

**COLLECTIVE GUILT AND SELF-SACRIFICE
IN SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE* AND IN II & IV MACCABEES
– PRELIMINARY CULTURAL-CRITICAL REMARKS**

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ABSTRACT

Jewish-Hellenistic authors use language and ideas of ancient Greek tragedies in order to express their own religious and theological standpoints and make them accessible to the Greek-speaking world. This article highlights the significance of Sophocles' *Antigone* for a cultural-critical understanding of the concepts of collective guilt and self-sacrifice in II Macc 6-7 and IV Macc.

Antisthenes, a pupil of Socrates and founder of Cynicism, states (Frg 38.9): ἀρχὴ παιδεύσεως, ἢ τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐπίσκεψις (“beginning of education is explanation of the names”). With this he means a definition of the terms we use to express our thoughts. In this sense, I would like to give first a clarification of the modern terms “collective guilt” and “self-sacrifice” that I use here in order to compare Sophocles' *Antigone* and II & IV Maccabees.

“Collective guilt” in juxtaposition to “individual guilt”, rooted in the concept of corporate personality,¹ characterises not simply a psychological phenomenon, an individual sentiment or emotion (shame) caused by the consciousness of having done something wrong or illegal, as commonly asserted, but the state of being objectively responsible and liable for the commission of a crime against the written or unwritten,

* Dr Gerda de Villiers (UP) must be thanked here for her willingness to read through this manuscript and to improve on its language.

¹ Robinson (1981:25ff.).

the positive or natural law or moreover against the divine law and against humanity.² While “individual guilt” refers to a single criminal, “collective guilt” pertains to all members of the group to which the criminal belongs as well (family, tribe, people, nation, state, humankind), because they make themselves complicit in the crime by ignoring, tolerating or covering it up.³ “Collective guilt” differs from “collective responsibility”.⁴ The first implies condemnation and capital punishment, the second expresses the obligation for repentance, reparation, compensation, and satisfaction. The problem of collective guilt and collective responsibility is depicted characteristically in the deuteronomistic guilt confession,⁵ “We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly”,⁶ as well as in the opening statement of the disputation on divine justice and the fate of Israel in Ezek 18:1: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”, which expresses a long-established understanding of social rules and behaviours against God’s will (Ezek 18:2ff.).

Self-sacrifice is commonly used in the metaphorical meaning of abstinence or denial or abnegation of one’s personal wishes, desires or interests for the well-being of others or for a cause or for the sake of duty.⁷ But literally speaking it means the giving up of one’s life for the sake of the highest ethical good or for what is regarded to be the total ethical value.⁸ The altruistic act of self-offering one’s own life for the sake of others⁹ presupposes distorted justice or absence of all justice. The sense of injustice caused by human selfishness can motivate one powerfully to take selfless actions and, under certain conditions, to take the blame for other’s offence or sin and find the

² Cf. van den Beld (1999:583f.).

³ See, e.g., Sophocles, *Antigone* 263ff. Platon, *Euthyphron*. Cf. Dafni (2012:72ff.).

⁴ Cf. Kaminsky (1995).

⁵ III Ki 8:47; II Chr 6,37; Ps 105(106):6; Dan 9:5; cf. I Esr 1:49; Dan 3:29; II Macc 7:18.

⁶ Biblical quotation according to NETS (2007, 2009). Cf. Brenton (1851).

⁷ See, e.g., Collins English Dictionary or Oxford Dictionaries: English, or The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language.

⁸ Cf. Hillerdal (1978:344–349).

⁹ See further Mark 8:34–9:1; John 12:25; 15:13; I John 3:16.

