

**THE AUTHENTICITY AND
DATE OF THE
SOPHOCLEAN AJAX,
VERSES 1040-1420**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649317677

The Authenticity and Date of the Sophoclean Ajax, Verses 1040-1420 by Harwood Hoadley

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HARWOOD HOADLEY

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TO MY MOTHER.

201549

INTRODUCTION.

From very early times the artistic character of the ending of the Sophoclean Ajax has been severely impugned,¹ and of late years critics such as Otto Ribbeck and chiefly Theodor Bergk² have denied the authenticity of the passage vv. 1040-1420. By reviewing carefully the stylistic and metrical features of the lines and the poetical feeling which they embody I shall endeavor first, to establish their non-Sophoclean origin; then to show that they probably date from the last part of the fifth century, and hence are, conjecturally, the work of the much-beladen but *not* third-rate poet Iophon, about 435-425; further that the present ending is not wholly Iophon's, but is a remodelling of the original ending by Sophocles, to suit the more violent political feelings of the times, yet that on one point at least, the attitude of the gods toward the burial of the hero, Iophon kept substantially the point of view and general line of argument of his father. By comparing these arguments with those used in the similar case in the *Antigone* I shall then try to show that the latter play is from five to ten years subsequent to the original Ajax, the force of the comparison being augmented by the possibility that Sophocles was the first to introduce into post-epic literature the stories of the disputed burial of Ajax and of *Antigone's* heroism. The date of the *Antigone* is

¹ Schol. on *vas.* 1123, 1127, 1205.

² Ribbeck, *Sophokles und seine Tragödien* (Vortrag gehalten im Saale der Kieler Harmonie am 16. April, 1868), Berlin, 1869, p. 19; Bergk, *Gr. Litt.-gesch.* (1872-8), 3, 378 ff.; Haigh, *The Tragic Drama of the Greeks* (ed. 1896), pp. 187-8. See also the lists in Van Leeuwen's *De Atacis Sophoclei authenticia et integritate*, p. 51, n. 2, and p. 75, n. 1. Verses 1028-1039 have been questioned with considerable reason by Morstadt, "*Progr.*, 1863, p. 30 f.," but it is doubtful if we should consider them in connection with our passage.

then fixed at about 440 B. C., partly on internal evidence, chiefly by its connection with the Samian war of that year; and the original ending of the Ajax is thus placed about 450 B. C.

Manifestly this discussion will be attended with very great uncertainties. Through the scarcity of positive evidence one must not expect definitive results but be content with the least unlikely conjecture, which will be based wherever possible on cumulative testimony. Yet I feel quite certain that some such theory as is given below, p. 21, represents in the main the actual history of the Ajax.

ANALYSIS.

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The points urged against the authenticity of verses 1040-1420 of the Sophoclean Ajax involve the character of the argumentation, the general tone and spirit of the passage, and its diction, taken in connection with certain of its metrical peculiarities. The argument is not based on any one point, but is rather cumulative.

The least tenable objection is that the controversies between Teucer, Agamemnon, and Menelaus add nothing essential to the play. We must accordingly examine the general economy of the drama. As in the *Antigone* so here, one of the dominant elements is the characteristically Hellenic belief that "pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." That Ajax has been guilty of this sin, and because of it has met with the punishment described, is clearly stated in the words both of Athena and of Calchas. But harmoniously with the Aristotelian principle,¹ even though he is culpable in many things, yet in most points his nature is lofty and noble. Not only is the deep affection and loyalty between him and his friends and kin, underneath his gruff and relatively unemotional exterior, one of the chief adornments and charms alike of the man and of the play; but Ajax is also a brave and vigorous warrior, equal to all emergencies alike in council and in battle, second only to

¹ *Poetics*, 13.

Achilles; never shunning toil or danger on behalf of the Greeks, often the sole savior of the army; withal conspicuous for integrity and dignity. If then the play were to end after his death or after Teucer's lament, we should feel that although he has been deservedly punished, too little emphasis has been laid on his virtues, and *οὐδὲ φοβερὸν οὐδὲ ἐλεεινὸν τοῦτο ἀλλὰ μαρὸν ἔστιν*. In the much-disputed soliloquy 646-692² the poet, as I believe, would have us understand that Ajax both recognizes and confesses his sins against the gods and the Atridæ and at the same time yields them in heart his full submission (albeit with hatred toward the chieftains); therefore, to atone for his sins, but chiefly because inward shame and outward disgrace will not suffer him longer to live, he determines to end his existence. Some ending for the play is thus demanded which shall bring out the hero's virtues in strongest relief, and at the same time show him to us vindicated and restored to divine favor, even though in death;³ and it also seems to be forecast in the preceding part of the drama, particularly in verses 572-3 and 826-30 (add 227-30, 245-56, 721-32). But this is just what we have in the discussion between the Atridæ, and Teucer and Odysseus. As to details we need only note among other things, that quite consistently, no reply is made to the charge of pride, insubordination, and self-will, other than the contention of Odysseus (itself in line with the general thought of Teucer) that the hero's virtues far outweigh his faults,—an entirely adequate rejoinder for the purposes of the tragedy. A similar notion underlies the argu-

² Sophoclean lines are numbered by the text of Jebb, 1897; Æschylean by that of Sidgwick, 1902; Euripidean by that of Nauck, 1891-5; tragic fragments by the edition of Nauck, 1889.

³ See L. Campbell, *Tragic Drama in Æschylus, Sophocles, and Shakespeare*, pp. 160 and 163. This principle appears at first sight not to be observed in many tragedies (notably the O. T.); yet I believe that it can in substance be maintained for all those plays where the hero suffers,—certainly for the Ajax.