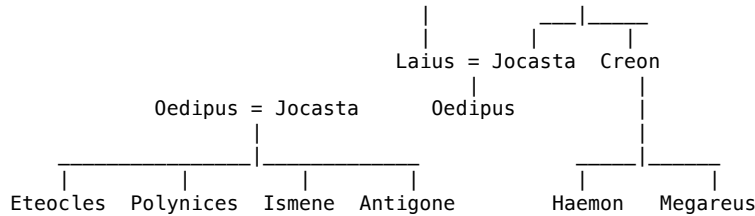


As you read *Antigone*, you will want to keep in mind certain aspects of the genealogical background to the "House of Labdacus," which is the Theban royal family into which Laius and Oedipus are born.

The critical part of the genealogy looks like this:



That is, Creon is the brother of Jocasta. Jocasta is both the mother and wife of Oedipus. Eteocles, Polynices, Ismene, and Antigone are the children of Oedipus and Jocasta. All four children are both nephew/grandnephew and niece/grandniece to Creon. Thebes is the place where this all takes place.

The story of how Eteocles and Polynices die is called the "Seven against Thebes" and was the subject of a play by Aeschylus. You can find a convenient summary of the background (how they came to take up arms) and the action (how they came to kill each other) in any number of places. A convenient source is the section on "Background" and that on "Plot summary" in the Wikipedia article, which I quote here:

#### Background

When Oedipus, King of Thebes, realized he had married his own mother and had two sons and two daughters with her, he blinded himself and cursed his sons to divide their inheritance (the kingdom) by the sword. The two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, in order to avoid bloodshed, agreed to rule Thebes in alternate years. After the first year, Eteocles refused to step down, leading Polynices to raise an army of Argives (captained by the eponymous Seven) to take Thebes by force. This is where Aeschylus' tragedy starts.

#### Plot summary

Seven Against Thebes features little action; instead, the bulk of the play consists of rich dialogues between the citizens of Thebes and their king Eteocles regarding the threat of the hostile army before their gates. Dialogues show aspects of Eteocles' character. There is also a lengthy description of each of the seven captains that lead the Argive army against the seven gates of the city of Thebes as well as the devices on their respective shields. Eteocles, in turn, announces which Theban commanders he will send against each Argive attacker. Finally, the commander of the troops before the seventh gate is revealed to be Polynices, the brother of the king. Then Eteocles remembers and refers to the curse of their father Oedipus. Eteocles resolves to meet and fight his brother in person before the seventh gate and exits. Following a choral ode, a messenger enters, announcing that the attackers have been repelled but that Eteocles and Polynices have killed each other in battle. Their bodies are brought on stage, and the chorus mourns them.

Due to the popularity of Sophocles' play *Antigone*, the ending of Seven against Thebes was rewritten about fifty years after Aeschylus' death. While Aeschylus wrote his play to end with somber mourning for the dead brothers, it now contains an ending that serves as a lead-in of sorts to Sophocles' play: a messenger appears, announcing a prohibition against burying Polynices; his sister Antigone, however, announces her intention to defy this edict.