exemplary death.¹⁰

All ideas linked or associated nowadays to the concepts of self-sacrifice and collective guilt are already drafted in the individual speeches in Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*,¹¹ written as early as 441 B.C. and referring to Theban legends and the fratricidal struggle between Eteocles and Polynices, the sons of king Oedipus, and his wife and mother Jocaste, who die fighting each other for political power. Antigone, their sister, buries her dead brother Polynices against Creon's decree, in obedience to a higher moral law, which she believed had been revealed in ancient times (*Ant.* 456f.). In II Macc 6-7 and in IV Macc (supposed to have been written in Alexandria in Egypt 167 B.C., and in Syria or Asia Minor between 90 and 100 A.D. respectively)¹² there is also a royal decree that requires obedience and implementation. Disobedience to the king's law entails a dreadful death. The narratives of the martyrdom of Eleasar and the mother with seven sons are structured¹³ so that each protagonist puts forward an argument over this issue, bearing remarkable thematic and terminological analogies¹⁴ to Sophocles' *Antigone* or even reframing and reinterpreting it. But this literary-historical background and its transformations have not yet been challenged as a source of culture-critical reflection. Accordingly, I will confine myself here to some preliminary remarks.

I

In Sophocles' *Antigone*, Creon the new ruler of Thebes buried Eteocles' body in honour, but regarding the death of Polynices, he applied individual guilt and proclaimed that none of the citizens should "conceal it [the corpse] in a grave or lament for it, but that they should leave it unwept for, unburied, a rich treasure house

¹⁰ The so-called "Songs of God's servant" in Deutero-Isaiah, as well as Jesus the Archpriest in Zech 3 could be considered as the cases par excellence for self-sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible.

¹¹ Lesky (1956:193–207); cf. Müller (1967); Patzer (1978).

¹² See discussions in van Henden (1997:50ff.) and de Silva (2002:268ff., 2006:xiv-xx). Summarised von Dobbeler [1997:161ff. & 2006 (lit.)].

¹³ Cf. Lebram (1974:81-96); Breitenstein (1978); Jensen (1988:39–54); Heininger (1989:43–59); Klauck (1989:451–465).

¹⁴ Cf. Dafni (2006:293f.).

for birds as they look out for food”¹⁵ (*Ant.* 26-30).¹⁶ He explains his decision by appealing to the individual responsibility of the leading members in a city and the total contempt of all selfish and vicious tendencies, no matter how high in the social hierarchy they go. Creon announces pretentiously (*Ant.* 178-183): “Yes, to me anyone who while guiding the whole city fails to set his hand to the best counsels, but keeps his mouth shut by reason of some fear seems now and has always seemed the worst of men; and him who rates a dear one higher than his native land, him I put nowhere.” According to Creon, Polynices is guilty and not worth of burying or lamenting because his actions are bound to have widespread social, religious, and moral ramifications (*Ant.* 200-202): “he came back from the exile to burn to the ground his native city and its gods and to kill and to enslave his relatives”.

The question that Antigone initially directed to her sister Ismene (*Ant.* 2ff.) addresses the problem of collective guilt: “... are you aware that Zeus ... ah, which of the evils that come from Oedipus is he not accomplishing while we still live?” Zeus condemns not only Oedipus, who had committed ignorantly both patricide and incest, but also his mother and wife, Jocaste, and his children, namely his sons who fight each other for the throne and die an inglorious death, and the two sisters who were not involved at all.

The concept of collective responsibility and guilt is formulated by the chorus who accuses Antigone of stumbling against the goddess Justice because of being related by blood to Oedipus and they say as follows (*Ant.* 855f.): “... she is paying for some crime of her fathers”. Antigone confirms (*Ant.* 858-871):

You have touched on a thought most painful for me, the fate of my father,
thrice renewed, and the whole of our destiny, that of the famous
Labdacids. Ah, the disaster of marriage with his mother, and my father’s
incestuous couplings with his ill-fated mother! From what parents was I
born, miserable one! To them I go, to live with them, accursed,
unmarried! Ah, brother who made a disastrous marriage, in your death

¹⁵ I quote the translation of Hugh Lloyd-Jones (1994:1–127).

¹⁶ The motif as well as its linguistic realization is found in the case of Rizpa (II Sam 3:7; 21:8–11).

you have destroyed my life!

For Sophocles everything is destined by the Fate. So the chorus reiterates (*Ant.* 951 cf. 987): "... the power of fate is strange".

A different focus is found in the words of the guardian, who informs Creon about the transgression of his royal decree. This draws the attention to the fact that collective responsibility, gripping unrighteous and righteous into punishment, will not be applied. Of special note is the guardian's assurance (*Ant.* 239f.): "I did not do the deed, nor did I see who did, and I could not with justice come to any harm."

