

## Antigone the Metic

In this paper, I will present a new reading of references to *metics* and *metoikia* in Sophocles' *Antigone* and draw connections to thematic continuities in the other Theban plays.

In the eponymous play by Sophocles, Antigone twice refers to herself as a *metic* (ll. 852, 868), before Creon in turn speaks of depriving Antigone of her *metoikia* (l. 890) as she is buried alive.

Despite the insistence of these reference over a short stretch of lines, few critics have paid them much attention. Jebb, while commenting on the *Oedipus Tyrannus* l. 452, had in fact ruled out the notion that Sophocles was even alluding to the Athenian institution of *metoikia*, an interpretation which appears to have had a great influence on how the use of these terms in the Theban plays have been understood.

Those who have taken note of the references, meanwhile, either read them broadly as a metaphor drawing on the liminal and lamentable status of *metics* to signify Antigone's own pitiable situation (e.g. Whitehead 1977, Griffith, Kennedy 2014), or focus exclusively on Antigone's self-characterisation as a *metic* by overlooking Creon's comment (e.g. Whitehead 1977, Reed 2008, Heno Castro 2013).

Beyond this, few critics have noted the peculiar persistence of the language of *metoikia* in Sophocles' Theban plays. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Teiresias refers with great irony to Laius' murderer as a "foreign *metic* in speech (l. 452). In *Oedipus at Colonus*, by contrast, Theseus threatens to make Oedipus a *metic* of Athens by force (l. 934).

In this paper, then, I intend to address the language of *metoikia* in *Antigone* first by considering uses of it and related terms in the play and in particular the divergence in how

Antigone refers to herself and how Creon characterizes her punishment. On the one hand, Antigone calls herself a *metic* only as she considers her fate: buried alive, she stands between life and death as a *metic* stands between alien and citizen. On the other, for Creon, Antigone's punishment is an end to her *metoikia*: her status and rights, like her life, are but by the grace of his sovereign power. Apart from revealing a conceptual similarity between the status of unmarried, citizen women and *metics*, Antigone's characterisation as a *metic* goes to the heart of the tragic opposition between her and Creon and offers a new angle on the nature of their conflict.

I will close by sketching connections to the other Theban plays by Sophocles. While these tragedies were of course not part of the same production, the concentration of the language of *metoikia* in these plays points, together with the problematic status of Oedipus in both Thebes and Athens, to a strong thematic continuity.

#### Works Cited

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