

In 1956 Knox argued that *Oedipus Tyrannus* could not have been produced *before* 426. Although he based his argument mainly on one sentence in the parodos, his influential view has never been seriously challenged; indeed two recent scholars have used his work as foundational for their own. I will try to disprove Knox's thesis by showing that 164-6 can be understood within its dramatic context.

The key sentence for Knox is the following: "If ever indeed, **in defense against previous disaster** (προτέρως ἄτας ὑπερ) rushing at the polis, you [three gods] banished utterly **the flame of calamity** (φλόγα πῆματος) from this place, come now also!" Knox argued that the two highlighted phrases can *only* be explained as referring to the second outbreak of the Athenian plague (autumn, 427).

My counter-argument is threefold. First, προτέρως ἄτας ὑπερ (164) can be understood very well from a crucial event related within the play itself, namely Oedipus' defeat of the Sphinx, which had already been emphasized implicitly by the king (ὁ πᾶσι κλεινὸς Οἰδίπους καλούμενος, 8) and explicitly by the priest of Zeus, who mentions the human δασμός which Thebes had to pay the σκληρὰ αἰοδός (31-9). Furthermore, the text makes clear that προτέρως ἄτας ὑπερ at 164 establishes the thematic context (i. e. the Sphinx's devastating attack) for understanding φλόγα πῆματος at 166.

Secondly, Knox argued that φλόγα πῆματος is a strange way to refer to the ravaging of the Sphinx and that it makes much better sense as a reference to the historical plague. But as Wunder (1840), following the scholiast, showed, φλόγα at 166 is best understood as a metaphor for 'vehemence,' much as the Romans used *incendium*. Such a figurative usage is fully Sophoclean and indeed occurs later in this very parodos at 192 (Ἄρεα...ὄς νῦν...φλέγει με; cf. *Ajax* 195, [Αἴας] ἄταν οὐρανίαν φλέγων).

Thirdly, several key linguistic and thematic parallels between the prologue and parodos indicate the full *dramatic* relevance of προτέρως ἄτας ὑπερ...φλόγα πῆματος. The priest had petitioned Oedipus to provide ἀλήθεια (42) against the plague. Basing his request on Oedipus' 'former zeal' (πᾶρος προθυμίας, 48) in vanquishing the Sphinx, the priest supplicated his king again: "Just as at that time (τότε) you brought us good fortune, so now also (καὶ τανῦν) be that same man" (52-3). Analogously the parodos petitions the gods to provide ἀλήθεια (189) against the plague. Basing their request on divine assistance in averting 'former ruin' (προτερῶς ἄτας, 164) the Theban elders petition the Olympians to 'come now also' (καὶ νῦν, 166). The structure and diction of this choral request is clearly a doublet of the priest's at 40-57. The parallelism of these adduced passages is clear; so, too, is the crucial difference of their respective appeals: confronted with the same disaster, the priest petitions Oedipus, the city's symbolic father (ὦ τέκνα, 2), whereas the chorus appeals to the gods, led by Ζεῦ πάτερ (202).

In sum, my threefold philological argument has argued that Sophocles' text makes complete sense within its own dramatic framework. Knox's thesis that προτέρως ἄτας ὑπερ...φλόγα πῆματος *must* refer to an historical event (the second outbreak of the Athenian plague in late 427) cannot stand.