Creon thinks that the only reason for a man to transgress his law could be folly or avarice. He underlines his twofold scenario by saying (*Ant.* 295f. 299ff.): "There is no institution so ruinous for men as money; ... Money by its teaching perverts men's good minds so that they take to evil actions!" And he makes the conclusion (*Ant.* 312f.): "One sees more people ruined than one has seen preserved by shameful gains." The tragic irony is that he is self-confident that only a man could be capable of violating his statutes (*Ant.* 248). He is not able to imagine that it may be a woman who disregards his laws, and this makes his position even more painful. But the guardian challenges him directly (*Ant.* 319): "The doer pains your mind, but I your ears." Anticipating the imminent revealing of the facts and hinting at Creon's hubris, the guardian adds (*Ant.* 323): "It is dangerous for the believer to believe what is not true."

What are Creon's beliefs and hubris? 1) He identifies his own decision with the will of the gods. This is particularly evident in his proclamation that Polynices must be punished posthumously because his burial could mean that the gods were concerned for his corpse and did him a great honour. He also states firmly and clearly (*Ant.* 575): "It is Hades who will prevent this marriage for me," that is, the marriage of Antigone and his son Haemon. This raises the question of theodicy, because Creon appears to know precisely the will of the gods and wants indeed to prescribe the way they had to act. 2) He is convinced that he must rule the land for himself and for no other (*Ant.* 736), but Haemon, his son, in order to make him aware of the limits of his political power and his jurisdiction, makes the suggestion (*Ant.* 737): "Yes, there is no city that belongs to a single man!" 3) Creon disregards the omens of death and the good

counsel of prophet Tiresias and accuses him (*Ant.* 1054) that his prophecies are false, and that all prophets are an avaricious race (*Ant.* 1055; 1059) given to dishonesty for the sake of profit (*Ant.* 1061). But Tiresias reminds him that he saved the city and that Creon came to power through him and his good counsel (*Ant.* 1058). 4) The highlight of Creon's hubris before Tiresias, a man sent by the gods, is expressed in these exaggerated statements (*Ant.* 1039-1044): "But you shall not hide him in the grave, even if Zeus' eagles should snatch the body and bear the carrion up to their master's throne! Not even then shall I take fright at this pollution and allow him to be buried; for I well know that no mortals have power to pollute the gods." 5) Creon condemns not only Zeus and Dike the goddess of justice but also the gods of the upper world. His hubris will be paid immediately, even though he regrets his decision to bury Antigone alive so that the pollution does not charge him. Tiresias announces the upcoming punishment, because the Greek gods do not welcome the arrogant abuser, even if he repents (*Ant.* 1064–1073): "Then know well that you shall not accomplish many racing courses of the sun, and in that lapse of time you shall give in exchange for corpses the corpse of one from your own loins, in return for having hurled below one of those above, blasphemously lodging a living person in a tomb, and you have kept here something belonging to the gods below, a corpse deprived, unburied, unholy. Neither you nor the gods above have any part in this, but you have inflicted."

Creon thinks disregarding this prohibition primarily lays claims to his power, not simply questioning it. And this is to be punished with the death penalty. Therefore, he treats Antigone's self-denial as ridiculous by saying (*Ant.* 524f.): "Then go below and love those friends, if you must love them! But while I live a woman shall not rule!" He turns to both sisters because he still believes that both agreed and together have committed the offense and attempts to relativize the grade of Antigone's heroism (*Ant.* 531-535): "You, whom I never noticed as like a viper hiding in the house you sucked my blood-nor did I know that I was rearing up two plagues and two subverters of the throne-come, tell me, do you admit being a party to this burial, or will you swear that you know nothing." After that he gives himself the following self-congratulatory promulgation (*Ant.* 672; 676): "There is nothing worse than anarchy

(insubordination)” ... “obedience is what lives save” (*Ant.* 677-680): “In this way we have to protect discipline, and we must never allow a woman to vanquish us. If we must perish, it is better to do so by the hand of a man, and then we cannot be called inferior to women.”

