Was Antigone Murdered?

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ANTIGONE is regularly assumed to have been a suicide. The crucial passage is Sophocles, Antigone, verses 1219-1230. Fortunately there are no textual difficulties; the problems are those of interpretation. The Greek text of A. C. Pearson¹ reads:

1220 η' θρούμεν' εν δὲ λοιπῇ τιμβεύματι
tὴν μὲν κρεμαστῆν αὐχένος κατείδομεν,
βρόχῳ μιτόδει συνδόνος καθημένην,
tὸν δ' ἄμβης μέσης περιπετεία προσκείμενον,
eὔνης ἀπομοίωσοντα τῆς κάτω φθορῶν
καὶ πατρὸς ἔργα καὶ τὸ δύστηνον λέχος.

Difficulties arise here and often elsewhere in Sophocles simply because the text is rarely literally translated. Rather it is paraphrased even by the most accurate critics. I should render the Greek text of A. C. Pearson literally as follows:

"Therefore at the commands from a disheartened master we proceeded to look; and in the innermost part of the tomb on

¹A. C. Pearson, Sophoclis Fabulae (Oxford 1924). The following editions are of particular importance and will henceforth be referred to by name of editor alone: Lewis Campbell, Sophocles edited with English Notes and Introductions ¹² (Oxford 1879); M. L. D'Ooge, Sophocles, Antigone (Boston 1884); R. C. Jebb, Sophocles the Plays and Fragments: Part III, The Antigone² (Cambridge 1891); F. C. Wex, Sophoclis Antigona II (Leipzig 1831). In the latter volume will be found conveniently collected the views of earlier commentators, e.g., Hermann and Musgrave.

²This is the translation of H. Weir Smyth written in his interleaved copy of D'Ooge preserved in Widener Library. The Widener number is Gs 31. 419. 03.

³So D'Ooge ad loc.
the one hand we saw her hanged from her neck, having been made fast with a threaded noose of linen, and on the other hand him lying falling round about her middle, *bewailing loudly* destruction of a bride, the one below, and a father's deeds and the wretched marriage-bed. But he, as he sees them, having wailed a gloomy wail, goes within to him and having *wailed aloud* he calls: 'O miserable, what a deed you have done; what mind did you take on? *At what point of calamity did you go mad?* Come out, child; supplicating, I beg you.'

For τὰδ' I follow Hermann, in an interpretation approved by Ellendt-Genthe. The pronoun is retrospective and looks back to the words (especially verses 1217-1218) just spoken by Creon. Ellendt-Genthe catch the nuance with "Circumspiciebant igitur ministri, num recte audivisset ille." The scholiast rightly glosses ἠθροῦμεν with ἑθεωροῦμεν. G. Dindorf's *explorabamus* is a better translation than Ellendt-Genthe's *vidimus*, which destroys the studied contrast of tenses in the two finite verbs. The scholiast further suggests that *the threaded noose of linen* was the girl's ζώνη, a view endorsed by Campbell, while D'Ooge thinks it her *veil*; but the whole approach is documentary in Waldock's sense and so to be avoided. εὖνης (1224) and λέχος (1225) seemed synonymous to Dindorf, who therefore thought the verse otiose and an interpolation; but there is a distinction. By metonymy εὖνης is the bride, as Musgrave saw (*coniugis iam apud inferos agentis*), and λέχος the marriage. So Jebb saw, who translates "bewailing the loss of his bride who is with the dead, and his father's deeds, and his own ill-starred love." This way there is a logical and rhetorical denouement. Haimon recalls first his dead bride, then the evils of his father, and finally his own condition.

At verse 1226 I have proposed a new translation by taking σφε to be plural. In the tragedians the pronoun often means *eos, eas.*

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5 *Idem*, s.v. διακόκιον.
6 So Campbell, p. 556.
7 See Wex, *ad loc.*, p. 277.
8 Fr. Ellendt and H. Genthe, *Lexicon Sophocleum* (Berlin 1872) s.v. κέλευσα. 
This way the pronoun becomes neatly resumptive, including τῆς of verse 1221 and τῶν of verse 1223. The result of the new translation is that the motivation for Kreon’s outburst on entering the tomb becomes the sight of Haimon and Antigone. The importance of such a motivation will be soon evident.

The crux in the passage is ἐργον of verse 1228. What is the deed to which Kreon refers? Commentators regularly ignore the problem and only Jebb on verses 1228 f. interpreted: “i. e., Haemon’s forcible entrance into Antigone’s tomb.” For some seventy years this view was not challenged. Then in a passage of remarkable insight Professor S. M. Adams suggested that the word refers to the hanging. He made the simple and cogent observation that if Jebb is right the words (p. 57): “are mad enough, since Creon intended to do precisely that and should have welcomed this anticipation.” This view is clearly correct and it is only a wonder that it had not earlier been brought forward. Otherwise there is no motivation for τλήμους and διεσθάρης. The verb indicates that Kreon fears the boy deranged. This is plausible if he believes that Haimon has murdered his betrothed, but is nonsense otherwise. The urgency of verse 1230, together with the affectionate τέκνον replacing Kreon’s usual παι, support this view. In short, we can believe only that Kreon considers Haimon to have murdered Antigone.

