Iophon. Iophon was his son by Nicostrate, but he had a son Ariston by Theoris of Sicyon, and he was especially fond of this son's child, whose name was Sophocles. Once in a drama he portrayed Iophon

... as being envious of him and as making accusations to his clansmen that his father had lost his mind in his old age. They censured Iophon. Satyrus [*FHG* 3.162] says the poet said: 'If I am Sophocles I'm not out of my mind; if I am out of my mind, I'm not Sophocles', and then he produced the *Oedipus*.

[14] Ister [*FGrHist* 334F37] and Neanthes [*FGrHist* 84F18] say he died in the following way. When Callippides the actor came from the workshop in Opus and around the time of the festival of the Choes sent Sophocles a bunch of grapes, and when Sophocles put a grape that was still unripe into his mouth, he choked because of his advanced age and died. Satyrus says [*FHG* 3.162] that when Sophocles was reciting the *Antigone* and came to a passage toward the end of the play that did not have a break or mark for a pause, he strained his voice too much and gave up his life along with his voice. Some say that after he recited the drama, and he was proclaimed winner, he was overcome by joy and died.

[15] His body was placed on top of his ancestral tomb near the road to Deceleia, eleven stades from the city wall. Some say that they put up a statue of a siren in his memory; others, a bronze Cheledon. Since the Spartans were building a wall at this spot against the Athenians, Dionysus appeared to Lysander in a dream and ordered that the man should be buried. When Lysander ignored the dream Dionysus appeared to him a second time with the same message. Lysander then asked some fugitives who had died, and learned that it was Sophocles. So he sent a herald and allowed the Athenians to bury the body.

[16] Lobon says that this epitaph was written on his tomb:

In this tomb I hide Sophocles who won first prize with his tragic art, a most holy figure.

[17] Ister says [*FGrHist* 334F38] the Athenians voted to sacrifice to him each year because of his excellence.

[18] He wrote one hundred and thirty dramas, as Aristophanes says [p. 249, fr. iv N] of which seventeen are spurious.

[19] He competed against Aeschylus, Euripides, Choerilus, Aristias and many others, including his son Iophon.

[20] In general he used Homeric vocabulary. He took his

plots from the direction set by the epic poet and drew on the *Odyssey* for many of his dramas. He gives the etymology of Odysseus' name [*Od.* 19.406ff.] the way Homer did:

I am Odysseus, named correctly for my troubles. For many impious people have been angry [*odysanto*] at me [fr. 965].

He delineated character, elaborated and used contrivances skilfully, reproducing Homer's charm. For this reason a certain Ionian says only Sophocles is a pupil of Homer. Certainly many poets have imitated one of their predecessors or contemporaries, but Sophocles alone culled the best from each. For this reason he was also called 'the bee'. He brought everything together: timing, sweetness, courage, variety.

[21] He knew how to match timing and events, so that he could delineate a whole character from a fraction of a line or from a single speech. This is the greatest mark of poetic skill, to delineate character or effect.

[22] Aristophanes says [fr. 580A Edmonds] that 'a honeycomb sat on him', and elsewhere (T108 Radt) that Sophocles' mouth is smeared with honey.

[23] Aristoxenus says [fr. 79 Wehrli] that he was the first of the Athenian poets to put Phrygian music into his own songs and to mix in the dithyrambic style.

5. THE LIFE OF EURIPIDES¹

Euripides the poet was the son of Mnesarchides, a storekeeper, and of Cleito, a vegetable-seller.² He was an Athenian. He was born in Salamis while Calliades was archon in the seventy-

¹ Ed. Méridier 1929. In the translation of the *Vita* I have followed Méridier's text: a chronological account (1-49), a set of anecdotes (50-113); then a second short biography with comments on the poet's style (114-35). For the reader's convenience footnotes mark correspondences with earlier sources.

² Text of Satyrus from *POxy.* IX 1176, on the advice of S. West 1966, 546-50, though with some modifications to Hunt's translations. For *Vita* 1-44,

THE LIVES
OF THE
GREEK POETS

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The Johns Hopkins University Press

Baltimore, Maryland