The issue of collective guilt brings Ismene to the fore again. Ismene initially refused to be associated to her sister and now repents and wants to share her punishment claiming that they are equally guilty (*Ant.* 536f. 546f. 558). Ismene’s words testify not to a logical decision but to an emotional reaction (*Ant.* 565): “How can I live alone without her?” In this sense, Creon comments (*Ant.* 561f.): “I say that one of these girls has only now been revealed as mad, but the other has been so from birth.” Antigone in turn refuses her sister’s offer to take the blame because she thinks she herself is a lost case and replies (*Ant.* 542f.): “Hades and those below know to whom the deed belongs! And I do not tolerate a loved one who shows her love only in words.” She advises Ismene (*Ant.* 553): “Save yourself! I do not grudge you your escape.”

From Haemon’s perspective, his father’s stubbornness is emptiness. In this regard, he gives him the fair warnings (*Ant.* 710f.): “It is not shameful for a man, even if he is wise, often to learn things and not to resist too much”, and (*Ant.* 723) “it is also good to learn from those who give good counsel.” But Creon does not perceive the warnings and judges according to age (*Ant.* 726f.): “So men of my age are to be taught sense by a man of your age?” And Haemon replies (*Ant.* 728f.): “Nothing but what is right! If I am young, one must not consider my age rather than my merits.” Creon believes that his son is biased in favour of a woman (*Ant.* 740): “This man, it seems, is fighting on the woman’s side”; he is the “slave of a woman” (*Ant.* 756). Characterising Creon’s acts and decisions as unmanly, Haemon says in turn (*Ant.* 741): “If you are a woman; because it is you for whom I feel concern.”

Antigone’s decision to die for her dead brother is based on the unwritten law. Antigone knows that (*Ant.* 450–452): “it was neither Zeus who made this proclamation, nor Justice who lives with the gods below that established such laws among men.” She tells Creon boldly and with frankness (*Ant.* 453–457): “I did not

think your proclamations strong enough to have power to overrule, mortal as they were, the unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods. For these have life, not simply today and yesterday, but for ever, and no one knows how long ago they were revealed.” And she concludes (*Ant.* 458-470):

For this I did not intend to pay the penalty among the gods for fear of any man’s pride. I knew that I would die, of course I knew, even if you had made no proclamation. But if I die before my time, I account that gain. For does not whoever lives among many troubles, as I do, gain by death? So it is in no way painful for me to meet with this death; if I had endured that the son of my own mother should die and remain unburied, that would have given me pain, but this gives me none. And if you think my actions foolish, that amounts to a charge of folly by a fool!

Antigone’s decision to bury the dead brother, apart from the question of whether he had committed an impious or a pious act whilst he was still alive, is an expression of her godly reasoning and her free nature. She emphasizes this by saying (*Ant.* 517): “It was not a slave, but my brother who had died.” The chorus praises her act but draws simultaneously attention to the difference between written and unwritten law, divine right, positive and natural law¹⁷ and to the fact that the positive law in the hands of unjust rulers is injustice par excellence (*Ant.* 872–875): “The respect you showed is a noble kind respect; but power, in the hands of him to whom it belongs, is in no way to be flouted, and you were destroyed by your self-willed passion.”

But since Antigone cannot understand why there must be a discrepancy between written and unwritten law, and why she is led undeserved to her death, she asks (*Ant.* 921-928): “What justice of the gods have I transgressed? Why must I still look to the gods, unhappy one? Whom can I call on to protect me? For by acting piously I have been convicted of impiety. Well, if this is approved among the gods, I should forgive them for what I have suffered, since I have done wrong; but if they are the wrongdoers, may they not suffer worse evils than those they are unjustly inflicting

¹⁷ Cf. Koester (1968:521–541).

upon me!” And thus it is also the question of theodicy and above all the human perversion of justice.

What motivates Antigone to her act, and why does she honour the dead Polynices? She explains as follows: a) She will give pleasure to those she must please most (*Ant.* 89), namely her dead parents and brothers. b) She is the last from her family who can do it, and Polynices is unique, because (*Ant.* 895ff.; 911ff.), “with her mother and father in Hades below, she could never have another brother.” c) In this way, “she shall come dear to her dead father, mother and brother in Hades” (*Ant.* 895ff.; 911ff.).