Was Kreon mistaken? Professor Adams thinks he was; that it was this infamous accusation that enraged Haimon to attempt parricide and then, in despair at failure, to take his own life. Adams’ view is an opinion, albeit an intelligent one; for he provides no evidence. It is difficult to find any, but in defence of his view I note two points. At verse 763 Haimon asserts that Antigone shall never perish by his side; but he is distraught, referring to the immediate threat of Kreon, and might easily later have reconsidered. Just so Kreon (760-761) will have Antigone done away on stage but at

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11S. M. Adams, Sophocles the Playwright (Toronto 1957) 57-58 with n. 7. I approved this interpretation at CP 54 (1954) 70, but did not explore the consequences.

12See Campbell and Jebb ad loc. who are elaborating the view of J. W. Donaldson (London 1848) ad loc.
verses 773 ff. reconsiders. Further, as D'Ooge cleverly observed, when the servants enter the cave, Antigone has been cut down. Haimon is lying over her (1223.) After his suicide, corpse lies on corpse (1240). It is difficult to imagine why the young man would cut down his victim. Perhaps there was a change of heart or else he wished to die close to her. The dramatist did not choose to tell us and we should not pry. Obviously Kreon was not disturbed by this circumstance and perhaps we ought not to be.

In defence of the veracity of Kreon's opinion we may remark that his words are the last reference to the circumstances of Antigone's death. They are never contradicted by the Messenger or by any other character in the play. It would seem careless, if not naive, for Sophocles to present an error in a messenger-speech and never to correct it for his audience. Notice also that at verse 750 Kreon tells Haimon that he shall not marry Antigone while she still lives. Jebb renders Haimon's reply: "Then she must die and in death destroy another." These words are by no means incompatible with a murder. Finally Hyginus in Fable 72 abstracts a dramatic treatment of the story of Antigone. His version is not the Sophoclean play. The fabulist's source is either Euripides' or Astydamas' Antigone. Hyginus writes (p. 56. 13 Rose): "Haemon se et Antigonam coniugem interfecit." The killing of women by hanging is of course paralleled at Odyssey 22. 465 ff.

Sophocles' ambiguity concerning his heroine's death is apparent from the text. We can only surmise his motive. Perhaps in the received version (reflected in Hyginus?) Antigone was

\[\text{[Footnotes]}\]

\[\text{13D'Ooge, p. 146 on 1223: "From 1237-1240 it is evident that Antigone's body lay prostrate on the ground. The attendants could not have seen Antigone suspended, but they inferred that this was the manner of her death from the noose that was still around her neck. It is also inferred that the first thing that Haemon did was to unfasten the noose from the ceiling, that he might save Antigone, if possible, from death." Notice that the first inference is made by the attendants; the second by the modern critic and contains the documentary fallacy.}\]

\[\text{14Obviously if Antigone lies on the floor κρημαστής means dead from hanging and καθημετέρων tied.}\]

\[\text{15For the Euripidean attribution see e.g., Schmid-Stühlin, I. 2. 358 n. 5 (after Welcker). James H. Paton in HSCP 12 (1901) 269-276 provides sensible reasons to doubt a Euripidean source and supports (after George Müller) Astydamas. The dogmatic treatment of the Hyginian fable by Carl Robert, Oidipus I (Berlin 1915) 381-2 is not useful. We can only safely say that Hyginus is evidence for a tradition, probably dramatic, of murder by Haimon.}\]
put to death by Haimon. Sophocles did not consider such a murder to be compatible with his characterization of the heroine. A noble heroine ought better like Ajax or Deianeira to take her own life. The dramatist chose therefore to imply a suicide but carefully used ambiguous language that never literally contradicted a murder. For just such slyness elsewhere in Sophocles compare the Neoptolemus who never literally lies although it is implied to almost any spectator that he does.\textsuperscript{16}

I hold therefore that the Sophoclean text nowhere explicitly contradicts the view that Haimon murdered Antigone, while in order to consider Antigone a suicide a spectator must contradict the words of one who reportedly was at the scene. A murder also has the advantage of reconciling the Sophoclean account with that of the drama abstracted in Hyginus.

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\textsuperscript{16}This has been noted by Adams, \textit{op. cit.} (\textit{supra n. 11}) 140 with n. 1.