Hour 18: on Sophocles Oedipus at Colonus. The powers of the cult-hero in death. The key word for this hour is kolônos, which is a ‘tumulus’ or ‘elevation’ in a local landscape; this tumulus is ‘shining’ or ‘white’ from afar. By metonymy, kolônos can mean the whole landscape, as in the case of the grove that is entered by the wretch Oedipus. By further metonymy, Colonus / Kolônos is the name of a district or démos ‘deme’ of Athens, was named after this prominent landmark. By still further metonymy, Colonus / Kolônos is the name of a local cult hero of the district of Colonus.

Passage A. Sophocles Oedipus at Colonus lines 52-65

Oedipus: What, then, is the place that we have entered?
Xenos: All that I myself know, you will hear and learn. This whole place is sacred [hieros]; 55 august [semmos] Poseidon holds it, and in it lives the fire-bearing god, the Titan Prometheus. But as for the spot on which you tread, it is called the Bronze Threshold of this land, the Protection of Athens. And the neighboring fields claim Colonus, the one who drives chariot-horses [hippotēs], for their ancient ruler; 60 and all the people bear his name in common as their own. Such, you see, xenos, are these things, which receive their timē not through our saying what they are, but rather through our living with them.

Oedipus: Are there indeed dwellers in this region?
Xenos: Yes indeed, the namesakes of this god here [Colonus].

- Review Passage C from Hour 14, from Philostratus, On Heroes 9.1-3

Listen to such stories now, my guest [xenos]. Protesilaos does not lie buried at Troy but here on the Chersonesus. This large kolônos here on the left no doubt contains him. The nymphs created these elms around the kolônos

B) Sophocles Oedipus at Colonus 668ff [the speaker of the chorus is speaking to Oedipus, addressing him as a xenos]

Xenos, in this land of fine horses you have come to earth’s fairest home, the shining Colonus [Kolônos] 670 Here the nightingale, a constant guest, trills her clear note under the trees of green glades, dwelling amid the wine-dark ivy [675] and the god’s inviolate foliage, rich in berries and fruit, unvisited by sun, unvexed by the wind of any storm. Here the reveller Dionysus ever walks the ground, [680] companion of the nymphs that nursed him. And, fed on heavenly dew, the narcissus blooms day by day with its fair clusters; it is the ancient garland of the Great Goddesses. [685] And the crocus blooms with a golden gleam. Nor do the ever-flowing springs diminish, from which the waters of Cephisus wander, and each day with pure {690} current it moves over the plains of the land’s swelling bosom, giving fertility. Nor have the khoroi of the Muses shunned this place, nor Aphrodite of the golden rein. And there is a thing such as I have not heard of on Asian ground, {695} nor as ever yet born in the great Dorian isle of Pelops: a plant unconquered, self-renewing, causing terror to destroying enemies. {700} It greatly flourishes in this land—the gray-leafed olive, nurturer of children. Youth can not harm it by the ravages of his hand, nor can any who lives with old age. For the sleepless eye {705} of Zeus Morios [guard of the sacred olive trees], watches over it, and gray-eyed Athena. And I have another praise [ainos] to tell for this polis our mother, {710} the gift of a great daimôn, a glory most great: the might of horses, the might of colts, and the might of the sea. For you, son of Cronus, lord Poseidon, have set her on the throne of this pride, {715}

1 At climactic moments in the veneration of cult heroes, they can be called theoi ‘gods’: see Nagy “Sign of the Hero” (2001) n17.
by establishing first in our roads the bit that cures the rage of horses. And the shapely oar, well-fitted for the sea, in flying past the land leaps to follow the hundred-footed Nereids.

C) Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 1638ff: Immediately Oedipus felt for his children with blind hands, and said: [1640] “Children, you must bear up nobly in your phrenes and depart from this place; do not consider it right [dikaion] to look upon what is not themis, or to hear such speech as you may not hear. Go in haste; let only Theseus be entitled to remain to learn of those things that are done [draiō].” 1645 So he spoke, and every one of us listened; with streaming tears and mourning we followed the maidens away. But when we had gone off, very soon we looked back and saw that Oedipus was nowhere any more and our lord [= Theseus] was alone, [1650] holding his hand in front of his face to screen his eyes, as if he had seen some terrifying sight, one that no one could endure to behold. And then after a short time, [1655] we saw him adore together the earth and Olympus of the gods in the same prayer. But by what fate Oedipus perished, no man can tell, except Theseus alone. It was no fiery thunderbolt of the god that removed him, [1660] nor any rising of a gust of wind [thuella] from the pontos; it was either an escort from the gods, or else the dark world of the dead gaping open, with good intention [noos], to receive him. The man passed away without lamentation or sickness or suffering, and beyond all mortal men he was wondrous.

D) Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 1586ff: In that you touch upon what is indeed worthy of wonder. How he departed from here, you yourself must know since you were here: with no one of his philoi as guide, but rather with himself leading the way for us all. [1590] When he had come to the Descending Way, which is bound by steps of bronze to earth’s deep roots, he paused at one of the many branching paths near the hollow crater in the rock, where the faithful covenant of Theseus and Peirithoos has its memorial. [1595] He stood midway between that basin and the Thorikios Rock, and between the hollow pear-tree and the marble tomb; then he sat down and loosened his filthy clothing. And then he called his daughters, and bade them bring water from some flowing source, so that he might wash and make a drink-offering. [1600] They went to the hill which was in view, the hill of Demeter of the tender plants and in a short time brought what their father had commanded. Then they washed him and dressed him, as is the custom [nomos]. But when all his desire was fulfilled, [1605] and nothing that he required was still undone, then Zeus of the Underworld sent forth his thunder, and the maidens shuddered as they heard. They fell weeping at their father’s knees, and did not cease from beating their breast, and from wailing loud....[1620] In this way, clinging close to one another, the father and his daughters sobbed and wept. But when they came to the end [telos] of their crying, and the sound of wailing went forth no more, there was a silence; suddenly a voice called aloud to him, so that everyone [1625] felt the hair on their heads stand up from the sudden terror. The god called him again and again: “Oedipus! You, over there, Oedipus! Why do you delay our going? Too long you have been lingering.” And when he perceived that he was called by the god, [1630] he asked that lord Theseus should come to him; and when he did, he said: “Philos, give me the sworn pledge of your right hand for my children; and you, my daughters, for him. Give your solemn word [kat-aineō] never to betray them by your own free will, but always to bring to a telos whatever is in your phrenes for their benefit.”

E) Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 576ff: Oedipus says, essentially, that he will donate his corpse (the Thebans only want it on the edges of their community, 399-400).
F) Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 621-623 (Oedipus will punish the unjust = the Thebans):
And then my sleeping and long-hidden corpse,
cold in the earth, will drink hot blood of theirs,
if Zeus endures if his son’s word is true.

G) Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 1656-1662 (adapted from the version of Robert Fitzgerald)
But the way in which he [Oedipus] died
no one of the mortals could reveal except Theseus.
No fire-bearing thunderbolt of the god finished him off.
Nor did any gust from the sea [*pontia thuella*], set in motion at that time.
But it was either a messenger from the gods, or else the underworld
opened in love the unlit door of earth.

H) Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 1679-1682 (adapted from the version of Robert Fitzgerald)
It was not war
nor the deep sea that overtook him,
but something invisible and strange
captured him up - or down -
into a space unseen