Acting according to the unwritten law is for Ismene (*Ant.* 90) like being “in love with the impossible” and “it is wrong to hunt for what is impossible” (*Ant.* 92). In her going Antigone is “foolish but truly dear to those who are her own” (*Ant.* 98f.).

After being walled up, Antigone hangs herself. After finding her body, Haemon, Creon’s son and her fiancé, kills himself, and his mother, Eurydice, also takes her own life as a result of both suicides committed after her husband’s deed. Creon has been punished, although he had repented. Sophocles wants that Creon’s guilt is paid not on him but on his family and that is not initiated by a man or a god but by the Fate.

II

Sophocles’ tragedy seems to provide the main impetus for telling the story of the martyrdom¹⁸ of the old Eleasar and the seven brothers with their mother in II Macc 6–7 and for retelling it in IV Maccabees, explaining the motives of resistance against the proclamations of Antiochus IV Epiphanes from the perspective of εὐσεβῆς λογισμός, namely the godly or god-fearing reason (Weber 1991:212–234). Sophocles says (*Ant.* 175-177): “There is no way of getting to know a man’s spirit and thought and judgment, until he has been seen to be versed in government and in the laws.” From the Jewish-Hellenistic perspective reflected in IV Macc, the main question is whether or not the godly reason is master of the passions and embraces the praise of the highest

¹⁸ Cf. Obermann (1931:250-265); Perler (1949:47-72); O’Hagan (1974:94-120); Winslow (1974:78-86); Johnson (1979:155-175); van Henden (1997); van Henden & Avemarie (2002); furthermore Hadas & Smith (1965).

virtue, namely the virtue of φρόνησις.¹⁹ Sophocles' tragedy puts the question: What drives Antigone to disobedience against Creon's law? Is it folly (*Ant.* 383) or wisdom? What is the worth of self-sacrifice if an act is simply an application of collective guilt, or moreover if it is driven by folly or self-willed passion? IV Macc 1:15f. in turn determines reason and wisdom and responds thus to the question which remains open in the tragedy: "15 Reason, then, is the mind preferring, with sound judgment, the life of wisdom. 16 Wisdom, in turn, is the knowledge of things divine and human and of the causes of these." On this basis, the authors of II and IV Macc re-form and re-arrange their arguments, combining theological and philosophical reflection (Renehan 1972:223-238).

The meaning of the royal decree from a Jewish perspective is summarized in II Macc 6:1–3 and exemplified in 6:4–11: it is apostasy from God's laws and the laws of the fathers (cf. Redditt 1983:249–270) and desecration of the temple in Jerusalem and on Mount Gerizim (v. 1ff.). Especially it means: a) to practice harlotry and drunkenness in the temple and within the vicinity of the holy places by the gentiles (v. 2), b) to desecrate the altar by filling it with profane things (v. 5), c) to disregard the Sabbath and the ancient feasts (v. 6), d) to renounce the Jewish identity (v. 6), e) to eat sacrifices (v. 7ff.), f) to keep the feast of Dionysus and to go in procession carrying ivy (v. 7) and g) to prohibit circumcision and honour of the feast of weeks and pascha (v. 10f.). In the case of Eleasar and the seven brothers with their mother, the severity increases in the commandment to eat pork flesh.

III

The narrator creates Eleasar's portrait (II Macc 6:18ff.): he is one of the most respected high scribes, a man already advanced in age but of noble physical appearance and internal spiritual content. His ideal of life is rather to die with honour than to live in shame. The account of II Maccabees repeatedly emphasizes the theme of Eleasar's free will, as well as his ability and possibility to choose between life and death (cf. Gen 2–3). Before he dies, Eleasar explains that the omniscient God knows that he

¹⁹ Cf. Aristoteles, *Magna moralia* 1,34.12.1.

could probably avoid bodily harm and death by pretending to be obedient to the king's decree, but after that his soul would suffer much because he acted against his own conscience and against God's law. Consequently, the narrator underlines that, when he died, he left an example of nobility, which should teach self-control, self-denial and bravery not only to the youth, but to all the people.²⁰ Eleasar's motif is a posthumous reputation and memory, namely that his reputation by his example will pass from generation to generation and will become immortal. The accentuation of the idea of thinking and acting according to your age is evident in II Macc 6:23: "But making a high resolve, worthy of his years and the dignity of his old age and the grey hairs that he had reached with distinction and his excellent bearing even from childhood, and moreover according to the holy God-given law, he declared himself quickly, telling them to send him to Hades."

