

from the Library of pseudo-Apollodorus
translation and footnotes by J. G. Frazer

[3.5.7] After Amphion's death Laius succeeded to the kingdom. And he married a daughter of Menoeceus; some say that she was Jocasta, and some that she was Epicasta.⁷³ The oracle had warned him not to beget a son, for the son that should be begotten would kill his father; nevertheless, flushed with wine, he had intercourse with his wife. And when the babe was born he pierced the child's ankles with brooches and gave it to a herdsman to expose. But the herdsman exposed it on Cithaeron; and the neatherds of Polybus, king of Corinth, found the infant and brought it to his wife Periboea.⁷⁴ She adopted him and passed him off as her own, and after she had healed his ankles she called him Oedipus, giving him that name on account of his swollen feet.⁷⁵ When the boy grew up and excelled his fellows in strength, they spitefully twitted him with being supposititious. He inquired of Periboea, but could learn nothing; so he went to Delphi and inquired about his true parents. The god told him not to go to his native land, because he would murder his father and lie with his mother. On hearing that, and believing himself to be the son of his nominal parents, he left Corinth, and riding in a chariot through Phocis he fell in with Laius driving in a chariot in a certain narrow road.⁷⁶ And when Polyphontes, the herald of Laius, ordered him to make way and killed one of his horses because he disobeyed and delayed, Oedipus in a rage killed both Polyphontes and Laius, and arrived in Thebes.

[3.5.8] Laius was buried by Damasistratus, king of Plataea,⁷⁷ and Creon, son of Menoeceus, succeeded to the kingdom. In his reign a heavy calamity befell Thebes. For Hera sent the Sphinx,⁷⁸ whose mother was Echidna and her father Typhon; and she had the face of a woman,

⁷³ For the tragic story of Laius, Jocasta or Epicasta, and their son Oedipus, see Hom. Od. 11.271-280, with the Scholiast on Hom. Od. 11.271; Eur. Ph. 1-62; Diod. 4.64; Paus. 9.2.4; Paus. 9.5.10ff.; Paus. 10.5.3ff.; Scholiast on Eur. Ph. 1760; Hyginus, Fab. 66, 67. In Homer the mother of Oedipus is named Epicasta; later writers call her Jocasta. The mournful tale of Oedipus is the subject of Sophocles's two great tragedies, the Oedipus Tyrannus and the Oedipus Coloneus. It is also the theme of Seneca's tragedy Oedipus. From the Scholiast on Hom. Od. 11.271-280 we learn that the story was told by Androtion. Apollodorus's version of the legend closely follows Sophocles and is reproduced by Zenobius, Cent. ii.68 in a somewhat abridged form with certain verbal changes, but as usual without acknowledgment. Some parallel stories occur in the folklore of other peoples. See Frazer's Appendix to Apollodorus, "The Oedipus Legend."

⁷⁴ Sophocles calls her Merope (Soph. OT 775), and so does Seneca, Oedipus 272, 661, 802. But, according to Pherecydes, the wife of Polybus was Medusa, daughter of Orsilochus (Scholiast on Soph. OT 775).

⁷⁵ The name Oedipus was interpreted to mean "swollen foot." As to the piercing of the child's ankles, see Soph. OT 718; Eur. Ph. 26ff.; Diod. 4.64.1; Paus. 10.5.3; Hyginus, Fab. 66; Seneca, Oedipus 812.

⁷⁶ The "narrow road" is the famous Cleft Way (Paus. 10.5.3ff.) now called the Crossroad of Megas (Stavrodromi tou Mega), where the road from Daulis and the road from Thebes and Lebadea meet and unite in the single road ascending through the long valley to Delphi. At this point the pass, shut in on either hand by lofty and precipitous mountains, presents one of the wildest and grandest scenes in all Greece; the towering cliffs of Parnassus on the northern side of the valley are truly sublime. Not a trace of human habitation is to be seen. All is solitude and silence, in keeping with the tragic memories of the spot. Compare Frazer, commentary on Paus. 10.5.3 (vol. v. pp. 231ff.) As to the Cleft Way or Triple Way, as it was also called, and the fatal encounter of the father and son at it, see Soph. OT 715ff.; Soph. OT 1398ff.; Eur. Ph. 37ff.; Seneca, Oedipus 276ff.

⁷⁷ Compare Paus. 9.5.4.

⁷⁸ As to the Sphinx and her riddle, see Hes. Th. 326ff. (who says that she was the offspring of Echidna and Orthus); Soph. OT 391ff.; Eur. Ph. 45ff.; Diod. 4.64.3ff.; Paus. 9.26.2-4; Scholiast on Eur. Ph. 45; Hyginus, Fab. 67; Seneca, Oedipus 92ff. The riddle is quoted in verse by several ancient writers. See Athenaeus x.81, p. 456 B; Tzetzes, Scholiast on Lycophron 7; Anth. Pal. xiv.64; Argument to Soph. OT, p. 6, ed. R. C. Jebb; Argument to Eur. Ph.; and Scholiast on Eur. Ph. 50 (Scholia in Euripiden, ed. E. Schwartz, vol. i. pp. 243ff. 256). Outside of Greece the riddle

the breast and feet and tail of a lion, and the wings of a bird. And having learned a riddle from the Muses, she sat on Mount Phicium, and propounded it to the Thebans. And the riddle was this: -- What is that which has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed? Now the Thebans were in possession of an oracle which declared that they should be rid of the Sphinx whenever they had read her riddle; so they often met and discussed the answer, and when they could not find it the Sphinx used to snatch away one of them and gobble him up. When many had perished, and last of all Creon's son Haemon, Creon made proclamation that to him who should read the riddle he would give both the kingdom and the wife of Laius. On hearing that, Oedipus found the solution, declaring that the riddle of the Sphinx referred to man; for as a babe he is four-footed, going on four limbs, as an adult he is two-footed, and as an old man he gets besides a third support in a staff. So the Sphinx threw herself from the citadel, and Oedipus both succeeded to the kingdom and unwittingly married his mother, and begat sons by her, Polynices and Eteocles, and daughters, Ismene and Antigone.⁷⁹ But some say the children were borne to him by Eurygania, daughter of Hyperphas.⁸⁰

seems to be current in more or less similar forms among various peoples. Thus it is reported among the Mongols of the Selenga (R. G. Latham, Descriptive Ethnology, i.325), and in Gascony (J. F. Bladé, Contes populaires de la Gascogne, i.3-14). Further, it has been recently recorded, in a form precisely similar to the Greek, among the tribes of British Central Africa: the missionary who reports it makes no reference to the riddle of the Sphinx, of which he was apparently ignorant. See Donald Fraser, Winning a primitive people (London, 1914) p. 171, "What is it that goes on four legs in the morning, on two at midday, and on three in the evening? Answer: A man, who crawls on hands and knees in childhood, walks erect when grown, and with the aid of a stick in his old age."

⁷⁹ Compare Eur. Ph. 55ff.; Diod. 4.64.4; Hyginus, Fab. 67.

⁸⁰ This account is adopted by Paus. 9.5.10ff.; and by the Scholiast on Eur. Ph. 1760, who cites Pisander as his authority. According to another version, Oedipus, after losing Jocasta, married Astymedusa, who falsely accused her stepsons of attempting her virtue. See Scholiast on Hom. Il. iv.376; Eust. on Homer, Il. iv.376, p. 369; Scholiast on Eur. Ph. 53.