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SOPHOKLES

# PHILOKTETES



Translation with notes, introduction and interpretive essay

Seth L. Schein

# SOPHOKLES: *PHILOKTETES*

TRANSLATION WITH NOTES,  
INTRODUCTION, AND INTERPRETIVE ESSAY

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Focus Classical Library  
Focus Publishing  
R. Pullins Company  
Newburyport MA

ISBN 1-58510-086-2

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*Dio Chrysostom*, Discourse 52, *Philoctetes in The Tragedians* by D.A. Russell, from *Ancient Literary Criticism*, ed. D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1972), pp. 504-7. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

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## Preface

This translation is intended for students, teachers, and general readers who desire a version that is as close to the Greek as I have been able to make it without sacrificing readability. I have tried to preserve or to convey the effects of Sophokles' idioms, imagery, figures of speech, meter, word order, and sentence structure, as well as the combination of a traditional high style with colloquial Attic Greek that is characteristic of all Attic tragedy. Despite some inevitable awkwardness and the impossibility of bringing over into English everything that I see in the Greek, I hope that my version will help readers to achieve an intimate familiarity with the play and its complex meanings.

I have based my translation mainly on the Oxford Classical Text of Sophokles, edited by Hugh Lloyd-Jones and Nigel Wilson,<sup>1</sup> but sometimes I have departed from their text in favor of different manuscript variants or suggestions by modern scholars. I have benefited greatly from the edition and commentary by Sir Richard Jebb and to a lesser extent from the Teubner edition by R.D. Dawe and the commentary by J.C. Kamerbeek.<sup>2</sup> I also have consulted with profit the translations of Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Maria Pia Pattoni, and Judith Affleck.<sup>3</sup> The line numbers in my notes and essays refer to the present translation and occasionally differ by a line or two from the line numbers of the Greek text.

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<sup>1</sup> H. Lloyd-Jones and N.G. Wilson (edd.), *Sophoclis Fabulae* (Oxford, 1990, corr. 1992)

<sup>2</sup> R.C. Jebb, *Sophocles: the Plays and Fragments. Part IV, The Philoctetes* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Cambridge, 1898); R.D. Dawe (ed.), *Sophoclis Philoctetes*, (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1996) [1<sup>st</sup> edition in *Sophoclis Tragoediae, Tom. II* (Leipzig, 1979), pp. 111-71]; J.C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries, Part VI: The Philoctetes* (Leiden, 1980)

<sup>3</sup> H. Lloyd-Jones, *Sophocles II*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), pp. 253-407; M.P. Pattoni, *Sofocle: Trachinie-Filottete*, Introduzione di V. di Benedetto, note di M.S. Mirto, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Milan, 1998), pp. 169-287; J. Affleck, *Sophocles' Philoctetes*, Cambridge Translations from Greek Drama (Cambridge, 2001)

The colleagues, students, and friends with whom I have discussed *Philoktetes* over the years, and whose comments, criticism, and suggestions have improved my understanding of the play, are too numerous to mention. I would, however, like to thank Nancy Felson and Mark Griffith for commenting helpfully on an early draft of the first few hundred lines of the translation; Deborah Roberts and Heather Wood for reading a penultimate version of the translation and notes and for many detailed suggestions that greatly improved them; Carolyn Dewald, Nancy Felson and Heather Wood for helpful criticism of early drafts of the Introduction and Interpretive Essay; Stephen Esposito, editor of the Focus Classical Library, for detailed criticism of the entire manuscript and many helpful suggestions; the anonymous reader for Focus Classical Library for useful comments and recommendations. I am also grateful to Ron Pullins, publisher of the Focus Classical Library, for encouraging this translation and for helpful suggestions in the final stages of preparing; and to Melissa Wood, Production Manager, and Cynthia Zawalich, Copy Editor, at Focus Publishing for their work in transforming that manuscript into a book. Finally, I would like to thank Sherry Crandon for her support and encouragement as I worked on this volume, and I am happy to dedicate it to my teacher, Helen Bacon, with whom I first studied *Philoktetes* in Greek as an undergraduate, and to Daniel Schein, my son, with whom I first saw the play performed.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am grateful to Oxford University Press for permission to reprint, as an Appendix to this volume, D.A. Russell's translation of Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse 52: Philoktetes in the Tragedians*, which originally appeared in *Ancient Literary Criticism*, edited by D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1972), pp. 504-7.