In IV Macc 5:20f., Eleasar justifies his decision in terms of moral goodness rooted in the divine law: "20 to transgress the law in matters small or great is of equal seriousness, 21 for in either case the law is equally despised." Eleasar dies for God's law which fulfils his existence with meaning (IV Macc 6:26–30). He explained his free choice to sacrifice himself from the perspective of the suffering servant of God (Is 53:5ff.) and of Joshua the Archpriest, who takes the blame of the others (Zech 3:4) by saying (IV Macc 6:28f.): "28 be merciful to your people, and be satisfied with our punishment on their behalf. 29 Make my blood their purification, and take my life in exchange for theirs." The collective guilt of all people will be satisfied through the martyrdom of one who willingly and individually without any debt gives his blood for the others. The explanation for this act is that the godly/god-fearing reasoning is the master of the passions. In this sense, self-sacrifice is due to god-fearing reason and not due to folly or self-willed passion.

The belief in resurrection is expressed in IV Macc 7:18–19, referring to Eleasar: "18 But as many as attend to piety with a whole heart, these alone are able to overcome the passions of the flesh, 19 since they believe that they do not die to God, even as our patriarchs Abraham, Isaak and Iacob did not die to God, but live to God"

²⁰ Eleasar before the tyrant could be seen as the counterpart of the *mantis* Tiresias before the king. But Tiresias does not suffer. His words bring Creon to his senses and to remorse.

(cf. Seim 2001:27-42), because he is a God of the living and not of the dead (Luc 20:38; cf. Dafni 2004:37-54). But what does it mean? Living in memory in this world or living eternally with God? If God lives in someone's heart, then living eternally could mean living in memory in this world.

IV

The case of the seven brothers with their mother (II Macc 7 & IV Macc 8ff.),²¹ who were also compelled to taste pork flesh, is definitely about the belief in resurrection.

The first brother resolutely declares that they are all ready to die rather than break the law of their fathers, and they will be comforted by the Lord according to Moses' law (II Macc 7:2-7 cf. IV Macc 9:11-25). Being at the last gasp, the second brother expresses his belief that the king (namely Antiochus) takes them out of the present life but the king of the world will raise up unto everlasting life all who die for his law (II Macc 7:7-9 cf. IV Macc 9:26-10:1). The third confesses that all he has is from heaven and from heaven he hopes to receive them again (II Macc 7:10-13 cf. IV Macc 10:1-12). The fourth says it is good being put to death by men looking for resurrection from God. But he who gives him death will have no resurrection to life (II Macc 7:13-14 cf. IV Macc 10:12-11:1). This implies the belief in a resurrection to eternal life and a resurrection to judgment and eternal death. The fifth says Antiochus has power over men but he is mortal and corruptible (II Macc 7:15-17 cf. IV Macc 11:1-13). God shall not abandon his people and in his great power will torment Antiochus and his seed (cf. Isa 14:20f.). The sixth confesses that they are suffering for themselves having sinned against their God and marvellous things are done unto them (II Macc 7:18-19; cf. IV Macc 11:13-12:1). But Antiochus, striving against God, will not escape unpunished. In this expression, collective guilt of Jews and individual guilt of Antiochus are linked together. The seventh brother recapitulates and expounds the arguments (II Macc 7:24-40 cf. IV Macc 12:1-19).

In *Antigone*, retaliation for Creon's outrage comes not after death but in this life and directly. In II Macc 6:13, the narrator states: "It is a sign of great kindness not to

²¹ See Schaper (II Macc) and Westerholm (IV Macc) in NETS; cf. Brenton.

let the impious alone for long but to punish them immediately.” And in II Macc 9:7ff. he refers that Antiochus unexpectedly “fell out of his chariot and he who only a little before had thought in his superhuman arrogance that he could command the waves of the sea and weigh the high mountains ... was brought down to earth ... worms broke out of his eyes and his flesh rotted away and he realized when he could not endure his own stench that ‘it is right to be subject to God and that a mortal should not think haughty’” (cf. Heininger 1989:43–59).

