

**SEPTEM CONTRA THEBAS,  
A TRAGEDY; WITH  
ENGLISH NOTES, FOR  
THE USE OF COLLEGES**

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Septem Contra Thebas, a Tragedy; With English Notes, for the Use of Colleges by Æschylus

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**ÆSCHYLUS**

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SEPTEM CONTRA THEBAS,

A

TRAGEDY OF ÆSCHYLUS.

EDITED,

WITH ENGLISH NOTES, FOR THE USE OF COLLEGES,

BY

AUGUSTUS SACHTLEBEN,

PRINCIPAL OF A CLASSICAL SCHOOL IN CHARLESTON, S. C.

ὄξει' Ἐρινύς  
ἔπειθε \* σὺν ἀλλαλαφονίᾳ γένος ἀρήϊον.

PINDAR.

C.

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TO

C. C. FELTON,

PROFESSOR OF GREEK LITERATURE IN HARVARD UNIVERSITY,

THIS VOLUME

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

THE EDITOR.





## P R E F A C E.

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Among the mythological legends of ancient Greece, which furnished material to the Attic dramatists for their poetical compositions, there was none of a more truly tragical character than that of the house of Labdakus, because none exhibited on a grander scale the vicissitude of human affairs, as the result of that conflict between individual freedom and a higher necessity, which constitutes the chief element of all tragedy among the ancients. Hence it is that the misfortunes of Laius and his descendants formed one of the favorite subjects for representation on the Athenian stage. All the great dramatists of whom we have any account handled the subject with more or less success, and some of the finest specimens of dramatic poetry which have come down to our times treat of the fate of the royal house of Thebes.

Whilst we possess, in the *Antigone* and the *Oedipus Rex* and *Coloneus*, three entire tragedies of Sophocles on the history of the Labdakidæ, there remain to us, with the exception of the "Seven against Thebes," only the names and

a few insignificant fragments of the various dramas which Æschylus composed on the same subject; viz. the *Laius*, *Œdipus*, *Sphinx*, and the *Eleusinians*. From the early date of the first performance of the "*Septem*" (B. C. 471), we may safely conclude that it formed part of a trilogy or tetralogy; for, as it is well known that Sophocles was the first poet who departed from the custom of composing his dramas in trilogies, but did not exhibit his first play, the *Triptolemus*, until the year B. C. 468, Æschylus cannot have written detached plays previous to that period. Until lately, there was generally assigned to the "*Septem*" the second place in the tetralogy which our author wrote on materials drawn from the *Cyclic Thebaid*, the *Eleusinians* forming the concluding play; but according to an ancient *διδασκαλία*, or theatre-roll, which has been recently discovered, the "*Septem*" formed the third part of this tetralogy, the *Laius* and *Œdipus* being the first two, and the *Sphinx* the satiric drama. There are, however, serious objections to both these arrangements. If, according to Plutarch (in *Theb.* cap. 29), the *Eleusinians* represented the burial, through the mediation of Theseus, of the Argive chiefs who had fallen before Thebes, — the correctness of which statement the name of the play seems to corroborate, — its subject was altogether foreign to the misfortunes of the house of *Œdipus*, and had little or no connection with the "*Septem*"; and if it contained an account of the fate of *Antigone*, for which the conclusion of the "*Septem*" evidently prepares the mind of the spectator, *together with* the burial of the Argive chiefs, its subject was far too extensive to be

comprehended in one play. On the other hand, it is equally difficult to believe the statement of the Didaskalia to be correct, because it assigns to the "Septem" the concluding part of the trilogy. A poet like Æschylus, however crude and irregular his plots may occasionally have been, could never have committed so egregious an error as to leave his audience entirely in the dark about the fate of Antigone, after having excited their deepest sympathy in behalf of the heroic maiden by stating her determined opposition to the decree of the Theban senate, and the awful doom which awaited her in case she should persist in her resolve of burying her outlawed brother. Nothing prevented him from concluding his drama with the funeral song over the slain bodies of the two brothers, and it is paying poor homage to the genius of Æschylus to believe him capable of having added to one of his sublimest conceptions an appendage, the utter uselessness and impropriety of which must be perceived by the most superficial observer. Æschylus himself is said to have been prouder of the "Seven against Thebes" than of any other of his works, and Aristophanes, a very acute critic, indorses the author's high opinion of his play, at least indirectly, by introducing him, in the *Frogs* (v. 1085), as priding himself on his work, without ridiculing him on account of these boasts; and could both have been insensible to a blunder which almost every school-boy in Athens might have pointed out to them? We are, therefore, compelled, in the face of the statement of the Didaskalia, (the genuineness of which is probably far from being firmly established,) to