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# Philoktetes

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ODYSSEUS, a Greek leader at Troy  
NEOPTOLEMOS, the son of Achilles  
CHORUS OF NEOPTOLEMOS' SAILORS  
SAILOR (as Lookout and Merchant Captain)  
PHILOKTETES, a Greek leader abandoned on Lemnos  
HERAKLES, a deified hero

*(Setting: a deserted spot on the northeast coast of the uninhabited island, Lemnos, near Mt. Hermaion. A cave opens into a steep cliff that rises above the shore. Odysseus and Neoptolemos enter from the audience's left, followed by a Sailor.)*

### ODYSSEUS

This is the shore of Lemnos, a land circled by the sea;  
it's uninhabited, and no mortal sets foot on it.<sup>1</sup>

Here, Neoptolemos, you who are sprung from the mightiest  
of Greek

fathers, true-bred son of Achilles—here I once abandoned  
the son of Poias from Malis,<sup>2</sup> like a new-born child.

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<sup>1</sup> *Lemnos*: an island with an area of 183 square miles in the northern Aegean Sea, about equidistant from Troy (to the east) and Mt. Athos (to the west). That Lemnos is uninhabited is a radical innovation on the part of Sophokles. In the *Iliad* the island is called "well-settled" (21.40), and its King Eunêos engages in trade with the Greek army (7.467-71). Ironically, the "uninhabited" island that "no mortal sets foot on" (*brotois astiptos*) will turn out to be inhabited by the distinctive "footstep" (*stibos*) of Philoktetes (158, 163, 206); the same word is used elsewhere in the play of human tracks, paths, or footfalls, e.g. 29, 48, 487.

<sup>2</sup> *Malis*: a region on the east coast of mainland Greece, opposite the northwest

I was following the kings' orders: his foot was ulcerous  
 and kept dripping from the disease that was eating through it;  
 we couldn't put our hands to a libation or sacrifice  
 in peace and quiet: each time he would fill the whole camp  
 with inauspicious, savage cries, 10  
 shouting and groaning. But why should I go on speaking  
 of these things? We have no time for long speeches.  
 He may learn that I've come, and I'll waste the whole  
 clever plan by which I expect to catch him right away.<sup>3</sup>  
 Your task from now on is to serve me and, in particular, 15  
 to scout out where there's a two-mouthed cave nearby--  
 the sort where in winter there are two places  
 to sit in the sun's warmth, and in summer  
 a cool breeze sends sleep through a grotto open at both ends.  
 A little below, on the left, you may see a fresh-water spring 20  
 welling up, if it is still there and still running.  
 Don't make a sound, but go and signal me if he still keeps to  
 this same place, or if he happens to be somewhere else,  
 so you may hear the rest of what I have to say,  
 and I may explain things, and a joint action may proceed from us  
 both.<sup>4</sup> 25

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coast of Euboeia, a long island running NW to SE. Poias, the King of Malis and father of Philoktetes, probably would have been known to Sophokles' original audience as one of the Argonauts (cf. [Apollodorus], *The Library*, I.9.16, 26), and they would have understood "the son of Poias" to be Philoktetes. In any case, Odysseus' reference to abandoning him on Lemnos because of his diseased foot would have made his identity completely clear. (Philoktetes is called by his own name only six times in the play: 55, 101, 263, 432, 575, 1261.)

<sup>3</sup> "clever plan": *sophisma*. Here as elsewhere in the Prologue, Odysseus uses a word that associates him with the fifth-century Sophistic movement (see above, Introduction, p. 13). Cf. 77: "be clever," *sophisthênai*; 80: "contrive," *technasthai*; 119: "clever," *sophos*; 131: "what is advantageous," *ta sumpheronta*.

<sup>4</sup> In ancient Greek, in addition to the singular and plural, there was a separate "dual" number used of two persons or things which, by nature or association, belong together and form an equal pair. Here, as at the end of the Prologue (133), Odysseus uses a "dual" form persuasively to make Neoptolemos seem to be on an equal footing with himself. Other significant uses of the dual occur at 533, 1079, and 1436.

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The Focus Classical Library is dedicated to publishing the best of Classical literature in contemporary translations with notes and introductions, so as to provide modern students access to the thought and context at the roots of contemporary culture.

This translation of Sophokles: *Philoctetes*, with introduction, notes and essay, is first-rate. Very much in the Focus tradition, the translation is attractive and very readable, while sticking closely to the idiom and structure of the Greek text. The notes do not overwhelm the reader but provide useful and appropriate guidance. The introduction nicely situates the play in its various contexts and the concluding essay offers a strong interpretation while opening up paths for further thought.

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