It is remarkable, that the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* (II Macc 7:28) is grasped by the mother of the seven brothers, as she witnesses and, at the same time, experiences their pain and suffering in her soul, and realizes that they are perishable, destructible, mortal, although God the Creator shaped them and gave them life in her womb (II Macc 7:22-23 cf. Gen 4:1). Before throwing herself into the fire,²² in order that no one touches her body, she reinforces “... her woman’s reasoning with a man’s courage” (II Macc 7:21)²³ and urges them to be sacrificed in the hope of resurrection (cf. Young 1991:67-81). For God brought them from nothing in existence and He is the One who can raise them up unto eternal life, even if this in human measures seems to be impossible.

According to IV Macc 9:8 death for their religion, for god-fearing, torturing, ill-treatments and endurance bear for the seven brothers “rewards of virtue” (ἀρετῆς ἄθλα), but for him who caused them and his vain glory and destructive pride (IV Macc 8:18) comes divine vengeance and enduring eternal torture by fire (IV Macc 9:9: *σὺ δὲ διὰ τὴν ἡμῶν μαιοφονίαν αὐτάρκη καρτερήσεις ὑπὸ τῆς θείας δίκης αἰώνιον βάσανον διὰ πυρός*). It is clear about individual punishment and afterlife. But it is not yet clear whether “rewards of virtue” means reputation or resurrection and being by God of the fathers. In IV Macc 9:18, it is said that only the children of Hebrews alone are unconquered on behalf of virtue. But what is virtue according to the books of Maccabees?

IV Macc emphasizes that the seven brothers because of fear of God and Torah

²² IV Macc 17:1. Cf. II Macc 7:41f.

²³ Cf. IV Macc 16:5–25; 18:6ff.

piety preferred death and wanted θεία δίκη²⁴ (the divine court of the eternal fire) for the tyrant. It is the narrator's assessment that they went to martyrdom attracted by immortality. Both the seven brothers' belief of divine court for the sinners after death, as well as the narrator's value judgment, point to a belief in individual resurrection that was already formed (IV Macc 18:23): οἱ δὲ Ἀβραμιαῖοι παῖδες σὺν τῇ ἀθλοφόρῳ μητρὶ εἰς πατέρων χορὸν συναγελάζονται ψυχὰς ἀγνάς καὶ ἀθανάτους ἀπειληφότες παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ. The idea of individual resurrection to eternal life differs significantly from the expectation of restoration of the historic Israel as a corporate personality after Ezek 37.²⁵

V

In sum:

- a) In Sophocles' *Antigone* and II Macc 6-7 & IV Macc, collective guilt is inextricably linked to consanguinity and not to the active or passive participation in a crime of non-consanguineous.
- b) In Sophocles' *Antigone*, collective guilt and punishment is a matter of fate but in II & IV Maccabees it is an issue of the revealed law of God, namely the written Law of Moses and the living laws of the fathers. The collective guilt does not concern the way of doing justice, but the perception of self-sacrifice, and the relationship of the victims to divine law and Fate.
- c) In Sophocles' *Antigone*, violation of the unwritten law is characterized indirectly as unmanliness. In II & IV Maccabees, the word ἀνδρεία²⁶ (manliness, the virtue of courage and strength, Moore & Anderson 1998:249-273) and its neologistic derivatives²⁷ characterize directly the self-sacrifice of Eleasar and the seven brothers, and especially the self-denial and bravery before death of their mother who encouraged them in hope of resurrection.
- d) IV Macc departs from the question posed by Sophocles' *Antigone*, namely whether

²⁴ IV Macc 4:13; 8:22; 9:9.15.3; 12:12; 18:18. Cf. II Macc 8:13.

²⁵ IV Macc 18:17 interprets Ezek 37 from the perspective of individual resurrection.

