Oedipus in Turku

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Abstract

The play of the ancient Greek tragedian Sophocles is the most famous story of Oedipus. However, similar stories have existed before and have been told thereafter throughout history as legends and folk tales in different parts of the world and in many cultures. Altogether, there are 25 examples of Oedipus folk tales that are known to be from Finland. The prevalence of such tales is particularly abundant in Finland, compared to other regions of the world. From Scandinavia, for instance, they are virtually absent. One of these Oedipus folk tales is located in the city of Turku. Several Finnish Oedipus stories, including the story in Turku, have a special feature that is unique in the world: the content is not only a prediction of a boy who grows up to kill his father and marry his mother, but also a peculiar prophecy of a sheep that will be born at the same time and eaten by a wolf.

This review deals with the nature and differences of the Oedipus legend and its folk tale analogs. An example of these folk tales is told, representing typical Oedipus stories born in the Finnish folk culture and being specifically located in Turku. Possible interpretations of this tale are offered and discussed. This unique feature of the Finnish Oedipus tales stimulates a discussion on the different opinions regarding the timing of the Oedipus complex, especially considering its oral precursors.