



Seven against Thebes

Aeschylus

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Seven against Thebes (Hepta epi Thebas), which was performed in 467 BC, has the theme of the interference of the gods in human affairs. It also marks the first known appearance in Aeschylus's work of a theme which would continue through his plays, that of the polis (the city) being a key development of human civilization. The play tells the story of Eteocles and Polynices, the sons of the shamed King of Thebes, Oedipus. The sons agree to alternate in the throne of the city, but after the first year Eteocles refuses to step down, and Polynices wages war to claim his crown. The brothers kill each other in single combat, and the original ending of the play consisted of lamentations for the dead brothers. A new ending was added to the play some fifty years later: Antigone and Ismene mourn their dead brothers, a messenger enters announcing an edict prohibiting the burial of Polynices; and finally, Antigone declares her intention to defy this edict.

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