²⁶ I Macc 9:10; IV Macc 1:4, 6, 11, 18; 5:23; 17:23

²⁷ Cf. ἀνδραγαθεῖν, ἀνδραγάθησις, ἀνδρείος, ἀνδρειοῦν, and ἀνδρείως.

self-sacrifice as an expression of ἀνδρεία is a rational or an irrational act, an act contrary to reason. It asks in particular whether godly reason is absolute master of passions, and so begs the question what exactly is the worth of renouncing one's life for the most precious good, and to sacrifice yourself for it. It answers: the faithful observance of the divine commands depicted in the Law of Moses and transmitted from generation to generation until the days of Eleasar and the seven brothers with their mother. It also reiterates that they have suffered and died as martyrs in favour of benevolence (ὕπέρ τῆς καλοκάγαθίας)²⁸ as the fundamental ethical virtue. But death means annihilation, and losing one's life voluntarily for the sake of others could not be explained if there was no prospect of going beyond and coming closer to the benevolent Creator. And this is the prospect of resurrection in eternal life or eternal death, as the end of human existence.

e) Both Antigone and the Maccabean Martyrs sacrifice themselves with regard to a life after death. But Antigone imagines a shadowy existence together with her beloved parents and siblings in Hades the god of the underworld,²⁹ while Eleasar and the seven sons with their mother expect a life with God, who is a God of the living and not of the dead.

f) Unlike Sophocles talking about the perceptions of his people and presenting all the controversy, the authors of the books of Maccabees are religiously and nationally not related to Antiochus. Therefore, they do not present the counter-arguments, but merely capture the feelings of the Greek guardians who bent the torture and took counsel with the martyrs at least to pretend obedience and save their lives (IV Macc 9:16).

g) The Greek ruler neither in the books of Maccabees nor in Sophocles' tragedy applies collective guilt to punish the unrighteous and righteous blindly, or to carry out mass executions.³⁰ Therefore, the Maccabees do not put the blame on Greece and the

²⁸ Only IV Macc 1:8, 10; 3:18; 11:22; 13:25; 15:9. Cf. καλῶ κάγαθῶ by Plato.

²⁹ In Sophocles' *Antigone*, there is a well-circumscribed conception of the underworld and the laws prevailing there.

³⁰ In order to punish the guilty, Creon claims that he is going to forget consanguinity and give impartially justice (*Ant.* 486ff.), but his motif is selfishness. The same is also by Antiochus the case.

Greeks in general,³¹ but especially on this certain tyrant, as well as on their own people who, motivated by greed and lust for power, commit treason against their fathers' faith expecting to take control of the land Judah with the help of foreign rulers.

h) The books of Maccabees were written in an era of deep political and religious upheavals. The Jewish world, however, through the classical works of Homer, the tragedians, and the philosophers was captured by Greek language and thought. Greek was not the hated language of an occupying power, of an oppressor, that people wanted to displace and forget because of being forced to learn and speak it. But it was a cultural asset that Jews received voluntarily, without coercion, and used as a vehicle to express their own religious beliefs and theological ideas, and to communicate them to the Greek speaking nations.³²

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³¹ But de Silva (2006:xx) reckons that “if the author has Gentiles in view at all as the recipients of his message, they will hear only insofar as the Jewish audience takes to heart and transmits by word and deed the lessons the author perceives Gentiles to be in need of learning: that true piety consists in rendering to the One God his due; that true humanitarianism includes respect for, and toleration of, the Jewish way of life (rather than its marginalization as part of Greek cultural imperialism); and that the values held dear in minority cultures are every bit as valid and worth sacrificial self-investment as the values prized by the dominant culture, and may, in the end, represent highly consonant goals.”

³² Yehoshua Amir (1978:2ff.) drew attention to the fact that the Jews in the time of Alexander the Great have realized that they were not alone in the world believing in one God, because they found among the Greek philosophers like-minded partners. In this sense, I think, the books of Maccabees enumerate precisely what was strange in the decree of Antiochus and the reason of the revolt and martyrdom. Over and above that, Jews admit that they found themselves blood-relatives to the Spartans and, therefore, became allies against the Seleucids (I Macc 12:2, 5f., 20f.; 14:16, 20, 23; 15:23).

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