The Authenticity of the Verses 904-920 in the Antigone of Sophocles

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The research history shows how the authenticity of the verses 904-20 in the Antigone has been controversial for a long time. The summary of its central argument (904-912) runs as follows: If it had been not her brother but her husband or her children, she would not have acted “in defiance of the citizens” (βία πολίτων, 907). For her dead brother would not be replaceable. The opponents of their authenticity believed that these verses disturb the tragic quality of the scene, do not fit Antigone’s passionate character, and show some weaknesses in language style. The defenders have tried to refute such criticism and prove the importance of the verses for Antigone’s final speech. As to this problem of the authenticity it seems that we do not reach a final decision.

The arguments of the opponents can be summarized in following respects: namely, (1) Antigone’s character, (2) inconsistency of nomos concept in Antigone’s words, (3) Antigone’s repetition of Ismene’s words (βία πολίτων, 79). Against these arguments I would like to argue to strengthen the position of the defenders.

1 904-20 del. Lehrs (905-13 iam A. Jacob) in the criticus apparatus edited by Lloyd-Jones & Wilson.
1. The dialectical reasoning Antigone used in her speech (904-20) does not match Antigone’s passionate character, for it is difficult to imagine such a frigid calculation in her character. But this argument ignores the dramatic situation in which Antigone in isolation and desperation tries to justify again her deed, thus resorting to the practice of such kind of argument. “She cannot support herself on the laws of the gods because she now feels that she has been deserted by the gods. [...] She is driven back to rationalization.”

Thus, Antigone’s argument is properly not only called her struggle for self-assertion, but also her balanced act to cope with and reflect on the problem. In addition, we must remember that it is a convention of Greek tragedy that dramatic figures, after lamenting in pathos their own fates in the amoibaion-kommos, reflect on them and make a detached and calculated reasoning (logos) in their speeches, sometimes even stepping out of their character for a moment.

2. It will be difficult for the opponents to imagine that in her speech (891-928) Antigone can renounce her past deed she has once defended and justified in deep religious feeling. She “suddenly gives up that which, throughout the drama, has been the immovable basis of her action, - the universal and unqualified validity of the divine law.”

If the verses 904-920 are genuine, there arises a huge discrepancy between the nomos of philia, i.e. the unwritten divine laws (453-457, esp. ἀγαπητας κασφολὴ θεῶν νόμιμα 454-5), which she announced in her speech (450-470), and the nomos she specifies and modifies in her speech (908-14). But this discrepancy will be reduced provided that Antigone here represents the nomos of philia in a

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4 E.g. Whitman 1951, 92f.
6 Jebb 1900, 259.
7 For the discrepancy Szlezák 1981, 117: “Was in 904ff. gesagt ist, ist [...] unvereinbar mit den religiösen Ideen im übrigen Drama, gleichgültig, von wem sie ausgesprochen werden [...]”